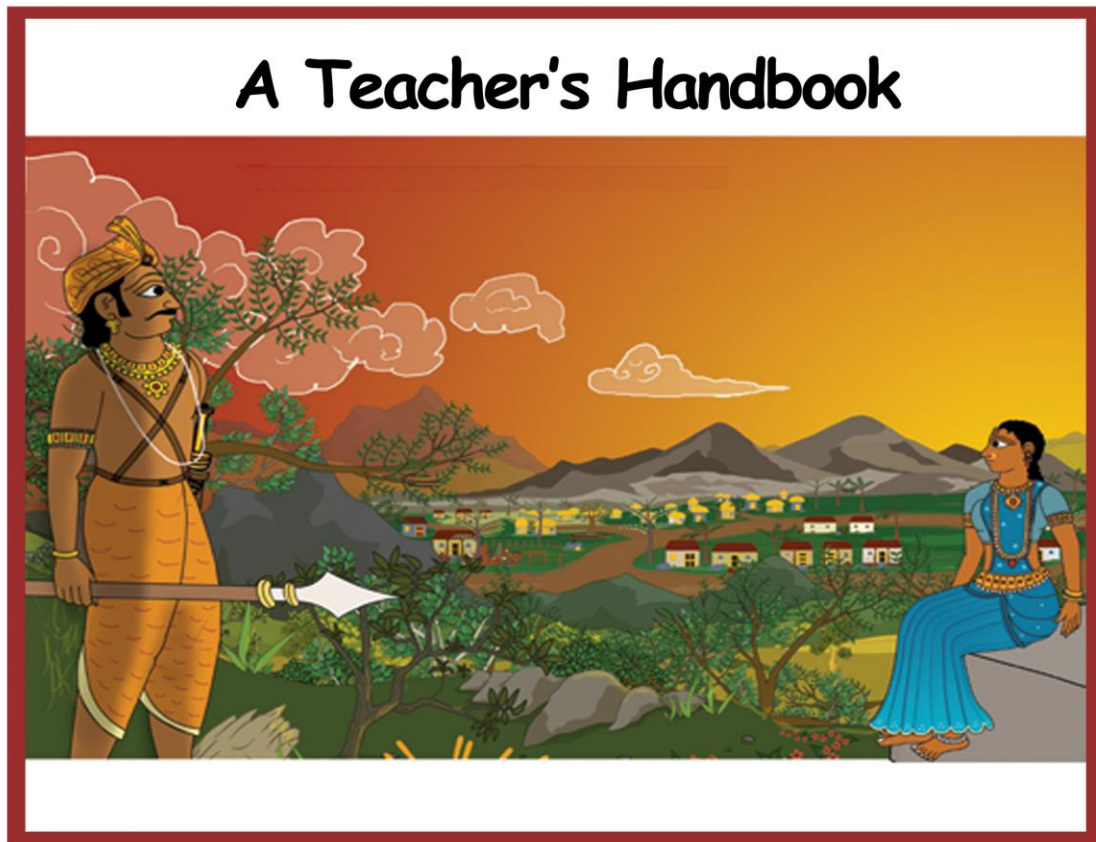


THE LEGEND OF PONNIVALA



Please also consult
www.ponnivala.com
for additional resources and ideas

All materials & illustrations in this manual are under copyright
© Ponnivala Publishing, Gore's Landing, Ontario, CANADA
2014

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------|
| Introduction | p. 2 |
| PART ONE: Broad Basic Themes in the Legend | p. 7 |
| a) Social Themes | p. 8 |
| The Landowner/Ploughman vrs. The Hunter/Forest Dweller | |
| The Farmer vrs. The Craftsman | |
| A Three Generation Evolution in Gender Roles: The Males, The Females | |
| b) Family Themes | p. 13 |
| Male Cousins | |
| Elder/Younger Brother Tensions | |
| Brother/Sister Tensions | |
| Parent/Child Tensions | |
| Husband/Wife Tensions | |
| The Brother-in-Law Relationship | |
| Becoming A Solitary Female | |
| c) Ethical Dynamics Within The Story | p. 22 |
| d) Political, Geographic and Historical Information | p. 23 |
| Kingdoms | |
| Kings | |
| Geography | |
| Time Periods | |
| e) Basic Concepts in Folk Hinduism | p. 28 |
| Gods | |
| Demons | |
| Goddesses | |
| Common Village Ceremonies | |
| PART TWO: The Digital Parcheesi Game “Play Ponnivala Parcheesi” | p. 31 |
| a) Teacher’s Overview of Ponnivala Parcheesi | |
| b) The Parcheesi Board Visual Concept and Layout | |
| c) Ponnivala Parcheesi Player Details | |
| d) Suggested Educational Uses For Ponnivala Parcheesi as a Digital Classroom Game | |
| PART THREE: Mini Folktale Themes | p. 40 |
| For Every Episode (<i>allowing for three to five sub-segments per episode</i>) – There is a list of: | |
| a) The key events of each episode are first described (in black) followed by | |
| b) Suggested Discussion Topics & Exercises (in green) and then extended via | |
| c) A Commentary (in red) that contains additional insights and ideas a teacher can refer to. | |
| Example: Episode #1 (All 26 episodes are described and broken down in a similar way) | |
| 1-a) The Woman Who Had A Grand Vision | |
| 1-b) The Cloud With A Silver Lining | |
| 1-c) Hard Work Wins Rewards | |
| 1-d) Think Twice Before You Act | |
| 1-e) The Gift of A Child | |
| See Index 2 For The Complete List of Sub-Stories, By Episode | |
| PART FOUR: Answers To Common Questions | p. 94 |
| PART FIVE: INDEXES & BIBLIOGRAPHY | p. 96 |
| a) Index of Episode Titles (Same Wording As The Graphic Novel Titles) | |
| b) Index of Major Sub-Stories by Episode | |
| c) Index of Powerpoint Resources based around Single Character’s Lives | |

INTRODUCTION

Linking the Ponnivala Story to Modern Life

Why Choose The Ponnivala Story?

It's FRESH -

This is a newly animated folk epic that will charm and delight all who watch it. The story is broad and interwoven with many social and cultural themes. Like a diamond that has been finely cut, its many surfaces sparkle with ideas and insights. One can discuss a huge range of topics, picking and choosing what is most relevant to each individual teacher's interests and curriculum plans. The epic can be taught at any grade level and given a much background depth as a given setting may warrant. If teaching at the university level, there are numerous books, articles and internet research topics that link to the Ponnivala story that students can explore.

It's RELEVANT –

Many of the topics covered by this medieval epic describe problems that are still with us in modern times: topics like being exiled from one's homeland, being orphaned, suffering from famine or drought, being sick at a critical time, and also moral issues such as gambling, lying, poisoning an opponent, bullying, attacking the innocent in a type of "terrorist" raid... and much more.. Key family relationships are also featured in the story, in particular common tensions found between brother and brother, brother and sister, husband and wife, and also between parent and child.

It's Got BREADTH and DEPTH -

The story balances conflicting viewpoints. It can be used to discuss ethics, philosophy, fate and a variety of similar topics. It also addresses the nature of kingship, the nature of death and succession and issues of land stewardship. The Legend of Ponnivala is also full of cultural riches and will be of interest to anyone studying India, and in particular South Indian customs. It is also a superb example of a genuine, orally transmitted folk epic, the kind of story all humans once referenced when searching for fundamental insights into the human condition. This legend is like a social keystone. It supports and links to many other cultural domains not the least of which are art, music, poetry and Hindu religious traditions.

It's STRATEGICALLY LOCATED - both in time and by geography

This epic is about a region, a very strategically located area of South India that lay right in the middle of major maritime sea-land routes that led connected the Mediterranean (and also Africa and Egypt) to china for over 2,000 years. Because India was the source of many desirable spices, and also gems, the ships stopped on both its West and East coasts. But the route around the tip of India was very challenging, due both to peculiar winds and a very dangerous rocky ridge. For this reason much (perhaps most) of the East/West trade was taken across the highland central plain in "ox carts" that connected the two coasts. All this trade had to be funnelled through one key pass through the Western "ghats" (high mountains that rise from India West coast and largely block access to the interior). The Kongu region lies right next to this pass and all the trade routes had to traverse it to reach the rivers valleys that flow eastward, in particular that of the Kaveri river. This story gives us a good sociological picture of this region in the period between roughly 1,000 and 1,600 A.D. Thinking about this story is a good way to understand what went on separate from but right along side the great maritime silk road of the past. Huge finds of Roman coins in this area attest to the importance of trade in this area from a very early period. What better way to teach history than through understanding a story like this? The game Ponnivala Parcheesi has been designed to heighten a player's appreciation of what life was like across this broad swath of time and space.

Multiple Frames For Presenting The Legend of Ponnivala In Your Classroom

This amazing epic provides a fresh and engrossing view of the past. The culture and geography of the story describe medieval South India. However, used creatively, this story can be used to teach a wide variety of topics in an entirely new way. Consider the following:

Literature: The Ponnivala Legend provides a prime example of the structure and the verbal style of a traditional oral folk epic. It is the kind of story that people created in many places to record their history and to celebrate a local culture. You can make comparisons with the Iliad, with the Bible, or with epic literature from any where else in the world. If true depth is required a translated text of the entire story is available. Academic books and articles about the epic provide further source material for the serious scholar. Songs and poetry are also central to this story, and are given their due place in the animated series.

History: This epic describes medieval South India in a fascinating and fresh way. You can use it as a “foil,” contrasting and comparing its details with what is known (say) of medieval Europe or medieval Japan. You can also use it more specifically for a course on the history of India or of South Asia in general.

Cultural Studies: The 26 animated episodes are full of cultural details that students will greatly enjoy. There are any number of topics to select from such as dress codes, eating habits, ceremonies, the actions of the gods and much more. It can be used for a course specific to South Asia or for something much more general such as “Peoples of the World.”

Social Studies: The legend is chock full of social information, everything from kinship patterns to the interrelations (and rivalries) between social groups. The story focuses on one core family over three generations so there are plenty of insights to be garnered about sibling relationships, parent-child bonds, inheritance patterns, concepts of kingship and more. Again the story can be used as a “foil” and contrasted with (say) European traditions, or it can be taken as direct in-depth testament that describes the traditional social structure of life in South India.

Religion and Myth: This is an excellent story to use to introduce students to the core concepts of Hinduism. It is full of relatively easy to understand information about the key gods and goddesses and it nicely describes their complementary roles. The story also tackles deeper issues such as the nature of human fate, the nature of hell, of sacrifice, of sainthood and much more. Several important “myths” are also imbedded in the wider legend. These can be easily pulled out and studied, both in their cultural context and also in their own right.

Folklore: This material is a “natural” choice for the study of folklore and story telling. When each of the twenty six episodes is sub-divided into three to five smaller units then practically every one of these segments takes on the character of a folktale. A large part of this manual tackles each of these tales in turn. There are practical suggestions as to how each one can be discussed with students and most importantly, vividly related to everyday modern experience.

Art: You should also consider using this material to teach art and music. The artwork draws on the traditional folk paintings of South India for style and layout. The colors selected are largely

traditional as well. The imagery can be compared to folk art elsewhere in the world or, just as easily, to specific Indian traditions such as miniature painting. At the same time one can discuss shadow puppetry, comparing the style and movement of the animated characters in this story to South Asian puppetry in general. One can even use this epic as an interesting reference when teaching a class centered on animation techniques.

Music: The Ponnivala animated series can also be used in a class about music. There are traditional songs imbedded in the story's sound track. One can hear both their style and their instrumentation. A visit to the Smithsonian Folkways web site will provide students with actual "pure" excerpts of what this epic sounded like during its full oral performance, a 44 hour tape recording done back in 1965. Translations provided along with these excerpts allow a student to understand the meaning behind the songs, the dramatic character voices and also the narrator's descriptions.

A creative music teacher can discuss how the larger sound track has incorporated traditional South Indian musical elements. He or she can also expand on the repertoire of instruments used, point to specific rhythms and discuss how the larger sound track "mix" reflects modern Indian tastes. One can ask questions like "What expectations do you think a modern audience would bring to such a work?" Finally, one can point to the extensive use of foley in this story to create the "feel" of traditional background noises (ox carts, cattle grazing, tigers, frogs and more).

Philosophy, Ethics and Logic: The Ponnivala story is full of interesting ethical dilemmas. It is also illustrative of traditional Hindu philosophy and its rich, complex understanding of cause and effect. Almost all of the key issues in the story are worthy of extensive debate. You will not find black and white moralizing here. Instead, like any other major folk epic, this legend is built on a delicate balance between several equally worthy principles. In sum, this story is a teachers' delight. It provides many, many opportunities for a rich classroom discussion of opposing views.

In sum:

This is a story for all kinds of teachers and for all levels of students to study and enjoy. Each will find his or her own favourite themes and concepts buried deep within its complex, masterful story structure.

This Handbook provides hundreds of guideposts for teachers of any subject, and from any cultural background. Everyone will find something here that nicely suits their own style of classroom instruction.

For More Information About The Ponnivala Story Go To:
www.legendofponnivala.com

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USES

By Study Level

A) At The Primary Level

Use the sub episodes as **Short Stories** for viewing and for discussion.

Get kids to tell their own related stories.

Use the **Digital Game** to introduce traditional village life in India and its multiple adventures.

Use the 26 **Graphic Novels** (comic book summaries, by episode) for reading practice and classroom storytelling.

Introduce the idea of **Traditional Puppets** used in story telling. Relate animation to puppetry.

Get students to **Create Sounds** for the sound track of the stories they watch.

B) At the Secondary Level

Teach **History** through a colourful and genuine folk story

Teach **Geography** by examining the Kongu plain, its key river, and the surrounding mountains. Link this to the maritime silk road introduce links between every country from the Mediterranean on one side of the globe to China on the other. \

Teach **Literature and Poetry** by showing students what an important folk epic was like. Compare and contrast this key genre with a variety of textual source materials used by most by most classroom teachers today.

Teach **Social Studies** by reference to a wealth of information in this story about families, villages and political kingdoms in the medieval period.

Teach **Ethics and Philosophy** by pointing to the moral dilemmas highlighted by this epic story. Discuss why each side in each dispute could call on important arguments and reasons backing their specific point of view.

Teach **Art** by examining the extensive and very beautiful illustrations that tell this story. All have been designed with traditional Indian folk art as a model and reference point.

Teach **Music** by examining the way in which traditional South Indian folk music has been woven into the sound track. Listen for excerpts from the bard's own voice (tape recorded in a village setting in 1965) and examine how his songs and his drum rhythms have been extensively mixed with more modern instruments and patterns to create a very unique sound track. Excerpts of the original recordings can also be studied independently by using a variety of tracks available on the Smithsonian Folkways website.

C) At University

Teach a course on **South Indian Folk Literature** by using this epic as a starting point and branching out from there to additional and better known literature this epic refers to, both directly and indirectly .

Teach a course on **South Indian Family Structure**, or on Indian family organization more generally by pulling examples from this legend.

Teach a course on **Hinduism** by studying the extensive references to the great gods of Hindu South Asia found embedded in this story.

Teach a course on **South Asian Kingship** and Politics by studying the political material provided by this epic.

Teach a course on **South Asian History** by linking this story to the great kingdoms of South India, and also to the maritime silk road and its core trading communities more generally

Teach a course on **South Asian Sociology** by studying how caste and community are portrayed in this story. Contrast and compare that with what others have written about varieties of traditional social organization found on this great sub-continent..

In sum, this Ponnivala epic is like a huge prism. Shine light on it and you will see a rainbow of colors. Pick any color and it will lead you into a fresh new world of insight after insight. This is teaching material that is both fun and informative for all who take the initiative to use it!

Possible Starting Points (Elementary or High School Levels):

One way to introduce this material is to begin with one folktale/sub-story you pre-select:

- 1) **Find** a topic you feel is appropriate to your own students' interests and age level.
- 2) **Tell** a story you already know (after spot-checking this guide) that resembles one pre-selected from The Legend.
- 3) **Play** the one part of this video series that features the sub-story you have just matched. Treat the video interlude as a prelude to an open discussion. (Precise chapter markers for each sub story are embedded on the DVDs).
- 4) **Point Out** how you just juxtaposed two stories from different time periods and cultures.
- 5) **Stimulate** discussion about the two stories' differing "content" yet essentially parallel abstract structure.
- 6) **Use** the 26 Graphic Novels as a reading assignment. Give each student a separate booklet and then have them summarize that story segment in front of the entire class. Or get them to use these as a script for the presentation of a dramatic stage-style reading event.

Further Suggestions For Classroom Activities:

A) **Discuss** how the older story can be used as a kind of "frame" or model" for telling a more modern one. Then point out how the modern story suddenly seems "richer" and more interesting because of the depth given to it by making a comparison with a very old story.

B) **Describe** how story tellers in general try to incorporate both personal and traditional elements when they tell a story to an audience. They frame the old story with a personal incident, or maybe they change the traditional story a little to make it seem more modern. Finally, maybe they tell the old story and then follow it up with some personal comments. Point out that this is an important tip for giving any kind address or lecture.... Mix something personal (often a joke) with the "formal content" of the presentation.

C) **Create** a story telling "competition" where each student (or student team) finds and then tells a story of their own. Insist that the content of their story relate to the content of the original tale in some way. Ask each student to "explain" that relationship if it is not obvious (the comparison they see could be very creative but somewhat hidden).

D) **Assign** students to one or more "drama teams" and ask the students to act out the ancient story in their own words.

E) **Ask** the students to become newspaper reporters. The assignment could be to create "an article, complete with a headline, featuring the content of the traditional story. This can be done in two parts:

- a) Have a student "reporter" interview a student who acts the character in question (to establish what happened).
- b) Have the student actually create a newspaper story from her/his collection of interview notes taken while interviewing the 'actor.' Note: this can be a lot of fun!

PART ONE : MULTI-EPIISODE TEACHING THEMES

Overview

If one looks at the Ponnivala Story “episode” by episode then one can easily recognize many folktale motifs. Most of these can be read as parables or simple “teaching” stories. However, there is a whole other level in this great epic. The study of entire generations in the family (and also still larger patterns of shift over three generations) yield a very different kind of “teaching” opportunity. Now one sees that a number of broad oppositions and “balances” have been built into this story. At this “higher” level things are less black and white. We see that each and every has his or her own reasons for acting as they do. These are not evil people so much as people who read the logic of the story’s events from a different perspective. Everyone recognizes that they have rights and responsibilities; it is simply that the rights and interests of the different characters clash. And no one is free from greed and self interest. Even the key heroes and heroine of the third generation exhibit personal weaknesses. Of special interest is the fact that many of the missteps taken by the story’s central characters involve “omission” as much or more than they do “commission.”

When addressing these larger themes the teaching opportunities are both more powerful and more subtle. One could say that they are more “adult.” Taking the large view, no actor, friend or foe, is black or white. Everyone has some degree of moral right to bolster their claims and their actions. Teasing out these larger patterns and then posing the question “who had the greater right,” or “who chose the wiser path” can provide a focus for many fruitful discussion-debates. Taken at this level the Ponnivala story forms a “keystone” or overarching frame story similar to the two great classical epics of India, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Just like Indian gurus find these larger stories an endless resource for philosophical and moral discourse, so too this local epic presents a wealth of “advanced” teaching opportunities. Some of the many possibilities for a broad discussion or debate are outlined below.

a) SOCIAL THEMES

Professional Rivalries and Shifting Identities:

THE LANDOWNER / PLOUGHMAN VRS. HUNTER / FOREST DWELLER

The epic begins with the great goddess Parvati (Lord Shiva's famous wife) creating nine farmers so that the land can be cultivated and food crops grown. She wants to see the land generate both animal and vegetal bounty, and above all she wants to see the fertile soils of the area tilled skilfully by experienced ploughmen. Although we are not introduced to the tribal community that lives in the nearby hills until near the end of the story, the implication is there from the start that the presence of the new settlers will bring change. Episode twenty one suggests that the tigers and cobras that live in the forested areas are particularly fearsome. The forest birds are under threat too. Episodes twenty through twenty five highlight the human face of this confrontation. Anywhere in this part of the story it would be appropriate to design questions or assignments that challenge students to compare the situation of the tribal groups in India with that of native communities elsewhere in the world.

Significantly, the forest hunters (tribals by implication) have a social structure that is not very different from that of the farmers who live on the plains. They too have a palace for their lead family. They also own horses, and there are merchant businessmen nearby. The parallel grows even stronger when we discover that these hunters, a band of brothers, also honor a virgin female (their "sister") who lives inside the palace walls. Her decisions and her leadership are given considerable respect. There is a clear rivalry between this girl, named Viratangi (the brave little sister) and the heroes' own virgin sibling who is simply addressed as Parvati or as Tanci (little sister). The farmers capture a female parrot from the hunter's forest (which can be read as a metaphor for "raiding" their women). In revenge the hunters plot to capture the sister of the heroes. Her honor is saved when they mistake a simple palace maid for the real thing, but the deep desire to disgrace and dis-empower the rival community by kidnapping their most magical female is quite clear. The rivalry between the two females is personalized when Viratangi (the tribal princess) turns to her brothers and says: "Look at what (sacrifices) those farmers have made for their sister! Now, let me see what you men will do for me?"

Finally, it is not at all clear who comes out on top in this rivalry at the end of the epic. Indeed, Lord Vishnu sides with the tribals in the great war that ends the story. Although the valiant forest fighters all appear to die, so too do the two farmer-heroes. One can argue that the heroes' death by self-sacrifice is the more heroic, but then the tribal warriors are all shown to be a sort of "figment of the creative power of Lord Vishnu himself. They represent the Lord's "play" (lila) and perhaps they don't actually die at all. This too can be a point of discussion for advanced students who seek to understand the concepts of "divine play" and of "sacrifice" more generally in Hindu thought.

Symbolically, the great boar Kombar (episodes twenty three through twenty five) represents the anger of the forest hunters. His campaign to destroy the farmers' lush fields, irrigation system and even their flower garden is clearly expressive of the hunters' anger at these things more generally. Also interesting is the boar's ability to "write" with his tusk, much as the popular god Ganesh is said to have done as he set down the text of the great Mahabharata. Although this is a kind of "joke" it can also be read as an expression of the hunters' awareness of the status and power that literacy brings in its wake.

The tiny, ugly, earless female dog who is a pet of Princess Tungal is the boar's direct opponent. She is interesting at many levels. If we take the hunters to be big, black-skinned and ferocious, the little dog is small and female, but very clever. She is ugly but also considerably lighter in terms of surface color. Most notably, her teeth are full of poison. She can win against great odds by using her wits. These kinds of stereotypic contrasts may well be expressive of the wider kind discourse of the farmers and the hunters shared when each conjured up images of the other.

Finally, there is the interesting scene in episode 15b where the parents of the second generation are forced into exile. They end up at the palace of the forest hunters who greet them with hospitality. They are invited to a fine meal, but the couple refuse offering the thinly veiled excuse that they are not hungry. The real reason is that they consider the forest king to be from an inferior community from whom they will not accept food for fear of demeaning themselves. They suffer significantly for this pride, as they are then asked to leave the fine dwelling and make a home for themselves in the horse stable. This scene, too, reveals something of the social stereotyping that used to define key interactions between these two communities.

THE FARMER VRS. THE CRAFTSMAN (THE PLANTGROWER/HERDSMAN VRS. THE MAKER OF OBJECTS)

There appears to have been a major antipathy between artisans and farmers in South India that has its roots in attitudes that date back at least two millennia. The classic Tamil epic called "The Tale of The Anklet" or Silapadikaram dates from the very beginning of the Christian era. This story about ordinary people's lives points to a cultural stereotype existing at that time which describes "the conniving and dishonest goldsmith." The Silapadikaram (also spelled with a double "p") is one of the earliest recorded tales in Tamil literature. Furthermore, several additional Buddhist stories from a slightly later period describe a goldsmith who devised a way to steal temple jewels. By the 10th century a major social rivalry developed between what we might call the craftsmen (who made things) and the farmers (who grew and nurtured plants and animals). This rivalry was cast in symbolic terms and described as the "two sides" of the social body (the left and the right sides respectively). Only the priestly community (the Brahmins) were considered to be above this dispute and they were considered to be like the "head" on that divided body. There were service communities like washerman and barbers allied with each social half.

The history of this division is still half hidden from view and it is not well understood. However, there are many inscriptions from this period, and also slightly later, that report on this and what various kings did to "smooth over" what must have been bitter confrontations. In general the artisans felt they were deemed and they were demanding more respect and the right to display more status symbols. Gradually the kings of the period granted them more rights and their status improved. The origin myths linked to these two broad occupational categories were also in opposition. The origin of people who work with the various crafts is generally associated with fire, while the origin of people who work on the land is generally associated with birth from the earth in some way.

In this epic the antipathy between the artisans and the farmers comes out in three places. In each of these the artisan(s) are clearly painted as liars and scheming villains, making it very clear that the story is told from the farmer's perspective. These three incidents are:

Episode One: Where the farmers rise from the earth with the help of Lord Vishnu and then are granted land previously controlled by artisans because the latter are unable to behead the farmers with their swords,

Episode Eleven: Where the artisans try to trick the king and queen into committing suicide by suggesting they should place their heads under the wheels of a huge temple cart (but the goddess rescues them)

Episode Twenty Two: Where an artisan (likely a goldsmith because he works with gold) tries to rob the farmer-king and then, when unsuccessful, tries to treacherously kill him.

The British left behind a number of records describing this major right/left social divide. And some interesting ceremonial and symbolic remnants of this salient division lasted up until the mid 20th century in the rural areas of South India. It is possible, perhaps, that the discrimination against Jews in Europe has historic roots related to the specific attitude towards goldsmiths. But suggestive parallels could also be drawn with the “trade unions” of today, where workers with various skills often place themselves in “opposition” to factory owners and management. The tenth through the twelfth centuries in South India was a time of huge economic expansion and large building projects. Tradesmen and craft people of many kinds would certainly have been well positioned to hold up such projects with their demands for better treatment.

A THREE GENERATION EVOLUTION IN GENDER ROLES:

The Legend of Ponnivala covers three generations in one family. The paragraphs below describe the evolution of males and female roles, separately, over this time.

THE MALES: PIONEER ⇨ SUBSTANTIAL LANDOWNER ⇨ VALLIANT WARRIOR

The shift in the personalities and activity focus for the males over this time period matches changes in the actual nature of social life in this region of South India (upland Kongu nadu) over a period of about six centuries. In the 11th and 12th centuries the three major kingdoms of the South (Chera, Chola and Pandiya) all had political centers located close to but not inside the Kongu area). The three groups all tried to expand their influence and the Cholas were particularly successful. Their key strategy was to expand agricultural activity by sending skilled farmers up the main river valley of the Kaveri River to open up new lands. Like the European pioneers in North America, these castes had to establish their rights to till the soil in areas where they were considered outsiders (and even invaders). The grandfather in the Ponnivala story is part of a “family” of men who obtained land in the area thanks first to “divine grace” and secondly due to having been backed by the Chola king.

The second generation in the story represents roughly the 13th and 14th centuries in this same area. Now the original farmers have a good “toehold” and ambitious families expand their holdings and begin to exert political influence of their own. The Chola king(s) are still important but now they operate by establishing “alliances” with outlying landlords. The relationship is more one of respect rather than of outright control. The father in this story is described as having paid a kind of symbolic tribute to the Chola king on a periodic basis (see episode) but this was probably more a gesture of ceremonial deference than it was one of outright submission or of revenue payments. The tribute (according to this story, episode 19-a) seems to have consisted of a container of curds (animal produce), a measuring vessel (symbolic of commerce and of grain production), and of a ploughing yoke (human labour and skills). One can read it as a kind of gift to the monarch that represented each of the three significant economic domains: animal, vegetable and human wealth respectively.

The third generation represents a further social shift and matches nicely with the 15th and 16th centuries in the Kongu area. This was a period of great upheaval and constant warfare. Many small kingdoms and landed families operated independently, each attempting to expand its own political power and influence. The twin sons in the third generation are both warriors and they represent this kind of social dynamic. But they also symbolize two different approaches towards the rulership of a local area. The elder twin models his “style” after that of his father. He is mild mannered, understanding, tolerant and concerned for the welfare of others. The second or younger twin, by contrast, is aggressive and quick to anger. His main concern is the defence of family pride and honor. He is rebellious and rejects the wisdom of his father’s dying words. He will humble himself in front of no one and he leads the charge against the Chola king (episode 19) whom he eventually kills in his quest for true independence. Probably this too was representative of the times. Some people retained the value set of the previous centuries while others struck out on their own in hopes of political and social gain.

SYMBOLIC EVOLUTION: THE PLOUGH ⇨ THE SWORD

THE FEMALES:

WORKING WIFE & MOTHER

⇨ HUMBLE PENITENT & PILGRIM ⇨ MAGICAL VISIONARY & (WARRIOR) SAINT

Like the men, so too the key women evolve through the three generations depicted by this story. Their “evolution” however is not linked to historical changes in the region. Rather, it is as if they express three different dimensions of some kind of basic “paradigm” of femaleness. The grandmother is just a “good woman.” She is very hard working and she is able to augment the family’s income (through in kind payments of grain) when she and her husband work together as laborers for the Chola king. She is barren and very sad about this, though it is through no fault of hers. It is due, instead, to a curse laid on her husband by Lord Shiva.... (Episode 1d-e). She prays to this great god and he finds a way to give them a child they can find (in their fields) and adopt. She is a good mother to this child and tried her best to protect it, up until the last second when she and her husband are both taken from their home by death. We can say that the grandmother depicts a good, normal all round wife and mother.

Things change in the second generation when the son marries his cousin (on his mother’s side of the family). The story describes the magical birth of this girl on a lotus leaf. We also learn that her life sprang from Shiva’s love play with his wife Parvati. Thus this woman (whose very name Tamarai means “lotus flower”) has a divine and somewhat magical origin. Her personality reflects these special gifts. She has many insights and is able to warn and to help her husband on several important occasions. She is responsible for finding the family great wealth (in the buds of maize plants... Episode 7a-b). She is also very charitable and gives away money to beggars without a second thought. But she also has a rebellious streak and is capable of extreme anger. Tamarai disobeys her husband when he asks her not to visit her own brother’s home, and then she burns his house and murders his children when the brother rejects her and refuses her entry into his home (eventually she also brings them back to life with a magic wand). Like the grandmother, her barrenness is the cause of this pain and much

other suffering as well. Most important and memorable, however, is Tamarai's long twenty one year pilgrimage to the gates of heaven. On this trip she endures unbelievable hardships and she also performs a harsh penance. This sincere devotion eventually results in Shiva granting her three children, all of whom he places in her womb at the same time. When she returns home she shares her fertility with the entire kingdom by sprinkling sacred water everywhere that she has brought back with her. She is also a good mother and raises her children with love until the time of her death. But the most memorable thing about Tamarai is the strength of her unbelievable determination and the key symbol of this is that she sits motionless on the top of a high pillar for twenty one years.

Tamarai's daughter, Tangal, is the heroine in the third generation. She remains a young girl and a chaste virgin throughout the story. She is also born with Lord Shiva's help and reincarnates a "celestial virgin" from his counsel chambers. She too has many insights that are delivered (in her case) through her dreams. She is always treated as a very young girl, she loves to sit on her swing and she is accompanied, in the later part of her story, by a female dog and a female parrot. Tangal's personality is calm on the surface, but underneath one can sense a growing impatience with her brothers who do little to help her. She is lonely and she is worried about their endless and dangerous adventures. Finally her brothers die.

Now Tamarai becomes a fiery saint that can burn down homes and also call on torrential rains. She wanders across the land as a kind of lonely pilgrim and when she finds her brothers' bodies she raises them (briefly) from death for a heart-to-heart talk).

Finally Tangal (which means "little sister") performs her brothers' funeral rites (as if she were a male). Then she ascends to heaven in a chariot sent to earth by Lord Shiva. She is, in sum, a sort of oracle that transforms (upon her brothers' deaths) into a warrior-siren-saint. Her most powerful symbol is her swing, always moving, always suspended from above rather than from the ground. It is as if she is sort of "dangled down" from above, to live in the palace of her brothers, but that she has her true roots are still attached to the firmament above. Her mother Tamarai is a sort of half human-half goddess type of being.

In fact Tangal is a (hidden) goddess from the very start. She constantly swings, expressing a sort of divine play, and her character is elusiveplainly tied in to the world above.... from the moment of her birth. She is childlike, intangible and unpredictable. Towards the end of the legend she starts to hide the truth from her brothers and to become dangerous. She wanders alone and then performs the final funeral ceremonies for her siblings as if she were a male. There are many reasons to associate Tangal with the famous goddess Meenakshi of Madurai (a city not too far away). Meenakshi was a warlike female when she was young, but after marriage transforms into a calm and well-controlled women. Tangal resembles Meenakshi in her childlike form. In sum, we have a gradual evolution from (the grandmother) a simple down-to-earth mother/worker, to (the mother) a strong predictable devotee/penitent, and then to (the granddaughter) a young ethereal spirit/warrior.

SYMBOLIC EVOLUTION: STEADFAST PILLAR ⇨ MOVING SWING

b) Family Themes

MALE COUSINS - RIVALRY OVER LAND INHERITANCE

A conflict between cousins who share the same male ancestry runs throughout much of this story. This is the old theme of intra-clan warfare that one finds in India's great epic the Mahabharata, and also many other places in the world. The rivalry stems from disputes over rights to land and the distribution of unequal parcels in previous generations. The status of adopted sons with regard to matters of inheritance is also a key issue. In this story the contest between cousins is expressed in many ways: through deceit and trickery, through mutual acts of violence, by forcing the exile of one party or the other and also through attempts to find allies in high places. Attitudes about how to address this key problem vary with the personalities of successive generations of heroes. The father in the second generation advocates tolerance, restraint and understanding. But one of his sons (the key younger twin) in the third generation, favors straightforward retribution and aggressive expressions of vengeance. The conflict is never really "solved." The matter is over when all the male representatives in the rival lineage line die during the fight with the Chola king in which this monarch is also killed (episode 21e).

ELDER / YOUNGER BROTHER TENSIONS & related DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY (This rivalry can also be understood as a commentary on differing styles of KINGSHIP)

A major contrast develops in the third generation between the twin sons of the king. The first born twin is mild tempered, tolerant and concerned for the welfare of others. The other twin, by contrast is physically and verbally aggressive. His thoughts focus on the defence of family honor and their local power. Tensions between the two brothers are visible at several points, mainly when the younger brother starts to attack his "elder" sibling for being too soft, too deferent, or too indecisive. Several times he swings his sword at the elder twin, but he never actually hurts him as Vishnu (or the sister) always intervenes just in time and clams things down.

This contrast between brothers can be understood to also represent two different "styles" of kingship. The elder twin resembles his fathers' approach while the younger rebels against this senior male and ignores his dying words. He also takes the lead in ignoring his sister's requests and advice. We can clearly say that he is "less family oriented" and more individualistic than his brother.

In the larger literature, and in academic studies, twins are often understood to represent two sides of "one coin." In other words, they can be a device to "split" a personality in two so as to give equal share to the two "halves" of an ambivalent situation. In this story it is as if the twins represent two different concepts of kingship, concepts which compete for recognition in the larger society. One does not have to look far to see this opposition writ large in other aspects of Indian culture, for example the Gandhi's "tradition" of non-violence versus a valiant warrior

attitude many Indian kings are famous for. The contrast also plays out in the daily opposition of vegetarian versus non-vegetarian life choices made daily by most individual Indians. The Legend of Ponnivala can be seen to reflect this “debate” in a very visceral way, especially if we focus on the third generation of heroes.

BROTHER / SISTER TENSIONS

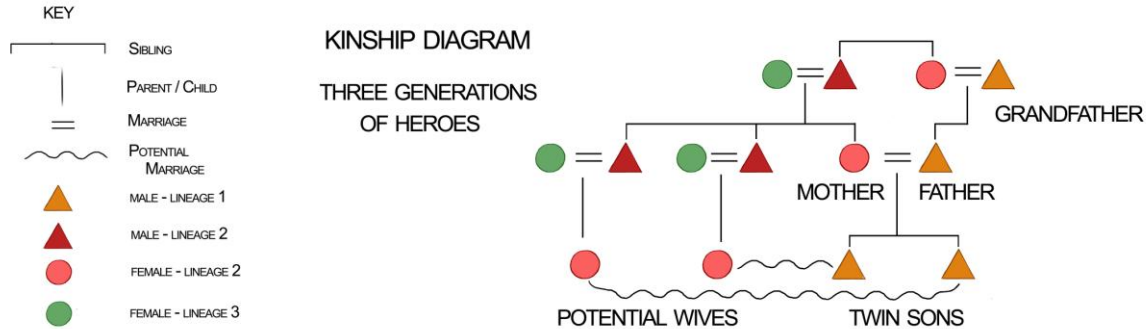
(A story of the gradual breakdown of cross gender expectations and responsibilities)

There are important brother/sister interactions in both generation two and in generation three of this story. In generation two the brothers “expel” their sister from the family palace and from the village. They do this because (with Lord Vishnu’s backing) their key farm hand and palace helper has married this girl. He announced a surprise claim on her, saying that is actually their own cousin (a father’s sister’s son). This is a special relationship that, according to traditional marriage rules in the area, allows a man to claim his “right” to marry a girl that is a “mother’s brother’s daughter. The right can not be refused, but this marriage causes a major social “disconnect.” A man who was working for these two men as a family servant by this marriage becomes a “brother-in-law” who is (by tradition) suddenly due substantial respect. The brothers are angry at this surprise turn of events. They deal with it by throwing the sister out, giving her very demeaning gifts and building a fence across the path when she leaves. The fence indicates that she is never to return to her natal home.

The above incident is very jarring and significantly “disrupts” the family. A woman is always supposed to always have the right to return to her father’s home in times of trouble. There she expects to find respect, comfort and sympathy. But in this story that rule is broken too. The first ethical misstep now brings on a second. The sister (Tamarai) does experience misfortune after her marriage. Although happy in many respects, she remains barren and this upsets her greatly. After some time she thinks of going to visit her brothers. She wants to see their children. She has special gifts made for them and hopes this trip home will lift her spirits.

When Tamarai arrives at her family palace, however, the reception she receives is horrible. The palace guard has been instructed to beat her. He also lies, telling her that her brothers have left on a long hunting trip. Tamarai grabs a handful of earth and curses all the children who live inside (Episode 10a). And there is more revenge. She also curses the whole family to future barrenness, a clear eye-for-eye style of retaliation. Later her brothers beg her forgiveness and she restores the children to life, but then she extracts a further price. Tamarai takes two of the young girls in the family and turns them into stones to await (a potential future marriage) with her own (potential) future sons. Again, this specific kind of marriage is sanctioned by convention: the wedding of Tamarai’s (hoped for) sons to their mother’s brothers’ daughters. So, in generation two the sister marries the specific man who has that “right” but (alas) she suffers barrenness as a result (due to an earlier curse on her husband’s family that she had nothing to do with). In revenge, she curses her brothers’ families to the same future barren fate. She also plans ahead for the exact same kind of marriage she herself has undergone. A diagram explains this visually:

Note: In each generation male lineage 2 (deep red) gifts their women (red) to male lineage 1 (orange). Lineage 2 gets their women (green) from elsewhere.



In the third generation there is a second brother / sister relationship. This time it is an unmarried sister who has twin elder brothers. This is a very important relationship, perhaps a “key” to understanding the whole story (a deep level). On the surface the sister and her brothers are very devoted to each other. The brothers are responsible for taking care of their sister by providing a home, food and clothing. But they are also responsible for her psychological well-being by giving her companionship and by arranging her marriage when the time is right. We can be sure of this because their parents lay these responsibilities out in a long discussion with their sons before they die. (See the next section). But once they are gone the sons have other ideas, particularly the second or “younger” twin. The two men set off almost immediately on their warlike adventures. At first they “lie” to their sister about where they are going. Later they “lie” about where they have been and what they have really been doing. And more significantly, they do not listen to their sister’s warnings, her fears that they will get into trouble. They also do not take adequate precautions to “protect” their sister from kidnapping (or other kinds of potential violence) while they are away. And when they marry they lock their brides in a separate palace. As a result the sister has no other women in the palace (except servants) to keep her company. She becomes very lonely and eventually asks her brothers to catch two parrots from a rival neighbor’s territory as pets. This expedition (which the sister changes her mind about) starts the “war” that eventually ends the entire epic. The two men die without ever getting their sister married, and when they leave this world the sister’s personality turns very angry. She becomes dangerous and destructive.

So we can see that the brothers gradually become less responsible vis-à-vis their sister. Their “sins” are main those of omission (rather than of direct commission) but, none-the-less they do not treat their sister justly. She responds by becoming gradually less helpful and supportive. She changes her mind about asking for parrots (when it is too late), she “tests” her brothers” and then lies to them about the outcome of her magical seed throw (episode). Finally she never commits to blessing their swords before they go into their final and very dangerous “war.” Also her little female dog, Ponnacci, lays a curse on her brothers and makes them sick in their war tent. With this illness hanging over them they make more mistakes and their power and respect are quickly weakened because they send an assistant to act for them and he loses all of their fighting men in a confrontation with the great wild boar, Komban.

If one looks carefully at what happens over many episodes, the gradual build in these brother/sister tensions will become clear. One can say, I think, that this is the “core” kinship bond in South Indian culture. In this story that strong bond is gradually broken. The anger and frustration is foreshadowed by several bitter incidents in the second generation. There is an ultimate “breakdown” of this tie with the death of the two brothers in the third. This misfortune, which is “of their own doing” at many levels (including their final joint suicide), leaves the sister entirely alone. She reacts by becoming a kind of roaming, and almost deranged warrior/saint. She also becomes more male-like, more independent and more violent towards the end of the story. It is almost as if she has “absorbed” the spirits of her dead brothers into her own body to become some sort of “siren.” Tungal even rides a bird near the end of the story, which makes the reverberation with Greek mythological parallels even stronger. But all these images and implications are kept rather hidden. You have to look hard for them. This is no doubt because all three siblings are understood to be divinities. Their memories are worshipped rather like saints are in the West. The brother/sister bond is so powerful in South Indian culture generally, and so sacred, that the story teller doesn’t want to openly show these characters in a bad light. But when the bond is “broken it is like splitting the electron from the nucleus of an atom.... a huge and fearful energy is released!

PARENT / CHILD TENSIONS - AND EXPECTATIONS

(A description of what the story says about inter-generational value shifts)

There is not much to say about the shift between the first and the second generations in this story. In the first generation the grandfather is a very hard worker. He has to live in exile for some time, but when he returns he is gifted a good, fertile tract of land by the neighboring Chola king. He and his wife have every intention of passing this land onto their (adopted) son. But they both die when he is only five years old. At this point the greedy clansmen who feel they were given less valuable land, take over the tract belonging to their elder “brother.” They destroy his palace, take the young child with them and then mistreat him. It is only years later, after his marriage, that this boy (the father) returns to the family lands. He works hard to rebuild his father’s home. He is also generous and kind. He rules the area with gentleness and compassion. He also receives recognition from the Chola king in the form of special honors and titles. He becomes substantially wealthier than his father was. One can say that the father (the lead second generation male in this story) is less of a labourer and more of a ruler than his father (the first generation grandfather). However, they basically share the same personality and the same leadership style.

Between the second and the third generations in the story, however, there is a substantial change. The father is a ruler but he is also a farmer. He is concerned about his crops, his lands, and the villages that are allied with his family. He pays tribute to the Chola king regularly and is willing to accept his honored (but subordinate) status vis-à-vis this higher level monarch. He is repeatedly praised in story songs as a good king and his lands prosper under his rule. He is also a devout worshipper of the local family goddess, Celatta. He is said to pay his respects to her three times each day.

When the twin grandsons are born matters change. First of all, these two men are raised by the goddess for a full five years. They live secretly in a cave under her temple and they receive regular marshal arts training. When they are old enough to fend for themselves the goddess takes them back to their “real” parents. Now they each get a magical horse to ride and they spend their time enjoying their outdoor adventures. When their mother begins to plan for their marriage they refuse to listen to her. Eventually they agree to a joint wedding, but only with a shocking proviso. They will never ever touch their wives, not even in the wedding ceremony itself. Like hockey players on a night before a big game, they remain celibate in order to enhance their virility and fighting prowess. The difference with hockey is that these men remain perpetually celibate.... throughout their lives! This is a very rebellious move. Their parents are shocked. How will there ever be offspring that can inherit the family lands and their substantial local status? Their sister is upset because she is all alone in the palace. There will be no hoped-for sisters-in-law to keep her company.

The twin sons also rebel in other ways. They are not farmers. They never touch a plow and instead they dream of becoming valiant warriors. They play dice regularly (a game culturally associated with danger and with taking big chances in life). In fact, just before every serious development or major challenge in their lives these men are found in their special “dicing room” playing with chance. When their parents are about to expire they leave important instructions with their sons: 1) Always be patient and kind, 2) Never take revenge on family enemies, 3) Always respect and protect your sister. 4) Always carry out her requests, 5) Be sure to get her married to a fine husband at the proper time, and 6) Worship the family goddess Celatta three times each day. One by one, the sons “disobey” every single one of their parents’ key “deathbed” instructions.

In sum, there is a dramatic shift between the second and the third generations of male heroes in this story. The second generation male is kind, gentle, devout and sensitive. He is a good farmer and a good ruler. In the last generation the grandsons rebel. They are warriors par-excellence. It is important to note, however, that these warlike traits apply mainly to the younger or “second” of the twin brothers. The first is much more like his father. He is considerate and frequently thinks of his sister. But he is also “weak” in the sense that he frequently follows the lead of his younger sibling. He is praised and loved for his gentleness, but it is the fierce, brazen and very strong younger brother is the true “hero” of this epic in the eyes of most story listeners. The story celebrates the aggressive, outgoing and honor-oriented character of this key youth. He is an archetype male and he can be interpreted as symbolizing the warlike aspirations of many young men born into the dominant farming community in the Kongu area today (a group known as the Vellala Gounders).

HUSBAND / WIFE TENSIONS

(What this story has to say about the institution of marriage)

The story starts off accepting the institution of marriage without question. The husband-wife relationship in the first generation is unremarkable and is taken completely for granted. The two are loyal partners and both work in the fields. There is hardly any misunderstanding between them and the only issue is the wife's barrenness. Once her husband finds a "magical" orphan in one of his fields the wife focuses on raising her child. She is content.

In the second generation there is more marital tension. Now the wife has special powers of insight and she has to use these powers from time to time to keep her husband from making serious mistakes. She mistrusts the clansmen and expects them to lie and cheat where her husband takes their words at face value. She finds the jewels inside the buds of their precious maize crop. Gradually these tensions grow. The wife wants to visit her brothers' home and meet the children there. Her husband warns her (this time he is correct to suspect trouble) but she goes any way. When she returns home, badly beaten and bruised, he throws her out of the house and she then contemplates suicide. Later they reconcile, however, when Lord Vishnu intervenes and sets them a long list of charitable tasks.

The last of the great tasks Lord Vishnu sets Tamarai, is a twenty one year pilgrimage to the gates of heaven. The husband, Kunnutaiya, is not strong enough for the journey. Tamarai tries to carry him on her back. She tries to fetch him water for his thirst. But still, he is the weaker partner and he has to stop half way. Lord Vishnu helps out and sees to it that his spirit is kept safely in a little god box until his wife's return. She carries on alone, with Lord Vishnu's help. Finally after 21 years of severe penance, she returns with a promise from Shiva of three children. They will be born back at the palace, but she full faith in his gift. Later, after the children are born the couple under go more hardships. They are sent into exile by the clansmen who demonstrate that they have no male offspring. (Of course, unbeknownst to all, these children are being hidden in the temple of the goddess nearby). While in exile the wife, Tamarai, again bears the brunt of the many hardships they endure. She has to beg for milk for her girl-child, she does the hard manual labor required to support the family and bring home food, and she also bravely suffers the taunts of the local women in the foreign area where they are forced to live in a horse stable. None of these hardships "break down" the marriage. But it can certainly be said that it is due to largely to the determination of the wife that they eventually are able to return home and re-establish a normal palace life.

In the third generation the situation is starkly different. The twin heroes marry but there is no conjugal relationship whatsoever. The two men lock their poor wives in a lonely home by themselves and force them to spin forever. This part of the story is characterized essentially by the absence of any normal marriage. And the same can be said for the key rivals, a group of mountain dwelling hunters with whom the final heroic battle is fought. In an exact parallel to Tangal, this band of tribal brothers also has a virgin sister whose powers serve to bless their exploits and heighten their virility. It is interesting that over three generations the marital relationships evolve from "normal" to "female dominated" to "non-at-all." If anything, the two virgin sisters take the place of the heroes' wives. The relationship is asexual in the extreme. Instead the transfer of hidden powers from the sister to her brothers is given extreme importance.

THE BROTHER-IN-LAW RELATIONSHIP

There are only two places in the story where the brother-in-law relationship is portrayed. In the first instance the interaction becomes negative as soon as the bond is established, but there is a good reason. The man who marries Tamarai has been working as a shepherd and household servant for her two brothers for some fifteen years. No one knows that these men are members of affinally related lineages that have exchanged women in the previous generation. The huge instantaneous change in status from servant to brother-in-law is too much for Tamarai's brothers to accept. They "excommunicate" their sister and her new husband and tell them never to return to her natal village. Various unpleasant gifts (like blind goats) are given to the couple to symbolize this expulsion.

The other brother-in-law relationship in the story is far more interesting. This is the bond that ties the story's two key gods to one another: Shiva and Vishnu. Shiva's wife Parvati is Vishnu's sister. Vishnu is the more "active" god. He descends to earth repeatedly. There the key heroes and heroines ask him for help, much as someone might call on a Saint or on Jesus himself, in Western Christian tradition. Sometimes Vishnu can help out on his own, but there are multiple times when he needs his brother-in-law's help. Vishnu visits Shiva repeatedly to ask him for "favours." These are generally matters that involve life and death, but Shiva also controls fire and he has a magic wand. When Vishnu visits Shiva he is pleasant and a sort of "teasing" banter colors their conversations. This is a kind of "tension" but it is one that is "managed" and even enjoyed. Exactly the same kind of "teasing" and joking is considered appropriate between human brothers-in-law. The relationship between these two gods conforms to a paradigmatic human model. Once in a while Vishnu's sister is asked to speak to her husband on Vishnu's behalf, but generally he will tackle his brother-in-law by himself.

The key scenario that adds interest to the stereotyped and playful "tug-of-war" between Hinduism's two greatest male gods develops at the half way point in the story. Shiva is deep in meditation and Vishnu builds a hot fire with the intent to get his attention. Although Vishnu has to do this several times, his strategy finally works. Vishnu then asks Shiva to grant his protégée Tamarai three children. Shiva agrees, after considerable protest. He finds three "spirit lives" near his Himalayan paradise. Using a powerful beam (of something like light) he plants all three spirits in Tamarai's womb. Vishnu and Shiva now bargain over how many years these three children will be able to spend on earth. Finally the number sixteen is arrived at (with a few extra years thrown in that are not to be counted). At any rate, Shiva then demands that Vishnu's powerful conch shell (a great war weapon that can emit magical sounds) be left in "hock" with him during the period that the heroes (and heroine) will spend on earth. He is also to leave behind a sacred powder box. (Perhaps he uses this powder to apply magical marks to his body)? Vishnu is told by Shiva to look after all three children well and then to return them safely to paradise after the pre-agreed sixteen years have elapsed.

Having made the bargain, Vishnu reluctantly hands over his conch shell to his brother-in-law. Sixteen years later Lord Vishnu himself directs the heroes to sacrifice their lives at the proper moment. This "caretaker" god then carries the three spirit lives back to Shiva in a little golden box. Vishnu immediately reminds Shiva of his bargain and Shiva returns Vishnu's sacred conch and the little powder box. The scene is important because it reveals that there is more than joking in this serious brother-in-law relationship. There is bargaining, negotiation and there is a sense of honour. Each god keeps his promise to the other.

BECOMING A SOLITARY FEMALE - or BURSTING KINSHIP BONDS

It is surprising how much “air time” the Ponnivala legend gives to the movements of solitary females, especially considering the heavy social constraints placed on women in the traditional culture of South India more generally. In the Kongu area woman normally travel about either in pairs, or even in larger groups. Usually they are accompanied by a male relative, but alternatives include a sister, an aunt or a good friend. In this story both key heroines are solitary travelers for significant periods of time.

In the second generation queen Tamarai takes a pilgrimage to the gates of heaven. She starts off with her husband at her side, but after some time it becomes clear that he can not withstand the rigors of this difficult trip. So he is left by the side of the path, resting under a tree. There Lord Vishnu puts his “spirit” in a small gold box for safe keeping. He remains in this “comatose” state, as if he were dead, for twenty one years. Meanwhile his wife proceeds upward towards her destination. It is true that Lord Vishnu is her protector and is always “watching her.” But for much of the trip she appears alone. And during this time she faces many challenges, including crossing “rivers” of fire and of stone. She also meets wild animals of various kinds. Finally, reaching the spot Vishnu has selected for her, she sits alone on a pillar, deep in meditation. During her twenty one years of deep prayer she undergoes seven “deaths” designed by Lord Shiva to test her resolve. And once she wins her great gift of life from this god she has to make the return journey alone as well, at least as far as the spot where her husband awaits her arrival.

During this entire period of solitary travel Tamarai retains her phenomenal determination to succeed. She also retains her self respect. This alone is a fine testament to the fact that there is an honored cultural niche for women who act alone. Perhaps we can call this the role of becoming “a solitary pilgrim.” There is a parallel with medieval Europe where women saints were also honored as they traveled about, lived alone and acted as individual, separate beings.

The same scene described above repeats itself in the third generation of the Ponnivala story. Now it is the young Tungal who becomes the solitary traveller. As soon as she reads “the signs” that show her brothers have left her, and realizes that they have died, she transforms and takes on a new role. In this last phase of her unmarried life she lets her hair down, she uses fire to “burn” the persons she feels have wronged her (along with their assets), and she also exhibits the power to call on rain for similar reasons (melting the work of the potter who refuses to give her free pots, Episode 26b). She wanders alone in the forest for days. Here she seems to have a special charm or ability to deal with dangerous animals, as for example when she encounters a huge (female) cobra that ends up helping her by shading Tungal from the sun and the rain with its large “hood.”

Eventually Tungal flies over the mountains to the spot where her brothers have died, using a borrowed golden goose vehicle that belongs to a forest maiden she met along the way. Interestingly, this woman is also alone, and she also spends her time meditating on a high pillar. The scene provides a close parallel to the way in which Tungal’s own mother prayed many years earlier. And also similar to what happens in the previous generation, Tungal and her forest friend retain their honor and their self respect. These are both fine, pure and saint-like females.

The two “sub-stories” just described are important as they create a kind of paradigm for solitary women. They describe a niche, a role for a lone woman that is clearly respected.

However, there is one more dimension to this “single female” theme that must be mentioned. There are two female goddesses in the story, Celatta and Kali. Each resides alone on earth in her own solitary temple. Both women are considered to be “forms” of the great goddess Parvati (Vishnu’s sister / Shiva’s wife) that have come down to earth on her own. They too can be understood as being deep in meditation, as they sit in their local temples. Celatta is the more peaceful and “mild” form and Kali the more “angry” or violent. Both are familiar to villagers everywhere in the region. Interestingly, in this story Celatta is associated strongly with the heroes’ family while Kali is associated with their rivals (Tamarai’s two brothers who have rejected her, and the forest hunters who are rivals from the start). Kali is associated with much of the violence in the story (the “burning” of Tamarai’s brothers, the curse Tungal’s dog lays on her brothers, and finally the hunter’s sister who urges her brothers into war against the twin heroes).

The two goddesses, Celatta and Kali, are “sisters.” Taking a wide view, they are very much like the twin heroes in the third generation of the story. In both cases one half of the paired set has a peaceful and gentle temperament while the other half is known for anger, and violence. One wants to settle matters by applying tolerance and understanding, the other wants to strike down evil and “stamp it out.” These are two sides of human nature. Here this opposition is projected onto two separate beings with an example provided for each gender (male heroic twins & goddess sisters). At a deeper level one might say that everyone has these sorts of oppositions, a kind of deep “ambivalence” about the right way to act, embedded deep inside the self. Here we have a moral psychology of balance writ large, played out on a larger-than-life dramatic stage. (This theme of balance is further discussed in the section on “Ethical Dynamics” that immediately follows).

c) ETHICAL DYNAMICS WITHIN THE STORY

One of the important and interesting things about this legend is that it does not moralize or point to clear “right” and “wrong” behaviors. Yes there are heroes and heroines, but no one is portrayed as totally good or totally evil. At best there are “shades of” white or of grey. This makes the story very good for teaching and for discussion in a classroom setting. This is one good reason not to look solely at individual sub-episodes (as they have been summarized in another section of this manual). To see the “moral balance” displayed by this story you have to look at the larger picture and at multi-episode patterns. For example, the clansmen try to “trick” the father by roasting the packet of seeds they give him for planting. Yes, this is a very mean thing to do. But there is a reason. They believe that the land should be theirs and they have two strong arguments to reinforce their position. For one, the initial division of the land between the clansmen’s fathers and the father of the hero, Kunnutaiya, was unequal. Kunnutaiya got “Ponnivala,” a very fertile tract. The other clansmen had to share “Tangalvala” which is a drier and less desirable area. Secondly, Kunnutaiya’s son is adopted. The clansmen can argue that “legally” only male offspring who can claim a position in the direct blood line should inherit land. Though the clansmen may seem “mean” they do have some good arguments on their side.

This same situation stands true for many other matters in the epic. The wife has a good reason to go and see her brothers, the husband has a good reason to ask her not to go. The artisans have a good reason to dislike the farmers (they took lands belonging to the artisans away from them in the very first episode). The men of the hills are angry because the farmers stole a female parrot from their forest tree. The little dog is angry because she has been ignored by the heroes and not asked to join the war. Tangal has a right to be angry with her brothers because they have left her alone and unprotected. At every step therefore, therefore, each protagonist in a confrontation has a good reason for taking the stand they do. This makes the Legend of Ponnivala a very well integrated story. It is a story that has been “woven together” with much care and thought.

This complex moral “texture” makes the story a very good teaching tool. You can ask your students to “tease out” the reason for any action and then to defend it. You can ask them to form teams that defend the different points of view displayed. Some of the obvious oppositions that can be treated in this way are listed below. You are sure to find more, as are those whom you will want to draw into such discussions:

- Artisan – Farmer
- Hunter – Farmer
- Brother - Sister (in Generation 2 & in Generation 3)
- Brother - Brother (in Generation 3)
- Husband – Wife (in Generation 2)
- Brother-in-law – Brother-in-law (consider Siva and Vishnu)
- Sister – Sister (The sole example, a little tricky, is Celatta versus Kali, the two female goddesses)

d) POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Kings, Kingdoms & Geography and Time Periods

Kingdoms: The lands of south India are surrounded on three sides by ocean. We know that sea trade with kingdoms the Middle East and the Gulf area existed in this region from very early times. Travel by sea was much easier than overland travel to the North because a major mountain chain runs across middle India. Those rough and remote hills obstruct easy north/south travel, even today. As a result the major economic and political power centers that developed in South India were positioned along the coast. There were three main areas of influence, the Chola, Chera and Pandiya regions. But there was also a significant upland tract in the middle of the peninsula, and this area was a kind of no-man's-land. This is the area known as the "Kongu" region, and in it lies Ponnivala, the area where this story takes place. Kongu was always "warred over" by stronger competing kingdoms that lay along its periphery. This also gave Kongu a distinct cultural heritage. The people of the area wanted their "own identity." Kongu residents were both proud and fierce. The Legend of Ponnivala stands as a sort of testament to the pride of place that the local residents in this area felt. They wanted to distinguish themselves from the powers that lay around them, and to claim equal status whenever possible. This kind of thinking goes a long way to explaining how the "Legend of Ponnivala" came about. It is a history of this area as understood by its own residents, and passed down through time by its very talented singing bards.

Kings: During the period between the 11th and 16th centuries South India was dominated by three powerful lines of rulers, the Cholas, the Cheras and the Pandiyas. These several and distinctly different coastal kingdoms competed for power and position throughout this period. Each one had access to the sea and to important trade routes, including ties to merchant groups that traded with Europeans. All three kings are mentioned in this epic story, but the Pandya and Chera leaders are touched upon only lightly. One has the impression that they were allies and friends of the Chola king, but we know from other sources that this was not the normal, very competitive, state of affairs. At any rate the story is told by men who felt an allegiance to the Chola king, and hence he is made out to be the superior figure and the most important of the three.

Geography: During the first generation in the story the Chola king gives the farmers a significant boost. He backs the eldest brother, who comes to work for him during a time of drought and famine. Pleased with this man's skilful and hard work the Chola awards him a fertile upland area known as Ponnivala. This is a fertile tract of land that lies along the Southern bank of the great Kaveri river. The story finds its geographic center through this key event. A lesser tract is awarded to the first farmer's eight younger brothers. It is called Tangavala. Both Ponnivala and Tangavala are "nadus" or recognized territorial areas. The in-laws inhabit a third such area that is known as Valavandi. It is also a nadu. Interestingly, the fourth key area in the story, the hilly tract where the tribal hunters live, is simply referred to as the Viramalai (literally the mountains of the brave). The Viramalai are never given the status of a nadu. This suggests that in the eyes of the ruling farmers this area was "uncivilized." It is never given a geographic and political status equal to the other three (nadu) areas.

As to the “historicity” of the story, a few old palace walls can be seen. And local traditions define the specific areas where events like a key wedding occurred. There are also old and important temples associated with the legend. And there is a key festival location. Furthermore, there are village names, and specific mountain ranges described. All these “tidbits” of local tradition provide a certain amount of physical evidence. It is safe to say that some of the key events described by this story..... may have actually occurred!

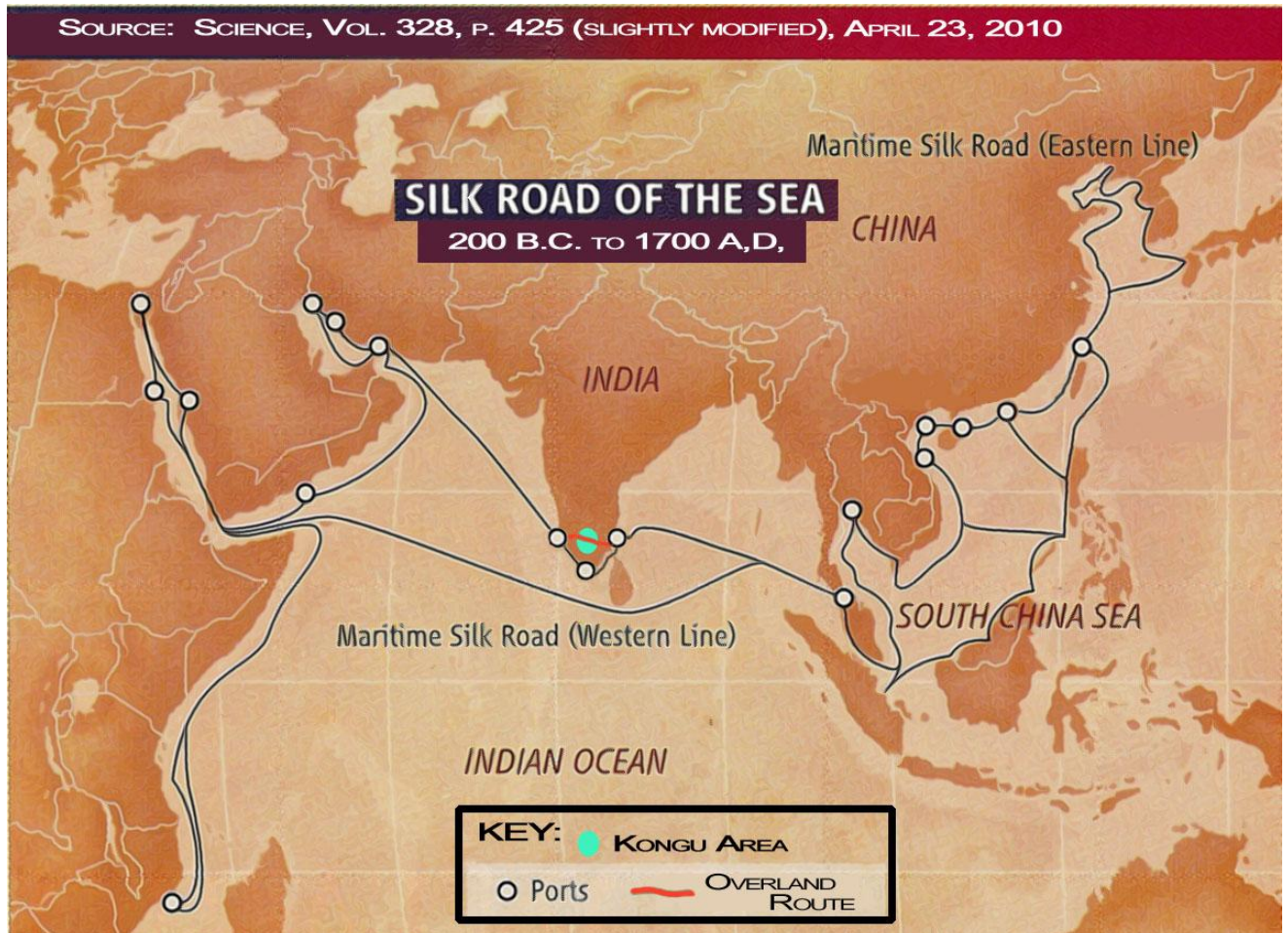
As to the origins of the story itself, no one knows. Who told the story first, and what key events were included during that first telling must be left to the imagination. But it is certain that the story dates back at least a couple of centuries, and probably a lot further. It also seems likely that it was “composed backwards.” By that it is meant that the events of the third generation were probably told first. Perhaps there were twin brothers, or at least two brothers who were valiant fighters who gained some degree of “independence” from wider powers for their local family. Perhaps these men also fought off tigers, protected villagers and gained heroic status for their bravery. We know that the area is peppered with stones that memorialize male heroes for just such acts.

Once the Ponnivala story got started audiences would have wanted to know more. Questions would have been posed to the story tellers. Who were the parents of the two heroes? What was their family background? How did they acquire their lands? Asking such questions may have inspired the more inventive bards and poets of the time to ‘work backwards.” They may have filled in information (likely from their own imaginations) that fit with what was anyway known about the area’s history. After all these bards were the local historians, in a time with few schools and no school books to read. This is a people’s story, told by their own poets and singers, about their own history and their own region. This is a story knitted together with intelligence and with a deep cultural understanding. It is an amazing example of what oral epic story telling once was. The Legend of Ponnivala is a document to the creative artistry and perceptive depth of the human imagination, left over from a time when all peoples built their education around oral epic legends much like this one.... legends about heroes and heroines once told around the world!

Time Periods: The Legend of Ponnivala describes a period between roughly the 11th and the 16th centuries. Speaking very generally, the first two centuries (the 11th and 12th) was a period of expansion along the main river routes that lead into the interior from the coastal areas. The major dynastic powers, especially the Cholas, tried to expand their control inland at the time by sending groups of farmers up river to settle “new areas.” They had to wrest land from earlier inhabitants in order to bring new areas until the plough. The earlier people controlling these uplands were mainly tribes that lived by hunting and gathering. However, there were also important trade routes that were developed very early that led travelers across a political no-man’s land (but served to connect India’s West and East coasts). Using a variety of inland route for the transport of goods was probably more efficient than trying to take a merchant ship full of goods all the way around the very tip of India. There were also important items that could be bought and traded along the way, like the semi-precious beryl stone. For this reason we can guess

that important guild groups made up of artisans and merchants may have controlled many of these inland trade routes during and just before the 11th and 13th centuries.

The map below details the likely Asian shipping corridors used by merchants over roughly 2,000 years. The red line shows the connecting land route which bisected the Kongu area.



During the initial description of the first generation of men in the story (episode 1b) we learn that the farmers wrest tillage rights in Ponnivala from a group of “artisans.” Of course Lord Vishnu gives the farmers a little help with this “acquisition” but reading this event with an eye to recorded history, we can imagine that these farmers had some help from a Chola king. Such a transfer of land rights does seem to reflect actual events during this period. We know from inscriptions, that this was the “heyday” of the Chola empire. A long succession of Chola kings became actively involved in sending farmers up the Kaveri river with the core intent of opening up new lands to agriculture. At the same time these very same Chola monarchs were building important new temples on the banks of the river. And the same kings were also ordering the construction of major irrigation works alongside the Kaveri. This additional water was needed, of course, to irrigate the many new fields, new crop land that was rapidly being brought under the

plough. In sum, the experiences of the first generation of men in the Ponnivala story fit in well with what other sources of history have to say about actual human activity in the Kongu area at this time.

It is also worth noting that very few merchant ships actually sailed around the southern tip of India. The winds there were very unpredictable. And furthermore, a very dangerous finger of submerged rocks “connects” Sri Lanka to the mainland. This made the sailing of large loaded boats up (or down) the eastern side of the tip very dangerous. So most merchants preferred to unload at a good port on either the West or the East coast and send their goods overland in caravans of ox carts. There is only one significant gap in the mountains that line the Western side of the “tip” (called the Palghat gap), and so all the merchant caravans were fed into and out of that “pass.”

The Western side of the Palghat trade route was fed by cart trails from many ports (including Cochin and Calicut). On the East the “roads” spread out through many small settlements that dotted the upland plain that is known as Kongu nadu today. There have been many significant finds of Roman coins in this area, attesting to its popularity with traders from early times. Essentially all routes led Eastward to the valley of the great Kaveri river, and from there down stream through its wide delta to several major ports at and near what is today called Nagapattinam.

This history is important for the Ponnivala story because all the traders must have passed either through (or right alongside) the Ponnivala area. Although the Legend of Ponnivala is generally silent about these traders we do get a hint of what was happening from the first episode, where the farmers sent up river by the Chola king encounter “Artisans” who do not want to yield their control of the area. We know that the merchants were “allied” with many artisans who provided them with trade goods. These men also manufactured (and repaired) their ox carts. It does not seem that the artisans were “farmers.” Much more likely, they lived in small settlements along the trade routes (where they still tend to cluster today). The rest of the land would have been essentially unoccupied forest and bush. The farmers cut this vegetation back to establish their fields. But the artisan and merchant guilds retained control of trade. These two groups are depicted as antagonists throughout the Ponnivala story. The early economy of the area explains why this rivalry was so strong. According to this story neither group has much to do with the other. The Legend of Ponnivala describes what life was like on either side of the great trade routes through the area, but hardly mentions the lives of the traders and artisans themselves. This story clearly presents only the farming community’s perspective on traditional life in this area.

A similar match between the story and recorded history can also be found when we consider the second and third generations. The father of the twin heroes becomes a small king in the Ponnivala area. He is a loyal supporter of the Chola king and he pays him “tribute” on a regular basis. This does not mean that he was a minor subordinate paying tax. The situation is more like a gentleman’s alliance, where the hero acknowledges the superiority of the Chola and brings him symbolic gifts. The monarch, in return, gives the land owner recognition and fine-sounding titles. He also comes and attends various family ceremonies. And he shows concern for the welfare of the young orphan boy the Ponnivala king and his wife are forced to leave behind at the time of their

sudden death. This general “picture” matches well with what was happening in the 13th century (and part way into the 14th). In this period the Chola kings are strong and the whole area is relatively peaceful. The Chola, Chera and Pandiya kings are managing their alliances adeptly.

But after the middle of the 14th century things start to deteriorate. The various southern kingdoms weaken. There is more rivalry and more warfare. Furthermore, the northern Vijayanagar empire now starts to expand its influence Southward. The results are easy to see. There is now a lot of warfare. Every large landowner has to defend his own lands. It is every small ruler out to protect himself and perhaps expand his personal influence if he is lucky. This is exactly the period that the twin sons of the third generation can be understood to represent. They are warlike. They stop paying tribute and soon afterwards they “overthrow” the Chola king and assert their family’s complete independence. Gradually, during their lifetimes one can say, the whole world descends into chaos. Just about everyone dies and there is no one left to look after the family palace and its associated lands. In Hindu terms this is the end of time, the apocalypse. The heroes die by their own swords. They understand that everything must now end and then begin again. There is fire, there is flooding and then, at the very end of the story there are hints of peace and of renewal. What an amazing “match” between what we know of actual history, and what we learn from the local bards. This local history, as grasped and retold by the people’s own historians (their oral bards) rings true in so many ways! Here is a story faithful to the Hindu view of time and also faithful to the actual wide “sweep” of events that most historians agree defined South India in pre-British. “medieval,” times.

E) BASIC CONCEPTS IN FOLK HINDUISM

Gods, Goddesses and Common Ceremonies

The Major Gods in the Story:

Shiva: Shiva is one of the two most important male gods in Hinduism. He is often absorbed in meditation and his ashen skin color reflects the internal fire that his concentration generates. But Shiva is also a kind of governor who sits in his Council Chambers and decides matters of life and death. He is accompanied by an accountant who keeps his records regarding the lives of people on earth. The accountant also notes what spirit lies are “available” for rebirth assignments.

Physical Attributes: Shiva traditionally carries various identifying symbols including a hand drum and a large trident. He often sits on a tiger skin and his favorite retreat is a mountainous snow-covered area that lies high in the Himalayas. His vehicle is a white bull named Nandi. Shiva’s wife is the goddess Parvati, who is considered to be Vishnu’s sister (at least in South India).

Vishnu: Vishnu is often called “the Preserver” because he works hard to help his earth-bound devotees. He visits earth frequently, but can be hard to recognize because he takes many forms and likes to use disguises. Vishnu is playful and frequently “tests” people with his illusions and other tricks. He is famous for his ten “avatars” or various ways in which he has appeared on earth in the past. These avatar forms are not a part of this story, with the possible exception of the great boar Kombar (who could be linked to Vishnu’s boar avatar known as called Varaha).

Physical Attributes: Vishnu carries a conch shell, and a discus. When not busy on earth he likes to lie on a couch made of cobras that floats on a “milk sea” high above the earth. Vishnu’s vehicle is a half man, half bird creature named Garuda.

Ganesh: Ganesh is Shiva and Parvati’s first born son. He is the god of “beginnings” and the “remover of obstacles.” He is always worshipped before anything important is to be started. Ganesh temples can be found in every village, often being just a simple shrine under a tree. These are popular places for people to gather and chat. The Ganesh temple serves repeated in this story as a king of village meeting room.

Physical Attributes: Ganesh has a broken tusk. This relates to the tradition that he broke off his own tusk to use as a writing tool when he once took down a dictation of the entire Mahabharata (a very long and very famous epic story). Ganesh is always portrayed as quite plump. He likes to eat and usually holds a “delicacy” or a sweet of some kind in one of his hands. His vehicle is the rat. There are many stories that explain why Ganesh has an elephant-like face. These legends can easily be researched on the internet.

Other Minor “Spirit” Beings:

Yeman: Yeman is the “Lord of Death.” It is his job to come to earth and fetch poor souls just as they die. He then takes these souls back to Shiva’s Council chambers via a rope ladder that reaches into the heavens. Yeman has two fierce assistants who help him with his work.

Physical Attributes: Yeman carries a hatchet and a large rope or “noose.”

The Demons: The demons appear in just one place in this story (episode 23d) where they are shown under water guarding the great war drum that belongs to the heroes’ family. Demons are troublemakers but they are also easily pacified with food offerings. When the demons are given leftovers from foods used in a ceremony they usually agree to leave. Here they take off in the four directions, where they are vaguely said to reside... on the outer peripheries of the universe (or perhaps the edges of human space?). Demons especially like blood offerings. They are non-vegetarian.

Physical Attributes: Demons have big staring eyes and fangs in their mouths according to folk tradition.

The Major Goddesses in the Story:

Parvati: Parvati is the wife of Shiva (and in South Indian folk tradition) the sister of Lord Vishnu. She is a kind, beneficent and peaceful goddess but she has great creative powers. In The Legend of Ponnivala she appears at the very beginning of the story where she creates the 9 farmers whose descendents will become the heroes of this epic. She also creates an affinal line (not well described) that will be able to “exchange women” for marriage purposes with the men in the heroes’ own line. Parvati lives in a palace near her husband’s Council Chambers. She also has a peaceful “garden.” She only appears in this story in two types of roles: 1) When she is “creating people” either alone or in consort with her husband and 2) When she is asked by her brother to be “go-between.” Vishnu asks his sister, on several occasions, to intercede with Lord Shiva and thereby win a favour from him for a favour that will help people down on earth. Parvati can be tough and a good “bargainer” in her own right. In several myths (not included in this legend) Parvati plays dice with her husband and wins (much to Shiva’s dismay).

Physical Attributes: Parvati is very beautiful. She is often associated with a lion or a tiger, although she rides on her husband’s vehicle (a white bull) as well.

Celatta: Celatta is a “form of Parvati as she is found, alone and without her husband at her side, Parvati can be found in many temples with Shiva at her side, but she also takes a solitary form in many village temples where she can be seen without her husband nearby. In this condition Parvati is a guardian of the earth and an expression of its “sakti” or great power and fecundity. In this condition she has many, many local names of which Celatta is only one. Essentially she is the local goddess par excellence, and a favourite with worshippers who are concerned with the need for rain, with help with protection from disease and also when assistance with any kind of family problem is needed. In this story Celatta is worshipped three times a day by the males of the heroes’ family. She is their constant protector and benefactor but she can turn angry if not well treated.

Kali: Kali represents the “darker” side of Celata. She is also present in many, many local shrines. Kali and Celatta are essentially the same goddess, but in two different “moods” of psychological states. Kali is darker skinned than Celatta and more prone to violence. In this story Kali is associated with the enemies’ villages. There is a Kali temple in the in-laws’ village and also one in the village of the hunter-tribal community that live in the nearby hills. Since the Ponnivala legend takes the heroes’ perspective it is not surprising that the more violent “side” of the local goddess has been associated with the peripheries of the story space and associated with the family’s rivals.

Common Village Ceremonies:

Life Cycle Ceremonies: The main ceremonies represented in this story are ones that celebrate life cycle milestones for the key family. The story includes a naming ceremony for a young child (episode 16c), two weddings (episodes 5c and 17a), and three ceremonies for the recently deceased (17b, 26a and 26d). Both wedding ceremonies are ‘abbreviated’ and unusual in that they take place outside the normal home space in a kind of “no-man’s land.” The unusual space is symbolic of the fact that both weddings are “unorthodox” in some way or other (the first involves a complete rejection of the bride by her family, and the second is forced, hurried and modified to insure that the two brides and twin grooms do not physically touch each other). The second funeral ceremony is also very abbreviated because there are no relatives to call and because the sister (Tangal) is acting out her anger. The third is unusual because the sister is performing the ceremonies as a stand-in for a non-existent male. It is also greatly shortened. The common ingredients in all these ceremonies are food offerings placed before one or more gods or goddesses. These offerings are later consumed by the guests, service personnel and last of all, the leftovers are given to itinerant beggars. In the case of a funeral the crows are also fed, as they are thought to represent (in some loose way) the spirits of other deceased relatives.

General Temple Worship: The story also describes the frequent worship of a family goddess. This is a relatively simple matter. The hero simply waves a plate of offerings (flowers, fruits etc.) and some sweet smelling incense in front of the god’s image and thinks of that god in a brief set of prayers. The basic idea here is that the worshipper is honouring a welcome high-status guest. Just as one would offer a human guest tasty tidbits and sweet-smelling things, so too one offers these to the gods. It is not that the gods are actually imagined as eating the offerings. This is more of a symbolic gesture honouring them. The foods are considered to have been ‘infused’ with the god or goddess’s spirit after having been set in front of the shrine idol.

Temple Festivals: Larger temple ceremonies often involve pulling a large wooden chariot around the temple with an image of the particular god or goddess (or the couple together) seated inside. The idea is to give the divine figure a pleasant and honored outing, a “grand ride,” so-to-speak (see episode 11b). This is often a big event in the yearly calendar and all the people of the area will try to attend. However, it is also an occasion when disputes surface. Any community with a role in the ceremonies (which normally includes most groups) can refuse to play their part if they want to raise their issue publically. These brief “boycotts” become the occasion for a bargaining session, so that the ceremonies can be completed in a timely manner. As in the West, which churches often compete, so to temples in India can become the focus of what are essentially rivalries between powerful local social groups.

Other Ceremonies: There are many other occasions when a ritual or ceremony of some kind is performed. One that we see in this animated epic is a ceremony that starts the building of something important, like a house or a palace. (episode 8a). Here a plant with a milky sap is tied to post (indicating prosperity to come?). Another common ceremony is to boil a pot of milk until it spills over in an auspicious direction (normally the east). The pot is generally tipped a little to insure the spill is occurs on the correct side. This is also a symbol of abundance. This ritual is done before moving into a new house and also every January, at the beginning of the Tamil New Year.

PART TWO: THE DIGITAL PARCHEESI GAME

A Teacher's Overview of Play Ponnivala Parcheesi

About the Game:

Parchesi is a very old game that can be traced as far back at the 4th century AD. It was the royal game played by the Maharajas of India. Some palaces had a huge inlaid marble courtyard with the board set in stone at its center. The game pieces could be actual slaves from the kings harem, who would move around the board at his command. Commoners played the game as well on an embroidered cloth, or on a stone surface that was etched according to the custom pattern. In the Legend of Ponnivala the heroes of the third generation frequently play parchesi. Sometimes Lord Vishnu descends from heaven to join in the game.... Symbolizing the game's link to the role of the god's in human life. Significantly parchesi is a game that mixes the "chance numbers" of the players' dice rolls with personal judgment and decision making. The game has many "variants," including variant spellings. In the past the game was usually played by three or four players at a time. In Ponnivala Parcheesi up to four “families” (each with four members) can play against each other.

How The Game Is Related To The Animated Video Series (the DVD Episodes):

Play Ponnivala Parcheesi takes its inspiration from the multiple games of dice which the twin heroes play in the 3rd generation of the Ponnivala story (episodes 16 through 23). In the video story you will note that Lord Vishnu frequently descends to earth and joins in these repeated dicing scenes. The legend itself does not make it clear whether the two brothers play against the god or whether Lord Vishnu simply influences the heroes' dice throws in some way. Whatever the case may be, we can read these scenes as a larger metaphor for how humans must jockey with “fate” (or the will of the gods) in general. Life on earth is a mixture of luck, planning, strategic moves and a person's broad efforts to lead an ethical life. This interpretation, seeing all of life as a sequence of games of Parcheesi, can be expanded and used as an interpretive umbrella that one can apply to the entire Ponnivala story, in all three generations. A teacher can easily discuss how other more modern games (ice hockey, baseball and more) are similarly used metaphorically to talk about the nature of teamwork and/or about life in general.

Ponnivala Parcheesi As A Digital Classroom Game:

If you set up for students to play Ponnivala Parcheesi in the classroom they can benefit from viewing the 480 pictures of life in medieval Ponnivala that the game contains. Of course a teacher can discuss any of the 480 the "pop-up" questions (or comments) posed. In addition, one can ask students to think about any of the legend's sub-stories or episodes they have seen in the light of this game. What are the characters doing to bargain over the terms and the constraints the gods have set out for them? How is any particular sequence of events in the legend like a metaphorical game of Parcheesi? Encourage students to think about the ways in which luck, strategic reasoning and ethical behaviour all become intertwined, both in the epic and in the game.

The Game "Layout" and What It Symbolizes:

The Parcheesi board has four "identical" arms that stretch out from a square centerpiece. Each arm is a long rectangle made up of three adjacent columns that is subdivided into eight squares. One moves "up" or "down" a column, not across them. Symbolically the large central square is "heaven." In Hindu tradition, living beings are "reincarnations" of past beings whose spirits have been stored or given a rest in heaven. So, as you begin the game you are one of those "spirits" that has just been given a new earthly life. You will "descend" from heaven down the central column of one arm (the arm "closest" to you). From there your life of adventure will take you on a long journey around all four "arms" of the board. You will always move clockwise as you progress (but counterclockwise if you fall back for any reason). Once you have made the entire circuit your "good works" will be tallied up. If you have accumulated enough "merit points" (100 of them) you are allowed to "re-ascend" the central column or ladder into heaven. This is the meaning of "winning" the game. Once you reach heaven you will enjoy a lovely (brief) glimpse of what it looks like there!

How To Win: You will start the game with 50 rupees in your royal treasury, and 25 merit points you have already earned for your admirable good deeds in past lives. You will also start with 3 "Bravery" points and 10 points in "Assets" (a small house or a seasons' worth of grain from a good harvest, or the like). To "win" you must obtain another 50 merit points. And remember... you can also lose merit points during your journey! While you travel you must keep your treasury from emptying totally. **Hint:** You have to "spend" money at some points in order to accomplish the good deeds that will earn you merit. However, don't spend foolishly because the money in your treasury can be quickly drained if you happen to encounter a streak of bad luck. Before you can proceed you will then have to wait until you roll a double "three." A double three will replenish your treasury ... adding 10 rupees to it, which is your profit on a successful local harvest.

Score Counters: You will see four screen counters react to your decisions as you play. These counters will keep track of the quantity of rupees currently stored in your treasury, the value of your assets, points acquired through brave deeds, and merit points awarded to you by the gods. At the end of the game, just before you enter the beautiful place of final "repose" you can ask to have your points you have earned on all four counts... summed. The gods will not tell you exactly how they make this calculation, but they will "convert" all of your points into one final "merit" score. If that score is equal to 100 or more you may proceed into "heaven." Otherwise you will be asked to continue your journey in life and (this time) try harder. When competing among families of pawns the family score is calculated when all four members reach the final resting place. The family with the highest joint score wins the contest.

The Dice: The game uses simple four sided, oblong-shaped folk dice such as one used to see in the villages of South India. These used to be made of brass. Each dice can roll a "0", "1", "2" or "3." The number of squares you can move is calculated as the total face value shown by both dice together. There are ten possibilities: 00, 01, 02, 03, 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, and 33. Press the "dice roll" button to find out what number you have obtained. Click on your chosen pawn and it will then move forward automatically the required amount. If you have more than one pawn on the board you can choose which one you would like to move forward.

How The Game Ends: To "win" you have to successfully circumambulate the entire board by following the "outside" path up and down each "arm." You will move ahead according to your throw of the dice. Landing on a lucky or unlucky square could cause your pawn to advance a little further, or to roll back a bit. Once you have made a complete circuit you can return up the central column of the arm you started on. You have to roll a "double zero" to enter "the final place of repose" and also have a calculated final "merit" score of 100 or more. **Heavenly Repose:** You will find out what this place looks like when you get there!

Choices You will Have to Make: Life is full of choices and so is this game of parcheesi. Whenever you land on a square marked with a yellow X you will be faced with a dilemma. There you will get a pictorial glimpse of the issue facing you. But then you will have to "act" if you want to proceed with the game. Make your "yes" or "no" choice and then you will find out how much you have earned or spent and whether or not you have gained any merit by doing so! When you land on a square marked with a blue X, by contrast, you will get a message about your good (or bad) luck. You will be rewarded or assigned a hardship accordingly. These consequences of your luck might cause your "pawn" to move ahead, or to roll back a few squares,.

Some "Obstacles" you will face: At the "corner that lies between each arm there is a geographic obstacle. The first will be a deep forest, the second a deep river, the third a hot desert and the fourth a path of high mountains. You will need to roll a dice number high enough to allow you to "jump over" this obstacle. Otherwise you can pay a guide to lead you through. If you pay for a guide he will allow you to get a "glimpse" of the terrain you are passing through!

Good Luck! Enjoy Your Journey into the Heart of Ponnivala! It is a beautiful, golden land from medieval South India. May you reach heaven and enjoy both its beauty and its matchless serenity!

Ponnivala Parchesi: Player Details

Basic Concept and Layout: The game of Ponnivala Parchesi has been designed to portray medieval South India between (roughly) the 10th and 16th centuries. The game parallels the Legend of Ponnivala, "fleshing out" the social dynamics of an era on the subcontinent that predates the British colonial period. The action takes place in the upland delta region of the Kaveri river (in the current state of Tamilnadu) just West of the Chola power center at Uriyur (now known as Tiruchirappalli). There are four basic geographic sub regions referenced in the game: 1) The River Delta, 2) The River Corridor, 3) A Dry Upland Plain, and 4) The Dense Forest Periphery. Each area is primarily associated with a particular community, 1) Ploughmen/Rulers, 2) Artisan/Journeymen, 3) Merchant/Traders and 4) Hunter/Bandits. These groups can and do form shifting alliances with one another but basically they are in competition both for dominance and for core amenities. You, as the primary player, will choose a family belonging to one of these four social groupings. Each "family" has four members who will work together for their common good. You must also decide if you want to "play against a family whose moves are directed by the computer" or against a live opponent. In all cases a family has four members.

Each family of four players is represented by a specific color and symbol. You will see these next to your playing position when you start the game.

Levels of Play: Next you define the extent and complexity of the competitive arena. "Level 1" play features two opposing families. When you choose to play against a "live opponent"

then that person gets to select which community group they want to represent. However, if you play against the computer then you can choose what social community your opponent's family belongs to. For "Level 2" lay you will have two opponents and for "Level 3" three opponents. You also must decide whether your "family" members will move around the board clockwise or counterclockwise. But once you make this choice then all members of your family must move in that direction ONLY, for the entire game. Finally, if you decide that there will be four "families" of players, then they may be grouped into two "opposing" teams, if you so wish. Each family group has a distinct sound that plays when it is their turn. You can choose your distinctive sound from a list (or choose NO SOUND at all if you prefer).

Starting choices (in sequence):

1. Which social group would you like your players to represent: A) Ploughmen/Farmer, B) Artisan/Craftsman, 3) Merchant/Trader, or 4) Hunter/Bandit. And which direction (clockwise or counterclockwise) will they move in?
2. Do you wish to play "the computer" or "live opponent(s)"?
3. (If you answer "live" to the previous question, then) How many "live opponents" do you plan to play against? 1, 2 or 3. (These "live opponents" then get to choose their particular social group, unique sound and direction of board play.)
(If you answer "the computer" to the previous question, then) How many "computer opponents" do you plan to play against? 1, 2 or 3.
4. For each "computer" opponent you will next be asked: Which social group does opponent family B (C, or D)..... belong to? AND Which direction (clockwise or counterclockwise) does that family always move in?
5. Finally, if you have selected four families, you will then be asked: Do you want to set up alliances between the four families? If yes, then who is the partner family for the (A) players and who is the family partner for the (B) players?

The order of play: When there are two "teams" then Selection A will always play first, then selection B, then the partner of selection A and finally the partner of selection B. If there are no teams designated then the several opposing "families" will play in the order in which they have been originally designated or set up.

The Ponnivala playing "board:": The basic board has four equally sized "arms" that stretch outward in four directions from a central square. One arm will be allocated to each family as its "home" and "start/end" path for the game. Each family player descends down to earth along its designated arm, starting from the central "celestial" square where birth, rebirth and 'liberation from life" all occur. The Ploughman/Ruler family must start down "their" designated arm of the board, and likewise for the other social groups. If more than one "family" representing the same social group has been entered in the game, then the second (third and fourth) families of that type start from the closest arm (calculating counterclockwise) not already "taken" by another family of a differing social group (that, by definition, has a prior claim on that arm).

Who Wins: Played simplistically, the winning 'family" is the one that first succeeds in moving all of its members safely around the board and back to the central starting square. If the other families continue to play after this point then the game will eventually compare final 'merit" scores of each family reaching the center. The family with the highest number of merit points after all have reached the center, will become the "supreme winner" and a special picture will be displayed on their behalf!

Strategic Play: The outcome of the Ponnivala Parchesi game is partly determined by dice rolls (random luck) and partly by careful thinking and strategic playing. This is intentional. The underlying goal is that the "game" represent something close to real life.

Principal One: There are three Xs located on either side of each "arm" of the board. If you land on either of the two "outer" Xs in any row of three you will be asked to make a choice. You should try to choose the option you think is more ethical or appropriate for a family of your "type" or "lifestyle."

Principal Two: There are four geographic areas on the board, one between each "arm:" The *Delta*...an area associated with the Ploughmen/Rulers, The *River Valley*... associated with the Artisan/Journeymen, The *Upland Plain*...associated with the Merchant/Traders, and The *Dense Forest*... associated with the Hunter/Bandits. You will note, as you play, that the kinds of events or opportunities you face are "linked" to the kind of terrain you are traveling through. For example, you are more likely to be attacked by bandits while traveling through the dense forest area, while there is more opportunity to hire the services of a skilled artisan when you travel through the river valley.

Principal Three: The third (or middle X) in each cluster entails a simple good or bad luck outcome...that is, the game does not give you a behavioral (yes or no) choice. Your "odds" of encountering good are roughly 60% on three of the four "arms." On the arm that represents your "home" area, however, your odds of getting good luck rise to about 75%. Your luck somewhat improves in this own "region" because your "family" has more control over event outcomes in this area.

As you have control over which of the four family members "move forward" on any one dice throw, you can try to preferentially land on the middle Xs in your own territorial area.

The Dice: The "dice" in this game are traditional in shape. They are oblong and have just four sides. These four sides bear the values 0, 1, 2 and 3 respectively. There are two dice used in any roll. The player must move according to the sum of the two dice, as rolled (randomly) by the computer (the result appears after the player clicks on the "roll" button). The player may choose which member of the family to move, but the direction of that move (clockwise or counterclockwise) has been pre-determined at the beginning of the game.

Keeping "Score:" Each player has a scoreboard on which four "scores" are displayed. These record the Merit, Bravery, Coin and Asset points currently held by the player's family. The scores combine the "earnings" of the families four players and pool these in a common "kitty." The scores change with each move, accurately reflecting the current family fortune. If a bandit family has achieved "a kill" a small red dot appears on their score board. (The other score boards do not have this feature). The central player's score board is displayed, large, in the bottom left corner of the screen. The score boards of rival families are smaller and displayed in the upper left hand area of the screen.

Sitting on the Same Square: But when other types of players come to rest on the same spot they are simply "charged a visiting fee" by the previous occupant. The fee is always the same. The visitor has 4 points deducted from his/her coin score and the primary occupant has those 4 points added to their coin score. To avoid "congestion" the visitor is also

"bumped back" one square. If any such landings involve an "X" then the "visitor" must also answer the questions posed and or graciously accept the good or bad luck handed out to them. If you land on the same square as another member of your own family, however, you are permitted to remain there free of charge. "Nuclear family members" are the only ones allowed to "sit" together on the same square. This symbolizes that they are cooperating siblings and that they sometimes share the "same cooking hearth."

Dying Due to Bad Luck: Anyone can "die" due to bad luck. This particularly bleak form of misfortune is rarely (but randomly) encountered when one lands on the "middle X" in a row of three. Fortunately, good luck, or much milder forms of bad luck are the more common result of coming to rest on a "central X." However, when someone does receive a "death sentence" it always requires the affected player to retreat to the central square (the celestial sphere) and start his or her life's journey all over again.

"Killing" Opponents: The members of the all hunter/bandit families have one special privilege. They are the only ones that can deliberately "kill" an opponent by co-landing on a square where a rival from another (non-bandit) category is currently sitting. However, certain squares are "protected" and safe from bandits. Any square with an X on it is treated as a "safe" resting spot as far as deadly bandit attacks are concerned. After being "killed," an opponent is sent back to the "celestial sphere" or central square. There he/she must start again, undertaking a new "birth" occasioned by a fresh roll of 0 and a 1. "Killing" an opponent, however, gives members of a bandit family a special privilege (after one kill all family members may start their (new) "birth" with a dice roll of 5, (as well as with the standard dice roll of 0 plus 1). If two or more "bandit" families are playing against one another then they are allowed to also "kill" each other. However, there is also a new restriction. No member of a bandit family may "reenter the celestial sphere" (to possibly win the game) until at least one member of his/her particular family has killed an opponent from another family (of the bandit or non-bandit category). It is important to note, however, that bandits never "kill" members of their own family. Two bandit "brothers" may rest jointly on the same square (symbolizing their close collaboration) during play.

The Luck of the Dice and Positioning To Win the Game: A member of any family can only "be born" and start life moving around the board with a dice roll of a 0 plus a 1. However, the "bandit family" has one special privilege since they are the only family that "kills" opponents. After the first kill, members of the bandit family can be "reborn" from the central square with a either a 0 plus a 1 or with a combined dice roll of 5 (a 2 plus a 3). However, after a member of your "family" has "cut" or destroyed an opponent then your "powers" increase and you can get your other men out of the starting gate with a score of 5. The "down" side of this privilege is that a bandit family member can not return to the "celestial sphere" until it has "killed" at least one opponent.

The Actual Game Winner: A family needs at least 100 merit points per family member to send each one across the "finish line" and into the celestial sphere. Bravery, coin and asset points collected are convertible into "merit"... but a slightly mysterious or 'unpredictable' formula is used Once your fourth family member reaches the ladder going back "up" to the center the player should ask the computer to "calculate" the family's final merit score based on this secret conversion algorithm. At the appropriate time a "button" will appear allowing the player to ask this question. (Approximately) 2 bravery points, 5 coin points or 5 asset points will be counted as equaling 1 extra merit point.

The first "family" to satisfy the merit criterion and also roll the right dice combination is then allowed to pull its last player "up to" the celestial sphere...This family wins the competition! "Winning" therefore involves a good "balance" of the assets acquired by a family over time, and requires that these assets be shared amongst all the family members. In traditional Indian thinking one does not succeed as an individual, but rather as a family. Furthermore, success is not just a matter of acquiring money, demonstrating bravery or building up assets. These desirable and worldly attributes are (somewhat) interdependent and interchangeable. One needs to pursue a "balance" in such matters, particularly as different communities have differing social traditions and normally strive to uphold (somewhat) contrastive core values. But in the end, "merit" is what counts and only merit points can guarantee your sublime future existence in the "celestial sphere."

GOOD LUCK, and MAY THE MOST MERITORIOUS AND WELL-BALANCED FAMILY WIN!

More About the Four "Social Communities" in the Game:

The Farmer/Kings own land. If poor they do the cultivation themselves; if wealthy, they supervise the cultivation work of others. When recognized by a monarch or powerful king a family will grow in importance, prestige and influence. Eventually such families can become "little kings" that control substantial sub-regions in their own right. They form alliances easily and contribute to the communal good by sponsoring public works of many kinds. They are generous towards those less fortunate.

The Merchant/Traders make their living by buying and selling goods. Often this involves the transport of wholesale supplies over long distances. They also build warehouses to store their assets and rent or own resting compounds they construct along the major trade routes. These families are worldly, well-traveled, hard bargaining and resourceful. They own shops, lend money, charge toll fees, know how to manipulate supply and demand, and to purchase "futures" to be cashed in at harvest time.

The Artisan/Journeyman are the craftsmen, the designers and the architects. They have highly developed skills and know how to source quality raw materials for their work. They are woodworkers, stone carvers, jewelry makers, ironsmiths and brass smiths and more. They are hired to do the detailed specialty work. Artisans are known for their cunning, stealth, creative ability, and their tenacity. They relish revenge and are not above using wily tricks to achieve their ends.

The Hunter/Bandits are mobile forest dwellers. They operate in small family bands, often using stealth and their intimate knowledge of the local landscape to great advantage. They carry out frequent raids on unsuspecting travelers, and are skilled at espionage. They highly value personal honor, bravery, and courage. However, they are highly principled in their own way and often fight for an underdog's interests. In sum, this community provides a South Indian equivalent to "Robin Hood's men."

Symbolic Summation: In line with their community "emblems" one could say that:

Farmer/Kings vie for SOCIAL DOMINANCE (the white umbrellas carried by rulers...symbolize POLITICAL CONTROL).

Merchant/Traders compete for the OWNERSHIP of GOODS (the wheels of their ox carts...can CRUSH competition)

Artisan/Journeyman vie for QUALITY and CREATIVE EXCELLENCE ...their fire can BURN those who approach)
 And Hunter/Bandits vie for PHYSICAL SUPERIORITY in strategic situations ...their deadly spears can PIERCE challengers.

Like the game of scissors/paper/stone... any of these four social groups can conquer all comers... each knows how to triumph over their three social competitors...each in their own way.

More About the Four "Core Regions" in the Game:

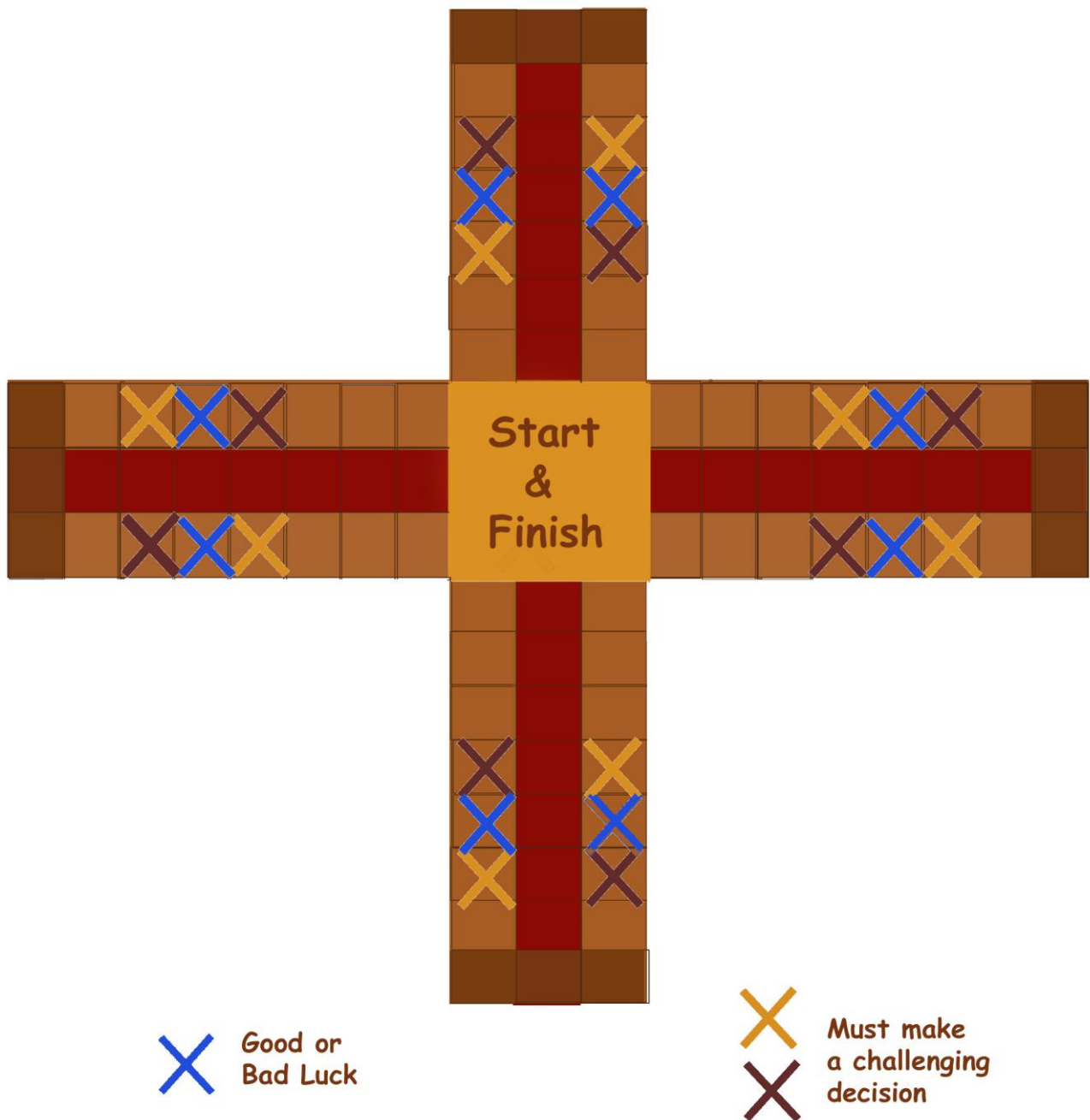
The Moist Delta: This is a rich flatland with plenty of moisture. There are irrigation works everywhere and a lot of rice and sugarcane is grown. There is a big gap between the rich landlords and the poor laborers. One sees large palace-like homes and also the thatched huts of the poor. There are big temples in abundance. The area is full of cocoanut trees and other "frond" vegetation; Bananas grow in abundance. Transportation is limited by the high moisture content of the soil and the many rice paddies. The "raised bunds" on which the bullock carts travel are in frequent need of repair and are difficult to maneuver.

The River Valley: Here the wide river valley is the main feature of the geography. There are many crossing points where boats can be hired as ferries. Many villages dot the river bank, and each one has several temples associated with it. There are also diversionary channels that draw water off the main river and distribute it to nearby fields. Large holding tanks and a complicated system of "sluice gates" move the water to where it is needed. There is one good road along each river bank and that creates a major transportation corridor used by traders, artisans and farmers alike.

The Dry Uplands: This is where the majority of the "natural resources" are found. There are granite mines and some precious stone quarries too. Dry crops such as cotton, corn and various millets and pulses are cultivated. There are numerous types of thorn bushes and palmyra palm trees as well as basic forest "scrub." Irrigation channels are sparse and precious; farmers draw water from deep wells. The area is criss-crossed by trade routes and toll gates. There is land clearing activity everywhere. Wild rabbits, deer, antelope, feral pigs abound. Small fortresses used by traders and travelers dot the landscape.

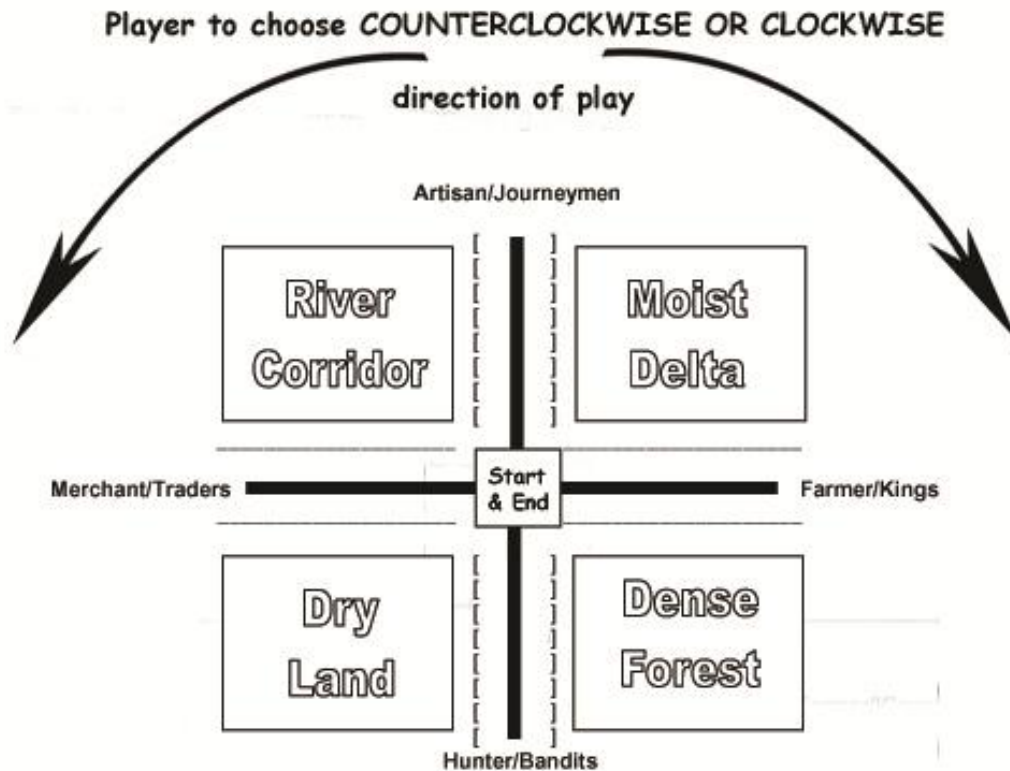
The Dense Forest: Large tracks of relatively "primeval" forest cover the many hills which encircle this upland area. Small streams that flow out of the hills have created deep gorges here and there. These are cool, moist places full of rock boulders and haunted by tigers. There is a wealth of mahogany, sandalwood and other valuable trees. Bird life is rich and the air is full of the sound of their songs. The area is full of wildlife of all descriptions. There are cool springs, and high mountain ridges, but the paths are narrow and travel is difficult. Only hunters and bandits know how to maneuver through the dense brush.

Basic Ponnivala Parcheesi Board Showing the "Active Squares"



Ponnivala Parcheesi Board

Showing the Spatial Layout
&
Social Categories in the Game



Four "home" corridors (for four families)
The "birth" path for each player in one family
and "death" path for the players in that same family.

PART THREE – MINI FOLKTALE THEMES

(& Episode-by-Episode Teaching Ideas)

Reference Material (each of the 26 DVDs plus their Matching Graphic Novels)

Episode 1 – In The Beginning (Sub Stories a, b, c, d and e)

1-a) THE WOMAN WHO HAD A GRAND VISION

The great goddess Parvati creates 9 brothers who then work hard to bring a lovely and very fertile area under the plough.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know someone with a grand vision? Do you dream of creating something big yourself?

COMMENTARY: Often we have a dream or vision of something we would like to see happen... something grand and good. Sometimes if we work on a dream we can make it come true (for this story we can take the goddess's perspective... and think like she does). Often we need the support of others to help make a grand dream come true. In the above story it is the husband of the goddess (Lord Shiva) who gives her helpful psychological support. Many times a parent, a spouse, a sibling or a good friend plays the role of advisor in our own human lives... helping our own dreams advance through supportive words and actions. Shiva gave Parvati the courage to take a bold (and untried) step forward. She would create a new group of human beings.

1-b) THE CLOUD WITH A SILVER LINING

Lord Vishnu creates a contest. The skilled farmers win and the previous residents (artists and crafts people) lose. Instead of controlling land they must now rely on their well-known creative abilities as "makers of things." They become carpenters, stone masons, ironsmiths, goldsmiths and the like.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you even had a disappointment that quickly became an opportunity to embrace something not thought of before... something new and good?

COMMENTARY: This contest may seem "unfair" in that Lord Vishnu takes the side of the new comers and helps them obtain rights to land that previously belonged to others. The former residents are "pushed aside" (and even embarrassed) in this process. However, this can easily happen in real life... a person loses a contest for a job, does not get admission to the school of their choice, or misses out on a good business deal. Sometimes an actual war forces people to leave their lands and abandon their livelihood. But, when we look at this event from the perspective of the artisans, we find that the outcome has several good (if initially hidden) benefits. For one, the artisans are now assured of a living, as the farmers enter a contract (or covenant) to give them a generous amount of food for each plough or other implement they make. Even more important, the unfortunate loss of land rights opens up a new and promising profession for this entire group of people. Now they will become the creators, the artisans responsible for shaping useful and beautiful new things. This is like finding a new career or a new skill,... a trade one would never have developed if an initial period of hardship and dislocation had not been experienced. It is also like "leaving the family homestead," perhaps as a younger son who does not inherit land, and having to strike out on one's own. Many fine artists, poets and entrepreneurs have this kind of personal story to tell... something that "pushed" them into discovering their own personal inner creative strength... a skill they didn't initially know they had!

1-c) **HARD WORK WINS REWARDS**

(OR THE REFUGEE WHO FOUND SUCCESS IN A NEW LAND)

Drought forces the lead farmer to leave his lands and migrate to find work in a land where there have been good rains. He is successful and the king is pleased. He is rewarded by the king with a land grant where he can homestead and start again.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you have a story about someone in your family or your neighbourhood who started out with very little but worked hard and achieved much in the end?

COMMENTARY: This story is similar to the one above. An initial hardship causes dislocation, but then a person's hard work in a new land (or new area) becomes recognized and praised. The powerful people there reward the skilled and dedicated worker and give him or her the assets needed to build a future independent life on. In this case the work is physical labor, but the king understands that the immigrant has brought more than this to his country.... The hero has literally brought a new abundance and prosperity to the king's lands through applying his fine work ethic, demonstrating to all who know him his dedication and positive spirit. He works as an ally and for the good of the king, not just for personal reward.... Though it is a personal reward that is gifted to him in the end.

1-d) **THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU ACT**

(OR DO YOUR HOMEWORK!)

The king's own lands are brought to ruin by a great drought. He lets loose his cows in hopes they will wander and find food elsewhere. They have tags on their necks and so their story can be understood. But the lead farmer is horrified to find "wild animals" eating his sugarcane. Without proper research he orders a fence built that has sharp spikes. The sacred cows die trying to jump over this fence to appease their hunger. They die and go to heaven where they complain to the great Lord Shiva. Shiva is angered by their story and curses the lead farmer's family to seven generations of barrenness.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever made a big mistake because you didn't ask enough questions before you decided to act?

COMMENTARY: This is a story about not taking sufficient care before deciding on a course of action. The farmer did not research the situation; he did not actually see a cow eating his sugarcane. He did not "read" any of the obvious "tags" they were carrying that explained their plight. As a result the farmer suffered a serious "curse" (an impediment or setback) that threatened to trouble his family for many years. There is a moral here: "Think before you act. Find out what impacts your decision could have on the innocent or the disadvantaged, before rushing into a decision." The world has a way of "tripping you up" when you do something that is unfair to others, especially to those who are already weak and who are suffering. (There are plenty of modern examples in the financial world, such as a lending institution taking advantage of the poor by charging high interest rates or an investment salesman offering deceitful promises of prosperity later in return for handing over un-secured cash now). Another tack to take is to talk about taking measures for "personal protection" that could hurt innocent others un-intentionally (carrying a knife, bullying etc.) Also note the "contrastive" outcome for story 2a, about the same farmer. The two stories can be considered together.

1-e) THE GIFT OF A CHILD

The wife of a large landowner is barren because her husband has been cursed by the gods for his careless actions. The wife learns of this problem and pleads with Lord Shiva for help. Finally this great Lord promises to help her overcome her barrenness.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know someone who very much wanted a child but couldn't have one naturally, and then had a happy surprise when one arrived unexpectedly?

COMMENTARY: The problem of barrenness has always been with humankind. It is a common modern issue too. Many couples seek help when they find their efforts do not easily lead to pregnancy. Often the woman is blamed (especially in earlier times, before the advent of scientific testing that nowadays can usually assign the problem to a biological barrier carried within one partner or the other). In a way this sub-story is "radical" for its time (though barrenness is a common motif in Indian mythology more generally). It is radical in a "social" sense because clearly the male half of the partnership is at fault. But his wife dearly wants children and so she works hard to find help. At last she is granted a child by the gods. This is often the feeling "expressed" by women who use fertility clinics. Their new and sudden ability to conceive seems, indeed, like a gift from above. But now the story takes another surprise twist. The gift from Lord Shiva does not create a normal biological pregnancy. Instead he grants the story heroine the chance to adopt a "magical baby." Again the story is "socially stunning" because the gods endorse adoption from an "unknown" source. This is very modern, as most women who adopt these days do not know who the child's parents were, and are often legally prevented from obtaining this knowledge. The story illustrates how an essentially "blind" adoption procedure becomes a "blessing," and a reason for celebration. Indeed this "blind adoption" is the god-sanctioned solution to a terrible problem for this barren family. The outcome gives them great happiness. See the opening of Episode 2 to learn about where the baby was found and how joyous this outcome is for this lucky family.

Episode 2 - A Young Orphan - (Sub Stories a, aa, and b)

2-a) A BABE IS FOUND!

The child is found when the landowner discovers that one of his cows is not feeding its calf. There seems to be little milk in its udder. Following the child and questioning the shepherd the landowner finally finds a beautiful baby under a large pile of rocks in his field. The cow with the empty udder had been secretly feeding it. This child shines "like the sun itself." When the farmer takes it home his wife takes a few minutes to adjust to the idea, asks some questions, and then becomes overjoyed at the prospect of keeping and raising the little infant as her own.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever done some careful research before you took action, had a good outcome and been very glad that you asked lots of questions up front? Do you know any animal stories that describe gestures of caring or kindness towards the helpless, say an example where a she-dog adopted a kitten and raised it lovingly with its own litter of pups? Have you ever read a "children's book" that tells a story like this?

COMMENTARY: This story is covered above, by 1e. It should also be compared to 1d as this is essentially the same story as that one with the outcome reversed. This time the same farmer does careful research and is amply rewarded for it. One can separately discuss the small sub-story

embedded here by focusing on how the farmer found his baby in a surprising and un-natural place (under a pile of rocks in a field). (A biblical parallel with the Moses in the Bullrushes story comes to mind here). Abandon babies frequently make the news today. Often the mother will leave her child in a somewhat hidden spot.... in a stairwell, in a side ally or whatever and then a passer by later discovers it. Children are also commonly found in piles of rubble after an earthquake. Sometimes the natural mother is still alive and sometimes not. The fact that a cow is feeding the child in this story is a nice touch, almost suggesting it was living in a kind of cow “nursery” awaiting adoption. Stories about children raised or breast fed by animals are quite common, both in folklore (as in the popular wolf-boy story) and in mythology (a human child fed by mare, a doe etc.) Indeed the Legend of Ponnivala has such a story (in the third generation) where the story’s heroic male twins are fed by a tigress and also by a she-elephant. See Episode 14d.

2-b) AN ORPHAN CREATED BY HIS PARENTS’ DEATHS

After only five years of joy, the parents who adopted the little boy (above) both die. The Lord of Death shows them no mercy and they must take the ladder the heaven only hours after they learn of their fate. Their adoring son is left behind. The neighbouring Chola monarch who attends their funeral tries to console him and rebuild his confidence. This ruler gives the clansmen the right to use the lands for a few years, but they have to agree to return these fine fields to the boy when he grows up. As soon as this gentle ruler leaves, however, the clansmen of the boy’s parents begin their abuse. They attack the little hero verbally and beat him physically. Their motive is obvious. They want intimidate him and make sure that the family’s land will become theirs forever. These men quickly destroy the farmer king’s palace and drag the frightened little boy off.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know anyone whose two parents died together suddenly? Did this unexpected misfortune leave a child of theirs alone to cope in the wide world by itself? Can you image something like this happening to you?

COMMENTARY: There are many stories like this from places like Haiti, where both parents died in the earthquake leaving a child (or children) alone in the world. This story reminds us that this is not just a “modern” tragedy. It is a sad story that has always been true for a few. The consequences of suddenly finding oneself to be an orphan are also (sadly) predicable. These children suffer a lot and are very vulnerable to exploitation.

The life of any orphan is tough, and this story can always be taken in that direction. Furthermore, almost any story of child abuse will reverberate with this tale of woe. Greedy relatives want their kinsmen’s wealth. They also hold a grudge because their own fathers were “younger brothers” and the land given to them was not as good as that given to the eldest son, (the father of the hero) long back. A straight forward telling would emphasize the traditional pattern of land inheritance following in the descent male line. The farmer king’s family never had a “genuine” biological son who could claim his rights. The relatives were just waiting for this moment. When the king asks why they didn’t request that he endorse their rights earlier the men standing before him have no good answer. The king extracts a promise that they will return the land to this newly orphaned boy when he matures.

As soon as this monarch leaves there is no one to enforce the clanmen’s hollow promise to look after the little boy well. Intimidating the child and destroying his family palace are their means to further weaken the possibility that he might try to claim back his inheritance later, as a grown up. This same

story can be broadened, of course, and used to reflect a larger landscape of exploitation. Almost any modern story of a young and dispossessed child whose future is taken in hand by a stronger, manipulative and very savvy adult could serve here for comparative purposes.

Episode 3 – A Long Exile (Sub Stories a, and aa)

3-a) THE HERO SUFFERS AS AN ABUSED HOMELESS WAIF

The young orphan is sent from family to family. Each household treats him more cruelly than the last. In one home the wife is the meaner one, in another it is the husband. Some families will not have him at all. Finally the clansmen meet and decide to give him a begging bowl, asking him to beg hereafter for food.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever met and talked to a homeless child? Can you find and tell the story of such a person?

COMMENTARY: This episode features the sufferings of the homeless. It makes a good parallel for the stories of “street children” today. There are many examples of kids who live on the streets in any 3rd world country right now and also similar kids who live on the streets in affluent countries. The abuse experienced by such children is similar across cultures and across times and places. There are certain basic themes one finds among the homeless: the basic struggle to find food, reliable shelter and the search for safety. Good health and good hygiene are also common challenges for the homeless. But don’t forget to discuss the ending here. It is significant. The young hero is always hopeful. With each adventure he dreams of finding something he can call home, a place where he will be respected, safe and properly fed. Such good fortune is not easy to come by but his optimism helps him pull through. One can also point to the hero’s self reliance in adversity, his strength of character and his ingenuity in the face of hardship. Many “survivor” stories can be used as parallels here.

3-b) A CHILD WITH MAGICAL STRENGTH

Five years pass like this while the poor child suffers in extreme poverty, sometimes working as a shepherd to earn his keep. Finally he becomes strong enough to run away. This basic theme repeats. Finally the boy sees the tower of a lovely temple in the distance. Hope for a good home rises once more in his heart. Eventually the little hero finds firewood in a forest. He ties up a huge bundle and lifts it onto his head. Lord Vishnu helps him lift this awesomely big load. A woman sees him and invites him in but when the husband begins to beat his wife the little hero is frightened and runs still further into the unknown.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you find a story of a sibling or a friend’s child who did something absolutely unbelievable?

COMMENTARY: Many folktales and myths describe children who have magical or supernatural strengths. But so-called “ordinary” children can also seem “magical” to their parents. This sub-episode has many folktale and mythical equivalents. Hundreds of popular tales feature the supernatural characteristics of a bright and charming child. Sometimes the youngster may also have “trickster” characteristics, as in the popular stories about the much loved boy-Krishna which circulate widely in Hindu India. Many of these stories are accessible on the internet.

Episode 4 – A Love Match (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

4-a) REFUGE FOUND AT LAST

The little hero now runs towards a temple he sees on the horizon. On the outskirts of that village he finds a wealthy farmer sitting at the local (Ganesh) temple. The man strikes up a conversation and asks the boy where he is from. Learning that he is an orphan from a farming family he decides to take him in. He is treated kindly for a change. He is offered a bath and food and then hired on as a shepherd. He is treated well and (we learn later) he stays there for some twenty years.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you find a story in the news or on the internet about an orphan or an adopted child and the challenges they have suffered? Did someone kind take them in?

COMMENTARY: Many orphanages, children's aid groups and "shelters" serve this kind of role today. They also "place" kids with foster parents. Most of these people are happy to share their positive stories. This is a happy outcome tale. It provides a counterpoint to the misery we see the hero undergo in substory 3a. You could select any story about a 'good Samaritan' who takes in a waif and treats that boy or girl with love and compassion to use as a good discussion parallel here.

4-b) THE HERO FALLS IN LOVE WITH A GIRL WHOSE SOCIAL RANK IS MUCH TOO HIGH

The boy-hero finally finds refuge with a kind family of rich landowners. He is assigned work as a shepherd and also asked to push a garden swing for his two bosses' lovely young daughter. The hero notices her charms and gradually falls in love. But the boy does not dare to show his interest. He is a mere worker in the eyes of these powerful farmers. Time passes. He keeps his feelings of affection hidden.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know the story of someone, especially a boy, who "fell in love" with a girl who was socially "out of reach?" Maybe she was from a different country? Maybe her parents didn't approve of his "background." Did he hide his affection for her for many years?

COMMENTARY: This is the classic story of love "strings true" across all social barriers. This particular mismatch is made all the more poignant because it features a boy in love with a woman of high status. Usually it is less radical for a girl to think of "marrying up," than for a man to dream of this. India fits the common pattern. Women of high status are well-protected from the advances of would-be lovers of lower status than their own. Though very "radical," the "romance" in this story is also very innocent. Nothing at all inappropriate happens between these two lovers. On the contrary, the girl's exceptional innocence and purity is carefully preserved. Their dilemma, therefore, has to be "solved" by some type of exterior intervention.

4-c) THE HERO'S TRUE STATUS IS REVEALED TO HIM BY A GOD

The goddess who looks after the boy's (unknown) former family lands is unhappy. Her temple on earth has not had a good cleaning for twenty years. So she goes to her brother, Lord Vishnu, to seek his advice. Promising to help, Vishnu takes the form of an elderly beggar and visits the shepherd boy at the cattfold where he sleeps. He now "reveals" that the girl the hero admires is really an appropriate marriage mate (because he is an orphan he doesn't know about his true parents, who were also local farmer-kings). The shepherd is shocked at this amazing news. At first he drives the mendicant away. Trying a second time, Lord Vishnu casts a spell over the boy. In this way he manages to persuade the humble shepherd/hero to request the hand of the girl he loves, in marriage.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you continue the story above? What happened? Did the parents of the girl finally come to know about the boy who was in love with their daughter? Did the girl return the affection? How did the situation evolve? Did the family finally come to accept the boy as their daughter's suitor? What did they learn that made them grow to respect him?

COMMENTARY: This is the classic "revelation" event. Various folk stories from around the world chose to reveal situation-shattering news in many different ways. In this case the details that solve the hero's dilemma are delivered by a god. But there is also teasing and testing in this important sub-story. Lord Vishnu is having fun. He is behaving like a trickster, egging on a reluctant subject while testing the hero's inner self-confidence at every step. At first he will fail..... As is typical of most folk traditions, the test will eventually happen three times....

4-d) **TRIAL #1: THE HERO SUMMONS HIS COURAGE BUT FAILS TO SUSTAIN IT**

The hero, given courage, follows Vishnu to the palace in the early morning and stands on the path where her two elder brothers will soon pass on their way to their local temple to pray. But his steps are tentative. When the men see him he loses his courage to speak out.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know the story of someone who was asked to make a declaration in front of elders (perhaps a judge, or a boss at work) about his real identity but was just too afraid to speak out? Maybe he has something to say about others, some wrong that he saw that others do not want revealed.

COMMENTARY: Here again we have a classic "folktale" scenario. The godlike figure "tests" the hero. The first time the young man fails. He is thoroughly intimidated by his two land-owning bosses. Any story where a person's inner strength and conviction are tested will work in this situation. It is the old scenario... "if at first you don't succeed try, and then try again."

Episode 5 – A Magical Marriage (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

5-a) TRIAL #2: THE HERO IS TESTED / BULLIED FOR A SECOND TIME

Once the hero is back in his familiar surround Vishnu appears once more. .. again in disguise and again uses sacred ash to cast a spell. This time he gives him clearer instructions. He is to explain to his “bosses” who he is and how he is related to their sister. Then he is to immediately demand her hand. So the next morning the elder brothers of the lovely girl now find the boy standing in their path again. This time he finds the courage to speak. He tells them that he really the son of a powerful farmer and thus their equal. But the two brothers react badly and give the boy a severe beating for his egotism. He falls unconscious and the men then place a big stone on him, assuming he will die.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know someone who has gone through a long period of difficulties? Were they courageous? Did they keep up their hope that someday they would succeed? Do you know someone who has been bullied repeatedly?

COMMENTARY: After a 2nd “trial” the boy is still suffering... now even more than before. He is left in a very tough spot. Even his second courageous attempt to speak out does not bring him success. Many witnesses in courtroom cases have this problem. So do people who can’t find a job or kids who are bullied. Sometimes the effects are cumulative, so that lack of success on the first or second try make things harder and harder. Bullies continue to hurt their victims when they see that they are intimidated or scared. Sometimes the attacks or threats continue because the aggressor does not want to “hear” the truth themselves (as in this story) or because they don’t want others to hear it (which can be called “blackmail”).

5-b) TRIAL #3: THE HERO IS TESTED A THIRD TIME NOW A HELPER INTERVENES

When the shepherd regains consciousness he is still under a huge stone. But now he sees Vishnu standing beside him. He moans and asks the god for help. Vishnu throws magical ash on the brother’s palace and it catches fire. The servants rush out. They ask the two brothers to stop the fire. Suffering themselves now, the two men go to the temple to find help. There they see a beggar (Vishnu in disguise) and address him as a learned man. Gradually Lord Vishnu reasons with the brothers and explains that they really are related to the shepherd boy. The men listen and accept this “revelation.” They then lift the stone off the suffering boy. But these men still refuse to marry their sister to a former palace servant.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know of a story where a teacher, a parent or some other senior person helped “rescue” someone who was being bullied? Did the person in authority persuade the aggressors to stop tormenting him or her? Very likely. But was the

situation itself changed in some way... so as to prevent a similar event ever happening again?

COMMENTARY: As the third trial begins the boy turns to someone senior for help and so gets the assistance he badly needs. This voice “from a person of rank” backs his claims. Sometimes a voice that can speak with authority is needed to help settle a bitter dispute. Now the high status of the boy is confirmed, but that isn’t the end of the story. The brothers still don’t want him to marry their sister. How is this final step in the story achieved?

5-c) THE PROBLEM IS RESOLVED AND THE MARRIAGE ARRANGED

The old beggar demands that the girl be given to him. The brothers resist. But the wise man points to the fire consuming their palace. They now see they have been “set up” for a bargain. They consent to hand over their sister to the old man in exchange for his promise to stop the fire. He does this and the girl is sent to the edge of the village to meet him where he said he would wait. This god-in-disguise now arranges the wedding in a no-mans-land outside the village in a forest. Only the other gods attend. Once the wedding is over the brothers leave several gifts and signs on the path indicating that their sister is never to return home. Instead she and her husband are now to leave the area entirely. The newly weds walk away from the village.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: In many bullying situations a teacher will resolve the situation by spatially separating the victim from the victimizer(s). Both may be asked to “start over again” and will be assigned new classrooms, new teachers or even new schools. Judges, in their sentencing, often separate warring parties as well. Can you tell a story about a situation where this kind of resolution was imposed?

COMMENTARY: There are other elements to this story that can also be discussed. One interesting outcome is the fact that the girl was banished from her village and told not return, ever, to visit her family. (We see in episode 9 what happens when she actually disregards this edict and does come back). Such things happen in modern life too when one or both parents get angry and tell a son or daughter to leave home forever. A second line of discussion could involve all the interesting and very symbolic things the family leave as gifts... a blind goat, a broken pot hanger and a dried up old cow. Pointing this out can lead to a lively discussion about the huge emotive power of metaphor. More generally one can also point out the wide use in ceremonies (and in literature) of marginal spaces. “limbo” or no-mans-land is often the place selected for status transformation, and/or for contact with other (magical) worlds. People often seek visions in the wilderness (as for example Moses did). Native North American cultures deliberately send their young men out into the wilderness for spiritual inspiration.).

Episode 6 – Roasted Seeds (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

6-a) THE HERO FINDS THE OLD FAMILY HOMESTEAD

The couple wander and eventually find the husband's traditional lands in Ponnivala. They see that the old palace was long ago flattened and ploughed under. The first step is to perform a proper ceremony for the local goddess. She welcomes the attention and blesses them.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a story about someone who traveled to a new place and found reasons for both joy and heartbreak upon arrival? Probably they realized that a lot of work lay ahead. Did they first enlist the support of the local authorities, and win their backing?

COMMENTARY: This is what the hero and heroine decided to do by making the cleaning of the temple for the local goddess-guardian of the land their first priority. Although the goddess was angry that she has had no attention for many years, the couple's hard work and respectful worship quickly brought this powerful protector on side. Indeed one can point to the role of the goddess in this story as a kind of "healthy environment" thermometer. When the lands are well cared for and the crops flourish, then her devotees will find that she is happy and supportive. But if her lands are not thoughtfully farmed using what we now-a-days call "sustainable and green practices," then the goddess will be angry and surely find a way to retaliate.

6-b) RIVAL CLANSMEN DISPUTE CONTROL OF THE FAMILY'S ANCESTRAL LANDS

The joy of the newly weds' homecoming does not last. The young wife soon detects a problem. She sees a group of rival clansmen approaching lands the couple have identified as theirs. These men are carrying their ploughs. Unsure about how to proceed, the husband leaves to consult the major ruler in the area, a Chola king. That monarch calls the clan rivals to his palace. The overlord then orders them to give the land back to its rightful claimants (the new arrivals whom they disparage because the husband is known to be an "adopted" son). But the clansmen protest. A compromise is reached. The son will get back one insignificant field now, and the rest of his lands after the next harvest. (See episode 2b for the background story).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you had someone take away something important that you believed belonged to you? Did they have a reason to feel that it should be "shared?" Did someone senior or highly respected finally intervene and settle the argument by suggesting a compromise?

COMMENTARY: The clansmen once promised the king (episode 2b) that they would give the land back to the hero when he became an adult. Actually, they had no intention of doing this. One can understand their point of view. These men are the hero's father's brothers' sons. They can lay a legitimate claim to these fields citing the common rule that "land descends in the male line." If no sons are born to one brother, the sons of the next brother may inherit that acreage. The "dispute" is over whether an adopted son should have a right equal to that of a biological son. What do the students think is "fair?" Tradition-based land claims cause similar problems in many parts of the world.

6-c) A CRUEL TRICK IS SECRETLY ENGINEERED BY RIVALS

The husband returns home and wants to plough his newly acquired land. He tells his wife he is going to borrow a yoke of oxen. He wants to go ask his the clansmen for this but his wife warns him against it. So he goes instead to an allied village to find families that traditionally provided services to his father. He is successful but upon returning home there is a second problem. He has forgotten to ask for planting seed. Again his wife warns him about the clansmen. This time, however, the hopeful farmer goes to them anyway (without telling his wife). Those rivals quietly “toast” the seeds before giving them to him.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know someone who played a similarly mean trick on a rival? Did they pretend to give away something good that turned out to be faulty or to not work at all?

COMMENTARY: There is actually a “double deception” here. The husband first deceives his wife by secretly going to ask a favour from people his wife warned him not to trust. So the fact that he is “tricked” by them is partly his fault. One can cite many similar examples from the modern world. Ponzi schemes or other deals advertised or offered that seem too good to be true are good examples of “tricks” that are easy to fall for. Internet scams would be another generic example. There are constant warnings... but naïve people sometimes ignore them and suffer as a result.

6-d) **THE INSIGHTFUL WIFE NOTICES HER HUSBAND HAS BEEN TRICKED**

Upon returning home, however, the wife notices they have been pre-cooked. The husband retains his confidence, but she is frightened and refuses to do the traditional woman’s job of planting (she fears the seeds won’t sprout and she’ll end up being held responsible). So the husband does the plowing and the planting both, by himself. But, unexpectedly, the hero is helped by Lord Vishnu who plants one magical seed beside each roasted one. But he doesn’t know this is happening. Assuming they will have a good harvest, the couple now plan to build a small house. Men from a “helper” village come to assist with the work. Their new home is soon complete.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a story about a good person who was tricked but didn’t realize it and so carried on as if nothing had happened? (And for older students) Did that person then spend money on still more things up front, not realizing that their whole future was being built upon a very “weak” foundation stone?

COMMENTARY: The wife of the hero is the one with “insight.” He is not a bad person. He is just naïve and over-trusting. She, by contrast, is perceptive, questioning and cautious. She is also in a tight bind. She would like to help her husband, but if seeds she has touched don’t sprout then she will get a bad reputation as a “sort of witch” whose involvement spoils things and causes them not to grow. Perhaps this is “superstition” but we can also call it “sensitivity” to public opinion. Fortunately the couple “get lucky” and Lord Vishnu helps out instead. We know (from other parts of the story) that this god is especially fond of the heroine. It is as if he steps in to take over her female role (this is symbolically a more interesting idea than his just deciding to help the hero).

Episode 7 – A Thousand Beggars (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

**7-a) THE RIVALS TRY ANOTHER TRICK
BUT A GOD COUNTERS THIS EFFORT**

The hopeful farmer now begins to check his newly-planted field once a week. After the second week there is nothing, not even a sprout. After the third there are some strong green shoots and after the fourth the field is full of young tender stalks. The rival clansmen see this and are worried that a harvest might be possible after all. So they send their cows in to devour the growing plants. But Lord Vishnu, with a little magic, sees to it that no permanent damage is done. After the tender shoots have been well bent down the clansmen drive the animal herd back to their own lands. The husband soon inspects the field. He is shocked by the trampled stalks but there is no serious harm.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you compare the clansmen's two mean tricks? How are they different? (Some possible answers are: human/animal, achieved inside/achieved outside, organized by one person/organized by a group, done at home/done on another family's land, (almost) invisible result/visible result).

COMMENTARY: This is another "mean trick" story (see also 6-c), but this time Lord Vishnu intervenes early and prevents any serious problems from developing. Again the hero is naïve. He does not recognize his rival's handiwork when he discovers the damage done to his tender plants.

7-b) THE INSIGHTFUL WIFE FINDS MAGICAL WEALTH

The next week there are many buds but none have opened. The wife becomes anxious. Unlike her husband she wades deep into the crop and then pinches a bud with her fingernail. Inside she finds a pearl! So she pinches another one. There she finds another jewel. She becomes excited and calls her husband. Together they discover that their planted field has sprouted gems of all kinds!

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How does the heroine's behavior differ from that of her husband? Why does she see jewels inside the plants while her husband sees nothing?

COMMENTARY: This sub-story provides further confirmation of the difference in the personalities of these two key characters. One is timid and accepting of "superficial" realities. The other is insightful, questioning and unafraid. One holds back and the other takes the initiative to "wade in" and look carefully. However, at a deeper level these differences are most certainly "gender related." The women in the story (particular in the second and third generations) have unusual powers of insight. They can "see" realities that others can not. These special powers are related to the depth of their devotion to Lord Vishnu and to their willingness to place their faith in God's beneficence. In the next sub-story (just below) we also see that the wife is far more generous than her husband, when it comes to giving her wealth to the poor.

7-c) BOUNTIFUL WEALTH ACQUIRED.... UNEXPECTEDLY

The couple now call in laborers to help harvest their field but they only allow these men to cut down the stalks. When the laborers leave the husband calls on Lord Vishnu to help the two of them privately cut each bud from its stalk and break it open. Again Lord Vishnu helps and soon they have filled their

harvest baskets with beautiful jewels. They store these baskets inside their home and measure out their new found wealth.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This couple's new wealth comes to them very suddenly. It is as if they have "won the lottery." Find some stories about sudden wealth. Develop a story about what would you do if something like this happened to you.

COMMENTARY: Winning sudden wealth is very common in folktales, but very rare in real life. You could compare this sub-story, for example, with Aesop's Fable "The goose that laid the golden egg." What happens in that story? Will something similar happen here? The next sub-story gives this magical event much added depth and also answers this question.

7-d) A DOUBTING HUSBAND AND A SAINTLY WIFE

Vishnu is watching their actions and wants to test the couple's generosity. So he turns a hundred shepherds who are grazing animals nearby into beggars. He sends these "holy men" to the couple's home to ask for alms. The husband is upset and demands that they be sent away. But the heroine ignores him and starts generously giving the jewels away to the beggars. Somewhat dismayed, the husband decides to go to visit their overlord, the great Chola king, and to take him a token gift. When he returns from this trip the door of the house is stuck shut. Together he and his wife manage to open it. Now, to their surprise, they find that their stash of jewels has been replenished. The heroine recognizes Lord Vishnu's hand in this beneficence. Together they decide to spend their new-found wealth building a fine palace.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Read (or tell) Aesop's Fable about the Goose That Laid The Golden Egg. How does this story differ from that one?

COMMENTARY: After telling (or watching) this sub-story a comparison with Aesop's "Golden Goose" fable becomes interesting. The Ponnivala couple have worked hard to obtain their wealth, and suffered along the way (background information missing in Aesop's Tale). Furthermore, an important contrast between the husband's and the wife's reactions develops. This is missing in Aesop's account. Consistent with what we already know of our heroine's personality, she is quite ready to give all away. This woman is saintly and concerned for the welfare of others, while her husband is far less generous. Finally, when the new wealth is given away (similar to killing the goose) a god steps in to "reward" the generosity by replenishing the treasure. This doesn't happen in the Golden Goose story.

Lord Vishnu is also "playing" with the couple. Again (as in 6-d) the god's focus is mainly on the heroine. He is "flirting with her." However, she passes his tests and proves her sincerity as his devotee. This is a common theme in the Hindu mythology surrounding Lord Vishnu. Finally, one can mention that the husband's trip to see the neighboring Chola king is a kind of "tribute" visit. He is sharing a small token of his new abundance with that overlord. The gift is a token of his respect, and also of submission to the great monarch's superior political power.

Episode 8 – A Cruel Curse (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

8-a) A WONDEROUS PALACE IS BUILT

The newly rich farmer now sends for a thousand stone masons and carpenters to build his palace. It will be a fine building with many rooms. Lord Vishnu is watching from his couch on the milk sea. He decides to descend to earth and help. Invisibly, for every stone the masons lay, Vishnu lays another thousand. In this way their fine palace is quickly constructed.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How would you design a palace and what rooms would you have in it? (Do some internet research) How do you think palaces built in India differ from palaces found elsewhere in the world? What is the reason for these differences?

COMMENTARY: Palaces in India are famous for their outer fortification walls. Inside one normally finds a “mini” city, complete with wells, temples, palace animals and many weapons of war. There are many courtyards and open spaces. There are also many ceremonial reception halls for visitors. Old palaces are very hard to find nowadays, especially in the far South. This is because the enemies of a ruler generally destroyed the entire physical space after its conquest. This humiliated the previous ruler and made a comeback by his family that much more difficult. Note: This is exactly what happened to the hero’s initial family palace in this Ponnivala story.

8-b) A GRAND CORRONATION OCCURS

The farmer’s wife calls on Lord Vishnu and announces that she wants to perform a major “inauguration” ceremony. Lord Vishnu suggests that all three monarchs of the South (the well-known Chola, Chera and Pandiya kings) be invited. He also announces that he wants to confer a title on the family. A grand ceremony ensues with many honors accorded the new “king” of Ponnivala. Rather tardily, rival clansmen arrive and pay their respects to the three monarchs. The Chola king then tells them that they must give back all the lands that once belonged to the farmer-king’s father. The clansmen agree to do so and quickly leave.

SUGGESTED EXERCISE: Have you ever seen a royal coronation? What kinds of symbols of respect and authority are used? Are European traditions any different from the what one sees in the Ponnivala Story?

COMMENTARY: The king and queen of Ponnivala are actually only “minor royalty” and do not have the same stature as their guests. The Chola, Chera and Pandiya overlords are understood to represent the three great kingdoms known to South Indian history. They were rarely a friendly threesome. Here they are conferring honors on an ally whose overall power is less than theirs. Plenty of information about these three kingdoms is available on the internet.

8-c) A TRAGIC CURSE: THE QUEEN IS BARREN

The Chola now turns to the new raja and issues a set of instructions on how to be a wise ruler. Then he leaves for his own territory, hoping that the Ponnivala area will now be ruled with justice and kindness. But the couple lack one vital thing: children. They purchase a pair of fine cows, two handsome horses, and even a male and female pig. But none of

these animals bear offspring. Finally the queen grows weary of her barrenness and yearns to visit her natal household. There she can at least see her brother's children. Her husband is vehemently opposed to this plan. He remembers the way that family "cast them out" at the moment of their marriage. But the queen is determined to go and starts her preparations.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Why is the queen's barrenness such a big issue? Why are the barren animals important? And is the queen justified in visiting her brothers' home when her husband has told her not to go?

COMMENTARY: There are many different threads one can follow up on here. Barrenness is the stumbling block to perpetuating the family's rule of the area. The animals were bought as a kind of "test" of the broader curse that lies on the family (see episode 1-d). If none of them bear offspring then the whole kingdom is covered by the curse, making the situation very serious indeed. And finally the issue of the queen's "right" to visit her brother is important. This is one "right" that women retain for life. No husband has the authority to keep his wife from visiting her natal family. The "twist" here is that such visits are usually built around the wives pregnancy and then delivery of her children, which by custom should happen in her natal home. In this case she is "barren" so the normal reason for such a visit is absent, even contravened. Furthermore her brothers threw her out at the moment of her marriage, telling her never to return (see episode 5-c). This makes the situation very unclear. One might say that the wife's and the husband's logic are equally balanced in this "tug-of-war" scene.

Episode 9 – The Counter Curse (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

9-a) A BARREN "WITCH" IS SPOTTED

The queen orders the jewelers to come and prepare necklaces for her nieces and nephews. She also has lovely boxes made to carry these and her other lovely gifts. Then, early one morning, she awakens her husband to tell him that she is leaving for her brother's place. Once more the king again tells her not to go but she is determined. She bravely sets out with a group of servants. After much hardship en route the weary travelers arrive. At that moment the two sisters-in-law of the queen spot the strangers. Asking who they are and why they have come, these ladies discover that their husband's sister has arrived. Remembering that this woman had been forbidden ever to return to their place they rush back to the palace to warn their husbands. Fearing her evil spells (because she is barren) together they make a plan to hide all the children under some large baskets.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: What stories to you know about people rejecting strangers and being afraid of them? How does this story

resemble (or differ) from ideas about foreigners being dangerous that some people have?

COMMENTARY: The queen's status is beautifully 'ambiguous' in this encounter. She has been made into a "foreigner" by an act of expulsion that occurred at the moment of her marriage. But she can still claim her right as a "blood sister" of the two men who now live in her old palace home.

9-b) THE SISTER IS REFUSED ENTRY TO HER NATAL HOME

The palace guard has been instructed to refuse entry to the visiting sister. Instead the gate is locked and she is severely beaten when she knocks on the door. The crying woman calls on Lord Vishnu and asks for a magic fireball. Vishnu asks permission for this from Lord Shiva and when the great god consents, the angry woman receives her fire ball and with it she burns the palace.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Brother/sister arguments are common around the world. Do you know of a story where a brother locked his sister out? How did she respond?

COMMENTARY: This story can be discussed as a metaphor for many kinds of anger that can come between a brother and sister. In India the social reputation of the sister is a matter of honor for the brother. In this story it is the sister's barrenness that has her brothers frightened and angry. But other reasons for worry about a sister's reputation are more common, especially worries that she has been defiled or polluted in some way. Brothers are supposed to protect their sisters from harm, so this story presents a shocking "inversion" of the correct behaviour of a brother. It is "natural" for a sister to respond to this moral misbehavior of her brothers with anger that seems as "hot" as real fire. In this sub-story the sister has a moral right to expect hospitality from her brothers. Her barrenness is not her fault, their violent treatment of her is reprehensible. Nonetheless, one can understand why (given their beliefs about barren women) they are afraid of her.

9-c) THE SISTER CURSES HER BROTHERS AND (TEMPORARILY) KILLS THEIR CHILDREN

The angry sister kills all fourteen children inside the palace by throwing some magical handfuls of earth in their direction. Finally she erects two stones near the palace and inscribes a curse on them that is to lie on her brother's family. She also goes to the temple of the fierce goddess Kali. Kali feels sorry for the badly beaten lady and thinks about what she can do to help.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: There is a wide spread festival in India (and other rituals are practiced as well) during which brothers and sisters ceremonially honor each other. This is an interesting festival which students can be assigned to research on the internet. In one area (the state of Bihar) these rituals also include the sister having to ritually swear at her brother to start things off. Then they "make up" afterwards. What might be the idea behind this peculiar custom?

COMMENTARY: Ironically the brothers in this story believe that their sister may harm their children out of jealousy, because she has no children of her own. This is exactly what the sister does end up doing, but that was not the intention she had on arrival. In planning her trip she had jewelry made for each child and she had planned to honor them. The sister's violent act is caused by her emotional anger after her brothers first make the moral mistake of mistreating her. There can be a deeply hidden jealousy and discord between opposite-gendered siblings. This is one of the less obvious but sociologically important themes that run through many episodes of this Legend of Ponnivala story (see sub-story 2-b).

Episode 10 – Pillar of Destruction (Sub Stories a, b, c, d and e)

10-a) TWO BROTHERS BEG FORGIVENESS

While the bruised and dejected heroine stands before the goddess a priest of this temple happens by. He asks who beat her and why. Upon learning the story he makes the excuse that he has forgotten something and then runs to her brother's home. There he talks with the two brothers and begs them to go to the temple and ask their sister's forgiveness. Only then will their children be brought back to life. The two men reluctantly go and fall at their sister's feet. She does not want to look at them but the goddess advises her to forgive them and then to enter the home where she was born.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Does the goddess give the right advice to the queen? Do you think she will forgive her brothers?

COMMENTARY: The story is pretty clear in its moral judgement here. The goddess Kali confirms that the heroine's brothers have erred in not welcoming their sister back. At the same time she is encouraged to forgive them when they lower themselves before her and beg for an apology (which she does grant them). The ambiguity remains, however, and the "feud" continues. The heroine announces that now she never wants to see them again.

10-b) MANY CHILDREN MIRACULOUSLY REVIVED

The queen forgives her brothers, but demands that they run off, out of sight. They do this and she proceeds to visit her natal home with the temple priest as her escort. Inside she finds the dead bodies of her brothers' fourteen children. The priest tells her she has special powers and begs her to revive them all. The heroine bargains and asks permission to take two of the female children for her own purposes. The priest allows this and all the children are brought back to life using a golden wand sent to the sister by Lord Shiva himself.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Was the sister right to tell her brothers to run away so that she would never have to see them again? Why do you think she wants to "take" two of the female children with her?

COMMENTARY: The story clearly states that the queen has special powers and is able to bring children back to life (even though she can not give birth to any herself, for now). One could say, in a slightly more modern reading, that she never really killed her brothers' children to begin with, but rather

that they just became “frozen” by fear. This interpretation is strengthened by an explanation of what she is going to do with the two girls she now asks for (see below).

10-c) **TWO BRIDES-TO-BE BECOME STONES TO AWAIT THEIR GROOMS**

The heroine takes two girls of her choosing from the palace, dragging them against their will to a spot near the village (Ganesh) temple. There she magically turns them into two upright stones. Calling on Lord Vishnu, she asks that these girls be guarded by beetles and wasps until such time as she can bring her own (as yet unborn) twin sons back to that very spot to marry them. Finally, satisfied with her accomplishments, the queen gathers her servants and start out on the path back to her own palace.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you find another story or situation where women are somehow “reserved” for their husbands-to-be, many years in advance?

COMMENTARY: As a woman with special powers the queen believes her curse will one day be lifted and that she will then bear twin sons. According to a very powerful local custom, she has the right to demand that her brothers provide (their own daughters) as brides for these sons. This kind of cousin-to-cousin marriage is an old, old tradition in the area this story come from. So the heroine wants to “freeze” two girls in time and keep them ready for her own sons’ marriages. Turning women to stone is a familiar theme in Indian mythology. It appears in other contexts as well.

10-d) **THE QUEEN IS BANISHED FROM THE PALACE BY AN ANGRY KING**

Now back at home, the king finds his queen asleep and exhausted. He suspects trouble because she has covered her whole body with her sari. Asking to see her arms and legs he soon knows the real truth about her terrible beating. He banishes her from the palace. She plans on suicide and calls in the stone masons to build her a 60 foot tower from which she will jump to her death.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: What would you do if you were a queen and were thrown out of your own palace? Might you have suicidal thoughts and why? Can you find a story or do you know someone close to you where something like this actually happened?

COMMENTARY: This very common theme, where a husband throws a wife out of the house, can be found in many stories. The queen’s suicidal thoughts are also not surprising. Many women think this way when they are forced out of their home and believe they have no where to turn.

10-e) **THE QUEEN CONTEMPLATES SUICIDE BUT IS SAVED FROM DEATH AT THE LAST MOMENT**

When it is completed she climbs up and then calls on Lord Vishnu, asking that he assure her that when she jumps her body will be broken into many pieces. Vishnu dissuades her with his cunning and exhorts the couple to perform a long list of good works instead. Vishnu implies

that when these many fine deeds are complete, that they will be granted a child.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Heroines are also associated with high towers in some European folk stories. Can you find (and then tell) a story that combines a fine woman and a tower?

COMMENTARY: Climbing a tower (or a pillar) is something the queen will do again in this legend. In the next generation her daughter and another saintly woman also sit on top of a pillar while praying. It is as if the person climbing the tower is getting closer to god, making his or her conversation with a divine being easier and more focused. And in a sense this strategy works for our heroine too. Lord Vishnu does respond to her pleas, and then succeeds in “converting her” from thoughts of suicide to a plan that will have her help others. He also teases her repeatedly, testing her to see if she is deserving of his help (as in episode 7-d). Lord Vishnu’s rescue efforts in this traditional legend could be discussed and compared to modern day women’s shelters, or to the efforts of others who work with refugees, the poor and so forth.

Episode 11 – A Pilgrim’s Journey (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

11-a) The Heroic Couple Undertake Good Works

Lord Vishnu first asks the couple to build a set of resting stones for people with heavy head loads. He also asks that they construct eating shelters and pay to have public wells dug. He also asks them to marry two particular trees (similar to constructing a local shrine). Most importantly, they are to have a temple cart built for the goddess and then pull it around her temple.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Many people today do similar things. They plant trees, they help build homes for the poor, they donate to charities and so forth. Tell your own story of someone whose “good works” have impressed you.

COMMENTARY: The things the king and queen need some explanation. The resting stones are like high shelves constructed along a main road that people can rest their head loads on. These shelves are like public benches in a park. Having a shelf at eyebrow height close to a walking path allows someone to rest a head load without having to bend over, set it their burden on the ground and then lift it up again. Eating shelters, where people can rest out of the sun, and digging public wells need little explanation. But marrying two trees may seem odd. The species selected are very specific, ones that will happily grow up together and become “entwined” in a symbiotic way. Such “dual” tree systems usually become small shrines and are worshipped as pleasing examples of positive relationships or “bonding.” Finally, there is the tradition of building temple carts for larger shrines. The god, the goddess, or a divine couple in such a temple are normally worshipped once a year by placing small mobile statues of the particular deity (or deities) high on the cart, in a position of honor, and then the cart is pulled around the temple as a festive celebration that is said to give “joy” to the divinity in question. The Catholic church has similar customs. In many places, a small portable shrine dedicated to a particular saint will be carried in procession through the streets near a popular Catholic shrine on special festival days.

11-b) The Rival Clansmen Cleverly Plot To Kill The King and Queen but They Escape

The rival clansmen hear of the coming festival and the plan to hand pull a new temple cart around the temple. They instruct the carpenters to stop the cart part way. They are to declare that a dream was sent to them by the goddess asking that the king and queen place their heads under its heavy wheels as a powerful sacrifice. They are counting on the couple's belief in the goddess to get their agreement. A huge bribe is promised in exchange for this lie. The artisans agree and do as they are told. The devout king and queen do reluctantly place their own heads on the ground in front of the cart's heavy wheels. But with Lord Vishnu's help, the great wagon magically rises up and flies above their heads, causing them no injury! Now we see divine justice at work. The 16 clansmen who were pulling the cart are killed, along with six lying artisans (the 7th escapes).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This is the story of a group of villains who fail to obtain their ends and end up getting "harmed" themselves, instead. Many legends and many movies have this kind of plot line. Can you tell a story where someone tells a lie intended to hurt others gets tripped up, and instead ends up being the one to suffer?

COMMENTARY: Pre-existing social disputes often surface during Hindu festivals. This is because during a ritual event every social group, and every key participant, will have a pre-assigned and well-known role to play. If such a group or person is disgruntled they can refuse to do what is expected of them during the ceremonies and thereby hold up proceedings. Many people are kept waiting in such a situation, and so pressure builds to forge a workable compromise. Festivals can actually be good occasions to "study" social tensions. The clansmen's alliance with the artisans and their joint plot to kill the king and queen fits within this wider festival dispute tradition, though the example is a little extreme. This particular sub-story also reminds story listeners of the fact that both the clansmen and the artisans are unhappy with the hero's family. The clansmen believe they are the rightful heirs to the king's palace lands (episode 2-b) and the artisans feel they were unfairly cheated out of land by these same farmers... from the very start (episode 1-b)

11-c) A Vow To Feed The Multitudes

The queen remembers that there are two more important things Lord Vishnu has asked for. They are to feed a thousand beggars and then to travel to heaven and perform penance at the feet of Lord Shiva himself. The feast for the beggars is prepared. But the couple can only find nine hundred and ninety nine beggars, one short of the 1,000 needed to fulfill the vow. The queen sets off to find one more, but there are no more, anywhere. Finally, on the way back she finds a very weak and poor man lying in a ditch. The queen takes this man in her arms and carries him to her palace where she coaxes him into eating a little rice. The vow is fulfilled!

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Stories from many different religions feature saints or other good people who miraculously feed a multitude. Do you know such a story?

COMMENTARY: At one level this story is a “test” of the queen’s generosity and saintliness. It is also an illustration of how the rich were expected to act. Still today many churches, mosques and other religious institutions have a guideline that their followers should give 1/10 of their yearly income either directly to the poor or to the institution that will in turn support good works. Many charities operate on this principle, as do food banks, the goodwill and others.

11-d) **The Penitents Begin a 21 Year Pilgrimage**

Next the couple begin their pilgrimage to the gates of heaven. First they lock the palace and leave a perpetual lamp burning in the family temple. Next all the people of the area come to say good bye. Even the animals of Ponnivala appear one by one. They ask that the queen return from heaven with a gift of fertility for them as well. Among the visitors are cows, who ask for calves, and horses who ask for colts. A poor woman from the area asks for the gift of a strong son who can serve as a powerful assistant for the queen’s sons-to-be. Finally the couple set off. The four gates to the palace compound are locked and black beetles and wasps are called to stand guard.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES Do you know someone who has gone on a pilgrimage? What was their reason for going? Did they come back satisfied and with a feeling that the trip (and all its difficulties) was worthwhile?

COMMENTARY: Many people undertake pilgrimages, even today. Usually such travelers hope to obtain a divine blessing. Some have taken vows and in return for a gift already received ... and are now saying “thank you.” Many people promise to make a visit to a certain shrine if a medical cure is obtained for a loved one, if a scholarship is won, or whatever. When the happy event occurs they must then keep their promise.

In the case of the king and queen in this story, however, their hope is based on obtaining a future reward. The queen is the focus of the journey and Lord Vishnu has put her up to it. Her husband comes along in support, but she is the one who is determined to bear a child. There is also a sense in which the queen bears the fate of the entire region on her shoulders. . Every person and every animal in the region is suffering. It is a heavy responsibility for the queen to bear. But it is also a sign that her power to achieve such a difficult goal is important. When she can come back from the pilgrimage successful, she will have gained a great deal of respect.

Pilgrimage in medieval times, and even today, was and continues to be a huge educational opportunity. Often this was the only way poor and uneducated people could see something of the wider world. Pilgrims meet people from other lands, people who speak other languages and people whose customs are greatly different from their own. Making a pilgrimage was also one of the few ways that women could “escape” the daily grind of housework and child care. Pilgrimage can represent a real “freedom” from routine and provide the logic for undertaking new and challenging adventures. It is important to understand pilgrimage in its global and historic context. This story is just one way of understanding humankind’s age-long desire for travel adventure!

Episode 12 – The Gates of Heaven (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

12-a) A Great Insult & Its Consequences

The king and queen set off on their long journey. But they have gone only a short distance when a large sow blocks their path. It is the same she-boar that the queen had earlier purchased and raised on her lands, in hopes of its bearing offspring. The heroine is impatient now. She is eager to get on with her travel plans and feels that the boar is being rude. So she kicks it with her right foot. The boar takes this as an insult. The huge animal now acts as a soothsayer who can see the future. She predicts that the queen will eventually bear two sons and one daughter in return for her good deeds. But the mother boar also says that she will bear a son too, an extraordinarily large huge male who will kill the queen's sons. With this curse spoken, the mother-boar jumps off the path and runs away. Next a little palace dog, appears. She is the queen's personal pet. It too wants a boon, and it knows what has just transpired. So it asks for a pup that will have poison in its teeth. Her plan is that once born, her tiny daughter will become the one to actually kill that great black boar.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This sub-story features a threat and then a counter threat. Arguments and even major feuds often start like this. Can you find a story about how a small insult gradually escalated into a major confrontation in just this kind of way?

COMMENTARY: This seemingly small “pig-kicking” incident lays the ground work for the entire second half of the story. Most of what is threatened comes true, and all the actors who address the queen as she leaves on her pilgrimage become important characters at a later point. This little sub-story, then, can be used to illustrate how a great story is knitted together. Everything is connected and the significance of the tiniest details will become significant in hindsight. Good novelists and story writers all make sure that their story cloth is “well woven” and that every detail has a purpose and a place within the larger whole.

It is also interesting to note that the queen has been collecting a long list of others' requests and promising to work for their fulfillment. This is much like a politician running a political campaign. At this point the role of “leader of the region” has subtly shifted from her husband's hands to hers!

12-b) The King Falters but His Queen Comes to the Rescue

With a long list of requested gifts on their mind, the couple now set out for the abode of the gods. Soon the husband begins to tire and the queen has to urge him on. She coaxes him, then carries him on her back, up the steep path. Lord Vishnu is watching and teases her at several points, making the journey even more difficult. Finally the husband faints and she finds a little pond water that might revive him. Again Lord Vishnu plays with her, making the water recede. At last the god allows her to fetch a few handfuls. The water is almost magical it is so potent. The king quickly revives.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever sought for something that seems to repeatedly recede before your eyes? You grasp for it over

and over, but it always lies just beyond your reach? Sometimes dreams are like this. Can you tell a story to illustrate the frustration you felt when this happened to you?

COMMENTARY: The queen is teased by Lord Vishnu. Here again he is testing her dedication and her fortitude. Her husband is about to expire. She has even had to carry him on her back. Now she can't even get water for him. But she passes the "test" and is finally rewarded. She has been selfless and persistent. And so the god allows her greatest asset, her husband, to be revived. "Tests," directed at either the hero or the heroine are the standard building blocks used in folk tales. Sometimes they are referred to as a "lack" which the key character experiences.... such that eventually that "lack" is remedied or fulfilled. The above story fits the classic pattern.

12-c) There Are Many Challenges Along The Pilgrims' Path

Next the pilgrims face a huge mountain cliff. Vishnu helps by lifting the two over the worst spots. Next they cross rivers of stone, of thorns, of butter oil and finally of fire. When these feats are complete the couple face yet another threat. This time they are confronted with a forest full of cobras. One cobra asks the queen for a son, someone who can later assist her in a time of need. The queen agrees to carry this special request with her as well.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The queen and her husband have to face many challenges. They struggle a lot. Can you think of another story where someone struggles against overwhelming obstacles and finally succeeds?

COMMENTARY: The obstacles the couple face have a mythic "feel." Try discussing what climbing a mountain cliff could represent in human terms. Similarly, try talking about passing across stones, stumbling through thorns or walking across a fire could be used as metaphors for difficult human experiences. Another direction that might interest students is to take this as a "description" of the strange geography and typography the couple encounter on their way to the god's domain. Their journey takes them through a no-man's land, a land of the imagination. It can be compared with medieval European ideas of what lies between earth and heaven. One could collect and compare a variety of artist's impressions of such "liminal" landscapes (using internet sources).

12-d) The King Drops Into a Deep Sleep But The Queen Reaches Her Destination

Finally the king and queen reach a flight of steps leading to heaven. Vishnu tells the queen that only she will do the penance. Her husband is tired and will wait there for them. He falls into a deep sleep and Lord Vishnu puts his life in a little protective box. As the Lord and the queen climb the steps they see visions of people being tortured in hell. Vishnu instructs her not to be frightened. Finally they reach the place where the queen will sit in deep meditation. Lord Vishnu builds a special pillar, made of sharp needles, for her to sit on.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you have an example of a team where one person was "sidelined" and the other had to carry full responsibility for the mission under way?

COMMENTARY: It now becomes clear that the king lacks the stamina and special powers his queen is endowed with. One can also "suspect" that Vishnu is behind this separation. He wants the queen

alone to make it to the special spot where she will perform her twenty one years of penance. This is a way of getting the king moved gently out of the picture before her years of near-death “testing” begin.

Episode 13 – The Book of Fate (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

13-a) The Queen Sits Deep In Prayer For 21 Years

The queen now sits on her pillar of penance for twenty one years. She is so motionless that a family of heavenly parrots build a nest in her nose. Eventually Lord Vishnu comes to check on her, and as he waves his arms the parrots leave the queen’s nose and fly off to earth. They go directly to the palace of the hill-dwelling hunter king. His sister greets them warmly and they settle in her forest (until needed later in the story).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Sometimes people slip into a deep trance-like state. Sometimes their thoughts or their “spirit” are understood to travel to a higher realm during this interlude. Have you ever “seen” something like this or read a story about such a person?

COMMENTARY: Trance-like states can be compared to extensive prayer or meditation. There are many examples one can find in native North American traditions where young men are sent into the wilderness and required to experience a special communion with an animal or with the spirit world. It is interesting to think about the heroine doing the same kind of thing in this story. Again, note that the character chosen for this is a woman. Some medieval female saints in Europe took on similar trials. If one focuses on the pillar in this story one can also compare the queen to Simeon Stylites, an actual historical (documented) Christian saint from Aleppo (now in modern Turkey) who sat on a pillar for over thirty years.

13-b) The Queen Is Tested Seven Times

The supreme god, Lord Shiva, now pushes the queen to the brink of death. He then revives the poor queen only to put her through the same cycle again and again. Finally she has experienced a complete cycle of seven “rebirths.”

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know anyone who says they have been “reborn?” What did they mean by this? Can you compare that experience with what is happening to the heroine in this sub-story?

COMMENTARY: Concepts of “rebirth” are common in many cultures. In Hinduism the idea of rebirth has so much importance that it can be said to provide a cultural foundation stone. Taking this perspective, human lives are seen to “cycle” through many births on earth. If they are dedicated and good at heart, however, such lives will finally build up enough merit through prayer and good deeds to find “release” from their perpetual rounds of struggle. Christians have a related idea and many say that they have experienced “rebirth” when they undergo a baptism or other ritual to mark their entry into the fold as a true or devout Christian. The heroine in this story is being “fast tracked” on the rebirth circuit. Her seven deathlike experiences are intended to purify her soul and ready her for the miraculous event soon to come.

13-c) Lord Vishnu Intervenes

Lord Vishnu sees all this and becomes worried about the woman he has helped so much. So he takes the form of a beggar and goes before the wife of Lord Shiva (who is also his sister). After being

screened by a maid he is allowed in at last. There he complains to Shiva's wife (his sister) about the queen's treatment. She then promises him that she will intercede with Lord Shiva himself. But Shiva is angry about the "heat" generated by the penitent who is requesting the gift of sons. (His body is now covered with sores). He does not quickly cede to Vishnu's request for mercy easily.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: What stories do you know where a leader, a saint or other helper intervened to assist someone in approaching a higher authority? Was the intervener honorable? Did he or she have the authority and the connections needed to get the job done, as Lord Vishnu certainly does in this case? Do you know of an opposite story, where an intervener misrepresents himself or is only interested in personal gain?

COMMENTARY: Sometime a pilgrim or penitent feels unworthy of meeting a god face-to-face. So they will ask for help from an intermediary. There are differing kinds of "connections" that an intermediary can have with a higher authority and differing motives. These can be points for discussion. Sometimes an intermediary has to "strike a bargain" in order to get what is wanted for the "client" or supplicant. In this case Lord Vishnu is quite selfless.

13-d) **The Queen's Prayers Are Answered!**

Finally Shiva allows his brother-in-law to bring the queen before him. He has his accountant check his records and then grants the penitent three children. The two boys will each reincarnate the spirit of an important hero in India's famous classical epic: the Mahabharata. The girl will reincarnate one in a set of seven "virgin sisters" who live near Shiva's counsel chambers. But there are two provisos: 1) All three children will have lives lasting only 16 years. 2) Vishnu must give up his sacred conch shell and leave it "in hock" with the great god Shiva. He will only get this important possession back when he physically brings the lives of the three divine children back to Shiva's chambers when their sixteen years of life are over. After these matters are finalized the couple start their long journey back to earth. Lord Vishnu revives the heroine's "dormant" husband when she reaches the spot where he rests. The couple continue on to their palace together.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The queen was on a long quest. But she finally succeeds and gets the outcome she wanted. What other long quests do you know about, either real ones in the history books, or from stories and myth? Did any of them succeed?

COMMENTARY: This is the "climax" point of the entire first half of the Ponnivala story. The queen is finally granted the wish she has struggled to obtain for so long. The bargain Vishnu strikes with this brother-in-law Shiva is notable as the conch is an instrument of war and its sound has very special powers. Lord Vishnu's own strength is "reduced" until he can get it back. Furthermore, the heroine's pregnancy is caused by a god, and her children represent the "rebirth" of divine spirits. There is even a kind of "annunciation." The parallels with the Virgin Mary in Christian tradition and the miraculous birth of Christ are thus rather strong.

Episode 14 – The Temple Secret (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

14-a A Midwife Is Bribed By Greedy Clansmen

Several clan relatives of the ruling family in Ponnivala hear rumors that triplets (two sons and one daughter) will soon be born to the queen. They decide to bribe the local midwife, asking her to kill the two baby boys before their mother ever sees them. She is to “stuff any male babies down a rat hole” leaving only baby girls to survive. But Lord Vishnu hears about the plan from his seat on the milk sea and decides to help the queen. He alerts the local family goddess and asks her to dig a secret tunnel that will connect the palace birthing room to her nearby temple.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Sometimes malicious plans are carried out secondhand, by someone who has been bribed or otherwise drawn in to serve as a “henchman.” Do you know a story about someone, like this midwife, who agreed to execute a plan without being the crook who is really “behind it all?”

COMMENTARY: The midwife is a “classical” example of someone who gets blamed for malicious (or careless) work. In this story the midwife is a hunchback, and she is also elderly, both characteristics that can be used to stigmatize someone. But really the midwife is just a “worker” pressed into service by her powerful superiors. She is not in a position to say “no.” (See the parallel with the hunchback Manthara from India’s classical epic The Ramayana).

14-b Two Magical Heroes Are Born!

Then Vishnu takes the form a fly on the wall of the birthing room. The midwife blindfolds the queen, telling her that “this is her first experience of childbirth” and that the blindfold will help her not to be scared. While she sharpens her knife in an adjacent room Vishnu transforms into his true self and performs a magical Caesarian on the queen. He lifts out the twin boys who are already strong and warlike. They first “kick the evil” out of the midwife, straightening her back (which earlier had 18 bends).

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: A Caesarian birth is a sort of “magical” event, even when performed by a human doctor. Were you, or was anyone you know born in this way? Imagine how much more magical these heroes’ births were... since the “operation” was performed by a god.

COMMENTARY: This magical birth of twins has many classical parallels. Many cultures treat the birth of twins as very special. Twins are often thought to have magical powers. Certainly they do in this episode as they are born fully active, dressed, able to speak, and they hold weapons they can already use. In this first “glimpse” of their characters we already see that there will be difference between the elder twin who is the more patient and peaceful, and his younger brother who is much more active and aggressive. The young hero, Shankar, kicks the midwife who is present in a side room because he “knows” (due to his magical powers) that she has had thoughts of killing him at his birth. So he kicks her to “get those evil thoughts to leave her.” He aims his kicks at her hunch and succeeds in straightening it, symbolizing his success in transforming her inner character.

14-c A Shocked Mother Learns The Truth

About Her Only New Born

Then the goddess appears in the room and lifts the two boys in her arms. She whisks them thru her secret tunnel to her local shrine where they will now live safely hidden under her protection. Meanwhile, the queen gives birth naturally to the third in the series, a baby girl. When her blindfold is finally untied the new mother is shocked to learn that she has only one baby girl.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How would you feel if you had been told you would give birth to triplets and only one child showed up? Could this ever happen in the “real world,” especially before the age of the ultra sound machine?

COMMENTARY: The fact that the goddess is raising the twin heroes in her underground “cave” is important. It gives them a kind of “implied” contact with the powers of the underworld. Of course it also associates them with the temple and with the powers of the goddess herself. At the same time the fact that the two male children are raised secretly, in an off-site location, links the story to many other folktales and myths where “first born” males are subject to a threat of death. Jesus is said to have been taken into Egypt by his parents for this very reason. Because inherited power and wealth is generally understood to descend from father to first born son (here and in many other societies... but not universally) it is the young boys who are at risk. Infant girls normally escape such threats.

14-d The Twin Heroes Are Raised By A Goddess

The king and queen graciously accept their fate and commit to raising their daughter well. She introduces her to the family goddess and welcomes her into palace life. Meanwhile, the local goddess is secretly raising the girl's twin brothers in a cave-like space under her temple. There she feeds the boys on the milk of tigers and elephants. Soon they will grow mature and be endowed with magical powers. But all this happens without the knowledge of the royal couple.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The king and queen are gracious and good. They accept the fact that they have only a daughter and they decide to raise her well. Do you know a story about a family that was very happy to have a girl child? Do you know a family that wasn't and really wanted to have boys, but then when they got a girl anyway they “adjusted” and discovered that girls are wonderful?

COMMENTARY: Sometimes children get separated from their biological parents at a very young age, either by accident or deliberately. Though in real life this is generally considered unfortunate, there are times when the child is exposed to a better life than the real parents could have given it. Here the two boys are really “blessed” by the goddess. She is able to feed them very special foods and help to develop their magical strength and powers. Their stay with her is one of the many ways we come to know that these are no ordinary children, but rather two young lives that reincarnate important aspects of divinity itself.

Episode 15 – The Truth Unveiled (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

15-a The Royal Couple Are Forced Into Exile

The scheming clansmen now begin to threaten the king, using the excuse that he has no male heirs. They beat and bully the family mercilessly until the latter become resigned to leaving their lands and to seek refuge elsewhere. They first go to the village where they have traditional ties and loyal workers. But these allies warn that their presence puts them all in danger of being beaten and further harassed by the same clansmen who just pushed the couple out of their palace.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: If you were pushed out of your home by a landlord, or someone else who didn't want you there, where would you go? Who would you turn to for help?

COMMENTARY: In medieval India villages were grouped into clusters (called naadus). Each of these territorial units was considered to be a functioning entity that shared temple festivals and whose residents exchanged goods, labor and a common political identity. A rough parallel might be the French "Canton." Often such a unit was identified with one particularly powerful landowner in the area. Ponnivala (naadu) was such an area and one of its key settlements was called Aniyappur. There were a lot of artisans living in Aniyappur. The "clansmen" in this story live in a different cluster which is called Tangavala (naadu). The heroes' family thought they would be "safe" in Aniyappur because this was an "allied settlement." But the locals knew that the royal couple would be vulnerable to attack there because neighboring Tangavala wasn't far away.

15-b The Wandering Family Finds Refuge in a Horse Stable

The king, queen and their little baby daughter now leave their familiar Ponnivala territory all together. They decide to retreat to the forested hills where a group of tribal hunters live. There they are offered safe haven and a good meal. But a problem soon appears. The destitute family is offered food by their hunter-hosts, but they try (politely) to refuse. The hunter king suspects (correctly) that this refusal is for caste reasons. In simple terms the farmers perceive themselves to be superior to a group of hunters and don't want to take food from the hands of this "inferior" community. Now the hunter king gets angry and the only refuge he will offer the destitute couple is to set up house in an old horse stable.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: It isn't always easy to find a welcoming host when you are a new comer without pocket money. New immigrants often end up in second-rate housing because they lack the knowledge and power to command better. Do you know a story of an immigrant family that you can compare to this story about the homeless king and queen?

COMMENTARY: Food refusal was a very common way of claiming status in medieval India. Remnants of this way of thinking persist in India today. Food exchange can be a very "political" minefield. Hosts want you to take food from their homes, but doing as a stranger can put you in a "dependent" relationship. Some castes (basically occupational groupings) are more sensitive to this kind of symbolism than others. Food is a powerful symbol because it is going "inside" the body and can be seen as affecting your degree of personal "purity."

15-c Two Hidden Sons Learn The Truth About Their Parents

They have no food and the wife of the king is forced to offer to do common labor (pounding rice) in exchange for food supplies. The other women of the village reject her as too frail and inexperienced to do hard work, but with the help of Lord Vishnu she manages to husk prodigious amounts of paddy rice. Meanwhile the boys grow fast, cared for lovingly by the goddess. One day she is singing a lullaby to the boys that makes a vague reference to their parentage. The younger son (the aggressive one) instantly demands to know who their real parents are and where they are located. The goddess now reveals to the boys their true identity and promises to return the twins to their parents as soon as she can discover their whereabouts.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Outwardly the queen looks like she has never done hard physical work. But the other working women who see her do not know about her amazing inner determination. Do you know a story about a woman who had to support her family and who surprised everyone with her huge success?

COMMENTARY: The queen is very determined. She also has some magical help from Lord Vishnu. Just like the story of her trip to the gates of heaven and her twenty one years of penance there, this woman again surprises all with her inner strength. Again (as in Ep. 12-b through Ep. 13-d) she is the pillar of strength in a time of struggle and hardship. Her husband, though well-meaning, contributes little. She must carry and support him through her efforts. This is a good episode to use if you want students to discuss the “power of women.”

Episode 16 – The Homecoming (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

16-a A Goddess Visits The Couples’ Humble Home

The goddess takes the boys on her shoulders and sets out on foot to search for their parents. After several inquiries and some wandering she finally hears that the boys’ family is living in a hunter king’s horse stall. She leaves the twins at the local temple in the hunters’ main village and cautions them to stay put while she goes on an unspecified errand. Soon her shadow crosses the doorstep of the couple’s living space. They rush out to find this most unexpected visitor.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you have a story about a surprise house guest? Who was it and did the person bring some important and startling news?

COMMENTARY: There are plenty of traditional stories like this, when a magical or divine visitor arrives at a person’s home. Sometimes it is in a dream or vision, instead of being portrayed as an actual event, like it is in this story. She also brings news that the couple find hard to believe. It takes a while for them to “adjust” their thinking and become accustomed to the idea that they actually have three children (including two sons). One can also talk about the multiple lines the goddess draws at the boys’ feet when she asks them to wait at the local temple for her return. This has a direct parallel in the great Ramayana story where the brother of the hero draws lines on the ground to indicate that his sister-in-law should not leave the spot where she has been told to wait for her husband’s return. This use of “magical” barriers can related to “boundaries” parents need to set for their children’s

behaviour.... anywhere. At a more “scientific” level one could cite the boundaries set for some dogs by “invisible electric fences” nowadays, or for cattle using a single electrified wire.

16-b The Queen Asks For Proof of Her Sons’ Legitimacy

At first the queen does not believe that she could have two sons. But the goddess asks her and her husband to come to the nearby temple to see for themselves. Both the king and the queen are overjoyed at the beauty of the two young boys they find waiting there. But the queen refuses to believe the goddess’ assurance that these children belong to her. She calls upon Vishnu to verify the matter. He proves the goddess’ word by staging a magical demonstration. He makes milk from the queen’s breasts pass through seven cloth veils to reach her sons’ mouths and then spill into her sons’ mouths. The couple are overjoyed and realize that it is now time for them to return to their old palace and reclaim their ancestral lands.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: How would you “prove” that a child belongs to you and not to someone else? Can you think of ways people did this before the world had blood tests and other genetic indicators of kinship that doctors and scientists could use?

COMMENTARY: The “magical” test of kinship that Lord Vishnu devises is significant in several ways. For one it uses milk, which is considered “the” substance which links a mother and child definitively. Secondly, the seven cloths are like “seven veils.” They provide modesty for the queen, since women of high status were expected to keep their breasts well covered (in medieval times for sure and also frequently in the present). Indeed breast covering was used as a sign of status, as traditionally low status women did not supposed to wear “blouses” (an upper caste privilege). Technically most of the women in this story (except the queens) should be drawn without blouses (if the medieval period in this region of India is to be portrayed accurately). However, because of the sensitivity of this topic every woman in this story has been given a modern-style blouse. The number seven is a sort of magical “formula.” Many things occur in sevens, in Indian stories as well as in European ones. And furthermore, because this is a kind of “sacred ritual” the queen must bathe properly before undertaking this breast-milk “test.”

16-c The Royal Couple Return From Exile With Three Children Instead of One

The couple return to Ponnivala with all three children and reclaim their ancestral lands. Their palace is cleaned and redecorated. Soon the two boys meet their key guardian for the first time. He is the magical son of a poor family living nearby. They also meet the offspring of many important animals in the kingdom (horses, goats, etc.) that they will interact with again later.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a story about a child who enters a new land and a new life.... and shows eagerness to explore the changed surroundings? Did they have fun? What did they learn?

COMMENTARY: This is the episode where the twin brothers start to explore their lands and learn about their heritage. Their learning is very physical and they interact a lot with these animals. They also are given an assistant who will be with them for life. The relationship the story describes is both very traditional and interesting. The assistant is actually from a very low ranking caste (he is technically an “untouchable”) yet he is greatly honored and respected by the young heroes. This bond between a land owning family of rank and a low ranking family of near-by workers is very traditional. It can be

seen in other cultures too, Something very similar is described by a recent award winning novel about Afghanistan: [The Kite Runner](#).

16-d The Couple Arrange Their Sons' Weddings

All three children grow up happily, but the king and queen now begin to worry about their own deaths and want to arrange their sons' weddings. The two boys resist, but finally agree to their mother's wishes. However, they set out one key condition: they will never touch their wives or look at their faces. (Of course this implies there will be no offspring from these promised formal unions). The queen is horrified but has to agree to this wish in order to strike a bargain with her two sons.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a story about someone who didn't want to marry but their parents "pushed" them into it. What was the result? Did the marriage go badly or even "break up" soon afterwards?

COMMENTARY: The sister, though technically the same age as her brothers is not in question here. Normally "elder" brothers would be married before their "younger" sister. Here we can guess that the parent's concern is with the family inheritance. The married sons will be able to hold on to the family lands. The sister can be married a little later, if necessary after they have passed on. The very strange "condition" that is set for the joint wedding and for lack of contact with the two brides has something to do with the sons wish to maintain their maximum virility. This is a way of satisfying "the letter of the law" (marriage is required) without any physical results (love making and the birth of offspring). The unions become purely symbolic. One could compare the "no physical touch" condition to the rule some U.S. football teams have that specifies (or used to specify) "no sex" for the male players on the night before a big game. (Loss of semen can be understood to equate to a loss of power. Stored up semen, in Hindu thinking, equates to increased supernatural and spiritual power)

Episode 17 – Chastity Forever (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

17-a A Very Strange Wedding Occurs

The big wedding day is arranged. The two girls that are being held in waiting as the brides (see episode #10) are returned from their "stone" forms to flesh and blood for the event. The wedding is "simple" by Indian standards and quickly completed. Most important is the fact that neither groom sees his wife's face during the ceremony. Furthermore, they never touch, as silver "finger extensions" are used at the point when a couple would normally link hands. The younger twin stays only the minimal amount of time at the event. Soon afterwards the two wives are "jailed" in a remote and very plain palace. There they live alone and are forced to spin endless hanks of cotton thread day after day

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever heard of brides that were forced to spin thread day after day in a locked palace? Try looking up "spinning in myths and folktales," on the internet for some interesting contrasts (and parallels)

COMMENTARY: This forced spinning in a kind of jail may seem like a cruel fate for the heroes' wives. It is. But looked at symbolically it is interesting. First off, spinning is often associated with "fertility" in myth. Just as the twin heroes store up their sexual power through abstinence, perhaps their wives store up extra fertility through spinning. The story doesn't provide a rationale, but we can guess. There is a possible parallel with the queen (the heroes' mother) who stores up her energies

by sitting on a high pillar for 21 years and then receives so much “fertility power” from the gods that she can distribute it throughout her kingdom. The heroes’ sister (as we shall see) never marries at all. In a sense she also stores up her fertility for later. Taking another tack, this is the “beginning of a much greater family breakdown that the heroes’ actions result in ... and that can be seen as the story progresses. Just as the kingdom can have no legitimate heirs with the two key wives locked up, so do social bonds more generally begin to unravel from this point forward.

17-b **The Parents Make Their Death-Bed Wishes Known**

Meanwhile the twin brothers return to a pleasant and carefree life in their much grander palace. In particular, they pass the time by playing dice with Lord Vishnu, who descends from heaven to visit them for just this purpose. The two young men also gradually begin to concern themselves with the affairs of their parent's kingdom. Foreseeing their own death, this kind and gentle senior couple now counsel their sons. They ask them to refrain from pursuing any grudges. They request that they be wise, gentle and calm rulers. In particular, the parents ask their sons never to pick a fight with family rivals. They also ask that they take good care of their sister and see that she is well married. Soon, however, the last rites for these two seniors are performed. The great Yeman, Lord of death, is sent to down by the great god Shiva. His “accountant” has told him that his book states that the days this couple can spend on earth are now used up. So Shiva asks Yeman to bring the lives of these two quickly back to his Himalayan abode.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This is like the heroes’ parents’ “last will and Testament.” Is it good advice? Would you change anything they say? Would you add anything to fit better with modern times?

COMMENTARY: The advice that the parents give their sons will be critical in the coming episodes, mainly because each and every piece of advice they give will be ignored. This could be taken as an indication of a “rift” or a change between generations. It can also be understood as presaging the change for a society of small and relatively peaceable kingdoms to one where warfare will dominate. When conducting war brave warriors are needed. The two brothers (plus their wives and their sister) could be understood to be “storing up their powers” for just such an eventuality (see episode 17-a).

17-c **The Sons Ignore Their Parents’ Final Words**

Not long afterwards, the younger twin wants to begin settling old family scores. He singles out the enemy clansmen, the same men who once forced his parents into exile. The elder brother is very reluctant to endorse this move, but he is soon pulled into action by his fiery younger sibling. The two of them go to the palace dressing room and prepare for an attack. They wrap their fine turbans on their heads, put their swords in their scabbards, and call for their powerful horses. Their assistant (son of the untouchable described earlier...who is also their guardian) helps with these preparations.

The two young kings soon leave the palace on horseback for the clansmen's key village. Their powerful assistant follows at a run behind them.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Why do you think the heroes decide to ignore their parents' advice so quickly? Would it be hard to write a good story where these two men just decide to do everything their parents told them to do?

COMMENTARY: The parents' advice obviously "sets up" the heroes to break their mould in some way. They want to be different from their parents. But it is important to look more closely. Actually this is where the difference between the two brothers begins to take on real importance. One can suggest that they are meant to define two kinds of kingship: the older son is gentle, loving and patient, the younger one is aggressive and impulsive. He is focused on defending the family's honor and good name. The elder son is much like his father (and we know he was gentle and trusting to a fault). The other sibling represents a new model, perhaps a new age. He is the "ring leader" and (as we will see) he usually gets his way.

Episode 18 – An Overlord Angered (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

18-a The Twin Heroes Attack Their Rivals' School-age Sons

The twin brothers racing their horses towards the land of their clan rivals. Following on foot (with magical speed) is their powerful assistant. When these three men find the clansmen's village they quickly locate its single room school house. There they tie up the horses, enter the one-room building, and sit down at the back of the class. Of course, they are soon noticed. The children react with anger at the presumption of the visitors and a row begins. The younger brother, with help from the powerful assistant, wreaks havoc inside the school. But the elder brother stands to one side. After much beating and whipping, all the young boys in the class are tied together in sets of two. Then they are forced out the schoolhouse door and told to run home. Of course they can only hobble.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you think of some modern stories like this where a school was attacked by an intruder and the kids were frightened? Do the modern examples we hear about differ from this old-fashion one in important ways?

COMMENTARY: An attack on a school full of children is not just a modern event. People in other cultures and during other times have thought of this terrible idea too. Attacking innocent children in a school is a very good way of upsetting parents and teachers, as well as directly hurting kids. It will likely start a much bigger row. The heroes of The Legend of Ponnivala can not be admired for having decided to start their "warrior" careers with this kind of violence. However, one can understand that a long-standing rivalry between the families of these kids (the hated clansmen of neighboring Tangavala) already existed. The clansmen and the heroes' own parents greatly disliked each other. The original episode, (as described by the village bard whose words lie behind the entire legend), is actually quite a bit more violent than what the video depicts. In the un-expurgated version the attack is rather similar to some of the horrific school violence we hear about today. This small part of the larger story has been

significantly “tamed down” in its retelling so as to make it easier to share with kids. However, the motivations of the attackers (modern and old) are not so different. Here, as in stories from present times, anger at imagined insults and/or a desire to “get even” with someone who has made the aggressor suffer in an earlier incident, seem to be common themes. In a nutshell, all these stories seem to have to do with a desire for “sweet” revenge.

18-b **A Group of School Boys Are Humiliated And Their Families Exiled**

The school boys’ mothers soon notice a strange-looking group of kids running towards them. They call their husbands who have just returned from the fields for lunch. Everyone who sees the state of these poor children feels horrified and insulted. The men from each child’s family run to the school and try to attack the challengers with sticks. But they do not win. Instead, the heroes beat them back. As the situation worsens the heroes throw the entire set of residents out of their village. Forced into exile by the unwelcome visitors, these victimized families set out from their own village as refugees. They quickly develop a plan. They will find refuge with the overlord of the entire South (the Chola king). Then they will submit their complaint about mistreatment to him.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This episode resembles many refugee stories from modern times. What refugee story can you tell where a whole group of people were forced out of their homeland and forced to find shelter elsewhere?

COMMENTARY: This story will work well for discussing modern refugees and some of the crimes they have suffered. Being exiled is not a “new” kind of horror. Similar events have been a part of human history since at least time of written records, and likely long before. And exile is not new to this story. The heroes’ own parents were sent into exile by this same group just one generation back (Episode 15-a). The occurrence of a similar story here is thus a kind of “tit for tat.” And it also occurred once before that, when the heroes’ father was just a young boy (episode 3-a). In sum this is a recurring theme that underlies the entire Legend of Ponnivala in an important way.

18-c **The Exiled Families Cleverly Enlist A Superior King’s Backing**

The clansmen find the Chola’s palace. As they meet the king, several spokespersons for the group cleverly remind the great monarch that the two young boy-rulers from Ponnivala have not delivered the traditional tribute to him even once since their parents’ death. Angered, the Chola sends an envoy to the twin brothers’ palace to demand immediate payment. But the envoys are stopped at the river by aggressive palace animals. Frightened, they leave their message with a maid who is filling water pots there, and return quickly to the Chola’s home territory. The palace maid brings the two king brothers news of the great Chola’s demands. But they disagree on how to handle this new challenge. The younger brother refuses to humiliate himself by taking a symbolic tribute payment to their overlord. By contrast, the elder feels it must be done. He agrees to go.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know of a story where a messenger got “frightened” during his or her mission and in the end had to pass the job to someone else to get it done? Do you think this made the message stronger or weaker when it was finally received?

COMMENTARY: The refugees are clever and find a way to get the king’s attention. The monarch is unsympathetic at first but the clansmen find a reason why he should “switch sides” and support them rather than remain loyal to his old ally. After all it is the sons of that ally who beat up the visitors. Many politicians today use a similar tactic as a way to get members of parliament to “cross the floor.”

Episode 19 – Independence Won (Sub Stories a, b, c, d and e)

19-a The Humble, Tribute-Paying Elder Brother Is Thrown In Jail!

As a consequence the elder sibling takes the humbling gift to the Chola palace by himself, accompanied only by the loyal family assistant. The great king accepts the payment but he is not happy. He has not won the submission of the younger twin, the one he really wants to humiliate. So he develops his own scheme and throws the elder twin in jail. The king reasons that when the younger twin gets word of this he will come to his palace in search of his missing brother. Back at the palace the younger sister has a dream in which she learns that the brother who took the tribute to the Chola has been jailed there. She tells her other brother who angrily takes off to rescue his twin.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The king has used a clever trick. How would you get someone to come to your palace and beg for your respect, especially if they didn't want to submit to your authority? This would be something like the police, who know you are a friend of a thief they have in jail, laying a trap for you so that you will come and talk to them. Maybe you can think of a modern story where the opposite happens, that is a story about a friend of a person in jail who tricks the police in order to help that friend escape.

COMMENTARY: There is a kind of “bargaining” going on here between the Chola ruler and the two kings who dominate the smaller outlying area called Ponnivala. This “argument” symbolizes that a change in the relationship has occurred. In the father's generation there was friendship and respect. The Chola trusted his ally but expected periodic gestures of submission to his greater authority. Now the two kings have ignored the tradition of tribute payment (which they surely knew about... though this is not directly stated). One is willing to meet the Chola's demand, the other is not. This is a sign that the outlying kingdom is feeling “rebellious.” A show down is coming.....

19-b The Younger Brother Rides To His Elder's Rescue

The young king rides at full speed towards the Chola's palace. When the younger king arrives he finds the assistant still waiting patiently outside the palace. He knows nothing of the “jailing” story. He stops to vent some of his anger on him. Meanwhile the Chola, knowing that the younger twin is prone to violence, gets worried. So decides to pretend that nothing is wrong. He releases his brother and prepares a feast. Pretending that he wants to honor the elder brother he decorates him by putting rings on his toes, seating him on a throne, and so forth. But, in fact, there are several more tricks up this monarch's sleeve. He is not willing to let the younger brother “off the hook.”

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: If you were a king and you wanted your distant allies to show their loyalty and their submission to your higher authority what would you do?

COMMENTARY: In this episode the Chola king is made to look rather weak and silly. Perhaps he is a “son” of the former king (we don't know that he is the same “king”). That man proved himself a kind generous ruler who was an ally (as well as an overlord) in the eyes of the heroes' father. Now there is a change on this side of the “fence” too (as discussed in 19-a referring to the attitude of the twin brothers). Now the Chola seems a bit foolish and rather scared. He doesn't think through his “tricks” and therefore they are unconvincing. The younger twin trusts his sister, not what he sees the king do

when he gets to the palace. Her “dreams” are reliable visions, and they are always “true.” Thus he is suspicious, while the elder brother, true to his character, remains the more gullible one.

19-c The Dishonest King Attempts Many Kinds of Treachery

First the Chola king tries to poison his two guests while offering them a pretentious palace “feast.” Foiled by a cat (an envoy of Lord Vishnu) the Chola then tries another trick. This time he hopes to get them to sit on a chair that has been cunningly tied over a deep pit and is designed to dump its occupant into that hole. But one of the Chola’s own sons falls into that deep hole instead. Finally the Chola proposes a trip to a mountain shrine near by. Eventually he traps the two brothers there, stranding them on a high cliff. He helps them climb up by providing a long ladder, but then pulls it away. Then the Chola runs gleefully back to his palace, believing his “enemy-guests” will die on the isolated mountain. But the two heroes are not ready to give up. As usual they call on Lord Vishnu for help once more. The Lord starts to fly towards earth.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This is a very mean trick for someone in high authority to use. Can you think of a story where a weak king does something foolish and dishonorable?

COMMENTARY: This substory functions to make the Chola king look bad. In this way it builds a “justification” for the heroes’ actions at the end of this episode (when they attack the monarch and kill him). The heroes are first “wronged” and this will make them look justified (later) when they take revenge. The series of three tricks used first the classic folktale pattern... building suspense and also a sense of disgust at the monarch’s lack of ethical principles.

19-d Lord Vishnu Rescues the Heroes From A Lonely Mountain Top

Vishnu rescues the stranded royal twins from the top of the cliff where they are stranded. He appears to them as a beggar with very long hair, walking along a path at the foot of that cliff. Hearing the two stranded men call out, the beggar then braids his hair and throws his magically long plaits up to them. The two men scramble down those braids readily. As soon as they are “free,” however, they have only one thought: They want to attack the Chola king in revenge. An all out fight ensues.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: This is like a “dream sequence” where something fun but totally unrealistic happens. Can you describe a movie or a dream where one or more heroes fly thru the air in a magical and totally surprising way? **ALTERNATIVE IDEA:** Hair is a frequently used symbol in folk tales. What stories do you know where someone magically grows long hair? Was that person male or female? Do you think there is a difference between stories about hair that feature a character of one type or the other?

COMMENTARY: The pattern of Vishnu appearing to the heroes (or the heroine) in disguise runs throughout this legend. Usually the great lord takes the form of a beggar or a fortune teller. This is part of the Hindu tradition of “play” or “illusion” which the gods love. Such stories make the point that “things may not be quite what they appear to be at first glance.” They also suggest that all beggars should be respected, as you never know who they might really be. One small point (not in the summary) is that the younger brother threatens his elder, just after they have been stranded on the cliff, blaming him for the predicament they are in. This is part of a gradual “build” in the story of incidents where the younger brother expresses aggression towards his sibling. Meanwhile the elder

pleads for restraint. He worries (by contrast) about their “little” sister. This is part of the wider “family dynamic” between the twin heroes and is also expressive of their very different personalities.

Differing lengths and styles of hair are used to convey symbolic messages in many cultures. Here Lord Vishnu grows “long braids” in order to rescue the heroes. Generally, according to Indian Hindu traditions, long hair should be kept tied up in some way or other. This represents a “safe” and controlled state. Evil influences (and smells) do not enter tightly bound hair, but loose hair is like a magnet that attracts such energies. The heroine lets down her hair when she is angry and upset (Ep. 26a and also Ep. 9b-c. This symbolizes the fact that she is “dangerous” and about to burn others with her fiery magic. A discussion of various common hair styles the students are familiar with and what their cultural “connotations are” would be appropriate here. You could ask the students for an essay comparing Rapunzel and how she uses her long hair, with how Lord Vishnu uses his!

Finally, it is important to note that Lord Vishnu himself (not in this summary) sanctions the heroes’ attack on the king. This supplies them the divine backing they need and justifies (to the story’s audience) their initiation of such a dangerous (and rebellious) mission.

19-e **A Battle Royal With The King Which the Heroes Win**

The heroes are without their horses. So they run at full speed towards the Chola’s palace. When arrive both the wicked Chola king and the angry clansmen are inside the palace gates. There is a major attack by the skilful heroes and their huge assistant. At the end of the scuffle the Chola king lies dead, along with all of the rival clansmen who initially brought their complaint to him. The twins return home victorious. They have now freed themselves from the requirement to show submission to an onerous overlord. Peace reigns throughout the kingdom.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The heroes were trained in traditional South Indian marshal arts. Some of their battle “tricks” are visible in this battle scene. Can you point them out? How do their actions compare with other marshal arts techniques you know about?

COMMENTARY: This battle scene is a “classic” one. There are two against many. The underdogs are attacking their oppressive overlord. After a great struggle, the heroes win. They kill the despot and gain their freedom. A time of peace is ushered in. Many historical wars are cast in this light. Modern political leaders often refer to this “model” in their campaign rhetoric. It is also worth noting that the heroes do “summersaults” and use other athletic tricks during the battle. These usual “positions” and attack strategies reference the martial arts, in which both heroes are said to be experts. There are several important marshal art traditions that are popular in South India, a major one being “*Kalaripayattu*.”

Episode 20 –Two Swords Blessed (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

20-a **The Lonely Sister Asks Her Brothers To Fetch Her Two Pet Birds**

Meanwhile, the twin kings’ lovely little sister is lonely and begins dreaming about obtaining two magical parrots as pets. She wants her brothers to catch those “heavenly” birds for her. They will become her pets. The brothers express reservations. The parrots, though of heavenly lineage, reside well within the territory of their enemies: the hunters. The mountain territory there does not belong to them. But the brothers decide to go anyway.

Then the sister changes her mind. She now realizes that the risks are too great. But the two kings have now committed to the mission and put their honor on the line.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you dream of things you want? Then do you sometimes change your mind when you discover that you can't afford it? Or maybe there are other problems? What you thought you wanted might be illegal, or it might upset someone and cause problems. What if you had to ask someone to steal what you wanted? Would you change your mind if you found what you wanted belonged to an enemy or a rival?

COMMENTARY: This is a significant episode, a kind of turning point in the story. The sister is lonely and wants two parrots for company, but when her brothers tell her that the tree where these birds can be found grows in the enemy's forest (a tribal area) she changes her mind. She does not want to put her brothers in danger and start a huge row.

20-b **A Treacherous Theft Yields Iron For Making a Fine Bird Net**

The brothers realize that they need help to catch the parrots their sister requested. They plan on using a large iron net especially made for the purpose. But when they call the artisans and ask them to make such a net, the workmen advise the kings that they need to use especially strong "foreign iron" for this assignment. So the heroes' magical assistant is sent off to obtain the material required. Ironically, he finds some of the correct iron stored in an awkward place, at a temple that belongs to their hunter-enemies. It is located in the very same hills that the two kings plan to steal the parrots from. The heroes' assistant soon obtains the by trickery. He carries it all back to Ponnivala in one big, magical head load. The parrot net needed is then quickly manufactured, and so is a golden cage that is designed to hold the two lovely birds.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: What are some of the "tricks" the heroes' assistant uses in order to steal the iron rods he needs? Are these any different from the tricks a thief might use today?

COMMENTARY: This episode focuses on the prowess of the heroes' assistant and his supernatural strength. He is a clever man and he gets what he wants. This is also the episode where the hunter's sister is introduced. She is an important counterpoint to the heroes' own unmarried sister. If the heroes get the magical backing of their little princess, we now see that the enemies have a similar magic "well" of blessings to draw on. In a very subtle way this story will become (in the final struggle) a battle between the powers of two (structurally opposed) women.

20-c **Skilled Artisans Make a Fine Bird-Hunting Net and Also A Golden Bird Cage**

The brothers realize that they need help to catch the requested parrots. They plan on using a large iron net especially made for the purpose. But when they call the artisans to construct this, the workmen advise the kings that they must use especially strong "foreign iron" for this delicate task. So the heroes' supernatural assistant is sent off to obtain the material needed. Ironically, he finds some of this iron near a temple associated with the hunter's palace. This temple lies in the very same hills that the two kings plan to steal the parrots from. Their assistant soon obtains the iron by trickery. He carries it all back to Ponnivala in one big, magical head load.

The iron net needed is quickly completed, and so is a golden cage that will hold the lovely captives. The artisans are paid with pearls.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The heroes' assistant is acting as a thief. He is clever and strong, and he succeeds in getting the iron his masters want. But his theft is sure to be noticed, and that will cause anger. This is the start of a much bigger problem the heroes will face down the road. Can you tell a similar story where a seemingly small mistake (immoral action) starts a "chain reaction" and leads to much bigger problems down the road?

COMMENTARY: The heroes' assistant is a sort of magical character himself. He has superhuman strength and also can work a certain amount of magic. He is also a sort of buffoon. He is a big drinker and he is a bit of a show-off. One could say that he exhibits a lot of "bravado." In this scene the story is careful to describe the "idea" of the theft as originating with the assistant rather than coming from the mouths of the heroes themselves. This lets the main characters "off the hook" to some extent, when it comes to moral responsibility for what happens. One could start a discussion about how much "responsibility" the heroes must bear for what happens, if any? How does one "divide" a crime between the perpetrator and the master who allows something immoral to happen under his watchful "eyes." There are plenty of "political" rows of this kind, where the underling is accused of a crime, and the overlord is judged to be "innocent."

20-d The Sister Blesses Her Brothers' Swords

The two brothers are now fully committed to the hunt for two magical parrots. They make all the necessary preparations including drafting fighters from each village in the Ponnivala area. They dress for battle. The twin kings ask their sister to bless their swords and thereby ensure their success in this dangerous mission. She does so. The two men are ready to depart.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The brothers believe need their sister's support for their quest. They ask her to bless their swords. Why do you think they want this blessing? How will it help? Have you ever asked someone for their blessings before starting something new or setting out on a long trip?

COMMENTARY: The sister is a very special woman. Because of her "chastity" and also because of her very special birth, she is considered to have special powers of insight into the future and also magical abilities. In south Indian tradition, all women have such powers to some extent, but these are "concentrated" in this heroine because of her purity of mind and body. She is able to "transfer" some of this power to her brothers' swords through her blessing. Lord Vishnu helps the two swords "fly" into her hands, and that adds to the strength of the blessing (because he is involved). The sister's hands are important in this scene. It is her physical touch of these weapons of war that transfers the extra "power" to them. The scene can also be interpreted in a psychological light. If the people one is close to and who believe in you lend you support in times of stress or danger... that will give you extra self-confidence and emotional strength. The sister's "magic" can also be understood in this way.

Episode 21 – A Kidnapping Spree (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

21-a The Heroes Break Several Magical Barriers

The hunters' sister suspects that her beloved parrots are in danger. So she sets up several barriers along the forest path leading to their nesting site, to prevent their capture. She creates an ambush of one thousand tigers. There will be a quiver of cobras waiting in the bushes as well. When the brothers encounter these ferocious animals they fight bravely and after some time they successfully defeat these animals and proceed to the huge tree where the parrots are known to nest.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The heroes fight a mythical array of tigers and cobras in this scene. What other heroes have you read about that fought mythical animals (like, for example) a dragon? How does this kind of adventure bolster the heroes honor and reputation as warriors?

COMMENTARY: Of course the fight with so many tigers and cobras makes a dramatic statement about the heroes' fighting prowess. It sets them up for success in their parrot quest. But what happens next is of more interest if one is seeking a broader understanding of this story. The sister has asked for two parrots. And when the heroes reach the parrot tree we realize that these are going to be a magical husband-wife pair. But the twin brothers only succeed in catching one member of this happily the married couple. That's the rub. The wedding bond is broken and the husband flies off to the enemy palace to lodge a complaint about what has happened. The story here can be read as a kind of metaphor. The heroes, already stressing the bond with their sister, now manage (unwittingly) to break a marital bond. This will have severe consequences. It is also one more step down a slippery slope whereby the bonds with all their relatives, all their helpers and eventually their one and primary female sibling..... are gradually being severed.

21-b The Heroes Capture One Female Bird But Its Partner Escapes

The heroes and their brave fighting allies creep quietly up to the tree where the parrots are located. The main assistant throws the huge iron net that has been prepared over their tree. But after much maneuvering, the men manage to capture only one bird, a female. Her partner/husband is able to escape. This is very upset at the loss of his mate and he flies to the hunter's forest palace to complain to their princess. His sad song is heard through the palace window and he is invited in. He explains to the princess that he has lost his lovely wife to a bunch of farmer-thieves.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: A husband/wife pair have been separated by the farmers' expedition. It is not surprising that the husband tries any strategy he can think of to get his wife back. This is as much a "kidnapping" as it is a theft. What would you do if your sister or wife were nabbed and taken away by force?

COMMENTARY: This episode is symbolic in several ways. First, it is the female who is captured. The theft of a woman can be seen as an assault on her purity and chastity, even if metaphorically couched in animal (bird) imagery. But this act also serves as a huge insult to the fathers, brothers husbands and sons whose honor rests on that female's successful protection. And finally, this is a "criminal act" because it has broken up a loving "married" pair. This is an assault on the family and on social structure, as well as on the hunters' community more generally. It is sure that the hill-dwelling tribesmen will react en masse.

21-c The Parrot Husband Flies to The Hunters' Palace To Protest the Capture of His Wife

The hunters' sister is upset by the news of the parrot's capture. She calls her many brothers together. They plan revenge and soon a large group of hunter warriors come to Ponnivala. There they hope to kidnap the heroes' own little sister. But a mistake is made. The hunters stop at the river near the palace where they see a maid filling her water pots. They think she is the princess herself and so they kidnap her. The hunters run back to their own lands with this woman and prepare to make her into their own household servant. But the heroes' brave assistant soon comes to her rescue. Using a few more tricks he carries her back to Ponnivala on his shoulder,

unharméd. The female parrot, meanwhile, sits in a lovely gold cage by the heroes' sister's swing. She sings a sad song that laments the loss of her lifetime mate.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know a modern story about kidnapping? It is an old concept but could the motives be different today? What do you think the kidnapping in this story is all about?

COMMENTARY: The key to this episode is the serial “kidnappings” that occur. It starts with the capture of the female parrot. She is kidnapped or stolen from enemy territory and put in a cage (an insult to a wild bird). So when the hunters learn about this, from the bird's husband, they decide on revenge. They will kidnap the heroes' own sister and degrade her by making her their servant! The fact that they get a palace maid instead is due to their sloppy “research.” They think they have the real thing. Now there is a counter revenge. That girl is recaptured and brought safely back within the palace walls. The fact that there is a series of three women here is no accident. It would seem that this set of events is really about insulting the women of the opposite camp. To degrade a powerful (magic-endowed) woman and to take her away from the enemy will weaken their powers. Kidnapping in this story, therefore, is about insulting and degrading women that belong to the opponent. This is an old theme and it is a strategy used in European tradition too. Kidnapping children has similar overtones (threatening the innocent and the most beloved). Today's kidnapping strategies may have overtones of this, but modern motives also include money and high stakes power-bargaining between nations or multi-nation sized groups. It almost seems that what is certainly very old is now new again....

Episode 22 – A New Challenger (Sub Stories a, b, and c)

22-a An Artisan Develops a Secret Plan To Make His Family Wealthy

A few artisans (family rivals from day one) have successfully hidden themselves from the heroes until now. But one foolish survivor wants to take revenge. He develops an elaborate scheme to deceive the heroes. First he cuts down a very venerable and large tree in his back yard, something his ancestors have honored for generations. His wife questions his decision but the artisan ignores her. Then he makes a very large measuring vessel made from the lovely wood. Asking his wife to buy a small amount of gold from the market, he then thinly covers the huge dish with gold foil. Now there are many bad omens. The artisan hits his head on the door frame of the house when leaving, he sees a black cat cross his path, and more. Again his wife begs him to stop and to at least wait for a more auspicious day. Again the artisan ignores her advice.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: What are the many bad omens the wife ‘sees.’ What do you think noticing an omen really about?

COMMENTARY: Omens are a traditional way of trying to see into the future. They reflect specific beliefs important in specific cultural settings. But some of them can also be pretty universal, like hitting one's head on a door frame. Omens are “seen” when people are in a certain frame of mind.... When they are scared or anxious. One could say that they point to a kind of “folk psychology.” It would be wrong to speak about omens as simple superstitions. They can be useful, even helpful signs, providing insight into a person's frame of mind in certain situations.

Considering the matter described here a wider level, we can say that the artisan is clearly ill-intentioned. He is deceitful from the start. This man villainized and stereotyped. He is insensitive to

family tradition and to the destruction of a core asset (the old tree). He won't share his idea with his wife and he is mean when he speaks to her. She (with her female insight) notices many bad omens as her husband sets out. He ignores these as well. In these many ways this episode is not very subtle. It clearly paints the artisan as a "villain." This craftsman also appears to be a goldsmith by profession. This one profession has been villainized in South Indian literature from ancient times (see the famous and very old Tamil story called Silappadikaram where a goldsmith is also a villain). A goldsmith also bears the brunt of ignominy in some European folktales too. And there is "overlap" here, as well, with an old South Indian confrontation between right (the farming) and left (the craftsmen) communities. Suffice it to say that the "artisan" anger at the farmer kings starts with episode 1-b and their resultant antipathy towards the farmers provides an undercurrent which then flows beneath this entire legend.

22-b The Greedy Artisan Makes a Mistake While Planning To Steal The Heroes' Wealth

After walking quite a distance with a large bowl on his head, the artisan finally reaches a temple near the twin kings' palace. The older (and more gullible) twin is sitting there. After a short conversation this brother takes pity on the artisan (alone with an expensive vessel on his head at the end of the day) and invites him to spend the night. He warns him that he may encounter thieves if he proceeds any further after dark. The artisan accepts this offer of hospitality and asks to leave his vessel in the palace storeroom. There he carefully places it next to a small lighted oil lamp. He goes to sleep in the palace room. But a big incident erupts in the middle of the night. The artisan tries to sneak into the palace armory and steal one of the heroes' swords. Being careless, he ends up cutting himself with it instead. Then he cries out in pain. Still the gullible elder brother is tolerant and trusting He merely asks the artisan to go back to sleep after the maids give him a balm for his wounds.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Why is the hero so tolerant of the artisan's suspicious behavior? Is being so trusting a good personality trait for a king?

COMMENTARY: This episode again makes the artisan out to be a bumbling fool. But it doesn't do much for the reputation of the elder brother either. He is clearly too trusting, too naïve, too kind. By implication the sub-episode is building up and reinforcing a general character contrast between the elder brother in the story and his younger sibling (whose role in all this we will see later).

22-c The Elder Hero's Honesty Is Tested By Having To Swim Through Fast Moving Waters

The next morning, when the artisan and he go to the storeroom to get the golden vessel they find it has been "replaced" by a simple wooden one. (In reality the gold foil has melted from the heat of the lamp). The artisan then accuses the elder hero of having stolen his vessel. Of course, the mild-mannered king denies having done anything of the sort. Now the artisan demands proof of his honesty in the form of several supernatural feats. Twice the elder twin is asked to swim through an irrigation sluice where the water is running at high speed. On the second attempt the artisan tries to hit him on the head with a statue of Lord Ganesh. The sister

awakes from a dream and calls her younger brother, warning him that the elder twin is in grave danger. He rushes to the irrigation tank on horseback. Just then Lord Vishnu comes to the rescue and the hero is saved. The younger hero, meanwhile, arrives at the scene and angrily attacks both the artisan and a group of allied warrior-hunters who have also appeared and are ready to attack. As usual, the heroes' side is victorious and both brothers come through this mini war unharmed. The artisan and his hunter friends are all killed. For the moment life at the palace returns to normal.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The hero has to undergo an awesome set of tests. Finally, with Lord Vishnu's help, he succeeds and his life is saved. What traditional folk story can you find where a hero has to under a similarly difficult (but essentially peaceful) test, one that does not involve his having to fight?

COMMENTARY: Now we see the full extent of the contrast between the elder and the younger brother. The younger twin arrives on horseback with his sword. He fights all of his brother's attackers off and emerges as a brave hero. But the elder brother has a story of his own. He has passed two very difficult tests by swimming in both directions through a dangerous current that flows in a dark funnel. Lord Vishnu has come to his rescue, giving him special status as the honored (and protected) one. He does little to advance the fight his brother undertakes. So here we see the familiar contrast between these two heroic brothers grow ever stonger. One is peaceable and blessed. The other is violent and wins status by virtue of his skills as an awesome fighter. The bond between the two brothers remains strong, but the younger is definitely the one "in command."

Episode 23 – The Enemy Confronted (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

23-a A Huge Wild Boar Destroys The Farmer's Fine Crops

Now the end game begins. A great wild boar, pet of the hunters' little sister, is destined to attack the heroes and their fertile lands. He sets out and on three successive nights he systematically destroys the heroes' rice fields, sugarcane crop and finally, the palace flower garden. A gardener picking flowers for morning offerings at the local goddess' temple is the first to see all this terrible destruction. He is distraught, but still he hopes to collect the few flowers that remain visible. The great boar, which has now disguised himself as a large black rock, feels the gardener's weight on his back as he climbs on it to pick an especially pretty little bloom.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: What would you do if you were a farmer and you found all your lovely fields ripped up overnight? Why do you think the hunters (who are really behind the great boar's work) so angry? Can you think of a similar modern story where natives are angry because they feel their lands have been destroyed by cattle ranchers, by farmers or by big business in general?

COMMENTARY: This sub-episode focuses on the destruction the wild boar wreaks on the farmer's beautiful and bountiful lands. It sets out the confrontation between the hunters and their farmer enemies in a vivid way. The boar can be seen to represent a kind of "metaphorical terrorism." Even his sending a threatening letter to the heroes challenging them to war has its parallels with the way some terrorists use the modern media. The poor gardener is just a pawn, something like a hostage. Even his climbing on the boar itself (which made itself look like just another inert black boulder) could be likened to an innocent person setting off a deliberately placed explosive device.

23-b The Wild Forest Boar Sends A Challenge To the Farmer Kings

The great boar now jumps up. He begins to intimidate the gardener and bully him. Finally the gardener is asked to roll in the mud so that his body is caked with dirt. Then he is told by the boar to turn his back so that the huge creature can write a message on it with his right tusk. The text is to be taken by the gardener to the palace of the two farmer kings. As the message is scripted the message gradually becomes clear. It reads (as voiced by the boar) "Come challenge me in the forest within three days or die." It is signed with the well-known name of this challenger: "King Kompan." When the heroes receive this message they quickly prepare for war.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you find another story or folktale where the villain sends a written threat to the hero? What about modern terrorists who send their threats through video clips that are sent to the world-wide media through similar intermediaries?

COMMENTARY: Here the story is making "fun" of the boar by having it "write" on the gardener's back. This is a society where literacy and the ability to write are prized, and are rare abilities. And furthermore, in having this "gift," the boar is metaphorically juxtaposed to a famous Hindu deity (Ganesh). Ganesh is seen in several episodes in this story with a broken tusk (episode 22-b for example). Ganesh is said, to have penned the India's classic Mahabharata epic by breaking off his right tusk and using that as his writing implement. Look carefully at any statue of Ganesh (in this story or elsewhere) and you will see that his right tusk is always broken. This is an "iconographic" reminder of the famous tale. Having the boar "imitate" the famous Ganesh as he tries to write is a kind of "joke" in its own right.

23-c The Sister Foresees Disaster But Fears To Speak Out

The two brothers read the message and decide that they must go to war against the great boar right away. But the sister first wants her brothers to undergo a magical "test." She will throw mustard seeds in the air in front of the family temple. They are to split every one of them in half before these little grains can fall to the ground. After this amazing feat the sister inspects the cloth the seeds have fallen on. One seed is left unsplit after the test. This is a sign that disaster looms, but by now the two brothers are fully committed to their war against the boar. The sister is unhappy. That one unsplit seed is a sign that their mission will fail. But she can not bring herself to tell them this terrible news.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Why do you think the sister asks for this totally "unreasonable" test? What is accomplished by her asking her brothers to do such a strange thing?

COMMENTARY: This test helps the sister see into the future. It is also a way of showing story listeners how skilled the twins are with their swords. Who could possibly cut tiny seeds in the air, as they fall from above, using such a heavy metal blade? Surely these men will be awesome fighters. Their swordsmanship is exceptional. But the test does not much help the two brothers prepare for the challenge ahead. Fearful of affecting their self confidence and their courage (and perhaps also not wanting to accept what she now knows) the sister conceals the real truth.....that her brothers will not survive this final battle. This whole "testing" event can be read as just one more way in which the bond between the two brothers and their sister is weakening. At several points they have not been truthful with her. Now, for the first time, she is also not being truthful with them.

The sister has magical powers, just as all chaste and family-oriented women do in this cultural (story) tradition. It is the sister's blessing that gives power to her brothers and allows them success in a dangerous mission. Looking deeper, the brother/sister dynamic in this episode is quite important.

23-d The Heroes' Ritual Preparations For War Are Completed

The great war drum is now raised from its storage place at the bottom of the irrigation tank. It is re-covered with fresh leather and a huge feast is offered to the demons of the underworld. Soon the drum is beaten and a deep "toom toom" sound can be heard throughout the kingdom.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Ponnivala's great war drum is repaired and beaten to announce the coming war. Can you cite other examples of where war drums are beaten to announce a looming battle? Is there any equivalent that Western armies use to announce a war today?

COMMENTARY: The use of a war drum is very traditional and can be found in many cultures. The use of a large and deep sounding drum for this purpose is been documented repeatedly in old manuscripts. The phrase "beating the war drum" is so familiar that it is often used metaphorically. The war drum is usually kept at the bottom of a large tank or well. This helps preserve both the wood and the leather. Under water is considered a traditional place to keep powerful and sacred things more generally. (The bottom of a well is a good place to do an archaeological dig, and much has been found in such places (for example in the Aztec ruins of ancient Mexico). As for the "demons" described, they are sort of like low level protectors. They hang around and can either be pests or guardians. Demons generally expect a bribe or some sort of gift. That is why they are given sacrificial food during the drum ceremony. After a demon is fed it is believed that he will take off, feeling 'satisfied,' and not bother anyone in the future.

Episode 24 – A Curse Revealed (Sub Stories a, b, c, and d)

24-a The Heroes Dress For War And Their Fighting Assistants Are Called

The little sister is all-seeing and senses that her brothers will not return from their battle against their hunter enemies. Knowing that her brothers are going into battle, she asks that they first let themselves be carried through the streets in royal style so that everyone can say their "goodbyes." Then they go into the palace dressing room and adorn themselves with fine silks. They also tie on sacred, protective neck threads. Furthermore, even though the sister knows that she will not see her brothers again, she still wants to be double sure she has some sense of what is happening. So she asks them to provide six signs that will indicate the day-to-day state of their well-being: The sister wants her brothers to present her with: a whole coconut, a burning lamp, a ripe mango fruit, fresh flowers, a dish of water, and a small bowl of turmeric. The two brothers supply these on a tray for her to keep close to her side. Next they send their huge assistant ahead to set up a war tent. The fighting men from the 56 "revenue" villages under their leadership gather for the fight.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: These men dress in "battle silks." Why do you think they would they wear such fine clothes when going into the thick of battle?

COMMENTARY: The fine battle clothes serve to "announce" the stature of the heroes. It makes them imposing and also, psychologically, it makes them feel important. The thread is a "protective" that might be likened to a good luck charm. The sister also asks for a parade through the village. For this the brothers sit on a traditional palanquin that is carried on other men's shoulders. It is a great honor to be carried in a palanquin. The symbolism of the plate of omens is also somewhat obvious. The six items

can be interpreted as follows. The coconut is like the “head” of the brothers. The mango is like their ripe bodies. The turmeric paste (used for body beauty) probably represents their handsome faces and their good health. The flowers are aromatic jasmine and can be likened to the sweet smell of their bodies. The burning lamp can be likened to their lives or active spirits and the water can be seen to represent their body fluids. If these things wilt, dry up, rot or break open, then she will know that her brothers’ lives have ended.

The reference to 56 revenue villages is a sort of “formulaic number.” It represents the numerous settlements near the brothers’ palace that are expected to pay homage and send periodic gifts. Whether there was actual “revenue” received in the form of taxes from villages like this is unclear. Nothing in this story mentions that the heroes received any revenue payments from their laborers or subordinates. The use of the term “revenue villages” is probably just a sort of honorific phrase. But each household in the area was definitely expected to send one healthy fighting man to any battle undertaken by their leaders. Each “warrior” was expected to bring with him a good fighting stick and a brave dog. Some food for the expedition was also expected (rice or gruel tied in a white sack).

24-b A Little Dog Sickens The Younger Hero With A Powerful Curse

As the two heroes ready for departure and stand on the palace porch, their little sister runs towards them. The brothers tell her they are leaving for the war. They ask her to bless their swords. She only cries. Then, with tears in her eyes she bids them goodbye and they take their leave. The two men depart on horseback for the great war. The fighters have taken all the fearsome dogs of the kingdom with them but they have overlooked the tiny little palace dog. She is insulted and now goes to the family goddess. There she begs that a curse be placed on the younger twin. Afterwards she goes and finds a deep hole where she will hide, out of the sight of all who were left behind at the Ponnivala palace. The curse request is passed by the family goddess to a “sister” who is the fearsome and warlike Kali. Then Kali causes it to leave the little dog’s secret den and fly through the forest all the way to the forest camp. Soon the younger twin falls ill in the heroes’ war tent. He can no longer fight. Fear of the boar’s three day ultimatum hangs heavy in the air.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The little dog’s curse is due to anger. She was ignored and discriminated against for being “too small.” Do you know a modern story about someone who is discriminated against for being physically different? What happens in that story? Compare it with the tale of the little dog told here.

COMMENTARY: This is an important sub-story that can be understood at many different levels. First and foremost it describes a weak, small female who is also rather ugly (the dog has no ears). She wants to be like all the other dogs that got to go to war but she is ignored when the call goes out. So she finds a way to take revenge (and hopefully get noticed).

At another level the dog serves as a kind of “metaphor” for the sister herself. She is, after all, the sister’s main pet. The sister didn’t want her brothers to go to war. She didn’t bless their swords, although they asked for this. She knows they will die. The future she can look forward to is even lonelier than the condition she is in now. Implied (but not restated openly) is the fact that her brothers have promised both to “look after her” and to get her married. They have left without considering either of these responsibilities. The relationship between the brothers and their sister has now further “broken” down. This is a turning point. From now on the fearsome and warlike goddess Kali begins to intervene. And Kali is allied with the forest enemies. Eventually (but not just yet) the sister herself will become a Kali-like figure. The little dog is a sort of “harbinger” of these changes.

24-c **The Heroes' Assistant Offers To Lead The Fighting Men Himself**

The heroes' huge assistant now offers to go and locate the boar's hideaway by himself. After finding the beast he plays his horn to the boar, tricking him into a deep sleep. The brave assistant then sneaks into the boar's lair and pulls out nine of the great enemy's back hairs. Then he quickly returns with these to the war camp of the heroes. When these are burnt in a small fire the smell proves that he has indeed carried back boar to prove his success. He now knows where the enemy is hiding.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Could you put a huge and aggressive boar to sleep playing a simply lullaby on a horn? Would you be brave enough to go into his lair and pull out some of his hairs? Do you know another story where an assistant returns to the hero with evidence that he has located the enemy?

COMMENTARY: This is a "teasing" incident. The assistant is seen "playing" with the boar" by blowing a lullaby on his horn. The banter between the boar and the assistant heightens the tension, and makes the story fun. It also builds up an appreciation of the great power of the adversaries on both sides of the battle to come. This is one of the favourite sub-stories of the entire epic. It is one that local audiences ask to hear over and over again. As you can imagine it gives a lot of scope to the story teller to imitate the sounds of the boar, the sound of the horn and the words of the rather scared assistant. You could ask students to experiment with telling this sub-story themselves and inventing appropriate sounds to go with it.

24-d **There Is A Wartime Disaster. All The Support Fighters Are Lost**

The brothers are still too sick to fight so the assistant offers to lead the attack by himself. He takes all of the fighters and all of the dogs with him. This becomes a miserable failure. All the dogs, and all the fighters except the assistant himself, are killed by the monstrous boar. Lord Vishnu then descends to earth to help. He takes the disguise of a fortune teller. Then he approaches the heroes' war tent and is welcomed inside. Reading from a traditional palm leaf manuscript he carries with him, the fortune teller reveals that the sickness the one brother is suffering has been by the little palace little she dog. It is what hangs over their tent and has caused them so much ill-fortune. He advises the men to apologize to the tiny creature and invite her to join them in the war effort.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Can you think of another story where (one or more) heroes suddenly learn something new, something they hadn't thought about that has the potential to "turn all their bad luck around?" If you can't think of such a story can you make one up? A story where the hero has to apologize to someone with a disability, or someone who looks different, would work especially well.

COMMENTARY: This sub-story is another turning point. Lord Vishnu, in the form of a fortune teller, reveals a key fact. The heroes have been cursed, and it is a curse due to their own insensitivity. But if they back off, forget some of their pride, and behave in a humble manner, the situation can be remedied. Of course the situation is embarrassing. They, two great war heroes, have to apologize to a tiny dog, and a female at that. And it is the more aggressive and more insensitive of the two men who has to take the lead! A heartfelt apology will turn the entire situation around. This is a sub-story where this legend shows real insight and conveys some significant wisdom, albeit through a kind of extended metaphor.

Another view of the episode is to suggest that the heroes (and particularly the younger one) made a big mistake by letting his assistant talk him into taking all their fighting men and all their dogs to meet the great boar by himself. This was not an appropriate ‘delegation of responsibility’ and the result is that 11 of the fine fighting men of Ponnivala are now dead. Their wives are now widows. The brothers themselves understand this and feel their honor has slipped away. How can they return to the palace with this kind of news? This incident adds much weight to argument that this story is really about responsibility, and the heroes’ increasing failure to shoulder the wide variety of social commitments that rest with them as family men and as rulers.

Episode 25 – A Great Sacrifice (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

25-a A Big Apology that Yields Results

The king now sends for the forgotten dog. When she is found and brought to the war camp the younger king offers her his apology. She volunteers to help and asks her two Lords to go and wait with their great boar spear at the top of a huge rock. The little dog then finds the great boar, challenges it, chews on its ears, bites it with poisoned fangs and generally weakens it greatly. As a consequence the huge boar runs in pain and distress toward the high rock. The little dog rides along on the boar's tail.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The little dog has a lot of power even though the enemy is very big. Do you know a story where something small and seemingly weak wins out over something or someone who is very big and strong?

COMMENTARY: This is a really much beloved sub-story, probably because it is rather raucous and has major sexual undertones. The little dog bites the testicles of the big boar and subdues him in this very graphic way. It is clearly a tale that has easy-to-read metaphorical overtones. The little, weak, ugly and forgotten female conquers the big, boisterous and overly proud male. He is huge and black, she is tiny and a motley brown. She chews up his ears, which can also be read sexually. The boar is associated with the violent and black goddess Kali from the start, But the curse of the little dog also came from Kali, so the little dog is also, in a way, empowered by this “dark tempered” divinity. The dog is now a warrior in her own right, and via her pet the temperament of the heroes’ sister is also implicated. It is changing. Her anger is ripening... and is soon to surface.

25-b The Boar is Killed and The Meat Divided Into Shares

Jumping off the boar’s tail the little dog advises the heroes to throw their spear now for the final kill. The weapon hits its target and the great boar dies, but not before it calls out to the hunter's little sister in its distress. The hunters declare war. Lord Vishnu himself descends from heaven to lead their army. But just as these fighters advance towards the heroes Lord Vishnu asks them to pause and wait for him. Then he approaches the heroes in the disguise of a washerman. They have now butchered the boar and divided the meat into seven portions in preparation for a ritual feast. But the washerman begs for a small piece of the sacrifice. The elder hero (when his brother has stepped away from the scene), offers the leftover boar’s head to the washerman instead. Lord Vishnu drags the head away.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The boar has a great ally The hunters have always been its friends. With his last breath this great beast calls out for help. The sister of the forest dwellers hears him. She will send her troops. Can you think of any parallels with other battles: in other words, just when the heroes think they have “won” the enemy calls in major reinforcements?

COMMENTARY: Significantly, the little dog steps aside at the last minute. She yields the honor of the actual boar kill (or shall we call it a sacrifice) to the two brothers. And then the elder steps back to allow the younger to wield the great spear. She is the real “killer” but the two human heroes (both male) now enjoy the formal honor of the hunter... bringing home the subject of the chase. However, the story of the great war has only just begun. The great boar calls out to the sister of the rival hunters with his last breath. He is heard. The entire force of these skilled forest dwellers is about to be concentrated on the twins. They are alone now with no large band of loyal village fighters to back them. More significant still, Lord Vishnu himself will lead the hunters’ attack.

The washerman who takes the boar’s head is just one more sign that the heroes’ own life is nearing its end. Perhaps Vishnu himself was the boar (as he is a boar in his famous Varaha or boar incarnation). Perhaps, however, the boar was sent to earth by Lord Shiva, who (we saw in Ep. 13-d) created all the fertility that was sent down to earth when he made the queen pregnant. Perhaps Vishnu is just “playing” with Shiva’s great powers (as his brother-in-law), perhaps he is taking the spoils of the boar hunt for himself. We don’t really know... The epic leaves a few mysteries unanswered. But it is certain that Vishnu is symbolizing, forshadowing the heroes’ own deaths...by this act. We know this because this is the way the heroes themselves read this dramatic moment.

25-c The Heroes Die In A Heroic And Sacrificial Way

No sooner does the washerman leave than Vishnu is back leading his army of hunter-warriors. Very soon the two groups meet and start to fight. But the younger brother soon turns to his powerful assistant with a question. “How can these guys keep coming and coming? We have killed so many!” he comments with exasperation. Then Vishnu does something significant. He creates a vision such that the young twin can suddenly see hundreds of fighting hunters emerging, one after the other one, from the Lord’s right palm. This shows the hero that Vishnu himself has “created” the entire war. It is his play, his illusion. The hero draws his sword against Vishnu but the power of the god freezes him in his tracks. The Lord then asks the twins to spend one last heroic moment fighting their enemies. Both join in briefly and together they kill a few more challengers. Then, weary of battle, the two men go to wash the blood off their swords by wading into a nearby river. At that moment Lord Vishnu (hidden in the branches of a tree) shoots the younger twin’s protective chest thread off with a freshly made flower-arrow. Both heroes now recognize that this is Lord Vishnu’s private sign to them. that the time allocated by the gods for their lives on earth is almost over. Accepting this message, the two heroes and their loyal assistant all commit heroic suicides on a hillock overlooking the river bank. The two brothers fall forward, the younger one first, each on his own battle sword. The assistant follows suit, but uses a pointed tree branch instead, since he does not carry a sword of his own.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Discussions about this sub-story will be sensitive but can be enlightening if students are well prepared. Try some of the following queries: How do the heroes die in myths or folk stories that you know? What is Lord Vishnu trying to tell the heroes when he shows all the fighters are coming from his own right hand? Why does Vishnu remove the younger twin’s sacred thread? Do you think the twin heroes’ deaths represent a happy or a tragic event?

COMMENTARY: The vision Lord Vishnu on the battlefield is important and can be compared (also contrasted) with the famous “Vision” that Krishna (a form of Vishnu) reveals to the heroic warrior Arjuna in the Bhavadgita, a “short” but very famous story that forms a small segment of India larger Mahabharata epic. In both the great Lord “shows” the hero something of his “real” self and in both the god urges the warrior to fight on. But in the Legend of Ponnivala the concept that this final war has been an illusion and was created by the god himself, is especially important. Perhaps he actually “sent” the great boar to earth to start it all? Or perhaps he is “cleaning up” what his brother-in-law Shiva started? (See the discussion of ep. 25-b). What is sure is that the Hindu world view understands that mankind lives on a downward spiral (the four yugas) and that the last one called the Kali yuga (which mankind is currently living through) will be especially destructive and painful. At the end of the Kali yuga all will end and the earth will be cleansed and renewed. Life will then begin again. (This concept can be contrasted with the view of many in the West that mankind is on a never ending upward spiral, and that each age is better than the last). Following this reasoning, the ending of the Ponnivala story can be seen as a kind of metaphor for the ending of the Kali yuga itself. They submit to this inevitable situation.

The breaking of the protective thread on the heroes’ chests by Lord Vishnu is just that. The thread offers supernatural or magical protection and that is why Lord Vishnu takes aim at it. Breaking it is a sign to the heroes that they are not supposed to live any longer. Vishnu’s arrow of flowers is comparable to the arrows that the Hindu god of love (Kama) shoots. Kama is comparable to the god Cupid. But the arrow here carries much more irony.... since the “love” expressed also tells the heroes that it is time for death.

The two heroes’ suicides could be described as “altruistic.” They are doing what they believe will be best for others and also doing what they believe Lord Vishnu wants. Their last act(s) can be seen as a kind of submission to god’s will, a giving up of self for the larger cause of world renewal. The subject is too complex for these brief notes, but this ending should not be read as a tragedy. The story understands these suicides as positive and heroic acts, even as a kind of martyrdom. Their deaths could also be compared to the death of Christ, who also knew his end was near and who died willingly in a similar kind of sacrificial act (though of course the act in his case was committed by others). The assistant does not carry a sword (because of his low social status). His moral behavior is just as fine as that of the twin brothers, and his dedication to them is absolute. He simply doesn’t have a sword available and so he uses the branch of a sacred tree (called vani in Tamil, the original language of the story).

25-d Lord Vishnu Takes The Heroes’ Spirits Up To Heaven

Lord Vishnu soon arrives on the hillock where the heroes have died. He now takes the spirit lives of these three men back to heaven in a tiny golden box. There he presents all three to the great god Shiva. And reminds him of the bargain made long ago. When he brought the lives of the heroes back, Shiva was to return his conch shell, and also a sacred powder box. Shiva makes the exchange graciously. Back on earth, the loyal little sister sees that the signs of her brother’s well being have changed (the cocoanut has broken open, the jasmine flowers have wilted, the sandalwood powder has dried up, the water in the pot has disappeared and the burning wick of the little lamp has gone out). She knows that her two brothers are now dead. Saddened and horrified she wonders what to do.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Shiva keeps his bargain and gives Vishnu back the things that belong to him. Can you think of some present-day situations that are similar? Do you know a story where people end up keeping their promises to one another, even after many years have passed?

COMMENTARY: Vishnu and Shiva are brothers-in-law. They are bound together by kinship, and although they tease each other, they are honourable and they value their on-going relationship. The story, on a wider level, also presents an important “balance” between these two gods. At many points in Indian history the people who worship Vishnu as a primary god have clashed with the people who believe Shiva is the more powerful and important divinity. The rivalry between these groups (or sects) is a little bit like the Catholic/Protestant rivalry in the West. This story presents a unique “folk” perspective that sees the two gods as different but basically equal. Neither god has all-encompassing powers over the other. This is one of the charming things about the Ponnivala story. It does not take sides in such debates. It is a syncretistic story that balances out differing view points. Generalizing a bit, one can say that It represents a spirit of tolerance and compromise rather than a spirit of one-upmanship and conflict. This is a characteristic of folk epics, which lack the adversarial style of many more philosophical and learned works.

The sister's likely understanding of her “plate of omens” has been discussed at length in the commentary provided for Ep. 24-a.

Episode 26 – An Epoch Ends (Sub Stories a, b, c and d)

26-a The Sister Reacts With Anger Upon Discovering That Her Brothers Are Dead

The sister knows that her brothers have died in the mountains. Her first act is to go to the “jail” where her sisters-in-law live and ask them to perform their husbands’ funeral ceremonies. The women, angry at their life spent locked in a humble home, refuse. The sister is angry, feeling that these women have refused to give her brothers the ceremonial respect they are due. She leaves and returns to her own palace. There, still more angry, she asks her servants to take home anything they want. As soon as the great home is emptied she asks Lord Vishnu to send her a fireball. With that she burns the family palace to the ground. When little but ashes are left she stops the fire by asking for rain. Next she turns to her sisters-in-laws’ palace and burns that too. She cools the ashes of this second fire with more rain. Then she collects her sisters-in-laws’ bones and takes them to the river. There she performs a minimum funeral for these women by feeding a flock of crows cooked rice. Turning towards the hills where her brothers’ bodies lie, the devoted sister now begins a long pilgrimage to search for the spot where they died.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The sister’s angry is so great that it turns into the power to burn with fire. Do you know any other stories where a main character has control of fire and can actually burn things? Can we think of anger as a kind of emotional fire inside the self? Can anger hurt someone else in a way that makes them feel like they have been burnt? Can you tell a story about anger that made a person feel like they were burning inside?

COMMENTARY: The power of women to burn things “with fire” when they have been wronged is a key thread that runs through the ancient literature of South India. Stories like this have been recorded from very early times. One of the most famous of these tales is called *Silappadikaram* (The Story of the Anklet). In the Legend of Ponnivala itself there are examples of this in two different generations. Here the sister burns the palace that (technically) belongs to her brothers. In the previous generation

her mother (Tamarai) burns the palace where her two brothers live. Lord Vishnu uses the power of fire to persuade these same men that (that by traditional rights) they must allow their daughters to be married to their sister's sons. These men's initial refusal to allow this can also be read as an "affront" to their sister's rights (ep. 5-c). This "burning" is expressive of the power of a woman's deep anger, especially when it is backed by her otherwise spotless character and by the horror of some injustice that she has suffered. Turning to animal metaphors, we can observe a similar kind of power in the sister's tiny female dog. This time the anger exits her pets as a curse that causes illness (rather than as fire) but the underlying dynamics are similar. The fearful Indian goddess Kali, whose skin is black and who dances on the ashes of the cremation ground, shares the same background theme. Another feature of this story theme is that women who have this kind of anger let their hair loose. Loose hair is thought to be dangerous. Various evil spirits are said to be attracted to a woman's loose hair and to "inhabit" or "stick" inside its tangles. The sister leaves her hair down as she sets off on her long, sad pilgrimage to find her brothers' bodies.

Thinking more broadly, the several fires that we see followed by heavy rain in this episode are also symbolic of the end of the Kali yuga (see the discussion of this concept provided for ep. 25-c). As for the sisters-in-laws funeral rites, the images provided by this story are standard for the area. Dead bodies are generally cremated by anyone affluent enough to afford the wood needed to do so. And then the bones are put in a river, and the crows are fed rice. This last gesture is similar to the feeding of the demons that happens in episode 23-d. What is "missing" is the funeral ceremony itself, with a large feast and the gathering of friends and relatives. The sisters-in-law are "denied" this honor. That omission seems appropriate as they were never really a part of the family nor did they participate in palace life.

26-b The Sister Becomes a Wanderer

Eventually, after wandering for days through the forest, the sister finds a clearing where a lovely ascetic maiden is performing penance. Vishnu has been watching and descends to help the sister at this moment. He asks the meditating maiden to climb down from her pillar momentarily, so that the heroic little sister can use it to obtain a gift from Lord Shiva. When that woman agrees and the sister climbs this huge post she asks for a special wand. Vishnu gets this from Shiva's counsel chambers and the sister (later) uses it to revive her brothers. After obtaining the all-important wand, the ascetic maiden sends the sister to a nearby village to fetch a stack of tiered pots. But the sister has no money and the local potter refuses to be generous. Facing injustice once more, the sister calls on a great rain cloud. There is a sudden downpour and the potter's unfired work disintegrates before his eyes. He apologizes and begs for forgiveness, exactly what the sister needs to return the many pots to their former state. Now the potter readily gives her what she needs. When the sister returns to the forest maiden with her tiered vessels the maiden fills them with the exact ritual substances she will need when she finds her brothers' bodies. The forest maiden also lends her "gooselike" vehicle to the sister for a flight to her brothers' place of death.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Here the heroine has the power to call up rain (in contrast to fire). Do you know any other stories where a main character has the power to cause a (destructive) torrential rain? What about some of the classic stories about floods? Can you tell a story with that kind of theme?

COMMENTARY: The imagery in this episode shares has much in common with what has been discussed elsewhere. Again there is a chaste and determined woman sitting on a pillar who is deep in meditation (as in ep. 13 a&b). It is worth noting that most forest sages who meditate in Hindu mythology (yogins) are male. Usually they are "distracted" by lovely women that happen by. This scene presents a kind of unusual reversal. Now there is a female meditating who is interrupted by Vishnu with a non-sexual intent... but still he briefly interrupts her concentration). But we do not learn anything more about who this "mystery" woman is. Also, we find another major downpour here... again

caused by a woman's magical anger (similar to that just seen in ep. 26-a). Finally, there is the story of the 7 pots. The potter is a "ritual specialist" whose willingness to contribute to important ceremonies is important (see ep. 11-b for a further discussion of caste roles in ritual). Perhaps the sister having to coerce him into service is symbolic of her need to obtain "endorsement" for her mission from a wide range of social groups. The ritual substances the maiden magically puts in these pots are not particular symbolic individually. However, as a cluster one can say that they are all intended to soothe, nourish, moisten and "cool" the broken bodies of her two dead brothers.

26-c The Sister Finds Her Brothers Bodies And Briefly Revives Them From Death

The meditating maiden offers the distraught girl her own lovely vehicle, a golden bird. The young sister is then flown by this bird to the site of her brothers' suicides. There she finds her little palace dog guarding the boar meat left over from the great kill. With this dog's help she locates her brothers' bodies. Then awakens them with the help of her golden wand and talks to them briefly. The two men reaffirm that their lives are now over and that they can not go back to their lands in Ponnivala. It is time for others there to take up the responsibilities of kingship.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The wand the sister carries allows her to "awaken" her brothers from death, if only briefly. So you know of any other stories where a dead hero is brought back to life by a friend or a relative?

COMMENTARY: The golden goose that the forest maiden lends the sister is of real interest. All gods and goddess have a "vehicle" in Hinduism and many of these vehicles are birdlike. This shows that the lady doing meditation is "like a goddess," as otherwise she would not have such a vehicle. Surprisingly, perhaps, the vehicle is gooselike, as is the bird used by the goddess of learning and of the arts, Saraswati. Certainly this particular bird lends status to its owners and implies that they are knowledgeable and educated. More significant, perhaps, is the fact that the little sister is able to "fly" to the place her brothers have died, because she is lent the use of this bird. This is the only time in the story that any "human" flies. This suggests that the young girl is already undergoing a transformation to divine status. Also, her trip on the goose will take her to the "dying place," which can be understood as a kind of liminal location that is already ½ way between heaven and earth. The use of the bird symbolises the beginning of the transformation from human to god... a change that is soon to take place for all three heroic siblings.

The wand used by the sister to bring her brothers' lives back to them, if only briefly, has no particular significance. It is just a "magical tool." However, this scene and the kind of "resurrection" that occurs in this sub-story is very important from a ritual point of view. There is a huge temple festival each year near the spot where the heroes are said to have died, and devotees actually go through rituals that symbolize this "return from death" event. Male worshippers enter a kind of trance state, with the help of special drum beats and then fall on the ground as if dead. Later a skilled poet-singer will chant special sacred verses over them to bring these prone, stiff, corpse-like men back to life. These events are of much interest to local worshippers and are highly anticipated each year. Only the most devout undertake to submit to such a deathlike trauma. Other temples in the area celebrate the heroes' deaths in a similar way.

More important for classroom discussion, perhaps is the content of the conversation between the sister and her brothers during the brief moments that they regain their lives and the ability to speak. In this special interlude the brothers (especially the more aggressive and younger one) declare that it is their duty to pass the role of local ruler to others, to "pass the baton" so to speak. This is an important characteristic of a wise king... that he recognizes when he must (graciously) let others take over control. The "rub" in this case is that the two brothers have most definitely not laid any plans for successor

ship.... In deed quite the opposite is the case. They have groomed no one for the post. They have left their wives untouched and produced no offspring. They have not even “adopted” a child. And most grievous of all, perhaps, they have not seen to their sister’s marriage as they once promised their parents they would. She is now alone in the world and without support. These steps (or more plainly the lack of them) must be considered to be a deliberate part of the story. They say, to a knowledgeable Hindu audience, that this is intended to be the end. There are no successors, there are no remaining relatives (except one sister) and there are basically no enemies or adversaries either. Note that the clansmen, the artisans, the hunters, the Chola king.....all these people have all died in the lead up to this final outcome. The world is at an end. The Kali yuga has come to a close. The world will now reabsorb itself and the gods will see to it that life begins again.

26-d **The Heroes’ Three Spirits Are Returned To Lord Shiva And Blessings Are Showered Upon All**

Lord Vishnu then takes their spirits back to heaven and the bodies are carried on magical biers to the town nearby. There they are paraded through the streets to receive their final respects. Then the bodies magically turn to stone and become shrines. The sister sets a lovely array of offerings before the two stone heroes. The Lord Shiva himself sends a chariot down from heaven and the sister is taken up to join him in his counsel chambers. The epic ends with a lovely blessing addressed to all who listen to the story. There are images of ploughing the land, of planting, of a lovely river that flows through the kingdom, of a spreading banyan tree, of well rooted grasses and finally, of birds singing in the bamboo.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: The sister performs her brothers’ funeral ceremonies. Essentially she takes over the role of a male... the son, who should do this work at his father’s funeral. Can you think of other stories or situations where a girl must essentially “become a man” in order to do things that are required by custom because there are no other better qualified people around?

COMMENTARY: In this final sub-story of the Legend of Ponnivala the heroes are “transformed into gods.” They are given shrines on earth and also a position next to the great gods, back in heaven. The situation is not very different to what happens in the “Christian story” when Jesus ascends to heaven and the church becomes established here on earth. Here there is no one left to perform the brothers’ funerals and to establish temples for them. So the sister does this work (behaving essentially as a male priest would under more normal circumstances). Again this can be seen as honouring and respecting the powers of a woman, a chaste and dedicated female who steps in to do what is necessary in a time of great adversity. In some ways (like in talking to the revived brothers) she is like Mary Magdalena in the Christian tradition. After she has finished the necessary ceremonies Lord Shiva himself recognizes her good works and has her raised to his Counsel Chambers in an honorific palanquin. Significantly, it is not only the two heroes and the sister who are honored. The loyal assistant (who was of very low origin) is also given a place of honor, as are the heroes’ two magical horses and the heroine’s pet dog.

There is a “blessing” at the end which is something traditional that story tellers in India do. The blessing essentially confirms that hear this story retold is a kind of good deed that will bring prosperity to one’s family and well-being to all. Listening to this story, in religious terms, conveys benefits similar to that are thought to accrue from “reading the bible” regularly for some Christians. There are also the benefits, of course, of learning much about the traditional culture and beliefs shared by the people of this area of South India. The bards who told (actually sung) this epic acted rather like village history teachers. In a time before universal education in India this story served as a kind of oral “reconstruction” of what was remembered about this area’s past. From hearing this story people

learned much about their own history, and about the life and customs of their own ancestors. Making allowance for some of the more imaginative and fanciful events, the basic story line is not far out of line with what is actually known about this area in the medieval period. See part two of this manual for more information about this issue.

PART FOUR: ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY PEOPLE NOT FAMILIAR WITH INDIA

This section takes the form of questions that many people ask. Here are some brief answers. You can also turn these observations around to make them into points of discovery: For example: Is there something different in this picture? What strikes you as unusual about it?

Why is the sky red in many of the story pictures?

It is a convention in South Indian folk art to make the sky (and other empty background space) a deep red. The artwork in this story follows that tradition. A great expanse of red also looks better on a big screen TV or on a video monitor than does a great expanse of white or very light blue.

Why do the gods have multiple arms?

Multiple arms are a sign of power and of extra human abilities. This convention in depicting Hindu deities implies that “gods have more abilities and more powers” than human do.

Why do people eat off leaves?

Using fresh large leaves as a plate is an honor showed to high status people and to guests. Fresh leaves are pure, as no one else has eaten off that leaf. These eating leaves are taken directly from the tree, rolled and then brought to the house (or sold in the market place). They are considered to be very clean or pure. After the leaf has been used for a meal it is given to an animal (for example a cow or a goat) to eat. This means there is no garbage created. One can consider this to be an old fashion form of 100% recycling!

What do people “chew” after they eat?

There is a traditional mixture of betel leaf and areca nut that people like to chew after a large meal. It is said to be good for digestion. Sometimes people put a little bit of lime paste on the mixture as well. Another popular after dinner chew is made from liquorice seeds.

Why is the war drum kept at the bottom of a well (in episode 25)?

The bottom of a well or an irrigation tank is a sort of sacred place where many things used in rituals are “deposited.” Of course water is also a preservative that keeps wood, and leather, in good condition for many years.

Why are the heroes’ horses blue?

The heroes’ horses are magical. Blue is a divine or magical color that indicates their special status. The heroes’ horses are specifically said to be blue or blue-black in the story. This is also a color strongly associated with Lord Vishnu and may indicate that these animals are a form of the great Lord himself.

Why is Vishnu blue?

Vishnu is blue by convention. This color indicates his extra sacred qualities. In this story if you see someone with blue skin you know it is Lord Vishnu, even if he is in some sort of “disguise.” Generally

blue is associated with darkness and with divinity in general. To be dark is to be powerful, magical and infused with divine power.

Why does one twin have a darker skin color than the other?

One twin is darker than the other in much (though not all) folk art representations of these two heroes. The darker twin is the younger one, and the one considered to be closer to Lord Vishnu because of his great power and strength. He is also the favourite “hero” among locals. To be dark skinned in this Hindu tradition is to be honored, and to be considered special. Krishna and other especially loved Indian epic heroes are often portrayed as darker than their companions. The Ponnivala story follows this wide spread iconographic convention.

Why does the little dog Ponnacci have no ears (episodes 24 and 25)?

It is not entirely clear why the little dog has no ears, but this is clearly specified in the story the bard told. Certainly to have no ears makes one ugly. Ponnacci is a little dog who is ignored and considered unworthy of going to war. She is left behind and this makes her very angry. She has her revenge when she curses the younger twin who has treated her so unjustly. He discriminated against her for her looks, not realizing that inside she had a great magical power. Furthermore, in South Indian folk stories (as elsewhere in the world) cutting off an opponent’s ears or nose is a great insult. The little dog shows by her actions that she will not stand for such insults. When she is teased by the huge black (male) boar for having no ears she evens the score by biting off his ears to match (making him ugly as well...). Of course this gesture is very hard on his male ego. In a sense the fact that the little dog has no ears prepares her for greatness ... she is just waiting for others to trip up and tease or insult her... so that she take revenge by revealing the great magical power she has hidden inside.

Why Do The Heroes Play Dice (Parcheesi)?

The Indian version of the game of Parcheesi is at least two thousand years old. This was the favored game of kings and there is plenty of historical evidence of its popularity in ancient times. The gods play and so do the great heroes of the famous Indian epic called the Mahabharata. The game is associated with danger and chance, especially when played counter clockwise. Courtesans and other palace women also played but (it seems) they played a version where the pieces travels clockwise, which was considered less dangerous. A special digital version of Parcheesi has been developed to complement the teaching of the Ponnivala story. By playing this digital game students will experience “life in medieval India” and learn a lot about ethics and morals in that period. Unlike most modern digital games of violence, Ponnivala Parcheesi presents new concepts, in particular the principle of family identity (the family gains or loses points rather than the individual) and the key importance of earning merit (which allows one re-entry into paradise at death).

Why Does The Chola King Carry an Umbrella?

The umbrella was a key symbol used by all of the ancient South Indian kings. The umbrella created shade in a hot and sunny climate. But this shade was not just for the king. Rather it was “extended” metaphorically to all of the persons that feel under that king’s rule. A popular Tamil expression describes how “cool” it is (was) to be living in the shadow of a great and wise king.

Why Do The Women’s Sari’s Look Different From The Saris We See Today?

Women in most cultures around the world use dress to make public statements about their broad social identities. In India this is done, in part, by the way the sari is wrapped. Today urban sophisticated women wrap their saris in essentially the same way, using six yards of cloth with the “loose end” falling over the left shoulder. But in the past different regions had different sari styles. The style shown in the animation artwork for the Ponnivala story was the standard “working” sari for women of the Kongu region, where this story takes place. This style was still in wide use in 1965 and today one can still see this type of sari worn in some village areas. The particular sari depicted uses eight yards of cloth rather than six. Traditionally women did not wear a blouse underneath, but the animators gave the

women blouses in this story for “modesty” and so that no viewers would be offended. It should also be noted that this “old fashion” sari style was easier to work in than the modern wrap is. Girls up to the age of sixteen or so, traditionally wore long skirts rather than saris.

PART FIVE: INDEXES

a) Index of Episode Titles

- 1) In the Beginning
- 2) A Young Orphan
- 3) A Long Exile
- 4) A Love match
- 5) A Magical Marriage
- 6) Roasted Seeds
- 7) A Thousand Beggars
- 8) A Cruel Curse
- 9) The Counter Curse
- 10) Pillar of Destruction
- 11) A Pilgrim's Journey
- 12) The Gates of Heaven
- 13) The Book of Fate
- 14) The Temple Secret
- 15) The Truth Unveiled
- 16) The Home-Coming
- 17) Chastity Forever
- 18) An Overlord Angered
- 19) Independence Won
- 20) Two Swords Blessed
- 21) A Kidnapping Spree
- 22) A New Challenger
- 23) The Enemy Confronted
- 24) A Curse Revealed
- 25) The Great Sacrifice
- 26) An Epoch Ends

b) Index of Major Sub-Stories -- By Episode

Episode 1 – In The Beginning

- 1-a) The Woman Who Had A Grand Vision
- 1-b) The Cloud With A Silver Lining
- 1-c) Hard Work Wins Rewards
- 1-d) Think Twice Before You Act
- 1-e) The Gift of A Child

Episode 2 - A Young Orphan

- 2-a) A Babe Is Found!
- 2-b) An Orphan Created by His Parents' Deaths

Episode 3 – A Long Exile

- 3-a) The Hero Suffers As An Abused Homeless Waif
- 3-b) A Child With Magical Strength

Episode 4 – A Love Match

- 4-a) Refuge Found At Last
- 4-b) The Hero Falls In Love With A Girl Whose Social Rank Is Much Too High
- 4-c) The Hero's True Status Is Revealed To Him By A God
- 4-d) Trial #1: The Hero Summons His Courage But Fails To Sustain It

Episode 5 – A Magical Marriage

- 5-a) Trial #2: The Hero Is Tested / Bullied For a Second Time
- 5-b) Trial #3: The Hero Is Tested A Third Time, Now a Helper Intervenes
- 5-c) The Problem Is Resolved And The Marriage Arranged

Episode 6 – Roasted Seeds

- 6-a) The Hero finds The Old Family Homestead
- 6-b) Rival Clansmen Dispute Control of the Family's Ancestral Lands
- 6-c) A Cruel Trick Is Secretly Engineered By Rivals
- 6-d) The Insightful Wife Notices Her Husband Has Been Tricked

Episode 7 – A Thousand Beggars

- 7-a) The Rivals Try Another Trick But A God Counters This Effort
- 7-b) The Insightful Wife Finds Magical Wealth
- 7-c) Bountiful Wealth Acquired.... Unexpectedly
- 7-d) A Doubting Husband And A Saintly Wife

Episode 8 – A Cruel Curse

- 8-a) A Wondrous Palace Is Built
- 8-b) A Grand Coronation Occurs
- 8-c) A Tragic Curse: The Queen Is Barren

Episode 9 – The Counter Curse

- 9-a) A Barren "Witch" Is Spotted
- 9-b) The Sister Is Refused Entry To Her Natal Home
- 9-c) The Sister Curses Her Brothers and (Temporarily) Kills Their Children

Episode 10 – Pillar of Destruction

- 10-a) Two Brothers Beg For Forgiveness
- 10-b) Many Children Miraculously Revived
- 10-c) Two Bride's To-Be Become Stones To Await their Grooms
- 10-d) The Queen Is Banished From The Palace By An Angry King
- 10-e) The Queen Contemplates Suicide But Is Saved From Death At The Last Moment

Episode 11 – A Pilgrim's Journey

- 11-a) The Heroic Couple Undertake Good Works
- 11-b) The Rival Clansmen Cleverly Plot To Kill The King and Queen but they Escape
- 11-c) A Vow To Feed The Multitudes
- 11-d) The Penitents Begin a 21 Year Pilgrimage

Episode 12 – The Gates of Heaven

- 12-a) A Great Insult & Its Consequences
- 12-b) The King Falters but His Queen Comes to the Rescue
- 12-c) There Are Many Challenges Along The Pilgrims' Path
- 12-d) The King Drops Into a Deep Sleep But The Queen Reaches Her Destination

Episode 13 – The Book of Fate

- 13-a) The Queen Sits Deep In Prayer For 21 Years
- 13-b) The Queen Is Tested Seven Times
- 13-c) Lord Vishnu Intervenes
- 13-d) The Queen's Prayers Are Answered!

Episode 14 – The Temple Secret

- 14-a) A Midwife Is Bribe By Greedy Clansmen
- 14-b) Two Magical Heroes Are Born!
- 14-c) A Shocked Mother Learns The Truth About Her Only New Born
- 14-d) The Twin Heroes Are Raised By A Goddess

Episode 15 – The Truth Unveiled

- 15-a) The Royal Couple Are Forced Into Exile
- 15-b) The Wandering Family Finds Refuge in a Horse Stable
- 15-c) Two Hidden Sons Learn The Truth About Their Parents

Episode 16 – The Homecoming

- 16-a) A Goddess Visits The Couples' Humble Home
- 16-b) The Queen Asks For Proof of Her Sons' Legitimacy
- 16-c) The Royal Couple Return From Exile With Three Children Instead of One

Episode 17 – Chastity Forever

- 17-a) A Very Strange Wedding Occurs
- 17-b) The Parents Make Their Death-Bed Wishes Known
- 17-c) The Sons Ignore Their Parents' Final Words

Episode 18 – An Overlord Angered

- 18-a) The Twin Heroes Attack Their Rivals' School-age Sons
- 18-b) A Group of School Boys Are Humiliated And Their Families Exiled
- 18-c) The Exiled Families Violence Cleverly Enlist A Superior King's Backing

Episode 19 – Independence Won

- 19-a) The Humble Tribute-Paying Elder Brother Is Thrown In Jail!
- 19-b) A Problem Revealed By A Sister's Dream Sends The Younger Brother To The Rescue
- 19-c) The Dishonest King Attempts Many Kinds of Treachery

Episode 20 – Two Swords Blessed

- 20-a Lord Vishnu Rescues the Heroes From A Lonely Mountain Top
- 20-b A Battle Royal With The King Which the Heroes Win
- 20-c The Lonely Sister Asks Her Brothers To Fetch Her Two Pet Birds

Episode 21 – A Kidnapping Spree

- 21-a A Treacherous Theft Yields Iron For Making a Fine Bird Net
- 21-b The Heroes Break Several Magical Barriers But Only Capture One Female Bird
- 21-c The Parrot Husband Flies to The Hunters' Palace To Protest the Capture of His Wife

Episode 22 – A New Challenger

- 22-a An Artisan Develops a Secret Plan To Make His Family Wealthy
- 22-b The Greedy Artisan Makes a Mistake While Planning To Steal The Heroes' Wealth
- 22-c The Elder Hero's Honesty Is Tested By Having To Swim Through Fast Moving Waters

Episode 23 – The Enemy Confronted

- 23-a A Huge Wild Boar Destroys The Farmer's Fine Crops
- 23-b The Wild Forest Boar Sends A Challenge To The Farmer Kings
- 23-c The Sister Foresees Disaster But Fears To Speak Out
- 23-d The Heroes' Ritual Preparations For War Are Completed

Episode 24 – A Curse Revealed

- 24-a The Heroes Dress For War And Their Fighting Assistants Are Called
- 24-b A Little Dog Sickens The Younger Hero With A Powerful Curse
- 24-c The Heroes' Assistant Offers To Lead The Fighting Men Himself
- 24-d There Is A Wartime Disaster and All The Support Fighters Are Lost

Episode 25 – A Great Sacrifice

- 25-a The Little Dog Wins Role In The War And Attacks The Great Boar Single Handed!
- 25-b Lord Vishnu Reveals He Is Behind The War Which Is Revealed To Be His Illusion
- 25-c The Heroes Die In A Heroic And Sacrificial Way
- 25-d Lord Vishnu Takes The Heroes' Spirits Up To Heaven

Episode 26 – An Epoch Ends

- 26-a The Sister Reacts With Anger Upon Discovering That Her Brothers Are Dead
- 26-b The Sister Becomes a Wanderer
- 26-c The Sister Finds Her Brothers Bodies And Briefly Revives Them From Death
- 26-d The Heroes' Three Spirits Are Returned To Lord Shiva And Blessings Are Showered On All

c) Index of Powerpoint Resources based around Single Character's Lives

Each Named & Numbered File is roughly 17 screens long (the Shambuga ones are a little longer)
Please access these resources through the www.ponnivala.com website. "Click" on teachers and follow the links.

Ariyanacci: Pioneer Grandmother

1. Ponnivala's First lady
2. A Mother At Last

3. Providing For The Future

Kolatta: Pioneer Grandfather

1. The Legend's Clan Ancestor, Grandfather and Pioneer
2. The Family's First Big Political Challenge
3. The Big Mistake
4. The Reprieve

Tamarai: Mother of the Heroes

1. A Beautiful Birth
2. Her Marriage and Early Years In Ponnivala
3. The Great Harvest
4. Wealthy or Poverty?
5. From Sadness To Good Works
6. The 21 Year Pilgrimage
7. Becoming A Mother
8. Raising Children
9. The Discovery of Two Hidden Sons
10. The Final Days

Kunnutaiya: Son Of Kolatta

1. Early Life
2. The Orphan
3. The Bridegroom
4. Becoming A King
5. A Challenging Marriage Partnership
6. Community Building
7. The Pilgrim
8. Becoming A Father
9. The Wise Elder

Komban: The Great Wild Boar

1. Komban in his Cave
2. His Origin and Childhood Years
3. Ponnivala's Fields Attacked
4. The End Game

Ponnacci: The Magical Little Dog

1. Her Birth Story
2. Standing Guard
3. The Curse
4. An Apology
5. The Final Conquest

Shambuga: The First Minister

1. Family Background and Childhood
2. Duties as a Key Assistant and Fighter
3. Theft and Kidnapping Assignments
4. Raising the War Drum
5. Leading The Master's Boar Hunt

6. Final Days

King Komban: The Great Wild Boar

1. Komban In His Cave
2. Origin and Childhood Years
3. Ponnivala's Fields Attacked
4. The End Game

Magical Ponnacci: The Tiny Little Dog

1. Her Birth
2. Standing Guard
3. The Curse
4. An Apology
5. The Final Conquest

PART FIVE, SECTION TWO: BIBLIOGRAPHY

**Publications (in English) By Dr. Brenda E. F. Beck
That relate to the Legend of Ponnivala Story**

As of September 1, 2017

(Note: This is NOT a complete publications list for Dr. Brenda Beck)

Materials Pertaining Directly To The Legend

- 1978 "The Personality of a King: Prerogatives and Dilemmas of Kingship as portrayed in a Contemporary Epic from South India," in John Richards (ed.) Kingship And Authority in South Asia, Madison, University of Wisconsin, Madison Publication Series, No. 3, pp. 169-191.
- 1978 "The Hero in a Contemporary Local Tamil Epic," Journal of Indian Folkloristics, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 26-39.
- 1978 "The Logical Appropriation of Kingship as a Political Metaphor: An Epic at the Civilizational and Regional Levels (India)," Anthropologica, Vol. 20, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 47-64.
- 1980 "The Role of Women in a Tamil Folk Epic," Canadian Folklore Canadien, Vol. 2, Nos. 1&2, pp. 7-29.
- 1982 The Three Twins : The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic, Bloomington, Indian University Press, 248 pp.
- 1982 "Kongu Vellalar Women: The Legend of Tamarai," in Kongu Vellalar Gounder Manila Manatu, (Kongu Vellalar Gounders' State Conference Commemoration volume), Coimbatore (India), Nandi Press, pp. 3-10.
- 1982 "Indian Minstrels As Sociologists: Political Strategies Depicted in a Local Epic," Contributions to Indian Sociology, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 35-57.

- 1982 The Three Twins: The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 248 pp.
(an ACLS re-publication project has now made this book available on line
at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb33132.0001.001>)
- 1983 "Fate, Karma and Cursing in a Local Epic Milieu," in Charles F. Keyes and E. Valentine Daniels (eds.), Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry, Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 63-81.
- 1989 "Core Triangles in the Folk Epics of India," in Oral Epics of India, S.H. Blackburn, P.J. Claus, J.B. Flueckiger and S.S. Wadley (eds.), Berkeley, University of California Press, pp. 155-175 and 203-207.
- 1992 Annanmar Katai: Vols. I & II, (A folk epic of Tamilnadu in Tamil and in English, on facing pages), Institute of Asian Studies, Madras, Tamilnadu (approximately 780 pages), collected, translated and edited by B. Beck.
- 2003 "Annanmar Katai," in South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia, Peter Claus, Sarah Diamond and Margaret Mills, Editors, Routledge, New York, N.Y., pp. 19-20.
- 2005 "The Retelling of a Tamil Folk Epic Using Digital Tools," Paper delivered at the Old and New Forms Conference: New Forms Festival, 2004, held at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Oct. 15-16, 2004. (This paper exists in "electronic form" and has been submitted for publication with the conference proceedings. It is not yet publicly available. 8 pp.
- 2011 "Discovering A Story," in Hinduism in Practice, Routledge, Oxon. U.K., pp. 10-23.
- 2011 "An Old Legend For Today's World: The Significance of the Ponnivala Epic," The Tamils: From the Past to the Present Celebratory Volume in honor of Professor Alvapillai Velupillai at the occasion of his 75th birthday. Peter Schalk Editor-in-Chief, Kumaran Book House, Colombo, Sri Lanka, pp. 33-56.
- 2013 The Legend of Ponnivala in Graphic Novel Form. This work is presented in 26 segments, each sub-story being 36 pp. long and told in full color using traditional South Indian folk art for the illustrations. Available in print and in ebook form, in both Tamil and in English (as separate sets). Also available as a two volume set of 13 stories each. 888 pp. in total, by Ponnivala Publishing, Gore's Landing, Ontario. The majority of this material can be viewed at <http://www.ponnivalamarket.com>
- 2013 Two Yoginis, Ponnivala Publishing, Gore's Landing, Ontario, K0K 2E0, CANADA
- 2014 "What The Sister Knew: A South Indian Folk Epic from the Sister's Point of View," in Divine Domesticity, a special issue of Religious Studies and Theology, edited by Patricia Dodd, Memorial University, Nfld.
- 2014 "Goddesses That Dwell On Earth," in Inventing and Reinventing The Goddess: Contemporary Iterations of Hindu Deities on the Move, Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham, MD, edited by Sree Padma.
- 2015 The Legend of Ponnivala: A Graphic Novel presented in 26 segments, reprinted a two volumes set separately in Tamil and in English, N.I.A. Educational Institutions, Pollachi, Tamilnadu, India.
- 2016 "The Wild Boar Versus the Tiny Little Dog: What We Can Learn From Studying Local Legends and Stories," Bulletin of The Department of Anthropology Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh 786004, Assam (India), Volume 43, pp. 1-8.
- 2016 "The Masks of Majuli," a review of The Tradition of Masks in Indian Culture: An Anthropological Study of Majuli, Assam, by Arifur Zaman, in The Assam Tribune, Guwahati, May 7, page 13 (full spread).

- 2016 "A Tamil Oral Folk History: Its Likely Relationship To Inscriptions & Archaeological Findings," in Medieval Religious Movements and Social Change: A Report of a Project on the Indian Epigraphical Study, edited by Noboru Karashima, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, Japan, pp. 87-123.
- 2016 "Discovering Social Justice Through Multicultural Story-Telling," (The) Community Works Journal, an online publication of the Community Works Institute: www.communityworksinstitute.com The direct link is: http://www.communityworksinstitute.org/cwjonline/articles/aarticles-text/brendabeck_folkindia.html
- 2016 "Divine Boar to Sacrificial Pig: References to Swine in the Sangam Texts, In Tamil Folk Tradition and in Ancient Astrological Art," Part 1, Pandanus, 16/1, pp. 29-54 (actually published in 2017).
- 2016 "Divine Boar to Sacrificial Pig: References to Swine in the Sangam Texts, In Tamil Folk Tradition and in Ancient Astrological Art," Part 2, Pandanus, 16/2, pp. 17-58 (actually published in 2017).
- 2017 "A Newly Digitized Archive of Tamil Texts, Video, Audio and other Graphic Materials," Proceedings of the 16th Internet Conference of INFITT, 25-27th August, 2017, University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus, International Forum for Information Technology in Tamil (INFITT), pp. 202-209 (published and distributed in a digital format only). Contact the author for a copy.
- 2017 "Becoming A Living Goddess" The Oxford History of Hinduism, Mandakranta Bose (ed.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

Background Studies on the Culture of the Area Where the Epic Is Told:

- 1966 "A Sociological Sketch of the Major Castes of the Coimbatore District," Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, International Association of Tamil Research, Kuala Lumpur, pp. 635-650.
- 1969 "Colour and Heat in South Indian Ritual," Man, Vol. 4, pp. 553-572.
- 1970 "The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society," in The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, pp. 779-798.
- 1972 Peasant Society in Konkku: A Study of Right and Left Subcastes in South India, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 327 pp.
- 1973 "The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society with Added Comment," (reprint of the above with additions) in Rodney Needham (ed.) Right and Left, University of Chicago Press, pp. 391-426.
- 1974 "The Kin Nucleus in Tamil Folklore," in Thomas Trautmann (ed.) Kinship and History in South Asia, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 1-27.
- 1976 "Centers and Boundaries of Regional Caste Systems: Towards a General Model," in Carol Smith (ed.) Regional Analysis: A New Approach to Complex Social Systems, Vol. II, Chapter 10, New York, Academic Press, pp. 359-399.
- 1977 Review of article discussing Essays on South Asia, Burton Stein (ed.) in Pacific Affairs, Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 537-541.

- 1979c Perspectives on Regional Culture: Essays on the Coimbatore District of South India, Durham, Carolina Academic Press, and Croom Helm Ltd., England (B. Beck is editor of the whole and author of about two thirds of the book), 207 pp.

Background Studies on Folklore Concepts and Ideas:

- 1970a Review of Kailasapathy, Tamil Heroic Poetry, in The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, pp. 184-186, (with Kamil Zvelibil).
- 1972b "The Study of a Tamil Epic: Several Versions of Silappakikaram Compared," in The Journal of Tamil Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 23-38.
- 1975 "A Praise Poem for Murugan," Journal of South Asian Literature, Vol. XI, Nos. 1&2, pp. 95-116.
- 1975 "The Anthropology of the Body," Current Anthropology, Vol. 6, No. 3, p.486.
- 1976 "The Symbolic Merger of Body, Space and Cosmos in Hindu Tamilnad," in Contributions to Indian Sociology, Vol. 10, pp. 213-243.
- 1976 "Time and Space in Indian Ideology: An Anthropological Approach," in Papers of the Tenth World Congress, International Political Science Association, Edinburgh, Paper #37, 19 pp. (University of British Columbia microfiche card #18).
- 1977 "The Distancing of Emotion in ritual: Comment on a Current Anthropology article by Thomas Scheff," in Current Anthropology, Vol 18, No. 3, pp. 490-491.
- 1978 "The Metaphor as a Mediator Between Semantic and Analogic Modes of Thought," in Current Anthropology, Vol. 19, No. 1 (March, 1978), pp. 83-97.
- 1978 Review of Purusartha: Recherches de science sociales sur l'Asie du Sud Part II. In the Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 37, No. 4 (August), pp. 775-777.
- 1979 Comment on Bruce M. Knauf, "Percussion and Metaphor," in Current Anthropology, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 190-191.
- 1979 "The Body Image in Tamil Proverbs," Western Folklore, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 21-41.
- 1979 "Review of Jawaharlal Handoo, Current Trends in Folklore, Journal of Indian Folkloristics, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 78-81.
- 1980 "Our Religious Rituals : Why Do We Perform Them?," Hikmat, Vol. 1, No. 10, pp. 9-12 and p. 24.
- 1981 "The Goddess and the Demon: A South Indian Festival in its Wider Context," Purusartha: Recherches de sciences sociales sur l'Asie du Sud. Pt. 5, Paris, Ecole des Hautes Etudes, pp. 82-136.
- 1981 "Social Categories and Their Transformations," Indian Folklore I, Mysore, Central Institute of Indian Languages, pp. 32-37 (with A.K. Ramanujan).
- 1982 "The Courtship of Valli and Murugan: Some Parallels with the Radha-Krishna Story," in J. Hawley and D. Wulff (eds.) The Divine Consort: Radha and The Goddesses of India, Berkeley, California, Berkeley Religious Studies Series, pp. 262-77 and 360-62.
- 1982 "Root Metaphor Patterns," Review article in Semiotic Inquiry, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 86-97.

- 1984 Review of Gene H. Roghair, The Epic of Palnadu: A Study and Translation of the Palnati Virula Katha, Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 97, No. 385, pp. 357-59.
- 1986 "Social Dyads in Indian Folktales: An Overview," in Stuart Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan (eds.) Another Harmony: New Approaches to Indian Folklore, pp. 76-102.
- 1986 "Hindu Domestic Rituals," The Encyclopedia of Religion, (Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief), Macmillan Publishing Company, New York, N.Y.
- 1987 Folktales of India (Beck is first of joint editors and also a contributor). Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 392 pp.
- 1987 "Metaphors, Cognition, and Artificial Intelligence," Cognition and Symbolic Structures: The Psychology of Metaphoric Transformation, Robert E. Haskell (ed.), Norwood, N.J., Ablex Publishers, pp. 9-30.
- 1987 "Frames, Tale Types and Motifs: The Discovery of Indian Oicotypes," Indian Folklore II, Peter Claus, Jawaharlal Handoo and D.P. Pattanayak (eds.) Mysore, India, Central Institute of Indian Languages, pp. 1-51.
- 1988 Folktales of India, (paperback edition, joint publication of the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, and Motilal Banarsidas, New Delhi), 392 pp.
- 1989 "Uses of Folklore: Think Creatively to Make Folklore Come To Life," Rangasthala 4: Director's Report, The Regional Resource Centre For Folk Performing Arts, M.G.M. College, Udipi, South Kanara, India p. 29.
- 1990 "An Interview with Brenda E. F. Beck," by T.N. Shankaranarayana and S.A. Krishnaiah (text edited by Brenda Beck) Karnataka Folklore Newsletter, Vol. 2, Nos. 2-3, 1990, pp. 14-18.
- 2002 "The Folktale As Mirror – Who Is The Most Just of All?" Review of Stuart Blackburn, Moral Fictions: Tamil Folktales from Oral Tradition, in the Journal of the Folklore Fellows, FF Network, (Published by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and the Kalevala Institute, Turku, Finland, April 2002, No. 23, pp. 16-19.
- 2003 "Annammar Katai," in South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia, Peter Claus, Sarah Diamond and Margaret Mills, Editors, Routledge, New York, N.Y., pp. 19-20.
- 2004 "The Retelling of a Tamil Folk Epic Using Digital Tools," Paper delivered at the Old and New Forms Conference: New Forms Festival, 2004, held at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Oct. 15-16, 2004. (This paper exists in "electronic form" and was submitted for publication with the conference proceedings).
- 2011a "Discovering A Story," in Hinduism in Practice, Routledge, Oxon. U.K., pp. 10-23.
- 2011b "An Old Legend For Today's World: The Significance of the Ponnivala Epic," The Tamils: From the Past to the Present Celebratory Volume in honor of Professor Alvapillai Veluppillai at the occasion of his 75th birthday. Peter Schalk Editor-in-Chief, Kumaran Book House, Colombo, Sri Lanka, pp. 33-56.
- 2013 "The Legend of Ponnivala in Graphic Novel Form." This work is presented in 26 segments, each sub-story being 36 pp. long and told in full color using traditional South Indian folk art for the illustrations. Available in print and in ebook form, in both Tamil and in English (as separate sets). Also available as a two volume set of 13 stories each. 888 pp. in total, by Ponnivala Publishing, Gore's

Landing, Ontario. The majority of this material can be viewed at
<http://www.ponnivalamarket.com>

- 2014 "Goddesses That Dwell On Earth," in Inventing and Reinventing The Goddess: Contemporary Iterations of Hindu Deities on the Move, Lexington Books, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Lanham, MD, edited by Sree Padma.
- 2014 "What The Sister Knew: A South Indian Folk Epic from the Sister's Point of View," in Divine Domesticity, a special issue of Religious Studies and Theology, edited by Patricia Dodd, Memorial University, Nfld.
- 2014 (forthcoming) "Arjuna Transformed," an article commissioned by The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi. To be published in a volume on Folk Variants of the Mahabharata.