A Colonial Affair

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A Colonial Affair: Commerce, Conversion, and Scandal in French India. 

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In the course of the Nayiniyappa Affair, one of the charges leveled at Governor Hébert concerned the destruction of Nayiniyappa’s personal archive. “Never was there a Malabar,” wrote Nayiniyappa’s sons in one of their appeals, “who had his affairs in better order.”1 When Nayiniyappa was first arrested in 1716, Hébert seized all his papers. This extensive personal archive and other documents, all written in Tamil on palm leaves (Tamil: olai, or olles in the French rendition), were kept in Pondichéry’s fort on the town’s waterfront. The dampness in the air, claimed the sons, spoiled the palm leaves, rendering them illegible. Nayiniyappa’s sons vividly described the transformation from the legibility that bestows credibility and authority to the useless illegibility of the ruined archive: “Today [these documents] are in a horrible state, all eaten up, desiccated, broken, resembling litter more than account books.”2

There does not exist, in France or in India, a formally constituted and indexed archival collection devoted to the Nayiniyappa Affair. But the principal actors most affected by the affair actively tried to create and preserve such an archive. The two central characters—Nayiniyappa and Governor Hébert—both explicitly described the destruction of their archival efforts as part of the punishment inflicted upon them as the affair unfolded. Nayiniyappa was the hero and victim in the archive he created; Hébert was the hero and victim in his own archive. Their respective accounts suggest much was lost. Yet their
narrative efforts were so ambitious, coherent, and passionate that the broadly
distributed archive that remains provides a more general story of Pondichéry
in the early eighteenth century. The yearly judicial and administrative records
of the Compagnie des Indes, as well as the archives of the Missions étrangères
des Paris, reveal that the Nayiniyappa Affair was a defining event of the period
1715–1724 for people on two continents. The affair is the throbbing center of
what Ann Stoler has termed “the pulse of the archive.”

This chapter examines the making and unmaking of the archives of the
Nayiniyappa Affair and, more generally, the archiving practices of three cen-
tral groups in the colony: Tamil intermediaries, French traders, and Catholic
missionaries. The colonial officials, missionaries, and native intermediaries
who created the documents that make up the archives of French India, and
more specifically the Nayiniyappa Affair, were keenly, desperately aware that
official documents were crucial in determining political struggles and future
reputations. Depositions, appeals and counterappeals, commercial records,
missionary missives, and even personal diaries—these were the weapons with
which the Nayiniyappa Affair was fought. As the affair wound to a close, its
participants were eager to preserve and shape the archive that attested to its
importance.

By “archive” I mean a collection of texts or artifacts that are collected
and carefully curated so as to enable making claims about the past. Histor-
rians and anthropologists alike have called for taking paperwork seriously. Some have suggested that there has been an “archival turn,” the reflexive
examination of archives and their conditions of knowledge. This chapter
will reveal that the collating of documents into archives was crucial to mak-
ing claims about the injustice of the Nayiniyappa Affair for all the partici-
pants. Both Nayiniyappa and his allies, as well as their rivals, claimed that
archives were the bedrock of both truth and reputation. While we tend to
think of the creation and curation of archives as acts both institutional and
metropolitan, individuals in the colony, including both Governor Hébert
and Nayiniyappa, undertook intentional and often-successful historicizing
efforts in the colony.

The two kinds of documents most discussed in the course of the Nay-
iniyappa Affair were commercial records and diaries. Both function in the
archive as collections of documents of business transactions and daily events,
respectively. Historians focusing on archive creation have for the most part
examined documentary collections created by organizations rather than the
small-scale archiving efforts of individuals. Yet archive creation and sustained
concern about the possibilities for crafting historical narrative are not the sole
purview of large and bureaucratic organizations. Small-scale, nonprofessional archiving efforts have radical potential, since these unofficial archival repositories diverge from hegemonic organizing logics. In Pondichéry, local intermediaries, company traders, and Catholic missionaries all undertook explicit efforts at archiving, and in the process tried to craft competing narratives of their histories in South Asia.

Traders and Their Archives

As with any governmental organization, the Compagnie des Indes’s offices in both Paris and Pondichéry were the site of a relentless document-producing bureaucratic operation. The Superior Council produced most of the documents recording Pondichéry’s commercial, administrative, and judicial doings. The trader-administrators in India maintained yearly logs of reports sent to Paris, which contained exhaustive and meticulous descriptions of changes in personnel, new building projects, and discussions of the political situation surrounding Pondichéry. In Ananda Ranga Pillai’s diary, he often commented on the constant effort in the council’s chambers to prepare missives to be sent back to France. In an oft-repeated observation, he once noted, “The work of signing the letters for France, and putting them into envelopes was going on apace.” Writing and governmental functions, here as elsewhere, were complementary processes. This, as Miles Ogborn has written, was a “world made on paper as well as on land and sea.”

The reports from India to France generally followed a prescribed format, moving back and forth between the global and the particular: commerce with Europe, commerce in India and its surroundings, matters pertaining to Pondichéry, matters pertaining to the other French comptoirs in India, reports on troops, reports on company employees, fortifications and building projects, and accounts relating to the French colonies in the Indian Ocean, Île de France, and Île Bourbon.

The archive also includes the directives of the Parisian directors about management of the colony. Ships traveled between France and India according to a schedule determined by the monsoons, which meant the Superior Council in Pondichéry could write and send its reports between September and January, and the directors in Paris could respond between October and February. The trip between India and France took six to eight months, and stops along the way might mean letters would arrive a year or more after the time of writing. This delayed communication afforded the administrators in India a large measure of independence: on multiple occasions they wrote the
Parisian directors to say that their orders had arrived too late and decisions contrary to their wishes had been carried out. Geographical space, not only language barriers, could make miscomprehension possible.

In their response to Nayiniyappa’s arrest and punishment, the directors argued that they needed access to the documentary archive compiled in India if they were to make informed decisions. For example, when the association of traders from St. Malo complained in 1717 about Hébert’s performance and the treatment of Nayiniyappa, the directors wrote that “the company responded to [this complaint], but in a manner very different than it could have done if it had been better instructed and if it had had here a copy of the charges and interrogations of the whole trial.” They demanded that the council ship the entire documentary record to France by the first ship departing Pondichéry, “other than the one which will carry M. Hébert” and threatened that their judgment of misconduct could have dire consequences for the errant party. The inclusion by the directors of the specification that the full archive should not be on the same ship as Hébert suggests they were suspicious of Hébert. This suspicion was of a piece with the directors’ decision to recall Hébert back to France. Most likely they did not expect the archive would be wholly reliable. The directors also noted that when the merchants of St. Malo sent their request calling for Nayiniyappa’s release and Hébert’s dismissal, the Malouins supported their complaint with “various letters and certificates.”

Written exchanges between the directors in Paris and members of the Pondichéry Superior Council in India at times evinced significant tension, often revolving around the problems of communicating at a distance and uneven access to information. In 1726 the directors requested more information about rights of taxation given to Nayiniyappa’s daughter-in-law, known in the French archive as the widow Guruvappa. They scolded their subordinates in India about their inadequate communication practices, writing, “The company is not adequately informed by your letter.” The councillors’ reply the next year was peevish: “We have had the honor of writing you everything we know about this matter in our letter of January 23, 1723 and by that of October 15, 1725.”

Information about Nayiniyappa and his fate arrived in Paris from multiple directions. In addition to official correspondence with the French employees in Pondichéry, various actors with knowledge of the affair registered their dissatisfaction with the directors of the Compagnie des Indes. A veritable documentary parade arrived in Paris, penned by Frenchmen in Pondichéry, including the trader Cuperly and the Missions étrangères de Paris missionary Tessier, who all agreed, according to the company
directors, that “the procedure was the most irregular ever undertaken in a foreign language.”

The company’s ability to make money and govern Pondichéry depended on administrative, commercial, and judicial archives. Such commercial archives also held meaning for their creators, as mercantile papers allowed privileged formats for a mercantile society to articulate its understanding of its own ambitions, agendas, and values. As a historian of a mercantile archive connecting seventeenth-century Amsterdam and New Netherlands has observed, such archiving efforts reflect a world in which “understandings of reality and self-realization were largely worked out in account books, business correspondence, official reports, notarized papers, and records of local judicial proceedings.” The collection, archiving, and rereading of mercantile papers could be a form of self-fashioning.

Missionaries and Administrative Archives

Missionaries in Pondichéry took an active role in the creation of the colony’s official record. The Jesuit Father Turpin, who translated the testimonies of witnesses against Nayiniyappa, was perhaps the most explicit example of such involvement, but missionaries served as translators and creators of official records at other times too. Catholic missionaries in the East were involved in a massive project of producing knowledge of various kinds—linguistic, religious, ethnographic, and scientific. Efforts at producing documents attesting to this knowledge were at the heart of missionary work, mostly as letters written by missionaries and sent back to Europe but also in the large body of published scholarly work penned by missionaries. The Jesuit missionaries in India, following the dicta of the founder of the society, Ignatius of Loyola, wrote frequent, detailed letters about their doings. They sent their letters to their brethren and contacts in Europe, as well as to other Jesuits working in the East. These missives were meant to be circulated and soon found a broad European audience outside the order.

In addition to their letters and scholarly work, the Jesuits and other missionaries also participated in the making of administrative archives in French India. An incident following the meeting of the Superior Council to discuss the local unrest regarding religious freedoms in 1715—the same unrest that Hébert would later accuse Nayiniyappa of fomenting—suggests both groups’ dedication to documentation. After the councillors discussed how they should respond to the locals’ threat of abandoning the colony over religious restrictions, they presented the write-up of the discussion before the missionaries whom they had consulted. The three Jesuits involved, led by the superior
Father Bouchet, refused to sign this account, saying that it did not adequately reflect the statements they had made before the council. Essentially they argued that the translation of their statements, from the oral to the written, was inadequate. The Jesuits submitted their own account, which the council incorporated into its records. As at other points, the archive here was explicitly multivocal, reflecting opposing missionary and commercial agendas and voices.

The Capuchin missionaries also fought with the colony’s administration about matters concerning the dissemination of official decrees. On January 12, 1716, a Sunday, the Capuchin missionary Father Esprit read aloud and published a text in the Malabar language (Tamil), which he said had arrived from Rome, concerning the Malabar Rites, the Jesuit practice of allowing their converts to keep adhering to certain non-Catholic practices. Two days later, the council gathered, and the procureur général noted that “he didn’t know on which authority this publication had been made, nor the contents of this document” and demanded that the Capuchins provide the council with the original text within twenty-four hours. The council ordered that “all [religious] Superiors of communities and all other persons, no matter who they may be, may not in the future read, publish and distribute any memos, bulls, mandates or any other writing of any nature” without first receiving the approval of the council. The same declaration prohibited all the king’s subjects from keeping such writings in their houses without first receiving the council’s stamp of approval—thereby staking a claim for controlling even archives privately constructed and maintained.

Once more, the approaches of the trader-administrators of the Compagnie des Indes and Catholic missionaries followed markedly different routes. The missionaries’ approach to communication, as in other realms, was much more ambitious than that undertaken by the traders. The missionaries wanted to crack the code of Indian social and spiritual structures, and the result was a massive project of learning and data collection. The knowledge archive they produced relied on their own linguistic immersion; they intended it for wide distribution as a means to equip other missionaries who would follow them. These archives were meant to be outward facing and open. The missionaries’ fund-raising texts took a different approach, highlighting the conversion of thousands, the acceptance of missionaries by local rulers in their courts, and children swarming the fathers in remote villages. It also glorified the martyrdom of dead missionaries slain by unwelcoming locals. The collection of documents produced by the Compagnie des Indes was an inward-facing ledger book, and it often detailed more failures than successes. As an internal
Go-Betweens and Their Archives: The Diaries of Tamil Intermediaries

A diary is “an archive that situates self in history.” The most ambitious archival effort by a Tamil intermediary in Pondichéry is Ananda Ranga Pillai’s twelve-volume diary. The chief commercial go-between for the French company in the period 1747 to 1761 and Nayiniyappa’s nephew, Ananda Ranga Pillai started keeping a journal in 1736, when he was only twenty-seven, and kept up the practice to his dying day.

The diary began with an explicit, reflexive statement on the task he was undertaking, appended to the text before the very first entry of September 6, 1736: “I proceed to chronicle what I hear with my ears; what I see with my eyes; the arrivals and departures of the ships; and whatsoever wonderful or novel takes place.” This preamble promised to rely on first-person and tangible evidence, focus on Pondichéry as a commercial hub, and relay marvelous events. The actual diary, with its gossipy critiques of rivals and detailed descriptions of commercial transactions, does not quite live up to that promise.

Ananda Ranga Pillai conceived of the diary as a complement to his work as a professional broker. When the French company sent his brother to Madras as its agent, Ananda Ranga Pillai advised him to start keeping his own daily diary and provided him with materials for doing so. He treated his own diary as an alternative archive to that of the company, at times translating company documents into Tamil just as the Company translated Tamil documents into French for their own registers. For example, the diary includes a Tamil translation of a letter from one French director to his Pondichéry-based cousin that does not omit reports on the well-being of the man’s wife and children. Ananda Ranga Pillai also used the diary as a depository for decisions that had little to do with his own commercial interests but evinced a more general concern with the history of Pondichéry. An entry in his diary in 1738 discusses the enmity between Jesuits and Capuchins in the town and traces the conflict to a papal bull of 1712. While not a Christian, Ananda Ranga Pillai was well versed in this intra-Catholic religious conflict. The diary also includes his transcription of the entirety of a decree about public offenders published by the French governor, and the text of a decree about coins allowed for use in town. His copy of a 1741 council decree regarding caste disputes in Pondichéry reproduced the
signatures of the members of the council, in the order in which they appeared in the original document. Such transcriptions are best understood as archive making par excellence.

Most of the principals of the Nayiniyappa Affair had already died by the time Ananda Ranga Pillai started writing his diary in the 1730s, including Guruvappa, his cousin, and his father, Tiruvangadan. Yet in the diary, he continued to engage with the aftermath of the affair. The central conflict animating the first decade of the diary’s existence is the competition between the diarist and his rival, the chief commercial broker Pedro Modeliar, who served after Guruvappa’s death. The diary refers to him by his Tamil name, Kanakarâya Mudali. Dozens of entries mention Pedro/Kanakarâya’s commercial and personal successes and failures. Throughout, the diarist organized many events he described through a single question: Who emerged on top, he or Kanakarâya?

The diary recounted this exchange about the inherited rivalry. A French trader, M. Dulaurens, asked, “What has given rise to so much animosity between Kanakarâya Mudali and you?” The response, also recorded: “You may remember all the mischievous acts of which he, out of sheer jealousy, was the author during the time of M. Hébert. In spite of my unremitting efforts to act in accordance with his wishes, he still cherishes in his heart the old ill-feeling.” The diary here acted as both testament and repository of ill will tracing back a generation, the animosity cherished and kept alive like a precious inheritance.

Even as Ananda Ranga Pillai lay dying, while the British were laying siege to Pondichéry in 1761, his thoughts turned to his documentary output and its meaning. He apparently asked an associate to complete the account, as the last three entries in the decades-long effort record his illness in another’s hand. The very final entry concluded with a description of the sick man dictating a letter berating an uncooperative associate. The scribe wrote, “[Ananda Ranga Pillai] told me to write such a peremptory letter and have it dispatched. I wrote one and brought it to him for his signature. He got up and sat, ordered the two doors to be opened, and putting on his glasses, signed it, adding, ‘This must be considered my last letter.’”

This commitment to the creation of personal archives moved down the generations, beyond Nayiniyappa, his son Guruvappa, and Ananda Ranga Pillai. The man who likely wrote the final entries in Ananda Ranga Pillai’s diary, a relative, kept his own daily journal for nearly a decade, also while serving as a commercial broker. Other members of this clan of intermediaries continued these efforts. All told, Tamil diarists of Nayiniyappa’s lineage who were involved with the Compagnie des Indes in Pondichéry
created in their diaries a record of French India that extended past the days of the French Revolution.  

Late in the eighteenth century a member of the Pillai family also authored a little-known French-language text attesting to the family’s influence and power. He was Tiruvangadan’s grandson and Ananda Ranga Pillai’s nephew and also named Tiruvangadan. The document bears no date but likely was written after March 1791—the date the author was named courtier and chef des malabars in the colony, the title by which he refers to himself in the text. The history describes the “services he and his ancestors provided to the establishment of Pondichéry.” This manuscript history was left in Pondichéry’s archives when the majority of French records were moved from India to France following India’s independence.

This Tiruvangadan Pillai’s late eighteenth-century historical account is revisionist in significant ways. It tried to position the arrival of the author’s grandfather, Tiruvangadan, as the beginning of prosperity for the French holding. “This city was only a small village at the time, properly speaking a wood full of palms and bad trees, lacking any kind of workers and peopled only by petty merchants, most of whom were shopkeepers,” Tiruvangadan wrote of the period when his grandfather Tiruvangadan was a young man in Madras. He credited Nayiniyappa—his own great-uncle—and his grandfather Tiruvangadan with charting a new course for the colony; they did so by writing to their broadly distributed regional network of acquaintances, business partners, and skilled artisans, inviting them to the colony, and so improving it.

The memoir described Guruvappa’s successful trip to Paris, saying, “All of France knew about the harsh decision made by the conseil d’état about Governor Hébert’s [mistreatment of Nayiniyappa].” It named the French governors that succeeded one another through subsequent decades, framing French governance in relation to its reliance on the services provided by local brokers. The memoir also described battles between regional rivals and agreements made with local leaders from the point of view of the company’s successive generations of chief commercial brokers. In short, it provides an alternative archival account to the one provided by sources produced by French officials or missionaries.

**The Destruction of Nayiniyappa’s Archive**

Even after Nayiniyappa was exonerated, his heirs did not drop the matter of the destruction of his archive and brought it up again and again. “Hébert had our olles, registers, and correspondence destroyed, so that the theft of
our father’s goods could not be discovered,” they complained. On another occasion they named Hébert, his son, and the governor’s secretary as all complicit in this act: “The Héberts and Le Roux their secretary, after pillaging our home, destroyed the olles, registers, and accounts books of our father, such that no information can be extracted from them.” In a separate letter the sons explicitly called the destruction of this archive an attack against multiple generations: “The Héberts, so as not to allow Nayiniyappa and his descendants a remedy against their injustice, took all his olles and registers and put them in a place so humid that they perished entirely, and it is impossible to know anything from them.” In their own account, the destruction of the archive was one of the worst crimes perpetrated against their family. “This is one of the chief complaints that the supplicants have presented before the commissioners named by the council for a revision of the trial, and which will without doubt be proven true by the report of these same commissioners.” The French advocate La Morandière concurred that the Héberts had destroyed Nayiniyappa’s palm leaf documents as an intentional and malicious act, meant to hide exactly how much of Nayiniyappa’s goods the Héberts had managed to confiscate.  

Governor Hébert had seized the ledgers from Nayiniyappa’s home on the grounds that they proved financial malfeasance on the broker’s part. The ledgers, he argued, justified both the confiscation of Nayiniyappa’s goods and the demand that the broker should reimburse the company with thousands of pagodas, as his sentence decreed. At the same time as he described the documents as a central piece of evidence against the broker, the sons charged, Hébert claimed they were unnecessary for actual examination. According to Nayiniyappa’s sons, when the judges in the case were interrogated about their involvement in the trial, they said they had asked Hébert how they should decide what damages Nayiniyappa should be sentenced to pay the company. Hébert answered that he had determined the amount on the basis of the translations he had made of the palm leaf and account books. When the judges asked to see these account books, “Hébert fils said, ‘They are at the Registrar’s office, that is enough.’ And Hébert said, ‘Let us move on, or we will never finish.’” There is no way to determine whether the fragile olles disintegrated in the humid heat by design or the simple incompetence of Frenchmen used to paper. The loss had, to be sure, a pragmatic impact. The ledgers documenting Nayiniyappa’s business dealings, the accounts owed and transactions paid, would have made it far easier for his family to collect on debts and continue doing business. Indeed, as late as 1725 French authorities referenced the seizure of Nayiniyappa’s papers as a complicating factor when trying to sort out
some local business dealings. But the outrage over the destruction of an archive was also more fraught and multivalent. The obliteration of the archive tragically mirrored the annihilation of the man; like his archive, Nayiniyappa himself was thrown into a holding cell in the waterfront fort. Removed from his home and stripped of his ability to tell convincing tales through the denial of Portuguese in his interrogations, he was ruined in much the same way his documents were ruined—both were rendered mute and illegible. The archive here served as a potent symbol of both the past-oriented careful accumulation of accounts and connections and the future-oriented loss of opportunities. By bemoaning the destruction of their family documents, Nayiniyappa’s sons were also voicing regret for losing the archive as a foundation on which to base their own telling of events and as source material for bolstering their claims to power. For them, the archive served not as a “monument” of the state and its power of ordering things and narratives but as a ruin and a relic of their family’s position.

The Destruction of Tiruvangadan’s Archives

Nayiniyappa’s associate and relative Tiruvangadan also complained of tampering with his personal business papers. Tiruvangadan had been recruited to relocate from Madras to Pondichéry in 1715 as part of an ongoing French effort to lure well-established local merchants to the colony. Before he arrived in town, Nayiniyappa approached him and asked him to purchase a promissory note in the sum of 1,022 pagodas, which Governor Hébert’s son had given to a man in Madras, one M. Lapotre. The money would be a short-term loan, as the governor’s son promised he would repay the money as soon as Tiruvangadan arrived in Pondichéry. Tiruvangadan’s appeal claimed that once he was in the French colony, the governor and his son greeted him warmly and promised him that he would shortly be repaid for the promissory note. Thirteen days later he was arrested without being told the reason why, and as he wrote in his appeal, “All my accounts, promissory notes, and all my personal effects” were taken. Hébert told Tiruvangadan that Nayiniyappa had been taken prisoner, and Tiruvangadan was accused of hiding Nayiniyappa’s money—money the company was now claiming had been embezzled. Tiruvangadan answered that his own record books as well as Nayiniyappa’s would reveal that the chief broker actually owed him money and not the other way around. But the record books of both men had been seized in the process of their arrest, making such claims hard to prove.

Tiruvangadan was sent back to prison. After three months, he recounted, the Christian broker who replaced Nayiniyappa, Pedro, visited him in his cell.
“He asked me where the promissory note was which I had bought back from M. Lapotre, saying that M. Hébert [fils] had sent him to find this out so that he could repay me. I responded that I had it among my other papers in a little armoire.” The council’s secretary then showed up at the imprisoned Tiruvangadan’s house with a locksmith and ordered him to break the locked armoire, at which point Tiruvangadan’s sister provided a key. The secretary removed the promissory note—the same one that Tiruvangadan had bought in Madras and for which the Hébarts owed him 1,022 pagodas. The next day French officials removed the remaining papers. Hébert summoned Tiruvangadan’s clerks from Madras with additional account books.

The council had a number of documents, including the promissory note, translated into French. While this was going on, the councillors prevented Tiruvangadan from communicating with his clerks to prevent them from making changes based on his directions. Tiruvangadan wrote in his appeal about the events that followed under Hébert’s orders: “The next day I was taken to a house, and there were the catechist’s son [Manuel] and ten or twelve clerks, who had with them Nainapa’s accounts. These clerks or scribes and the catechist’s son examined these accounts carefully, balancing everything over four or five days and asking me for clarification.”

The clerks concluded that Tiruvangadan had spoken accurately: Nayiniyappa owed him a small sum, and he held none of Nayiniyappa’s money.

Tiruvangadan argued that Hébert had arrested him because he hoped to avoid paying for the promissory note by proving that Tiruvangadan had purchased the note with Nayiniyappa’s money. This would have made the note the property of the company, according to the charges against the chief broker. Hébert fils himself conducted the interrogation about the origins of the funds used to buy his promissory note. Tiruvangadan suggested that the general’s son clearly implied that providing the desired answers would lead to his release. “Hebert fils asked, ‘Have you nothing more to say?’ I answered, ‘What more can I say?’ And having heard that he turned his back on me and said, ‘You do not want to leave this prison,’ and had the corporal put me back in the cell.”

After several months in prison, Tiruvangadan was released and banished from Pondichéry. At that point, his confiscated papers were returned to him—except for the promissory note bearing Hébert fils’s name. Tiruvangadan sent his sister to ask for the note and wrote Governor Hébert demanding its return. A letter from Pedro informed him that the governor had read his letter and decided that his punishment for wrongdoing committed in Pondichéry was a fine of 1,022 pagodas—conveniently, the exact sum that Hébert’s son owed to Tiruvangadan. Tiruvangadan wrote again to the governor, only to
again receive responses from Pedro the chief broker. Pedro’s third response to Tiruvangadan concluded, “This is all that M. le Général told me to write you.” Tiruvangadan’s appeal, sent to Paris in demand for recompense for his losses, included the three letters Tiruvangadan wrote to Governor Hébert and the three letters from Pedro he received in response as tangible evidence of Hébert’s vexing silence. Much as he had insisted on using French instead of Portuguese in Nayiniyappa’s interrogations, here the governor refused to have direct communication with an individual he had frequently dealt with directly in the past.

To instill the letters with greater evidentiary force, Tiruvangadan had their veracity attested to by a French notary in Madras. The notary explained that Tiruvangadan’s own letters had been translated from Portuguese into French. He shed more light on the process of producing these texts by naming the man who had translated the letters into Portuguese from the original Malabar (Tamil) in which Tiruvangadan had composed them. Both Tiruvangadan and the Tamil-Portuguese translator appeared in person before the French notary to vouch for the documents. A large crowd of supporters attended this attestation, including two French Capuchin missionaries, in another example of the involvement of missionaries in the minutiae of the Nayiniyappa Affair.

Tiruvangadan made extensive efforts to spread the message about the wrong done to him, producing multiple versions of his complaints and sending them to the king, to the directors of the company, and to M. de Nyons, a man formerly employed in Pondichéry who had returned to France. The Indian merchant hoped this French ally would make sure his letters reached as wide an audience as possible in the metropole. Given that several of the appeals of Nayiniyappa, Tiruvangadan, and their associate Ramanada were crafted while the men were still held in prison, both the production and distribution of these documents posed special challenges. Yet the company directors ultimately awarded restitution to Tiruvangadan along with Nayiniyappa’s heirs, ordering that Hébert pay him ten thousand pagodas in damages. However, Tiruvangadan died in 1726 before the restitution was paid out, and it benefited only his heirs. Guruvappa experienced the same unfortunate circumstance.

The Destruction of Governor Hébert’s Archives

A man at the height of his power was thrown into prison, his personal belongings confiscated, his allies turned into enemies. Nayiniyappa suffered this fate—but so did Governor Hébert, twice: first, when he was removed
from his position as governor of Pondichéry in 1713, and again when he was
arrested in 1718, as a result of Nayiniyappa’s posthumous exoneration. Gov-
ernor Hébert and Nayiniyappa, over the evolution of the Nayiniyappa Affair,
more than once found themselves unlikely twins on a fateful seesaw that put
one on top as the other was down. So it was also in the matter of personal
archives.

Like Nayiniyappa and his allies, Hébert actively tried to create a documen-
tary archive that would cast him—and not Nayiniyappa—in the role of both
hero and victim. Historians have largely turned a deaf ear to the clamoring of
Hébert’s paper trail, giving Nayiniyappa and his supporters greater credence.
Yet both men conceptualized a personal collection of documents as the bed-
rock for their true stories. Both carefully created and curated bodies of texts,
only to see destruction, seizure, or denial of documents render their efforts
ineffectual. Like Nayiniyappa’s sons’ statements after their father’s death,
Hébert’s statements reveal that the dismantling of archives and personal writ-
ing was a particular and painful punishment.

Hébert’s first fall from grace had happened three years before Nayiniyappa’s
arrest. Dulivier, following orders from secretary of the Marine, Comte de
Pontchartrain, and the general directors, replaced him as governor in October
1713. Hébert had failed to make significant money for the company, and
when Dulivier took over the position, he found a measly fourteen pagodas
in the company’s coffers. Hébert’s conflicts with the Jesuits, whose power-
ful allies in the French court would have been in a position to affect hiring
decisions in the colony, probably also influenced his ejection from the gover-
nor’s seat. Hébert found himself in what must have seemed an unbelievable
reversal. His experience uncannily prefigures and mirrors that of Nayiniyappa
three years later. Like the broker, Hébert found himself defending himself
before the very same institutional structures in which had had filled an impor-
tant position. Hébert’s first removal from office in 1713 may have been even
more unlikely than Nayiniyappa’s own surprising fall from power, given that
the Superior Council questioned Hébert for malfeasance a mere few days
after he had been their president.

Dulivier demanded that Hébert provide his accounts to the council,
in accordance with orders he brought from Paris. Six days later, on Octo-
ber 13, 1713, the council opened an investigation. It noted Hébert’s refusal to
obey the order to provide his accounts and issued a summons. No tangible
outcome resulted. The company offered Hébert the much less important
position of governor of Île Bourbon. He refused and returned to France to
seek a better position. It was testament to Hébert’s political acumen that he
returned to the colony in 1715, this time with an appointment as Governor Dulivier’s superior, with the newly created title of “General of the Nation.”

The second time Hébert fell from grace, he would not have such a quick recovery. On July 14, 1718, he and his son were signing their names to a standard deliberation of the council. The very next deliberation in the record, dated August 19, 1718, notes the arrival of a ship from France, carrying orders from the king to remove Hébert from his position as governor and president of the council and replace him with La Prévostièr as interim governor. The following day the new governor read before the council a letter from the company’s general directors regarding Hébert’s removal. It demanded the seizure of all Hébert’s papers, furniture, personal effects, account registers, and books—and not only those kept by Hébert himself but anything belonging to him that might be held in other hands.

Perhaps worried that Hébert would make scarce either his papers or himself, the councillors immediately dispatched two of their members to Hébert’s house with the seals of the company as tangible proof of their authority over their former superior. In December of 1718 the council’s records noted that Hébert had refused to comply with the seizure of his goods and that the company had accommodated him in this matter. At this time, the council members wrote, they had received new information regarding embezzlement by Hébert and his son, including a claim that Hébert owed the company the enormous sum of one hundred thousand livres. In the meantime, claimed the council, in order to protect the interests of the company and of the multiple people who had brought complaints against the Héberts, father and son must be held at the fort until the departure of the next ship to prevent an escape or a spiriting away of their fortune.

That Hébert and his son found themselves as prisoners at the fort—the very same fort in which Nayiniyappa was held and where he died—must have carried special resonance for both the former governor and the men who had been his subordinates. The procureur général suggested that the Héberts be sent to France as prisoners under the authority of the ship’s captain until they could be transferred to the king’s officers immediately upon disembarkation in France. When the council signed this order on December 15, 1718, Hébert completed his transformation from prosecutor to prisoner.

Hébert described his arrest: “On the 15th of December, as I was returning from mass, I was taken from my house, dragged through the streets of Pondichéry, and taken by a troop of soldiers as if I were a scoundrel and a villain, and confined in a small prison alongside my son.” As in Nayiniyappa’s case, all his requests for an explanation for why he was being subjected to
such “cruel and harsh treatment” were denied. His son also complained that his requests for clarification were ignored. This complaint mirrors Tiruvangadan’s complaints regarding his three unanswered letters to Governor Hébert. Hébert protested that he had sent two letters to Governor La Prévostière but received no response. The seizure of the personal papers would also draw Hébert’s ire: he complained that they had been taken from him precisely at the time that he most needed them in order to present a case in his own defense.

Once Nayiniyappa’s conviction was overturned in 1719, company records positioned Hébert firmly in the role of culprit. An account penned by La Morandière, the councillor and judge who became an advocate for Nayiniyappa and author of his later appeals, suggested he actively tried to redirect blame in Hébert’s direction. La Morandière revealed in one of his letters that when local Indians wanted to complain about their mistreatment, they complained against Pedro, the Christian broker who replaced Nayiniyappa. But La Morandière redirected these complaints from Pedro to the Héberts, because—so he argued—everything that happened in town was done at the instigation of Hébert, and Pedro was only his tool. He reassured the directors: “You have not at all been implicated, Messieurs, in these disturbing affairs.”

This depiction of Pedro as an agency-free tool is highly questionable, given his active campaign of collecting evidence against his rival, Nayiniyappa. The implication that attacks against Hébert served the additional role of shielding the directors of the company in Paris from blame provides a motive beyond La Morandière’s ongoing animosity for Hébert. Thus these statements bolster Hébert’s claims of being targeted by his enemies.

Three days after the Pondichéry council overturned Nayiniyappa’s conviction and cleared the broker’s name, Hébert wrote a response, presenting his own version of events. It was titled “A protest by me, the undersigned, formerly général de la nation française in the East Indies, and presently director of the company, made against the violence and injustice committed against me by Sieur de La Prévostière.” In it, Hébert described his removal from office the prior year in the most dramatic terms. The previous August, he began, a ship had arrived from St. Malo, carrying orders that he was to give up the government of Pondichéry. The company then demanded the seizure of his papers, echoing the efforts to seize his papers in 1713 when he was first dismissed from his post. Hébert wrote that he could not agree to such a shameful thing, and he put down his objections in writing, and there matters rested for a while. He claimed he had “the best reasons in the world” to object to the examination of his affairs by La Prévostière, since he had twice dismissed La Prévostière from the company’s service, and “we had for quite some time
lived in a state of open enmity.” He had decided “to let things run their natural course. I quickly realized that I was the dupe of my own good heart.” Hébert referenced Nayiniyappa’s sons and allies when he wrote, “The Blacks whom I had chased away from town as public pests returned triumphant, protected by the governor and the government.” He accused the Indians’ advocate La Morandière of exacerbating the upheaval, saying that his enemy “encouraged the Blacks to present the most insolent complaints against me, of whom he himself was the author.”

Once Hébert realized “but too late, that I was in the hands of my cruelest enemies,” he understood it mattered little what arguments he made or what information he provided, since nothing would deter his adversaries from the plan to crush him. The similarity to Nayiniyappa’s claims is startling. As Nayiniyappa argued that Hébert refused to hear him out and made him voiceless, so did Hébert complain in a similar vein. “I waited with patience, entirely resigned to the will of God, for the conclusion of such cruel persecution,” he wrote. In much the same terms Nayiniyappa described signing the paper bearing his conviction “while lifting his eyes to the heavens asking for justice.”

Hébert recognized the parallel nature between Nayiniyappa’s predicament and his own subsequent woes when he thus raged against it: “[La Prévostière] covered my white hair with the worst infamy, he equated a French name with that of the most odious [of men], the most unworthy who has ever been known in all of India. Me, a white man and a Frenchman, with a negro regarded in this country as a slave; me, a director of the company and consequently one of the masters of this place, with a miserable servant; me, a general of the nation, with a worthless black villain, an idolater.” However much he fumed at being compared to Nayiniyappa, and highlighted in racial and racist terms the differences between them, Hébert found himself making the very same claims the broker and his allies had made when they tried to overturn his conviction. For both men, the act of selecting a body of documents to prove their probity and innocence stood at the center of their respective calls for justice, and accusations about the destruction of these personal archives were a recurring motif.

As the investigation shifted its shape over the course of 1718–1720 and focused on Hébert as perpetrator instead of prosecutor, the disgraced governor made claims very similar to Nayiniyappa’s about the importance of his stash of documents, as when he complained about the council’s attempt to seize his papers. Hébert adamantly refused to hand over his papers, claiming that the request was both damaging and shaming. Worse still, he claimed, the seized papers were not properly inventoried. Thus the harm inflicted on
his personal archive would be a permanent one. He acknowledged his former
subalterns had examined the information he provided in his defense, but, he
wrote, “all my arguments were ignored, all my requests were dismissed as
frivolous.” He realized none of the information he supplied would make
the slightest difference, nothing would stop his adversaries from “oppressing”
him. Nayiniyappa’s sons used highly similar language in their appeals. In an
instance of uncanny doubling and sonic reverberation, Hébert was repeating
the words of the sons, who wrote that the Jesuits had been “oppressing” their
father.

La Morandière presented another view of the seizure of Hébert’s per-
sonal archive. In addition to being a judge who had condemned Nayini-
yappa, a longtime enemy of Hébert, and an eventual defender of the
broker, La Morandière had been the company’s bookkeeper. He claimed
that Hébert had falsified the company’s account books. La Morandière also
accused Hébert’s son of hiding the company’s receipt book, thereby making
it impossible to determine how much money the company had on hand.

He claimed, of his inquiries into the Héberts’ disreputable bookkeeping
practices, “All these inquiries, which I undertook in the course of my role
as your [the directors’] bookkeeper, brought upon me the wrath of Hébert
and his son. . . . They raged to a point I cannot express, and promised that
as soon as they arrived in France they would have me shamed and removed
from your service.” The bookkeeper La Morandière’s role in crafting the
appeals by Nayiniyappa and his associates helps explain their emphasis on
record keeping as a central means for effective claims making in the Nayini-
yappa Affair.

Of all the papers that had been taken from him, Hébert was especially
indignant about the seizure of one document. “Among my papers was a
journal that I had kept, day by day,” wrote Hébert, in a moment of easy-
to-identify-with writerly vulnerability. “This [journal] was a secret thing, it
might as well have been my confession. . . . No one had ever seen this jour-
nal, not even my son, and it should never have been revealed. Everyone
knows that such things are sacred.” In this journal, Hébert explained, he
had written with absolute honesty of his unfavorable opinions about his col-
league La Prévostièr and other members of the council, never guessing they
might read it. Hébert wrote of the incendiary contents—unfortunately not
preserved, “You will easily judge the effect that passages in my journal had
on the people concerned.” The publication of his diary’s content, Hébert
suggested, was a deliberate attempt to alienate people who might have
otherwise supported him. When the council convened to discuss Hébert’s
culpability in the Nayiniyappa Affair, three of the commissioners recused
themselves under different pretexts—Hébert likely felt they might have been allies if they had not read his diary. On the day of his departure from India, ignobly removed from the town he had so recently ruled, Hébert made sure to deposit a copy of a written appeal in the Pondichéry greffe (court clerk’s office), ensuring that a paper trail proclaiming his innocence would remain in the colonial archive even after he was gone. He made multiple copies of this document, sending another version of it to Paris from Brittany, where he was held upon arrival in France.

Throughout his ordeal, Hébert would emphasize the seizure of his papers in Pondichéry. His writings pose a formulation of private archives as complex and multifaceted creations: some documents must be made public, yet their veracity is denied; others must remain private or be desecrated. In either case, the writing is the measure of the man.

**Distributed Authority, Distributed Archives**

Most of the documents that made up the archives of the Compagnie des Indes in Pondichéry were shipped from India to France in 1954. The company collections pertaining to India were then moved from the National Archives in Paris to Aix-en-Provence, to the newly constituted Archives d’outre-mer—an archive that was itself part of an explicit French effort to reckon with the colonial past. Documents, this reminds us, end up in archives through the intentions and machinations of people and institutions, and the archive is shaped and made legible through political agendas.

The distribution of the remnants and traces of the Nayiniyappa Affair in archives in Aix-en-Provence, Nantes, Paris, and Pondichéry suggests the global contours of the affair itself. This chapter has suggested that far-flung archives serve as both semiotic referent and embodiment of the global ambition of the French imperial project. The actors most intimately involved in the affair understood their personal documentary collections to be the bedrock of their authority and reputation.

In addition to the official and unofficial records produced by company officials, missionaries, and the brokers they employed, the archive of French India consists of daily records created in global settings, as ships crisscrossed the ocean between France and India. Evidence of Nayiniyappa’s position in the colony prior to his fall can therefore be found archived in unexpected places. The journal with which this book began, written aboard a fleet of three merchant ships that traveled between Brest and Pondichéry in the period 1712–1714, is such a place. The fleet of the *Mercure*, *Vénus*, and *Jason* had come
to Pondichéry to fill the ships’ holds with Indian goods, mostly cloth woven by local artisans.\textsuperscript{113} The majority of the journal was written at sea and thus devoted to matters of wind and navigation. But when the merchant sailors arrived in Pondichéry in 1714, they were impressed by the massive wedding celebration hosted by Nayiniyappa in honor of his son.\textsuperscript{114} It is poignant to think of this demonstration of power and family taking place so shortly before Nayiniyappa’s lonely death in his prison cell. But it is also noteworthy that this trace of Nayiniyappa’s family affair should appear in the record of a ship’s journal currently held in a departmental archive in Nantes, penned by one M. Robert, a man who had surely never before heard of Nayiniyappa or his importance for the French project. Yet there Nayiniyappa is in the journal, “a facteur of the Company, a Black gentile.”\textsuperscript{115} The ship’s scribe described the wedding ceremony as being carried out “in the manner of the gentiles, and with all possible magnificence,” and the writer breathlessly reported that the wedding cost more than eight thousand pagodas.\textsuperscript{116} When the town’s Christians—French and Tamil alike—married, Pondichéry’s civil records recorded the fact in a brief entry. The record of a journey from Brest thus provides the only source for the elaborate details of a marriage that appears to have taken over the streets of Pondichéry, both “White Town” and “Black Town,” for days on end, with the cannons in the fort booming in celebration.\textsuperscript{117} Both the global distribution of the archiving of this event and the munificence it described—striking enough that a visitor newly arrived to the colony would devote several pages of a ship’s journal to detail the wedding celebrated by the colony’s broker—reveal Nayiniyappa as a man occupying significant space in the colony’s early days and its historical record.

The Nayiniyappa Affair demonstrates that while archives are an instrument of power, access to the act of archiving is broadly available, at least to actors with the literacy and social authority to produce records that have probative value.\textsuperscript{118} The affair made visible the existence of a shared vision in the colony of archives as a prerequisite for action, knowledge, and reputation. Just as the Nayiniyappa Affair had global reach and concerned issues of shared and unexpectedly distributed authority, so its archives are also globally constituted and in turn widely distributed. The distribution of the archives is emblematic of the distribution of authority.