

## 2. Resolving Boundary Disputes: Circumambulating New Identities

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For residents of villages in Coastal Andhra, interaction with East India Company officials was a regular activity by 1795. <sup>1</sup> So it should not have been odd that Leveston G. K. Murray, the representative of Thomas Snodgrass, Collector for the 1st Division, Masulipatam, <sup>2</sup> would arrive on the scene to resolve a boundary dispute between two villages. Nor should it have been unusual that he would ask generally of the inhabitants of Tooringi "how far they supposed their ground extended," upon inquiring into the disagreement between that village and the Dutch-owned village of Jagannaikpuram. <sup>3</sup> This interaction broke ranks with the usual when, to Murray's dismay, he "received no other answer than that they did not know." Murray and Mr. Topander, who accompanied him, then brought out their tool for resolution, a type of map. They showed certain villagers this "Gentoo Paper" containing a Dutch account of the nature of the boundary between the two villages. <sup>4</sup> The consensus among the villagers was that the document was in order. No one brought problems with its authenticity to the attention of these officers. And yet a subsequent attempt to walk the boundary as described in the document provoked significant differences of opinion as to whether this was in fact the correct boundary line. <sup>5</sup> Finding himself and the various parties at another impasse, Murray then proposed that the groups use an arbitrator to settle the dispute. <sup>6</sup> This new idea, however, was quickly rescinded by Murray when he realized that it could easily produce an excessively prolonged period for resolution. Without Murray's prompting, it seems, at this point in the discussions "It was proposed by the Inhabitants of Jaggernaikporam that an old and respectable man should be chosen who was to walk [the boundary] with fire on his head." <sup>7</sup> This invocation of a local means for deciding the limits of the villages, and the process by which the firewalker eventually trod the boundary between the two villages, came to represent an important moment in the process of identity formation among villagers up and down Coastal Andhra. With the treading, a new meaning for that village would come into being, as would a new definition of the people who resided there.

The recurrence in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth centuries of a certain type of language surrounding the resolution of disputes such as this, arising over the exact geographical drawing of village boundaries, is one space in which to suggest the category creation process that took place in South India during this period. With these cases villagers made it clear that they could act out a solidarity that was based on the terms of residence in a village, and that they were willing to discount other, perhaps convenient, labels for the purpose of promoting their village identity. Despite the abundance of literature to the contrary, the village was not a core

unit of culture, but was in fact one of the many metaphors, even bargaining chips, for the ongoing historical process of working through the politics of the locality. Scholars of India have yet to problematize the categories of the "village" and "villager" according to historical contingency and in ways that take into account the subjectivity of those people who were listed as "villagers." This trend represents a failure on the part of scholars to question the categories they choose in their depictions of Indians, and it is not so much a problem within the historiography of "The Village in India." The main issue remains, however, that formations such as the village escape being problematized precisely because they do not easily find a place in the convenient lists of available *historical* categories. This chapter looks at village boundary disputes in the hope of showing that those debates were fruitful sites for the creation of village identities, and even villages.

Any suggestion that the British by 1795 were in control of the land they claimed, let alone in control of land tenure issues in general, is put severely in doubt by the fact that officials such as Murray were not able to (or, perhaps, were unwilling to) impose a settlement on these disputes. The situation Murray sought to resolve here did not center on the collection of revenue itself, a situation that rulers in the area had certainly always confronted. Instead, Murray was being called on to mark a boundary because the British sought ascertainable limits to villages that would be, then, their bases for revenue collection in the future. This practice was in contrast to the estimation of the yield of certain areas, as perhaps the Mughals had done earlier. <sup>8</sup> This newer and probably distinctly British practice was not carried out strictly with an eye to the collection of revenue, but rather with the goal of delineating the physical outline of each village and of thereby establishing the East India Company's ultimate units of revenue collection, villages. Villages were seen by the British to be the elemental bases for India society. In turn, this geographical search for the limits to the village also served as a process by which the discursive boundaries of the village could take shape. The negotiations over boundaries in general called for cultural capital that Indians could use towards the creation of politically charged "villager" identities.

At this ground level the bureaucratic problem Murray faced eventually turned itself into an opportunity for the villagers themselves to put forth a solution, and for them to insist that this solution be the only one by which they would abide. Resolutions to these cases required that dialogues be established, dialogues in which the villagers were able to set forth what the parameters of a dispute would be. They decided what issues were nonnegotiable and what issues could be used as the bases for compromise. What we find in such cases is that villagers themselves ultimately directed the deployment of juridical power as represented by East India Company administrative procedures. Through their roles in the resolution of a dispute, the villagers also decided how they would express who they were.

The cultures represented here by the disputants did not have a "core"—an uncontested center—that could be offered as an ultimate guarantor of truth. That is, almost anything might be up for negotiation in these contests. Nevertheless, there was an unwavering subtext to each dispute, an only sometimes-articulated thread that wove its way throughout these many boundary resolution cases. That thread was this: the people who populated the areas on both sides of each boundary dispute repeatedly sought to demonstrate who they were—both for themselves and in the eyes of the "other," the colonial system and its representatives. Central to every argument and petition the villagers put forth was some statement on the self. At first that sense of self might just be a conventional label added to the person's position as a member of the village—a village accountant, for instance. But as the debate over the boundaries heated up, the identification of the villager with the village became formidable and lasting. There arose a conjunction of village and identity that ultimately provided for part of that village identity that persists into late-twentieth-century Telugu notions about the self. Telugu speakers today are not simply nostalgic about the village (although this may seem the case if you ask what his or her *santa úru*—original village—is). Rather, the ancestral (though, perhaps, hypothetical) village is a critical part of who they are. Because notions of the self and expressions of identity underlie these boundary dispute discussions and remain for the most part unarticulated, it will be useful to look more closely at the actors and their actions as a way to arrive at some understanding of those notions. As it turns out, how groups insisted on resolving issues is quite revealing about how they viewed themselves.

### The Workings of Village Boundary Disputes

Initially, then, we should ask some basic questions about these boundary disputes. What was a village boundary? How was it determined "originally," or was it to be decided in these cases? And who were the people to make that determination? If the records are any indication, there were no simple answers to these questions. At one point during the dispute of 1795, the Despondiah of Cocanada handed Murray a letter about his understanding of the boundaries in this case. <sup>9</sup> Included in that letter was a short exposé on why a boundary needed to be settled in its particular way:

The *custom of the Coast* is for those who walk boundaries that the man fixed on by both parties must give a sunnud or paper mentioning a fixed time therein that if he or his wife or any of his children should die within that period the settlement of the boundaries ought to be made again therefore you will be pleased to enquire into the *custom of the Coast* and do justice as you shall think proper. It is *the custom* therefore I write this for your information. <sup>10</sup>

Three times this short passage reminded Murray that there was a custom of the coast. 11 Three times he heard that there was a coherency and integrity by which contestants organized themselves and made decisions "on the coast." Even given the necessity of recognizing that the Despondiah was framing his plea for a colonial audience, his ability to articulate it as such suggests a presence of that custom and those rituals beyond that colonial context.

Custom or no, however, the boundary marking ceremonies in general, and the treading ceremony in particular, appear to have taken on a limited set of general forms in this period. On 11 June 1795, the collector at Masulipatam received the following description of one way in which the treading ceremony was to be done:

the track of the treading should be made clean taking off the bushes and thorns and there the people on the part of the person that treads are to watch that the opponents may not throw thorns or let out live snakes etc., for it is the *usual custom* that when the man treading the Boundary—in case the thorn get in his feet or snake pass cross his way or blood come out of his feet etc. or he stop in the way the treading is not to be admitted. The opponents will set on him devils or unclean spirits by enchantments in order to get him any trouble by sickness etc. that the treading may not be performed regularly—in consequence—the man that treads will put to his neck or hand Rings or amulets for his safety and will perform the worshipping of the Ganais (?Ganesh) etc. (Pullias) upon which the opponent is to put the   ?   sorts of grain is his vody (cloth round his waist) and give betel and nuts in his hands desiring him to tread. Then the man should very quickly tread without turning his head behind or stop with fear at the opponents alarming him with Tapallys or Tom Toms behind him. 12

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This long description was placed in the records after the collector had solicited advice from his servants. Another description came in the course of investigating into a boundary dispute of 1799. The collector at Masulipatam, John Read, received from some of the disputants a document written nine years earlier containing the following form of treading, in many respects similar to the above.

With all gathered "Rajanah shall wash with cold water, and being dressed in wet cloths, and without wiping his Body, and having placed his mark on his head, stand opposite to the East, hold Beetle nuts as well a yellow Rice in his hands, and looking at the Sun, and having repeated the names of the Gramah Devatah and offered a prayer to the goddess, he shall declare, so as to be heard by every body present, that in case I succeed according to the terms stipulated between us, the ground which is to be trodden by

me shall belong to Nidmole, If on the contrary any the least danger or difference happens, the ground will belong to Culpatam and Tuckemcherlah" and he should then proceed to the ground in dispute, and repeating "I will tread my ground from hence" and he should walk from that spot to the End of the Boundary, without either looking back or resting on the way, he should proceed straightly without turning on either side, frequently mentioning "this is the boundary of my Village—" Should Rajanah fall down while treading the Boundary, or any accidents happen to the said Rajanah, or to his Family, Cattle, or House during the above mentioned 21 days, the ground will be considered to belong to Culpatam and Tuchemcherlah, and out claim to the Ground will be forever forfeited. This Mutchelkah is written by our free will and Consent Dated 20th May 1790. [13](#)

The use of betel nuts (even tambulam, betel leaf with betel nuts on it), the performance of púja to certain gods, the necessary presence of representatives from both villages, and even the idea that hindrances such as thorns must be allowed to work their art if they happen to obstruct the treader, were all parts of the local understanding of the way in which the treader should tread.

Treading the boundary, furthermore, with all of its rules and variations, was not even the only "standard" means of settling a village boundary dispute in this period. Another method that proved popular in some cases was the delineating of the boundary by use of a plough. In these instances a similar set of circumstances occurred at the time of marking out the boundary. But here it was a matter of the plough, and not the treader's feet, following the appropriate path for the boundary. One petition of 1800 reminded the collector at Masulipatam that a boundary had already been settled in this way, and that the villagers expected the collector to honor that settlement:

The Curnams and the inhabitants of Collepara represent to the Collector that the inhabitants of Davarapilly lay claim to Lata lanka and another lanka formed recently, though they were given a portion of it consequent to a previous arbitration arrived at by "chow-chall" (marking the line by plough) and request him to direct the inhabitants of Davarapilly to keep themselves aloof from the ground which belonged to them. [14](#)

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The plough method, however, appears to have obtained only a secondary level of respect for its ability to instill some level of authority over the resulting boundary. A letter from John Read, collector 4th division Masulipatam, to William Gordon, Collector in the Guntur Circar, offers some hints as to the problems associated with deciding between using the plough or the treading method.

I am perfectly contented with the proposal made for settling the Kirkasha between the Inhabitants of Collepara, in the Guntoor Circar and Davarapilly in the Vulloor Samut. Although I willingly consent to Jonnaloo Kistnamah drawing the Boundary Line *with his Plough*, I certainly avoided the proposition, thinking I might be accused of Substituting in my favor *a less solemn mode* than generally in practice for terminating the dispute under this explanation. I shall stand relieved of encouraging the renewal of Disputes (which is farthest from my wish) by proposing that the Kirkasha in question *should be determined by treading* the Boundary. I beg leave to recommend that the ceremony be performed in the presence of our assistants. 15

Read, as collector, sought the resolution that would produce the most lasting effect. Villagers, on the other hand, were willing to use the mode of resolution that best served their own interests, whatever those interests might be—they were not necessarily inclined toward a "solemnity" inherent in either process. And yet identifying some hierarchy of methods was one of the few useful constructions that Company officials might leverage in their search for referable order within a society they were attempting to administer.

For the Company the terms of the resolution mattered less than what that resolution hoped to solve. As Read suggested, solemnity of resolution was a goal inasmuch as it presumably could lead to a greater degree of respect for the boundary line, and therefore orderly collection of future revenue from the village. For villagers the lines of the boundary meant more than that. In certain cases a belief on the part of a particular village might be at complete odds with the so-called standard practice of the boundary marking by another village. In those instances, a resolution sought to prevent occurrences of the nature described by a *vakil* of Raja Vassireddy Vencatadry Naidu in his report to the collector about one dispute. 16

According to the custom, the inhabitants of Puttoor cut dharba grass on the lanka adjacent to their village and pay a pannu to the Circar. The inhabitants of Vullipauka village in the district of Vuttoor came to the Lanka in force and molested them. Later there occurred a great fight, at the end of which the Vullipauka people set fire to the grass which was worth Pag. 200. 17

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Settlements of boundaries between villages were by all accounts tremendously contentious issues. The ferocity of one such battle to assert a particular boundary indicates that villagers were by no means indifferent to the notion of who belonged to their village. Nor were they ambivalent about where their villages ended, and about the rights that accompanied the

fullness of the limits of those villages and the villagers who resided there.

Bringing together the disputing parties in a village boundary issue was no easy task. Then knowing that there were options for the determination of the method of settlement further complicated the possibility of reaching a secure agreement. But even then, if the parties could identify common ground for the means to hammer out a resolution, whether through plowing or treading, there was still room for dissension between parties and within villages. In one case, after all had agreed to allow someone to tread the boundary, there arose a disagreement as to how that treading should then take place.

This is the Former form of treading according to *mamool*—with respect to Mr. Wranghams Gomastahs stating in their Arzee [petition] that the treading should be very slow it is to be observed that in *every Country* the *mamool* is to tread very quick to give the chance of Thorns or anything else getting into his feet or if he may fall down if his claim be unjust—when the man goes slowly it appears that he takes Care to walk slowly for fear of Thorns etc. and so the treading may be objected to. 18

Such qualification about the form, though slight, demonstrates on the one hand some of the possible range of customs within the rubric of *mámúl*. But it was also consistent with the notion that *mámúl* was predicated on ascertaining intentionality through objectifiable criteria. As we will see, subjective assessment did come to claim a role within debates over identity (assertions, for instance, of respectability). Here, however, the speed of the trader itself was seen to indicate a very particular intention on his part. Nevertheless, this objection remained a small part of the larger boundary making debate, as did the form of the treading in general. The largest spaces for debate were kept open for issues of establishing the village identity. This is again evident in the fact that these detailed descriptions were only the last and apparently least contentious aspects in the disputes as a whole.

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Dialogue concerning descriptions of the form of the treading can also reveal the distance (even helplessness) at which the British were placed because of the ways in which Telugu speakers forcefully jockeyed to establish their own positions regarding the ceremony:

The account of the performance of the ceremony of treading the boundary etc. was furnished by Mr. Ram's own people. It may probably be a just account, but then the representation of the Gomastahs employed by me, I should suppose to be equally worthy of credit until the particulars had been enquired into, and the truth ascertained. 19

Lines of interest and influence were drawn any number of ways. But the meanings and knowledge arising out of this process could not be stemmed by some colonial desire to "ascertain truth." This process of interaction and dialogue as to how boundaries should be settled was replicated again and again in this period over much of coastal Telugu-speaking areas. Each new episode brought with it a refinement both in the process whereby the boundary was settled and in the way by which Telugu speakers articulated their needs and rights.

### **Beneath These Disputes Surrounding the Boundary**

Despite the fact that these debates were nominally boundary disputes, with virtually every case both the form of treading or plowing and the issue of where the boundary should actually lie seemed to be secondary to some other central point. This meant that multiple mixed signals were going to be sent, and in many directions. For instance, villagers seemed to understand that a disagreement that had reached the stage of requiring some kind of intervention was a serious dispute. The very willingness to accept an arbiter demonstrated that the physical boundaries of their villages were indeed reproachable and open to debate. Yet if an arbiter were needed, it usually meant that a local nerve had been struck and that villagers were going to act to defend the limits of their village as they saw them. But since the physical boundaries were open to interpretation, villagers seemed to hold onto something that they could claim was not open in that way, something they could hold onto against all arguments, and in opposition to the judgments of a third party. For this reason petitioners who wrote to defend their village boundaries inevitably searched for and threw forth in their positions those issues that, in their view, remained unassailable. These, it turned out, were always village characteristics that they felt could not be questioned, characteristics that could somehow be shown to be pertinent and integral to the settlement of the boundary. At times they were issues that centered on the particular—who should tread, for instance. At times they were more general issues—attempts to pull a dispute over boundaries into the realm of custom, to make the dispute itself a challenge to tradition, that is, "the custom of the coast." In either case, petitioners making these points knew how to get the attention of those reading the petitions and how to escalate the seriousness of the debate. Thus, though there might be some agreement on how the boundary should be trod, there remained a wide gulf among speakers regarding the other main issues. In fact, the most contentious issue of these debates leads us to an easier acceptance of examining the settlement of boundary disputes as a means to investigate identity formation. It is the set of criteria surrounding the identity of the person who was to tread the new boundary that occupied the largest space in the debates and in the petitions.

In general, the records do not reveal how thoroughly established the connection between village and villagers was prior to the act of treading in

the colonial context. 20 What is clear is that the process helped make more meaningful that connection. We can begin to see this in the correspondence John Read sent to the Board in Madras when trying to establish some reliable basis for what the actual customs in the region might be. In these letters Read included an interview he had with a murmadar, a village figure he deemed authoritative on the matter. During the interview Read asked the murmadar, "May the Gentoo inhabitant tread the boundary?" The response was

Yes he may, but he will remark "is this my merassee?" and as the proverb says "that whoever has a Plough will find land to cultivate"—I am of the Opinion if such an Inhabitant has resided in the Village for a considerable number of years and be named by the opposite Party he may tread the Boundary under the necessary ceremonies prescribed for Persons of his situation—the Vetty man may be considered a merassadar but to this time I never heard that the Vetty trod the Boundary. 21

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The murmadar was willing to recognize the village as a binding force to the extent that it could in some cases supersede land ownership, or jāti restrictions as a criterion for suitability in treading. 22 Ironically, then, the form of the treading was at a tertiary position in relation to the actual settlement of the boundary of the village, and establishing a village identity was the unspoken center for the debates. That meant that the main issue that became articulated—who should tread—served as a messy but purposeful sideshow for the dispute, all the time acting as a signifier for the actual center—the establishment of a village identity. Who should tread, and how that person came to be picked, filled the articulable space of the debate. Subsequent questions such as, "Who is legitimate within the boundary?" (and not "How the boundary?") produced their own rhetoric and posturing with their accompanying identifiable parameters. Ultimately, the structure of the treading itself (and its role as a workable solution to the dispute) consisted in working through these postures, and in the process helped assert and establish a village identity.

### Strategies for Proposing Boundaries

Parties to the dispute understood the role of posturing, and insisted on the posturing in most cases. Thus the first and most basic of fallback arguments common to boundary disputes, the objection the collector would first hear, was this question of who may tread. We saw that in the dispute near Jagannaikpuram, the quality of person to tread was integral to the treading process. There, an "old and respectable" man was called for. Other criteria were not mentioned. Presumably, caste was not an issue. But in July 1796, after consulting many parties, the collector ordered that the treader "may be of any caste above Pariah." Jāti was also a factor in Masulipatam in 1799,

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when the collector wrote that his sources claimed that the arbiter of the dispute had to be "either a Bramin or a Sooder curnum—preference is given to the former—the person chosen to perform this solemn office should, in fact, be free from all bodily blemish." 24 How did caste come to enter here? What was the basis for deciding who could tread and when did it become an issue? In a sense, this is the one central theme permeating a process that sees identity emerge out of a dialogue. This case shows that caste was not the absolute operating basis for social action. Here the inclusion of caste as a condition for conducting the ceremony is a metaphor, as in "old and respectable," for establishing authoritative language in a dispute for which there existed no ready-made, obvious discursive categories. Although caste itself may be unassailable in the minds of these speakers, its positioning in social engagements is completely political (or, at the very least, must be understood contextually). Until the village itself became an identity unit, it (the village entity) could not serve as the authoritative position behind which to argue for a settlement to its boundaries. Ceremony, existing group labels, economic status, tradition in general, were all marshaled forth to play the role of authority while the physical limits of a village were being hammered out.

As was noted earlier, the extent to which there was a solid identification between villagers and the geographic space of their village before the boundary markings we see here in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remains, at best, unclear. Scholars have noted that under Mughal forms of administration, most aspects of village revenue collection and management were left to the zamindar to perform. And then it was chiefly a matter of effectively extracting that revenue, with little apparent concern given to the boundaries of the specific villages. 25 John Richards also speaks of great numbers of "tenant farmers (pahi) who did not share in the corporate privileges of the village." 26 This is clearly

distinct from the *incorporated* villagers making their positions heard here in southern India. Irfan Habib and Muzaffar Alam observe that, for North India at least, Mughal assessments of villages were left to the village-wide jamas (estimates), and not to a process of wrangling with individual peasants over where the boundaries of their fields ended. 27 No such distancing from the process by village inhabitants took place in these Telugu-area cases. All villagers could offer a wide variety of opinions, judgments, or diversions, diversions that proved to be critical to understanding how identities emerged with these disputes. It was through the production of knowledge about what was at stake, and the understanding of how meaning could be conveyed (based on a realization of the solidarities at play) that the actors moved and spoke toward the fulfillment of an acceptable boundary.

The dynamic of a dispute and the presence of an "other," in this case the British, to whom to convey the nature of the dispute forced the production of new meanings as to who the parties involved were. That which became

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nonnegotiable is where we can see the beginnings of the use of identity as a political tool. Disputation was allowed to exist only where the desire to express an identity ended. That is, even early on, petitioners reserved the right to group themselves as they chose, and would not move from those positions easily. New understandings of who those villagers were emerged from the process as a whole as a result of having to articulate their positions in the first place. The forum, in the end, permitted for the production of the identities of the actors. But the actors, nevertheless, determined their own roles.

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Boundary dispute posturing in general had many facets. One village might put forth an arzee insisting that the collector's gumastahs (servants) were wrong on certain key points of order about the treading. 29 Here again, the petition became the space for being able to actually state the village identity. An argument such as this threw before all the idea that the village could indeed speak authoritatively as a collective whole in the dispute. In fact, that is what prompted the description of the treading from 1795. To affirm the solidarity of all the members of the village they insisted on that particular form of treading. This type of arzee served as a means of restating a group's authority and position in society, as with other arzees. But here it also invoked the petitioners' roles as members of a particular village.

Another facet of the posturing process (in addition to birthplace, jāti, respectability, and custom/tradition) was the assertion of particular land tenure rights to an area in question. This might be phrased in terms of a certain right to the land's "enjoyment" (*anubhāvam*) through outright title to that land, or even by use of associating certain terms with the right to make decisions about the dispute's adjudication.

Although the Curnums are meraseedars of the village we the meraseedars of Curneecum of the Whole Purgana and the zamindar should agree together and cause the treading which *only the Curnams themselves cannot give consent* for doing it. 30

The village boundary dispute was in this case a chance to delineate hierarchy between karanams and mirasidars. Here, if the mirasidars were to be successful in their bid, they would have to undermine the authority that the British had attributed to karanams, the term given to village accountants who were also usually Bráhmans. The mirasidars sought to invest their titles with a more powerful set of meanings based on the larger scope of their mirasi, and on their association with the zamindar. Thus here, in the space of the village boundary dispute, yet another set of articulable conditions arose on the basis of which groups felt they could argue their right to determine the physical limits of the village. In this instance it just happened to be office tenure and land tenure titles.

This particular posture reminds us of the place of the boundary dispute within the British scheme of "control" in the area. It is impossible to come to a wider understanding of the posturing going on here without seeing it in the context of the records—in which and for which much of the debate was taking place. The village was recognized in many respects by the East India Company solely as a subunit of the larger purgana (or even the mirasi), a land-revenue-collection unit. <sup>31</sup> If a question then arose as to the limits of those revenue units, the issue of who would decide the limits arose with it, forcing a conjunction of colonial bureaucracy with village politics. The colonial bureaucracy and its call for petitions to be placed on record opened a space for discussions as to who was responsible for setting the boundary. This is not to say that questions such as this had never before existed. Rather, it appears that the desire to ascertain and then fix who would determine village limits was heightened by the presence of the British records themselves and that very basic aspect of being they possess, written permanence and authority.

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The posturing and asserting of authority also continued after arrangements for the treading of the boundary had been agreed to. In the dispute of 1796 one group attempted to invalidate the treading by asserting that the treader's bullock had died within twenty-one days of the ceremony. <sup>32</sup> The same people also tried to (mis)direct the collector's gumastah when he attempted to find the bullock's corpse. In the episode of 1795, the collector, L. G. K. Murray, had gone to great lengths to find a suitable treader, but on the day the settlement was to have taken place he arrived to find "that they had a reason why the man should not walk." The reason, Murray was told, was that "the man is mad. I desired him to be called and he, the Despondiah, having put several questions to him made no more objections as Moomerdy Ramadoo answered every one of them with the greatest clearness. I found it was only *to postpone the settlement.*" <sup>33</sup> Madness was just one of many acceptable obstacles to be overcome in the course of determining a boundary.

The general management of the ceremony amid all the various claims and posturing also bears looking into. Murray's role in this last boundary dispute and his account of the treading ceremony offer good cases in which to see the colonial individual as "other" and his role in helping to provide a productive space for identity formation. Recognizing that a joint effort was necessary, Murray acceded to the villagers' demands with regard to the form of the treading, as long as he could play an authorizing role: "I had it explained that he was to fix immutably the boundaries of the Villages ... and all that was expected from him impartiality—this was done publicly in the midst of hundreds who had assembled on the occasion. Moomerdy Ramadoo then took up the fire put it on his head and went first, we followed at a distance and made marks where it was necessary." <sup>34</sup>

It is difficult to read past this passage in the records without stopping to consider the underlying complexity of how this boundary dispute was settled. Murray was acutely aware that all the participants in the dispute would have to be satisfied. He made a point of recording that all were happy with the treading ceremony. And the symbolism of his staying behind the treader at a distance—presumably so as not to disrupt the actual ceremony—as well as his need to place physical markers along the boundary, were also integral to the contemporary position of the British in India. Murray was one of the many actors in the play of boundary determination. All he was there to do was to make official, place a stamp on, the activity of Indians resolving the dispute. He served as the focal point of much of the discussion, but he was also a reactor by which the base materials—ideas and actions—were transformed into the substance of what actually took place.

Murray perceived that a consensus solution, one that permitted villagers to express their solidarity, was, in 1795, the only kind that would stick. He made sure all parties signed the paper describing the trodden boundary, and that they would agree to respect that boundary. But at the same time that Murray attempted to put together a solution that would ultimately reinforce British rule in the area by defining territorial limits, Telugu speakers were, perhaps for the first time, demanding a place in the record, that ultimate bastion of British authority, for their own position on how the boundary should be settled and why it need be settled in that way. Most important, however, with this process they were also describing to the British who they were and how they were to be reckoned with. Murray simply helped to find a place for them to do it.

Three months after the boundary dispute in the Godavari region (relating to the village of Tooringi) an issue arose to the south near the regional center of Guntur. There, on 22 July 1795, the collector received a petition from the "Curnams and Inhabitants of Camarauz Guddah" asking for a resolution to a boundary dispute.

We represent this Arzee that the H. Company will enquire into the dispute with equity for they are honored with justice—We are a number of people—the meraseedars—Your Honor should be pleased to examine the witnesses as to the Right of Holding the Ground in question—

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Curnums	Inhabitants
(signed) Caumaraz Gudda Padda Muttumraz	(signed) Jungum Mootiah Lingum
ditto Chirma	ditto Valapah

Mootumraz	
ditto Naurappa . . .	1 mark of Canaguala Veerana
ditto Reppiah . . .	(signed) Munama for Yalvarty Ukkiah
	(signed) Nummagudda Ramanapah
	1 mark Yarlagudda Vencataramdoo
	1 mark of Cunna Vencataramdoo
	mark of Moolata Mookete Lingum <u>35</u>

Here what is clear (besides a higher rate of literacy among karanams) is that an alliance had formed that transcended many varied groupings. The "Curnums and Inhabitants of Camarauz Guddah" bonded together over a disagreement with the "people of Deveen." *Karanam* tended to be a gloss for Bráhmán in the records and in some Telugu literature, despite its literal meaning as the title for the holder of a particular village office. (This correlation between *Bráhmán* and *karanam* is made evident in much Bráhmán writing.) So one aspect of the grouping in the header of the petition here is clear. The "Curnums and Inhabitants of Camarauz Guddah" refers to "Brahmans and others." In other words, the village was not obvious, not transparent. It had to be spelled out through a grouping of the types of people to be included in it. Phraseology, then, served to clarify the extent of the village itself. Bráhmán inhabitants were not automatically to be counted in a mustering of villagers; this petition would rectify that. Thus the inclusion of the karanams here is significant in its contextual redefining of the inhabitants/participants of the village, the "villagers."

This moment of unity within a village involved a social topography with rather rough terrain. Though the signatures and marks appear to represent a group whose willingness to participate was likely economically based, the coalition they formed was important for its potential challenge to other groupings. Adjacent fields could easily have had co-játi owners, despite being across village lines. Karanams of both villages were almost certainly Bráhmáns. And a family member would most certainly have been willing to marry across village limits into a co-játi family. But this instance of solidarity defies these other social entailments. What this petition shows is that social linkages were by no means obvious, and those that did take shape required courage to form. Here I would propose that new to the equation was first the petition itself—its offer of allowing potentially disparate entities to come together. The second novelty was the incorporation of another party into the settlement process—the growing Company bureaucratic mechanism.

One intrinsic feature of the petition, as will be evident in the next chapter with more general petitions (those not exclusively related to boundary resolution issues), is its implicit call for the redistribution of authority, its formal bestowal of authority, onto those petitioned. Petitions and petitioners relinquished power in order to gain power in the end through the response they fully expected from the government of which they were making a request. In the structure and language of the petition and petitioners, it was the Company that came to possess "justice." According to petitioners the Company was "fit" to settle disputes of all sorts. This language, itself a colonial discourse in the hands of petitioners, was, in essence, a taking on the voice and language of the "other." And for this reason, the petition was a medium rife with the potential for self-empowerment. It was a document that permitted the use of colonial symbols and structures in an attempt to achieve local success. All this may be inherent in the production of any petition. In the above case, however, the employment of the petition also necessitated nontraditional solidarities and alliances. That is, petitions, as such, required petitioners. And because the petition of the early nineteenth century was a document of Company bureaucracy, petitioners came together in the form of *bureaucratic groupings*—not in the form of some kinds of "necessary" groupings that may have relied on pre-Company allegiances or epistemologies of a previously existing social order. The people who figured on the lists of petitioners formed solidarities, in a sense, despite themselves and their society, as a result of the basic historical requirements of the petition itself. How else would the karanams (accountants) team up with this slew of mirasidars (land proprietors), especially when we earlier saw a group of mirasidars reject such an alliance? Why should they even defer to the British at all in the process? The heading of a petition from 1799 to George Andrew Ram, then the collector in the Moortayanagar Circar of Guntur, begins with, "Arzee of Curnums, Banians, Weavers, and Inhabitants of Mungalageery." <sup>36</sup> Although the petition leaves us wondering if the first three groups are not inhabitants of the village, we are nevertheless reminded that that document has become the space for the suggestion of new alliances and solidarities. The very listing in the title hints at a grouping that does not neatly exist outside the petition's discursive realm.

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Ultimately, how and why these groups came together may be unanswerable questions. What is available from these actions is a picture of the realm of the possible. The solidarities that formed did not represent so much a break from the past or a discarding of "established social structure." They represented the extent to which those previously understood structures were simply one set of metaphors for modes of action and descriptions of groups. When these people came together with an arzee for the Company as the "Curnums and Inhabitants of Camarauz Guddah" or as the "Curnums, Banians, Weavers, and Inhabitants of Mungalageery," they effectively struck out afresh and established new metaphors for community action. An episode of solidarity produced a new, nontraditional category. We must assume that this process of creating new meaning for categories is not novel in the history

of these societies. (New meanings had probably been created at all times in the past, and are only "more" visible here because of the record.) That they were able to do it with relative ease demonstrates flexibility and an understanding of how solidarities worked. The differences here included the establishment of the new metaphors that could be placed in the record, metaphors that would serve as points of reference for the future and that would be available in the future, for Indians, and for those ominous "others," the institutions of colonialism. In the oral-tradition world, social boundaries may have had great permeability at liminal moments—crisis, dispute, and so on. The record, with its pretense of permanence (remember Murray's insistence that the man was to "fix immutably the boundaries of the villages") forced these metaphors to reflect back on the solidarities and to take hold in a new way. Expression, through the record and the "other," became the means of transforming one-time useful metaphors for groups within society into new, more strongly held identities. Who these people were (or believed themselves to be) was altered because the answer to that very question, "Who are we?" became a function of who they *said* they were, and not simply of who they were by virtue of birth or other ascriptive category.

Although the importance of the presence of a colonial structure (with its records and bureaucratizing mechanisms) cannot be overstated, the colonial role in the boundary dispute process during this period was extremely limited. It was the villagers who *taught* the collector. They were the ones fighting to have their positions reflected in the record. And it was the villagers, not some British orientalist, who put forth arguments and reasonings, quotes from text and examples of precedence, and who insisted on both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic traditions, all in an attempt to bolster their cases in the space of the records and in the eyes of the collector. The wide scope of their arguments conveys a sense that the villagers were incorporating an understanding of what they understood to be legitimate (or enforceable) points of reference into notions of what they thought the collector wanted to hear. They negotiated the terms of their inclusion into the space of the records. Their cases, therefore, had to be able to work across many boundaries and become meaningful to various different kinds of listeners. What this level of flexibility demonstrates, among other things, is that there appears to have been no rock-bottom, necessary reference points or obvious (traditional) lines of thinking for the articulation of group boundaries, and that Telugu speakers had the upper hand in deciding how the process of the creation of categories that referred to themselves would take place.

### **The Extent of Colonial Influence in Making Boundaries**

All of this is not to say that the hand of colonialism was absent from a shaping of the outcome. Nor were Ram, Murray, or Read solely fellow participants—equals in the arguments. Though colonialism's most important role in these boundary disputes was to provide a space for acting out

identity, it could also perform other functions. At times colonialism could help set up a narrower range of possibilities for the resolution of a village dispute. This is apparent in the Guntur case of early 1799.

In the process of attempting to walk the boundary to settle that Guntur dispute, it became clear that "the karanams of Pautoor had absconded, some time since, and that there were only two persons present ready to tread the Boundary, namely an Inhabitant of the Barber cast and the mohatad Peon named Lingadoo." <sup>37</sup> George Ram was insistent that the dispute be settled, even in the absence of the karanams, for whom he had obvious contempt. <sup>38</sup> Ram determined that if he could find a tradition, locally based or otherwise, that did not prohibit a shepherd or barber to tread the boundary in the absence of karanams, he would take advantage of it and perform the ceremony. It was at this point that he looked to the "Neguntoo or Gentoo Dictionary." <sup>39</sup> In that work he found something that gave him a certain amount of resolve. Ram proclaimed that each party to the dispute was to find a tradition by which to tread the boundary (and to forget about criteria for the treader). They were to do this such that they could meet the deadline that Ram picked, and then be ready to settle the fracas. He challenged any attempt at the imposition of more obstacles with a daring declaration: "I am therefore bold to say that there is not Shastrum to prevent the treading of a man of the Barber cast." <sup>40</sup> Ram, like others, saw that the debate centered not on which interpretation to choose but on the nature of interpretation itself. Telugu speakers were here faced with a new figure, Ram, who was ready to posit himself as chief interpreter of text. (Of course, with the karanams out of the way this was a far easier ploy to pull off.) And though this reconfigured much of the form of the debate by establishing the possibilities for settlement firmly within *sástra*, it did not change what the root issue in the debates tended to be. In fact, as we will see, Ram's imperative here of insisting on the overlay of tradition onto the settlement process merely added to the available selection of diversionary rhetoric.

The introduction in 1799 of a British official dictating terms added to the ways in which Telugu speakers were capable of discussing tradition as practiced or interpreted. The karanams had absconded because they did not want to see a barber tread the boundary, and because they knew that the *sástra* they had presented to the British would not extricate them. These functionaries were being squeezed by two types of pressure, that of their local needs to maintain an established hierarchy, with them at the top (therefore trying to avoid permitting a barber to occupy such a position), and that of the British to get on with this bureaucratic ceremony in an expeditious fashion, and according to the designs set out by all groups to that point. Ultimately these forces proved to be too much, and rather than compromise what they knew to be practice, though it did not necessarily coincide with the tradition they had preached, they removed themselves from the decision-making process. Colonialism had not defined the hierarchy, nor

had it defined the categories; it had focused the realm of interpretation. The settlement would have to be made through a dialogue among those parties left to talk, even if it meant that those parties were Indians not known to be traditional interpreters of *sástra*, and even non-Indians.

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None of this, however, made colonialism the absolute arbiter of the dispute. As might be expected, then, after the departure of the karanams, even with a mandate from the collector for debate to remain within the confines of *sástra*, dialogue again centered on arguments that suited the needs of Telugu speakers themselves. The posturing again took forms disputants saw fit to use. This time villagers accused the man Ram had chosen of being a thief.

Your other objection that the Barber in question has been accused of theft has I believe no better foundation than the former as it is universally contradicted by the People of his own and the neighbouring Villages.... The accusation of Theft has been merely brought forward by the Pedda Podipauka People *to embarrass the present decision.* [41](#)

Arguments such as this continued to confound Ram in his attempts to come to a quick settlement. Read, the collector for the village on the Masulipatam side of the boundary, objected to the barber and "pariah" cultivators proposed by Ram earlier as being too low in caste. [42](#) Read's men insisted on the application of current practice, and not reference to literary tradition (as Ram had thought might work), for a means to a settlement.

Ram, then, was left scurrying to find a new candidate for treader, or a new way to make his candidate more "authentic." And he did the latter by going to the villagers themselves, and asking them to put forth a legitimate candidate, someone who was and had been a resident of that village for some time. He was forced to validate his choice of a local cultivator with the following claim (half-hearted as it must have seemed to Read and his practice-based assistants): "I am able to affirm on the authority of the Declaration of upwards of 31 persons of Pautoor and the neighbouring villages ... that he is a cadeem or native of the village of Pautoor which he has regularly cultivated." [43](#) The only means of manipulation left to Ram was some kind of management and molding of voices already involved in the settlement process. He was not able to impose a strict hierarchy of authority. Ram became a prisoner of the testimony of the people around him, a tool for a means of establishing legitimacy and asserting authority. And in the course of this maneuvering, the debate not only again shifted to identity from boundary, but also did so ultimately at the expense of the colonizers' authoritative voices and colonialism's attempts to define the parameters of the dispute. Who the disputants were and who the treader would be (in this

case, whether the treader was a "native" of the village) became the focus of the debate. As with earlier instances, identity had been, in fact, the salient issue for Telugu speakers all along, even though the stated problem dealt with where to draw a boundary.

Ram clearly had his own agenda for settling this boundary dispute, as is indicated by the apparent great difficulty he had reconciling differences with Read, and those men's need subsequently to refer the matter to the Board of Revenue in Madras. But the exchanges we see also demonstrate how matters circulated back to Telugu speakers for resolution. At one point Ram was forced to bow to objections raised in connection with establishing contextualized parameters for any one particular settlement. His candidates for treading had been objected to (in another instance) by Read's representative, Temulrow, "as of too low cast [*sic*]." <sup>44</sup> Ram then wrote to Read, "If you think proper to insist on his objection, there can be no settlement of this Dispute at present." If it had ended with that exchange, it would be difficult to make a case for Telugu speakers and the role they played in their own formulations of identity. The representatives of Ram, however, offered another answer to Read and Temulrow, one that forced compromise on both sides, and permitted for the establishment of a Telugu voice regarding the definition of who would be allowed to tread. "The People sent by me judge Lingadoo the mahated peon a Proper Person to tread as he has a family of children and is possessed of some cattle." Somewhere, beyond Ram's actual space of control, Telugu speakers agreed to these conditions for the treading. Urged by the collector and his establishment to find a solution, they came back with a decision of their own making. And, according to form, the resulting stated reason for the peon's suitability to tread was yet another of the many various posturings itself—possession of children and cattle. This (non-caste-based) reasoning happened to prove useful for Ram, who then referred back to his original suggestion and wrote that "it is by [no] means so uncustomary as you intimate for persons of the Barber cast to perform the ceremony of treading a Boundary." <sup>45</sup> In situations when categories were called for as means to affirm understandings and seal relationships, caste could be discarded or inserted, as could custom or respectability, as needed. But each time the conditions and categories used in the dispute were left to the care and manipulation of competing voices in a battle for attributing hierarchy and meaning to those categories. All this happened while working through the determination of the limits of a village.

### Articulating a Village Identity

In the course of this particular dispute there arose a new important feature of the resolution process. A number of people from the village sent a letter to the collector asserting the upright character of the barber. He was, they claimed, as respectable a man as any other in the village. <sup>46</sup> This statement was a completely different way of attributing characteristics to a villager than

had appeared anywhere earlier in the records about boundary disputes, and it is exactly revealing of the formation of a village identity emerging during the expression of solidarity over asserting village limits. With this declaration the man became synonymous with the status of the village itself. He was to be seen as respectable as any other man there, regardless of caste, land ownership, or any other category. Being a villager of that village had become a new legitimate category for the individual. To put a barber forth as the symbol of the village is to drastically displace the importance of other categories for the sake of the village, and eventually for the sake of a village identity. Here the village had become the organizational feature of an identity through the act of expressing the identity of the potential treader in this way to government. The process of writing this down for inclusion in the record forced a recognition of this leap from the individual and his place within previously accepted categories to the political status of the individual in relation to the village body. The leap we see here is made possible by expression and by the space of the petition where villagers argued for a resolution to the dispute.

This equating process (where villager = village) within the boundary dispute went hand in hand with an important naming action that, though it had preceded the equation, now served to solidify the identity. The treader himself could be referred to by the name of the village for which he trod. In a case from 1796 the treader was referred to in a letter to the collector as "Parala," the name of the village. <sup>47</sup> This, in a sense, was its own act of validation for the choice of a man to perform a ceremony that would come not only to delineate a village, but also to contribute to the actual identity framing experience. The representative of the village became the village itself, and was thus authoritative about the village, as were all of his fellow inhabitants. This foreshadowed the more significant links seen in the case above (from 1799) when the inhabitants of the village of Pautoor asserted that the barber was as respectable as any man in the village. For the purposes of marking out the boundary of the village and in the course of disputing that boundary in petitions, a barber could become the village, any individual could become the village, thereby allowing the people of the village to conceive of their collective identity in terms of the village itself. Again, having to say it in the record helped make that relationship so.

Before his direct encounter with Ram, John Read, the collector at Masulipatam, had written to the Board of Revenue in Madras to explain his interpretation of a dispute. Read intended to set this explanation against Ram's insistence that this dispute could be settled quickly and expediently without reference to certain authorities. Read, however, eventually also sought some authoritative local voice and set up an interview with a murmadar, someone taken to be an expert on village matters. He asked the murmadar, "Who should decide ownership of land?" <sup>48</sup> Now, even though this was very different from asking where a boundary lay, the response it received from a man "the most fitted from their situations to afford me Information"

is revealing for the attention it gave to answering who the villagers were. [49](#)  
The interview included the following:

Collector	Murmadar
By which Village is the boundary to be trodden?	Those who claim the Land as their Right should tread the Boundary.
Who should be chosen for that Office?	A <i>Curnum</i>
Can no other person than a Curnum tread the Boundary?	No.
Are all the curnums eligible to tread the Boundary?	No, only that Curnum who is chosen by the Opposite Party.
May not an Inhabitant of a Village unconnected with the Dispute tread the Boundary?	The <i>Inhabitant</i> of a different Village should not tread the Boundary. <a href="#">50</a>

The murmadar made it clear here that the operating structure of settling this dispute was to be founded on the idea of the integrity of the village. Other titular distinctions that might arise in the decision as to who may tread were of less importance. The *jāti* issue bothered the murmadar. Earlier in the interview he expressed qualms about the possibility of barbers and washers treading the boundary. But his insistence that it be a *karanam Inhabitant* of the appropriate village who must tread placed new lines around the *karanam* and his relation to the village. Where it had before been "The Curnums and Inhabitants of ..." might now read "The Inhabitants of..." The murmadar conceded that a different inhabitant may tread, someone other than a *karanam*. But he did not accept the idea that a *karanam* from a different village may tread. Though it was not as simple as all this, though change did not occur as quickly as might seem implied here, it is clear that the murmadar and his like (so called "authorities" of tradition), in the process of explaining "The Village" and its workings, were coming up with new meanings for it themselves.

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At one point in the interview Read came to the heart of the matter: because the Company had, through various circumstances, caused the *karanams* to leave, who should tread the boundary? The murmadar answered in a way that must have been obvious to him. But it was also an answer that spoke

both to the epistemological rift between the British and the villagers and to the special nature of the village unit in this society. The murmadar answered Read's question about a village that has no karanam: "There can be no Village without a curnum." <sup>51</sup> This was to say, every village had a karanam. But we might as well take from it that other meaning: without the presence of one of these integral members of the village, a village had no life, no unity, no existence. A village simply did not exist without a karanam. <sup>52</sup> The murmadar was not voicing this concept in terms of his own sense of village identity. He was speaking with an awareness of the village, an awareness of all the individuals' relationships to the village, and an awareness that the village existed at some level solely because of that collective identity of all the village selves. He spoke of the village self in terms of possibilities and limits. But the experience of again and again describing the limits and possibilities of the village, of acting out limits, to government officers connected these tellers to a new experience of "village"—a sense of the village that itself was tightly bound to these explanations. Village identity arose out of the repetition of precisely these types of moments of expression.

Most of these turn-of-the-century cases were consistent in the extent to which we see language that only obliquely articulates notions of a village identity. Although the petition clearly provided a forum to do so and boundary disputes could easily, with the required solidarities along village lines, encourage an explicit narrative on the self, it is only in flashes that we see a village identity emerging at this time. We seem to see instead a debate over identity without an established discourse of identity. In these cases of Telugu speakers and their petitions we see a society in which objectifiable criteria were the bases for assessing individuals and their worth or appropriateness in social settings. That is, was the person a *cadeem* (a native)? Was he the owner of cows? Was the treader walking quickly enough? One excerpt from a petition on boundary making shows the objectifiable criteria notion clearly.

Objections to Lingareddy	Reply by the Inhabitants of Pautoor
5. Lingareddy has only a couple of Bullocks one She Buffalo and one calf it is not foreseen whether any person may hereafter assist Lingareddy in this respect in order to make <i>him appear</i> every way qualified to tread the Boundary in question. <sup>53</sup>	5. He is a <i>Cadeem</i> (native) <i>Family man cultivator</i> and is <i>in possession of cattle</i> and may be permitted to tread the Boundary without any objections.

Over time, however, the need for this line of reasoning appears to have subsided.

Questionings and debates such as this over who may tread occurred with decreasing frequency in the records. In their places arose collective (community-wide) agreements to determine nativity or suitability in general. As objectifiable social boundaries made way for subjective understandings of the self and groups, the state of being a suitable treader would no longer rest in the actions of an individual, but in the criteria set forth by the subjective assessment of the individual and the group. Telugu-speaking society would no longer hold the treader to those external conditions, but rather to the quality of the person himself. There would become an equation between the evaluation of a man and the suitability of a treader. It was for this very reason that the description of the barber as suitable was so awkward for the participants at that early date. The general logic of that period dictated that only objective criteria should determine who should tread (caste, cows, buffaloes). As a barber, then, he should not have been suitable. Allowing subjective criteria to have any sway—saying he was respectable and therefore suitable—was a bold move for Telugu speakers. But the barber had become a *villager*, making it conceivable to give him the necessary subjective criteria. It therefore remains critical to remember that it is by virtue of the fact that Telugu speakers could even begin to use subjective criteria in such an instance at the turn of the nineteenth century that we can recognize their understanding of the realm of the possible, that we can begin to understand that there were real limits to those "absolute" categories such as *jāti*. Ultimately the "village" and the category "villager" of this or that village became a legitimate category, opening up for Telugu speakers a wider world of category use and identity assertion. Through expression in the medium of the petition, the shift from understandings of the self being based on action, external and objectifiable, to discourse, internal and subjective, was able to begin to take place.

### Later Boundary Dispute Resolution

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The year 1816 saw an attempt by the Company to formalize boundary dispute resolution. Regulation XII of that year stipulated that pancháyats alone be convened to handle such resolutions. Even so, as late as 1820 boundary disputes could still be counted on to produce debate surrounding group identity. The Company left open for contest how lines would be drawn, and Telugu speakers played their parts by insisting on particular roles in arriving at boundary line settlements. However, as one would expect, as village identities emerged and became accepted, as the establishment of some kind of discourse on identity became a reality, petitions and boundary disputes provided different functions (became less important) for their users and contestants. Furthermore, issues of land tenure changed—became less

open to debate—thereby ameliorating tensions arising out of boundary issues in general. <sup>54</sup> And the petition, as an expression genre, with its particular role in providing a forum for the formulation of the self, slowly came to play a smaller role for both parties when it came to boundary disputes. Finally, whether as the ongoing result of critical points of cultural negotiations shifting to different arenas of contestation, religious identification, caste, nationality, or the like, the importance of dialogue in the framework of boundary disputes would gradually lessen over the course of the nineteenth century.

By January of 1829 the mode of understanding boundary disputes was already showing signs of change. J. Dent, the collector of Masulipatam, wrote to the Board in Madras his obviously strong feelings about the way in which boundary dispute resolution should take place.

I am convinced that disputes of this nature, which so materially affect the Prosperity of the Frontier Talooks can never be finally settled but by European Agency. Your Board will observe from the correspondence that I have taken the line laid down in the Map of the District, furnished to me from the Surveyor General's Department, as the correct Boundary. <sup>55</sup>

Although it may be tempting to see this in terms of colonial desire to circumvent the involvement of Telugu speakers in the decision-making process, there is more to this particular dispute, and the differences are indicative of a different stage in the relationships between Telugu speakers and Government, and of a different, more firmly established sense of identity among Telugu speakers themselves.

By 1829 almost all boundary disputes in Telugu-speaking areas were attempting to determine the line between the lands of the Nizam and those under the control of the British. Interdistrict lines had by then been well established for a number of years. Furthermore, procedures for setting up a boundary line had also settled into a more predictable format. Instead of conferring with an individual karanam from the village, the panchayat was the body that spoke for the village, a confirmation in some ways of a solid village unit that had not been there before. "It is a circumstance well known to all the inhabitants of that part of the country, that the Panchayet was *fully competent* to have settled the dispute justly." <sup>56</sup> The collector and his accompanying entourage were called in only because of the objections from the despondiah of the zamindar on the Nizam's side of the boundary as to the legitimacy of the line produced by the panchayat. But because an objection had been raised at all, it followed that the dialogue between the Nizam's representatives and those of the East India Company would be no less posture-filled than earlier boundary disputes. The despondiah claimed

that the pancháyat was unduly influenced by the intrigues of one "Bheem Rao a Mootsuddee of the Masulipatam Court." <sup>57</sup> Later the Board also read that the maps themselves were not authoritative because they merely outlined areas that were in dispute, and that map makers did not arrogate to themselves the power to decide a true boundary. <sup>58</sup> Eventually, the boundary was settled by a treading performed by the collector and the representative of the Nizam along a line that almost matched the boundary drawn in the maps of the Surveyor General.

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Every one of these changes in the settling of a boundary dispute was absolutely consistent with the state of the contemporary awareness of the village identity. It was not that the British were circumventing the villagers, but that the villagers were no longer so intimately concerned about the actual settling of the dispute. They were confident in the pancháyat's ability to decide the matter as a representative body of the village. And they did not instigate a flurry of petitions to obtain redress from the collector for the sake of protecting their village limits. This confidence, knowledge about the boundaries of the village and the village identity, would carry itself into later disputes also.

A boundary dispute of 1836, again between villages on either side of the line dividing the Company's lands from those of the Nizam of Hyderabad, firmly demonstrates how the debate had ceased to be one exclusively posed over identity formation. It also confirms how bureaucratic structures such as the record did not close off knowledge creation, but in fact extended dialogue on any particular pertinent/contemporary issue, as was the case in the dispute of 1829. Unlike earlier debates, for the most part, this one was worked on without reference to locals. For their part, locals did not seek out the collector's ear this time either.

A letter from a captain at the scene addressed to J. C. Wroughton, Esq., the Collector at Masulipatam, requested that the receipt of the produce from the disputed lands be held in Amanee (under government control) until a settlement was reached. In the meantime the zamindar had sent in troops to prevent movement of the produce from the spot where it had been cut. <sup>59</sup> On the Nizam's side of the line a familiar scene was acted out. Seetaputtee Rao Naib of the Mudrah Purgannah wrote to the Naib of the Sirkar,

There are many villages near disputed fields where there are one and two Rohillas and others; those people came and said "The Zamindar has thus committed such outrage upon these people—they will come to commit similar violence upon us—let however many come, to meet disgrace at their hands because we are only one or two, what is there in Sepahegeeree? *Therefore relieve us, or otherwise we want no Sirdar's rules, let any number of people*

come upon us we will put down one or two and afterwards sacrifice our lives." [60](#)

Despite the apparent incendiary nature of the dispute, no such letters arrived in the collector's office from the other (Company) side of the boundary. In a sense the debate had already been worked out, and government was given the opportunity to handle the problem on its own, in basic bureaucratic fashion. The Company agreed to the resident's suggestion that the treaty line of 1768 be used to finalize the matter. Clearly the debate was different in certain respects from other disputes. There was, most notably, a shift from intervillage to international arguing. But no doubt the ryots were still divided over the drawing of the actual line; despite this, they did not argue. They did not engage in the series of posturings that characterized all the earlier disputes. The villagers did not argue (or petition the collector) precisely because the actual line was never the salient issue in the debates over the earlier village boundaries. While they were establishing boundaries in those contests, any issue might spark a series of letters and charges. But that was because more important issues were at stake. By 1836, even though it was still early in the larger picture of the identity formation process, there existed a wider freedom of action for government and a loosening of reins by Telugu speakers. Control was acceded to government because Telugu speakers had already wrested from it the particular control they sought earlier. The division of labor in this changing society had altered to the extent that Telugu speakers were willing to give up certain juridical powers over *geographic* boundary making as long as they retained sway over the identity-boundary making (category creation) that happened to hold importance for them at that time.

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Thus in 1838 the collector at Guntur could write to the collector at Masulipatam that a boundary dispute that had arisen over the possession of an island in the Krishna River could be settled by the simplest of means:

The inhabitants of Volaru were willing to abide by the decision which may be given by Moommaravany Gooravunnah, inhabitant of Bobberlankah and that the Bobberlankah people said that they would consent to the decision which may be given by Vamoolapully Gopannah, inhabitant of Voluroo regarding the Lanka dispute between Volaroo in this Zillah and Bobberlankah in your jurisdiction. The proposition of settling the matter at issue by a single arbitration would appear to be inexpedient in as much as not being in conformity with Regulations. It will not be in the power of the Collector to enforce the decision should the party against whom it is given object to it afterwards. Accordingly, Vamoolapully Gopunnah and others, the Jeroptedars (?) of Volaroo have presented before me an arzee praying that a decision may be given by PUNCHAYAT according to Regulation XII of 1816. [61](#)

The fact that the parties in the dispute were willing to accept either arbitration or the decision of a pancháyat, according to the regulations of the time, signaled a move to a different level of understanding on the part of Telugu speakers regarding the relationships between them, their village boundaries, and the Company. Here it was the collector who seemed to be adding to the process, for boundary marking had become an administrative, not an epistemological, issue.

A brief look at a much later claim of a boundary dispute shows immediately how drastically changed the entire situation had become. In fact, the only reason it elicits any kind of action on the parts of officials is that it is another instance of an international boundary issue. Such matters were of necessity referred to Madras for resolution, thus producing the unusual amounts of paper work for this period.

The disputes existed between Baravancha and its surrounding villages, Ganugapad and Marepalli, and Gopavaram and Vinagudapa.

4. Of these the chief was the first. The Baravancha Inamdars, who are Mussalman Fakirs and their renters claimed in all about 7,000 acres of land, including eighteen topes and some tanks belonging to Nuzvid

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5. A falser claim was never made; *it is plainly so by every map I have in my office*; and the two arbitrators having arrived at the decision that the evidence in behalf of Baravancha was untrue, marked out the boundary of the village in accordance (except in very trifling instances, where the Baravancha ryots had had *long and uninterrupted* enjoyment) with the *evidence, documentary and oral*, of the residents of the villages in the jurisdiction of Her Majesty's Government. 62

Here, of course, we see that textual bases for authority have achieved the highest level of prominence. Not only is any suggestion of an act of treading no longer the focal point, but it is also seen by government officials as a completely transparent means to dupe those against whom the boundary dispute is being made.

The boundaries given for the most part are merely indistinguishable marks, such as Masara (gray land)–"a line of bushes"–"stony ground," etc., and it is impossible by the utmost ingenuity to make it fit the line indicated by the claimants. *When showing their boundary*, the Jaghirdars assured us that the line they pointed out was strictly in accordance with that laid down in

the Chekunama, but such was by no means the case. The line passed through a number of hills, yet none of their names were given nor was the village of Vettigudipad mentioned in it. Such being the case, *I consider it to be utterly worthless* as a means of establishing the case set up. [63](#)

Ceremony has given way to an understanding that there is a reality beneath all the talk, ascertainable through investigation and reference to evidentiary documents. Dialogue in the form of arguing the boundary and then treading or plowing it—making a village and its villagers—has been supplanted by authoritative monologue. Here village identities are not formed by the settlement of the boundary because the village is not constituted anew with the resolution of the dispute. The former practice created a new village, and therefore an additional feature of identity, for its people because the treading was the act that actually gave the village its physical makeup, and the debates that preceded the treading gave the villagers a broader discursive makeup. Based on records from the last part of the nineteenth century (1874) there appears to have arisen a conviction among Telugu speakers in the area, as well as among the British, that the village existed in some real and unchanging shape, as did its inhabitants, and that it was merely the role of government to find that village through the sifting of facts. The willingness by the Company to hear interpretations of claims to authenticity that were then debated and accepted or rejected in the early part of the century, was now supplanted by a summary justice meted out by the Madras government over claims that were either completely hollow or completely true—no debate was to be heard. The collector demonstrated this is his assessment of some of the evidence and testimony from claimants on the Nizam's side of the boundary.

Witnesses described the Baravancha boundary as pointed out to us with little variation; the glibness with which they did so was remarkable; all began at the same point; and the impression left was that they had got it up for the occasion.... No. 6 saw the Zamindar sign the document, yet all three witnesses distinctly state that they each went alone with the Jaghirdars, now dead, to receive the khut, and that the other witnesses were not there. In the face of such contradiction it is impossible to credit any of them. [64](#)

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Treading was not an option because, at this new level of understanding, one set of claims had to be false. Arguments now appeared to be made to fit the existing documents, instead of a set of documents being produced from the making of the boundary. By 1874, action and articulation on the parts of villagers had shifted to bureaucratic discourse on the veracity of claims, and the entire focus had moved from *process* to a type of *confirmation*—authorization—by government.

Most important, by virtue of all parties by this period having come to accept the negotiated role for government in the resolution of boundary disputes (there was now a set procedure, by and large), the petition and the debates could not be the loci for the formation of village identities. If those identities were to become politicized again, they would have to find a different set of historical circumstances besides boundary disputes in which to do it, and a different medium besides petitions (the census, for instance) with which to articulate those identities.

In the end the dispute was decided against Baravancha but it was allowed to retain strips of land outside the real boundary, including altogether about 400 acres, on the ground of long continued possession. The boundary thus decided was marked out by what may be called "a ring fence of stones" each inscribed with a sun and moon and the Christian year in Telugu. [65](#)

This boundary resolution was a far cry from the way Murray was forced to resolve the dispute in his area eighty years earlier, despite its being virtually identical to the way he had initially proposed. Devoid of the politics of culture and identity in this case, the dispute's resolution could take on a rather bland marking out of the boundary line on the basis of the accepted documents in hand.

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By 1905 only the oddest of cases made it past the orderly practice of using existing evidence to establish village boundaries. In one case, it just so happened, a hill that lay between two villages had been excluded from both the original survey map and the resurvey map of the area. [66](#) This exclusion led to an investigation of the boundary and a process reminiscent of earlier days. But even then, the tahsildar was able to manage a resolution after a fairly meaningless series of interviews and some research into the history of land use by the two villages. Without a survey map to guide them, officials almost reluctantly arrived at an answer that both sides were willing to accept.

It has now to be decided what the boundary line between Pedda Saukarlapudi and Chinna Saukarlapudi portion of the hill is. *When there is no other means of defining such a limit*, the portion of the hill that drains down into a village must be held to belong to that village. [67](#)

Treading and plowing were out of the question. "No other means" here referred not to those ancient methods of definition, but to the fact that no documents existed that could satisfy the tahsildar as to the objectifiably ascertainable limits of the two villages. The fact that the hill was not arable land, and thus was not questioned as a basis for who might use it to enhance

their livelihoods, was not the issue here. If anything, that fact perhaps only led to the late date of this issue coming before any authorities. Earlier debates, it should be recalled, were never about some material basis underlying where each village ended. Those disputes always referred, instead, to the ways in which the marking of the physical boundaries of the village were connected to the labeling of the people of the village. When those definitions ceased being contested, boundary disputes, such as this one of 1905, ceased involving heated debates.

As a final example, a case from 1913 demonstrates how completely closed had become the connection between drawing a boundary for a village and the possibility of that action being taken as a challenge to the identity of the village. By this late date the possession of a village identity by inhabitants of a village was unassailable, and by no means open to interpretation. In this case the actual ground of the disputed land was split. It was decided that the land which villagers from Gudimetla had been cultivating, despite its being in dispute, would be given to Madras, the British, and thereby stay attached to the village itself. <sup>68</sup> As a compromise, the diamond works that were also part of the disputed area would be given to the Nizam, as per a 1766 treaty between the Nizam and the East India Company. The decision to grant the cultivable land to Madras was based solely on the fact that the village and all of its inhabitants should remain a unity. Neither party broached the possibility that the village of Gudimetla should be divided, a resolution that would have forced some inhabitants to become attached to the other village in the dispute, Ushtepalli. Nor did anyone suggest that the treaty of 1766 was open for interpretation in that way.

The historical process of resolving village boundary disputes and the eventual delineation of an identity for "villagers" offers a framework for seeing how Indians could work with the East India Company bureaucracy in such a way as to establish for themselves contingent identities, transcendent of conventional categories. This learned practice would become only more sophisticated as the century wore on, and applicable to more situations in which negotiations with colonial officials were called for. Both the learned activities of dealing with bureaucracies and that of using newly introduced technologies to form new categories translated well into being able to understand many of the larger discursive units that arose by the end of the nineteenth century, nationalism and regionalism based on language being two such formations. In the next chapter the case of the petition in general serves as another example of how Telugu speakers furthered the process of adapting notions of the self to the politics of culture in the nineteenth century.

**Notes:**

**Note 1:** A version of this chapter originally appeared as "Manufacturing Village Identity and Its Village: The View from Nineteenth Century Andhra," *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (1999): 87–120.[Back.](#)

**Note 2:** The name of this town in Telugu is pronounced "[Machilipatnam.](#)"[Back.](#)

**Note 3:** The full account of this inquiry is located in Godavari District Records, vol. 961, fols. 235–252. It should be noted that most of the boundary dispute controversies that are present in the records (and thereby available to us) are there because of their international or interdistrict nature. Boundary disputes that did not have such characteristics were most likely settled either without reference to the collector in the first place, or by the collector himself, without reference to the Board of Revenue in Madras. Jagannaikpuram was part of what is now [Kakinada](#). The Dutch and the British had factories very close to each other in that area. [Images of recently cut paddy fields.](#) It was these fields and piles of cut paddy that collectors were to survey and use for their determination of a village's tax assessment. [Images](#) of contemporary village and other boundary demarcations.[Back.](#)

**Note 4:** Godavari District Records, vol. 961, fol. 236. Note that "Gentoo" was used in place of "Telugu" by many British officials up to the early part of the nineteenth century. "Gentoo" may come from the Portuguese word for "gentile." See Horace H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, ed. A. C. Ganguli and N. D. Basu (Calcutta, 1940 [1855]), 267.[Back.](#)

**Note 5:** Note here the credence attributed to the authority of paper by villagers as opposed to the irreverence attributed to the trodden boundary. This partiality may explain to some extent the desire on the parts of Indians to seek places in the district records for their voices.[Back.](#)

**Note 6:** There are indications, though not explicit in the record, that Murray wanted a pancháyat (meeting of village leaders) convened. Other boundary disputes called for pancháyats outright. In any case, the arbitration that Murray sought would almost certainly have taken the form of a pancháyat.[Back.](#)

**Note 7:** Godavari District Records, vol. 961, fol. 238.[Back.](#)

**Note 8:** See Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India, 1556–1707* (Madras, 1963), 231–232.[Back.](#)

**Note 9:** *Despondiah* is a term for a local official. According to Wilson he was "the hereditary revenue accountant of a district or certain number of villages, holding office by hereditary tenure, and paid by lands" (Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 206). Currently, [village boundary markers](#) are only a convenience and hold little importance for cultivators or government.[Back.](#)

**Note 10:** Godavari District Records, vol. 961, fol. 243.[Back.](#)

**Note 11:** The Telugu word is not given. Later passages translate ప్రచారం (pracháram) as "custom."[Back.](#)

**Note 12:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 526. Note also that there are no mentions of caste requirements here.[Back.](#)

**Note 13:** Madras Board of Revenue [MBR] Consultations, vol. 220, fols. 1734—1735. The [boundary of Nidamole](#) is today a matter of little consequence.[Back.](#)

**Note 14:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3068, fol. 77 (ca. 1800). "Curnams" here refers to the Telugu term *karanam*, a village accountant (J. P. L. Gwynn, *A Telugu—English Dictionary* [Delhi, 1991], 112.)[Back.](#)

**Note 15:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3067, fol. 53 (16 March 1800).[Back.](#)

**Note 16:** A *vakíl* was an agent assigned to handle legal matters.[Back.](#)

**Note 17:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3073, fols. 208—216 (ca. 1798).[Back.](#)

**Note 18:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 528. *Mámúl* referred to the "usual practice" (Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 514). *Mámúl* is an Arabic word by origin but has come to be, probably through Bengali, commonly used by Telugu speakers in such situations.[Back.](#)

**Note 19:** Letter from J. Wrangham, collector of Masulipatam, 13 June 1795, to Governor and Board of Revenue, MBR Consultations, vol. 132, fol. 5076 (June 1795). Gumastas were agents of collectors, zamindars, and even merchants (Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 294).[Back.](#)

**Note 20:** This is an idea that has not been developed thoroughly in Indian historiography. For some discussion of the possibility of special sets of ties between villagers and their particular village in South India see, for instance (in the case of weavers and "weaving villages") Sinnapah Arasaratnam, *Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1650—1740* (Delhi, 1986), 265—273, or David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton, 1985), 36 ff., for the case of Bráhmaṇ sabha villages. For some brief mentions of this at the wider level, see C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (New York, 1988), 26—32. Some attention to the possibility of such a village identity, using earlier Mughal sources, is given in Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 123—124; John Richards, "The Seventeenth Century Crisis in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 24 (1990): 632—633, and *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge, 1993), 80—81.[Back.](#)

**Note 21:** MBR Consultations, vol. 220, fol. 1731 (March 1799). What the murmadar is faced with in this question is whether a non-landholding resident of the village is eligible to tread the boundary in the ceremony. ("Gentoo" here refers to someone who is not a *mirasidar*—someone with a kind of title to land

use.) The "vetty" is most likely "chetty," a term for a caste generally associated with business as opposed to agriculture.[Back.](#)

**Note 22:** Note, however, that the murmadar did not (as we will see) accede to a barber's or washerman's treading, though in this passage he did not rule outright against either of them performing the ceremony. Here he merely set forth an interpretation of tradition, and explained there was no custom for such action (different *játi*s treading). It appears he was reluctant to acknowledge village ties at certain levels, as in when they compromised his understanding of *játi*. That the role of the village as a single unit was not understood in the same way by the colonial official is perhaps not surprising. A 1796 understanding of the *játi* implications on the part of the British, though straight forward, was quite different from the murmadar's: "a weaver therefore may very readily be performed before the Curnum to tread the boundary. The case of the Banian is not so clear; the general bad Reputation of his cast (he not very scrupulous) relative truth renders him not altogether so proper" (Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3047C, fol. 858).[Back.](#)

**Note 23:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3047C, fol. 867. *Pariah* is a Tamil term for a person belonging to any number of actual *játi*s, and is being used here to apply to a Telugu group that the collector considers "low" caste.[Back.](#)

**Note 24:** MBR Consultations, vol. 220, fol. 1719 (March 1799). Of course, this is contrary to the murmadar's claim that the obvious person should be the landholder.[Back.](#)

**Note 25:** See Richards, "The Seventeenth Century Crisis in South Asia," 633, and *The Mughal Empire*, 82.[Back.](#)

**Note 26:** "The Seventeenth Century Crisis in South Asia," 632—633.[Back.](#)

**Note 27:** See Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, 1707—48* (Delhi, 1986), 105, and Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 231—233, for example.[Back.](#)

**Note 28:** Again, though the presence of a British administrator should not be over determined, differences from Mughal functionaries included the fact that these men were westerners, they were seeking "permanent" *physical* boundaries, and they put forth the *written record* as a permanent and final document.[Back.](#)

**Note 29:** *Arzee* was a common term in the region for any petition. See chapter 3 for more discussion on the role of the petition at this time.[Back.](#)

**Note 30:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3047C, fol. 865. Note here also that, as in other communications with Madras, it was the collector who provided for the Board the gloss of "enjoyment" for *anubhavam*. *Purgana* refers to Wilson's "pargana, ... A district, a province, a tract of country comprising many villages.... The actual extent varies, but the distinction is permanent" (Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 640).[Back.](#)

**Note 31:** For the special relevance of the concept of the mirasidar as proprietor of land see, for example, Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley, 1994), 32–33.[Back.](#)

**Note 32:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3047C, fol. 867.[Back.](#)

**Note 33:** Godavari District Records, vol. 961, fol. 240.[Back.](#)

**Note 34:** Godavari District Records, vol. 961, fol. 240. Note here also that Murray was not able to communicate the order in Telugu himself.[Back.](#)

**Note 35:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 583, as cited on 2 February 1799.[Back.](#)

**Note 36:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 450 (17 January 1799). Note that the collector's name is only coincidental with the North Indian pronunciation of the name of the Hindu deity. G. A. Ram was English. See Charles C. Prinsep, *Record of Services of the Honourable East India Company's Civil Servants in the Madras Presidency, from 1741–1858* (London, 1885), 118.[Back.](#)

**Note 37:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fols. 466–467 (26 January 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 38:** Unstated, but elsewhere inferable, is that the karanams absconded because of a disagreement with Ram as how best to settle the dispute. They had been asked points of reference from ancient texts and had had to concede that, according to those texts, there was no injunction against a non-Brahman or non-landholder's treading the boundary. The Karanams were uncomfortable with this possibility. Why they were asked about laws from ancient texts is another, British and colonial-knowledge-production, issue.[Back.](#)

**Note 39:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 589. "Gentoo," again, referred to Telugu. Interestingly, this example is another side of the process that Nicholas Dirks claims to identify in *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1988). There, the British did not make up tradition. Rather, it seems, informants (in most cases Bráhmans) offered the British a limited set of traditions from which to choose. The British chose as suited their needs. In this case, however, we see a variation. The Bráhman karanams, as if having unleashed the monster of tradition and then not being able to recall it, found themselves passed over as a basis for authority.[Back.](#)

**Note 40:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 590 (2 February 1799). Ram's reference here to "shastrum" relates to the body of Sanskrit literature and tradition that formed the basis of Brahmanic teachings about the ordering of society.[Back.](#)

**Note 41:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 589.[Back.](#)

**Note 42:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3075A, fol. 95 (20 April 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 43:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3075A, fol. 95 (20 April 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 44:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 466 (26 January 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 45:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 589 (2 February 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 46:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3074B, fol. 590 (2 February 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 47:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3047C, fol. 868 (6 July 1796).[Back.](#)

**Note 48:** Letter from John Read, Collector at Masulipatam, to Governor and Board of Revenue, Ft. St. George, Madras, MBR Consultations, vol. 220, fol. 1716 (4 March 1799). Note here also how the colonial discourse could attempt to frame a discussion of boundaries in terms of ownership. Boundary, on the other hand, could remain beyond that realm for these Telugu speakers. Discourse on boundary could easily surround tranquility and order—here also read influence and its maintenance. But boundary also had different possible immediate meanings for peasants. For them it lay more in "What do I plow?" than a question of ownership, that is, who benefited from the land. Nevertheless, as seems evident in the answers that the murmadar gave, there was a mutual recognition of what the intent of the interview in general was, and thus the answers to Read's questions were quite coherent and should not be stigmatized for their inclusion in a colonial framework on ownership.[Back.](#)

**Note 49:** Letter from John Read, fols. 1717—1718.[Back.](#)

**Note 50:** Letter from John Read, fols. 1730—1731.[Back.](#)

**Note 51:** Letter from John Read, fol. 1731.[Back.](#)

**Note 52:** There is a Bráhmaṇ-based poem about what constitutes a village that follows this interesting line of reasoning put forth by the murmadar.

అప్పిచ్చు దాత వైద్యుడు ।

యెప్పుడు బారుచును వుండ్లు యేరును దివిజుల్ ।

చొప్పుడిన యూర కుండ్డిన ।

చొప్పాడి కుంనాటి వారు । బారకు సుమతీ ॥ ౯ ॥

A lender, a doctor,

An always full well, a Brahman

Stay in a village that has these

Don't enter into a village that is without these.

From *Sumati Satakam*, manuscript on palm leaf, Andhra Pradesh Oriental Manuscript Library version number 3404, verse 9.[Back.](#)

**Note 53:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 3075A, fol. 98 (April 1799).[Back.](#)

**Note 54:** The historiography on land tenure in India is vast, and no small set of citations would do that corpus justice. But for two general works one might turn to Thomas Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj: Northern India in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1979) or Robert Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison, 1969).[Back.](#)

**Note 55:** MBR Consultations, vol. 1177, fols. 863—864.[Back.](#)

**Note 56:** MBR Consultations, vol. 1177, fols. 876—877. From a letter addressed to the Board of Revenue in Madras by the Nizam's officer, George Lee, of 26 May 1828, in response to the report on the dispute submitted by the collector of Masulipatam, J. Dent.[Back.](#)

**Note 57:** MBR Consultations, vol. 1177, fol. 876.[Back.](#)

**Note 58:** Letter to the Board of Revenue from D. Montgomerie, Deputy Surveyor General, 24 April 1829, Madras, MBR Consultations, vol. 1210, fol. 10,754.[Back.](#)

**Note 59:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 6408, fol. 7.[Back.](#)

**Note 60:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 6408, fols. 77—78.[Back.](#)

**Note 61:** Masulipatam District Records, vol. 4085, fols. 103—104 (20 July 1838).[Back.](#)

**Note 62:** Letter from G. D. Leman, Esq. Collector of the Kistna District, to the Hon. W. Huddleston, Chief Secretary to Government, Revenue Department, Ft. St. George, through the Board of Revenue, Madras, Masulipatam, 27 December 1873. *Proceedings of the Board of Revenue for the Month of February, 1874* (Madras, 1874), 651 (11 February 1874).[Back.](#)

**Note 63:** Letter from G. D. Leman, 659.[Back.](#)

**Note 64:** Letter from G. D. Leman, 654.[Back.](#)

**Note 65:** Letter from G. D. Leman, 664.[Back.](#)

**Note 66:** Proceedings of the Land Records Tahsildar, Godavari District, 5 January 1905, Cocanada, 35. The tahsildar was a collector of revenue, but he could also act as an officer of police (Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, 801.)[Back.](#)

**Note 67:** Proceedings of the Land Records Tahsildar, Godavari District, 5 January 1905, Cocanada, 35.[Back.](#)

**Note 68:** A full account of this case is available in "Proceedings of the Court of Arbitration Relating to the Boundary Dispute Between Gudimetla Village (Kistna District) and Ushtepalli Village (H.H. The Nizam's Dominions)," *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government New (Revenue) Series*, no. 8, vol. 2 (Madras, 1913).[Back.](#)

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