7 A Living Tradition:
An Introduction to the Context of the *Icakkiyamman̠ Katai*

7.1 The Goddess's *nāṭu*

Kan̠n̠iyākumari and Tirunelvēli districts are the main centres of the cult of the goddess Icakkiyamman̠, with Tūṭṭukuṭi (Tuticorin) district a third one of less significance. Although these are where the cult of Icakkiyamman̠ is practised, the origins of the *IK,* as far as historical topography can reveal, must have been in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu near Arkkōn̠am in the north of Tamilnadu, the only place with concrete architectural evidence.[1]

It is clear that the *villuppāṭṭu* or bow-song tradition of the southernmost districts of Tamilnadu (Kan̠n̠iyākumari and Tirunelvēli) took the story and endowed it with an integrity of its own as a sequel to the *Pen̠n̠araciyar Katai,* the elder sister's story[2]—making it the central text of Icakkiyamman̠ worship, which is found only in these districts. If the claim of Paḻavūr[3] (a small village in an area on the border between Tirunelvēli and K.K.Dt.) that it is the original site of the worship and identical with South Paḻakai[4], were accepted by other centres, this would greatly enhance the position of Paḻavūr within the hierarchy of Icakki cult centres. However, we should not ignore the fact that the worship of the goddess has become the focus of social and political interests, inasmuch as different communities and their temples compete with one another, namely the Vēḷāḷa (or Veḷḷāḷa)[5] and Nāṭār[6] communities,[7] each of which insists upon a different place of origin. But no matter where the worship first arose, the story of Icakki is alive and well, thanks to the cult of the goddess within the *villuppāṭṭu* tradition. This is what I shall be attempting to show.

In order to understand the context of the Icakki cult and its relation to the bow-song tradition, it is helpful to consider more closely the district where the goddess is most dominant and where the interwoven relationship between text and ritual has, in my opinion, best been preserved. I am referring

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[1] See Sect. 2.5 above.

[2] See the discussion and Figure 1 in Sect. 2.4, N4 above.

[3] I must stress that nothing has been definitely proved. Members of the temple in Paḻavūr, of course, insist on its primacy (personal communications with the treasurer of the Kiṭaṅkaṭi Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki temple, Paḻan̠iyā Piḷḷai of Paḻavūr [27 March 2002], and Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai [19 January 2003]). Others, such as Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai of Paḻavūr (27 March 2002), are neutral, conceding that nothing has been proved.

[4] That is, the site mentioned in the *IK,* N1.79.

[5] Both forms are in usage. However, the former is considered to be the older of the two. This influential social group can be assumed to have been the dominant upholders of the ritual tradition surrounding the *IK*. For the history of this landowning peasant community, see n. 11 below.

[6] This social group has traditionally been associated with the bow-song performance of the goddess's legend. The Nāṭārs are generally better known under their earlier community name Shanar. On the community's petition in the nineteenth century to change their official name in all public records to Nāṭār, see Ludden 1989:194. For the history of this community, see n. 10 below.

[7] I am referring to the conflicting parties in Muppantal.

to Kanniyākumari district. It is the district where the female deity has not yet undergone a complete shift from a wilderness or crossroads outside an inhabited location to a roadside inside one.[8] In Kanniyākumari district, she is still an outside-inside goddess. Indeed it is remarkable that the two main centres of Icakkiyamman̠ worship, at Mēlāṅkōṭu and Muppantal, are located close to the borders of the district, the one in the west being under Malayali influence, and the other in the east under Tamil influence.

Kanniyākumari district comprises four administrative units (taluks): Tōvalai, Akastīcuvaram, Kalkuḷam, and Viḷavaṅkōṭu. According to the *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* (1995:136f.) the district has an area of 6,184 square kilometres and a population of approximately 1,500,000. It is considered to have the highest rate of literacy in Tamilnadu. The district is bounded by Kerala state in the west, the Western Ghats in the north, Tirunelvēli district in the north-east, and three bodies of water (the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea).

Kanniyākumari district shared a common history with Kerala until 1956, and was known as Nāñcilnāṭu (lit. "the land of the ploughshare"; and also as the land of wet agriculture).[9] As the *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* (1995:137) states, "[t]he main occupation of the people of the area is agriculture. However, considerable population is also engaged in small scale industries like cashew nut industry, weaving, rubber plantation, etc. [...]." The main communities are the Dalits (former Harijans), Nāṭārs,[10] Vēḷāḷas,[11] Muslims, and Nairs. However, the predominant community in three administrative units is the Nāṭār community. Only in the taluk of Tōvalai are the Vēḷāḷas in the majority. However, they form—if not in terms of population, then of social-economic dominance—a major community in the district.[12]

There are today three major religions: Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. According to the

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[8] The latter is the case with the sixty-year-old Muppantal Śri Icakki Ampāl Ālayam temple on Ān̠pāl Street and the Vempati-Icakki temple at Tirunelvēli Road, both in Tūṭṭukuṭi (Tuticorin), and Putukuḷam-Icakki temple in Pālaiyamkōṭṭai (Tirunelvēli district).

[9] For further details, see Blackburn 1980, Chap. 2.

[10] For a historical survey, see Hardgrave (1969: Preface, x), who locates the "homeland" of the Nāṭārs in the Tiruchendur area; see also Ludden (1989:46ff.), who points out the fact that they historically constituted one of the "largest migrant peasant groups" (46), and "moved far from their villages to trade" (48) "[...] In the mixed [wet-dry; B.S.] zone, both north and south of the Tambraparni, they found a more varied set of opportunities, including palmyra cultivation, gardens, and trade." However, according to the same historian, "[...] in the mixed zone, they were not the only new arrivals to come in search of land" (49). Nāṭār settlements also tended to be concentrated in the southern dry zones of the Tirunelvēli region (ibid.:67). As Ludden remarks: "[...] people in the dry zone [...] lived in a hard world of stiff competition and locally tight sub-jati solidarity" (84). It is of some interest for our further discussion that the cultivators of dry land could produce dry crops and cotton independently of water assets—a form of wealth historically in the hands of the elite (Ludden 1989:95)—since produce of the dry zone (for instance, cotton) resists drought and grows with little rainfall (ibid.:161). According to Ludden, the agrarian economy of the dry zone experienced a great boom in the cotton trade during the nineteenth century (159), favoured by the construction of the cotton road in the 1840s (ibid.:160). The reason for the boom was the high demand in industrial Britain (137). The Nāṭār community profited greatly from this.

[11] For the history of the landowning peasant community of the Vēḷāḷas, see Ludden 1989, particularly pp. 67, 85ff., where it is stated that "[i]n the Tamil country, irrigated agriculture developed under the Vellala-Brahman alliance, through which high-caste landowners brought under their control land, labor, and water; established their status in the agrarian system as a whole (85). [T]his community order [...] dominated the whole of the wet zone and scattered throughout the mixed zone (87) [near the Ghats (67)]. [...] In command of water from the Ghats, Brahmans and Vellalas were in a strong position to establish themselves as non-laboring landed elites" (91). It must be mentioned that in Tamil culture a crucial distinction is made with regard to the peasantry. Ludden remarks hereto: "In stark contrast with the dry zone, the wet zone was not a land of rustic warrior-peasants, but of two distinct peasant strata: one owned land but did not labor; the other labored without owning even, in many cases, rights to its own labor power" (93). The first stratum, the "peasant elite [...,] lived [...] in farming communities, yet had become long before the 1700s refined, educated, and socially mobile. From these families came many of the region's most powerful, learned, and able people in the arts, literature, business, and government" (94). As Ludden goes on to point out, the "Vellala mirasidars tended to work land with their own hands more often in the mixed than in the wet zone" (95). One may add that in contrast to the wet zone (devoted to paddy, i.e. unhusked rice) it was cotton, oil seeds, and betel nuts that were the major crops in the mixed agricultural zones (i.e. Nankun̠ēri); see Ludden's chart (1989:133) reflecting the early nineteenth century. – According to the *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* (1995:117), the Nāñcilnāṭu Vēḷāḷas are said to have come from Maturai in the first century C.E.

[12] See Blackburn 1980:59.

Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer (1995:137)

> [d]ifferent people of the same caste group are found both in Hinduism and Christianity. For example nearly 50 per cent of the Nadar caste professes Christianity whereas the other half owe their allegiance to Hinduism. Both these religious groups are found in almost all the villages and towns in the district. Likewise there are Christians and Hindus in castes like Vellalas and Harijan[s/Dalits]. The number of Christians in the Vellala and Harijan groups are low in per centage when compared to that of [the] Nadar caste.

It is obvious that Christianity competes with Hinduism. There have been riots in the recent past between Hindus and Christians (for example, in 1987 in Maṇṭaikāṭu in the Kalkuḷam taluk).[13] As remarked in Blackburn 1980:

> This continual process of converting a large section of the local population to a foreign religion has created a conflict that has been a persistent and volatile aspect of Nancil Nadu society since 1800. [...] This Hindu-Christian conflict, however, is a manifestation of a more fundamental economic conflict between the most populous castes in Nancil Nadu, the Piḷḷai [Vēḷāḷas] and the Nadar (Nāṭar) [56]. [B]y 1850 the reaction of the orthodox Piḷḷais and Nāyars culminated in a wave of violence and destruction of Christian settlements and missionary quarters, particularly in and around Nagercoil [63].[14]

Though Buddhism and Jainism are religions that no longer thrive in the Tamil region, they both acquired considerable influence in their heyday[15] through the establishment of great centres of religious practice around Kāñcipuram,[16] Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam,[17] Maturai,[18] and Nagercoil.[19] As Orr (1999) points out, "[a]lthough many medieval Jain institutions gradually fell into disuse, or were replaced by Hindu temples, Jainism was not [...] a marginal religious phenomenon [...] but was, instead, well-rooted throughout the Tamil countryside" (256).[20] More generally, there were historical contacts among "Jains, Buddhists, and others [Brahmins, non-Brahmins] speaking, writing, singing, and performing rituals in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, and Tamil, with cultic foci on the Jina, the Buddha, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Murugaṉ, the goddess, and other deities" (Cort 2002:85). Whatever points of interaction there were between them was perhaps what led to a complex multiform culture[21] in this southern area, which doubtless displayed

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[13] The Maṇṭaikāṭu riot forced my main informant, the bow-song bard T.M.P., to leave the place and settle with his family in Svayambhūliṅgapuram, closer to Nagercoil. Interestingly enough, this trauma led people to construct a large number of new Icakki temples. This clearly shows that new temples spread fastest precisely where "competition and resistance [are] most intense," an observation made by Ludden (1989:98) with respect to another, earlier political conflict in the second half of the eighteenth century. It moreover reflects the belief in Icakkiyammaṉ as a protectress.

[14] Ludden (1989:188f.) takes note of a conflict in Tirunelvēli town in 1858, involving native Christians. The conflict broke out over demands for street access.

[15] As for Tamil Buddhism, Schalk (1994:197) dates the arrival of Buddhism in Tamiḻakam to the fourth century C.E., thereby countering the common assumption that it was established during Aśoka's time (third century B.C.E.). – In deviation from Obeyesekere (1984:517), who places the dominance of the Jain and Buddhist religion in southern India in the period from the fifth to the eighth century C.E. (similarly, Clothey 1982:51), Orr (1999) finds inscriptional evidence to counter their assumption of the displacement of Jainism "in consequence of the Hindu 'revival' of the sixth to ninth centuries" (253) and postulates that "Jainism continued to flourish after the rise of Hindu devotionalism" (ibid.). She finds evidence for this in the great number of Jain inscriptions up until the thirteenth century (265), and in particular in the references to Jain goddesses (*yakṣīs*) from the eighth to the eleventh century C.E. (266).

[16] Obeyesekere (1984:516f.) argues, citing Ramachandran 1960, that "'Buddhaghosa of Magadha, poet, philosopher and commentator and Thera Buddhadatta were patronized by Samghapala, a king of Kanchipuram. The evidence from his works and those of Thera Buddhadatta clearly points out that Kanchipuram, Kaveripattinam and Madurai were three great centers of Pali Buddhism in the fifth century A.D.'"

[17] The oldest Buddhist sanctuary in Tamiḻakam, according to Schalk (1994:197), is in Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṇam; it has been assigned by the Archaeological Survey of India to the fourth century C.E. (Pallava times).

[18] Schalk (1994:200) remarks that "Jainas enjoyed royal patronage in a limited area in the surroundings of Maturai in pre-Pallava times." Cf. Vēluppiḷḷai 1997:62.

[19] See Obeyesekere 1984:519, where reference is made to "the Buddhist Śrī Mūlavāsam temple and the Jaina shrines of Chitaral [Citaṟāl] and Kallil in the extreme south of India in the Kanyākumārī district."

[20] Orr bases herself on inscriptional evidence.

[21] Cort (2002:85), for instance, argues thus in the case of the various forms of *bhakti* practised in Tamilnadu in earlier times, viewing as he does "bhakti as lying along a continuum from sober veneration to frenzied possession [...within which

religious patterns that were different in different times and places, yet at times also similar across the various traditions.[22] But even though all religions of India have thrived in this district, Hinduism is the only one that has remained alive since the early period.[23]

A remarkable feature of the sacred geography[24] of Kaṇṇiyākumari district is that it is guarded by female power, under different names, in the four quarters of the district: in Kaṇṇiyākumari town in the south-east, as the goddess Kaṇṇiyākumari-Bhagavatī;[25] in Āralvāymoḻi (neighbouring Muppantal) in the north-east, as Mīnākṣī; in Maṇṭaikāṭu in the south-west, as Bhagavatī; and finally in Koḷḷaṅkōṭu in the north-west, as Mēkalai (see *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* 1995:172). These goddesses are considered to be of independent status, that is, without consorts. This is true in particular of Mīnākṣī, who, being identical with the Great Goddess in Maturai, there has Śiva Cokkanāṭaṉ ("the gentle, handsome one") for a partner.[26] As regards Bhagavatī in Kaṇṇiyākumari town, she, too, is associated with Śiva, but is not married to him.

7.2 The Communities Who Patronise the Icakki Cult

The communities most closely associated with Icakki worship—and therefore necessarily most familiar with the Icakki bow-song story—are the Vēḷāḷas (nowadays known as Piḷḷais[27]), the Nāṭars, and the Kaṇiyārs.[28]

Kaṇiyārs are landless labourers[29] who in the past used to follow the matrilineal system of descent *(marumakkaṭṭāyam).*[30] Probably because of their geographical and social marginality,[31] they are believed to worship malevolent spirits. However, one of their deities is Cāstā,[32] a forest god and tutelary

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[continuum] the Jains and Buddhists [...] lay at one end and the Nāyaṉārs and Āḻvārs (as well as cults based on possession by deities such as Murugaṉ and the goddess) lay at the other end" (ibid.).

[22] I base myself on Carrithers (2000:833), who advocates viewing the nature of religious life in medieval South India as eclectic and flexible. Cort (2002:85) similarly calls for a "fluid and less sectarian model for what was happening in ancient Tamilnadu"; also Orr (1999:267), referring to the Tamil medieval period, writes: "[...] the boundary between what is 'Jain' and what is 'Hindu' in the religion of Tamilnadu is not always so easy to locate."

[23] Obeyesekere (1984:518, 520) identifies the late fourteenth century as the historical point of Buddhism's near-total demise in southern India and Jainism's decline to insignificance. On Tamil Jains today, see Singh 1997:1437.

[24] For further details of the sacred geography of Nāñcilnāṭu in general, see Blackburn 1980:72.

[25] The goddess is known under both names. Blackburn (1980:72) writes: "The Kanya Kumari temple [...] is a blend of Tamil and Malayali cultures, exemplified by the twin appellations of the goddess [...]." The goddess's myth tells of her victory by reason of her virginity. By the power of her chastity she destroys the demon who has been troubling the gods and desires her. See also the remarks in Blackburn 1980:74, where the myths of the Kaṇṇiyākumari and Cucintiram temples are compared, and the conclusion drawn that "both are powerful, but the goddess is chaste, while the god [in Cucintiram] is fallible."

[26] Interestingly enough, even though the goddess in Maturai is considered to be of married status, her partner is quite passive by nature.

[27] According to Singh 1998 (N-Z):3642, the Vēḷāḷas of the districts of Madras, Chingleput, and North Arcot, and to some extent of South Arcot, go by the name Mutaliyār, while those in Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, Maturai, and Tirunelvēli are called Piḷḷais. On the Vēḷāḷa community, which is represented in every district of Tamilnadu and Kerala, see Singh 1998 (N-Z):3629ff. (based on Thurston 1909), who distinguishes 26 groups, among which are the "Tonda[i]mandalam Saiva Vellala[s]" (North Arcot and Chingleput), "Pandya Vellala[s]" (Maturai, Ramnad, Tirunelvēli), and "Nanchinad Vellala[s]" (scattered throughout Kaṇṇiyākumari district; also called Piḷḷais). The information provided by Singh suggests that this community migrated mainly from north to south—for instance, some groups from Toṇṭaimaṇṭalam to Ramnad (ibid.:3631), or from Chidambaram to Tiruchirapalli (3638), and still others from Kumbakonam to Travancore, or from Tenkasi (Tirunelvēli district) to Travancore (3631).

[28] According to Singh (1997:621), "[Kaṇiyārs] live in the foothills of the mountains of the northeast part of the Kanniyakumari District adjacent to the towns of Nagercoil, Kuzhitturai and Padmanabhapuram."

[29] Traditionally they were hunters.

[30] See Singh 1997:622. For a definition of *marumakkaṭṭāyam,* see Sect. 6.3, p. 224, n. 24 above.

[31] Blackburn 1980:58: "[...] the Kāṇikars/Kaṇiyārs are a part of the local social system precisely because they are outside it."

[32] Also known as Aiyaṉār, Skt. Śāstṛ. For the Kaṇiyārs' ties with Cāstā, see Clothey 1982:54. Interestingly, the hill shrines of Cāstā are loci "where spirits of the dead are worshipped" (ibid.:55).

Hindu deity of villages in Tamilnadu.[33] Kaṇiyārs also have a link to Icakki. The Icakki story of the Kaṇiyārs is shorter in length, 1093 lines (personal communication from Dr S.M. Mahāleṭcumi on 29 January 2003). The story is performed within their *koṭai* festival, and called the *Muppantal Icakkiyamman̠ Kaṇiyān̠ Pāṭṭu*.[34] There is a belief that there are powerful magicians among the Kaṇiyārs.[35] Their image as a "hill tribe"[36] includes the conviction that they help people who want Icakki to wreak vengeance on individuals or a village. Moreover, it is said that people consult them in their role as exorcists (*Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* 1995:120f., and Perumāḷ 1990:126, appendix n. 10).

Still another social group that patronises the Icakki cult are the Nāṭārs, who have traditionally engaged in agricultural labour and tapping toddy.[37] Their exploitation in the eighteenth century is reflected in a story cited in the *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* (1995:183). Often told in informal settings, it concerns the year 1745 when Nāṭārs received no wages from the Travancore government for digging work during the time of the Nāñcilnāṭu Pattaneru project.[38] Today they are a well-to-do community of landowners in K.K.Dt., their influence extending to the north, to Ramnad and Maturai districts (*Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* 1995:117),[39] where they compete with Tēvars[40] and the landed Vēḷāḷas.[41] The Nāṭārs have "develop[ed] a subculture that is both insular and traditional."[42] Most of the palm-leaf manuscripts of the *Icakkiyamman̠* story are in their hands and have been well preserved.[43] Though they may not have had control of the ritual tradition surrounding the *IK* text, I think that little by little they adopted it from the Vēḷāḷas. It is not surprising that the wealth of this populous community, as it progressed both socially and economically, should have enabled them to support their own singers and establish their own worship centres.

The third community associated with Icakki are the Vēḷāḷas,[44] who "[u]ntil the establishment of British power in 1800 [...] controlled a local ruling council of Nancil Nadu, the Nāṭṭār"[45] (lit. "those who belong to the land, those of the *nāṭu*"). Whereas the Nāṭārs are "strongly Tamil, patrilineal, low status, partially Christian, and laborers," the Vēḷāḷas are "Malayali-influenced, partially matrilineal, high

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[33] Note that, according to Singh 1997:624, it is Bhadrakālī whom they venerate as their *kulateyvam*.

[34] For a study of the *Muppantal Icakkiyamman̠ Kaṇiyān̠ Pāṭṭu*, see Mahāleṭcumi 2003.

[35] See Singh 1997:624.

[36] They were designated as such by the Forest Regulation Act of 1893 (clause e, Section 60); see Clothey 1982:54.

[37] For further details, see Sect. 7.1, p. 233, n. 6 above.

[38] For an account of their suffering under "tremendous social and economic oppression in the 19th and early 20th centuries," when the Vēḷāḷas were often the oppressing social group, see Blackburn 1980:62. One reaction to this social inequality was felt in the early 1800s (ibid.:63), when a wave of conversions to Christianity took place.

[39] For the social mobility of the Nāṭārs, see Hardgrave 1969.

[40] Tēvars belong to the Maṟava social group. On the confrontations between Maṟavas and Nāṭārs that led in the second half of the nineteenth century in some parts of the Tamil territory to serious riots, see Ludden 1989:194f., whose descriptions, which focus on the Tirunelvēli region, provide insight into the problems: "[...the] Shanar attack on customary rules of access to sacred precincts in traditional Marava domains [met fierce resistance, particularly from Maṟavas]. At stake were the honors and status that Marava warriors had invested in dominion for centuries by building and patronizing temples. Conflicts centered around towns where Shanar businessmen prospered most visibly, and around villages where Marava and Shanar fortunes had moved in opposite directions for decades." The outbreak of the conflict was favoured at the end of the nineteenth century by "a season of severe agricultural distress in Tirunelveli and famine throughout Madras Presidency" (194). "Riots broke out in cotton towns at least once again before 1920, pitting Shanar shopkeepers against Marava laborers during food shortages, in 1918." (195).

[41] The conflict with the Vēḷāḷas, according Blackburn 1980:61f., is based on the fact that "within Nancil Nadu, the Nadars are settled in the less fertile portion of the agriculture zone, i.e., from its center to the coastal strip," in contrast to the "Piḷḷais who control the contiguous area from the center of that zone to the mountains" (i.e. the most fertile portion).

[42] Blackburn 1980:65.

[43] The group has always been professionally linked to palm trees, and therefore has had easy access to this writing material; see Ludden 1989:46f.

[44] Perumāḷ (1990:126) notes that for some families among the Vēḷāḷas of Nāñcilnāṭu Icakki is the *kulateyvam* (family deity). She is said to appear in their dreams as a Malayali woman.

[45] Blackburn 1980:59.

status, Hindu, and landowners."[46] Among them are the Vēḷāḷa Ceṭṭiyār community,[47] a social group of a somewhat hybrid make-up, being a fusion of peasant-farmers and merchants who "retain their economic control of agriculture at the cultivation level and have moved into various town-based businesses."[48] The same mixed community appears in the Tamil *kāppiyam Cilappatikāram* (450 C.E.?), Chapter 22 ("Aḻarpaṭu kātai"), its hallmark being a *nāñcil* (plough) and a *tulā/tulām* (pair of scales):[49]

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61   அரைச பூதத் தருந்திறற் கடவுளும்
     [...]
65   வாணிக மரபி னிணிில மோம்பி
66   நாஞ்சிலுங் துலாமு மேந்திய கையினன்
     [...]
83   (மலையவுங் கடலவு மருூம்பலங் கொணரந்து
84   விலைய வாக வேண்டுநர்க் களித்தாங்)
85   குழவுதொழி லுதவும் பழுதில் வாழ்க்கைக்
86   கிழவ னென்போன்...
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                (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:492], Chapter 22, "Aḻarpaṭu kātai," 61, 65-6, 84-6)

61   And there has been the demon *(pūtam)* of the kingly class, a victorious god,
     [...]
65   protecting the vast land of the merchant community.
66   He holds in his hand a plough and a pair of scales [emblematic of agriculture, which is in his charge, as is trade]
     [...]
84   (He supplies to those who want as commodities
83   [the] rare products he has brought from the mountains and by sea.)[50]
85   He appears as a chieftain who lives a healthy and harmless life by working the soil as another [source of] income.[51]

Indeed, this community seems to be classifiable somewhere between a right-hand *(valaṅkai)* and left-hand *(iṭaṅkai)* community.

The division of communities into right-hand and left-hand has long been integral to Tamil society.[52] Right-hand communities are agriculturalist and landowning communities. They include the Vēḷāḷas and Nāṭārs.[53] In contrast, left-hand communities are trading and artisan communities. The Ceṭṭiyārs belong to this social group of traders, a profession that affords them a certain degree of social space.

As V.N. Rao (1986) observes, the two divisions largely correlate with the two notions of male- or female-centredness. The right-hand communities are male-centred; the left-hand communities are female-centred. This distinction is apparent in the epics of both, inasmuch as there is a particular quality to each: The epics of the right-hand castes tell of heroic warriors who "[...] keep their women under strict control [...]" (ibid.:147), confining them to domestic life. Interestingly enough, as Handelman (1995) observes, "these also are the social groups who often worship unattached, disease-bringing goddesses of the peripheries whose ethos is distinct from goddesses of the centre" (332). This shows

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[46] Blackburn 1980:62.

[47] According to Singh (1997:317f.), the Śaiva Ceṭṭiyārs "equate themselves with [...] Vellalar communities" (317). They "are mainly a land-owning community. Their traditional occupations are cultivation and business" (319). Singh (ibid.:317) notes that "[t]hey are mainly distributed in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, such as Nellai Kattabomman [...] and Kanniyakumari." They follow the practice of cross-cousin marriage.

[48] Blackburn 1980:60.

[49] This hybrid make-up of the social group (simultaneously merchants and farmers) is likewise found, notably, in the *paṭṭiṇappālai* poem (vv. 186ff.) of the classical work *Pattuppāṭṭu* (The Ten Songs), which according to Zvelebil 1995:540 dates from 190–200 C.E.

[50] The parentheses mark an interpolation.

[51] This means that he retains economic control of agriculture as a cultivator, but has shifted his main activity to business.

[52] On the emic division of *valaṅkai* and *iṭaṅkai*, see Beck 1970 and 1972, Hardgrave 1969:23. See also Stein (1985:469f.), who, elsewhere dating this dual division to the eleventh century, by comparing its character in the Cōḻa and the later Vijayanagara periods (the major ingress of the latter authority into the Tamil land occurring around the fifteenth century; ibid.:485), underscores its continuity, and points out that "the divisions were differentially linked to two commanding institutions of the age: temples and royal figures" (470).

[53] See Hardgrave 1969:23.

clearly, as the same scholar goes on to point out, the contrasts between "the warrior husband's control" over his wife—and—"the violence of the peripheral woman" (332). The left-hand epics read differently. Here "the female heroically defends the integrity of the social group against an alien, aggressive power" (332). Thus among the left-hand communities "[...] women represent an inner strength, and the men remain largely passive" (Rao 1986:147). This suggests that the *IK* epic we are focusing on is a fusion of both notions.

7.2.1 The Marriage System

Marriage is at the heart of Tamil concerns. The marriage systems of the Vēḷāḷas and Nāṭārs, the two predominant communities of the district, are of some significance to our discussion of the *IK* we are concerned with here. In the following I draw upon the *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* (1995:125f.).

The marital system of polygyny[54] was long a fixed feature of Tamil society; only in 1955 did it become prohibited under law. Originally the Nāñcilnāṭu Vēḷāḷas were patrilineal *(makkaṭṭāyam),* with the inheritance passing to the son. Then around 1100 C.E. they deliberately changed to a matrilineal system *(marumakkaṭṭāyam)* in order to conform to Malayali custom.[55] Once they had come under the sway of a Malayali royal house that followed the matrilineal system, kin relations and the inheritance rights became centred on the female line. Their community structure and laws of inheritance developed, in the course of time, into an interesting repository of Tamil and Malayali social characteristics. However, in conformance with the Nāñcilnāṭu Veḷḷāḷa Act of 1926, passed following a campaign led by educated Vēḷāḷas/Piḷḷais,[56] the Vēḷāḷas shifted back to a patrilineal system. In contrast, Nāṭārs had always been strictly patrilineal *(makkaṭṭāyam),* following the *Mitākṣarā* of Hindu law.

7.3 The Goddess's Name

1. Generally the goddess is referred to as Icakki, Iyakki, or Ēkki. *Icakki/iyakki*[57] in its primary sense is related to the Sanskrit word *yakṣī* (see *TL* 271, s.v. *icakki*), denoting "semi-divine beings, generally regarded as beings of a benevolent and inoffensive disposition, occasionally classed with malignant spirits, and sometimes said to cause demonical possession" (Monier-Williams, s.v.).[58] I shall return to this term in Section 7.3.1 below. The *TL* (271, s.v. *icakkiyamman*) further identifies Icakki as "a name of a form of Durgā, worshipped in S[outh] India."

U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar in his edition of the fifth-century(?) *kāppiyam* text *Cilappatikāram* refers in a footnote to *Cil.* 15.115-9 (line 116) to Iyakki as a *yakṣī,* a deity worshipped in Kaṇṇiyākumari.[59] It is in this work of literature that the Tamil equivalent *iyakki* of Skt. *yakṣī* probably occurs for the first time.[60]

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[54] On the institution of polygyny, see Sect. 6.2, p. 222, n. 7 above.

[55] On the dating of the adoption of the *marumakkaṭṭāyam* system, see Blackburn 1980:59. The Malayali system was adopted following a Vēḷāḷa caste resolution. For further details on the split into matri- and patrilineal groups within the Tamil Vēḷāḷas, see Blackburn 1980:50f. – Evidence of the existence of both groups, and clashes between them in K.K.Dt. when the former sought a marriage alliance with the latter, is found in the *Veṅkalarājaṉ Katai* and *Tottukkariyammaṉ Katai,* two sociohistorical ballads only documented in the southern part of Kaṇṇiyākumari district (Vanamamalai 1969:112). – For a comprehensive study of the matrilineal system in Kerala and its abolishment in 1976, see Arunima 2003. Her work focuses primarily on the Nayars, a matrilineal community of the landed elite.

[56] For details concerning the reason for the campaign, initiated by Trivandrum-based patrilineal Vēḷāḷas, see Blackburn 1980:51, 59.

[57] The two words, in fact, are interchangeable, the difference being due to a dialectal feature that replaces the syllable *ca* with *ya.*

[58] Cf. Grönbold (1984:499): "[Die Yakṣī-]Konzeption ist nicht einheitlich."

[59] *iyakki - yakṣitēvatai; [...] ippeyr kaṇṇiyākumarip pakka ūrkaḷil icakkiyeṉa vaḻaṅkum* (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:405, n. 1] to lines 115-9, Chap. 15, "Aṭaikkalak kātai").

[60] Prior to this, the word appears in the masculine gender as *iyakkaṉ* in the Caṅkam literature of the *Puṟanāṉūṟu,* as the personal

In the same edition U.V.C. further notes in the index (p. 617, s.v. *iyakki*): *iyakki – oru peṇ teyvam; pāṇṭi nāṭṭil icakkiyeṇa itu valaṅkukiṇratu,* relating the word to "one goddess, Icakki by name, who is found in Pāṇṭiya Nāṭu."[61] Turai Irācārām in his edition of another Tamil *kāppiyam,* the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi,* vv. 596[62] and 1015[63], similarly glosses the term *iyakki* in the commentary as *yakṣī.* Again, the *Maturait Tamilp Pēr Akarāti (Dictionary),* part 1, p. 258, particularises the term *iyakki* as "a small deity, Icakki by name,"[64] while Fabricius's Dictionary (1972:73) explains the word in one of its secondary meanings, in more general terms, as a "goddess of benevolence."

2. The third name applied to the goddess is Ēkki, a Malayalam word in use among the Nāṭār community of Kaṉṉiyākumari district. I consider the term a corruption of the dialectal form *iyakki*/Skt. *yakṣī,*[65] though there may be echoes in it of a secondary meaning, *ēkkam* (eager desire; *TL*), *ēkkaṟṟu – virumpi* (having desired).

3. Whereas Icakki, Iyakki, and Ēkki are the names the goddess is referred to by in the context of worship, in her story (i.e. the *IK*) she is called either Icakki or Nīli. *Nīli,* as a generic name,[66] carries the primary meaning "female demon" and "wicked woman (colloq.)"; however, it is also "a name for the fierce goddess generally"[67] (see *Cil.* 12.21.3)—a name with overtones of violence.

To judge by the index created by S.V. Subramanian (1965:197), in several parts of the *Cilappatikāram* there are indications of a special connection between the goddess Durgā and Nīli (see *Cil* 12.1.68, 12.21.3). Such indications exist elsewhere. The *Cēntaṉtivākaram, teyvappeyrttokuti,* pp. 7f. (s.v. *pakavati*), mentions the name Nīli along with others (Koṟṟavai, Aiyai Durgā, Cūli etc.) as a multiform of Bhagavatī. Again, *Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu* (850–900 C.E.)[68] refers to Nīli along with other names (such as Catti, Caṅkari, Aiyai, Antari [106], Cūli, Vallaṇaṅku, Aiyai etc. [119], Aiyai, Cūli etc. [124]; identification as found in *Cil.* 12.68; 12.21.3) as a multiform of Uma-Mākāḷi-Durgā (106, pp. 23f.; 119, pp. 27f.; 124, p. 28).[69]

However, in the index of U.V.C.'s edition of the *Cilappatikāram* (p. 704), we find the entry for Nīli describing her as the "wife of Caṅkamaṉ" *(caṅkamaṉuṭaiyamaṉaivi).*[70]

When it comes to the *TL*, it has under *nīli*: "black coloured *(karu niṟam)*; Pārvatī; a female devil; wicked woman (colloq.)," while in Cre-A (a dictionary of modern Tamil) the meaning is reduced to "a wicked woman who feigns innocence." *Nīlik kaṇṇīr* (crocodile tears) is a set phrase widely used among the Nāṭār community in connection with a woman who spawns mistrust.

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name of a chieftain: *veñciṉa viyakkaṇu muḷappaṭap piṟarum* (*Puṟanāṉūṟu* [ed. U.V.C. 1971:169], 71.14); *veñciṉa viyakkaṇu – veyya ciṉattaiyuṭaiya iyakkaṇu meṉa ivarutpaṭap piṟarum* (ibid. 1971:170).

[61] I assume that Pāṇṭiya Nāṭu here means southern Pāṇṭiya Nāṭu, i.e. present-day Tirunelvēli district. – See also the index (s.v. *iyakki*) in S.V. Subramanian 1965:35, where *iyakki* is translated as *peṇ teyvam* (goddess). I may remark in passing that the term *iyakki* in *Cil.* 14.74 (ed. U.V.C., Chap. "Ūrkāṉ kātai") (in connection with boats *[nirmāṭam, nāvāy]*) also appears as the non-finite verbal participle *iyakki,* "having made to move" of the transitive verb *iyakku-tal,* "to cause to go, travel" *(TL)* (see the index in Subramanian 1965:35, s.v. *iyakki*); note also *iyakkam* (movement).

[62] See *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi,* ed. T. Irācārām (2000), p. 50.

[63] Ibid., p. 246.

[64] The dictionary is not available to me; I have taken the reference from Perumāḷ 1990:44.

[65] Note that Coomaraswamy (1993:9) gives *ecca* as the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit word *yakṣa.*

[66] See Blackburn 1980:218, chart 9.

[67] Shulman (1980:196, n. 18) emphasises this association.

[68] On the dating of this medieval lexicon, see Zvelebil 1995:562. Clothey (1982:42) dates it "somewhere between the *Tivākaram* (8th or 9th century) and the *Naṉṉūl* (13th century)."

[69] In the *Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu,* further, in entry 3734, p. 456, *nīli* is said to refer to "a tree, Durgā, the colour black, and the indigo plant *(avuri),*" *nīliyoru maramum pālaik kiḷattiyuṅk* (lit. "the mistress of the *pālai* wilderness") *karumai niṟamu mavuriyumākum.*

[70] With references to pp. 23, 314, 319, 328, 505 in the same edition; see also the index in Subramanian 1965:197, which in this connection mentions *Cil.* 23.159.

The reader may also be referred to Chapter 3 above, where the name Nīli is traced throughout the history of Tamil literature.

The term *amman* (mother/breast goddess[71]) is used in association with the generic name Icakki, in the context both of the *katai* and of worship. It is not applied to the name Nīli.[72] As an epithet, *amman* implies "motherhood," a role that in a sense does not fit the goddess, standing as it does in sharp contrast to the activities of Nīli-Icakki, at least within the framework of the story. Within the *villuppāṭṭu* tradition, we must probably read *amman* simply as an accepted appellation for the goddess; moreover, as marking her out as a "female" deity in contrast to *māṭaṉ*, the category for "male" deities.[73]

7.3.1 *Yakṣī*

Let us return to Ta. *icakki/iyakki* in its primary meaning of Skt. *yakṣī* (or *yakṣiṇī*), Pali *yakkhī*, Prakrit *jakkhiṇī*.[74] The antiquity and popularity of *yakṣa*s in India has been pointed out by different scholars, particularly A.K. Coomaraswamy[75] and R.N. Misra.[76] For the study of *yakṣī* worship in Tamilnadu, Ve. Vētācalam 1989 is the most important source. Drawing on the details provided by these three scholars, I shall present a brief note on the characteristics of *yakṣī*s, the female counterpart of *yakṣa*s, a term whose etymology and meaning in earlier literature has been much disputed. However, there is a consensus among a majority of scholars to derive the word from the Sanskrit root *yakṣ*, "Med.: 'erscheinen, sich zeigen'" and "Akt.: 'zeigen, zur Schau stellen'" with prefix *pra* in RV 1,132,5; 2,5,1 (Gotō 1987:253);[77] whence the noun *yakṣa*, "Wundererscheinung, Blendwerk, [...] Phänomen" (Mayrhofer 1996:391).[78] Coomaraswamy (1993) offers for *yakṣa*—as in his view probably the best translation—"spirit" or "daimon" (ibid.:16).[79]

The *yakṣa*,[80] an ancient deity obviously bound up with animistic belief,[81] is associated with different Indian religious traditions. In attempting to show the presence of *yakṣī* characteristics in the goddess Icakkiyammaṉ, as today worshipped in the southernmost area of India, we must be satisfied with a few brief hints suggestive of the diverse features that have been attributed to *yakṣa*s and *yakṣī*s in various socioreligious contexts over time.[82] The ones listed below are no more than a selective—and to some extent impressionistic—survey of features, which is intended to be helpful for discovering the identity of the goddess whose worship and story (the *IK* and local story) we are concerned with.

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[71] According to Blackburn (1980:213) A.K. Ramanujan translates Ammaṉ as "breast-goddess." (The paper presented by A.K. Ramanujan in 1980 is not available to me.)

[72] This fact will support my later argumentation that the two deities Nīli and Icakki were conjoined; see Sect. 7.3.2.

[73] On *amman* and *māṭaṉ* as categories of *villuppāṭṭu* deities, see Blackburn 1980:150.

[74] Note also Sinhalese *yakī*. Cf. Grönbold 1984:499.

[75] His work first appeared in two volumes in 1928–31.

[76] See also Sutherland (1992), who has sought to take up and elaborate upon A.K. Coomaraswamy's study on *yakṣa*s.

[77] See also Werba 1997:435, s.v., and Mayrhofer 1996:391, s.v. – In tracing the term through Sanskrit literature, Coomaraswamy (1993:9) also gives due consideration to the Sanskrit root *yaj*, "to worship with offerings, or honor." But compare the argumentation of Gotō (1987:253), who diverges from Coomaraswamy on this point: "Obwohl die Möglichkeit besteht, *yakṣanta* als *s*-Aor. Konj. von *yaj* 'opfern' [...] zu erklären, muß man in Anbetracht des Nomens *yakṣa*- 'Phänomen, Wundererscheinung, Monstrum' eine selbständige Wz. *yakṣ* ansetzen."

[78] But cf. Graßmann 1996:1069, s.v.: "*yakṣ* erscheint aus *yah [...]. Der Grundbegriff scheint der einer sehr schnellen Bewegung und zwar einerseits in dem Sinne 'jagen, verfolgen', insbesondere 'rächend verfolgen', oder 'durch Unrecht, Gewaltthat verfolgen', und andererseits in dem Sinne eines schnell hervorbrechenden Lichtscheins, der meteorartig vorübergeht."

[79] For a further discussion of the etymology, see Misra 1981:9f.

[80] On *yakṣa*s, see also Härtel 1993:425f.

[81] See Misra 1981:165. By animism I mean the belief in spirit beings including ones who live, for instance, in trees and plants.

[82] Note that I have chosen a *synchronic* approach.

1. Misra (1981), in tracing the semantic development of the term *yakṣa*, remarks the ambivalent twin qualities of benevolence and malevolence ascribed to the earlier Vedic *yakṣa* type (14,[83] 15), and goes on to show "the transformation of Yaksha into a demonic being" (13) in the Sūtras.[84] He also notes the proximity of the later concept of *yakṣa* to other kindred semi-divine beings (Gandharvas, Rākṣasas, and the like) in their Vedic conception, and points to traits *yakṣa*s may have obtained from them, as, for instance, from Gandharvas the characteristic of "lik[ing...] fragrance, possess[ing...] women, [...] control[ling...] [...] offspring [...and of being of] great beauty" (3), and from Rākṣasas delighting in "destroying offspring" (3).[85]

2. Coomaraswamy (1993:97) makes it an object of his work to define the term *yakṣa* in the Hindu religion when he writes: "[T]he general character of the *yakṣa* type [...] includes universal deities like Kubera, Kāmadeva, and Śrī, tutelary deities of kingdoms or clans,[86] [...] and also still more localised and generally unnamed male tree spirits[87] and dryads [i.e. goddesses in trees] whose power does not extend [far ....] *[Y]akṣas*, great or small, are vegetation or progenitive spirits directly controlling, and bestowing upon their *bhaktas*, fertility and wealth, or to use a single word, abundance."

3. These nature spirits serve as emblems of fertility in Buddhist sculpture and mythology. The *yakṣī*, the goddess in the tree, was believed to grant offspring to women. The tree goddess was portrayed in sculptures with children, who are either standing beside the tree mother or held firmly on her hip. Through its association with the birth of Buddha, the *yakṣiṇī* motif became indelibly inscribed with the potent power of growth, and women prayed to it for the bounty of children.[88]

4. Coomaraswamy (1993:78) makes a point of some significance when he draws a link between *yakṣa*s and adultery in his discussion of the eleventh-century Sanskrit work *Kathāsaritsāgara,* stating that "[t]he anecdote [of a powerful *yakṣa* named Maṇibhadra] turns upon the interesting fact that the *yakṣa* temple was regularly used as a temporary jail for adulterers."[89]

5. Furthermore, regarding the rituals for attracting *yakṣī*s, as described in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*,[90] Coomaraswamy (1993:79) emphasises that "[t]hese rites are performed in cemeteries, and are evidently

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[83] Misra 1981:14: "[...] the Vedic Yaksha [...] carried both good and evil connotations." He refers (ibid., n. 4), for instance, to *Atharvaveda* 10.7.38, *Ṛgveda* 10.85.5, *Atharvaveda* 8.10.28, and *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1ff., where *yakṣa* designates something good. Contrarily, he finds in *Ṛgveda* 4.3.13 and 5.70.4 negative qualities (ibid., n. 5).

[84] Misra (1981:13) refers to *Kauśika Sūtra* 9.3.3. Here, he opines, the "attitude of fear and dislike" (14, n. 5) is dominant.

[85] Misra 1981:4 writes: "These similarities between the foresaid demi-gods in their Vedic conception and the Yakshas in their later conception confirm the view that Yaksha was a compound of different [...], disparate ideas and that Yakshas obtained different attributes of the various demi-gods to evolve their own ultimate and mature personality." – See also Grönbold 1984:499.

[86] For the latter see also Coomaraswamy 1993:54, where Sylvain Lévi's remark is cited: "The Yakṣa is essentially a divine personage, closely associated by tradition with local memories [...]." Coomaraswamy himself adds: "In many cases these *yakṣa*s have been human beings attached to the service of a community or individual, and, reborn as a deity, continue to watch over those [...]." – The protective attitude of the *yakṣa* is also mentioned in *Atharvaveda* 11.6.10, as remarked by Misra (1981:19).

[87] Tree worship was highly popular in pre-Vedic and Vedic times; cf. Misra 1981:4.

[88] See, for example, the discussion of the *dohada* motif in Coomaraswamy 1993:86f.: "The word *dohada* means a pregnancy longing, and the tree is represented as feeling, like a woman, such a longing, nor can its flowers open until it is satisfied." For the significance of the "woman and tree" in general, see ibid.:83ff., and Roth 1957.

[89] Coomaraswamy refers to *Kathāsaritsāgara* 2.5.165ff. (see ed. J. Mallinson 2007). The link between *yakṣa*s and adultery is also well substantiated in a Jain *yakṣa* tale provided by the twelfth-century text *Pariśiṣṭaparvan* (II, the eighth story) of Hemacandra (ed. Hermann Jacobi, *Sthaviravalicharita* or *Pariśiṣṭaparvan* of Hemacandra. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1883). In this tale, to cite Sutherland (1992:129), "an adulterous woman offers to establish her truthfulness by stepping under the legs of a yakṣa."

[90] *Kathāsaritsāgara* 8.49.160ff. (ed. Durgaprasad and Parab 1889, 1930); tr. Tawney 1924–28, Vol. 4, 96f.

Tantric."[91] Misra (1981:26) maintains that "[t]his Tantric aspect of Yaksha seems to be directly connected with the early concept of Yaksha as 'magical power'."

6. *Yakṣī*s were also associated with the Jain religion.[92] U.Vē. Cāminātaiyar in a footnote to *Cil.*, Chapter 15, "Aṭaikkalak kātai," 115-9 (line 116) notes:

இயக்கி – [...] 24–தீர்த்தங்
யக்ஷியென்றும் இவ்விருவர் உள்ளாரென்று சைசனநூல்கூறும்,[93]

As remarked by Paul Dundas (1992:182):

> The origin of the practice of linking each of the fordmakers with a *yaksha* and *yakshi*, a divine male and female attendant respectively, is difficult to date. Some of these deities no doubt go back to Jainism's beginnings [...] An image from Akota in western India dating from about 550 CE [...] represents the earliest iconic example [...], and textual and iconographic evidence points to the introduction of a full complement of twenty-four *yakshas* and *yakshis* by the end of the first half of the eighth century CE.

In Tamilnadu we have a steady stream of information about the association of *iyakki*s *(yakṣī*s) with the Jain religion roughly from the fifth until the fourteenth century.[94] During the thirteenth century the status of the *iyakki* was raised, and the term itself was incorporated into the name of a Jain fordmaker *(tīrthaṅkara).*[95] Interestingly, worship of a female deity called Icakkiyammaṉ is attested in some verses of the late-sixteenth-century Jain text *Appāṇṭaiṉātar Ulā* of Aṉantavicayar, a text belonging to the *ulā* genre. Along with praise for the Jain *tīrthaṅkara* Pārcuvaṉātar (Pārśvaṉātha), also known as Appāṇṭaiṉātar, enshrined at the Tirunaṟuṅkoṇṭai temple,[96] and the naming of still other Jain fordmakers

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[91] For the associations of Tantric practices with *yakṣī*s/*yakṣiṇī*s, see also Bühnemann 2000:118f. and the *Guhyasamājatantra* (Gäng 1988:207–21), in which the modes of controlling the different *yakṣiṇī*s are described.

[92] Coomaraswamy (1993:79) remarks: "It is clear that Jainism and *yakṣa* worship could be as closely interrelated as Buddhism and Hinduism have often been." That *bhakti* in the Jain tradition is not as marginal as earlier scholarship has made us believe is demonstrated in various works, particularly ones by Orr (1999), Carrithers (2000), and Cort (2002). – There is an ongoing debate over who adopted the goddesses from whom. Orr (1999:267) and Zydenbos (2000:187) are among the scholars who reject the opinion that Jain goddesses (*yakṣī*s) were adopted from the Hindu religion. They instead argue that both Jainism and Śaivism show a parallel—though slightly staggered—development in goddess worship, produced by similar cultural needs. They see evidence that in Jainism this process began earlier. On the dynamics of developing religious features to appeal to the needs of the "consumers" of religion, see Carrithers's study on Digambara Jains (2000:839f.). Among the representatives of the hypothesis that the *yakṣī*s were probably foreign and introduced into South India by the Jain religion are such scholars as Natarajan (1986), Ramaswami Ayyangar (1982), and Vētācalam (1989:111f.).

[93] "Jain literature says that to each of the twenty-four *tīrthaṅkara*s is linked a *yakṣaṉ* and *yakṣī* who have the right to serve them" (*Cil.*, ed. U.V.C. 1978:405, n. 1).

[94] See Vētācalam 1989:115: தமிழ்நாட்டில் சமணசமயத்திலேயே சிலப்பதிகாரகாலத்திலிருந்து நாயக்கர் காலம் வரை அவர்களது சமயத்து இயக்கியர் வழிபாடு பற்றித் தொடர்ச்சியான செய்திகள் கிடைக்கின்றன. ... கி.பி. 14–ஆம் நூற்றாண்டிற்குப் பிறகு தமிழ்நாட்டில் சமணசமய இயக்கியரின் செல்வாக்கு குறைந்திருப்பதைக் கல்வெட்டுகளும் சிற்பங்களும் உணர்த்துகின்றன. – One early reference is to Pūṉkaṉ Iyakki in Puṟaṉciṟai Mūtūr, outside Maturai, who in *Cil.* 15.116 (fifth century C.E.?) is said to have had a shrine next to the residence of saints (probably Jain saints). – Furthermore, Chakravarti (1974:159, 199) refers to a record in Vaṭṭeḻuttu script of 870 C.E. that registers a donation to a Jain saint and his attendant *yakṣī* at Tiruvayirai, Aivarmalai, Palani taluk, Maturai district; and an eleventh-century record from Tirumalai, North Arcot district, of an image of a *yakṣī* having been made. Orr (1999:263) notes "that *yakṣī*s are prominent in Jain inscriptions [of Tamilnadu] in the eighth to tenth centuries."

[95] The source of this information is Vētācalam (1989:49), who refers to the fordmaker Pakavati (Bhagavatī) Nāyakar in the Iḷaiyāṉkuṭi inscription, where Bhagavatī is used in place of Iyakki.

[96] According to N. Ramaswamy, EFEO (personal communication to Dr Eva Wilden) the foundations of the Jain temple at Tirunaṟuṅkoṇṭai go back to the thirteenth century. There are inscriptions dating back to that time. The Jain temple, located on a hill, is well maintained at present, whereas the Śiva temple, at the foot of the hill, containing no inscription and probably younger, has been abandoned. Tirunaṟuṅkoṇṭai is situated in the Uḷuntūrpet taluk, about 80 KM south-west of Pondicherry on the way to Tiruccirāppaḷḷi. I am very grateful to N. Ramaswamy for this information and to Dr Eva Wilden for conveying it to me. – I may remark in passing that Tirunaṟuṅkoṇṭai is mentioned in the popular literary legend of Kampaṉ (see Shulman's summary 2001:115) as a village of learned Jains where Kampaṉ (twelfth century) was sent by the Brahmins of Śrīraṅgam in order to get additional endorsement from the Jains so that the Brahmins would agree to a public reading of his *Irāmāvataram.*

(Nēminātar etc.), a prayer to Icakkiyamman̲ is found in vv. 65-79.[97] However, it was the Jain *iyakki/yakṣī* Ampikā, associated with the twenty-second fordmaker Nēmi,[98] who enjoyed, in seventh-century Karnataka, a particularly independent and prominent status.[99] Ampikā[100] (lit. "Little Mother")—apparently a deity widely worshipped in Tamilnadu in former times[101]—is generally depicted with two children and mangoes.[102] As a goddess, she is associated with childbirth and prosperity.[103]

7. What, then, was the character of the *iyakki/yakṣī* type in the Tamil *kāppiyam*s?[104] In the eclectic *kāppiyam Cilappatikāram* (450–475 C.E.?), which unites elements drawn from various sources—such as oral elements, Tamil Caṅkam poetry, Sanskrit *kāvya,* Hindu myths, and the Jain tradition—we find deities that exhibit the traits of an *iyakki/yakṣī* at very particular spatial locations. I draw here mainly on Vētācalam's study (1989) on *yakṣī* worship in Tamilnadu:

7.1. There is, for example, the *pāvai*[105] (already known in Caṅkam literature), a deity found at roadsides, who will remain totally silent when the king commits injustice, but on the other hand will shed tears and weep—a deity full of compassion.

135 அரைசகோல் கோடின̲ு மற̲ங்கூ ற̲வையத்
136 துரை நூல் கோடி யொருதிற̲ம் பற்றின̲ும்
137 நாவொடு நவிலாது நவைவீ றுகுத்துப்
138 பாவை நின̲ ற̲ழூஉம் பாவை மன̲ நமும்
        (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:145], Chapter 5, "Intiravil̲avūr eṭutta kātai," 135-8)

138 There was also a locality with a statue [the fifth of the wonders of Puhār], an image
137 that would never speak,
138 but would weep,
137 shedding tears of sorrow
        (My translation)
135 whenever swerved the king's sceptre, and preference was shown in court,
136 by favouring one side against the rule of law.
        (Parthasarathy 1993:341[Postscript])

7.2. While the *pāvai* remains silent, a *pūtam* (evil spirit; Skt. *bhūta*) that has taken up its abode at a

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[97] For the reference, see *ETL* 2.252f.

[98] See a reproduction of the engraving of Nēminātar and Iyakki Ampikā at Kal̲ukumalai (a hill in Kōyilpaṭṭi taluk, Tirunelvēli district), in Vētācalam 1989:25. – Interestingly, Dundas (1992:202) reports that there was an "early association of Krishna [...] with the fordmaker Nemi (the two came to be regarded as being related)." – On the Kal̲ukumalai Jain site, see also Schalk and Vēluppil̲l̲ai 2002:189f.

[99] See Dundas 1992:183. For Tamilnadu, see Orr 1999:267. She sees in "the prominence of *yakṣī*s as independent objects of worship for Jains in early medieval Tamilnadu [something] distinctively 'Tamil'."

[100] The *yakṣī* Ampikā who served as the female attendant of Jain saints was endowed with semi-divine attributes. – There are similarities between the legend of the Jain *iyakki* Ampikā and the Śaiva saint-poetess Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār. Both respected saints by serving them food, thereby causing great disturbance to their own family life; both left domestic life after performing miracles at home; both had husbands who were struck with awe for their wives; both were associated with mangoes; and both projected themselves as devotees: the one, of the fordmaker Nēmi, and the other, at the feet of Śiva. Ampikā, who committed suicide, became an *iyakki (yakṣī),* and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār a *pēy.* See the short account of Ampikā's legend in Dundas 1992:183; see also Vētācalam 1989:89ff. For a comparison between Ampikā and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, see Vētācalam 1989:97f.

[101] Vētācalam 1989:115.

[102] See illustrations in Vētācalam 1989:88 (in Citar̲al [55 KM from Kan̲n̲iyākumari Town] [figure and tree]; and in Yān̲aimalai, Maturai district), 89 (in Tirumalai, North Arcot district), 104 (in Vil̲āttikul̲am, Citamparan̲ār district), and 105 (in Ceṅkan̲ikkuppam).

[103] Dundas 1992:183.

[104] This period of Tamil literature has not been chosen at random. The choice is justified by the fact that we witness in the *kāppiyam Cilappatikāram* both the figure of *yakṣī*s and the earliest occurrence of the name Nīli; see Chap. 3, No. 1.

[105] See Vētācalam 1989:40.

crossroads[106] is far less reserved in its judgement: it communicates and demonstrates that it has full punitive powers over adulterers[107] and cheats. It is a deity that renders justice.[108]

130 ... பிறர்மனை நயப்போர்
131 பொய்க்கரி யாளர் புறங்கூற் றாளரென்
132 கைக்கொள் பாசத்துக் கைப்படு வோரெனக்
133 காத நான்குங் கடுங்குர லெடுப்பிப்
134 பூதம் புடைத்துணும் பூத சதுக்கமும்
       (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:144], Chapter 5, "Intiravilavūr eṭutta kātai," 128-34)

134 Furthermore, there was a junction where four roads met. There a *pūtam* resided who,
133 in a loud voice [audible at a distance] of four *kātam*s [= 2.5 miles], proclaimed
132 that it would catch with a rope, beat, and devour
130 [...] any adulterer who enticed away another man's wife,
131 [and also] those who bore false witness or backbit.

7.3. There are yet other deities of the *yakṣī* type: *kāṉuṟai teyvam*.[109] Found in the forest, they appear before passers-by in an attempt to seduce them.[110] These deities are of an unsettling character. If there are three forest paths, they stand and wait along the middle path.

171 கானுறை தெய்வங் காதலிற் சென்று
172 நயந்த காதலி நல்குவ னிவனென
173 வயந்த மாலை வடிவிற் றோன்றி
       (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:296], Chapter 11, "Kāṭukāṉ kātai," 171-3)

171 A [charming] *yakṣī* of the forest *(kāṉuṟai teyvam),* full of passion,
173 assumed the shape of Vayantamālai, [the maid of the courtesan Mātavi,] and appeared [before Kōvalaṉ],
172 [luring him] in the hope of obtaining his desirous love.
       [This happened on the path said by the Brahmin to be the middle path.]

7.4. While the deity just mentioned awaits the passers-by on the middle path, another charming *yakṣī* will await travellers on the forest path to the left. U.Vē. Cāmiṉātaiyar suggests that the word *orutti* in *Cil.* 11.111 refers to a *yakṣī ("ōr iyakki")*.[111]

108 நிலம்பக வீழ்ந்த சிலம்பாற் றகன் றலைப்
109 பொலங்கொடி மின்னிற் புயலைங் கூந்தற்
110 கடிமல ரவிழ்ந்த கன்னிகா ரத்துத்
111 ... யொருத்தி தோன்றி
       (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:293], Chapter 11, "Kāṭukāṉ kātai," 108-11)

108 At the broad bank of the river Cilampu, which flows parting the land,
110 at a *kaṉṉikāram* tree blossoming with fragrant flowers
111 appeared a lady, [a *yakṣiṇī*], [...]
109 [fair like] a golden vine, [dazzling] like the lightning, with hair *(kūntal)* dark as a [rain] cloud.

7.5. Again, in the *Cilappatikāram*, there is a deity called Pūṅkaṇ Iyakki ("Iyakki with Flower-like Eyes"; *Cil.* 15.116). Iyakki is here part of the goddess's proper name.[112] She stayed outside the fort of Maturai[113] in a place called Puṟañciṟai Mūtūr.

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[106] On female deities residing at crossroads, see Kinsley 1987:155, with regard in particular to *mātṛkā*s.

[107] On a link between *yakṣa*s and adultery, see No. 4 above.

[108] On *yakṣa*s as punishers of wrongdoers, see also Misra 1981:155.

[109] *vaṉa-sāriṇi, āraṅgarteyvam*.

[110] See Vētācalam 1989:41.

[111] *Cil.*, ed. U.V.C. 1978:304, footnote to 108-11.

[112] See Vētācalam 1989:42.

[113] Vētācalam (1989:50) points out early *yakṣī* worship in the areas of Maturai and Kāñcipuram. He writes: "The statues of an *iyakki* have been made as reliefs individually in the hills of Aṉantamaṅkalam near Kāñcipuram, and Pūlāṅkuṟicci in Mutturāmaliṅka district [south of Maturai]. These are the earliest statues of an *iyakki* found in Tamilnadu."

Whether or not the Jain[114] saints who lived nearby worshipped her and believed that she protected them from any interference with their asceticism,[115] this deity—apparently after attaining a more prominent status[116]—was worshipped also by other social groups, for instance, by Mātari of the *āyar*-cowherd community.[117]

115 அறம்புரி நெஞ்சி னறவோர் பல்கிய
116 புறஞ்சிறை மூதூர்ப் பூங்க ணியக்கிக்குப்
117 பான்மடை கொடுத்துப் பண்பிற் பெயர்வோள்
118 ஆயர் முது மகண் மாதரி யென்போள்
(*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:393], Chapter 15, "Aṭaikkalak kātai," 115-8)

118 The old cowherdess, Mātari by name,
117 came back from giving her routine offering *(maṭai)* of milk
116 to Puṟañciṟai Mūtūrp Pūṅkaṇ Iyakki [lit.: the *Yakṣī* with Flower-like Eyes Who Resided outside *(puṟam)* the Walls *(ciṟai)* of the Ancient City *(mūtūr)* [of Maturai],[118]
115 where numerous monks [advanced] on the path of dharma *(aṟam)*.

8. Some further features ascribed to the *yakṣī/iyakki* type are revealed in the later (tenth century?)[119] Jain Tamil *kāppiyam Cīvakacintāmaṇi* of Tiruttakkatēvar.[120] The *yakṣī* is here depicted as a powerful deity that is able to grant any wish. Being benevolent, unmarried, and of ethereal beauty, it can display magic power,[121] and what is more, can transfer its magic skills. That one can work magic with the help of *yakṣīs* is an idea conveyed, for instance, in *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1600-1. Here an *iyakki/yakṣī* helps Pavatattaṉ,[122] who pines for his absent wife, to make his beloved appear.[123]

9. In the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* any extraordinary beauty is referred to as an *iyakki* figure:

596.1   காமர்களி நும்பிடியும் கன்றுங்கலை மானுங்
             தாமரைய வாவிகளும் புள்ளுந்தகை நலத்தி
             னேழுறுவ பாவையினொ டியக்கிநிலை யெழுதி
             யாமொரையம் காண்பவர்க்கி தகம்புறமி தெனவே.
             (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967], Chapter "Kāntaruvatattaiyār ilampakam," 596)

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[114] Vēluppiḷḷai (1997:57) views *yakṣī* worship by the Maturai Jains as having been quite possible.

[115] Vētācalam (1989:43) suggests that the Jain saints who resided nearby may have praised and worshipped Pūṅkaṇ Iyakki in the belief that she protected their asceticism (...இதனை இப்பகுதியில் தங்கிவாழும் அறவோர்களாகிய முனிவர்கள் போற்றி வழிபட்டிருக்க வேண்டும்...தங்களது தவத்திற்கும் அறத்திற்கும் இத்தெய்வம் துணைநிற்கும் என்ற நம்பிக்கையின் அடிப்படையில் இதனைத் தங்களது வாழ்விடங்களில் வைத்து வழிபட்டிருக்க வேண்டும்.

[116] This can be deduced from the fact that the generic term *iyakki* is now part of the deity's proper name.

[117] From these lines in the *Cilappatikāram*, Vētācalam (1989:43) draws the conclusion that Pūṅkaṇ Iyakki was worshipped in the place mentioned near Maturai and that the deity was not just popular among the Jains: ஆயர் குலத்தை சாரந்த மாதரி போன்ற பெண்களும் வழிபட்டிருக்கின்றனர் (43)... இதனையே மதுரையில் அறவோர்கள் தங்கிய புறஞ்சிறை மூதூரில் இருந்த பூங்கண் இயக்கி வழிபாடு காட்டுகின்றது (43).

[118] That it is near Maturai is clear from another passage in *Cil.* (ed. U.V.C. 1978:387), Chap. 15, "Aṭaikkalak kātai," 6-8: மதுரை மூதூர் மாங்கர் கண்டாங் / கறந்தரு நெஞ்சி னறவோர் பல்கிய / புறஞ்சிறை மூதூர்ப் பொழிலிடம் புகுந்து, "After [Kōvalan] had seen there the ancient and great city of Maturai, he entered a grove outside the walls of the ancient town, where numerous monks *(aṟavōr)* lived with a mind engaged on the path of dharma *(aṟam)*." – For the Jain saints' choice of place of residence, see Ramaswami Ayyangar 1982:47.

[119] See Zvelebil 1995:169.

[120] We may see this work, following Ryan (1998:81), as a "skillfully poisonous parody."

[121] These are all characteristics that had already been associated with *yakṣīs/yakṣas* in Vedic times. Misra (1981:16) makes this point when he writes: "[...] the idea of possession [by *yakṣas*] makes its first appearance in the *Ṛgveda* (VII.61.5)."

[122] இயக்கி கொணர்ந் தருளும் – இயக்கி கொணர்ந்து அருளும் (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967], "Kaṉakamālaiyār ilampakam," 1600.2).

[123] According to Perumāḷ (1990:44), Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar, the commentator of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi,* refers to *iyakki* as "a deity in the mountain that obeys to mantra and magic." (Unfortunately I do not have access to U.Vē. Cāmiṉātaiyar's edition of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* with Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar's commentary.) – For the popular belief that *yakṣas* have the extraordinary power to fly, see Misra 1981:151.

596.1 Beautiful bull- and cow-elephants, elephant calves, stags, deers,
2 pools with lotus-flowers, and birds
3 have been drawn, together with delightful young women in the posture of an *iyakki (yakṣī)*,
2 at whose beauty
4 doubt arises in the on-looker's mind as to whether [these painted images are] real or not [lit.: "inside" the crystal wall or "outside"].

9.1. In verse 1015 of the same work we come across another example in which the term *iyakki* refers to a ravishingly beautiful, bewitching woman.[124] Here we witness a quarrel between Cīvakaṉ and his first wife Kāntarvatattai, who discovers, with resulting jealousy, Cīvakaṉ's love for Kuṇamālai through the portrait he has painted of his new beloved:

1015 இதுவென வுருவென வியக்கி யென்றலும்
[...]
மதுவிரி கோதையும் மாலை நின்மன
மதுமுறை யியக்கலி னியக்கி யாகுமே.
(*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967], Chapter "Kāntaruvatattaiyār ilampakam," 1015)

1015.1 "Who is this figure [on the painting]?" [Kāntarvatattai asked.]
"It is an *iyakki/yakṣī*." [Cīvakaṉ answered.]
[...]
3 [Having understood whose portrait it is, Kāntarvatattai replies ironically:]
[She] wears a garland of flowers *(kōtai)* full of nectar.
4 Given that she touched
3 your heart
4 in such a manner, she must of course be an *iyakki/yakṣī!*

9.2. It is the accentuation of feminine physiology that causes bewilderment and an overwhelming passion—the same emotional nuances that are seemingly produced by *yakṣīs*. Verse 1326 of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* bears this out. Here Cīvakaṉ, upon seeing Patumai's enticing beauty, wonders:

உரையின் சாய வியக்கிகொல் யார்கொல
(*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967], Chapter "Patumaiyār ilampakam," 1326.3).

Is she an *iyakki*? Who is she?

9.3. To quote two more verses of the *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*, 1570.4 and 1658.4, that equate captivating beauty with an *iyakki:*

[...]யியக்கிகொ லிவெண்மற் றென்றான்.[125]
(*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967], Chapter "Kaṉakamālai ilampakam," 1570.4)

She might be an *iyakki,* [Cīvakaṉ thought].

[...]இயக்கி யிருந்த வெழிலொத்தாள்.[126]
(*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967], Chapter "Kaṉakamālai ilampakam," 1658.4)

[... in this] she resembled an *iyakki* in beauty.

To sum up, this section has acquainted us with various aspects of *yakṣīs*, namely their benevolence, protectiveness,[127] seductive beauty, magical power, and ability to bestow fertility, as reflected in tree worship, Buddhist sculptures, and various texts of the different Indian religions, including the Jain-

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[124] Ryan (1998) and Davis (1998) offer a convincing argument for the centrality of eroticism in this Jain work. Davis (1998:218) writes: "Tiruttakatēvar deploys his 'secular' erotic material strategically, to develop and enhance his Jaina message by subverting the erotic and pointing the way towards austerities."

[125] [...] இயக்கிகொல் இவள் மற்று என்றான்.

[126] [...] இயக்கி இருந்த எழில் ஒத்தாள்.

[127] As we have seen, this includes protection against adultery.

influenced Tamil *kāppiyam* literature. This *yakṣī* type—I call it hereafter type A—seems to correlate with locations that are outside of settlements: at roadsides/crossroads or in the forest[128]/wilderness. Yet a *yakṣī* also may display features that sharply contrast with the sensibilities manifested in this *yakṣī* type.

10. We find one such *yakṣī* in the popular Buddhist figure Hārītī.[129] Her story, which Misra (1981:75) characterises as "a standardised version of a stock-belief in such popular deities," tells of her addiction to stealing and devouring children until she was converted by the Buddha and thereby turned into a goddess of protection and childbirth.[130] Interestingly enough, Hārītī's drive to kill children is a result of her having been a pregnant woman and having had a miscarriage in her former life.[131]

11. The child-devouring deity is a constantly recurring figure, Hārītī being only the most prominent one.[132] The theme of a *yakṣī* who devours children—I call this *yakṣī* type B—is again found in the *Ayoghara Jātaka* (No. 510),[133] where the barren wife of the king of Benares jealously prays to be able to devour the later queen's child. When she is reborn as a *yakṣī* she is able to fulfil this desire.[134]

This *yakṣī* type could be easily equated with another group of goddesses, the *mātṛkā*s (mothers).[135] The impression is difficult to avoid, if one observes carefully enough, that one will find both groups, the *yakṣī* type B and the *mātṛkā*s, inhering in one common representative. The *mātṛkā*s, appearing collectively from the *Mahābhārata* epic on (Kinsley 1987:151, 160),[136] show traits that are strikingly identical with the Hārītī-like *yakṣī* type B: they are primarily "characterized as stealing children" (152), dangerous to newborn babies (153), and "inimical in nature and particularly dangerous to children" (160). Their teeth are large, and they inhabit trees and live at crossroads[137] (153). Kinsley (1987:154) in

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[128] On the forest as an equivocal location (fearsome, but at the same time a place of fertility and renewal), see Sontheimer and Kulke 1989:203.

[129] It is Vētācalam's (1989) study to which we owe the insight of the parallel features shared by Hārītī and Nīli-Icakkiyammaṉ. On Hārītī's status as a *yakṣī,* see Grönbold 1984:367: "Hārītī [...]. Ihre Beinamen Yakṣeśvarī (SM Bd. 1, S. 82) oder Mahāyakṣiṇī (S. 103) zeigen, daß sie eine Yakṣiṇī [...] ist." – Hārītī's husband is Pāñcika, a general in the retinue of Kubera, the king of *yakṣa*s. Hārītī is found in cave 2 at Ajanta (600–642 C.E.); see Zimmer 1955:plate 155. Hārītī was also known of in Java during the late eighth century C.E.; see Zimmer 1955:plate 473. See also *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (1992:411–3), Zin (2003:236), and Akanuma (1994:220f.), Hārītī, s.v.

[130] See Peri 1917:16-21. As Grönbold (1984:367f.) remarks: "Ihre Legende wird in mehreren Versionen berichtet (s. Getty GNB S. 84ff., Bhattasali IBBS S. 63-67). Sie lebte mit ihren 500 Kindern in der Nähe der Stadt Rājagṛha, stahl Kinder und fraß sie. Die Bevölkerung bat [...] Gautama Buddha um Hilfe. Dieser versteckte Piṅgala, den jüngsten Sohn H.s in seiner Bettelschale und gab ihn der Mutter erst zurück, als sie versprach seiner Lehre zu folgen. [...] Abschließend muß nochmal betont werden, daß — die sehr populäre — H. im buddh. Pantheon eine Sonderstellung einnimmt. Sie ist eine der ersten [...] Göttinnen überhaupt. In ihrer Entstehung, die verhältnismäßig gut zu eruieren ist, geht sie auf ein sehr konkretes Ereignis zurück [...]." For further bibliographical references, see Grönbold 1984:368. – R.S. Gupte (1972:119) points out that Hārītī, who occupied a prominent position in Buddhist literature, became popular not only in India, but also in Nepal, Tibet, China, Java, and Turkistan. For Hārītī and her cult in Nepal, see Merz 1996.

[131] See Peri 1917:12: "[I]ls rencontrèrent la femme de ce bouvier, enceinte, portant un pot de lait caillé. Tout lui dirent: 'Sœur, viens danser et te réjouir avec nous.' La femme [...] se mit à danser avec eux; il en résulta qu'elle se fatigua et finalement avorta." ([The celebrating people] met on the way the herdsman's pregnant wife, who was carrying a pot of curd. They all said: 'Sister, come and dance and have fun with us.' [...] She began to dance with them. This resulted in tiredness and finally in a miscarriage.) See also Panglung (1981:196f.); I am grateful to Dr Martin Delhey (University of Hamburg) for having drawn my attention to this author.

[132] For counterparts found in works of other religious traditions, see Misra 1981:75.

[133] See *Jātaka,* Vol. 4, p. 491 (tr. Cowell 1901 [Vol. 4]:304f.).

[134] A similar child-devouring *yakṣī* is mentioned in *Jayaddisa Jātaka* (No. 513); see *Jātaka,* Vol. 5, p. 21 (tr. Cowell 1905 [Vol. 5]:11. Here a wife prays to be able to devour the child of the king's co-wife.

[135] Flood 1996:180: "The Mātṛkās are described as dark, living on the periphery of society, and bringing misfortune, particularly upon children who must be protected from their unwanted attentions."

[136] Note that Kinsley (1987:160) tends to perceive the *mātṛkā*s as grounded in village-goddess cults, stating that "[i]t is quite likely that the Mātṛkās [...] can be identified with those goddesses, who are so central to the religious life of most Hindu villagers." Orr (1999:261), it seems, would argue against this identification.

[137] A crossroads is a common place to dispose of dangerous things. On crossroads as places inhabited by *mātṛkā*s, see Kinsley

his attempt to explain the phenomenon remarks:

> Behind child-afflicting goddesses such as the Mātṛkās is probably the belief that women who die childless or in childbirth linger on as inimical spirits who are jealous of other women and their children and whose jealousy is appeased by stealing or harming their children.

If Kinsley is correct, we would have a salient point of convergence between the *mātṛkā*s and *yakṣī*s, the latter as reflected in the popular beliefs of present-day Tamilnadu (see Sections 7.4 and 7.5). For in popular belief, too, *yakṣī*s are regarded as being the hungry, unsatisfied spirits of pregnant women who have died an untimely death.[138] It seems to me that the features of both the *yakṣī* type B and the *mātṛkā*s are quite close to the Western medieval witch, who was either a healer or midwife, the latter often looked upon as an evil mother, who, in her supposed cruelty and enviousness, was held responsible for the deaths of mothers and children.

CONCLUSION TO 7.3.1

As stated earlier, the brief excursus on *yakṣī*s has been aimed at determining the extent to which the goddess who goes by the name Icakki, Iyakki, or Icakkiyammaṉ, and is worshipped today in the far south of Tamilnadu, matches the picture of *yakṣī*s portrayed in texts of the various Indian religious traditions. In the Icakki worship we are concerned with, it is tempting to combine the two *yakṣī* types, that of the benevolent, protective, magically powerful, and progeny-bestowing *yakṣī* (type A) and that of the avenging, jealous, child-devouring *yakṣī* (type B, the type exhibiting the *mātṛkā*s' traits) into the figure of the goddess Icakkiyammaṉ. This combination is iconographically depicted in the Paḷavūr Icakki with a child on her hip and a child in her mouth,[139] and, in a more restricted sense, described in the local Icakki story of Paḷavūr.[140] However, I do not wish to imply that the worship of the goddess Icakkiyammaṉ found today in the southernmost parts of Tamilnadu is similar to the *yakṣī* worship of ancient or medieval times.[141] But I do argue that in the Icakki *koṭai* ritual under discussion a relation to *yakṣī*s can indeed be assumed (as indicated by the goddess's very name[142]), and that the features ascribed to this goddess in the context of worship bear certain similarities to earlier Vedic conceptions of *yakṣa*s. Such Vedic conceptions are quite equivocal:[143] both benign and malign;[144] moreover, as having "magical power"[145] with the ability to possess other beings,[146] probably owing to their spirit nature. It would not be amiss to say that the goddess in her *koṭai* ritual, in agreement with her dual character, can primarily be seen in two ways, as devouring new life and granting new life. These two facets are similarly ascribed to *yakṣī*s (or *yakṣiṇī*s) in the Buddhist *Jātaka*s, although they are rarely

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1987:155; referring to *Cārudatta* of Bhāsa and the *Mṛcchakaṭika* of Śūdraka, the author notes the practice of making offerings to *mātṛkā*s at crossroads.

[138] See my discussion in Sect. 7.4.1.

[139] See Sect. 8.7.

[140] Note that in this confusing landscape of Icakki stories we have constantly to distinguish between the local Icakki story (see Sects. 9.2.2, midnight session and 9.3.4.2) and the translocal epic *IK* (Sect. 5.4).

[141] Here I deviate clearly from Vētācalam's view (1989:111f.).

[142] Interestingly enough, according to Orr (1999:266), "the terms used to refer to female deities in Jain and Hindu inscriptions [of medieval Tamilnadu] are different from one another"; in particular, "[n]o Hindu goddesses are referred to as *yakṣī*s."

[143] On the ambiguous character of *yakṣa*s in early beliefs and the element of fertility in their character displayed in later times, see Misra 1981:162: "As regards the popular mythology and folklore of the Yakshas in the modern period, it appears that they have found their place as fertility of [*sic*] protective deities in which their old ambivalent attitude persists." In their protective aspect, they are, according to the same scholar (ibid.:163), "similar to [...] deities such as *Ellammā, Mariammā* [...]."

[144] See Misra 1981:14, referred to above in Sect. 7.3.1, point 1.

[145] Misra 1981:26.

[146] See Sect. 7.3.1, point 8, p. 246, n. 121.

combined in a single *yakṣī*. In this respect, Icakki seems to be an exception.[147]

At this point attention should again be drawn to the prayer to a female deity called Icakkiyammaṉ in the late-sixteenth-century Jain text *Appāṇṭaināṭar Ulā,* a poem in praise of the *tīrthaṅkara* Mahāvīra Pārśvanātha, also known as Appāṇṭaināṭar (see Section 7.3.1, point 6.). It may be a minor detail or a coincidence that our goddess's name has a counterpart in a sixteenth-century Jain context. But perhaps it is not. I confess I do not know what precise connection this goddess may have with the present-day Icakkiyammaṉ, who can be classified as non-vegetarian and Hindu. On the basis of the information currently available to me, any attempt to assume a historical connection would be far too speculative. However, it is worth considering that the transformation of the religious identity of Tamil Jain goddesses (*yakṣīs*) is attested.[148] As several scholars have pointed out, Jain goddess shrines were,[149] and still are being, altered into Hindu temples.[150] In any case, the namesake invites an inquiry—something that goes beyond the framework of the present study.

7.3.2 Icakki *(yakṣī)* and Nīli: Two Basically Autonomous Figures

In the preceding section I discussed the name Icakki as applied to the goddess in the context of worship. However, in the story (translocal *IK*) told of her within the *villuppāṭṭu* bow-song tradition she is called not only Icakki but also Nīli, the latter carrying largely different connotations, as I have shown in Section 7.3 and Chapter 3. This seems something of a contradiction and deserves careful scrutiny. In this chapter, I shall discuss the apparent contradiction and show its causes. I propose that the two names applied to the heroine in the translocal *IK* were originally used for two autonomous figures, who only converged when the story of Nīli became linked to the worship of Icakkiyammaṉ.

Let us start out with a few givens. First of all, we have the translocal *IK*. Its compositional core, the story of the human Paḷaiyaṉūr Nīli, was well known in the seventh century C.E., and was in one way or

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[147] The pan-Indian goddess Durgā, of course, also exhibits a dual character; however, we cannot really consider her traits as falling under the maternal–antimaternal dichotomy.

[148] This is perhaps not very surprising in view of the fact, as Orr (1999) points out, that Tamil Hindu and Tamil Jain worship are not, after all, entirely incompatible, and may even have emerged from a common background. Indeed, her examination of Jain and Hindu medieval inscriptions brings to light a "manner of worship, [which was] virtually identical [...] in terms of notions of devotion, service, and sensuous worship [...]" (ibid.:265). Interestingly enough, according to the same scholar (ibid.:256) "[t]he offering of flowers is the only type of worship that is commonly found referred to in Hindu inscriptions that is not in evidence in the surviving epigraphical accounts of Jain worship."

[149] In Kerala, according to Obeyesekere (1984:518), the Jain temples were transformed into Bhagavatī shrines in the fourteenth century; cf. Clothey 1982: "A Jaina temple at Cittaṟal [Citaṟāl] and one at Kallil in Northern Travancore became temples to Bhagavathi, the former around the middle of the thirteenth century" (ibid.:50f.). A temple in Nagercoil was converted in 1522 from a Jain shrine to a temple to the "king of the snakes" (according to Clothey [1982:51], who refers to the *Travancore Information and Listener,* III, 9 [May 1943], p. 19). Mahāvīra Pārśvanātha and other *muni*s are depicted within the temple compound. The transition from a Jain shrine to a temple of the snake-king is not very surprising in view of the assimilation of the *nāga* and *bhūta* cults by the Jain tradition (see Zydenbos 2000:187, with regard to the Jain cult of Patmāvatī). Interestingly enough, Icakki, as a minor deity, is connected with the Nāgarāja temple at Nagercoil; see Sect. 7.7.3 below. – It seems to me that the multiform culture of Tamilnadu has all along offered a platform for various potential conversions. Thus, similarly to transitions of divinities from a Jain context to a Hindu one, people's conversions from one to the other adherence are well substantiated, as the case of the famous poet-saint Appar shows: he was first a Jain mendicant before becoming a Śaiva; see Cort 2002:85f.

[150] Vētācalam 1989:103: தென்தமிழ்நாட்டிலும் அதைதயொட்டிய கேரளப்பகுதியிலும் இருந்த இயக்கி கோயில்கள் பிற்காலத்தில் பகவதிகோயிலாக மாறியுள்ளன. The *iyakki* shrine in Ciṅkikkuḷam in the area of Nāṉkuṉēri, Tirunelvēli district strikingly exemplifies this process: நாங்குநேரிப் பகுதியிலுள்ள சிங்கிக்குளத்திலிருந்த இயக்கிகோயில் இன்று பகவதியம்மன் கோயில் என்ற பெயரில் விளங்குகின்றது (ibid.:103). Dr Lourdu (the eminent Tamil folklorist) and Peter A. Raj (the archivist of St. Xavier's College, Paḷaiyamkōṭṭai) remarked in personal communications in respectively May and December 2002 that in one particular location, Ciṅkikkuḷam, the Iyakki temple has had a storey added on for the worship of Bhagavatī. Unfortunately my schedule did not allow me to visit the site personally. According to Vētācalam (1989:103) there is also the case, in Kuḷattupuḷā in Kerala, of a Bhagavatī temple even today bearing both names, being called the Iyakki Bhagavatī temple: கேரளத்தில் குளத்துப்புழா என்ற இடத்திலுள்ள பகவதி இன்னும் இயக்கிபகவதி என்றே அழைக்கப்படுவது குறிப்பிடத்தக்கது.

another affiliated with the fierce goddess Nīli-Kālī of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu in northern Tamilnadu.[151] It presents a story of the type violation–death–deification–revenge.[152] This story type, at the core of the bow-song tradition,[153] is a variation on the *Cilappatikāram* type of story (violation–revenge–death–deification).

Second, we have the Icakkiyamman̠ worship. It is first attested with certainty in the second half of the seventeenth century in the far south of Tamilnadu.[154] A possible indication that it existed still much earlier, however, may be seen in the Muppiṭāri[155] Amman̠/Mukāmpari temple of Tāḻakkuṭi, a temple of the early fourteenth century[156] dedicated to Puruṣā Tēvi (later Icakki),[157] the same deified warrior-queen who resides in the Cukkuppāṟai (Nāṭār) temple near Kan̠n̠iyākumari, founded in 1670[158]. There her story, the *Pen̠n̠araciyar Katai,* an account of the princess Puruṣā Tēvi (N4), was, and still is, the central text[159] of Icakkiyamman̠ worship. This indigenous southern story of an autonomous homoerotic[160] virgin warrior-queen, presumably part of the Icakkiyamman̠ cult prior to the *IK,*[161] presents a narrative centred on women (female leader–violent invasion–suicide–deification[162]) and falls in a broad sense under the *Alliyaracān̠imālai*[163] type of story. One has little reason to doubt former royal patronage of the Puruṣā Tēvi–Icakki cult tradition. The royal family of Mēlāṅkōṭu, which had Puruṣā Tēvi–Icakki installed,[164] considered her to be the family's tutelary matrilineal ancestor and protectress.[165]

Third, it may be supposed that Icakkiyamman̠ worship is a cult that developed out of a tradition of honouring powerful female spirits of the dead. The *cumaitāṅki kal* (load bearer in stone), a memorial for death during pregnancy or childbirth, figures prominently in it. The goddess Icakkiyamman̠ would then be a composite spirit representing pregnant women and virgins who have died untimely deaths. She is hence a most feared figure, the limbo state she is in rendering her highly unsatisfied and thus vengeful (see Section 7.4.1 below).

Given these three aspects of the figure and the fact that not only Puruṣā Tēvi's story but also that of Nīli (both figures later renamed Icakki) became tied to the Icakkiyamman̠ cult,[166] the question arises why and how the *Paḻaiyan̠ūr Nīli Katai* (a northern text that existed in a recast southern version by

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[151] See Chap. 3, No. 4.

[152] See Sect. 4.2 above.

[153] See Sect. 4.2.

[154] For the dating of the Cukkuppāṟai Tēriviḻai shrine of P. Taṅkarāj Nāṭār, see Sect. 7.7.2, K.K.Dt., No. 1 below.

[155] Orr (1999:262, 266) remarks that Jain and Hindu inscriptions in Tamilnadu dating from medieval times use the term *piṭāri* both for Jain *yakṣīs* and pan-Indian goddesses such as Kālī and Durgā.

[156] See p. 13, n. 30, in Sect. 2.4, N4. Tāḻakkuṭi is mentioned in the *Pen̠n̠araciyar Katai.*

[157] Very probably this temple is identical with the Puruṣā Tēvi–Icakki temple mentioned in the *Pen̠n̠araciyar Katai,* and said to have been built by the Karaiyāḷars (Vēḷāḷas) of Tāḻakkuṭi (see Sect. 2.4, N4, synopsis).

[158] See Jeyakumār and Pūmin̠ākan̠ātan̠ 1995:xxviii.

[159] Note that in some Icakkiyamman̠ shrines of Kan̠n̠iyākumari district this text is indeed the one performed in the *koṭai* festival; see p. 268f., Sect. 7.7.2, K.K.Dt., Nos. 1, 9.

[160] For Puruṣā Tēvi and her all-female kingdom being impregnated by the south wind, see Sect. 2.4, N4.

[161] See Sect. 2.4, N4, Figure 1.

[162] Rao (1986:140) dubs this story type "sacrificial epic"; for further details, see Sect. 2.4, N4 above. I may remark in passing that the theme of revenge also figures in the *Pen̠n̠araciyar Katai.*

[163] The story of the princess Alli of Maturai. The story has links with the classical Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata.*

[164] See Sect. 2.4, N4, synopsis.

[165] See Sect. 2.4, N4, p. 15, n. 35. Note that the middle-aged Nāṭār Tiru Kānti, the wealthy owner of Man̠ikkaṭṭippoṭṭal Cāmiv̄iṭṭukōyil, told me in a personal communication that during the lifetime of his father the icon of Poṭṭal Icakki was confiscated by the royals of Patmanāpapuram, who claimed that the deity was too powerful; see Sect. 7.7.2, K.K.Dt., p. 269, No. 8. Since it has never been returned, an eternally lit oil lamp has replaced the deity.

[166] Support of this view comes from Blackburn (1980:204): "Purushā Tēvi then goes to Kailāsa, receives boons from Śiva, and returns to earth [...] and is [...] merged with the most fearful of all the avenging Ammans, Icakki Amman," and Paramasivan 2002: "In the southern districts, Paḻakainallur Nīli is now connected with Icakkiyamman̠." See also Sect. 2.4, N4.

1775)[167] came to be associated with the Icakkiyamman̲ worship prevailing in the southernmost *villuppāṭṭu* bow-song region.

Concerning the first question, I would argue that the story of Nīli, having forged an existence of its own, at some point set out in search of a cult.[168] This is not as far-fetched as it may seem, given that in northern Pal̲aiyan̲ūr-Tiruvālaṅkāṭu the heroine of the *katai* has never had a living cult.[169] What we probably witness is a late cultic deification of the Pal̲aiyan̲ūr Nīli character in the goddess Icakkiyamman̲ of southern Tamilnadu. Any attempt to date the historical process that linked story and cult would, however, be highly speculative.[170] The same is true of the question of how the text migrated to the south. While these questions must be left pending, the question as to why the Nīli story should tie in precisely with the cult of Icakkiyamman̲ is more easily answered. I think it clear that Icakkiyamman̲, who is considered to be the most feared goddess in the bow-song tradition,[171] was seen as a most suitable choice for a similarly threatening figure like Nīli to meld into.

This brings us back to the second question asked above of how the Nīli story became linked with the Icakki cult. Nīli's relation to Icakkiyamman̲ worship is, I think, an indirect one, and can only be understood by the common theme they share: the violent death of a pregnant or virginal woman.[172] Only such an event can explain in full the complex manner in which Nīli and Icakki converged. However, in spite of this common theme there is an odd sense of disjuncture when we try to merge the two. Part of the problem with the complete identification of the goddess Icakkiyamman̲ and Nīli is Icakkiyamman̲'s maternal and antimaternal traits. These traits bring her naturally close to displaying a Hārītī-like *yakṣī* disposition. However, they do not fully suit the disposition of Nīli, whose name (see Sect. 7.3) is so closely connected with the ferocious warrior-like Nīli-Kor̲r̲avai and Durgā, "the murderous bride."[173] Perhaps it was this sense of disjuncture that led to the devadāsī motif[174] being introduced into the

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[167] See my discussion in Sect. 2.6.

[168] On this view, cf. Johansen 1971:104.

[169] See Subramaniam (*A Tale of Nemesis,* Tamil with Engl. transl. of *Nīli Yaṭcakān̲am*) 1996:xviii. See also Can̲mukacuntaram 1978:27: "From Ton̲ṭaimaṇṭala catakam [of Paṭikkācu Pulavar] it is known that there is no custom of building a temple and worshipping Nīli. It is only found in south Paṇṭiya country. There is a temple in Pal̲avūr. There is a temple of Nīli, called Icakki at Muppantal otherwise named Muppandharam." – In Pal̲aiyan̲ūr-Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, up to the present, it is only the Vēl̲āl̲as whose importance is acknowledged, as the lately opened memorial to the seventy Vēl̲āl̲as shows.

[170] It is said that at Pal̲avūr, the main place of my research, the worship of Icakkiyamman̲, which includes the *IK,* was established around 300 years ago, that is, around 1700.

[171] After all, she challenges human's continuity of existence.

[172] Recall An̲n̲atāṭci-Nīli in the northern version N7, who died pregnant, and Lakṣmī of the southern bow-song version N1, who died as a virgin.

[173] Note that in the *IK* (see N1) Nīli-Icakki is identified in the last line of the text with Bhagavatī, a goddess associated with Kālī and Durgā. The Durgā of the South Indian Śaiva tradition is seen as a dangerous, "murderous bride" (Shulman 1980:176ff.) who "poses a fatal threat to those who approach her sexually" (Kinsley 1987:115). She is said to "present [...] a picture of determined, fierce independence, which is challenged only at great risk by her suitors" (ibid.:115) and is "described as a ferocious, invincible warrior" (ibid.:138). On the Bhagavatī-Kālī cult in Kerala, see Caldwell 1999. None of the descriptions captures any aspect of the maternal–antimaternal dichotomy in the identity of these goddesses. – Note also that in our story's variant N7 of the northern line Nīli is a form of Pārvatī; see Sect. 2.4, N7 above.

[174] One has little reason to doubt a link between devadāsīs and *yakṣīs*. This can be inferred not least from the fact that *yakṣīs* are worshipped by devadāsīs. Thurston and Rangachari (1909:142), referring to the worship practice of devadāsīs, write: "Minor deities, such as Bhadrakāli, Yakshi and Gandharva are worshipped by the figure of a trident or sword being drawn on the wall of the house, to which food and sweetmeats are offered on Fridays." – Note that it is the devadāsī motif (a reconceptualisation of the story's protagonist) that provides the Nīli story with its local contextualisation in the south of Tamilnadu. – Along these same lines, it may be suggested that there is even a tripartite connection: *yakṣīs*, devadāsīs, and Vēl̲āl̲as, the latter a social group that is an integral part of the productive landowning classes of the wet zones, that is, those who are concerned with agrarian fertility and water assets. A remark in Thurston and Rangachari 1909:127 does seem to point to the assumed link, namely that "[from...] the two castes (Vellala and Kaikola [the latter being weavers; B.S.]) [...] most of the Dāsis are recruited [...]." Cf. Kersenboom-Story 1987:180, which echoes this: "[...] the *vir̲ali* and *pāṭin̲i* represents a most likely antecedent of the later devadasi 'proper'. However, the bardic literature offers us no clue as to the caste [...]. The medieval commentator Naccin̲ārkkin̲iyar (ca. 14 century A.D.) expounds clear ideas about the caste of the *vir̲ali* [...] who belong to the caste[s] of [...] and *vel̲l̲āl̲a jāti* [...]. *Vel̲l̲āl̲a jāti* stands for a number of non-Brahmin castes of the South: Mudaliars, Pil̲l̲ais, Kaikkolans [...]. These are indeed the social groups from which devadasis could be recruited."

story.[175] Paradoxically, such highly auspicious[176] and sexualised women are, at the same time, not fully women at all, in that they generally do not bear children. It seems to me that this new motif of the devadāsī[177] is conducive to the convergence of the Nīli figure with Icakkiyamman, the more so as the latter, like a devadāsī, is seen to be to an equal degree both fertile and the very opposite of fertile in essence. However, again, the decisive factor in the convergence of the two figures is due to their similarity in dying childless. Their natures gave rise to analogous themes, but never fully overlapped. This conclusion is supported by the fact that in the context of the *koṭai* festival it is not the translocal *IK* (the southern version of the *Palaiyaṉūr Nīli Katai*) that generates the moment of fusion of ritual and text (Section 9.2.2, midnight session), but rather the local Icakki story, a story that plainly reveals the main feature of the goddess Icakkiyamman—her blocking of bearing children.[178]

CONCLUSION TO 7.3.2

In the preceding lines I have concluded that at a textual level two originally autonomous figures have converged: Nīli and Icakkiyamman. The presence of the name Icakki in the translocal *IK,* in my opinion, can only be explained when seen in the context of concrete cultic realities, realities to which the text gained only deferred entry (and that only in the southernmost part of Tamilnadu). It seems that the Nīli of the story and the Icakkiyamman of the cult became interlocked in virtue of both having died in a childless state. Recognising this puts the relation of these two figures into proper perspective. However, their traits do not correspond one-to-one. This leads us to the conclusion that they are indeed basically different figures: on the one hand, the once human Nīli, whose name in *Cil.* 12.21.3 *(palikōṭai),* is "apparently so closely linked with violence"[179] and associated with Korṟavai,[180] the

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[175] This, of course, does not exclude other reasons for the introduction of the devadāsī motif into the story—for example, the possible cross-fertilisation of the *IK* text by other texts. It is not unlikely that, for instance, the elaborate erotic depictions of the devadāsīs, very visible in works such as the *Vaiśikatantram* and the *Uṇṇunīlisandēśam* (both Maṇipravālam works of the Sanskrit-proficient elite circles of Kerala, that is, works with a blend of Sanskrit lexico-grammatical incorporations in Malayalam speech), found their way across caste boundaries into wider circulation, and thereby indirectly into the bards' textual practice. Such imitation is not unlikely with respect to the *IK,* which made eroticism and courtesan culture part of its world, within its southern setting. Similarly, from an anthropological point of view the depiction of the sexual charms of women and erotic behaviour in the southern version may reflect not only the cross-fertilisation of texts, but equally as well the tendency of an epoch to make the perceptions of body, and the relationship between money and erotic bodily experience a conscious focus of lived reality (cf. Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 1998). (Perhaps such an influence on the story can be more easily acknowledged against the backdrop of sociopolitical change and the large-scale migrations beginning in the late fourteenth century and culminating in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; see Ludden 1985:50ff., 69–75.) We may also expect that individual episodes were elaborated as a reflex of socially or geographically formed influences. The two social groups of bow-song bards, the landed Vēḷāḷas and the oppressed Nāṭārs, each doubtless left its imprint on the story as a mirror of its own perceived realities. (Nāṭārs, for instance, always favoured Nīli, the ferocious abandoned woman—a fact both confirmed in my fieldwork and emphasised by Paramasivan [2002].) Similarly, the southern version may have developed rudimentary scenes into what by comparison are full-blown episodes so as to suit the tastes of the new local audience, one used to a cultural blend of Malayali and Tamil. All this may explain not only how the heroine ultimately evolved her unique personality within the bow-song *IK* text, but also what happened to the text once it arrived in the south.

[176] On the devadāsī and auspiciousness, see Kersenboom (1991:137): "[...] the *devadāsī* exceeds even the *sumaṅgalī* [i.e. a married woman whose husband is still living and who has borne several children] in auspiciousness [... and] is called 'ever auspicious' (*nityasumaṅgalī*)."

[177] This new motif is found in the context not only of expanded episodes of childbearing, but also of previously unknown scenes of killing wives and children. I refer to the scene in N1 where Nīli-Icakki kills all the children and their mothers, a murderous act that results in halting the reproductive continuity of a community (cf. the Hārītī figure). The scene follows the murder of the Ceṭṭi and the suicide of the seventy Vēḷāḷas—two parties that fall victim to what could be called a rational act of 'justified' revenge. This theme of child slaughter is found neither in the (self-impregnated wife)–sword–fire type (northern line) nor in the transitional version, the margosa leaf–fire type. We may state that both episodes, the childbearing and the hindering of reproduction, highlight the same dichotomy (fertile–infertile) as we are disposed to see in the devadāsī motif.

[178] I need not enter here into the details. I shall show at a later stage in the analysis of the midnight *koṭai* ritual (Sect. 9.3.4) that this can indeed be assumed.

[179] Shulman 1980:196.

[180] Reference is made to this goddess, a proto-Durgā, in the Tamil literature of the Caṅkam period and in the *kāppiyam* work

ancient war goddess, and on the other, Iyakki/Icakki, whose name reflects both the child-devouring (type B) and the protective and fertility-bestowing (type A) aspects of the *yakṣī*s. The latter name clearly defines the goddess's essential role in the cult.

While at the textual level there is an uneven convergence of two figures that have no exact parallels (a fact that can only be explained by the story's having become attached to a cult), at the ritual level, I would argue, the goddess is voided of the Nīli-Koṟṟavai-Durgā traits,[181] while retaining much of the dual life-giving and life-taking qualities of apotheosised women who died violently and childless.[182] We can go a step further in the argument by asserting that this duality, in fact, is reflected in what Blackburn (1980:211) has defined as the "split goddess": Icakkiyammaṉ worshipped in the role of two sisters, an elder and a younger one, who divide, according to indigenous notions, two psychological dispositions between themselves: the erotic–fertile and the unsatisfied–antimaternal.[183] Indeed, this dichotomy postulated by popular psychology underlies the cult of Icakkiyammaṉ.[184]

7.4 Icakki and People's Beliefs

Though the worship of Icakki is mainly patronised by three social groups, those mentioned above, other communities do visit her shrines and participate in her *koṭai* festivals, the principal ones being the Ācāris, Iṭaiyars, Kollars, Cāmpavars, Tēvars, Pataiyācciyars, Paṟaiyars, and Vīracaivars.[185] What are we to make of their devotion, and what is their belief? Generally speaking, it is worth consulting Icakkiyammaṉ for everything relating to fertility,[186] wealth, and progress in life. It is, however, domestic life in general and female fertility/infertility in particular that she is most closely associated with.

When Vētācalam (1989:110) talks of Icakki's charmingly seductive character as able to unnerve and entrap men, my fieldwork has shown that this is due above all to the fact that they in one way or another have become entangled in adultery. There is no doubt that adultery is a concern Icakkiyammaṉ raises her voice at, thereby exhibiting continuity with the historical *yakṣas*.[187] One fact that came out of my interviews held with female devotees at the Muppantal Icakki temple and with the Nāṭār woman Pakialeṭcumi, an informant residing in Teṟkukkūṇṭal (K.K.Dt.), is just how much of a domestic problem adultery and polygyny is, for although the latter is now illegal, husbands' promiscuous lives cause women to suffer and propel them towards Icakki. While marital crises are kept under wraps, being treated as a taboo in Tamil society, they are a factor in the worship of the goddess Icakkiyammaṉ, along with themes closely relating to the female body and its reproductive capacity or lack thereof. These

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Cilappatikāram. It is, however, an unsolved question whether Koṟṟavai originally displayed aspects of a fertility goddess. Kinsley (1987:176) holds that there is "no marked element of fertility in the character." Tiwari (1985:233) agrees with him, but admits that an "original fertility character of this goddess is not unlikely." For Tiwari's argumentation, see Chap. 3, No. 1.1, p. 28, n. 5 above. Support of Kinsley's view comes from the *Cilappatikāram,* a work which opens up early layers of popular religiosity to view. Here Koṟṟavai's identity can be inferred not least from the social group of Maṟava warriors who venerated her—that is to say, from their social identity and economic needs.

[181] Note that at the ritual level the goddess is never addressed as Nīli.

[182] Paramasivaṉ (2002) argues along the same lines when he writes: "[the ...] connection [of the *Paḻayaṉūr Nīli Katai* and the goddess Icakkiyammaṉ] is at the level of bow-song, but not at the level of worship." This assertion has not been elaborated on and argued analytically by Paramasivaṉ. – On the emic distinction between goddesses born out of violence and village goddesses, see Mines 2002:241 (Issakkiyamman [*sic*]), 243.

[183] For a detailed discussion, see below, Sect. 7.6.

[184] This I attempt to show in Chap. 9.

[185] This list is taken from Perumāḷ 1990:59.

[186] For the belief that cattle diseases are also caused by Icakki, see Natarajan 1986:4. – Cf. Favret-Saada 1979, which examines the notion of a link between witchcraft and the death of cattle in France.

[187] See *Cil.,* Chap. 5 "Intiraviḻavu ūr eṭutta kātai," 128-134; and *Kathāsaritsāgara* 2.5.165ff., referred to in my discussion in Sect. 7.3.1, point 4.

include menstrual problems, fear of labour pains and the physical ordeal of childbirth, pregnant women's belief in their psychic susceptibility to spirit possession, and above all to the problem of barrenness.[188] A visible sign both of women's requests and thanksgiving are the offerings of wooden dolls and cradles, on the one hand, and Iyakki terra-cotta figures offered as a *koṭai* (gift), on the other.[189] Still other terra-cotta figures, placed at fences and walls around Icakki shrines and bearing signs of amputated limbs,[190] are responses of gratitude to Icakki's health-restoring help.[191] Women may require other support as well, as seen in their offerings of black bangles.[192]

However, Icakkiyammaṉ is not considered to be wholly benevolent. People's beliefs make abundant allowance for the two strands of her nature, the benevolent and malevolent,[193] as witnessed in the *cumaitāṅki kal,* which we shall discuss in the following section.

7.4.1 Icakki the Composite Spirit[194] of Pregnant Women and Virgins[195] Who Have Died Untimely Deaths

1. Cumaitāṅki kal[196] — a memorial for the death of a pregnant woman

Death in pregnancy or in childbirth means, according to Hindu belief, that a woman has left this world in a state of defilement, with adverse consequences for her next life. The woman who dies in this manner cannot perform her duty as a mother toward the child;[197] if the child dies with her, she has failed in her filial and uxorial duties to produce offspring that will continue the family line and perform ancestral rites. A memorial stone (called *cumaitāṅki,* "load bearer") is believed to relieve her of this burden.

This memorial stone installed along the side of a road in remembrance of the untimely death of a pregnant woman or a virgin turns in the course of time into a place of Icakki worship. A fine example is found in Cempoṉkarai, a site of Icakki worship, where the top stone of the *cumaitāṅki* has fallen off. Blackburn (1980:156) notes one generally held belief: "When the top stone falls off, the harmful effects [...] of the tragic death are thought to have been spent." As regards the connection between the *cumaitāṅki* and Icakki, the goddess we are discussing here, Perumāḷ's remarks are most valuable:

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[188] Cf. Natarajan 1986:2 and Perumāḷ 1990:63. With respect to the problem of childlessness, the bow-song singer G. Muttuleṭcumi and her husband G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, in an interview held on 8 May 2002, remarked: "Icakkiyammaṉ is powerful enough to give the boon of a child to those who have had no child for more than ten or fifteen years" (K.-L.01.500).

[189] See the description of my field research in Chap. 9.

[190] These are particularly in evidence in Muppantal.

[191] Cf. Natarajan 1986:2.

[192] Natarajan 1986:2.

[193] See my discussion of the goddess's name in Sects. 7.3.1 and 7.3.2.

[194] I borrow this term from Babb (1975:228), who refers to a similar figure in Chhattisgarhi belief: the demoness Churalin. Churalin, in Babb's words, "the most malevolent of all ghosts," is associated with "women who have died in childbirth."

[195] Cf. Natarajan 1986 and Perumāḷ 1990:63. – On the inauspiciousness and potential malevolence of women who die during pregnancy and childbirth, or who die unmarried and therefore childless, and their connection with the concept of *dṛṣṭi* (evil eye), see Kersenboom-Story 1987:207, n. 5. This author remarks that one who is childless and infertile "may impede the fertility of all spheres of reality," and that, analogously, a pregnant woman who dies "may impede the deliveries of pregnant women."

[196] An approximately 1.30-metre-high table-like stone formation consisting of two vertical stone slabs topped by a horizontal one. The *cumaitāṅki kal,* as its name implies, was previously made use of among travellers to set down a load on while resting. – The bow-song bard T.M.P., in an interview held on 21 January 2003, succinctly explains the link between the stone, installed as the result of the untimely death of a pregnant woman, and the people who use it as a convenient support: "They put their load on this stone and take some rest. When they take rest, their body and soul is relaxed. Psychologically, this has a positive effect on the troubled family [who installed the *cumaitāṅki*]." In other words, as Blackburn (1980:155f.) puts it, "[t]he soul of the dead woman who died 'bearing a load' is believed to reside in this structure which 'bears the load' of others."

[197] For examples of this problem, see the complaint of the daughter of Puruṣā Tēvi to Śiva in the synopsis of the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai,* Sect. 2.4, N4.

When a woman dies before delivery, she becomes a *pēy* (hungry spirit) who roams about with her child. She suffers due to the unbearable weight of the child, and takes revenge on her relations. This, people believe still today, so they neither cremate nor bury the dead body of a pregnant woman.

They put the dead body of a pregnant woman next to the pit of the cremation ground, wrap it in white clothes, and remove the dress of the dead body. As the body lies on the ground facing the sky, they split the stomach of the pregnant woman with a sharp horn of a bull. After cutting, they take the foetus from the womb. This is done by the woman belonging to the Harijan community who guards the cremation grounds. Afterward the relations either burn or bury the two bodies separately.

If a woman dies before her delivery, it is believed that she will harm people. If the dead woman appears in a dream with her child, or appears in their mind, the mature girls in the family will start menstruating. In remembrance of the dead pregnant woman, they [the family] will install a stone at the boundary of the village. This stone is worshipped by the relations who installed it. They serve offerings on the last Friday of the month of Kartikai (mid-Nov.-mid-Dec.). As soon as the news and the implied belief begin to spread, the stone becomes important. In due course it becomes Icakkiyamma<u>n</u>. This stone, which once belonged to one family, afterward is common to all. After some years it turns into a place of Nīli-Amma<u>n</u> worship.

When field researchers asked about the development of the cult, the people replied that the temples that are found in Ka<u>r</u>kāṭu, Cāntā<u>n</u> Cettiviḷai, and so forth were some 50 years earlier *cumaitāṅki* stones. (Perumāḷ 1990:129, appendix, n. 13)

2. Icakki and the untimely death of virgins (ka<u>nn</u>is)

The way virgins who meet an untimely death are believed to become Icakkis is well described in a story thought to be native to the former Tiruvitāṅkūr Nāṭu (Travancore State).

> The plot involves an intrigue planned by two blood relations of King Mārttāṇṭavarmā of Tiruvitāṅkūr to assassinate the latter. Patmanāpa<u>n</u>, a great hero and supporter of Mārttāṇṭavarmā, was in charge of training the warriors of Travancore. His fame as an expert of the whirling sword *(curuḷ vāḷ)* spread everywhere, and beautiful women desired to marry him—including the two daughters of a Nambudiri Brahmin, a priest who performed the pūjās at the Nīlakaṇṭacāmi temple in Patmanāpapuram. They claimed they would die if they could not marry Patmanāpa<u>n</u>, the great hero who belonged to the Nāṭār community. When their father came to know that Patmanāpa<u>n</u> had promised to marry his two daughters, he pushed both into a well at Mēlāṅkōṭu, for he realised he could do nothing against Patmanāpa<u>n</u>, given the latter's influence not only with the king, but also among the people. The two *veṭṭuppaṭṭa vātai*s ("cut-up spirits")[198] became Iyakkis with the names Nīlā and Ceṇpakam, and settled in Mēlāṅkōṭu.[199]

We can conclude that Icakkiyamma<u>n</u> is not only closely associated with the spirits of women who died during pregnancy, but also to an equal extent with spirits of virgin women who met any sudden, unnatural, and violent death.

7.5 Different Local Icakki Stories

If we are to interpret the story of Nīli/Icakkiyamma<u>n</u> in its context, we must make clear that at the *koṭai* festival it is not only the *IK* (also known as the *Paḷakainallur Nīli Katai*) that the *villuppāṭṭu* group is expected to perform. Although the *IK* is compulsory, the bow-song singer used to be qualified to sing, in addition, the story of Icakki specific to individual locations.[200] Each setting of the local story is unique and is considered to be the centrepiece of the *koṭai,* as I shall demonstrate at a later point in the discussion of the *koṭai* festival in which I participated. If we ignore these local stories, our

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[198] For a discussion of the two categories "divine birth" and "cut-up spirit," see Blackburn 1980:151.

[199] My synopsis is based on Perumāḷ 1990:123f., appendix, n. 8. – For the two daughters' nocturnal activities as Iyakkis, see the musician's story in Sect. 7.6, p. 259, n. 208.

[200] These products of local memory we may consider as foundation legends, that is, as a reflection of a shrine's origin. A centre comes about in an act of self-proclamation by narrating its beginnings. For an insightful discussion on "topographies of memory," see Remensnyder 2002:193ff.

understanding of the goddess would be incomplete, for they have shaped parts of the history of the Icakki worship that has spread throughout the southernmost districts of Tamilnadu. G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, the *kuṭam* (pot) player and husband of the lead singer, G. Muttuleṭcumi, pointed this out when he stated in an interview I held with him on 8 May 2002 during the *koṭai* festival of Paḷavūr:

> She [...] takes revenge and afterwards she is present in each and every temple. If we sing in this temple, we finish like this: 'She has come from that temple, and has settled in this temple.' This is how we will finish our story. The basic story is only one. All sing the basic story. But each and every temple has its own story. In each temple there is a new and separate story. (K-L.01.070) If the deity comes to a village and settles there, this should be backed up by some evidence.

The stories I present below were collected and published in Tamil by Perumāḷ in his 1990 and 2002 editions.

❑ The story of *Naṭukkāṭṭu Icakki* (Naṭukkāṭṭu near Nagercoil)[201]

> A woman belonging to the shepherd community was married to a person from the town of Pañcaliṅkapuram. The woman's mother went there to bring back her pregnant daughter to her house. According to the community's custom, after the *vaḷaikāppu* ceremony [when a seventh-month pregnant woman is honoured with bangles for her first pregnancy] is over, the pregnant woman is taken to her parents' house. As they proceeded along the way, the pregnant woman said to her mother: "O Mother, I have acquired a little money without the knowledge of my husband. I'll enter the house through the backyard and get it." The mother, who was greedy for money, sent her [back] on her own.
> The pregnant woman went [back] speedily. Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki was standing along the same route. Icakki called to the pregnant woman. She did not turn back but kept on going. As the pregnant woman was returning, after taking the money, Icakki confronted her, laughed horribly, and showed her long nails to the pregnant woman. The woman was afraid, vomited blood as a result of her fear, and died.[202] Icakki tore open her stomach, took out the foetus and put it in her mouth, and then ran away, producing the *kuravai* sound [made by flapping the tongue against the palate].
> The dead pregnant woman came [back] as a *pēy* (hungry spirit) on the following day. She committed atrocities in the village. She threw stones and sand at midnight. Her family members fervently promised to her [Icakki] that they would put out *paṭaippu* (offerings). They installed a *pīṭam* (platform) at the place where she was buried. They brought an animal sacrifice and prepared *poṅkal* rice. Thereafter the fear that the people in the village had experienced disappeared. (Perumāḷ 1990:127, appendix, n. 11)[203]

❑ The story of *Teṉkaṉputūr Icakki* and the establishing of an Icakkiyammaṉ temple[204]

> The story of the establishing of an Icakkiyammaṉ temple in the village of Teṉkaṉputūr in Nāñcilnāṭu [the present-day Kaṉṉiyākumari] is as follows:
> There was a magician in a village by the name of Teṉkaṉputūr who belonged to the Paṇṭāram community [responsible for minor temple work, such as preparing garlands]. He was a powerful magician *(caktivāynta anta mantiravāti)* His wife was pregnant. As she had neither mother nor father, nor any other relations, she performed household chores alone. The magician went in search of a maidservant to assist his wife. He could not find anyone, so [by his magical skills] he turned Paḷaiyaṉūr Nīli into a 16-year-old young woman. In order to remove her demonic qualities, he drove a sliver from a *kāñciram* stick into her head and brought her to his house.
> Nīli, the maidservant, did work obediently, according to the orders of the magician's wife. She hauled water from a deep well, made flour, and carried firewood. These difficult tasks she did very quickly. The magician ordered his wife to be

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[201] The well-known bow-song singer S. Svayamburajan of Rājakkamaṅkalam told me in an interview on 8 May 2002 that a cassette recording of his *villuppāṭṭu* performance of the *IK* is available at this temple.

[202] Malay beliefs allow for a similar sequence of spirit attack followed by a startled reaction, see Laderman (1987:127).

[203] Perumāḷ (1990:127f.) adds to the synopsis the interesting information that "even today people serve offerings to that *pīṭam*. Together with the offerings new saris are given to women who have given birth to a child. Additionally, the people give indigenous medical herbs that are mixed in hot water for bathing." (This information has been left out of the reprint Perumāḷ 2002.)

[204] The story of Teṉkaṉputūr Icakki has the same content as the local Icakki story of Paḷavūr; see Sect. 9.2.2 (midnight session) below. – It is unclear why Perumāḷ in his 2002 reprint removed the name of the village where the events occurred. In his 1990 edition the same scholar notes: "The same story is in currency in the villages of Kaṉṉiyākumari district. With some changes, moreover, it is found in the palm-leaf manuscripts of the Nīli story of Nellai district. In that story, Nīli herself goes to the house of the *mantiravāti* in order to take revenge" (131). This information, too, has been left out of Perumāḷ's new 2002 edition (132). On the Icakki temple in Teṉkaṉputūr, see 7.7.2.

careful with the new maidservant. He told her not to talk much and not to touch her. In this way, the magician warned his wife. The pregnant wife neither spoke much to the new maidservant nor had many dealings with her. The magician thought that after his wife's delivery he would send the young woman away.

One day the young servant was engaged in carrying a bundle of firewood. She said that the firewood had pierced her head, and asked for it to be looked at. The pregnant woman looked at the head of Nīli, the servant. She saw that a sliver of *kañciram* wood had pierced into the young woman's head. She tried to move the sliver. The young woman begged her: "O Ammā, please take it out!" The pregnant wife was captivated by the beautiful face of the young woman and pulled out the sliver from the top of Nīli's head.

As soon as the sliver was drawn out of her head, the young woman turned into Nīli. She took on a horrible shape, and produced the *kuravai* sound. Pushing the pregnant woman to the ground, she split open her stomach. She plucked out her intestines, and garlanded herself with it. She grasped the foetus between her teeth. She sprinkled the blood. At that time the magician entered and found matters beyond his control. He thought that if he left Nīli in this position, she would destroy the village, so he built a temple for her in that place. (Perumāḷ 1990:131, appendix, n. 14)

❏ The story of *Kuttuppiṟai Icakkiyamman* of Nāṉkuṉēri

In order to install a flagstaff *(koṭimaram)* in the Tirumalai Nampirāyar (Śiva) temple of Tirukuṟuṅkuṭi, people went to the forest and cut down a tree. The female *devatā* that had resided in the tree came along with them. When this came to be known, they placed a *pīṭam*[205] near the temple, at a spot where paddy was usually pounded *(kuttupiṟai)*, and worshipped her under the name Kuttuppiṟai Icakki. At night, after the doors of the main temple were closed, she served as a guardian deity. The pūjās in the temple were performed by Toḻukai Nampi Paṭṭar, who came from Kōkilammāḷpuram, a nearby village. One day when he came to Tirukuṟuṅkuṭi with his five-year-old son, and before the night pūjās had been completed, the boy fell into a deep sleep. The temple priest, forgetting the presence of his son, locked the temple door and went home. Only when his wife, Rukmini Ācci, asked him, "Where is our child?" did he remember. The mother began to weep and cried, "I want my son immediately." The priest replied, "It is utterly out of the question to open the doors of the temple before morning. We shall see our son tomorrow morning." Though he tried to convince his wife, the mother did not acquiesce. He went back to the temple in Tirukuṟuṅkuṭi. The priest knew very well that it would be dangerous to open the doors of the temple during the night, after they had been locked. Therefore he called for the guardian deity Icakki and asked her to bring the boy outside. The deity replied, "During the night the temple is under my control; come again in the morning and take your child." The temple priest knew he would be unable to bear his wife's accusations, and therefore demanded the boy immediately. "If you want the boy alive, you come in the morning," the deity replied. The priest insisted on receiving the boy immediately. The deity became angry, killed the child and flung it outside the temple. Seeing that his son was dead, the priest was shocked. He caught the deity and locked it up in a copper pot. He buried the pot under the earthen floor in a run-down empty house.

An Ācāri [a man of the artisan community] from Maṟukāl Kuṟicci cleared the run-down house of scattered things. Among the things he loaded on a cart was the pot in which the deity was locked. The Ācāri, thinking that it might be a treasure, took the pot to the bank of a man-made pond to the west of the village, placed it on a rock, and broke it. The deity inside the pot fled, making much noise. Up to the present the rock is known as Natukāṉ pāṟai. The deity followed the Ācāri to Maṟukāl Kuṟicci. There she created trouble for the people. As a result, they constructed a small temple for her in Maṟukāl Kuṟicci, named her Kuttuppiṟai Icakki, and began worshipping her.

At that time, four brothers belonging to the shepherd community were living in Nāṉkuṉēri. The eldest brother was Piccaiyā Kōṉār, the youngest Civaṉu Kōṉār, and the others Āṉṭi Kōṉār and Cappāṇi Kōṉār. Piccaiyā Kōṉār and Civaṉu Kōṉār fell out with each other over a transaction to purchase bulls for ploughing. The two brothers went to Maṟukāl Kuṟicci in order to take an oath in front of Kuttuppiṟai Icakki Ammaṉ, who was considered to be dangerous. Meanwhile Kuttuppiṟai Icakki demanded a separate place of worship, and therefore troubled the brothers. They tried to get a *kuṟi* (prediction). Meanwhile the wife of Veṟṟivēl Kōṉār, son of Civaṉu Kōṉār, became pregnant. One day she was possessed by the deity Icakki, and she began to predict: "If you all want to be saved, you have to build for Kuttupiṟai Icakki Ampāḷ a *pīṭam* facing eastwards, at the junction of three roads, to the west of the village." Accordingly Veṟṟivēl Kōṉār constructed a *pīṭam* for Kuttupiṟai Icakki in the year 1880, and they began to worship her. To her side, he also installed Muppantal Icakki and Pēcci, and outside the temple Caṅkali Pūtattār, Mācāṉa Muttu, Cutalaiyāṇṭavar, and Cappāṇi Māṭacāmi. For all of them he built *pīṭam*s, and also worshipped them.[206] [My slightly shortened translation from the *sthalavaralāṟu* (n.d.) of the Nāṉkuṉēri Kuttuppiṟai Icakki temple]

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[205] An aniconic representation of this minor deity.

[206] The temple continues to be looked after by the Kōṉār community. After the death of Veṟṟivēl Kōṉār, his son Cuppu Kōṉār conducted the daily pūjās. In 1934 Cuppu Kōṉār built a new building. Afterwards Kaṇṇapirāṉ became the hereditary trustee. Renovations were carried out in the years between 1976 and 1985. In 1996 marble stone flooring was installed—a new trend in the small temples.

7.6 The Split Goddess's Iconography

As has already been noted, the worship of Icakkiyammaṉ is focused on the role of two sisters, an elder and a younger one,[207] who represent her split psychic disposition and physical condition,[208] each with an iconographic representation of its own. Blackburn (1980) states in this regard:

> The older sister is said to be "calm"[...]. By contrast, the younger sister is said to be "fierce," and her image has fangs ("warrior's teeth") [...]. In some temples the division between the sisters displays a maternal/anti-maternal split for the older sister holds a child in her lap, while the younger one crunches a child in her sharp teeth.[209] (Blackburn 1980:212)[210]

We may note that, although the elder sister conveys the higher values, the practice of worship makes it obvious that the active and fearsome younger sister is the more important deity,[211] perhaps because she is critically and alarmingly associated with children.

Let me underscore the fact that both sisters are regarded as virgin goddesses.[212] The bow-song tradition considers them as autonomous, and this is the ultimate reason for their having become an integral part of the tradition. A goddess only remains in the bow-song tradition as long as she is unmarried,[213] a fact that suggests that the tradition sees marriage as something that would undermine the

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[207] The sisters may exist side by side in the same temple, but sometimes they are separated in different temples (Blackburn 1980:212). We thus see the younger and elder sister spatially sharing a single shrine in Cukkuppāṟai (south-west), Teṉkaṉputūr (Ōṭakkarai-Icakki; south-west), Paṉaṅkoṭṭāṉviḷai, Cempoṉkarai, and Ālamūṭu (north-west), but separated in Mēlāṅkōṭu (an important centre of Icakki worship in the north-east), where two temples are found, albeit not very far from each other. While there is a spatial proximity, then, in these examples, in Muppantal and Paḻavūr the sisters are clearly separated: the elder sister resides along a busy highway, and the younger in the wilderness. Oddly enough, unlike in Mēlāṅkōṭu, where we find a meat offering for the younger sister and a vegetable pūjā for the elder one, Muppantal Icakki continues to receive a blood sacrifice, even though she is said to be the elder sister (personal communication with the bow-song bard T.M.P).

[208] One story of the two Icakkis, collected by Perumāḷ (1990:124), and described by the same author as penetrated by Malayali themes, clearly delineates the psychological states of the elder and the younger sister: "Once upon a time Patmanāpapuram, which is now in Kalkuḷam taluk, was the capital city of Tiruvitāṅkūr. One day an artist of Nāñcilnāṭu went to take part in a music concert performed in the palace of Patmanāpapuram. His song being appreciated, he was awarded by the king. It was night and a Friday when the artist returned, after taking part in a dinner given by the king. The moonlight was bright, and there was a sweet breeze [...]. The artist probably had left Patmanāpapuram about two miles behind when he became fearful of the silence all around. Thinking how foolish he was to be going alone, he nevertheless proceeded. At a turn in the Patmanāpapuram road two beautiful women were sitting on a *cumaitāṅki kal*, a stone to put down loads on while taking a rest. (Simultaneously, it is considered to be a memorial for the untimely deaths of virgins and pregnant women.) They were both dressed in the style of Malayali women. One was *taṅkai Icakki* (the younger Icakki sister); the other was *akkā Icakki* (the elder Icakki sister). As the artist approached the ladies, the younger Icakki sister began to speak to him: 'O musician, sing the song that you sang in the palace!' The artist began to sweat out of fear, for he realised that it was the younger Icakki sister. Laughing horribly, Icakki cried: 'I am Nīli. I wish to hear your music. Don't delay! If you don't sing, I'll pluck out your intestines'. The musician was about to collapse. The elder Icakki sister, who until then was silent, rebuked her younger sister. She asked the artist to sing. 'I am Ceṉpakavalli. You will not be harmed. Sing!' The artist, freed from his fear, began to sing. The elder Icakki sister, who enjoyed the music of the artist, presented him her finger-ring, and said: 'Nobody will disturb you. I am here. You can go!' The artist worshipped Icakki and went on. The next day when the pūjāri of the Mēlāṅkōṭu Icakki temple went to perform pūjā, he was astonished not to find the ring on the finger of the elder sister. The matter was reported to the king. Icakki appeared that night in a dream of the king and related everything that had happened the previous day. Again the king called the artist and awarded him" (Perumāḷ 1990:124, appendix, n. 9).

[209] As the pūjāri of Ālamūṭu Icakki temple in Muppantal put it in a personal communication (3 December 2002): "Without a child she would not be called Icakkiyammaṉ."

[210] Note that Perumāḷ (1990) in a Keralese context attempts to explain "the division of elder and younger sister by the impact of Bhagavatī worship" (58).

[211] See Perumāḷ 1990:62, which supports this assumption.

[212] The younger sister's virginity as emblematic of an autonomous goddess's sexuality and body is insisted upon by two bow-song bards I have interviewed. Both, T.M.P. and S. Svayamburajan, contend that though the Brahmin was Lakṣmī's lover, she herself must be considered to be a virgin. Both raised the issue independently and in the same terms: "'There was no physical relationship between the Brahmin and Lakṣmī,' *vāyuravu alatu, kaiyuravu kaṇṭatillai* (456f.). [...] Some stories say that she was pregnant at the time of her murder (461). [...] In a sense Lakṣmī died unmarried. That is why I said above: *vāyuravu alatu, kaiyuravu kaṇṭatillai*" (K-L.02.A.485).

[213] See Blackburn 1980:153.

goddess's power and status.[214] The tradition's insistence upon virginity thus indicates its own greatest desire to profit from the undivided power vested in an unmarried goddess.

When we look more closely at her iconographic features, Icakki's appearance, as reflected in the almost human-like terra-cotta figure approximately 1.30 metres tall, is wholly in accordance with her psychological profile. What is most striking is an iconic representation in which the maternal and the antimaternal aspects are potentially present in one figure. This statue *(cilai),* with one baby boy[215] on the left hip, another baby clamped between her fangs, and at times still another between her feet, is the one one encounters at Paḷavūr[216] and Muppantal, and throughout Kaṉṉiyākumari (Cukkuppāṟai etc.)—whether inside shrines or (presented as *koṭai*s, "gifts," to the goddess) placed in close proximity to shrines. The clearly visible corner fangs are, in a sense, reminiscent of the *mātṛkā*s,[217] and particularly the goddess Cāmuṇḍā.[218] One may recall Nīli-Icakki's identification with Cāmuṇḍā in the N9 Nellai version.[219] Probably, then, we are faced here with iconographic contamination.

The figure designed by potter artists is in a standing position and has two arms.[220] It holds in its right hand, raised to head level, a weapon that is pointed at its opponent.[221] The weapon may be either a knife[222] or a trident *(cūlam;* probably the older form of her armament).[223] The *mudrā* gesture of the hand that aims the weapon at an opponent may vary: either half-opened,[224] with the trident[225] or knife resting on it, or balled up into a fist.[226] The iconographic differences are not irrelevant, for whereas the fist does not have anything of the erotic about it, the half-opened *mukula mudrā* gesture obviously does.[227]

Looking more closely at the meaning of the erect right hand, I would suggest that it is the locus of

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[214] S. Svayamburajan's statement in an interview held on 8 May 2002 is informative: "If we worship a virgin deity in our house no demon will attack us (478). This was put to the test when I asked the *mantiravāti* (sorcerer) to send a spirit to a particular house. The sorcerer did what I requested, but afterward he told me that the spirit which I sent to the house had returned, saying that it could not enter the house owing to the virgin deity that resided there" (K-L.02.A.480). On the power of a virgin, see also Shulman (1980:253), who notes "the important folk motif of the brothers who keep their sister or sisters unmarried in order to profit from the power vested in the virgin."

[215] The baby is without exception in all icons a boy.

[216] See Sect. 8.7.

[217] See Kinsley 1987:153.

[218] Cāmuṇḍā/Kālī is a ferocious goddess who demands blood sacrifice.

[219] The second line of version N9 identifies Cāmuṇḍā with Nīli: "From ancient days till today the people of this realm (who) speak with fear [line 1] / of the villainous Nīli, Cāmuṇḍī [...] [line 2]."

[220] By contrast, pan-Indian deities are represented with four arms.

[221] A noteworthy inversion of the common associations of the left and right sides here strikes one as something of a contradiction. Cf. Das (1990:119), who associates the right and left sides with the opposition between respectively life and death: "The analysis of the data on domestic rituals strongly suggests that the sacred in Hindu belief and ritual should be conceptualized as divided with reference to the opposition of life and death [...]. The right side dominates events associated with life, such as pregnancy, blessing of a new-born child, marriage and initiation [...]." Contrariwise, "[...] the left side dominates in cremation rituals [...]." Also listed by her under the latter are "rites of ghosts, demons, etc.," ancestor rituals and rites relating to snakes.

[222] Blackburn (1980:212) states that Icakki often holds a club, but I did not find this to be the case in the region covered by my field research.

[223] Dr S. Alagesan (Tūttukuṭi), who is thoroughly familiar with the Icakki cult, remarked in a personal communication of 7 May 2002 that the trident represents the older iconography.

[224] The *mudrā* is very probably the *mukula mudrā*: the thumb and middle finger touching each other.

[225] The trident in the erect hand may additionally be decorated with red bangles, and a second trident with bangles may rest in the left hand; the terra-cotta statue in the family shrine of Dr S. Alagesan at Paḷavūr displays these features.

[226] The terra-cotta statue in the family shrine of Dr S. Alagesan furnishes an example. The *mudrā* there is very probably the *muṣṭi mudrā*. According to U.S.K. Rao (1990:39), the *muṣṭi mudrā,* the "gesture of a fist," denotes "steadfastness [...], wrestlers fighting, [...] grasping a sword, holding a club or a spear."

[227] The *mukula* hand gesture belongs to the expressive language of Bhāratanāṭyam dance, originally a temple dance. (One may recall that Icakki in her first birth is a devadāsī, a temple dancer.) According to Rao (1990:39) *mukula* is a *mudrā* denoting, among other things, "eating, [the] god of love [...], [the] navel, [...] [and also] flower buds." This *mudrā* signifies creation and generative capacity, as exemplified in the images of the bud and navel.

the minatory force of a curse.[228] It carries the curse, which the goddess activates with the words: "You don't know anything about this vow of Nīli" (see *IK*, N1.1397). In the case of Icakki, the right hand is doubly defined, for it both belongs to a woman who values her honour the way a man values his, and who at the same time is driven by a non-human demonic force.

However, we also come across Icakki statues—popularly said to be identical with the fearsome Paḷavūr Icakki—that look much more harmless in that they are holding the trident upright and have no baby gripped in their teeth.[229] One may wonder whether here the weapon (a trident or the like) iconographically refers to the devadāsī tradition. One custom found among temple-dancers, as shown by Kersenboom-Story (1987), suggests as much.[230]

Icakkiyamman̠ is prominently visualised in the shape of a terra-cotta figure, as described iconographically in the preceding lines, but the deity is represented in other, non-anthropomorphic forms as well, first and foremost as a rectangular blackened slab with a semicircular head-like top. Though this object of worship is generally identified with Cuṭalaimāṭan̠, it may also represent Icakki as a subordinate deity.[231] Apart from it, we must also note the strong presence of Icakki in the worship of trees (margosa *[vēmpu],* banyan *[ālam],* and the *iluppai*[232])[233] and the *cumaitāṅki kal* (load-bearing stone; see Section 7.4.1), also called "*cumai* Iyakki."[234] All of these are economically easily accessible objects of worship that are smeared with turmeric *(mañcaḷ).*[235]

7.7 A First Encounter with Icakki in the Field

7.7.1 Muppantal: Three Icakki Temples

My first field trip to Tirunelvēli and Kan̠n̠iyākumari districts, at the beginning of March 2002, was timed to coincide with the main annual events: the festival season for Icakkiyamman̠ during the hottest time of the year, the agriculture off-season of rest and scarce water, and domestically the season of marriage and conceiving.[236] Icakki has an affinity with this dry season corresponding to her primary nature, that of being a goddess of heat.[237] Moreover, she is only worshipped on Tuesdays and Fridays,

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[228] The right hand in Tamil culture is part of a complex of sacred signs. Indeed, the right hand, the solemn guarantor of one's word, lays a curse upon itself when one is not true to that word.

[229] Examples are the Icakkis in Svayambhūliṅgapuram (Paḷavūr Icakki there serving as a subordinate deity) and Nān̠kun̠ēri (Kuttuppiṟai Icakki as a primary deity). In Ten̠kan̠putūr Ōṭakkarai we find among the various stone statues of Icakki some with the trident upright and others with the trident pointed at an opponent, but in the latter case there are some with no child in her mouth.

[230] Kersenboom-Story (1987:181) notes: "Elderly ladies fetch a *kaṭṭāri* (sword, spear, trident) from the temple; install it in the house of the dancing-girl. [...] the girl is given the *kaṭṭāri* and a regular wedding-ceremony [with the weapon] is performed." Thurston and Rangachari (1909:137f.) write similarly about the Basavis (young women formally married to a god or a sword) of Bellary district (Karnataka): "A sword [or other weapon, see p. 138] with a lime stuck on its point is placed upright beside the novice [Basavi], and held in her right hand. It represents the bridegroom, who, in the corresponding ceremony of Hindu marriage, sits on the bride's right. [...] (137) [...] and an imaginary nuptial ceremony is performed" (138). The authors quote both Fawcett and the *Manual of the North Arcot District.* This initiation-cum-wedding ceremony was in practice among the Bōyas, Bēdarus, and certain other castes (Thurston and Rangachari 1909:129).

[231] Cf. Perumāḷ 1990:60.

[232] Latin *Bassia longifolia.*

[233] See Perumāḷ 1990:61.

[234] See Natarajan 1986:3.

[235] For the powerful effects of these objects of worship, especially of the long-living trees, see Perumāḷ 1990:61.

[236] Cf. Babb 1975:128.

[237] Heat is regarded by Babb (1975:236) as a "multifaceted concept" (236), spanning a range of meaning: "human temperament," "the malevolent impulse of witchcraft," "the frenzy of ritual possession," "vital force that kindles life," "sexuality," and "illness." For the distinction between "hot" and "cool" deities, see Flood 1996:193. According to this author, local female deities are generally regarded as *hot* goddesses (193).

the former an *amangala* (inauspicious) day generally associated with the malevolent, life-taking persona of goddesses, and the needs of the unquiet hungry spirits of the dead,[238] and the latter a *mangala* (auspicious) day more "appropriate for the worship of a benevolent goddess."[239]

I arrive with two research assistants on Tuesday, 12 March 2002 at Muppantal, a place that is considered central to the cult of Icakki and situated three to four kilometres south of Kāvalkiṉaṟu on the national highway Route 7 leading to Nagercoil. Nearby to the south lies the small town of Āralvāymoḻi.[240] Some kilometres further to the south, as Ludden (1989:19) describes it, "the peninsula narrows so that semi-arid and humid tropics lie in close proximity [...] divided by high jutting mountain peaks." Two of the three local Icakki temples are located next to each other along this busy route,[241] one having been run by the Vēḷāḷa community until it came under governmental rule, and the other belonging to the Nāṭār community. Both have profited greatly from this location on a vehicular artery, including monetarily.[242] The third Icakki temple is situated in a calm setting in the close vicinity and is run by a trust headed by a member of the Ampaṭṭar community.

Map 1: The three Icakki temples at Muppantal

Muppantal (K.K.Dt.)

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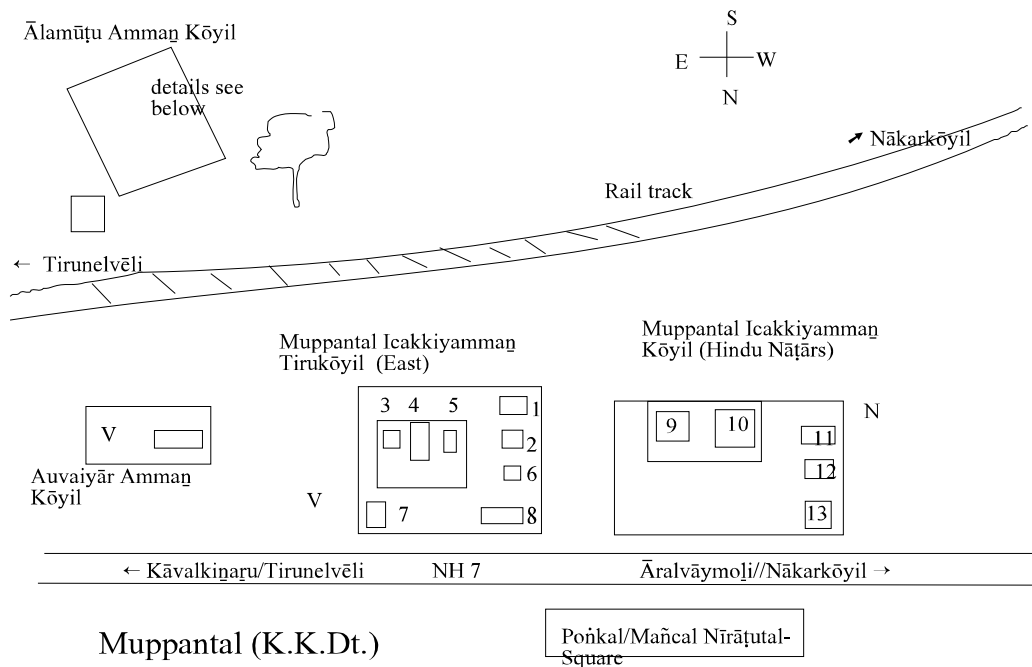
[238] See Babb 1975:111f., and Caldwell 1999:133.

[239] See Babb 1975:113. Cf. Caldwell 1999:133, who considers Friday as inauspicious. Caldwell's account, relating to Kerala, contains the interesting remark of one toddy-tapper (in Tamilnadu the traditional occupation of the Nāṭārs) that Tuesdays and Fridays are the only proper days for "the massaging of the coconut bud and the cutting of the tip," that is to say, for the "manipulations of procreative life-forces," as Caldwell puts it.

[240] Approximately 65 KM south of Tirunelvēli. – There are some references to an ancient pass that led through Āralvāymoḻi, perhaps the one situated on the modern Route NH7 (leading to Nagercoil). Parthasarathy (1993:343), referring to an article by M. Raghava Aiyangar in J. Parthasarathi (tr.), *Some Aspects of Kerala and Tamil Literature*, Trivandrum: University of Kerala, 1973, 33–43, notes mention of it in Caṅkam poetry: *Akanāṉūṟu* 251.11-4 and 281 by Māmūlaṉār, *Akanāṉūṟu* 69 by Paraṅkoṟṟaṉār, and *Puranāṉūṟu* 175 by Kaḷḷil Āttiraiyaṉār. The *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* (1995:174) calls into question the very idea of the establishment of Icakkiyammaṉ worship along this ancient pass.

[241] On the same route between Muppantal and Tirunelvēli, a further place of worship is found at the Nāṉkuṉēri crossroads (Tirunelvēli district). There the goddess is called Kuttuppiṟai Icakki Ammaṉ (for her story, see Sect. 7.5). One of the statues inside the shrine, which is administered by the Kōṉār community, is Muppantal Icakki.

[242] Each and every bus and truck is stopped and packed holy ash is distributed for a small sum.

V   formerly Vēḷāḷa community / now under governmental rule
N   Nāṭār community

Muppantal Icakkiyamman̠ temple (East)
1   Kan̠n̠i Vin̠āyakar
2   Murukan̠
3-5   Inner sanctum *(karuvarai)*
3   Kalyāṇi
4   Icakkiyamman̠
5   Tēvi
6   Auvaiyār
7   Paṭṭavarāyan̠
8   Cuṭalaimāṭan̠

Muppantal Icakkiyamman̠ temple (Hindu Nāṭārs)
9   Child of Icakkiyamman̠
10   Icakkiyamman̠
11   Vin̠āyakar
12   Nīlaperumāḷ (Nīlan̠)
13   Cuṭalaimāṭan̠ (guardian deity)

❑ *Muppantal Icakkiyamman̠ Tirukōyil (East)*

Let us first turn to the Icakkiyamman̠ temple East,[243] a temple that is said to be around 200 years old (AK-F, A, 087) and to have been established with soil taken from the village of Paḷavūr, where Icakki had come from (AK-F, A, 180). Icakki, facing north,[244] is worshipped as an autonomous goddess. It being a place at the roadside, the goddess desires guardianship by Cuṭalaimāṭan̠ (Map 1, 8) and Paṭṭavarāyan̠ (7). One notable feature of this place of transformation and ambiguity is the presence of the poetess Auvaiyār both within Icakki's temple (6) and outside, in a separate shrine of her own. According to local legend, Auvaiyār consoled the furious Icakki (who had come to Muppantal after avenging herself on her Brahmin murderer) and asked her to stay on in order to serve the people (AK-F, B, 062-074). This may be one of the reasons why the first pūjā is performed to Auvaiyār (AK-F, B, 191). It is also conceivable that another legend surrounding Auvaiyār has influenced the order of the pūjā. According to *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer* 1995:173 (cited verbatim),

> [t]here is a version that [...] Muppandal was founded only because of Avvayar, when she wanted to compromise the grievances among the three rulers viz., Chera, Chola and Pandya towards Atiyaman, a chieftain she arranged a meeting of the three in that place for negotiations where they constructed three pandals [Ta. *mū pantal*].[245]

The Muppantal Icakki is represented in the form of three statues (3-5) which are addressed by different names: The name of the one in the middle (4) is Icakkiyamman̠ (AK-F, A, 282). The one to her right, said to be worshipped by Brahmins (AK-F, A, 300), is called Kalyāṇi[246] (3), while to her left stands Tēvi (5), a mere ornamental figure that is only 15 years old, I was told (AK-F, A, 363). The main statue in the centre is iconographically depicted with a lolling tongue and fangs in the corner of her mouth. She is carrying a child in her arm,[247] but no child is crunched between her teeth.[248] Icakki, although

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[243] My main informants were M. Pan̠ṭu Piḷḷai, for the past 15 years the main pūjārī, and Rama Subha, the executive officer of the temple. Both were interviewed (AK-F) on the temple premises on 12 December 2002.

[244] Some say the direction is due to constraints imposed by road conditions (K-E).

[245] It is interesting to see that the legend of the Muppantal Icakki temple takes the form of a hagiography, in which royals are associated with the remembered beginnings of the temple. It apparently turns a place located in a border area (i.e. in a politically periphery zone) into a self-proclaimed centre with its own created image of itself. For a discussion of "topographies of memory," see Remensnyder 2002:206f.

[246] *TL* s.v. *kaliyāṇi:* "a woman endowed with auspicious features and excellent traits, usually applied to goddesses like Lakṣmī and Pārvatī."

[247] M. Pan̠ṭu Piḷḷai (interview of 12 December 2002; AK-F, A, 269) remarked that the child carried by Icakki is an unmistakable sign that she has weaked vengeance on her former Brahmin lover.

[248] The importance of the central statue addressed as Icakkiyamman̠ is reflected in the order the pūjās are performed: first

potentially dangerous in her active presence, is benevolent within the Icakkiyamman temple that formerly belonged to the Vēḷāḷa community. The little wooden cradles at the two temple shops and a first interview[249] with a woman who was possessed by Icakki at the time her husband left her and their five-year-old child in favour of a co-wife left me with a first impression that this goddess is conceived of as an index of domestic welfare and misfortune.

A first impression of a villuppāṭṭu performance in the context of a possession ritual on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram[250]

On Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, the day when patrilineal families visit their *kulateyvam* (family deity), a *villuppāṭṭu* performance of the *IK* is presented by the group Nāñcil Jīvā Kuḷaviṉar of Pārvatipuram (K-J) at the Muppantal Icakkiyamman temple (East). The story of Icakki is sung in a modern *villuppāṭṭu* style. The *villuppāṭṭu* group, having taken up their places outdoors next to the roadside, in front of a shop that sells little wooden cradles, is a great distance from the indoor goddess—out of her sight and hearing. It is hardly conceivable that the goddess can listen to her own story, let alone respond to it. One is therefore tempted to regard the *villuppāṭṭu* performance of the goddess's life story at this temple as entertainment rather than as an integral part of the ongoing rituals. Around 1:00 P.M. (*ucci nēram)* the *villuppāṭṭu* singers stop. Drums are beaten, and devotees are invited to the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* at Auvaiyār's temple, a ritual that is followed by another *tīpārātaṉai* in front of the statue of Auvaiyār located in Icakki's temple. When it is Icakki's turn, the *kuravai* sound[251] is performed. Women enter a state of possession. Meanwhile a garlanded young man dressed in red and holding a *vēl* (spear) in his hand has become Icakki. Acting as a *cāmiyāṭi* (god-dancer), he slings a cock onto his back and rotates a bunch of areca flowers *(kamukampū)* in the air, thus, it is said, driving the evil forces away.[252] Fully emerging, the goddess receives the *pālabhiṣeka* (cermonial pouring of milk). A remarkable incident then takes place when the goddess, delivering a *cāmivākku* (divine utterance), climbs the shrine of her guardian deity Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ. A man suddenly approaches the *cāmiyāṭi* and angrily scolds him/her: "Are you Cuṭalai or Amman? Tell me who you are." He pulls the *cāmiyāṭi* out of the shrine and takes up position there himself. After removing an upper cloth, he wraps himself in an ochre-coloured dhoti. He is garlanded, in recognition of his being possessed. All of a sudden he darts off down the road towards the northern limits of Muppantal, throws a coconut in his hand onto the street so that it bursts,[253] and runs back to the shrine. Exhausted, he sits down at the feet of an 85-year-old ritual specialist who himself used to be possessed by Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, and places his head on the old man's lap to receive the blessing of one who is said to be a powerful *cāmiyāṭi* of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ. When the main pūjārī is asked what all this was about, he explains as follows:

> There is an expectation that the young man dressed in red will be possessed by Amman. Yet he is dancing in the Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ temple. It was somewhat confusing. The man who angrily inquires about this used to be possessed by Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ. [...] One cannot do the *cāmiyāṭṭam* [god-dance] for two different deities. [...] Therefore, when the young man acts for both [Icakki and Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ], that man [from Āralvāymoḻi] interferes and lectures him that it is improper

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Auvaiyār, then Icakkiyamman followed by Kalyāṇi and Tēvi.

[249] Interview on 12 March 2002 (K-A).

[250] Friday, 29 March 2002 (1177, Paṅkuṉi 15th). Although in the year 2002 Paṅkuṉi Uttiram fell on 28 March 2002, a Thursday, at the Icakki temple at Muppantal it was celebrated only the day after, on Friday, traditionally a day of Icakki worship.

[251] Asked about the meaning of the *kuravai* ululation, M. Paṉtu Piḷḷai (main pūjārī) and Rama Subha (temple executive officer), in an interview held on 12 December 2002, supplied the following information: "Amman is fond of the *kuravai* sound. If the *kuravai* ululation sounds, Icakki's power will increase and somebody will be possessed by her" (AK-F, B, 275f.).

[252] This was the explanation given by the main pūjārī, M. Paṉtu Piḷḷai, on 12 December 2002 (AK-F, B, 371; 417), after observing the scene on my video recorded on 29 March 2002 (V01, 30:52; 31:09; 31:16; 32:25).

[253] Unlike Flood (1996:214), who assumes—in a similar ritual context—a "dissolution" of the ritual specialist into the deity, Icakki's pūjārī (who, to be sure, is not her *cāmiyāṭi*) sees in the smashing of the coconut a sacrificial act, with the coconut replacing an animal (AK-F, B, 520; 12 December 2002; see citation below). The two explanations of the pūjārī and Flood are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but may simply be different points of views.

to do so. [...] He throws him out of the Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ temple in great anger. [...] At this point the man is seized by Cuṭalai and by the deity's power he throws the young man out [...] and he himself performs the *āṭṭam* [dance] of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ. Both men used to perform the *cāmiyāṭṭam* at important functions. [...] He [the *cāmiyāṭi* of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ] then runs with a coconut to the limits of Muppantal in order to perform a sacrifice. [...] Only Cuṭalai is supposed to go there. He is the guardian deity. [...] There he sacrifices a coconut, a substitute for an animal sacrifice.[254]

Another *pālabhiṣeka* is performed for Icakki, who is still embodied by the young man. Children and babies are handed over to the *cāmiyāṭi* to be blessed.

❏ *Muppantal Icakkiyammaṉ Tirukōyil (Hindu Nāṭār[255] community)*

Let us now proceed to the neighbouring Nāṭār Icakki temple, which came into existence owing to a disagreement between the Vēḷāḷa and Hindu Nāṭār communities. I was told (K-E, A, 224f.) that a broken *cumaitāṅki kal*, a memorial stone for a pregnant woman or virgin who died unnaturally, can still be found behind the temple. Iconographically, the goddess inside the inner sanctum is depicted in a benign mode, with neither fangs nor a child in her mouth. She is considered to be a *kaṉṉi* (virgin). Her child, my Kampar informant noted, is the *kaḻḻi* branch that turned into a child (K-E, A, 300ff.). A statue of Nīlaperumāḷ (Nīli's brother in the *katai*) is also found (K-E, A, 280, picture 28). The temple is visited by Keralites in great number, it is said.[256]

❏ *Icakki at Muppantal Śrī Ālamūṭu Ammaṉ temple[257]*

The third of the Icakki temples at this site, is the Ālamūṭu (Ta. "at the bottom of the banyan tree") temple, situated in Lakṣmiputukuḷam, in the vicinity of the Muppuntal Icakkiyammaṉ temple, beyond the railroad tracks. The worship of goddess Ālamūṭu Ampāḷ was established 17 years ago under a banyan tree *(ālam)*. E. Aruṇācalam, a Tamil of the Ampaṭṭar (barber) community, who established this temple together with his Malayali wife, Kuṭṭi Ammāḷ, is the main *pūjārī*. He administers temple affairs and successfully raises funds. Between my two visits in April and December 2002, the temple witnessed a significant rise in the number of devotees. Ampāḷ is regarded as serving barren women and those who want to get married.

E. Aruṇācalam's wife established the cult of Icakki after recovering from a sickness for which she had been hospitalised. She had suffered from a swollen stomach, fits, and other forms of pain. In the hospital she met a woman who suffered from the same symptoms. This woman was suddenly possessed by the goddess Icakkiyammaṉ. Icakki told Kuṭṭi Ammāḷ, through her medium, the entire history of her husband and suggested that they meet at a black rock near a footpath. Kuṭṭi Ammāḷ found the described spot and established a site of worship for Icakki at the rock itself, the same one now found under the sanctum of the Icakki shrine (AK-C, A:041-059, 072ff.). Among the donors who contributed to building the complex are persons from the Ācāri, Nāṭār, and Vēḷāḷa communities.

Icakki and Ucciṉimākāḷī[258] are described as respectively the younger and elder sisters of the Ālamūṭu temple. Icakki, who has a tiny one-room shrine (fronted by a roofed area only installed during times of extended *pūjās*), is here in the midst of a tranquil setting, unlike the shrines of Icakki at the Muppantal (East) and Muppantal (West) Nāṭār temples along the side of a busy, noisy road. All three shrines are outside inhabited areas, though they are in places where movement and transformation take place. Icakki at the Ālamūṭu Ammaṉ temple is perceived as benevolent. She has a trident in her right

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[254] The interview was held on 12 December 2002 with the main *pūjārī*, M. Paṇṭu Piḷḷai (AK-F, B, 443-483; 512-528) on the basis of my video recording of 29 March 2002 (V01, 32:46-33:32; 35:35-35:55).

[255] The information was supplied by the temple servant (not the main *pūjārī*), a Kampar (traditionally drum and *nātasvaram* players who are also in charge of minor temple work, such as preparing flowers, oil etc. for *pūjās*).

[256] Asked why Keralites come here for worship, the temple servant retells the local legend of Icakki's vow to destroy the region of what is today Kerala, a plan whose execution is being prevented by Auvaiyār.

[257] See in this context, from the monthly magazine *Maṉitam,* the article "Ālamūṭu Ampāḷ," September 2002:7–9.

[258] This deity was created from the blood of the great demon Hiraṇyakaśipu.

hand and a child in her left arm. "Without a child she would not be called Icakkiyamma<u>n</u>," E. Aru<u>n</u>ācalam, the main pūjārī, stated in an interview held on 3 December 2002 (AK-C, A:305). Her iconography is not that of Pa<u>l</u>avūr Icakki, with fangs and a child both in her mouth and between her feet. She resides in a black stone and gives her *aru<u>l</u>* in a standing posture. In her *alaṅkāram,* she appears daubed with sandal and turmeric paste and the flour of husked rice, and wearing a silver mask *(aṅki).* The temple is considered to be a *deva-kōyil,* and Icakki, according to the pūjārī E. Aru<u>n</u>ācalam, is a *cāntacorūpi,* a "peaceful" goddess, without her fierce look (AK-C:146).[259] Her elder sister has no shrine but sits on top of a termite hill under a tree. There are several subordinate deities. Pūjās are performed in the following order: 1. Vināyakar, 2. Muruka<u>n</u>, 3. Icakkiyamma<u>n</u> (younger sister), 4. Ucci<u>n</u>imākālī Amma<u>n</u> (elder sister), 5. Ak<u>n</u>i Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>, 6. Pulai Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>, 7. Ūrkā<u>tt</u>u-Cu<u>t</u>alai (a kind of *mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>*), and 8. Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>, he being the only non-vegetarian deity at this site.

Icakki and Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>, her guardian deity, have shrines. While Icakki faces west, Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u> faces south-west (*ka<u>n</u>ni mūlai,* the orientation of temples corresponding to lunar months[260]), according to E. Aru<u>n</u>ācalam (AK-C, A:254). In my opinion he faces south, given that the temple is set at a 90-degree angle to Icakki's shrine. Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>'s shrine was built first and is larger in size. At first Icakkiyamma<u>n</u> alone had been worshipped. One day when the main pūjārī had performed a *kumbhābhiṣeka* after erecting the *ma<u>nt</u>apam,* Icakkiyamma<u>n</u> informed him that Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u> was needed as a guardian deity. When possession *(ā<u>t</u>um pōtu)* occurred during the *kumbhābhiṣeka,* the possessed person took a lemon and put it at a certain spot, demanding that a *ma<u>nt</u>apam* be erected there for Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>. (Architectural plans have been made to enlarge and renew the Icakki shrine and to put the elder sister under a roof too.)

In the elevated place where *pūkku<u>l</u>i* (fire walking) is performed during the *ko<u>t</u>ai* festival, Ak<u>n</u>i Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u> stands as guardian deity together with Pulai Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>. Next to Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>'s shrine there are nine *pu<u>rr</u>u*s (termite hills / white ant hills). Nāgaramma<u>n</u> resides on them. Mud is taken from these nine *pu<u>rr</u>u*s to shape the statue of Pa<u>n</u>ri Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>[261] (a male deity in the form of a pig).

During the annual *ko<u>t</u>ai* festival, generally celebrated on a Monday and Tuesday in the second week of the Tamil month of Ā<u>t</u>i (mid-July to mid-August), such rituals as fire walking and the flower offering[262] / flowerbed are conducted, the latter featuring four flowerbeds for the deities: a) Icakki, b) Cu<u>t</u>alaimā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>, c) Nāgarteyvam, and the pair d) Ak<u>n</u>i Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u> and Pa<u>n</u>ri Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>. Asked why the flowerbed ritual is considered to be important, the main pūjārī replies that the flower offering / flowerbed provides an opportunity for Amma<u>n</u> to play with great enjoyment (AK-C, A: 432, 454). He even insists that it is indispensable for Icakkiyamma<u>n</u>. The flowerbed consists of different layers: 1. *tu<u>l</u>aci* (Skt. *tulasī*) beneath, 2. *vēmpu* (margosa leaves) next above, 3. *tāmarai* (lotus), 4. *ara<u>l</u>i* (oleander), 5. yellow *ceṇpakam* (*champak;* Indian magnolia), 6. red *vā<u>t</u>āmalli,* and 7. other flowers on top (AK-C, A:509-514). The layers are for the purpose of design, the pūjārī said. In 2003 the *ko<u>t</u>ai* was celebrated on Tuesday *(cevvāykki<u>l</u>amai),* the 13th day of the month of Ā<u>t</u>i (29 July 2003), a new moon day. A video recording of the *ko<u>t</u>ai* of 26 July 2000 produced by Peter A. Raj is kept in the Archives of the Folklore Resource and Research Centre at St. Xavier's College in Pā<u>l</u>aiyamkō<u>tt</u>ai. The annual *puṣpa-abhiṣeka* festival used to take place on the second Tuesday of the Tamil month of Tai (mid-January to mid-February). Moreover, there is a full moon pūjā *(pauṛṇami-pūjā)* every month, and a weekly pūjā on Tuesdays. The temple has no own palm-leaf manuscript of the *IK* (AK-C, A:408).
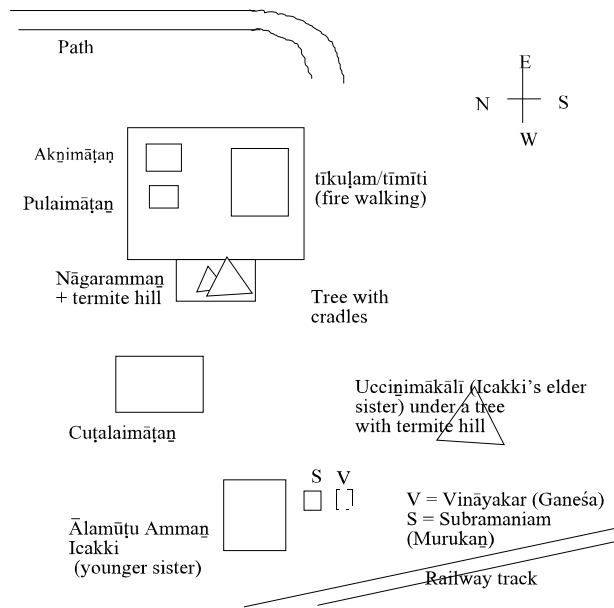
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[259] We may see here a process in which the goddess's *pēy* persona vanishes and the cult of Icakki transforms itself into the *bhakti* worship of a benevolent image of the goddess.

[260] See Caldwell 1999:139.

[261] According to Blackburn 1980:409, Appendix A, Pa<u>n</u>ri Mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u> is a type B *mā<u>t</u>a<u>n</u>.*

[262] Ta. *pūppa<u>t</u>aippu.*

Map 2: Ālamūṭu Ammaṉ shrine at Muppantal

A brief description of an extended pūjā containing a possession ritual[263]

The extended pūjās at the Muppantal Icakkiyammaṉ temple (East) are over. The people now head in a procession towards the Ālamūṭu temple. By the time we arrive the possession is already in full swing. It is 2:30 P.M. Icakkiyammaṉ is enacted by Kiṭṭu Ammāḷ. She wears a red sari soaked in water. The men—Muthu, Balasubramanian, and Tirumalaikumar (possessed respectively by Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, Akṉi Māṭaṉ, and Paṉri Māṭaṉ)—are wearing black dhotis and variously carrying a spear-like *vēl* and trident, a fiery torch, or some other implement. None of the spectators need fear harm, though the person possessed by Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ moves about fiercely, swinging his *vēl* and trident violently in the midst of the crowd in front of his shrine. The man enacting Akṉi Māṭan keeps a huge conical fiery torch pressed under his arm, while Paṉri Māṭaṉ skitters around, wiggling his erect imitation pig ears with an air of merriment. Persons possessed by Nāgarammaṉ and Ucciṉimākālī Ammaṉ are also present.

Attention is focused on the acting of Icakki. Kiṭṭu Ammāḷ is possessed by Icakki: has become her. She stands outside on the steps leading up to her shrine. Her mouth is crammed full of margosa leaves. Her hair is dishevelled, reflecting her freedom from societal rules and behaviour. She is now in the world of human beings, with a will of her own that is not available to the women who worship her. Couples come before her one at a time, and she proceeds to throw coconuts into the air, which land on the ground and smash. Once the goddess emerges, her heat continuously increases.[264] To soothe it, she chews the margosa leaves. Water is poured over her as well in order to cool her. By the end she will have been doused with 200 litres of bucket water. With the margosa leaves still in her mouth, she slaps water onto the couple's faces, distributes red *kuṅkumam* to them, and blesses them. She is now in close contact with the devotee couple. The goddess and the husband and wife, it seems, establish intimacy with each other. The goddess's actions are accompanied by the melodious singing of a group of women: "*Icakki vā vā* (Icakki come! Icakki come!)."[265] Icakki's force is now fully aroused, thus allowing people

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[263] The date was 12 March 2002.

[264] Babb (1975:233) points out that "possession [...] is understood as a kind of heat," the heat that accompanies the presence of a *hot* goddess.

[265] A recording (K-A) was made of the invocation sung by the group of women.

to benefit from her presence. The reciprocal emotional relationship between her and the people is probably what underlies her power to give.

Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ at times draws nearer to Icakkiyammaṉ's shrine. He carries the raised *vēl* with a pierced lemon that absorbs the heat. His body has been blackened. Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ enjoys a most intense relationship with Icakki: Icakki takes Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ's head under her arm and presses it against her voluminous breast. It is said that Icakki and Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ are mother and son.[266]

While Icakki's blessing of the couples continues, the *cāmivākku* begins at the Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ shrine. Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ calls me also over to give his blessing and *cāmivākku*. Later, when I am shooting photos, I overhear his expression of surprise to another *pūjārī* at my fearlessness, even though he had acted violently and angrily. His remark perhaps shows that the possessed is fully aware of his surrounding and suffers no loss of memory.

The *pūjā* comes to a close before sunset, and people head back to the Muppantal Icakki temple (East), where activities continue until 9 P.M.

7.7.2 Icakki at Other Places

In the following I shall list other Icakki temples that I visited during field trips:

Tirunelvēli district:
1. Putukuḷam at Pālaiyamkōṭṭai
2. at the Nāṉkuṉēri crossroads, run by the Kōṉār community (Kuttuppiṟai Icakki Ammaṉ; Muppantal Icakki)

Tūttukuṭi (Tuticorin) district:[267]
1. Tūttukuṭi town, Āṉpāl Road (Muppantal Śrī Icakki Ampāḷ Ālayam temple)
2. Tūttukuṭi town, Tirunelvēli Road (Vempati Icakki)[268]

Kaṉṉiyākumari district:[269]
1. Cukkuppāṟai Tēriviḷai, owned by P. Taṅkarāj Nāṭār (second half of the seventeenth century; Icakki as *akkā* [elder sister] and *taṅkai* [younger sister]; Koppukkōṭṭai Icakki, Āṭṭuk kāra Icakki [Ciṉṉa Icakki], Mēlāṅkōṭṭu Icakki; a palm-leaf manuscript of *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai* version N4 is available)
2. Teṟkukkūṇṭal
3. Teṉkaṉputūr, run by the Nāṭār community (Ōṭakkarai Icakki; Nīlacāmi [Icakki's brother]; no *katai* palm-leaf manuscript is available)[270]
4. Putukkuṭiyiruppu (close to Teṉkaṉputūr), run by the Cuṇṇāpparavaṉ Dalit community (Ālamūṭu Icakki / Ciṉṉa Icakki; Nīlacāmi; no *katai* palm-leaf manuscript is available)
5. Uttaraviḷai, run by the Nāṭār community; it is said to have been a centre of great magicians (Vallavar

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[266] Another relationship is posited by Valli, an informant of the Vēḷāḷa community of Tirunelvēli whose *kulateyvam* (family deity) is Icakki. She considers them to be husband and wife.

[267] I would like to thank the Tamil scholar Dr S. Alagesan (Tūttukuṭi), who showed me all the Icakki shrines in town.

[268] During the time I visited the site, on 22 May 2002, the temple was undergoing complete reconstruction and about to be greatly enlarged.

[269] T.M.P. draws a clear map of the geographical movements of the goddess Icakki when he remarks: "Almost all temples found in Kaṉṉiyākumari district have come from Pāṇṭināṭu [that is, Tirunelvēli district; the people of Kerala and K.K.Dt. address the people of Tirunelvēli as *pāṇṭināṭu makkaḷ*]. Icakkiyammai came with the people who migrated to this place (AK-I.02, B 015)." – The temple survey shows that by contrast Nīlacāmi, Icakki's brother, is accorded prominence only in K.K.Dt. – I am greatly indebted to the bard and bow-song singer T.M.P. for generously offering to share his knowledge with me on a sightseeing trip (Friday, 13 December 2002) to all the Icakki shrines listed below except Cukkuppāṟai and Teṟkukkūṇṭal.

[270] The shrine, covered by a thatched roof and situated at a water channel, houses several black stone statues. – Teṉkaṉputūr is mentioned in the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai* (the second epic narrative of the Icakki cult) as one of the places afflicted by Ciṉṉa Icakki's atrocities; see Sect. 2.4, N4. For the retelling of the local Icakki story of Teṉkaṉputūr, see Sect. 7.5 above.

Icakki; Nīlacāmi; no *katai* palm-leaf manuscript is available)

6. Paṉaṅkoṭṭāṉviḷai, run by Nāṭārs (Paṉaṅkoṭṭāṉ Icakki, who comes originally from an agricultural tract of Tēvakuḷam close to Kottāram-Kaṉṉiyākumari town; Nīlacāmi; a palm-leaf manuscript of version N10 is available)

7. Cempoṉkarai/-turai(?) (Naraiyaṉviḷai), originally run by Vēḷāḷas (at the roadside: the Cempoṉkarai *cumaitāṅki* memorial stone; in a grove: Poṉṉār Uṭaiyāḷ Icakkiyammaṉ [a local Icakki story dealing with pregnancy is retold]; Auvaiyār; Nīlacāmi; nearby is a shrine of Poṉṉār Uṭaiyār Cāsta; a palm-leaf manuscript of the *katai* is available)

8. Maṇikkaṭṭippoṭṭal Cāmivīṭṭukōyil, owned by Tiru Kānti,[271] a wealthy Nāṭār (no statue;[272] Poṭṭal Icakki, who became a vegetarian, is represented as an eternally lit oil lamp; Nīlaṉ; a palm-leaf manuscript of the *katai* is available)

9. Mēlāṅkōṭu (Icakki: the younger sister Nīlappiḷḷai [non-vegetarian] and the elder sister Nīlāmpikai [vegetarian] in two separate temples; the Mēlāṅkōṭu Icakki story is identical with the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai*[273])

7.7.3 Icakki as a Primary and Subordinate Deity

As I am concerned with Icakki as a primary deity, we must be satisfied with a few brief remarks about Icakki as a subordinate (or guardian) deity. According to Perumāḷ (1990:58f.), Icakkiyammaṉ is a subordinate deity in various temples of Nāñcilnāṭu. To begin with, she is present in the temples of Muttār Ammaṉ,[274] Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, Manarāja, and Piccaikālaṉ,[275] and interestingly, as we learn from the *Census of India* (1961),[276] she is also connected with the Nāgarāja temple at Nagercoil. On the seventh day of the festival held at the latter temple in the month of Tai, the local goddess Icakki joins in the morning the palanquin procession of Gaṇeśa, Āṉantakṛṣṇa, and the latter's two consorts, Rukmiṇī and Sathyabhāmā.

When we approach Icakki as a primary deity, various deities are seen in turn to be subordinated to her. Perumāḷ (1990:59) mentions thirty such deities. Some of the more relevant ones for our research are Akṉi Māṭaṉ, Auvaiyār, Cāstā, Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, Nāgārājaṉ, Nīlaṉ, Palaimāṭaṉ, Paṭṭavarāyaṉ, Pūtattār, Vaṉṉiyaṭi Maṟavaṉ, and Vātaikal-Vairavaṉ, along with such *vātai*s (spirits) as Unvāḷvātai and Kaimurivālvātai.[277] Muttār Ammaṉ, the most prominent female deity in the *villuppāṭṭu* tradition,[278] is probably the only deity who is never subordinated to Icakkiyammaṉ.

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[271] His ancestors at some point shifted southward from Tirunelvēli district, bringing Icakki along with them (AK-I.02, B, 019; 160).

[272] The statue was confiscated by the king of Patmanāpapuram during the lifetime of the present owner's father (AK-I.02, B, 377).

[273] This information was supplied by the bow-song singer T.M.P. in an interview held on 21 January 2003 (AK-I.03, A, 117).

[274] Muttār Ammaṉ is of divine birth. "[She] is born from a bead of Pārvatī's sweat that drops in a sacrificial fire" (Blackburn 1980:153). – In Svayambhūliṅgapuram (near Nagercoil) and Paṉaṅkoṭṭāṉviḷai, Icakki was first a primary and then became a subordinate deity.

[275] For more details, see Perumāḷ 1990:58.

[276] See Vol. 9, part VII-B, "Fairs and Festivals," p. 43.

[277] For a complete listing, see Perumāḷ 1990:59.

[278] See Blackburn 1980:152.