9 A Ritual System Observed

9.1 The Programme of the Ritual Practice

The ritual practice that occurs in tandem with the telling of the Icakki story represents a direct response to the murderous battle that is recounted in the narrative. It sets out with the intention of inverting the main thrust of a story which has violence as its core theme. Throughout it serves a goddess who is considered to be a split goddess—split, namely, into a highly dissatisfied, child-eating younger and a harmonised, fertile elder sister. The ritual attempts to heal this split. The goddess, who has turned to killing and blocking reproduction, will, it is hoped, be transformed and persuaded to emerge from within herself in a form that confers the gift of generativity and growth upon her devotees. The ritual specialists have chosen a creative and compelling strategy. They engage the goddess in a multiplicity of rituals which express appreciation and intimacy, while labouring to satisfy her needs. Thus they transform her all-destructive rage. The ritual is a composite of several initiatives that result in the suspension of the goddess's blocking of reproduction, and eventually in the fertility of the childless couples being restored or activated.

9.2 A Description of and Reflections on the Rituals of the *koṭai* Festival at Kiṭaṅkaṭi Naṭukāṭṭu Icakkiyammaṉ Temple at Paḷavūr[1]

Early in the morning of Tuesday the 24th of the Tamil month Cittirai (7 May 2002) I arrive with my assistant at the Naṭukāṭṭu temple of Paḷavūr, a place of Icakki worship that is said to be three to four generations old.[2] The view west of the temple is a beautiful panorama: a blue sky and white clouds that touch the hilly skyline of the Western Ghats, the huge mountain range dividing Kerala from Tamilnadu.[3] It is extremely hot, the hottest month of the year, and it is a Tuesday—along with Friday, one of the two days on which Icakkiyammaṉ worship takes place. Everything looks dry, and there is no river or pond in sight. One remarkable feature of the area are tall white windmills scattered throughout the landscape. The landscape is much more barren and parched compared to what one is treated to after the rainy season, in the cool months of Kārttikai (November-December) and Mārkaḻi (December-January), the second period of the year associated with Icakki worship, albeit on a lower scale. Then the

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[1] This fieldwork was undertaken in 2002 and 2003 while I was a MINERVA Foundation (Max-Planck) doctoral fellow and visiting research fellow in the Department of Indian Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel.

[2] Personal communication with Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai of Paḷavūr on 27 March 2002 in the courtyard of Paḷaṉiyā Piḷḷai's house. The latter, treasurer of the Icakki Temple Trust, kindly called upon the elderly men to answer my questions.

[3] The border area of Tirunelvēli and K.K.Dt. to the east is semi-arid and not as alive with green as further west and southward. Still, it receives somewhat more than the meagre rainfall of the Tirunelvēli region, "one of the very driest parts of the peninsula" (Ludden 1989:19). Its soil is a dusty brown, supporting a natural flora of hardy scrub. In the hot season, people face a scarcity of water.

landscape is one of great abundance, freshness and loveliness—a landscape as described in the first lines of the *Icakkiyammaṉ Katai (IK)*.

The shrine of Icakki is reached from the village of Paḷavūr after half an hour's walk along a small, difficult footpath, impassable when rain is falling. This is the Kiṭaṅkaṭi Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki *kōyil* ("Shrine of Icakki-in-the-middle-of-the-forest/wilderness Adjacent to Barren Land"),[4] set on a small raised foundation of red soil (see Map 4, Section 8.6). The first tiny building on the left is the shrine of Pūtattār, the primary guardian deity.[5] The one adjacent to it on the right is the Icakki shrine, a modest one-room structure of the same size, fronted by a thatched-roofed area (elevated for the event). To its right is a storage building. The space in front of this third building, which is slightly set back and at a 90-degree angle to the Icakki shrine (which faces east), is the stage for the *villuppāṭṭu* group. Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ and Vairavaṉ are positioned on an elevated spot facing the Icakki shrine. This spot is roofed, pillared, and open on all sides. The two deities face west.

None of these gods have a role to play in the *IK,* but they do figure in one or the other story connected with Icakki, particularly Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, who is said to have chased Icakki in a nearby area that once was cotton fields.[6] This story is a good example of how narratives implying Icakki's presence in a particular location multiply and grow independently, yet at certain points converge.

The temple site belongs to the Vēḷāḷas, the dominant community in the village. Behind the Icakki shrine is a tree with small wooden cradles hanging on it. To the right, at the bottom of a fence, can be seen a spot soaked with fresh blood, and close to it, level with Icakki's shrine, there is a row of seven terra-cotta Icakki statues along a hedge of thorny cactuses.[7] Two of them are wrapped in silk saris. All are adorned with such ornaments as bangles, *meṭṭi*s (foot-rings), *cilampu*s (anklets), a *mēkalai* (waistbelt, a sign of long life), a *tāli,*[8] and earrings. A red dot marks the centre of their forehead. Their neck, arms and face look as if they were smeared with turmeric. They are of enticing femininity, irrespective of their widely opened collyrium-smeared eyes that flash menace. On their head is a colourfully striped crown, with the design of a trident front and centre. They are of a bewitching beauty such as one would expect from the portrayal of Icakki during the forest scene of the *IK,* when she comes face-to-face with the Ceṭṭi (see N1, lines 1040-96). Taken by their beauty, one would almost have overlooked their lolling blood-red tongues (a sign of their all-consuming nature), their fangs, the baby crunched between their pearly-white teeth, another child between their feet, and their right arm held head-high with a knife in hand. The iconography found on the terra-cotta statues presents a revealing and coherent picture of their close-knit relation to both the well-known translocal *IK* and the local Icakki story, as made explicit in the main pūjārī's interpretation of the iconic representation of the three babies:

> When Icakki was ferocious she killed the pregnant wife of Nampiyār and plucked out her intestines, took the child from her womb, and clamped it between her teeth. That is why she has a child in her mouth. [...] In order to show her power, she did so, opposing the magic power of Nampiyār. [...] The child at her feet is that of a man who prepares magical paste *(mai)*. It is the child of Karaiyāḷaṉ [and his wife...]. [Did Karaiyāḷaṉ come from Paḷavūr?] No. Karaiyāḷaṉ came from Ampalavaṉapuram. He only prepared the magical paste and sold it to Nampiyār. [...] The child at her feet is the child of Karaiyāḷaṉ of Ampalavaṉapuram. The child in her arm is her own creation.[9] (Interview with the main pūjārī held on 15 December 2002)

That the child in her mouth is that of Nampiyār and his wife, and that the child at her feet is that of the

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[4] See also Sect. 8.3, p. 276 above.

[5] See Sect. 8.6, p. 278ff. above.

[6] See Sects. 8.6 and 5.4, p. 186, n. 256.

[7] See Photo 3 in Appendix A, p. 355.

[8] Note that the *tāli* is not necessarily a sign of marriage. According to Arunima (2003:24), in Malabar matrilineal society it was the custom to tie a *tāli* around the neck as a sign of sexual maturation. The same scholar writes (ibid.): "During the debates of the 1880s and 1890s, the reformers attacked this ritual as a symbolic initiation into prostitution, as it signified that the girl was ready for sexual relations."

[9] That this child is the baby she created herself is confirmed by various people.

magician's assistant Karaiyāḷaṉ and his wife, are the iconographical features that can be linked to the local Icakki story (see synopsis, Section 9.2.2, p. 303f.),[10] and to Icakki's competitive relations with *mantiravāti*s (magicians) as well.[11] However, the child in the arm can only be explained on the basis of the *IK,* and apparently must be identified with the *kaḷḷi* plant that turned into a child (see synopsis, Section 2.2.1, p. 10).[12]

The two statues clothed in saris have not yet been completely forgotten. In contrast, the others to their right have been left to their fate: there is a lonely torso that has come to rest in the shade of a tree, and there are legs and feet scattered about. If we circumambulate further around to the right, we reach the site of the *poṅkal;* at noon it will be filled with blackened pots standing in a row, the smell of firewood and rice boiling over, rising smoke, chattering women, playful children, and pitiable kid goats tied to a tree awaiting sacrifice. Adjacent to this site is a termite hill indicative of the presence of the coiled snake that represents fertility. Let us now turn to the events of the *koṭai* festival.

The complete series of ritual are performed in three cycles: the first cycle is divided into a morning and afternoon segment; the second cycle is divided into evening, midnight, and dawn segments; and the third cycle is a single segment on the second day. The three cycles together have a climax of their own, which occurs in the second cycle.

9.2.1 The First Ritual Cycle[13]

MORNING 7 MAY 2002

The villuppāṭṭu

It is 10:05 A.M. While the main pūjārī, 48-year-old Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, is awaiting the arrival of the first devotees at the steps of the Icakki shrine, the *villuppāṭṭu* group starts to perform. Its main members are the 40-year-old main female singer G. Muttuleṭcumi of Eṭṭaiyāpuram (Tūttukkuṭi district),[14] and her husband, G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, the main *kuṭam*[15] player—both of them belonging to the Tēvar community. The first session, played in the classical Carnatic style (at times calling for a *vil*[16] and *tuṭi*[17]), is devoted to invocations. These are part of the *IK*.[18] Divine power is summoned by means of

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[10] On another level, of course, as already suggested, these features mark her out as a *yakṣī* type B.

[11] The competition between Icakki and the *mantiravāti*s is very apparent in the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai* as well. See my synopsis in Sect. 2.4, p. 13ff. – Magic arts like sorcery and divination (featured at a later point, in the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual) are integral to the Icakki cult, as they are, more generally, in the traditional popular religion of Kaṉṉiyākumari district and Kerala. We may at this point recall the words of the main pūjārī that Icakki knows the *vātai*s (spirits, ghosts) and controls them. This seems to me reasonable, if we bear in mind her life story: her first birth ended in violent death, while her second began with her birth as a hungry spirit which came to reside in a margosa tree, a species Tamils believe—along with the banyan tree—to be the haunt of *pēy*s (evil spirits) and *yakṣī*s (spirits of pregnant women and virgins who have died an untimely death).

[12] G. Muttuleṭcumi (the bow-song singer) and her husband G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, in an interview on 8 May 2002, confirmed: "Then she broke the *kaḷḷi* plant and turned it into a child in order to present it as evidence. This is the reason why she has a child in her arm in all the temples" (K.-L.01.494). Likewise, Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai, Paḷavūr, stated in an interview of 27 March 2002: "Nīli's child in her arm is the *kaḷḷi* plant" (K-F).

[13] The first ritual cycle: morning and afternoon (the first *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṇai* and the flowerbed ritual).

[14] G. Muttuleṭcumi (born 1962), daughter of the Carnatic musician Kaṇṇucāmi, has an 8th-standard school education. Her father introduced her at the age of thirteen to the art of bow-song singing. He used to accompany her himself on the *kuṭam*. (K-L.01.B.469ff.)

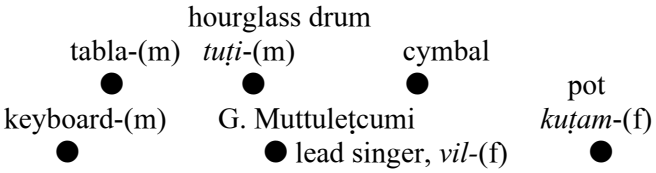
[15] The pot *(kuṭam)* used is especially made for bow-song performances. It is played by slapping its open mouth with a paddle.

[16] For a more detailed description of the bowed instrument, see Sect. 1.1, n. 4.

[17] The *tuṭi,* familiar to old Tamil literature, is the instrument held in the left hand of Śiva Naṭarājaṉ. It is a small, hourglass-shaped drum that is played by striking the fingers of the right hand against it. *Tuṭi* and *uṭukku* are synonyms for one and the same instrument.

[18] For the invocations, see N1, the published text N8, and N10.

them, and a sacred map is drawn as the relevant temple, region, and so forth are called out by name. The invocations make it clear that the *katai* is deeply rooted in religious, social, and geographical traditions. The *iruppu* (position of the group members) is as follows at the beginning stage of the performance:



It is nearly 11:00 A.M. I am awaiting the arrival of the procession, which can be seen at some distance walking from the village towards the temple in the wilderness. Some devotees carry on their heads palmyra leaf baskets containing offerings covered with white pieces of cloth. Others bring animals, such as goats or cocks. Then the first boys and girls of the procession accompanying the newly made Icakki, arrive. Smeared with holy ash and garlanded with flowers, they carry brass pots on their heads. Some pots are wrapped in white or orange pieces of cloth, decorated with flower garlands, and filled to the brim (a sign of fertility). One person carries a silver plate containing holy ash. People begin to gather in front of the Icakki shrine. The brass pots are placed at the entrance of the shrine. Finally the Vēḷar (potter) arrives on the scene, preceded by drummers.[19] He is carrying the Icakki statue recently sculpted by him,[20] and now dressed in a white dhoti[21] and garlanded with flowers.

A flashback to the village: The inaugural function of the koṭai festival, the pāl kuṭam (milk pot) ritual

Although the *koṭai* seems to have not yet started at the Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki temple far from the village, the first rituals are already over, namely those that took place in the village, involving first the Icakki pūjārī of the Śaiva Vēḷāḷa Ceṭṭiyār community (at 8:25 A.M. in his house: special preparations), and secondly the Ammaiyappar (Śiva) temple (see Map 3, Section 8.3), where (at around 9:00 A.M.) a pot is filled with milk *(pāl kuṭam)*. There is a reason for this. Icakki, as the local Icakki story tells, killed Nampiyār's wife, plucked out her intestines, and snatched away her child (see the synopsis in Section 9.2.2 midnight session below). After also killing Nampiyār (the Brahmin), Icakki takes up position at the foot of the temple chariot *(tēr)* opposite his house and adjacent to the Ammaiyappar temple. (She is still present there in the form of a stone,[22] in the shade of a tree next to the Ammaiyappar temple wall.) To her left is Pūtattār,[23] her guardian deity. Her own name, Tēraṭi Icakki ("Icakki-at-the-foot-of-the-temple-chariot"[24]) refers to her *mūlasthāna*, the spot where she stays first before being taken to the pūjārī's (Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai's) house.[25] Whereas at the *mūlasthāna* the stone in the shape of a *liṅga* (although not as tall as a normal one) is situated in an open space, in the pūjārī's backyard she has been given a small shelter with walls and a thatched roof. There 80-year-old Paramacivaṉ Piḷḷai (the former pūjārī and father of the present one) used to sit in meditative communication with the deity. At all three

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[19] The drummers belong to the Kampar community.

[20] It is made of burnt clay.

[21] Her wearing a dhoti, a male dress, rather than a sari has a reason behind it, as the pūjārī explained to me: it is later removed and presented to the Vēḷar as a token of thanks.

[22] Handelman (1995:322) posits a link between stone and interiority: "The deity's turning into a rock on the human plane is an index of [...] great interiority and distance from human beings."

[23] On Pūtattār, see Sect. 8.6.

[24] Reiniche (1975:180) remarks that temple chariots are regarded as equal in status to temples; in other words, the chariot is a temple. It seems to be common for stones of *ammaṉ*s and *māṭaṉ*s to be installed near Śiva temples. Reiniche (ibid.) mentions such a stone placement relating to the demon Māṭaṉ, who stole Śiva's ritual rice. When Śiva perceived Māṭaṉ on the basis of the theft, a stone representing Māṭaṉ was placed near the Śiva temple. Interestingly enough, according to Reiniche's account the villagers believe that the connection between stone and temple was established by the god of the chariot.

[25] The pūjārī does pūjās for both Tēraṭi Icakki and the Icakki in the backyard of his house (personal communication on 19 January 2003).

locations (Naṭukāṭṭu temple, Tēraṭi near the Ammaiyappar Śiva temple, and the pūjārī's backyard) Pūtattār is to her left. In the pūjārī's backyard, both take the form of blackened rectangular slabs of wood *(palakai).* There Icakki is considered to be of a ferocious nature, and this is the reason for not having given this *pūtam*[26] a human shape or name. It is believed that when she assumes an anthropomorphic form, her rage knows no limits, causing fright among the people. Moreover, her ability to bewilder others with her charm increases. Icakki is partly covered with red silk, and a jasmine garland is placed on the semicircular top of the slab of wood. In front of her are lying her *kaṭakam*s,[27] bangles of pure silver. To her right stands the red bow-shaped *pirampu*, a stick that is said to ward off evil. To the left of Pūtattār another stick, this time a straight one, leans against the wall. It is considered to belong to Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ. Whereas Icakki in the form of a slab never moves anywhere, her *pirampu* and *kaṭakam*s are taken during the annual *koṭai* festival to the Naṭukāṭṭu shrine and are there worn by Kantappiḷḷai,[28] the bodily vessel of Icakki during the *cāmiyāṭṭam* (possession, lit. "god-dance"). They are returned to the pūjārī's house shrine as soon as the festival is over.

This brief excursion to Icakki's *mūlasthāna* in the village makes it obvious why there is interaction between the village and the Icakki who resides in the wilderness, that is to say, between the inside and the outside. As my further descriptions will show, the villagers enter into a reciprocal relationship with Icakki on the outside by bringing material objects from the village, and in return taking social, psychological, and spiritual enrichment back with them to the village. Everything begins in the village and ends in the village, and more precisely, at the pūjārī's house, where *pūtam*-Icakki resides.

According to convention, all religious functions in Paḷavūr start from the Ammaiyappar temple, to which the village attaches special importance as being the temple dedicated to Śiva. The *pāl kuṭam* (milk pot) ritual, the inaugural function of the Icakki *koṭai* festival, is no exception. But as we shall see at a later point, there are two other rituals that highlight more directly the link between the two temples, the Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki shrine in the wilderness and the Ammaiyappar temple in the village. I am referring to the *kumbhābhiṣeka,* performed at the Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki shrine by the Brahmin priest of the Ammaiyappar temple, and the preparation[29] of *āppam* and *puṭṭu*, both vegetarian items made available by the Brahmin priest for the *poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu* during the *arttacāmapūjai* (the final night pūjā) of the *koṭai*. It is important to recall that Nampiyār, murdered by Icakki, was a Brahmin and the priest of the Ammaiyappar temple. The local Icakki story accounts for the link between the two temples and for why food offerings should indeed be given by the Ammaiyappar temple to Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki.[30]

The first pūjā to the newly made Icakki statue at the Vēḷar's house

Returning to the sequence of events: After the *pāl kuṭam* ritual is over at 9:00 A.M., the procession heads towards a house on the outskirts of Paḷavūr belonging to the member of the Vēḷar community (potters, also known colloquially as *kuyavar*s or *kucavar*s)[31] who has made the new image of Icakki.[32] The new

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[26] The pūjārī talked about her in terms of a *pūtam* (a Sanskrit loanword: *bhūta,* "demon"); an interview on 19 January 2003.

[27] *Kaṭakam* (LT) - *kaṭayam* (ST).

[28] Kantappiḷḷai is the brother of Paramacivaṉ Piḷḷai, the former pūjārī.

[29] This preparation is done at the Ammaiyappar temple.

[30] Interestingly enough, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai called the temple's contribution "the punishment for Nampiyār, the Brahmin." It is significant that Nampiyār's role in the local Icakki story is conceived in Paḷavūr as an activity that continually calls for reparations on the part of the Brahmin priest (directly) and the Śiva temple (indirectly). It should be mentioned that Nampiyār, who moved to Paḷavūr from a northern area, laid the foundation for the Ammaiyappar (Śiva) temple. His house, which no longer exists, was situated opposite the Śiva temple. All his relatives, so it is said, went away after the atrocities carried out by Icakki occurred. – In short, the Ammaiyappar temple either indirectly or directly participates in two rituals linked with the Icakki temple: the *pāl kuṭam* and the preparation and offering of *āppam* and *puṭṭu.*

[31] For further details, see Singh 1998:3626f.

[32] The Vēḷar who was commissioned to make the image is not from Paḷavūr but has come especially for the ritual from his native place, Iraniyal, west of Nagercoil. (Interview with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai on 19 January 2003) – I had no chance to interview the potter of this particular statue, but in February 2003 did interview, by letter correspondence, the potter A. Cupparamaṇiya Perumāḷ Vēḷāḷar of Ammāṉṭiviḷai (K.K.Dt.), a specialist in making the Icakki statue. I give a summary of his

statue, simply called Icakki Ammaṉ,[33] witnessed its first pūjā at the Vēḷar's house—performed by the Vēḷar with the permission of "*pūtam*-Icakki,"[34] whose seat is in the pūjārī's backyard. The offerings of a white dhoti, coconut, betel nut, fruits, a cock, and money[35] are made by Icakki's pūjārī, but come from the client who ordered the statue. This pūjā has more importance for the Vēḷar than for Icakki.[36] It is performed to thank the potter (by means of a dhoti, money etc.). There is no animal sacrifice in the Vēḷar's house. An egg sacrifice only takes place to appease the *vātai*s (spirits, ghosts). Icakki is said to know the *vātai*s and to control them.

The ritual of opening the eyes (cilai kaṇ tiṟappu) of the newly made Icakki statue carried in procession

After the pūjā is over the image is taken in procession to the Ūr Ammaṉ—that is, to the Veyilukanta Ammaṉ—temple at the northern outskirts of the village.[37] Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ and Vairavaṉ are also present. The new image of Icakki is carried by its Vēḷar maker.[38] The statue is placed in front of the Ūr Ammaṉ temple, where at 10:00 A.M. the opening of the statue's eyes *(cilai kaṇ tiṟappu)* takes place. Fruits are offered, and a coconut is split in two. The statue is dressed in the white dhoti given by the pūjārī, and a towel is tied around its waist. A cock is beheaded, and the blood is sprayed in all directions. Some blood is smeared as a tilak on the forehead of the statue to open her eyes. One egg is thrown towards the east, another one towards the north, and a third one towards the front of the temple, thus creating a fence *(vēli)* for protection. Asked why the eye-opening ritual must be done at the Ūr Ammaṉ temple outside the village and cannot occur at the Ammaiyappar temple, the main pūjārī of Icakki replies:

> The eyes are not opened inside the village because the people are frightened. [...] The Ammaiyappar temple is inside the village. This statue doesn't go to the Ammaiyappar temple. Ammaiyappar is the devotee of Śiva. Icakki is a *pēy* [hungry spirit].

The eye-opening ritual takes half an hour, after which time the image of Icakki (still carried by the Vēḷar) sets off in procession to the Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki temple and finally reaches its destination. It is crucial that the new Icakki figure not touch the ground until it has approached the Icakki temple. It is believed that Icakki settles wherever the figure comes in contact with the ground.

The arrival of the newly made Icakki in the wilderness and her placement face-to-face with the permanent Icakki-in-the-shrine

It is 11:00 A.M. Drums *(mēḷam)* are beaten. The *nātasvaram* is played. The *villuppāṭṭu* stops. The *IK* proper has not started yet. The bow-song singer folds her hands respectfully. A few people gather. The new image of Icakki approaches the temple square. Resembling the iconic representation of the terra-cotta figures standing along the cactus hedges (see the description in Section 9.2), and dressed in the white dhoti, she is placed face-to-face at some distance from Icakki-in-the-shrine, whose iconographic

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reply: The Vēḷar has to observe a 41-day fasting from the time he starts to make the statue. This particular Vēḷar takes the clay from the pond of Tōvāḷai (a place nearer to Āralvāymoḻi), visits his client, circumambulates him, and starts his job. After he finishes it, the eye-opening ritual is conducted by him at the temple, with a cock being sacrificed and the dress being donned. Asked about the two holes, the one on the head and the other on the stomach of the baby placed at the foot of the Icakki statue, he replied: "The hole is made in order to make the wet clay dry fast. These holes are closed when it arrives at the temple." That the holes made at the time the statue is formed are merely a technical expedient of the potter's was confirmed by Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, Icakki's pūjārī, in Paḷavūr on 19 January 2003.

[33] Interview with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002.

[34] As mentioned above, she has no proper name. Merely in order to distinguish her, I shall continue to refer to her as such.

[35] If a person is prepared to order a statue, he has to pay Rs. 2,000 to the Vēḷar association, and in turn the Vēḷar association will pay the pūjārī of Icakki. The Vēḷar has no other function in the *koṭai* than making the statue and carrying it to the Naṭukāṭṭu temple, where he conducts the sacrifice of the cock given as an offering by the pūjārī.

[36] Personal communication with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, the pūjārī, on 19 January 2003.

[37] See Map 3, Sect. 8.3; also Sect. 8.6.

[38] The Vēḷar is paid by his client, the donor of the statue, to carry the statue.

features (see Section 8.7) are identical, except for one baby missing at her feet.[39] There is significance in the arrival of the new Icakki donated by a young man from Āvaraikuḷam, whose offering to Icakki-in-the-shrine can be considered as an act of thanksgiving, since his request for a child had proved successful.[40] Every vow to a deity is required to be kept if the wish is granted. That people are convinced of Icakki's benevolence in bestowing children is also apparent in the offering of a cradle by a woman who approaches the pūjārī. Birth, the visible sign of women's reproductive power, is the essence of their identity in traditional Tamil culture. Is Icakki-in-the-shrine, whose stories tell of her blocking reproduction, aware of this? The differences between her and the newly arrived clay *(cuṭṭa maṇ)* figure are somewhat striking. The blackened terra-cotta statue of Icakki-in-the-shrine not only lacks the vital quality of beauty possessed by the colourful, *mañcaḷ*-skinned and garlanded new arrival, but also contrasts by reason of the colour of her dress. While the terra-cotta statue of Icakki-in-the-shrine wears a red sari, the figure outside is dressed in white, a sign of her non-active, benevolent nature,[41] which is rooted in the village, a place of assembly and stability.[42] With the statue standing outside going unnoticed, a great rush of people place even more brass pots and such cooling foods as bunches of plantain, sugarcane, and green coconuts on the steps of the shrine. The pūjārī serves the people who bring their offerings a paste of sacred ash, turmeric, and sandalwood. The *villuppāṭṭu* continues, though at times it is interrupted by disturbances.

The kumbhābhiṣeka

—The kumbhābhiṣeka for Pūtattār (also called Māṭaṉ)
The turning point comes unexpectedly. The scene shifts suddenly to the Pūtattār shrine. Another name for this deity is Māṭaṉ. It is 11:30 A.M. Drums are beaten. The *villupāṭṭu* stops. The *IK* proper has still not started. Men of high standing go to the front. A crowd gathers—mainly men. The *kumbhābhiṣeka* for Pūtattār takes place. To Pūtattār, as the primary guardian deity, goes the honour of receiving the first pūjā in the *koṭai*. An Aiyar Brahmin priest performs the ritual, while Icakki's pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, assists. Bells are rung. Possession takes place. An elderly woman's body begins to tremble. Kantappiḷḷai, who will later enact Icakki, and Icakki's pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, are seized by the emerging deity.

—The kumbhābhiṣeka for Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki and, simultaneously, a first ritual exchange of views between Icakki inside and Icakki outside
The scene shifts back. One ritual having come to an end at the Pūtattār shrine, another one starts now as a direct sequel at the Icakki shrine. The drummers move about. The heat increases. Women now show greater interest but remain seated. Men gather in front of the shrine. There are seven earthen pots of plenty (signifying fertility and fruitfulness) smeared with red *kuṅkumam* powder and sandalwood paste, to which adhere bits of coconut and assorted margosa leaves and jasmine flowers. Plantain fruits are also in evidence. It is 12:00 noon. Inside the shrine the sari is being removed from the blackened terra-cotta statue.[43] The figure has one baby in its mouth and one on its arm, bespeaking the ambivalent character of the goddess. There is no child at her feet. Her devotees have formed a row so as to give her a free view of her other self that has come directly from the village—representing something of the

[39] For the meaning of the baby at her feet, see the interview with the main pūjārī in Sect. 9.2, p. 282.

[40] Interview with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002.

[41] The pūjārī explained: "If we dress the statue in red it will be ferocious. For this reason, she has got a white clothing" (interview on 19 January 2003).

[42] I identify this figure as the elder sister version of the goddess.

[43] "She is smeared with oil. *Mañcaṇai* and oil are used on the statue. This leaves the figure black. That statue in the Naṭukāṭṭu temple is anywhere from 80 to 100 years old. We should not allow anybody to go near the statue, to avoid its being broken. If it is broken it is very difficult to recast. We have to spend nearly one lakh of rupees to do so. And we have to observe fasting for it. It is made of clay and burnt" (interview with the main pūjārī at his house in Paḻavūr on 15 December 2002).

benevolence which, it is hoped, will be remembered and adopted by Icakki who is inside the shrine.[44] The timing is not accidental. Noontime is an important division of the day.[45] With respect to Icakki, midday is a dangerous time. Her temples, it is said at Muppantal, should not be passed by pregnant women at this particular time (the same applies at midnight), and if they do, they should have with them a protective margosa leaf. It is the Aiyar Brahmin priest again who performs the ritual, in a swift and highly elaborate manner, purifying the statue and other items with the milk taken in procession in the *pāl kuṭam* (milk pot) from the Ammaiyappar temple. Icakki's pūjārī assists. Bells are rung. At the time of the *tīpārātaṉai* Kantappiḷḷai is entered by the goddess and made to partake of her substance. An assistant supports him. The *kumbhābhiṣeka* is over, and so are the morning rituals. What we have witnessed so far are the classical temple rituals.

—The kumbhābhiṣeka rituals for Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ and Vairavaṉ

REFLECTIONS ON THE MORNING SEGMENT

I would argue that certain aspects of the morning segment decode the ritual exchange of views between the two versions of the goddess, one inside and one outside, and that the placement and the showing of the outside image (harmonised/fertile) to the inside figure (unfulfilled/fertility blocking) is a sign set by the village from the outset. I interpret the sign as an invitation for the inside figure to initiate a transformative process towards the other version of herself, a lost variant she must possess, for otherwise the outside figure would not have come into existence and been offered to her in thanksgiving. I argue that these meanings are present for the participants of the *koṭai.* As we shall see in the course of the rituals, what is initiated at this point is accomplished in the final ritual of the second cycle at the end of the dawn watch.

AFTERNOON

The villuppāṭṭu

It is approximately 1:30/1:45 P.M. The *villuppāṭṭu* opens the afternoon session. People listen attentively. The entire temple square is covered with women sitting on the ground. The *pantal*s (canopies),[46] constructed of banana stalks and palmyra thatch, transform the place into a shady, cool setting.

The second pūjā for the newly made Icakki figure

In the morning the ritual stage was set by the *villuppāṭṭu* in its invocation of the gods, but it is only between 1:30 and 1:45 in the afternoon, after an intervening break, that the *koṭai* festival proper starts,[47] with both the *villuppāṭṭu* group beginning its performance of the *IK* and the *pūjā* for the newly made Icakki image. Such acts give substance to the term *koṭai,* which means "gift": here, the gift not only of the *katai* that retells the goddess's life, but even of Icakki's own self, or more precisely, a version of her split self in the form of the new terra-cotta figure. The Vēḷar (potter) will serve a final function. It is a significant moment. The nature of the statue is about to undergo change. The Vēḷar receives the white dhoti worn by his newly made image, while the terra-cotta figure is now dressed in a red silk sari,

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[44] Making her remember her connection with the village is essential. Three elements represent the village: firstly, the newly made image of her offered by an individual indebted to the deity; secondly, the *pāl kuṭam* (milk pot) carried together with the statue in procession from the village; and thirdly, the Aiyar Brahmin priest of the Ammaiyappar temple who purifies her.

[45] See Obeyesekere 1984:109.

[46] For *pantal,* see Dubois 1906:154.

[47] Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai in a personal communication of 19 January 2003 made clear that in a strict sense this is the time the festival begins.

Icakki's favourite colour, a metaphor for heat, but also the colour associated with brides—clearly evoking auspicious fertility. She is garlanded with flowers. A plantain leaf is placed in front of her, and a halved coconut, betel, bananas, and incense sticks are put on it. As the *villuppāṭṭu* continues and preparations for the *poṅkal* are made at its assigned spot, the young man from Āvaraikuḷam who offered *(nēranta āḷ)* the statue sprinkles her with flowers. He is asked to hold his right hand on the statue's chest while facing towards Icakki-inside-the-shrine. He prays: "O Ammā, I have done my duty. Let me from now on be free from all suffering and disease. I swear thrice an oath that I have fulfilled my duty—*uṇmai cattiyam, uṇmai cattiyam, uṇmai cattiyam*." He circumambulates the statue clockwise. A cock is swung three times in a circling movement (similar to a *tīpārātaṉai*) in front of her. It is sacrificed—beheaded[48]—and its blood daubed in the form of a *poṭṭu* (red tilak mark) on the statue's forehead, and then smeared on the child in her left arm. This is the task of the Vēḷar. The bell rings; camphor and light are swung. The young donor circumambulates the newly made image again three times. It is the moment when the donee, the permanent Icakki-in-the-shrine—though hidden behind a red curtain for changing into her *alaṅkāram* form[49]—accepts from the donor his offering (made in fulfilment of a vow, *nērccai*[50]) by giving a handful of jasmine flowers, which are sprinkled on the newly made statue.[51] The main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, blesses the donor and the Vēḷar who conducted the pūjā with both rose water and holy ash. This is the main pūjārī's sole function in this segment. It is 2:00 P.M. The statue has now lost its importance.[52] It is removed and placed in a corner of the storeroom next to the shrine (see Map 4, Section 8.6).[53]

Reflections on the pūjā for the newly made Icakki figure

Given that the newly made Icakki figure mirrors the hoped-for transformation of the goddess-in-the-shrine, I would argue that the outside figure is evidently meant to awaken the other one's interest in the split version of herself, that is, in her benevolent vitality. Indeed, initiating this process of self-awareness in the Icakki inside is the only function of the Icakki outside. That the outside figure eventually loses its importance is indicative of the fact that the goddess has accepted the gift.

I argue that the strategy of the ritual specialists, which began earlier with the "ritual exchange of views," proves effective. I argue more particularly, however, that the transformative impulse must come from outside.

The villuppāṭṭu

It is 2:00 P.M. (7 May 2002). The *villuppāṭṭu* group has started to perform the *IK* proper, singing of Śivapāppāṉ and Śiva-Āṭi, his barren wife, and singing also about the Ammaiyappar temple and

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[48] There are two ways of beheading a cock: to slit the throat and let the blood drain off, or to wring the neck. The Tēvar charged with the task at this *koṭai* follows the old way, of slitting the throat—the method considered proper in temples that are ancient (Perumāḷ 1990:62). The head has to be thrown away, according to the pūjārī.

[49] The blood-red curtain can be read as a foretoken of the goddess's maturation. – Note that the curtain is set up before the pūjā for the newly made Icakki-outside-the-shrine takes place, and is only taken down after she is removed and stored in the storeroom.

[50] *nērccai* < *nērttikkaṭaṉ*. The term is used for offerings in fulfilment of a vow.

[51] The main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, comes out with a handful of jasmine flowers to announce that the goddess has accepted the offering. This was confirmed to me in an interview with the main pūjārī held on 19 January 2003.

[52] Asked when the newly made Icakki statue is most powerful, whether after the eye-opening ceremony or after she has changed her dress from white to red and is placed face-to-face with the permanent Icakki, the pūjārī Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai answered as follows: "The power disappears immediately after the *tīpārātaṉai* is over and the sacred ash has been distributed. There is no reason why this offered statue should still have power. [...] At the time of the eye-opening ceremony the statue acquires some power, but loses it after the *tīpārātaṉai,* and henceforth is considered to be a mere statue of clay. [...] The power has gone to the Ammaṉ" (interview on 19 January 2003).

[53] Interview held on 15 December 2002: "It [the newly made statue] is kept in the room next to the Icakki shrine for some time. When the next statue comes, we replace this one with it. We put this one outside [near the cactus hedges]. [...] It doesn't go back to the village."

Śivakāmi, the temple dancer *(devadāsī)* who is longing for a child.

Cooking the festival food (poṅkal)

2:00 P.M. The making of *poṅkal* (rice and milk boiled and offered to the goddess) is in full swing, while simultaneously, behind a red curtain veiling the inner sanctum, Icakki is being decorated with flowers for the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*. At the same time, the *villuppāṭṭu* continues to narrate her story.

The villuppāṭṭu

2:15 P.M. A middle-aged man standing on the steps of the goddess's shrine is suddenly entered by the goddess when the Icakki story reaches the point telling of Śivakāmi's longing for a baby girl, whom she expects to be her successor in the art of temple dance.[54]

The alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai (ornamentation and the worship with a light)

—1a) The alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai at the Pūtattār shrine
It is 2:45 P.M., the moment when the *IK* tells of Lakṣmī, who was born to Śivakāmi, the devadāsī, as her successor. We are told, among other things, how she teaches her the devadāsī temple dance, and how gifted and lovely Lakṣmī is. It is the moment we are asked, with the playing of the *nātasvaram* and the beating of drums, to proceed to the Pūtattār shrine for the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*. The *villuppāṭṭu* stops. Again Pūtattār, the guardian deity, comes first. The image has undergone a change. Before merely a black stone slab, he now has a human look to him: he wears a silver mask *(veḷḷi aṅki)* and is swathed in a white dhoti, garlanded with flowers, and bears two whisks of areca. Cooling food like lemon, coconuts, and bananas have been placed at his feet. The *nātasvaram* intensifies its playing; the drums are beaten faster; the bells are rung. Kantappiḷḷai and the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, become possessed. Their garlanded upper body is smeared with white cooling paste. As Kantappiḷḷai's possession ebbs, the main pūjārī rocks swiftly back and forth, and loses his balance. Holding one of Pūtattār's accessories, he dances to the rhythm of the drums, and delivers *cāmivākku* to one highly honoured man. At the same time as the possession ritual is going on, arrangements for the flowerbed *(pūppaṭukkai)* are being made at the square in front of Icakki's shrine.

—1b) The first alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai at the Icakki shrine
The *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* at the Icakki image follows as a direct sequel. *Alaṅkāram* means "embellishment." Icakki's blackened terra-cotta statue, having been purified in the *kumbhābhiṣeka,* is now fully covered with huge garlands of common flowers. The language of flowers in Tamil is always the language of maturation.[55] The act of flowering is a first attempt to make the goddess become fertile. A whisk of areca hangs from the top of her head. Her face has been made up. As her permanent image is anthropomorphic, unlike Pūtattār, her face is not covered by a mask *(aṅki)*, but rather decorated with single pieces of silver, which accentuate her most striking features: her facial expression of dissatisfaction, unfulfilment, and disappointment—most clearly visible at the downward slanting corners of her mouth. Speaking in Tamil people's terms: "She has the *mūtēvi* in her face" (cf. 2.4, N7). There is a contradiction between her psychological interior and her physical exterior: on the one hand, the *mūtēvi* in her face (a sign of misfortune), and on the other, the abundance and fullness indicated by

[54] We learned from the popular bow-song singer S. Svayamburajan in an interview held in Paḻavūr on 8 May 2002: "At such points, when we are singing the invitation to Ammai, [...] those who are involved in that part of the song among the audience will be possessed" (K-L.01.B057f.).

[55] Cf. Trawick 1978:193: "First menstruation is blossoming *(pūttal)*"; and also Ramanujan 1995:34: "In Sanskrit, a menstruating woman is called a *puṣpavatī* (a woman in flower)." – Note that the goddess's maturation is presaged by the red curtain spanned in front of the inner sanctum.

the flower garlands, and by the offerings heaped up in front of her: coconuts, plantain, mangoes, and other cooling fruits.

One would have expected the story to narrate at this point the forest episode in her divine life, namely the appearance of Icakki in her first *alaṅkāram* to the Ceṭṭi (see N1), but it does not do so. As this ritual segment begins, the performance has only arrived at the encounter between Lakṣmī and the Brahmin in their first human birth.

While the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*—the first *alaṅkāram* (two more will follow[56])—is going on to the beating of drums and the ringing of bells, there is a response among the spectators: a woman sitting in the crowd becomes possessed.[57] With loosened hair she sways back and forth, pumping with her arms. Kantappiḷḷai, too,[58] is affected by the goddess's emergence and the first moments of her full presence. His appearance has changed. He has been garlanded with flowers. He wears the *kaṭakam*s,[59] bangles of pure silver taken from *pūtam*-Icakki in the pūjārī's backyard. His entire upper body, including his face and hair, is smeared with blazing red *mañcaṇai,* a mixture of yellow turmeric, red *kuṅkumam* powder, and oil, as described in the *alaṅkāram* scene of the translocal story.[60] There is significance in this mixture.[61] He wears a white dhoti. The goddess has come alive, and is now ready to turn outwards to the flowerbed, which is currently being prepared. He, the possessed, is she, the possessor. She comes outside and stands at the entrance of her inner sanctum, facing the audience (all seated in an orderly fashion) with many silver bangles (*kaṭakam*s) on her arm.

Reflections on the first alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai at the Icakki shrine

The inquiry being pursued here is towards answering the question of how the goddess is aroused. The goddess has to come alive if she is to be made accessible to the villagers. I would argue within the context of this ritual that to have her present in a certain way necessitates both her recognition of herself and her recognition by others. I have shown that recognition of her maturation, creativity, and richness is accorded to her in her *alaṅkāram* (ornamentation)—this being yet another gift *(koṭai)*—and that it is through the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* that the goddess first emerges. The aesthetic qualities of the *alaṅkāram* seem to be instrumental in generating change in the goddess's consciousness and self-perception. In

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[56] Blackburn's study (1980:256f.) confirms that a *koṭai* used to consist of three *tīpārātaṉai.* On the ritual sequence in *koṭai*s in broad outline, see Blackburn 1980:225ff. He remarks that the *koṭai* in general is structured around three *tīpārātaṉai*s (228), which are "differentiated from the ordinary pūjā by their timing. They occur [...] either [...] at 12 noon or [...] at 12 midnight" (229f.). However, he admits that "although the *tīpārātaṉai* rarely transpire exactly at either zenith time, their synchronization is a deliberate goal and all activities are directed toward it."

[57] On the possession of "undesignated persons," see Blackburn 1980:254f.: "This possession [...] is somewhat unexpected [...]. Most of those affected in the audience have either danced once or twice before in this unofficial status or have suffered unwanted possession outside the *koṭai* context. If women in the crowd are possessed, they dance in a particular style. [...] These unexpected dances often evoke a greater interest in the audience than do the official dancers. Because the possessing deity of the undesignated dancer is unidentified, people watch closely for clues."

[58] It is most interesting that it is only in his immediate response to the possession of the woman in the crowd that Kantappiḷḷai shows signs that he himself is possessed by the goddess.

[59] I counted at least twelve.

[60] See *IK,* N1.1078-9.

[61] The two substances mirror both the beauty and the flowering of women. Turmeric or sandal paste is commonly smeared during love-making. The most striking poetic description of the attraction of sandal paste smeared on a woman's body is probably Aśvaghoṣa's *Saundarānanda* 4.34-7, in which the prince (Nanda) reluctantly follows the call of his brother, the Buddha, while constantly thinking of his lover (Sundarī), who is smeared with sandal paste. He promises her that he will return before the sandal paste on her body has dried. See also *Cil.* 4.58ff., where passionate women feel sad, during the absence of their lovers, that their breasts cannot be rubbed with sandalwood paste *(malayam)* (62). *Kuṅkumaccāntu,* the scented mixture of red *kuṅkumam* and sandal *(cāntu)* paste, used by a husband to apply artistic designs to his wife's breast, figures in *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 2479.3, where Cīvakaṉ paints Ilakkaṇai's breasts *(ākam)* with sandal paste *(cāntam): cānta māka meḻuti [...]* (ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967, Chap. "Ilakkaṇaiyār ilampakam"). Sontheimer (1989:309) observes that turmeric is thought "to cause fertility in marriages." – The red paint probably signals an overheated flowering goddess. In essence, heat is associated with life and fertility (see Beck 1969:553).

particular, the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* is illustrative of the fact that the exterior is emotionally and cognitively operative upon the goddess's interior.[62]

A few words on the *villuppāṭṭu* performance are in order at this point. What has become clear so far is the fact that up to the end of the performance of the *IK*, that is to say, up to midnight, the *villuppāṭṭu* at no time advances in direct conjunction with the ritual action. It seems that it is not the *villuppāṭṭu* story that is crucial in luring the goddess into an active presence, but rather the *mēḷam*—the drum and *nātasvaram*[63]—instruments that feature regularly in temple activities. Despite the fact, though, that an actual parallel is lacking, a parallel to the first *alaṅkāram* scene of the *IK* (see Section 4.7) may well be assumed at least in conceptual terms. In any case, ethnography confirms Kapferer's general assumption (2000:29, n. 5) that "the ritual [rather than the story] is the structure."

The first flowerbed (pūppaṭukkai)[64]

The direct sequel to the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* that brings the goddess to life is a ritual of quite a different sort. No programme schedule could inform the spectator of what awaits him. The crowd is huge, the small temple square being entirely filled with devotees. Most of the women are sitting on the ground—in front, the female members of the pūjārī's extended family (clearly distinguished by their red and white patterned saris) and the women who will participate during the night session in the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual. The Vēḷāḷas are closest to the unfolding events, while the Tēvars, another distinct group, gather at some distance in front of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ's image. Some women are standing in a row at the edge of the temple square. Those present remain mere spectators. They can identify with, but not participate in, the action that is about to occur.[65]

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[62] On this cross-cultural notion, cf. Köpping 2003:190 and the discussion there of the concept of the body in European medieval festive culture: Bodies are conceived as "[...] durchlässig und zu Veränderungen hin geschaffen [...weil sie] das Äußere ins Innere aufnehmen können, während innere Zustände wie Produkte nach außen befördert werden können."

[63] Cf. Blackburn 1980:268: "[T]he possession dance in [the initial] slot is closely linked to the *tīpārātaṉai* which takes place at some remove from the vil pāṭṭu performance. The medium becomes possessed with the accompaniment of the mēḷam and not the vil pāṭṭu singing [...]."

[64] This is also called the flower offering *(pūppaṭaippu)*. Both terms are in use. This was confirmed in several interviews (see the one with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002, B-AK-H.01.144f.): "Both terms are common: *pūppaṭukkai* and *pūppaṭaippu*. [...] She will come and roll on it. Just as we have our quilts, she has her bed of flowers." – Note that this ritual should not be confused with the term *pūkkuḻi,* which refers to "fire walking." – The flowerbed, an offering *(paṭaippu)*, is not confined to rituals involving Icakki. It is also important, on other occasions, both for Muttār Ammaṉ (a benevolent goddess), and for Pattirakāḷiyammaṉ (a wrathful deity). The same offering is also made at the shrines of Pēcciyammaṉ. The songs about Muttār Ammaṉ relate that she was born from the *pūppaṭaippu*. She is thus also called *pūppaṭaippu-kāri*. In the songs about Pēcciyammaṉ, this goddess is said to "like the *pūppaṭaippu" (pūppaṭaippai ukantaval)* (personal communication with T.M.P.). – According to T.M.P. (interview on 20 January 2003, Svayambhūliṅgapuram) *pūppaṭukkai* rituals gained more popularity in the western side of K.K.Dt.—for instance, in Tuckalai. We may conclude that there is an underlying Malayali influence. It is striking that, in questionnaires distributed at various temples largely associated with the Nāṭār community, the answer to my inquiry about a *pūppaṭukkai* ritual was generally negative. On the flowerbed in a Sri Lankan context, see Kapferer 1997:356, glossary: *mal asna*, "flower bed/altar"; and Obeyesekere 1984:51: "Altars to god are called 'flower-couch'. For the actual flowerbed, see Photo 4 in the appendix, p. 355. – It is customary among wealthy Tamils to prepare a couch strewn with flowers as the nuptial bed for couples in order to consummate their marriage on. I thank Professor T. Naṭarājaṉ (Maturai Kamrāj University) for this information.

[65] Though the flowerbed ritual is meant in the first place for the goddess, it additionally serves to initiate couples into matters of sexuality in order, in particular, to overcome infertility—above all, those who have failed to have any children. The flowerbed ritual can be read by women and men as a manual, with the first of the three rituals serving as an initial step towards understanding the sexual aspects of the body, areas of regenerative processes, heightened vulnerability, and the creation of erotic harmonies. Themes expanded on include individual needs, dislikes, disappointments, and rejection; moreover, repudiation of femininity, orgasm, sexuality, and so forth. In short, the flowerbed ritual serves to direct one's view onto problem areas of sexuality and, in cases of childlessness, can help to overcome psychological barriers. – On the theme of vulnerability in sexual union in an Indian context, see Trawick 1978:145, and Osella and Osella 1999:197; on the ambivalence of sexually mature young women at the moment of the "breaking of the vagina in defloration," see Osella and Osella ibid. Analysis within this field of research can draw on numerous examples from contemporary Indian literature in general, and Tamil ballads in particular. A recently published novel titled *A Married Woman*, written in 2002 by Manju Kapur, a female novelist and professor at Delhi University, offers good insight into the sexual needs of Indian women. – On female frustrations,

Purifying smoke covers the sacred site. The *nātasvaram* plays mildly. The drummers and the *nātasvaram* player stand near the circular altar-like flowerbed / flower offering *(pūppaṭukkai/ pūppaṭaippu)*. The flowerbed is gorgeous in its three layers of plants and flowers: below *tuḷaci*[66] covered with cooling margosa leaves,[67] and above them, on the uppermost layer, a variety of flowers (including lotuses) and a banana leaf containing a *Pandanus odoratissimus* flower *(tāḻampū)*, an areca flower *(kamukampū),* and various other substances.[68] The air is filled with expectation and excitement. People believe that the power of Icakki is felt only on the flowerbed. "Ammaṉ will come and play *(viḷaiyāṭutal)*[69] on the flowerbed," they say.

Then the goddess comes out of the inner sanctum and descends to the flowerbed, which is situated in the arena in front of the shrine. Kantappiḷḷai, the man who offers the goddess his body, is smeared with *mañcaṇai* paint indicative of overheat and sexual maturity.[70] His body begins to rock to the rhythm of the *mēḷam* to and fro. He looks at Icakki-in-the-shrine, gently smiling at her. Then he throws sacred ash onto the flowerbed, as a blessing. The drums start to beat faster, and become insistent. Soon Kantappiḷḷai gets up from the ground, jumps onto the flowerbed, and in the blink of an eye grabs the cooling margosa leaves, and bites into and chews them. He is joyful. Like a royal personage, he lies down comfortably upon the flowerbed, his legs drawn up, with his head erect, facing Icakki-in-the-shrine. The surrounding men produce the *kuravai* sound.[71] Kantappiḷḷai, the *camiyāṭi,* begins to roll clockwise on the flowerbed.[72] He is now extremely joyful. He throws flowers in the air. Then, resting on his knees, with his arms extended, hands pressed on the flowerbed, and back arched, he thrusts himself forward. His face touches the flowerbed. The sensuality of Kantappiḷḷai's / the goddess's behaviour is suggestive of an ecstasy that, in tandem with the flowerbed's response, is not unlike an orgasmic act.[73] An elderly woman in the audience smiles. Others in the front who will participate with their husbands in the ritual of *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* for the boon of a child during the night session remain expressionless.[74]

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see Kakar (1990:21), who notes: "Most women portrayed even sexual intercourse as a furtive act in a cramped and crowded room, lasting barely a few minutes and with a marked absence of physical or emotional caressing. Most women found it painful or distasteful or both." Concerning husband-wife relationships, Beck (1986:95) states that in Indian folk tales "husband/wife bonds are more often characterized by negative attitudes [...] than by [...] positive ones [...]. [T]he negative cases [...] often involve adultery, suspicion, or outright physical aggression."

[66] Skt. *tulasī* (*Ocimum sanctum,* Linn.). Interview with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002 (B-AK-H.01.140ff.): "*Tuḷaci* is put by us for the smell." – See Narayan 1995:487: "The sacred basil shrub, tulsī[...] is regarded as a goddess, and is a special focus of women's religious life." See also Dubois 1906:649: "Brahmins consider it to be the wife of Vishnu." For more on *tuḷaci* worship, see Chandola 1976; S.S. Gupta 1980:38–45; and S.M. Gupta 2001:54–60.

[67] Interview with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002 (B-AK-H.01.140ff.): "The margosa leaves are meant for her to chew and eat. If there is no margosa leaf Icakkiyammaṉ won't come here (141). She is fond of the green margosa leaves."

[68] See Figure 3 below.

[69] I may add that in Tamil *viḷaiyāṭal* (play, amusement), unlike in English, can convey the meaning *kātal viḷaiyāṭal* (love-play).

[70] The timing of the ritual during the hot afternoon suggests a high degree of bodily fervidness. In contrast, the flowerbed connotes cooling.

[71] Blackburn (1980:255) states: "[T]he kuravai ululation is not orchestrated [...]; it is emitted spontaneously [...] by people in the crowd. This [...] contribute[s] to the extreme ritual depth of the possession."

[72] Asked about the meaning of the "rolling," the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai replied in an interview held on 15 December 2002: "It is the *cāmi aruḷ* (the presence of the deity)."

[73] *Maithuna* rituals during festivals held in honour of village goddesses mainly sought out by childless women seem not to be uncommon; see Dubois 1906:595. The French missionary wrote in the nineteenth century: "At Mogur [...] a short distance from [...] Nanjangud [...] there is a small temple dedicated to Tipamma, a female divinity, in whose honour a great festival is celebrated every year. The goddess [...] is carried in procession [...]. In front of her there is another divinity, a male. These two idols, which are entirely nude, are placed in immodest postures, and by help of a piece of mechanism a disgusting movement is imparted to them as long as the procession continues. This disgusting spectacle [...] excites transports of mirth, manifested by shouts and bursts of laughter." The foregoing shows that the sexual act is an inherently ritual act (cf. *maithuna* in a ritual setting in tantric practice), and sexual intercourse to be considered auspicious *(mangaḷa).*

[74] It seems to me that special attention is paid to the proper seating (an unobstructed view of the scene) of these women, who have paid one thousand rupees for the right to take part in the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual, held in the third (dawn) watch of the night.

Kantappiḷḷai takes a handful of flowers and throws them into his face. He is filled with joy. His mouth is crammed full of cooling margosa leaves. He starts rolling around again clockwise on the flowerbed. After rolling around once on the womb-like bed, he sits up on the ground and sinks his head into the flowers. Suddenly he turns towards Icakki-in-the-shrine, the upper part of his body lying back upon the flowerbed, his arms crossed behind his head, his lower body turned to one side, and his legs drawn up, winningly; with a charming smile he lies in this pose. Kantappiḷḷai / the goddess has now a most erotic look. The heat is increasing. Once again he starts to roll. Behind him is a woman dressed in red, and with bangles on her arms, who is sitting among the spectators with her legs crossed and her upper body swaying back and forth. Her hair is dishevelled. Kantappiḷḷai turns his body towards her and the gathering, in the same winning pose as before. His rolling recommences. Then he hides his face in the flowers, gently rubbing his nose against them. Someone gives him fresh coconut water to drink. It seems as if something has changed. Some power has been lost. He starts rolling a third time. Suddenly he gets up. With a gesture he signals that the goddess has begun to leave him. He asks the *nātasvaram* and drums to help out with a faster rhythm.[75] The speed is increased. The main pūjārī shouts: "*aṭi, aṭi, aṭi*" (beat, beat, beat [the drum]!).[76] Men again perform the *kuravai*.[77] In the blink of an eye the man whose body is possessed by Icakki finds and picks the square-shaped plantain leaf—placed in the centre—containing the *tāḻampū.* He who is the goddess[78] smiles happily. S/he has found and picked the *tāḻampū*[79]. In this lies the entire meaning of the flowerbed ritual.[80] It identifies Kantappiḷḷai as Icakki, so it is said. He is filled with an excess of joy. He lays his head on the chest of a man of high standing.

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[75] "Usually when the *mēḷam* is not properly played while Kantappiḷḷai rolls on the bed, possession won't occur. Ammaṉ herself says that the *mēḷam* is not sufficient" (interview with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai held on 19 January 2003).

[76] The significance of the drum in the series of rituals is confirmed by Icakki's former pūjārī (Paramacivaṉ Piḷḷai, the main pūjārī's father). He made clear that it is not the *villuppāṭṭu* but rather the drum that induces possession. This makes sense, since the *villuppāṭṭu* stopped each time the possession ritual started, and played no role during the ensuing actions. The drum is thus instrumental in attracting the divine or inviting it to make its presence felt. On drumbeats inducing possession, see Hicks 1999:281, where Rodney Needham is quoted as stating: "[T]he brain responds to percepts differentially; for instance, [...] to percussion as distinct from more mellifluous sounds. [...]." Chesi (1997) declares that ritual music is an "emotional intensifier" (199) and argues "daß langandauernde Perkussionsmusik, besonders Trommelmusik, zu den weitest verbreiteten Induktionsmethoden zählt" (156). He concludes "daß die Musik mit erstaunlicher Konsequenz darauf angelegt ist, mittels intersubjektiv feststehenden Konstanten eine Spannung [...] aufzubauen, die in [...] Besessenheit kulminiert" (199). Furthermore, Laderman (1991:90) notes the production of "endorphins, endogenous morphinelike substances that act on the nervous system." A growing number of scholars from various fields of research have speculated that these are the key to understanding the state of possession. Laderman, too, is tempted to explain the onset of possession by these "biochemical changes" taking place in response to the sensory world of a drumbeat, for instance. For more on the likely connection between percussion and transition, see Hicks 1999:339, who cites Needham.

[77] Note that the entire scene is in the hands of men.

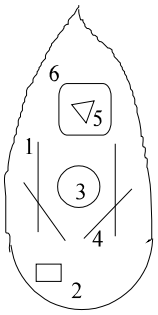
[78] Concerning the assumption of a total overlap between a person and the reality of a deity or demon during trance, see also Kapferer (1984:161, 165, and 170). – Regarding the embodiment of Icakki by a man, various interpretations are available: (1) "The person who is possessed *(cāmiyāṭi)* is a male when the concerned person belongs to an upper-caste community. But in all temples belonging to the social groups of the Paṟaiyar, Cāmpavar, Paḷḷar, Cakkiliyar, it is women who are possessed" (Perumāḷ 1990:74); (2) Another explanation can perhaps be provided on the basis of remarks by Baudrillard (1990:13) in his work on *seduction*: "Only the non-female can exercise an untainted fascination [on the female spectators], because he is more seductive than sexual." A similar opinion is pronounced by Doniger (2002:69) in an Indian context, when she notes: "[M]en dress as women to seduce other men." Should we think in our own ritual context in analogous terms: a *woman is disguised as a man to entice other women?* Perhaps the fact that one of the most important tasks of the *koṭai* ritual is to solve the problem of childlessness suggests as much. Given the goal of taking the enchantment of female participants to the limit, it would seem easier for a male than for a real woman, already legitimated by her sex, to move towards the appropriate signs. (3) Or should we, taking our cue from Handelman (1995:331) and Handelman and Shulman (2004:114), interpret the male body through which the goddess emerges as a sign of the integral male within herself (note the name Puruṣā Tēvi [N4], which can only be rendered as "male goddess"), in a sense suggestive of the "inside out" postulate put forward in Handelman and Shulman 1997?

[79] Interestingly enough, the flower formation in the centre containing the *tāḻampū* is found on all three flowerbeds; interview with the main pūjāri on 19 January 2003.

[80] My interpretation is confirmed by the main pūjārī's own words: "That he picks the *tāḻampū* [from among a heap of flowers] is due to the power of the deity. It [i.e. the *tāḻampū*] is the symbol *(aṭaiyāḷam)* of the whole action" (interview with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai held on 19 January 2003). – Note that this ritual could easily have been spoiled by a person from the crowd approaching the flowerbed in an attempt to snatch away the *tāḻampū,* and so deliberately to induce ritual failure.

Then he distributes the sacred ash, first to men of the family, and then to women and girls standing in a queue awaiting the goddess's blessing.

Figure 3: The arrangement of the *tāḻampū, kamukampū,* and other flowers on a plantain leaf



1 kamukampū
2 mañcaṇai
3 mallikai
4 tāḻampū
5 elumiccai and veṭṭivēr
6 koḻuntu

A plantain leaf serves as the base; (1) areca nut flowers *(kamukampū)* lie vertically across the leaf on both sides, topped obliquely by (4) pandanus flowers *(tāḻampū);* (2) *mañcaṇai* is smeared at the bottom; (3) two jasmines *(mallikai)* form a circle in the middle; (6) fragrant tender leaves *(koḻuntu)* surround (5) a lemon *(elumiccai)* and fragrant cuscus grass roots *(veṭṭivēr);* aromatic rose water will be sprinkled over the leaf.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST FLOWERBED

The dominant mood in this key ritual is intimate, highly sensuous, and erotic. I would argue that if the goddess is to be present in the manner expected of her, she must experience the flowerbed, the goddess's sexually vital body,[81] physically and sensuously. The flowerbed as a locus of love-making and a source of cooling effects for the pangs of love is well known both in Tamil and Sanskrit classical literature.[82]

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[81] For a further discussion of this point, see Sect. 9.3.3.

[82] The *kāppiyam* work *Cilappatikāram* supports the argument of the flowerbed being a metaphor for love-making: *Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:124], Chap. 4, "Antimālaic ciṟappuccey kātai," vv. 27-8: 27 **தில்வளர்** (for *tilvaḷar,* read *ilvaḷar*) **முல்லையொடு மல்லிகை யவிழ்ந்த / 28 பல்பூஞ் சேக்கைப்**... ([Mātavi's] couch *[cēkkai]* was covered with all sorts of blossoming flowers—domestic *mullai,* jasmine, and others); and in continuation of this verse (ibid., 4.28-34): 28 **...பள்ளியுட் பொலிந்து / 29 செந்துகிர்க் கோவை சென்றேந் தல்குல் / 30 அந்துகின் மேகலை யசைந்தன வருந்த / 31 நிலவுப்பயன் கொள்ளு நெடுநிலா முற்றத்துக் / 32 கலவியும் புலவியுங் காதலற் களித்தாங் / 33 கார்வ நெஞ்சமொடு கோவலற் கெதிரிக் / 34 கோலங் கொண்ட மாதவி யன்றியும்** (In the love chamber she seemed unaware that her girdle *[mēkalai]* was undone and her thin garment slipping from her lovely hips. Lustful, she came out onto the terrace bathed in moonlight. All night only loving quarrels *[pulavi]* would interrupt the passionate embraces *[kalavi]* of Kōvalan [transl. by Daniélou 1967:16]). We encounter the same connotations with respect to the flowerbed in yet another verse, *Cil.* 4.65-71, describing women who, having been separated from their beloved, become melancholic at no longer being able to enjoy the cool, flowery couches *(pūñcēkkai)* where they used to engage in sulky love quarrels *(ūṭal)* with their lovers. Another similar passage is *Cil.* 14.85. – For a further example of linking soft flower-strewn beds with the pleasures of love, see *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1081, where the atmosphere among courtesans is depicted. – Classical Tamil literature at the same time provides us with fine scenes where the love-stricken grief of the lonely woman who is separated from her lover is mediated through the picture of the flowerbed. In *Cil.* 8.117, Mātavi is portrayed as being love-stricken at heart, lying sleepless on the *pū malar amaḷi* (couch covered with blossoming flowers). – The *Kamparāmāyaṇam* (twelfth century) contains noteworthy examples of flower-strewn beds that provide a cooling effect for the pangs of love, one such being in Chap. 10, "Mitilaikkāṭcippaṭalam," v. 46: *cītanuṇ ṭuḷimala ramaḷic cērttiṇār* (They placed Sīta on the flowery bed *[malar amaḷi],* which was [as cooling] as little dewdrops). That the flowerbed is meant to cool the "fire of desire" is testified to in a further verse in Kampaṉ's work, 10.49: *vempuṟu maṇattaṇal vetuppa meṉmalark / kompeṉa vamaḷiyiṟ kuḷaintu cāyntaṇaḷ* (As the fire *[aṇal]* [of desire] in her heated mind flared, she sank onto the bed *[amaḷi]* made of tender flower branches *[meṉmalark kompu]*). Here Kampaṉ portrays Sīta left alone with pangs of love after Rāma's devouring eyes and hers had crossed and had entered each other's mind. – I am grateful to Professor Harunaga Isaacson, University of Hamburg, for providing the following references to flowerbeds in Sanskrit literature: (1) the flowerbed as a locus of love-making; e.g. in *Kathāsaritsāgara* 12.27.56 (between a king and the daughter of a sage), and in Kālidāsa's *Kumārasambhava* 4.35 (see Smith 2005:146) (between Rati and Kāma);

Various markers signal the sexual overtones of the flowerbed: first the botanical markers,[83] second the burrowing into the flowers,[84] and third the sexually suggestive behaviour of the *cāmiyāṭi*. The botanical markers are the key elements that delineate the self-procreation of the goddess that the ritual seeks to ensure. In finding them, the goddess reveals herself in her procreated form.

The clearly defined spatial realm of the flowerbed raises the question whether the womb-like flowerbed is meant as an aniconic circular form, namely a "geometrical representation of a *yantra,*"[85] a microworld of the cosmos, delineating and embodying the divine presence in it.[86] As Bühnemann (2000:22) remarks, the ritual diagrams (*yantra*s/*cakra*s) are of "great importance especially in rituals performed for the attainment of specific objectives" (22), "such as securing offspring" (22). The assumption of tantric elements is perhaps valid, given both the *mātṛ*s' and *yakṣī*s'[87] association with tantra in general,[88] and their role in the local Icakki story in particular (see the synopsis in Section 9.2.2, midnight session, below). In the latter, the Brahmin *mantiravāti*, Nampiyār, attracted by Icakki's appearance, draws a *cakra* in order to control and confine her within the spatial bounds of a banyan tree.[89] All of this, of course, is only hypothetical, for the ritual specialists provide no exegesis, and I can only concur with Tiwari (1985:171), who argues in the context of the *mātṛkā*s that the seemingly tantric rituals should not be considered identical with the technically sophisticated rituals described in tantra texts. However, an analogy along the above lines is conceivable; that is, an intertwining of the rituals performed in the local cult of the goddess Icakki with tantric practices is likely.

Another tīpārātaṉai resulting in the possession dance

In a follow-up to the flowerbed ritual and the finding and picking of the *tāḻampū* by Kantappiḷḷai, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, Icakki's main pūjārī, stands motionless in the crowd and fixes his eyes on the *alaṅkāram* statue inside the shrine. Someone puts the bangles of pure silver on his arms. He is garlanded three times. The *nātasvaram* and drums play faster. A second *tīpārātaṉai*, the swinging of the light in front of the *alaṅkāram* statue, is performed by one of the main pūjārī's brothers. People respond with the *kuravai* sound. The drums beat more strongly; the *nātasvaram* is played with growing insistence. Then the main pūjārī, dressed in an orange dhoti, begins dancing. The goddess, it seems, does not want to return to the inner sanctum after the flowerbed ritual is over, for she takes possession of another body.[90] Encouraged by a second *tīpārātaṉai,* she continues to express herself through her body,

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(2) the flowerbed as a cooling remedy; e.g. Śakuntala's suffering from the fervour of love in Kālidāsa's *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 3.70ff. (Act 3; see S. Vasudeva 2006:146f.). The flowerbed is thus a prime example of the way the Tamils use such elements to create culturally powerful expressions of their inherited (poetic literary) tradition.

[83] For a detailed discussion of the botanical markers, see Sect. 9.3.3.

[84] The scattering of flowers is a well-known metaphor for love-making employed in love scenes within classical Tamil literature—for instance, in the "Mitilaikkāṭcippaṭalam" chapter of Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram*. Such figurative phrases as "[t]he ruining of a garland in lovemaking" appear also in the Sanskrit epics; see Hart 1999:289. – The cultural meaning attached to budding flowers by Tamils is also explicated by Trawick (1978:141).

[85] The phrase is Bühnemann's (2000:21).

[86] Remarks made by Tiwari (1985:172) in the context of the *mātṛkā*s would seem to support this view: "If we understand the word *maṇḍala* in a somewhat loose, literal sense of a circular configuration of icons or symbols of deities, and not in the technical sense of the Tantric *maṇḍalas,* it is not improbable that the Mātṛs were propitiated in a *maṇḍala* form—at least in some magical rites involving them [...]."

[87] For Icakkiyammaṉ's *yakṣī* traits, see the conclusion to Sect. 7.3.1, p. 249f.

[88] For the *yakṣī*'s association with tantra, see Bühnemann's (2000:118f.) study on Hindu tantric deities; also Tiwari 1985:171ff. On tantric practices and *yakṣī* worship, see Misra 1981:100f. Particularly interesting in this context are his remarks on tantric practices based on the *Jayākhya Saṁhitā* and *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*: "It is said that after the completion of rites, the Yakshiṇīs appeared as mother, sister or wife and fulfilled the wishes of their devotees" (ibid.:100). Note, too, Flood's (1996:190) remark that among right-hand tantric groups, which avoid transgressive practices, it is a common practice to use "offerings of flowers" as substitutes "for sex."

[89] On *subjugation,* that is, "bringing a person under one's control"; *attraction,* which "often precedes the act of subjugation," and *immobilisation,* "stopping someone's activity"—all of these are typical of tantric practices—see Bühnemann 2000:23.

[90] The multiplication of a god's being in the world is explained in Freeman 1999:154 in the following terms: "[The] conscious

a medium that, deprived of speech, depends solely upon the power of gesture. Her body is caught up in a powerful rhythmic beat heightened by the force of the drum, and yet it is not a frenzied, menacing dance; nor is it a licentious one either. It has the look of a disciplined dance, involving a mentally controlled movement of body.[91] Then the main pūjārī's younger brother, Śaṅkara, joins in. His dancing appears to be more forceful. In total bodily abandonment he rolls on the ground, acting wildly. He attempts to break out of the circle but is held back. The dance seems to be confined within strict bounds. It is not allowed to extend beyond the prescribed borders but, like the flowerbed itself, is limited to a "cultivated" arena of dynamic stability.[92] With Śaṅkara having joined in, the dance of one has opened up into one of two. Has the goddess reduplicated herself again, or is Śaṅkara embodying some other deity?[93] Each dancer seems to be playing a known part.[94] The main pūjārī, equipped with a curved protective *pirampu,* dances powerfully, bearing witness to the goddess's presence and engagement in the human world. S/he is offered the cooling liquid of a green coconut to drink.[95] Stopping dancing, s/he distributes sacred ash, blesses the devotees, and then starts dancing again. Later s/he delivers *cāmivākku,* the goddess's message, to her devotees. All in all, what Padel (1995:135) posits with regard to music can be applied to dance too, namely that "it can [...] be used ritually to cure violence."

The animal sacrifice

One ritual glides into the next without interruption. A small brown goat is placed in the arena in front of the shrine. A short pūjā is performed on the animal, which is made to face the goddess in the shrine, and then it is beheaded. The sacrifice of a larger black goat *(veḷḷāṭu)* follows. Beforehand the black goat is adorned with jasmine flowers, sacred ash is put on its forehead, and water is poured over its neck and ears, making it shake.[96] The Tēvars, traditionally in charge of the killing of the animals at the *koṭai* festivals of this temple, in vain try to interest the goat in a plantain leaf to make it stretch its neck; it is only by offering a bitter but cooling margosa twig that they succeed in beheading it.[97] The blood is neither drunk by the *cāmiyāṭi* nor collected in a vessel.[98] A number of cocks follow. All animals including the black goat are given by individuals. No animal is donated by the whole village.[99]

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stuff of the deity's personality and will [...] is [...] the substance that flows into various media and that turns the possessed media into the expression of the god's personal being."

[91] As Padel (1995:136) states, with respect to the demonic dance in the Greek context: "[D]ance [...] incarnates order." This part of the discussion has greatly profited from Padel's chapter on demonic dance (ibid.:131ff.).

[92] This suggests that the dance mirrors an underlying social structure, but it does so with a logic of its own.

[93] The second alternative is bolstered by Blackburn's remark (1980:254) that in *koṭai*s "[i]n addition [...] three other types of mediums may dance. [...] (1) mediums of other deities in the chief deity's story."

[94] The pūjārī obviously embodies Icakki, embellished as he is with her silver *kaṭakam*s, and in virtue of his delivering *cāmivākku* and distributing sacred ash.

[95] This suggests that Icakki has become overheated. The heat could be either a sign of her maturation or of her *pēy* nature, the latter implied by the curved *pirampu*.

[96] According to Masilamani-Meyer (2004:199), "the deity has to accept the animal by making it shake when water is sprinkled on it. If it does not shake itself another animal is offered, but some devotees are rather practical and sprinkle water on the same animal until it shakes itself."

[97] There is a religious obligation to ensure that the creature dies with merciful swiftness. "All animals are slaughtered by a man of the Maṟavar/Tēvar community. The goat heads are given to the man who does the slaughtering, while the body is given to the donor of the animal. Both head and body will be eaten by those who receive them" (a summary of answers in the interview given by the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002). Note that it is traditional for animals killed for food to be slain by a specialist in a ritual setting, so as to ensure a good death. Here, then, the body of the animal is turned into a meal, being eaten as a *prasāda.*

[98] This is in contrast to the kid goat sacrifice at a later point.

[99] I confirmed this detail with the pūjārī.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ANIMAL SACRIFICE

There is consent among anthropologists that a general theory of sacrifice is impossible (Kapferer 1997:187). Each context affords its own interpretation. If we read the markers, we may assume that the blood sacrifice at this particular point articulates not only the dynamic of a gift (offered to win a favour from the goddess),[100] but also the goddess's bloodthirstiness that has to be satisfied.[101] Here, then, regenerative energies are expressed in violent forms.

The possession dance

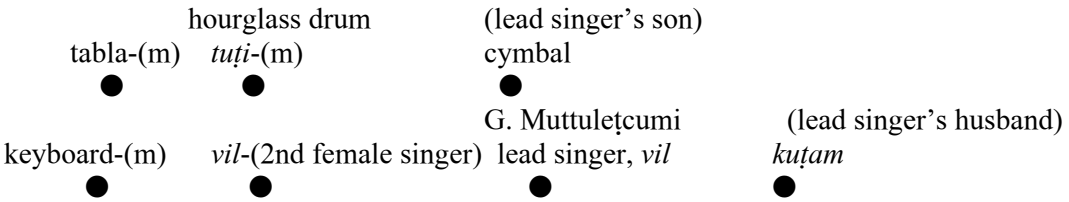
The animal sacrifice comes to an end and the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, accompanied by his younger brother Śaṅkara, begins dancing again, each holding a curved protective stick in his hand. The movement of the two has all appearances of being a veritable dance fête expressive of deep satisfaction. A little girl who had come in the morning carrying a brass pot in the procession from the village, approaches the *cāmiyāṭi*. She garlands him. Immediately the goddess visibly intensifies her presence. Once the *cāmiyāṭi* has delivered *cāmivākku* and blessed devotees with sacred ash, the afternoon session comes to a close. It is 3:30 P.M.

9.2.2 The Second Ritual Cycle[102]

EVENING 7 MAY 2002

The villuppāṭṭu

The evening session opens with the *villuppāṭṭu* group performing. It is about 6:00 P.M., and darkness has set in. The temple square is illuminated by florescent lights. The group assignments *(iruppu)* have changed. Now the *kuṭam* (pot) is played by the lead singer's husband, S. Gopikriṣṇaṉ. He replaces the woman (who now beats the bow-string) and accompanies the lead singer in singing the text.



The performance gets under way with a duo from the *tuṭi* and *kuṭam,* followed by a long solo on the *vil*. Finally, the *IK* begins by telling of Śivakāmi and her two children, the elder brother Naṭṭuvaṉ and his

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[100] For blood sacrifices and their meaning in Tamilnadu's popular religion, see Masilamani-Meyer 2004:195–210.

[101] The two goats, in particular, might be interpreted along these lines. Of course, we can only assume a conceptual parallel to the performed *IK*, which has fallen far behind and never does, in any case, synchronise with the ritual practice. However, all stories relating to Icakki reinforce the assumption of a connection between the goddess's bloodthirstiness (satisfied by the animal sacrifice) and men's aggression against women: N1 (Lakṣmī's being killed by her lover), the local Icakki story (the sorcerer's control of Icakki and his driving of a *kāñciram* peg into her head), N7 (the self-impregnated wife being killed by her husband), and N4 (the neighbouring king's invasion of and aggression against a queen's homosocial and homoerotic queendom).

[102] The second ritual cycle includes not only the evening rituals, but also the midnight session (which witnesses a fusion of *katai* and *koṭai*) and the central rituals (1:00 A.M. until dawn). Among the latter are, to begin with, the second *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* (at 1:00 A.M.), which includes the torch ritual followed by dance and the flowerbed ritual *(pūppaṭaippu)* interspersed with dance; secondly, the *poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu* (food offering) combined with the *tuvaḷai* blood drinking; and finally, the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual, featuring the divinatory spinning of the coconut. Coinciding with the most dangerous time of the day *(camayama)*, these are the crucial rituals of the second cycle, and indeed of the entire *koṭai*.

sister Lakṣmī, and passes on to the dialogue between Śivakāmi and the Brahmin of the Ammaiyappar temple: *vāṅka, vāṅka, cāmi, uṭkāruṅka* (Please come and sit down!). The *villuppāṭṭu* performs a *lāvaṇippāṭṭu,* an exchange in the form of questions and responses full of jestful taunts between two singers. Śivakāmi calls upon her daughter Lakṣmī to serve Śivappaṉ. The bow-song singer is interrupted, as often occurs, in order to make an announcement requesting the drummers and *nātasvaram* players to come: *vētaṉ vācikka kalaiñarṅkil iṅkē ... kēṭka kōḷkiṟārkaḷ / mēḷam vacikkiṉṟa arumaik kalaiñarkaḷ*. Then the *villuppāṭṭu* continues. Śivakāmi is about to send the Brahmin away, having found out that he has been reduced to poverty. The scene shifts to the forest: *talai ... tūṅku tūṅku* (sleep!). The story nears the point where the Brahmin kills Lakṣmī, who is lying with her head in his lap, when the *villuppāṭṭu* is interrupted: the drums have started to beat, and the *nātasvaram* to play. It is time for the *karukkal pūjā*.

We are still far behind in the story, which is often interrupted by announcements. Evidently, the main pūjārī is more concerned about the timing of the rituals than the story. Those who have announcements made pay no heed to the bow-song singer's difficulty in resuming the story after being forced to stop in the middle of it. The *villuppāṭṭu* apparently has yet to find its appropriate place in the ritual process. That we had to wait until midnight for it was a surprise. For the evening performance, the formation of the *villuppāṭṭu* group has changed. I am told that the role of the Brahmin character must be enacted by a male singer. Other bow-song singers even insist that no woman at all should be part of the group in the *villuppāṭṭu* performance of the *IK*. One might posit that the dialogues containing sexual innuendo explain the exclusion of female performers. Yet it is apparently acceptable for a married couple, such as the lead bow-song singer G. Muttuleṭcumi and the *kuṭam* player S. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, to enact the scenes. When it comes to Icakki's pressing her sexual demands upon the Ceṭṭi, however, a small (solely male) group among the audience consider G. Muttuleṭcumi's enactment obscene, and judge the performer to be unsuitable for this job.

The karukkal pūjās[103]

—The karukkal pūjā for Pūtattār

The *villuppāṭṭu* group is requested to interrupt its playing. It is around 8:00 P.M., two hours behind schedule. The drums and *nātasvaram* have moved on to the Pūtattār shrine. The evening ritual starts. Again the first ritual is for Pūtattār. The *karukkal pūjā* is performed. It is the last pūjā of the day for the main guardian deity, who now wears a whisk of *kamukam* (areca) upright on his head.

—The karukkal pūjā for Icakki

The *karukkal pūjā* for Icakki apparently serves to reconnect her to the ritual gathering after a three-hour break. The goddess does not seem to be in her *alaṅkāram* form, since her black statue is not as richly covered as in the afternoon. Her upper body is unclothed radiating shades of white and red produced by the jasmine and red *araḷi*[104] flower garlands that adorn her. There must be something of relevance in highlighting her silver breasts by unveiling them.[105] Her broad *mēkalai* (long-life belt), a well-known marker associated with tree dryads of fertility, is also exposed.[106] There are no *tāḻampū* flowers.[107] The

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[103] The *karukkal pūjā* (twilight pūjā) is the evening pūjā between 6 and 7 P.M.

[104] *Araḷi,* oleander; see *TL.*

[105] Asked what the exposing of Icakki's breasts and making them stand out with a silver design means, the main pūjārī replied: "The breasts' silver design (*kavacam)* is for beautification. [...] There are fewer flowers in the *karukkal pūjā;* that is the reason why the breasts are exposed. During the *camapūjai* they will be completely covered by flowers." [I insisted on being told the deeper meaning, but he replied again:] "The decoration is less here, and the decoration is more in the *camapūjai*" (interview held on 19 January 2003, with videos and photos shown). I sensed that the main pūjārī was being evasive on a delicate subject.

[106] On the waist belt, see Coomaraswamy 1993:83, referring to "Archaic Indian Terracotta" (n. 4), in *Ipek* 3 (1928):64–76, and *Atharva Veda* 6.133.5, the latter stating that it "was a long-life *(āyuṣya)* charm (cf. the 'girdle of Aditi,' *AV* IV.1.5)." Coomaraswamy (ibid.) writes further: "[F]emale figures associated with trees are voluptuous beauties, [...] always provided with the broad jewelled belt *(mekhala)* which appears already on the pre-Maurya terra-cotta figures of fertility goddesses [...]."

[107] For the connotations of this botanical marker, see Sect. 9.3.3.

whisk of *kamukam* flowers,[108] which in the initial *alaṅkāram* hangs down over her forehead, is now standing upright behind her head. This gives the goddess a more friendly appearance. Placing the *kamukam* flowers upright opens the silver crown to view. The statue is garlanded with a cooling chain of lemons. Though the goddess appears with the same designed facial expression as in the previous *alaṅkāram* pūjā, her face is now smeared with blazingly red *mañcaṇai* paste. The knife in her erect right hand, whose wrist is decked out with black bangles, is also visible, as is a silver cradle dangling from her left hand.

The pūjā is performed; the light is swung (Skt. *āratī*) inside the shrine and given by Śaṅkara, the younger brother of the main pūjārī, to the devotees sitting outside on the square. The *cāmiyāṭi*'s (Kantappiḷḷai's) upper body is smeared with white ash. There is no sign of the auspicious *mañcaṇai* paste on him, nor is there any sign that a flowerbed will be laid out. It is a comparatively small pūjā, with only a very few offerings of coconuts and the like.

Reflections on the karukkal pūjā for Icakki

If we read the markers we may conclude that the *karukkal pūjā* is an attempt on the part of the ritual specialists to make the goddess aware of her most valuable asset, her fertility, signalised in the unveiling of her milk-giving breasts.[109] To expose them[110] is to project onto her the power of her own breasts.[111] I suggest interpreting the exposed breasts as a sign—more precisely, as an extra sign—that these breasts are *designed*. It can be read as an act of attracting her (by her own assets) and at the same time distracting her (from her rage).[112] The designed breasts blunt the destructive violence mirrored in her erect right hand holding a knife,[113] potentially allowing the knife's force to be shunted aside. The ritual specialists seek to overturn and exorcise the unwanted force of violence in favour of the milk-giving breasts, which accord with the *mēkalai* belt, the face smeared with the auspicious blazing red *mañcaṇai*, the whisk of areca *(kamukam),* and most significantly, the silver cradle in her hand.

I propose that there is a nexus between the *unveiling of the breasts,* the *rolling on the flowerbed,* and the divinatory *spinning of the coconut* (below). Interestingly enough, all three objects are round in shape, and each holds forth the possibility of childbirth; two of them, moreover, are potentially filled with fluids. I suggest that the display of the goddess's breasts is the people's own projection onto her of their wish for offspring.

The first fiery torch (tīpantam) possession dance[114]

In front of the shrine an elderly woman, one of the pūjārī's family members, is dancing with the curved red *pirampu* (protective stick) in her hand. Then bells are rung and the goddess, embodied in Kantappiḷḷai, emerges from inside the shrine with *mañcaṇai* paste smeared all over her upper body and head. Her arms are adorned with the silver *kaṭakam*s. S/he stands at the entrance facing the spectators. Having emerged in response to the *karukkal pūjā,* she does not, strikingly, descend to the flowerbed, as she did in the afternoon session, but moves on to the fire torch ritual. The reduced night temperature apparently does not offer her the heat she requires.

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[108] For the meaning of this botanical marker, see Sect. 9.3.3.

[109] On the equation of "breast milk and the seed of the phallus [...] in many origin myths," see Shulman 1980:209. On "breasts" as they are culturally understood, see Trawick 1978:146: "[N]ot their [i.e. the breasts'] decorative quality, [...] but the function of the breasts [...] is most admired. Milk is the highest, purest food."

[110] On the exposure of a goddess's breasts, see Parthasarathy's (1993:332) cross-cultural reference to the Egyptian mother goddess Hathor, whose breasts were unveiled and displayed to her followers as her image was being carried in procession.

[111] As Trawick (1978) remarks, the breasts give milk; in that sense they are "receptacles of power" (ibid.:145), nourishing newborn life. See also Trawick's (ibid.:191) reference to breasts as "hav[ing] power of attraction."

[112] Noteworthily, images of pairs of breasts are used as a means of attracting and distracting among practitioners of the *kaḷari* martial art tradition in Kerala, see Caldwell 1999:30.

[113] For the significance of the right hand in the iconography of Icakki, see Sect. 7.6, pp. 260f.

[114] See Photo 5 in Appendix A, p. 356.

The *cāmiyāṭi* places a flaming torch *(pantam)*[115] on his head, then on his shoulder, and then under his arm. He dances. His eyes are now fixed on Icakki-in-the-shrine. He is garlanded. He passes his hand over the flame. (It is said that Icakki likes heat.) Now the flaming torch is under his left arm, and the curved protective *pirampu*[116] upright in his right hand. Again he places the *pantam* on his head. Then he swings the torch back and forth thrice over his head, and gives it to the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, while both are in eye contact with Icakki-in-the-shrine. Once the main pūjārī has taken the torch, he begins to dance forcefully, yet, noteworthily enough, without the goddess's *kaṭakam*s.[117] His younger brother Śaṅkara has also joined in the proceedings. Kantappiḷḷai removes the flower garland from his own neck and decorates the main pūjārī with it. Immediately the new *cāmiyāṭi* swings the fiery torch and puts it on his head. Others smear him with cooling *mañcaṇai* paste. The possession dance *(cāmiyāṭṭam)* appears to intensify. The space in the arena seems to shrink as the bodies of the people who demarcate it edge closer together. The *cāmiyāṭi* is decked out with several garlands from the image inside. Immediately s/he dances with great animation, throwing her head backward. The embellishment causes her face to brighten. She smiles charmingly, and proudly strokes her chest. More garlands are thrown over her head. She joyfully exchanges views with Icakki-in-the-shrine, and then begins to deliver *cāmivākku* and bless devotees with sacred ash *(vipūti)*. Once again the *cāmiyāṭi* explodes into dance. Suddenly his body loses strength; he seems to sink into unconsciousness.[118] The dance attains "ritual depth."[119] The monitoring assistants quickly intervene, since the *cāmiyāṭi* (still without the silver *kaṭakam* bangles) appears deeply unaware of the burning torch he is holding tightly under his arm.[120] They remove the *pantam*, placing it next to the entrance of the inner sanctum, and instead give him the curved red *pirampu* that is set upright next to the goddess's image.[121] The stick will protect him from demonic forces within himself and from without,[122] it is said.

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[115] Blackburn (1980:251) describes the *pantam* used in possession dances as "a tightly packed bundle of cloth in a conical shape which is soaked with kerosene and then ignited."

[116] "If any evil spirit comes in front he will beat it with the *pirampu*. Immediately the evil force will run away. When a man possessed by an evil spirit comes in front of the possessed man *(cāmiyāṭi),* the latter will beat him with the stick and cure him" (interview with the main pūjārī on 9 May 2002).

[117] The goddess exchanges her body for a more powerful one. Does this indicate an oscillation between her two psychological states: fulfilled versus demoniacally unsatisfied? Demonic beings, too, are engulfed in heat. They like heat. Kantappiḷḷai wears the silver *kaṭakam*s; the main pūjārī does not. Recall that Icakki as a *pūtam* (demon) in the courtyard of the pūjārī's house is not embellished with the silver *kaṭakam*s; rather they lie on the ground. Or is the change of body due to the aged Kantappiḷḷai's exhaustion?

[118] Crapanzano (1987:14) remarks along these lines: "[P]ossession is neither continuous nor unchanging. The possessed person moves in and out of dissociation. There are [...] moments [...] when consciousness appears to have surrendered to the possessing spirit, and still other moments of complete unconsciousness." The latter may correspond to the pūjārī's experiencing weakness in his body. It is not unlikely that led on by the drumming and the dance rhythm (in Crapanzano's terms "techniques of bombardment" [ibid.:13]) the dancer's "consciousness is submerged" (ibid.:14). Unfortunately, I have no indigenous descriptions of this experience, for the dancers themselves keep it secret. Neither the Malayali woman Kuṭṭi Ammāḷ of Ālamūṭu temple (Muppantal) nor the old Nāṭār woman at Muppantal Nāṭār temple (West), nor Kantappiḷḷai either, agreed to give any interview on this subject. Only the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, willingly disclosed that the degree of possession changes abruptly and unpredictably (interview held on 19 January 2003; see also under Sects. 9.2.1, p. 294, the first flowerbed, and 9.2.2, p. 313, the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual, citation).

[119] I adopt this term from Blackburn 1980:255. For further features of "ritual depth" in *koṭai* rituals, see ibid. One of the markers of ritual depth is its triggering the intervention of the assistants in cases of observable injury.

[120] For the safety measures taken by assistants, see Blackburn 1980:252: "[There are] monitors who prevent any accidental injury. They continuously lubricate areas of the medium's body exposed to heat. [...] At [...] critical moments, the monitors either remove the dancer to safety and make necessary adjustments, or cool down his dance with a special liquid. Sometimes it is necessary to end the dance altogether."

[121] The image is still richly covered with flowers: one jasmine garland is hanging on the erect right arm, a pair of garlands (one each of red *araḷi* and jasmine flowers) over the shoulders, and jasmine convoluted under the chin, covering underlying stems of *tuḷaci* and margosa leaves; jasmine flowers also continue to embellish her forehead.

[122] The time is significant. We have reached the first watch of the night, which corresponds to the first watch of demon time (after 6:00 P.M.).

The possession dance

In a direct sequel to the fiery torch dance, the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, continues dancing without the fiery torch, merely equipped with the red *pirampu*, which he swings rhythmically to the right and to the left. The dance, self-absorbed and single-minded, seems to lure him into a bodily rhythm in interplay with the ordered drumbeat. Meanwhile his younger brother Śaṅkara and a near relative have joined him. The elderly woman continues dancing too. As described by Blackburn (1980:250), this style of dance calls for coordination between arms that pump and legs that step high. Suddenly the younger brother makes his way through the crowd, snatches the *vēl* (spear), the accessory of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, and returns to the arena. In protestation, the Tēvars, the community with a close relationship with this deity, retrieve the *vēl* and return it to Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ's image. Is the dancer's transgression, his breaking through the prescribed invisible zone, a sign that he is in some intermediate state, in which demonic forces have again slipped in? The point at which the *villuppāṭṭu* performance has arrived suggests as much.[123] Controlling wild disorder, a potentially dangerous aspect of the goddess, would then be the function of the dance.[124] The main pūjārī, covered with the *mañcaṇai* paste, delivers *cāmivākku* to a woman. Having been without the silver bangles throughout the series of evening rituals, he is at long last embellished with them.[125] The pūjārī and the elderly woman are smeared with the red *mañcaṇai*, while two other dancers have white paste applied. The *cāmivākku* continues. Crowds of women cluster around the *cāmiyāṭi*. Meanwhile the floral decoration of Icakki-in-the-shrine is being used for garlanding the bodies she has entered,[126] and so diminishes. By the end of the whole series of evening rituals, which end at around 10 P.M., the goddess, having been reduced to virtual nudity, now lacks all womanly modesty. Apart from two jasmine and two red *araḷi* garlands, she is completely deflowered. What remains, in full, inescapable view to the goddess and the spectators is: the voluptuous milk-filled breasts with their swollen nipples. A long *villuppāṭṭu* performance follows.

The villuppāṭṭu

The possession dance is directly followed by a long *villuppāṭṭu* performance. It is around 10:00 P.M. The *villuppāṭṭu* relates the *IK* scene in which the Kōṉārs, complaining about the disappearance of their cattle and sheep, reel off their own names: "Aṇṭi Kōṉ, Paṇṭi Kōṉ ..."; and the dialogue between the two hungry spirits, brother and sister, disguised as the children of the Cōḻa king, takes place. Abandoned in the forest under a margosa tree, Nīlaṉ frightens the pūjārī of the Cāstā temple. Again the bow-song singer is interrupted, this time to express thanks for a money donation of ten rupees. It is 10:20 P.M. when the narration reaches the scene in which Kuṇṭōtaraṉ is ordered to kill Icakki's twin brother Nīlaṉ. Again there is an interruption. The bow-song singer announces that a ring has been lost. The story advances on apace: *Anta ceṭṭi muṉālē vantu tōṉṟiṉāḷ* (Icakki appears to the Ceṭṭi [in the Paḻakai forest]). The *IK* has now arrived at Icakki's first *alaṅkāram*, but this seems to be unimportant. No rituals occur at this point. The story continues on. Icakki asks the Ceṭṭi to sit and talk *(koñca uṭkāra, pēci)*. The bow-song singer is told to proceed on without delay (something the bow-song singer T.M.P., with whom I mainly worked, never would have allowed to happen). Icakki demands to be recognised as the Ceṭṭi's wife. But the Ceṭṭi denies being married to her *(kalyāṇam māṭṭēṉ)*, and orders her to be off. Again the story is interrupted. Someone passes instructions to the bow-song singer, and once again someone else says something to her after she continues singing. Icakki complains that the Ceṭṭi does not look at his child

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[123] See the description of the *villuppāṭṭu* that follows.

[124] Kapferer (2000:12) writes: "[T]he discourse of episodes of dance [...] that are generally enacted [...] are important to the building of [...] the subversion of demon control." On the link between mind and dance, Padel (1995:131ff.) notes that if the mind is licentious, dance marks it off and sets it aright.

[125] "The *kaṭakam/kaṭayam* (bangles) and the anklets should be worn by the man who is possessed by the deity. The bangles should be worn in large numbers. Only then will he be possessed" (interview of 15 December 2002).

[126] This seems to be a custom in *koṭai*s; see Blackburn 1980:251: "Dancers [...] also decorate themselves with the garlands placed around the image of their possessing deity."

(piḷḷai ... pārātē). Thirteen minutes later the scene has shifted to the assembly place of the Karaiyāḷars, who decide to postpone confronting the problem to the next day (*piracciṉai nāḷai pēcuṟōm,* "Let's discuss the problem tomorrow"). Here Muttuleṭcumi, the singer, skips some pages in her notebook. Icakki forces the Karaiyāḷars to take the sword from the Ceṭṭi. The bow-song singer again skips some pages. The couple is put into the *ilaṅkam*. The bow-song singer skips some more pages of her script. The smoke of a cigarette held in the hand of an elderly man sitting in front of the stage rises into the air. Icakki asks the Karaiyāḷar women to drink the buttermilk she offers *(mōr cāppiṭa enṟa colli).* The story is interrupted. The bow-song singer receives ten rupees and announces the fact. The story continues on. All the women drink the buttermilk and die. The translocal *IK* has come to a close. Icakki has managed to take revenge on everyone: the Ceṭṭi (her own murderer), the seventy Karaiyāḷars (the murderers of her brother), and a whole village including all its children. In doing so, she has put a stop to all reproduction within the community. It is nearing midnight. The lead bow-song singer lays her script aside, keeping only a sheaf of loose papers in her hand.

MIDNIGHT SESSION 7 MAY 2002

The continuation of the villuppāṭṭu performance: the local Icakki story

As a direct sequel to the translocal *IK,* the *villuppāṭṭu* group begins to perform the local story of Icakki.[127] It is said that Icakki, after killing the Ceṭṭi, the Karaiyāḷars, and their families, came with insatiable hunger southward to Paḷavūr, where she continued her atrocities.[128] The narrative retelling of her appearance in Paḷavūr is performed by the bow-song group within one hour, from midnight to 1:00 A.M. I offer here a synopsis:[129]

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[127] See Sect. 7.5; also Caṇmukacuntaram 1978, ed. "Palaiyanūr Nīli," appendix "Nīlikatai Āyvurai":38 *(ikkataip pāṭi ....):* "After completing the story by singing the bow-song [i.e. the translocal *IK*], artists used to tell the [local] story of Nīli, who came to Palavur, in prose." – Except for this crucial point of an interpolated local story of Icakki, the ritual and narrative sequence followed the pattern that Blackburn (1980:238, 263) delineates in his dissertation on the bow-song tradition. In the morning session, the *villuppāṭṭu* performed a type A *katai,* the first of the two categories Blackburn 1980 has identified (type A and B). "Type A narratives are defined by a divine birth in Kailāsa and are fictive in tone; type B narratives are defined by a tragic human death on earth, and their tone is realistic" (262). In the afternoon session, whose components are clustered around the first *tīpārātaṇai,* the beginning of the *IK* was sung. Though a type B *katai*, it here counts as a type A variant, since it begins with the three birth stories of the Brahmin, the brother, and Lakṣmī. Then in the midnight session, which contains the second *tīpārātaṇai*, the death scenes of the *Icakkiyammaṉ Katai* (type B) are performed.

[128] Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai of Paḷavūr in an interview held on 27 March 2002: "It all began from that place, and that place alone. That Icakki came here to the south [...]" (K-F); see also in Sect. 7.5, p. 257, the interview with the bow-song singer G. Muttuleṭcumi and her husband G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ (8 May 2002), in which they explain how they make the translocal *IK* of epic length more obviously tie in with the local Icakki story.

[129] I have chosen here the synopsis given to me by Paḷaṉiyā Piḷḷai (treasurer of the Icakki temple) and Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai on 27 March 2002, and published earlier by the latter in the local newspaper *Tamiḻmuracu,* 18 February 2000. As has already been noted, this local Icakki story of Paḷavūr is the same story as the one mentioned in Perumāḷ 1990:131, appendix to n. 14 under the subtitle: "The Story of Teṉkaṉputūr Icakki and the establishing of an Icakkiyammaṉ temple," but there relating to a village called Teṅkaṉputūr; see Sect. 7.5 (also 7.7.2) above. Caṇmukacuntaram 1978:38 also shows up with a retelling. The synopsis he gives of the local Nīli story of Paḷavūr slightly diverges from the story told at the *koṭai* festival in Paḷavūr on 7 May 2002, in that in his account it is the daughter who is pregnant rather than the wife of the pūjārī: "Likewise Nīli came back to earth and resided at Paḷavūr. Then a priest (pūjārī) of Paḷavūr temple came to the temple at noon, oblivious of the summer season and the hot sun. Seeing him, Nīli wanted to be adored by him. She obstructed him and began to argue. The pūjārī understood her motivation and drove a peg made of wood from the strychnine tree *(kāñciram)* into her head in order to control her ego and power completely. [...] Afterwards she took the form of a maidservant and went to the house of the priest. The pregnant daughter of the priest came to her father's house for her first delivery. Nīli, harbouring a plan of revenge, joined them as a maidservant and played the role of a good servant. When the priest returned home, he saw the new woman, but did not suspect her." The remaining part narrates the same story as Perumal's version, and ends with the construction of a temple.

> Icakki, the enticing younger sister of Nallaṇṇaṉ, is sitting under a banyan tree *(ālamūṭṭil)* near Caṭṭi Nakki spring *(ūttu)*, when Tiruvēṅkaṭa Nampiyār,[130] a *mantiravāti* (magician) and Brahmin priest of the Ammaiyappar Śiva temple of Paḷavūr, comes along on horseback on his way to Āḷvār Piḷḷai of Ampalavāṇapuram in order to conduct anniversary death rites *(titi)*. He is attracted by the young woman's beauty and decides to employ her as a maidservant. Being a *mantiravāti,* he penetrates her mask and sees that she is [the hungry spirit] Icakki (*cuyarūpam,* "real form"). He wants to control her. He draws a *cakra* (Ta. *takaṭu,* lit. "metal plate") in order to immobilise her, and drives a *kāñciram muḷai*, a peg of strychnine wood, into the top *(ucci)* of her head in an attempt to bring her under his control and render her docile.[131] He takes her home as a maidservant for his eight-month-pregnant wife. His wife is suspicious but accepts her, for the young woman is amazingly skilled in housework. One day, when the time of delivery is nearing, Icakki asks the lady of the house, who discovers the impress of the peg while delousing her, to pull it out. When she innocently does so, Icakki explodes and emerges in her active, raged form and kills the pregnant woman.[132] She plucks out the baby, and crunches it in her teeth. She garlands herself with the intestines of the woman and makes the *kuravai* sound. Then she takes up a position opposite Nampiyār's house, next to the Ammaiyappar Śiva temple—where she is still present as a memorial stone, and known as Tēraṭi Icakki (Icakki-at-the-foot-of-the-temple-car). From there she proceeds via the Ōraiyāṉ tank, Ilantaiyaṭi, and Ceṭṭikuḷam to the Vēlukanta Ammaḷ/Veyilukanta Ammāḷ temple (see Map 3, Section 8.3), on the way committing all kinds of atrocities. Tiruvēṅkaṭa Nampiyār returns home and finds everything out of control, and she kills him, too. Day by day her atrocities become worse. When things become unbearable, the villagers decide to build a temple for her beside the trunk of a banyan tree, on barren land *(kiṭaṅkaṭi ālamūṭṭil),* and worship her. (A synopsis related by Uṭaiyār Piḷḷai, Paḷavūr).

It is nearing midnight. The local Icakki story, which has its setting in Paḷavūr itself (so it is said), continues on seamlessly from the end of the *IK.* The *villuppāṭṭu* recalls the connection between Icakki-in-the-wilderness and her former activities, and her place in the village, her *mūlasthāna,* where she is present as Tēraṭi Icakki, residing in a stone next to the Ammaiyappar temple. Icakki is the story's protagonist, and her antagonist is Tiruvēṅkaṭa Nampiyār, the *mantiravāti* and Brahmin priest of the Ammaiyappar temple. When the bow-song singer mentions Paḷaiyanallūr, the same name as in the translocal *Nīli katai,* Paḷaṉiyā Piḷḷai, the treasurer of the temple committee, steps forward and corrects her, asking her to call the place Paḷavūr.[133] The bow-song singer continues with the story:

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[130] On the title Nampiyār as applied to priests in charge of funeral rites, see Thurston and Rangachari 1909:142.

[131] See also other stories where Icakki or other goddesses are locked up in bottles or captured in pots by a male, but ultimately flee—for instance, in the *sthalapurāṇam* of Kuttuppiṟai Icakki of Naṉkuṉēri (see above, Sect. 7.5, p. 258). Putting the goddess in a bottle and sealing it with a cork in order to immobilise her is exactly what Nampiyār does in the local Icakki story when he drives the *kāñciram* peg into the top of Icakki's head. (Exercises in which the practitioner tries to bring a *yakṣī* under control to satisfy his wishes are reminiscent of tantric practices.) – Cross-culturally, we find similar motifs in Malay village beliefs. (Note that Malaysia formerly underwent Hinduisation.) Laderman (1987:126f.) draws attention to the Malay idea that a "clever man" can turn a *langsuir* (the spirit of a woman who has died in childbirth) "into a human woman if he places a nail or other long, hard, pointed piece of iron or steel into the hole [in her head]. After its insertion, the gap closes up, leaving no mark to reveal the langsuir's nature [126][...which is] dangerous and threatening" (127). Laderman (ibid.:127) regards the object inserted into the hole as a "phallic object."

[132] Note the striking similarity of narrative pattern in a folk tale (from Muruganandan, *Nāṭṭuppuṟa Makkaḷ Collum Kataikaḷ,* Madras: Tenmaḷai Pathippagam, 1991, 128) retold in Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 2002:70: "The murder of a toddy-drawer's wife must be attributed to a demon's (transversal) revenge on her husband. The demon had begged the toddy-drawer for some palm-juice, but when he bent down to drink, the toddy-drawer drove a nail into his head. The nail changed the demon into a man whom the toddy-drawer made his house servant. After a few weeks of diligent work, the servant asked his mistress to search for lice in his hair. She thus discovered the nail and pulled it out. At that moment he regained his demonic form, killed the woman, and escaped."

[133] I concur with Blackburn and Ramanujan (1986:176): "Since these narratives are local history and often genealogies, this concern for the authenticity of their oral presentation is not surprising." – Here the source of interruption (i.e. those who dare to interrupt) gives a fair idea of where local power resides.

Beautiful Icakki is sitting under the banyan tree when the Brahmin comes along on his way to a client. Seemingly attracted by the beauty of the woman, he decides to take her home as a maidservant for his eight-month-pregnant wife.

By the time the local story has started, Kantappiḷḷai, Icakki's *cāmiyāṭi*, is sitting among the audience in front of the stage. Everybody is listening attentively.

The fusion of villuppāṭṭu and possession ritual[134]

It is 12:00 P.M. midnight *(ucci nēram)*—demon time.[135] Kantappiḷḷai becomes increasingly possessed while listening to the goddess's local story.[136] The lead singer notices this with surprise and continues on happily: "Icakki is fixed on a *cakra* by the *mantiravāti* Tiruvēṅkaṭa Nampiyār, who drives a poisonous *kāñciram* peg into Icakki's head *(ucci)*." This is the moment the *villuppāṭṭu* fully succeeds in its attempt to make the goddess's presence felt:[137] Kantappiḷḷai is in a high state of possession. He lets out a howl.[138] His body rocks to and fro while sitting on the sandy ground in front of the stage. He keeps on howling. The bow-song singer is spurred on by the possession and increases the tempo of her performance. *Villuppāṭṭu* and possession ritual have finally coalesced. The event takes place in a small, densely packed arena. With Kantappiḷḷai's body still jerking strongly, a family member adorns his arm with additional silver *kaṭakam*s. Kantappiḷḷai is supported by Śaṅkara. S/he asks the *mēḷam* (drums) to join in: *cantaikāṭci kiṭṭa kalaiñar ... cīkiramāka varum.* The cast is complete. It consists of the whole of the ritual gathering, which manifests the following hierarchy: a) Kantappiḷḷai, who is Icakki, b) the *villuppāṭṭu* singer, who is in charge of evoking the deity, c) the drummers, who reinforce the acoustic impact on the goddess, d) the monitoring assistant, who supplies the goddess with additional bangles, e) the family members of the pūjārī, who care for Icakki throughout the year, f) the villagers.

The sacred arena is thrown into an "unspaced"[139] fusion of exciting drumbeats, the high-pitched singing style of the *villuppāṭṭu*, and the ongoing possession, each attracting and sending the others spiralling to new heights. The audience is no less seized. The action is synchronised. The goddess has fully emerged. In the blink of an eye everyone is engulfed by the depths of her presence, until the narration "respaces," bringing the people back up to the surface, that is to say, back into time. The goddess's devotees (and non-devotees) experience a special sort of *darśana.* The *villuppāṭṭu* continues at full speed: "Nampiyār takes Icakki home as a maidservant." With a jerk Kantappiḷḷai / the goddess receives the silver vessel with the sacred ash, which she applies to her forehead. Flowers are on her lap. The goddess remains present, listening to her own story: *[...] nēṟṟi ceyñcu vēlai curu curuppu,* (colloquial; "yesterday's work was done very fast"). She grasps the flower garland, holds it to her chest, buries her face into it, and smiles. Again her possession increases. She shakes her head excitedly as she buries her face into the flowers. *Nalla vēlaikāri* (fine maidservant), the *villuppāṭṭu* singer sings, echoing the wife's words of high praise for Icakki's work. Kantappiḷḷai / the goddess, now holding the convoluted garland,[140] again jerkingly buries her face deeply into the fragrant and cooling flowers. The

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[134] The fusion lasts more or less uninterruptedly for one hour, at various degrees of intensity. Possession in the central session can easily last for more than one hour, as underscored in Blackburn 1980:236: "[T]he possession [...] by the medium of the chief deity may extend beyond the usual 10-15 minutes and last for as long as two or three hours."

[135] According to Blackburn (1980:261) it is customary for stories of type B goddesses to be performed at midnight: "If the chief deity is a type B Ammaṉ (e.g. Icakki Ammaṉ), her story is performed at the nocturnal zenith. If the chief deity is a type A Ammaṉ, the center performance may be at either zenith: at 12 noon if she is a maternal Ammaṉ (e.g. Muttār Ammaṉ) and at 12 midnight if she is a fierce Ammaṉ (e.g. Kāḷi Ammaṉ, Bhadrakāḷi Ammaṉ, Ucciṇimakāḷi Ammaṉ)." See also his chart 13, p. 263.

[136] This is, according to Blackburn (1980:275), a common feature of the central cycle: "[I]n the center slot the medium usually becomes possessed while in the audience listening to the performance itself."

[137] As is clear from my description, earlier it was the ritual procedure and the drums rather than the bow-song which made the goddess emerge.

[138] Babb (1975:136) calls the act of howling "evidence of possession by the goddess."

[139] For the terms *unspaced* and *respaced,* borrowed from Don Handelman, see Sect. 8.2, p. 275, point 9.

[140] One wonders if the convoluted form can be read as an oblique reference to the intestines she extracts after killing mother and child.

villuppāṭṭu proceeds. (Icakki:) *Akkā, akkā!,* "Elder sister!" (Wife:) *Eṉ peṇṇai!,* "My girl!" (Icakki:) *Ucciyil oru muḷai*, "There's a thorn in the top of my head." The goddess touches the point on her head, and her body jerks. Then the *kāñciram* peg is pulled out by the wife: *koṭuccā,* "It's out!" At that very moment the goddess's body collapses. The upper part of her body topples down to the ground. The hands of the monitoring assistant support her. The goddess maddens.[141] Her impulses erupt vulcano-like. She is death personified. Crawling on the sand towards the steps of her shrine, she exchanges glances with herself in the shrine. The whole scene has attained ineffable depth. Nothing is as it was. The ritual gathering releases a deep expiration of breath, glad that the unspeakable force has exploded within the safe arena of ritual order. There is no doubt that the goddess has shown her destructive potential.[142] The *villuppāṭṭu* group sings: *nampiyārum maṉaiviyum koṉṟu,* "Nampiyār and his [pregnant] wife have been killed." *Inta kiṭaṅkaṭiy Icakki pukaḻavaḷ,* "This Kiṭaṅkaṭi Icakki is famous." The local story has come to an end. The lead singer lays her script aside, though some pages still remain. It is nearing 1:00 A.M.

Reflections on the fusion of villuppāṭṭu and possession ritual

The fusion segment is the only one in the entire *koṭai* festival when the story is directly enacted in the ritual. The synchronisation of the narration, the possession, and the drum music is an index of this. The whole centres around the *kāñciram* peg, its being driven into and pulled out of the top of the goddess's head *(ucci)*.[143] The dominant mood of this segment is tension, mirrored in the highly dynamic movement and in the intense emotions paired with cognitive insights into the challenging play between life and death. At midnight *(ucci nēram)* everything is pushed towards fusion. There is the *IK*; and then the local Icakki story that, added to the translocal one, attempts in vain to avoid the disaster of the preceding story by driving the peg into the top of the head of Icakki, who again has appeared in order to challenge life. Everything, I would argue, moves predominantly within the register of physical violence and death, which overshadows the goddess's maturation and creative nature, and gathers towards the fusion. The critical moment comes when the *kāñciram* peg is pulled out. It is then that the goddess emerges, possessed[144] by her demonic past. The *villuppāṭṭu,* in creating memories, relatedness, and strong emotions, unmasks itself as a hunter, who lures both the goddess and the audience into meeting one another and making the private public. By participating in the knowledge of the goddess's blocking of reproduction the villagers become activated. Their knowledge demands a counterresponse. This fusion thus not only marks the point where all the different pieces virtually fall into place, but also the turning point.[145]

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[141] The range of madness and the notions associated with it in the Tamil context have been studied by Handelman and Shulman (2004:164ff.). For *veṟi*-madness, see ibid.:175: "*Veṟi* primarily suggests states of rage or fury [...] wildness, mental aberration, and what we call 'possession'." For *veṟiyāṭu*, see Hardy 1983:141; Zvelebil 1984:947ff.

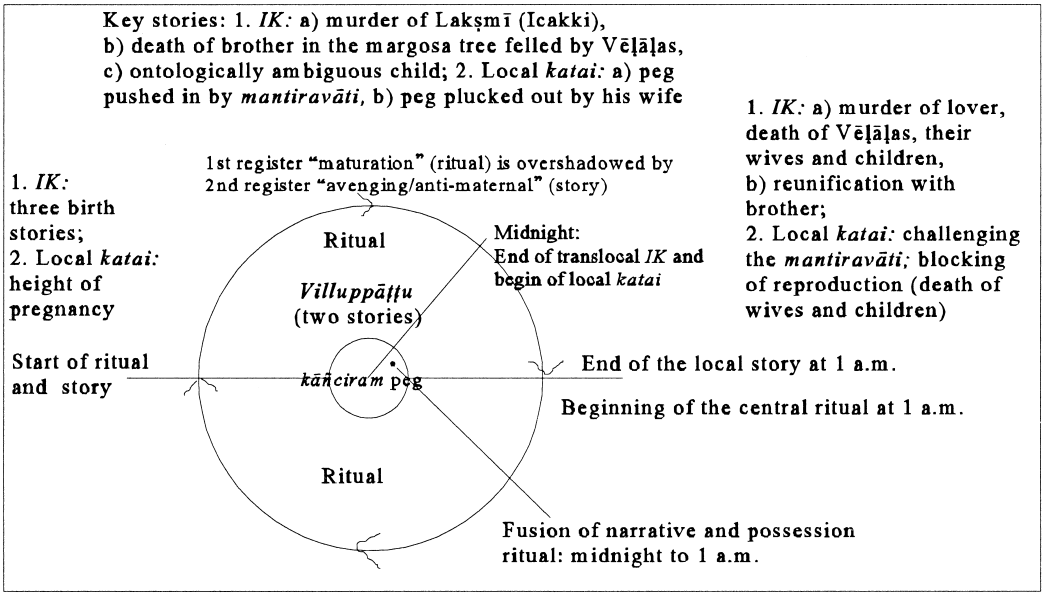
[142] The bow-song singer's words are proven right: in order to control the deity, the sorcerer's means are effective only for a certain time. Not only has he applied the wrong procedure to return the goddess to a healthy state of mind; even his tools are not effective; indeed, they are a failure, as being entirely unsuitable for this goddess.

[143] On *ucci* as the centre of the body and centre of gravity, see Osella and Osella 1999:189: "The *ucci* is the most important of the series of holes in the body [...; it] is a holy place."

[144] I would argue that what we witness here is a possession within a possession. Not only Kantappiḷḷai is possessed by the goddess, but the goddess herself is also possessed. On goddesses themselves becoming possessed, cf. Kinsley 1987:205.

[145] I suggest that the rituals do not intend to tread further along the path taken by the stories, involving the destructive, antimaternal younger sister, but rather attempt to render the goddess more harmonious and fertile.

Figure 4: The link between story *(katai)* and ritual *(koṭai)*



The varattu pāṭṭu performance of the villuppāṭṭu group and the possession dance of an elderly Tēvar woman

The local Icakki story has come to an end, but though the lead singer has laid her script aside, she continues her performance. She now sings in praise of the goddess, and invites her to come by performing the *varattu pāṭṭu.*[146] It is getting ever nearer to 1:00 A.M. The goddess is expected to make her dazzling presence soon felt in the second, the central *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*, the pūjā that initiates the most important rituals of the *koṭai* festival. Meanwhile an elderly woman from the Tēvar community begins dancing. Her red silk sari is draped loosely around her body. She is wearing the goddess's silver bangles. (She is said to make predictions, usually at her house in Paḷavūr.) Adorned with a huge flower garland, she now veils her hair with one end of the sari, and stands with folded hands in communication with Icakki-in-the-shrine. Then she turns toward the members of her community and throws sacred ash over them. Her possession dance differs in style from that of others. It appears as though she is floating on air, while her hands draw imaginary circles in it. The scene appears somewhat surreal. Her movement is slow and impressive, very much in the mood and rhythm of the *varattu pāṭṭu*, the song of invitation that is melodiously sung by the lead singer and the accompanying *kuṭam* player (who, after the end of the Icakki story, is now again a woman). The dancer's hair is loose. Her dance evokes interest among the audience. She begins to speak *kuṟi*s (predictions), but only to members of her community who have gathered in front of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ's image. Some of them adorn her with the huge flower garland that had previously been offered to the inner sanctum and is now taken from there. The Tēvar woman dancer then approaches the lead singer. She generously throws some coins onto the spanned end of the lead singer's sari. The Tēvar man in charge of keeping an eye on the arena comes and stands next to her. It is unclear whether the Tēvar woman dancer is "designated" or "undesignated."[147] An interview with the

[146] The bow-song singer T.M.P. pointed this out: "In the temples of the Piḷḷaimār conditions are not strict. They used to sing the *varattu* only at the time of the *tīpārātaṉai.* [...] If we sing the *varattu* with great effort, it [the deity] will come [...]," பிள்ளமாரு கோயில்ல, அந்தக் கோயில்ல உள்ள கதையத்தான் பாடித்தீரணுண்ணு கண்டிசம் கிடையாது. தீவாரண நடக்க நேரத்திலெ வரத்து மட்டும் பாடுவாங்க...வரத்த படிச்சி நாங்க கஸ்டமா பாடுனா வந்திரும் (interviewed by Nā. Irāmaccantiraṉ in *Puṉaikaḷam*, January-March 2002:104). – S. Svayamburajan (8 May 2002) commented similarly: "If we sing in praise of the deity, her power is evoked and she comes" (K-L.01.A.736).

[147] That there are undesignated persons, we have already seen in the course of the *koṭai* festival. For the concepts of

main pūjārī revealed that she has no official status within this *koṭai* festival of the Vēḷāḷas (or Piḷḷais).[148] We may assume, though, that she has been designated by her own community (in terms of numbers, one of the larger in the village).[149] After all, her appearance on the scene does not appear to be fortuitous, given that she is garlanded, and more importantly, is wearing the goddess's silver bangles. There can be no doubt that she embodies none other than Icakki herself. There are signs that the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* is about to start. This implies that the *vil* performance has come to an end for the night.

THE SERIES OF CENTRAL RITUALS IN THE SESSION FROM 1:00 A.M. UNTIL THE DAWN OF 8 MAY 2002

Arttacāmapūjai (last nighttime pūjā)
The second alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai for Icakki—a central ritual[150]

It is 1:00 A.M.—*camayama* time (demon time).[151] The *villuppāṭṭu* performance has come to a close. The local Icakki story is completed. The goddess is praised and invoked. The air is pregnant with expectation. With Kantappiḷḷai still in a state of possession, a direct transition occurs to the second and central *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai,*[152] "the culmination [...] of an enormous amount of preparatory labor [...]," as Blackburn (1980:236) describes it. (Since the post-evening session Pūtattār has receded into the background. He does not receive any further pūjā until the next morning.) Icakki appears in a gorgeous *alaṅkāram*.[153] The extent of the latter has increased significantly. Flowers cover not only her statue *(cilai)* but all quarters of the inner sanctum. Without question, the second *alaṅkāram* is the peak of Icakki's flower decoration and beautification. Hour by hour her appearance has been growing in splendour, in a process that can be likened to budding into womanhood.[154] Fruits are heaped up in front of her. Her face is thickly smeared with the auspicious, radiant *mañcaṇai* paste. The pūjā is the same as the initial *alaṅkāram* in the afternoon.

I am not allowed to shoot pictures or make a video recording. Some feared that I would be the one

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"designated" and "undesignated medium," see Blackburn (1980:254), who specifies the different types of dancers: "Two of these are designated mediums: (1) mediums of other deities in the chief deity's story, and (2) mediums of deities of other stories. The third type are undesignated mediums from the crowd who may become possessed by any deity."

[148] "These ladies make prediction professionally. [...] We have not engaged her for the *camiyāṭṭam*" (interview [AK-H.02, A.039] held on 15 December 2002 in Paḷavūr).

[149] See Map 3 in Sect. 8.3.

[150] As Blackburn (1980:232) emphasises, "the second tīpārāṭaṉai of the koṭai is the central node of the sequence and the entire festival."

[151] For demon time, see Obeyesekere 1984:109: "The night is divided into three watches [...]. The first watch [is...] roughly from 6:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M.; middle watch [...from] 10:00 P.M. to 2:00 A.M.; and [...] dawn watch, from 2:00 A.M. to 6:00 A.M. [...] Demons are active at crucial points of these watches; hence they are called *[c]amayama* times [...]." – The central *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* takes place at a somewhat unexpected time. The bow-song bard T.M.P. cleared my uncertainty over the timing of the *tīpārātaṉai* in the interview with Nā. Irāmaccantiraṉ (2002:104), published by *Puṉaikaḷam*, Folklore Magazine (January-March): "East of Āralvāymoḻi they perform the midnight pūjās or the midday pūjās accurately. In our K.K.Dt. we don't do like that. We perform the *tīpārātaṉai* at the time the story ends. Really, that is wrong. It must be exactly twelve o'clock when the pūjā is performed [...]," ஏகதேசம் ஆரல்வாமொளிக்கி கெழக்க என்ன நடத்து காங்கன்னா–தெய்வங்களுக்கு கரெக்டா பகலோ ராத்திரியே பனனி ரெண்டு மணிக்குப் பூச கொடுக்கிறாங்க. நம்ம கன்னியாரி மாவட்டத்தில அப்படி செய்ய மாட்டாங்க. கத எங்க போயி நிக்கோ–அதுவர பாத்திரந்துதான் தீவாரண கொடுக்கது. உண்மையிலே அது தவறு [...] (104). – Blackburn (1980) also notes that twelve o'clock at midnight is the standard time for the central *tīpārātaṉai;* see his chart 11, p. 238.

[152] For a comprehensive summary of the "sequential movement [...] through the three tīpārātaṉai of the *koṭai*," see Blackburn 1980:256f.

[153] See Photo 6 in Appendix A, p. 356.

[154] Is not the right hand of Icakki's icon, modelled on the gesture of *mukula* in the language of classical Bhāratanāṭyam dance, the very sign of a bud? It appears as if the bud, which had been sheathing a knife for violent use, has now blossomed—has fully opened—and has relinquished the knife. It is not surprising that the ritual specialists regard this moment as most significant. It seems clear, as pointed out elsewhere, that the theme of revenge, had simply overshadowed the goddess's maturation, and had made what we now see in all its pervasiveness—her flowering—imperceptible.

to benefit from the goddess's power;[155] others that I would put myself in danger. Though the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* is being performed in the inner sanctum, one has the impression that the goddess long ago left it and is out among the people. Physically, space seems to me to have narrowed, and time to have stretched out prodigiously. A few minutes earlier I was still confused about the villagers' sudden decision not to let me shoot. I felt like an intruder. It hurt. But then I accepted it, and Icakki's appearance took me somewhere unexpected.

Asked which rituals he regarded as most important on the first day of the *koṭai*, the main pūjārī replied: "Tuesday night, 1:00 A.M. is the most important ritual." [Do you mean the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*?] "Yes, it takes place at 1:00 A.M." (interview on 19 January 2003). This explains my being reduced to a mere bystander. On no account could they risk the goddess's not coming into their presence.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND ALAṄKĀRA TĪPĀRĀTAṈAI FOR ICAKKI —A CENTRAL RITUAL

The dominant mood during the central *alaṅkāram* at 1:00 A.M. is the expectation on the part of the ritual gathering that they will receive a vision *(darśana)* of the goddess, and will recognise her for what she has become. It is during this central ritual that the goddess is expected to emerge and recognise herself in her full maturation, that is to say, as a goddess filled with procreative power. This meaning is also latent in the second *alaṅkāram* scene of the *IK* (Icakki with child).[156] However, there things go badly wrong. As the pūjārī's words indicate, in the series of central rituals the goddess is considered to be "highly active" and in a state in which she can generate power from within:

> During the *camakoṭai* she is highly active; if anybody goes against her, that person will immediately die. She can do anything at that moment. She will bite into and eat even a huge goat. (Interview with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai on 19 January 2003)[157]

The state of "activeness" the pūjārī alludes to can be understood on the basis of a complex notion that equates flowers with menstrual blood or maturation,[158] and these two in turn with procreative strength.[159] That the ritual attempts to control the manner in which the goddess emerges is suggested by the ritual segment that follows.

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[155] Kinsley's assumption (1987:199) is in line with the villagers' claim: "The exclusion of outsiders seems to be associated with the idea that they might benefit from the power of the goddess, which is intended for the local village. Her power is believed to be for her village, not for outsiders."

[156] Perhaps this particular point of the ritual (the second *alaṅkāram*) presents a parallel to the *IK,* inasmuch as they both refer to Icakki's procreative power (to be sure, each in its own language). In the second *alaṅkāram* of the ritual, procreative power is signalled by means of floral markers, while in the second *alaṅkāram* of the *IK* narrative (N1:1460ff.), the same meaning is implied in the *kaḷḷi*-turned-child Icakki has created herself (and with which she appears to the Ceṭṭi). Note that the first *alaṅkāram* scene of the *IK* (N1:1040ff.), by contrast, refers merely to Icakki's maturation and sexual attractiveness. In this particular scene Icakki appears without the child. For an overview of the three *alaṅkāram* scenes in the *IK,* see Sect. 4.7.

[157] The citation of an Ayurvedic practitioner in Kersenboom-Story 1987:69, n. 22, is in compelling agreement with the pūjārī's statement above. Noting the accumulation of blood in women and the necessity of its monthly discharge, he states: "'If it were not for her monthly period, five men could not hold one woman down.'" That the flow of menstrual blood, then, is a time of danger, is emphasised by Kersenboom-Story (ibid.): "[T]he advent of puberty is considered a highly dangerous process and state of physis."

[158] It may be suggested that the goddess is indeed filled with the power of flowers, which are equated with the vital potency of menstrual blood, the latter a sign that marks bodily maturation. Cf. Kersenboom-Story (1987:69, n. 22), who stresses that "[t]he process of physiological maturation from infancy to adulthood is seen as a direct consequence of the increasing 'force' of the blood in the body."

[159] Cf. Kersenboom-Story (1987:69, n. 22): "The fact that the girl has become mature means that she shares now in the procreative power [...]. This is marked by flow of menstrual blood."

The second fiery torch (tīpantam) possession dance

Kantappiḷḷai comes out of the shrine, his upper body smeared with *mañcaṇai* paste. Embellished with the silver *kaṭakam*s and garlands of flowers taken from the inner sanctum, he begins dancing with a fiery torch, waving it back and forth over his head and shoulders. Occasionally the lighted end of the torch brushes against his chest. The torch has come from the inner sanctum—a sign that the goddess has burst into flame. It is striking that, once the second *alaṅkāram* has been built up, the goddess, now apparently in full maturation, enters into the fiery torch possession dance rather than into the cooling flowerbed ritual.[160] Meanwhile the main pūjārī, garlanded richly and adorned with the goddess's *kaṭakam*s, intermittently joins in, taking the burning torch from Kantappiḷḷai and dancing around with it in the middle of the arena. He touches the fire briefly to his body as he swings the torch past his chest. One wonders whether the flame of the torch, the focus of the scene, is meant to be implanted in the goddess's consciousness, there to become a radiant embryo. This is perhaps not too strained an interpretation, given that fertility is boosted by heat, and fertility is the motivation of the rituals in this cycle.[161]

The possession dance with the protective pirampu and a whisk of kamukam (areca)

In a direct sequel to the fiery torch possession dance, the main pūjārī, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, continues dancing with the curved red *pirampu*. The aged female family member joins in, and both go round and round in a circle in the middle of the arena, demarcating with their *pirampu*s the area of control where the goddess is to reside. Blackburn (1980:254) points out the "greater ritual depth of the dance in the center tīpārātaṉai"—marked by a larger number of dancers joining in. But ritual depth is also accompanied by moments of ambivalence, when opposing cosmic forces are confronted. The protective *pirampu* is in this sense suggestive. Demonic forces from both outside and within the goddess must be averted. Fertility must be protected at nocturnal times.[162]

The elderly woman from the Tēvar community continues dancing with the others, her arms embellished with the goddess's accessories. She again is wearing a huge flower garland, but the loosely hanging silk sari has been replaced with a lilac-coloured one. One Tēvar, a monitoring assistant, smears her with more blazing red *mañcaṇai* paste. Her look is somewhat fierce. Then suddenly she rushes towards Icakki-in-the-shrine, all the while beating her own reddish head with a whisk of *kamukam.* Meanwhile the main pūjārī, too, dances with a whisk of areca, with the *pirampu* also still in his hand. From time to time he distributes the sacred ash.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND FIERY TORCH POSSESSION DANCE AND THE POSSESSION DANCE WITH THE PROTECTIVE PIRAMPU AND A WHISK OF KAMUKAM (ARECA)

To lead the goddess from the *alaṅkāram,* the moment of the goddess's self-recognition (and her recognition by others), directly into the fiery torch dance, rather than into the cooling flowerbed, makes perfect sense. Under the sign of the burning torch, the goddess is erotically aroused and overheated, the latter property a result of her increasing procreative force. The inner heat, rather than being cooled on

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[160] One harbinger of this change of sequence can be seen in the *karukkal pūjā,* which likewise did not make use of the flowerbed. A couch spread with flowers would cool rather than heat the goddess. Thus, it seems, she is to be kept in an environment of heat. Fertility presupposes heat.

[161] Blackburn (1980:219) in his dissertation on the *villuppāṭṭu* tradition makes a point of general significance when he postulates that maternity is stressed by the tradition to an equal extent as the marriage of the goddess: "[T]he wedded state of the goddess has normally been seen as the dividing line between her dual aspects, but the vil pāṭṭu narratives suggest that her maternal state may be equally important." On the basis of the *koṭai* rituals we are discussing here, we can only concur with Blackburn's assumption. In our case we may even go a step further and neglect the *unmarried-married* dichotomy, putting all the emphasis on *barrenness-maternity* as the important opposition. After all, in the southern version of *Nīli/Icakkiyammaṉ Kaṭai* the goddess's marriage is not an issue, as indicated by the choice of a devadāsī as the heroine.

[162] On demons being attracted by the powerful blood of a virgin, see Kersenboom-Story (1987:69, n. 22).

the flowerbed,[163] is to be increased by an external heat containing, it can be argued, generative and fertile qualities.[164] The more the process of fertility in the goddess is kindled by the flaming heat, the more she must be protected from bloodthirsty spirits that could invade the arena.[165] This is implied in the protective *pirampu* held by the goddess. The time is a period of danger.[166] And although the rituals offer no clarity on this point, I think it eminently plausible that the gesture of protection has as much to do with protecting the goddess from herself[167] as with protecting her from demonic *(pēy)* invasion from without. That the goddess is no less susceptible to her own *pēy*-like component must be clear by now.

The second flowerbed, flowerbed tīpārātaṉai, and dance

There is purifying smoke in the air of the sacred space. The pūjārī's assistant, a family member, circumambulates[168] the flowerbed clockwise, performing a *tīpārātaṉai* to it. The second flowerbed has the same lay-out as the one in the afternoon.[169] Meanwhile Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, the main pūjārī, has begun dancing. The flowerbed ritual takes on a novel form. What we observe in this second flowerbed ritual occurs in concert with the possession dance—a fact illustrative of Freeman's observation (1999:154) that "across physical embodiments [...a] single divine being [...] can simultaneously possess two human vehicles" (ibid.), inasmuch as consciousness can "variably part and fuse" (ibid.).[170] The main pūjārī's joyful dance, Kantappiḷḷai's reiterative finding of the *tāḻampū* and the *kamukampū,* and people's performing of the *kuravai* sound play off against each other with great intensity (and with ever more joining in to perform the *kuravai*).

The poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu (food offering),[171] *the tuvaḷai kid goat sacrifice, and the drinking of the kid's blood*[172]

It is 3:00 A.M.—dawn watch. Three men, close relatives of the pūjārī, prepare a food offering within a sacred square demarcated by a spanned long white *vēṣṭi.*[173] A long plantain leaf is handed over to them, and they place it on a white cloth. One big pot is filled with *puṭṭu,* a speciality of K.K.Dt., Kerala, and

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[163] Compare the sequential pattern in the first ritual cycle, Sect. 9.2.1.

[164] For the notion of "reproduction of life" being related to an increase of heat, see Mareno and Marriott 1990:151.

[165] See also Kinsley 1987:205, relating to another context: "[T]he goddess too is said to become [...] invaded by the demons."

[166] Susceptibility to demoniacal forces is believed to be particularly strong between sunset and 6 A.M. and at midday.

[167] Along these same lines, see my previous argumentation in Sect. 6.4, p. 229 above.

[168] Icakki's pūjārī said: "When the pūjārī starts the circumambulation, he does so from a position facing both the flowerbed and the statue inside the shrine" (AK-HH.01, A, 738, interview on 19 January 2003).

[169] "All the three flowerbeds are equal. We throw away all the flowers used in the first bed, and fresh flowers are laid for the second bed and the third bed. For each flowerbed, a fresh *tāḻampū* is put in place. All the flowers are freshly laid" (interview held with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002). "The square form with the *tāḻampū* is found on all the three beds" (interview on 19 January 2003). Asked whether the flowers used for the *alaṅkāram* figure are identical in type with the flowers on the flowerbed, the main pūjārī replied in an interview held on 15 February 2002: "Yes, the same flowers are used. In the flowerbed the flowers are single flowers, but here in the *alaṅkāram* they are placed as a garland. All the flowers which are found on the *alaṅkāram* figure are also placed on the flowerbed, except for the lotus. The lotus flower is on the bed, but not on the garland." Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai gives an account of the flowers used for the *alaṅkāram* figure: "There are *mallikai, picci, campaṅki, civappu araḷi, veḷḷai araḷi, aṭukku malli, tuḷaci, kirēnti,* roses, *vāṭāmalli, mallikai* at the neck, two *tāḻampū*s, *vēmpu* (margosa) leaves at the bottom of the statue, and finally garlands of lemon *(elumiccampaḻamālai)*" (interview with the main pūjārī on 15 February 2002).

[170] Cf. Parfit's (1984:199ff.) scenario of teletransport (in Western philosophy), which demonstrates that it is logically possible to branch psychic continuity. Parfit's thought experiment results in the reduplication of a person.

[171] The main pūjārī states: "The *poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu* is the third offering *(paṭaippu)* on this day [i.e. Tuesday]. Beforehand there was the 'noon offering' *(mattiyāṉam paṭaippu)* [of the first flowerbed], followed by the 'midnight offering' *(naṭurāttiri paṭaippu)* [of the second flowerbed]" (interview with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai on 19 January 2003).

[172] According to the main pūjārī (interview of 15 December 2002), the *paṭaippu*, the *tuvaḷai* goat sacrifice, and the drinking of the kid's blood, in exactly this sequential order, form one functional unit.

[173] A dhoti.

Sri Lanka. Another pot contains chicken curry. For this a hen *(peṭṭai kōḻi)* has been sacrificed and cooked along the northern side of the temple, adjacent to the *poṅkal* site. The cooked hen, the rice and other dishes are then put on the plantain leaf together with the *puṭṭu* and *āppam,* the two latter eatables having been given by the Brahmin priest of the Ammaiyappar temple.[174] All the food has been cooked under purified conditions, namely with napkins placed over mouths and noses to prevent impurities (sweat or saliva) from coming into contact with it. The food must not be smelled by anybody other than Icakki, I am informed.

A *tuvaḷai* goat, a very young kid still sucking its mother's milk and not yet able to bite into grass and chew it,[175] has been donated by a Kōṉār (shepherd). It is smeared with holy ash and sprinkled with water prior to being sacrificed. The *vēṣṭi* that has been spanned so as to hide the food is removed. The full meal, with the *āppam* on top, is revealed. Incense sticks are lit. The men are supposed to remain with napkins over their mouths till the *tīpārātaṉai* is completed. Finally the meal is ready to be served. The bell rings. A pūjā for the food offering is done. Icakki has in the meanwhile come, still in the embodiment of Kantappiḷḷai. S/he sits down. Again a white cloth is spanned. A Tēvar then cuts open the belly of the *tuvaḷai* kid goat.[176] There, it is said, is where the power of the deity is aroused. The intestines are plucked out; in the process something is turned "inside out."[177] Then the throat is slit (or squeezed?).[178] Instantly someone lets forth a deep, howling sound, an indicator of extreme ritual depth. Icakki embodied in Kantappiḷḷai looks at Icakki-in-the-shrine. S/he bends down behind the white veil. She drinks the blood.[179] Her blood-stained right hand appears from under the veil. With a movement of her hand she makes a sign (*kuṟi)* towards the shrine. The veil is partly drawn aside. Facing the shrine, she lolls out her tongue. She straightens her upper body, sitting up erect, deeply immersed in the image inside the shrine, her eyes drowned in tears. Her mouth is covered with blood, while her forehead is smudged with holy ash. She is served water. The main pūjārī stands to her left. The *tīpārātaṉai* takes place. The events have all been interwoven, and it is said that "with all these she is satisfied."[180] The third *paṭaippu* (offering) of the day is over.[181] The white veil is fully removed. The *nātasvaram* begins to play mildly. The goddess puts the kid goat on her lap, as if a newborn baby were being laid down gently by its mother. The intestines will remain inside the kid goat. After the *koṭai* they and the rest of the *tuvaḷai* will be handed over to the Vaṇṇār (washerman) who carried the *pantam* (burning torch) to the temple. The *poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu* (food offering) will be distributed to the pūjārī's family members at his house.

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[174] Interview on 19 January 2003. See also Sect. 9.2.1 "A flashback to the village," p. 285.

[175] Only at this stage is the goat called a *tuvaḷai* (otherwise kids are called *āṭṭu kuṭṭi*); interview with the main pūjārī on 19 January 2003.

[176] It is the Tēvars again who do the slaughtering.

[177] For this concept, see Handelman and Shulman 1997.

[178] It is not clear whether the throat is cut or squeezed. The main pūjārī gave me two different descriptions at two different times.

[179] Cf. Babb's (1975:136) observations regarding possessed dancers licking at the blood slick on the floor produced when a goat was decapitated behind a cloth. See also Whitehead's (1983 [1921]:99f.) description of an annual ritual in honour of the goddess Kalumaiamman. In this ritual, which is held in the months of February or March in Tiruccirāppaḷḷi (Tiruchirapalli), "some two thousand kids are [...] sacrificed one after the other, the blood of the first eight or ten is collected in a large silver vessel [...] and handed up to the pūjārī [of the Vēḷāḷa caste], who drinks it all. Then, as the throat of each kid is cut, the animal is handed up to him, and he sucks or pretends to suck the blood out of the carcass. The belief of the people is that the blood is consumed by the spirit of Kalumaiamman in the pūjārī [...]." – The *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* compiled by Jobes (1962:226, s.v. "blood") notes: "[I]n India goat blood was drunk by magicians to enable them to prophesy."

[180] Interview with the main pūjārī on 15 December 2002.

[181] The other two *paṭaippu*s were the first and second *pūppaṭukkai* or *pūppaṭaippu* (flowerbed or flower offering).

REFLECTIONS ON THE POṅKAL PAṟIPPU PAṬAIPPU, THE TUVAḶAI KID GOAT SACRIFICE, AND THE DRINKING OF BLOOD

This tripartite segment is the last of the three offerings *(paṭaippu)* made to satisfy and reorient a goddess who, at one time a human, died childless and violently. The dominant themes of the segment are reintegration paired with violence. I interpret the food offering *(poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu)* as an invitation to the goddess to reintegrate herself into the villagers' world,[182] and the sacrifice of the kid goat as instrumental in providing new life. It is surely important that the goddess drinks the blood of the kid goat before creating the babies for the childless couples.

The māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai and the divinatory spinning of the coconut[183]

Asked for whom the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual is meant, the main pūjārī replies: "Those who don't yet have children come. It is only for childless couples."[184]

This ritual occurs in a direct sequel to the preceding events in the sacred arena in front of the shrine, where the goddess, embodied in Kantappiḷḷai, sits with the *tuvaḷai* goat victim on her lap. Her left hand gently enfolds the head of the *tuvaḷai,* as if it were a baby. She is wearing a large number of *kaṭakam*s, perhaps more than twenty. The main pūjārī joins her and sits down to her left. Both face the shrine, in front of them the untouched *poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu* (food offering). A couple approaches them and sits down to their right—the main pūjārī's younger sister and her husband. The right to be the first is usually reserved for some family from among the Kōṉār community, but no such family has shown up this time, I am informed.[185] Ever since the *tuvaḷai* goat was sacrificed, a mild tune played on the *nātasvaram,* as if produced by a bamboo flute *(pullāṅkuḻal),* has filled the air. No drum is heard. The main pūjārī describes the atmosphere in the following words:

> After the *tuvaḷai* is slaughtered the music is very mild. The instrument is played just as it is when the Nāgarājan (the king of serpents) appears. At that time those who are childless come to receive the goddess's boon. Those who come first experience the birth of a child without fail. Those who come at the end may not. The power of the deity comes but does not last long. The power of the deity comes in intervals. Whenever the deity performs *aruḷvākku* the results are definitely positive.

While the mild sound is lulling us into a sense of intimate harmony with ourselves, others, and the goddess, the main pūjārī passes a plantain leaf to Kantappiḷḷai. It contains a pair of dolls called *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai*,[186] sacred ash (*tirunīru),* lemon *(eccaipaḻam)*, and *mañcaṇai*, all said to be auspicious and powerful items. The boon of a child depends on the *māppiḷḷai* and *mañcappiḷḷai* figures not being missing on the leaf. Kantappiḷḷai touches the blood of the *tuvaḷai* and smears it on the plantain leaf. The

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[182] Recall that though linked with the *tuvaḷai* sacrifice, the meal is offered and the *tīpārātaṉai* is performed prior to the killing of the *tuvaḷai*. For a detailed discussion of this ritual segment, see Sect. 9.3.5, p. 333.

[183] See Photo 7 in Appendix A, p. 357.

[184] Interview held on 19 January 2003. Those who want to participate in this ritual must inform the pūjārī one month earlier. They will be charged one thousand rupees.

[185] Giving priority to families of the Kōṉār community goes back to an event that happened some forty years ago, when a very young Kōṉār "was playing with broken pieces of an Icakki statue while tending cattle. All of a sudden he felt severely ill. He went to the Icakki temple and prayed. Icakki appeared and asked him for a sacrifice consisting of a *tuvaḷai* goat and a brown *cemmaṟi* goat. The boy was poor but miraculously managed to fulfil Icakki's wish. Later on he became a wealthy man. This is why the Kōṉārs have priority. During the *koṭai* festival a pot filled with cooked rice and placed near the flowerbed is presented to the same Kōṉār. The Kōṉār community's ties to the Icakki temple are strong. The restoration of the temple in the year 2000 was financed by a Kōṉār" (interview on 15 December 2002 with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai).

[186] The main pūjārī went into more detail in an interview held on 15 December 2002 (AK-H.01, B, 461-477): "[The pair] is called *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai*. We create it from *māvu* (rice flour) and *mañcaḷ* (turmeric); hence the name. The pairs of dolls are given to the childless couples. They effectively ensure childbirth." In another interview, held on 19 January 2003, the main pūjārī added: "*Māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* are more or less like dolls. We form them just like a child, with eyes, mouth, and nose. The pūjārī forms them."

blood is a symbol *(aṭaiyāḷam)* of Icakki's power, it is said.[187] The couple turn their heads to the image inside the shrine, while the goddess in Kantappiḷḷai sits deep in thought with the plantain leaf in her hand. She spins the coconut, observing its three eyes, and then buries her face in the leaf. She begins gyrating with her upper body. Her very look reveals whether she has granted the boon of a child or not.[188] Kantappiḷḷai applies holy ash, first to the husband's forehead, then to the wife's. S/he hands over the plantain leaf. Placing it on the receptive lap of both, she ties the couple's hands together. Again she distributes holy ash, but now first to the wife and then to the husband. She puts her hand into the intestines in the open belly of the *tuvaḷai* goat and smears the contents on the foreheads of wife and husband. The procedure is repeated with the next couple.

A woman with clear signs of aversion towards her husband comes next. Her body stiffens and for a few moments she seems to suffer a spell of unconsciousness and dissociation. The woman quite obviously is not eager to participate in the ritual.[189] Someone among the spectators whispers to others close by the name Icakki, identifying the irregular behaviour as a sign of the woman's possession by the goddess. This unexpected possession evokes great interest in the ritual gathering.[190]

The couple is followed by others. The ritual is nearing its end, with wives and husbands drawing closer to each other and the goddess. The audience, too, profits from the intimacy that envelops the main actors. That women and men sit now in a mixed group is significant, and a sign of the effects of this ritual segment.

Reflections on the māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai and the divinatory spinning of the coconut

The *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* and the divinatory spinning of the coconut mark the culmination of a sequence of rituals starting with the morning segment and ending with the dawn segment. The prevailing mood of this last segment in the midnight session is intimate, highly intense, and spiritual. During this ritual the goddess provides a most direct form of help to the childless couples who ask for it: she produces offspring. The coconut is the sign that creation occurs. When spun, it "utters the sign" *(kuṟi col)*. How could a ritual so obviously linked with human fertility make its inner workings and purposes—the visualisation of child production by the divinity and the transformative process within the couple—more apparent than by the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* and by the divinatory spinning of the coconut? That the couple only becomes ready for its own transformation after the transformation of the goddess has taken place seems significant to me.[191] One can infer that the rolling on the flowerbed and the spinning of the coconut are intimately related.[192]

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[187] Interview on 15 December 2002 with the main pūjārī.

[188] Interview of 15 December 2002 with the main pūjārī.

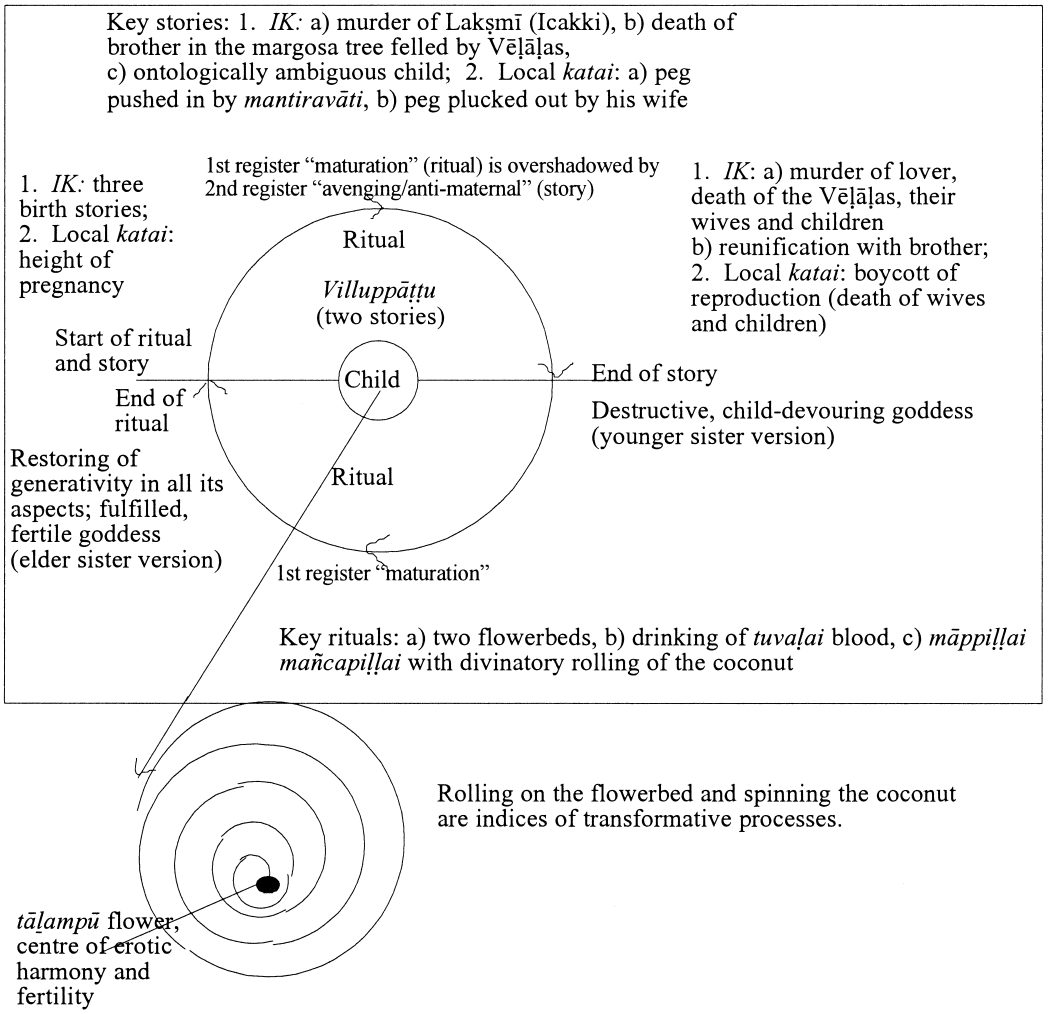
[189] It is the family of the husband who decide what is to be done in the case of mental or physical problems relating to childlessness, and in this case it was certainly not the woman herself who decided to undergo the ritual.

[190] Blackburn (1980:255), familiar with the phenomenon, makes the following point: "Because the possessing deity [...] is unidentified, people watch closely for clues."

[191] Cf. Köpping and Rao's observations (2000:10) relating to temple rituals studied by Marglin.

[192] For a detailed discussion, see Sect. 9.3.5, p. 335.

Figure 5: An enhanced synoptic diagram of the ritual–story complex



9.2.3 The Third Ritual Cycle

THE SECOND DAY, 8 MAY 2002

The villuppāṭṭu

The second day of the *koṭai* festival opens with a *villuppāṭṭu* performance. It is around 11:00 A.M. The group performs the stories of Pūtattār and Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, Icakki's story having been completed the night before. It seems as if the *villuppāṭṭu* is now being employed to entertain the villagers.

The alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai

—The second alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai for Pūtattār
Pūtattār, who has not received any attention since the evening *karukkal pūjā,* now puts in his second *alaṅkāram* appearance. Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ and Vairavaṉ, the other two subordinate deities, are also bounteously adorned.

—The third alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai for Icakki

The goddess appears to spectators in the same gorgeous *alaṅkāram* as the night before for the 1:00 A.M. *tīpārātaṉai*. That this final *tīpārātaṉai* is ritually weak is indicated by the reduced number of spectators for this second day of ritual. The climax of the *koṭai* festival was clearly the night before. What happened in those central rituals is something that the rituals of this second day cannot add substantially to. An analysis shows, then, that the climax does not necessarily coincide with the end point and that it is important to try to make sense of whatever clear markers there are of the ritual's organisation.

The possession dance with protective pirampus and whisks of kamukam (areca)

The direct sequel to the *tīpārātaṉai* is a possession dance by the garlanded main pūjārī and his assistant. Both are equipped with a *pirampu,* which is later exchanged for a whisk of *kamukam*. Kantapiḷḷai, who usually is the first to be possessed by the goddess, does not join them. While dancing to the beat of the drum and the soft tones of the *nātasvaram,* the dancers occasionally receive gifts of white dhotis from the villagers. Then a big pot filled with water is set over a fire in the arena, where the possession dance is taking place.

The third flowerbed ritual

In design, the flowerbed to which the goddess is invited to come to play on is the same as the day before. While the goddess is thus disporting herself on the flowerbed, the water in the big pot is being heated preparatory to the *mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu* ritual. Though this final flowerbed is ritually subdued, during her rolling on it the goddess is again expected to find the *tāḻampū* flower.

The villuppāṭṭu and possession dance

The *villuppāṭṭu* group performs the story of Pūtattār and Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ.[193] The dancers are equipped with the accessories of the deities of whom the *villuppāṭṭu* sings in praise: first with the *vēl* (spear) of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, then with the club of Pūtattār. They are later replaced with whisks of *kamukam* and the protective *pirampu*. The *villuppāṭṭu* is accompanied by the drums, while the dancers dance with whisks of dry areca in hand.

The mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu

It is 3:00 P.M. We are nearing the close of the festival.[194] The second day of the *koṭai* festival is clearly anticlimactic. It is marked by a decrease in ritual expectations and tension, even though the actors have not yet shed their ritual identity. There is just one moment of excitement, when the *mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu* takes place; it is revealing that this segment is regarded as the highlight of the second day.

The turmeric *(mañcaḷ)* water, after a long process of being heated in the pot, is finally boiling. This is a sign that the goddess has emerged.[195] Indeed one might suggest that it is the goddess's own heat that brings the water to a boil.[196] Kantapiḷḷai, again possessed by her, dips a whisk of *kamukam* into the

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[193] Blackburn's comments (1980) on the story of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ and the final part of the festival are valuable: "A more commonly performed narrative in the final slot is the Cuṭalai Mādaṉ story, which [...] is presented as a form of worship [287] [...] In the final slot [...] the [...] story produces a ritually weaker dance [287f.]. [...] the events with a type B emphasis are removed from the story when it is performed in the final slot [288]."

[194] "The final part of the *koṭai* includes the bathing in the turmeric water *(mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu)*" (interview [AK-H01, B, 529] with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, in Paḻavūr on 15 December 2002). Cf. *TL* :3008, s.v. *mañcaṇīrviḷaiyāṭṭu*: "Play of sprinkling turmeric-mixed water at the close of a festival [...]."

[195] The main pūjārī pointed this out when he remarked: "If she does not come, the water will not boil" (interview [AK-HH.01, A, 659] with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai held on 19 January 2003 in Paḻavūr).

[196] The main pūjārī confirmed this when he pointed out: "During her bathing in turmeric water, the water will come to a boil" (interview [AK-HH.01, A, 659] with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai held on 19 January 2003 in Paḻavūr).

boiling turmeric water, jerks it over his shoulder and strikes his back, sprinkling the auspicious turmeric water mixed with herbs all about.[197] The main pūjārī follows suit. Other dancers, whether possessed or not,[198] also join in. The drum beats stirringly, accompanied by the strong tones of the *nātasvaram*. The dancers circle around the pot again and again, jerking the dipped whisks over their backs. Finally the whisks are thrown away. Asked about the meaning of the *mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu,* the main pūjārī replied:

> There is a line in the *Icakkiyammaṉ Katai*: *mañcaḷ mukattu aḻaki*, "she who has a beautiful face for having it smeared with *mañcaḷ* paste." [...] She feels very happy with the *mañcaḷ* when there is heat like that of a fire. She is happy when she feels the fire, just as we are happy when there is rain. She will bathe in the fire. (Interview held in the pūjārī's backyard next to *pūtam*-Icakki on 9 May 2002)

"Bathing," according to Narayan (1995:488), is "a common allusion to sexual relations in Indian folk narratives [...]," and turmeric *(mañcaḷ),* according to Rao (1986:148), "a symbol of femininity." The scholars' observations are supported by the *IK,* which mentions *mañcaḷ kuḻikka* (lit. "to bathe in turmeric") in verse N1.1409: "Give me the money one [usually] gives for the pleasure of bathing in turmeric," a euphemism for sexual enjoyment.[199]

That the *mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu* ritual bears resemblance to a ceremonial act conducted after the first menstruation must be assumed on the basis of a reference given in the Cre-A Tamil dictionary, where *mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu* is referred to as "a ritual bath in turmeric-mixed water for a girl who has attained puberty" (798).[200] Also relevant is what Marglin (1985) writes in her work on rituals in the Jagannātha temple in Pūri (Orissa): "[T]he women [after menstruation] will bathe [...; likewise] the goddess [...] will also be bathed and her body rubbed with oil and turmeric" (235). The same author adds: "The menses of the goddess takes place around the month of [... May–June] usually before the bathing festival" (234). Although the rituals at the famous Jagannātha temple in Pūri are more sophisticated, there are recognisable similarities in the underlying concepts and timing.

The animal sacrifice

The ritual reverts to killing and exacting fresh blood. Sacrifices of cocks made in return for divine favour are numerous. First of all, though, a black goat is sacrificed within the goddess's field of vision. There is probably further significance to the sacrifices: Having made available all her life force for others, the goddess is once again empty. The extent of this can be gauged by the number of animals sacrificed. With the animal sacrifices the *koṭai* is at an end. It is 4:00 P.M. in the afternoon.

9.3 Notes on the Inner Logic of the Ritual System in Paḻavūr

In the following sections I attempt to exhibit the inner logic of the ritual system that I have described above. In order to do so, I follow the rituals as they unfold. An analysis of the system is greatly furthered by looking at its major components and junctures. I highlight those that the ritual specialists,[201]

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[197] Concerning what is called *mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu* Blackburn (1980:234) writes: "The second form of possession [...] is standard [...]. It is known as 'dancing with turmeric water' (mañcaḷ nīr āṭutal)." The main pūjārī explained that for him the mere fact that he is able to sprinkle the boiling turmeric water on his body without the appearance of pustules is proof of his being possessed (interview held on 9 May 2002); cf. Blackburn 1980:234f.: "[T]he presence of the deity within [the *cāmiyāṭi*] prevents any burning."

[198] Not everybody, apparently, is possessed. The police inspector for one seems to have been designated to dance, but seems not to be possessed by the deity. He appears to be dancing on his own, a form of dance called *taṉ āṭṭam* by Blackburn (1980:255).

[199] I rely here on the interpretation offered by Professor T. Naṭarājaṉ, Maturai Kamrāj University, and the bow-song bard T.M.P.

[200] Singh's (1998:3638) characterisation of "manjalneerattu vizha" as a puberty rite, observed, for instance, by the Veḷḷalas of North Arcot, accords with this. See also Singh 1998:3642. For the puberty rites of the Śaiva Ceṭṭiyārs, see Singh 1997:318. In their rites, the "aunt pours *manjal neer* (turmeric water) on the girl's head."

[201] The term *ritual specialist* refers exclusively to the actors in the ritual who are responsible for its efficacy.

including the bow-song bard, identify as the most significant, and look at how these significant portions relate to the needs of those gathered for the ritual, the villagers. Such an undertaking is useful in the first place for understanding the transformative process and the highly original way experiences are organised within it. I have divided this ritual practice into various components, which include the goddess's self-recognition and her self-procreation, reorientation, and reintegration, and I suggest that once all the components are enacted the transformation can be said to have occurred. In this particular system, healing[202] seems to be understood as an external impetus, a stimulus generated from the outside, which sows the seeds for what follows.

Furthermore, the discussion also looks at how the local people experience and understand problems of reproduction within the cultural environment in which they live. I devote particular attention to the system of causes (etiology), in this case, the villagers' view of the sources of their reproductive problems. These problems are often attributed to demons (*pūtam*s, *pēy*s)[203] (see the local Icakki story; Section 9.3.4.2), and therefore the conception of how demons act in the human domain is integral to this ritual system.

9.3.1 Icakki Inside Meets Icakki Outside, Another Version of Herself[204]

The most relevant aspect of this multifaceted ritual practice is the two versions of Icakki:[205] The one version is Icakki-inside-the-shrine, enclosed in a world that is wild and inhabited by spirits. Here she lives in a state of hostility; everyone who approaches and challenges her is a potential victim. She is enclosed in a world of deep dissatisfaction, separation, and hungry emptiness—feelings she externalises by taking life. This side of her is very pronounced in both the *IK* and the local Icakki story. The second version is Icakki-outside-the-shrine—the diametrical opposite of the Icakki within. She is harmonised and a generative and fertilising presence, as seen by the fact that her image is displayed in an act of thanksgiving for having granted the blessing of offspring at the *koṭai* festival of the previous year. From the outset, the goddess inside the shrine is invited by the *koṭai* to initiate a transformative process towards the life-giving nature of the other version of herself, a lost side she needs to regain. By being shown her opposite self[206]—or rather, what she could become—she is made aware of the vitality of her erotic and fertile benevolence, which has been eclipsed by former events. It is not only my view that the face-to-face meeting of the two configurations of Icakki's identity results in an awakened awareness on the part of the Icakki-inside-the-shrine. The ritual specialists, too, consider that this is what happens: they assert that a transfer of power—or, we may say, of identity—from Icakki-outside-the-shrine to Icakki-inside-the-shrine has taken place.[207] In addition, they affirm that a transfer from inside to outside is mediated in turn by the priest on behalf of the Icakki inside, and marked by a sign of acceptance (in

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[202] When speaking of healing, I consider, as Csordas (2002:3) suggests, that "the object of healing [...] is not elimination of a thing ([...] a problem [...] a disorder), but transformation of a person, a self [...]"; or following Krippner (1994:183), "[that healing is] attaining wholeness or harmony with the community, the cosmos, and one's body, mind, emotions, and/or spirit." On the connection between healing and self-transformation, cf. Shulman and Stroumsa 2002. In their introduction these authors state: "[T]ransformation [...] means the healing movement towards a wider sanity [...]. [T]he very concept of healing in the context of self-transformation entails concerns of integration and voice" (ibid.:12).

[203] The two terms are used interchangeably by the local people, although they convey different meanings. *Pēy* may be the Prakrit loanword *peya,* from Skt. *preta* (spirit of a dead person [in limbo], and *pūtam,* a loanword from Skt. *bhūta* (demon). Writing in the year 1713, Ziegenbalg referred to *pēy*s as "evil spirits" (see Nabokov 1997:299), in accordance with the contemporary usage of the word: "[...] throughout Tamilnadu the word *pēy* usually characterizes the spirits of people who [...] met an 'untimely' [...] death [...] which prevented their transit into the hereafter" (ibid.).

[204] For a description, see Sect. 9.2.1, pp. 286ff. above.

[205] We speak here of two complementary configurations of the goddess. They are often also designated as the younger sister version and the elder sister version, a categorisation that springs from the cultural outlook of the Tamils.

[206] For a definition of the term *self* as applied in this work, see Sect. 8.2, p. 274f., point 7 above.

[207] See Sect. 9.2.1, p. 289, n. 52.

the form of jasmine flowers).[208] This sign must be understood as her having taken notice of the existence of another version of herself, of which she has been unaware. Persuading the highly destructive, child-devouring goddess to meet her other self is the beginning of a process of signs working upon her consciousness—signs that have the potential to change her picture of the world and of herself.[209] This should be interpreted as a procedure for making her remember her connection to a human type of social behaviour, and more importantly, for causing her to be attracted to a harmonic cosmos that is generative and fertile. Both changes benefit the villagers, who desire her good offices, but they seem of no less benefit to the violent goddess herself, seeing that she has forgotten who else she could be.

9.3.2 *Alaṅkāram:* Generating Self-Recognition in the Goddess[210]

The self and its transformative qualities[211] have been discussed illuminatingly in a publication edited by Shulman and Stroumsa (2002) and in the article by Don Handelman (1995) titled "The Guises of the Goddess and the Transformation of the Male." The parameters set by these scholars (particularly Handelman) are useful for exploring similar features in the *koṭai* under discussion. Given the ritual's insistence that the goddess radically change, I shall try to show the actual process of her inner change, as determined within a ritual system that opposes a goddess who, in the legends about her, was notorious for violently blocking reproduction. The view that the *koṭai* invites the goddess to initiate a transformation into another version of herself has been outlined above. Each of the major ritual junctures contributes to this process—most particularly, the moments of *alaṅkāram* (ornamentation), which, I would argue, induce the goddess's self-recognition. It is through the *alaṅkāram* that the goddess acquires her sense of self. In other words, the split goddess, whose self-awareness has been diminished, becomes conscious of who she is and what her relation to others is.[212] The *alaṅkāram* enables this process to unfold. It is thus not surprising that it is as a result of the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* that the goddess first emerges.[213] The people's emotional response makes her actively present. Decorating her with flowers initiates her change in the direction of the newly made terra-cotta figure.[214] The flowers fill her with the world of this figure.[215] Presented from without as a gift *(koṭai)*, they effect a change in the goddess's internal state. The garlanding attracts her attention, shows her the people's appreciation of her, and so touches her emotions. It should be clear that the purpose of adorning her is not only to allow devotees *darśana* of her, but also to induce a process of self-knowledge within her, towards a form that people can appreciate and relate to emotionally. In the context of Andhra Pradesh, Handelman (1995:324f.) has pointed out that a goddess's self-recognition occurs through "an external perspective that will tell her [...] how she is [...]." In our case, too, the same can be said: the impulse comes from without.

The *alaṅkāram,* then, is directed towards the goddess's self-recognition and her recognition by others. She wants to be recognised[216]—a desire that she clearly expresses, for instance, in the *IK* at the

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[208] For a description, see Sect. 9.2.1, p. 289, n. 51.

[209] This initial act of the transformative process begins with the *kumbhābhiṣeka* ritual.

[210] For a description of the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*, see Sect. 9.2.1, pp. 290f.

[211] The transformative qualities of the self can be: "to shift, to split [parts], to unravel, to disappear, to cumulate new levels or parts, to disencumber itself of levels of parts, to refashion, deepen, or diminish its own self-awareness in changing contexts [...]" (Shulman and Stroumsa 2002:4).

[212] See the definition of "self-concept, or identity" in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 14:838. My view owes much to Don Handelman's essay on Gangamma (1995:326).

[213] The link between a god's "coming into presence" and a "god's awareness" has been described by Handelman and Shulman (2004:39). The authors state: "Śiva's coming into presence, that is consciousness, is a primary, quotidian goal."

[214] On the ability of emotional responses to cause profound changes in the body and brain, see Damasio 1999.

[215] The notion of a god's being filled and emptied was introduced by Handelman and Shulman (2004:38). – Concerning the metaphoric link between flowering and a woman's maturity, see Ramanujan 1995:35: "[A] woman's biological and other kinds of creativity are symbolized by flowering."

[216] On the need for recognition, see also Handelman and Shulman 2004. In an insightful analysis of the myth of Śiva's

time of her divine appearance to the Ceṭṭi: "When you see (me)—don't you recognise this woman?" (lines N1.1128-9; forest scene). Icakki wants to be seen; to be appreciated. Aṉṉatāṭci, the protagonist in the northern version N7, expresses this same desire when she complains that her husband, the Brahmin Āticēṣaṉ, had not looked at her since the day of their wedding. Here the implication is that he has not consummated the marriage. I argue that the people's recognition of the goddess's maturation, creativity, and richness brings her to life and makes her present.

This opinion is shared by the sixty-year-old bow-song bard T. Muthucami Pulavar (Nāṭār community), as is evident from the importance he attaches to the *alaṅkāram* passage of the *IK*. He sang this particular section of the *katai* for me during an interview I held with him on 10 May 2002. For him, the *alaṅkāram* passage is the most important part of the story[217]—the main highlight of it. It is at this point that possession by the goddess should occur:

> [He sang:] "She appears, dressed suitably [...] in silk, the *mēkalai* around her waist. She wears gold jewels; she has oiled her beautiful hair. That deity with beautiful hair appears just like a moon." [He continued:] "That young lady, that teenage woman—in order to beautify herself, she has tied her lovely long hair into a knot. She exposes the sacred *tāli* on her neck. She smears *mañcaṇai* [on herself]" [N10.1073/1079] [end of the demonstration]. First of all, God gives her the *mañcaṇai*. [He sang again:] "She smears sandalwood and applies red *kuṁkumam*. 'O Ceṭṭiyār, stop here!' That sweet-tongued Icakki, that deity, appears in such a way" [end of the demonstration]. If the deity does not come, I have to sing the part [that begins] "*tōṉṟiṇāḷ* (she appeared)...." again in a special tune. Exactly at midnight I shall sing the part "*tōṉṟiṇāḷ Icakkiyammai.*" If I begin with that line, it is where the power will possess me. At that time, too, the pūjā will be performed. The power of Icakki will enter a particular person. All are attracted by that time. The man who possesses the power of Icakki will begin to act.

I remember well that when T.M.P. performed the entire story at my request in November 2002, his body expressed the emergence of the goddess at this particular point of the story. I, too, his audience, responded emotionally to the tune and the power with which this passage was sung. Perhaps there was something at work similar to what Shulman and Stroumsa (2002:9) describe in another context: "to sing the poem is both to conjure up the presence of the deity within the self [in our case, within the bow-song bard,] and to be transformed."

To conclude, the goddess is not merely what she appears to be. Her self-perception has been diminished. The focus on generating self-discovery within the goddess—a recognition of herself—clearly shows that the problem consists in her having forgotten[218] her relationship with the social world and its generative qualities. Most importantly, it presents a view of people's understanding of how it is possible to induce an inner change in her. In this section, I have attempted to capture something of this and to display the

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adventures in the Dāruvana (forest of pine) the two scholars argue that Śiva must be recognised, and indeed is recognised, by the sages' wives of the pine forest.

[217] His assessment of the importance of the *alaṅkāram* passage in the *IK* is not shared by all bow-song singers. The forty-two-year-old G. Muttuleṭcumi (Tēvār community), the bow-song singer of the *koṭai* being described here, and her husband S. Gopikriṣṇaṉ hold the revenge scene to be the most important: "The revenging part is the important part. [...] She avenges her being killed by the Ceṭṭi. We will cut short the story if we are asked to do so. [...] We come immediately to the place where she takes revenge. We will omit all other portions and will sing about the story where she took vengeance on the Ceṭṭi in the *ilaṅkam*" (interview held on the second day of the *koṭai*, 8 May 2002). Pakialeṭcumi, the Nāṭār woman from Teṟkukkūṇṭal in her sixties who provided me with the N2 version, declared for her part that the murderous act of Lakṣmī's lover was the most important segment: [She sang:] *kal eṭuttu talaiyilēyē pōṭṭāṉ.... kaḷḷi nīyē cāṭci,* "He took a stone and killed her.... *Kaḷḷi* plant, you are the witness!" Thus while T.M.P. accords precedence to the ornamentation acts *(alaṅkāram)* and the divine appearance of the protagonist, the other two consider the antagonist's criminal deed and its injustice as being central—the latter a choice of emphasis perhaps indicative of the fact that injustice and revenge figure prominently in the lives of individual members of Tamil society.

[218] The goddess's forgetting that she had been a woman and originally had felt solidarity with women is a theme that Caldwell (1999:210f.) points out in another context, one relating to the closure of the eastern door at the Panayannarkavu Bhagavatī temple near Chengannur, Kerala. It is "a place where guruti was done by human sacrifice. A pregnant lady was the last person. [...; because of her pregnancy she was not sacrificed]. [F]rom then onwards it was decided [...], no more women. After that, [...] cows and goats were offered. Then it became chickens. Now it's this turmeric water with lime" (an interview with an Ezhava sweeper woman at the Panayannarkavu Bhagavatī temple near Chengannur held by Sarah Caldwell.

"'raw' moment"[219] of the goddess's self-recognition as translated into a performance. My video material (and the description in Section 9.2.1) of the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai,* which results in the transition to the flowerbed, makes the moment in which the *alaṅkāram* generates the goddess's self-recognition and leads to her emergence in a body palpable. Bringing herself into visual presence allows the goddess to face herself in the world and consequently to re-create her sense of self. Yet the fact that the performance of the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai* is repeated three times suggests that its effects are far from lasting.[220]

9.3.3 The Goddess's Self-Procreation: Icakki Rolls into Icakki

This section begins by recapitulating two points. First, the goddess is split from the fertile part of herself. Second, the goddess, having acquired an awareness of what has been lost in her own self, is ready to regain her vital core and re-create herself. It is the flowerbed ritual,[221] I would argue, that resolves the contradiction within the goddess's self, with refined methods that guide her elegantly towards the goal. The interpretive possibilities of this ritual segment revolve around the highly anticipated goal of finding the pandanus *(tāḻampū)* and areca flowers *(kamukampū)*, the ultimate moment of the goddess's full self-procreation and self-recognition, in which the split self reveals itself within herself. My interpretation rests essentially on an understanding of the nature of the flowerbed. We can speak and think of the flowerbed as being the goddess's fertile version of herself[222] offered to her by the villagers.[223]

Several points require closer attention. I shall begin my elaboration by an examination of the markers of the erotic and fertile aspects of the flowerbed. That the flowerbed becomes the locus of the goddess's amusement or play *(viḷaiyāṭal)* is disclosed by the following words:

> When she comes, she will play there. She comes out to play on this flowerbed. She is very happy to play on the flowerbed, [said the main pūjārī in an interview held on 19 January 2003. Asked what he meant by "playing," he replied:] She is joyful. During the *koṭai* she comes out and plays. After the pūjā, at the time when the drums beat, she will be extremely joyful—in the afternoon, in the evening, and at midnight (*camakoṭai)*. [Asked with whom she plays, he said:] She plays alone. If there is more than one, they are also possessed by this Icakki. All are considered to be one. The person who plays on the flowerbed belongs to our family.

That this key ritual[224] is sequentially closely related to the *alaṅkāram,* the moment of the goddess's self-recognition, is most significant and makes perfect sense. The interwovenness of the two segments is also pointed out by the main pūjārī:

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[219] Shulman and Stroumsa (2002:8) state: "We have no access to the 'raw' moment of transformation; what we have is a wealth of textualized materials."

[220] Cf. Shulman and Stroumsa 2002:6, which discusses the impermanence of changes in the self.

[221] For a description of the flowerbed rituals, see Sects. 9.2.1, pp. 292ff. and 9.2.2, p. 311.

[222] That the pūjārī performs a *tīpārātaṇai* by circumambulating the flowerbed adds to the argument that the flowerbed *is* the goddess.

[223] It seems apparent to me that the ritual community is fully aware of the goddess's state. If a parallel can be drawn with a childless woman within a Tamil family, the goddess's infertility is a blight upon her people. A woman who is infertile is likely to be pitied and tacitly considered flawed and incomplete. The villagers evidently sense that when someone feels inadequate, the whole social group is affected. Obviously, the villagers mobilise on Icakki's behalf. They attempt to satisfy the goddess in order to allow her to regain the vital core of her self. Towards that end, the ritual specialists must fill her with what she lacks. (This role of the caretaker is reminiscent of what might be called Nīlaṉ's role of providing dynamic stability to his sister in the story. We may see them, then, as standing in for the brother figure.) – Up to the end of the crucial second ritual cycle there are altogether three offerings *(paṭaippu)*: two flower offerings *(pūppaṭaippu)*—one each in the first and second ritual cycles—and one food offering *(poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu)* in the second ritual cycle.

[224] Asked about the importance of the flowerbed, the main pūjārī replied: "In the *koṭai* festival Ammaṉ plays on the flowerbed. Therefore it is considered to be the most important ritual. [More important than other segments?] Yes, more important."

> When the deity comes alive, the flowerbed must be there in order to play on it. At the time of the *alaṅkāram pūjā* Ammaṉ should come and play on the flowerbed. (Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai, in the interview held on 19 January 2003)

As stated earlier, various markers point up the erotic and fertile aspect of the flowerbed. Apart from the flowerbed's own cultural meaning as a locus of love-making,[225] two botanical markers, placed in the centre of the uppermost layer, require closer attention: the *tāḻampū* and *kamukampū* flowers. These botanical markers are key elements. The *tāḻampū* flower (in classical Tamil literature known as *tāḻai* and *kaitai,* Skt. *ketakī/ketaka,* Te. *mugali,* Latin *Pandanus odoratissimus,* Engl. screw pine),[226] of a bewitching, strong fragrance,[227] clearly has highly sensuous overtones. S.M. Gupta (2001:63) writes about *tāḻampū* flowers: "Flowers of *Ketaki* are generally worn by young girls to win lovers."[228] The eroticism they arouse is illustrated by the following myth:

> One day Siva was playing a game of dice with his wife Parvati. Parvati defeated him. Feeling ashamed he hid in the *Ketaki* woods and got absorbed in meditation. Parvati sensed his feelings and approached him to entice him back. With his eyes closed in deep meditation, Mahadeva neither saw her nor felt her presence. Parvati then approached him wearing *Ketaki* flowers in her hair. The sweet fragrance of *Ketaki* flowers distracted him. Getting annoyed at being thus disturbed, he cursed the *Ketaki* flowers. (Gupta 2001:62).[229]

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[225] See my reflections on the first flowerbed ritual in Sect. 9.2.1, pp. 295f.

[226] Ta. *tāḻampū*, can be found as *tāḻai* (DEDR 3183) and *kaitai* (DEDR 2026) in ancient Tamil Caṅkam poetry. Both words refer to the same flower (see also the discussion on the etymology in Vacek 1999:153). Vacek (1999:150 n. 8) has counted the number of occurrences of these words in Caṅkam literature: "[T]he term kaitai appears only about 8 times (Akanāṉūṟu 3 times [i.e. *Aka.* 170.9], Naṟṟiṇai 3 times, Kuṟiñci and Kalittokai have 1 each). The term tāḻai appears almost 40 times, the majority being in Akanāṉūṟu (9), Naṟṟiṇai (10), Kuṟuntokai (7) [i.e. *Kuṟ* 163.4], and Kalittokai (5). Several other texts have just one or mostly two occurrences (Puṟam). No occurrences are found in Aiṅkuṟuṉūṟu" (the brackets are mine). For an exact listing of the occurrences of the terms in Caṅkam literature, see the index in Lehmann and Malten 1992:173, 224. – *Tāḻai,* too, can be found in Tamil *kāppiyam* literature: *Cil.* 2.17, 6.166, 8.49, 22.68, 27.237 (see the indices in S.V. Subramanian 1965:164 and the *Cilappatikāram,* ed. U.V.C. 1978:684). On *tāḻai,* see also N. Subramanian 1966:425. – The female flower is of light yellow colour. Syed (1990:235) remarks: "Bemerkenswert ist die Tatsache, daß die Schraubenbaumgewächse [screw pine; B.S.] nur [...] eingeschlechtliche[...] Blüten kennen, die getrennt auf den männlichen bzw. weiblichen Pflanzen wachsen und daß die Inder *ketaka* und *ketakī* nennen, was auf eine Kenntnis dieser botanischen Gegebenheit hindeuten könnte." S.M. Gupta (2001:63) states: "*Ketaki* is a densely branched, rarely erect, evergreen tree growing in the low moist swampy places in the Andaman islands and on the coastline of India. The plant with strong roots and its trunk studded with short prickles, is aphrodisiac, and induces sleep." The natural habitat of *ketakī* is on marshy ground; see the Sanskrit literature cited in Syed 1990:230, 232, 234. – The *neytal* (seashore) lines in *Cil.* 6.166 provide us with evidence that the *tāḻai/ketakī* is native to coastal regions. – In Tāḻakkuṭi, where Puruṣā Tēvi Icakki resides under the name of Muppiṭāri Ammaṉ, there is a *tāḻampū* growing close to her shrine.

[227] Its Latin name, *Pandanus odoratissimus,* clearly reflects the penetrating scent of this flower. Gandhi (2000:121) states: "The Keora [Hindi for *tāḻai*] is mentioned frequently in Tamil classics as having flowers which neutralize with their strong perfume the foul fish odour pervading the sea coast. The flowers are swan-like in shape and are worn in the hair. [...] Jehangir in his memoirs, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, [...] writes that [the] scent [of *tāḻampū*] is so strong and penetrating that it even obscures that of musk." The ability of the *tāḻai/tāḻampū* to neutralise fish odour is mentioned in *Cil.* 6.166, in the chapter on the seashore, "Kaṭal āṭu kātai": *kaṭaṟpulavu kaṭinta maṭaṟpūn tāḻaic / ciṟaicey vēli yakavayi ṇāṅku [...]*, "There in a place confined by a fence of flowering screw pines *(tāḻai)* that drives off the foul fish smell of the sea [...]" (6.166-7). – On the penetrating fragrance of the *ketakī/tāḻai* blossom, see also Syed 1990:234.

[228] During my field research, this was confirmed by young Tamil women.

[229] The statement of T.M.P., bow-song bard and great devotee of Śiva, is quite interesting: "[...] *tāḻampū* is not suitable for the temple. It is a danger for Śiva" (personal communication). There is a myth in *Skanda-Purāṇa* (tr. G.V. Tagare 1992:44ff.) I.1.6.25ff., that offers one more reason why Śiva curses the plant: Owing to a curse by the forest sages, Śiva's *liṅga* fell to the ground, where it continued to grow in size (6.25) until it pervaded the entire universe. Both Brahmā and Viṣṇu decided to go in search of its ends in two different directions, Viṣṇu in the lowest regions and Brahmā in the highest (6.34). Viṣṇu accepted his defeat at not finding the end of the *liṅga,* but Brahmā decided to cheat, saying that he had reached the top of the *liṅga* (6.44). The *ketakī* bore false witness for him (6.55-8). For this falsehood, the *ketakī* flower was rejected by Śiva, who had meanwhile appeared, and he laid a curse on it that it never be offered again in his worship, despite its wonderful fragrance (6.63). This myth is also found in *Śiva-Purāṇa* (tr. Board of Scholars 1981:56f.),Vidyeśvara-Saṁhitā, 7.19ff. There it is related that the *ketakī* flower fell from the head of Śiva when he bursts out in laughter over the contest between Brahmā and Viṣṇu. Brahmā, in search of the summit of Śiva in his form as a column of fire, asked the *ketakī* flower to bear false witness, in the presence of Viṣṇu, that he (Brahmā) had indeed reached the top of the column (7.24-5). See also Syed 1990:233. As remarked by Gupta (2001:63): "The Nair girls do not use its flowers for adorning their hair because the plant was cursed by Siva."

Asked for the meaning of the *tāḻampū* flower for Icakki, Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai (Ceṭṭi-Veḷḷāḷa community), the main pūjārī, stated in an interview held on 15 December 2002:

> Icakki likes only that fragrance. Young snakes reside inside the *tāḻampū*.[230] [...] She likes everything that comes from the source of evil power. Icakki likes the fragrance of *tīyaśakti* (fiery power).[231] Without *tāḻampū* we do not allow this flowerbed [ritual] to be held.

This flower signifies bodiliness and eroticism. This meaning is further underscored by the other flowers and substances placed on the plantain leaf:[232] jasmine, the fragrant, tender leaves of the *koḻuntu* shrub,[233] lime,[234] the red *mañcaṇai* paste mixture, and the *kamukampū* (areca flower).[235] Interestingly, the areca flower in particular is considered to be a transformative substance related to fertility.[236] As remarked by Honko (1998:230) in his description of one of the segments of the Siri cult:

> Soon it was the Siri women's turn to receive the areca flowers. [...] a few of them [were] already in mild possession. As soon as they got the areca flower, they began to rock it as a child in their arms.

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[230] On the belief that the plant is inhabited by snakes, see Böhtlingk 1966:349, aphorism 6331: "*vyālāśrayāpi viphalāpi sakaṇṭakāpi vakrāpi paṅkilabhavāpi durāsadāpi / gandhena bandhur asi ketaki sarvajantor eko guṇaḥ khalu nihanti samastadoṣān,* 'Obgleich du, o Ketakī (Pandanus odoratissimus), Schlangen als Behausung dienst, keine Früchte trägst, mit Dornen versehen und krumm bist, auf sumpfigem Erdreich wächst und schwer zugänglich bist, so bist du doch Jedermann durch deinen Duft ein lieber Angehöriger: ein einziger Vorzug macht ja sämtliche Fehler zu Nichte.'" On young snakes surrounding the *ketakī* blossom, see Syed (1990:231), who cites *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* 10.33. – For further references to *ketakī* in Indian aphorisms, see Böhtlingk 1966, aphorisms 1159, 1719, 2083, 2128, 3897, 7093, 7607. – For a further source, see the Tamil *kāppiyam Cīvakacintāmaṇi* of Tiruttakkatēvar (very probably not earlier than ninth century, Zvelebil 1995:169), in which the hero Cīvakaṉ—called to cure Patumai of a snakebite—in a discourse on the different types of snakes remarks that "a snake that smells like the *tāḻai* flower *(Pandanus odoratissimus)* belongs to the Vaṇikaṉ (merchant) type of snakes," *tāḻait taṭamalar vaṇika ṉāṟum* (*Cīvakacintāmaṇi* 1287.3 [ed. Po.Vē. Cōmacuntaraṉār 1967:733]). From the different sources we can perhaps draw a tentative conclusion that the pandanus flower has been traditionally associated with the Vaṇikaṉ caste. This assumption is supported by *Cil.* 22.68, which mentions the *tāḻampū*, a corruption of the old term *tāḻai,* as being, along with other flowers, in the hair of the demon of the merchant caste: **61 அரைச பூதத் தருந்திறற் கடவுளும்... 66 நாஞ்சிலும் துலாமு மேந்திய கையினன்... 68 (வெட்சி தாழை கட்கம ழாம்பல் 69 சேட னெய்தல் பூளை மருதம் 70 கூட முடித்த சென்னிய ன்...)** (*Cil.* [ed. U.V.C. 1978:492], Chap. 22, "Alaṟpaṭu kātai" (Conflagration of Maturai), 61, 66, 68-70; the text in parentheses belongs to the interpolation.), "61 And there was the demon *(pūtam)* of the kingly class, a victorious god [leaving the burning city] ... 66 He held in his hand a plough and a pair of scales, [emblems of agriculture and trade], ...70 (in his topknot tied together 68 [various] flowers: *veṭci*, pandanus *[tāḻai]*, *āmpal* with the fragrance of honey, 69 *cēṭal*, *neytal*, *pūḻai*, *marutam*)." The "kingly class" of line 61 are the Ceṭṭiyārs, who consider themselves of high rank. See also the *IK*, where the Ceṭṭi explicitly places his community on a par with petty kings.

[231] Tamils usually translate *tīyaśakti* as "evil power," but I consider "fiery *(tī)* power" more appropriate and think that this is perhaps close to what the main pūjārī meant.

[232] See the exact arrangement of the different flowers, leaves, and substances in Figure 3, p. 295. Asked what significance this particular arrangement has and whether it could be changed, the main pūjārī could give me no explanation, but added: "From olden days we have been following this tradition—for what reason we don't know. We don't want to change it. We blindly follow the tradition. If we change the arrangement, Ammaṉ will get angry and will kill our family members" (interview held on 19 January 2003).

[233] Young women wear these leaves in their hair. Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (2002:71) tells of a tale in which "[t]he fragrance [of the *koḻuntu* leaves ...] attracted a demon's passion."

[234] A lime is cooling (and so an object of attraction) for hot *pēy*s (demons) who appear to passers-by in the forest (see the *katai* N1.1135-6). T. Natarajan, in his unpublished seminar paper (1986), writes that the fact they are demons is revealed when they ask for a lime.

[235] The whisk of areca is most important in the possession rituals of the Siri cult of southern Karnataka. On areca, see Hirschberg 1988:56: "B. [i.e. Betel] hat eine große Bedeutung im Lebensbrauchtum, so bei Geburt, Initiation, als Liebesgabe (wird die Betelnuß vom Partner oder der Partnerin akzeptiert, so gilt dies als klares Zeichen), bei Hochzeit und Tod." For the areca nut in *yakṣī* iconography, see Bühnemann 2000:118f., where mention is made of Vaṭayakṣiṇī in the *Mantramahodadhi,* a deity whose iconography features an areca nut. Bühnemann remarks (ibid.:119) that the vision of this *yakṣī* shows her "asking the worshipper for sexual intercourse."

[236] I am very grateful to Nir Avieli, graduate student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for the valuable information relating to similar beliefs in China having to do with the areca flower.

It is notable that this flower is placed diagonally across[237] the *tāḻampū*. Hart (1999:165) provides us with examples in early Tamil Caṅkam love poetry where two plants are described as intertwined, suggesting love-making.

From what has been said, it is apparent that the flowers of the uppermost layer in general, and the *tāḻampū* flower in particular, add to the evidence that the flowerbed is the goddess's vital self, and the *tāḻampū* and *kamukampū* its centre.

Rolling on the Flowerbed

In order to understand the rolling on the flowerbed as a moment critical for the goddess's transformation, not only a description but also an interpretation of the process will be required. Given that the divine presence is figured and embodied in the flowerbed, I would argue that in rolling on it the split goddess rolls back into herself, filling herself with herself.[238] The act of rolling bears witness to a vital dynamic. It is a three-dimensional movement towards the heart of the goddess's cosmos, the centre of erotic harmony and fertility. In concrete terms, it is a movement into the layers towards the centre of the flowerbed—the location of the pandanus and the areca flowers. Finding these flowers is, in our interpretation, finding and merging with the fertile part of her split self.[239] Her physically burrowing into herself and fertilising herself, in a sexually suggestive manner, is an act of self-procreation, in which she reveals herself to be an androgynous virgin goddess.[240] This being an inherently ritual act, perhaps the flowerbed can indeed be seen as a kind of *yantra.*[241]

To conclude, the goddess is offered the flowery body in order to fill and fertilise herself. This interpretation fittingly applies to the concept of self-fertilisation as manifested not only by women both in the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai* (N4) and in version N7 of the *IK,* but also by most flowering plants.[242] My interpretation of the flowerbed ritual, then, is to view the goddess's sensuous playing *(viḷaiyāṭal)* as being an act of self-procreation,[243] during which the fertile self reveals itself within the goddess. This revelation is signalled by the discovery of the pandanus and areca flowers. We may say that finding herself induces a change in the goddess and makes her internal resources readily accessible. It produces intimacy, both physical and emotional, and brings her close to the people who desire her help. This can probably be considered the true moment of *alaṅkāram*.

However, the tension within the goddess's procreated cosmos is not fully resolved. Depending on the circumstances, it may become either potently fertile or turn aggressive.[244] This ambiguous state is clearly seen in the fusion segment at midnight, which will be discussed in Section 9.3.4.2 below.

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[237] See Figure 3, p. 295.

[238] On the opening of inner space as a prerequisite for self-transformation, see Handelman 2002:246f. See also Guy Stroumsa's contribution in the same volume.

[239] On the womb or vagina being the flower par excellence, see Trawick (1978:141).

[240] The virginal goddess has long been a topic of discussion in Indological studies. With respect to Tamil goddesses, Shulman 1980 stands out. The author proposes that the Tamil goddess is "in some sense bisexual," and calls her "male-female hybrid" quality an "original conception" of virgin goddesses (ibid.:295). Cf. Nichter (1977:141) on the androgynous concept of *pūtam*s in Tulunadu. See also my general discussion of Icakki's identity in Chap. 7 and, more specifically, in Sects. 7.6, 7.4 and 7.4.1. In Sects. 7.1 and 7.6 I stress the goddess's independent status; Sect. 7.6 concerns itself with her two configurations (male–female), corresponding emically to the pair of younger and elder sisters.

[241] See my reflections on the first flowerbed ritual in Sect. 9.2.1, pp. 295f.

[242] On self-fertilisation as it occurs in bisexual organisms, including most flowering plants, see *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 10:619. On the concept of tree fertility in the translocal *IK*, see Sect. 6.4, p. 229.

[243] The "active presence of play in the acts of creation [...] in Hinduism" has been noted by Handelman (1987:363, s.v. "Play").

[244] We have ample evidence of the goddess turning aggressive in the various stories about her, either because she is scarred by men's physical aggression (N1, N4, N7) or otherwise misused by men (local Icakki story). – On an androgynous goddess's aggressiveness being seen as masculine, see Shulman 1980:295.

9.3.4 Reorienting the Goddess in the Presence of the Past: Icakki Relives Her Story and Meets the Murderous Spirit within Herself[245]

9.3.4.1 The moment of fusion as a marker of ritual depth[246] and the turning point

In this section I shall be chiefly concerned with the goddess's reorientation and the manner in which it occurs. I argue that in order to become reoriented the goddess must re-encounter her own past, which has taught that regeneration is achieved and life gained only through murderous vengeance. The focus of this section lies in the moment, occurring at midnight, when the performance of the story, the drum music, and the possession fuse. Viewing more closely this moment of profound tension and violence will lead to an understanding of both the underlying therapeutic programme of reorientation and the concept of ritual depth. It will also provide the means of demonstrating how the local Icakki story, which is bound to a system of *memoria,* serves the interests of ritual depth by drawing the goddess and the villagers closer, to the point of making them directly involved with one another.

As a first step in this direction, let us consider the conclusion of the *IK*, which marks the starting point of the fusion. What we witness in this particular *koṭai* is an exception to the rule. In *koṭai* festivals held by the Vēḷāḷa community, the *cāmiyāṭṭam* usually takes place at the moment of the Vēḷāḷas' death.[247] The interviews with G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ (*kuṭam* player) and S. Svayamburajan[248] (bow-song singer) on 8 May 2003 at Paḻavūr confirm this:

> In Nāṭār temples, the *cāmiyāṭṭam,* or the dance of the deity, takes place when the Ceṭṭi is murdered. (584) In Piḷḷaimār [=Vēḷāḷa] temples they don't like this. They want it after their [= the Vēḷāḷas'] death, that is, after they went to Kailāsa and received the boon from Śiva (586). Then only is the power of the deity *(cāmiyāṭṭam)* expected to come (K-L.02.A.587).

Be that as it may, in our context the fusion of the *villuppāṭṭu* performance and the possession ritual clearly begins with the transition from the translocal to the local narrative,[249] and centres on the local Icakki story rather than the translocal *IK*. Both are stories assumedly containing some underlying real-life facts in them, but it is the local Icakki story that the villagers identify with, for it is about their own village. Blackburn and Flueckiger state as much:

> [O]ral epics in India have that special ability to tell a community's own story and thus help to create and maintain that community's self-identity (Blackburn et al. 1989:11).

It is thus no surprise that the local Icakki story is the central text of the *koṭai*. Given that it resonates more strongly with the local people, it is logical that the fusion, which marks the emergence of the goddess, should happen at this point in the performance. The need to finish the translocal *IK* shortly before midnight in order to begin with the local story is thus not accidental. We have seen that the lead singer skipped several pages of her script in order to keep to this schedule.[250] Independently of one another, both bow-song singers, G. Muttuleṭcumi and T. Muthucami Pulavar, pointed out that the emergence of the goddess occurs at midnight *(ucci nēram)*. G. Muttuleṭcumi, telling about her experiences at *koṭai* festivals in honour of Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, stated: "At midnight the deity possesses a person. The possession [...] will appear to a particular person, at a particular time" (K-L.01.352).

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[245] For a description of the moment of fusion, see Sect. 9.2.2, midnight session, pp. 305f.

[246] For general remarks on ritual depth in *villuppāṭṭu* performances, see Blackburn 1980:237ff.

[247] The terms *Vēḷāḷa* and *Karaiyāḷar* are used interchangeably.

[248] In the following I shall refer to him as SR.

[249] We are dealing with two strands of the story, the translocal and the local. This is important to bear in mind when attempting to understand the way in which the *IK* is kept alive. For the people of the *villuppāṭṭu* regions, the two strands are interrelated, in that they reflect an overlapping regional and local identity, and also a common understanding of the goddess, whom they imagine to be constantly on the move.

[250] See my description of the *villuppāṭṭu* performance prior to the midnight session.

Yet the possession is induced by the *villuppāṭṭu* performance. How does this work? The *villuppāṭṭu,* as it increases in speed, is indicative of possession by the deity. G. Muttuleṭcumi confirmed this: "When possession comes, we sing speedily" (K.-L.01.341). Singing quickly requires performing in the *pāṭṭu* (song) style, a style that communicates ritual depth.[251] The statement of the lead singer underscores my impression, noted above, that the *villuppāṭṭu* is a hunter, as it were, who lures the goddess into becoming actively present.[252] SR,[253] a renowned bow-song singer of K.K.Dt., in an interview held on 8 May 2002 (K-L.01.A+02.A), also stressed the allurement that the *vil* exerts:

> It is called *varattu pāṭṭu* ("a song for inviting [a deity]"). [...] The pūjā is going on. The *mēḷam* is playing. It has some effect on the deity. [...] The lines must be sung with great speed. Then the power of the deity arises. [...] If we sing in praise of the deity, the power of the deity arises and she comes (K-L.01.A.736).[254] [...] We have to play the instrument at a high pitch (K-L.02.A.363). The power of the deity arises in response to our tune. That is what the bow-song is all about (366). We have to sing like that for some minutes at that particular time—that is all (368). And the *mēḷam* also will be performed at such a speed (369). In that way we also sing and perform with the instruments at a fast pace. (372) [SR illustrates the tune.] If we change the tune to a slow tempo, then there will be no *cāmiyāṭṭam* at all (K-L.02.A.375).

SR described the magic of his art when he compared the bow-song singer to a *mantiravāti*:

> In a sense the bow-song singer is a *mantiravāti*. In a way they are one. (392). If we perform the programme for a full night we are constantly speaking about Icakkiyammaṉ (394). We repeat her name again and again, the same way as the *mantiravāti* does (K-L.02.A.396).

Much the same is remarked by Blackburn (1980:266): "[T]he ritual power of a vil pāṭṭu performance is no different from that of shorter oral genres, e.g., the mantiram. In both, the ability to verbally name a thing becomes manipulative control over it."

That the goddess is aroused by words is also confirmed by the statement of the *kuṭam* player, G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, in an interview held on 8 May 2002. Though he was referring to Muttār Ammaṉ, his statement holds true for any deity:

> Only if the story is performed will the possession of the deity take place. The reason for this is that the person who is possessed by the deity has that power only after he has heard the sound of that particular story [being told]. If the performer sings in any other way, he will say, "This is not proper." They expect the particular words of the story to be heard (K.-L.01.180ff.).[255]

From this statement it is clear that the correct wording evokes a memory. This holds especially true for

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[251] There is a correlation between the *pāṭṭu* delivery style of dense text (a reflex of the text's fixity) and ritual depth. On this connection between the *pāṭṭu* style and ritual depth, see Blackburn 1980:347ff.

[252] Perhaps the function of the musical instrument explains the name of the genre: *villuppāṭṭu*, translated as "the song of the bow *(vil)*"—a hunter's tool, so to speak. Compare the "art of hunting" of Sri Lankan exorcists. Kapferer describes them as "seductive hunters of the demonic who deflect demons from their destructive course [...]" (2000:19). – Discussing the luring of a deity, the bow-song bard T.M.P., in an interview in *Puṉaikaḷam* (January-March 2002):103, pointed out yet another method used by the *villuppāṭṭu,* one not applied through the music but rather through the style of narration. However, this style seems to have been lost in contemporary *villuppāṭṭu* performances. In his demonstration of the two styles, he illustrated the difference nicely in a scene between Narada and a *rākṣasa,* in which the *rākṣasa* is asked to go to Śiva. In the old style, Narada, the emissary, gently approaches the r*ākṣasa* and sings praises of Śiva, whereas in the modern style Narada simply commands the *rākṣasa* to come, saying "Come, come! Śiva is calling you. Come [with me]!"

[253] I had the opportunity to meet SR, whose name is so well known that I had already heard of him in Chennai from people working in the National Archives at Egmore. He is a sought-after bow-song singer of the modern *villuppāṭṭu* style, and was originally chosen by the temple committee for the performance of the Icakki *koṭai* I describe here. Born in 1956 (K-L.02.A.603), and a later student of Taṅkacāmi Nāṭār of Alataṅkarai (K-L.01.B.385) and owner of a textile shop, SR is a gifted bow-song singer. It is said that at Curaṅkapāṟai Icakkiyammaṉ temple of Karuṅkal he was able to bring Icakki into the presence of the devotees after forty years of non-possession. (K-L.02.A.349). Icakki is his *kulateyvam* (family deity).

[254] SR gave an example to demonstrate this: "[T]he *kaḷḷi* plant is turned into a child [*kaḷḷitaṉai piḷḷai ākki*] and the music begins with these words (734): 'O Ammā, who kills the Ceṭṭi, come, come!'" (K-L.01.A.735).

[255] Blackburn (1980:266) writes in a similar vein: "[L]ocal people [...] stressed that the performance must be correct: 'If one word is in error, the cāmi will not come'."

the type B[256] goddess, who actually experienced what is being narrated. The goddess wants her story to be heard as she experienced it. After all, one of the functions of the *koṭai* is to make her life public. The transfer of suffering from a private to a public sphere is of crucial importance. Usually strongly discouraged from revealing their suffering to the outer world, women thus acquire a voice and enter the public domain.

In our context, then, what SR, G. Muttuleṭcumi, and Blackburn have referred to takes place at midnight. The *vil* and *mēḷam* (drums) go on a hunt to lure the goddess out into the open. Yet it seems that bringing the goddess into the full presence of devotees likewise demands attention on the part of the ritual gathering. As remarked by SR (interviewed on 8 May 2002):

> Each and every member in the audience *(sabha)* will be in a different mood. Some will be in a sorrowful mood. We have to make all the moods of the audience concentrated and focused on one point. [...] We try to make them attentive (K-L.01.B.018).

When I asked the bow-song singer G. Muttuleṭcumi (8 May 2002) whether she performs according to the taste of the audience, she answered in the affirmative, referring to the moment of the fusion:

> Yes, did you see? At the end of yesterday's performance I played a particular tune, and each and everyone appeared joyful. We can determine the psychological state of mind of the audience from facial expressions (K.-L.01.514).

Obviously, the *vil* (bow) hunts not only for the goddess but for the people who have gathered as well. Its aim is an intimate meeting of the two. If the *vil* is successful in its 'hunt,' the bow-song group earns a good name for itself, as G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ stated (8 May 2002):

> The people [...] will appreciate the artists, saying that they are good, because they evoked the power of the deity. One earns a reputation for the act of inviting [the deity]. Whether our programme is good or not, we earn a reputation only for this (K-L.01.B.057f.)

G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ stressed the visible presence of the goddess during the performance of the local story:

> For example, yesterday during our performance the deity came in front of us and expressed enjoyment by nodding its head (K.-L.01.143). The audience was very pleased to see this, assuming that the deity was enjoying the story, and afterwards would be gracious to the people of this area. (Interview with G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ held on 8 May 2002 at the *koṭai* festival in Paḻavūr)[257]

The crucial point concerning the fusion of the *villuppāṭṭu* narrative and the possession ritual is the attention the fusion commands. If the narrative is punctuated by acts of possession during its performance, these are thrown into the spotlight. The dialogue between ritual and narrative energises the goddess's story to the point where its message attains ritual depth. The force of the *villuppāṭṭu* and *mēḷam* pushes the narrative and the possession towards one another and unites them at a moment of maximum intensity. As a result of the fusion, the gaps segregating the worlds of narrative, ritual, and

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[256] This, it will be recalled, is Blackburn's (1980) categorisation.

[257] The statement reveals something of the bow-song singer's dependence on the ritual specialist and the person who is possessed. If the latter, for instance, is not pleased by the *villuppāṭṭu* group, it is possible that he may not undergo possession. S. Svayamburājan (SR), G. Gopikriṣṇaṉ, and G. Muttuleṭcumi, in an interview held on 8 May 2002 (Paḻavūr *koṭai* festival), pointed out their interdependence (K-L.02.A.182ff.). SR said: "First of all the pūjārī should have sympathy for the artist (184). Suppose they don't appreciate the bow-song singer; then the pūjārī will not act in a manner of one possessed by the deity, no matter how the artist may sing (185). The pūjārī will say with disgust: 'What is this song!' So when we enter into that temple we [have to] convince first of all the pūjārī (187). They will [attempt to] convince him: 'O this temple is great because of you alone!' (189). Otherwise, no matter how [well] we sing he will not be satisfied, and will not show himself possessed by the power of the deity. This is the link between pūjārī and artist (194)." (K-L.02.A.259): "The pūjārī is the person who has the say—only the pūjārī, not the trustee. [...] The relationship is between us and the pūjārī. We will do what the pūjārī says." G. Muttuleṭcumi (K-L.02.A.168f.) confirmed this: "We are only assisting them, that's all. They will say: 'You sing this part of the bow-song at the time of a particular ritual.' That's how they arrange things (177). We only support them."

women and men seem to close. If the assumption is correct that both the suffering inflicted upon women by men and the subliminal accusations made by women against other women are usually perceived only by women, and only sporadically realised by men (although they control the local sociopolitical structures), then the moment of fusion bridges this gap and makes the invisible visible. Through the sharing of all groups in the true knowledge of the state of social relations, the whole village is activated. The fusion has revealed a most crucial point. Something incredible is going on. One witnesses an angry woman who has no maternal instincts—a child-killer. At first she horrifies the viewers,[258] but then they are led to ask what drives Icakki to such extremes. What causes the anguish of a woman like her? The *villuppāṭṭu'*s function is to expose the female psyche publicly, while the task of the ritual is to offer a simultaneous enactment of it. Where both meet, an imprint is left.

At the moment of fusion, the ritual attains an ineffable depth reflective of a cosmic conflict, a clash: the challenging play of life and death. It is here that the goddess challenges humans to exist. This challenge creates the tension that leads to ritual depth.[259] The fusion, which takes place on an "unspaced" plane,[260] thrusts the audience into the heart of existence, revealing realities that are folded into one another: *āvatum peṇṇālē aḻivatum peṇṇālē,* "Becoming is through the female; destruction is through the female" (a Tamil proverb).[261] It lays bare the fragile nature of humans' existential being and offers "true seeing."[262]

Within the ritual process we are discussing here, the fusion marks a most interesting and significant point, one that Victor Turner probably would call "betwixt and between,"[263] an intermediate phase between no longer and not yet. For the goddess, this phase clearly imposes the urgent need to sever herself from her old destructive version of herself. However, in order to bring about a new state,[264] a ritually induced re-experiencing of the earlier destructiveness seems necessary. This conveys some sense of the complex ideas upon which the ritual process is based. The key to understanding this practice is the notion of regeneration by means of ritually returning to chaos and destructive forces.[265] If the reawakening and confronting is done intelligently, and with the intention to reintegrate, reorientation can occur. The conscious reliving of her past induced by the *villuppāṭṭu* can be seen to provide the goddess with an understanding of her demonic fragmentation. It allows her to reconsider her "feelings of interior asociality,"[266] her antimaternal attitude that rejects social relations and the reproductive capability of women. Reactivating her memory by calling up her story and its underlying motivation therefore leads her to a state of self-knowledge and redirects her destructive orientation. It allows her to see her role differently: as generative and beneficial to the world of human beings. The

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[258] Note that at the moment of fusion the audience is induced to adopt the position of "under-distancing." Concerning this notion, see Kapferer (1984:170f.), who distinguishes between an "under-distancing" (= "build-up of tension"), "aesthetic distancing" (= "balance of thought and feeling"), and "over-distancing" style of performance.

[259] Cf. Blackburn's (1980:277f.) comments: "Ritual depth is then greater in performance which present the fierce and murderous aspect of the goddess and less in performances which project her maternal and benevolent aspect."

[260] For a neurobiological explanation of the "unspaced" and "timeless" quality of ritual experience, see Laderman 1991:89. Referring to Barbara Lex ("The Neurobiology of Ritual Trance," in: *The Spectrum of Ritual:A Biogenetic Structural Analysis,* ed. Eugene G. D'Aquili et. al.) and R. Ornstein (*The Psychology of Consciousness*), the author remarks: "It is believed that the ability to assess duration of time is lacking in the right hemisphere [of the brain] (Lex 1979). Ornstein (1972) believes that ritual practices employing the rhythms of singing, chanting, clapping, and percussion instruments evoke and place into preeminence the right hemisphere's functions and inhibit those of the left hemisphere, accounting for the 'timeless' quality of the trance experience." For the term *unspaced,* see also Sect. 8.2, point 9 above.

[261] Here two configurations become visible: giving the breast and withholding the breast, or to put it differently, the loving mother and the devouring mother.

[262] This expression is Padel's (1995:78).

[263] Turner (1969:95) uses this expression to refer to liminal moments; see also Köpping 2003:188, "Dazwischensein." This ambivalent state is a potent phase of transition "in der die Partizipanten in einen Zustand *zwischen* allen möglichen Werten und Orientierungen versetzt werden, der neue zum Teil verstörende Erfahrungen zulässt" (Jaeger und Straub 2004:289).

[264] Köpping (2003:189) holds not only that chaos is necessary in order to re-establish harmony, but also that it is necessary to newly establish harmony and form it again and again.

[265] Cf. Köpping 2003:191.

[266] This phrase is Handelman's (2002:239).

villagers know that life is secured if she understands that destructive activities are no longer necessary. Letting the goddess confront the murderous spirit within her serves to remind her how disruptive her destructive states are,[267] both for the outer social world and for herself. Her past indeed stands in striking contrast with the flowerbed she has tasted in the present. She is thus offered a choice. This creates an openness to reorientation that, in turn, is critical to the efficacy of the ritual.

9.3.4.2 A system of *memoria*: The local Icakki story[268]

Let us now take a closer look at the local Icakki story, a narrative that is shaped by the theme of control and challenge *(aṟaikūvutal)*. Our first task will be to uncover this narrative's underlying meaning. What is the nature of the experience it relates? The local story refers to the people of Paḷavūr. It expresses in words realities that apply to them and lays bare the etiological (causal reasoning) processes they engage in to explain them. The story is the villagers' own version of the causes of death, encapsulating as it does their religious notions of spirits wading into human lives and their explanations of what happens within and to people. At the centre of the story are not only the crucial relationships between humans and hungry spirits against the backdrop of the practice of sorcery[269] on the one hand, and between men and women, on the other, but also relationships internal to the self.[270] The local story of Icakki is clearly concerned with problems of birth and infant mortality—in earlier days very common ones in rural areas. It is about a woman who dies a premature death during pregnancy. But it is also about a fragmented and violent goddess,[271] about a sorcerer *(mantiravāti),* and last but not least, about murders of revenge. The two main characters of the story are Icakki, by nature a hungry spirit *(pēy),* and Nampiyār, a *mantiravāti,* who knows the real nature of the young woman. Nampiyār is seen as being able to identify and deal with evil spirits. He knows that evil spirits are inherently deceitful and attempt to disguise their identity.[272] He is considered to be a stalker of spirits,[273] someone who can immobilise and control such beings by sorcery.[274] It is believed that a skilled sorcerer can change a vampire-like hungry spirit into an ordinary woman if he inserts a peg into the top of her head.[275] If, on the other hand, a powerful sorcerer is not permanently successful,[276] this can be taken as evidence that he has a false end in view, and in the

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[267] The goddess's guardian deities live in similar destructive states: first, Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, who greatly desires to have barren women under his control and to attack women who are seven months pregnant; second, Vairavaṉ, who goes begging with the severed head of the creator god Brahmā. See also Sect. 8.6 above.

[268] See the synopsis of this local story in Sect. 9.2.2, midnight session, p. 304 above.

[269] Kapferer's (1997) view of sorcery is helpful here. He argues that sorcery "illuminat[es] the processes whereby human beings create themselves and their realities. [...S]orcery practices [...] are exercises in the construction and destruction of the psychosocial realities that human beings live and share" (ibid.:301f.).

[270] Regarding the inner social world of the self, see my definition of self in Sect. 8.2, point 7, above.

[271] On violent goddesses as "a common south Indian prototype" and as a "translation of wronged woman into violent goddess," see Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam 1998:78; see also Brubaker 1978:122.

[272] Recall Icakki's tactic of disguise in the translocal *IK.*

[273] N4, the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai,* characterises a *mantiravāti*'s task as quite legitimate (see the synopsis of N4, p. 15). Here even royalty becomes a client of the *mantiravāti* named Mantiravēlaṉ. Since the Pāṇṭiyaṉ king calls on him for help, we may assume that the *mantiravāti* indeed tracks demons down on behalf of the righteous. Still, sorcery, as anthropology has shown us, is ambivalent by nature.

[274] The bow-song singer G. Muttuleṭcumi, in an interview held on 8 May 2002, said: "[T]he deities are controlled by the power of magic" (K.-L.01.258). Immobilisation and control are achieved in our local story by drawing a *cakra* on the ground and driving a *kāñciram* peg into the top of Icakki's head. The *mantiravāti,* personifying a particular ritual order, should be considered as someone who controls whatever he regards as active, turbulent, unpredictable, and secret.

[275] Recall that, in the local story, inserting a peg into the top of Icakki's head restored her to humanity. After the peg was removed she returned to her demonic self, killing the baby and its mother. The claim of anthropology that all sorcery attempts to modify the life and circumstances of others is here notably confirmed.

[276] The bow-song singer SR also referred to the fact that magical devices may not be permanently successful in an interview held on 8 May 2002: "[...] However, magic is effective only for a certain time. He [i.e. the *mantiravāti*] can control the deity only for a certain time [SR mentions 3.75 *nāḻikai;* 1 *nāḻikai* = 24 minutes]" (K-L.02.A.416). See also the synopsis of the N4 version, *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai* (Sect. 2.4), where a *mantiravāti* from the hill station who had been requested by the Maturai court to come help control Icakki and her demonic group (which were threatening the city) fails in his attempt.

case of Icakki has enlisted her to perform actions on his own behalf.[277] It is then that Icakki takes revenge on him.[278] What is the nature of this attack?[279] Icakki's violence involves human-like emotions. The inner logic of the local Icakki story, which treats demons as real entities, calls for Icakki's attack to be interpreted as a revenge killing. Nampiyār's wife is ammunition in the conflict between Icakki and the *mantiravāti*.[280] Icakki—a bloodthirsty *pēy* who in her human life was not allowed to complete her female task of giving birth—is depicted as engaging in a deceitful manoeuvre—indirectly,[281] via the wife—so as to take revenge on the *mantiravāti* Nampiyār in response to his direct sorcerous assault. She

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[277] That the *mantiravāti* is the target of Icakki's uncanny vengeance may indeed be grounded in the fact he has at times misused his powers of sorcery.

[278] Regarding Icakki's punitive acts, T.M.P. stated in an interview held on 10 May 2002 (K-O.02): "There are so many *mantiravāti*s in the Nagercoil area. They do so many evil things. I'm also a victim of them. [...] Icakkiyamman is more powerful than these *mantiravāti*s. (551) Icakkiyamman punishes such *mantiravāti*s. But sometimes victimised persons are under the power of these *mantiravāti*s. It is because of the ill fate of that particular person. At that time Icakkiyamman will take a closer look at that person, and when the time comes she punishes the *mantiravāti*." Note that Kaṉṉiyākumari district, until 1956 a part of Naṅcilnāṭu and joined with southern Kerala (formerly Travancore State) is, like Kerala, well known for its active practice of sorcery. Power struggles have also been known to take place between bow-song singers and *mantiravāti*s. T.M.P. told me in a personal communication (10 May 2002) about one such incident (K-O.02.A.235): "The *mantiravāti* (sorcerer/magician) can [...] break the bow. I have told this in a previous interview [with Nā. Irāmaccantiran in "Puṉaikaḷam," January-March 2002, 102–115]. There is a village by the name of Vaiyirāvi Kutiyiruppu near Rājākkamaṅkalam. In that village there lived a great *mantiravāti*. He was a disabled fellow; he had only one leg. If any bow-song singer or any *nātasvaram* group went there, they had to go to his house for a courtesy visit. Then only could they start in on the bow-song programme in the temple. These things were usually told of earlier by the people of that village. I did not know the whole procedure before, even though I live in the neighbouring village. [...] When we were about to sing [...], the *mantiravāti* came there with the aid of a walking stick. The villagers gave him a special place to sit, next to the Muttār Amman temple. [...] He came, sat down, and within ten minutes the rope of the bow was cut. This is the first such incident in my forty years of service. It was a beautiful rope. When I tie the rope to the bow, I usually examine it and only then attach the rope, because there is a possibility of worms. Sometimes the rope may tear off because of this. Therefore I try the rope before. [...] There was no damage at all. Yet it was torn at the centre. The *kuṭam* player [...] repaired it and we continued the programme. [...] Only one man somehow understood what had happened. The programme was not stopped. [...] There was possession. Afterwards the people said that prior to this performance no one was strongly possessed, but that this time the possession was fine. [...] The eighth day of the *koṭai* festival [...] was [...] the final day. Before that, the *mantiravāti* died. He was a ferocious *mantiravāti*. [...] But we are more powerful than that *mantiravāti* [...]."

[279] Before I proceed further I would like to clarify some important differences between the terms *sorcery* and *witchcraft* as these are used by certain anthropologists. Kapferer (2003:10ff.) has defined the differences between these terms on the basis of the distinction between "protective and destructive" (11), corresponding to ambivalent qualities in the case of sorcery, and "unambiguously malevolent and death-dealing and highly immoral" (11) ones in that of witchcraft. He contends that "witchcraft is a potential quality of everyone and is deeply integral to the person [11][... and] social relations and arises from them" (12), "whereas sorcery [...] comes from outside" (11). "[W]itchcraft-like effects, such as the 'evil eye,' emerge in the intense spaces of everyday sociality and often involve close kin" (12). Lewis (1976) explains the differences in other terms: "[S]orcerers are people who employ magical spells, rites and medicines to achieve their fell ends. Their malevolent apparatus is tangible and external to themselves. Witches [...] do not need any of these aids; their power consists in their own innate psychic capacity to cause harm. Their weapon is malicious thought itself, not techniques which, in priniciple, can be detected and observed" (ibid.:71). On witchcraft (or sorcery) and its close relationship to accusations, aggression, envy, and social tensions, see Lewis 1976:81, 82. On witchcraft and its threat to fertility and sexual potency, see ibid.:83f.; cf. Favret-Saada 1979. – Lewis (1976) further distinguishes between *witchcraft* and *spirit possession,* defining the difference as a degree of "severity": "The possession attack seems on the whole to be a milder and less radically challenging assault than that conveyed by charges of witchcraft [...]" (89). He also distinguishes between the indirect "devious manoeuvre" of spirit possession and witchcraft's "direct strategy of mystical assault" (1971:118). Another important point is made by him (1976:83): "[T]he witch naturally takes his form and character from the society which conceives him. Thus he attacks what people at a given time and place hold in highest esteem, and people's fears of witchcraft correspondingly reveal their deep-seated cultural preoccupations." This statement clearly suggests that witchcraft is found where humans live under a cloud of uncertainty and unpredictability. For further references to discussions of spirit possession, see n. 286 below.

[280] The rivalry is confirmed by the bow-song singer SR, who stated in an interview held on 8 May 2002: "[Nampiyār], the *mantiravāti,* was a great man. In order to defeat him, Icakki appeared" (K-L.02.A.406).

[281] Taking revenge indirectly forms an easily detectable pattern in the translocal *IK,* too. There, as I have already proposed in Sect. 6.3, Icakki takes revenge on the Vēḷāḷas by a roundabout means, via the Ceṭṭi. Remarkably, in both stories (the local and the translocal), the aim of the revenge is to put an end to human reproduction. Note that the range of cases to which such indirectness could apply is obviously not confined to demonic behaviour and spirit possession. For instance, in the Dāruvana story (recounted in Handelman and Shulman 2004), Śiva seduces the sages' wives in order to destroy the sages' power.

employs spirit possession[282] and kills that which guarantees the continuance of Nampiyār's lineage: his wife and unborn child.[283] While a clinical view would likely be that such deaths of mother and child are caused by some physical disorder, perhaps brought on by eclampsia[284] or an infection, the local story explains the cause as an attack by a demon[285] who has discovered the woman's vulnerability and susceptibility to spirit possession at the height of her pregnancy.[286] As anthropology has shown, pregnant women are perceived as being particularly vulnerable to unwanted spirit possession, be it because of an environment of deceit (for example, demonic mental states of others),[287] their own ambivalent feelings towards the unborn baby,[288] or their own fear of failing to meet others' expectations.[289] Whatever the

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[282] During possession there may be either a complete or only a partial merging of the personality of the possessing spirit and that of the possessed. – For cases of spirit possession in contexts outside India employing a similar indirect strategy, see the analysis of the Japanese *Tale of Genji* in Bargen 1997.

[283] As remarked by the main pūjārī in the interview of 15 December 2002: "In great anger she challenged Nampiyār [the Brahmin *mantiravāti*]: 'I shall put a child in my mouth, one on my arm, and one between my feet!' In order to show her power, she did so, to oppose the magical power of Nampiyār." – On the killing and devouring of children ascribed to witches, see Briggs 1996:241. Interestingly, in the Tamil culture, the womb and mouth are considered to be alike (Trawick 1978:206), and each has an ambivalent nature. The mouth may eat in order to nourish, or may express oral aggression. Likewise the womb may be reproductive, or may not. – Note that in Tamil society children are treated with great affection and concern. They are regarded as the later providers of their parents and the preservers of the family line and property. This child-centred model presupposes that reproduction is the only purpose of a conjugal bond. Of all models found in the history of conjugal relationships, it is by far the most favoured one, and is the one at the base of traditional Tamil society. The other main models are either economic-juridical or institutional-juridical in nature.

[284] Ger. "Gestose," EPH/HES/SIH; see www.rund-ums-baby.de/gestose.html (21 March 2004, 23:29 P.M.). The opinions concerning the causes of eclampsia are varied. The syndromes are convulsive fits, headaches, and hypertonicity. I would like to thank the gynaecologist Dr med. Clas Schwenke, Hamburg, for introducing me to this phenomenon. I would also like to thank the folklore scholar Hedda Jason, Jerusalem, for explaining the relationship between pregnancy-induced hypertonicity and child mortality.

[285] Csordas (2002:131) categorises disease as a "biological substrate of distress," while demons are a "spiritual substrate of distress." He argues that the two views "account [...] for the different way the two [...] name the problem." – See also the synopsis of the local story of Naṭukāṭṭu Icakki in Sect. 7.6. In the story I recount there, the pregnant woman's death is caused by her seeing the terrifying Icakki.

[286] On the vulnerability to spirit possession during pregnancy and menstruation, see Osella and Osella 1999:204, n. 30. This, so the authors, we might expect, for "categories of women whose wombs/vaginas are at that moment particularly 'open'." On "unintentional" contact with spirits in a Tamil context, see Blackburn 1980:240, listing "[...] possession at puberty, during pregnancy, after intercourse, during childbirth, and as a result of frustrated sexual desires." – For a cross-cultural treatment of the relationship between reproduction and spirit possession, see Graham's (1976) article on "Pregnancy as Spirit Possession"; see also Boddy's (1989:185ff.) discussion on the Hofriyati Muslim society in Northern Sudan; and Bargen 1997:88, which, referring to the Japanese *Tale of Genji,* highlights similar beliefs during the Heian era, as exemplified by the Empress Anshi's (927–964 C.E.) vulnerability to spirit possession at the height of her pregnancy.

[287] The issue referred to here revolves around the innate fears of pregnant women, who (according to Graham 1976:295) are most vulnerable to the responses of their social environment at the height of their pregnancy. Kapferer (2000:13), in a Sri Lankan context, similarly alludes to this psychological phenomenon: "They [the main myths of Kalu Kumara] suggest [...] that the plight of female victims is not so much a consequence of their own sexual desires and obsessions as it is a result of sexual obsessions and repressions arising among others, women and men, in the social context of the victim." This phenomenon is well known in the Tamil context, as in the cruelty of a teenage sister towards her brother's wife. Paramasivan (2002:116), in his article on the *Paḻaiyaṉūr Nīli Katai,* points this out: **... ஒரு பெண்ணுக்குக் கணவனின் தங்கை கொடியவளாகவே தோற்றமளிக்கிறாள். பாலியல் பொறாமையும், சொத்துரிமை மறுப்பும் பெண்களைப் பெண்களே எதிரிகளாக நினைக்கும்...**; "[T]he sister of the woman's husband seems to be a cruel woman *(koṭiyaval)*. Sexual jealousy and the denial of property rights cause women to become women's enemies." See also Ramanujan 1995:36f., pointing out this same theme in a Kannada woman's tale. Cf. Trawick 1990a:204: "[Sister and wife] compete for the affection of the same beloved man."

[288] The ambivalence of feelings towards the unborn child bespeaks not only an exterior disconnectedness resulting from the pregnant woman's "abnormal" state (a condition of "biological ambiguity" in which "two [are] in one," Graham 1976:297), but also a sense of inner strangeness. In this regard, it is not unlikely that the foetus is perceived as an insatiable *taker,* which, like a hungry spirit *(pēy),* snatches and fills itself up from without, or to be more precise, from the expectant mother's womb. The pregnant woman would then be inclined to regard the foetus as an uncontrollable inner being, which threatens her by sucking up food, attention, and her feelings, like an inner demonic force. The belief that children have innate magical capacities is in keeping with this. (Children may serve the aims of sorcery, as in the *mantiravāti*'s use of *mai,* a black substance said to be "concocted from the boiled and charred skulls of first-born sons" [Nabokov 2000:150].) Beyond the borders of India, the observations in Mary Douglas's study (2001) on the Nyakyusa are noteworthy: "A pregnant woman is thought to reduce the quantity of grain she approaches, because the foetus in her is voracious and snatches it" (96). – On the pregnant women's

cause of the spirit possession, the influences are seen to operate on or within the seized person. According to local belief, demonic aggressors attack both mind and body. In their active state they can easily be personified. Icakki's intrusive destructive force,[290] which had been contained, explodes, and goes wandering off by itself, not with the primary purpose of targeting Nampiyār's wife and child,[291] but rather to use them as a means of striking at her real victim. No matter what the mechanisms of the mother's and child's death are, it seems clear that the presumed traumatic possession by Icakki's spirit[292] reflects mainly the tension between men and women.[293] Again, as already seen in the translocal *IK,* it is the conflict between male and female that leads to the attack on the fertile centre of life. His pregnant wife's death is the destruction of the world Nampiyār has built. That Icakki is challenging the *mantiravāti*'s sorcerous power of control spells danger for his wife.

It is clear that Icakki's identity, as perceived by the people of Paḷavūr, harbours a demonic potential that can break out into furious and ruinous forms if she is aroused or challenged—the reason why the image of Icakki in the pūjārī's backyard is kept as a non-anthropomorphic wooden slab rather than in the shape of a human being. The local people know the potency of the "younger sister version" and try to prevent the intrusion of demons, those insatiable, inhuman strangers that are within humans as well as without. Through the collective local *memoria,* which takes mental note of the dynamic of violence and women's susceptibility to spirit possession at the height of their pregnancy, we can come to understand the intention and victim of the demonic.

Returning to the key point, we may conclude that the fusion is the dynamic moment of a challenge.[294] It addresses the crisis of being-in-the-world in a most direct way. The moment of fusion superimposes a view of the goddess's past upon both our own and the goddess's perception of the present. It allows the ritual gathering to share in the experience in their deepest selves. The potency for radical inner reorientation lies in such tense ritual depth. In my view, the end of the fusion is the decisive turning point. Its intention is to create new factualities.[295]

9.3.5 The Goddess Reoriented and Keenly Self-Aware[296]

If we proceed on the assumption that the goddess has arrived at a reoriented and keenly self-aware state, the main questions are how this result has come about and what effect the change has. In this regard it is first necessary to look at the effects of the central rituals that follow the fusion.[297] I focus here only on the most important ritual (during the dawn watch):[298] the tripartite segment consisting of a food offering

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experiences of intense relationship with and ambivalence of feelings towards a growing child in the womb, see Graham 1976:298. Beck (1986:97) describes the phenomenon of the ambivalence of motherhood from the Tamil point of view, and records a predominance of the aggressive mother in her collection of Tamil folk tales, where "of twenty-seven folk stories [...] twenty-four involve a mother who [...] eats the flesh of her own female offspring."

[289] Note that Tamil women's status in relation to their husbands is closely connected with their role as child-bearers.

[290] In this story, the destructive force may be interpreted, too, as the jealous thoughts of a childless woman.

[291] That Nampiyār's wife is of secondary importance gains added credence from the fact that the narrative does not give her a name.

[292] On vengeful Ammaṉs as possessing spirits, see Blackburn 1980:239. Cf. Misra 1981:152f. on the popular belief that *yakṣī*s possess human beings. – Note Burrow 1979:283, where "the possessing spirit" or "the state of possession" corresponds to the Tamil term *aṇaṅku*. On the concept of *aṇaṅku,* see also Chap. 3, p. 33, point 4.2 above.

[293] Paradoxically, Nampiyār's wife is the one who removes the peg.

[294] This can also be said of the fusion's various components. The *vil*, drum, and possession all jostle and challenge one another to the maximum.

[295] On notions of ritual inversion, see Köpping 2000:25, where such ritual intentions are formulated with the phrase "Lasst uns neue Tatsachen schaffen."

[296] On processes leading from "non-self-recognition" to "self-recognition," see Kapferer 2003:115.

[297] For a description of the ritual segments following the moment of fusion, see Sect. 9.2.2, pp. 308ff.

[298] I have already given an account of the underlying scheme of the other central rituals in Sect. 9.2.2, and therefore shall here

(poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu), the *tuvaḷai* kid goat sacrifice, and the drinking of the kid's blood,[299] and briefly repeat the main features of the dynamic process at work in this functional unit in somewhat detailed terms, before moving on to the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual, the moment when the goddess finally emerges in her generative and social self.[300]

As has already been noted, the tripartite segment is the last of the three offerings *(paṭaippu)* made to satisfy[301] and reorient an unfulfilled goddess who died prematurely and childless in her human life. In describing this tripartite unit, I follow the order of the ritual.

There is first the food offering *(poṅkal paṟippu paṭaippu).* I interpret it as an invitation to the goddess to reintegrate herself into the world of the village, which is dynamic but stable. The food comes from the village.[302] Food offerings—here I follow anthropologists—strengthen the relation and simultaneously sever the demonic conjunction. Second, there is the kid goat sacrifice. I would argue that certain characteristics point to the kid goat being a human surrogate. Indeed it may be seen as a child.[303] To look at it as a gift and a final act of healing, in which the kid's pure blood is a beneficial vital fluid rather than a destructive one, would be one way to understand its purpose. It empowers[304] the goddess and becomes new life in the wombs of the childless women. It seems, then, only fit that the sacrifice of the kid goat takes place just before the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* and divinatory ritual, which is the climax of the *koṭai,* and the moment when the goddess makes her life-force available to childless couples.

Yet there is something odd about the *tuvaḷai* kid goat and the drinking of its blood—some sort of witchcraft—probably owing to the ambiguous inner potency of the goddess and baby.[305] A peculiar inversion occurs:[306] the goddess's drinking the kid goat's blood upsets the normal pattern of a baby drinking its mother's breast milk.[307] Here it is not the mother who nourishes the baby, but rather the kid

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focus only on the most important one.

[299] For a detailed description, see Sect. 9.2.2, pp. 311f.

[300] See the description and accompanying reflections in Sect. 9.2.2, pp. 313f.

[301] I refer to the main pūjārī's remark; see Sect. 9.2.2, p. 312.

[302] Recall that the *puṭṭu* and *āppam* food items come from the Brahmin priest of the Ammaiyappar temple. He is closely linked with the local Icakki story.

[303] I base my interpretation on the assumption that the Icakkiyamman worship is a cult that originally developed out of a tradition of honouring women who died when pregnant or as virgins (see Sects. 7.4.1 and 7.3.2, point 3), and so, according to Tamil belief, were not allowed to become fully female, whence they linger on in an unsatisfied and envious state. The *IK,* the *Peṇṇaraciyar Katai,* and the local Icakki stories, which are all connected with the Icakkiyamman cult, strongly suggest as much. Yet one might be hesitant to follow, for the kid goat sacrifice we are concerned with, the views of Mahāleṭcumi (2003:54), who, in her recently published work on the Icakki story of the Kaṇiyāṉ people, relates the kid goat sacrificed in the *koṭai* festival directly to a scene in the *IK*: **பலி கொள்வதற்கு முன் கள்ளிக் கொப்பாகிய குழந்தையைத் தொட்டிலில் இட்டு தாலாட்டுவதையும் இக்கதைப்பாடல் குறிப்பிடுகிறது. கொடையின் போது பலியிடுவதற்கென உள்ள துவளைக் குட்டியைத்** [...] **தொட்டிலில் போட்டு கணியான் தாலாட்டுகின்றனர். தாலாட்டும் போது இக்கதைப் பாடலில் இடம் பெற்றுள்ள தாலாட்டுப் பகுதியினைப் பாடுகின்றனர்,** "Before being sacrificed, the child created from the *kaḷḷi* branch was put in a cradle and it was sung a lullaby. This is also referred to in the folk song. The *tuvaḷai* kid goat that is going to be sacrificed during the *koṭai* festival is put in a cradle and a lullaby is sung by the Kaṇiyāṉ. In this lullaby he sings the lullaby passage of the folk story." Here, it seems to me, the *IK* is enacted in the ritual in a most direct way. This is not so in the *koṭai* festival we are concerned with. In our case, it is rather the local Icakki story that can be directly related to the kid goat sacrifice; indeed this story is indivisibly conjoined with the ritual in question (see Sect. 9.3.4).

[304] The pūjārī remarked: "The power of the goddess is aroused when the *tuvaḷai* kid goat is sacrificed" (interview of 15 December 2002).

[305] Popular belief stresses the internally grounded capacities of women. Examples of these abilities are found in the various Icakki stories. It is an inner resource of the goddess in the story of N1, for instance, that allows her to turn a *kaḷḷi* plant into a child, or as we read in N7, that allows Aṉṉatāṭci to become pregnant from her own swallowed saliva; moreover, in N4, that enables Peṇṇaraci and Puruṣā Tēvi to conceive with the Śrī Laṅkan wind, without any biological need of male semen. From these stories it is clear that men do not share this resource; recall N7, where the Brahmin Āticēṣaṉ questions his self-impregnated wife Aṉṉatāṭci: "Does a woman become pregnant without a husband? [She doesn't.]" (N7.237-8).

[306] One may recall that this theme (of inversion) in the conceptualisation of the child is no less prominent in the *IK*, but there the child is equated with death rather than with life.

[307] Note that in Tamil culture, blood and milk are akin to one another: "[M]ilk is regarded as a refined extract of blood. [...] [E]ighty drops of blood make one drop of milk" (Trawick 1978:146). Note also the milk–blood equation in the case of milk-coconuts used as substitutes for blood sacrifices.

goat that nourishes the goddess, in order to give her power, particularly the power to bestow new life upon others.

A few words on the act of killing itself are in order here. As shown by the anthropologist Bruce Kapferer (1997), the moment of killing is "filled with the ambiguity of potency" (190). It is a moment that violently connects death to life. At the same time it severs life from death, and in our case causes the potentially demonic forces within the goddess to be exorcised.[308] Destructive violence thus becomes a transformative dynamic that creates new life.[309] The kid goat victim prepares, then, the way for the final transformative step the goddess must take so that she can give or release new life.[310] This has obvious repercussions for the domestic life of the villagers.

It is necessary to look now more closely at the effect the change of the goddess has and at the power her regained sense of self is supplied with. The *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual, involving the divinatory spinning of the coconut, is the major reference point for this. Here the beneficent, procreative goddess emerges and brings an end to a crisis. Her journey has taken her from blocking reproduction to partaking of erotic harmony and fertility, and above all, to *aruḷ,* a "presence that is [....] full."[311] This process has progressively unfolded in the course of the various ritual segments. By the end of the second ritual cycle there is, then, every indication that the goddess's cosmos is profoundly social. It is important to note that at this stage Icakki creates her cosmos by internal dynamics of her own.[312] She presents herself as the "creative, virginal mother"[313] who directly helps childless couples. She invites couples to be on intimate[314] terms with her, and receptive to the offspring she has produced for them to implant. This is shown first of all by her transferring a plantain leaf that contains the edible *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* dolls and the blood of the *tuvaḷai* kid goat[315] from her lap to the couple's lap.

Several points require explanation. I shall begin with an examination of the *mā(vu)ppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* pair of dolls. Stories collected by Mahāleṭcumi (2003) have provided me with the needed material. As we learn from the Māvicakkiyammaṉ narratives (ibid.:36),[316] the *mā(vu)ppiḷḷai* male doll

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[308] Such demonic forces, nourished by envy and rage, are considered to reside in childless women who die prematurely. N7.864 provides a notable example. There Icakki's demonic forces have materialised in her self-created child, which attacks the Ceṭṭi. Similarly, in N1 this demonic (male) offspring, a composite of angrily violent relations with the outside world (represented by the *kaḷḷi* plant-turned-child), is used to seduce and finally take revenge.

[309] For a discussion along these lines, cf. Kapferer 1997:190; also ibid.:206: "[V]iolence [...] is both a generative and destructive force." It takes life in order to create life.

[310] It is in this act, it seems to me, that the goddess acquires the honour and status of maternity. – Cf. Blackburn 1980:215 on babies' importance for transformative processes within violent women: "The appearance of the child as an agent for transforming the aggressive woman into a pliant mother is [...] found in [...] vil pāṭṭu narratives. [T]ransformation of the fierce to the maternal goddess."

[311] The translation is Shulman's (in Shulman and Stroumsa 2002:146).

[312] I have several times pointed out the external impetus needed to induce change in her.

[313] Shulman in his discussion of the "creative, virginal mother" (1980:305) equates this figure both with sister-ness, as exemplified in the seven sisters who are also seven mothers (ibid.:254), and with the bisexual creator, who is described in Tamil myths as a "'male' goddess [...] a virgin who creates alone, possessed of male and female components within her own nature" (ibid.:254).

[314] Cf. Luhrmann 2001:136: "[The] divinity communicates with the worshiper through divination, omens, and indications. A relationship with divinity can feel very intimate, more intimate than any closeness to an ordinary body-burdened human. [...T]hat relationship can figure as more important, more powerful, and more trustworthy than those with mere others."

[315] These are the main substances. For the other substances, see my description in Sect. 9.2.2, p. 313.

[316] The outline of one story is as follows: The Malayali sorcerer Pulaiyaṉ found a plantain leaf floating on a river. It contained a male doll *(mā[vu]ppiḷḷai),* put there by women who had performed the *avvai viratam.* The female doll *(mañcappiḷḷai),* which also figured in the ritual, had been dissolved in the river. The sorcerer picked up the *māppiḷḷai* male doll, uttered some mantras, and brought it home to his barren wife, asking her to consume it together with milk. Doing so, she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter. Mahāleṭcumi (2003:36f.) additionally offers an alternative story: The wife of the sorcerer Kāḷippulaiyaṉ performed the *avvai viratam* with other women in her house while her husband was away. After the ritual the women took the *mañcappiḷḷai,* the female doll, with them, but they left the *mā(vu)ppiḷḷai,* the male doll, behind, asking Kāḷippulaiyaṉ's wife to dissolve it in the river. She remembered the request only at dawn. Not knowing what to do, she mixed it with milk, consumed it, and became pregnant with a baby girl.

is made of rice flour *(māvu)* by women performing the *avvai viratam* (see *Auvaiyār nōṉpu* in Section 6.3 above). If consumed with milk, it is said to be able to impregnate a woman who wants to conceive. From this we can draw conclusions: First, an actual power to procreate inheres in these dolls. Second, the *mā(vu)ppiḷḷai* (male doll) plainly must be eaten by a member of the opposite sex to have an effect. Third, the dolls acquire their power through the ritual practice, in our case through the inner dynamics and procreative resources of the goddess.

On the plantain leaf handed to the couple, in addition to the pair of dolls, is the *tuvaḷai* kid goat's blood. Blood and intestines are bodily substances that can serve the interior of others.[317] As one such substance, the kid goat's blood provides infertile couples the wherewithal to obtain offspring.[318] Thus the goddess produces the child. It comes from her lap and is received onto the laps of the childless wives.[319] This is the most direct help she can offer to a couple who have come with a desire to procreate.

Finally—as seems only fit—we are left with the important act of spinning the coconut, another part of the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual. Spinning the coconut is an act of divination[320] that provides information about the past, present, and future, and about matters beyond ordinary perception. According to the main pūjārī, it is an *aṟivippu*, an announcement that does not fail to come true.[321]

However, I also see in the spinning of the coconut, in addition to its divinatory function, an inward and outward spiral-like movement, as has already been described with regard to the rolling on the flowerbed. There are obviously close similarities between the repotentialisation of the goddess and the childless wife, both in the overall structure and the details of the rituals. Though the flowerbed ritual exclusively concerns Icakki,[322] and the divinatory spinning of the coconut the couple, their vocabulary is the same. The spinning of the coconut can be seen as spinning the wife back into the space of the couple—or to put it differently, as spinning the couple into and through each other, and through the goddess's fertile cosmos as well. The decisive moment of the divinatory spinning is meant to unblock the forces of fertility[323] that have been dysfunctional in the couples. The spinning has a transformative dynamic that is directed by the goddess. It is she who spins or rolls the coconut. Waiting for the coconut to stop rolling and 'speak' the sign *(kuṟi col)* is a highly suspenseful and spiritually heightened moment.[324] 'Speaking' the sign is what makes conception succeed or fail. It is instrumental to conception, yet occurs before the fact. The goddess 'speaks' the sign and then creates the baby. The point should again be stressed that the transformation of the childless couples would, however, be unthinkable without the preceding transformation of the goddess.[325]

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[317] I would like to thank Don Handelman, personal communication 2002 for this information. Accordingly, a piece of the intestines is rubbed on the foreheads of both wife and husband. This external use of an internal part of the body (during which something of the interior is revealed) may signal the transformation of husband–wife relationships, and of family life as a whole. On the notion of "inside out," see Handelman and Shulman 1997, upon which I base my own line of thought. Note that in Tamil, domestic life is called *akam* (inside), in contrast to *puṟam* (outside).

[318] On blood as a "source [...] of [...] nourishment" for the developing foetus, see Leslie's discussion (1996:94) of medical texts.

[319] The reproductive technology offered at clinics treating infertility inevitably comes to mind. The two procedures represent different procedures of approaching the disorder. – A lap can be seen as a receptacle of *desiderata;* see Beck 1979:31, 32.

[320] A similar custom is found in the *teyyam* cult of northern Kerala, where astrologers use a coconut to set an auspicious date for their festivals. On coconut divination, see also Honko 1998:328.

[321] The three eyes *(muṉṟu kaṇ)* of the coconut show the divinatory result. This was stated during an interview with the main pūjārī held on 15 December 2002. He did not, however, disclose whether it is the direction in which the three eyes point or something else that yields the result. – For the coconut and its three eyes, see also Kapferer 1997:249. Note that a coconut is regarded as equivalent to a human head (Hiltebeitel 1991:84; Masilamani-Meyer 2004:205): the holes are the eyes and nose, the outer fibres are the skin, the edible white portion is the flesh, and the milk is the blood. Coconuts are also thought of as equivalent to babies; see Newton and Newton's article on "Childbirth in Cross-Cultural Perspective" (2003:12). They are compared, moreover, to childbearing wombs; see Laderman 1996:131, concerning a Malay context: "Hard and round like a pregnant womb, the coconut contains liquid and solid elements that mimic the fetus and amniotic fluid."

[322] This is confirmed by the main pūjārī's female relatives. The goddess alone experiences the flowerbed, though the outcome of this ritual, namely the goddess's regained split version of herself, is of benefit to all.

[323] On the problems of sexuality, see Sect. 9.2.1, p. 292, n. 65 and also Sect. 7.4.

[324] There is a similarity here to the interval in a game of dice between the toss and the moment when the dice stop rolling.

[325] This is supported by the fact that the divinatory spinning of the coconut, exclusively for the sake of the childless couples,

To conclude, the *māppiḷḷai mañcappiḷḷai* ritual brings Icakki's constructed, procreative self into full light. The goddess and, consequently, the childless couple are transformed. This has repercussions for domestic life.

However, the harmonies achieved by the ritual process are temporary, and the realities that create disharmony and emptiness naturally return within the environment outside the ritual. Their reappearance is signalled not only by the animal sacrifices at the end of the *koṭai* festival, but also by the silver bangles *(kaṭakam*s*)* that are returned to the backyard of the pūjārī's house and lie unworn on the ground in front of *pūtam*-Icakki,[326] who resides there as a wooden slab. Unworn bangles do not produce the jingling sound[327] that for Tamils is filled with overtones of eroticism and the auspiciousness of women in the seventh month of their first pregnancy.[328] This illustrates what Shulman and Stroumsa (2002:6) have already pointed out, namely that transformation underlies a notion of continuous strife.[329]

Let me add that the ritual specialists of the *koṭai* may not be aware of the internal organisation and logic of the ritual in the same terms as I have discussed them here, but they nonetheless enact the ritual in the same logical sequence, as an integral and complex set of actions. The accompanying DVD is meant to illuminate the internal processes from an emic point of view, and to the extent that it succeeds, exemplifies the power of visual anthropology.

9.4 A Brilliant Strategy: The Supportive Elements in the Making of a Fertile Goddess

Communication is usually understood as an exchange of information, and speech as the major medium of communication between humans. When communicating, we wish to express a range of meaning, and so say what we think, expect, and the like. If there is communication without speech, the transfer of meaning, to follow Roth (2003:420), is entirely dependent on the ability of the receiver to interpret the meanings of visual, gestural, or audio signs correctly. If the signs are to be understood, they must be unmistakable and vivid.[330] If at the same time the expectation is that the receiver will be alert and respond to them, they must be perceptible to the senses in a pleasant[331] and attractive form.[332] There is evidence that indeed this knowledge has guided the ritual specialists' strategy I am discussing here. This will be pertinent to this section, in which I consider the individual components of ritual and the message they convey. Paying attention to the language of signs as a form of communication leads to an understanding of the ritual specialists' intention and the realities upon which their ritual world is built. It can also show us what the efficacy of the ritual is based upon.

A study of the components of ritual and the inherent reference marks within them, then, is a worthwhile inquiry. How they are arranged and wielded gives us a working idea of the transformative

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is the final segment of the crucial second ritual cycle.

[326] See Sects. 8.7 (p. 280) and 9.2.1 (p. 285).

[327] The main pūjārī has pointed out the function of the bangles: "These bangles are possessed by the deity. If he [the embodiment of Icakki] wears the bangles, he can do the *cāmiyāṭṭam.* There must be a sound from the bangles. He has to wear the anklet; also to jingle [them] and make sounds" (interview).

[328] In Tamilnadu it is customary to decorate a woman in the seventh month of her first pregnancy with additional bangles. This ceremony is called *vaḷaikāppu.* On pre-delivery rituals observed by the Śaiva Ceṭṭiyārs, see Singh 1997:318.

[329] A similar insight has been formulated by Doniger (2002:68) with respect to "transformations in the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa."

[330] Roth (1997:322) stresses that the more vivid a perception is, the more we are conscious of it, and the more likely we are to take as real that which is perceived.

[331] See Damasio (1999:78), who states that if a perception gives pleasure it generates "behaviors such as seeking and approaching," in sharp contrast to painful experiences, which lead to "freezing and withdrawing" from the surrounding environment.

[332] See Roth 1997:323.

process leading towards the manifestation of the goddess's social self. In the arena where this process occurs are two players in close relationship with one another: the goddess and the ritual specialists, including the *vil* bard. Signposts[333] are carefully placed throughout the series of rituals by the ritual specialists, seemingly to serve as reference points for the goddess, marking as they do the transition that the ritual has in store for her from an unfulfilled-antimaternal to a fertile goddess. Each marker contributes to the process of making the goddess conscious of her newly assigned role.

I shall begin by considering the most basic elements of this type. At the top of the list I place the flowerbed. The flowerbed commands centre stage. Its botanical markers are highly significant. Their positioning foreshadows the anticipated fertile self. In highlighting the flowerbed segment, however, I do not mean to suggest that other elements are less important, but rather that the flowerbed possesses a remarkable degree of internal dynamic. It generates values and activates emotions, wishes, and desires, all of which the participating devotees are also invited to internalise. There are other markers—first and foremost the freshly made terra-cotta Icakki figure—which also foreshadow the 'new' identity. By placing Icakki face-to-face with these signs, the ritual provides her the opportunity to merge with them. We can view the ritual arousal of eroticism and the increase of fertilising heat—manifested in the fiery torch, the red *mañcaṇai* paste, the pandanus flower *(tāḻampū),* the *mēkalai* long-life belt and the display of the goddess's breast (*karukkal pūjā*, in Section 9.2.1), just to mention the most relevant—along these same lines.

The choice and combination of the signs and their reference to one another show that the ritual specialists obviously know the relationships between signs and what each sign means.[334] As Dücker and Roeder (2004:33f.) stress, it is the specific *semiotics* of the ritual itself that enable it to enter into the old reality in order to build a new one. I for my part propose that the repetition of the signs is especially relevant when it comes to building this new reality. The repetition of any significant experience, such as that of the *alaṅkāram* moment or the flowerbed ritual, increases its embeddedness in awareness, which in turn develops the emotions associated with that sign.

Here we have arrived at the point where the apparent tendency of the ritual to provide stimuli that produce pleasure may be profitably discussed.[335] "Pleasure [...] is all about forethought. It is related to the clever anticipation of what can be done *not* to have a problem," a postulate of the neurobiologist Damasio (1999:78) that serves our context well. Pleasures "open up to the world," to cite the same author (ibid.) again. We find a fine example in the moment of the *alaṅkāram,*[336] which triggers positive emotions that lead to the goddess's emergence and her motivated exploring of her fertile self.[337] However, pleasure is not restricted to the moment of the *alaṅkāram*. It is also produced by the sound of the drum, by the touch of the fresh flowers, by the smell of the fragrant pandanus flower *(tāḻampū),* and by the taste of the cool margosa leaves.[338] All of these sensual perceptions are highly vivid. A mood is generated or modified. Heat is drawn to coolness;[339] or upon occasion, contrarily, heat maintains its heat.[340] But also dancing and the *vil* produce pleasure, the former in its uniting body and mind,[341] the

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[333] The three terms *signpost, sign,* and *marker* are used interchangeably here.

[334] This knowledge is not necessarily transparent to the participating devotees. Cf. Jaeger and Straub 2004:290.

[335] I regard pleasure, along with Damasio (1999:76), as "a constituent quality of certain emotions."

[336] On the emotional-cognitive effect of the external floral decorations on the internal state, see my reflections on the first *alaṅkāram* in Sect. 9.2.1, p. 291f.; also Sect. 9.3.2.

[337] This is evidence that the inner logic of the ritual system I am discussing here supports the conception that "emotion is integral to the processes of reasoning and decision making" (Damasio 1999:41), and that "emotion probably assists reasoning, especially when it comes to personal and social matters" (ibid.). For the notion that higher values are communicated by the elder sister version of Icakki, see Sect. 7.6.

[338] Here it is worthwhile looking at the text's and ritual's use of flower images. Whereas the *IK* text uses the language of plants *(kaḷḷi)* to voice accusation (Sect. 6.2), signify danger and rebellion, and to serve as a link to the world of hungry spirits (Sect. 6.4), the floral terms in the ritual (e.g. *tāḻampū*) allow one to explore associations with pleasure and fertility (Sect. 9.3.3).

[339] See the description of the flowerbed ritual in Sect. 9.2.1.

[340] See the reflections on the fiery torch ritual in Sect. 9.2.2, p. 310f.

[341] See the descriptions in Sect. 9.2.1, pp. 296f. and 298 under the headings "Another *tīpārātaṇai* resulting in the possession dance" and "The possession dance."

latter in its bringing people together. Issues of intimacy and harmony are automatically addressed. Thus seen, the charting of signs is a seductive tactic that sets in motion a sequence of actions that can be expected to culminate in fertility. The goddess's moods and states are well known.[342] After all, this is not the first *koṭai* festival for the goddess. The *nērccai*, the gift of a freshly made terra-cotta figure of Icakki at the beginning of each *koṭai,* attests to the efficacy of the ritual specialists' strategy.

The sparking of specific pleasures is an important part of the inner design of the ritual,[343] but the building up of tension is equally essential. Humans are naturally inclined to respond to pleasures, but what about to a challenge? One cannot but respond to it, as has become clear from the fusion segment. Here the challenge is a signal that, given the underlying tension, requires a response. The efficacy of the ritual is thus founded on both the positive emotionality and the challenge being offered. Together they seem to draw Icakki toward transformation and higher values. We find evidence of this in the ritual depth during the crucial moment of fusion (see Section 9.3.4.1).

To conclude, from the outset the ritual specialists must have a clear vision of the pivotal moment that will occur at dawn. Working with variable components, they introduce signposts that suit their intent. It is a brilliant strategy, which quietly and effectively approaches the fertile self, a self that serves society. Towards this end, the ornamentation process *(alaṅkāram)* would seem to play an especially significant role; it does something from without that has an emotional-cognitive effect within. It may even be suggested that the *alaṅkāram,* as a form of recognition, both of oneself and by others, is what in the end produces the child.[344] From both the story and the ritual, one can deduce that the *alaṅkāram* and recognition are intimately connected.[345]

9.5 The Organisation of the Ritual and Its Repercussions for Domestic Life

As is seen in my tabular summary of the ritual sequence (Appendix A), the *koṭai* festival consists of three ritual cycles. Each cycle has its own peak moments: in the first cycle it is the flowerbed segment, in the second cycle it is the drinking of the kid goat's blood and the divinatory spinning of the coconut, and in the third cycle it is the goddess's bathing in water mixed with turmeric *(mañcaḷ nīrāṭṭu)*. The three cycles together have a climax of their own, which occurs at the end of the second cycle. The second cycle is at the same time an intensification of the first, since it multiplies the signs and draws the goddess deeper into the ritual. In terms of activity and mood, there is an increase of heat and a ritual arousal of eroticism. As regards the individual segments, I would suggest that each segment must take place in the specified sequential order. Each of the components is dependent on the one before to do its part towards producing a result. The goddess cannot emerge before she is made aware of herself in the *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai.* She must not come out of her shrine before the flowerbed is prepared. Her

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[342] This is suggested by remarks of the main pūjārī: "After the pūjās with the *mēḷam* she is filled with an excess of joy. In the afternoon, in the evening, and at midnight *(camakoṭai)*, these three times" (interview with Veyilukanta Perumāḷ Piḷḷai on 19 January 2003).

[343] Cf. Kapferer 2000:24, listing "[h]armony [and] the enjoyment and happiness of mutuality" as being among the elements employed in rituals in a Sri Lankan context.

[344] In terms of married couples, recognition could be understood to be a husband's identification of his wife as his goddess. The converse is the rule in traditional India: the husband is the wife's god, see for instance Leslie 1989:322f. Cf. version N7 of *Nīli Katai,* lines 897ff.: "No mother, father, or god is equal to a husband. I had a great belief in you, and I never disobeyed you." Concerning the drive for recognition by a husband, see the Kannada tale of "a flowering tree" retold by Ramanujan 1995:22ff. – As for fertility disorders, there have been a number of studies investigating the role of neurotransmission in modulating emotional behaviour and reproductive activity. Neurobiologists attest that the brain of a person showing symptoms of depression releases dopamine and noradrenaline (also called "happiness transmitters"). Scientists assume that as a result of this release in the case of depressed women the production of the follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), which is responsible for ovulation, and also of the so-called prolactin-inhibiting factors (PIH), is reduced. If the concentration of these hormones is reduced, ovulation and menstruation are obstructed. See Ramachandran and Blakeslee 2002:348f.; also Corr 2006:558.

[345] This applies to all three *alaṅkāram* scenes in the *IK* (N1.1039ff., 1460ff., 1683ff.; see also my tabulation in Sect. 4.7) and also to the three *alaṅkāra tīpārātaṉai*s in the *koṭai* festival.

becoming fiery should occur not at noon but in the middle of the night. The goddess's drinking of the *tuvaḷai* kid goat's blood, and equally important, the divinatory spinning of the coconut for the benefit of childless couples, cannot occur until the goddess has been re-created and made keenly aware of her fertile self. We can see that single modules cannot be rearranged without doing harm to the integrity and efficacy of the whole.

That this ritual system of the Vēḷāḷas is marked by great integrality is seen in its self-containment, its compact wholeness. The high degree of self-containment is immediately evident not only in the complex circular and three-dimensional flowerbed segment (Section 9.3.3), but also in the fact that the ritual courses around and re-establishes a link to the beginning of the legend of the goddess, thus carrying us full circle back to human fertility. In doing so, the ritual sets procreation against the fatal dénouement of the stories. Here we see a great ritual dynamic, with the movement being from death to new life. The ritual turns the goddess back upon herself. It is an inner dynamic that works towards change. What comes out at the end is different from what was before. Two examples will make this clear: First, the violent antimaternal goddess, after rolling on the flowerbed, returns to her shrine not bent on destruction, but rather eroticised and otherwise transformed. Second, the kid goat is slaughtered; however, its blood is turned into new life. At the end there are clear signs of the transformed goddess who gives up opposing reproduction, and of the transformed kid goat's blood that becomes foetuses in the wombs of the childless women. The childless women, too, then, are different than before. That this ritual system has repercussions on domestic life is reflected in the divinatory spinning of the coconut, meant to unblock the forces of fertility that have been dysfunctional in the childless couples who have come to ask the goddess for help. With the spinning of the coconut, the ritual opens up to the outside world, to the childless couples, who receive a most direct form of help from the re-created and now highly self-aware goddess.

I would propose that this ritual practice manages to do what the split goddess and the childless women could not have done by themselves.[346] This, in my opinion, is what makes the ritual practice of the Vēḷāḷas most powerful. It allows for an experience that is radically different from the social patterns outside the ritual. Thus the ritual can claim an independent status. In Handelman's (2004b:12) theory of ritual, the otherness of experience within the ritual compared to the experience outside the ritual world presupposes a ritual which not only manifests a high degree of self-organisation, but is also distinguished by its autonomy and power to bring about change.

[346] I have pointed out several times that the impulse for change has to come from outside.