

## 7 The Formation of Cultural Memory

In the preceding chapter I demonstrated that participants are involved in the marriage festival, and accompanying rituals, in various ways. The forms of participation vary according to, for example, group affiliation, personal expectations, and interests. Some participants wait eagerly near the Utsava Sannadhi to get their first *darśan* of the deities, while others stroll around the temple's entrance area to enjoy the carnival atmosphere of the fair. Priests and donors are committed to fulfill their specific duties and ritual tasks, and a number of people come to the temple to be married at the same time as the gods. The festival provides a setting for a wide range of individuals, and meets various needs such as amusement, socializing, religious merit making and social recognition, through the distribution of temple honors. Considering this wide range of activities and modes of participation, I will now investigate the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage celebration as a commemorative festival that re-enacts the marriage of two deities each year.

Inspired by Connerton (1989), who emphasizes the importance of commemorative ceremonies as acts of memory transfer, I examine how the marriage festival forms and transmits a collective cultural memory. Connerton (1989: 40) argues that “images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances.” I inquire how an image of the past can be conveyed and sustained in a long-standing festival, which had to adjust its performances to changing circumstances while maintaining a continuity with the past. In doing so, I focus on the divine bride's identity in the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage rituals, since her identity is far from clear. Up to the end of the seventeenth century, a festival image of Kāmākṣī, called Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, from the Kāmākṣī temple nearby, was the bride performing the celebrations. When this image was shifted to Thanjavur, however, she was presumably replaced by the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali from the Ekāmrānātha temple (see Chapter Five). Today, the goddess Kāmākṣī, from the neighboring temple, is publicly presented—one can even say officially promoted—as the bride, whereas the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali serves as the actual bride in the ritual performance, and is explicitly recognized as the bride by participants. So there is a rift between public representation in leaflets and so on, and the individual participants' recognition of the identity of the bride. I analyze how these differences in the ‘official’ representation and the lived experience shape and re-shape the cultural memory (or memories) of the participants—who, as mentioned, can be said to celebrate the festival in different ways.

## 7.1 Commemoration<sup>1</sup>

The word ‘commemoration’ is derived from the Latin verb *commemorare* (*com* (together) + *memorare* (bring to remembrance)), rendered by Schwartz (2004: 2267) as ‘remembering together’. The act of ‘remembering together’ takes place in social groups of various sizes. These can comprise friends or family members, who, for example, look at photographs and reminisce about the events depicted. Within bigger social groups, such as associations, religious communities, or societies, the act of ‘remembering together’ often takes a rather organized form as commemorative ceremony. Significant for commemorative ceremonies is the fact that they “include activities that explicitly recall important (historical) events” (Bell 1997: 104).<sup>2</sup> Many of them, including the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage festival, do so by re-enacting key scenes of these events. This explicit link to a past event sets them apart from other rites, which rather imply continuity with the past through their repetitive character (Connerton 1989: 45). It is specifically this explicit link to the past that accounts for the role of commemorative ceremonies in the formation and transmission of collective memory, as Connerton (1989: 48) argues. Commemoration calls on collective memory, which Beim (2007: 23, fn. 1) describes as “the collective thought that gives meaning to the events or persons commemorated.”

### *Hinduism and commemoration*

Several practices of Hinduism—as with other religions<sup>3</sup>—can be interpreted as ways to evoke memories of mythological and historical events or persons, which are of significance for the religious community. Hindu sacred sites in India, for example, are most often associated with heroic deeds of gods or epic heroes, and people set out on pilgrimages to visit these memorial places. Moreover, many of these places are linked with each other through shared mythologies and/or are grouped on the basis of common characteristics (as for example the *pañcabhūtaṅgas* described in Chapter One). They thus form a sacred geography of places of memory on a local, regional or national scale.

Texts such as *Sthalapurāṇas* and *Māhātmyas* glorify these memorable places and narrate their associated mythology. The reading and retelling of the narratives evoke the memory of important past events and persons. Yet, the themes of the narratives are not only recalled and circulated by storytelling, but are often also supported by visual representations. For instance, temple walls and especially the pyramidal temple gateways (*gopuras*) in South India are studded with sculptures, depicting the heroic deeds of their deities, which are known from the texts as well. Today, the memorable events as told in the mythological

1 Commemoration and commemorative ceremonies have been the topic of many studies. Most of them deal with nation-state commemorations (see for example Gillis 1994; Schwartz 1982), and less with religious commemorative festivals.

2 I put the word ‘historical’ in parentheses, since I am not distinguishing between historical and mythological events. The memorable event is believed to have taken place, whether in a mythological or historical past.

3 On commemorative holidays and festivals in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see, for example, Connerton (1989: 45–48) and Bell (1997: 104–08).

narratives are further supported by visual representations such as comics<sup>4</sup>, TV series and other new media.<sup>5</sup>

Commemorative days and festivals are other ways of recalling a memorable event. Frequently, the memorable event and its date in the annual cycle are indicated in the festival's name. For example, the Navarātri festival<sup>6</sup>, celebrated throughout India, concludes after nine nights (*navarātri*) on the tenth day with *vijayadaśamī*, 'the victorious tenth day'. The name recalls the memorable event, namely the victory of the goddess Durgā over the demons after a ten-day battle. Each year, the Navarātri festival re-creates this moment with elaborated re-enactments of Durgā's battle in order to vividly recall this event. Stories about the goddess's deeds are found in texts such as the *Devīmāhātmya*, which might also be read, recited or sung during the festival. The memory of her deeds is kept alive and circulated through storytelling and performative re-enactments once a year during the festival, and supported by visual representations. The significant moment, when the goddess is slaying the buffalo demon Mahīṣa, has been depicted on temple walls and columns since the sixth century.

There is a wide range of modes of recalling the past. Different means can be employed, or, as Schwartz (2004: 2268) says, different 'commemorative symbols' such as scriptures, icons, monuments, naming conventions, ritual observances and so on, may activate the commemorative process. They can be combined and connected with each other in 'commemorative networks'.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Commemorative aspects of the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage festival*

The Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage festival at the Ekāmrānātha temple, too, evokes memories of a past event by re-enacting it. The link to the past event is intensified through the enactment at the 'same' time and 'same' place as the original event is believed to have taken place. The time of the marriage has been determined by Śiva in one of the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas: 'Our wedding will be celebrated here every year in the month of Paṅkuṇi, in the constellation *uttiram*.'<sup>8</sup> The memorable time and event is also recalled in the festival's name *paṅkuṇ-uttirat-tirukkalyāṇap-peruviḷā*, 'the great festival of the sacred marriage on Paṅkuṇi Uttiram', often shortened to either Paṅkuṇi Uttiram or Tirukkalyāṇam. Additionally, re-enacting the marriage not only at the 'same' time, but also at the 'same'

4 Certainly, the most famous example is the ACK (Amar Chitra Katha) comic series, which started in 1967 and produced a collection of more than 430 titles on Indian history and mythology. The illustrated retelling of classic stories educates Indian youth and shapes their memories and knowledge about the religious traditions in India up to the present day.

5 See for example the "Karadi mythology DVD series" with titles like "Birth of Ganesha" and "Krishna's Conquests," or flash animations on children's educational websites (<http://www.kidsone.in>; accessed 22.01.2018).

6 On the diverse rituals, narratives and performances of the Navarātri festival in South Asia see Simmons, Sen and Rodrigues (2018). The articles of Hüsken (2018: 179–196) and Ilkama (2018: 157–178) are dealing with Navarātri in Kanchipuram.

7 See Schwarz 2004: 2267–68.

8 *Kāñcippurāṇam* 63.424–427, see French rendering in Dessigane et. al. (1964: 91). *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) 45.168–69 and *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* 8.128–29 give the same date (in Sanskrit: month of *phālguna*, star *uttara phalgunī*) and specify further, that the marriage should be held on the tenth day of the great festival.

place, further enhances the connection to the original event. The Kampā Nadī temple tank, to which the goddess is brought before the marriage, is believed to be the visible part of the Kampā River, on the banks of which the goddess performed penance before the wedding in the mythological past. Here, too, the connection with the past is indicated by the naming of the tank as Kampā Nadī (Kampā River), and intensified by re-enacting the goddess's *tapas* and worship of the sand *liṅga* at the 'original' location during the festival (see Chapter Four).

The Paṅkuṇi Uttiram festival clearly operates within a commemorative framework: it is linked to a mythological event in the past, which is re-enacted at the 'same' place and 'same' time each year. Yet, the mythical and performative representations of the past, connected to the commemorative ceremony, differ considerably. This is most obvious in the changing identity of the bride: the myth tells of the (re-)marriage of Śiva with his wife Pārvatī, whereas the marriage rituals are performed with the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali from the Ekāmranātha temple, and the festival invitation letters announce the wedding of the god Ekāmranātha with the goddess Kāmākṣī from the neighboring temple. How do participants understand and interpret the current situation? The next section describes and analyzes various media which represent the past event and thereby influence the formation of the participants' cultural memories.

## 7.2 What is remembered? – The transmission of cultural memory

If a social or religious group regards an event as worthy of being remembered, certain strategies are employed to maintain and convey the memory of this event. First, knowledge about the event has to be externalized in order to be shared with other individuals. The simplest way of doing so is to tell somebody about it. In order to make information about the event more permanent, it is usually externally stored in form of written texts, paintings, or sculptures, examples of what Schwartz (2004: 2268) called 'commemorative symbols', since they are mobilized to awaken ideas about the past. However, information about the past needs also to be circulated and transmitted, preferably over spatial and temporal distances, as for instance from one generation to the next. At this point, the term 'media of memory'<sup>9</sup> seems to be more suitable, because symbols represent information, whereas media have a rather dynamic connotation since they store, circulate and transmit information (Erlil 2005: 137). In this context, 'media' is understood in its broadest sense as something that mediates.<sup>10</sup> This includes oral communication between individuals, which is an important method of transmitting ideas about the past.

Media of memory always involve an agent who produces them, and people who receive them. If media of memory are not well received, the knowledge of the past they were meant

9 More precisely, 'media of collective memory', since they are distinct from 'media of individual memory' distributed and accessible to people. However, Meyer and Leggewie (2004: 278) have shown that the boundaries are flexible, as in the case of a diary, a medium of individual memory which was later discovered and published, thereby supplying the collective cultural memory of a bigger social group.

10 See Berek (2009: 87–88) on a discussion of the term *medial*.

to circulate and transmit can be forgotten, or become less influential in the formation of collective memory. At the same time, forgotten media of memory can be rediscovered, revived or newly interpreted to fit current needs and the present-day situation of people. These reflections shall underline the dynamics of collective cultural memory. People draw on different media of memory, mix them and set the contents in relation with each other in order to create meaning in accordance with the background of their social group environment.

### Media of memory

There are a number of different media of memory that tell the story of the divine marriage in Kanchipuram. I shall examine here what kind of knowledge about the past event, especially about the bride's identity, they transmit, who produced them, and how they are received by participants. The media of memory, which I regard as relevant and influential today, can be classified as iconographic, performative, textual and oral media.

#### *Iconographic media*

Iconographic media are visual representations of an image of the past. They store and transmit knowledge of the past in the form of sculptures, reliefs, paintings, prints, and the like. In Kanchipuram, scenes of a past event such as the covering of Śiva's eyes, or the goddess's penance, can be found as reliefs on temple pillars and as sculptural elements on temple roofs. However, the most prominent visual representation is the depiction of the goddess embracing the *liṅga* under the mango tree. This episode is also told in the mythological narrative. To recall the storyline briefly: 'While the goddess worshipped the sand *liṅga* on the banks of the Kampā River, Śiva sent a flood in the river to test her devotion. To protect the *liṅga* from the raging waters, she embraced it and pressed it to her breasts, which left the marks of her breasts and bangles on it. This affectionate gesture made Śiva appear under the mango tree and finally re-marry her in Kanchipuram.' The motif of the flood and embrace of the *liṅga* is testified as early as the *Tēvāram*<sup>11</sup> (seventh to ninth century; see Chapter Three).

The depiction of the goddess embracing the *liṅga* under the mango tree can be regarded as *the* emblem of Śiva Kanchi, the central part of Kanchipuram around the Ekāmrānātha and Kāmākṣī temples. It is widespread in many kinds of artistic variations, forms and materials; for example as sculpture on temple roofs (fig. 7.6), reliefs (fig. 7.1), on pillars (fig. 7.7), fine metalwork (fig. 7.2), and as modern paintings printed in booklets (fig. 7.4), posters, or even on bags (fig. 7.3).

11 *Tēvāram* 3.114.7 and 7.61.10.



Figure 7.1 Relief, Ekāmrānātha temple



Figure 7.2 Insignia, carried by a devotee

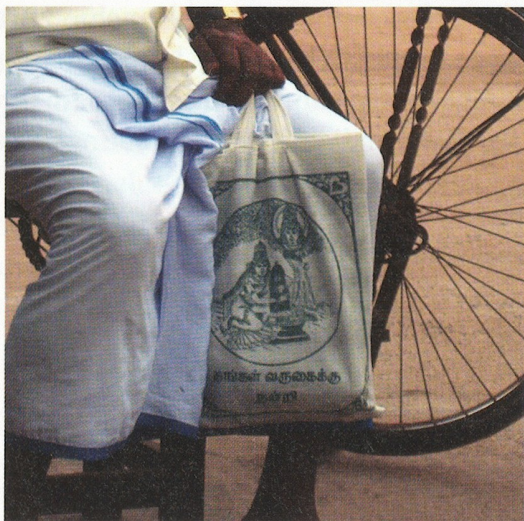


Figure 7.3 Emblem, printed on a bag



Figure 7.4 Intimate embrace of the *liṅga*

Artistic representations vary most strikingly in their depiction of the way the goddess embraces the *liṅga*, either close and affectionately, or distanced and rather stiff. Figure 7.4 is a photograph taken from a temple booklet, published in 2007 on the occasion of the *kumbhābhiseka* of the Ekāmrānātha temple after five years of renovation from 2002 to 2007. It depicts the goddess intimately embracing the *liṅga* under a mango tree. Peaks and what likely represents the flooded river are visible in the background of the picture. Articles used for *pūjā*, such as small vessels and lamp stands, lay scattered on the ground in front of the *liṅga*. A seat covered with a tiger skin is depicted to the left. The depiction of these items clearly refers to the version of the myth found in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (8.28–40), according to which the goddess was provided with thirteen objects that changed to articles used for a *liṅga pūjā*, when she reached Kanchipuram (see Chapter Three). The depiction of the *liṅga* as malleable is unique. *Periyapurāṇam* 6.2.287 refers to Śiva as *maṅkai-taḷuvak-kulaintār*, ‘the god, who became soft when the goddess embraced him,’<sup>12</sup> and three other verses in the *Periyapurāṇam* (4.5.64, 65, 67), too, mention Śiva’s softness and vulnerability through the goddess’s embrace. However, this photograph is a rare example, illustrating the *liṅga*’s malleability and the affectionate embrace of the goddess.

More often, however, the goddess’s embrace of the *liṅga* is rather stiff and formal. Figure 7.5 shows the dilapidated Rāmanāthasvāmī temple in the Ekambaranathar Sannadhi Street (shrine street). The sculpture on the temple roof shows the goddess barely touching the *liṅga*. The mango tree and remnants of a snake hood are visible. As part of the renovation work in 2011, the sculptures on the temple roof were rebuilt and repainted (fig. 7.6). Now, the sculpture of the goddess’ embrace has been supplemented with a depiction

12 The homepage of the Ekāmrānātha temple (<http://www.ekambaranathartemple.tnhrcce.in/history.html>; accessed 03.02.2018), too, refers to this characteristic: “In this context he [Śiva] is referred to as Tazhuva kuzhainthaar (‘He who melted in Her embrace’) in Tamil.”

of Śiva's head hovering over mount Kailāsa (indicated by grey boulders), from which the river Gaṅgā<sup>13</sup> is streaming down. Moreover, the scene of the closing of Śiva's eyes has been integrated as a sculptural element on the temple roof. This extends the symbolic character of the goddess's embrace into a depiction of the mythological narrative.

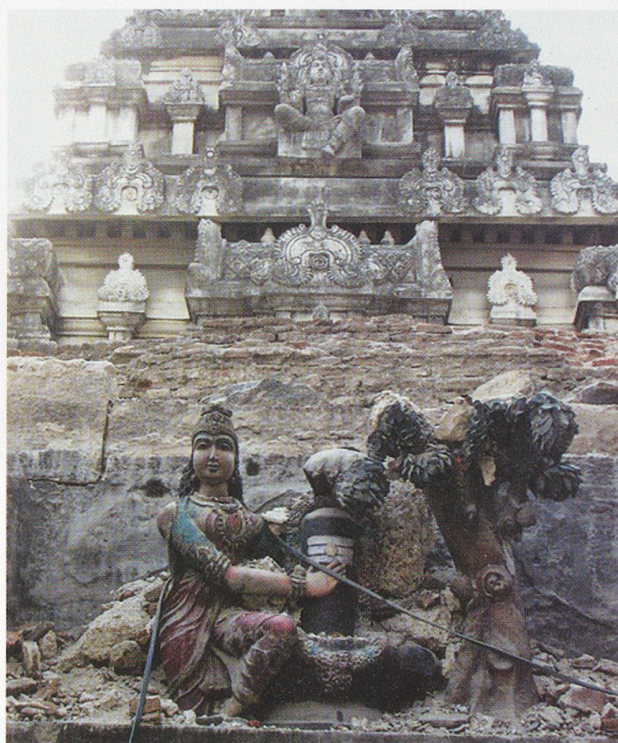


Figure 7.5 Rāmanāthasvāmī temple before renovation, 2009



Figure 7.6 Rāmanāthasvāmī temple after renovation, 2011

13 According to the myth's version in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, Śiva released the river Gaṅgā out of his hair to cause the flood in the Kampā River.



Two other examples add details to the symbol by depicting the flood in a rather dramatic fashion. On a pillar, located in front of the Kaccimayāñīśvara shrine at the Ekāmranātha temple, small human figures can be seen to the right of the goddess in a dynamic embrace of the *liṅga* (fig. 7.7). One figure has its hands folded above the head and others are struggling as if they were washed away by the flood. The second example is found as a decorative element on a silver-coated festival palanquin called *velli māvaṭi cēvai* ('worship of the silver mango tree') (fig. 7.8). It brings our attention to the flood, showing the goddess kneeling in the swollen river filled with fish.



Figure 7.7 Pillar at the Ekāmranātha temple



Figure 7.8 Detail of *velli māvaṭi cēvai* palanquin

The examples represent a wide variety within the artistic representation of the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga*. It seems that most contemporary reproductions avoid the depiction of an affectionate embrace and the obvious touch of her breasts, which is nevertheless an important motif in the earliest versions of the myth.

Interestingly, the artistic representation of the goddess's embrace is also found beyond Kanchipuram. Sculptures of the goddess in an intimate embrace, clearly pointing to the touch of her breasts and hands (bangles), are known at the Bṛhadeśvara temple in Thanjavur,<sup>14</sup> at the Śivatemple in Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh,<sup>15</sup> and at the Śaktivaneśvara temple in the village Tirusaktimuttam, near Kumbakonam.<sup>16</sup> It seems that today the goddess's embrace forms part of the local legend of the Śaktivaneśvara temple.<sup>17</sup> Yet, to my knowledge there is no other Purāṇic myth, except the one known from Kanchipuram, which deals with the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga*.

Evaluating iconographic media in terms of its reception poses some difficulties. The emblem of the goddess's embrace can be found prominently and widely in various forms and materials. Yet, the depictions on temple pillars are often hidden and, just like the decorative sculptural elements on temple roofs, usually do not catch the attention of pilgrims and visitors.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it does seem that the emblem, and the information stored and distributed therein, are influential in the formation of a collective memory. The emblem's widespread and diverse distribution makes it part of everyday life in Śiva Kanchi. Even if it may not be noticed consciously, it certainly works on a subtle level, imprinting the goddess's embrace into the memories of the inhabitants and visitors of Kanchipuram.

Regarding the question about the identity of the goddess, the emblem gives no clear answer. It does not explicitly depict Kāmākṣī, Ēlavārkuḷali or Pārvaṭī. But this is not the only ambiguity. The artistic variations stress different elements as well, and so does the interpretation of the emblem. It can be read as the worship of the *liṅga*, the testing of the

14 A picture of the sculpture can be found in Sivaramamurti (2007: 41). However, the location specified in the caption of the picture, reading "Parvati with *liṅga*, east of the garbhagriha" must be wrong. The sculpture is probably in a niche in the *ardhamanḍapa* of the Amman shrine in the same temple complex. L'Hernault 2002 describes large painted stucco panels in the Amman shrine, which are dedicated to the veneration of the *liṅga*. One of them shows Pārvaṭī embracing the *liṅga*.

15 A picture of the relief can be found in Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1987: plates).

16 See Rajeswari 1989, fig. 5.

17 A brief description of the myth and a picture of the *liṅga* (with Pārvaṭī to the left) can be found on [http://www.kumbakonam.info/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=254&Itemid=328](http://www.kumbakonam.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254&Itemid=328) (accessed 03.02.2018). I would suggest that the goddess's embrace known from Kanchipuram served as a model, which was transferred to the Śaktivaneśvara temple. Ayyar (1922: 72), too, points out that the sculptural representation of the goddess is "in accordance with the Kanchipuram legend."

18 During the festival in 2011, chalkboards were placed at the temple's entrance to the third *prākāra*. Drawings on them described the processions and events that took place on the same day or the day before. Here, again, the emblem of the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga* was reproduced. It was permanently depicted on one corner of the board, while the other drawings changed daily. Three scenes were shown from the events on Paṅkuṇi Uttiram: the goddess at the temple tank, the couple on the marriage stage, and the early morning 'honey moon' procession. Daily, I witnessed groups of visitors and pilgrims, standing in front of the chalkboard, studying the drawings on it, and discussing and explaining to each other what was depicted on the board. In this sense, the chalkboard was an excellent example of an iconographic media, which was well received by the audience.

devotee, the affection that made Ekāmrānātha appear, or the union of god and goddess. Probably, it is the emblem's inherent ambiguity that allows it to function even today as a powerful symbol.

### *Textual media*

Another medium, which stores, circulates and transmits knowledge about the past, is the written word, and in this case especially the Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram. They tell the story of the divine marriage. Yet, they are not at all consistent in their representation of this memorable event. Clearly, the narratives have been formed and re-formed according to the interests of their authors and their sectarian affiliations. In general, at some point in the storyline, mostly in the description of the wedding party, the name Pārvatī or Umā is replaced by Kāmākṣī to refer to the local bride in Kanchipuram. But none of these texts mention Ēlavārkuḷali as the bride's identity.

The Sthalapurāṇas are in verse, either written in Sanskrit (KM (Ś), KM (V), KāVi) or an old form of Tamil (KP), which can be read by a small group of people only, and, moreover, are difficult to acquire. Thus, priests and *paṇḍits* play an important role in the formation and transmission of cultural memory through storytelling.<sup>19</sup> Also, women circulate these stories, for example during *Navarātri Kolu*.<sup>20</sup> However, a number of temple booklets and recent publications, such as the *Kāñci Kāmākōṭi Purāṇam*, reproduce the Kanchipuram myths in simple Tamil and with illustrations. Almost all these texts mention Kāmākṣī as the bride.<sup>21</sup> The *Kāñci Kāmākōṭi Purāṇam*, for example, states that 'every year on Paṅkuṇi Uttiram the marriage of Kāmākṣī Devi is done with all *pūjās*,' that 'Ekāmrānātha and Kāmākṣī are made to sit on the marriage stage,' or that 'the *māṅkalyam* was tied by Ekāmrānātha to Kāmākṣī.'<sup>22</sup>

Another textual medium, which reaches a huge number of people, is the festival poster. Each year, the temple's administration (*devasthāna*) produces posters that advertise the festival's program and additional information, such as timings, processional routes, and the donor's names for each procession. The posters are distributed in the form of invitation letters to donors and other persons affiliated with the temple. Additionally, they are put up in the temple and in large-size print in the streets. Advertising of the festival in large print increased drastically during the three years (2009–2011) I was participating. Most often, these large prints point to specific processions with pictures of the deity on the respective vehicle of the day.<sup>23</sup> In 2011, at main stops on the processional route, such as the crossing

19 Moreover, one must not forget that the Purāṇas and Māhātmyas originated from oral traditions.

20 *Kolu* is a religious ritual in which small clay figures of gods and others are displayed at home during the ten-day Navarātri festival. During this time families visit each other's homes and exchange stories and mythological narratives connected to the *kolu* figures (Hüsken 2012a: 188–91, Ilkama 2018: 159–63). Shops in front of the Ekāmrānātha temple sell such *kolu* clay figures of the goddess embracing the *liṅga* under the mango tree.

21 However, one exception is Arivoli (1983). Here, Ēlavārkuḷali is explicitly mentioned as Ekāmrānātha's wife (p. 36) and that the marriage between Ekāmrānātha and Ēlavārkuḷali is taking place on Paṅkuṇi Uttiram (p. 39).

22 *Kāñci Kāmākōṭi Purāṇam*, p. 63–64. Translation from Tamil by Narayanan Subramanian.

23 Most often donors arrange for them to promote their respective procession. In few instances also priests were responsible for the production of the large prints.

near the flower market and the Kacchapeśvar temple, large prints displayed the schedule of the entire thirteen festival days (fig. 7.9). Often, participants and spectators stood in front of them and read the program while they were waiting for the deities to come.



Figure 7.9 Festival program on large print posters near the flower market

Apart from the general information they provide about the ongoing and upcoming events, these posters and invitation letters proclaim the union of Kāmākṣī and Ekāmranātha on the one hand, and associate Kāmākṣī with Ēlavārkuḷali on the other. The invitation letter of 2009 advertised its headline with big letters:<sup>24</sup> *kāñcipuram aruḷmiku kāmāṭciyammai iṭāṅkōṇṭa (aruḷmiku ēlavārkuḷali ammai) aruḷmiku ēkāmparanāta cuvāmiyiṅ carvatāri āṇṭu (pacali 1418) paṅkuṇi uttirat tirukkalyāṇap peruviḷāp pattirikai*—‘invitation to the great festival of the sacred Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage of the holy Kanchipuram goddess Kāmākṣī (holy goddess Ēlavārkuḷali) along with the holy Lord Ekāmranātha in the *carvatāri*<sup>25</sup> year (*pacali*<sup>26</sup> 1418).’ The invitation letters and posters of 2010 and 2011 changed slightly, now announcing: *kāñcipuram aruḷmiku ēlavārkuḷali ammai (aruḷmiku kāmāṭciyammai) iṭāṅkōṇṭa aruḷmiku ēkāmparanāta cuvāmiyiṅ (...)*—‘the holy goddess Ēlavārkuḷali (holy goddess Kāmākṣī) along with the holy Lord Ekāmranātha.’ Thus, naming Ēlavārkuḷali first and putting Kāmākṣī in parentheses gives clear prominence to goddess Ēlavārkuḷali.<sup>27</sup> I

24 The letters of 2002 and 2008 use the same headline (with another Tamil year). Between 2002 and 2007 the festival was suspended because of the temple renovation. Unfortunately, I was not able to find an invitation letter made before 2002.

25 The Tamil calendar follows a sixty-year cycle with different names for each year. After the completion of sixty years it starts anew with the first year. The Tamil year *carvatāri* corresponds to 2008–2009 of the Gregorian calendar.

26 The revenue or harvest era (Urdu *faṣlī* – harvest) was instituted by Akbar in 1555 CE and introduced to South India in 1630 CE. By adding 590 to the Fasli year one gets the Gregorian year.

27 Also the posters of the years 2016 and 2017 offered on the homepage of the Ekāmranātha temple

asked one of the main priests why they named Ēlavārkuḷali first. He explained: ‘Kāmākṣī is only Ēlavārkuḷali, of late the trustees due to affection to Tamil language they wanted to have the names in Tamil. So instead of Kāmākṣī they (*devasthāna*) have put it as Ēlavārkuḷali, otherwise both are same only. (...) It was put as Kāmākṣī *camēta* Ekāmranātha last year and this year Ēlavārkuḷali *iṭāṅkōṇṭa* Ekāmranātha. The meaning is the same, last year it was mixing of Sanskrit and this year it is Tamil.’<sup>28</sup>

The preference for Tamil might be one reason. Yet, Kāmākṣī’s name is often used as Kāmāṭci, the Tamilized form of the Sanskrit name, and *iṭāṅkōṇṭa* (‘along with’) as equivalent to the Sanskrit word *sameta* (Tam. *camēta*, ‘united, joined’) was also used in invitation letters from 2002, 2008, and 2009, and in a temple brochure published in 2007 on the occasion of the *kumbhābhīṣeka* after the renovation of the Ekāmranātha temple. This shows that the Tamil form was already preferred in former invitation letters by writing *kāmāṭciyammai iṭāṅkōṇṭa*.<sup>29</sup> It seems that a rising awareness of the identity of the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali added to the preference to use her name instead of the Tamilized form of Kāmākṣī. It remains to be seen, however, if the shift of their names marks the beginning of a durable shift in perception of the goddesses.

### *Performative media*

Re-enactments of myths and memorable events are performative media that display and transmit a picture of the past. The intensity of the experience through participation, and the involvement of all senses, embeds these re-presentations of the past deeply in the memory of the audience. The rituals and re-enactments related to the marriage festival comprise a time frame of almost twenty-four hours and take place at various locations. The events have been described in detail in Chapter Four. As can be seen, the performative media put emphasis on three key scenes of the memorable event as told in the mythological narrative: the goddess’s penance, the establishment and worship of the sand *liṅga* (though the embrace is not re-enacted), Ekāmranātha’s appearance and the final (re-)marriage. A scene which does not occur in the myth as represented in the Sthalapurāṇas, is the goddess’s trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam. Here, she meets two other goddesses, one of them the goddess Kāmākṣī, who is now promoted as the bride on invitation letters and posters. However, in the performance, the festival statue of the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali represents the bride. She is the bride throughout the rituals and Kāmākṣī takes the role of the bridesmaid, accompanying her to the Ekāmranātha temple. The majority of participants I talked with clearly recognized the different festival statues and the role they take on in the festival. They recognize Ēlavārkuḷali as the bride and address her by that name, in addition to Ampāl, the general appellation for a goddess.

However, it is difficult to pin down what ideas about the past event are actually transmitted through the performance alone. Participants discuss what is taking place, and interpret the events accordingly.

(<http://www.ekambaranathartemple.org>; accessed 01.02.2018) name Ēlavārkuḷali first.

28 Interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 05.04.2010.

29 The headline is not only used for the invitation letters to the festival, but for any ceremony such as private marriages, birthdays, and other rituals that stand in relation to the Ekāmranātha temple

*Oral media*

There are two popular narratives which are circulated orally during the marriage festival. One is about a cat that is crossing the marriage, which for many participants is the reason for a repetition of the festival (and not Śiva's instruction to celebrate it each year, as told in the myth). The other narrative tells of a domestic quarrel between the goddess Ēlavārkuḷali and her soon-to-be husband Ekāmranātha, which according to some originates from Ēlavārkuḷali's jealousy of Ekāmranātha's first wife, Kāmākṣī. Both narratives have been detailed in Chapter Four.

I regard these oral narratives as a medium of memory, since they store and circulate knowledge of the past event. But at the same time, they are already formations of cultural memory, which have been produced by participants, who draw upon different media and their own experiences to understand and interpret the present situation within the framework of the culturally transmitted images of the past.

Regarding the question about the bride's identity, people establish a relationship between the two brides, which can be classified as one of three relationships: 1. Identificatory, 2. Spatial, or 3. Temporal.

1. Identificatory relationship: Identifying two deities with each other is a common strategy in the Hindu religious traditions when incorporating deities from other traditions. Michaels (2004a: 7) coined the term 'identificatory habitus', defining it as "the establishment of an identity by equating it with something else." This mode of establishing a relationship is mainly used by priests of the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples. Both priestly groups, though, tend to imply a hierarchical order in the identificatory relationship. Ekāmranātha temple priests regard Pārvatī as the consort of Śiva, and both Ēlavārkuḷali and Kāmākṣī as local manifestations of her. In contrast, Kāmākṣī temple priests consider Ēlavārkuḷali as a form or part of Kāmākṣī, which serves as bride for Ekāmranātha, whereas Kāmākṣī in her total form is not married.

2. Spatial relationship: This relationship, too, acknowledges the identification of the two brides with each other. Yet, it does not imply a hierarchy. People consider both goddesses to be the same. They understand the changing name as an indication of where the goddess is placed. 'In each place one name comes,'<sup>30</sup> said the main donor for the marriage festival. The secretary of the 'Seven Streets Association', which arranges for the function at Okkapiranthan Kulam, explained in more detail: 'Kāmākṣī Amman and Ēlavārkuḷali are the same, only the name is different. Ēlavārkuḷali is having a *caṇṇati* (shrine) at the Ekāmranātha temple, Kāmākṣī is having a separate temple. Once Kāmākṣī Amman goes there her name changes into Ēlavārkuḷali.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, the goddess has different names. She is Kāmākṣī at the Kāmākṣī temple, Ēlavārkuḷali at the Ekāmranātha temple and Pārvatī on Mount Kailāsa.

3. Temporal relationship: What I classify as temporal relationship is the oral narrative that Kāmākṣī is the first wife of Ekāmranātha, and Ēlavārkuḷali the second wife whom Ekāmranātha is going to marry during the festival. This narrative is prevalent in interviews I took at Okkapiranthan Kulam. It shows an interesting development in the sense that it

30 Interview R. Narayanan, 18.03.2010.

31 Interview S. Sengalvarayan, 22.03.2009.

highlights Ēlavārkuḷali as the contemporary and local bride, whereas the marriage with Kāmākṣī is placed in the remote past. In some versions, more often told by women, the narrative implies Ēlavārkuḷali's underlying jealousy of Ekāmranātha's first wife, Kāmākṣī.

To sum up, the four different media of memory dealt with here highlight different elements of the memorable event and transmit different knowledge about the bride's identity. The iconographic media focus on the embrace of the *liṅga*. In terms of the goddess's identity, they allow many interpretations. A clear statement is made in the textual media, which strongly promote Kāmākṣī as the bride. In contrast, the performative media present Ēlavārkuḷali as the bride, whereas Kāmākṣī plays a secondary role as bridesmaid. The oral media in turn do not prioritize any of the two brides. They rather try to bring both of them in line by establishing a relationship between the two. The oral media can at the same time be seen as a representation of cultural memory, produced by individuals and groups. The analysis strongly suggests that a picture of the past and present event is formed according to specific patterns, which are available for different social groups, such as priests and their temple affiliations, inhabitants of Okkapiranthan Kulam, or men and women.

### What is not remembered?

I have described and analyzed the different media that represent the memorable past event, and pursued the question of how people make sense of the event by means of the different media and what picture of the past they remember. A similarly intriguing question relates to what people do not remember. Or to put it in other words, 'which knowledge about the past is not transmitted?'

In our case, obviously the role of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as the former bride of Ekāmranātha in the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage rituals is not remembered (see details in Chapter Five). The history of the relocation of the festival statue of Kāmākṣī, called Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, at the end of the seventeenth century is hardly known to the public. The priests of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram and of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur remember this narrative and hand it down among themselves, but they do not promote it, nor the former role of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as bride in the marriage rituals. However, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is not forgotten. She still has a shrine at the Kāmākṣī temple, which houses a pedestal with her feet and, since 2009, a drawing of the goddess. The myth of her creation from Kāmākṣī's third eye is told in temple booklets, and a note about the relocation of her statue to Thanjavur is found on the homepage of the Kāmākṣī temple.<sup>32</sup> Some sources even mention that Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī has been created to serve as Ekāmranātha's consort, and that she still is his consort, as evidenced by the annual celebration of her wedding anniversary in Thanjavur. Nevertheless, this knowledge is not spread or transmitted on a large scale. Hardly any of the participants I spoke with have heard about Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī before. She does not form part of their collective memory, only of the group specific memory of her priests.

Connerton (2008) distinguishes seven types of forgetting. Among these, 'structural amnesia' suits best in the case of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, because "structural amnesia results

32 <http://www.srikanthikamakshi.org/kamakshi-ambal/> (accessed 01.02.2018).

from a deficit of information” (2008: 64). However, this does not answer the question of why knowledge about her former role in the marriage rituals fell into oblivion or why this information is at present not promoted. I suggest that this policy is in the interest of her priests, who follow a ritual tradition other than the Ekāmrānātha temple, downplay existing connections between the two temples, and, moreover, emphasize that the goddess Kāmākṣī is actually not married.

### 7.3 Concluding remarks

Commemorative ceremonies and re-enactments are important means for conveying and sustaining images and recollected knowledge of the past. The analysis of the media of memory has shown that a number of media are available for the production of collective cultural memories. It seems that participants differentiate and use the available media in a variety of ways. Most striking is the clear recognition of the bride’s identity as Ēlavārkuḷali in the ritual performance. Yet, the performance is only one medium of memory which is in dialogue with other media, such as texts and images. Taking the example of the bride’s identity at the Ekāmrānātha temple festival, the textual media are influential for the formation of cultural memory, as the persistence of Kāmākṣī as bride has shown. However, a powerful means for the circulation of images and ideas about the past is orality, since the contents of the available media are often discussed and transmitted through storytelling.

Moreover, it seems that for the participants the importance of the performance is the lived experience. This experience is rooted in the present and interpreted accordingly. Although the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram marriage festival is represented as the commemoration of a past event, it is not retrospective. Rather, it connects the past with the present and provides future prospects. These future prospects—the creation of auspiciousness and well-being through the marriage of two deities—are highlighted by participants and seem for them much more important than the commemoration of a past event.