

II

Wilderness and Ordered Space

1. Introduction

From my window I see patches of lawn, perfectly green, contained in borders of even stones; I see patches of flowers, yellow pansies interspersed with red tulips. There is a small pond, there are trees, and if I look through the window at the back of the house, I see a herbal garden, each herb nicely separated, the whole arranged into a maṇḍala form. These landscapes are man-made, they are pretty, they are perfect. It is nature cultivated according to our human taste. There is also a different kind of nature, one that has its own say, that grows and dies the way it wants: weeds between railway tracks, forests without paths. There is something savage about these patches of wild space, but they can make one feel free and independent.

What is wilderness? Basically it is a piece of land that has not been cultivated, on which things grow the way they happen to grow. Wilderness can be a forest with large trees, a forest with bushes, shrubs; it can be a desert landscape with cacti; it can be a field of stones and rocks. But wilderness is more than just landscape. A person can be wild – meaning he or she is out of the ordinary, or unmanageable (as a child that cannot be controlled), or an intense emotion can be called wild, for instance anger. In German a wild man, a ‘Wilder’, is someone who lives in the forest, is uncouth, uncultivated. What is wild is contrary to conventions, defies boundaries, is unruly, lacking restraint (a wild party), a-social, undomesticated (as an animal or plant). But the wild can also mean what is left intact, what is not genetically altered, the natural self-organization of a species, an inner wilderness that, according to Vandana Shiva, needs as much protection as the outer wilderness.¹

Wilderness plays an important part in most religions. It is in the wilderness that a human being is closest to the divine spirit, here he or she meets God, but also the dark forces, Satan. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness,² here he fasted, prepared for the decisive encounter. The Way of the Wilderness connotes an alternative way of life, away from corruption, indulgence, materialism; it is a way of re-grouping strength

¹ Shiva 1995.

² Matthew 4.1 ff.

and re-asserting faith, an ascetic way of life. Āśramas are in the wilderness, saints meditate in caves, on mountains, in forests; it is in the wilderness that men or women meet their guardian spirits.

The most obvious wilderness symbol is the tree. Buddha was 'awakened' under the Bodhi tree; each temple has a temple tree (sthala vṛkṣa) that points to the deity's birth in the wilderness; but the tree symbol encompasses more than just the wild, the forest: it stretches into the ordered space, it links, mediates. Standing firmly planted in the earth, its branches pushing into the eight directions and into the sky, it conducts vitalizing energies; with its leaves falling and new ones budding, it displays the changes of seasons, fertility and growth, life and death. Upside down it is the tree of life, in India the aśvattha (Pipal, ficus religiosa), symbol of the eternal Brahman; its branches, the five elements, grow down; its roots spread upwards.³ The tree also represents the world axis, the center pole, and can figure as a symbol of power and justice. In depictions of Minākṣi's marriage to Śiva in Maturai, a tree looks on, fills the background. It is never missing and is perhaps witness to the wedding, as is a *vanni* (Skt. śamī, prosopis spicigera) in another of Śiva's sixty-four divine plays.⁴

Opposite to wilderness is the ordered space, the inhabited, domesticated, planned space, the village, the town. It is space constantly altered, improved, interfered with by human hands. An abandoned building returns to wilderness. Ordered space needs human attention. Ordered space means laws, customs, norms, predictability; it means human fertility, family, society and as much as humans make use of nature, it means domesticated plants and animals, agriculture, animal husbandry.

The two 'worlds', the ordered and the wild, are opposites yet complementary. Each needs the other. Ordered space without wilderness becomes stagnant, barren; wilderness without the ordered ends in chaotic destructiveness. There is, of course, an order in the wilderness, a rhythm, a time; just as the norm, the structured space shows gaps of wilderness: perhaps in the liminality of the old rites de passage (van Gennep) and, in modern society, in the rebellion of adolescents or in extreme forms of sport.

In the Indian context, which is our concern here, many scholars have noted, commented and expanded upon the theme of wilderness and ordered space. Malamoud writes that in Vedic Brahmanic India 'the entirety of the inhabitable world is divided between grāma and araṇya'.⁵ Grāma is the village, in the sense not of a territory, but a group of people,

³ Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad 6.4, Katha Upaniṣad 6.1, Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 3.9, Bhagavad Gītā Ch. 15.

⁴ Dessigane et al. 1960: 109.

⁵ Malamoud 1996: 75 f.

inhabitants, and aranya is the forest, according to Malamoud's definition 'the village's other', 'that which is external to the village'. The village is the world of men, the forest the world of the gods; thus, according to Malamoud, Vedic sacrifice correlated those worlds with the animals to be sacrificed: domestic animals for this world, forest animals for obtaining the world of gods.⁶

We find thoughts and discussions on wilderness and ordered space in many of Shulman's works. For instance in his article 'On South Indian Bandits and Kings' Shulman juxtaposes the antinomian folk hero Maturai Viraṇ and the king.⁷ Maturai Viraṇ brushes aside social norms and their hierarchic laws; he is an 'outlaw' who stands opposite the king whose daughter he abducts.⁸ But when he gains prestige, becomes the king's helper and fights the robbers, the outlaws, he himself becomes a 'little king'.⁹ Maturai Viraṇ moves in and out of wilderness and ordered space, mediates between them, is himself once outlaw, once law enforcing agency. Ordered space is here represented by the king, wilderness by the robber hero. Both interact, need to interact; Shulman sees them as opposites, but also as sharing identity and complementing each other. In 'The Crossing of the Wilderness: Landscape and Myth in the Tamil Story of Rāma' Shulman shows how Kampan's Rāma needs to cross the wilderness – a wilderness that is not forest or jungle as in Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa, but desert, the pālai¹⁰ of the Tamil Sangam poets – in order to mature into a man fit for marriage and kingship.¹¹ Rāma has to face and fight wilderness in the form of the demoness Tāṭakai before he can rule over dharma.

Nancy Falk, in 'Wilderness and Kingship in Ancient South Asia', explores the connection that early Hindu and Buddhist kings had to wilderness and a wilderness being, the Yakṣa. Conquered territory could only be retained if the king respected and cared for the Yakṣa's sanctuary.¹² The wilderness-being at the same time was a source of the king's power. Peter Claus shows how certain folk heroes mediate between the wilderness space with its deities and the ordered, settled space, and kingship.¹³

These authors widen the concept of wilderness to include social and religious space; the wilderness harbors certain powers manifested in spirits and deities; it is a place where changes are initiated and occur; it is

⁶ Malamoud 1996: 79.

⁷ Shulman 1980c.

⁸ See Chapter I.7.

⁹ On this term and its historical meaning see Dirks 1989.

¹⁰ See below.

¹¹ Shulman 1981.

¹² Falk 1973.

¹³ Claus 1978.

a space of death and renewal, a source of strength. Wilderness is the place of robbers, of anti-socials, of outsiders, the 'outcaste' who, nourished by wild animals, conquers the ordered space and becomes king and ultimately deity, as Maturai Virāṇ and other folk heroes exemplify. We could say that wilderness is a pre-condition to social and spiritual power. Following Sontheimer in his article 'The Vana and the Kṣetra',¹⁴ we can classify the brahmācārin and the gṛhastha under ordered space, the vānaprastha and saṁnyāsīn under wilderness. The tribal traditions fall under wilderness and the 'codified' Hinduism (Eschmann) under ordered space. Sontheimer's terms for wilderness and ordered space differ from those chosen by Malamoud;¹⁵ Sontheimer's wilderness is (Skt.) vana and the ordered space is (Skt.) kṣetra. By kṣetra Sontheimer means the inhabited, well-settled space, the ordered space ruled over by a king. It is the area of regular plough agriculture, the village and the great holy centers in this area. Hierarchy, strict caste dharma and social control is emphasized in the kṣetra. Vana is the wild space, the jungle, the forest with its tribal people, ascetics and āśramas. Sontheimer points out that the two realms are complementary, that they influence each other and that much that used to belong to the tribal world (e. g., the worship of mountain spirits, of trees, animals, yakṣas, snakes, termite hills, deified clan ancestors) has found its way into folk religion and through folk religion into the codified (high) Hinduism. On the importance of the forest in terms of Maharashtrian myths from the epics (Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata) and especially with regard to rivers see Feldhaus.¹⁶

In the following, when I speak of wilderness and ordered space, I mean the physical space and the mental space, i. e., the ideas associated with the two areas. It is important to keep in mind that there are no clear boundaries between the two, but that they feed on each other in a reciprocal process: as soon as man enters the wilderness he orders it, changes it, leaves his/her marks; in turn, the ordered space grows out of the wild, and it falls back into it.

2. Naming the ordered space and wilderness

Sontheimer called them vana and kṣetra. Skt. vana means a forest, wood, thicket of trees, a cluster of plants; (Skt.) kṣetra denotes a field, ground, region, fertile soil, land, place (also of pilgrimage). Another Skt. term for forest is araṇya, a term Malamoud uses to denote wilderness space. While these terms fit the Sanskrit context, their transposition into Tamil is

¹⁴ Sontheimer 1987.

¹⁵ See above.

¹⁶ Feldhaus 1995: 96 ff.

problematic. Vana, Tamil *vaṇam*, does mean what it means in Sanskrit: wilderness, uncultivated country, forest, and is used as such, for instance, in *Vaṇa Durgā*, *Vaṇa Bhadrakālī*, but the word also has strong associations with cultivated plants as in *pūṅkāvaṇam* ('flower garden, pleasure-ground'), *nanta vaṇam* or *nantaṇa vaṇam* which means a flower garden or grove. A harsher and perhaps better word for wild space is Tamil *kāṭu*. It has meanings and connotations of uncultivated land, forest, thick, impenetrable brush wood, desert areas, the place for burning dead bodies (*cuṭukāṭu*), wildness, roughness, unpolishedness and so on. As a suffix *kāṭu* implies the wild species of a plant as opposed to its cultivated, domesticated one; or the wild cousin of the domesticated animal, e. g., *kāṭṭerumai* is a wild buffalo. *Kāṭu* is a place one would not visit at night as it is believed to be the abode of dangerous spirits. Another term, but with a different shade of meaning is *pālai*. It is one of the five landscapes (*tiṇai*) that the Sangam poets (first few centuries of the Christian Era) used in their poetry. *Tolkāppiyar* (in *Akattiṇaiyiyal*) explains *pālai* not as a separate *tiṇai*, but one shared by the other four landscapes when these are dried out in the scorching summer sun. Later writers, however, give *pālai* a status equal to that of the other landscapes.¹⁷ *Pālai* means desert, a desolate landscape in which cacti grow; it is the home of lizards, vultures and robbers. In the Sangam poetry it denotes the separation of the lovers, the pining away or wasting away of the lady left behind. The deity assigned to the *pālai* is the goddess *Korravai* or *Kālī*. Of these three terms, i. e., *vaṇam*, *kāṭu*, *pālai*, informants used *kāṭu* to denote wilderness or a space opposed to the settled area, forest, burning ground, waste land, empty plot. While *pālai* was never used, *vaṇam* could substitute for *kāṭu*, but was less favored.

A term for the ordered space presents a problem. *Kṣetra*, in Tamil *kēttiram*, does not really fit. Informants didn't use the term, except sometimes to mean a temple area. There are two common words in Tamil for village or settled space: *ūr* and *kirāmam*, the latter from Skt. *grāma*. The term *ūr* has many meanings: village, hometown, birth place, country, caste village when it stands in opposition to the *cēri*, the Dalit village, and it can express both, the village as an administrative unit (then often called *kirāmam*) which includes the wilderness space and the village as purely settled space which excludes wilderness.¹⁸ *Kirāmam* is always a village while *ūr* can be a city as well. In colloquial parlance the sophisticated city dweller will employ a form of *kirāmam* to describe the simple-minded 'village folks'. If we are to make a choice between the two terms, *ūr*

¹⁷ On the *tiṇai* see Marr 1985: 15 ff., Zvelebil 1974: 37; Hardy 1983: 144; Ramanujan 1985: 252; Ramanujan 1994: 107; Richman 1988: 29.

¹⁸ On the term *ūr/kirāmam* see Daniel 1987.

seems more appropriate since it strongly implies culture in all its meanings.

3. *Manifestation of a deity – birth in the wilderness*

When a deity is 'born', that is, when the divine power chooses to show itself somewhere on earth, it is invariably in the wilderness. Even if a temple now stands in the middle of inhabited space, the priest will begin his account of the temple by saying: 'When this here was wilderness (kāṭu) ...'. The deity is discovered in a forest or in an uncultivated piece of land; he/she is found in a termite hill, under a tree or thorny bush, in a field that is being ploughed (transformed from fallow to fertile earth). This is true of any deity, be it Śiva or a local god or goddess.

Tanañcayan, a merchant, returned late from a journey. It was night and when he crossed the caḍamba forest (kaṭampavanam), he saw in it Śiva-Sundara in Indra's chariot and all the gods worshipping Śiva. The merchant joined in the prayer and stayed there until the gods disappeared in the morning. As soon as he was home, he informed the king, Kulaśekara Pāṇḍiyan, of what he had experienced in the forest. Śiva-Sundara then appeared in the king's dream and asked him to cut the forest and build a city there. When the city was finished, Śiva was so pleased that he poured his divine nectar (maturam) on the city and this is how the city got its name: Maturai.¹⁹ Nellaiyappar (Śiva), whose temple is in the centre of Tirunelvēli, appeared in the forest as well. A cowherd bringing milk for the king daily had to pass through a bamboo forest. One day he stumbled, and the three pots filled with milk fell to the ground. The milk spilled, but the earthen pots did not break. The cowherd was surprised, nevertheless, he brought an axe and dug up the palmyra shoot over which he had stumbled. Blood flowed from it. The king was called. He recognized the shoot as śivaliṅga and built a temple for the god.²⁰

Kāṭpāṭi (Vellore) is an important railway junction, and the town's local goddess is called Rēṇukāmpikai (Rēṇukā). The goddess' statue was discovered 750 years ago when the last of a group of bullock carts hit something while traveling through the dense forest of this area. When the driver of the cart got down, he saw a statue that was bleeding on its left side. The sight caused the merchant to fall unconscious and then Rēṇukāmpikai appeared in his dream and told him to build a temple in her honor at that place.²¹ Māriyamman, a sister or form/aspect of

¹⁹ Dessigane et al. 1960: 11 f., Tiruṣaiyāṭal 3.

²⁰ Tirunelvēli 1987: 25 ff.

²¹ Indian Express, Madurai, 16.3.1998.

Reṇukā²² is the most popular goddess of Tamilnadu. Even kings worshipped her, among them the ruler of Tañcāvūr, Veñkōji Makārājā Cattirapati (1676–1683). He used to visit the goddess Māriyamman in Camayapuram (near Tiruccirāppaḷi). One night the goddess appeared in his dream and revealed to him that he need not go so far and that she was close by, five kilometers east of Tañcāvūr. He would find her there in a forest of punnai trees (Alexandrian laurel) in a termite hill. The king found her, happily began to worship her at that place and built a small temple for her.²³ This temple, now called Punnainallūr Māriyamman temple, has grown big and famous and houses a number of sub-deities, one of them Durgā. She was found under similar circumstances: A rich man's black cow stopped giving milk to its calf and instead poured the milk over a particular spot. When the cow owner dug up the place where the cow had released its milk, he found the statue of Durgā.

The deity discovered in the wilderness can be in the form of a statue, but more often it has itself a wilderness shape: is a stone (which can easily be assimilated to the śivaliṅga), a root, a sprout, a tuber, a snake etc. Embedded in the wilderness image are certain symbols: the milk which pours over the deity, the blood that flows from the deity as a sign of the deity's injury – to compound the wilderness imagery, the blood often flows from a tree or plant that itself is regarded as the deity or that harbors a deity.²⁴ One or the other or in combination these symbols turn up in countless origin myths throughout India and even in Muslim myths, where a pīr's discovery can be marked by his injury and flow of blood.²⁵ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi collected 130 examples and found that the majority of them came from Śiva temples and Shulman's collection too comes from śaiva sources.²⁶ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi concludes from her material that the blood legends pertain mainly to Śiva as svayambhūliṅga (selfborn liṅga), but also to Gaṇeśa, Subrahmaṇya, folk goddesses and folk gods who are avatāras or have aspects of Śiva (Khaṇḍobā, Aiyappan, Nāgarāja), and that, with a few exceptions, these legends are lacking in the vaiṣṇava tradition.²⁷ The folk data from Tamilnadu agrees with this: in most cases the injured deity turns out to be Aiyānār or a goddess, while the vaiṣṇava deities tend to emerge from water.²⁸ There are exceptions.²⁹ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi and especially Shulman have analyzed the

²² See below.

²³ Sthala varalāru, Das 1991: 124.

²⁴ See also Feldhaus 1995: 98; Bhīmaśaṅkar; Link 1997: 91; Murukan in Kataragama.

²⁵ Bayly 1993: 481; on wilderness in South Indian Muslim tradition see Bayly 1992: 120 ff.

²⁶ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978; Shulman 1980a: 93ff.

²⁷ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978: 116.

²⁸ See above, Karuppar, and Chapter V.

²⁹ See below.

meanings of blood and milk/cow,³⁰ and, with certain reservations, their findings can be applied here as well: the blood that flows is a sign of the deity's sacrifice/birth (Shulman); but, contrary to Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's argument, it need not necessarily be a sign of the deity's anger or displeasure, nor need the violence that causes the blood show a correspondence to certain character traits of Śiva and the goddesses.

The cow, sometimes black, sometimes white, sometimes said to be Kāmadhenu,³¹ is the nourishing (white) or destructive (black) female/goddess (Shulman; but this interpretation does not make sense when the injured deity is the goddess herself, as in the case of Durgā above); the milk is cooling, is food and purifying substance used in abhiṣeka rites; it can be likened to semen (creative seeds), to Śiva's ashes, the moon on the god's head, to purity and sattvic qualities and stands in opposition to the red of the goddess, the creative-destructive aspects of life, the rajasic qualities.³² Blood and milk in these myths do not necessarily always mean an opposition between violence/death and nourishing, supporting life substances;³³ in Tamil folk religion blood is sometimes homologous to milk, i. e., a life-giving/life-supporting substance, e. g., when the god-dancer drinking the blood of the sacrificed animal calls it 'pāl', milk! This explains why in some of the myths either the blood or the milk can be missing. The red-white pair together with the black cow forms a triad of colors, the colors of the *guṇas*.³⁴

It seems clear that in the long history of Indian religions blood and milk have become heavily loaded with symbolic content and that the value attached to them can differ from context to context; a study of this is not possible here, but for our purpose it should be pointed out that South Indian traditions, especially those less 'brahmanized', do not attach the polluting quality to blood that the high, brahmanical tradition does. Blood does signify danger, violence, but it is also a source of power and life-force (we shall come back to this when we look at blood sacrifices). Milk has pure, sattvic qualities; it stops the blood, appeases the heat/violence of birth, it is one of the five sacred products of the cow. The cow is a domestic animal, and this could mean that the wilderness power of the deity is domesticated through the cow's milk; the cowherd who replaces the cow as carrier of the milk (which he spills) has a mediating position in society: he supplies milk to kings as well as to Brahmans and other castes; through his association with the (sacred) cow his position in the caste hierarchy has a certain fluidity. If the discoverer of the deity is of a

³⁰ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978; Shulman 1980a: 93ff.

³¹ See plate.

³² See Chapter III.

³³ As argued by Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi.

³⁴ Discussed in Chapter III.

low caste or even a Dalit, it can mean a recognition of a particularly close and ancient relationship between the low-caste and the deity;³⁵ but it can also reflect the belief that low-caste persons and Dalits are particularly able to manage the dangerous forces of a deity. In Tamilnadu the discoverers of the deity are in most cases men, as in Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi's examples; however, if the finder is a woman, it does not mean that her caste is matrilineal; furthermore, we do find couples involved in the sighting of the deity (in Ciñkampuṇari a hunter couple discovered the god while digging up sweet-potatoes, vaḷḷikkilaṅku), but we can agree with Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi that the gender distribution reflects social roles, and where it is a couple it might reflect not so much social equality but the shared duties of food-gathering.³⁶ The king who is called to the spot or who is informed of the deity's appearance has the role of patron: he legitimizes the cult and provides funds for the temple building and the worship. In fact, many folk temples stood under the patronage of a local king, who in more recent times has been replaced by a village officer/functionary. Depending on certain circumstances at the time of the deity's appearance like place (public, private), caste power structures, the finder can claim the deity as his/her (clan/family's) own. This means that he/she or the clan takes all the responsibility for the deity (financing and doing of worship etc.).

Apart from the blood and milk imagery, what seems important in the Tamil myths are the earth and the wilderness. The deities do not come from the sky, from heaven, they are born from the earth, emerge from it, are dug up or grow out of it. This shows two things: one, that the deities are present on earth, accessible to humans, and two, that the earth, the womb from which the deities emerge, retains a quality of the sacred, a sacredness that once must have been more predominant if we can accept that the non-aryan societies worshipped earth as goddesses,³⁷ and that certain agricultural rites still practiced today are a reflection of this.³⁸ The sacredness of the deity extends to his/her place, the temple (kōvil); deity and temple form a unity. There may be no outward sign (stone, statue, weapon etc.) to show the presence of the deity, the sacred site (often known only to the villagers) is enough to indicate a source of divine power. If we replace the black cow with the black earth, we can propose a vertical triad of black earth (womb), manifesting (red) deity and white or sattvic sky/heaven.

Before we say more about the wilderness aspect, let us look at the following three examples. They underline the motives discussed above

³⁵ As Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978: 117 points out.

³⁶ Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1978: 118.

³⁷ See e. g., Boal 1979 and 1980; Bhattacharyya 1977, Jayakar 1989.

³⁸ See e. g., Brückner 1995: 221 ff.

but bring in three more important elements: the termite hill, the snake and the deity's fixity.

A cow kept releasing its milk at a particular spot and nothing could be done to prevent it. Finally the villagers called the king. At the place where the cow had released its milk, there was a stone. While they tried to remove the stone with iron bars, the god appeared to a man and said: 'I am Aiyaṅār. Build me a temple here!' (Eṅṅāyiram, Viluppuram).

Where the god appears, the temple has to be built because the god refuses to be moved.³⁹ As in the case of the large Śiva temples, the king is called to acknowledge that the stone is in fact a deity and that a temple can be built for the god. This Aiyaṅār is the clan deity of a group of Brahmins calling themselves Aṣṭasahasram.⁴⁰

A boy daily grazed the cattle of Piḷḷaikkavuṅṭar. There was a barren cow that kept releasing its milk over a termite mound (puru). When the boy (a Dalit) dared speak about it, nobody believed him and he was beaten. One day Piḷḷaikkavuṅṭar himself came to verify the persistent claims of the boy. When he saw that the boy had spoken the truth, he fell at his feet. Then he built a hut over the termite mound. Later the god appeared in Piḷḷaikkavuṅṭar's dream and revealed himself as Malaiyāṅṭicāmi (Kōmaṅkalam Putūr, Coimbatore).

This god receives only vegetarian offerings and his priest, a Nāyakkar, is very strict in observing purity rules. He related that once he had accidentally come in contact with meat and when he had entered the temple, he had seen a snake circled around the god, a sign of the god's displeasure. Describing the god, he compared him to Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa even though śaiva festivals such as kārttikai tīpam and civaṅrāttiri (Skt. śivarātri) are celebrated for him.

One of the guardians of the goddess Celliyammaṅ in Mōkaṅūr is called Cempāṅ. Cempāṅ was one of six brothers who were moving from place to place in order to avoid men harassing their beautiful sister. The god Karuppaṅṅacāmi went with them in his invisible form and protected them until one day the brothers had nothing to eat. At that time the god revealed himself and offered them edible golden flowers that appeased their hunger. Following Karuppaṅṅacāmi's suggestion, they settled in Mōkaṅūr, where the brothers got work as guardians for the king. When the king showed an interest in their sister, five brothers left with their sister, leaving Cempāṅ, the cattle-herder, behind.

While Cempāṅ was herding cattle, it happened that three cows regularly released their milk at a nāval tree. The village people, hearing of it, followed these cows and began to dig up the earth where the cows had released their milk. While doing so, they injured the god Karuppaṅṅacāmi with the shovel. The god was in the

³⁹ See Chapter V.

⁴⁰ See Chapter VI.2.

form of a snake and blood flowed. When the king realized that he had hurt the god, he died. Cempān, accused of having murdered the king, committed suicide (Mōkaṇūr, Namakkal).

Karuppaṇṇacāmi is in the form of a stone under a nāval tree inside the main shrine. He is one of the guardians of Celliyammaṇ, the main deity of this temple, and the temple is named after him: Nāvalaṭi Karuppaṇṇacāmi (nāvalaṭi = at the foot of the nāval tree). Outside the main shrine, where Dalits worship, Cempān, like the god, sits under another nāval tree in the form of a stone.

One of the wilderness symbols is the termite hill. If it grows in places where people live, it is destroyed because people fear that snakes may settle there and enter their homes. In the wilderness or in areas distant from houses the termite hill, especially if it shelters a snake, can become a temple, because the termite hill or the snake or both are regarded as deity. Karuppaṇṇacuvāmi in Māranāṭu (Sivaganga) is in the form of a termite hill; Aṅkāḷammaṇ of Mēl Malaiyaṇūr (Viluppuram) is a termite hill;⁴¹ many other gods and goddesses of South India are termite hills or live in them in the form of a snake.⁴² Many stories tell of ascetics who disappear when termite hills grow around them (Vālmiki being the most famous), and other religious traditions in India know the symbol: the Jaina Bahubali in Sravanabelgola (Karnataka) stands in a termite hill. The termite hill is the gate to the netherworlds,⁴³ it is the world mountain, the axis mundi,⁴⁴ the center; it has an upward movement, connects heaven and earth; it grows, renews itself; it is at a place where there is water and often it surrounds a tree. It is the house of snakes. The snake, like the termite hill, can be of either sex, a god or a goddess. If the deity needs to communicate with humans, it frequently does so by appearing in the form of a snake.⁴⁵ The snake symbolizes fertility (in connection with a child wish women set up snake stones under the pipal and neem trees, considered a couple), renewal (it sheds its skin), immortality (the snakes licked some of the ambrosia)⁴⁶. When the Ādiśakti creates the worlds she takes the form of a snake;⁴⁷ snakes are associated with rain and water and they spread their protective hood over deities and saints. The snake is located both in the center of the shrine as well as at its boundary: we see it sometimes under the seat of Aiyaṇār (at the center) and near Muṇi (at

⁴¹ Meyer 1986: 29 ff.

⁴² Meyer 1986: 58.

⁴³ On the mythology and cult of the termite hill in India see König 1984.

⁴⁴ Irwin 1982.

⁴⁵ See above.

⁴⁶ O'Flaherty 1980: 222.

⁴⁷ Meyer 1986: 6.

the boundary). The serpent re-traced the ancient boundaries of Maturai, hence the city's old name: 'tiruvālavāy' ('poison-mouth')⁴⁸.

The deity born in the forest might be in a city now (Śiva in Maturai, Nelliappan in Tirunelvēli) or swallowed by suburban settlements (Kāṭṭumuniyappan 'Muniyappan of the forest', Kukai, Salem); the story of the deity's birth in the wilderness is not altered, and, in a sense, the wilderness remains in the temple in the form of the temple tree (sthala vṛkṣa). The species of this tree varies, what is important is the tree's sacredness: it must not be tampered with, nobody is allowed to cut its branches – if anyone does, the god's punishment follows (the Pipal tree inside the Muniyappan temple of Kāntipuram, Kōyamuttūr, is still growing and a hole was made in the temple ceiling to accommodate it). Precisely because it represents wilderness, human hands should not touch it, use it for their domestic purposes. A more powerful statement of the deity's wilderness is if the deity itself is a tree; famous examples are Māriyamman of Camayapuram (Trichy) whose original form is a Nīm tree (the Nīm is sacred to her, is her tree) and the god Jagannātha of Puri in Orissa.⁴⁹ Trees (especially the Ficus variety and the Nīm) are shrine sites; e. g., if Pipal and Nīm are together they form a couple and are worshipped for children; surrounding them are snake stones;⁵⁰ if a snake inhabits a tree it becomes a shrine to Nāgarājā (Kōccaṭai Muttaiyā temple, Maturai).

Heroes who become deities similarly are born or 'reborn' in the wilderness. We have met Maturai Vīraṅ.⁵¹ His mythology says that he was born the son of a king, but because the umbilical cord was wrapped around him at birth (which astrologers interpreted to mean the destruction of the kingdom), he was abandoned in the forest. Fed and protected by wild animals, he survived and was found and raised by a leatherworker (Cakkiliyar) couple. Throughout his short life, Maturai Vīraṅ breaks conventions, moves in and out of wilderness space, and his final destination reflects his ambivalent status: he becomes the guardian of goddess Mīnākṣī at Maturai, and his shrine is still located on the eastern side of the temple, at the outer wall which separates the sacred space from the busy city world. Kāttavarāyaṅ is another hero god whose birth is associated with the wilderness. Like Maturai Vīraṅ, he is a son of Śiva, born either of a deer that Śiva creates in his mind, or from the union of Śiva and Pārvatī in their deer forms. He is also born of high caste human parents, abandoned in the forest and there taken care of by animals. His life ends on a wooden pole that grows parallel to his life and is tended in

⁴⁸ Shulman 1980a: 123 ff.

⁴⁹ See Tripathi 1986: 223 ff.

⁵⁰ See e. g., Boulnois 1939.

⁵¹ In Chapter I.7.

the forest by the goddess Kālī.⁵² Similarly Muttuppaṭṭan, a popular folk deity/hero of Tirunelveli, though not himself born in the wilderness, meets the two women he falls in love with and later marries in the forest. Muttuppaṭṭan is a Brahman and his wives are Cakkiliyars, they stand at the opposite end of the social hierarchy. One version of the ballad⁵³ says that the two women at birth were abandoned in the forest by their mother, a Brahman, who was afraid her fidelity would be suspected because she had conceived the girls through the grace of Śiva and during her husband's absence. Multiple births or different births often serve to correct forbidden intercaste relationships. On Muttuppaṭṭan see Blackburn 1988: 141ff.

Birth or survival in the wilderness forecasts an extraordinary destiny for the hero; in the forest itself extraordinary events happen: a snake spreads its hood over the child to protect it from sun and rain, wild animals offer their milk to the child. The forest and, by extension, the tree represent a space in which the normal behavior and the laws known and followed by humans can be dissolved or even reversed. Cows don't normally release their milk somewhere in the wilderness, stones don't normally bleed. Certainly, extraordinary events can happen in the ordered space, and they do, as when a termite hill appears in the middle of a room and reveals itself to be the goddess Ankāḷamman (Valājāpēṭṭai); but, if we want to find divine power or a divine being, the best place to look is in the wilderness. What makes wilderness so attractive? We shall discuss this below, here let us just summarize: the deity or hero needs to be born in a pure environment, one free of human pollution; divine power can best be felt in the wilderness, and wilderness generally is charged with a different kind of power than human habitation, one could say a more 'spiritual', pristine or raw power.

4. Landscapes: from the village to the wilderness

How is space ordered in India? The most basic model for both the arrangement of a village/city and of large temple areas is the maṇḍala, a design based on a square divided by lines that connect the cardinal directions and concentric circles that move outward from a center (the maṇḍala form was also used in ancient India as a theoretical framework for interstate relationships and strategies of warfare). Exact form and content of the ground-maṇḍala are described in the works of architecture

⁵² See Shulman, Biardeau, Masilamani-Meyer in Hildebeitel 1989 and Masilamani-Meyer 2004.

⁵³ *Muttuppaṭṭan Katai* (Nā.Vāṇamāmalai). On Muttuppaṭṭan see Blackburn 1988: 141 ff.

and town planning which also describe the selection of an area, the layout of streets, the position of temples, structure of houses, etc.⁵⁴

In general the city or village plan is based on a diagram consisting of 81 or 64 (or less) squares (Skt. pada, Ta. patam). Each square is inhabited by a deity.⁵⁵ The diagram (of 81 or 64 squares) has four zones, consisting of the center, the square of Brahmā, called brāhma zone. This center is surrounded by the daiva or daivika zone (zone of deities), which in turn is enclosed by the mānuṣa zone (zone of humans). Enveloping the mānuṣa zone is the paisāca zone (zone of the 'malevolent spirits'). Sometimes a fifth zone is added, called rākṣasa.⁵⁶ The square diagram and the four or five zones are also called vāstumaṇḍala.⁵⁷ In the daivika and mānuṣa zones should be the houses of the Brāhmins, in the paisāca zone the houses of the craftsmen.⁵⁸

Two basic ideas seem to lie behind the plan of a village: a square, in which the streets follow the four cardinal points, and a circle, presided over by a deity (Śiva or Viṣṇu) in the center, around which are the concentric zones corresponding roughly to the four varṇas: brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya, śūdra.⁵⁹ In the various village or city plans separate quarters are allocated to the different castes; and while there does not seem to be a general agreement as to where these quarters are to be (east, west etc.), castes that pursue impure activities (e. g., butchers) are strictly separated from those with purer occupations (e. g., goldsmiths). The houses of the Dalits and the cremation and burial grounds are situated outside the village.

The treatises on architecture laid down rules as to the location of the temples, but there seems to be much room for variance. Basically the deities are assigned one of the squares (pada) of the vāstumaṇḍala.⁶⁰ 'At the heart of the village are the temples consecrated by brahmins; the Śiva temple may be here as well or may be outside the village. The temple of Vināyaka should be on the square of Bhṛṅgarāja or that of Pāvaka; the Śiva temple is on the squares of Īśa, Soma or of any other deity ...'.⁶¹ In a village constructed according to the daṇḍaka plan, the gods are in the north of the village, but the goddess (Mahākālī, Durgā or Draupadī)

⁵⁴ See Ananthwar and Rea 1980: 130.

⁵⁵ There are minor variations in the division of the squares and the allocation of deities; Dagens 1985: 17–22; Colas 1986: plate 5.

⁵⁶ On these zones see Dagens 1985: 20; Colas 1986: plates 6–9; Moore 1990: 179 ff.; Brunner 1986: 17.

⁵⁷ See Chapter III. Brunner 1986: 17.

⁵⁸ Dagens 1985: 31.

⁵⁹ Ananthwar and Rea 1980: 172.

⁶⁰ See Dagens 1985: 31 ff.; Kramrisch 1946: 29 ff., 234.

⁶¹ Dagens 1985: 31.

should have her temple beyond the village;⁶² according to the svastika plan, Kālī has her temple at the northern and southern boundaries where the streets leave the fortified town, while Gaṇeśa is located at the eastern and western gates.⁶³ The Karmuka plan specifies that the crossroads of busy streets should be guarded by disease goddesses.⁶⁴

Today every village has a different topographical and social composition, behind which we can rarely trace the well-ordered concept of the *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*. The old towns, however, have been able to preserve some of the ideas of the architectural śāstras. We think of Maturai, built around the immense temple of Śiva (Sundareśvara) and Mīnākṣī, or Citamparam, where the streets also follow the four directions and encircle the temple of Śiva. In both towns the dangerous dark goddess (Cellattamman in Maturai, Kālī in Citamparam) sits at the northern boundary.⁶⁵ Uttaramērūr (Kanchipuram), planned as a Brahman village ('*caturvedimaṅgalam*') with its temples at the places prescribed by the āgamas, has much changed since its foundation in the 8th century as a study by Gros and Nagaswamy shows.⁶⁶ The temple of Aiyaṅār ('*Ayyaṅ Mahāśāstā*') in the south of Uttaramērūr has disappeared, but in the north of the village, a few meters from the pond named '*Aiyaṅār kuṭṭai*' ('*pond of Aiyaṅār*') there is a statue of the god, an 8th century image of the Pallava time.⁶⁷ A newer temple of Durgā, yet with the old statue of the 8th century, is in the north of Uttaramērūr, but the cult of this goddess has been eclipsed by that of two other goddesses: Draupadī and Mārimēlkaṭṭamman.

Village population fluctuates. Entire castes can leave a village and be replaced by different castes; they bring their own deities and/or take over old ones. The shift in the population displaces the village center so that, for instance, the Brahman street – provided it ever was at the center – comes to be located at the periphery. Nor are temples to Śiva or Perumāḷ necessarily in the center. It is extremely difficult to read a pattern into the organization of castes and deities in a village without knowing the village history, but what remains consistent with regard to the village population and its deities is a separation of pure from impure and a distinction between wilderness and settled space. In the following, moving from the center to the periphery, we shall discuss some of the common deities in and outside the village. What our choice represents are tendencies; in other words, if we place Māriyamman in the center it is because she tends to be associated with the village population, guarding people rather than a

⁶² Ananthwar and Rea 1980: 138.

⁶³ Ananthwar and Rea 1980: 153.

⁶⁴ Ananthwar and Rea 1980: 160.

⁶⁵ Shulman 1980a: 218 ff.

⁶⁶ Gros and Nagaswamy 1970.

⁶⁷ Gros and Nagaswamy 1970: 89.

piece of land, but it does not mean that her temple can never be located in the wilderness.

The center

Deities of the pan-Hindu tradition (Śiva, Perumāḷ, Gaṇeśa) and private temples tend to be within the village, the private temples (conta kōvil) tending to be located in or near the quarter of its owner(s). The most popular folk goddess of Tamilnadu is Māriyamman. She was the goddess of smallpox, the counterpart of Śītālā in the north of India, and today she is mainly worshipped in conjunction with skin diseases, blindness and general illness. Two myths explain her origin, one of them, also known in northern parts of India, traces her to Reṇukā whose infidelity caused her son, Paraśurāma, to cut off her head and replace it with that of a low caste or Dalit (Cakkiliyar) women. Māriyamman is the goddess with Reṇukā's head and the low caste body (that is why she is often worshiped in the form of a head); Ellaiyamman is the reverse: she has the low caste woman's head. The other myth tells of a Dalit (Paṛaiyar) who pretends to be a Brahman and gets wedded to the Brahman Māriyamman. When she finds out the truth, she sets fire to herself, dies and becomes a goddess. Before her death she curses her husband to become the buffalo that is sacrificed to her.⁶⁸

In Māriyamman low and high are combined and this fits her dual nature of disease, fire, on the one hand and cure, coolness, on the other. When she throws her pox pearls on a person, it is considered her grace, and she is treated like a guest in the home of the patient. All things that could anger the goddess are avoided during the time of the person's illness, especially frying food and sexual union (i. e., heating activities), and the goddess and the patient are cooled with margosa leaves and cool foods. Heating and cooling elements are also part of Māriyamman's rituals. Her festivals are held during the hot season, when smallpox used to strike. In many parts of Tamilnadu (Coimbatore, Salem, Trichy, Thanjavur) the goddess is 'married' to a tree trunk with three branches. This tree trunk is later uprooted and, after the sacrifice of a goat, replaced with a stone, her guardian (called e. g., Karuppar, Etircāmi – Etircāmi meaning the god who is opposite her). After the 'death' of her tree trunk 'husband', Māriyamman is dressed in white to show her status as widow, and the drummers play the one-beat rhythm used for funerals. A day later the goddess goes in procession around the village accompanied by music and

⁶⁸ On Māriyamman see Elmore 1925: 129; Oppert 1893: 466; Hildebeitel 1982: 88 ff.; Meyer 1986: 15; Masilamani-Meyer 1996a and 1996; Whitehead 1976: 117 ff.; Beck 1981; Nishimura 1987; Aiyappan 1931.

fireworks, to make her happy again (Cēlam). The identity of the goddess' husband remains a mystery so far, but Beck argues convincingly that he is a form of the buffalo demon (Maḥiṣāsura).⁶⁹ This connection was also made by the Brahman priest (Kurukkaḷ) of the Māriyamman temple in Tiruccirāppaḷli, who said that the goddess received her name (Makāmāri) because she killed a demon (asura); however, he denied that the tree trunk was the husband of the goddess. The priest of the Māriyamman temple in Ānantappālaiyam (Erode), however, said that the tree trunk was the husband of the goddess and that she was married to it and later became a widow. The theme of Māriyamman's wedding, of course, can be linked to smallpox itself. The disease heats the body, just as sexual desire heats the body. (Pimples of adolescents are said to be signs of a hot body and sexual desire.) The goddess' marriage allows a release of her heat. As widow, the goddess is all that is antithetical to heat and sexual desire. (Widows were not allowed any foods with heating qualities.) In other words, the wedding allows her to become cool and beneficent again. An interesting belief exists among the Mina of Rajasthan, namely that the grace (disease) of the pox goddess (Hitara) makes a young man ready for marriage.⁷⁰ Themes of fertility play as well in the festival; thus if the (demon) tree trunk grows leaves during the time of the festival, it means prosperity for the whole area (Bīma Nagar, Tiruccirāppaḷli), and in many temples the women of the village will plant nine grains that are left to sprout and are later thrown into the river or water tank.⁷¹ Walking over hot coals (tīmiti), carrying pots with hot coals (tīccaṭṭi), hook swinging (ceṭṭil), insertion of small hooks into the tongue, lips, etc. (alaku kuttutal), carrying a sick person on a 'bier' (pāṭai) to the goddess are the more fierce vows undertaken in gratitude for health and fulfillment of other wishes. Other offerings include animal sacrifices, flour lamps (māviḷakku), silver plates representing the part of the body that was cured (especially eyes, since smallpox could cause blindness) and salt (the salt granules stand for the pox pustules, pimples etc.).

The ambivalence of Māriyamman – she is both dangerous and benign – is reflected in her place in the village. We find her within the settled area, at its border, and outside, in the wilderness. It is also reflected in her status: she is married yet she is a virgin or maiden (kaṇṇi). The same can be said of other goddesses. For instance, Mākāḷiyamman of Cikkara-campālaiyam (Erode) is wedded to a tree trunk like Māriyamman. Buffaloes used to be sacrificed for this goddess. The bridegroom of Uccimākāḷiyamman of Tumpalappaṭṭi (Coimbatore) is Śiva. The priest considered the goddess married and pointed out her marriage necklace

⁶⁹ Beck 1981: 91 ff.

⁷⁰ Jain 1973: 154 ff.

⁷¹ On this theme see Hildebeitel 1991: 53 ff.

(maṅkaliyam), yet, like Māriyamman and Mākāḷiyamman, Uccimākāḷiyamman is without a consort in her shrine. It is possible that the wedding of the village goddess (kirāma teyvam), especially when she is in the settled area, serves to render her gentle.⁷²

Many of the goddesses in the settled area have undergone a 'sweetening' process;⁷³ their dangerous, fierce form has been pacified. Signs of this are a 'purification' of the goddess and a shift of the impure and dangerous substances onto her guardians. Thus, before 1956 (when the government took over the temple) Kōṭṭai Periya Māriyamman of Cēlam received many sacrifices of goats and chickens. Brahman and Ceṭṭiyar castes did not enter the temple then. Now the two compulsory sacrifices of a male goat and a rooster at the beginning and at the end of the festival are done outside the temple and the benefactor of the non-vegetarian offerings is the guardian of Māriyamman: Maturai Vīraṅ. No matter how much the sweetening of the goddess, signs of her fierce nature remain. Nellukkaṭai Māriyamman of Nākappaṭṭinam is surrounded by houses. Her priests are Brahmans (Kurukkal). No blood sacrifices are offered in or outside the temple. Many years ago hook swinging was practiced in front of the temple. On the ninth day of the festival Māriyamman goes in procession decorated as Maḥiṣāsuramardini ('Makiṣācūra marttanam', festival notice). She is depicted with a beheaded buffalo below her. She has two silver teeth that are removed on the last day of the festival, and the 'blood' (red kuṅkumam powder) is cleaned off them in a ceremony called 'utiravāy tuṭaiṭṭu' ('wiping of the bloody mouth'). Her fierceness has been converted and transferred onto her mobile (utsava/uṛcava) form. Coinciding with this sweetening is the hook swinging as it is practiced today: Instead of hooking someone by his back onto a long pole fastened on another pole and swinging him around in a circle,⁷⁴ a door-frame like structure hangs on the pole and the selected person (he represents Kāttavarāyan) stands in it while he is swung around once.⁷⁵ The temple itself shows signs of sweetening: facing the sanctum of the goddess is Nandin, Śiva's vehicle. His presence in the temple or shrine of a deity usually signifies a movement towards the brahmanic cults.

The goddesses within the settled area have a guardian function in the sense that they are responsible for the village's prosperity, its peace and unity. They have the power to heal, grant children, make the village rich; they preside over birth and death. In most villages they are distinguished from the ūrkkāval (village guardian) who usually is a male deity

⁷² See also below.

⁷³ A term used by Fell McDermott: 1994 in connection with Kālī of Bengal.

⁷⁴ On hook-swinging in India see Oddie 1995.

⁷⁵ Masilamani-Meyer 1989: 69 ff.

(Aiyaṅār, Muṇi, Karuppar) and who guards the whole territory of the village, including its wilderness space.

The area of fields and water sources

Surrounding the village is agricultural space. If the village is near a river or lake or in a fertile area, we are likely to find rice fields, sugar cane and banana plantations; in drier areas peanut and cotton fields. Near the fields, outside the actual inhabited area, are the large water tanks or irrigation ponds that fill during the monsoon rains and lie dry in the summer months. With the exception of the western districts from Coimbatore to Dharmapuri, the most frequent guardian of the pond in all the districts is Aiyaṅār. The following story tells us how Aiyaṅār received his job:

Once there was much rain. The pond was full and threatened to overflow. The maṭaiyāṅ (the guardian of the pond and the sluices) was worried. The earthwork around the pond threatened to break and that could mean the flooding of the village. He wanted to run to the village to get help, yet he did not dare leave the pond for fear that any small break in the earthwork without his immediate attention to it could turn into a major break. Aiyaṅār took pity on the maṭaiyāṅ and said: "Go to the village and get help. In the meantime I shall guard the pond." The maṭaiyāṅ ran to the village and told the villagers about the pond and about Aiyaṅār's promise. The wily villagers thought: "If we kill the maṭaiyāṅ, Aiyaṅār will have to keep on watching the pond." So they killed the maṭaiyāṅ (Ati-kamuṭaiya Aiyaṅār, Tiruppūvaṅam; Āṇaimalai Aiyaṅār, Tirumāṅikkam).

The killing of the maṭaiyāṅ may be a veiled indication of a human sacrifice, made to strengthen the banks of the pond.⁷⁶ Aiyaṅār not only guards the pond and water tank, he also stands near springs and rivers. From Cāptūr (Madurai) a path leads across the mango groves into the mountains. Up on one of the hills, in the wilderness of rocks and trees, there are two small ponds fed by a spring. Their water is crystal clear, soft and smells of spring blossoms. On the side of these ponds, in a niche of a rock, is the statue of Aiyaṅār. He guards the spring and is the eldest of four brothers. His first younger brother is further down the hill near a river. At the foot of the hills is the third Aiyaṅār. He guards the nearby water tank and the area up to the Cāptūr boundary. The fourth Aiyaṅār, the youngest of the brothers, is in Cāptūr and watches over the large pond (kaṅmāy). Ideally the order of the pūjā and worship should follow the order of the brothers' age, beginning with the eldest.

⁷⁶ See Chapter VI.4.

Rain is another domain over which Aiyānār rules and, connected to this, the fertility of the land. The priest of the Īṭāṭi-Aiyānār temple (Māṭakkūḷam, Madurai) called Aiyānār ‘the supreme lord of rain’ (‘maḷaikku ātipati’) and Varuṇaṅ (Skt. Varuṇa). Rain is supposed to be the result of Aiyānār’s asceticism (tavam) (Viḷāccēri). In most villages Aiyānār is near the large pond, is worshipped for rain and is also village guardian (ūrkkāval), e. g., Neṭuṅkuḷam (Madurai), Tiruppācētti (Sivaganga), Kīḷa Vāṇiyaṅkuṭi (Sivaganga), Viramūr (Viluppuram). In Eṇṇāyiram (Viluppuram) the god is called Cemmanṇēri-Aiyānār because his temple is built on red earth (cemmaṅ) between three large ponds or lakes (ēri). Aiyānār is not always the village guardian. In Allinakaram (Sivaganga) Aiyānār watches the pond while Muṇiyāṅṭi is the ūrkkāval, and in A. Vallāppaṭṭi (Madurai) one Aiyānār, whose temple is about three and a half kilometers northwest of the village on a hill, is the village guardian, the other Aiyānār, his younger brother, whose temple is about one and a half kilometers southeast of the village, guards the large pond. The two brothers came to this village with their armies. They chased the tigers and settled down, Cinnapuliya Aiyānār (the ‘younger tiger-Aiyānār’) with his larger army and more ferocious temperament near the pond, Periyapuliya Aiyānār (the ‘elder tiger-Aiyānār’) with the smaller army and a more gentle and peace-loving mind, on the hill. During the kutirai eṭuppu festival⁷⁷ the younger god receives the greater number of clay horses, because he had a greater army.

In the western districts of Tamilnadu other gods have the task of guarding the water sources. Kuṭṭaimuṇiyappaṅ, as his name suggests (‘kuṭṭai’ means ‘pond’) watches over the water source. He is also the ūrkkāval of the village (Cēmuṅṭiyūr, Erode). Kuṭṭaimuṇiyappaṅ is the largest of seven Muṇis sitting in a row. They receive non-vegetarian offerings. To their side are the seven maidens (Kaṇṇimār) and Vināyakar. These deities are covered during the non-vegetarian pūjā. The temple is private and belongs to Vaṇṇiyars. Karaimuṇiyappaṅ (from ‘karai’, ‘shore, embankment’) of Kēcarimaṅkalam guards the pond and the village and keeps away cholera, smallpox and black magic. The temple is common (potu) and the priest is a Vaṇṇiyar. The temple is an open shrine, like the one in Cēmuṅṭiyūr, but there are only two statues of Muṇi here, said to be elder and younger brother. As in the other temple, sculpted horses, the seven maidens and a snake charmer are part of the temple composition.

There are guardian deities who watch over dams, tanks, rivers, sluices and springs. They are there to sustain a balance and harmony in the flow of water and hence in the process of sowing and harvesting. Their protection encompasses the entire village, the wealth of which depends

⁷⁷ See Chapter V.

on a proper and measured circulation of water. Two, three years without rain for villages not located near rivers or other large water sources can mean their desertion. Too much rain, floods, can ruin a family's yearly food supply. Absence of rain is often attributed to moral wrongs. It is a very old Tamil belief that in the kingdom of a just king it rains three times a year and, where there is a just man, rain will not fail. A devotee regretted the neglected condition of his clan shrine (Vēṭṭiyappar) and he commented: 'If the temple were kept clean and ritually pure, it would rain!' In some villages near Viruttācalam long absences of rain induce the villagers to fashion a straw doll called koṭumpāvi ('terrible sinner'). Carried through the village, it absorbs all impurities and sins. Singing dirges, the villagers bring the doll to the northern village boundary where they sacrifice a small goat or pig, pour its blood over the boundary stone⁷⁸ and then burn the doll. Thurston mentions a similar ceremony in connection with the Veṭṭiyān⁷⁹: the ritual dragging through the streets, disfigurement and the death ceremonies of 'Kodumpāvi' (performed by the Veṭṭiyān) are supposed to induce her (i. e., Koṭumpāvi) to make her lover return and bring rain.

The wilderness deity

Having left behind the water tanks, ponds, the cultivated fields, we enter an area of true wilderness. Hills, where only the local inhabitants venture, where there are wild rabbits, perhaps wild boars, where a few centuries ago tigers stalked a stray cow; an area with few paths, with dense, impenetrable underbrush, supplier of firewood to the poor. On the western side of Tamilnadu we come to the foothills of the Nilagiri mountains, we climb to secret springs, crystal clear ponds where in the dry hot season elephants quench their thirst. Or we visit the peripheries of the central Javvatu or Kollī hills and encounter dry stony stretches of land where cultivation depends entirely on the unpredictable monsoon rain. Whichever landscape we have in mind, certainly there will be a deity in it. Hidden in the hills, visited by occasional devotees, hunters, firewood gatherers, once in a while by the priest, are true wilderness deities.

Not far from Valaiyappattī (Madurai) is the village Aracaṅpattī. Here lives the priest (a Mūppanār) of Moṭṭaimalai Karuppar. He leads us up a hill, along a narrow foot path that sometimes loses itself in the denseness of shrubs and trees. After a walk of about three quarters of an hour we reach a clearing in which stand old and new statues of Karuppar. In another clearing nearby is a group of terra cotta horses; they belong to the

⁷⁸ Ellaikkal – see below.

⁷⁹ Thurston 1987, VII: 393.

god. There is no shrine because the god said: 'I do not want a (concrete) temple because if there is a temple here, people will come, take shelter, sit around – people who are unclean.' The god does not like the sound of mortar and pestle, nor the sound of chickens. No drums are played near the god, and women stand some distance away from the god when they pray (they do not come close to him). The god is in the hill because he is very powerful. If he were near the village, there would be a chance of somebody doing something to offend the god (such as approaching the god without removing sandals or shoes). The god is an angry god. He receives sacrifices of goats (but not of chickens). The three main areas over which the god rules are: rain, justice and malignant spirits. During the festival, when the priest is possessed by the god, villagers can ask the god (through the priest) why it has not rained, or when it will rain, and those troubled by malignant spirits are 'exorcised' by the priest. Somebody once said to the god: 'I will give you five rupees if you make it rain.' From the clear blue sky rain fell. The god will catch and punish those who lie. Karuppar is guardian of this big mountain, and at night he rides around it on his horse. He obtained this duty from Mañcamalaicāmi, an ascetic god who smokes gañjā and who is the guardian of the smaller hill. The story goes that two zamindars (land-owners) of this area once had a quarrel and they lined up to fight, each with his god – one with Mañcamalaicāmi, the other with Karuppar. The zamindar of Karuppar lost the fight because he did not believe the god when he told him that the army created by the other god was an illusion. Karuppar was about to leave the area when Mañcamalaicāmi asked him to stay on the big mountain and watch over the area; in return he promised him horses.

Aiyaṅār, we said, has his place near water tanks and near human habitation, but some of his temples are in very remote areas, involving long bus rides and a walk on foot through the forest. Difficult of access does not mean the god has no worshippers. Corimuttu Aiyaṅār, for instance, is famous throughout Tirunelveli. The temple falls under the domain of the previous rulers (rājās) of Ciṅkampaṭṭi. The god is in the hills, past Pāpanācam. From Kāraiyaṅār, the last bus stop, a path leads through the wooded area to the river and the temple. The river roughly separates the vegetarian gods (Aiyaṅār, Makāliṅkacuvāmi) from those gods receiving non-vegetarian offerings (Māṭaṅ, Paṭṭavarāyaṅ). Aiyaṅār's name is connected to the following myth:

When Śiva and Pārvaṭī celebrated their wedding on mount Kailāsa, there were so many guests present that the north sank and the south rose. Śiva sent Agastya to the south with the mission to restore the equilibrium. Agastya visited various places in the south and one day he came to the temple of Corimuttu Aiyaṅār to worship. Suddenly he saw a light to his right. It was Corimuttu Aiyaṅār who was worshipping Śiva with a pūjā. Agastya then asked Aiyaṅār for a boon and

requested that Aiyānār shower his blessings on anyone who bathed and did worship to the god (Aiyānār) on this particular day. Aiyānār signaled his agreement by pouring (cori) flowers.

According to another version Aiyānār strewed pearls (muttu). The event happened on the new moon day in the month of āṭi (July-August); it is the day on which the main festival is celebrated. Large crowds gather at the temple for the festival and extra buses from Tirunelvēli are available for the devotees. Corimuttu Aiyānār used to face west, towards Kerala, but looks towards Tamilnadu now.⁸⁰ The god is one of a group of seven gods (the other six are Aiyappaṅs), each one of whom is associated with one of the cakras (energy centers in the human body). To Corimuttu Aiyānār is assigned the mūlādhāra cakra. (The ājñā cakra e. g., is assigned to the famous Sabarimalai Aiyappaṅ.)⁸¹

We can say that the territory of Corimuttu Aiyānār reaches much beyond a restricted geographical area. Having turned from west to east, the god now gazes over Tamilnadu and protects it; yet, he is part of a definite region encompassing the other six gods (Aiyappaṅs) and furthermore, he is master of the space related to one of the cakras. The Agastya myth links Aiyānār to the greater Hindu pantheon, while the folk story of his guardian, Paṭṭavarāyaṅ (Muttuppaṭṭaṅ), being part of the bow-song (villuppāṭṭu) repertoire, spreads Aiyānār's fame throughout Tirunelveli. It is therefore not surprising, if for the festival of Caṅkili Pūtattār, the fierce guardian of the Nellaiyappar temple (Tirunelvēli), sacred water (tīrttam) for the abhiṣeka is brought from the Corimuttu Aiyānār temple.

In Chapter I we have offered a portrait of Muṇi as we see him in the landscape of western Tamilnadu. He too can be in very remote places, a wilderness deity: No form of transport can bring one near the Muṇi high up on a hill about four kilometers from Korāṭṭukiri (Dharmapuri). The path leads across fields, rivers, hills. Muṇicuvarar has a splendid view from his temple, a square, concrete structure open towards the east, whitewashed inside and decorated with tridents in relief and highlighted with bright red color – which is all that is visible of his form. In front of the shrine is a small forest of metal tridents and to the side is a tree covered with cloth cradles, votive offerings. (Women who wish to have a child place a stone in a piece of cloth and hang it on the tree. When their wish has been fulfilled, they remove the stone. Such trees are a common sight in many folk and brahmanical temples.) Muṇicuvarar receives non-vegetarian sacrifices; but his double, who sits at the bottom of the hill (for

⁸⁰ Reinich 1979: 128.

⁸¹ For cakras, see Table II.

those who cannot walk up) and whose priest is a Brahman, gets only vegetarian offerings.

There is a certain logic behind locating a deity atop a hill or mountain. From there the deity's vision can encompass and thereby protect a large territory. Furthermore, the remoteness of the place safeguards it from polluting influences. The often quoted statement that a deity dislikes the sounds of mortar and pestle⁸² finds here its most drastic application. Goddesses too can be averse to these sounds; it means that they are located far from the village. Another way of indicating the goddess' wilderness aspect is by adding 'vaṇa' to her name: e. g., Vaṇapatrakāḷiyammaṇ in Tēkkampaṭṭi (about five kilometers from Mēṭṭuppāḷaiyam, Coimbatore) amidst green hills, at the river Pavāni, worshipped especially on new moon days; Vaṇapattirakāḷiyammaṇ of Irāmanātapuram (Coimbatore), who manifested in the forest and had her place under a banyan tree until a temple was built for her; Vaṇaturkkai (Durgā) of Katirāmaṅkalam (northeast of Kumpakōṇam, Thanjavur), whose temple has a built-in hole so that the goddess still has access to the outside. Mukkōṇattammaṇ (near Turaiyūr, Perambalur) who does not allow women near her temple and Patrakāḷiyammaṇ of Veḷḷiyampati-Ātiyūr, who still receives buffalo sacrifices, are examples of goddesses who have not lost their fierceness and need to be away from the village.

5. *Why the deity prefers wilderness to ordered space*

Why are some deities in the wilderness and others in the ordered space? What distinguishes a deity in the village from a deity in the wilderness? Again, there are no absolute rules, there isn't a pattern according to which one deity belongs to the village while another should inhabit wilderness. The same deity, as we have seen, can belong to the village and the remotest hilly region. But again, there are tendencies that make some sort of distinction possible, that allow us to sketch a pattern: wilderness deities tend to be fierce, ascetics, and very particular about purity rules.

Whether priests volunteered a reason for their deity's preference of wilderness space, or responded to my question, the explanation was the same: 'The god(dess) does not like (or should not hear) the sound of mortar and pestle (ural, ulakkai cattam)'. What does this mean, what does it imply? Few priests could expand on their statements, some tried to find a reason for their deity's dislike of these pounding and grinding instruments. Here is an assortment of answers:

⁸² See below.

‘The god (Muttumuni) is short-tempered’ (Kāmāṭciyamman tōṭṭam, Thanjavur). ‘If the god (Aṇaikkarupparāyacāmi) hears these sounds, he will not have any power (cakti)’ (Rākalpāvi, Coimbatore). ‘Tampirān should not hear the sound of pounding because he is an ascetic (tavaci)’ (Mānuppaṭṭi). ‘If Aiyaṇār hears the sound of pounding, he will kill the person making the sound’ (Naṭukkāvēri, Thanjavur). ‘Aiyaṇār should not hear these sounds because he is a pure (cutta) god’ (Vallam, Thanjavur). ‘Previously Aiyaṇār disliked the sounds of mortar and pestle. Then he was greater, more superior’ (Cūrakkōṭṭai, Thanjavur). ‘The person who causes the sound of mortar and pestle near the god (Paṭṭamaramuniyappar) will die within six months’ (Erode). ‘The god (Oṇṭikkaruppu) wants silence’ (Iraṭṭaimalai, Trichy). ‘If Karuppaṇṇacuvāmi hears these sounds, he gets angry’ (Karuppūr, Thanjavur). ‘Aiyaṇār should be on or near a mountain or alone because he is doing tapas. If he hears the sound of mortar and pestle, his tapas is disturbed’ (Mēlakkāl, Tiruyētakam, Madurai). ‘The goddess (Paccaiyamman) should not hear the mortar and pestle. The family that causes this sound will perish’ (Araṁkaṇṇanallūr, Viluppuram). ‘Forty years ago, if the god (Vēṭiyappar) heard the sound of mortar and pestle; it caused a dangerous event or a problem (āpattu). The god is a tuṣṭa teyvam (a dangerous deity)’ (Tiruvaṇṇamalai). ‘Aiyaṇār should not hear these sounds because he is in a state of asceticism (tavam). These sounds make the earth tremble and this disturbs the god’s tapas’ (Kontakai, Ilaṅtaikkuḷam, Madurai). ‘Aiyaṇār dislikes these sounds because he is a tavaci’ (Kila Vāṇiyaṅkuṭi, Sivaganga). ‘If Rāyar hears these sounds, he gets angry’ (Kaṇapati, Coimbatore). ‘Karumpāyiram koṇṭa Aiyaṇār should not hear the sound of mortar and pestle because he is a canṇiyāci (Skt. saṁnyāsin)’ (Kārkuṭal, Viluppuram). ‘Aiyaṇār is outside the village because he is a tuṣṭa teyvam. Were he in the village, he would destroy the village’ (Toravaḷūr, Viluppuram). ‘Aiyaṇār should not hear these sounds, because he is in a state of yoga’ (Ciṅkampuṇari, Sivaganga). ‘The god (Malaivēṭiyappaṇ) will get angry if he hears these sounds’ (Kōṭṭāṅkal, Viluppuram). ‘The goddess Paccaiyamman should not hear these sounds, otherwise her tapas is spoiled’ (Tiruvaṇṇamalai). ‘If Caparimalai Aiyaṇār hears the sounds of mortar and pestle, it means that people are still up and the god cannot yet go outside to protect the village. Nobody should see the god when he tours the village’ (Paṇaiyūr, Madurai).

Summarizing the above: the deity who hears the sound of the mortar and pestle gets angry, even kills the miscreant; he or she is disturbed in his or her meditation or ascetic practice; the deity loses some of his or her power; the deity in the wilderness is a pure deity and also a very powerful, sometimes malignant (tuṣṭa) deity. From the Hindu religious point of view it all fits together. Ascetics are known to store tremendous

power, a power that can erupt and destroy (or create). An ascetic's anger is greatly feared precisely because of the tremendous power at his disposal. He generates this power through his asceticism, be it meditation, castigation, one-pointedness in rituals etc., in his *tavam* (Skt. *tapas*, 'heat'), and this power leads to *siddhis* with which the ascetic can influence physical laws, control the elements and so on. The place where a person or deity engages in asceticism is the wilderness. It is a quiet place, a clean place. Cleanliness means certainly ritual purity but also mundane physical cleanliness. Ritual purity concretely means that women in their time of menses, advanced pregnancy, childbirth pollution and men and women in their death pollution periods should not visit the temple of a wilderness deity – or of any deity, in fact. (A Brahman priest offered as reason why non-Hindus are not allowed into certain temples that they do not observe purity rules.)

A woman was grazing the cattle near *Muṇiśvarar* (without knowing the deity was there). It was the time of her menstruation. Something that fell from the tree frightened the women. This caused some mental illness and her menstruation ceased for eight months. Her family called a magician (*mantiravāṭi*) and after some ceremonies and a blood sacrifice to the god, the woman was cured (*Rājakiri*, *Thanjavur*).

There are a number of temples that forbid women to go close to the deity; the reason is their permanent potential impurity. This does not, however, apply to non-menstruating (pre-pubescent and post-menopausal) women. A famous example of this rule is *Aiyappan* of *Sabarimalai*. Impurity is also the reason why women ought not to be priests. During the actual pollution women generally avoid a temple visit. Here we need to remember that there are two sides to impurity: on the one hand, the impure person can cause defilement, act upon something or someone, e. g., by touching (as a *Dalit* had defiled the statue of *Muṇiyāṅṅavar* by touching it and thereby had made the establishment of a new statue necessary – *Taṅcāvūr*); on the other hand, pollution, like liminality, causes a certain sensitivity or vulnerability, an openness towards attacks from malignant forces. In other words, an impure person can (willingly or unwillingly) contaminate by contact something that is pure, and at the same time the impure person is considered a potential passive danger. Thus many priests, when asked why *Dalits* do not enter the temple of a particular deity, said that the deity would harm the *Dalits*. Even if this is just a nice way of explaining discrimination, it brings out the idea that impurity burdens a person with being susceptible to causing and inviting harm.

Finally, purity encompasses also cleanliness; for instance in the sense that the deity dislikes dirt: *Kūricāṭṭā Aiyāṅār* (*Rāmanātapuram*) faces

west because he turned away from the ancient moat in which the refuse of the palace used to swim. The town and its dirt are now behind him.

Due to the amassment of power the deities become dangerous, malignant (tuṣṭa), unpredictable. Furthermore, residing in the wilderness they are believed to be surrounded by all kinds of other dangerous beings, spirits of dissatisfied ancestors or other demonic forces (pēy picācu) that can influence one's life in the negative. Nobody dares venture to visit a wilderness deity at night, unless he/she be a black magician who wishes to command these spirits.

Two questions arise from the priests' explanations: 1. why does a deity need to be an ascetic or, why does he or she require all this power when, in fact, he/she is in the wilderness and not easily accessible to the devotees and 2. why is the deity's preference for wilderness space expressed by his/her dislike of the sound of mortar and pestle? Let us answer the second question first. Mortar and pestle are domestic instruments; they are used by women to pound rice or wheat, to grind grains, spices etc. They link a typical activity of the village with women, women who are potentially always polluted. Pounding and grinding imply pollution because the activities are done by women (for some deities' festivals men do the pounding and grinding for this very reason), but these activities also imply pollution because of their association with the sexual act; in that sense they are doubly disturbing to the ascetic. Mortar and grinding stone are used in childbirth ceremonies: In Tamilnadu the mortar is a symbol for the womb, the grinding stone stands for the new born child;⁸³ in Orissa (Bauris) the grinding stone represents the deity of birth.⁸⁴ Some ancient grinding implements actually have the form of the male and female sexual organs. Fertility, family life, prosperity, the sphere of human activity, the space of domesticated life are part of the symbolism. Another way of saying the deity prefers the wilderness is to express the deity's dislike of being near an oil press. The oil press is a large grinding and pressing apparatus, rotated by a cow or bull walking in a circle around it. Again, we could liken the instrument to the mortar and pestle, but there is another dimension to it: the oil press transforms the wild plants (berries, nuts) into a product that is refined, domesticated and used in the village. The very process of grinding, pressing, pounding implies domestication, a change from the wild space to the space of family life, a change from the raw state to the cooked. For that matter, any preparation of food is domestication, and, in the brahmanical reasoning killing. Vedic 'ritual texts are perfectly clear on the point that grinding, pressing, cooking, and boiling constitute acts of killing the same as the killing of an animal. Later texts also speak about

⁸³ See Duvvury 1991: 183 ff.

⁸⁴ Freeman 1979: 403.

kitchen utensils as so many slaughter houses',⁸⁵ and therefore pounding could constitute a symbolic act for killing demons (rākṣasas), the sacrificial implements being regarded as weapons.⁸⁶ Pounding makes a sound similar to a drum, an instrument offensive to wilderness deities. Marriage and funeral drums especially have to be stopped near some wilderness deities, and some deities have to be asked permission, if the festival drums are to be played. Priests could offer no explanations save the ones advanced for the wilderness deities' dislike for mortar and pestle, and we can assume that since the drums have to do with life cycle rituals, it is their domestic character that upsets the ascetic deities. One priest of Durgā (Korukkai, Thanjavur) said that only war drums should be played for her since she was a war goddess – again a clear separation of ordered and wilderness space.

The wilderness deities' dislike of mortar and pestle, of grinding, pounding, frying, of sounds like breaking of coconuts, certain drums, even of the sound of chickens all point to a rejection of village life, of all that curtails the deities' freedom. Thus one Māriyamman 'detests the pounding pestle and the grinding stone as signs of slavery'.⁸⁷ Anything that stands for settled space is inimical to wilderness gods and goddesses, namely:

- male-female union, polarity/duality
- alteration, adulteration of natural substances
- confinement, domestication, restraint, adaptability
- order, manipulation
- life cycles, birth and death.

Why does a deity have to sit or stand in the wilderness, why amass all this ascetic power? The answer is that a deity does not need power, a deity *is* power. The many gods and goddesses of Hinduism are expressions of different kinds of power that have their source in one central powerhouse, and the deities' imagery is symbolic of the kind of power the deity represents. There are two important criteria that define a deity: iconography and place. We have seen above how in concepts of Hindu architecture the division of space follows a maṇḍalaic pattern that moves from the center to the periphery and in a hierarchic order the outer zones being the space of piśācas or even rākṣasas, while the innermost space is the space of Brahman, the highest and ritually purest in the hierarchy. We shall speak about this order in detail in Chapter III. The outermost space is characterized as the most dangerous. A deity sitting in the center of space obviously does not have the same kind of characteristics as a deity

⁸⁵ Heesterman 1985 'Vedic Sacrifice and Transcendence': 89.

⁸⁶ Das 1983: 455.

⁸⁷ Moreno and Marriott 1990: 163.

in the wilderness; divine power in the village needs to be other than divine power in the wilderness. The deity in the village represents or reflects the village power, a deity in the wilderness represents wilderness power; in other words, the wilderness deity is wilderness power, is free, fierce, unpredictable etc.

The wilderness deity, like all deities, has two aspects: the negative and the positive, while at the same time also transcending the duality. He or she is both strength and weakness, danger of wilderness and its remedy; he or she is the wild animal and the power that protects from the animal, he or she is the malignant spirit and the force that counteracts it. As a malignant spirit the deity is feared, as a force that can deal with the negative powers, the deity is worshipped. The deity keeps two forces (negative and positive) in balance, and we can imagine that to balance two extremely wild forces requires a lot of concentration. Wilderness force that is out of balance spells disaster, devastation. The identification of wilderness deities with dangerous power shows in their iconography: bulging eyes, fangs, giant size, a wild animal as vehicle⁸⁸, and their identification with nature expresses itself in their dislike of temple buildings. Wilderness deities rule over the four or eight directions, they spread into space (*Ākāśa Karuppu* 'Ether Karuppu', *Aracaṅkuṭi*, Trichy). When a temple is built for such deities, they refuse to inhabit it or even burn it down with their angry power, and so, to accommodate the need of the deity's connectedness to space, a hole will be made in the temple tower. Some deities think of imaginative ways of refusing a temple structure: *Ellaippiṭāri*, who according to her priest is a *tuṣṭa teyvam*, said: 'If you want to build a temple for me, it has to be such that the sound of its doors closing can be heard in *Tiruvaṅṅāmalai*.' (The town is more than fifty kilometers from the village of *Ellaippiṭāri*, i. e., *Nāraciṅkaṅūr*, *Viluppuram*.)

6. Symbols of wilderness and ordered space in iconography

Wild deities inspire respect, awe, sometimes fear. We think of the many-armed *Kālī* dancing madly on the battle field, her hair loose, her mouth bloody, her body dressed in the limbs of fallen warriors, her breast covered by a garland of human heads. Tamil folk deities have clear iconographic features; we can distinguish *Karuppar* from *Aiyaṅār*, *Aiyaṅār* from *Muni*, etc. The iconography tells us much about a deity's character: a deity with his/her legs folded in the *padmāsana* has attributes

⁸⁸ See below.

of the yogi, the ascetic; a deity with fangs shows animal traits. Below are lists of wilderness and ordered space symbols:

Wilderness

head:	loose or matted hair, moustache, beard, fangs, bulging eyes
body:	abnormal number of limbs (heads, arms, legs, breasts); big stature
posture:	yogic (or with yoga paṭṭa)
skin color:	dark
animal:	wild: tiger, snake
clothes:	a tendency to a bare upper body, nakedness; but feet clothed in sandals
status:	tendency to be single, not married
temple:	open, uniconic (stone, tree, termite hill, weapon)

Ordered space

head:	clean shaven, hair tied or braided ⁸⁹
body:	normal height or smallness, normal number of limbs
posture:	any
skin color:	light (except vaiṣṇava deities)
animal:	domestic: elephant (as symbol of king), bull, cow
clothes:	body covered, bare feet
status:	married (also two or more wives)
temple:	elaborate structures with many walls and many sub-deities

Iconographic symbols allow the creators of the divine forms to tell stories about the deities. Muṇi's giant form, for example, shows that he has great power. If he holds a club or dagger and shield, it means that he is willing to fight, that he is a warrior. His matted hair and one of his legs pulled up in a yoga position signify the Muṇi's ascetic nature; it means that he is a bachelor, a hermit and therefore wrathful. In him are compounded physical strength with yogic powers. If he wears sandals, it means that he goes on foot like a hunter. His red color and the white ash marks on his forehead place him in the camp of śaiva deities, and a tiger and/or snake near him discloses his mastery over wilderness forces. A deity's attributes can be altered, emphasized or softened according to the deity's position in the temple or village: e. g., fangs added, stature increased.

⁸⁹ On hair see Hildebeitel 1981; 1998: 143 ff.

The deities in the village generally are benevolent, calm and friendly. They do not get upset about human activities. Whereas the wilderness deities insist on purity, the deities in the village or city cannot be very particular; they have to accept that women in a polluted state walk past them, they don't react when a man eases himself near the temple wall (as anyone can testify who walks along the outer walls of the *Minākṣī* temple in Maturai). Wilderness deities are different, men or women who disrespect purity rules are punished: a man who defecated crouching near an *Aiyaṅār* temple was not able to stand up until the priest had asked the god for forgiveness and released the spell with sacred ash (*Varakūr*, *Tiruvannamalai*). *Āṇaikkarrupparāyacāmi* of *Rākalpāvi* (Coimbatore) caused a woman to die who had collected firewood near his temple. Wilderness deities demand extreme respect: people have to dismount from their horses in their vicinity; they should not pollute the nearby pond by bathing, washing in it. There are countless stories told by priests about British men who, due to disbelief in the deity's efficacy or due to disrespect, lost their eye sight. But local people too are punished with blindness for offenses of disrespect: the government official who came to measure the lake at *Vīramūr* (*Viluppuram*) did not get down from his horse (he was a Muslim and probably didn't know there was an *Aiyaṅār* temple nearby). He lost his eye sight and regained it only after he had promised that the produce from the lake and the surrounding area would go to the temple. Deities in the village and city are protected from human impurities by walls (the large *Śiva* and *Perumāḷ* temples of the *Cōla* period have five, seven or more walls enclosing the sanctum) or by a number of guardians who absorb impurities. Another way of absorbing impurities is through water. The tanks of the large temples do not only serve the devotees to clean themselves physically and ritually, they also absorb whatever impurities may be floating around, and they have a cooling and calming effect on the deities.

7. *Boundaries*

Between the wilderness and the ordered space are boundaries. Tamil villages have a goddess called *Ellaiyamman*, 'lady of the boundary' (Ta. *ellai* = boundary); in some villages we find *Ellaikkaruppar*; some boundary deities are simply called *ellaikkāval*, *ellai teyvam* (boundary guardian, -deity); and there is the *ellaikkal*, the boundary stone. A boundary may be the boundary between two villages, the boundary enclosing village or city space. At the northern boundary of a village or city we often find a goddess, *Kālī*, *Celli*, *Piṭāri*, *Ellaippiṭāri*, *Ellaiyamman* (in cities the dark counterpart to the benign goddess in the center, e. g.,

Kālī in Citamparam; Cellattamman in Maturai). Cities tend to have a guardian at each cardinal direction. As an example of folk deities as guardians of a larger town we shall look at Viruttācalam (Cuddalore), a town with an ancient Śiva temple.

Cuntaramūrṭti, one of the medieval śaiva poet-saints (nāyaṅmār) came to Viruttācalam. "The lord of the ancient mountain and his consort are old, the city is old", he said, and continued on his way without singing a verse in praise of the god. Śiva then appeared as Murukaṅ in the form of a hunter, blocked Cuntaramūrṭti's path and robbed him of his money and other valuables. Cuntaramūrṭti decided to return to the temple. There he sang a verse in praise of the god. The god showered his grace upon the devotee.⁹⁰ By order of Śiva, Murukaṅ guards the four boundaries of Mutukunram (Viruttācalam). Murukaṅ has the following forms: in the south he is Vēṭappaṅ, in the north Veṅṅamalaiyappaṅ, in the east Karumpāyiramkoṇṭavar and in the west Koḷaṅciyappar.⁹¹

Koḷaṅciyappar and Karumpāyiramkoṇṭavar are gods who were discovered when a cow released its milk over them. Veṅṅamalaiyappaṅ came as a stone in the basket of the priest's ancestor to Kaṅṭiyāṅkuppam.⁹² All the four temples are outside the settled area and consist of many shrines. Although Murukaṅ is not easily visible behind these gods, each priest did identify his god with Murukaṅ. Of the four temples, Koḷaṅciyappar of Maṅavālanallūr is the best known. In the notice published by this temple, only two deities (mūrtikaḷ) are mentioned: Vināyakar and Pālacuppiramaṅiyar (Murukaṅ). In the sanctum of the main shrine there is no statue, but only a platform (pīṭam) with a crown (representing Murukaṅ). In front of the shrine is the statue of a horse. Two more shrines are in the temple, one to Iṭṭampaṅ and Kaṭampaṅ and one to Muṅi. Muṅi takes care of devotees' complaints. If they write their complaint (a theft, a court case etc.) on a piece of paper and hand it to the Muṅi together with the bus fare required to travel to the place of their enemy (ten paisa per km), the god will go there and within ninety days resolve the problem or find an answer to it. The big festival of the temple is celebrated on paṅkuṅi uttiram, Murukaṅ's main festival day, and devotees fulfill their vows by carrying kāvāṭi (a structure in the form of a horse shoe, decorated with margosa leaves, peacock feathers, colored paper etc. on which hangs a small pot containing milk, evolved from a pole carried on the shoulders on which food, water, was transported)⁹³, by having their cheeks, tongue etc. pieced with silver spears, by pulling small carts hooked onto their backs etc. (feats performed for Murukaṅ at other

⁹⁰ For a somewhat different version see Shulman 1980a: 292 ff.

⁹¹ Koḷaṅciyappar Tiruttala varalāru 1987.

⁹² See Chapter IV.

⁹³ See plate.

temples as well). Animals can be offered. These are not sacrificed, but re-sold by the temple.

Vēṭappār has the form of Aiyaṅār and under his statue is said to be a liṅga. A number of horses stand in front of the shrine and left and right of the compound area leading to the temple entrance are various guardians: Malaiyāḷa Muttukkaruppu and Maturai Vīraṅ to the right of the god and the Tōṭṭi, Tamukkaṭi and Pāmpāṭṭi (two Dalit village servants and a snake charmer) to his left. Near the entrance and facing Vēṭappār is Kullā Karuppar. These guardians receive non-vegetarian offerings.

Veṅṅamalaiyappar is Aiyaṅār. He is in a concrete shrine and again, in an open shrine with his wives and with his vehicle, the elephant. The priest (Vaṅṅiyar) related the well-known birth story of Aiyaṅār, but he also identified Aiyaṅār with Murukaṅ, the guardian of Viruttācalam (and, according to the priest, the guardian of the northeast). The entrance of the temple is guarded by Maturai Vīraṅ and marked by four horses. Behind the shrine of Maturai Vīraṅ is a shrine to Kāḷi. Closer to Aiyaṅār is Virapattiraṅ. A row of small elephants and other figurines offered in fulfillment of vows stand between the shrines. Behind Aiyaṅār is a pond and to the left of Aiyaṅār stands the fierce Muttukkaruppu under a tree. He, like Kāḷi and Maturai Vīraṅ, receives non-vegetarian offerings.

Karumpāyiram koṅṭa Aiyaṅār (of Kārkuṭal) is in a forest area near a large pond. How the god received his name, we shall see in Chapter VI. Remarkable about this temple are the large terra cotta horses and elephants measuring three to four meters, partly broken, that line the path leading from the main shrine of Aiyaṅār to the shrine of Maturai Vīraṅ and Karuppar. Aiyaṅār is alone in his shrine, he is a caṅṅiyāci (Skt. saṁnyāsin). In the open and to the right of the shrine is the statue of Aiyaṅār with his two consorts. A spear (vēl), the weapon of Murukaṅ, and a Nandin face the entrance of the main shrine. At night, Aiyaṅār goes hunting on his horse. For this purpose Cakkiliyars (leatherworkers) offer the god large leather sandals to protect his feet from thorns.

The above examples show us some of the complexities of boundary deities; there isn't a particular god or goddess who is *the* boundary deity; furthermore, what exactly constitutes a boundary is relative. It is doubtful whether the four guardians of Viruttācalam are at the exact geographical boundaries of the city, although the term 'ellai' is used in the pamphlet issued by the Koḷaṅciyappar temple ('Mutukunrattin nāṅku ellaikaḷilum kāvalāy Murukaṅ – Murukaṅ, the guardian of the four boundaries of Mutukunram'). The four guardians are typical local deities, yet they are bound together through Murukaṅ, a god famous and present throughout Tamilnadu, and via Murukaṅ to the local Śiva, the main deity of the Viruttācalam temple. Villages too have guardians in the four directions. In Retṭippāḷaiyam (Tanjavur) the four boundary gods are: in the west and

south Muṇi in the form of a large statue, in the east Muṇi in the form of a nāval tree (*Eugenia jambolana*) and in the north Māmunti, a god identified as Rāma (above the temple entrance Rāma, Sītā and Hanumān are depicted). The vehicle of this Rāma, however, is the elephant, Aiyaṅār's vehicle, and his subordinate deities are the non-vegetarian Pēcci and Maturai Viraṅ. Tiruppācētti (Sivaganga) is guarded by three goddesses and one god: in the west Viraiyāttā (a stone), in the east Ellaippiṭāri (a stone), in the south Veyilvūntammaṅ whose statue is under a margosa tree (despite her name which means 'the lady on whom the sun falls'), and in the north Vaṭakkaraṅ ('northern border') Muṇiyāṅṅi.

8. *The boundary pūjā*

There is a special pūjā called boundary pūjā (ellaippūcai). It involves throwing rice mixed with blood to the malignant spirits (pēy picācu). The pūjā takes place at night, and women are excluded from it, as the following description of such a pūjā, performed in Aracaṅkuṭi (Trichy), shows. We have already met the goddess Tillaikkāḷi, the goddess who was 'robbed' by the Kaḷḷars of the village. The main festival of the goddess is celebrated in the month of May (cittirai-vaikāci). It lasts about three weeks. On the eighth day, a Tuesday, the priest of Tillaikkāḷi (a Paṅṭāram) collects the blood of two young, black, male goats (sacrificed in front of the temple) in an earthen pot (kāvucaṭṭi, 'sacrificial pot'). He covers this pot with another earthen pot, ties them together with strings of flowers and hangs this pot inside the Kāḷi temple. The priest worships the pot daily until the next Tuesday, when the blood is used for the boundary ceremony. On that Tuesday, around ten at night, the streets of the village are cleaned, and women decorate the front of the houses with a kōlam, an auspicious floor design. Towards midnight, another small black goat is sacrificed in front of the temple and its blood mixed with the old blood in the pot. No women are allowed to enter the temple of Tillaikkāḷi that night, except the wife of the priest. The priest of the goddess, who is also the maruḷāḷi (dancer) of Periyaṅṅacāmi (one of the goddess' guardians), places the pot with the blood into the fat, large flower garland that hangs from his neck. There, he holds it, invisible in the garland. Accompanied by the other maruḷāḷis and a large group of men, all carrying firebrands, and followed by Caṅkili Karuppu on his horse vehicle and Tillaikkāḷi on a palanquin (pallākku), the priest goes once around the temple and then, in a quick pace, in a northern direction to a field at the edge of the settled space. The goddess and the women and children remain at the edge of the field, while the men run to a stone in the northeastern corner of the field. At this boundary stone (ellaikkal) another small goat is sacrificed. The

priest removes the pot from his garland, mixes the blood with cooked rice and throws this blood-rice into the four intermediate directions. He begins with the northeast, turns to the southeast, then the southwest and the northwest. The sacrifice is called 'mūlai cānti', 'pacification of the intermediate directions'. At the end, the priest smashes the pot with whatever is left in it on the boundary stone. Villagers believe that the malignant spirits (one informant used the English word 'devils') will eat the rice. This pūjā over, the priest, maruḷāḷi, Caṅkili Karuppu and Tillaikkāḷi, followed by a large crowd of devotees, go to the house of the priest, where the priest will sacrifice a small, black goat. Then the procession moves to the main house of the māṇavaḷaṅkiyar Kaḷḷar clan, where a larger goat (not black) is sacrificed. This is followed by similar sacrifices at the houses of the other Kaḷḷar clans. The goat has to shake when water is poured on it. If it does not shake for a long time, a different goat is brought. The procession then tours the entire village and stops at every house for a pūjā and offerings, which in most cases are vegetarian.

This boundary pūjā is very much like the ones described by Whitehead.⁹⁴ In Iruṅkaḷūr (Trichy) the boundary pūjā is performed in conjunction with the goddess Karumpāyi whose temple is in the wilderness. Whitehead does not indicate the direction in which the boundary stone lies, and, according to his description, the boundary pūjā takes place during the day.⁹⁵ For 'Pullambadi' Whitehead indicates the boundary stone's place to be in the west.⁹⁶ The offering is rice mixed with blood and the food is for the 'evil and malignant spirits'.⁹⁷ Impurities or diseases are sent across the border with a blood offering to the boundary stone.⁹⁸

Data from at least fifteen temples concur in three important points: that the boundary pūjā is for the malignant spirits (pēy, picācu, arakkar), that the pūjā takes place at midnight (and should not be seen by anyone), and that the rice mixed with blood is thrown into the four directions or, if it is simply thrown into the air, into the north or the northeast. The pūjā is done on the last day of the festival for the deity considered 'in charge' of the boundaries and the directions, and one of its purposes seems to be to break open again the boundaries of the village that had been closed for the time of the festival. One informant (Kuḷumāyiyammaṅ temple, Tiruccirāppaḷli) called the ceremony 'ellaḷi uṭaittal', 'breaking of boundaries'. In Aracaṅkuṭi the villagers accompanied the deities through the village on the eighth day of the festival in order to mark the bounda-

⁹⁴ Whitehead 1976: 100 ff.

⁹⁵ Whitehead 1976: 101.

⁹⁶ Whitehead 1976: 102.

⁹⁷ Whitehead 1976: 101.

⁹⁸ See e. g., Srinivas 1952: 204.

ries. From this day onwards the purity rules had to be observed strictly. This was the day when the blood of the first goat sacrifice was collected in the pot. In other words, during the main days of the festival the boundaries are symbolically closed to avoid any impurities or disturbing influences that could harm the rituals. When the boundaries are opened again, the malignant forces are fed as a kind of compensation for having been excluded. Now in Aracañkuṭi the boundary ritual did not take place at the end of the festival, and it would be difficult to assign it the meaning of an opening of the boundaries; however, it seems certain that one of its purposes was to appease the malignant spirits. The north or northeast is where these forces assemble.⁹⁹ The north is the direction of Kubera, who is the god of wealth, but also leader of malignant spirits; the northeast is the direction of Īśāna, of Saturn and where the deity Kṣetrapāla is to be located.¹⁰⁰ In the large Śiva temples of the Cōḷa period we find Bhairava in the northeast corner. He faces inside, towards the sanctum, as if to protect the temple towards its inside.¹⁰¹ The boundary stone is not a deity in the sense that regular pūjās or worship are offered to it. It is a stone without any markings and informants only called it 'ellaikkal' ('boundary stone') and never 'ellaitteyvam' ('boundary deity'), a term reserved for actual deities at the boundary. The throwing of rice mixed with blood is sometimes part of a pūjā to dangerous deities, e. g., in Arimaḷam, in the Ciramiṭṭaiyaṇār temple: during the festival Aiyaṇār receives the first pūjās, vegetarian ones. Eight days later, Karuppar, one of the guardians of Aiyaṇār, gets a blood sacrifice and another eight days later Kāḷi (she has the form of Maḥiṣāsūramardinī) and Muṇicuvarar, the other two guardians who are also the 'deities going in front' (munṇōṭi teyvam) of Aiyaṇār, are treated to a midnight pūjā, in which rice mixed with blood is spread before Kāḷi. The priest throws a bit of this rice into the four directions as offering to the Muṇis who protect and surround Kāḷi. Malignant spirits are appeased with such blood-rice also during dangerous rituals and at the time of blood sacrifices.¹⁰²

9. Deified ancestors: between wilderness and settled space

Like the self-manifesting or self-born (svayambhū) deities who appear in the wilderness, the hero-deities are born or abandoned in the wilderness.¹⁰³ Hero/heroine-deity will be defined here as a human being who,

⁹⁹ Compare Samuel 1988: 161.

¹⁰⁰ Dagens 1985: 359.

¹⁰¹ On the directions see also Beck 1976: 232 ff.

¹⁰² See e. g., Meyer 1986: 112.

¹⁰³ See above; and see Eliade 1974: 249.

because of his/her extraordinary life – be it as a saint, courageous warrior etc. – or because of an extraordinary death, is deified. The human parentage of some of the more popular hero/ine deities is either lost or mixed with or substituted by divine parentage. A multitude of parents is a sign of the divinizing process. To establish their ‘true’ parentage is impossible and not actually necessary. If a human being can become a deity then only because the boundaries between the world of deities and humans are fluid.

Blackburn found that the following criteria are necessary for the deification of a human being¹⁰⁴: ‘First, the death must be premature, an end that cuts short a person’s normal life span. Second, and more important, the death must be violent, an act of aggression or a sudden blow from nature. Many deified heroes are killed in battle, some in less glorious conflicts; others (especially women) commit suicide. Lastly, the death that deifies is undeserved; the person killed is an innocent (if often fated) victim’.¹⁰⁵ These criteria are not always strictly applicable; as we shall see, ‘saints’ who die a normal death become deified; furthermore, it is important to stress that deification is a process that depends on a number of circumstances, e. g., the story of the dead person, the socio/political power of the descendants, and, not lastly, the dead person’s power to stay in contact with the living. Our first example shows the first step in the process of deification: a person dies a violent death, receives a memorial stone, but is not worshipped as a deity.

Both, the people of *Mēlakkāl* and those of *Panniyān* used to fish in the river near *Mēlakkāl*. Once the inhabitants of *Mēlakkāl* decreed that nobody should fish in the river near *Mēlakkāl*, hence the people of *Panniyān* went to *Koṭimaṅkalam* to fish. One day somebody from *Mēlakkāl* smelled fish and accused a certain man of having fished in the river near *Mēlakkāl*. The man denied it, but the people of *Mēlakkāl* demanded that the man prove his innocence by jumping onto a spear (*vēl*). On the appointed day, the man who was to prove his innocence disappeared. His family looked for him everywhere, and when he could not be found, one of his relations decided to take his place. He jumped onto the spear and died. In memory of this man, a memorial stone was set up.

The memorial stone stands outside the *Kaṇavāy Karuppuccāmi* temple of *Mēlakkāl* (*Madurai*) on the northwestern side and past the shrines of *Cōṇai* and *Cappāṇi*. The stone shows the hero in relief, flanked on each side by a woman. In the hands of the hero are various weapons: bow and arrow, sword and shield, dagger. The hero belongs to the caste group of the *Prāmalai-Kaḷḷar*.¹⁰⁶ This ancestor’s place is outside the temple but close to shrines of deities that still form part of the temple, deities,

¹⁰⁴ Blackburn 1985: 260.

¹⁰⁵ See also Blackburn 1988: 31 ff.

¹⁰⁶ On the *Prāmalai-Kaḷḷar* see Dumont 1986.

however, that are worshipped primarily by Dalits. The ancestor hero is called paṭṭavan, 'dead person', and is distinct from the deities.

Such paṭṭavans can be in form of simple stones or in sculpted memorials, and we find them usually close to the temple entrance. First they are not worshipped as deities but receive worship and offerings *like* deities from the descendants. The next step in the deification process is to build a shrine or temple for the ancestor. This either can mean a shrine within an already existing temple or a separate shrine. In Cattiyamaṅkalam (Pudukkottai) e. g., there is a temple to Tittappan, an ancestor of a group of Kaḷḷars. The shrine or temple looks like any other temple, it has Nandin figures at the roof corners, and in front of the temple are statues of horses and dogs. This ancestor had died on the stake. (Tying a criminal up on a long pole or impaling him used to be a form of punishment.)¹⁰⁷ Included in the temple are the wife and brothers of Tittappan; they had died of grief. A priest of the Mutturājā caste is especially hired for the pūjā duties. Goat and chicken sacrifices take place once a year when the Kaḷḷars celebrate the 'festival' of this ancestor.

Muttuppaṭṭan, the Brahman who had married the two Cakkiliyar women, has a shrine in the temple of Corimuttu Aiyānār¹⁰⁸ and is worshipped as a deity (together with his two wives). He is one of the non-vegetarian guardians of Aiyānār (offerings include goats, chickens, alcohol and cigars), yet some Brahmans still worship him as an ancestor. Proof of Muttuppaṭṭan's healing powers are the wooden legs and arms that decorate the god's shrine;¹⁰⁹ other votive offerings include chains and spears. Muttuppaṭṭan fits the category of deified ancestors or hero gods who disregard caste conventions, marry above or below their status and are willing to die for it; other examples are Maturai Vīraṅ and Kāttavarāyaṅ.

About a hundred or two hundred years ago tigers were not rare in Tamilnadu. Countless memorials tell the story of how a courageous cowherd fought with a tiger to save a cow. Here are two examples: In Cempilicippālaiyam (Erode) there is a temple dedicated to Pāṭṭappan. Above the temple entrance the following scene is depicted: A hero, painted red, is about to thrust his spear into a tiger. From the tiger's genitals spurts blood in the direction of a dog sitting beneath the tiger. Beside the hero are two women. The same scene is in relief on the stone inside the shrine.

While the wedding of Pāṭṭappan with Periyakkāyi was celebrated, a tiger attacked Pāṭṭappan's cow. Without a moment's hesitation Pāṭṭappan left his wedding and, accompanied by his dog, went in search of the cow. He valiantly fought with the

¹⁰⁷ See Masilamani-Meyer 1989: 87; Bloomfield 1924: 219.

¹⁰⁸ See above.

¹⁰⁹ See plate.

tiger, while the dog bit into the tiger's genitals. A fox appeared on the scene and the dog fought with the fox. Finally, all lay there dead: Pāṭṭappan, the tiger, the cow, the dog and the fox. Pāṭṭappan's bride and another lady, his lover, entered the burning pyre and became Satīs.

The temple belongs to about 150 Vanniyar families, descendants of Pāṭṭappan. They worship here, do the pūjā and celebrate festivals. Offerings to this ancestor include male goats and roosters.

Mēṭṭuppaṭṭi is a small village near Valaiyappaṭṭi, north of Maturai. The main deity in the village is Muttālamman; her shrine is a square building with a cupola roof. On the roof, around the cupola, stand three figures looking towards the north, the west and the south respectively. The figure in the north is Caṭaiyāṇṭi, a bearded figure wearing a sacred thread, an ascetic. In the west stands Karuppucāmi carrying sword and staff, and facing south stands a male figure with naked upper body, green leg clothing, his head wrapped in a turban. He plays the flute, and beside him stands a white cow or calf. He is the ancestor (the grandfather) of Karuppucāmi's priest, a Nāyakkar. This grandfather used to guard the cows on a nearby hill, playing the flute. One day a tiger attacked him. Before he died he was able to remove the ring on his finger and place it on the horn of one of the cows. The villagers discovered the ring and, led by the cow, found the man lying beside the dead tiger. The priest's grandfather was cremated on the hill, where he had died. The cow that had worn the ring remained on the hill until all of the ashes had been carried away. There may be some significance in the fact that the ancestor figure on the roof faces south: it is the direction of the ancestor heaven and the direction of Yama, the god of death. The figure itself, were it blue, could easily be identified with Kṛṣṇa, and although the priest did not make any such connections, the prerequisites for an interpretation in this direction are there. So far the ancestor receives pūjā at the place where he had died and not in the temple.

People who in their lifetime show extraordinary powers receive special attention after their death: a 'samadhi' or memorial is built over their grave and their burial site becomes a shrine or temple at which the continuing powers of this 'saint' still can be tapped (this is also true in the Indian Islamic traditions where dargahs, the places of pīrs, are visited by the devotees or devout, often to seek healing).

In Kallāpuram (Coimbatore), a village near the Amarāvati dam, there is a temple dedicated to Malaippiṭāriyamman. The temple is outside the village in a grove. The shrine of the goddess is a concrete building ending in an open hall. Facing the entrance to the main shrine is the statue of Nandin, the vehicle of Śiva, and outside the hall, still facing the sanctum entrance, is a stone pillar of a height of about three feet, topped by a square and surrounded by a few triśūlas; it is a god called 'Ēlumalaiyān'.

The temple is a private temple and belongs to a Paṅṭāram family that has been supplying priests for the past five generations. About 300 years ago there lived a young girl, a female ancestor of the Paṅṭāram family, who was endowed with special powers. She was able to foretell the future and to cure illnesses. The girl predicted her own death, and she asked her family to set up a temple for her after her death so that she could fulfill the wishes of those who came to pray at the temple. The girl's name was Malaiyamman, later changed to Malaiyaraci and finally to Malaip-ṭiṭāriyamman. Malaipṭiṭāriyamman is the clan deity (kula teyvam) of the Paṅṭāram family, but other people worship the goddess as well: tribal people from the surrounding hills offer prayers at the temple and have their wishes fulfilled. The goddess is known to cure mental illnesses. Piṭāri, we have seen, is a common name for goddesses of the boundary, especially the northern boundary. The stone pillar facing the goddess is supposed to be her husband, and a wedding of the two is celebrated in the month of cittirai (April-May; time when the wedding of the goddess Mīnākṣī of Maturai and Śiva-Sundareśvara takes place). The name, Ēlumalaiyān ('lord of the seven mountains'), is the name of Viṣṇu (Vēnkaṭeṣuvavarar) at Tiruppati, and the priest compared Malaip-ṭiṭāriyamman to Gajalakṣmī. There are other deities in the temple: Karupparāyar, a meat-eating guardian, in the form of a stone, the nine planets (Skt. navagraha), and a Pipal tree (aracu, *Ficus religiosa*), on which hang wooden cradles. They are witnesses to the fulfillment of child wishes. The temple of Malaipṭiṭāriyamman is a blend of śaiva, vaiṣṇava and folk elements; the ancestress has become a full fledged goddess to whom regular pūjās are offered and her reign has grown from the protection of her own family to the protection of the surrounding hills and their people. The deification of the young girl was made possible by her extraordinary powers, powers that the girl promised would continue after her death.

Great ascetics and holy men generally are not burned, but buried in an upright position with a grave stone marking the site (camāti, Skt. samādhi). Sometimes a concrete shrine is erected over the camāti and a priest designated to perform pūjās. The origin myth of the Paṅṭāra Appicci temple near Pavāni (Periyar) contains an interesting combination of myths we are already familiar with, and the discovery of a camāti.

Long ago, about 300 years ago, there was only forest (kāṭu) here. Near the river (Pavāni) there was a garden (tōṭṭam) and in it a holy man (muṇivar) was doing his meditations (tavam). While he was sitting there, he saw the goddess Malaiyāli Pakavatiyamman floating in the river. He caught her and installed her nearby. Later, one of the cows did not give any milk and the villagers, curious as to the reason, followed the cow. They saw that the cow released its milk at a particular spot. There they found the holy man's sandals, his rosary and his begging bowl. It

was his *camāti*. Later the holy man appeared in the dream of a *Vanniyar* and said: “I am *Paṅṭāra Appicci*, why have you not cared for me?” The *Vanniyar* began to do *pūjā* and erected a compound wall around the *camāti*.

The temple is a private temple and the present *Vanniyar* priest is the sixth in line, tracing his descent to the first priest. There are two main shrines in the temple, one for *Pakavatiyamman* and one for *Paṅṭāra Appicci*. *Pakavatiyamman* is a goddess from Kerala (as her name, *Malaiyāla Pakavati*, says); like *Karuppar* (who also comes from Kerala), she appears in the river. Between the two shrines and along one side leading from the shrines to the temple entrance are the statues of ten large *Muṇis*, guardians of the main deities. They, together with *Pakavatiyamman* and *Paṅṭāra Appicci*, are the boundary guardians of *Pavāni* and the village guardians of *Kāṭaiyampatti*.

Both *Malaippiṭāriyamman* and *Paṅṭāra Appicci* are deities, and in their temples there are no traces of them ever having been human beings; neither do the festival rituals reveal any clues.¹¹⁰ We find a different picture in the temple of *Vālaittōṭṭattu Ayyan* in *Ayyan̄kōvil* or *Ayyan̄pālaiyam* (Coimbatore). *Vālaittōṭṭattu Ayyan* lived in the latter half of the eighteenth century. He was the ninth child of a *Koṅku Vēlāḷar* (*Vēlāḷar*) couple. He spent his time tending cattle. Before he reached the age of fifteen, a *Siddha* initiated him into *Yoga* practices and mantras that had the power to absorb the poison of various animals, especially of snakes. *Cinnaiyan* (the saint's actual name) spent his life healing people and died or gained ‘release’ (*vīṭu*) at age seventy-two, as predicted by his guru. *Cinnaiyan* received the name *Vālaittōṭṭattu Ayyan* because, when he was young, he had leased a piece of land called *vālaittōṭṭam* (‘banana garden’), and people had begun to call him ‘master (or lord) of the banana garden’. Some hundred years ago a temple was built in commemoration of the saint on a piece of land that had belonged to him. Today *Paṅṭāram* priests offer regular *pūjā* service in the temple. Inside the sanctum we find a *kiḷuvai* tree, beneath it a *svayambhū* *liṅga* (a ‘self-born’, self-revealed *liṅga*) and a *Nandin*. A bit to the south of the tree there is a termite hill, about four feet high. The earth from this termite hill is medicine for all kinds of illnesses. In front of the temple compound and facing the shrine is a stone frame holding large chains. These chains, when rubbed along the body, are said to cure headaches, water in the limbs etc. A few feet away from the stone frame stands a large horse (similar to the horses we find in goddess temples in the Coimbatore area and in *Aiyanār* temples in and around *Madurai*). Animals offered to *Vālaittōṭṭattu Ayyan* by devotees are re-sold and not sacrificed. Women are not allowed to enter the main shrine, i. e., the shrine of *Ayyan*. The

¹¹⁰ See Chapter V.

temple of Vālaittōṭṭattu Ayyaṅ is famous and well known in the northern Coimbatore area. Some thirty kilometers north, near the village Patuvampalli, there is a temple named after another saint called Aiyantōṭṭa Aiyāṅ. This saint is said to have had much contact with Vālaittōṭṭattu Ayyaṅ. Inside the sanctum of this temple there is a śivaliṅga, but no termite hill. The cures effected here are especially those caused by the negative influences of spirits (pēy, picācu). Both temples have issued a pamphlet in which the history of the respective saint and the saints' miracles and cures are recounted. Although these saints receive a cult and although their worship is through the form of the śivaliṅga, they have retained their identity as saints and have not themselves become deities in the sense that Malaippiṭāriyamman and Paṅṭāra Appicci have. Nevertheless, for the devotees who worship at these temples, the saint is a deity, a deity who might make use of the cement horse standing in the temple courtyard when he protects the surrounding area at night.

The common theme uniting these ancestors turned deities is power and a way of life beyond the normal. Part of their biography is steeped in wilderness space, one could say that they stand with one leg in the wilderness, that they belong to both spaces and when we look at their place in the village geography, we often find them at the boundary, be it between villages or between the temple sanctuary and the outside, or we find them as watchmen, guardians of other deities.¹¹¹ The main underlying quality that separates an ordinary ancestor from one with a potential to be deified is power; it can be physical power (much like the cinema heroes who single-handedly rout an army of villains), emotional power: courage (the heroes who battle with tigers to save their cows, the warriors), or mental power (healing power, clairvoyance etc.). And this makes sense, of course, since power is what causes a deity to be prayed to.

The kind of deity that develops out of an ancestor seems to depend very much on the latter's life and type of death. Ancestors with healing powers turn into deities with healing powers; their life stories, and the myths woven into them by the story tellers, will center on actions derived from the ancestors' mental powers (miraculous cures, foretelling the future etc.). Ancestors whose deification depended on their martial powers tend to become heroic deities, their courage being the center of their myths. The myth-making process and, coupled with it, the deification process are also a question of caste. Who is the story teller, what is his perspective? How does he view the upper or lower strata of society? Kāttavarāyaṅ, for instance, – if he developed out of an ancestor – would have come from low caste origins, been glorified and made to fight upper castes (Brah-

¹¹¹ See also the story of Cinnattampi in Devi 1987: 1 ff.

mans and kings) and even 'upper caste' deities; while ancestor deities from higher castes need not have worried so much about social ascent, nor would it have been difficult for them to have themselves identified with 'high' pan-Hindu deities. In other words, deified ancestors tend to reflect their social environment. A *ṣatriya* hero-deity, as for example Pābūji,¹¹² a Rajpūt warrior turned deity, who is worshipped in Rajasthan and other areas of northwest India, has a different code of ethics, a different social goal and different ways of pursuing his goals as would a Dalit ancestor deity. Smith's proposed list of traits characterizing the hero-deity as described in folk epics cannot simply be applied to all hero-folk-deities (whereby a major question would have to be what constitutes a hero-deity and what a folk epic – a question we cannot address here).¹¹³

What seems to characterize the deification process is 1. an upward mobility (higher social or even a divine ancestry) of the hero/ine, 2. a geographical expansion of the hero/ine-deity's name and influence, 3. a tendency to integrate or convert the cult of the ancestor into an existing deity cult (often the eating habits of the ancestor are maintained, i. e., a brahmanization process does not always occur: *Muttuppaṭṭan*, even though worshipped by Brahmins, is a non-vegetarian deity).

Before we leave the ancestor deity a few general remarks are necessary. While for some deities a human ancestry can easily be traced,¹¹⁴ it is not so for other deities: *Kāttavarāyan* and *Maturai Viṛan*, for instance, seem to have evolved from an ancestor cult because the myths give them human parents, but whether or not this is supported by historical evidence we do not know. Of course one can ask: is this relevant? For many Hindus knowing the actual earthly birthplace of a deity apparently does not make the deity less divine! A question one might want to ask, however, is why some heroic persons turn into deities while others do not. *Nallatankāl*, whose story is known throughout Tamilnadu (she threw her children and herself into a well), is only very locally worshipped in a temple; *Viṛapāṇṭiya Kaṭṭapomman*, the *Pālaiyakkārar* of *Pāñcālakuricci*, who at the end of the eighteenth century dared to defy the British and was finally hanged and who would be an ideal subject for deification (violent heroic death, a well-known story, and about whom a film was made), is not a god (I do not know if there exists a shrine or temple for him in *Pāñcālakuricci*). Why are the low caste heroes (*Maturai Viṛan*, *Kāttavarāyan*) popular gods while the kingly hero *Kaṭṭapomman* is not? A study on deification would have to consider these questions.

¹¹² Smith 1991.

¹¹³ Smith 1989: 176 ff. For a recent analysis on India's Oral and Classical Epics see Hildebeitel 1999.

¹¹⁴ As we have seen above, e. g., *Vālitōṭṭattu Aiyyan*.

10. Integration into or rejection of the ordered space

When the ordered space eats up wilderness, wilderness deities either leave or adjust. Fierce, wild, unpredictable deities pose a threat to the ordered space and therefore they have to be appeased, made friendly. There are various ways to do this, some of which we shall now look at. In the brahmanical tradition too there is the theme of the wild, the black, having to leave the ordered space: the dark goddess cannot remain in the center, she has to go outside, to the border: Kālī at Citamparam, who was tricked into losing the dance competition with Śīva, a pretext to send her to the border,¹¹⁵ Cellattammaṅ in Maturai. Here the myth says that drinking the blood of a buffalo when she was thirsty on her walk with Śīva made Cellattammaṅ unfit to stay in town at the side of the pure god. Cellattammaṅ is now in the city (north of the Mīnākṣī temple), but she has retained her fierceness and receives blood offerings. The gods and goddesses of villages do not need elaborate myths to relocate them; it suffices that they complain to the priest. Pārikkaruppuṇāmi or Vēṭṭaikkaruppuṇāmi (Karuppuṇāmi of the hunt) of Mēṭṭuppaṭṭi first had his shrine in the valley where the village is now. When the area was developed and mortar and pestle used near the god, he was moved up the hill from where he now looks down onto the village and has a splendid view of the surrounding hills. Similarly, Karuntāruṭaiya Aiyāṇār left the village because he didn't like the sound of mortar and pestle and moved into the forest where he still is (Kāraikkuṭi, Ramanathapuram). Celliyammaṅ near Koṭimaṅkalam (Madurai) asked to be moved when a rice mill and an oil press were set up near her. But not all deities are moved when the human habitation encroaches upon them, and if they are to remain among people they need to be tamed. We have already met Muṅicuvarar of Tiruccirāpaḷli who, born in the forest, is now in the middle of the city. It was the famous Advaitin Śāṅkarācārya who subdued the god's power: he simply attached Muṅicuvarar with a chain to the Margosa tree and established Viṅāyakar and Murukaṅ, two vegetarian gods, in the temple. We find a close parallel in the story of Akhilāṅṭeśvarī of Śrīraṅkam (Trichy) who once was a 'ferocious deity who burned everything before her'. Śāṅkara drew out her fierceness by establishing a Gaṇeśa just opposite her, and he further prepared two śrīcakras in the form of earrings for her which absorb her wildness whenever she wears them.¹¹⁶ Peaceful gods have a calming effect; it suffices to install them or a form of them near a fierce god: Karupparāyar of Liṅkaṅūr used to be a fierce and dangerous god. His power was reduced by installing in his temple the yantra (yantiram) of the nearby Murukaṅ of Marutamalai (Coimbatore).

¹¹⁵ Shulman 1980a: 219.

¹¹⁶ Wilke 1996: 143 f.

Directions are governed by their guardians and by planets. Very generally we can say that the north and east and their intermediate directions are auspicious, while the west and south are less so. Deities usually face east or north (the goddess who faces north is said to meditate upon Śiva, who is in the north) and they seem to derive some of their power from the direction they are looking at; changing them is one way of reducing their power: Vēṭiyappar of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai was turned from north to south some thirty or forty years ago. When he looked north he was averse to the mortar and pestle sound, and women, who in their polluted state came near him, died. Muttukkaruppu, the fiercest of Veṅṅamalaiyappar's guardians¹¹⁷ was turned from east to face west some sixty years ago during a kumpāpiṣēkam (Skt. kumbhābhīṣeka). He now faces Veṅṅamalaiyappar. Cuṭalai, a guardian of Pacuṅkiḷi Aiyaṅār of Kōpālacamuttiram (Tirunelveli), was changed to face west because facing east he had too much power. We can offer three reasons behind the idea of the god's change of direction: 1. by turning his back on the village, its people and devotees, the god can do no harm with his gaze;¹¹⁸ 2. in facing the main god, the dangerous sub-deity acknowledges his submission and accepts the latter's authority; 3. north and east are auspicious directions, life-empowering directions, while the south and west are directions of decrease and death.¹¹⁹

The easiest way to calm a deity is changing the meat/blood offerings to vegetarian ones. For example Muniyappaṅ of Kāntipuram (Kōyamuttūr) used to receive animal sacrifices when he was still in the wilderness; now the city has overtaken the god, and he has become vegetarian. According to informants, blood sacrifices enhance a deity's power, his/her anger and fierceness: Veṅṅaṅkuṭi Muniyappaṅ (Jākkirāmapālaiyam, Salem) is an angry god because he takes meat offerings (pali, Skt. bali). Karupparāyar eats meat to give him strength, power (Kallāpuram, Coimbatore). The blood sacrifice appeases the goddess' anger (Vaṭivēlkarai, Madurai), and so on. Although the government forbids animal sacrifices in temples, they still occur in most places. To circumvent the law, the animals are sacrificed outside the temple area.¹²⁰

Above I have mentioned the black goddess who sits at the city boundary. She is the virgin goddess while her counterpart, the golden, benign goddess who is beside her husband (Śiva), is married. Folk deities who are married are considered less fierce. As one priest remarked: 'Aiyaṅār is soft because he is married', and if people are afraid of a god it is Karuppar, the bachelor and meat-eater (Tōṭaṅeri, Madurai). However, as

¹¹⁷ See above.

¹¹⁸ On the power of a deity's gaze see Masilamani-Meyer 1996a: 449 ff.

¹¹⁹ On the directions see also Beck 1976.

¹²⁰ See Chapter VI.

we have already seen in Chapter I, it is not so easy to establish whether or not a god or goddess is married; in fact, sometimes both statuses are possible (this obtains especially for the goddess). Suffice it to say here that marriage is a symbol of the ordered space and that if a god has one, two or more wives, it signifies that he is not an ascetic, that his power does not derive from tapas.

The landscape of Tamilnadu is dotted with deities; they overlook village squares and tanks, they dominate a street, a caste quarter; they guard boundaries; they are hidden in groves or lonely mountain tops; some are fierce, some benign, some like offerings of animals, others prefer food that does not involve the taking of animal life. Most of these deities are believed to guard something; the ūrkkāval guards the village and its immediate surrounding area; the kaṇmāykkāval watches over the large irrigation pond; at the boundary of the village stands the ellaikkāval, and the many deities guarding the main deity of a temple are simply called kāval ('watchmen'). The astounding variety of deities, their functions, their set-ups and temples and their difference in iconography will baffle the uninitiated, and yet there are patterns. Some we have looked at already, others we shall treat in the following chapters. To sum up the discussion on wilderness and settled space, let us look at one particular deity spread over a relatively small area and see how wilderness and inhabited space affect him.

11. Vēṭiyappar

Distributed over the Ceṅkam taluk of Tiruvannamalai are ancient hero stones. They were established between the eighth and the tenth centuries and depict a warrior in relief who holds a bent bow and an arrow. On some of the stones are inscriptions.¹²¹ We can presume that these heroes once were worshipped.¹²² In Kīl Irāvantavāṭi the upright stone shows inscriptions at the top and a figure of a warrior with bow, arrow and a knife at the bottom. At the warrior's feet, barely visible, are a box and a water vessel. According to the inscription, the figure represents a fallen hero (Vēṇarkkaḷiyaṅ) who fought in a war during the reign of king Nantīccuvaravikkiramaparumar.¹²³ The approach to the stone has been cleared and a small spear was added facing the stone. This warrior is now the god Vēṭiyappar and receives animal sacrifices.

About ten kilometers north of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai, half-way up a mountain, is the temple of Tirttamalai Vēṭiyappar. The temple is famous for its

¹²¹ About 50 of these stones are described in *Ceṅkam Naṭukarkaḷ* (Irā. Nācakāmi).

¹²² See Soundara Rajan 1982: 59 ff.

¹²³ Eighth century – see *Ceṅkam Naṭukarkaḷ*, no. 51.

sacred and healing water (*tūrttam*), which the priest distributes on Mondays and Fridays and which is said to cure illnesses. Those who wish to receive and use the water must observe certain rules: they have to bathe, avoid non-vegetarian food, and have to be ritually pure (e. g., be free from the pollution of death, menses). Once they have received the water, they should not set it down, and they should not speak until they have reached home. (Devotees asked us for our pens with which they wrote their destination on a piece of paper in order to avoid having to speak to the bus conductor.) The temple itself consists of a square building. Above its entrance is the relief figure of a red-colored mustachioed hero who holds in one hand bow and arrow, in the other an arrow, mirroring the black stone *mūrti* inside, which is a relief showing a warrior with bow and arrow. In front of the building are two large white cement horses and small clay dogs. The only access to the temple is via a foot path which is about two kilometers long; the temple is in the wilderness. Goats can be offered to the god!

Varakūr lies southeast of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai. Inside the village is the temple of Māriyamman. On a hill is the Murukaṅ temple. Towards the northwest of the village, outside the settled area, are first the Vēṭiyappar/Aiyaṅār temple, then the Ellaippiṭāri temple, and at the northern boundary is a boundary deity, *ellaṭeyvam*. The deities inside the Vēṭiyappar/Aiyaṅār shrine are in the form of stones, and they are surrounded by clay horses and elephants, most of them broken. At the entrance to the shrine is *Munnōṭiyāṅ*, marked by a stone and flanked by two tridents. The deities are sheltered by a few trees. *Aiyaṅār/Vēṭiyappar* is the village guardian (*ūrkkāval*). The priest (a *Vaṅṅiyar*) maintained that both *Aiyaṅār* and *Vēṭiyappar* were inside the shrine and that they were brothers, the elder brother (*aṅṅaṅ*) being *Aiyaṅār*, the younger brother (*tampi*) being *Vēṭiyappar*, but the teacher of the village said that the two gods were the same deity. The god(s) should not hear the sound of the mortar and pestle, nor the sound of drums (*mēḷam*). During the festival time in the month of *āṭi*, men prepare the *poṅkal* rice (a specially prepared rice of which the water is not strained), and women are not allowed to come to the temple during that time. Both *Vēṭiyappar* and *Aiyaṅār* are bachelors. Apart from being guardians, they help to recover stolen or lost articles. The injured party writes the grievance on a piece of paper and, after a *pūjā*, places it on or near *Vēṭiyappar/Aiyaṅār*. (Deities with grievances attached to them are a common sight in Tamilnadu.) Within a month the devotee will know where the lost article is, or the thief will feel the effect (the god may appear in his dreams and cause him to return the stolen goods). Once the article is recovered, the paper is removed with another *pūjā*.

North of the large Śiva temple of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai is a small Vēṭṭiyappan shrine. The relief picture above the entrance shows the god with bow and arrow in his hands. In 1988 the goddess Karumāri was established inside the shrine beside Vēṭṭiyappan. Vināyakar is also in the shrine, closer to the entrance. Facing Vēṭṭiyappan is a stone elephant, his vehicle. In front of the shrine are the nine planets (Skt. navagraha). Vēṭṭiyappan is said to guard the northern boundary of the city. The god was first in a forest or wilderness area (kāṭu) and, like most wilderness deities, he does not like to have a roof over his head. When the shrine was built, care was taken to leave a hole in its roof thereby preserving the god's access to space and nature.

Another Vēṭṭiyappan temple lies in the east of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai. Like the Vēṭṭiyappan temple in the northern part of the town, this temple is within the settled area. The temple consists of a main shrine housing the usual relief showing a warrior with bow and arrow. Left and right of him are Parameśvara and Gaṇapati. Along the front wall of the main shrine are Muṅṅicuvavar and snake stones. In the square in front of the main shrine are elephants and horses, and facing the main shrine is another, smaller shrine, showing a god holding sword and shield. He is called Munṅōṭiyān and faces Vēṭṭiyappan. Two lions sit on the corners of this shrine facing outwards and flanking another relief of Vēṭṭiyappan. Left and right of the entrance stands a horse each. The temple was established by Nāyinar, ¹²⁴ and the god Vēṭṭiyappan is their kula teyvam. The temple is now common (potu) and the priest is a Tēcikar. ¹²⁵ Some forty years ago Vēṭṭiyappan was under a banyan tree and, as we saw above, when houses were built near the god he was turned from facing north to facing south. Although the god is still a dangerous (tuṣṭa) deity and protects from cholera and other diseases, his power is now much reduced. The informant, who worships this deity as his kula teyvam, pointed out that Vēṭṭiyappan was Aiyanārappan, and Aiyanārappan was Mahākālā-Śāstā, the god who protected Indra's wife, Indrāṇi, from the demon Cūrapatman and his sister Ajāmuki. Here we see the transformation from a feared wilderness deity to a relatively benign god whose fierce aspect nevertheless remains in the type of offerings he receives: chickens, goats, cigars, arrack and gaṅṅā. Another change is in the god's traits. He becomes the village guardian (ūrkkāval), turns into a form of Aiyanār and through him finds an entry into the greater Hindu pantheon. His vehicle is the elephant (the traditional vehicle of Aiyanār), and it is said that 'in the olden days' people used to see the god mounted on his horse and riding around the area with his entourage.

¹²⁴ According to Thurston 1987 they are a section of Veṅṅālas believed to be descended from Jains who were converted to Hinduism.

¹²⁵ According to Thurston 1987, Tēcikar is a subdivision and title of Paṅṅāram.

The transformation of Vēṭṭiyappar (the name probably is derived from vēṭṭan, 'hunter') nicely illustrates the changes that can happen when a deity moves from the wilderness to the settled space: an open shrine under trees becomes an elaborate temple, a number of guardian deities are added, the god loses his ferociousness and he takes on the coloring of a more popular god, even becomes this god. (Aiyaṅārappaṅ is known in the Viluppuram, Tiruvannamalai and Salem districts; Aiyaṅār is spread throughout Tamilnadu, Śāstā is mainly known in Tirunelveli.) Vēṭṭiyappar is present in all possible forms or combinations: he is in the settled area, he is in the wilderness; some of his temples are private, some public. Horses, elephants and dogs stand in his shrines and testify to his function as guardian (in Mēl Karippūr he guards the boundary). Vēṭṭiyappar is identified with Aiyaṅār, is called an aspect (amcam) of Viṣṇu (Vīraṅantal); is worshipped in connection with diseases (such as cholera) and rain; thus a flower placed on the god foretells the coming of rain (Vīraṅantal). The god is main deity, but sometimes he is a sub-deity, as e. g., in a Draupadī temple (Vīraṅantal). The popularity of Vēṭṭiyappar in this area has led to the establishment of new temples: clusters of heroes depicted on stone reliefs, bow and arrow in hands, they resemble the original hero stones. The examples of Vēṭṭiyappar show us that the name of a deity supplies us with very limited information; what we can surmise is the god's iconography, perhaps a myth, but the name does not tell us what kind of offerings the god receives, where the deity is located within the village or temple, whether or not the deity is fierce. If we wish to understand a folk deity we have to see his or her place in the village or temple and his or her relation to other deities. This is what we shall look at in the next chapter.