

III

Power and Hierarchy within the Temple

1. The temple

A temple (kōvil, kōyil) is a particular space, a circumscribed piece of land that is distinguished from the rest by being the place of residence of a divine power. The space is sacred in the sense that certain purity rules have to be followed if one wishes to enter it. This space or area can be without visible boundaries such as walls or fences and it can be so well integrated into nature, e. g., if it is a simple stone under a tree or a tree itself, that a stranger will not be able to recognize it as a temple. Many of the wilderness shrines consist of not more than a few stones and one or two weapons (trident, spear). The more complex temples, mainly those in or near the settled space, tend to house many deities and have walls around them or at least clearly defined boundaries. In wilderness shrines, where there is only one deity with perhaps a guardian and where there are no fences or walls, the boundary is fuzzy and it is up to the visitors to decide where they wish to leave their shoes or sandals, or they have to follow the priest's instructions. Whether visible or not, clearly defined or not, the temple boundary is important because a deity wishes his/her space respected, and those who violate the boundaries are punished. Countless stories tell of men (especially ignorant white men) who neglect to dismount from their horses near a temple with the result that their horses become lame, refuse to continue on their way, throw off their riders (Nīrētān) or even die (Tanicciyam). To atone for the sin or in gratitude for the deity's restoration of rider or horse, the white man digs a canal, pays for a horse statue, offers the temple some land etc. Other stories tell of women who in a polluted state transgress the sacred boundaries and are punished with death, or of Dalits who, in violation of caste rules, dare enter a caste temple and consequently are struck by misfortune or illness. Respecting the deity's boundaries means concretely not entering the temple or shrine in a polluted state or with shoes on, showing proper respect by dismounting from a horse or cart or, in rare cases, by entering the temple clad in vēṣṭi and without a shirt (a rule only for men); respect means not gambling near a temple, not making love (those who transgress this rule are e. g., stung by bees, Āliyār), and it means not to disturb the deity during his/her periods of rest (early

afternoon, night). The priest who opens the shrine door during that time is likely to be given a warning.¹

What is a temple, a shrine? We can define it as a miniature society on another, higher level, or as an aspect of divine power clothed in earthly symbols. When we now look at the inhabitants of temples, we shall see that they represent the whole spectrum of Hindu society, with the important difference, of course, that they are divine, not human. The temple is inhabited by one, two or more deities with one deity being the main deity and the rest guardians or sub-deities (*kāval*). The deity's form can be a stone, tree, termite hill, weapon, icon with definite animal or human features. By main deity we mean the god or goddess to whom the temple is dedicated. Generally the main deity faces the temple entrance. If there is a flag post in the temple, it is opposite the main deity, and similarly, in front of and facing the main deity will be his or her vehicle. Basically any deity can be main deity or guardian, but some deities are rarely guardians, while others are rarely main deities. *Aiyanār* is a god who prefers to rule and his role as guardian is the exception: as sub-deity he is e. g., in the *Reṇukā* temple in *Paṭavēṭu* (Tiruvannamalai), in the *Śiva* temple of *Tirukkōvilūr* and in a temple to *Mahākālī* near *Tiruccirāppaḷli*.² The goddess *Māriyamman* and various other local goddesses (*Aṅkāḷamman*, *Pattirakālī*, *Draupadī*, *Icakki*, *Paccai Vāliyamman*) are main deities, while we find *Rākkāyi* and *Iruḷāyi* in a guardian function. The goddess *Pēcci* and the gods *Cōṇai* and *Virapattiraṅ* are usually guardians, on rare occasions main deities. *Karuppar* and *Muṇi* are as often main deity as they are guardians. *Maturai Viraṅ* is generally a guardian, but the Dalits worship him as main deity in the sanctum (Coimbatore). Other deities with predominantly guardian functions are *Caṅṅāci*, *Iruḷappan*, *Caṅkili Karuppar*, *Camayan* and *Noṇṭi*. Table I approximately shows in which areas of Tamilnadu we find which main deities.

The main deity can be considered the most important deity of a temple; however, there are temples in which a guardian is more famous than the main deity. The most glaring example of this is *Maṭappuram* (*Sivaganga*). The main deity in this temple is *Aṭaikkalam kātta Aiyanār*, but the hundreds of devotees who throng the temple every Friday come because of *Pattirakālī*. She is the figure between the front legs of the large horse in the temple, a figure hardly noticed in other temples. The temple is now better known as *Kālī* temple than as *Aiyanār* temple.³ In a few temples *Karuppar*, the guardian of *Aiyanār*, has stolen the show from his master. In the *Aiyanār* temple of *Kōccaṭai* (*Maturai*), *Periya Karuppar* and *Cinna*

¹ Meyer 1986: 254.

² Whitehead 1976: 105.

³ On *Kālī*'s myth see Chapter IV.

Karuppar (also called Periya and Cinna Muttaiyā) are the famous gods, and in the Kaliyuka meyya Aiyānār temple of Potumpu (Madurai) it is Nilamēkacāmi (a form of Karuppar) who gets the main attention.

We have already seen in the first example of Vēṭiyappar what a simple temple looks like.⁴ Here then is an example of a complex temple (a temple with many guardians). The Niratalamuṭaiya Aiyānār temple of Mānāmaturai (Sivaganga) is situated on the eastern bank of the Vaikai river. It is a temple in the settled area and is sheltered by a compound wall. Towards the back of the temple is the shrine of the main god Aiyānār, and facing it is the elephant, Aiyānār's vehicle. This shrine marks the boundary line between the vegetarian and the non-vegetarian guardians, all of whom are lined up along the southern compound wall. Behind the main shrine we find another set of the statues of Aiyānār with his two consorts in their usual positions, this time protected by the hood of a five-headed cobra painted in blue, red, white and yellow. In front of them is the elephant and an altar, left and right of them statues of Gaṇeśa. The first statues in the row of guardians along the southern wall at the back of the temple (i. e., in the vegetarian zone) are snake stones. Next to these are the seven maidens (Kaṇṇimār). They sit crowded together, have alternatively a yellow, a red and a blue skin color and wear either a green, a red or a yellow sari. They are followed by Cannāci, the god with a beard, a moustache and hair piled up on top of his head. He sits and has his legs crossed. Beside him is Āñcaṇēyar (Hanumān) in green with a monkey face, his hands folded and with a club tucked under his left arm. Two gods with a red skin color are beside the monkey god: Akṇivīrapattirar, and next to him, Iruḷappacāmi. (Above the deities their names are written – a help to researchers, but also to the priests and devotees!) Akṇivīrapattirar (Agni Vīrabhadra) has eight arms holding various weapons. With a large triśūla the god pierces a male figure lying at his feet, probably Dakṣa. Fangs and a halo of fire around his head show Akṇivīrapattirar's fierceness. Iruḷappacāmi (from Tamil 'iruḷ', 'darkness') has four hands with various weapons, among them a triśūla. Like Akṇivīrapattirar, he has a moustache, but no fangs. (A moustache shows a man/god's power, the larger the moustache, the fiercer the god. Śiva, Viṣṇu, Murukan and Aiyānār usually do not have moustaches.) A white band (of holy ashes) on the foreheads of Akṇivīrapattirar and Iruḷappacāmi shows that these two gods belong into the camp of Śiva. With Iruḷappacāmi end the vegetarian gods.

The next god is Maturai Vīraṇ, here without his companions. He is of red skin color, has the śaiva markings on his forehead, wears a moustache and has two hands, one of which holds a large, slightly curved instru-

⁴ See Chapter II.11.

ment, perhaps the 'boomerang' (vaḷaitaṭi). He wears sandals. Next to him stands Karuppaṇacāmi. He is blue, has two arms and holds a dagger (turned downwards) in his right hand and a club in his left. Like all the other gods, he has a moustache. Beside him is a goddess: Kāḷiyammaṇ. She is of a green skin color, has six arms, holds weapons such as the triśūla (turned downwards), a knife, a dagger, the uṭukkai drum, a bell and the kapāla. She is standing, has fangs and a crown of fire. She is followed by Muttu Karuppaṇ, a blue standing god with two arms. He holds a curved knife in his right and a club in his left hand. His upper body is covered. He is again followed by a goddess: Rākkāyi Ammaṇ. She sits; her left leg is propped up on the seat. She has four arms and holds in her left upper hand a head, in her lower left the kapāla and in her upper right hand a dagger. The weapon of the lower left hand is missing. Rākkāyi has a yellow complexion and fangs. Beside her is the third Karuppar, Noṇṭi Karuppu (the 'lame' Karuppu). He is blue and, like the other Karuppar, has the vaiṣṇava nāmam on his forehead. He kneels on his left leg, has a covered upper body and carries in his right hand a scythe and in his left a club. He is followed by Muṇiyāṇṭi, a standing god of red color with the śaiva markings on his forehead. He has fangs, a bare upper body, and carries a large triśūla in his left and a small club in his raised right hand. The last figure is a snake, called Nākanātar, a curled-up cobra raising its five heads, painted white, red, blue and yellow.

We have reached the front part of the temple. To the right (in the southeast corner) is a white horse, about double the height of a man and in the northeast corner, facing the temple entrance, is the large stone statue of Cōṇaicāmi, here also called Karuppuccāmi. His iconography is that of Karuppar: he holds in his raised right hand the arivaḷ (a machete type knife slightly curved at the top); in his left is the club which rests on the floor. At his hip there is a small, curved dagger (vaṅki). On his forehead the nāmam is traced with sandal paste and kuṅkumam powder. Unusual for Karuppar is that he wears sandals and receives liquor. In front of him are some wooden sandals covered with pointed nails, a votive offering. Cōṇaicāmi is covered in garlands. He is considered to be very powerful and he is the Munnōṭi of Aiyaṇār. If we count the seven maidens as seven deities, the number of the gods and goddesses surrounding this Aiyaṇār is twenty-one, the traditional number of parivāra deities in the Aiyaṇār temple. In other temples this number is sometimes doubled to forty-two or trebled to sixty-three.

This is just one example of a great many varieties of arrangements. Who the main deity and his/her sub-deities are differs from temple to temple; some of the sub-deities are vegetarian, others are not; in one temple the vegetarian deities are clustered around the main deity, in other temples they are lined up along one side of the temple and face the non-

vegetarian deities. A sub-deity suddenly turns up as main deity, changes character. How are we to understand this? Is there a system to the arrangement of the deities in a temple? Having visited more than three hundred temples in Tamilnadu, we found that indeed there is an order to the arrangement of the deities. It is complex, doesn't follow simple rules and defies definite and final statements; but having a basic tool (which we hope to supply) helps us to make predictions. Still, analyzing the temples with this tool will be a bit like forecasting the weather: one can say that the known and collected data point to rain, but if the sun shines the meteorologist cannot be held responsible because sometimes the weather has a will of its own, scoops up a handful from the unpredictable chaos and surprises us. Gods and goddesses love to play!

What struck me first when I looked at the temples was how the placement of the sub-deities very broadly mirrored the hierarchic order of the four varṇas: there was a king, Aīyaṅār, beside him a Caṅṅāci who looked as if he could be a Brahman priest; there were the Dalit deities near the entrance. Let us now walk through the temples simultaneously and discover step by step what kind of deities we find.

2. The hierarchic order of the guardians

The entrance

When we visit a temple, we leave our footwear near the entrance. When there is no visible entrance, we take our shoes off a good distance away from the main deity. Shoes or sandals, as we know, are polluting objects, not only because we have walked through the dirt with them, but mainly because they are on our feet, the lowest part of our body. To slap someone on the head with a sandal is a great insult: the lowest part touches the highest, the head. The hierarchic model that makes the head the highest, the feet the lowest, and that fits society into the simple model of a human figure, goes back to the famous puruṣa sūkta, Ṛg Veda X.90, that describes the sacrifice of the cosmic puruṣa from which emerge the four varṇas: the Brāhmins from the mouth, the Kṣatriyas from the arms, the Vaiśyas from the thighs and the Śūdras from the feet.

The temple entrance then is a boundary that separates certain impure substances from pure ones: the Dalits from the caste people – it is where the Dalits stand to worship, where they place the large leather sandals for the god(s); sometimes these sandals are nailed up on trees at the entrance

(Antiyūr, Mōkaṅūr) – in some temples they are stored in the main shrine: Kārkuṭal; Pūmalaiyappar temple, Neyvācal.⁵

Outside the compound wall or inside and near the entrance, as well as right at the entrance of the shrine, is the vehicle of the god: the horse, the elephant, Nandin or the lion of the goddess. The actual vehicle of the god faces the god while other animals, for instance the horses on which the gods ride out at night in order to protect the villages, look towards the entrance. Other animals fill the temple courtyard: horses, cows, dogs etc.; they are votive offerings. Beginning with the feet, with the place where we leave our sandals, we shall look at the various guardians and discuss them in relation to their location in the temple.

Pūtam, Muṇi, Muṇiyāṅṭi.

There are four types of deities at or near the outer entrance of a temple: the pūtam (demon), Muṇi or Muṇiyāṅṭi, ancestors and the deities of the Dalits. The pūtam (and the Āḷi in Tirunelveli) impress by their size. They stand left and right of the temple entrance or in front of it; they can be single, in pairs, male or a male-female couple. They have their back to the temple, which means that they face those who enter. It is their task to keep all that is impure and unclean from entering the temple. Their appearance is demonic in the sense of being scary. The word 'pūtam' suggests a frightening being of large size, an association it shares (in Tamil) with the word 'Muṇi'. Pūtam and Muṇi sometimes are hard to differentiate iconographically, but Muṇi, as sub-deity, stands in the row of guardians, or he faces the main deity (as kneeling Māmuṇi in the Coimbatore district, or, as standing Muṇiyāṅṭi in e. g., Maṅalūr). Muṇi's distinguishing feature in relation to other deities is his size, and usually he is single (except in the Coimbatore, Periyar and Erode districts where his configuration in relation to the other deities is somewhat different), while the pūtam can have a female companion beside him (Pārttipaṅūr). The pūtam is a typical door or threshold guardian (Skt. dvāra pālaka), while Muṇi represents a contrast to the benign, physically small, vegetarian main deity (Aiyaṅār). Muṇi is a culmination of all those forces that are differentiated in the other guardians; in other words, he is the raw, as yet unfiltered, power. His offerings include everything: goats, chickens, pigs, liquor, cigars and gaṅjā. He is a god who walks – like a servant. In sum, Muṇi is powerful, yet a deity whose place is at the boundary, a place associated with danger and with the lowest strata of society: the Dalits.

⁵ On the large leather sandals for the god Mailār in Karnataka see Sontheimer 1984: 12.

'Munaiyar', another form of Muṇi, is the fierce Hindu guardian of St James, staying 'by the south door of the church'!⁶

Ancestor deities, Dalit deities

Close to the temple entrance we also find the ancestor stones.⁷ Simultaneously with their deification they seem to move up: from the outside of the temple to the inside, from the periphery to the center. How much attention they receive and hence how far inside the temple they can be located often depends on the financial and political power of the descendants. Wherever they stand, they are clearly distinguished from the other deities at the entrance, especially the Dalit gods. Talaiyāri and Tamukkaṭi Vīraṇ are two deities who represent village servants (they also are called Veṭṭiyāṇ in e. g., Ecaṇūr and Ālampāṭi although the Veṭṭiyāṇ is the attendant at the burning ground). The Talaiyāri as a person is the actual village guardian or the assistant of the village police officer. The beater of the tamukku drum is also a village servant. He makes public announcements catching the attention of the villagers by beating the tamukku drum. Both offices are usually held by Dalits. In the temples, we encounter these two village servants in the form of statues at the entrance, sometimes in front of the shrine of the non-vegetarian guardians (Ecaṇūr, Cuddalore). The Talaiyāri is portrayed with a long stick in one of his hands. He is of a dark brown color, wears a dhoti folded up to leave his legs bare. He has short hair and a moustache. In Ecaṇūr a white cloth had been tied around his head.⁸ Tamukkaṭi Vīraṇ beats the tamukku drum that hangs at his belly. He too is of a dark color, and in Vayalūr he wears a necklace with two tiger teeth and, around his head, a white turban.⁹ Older statues of Tamukkaṭi Vīraṇ show more decorations (on ears, arms and chest) and an elaborate headdress (Pēcciyammaṇ Paṭitturai, Maturai). The modern statues of these village servants mirror the appearance of their human counterparts. Even in temples belonging to Dalits, Tamukkaṭi Vīraṇ stands beyond the temple wall, as e. g., in a Maturai Vīraṇ temple at the outskirts of Viḷuppuram (Valūtareṭṭi). Fascinating about this particular temple is that the low walls enclosing the main deities are painted with pictures of pan-Hindu deities: Śiva, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Kṛṣṇa and so on.

Another figure representing an actual village servant is the Maṭaiyāṇ. He had to sacrifice his life in return for making Aiyaṇār the permanent

⁶ Mosse 1994: 313.

⁷ See above.

⁸ See plate.

⁹ See plate.

guardian of the village pond.¹⁰ In the Atikamuṭaiya Aiyānār temple of Tiruppūvanam (Sivaganga) he stands outside the temple compound wall, at the northern side of the entrance. His dress consists of a green top and a vēṣṭi (not tucked up) with a yellow cloth over it. His headdress is a towel tied into a turban. The god receives as offerings chicken and arrack by the maṭaiyān (Dalit) family of the village.

Camayaṅ, Cappāṇi, Noṇṭi, Cāmpān and Cōṇai

There are five gods whose place is either outside the temple compound wall or inside it near the entrance and who are worshipped by Dalits as their special deities. They are: Camayaṅ, Cōṇai, Cappāṇi, Noṇṭi and Cāmpān. Cāmpān is shown with a drum ('cāmpu') in his hands and we seem to find him mainly in the Trichy district. Camayaṅ, whose name informants derived from 'camayam', meaning 'time, proper time or moment', i. e. 'the one who comes at the right time' (so the interpretation of an informant), is also called Camaya Karuppar and is the kneeling form of Karuppar. Often he is simply called Noṇṭi or Cappāṇi ('lame'). The gods show small iconographic variations: in Pettāṇiyāpuram (Maturai) Camaya Karuppucuvāmi is blue, but has the śaiva markings on his forehead; in the Aiyānār temple of Neṭuṅkuḷam Camayaṅ has fangs; in the Aṅkāḷa Īsvari-Kurunāta temple of Vaṭivēlkarai (Madurai) Cappāṇi is outside the compound wall and has a companion. Instead of the arivāl he carries in his right hand a knife that points downwards. Beside him is a yellow Karuppāyiammaṅ with fangs (both deities are worshipped by Dalits).

Cōṇai, whose name can be derived from 'cōṇam', 'red' (as in 'cōṇācalam', the 'red mountain' with which Śiva as Cōṇēcaṅ is identified), is usually of a reddish color, even if he is sometimes identified with Karuppar: the priest of the Aiyānār temple of Pārttipaṅūr (Ramnad) called Cōṇai an avatāra of Perumāḷ (Viṣṇu). Cōṇai's ambivalent iconography is well expressed in the Aiyānār temple of Pettāṇiyāpuram where the god is painted purple and, like Camaya Karuppucuvāmi, has his forehead decorated with the śaiva stripes. The god can be standing or kneeling as in Koṭimaṅkalam, where he is accompanied by a dog. Cōṇai, Cappāṇi and Camayaṅ can be differentiated and stand side by side in the same temple. Thus in the Aṅkāḷa Īsvari-Kurunātaṅ temple of Maṅalūr (Sivaganga) Cōṇai has a reddish color, is standing, has fangs and holds a knife and a kapāla. He is the third to last deity before the entrance. Next to him is a goddess, Pātāḷi, and next to her

¹⁰ See Chapter II.4.

is Cappāṇicāmi, a blue, kneeling god with a nāmam on his forehead. In his right he carries a small knife that points downwards, in his left a club. He has fangs. He is the last god within the temple walls. Outside the compound wall, but facing in the same direction as the other guardians, is Camayaṇ. He is blue, with a nāmam, but does not have fangs. He kneels and carries in his left a club and in his right a knife pointing upwards. In the Aiyaṇār temple of Poṇṇmēṇi (Madurai) Cōṇai is both inside the temple as well as outside it. Outside he is on the southeast side of the entrance, a stone on a platform, inside he is in the form of a picture painted on the wall and is the last god. Beside him is Cappāṇi, a blue, kneeling god. These gods receive animal sacrifices and liquor. Cōṇai of the Aiyaṇār temple in Kīlavāṇiyāṅkuṭi (Sivaganga) was placed some distance away from the temple under a banyan tree because the devotees who offered the god liquor, and then of course drank it, caused too much noise.

These deities, worshipped by Dalits, are outside the temple compound wall because basically the Dalits should not enter the temple as such (if it is a caste temple). The deities are also within the compound wall (but close to the entrance) because, like their devotees, the Dalits, they are believed to perform certain tasks for the main god such as playing the drums. Most importantly, they are part of the temple because (according to the ancient varṇa model) a body needs feet.

Remarkable about Camayaṇ, Noṇṭi and Cappāṇi is that they are kneeling, are called 'lame'. Why is the god lame? The explanation offered with regard to the kneeling Aḷakarappaṇ (the 'beautiful god'), the Dalit deity in Cattiyaṁkalam (Pudukkottai) was: 'The god is so strong and courageous that he won all the battles despite his lame leg!' As the chain that keeps the power of Caṅkili Karuppar in check, the lame leg prevents a full display of the god's power. The lame leg restrains the god, slows him down. Lameness evokes other interpretations as well: a defect, an imperfection, a punishment for a crime,¹¹ in other words, a person who is 'outcast' by society. It has associations of ill luck: the planet Saturn is lame.¹² The kneeling attitude suggests servitude, deference. Furthermore, this position is reminiscent of the hunter or soldier who kneels in order to fire his arrow. In some temples of the Coimbatore district there is a kneeling figure about to shoot the tiger that stands opposite him. And kneeling is how the artists of the Pallava period depicted the warriors who cut off their heads in front of Durgā.

¹¹ Thieves had their arms and legs cut off, e. g., Maturai Virāṇ, and see 'Noṇṭināṭakam' in Shulman 1985: 373 ff.

¹² See Tüerstig 1980: 79 ff., and in this connection the Gujarati goddesses Khoḍiār and Vaḍuchī in Fischer et al. 1982: 76 ff.

Snake deities

In the Niratalamuṭaiya Aiyāṅār temple of Mānāmaturai, Nākanātar is the last deity in the row of guardians, after Noṅṭi Karuppu and Muṇiyāṅṭi, and in Pettāṇiyāpuram Nākappacuvāmi similarly has the last position, past Cōṅai and Camayakarupucuvāmi. The snake is an animal that we find associated with Muṇi, curled around his club or near his legs. It is an animal that is wild (not domesticated) yet that enters the settled area or comes in contact with humans (in the fields). Villagers regard the snake, especially the cobra, with mixed feelings. On the one hand, the poisonous snakes are much feared, on the other hand the cobra is worshipped: eggs and milk are offered to live cobras living in temples (e. g., Kōccaṭai), and snake stones are set up by women whose wish for a child has been fulfilled. The snake lives in two worlds, the world of humans and its own world, nāgaloka, and it lives in the cultivated area (for instance the rice fields) and in the wilderness. It is also the form that deities take to communicate with humans; the snake is a messenger, so to speak. The snake deity's place at the threshold is not surprising then: it is the mediator between different kinds of worlds. Spreading its hood, it is protector of deities and saints, but also a dangerous foe, ready to strike. As if to prove its ambivalent nature, we find the snake often also near and in conjunction with the main deity.

Virāṅ and goddesses

Leaving the entrance area, we meet a row of other non-vegetarian guardians led by a chief who is said to be the minister or general of the main deity. There are the goddesses Rākkāyi, Pēcci, Iruḷāyi, Pattirakāḷi, the gods Maturai Virāṅ, Virāṅaṅ or simply Virāṅ, Caṅkili Karuppar, and other forms of Karuppar, Māṭaṅ and his forms. This group of deities, we can say, watches over society and helps it solve its problems. The goddesses grant fertility and children, the Virāṅs see to it that justice is done; they catch thieves, punish those who did a wrong. Included in this group can be Muṇi or Muṇiyāṅṭi, since he is not a deity worshipped especially by Dalits as are Camayaṅ, Noṅṭi, Cōṅai, and his place need not be near the entrance all the time. Who are the goddesses? Informants were not able to offer much information about them. Pattirakāḷi, a fierce goddess with ten arms, who e. g., in Maṅalūr crushes a male under her right foot, is the companion of Virāpattiraṅ, brought into being by Śiva and ordered to destroy Dakṣa's sacrifice. Pēcci (from Ta. 'pēy', 'malignant spirit') has two forms, a standing one and one in which she sits and rips open the belly of a woman. Here too, not much information was

forthcoming, although the lady priest of the *Muṇiyāṇṭavar* temple in *Naṭukkāvēri* (Thanjavur), where *Pēcci* is a sub-deity, knew that the woman on *Pēcci*'s lap was a queen and that the goddess, in the form of a basket weaver, came to 'deliver' the child in revenge for not having received proper attention. The priest of the nearby *Pēcciyammaṇ* temple was unable to say what the image represented. The story of *Pēcci* seems better known in the *Viluppuram* and *Tiruvannamalai* districts in conjunction with the *Aṅkāḷammaṇ* cult. (*Pēcci* took the form of a midwife and ripped open the belly of *Vallāḷarājan*'s wife and took out the child, in some versions *Śiva*, in order to punish the king.)¹³ Women make offerings to *Pēcci* after the sixteenth day of childbirth. *Iruḷāyi* (from 'iruḷ', 'darkness') and *Rākkāyi* (probably from 'irākkatar', Skt. *rākṣasa*), like the other two goddesses, grant children, but also kill them. Both negative and positive sides of childbirth (birth and death) are attributed to these goddesses, and in order to appease them, people offer them the fetus of a goat at midnight (*cūlāṭṭa pūcai*) – this sacrifice is done especially for *Rākkāyi* in the *Madurai* district. The usual offerings to these goddesses include eggs and hens.

Karuppar

Karuppar, as *Cinna* and *Periya Karuppar*, stands at the boundary between non-vegetarian and vegetarian deities. *Karuppar* himself is usually a god who receives goat sacrifices, but in some temples he has become a vegetarian (e. g., *Potumpu*, *Madurai*). As we have seen,¹⁴ *Karuppar* is called an *avatāra* (manifestation) or an *amcam* (aspect) of *Viṣṇu* and is believed to have come from Kerala. He is the general or minister of *Aiyaṇār* and, in the central parts of *Tamilnadu*, he is his main guardian. *Karuppar*'s preeminence is evident in his being the only guardian who, besides *Aiyaṇār*, sits on a big horse in the temple compound. There are alternatives to *Karuppar*, gods with the same function, e. g., *Uttanṭa Vīraṇ* of *Mutanai* (*Viluppuram*). His shrine is closest to *Aiyaṇār*'s and there are eighteen steps leading to his shrine, recalling those at *Aḷakarkōvil* and *Sabarimalai*, where eighteen steps lead to the shrines of *Karuppar* and *Aiyappaṇ* respectively. As in *Aḷakarkōvil*, where magicians had come to steal *Perumāḷ*'s essence, a magician (*mantiravāti*) had come to take away the power (*śakti*) of *Uttanṭa Vīraṇ*. This magician sat in front of the door of the god's shrine and chanted mantras, but *Uttanṭa Vīraṇ* gave the door a mighty kick, killing the magician and making the door fly through the

¹³ See Meyer 1986: 184 ff.

¹⁴ See Chapter I.

air and land in the nearby pond. Since that time the shrine is without door. In Tirunelveli Aiyaṅār's chief commander is Taḷavāy Māṭaṅ.¹⁵

A different aspect of Karuppar becomes visible in Caṅkili Karuppar, whose might is expressed in his physical power. The chains are both a symbol of power and of freedom.¹⁶ On the one hand, informants say that the chain was placed on Karuppar to keep him from causing mischief, on the other hand, that Karuppar broke the chains and killed the robbers who had tied the chains around him. Caṅkili Karuppar's power is less controlled and, with regard to the temple hierarchy, he is a step below Paṭiṇeṭṭāmpaṭi Karuppar. Apart from the more common standing image, Caṅkili Karuppar also has a kneeling form (e. g., Ciṅkampuṇari), and it is not surprising then, if the story told about Caṅkili Pūtattār in Tirunelveli is the same story that Dalit priests elsewhere tell of Karuppar, namely that Caṅkili Pūtattār tore the priest's son to pieces when the priest refused to leave the child with the god in the temple.¹⁷ Caṅkili Pūtattār continued to do mischief until Aiyaṅār asked him to settle at the northern entrance to the Kurrālam shrine.¹⁸ And indeed, we find a small statue of Caṅkili Pūtattār in the Śiva temple of Kurrālam.¹⁹ He is in the northeast corner of the temple compound and not far from Paṭiṇeṭṭāmpaṭi Karuppar who, in an invisible form, sits atop eighteen steps leading to a platform. Paṭiṇeṭṭāmpaṭi Karuppar faces the northern door of the big temple and the god is the main guardian of Śiva. According to the ballad,²⁰ Caṅkili Pūtattār 'was born when the ocean of milk was churned along with Mudevi, the personification of all misfortune. He was instructed to go and stay with Kshetrapala, whose duty it was to protect the village. But the fellow always took delight in causing harm.' We have noted that in e. g., Pettāṇiyāpuram (Maturai) Caṅkili Karuppanācuvāmi did not have the vaiṣṇava nāmam on his forehead, but the śaiva stripes. Informants in Tirunelveli counted Caṅkili Pūtattār among the śaiva gods and the Brahman priest of Corimuttu Aiyaṅār thought that Caṅkili Pūtattār was born from Śiva's anger (like Virabhadrā).

The minister or general of the main deity is not only offset from the other guardians by his place, but also by his offerings. Although he receives the sacrifices of goats like the other guardians, he usually does not get liquor and cigars, an offering favored by the lower, male guardians.

¹⁵ See Chapter I.4.

¹⁶ On the breaking of chains see e. g., Sontheimer 1984: 16.

¹⁷ See Chapter I.2.

¹⁸ Arunachalam 1976: 193.

¹⁹ Tirunelveli; see plate.

²⁰ Arunachalam 1976: 192.

Iruḷappacāmi and Vīrapattiraṅ

Near the main deity are the vegetarian guardians. Closest to the boundary that separates the vegetarian from the non-vegetarian deities and nearest to Karuppar is Iruḷappacāmi. He is followed by the two Vīrapattiraṅs: Akōra Vīrapattiraṅ and Akkiṇi Vīrapattiraṅ. Iruḷappacāmi and Vīrapattiraṅ seem to be vegetarian because of their identification with their 'classical' counterparts, Bhairava and Vīrabhadra. At least in the central parts of Tamilnadu (especially in the Pudukkottai, Madurai and Sivaganga districts) their iconography facilitates this identification. Furthermore, Akkiṇi and Akōra Vīrapattiraṅ are stationed opposite the shrine to Maturai Śiva-Sundareśvara, and there they obviously do not receive meat offerings. The statues of these gods in the temples of Aiyaṅār resemble iconographically the statues in this Śiva temple. Why are there two Vīrapattiraṅs? An old priest of the potter (Vēḷār) caste explained: 'Takkaṅ (for Taṭcaṅ, Dakṣa) received the boon that nobody could kill him. Thereupon he caused troubles everywhere. Īśvara created Akkiṇi Vīrapattiraṅ and told him to kill Takkaṅ. He was unable to do so. Then Īśvara created Akōra Vīrapattiraṅ (with two more arms). He was able to conquer Takkaṅ.'

As we go north in Tamilnadu, Vīrapattiraṅ changes his form, and he becomes a non-vegetarian. In Eṅṅāyiram e. g., Vīrapattiraṅ has retained his name but in iconography metamorphosed into a god usually called Vīraṅ in the Viluppuram district: he sits opposite the shrine of Aiyaṅār and holds sword and club. His left leg is folded on the seat, his right reaches over the platform and rests on the head of a demon. He is accompanied by two dogs and two uniformed policemen and his offerings include goats, hens, pigs and alcohol. Dalits are allowed to step up to this god's place. The god's name, Vīrapattiraṅ, is written on the pedestal on which the god sits. Another name of Vīrapattiraṅ is Viyarvai (or Vērvai) puttiraṅ, 'son of sweat', because he emerged from Śiva's sweat.

Hanumān

The next god, Āñcaṅēyar or Hanumān, is a pan-Hindu deity. In Tamilnadu we find the god often in the brahmanic Viṣṇu temples, occasionally also in folk temples. As a folk deity he is much less popular in the South than in northern parts of India. In Tamilnadu he often forms a pair with Garuḍa, for instance on the walls of the Karuppaṅṅacāmi temples of Māranātu and Kīlakkuyilkuṭi (perhaps in imitation of similar paintings on Viṣṇu temples), and he is portrayed in the company of Rāma

and Sītā, e. g., over the entrance of the shrine of Māmūnti (Retṭippālaiyam, Tanjavur). As a free-standing figure in the temples of Aiyaṅār, Hanumān is near the seven maidens and Cannāci.

Cannāci

Cannāci is an interesting figure. He is the archetype of the Indian ascetic: he sits on a tiger skin, has long, matted hair, part of which is piled up on his head or flows over his shoulders; he is bearded, his body is smeared with sacred ash and he wears a rudrākṣa garland. An integral feature of his iconography is the gañjā vessel. Its form varies from a chillum to a small pot-bellied cup or a hookah and, if it is a small vessel, it is in one of his hands, or even tucked under his arm (puli mēl Cannāci of Cattiyamaṅkalam), otherwise it is depicted on the pedestal on which the god is sitting. Cannāci and Muṇi are the two major gods who receive offerings of gañjā; both gods are wilderness gods. Śiva, we know, likes to smoke or drink gañjā,²¹ and modern ‘ascetics’ use it for different reasons or purposes.²² In the Coimbatore district Cannāci becomes Tannāci (perhaps from ‘tan’, ‘self’ or ‘taṇi’, ‘alone’; compare Taṇi Viraṅ in Vīramūr, Viluppuram), and he too receives gañjā. (In many temples gañjā offerings have been stopped recently.) Cannāci and his variants always receive vegetarian food.

Kannimār

Next to Cannāci are the seven maidens. In contrast to the other goddesses, the Kannimār (‘kanni’, ‘young, unmarried woman’) are gentle deities. They sit, seven (sometimes eight) in a row, hardly distinguishable from each other, have neither fangs nor other fearful attributes. Often they are simply stones. Left and right of them may stand Vīrapattiraṅ and Gaṇeśa or one of the two.²³ The Kannimār can be non-vegetarian goddesses and even fierce when they are alone, e. g., when they guard a water source.

²¹ See Kramrisch 1981: 198 ff.

²² For a modern Aghori’s view on ‘drugs’ see Svoboda 1986: 173 ff.

²³ See Dagens 1985: 362 where Vīrabhadra and Vināyaka are mentioned as companions of the ‘mothers’, who are the Mātṛkās Brahmāṇī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī etc.

Aiyaṅār

Continuing our journey into the temple we lastly pass the elephant that faces Aiyaṅār and enter the sanctum. We have met Aiyaṅār in Chapter I and have mentioned his role as god of rain, a role which, in all likelihood, he has taken over from Indra.²⁴ Today no festivals for Indra are celebrated in Tamilnadu. Aiyaṅār seems to have received another function from the old king of the pan-Hindu deities, namely that of king. Informants repeatedly pointed out Aiyaṅār's role as king, king not over a territory but king over the other deities, corresponding to Indra's role in heaven as king of the pan-Hindu deities, the devas. Yet, apart from the elephant and the elephant goad which the god holds in his right hand, nothing in Aiyaṅār's iconography is suggestive of royalty. Aiyaṅār resembles more an ascetic than a king: he has matted hair and a yoga band encircles his waist and his left raised leg. Informants insisted that Aiyaṅār was doing tapas. Aiyaṅār's contradictory image can be explained, on the one hand, by his parental heritage: Śiva is a god associated with asceticism, yogic powers, while Viṣṇu, especially in his Rāma avatāra, is symbolic of kingship. On the other hand, king and ascetic are combined in Aiyaṅār because Aiyaṅār is not only king, ruler over the other deities, but also godhead, supreme deity, which in Tamil folk Hinduism means Śiva (and in Tamil śaiva philosophy, the neutral śivam).

In fact, there is a strong śaiva tendency in all main deities: Karuppar and Karupparāyar change their vaiṣṇava aspects to śaiva ones when they become main deity, and Aiyaṅār himself is more Śiva than Viṣṇu. In representations of Aiyaṅār and Karuppar on their respective large horses, Karuppar bears the vaiṣṇava markings, while Aiyaṅār shows the śaiva stripes on his forehead (with a few exceptions, e. g., Allinakaram). A more obvious sign of Aiyaṅār's identification with Śiva is the liṅga that is near or under the mūrti of Aiyaṅār (Ciṅkampuṅari, Pattamaṭai, Kāraiyaṅ, Eṅṅāyiram, Allinakaram). Aiyaṅār's ambivalent position between śaiva and vaiṣṇava affiliations (as Aiyappaṅ, the bachelor god of Kerala, he wears the nāmam on his forehead) and between ascetic and king, to some extent, may be responsible for the ambivalent position of Aiyaṅār's companions. Their names, meaning 'full, filling, satisfying' and 'plenty', are fitting for companions of a king and for goddesses whose role it is to maintain the earth (a function assigned to Viṣṇu's companions). The two women on Aiyaṅār's side are painted one with a dark color, the other with a light one (e. g., green and yellow), which suggests a pattern found all

²⁴ That Indra was a celebrated deity can be seen from the description of an Indra festival in the Tamil epic Cilappatikāram; Iṅṅkōvaṭikaḷ 1985: 136 ff.

over India and with many gods, namely: that one wife is from a low caste, often a tribal (the dark one), while the other is from a high caste.²⁵

3. *The vāstumaṇḍala*

Above we have mentioned the model of the four varṇas and we began our excursion into the temple at the position of the feet. Using this same model and applying it to the deities in the temple we get the following arrangement:

head	Brahman	ascetic, Caṇṇāci
arms	Kṣatriya	king, minister or general, warrior, Karuppar
thighs	Vaiśya	viś, the people, goddesses, heroes
feet	Śūdra	servant, Dalit gods, Muṇi

If we place this human figure with its deities onto the temple space we get the vāstumaṇḍala or vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala, the maṇḍala on which reside or dwell the deities,²⁶ but one different from the 'classical' vāstumaṇḍala that we looked at in connection with the village plan, the maṇḍala consisting of concentric squares.²⁷ The figure (puruṣa) on the 'classical' maṇḍala lies in a squatting position, face down, head in the east or northeast, and filling the entire square. The figure is a demon who came into being from a drop of sweat that fell from Śiva's forehead. The demon fell to the ground and the gods sat on him to hold him down.²⁸ Before the construction of a temple can begin, offerings have to be made to this puruṣa and to the deities on the vāstumaṇḍala, starting with Brahmā in the center.²⁹ The center, the Brahmā-square, corresponds to the garbha-gṛha (the 'womb-house'), the sanctum. Above it rises the vimāna, the temple tower, which again has a maṇḍala form. Around the main deity (the center) are positioned the guardians or attendants, which can be eight, twelve, sixteen or thirty-two.³⁰ Five or seven walls surround the temple. The temple as a whole is likened to the universe and its center together with the vimāna to Mount Meru and the axis mundi.³¹ The big temples to Śiva and Viṣṇu (e. g., Maturai, Śrīraṅga) show a ground plan based on the maṇḍalaic concept of concentricity with a definite central

²⁵ E. g., Murukan with his tribal wife Vaḷḷi and his high caste wife Tēvayāni or Devasenā; and the gods Khaṇḍobā in Maharashtra, Mallanna in Andhra, Mailār in Karnataka, see Sontheimer 1976: 61, 1984a: 167 f., 1989: 322 ff.

²⁶ On vāstu see Kramrisch 1946, I: 21.

²⁷ See Chapter II.4.

²⁸ Ramachandra Rao 1979: 131 ff.; for another version see Shulman 1978: 116.

²⁹ Dagens 1985: 23 ff.

³⁰ Dagens 1985: 152.

³¹ Michell 1979: 67 ff.; Ramachandra Rao 1979: 135 ff.

area and entrance gates in the four directions; and, wherever the folk deities receive a new shrine, this pattern is followed in so far as a vimāna will grace the central shrine and a compound wall, tracing a square around the center, will mark boundaries.

The stretched-out figure fits another ground-plan concept, one that the South Indian architects seem to have had in mind when they constructed a temple; it is the idea of a human figure lying along the east-west axis, with his head at the center and his feet at the eastern entrance tower. The temple architecture is arranged on it so that the flag-staff stands over the genital organ of the ground figure, the sacrificial altar above his navel, the entrance porch to the sanctum above his heart, the sanctum over his head and the main deity's place where the eyebrows meet.³² Vanmikanathan presents a similar model,³³ in which the human figure is drawn only as far as the first or lowest cakra in the body (mūlādhāra cakra), which corresponds to the location of the flagstaff and the altar. Vanmikanathan's plan joins parts of the temple (deities) with the cakras located along the stretched out human figure. Beck reproduces Vanmikanathan's model and adds the corresponding body parts to the cakras.³⁴

The above model of the stretched-out human figure allows a change of focus: instead of looking at a square with a center, we see a rectangle divided into zones, of which the innermost corresponds to the top of the rectangle and to the head of the figure. The main deity is no longer in the geometrical center, but has moved up towards the back. This rectangular temple plan, which perhaps emerged from a reduplication of the square,³⁵ is common in the classical South Indian temples and certainly fits the arrangement of the deities in the folk temples.³⁶

If we superimpose the model of the stretched-out figure rather than the 'classical' squatting one upon the maṇḍala with its four or five zones (brāhma, daivika, mānuṣa, paiśāca and rākṣasa), we get a fairly good illustration of the configurations we have been discussing. Table II shows each of the zones marked with a different shade (the brāhma zone is white, the daivika zone is light grey etc.). Each zone contains the shades of the other zones. This is to show that the temple and its deities is a projection out of the center and out of the main deity; in other words, all zones are potentially contained within each other, but only one of the zones is manifest. The movement is from the non-manifest to the manifest, from the subtle to the gross, from the light to the dark, from the

³² Ramachandra Rao 1979: 97.

³³ Vanmikanathan 1980: 117 ff.

³⁴ Beck 1976: 239.

³⁵ Ramachandra Rao 1979: 136 ff.

³⁶ Sivaramurti 1977: 511, 520, 521.

sattvic to the tamasic, from the center to the periphery, from the settled space to the wilderness, from the divine to the human.

This hierarchic model, based on the varṇa ideal, can explain for instance why the Dalit deities are near the entrance, but it is inadequate if we wish to know why Muṇiyāṇṭi, a deity at the feet of the figure and near or even outside the entrance, is an ascetic whose offerings are non-vegetarian but include gañjā, while the same offering of gañjā goes to the vegetarian Cannāci god who is close to the center. Fundamental to the hierarchic model is social stratification defined by purity (e. g., a caste defines its status by saying from whom in the hierarchy it can accept and to whom it can give water). This (Dumontian) model cannot explain certain power structures within Hindu society. A number of scholars have pointed out the importance of donor-dependency, gift-giving power, of political versus religious power, of landownership versus purity as determining factors in hierarchies of power.³⁷ Acknowledging these insights, I wish to propose a tripartite model of power that will help to explain the relationship between the deities: spiritual power, authoritative power and physical power.

4. Three kinds of power

Spiritual power: It is the power a yogi or ascetic gains from his tapas. This power can manifest in siddhis, certain kinds of magic power, power that enables a person to influence other lives through invisible channels. This power is wilderness power in the sense that it is not dependent on a moral or hierarchic order; a demon can gain this power and use it for his own evil purposes.

Authoritative power: This kind of power is based on politics, on wealth and status. It is the power a general has over his troops, a king over his subjects, a parent over his child. This power is sustained by hierarchy and respect.

Physical power: This is the raw power, power of numbers, of muscles, brute force. It is based on extreme emotion, on courage and heroism.

This division resembles in many respects Dumézil's tripartite classification,³⁸ but we have to emphasize here that folk deities partake to a larger or smaller measure of at least two if not of all three kinds of power. Depending on the deity's function or task one or the other power will predominate. The god who fights demons, monsters, malignant spirits, has great physical strength. The god who supervises justice and order

³⁷ See e. g., Burghart 1978: 532 and 1983; Dirks 1989: 128 ff., 293 ff., and 1990; Raheja 1990.

³⁸ See e. g., Lyle 1982: 26 ff.

needs controlling or authoritative power while those deities dealing with magic or the more subtle forces of the universe need spiritual power. Muṇi, Karuppar and Aiyaṅār can serve to illustrate this distribution of power: Muṇi baffles us by his sheer size, and we can attribute great physical strength to him; but, he clearly also has spiritual power (its symbols being his unmarried state, his matted hair etc.). Aiyaṅār's elephant, his entourage of various deities and his two companions mark him as a king. In him authoritative power predominates. Karuppar is said to possess magic power (because he comes from Kerala, land of magic) – and as Mahāviṣṇu he likes to play tricks, create illusions. Karuppar is unmarried, often averse to the presence of women, but being the general of Aiyaṅār, he also wields authority. A simpler way of describing these three powers is tying them up with the roles of king, priest and minister.

This latter categorization comes from an informant (Antiyūr, Erode). Hidden in the forest of Antiyūr there are three separate temples. The one farthest from Antiyūr is the temple of Karumalai Āṅṭavar. In a verse of praise on a board in the temple the god is described as king among kings, as god of Karumalai ('black mountains'). A few minutes' walk further down the hill is the temple of Karumalai Tavakuru. He gets only vegetarian offerings and is worshipped for the cure of sickness and especially mental illnesses. The third temple, still further down the hill, is the temple of Karumalai Muṇisvarar. He receives non-vegetarian offerings and he is the fiercest of the three gods. The three gods are brothers, Tavakuru being the eldest and calmest of the three. Karumalai Āṅṭavar and Muṇisvarar used to fight much and on the suggestion of Tavakuru, the three brothers went to live separately, Muṇisvarar farthest from the other two. The pūjā always begins with the eldest brother and ends with the youngest, Muṇisvarar. According to the informant, Karumalai Āṅṭavar is a hunter king, Tavakuru (also called Tavaciyappan and Tavacimuṇi) is his guru – we could say the priest –, and Muṇisvarar is the king's minister. Tavakuru, as his name says, is a guru doing tapas, hence his vegetarian diet. Āṅṭavar means 'ruler' (from Tamil 'āḷ'). My assistant compared Muṇisvarar to the youngest child in a family who is generally considered the most mischievous and quick-tempered of the siblings. The power of deities in a village is often characterized in terms of a sibling relationship. The elder brother (or sister) is the calmer and gentler deity. In Nāraciṅkaṅūr (Viluppuram) Aiyaṅār, the more gentle god, is the elder brother of Ēllaippiṭāri, the fierce (tuṣṭa) goddess.

Even though Muṇi may be physically stronger than Aiyaṅār, he has to submit to the latter's authority. Here are some examples to show how the power structures work in the temple:

In Allinakaram (Sivaganga) Taṅṅisvara Aiyaṅār guards the caste pond and, although he is not the village guardian, he rules over other gods near

him, for instance, Karuppuccāmi, a fierce god who used to extort money from people for favors he did for them. Aiyaṅār did not like this and he said to Karuppuccāmi: ‘I shall give you a handful of rice and a young goat (a “muṭṭi” and a “kuṭṭi”), but you will have to settle at the border (ellai)!’ Therefore the villagers placed the god at the border. Muṇiyāṅṭi, the guardian of the same village (ūrkkāval) also once had his place close to Aiyaṅār. Being a god who receives liquor, he used to cause a lot of trouble when he was drunk. Aiyaṅār ‘kicked’ him and told him to go to a separate place.

Sometimes, instead of sending the trouble-makers away, Aiyaṅār brings them to his temple in order to have a better control over them. In Cattiyamaṅkalam (Pudukkottai) Karuppar had a separate temple. He was so fierce that he killed those women who approached his temple in an impure state (during their menstruation). Aiyaṅār then said to the villagers: ‘Place Karuppar beside me. I shall look after him and I shall see to it that he gets sacrifices.’ Now Karuppar is in the temple of Aiyaṅār, in a side shrine, where the non-vegetarian deities are. Aiyaṅār, as the ‘king’, can rule over the other gods and give orders, but he concedes a certain power (indicated by the promise of blood sacrifices) to his subordinates, a power he knows they need if they are to be efficient in their tasks.

The power struggle between the gods in a village manifests in a number of ways. What could be a clearer sign of a god's submission than his ‘feminization’? The biggest temple in the Dalit settlement of Māraṅṅaṭu (Sivaganga) is the Karuppaṅacuṅvāmi temple. The god is in his sanctum in the form of a termite hill. Karuppaṅacuṅvāmi is a new-comer. Oṅṭi Viraṅ is the older god, the village guardian, and has a small shrine about 500 meters away. When Karuppaṅacuṅvāmi came to the village (via the river from Kerala), Oṅṭi Viraṅ said to him: ‘I shall bestow the right (to be here) on you only if you shave off your moustache and wear flowers (in your hair).’ This scene is enacted during the festival, and as a sign of respect Oṅṭi Viraṅ receives the first garland at the time of the kaḷari rite.³⁹

Aiyaṅār definitely rules as king over his subordinates and sometimes his role extends even to the human king:

Caṅkili Karuppaṅ was born under the palmyra tree. Once he changed into the form of the king and judged and punished like the human king, thus creating much confusion. He even warned the king not to interfere saying that he was now in charge of justice. But the king bound Caṅkili Karuppaṅ with a chain. The god then became the “additional captain” of Aiyaṅār.

Aiyaṅār's ‘chief captain’ in this temple (Ciraikkāṭta Aiyaṅār, Paḷḷiyakkirakāram, Thanjavur) is Utirakkaruppu (from ‘utira’ meaning ‘blood’). His place is above Caṅkili Karuppaṅ.

³⁹ See Chapter V.

Once some magicians (mantiravāti) came to the temple, captured Aiyaṅār in a bottle and carried him towards the Kolli hills. Utirakkaruppu pursued the magicians, killed them and released Aiyaṅār.

We have already seen two examples of magicians wanting to steal a deity's power (the power of Kaḷḷaḷakar of Aḷakarkkōvil and of Uttāṅṭa Viraṅ of Mutāṅai). The Kolli hills are a mountain range between Tiruccirāppaḷli and Cēlam. Magicians and siddhas are believed to live in these hills, where special herbs used for magic purposes are said to grow. Aiyaṅār either is powerless against the magicians, or he refuses to act against them. It is his guardian Karuppar, the god associated with magic, who saves him, but, instead of subduing the magicians with magic power – which he must possess, being a deity who is worshipped by those suffering from mental illnesses, problems due to black magic (pillicūṇiyam) and spirit possessions – Utirakkaruppu simply kills the adversaries. In any case, this seems to be the most efficient way to get rid of magicians. Utirakkaruppu is accompanied by a tiger, an animal we notice in conjunction with Caṅṅāci and Muṇi, an animal with connotations of wilderness and asceticism.

Sometimes Aiyaṅār leaves the work of subduing unruly deities to his general, one example of which we have seen in Chapter I.6. The pattern is always more or less the same: deities lower in the hierarchy but equipped with physical power can easily be tricked by a higher deity. The deity in the center of the temple, the main deity, receives the most respect (as one would respect a person of authority) even if a sub-deity is believed to be more effective and hence is worshipped with more fervor. Each deity in a temple has a particular character, and so far we have looked at various ways that help us determine that character: i. e., iconography, place in the temple, place in the village, kind of power; added to this we can look at the kinds of food offerings a deity receives, at specific purity rules which the deity demands and so on. Clearly all these things hang together: knowing the iconography, we can deduce the deity's power range, knowing his or her place in the temple, we can infer what kind of offerings the deity receives. Hindu philosophy has given us a simple tool that subsumes to a large extent the categories we have looked at so far, and it has the advantage that it functions on both the vertical as well as the horizontal plane; it expresses hierarchy and polarity. This tool is the concept of the three qualities, guṇas.

5. *The three guṇas*

The word *guṇa* (Skt.) means among other things: quality (either good or bad), thread, rope or strand, the ingredients or properties out of which *prakṛti* (the source of the material world) is woven. When we read in *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* that the ‘unborn’ (*prakṛti*) has three colors⁴⁰: red, white and black, we know that it is a reference to the three *guṇas*: red – *rajas*, white – *sattva* and black – *tamas*. To get a feeling of what these *guṇas* are we shall list in short-hand their meanings in a number of texts. In the early *Sāṃkhya* school (Caraka), thought and gross matter are made up of these three elements: *sattva* (intelligence) and *rajas* (energy, movement) are preponderant in thought, while *rajas* and *tamas* (mass, obstruction) are preponderant in gross matter. The *guṇas* are substances or subtle entities; they are permanent and indestructible, but suffer modifications and changes by grouping and re-grouping. When the three *guṇas* are in an equilibrium, they are called *prakṛti*, a state devoid of characteristics that can neither be said to exist nor not to exist but that is hypothetically the mother of all things. When the equilibrium of the three *guṇas* is disturbed, creation begins. In the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* *sattva* is of the nature of pleasure, it illuminates; *rajas* is of the nature of pain, it activates, while *tamas* is of the nature of delusion, it restrains, fixes, obstructs.⁴¹

The *Bhagavad Gītā* speaks about the *guṇas* in e. g., Chapters 14, 17 and 18: They have their origin in the supreme deity, here *Kṛṣṇa*. *Sattva guṇa* is light, luminosity, freedom from suffering, happiness, knowing good deeds or actions, actions done without attachment; it has an upward motion. *Sattvic* beings make offerings to gods and goddesses. *Rajas* is activity, passion, desire, greed, suffering. Beings with a preponderance of *rajo**guṇas* bring offerings to *Yakṣas* and demons. *Tamo**guṇas* have the quality of ignorance, delusion, lethargy, sleep; they describe a downward movement. *Tamasic* beings bring offerings to the dead. The *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad* offers a list of the qualities that emerge from *tamas* and *rajas*;⁴² from *tamas* come e. g., delusion, fear, desperation, sleep, lethargy, sorrow, hunger and thirst, ignorance, pride; while *rajas* lead to e. g., thirst, passion, attachment, lust, hatred, jealousy, greed, hypocrisy. The same text assigns a deity to each *guṇa*⁴³: *Rudra* to *tamas*, *Brahmā* to *rajas* and *Viṣṇu* to *sattva*. *Jaideva Singh* in his *Introduction to the Śiva Sūtras*⁴⁴ lists each *guṇa* in a tripartite order of being, psychology and ethics thus: *sattva*

⁴⁰ *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.5.

⁴¹ See Dasgupta 1975: 243 ff.

⁴² *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad* 3.5.

⁴³ *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad* 5.2.

⁴⁴ Singh 1979: xiii, 127.

in the order of being is brightness, lightness, in the psychological order it is transparency, joy and peace, in the ethical order it is the principle of goodness; *sattva* (*prakāśa*, visibility, manifestation) is the predominant attribute of *buddhi* (intellect). *Rajas* in the order of being is activity, in the psychological order it is craving, passion and in the ethical order ambition, avarice. *Rajas* (unsteadiness, disharmony) is the predominant attribute of *manas* (mind). *Tamas*, in the order of being, is darkness and inertia; in the psychological order it is dullness, delusion, dejection and in the ethical order it is degradation, debasement. *Tamas* (covering, concealing) is the predominant attribute of *ahaṅkāra* (ego). Summarizing we have:

<i>sattva</i>	<i>rajas</i>	<i>tamas</i>
white	red	black
goodness	emotions	delusion
light	action	obstruction
intelligence	instability	inertia
<i>buddhi</i>	<i>manas</i>	<i>ahaṅkāra</i>
gods	men	demons ⁴⁵
day	dawn	night
water	fire/heat	food ⁴⁶
dwelling in the forest	in the country	in a gambling house (Śrīmad Bhāgavata)

This triadic system overlaps in parts with the hierarchic *varṇa* model in that the mouth, from which the Brahmins emerged, has the quality of truth, a quality associated with *sattva*; the feet, location of the Śūdras, the quality of ignorance, while the middle part, the breast, has the quality of passion, a quality of *rajas*.⁴⁷ Black and red are colors of life and death, and it is not surprising that the death maiden (a black woman with red garments and red eyes) is the product of Brahmin's anger, of the fire of his anger.⁴⁸ The three colors are part of Dumézil's system of 'three functions' (priests, warriors, food producers), which Lyle expanded by the color yellow (for the Vaiśyas, assigning black to Śūdras) to fit the four *varṇas*.⁴⁹ Moreno and Marriott describe the *guṇas* in terms of Āyurveda's heating and cooling qualities and apply their insights to their analysis of the festivals of two South Indian deities, *Murukan* and *Māriyamman*.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ O'Flaherty 1980: 44 ff.

⁴⁶ Chandogya Upaniṣad 6.2–6.4

⁴⁷ See O'Flaherty 1976: 27.

⁴⁸ O'Flaherty 1976: 228.

⁴⁹ Lyle 1982.

⁵⁰ Moreno and Marriott 1990: 149 ff. For further references on the *guṇas* see also Eliade 1973: 374.

The advantage of this relatively simple triadic system is that we can use it to mark hierarchy as well as opposition. White in opposition to red, for instance, shows the duality male – female, Śiva – Śakti, the eternal and unchangeable against life, life as transformation, creation and destruction. Red is the kuṅkumam prasāda of the goddess, white the sacred ash of Śiva; red is heat, white coolness.⁵¹ Red and white are the milk and blood ingredients of a deity's birth, symbolizing suffering, sacrifice, activity (blood) and nourishment, appeasement, cooling and healing (milk),⁵² and when we add the stone, or plant that emerges from the earth (black), we arrive again at the triad. Black in opposition to white often contrasts gods and demons, the latter having a dark skin color while the gods are fair. Yama, the god of death, is shown with a black skin color and his vehicle, the buffalo, is black, while Śiva's vehicle, the bull, is white. Coming back to the temple of folk deities, we notice a general tendency of sattvic deities in the center, rajasic deities in the middle and tamasic deities at the periphery.

We can imagine a circle with two rings. The outer ring represents the three kinds of power: spiritual, authoritative and physical, the inner ring represents the three guṇas (each making up a third of the ring). The inside of the circle thus enclosed by the rings is divided horizontally into wilderness space and ordered space and vertically into vegetarian and non-vegetarian qualities. The vegetarian side is close to the spiritual power and sattvic qualities and partakes both of ordered and wilderness space; the non-vegetarian side is closer to physical power and tamasic elements and partakes more of wilderness space and so on. The movement within the circle is from the inner, vegetarian and sattvic towards the outer, non-vegetarian tamasic, from spiritual power to physical power. The guṇas sattva and tamas are in wilderness space, rajoguṇas in the ordered space; the three kinds of power overlap. Basically all the deities are located in the rajasic part, but the temple itself encompasses the entire space of the circle thus including non-visible entities (spirits, planetary influences etc.). The more a deity is towards the center of the temple, the more he or she has sattvic qualities. If a deity shows wilderness symbols, e. g., a beard, long, matted hair, and is in the center, we can assume that the god or goddess is sattvic and vegetarian; if the deity is at the periphery or near the wall, it means he or she is tamasic, non-vegetarian and probably fear-inspiring. Both will be ascetics, but while the one in the center will be benign, the one at the periphery will be malignant (tuṣṭa). If Muṇiyāṅṭi, who stands at the periphery, receives gañjā, it makes sense because he belongs to the wilderness – his ascetic sign being matted hair. He is tamasic, a 'demon' (expressed by his fangs,

⁵¹ See Beck 1969.

⁵² See Chapter II.

large stature) and he has physical and spiritual power, the latter derived from his asceticism, the former from his non-vegetarian habits. In other words, his power will be compounded – which makes him a very dangerous deity. Maturai Vīraṅ, if he is a guardian, is likely to be non-vegetarian. He has signs of authoritative power: a horse, two wives, which place him well in the section of rajas but towards the periphery. If, however, he is the central or main deity, he will be vegetarian and have more authoritative power, and while he himself will have no wilderness or ascetic symbols, an ascetic god (Cannāci or Tannāci) will be at his side. Being vegetarian (as main deity), Maturai Vīraṅ will tend towards sattvic qualities, a benign disposition, and he will have guardians who receive the meat offering, e. g., Mahāmuni, whose kneeling position shows him to be subservient but also physically strong (Coimbatore). Most of the main deities are vegetarians. An exception are some of the Muṅis in the Coimbatore district: though main deity, they receive animal offerings; they have all three kinds of power (are ascetics, kings and strong), but by their side we find the seven maidens, ascetic vegetarian goddesses who complement the Muṅis with sattvic and female qualities. The temple, representing the world or the universe, contains all: deities who are like deities (who are in heaven), deities who resemble humans (who are on earth or were born there), deities who are like demons (pūtam) and deities who are animals.

We can imagine this circle with its two rings as consisting of rotating parts, thus the three kinds of power could be moved to encompass more of one or the other; the human figure symbolizing the space from periphery to center could be placed partly into the sattvic or tamasic space and so on. The idea is to show the flexibility of deities and their arrangement in a temple, and to illustrate the wholeness and order upon which this flexibility can make sense.