IV

Relationships: One is Many, Many are One

1. Introduction

Ad nauseam temple priests love to tell foreigners that all goddesses are one; Mīnākṣī is Śakti, Māriyamman is Śakti, Aṅkāḷamman is Śakti; or, Mīnākṣī is Pārvatī, Māriyamman is Pārvatī and so on. When we take a closer look at the local goddesses we notice differences, realize that they are distinct from each other and that they fit the description of Pārvatī neither iconographically nor in myth. And yet, the priest is not telling us a lie, he is not trying to simplify Hinduism. He is expressing a fundamental truth. All goddesses are the same, but they are not the same. All gods are the same and yet different. How are we to understand this? It is not only that Māriyamman is a form of Pārvatī, but both Pārvatī and Māriyamman are forms of a supreme Śakti.

When a deity is born, two processes take place: 1. an omnipresent, nameless, formless, eternal power chooses to reveal itself by pressing itself into a particular form and by staging an event around the form to attract the attention of human beings; and 2. humans are made aware of the appearance of the deity and they recognize that the event is a sign of divine power. When the man or woman sees a stone bleed, he or she does not know which god or goddess has manifested; what is known is that a cāmi has appeared. In Tamil the word cāmi (from Skt. svāmin) means 'master, lord' and is used to address people, but more commonly the word denotes divine power and not being gender specific, it means god and goddess. When a person asks: 'Did you see the cāmi?' He or she wants to know if you had darśana ('sight', Ta. taricanam) of the deity – be this deity Śiva, Karuppar, Mīnākṣī or Vēṭiyappan. In fact, Tamil people are more apt to ask you if you saw the cāmi than to ask if you saw Śiva or Māriyamman. It is as if using the impersonal cāmi were more respectful and also safer. Pronouncing a deity's name is like calling the deity and – especially if it is a ferocious deity – one does not necessarily wish him or her close. Cāmi, then, is the manifested divine power before it has received a name; it is deity-power on earth.

Other common words for divine power without a name are Ta. kaṭavuḷ and cakti (Skt. śakti). Kaṭavuḷ is often defined as 'that which, having gone beyond or crossed over (kaṭa), is inside (uḷ)', basically referring to

what in the Upaniṣads is called the Ātman;[1] however, even if kaṭavuḷ is only divine power without a specific name, it is thought of as masculine. Another feature or quality that distinguishes it from cāmi is its loftiness. Though the two terms are interchangeable, a cāmi is closer to humans, is on earth, is tangible; kaṭavuḷ is in heaven, intangible. Śakti has a variety of meanings: 1. it denotes the all-encompassing, primordial, female power; 2. it is the female part of the male deities or their consorts (e. g., the Śakti of Śiva is Pārvatī or Kālī); 3. it is power per se, i. e., power of a deity, a person, or an object, e. g., (Ta.) aṇucakti is atomic energy.

This nameless, formless divine power is believed to be everywhere; it is the stuff from which the universe is made; it is both the unchangeable, eternal, unmanifest and its opposite, the ever-changing forms of creation and destruction. Manifested divine power has thousands of names and forms, they are the legendary thirty-three crores of Hindu deities. These countless gods and goddesses all stand in some sort of relationship to each other; the least known deity in a tiny village will find a way to connect to the great pan-Hindu Śiva. How the deities network with each other will be the topic of this chapter.

2. The five levels of deities

Not all deities are on the same level. There is a hierarchy, not defined by a deity's power, but by his or her mythical dwelling place and, partly in correlation with the dwelling place, by his or her range of spread and fame. We can easily distinguish five different levels, each one showing a particular type of deity manifestation. These levels are:

1. Primordial power without form; all-encompassing
   – kaṭavuḷ, cakti (śakti)
   – ādi-deity (Ādiśiva, Ādiśakti)
2. Pan-Hindu deity – in heaven
   (god, goddess, with well defined forms, names, myths; e. g., Śiva, Pārvatī, Viṣṇu)
3. Regional deity – on earth
   (god, goddess, with well defined forms, names, myths; e. g., Aiyaṉār, Māriyammaṉ)
4. Local deity – on earth
   (god, goddess, ill-defined forms, name changeable; e. g., Muttupaṭṭaṉ, Vēṭiyappaṉ)
5. Localized power, without form
   (not gender specific; cāmi)

[1] For another meaning see Hart 1975: 27.

These levels are fluid. Any deity appearing on earth as cāmi is connected to the primordial power and is, at the same time, connected to some or to all the other levels of deity. In other words, the levels show steps or processes of integration in the greater pantheon, but they are also *simultaneous* levels of being or manifestations of divine power. There are two movements of divine power: one is descent, the other ascent; the primordial, genderless power splits into a male and a female part and once there are two, a marriage occurs. The pan-Hindu couple lives in heaven, but then one half, usually the goddess, is sent to earth, becomes a regional deity. The ascending movement starts with the manifestation of divine power on earth (cāmi), which is then named and becomes a local or regional deity that is further linked to a pan-Hindu deity. How the ascent and the descent happen, what kind of myths are offered as explanation, we shall now look at.

3. Descent

The primordial power is name- and formless, is beyond duality, cannot be described, is neither this nor this (Skt. neti neti), is the eternal, unchangeable, the microcosmic Ātman and macrocosmic Brahman as described in the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā. As a first step in concretizing this power, it receives gender, becomes a male or female first being with androgynous qualities, which, when further defined, is given shape as Ardhanārīśvara. Depending on the philosophy, the steps from a one to a two can be simple (some systems, e. g., Sāṁkhya start out with a duality) or subtle and complex (e. g., in the Kashmiri Śaivism). The first major step in the descent is a split into two (see e. g., Bṛhadāraṇyaka Up.) for the sake of creation, which poses the problem of incest. In Sanskrit sources the first being usually is male (Prajāpati, Dakṣa, Brahmā)[2], in South Indian folk religion it is female. She is the Ādiśakti who comes into being before all else, 'three days before earth, heaven, and the netherworld came into being, three days before Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva'.[3] She is called Ammavaru, existing even before the time of the four yugas,[4] Ellamma, the Ādiśakti without father or mother or husband, born out of the earth by means of a mantra from a sage – the only being there before her,[5] Peddamma, emerging out of the great world-light,[6] or simply

[2] On creation see O'Flaherty 1980: 28 ff.
[3] Ramanujan 1993: 107.
[4] Whitehead 1976: 127.
[5] Oppert 1893: 465.
[6] Oppert 1893: 472.

Śakti[7]; she is Aṅkāḷamman or Umā Parameśvarī, the embryo in the universe egg of which the top shell becomes the upper part of the universe, the bottom shell the lower part of the universe, the egg white the oceans.[8] She is there alone and, as is usual in creation myths, the first movement towards creation is desire. The goddess wishes a husband, but her attempts at creation are roundabout: Aṅkāḷamman first creates androgynous women; just as Brahmā first manages to produce only male things until Śiva appears in his Ardhanārīśvara form and lets his female part explain to Brahmā the polarity principle of creation.[9] Ellamma, Peddamma and Ammavaru each lay three eggs, one of which contains the Trimūrti. Once Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu are created, the goddess approaches them as partner. At first they refuse on the grounds that she is their mother, but eventually she manages to convince one of them (either Śiva or Viṣṇu) to marry her.

Marriage means that the one divine power is split into two unbalanced parts: the goddess has to relinquish some of her power to her husband; actually she is tricked out of her power: Aṅkāḷamman hands over her five attributes to Śiva, one of them the eye on her forehead, which the god uses to burn her; or, the goddess burns herself when Śiva tricks her in a dance contest to place her hand (that contains her power) on her head;[10] or, she simply loses her strength by handing Śiva her third eye (Peddamma, Ellamma). In one version Viṣṇu cuts her into three pieces with his cakra and Brahmā takes the trunk, Viṣṇu the head, Śiva the legs, and these pieces become the respective goddesses.[11] The result of the burning and maiming activities between the gods and the goddess is that in the end there are the three gods with their proper wives (created from the ashes or made from the parts of the first goddess). These couples (Śiva and Pārvatī, Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, Brahmā and Sarasvatī) reside in heaven, each in a heavenly world (loka). This is the ideal state, family life in 'paradise', as the popular posters show: Śiva seated peacefully on mount Kailsāsa together with Pārvatī and their sons Gaṇeśa and Skanda (Murukan); or Viṣṇu reposing on the serpent Ananta while Lakṣmī massages his legs. But, like the ancient Greek gods, Hindu gods are not the kind of ideal partners one would wish from a human (feminist) point of view: they are domineering, they have mistresses, enter contests with their wives that they tend to win. The smallest incident can anger the god and he sends his wife to earth, a place of pollution and suffering, and all

[7] Elmore 1925: 94.
[8] Meyer 1986: 6.
[9] Dessigane et al. 1964: 82 f.
[10] Ramanujan 1993: 114.
[11] Elmore 1925: 95.

the goddess can do while she plays regional or local goddess is meditate, pray and hope for the day when she is again united with her husband.

Once Śiva, the god of Maturai, explained the Vedas to Mīnākṣī. She did not show enough interest and therefore the god cursed her to be born on earth to fishermen, but he also promised to marry her at the appropriate time. Therefore it happened that the king of some fishermen who had no daughter one day noticed a small girl under a tree near the shore. He brought her home and raised her, naming her Mīnākṣi. When Mīnākṣi reached the marriageable age, Śiva appeared as king of the Maturai fishermen intent on marrying Mīṉākṣi. He proved his abilities by catching the large fish that had caused much trouble to the king and his subjects. This fish was none other than Nandin (cursed by Śiva to be a fish). The king, pleased with Śiva, gave him his daughter Mīnākṣi in marriage. Śiva then ascended with her into the sky.[12] In another episode the goddess is sent to earth because she had closed Śiva's eyes in jest and thereby plunged the earth into darkness causing suffering to humans.[13] A popular folk myth tells how Nārada implants doubts in the goddess' mind about her husband's daily activity, which is to feed all living beings. She tests Śiva by placing an ant into a box to see if he feeds this tiny hidden insect as well. For this mistrust she is sent to earth.[14] Whatever the pretext: sin, mistrust, disobedience, the goddess has to go to earth in order to interact with humans. The descent to earth means a lowering of her status. This is clearly shown e. g., in the myth of Reṇukā who, having failed in her marital fidelity for just a few seconds, becomes the pox goddess Māriyamman̲, a being split into a pure upper part (head) and an impure lower part (trunk).[15] The goddess' stay on earth is often linked to the kali yuga, the age in which the distance between humans and the divine is greatest and in which humans need the help of deities most.[16]

The goddess' sin (pāvam) is not the only reason for her descent to earth. Sometimes she comes to fight a demon, as e. g., the goddess Aṅkāḷamman̲ who helps her father (Parvatarājan̲) destroy the rākṣasas. This myth has the double function of changing the goddess from Pārvatī to a regional goddess and of making the inland fishermen the descendants of her father, Parvatarājan̲-Himavat.[17] Not only goddesses have to undergo a birth on earth, gods do as well, but with a subtle difference, it seems: while it is clearly Pārvatī, Śiva's wife, who is sent to earth, it is, with some exceptions, not Śiva himself who is made to take residence on

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[12] Tiruviḷaiyāṭal 57, Dessigane et al. 1960: 89 ff.
[13] Dessigane et al. 1964: 83 f.
[14] Told about Aṅkāḷamman̲, Meyer 1986: 9 ff. and Kāmākṣī in 'Kāttavarāyan̲ katai'.
[15] On Reṇukā see Meyer 1986: 15; Masilamani-Meyer 1996, 1996a.
[16] Meyer 1986: 11.
[17] Meyer 1986: 34 f., 98 ff.

earth, but already a lower form of him. For instance, Kāttavarāyaṉ, a divine son of Śiva, has to live on earth as son of a (low caste) fisherman, and the only way he can redeem himself and become divine again is by dying.[18] Similarly in one version of the Maturai Vīraṉ story the regional god (Maturai Vīraṉ) is a lower form of Vīrapattiraṉ (Vīrabhadra) who, in turn, is a son of Śiva (born of Śiva's sweat).[19]

So far we have looked at descent from pan-Hindu to regional deity, but the jump can also be from pan-Hindu to local deity:

The Urumar temple of Peruṅkaḷūr (Pudukkottai) is one of the temples to which women in the menstruating age have no access. Urumar is a tuṣṭa deity who receives goat sacrifices. Surrounding the shrine of Urumar are terra cotta horses, statues of Muṉis, Karuppar and other deities and a shrine for Civavākkiyar. The priest told the following story about Urumar:

> Civavākkiyar was a devotee of Śakti who is at the back of the temple. He did great pūjās to Śakti. While he was engaged in this worship, mean deities (tuṣṭa teyvaṅkaḷ) used to come and bother him. Mahāviṣṇu therefore changed into the form of a horrible deity and destroyed all the tuṣṭa deities who plagued Civavākkiyar. Then Mahāviṣṇu stayed here as Urumar.

Urumar's name is derived from 'uru' (form, appearance) and an etymologically incorrect (but semantically correct) 'māṟu' (change). A deity with the same name (Urumar) is guardian of a number of Aiyaṉār temples in the Pudukkottai district, and we can assume that the above etymology is confined to this one temple. Civavākkiyar is one of the famous Tamil siddhas (cittar) and poets. He lived sometime before the tenth century.[20] It is possible that the so-called 'Civavākkiyar' was a local siddha with the same name or a person later identified with the siddha-poet. The interesting part of the story is Mahāviṣṇu's change into a horrifying deity. Only a tuṣṭa teyvam can chase a tuṣṭa teyvam. Asked, whom he meant by tuṣṭa teyvam, the priest mentioned Kālī, Kāṭṭēṟi (fierce goddesses). Incidentally, Mahāviṣṇu is the name most commonly used for Viṣṇu in folk religion and it seems to imply a (somewhat) fiercer form of Viṣṇu than is usually attributed to Perumāḷ or Tirumāl, the Tamil Brahmanical Viṣṇu.

The process of descent often entails changes: from the inner to the outer part of the temple (from main to subsidiary deity), from sattvic to tamasic, from benign to ferocious. A good example for this process is the myth surrounding Paccaivāḻiyammaṉ. Her two most ferocious guardians, situated at the extreme periphery of her temple in Vāḻappantal, are

[18] See Masilamani-Meyer 2004.
[19] Vīraiyaṉ Ammāṉai: 13 ff.
[20] Zvelebil 1973: 80; 1974: 55.

Cemmuṉi and Vāmuṉi, two giants who receive alcohol and animal offerings. These two Muṉis are Śiva (Cemmuṉi) and Mahāviṣṇu (Vāmuṉi; in other temples called Vāḻvumuṉi). They came to earth to guard Paccaiyammaṉ during her meditation (tavam) and to destroy the rākṣasas (arakkar) who bothered her (from the 'tala varalāṟu' written on a board and exhibited at the temple entrance; on this goddess see also Shulman 1980b; Biardeau 1967, Meyer 1986: 22ff.).

Descent can also involve pan-Hindu deities not generally worshipped in pan-Hindu temples, e. g., Dakṣa, who, as we have seen in Chapter I.5., has been turned into the local god Taḷavāy Māṭaṉ.

While there is a need to bring the pan-Hindu deities down to earth or to a space where their interaction with humans can more easily be imagined, where the walls separating deities and men are so low as to be crossed over, the impulse to rise above the human, to enter an eternal, divine space, the need to ascend, is much greater. All local deities are linked to the pan-Hindu deities in one way or another, even if it is only through a symbol such as the ash stripes on the forehead or a weapon such as the trśūla (attribute of Śiva) or the conch shell (attribute of Viṣṇu).

4. Ascent

It seems of utmost importance to a local deity to be linked to a greater network that provides avenues eventually leading to a solid tie or even identification with a pan-Hindu deity. Why this concern? The answer is: prestige and authoritative power. The greater the territory a deity rules over, the greater his or her prestige; or, the higher a deity ascends, the greater his or her following. Status, fame and power are linked; in fact, it is very much like the scenes of politics and entertainment: the higher a person ascends, the greater his or her sphere of influence, the larger his or her following, and the more power at his or her disposal. Aiyaṉār, as king of the Tamil folk deities, commands the deities below him, but within the greater Hindu pantheon, he is no more than a regional deity, while Śiva's reign encompasses the whole of India. Authoritative power diminishes towards the base, but physical and spiritual power do not. A subordinate can be physically or mentally stronger than his superior, but without the authoritative power, without a platform from which to exhibit his power, the subordinate's sphere of influence remains limited. For the local deities fame or prestige is important because it means more devotees; it means survival. Unknown deities with a small following cannot hope to get a daily pūjā, and the priest of such a deity often struggles to maintain the worship (sometimes he even pays for the pūjā from his own pocket). While local deities try to enhance their power by linking to regional and

pan-Hindu deities, it is not the only way leading to fame and wealth. Hindu deities' power is measured by their actual power (spiritual power, i. e., effectiveness in granting devotees' wishes) and by their wealth, whereby wealth translates into the existence of a great number of devotees and this in turn supposes a deity's effectiveness. Veṅkateśvara of Tirupati is said to be the richest god on earth. The richer he gets, the more power is attributed to him, the more devotees flock to him, the richer he gets: an upward spiral. Aiyappaṉ of Sabarimalai is another god whose power and prestige has increased tremendously over the past decades. Apart from the belief in Aiyappaṉ's effectiveness, caste equality, the custom of bringing new devotees on each pilgrimage, and surely also the restriction of this cult to males and non-menstruating females (which gives the male devotees a chance to be without their families for a while) have helped to make this god one of the most popular ones in the South of India. Other strategies to empower a deity, apart from linking, are promotion through films (e. g., Kāttavarāyaṉ, Maturai Vīraṉ, Aiyappaṉ, Kāmākṣī, Mīnākṣī, Mēl Maruvattūr Ādi Parāśakti), meditation and seva (service) groups and publications (Mēl Maruvattūr Ādi Parāśakti).

Linking or networking is not always a straight ascent. It can follow a horizontal path, linking the deity with other deities on the same level first and through these get access to regional or pan-Hindu deities. With whom a local deity links depends on a number of factors: geography, caste, trends (which deity happens to be popular at a particular time). The local deity will link with the regional deity of his/her area; in other words, a local god in Tirunvelveli district is not likely to be identified with Vēṭiyappar, a god known basically only in the north east; i. e., the choice of regional deity will be determined by the type of deities known in the area. Caste plays a role in so far as it influences the popularization of a deity.[21] Trends can alter the spread of deities in an area; e. g., in the past few years many Aiyappaṉ temples have come into being. This has led inter alia to a stronger identification of Aiyaṉār with Aiyappaṉ.

Ancestor deities who died a violent death seem to take much longer at integration and deification than saint ancestors. We have looked at a number of ancestors in Chapter II.9: the paṭṭavar (simple dead) are present in the local temple in the form of a stone or relief; they are not deities. The deification process seems to start with the construction of a temple to the ancestor (Tīttappaṉ, Pāṭṭappaṉ) into which images and symbols of regional or pan-Hindu deities are integrated (cow, tiger, skin color of ancestor statue, Nandin). Saint ancestors, having been endowed with divine power already in their life times, easily transform into a god

[21] E. g., in Vaṉṉiyar territory Draupadī is popular; see Hiltebeitel 1988; 1991.

or goddess. We have already looked at Malaippiṭāriyamman, Paṇṭāra Appicci and Vāḷaittōṭṭattu Ayyan.[22] Here is how they are linked:

Malaippiṭāriyamman

pan-Hindu:	Pārvatī (through Nandin and triśūla facing her); Lakṣmī (one of the names by which the priest addressed her), navagraha (present in her temple)
regional:	Piṭāri (through her name), Karupparāyar (her guardian)

Paṇṭāra Appicci

pan-Hindu:	Pakavatiyamman (Bhagavatī) – the other main deity in the temple
regional:	Muni (guardians)

Vāḷaittōṭṭattu Ayyan

pan-Hindu:	liṅga, Nandin (present in the temple)
regional:	horse (various deities, mainly Aiyanār)

Regional deities have their local idiosyncracies. For example, although Māriyamman is known in the whole of Tamilnadu, the way her festival is celebrated changes from area to area. Iconographies are fluid as well, as we saw in Chapter I: Maturai Vīran, e. g., has a different look in the Viluppuram district from the generally known iconography. Muni or Munīśvara is a god with many forms.[23] In Kukai, a suburb of Cēlam city, there is a temple to Ātimunīsvarar. The god is a saṁnyāsin. He sits with his legs folded in a yogic position. His priest (whose family originally came from Karnataka) called him a siddha. He told the following story:

Two siddhas, a guru and his disciple (Skt. śiṣya), came here. They discovered that they were missing a particular herb (mūlikai) and therefore the guru decided to return to the mountain, leaving the disciple behind. After a while the disciple felt hungry and cooked some rice. He felt like eating some of the rice, but he could not find a spoon or ladle. There was a stick nearby. The disciple took the stick and as soon as he stirred the rice with it, it turned black (or golden, as sometimes a mūlikai can turn things into gold – comment made by the informant). The

[22] See Chapter II.9.
[23] See Chapter I.

disciple, seeing the black rice and thinking of his guru's return, got frightened: The guru would want to eat some rice and surely he would scold him. Therefore the disciple decided to eat all the black rice and to cook new rice for his guru. As he ate the black rice, he became younger. He turned so young that the guru, upon his return, did not recognize his disciple and refused to believe it was he. Finally the disciple told the guru the story of the black rice. The guru then demanded to be given some of the rice, and the disciple vomited some of it back out. This the guru ate and became young as well. The disciple stayed here as Ātimuṉīsvarar, while the guru went to another temple.

This very same story is told in connection with the Siddheśvara temple of Kañcamalai, Salem,[24] a temple the priest was familiar with. The priest, to cement the god's ties to the Siddha tradition, claimed that Ātimuṉīsvarar was a disciple of Tirumūlar, the famous Siddha poet-philosopher (ca. 7th century). As if this illustrious association were not enough, the priest further connected Muṉi with Śiva-Dakṣiṇāmūrti, saying that Muṉi faced south like Dakṣiṇāmūrti and had the same powers as Śiva. Because of the god's power and to offer him due respect, devotees are expected to sit in front of the god (rather than stand). Muṉi is a guardian and (according to the priest) his anklets and his stick can be heard when he goes on his rounds. He likes cigars and gañjā. If a devotee offers the god a cigar and sees the next day that the cigar has been smoked by the god (there will be ashes at its tip), he can be sure that his wishes will be fulfilled. (This is a belief and, as with so many 'miracles', the question of veracity does not arise for the devotee or the priest.) Up to fifteen or twenty years ago, Muṉi received the sacrifices of goats and chickens. Today he is a vegetarian. The temple of Ādimuṉīsvarar is not very old. It was built in 1907, and there have been only two generations of priests. Muṉi's iconography is unusual: he wears a necklace of rudrākṣa beads and has a yogic arm-rest, attributes we expect of Caṉṉāci rather than of the ferocious Muṉi who, especially in this area, usually is a giant figure bearing weapons. The god's image might have led to his identification with the siddha and also with Śiva-Dakṣiṇāmūrti. While a number of gods, among them Muṉi, are believed to be forms of Śiva, an identification with Śiva-Dakṣiṇāmūrti is rare. Ādimuṉīsvarar's connection with both the siddha tradition (and Tirumūlar) and Śiva-Dakṣiṇāmūrti lifts him above the purely local sphere and endows him with a refined siddhic power, one held by gods in the center rather than gods at the periphery. In other words, Ādimuṉīsvarar's power has shifted from the ferocious, physical aspect to that of the ascetic and king.

The above example shows how priests appropriate myths from other deities and, if necessary, alter them to suit their own god or goddess, how the iconography of a deity influences the choice of myths, and how

[24] In the Census of India 1961.

linking is not only a way to latch onto the pan-Hindu tradition but also allows the priest to manipulate the deity into a certain direction (in this case away from the ferocious aspect). The veiled implication of the myth cited above is that Tirumūlar (the guru) had visited the temple (a historical impossibility).

A very common way of linking is having a famous regional or pan-Hindu deity worship at a local temple; it is a strategy employed in the pan-Hindu tradition as well; e. g., the Śiva temple at Ramēśvaram has its mythical origin in Rāma's act of worship at this place before crossing over to Śrīlaṅka and the establishment of a śivaliṅga upon his return in order to atone for his killing of a Brahman (Rāvaṇa).[25] There must be countless myths that tell of Rāma's journey and his stops at one or the other local temple. Thus, for example, when Rāma, on his way to Śrīlaṅka, came to the river (Uppāṟu) at Āṉaimalai (Coimbatore), he saw a powerful light shining from the cremation ground. While he meditated on the nearby ground, the goddess appeared to him in a wonderful and shining form. Rāma took some earth from the cremation ground and formed a prone figure of the goddess he had seen at the place where he had meditated and then worshipped her. The goddess blessed him, and he continued on his journey.[26] This figure is the famous Mācāṇiyammaṉ, whose cult originally had nothing to do with Rāma.[27]

In the past twenty years the fame of Sabarimalai Aiyappaṉ has grown beyond the bounds of Tamilnadu and Kerala. Each year more men undertake the pilgrimage to Sabarimalai (in Kerala). Aiyappaṉ and Aiyaṉār have the same ancestry, both are Hariharaputra, and because of this they can be and are identified with each other. The two gods become amalgamated into Aiyaṉārappaṉ in the Salem district, and it is not uncommon to find Aiyappaṉ in the sanctum of an Aiyaṉār temple (e. g., Kōccaṭai, Madurai). Yet, the priests generally distinguish between the two gods. Aiyappaṉ is a bachelor, Aiyaṉār a god with consorts. Some priests believe Aiyappaṉ to be the young Aiyaṉār (i. e., before his marriage). In his iconography Aiyappaṉ shows clear divergences from Aiyaṉār: both his legs are pulled up towards his body and both legs are secured by the yoga-band. His arms are stretched out in front of him and his hands do not carry any weapons; his right hand shows the abhaya mudrā. Often his forehead is marked with the vaiṣṇava nāmam. An alternative image shows Aiyappaṉ riding on a tiger. Clothey 1982: 44 summarizes Aiyappaṉ's story at Sabarimalai as follows:

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[25] See Das 1991: 70 ff.

[26] Mācāṇiyammaṉ tiruttala varalāṟu 1996: 5 f.

[27] See Meyer 1986.

... the deity was found as an infant on the banks of the Pambhā river in the forest country of Kerala and was brought up as a prince named Maṇikaṇṭhan (i. e. he who wears a bell on the neck) in the court of the royal family of Pantalam. Victimized by a plot instigated by the jealous queen, Maṇikaṇṭhan agreed to seek leopard's milk to cure the queen's feigned stomach distress. In the forest, the young prince subdued demonic forces, found the milk and returned to the palace riding a tiger and leading an entourage of leopards. Having thus revealed his divinity, Maṇikaṇṭhan is said to have repaired to Sabarimala, where a temple to him was built by Viśvakarma, the divine architect.

About five miles southeast of Maturai is Paṉaiyūr and near this village is the 'Caparimalai Ayyaṉār' (Sabarimalai Aiyaṉār) temple. The story of this Aiyaṉār is written on the 1985 'kumpāpiṣēkam' invitation. I summarize:

The Pāṇṭiya king of Maturai was without a child. He therefore prayed to Mahāviṣṇu. One day the king and his retinue went hunting. They rested some five miles southeast of Maturai. The king, being thirsty, asked his minister to fetch some water. When the minister came to the pond (kuḷam) he heard a child crying. It was a boy created through the union of Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu. The two gods had placed the child there and were watching it from the sky (ākāyam). The minister reported his discovery to the king and the latter brought the child to his palace, gave him the name Maṇikaṇṭaṉ, and raised him. While Maṇikaṇṭaṉ was in the palace, the queen bore a son. At age sixteen Maṇikaṇṭaṉ had learned everything there was to learn and he received initiation from Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu. At that time king Tippu Sultan (Tippucultāṉ) sent a messenger to the king of Maturai demanding tribute and threatened war if the tribute was not paid. Maṇikaṇṭaṉ came to know that the king of Maturai was not able to pay the tribute. He worshipped Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu, received their blessing and routed Tippu Sultan's army. At the pond near Paṉaiyūr Maṇikaṇṭaṉ got down from his horse, drank some water and gave some water to his horse. At that instant Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu appeared to him, granted him release (mukti), gave him the spear (vēl) as weapon and told him that whenever he thought of them they would appear before him ("nī enta camayattil niṉaittālum nāṅkaḷ uṉakku kāṭci koṭuppōm"). Meanwhile the minister had spun some intrigues at the palace and when Maṇikaṇṭaṉ returned, the queen told him that she had a headache and that the physician had told her that only tiger milk (pulippāl) could cure it. "Therefore, bring me some tiger milk," said the queen to Maṇikaṇṭaṉ. He went to the forest southeast of Maturai. There he meditated (tiyāṉam ceytāṉ) on Śiva and Mahāviṣṇu. They appeared to him, gave him superior knowledge or siddhis (cittu), changed Brahmā (Piramma tēvatai) into a tiger on which Maṇikaṇṭaṉ rode into the palace. The king and queen, being afraid, bowed before Maṇikaṇṭaṉ and asked him to return the tiger to the forest. Maṇikaṇṭaṉ returned to the forest, and as he worshipped the gods, the three gods (mummūrttikaḷ) appeared to him and asked him to spend twelve years at Caparimalai (Sabarimalai) in the form of an ascetic (tava nilai), to stop the troubles which the asuras (acurarkaḷ) caused the saints (muṉivarkaḷ) and then to return to the palace. After Maṇikaṇṭaṉ had begged the king to designate his brother as successor, he went to Caparimalai, stopped the

asuras' harassments and spent twelve years as an ascetic. Then he returned to Maturai, visited his father, mother and brother, made sure that their rule was just and then settled down as an ascetic (tava nilai) five miles southeast of Maturai. At this place is situated the temple of "Caparimalai Ayyaṉār".

This example nicely illustrates how a local cult integrates a popular myth from another cult in another area. The mythmaker, be it the priest or the storyteller, simply transferred the myth to Paṉaiyūr, brought the king from Kerala to Maturai and established the link to Sabarimalai by sending Maṇikaṇṭaṉ to do his tapas (tavam) there. By means of this fusion Aiyaṉār can be the local village guardian and, at the same time, the famous Aiyappaṉ of Sabarimalai. The myth imbues the whole locality with sacred places: near the pond of Cilaimāṉ a liṅga marks the place where the baby Maṇikaṇṭaṉ was found; the place to which Maṇikaṇṭaṉ brought the tiger's milk is near the Cittar temple of Puliyūr, and in Paṉaiyūr is where Maṇikaṇṭaṉ received mukti. The Caparimalai Ayyaṉār temple mirrors the confluence of the local Aiyaṉār tradition and the larger cult with its arms reaching into the pan-Hindu world. A large horse in the temple compound with Aiyaṉār as rider, the guardians Akkiṉi Vīrapattiraṉ, Iruḷappaṉ, Muttukkaruppaṉ and Periya Karuppaṉ, Pēcci, Rākkāyi and Iruḷāyi, on the one hand, form the typical local frame of Aiyaṉār. The deities Tirumāl (Viṣṇu), Cokkar (a śiva-liṅga), Turkkai (Durgā), Mīṉāṭciyammaṉ (Mīnākṣī) and Parmā ṛiṣi (Brahmā?), on the other hand, constitute the pan-Hindu dimension. All deities in the Caparimalai Ayyaṉār temple receive vegetarian offerings; however, the temple has a non-vegetarian guardian. He is Cōṇai, who has his own shrine to the side of the temple, his own guardians (Muṉiyāṇṭi and Munnōṭi teyvam) and receives the offerings of goats, chickens and arrack. It is believed that thieves who have been successful in their robberies leave large garlands at the door of Cōṇai's shrine.

Above we have mentioned Rāma and his connection to the folk deities. Heroes and heroines from the epics (Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata) are favorite connectors between local/regional and pan-Hindu deities. One can think of a variety of reasons why: 1. Rāma (Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa) and the five Pāṇṭavas travel around the country and the mythmaker can alter their itinerary at his wish, letting them visit any village that suits him; 2. the heroic nature of the epic persons lends itself for an identification with local heroes and heroines; 3. some of the characters, who are not actually deities but super-human heroes or heroines, can qualify as subordinate deities to a regional god or goddess, the way Bhīma and Bakāsura become the fierce guardians of Vaṉapatrakāḷiyammaṉ of Tēkkampaṭṭi (Coimbatore):

The Vaṉapatrakāḷiyammaṉ temple (as spelled in the temple pamphlet) lies amidst green hills near the Bhavani (Pavāṉi) river. The temple of the

goddess is a simple concrete structure. Striking are the two large figures that face the goddess from a broad square in front of the temple. They are Pīman̲ (Bhīma) and Pakācūran̲ (Bakāsura). Both carry clubs in their right hands, have fangs and large moustaches. Like the large Mun̲is of the area, they sit with one leg folded. In the pamphlet issued by the Van̲a-patrakāḷiyamman̲ temple authorities we read the following story (I summarize):

In previous times, in the west of the temple, in the hills of the "blue mountains", there was the fort of the rākṣasa (arakkan̲) Pakācūran̲. In strength he was equal to Bhīma and Duryodhana. He had received the boon that nothing and nobody could defeat him. He was terribly hungry and the people from the nearby village had to bring him daily a cart full of food. Being afraid of him, the villagers did what he demanded. Sometimes, when the food did not satisfy Pakācūran̲'s hunger, he also ate the cart driver and the bullocks. At that particular time the five Pāṇṭavas (pañcapāṇṭavarkaḷ) came to live in the area. Having heard about Pakācūran̲'s deeds, Bhīma decided to bring the rākṣasa his food. A short distance from the rākṣasa's home, Bhīma dismounted from the cart and ate all the food himself. Pakācūran̲, who saw this, got very angry and shouted: "Who are you, boy?" He approached to kill his adversary. He did not know it was Bhīma. Bhīma worshipped Kāḷi and got ready for the fight. The fight looked like two mountains knocking against each other. Finally Bhīma, who had received the goddess' grace, was able to defeat the cruel rākṣasa. Pakācūran̲, at the point of death and his arrogance deflated, saw the truth. He cried and lamented and prayed to the goddess to make him her "guardian demon" (tēviyin̲ kāval pūtam). She granted his wish, blessed Bhīma and disappeared. Because of the goddess' boon, Pakācūran̲ became her guardian. Still today there is a place atop one of the hills called Pakācūran̲'s fort.[28]

This myth, without the local colorings, is from the Mahābhārata. In the epic the demon dies; there is no Bhadrakālī to rescue him. The myth here seems to fulfill two functions: it fuses the local goddess with the greater tradition (thereby enhancing the sanctity of the place), and it demonstrates the great power and compassion of the goddess. Another, longer myth, also printed in the temple pamphlet, is a shortened and somewhat altered version of the 'Āravalli Cūravalli katai', a story available in the chapbook edition (B. Irattin̲a Nāyakar and sons, Madras). The story of Āravalli and Cūravalli belongs to the local cycle of Mahabhārata myths in the Draupadī cult and is known and told in the Coimbatore district as well.[29] The story narrates the fight between the seven sisters (among them Āravalli and Cūravalli) and Allimuttu, son of the Pāṇṭavas' sister Caṅkuvati. Allimuttu worships the local Patrakāḷiyamman̲ and with her sacred ashes and powerful sword (caktivāḷ) is able to destroy the sisters'

[28] *Aruḷmiku Van̲apatrakāḷiyamman̲ Kōyil, Kōyil Varalārṟuk Kurippukaḷ* (Ka. Capāpati).

[29] Hiltebeitel 1991: 417 ff.; Hiltebeitel 1991: 418ff. gives a summary of the chapbook version.

magic. The sisters convince Allimuttu to marry Āravalli's daughter, Palvaricai, and hope to kill him through her. Their plan does not work and in the end the sisters are killed, save one, who becomes the goddess Bhagavatī in Kerala. The author of the temple pamphlet says that people of the area believe Āravalli's town, Nellūr, to have been west of the temple near the river. Names like 'Nellitturai', 'Nellimalai', 'Nellūrkāṭu', 'Pāñcālikāṭu' are believed to be proofs that the story happened in this area. West of the river there is a place called 'Āravalli's fort'. The author then cites some further evidence connecting the place with the story; however, he admits that there is nothing tangible to prove the existence of the seven sisters. In any case, it seems clear that the local Draupadī cult supplied Vaṉapatrakāḷiyamman with the two myths. The temple and its myths are famous enough to have warranted a full page write-up in the local newspaper.[30]

The regional deities all have their local forms and, as already mentioned, these show differences. Bhadrakālī (Tamil Pattirakāḷi) is a goddess worshipped as a main deity especially by Nāṭārs who have her as their clan deity. More frequently though we see her as a sub-deity in Aiyaṉār temples, where she is both a free-standing goddess in the entourage of Aiyaṉār and a figure between the upraised front legs of one of the large horses near the entrance (in most cases it is the horse on which Karuppar sits). Usually these figures between the horses' front legs hardly receive any attention (the figure below the other horse, the one Aiyaṉār usually sits on, is Vīrapattiraṉ); they are rarely even included in the pūjā rites, but in one temple Pattirakāḷi was able to become very popular, so popular as to usurp the power of Aiyaṉār. When every Tuesday and Friday large numbers of devotees (mostly women) flock to Maṭappuram, it is to see Pattirakāḷi. She stands, a huge green form, her face made ferocious with fangs, in front of the platform on which the white horse hovering above her rests its upraised front legs. Her head is surrounded by a crown of red flames. A group of priests is busy receiving the large lime garlands from the devotees, fixing them with big sticks up on the otherwise unreachable head and shoulder parts of the goddess. Cocks, waiting to be sacrificed outside the temple later or auctioned off, fight with each other in the crowded area in front of her. The full attention is on the goddess, it is she who made the temple famous: everyone in Maturai knows of Maṭappuram Kāḷi and devotees would be surprised to hear that the temple they are so avidly patronizing is dedicated to Aṭaikkalam kātta Aiyaṉār. Under the title 'Aṉṉaiyiṉ avatāram' ('the avatāra of the 'mother'') the following story is related in the temple pamphlet of 1987 (I summarize):

[30] Tiṉamalar, Īrōṭu, 8.9.1988.

2,300 years ago the three gods (mummūrttikaḷ) and mother Kauri (Kauri tāyār, Skt. Gaurī) came hunting in Tiruppūvaṉam. Then this area was covered by a large forest. Śiva (Civaṉār) looked at Pārvatī (Pārvati) and said: "It is much too far a distance for you to go in the forest. Stay here." Pārvatī asked: "How can I stay here alone?" Śiva then fashioned a son called Appaṉār and gave him to Pārvatī as companion. Pārvatī then said: "As I am staying here, you have to give this place some eminent qualities." Śiva answered that those who bathed in the Vaikai river, which was some three miles away, would receive the same merit as those having bathed in Varanasi (kāciyil kuḷitta puṇṇiyam kiṭaikkum). Thereafter Pārvatī came to stay in this place in the form of Kāḷi (kāḷivaṭivil).

Pattirakāḷiyammaṉ is identified with Pārvatī. To the writer of this 'purāṇic account' ('purāṇa varalāṟu', as the subtitle specifies), Pattirakāḷi and Kāḷi are the same, even though these goddesses are generally distinguished from each other in Tamilnadu, both in iconography and cult. Apart from Pattirakāḷi there is no Kāḷi in the temple and, as if to remove all doubts as to who is meant by Kāḷi, another story is added in which the white horse above 'Kāḷi' is said to be a bhakta (paktaṉ) whom the goddess, through her grace, had changed into a horse so that he would be able to offer shade to her in this form. In yet a third story the place, Maṭappuram, is joined with Maturai: the floods of a pralaya had erased the boundaries of Maturai and Ādiśeṣa retraced the boundaries with his body. The place where the snake's head (paṭam, 'hood') and tail joined was called 'Paṭappuram' ('village of the snake-hood') which in time was changed to 'Maṭappuram'. The myth of Ādiśeṣa marking the boundaries of Maturai is from the Tiruviḷaiyāṭaṟ purāṇam.[31]

Linking does not always need such elaborate myths as the ones we have cited. The easiest way of identifying a local or regional deity with a pan-Hindu god or goddess is by saying that one is an avatāram or amcam of the other.

5. Avatāra

Avatāra is a term used in connection with the 'descent' of Viṣṇu to earth in order to subdue a demon or rid the earth of other problems. The daśavatāras, the ten avatāras, are an integral part of vaiṣṇava mythology. Early meanings of avatāra had connotations of 'being born', 'taking on form', 'manifesting', and in the Mahābhārata the term 'amśāvataraṇa' meant that gods, among them Nārāyaṇa, descended from heaven to earth with parts (amśa) of themselves; in other words, only parts of the deities took on form on earth.[32] While in the pan-Hindu tradition avatāra clearly

[31] Viḷaiyāṭal 49; see Shulman 1980a: 123 ff.
[32] Hacker 1978: 404 ff.

designates a descent, a coming from heaven to earth, and is commonly used for Viṣṇu, this is not so in folk religion. Tamil informants used (Tamil) avatāram indiscriminately for all gods and goddesses; and rather than strictly describing a descent, the term more often seems to imply an upward-moving relationship. Thus, if Māriyamman is called an avatāram of Pārvatī, Aṅkāḷamman an avatāram of Pārvatī or Kālī, Muniyāṇṭi an avatāram of Civan (Śiva), it does not mean that the informant has in mind a particular myth of a pan-Hindu deity's descent to earth; rather, it illustrates an effort to raise the local deity up to a higher level. The term amśa (Tamil amcam) is similarly used and is often interchangeable with avatāra: Muni is an amcam of Śiva; Karuppar an amcam of Viṣṇu. For some informants amcam seemed to connote more distance from the pan-Hindu deity, while the avatāram form was a step closer. For instance, any god with the śaiva ash stripes on his forehead could be an amcam of Śiva, while gods who were mythic sons of Śiva (preferably ones also known in the pan-Hindu tradition, e. g., Vīrabhadra) tended to qualify as avatāram. In any case, informants did not really insist on such distinctions, for them it was important to connect the local or regional deity to a pan-Hindu god or goddess. Avatāram and amcam both are basically just used to link 'lower' deities to 'higher' deities.

6. Family ties

In the South Indian tradition Śiva's wife is Viṣṇu's sister, and where the local goddess is identified with Pārvatī, she too becomes Viṣṇu's sister, to be more exact, the god's younger sister. This relationship is cleverly used in myths to develop a story and to reflect back on the South Indian kinship system. If Perumāḷ sanctifies the wedding of Śiva Sundareśvara with the goddess Mīnākṣī (by pouring water over their hands), it is because, as her brother, he is the most important and appropriate person for such a ceremony when parents and maternal uncles are not available. In folk myths the goddess often relies on her brother's (Perumāḷ's) help,[33] and sometimes she schemes to have his daughter marry her son, because that is the ideal cross-cousin alliance in South Indian kinship terms (e. g., in the story of Kāttavarāyan Kāmākṣī tries to get her son, Kāttavarāyan, interested in Perumāḷ's daughter). The goddess' relationship with her brother is of such importance that she calls upon him even before he is born (e. g., Aṅkāḷamman calls Kṛṣṇa before she brings Viṣṇu into being).

The goddess' status is ambivalent. On the pan-Hindu level she is married, but on the regional and local levels she is unmarried. Her

[33] See e. g., in the Aṅkāḷamman myths, Meyer 1986: 6 ff.

regional or local form is only temporary, an atonement for some offense, as we have seen, and while she is on earth, the goddess does all in her power to regain her status as wife of Śiva, to be re-instituted at his left side, to become part of his Ardhanārīśvara form again. Facing north to Śiva's abode, she meditates or engages in austerities (tapas, Ta. tavam). The release from her earthly existence can be tied up with the fate of her son, as in the story of Kāttavarāyaṉ, or it can occur when the goddess reaches a particular place, which in many myths is Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, the place of her re-absorption into Ardhanārīśvara. Paccaiyammaṉ or Paccaivāḷiyammaṉ, journeys for that purpose from Kāñcipuram to Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. As we have seen, she rests on the way in Maṉukappaṭṭi or Vāḷappantal under a 'banana tree shelter' (vāḷaippantal) and does pūjā to a śivaliṅga. To protect the goddess from the rākṣasas who live in the surrounding forests, Śiva and Viṣṇu (Civaperumāṉum Makāviṣṇum) take the avatāra forms (avatārittu) of Vāmuṉi and Cemmuṉi (Śrī Paccaiyammaṉ ālaya stala varalāṟu). Vāḷappantal is not far from Tiruvaṇṇāmalai and the idea of the goddess' journey to Tiruvaṇṇāmalai for the purpose of her reunion with Śiva might have been influenced by the myths surrounding the famous Śiva temple there.[34] Aṅkāḷammaṉ gains the left side of Śiva near Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, namely in the cremation ground of Mēl Malaiyaṉūr.[35]

While the goddess can ascend through (re-)marriage with Śiva, or at least claim to be his left side, local gods have to find other options. Often being sons of Śiva, they do not marry the goddess, at least not in her pan-Hindu form and not openly.[36] A favorite pattern for local gods to regain their place in heaven is through sacrificial death (e. g., Kāttavarāyaṉ, Maturai Vīraṉ).

The goddess' married yet virgin form is necessary from the point of view of folk religion: married, she is the high, pure, benign goddess in heaven, unmarried she is the fierce and powerful goddess, gaining her strength (just like the gods) from her ascetic life-style.[37] This ambivalence of being married on the one hand but retaining virgin power on the other is well expressed in the goddess' cult; e. g., Māriyammaṉ who is married to a tree-trunk husband, becomes a widow and later a young virgin again;[38] or Aṅkāḷammaṉ who is a virgin (kaṉṉi) yet regarded as Śiva's wife and mother of a number of children. Rituals that suggest marriage to a god are celebrated for many virgin goddesses. The double aspect of the

[34] See Shulman 1980a: 179 f.

[35] Meyer 1986: 22, 25.

[36] See the myths of Māriyammaṉ and Aṅkāḷammaṉ where these goddesses' sons are identified with their husband, Śiva.

[37] See e. g., the goddess Kaṉṉiyākumari in Shulman 1980a: 146 f., Das 1991: 1 ff.

[38] For a good description of her festival see Beck 1981.

goddess reflects to some extent the god's two wives: one wife who is legitimate (of the same standing), friendly, golden, the other who is dark, often from a tribe (of lower standing), and who is the lover; the juxtaposition being: first wife, light-colored, mother-figure, friendly/second wife, dark-colored, lover-figure, dangerous. Certainly there are many facets to this theme and they cannot be treated here.[39]

Many regional/local deities are said to be sons of a god or goddess; the absence of any daughters is significant and seems to reflect the low value generally attached to daughters in Indian society. Apart from Gaṇeśa and Skanda/Murukaṉ (the most famous sons of Śiva and Pārvatī), any local or regional god can qualify as son of Śiva, or of Pārvatī or of any folk goddess; but while we find Gaṇeśa and Murukaṉ frequently as sons of regional goddesses, of avatāra forms of Pārvatī like Aṅkāḷammaṉ or Māriyammaṉ, they rarely are the sons of regional gods such as e. g., Vīrabhadra or Kāttavarāyaṉ. In other words, in folk religion the goddess is given many sons to underline her motherly aspect, but if sons are attributed to a god, they have the purpose of linking rather than expressing fatherly qualities. Aṅkāḷammaṉ's sons are Murukaṉ, Vināyakar (Gaṇeṣa), Pāvāṭairāyaṉ, Vīrabhadra, Iruḷappaṉ[40] and sometimes the 108 stones or liṅgas that surround her cremation ground form; their function is mainly to imbue the single goddess with the proper respect (i. e., to show that although she is alone, she is married) and to guard and help her (for instance when the goddess travels alone, her sons or other guardians surround her to prevent any erotic or violent attacks on her). As guardians, any male gods tend to become the goddess' children and, in a logic that seems typical of Hinduism, these children can be equated with her husband. We remember the Ādiśakti who wishes to unite with the three gods she has created and their refusal on the grounds that she is their mother; or we think of the replacement of the tree trunk husband of Māriyammaṉ who, in form of a stone, becomes her guardian/child;[41] we note the fact that e. g., some of her children/ guardians are avatāram or amcam forms of Śiva, e. g., Iruḷappaṉ who is a form of Bhairava, or Vīrabhadra.

Folk deities tend to link with the śaiva tradition more easily than with the vaiṣṇava one. Kāttavarāyaṉ, Cuṭalaimāṭaṉ, Rāyar, Aiyaṉār are sons of Śiva (although Aiyaṉār is the son of both Śiva and Viṣṇu, Śiva's parentage is more stressed); Karuppar, with one or two exceptions, was never called son of Viṣṇu; he is only an aspect (amcam) of the great god. Local/regional goddesses too fit more easily into the śaiva camp; avatāra

[39] The topic has been looked at from various perspectives by Shulman 1980a, Sontheimer 1976: 61; 1984a: 167 f.; 1989: 322 ff., Kakar 1981.

[40] Meyer 1986: 19, 81.

[41] Beck 1981.

forms of Lakṣmī are rare – the reason may be that Lakṣmī's pure and peaceful image is not very compatible with that of the fierce folk goddesses.

Folk religion likes to make use of sibling relationships. Seven brothers and a sister, seven sisters and a brother or two brothers and a sister are favored constellations: there are seven Valaṅkaiyār;[42] their chief has seven daughters; Nallataṅkāḷ has seven children; Āravalli has six sisters; the Vaṉṉiyar of Cittūr are seven brothers and one sister;[43] the Aṇṇaṉmār are two brothers with a sister.[44] Among themselves goddesses are sisters, usually they are seven, but who the seven are varies; they can include: Aṅkāḷammaṉ, Māriyammaṉ, Kāḷiyammaṉ, Celliyammaṉ, Pakavatiyammaṉ, Turkkai (Durgā), Draupadī, Pārvatī etc., but lists of brother-gods seem rarer. In folk myths gods call each other elder or young brother, but they are not necessarily a set group the way the goddesses are. The reason lies perhaps in the very popular Kaṉṉimār, a group of seven goddesses who sometimes are equated with the sapta mātṛkās and who we find in almost all the Tamil folk temples, There are no such prominent septuplets on the side of the gods. The seven ṛṣis do appear in the local myths, but they are rarely present in temples.

7. Concluding remarks

Linking happens in both horizontal and vertical directions. Linking helps to bring deities and cults together and to position a deity within an all-Hindu framework, but it does not necessarily play an integrative role in village caste politics. The local myth might express a low caste group's wish to be regarded as higher or to be associated with a higher caste group, but it does not reflect a social reality.[45] As we have seen, deities like to be connected on various levels. Aṅkāḷammaṉ is the Ādiśakti, the primordial power, the universal power.[46] She marries Śiva, is the left side in his Ardhanārīśvara icon. Viṣṇu is her brother, Parvatarāja (Himālaya) her father and Gaṇeśa one of her sons. As Pārvatī then, she is part of the pan-Hindu pantheon. On the regional level she is connected to Murukaṉ, another of her sons, to Māriyammaṉ who is one of her sisters and to Pēcci, her own fierce form. Murukaṉ, Māriyammaṉ and, to a lesser extent perhaps, Pēcci, are deities known throughout Tamilnadu. Aṅkāḷammaṉ's local avatāram is Mācāṉiyammaṉ, a form only known in a limited

[42] Arunachalam 1976: 179; Samuel 1988.
[43] See Chapter VI.
[44] Arunachalam 1976: 173 ff., Beck 1982 and 1992.
[45] See the Kāttavarāyaṉ myth.
[46] Meyer 1986.

regional trail from North Arcot to Coimbatore. In her most famous temple, in Āṉaimalai, Mācāṉiyammaṉ has again forged a link to the pan-Hindu pantheon, this time to Rāma. Aṅkāḷammaṉ has other local connections, one is through her son, Pāvāṭairāyaṉ, a god known in the North and South Arcot areas.

Maturai Vīraṉ is linked to the pan-Hindu tradition by being a form of Vīrabhadra (who in turn is a son of Śiva).[47] He has successfully associated himself with Maturai Mīnākṣi, whose guardian he is. Mīnākṣi, although a local goddess, is known beyond the boundaries of Tamilnadu and attracts many pilgrims from all over India. This association with Mīnākṣi might have helped to popularize Maturai Vīraṉ's cult in Tamilnadu, but it has not made him a famous deity beyond the state. Maturai Vīraṉ's two wives connect the god locally. Veḷḷaiyammāḷ is said to have been a dancer in Maturai and seems to be known mostly in that area. As we have seen, in some temples the god is represented only with one wife, Pommi, and in some areas her name changes to Pommakkā. Variations can be due to a local coloring of the myth or to a particular caste's association with the god. When castes migrate, they tend to take their deities with them, and once the deity is settled in the new location he or she connects to the neighboring cults.

Linking works so well because one deity can be connected to another through the concept of an universal, omnipresent, primordial divine power (ādi-deity, cāmi). This concept allows the deity at the same time to retain his or her individuality. It is an important point to remember: Muṉiyāṇṭi is not Karuppar although both are particular forms of an unnamed divine power that ultimately makes them one. As icons they are distinct, just as Śiva and Viṣṇu are distinct. Māriyammaṉ is not Aṅkāḷammaṉ although both are avatāras of Pārvatī. Each deity is a particular expression of the one, all-encompassing divine power; giving it a name, form and story is bringing it into the realm of the tangible, the understandable, down to a point where even the 'criminal' gods are but an aspect of the divine play.

Dimock's statement about Kṛṣṇa summarizes the thoughts of this chapter well[48]:

'... the full deity is in constant motion and therefore of everchanging form, spreading out, as does the quantum wave, to fill all available areas of space and time. At the same time, it cannot be said that each of them is not fully God. And this is a basic tenet of the Vaiṣṇavas: like the *śaktis* in the relation to the *śaktimān,*

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[47] Shulman 1985: 355 ff. and Vīraiyaṉ Ammāṉai.
[48] Dimock 1989: 165 f.

there can be infinite manifestations of God without these having any effect on the essential godhead. A measurement can be taken at any point in time and space, and that measurement has form and definition. But it does not describe the quantum wave; nor is the image the full description of God.'