

V

Stability and Mobility

1. Introduction

We have seen how a deity reveals him/herself: a cow releases her milk at a particular place, and when the people try to dig up the stone or plant at the spot so marked, blood flows. The blood flows because the deity cannot be dug up, cannot be uprooted.

The priest of Aṇaikkarupparāyacāmi (Rākalpāvi, Coimbatore) explained that the god, who is in the form of a triangular stone and guards the village dam (aṇai) and fields, had been discovered after rain and floods had been unable to move him. The stone had been held firmly by the roots of a kallitti tree (a type of fig tree), and the stone's immobility had aroused the curiosity of the people, among them the Muslim owner of the wilderness area (kāṭu) in which the stone was located. Convinced that it was a deity, the Muslim had handed the stone to a Hindu and had asked him to do pūjā. The stone's fixity or stability was interpreted as a sign of divinity.

The deity's preference for a particular place, his or her insistence on remaining rooted to the spot where he or she touched earth, this fusion of a divine symbol and earth, are recurring and important themes of folk myths. Veṇṇamalaiyappar is one of the guardians of Viruttācalam.¹ How the god came to the present place was related by the priest:

This happened four generations ago. My ancestor had gone somewhere on business. Here at this place (where the temple now stands) he set down his basket in order to drink some water. When he wanted to continue his journey, he was unable to lift the basket because inside it was a large stone. He threw it out but as soon as he tried to pick up the basket, the stone was in it again. This happened a few times and finally he said: "Whatever you are, hostile spirit (pēy, picācu) or god, I shall place you here!" This is how the temple was established.

The priest's ancestor is not sure about the nature of the stone in the basket, but he knows that it is some kind of supernatural power, a power that can be good or bad and a power to which he has to yield. The stone in the basket is a very common motif: a person carrying a basket will feel it to be heavy and will discover a stone in it. He or she will throw it out,

¹ See Chapter II.7.

but the stone will keep coming back into the basket until a divine force is suspected to be behind it and a shrine is set up for it.² Through the weight of the stone the deity communicates his wish to be set down, and once the god touches earth, he cannot be moved again. This idea is expressed in another common version of the myth: The priest has to flee his village. He packs his deity into a basket and carries it along. Somewhere on the way he sets the basket down (to wash his face or brush his teeth) and is then unable to lift it again (e. g., Aiyaṅār near Vallam, Tanjavur).

Even popular films make use of this idea that once a deity is set down on earth it fuses with it: in ‘Kākkum Kāmāṭci’ Śaṅkarācārya finds the idol of the goddess Kāmākṣī in a river and places it on firm ground; when he wishes to lift it again, he is unable to do so.

On the one hand, a deity is moved, carried or transported, sometimes in ignorance of the carrier; on the other hand, the deity is not a passive agent but firmly makes known where he or she wishes to be established. A variant of Oṅṭikkaruppu's journey³ is that thieves had stolen a box in Kerala believing it to be filled with jewels. At Iraṭṭaimalai they set the box down and when they tried to lift it to share the spoils, they were not able to move it. Looking inside the box they discovered – instead of the jewels – the god Oṅṭikkaruppu!

There are two favorite means of transport: the basket or box and the bullock cart.

The god Karuppuccāmi was transported as a weight stone on a bullock cart from Kerala. Here (in Ayyalūr), the people unloaded everything. Later they packed the cart again to continue their journey and placed the stone on the cart as a counterbalance. The bullocks would not move. A Kōṭaṅki (fortune-teller) was called. He said: “What you transported was not a stone, it was a god!” The Kōṭaṅki also foretold that the priest for the god would be found in the nearby village.

This god decided he wanted to stay where the people had rested and, because the god came to this village (Ayyalūr, Dindigul) on a cart (vaṅṭi), he is called Vaṅṭi Karuppuccāmi. (The present priest, a Mūppaṅār, is the fourth generation, descended from the priest who was found in the nearby village.) Other gods who were transported on a bullock cart are, for instance, Caṅkilikkaruppar of Veṅacappaṭṭi and Karupparāyar of Mākkiṅampaṭṭi (both Coimbatore). Sometimes, during the journey, the deity makes his or her wish known by saying: ‘I like it here. I wish to stay here!’ (Ellaiyamman, Nakkacēlam; Karuppuccāmi, Mēlakkāl; Aṅkālamman in Veṅkampūr).

² E. g., Muṇiyappaṅ, Cempiliccippālaiyam; Meyer 1986: 60.

³ See Chapter I.3.

We realize that the deity needs a fixed place, a temple or shrine, but we also notice that the deity is moved, that he or she has a great deal of mobility. Certain deities travel long distances on water but, wherever they happen to reach land or get fished out by people, they must become established. The best known of these water journeys is Karuppar's. He floats on the river from Kerala to Tamilnadu and wherever his basket or box or statue runs ashore or is fished out, he receives a cult (Cōlavantān, Kōccaṭai, Vaṅṭiyūr, Tiruppūvaṇam, Māranāṭu, Camayanallūr). Physical realities are discounted, any water source can be part of the mythical river system that allows Karuppar his connection to Kerala.⁴ Water serves as transport; symbolically it stands for change;⁵ it connotes instability, fluidity. Viṣṇu and his avatāra forms are gods who bring about change, who themselves change, who with their power create fluid images of temporary reality (as when Kṛṣṇa multiplies himself to dance with all the gopis); they are 'watery' gods: Viṣṇu rests on the primal ocean, Kṛṣṇa brings rain, and Āṅṭāl compares Kṛṣṇa to the dark rain clouds.⁶ These images may partially have inspired Karuppar's association with water and magic (we remember that Karuppar is an avatāra or amca of Viṣṇu). The box or basket is the safe container, the shrine or womb house (Skt. garbhagrha), the stable element in the flowing water. More practically, it is in boxes and baskets that deities (in form of small statues or other symbols e. g., weapons) are stored while they lie dormant (i. e., are not worshipped) and are carried to the festival on the head of the priest or family/clan eldest.⁷ Stability, the contained, fits Śiva the liṅga pillar, the fire mountain.⁸

2. Stability and mobility (definitions)

Stability and mobility as opposites, yet with complementary qualities, are concepts well embedded in Hinduism. In Sanskrit we have the terms *cala* (moving, movable, unfixed, loose, transitory) and *acala* (steady, immovable, fixed, permanent, mountain, rock); *acalā* (earth); *sthala*, from the root *sthā*, to stand (firm ground); *sthāṇu* (firm, fixed, motionless and also a name of Śiva); *sthānam* (standing, house, altar, holy place); *sthāpanam* (fixing); *sthāvāra* (a. o. mountain, any stationary or inanimate object) and its opposite, *jaṅgama* (moving, moveable).

⁴ See also Chapter I.3.

⁵ The dismembered god is made whole again on his journey – see Chapter I.3., and with regard to throwing deities into the river: Shulman 1980a: 197.

⁶ Tiruppāvai 4.

⁷ See below.

⁸ See below.

<i>stability</i>	<i>mobility</i>
acala (mountain)	cala
sthāṇu (pillar, liṅga)	
sthāna (temple)	
sthāvāra (temple, liṅga)	jaṅgama
tree	water
nivṛtti (repose)	pravṛtti (activity)
sattva	rajas
tamas	
mūlava(r) (root deity)	utsava (uṛcava) (mobile deity)
yogin, meditation	god(dess) dancer
eternal	temporary

Stable are the stone and the stone mūrti embedded in the earth or fastened to an immovable platform, and by extension, the temple. In Viraśaiva usage the firm, stable (the idol, the liṅga, the temple) is called sthāvāra and is opposed to the movement of the religious ascetic, the renouncer of the 'stable world', called the jaṅgama. The jaṅgama does not need a concrete temple of stone, his own body is a temple; the god dwells within his body; he is a living, moving temple.⁹ Stability and movement are opposites yet complementary; both are needed. This is well demonstrated in the living religion: the stone idol is firmly fixed, the temple stands fast, but for every fixed dwelling or icon of the deity there is a moveable one; the immovable deity of stone, the mūlava(r) deity, has a moveable form used in certain rituals and in processions, the utsava (uṛcava) mūrti; the fixed temple has a moveable form, the deity-dancer.

The two qualities, stability and movement, are two aspects of a whole. The stable forms: stone, mountain, liṅga, temple vimāna, describe a vertical movement, implanted in the earth they stretch into the sky, they link the tamasic with the sattvic, the energy flows up and down. Seen from the top they are a dot, the bindu, the essence or the state of inactivity (nivṛtti), a state in which the divine power is not yet manifest. Movement, mobility, is expansion, is activity (pravṛtti), the rajas guṇa, the deity manifest; it is life and from the top describes the circle around the dot, the circumambulation, the pradakṣiṇa, the worship.

⁹ See Ramanujan 1973: 20 ff; also Eck 1993: 335.

3. Stability

The śivaliṅga

One of Śiva's names is Sthāṇu. It means pillar, post, and describes the god as the motionless ascetic with his semen drawn up, unwilling to create mortal beings, the god 'in whom the fire of life burns upward inwardly while he stands still'.¹⁰ Sthāṇu is Śiva in his liṅga form, the liṅga that the god has discarded since it does not serve him in the creation of beings. The liṅga falls to earth and becomes stabilized in the yoni, the womb of the goddess. As image the liṅga rises out of the yoni, being firmly rooted in it like a tree. Only Pārvatī is able to hold the liṅga.¹¹ The liṅga rises up eternally, it has no end, as the myth of liṅgodbhava illustrates. Neither Viṣṇu, who in his boar form digs below, nor Brahmā who in his goose (haṁsa) form flies up, can find the periphery of the flaming pillar.¹² Śiva as the fire pillar is the red mountain (aruṅācala) of Tiruvaṅṅāmalai. The liṅga is stable as a mountain, is firmly fixed like a tree. In the Vāmana Purāṇa the fallen liṅga of Śiva is planted at the site of a banyan tree in the middle of a lake and there, on the primordial liṅga, Brahmā establishes a stone liṅga.¹³ Primordial liṅga, stone liṅga and tree form a unity reflecting the image of the ascetic Śiva who tries to create perfect beings while submerged in the water.¹⁴ The image encompasses the idea of the vertical (liṅga) within the horizontal (yoni, earth, water).

Śiva, the ascetic with erect liṅga, in full concentration and keeping the creative seed within, is model for the yogin who sits firmly with erect back, who keeps his mind stable:

The worldly man is "possessed" by his own life; the yogin refuses to "let himself live"; to continual movement, he opposes his static posture, the immobility of āsana; to agitated, unrhythmical, changing respiration, he opposes prāṇāyāma, and even dreams of holding his breath indefinitely; to the chaotic flux of psychomental life, he replies by "fixing thought on a single point", the first step to that final withdrawal from the phenomenal world which he will obtain through pratyāhāra.¹⁵

¹⁰ Kramrisch 1981a: 119.

¹¹ On the liṅga and sthāṇu see Shulman 1986, 1980a: 50; Kramrisch 1981a: 117 ff.; Kulke 1970: 68.

¹² See Kramrisch 1981a: 159; O'Flaherty 1980: 140; illustrations of this myth are carved in stone on the western side of Cōḷa temples.

¹³ Kramrisch 1981a: 161.

¹⁴ Shulman 1986: 103.

¹⁵ Eliade 1973: 95 f.

The stone, the root-statue (mūlavara)

The stone rooted to the earth is the first and foremost seat of divine power; it is the most basic dwelling place of a deity; it is the most simple representation of main and subordinate deities in folk temples. Even if an anthropomorphic statue is added later, the original rough stone remains in front of the new statue, and the priests insist that the actual power (*śakti*) of the deity is in the original stone, not in the statue. The iconic statue is the visible image of the divine power and, when established or consecrated properly, it too serves as a seat of that power. When a permanent statue is consecrated, it is important that it be fixed firmly on the platform. In the richer temples various gems and herbs are buried beneath the statue (sometimes in a pot), which channel the earth energies upward, while the *kalaśa* (the drop-shaped vessel) that contains the same ingredients and is on top of the temple tower (*vimāna*), i. e., above the deity, channels the powers of space downward into the *mūrti*.¹⁶ In other words, the energy movement thus created is one between earth and sky, a vertical movement finding its center-point in the *mūrti*. If a statue or other representation of a deity refuses to stand upright and firmly, it causes great concern, as the well-known story about the great *liṅga* of *Bṛhadīśvara* in *Taṅcāvūr* shows: Nothing could make the *liṅga* stand upright, it kept leaning to one side, and in desperation the king (*Rājarājacōḷaṅ*) had his guru, the *siddha* *Karuvūrār*, called. *Karuvūrār* asked for some betel preparation, chewed it contentedly and then spit the pulp onto the floor where the *liṅga* was supposed to stand. Of course it worked, and since then this immense *Śivaliṅga* has been standing firmly and powerfully in its sanctum. Whether the story is true or not, it is a typical *siddha* story in that it inverts the usual rules of purity and pollution,¹⁷ and it illustrates the need of a proper establishment of a *mūrti*; here the betel leaf pulp becomes the paste that fixes the *liṅga* to the earth.

Extensions of the stone are the termite hill and the mountain; both are dwelling places of deities and ascetics: the termites build their mound around the immobile yogin; the ascetic meditates in the mountain caves. Gods and goddesses manifest as termite mounds (e. g., *Aṅkāḷamman*)¹⁸ and mountains too are deities (*Himavat*, *Aruṅācala*), are favorite abodes of deities (*Meru*, *Kailāsa*); they are the center or pivot of the earth (*Meru*, *Mandara*). Many shrines or temples are located atop mountains, e. g., the most well-known in *Tamilnadu* are those of the god *Murukan*. Trees atop a mountain signal the presence of a deity, and stones under a tree often

¹⁶ See Ramachandra Rao 1979: 87 ff.

¹⁷ On *siddhas* see Zvelebil 1973 and Ganapathy 1993.

¹⁸ See also König 1984.

are seats of deities. Stones, mountains and trees share the quality of stability and the up- and downward movement.

Trees, flagstaffs and yūpa

In our discussion of wilderness and ordered space we have mentioned that trees are deities (e. g., *Māriyamman* of Camayapuram), that trees are the material for divine *mūrtis* (e. g., *Jagannātha*) and that they are the focus of fertility symbols (as when snake stones are set up under a tree couple or cradles hung on trees in hope of or thanks for the fulfillment of a child wish). The tree top is a favorite place for malignant deities, for spirits, and anyone wishing to fell a tree must be aware of its inhabitant. When an Englishman had a very tall tree cut in the Kanyakumari area for the mast of his ship, he did not propitiate the local deity, *Ceṅkiṭākkāraṇ*, who happened to live in that tree. Blood, which flowed when the tree was felled, showed the god's presence, but the foreigner did not acknowledge it. The god took revenge and caused his ship to crash on the rocks along the Kanyakumari coast, killing the white man (*veḷḷaiakkāraṇ*). Realizing his fault, the white man's spirit asked the god for forgiveness, and as a boon the god turned the white man into a deity (from '*Veḷḷaiakkāraṇ katai*')¹⁹. Stories of deities in trees who cause harm when not properly worshipped are common and we cannot expand on them here;²⁰ what interests us is the tree as symbol of stability, as a seat for divine power (the blood that flows from the tree is analogous to the bleeding stone), as something that should not be uprooted or felled without the proper respect shown to it. The tree's stability connects to the ascetic, to Arjuna's *tapas* tree,²¹ to the 'stake' tree on which *Kāttavarāyaṇ* does *tapas* and on which he 'dies' or metamorphoses from human to deity.²² Tree and *liṅga* resemble each other in their vertical movement and in their stability, and in symbolic content they share with the ascetic the retention of fertile power. Like the tree that periodically withdraws its life-force and sends it out and upward again in the form of new branches and leaves, the ascetic pulls the power within and raises his *kuṇḍalīnī* upward to gain release. The tree stands both for fertility and life and for death. It is the pole that leads from earth to heaven, from one life to another life, and by analogy we can understand the pointed, thorn-like instruments (spears, thorns, beds or seats or sandals fitted with nails etc.) that the ascetic uses on his

¹⁹ See *Veḷḷaiakkāraṇ Katai*.

²⁰ See e. g., Hildebeitel 1991: 92 ff.; Reiniche 1979: 206 ff.; Ramachandra Rao 1980: 17.

²¹ Hildebeitel 1991: 213 ff.

²² Masilamani-Meyer 1989: 87 f.; 2004.

body, or the chickens that are thrust on spears in front of some temples, as an offering that will lead the human spirit upwards and towards release.

When we enter a well-developed, large temple, we cannot follow a straight line to the main god: the flagstaff, the altar (*bali pīṭha*, Ta. pali *pīṭam*) and the deity's vehicle obstruct our way; they are in a direct line of the deity's vision. On the prone figure of the temple ground plan, the flagstaff is at the height of the sexual organ, the altar at the navel.²³ Flagstaff and altar are interchangeable in their position, and in folk temples the flagstaff can be missing or replaced by the lamp-post (a large wooden pole on top of which there is a pot serving as lamp). In front of these two and closer to or outside the entrance we find in folk temples the deities involved in sacrifice, the gods who receive the blood offerings – sometimes represented by a weapon like the *triśūla* or the *arivāl*. The flagstaffs of the big South Indian temples end in three horizontal 'ladles' or branches pointing towards the sanctum. These are said to represent the three gods *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Śiva*,²⁴ *Śiva* being at the bottom, as he is in the hierarchy of the *guṇas*.²⁵ These elements (altar, flagstaff, weapon, servant-deity), which face the deity, can be connected to the Vedic *yūpa*.²⁶ The *yūpa*, to which the sacrificial animals were tied, had the same place with regard to the fire altar of the *uttaravedī* (part of the *mahāvedī*) as the altar, flagstaff, weapon, servant-deity, etc. have in relation to the main deity in the present temples.²⁷ The *yūpa* was made 'from the wood of a tree found in the forest, which one addresses by a term meaning "lord of the forest"'.²⁸ Eliade points out the *yūpa*'s affinity with the cosmic pillar and the cosmic tree,²⁹ an idea we find in another source as well, in the *Vāstusūtra Upaniṣad*³⁰. The sacrificer uses the sacrificial pillar to ascend to heaven;³¹ again then we have an upward, vertical movement. Like the flagstaff, the *yūpa* has three basic sections, 'by its upper section it gives power over heavenly things, by its middle part, over the things of the air, by its lower part, over those of the earth'.³²

²³ Ramachandra Rao 1979: 97.

²⁴ Ramachandra Rao 1979: 104.

²⁵ *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad* 5.2., compare Östör 1980: 53: *Kālī* being associated with *tamas*, *Lakṣmī* with *rajas* and *Sarasvatī* with *sattva*.

²⁶ See Biardeau 1989a, Ramachandra Rao 1979: 100, and in detail, Hildebeitel 1991: 117 ff.

²⁷ See illustration in Hildebeitel 1991: 158.

²⁸ Malamoud 1996: 81.

²⁹ Eliade 1973: 326.

³⁰ Boner et al. 1982: 67.

³¹ Eliade 1973: 326; Malamoud 1996: 286, fn.37; Hubert and Mauss 1964: 27.

³² Hubert and Mauss 1964: 27 and see fn. 144 p. 121, which lists the functions of the *yūpa* as: slaying demons, protecting mankind, symbolizing life, bearing up the offering to the gods, supporting heaven and earth.

Liṅga, stone, mountain, termite hill, tree, vimāna, flagstaff – all have associations of stability, firmness, describe an upward/downward movement, connect earth and heaven; they signify changelessness, permanence, the deity's eternal and unchanging power, its unmanifest state, and a path that leads the human soul to the deity (the withdrawal from the outside to the inside, the upward flow of the power). It is the meditative, ascetic path. Similarly, the vertical axis shows the deity's descent to earth, his or her ascent back to heaven, it stands for hierarchy and the connection between two poles, and the dissolution of duality symbolized in the dot or bindu. While the vertical describes the withdrawn, inactive force, the horizontal movement demonstrates communication.

4. Mobility

Divine power – being omnipresent – basically needs a place, a seat, a shrine only for the purpose of ritual worship; and for this a movable seat might suffice. If a permanent dwelling place is assigned to it, the reason is simple: from it the power can flow any time, be tapped any time, while the mobile seat only allows temporary contact. Both pan-Hindu and folk religion use movable icons in their cults; however, the need for mobility: the divine power's play in the human body, the dancing of a deity, seems much stronger in folk religion and is perhaps its most distinctive trait. In the following we shall discuss the three most important forms of mobility: the processional icon, the pot, the god(dess) dancer.

The processional icon (*utsava mūrti/urcava mūrṭti*)

The movable icon of the deity can be a figure with full iconographic details, the deity's weapon or other symbol (e. g., *pādukās*), even a *liṅga*.³³ In the rich pan-Hindu temples these movable icons are made from the traditional five metals (*pañca loha*) or from gold or silver; in folk temples these same substances are used; but besides these the icons can be fashioned from brass, wood, clay or cloth. How the icons are carried varies considerably: they are placed on vehicles (their own, e. g., *Aiyanār* on the elephant, or others), on palanquins, in boxes or baskets; if they are not pulled on a cart or carried in a palanquin or on an animal, they have to be transported on the head of a designated person (the head being the most pure and respected part of the human body). Sometimes deity and

³³ See also Eck 1993: 110.

vehicle are molded together into one figure (this happens often in clay images). Some mobile forms of deities, those that are transported only once and then established in a temple, become immobile forms; for instance, the new terra cotta statue of a folk deity is only mobile until it has been set up at its permanent place.

Mobile icons are used in processions when the deity visits the different quarters of a village or town, when the god or goddess resides in the village square or special *maṇḍapas* (halls or temporary shelters) during the festival or has to participate in a particular ritual, e. g., when the goddess *Māriyamman* presides over the pit of glowing coals over which the devotees walk. Some mobile figures are specifically fashioned for the festival; they are imbued with the divine power and at the end are dissolved in water (*visarjana*). An example of this is the figure of the goddess *Muttālamman* of *Maṇakkāṭṭūr* (Dindigul) which is made new for every festival, the belief being that the goddess' power is so strong that it can be manifested in a statue only for a very short time. At the end of the festival the priest carries the terra cotta image of the goddess to the river in what is like a funerary procession: women sing lamentation songs and throw cotton balls and peanuts at her. At the river the figure is broken and thrown into the water.

Elsewhere the permanent statue of the goddess becomes the mobile form: when the festival of *Vīramākāḷiyamman* of *Pāpanācam* (Thanjavur) is celebrated, the goddess's many-armed wooden statue, which throughout the year is in a shrine, is dismantled and re-assembled around and over the priest, so that he becomes the goddess and in this form is able to move around the village and enact the goddess's myth.³⁴

Mobile forms of deity are just as powerful as the stable ones, if not more powerful. During one of the festival processions when *Virapattiran* accompanied the goddess *Ellaiyamman* of *Nakkacēlam* (Perambalur) through the village, some houses caught fire. This was attributed to the power of the god and since then *Virapattiran* has not been taken out in procession. Bringing the god or goddess through the village is important because it is the only time all the villagers have equal access to him or her, but the processional route is also a cause for conflict: higher castes do not wish their deities to visit the quarters of the lower castes, and this point of contention between high and low castes has led to the discontinuation of festivals in many villages. An expression of this problem is the statement made by a Brahman about his clan deity, *Karuppar*: 'when the god goes through the Brahman streets (*agrahāra*), he receives only vegetarian offerings and he smiles, but when he returns from the streets of the lower castes where he gets animal sacrifices, he shows a fearful

³⁴ See Chapter VI.2.

expression and has red eyes' (red eyes are a sign of anger). In his or her shrine, the god(dess) can easily be sheltered from polluting agents, but not so in the open.

The pot (karakam, kalaśa/kalacam)

The ceremonial pot can have a variety of shapes and sizes and be of different materials (brass, copper, gold, clay). At the beginning of a festival for a folk deity the ceremonial pot is prepared at the river: it is washed, filled with different items like water or rice, money, sometimes jewels and herbs; its body is decorated with string and its top closed with a coconut, leaves and flowers. This decorated pot represents the body of the deity: the string surrounding the pot represents the veins, the water in it is the blood, the mango-leaves the hair and the coconut the head.³⁵ When the pot is ready, the deity is called or invited into it (śakti aḷaippital), and when the priest or another designated person places the pot on his head, the deity takes possession of him, showing his or her presence. Like the processional figure, the pot serves as mobile icon, as additional seat of divine power (thereby supplementing the power of the deity inside the temple), or as a temporary seat for the deity when there is no other form or statue available (e. g., when a new temple is built)³⁶. Special fire rites (yākam) are done to empower the content (water) of the pots which then is e. g., used for the washing (abhiṣeka/apiṣēkam) of the root deities. By its shape the pot suggests obvious meanings: womb, cosmic egg; vessel of fertility, life-force, seed.³⁷ The pot is a neutral symbol and can carry or represent a god or a goddess.³⁸ Apart from being a seat for divine power, the pot is a much used vessel in rituals, be it simply as container, be it as a special, decorated container of milk or water that the devotees, who have made specific vows, carry on their heads in procession to the deity. In the latter case the pot is more than a container, it is suffused with divine power and therefore can cause possession in the devotee carrying it.

³⁵ See Clothey 1983: 125.

³⁶ See Clothey 1983: 183 ff.

³⁷ See e. g., the Kumpakōṇam myth, Das 1991: 140; on its use in funerals as symbolic carriers of life see e. g., Srinivas 1952: 151; Thurston 1906: 159 ff.

³⁸ See e. g., Meyer 1986: 238.

The god(dess) dancer (cāmiyāṭi)

Being a 'deity-dancer' (cāmi = deity and āṭi = dancer, from āṭa, to dance) is a job, title or office held by a particular person and passed on through inheritance from father to son. The cāmiyāṭi can be a priest or a lay person, a man or a woman (although from what I could gather more than 90 % of cāmiyāṭi are men, the reason being a woman's natural pollution through her monthly menstrual cycle). The cāmiyāṭi functions as channel or vehicle for the deity he represents (e. g., the priest may dance the main deity of a public temple while lay persons dance their clan deities who are subordinate to the main deity). Dancing the deity involves at one point being possessed by the deity and this possession is expressed in terms of grace (aruḷ), intoxication or bewilderment (maruḷ), a 'coming' of the deity (cāmi varukīratu), a dancing (āṭa) of a deity.³⁹ This dancing of the deity is not a wild, uncontrolled running about but is embedded in a frame (ritual, festival) and has a pattern, i. e., it is controlled and especially when possession occurs, it is important to keep the power within certain boundaries – a process that involves a cooling through the application of sacred ash on the forehead or the placing of limes into the mouth of the possessed, or, if needed, a heating (increase of possession) by means of beating the drums or the sight of the deity.

The cāmiyāṭi acts as a direct means of communication between deity and devotee: the deity speaks through the cāmiyāṭi, the devotee can ask questions to the deity through the cāmiyāṭi and, being a living embodiment of the deity, the cāmiyāṭi can act out the deity's myths. Most of the time the cāmiyāṭi will be dressed in a costume and/or mask showing him/her to be a particular deity, or at least the cāmiyāṭi will have a minimal mark that identifies him/her as a deity, e. g., flower garlands, a weapon of the deity. Before and during the time he performs, the cāmiyāṭi observes strict rules of behavior: fasting, sexual continence, keeping pure.

It is possible that the dancing of a god(dess) goes back to a possession/dance cult of animal-, nature- and ancestor spirits; today, however, at least in Tamilnadu, such an origin is not clearly evident. The deities danced are not animal spirits and rarely ancestors; they are gods and goddesses ranging from the pan-Hindu deities (Kālī, Vīrabhadra) to the regional (Māriyamman, Karuppar), to the local (Paṅṭāra Appicci – see below). Because dancing the deity is a title or office and not a random

³⁹ In North India other terms are used: playing 'khel, khelnā'; a playing of wind 'pavan' – see e. g., Sontheimer 1984: 9; Erndl 1996: 178.

event, it has social implications reaching into local caste and power politics.⁴⁰

Like the Viraśaiva ascetic, the jaṅgama, the cāmiyāṭi, considers his body as a dwelling place for the divine; but there are considerable differences between the two, the main one being that the cāmiyāṭi is only a temporary vehicle and that he does not attempt a union with the divine power but acts as a channel, his own 'person' being placed to the side to make room for the deity. When filled by the deity's power or presence, the cāmiyāṭi is not conscious of his/her own self in relation to the possessing deity, cannot relate what happens to him/her during possession, while the jaṅgama invites the deity to take up permanent residence in his body and through this attempts a conscious union with the deity.

Stability and mobility in iconography

Iconography uses signs or symbols to signify these two qualities and thereby characterizes the particular aspect of divine power. Looking at Śiva, we clearly see an opposition between the liṅga, the stable, and Naṭarājā, the dancing god in whom everything is in movement: limbs, the fire 'halo', the flowing hair, and who epitomizes movement: creation and destruction, the cycles of life and death. In Tamil folk religion there are sitting, standing, striding forms of deity, deities on horse-back, on tigers, deities wearing sandals. The following can be taken as signs of mobility or stability:

	<i>signs of mobility</i>	<i>signs of stability</i>
pose:	dancing, striding, riding	sitting, standing, lying
implements:	weapons (lifted and/or ready to strike)	rosary, yoga-band
accessories:	sandals (sign of walking), vehicles	

Stable and mobile signs can be used to show subtle differences in a deity, as e. g., in the saṁnyāsīn figures: Caṁnāci sits, sometimes with a yoga-band supporting his legs, he holds a rosary and yet sometimes he rides a tiger. The tiger is here less a sign of mobility than of power over wilderness, the taming of the wild. Bhairava (Ta. Vairavar) is a wandering ascetic and this is expressed by his striding stance, the sandals he wears. Sandals, on the one hand, show mobility, as when e. g., Aiyaṅār receives sandals from leatherworkers because he is believed to walk around the area at night to protect it; on the other hand, sandals are also

⁴⁰ For a good illustration of god/dess dancing and its meaning in terms of cults and politics see Brückner 1995.

associated with fierce/low caste deities because the sandals are made and offered by Dalits; yet, at the same time wearing sandals implies a high status because until not long ago only higher castes were allowed to wear sandals while the Dalits had to be barefooted. Very generally speaking, only fierce, ascetic, standing gods are depicted with sandals on their feet. Some deities have both a mobile and a stable form. Aiyānār e. g., has a sitting, stable image inside the sanctum, and a mobile one outside that shows him on top of a horse. The sitting image reflects the king-samnyāsin, the stabilizing power of the ruler, the rider points to the violent tasks of the ruler (protection and defense of a territory, war).

5. *Three festival examples*

Introduction

What we have said above about mobility and stability can best be illustrated with some examples of festival procedures. In these we shall see what roles the mobile icons play, how stability and mobility alternate. The three festival examples shall serve us in Chapter VI as well when we look at worship, at how devotees approach their deities. Before we describe the festivals we need to make some general remarks about festivals.

Festivals for the guardian deities are rarely as grand and elaborate as those for the goddess. While the festival for the goddess (e. g., Māriyamman) lasts several days and is accompanied by music, theatre performances and often spectacular sacrificial offerings such as hook-swinging, the guardians (e. g., Aiyānār, Muṇi, Karuppar) in general have to be satisfied with more modest celebrations, animal sacrifices and dedication of new statues and votive offerings. There are exceptions: for instance, the festival of Tenkarai Makarājēsvarar (Cittūr) lasts ten days and draws large crowds. The extent of the festival celebration depends on the temple income and on the wealth of the villagers. The general tendency over the past few years has been to celebrate less elaborate festivals or to celebrate them at greater intervals. While much of the basic rituals have remained the same over the years, the accessories have changed: instead of listening to the recital of mythological tales, the festival crowd prefers to hear modern cinema songs; instead of performing traditional dances, the devotees prefer to just be there. Folk dances such a kummi (a dance in which the participants go in a circle, sing and clap the rhythm with their hands) and oyiḷāṭṭam (a dance in which handkerchiefs are waved) are still performed, but they become rarer with

each year (although recently an emerging pride of Dalits in their own traditions has led to a renewed interest in folk dances). Dramatic performances on stage still enjoy a great popularity, especially in rural areas. A popular play that is often performed as part of the Aiyānār festival is 'Vaḷḷit tirumaṇam' ('the wedding of Vaḷḷi' – which actually has nothing to do with Aiyānār; it shows Vaḷḷi's wedding to Murukan). Another vital ingredient of a festival is the market – especially in rural areas and in remote villages, where it offers the festival crowd a chance to buy all kinds of goods from saris to hair ribbons, from domestic animals to books.

During the time of the festival the villagers have to observe certain purity rules; these may entail no eating of meat until the day of the non-vegetarian pūjā, avoiding pollution: women in an advanced state of pregnancy and women who are menstruating do not enter the temple and keep away from the deities when they go in procession through the streets, or they leave the village altogether. With the exception of those who leave the village for purity reasons, villagers are not supposed to leave the village during the time of the festival; if they do, they should return before night and worship the deity after their return.⁴¹ Priests and cāmiyāṭis observe sexual continence and dietary restrictions, or they fast.

The festival is a time when quarrels erupt, when old feuds surface, when the order of 'first respect' (mutal mariyātai) is questioned and fought about; it is a time when the smallest argument can lead to the flowing of human blood; it is a time when people are tense, especially those directly concerned with the rituals: they have to make sure that everything goes according to procedure and order. The presence of the police is necessary to keep the crowds in check, to free a path for the procession and to prevent serious fights. Although the festival is structured around a time plan, delays are inevitable, and it often happens that the auspicious moment passes before the ritual begins. The observance of ritual time and proper ritual performance seems much less important to the villagers than the maintenance of the social hierarchy. The ranking at the festival reflects and projects who will 'rule' the village.

The festival of a common temple is financed by the villagers, while for the festivals of private deities the caste in charge of the temple will bear most of the costs, but accepts contributions from others. Each household pays a certain amount of money and in some villages even Christian and Muslim families contribute to the Hindu festival. An average festival can cost anywhere from 5'000 to 50'000 Rupees (a meal in an average restaurant in Tamilnadu costs Rs. 20–30). The festival expenses

⁴¹ See also Srinivas 1952: 201.

commonly include: the renewal of the statues (they are made entirely new or the old ones are repainted), temporary shelters (pantals), vehicles for the procession of the deities, decorations (mainly flowers and garlands), food, sacrificial animals, sound equipment, entertainment (plays, music), festival notices etc. Individual donors can offer to pay for particular ceremonies – their name is then mentioned in the festival notice. Many villages cannot afford a festival each year and therefore they alternate, for example, the festival of the goddess with that of the main guardian, *Aiyanār*; or they celebrate the festival of all the deities in the village together; or they space the festival and celebrate it every two, three or five years. Poverty, meager harvests and caste rivalries and disputes are common causes for the postponement and even discontinuation of festivals.

Festivals are celebrated differently for each deity and there are local variations for the same deity. What most festivals have in common are certain patterns: they begin with the flag-hoisting ceremony and end with the lowering of the flag; there will be deity dancers; there will be sacrifices (vegetarian or animal); there will be processions of the deities through the streets. The content of a festival can be extremely complex, incorporating myths in acted, recited, ritualized forms, and elaborate sacrificial rites (hook-swinging, walking over hot coals etc.) which may or may not bear a direct relationship to the deity involved. The following festivals are fairly simple, but they show how even seemingly insignificant stories are incorporated in the festivals.⁴²

Paṅṭāra Appicci, Kāṭaiyampāṭṭi/Pavāni (Erode)

In Chapter II.9. we related how the cult of this god began. The temple lies at the boundary between *Pavāni* and *Kāṭaiyampāṭṭi*. The god is village guardian (*ūrkkāval*) of *Kāṭaiyampāṭṭi* and boundary guardian (*el-laikkāval*) of *Kāṭaiyampāṭṭi* and *Pavāni*. Equipped with burning torches the *Muṇis* make their rounds at night, led by *Makāmuṇi*. Striking about the temple are not the shrines of *Paṅṭāra Appicci* and *Pakavatiyamman*, which are simple structures, but the large guardian *Muṇis* who sit in a row leading from the entrance to the shrines. They are, starting from the entrance: *Vēṭṭaiikkāramuṇi* and *Caṭāmuṇi* (both of pink color), *Vāmuṇi* (green), *Cemmuṇi* (red), *Makāmuṇi* or *Periyamuṇi* (the *Muṇi* with the greatest power, 'akti'; he is yellow), *Kācimuṇi* (yellow). Between the two shrines are: *Akastiyar Muṇi* (yellow), *Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar* (smaller than the other statues, and playing the flute), *Tavamūni* (with a long beard and

⁴² For descriptions of more elaborate festivals in Tamilnadu see e. g., Beck 1981; Hildebeitel 1991; Reiniche 1979; Meyer 1986; Whitehead 1976.

wearing a loin cloth) and Tēvamūni (of a silvery color) – with the exclusion of Pāmpāṭṭi Cittar, they could represent the seven Ṛṣis and Śiva and Viṣṇu). All Mūnis are of the same large size, they sit, and each has his left foot resting against his right knee, except Vēṭṭaikkāramūni whose right foot rests against his left knee. His right knee is propped up on a small lion. All Mūnis have fangs, large moustaches (some have small beards) and wear crowns. The main shrines of Paṅṭāra Appicci and Pakavatiyamman are at the back of the temple, separated from the rest of the area by a low wall. The temple looks well maintained and various votive offerings speak of the god's power: A small statue of Paṅṭāra Appicci with a cow releasing its milk over him was donated for the cure of a child; a farmer offered a horse when his prayer for water was fulfilled (he dug a well and found water); a cow statue was given in thanks for the cure of a cow and another cow in gratitude for the birth of a child. The Nandin in front of the shrine of Pakavatiyamman was the votive offering of a lady, and the temple's electricity was a gift by yet someone else.

The festival of Paṅṭāra Appicci, Pakavatiyamman and their guardians is celebrated once a year in the month of āvaṇi (August-Sept.). A few weeks before the date of the festival the trustees (tarmakarttākkaḷ) send out notices. 'Aruḷmiku Paṅṭāra Appicci Pakavatiyamman poṅkal & tērt tiruviḷā ālaippital' ('Invitation to the poṅkal and tērt festival of the grace-bestowing Paṅṭāra Appicci and Pakavatiyamman') is the title of the invitation that announces the dates and broad outline of the festival and exhorts the devotees (paktar, from Skt. bhakta) to attend the festival and to support it financially. The cost of the festival is approximately Rs. 5'000. The word 'tērt' commonly denotes the cart or vehicle on which a deity is dragged in procession through the streets; poṅkal is the ritually boiled rice that is offered to the deity and distributed as prasāda to the devotees. Responsible for the celebration are the Vaṇṇiyars; they are the main 'actors' in the festival; however, devotees from other castes may participate, make offerings and receive the deities' grace. The following is a description of the festival as it was celebrated on the 22. āvaṇi (7. Sept.) 1988.

Early in the morning the small, decorated mobile statues (uṛcava mūrṭti) of Paṅṭāra Appicci, Pakavatiyamman and Makāmūni are brought from the house of the priest in Kāṭaiyampaṭṭi to the temple: Pakavatiyamman on a palanquin, Paṅṭāra Appicci on a small tērt, Makāmūni on a larger tērt. These statues of embossed silver forms and decorated with pieces of cloth, jewelry and flowers, stand on small platforms in front of their respective permanent mūrṭtis: Pakavatiyamman is at the entrance of her shrine, Paṅṭāra Appicci inside his shrine and the small uṛcava mūrṭti of Makāmūni, flanked on each side by a photo of the father and grandfather

of the priest, stands beside the large statue of the guardian god. For the festival the statues of the Muṇis have received a new coat of paint; they are decorated with flower garlands and their shoulders are draped with vēṣṭis (dhotis) donated by devotees. After the sacrifice of a goat in front of the large statue of Makāmuṇi, the painter covers with black paint the small white dot in the center of the black eyes of the Muṇis thus 'opening their eyes' and bringing them to life. He then writes anew the names of the Muṇis beneath their statues. Behind the temple, at the river, a relative of the priest washes the seven copper pots, the brass temple bells, the nail-sandals and other things. He places the pots one atop the other (they are of decreasing size) and decorates them with flowers until they look like one large, cone-shaped flower-pot (pūṅkarakam). In the meantime the small stones in front of the statues are washed and anointed. Family members and relations of the priest and many devotees crowd the temple courtyard in which three flagpoles have been set up for the festival, two standing near the two rows of Muṇis and one near the votive offerings (cows and horse). They are bamboo-poles ending in a triangle decorated with garlands. The band, consisting of drums and clarinets, assembles at the temple entrance. In front of the shrine of Paṅṭāra Appicci, the priest has laid out a banana leaf on a new vēṣṭi. Beside it he places the pūjā plate containing the usual pūjā articles: betel leaves, areca nuts, flowers, bananas, incense, camphor, sacred ash, kuṅkumum powder and a coconut. The pūṅkarakam is brought and set on the banana leaf and beside it, on the vēṣṭi, are placed four wooden staffs, two decorated with silver bands or rings, the others with a knob at the end.

To the accompaniment of the band that competes with the cinema songs blaring from the loudspeakers, the priest performs a pūjā (he rings the small brass bell, shows the camphor flame to the deities, offers the flame to the devotees). Then the priest, his son and three or four other gentlemen are decorated with large flower garlands. The drums sound louder and faster; they induce those decorated with the flower garlands to dance, to get possessed and to pick up the staffs. The priest and his son take the staffs with the silver decorations. All those equipped with staffs continue to dance wildly. The son of the priest then takes the pūṅkarakam and places it on his head; with it he dances a few times back and forth from the entrance of the temple to the shrine of Paṅṭāra Appicci. He then leaves the temple in a quick stride in the direction of Kāṭaiyampaṭṭi, followed by the other men and by the devotees. Now and then the priest with the staff in his hand dances in front of his son, facing him, while at the back a man stands ready to adjust the pūṅkarakam when it threatens to fall from the head of the priest's son. In front of the procession, some distance away, an elderly woman dances; she seems possessed by the

deity, but nobody pays any attention to her and her only function seems to be to keep up the fast pace and the spirit of the procession.

Following a dirt road through the rice fields the group reaches the river. Under a margosa tree are three stones and a *triśūla* decorated with flowers. It is the shrine of the maidens (*Kaṇṇimār*). Here the group stops, the priest's son places the *pūṅkarakam* in front of the stones and the priest conducts a *pūjā* while the drums play and firecrackers are sent into the sky. With *prasāda* in their hands (consisting mainly of flowers and *poṅkal* rice) the priest and his son enter the river until they are entirely submerged, leaving the offering to be carried away by the water. This offering is for the crocodile.⁴³ The priest and his son replace their wet clothes with fresh *vēṣṭis* over which they tie a red cloth; they return to the shrine and under the influence of the band, they and the other men wearing flower garlands dance and get possessed by the maidens. Under the influence of the maidens one of the elderly men carrying staffs advances towards the pair of nail sandals (wooden sandals from which sprout long sharp nails) and stands on them for a few seconds with his full weight. This causes the priest's son to shout angrily at the deity: 'Why did you stop me from walking on the sandals!' He obviously feels slighted by the deity for having someone else allowed to stand on the sandals and he edges the elderly man out of the area near the maidens. Then he places the *pūṅkarakam* on his head and leads the procession back to the main road and in the direction of the temple. On the way to the temple the procession stops at various houses where women pour water over the feet of the priest's son and the others; some devotees prostrate in front of the deity represented by the priest's son and the *pūṅkarakam*, while the priest, always nearby and dancing, at times whacks the prostrate devotees with his stick (as a sign of the deity's grace). *Pūjās* are performed, the priest distributes sacred ash; at times he makes predictions (*aruḷ vāḱku*). Slowly the group reaches the temple entrance. Here the priest takes a few steps on the nail sandals that have been carried along in the procession by a young boy. The procession then continues in the direction of *Pavāṇi* to the junction of the two rivers.

In the meantime many devotees have fulfilled their vows in the temple by offering *pūjā* and by sacrificing chickens and goats. They bring the goat in front of the *Muṇis*, sprinkle water over it, and when it shakes the water off – the sign that the deity accepts the offering – the animal is brought to the backside of the temple and its head cut off. (This is to circumvent the law forbidding animal sacrifices on temple premises.) At the side and the back of the temple women are busy cooking rice and preparing the meat; the place is strewn with chicken feathers, wood (for

⁴³ See below.

cooking), utensils. Children run around and amuse themselves on the small merry-go-rounds or by looking into a special box made of oil cans and magnifying glasses in which one can view such sights as devils sawing a lady in half, the sacred hill of Paḷani, Madras, politicians and a naked lady. These views are pasted on cards gathered in a book that the owner of the machine causes to turn with a handle while he sings a song. For the benefit of the white lady he carries at the picture of the naked lady (she is white!) asking several times with a grin if the viewer is able to see the picture properly. Along the road to the left and right of the temple entrance are stalls selling food, toys, ribbons and other small things.

When the procession with the pūṅkarakam returns to the temple it is almost three p. m., which means that the priest's son has carried the pots on his head for nearly six hours. He dances a last time in front of the three main deities: Paṅṭāra Appicci, Pakavatiyamman and Makāmuṇi and runs in a final fit of possession into the shrine of Paṅṭāra Appicci, where he deposits the pūṅkarakam. With a large pūjā and the distribution of prasāda (poṅkal rice, pieces of coconut, bananas, betel etc.) ends the main part of the festival. As we leave the festival site, exhausted and slightly drowsy from the sun, we see a large gathering outside the temple near the entrance. The crowd stands around two large black pigs that are being stabbed with long spears by men. Many women get possessed, some gather up the blood from the pig and bring it to their lips. Small boys crawl through the legs of the spectators to get a better view. We leave.

In the evening of the same day the festival forms of the three deities are returned to Kāṭaiyampatti with a display of fireworks. Two days later the Muṇis receive their non-vegetarian pūjā consisting of cooked meat and poṅkal. All the Muṇis are meat-eaters, Paṅṭāra Appicci and Pakavatiyamman and the side-deities in their shrines are vegetarian.

Regarding the large pūṅkarakam and the pūjā at the river the priest told the following stories:

When my grandfather (tāttā) carried the pūṅkarakam – then it was a clay pot – on his head during the festival, an Englishman, who was forest-guard at the time, watched the procession with his binoculars. He became blind. He came to this temple, prayed, and his eye-sight was restored. Then he brought seven copper vessels and placed them at the junction of the two rivers (the Kāvēri and the Pavāni) and notified everyone in the surrounding villages that the vessels would belong to the person who received the grace (aruḷ) of the deity. My grandfather received the grace and therefore the pots. Once, when this same Englishman was at the river, a crocodile caught his leg. Some women who saw this came to the temple and prayed; the Englishman's foot got cured. In gratitude he had the compound wall of the temple built. These two incidents are remembered during the festival.

A green stone crocodile sitting on the compound wall near Paṅṭāra Appicci's shrine testifies to the event, and the pūjā at the river is a thank offering to the crocodile. Crocodiles, of course, have become rather rare – if not extinct – in this area.

Karuppaṇacuvāmi, Māranāṭu (Sivaganga)

The temple of Karuppaṇacuvāmi is common (potu) and is managed by Paḷḷars (Dalits) who constitute more than a third of the village population. The two major caste groups in the village are the Akamuṭaiyār and Veḷḷāḷar. The priest of Karuppaṇacuvāmi and the Kōṭaṅki ('fortune-teller') are Paḷḷars. The temple is located at the edge of the village near the large pond. Karuppaṇacuvāmi is in the main shrine and has the form of a termite hill. On the walls of his shrine, left and right of the entrance, are paintings of Hanumān and Garuḍa. In a side shrine of the temple is Pattirakāḷiyammaṅ, the younger sister of Karuppaṇacuvāmi. The village goddess (kirāma teyvam) is Vīrakāḷi; the village and boundary guardian is Oṅṭi Vīraṅ, a blue god holding arivāḷ and club. His shrine is a few hundred meters to the south of the Karuppaṇacuvāmi temple. Oṅṭi Vīraṅ is the older god and receives the first respect, i. e., the first garland, during the festival. He allowed Karuppaṇacuvāmi to settle in the village on condition that the latter cut off his moustache and wear flowers in his hair. Karuppaṇacuvāmi reached Māranāṭu via the river after the angry Brahman had disowned him.⁴⁴

The festival of Karuppaṇacuvāmi takes place in the month of māci or paṅkuni. The following description is of the festival celebrated on 30.3.1990. From the early afternoon merchants arrive to set up their stalls near the temple area. Among other things, tea, coffee and snacks are sold to the devotees and spectators who stay awake all night. A number of families from surrounding villages bring their clan deities (kula teyvam) to the temple and erect shrines for them. They pile up the earth to form a platform on which they set up small shrines made of woven green palm leaf fronds, open towards the Karuppaṇacuvāmi temple. They transport the god (who is in the form of a picture, a small statue or a weapon etc.) in a box, and when the shrine is finished, they place him in the shrine together with the usual pūjā articles. They also bring with them cooking utensils, pots, fire wood and food. In the temple compound, along the northern wall, an Ācāri family has set up a shrine for the god Vīrapattiraṅ; a bit further away, towards the entrance, there is a temporary shrine for Camayaṅ. Outside the temple, north of the entrance and

⁴⁴ See Chapter I.3.

against the eastern temple wall, are two more shrines to Camayan. Northeast of the temple three shareholders (paṅkāḷi), calling themselves Cērvai (usually a sub-caste of Maṛavar), set up separate shrines for their god Akkiṇi Vīrapattiraṅ. A quarrel apparently led them to 'divide' the deity. Facing these shrines and south of the Karuppaṇacuvāmi temple is a shrine for Iruḷappaṅ, and facing the entrance of the Karuppaṇacuvāmi temple is the permanent new brick shrine of Iraṇiyaṅ. Iraṇiyaṅ and Iruḷappaṅ are gods of Dalits. At each festival the same families put up the shrines of their deities; this is a hereditary right.

In the center of a large, bare area in front of the temple is a cement post consisting of two parts, each a bit larger than the height of a man, one sitting on top of the other, the top one more slender than the bottom one. This post is called 'kaḷari maram' which can be translated as 'arena post'. The word 'kaḷari' has various meanings, among them: battlefield, barren ground, a place for performances, an arena; but the informants (the priest, the Kōṭaṅki and other cāmiyāṭis) defined it as 'the place where the cāmiyāṭis dance'. Four ropes, decorated with bundles of margosa leaves, extend in four different directions from the kaḷari maram to the periphery of the square.

The ceremonies of the festival begin around eight o'clock at night. The space in front of the temple around the kaḷari maram is crowded with hardly a space left for latecomers. The Kōṭaṅki, who is the cāmiyāṭi of Karuppaṇacuvāmi, appears for his first festival performance with a naked upper body, a vēṣṭi tied around his hips and jasmin flowers in his hair gathered at the back. He wears his traditional caste earrings and carries in his right hand an arivaḷ and in his left a wooden club painted in many colors. His face is clean-shaven (as is the face of the Iraṇiyaṅ dancer). There are two explanations for his female role: 1. he represents the girl who discovered Karuppaṇacuvāmi in the pond after his long voyage on the river and 2. he is Karuppaṇacuvāmi who, in return for a place in the village, had to cut off his moustache and wear flowers by order of Oṅṭi Viraṅ. First the women of the various clan groups dance in front of Karuppaṇacuvāmi carrying on their heads the brass or clay pots in which the poṅkal rice will be cooked later. Then Karuppaṇacuvāmi cāmiyāṭi (i. e., the Kōṭaṅki) dances in front of the main god. Tamukku and tavil drums provide the rhythm. After the dance, he follows a person with a torch (a trident on which burn balls of cloth soaked in oil) who leads him to the front of each shrine set up for the festival, where he continues his dance and traces with his arivaḷ a line in front of the shrine. At the place of this line the owners of the shrines dig a hole, make a fire and boil rice in the pots with which the women have previously danced.

Preparing the poṅkal rice in front of each shrine, setting up the other items for the pūjā, getting dressed for the dance around the kaḷari maram

takes nearly four hours. When all is ready, the poṅkal pots are taken from the fire and placed inside the shrines. Then there is a pūjā for all the deities present.

All the cāmiyāṭis, i. e., all those who dance a deity, stand ready in front of their respective shrines. They have tied a vēṣṭi of twenty-two yards (muḷam) around their lower body fastening it around their waist with a white or black cloth which, hanging between their legs and tied at the back, pulls the vēṣṭi up to knees-height. Their upper bodies are liberally smeared with sandal paste, and some of the cāmiyāṭis have draped around their chests a vēṣṭi gathered lengthwise and tied cross-wise in the front and back. On the head the cāmiyāṭis wear a black or red kerchief with a golden border. On their wrists they wear silver bangles (protective bangles, 'kāppu'), and around their ankles they have tied ankle-bands covered with small bells. In their hands they carry a club, arivāḷ or vaḷaitaṭi (a kind of boomerang that used to be employed for hunting). The sharp weapons are topped with a lime. Many flower garlands hang around the necks of the cāmiyāṭis. The Kōṭaṅki now wears the same dress as the other cāmiyāṭis; on his head he has a black kerchief, a broad flower garland covers his entire chest.

The Kōṭaṅki (Karuppaṇacuvāmi's cāmiyāṭi) goes from shrine to shrine, dances in front of the cāmiyāṭis until they too dance, possessed by their deities, and then leads them to the kaḷari maram. At the kaḷari maram the cāmiyāṭi of Oṇṭi Viraṇ receives the first garland, signifying first respect (mutal mariyātai). He then offers a garland to Karuppaṇacuvāmi, who in turn offers a garland to Oṇṭi Viraṇ. The latter returns to his temple; he does not participate in the dance around the kaḷari maram. Karuppaṇacuvāmi and the other deities (cāmiyāṭis) then dance around the kaḷari maram until the first signs of dawn appear on the horizon. During the whole night devotees offer garlands to Karuppaṇacuvāmi and the other dancers. The dancers take them off right away and hand them to attendants who drape them around the kaḷari maram until it is entirely covered. A band consisting of tavil and tamukku drums and a clarinet-type instrument provides the music and rhythm for the dance. The cāmiyāṭis dance in small groups; they stand side by side, take hopping steps forwards and backwards, turn ninety degrees, repeat the same movements and so on. A group of cāmiyāṭi women dance as well, among them is the cāmiyāṭi of Pattirakāḷi (she is the wife of the priest), Iruḷāyi Ammaṇ and others who have come with one of the temporary gods; however, their role is subordinate to the male cāmiyāṭis. At about four-thirty in the morning the dance is interrupted for a mock fight between the cāmiyāṭis of Karuppaṇacuvāmi and Camayaṇ. The two dancers face each other, charge with their weapons raised, retreat, charge again. This they do a few times. It is supposed to represent a fight between the two

gods: when Karuppaṇacuvāmi arrived in the village, Camayaṇ, who was already established there, challenged him to a fight. After the mock fight the dancing continues.

At the break of dawn the dancing stops and the Kōṭaṅki stands on an arivāḷ, then makes predictions. A few men hold the arivāḷ ready, and with much difficulty the Kōṭaṅki places his feet on the blade and stands upright, his arms raised above his head in a gesture of worship. Then he says the 'aruḷ vāḅku', the god's prediction, into the ears of the village officer who then announces it to the villagers. During the rule of the Rājā of Civakaṅkai (Sivaganga), it was the king who received the god's sacred word. The prediction is about agriculture; the god says e. g.,: 'There will be rain in the month of cittirai. Red and white seeds will do well; black seeds are to be avoided.' Devotees are then allowed to ask Karuppaṇacuvāmi (the Kōṭaṅki) questions, and while they crowd around him, the sacrificial goats are readied. The first goat that is sacrificed is against the evil eye, to prevent any mishap. The second goat, entirely black, is offered to Karuppaṇacuvāmi, the third, also black, to Camayaṇ and the fourth, a brown one ('cemmaṅṅi kaṭā' can mean male goat or sheep) to Iraṇiyaṇ. With one stroke the animal is beheaded and the cāmiyāṭi drinks a bit of the blood that flows from the animal's neck. The cāmiyāṭis call this blood milk 'pāl'. While this happens, the devotees tear the garlands from the kaḷari maram and take them home; they believe that they bring good fortune, health, fertility. Iraṇiyaṇ meanwhile ties the cleaned intestines of the sacrificed animal crosswise over his chest and waits to walk over a small fire. Later, when we asked, why he did this, the cāmiyāṭi answered: 'It is to prove to Karuppaṇacuvāmi that I am Iraṇiyaṇ, the god who has come from Maturai.' According to the informants, Karuppaṇacuvāmi went to see the goddess Mīnākṣī in Maturai. Maturai Vīraṇ barred his way, but after Karuppaṇacuvāmi promised him a poṅkal offering, he let him enter. Here one informant commented that Karuppaṇacuvāmi fled as soon as he saw the Brahman priests. Informants' identification of Iraṇiyaṇ with Maturai Vīraṇ, however, does not help to explain the intestines. Iraṇiyaṇ is possibly one of the two Asuras Hiranyaḅṣa or Hiranyaḅśipu, but whether the episode of Narasiṅha pulling out the intestines from the body of Hiranyaḅśipu has anything to do with Iraṇiyaṇ's peculiar decoration, none of the informants could confirm. Structurally it would make sense since Karuppar is a form of Viṣṅu and Iraṇiyaṇ, as the deity facing Karuppar, the sacrifice; in other words, Iraṇiyaṇ/Hiranyaḅśipu is the devotee/sacrifice of Karuppar/Viṣṅu.

Before Iraṇiyaṇ begins his small ceremony, the sun has come up. The kaḷari maram stands naked, the marigolds strewn on the ground around it seem like a golden reflection of the first sun rays; devotees have left; the

cāmiyāṭis and their families have packed up their goods and loaded them onto the bullock carts; devotees, who have come from far away places to worship their family deity (Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi), offer a last prayer at the temple; special busses, filled to the last space, leave the site. The festival has been a success.

A few things need to be emphasized with regard to this festival. Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi is the most important god in this festival; he leads the other cāmiyāṭis to the kaḷari maram; he gives them the power to dance, so to speak; he is the first god to receive a goat offering. It should be noted that Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi receives only vegetarian offerings inside his shrine. When Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi came to this village, he had to contend with two rivals: Camayaṇ and Oṇṭi Vīraṇ. Oṇṭi Vīraṇ allowed Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi to stay in the village; however, the latter had to show his subordination by cutting off his moustache etc. Camayaṇ (who has a permanent place under the banyan tree near the temple) challenged Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi to a fight and obviously lost. This fight is enacted during the festival. Camayaṇ is second in the hierarchy of goat sacrifices, after Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi and before Iraṇiyaṇ. (Camayaṇ's cāmiyāṭi is a Cērvai.) Iraṇiyaṇ, the god who came later than Karuppaṇacuṁvāmi, is the third to receive a goat. His permanent shrine faces the entrance of the temple, the way flagstaff and altar do, which means that he is servant/devotee/sacrifice of the main deity.

Aiyaṇār

We have mentioned above that the festival patterns change from area to area. This is also true of the festival of Aiyaṇār, a god we find in practically all parts of Tamilnadu. While the dedication of hundreds of clay horses for the god is prevalent in the central and eastern districts (Sivaganga, Maturai, Dindigul, Pudukkottai), the celebration in other districts does not include such offerings or involves only a few votive statues. In some districts, e. g., Cuddalore and Viluppuram, the festival of Aiyaṇār is celebrated together with that of the other deities in the village, and this can mean that the mobile statue of Aiyaṇār (urcava mūrṭti) is carried in procession through the village together with the other deities (e. g., Vināyakar, Draupadī, Māriyammaṇ). In many temples the festival simply consists of food offerings and pūjā. What seems common in all temples, however, is the division of the offerings into vegetarian and non-vegetarian, the vegetarian offerings to Aiyaṇār always preceding the meat offerings to his guardians. The time of the festival varies considerably: the months of tai, māci, paṅkuṇi, cittirai and vaikāci were mentioned (Jan. to May/June), as does the length of the festival: from one to ten

days. In the Tirunelveli district paṅkuni uttiram (uttiram is the twelfth lunar asterism) is the day on which many temples celebrate Aiyaṅār/Śāstā's festival – the day is believed to be the god's birthday (Kōpālacamuttiram). Dancing the deities, possession, dedication of votive offerings and in some areas the carrying of kāvaṭi and karakam are important features of the Aiyaṅār festival.

Below we first shall describe the dedication of horses, the 'kutirai eṭuppu', a ritual confined mainly to the Aiyaṅār festival of the Madurai, Dindigul, Sivaganga, and Pudukkottai districts and shall then have a short look at the Aiyaṅār festivals of the Cuddalore/Viluppuram districts. Detailed descriptions of other Aiyaṅār festivals are in Muttaiyā for Madurai, Reiniche for Tirunelveli and Dirks for Pudukkottai.⁴⁵

The term 'kutirai eṭuppu' or 'puravi eṭuppu' ('taking up or carrying of horses') appears as heading on the notice inviting people to the Aiyaṅār festival; the term encompasses more than just the dedication of the horses, it includes the dedication of new statues of deities and basically signifies the entire festival. Large old clay (terra cotta) horses reaching a height of two meters and more, wonderfully molded and with intricate decorations can still be admired in a few temples (e. g., in Kārkuṭal, Cuddalore and in some villages of the Pudukkottai district). Today's clay horses tend to be smaller and more colorful. Aiyaṅār, however, is not the only god to whom horses are dedicated; we find horses in temples of Karuppar, Vēṭiyappar and other gods, and we even find them in temples dedicated to the goddess. Maturai Viraṅ is depicted atop a horse and Muṇiyāṅṭi of Alaṅkanallūr and Cōṇai of Pāppākkuṭi (Madurai), both main deities, sit on a horse. The horse denotes status, strength, power and, very broadly speaking, expresses a deity's martial and royal qualities. In some temples in the Cuddalore, Viluppuram and Coimbatore districts a live horse conveys the deities (god or goddess) from one place to another. Nowhere in Tamilnadu, however, do we find as many clay horses crowding the temple compound as in the Madurai and Sivaganga areas, and nowhere but there does the size of the horse and rider, Karuppar on a big brown horse and Aiyaṅār on an equally large white horse, catch the eye of the distant traveler.

The festival of Aiyaṅār (if the temple is common) is decided upon by the entire village. After the decision has been taken, the god sometimes is consulted as well; he will answer e. g., through the chirping of a lizard or by causing a flower to fall from his statue. With a symbolic handful of earth from the temple the priest requests the potter (Vēḷār) to make the necessary statues. The temple pays for the statues of the deities and some of the horses (depending on the money available); the devotee commis-

⁴⁵ *Nāṭṭuppurac caṭāṅkukaḷum maṇita uravukaḷum* (I. Muttaiyā 1996); Reiniche 1979: 113 ff.; Dirks 1989: 300 ff.

sions his/her own votive offerings and pays for them. When in 1990 in A. Vallāḷapaṭṭi (Madurai) the 'puravi eṭuppu' festival was celebrated after an interval of twenty years, devotees commissioned 800 clay horses. Thirty-five potters worked on them for three months. Depending on its size, a horse costs between 50 and 300 Rupees. The potters also fashion the statues of the deities and of other items, be they animals or parts of the human body (legs, arms, eyes etc. offered in return for the healing of an illness). The statues are whitewashed and then painted, colors and designs vary.

The festival begins with the hoisting of the flag (koṭi) and ends with the lowering of the flag. The flag can be a piece of cloth on which has been painted the deity's vehicle or some other symbol, it can be a bamboo pole with flowers or some other pole, and the flagstaff can be temporary or permanent. After the flag ceremony the participants (priests, cāmiyāṭi) receive a protective bracelet (kāppu). Some villages will call a Brahman priest to decorate the deities, especially the urcava statues, if there is to be a procession. If the temple is far from the village, the deities (Aiyaṅār and his consorts and some guardians) are established in a temporary shed or tent on the main village square. The new statues of deities, horses and other votive offerings are brought to the square and decorated with vēṣṭis, saris, lunghis, flower garlands. Over a padding of straw tied to the sides of the larger statues, two wooden poles are fastened with which the statues can be carried. The smaller statues are carried on the head or shoulder of a person. Devotees decorate their votive offerings themselves with flowers, pieces of cloth, balloons, pin-wheels, mirrors etc. In A. Vellāḷapaṭṭi they draped colorful saris or lunghis around the heads and over the backs of the votive horses.⁴⁶ When everything is ready, the cāmiyāṭi will dance. They are dressed in short pants that have an appliqué design, wear garlands around their necks, bells around ankles and perhaps around their waists and they carry as weapons the arivāḷ, a stick or club, a whip. After the dancing, the priest performs a pūjā to the deities and all the votive statues, but if there are too many votive statues, the devotees' family priests will do the pūjā to them. The clay statues are then carried at a fast pace to the temple, where their eyes are opened and where they receive a place in front of the old statues. A feast may follow.

The orchestra consisting of drums and wind-instruments plays at important moments (when the cāmiyāṭis get possessed, at pūjā time, during the procession). Some villages may hire professional karakam dancers – they dance balancing a decorated pot on their heads and entertain, but don't otherwise participate in the rituals.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See plate.

⁴⁷ On the Aiyaṅār festival in the Madurai district see also Inglis 1980: 26 ff.

In Maṅakkāṭṭūr the Aiyaṅār festival took place right after the festival for Muttālamman. While for the goddess a number of goats were sacrificed, there were no animal sacrifices during the ‘puravi eṭuppu’ festival, nor were there any cāmiyāṭis. The old priest of Aiyaṅār (Ampalar or Ampalakkārar), dressed in a new vēṣṭi and wearing a red cloth with gold border tied on his head like a turban, did the pūjā to all the new statues of deities. Then he climbed on top of one of the large clay horses. He stood upright on it possessed for a few minutes; then he was handed the pūjā plate, which he raised to the sky, and after a prayer, he sprinkled the statues and the large crowd in front of him with coconut water. As soon as he had descended, the men hoisted the statues onto their heads or shoulders, walked once around the Muttālamman temple (near which the new statues had stood and where the pūjā had taken place) and then hurried towards the road leading to the temple of Aiyaṅār. The old priest’s son, himself a priest, accompanied the new statue of Aiyaṅār. As the ceremonies had been delayed, it was night by the time the procession reached the temple, and it was then rather difficult to perform the last pūjā since the temple had no electricity and was located in the middle of a forest (Karantamalai). We have to remember that the distance between the village and the temple is six kilometers.⁴⁸ Villagers are well equipped for such occasions with matches and flash lights, but the same is not always true of the researcher, who then literally is left in the dark (we did have one flash light but were not certain if the battery would last until we reached the main road).

Many temples cannot afford to have separate festivals for all the deities in the village. In many villages of the Cuddalore/Viluppuram districts Aiyaṅār participates in a general festival at which the common deities of the village go in procession on their respective vehicles or in palanquins. The procession usually excludes Śiva and Viṣṇu, but there will be, for example, Vināyakar, Aiyaṅār, Māriyamman, Celliyamman and Maturai Vīraṅ (Marutāttūr), or, Utaṅṅa Vīraṅ, Vināyakar, Cembaiyaṅār, Murukan, Turkkai (Durgā), Kāttavarāyan (Mutānai); in Vayalūr the festival of Aiyaṅār is celebrated together with that of Celli and Draupadī and the uṛcava idols of these three deities are placed near the field of hot coals (kuṅṅam) across which the devotees will walk (as part of the Draupadī celebration), and in Toravaḷūr the festival of Aiyaṅār is celebrated in the month of cittirai, followed by the festivals of Māriyamman and Draupadī. In this village the uṛcava statue of Aiyaṅār is kept in the Māriyamman temple, and when Aiyaṅār goes in procession through the village at night, he is accompanied by four Brahman priests (Kurukkaḷ) – the priest of Aiyaṅār is a Brahman (Aiyar) even though

⁴⁸ See Chapter I.1.

Aiyaṅār is outside the village, was called a ‘tuṣṭa teyvam’ by the priest and has guardians (Kuḷḷa Karuppu, Periya Karuppu and Patāḷa Karuppu) who receive offerings of goats, chickens and pigs. Aiyaṅār is also worshipped in connection with festivals of those adjoining villages for which he has a guardian function. In some villages of Cuddalore/Viluppuram devotees fulfill their vows to Aiyaṅār by carrying kāvāṭi, by having their tongues pierced with small silver spears, by carrying on their heads large pots decorated with a coconut and flowers and containing milk or water (karakam, kuṭam). Small statues depicting children, dogs, cats, horses, cows etc. are dedicated to Aiyaṅār.

General comments

In each of the festivals the mobile deity-forms (statues, pots, dancers) had functions that the immobile statues would not have been able to ‘perform’: moving from one place to another (e. g., from the priest's house to the temple, from the temple to the shrine of the maidens at the river), gathering and dancing around the post, confronting each other, speaking or communicating divine words, etc. The mobile form brings additional divine power to the stable deity, it can represent more than one deity (as e. g., the pūṅkarakam which functioned for Paṅṭāra Appicci, the goddess and Muṇi), and through the mobile form the deity is able to communicate his/her presence (by taking possession of the dancer). If the stable form of the deity is the center, the mobile deity covers the space from the center to the periphery. This is how we could look at the dancing that the cāmiyāṭis do around the kaḷari maram: the tree (maram) represents the center, the stable aspect of the god, the vertical movement (internalization), while the mobile form of the god in his dance describes the periphery, the circle around it, the outward worship (pradakṣiṇa). We can also see the mobile deity as a link between the sheltered and not easily accessible deity in the shrine and the people, the devotees. Another aspect of the stable/mobile forms is the ability to split the deity into two: one who accepts vegetarian offerings and one who receives animal sacrifices. Karuppaṇacāmi is a case in point: the stable form inside the temple is purely vegetarian while the mobile form, the cāmiyāṭi, drinks the blood from the sacrificial goat. Accommodating both pure and impure aspects of a deity by means of the mobile form (or by a temporary form outside the temple – the stable form in the temple being the vegetarian one) is a very common pattern in folk religion. It is a pattern that coincides nicely with the hierarchic arrangement of the deities in the temple, where the central deity is the pure one and the deities at the periphery are the non-vegetarian ones. At the festival of Paṅṭāra Appicci,

the priest's son got angry because someone else had managed to walk on the nail sandals in front of the Kannimār shrine; this meant that the deity had favored the other person. Rivalries and aiming for a higher ranking in the village hierarchy or for first respect (*mutal mariyātai*) can be played out through the mobile deities or the *cāmiyāṭis*; in fact, village politics plays an important role at festivals: whose deity receives the greatest favors reflects often who has the greatest power in the village. Lastly, mobile deities can claim territory: going out in procession through the village quarters shows that the deity rules over them, and describing a circle around the temple equals the deity's command over the four directions and ultimately over the universe.