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The gods and goddesses that populate the Tamil villages and countryside are rarely called Śiva, Viṣṇu or Pārvatī and yet, they are understood to be forms or aspects of these pan-Hindu deities. Similarly, the rituals performed for the folk deities show traits antagonistic to Brahmanical values and yet, we find in them symbols and myths common to the „high“ Sanskritic tradition. In the present work the author traces patterns and structures that help the reader understand the salient features of Tamil folk Hinduism and its differences to and similarities with the „high“ tradition.

The book has chapters on the arrangement of the folk deities in the temple, the deities' place in the ordered and wild space, their relationship with the pan-Hindu gods and goddesses and chapters on how the devotees connect to the folk deities through myths, rituals and worship. The great diversity and richness of the Indian folk religion and the ever greater assimilation of folk cults into the „high“ tradition are topics that need to be explored in depth. The present book is a contribution towards this goal.

The author studied Indology at Heidelberg University. Presently she teaches Tamil in Switzerland. This is her third book on Tamil folk religion.

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