

The Temples of the Interface:  
A Study of the Relation between Buddhism and Hinduism  
at the Munnesvaram Temples, Sri Lanka.

by

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## ABSTRACT

The two important temples at Munnesvaram, on the west coast of Sri Lanka, are Hindu and are run by Tamil priests. Their patronage is largely Sinhalese Buddhist. They are the context for an examination of the relations between Hinduism and Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka in a period of violent ethnic tension between Tamils and Sinhalese. The thesis falls in two parts. The first deals with the history of the temples in the colonial and post-colonial eras, the history of religious difference, and with a social analysis of the two groups of priests and of the worshippers. This establishes grounds for a consideration of current anthropological debates on hierarchy and on historicity. The second extends the consideration through a detailed analysis of temple design, ritual and worship. The growing popularity of Munnesvaram as a centre for sorcery, where female Hindu deities predominate, is analysed in the context of ethnic hostility, in order to interpret the changing nature of Munnesvaram's religious significance in a labile social environment.

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## PREFACE

The following is a study of a Tamil Hindu temple complex on the west coast of Sri Lanka that is patronised predominantly by Sinhalese Buddhists. To the Western outsider, it may seem quite incongruous that Buddhists attend Hindu temples and more especially that Sinhalese Buddhists would attend a Tamil Hindu temple when these two ethnic groups have been violently opposed to each other, particularly in the last decade. The contemporary situation in Sri Lanka has certain parallels with Northern Ireland and Cyprus: two opposed ethnic groups struggling to cohabit under a government that defers to one group more than the other, with occupying armies from interested outsider countries exerting their influence. Yet the tensions between Catholic and Protestant Irish, or Christian and Muslim Cypriot, at the level of actual religious practice are revealed most clearly as exclusive. In Sri Lanka, particularly at the Munnesvaram temples, Sinhalese Buddhists patronise Tamil Hindu run temples. Moreover, their attendance has been growing as the 1980's proceeded and the climate of unrest worsened.

The following study focuses on the religious dimensions of the unrest in the context of the Munnesvaram temples, a group of five temples near the port town of Chilaw, eighty kilometres north of Colombo. It is a study of religious change, of the relationship between contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism and Tamil Hinduism as this relationship manifests as the religious significance of the Munnesvaram temples. I



concentrate on history, the discursive fields with which history is interpreted, and on religious practice as the expression, often oblique, refracted and obscure, of these interpretations.

As with many anthropologists, my thesis is not at all what I set out to do. In 1983, interested in a possible study of Romanesque architecture and iconography in relation to the nature of symbols, but weary of twenty years of Christianity, I approached Bruce Kapferer with the idea of studying Hindu temples. My ruminations over which part of India I would go to were cut short by Bruce's enthusiastic endorsement which included, almost as a fait accompli, the idea that I would conduct research in Sri Lanka. He even suggested the Munnesvaram temple, but as soon as I learnt that the area was heavily populated by Roman Catholics, and anxious to have some say in my research, I stated that I would work in the Eastern Province, eventually choosing to go to the town of Batticaloa.

I arrived in Batticaloa District in July 1984 and moved into the Batticaloa University College for the next nine months. I extend my gratitude to the staff and students of that time, especially the Director, Professor Tawney Rajaratnam, for their friendship and hospitality under what proved to be trying circumstances for all of us.

As the site for the first fieldwork of a young twenty-two year old anthropologist, Batticaloa was difficult.

Assuming that the silence and indifference of many people was a cultural trait, I struggled to collect information about temples, temple festivals, and the goddess Kannagi Amman cult not found elsewhere in Tamil Sri Lanka. My language skills improved slowly, though I never mastered Tamil. But the cold indifference was more the result of fear. The Sinhalese army and air force were conspicuous and dangerously nervous, an army of occupation that had not left home; the police stations were modified to withstand armed attack; Israeli-trained police commandos were deployed; police informants were shot and strung from lamp-posts by Tamil militants; young men and women disappeared; curfews were enforced. It was twelve months after the bloody island-wide riots of July 1983 when more than 2,000 Tamils perished in violence implicitly and explicitly supported by the Sri Lankan government.

Naively I persevered; but after witnessing the assassination of a man I knew, being held at gun-point while my room was searched, and seeing the Mossad-style burning of a village that happened to have been the site of a confrontation between police and militants, all in the space of ten days, I deserted my field area. Just over a month later, having been persuaded not to give the whole thing up, I began work at Munnesvaram, Bruce Kapferer's suggested field-site all along. Chilaw and Munnesvaram could not have been more different. Without such a climate of fear, people were more open, there were hardly any curfews, and I hardly ever saw a soldier. On the other side, it was a completely new piece of research and I had

to struggle to see its relevance, and the relevance of anthropology generally, given my past experiences.

Doubtless these experiences sensitised me, because I was stunned to find that almost nine out of every ten temple worshippers my new assistant, Rasiah Pathmajothy, and I interviewed, were Sinhalese and nearly all of them were Buddhists; yet they were worshipping in temples that were clearly Hindu in both design and in the ritual performances by their Tamil priests. Additionally, I began working in a nearby Tamil village that was surrounded by Sinhalese villages. My research began to assume a cathartic nature: I felt that if I could unravel the complexity of Munnesvaram, I might begin to understand better what was happening in Sri Lanka. The following is my attempt to do so.

I was supported in my initial research by a Commonwealth of Australia Postgraduate Research Award which I gave up when I transferred to University College London. At U.C.L. I was helped by a Dean's Scholarship and I received twelve months funding from the Wenner-Gren Foundation. The final production costs were met by a Radcliffe-Brown award of £300. I thank all of the bodies involved for their support.

I extend here my thanks to the priests of the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples who both tolerated my presence and patiently answered my questions. To the other temple workers I also express my thanks. In the village of Maradankulam I was always welcome and I especially single out Canagaratnam and Rajaratnam who

helped me with my questions and surveys. Pathmajothy, my assistant, though more often a hindrance than a help, shared most of the work with me.

Elsewhere in Sri Lanka, I was always welcome in the home and intellectual environment of Mahen Viathanathan as well as Serena Tennekoon. Serena, who died in 1989, is sadly missed. I also thank I.V. Edirisinghe and the late Newton Gunasinghe of the Sociology Dept. of Colombo University for their hospitality and support.

At University College I benefited from the intellectual climate and single out for special thanks, Llyn Smith, Nancy Russell, Peter Flügel, Alan Abrahamson, Rob Jones and Eli Collis. Jadran Mimica, who supervised my honours thesis in Adelaide, listened critically to all my ideas when he taught at U.C.L.. Bert Van Den Hoek at Leiden University gave critical comments on Chapter 7. While struggling to survive in London I was supported by my friends and I particularly want to thank Craig Carter who gave me a roof and a bed when Waterloo Bridge was beckoning.

The final draft of this work was written while I was in my first year as a tutor in anthropology at the University of Melbourne. To my colleagues Peter Koepping, Douglas Lewis and Roger Just, as well as Nils Bubandt, and to my students, I express my thanks.

I have throughout been supported, encouraged, cajoled and listened to by Bruce Kapferer and my gratitude is

enormous. Like other anthropologists working in Sri Lanka, Bruce has tackled the modern tragedy, but he stands head and shoulders above all of them for his insights and rigour. One could not ask for a better supervisor. Additionally, I received the friendship, good humour and advice of Bruce's long-time assistant and friend Chandra Vitharana.

My final and greatest thanks are to my parents Neil and Erina who have always allowed me to follow my interests and more than that have given emotional and financial support. With love, respect and gratitude, I dedicate this work to them.

\*\*\*

#### Note on Transliteration

I have strived for a consistent transliteration throughout, following in part Winslow's English-Tamil Dictionary 3rd Edition, Reprinted 1984, and A.A. Macdonell's A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary, Reprinted 1976, as well as other scholars. Diacritical marks were added manually.

## Chapter 1, Introduction

Throughout the twentieth century, Sri Lanka has experienced periods of ethnic conflict between all of its major ethnic groups. Since independence from Britain in 1948, ethnic tensions have intensified and throughout the 1980's, the country has experienced bloody civil war. The major schism lies between the Sinhalese and Tamils. As this tension has developed so has the Sinhalese presence at the Tamil Hindu Munnesvaram temples grown. In the twelve months from the Hindu and Buddhist New Year in 1985, approximately 88% of the patronage of the Munnesvaram temple complex were Sinhalese and more than 90% of them were Buddhist (see Table 1).

Table 1, The Munnesvaram Patronage<sup>1</sup>

<u>Ethnic Group &amp; Religion</u>	<u>% (% of Population)</u> <sup>2</sup>	
Sinhalese Buddhist	82	69
" Christian	6	4
Tamil Hindu	11	16
" Christian	2	3
Muslim	-	7
Unspecified	-	1

The study aims to understand the significance of the Munnesvaram temples for Sri Lankans and to discuss the relationship between the Hindu and Buddhist religions as several facets of this relationship are revealed in the contemporary Sri Lankan context. I outline both the temples' specific qualities of history, ritual and myth, and their more general qualities as Hindu temples.

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic society in which identity is determined both linguistically and religiously. The

religions Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity are practised and the first three religions form the basis of ethnic groupings. Sinhala and Tamil are the principal languages and they further delimit ethnicity. The largest ethnic group is the Sinhalese at 74% of the population of roughly sixteen million, Tamils comprise the next largest group at 18%, and the rest of the population is made up of Muslims (7%) and Eurasians (Census Reports 1981). Tamil is spoken by Muslims even in the Sinhalese areas.

Most Sinhalese are Buddhists (94% in 1981) and most Tamils Hindu (86% in 1981). Sinhalese practise forms of Theravada Buddhism which include deity cults with ostensibly Hindu influences that are nonetheless tempered and modified in their Buddhist setting. For example, the Hindu god, Viśnu (The Preserver) is worshipped in Sinhalese Buddhism as the protector of that religion. The attendance at Hindu deity temples run by Tamil priests is in addition to Buddhist deity worship and this is the form of worship undertaken at Munnesvaram, where the major deities are the goddess Ambal, consort of Śiva, and her ferocious demonic form, Bathrakali. The priests of the Ambal temple are Brahmin kurukkals, those of the Bathrakali temple are non-Brahmin pūsāris. The other three temples have far less importance to worshippers and accordingly they receive less attention in this work.

Currently, Sinhalese Buddhism is the de facto state religion, though at times in the recent past its position has been officially recognised. Other Sinhalese are

Christian, mainly Roman Catholic, as are other Tamils.

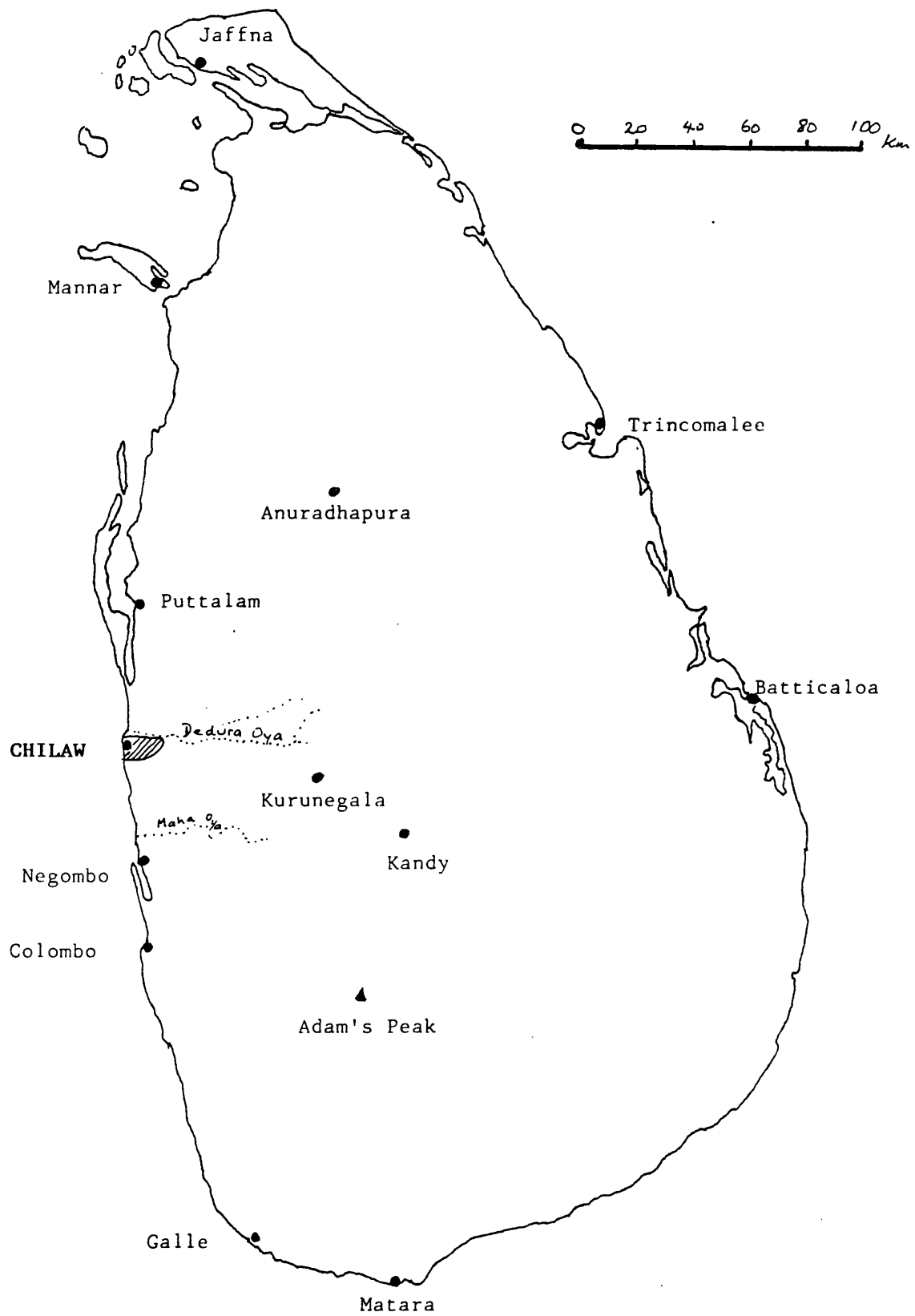
### The Setting

The Munnesvaram complex consists of five temples located in a settlement of about two hundred houses some two kilometres east of the port town of Chilaw, eighty kilometres north of Colombo on Sri Lanka's north-west coast (see Map 1). The five temples in the Munnesvaram complex are 1) the Munnesvaram temple, a Śaivite temple run by Brahmin priests; 2) the Bathrakali temple owned and run by Tamil non-Brahmins; 3) the Pillaiyar temple also run by Tamil non-Brahmins, though its building is owned by the Munnesvaram Brahmins; 4) the Pusparamaya Pansala, a Buddhist temple and school administered by a Buddhist monk; and 5) the Aiyanyake temple, a Buddhist deity temple for the local guardian god Aiyanyake, a Buddhist form of the Hindu god Aiyandar. This last temple is owned and run by a Sinhalese Buddhist deity priest (kapurāla). Map 2 shows the location of the temples in the village.

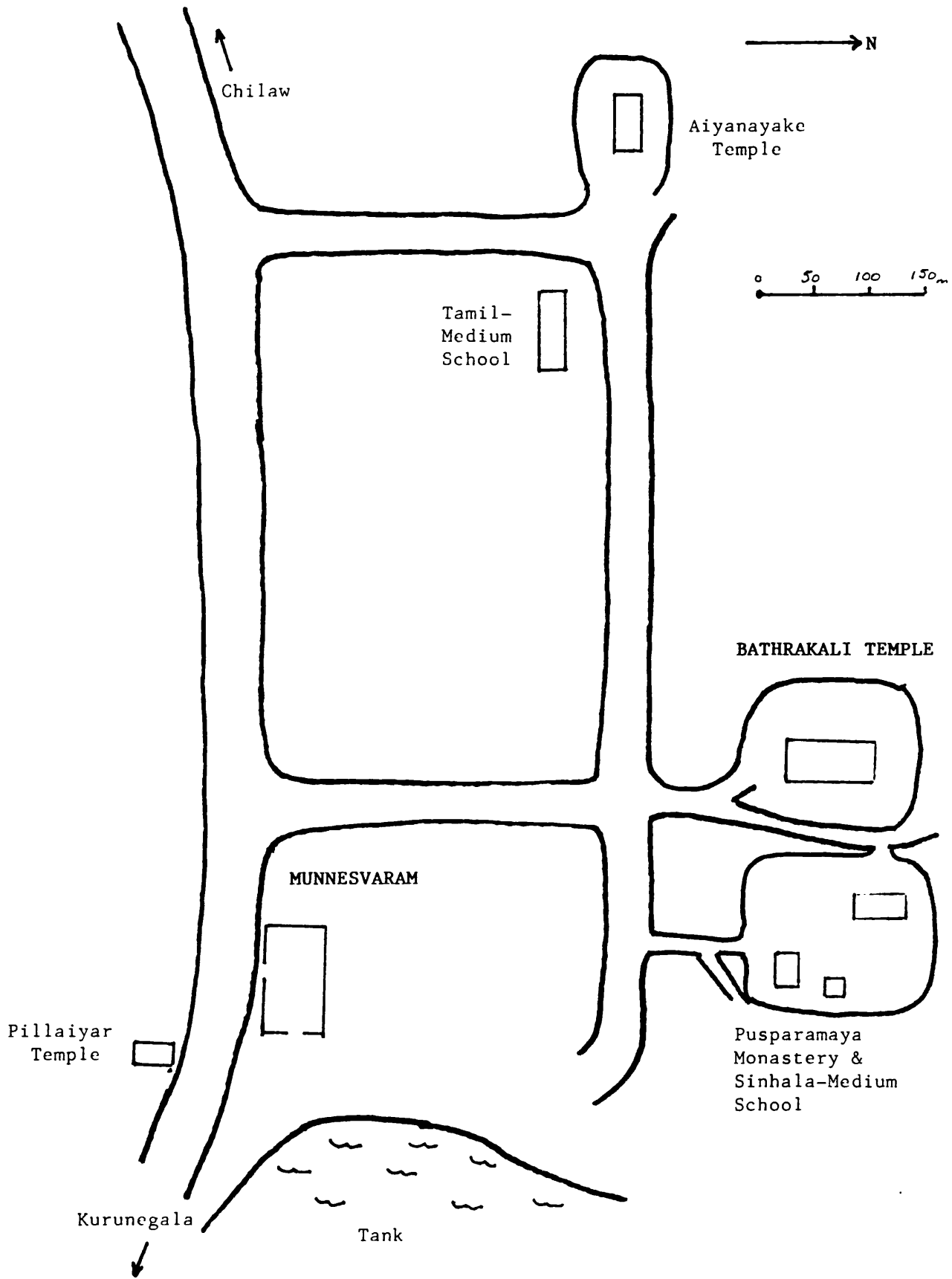
Munnesvaram village, with a population of less than 500, stands on the edge of the Munnesvaram tank, the waters of which feed the paddy fields on three sides of the village. A paved road connects Chilaw to Munnesvaram and continues east through several small market towns eventually reaching the large town of Kurunegala, one of the Sinhalese capitals in the thirteenth century. About thirty kilometres from Munnesvaram, the road passes through the ancient capital, Panduvasnuwara, the first capital of the Sinhalese state.



Map 1: Sri Lanka, Showing Research Area



Map 2: Munnesvaram, Showing the Location of Temples



Proximity to historic capitals indicates the links the area has had with the Sri Lankan hydraulic state. Small irrigation tanks of various ages and in various states of repair are dotted around the countryside. Where irrigation has ceased, land is given over to chena (swidden) cultivation but more especially to coconut cultivation. Coconut is the dominant crop in the area and the history of its intensive cultivation is intrinsic to the modern history of Munnesvaram. Some Munnesvaram village inhabitants engage in both coconut and rice cultivation; but the majority derive their incomes directly and indirectly through the Munnesvaram temples.

Most of the Munnesvaram patronage come from places more than two hours drive away, especially from the dense area of settlement in and around the capital city of Colombo. But Munnesvaram is not a pilgrimage centre like the temple complex at Kataragama in the south of the island. No value, in the sense of acquiring religious merit (pin), is attached to the actual journey to Munnesvaram by Sinhalese Buddhists. Kataragama, on the other hand, has this quality for both Tamils and Sinhalese who annually make the journey to the remote jungle temple, often on foot. Indeed, in these days of motor vehicles, many still walk the last dozen or so miles to the temple as a devotional act. Not so at Munnesvaram because the reasons for Buddhists going there do not relate to the acquisition of merit rather than the performance of sorcery. Additionally, whereas Kataragama has been overlaid with a strong Sinhalese Buddhist character, Munnesvaram is an overtly Tamil Hindu

temple complex.

Buddhist pilgrimage centres are dotted throughout Sri Lanka and Sinhalese Buddhists derive merit from visiting them. The sites specifically relate to points of contact between the Buddha and the country, either directly in the places where the Buddha is understood to have visited the country, such as at Mahiyangana and Sri Pada (Adam's Peak), or at places linked to relics of his life, such as the sacred bo tree at Anuradhapura, a sapling of the tree under which he attained enlightenment, or the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy. Other sites specifically relate to the traditional Buddhist state. Panduvasnuwara, close by Munnesvaram, is the symbolic centre for Vijaya, the mythical founder of the Sinhalese state, and for his nephew Panduvasdeva. Kataragama is for King Dutugemunu the vanquisher of the Tamil Elara. At some of these places, such as Sri Pada and Kataragama, a Hindu element is also present; but it is subordinate to the Buddhist element. Not so at Munnesvaram where Hinduism is the dominant religion.

The following study, therefore, does not exhaust the contexts of Hindu/Buddhist interaction in Sri Lanka<sup>3</sup>. Rather it analyses the specific phenomenon of Buddhists attending an overtly Hindu temple complex, without deriving merit from doing so. More precisely, they attend Munnesvaram especially to establish links with malevolent cosmic forces.

Hinduism & Buddhism, A History of Interaction

A temple such as Munnesvaram reveals that Hinduism and Buddhism are in a continual dialogue with each other as a function of both their histories and more especially of their mutually derivative forms. These forms derive primarily from a shared structure, a shared logic of symbolic ordering<sup>4</sup>. In emphasising structure, generalisations about Hinduism and Buddhism are possible, though it must be noted from the outset that Hinduism and Buddhism in contemporary Sri Lanka, are more precisely, particular forms of two highly diverse world religions. A temple such as Munnesvaram constitutes a field of interaction between certain forms and in doing so it reveals general principles of wider application. I shall, then, commence with a general discussion of the history of the two religions.

Hinduism and Buddhism belong to the complex of South Asian religions explicitly articulating ideas of hierarchy and renunciation (Dumont 1980, 1986a; Tambiah 1976; Kapferer 1983, 1988; Heesterman 1985). As Dumont argues, Vedic Hinduism became a more unified religion after the influence of the renunciatory religions, Buddhism and Jainism (see Basham 1982). Both Buddhism and Jainism function within the logic of Hinduism: the logic of hierarchy and its negation - "ultramundaneity" (Dumont 1980:273). They do so, firstly, through retention of the concepts of transmigration and the "moral determinism governing the retribution of action" (ibid:276), or karma, and, secondly, in emphasising the place of the renouncer,

for whom in Hinduism "a special kind of sacredness is reserved" (ibid:279). Buddhism and Jainism, therefore, do not make a radical departure from Vedic Hinduism; but they do influence Hinduism's development (see Zimmer 1962).

All the post-Buddhist-and-Jain religious movements in Hinduism have had renouncer protagonists, such as the authors of the later Upanishads (Dumont ibid:276-277), or have celebrated being in the world explicitly relative to the values of renunciation, such as in Tantrism and in Bhaktism (ibid:278-284). Dumont's point is that in reconquering India from Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism was altered and given greater coherence in relation to the strict formulations Buddhism and Jainism made concerning renunciation.

In other words, Hinduism, which seems to be historically prior to Buddhism and Jainism, is coexistent and even posterior to them in the forms that we see it. This includes at such places as Munnesvaram where the influences of Hindu Bhaktism and even more recent movements such as Saiva Siddhanta are evident.

Conversely, early Buddhism explicitly reacted to Brahmanic Hinduism. Tambiah (1976) discusses this reaction in terms of the Vedic Hindu origin myth and the reactionary myth of the Great Elect (Mahasammatta). In the Vedic myth, the varnas, or categories of men, are created as the world is created from the self-sacrifice of the Cosmic Man, Purusa. The Brahman (Priest) varna is pre-eminent over the

Kshatriya (Warrior/King) varna. In the Mahasammatta myth, on the other hand, humans are equal when the world is created and the force of their actions generates difference. That is, through greed and hoarding (private property), suffering is caused. In response to this, the humans elect the best among them to be king. Mahasammatta "is both elective and elect" because he is at once chosen and the only suitable candidate (ibid:13). He is elective because he embodies the ideals of the renouncer; he is the only true individual among men. Following his installation, the varna categories appear. Society develops from the State. What the anti-Brahmanic Buddhist reactionaries valued is personal agency above the notion that one's status was determined at the creation of the world (see also Gombrich 1988:68).

Tambiah says of this anti-Brahmanical reaction in early Buddhism that it is not only the foundation of Buddhism and in particular the Buddhist theory of the state, but it also constitutes a continuous referent for the re-articulation of these ideas in twentieth century Thai Buddhism and the Thai polity (ibid:5). That is, the historical thread described by Tambiah is also potent in Buddhist historicism and historiography; in the history modern Thai Buddhists perceive and which chroniclers write. The texts that deal with these issues thus have an immediacy beyond their historical location because the Buddhist reaction transcends a simple historical priority and becomes the source of a "periodic regeneration" of the whole system, to use Eliade's (1989:75) term. A similar argument is

proposed by Kapferer (1988) for the Sinhalese Buddhist case. Kapferer determines this quality to be ontologically fundamental to Sinhalese Buddhism.

Kapferer, however, emphasises how certain ideas derive significance in particular historical circumstances. He employs an abstract distinction between pre-reflective modes of consciousness bearing certain orientations to the world (ontologies), and the expression of these ontologies in ideas and in the systematic organisation of these ideas as ideologies. Ideas and ideologies are what we see, ontologies are determined in analysis. The distinction is, therefore, analytical. Importantly, ideas and especially ideologies are actively in the world, in social action (ibid:79-84). The ontologies that underlie them become ideologically active in particular historical circumstances such as in modern Sri Lankan nationalism. Hence, the Buddhist historiography Tambiah identifies is, for Kapferer, not simply a transcendental structural determinant, but a structure rendered potent in modern nationalism. The religious significance of the Hindu Munnesvaram temples for Sinhalese Buddhists has emerged in this field.

What Dumont, Tambiah and Kapferer argue is that Buddhism never simply departed from its Hindu origins in the manner of an evolutionary speciation. Rather, it is in continual dialogue with Brahmanic Hinduism. On the other side, contemporary Hinduism is in continual dialogue with renunciatory religions like Buddhism. Hinduism did not



simply pursue its own course of development following the renunciatory schism, because no actual schism took place. This suggests that the history of these religions should not be conceptualised in an evolutionary linear manner. Instead it seems more apposite, again following Eliade, to employ a notion of an "eternal return". That is, to understand the nature of a Buddhist/Hindu interaction it is necessary to examine the particular historical consciousness that each religion encodes at particular moments in their development. I propose to do so in light of a discussion of hierarchy, because, as Dumont, Tambiah and Kapferer argue, albeit differently, Hinduism and Buddhism are hierarchical systems.

### Hierarchy

For Dumont, hierarchy is a universal phenomenon that derives an explicit articulation from the religious values of Indian society; totalising values based on a principle of negation. In particular, hierarchy is evident in the varna conception as this conception embodies "the principle by which the elements of the whole are ranked in relation to the whole" (ibid:66). The hierarchy of varnas is "a series of successive dichotomies or inclusions" (ibid:67): the Brahman encompasses the Kshatriya who in turn encompasses the Vaishya and the Shudra (ibid). They all define the outsider Untouchable. The language employed emphasises that hierarchy is to be seen as dynamic and processual, Brahman is at once Brahman and all the other varnas, while each one of these varnas defines itself distinctly in relation to Brahman.

Though not emphasised heavily in Dumont's major work on India, Homo Hierarchicus, the hierarchy concept is central to his analysis, far more so than his complementary categories pure and impure. Much of the confusion Dumont's work has generated stems from confusing the ideological principle of Indian hierarchy, pure and impure, with the structure, hierarchy itself. In the newer edition of the work, Dumont adds a postface expressly on hierarchy, while in Essays on Individualism (1986a) he gives the following definition:

Hierarchy: To be distinguished from power, or command: order resulting from a consideration of value. The elementary hierarchical relation (or hierarchical opposition) is that between a whole (or a set) and an element of that whole (or set) - or else that between two parts with reference to the whole. It can be analyzed into two contradictory aspects belonging to different levels: it is a distinction within an identity, an encompassing of the contrary (p.227). Hierarchy is thus bi-dimensional (p.253). In general, see the Postface to [Homo Hierarchicus]. (Dumont 1986a:279)

By hierarchical opposition Dumont means an ideological distinction and not a factual relation. Most importantly, the hierarchical opposition does not presuppose the equivalence of the opposed terms. It is an asymmetrical opposition in which the inversion of the opposition can be significant (ibid:280). For example, this is essential to the relationship between the divine and the demonic in the cosmic hierarchies of Hinduism and Buddhism. As Kapferer notes, the divine and demonic represent in Buddhism reason and non-reason. The process of time involves a movement between reason and its opposite. The distinction is not dualist in the sense of parity between the constituent parts. Nor is it symmetrically oppositional in the sense

that one can completely nullify the other. It is hierarchical. The same holds for the oppositions, pure/impure and order/disorder. The relation between the oppositions is one of encompassment and of inversion of the usual order of encompassment.

To exemplify hierarchy, Dumont employs a Judeo-Christian image, the creation of Eve from Adam's rib. Adam, the prototypical man is differentiated to produce the prototypical woman. The latter is of the former and their contrast is only defined in relation to the encompassing unity of the Creator (Dumont 1980:239-240). Similarly, and more pertinent to a South Asian cultural milieu, the valuation of the right hand over the left only emerges in the context of the whole body (Dumont 1986a:231; Beck 1972). Male/female is also found to be a hierarchy in South Asia in the Śiva/Śakti relation and Dumont discusses it with respect to Tantrism (Dumont 1980:281). It is also a relation of great significance at Munnesvaram<sup>5</sup>.

A hierarchical system is accretive as it generates contraries and accomodates them. This is its holistic nature through which it derives wholeness through the encompassing of the contrary. The hierarchical opposition and the principle of inversion are central features not epiphenomena in the creation of parts within the whole (see also Barnes & De Coppet 1985).

Both Hinduism and Buddhism are hierarchical systems that follow the logic of inversion and encompassment. The point

I wish to stress is that they feed from one another as a logical necessity of their hierarchical natures. In the case of Hinduism, the logic serves to maintain a religion unlike others for the absence of central texts. Indeed, there is no such thing as Hinduism. As it is generally known, the term was coined to describe the religion of India, and there are actually many religions of India apart from the distinctly definable later arrivals such as Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. These less distinguishable religions belong to various categories such as Brahmanic Hinduism or Vedic Hinduism, itself differentiated into Vaisnavism, Saivism, Saktism, Lingayat sects, Tantrism and Bhaktism, to name a few, and other categories such as the more localised cults. Then there are the practices emergent from the interaction between Hinduism and Islam and Hinduism and Christianity. All of the forms can be defined with varying weight as Hindu, the weight relating to the form's association with Brahmanic Hinduism and its derived pantheon. The derivative nature of this pantheon is important because it indicates the way Hinduism absorbs new forms and new arguments.

### Hierarchy and Power

I am particularly concerned with the relation of hierarchy to power, since the ontology of power is critical to the nature of the Hindu temple. In Dumont's definition, hierarchy is distinguished from power or command. By power, Dumont specifically means political power which he defines, following Weber, as legitimate force (1980:153). The definition is necessarily narrow, since here Dumont is

outlining the phenomena concomitant with modern ideology, and seeking to demonstrate how such phenomena have a different orientation in a different ideological system. The narrowness of the definition also suits the Indian, Hindu, context because there the definition of power (ksatra) is also limited (ibid).

For the modern, hierarchy equals rank equals power. It is not the case in India. Here Dumont makes a major point: for India, he argues, spiritual and temporal authority were distinguished very early and absolutely;

the fact is older than the castes, and it is fundamental to them in the sense that it is only once this differentiation has been made that hierarchy can manifest itself in a pure form. (ibid:72)

The temporal is thus relegated to a subordinate position, leaving the spiritual as absolute. The social order becomes founded directly on the spiritual, the everyday order "becomes here the permanent order in the world" (ibid:279). Absolutely distinguished, the temporal can then be encompassed by the spiritual. The negation becomes the ultimate referent and it is here that Dumont states that a "special sacredness is reserved" for the renouncer because the everyday order is relativised in respect to its negation (ibid).

Thus, hierarchy is to be distinguished from power while at the same time, the exercise of power is an expression of the absolute order, of hierarchy. Brahman encompasses Kshatriya. So, for example, the king's military campaign can be characterised as a pilgrimage and as a sacrifice.

That is, the cosmic spiritual dimensions of what seems to be an absolutely political act must be recognised. Similarly, and of special importance to Munnesvaram, royal land-grants to temples have a political importance as well as a cosmic spiritual importance. The one dimension is rendered possible in the context of the overarching order. This theme will be considered in the history of temple ownership.

To return to the Buddhist reaction to the Hindu origin myth discussed by Tambiah, it is evident that it directly addresses the issue of power. The force of history in the Mahasammatta myth is the force of human action which is also the cause of human suffering. Agency, therefore, is paramount and it is directed by the hierarchical relation of reason and non-reason. Power resides in action. Order is founded on the king and the power of the king stands in relation to the reason for his election. Ultimately this reason derives from the Buddha, from the renouncer. Reason becomes the dominant hierarchical principle shaping the Buddhist hierarchical form.

Power in the Buddhist conception, therefore, resides in society and is simultaneous with society. Reason is valued, so generating its hierarchical opposite, non-reason or evil. Action, the force of history and the cause of suffering, is the manifestation of reason in hierarchy. This contrasts with the Hindu conception, not as hierarchy to non-hierarchy, but in terms of the origin of power in the absolute order of the Brahman encompassing the

Kshatriya. In the Hindu conception, power is pristine, prior to society, defined and continually redefined by the absolute order embodied by the Brahman. In the Buddhist conception power is in society and in the body of the king as society and king stand in relation to the Buddha.

The Hindu notion of power can be identified in the structure of the Hindu temple and to demonstrate this I shall discuss the meaning of the temple at great length. The Hindu temple, however, is a relatively recent manifestation; coming into significance in the south of India after the displacement of Buddhism and Jainism. Indeed, some think it is modelled on the Buddhist/Jain tradition of monumental architecture<sup>6</sup>. And this fits Dumont's argument with an important qualification central to this thesis: Hinduism derived its coherence from Buddhism and Jainism as the primordial religion of India dealing with primordial, autochthonous power<sup>7</sup>. This is the special relationship of Hinduism to Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

It is, therefore, not a chance relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism in Sri Lanka but one inscribed in their shared hierarchical logic and in their history<sup>8</sup>. The history of this relationship is examined in the following in terms of a study of a Hindu temple that has a special significance to Sinhalese Buddhists.

#### Thesis Outline

Munnesvaram temple revealed three significant characteristics that will be addressed. Firstly, the temple

is located in a Buddhist sacred geography, described by Tambiah as a "galactic polity", in a position on the margins. This marginal position is founded in the history of the Chilaw area, a history embraced in Hindu and Buddhist conceptions. Secondly, the temple complex specialises in what Dumont calls the "magical side of Brahmanism", in the performance of efficacious rites on the person of the devotee, rites for the cause and the alleviation of personal affliction. Thirdly, in this "magical" and marginal complex, the most important deities are female. Each of these characteristics is taken up in the course of this study and they will be briefly outlined here.

The marginal position of the Munnesvaram temple is encapsulated in its Buddhist origin myth of the king's cure from skin disease. The myth establishes the location of the temple with respect to the centre of the Buddhist state. In contrast, the Hindu origin myth does not place Munnesvaram in a cosmo-political order with a marked territorial orientation. It does place the temple in a wider order, one involving the deity Rama, his helper Hanuman, and the sacredness of the place Munnesvaram. Thus it accords generally with Hindu temple origin myths (Sthalapurānam) (Diehl 1956:63) that stress the "absolute localization" of their symbols (Shulman 1980:47). The two myths exist side by side, each conceptualising the power of the place in different terms. The two myths are not the only ones, but I contrast them because they were the two myths most commonly recounted to me when I asked dozens of informants about the



origin of the temple.

The myths reveal Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of history that derive from conceptions of power. I follow the argument that radical distinctions between myth and history must be at most analytical and synchronic. This has been the insight of Eliade, Lévi-Strauss and of Sahlins (1981,1985) in his studies of Polynesian history and polity. More relevant to Sri Lanka, the argument has been made by Kapferer (1988) with respect to nationalist myths. Kapferer argues how myths are made congruent in a rational world, not as epiphenomena but as participatory in shaping that world. He identifies this most closely with Sinhalese Buddhism but argues that both Hinduism and Buddhism "essay in effect a theory of history" (ibid:50)<sup>9</sup>.

Daniel (1989) suggests there is a major difference between the propensities of Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu conceptions of history. The former is characterised by its emphasis on concrete history, the latter by its emphasis on heritage (ibid:22). Buddhism, Daniel argues, emphasises historical time through recognising the moments of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. Such a recognition establishes a periodicity that informs a subsequent historicity. Buddhism can thus be likened to other world religions, such as Islam and Christianity, which have calendars based on a diary of events relating to the life of their genitors (ibid:26). Sinhalese Buddhism, for example, charts the history of the state with the history of the religion. The Mahāvamsa ("Great Lineage")

describes the founder of the state, Vijaya, arriving on the island on the day the Buddha died. Hinduism, on the other hand, without a calendar lacks an objectivist historical view and, therefore, does not produce chronicles such as the Mahāvamsa. Tamil Hindus share a consciousness of the present, a sense for a present heritage which links to a primordial past in a non-linear way (ibid:28)<sup>10</sup>.

The distinction Daniel draws between the fundamental Tamil Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist view echoes an older anthropological distinction between myth and history. But rather than fall into the rigid categorisation this distinction usually entails, a categorisation that has generated arguments such as whether myth is an historical charter, Daniel seeks to describe forms of historical consciousness. Importantly, Daniel argues that he is describing propensities, not fixed moral orders that categorise all Tamil Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist views of the past.

I am largely in agreement with Daniel's argument, though I think his explanation for Buddhist historicity is too simple. Instead of simply noting the importance of Buddhism's diary of events, I wish to emphasise how the value placed on the Buddha's enlightenment and death is a function of the value Buddhism places on society and on agency. Buddhism derives its reasoned coherence from the actions of the Buddha, from his renunciation. It is, therefore, not simply that the Buddha died on a certain date, but that Sinhalese Buddhists ascribe the same date to

the arrival of Vijaya in Sri Lanka. The centrality of the state in Buddhist thought creates the conditions for a particular historicity. This point is revealed in the Sinhalese Buddhist origin myth of the Munnesvaram temple. I take this myth in contrast to the Hindu myth as my starting point as it establishes the discursive field of the Munnesvaram temples' religious significance.

The history of the Chilaw area is then described to elaborate the question of historicity and religious significance. The marginal position of Chilaw as a port of fluctuating relevance to the Sinhalese kingdoms during the medieval and colonial periods is emphasised. In the break-up of a unified Sri Lanka from the late 14th century into small trading kingdoms, Chilaw port acquired an interstitial location between Tamil Hindu kingdoms in the north and Sinhalese Buddhist kingdoms in the south-west. The Portuguese conquest of the littoral in the 16th century extended this aspect, as did the period of Dutch rule in the late 17th and 18th centuries. It was in a brief period of Kandyan Sinhalese control in the mid-18th century that Munnesvaram temple was rebuilt. In the British period, the complexion of Chilaw altered with the development of coconut plantations. This changed the demand for land and was critical to the re-establishment of Munnesvaram in the 1870's. Chilaw's relative isolation from political and economic centres, however, was reproduced. Though taking different forms in time, this marginal isolation is important for the religious significance of the modern Munnesvaram temples.

The historiography I develop is undeniably my interpretation of historical events; yet it is not to be relativised to the Buddhist and Hindu historicities because it is one which seeks to account for these historicities in the formation of modern Sri Lanka and to account for the place of the Munnesvaram temple in this formation. That is, I privilege my historical account as I interpret the constructions of historical consciousness. The Buddhist and Hindu histories of Munnesvaram direct my historical gaze which is at the same time a critical gaze<sup>11</sup>.

From the history of the Chilaw area in the colonial period, the emergence of religious revivalism in the late colonial period is analysed. Munnesvaram cannot be understood apart from these national developments because they structured the two religions in a special relationship. Hindu and Buddhist revivalism are critical to the formation of Munnesvaram's significance. They developed in the late colonial context and elaborated a dominant rationalist ideology in hand with changes taking place in the Sri Lankan social order of caste, class and ethnicity. In this development the new forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, as they both sought to establish the criteria of their pristine purity, were placed in a special relation, one that resonated with the original hierarchical relation between them. In particular, modern Buddhism identified the so called folk practices of Sinhalese Buddhism with their apparent Hindu roots. Such practices were seen as corruptions of the pristine order. At the same time, modern Hinduism asserted its own pristine order, removing what its

protagonists saw as folk corruptions, and became more exclusively and visibly Hindu. The two religions grew apart as distinct religions, but in a symbiosis which dealt critically with an ideology of power - its nature, source, and fields of expression. As modern Buddhism defined its corrupting chaotic influences, it empowered them as the source of order from which an ideal Buddhist society could emerge.

The discussion narrows then to the priests of the principal temples highlighting how each group came to control their respective temples. Different conceptions of what the temples are coexist and inform the development of the temple aesthetic by the priests. Following a consideration of the hierarchical relations between them, I turn to the worshippers who fall into two groups: locals and outsiders. Both the locals and the outsiders are composed of Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists. Among the group of locals, a number of factors produce different forms of engagement with the temples. For the most part locals do not go to the Bathrakali temple, but their involvement in the Munnesvaram temple is not uniform. It is conditioned by class, caste, and ethnic factors that are to be understood in relation to the history of the Chilaw economy and the history of religious revivalism and ethnic nationalism. Similar historical factors underlie the participation by outsiders, both Tamil and Sinhalese, but their involvement is largely a consequence of the Munnesvaram temples being remote from their everyday situations, while for locals, the Munnesvaram temple has

historical significance as a centre.

The discussion of the composition of temple worshippers concludes the first part of the thesis, the part most closely directed toward the sociology and social history of the temples. Temple aesthetics are analysed more closely in the second part of the work as I take up the issue of what people do when they attend the temples. My focus is on temple design and on temple ritual in order to demonstrate the importance of hierarchy as the structure of the temple form. In the diversity of temple practices by Hindus and Buddhists, however, different hierarchical forms emerge. These extend from the different notions of power and history already described and they reveal the dynamic interaction of the two religions and two ethnic groups in the Munnesvaram and, therefore, Sri Lankan context.

Having described how Munnesvaram temple is a Hindu temple, I stress how Sinhalese Buddhist practice in the temple departs from Hindu orthopraxy, orthopraxy which has been shaped in modern circumstances. In particular, the nature of the Hindu and Buddhist interaction stresses the "magical side of Brahmanism", the links Brahmanism has with cosmic forces, especially malevolent forces. These relate particularly to forces embodied by female Hindu deities who are the most important deities at Munnesvaram. They are Ambal who is the main goddess of the Munnesvaram temple and Bathrakali whose temple is the other important temple in the complex. These two temples are the central objects of my analysis as they are much more important than any of the

other temples in the complex.

What manifests is a powerful arena for the expression of sorcery practice, both the undertaking of it, and the alleviation from it. The Tamil Hindu Munnesvaram is a locus for the demonic, as the demonic embodies the chaos out of which cosmos is achieved. In this locus, the worship of female deities becomes paramount, especially the worship of Bathrakali. What has happened is that a temple at the juncture of the rapidly reifying Tamil and Sinhalese ethnicities, with a history of marginality and with an expanding orthodox Hindu aesthetic, has become a potent arena in which modern ethnic tensions between Tamils and Sinhalese are both created and expressed.

Having stressed contrasts between Hindu and Buddhist interaction with Munnesvaram, I conclude with a discussion of the major annual temple festival. This demonstrates the modernity of hierarchy as hierarchy creates the Hindu/Buddhist dialogue as a permanent fixture of the Munnesvaram aesthetic. The festival encompasses the diversity of levels operating in the temple creating an overarching unity in which difference can manifest. Not surprisingly the form this festival takes is continually changing as the discursive structure seeks to embrace difference in its totalising logic.

## Chapter 2, Myths of Munnesvaram

There are several myths associated with Munnesvaram temple and the surrounding area that are variants of myths found elsewhere in Sri Lanka and South India. In the following, I shall consider two myths that recount the origin of the temple, one ostensibly popular with Tamil Hindus, the other with Sinhalese Buddhists. Comparison and contrast of these myths establishes the different conceptions of Munnesvaram held by each group.

### Rama at Munnesvaram

The well known account of Rama's epic battle with Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, exists in oral and textual traditions throughout Asia, but especially in South India and Sri Lanka. The story is partly set in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan oral versions describe a sacred geography, identifying evidence of the myth in the physical features of the countryside<sup>1</sup>. For example, in the southern hills stands a rock pinnacle named after Ravana that is understood to have been Ravana's fortress. Another fortress stands at Arugam Bay in the south-east. A devotee of Śiva, Ravana is thought to have worshipped at Konesvaram, Trincomalee. Swamy Rock, on which Konesvaram was built, is thought to have been cleft by Ravana at the request of his mother. Other places are the site of Ravana and Rama's great battle, and the place where Rama's wife, Sita, was kept captive. The islands off the Jaffna Peninsula are said to have been created by Rama's ally, Hanuman, as stepping stones to facilitate his journey from India.



Thus the island contains an elaborate sacred geography explaining how the deeds of gods shaped the world of men. The ebb and flow of the conflict between divine and demonic is to be seen in the form the world takes. Other gods, especially Murugan whose battle with the demonic asuras and love affair with the Vāddah princess, Vaḷḷi, also helped form the physical landscape and produce the sites of several east coast Hindu temples (Arumugam ibid). Buddha too shaped the land in his three visits to the island. One of these sites, Sri Pada, where Buddha left his footprint, being venerated by Hindus as being Siva's footprint, and by Muslims as the site of Adam's descent from Eden (hence, Adam's Peak). So it is not exclusively a Tamil Hindu practice to perceive the land in such a way, rather than something shared with other groups.

Munnesvaram is regarded by Hindus as having been made a sacred ground by Rama.

After vanquishing Ravana, Rama stopped at Munnesvaram because he sensed a need to worship Siva there and gain some peace after his bloody conflict with the demon abductor of his wife. Despatching Hanuman to India to fetch a sivaliṅgam, Rama waited on the site, already feeling pacified. Hanuman, however, dallied in his errand and, losing patience, Rama fashioned a liṅgam from sand and began to perform pūjā. When Hanuman finally brought the Indian liṅgam, Rama angrily threw it away, back in the direction from where it had come. The original sand liṅgam is the foundation for the Munnesvaram temple that was built later<sup>2</sup>.

Hanuman's Indian stone liṅgam was found in the 19th century by an Indian trader while he was clearing a piece of land north of Chilaw on the other side of the River Dedura at a place called Manuweriya. He then built a temple

for the liṅgam that is still owned by his descendants. They described its structure to me as having been built in a North Indian style to reflect the origin of its liṅgam. Not far from the river where the Munnesvaram festival bathing rite (tīrtham) is held, the temple was patronised by Jaffna Tamils returning from the annual festival. Other inhabitants, who dispute the authenticity of the Manuweriya liṅgam, claim that the river was the landing place. The river's capacity for flash flooding is seen as a reflection of Rama's anger<sup>3</sup>.

The sand liṅgam myth is also the origin myth of the Maamangam Pillaiyar temple near Batticaloa on the east coast, as well as of the Irameccuram temple in South India (Shulman 1980). These other myths include variations from the Munnesvaram myth. At Maamangam, Hanuman, angry at Rama's rejection of the liṅgam he brought, tries to destroy the sand liṅgam. Wrapping his tail around the sand liṅgam, Hanuman wrenches his tail violently in order to fragment the grains gathered up by Rama. But he only succeeds in setting fire to his tail, so he rushes to the nearby pond and extinguishes the flames. The temple is named after the pond which is said to magically fill with sandalwood on the tīrtham day of its festival. This version echoes the story in the Ramayana of how Hanuman has his tail set alight when a captive of Ravana.

My informant, a temple trustee, added that the sand liṅgam still sits in the ground under the temple's inner sanctum. He claimed that efforts were once made to excavate

to its base, but at a depth of 10m the digging was stopped. It was concluded that the liṅgam is endless<sup>4</sup>. The presence of the liṅgam leads to the temple being jointly for Pillaiyar and Śiva.

The Irameccuram myth recorded by Shulman has the same story of Rama's impatience with Hanuman; but instead of Rama, the liṅgam is fashioned by Sita. Shulman interprets this as the cthonic power of Tamil Hindu goddesses providing a "firm ground of stability" for the god (ibid:51). I shall not discuss this argument here but refer to it again in Chapter 7. What I note here is that in the Munnesvaram version, the fashioning by Rama directly relates the act of temple construction to the god who is also a king.

The widespread nature of a single myth indicates the way Tamil Hindus articulate themselves into their cosmology through their temples. Each temple is regarded as a special instance of divine action shaping the world.

Rama is a king. An avatār of Viśnu, Rama embodies the order of the Hindu state. The connection between Munnesvaram and Rama the king is highlighted by the Munnesvaram Brahmins as the origin of Munnesvaram's being a royal (pītham) temple. The temple's history is viewed as a dynamic relation between temple and state, embodying an interaction between the king and the deity in continuity with Rama's association. In the Rama myth, this deity is Śiva.

Śaivites will individually build small liṅgams from the sands on river banks and sea shores as private acts of worship (Shukla 1958:241)<sup>5</sup>. The liṅgam is fashioned, worshipped and washed away. It signs the presence and omnipotence of Śiva as part of the earth and its worship is entirely personal. So is Rama's worship but as the king his person makes for a permanence and subsequently a temple. His liṅgam is not washed away; from Maamangam, it cannot be dissociated. It is a gathering-up, a unification of the seeds of existence manifest in the grains of sand. The liṅgam is the incorporation of the fertile potential of existence. Moreover, it is part of the order Rama establishes through his victory over Ravana. It is part of his kingdom.

Munnesvaram is constituted in the deeds of the gods, in the creation of order and in the shaping of the world. To engage oneself in the temple is to engage in this world of its source and be part of its time. It is to be incorporated in the potency of the world-shaping movement like the grains of sand fashioned into the liṅgam. Moreover, the time is not past. The gods are in the process of performing the deeds described in the myth, deeds whose effects are experienced. What for humans is a lifetime or an epoch, for the gods is an instant; but nevertheless, the structure of existence is grounded in the myths. As I shall discuss below (Chapter 7), this ontology is to be identified in the temple.

Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe

The Sinhalese Buddhist myth is different. It does not only refer to such a present and primordial past, but also to the history of men and the history of kings. In this sense it asserts a particularity. Moreover, the myth describes the religious potency of Munnesvaram as being due to the goddess landing there from outside. Recorded from the inhabitants of Munnesvaram village and from pattuva villages, the myth recounts the origin of the temple with respect to the Sinhala state.

The origin of the temple is that Amma Deviyo landed on a stone raft at Chilaw and eventually the raft came to rest at Munnesvaram. When humans found the raft they built a temple around it for Amma Deviyo.

The Kandyan king, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe, was suffering from a nagging skin disease for which his physicians could find no cure. The disease left the king covered in sores that irritated him badly. Then he heard of the Munnesvaram temple and the goddess Amma Deviyo, so he travelled secretly at night until he reached the site of the old temple now in ruins. He bathed in the temple pond and gave offerings to the goddess. Miraculously the disease disappeared and the king was able to travel back to Kandy in full view of his subjects. After this the king bequeathed a large sum of money to have the temple rebuilt and he established villages in the Munnesvarampattuva whose inhabitants would serve the temple. Members of all the castes were settled in the villages. After this the king was never bothered by the disease again.

Origin myths featuring deities arriving on stone rafts are common in Sri Lanka, at least on the western and southern coasts. Obeyesekere (1984a) treats such myths as historical charters of migration patterns by different social groups, such as traders. The particular deity involved in these myths is the Pattini, the central goddess in Sinhalese Buddhism (ibid). At Munnesvaram, many regard Amma Deviyo ("Mother Goddess") as the Pattini. I shall

discuss the significance of stone in subsequent chapters, and so shall simply state here that the stone raft is a potent cosmogonic symbol, a symbol of the temple. The important feature is that it arrives in Sri Lanka from outside.

Not all the informants say it was Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe, credited with the temple reconstruction in the 1750's; but an earlier king, Parakramabahu VI or Bhuvanakabahu II, while others did not stipulate which king, but simply a Sinhalese king. That is, though not necessarily named in the myth, the king is at any rate assumed to be an actual historical person. Secondly, the myth accounts for both the origin of the temple and the origin of the villages of the pattuva. The history of the temple is the history of the villages and both temple and village stand in relation to the king, his state, and the temple deity. Here lies another difference: whereas Rama worships Śiva, the king worships the goddess Amma Deviyo or Ambal. Whereas the presence of Śiva is infused in the earth, the presence of Amma Deviyo stems from her landing there.

In the Sinhalese myth, the king has an incurable skin disease. His body is riddled with sores. Goddesses are closely associated with such diseases in India and also in Sri Lanka; but in this instance, the sores refer to the state. The fragmented condition of the king's body is the condition of the state manifesting in the king's person<sup>6</sup>. So he travels secretly to the margins of his kingdom, worships the goddess residing there, bathes in the pond and

is cured. His secrecy reveals his inability to represent his state; but once he is cured he returns to the capital in triumph and asserts his rule through his proclamation of land-grants, settlement of villages, and construction of the temple. Threatened within, the king travels to the borders and reconstitutes himself in the body of the goddess of the margins.

Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe is responsible for rebuilding the Munnesvaram temple in the 1750's, around the time when he was threatened with rebellion by sections of the Kandyan nobility. He suppressed the potential rebellion partly by courting the order of Buddhist monks and supporting a large-scale Buddhist revival that incorporated deity worship in the encompassing Buddhist pantheon. Most notably, Kirthi introduced the Buddhist Tooth relic in the annual Kandy festival, the Äsala Perahära (Seneviratne 1978), and commissioned the updating of the Chronicles, whose pages, not surprisingly, extol his Buddhist virtues (Cūlavamsa trans. Geiger & Rickmers 1953:262). He thus became a great king and this is related by some of my informants to his visit to the Munnesvaram goddess.

Transforming the annual Kandy festival can be characterised as an elaboration of a "galactic polity" (Tambiah 1976) whose centre was the Dalidā Māliqāwa (Temple of the Tooth). The deity temples now stood in relation to the Buddha temple. The entire island was mapped out as a cosmic domain with territories being closely associated with particular deities. The Sinhalese pantheon developed a

strong geopolitical aspect replicating, albeit indirectly, the feudal nature of the Sinhalese state (Winslow 1984a). At the more localised level, ritual complexes such as the Munnesvarampattuva stood as particular instances of the broader galactic polity (Tambiah *ibid*:113). This is evident in the myth when it states how all of the Sinhalese castes were settled in the pattuva. That is, the pattuva was given a full social complement and so resembled the Sinhalese world in microcosm.

The pattuva was comprised of a total of sixty-four villages, thus following a certain town-planning scheme employing mandala logic (Shukla 1961:192), the logic lying at the heart of the galactic polity (see Tambiah *ibid*:102)<sup>7</sup>. Such theories were followed in Sri Lanka. For instance, the Dambedeniya court astrologer, Tenuvaray Perumal, who wrote the Sarasothimalai in 1310, discusses these measures (Chelvadurai-Proctor 1927).

In the mandala-oriented conception of the polity, the quadrants acquire special significance. Munnesvaram is the western of these. Additionally, Munnesvaram stands at the margins of the polity, at the point of weakest intensity of the power of the centre. As such it represents the entry point of disorder that both potentially threatens the stability of the centre (Tambiah *ibid*) and provides potential sources of power through its encompassment by the centre. The logic is the cosmogonic logic of the movement from chaos to cosmos (Eliade 1959:29 - 35, 1978:200). It is demonstrated in Rama's lingam-building, and is



encapsulated in Kirthi's cure being effected by the goddess of the margin. But there is a contrast: in the Buddhist conception, Munnesvaram stands at the margins and is closely linked to disorder and the control of disorder, in the Hindu, Munnesvaram is created as a centre. The theme is repeated as an important element of the Sinhalese Buddhist myth of origin of the Munnesvaram Bathrakali temple discussed in Chapter 9. In it, Kali lands from India, there is no mention of a stone raft, and is tamed by Amma Deviyo, an earlier arrival<sup>8</sup>.

### Conclusion

Comparison and contrast reveals firstly that for Hindus the principal deity is Siva while for Buddhists it is Amma Deviyo, the former a god, the latter a goddess. Rama the god/king worships Śiva the god, while Kirthi the man/king worships Amma Deviyo the goddess. Then, the former takes place in the world and time of the gods, the time of the Ramayana, the latter in the time of men, in history. Allowing an initial and by no means comfortable characterisation, the Rama myth is myth, the Kirthi myth is history. I hasten to add that the characterisation is relational. It is based on the relative value of human agency, human action in the world, and an account of the particular history of a people. The Rama myth accounts for the origin of the temple, the Kirthi myth for the origin of the modern temple and the village order in relation to the centre of the state. That is, it is an origin myth of the society and not just of the temple.

The contrast of the relative value of human action and of history is to be evidenced by the fact that Sinhalese Buddhists have, in their Chronicles, a detailed history of kingship. Tamil Hindus have no such chronicles. This is not to say that there are no written documents for Tamil Hindus, rather that for the Sinhalese Buddhist state there are documents describing the continuous line (vamsa) of kings which give the state a historical continuity.

Whereas the Rama myth accounts for the sacred place, Munnesvaram, simply as being inhabited by Śiva and recognised by Rama, the Kirthi myth relates Munnesvaram to a mythic landscape covering the entire island as a topographic grid which relates the significance of Munnesvaram to its relation to the centre, to the Sinhalese state. Thus, not only does the myth locate the temple in its territory and define the society around it, it also locates that unit in the Sinhalese galactic polity. The arrival of Amma Deviyo on the stone raft marks her entry into the galactic polity.

This establishes the mythic landscape of the Munnesvaram temple and immediately demonstrates two distinct approaches to this landscape, one Tamil Hindu, the other Sinhalese Buddhist. It indicates the significance of the temple to both ethnic groups.

I shall close this chapter with some remarks about the relation of myth and history. In Myth and Meaning, Lévi-Strauss says of the gap between them,

But nevertheless the gap which exists in our mind to some extent between mythology and history can probably be breached by studying histories which are conceived as not at all separated from but as a continuation of mythology. (Lévi-Strauss 1978:43)

In Sri Lanka there is a blurring of the lines between myth and history as ostensibly distinct modes of thought. The written chronicles of Sri Lankan history, the Mahāvamsa etc., are powerful cosmological statements drawing their sustenance from Sinhalese Buddhist cosmology and providing sustenance to Sinhalese Buddhist historiography. Without such chronicles, the situation is not necessarily denied for Tamil Hindus; but it is qualitatively different. This difference has been identified by Daniel (1989) whose argument is discussed in the previous chapter.

The processes through which the world is perceived share a logic with the presentation of this world in myth. It is this shared logic, in Kapferer's (ibid:79 - 84) terms, an ontologic, that structures myth and structures perception, making myth a potent force in shaping human action. Myth participates in its interpretation (ibid:46) through its structures of significance. It is essential to an understanding of myth that it be seen as in a constant hermeneutic with itself and the world. For then both its structure and the contexts where it is expressed inform the interpreter of its ontology. The two myths considered here were current at Munnesvaram in 1985 and 1986 and thus they say something about the contemporary significance of the temple.

Kapferer (ibid:50) argues that both Hinduism and Buddhism "essay in effect a theory of history", one that is grounded in the concept of karma as this concept provides a logic for the connection of events<sup>9</sup>. This theory of history becomes evident in the two myths discussed here; yet there is a significantly different value given to human agency in each myth. This difference emerges when the myths are contrasted and when they are related to Hindu and Buddhist sacred geography. The Buddhist myth situates Munnesvaram both temporally and spatially in the process of describing the temple's importance.

Finally, it is important to be aware of the context for the collection of these myths. During my fieldwork Sri Lanka was highly politically charged and this situation has since deteriorated into bloody civil war. Issues of historical origins of Tamils and Sinhalese are literally burning issues. For example, I knew of a Hindu temple on the east coast where the members of the trust formed to build a new, orthodox temple on the site, dismantled the stone pillars of a ruin, not simply to facilitate their own construction, but to ensure that the government could not claim the area as historically a Sinhalese area. The ruin may not have been Buddhist, and even if it were it need not have been Sinhalese; but these men were not prepared to take the chance. They were reacting to the common opinion among Tamils that government archaeologists are fabricating evidence of Buddhist settlements in Tamil areas, and there is quite a lot of evidence to suggest that this opinion is not fantastic. I saw instances of it both in the north and

south of the island. In the atmosphere of ethnic divide and the call for traditional homelands, the question of historical origins became extremely critical. The divisions of the past have been conflated with those of the present.

One day I was confronted by a petty Sinhalese ideologue, employee of a government ministry that is active in propogating a great deal of ideological construction. Keen to know of my research, he responded to my brief description saying, "It's not as old as they say it is!" In his response he had assumed that if I were studying Munnesvaram I would be studying its history and in his view doubtless hearing all sorts of fabrication by the Tamil priests. He assumed I would be determining the temple's "true" history, the history as he knew it, rather than be collecting the various histories as discursive structures. In seeing these various histories as such structures, I do not for a moment deny their force. They have emerged amidst the tragedy of modern Sri Lanka as the hegemonic discourses of imagined communities.

The importance of recognising this context of my fieldwork is to ensure caution about over-generalising the Hindu/Buddhist contrast without acknowledging this discursive, contextual element. Myths, following Kapferer, are "made congruent with a rational world" and so become potent (ibid:46). Both structuring perception and being structured in perception, they exist historically. Their potency is intimately bound in the ebb and flow of historical change. At times they are active and at other

times dormant (ibid). Like philosophy they are "everywhere, even in the 'facts'," and they nowhere have a "private realm" sheltering them from "life's contagion" (Merleau-Ponty 1964:130). The prevailing atmosphere of ethnic nationalism during my fieldwork which began eleven months after the bloody riots of 1983, must be recognised as helping shape the body of myths I have collected here.

According to Foucault, an antecedent discursive structure will not have precedence over a current discourse, simply as it is historically prior, but because the structure of the current discourse takes it up and gives it historical authority (Foucault 1972:143). A myth as a structure of discourse has congruence with a rational world as it "offers a way of resolving some local present tension" (Merleau-Ponty ibid:117). It becomes reproduced in the "dynamics of the present" (ibid). It is to this rational world and my history of it that I now turn through a more specific examination of the Munnesvaram context.

Chapter 3, An Historical Background to Chilaw and Munnesvaram

The second census carried out by the British of Ceylon in 1827 listed 32% of the Chilaw-Puttalam District population of just under 30,000 as "Wellales", the Tamil farmer caste, Vellalar. Not all of the forty-one groups listed are caste groups as the list includes "European descendants", "Moors" and "Malays". Some castes like the "Hinnavas" (Hinna) have the common Sinhala name; others like the "Chitties" (Chettiar) and "Mucowas" (Mukkuvar) have the Tamil name. Additionally, there are names of groups not found elsewhere in Sri Lanka, notably the "Wagays" and "Ahampadias" (as distinct from "Agampadias" who are also listed). This suggests that the names listed were the names given by the population. Given this, what is significant is that nearly a third called itself Vellalar; yet nearly 40% gave Buddhism as their religion. Hinduism is barely mentioned<sup>1</sup>. Put simply, the figures reveal a mixture of concepts from Tamil and Sinhala, Hindu and Buddhist. In the 1921 Census of Ceylon, over 95% of all Sinhalese who listed their mother-tongue<sup>2</sup> as Tamil came from the coastal belt from Nth Colombo to Chilaw; 47% from the Chilaw District itself (Ceylon Census Reports 1921).

This evidence indicates a shifting ethnic identity in the Chilaw area taking place during the period of British rule. One of the characteristic features of the area in the eyes of social scientists and politicians alike (Roberts 1979a), this shifting ethnic identity is still evident in the villages near Chilaw. It has been discussed by Stirrat

(1974) who argues in his study of a Catholic fishing village on the coastal side of Chilaw lagoon that the ambiguous identity principally derives from a tension between being a Catholic fisherman and being a Sinhalese. Ethnic flux, however, is not restricted to Catholic fishing villages and can also be noted in agricultural villages inhabited by Hindus and Buddhists. Hence, I regard flux to be the general condition elaborating different ideas in different contexts in the area. The tension described by Stirrat is one such elaboration.

Located 80km north of Colombo on the north-west coast, Chilaw has been occupied variously by Sinhalese, Tamils, Portuguese, Dutch and British. But it has never been a focal point for the political control of any of these groups, rather than a centre of secondary importance. This is reflected in the social composition of certain groups in the area. Discussing caste groups such as the Ahampadias and Mukkavars, Ryan observes that these groups are to be found in marginal areas like the North Central Province, marginal that is, to territories of either direct Sinhalese or Tamil control (Ryan 1953:140). Historically, Chilaw is part of this margin, and Ahampadias and Mukkuvars could be found there. To a large extent this marginality explains the transient ethnicity of the Chilaw inhabitants. This is the historical context of the Munnesvaram temple.

#### Pre-Portuguese

The political history of Chilaw hinges on its value as a port. There are many irrigation tanks in the Chilaw area,



including the Munnesvaram tank on the side of which stands the Munnesvaram temple. Easily discernible are the remains of channels and irrigated fields, suggesting the area's history to include periods of settled agriculture and political stability<sup>3</sup>. Chilaw is near the capitals of some of the ancient hydraulic states of the North-west Province, the closest being Panduvasnuwara, the first great capital of the Sinhalese state. This city subsequently re-emerged in the 12th century when Parakramabahu I (The Great) (1153 - 1187) used it as his political base in his campaign to win the Polonnaruwa kingship. In short, there is evidence of Chilaw's periodic involvement in the Sinhalese hydraulic state. Chilaw's marginal location developed, then, after the shift of Sinhalese power to the south-west. In a marginal location the tanks most likely suffered neglect.

Chilaw is said to have gained prominence as a port in the drift of Sinhalese power (Pathmanathan 1974). Less emphasis on irrigated rice was matched by an increased emphasis on trade. The rise of the port attracted competing trading groups, whose numbers swelled in the medieval period, although there is evidence that these mercantile groups had a strong influence from the 10th century (Codrington 1916). A principal reason for the tanks suffering neglect was that trading groups competing for the control of Chilaw port regularly threatened the political stability necessary for settled agriculture. Chilaw port destabilised the political order of the surrounding area, and this seems to have been the case intermittently during the three centuries prior to the arrival of the Portuguese,

as I shall briefly outline.

The independent Tamil kingdom of Jaffna extended its control to parts of the west coast early in the 14th century with forts at Colombo, Negombo and Chilaw (Cartman 1957:33). This spread of Tamil control was checked in the latter half of the century when Nissanka Alagakkonara defeated a Tamil army at Panadura, south of Colombo, in 1368 and then captured the other forts (ibid). In South India, competition and conflict persisted between Hindu and Muslim kingdoms. The Tamil Vijayanagara Empire captured Madurai from the Muslims around 1378 and annexed the weakened Jaffna kingdom in 1385. Chilaw rose to prominence in this period as a frontier port for the Sinhalese kingdom centred at Kotte (Pathmanathan ibid, 1986-7).

Parakramabahu VI (1412 - 1467), a descendant of the powerful Alagakkonaras, originally a Malabar trading family, was the last Sinhalese king to unite the entire island under one rule. He made an extensive land-grant to the Munnesvaram temple in the 1450's recorded on a stone inscription which is part of the modern temple structure. The Alagakkonaras married into the Sinhalese nobility and thus established links between Indian trade and the Sinhalese state. Coastal towns became centres of interaction between the two groups and Chilaw was one of the most important of these (ibid).

A century after Parakramabahu VI's land-grant, Muslim confederacies attacked the Vijayanagaras. They destroyed

the city of Vijayanagara in 1565 in a phase of renewed expansion which included Sri Lanka, particularly the north-west coast. These factors contributed to weaken the position of the already internally divided Kotte kingdom. The effectiveness of Sinhalese suzerainty over Chilaw diminished<sup>4</sup> and thus the political climate was suitable for the development of Portuguese control over the littoral in the first half of the 16th century.

Chilaw was in Portuguese hands and mission schools were being established by the Jesuits by the beginning of the 17th century (Don Peter 1978:46). The most common language in Chilaw was Tamil and Sinhala was spoken in many of the villages (ibid:137, 251). Tamil can be described as the major trade language, Sinhala as the language of the Buddhist state.

For many years prior to the Portuguese, therefore, Chilaw was controlled by different groups and it was often the ground on which these groups asserted their dominance. Different Indian parties, from the Malabar and the Coromandel, representing competing kingdoms, both Hindu and Muslim, fought for control. The Portuguese entered this arena as yet another interest group competing especially with the Muslims (see Chaudhury 1985). The overall effect was that Chilaw was isolated from the direct control of either the northern Tamil or southern Sinhalese kingdoms.

#### Portuguese

Portuguese troops destroyed Munnesvaram temple in 1578

but did not control the area until the end of the century, establishing a fort at Chilaw in 1597<sup>5</sup>. In 1600, the temple was destroyed again. In 1606, the local leaders of Chilaw town, the patanqatins, converted as a group to Catholicism and so won "many favours and privileges" from the Portuguese Captain-General, De Azevado (Abeyasinghe 1966:207; Don Peter *ibid*:68)<sup>6</sup>. The revenues exacted by the Munnesvaram temple from its client villages in the pattuva were taken by the Jesuits who had established missions in Sri Lanka in 1602 (Pathmanathan 1974:64). This pattuva was recorded as comprised of sixty-two villages and its revenues, along with that of another two villages, were transferred to Jesuit control in 1605 by De Azevado (Abeyasinghe *ibid*:222)<sup>7</sup>.

Abeyasinghe (*ibid*:168) states that Chilaw flourished as a port throughout the 17th century because of the practicalities of internal trade. Small ports on the west coast became important links, often clandestine, between the Kandyan and India; but converted local chiefs would have possibly prevented this. By 1644, one thousand inhabitants were registered Catholics in Chilaw town and there was half this number at Munnesvaram (Don Peter *ibid*:47). The strong Catholic presence, remarked upon later by the Dutch (Baldeus 1959 [1672]), further distanced Chilaw from Sinhalese Buddhist influence.

Chilaw was a major site of Jesuit missionary activity, the Jesuits being allowed to break the Franciscan monopoly in Sri Lanka after 1602 when the Bishop of Cochin divided

the Portuguese territories leaving the more secure area around Colombo with the Franciscans and the Jesuits controlling north of Negombo<sup>8</sup>. The first Jesuit church in Chilaw was for St. Peter and at Munnesvaram for St. Paul and it is believed that stones from Munnesvaram were used in its construction. St. Peter was replaced by Mary who is still the most important Catholic figure in Chilaw, with the main church being Our Lady of Mt. Carmel<sup>9</sup>. It is understood that Munnesvaram received a lot of missionary attention because the Jesuits recognised the temple's importance as a centre for idolatry.

Portuguese conquistadors prized Sri Lanka for its spices and gems, and especially with regard to the former they altered the complexion of their territory to accommodate new spice gardens. Their rule was harsh with respect to religious freedom and nearly all of the Buddhist and Hindu temples on the littoral were destroyed. These included, with Munnesvaram, the famous Śiva temples of Mannar, Kankesanthurai, and Trincomalee; temples that comprise four of the five famous Śiva temples of the southern tip of India and Sri Lanka<sup>10</sup>. The Portuguese also employed a scorched-earth policy, terrorising villages, destroying paddy fields and breaking tank bunds. The consequences were especially serious in those areas reliant on irrigation and were still felt in the Chilaw area up until 1615 (Abeyasinghe *ibid*:32).

The most enduring consequence of Portuguese rule is Roman Catholicism, the most popular form of European

religion still practised in Sri Lanka. Its influence on the contemporary political climate in Chilaw is great.

### Dutch

In 1644, forces of the Dutch East India Company took Negombo from the Portuguese for good and by 1658 the Dutch had expelled the Portuguese from Sri Lanka. They succeeded with the help of the Kandyans who attacked the Portuguese at the same time. In fact Colombo fell in the name of the Kandyan king Rajasinghe (Winius 1971:152). This alliance between the Kandyans and the Dutch was, however, short-lived. After winning Colombo in 1656, the Dutch immediately tried to attack the Kandyan troops outside Colombo (Arasaratnam 1958). Between 1670 and 1676 there was periodic fighting between the Dutch and the Kandyans in which a lot of hitherto Portuguese territory, including Chilaw, was won by the latter (ibid), forcing the Dutch to negotiate. It is recorded that Munnesvaram received a grant of lands from Kandy in 1675 (The Ceylon Law Recorder Vol. VII p.16); however, there is no evidence to indicate that the temple had been rebuilt at this time. Dutch west coast territory extended up to the Maha River, 30km south of Chilaw, a situation that did not change for nearly a century (Abeyasinghe 1984:42).

The Portuguese use of Sri Lanka for the international spice market emphasised the Chilaw area's marginal relation to the wet zone area. The Dutch emphasised this relation still further. When the Dutch Reformed Church minister, Phillipus Baldaeus travelled through the Chilaw area soon

after the expulsion of the Portuguese, he noted that the cinnamon gardens kept by the Portuguese only extended from Colombo as far as the Chilaw river (the River Dedura) (Baldaeus 1959 [1672]:283). This river marks the border between the wet and dry zones, although from Chilaw to the Maha River (30km south) is more precisely intermediate between the two climactic zones. In terms of the spice trade, this made Chilaw a frontier port for various types of commercial produce. Its position in this largely spice-oriented economy was peripheral, a factor no doubt contributing to the Dutch readiness to concede the territory to Kandy.

Baldaeus observed that the area was sparsely populated when he travelled through, but there were large herds of buffalo (ibid). When he came to write his description about ten years later he indicates that the population subsequently increased rapidly (ibid:392). This suggests that the small size of the population was due to the fighting that took place shortly before Baldaeus's excursion. The population increased after the Kandians regained control in the late 1670's. So, by the 1670's, Chilaw is a sparsely populated, heavily Christianised frontier port and spice garden. It has nothing of great value to the Dutch.

The Jesuits were still entrenched in Chilaw (Baldaeus ibid:290) and the Portuguese territories were predominantly Catholic. Expressing the enmities in Europe, the Dutch only allowed Dutch Protestantism in the first part of their

rule. They destroyed Catholic churches, forbade Catholic worship and persecuted priests, many of whom were given protection by defiant Kandyan kings. On the littoral, Roman Catholicism was practised only in those areas outside Dutch control. Without established support, however, Roman Catholicism waned.

In the 1680's, Joseph Vaz an Indian born Roman Catholic priest secretly travelled in Dutch territories and began performing Catholic rituals. He narrowly escaped capture by the Dutch in Jaffna in 1689, established a church in Puttalam in 1690, fled after this to Kandy where he was imprisoned for a time, and, upon his release, ministered Catholicism on the west coast. He died in 1711 and is venerated by west coast Catholics, and regarded as a major force in the perseverance of Roman Catholicism in the Kandyan territories during Dutch rule. Partly through his efforts, Roman Catholicism remained the dominant religion in Chilaw. Additionally and perhaps more importantly, Kandy tolerated Catholicism in Puttalam and Chilaw, especially in the reign of Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe (Boudens 1957:201). Catholicism made the Chilaw patanqatins Kandyan allies against the Protestant Dutch in an alliance highly valued by Kandy because it assisted Kandy's access to India through the Chilaw and Puttalam ports.

In certain respects, Dutch trade interests were similar to those of the Portuguese, which were themselves not radically different to the existing trade patterns (Arasaratnam *ibid*:148). The Dutch involved themselves in



Indo-Lankan trade, and began to expand coconut production (Samaraweera 1972). They also exported spices, gems, fabrics and tobacco to Europe. As with the Portuguese, the Dutch prized Sri Lanka for spices, especially cinnamon and pepper. In Jaffna they encouraged tobacco cultivation and trade in tobacco between Jaffna and India (Arasaratnam 1982). From the beginning of the 18th century, the Dutch were more willing to negotiate with Kandy, especially because Kandy produced the best spices and from the 1730's, treaties and trade agreements existed (Abeyasinghe 1984). Indigenous trading was encouraged with a suitable taxation and traders began to ply the canal running from Panadura to Negombo. Coconut products went from Kalpitiya to India. Arrack became an important trade item but was monopolised by the Dutch. Rice was imported from India as was cotton. In this environment, Indian traders rose to prominence in the port towns of Mannar, Puttalam, Kalpitiya, and especially Negombo, Colombo and Galle, particularly when the Dutch and Kandyans were preoccupied with fighting each other (Arasaratnam 1958:149). The Hindu Nattukottai Chettiars dominated trade (Samaraweera *ibid*). Sinhalese entrepreneurial groups also developed, but largely in the south (Roberts 1982). These groups attained privileged positions in the economy through activities such as running boats (the Karāva) or peeling cinnamon (the Salāgama), activities that developed a caste-specificity in the colonial market context.

Chilaw rates no references in the European histories of the early Dutch period, suggesting that its prominence as a

port had diminished. I daresay that if it had been important to the Dutch they would have taken it, but apart from incursions from Negombo in the mid-1640's, they do not seem to have been very concerned with Chilaw and the place was neglected. Not so, however, by the Kandyans who valued Chilaw port. The Nayakkar king, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe, rebuilt the Munnesvaram temple along with several other temples in the area in the 1750's. He also settled many of his subjects into the area, aligning them through the temples to his rule. That is, the villagers paid their annual tithes through temples like Munnesvaram. The pattuva was re-established. Irrigated rice cultivation was also redeveloped with the labour of tank maintenance being organised through the rājakāriya system of service to the king. The strong Catholic influence in Chilaw now served to ally the town with Kandy in opposition to the Dutch. In the surrounding area, however, Buddhism was encouraged and supported. This Buddhism followed elaborate deity cults, doubtless developing along with the Kandy Äsala Perahāra (Seneviratne 1978). Under this patronage, Munnesvaram temple became one of the first littoral temples to be rebuilt.

Chilaw may have been ignored by the Dutch but was not totally forgotten. They took Kalpitiya in 1659 and thus were strategically placed between Puttalam and Chilaw, in a position to squeeze Kandy's links with India. The overall strategy was additionally to take Chilaw, Trincomalee and Batticaloa, so encircling Kandy (Arasaratnam 1958:10). In the early 1760's, war broke out and the Dutch took Chilaw

and Puttalam. They built a fort at Chilaw and began several military actions from there (Raven-Hart 1964). Once again, the population fled, but returned after the peace. The loss of Chilaw and Puttalam in this conflict seriously deprived the Kandyans of their trade links, something that contributed to the later fall of Kandy at the hands of the British.

Having taken Chilaw, the Dutch set about persecuting the town's Catholics, the allies of Kandy. In 1769, they ordered the Catholics of Chilaw to attend the Reformed church in the town. Under the direction of the Jesuit priest, the people went to the church but refused to enter it (Boudens 1957:164). The Dutch also banned Catholic weddings. These restrictions were relaxed a few years later. The construction of Catholic churches was permitted in the late 1770's (ibid:166-7).

There is no evidence that the Dutch took any action with regard to Munnesvaram in this period. By the beginning of the 19th century, however, some fifty years after Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's temple construction and settlement program, Munnesvaram temple is said to be neglected and in ruins (The Ceylon Law Recorder Vol. VII p.16) . The settlement program appears to have been ineffective and Chilaw seems to have become a backwater. The Dutch canal eventually stretched all the way to Puttalam, but early British reports from the 1850's state that the canal was not operational until the 1830's (Brodie 1853). Clearly then, the Chilaw economy did not develop during the Dutch

period, especially the later stages when Chilaw was wrested away from Kandy. By the time of the first English reports, the tanks were once again decrepit (ibid).

### British

In 1796 the British East India Company took control of the Dutch East India Company's interests in Sri Lanka. By 1802 the British government controlled these interests and by the end of the year they had a small fort in Chilaw. In July 1803 the Kandyan began a series of incursions into British-controlled areas and in mid-August, the agent of revenue and commerce at Chilaw led a group of twenty Malays and Sepoys into the neighbouring Kandyan territory and routed the newly erected barracks at Palanne. By the end of the month, the Chilaw fort was under siege and was relieved by troops from Colombo (Cordiner 1983 [1807]:227-30). So it appears that Chilaw was not subdued until the middle of the first decade of British rule. In 1815, the British annexed Kandy and by 1818 they had brought the island under one rule for the first time since Parakramabahu VI in the mid 15th century.

From the 1830's onwards the British established their plantations in the hill areas, hitherto of the Kandyan kingdom. Tea, first planted in 1839, did not become the dominant crop until after the coffee blight of the 1870's. But tea and coffee marked a big change in terms of colonial interests. Not only did the British conquer the Kandyans with subterfuge and force of arms, they took over the Kandyan territories to establish labour intensive

plantations growing hitherto insignificant commodities. Although economically more radical, the British were far more tolerant about religious freedom. In many ways this expressed a trend taking place generally in Europe given that the Dutch had relaxed their strictures in the latter part of their rule.

British rule after 1848 was strong and in this environment, the Sri Lankan economy developed into a large-plantation economy. In Chilaw, coconuts emerged as the major product and this development had a powerful influence on the renaissance of the Munnesvaram temple. British rule in the Chilaw District was not without incidents, some of which are symptomatic of the changes wrought. In 1897 there was rioting in Chilaw town when Sinhalese attacked Muslim shopkeepers over high prices, particularly for rice (Rogers 1987:168-9). The A.G.A. wrote,

... even as late as a fortnight after the disturbance I found it necessary to have certain young Sinhalese charged with insulting the Mohammedans by drawing pigs and indecent pictures on the walls of the mosque;  
(Admin. Rep. 1897:18)

For twelve months afterwards, a police detachment remained in Chilaw (Admin. Rep. 1898:19) and when they left, the local Muslims unsuccessfully petitioned the A.G.A. for their return. In the large-scale Sinhalese/Muslim riots of 1815, however, there was no trouble in Chilaw. In 1930, a serious dispute arose between different Sinhalese fishing communities in Chilaw Town which had to be settled by the A.G.A. (Admin. Rep. 1930:15). There are also instances of conflict within the Muslim community and cases reported of

serious crime in the Madampe area (Rogers ibid:238). However, these incidents were minor.

#### The Development of the Coconut Plantation Economy

A.O.Brodie wrote in 1853 of the Chilaw/Puttalam District that coconuts were the burgeoning industry. At this time, much of the interior land was disused due to the decrepitude of the village tanks (Brodie ibid:38). Consequently, much of it was defined as Crown Land and/or Waste Land ripe for government sale or individual encroachment. Brodie waxes enthusiastically about the suitability of the area for coconut cultivation and gives lengthy details of export volume and prices. Coconut products went from Kalpitiya to India and from Madampe to Colombo (ibid:42). The expanding plantations were established by land-owners "settling" peasant families on allotments of their estates for up to eight years by which time the trees would be bearing. Then the tenant would receive either half of the trees he had been tending or would be paid off at a shilling or rix (sic) dollar per tree and dismissed (ibid:43).

To understand the importance of this development I note that firstly, coconut palms take between five and eight years to mature. This means that investment in the establishment of an estate is tied up for a number of years before the investor gets returns. Secondly, at the time of the expansion of the industry, coconut products were principally distributed within Sri Lanka or in India. European markets were limited and British planters were

more keenly opening up coffee estates in the hill country where returns were more rapid, greater, and from Europe. In 1871 the coffee blight ended much of this expansion, and coffee was replaced by tea, something of great consequence for the growth of a permanent Indian Tamil presence in the hill country since tea is harvested constantly, coffee seasonally.

In the absence of European demand, land prices in the coconut areas stayed down, and consequently, coconut plantations attracted more Sri Lankan capitalists than European. Furthermore, many of these indigenous entrepreneurs had thriving arrack (distilled coconut toddy) businesses in the southern areas of the country (Roberts 1979b, 1982). Arrack had become very important in the Dutch period, but had been monopolised by the Dutch. The British freed the arrack trade but took over the market for other coconut products such as copra and coir (Samaraweera *ibid*:8). With arrack one of the principal commodities for indigenous capitalists, the Chilaw plantation economy boomed. Importantly, though, these indigenous capitalists were already established at the time of the coconut boom. Many had profited from the haulage business in the south. They came into Chilaw from outside, invested existing capital in plantations, and thus resembled the European planter capitalists. Hence, although the coconut boom opened the Chilaw economy, it never entirely dismantled Chilaw's long-standing peripheral location.

In 1878 the Assistant Government Agent (A.G.A.) for the Chilaw/Puttalam District wrote of the intensification of coconut production and the almost entirely indigenous capital investment (Admin. Rep. 1878:69). A year previous the A.G.A. complained of the "considerable encroachments of Crown Land" with the police headmen's connivance (Admin. Rep. 1877:30). He goes on to call for a separate administration for Chilaw to cope with this problem as well as with the escalating number of "legitimate" acquisitions of land. Chilaw became a separate administration in 1887 and in that year the A.G.A. noted how change had been brought about, not by the "much vaunted 'European Enterprise'", but by native enterprise which he hastened to add was "under a firm and fostering Government" (Admin. Rep. 1887:181). At this time, 65,000 acres had come under cultivation in the district since the 1830's (ibid:183).

Land-grabbing became common in this period of expansion and efforts were made by several individuals to prove legitimate ownership. Documents, real and fake, were presented showing proof of ownership<sup>11</sup>. In 1873 title to Munnesvaram temple lands was claimed by eleven individuals of Munnesvaram village in the Chilaw District Court. The eleven men claimed to comprise the temple trust and sought access to the land once it was recognised as temple land. The men brought in a Colombo-dwelling Brahmin priest, Kumaraswamy Kurukkal, to give evidence as to the legitimacy of the documents they presented in the courts. In 1875, the District Judge, awarded the lands to the temple (The Ceylon Law Recorder Vol. VII p.16). In the same year Kumaraswamy



was recognised as the incumbent of the temple. These lands were in 1985 under both paddy and coconut cultivation. Kumaraswamy is the ancestor of the Brahmins who presently own the temple. The court action and its consequences are discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Poor transportation restricted economic growth in the early period. The Dutch-initiated canal from Puttalam to Colombo was not operational until the 1820's and there was no direct road connecting Chilaw and Kurunegala (Brodie *ibid*:38). By the 1850's the canal was in disrepair (*ibid*) and this further restricted the growth of the economy. In 1876, A.G.A. Saunders described his one and only trip on the canal as something he cared not to repeat because the canal's silted condition, due to poor engineering and maintenance, made for a very slow journey. He adds that a railway was necessary (Admin. Rep.1876:71). The railway was commenced more than a decade later and completed in the mid 1910's. The Chilaw Association, an association largely of indigenous planters that formed in the 1880's to lobby the government on land matters, took up the cause of the railway.

The Chilaw Association was the first serious indigenous political association under the British and later formed the backbone of the Ceylon National Congress (C.N.C.) (De Silva 1979:149; Roberts 1979c:233). It resembled the Planters' Association which was wholly European and in certain respects the former stood antagonistically to the more exclusive latter, because of the scorn directed by the

English planters at its leader, C.E. Corea (De Silva *ibid*). Not surprisingly, therefore, the Chilaw Association was an important arena for the development of nationalist sentiments by the indigenous elite. By 1912, C.E. Corea was decrying British land policy in terms of peasant welfare (Roberts *ibid*).

The Corea family are said to be descendants of one of the generals of Sitavaka Mayadunne, founder of the Kandyan kingdom. Simao Correa having led a rebellion against the Portuguese, became one of their greatest champions, second only to De Azevedo for his ruthlessness (Abeyasinghe 1966:116). He acquired extensive land-holdings in the Chilaw area and so his family were perfectly placed to gain from the subsequent coconut boom. They did this through every means possible, including the use of force and through connections with higher authorities in the colonial administration (Rogers *ibid*:214). What C.E. Corea decried in 1912 was exactly the means by which his family had acquired its wealth. He now spoke as the representative of his new countrymen vis-à-vis foreigners who were openly scornful of his attempts to be like them.

As entrenched locals, the Coreas thus differed from many of the other Chilaw coconut planters. Significantly, as local land-owners of long-standing they were no longer Catholic Karāva, like nearly all of the other entrepreneurs (Roberts 1979b:171), but Anglican Goyigama. Their position in the area, established under the Portuguese, changed to reflect their position in the new social order. In 1931,

G.C.S. Corea was elected from Chilaw to the Legislative Council with just under 90% of the vote (Admin. Rep. 1931:13)<sup>12</sup>. In 1986, the United National Party M.P. for Chilaw was Gamini Corea.

This evidence points to the way the Chilaw economy thrived from the 1860's with an expanding plantation sector largely owned by Sri Lankan capitalists. District revenue came principally from land sales and the Chilaw-Puttalam District often rendered the British a profit when elsewhere the island was gripped by economic depression such as during 1882 (Admin. Rep. 1882:17).

The thriving economy brought an influx of labour into the district. The establishment of the plantation is most labour intensive, because of clearing land. Following the planting, the saplings require constant watering and preferably fertilising with cattle dung and artificial fertilisers. After about five years the labour requirements diminish and once the trees are bearing, labour shifts to the different aspects of coconut production, namely harvesting, palm leaf thatching, fibre milling and toddy tapping. Thus, unlike tea cultivation which requires a spatially fixed labour force of leaf pluckers and curers as well as maintenance labourers, coconut labour has a scale of intensity relative to the age of the trees; a labour which then diversifies.

Table 1 shows the population increases in ten year periods from 1871 to 1921. Although it appears that labour

immigration reached its highest between 1881 and 1891 (26.9%), the excessive death rate from the influenza

Table 1: Population Growth in Chilaw 1871 - 1921

<u>Years</u>	<u>Population Increase %</u>
1871 - 81	18.8
1881 - 91	26.9
1891 - 1901	17.7
1901 - 11	17.8
1911 - 21	16.4

(Source: Report for Chilaw District, Census Reports 1921:154)

epidemic between 1911 and 1921 meant that the increase was due to immigration alone (ibid). However, in the period 1901 - 1911, immigration had begun to diminish and the increase was natural. Moreover, there was a lot of movement within the district as older estates became established and the labour force moved on to the newer estates (Denham in Ceylon at the Census of 1911). The increase was not simply of agricultural labourers and their families, the increased consumer market they created also brought in fishermen from the Negombo area to fish off Chilaw for a growing local market (Stirrat 1974).

Unlike for the tea estates, Indian Tamils constituted only half of the estate population. The rest were Sinhalese, predominantly from the Low Country (Census Reports 1921). But this did mean a sizeable influx of Tamil-speaking Hindus. That there were as many Sinhalese as Tamils working the estates could be due, in part, to the fact that the majority of the estate owners were themselves Sinhalese. The apparatuses organising estate labour in the Hill Country were largely controlled by the British. The

number of Tamils, however, remained fairly stable as more Sinhalese moved into the district.

34% of Chilaw's earning workers in 1921 were on the estates both as labourers, owners, managers, etc. Colombo and Negombo Districts provided the bulk of the labour influx.

The coconut industry created a consumer market that intensified the economy in other respects. With the fishing communities that moved to the beaches either side of Chilaw, petty traders, both Tamil and Muslim, also moved into the town. These groups figure centrally in the incidents of unrest that I mention above. The troubles of 1897 between Muslims and Sinhalese were over grain prices; the Sinhalese reacting to the largely Muslim monopoly over grain imports.

The 1921 report was cautious about the population increase, largely because most of the District's rice had to be imported.

The Chilaw District is very prosperous indeed, and there is not the least indication that the area cannot support the population. But in a district that is developing so rapidly, and in which a gradual growth of the population coincides with the acquisition of more and more land by the large estates, it is not unlikely that in future the question of overpopulation or some form of unemployment problem may arise. (ibid:156)

Rates of population increase did slow in those areas of longer plantation establishment, particularly the area south of Chilaw known as Pitigal Korale South. Chilaw town continued to grow as did the non-estate areas where ex-

estate labour settled. The renovation of many village tanks meant that rice production increased, especially after Independence in 1948 when the government Irrigation Department began active tank repairs island-wide.

The coconut boom facilitated the incorporation of Chilaw into the Colombo-centred, Sinhalese-dominated market economy. The population increase, although having a large Tamil component, increased the presence of low country Sinhalese Buddhists as well as Sinhalese Catholics. The ethnic composition of the area, therefore, has been drifting towards the Sinhalese not simply because of the Sinhalese influx. Tamil speakers are numerous and bilingualism is common. The drift has also occurred within hitherto Tamil-speaking groups.

#### Post-Independence 1948

Since the Second World War, the rate of growth of the coconut industry in Chilaw has declined and with it the movement of people into the Chilaw area. It remains the major production but the boom has definitely run its course. Post-Independence governments have at different times nationalised estates and limited the extent of land an individual can hold. This has broken up many of the larger estates into individual holdings within families. Large estates still exist, nonetheless, and important land-owning families, like the Coreas, are still prominent. While many of the elite Sinhalese have converted to Buddhism, especially those in the south, the Corea family have remained Christian, albeit non-Catholic.

In 1953, 31% of the male and 41% of the female Chilaw workforce were engaged in coconut production. The figure for males indicates the commencement of the decline of the industry for the Chilaw economy since it is down 2% on 1934. Table 2 indicates the various fields of production.

Table 2: Coconut Labour Force 1953<sup>13</sup>

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Chilaw District %</u>		<u>Nationally %</u>	
	M	F	M	F
Coconut production	17	23	3	3
Distilling spirits	~	~	~	~
Fermented beverages	6	~	1	~
Dessicated coconut	2	3	~	~
Coir fibre & fibres	5	14	~	5
Oil pressing	~	~	~	~
Copra	1	~	~	~
Total	31	41	4	8

The 1981 Census notes that 70% of the total extent of coconut cultivation "is concentrated in the coconut triangle formed by the districts of Colombo, Kurunegala, Puttalam and Gampaha" (Census of Population and Housing 1981:111). Nowadays, those still holding estates, generally live in Colombo and, moreover, their estates have been divided through land-holding legislation passed by the Bandaranaike government in the 1970's.

The estates are not all vast tracts of land. I have no data to give precise details; but there are in Chilaw, large estates (divided into several family land-holdings) and smaller tracts of land of less than five acres on which coconuts are grown by one family. In other words, there are, in hand with the large estates owned by wealthy Sri

Lankans, smaller estates owned by petty farmers. Chilaw is under three hours by road to Colombo and since the Second World War, private road transport has superseded the railway, thus creating another area of capitalist investment.

The coconut industry, therefore, changed the complexion of the Chilaw area and incorporated the area into the national economy in a novel way. This incorporation has constituted an important influence on shifting ethnic identity in the area from Tamil to Sinhalese; something recognised with alarm by Tamil nationalists (Arasaratnam 1979:509). To ascribe a pristine Tamil identity to Chilaw, however, would be far-fetched. Firstly, because of Chilaw's long see-sawing history, and secondly because the categories of the ethnic groups have been forged in a modern context. What can be said, though, is that Chilaw is part of "The South", part of the Sinhalese-controlled area.

So strongly associated with a single commodity as the Chilaw economy is, it is subject to the vicissitudes of the international market. From 1985 the international prices for coconut products dropped sharply, something which affected internal coconut prices as well. Many small-scale coconut producers did not bother harvesting their nuts, instead allowing them to fall from the trees and gathering them into heaps which eventually rotted. Coconut toddy continues to be a source of income because it is collected by the State Distilleries Corporation and transported to Colombo to be made into arrack. Toddy tapping has, therefore, remained stable; but other areas of coconut



production are presently suffering. Drought in 1986 had a severe effect on rice production.

#### Catholicism and Ethnic Tension in Chilaw

The Catholic church is still very powerful in Chilaw and has, since Independence, struggled with the increasingly pro-Buddhist governments. In the early 1960's, efforts to nationalise schools were strongly resisted by the Catholic Church but to no avail (Stirrat 1974:12). Since 1973, Buddhism has been constitutionally recognised as the state religion. The tension between Catholic authorities and the government in 1986 concerned the question of whether a special Catholic Affairs Ministry should be established given that similar ministries exist for Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. The Catholic bishops rejected the idea, arguing that they already have the necessary bureaucracy. This rejection maintains the Church's independence from central government control, an independence the Church appreciates. Difficulties have emerged for the Catholic Church with the escalation of ethnic conflict because the Catholics in Sri Lanka, more than any other religion, draw their membership across ethnic lines<sup>14</sup>.

The tension between Sinhalese Catholics and Buddhists has overridden other potential forms of conflict, particularly between Sinhalese and Tamils. Many Tamils are also Catholic. There is a story popular among Chilaw Catholics dating from the early 1970's which tells of a wealthy Sinhalese Buddhist businessman (originally from Matara in the south) who claimed that he would make Chilaw

into a Buddhist town and proposed to build a Buddhist shrine at the Town's main road junction. Before he could proceed, a shrine had been erected for Mary and, moreover, shortly after, he sickened and died. Chilaw Catholics explain that the Virgin Mary keeps special care of Chilaw and the Church in Chilaw and they thereby imply that Mary caused the businessman's demise.

In Chilaw town, therefore, social tensions exist between Catholics and Buddhists within the Sinhalese community far more than between Sinhalese and Tamils. In the anti-Tamil riots of 1983, there were only two incidents in Chilaw and one death resulted from one incident. It was explained to me, however, that this murder was a private affair which took advantage of the chaotic conditions. Otherwise, Chilaw remained quiet. Several told of how, when the army appeared to give people petrol with which to burn Tamil houses, the people's uncomprehending reaction led the soldiers to wonder about their patriotism. The violent passions that overtook Sinhalese all over the country, including non-Buddhist Sinhalese (see Stirrat 1984), did not consume the inhabitants of Chilaw. The civil disturbances that have wreaked havoc on Sri Lanka since the 1987 Indo-Lankan Peace Accord, have similarly been barely felt in Chilaw.

This is less the case in the Sinhalese villages in the area, most of which are Buddhist. These villagers espouse a certain amount of anti-Tamil sentiment, but it is nothing in the order of what is espoused elsewhere. There are many reasons for this, one being that, like the Catholic fishing

people, many of these villagers know of their Tamil ancestry. Another reason is that the villagers personally know many of the Tamils in neighbouring villages and know them to be very like themselves. However, there is and has been enmity in some of the settlements south of Chilaw town, such as Madampe and Kuliypitiya. In one of the first incidents of anti-Tamil rioting by Sinhalese in 1958, Tamils were burnt out of Kuliypitiya and some have since settled in Munnesvaram village. In Munnesvaram village I knew a few chauvinist Sinhalese, one of whom was convinced that the chief priest of Munnesvaram kept a cache of weapons in the temple and in the evenings gave lessons to young Tamils about making bombs. The matter was eventually investigated by the Colombo police, after the Chilaw police had dismissed the idea as nonsense. In a few other villages, similar ideas were expressed, and from one village, neighbouring the Tamil village where I conducted research, some villagers reported the suspicious foreigner liaising with their even more suspicious Tamil neighbours. The Chilaw police were similarly unimpressed. But these incidents were quite isolated and unusual. In 1983, at the height of the rioting in Colombo, Munnesvaram held its Adi festival, admittedly with a strong police guard and very few in attendance. It was nevertheless one of the few Hindu temples in the Sinhalese areas to do so.

What is indicated, then, is that Chilaw continues to hold a marginal location with respect to modern political, religious and ethnic movements in Sri Lanka, thus forging its own character. I stress that a major factor in this is

the nature of the coconut plantation economy.

### Conclusion

I commenced this historical survey with evidence of the ambiguity of ethnic identity in the Chilaw area and structured my presentation around a consideration of the different factors which have contributed to this ambiguity. I have concluded with evidence of Chilaw's relative inertia with respect to ethnic conflict in the recent history of the country. Chilaw is well known to Sri Lankan scholars as something of an ethnic melting-pot (Roberts 1979a) and it is a knowledge held more generally as well. The melting-pot is the product of history, a history that is also the history of the Munnesvaram temple. The aspect I highlight is that for centuries before the destabilising influence of the Portuguese, the Chilaw area occupied a marginal location to the Sinhalese and Tamil state structures, as well as having a prominence as a port<sup>15</sup>. The Dutch period saw the increased importance of Chilaw to Kandy and it was in this time that Munnesvaram was reconstructed. Then the Dutch took over Chilaw, paving the way for the eventual fall of Kandy, and the Chilaw area and Munnesvaram temple declined again. Finally, the area boomed in the 19th century because of coconuts. The population increased and included Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists. Both groups began to patronise Munnesvaram temple, reconstructed in the 1870's, in growing numbers and the temple became famous island-wide.

Although the coconut boom invigorated the Chilaw area, increasing its population and incorporating it in the national economy centred in Colombo, the pattern of large-scale investment by southern capitalists, contributed to keep Chilaw on the margins. As an expression of this, Roman Catholicism has not been seriously challenged in the Chilaw area as it has been in the south, and remains an autonomous political force shaping ethnic relations in the District. Moreover, the questions of ambiguous ethnic identity, bilingualism, combined Tamil and Sinhala names, and syncretic religious practice reveal Chilaw's relative isolation from many contemporary political influences.

But this relative isolation is not without significance. I refer back to the myths of the previous chapter, noting again that the Sinhalese Buddhist myth stresses Chilaw's marginal identity with respect to the centre of the polity. The history of Chilaw reveals the rational world with which that myth is congruent.

The historical factors that changed the face of Chilaw in the 19th and 20th centuries were factors felt all over Sri Lanka in different ways. They have led to the massive urbanisation of the Wet Zone littoral from Negombo almost down to Galle, and to the emergence of an urban bourgeoisie and proletariat. I have dealt with the Chilaw area in some detail in order to explain the location of Chilaw in modern Sri Lanka. I now consider the emergence of modern revivalist religion in Sri Lanka and the material conditions underlying it. The detailed analysis of the

Chilaw area is to be regarded as a concentrated study of these general material conditions.

#### Chapter 4, Revivalism in the British Period

Throughout the period of Munnesvaram temple's renaissance amidst the burgeoning coconut plantations in the Chilaw District, the dominant social movement among indigenous Hindu and Buddhist Sri Lankans was religious revivalism. Rebuilt in the 1870's, when revivalism was gathering momentum, Munnesvaram temple displays both Hindu and Buddhist revivalist influences. But it does so in different ways for each religion as a consequence of the stance each revival took in relation to the other. Both Hindus and Buddhists sought to establish a pure religious form uncorrupted by what were seen as historical degradations; but in the Buddhist case this involved taking a position vis-à-vis Hinduism that has profoundly influenced all the temples at Munnesvaram.

Both Hindu and Buddhist revivalism grew in the context and as a consequence of the major social changes of the later colonial period. Both movements share the following elements: they emerged from an intellectual struggle with European Christianity and framed their arguments accordingly; they developed a strong textual orientation, an orientation to a "Great Tradition"; and they were enmeshed in the changing class processes of the British period and in the cultural articulation of these processes as changes in the caste order of each society. Both movements were retrospective, looking back to an ideal pre-colonial order of society and religion. From the past were drawn traditions, but the process was a selective one meaning that traditions were not so much revived as

invented. Thus the movements share similarities with movements described elsewhere (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). They took place in a context of colonial hegemony, a discursive field which was bureaucratic, rational and puritanical. One whose language was understood to be an authentic language of power. Through their location in the colonial order, as entrepreneurs, professionals and agents of the colonial state, the protagonists of the revival knew this language well.

### Hindu Revivalism

Under the freedom of religion officially tolerated by the British, there was a revival of Hinduism in Jaffna during the 19th century. It is important to note that at this time, the majority of the population in Jaffna were Hindu, or, in the language of the 1827 census, "Heathens", revealing that after more than 300 years of religious persecution by the Catholic Portuguese and Protestant Dutch, the Jaffna inhabitants had clung tenaciously to their faith. Hence, the revival was not simply the abandonment of Christianity and the reappropriation of previous beliefs. More correctly it involved a major re-expression of Hindu beliefs in the context of European colonial power and the hegemonic quality European ideas assumed<sup>1</sup>. Revivalist ideology assumed a similar quality, but it did so antagonistically to European thought.

The Europeans who came to Jaffna as missionaries assisted obliquely in the anti-colonial stance. They were American Wesleyans whom the British allowed to establish



schools in Jaffna. They actively encouraged the Tamil language, both learning it themselves and having it taught at their Methodist Central School. One of their students, Arumuga Navalar (1822 - 1879), became the champion of the revivalist movement. He took a teaching post at the school after graduation and assisted Reverend Percival with the first Tamil translation of the Bible (Kailasapathy 1982:4). However, he quickly renounced this work, remorseful for having been instrumental in trying to convert Hindus to Christianity. After this, he actively began lobbying against Christianity in favour of Hinduism, or more precisely Śaivism, and founded Śaivite schools that espoused the same standards as the Wesleyens (Cartman 1957:55; Russell 1982:26).

The revivalist movement was entirely in hand with a renaissance of the Tamil language. Indeed, Kailasapathy argues that the Hindu revival developed into simply a Tamil revival, stressing more the glories of the language than the centrality of the religion (Kailasapathy *ibid*:11). This was in part due to the subsequent participation of non-Hindu Tamils. In this way, the revival was the seed of Tamil cultural nationalism. Initially, though, religion and language were inseparable.

The revival coincided with the increasing availability of cheap printed books and so it addressed an expanding audience in the Jaffna peninsula. The textual emphasis meant that the principal ideologues were scholars and these scholars, like Navalar, sought to establish the eminence of

Tamil Śaivism through ancient textual sources, especially the Āgamas and the writings of the Śaiva Siddhanta saints, in the Thevāram. Hitherto, the principle Hindu scholars were Brahmin priests, experts in Sanskrit. "Navalar Revivalism" stressed Tamil Śaivism and non-Brahmin scholarship, but did not place itself in radical opposition to the Brahmins who were not numerous in Jaffna. Sri Lanka never exhibited the anti-Brahmin movement as in parts of India. In its place, the tension was with Christians. Revivalist polemics were addressed directly at Christian tracts which had ridiculed Hindu practice (Kailasapathy *ibid*:4). There was no anti-clerical movement within the Hindu community.

The movement was predominantly an elite movement. Its textual orientation and celebration of Tamil language fed the exclusive tastes of the literate. Its audience was composed of "the local intelligentsia engaged in the professions and the self employed who were of respectable stock and generally landowners" (*ibid*:3). As more Jaffna Tamils received education from the high standard schools in the peninsula, the number of adherents grew and the movement gained more of an elitist orientation than a specifically elite membership. It became a movement of the emerging bourgeoisie.

Educated Jaffna Tamils took employment in large numbers in the Colonial Service as petty bureaucrats. Not only did these jobs take them to Colombo and elsewhere in the country, but to Malaysia where they were active in running

the railways, the postal service and managing plantations. They carried the ideology of the revival with them and shaped it in relation to the managerial positions they held. They administered for the British their fellow Hindus, Indian born Tamils who worked as coolie labourers, as well as Sinhalese and Tamils from other parts of Sri Lanka. Many of them then returned to Jaffna to buy land with their savings and pensions and establish themselves as the landed gentry and principal temple patrons of the Northern Province. Revivalism thus operated as a ruling ideology under the umbrella of colonialism and shaped the nationalist ideology that subsequently supplanted colonialism.

In the 1911 elections to the Legislative Council, 36% of those entitled to vote, the "Educated Ceylonese", were Ceylon Tamils (Roberts 1977:ix). At this time, they constituted only 13% of the total population (Ceylon at the Census of 1911:199). The vast majority of them were from Jaffna. The figures indicate the extent of Jaffna Tamil involvement in European education and the European political and social order. But they did so generally as Hindus<sup>2</sup>.

The revival was predominantly, though not exclusively, a Vellalar caste undertaking. Importantly, Vellalars are both numerically dominant at just under half the Jaffna population, and economically dominant as the major land-owners. As a group, however, they are internally divided in terms of relative status (e.g., the Satśudra Vellalar

regard themselves as superior to other Vellalar) and by the amount of land owned. Endogamous groups exist within the caste and they tend to be localised in different parts of the peninsula (Banks 1960:69-70). Some of these groups are poorer than members of lower castes. The history of the Jaffna economy during the colonial period reveals the stratification of this land-owning caste and to some extent explains the eagerness with which Jaffna Tamils entered the Colonial Service.

The Jaffna economy was heavily monetised during the Dutch period with an emphasis on export agriculture. Tobacco was the main crop and export markets were mostly in India (Arasaratnam 1982). Tobacco cultivation was suited to small land-holdings and its intensification increased land values. The Dutch affirmed the position of the dominant Vellalar land-holders in their efforts to increase export revenues. They established slavery and imported slaves from South India (Pfaffenberger 1990:81), effectively routinising under Roman Dutch law the caste order thus creating rigid caste boundaries that favoured the Vellalar (ibid). The property laws of Jaffna were codified as the Thesamvalamai in this period. Three types of property were recognised: dowry property (seedhanam), property a man inherited from his parents (muthisam), and property acquired after marriage (thediatheddam) (Arasaratnam ibid:4).

The intensified tobacco economy radically decreased rice cultivation and necessitated rice imports. Cultivators were

thus even further articulated into the cash economy and were often in debt to the Indian tobacco export agents who bought the crops at prices they fixed (ibid:7). This fragile economy grew even more precarious during the British period when trade restrictions were relaxed (ibid:27-28) and this was matched by the British dismantling the slavery system. Rigid caste distinctions began to erode and many hitherto non-Vellalar began to claim a Vellalar status (Pfaffenberger ibid:84). At the same time, population increase pressured land availability. Great incentives were thus provided for young Jaffna Tamil men to seek education and salaried employment in the professions and in government service. They mastered the scientific rationality of the ruling order. Such salary earners put even more pressure on land because they invested their capital in property, both houses and land, as these two items were essential for the dowries fathers and brothers provided for their daughters or sisters<sup>3</sup>.

Jaffna society was thus heavily stratified by the time of the British takeover and this stratification intensified during the 19th century. But it was a stratification conditioned by the large and growing presence of a single caste whose poorer members could claim an identity with the wealthy elite. They could do so especially in ritual contexts, but also in the terms of the traditional order of society the revival celebrated. The increasingly popular ideals of the revival constituted the authentic identity of the educated, land-owning, temple-going gentleman, providing the less-endowed with a model of behaviour many

of them could claim simply on the basis of their Vellalar caste backgrounds. With so many Vellalar on the peninsula, the ideals were actively pursued, often in the absence of a strong capital foundation. These ideals and the struggle to express them manifested in two major domains, temples and schools.

Temple reconstruction was highly valued by the revivalists with Navalar himself a main protagonist. For instance, in 1872 he urged the reconstruction of the famous ancient Thirukeethesvaram temple near Mannar (Vaithianathan 1960). Thus, it was not simply temple construction but ancient temple reconstruction as the assertion of the old order. From the 1860's, temples were rebuilt in Jaffna and other parts of the island. The reconstructions were done according to the Āgamas, and, where possible, Brahmin priests were installed to perform the rituals in the most orthodox way. Craftsmen for temple reconstruction were often brought from India and it was still common in 1984 to see Indian craftsmen working at Jaffna temples, carving basalt statues and wooden juggernauts.

The emphasis on a Brahminic orthodoxy was a consequence both of the revival's retrospective textual orientation and of its dialogue with a Christianity which ridiculed Hinduism's chaotic nature. The texts were not only formalised, they also belonged to the past and so were deemed legitimate. This orientation emphasised both the employment of Brahmins and the reconstruction of ancient temples rather than the building of new temples.

Notwithstanding such an orientation to the past, the orthodoxy often resulted in transforming existing practices. For instance, Navalar came into conflict with the management of the Nallur Kandaswamy temple in the 1870's and successfully halted blood sacrifice and "nauch dance performances" in the temple (Arumugam 1982:63).

The orthodoxy-emphasis articulated key ideas about the revival as a neo-ruling ideology. There is a distinction made between Āgamic and non-Āgamic temples in Sri Lanka which sometimes relates to orthodoxy of design, but more commonly refers to the presence or absence of Brahmin priests. Generally, the orthodox temples were administered by trusts made up of middle class revivalists, and funding for reconstruction came from this group. Membership in a trust was an important indicator of social status; but more than this, a trustee was in association with Brahmins and ritual orthodoxy, both of which gave definition to his social position, a position forged in new economic practices. Therefore, the orthodox nature of the revival, its emphasis on pristine tradition, owed as much to modern social forces in the contemporary economy, as it did to its dialogue with Christianity and its textual orientation<sup>4</sup>.

In addition to the membership of temple trusts, revivalists organised the construction of pilgrims' resthouses (mādams) in temple grounds. In the absence of a temple trust at Munnesvaram, for reasons that are discussed in the next chapter, resthouse administration is a central activity by revivalists. Between 1870 and 1965, six

resthouses have been built. Most of them are run by Jaffna Tamils; but most of these administrators are Colombo-based. One administrator is linked to the Ramanathan family, famous for their prominence in Jaffna and Colombo politics and temple construction. In the 1950's, along with other Jaffna Tamil professionals, this administrator sponsored the construction of Tamil-medium schools in two of the Munnesvarampattuva villages, as well as in Munnesvaram village. Thus, though he and his colleagues were outsiders to the Chilaw area, they had a strong interest in the area's ethnic complexion. In short, revivalists have been active in the nationalist politics of the late-colonial and post-colonial eras.

An interest in the welfare of pilgrims and local populations, combined with the preponderance of lay temple trusts in the newly built temples, suggests that Hindu revivalism emphasised the laity. Such a lay-emphasis in Buddhist revivalism, though one conditioned by other factors, notably the relation between society and the orders of monks, has led some scholars to stress this laicisation aspect (e.g., Gombrich 1988). But this laicisation emerged in a colonial administrative environment. The resthouses, trusts, and various revivalist "Societies" that sprang up, were created and run by bureaucrats and professionals. Their articulation into the colonial order was critical. For instance, the Nallur Kandaswamy temple, having removed its dancing girls and halted its sacrifices, at least in public, was graced by a large mechanical clock set into its entrance tower.



Ostensibly this clock marks a return to orthodox tradition with daily temple ritual being performed strictly to schedule. Priests are issued watches. While this does return the temple to a highly orthodox Hindu fold, one should not neglect the role of Vellalar stationmasters in bringing it about.

Emphasising the laity did not subvert major social distinctions from being expressed. Restricted temple entry was a major issue in the reconstructed Āgamic temples, being asserted by members of high castes, especially the Vellalar, and disputed by others. Conflicts were common, and related incidents were being reported in Jaffna even in the late 1970's (Pfaffenberger *ibid*). This was part of a general atmosphere of intercaste tension that became very pronounced in Jaffna. In 1913, one national newspaper described the situation as "The ever-occurring caste disputes in the Northern Province" and went on to recount how some Vellalar men in Jaffna had been antagonised by a carpenter who had employed beaters for the 30th day after a funeral, a right usually restricted to higher castes (The Ceylon Independent Supplement, Colombo, 19.7.1913 p.1). In 1938, in an article on Kataragama and Jaffna's caste order, I.David, described caste as Jaffna's "inexorable goddess" (The Times of Ceylon Sunday Edition, Colombo 14.8.1938). This suggested that caste distinctions were primordial.

The British found these caste disputes to be bothersome and contrary to their own views of society and its economic progress. The largely Sinhalese administration that

followed them have also been frustrated by these disputes. In 1950 the report of the Special Committee on Hindu Temporalities argued against primordialism of caste restrictions. The committee stated that since temple entry bans were recent phenomena they were invalid. Restrictions were seen to be against "all accepted and recognised precepts of the Hindu religion" (Draft Report of the Special Committee on Hindu Temporalities 1950 p.1).

Munnesvaram temple initially had rules of entry but these were relaxed in the early 1920's as they became difficult to enforce during the annual Adi festival, with increasing numbers of Sinhalese Buddhists attending. However, the Sinhalese Beravā caste drummers, a low caste, play at Munnesvaram on special occasions and never enter the main part of the temple. Were they to attend casually they would be able to enter, since the priests never ask people making offerings what their caste is. That is, Munnesvaram and Chilaw did not experience many of the social movements originating from Jaffna with the same intensity as Jaffna itself.

The opposition to temple restrictions in Jaffna worked within the spirit of Gandhi's Harijan movement; but the extent of the antagonism to such a movement in Jaffna was quite pronounced and often violent. It was also expressed in the opposition Jaffna Tamils felt towards the Indian estate Tamils who were all regarded as low caste. This general attitude towards estate Tamils was grounded in a view of the lowly nature of their poorly paid labour rather

than in an understanding of the actual situation. That is, the view was that the estate Tamils must have been low caste for them to be engaged in such labour; whether they really were low caste did not matter. Poverty and the readiness to demean oneself in such a way were proof enough<sup>5</sup>.

That many of the temples rebuilt in the revival had been famous temples in pre-Portuguese times was both an important factor underlying why they were rebuilt and a factor effectively necessitating the use of old textual sources. The revivalist temple reconstructions invented a past because in the past there could be found a Tamil Śaivism, uncorrupted by modern European thought. This extended the anti-colonial nationalistic aspect of the revival<sup>6</sup>. Hence, the distinction Āgamic/non-Āgamic or, more pertinently, Great Tradition/Little Tradition, is a modern, revivalist distinction which has emerged in this context of cultural nationalism. It was even used by the Gandhians of the Hindu Temporalities committee when they argued that temple entry bans had no legitimacy in the past and, therefore, no legitimacy at all. Doubtless the supporters of bans were using the fact that caste is a pre-European phenomenon as their justification; caste as the "inexorable goddess".

Restricted temple entry amounted to restricted access to Brahminic orthodoxy. It extended to access to education. School entry as well as the equal height of school chairs for non-Vellalar children were keenly disputed by Vellalar

parents. Jane Russell (1982:11-14) describes incidents from the 1930's concerning the attempts by Vellalar parents to establish exclusive schools, incidents championed by Tamil politicians. Access to the means by which the revivalist bourgeoisie established their position, education and government service, was actively denied by those struggling to gain it to those deemed unfit to have it<sup>7</sup>. Seating was also an issue on buses and it extended to Christians as well as Hindus (ibid).

Restricted temple entry, reconstructed ancient temples, and Brahminic orthodoxy, were thus all central characteristics of Hindu revivalism. They relate to the critical issue of the assertion of Vellalar dominance in a changing socio-economic environment. It was in this context that the Munnesvaram temple was rebuilt in the 1870's. But Munnesvaram emerged in an environment where other factors were important, namely the relationship between Munnesvaram and its Sinhalese Buddhist past. Buddhist revivalism is as important to Munnesvaram as Hindu revivalism.

### Buddhist Revivalism

A Buddhist revival also took place in Sri Lanka, but it was shaped by different factors. Firstly, revivals, in the sense of periodic purges of the order of monks (saṅgha) by the king, were regular events. Liyanagamage (1983) describes tense relations between state and saṅgha in the early Anuradhapura period, Gunawardana (1979) mentions instances in the early medieval period (from the 9th to the 13th centuries), and Gombrich (1988) discusses the

importance of state control over ordination ceremonies. There was a revival during Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's time in Kandy, a revival that asserted the encompassing position of the Buddha in the pantheon and polity of the Sinhalese Buddhist state (Dharmadasa 1979). It was at this time that the Tooth Relic was incorporated in the Äsala Perahāra at Kandy (Seneviratne 1978). Significantly, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe was an Indian Hindu who converted to Buddhism and wooed the Buddhist saṅgha to support his fragile kingship. Opposition to Kirthi by certain Kandyan nobles forced him into this position and he ardently espoused Buddhism as a result (Dharmadasa *ibid*:100). He also sought to purify the order of monks and halt the practice of temporary monkhood because this had become a means whereby members of the nobility controlled vast tracts of temple lands under the guise of pupillary succession of the temple incumbency (Malalgoda 1976:54). Through reinstating a process for the ordination of monks, the state sought to reassert control over these lands and over the Saṅgha.

These links between state, society, and saṅgha, and the history of purification of the religion, make revivalism more intrinsic to Sinhalese Buddhism than it is to Tamil Hinduism, since there has long been an identifiable set of religious precepts and a clergy to embody them. These factors are additional to those modern Buddhism shares with its Hindu counterpart.

The close links between revivalism and the state were complemented by the independence of Kandy from European

takeover until the latter part of colonial rule. Kandy remained a separate Buddhist kingdom, a repository for the symbols and practices of what appeared to be the pre-colonial, "traditional", order, and hence in a dominant relation to centres for Buddhism re-emerging in the coastal areas. This dominance was largely in the hands of the dominant caste, the Goyigama, especially its aristocratic members, the Radala. But the economic position of this group became threatened by the rapidly expanding plantation economy with its attendant land-grabbing by European planters. As the political and economic power of the Kandyan nobility became more threatened, so too was their position under attack from the emerging non-Kandyan Goyigama and non-Goyigama elites participating in the long-monetised economy of the coastal area. Between the so-called "Low Country" and "Kandyan" Sinhalese serious tensions existed. Malalgoda (ibid) describes these tensions in some detail, noting the rise of different fraternities of monks at different times, and the concomitant shifting of the ritual centre from Kandy to Galle and Colombo. Moreover, the fraternities were themselves cloven by internal schisms and jockeyings for power. The claims to espouse a more pure form of Buddhism rang loudly as a consequence of these frictions and tensions which simultaneously impeded the emergence of a coherent Sinhalese Buddhist revival.

Though education and professional employment were not pursued as intensely as in Jaffna, the emerging Sinhalese bourgeoisie also actively engaged in the colonial order.

The non-Goyigama castes that began to participate successfully in the market economy on the coast were mainly from the Karāva fishing caste, and also from the Durāva and Salāgama castes (Roberts 1982). Of these groups the rise in status of the Karāva has been remarkable. Many of them now claim an equal status with Goyigama who have not been as successful as their Jaffna Tamil cultivator counterparts, the Vellalar. Importantly, a large portion of bourgeois Karāva were Christians, Protestants as well as Catholics. They converted "back" to Buddhism, especially in the early Independence period.

The struggle Buddhist revivalism had with Christianity was like its Hindu counterpart a struggle both with the colonial authorities and the local community. Buddhist monks actively and publicly debated with Christians from the 1860's, the most famous occasion being at Panadura in 1873 (Ames 1973:158). Such debates fed the tension between Kandyan elites and low country bourgeois Christians. This situation has led scholars to label revivalist Buddhism as "Protestant" (Ames *ibid*, Obeyesekere 1970, Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988, Malalgoda 1976), as it is seen to have borrowed many Protestant sentiments.

The debate with Christianity was also profoundly influenced by members of the Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Olcott. The latter, an American, established the Buddhist Theosophical Society in 1880. He gave much encouragement to the Sinhalese champion of the revival, the Anagarika Dharmapala (Obeyesekere 1979;

Kapferer 1983). Importantly, the Theosophical Society sought to dismantle the tensions that had developed between rival fraternities of monks. Olcott came from an egalitarian tradition.

Dharmapala was born in Colombo into a Goyigama caste family. His father had made a fortune in furniture manufacture (Obeyesekere *ibid*:296) and thus was part of the Colombo-based new economic elite. But the family was uneducated and Buddhist, his mother being especially devout, and this meant for some ostracisation from the predominantly Protestant Colombo elite (*ibid*), many of whom were non-Goyigama. Obeyesekere argues that these circumstances in which Dharmapala grew up were personally alienating and instrumental in shaping his ideas. He also sees Dharmapala's experience to be symbolic of the entire Sinhalese Buddhist identity (*ibid*:300).

Dharmapala saw Buddhism to be in decay, requiring cleansing from the tarnish of its fall from grace into a world of superstitions. Thus, his cry rang with earlier cries such as those of the Kandyan monks during Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's reign. His great text on the revival, Return to Righteousness was a guide for the Sinhalese layman about a correct Buddhist way of life. This guide defined a pure Buddhism which did not include practices such as deity worship and exorcism (Kapferer 1983).

Although Dharmapala adopted an ascetic lifestyle, he did not become a monk. The term anaqārika means "homeless" and



describes one who adopts the ascetic ideals of a monk without removing himself from the everyday world (ibid:277). His form of asceticism has been likened to what Weber characterised as the "inner-worldly-asceticism" practised by the Protestants in the development of rational bourgeois capitalism (Weber 1978) and this laicisation of Buddhist asceticism is identified by Gombrich to be at the "heart of the Protestant Buddhist ethos" (Gombrich 1988:191). In this way the Buddhist revival of the 19th and 20th centuries is distinguished from earlier revivals, such as Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's, and called "Protestant Buddhism" (ibid).

Both Hindu and Buddhist revivalism asserted the necessity of a pure religion uncorrupted by folk superstitions which were seen to have infused contemporary religious practice as society had been degraded by colonialism. But in adopting an anti-colonial stance, both revivals adopted a logic of colonial domination as their adherents assumed positions of power over the peasantry in the colonial and post-colonial political orders. The revivalist critiques of folk religion echoed the critiques made by the Christian authorities when they described the "superstitions" of Hinduism and Buddhism as the chaotic folk religion of the uneducated peasants. The revivals emerged in the context of rationalist colonial hegemony and refracted its discourse as their own. Such a refraction reveals the potency of the British colonial order, an order that not so much dominated as administered, an order that employed large numbers of natives to do its work. In doing

so the British created the strata who would replace them<sup>8</sup>.

When Hindu revivalists asserted their religious purity they dismissed in particular the practices of animal sacrifice, temple dancing, trance activities and sorcery. These practices were deemed to be those of the low castes, the uneducated and the poor. Elitist Jaffna Tamils identified them with outsiders, especially Indians but also Batticaloa Tamils who were known not to be Vellalar<sup>9</sup>. When Buddhist revivalists asserted the purity of their religion they also located these practices with the uneducated poor, but they did something more. They asserted that the corrupting influences of contemporary folk Buddhism stemmed from Hinduism. To this end, not only did they reject sacrifice, dance, trance and sorcery, they also rejected deity and planetary worship, the stuff of Brahminical Hinduism. There was historical precedent in the chronicled accounts of Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe, and there was the popular historical conception that Kandy had fallen when the last king had converted "back" to Hinduism<sup>10</sup>. These Hindu influences were thus seen to be at the heart of a fragmented Sinhalese Buddhist society, one that required a pure Buddhist, non-Hindu, state for a "return to righteousness". The fact of the large number of Tamils working for the British contributed to this view.

So while the Hindu revivalists identified folk practice with outsiders who were nonetheless part of the total Hindu society of which caste was a component, Buddhist revivalists identified "abaudha" folk religion with poor

Sinhalese and Tamil Hindus. As with the Hindu revival though, the definition of outsiders was an encompassing process. In constructing elements of popular religious practice as impure, the revivals hierarchically sought to incorporate them. This moved in accordance with the hegemonic discursive field of colonialism in which the movements were founded and grew.

### "Protestant Buddhism"?

But is the label "Protestant Buddhism" appropriate for all of this? It has been applied to revivalist Buddhism for the following reasons. Firstly, the revivalists on the littoral had experienced European Protestantism for more than a century and many of them had converted to Protestant religions. Secondly, Dharmapala's polemical text has a highly puritanical form, directing the laity in all their social habits, including the proper use of fork and spoon. Thirdly, the revivalists "protested" against the religion of the colonial authority. Finally, as mentioned above, Dharmapala espoused an "inner-worldly asceticism" and valued the laity over the clergy.

There are difficulties with the label "Protestant Buddhism", the principal one being that it aligns modern Buddhism too closely with European thought and not with colonial rule. What, for example, is particularly "Protestant" about Dharmapala's rejecting what can be called the "folk" religion of the Sinhalese Buddhist villages? His discourse was bureaucratic, rational and puritanical. It was the authentic language of power, one

Navalar also employed. Their puritanism was hegemonic and it had been learnt through long contact with the source of colonial hegemony.

It fell on the receptive ears of Tamils and Sinhalese who constituted the new ruling elite and it became their discourse as it also embodied a critique of colonial rule. That is, the Sri Lankan nationalists who won increasingly significant measures of autonomy from the British during the early part of the 20th century, both replicated their rulers and stood apart from them. This is clearly evident in the Chilaw Planters' Association. They opposed colonial rule but did not oppose colonial hegemony.

Many of the laity who espoused Dharmapala's creed were entrepreneurs engaged in business in the colonial capitalist world. It could be argued, therefore, that they were ready for a "Protestant Ethic". One immediate response to this is that, according to Gombrich (1988:55-59), Buddhism has always appealed to urban-dwelling merchants and so the argument could be that the ethic was nothing new<sup>11</sup>. But European capitalism assumed its dominance in a colonial context. Was there a "Protestant Ethic" to be absorbed? To say there was is to miss the point of Weber's argument: can Weber's concept of inner worldly asceticism be applied to a Buddhist context?

When Weber described the Protestant Ethic, he was not describing a thing, free-floating and autonomous, that appeared in Europe and created rational bourgeois

capitalism. Rather, he identified an idea, that emerged in parts of Europe at a particular time in Europe's history of society, technology and political stability (or instability), and fostered a major social change. In doing so, this ethic changed too. It became the Spirit of Capitalism and from there no return was possible because it was caught up in history. It is wrong, therefore, to look for this idea, appearing thing-like, in another context.

Secondly, to liken Dharmapala's Buddhist revival to European Protestantism is to neglect a major distinction Weber drew in forms of asceticism; namely, the abnegation of the world and the acquisition of magical mastery of the world through abnegation (Gerth & Mills 1977:327). These two sides of asceticism's "Janus-face" (ibid) respectively relate to Weber's distinction between the outworldly individual and the inworldly individual, as the definitive social orientation of the particular ascetic. In this scheme, Buddhist asceticism is not like the inner-worldly asceticism of the European Calvinist obsessed with the soteriological dilemma of Predestination. Asceticism is contingent with different forms of theodicy (ibid:275,358) and for this reason, types of asceticism are not necessarily commensurate. Any comparison between 19th century Sinhalese Buddhist revivalism and European Protestantism must recognise this fundamental incommensurability.

Thirdly, though it is undeniable that Dharmapala addressed the laity, he was addressing new social

formations within the Sinhalese community, and, most importantly, he was addressing a context of schism and tension between fraternities in the Buddhist clergy. Olcott's Buddhist Theosophical Society, which had such a profound influence on Dharmapala, sought to transcend these tensions. The lay religiosity of the Buddhist revival addressed an entirely different laity than that of the European Protestants.

To describe Buddhist revivalism as "Protestant" is, therefore, to obscure more than to clarify and consequently I see no use for the label. Most importantly, it takes no account of the relationship between modern Buddhism and modern Hinduism.

#### Munnesvaram and Revivalism

The Munnesvaram temples display the influence of both Hindu and Buddhist revivalism and their religious significance has grown in this interactive field. While it may appear contradictory that Munnesvaram has such a large proportion of Sinhalese Buddhists in its patronage, when modern Buddhism asserts its purity as a negation of its so-called "Hinduizing trends" (Gombrich *ibid*:203), the popularity of Munnesvaram is a direct consequence of this assertion.

Hindu revivalism has been very important to the Munnesvaram temple. Although Munnesvaram's recent history is prior to the modern Hindu revival, in that its reconstruction is credited to Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe in the

1750's, the existing temple structure dates back to only the 1870's and this structure was begun by a Brahmin priest who imported artisans from South India. In other words, Munnesvaram had already been rebuilt prior to the Hindu revival but underwent a major refashioning at the height of the revival. Munnesvaram is described by its priests as an Āgamic temple, the rituals and temple design are meant to be in accordance with Hindu orthodoxy.

In the Chilaw area the strength of the Catholic church has been an important impediment to the influence of the Buddhist revival. Many of the antagonisms of the post-Independence period have been between Catholics and Buddhists rather than any other groups such as Tamils or Muslims. The land-owning elite that emerged through the expansion of the coconut industry was Sinhalese. However, its members were not Buddhists and for the most part absent from Chilaw. The exception is the Protestant Coreas whose political support stems from the Sinhalese Catholics in Chilaw. Hence there has not been a strong Buddhist political influence led by a local bourgeoisie on the Munnesvaram priests.

The situation is different in many of the villages attached to Munnesvaram because these villages are Buddhist. The majority is inhabited by small-scale coconut producers and by petty coconut entrepreneurs; that is, those engaged in processes of articulation into powerful positions in contemporary Sinhalese society. In many instances, these inhabitants have espoused modern Buddhism

and rejected its "non-Buddhist" elements such as attending Hindu temples. Such revivalists maintain close links with the Buddhist monks who inhabit the area. As I have noted, though, there was no violence in 1983 between these villagers and Tamil villagers, or any violence directed at the Munnesvaram temple whose Adi festival was held during the period of island-wide rioting, albeit with police protection. This is not to say that the area is completely free of ethnic tensions, but that these tensions are moderated by other factors.

The absence of an effective local Buddhist agitation against Munnesvaram led by powerful Buddhist revivalists has enabled the Munnesvaram priests to pursue their Hinduisation of the main Munnesvaram temple and the Bathrakali temple. Munnesvaram remains conspicuously Hindu and as such it occupies a special place in popular Buddhism. As an ostensibly Hindu temple, Munnesvaram is the very embodiment of that through which modern Buddhism defines and asserts itself. The temples are critical to the self-affirmation of Sinhalese Buddhists who associate them with all that is fragmentary and disruptive of the Sinhalese Buddhist order. Munnesvaram stands on the margins of Sinhalese Buddhist society, at the interface of the Tamil Hindu and the Sinhalese Buddhist. The ethnic complexion of Chilaw, one forged in colonialism, contributes to this interstitial, ambiguous marginality. But in the logic of hierarchy, the margins are the points through which order is created. The Sinhalese Buddhist myth of King Kirthi's cure is an expression of this potency. The



deities of the temple, like the magicians of Batticaloa and the propagators of the Hindu elements of Buddhism (see notes 9 & 10), are female. And they are Hindu. Their enormous presence is partly a consequence of the historical factors which have shaped Chilaw and modern Sri Lanka.

### Animal Sacrifice

The attitude to animal sacrifice reflects both Hindu and Buddhist revivalists' attitudes present at Munnesvaram. In the Bathrakali temple ownership litigation brought against his father's brothers by the present temple incumbent in the 1970's, evidence was sought from both the then incumbent monk at the Pusparamaya vihāra next to the Bathrakali temple, as well as from the then senior officiating Brahmin at Munnesvaram. Although both the Brahmin and the monk gave only corroborative evidence on the Bathrakali priests' family, they were both keen to dissociate themselves from the temple.

Panawala Medankara Thero came to Munnesvaram in the late 1920's when he was twenty five. In 1985-6 he was the chief incumbent of the Karawita vihāra, and one of the most important Buddhist monks in the area. In 1975, about the Bathrakali temple, he told the courts that Kaliamma was a non-Buddhist deity not worshipped by Buddhists. The Buddhists who did so "never bring animals when they come to me". Rather they would worship the Buddha and then attend the Bathrakali temple where they may take animals to be sacrificed (D.C. Chilaw No.10/T 1977:143).

Subrahmaniam Kurukkal, father of Munnesvaram's current senior officiating priest, also made a submission about the Bathrakali temple saying "I am a Brahmin. I do not like to go to unclean places. I do not kill animals. I do not even break an egg and I am a complete vegetarian."(ibid:246). It was noted in the submission, however, that the Brahmins attend the Bathrakali temple on the night following the concluding event of the Adi festival. This is also the conclusion of the Bathrakali temple festival, the day of Velvi when several goats used to be sacrificed. The Brahmins went to the Bathrakali temple at night immediately after the temple was closed. During my research at Munnesvaram, as far as I knew, the Brahmins did not attend the Bathrakali temple.

The outright rejection of sacrifice by the Buddhist monk locates the Bathrakali temple outside the Buddhist order. The Brahmin priest also locates himself apart from such practice; but must admit that the temple is part of the overall Hindu order when he admits to visiting the temple on the day of Velvi. What is most interesting is that neither monk nor Brahmin were actually asked about the practice, but were both keen to dissociate themselves from it.

Since 1979, ritual animal sacrifice has been banned by the U.N.P. government and so the Velvi day is curtailed. The ritual practice, having already acquired a religious determination in the contemporary revivalist thought of both Hindus and Buddhists, acquired an additional political

determination in the populist Buddhist policies of the contemporary Sinhalese state. Significantly, the practice of animal sacrifice at the Bathrakali temple is most popular with Sinhalese Buddhists. Prominent Sinhalese politicians are heavily involved.

### Conclusion

Tamil Hindu revivalism stressed Brahminic orthodoxy with respect to newly rebuilt temples that were historically significant as ancient temples. Buddhist revivalism asserted the purity of Buddhism uncorrupted by the so-called "non-Buddhist" practices of deity and planet worship, sacrifice and exorcism. In doing so, Buddhist revivalism characterised such practices as Tamil and Hindu. Far from diminishing in significance, Tamil Hindu ritual centres derived an additional significance from the Buddhist revivalists' labelling. At the same time, the Hindu revivalists' valuing of Brahminic orthodoxy and temple construction helped create these ritual centres as conspicuously distinct from the Sinhalese. Munnesvaram temple is one of the most important of these centres. Its popularity with Sinhalese Buddhists grew as the Buddhist and Hindu revivals grew.

I have emphasised the class ideological elements of both revivals, stressing the colonial market economies in which they developed, and the extensive participation in these economies by revivalist protagonists. They asserted the purity of their religion over the folk practices of poor peasantry as they assumed dominant class positions. The

distinction between Great tradition and Little tradition, therefore, is to be understood as formed in class processes.

The growing popularity of such non-Buddhist centres as Munnesvaram with Sinhalese Buddhists could be viewed as an expression of resistance by depressed classes. There are difficulties with such a view. Most importantly, Munnesvaram is not simply attended by the poor, either urban or rural. Middle classes attend in large numbers too (see Chapter 6). It is better to regard Munnesvaram as reflecting the overall social and historical forces which have contributed to its religious significance, than to focus too closely on the poor who manifest their deprivation and assume a sense of personal autonomy in the non-Buddhist Munnesvaram context. This is not to say they do not do this, rather it is to say that this is only part of what happens at Munnesvaram.

Chapter 5, The Munnesvaram Priests, Brahmin and Non-Brahmin

The broad historical processes discussed in the previous two chapters realise their influence in the social composition of the priests of the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples as well as in the composition of the worshippers. The religious significance of Munnesvaram is bound up in history, particularly in the interpretations of the history of the temples and religious potency of their deities by the priests and devotees. These two groups, who will be described and analysed over the following two chapters, define themselves through the temples and through their determination of the rightful ownership of the main Munnesvaram temple.

What are examined in the following discussion of the priests of the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples, are the relations between each group and their respective temple, between each group and the other, and between each group and the inhabitants of the surrounding area. The Munnesvaram priests are Brahmins while those serving Bathrakali are not. These Brahmins have legally won a vague quasi-ownership of the temple from the local inhabitants, including the Bathrakali priests, while the Bathrakali priests' outright ownership has only been legally contested within the family group. The Brahmins are regarded as outsiders by the local population while the non-Brahmins are insiders. All of these factors shape the hierarchical relations which exist between the two groups of priests and thus inform the relationship between the two goddesses they

serve, Ambal and Bathrakali.

In the manner of many of the anthropological studies of Hindu temples<sup>1</sup>, the legal disputes over temple ownership are considered in detail. They explain the unusual fact that the Munnesvaram temple is controlled by its Brahmin priests; unusual since most of the famous Hindu temples in Sri Lanka are controlled by lay trusts. Were a lay trust to be incumbent at Munnesvaram, it would largely be Sinhalese Buddhist. Through their control the Brahmins are free to emphasise the Hindu elements of temple design, iconography and ritual. Additionally, the court disputes reveal the manner of the spread of colonial hegemony through the appropriation of temple administrations by the British courts and, through them, by the indigenous bourgeoisie<sup>2</sup>. The control of temples was reconceptualised in light of British ideas about property, and articulated in the language of British bureaucracy. For the groups competing for the control of Munnesvaram, this reconceptualisation created an absurd situation ending with the Brahmins controlling the temple and its revenues. In this situation several important ideas about Munnesvaram and Brahminism were expressed and continue to be expressed.

The nature of Munnesvaram temple's large Brahmin workforce reveals how considerations about a Brahmin identity have been shaped by the Brahmins' perceived need to protect the temple from outside non-priestly control. The Munnesvaram Brahmins are not Brahmins simply through serving as priests at the temple, they are Brahmins as they

serve at a temple they effectively own. This state of affairs has come about as a consequence of an 1873 litigation over temple lands which first brought the Brahmins to Munnesvaram, and a 1925 litigation against these Brahmins which secured their control. In both litigations ancestors of the Bathrakali temple priests were involved. Importantly, the Brahmins' conception of temple ownership gives pre-eminence to the role of the king. In their view, Munnesvaram is a king's temple, the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka. The link with kings, discussed already in relation to the temple origin myths, is constantly noted by the priests in several contexts, one of which is temple ownership.

#### The Munnesvaram Brahmin Priests

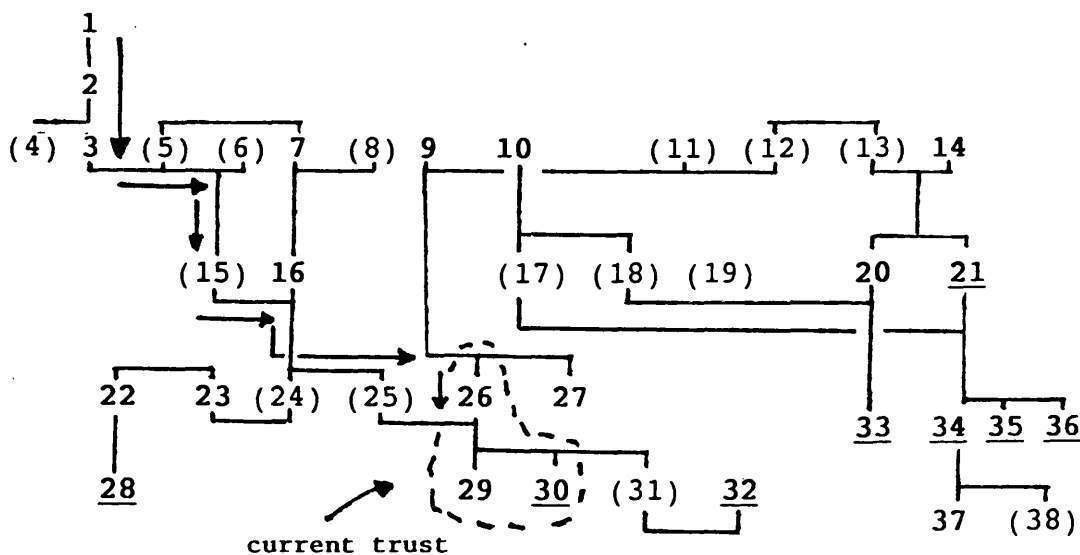
Legally nobody owns the Munnesvaram temple, a trust administers it. Where Munnesvaram is unusual is that one family of the Brahmin priests who officiate in it have absolute control over this trust. Currently the trust consists of one man and his two sons. Most of the other Brahmins present are related to these men and their relationships are shown in Diagram 1. The genealogy commences with Kumaraswamy Kurukkal (no.1) who came to Munnesvaram from Colombo in 1871 to advise on the court action of 1873 in which a group of Munnesvaram villagers sought to vindicate title to temple lands. One of these villagers was the incumbent trustee of the temple which was at that stage in ruins. He passed the incumbency to Kumaraswamy Kurukkal in either 1873 or 1874. He was also the owner of the Bathrakali temple. His great great

grandson is the current owner of that temple.

A striking feature of the Munnesvaram staff is the number of Brahmins serving at different levels other than the performance of ritual. Nearly all of them are related. I collected the genealogy shown in Diagram 1 from the present incumbent, Karthikkeyan (no.30) whose father, Ratnakailasanathan (26) is the chief incumbent. The genealogy is incomplete, however, in instances that will be noted in due course. Those priests in the genealogy who were working at the temple in 1985 and 1986 are underlined. Transmission of the incumbency is shown by the arrow.

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Diagram 1: The Munnesvaram Priest\*



\* Names are given in the text. Women are in brackets. Underlining indicates the working priests, 1985-6.

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The main officiating priests are Maniswamy (28), Somaswamy (33) and Seeniswamy (34). Seeniswamy is the senior of these, being fully trained as a kurukkal both in Jaffna and by his father, Subrahmaniam (21) who was the



senior officiating priest until his retirement in the early 1980's. Seeniswamy is qualified to wear the large wooden necklace indicating his position and it is he who performs the priestly roles in the annual Adi Utsavam festival. With Maniswamy and Somaswamy, Seeniswamy shares the daily temple duties on a three week roster; but he and his father hold more senior positions. They both receive a percentage of the annual temple income on top of a monthly salary, whereas Maniswamy and Somaswamy only receive a monthly wage. Seeniswamy increments his income through his private astrological consultancy while Maniswamy and Somaswamy earn commissions from the private rituals they accomodate within their daily schedule. That is, from accepting offering baskets and performing such private rites as the consecration of motor vehicles between the usual periods of temple ritual.

Seeniswamy and his Subrahmaniam are the only priests who wear their hair in the customary priestly manner of shaved at the front and long at the back tied in a knot. Their position is additionally reflected by the location of their house immediately north of the temple wall, the original priests' housing built in the 1870's, and the housing occupied by Ratnakailasanathan whenever he comes to Munnesvaram. Maniswamy lives on the other side of the temple, and Somaswamy lives in Negombo, staying in the northern housing during his week's shift.

The more senior priests are closer kin to the incumbents. Seeniswamy's father, Subrahmaniam (21), is a

parallel cousin of Ratnakailasanathan (26) the chief incumbent; their mothers are sisters. Moreover, Subrahmaniam's wife was Ratnakailasanathan's parallel cousin (FBD). Consequently they speak of each other as brothers, as do their sons, Seeniswamy and Karthikkeyan (30). Somaswamy (33) is similarly related but other factors account for his relative distance.

Although retired, Subrahmaniam still assists with special rites. He is a widower and as a result he should not perform the full duties of a kurukkal. That is, technically he should not perform any duties, because only married priests should officiate. This rule is, however, not strictly applied. The explanation for the rule is that the male Brahmin only becomes, as it were, whole through marriage. Through establishing a household with a female Brahmin, the male Brahmin gains a complement of creative energy (śakti), rendering him complete and able to act as a priest. Fuller (ibid:30-31) describes the same rule and theory for the Madurai priests, but notes that the rule is not everywhere the same and is not formally orthodox (or Āgamic). This too is the situation at Munnesvaram: the priests know the rule but are not especially strict about it and so Subrahmaniam helps out with ritual.

Laxity about rules is especially evident in the case of the younger priest, Somaswamy (33). He is similarly related to Ratnakailasanathan as his classificatory brother, Seeniswamy (FBS), but he is not qualified to act in the senior position because he is married to a Sinhalese

Catholic woman and lives with her in Negombo. Entering such a marriage is tantamount to renouncing his caste position. In the very least he should be excluded from any position in the temple. But neither course has been taken. Rather than outcast him or deny him a role in the temple, his family treat him as a bachelor. But this poses the additional difficulty, of being regarded as without access to the śakti of the female Brahmin. The tension is resolved through his bachelorhood not being considered as problematically as the question of his marriage to a non-Hindu, non-Brahmin. So he is there, acting as a priest, all of the considerations being subordinate to another factor: the importance of the kin group of priests and their control of the temple. Treating Somaswamy as if he were a bachelor, is to treat him as if he had never left the kin group, a group whose sanctity overrides factors that threaten its Brahmin status. Thus, though it might appear as if the priests flaunt the issue of caste purity, they are actually quite concerned about it as it manifests in their control of the temple.

Both of Subrahmaniam's other sons were university students (35 & 36) while I researched at Munnesvaram, but they stayed at Munnesvaram and worked in the temple during their holidays. Seeniswamy, the eldest, had also wanted to go to university and had successfully attained his A levels. His hopes were curtailed when the role of temple priest fell to him and he commenced full time kurukkal training upon finishing school. His choice as priest stems from where he is in the network of relations.

Maniswamy (28) lives with his family and his mother away from the other priests. At the front of their house they have a small shop where they sell items for offering baskets (coconuts, flowers, etc.) as well as soft drinks. Thus, in addition to priest's duties, Maniswamy is a petty entrepreneur. Maniswamy's father, Vaitheesvaram (22), was also a temple priest until he died in 1985, causing the temple to be closed (see Chapter 7). Both Vaitheesvaram and his brother, Subrahmaniar (23) (also deceased), worked at the temple on wages and were related to the controlling family through Subrahmaniar's marriage to the ex-incumbent Balasubrahmaniam's (16) second daughter, Sivahamasundari (24). Balasubrahmaniam's eldest daughter, Paramesvari (25), was married to Ratnakailasanathan (26) and it was Ratnakailasanathan who subsequently inherited the incumbency from his father-in-law. The younger daughter and her husband do not seem to have been so well provided for; but importantly, Ratnakailasanathan is Balasubrahmaniam's cross cousin (MBS) as well as being his daughter's husband and having other affinities (i.e., WFZHS). It seems, therefore, that Balasubrahmaniam's first daughter's marriage was more carefully arranged than the second to Maniswamy's father's brother; since the second daughter's husband was not related, or at least not closely enough related for my informant, Karthikkeyan, to know. This explains the subordinate position of Maniswamy and his family in the strata of temple priests and suggests that prescriptive marriage rules have also been conditioned by the issue of temple ownership.

The Brahmin married to Ratnakailasanathan's daughter (31) works sometimes at Munnesvaram although he is employed full time as an assistant postmaster at the Chilaw post office. Earlier he was the postmaster at Kalpitiya, but transferred to Chilaw in order to live at Munnesvaram. Generally, he could be found working at the temple on weekends.

Living next door to Subrahmaniam and Seeniswamy's house is another Brahmin family who are related to the senior Brahmins but are not indicated on the genealogy. The father is very old and long retired from working at one of the major orthodox temples in Colombo, the Ramanathan Temple. His son works in the Chilaw court as a reporter and also works at Munnesvaram, specialising in the chanting of texts and singing of devotional Tamil hymns from the Thevaram. When he is unavailable, Seeniswamy and Karthikkeyan will chant. In other words, there is no special priest for chanting (castiri). This accords with Banks's observation about the limited ritual specialisation of Brahmin subcastes in Jaffna (Banks *ibid*:66-69). What is evident at Munnesvaram is that ritual specialisation is organised in terms of relative proximity to the nucleus of the controlling family.

Four other salaried Brahmins constitute the rest of the Brahmin workforce, mostly performing non-priestly activities. One is distantly related I was told and he works as a helper. His main duty is to keep the temple machinery operating. This is the water pump, generators,

public address, and lighting. I often saw him leaning over a car engine in Chilaw town. He also performs rituals every Friday at the Manuweriya Siva temple, a few kilometres north of Chilaw (the temple of the cast out liṅgam mentioned in Chapter 2). The second priest keeps all the accounts and takes bookings for special rituals. He is unrelated to the owning family and comes from South India. The third is also unrelated and only recently arrived at Munnesvaram. His labour is not so specialised and he helps everyone, particularly with the rituals. The fourth is described as an apprentice and prepares all the temple food in the kitchen in the south-east corner of the temple. His younger brother, crippled by polio, also lives at the temple.

Finally, there is Karthikkeyan (30) whose incumbency is inherited from his father Ratnakailasanathan and mother Paramesvari. With his elder brother, an accountant living in London, and his father, Karthikkeyan is the legally listed temple trustee. He has resided at Munnesvaram since 1968 when his father was named a trustee, but his father lived in Jaffna until early 1985 when he moved to Colombo. He works mostly with his private astrological consultancy which is patronised by many members of the Sri Lankan elite, including the ex-prime minister, Sirima Bandaranaike. Occupied with this, he is rarely at Munnesvaram and the temple management is left to Karthikkeyan, a bachelor in his mid-thirties. Unmarried, Karthikkeyan does not perform ritual but does assist with the large, privately sponsored rites, which are described

in Chapters 8 - 11, usually doing recitations. His other activities include private tuition classes to a group of village children and the running of the village cricket team. Karthikkeyan does not seem especially interested in performing ritual and sees himself more as a manager.

Ratnakailasanathan (26) was named as co-trustee with his wife's father, Balasubrahmaniam (16) shortly before the latter died in 1968. Similarly, Balasubrahmaniam inherited the chief owning position through marriage to Somaskanda's (3) daughter (15) when Somaskanda died in 1940. In this way, temple control has passed to affines in the absence of male heirs on two occasions. Somaskanda inherited the position from his father, Muttuswamy (2) in the 1920's, and Muttuswamy from his father, Kumaraswamy in 1919. Patrilineal succession is the norm and affinal the second alternative.

Two significant factors emerge from description: firstly, the temple operates with a large Brahmin workforce whose importance to temple life extends beyond mere ritual performance; secondly, most of these Brahmins belong to one family, and this family effectively owns the temple. A kin nucleus constitutes the temple trust and the senior priestly positions, while the extended kin perform other duties. Munnesvaram, therefore, can be characterised as a 'closed-shop' with a large Brahmin presence. The kin nucleus of owners is protected by the way senior positions are kept within the family. Brahmins continue to hold senior positions when technically they should give them up

(the case of the widower and of the priest marrying out of caste being treated as a bachelor), and non-priestly Brahmins hold relatively senior positions on account of their relatedness to the owning family (the court reporter and postmaster).

Asking the Brahmins themselves about this unusual situation and they responded that it is appropriate for there to be so many Brahmins as this ensures a better ritual service. They also referred to the temple's links with kings and the need for there to be so many Brahmins in a king's temple. They thus articulate a very hierarchical argument in the strict sense of Hindu hierarchy. But it is important to see this situation as a result of the unusual fact that Munnesvaram temple is controlled by its priests as a consequence of two major court cases. The priests' hierarchical views are contingent on their circumstances.

#### The 1873 Case

The 1873 case for which Kumaraswamy Kurukkal came to Munnesvaram was brought by a group of eleven Munnesvaram villagers who were farming on Munnesvaram temple lands. The rapidly developing plantation economy, with its land-grabbing and haphazard land-sales by the colonial authorities of anything remotely resembling wasteland, necessitated the vindication of title over existing holdings. Documentary evidence, real or otherwise, was regularly tabled in the courts and some scholarship was often necessary to determine its authenticity<sup>3</sup>. With a stone inscription recording a 15th century land-grant by



Parakramabahu VI, Munnesvaram had a piece of solid evidence, but the group of villagers needed a scholar to interpret its contents. So they hired Kumaraswamy. The group, which included the local police and irrigation headmen, powerful men in the local context, defined their use rights over the temple lands through their association with the temple as self-proclaimed "trustees". The senior of them was the Munnesvaram incumbent, Sinnetamby Kapurala, by then an old and feeble man (The Ceylon Law Recorder [abbrv. C.L.R.] Vol. VII, 1925:16)<sup>4</sup>.

According to Sinnetamby Kapurala's great great grandson - the current owner of the Bathrakali temple - Sinnetamby's father, Narayan, was the adopted son of a Brahmin, Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar, who died sometime in the 1820's. I suspect that Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar and his father, Mayasinghe Giri Alakoon Aiyar, who founded the Bathrakali temple, were related to the Brahmins incumbent at the Munnesvaram temple. These Brahmins are last mentioned in any known official document in 1804 (Sarma 1968:59-60)<sup>5</sup>. It is stated that there were no Brahmins to officiate at Munnesvaram after 1804 (C.L.R. ibid). My information indicates that Brahmins were in the area up to the 1820's, but it is known that by 1819, Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar was feeble and in debt. In that year he handed over some of his village land to his debtors and formally adopted Narayan. It was probably through Ratnasinghe that Narayan's son, Sinnetamby, became incumbent of Munnesvaram. But he did nothing about the temple which by 1873 was in ruins. The name "Aiyar" denotes a Brahmin status, as does "Kurukkal".

"Kapurala" denotes a Sinhalese Buddhist deity priest.

Kumaraswamy Kurukkal, had emigrated to Colombo in the 1850's from Kanchipuram, South India, and was at Munnesvaram by 1871. Because of Sinnetamby's ill-health, the group of villagers nominated Kumaraswamy as the temple incumbent and in 1875, in a letter from the Ceylon Governor, he was formally recognised as the Munnesvaram chief priest (ibid). His appointment and his commencement of ritual at Munnesvaram reconstituted the temple as a functioning temple with legitimate claims to its lands. Doubtless, if Kumaraswamy did not already know of the historical significance of Munnesvaram when he first arrived, his translation of the documents for the land claim would have informed him. Beginning his involvement with Munnesvaram as an adviser, Kumaraswamy quickly took an active role, spending a large sum of his own money in the 1870's rebuilding, and by performing rituals or having another Brahmin perform them when he was in Colombo where he usually resided. In 1878, he named Muttu Aiyar as his full attorney with respect to Munnesvaram temple. Stipulated in the document naming Muttu Aiyar was the use of temple income in the repair and improvement of the temple buildings (ibid:17).

The villagers supported Kumaraswamy when he set about the temple renovation in the 1870's, importing artisans from Ramanathapuram, South India. The renovation further rendered the temple's legitimate claims to its lands. The new temple, however, was more than what had been rebuilt in

the 1750's. It was built closer to the principles of Āgamic Hindu orthodoxy at the direction of Kumaraswamy and at the hands of the South Indian artisans. The stone inscription of Parakramabahu VI's land-grant was built into the sanctum wall during this renovation. It was thus from the outset of Kumaraswamy's incumbency a significant part of the temple aesthetic.

Fowler, translating the inscription in the mid 1880's, notes that the priests were using the inscription as evidence in the land claim they were then making (Fowler 1887:118). This was another claim made by Muttu Aiyar in 1886. Thus the stone inscription was, as it were, in fairly continuous use in the early years of the modern Munnesvaram in the midst of expanding estates, increased population, and the associated pressure on land. The association of the temple with its past was paramount in the context of the priests grappling with the conditions of the present.

This link with the past is also a link with the pre-colonial state. It shapes the Munnesvaram priests' perception of the temple as a king's temple, the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka. The link with kings, discussed already in relation to the temple origin myths (Chapter 2), is constantly noted by the priests in several contexts especially in the anomalies they perceive in the ritual aesthetic (discussed in Chapter 8). It also relates directly to their understanding of temple ownership.

The following is Fowler's translation of the stone inscription which is written in Grantha script, a form of Tamil. Emphasis is added.

Let happiness be! On the tenth day of the waxing moon in October, in the thirty-eighth year of his reign, His Majesty Sri Parakrama Bahu descendant of the illustrious family of Sri Sangabodhi, worshipper of the lotus feet of Sri Samantapatra (Buddha), of a Solar race, king of kings, serpent to the royal and mercantile races, and emperor of the three worlds, invited to the Jayawardhana Kotte the Nampimar (priests) who officiate before the god of Monniswaram, and addressing himself to the Brahmin Pandit, who is proficient in all sciences amongst them inquired into the circumstances of that temple and bestowed the lands which formerly belonged to the priests, lying within the district of Monniswaram in the holy name and as the property of the god. As pusai lands he granted to the priests 22 amanams of field at Ilippedeniya, and 30 amanams in Kottapitiya to Mutanmai (chief priests) and 8 amanams of field in Tittakkadai, with the inhabited places and forests appertaining to this. In addition to the offering of 3 nalis of rice, he granted 30 fanams to the priests per mensem and 11 fanams to each of the Mutanmais (chief priests) for the daily offerings of vegetable curries, greens, and perfumes, to be enjoyed from generation to generation, while the sun and moon exist, as Sarvamaniyam (free gift) to the god of Monniswaram, which is hereby decreed to be irrevocable. Those who cause any damage to the land will be guilty of Panchamahapatakam (the five great sins) while those who take an interest in it will attain heavenly bless.

(Quoted from Sarma 1968:50-1. My emphasis)

This inscription is part of the gross substance of the temple. Embedded in the temple is a statement about the relationship between the temple, its priests who are Brahmins, the particular lands cited, including their inhabitants, and the Sinhalese Buddhist king<sup>6</sup>. The temple incorporates its history in its aesthetic and, in the manner of all royal edicts in Sri Lanka, the duration of the decree is "while the sun and moon exist" (ibid); forever in human terms. Importantly, the edict explicitly states the endowments to the temple Brahmins. Kumaraswamy

Kurukkal's position as priest perpetuated the presence of Brahmins and was thus intrinsic to the temple reconstruction and the assertion of rights to previously endowed lands. Simply stated, the group of Munnesvaram villagers who undertook the 1870's land claim, needed a Brahmin to ensure its success and so began the involvement of Kumaraswamy and his descendants with the Munnesvaram temple. Kumaraswamy's right to be the Munnesvaram priest derived from his caste. Through caste, Kumaraswamy established an affinity with the Brahmins of 400 years earlier, an affinity actuated in the relationship between the Brahmin, the deity and the king. Neither Sinnetamby Kapurala, nor his son Kalimuttu Kapurala could claim such affinity since they were not Brahmins<sup>7</sup>.

Temple endowments were essential qualities of South Asian kingship (Stein 1984, Dirks 1987) and usually followed military campaigns when the king steeped himself in the pollution of violence (Shulman 1985; Seneviratne 1987; Kapferer 1988; Obeyesekere 1990). The "sarvamaniyam" from king to Brahmin constitutes the removal of demerit accrued through military action, something which can be likened to the gifts to the ascetic Brahmins in Benares described by Parry (1986). The gift can thus be seen as a purifying act.

The land-grants place the land and its inhabitants in relation to the temple and, hence, in relation to the king. The grant is, then, an act of incorporation by the king: the creation of an "efficacious ideology of pacification,

political stability, and security" (Tambiah 1976:56). This quality of the grant is highlighted by the fact that, in the case of Munnesvaram, it followed the establishment by Parakramabahu of his control over the area. Through military conquest, the exercise of royal power (danda), the king incorporated the land. Through his grant to the temple, he did not simply atone for the demerit accrued through his military action, he realised that act of incorporation, he realised the state he had won. 300 years later, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe did the same thing as Parakramabahu VI, when he made a large endowment to Munnesvaram after Kandy regained the Chilaw area from the Dutch. The merit of the action is not simply atonement but also the truly incorporative gift of the good king. This is his dharma, effected by his wielding of danda, realised through the temple as the context for his gift. Such gifts to Brahmins, as the "sine qua non of kingly activity" (Dirks *ibid*:29), reveal how the king's power was defined in the ritual context of the temple. Crudely put, status (the temple) ritually incorporates power (the king) as the king politically incorporates the temple and its lands. This double aspect is emergent from the gift which is always triadically structured. That is, the gift of the king to the Brahmin enables the king to receive the gift of the god from the Brahmin (Fuller 1984). It is thus in a triad that the special relationship between status and power emerges.

The "free gift" is specifically of tax-free lands (maniyam), not of lands of independent political status. The lands and their inhabitants always remained part of the

state. This constitutes a different concept of property than the English concept around which were organised the laws that Kumaraswamy and the group of villagers negotiated.

As the grant includes the inhabitants, concomitant with the regular legal use of the inscription was the 1885 revival of the Adi festival, the festival which brings the surrounding villages into association with the temple. Nowadays, this association is seen to have antecedents in the time both of Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's temple reconstruction in the 1750's and, prior to this, in the creation of the Munnesvaram pattuva of sixty-three villages (see Chapter 12). Given that Kumaraswamy and Muttu Aiyar were actively reconstituting the traditional temple lands, the issue of antecedents would have been prominent and the festival further elaborated the modern Munnesvaram's links with its past. It articulated the villages back into their traditional association with the temple, an association ordained by the Sinhalese Buddhist state in inscriptions describing temple endowments.

To summarise: this evidence about the origins of the new Munnesvaram temple indicates that the temple was rebuilt in the context of an expanding economy that put pressure on land as well as pressure on the British administration to recognise traditional claims to land. Kumaraswamy Kurukkal came to Munnesvaram because of temple land claims. The legitimacy of these claims was then built into the very temple structure with the use of the Parakramabahu

inscription and, moreover, was a feature of the revival of the annual temple festival through the re-articulation of the old pattuva system with its client villages. Both elements, the land claim and the revived "pattuva", stressed the connection between both the traditional state and the temple priests, and the traditional state and the temple villages. The difference was that there was no longer a traditional state, but a colonial state that engaged in a partial recognition of the old order.

The Munnesvaram temple, therefore, was another of the famous ancient Hindu temples to be rebuilt in the revivalist context of the late 19th century. Hindu Revivalism manifested in the emphasis on Āgamic orthodoxy, the special knowledge of Brahmins. The political circumstances, however, were such that the links between Munnesvaram and the ancient Sinhalese state were also revived and thus Munnesvaram differed from its Hindu counterparts. One of these links was the relation between the temple and its client villages in the pattuva. All of this was achieved in the modern context of British colonial law.

#### The 1925 Case

Whereas the issue in the 1870's was temple land, in the 1920's it was the temple itself. According to the court report, Muttu Aiyar died in 1912, Kumaraswamy in 1919 (C.L.R. ibid:17). In 1902, Kumaraswamy named his grandson, Somaskanda Kurukkal, as joint trustee with him and as sole trustee after his death. This event occurred at the time of



a dispute between Muttu Aiyar and Kumaraswamy when the latter formally dismissed the former as his attorney, reinstating Muttu when he named his grandson as joint trustee<sup>8</sup>. I do not know why Kumaraswamy did not name his son, Muttuswamy Kurukkal at this time; since Muttuswamy assumed the position in 1919. In 1920, a group of villagers claiming to be descendants of the eleven villagers and hence hereditary trustees, petitioned the Government Agent concerning the affairs of the temple. They brought an action in the Chilaw District court against Muttuswamy in 1923.

In the years intervening the two cases the temple had prospered gaining popularity with Hindus and Buddhists from all over the island, especially during its annual Adi festival. The temple begins to be mentioned in the Administration Reports from 1915, the reports generally telling of the crowds during the festival and the policing requirements. With the increased popularity, largely the result of the efforts of Muttu Aiyar, the temple income increased, listed in 1925 as being Rs.5000 per annum (ibid:70). The priests had built a thriving temple and now the villagers felt they should claim it as their own.

The villagers' action demanded from Muttuswamy detailed accounts of temple incomes from 1912, the year Muttu Aiyar had died. Secondly, they sought to restrain Muttuswamy's access to the temple revenues. Thirdly, they asked for the appointment of an interim manager until a managerial trust was established with a scheme for its functioning. They

expected to be on this trust and brought the action both as hereditary trustees and as interested persons within the regulations set down in the Trusts Ordinance, 1917. The group of villagers was headed by Kalimuttu Kapurala, the son of Sinnetamby Kapurala, who charged Muttuswamy with improper behaviour.

with neglect and waste of the temporalities, pawning the jewelleryes and precious stone belonging to the temple and substituting tinsel and paste, leading an immoral life in Colombo and neglecting his duties as priest whereby the temple is brought into disrepute, and its services are neglected. (C.L.R. ibid:15)

The trial judge ruled on the first part of the action and stated that it would be beneficial to the temple, as a charitable trust, to have a board of trustees. He did not consider the personal accusations against Muttuswamy. Muttuswamy was denied access to temple funds. Priests with whom I worked describe this period as the low point in the career of the Munnesvaram Brahmins: they had just funded the second renovation and had no money to fight the action. Assistance for their cause eventually came from a family of Colombo-based Indian traders (Chettiar)<sup>9</sup> and a lawyer, S.Rajaratnam, offered his services. An appeal was lodged in 1925.

In the 1925 appeal the two judges overturned the first decision and gave precedented opinion that the trial judge had acted incorrectly in deciding in favour of the villagers on the basis of determining what was beneficial to the temple as a charitable trust. It was argued that only an act of parliament can determine public benefit and so direct the actions of a charitable trust. The appeal

judges did think a case could be made on the question of Muttuswamy's so-called improper behaviour; but as the trial judge had made no decision on this issue, the appeal judges could not make a decision either. Judge Dalton, whose summation was entirely agreed with by the second judge, Schneider, states,

As we were informed [the trial judge] is no longer in the Chilaw District, it is impossible now to send the case back for a finding to be arrived. The plaintiffs and the defendant were entitled to have a definite finding on these serious charges. (ibid:19)

Since the charges were not considered, the appeal court could make no decision. The case could not be reheard because the trial judge had left Chilaw. Thus the villagers, by force of circumstance and by the precedent of English law, lost their opportunity to control the temple.

Dalton's judgement reveals the conceptions of rightful ownership held by all parties: the court, the villagers and the priests. Dalton and his colleague decided the action in terms of the Trusts Ordinance, 1917 that defined the temple as a charitable trust; and in terms of the precedent established in the case Attorney-General vs. Bouchett, arguing that the courts could not direct charitable property except to carry into effect the intentions of the founders of that charitable organisation. Laws made with respect to such organisations as those that built and maintained housing for the poor in urban England were applied to the running of Hindu temples in Sri Lanka.

The villagers, arguing in the terms of the Trusts Ordinance, 1917, claimed to be both hereditary trustees and interested persons. The most heartfelt claim was as hereditary trustees, but it was actually the weakest claim. Dalton considered the validity of the villagers' claims to be hereditary trustees and found, in every case, the evidence lacking. Commencing with some doubts as to whether the eleven villager trust which brought the 1873 action was really a trust, Dalton states that even if it was, the 1923 plaintiffs did not adequately prove their descent from this trust. Only Kalimuttu could prove beyond doubt that he was Sinnetamby's son, but he could not prove that this entitled him to be a trustee. He had never acted as a trustee in all the years the temple was run by Kumaraswamy and Muttu Aiyar. Speaking about an even more spurious claim to trust membership, that of Ranhamy Gabode Lekama, Dalton says, "His real claim I think may be summed up in the words he used, 'the Devale belongs to us the villagers.'" (ibid:18). Dalton is correct, Ranhamy's statement encapsulates the whole intent of the villagers' claim, an intent recognised by Dalton, but seen as irrelevant for the purposes of hereditary trusteeship. For the villagers, however, membership in the village and not lineal descent constituted the grounds of hereditary trusteeship. The temple defined them and the annual festival was proof of this. They disputed with Muttuswamy because they saw him taking the temple away from them. Dalton would have none of this.

No doubt aware of the weakness of the villagers' claims to heredity, their counsel also made a secondary argument for their constituting interested persons as this was laid down in the Trusts Ordinance, 1917. Being a Munnesvaram villager was recognised in the court as constituting an interested person and so the villagers were able to bring an action against the trust incumbent, but only with regard to his behaviour. This was the secondary action on which the trial judge had made no decision and thus it could not be decided by the appeal judges. The villagers had not forced the issue as they had stressed that they were more than mere "interested persons".

The priests argued that the group of villagers were neither hereditary trustees, nor interested persons because Munnesvaram was not a charitable trust but a pitham ("parartham") temple, a king's temple. This was the kind of argument that had been made since 1873 when temple land titles were vindicated. The temple's identity as a royal temple had in fact established the grounds for the affinity between Kumaraswamy and the Brahmins of Parakramabahu VI's time. But now the concept of a royally endowed temple was opposed to the idea held by the court of the temple as a charitable trust. For Dalton there was no question that the temple was not a charitable trust and so subject to all the provisions of the Trusts Ordinance, 1917. Wisely, the priests' counsel argued in the terms of the ordinance and rejected the villagers' claims to be trustees. The priests, however, rejected the ordinance, rejected the idea that the temple was subject to it, and even rejected the court's

right to decide on the issue of the priest's behaviour. For them, land claims were one thing, but the activities of a Brahmin were another. Dalton comments on Muttuswamy's behaviour,

During the trial the defendant certainly took up the position that he was answerable to no one, no earthly authority, if I may put it so. He said 'I am only answerable to God in case I mismanage.' In arguing for the defendant Mr. Hayley has been unable to justify or support that attitude. I have, therefore, thought it unnecessary, for the purposes of this case, as it has gone, to deal with arguments arising out of the claim that the temple is the 'Parartham' temple (although it might have been necessary to do so, had ground been shown for varying the trust), and that the position of the defendant was that of the head of a 'Muttu' as found in South India. (ibid:20)

Clearly, the demeanor Muttuswamy maintained towards the British court radically differed from that maintained towards the pre-European state. He did not regard the former as a true inheritor of the position of the latter, a strikingly similar view to that of the Madurai priests (Fuller ibid:ch4). The position of the king, his right to rule, was inscribed in the temple through his relationship with the temple deity. This is Fuller's argument for Madurai encapsulated in the king-priest-deity exchange triad (see Note 12). It is also inscribed, at Munnesvaram, in the position of the temple with regard to the surrounding territory, the Munnesvarampattuva (see note 6). In the Sinhalese state, the temple constituted an important political institution, a role far greater than that of a charitable trust (see Whitaker 1986:Ch.8).

The description of the temple as "Parartham" (or "Pītham"), a regally patronised temple, thus underlies the

entire conception of temple ownership held by the priests<sup>10</sup>. In 1873 it formed the basis for Kumaraswamy being named incumbent. In 1925 it was a view so doggedly held by Muttuswamy that he almost completely ignored the validity of the English judicial system and aroused the judge's displeasure. The view relates the king's patronage with the temple's deity in such a way that the priest need answer only to the deity, as should the king. The idea that Munnesvaram is a charitable trust whose incumbent's behaviour can be regulated and judged by complete outsiders is anathematical to this view.

In the midst of all of this legal haggling, the contemporary priests feel that the Munnesvaram goddess played a part. Ambal is thought to have supported the priests, to have given them the strength to persevere in their struggle. They also believe the court decided on the issue of royal patronage whereas they did no such thing. Ignorant of the details until I left the field, I never knew to ask if perhaps they felt that Ambal had caused the transfer of the District Judge, because, ultimately, it is on his inability to have heard the case again that the Brahmins' control rests. That Brahmins are so essential to the way the Munnesvaram aesthetic has developed makes it extraordinary that their hold on the temple should be by such a slender thread. Yet, this thread reveals again the force of historical circumstance that creates the Munnesvaram complex.

To return to my initial observation about the numbers of Brahmins at Munnesvaram: their large presence both excludes any antagonistic villagers from any position of influence in the temple administration and, also, reaffirms the central position of Brahmins in the temple. This position is extended to several non-priestly duties as well as to priestly duties. The exclusion of non-Brahmins mirrors the exclusive nature of the Brahmin caste. The purity of the caste is extended to the purity, as it were, of the temple itself<sup>11</sup>. The importance of Parakramabahu VI's inscription, embedded in the gross substance of the temple, can be seen as a powerful expression of this relationship.

The emphasis on the temple's royal status links the Brahmins with the traditional Sinhalese state. They do not oppose Sinhalese Buddhist patronage, they promote it. In a sense, the Brahmins sell to the highest bidder and they do so with a feeling of remoteness from their sponsors. A conversation I had with the senior incumbent, Ratnakailasanathan, is quite revealing. We began discussing the gotra (patriclan) system practised in Brahmin marriage and Ratnakailasanathan stressed that the system is originally North Indian and that it was brought south with the migrating Brahmins who continue to practise it. These gotra, in his view, link all Brahmins from all over India while at the same time establish criteria of status differentiation. As the patriclans are the universal social link between Brahmins, Sanskrit is the lingua franca. Ratnakailasanathan stated that for all Brahmins, Sanskrit is their first language. They take as their second language



the common language where they live. Thus, Brahmins in Delhi are Hindi Brahmins, Brahmins in Calcutta, Bengali Brahmins, and Brahmins in Madras, Tamil Brahmins.

"And the Brahmins of Munnesvaram?" I asked.

"Oh, they're Sinhalese Brahmins." He replied. "Now, I am a Tamil Brahmin because I was raised in Jaffna and my languages are Tamil and English; but my children grew up here and they're Sinhalese Brahmins." (Transcribed interview with Munnesvaram incumbent, August 1986)

Not all of the Munnesvaram Brahmins would agree with this description. They regard themselves as Tamils, but above all they are Brahmins. Their lifestyle is, by and large, exclusive while at the same time being located in the social order created by the temple and its patronage. This patronage commences with the Sinhalese kingship and continues with the ruling classes of modern Sri Lanka. No-one demonstrates this better than Ratnakailasanathan who spends most of his time in Colombo working as a consultant astrologer to the Colombo elite. The striking feature of Ratnakailasanathan's view is not its exclusiveness, but its suggestion that Brahmins always mediate between a pristine identity and an identity taken from their context<sup>12</sup>. In other words, the history of the temple, the history of its significance and of the struggles to control it, taking place in the context of religious revivalism and the assertion of pristine religious forms, have shaped the Munnesvaram Brahmins' self-perception as the purest members of the Hindu world.

#### The Bathrakali temple Priests

I now turn to another major influence on the Brahmins' self-perception, the Bathrakali temple priests. They are

descendants of some of the oldest inhabitants of Munnesvaram. Below I list the line of primogeniture down to the present owner of the temple Letchuraman II, who was born in 1947.

Table 2, List of Bathrakali Temple Owners from the Late 18th Century

Mayasinghe Giri Alakoon Aiyar (?)  
 |  
 Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar (? - 1830)  
 |  
 (adoption, 1819)  
 |  
 Narayan (?)  
 |  
 Sinnathamby(1832-1885)  
 |  
 Kalumuttu I (1882-1942)  
 |  
 Letchuraman I (1899-1962)  
 |  
 Kalumuttu II (1927-1958)  
 |  
 Letchuraman II (1947- )

Mayasinghe Giri Alakoon Aiyar and his son, Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar, are said to have been Brahmins. Narayan, fifth generation patrilineal ancestor of Letchuraman II, was adopted by Ratnasinghe and so inherited the temple but not Brahmin status. Thus, the priests are known as pūsāris of the Pandāram caste, the caste of non-Brahmin priests. More specifically this is not a caste unto itself but a heterogeneous group drawing from several castes (Cartman 1957:74). Pandāram is more expressly, therefore, "non-Brahmin" rather than a definitive caste. It is unknown to which caste Narayan belonged prior to adoption, because the contemporary priests are concerned about their caste background simply as non-Brahmins rather than as any particular caste. They live this identity through a

lifestyle that includes the consumption of meat, alcohol and tobacco, as well as a lack of concern for strict rules of endogamy. As with the Munnesvaram temple, though, kin networks are important. Affinity structures the organisation of temple labour.

In an affidavit dated the 27th of September 1819, Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar stated that his father purchased waste lands in Munnesvaram in the area known as "Bodiyawatte", and constructed the Bathrakali temple. In 1819, Ratnasinghe gave over the accompanying garden lands to his debtors - a Sinhalese woman, Tamil man and Muslim man, all of Chilaw. The Tamil man was his daughter's husband, Ramalinger Nayakar, who was not a Brahmin.

Narayan was adopted in 1819, the same year as the affidavit, and from 1830 he acted as the temple priest. In the 1870's, his son Sinnathamby was one of the claimants for access to Munnesvaram temple lands in the claim that brought the present Munnesvaram Brahmins to Munnesvaram. It was he who formally held the incumbency of the Munnesvaram temple and, therefore, it is likely that this incumbency had been held by the founder of the Bathrakali temple. The adopted heirs of the Brahmin Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar, however, neglected the Munnesvaram temple and then gave the incumbency to Kumaraswamy Kurukkal in the 1870's. Kalumuttu I was involved in the 1925 case against the Brahmins.

Hence, it is likely that the Bathrakali temple was built by the controllers of the Munnesvaram temple. The significant difference between the Munnesvaram temple and the Bathrakali temple is that the former was built by a Kandyan king as the regional temple with client villages, while the latter was built privately. Therefore, the villagers feel they have a right to control the Munnesvaram temple while having no say in the affairs of the Bathrakali temple. The legality of Narayan's inheritance from Ratnasinghe is unquestioned. Moreover, the Munnesvaram temple has Brahmins inscribed into its constitution, while the Bathrakali temple does not. The Munnesvaram temple is inscribed into the history of the Sinhalese state and the permanence of the temple deities. The Bathrakali temple, on the other hand, was built by a private individual who, it is said and is recognised by the courts, was a Brahmin. Brahmins are not essential to the running of the temple, however, and it would be impossible now to have Brahmins in such a temple because they distance themselves from the content of ritual practice.

The absence of any formal association between the Bathrakali temple and pattuva villages manifests in the lack of participation by villagers in the temple. Very few villagers visit the temple and most of the devotees come from outside. The notable exception is Udappu village, a predominantly Tamil Hindu fishing village north of Chilaw. There is a Mariamman temple at Udappu whose priest is affinally related to the Munnesvaram Bathrakali temple priests<sup>13</sup>.

Legal disputes over the ownership of the Bathrakali temple have been between members of the family and have been about primogeniture. Letchuraman I had eight children and outlived his first son Kalimuttu I by four years. Letchuraman II was still a minor in 1962 when his grandfather died. His father's brothers administered the temple and took the profits. Soon after attaining majority in 1968, Letchuraman II took his uncles to the courts to claim sole ownership. The uncles attempted to settle out of court by offering him the money received from a normal Tuesday's takings, after deducting the maintenance costs. Letchuraman refused and pressed ahead with the litigation which he finally won in 1977. I was told by friends in Chilaw that the change of government in 1970 to the SLFP coalition helped prolong the case, for the uncles used political influence with the new Chilaw M.P. to delay proceedings. Letchuraman's barrister is a brother of the ex-U.N.P. leader, J.R. Jayawardene, indicating the political affiliations he holds<sup>14</sup>.

By 1986, the case was still being appealed; the relatives of the uncles were claiming for some proportion of the temple revenues and also claiming control of the Kathirvelaru pilgrims' resthouse (mādam). The temple ownership is now established, but Letchuraman has no sons and the question of who will inherit seems to be unresolved. However, given his own experience, I am certain that Letchuraman will provide for this contingency.

The main temple priests are the collateral kin who supported Letchuraman during the ten years of his legal dispute with his paternal kinsmen. Letchuraman has one brother and one sister. His brother, brother's wife's brother, sister's husband, and wife's brother all work at the temple as priests. His mother's brother, who helped raise him after his father's death, also works at the temple but in a reduced capacity. All the paternal kinsmen who opposed his claim have since died mostly in untimely, albeit quite innocent, accidents. About their deaths, Letchuraman feels a certain vindication over his ownership because he attributes them to Bathrakali's wrath against these paternal kinsmen, and her support for him.

All the priests are married and live in Munnesvaram with their families, apart from Letchuraman's sister and her children who moved to Madras in the early 1980's after the escalation of ethnic violence. The husband, who has other relatives in Madras, remains at Munnesvaram but spends a lot of time with his family. Because of the legal dispute, all the priests aside from the younger ones, have worked in other jobs. Letchuraman still has land and business interests that have been increased since he won the litigation. Friendships from his earlier, poorer days, have persisted and they include Sinhalese and Tamils from Chilaw and the surrounding area. His formal education is not great and his lifestyle is like that of a moderately wealthy farmer or businessman. He is fond of a drink and good company and on several occasions I joined him and some of his friends for the typical Sri Lankan male pastime of a

meal washed down with a couple of bottles of arrack. On these occasions we talked of cricket, movies, Australia and exchanged bad jokes. Often I would hazily remind myself that I was in the company of the chief priest of the most important Kali temple in Sri Lanka, because the contrast between him and the more distant Brahmins of Munnesvaram was acute.

The priests are not particularly knowledgeable about myths associated with Kali and sometimes recounted things they had learnt about her from Madras-made popular films<sup>15</sup>. None of them know Sanskrit, but when performing rituals, they recite Sanskrit mantra from books written in Tamil. The Munnesvaram Brahmins claim that such transliteration misses the nuances of Sanskrit and therefore is not as effective; but the Bathrakali priests are not overly concerned. They do strive, however, to perform the rituals correctly and regularly consult their copies of Tamil translations of the Āgamas. Moreover, they have on several occasions consulted the Munnesvaram Brahmins about further elaboration of ritual. In such elaborations they do not wish to replicate everything that is done at the Munnesvaram temple, rather they attempt to locate their temple within the Munnesvaram complex as it is presided over by the Munnesvaram temple and its Brahmin priests. These Brahmins are the acknowledged source of ritual orthodoxy. Located thus within the Munnesvaram complex, the Bathrakali priests nonetheless maintain the temple's independence. The most important practices at the temple are cursing, trance and animal sacrifice, practices that

are devalued or rejected by the Munnesvaram priests. At the same time, however, the Munnesvaram Brahmins do not reject the money such practices generate. In the small temple festival held every January/February, a festival held, the Brahmins said, to do in a fully Āgamic way that which is done in a non-Āgamic way in the main Adi festival, Letchuraman is a sponsor. His sponsorship affirms his identity as a wealthy Tamil Hindu devotee of Munnesvaram.

The initial contrast that emerges from this discussion is the degree of involvement by each group of priests with the surrounding territory. Within fifteen years of Munnesvaram's refounding, the relationship between the temple and its villages had been re-established in the context of the annual festival. It had already been presented in the courts because the need to vindicate temple land claims lay at the heart of the temple's renaissance. The link between the temple and the state has always been important for the modern Munnesvaram temple. This is less the case at the Bathrakali temple whose priests have gone to the courts only to settle disputes between themselves. Issues of rightful ownership centre on the principle of primogeniture, not on the relationship between the king, deity and worshipper (be it priest or villager). Significantly, in the disputes between villagers and the Munnesvaram Brahmins, the Bathrakali priests have been active. They are part of the Munnesvaram scene while the Brahmins are outsiders.



The contemporary Bathrakali priests, however, locate themselves in a Hindu order led by these Brahmins. The Bathrakali temple expressly follows the lead of the Munnesvaram temple in the timing of its festivals and in the elaborations to its aesthetic. The chief Bathrakali priest, sponsors a Munnesvaram festival event. He does this, though, while maintaining his own identity as a non-Brahmin priest serving a deity who desires blood sacrifice and who strikes down her devotees' enemies upon request. Where the Munnesvaram Brahmins command purity and exclusion, the Bathrakali priests are immersed in the bloody minutiae of everyday life. Their relationship is a manifestation of hierarchy as it is constituted in modern historical circumstances.

The identity of the Munnesvaram priests as Brahmins was established during the British period when a group of Munnesvaram villagers sought to protect their access to temple lands. Brahmins were seen to link Munnesvaram with its pre-colonial past when lands were granted by Sinhalese Buddhist kings. Reviving this past also affirmed the importance of the link between Brahmins and kings, creating the Brahmins' heartfelt claim that Munnesvaram is a "King's Temple", the only one of its kind in Sri Lanka. This claim to uniqueness is then used to account for several seeming discrepancies. Firstly, the temple sits in the midst of a political unit of the old Kandyan Buddhist political order when it is a Hindu temple. Secondly, its priests effectively own it through an absolute control over the managerial trust. Rivals to the Brahmins for the

trusteeship were local villagers, some of them descendents of the villagers responsible for the priests being there and being in power. These locals were Sinhalese Buddhists.

But the very discrepancies are contemporary issues which derive their force in the appearance of being timeless, natural conditions. They have the hegemonic power of appearing to be traditional and customary. For example, being Sinhalese Buddhist in 1925 is different to being Sinhalese Buddhist in a post-colonial, more actively revivalist, modern climate. One need only consider the Bathrakali temple priests. The Munnesvaram and Bathrakali incumbent who gave his incumbency of Munnesvaram to the Brahmin, Kumaraswamy Kurukkal, was called Sinnetamby Kapurala. A kapurāla is a Sinhalese Buddhist deity priest. "Sinnetamby" is a Tamil name, as is that of Sinnetamby's father, Narayan. But Narayan's foster-father's name was Ratnasinghe Giri Aiyar and his father was called Mayasinghe Giri Alakoon Aiyar. Their names are Sinhalese Buddhist except "Aiyar" which is a title given to Brahmins. Sinnetamby's descendent, Letchuraman II, is a pūsāri, a Tamil Hindu non-Brahmin priest. He is bilingual, but his first language is Tamil, his religion is Hindu, and he closely associates his Bathrakali temple with the Munnesvaram temple and its Hindu Brahmin priests. He is a Tamil Hindu, his identity is quite distinct from that of Sinhalese Buddhists.

At the same time, Letchuraman, as a non-Brahmin, pursues the same activities as most of his fellow inhabitants of

the Chilaw area. He eats meat and fish, drinks alcohol and takes tobacco. The Brahmins meanwhile live in virtual seclusion from the world around them. As Brahmins they are apart from the mundane world, their lifestyle reflecting their position as outsiders to this mundane order. In the self-perceptions of each group of priests, perceptions conditioned in the relationship they have with each other, can be seen a sense of caste identity as it is emergent in modern practice. The hierarchy that exists between the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples is not something pristine, but is emergent in history. This same point holds even more strongly for the identities of the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups and for the relations between them. They are modern constructions that have the appearance of being timeless. The marginality of the Chilaw area with its ambivalent ethnicity is also a modern product. And so it follows that the religious significance of the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples is bound up with modern practice. It appears, however, to be timeless and transcendent, truly religious. But this is how the hegemonic power of religion reveals itself.

## Chapter 6, The Structure of Temple Patronage

Temple patrons are critical to the self-perceptions of the priests of both the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples; but the patronage is not uniform in its engagement with the temples and their priests. Patrons fall roughly into two groups, the locals and the outsiders. The locals attend the Munnesvaram temple run by the outsider Brahmin priests, while outsiders attend it and the Bathrakali temple run by non-Brahmin priests who are locals. This irony is not lost on many of the priests and locals, though outsider patrons are generally oblivious to it and to the legal tussles that have made Munnesvaram's Brahmins dominant.

Locals come from villages which are part of the Munnesvarampattuva, the geo-political unit of the pre-colonial and Kandyan Sinhalese society<sup>1</sup> whose centre is understood to have been the temple. These are the people who claim an identity with the inhabitants described in the land-grants made to the temple. In their relations with the modern Munnesvaram temple, the locals thus demonstrate a version of the traditional order. They do so particularly during the annual festival and for many of them this is the only time they enter the temple. For other locals who are avowedly Tamil Hindu, participation at Munnesvaram is more extensive. Generally, locals do not attend the Bathrakali temple.

The outsiders come from all over Sri Lanka, including from nearby places which are not part of the traditional

pattuva, as it is defined by the festival. They are predominantly Sinhalese Buddhists and they engage equally in the Munnesvaram and the Bathrakali temples. Tamil Hindus also come from outside to Munnesvaram but their numbers have drastically decreased since the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 when many Tamils who survived the violence left Colombo. Many of those who remain are reluctant to drive through Sinhalese areas to reach the temple. This is even more pronounced with Jaffna Tamils who are unable to travel easily out of Jaffna to Munnesvaram.

Though the outsiders, both Tamil and Sinhalese, attend both temples, some of them associate more with one temple than the other. Social distinctions exist between those outsiders who engage more exclusively with one temple or the other. Those who participate almost exclusively at the Munnesvaram temple would claim a higher social standing than those participating at the Bathrakali temple. This is so for both ethnic groups. While Munnesvaram draws the elites, Bathrakali is popular with the unskilled from the poorer urban areas (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988:130); but generalisations must be treated with caution. Bathrakali is also popular with members of the wealthy elite. The differences between the patronage of these temples do not simply reflect the social order of modern Sri Lanka rather than contemporary class processes manifesting in a religious inter-ethnic complex.

As the priests see themselves in relation to the patrons, the patrons derive a measure of themselves through

the temples and their priests. But these mutual derivations differ widely as the existential possibilities of the religious order the priests create in their respective temples. For the locals, patrons of Munnesvaram temple, this order consists of a religious hierarchy - a structured relationship between status and power - which the priests assert through their control of the temple. Locals identify with this hierarchy in different ways, from active engagement to disparaging non-engagement, each identification being both conditioned in and a condition of the caste and ethnic climate of modern Sri Lanka. A similar structure orders the involvement of outsiders, but it is understood differently.

#### The Munnesvarampattuva Villagers

Without doubt, the sentiment expressed in the 1925 court action by the villager Ranhamy, that as a villager he was rightfully a trustee, is also a contemporary view. Intrinsic to the self-perception of many of the locals is a sense of affinity with the Munnesvaram temple, not as it is but as it was and should be. The contentious issue of the Munnesvaram priests' control was described to me on several occasions by different inhabitants of the pattuva. Some villagers knew simply that there had been a court action while others gave differing accounts of its details. Generally, the Munnesvaram priests were described as having used their better knowledge of the law to deceive the villagers. Three informants said that the priests had made a contract to renovate the temple and give it back to the villagers when the renovations were complete. The run-down

condition of the temple, with new building work always pending, was given as proof of the priests' deception, for it showed that the priests will never finish the renovations and hand back the temple. These informants list this as an injustice to the temple, because, if they managed it, all renovations would be complete. Thus the villagers claim that not only have they been cheated, but that the temple has been cheated too. Instead of performing the necessary ritual for the goddess Amma Deviyo (the Sinhala name for Ambal) and for the villages, these Tamil priests spend their time performing lavish private Hindu ritual for wealthy sponsors. The profits from these rituals then line the priests' purses and the temple is neglected. The fact that no-one really cared about the temple in the 1870's, and that their eyes were only for the temple lands, has been conveniently forgotten.

#### Pattuva Membership and Personal Identity

The original pattuva consisted of sixty-three villages. Royal land-grants constituted villages as temple villages (dēvalāgam) and the inhabitants of the villages as subjects of the traditional state. Rights to land accrued through temple service as temple service articulated the villagers into the broader polity. Service was defined in terms of caste, making caste both a ritual and a political institution.

A well-noted feature of Sinhalese social organisation is the single caste village (Leach 1961; Yalman 1967:60) indicative of the way caste was an institution of the

state, capable of manipulation by the state (De Silva 1981:ch4). A number of families of a caste would be established in particular locations and they would form the nucleus of a village caste group. This was possible due to the linkage between caste and land tenure: a family gained access to land through their caste service as well as their annual social service (rājākariya) relating to the cultivation of king's land (or land set aside for producing rice for the state), and/or tank maintenance. This arrangement has led some scholars to describe the Sinhalese system as a "feudal" arrangement. Ryan writes of Sinhalese feudalism as the crystallisation of the caste hierarchy becoming in its institutions of the temple and the state the "skeleton upon which caste was the flesh and blood." (Ryan 1953:50). This "feudal" quality is seen to have constituted a specific transformation of the Hindu caste system<sup>2</sup>.

Though the difference between the understandings of Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist caste systems may have been misleadingly called "feudal crystallization", differences between the Sinhalese and Tamil caste systems exist. Apart from single caste villages, the differences are evident in the ideal Sinhalese and Tamil personal naming systems, and village house structures. The differences entail a different process by which the state is understood to constitute a totalising principle shaping personal identity. Temples are critical to this process.



Sinhalese names relate directly to land tenure and hence to caste. The village name is also a lineage name (vasagama) and, hence, with enough information known, learning a person's name can lead to tracing the person to his or her natal house. With a detailed knowledge of names, there is also knowledge of caste both in respect to the name identifying the village and more simply in the association of certain names with certain castes. Yalman (ibid:91) sees this aspect of Sinhalese naming as evidence of the "deep roots" of caste penetration in Sinhalese society.

The Tamil system differs: naming follows the cosmology and has little lineal depth. Sons take their father's second name as their first name and their grandfather's first name as their second. If not the entire name, the name will retain the same initial. All names are derived from the Hindu cosmology and pantheon. They are chosen in consultation with astrologers who make various predictions according to the astrological configuration at the precise time of a person's birth, the precise moment of entry to the cosmos. Sinhalese Buddhists follow the same practice of astrology and hence share certain ontological concepts of the person; but they include the land and the natal village in the personal name and this suggests important differences. The ideal Tamil system can be schematised,

FF	A.B.
F	B.C.
S	C.A.
SS	A.B.

The cycle repeats at the fourth generation, thus mirroring Hindu conceptions of the cyclical nature of existence expressed in the four ages (yūga). Individual identity is enmeshed in the family as the family is bound up with the broader pantheon. The Sinhalese system on the other hand, with inherited names relating to caste, residence and land tenure, is part of a social system in which identity is tied geographically and historically. This extends to the village-naming system <sup>3</sup>. The village and the identity of villagers are intertwined and identified historically. Both can be manipulated by the state to a degree that the Hindu system cannot. In the Hindu naming system a transcendent level of incorporation is expressed as a person shares a name with a deity, while in the Buddhist system the transcendent unifying principle is embodied in the state.

The personal naming system in the Munnesvarampattuva is Sinhalese, even in the avowedly Tamil Hindu villages. Many of the village names, however, have Tamil origins. In the modern period, personal names have in many cases been changed.

#### The Pattuva in the Galactic Polity

Many villagers understand that when Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe rebuilt Munnesvaram in the 1750's, he established eighteen villages with the eighteen castes of the ideal Sinhalese social order and thus re-established the pattuva. Others state that the original sixty-three villages were re-established with the eighteen castes, some of which were divided and located in separate villages.

These villages correspond to the sixty-three statues in the Munnesvaram temple. Hence the picture is of a pattuva which was recreated with the full complement of castes with the centre of the pattuva being the Munnesvaram temple.

The statues referred to by the villagers are actually the sixty-three Saivite Saints, the Nayanar, and were cast and installed in the temple at the direction of the Brahmins only in the 1940's. Each statue is engraved with the name of a Saint. Hence, the relationship between the statues and the villages is an intellectual construction made by the villagers in the last fifty years. Winslow (1984a:288) cites another construction by non-pattuva inhabitants who informed her that the statues at Munnesvaram temple refer to the sixty-seven Bandāra deities, village guardians common in the Kurunegala area. Armed with this information, Winslow journeyed to Munnesvaram and found the statues did not relate to the Bandāra deities at all (ibid).

Albeit factually incorrect<sup>4</sup>, the association of the Nayanar with the pattuva villages (and by others with the Bandāra deities), reveals a conception of the pattuva as a cosmic totality. This is also revealed in the idea that the pattuva was settled by every caste of the Sinhalese system. The numbers "18" and "63" refer to totalities, although in the second instance "64" is more precisely the totality, one the Nayanar and villages make with Munnesvaram<sup>5</sup>. The origin of the eighteen Sinhalese castes describes them as being brought from India when the ordered state of King

Vijaya was established (Kapferer 1988:57). Other sources similarly associate caste with the state but with that pristine state of the cosmic founder Mahasammata (Yalman ibid:89). The total number is thus a central feature of the Sinhalese cosmic state<sup>6</sup>.

The perception of the pattuva in these numerologically holistic terms identifies Munnesvaram temple's place in the articulation of the villages into the broader society. The temple played a central role in the identity of the villages with respect to the Sinhalese state. Caste identity was a feature of pattuva membership and the temple provided the context for this identification as the centre of a network of caste relations. Contemporary symbolic associations of the Nayanar with the villages express this function of the temple as the encompassing centre of the pattuva. Significantly, they are relatively recent associations, indicating the potency of these ideas in the contemporary pattuva and the historical interpretations its inhabitants make.

The ideas constitute the pattuva as a totality that is part of the broader totality of Sinhalese society. The structure of the pattuva follows the principles of what Tambiah (1976:Ch7) employs to describe the traditional South-east Asian "Galactic Polity":

a central planet surrounded by differentiated satellites, which are more or less 'autonomous' entities held in orbit and within the sphere of influence of the center. (Tambiah ibid:113).

A characteristic of the satellite is that it symbolically reproduces the totality in its "autonomy". In the Sinhalese system, this satellite-totality is the collection of villages rather than each single village. The collection is a collection of castes each established in its own village.

In contrast Tamil Hindu villages are not single caste villages. Hierarchical principles manifest in intra-village relations. A Tamil Hindu village can thus establish incorporative principles internally in a way the Sinhalese Buddhist village does not. This contrast which is evident in the naming systems, also appears in the nature of house design. The Tamil house is usually a discrete entity, marked off from other houses by high walls and distance. House access is more restricted than in the Sinhalese village where houses are more open to the rest of the village. As the Tamil village is more of a complete totalising unit than its Sinhalese counterpart, and Tamil personal names link the individual to the pantheon and cosmos not to the village, the Tamil house establishes itself as a totality amid other totalities.

While Hindu temples are critical to the identification of the Tamil person in the social order and do so as regional temples (thesamkōvil) commanding an order of subject villages and wards within villages (Whitaker 1986), the Munnesvaram temple commands a Sinhalese Buddhist order which displays significantly different cosmo-political principles. These have influenced the nature of contemporary social relations between villagers and

priests. In Sinhalese Buddhist cosmo-political principles, the temple is vitally important to the definition of the galactic polity and hence of the individual member much more than the temple in the Hindu galactic polity. Both follow the same incorporative mandala principles, the difference is one of emphasis on the nature of the constituent units. The Tamil Hindu is located in a transcendent order from the outset, just by the name; the Sinhalese Buddhist identity is tied to time, space and to the king. The Sinhalese galactic polity, therefore, can lose its value in a changing socio-economic environment unless it is closely controlled.

#### Fluid Caste Identity

The history of the Chilaw area has meant that the question of pattuva membership is not straightforward. Political turmoil between the Kandyan kingdom and the Europeans often forced the locals to flee, leaving the area deserted. The re-establishment of the pattuva in the 18th century could be likened to a settlement program as Kirthi sought to populate the area with loyal subjects tied to his cosmo-political order of caste and religion. Then, in the late 19th and early 20th century labour influx dramatically swelled the population of the Chilaw District. Newly arrived inhabitants have had to participate in a social order which began to actively elaborate traditional links after the 1885 "revival" of the Munnesvaram festival.

The contemporary social situation is one of fluid caste identity for the local inhabitants, both recently arrived

and otherwise. This renders the temple problematic with respect to the villages because the identity of members of a village with the caste identity of that village is expressed in the ritual context of the pattuva's symbolic centre. The Munnesvaram priests claim to know the caste of each pattuva village, though they were never forthcoming with all the details. The pattuva villagers, on the other hand, resist those labels the priests do provide. At the same time, villagers claim their rights to village land as the descendants of the caste members settled by the Kandyan king.

I interviewed several villagers from different villages and recorded contradictory information<sup>7</sup>. Each informant agreed that a caste order existed, most of them stating that it had existed prior to the Portuguese and that it had been re-established during Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's reign. Taking all their information together, though, and no order appeared. Instead the picture emerged of an area inhabited almost completely by the highest Sinhalese caste, the Goyigama, but at the same time, it was a picture filled with menial servants (Padu). This contrary picture emerged as each informant corrected me as to who is the genuine Goyigama (the informant) and who is the lying Padu (the others). Where informants came from villages named after specific castes (see Note 7), they stated that they were not the original inhabitants, but recent immigrants of Goyigama background.

Judging by the 1827 census this is not new. In that year, the majority of the Chilaw/Puttalam District population listed themselves as Vellalar. Nor is it surprising given the nature of the Sinhalese caste system in which land was granted for caste service. Villagers could subsequently suppress the origins of their land-holdings and stress the simple fact of owning and cultivating land; especially if the state structure that had granted them the land had been dismantled by European takeover. The Sinhalese naming system and the central institutions of the pattuva could thus be critical, but in the case of naming, immigrants seem to have chosen new names<sup>8</sup>. This leaves the central ritual institution, the temple.

Such shifts have not affected the Hewesi of Weerapandiya who state that they were settled in the village with land in return for their drumming at Munnesvaram. These villagers have retained their caste identity because some of them continue to perform at Munnesvaram and also privately in the pattuva. Thus, they are viewed by every other member of the pattuva as Hewesi or simply as Beravā. Their identity is affirmed by Sinhalese Buddhist villagers who employ the Hewesi during the year to play at funerals and other domestic rites, but the identity and a large part of the drummers' livelihood is derived from their work at Munnesvaram. Their presence links the temple with its Sinhalese Buddhist past as they constitute with the Brahmins the boundaries of a total caste order in a ritual complex. As with the Brahmins, this complex extends beyond



the ritual context and serves to maintain the Hewesi's status which is low as it is elsewhere in Sri Lanka (Kapferer 1983).

Though the Munnesvaram priests employ the Hewesi every year for major festivals, during the rest of the year Tamil Hindu musicians are employed. The two musicians, a drummer and nagesvaram (flute) player, are both of Indian background and are outsiders to the pattuva. They also play at the major festivals along with the Hewesi and both groups are joined for the major events (discussed in Chapter 12) by Colombo-based Hindu musicians, some of whom have performed on Sri Lankan television. The order of the three groups of musicians in festival deity processions reveals their relative status. The Hewesi come first, the furthest away from the goddess, then the permanent Hindu musicians, and then, closest to the goddess, the Colombo musicians. As has already been noted, the low status of the Hewesi is reflected in their prohibition from the central part of the temple. The other musicians are free to move anywhere except inside the inner sanctum.

Thus the Hewesi through their active engagement in Munnesvaram as a low caste, retain their caste identity, even as this has been elaborated in relation to Tamil musicians who also belong to low castes. Members of other villages emphasise their land-holdings and their activities as cultivators and so deny the caste identity which centres on the temple. This is even the case in villages where nowadays most of the men live through toddy-tapping, a

traditionally low caste activity! But a man's material activities are not as problematic as when they are defined in the ritual context of the temple. It is simply a non-issue for villagers that they tap toddy, what is an issue is when they are defined in relation to the temple. The responses to this issue have differed from one village to another and they have been heavily influenced by the ethnic and religious polarisation of Tamils and Sinhalese in modern Sri Lanka. The following types of response, though not exhaustive, illustrate this complex situation. The first is one where the village has become heavily involved with the temple, elaborated Tamil Hindu conceptions of a Galactic Polity, and elaborated a Tamil Hindu ethnic identity. The second is an elaboration of a Sinhalese Buddhist identity and complete rejection of the temple. The third is also Sinhalese Buddhist but it involves remaining antagonistically involved with the temple.

#### The Tamil Response

The ostensibly Tamil village is one whose inhabitants claim a cultivator status though most of the families live through toddy-tapping. It is surrounded by Sinhalese Buddhist villages that make similar claims but its claim is to a Tamil Hindu Vellalar status, the others to a Goyigama status. Everyone is curious how this situation came about<sup>9</sup>.

In the 1950's, a Hewesi of Weerapandiya was settled in the village by a powerful villager, powerful in the sense that he owned a lot of village land and had a lot of support from other villagers. This villager gave the

drummer a piece of land in return for the drummer's services at the village temple whose renovation the man financed. Settling a low caste man in this way is the act of a high caste patron. Settling him inside one's own village is the act of a Tamil because it creates a village of more than one caste. The model was provided by the Munnesvaram Brahmins. The resettled drummer still performs at the Munnesvaram festivals with his colleagues from Weerapandiya. Hence, not only does the presence of the drummer create an intra-village caste order, it also legitimates traditional claims to village land in the principles of the pattuva.

The temple the powerful villager set about renovating is the village temple, a temple to the village guardian Aiyandar. The villager's descendants act as temple priests. The renovations made the temple into a model of the Munnesvaram temple, and thus symbolically brought Munnesvaram inside the village. This action had been even more clearly elaborated in the 1920's when the villager's parallel cousin and close rival built a Śiva temple across the tank from the Aiyandar temple. The rival imported Indian artisans who had just completed a temple in Negombo to build a mini-Munnesvaram inside the village. They thus brought modern Hindu revivalism to the village. Temple ritual largely follows a Hindu model.

With these temples and two others built subsequently, this village differs from Sinhalese pattuva villages that only have simple shrines to Aiyandar, whom they call

"Aiyanaayake" ("Water Minister", Lord of the Tank). The difference is highly significant because, inside the multi-temple village, the symbolic totality of the pattuva is reproduced. The village is a satellite to Munnesvaram while Munnesvaram is also symbolically inside the village.

The contrast with the Sinhalese pattuva villages reveals different cosmo-political conceptions which manifest in the ethnic identity of these villages. The mini-Munnesvaram village is remarkably Tamil Hindu, but surrounded by Sinhalese villages. It is one of the three pattuva villages to have had a Tamil-medium school built in the 1950's<sup>10</sup>. This was done on land donated by the son of the same man who imported the Hewesi drummer. The village also has an extensive involvement with the Munnesvaram temple, particularly during the annual festival<sup>11</sup>.

The man who imported the drummer, renovated the temple, and helped cement the village's ethnic identity is said to have married into the village from a small settlement near Panduvasnuwara. He was keen to affirm his own dominance as a Vellalar caste land-owner and ritual patron. When a descendent of this man married the drummer's daughter the descendent was virtually excluded from all social life in the village<sup>12</sup>.

Munnesvaram thus provides locals with a seemingly timeless religious hierarchical order into which the locally powerful can articulate themselves. At this level, it is like Hindu temples elsewhere (Whitaker 1986, Dirks

1987). But its "king" is not Hindu and so its incorporative principles are shaped by different contemporary factors. One local village has asserted a specifically Tamil Hindu identity as it has been extensively involved in the modern Munnesvaram. Its inhabitants consequently describe themselves as Vellalar, although the Brahmins state that the village is not Vellalar but Batgam, palanquin bearers and regal servants, a Sinhalese caste. One Munnesvaram Brahmin explained that these villagers pretend to a greater status than what they really possess. But in the climate of ethnic hostility, the Brahmins welcome the villagers' enthusiasm and allow them to perpetuate their claim because this enthusiasm has shaped their Tamil Hinduism.

This articulation and assertion is, however, not the only possibility. Other pattuva villages have behaved differently and asserted their Sinhalese Buddhism. This includes the village immediately adjacent to the actively Tamil village.

### Sinhalese Responses

Not all of the sixty-three villages became re-associated with Munnesvaram through its festival in 1885. Many are now Roman Catholic and their inhabitants were not asked. Buddhist villages were invited, but not all of them took up sponsorship. The actual number of villages still involved, twenty-three in 1986, reflects a declining interest in the temple as a regional centre. Members of several nearby villages claim to have dropped their sponsorship which has since been assumed by private patrons; "outsiders" in my

and many locals' terms. Inhabitants of some of the "drop-out" villages said that they grew increasingly angry with the way they were treated by the Brahmins and also with the way the Brahmins have treated what is really a Sinhalese Buddhist temple. Their anger is matched by other villagers who have not relinquished sponsorship. Instead, they have kept it and so denied the Brahmins any more opportunities to sell the sponsorship to outsiders whom they are sure will be Tamils. Nearly all of the villages still participating claim a Goyigama or Vellalar status.

The Sinhalese Buddhist village adjacent the Tamil Hindu village is one of those still involved, albeit antagonistically. Its inhabitants attend Munnesvaram only once a year, on their village day in the festival, and in 1985 and '86, many of the men were drunk and obnoxious. They flaunted their rights in the temple, rights which date back to 1885 when the festival was created, but appear to date back to the pre-colonial era. The Brahmins are thought to not date back to that time and so they are despised as outsiders.

The amount of money each village pays for this right, the priests said, has hardly changed and this rankles with the priests who would otherwise be able to sell the right to people whom they feel would honour it. But the priests will not terminate the association because to do so would be to renounce the temple's identity as the pattuva temple. In the same way, they would not dispense with the services of the Hewesi. Only the locals can renounce their rights,

the priests cannot abolish them.

The situation has been exacerbated by the climate of ethnic violence and the drunken behaviour of some of the pattuva villagers is an expression of this violence. To ban such sponsors might worsen the situation and so the Brahmins tread warily. But different factors underlie the ethnic tension and they relate to the caste order the temple articulates in its festival and the unresolved contradiction between status and power emergent in this articulation.

Munnesvaram, employing the Hewesi as it does, remains central to establishing criteria of caste patronage. It is in this role that the Munnesvaram Brahmins claim to know the real caste of each village in the pattuva. More precisely, the priests will name the caste of each village still associated with the temple through the annual Adi festival that they "revived" in 1885. When they did so, the priests reactivated the relationship between the temple and the pattuva villages as this relationship had become critical to the vindication of temple lands in British courts. The vast majority of the incorporated villages are Sinhalese and their inhabitants no longer accept the ritual superiority of the Brahmins. A superiority which is bound up with the Brahmins' capacity to define village caste identities.

The festival provides villagers, both long-standing and newly arrived, with an arena for the expression of village

identity and thus with personal identity in the village/temple complex. But not in the manner of the ideal functioning of the pattuva with its central temple because the majority of villagers despise the outsider priests who control it. This is not the case with the ostensibly Tamil Hindu village I have described; yet this village's involvement is conditioned by other factors that relate to temple construction inside the village and the importation of a Sinhalese low caste person for ritual service.

#### The Adi Festival and the Pseudo-Trust

The annual Adi festival will be discussed as a whole in Chapter 12. I discuss here only event of the opening day, the meeting between priests and festival sponsors, because it highlights critically the problematic relationship between the two groups. It is the only formal meeting that takes place between the priests and villagers each year.

The festival officially starts with the flag-raising (kodietṭum), the raising of a long white banner from the temple flagpole to announce the festival<sup>13</sup>. This is followed by the priests and village sponsors gathering in the hall in front of the temple's inner sanctum. The name of each sponsor is read aloud by a priest and repeated by the senior festival officiant as he hands a metal cup containing half a coconut with betel leaf in it to another priest who takes the coconut and gives it to the named sponsor or his proxy. The names of the sponsors are recited every night of the festival, but it is only in the opening event that the sponsors, albeit not all of them, are



physically present as a visible and ritually defined body.

The sponsors then assemble in the temple office for a meeting with the temple incumbent, Karthikkeyan. The meeting is ostensibly to discuss the arrangements for the festival. What actually passed on the two occasions I was present was that Karthikkeyan told the group what the arrangements were for that year. Although some sponsors describe the meeting as a forum, there was no discussion and no voting<sup>14</sup>. After saying his piece, Karthikkeyan asked if there were any questions and, as there were none, the meeting disbanded.

The meeting is the only time the villagers have any say in temple affairs but they have no direct authority except to be present. In other Hindu temple contexts, this right is an honour which is keenly competed for. Dirks (ibid:290) argues that such honours take their meaning in the public sphere the particular temple elicits. In the rapidly changing public sphere in which the modern Munnesvaram temple has emerged, local villagers have shifted their association as they have felt increasingly isolated from the increasingly Hindu temple. This shifting public arena has been influenced by modern class processes that have altered the nature of the Chilaw economy, and by changing ethnic relations in modern Sri Lanka. One of the most important influences has been the increased popularity of the Munnesvaram temple complex with Hindus and Buddhists throughout Sri Lanka as this popularity has established the pre-eminence of Munnesvaram as expressly a Hindu temple

complex. This extends beyond the Munnesvaram temple to the other important temple, the Bathrakali temple. What remains between the Munnesvaram Brahmins and the locals is a spirit of detente. The villagers exercise their right to be involved antagonistically to the priests' right to control.

The old conflict between the Brahmins and the villagers that concerned the legal control of the temple is kept alive by the annual festival. The festival expresses the identity of the temple as the centre of the pattuva, a ritual and political identity founded in the traditional Sinhalese state. But it is one that many villagers feel the priests would happily abandon. They believe that the priests would deny the links between the temple and the Sinhalese kings and so deny the very nature of the pattuva and with it their identity as members of modern Sinhalese Buddhist society. Their continued involvement, and their antagonism to the priests are their efforts to frustrate the priests from fully taking over.

The court dispute reveals not simply discrepancies between the substantial tenets of English law and indigenous concepts, as has been noted elsewhere (Appadurai 1981, Fuller 1984, Whitaker 1986, Dirks 1987). It also reveals that the court arbitrated on two largely distinct concepts of ownership, the priests' and the villagers'. Both groups defined themselves in relation to the pre-colonial monarchic state in different ways, the former as members of an international caste, the latter as tillers of the pattuva soil. The differences entail different concepts

of self in history and underline the differences between the two myths of Munnesvaram's origin discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, these myths are central to the conceptualisation of self in relation to the temple.

Different alignments with the traditional state were inscribed by different concepts of the relation between status and power as they emerged as disagreements over caste and ethnicity. The Munnesvaram Brahmins describe a fixed ritual caste order through their employment of the Hewesi and their supposed knowledge of the authentic pattuva caste order. While on the one hand, the Brahmin/Hewesi order can be entered by villagers, on the other they cannot do so as the Goyigama or Vellalar they claim to be. Instead of status being able to define power, it becomes antagonistic and contradictory to it. The contradiction is expressed as the different ideas of temple ownership - as belonging to the villagers qua villagers and as belonging to the Brahmins as a royal temple. The assertion of Munnesvaram as a modern Hindu temple and not a Sinhalese Buddhist temple refracts this contradiction in the terms of modern ethnic nationalism. The situation is, therefore, more than simply a specific arena of caste, or of ethnicity, or of class. Rather it is a complex interplay of all of these phenomena continually being redefined in terms of a transcendent religious edifice.

#### Munnesvaram and Kataragama

It is worthwhile to pause a moment and compare ownership of Munnesvaram with the ownership of the other famous

Hindu/Buddhist temple complex at Kataragama. The Sinhalese priests (kapurāla) of Kataragama claim their right from the god himself. Their myth of ownership states that Lord Kataragama asked some Tamil Hindus to keep a temple for him but they refused. A group of Sinhalese Buddhists agreed to assist the god and so their descendants run the temple. Another myth recounts that the kapurālas are descendants of Vāddahs, nominated by King Dutugemunu to look after the temple (Navaratnam 1964:76).

In 1938, a group of Tamil Hindu revivalists met in Colombo to press for a greater Tamil presence at Kataragama. The war postponed further action (ibid). From the 1950's, Sinhalese Buddhist revivalists began to participate and, through the kapurālas, excluded Hindus from control over the ritual (Obeyesekere 1977, 1978). One of their major achievements, through the offices of the Government Archaeology Department, has been the renovation of the Kiri Vihāra, a large dagāba, at the western end of the complex. The complex was thus made to elaborate a Buddhist pantheon with Buddha as the encompassing principle. The Kiri Vihara was originally built by King Dutugemunu, in fulfilment of the vow he made to Kataragama when he sought the god's help in defeating Tamil invaders. Rebuilding the vihara, therefore, reactivated the history of Sinhala/Tamil conflict in accordance with modern revivalist sentiments, sentiments that are present in the myth of the kapurālas' control. Kataragama is then the obverse of Munnesvaram; since Buddhist revivalism has held sway over Hindu revivalism.

One can only speculate about what would have happened had the Munnesvaram priests lost the court case. Who would have been in the new trust and would the new trust have kept Brahmins serving? Would the overtly Hindu nature of the temple have been dismantled and would a Buddhist influence have been allowed to predominate? What happened is that the priests won the case and have been relatively free to continue their Hindu temple renovations. Here the outsiders who comprise the largest part of the Munnesvaram patronage have been instrumental. Following the Brahmins' legal victory, the popularity of Munnesvaram has grown with Sinhalese Buddhist outsiders who know little or nothing about the legal disputes. For them Munnesvaram is Hindu and they attend the temple and the Bathrakali temple in large numbers as a Hindu temple complex. This has made the priests rich and convinced them that they were right. They still serve the Buddhist community, notwithstanding the resentment of so many local Sinhalese Buddhists.

#### The Outsider Patrons

The first significant feature about the outsiders is that they attend both the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples while the pattuva villagers hardly ever visit Bathrakali. The social composition of the temple patronage is dominated by Sinhalese Buddhists. The following proportions were determined through a sample of the temple patronage collected over one year through interviews<sup>15</sup>. For the Munnesvaram temple and the Bathrakali temple, the patronage break-down is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Temple Patronage

<u>Ethnic Group &amp; Religion</u>	<u>Munnesvaram (%)</u>	<u>Bathrakali (%)</u>
a. Sinhalese Buddhist	79	82
b. " Christian	7	4
c. Tamil Hindu	11	12
d. " Christian	2	2
e. Muslim	<1	<1
f. Unspecified	<1	<1

Since most people attending one temple attend the other temple, the figures should be combined; but they are presented here as they were collected to indicate that more Sinhalese Buddhists attend the Bathrakali temple than they do the Munnesvaram temple. This partly agrees with Obeyesekere's (1975, Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988) information on the Bathrakali temple. But Obeyesekere wrongly characterises the Munnesvaram temple patronage as Hindu and that of the Bathrakali temple as Buddhist. The actual situation is that the latter has fractionally more Buddhists attending than the former<sup>16</sup>.

The average attendance for the Friday morning pūjā at the Bathrakali temple was sixty people in a range of from ten to over five-hundred. During the later days of the Adi festival, the attendance exceeded five-hundred. Before 1983, when the Tamil population in the island was more mobile, the numbers attending were not significantly greater<sup>17</sup>. Table 2 shows a breakdown of a sample of the visiting population collected throughout my fieldwork.

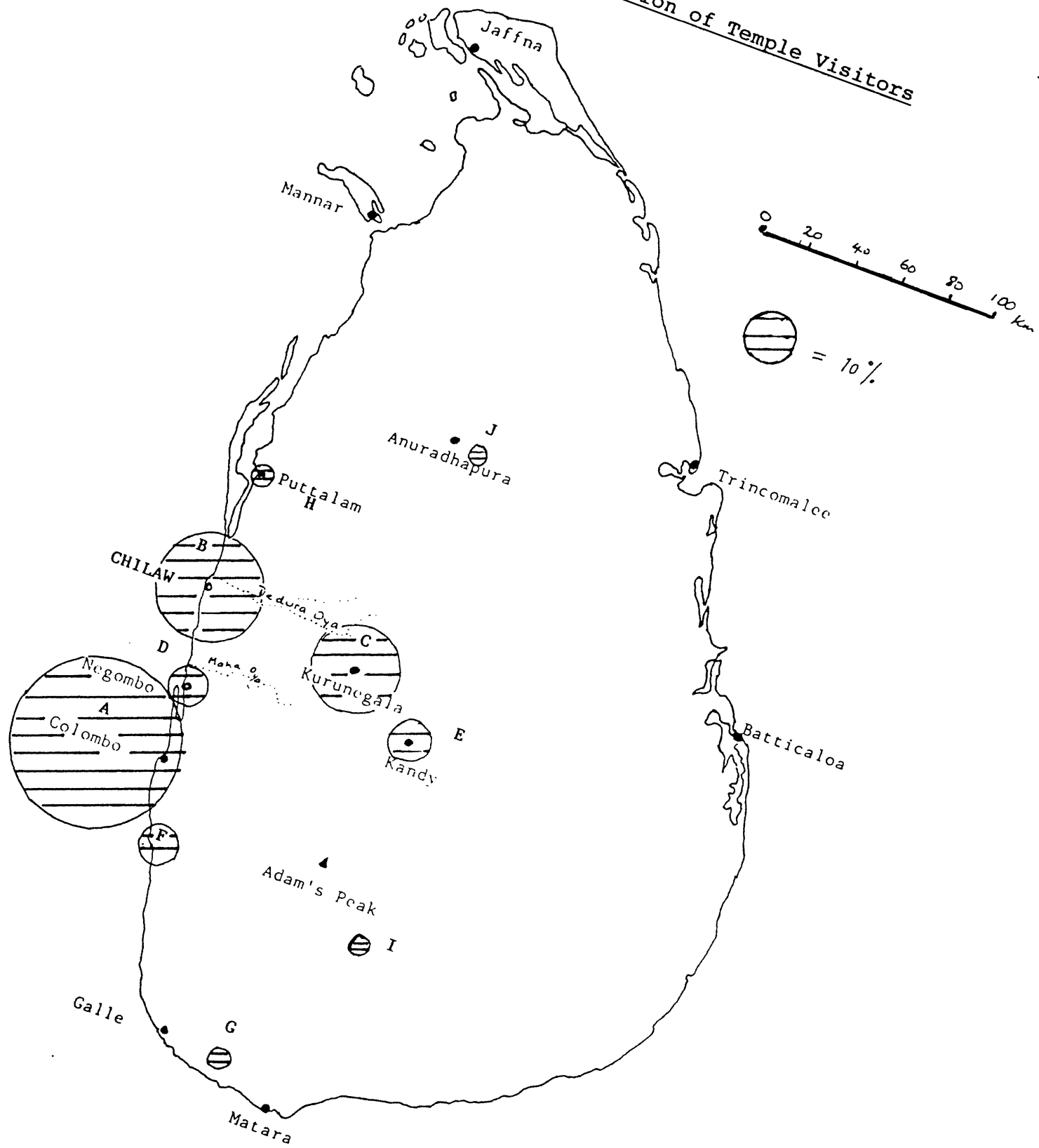
TABLE 2: Sample of Bathrakali Temple Visitors

<u>Occupation</u>		<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Labourer		15	22
Skilled Labourer		10	15
Small Business Owner		8	12
Planter/Business Owner		7	10.5
Middle East Worker		7	10.5
Peasant		6	9
Professional		5	7
Govt. Servant		5	7
Housewife		5	7
<u>Total</u>		68	100
<u>Location</u> (see Map 1)	<u>Code</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Colombo Area	A	22	33
Chilaw "	B	14	21
Kurunegala "	C	11	16
Negombo "	D	5	7
Kandy "	E	4	6
Kalutara-Seeduwa	F	4	6
Galle-Matara	G	2	3
Puttalam Area	H	2	3
Ratnapura & Estate Area	I	2	3
Anuradhapura "	J	1	2
<u>Total</u>		67	100

People from all walks of life attend the temple and come from as far away as Matara on the south coast. The largest proportion of the patronage comes from Colombo, generally from the poorer parts of Colombo, but wealthy people also attend. On a few occasions I interviewed poor people who were acting as proxies for their wealthy employers. The temple is not exclusively for the well-to-do or the poor.

The figures actually demonstrate a cross-section of the Sinhalese society. That such a large section of this society belongs to the poor urban working class is revealed in their large numbers in the temple. But as well as wealthy professionals, rural peasants attend in significant numbers (9%). Government ministers and bureaucrats,

Map 1 Distribution of Temple Visitors





lawyers, doctors, factory owners, Buddhist monks, nuns and temple priests, all attend and, moreover, they attend both temples. The patronage, therefore, reflects processes in the formation and composition of modern Sinhalese society. To think that Bathrakali is the slum-dwelling proletarian Sinhalese Buddhists' modern deity (Gombrich & Obeyesekere *ibid*) neglects the entire temple patronage for only one, albeit highly significant portion of it.

In the modern capitalist world present in Sri Lanka, the dominant social processes are class processes. Class processes never manifest directly or exactly as precise social groupings because their manifestation is always contingent upon the ideas about the nature of society held by its members. This is Weber's point when he distinguishes classes from strata: a class is a product of market relations, a stratum a product of social identification. Class and stratum interact with each other shaping their nature and appearance. For Marx the power of capitalism lies in social class always appearing as if in a camera obscura. The realisation of class processes synchronically removes class from its abstract embeddedness in diachronic history and necessarily obfuscates its nature. Caste and ethnicity are two phenomena in South Asia that manifest class obscurely and so change the nature of the class process which generates their modern form<sup>18</sup>.

The Bathrakali and Munnesvaram temples reflect the entire social process in its moments of realisation rather than simply constitute a venue for any particular social

realisation of this process, for any particular group to direct their worship and self-perception. This point underlines the significance of the temples. Their religious importance in modern Sri Lanka is far greater than just being a working class temple. Their huge patronage from all walks of Sinhalese society reflects their particular articulation of processes affecting the entire society.

Visitors from outside the pattuva constitute most of the patrons and their offerings bring great wealth to the temples. They often travel long distances, leaving their everyday networks to journey to Chilaw and Munnesvaram and attend the Hindu temples there. When they do not have their own transport, they travel to Chilaw by the regular minibus service, or they get together with neighbours and hire a bus, car or three-wheel taxi for the day. The choice to travel in smaller more expensive vehicles can relate to the secrecy under which the journey is being made. Minibuses are more commonly seen at pilgrimage centres like Kataragama. Patrons with their own smaller transport can maintain the secrecy of their journeys more easily than with such buses.

The Sinhalese Buddhist revivalist assertion of religious purity has been adopted more extensively by the dominant bourgeois strata as an expression of their dominance. Revivalism ostensibly rejects such non-Buddhist practices as Kali worship as Hindu. It is therefore often important for members of dominant Sinhalese strata to travel to Munnesvaram secretly and so maintain a front. Some simply

send their servants to the temple as proxies. This is not simply maintaining double standards. The significance of the temples is shaped in the very processes that label them as unsuitable for a good Buddhist to attend.

### Tamil Hindu Outsiders

Tamil Hindus are in the numerical minority as temple patrons, although they are the principal sponsors of the numerous special rites organised in the context of festivals. Those who sponsor special rites at the Munnesvaram temple are socially distinct from the sponsors at the Bathrakali temple. Munnesvaram temple is supported by Jaffna and Colombo-based Sri Lankan Tamils, members of the Tamil educated elite who espoused Hindu revivalism. Their involvement with Munnesvaram constitutes an instance of the revivalist emphasis on the reconstruction of ancient Hindu temples along orthodox, Āgamic lines. These sponsors do not express the same sense of travelling beyond their everyday world to attend Munnesvaram, as do the Sinhalese Buddhists. They do not travel in secret in the way some Sinhalese Buddhist patrons do.

As the sponsorship of the main Adi festival is concentrated in the hands of the pattuva villages, outsider participation in this festival's sponsorship takes place in the events of the last week of the festival. In the past, it was organised around three pilgrims' resthouses (mādams) and the sponsors were the managers of these resthouses. They belonged to three separate groups important to the

history of the modern temple. In the order of the festival events, the sponsors were 1. the Chettiars who financed the Brahmins' court appeal in 1925; 2. a group of Jaffna and Colombo Vellalars of the most eminent subcaste; and 3. the artisans who rebuilt the temple in the 1870's. Descendants of the first two mādams still sponsor a special event; but the third group had their honour removed after they took over the Pillaiyar shrine in the mādam and made it into an independent temple in the early 1970's. Their rite was still vacant in 1986, though several parties of outsiders were asking to fill it.

Outsider patrons are more active in the other special festivals such as the different Navaratri held during the year. The patrons of the Munnesvaram Saradā Navaratri are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Munnesvaram Saradā Navaratri Sponsors, 1985

<u>Day</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation and Domicil</u>
1	A.S. Somasundaram	Spare parts business, Colombo
2	M.V. Thiagaraja	Company Deputy Chairman Colombo
3	C. Nithyanatha	Government Engineer Colombo
4	S. Manoharam Mrs. Guhaperumal	Architect, Colombo ?, Colombo
5	Mr. Somanadar Mr. Lachchithanantha	Lawyer, Colombo Accountant, "
6	H. Somasekaram K. Ponnuthurai	?, Colombo Vet', "
7	Dr. Somasundaram Mrs. Umadevi	Medic, Colombo/Sydney ?, Colombo
8	K.K. Krishnakumar	Foodstuffs business Colombo

9	L. Jayasuriya	Proprietary planter Colombo
10	Mrs. M.D. Gunasena	Printer & Bookshop proprietor, Colombo

The first eight days of the festival are sponsored by twelve Tamils, most of them educated professionals, all of them Colombo inhabitants apart from one man who also lives in Sydney, Australia. Although I did not confirm this, I suspect that all of these sponsors have connections with Jaffna. I am sure in 75% of the cases. The last two days are less clear because the sponsors are Sinhalese. Of these two, however, only one is problematic because I know nothing about him aside from his being a Colombo businessman. I am fairly certain that he is not the same man who sponsors both the Bathrakali Navaratri and Adi festivals. The other Sinhalese sponsor is the wife of a prominent Colombo publisher. She attends Munnesvaram zealously throughout the year and sponsors whatever temple works she can. She urged the Munnesvaram Brahmins to develop major celebrations of the Navaratri festival ten years ago. She also sponsors the last day of the Vasāntha Navaratri and is usually accompanied by the ex-prime minister, Sirima Bandaranaike.

The Tamil sponsors of festivals at the Bathrakali temple belong to different urban Tamil groups (Tables 4 & 5). They belong to the less-educated business oriented fraternity of Colombo Tamils, many of Indian background. This is less evident in the sponsorship of the Bathrakali temple Navaratri (Table 4) than it is in the older Adi festival

(Table 5). In the latter case, the sponsors are predominantly Indian traders from the Pettah area of Colombo. Most of them are jewellers and gold traders.

Table 4: Bathrakali Temple Navaratri Sponsors, 1985

<u>Day</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Occupation and Domicile</u>
1	K. Dasa	Jewelry & Bookmaking, Jaela
2	D. Muthukrishnan	Lawyer, Colombo
3	Mr. Mahutan	Hotel/Restaurant, Moratuwa
4	R. Chandra	Politics, Colombo
5	R. Rajapakse	Confectionery business, Kelaniya (Colombo)
6	M. Nadarajah	Travel agent, Colombo
7	S. Silva S. Senanayake Arthy Jewellers	Business, Colombo " Kandy Colombo
8	H. Weerasinghe	Batik manufacturer, Nittambuwa
9	L. Jayasuriya R. Sudu	Business, Wellawatte (Colombo) " Colombo
10	S. Gnanalaksmi Mr. Pusparajah	" " Textiles, Chilaw

Table 5: Bathrakali Temple Adi Festival Sponsors, 1985

<u>Day</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>	<u>Occupation &amp; Domicil</u>
1	Lalitha Jewelry	Colombo 11 (The Pettah)
2	R.K.Kurusamy V.Thiyagaraja Pillai	Anusaya Gold House, Chilaw Business, Colombo 11
3	Mrs.Samana Kumari Mrs.Badra Samarawickrama	Bama Rice Mill, Nikaveritiya ?, Nugegoda
4	Aruna Jewelry Mr.G.A.Tennyvickrama- singhe	Colombo 11 ?, Kadawatte
5	Mrs. Menika Perera	?, Nugegoda (Colombo)

- |    |                                       |                                   |
|----|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 6  | Mr. L. Jayasuriya*                    | Business, Wellawatte<br>(Colombo) |
| 7  | Mr. Sarath<br>Vijeyasekara            | Business, Colombo 3 (Colpetty)    |
| 8  | Sujatha Gold House<br>Mr.P.B. Mohamed | Colombo 11<br>Business, Negombo   |
| 9  | Mallika Bakery<br>Hotel               | Moratuwa                          |
| 10 | Mr.Solamalal<br>Ambika Gold House     | Colombo 11                        |

\* This man is the same one who co-sponsors the ninth day of the Bathrakali temple Navaratri; but I do not think he is also the sponsor of the ninth day of the Munnesvaram Navaratri.

The sponsorship thus reflects social divisions in the Tamil-speaking ethnic group that can crudely be characterised as reflecting a distinction between the landed Jaffna Tamil elite, champions of Hindu revivalism, and the trading Colombo-based Tamils, mainly of Indian origin. Caste is an element of the distinction, the former group predominantly being Vellalar and the latter being Potkōllan (Goldsmith) or Chettiar (Merchant). In caste terms the Munnesvaram sponsors are superior to the Bathrakali sponsors. These divisions relate back to the division between the Brahmins of Munnesvaram and the non-Brahmins of the Bathrakali temple. For the Sinhalese sponsors in the lists, the distinguishing criteria are not the same; yet there is the same separation between older, landed forms of wealth and more contemporary entrepreneurial wealth.

The distinction between the forms of wealth that sponsor special festival rites has an important bearing on the

religious difference between the two goddesses, Ambal and Bathrakali. It conditions their relationship to the traditional Munnesvaram order, as it was revived, and the modern Munnesvaram order of predominantly outsider Sinhalese Buddhist patronage. The landed wealth of the Munnesvaram temple sponsors is seemingly immovable wealth, the wealth of kings. Festival sponsorship, like the royal temple endowment, legitimates landed wealth as being part of the old order. It is thus appropriate to the eminence accorded the land-owning temple-going gentleman ideal of Hindu revivalism. As I have noted, such sponsorship was a major impetus to pattuva village participation in Munnesvaram, but at Munnesvaram this participation has been contradictory for the Sinhalese Buddhist villagers. The participation by Jaffna Tamil Vellalars accentuated the contradiction for the local Sinhalese Buddhist village leaders generating their antagonism to the Brahmins who pander to wealthy Tamil outsiders.

The same tension does not arise in Bathrakali temple whose sponsors come from outside entrepreneurial backgrounds. Their wealth is movable and their position is legitimated in a temple for one of the most dangerous figures in the Hindu pantheon. Not surprisingly, therefore, the locals do not patronise the Bathrakali temple because the temple does not, as it were, localise their power. At the same time, the temple is popular with the outside Sinhalese Buddhist population.



## Conclusion

The data reveal the Munnesvaram temples to have a double aspect: the Munnesvaram temple as the centre of a pre-colonial geo-political unit of the Sinhalese Buddhist state, and the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples together as an important temple complex for Hindus and Buddhists island-wide. Tamil Hindu revivalism is prominent at Munnesvaram in the sponsorship of special festivals held by the temple's Brahmin priests whose authority has emerged in a struggle with members of the pattuva villages to control the temple. This struggle has involved the priests' articulation into the traditional Sinhalese Buddhist order. The priests perceive their mandate to derive from the Sinhalese king. So too do the villagers derive their mandate to participate in temple affairs as members of the Sinhalese Buddhist society of caste. Though both claims are made with reference to the state, they differ in the manner of their underlying interpretations within history. This complex situation has emerged in historical circumstances that have led to the valuation and revaluation of the significance of the temple complex.

It would be incorrect to stipulate that Munnesvaram temple is for Tamil Hindus and the Bathrakali temple for Sinhalese Buddhists. For the local inhabitants, both Tamil and Sinhalese (or rather of a particular combination of both ethnic groups), the main temple is Munnesvaram because it expresses concepts about the relations between each village and the wider society. For the Tamil outsiders, both temples are important, though Munnesvaram is more

important to Sri Lankan Tamils from the educated classes and the Bathrakali temple is important to Tamil entrepreneurs, especially those of Indian background. For Sinhalese outsiders, both temples are important also, though the Bathrakali temple is marginally more important than Munnesvaram.

The complex history of Sri Lanka, one of the emergence of a variety of social groups in the forging of a contemporary society, displays itself in the social composition of the Munnesvaram patronage and in the conflicts that have taken place between different groups. The temple has a special relation to its past, to its place in the pre-colonial society both of Tamils and Sinhalese. It occupies an interstitial position with respect to both groups as they have emerged in the modern era in competitive relation. This history is inscribed into the religious significance of the temple and is played out in the aesthetic form of the temple. In Part Two, I turn more specifically to this aesthetic form and demonstrate the historical dynamism of temple aesthetics as forms of historical practice.

## Chapter 7, The Hindu Temple & Munnesvaram Temple

The social and historical background of the Munnesvaram temples has been presented to introduce the religious significance of the temples as composing a Hindu temple complex popular with Sinhalese Buddhists. An understanding of this religious significance can now be pursued through a detailed study of temple aesthetics. Munnesvaram temple, standing at an interface of Sinhalese and Tamil social groups and with a predominantly Sinhalese Buddhist patronage, embodies in its aesthetic a mediatory position with respect to Hinduism and Buddhism. By temple aesthetic I mean both the design of the temple and its ritual. Both the architecture and the organisation of space are embodied in practices which at Munnesvaram are conditioned by the special significance of the temple for Tamils and Sinhalese. It is in its aesthetic that the world of Munnesvaram is continually reproduced. In this chapter, I analyse the temple form and the daily temple ritual as an expression of this form. I shall then turn to more specific aspects of the Munnesvaram aesthetic.

Existing anthropological studies of South Indian temples have neglected the architectural aspects, although Stein (1978:9) notes how research into such an area would be fruitful. Ethnographies have largely dealt with the history of temple political relations, temple mythology, and the sociology of temple priests. Temples have been studied in terms of their festivals and Hindu divinity has been studied with respect to statues<sup>1</sup>. Temple design in itself receives little attention. A study that commences with the

temple structure, however, will then be able to locate these other aspects within the logic the temple expounds. Forman (1985) has made a similar undertaking with the Kandariya Mahadeva temple, a temple of North Indian design. Many of his observations are relevant to my own argument, although his point is to contrast Hindu and Christian metaphysics.

In this chapter I deliberately restrict my discussion of the ritual to the daily cycle of normal rites for the temple deities, the nityapūjā. Pūjā can be regarded as the Hindu ritual paradigm for instrumental action (Diehl 1956). The meaning of pūjā is to be understood in relation to the temple because the temple structure is recreated daily through the pūjā.

The Hindu temple is the perfect representation of hierarchy as this has been identified and described in South Asia (see Introduction). It is the logic of hierarchy as a conception of power, that connects the ground on which the temple is built with the temple structure, its statues, and the daily temple ritual. These aspects of the Hindu temple are analysed here through the arguments of certain textual scholars, particularly Stella Kramrisch, in relation to the Munnesvaram temple aesthetic and the interpretations of this aesthetic especially by the temple priests.

### Sacred Ground

The Hindu origin myth of the Munnesvaram temple identifies the ground on which the temple is built as potently expressing Śiva's presence. Rama recognises this presence and breaks his journey to build the sand śivaliṅgam and perform pūjā. The sand liṅgam, drawn out of the ground, symbolises the temple. Rama's action is metonymical of temple construction.

Deities are understood to inhabit places suitable for their divine play (līla) and the effects of this play are experienced by humans who come to recognise the presence of the deity at the place. Some temple origin myths speak of deities appearing before suitable humans in dreams to instruct them to build a temple. For example, the Chitra Velauthaswamy temple at Verugal on the east coast (hereafter the Verugal temple) is such a temple. The temple is for the god Murugan, known for conquering the demonic Asuras and wooing the Vāddah princess, Vaḷḷi. In the battle with the demons one of Murugan's darts hits the ground at Verugal. Local Vāddahs find the dart and build a thatch shrine to house it for their worship, for in it they recognise the presence of the divine. Tamil Hindus who settle in the area take over the shrine and erect a brick structure. Sometime after this, an Indian trader who suffers from leprosy, while on pilgrimage to the great Murugan temple at Kataragama, rests at Verugal. In a dream, Murugan appears before the trader, tells him the whereabouts of a hidden treasure and commands him to build a temple according to the principles of the Āgamas. Bathing

in the river, the leprosy is cured, and following this the trader finds the treasure and finances the temple construction.

This mythic history of the temple establishes its origin with Murugan's battle with the Asuras. Vāddahs build the first shrine, Tamils take it over, then a wealthy Indian trader builds a temple according to the orthodox principles of the Āgamas.

Broadly, the myth illustrates the nature of sacred sites<sup>2</sup>, something Verugal has in common with Munnesvaram. At Verugal, the ground itself is infused with Murugan's presence; the place is a field of active power (kṣetra) (Kramrisch 1946:3)<sup>3</sup>. In his dream the pious trader experiences this field of active power and is cured of leprosy in the river which is the place for tīrtham, the holy bath culminating the annual festival. A tīrtha is a crossing point and is another name for a temple site (ibid). It need not be a river to be a sacred place, simply somewhere recognised as a point of articulation into higher cosmological domains (Bhardwaj 1973:63).

The Munnesvaram ground is inhabited by Śiva and his presence is recognised by Rama, the heroic king and avatār of Viṣṇu. The temple, therefore, has royal and divine origins, and is part of the mythic landscape carved out in the great struggle between Rama and the demon king Ravana, a landscape that has examples in many parts of Sri Lanka (see Chapter 2). Verugal temple is part of another mythic

landscape rendered in the struggle between Murugan and the demonic asuras. These struggles between gods and demons express the dynamic process of world formation and destruction well known in the literature on Hindu myth (Zimmer 1962, Zaehner 1966, O'Flaherty 1976, Eliade 1978). The struggles are the very essence of the world and its process. The temples and the sacred grounds are the physical demonstrations of these processes into which humans articulate themselves.

Rama, the divine king, lies at the heart of a history of royal temple patronage which is central to the priests' understanding of both the temple aesthetic and their temple ownership. They describe Munnesvaram as a "pītham" and as a "sannikriya" temple, a royal temple. Pītha in Sanskrit means base (Shukla 1961:409) and in Tamil, seat. This root meaning is extended by the priests in the sense of a regal seat and regal temple. It accords with the colloquial name for any temple, kōvil, which also has the sense "king's seat", but whereas kōvil means temple, pītham means king's temple. Thus, describing Munnesvaram as a pītham is in order to set it apart from other temples.

The Verugal temple myth indicates the importance of the ground on which the temple is built, and of the importance of the divine struggle with the demonic as this relates both to the origin of the world and the origin of the sacred ground. At Munnesvaram, this theme is extended to the history of kings.

### Puruṣa, Sacrifice & the Temple

Every Hindu temple is founded on a groundplan design of a yantram. Every stone statue in the temple is fixed to the ground by an individual metal yantram. The yantram binds the deity to the spot. Binding a deity is the fundamental aspect of the yantram; the root of yantram is the verb yam, meaning "to hold" and contextually "to gain control over the energy inherent in some element or being" (Zimmer 1962:141). The yantram is the foundation of the temple and more specifically it is the Vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala (Kramrisch 1946:6). This term is comprised of three words: vāstu, "the remainder" and more specifically, the remainder from sacrifice (ibid:45). Its root vas means "to reside"; vāstu is a residence (ibid:76). Puruṣa is the Cosmic Man whose self sacrifice is the origin of the material world. He is the totality of existence, its origin and its source (ibid:26). Maṇḍala is yantram, a geometric representation binding the energy of things to places<sup>4</sup>.

Every Hindu temple is such a vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala, the site of the original Puruṣa sacrifice. The maṇḍala is a compartmentalised square that signs a communication between "man (puruṣa) as the patron of the work and the Puruṣa, the Essence of all things." (Kramrisch ibid:7). The square is the simplest and the perfect symbol of the totality, a symbol of recurrent cycles of time and the unity of opposites (ibid:31,43). The compartments mark out the different moments of the totality. The world is made in the sacrifice and so comes to be, to reside in space and time. Sacrifice is fundamental to Hindu ontology. The following



description of the sacrifice portrays the world as divided into aspects of the encompassing body of Purusa.

Part by part, the Purusa sacrifices himself into existence, the gods are born from him, from his mind the moon, from his eye the sun, from his mouth the fire, from his breath the air and from his feet the earth. His being is given up to them and spent in them as far as he enters into manifestation; in as far as he is an active part in this all offered sacrifice of himself he is called Prajapati, lord of progeny (praja), totality of existence. He spends himself in an ever renewed, ever proceeding sacrifice by which the universe subsists. It takes place in time; time fathers it; is one with Prajapati (the year; [Satapatha Brahmana] VII. 1.2.11) and by his own sacrifice, outlasts death, the principle of all form, of all that has definition and thus is finite. (Ibid:68).

The body of the South Indian temple is the body of Purusa, lying on his back<sup>5</sup>. The innermost sanctum corresponds to the head and the entrance corresponds to the feet. The sanctum is called the gārbhaḥ, the womb-chamber. Its existence follows the original sacrifice from which it becomes the generative point for the further manifestation of the world. Hence its name, gārbha or womb. The sanctum is also called the mulasthanam, the first seat, the root seat<sup>6</sup>. Kramrisch distinguishes the gārbha as the womb and embryo in a microcosmic sense and as Prakṛti, the primordial substance of manifestation, in its "macrocosmic application" (ibid:163). In the original sacrifice as the coming into being of this world, the sacrificial point is the navel. This is shown in the temple by the balipītham the "seat of sacrifice" which sits in the largest hall of the Munnesvaram temple immediately in front of the flagpole (kodisthampam or kodikampam "flag tree").

The flagpole is Puruṣa's penis. It is also the Tree of Life understood to stand in the middle of the universe,

connecting the worlds of gods, men, and demons (Shulman ibid). Of the three objects in this hall, the Nandi bull vehicle of Siva, the balipītham and the kodisthampam, the latter is the most important, giving its name to the hall (sthampamandapam). The flagpole at Munnesvaram has a metal cobra on top, symbol of Siva, particularly his semen. A red flag hangs from the pole throughout the year, except during two festivals when it is replaced by a large white flag. The pole is an original point, a chronological marker, a symbol of time. The three horizontal bars at the top of the pole refer to the three moments in the day around which are organised the daily pūjā.

The world is born from nothing. Puruṣa's sacrifice is a sacrifice into existence. The world emerges in a process of manifestation as a coming-into-being. The temple replicates the process and so becomes the world in its process. As such, the temple essays a theory of power, the power of the world, or the sacred (Eliade 1959:12). The quality of the temple to be the world in its process is important for understanding the way the temple articulates various symbolic levels which I shall elicit as simultaneously co-existing. The first level is Puruṣa's body.

The body of the temple incorporates the six vital points along the body's vertical axis, known as the six cakra. Temple priests state that each cakra is inhabited by a particular deity.

6th -	Head -	Saṭśiva (Śiva as Light)
5th -	Thorax -	Maṅesvaram (Śiva the Supreme)
4th -	Chest -	Rūdra (Śiva the Destroyer)

3rd - Navel - Viṣṇu  
 2nd - Genitals - Brahma  
 1st - Perineum - Ganapati

(Sources - Brahmin priest Batticaloa, Brahmin priest Munnesvaram; physiological terms Tucci *ibid*:129).

Thus, the temple body has a physiology with respect to the flow of life energy, like the human body<sup>7</sup>. Cakras 4,5 & 6 are forms of Śiva. Hence the movement from the base is toward Śiva. The three Śiva's exist at levels of encompassment whereby Śiva the Supreme encompasses Rūdra (destruction), Viṣṇu (preservation) and Brahma (creation). He is encompassed at another level by Saṭśiva, Śiva as Light. Temple design, therefore, elicits the trimurti and, consistent with Śaivism, establishes the pre-eminence of Śiva. It also expounds the idea that every human body stands in relationship to the temple body. The conception of the temple is one of embodiment. Shukla (*ibid*:402), listing twenty-four body parts of the temple, notes that the terms are meant to suggest the organic unity of the architecture and to indicate the temple's vitality.

Puruṣa spends himself in his sacrifice. Ritual recombines the dismembered products for the repeated sacrifice through which the world exists. But not simply the ritual, the very act of temple construction is an act restoring Puruṣa's body for the sacrifice to be renewed (Kramrisch *ibid*:70). Temple architecture and temple ritual are closely related, for architecture is "an act of bringing disordered existence into conformity with the basic laws that govern it" (Volwahren 1969:44; Eliade *ibid*:59). This disordered existence is the spent sacrifice.

The ontology emphasises a process in which the world emerges and is spent in the process of its emergence. Therefore, both the temple and temple ritual bind together the remainder of sacrifice for the sacrifice to be repeated. The movement is a cyclical one of creation and dissipation. The phenomenal world is formed and continually reformed; its source is the primordial void pregnant with fertile possibility out of which Puruṣa sacrifices himself into existence. Puruṣa's relationship with Prakṛti, the fertile possibility, or the pristine energy of nature is a dynamic one whereby this energy of nature is given definition (see Zaehner 1969; Inden 1985). The temple, as a binding of a deity to a place, does so through reconstructing the deity's origin in the world which is also the origin of that world.

Prajapati having spent himself and fallen down exhausted, is rebuilt. The work of architecture is one of restoration of his body. The body of Agni-Prajapati is a universal symbol. Its images are those of the first and last sacrificial victims, man and goat; while bricks, and parts of the victims are embedded in its gross substance, number and measure constitute the subtle substance of its plan and structure. By its number it is a monument to time which is regulated, bounded and overcome. (Kramrisch *ibid*:70).

Defining the rhythm of the world as a cyclical process involves a particular conception of time. Time (Kāla) is of the world, intrinsic to suffering in the world. Suffering occurs in and through the dissipation of the spent sacrifice which takes place in time. As an anthropomorphic figure, Kāla and his female counterpart, Kālī, are demonic. They are agents of suffering and disorder. As Kramrisch states, temple design follows strict rules of proportion relating length, breadth and height precisely; the Āgamas

are quite specific about these ratios (Shukla ibid:80). This is the "monument to time", an attempt to define Time, to control it. The monument to time thus implies a control over the demonic. It follows the same logic as those mythic battles between Rama and Ravana, Murugan and the asuras; battles through which the sacred ground is created, battles that can be understood as sacrificial acts. In the logic of Hindu sacrifice, they are violent acts which are fundamentally creative.

The temple critically confronts the existence of suffering and its alleviation through explicating an ontology of suffering. Yet, this explication also identifies the very cause of suffering to be the very thing that controls it. Every attempt to control Time empowers the fragmentary process of Time. The conception is embedded in the entire conception of the sacrifice. Puruṣa is spent in the creative act of his self-sacrifice and so must be gathered up for the sacrifice to be renewed. Every renewal will also be spent. The movement between divine and demonic is an expression of this same movement of creation and dissipation.

The gods are settled on the Vāstupuruṣa. The fight between the demons and the gods is over for it is won conjointly. Every building activity means a renewed conquest of disintegration, and at the same time a restitution of integrity so that the gods once more are the limbs of a single 'being', of Existence, at peace with itself. (Kramrisch ibid:97).

Kramrisch has caught here the spirit of hierarchy. But the fight between god and demon is never over; it is the process of hierarchy. Creative acts are encompassing acts.

Temple construction is a creative act, its rules of proportion are rules of encompassment. But every act of encompassment is fated to fragment unless the entire process is done away with and the phenomenal world is renounced. The world as conceived in the Hindu temple is one whose power transcends every attempt to control it.

To return to the rules of proportion more specifically. Kramrisch discusses the rules of temple proportion at length (ibid: Part VII), noting the histories of different systems, and the separate system operating in South Indian temples (ibid:261-271). The consistent theme is that the proportions must be precisely related. These proportions commence with the Vāstupuruṣamāṇḍala and its division into compartments which then decrees the location of all the shrines in relation to the centre, the sanctum. Measurement is then made relating length, breadth and height exactly. Their proportional relation not only determines the temple's physical features, but also the day construction should begin, the asterism under which the temple is, as it were, born, and the expected lifetime of the temple (Kramrsich ibid; Volwahn ibid:50-51). Through its unique measurement, the temple gains a personality.

The original temple is Mt. Meru (Shukla ibid:413; Forman 1985:162), the abode of the gods, and, although each temple replicates this first temple and first sacrifice, it does so as an extension of the primordial temple. Thus, every temple is at once universal through its replication, and particular through its extension. The temple is both the

whole world in microcosm and its own part of the world in macrocosmic application; both general and unique. Here is the whole/part logic of hierarchy in which Munnesvaram is both a microcosm of the world, and itself - a temple with a particular history, design, and ritual. The personality of the temple derives from its uniqueness<sup>8</sup>. This personality nevertheless remains within the prescribed rules of proportion, although the part can be asserted over the whole when the temple's uniqueness is contrary to the temple's universality.

I do not know the particular system by which Munnesvaram is built; but it is regarded by its priests as imprecise. Munnesvaram has a very broad inner sanctum, too broad for its length, and this was causing the priests difficulties with the codified height of the entrance tower (gōpuram) yet to be built. The priests say that the wide sanctum is a consequence of the first reconstruction of the temple initiated by King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe in the 1750's. Importantly, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's reconstruction continues the association of the temple with kings established in the connection with Rama. The particular character of the temple proportions is related to the particular character of the temple history, thus, re-legitimizing the temple identity as the king's temple. The dilemma of the temple's proportions is thus overcome. The fact of the excessive width is explained by the origin of the temple itself and its historical importance in the island. Where Munnesvaram is irregular in its universal character, it is deemed entirely regular in its particular

character. In particular, it is a pītham temple<sup>9</sup>.

To return to the Hindu temple more generally. Many Hindu devotees describe the temple as the deity's house or, more grandly, palace. It is called dēvasthanam in Sanskrit by its priests meaning "god's seat". The household metaphor is demonstrated through the daily temple ritual, the pūjā, which treats the deity as lord of the house served by the priests. At Munnesvaram, the lord is Śīva, accompanied by his consort Ambal. Pūjā treats the day as a day in the life of the deities. They rise, are bathed before each of their three meals, retire in the afternoon when the temple is closed, and retire at night. Earlier, statues of Śīva and Ambal were brought to a special sleeping chamber in the outer walls of the temple two nights per week, where they slept together. But this practice is no longer followed and the chamber is used to house two peacocks donated to the temple. The household metaphor, nonetheless, persists. It structures a relationship between temples and domestic ritual and, thus, the process of the world and the life process of the person in the world. The temple as a body refers to the body of the person, the temple as a house refers to the person as a householder. The two associations may not be explicitly linked by people; yet they nonetheless share a logic.

The temple, therefore, operates at several symbolic levels, none of which annuls another. It is the body of Puruṣa, his sacrifice into existence, and hence the world. It is anthropomorphic and contains the cosmologically



significant junctures of the human body, the cakra, on a grand scale. The temple represents a mountain, Mt. Meru, the abode of the gods and axis around which the world rotates. This axial quality relates to its also being a controlling monument to time and, therefore, an attempt to alleviate time's concomitant, suffering. The relation to time is embodied both in its proportions and in the flagpole. Finally it is the house and the household of the divine couple. It exists at all of these levels of representation simultaneously as it combines the universal and the particular, the whole and the parts. This capacity for simultaneous levels of symbolism is expressed in the chronology. I said that temple ritual treats the day as a day in the life of the gods. The year also is seen to correspond to a divine day and, according to some, a single breath from the mouth of Brahma and hence a second. The simultaneity of these different temporal schemes appears to be contradictory. Actually, there is no contradiction because every scheme derives its character with reference to the encompassing unity of the cyclical movement of creation and dissipation<sup>10</sup>. It is the same for the different levels of representation of the temple structure: they exist simultaneously without denying the other's existence. Encompassing them all is Purusa, the Creator who is the temple.

#### Exclusive Areas in the Temple

It was the practice to demarcate specific areas of the temple exclusively for the higher castes. It is still forbidden for non-Brahmins to enter the inner sanctum of

Brahmin temples. Similarly, the non-Brahmin priests of the Munnesvaram Bathrakali temple forbid entry to the sanctum to all but themselves. However, most of the other rules of exclusion have been relaxed. At Munnesvaram, these rules were that the hall before the sanctum, the mahāmandapam ("great hall"), was exclusive to the highest non-Brahmins, the Vellalar and Chettiar. The larger hall housing the flagpole and seat of sacrifice, sthampamandapam ("pole hall"), was open to the lower castes. Temple musicians performed from here and moved around the temple via its "inner road" (ulvīdi), immediately adjacent to this hall. Still lower castes, notably the Karaiyar (fisher caste), were not allowed to enter the temple at all. Beyond the inner road is the temple wall and gateway. These low castes were not permitted to pass through the gateway and would remain at the temple's outer road (velvīdi) immediately beyond the gateway. Nowadays, these rules have been relaxed except for the inner sanctum and for the Sinhalese Buddhist musicians of the Hewesi caste who play at Munnesvaram on special occasions<sup>11</sup>.

The exclusive areas in the temple design demarcate relative proximity to the inner sanctum, the point of origin and hence of encompassment. The rules directly relate to the four varna categories underlying the hierarchical nature of the caste system. The varna are mapped onto the body of Puruṣa, for indeed, they spring from his body. Brahmans occupy the head, Kśatriya the arms, Vaiśya the belly, and Śudra the feet. This is how the Munnesvaram Brahmins understand the origin of society from

the Purusa myth. The conception of the varna is one of the totality of humanity inscribed into the totality of the temple. Proximity to the sanctum is a function of relative encompassment.

Obviously the varna categories in the temple describe an idealistic model of segregation; that is, a logic through which the actual segregations are defined. The Munnesvaram temple immediately highlights discrepancies between the classical ideal model and the actual demarcations. In Sri Lanka there are no Kśatriya, the highest caste is the farmer caste and, hence, technically Śudra. The Chettiar are predominantly traders and hence Vaiśya; yet they have access to the hall before the sanctum. But strict congruence is not the point of the classifications. A logic of hierarchy connects the varna categories to the caste system, a logic emphasising principles of separation and interdependence, a logic whose reference is varna<sup>12</sup>. It is for this reason that the temple can be seen to embody the principles of hierarchy: just as part of Puruṣa's body produces one varna as distinct from another varna, so do all the differences merge back into the unity of this body. The social order thus derives a relational identity from the temple as a totalising symbol.

The symbolic logic of hierarchical thought expressed in the temple, therefore, includes the social order. The temple is simultaneously the social order and the person. This is the relation between the temple-maker (puruṣa) and the temple (Puruṣa). The diverse aspects of being are

conjoined with divinity into a unifying totality. This is the potent message of the temple design.

### Stone Images

The temple structure, therefore, embodies an elaborate cosmology and the essential sacrificial ontology of Hinduism. It also embodies the spirit of hierarchy, in its process, and symbolic organisation. Now I turn to the temple substance which I analyse in terms of the aesthetics of temple statues.

Stone is the "aboriginal substance of the linga" the primordial Saivite image (Kramrisch *ibid*:153). Stone is the primordial substance made at the creation and from it the world takes further form. Stone is the womb, the egg, the mountain, the pristine substance having its place "at the navel of the earth" (*ibid*:119). Hindus worship black stone images called mūlamurti, the "root images". The absence of colour combines with the stone material to present images which are fundamental and primordial, relating directly to the origin of the world at the first sacrifice. This primordiality is emphasised in the contrast between the undifferentiated black statues and the brightly coloured statues adorning the temple towers. The images may not even be differentiated through carving. In poor temples the stone images may be simple pieces of stone that are worshipped as statues; that is, garlanded, decorated with the three parallel stripes of cow dung ash and offered pūjā.

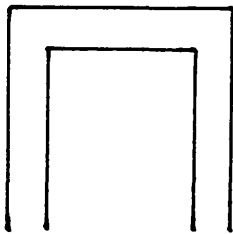
The classical scholar, Gopinatha Rao, argues that the use of unpainted black-stone statues is a relatively recent phenomenon, as is the practice of bathing the mūlamurti with water. Earlier, the statues were covered with stucco and painted "with the colour appropriate with each god" (Gopinatha Rao 1971:53). His work on iconography lists these appropriate colours for all the different manifestations of the Indian gods and he provides proof of his argument about the earlier practice of painting citing the instances of a couple of temple statues that are painted. However, he never explains why unpainted statues are central to the modern worship. In the next chapter I emphasise the unpainted nature of the statues which I later contrast with the statues used in Buddhist deity temples (dēvāles) which correspond to what is for Gopinatha Rao, the pristine correct practice. My point is that the unpainted statues are presented as pristine, although this is a relatively modern practice.

The central importance of stone is in keeping with the idea of the temple as a mountain. Kramrisch describes the temple structure not as something built up, moving from the earth to the sky in the manner depicted by the vaulted arches of the Gothic cathedral; but as a structure that grows through a "piling-down". This is shown in one of the words for the temple, prasādam ("piling-down"). At Munnesvaram, prasādam is not the name of the temple, but is the name for the returned offerings given to the gods. The piling-down is evoked through the use of trabeation and corbelling on the columns (ibid:149). I add that the device

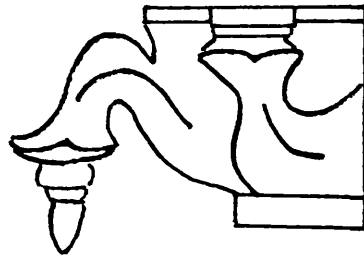
known as the palagi also demonstrates this piling-down effect (see Diagram 1). Black stone statues, principal objects of worship, thus lie within the larger brick, wood and stone edifice of the temple. One can feel as if one is burrowing in to reach them lying close to the earth, a sense that accords with the temple as a mountain or as a cave in a mountain (Shukla *ibid*:414). The temple seethes with the primordial power of creation and dissipation piled under by the temple structure. There is a heaviness, a solidity, which is absolute inside the dark and airless inner sanctum. The coloured statues of the structure above are piled in layers on the primordial, black stone images below. These painted images readily catch the eye, but they are not the objects of worship. The objects of worship are the stone images, infused with the power of the world.

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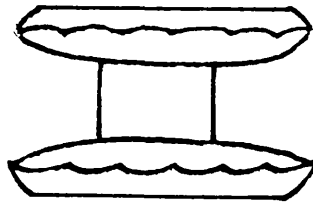
Diagram 1: The Aesthetic of "Piling Down"



Trabeate Arch



Corbel



Palagi

Stone is understood to have gender, male stones emit a bass tone when struck, and female stones a treble tone (Brouwer 1988:90). The fundamental image, the śivaliṅgam, is comprised of two parts, the liṅgam and the yōni. Respectively, they are penis and vagina, male and female. According to Brouwer, this statue will be made of both male and female stone, unlike other statues where the stone corresponds to the gender of the deity. The śivaliṅgam image, therefore, is an image of sexual union. Its imagery is consonant with the inner sanctum being the womb. In the first sacrifice, stone is created and, following this, the womb chamber in which sexual union is taking place. The womb is the generative point for the further extension of creation. In the other shrines in a temple like Munnesvaram, there are stone statues of other deities: the consort of Siva, Siva's sons Pillaiyar and Subrahmaniam, and other deities in the Saivite pantheon. These stone statues are extensions from the womb and can be distinguished for being carved, anthropomorphic and having a gender. The śivaliṅgam is not distinguished in this way; it is a simple image still close in appearance to the stone from which it is carved. For example, the anthropomorphic (albeit elephant-headed) statue of Pillaiyar is clearly this god, for not only is his elephant head carved, but also his pot belly, and characteristic weapons, insignia and posture. Likewise for Subrahmaniam. The stone of their substance is carved and thus differentiated from the primordial formless stone. Liṅga means "sign" (Kramrisch 1981:167) but was translated to me by some Munnesvaram devotees as "formless".

Linga, 'sign', not only signifies the existence of perceptible things, but also denotes the imperceptible essence of a thing even before the thing in its concrete shape has come to exist. (ibid).

The liṅga is therefore ontologically prior to the carved image, and the following scheme can be made:

Stone -----> Śivaliṅgam -----> Anthropomorphic Statue

And it can be characterised as

Formless -----> Immanent Form -----> Differentiated Form

Although it was explained to me that it is the śivaliṅgam that is formless, I am describing it as immanent form in order to include its material, the stone. This does not depart from the logic<sup>13</sup>. Relative to the carved image it is formless, but relative to its substance, it has form. Given that the simplest images seen in poor temples are simply stones, it is important to include stone in the scheme. Moreover, the entire temple, in all its elaborateness, is simply a stone, the mountain. Its logic is the logic of Purusa's sacrifice as a coming-into-being.

I pause here to note that at the moment of immanent form, male and female exist in union. They are different yet unified in their difference because their difference is yet to be realised. In the pristine stone, this union is yet to happen, while the carved anthropomorphic statues are the products of this union, the unity in difference of Śiva and Śakti. The male/female union is the creative



moment of immanent form and through the śivaliṅgam sexual union is the key motif of Śaivite symbolism. Sexuality becomes the metaphor for different expressions of manifestation. It must be stressed, however, that this does not mean that sexuality is the meaning of all such relationships. The sexual union of the śivaliṅgam is the pristine Śaivite object of worship as it is the encapsulation of the origin of existence and the continuous referent for existence. The dynamic of manifestation lies in the movement between male and female, Śiva and Śakti, Puruṣa and Prakṛti. It follows, then, that these movements are the movements of hierarchy. Moreover, this does not mean that the śivaliṅgam has always explicitly signified sexual union; rather it is a logical possibility realised in Śaivite symbolism. I shall return to this argument in my discussion of the sexuality of the goddesses Ambal and Bathrakali.

The relationship between the black stone images and the painted images extends from the relationship between the black śivaliṅgam image and the carved image. In the above scheme of movement from formless to form, a movement entirely in keeping with the sacrifice "into existence" as quoted above, the process of form-taking is aesthetically generated in the carving, in the elaboration of shape. In the extension to the painted image, the further differentiation employs colour. The movement to colour actually commences with the dressing of the statues with pieces of coloured silk.

Colours have cosmic associations in Hinduism (Beck 1969), commencing with the white/red contrast and its associations with passive and active principles, the Śiva/Śakti relationship which is also the liṅgam/yōni relationship. The outside wall of the Śaivite temple is painted in vertical red and white stripes. The statues on the towers have even more colour including green, blue, yellow, grey, etc. In textual traditions, every deity is associated with a colour (see Gopinatha Rao *ibid*). However, temple priests and the few artisans I met, are far less exact. I am not considering the colour contrasts, but the contrast between the presence and absence of colour as this signs the degree of manifestation of the deity in the world. Colour signifies differentiation from the pristine absence of colour; it signifies coming forth into the world.

### The Lingatbavar

The logic of manifestation I describe parallels what Zimmer calls the "phenomenon of expanding form" (Zimmer 1962:130ff). He analyses the lingatbavar statue, one of which is at Munnesvaram outside the wall behind the inner sanctum. The statue shows the liṅgam without the yōni. At Munnesvaram, carved shallowly on the liṅgam are, at the top a gander, at the bottom, a boar, and between them an elliptical niche in which an anthropomorphic figure is standing. In the statue studied by Zimmer in Paris, the carving is deeper and more detailed but the figures are the same. The statue depicts a myth, known by many Śaivite devotees, that describes how Śiva is superior to Brahma and

Viśnu. I quote Zimmer's version which includes some details that I did not collect from my informants. In the several oral versions I recorded there were no references to a "primeval situation". Instead, they simply commenced with Brahma and Viśnu's competition.

The myth of "The Origin of the Lingam" (lingobhava) opens with the familiar primeval situation: no universe, only water and the starless night of the lifeless interval between dissolution and creation. In the infinite ocean all the seeds, all the potentialities, of subsequent evolution rest in a dormant state of undifferentiation. Vishnu, the anthropomorphic embodiment of this fluid of life, is floating - as we have seen him before - in and upon the substance of his own essence. In the form of a luminous giant he is recumbent on the liquid element, radiant with the steady glow of his blessed energy.

But now a new and astonishing event: Vishnu perceives, all of a sudden, another luminous apparition, and it is approaching him with the swiftness of light, shining with the brilliance of a galaxy of suns. It is Brahma, the fashioner of the universe, the four-headed one, full of yogic wisdom. Smiling, this new arrival inquires of the recumbent giant: "Who are you? How did you originate? What are you doing here? I am the first progenitor of all beings; I am He Who Originated from Himself!"

Vishnu begged to differ. "On the contrary," he protested, "it is I who am the creator and destroyer of the universe. I have created and destroyed it time and again."

The two mighty presences proceeded to contest each other's claims and to quarrel. And while they were arguing in the timeless void, presently they perceived rising out of the ocean a towering lingam crowned with flame. Rapidly it grew into infinite space. The two divinities, ceasing their discussion, regarded it with amazement. They could measure neither its height nor its depth.

Brahma said: "You plunge; I shall fly upward. Let us try to discover its two ends."

The two gods assumed their well known animal forms, Brahma the gander, Vishnu the boar. The bird winged into the heavens, the boar dove into the deep. In opposite directions, on and on, they raced but could attain to neither limit; for while the boar descended and Brahma climbed, the lingam grew and grew.

Presently the side of the prodigious phallus burst open, and in the niche-like aperture the lord of the lingam stood revealed, Shiva, the force supreme of the universe. While Brahma and Vishnu bowed before him in adoration, he solemnly proclaimed himself to be the origin of them both. Indeed, he announced himself as Super-Shiva: the triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, Creator, Maintainer, and Destroyer, he at once contained and bodied forth. Though emanating from the lingam, they, nevertheless, abode permanently within it. They were parts of it, constituents, Brahma the right side, Vishnu the left, but the center was Shiva-Hara, "The Reabsorber, He Who Takes Back or Takes Away." (ibid:128-130)<sup>14</sup>

Zimmer interprets the statue as imbued with an internal energy of growth. The stone is vibrant, representing a "dynamomorphic event" (ibid:131) as the human figure emerges from the widening niche. But Zimmer's interpretation can be extended: the niche is in fact a vulva, vulva to the womb which is the stone. Although the lingatbavar is a liṅgam without a yōni, the statue is more precisely the two aspects embodied in the former. Thus, the lingatbavar statue and its myth demonstrate the logic of manifestation from the undifferentiated to the differentiated, from stone to liṅgam to anthropomorphic image. The process is birth; the stone is imbued with a sense vibrancy in the aesthetic which acts on the seeming inertia of stone to reveal the stone's actual potency. This vibrancy is similarly recognised by Kramrisch when she describes the niches in the sanctum walls that house shrines such as the lingatbavar shrine as "massive doors" (Ghanadvāra) expressing "the coming forth of the image from and through the massive wall" (Kramrisch 1946:301). As with other Śiva temples, the lingatbavar is on the sanctum wall directly behind the śivaliṅgam inside the sanctum.

As the lingatbavar demonstrates the logic of manifestation, it simulates the whole temple, existing at another level of microcosmic representation to the temple itself. These different layers of representation are possible through the organisational structure of existence which is ontologically hierarchical. In such a system, levels of symbolism are fluid<sup>15</sup> since each moment of symbolisation is, simultaneously, the complete symbol of the totality. The temple is primordially a stone, undifferentiated matter, the womb of existence. It is also a body, the body of Puruṣa, the Cosmic Man. Lying between the formless stone and the differentiated moments of existence is the Śivaliṅgam, symbol of sexual union and all that is possible in the world. Sexual union is the metaphor organising the process of differentiated form-taking that is the manifestation of the phenomenal world and, hence, it is the referent for the elaboration of additional meanings in the hierarchically structured cosmos. Sexual union generates hierarchy, this is its power and power of reference.

Just as the lingatbavar is the temple and the temple the original stone, so it follows that the entire physical structure of the temple is imbued with the presence of its deities, expressly understood to be present in the basalt statues. On this point I return to my initial suggestion of the metonym of Rama's sand liṅgam to the temple and note that the temple aesthetic realises the metonym. Additionally, the full significance of the stone inscription being built into the sanctum wall can now be

understood. The history of the temple's links with kings, Brahmins, and the surrounding territory is built into the very sacred edifice. It is part of the total object of worship, a truly fetishised history.

All of the symbolic associations are not equal and coterminous, the symbolism is itself hierarchical. Differences exist between the symbols in relation to the degree of manifestation in the world. This relative degree is signified through the painted images adorning the temple towers. These towers are built of layers of statues, generally plaster and cement, statues of the deities in their different manifestations; each manifestation having its own myth or myths. The tower above the sanctum is called the vimānam or the flying sthūpa ("tower"). Vimānam, another term for the whole temple (Shukla *ibid*:399) is from the root, mā ("to measure"). More commonly, it describes high edifices and also celestial chariots (Van den Hoek, personal communication). It is the Tamil word for aeroplane. The contemporary use of the word suggests that the tower is a dynamism, or a dynamomorphic event, a vehicle of movement into the world. The bright colours in which the statues are painted emphasise the dynamism, through signifying another level of differentiation. Moreover, the use of colour enlivens the statues. The temple is teeming with life and it is worthwhile to conceive of the tower statues as animated, acting in the world according to their associated myths. Zimmer is correct, temple aesthetics are more like a motion picture than a painting (Zimmer *ibid*).

At the top of the tower is the figure of the Makara, a demon-headed keystone consuming its arch and consequently everything beneath it. Here is the eternal return to the primordial, symbol of destruction through consumption. As the Purusa sacrifice pours forth, the Makara draws in. The temple thus signifies the total movement of creation and destruction. The Makara is Time<sup>16</sup>, and with it the temple is complete. The temple, as a monument to time, built with the objective of controlling time and its concomitant, suffering, ultimately recognises that any control will be, as it were, temporary. Inevitably, the cycles of time, of creation and destruction, affect us all. But in the face of this fact, temples play their part, establishing order, albeit only momentarily.

#### Metal Images and Processions

The principle objects of worship, therefore, derive their significance from the primordial substance of the temple - stone. Metal images are also worshipped, particularly as festival images (utsavamūrti). These statues are movable (chāla), the stone statues are immovable (achāla) (Gopinatha Rao *ibid*:17). Such statues are always metal, predominantly brass but always containing five metals: gold, silver, iron and zinc in small quantities, and copper. Copper tends to account for 80% of the alloy (Brouwer *ibid*:74)<sup>17</sup>. The metals, particularly gold, are considered to be most pure substances and are used for the yantra placed beneath every basalt statue when it is consecrated. These twenty-five square yantra are sometimes made of stone and contain twenty-five

compartments in which metal objects are placed in the rite of consecration. Less expensive is a brass sheet with the yantra engraved. The metal has a close relation with the stone but is an extension from the stone, a further manifestation. In this way, the processional images are extensions outwards from the immovable stone images inside the temple. It is only in the procession that such images receive the kind of attention from devotees, normally reserved for the stone images, although in most temples, most of the processional images are on permanent display and are incorporated in daily ritual<sup>18</sup>.

The movable metal images of deities thus extend from the stone images while retaining the qualities of these stone figures. They move outside the temple and their processions are interpreted to be for those people who cannot enter the temple. The deity is understood to be extending his or her grace (aruḷ) to those normally denied access to it. This interpretation, popular mainly with higher castes who have never been denied temple entry, additionally explains that the holy bath (tīrtham) which concludes the festival, is a ritual purification made necessary by this movement outside the temple. In light of the relaxation of entry restrictions, such an interpretation sees the continued practice of processions as a survival; but this is an unsatisfactory explanation. The theme I glean from it is the process of extension. The temple is not restricted to its physical boundaries, it continually incorporates and re-incorporates its world. The theme of extension relates to the importance of the temple's significance as the



coming-into-being of the world. This theme is central to the daily temple ritual.

### Pūjā at Munnesvaram and the Meaning of Pūjā

Dubois defines pūjā as "sacrifice", but Beauchamp, who translated and edited Dubois's manuscript adds that pūjā means honour, respect, homage and worship (Dubois & Beauchamp 1906:147)<sup>19</sup>. It relates directly, therefore, to the temple architecture. All ritual can be called pūjā but I am applying the term to the daily cycle of temple ritual. Each of the six daily pūjā has its own name and collectively they are called "Nityapūjā" ("Obligatory Daily Pūjā"). For a Śaivite to attend the temple generally means to attend one of the three principal pūjā each of which involves a secondary pūjā to make the total of six. These three pūjā are timed around the three moments of flux in the day: dawn, noon and dusk.

Table 1 : Munnesvaram Nityapūjā

1. <u>Uśakāla Pūjā</u>	-	Pre-dawn
2. <u>Kalāsanthi Pūjā</u>	-	7.30am (Dawn)
3. <u>Uchchikālasanthi Pūjā</u>	-	Noon
4. <u>Sayasathai Pūjā</u>	-	4.30pm
5. <u>Randamkāla Pūjā</u>	-	Dusk
6. <u>Arthasāma Pūjā</u>	-	9.00pm

1. The Uśakāla Pūjā ("Dawn" Pūjā) commences before dawn at the Bhairavar shrine (Diagram 2 No.15). Every night, following the Arthasāma Pūjā, the doors to the mahāmandapam (No.3) are locked and the keys kept with the guardian deity Bhairavar. The priest offers a single lamp and collects the keys, then opens the mahāmandapam and offers milkrice to the images in the sanctum and to Vadivambigai.

2. The main morning puja is the Kālāsanthi Pūjā held at 7.30 am, just after dawn. The order of deities is Sūriyan (5c), Pillaiyar (6), Subrahmaniam (7), the deities in the sanctum and arthamaṇḍapam (1&2), the deities in the mahāmaṇḍapam (3a,3b,3c), Vadivambigai (4), Nadesar (5a), Santhiran (5c), Nandi, the balipītham and the flagpole (9), the 9 Planets (10), Naga (14), Bhairavar (15), the 63 saints (18), Dakṣīnamurti (19), the Lingatbavar (21), Viśnu (23), Durga (24), and finally Sandesvarar (25). All the deities are bathed and dressed before being offered riceballs, flowers and fruit. The name of the pūjā literally means cooling (santhi) the parts (kalā), and thus refers to the way the rite involves every deity in the temple structure.

3. The noon pūjā (lit. "Remainder Time Pūjā") is done for the deities in the sanctum and for Vadivambigai. The statues are offered light curries of vegetables and rice. After the pūjā, the temple is closed for the afternoon and opened at 4 o'clock. Siva and his consort are understood to be resting.

4. The Sayasathai Pūjā commences at the Suriyan shrine and moves to the sanctum and Vadivambigai shrine.

5. The Randomkāla Pūjā is usually the best attended pūjā in the day and follows the statues in the sanctum and Vadivambigai being bathed. It commences at the Pillaiyar shrine, not the Sūriyan shrine. Sūriyan is addressed after Nadesar and before Santhiran. It is explained that Sūriyan

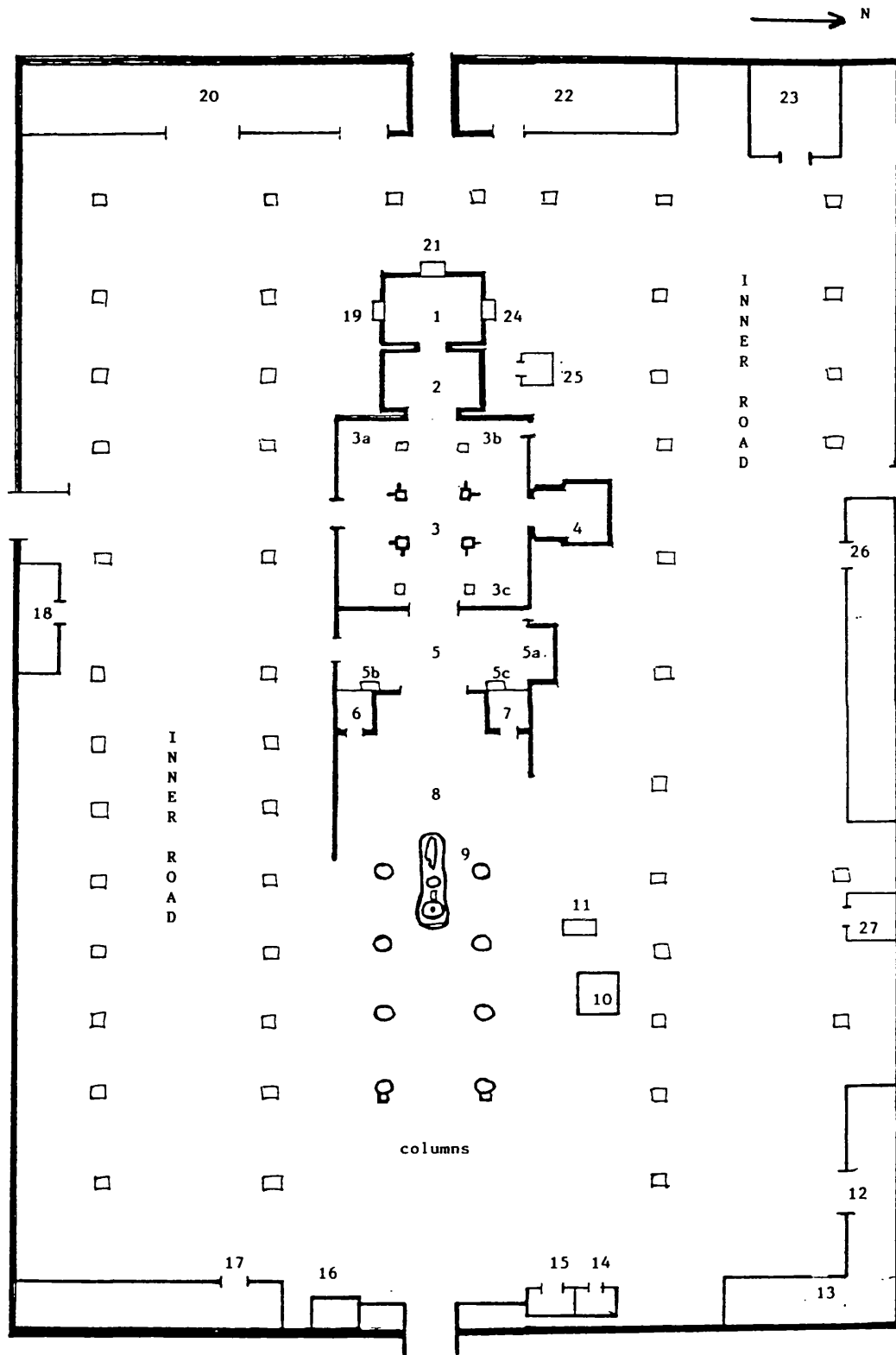
(the Sun) begins the dawn pūjā because it is the Sun rising. Otherwise Pillaiyar (the Clearer of Obstacles) is always propitiated first.

6. The Arthasāma Pūjā is prior to the temple closure at 9.00pm. A little milkrice is offered in a brief pūjā to the sanctum deities and to Vadivambigai. Then the mahāmandapam is closed and the keys deposited in Bhairavar's safe-keeping for the night.

There are, then, two pūjā involving every shrine in the temple, the morning and evening pūjā. Hindu Devotees generally attend one of these two pūjā, particularly on Fridays, the main day in the week for temple worship. The morning pūjā begins with the Sun god before Pillaiyar and the evening pūjā commences with Pillaiyar. Until about twenty years ago, the Pillaiyar shrine outside the temple was also incorporated in the morning pūjā, but this practice has been suspended by the priests.

Pūjā directly relates to time and in particular, to the ambiguous temporal moments in the day - dawn, noon and dusk. The temple flagpole (kodisthampam) is thought to be a temporal marker as well as Puruṣa's penis. The top of the pole has three parallel horizontal bars pointing to the sanctum. Some priests state that these bars refer to the temple pūjā. Other priests interpret the flagpole in terms of its Sanskrit term, dvajasthampa, which they translate as the return to the beginning, or the eternal return<sup>20</sup> and through this they recognise the link between the flagpole

Diagram 2: The Munnesvaram Temple Ground-Plan



Guide to the shrines

1. Inner Sanctum; mulasthaṇam or gārbhagrhm
2. Arthamaṇḍapam
3. Mahāmaṇḍapam
- 3a. Statues of Sōmaskanda (Śiva, Parvati, Murugan) & Bhikśadanar
- 3b. " " Subrahmaniam (with Dēvaṇai & Valli) & Pillaiyar
- 3c. Nadesar
4. Vadivambigai shrine
5. Nadesar maṇḍapam
- 5a. Statues of Nadesar, Arumugan (with Dēvaṇai & Valli)
- 5b. Sūriyan
- 5c. Santhiran
6. Pillaiyar shrine
7. Subrahmaniam shrine
8. Sthampamaṇḍapam
9. Nandi, balīpitham, kodisthampam
10. Nine Planets shrine
11. Temple bell
12. Vasānthamaṇḍapam
13. Yagam maṇḍapam
14. Naga shrine
15. Bhairavar shrine
16. Coconut-breaking bin
17. Kitchen & storerooms
18. Nayanar shrine with Mariamman & Aiyanar
19. Dakṣīnamurti shrine
20. Mahāvasānthamaṇḍapam
21. Lingatbavar
22. Storeroom
23. Viśnu shrine
24. Durga shrine
25. Sandesvarar shrine
26. Office
27. Earlier the Marriage shrine, now a cage for peacocks

and Time. The link between the bars and the pūjā indicates a similar reference to time in the pūjā. Strictly speaking the timing of pūjā should be absolutely precise. Not simply the commencement which is always punctual at Munnesvaram, but every movement in the entire rite. The Munnesvaram priests are not exact but they know they should be and point out that the Nallur Kandaswamy temple in Jaffna is one temple that is exact. Nallur priests are presented with wrist-watches and the Nallur gōpuram is adorned with a large clock. Throughout Tamil Sri Lanka, Nallur is famous as a monument to Time (Arumugam 1982:63), although this fame has been conditioned in modern revivalism (see Chapter 4).

I have noted already that the interpretation of the temple as the divine house stems from a consideration of the content of the three daily pūjā and I also noted that Hindu chronology elaborates a hierarchical conception of encompassing units of time, each one consistent with a general conception of the cosmic rhythm. This requires further explication. The rhythm cycles from light to dark, waxing and waning, auspicious to inauspicious. The day is so divided as is the lunar month which is comprised of two pakṣa each of which is made up of fifteen lunar days (tithi). In the waxing half of the month, certain days are set aside for certain deities. The deity receives a special pūjā before the 7.30 am Kalāsanthi Pūjā where the particular plant associated with that deity is presented. Table 2 lists these days.

Table 2: Special Days in Waxing Pakṣa

4th day after New Moon	-	<u>Chalhurli</u>	-	Pillaiyar
6th " " " "	-	<u>Sāstri</u>	-	Murugaṅ
8th " " " "	-	<u>Astahāmy</u>	-	Ambal
11th " " " "	-	<u>Ekathesi</u>	-	Viśnu

For Pillaiyar the plant is a river grass (kusa), tamarind leaves for Murugaṅ, red and white lotus petals for Ambal, and a leaf called tulasi for Viśnu. The plant is presented as a garland. The number of the day accords with an important number for the deity. Siva has no special day I was told because every day is his. Siva's plant is the belli leaf which he receives especially on festival days such as Śivaratri. For the other four deities at any rate, the month is understood to be moving with a rhythm into which they are placed through the pūjā that day. Śiva is understood to transcend the whole process because he embodies the entire rhythm

The movement of the day and the movement of the month are thus punctuated by pūjā<sup>21</sup>. Clothey has called these moments that bridge the constituent units of the chronology "tempocosms" (Clothey 1982:157). I prefer to liken them to the temple itself; that is, to tīrtha - crossing points. They are the moments of flux in the temporal order. This order is perceived to be hierarchical and thus the units of different scale have a simultaneous co-existence.

Important for pūjā, dawn and dusk are also important moments for demonic attack, important for their ambiguity. Pūjā, taking place at these moments of great demonic power, provides a model for the Sinhalese Buddhist exorcism

ritual, a ritual which also attempts to establish an ordered cosmic hierarchy (Kapferer 1983, personal communication). The logic is consistent. Pūjā is a sacrificial offering referential to the original sacrifice through which the cosmic order was created and the process of demonic fragmentation set in train. Pūjā, therefore, directly relates to the gathering up of the spent sacrifice through which the temple is created. The spent sacrifice is demonic fragmentation. Hence, the movement between divine and demonic is a central feature of the daily temple ritual. But this is not surprising given that the same movement between divine and demonic is essential to the constitution of the sacred ground of the temple, as I argue at the beginning of this chapter. Pūjā, temple, and the sacred ground are thus interrelated in reference to the process of the world.

Having established the importance of the time referent in pūjā, I turn to the structure of the rite. Dubois identifies three levels of pūjā (Dubois & Beauchamp *ibid*:147-148). What is performed daily at Munnesvaram corresponds to the third, simplest, level. Ostör describes three constituent units to pūjā - a flower, a gesture and an utterance - and argues that these three units will be constant from the simplest single offering to the most complex ritual covering days and even weeks (Ostör 1978:123). The key to an interpretation of the pūjā is in its gestural script, because it is in the gesture that the relation between the temple's different shrines is established and, thus, the relation between the pūjā and



the temple is elicited. The principal gesture is the alāththi which means "waving" or "rocking". In pūjā, the alāththi refers to the waving of lamps, but comforting a child by rocking it is also alaththi. Hence, alaththi has the meaning of soothing<sup>22</sup>.

Pūjā involves a succession of lamps which are waved before the statue. There can be as many as sixteen lamps in the pūjā, but most often four lamps are used. The lamps belong to two classes: lamps with oil tapers and lamps which burn small blocks of camphor. The lamps are metal, usually brass, and have an odd number of flames. Whether it is four or sixteen lamps there is the following processual pattern:

OIL=====>> CAMPHOR

Odd Number -----> One -----> One -----> Odd Number

There is always only one single oil and one single camphor lamp. The rest will be made up of odd numbered lamps. An odd number of oil tapers is followed by a single taper, at which point there is a hiatus when the priest moves forward to the statue and makes an offering of flowers, betel leaf, and fruits and possibly other items such as a five fruit mixture, milk rice and holy ash. The priest recites mantra during this hiatus between lamps and will also wave a censer. Now immediately before the statue, the priest waves a single camphor lamp followed by an odd numbered camphor lamp. During the lamp-waving the priest rings a handbell and the hiatus is marked by his ceasing the ringing. The temple musicians, at Munnesvaram a drummer and flute

(nagesvaram) player, play throughout, although, at Munnesvaram on occasion they stopped playing during the hiatus. Temples without musicians have no music other than the bell. As well as the handbell, the temple bell is rung during the rite. The temple musicians see their music in hand with the other offerings in pūjā, it is an offering of sound to the deity. The bell is also sound and like the music, it has rhythm. The rhythm of the sound is time. The same principle underlies the mantra as mantra are comprised of primal sounds recited with a rhythm. A single mantra, as a particular configuration of sounds, relates to a particular deity and to a particular aspect of a deity. The root of the word mantram is mā - "to measure" - also underlying the term vimāna.

At many temples the succession of lamps is from five taper to single taper oil lamps, followed by single camphor then five camphor lamps. Sometimes a three taper oil lamp follows the five tapers. The number decreases to one. Similarly, seven camphor flames can follow five; the number never exceeds eleven. The oil tapers on the lamps point outward from the priest and hence toward the statue. These lamps are held by handles, accentuating their outward aspect. Camphor lamps, held closer to the statue, are held by their central stems. Thus, the lamp design demonstrates the movement towards the deity in the statue. At Munnesvaram, in a simple pūjā involving four lamps, the first lamp has many tapers arranged on an odd number of circular tiers. Usually, a five-tier lamp is used burning as many as 108 tapers, although the priests were never

especially exact about lighting every taper<sup>23</sup>. The logic is the same as with a five-taper lamp, but the actual number of flames is greater. In the full pūjā performed on special festival occasions, the complete array of lamps are waved but the principles of decreasing number to a single lamp followed by a single lamp and an increasing number remains the same.

At an extreme, the number of tiers on the first oil lamp and the number of branches on the last camphor lamp is eleven. The number is always odd. The numbers follow the logic of yantra, indeed, the camphor lamps with their central stems and encircling branches are like yantra. The movement to the statue by the priest following the single taper lamp is totally within the logic of yantra as a movement from the differentiated outside to the unified centre. Once done, the priest approaches the statue, makes the recitation and the offering and then moves back out to the outside, now with the camphor flames. Priests and devotees point out that camphor burns without residue. They regard the camphor flame signifying the union of the individual soul with god. The being of the individual is taken up into the being of the god. The oil lamp paves the way for this movement which is both an offering of fire and a sacrifice of the individual to the god. This is the nature of pūjā as a sacrifice. Moreover, the oil fire is regarded as hot and the camphor fire as cold. In the movement from hot to cold lies the process of encompassment<sup>24</sup>.

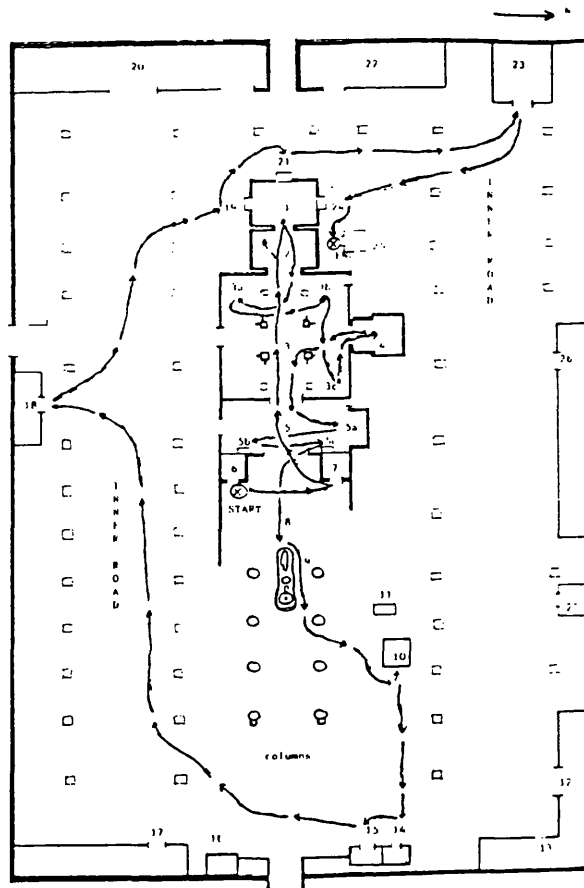
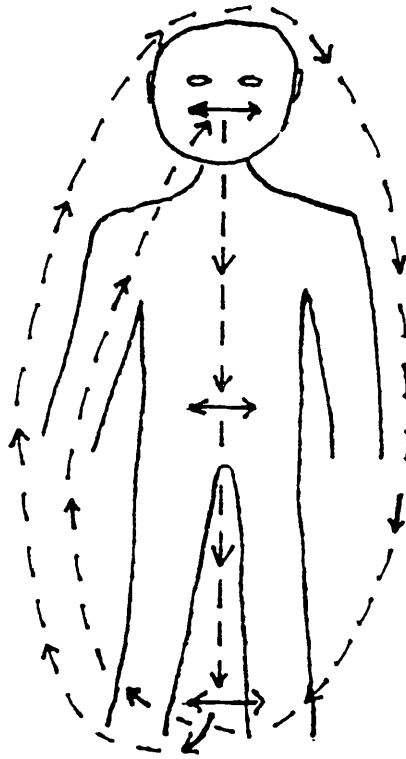
The action of alaththi is done at every statue in the temple and its gesture is replicated in the movement between shrines in the temple. The lamp is first presented to the face of the statue and oscillated across it. Then it is moved down the vertical axis of the statue and oscillated across the navel and then the feet. Then it encircles the statue thrice stopping at the head where it is oscillated again. The entire body of the statue is presented with the lamp, the deity consumes the fire as an offering and is consumed in the fire. For the non-anthropomorphic statue of the śivaliṅgam the gesture is the same. The movement is also linked with the Sanskrit letter Om - the primal sound of the cosmos (parāvāc).

Pillaiyar as the Clearer of Obstacles is always propitiated at the commencement of ritual. In some of the pūjā the first deity is the Sun (Sūriyan) whose shrine backs onto the Pillaiyar shrine. Pillaiyar follows immediately. Then, the priest moves into the sanctum, then out to all the statues in the mahāmaṇḍapam and the Vadivambigai shrine. The movement from here is down the temple to the nadesarmaṇḍapam and then the sthampamaṇḍapam. It is a movement down the horizontal axis of the temple, followed by a clockwise encirclement along the temple's inner road (ulvīdi). At each shrine the priest halts and performs pūjā. The entire movement replicates the alaththi to a single statue. Indeed, it is an alaththi to the whole temple, to the body of Puruṣa in which each statue is inscribed. Devotees move with the priests and musicians in the clockwise circumambulation. The last shrine is

Sandesvarar's (No.25). Sandesvarar is the messenger of Śiva. After the last lamp is waved before him, the priest claps his hands thrice and the devotees follow suit. The clapping is time, rhythm, the beginning. Pūjā is a creative act of reintegration. The priest then moves back to the sanctum and comes out to the devotees in the mahāmaṇḍapam bearing a many-branched (usually five) camphor lamp which the devotees worship through placing their palms in front of it and then placing them together three times. At this point they also receive holy water, ash, sandalwood paste (with which they mark their foreheads) and possibly some fruit. These items are the prasādam, the gifts of the gods hitherto given to the gods. The devotee is now inscribed into the being of the god and the being of the temple through the sacrificial gift of the pūjā. Devotees will also prostrate themselves before the statues as gestures of their incorporation. Diagram 3 indicates the relation between the movement of the alaththi and the movement of the pūjā.

When a devotee attends the temple, he or she should circumambulate it once or thrice in a clockwise direction. The rite is called pradakśina and literally means "a gift coming down". Kramrisch describes it as a rite, a "communion of movement with the images stationed on the walls" and not simply as a "visual recognition of their identity and the perfection of their workmanship" (Kramrisch *ibid*:299). The pūjā articulates this idea as well as relating every deity in every shrine to the totality of the temple. Alaththi and pūjā encompass, they

Diagram 3: Lamp-Waving and the Movement Around the Temple



articulate the cosmic hierarchy expounded in the temple. The entire temple is treated as a deity with its devotees who have given themselves up to it. Relating all the deities in the temple to the temple itself indicates how pūjā is just as much for the deities as it is for the devotees who are offering themselves to the deities.

#### Pūjā and the Death of a Priest

The occasion of the death of a Munnesvaram priest in 1985 demonstrated the relation between the temple deities and the temple. It is well known that death is an ultimate source of pollution for the close kin of the deceased. For Brahmins, the effects are less than for lower castes (Dumont *ibid*:70), but for temple priests it means that they cannot enter the temple and also that the temple itself is affected by the pollution.

As soon as the news of the priest's death had been relayed to the temple by his son from his house across the road, the temple was cleared and closed with the arthamandapam door-key being placed in Bhairavar's care as of a normal night. Usually, Brahmins are quickly cremated following a brief vigil. However, the cremation was delayed because the priest's wife had gone to Jaffna to be present for their daughter's confinement for childbirth; the tense political situation in Jaffna having kept the daughter from returning to her natal house as is usually done. Word was sent by telephone to summon the wife back to Munnesvaram and the cremation was postponed. The chief priest became increasingly agitated by the delay, especially after he

received word of travel on the Jaffna road being made difficult following a skirmish between Government troops and Tamil guerrillas. The priest said they would delay as long as possible but that every moment the temple remained closed was bad for the temple. A deadline of eight hours was given. The wife finally returned at 4 o'clock in the morning and had just a few minutes to pay her respects to her husband before the corpse was carried out of the house to the cremation ground. As soon as the corpse had been carried past the village boundary, the temple doors were flung open and all the fourteen pūjās that had been missed were performed in succession.

In 1988 the temple was also closed following the death of the chief priest's mother, but the cremation took place that same day because everyone was present. Once again, all the missed pūjā were performed as soon as the corpse had been taken past the boundary<sup>25</sup>. To have not performed the pūjā would be almost as serious as allowing a non-Brahmin priest inside the sanctum; that is, a desecration. Some priests explained that the deities's "days" had been disrupted; they had not been bathed and fed and could have justifiably become annoyed. The explanation rightly indicates that pūjā is both for the deities as it is for the devotees and I add that it is for the temple as a whole.

### Conclusion

The pūjā is the articulation of the temple space. Through pūjā the temple structure is practised and it is



done in reference to the primordial sacrifice through the sacrificial nature of the rite. I began this chapter with a brief reference to Rama's fashioning the liṅgam from sand and stated that his act is analogous to temple construction. Rama draws together particles of the world into a unified whole. The temple does so too. Kramrisch captures this sense in her preface:

The purpose of the Hindu temple is shown by its form. It is the concrete symbol of Reintegration and coheres with the rhythm of the thought imaged in its carvings and laid out in its proportions. (Kramrisch *ibid*:vii)

The metonymy between the sand liṅgam and the temple serves another purpose. Simultaneous levels of signification of the temple are possible in the logic of hierarchy. The temple is everything I describe and doubtless more besides. This is because the temple is the world in microcosm. This may seem a simple truism; but one that has been demonstrated and whose possibilities have been considered here. The temple combines the universal and the particular, and so, not only does it represent the world, the ideal cosmos, it is a world. A living dynamic entity. For this reason it would be impossible to fully exhaust its symbolic associations. Munnesvaram, for all its irregularities, never loses itself and ceases to be a Hindu temple. Temple construction is an act of reintegration and as such is a ritual. Temple ritual, the pūjā, functions in the same way. It is in pūjā that the temple is treated as a temple and its ambiguous design is sublimated.

Ostör's (1978) analysis of pūjā is more precisely an argument about the interpretation of ritual. I shall not go

into his analysis here, because my interest is more in the pūjā itself. He discusses the rite, identifying the constituent units of object, gesture and utterance; vague enough units to be identifiable in any ritual. I have dealt explicitly with the gesture, particularly the alaththi, and related it directly to the nature of the temple. But pūjā can be done outside a temple. Then it is like a single action in front of a shrine<sup>26</sup>. I have analysed the complete rite, both to facilitate my interpretation of the temple through the rite, and of the rite through the temple. Courtright (1985), following Ostör, analyses pūjā from the perspective of a larger rite than the daily temple ritual. He concludes that pūjā is a microcosmic representation of the process I have called form-taking (ibid:50).

Preston's (1985), working at the Puri Jagannath temple in Orissa, analyses the nature of divine images in the temple through the annual wooden statue construction in the Navakēlavara festival. He concludes that the images of divinity stress their own impermanence, their own fragility, and hence the way the deities are enmeshed in the vicissitudes of time. The image of divinity "is a process that continues to evolve as the many conceptions of divinity change through time." (Preston 1985:25). I agree and I think the relation is evident in more permanent structures and statues than those of this particular festival. The quality becomes evident in the deities' relations to each other in the temple arrangement.

My analysis of the Hindu temple reveals what Munnesvaram temple is while stressing the situational nature of its significance. I draw inspiration from the work of Bourdieu, particularly his concept of the dialectical movement between structure and practice (Bourdieu 1977) instanced in his study of the Kabyle house. The Kabyle house is treated, not simply as a physically and temporally fixed edifice, but as a space moved through, a habitation.

The house, an opus operatum, lends itself as such to a deciphering, but only to a deciphering which does not forget that the 'book' from which the children learn their vision of the world is read with the body, in and through movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted as much as they are made by it. (ibid:90)

Bourdieu's concept of an opus operatum (lit. "work of work" or "work of action") stands in relation to modus operandi ("manner of work or action"). The former is the structure, the latter the practice. He stresses practice over structure because practice is the real ground of existence for structure and, moreover, in this real mode, the distinction between practice and structure is revealed to be abstract. The argument is particularly critical of notions of culture that see it as a set of customs or jural rules which stand outside and constrain the individual member of that culture.

I extend this argument to the total aesthetic of the Munnesvaram temple and have commenced my discussion with an analysis of the temple as an opus operatum. But the practice of the Munnesvaram structure, the construction of a temple space as its own space, is not restricted to the

priests and the daily pūjā they perform. It also derives from the history of the temple as this history is activated and empowered in temple aesthetics by the priests whose control has been structured in legal disputes determining the nature of tradition. The priests have a concept of the Hindu temple, and they also have a concept of the Munnesvaram temple; yet neither of these concepts fully accounts for the "progressive symbiosis" (Certeau 1984) of the Munnesvaram aesthetic as a structure and a practice.

## Chapter 8, A Closer Examination of the Temples

The preceding discussion assessed the general significance of the Hindu temple as a totalising symbol of the cosmos, based on the primordial sacrifice of the Cosmic Man, Puruṣa, and on the creative union of the divine couple. In particular, the temple captures a sense of the dynamic process of the world, of the movement between creation and destruction, unification and fragmentation. This capturing, I argue, is an attempt at control, one that will only ever be momentary because the nature of the power of this process is primordial and transcendent. The effectiveness of the attempt to control such primordial power, to bind it, lies in the perfection of the temple design as well as in its history. What Munnesvaram lacks on the one side, it makes up for on the other because of its association with the Sinhalese Buddhist state and with kings right back to Rama.

As an expression of temple design, I analysed the temple pūjā, especially its movement before the statue and around the temple, concluding that pūjā is as much for the deity as for the devotee, and hence as much for the temple rather than simply in the temple. This is the basis of my disagreement with other anthropological interpretations of temple ritual and temple divinity, particularly Ostör's (1978).

In stressing the importance of ritual action to the entire temple aesthetic, the way is left open to consider the nature of the Munnesvaram aesthetic as it stands at a

Hindu/Buddhist interface. Firstly, as has already been mentioned, the temple proportions are wrong because of the history of temple renovations. Secondly, the ritual participation by the majority of the temple devotees does not fit with the general pattern for the Hindu temple. This is consequential for the Munnesvaram temple's capacity to embody only a Hindu conception of power. Finally, the central deity at Munnesvaram is Ambal and not Śiva. She is treated as the great force at the temple and has been ever since the temple was rebuilt in the 1750's. The other important deity is her demonic aspect, Bathrakali.

#### Munnesvaram temple Design

According to the Munnesvaram priests, an orthodox Siva temple should have twenty-seven halls (mandapa). Presently, Munnesvaram does not have twenty-seven halls and it is unlikely to ever have this many. Strictly speaking, Munnesvaram has six halls, the artha, mahā, nadesar, sthampa, vasāntha, and mahāvasāntha mandapa (Chapter 7, Diagram 2 nos 2,3,5,8,12 & 20). At certain times a shrine (grhm) will be called a hall and so the temple is seen to be more complete if the shrines are included in the total. Priests agree, however, that Munnesvaram is incomplete as a Siva temple and requires additional halls, shrines and an entrance gateway (gōpuram). These things come in time; the temple is growing, its unfinished nature reflecting its vibrancy as a living entity<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the temple's incompleteness is continually being revised and this is understood in terms of the nature of the Hindu temple. Renovation is constant but should be prefigured by the

existing groundplan as this contains the determining temple proportions.

### The Sanctum

During 1986 the priests several times discussed the construction of the temple gōpuram and the difficulties associated with the excessively wide sanctum. The explanation for such a sanctum was that the temple is a royal temple and the sanctum width "has something to do with the king". Earlier I argued that such an explanation recognises the temple as irregular in the general terms of Āgamic temple construction, but entirely acceptable in terms of the temple's history of association with the Sinhalese state. This is not contradictory because of the relation between the universal and the particular in temple symbolism. The origins of this wide sanctum should, nonetheless, be considered for the way they reveal differences in the Hindu and Buddhist conceptions of the temple.

There is conflicting opinion<sup>2</sup> about the extent of the temple structure that remained from the 1750's reconstruction. The present temple structure is mainly the result of two renovations, the first in the 1870's and the second in the 1910's. Some say nothing but ruins remained when the 1870's work was undertaken, others state that the sanctum was still standing and the temple was built around it. My view is that part of the sanctum wall, dates from the 1750's but that the rest of the wall is from the 1870's.

My view stems from the fact that the base of the western and northern parts of the wall contains the inscribed stone recording Parakramabahu VI's 15th century land grant. Fowler noted in his translation of the inscription in 1887, that it was recently mortared (Fowler 1887).

Additionally, the style of the line motif on the top of the sanctum wall is not from the late 19th century. The carvings of lions and cattle appear very old, as if the motif dates from the 1750's and was used in the 1870's renovation. Such animal line motifs are normally found in Buddhist temples, especially the older ones. These Buddhist motifs, generally geese, elephants and demonic men (Bhairavar), are placed at the bottom of the wall. At Munnesvaram the cattle and lions are at the top. They suggest a Kandyan Sinhalese influence that was retained in the 1870's reconstruction.

The tower work above both the wall and animal motif was probably added in the 1870's but may have been added as late as the 1910's.

Therefore, I speculate that the sanctum was to a large extent rebuilt in the 1870's using stonework from the 1750's and retaining the same dimensions as of the original structure. The sanctum is approximately 7.25 m wide and 10.5 m long. The length includes the arthamandapam which is as wide as the inner sanctum. Hence, the overall sanctum structure is rectangular, whereas in modern Saivite temples, the arthamandapam is narrower.



The tower work, though added later, is also unusual. The tower (vimānam) has four sides sloping away from each other, each side inhabited by a particular deity in various painted forms. At Munnesvaram the sides are:

East (front)	- Pillaiyar
North	- Śiva (Dakṣīnamurti)
West (rear)	- Viśnu
South	- Arthanathesvara (Śiva/Śakti)

The rear side should be for the main deity of the temple, but at Munnesvaram it is for Viśnu. The central avatār is the Lion, the Narasingham, with Rama on its right and Narayan on its left. The Narasingham is part of the Kirttimukha or Makara, the demonic face surmounting the tops of the towers. His face is fierce, his bulging eyes look down to where the devotee stands looking up; yet one of his hands is raised palm outward in the abhaya ("fear not") gesture. The second tier above is centred by Viśnu flanked by his consorts Sri and Bhū and this is repeated in the top tier.

Priests say that this arrangement is unusual but think it stems from the important role Viśnu (as Rama) has in establishing the temple. Why the centre is taken by the Lion avatār is unclear. According to very old traditions, however, the location of the Lion avatār is perfectly correct. Gopinatha Rao cites the Narasingham along with the Boar avatār, Varaha, as deities whose popularity has waned. In the height of the Lion's popularity it was stipulated that a statue,

be set up to the west of the central shrine even in Siva temples. As a matter of fact an image of Kevala or the Yoga form of Narasimha [the form at Munnesvaram] is

found in a niche on the west of the central shrine or the vimana in all old temples. (Gopinatha Rao *ibid*:39, emphasis added)

The presence, therefore, of the Lion on the Munnesvaram tower has antecedents and is not a radical departure from orthodoxy. Nor is it surprising, according to Rao, that the priests do not know why he is there, since the practice of keeping the Narasingham on the west of the tower is otiose. Hence, the Narasingham's presence follows an ancient practice done relatively recently. It refers back to an older orthodoxy about which the contemporary priests are ignorant. Thus, a modern temple is continually elaborating its past. While it must be remembered that such elaborations were common during this period of Hindu revivalism, the elaboration of a Kandyan Sinhalese past was peculiar to Munnesvaram.

#### The Addition of Shrines

The question of in which renovation the different temple shrines were added is for the most part difficult to answer. The Vadivambigai shrine (No.4 in Chapter 7, Diagram 2) was probably built in the 1870's renovation judging from the condition of its stonework, along with the mahāmaṇḍapam (No.3) and the nadesarmaṇḍapam (No.5). The sthampamaṇḍapam (No.8) and the Pillaiyar and Subrahmaniam shrines (Nos.6&7) date from the second renovation in the 1910's along with the outer temple wall and the rooms and shrines in it. This second renovation resulted in the nadesarmaṇḍapam which I suspect had been the sthampamaṇḍapam previously. Śaivite temples do not usually have a special hall for Nadesar

(Śiva the Lord of Dance), although there is always a shrine in the general area of the Munnesvaram Nadesar shrine<sup>3</sup>. The addition of a larger flagpole hall resulted in the Nadesar hall between the mahāmandapam and the sthampamandapam.

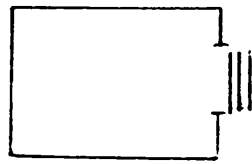
The Bhairavar shrine (No.14) probably dates from the 1870's construction but it was then moved to its present location. The Viśnu shrine (No.23) was built through a private donation by a Jaffna Tamil in 1947. The Sixty-three Saints (Nayanar) shrine was built in 1946, following the casting of the sixty-three statues by the priests four years earlier.

Sinhalese deity temples (dēvāles) are generally rectangular and do not have all the shrines attached as in the Hindu temple. They do not elaborate the body of Puruṣa although they are built on a yantram. When Munnesvaram was renovated in the 1870's, the attached structures that make up the Puruṣa, such as the Vadivambigai shrine, were incorporated into the existing design to make an orthodox Hindu temple employing the elaborate tower work of carved and painted statues not seen on dēvāles. This superimposition of a Śaivite Hindu structure onto what appears to be a Kandyan Buddhist dēvāle has since been extended in subsequent renovations. I schematise these developments in Diagram 1.

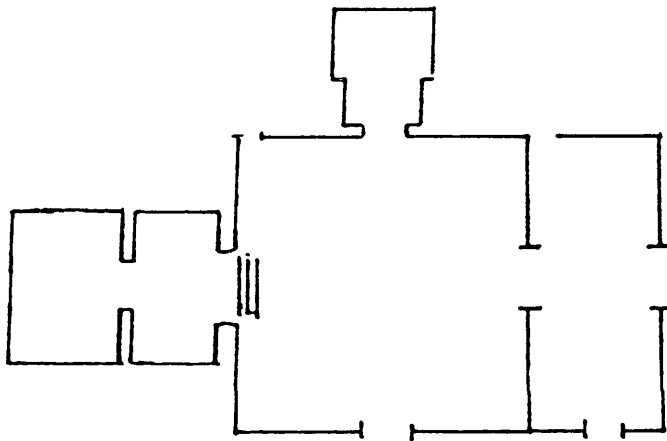
Munnesvaram temple faces the Munnesvaram tank. This is its tīrtha, although the annual festival's holy bath (tīrtham) is held a few kilometres north at the Dedura

Diagram 1: Developments in the Munnesvaram Building

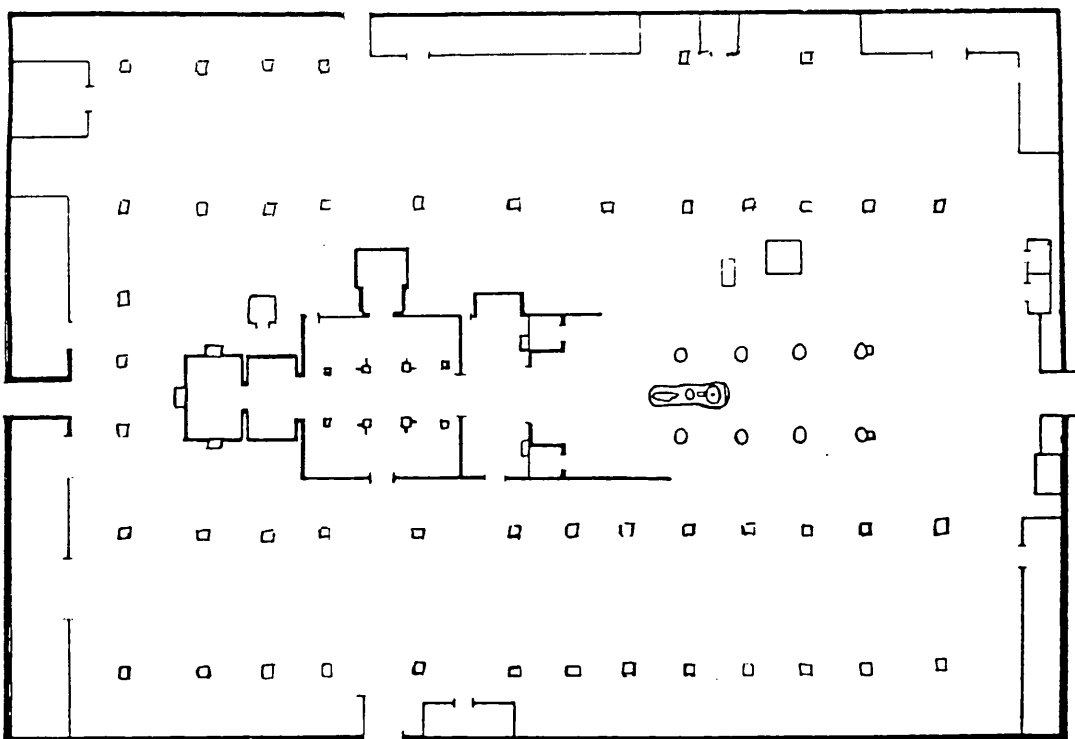
18th Century



19th Century



20th Century



River. In front of the temple is a square pond built of stone with steps down to the water. Previously, temple water was drawn from the pond but it is no longer used. Between the pond and the temple stands a bo tree and it is understood to be inhabited by a form of the guardian Bhairavar who guards the whole temple ground. A stone with a trident (symbol of Bhairavar) carved on it stands at the base of the tree. Inside the temple there is a large stone statue of Pillaiyar which the priests plan to install next to the trident stone. Pillaiyar is also a temple guardian and he has a shrine in the paddy fields south of the temple. But the bo tree is the most important tree for Buddhists who hang blue, white and yellow flags from its branches in fulfilment of vows. Therefore, not only in the temple groundplan, but also outside the temple, one finds a mixture of Tamil Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist practices.

The problems associated with the Munnesvaram design, therefore, speak more generally of the temple's interstitial location between Sinhalese Buddhism and Tamil Hinduism. This is embedded in the history of the temple as an authentic expression of the temple's links with the past. The priests proudly point to the link between Munnesvaram and the Kandyan king, acknowledging that it is this very link that causes the problems in the Āgamic design. The very power of the temple is a source of difficulty for the temple priests; yet it is also the means by which they negotiate these difficulties. Munnesvaram's "royal" status is absolutely intrinsic to its sacredness.

As a concluding note, Cartman (1957:90-6) describes the Munnesvaram groundplan to illustrate the typical orthodox design of a contemporary Sri Lankan Hindu temple. His presentation of the groundplan is very simple and in this he fails to recognise Munnesvaram's complex relation to its history. Secondly, his study of the temple took place during the annual Adi festival. This is evident from where he notes the locations of certain statues. During the festival, which is principally for the goddess Ambal, the statues of Ambal and of the Meru Yantram are not in their usual location inside the inner sanctum. With the śivaliṅgam by itself, the temple appears more orthodox. That the statues are usually inside the sanctum indicates the central importance of the goddess at Munnesvaram, another aspect of Munnesvaram's interstitial character that will be considered at length in the next chapter.

#### The Bathrakali temple

Without the same links to outside structures and the need to incorporate these links into the temple design, the Bathrakali temple is more free to elaborate its own design. The location of the temple in the overall Munnesvaram complex conditions this freedom, however, and this in part results from the self-positioning of the Bathrakali priests with respect to the Munnesvaram Brahmins. Such self-positioning stems from the Bathrakali priests' identity as Tamil Hindus, something expressed in the temple form. The present temple form, along with planned future additions, ostensibly follows orthodox Indian temple design.

As stated, the Bathrakali temple faces north and stands outside the boundaries of the Munnesvaram village. One enters the temple grounds through a gate at the rear of the temple and passes a large bo tree before reaching the temple. This tree is oldest of its kind at Munnesvaram and like the Munnesvaram temple bo tree it is a shrine for the temple guardian Bhairavar. It is also worshipped as the sacred tree of the Buddha by Buddhists who come to the temple and hang white bunting from its branches. On one occasion I observed a Buddhist monk chanting at the tree.

The temple sanctum is adorned with painted statues of Kali that were made in the 1940's. Inside the sanctum the central image is a black basalt statue of Bathrakali with eight arms. I shall discuss the statue at greater length in the next chapter. For the moment the quality I highlight is that with the central image of black stone and the tower images of painted cement, the sanctum conforms to Hindu temple principles.

The small chamber at the sanctum entrance houses stone statues of Pillaiyar and his Rat Vehicle (Moośigavahanam), as well as a metal statue of Mariamman. Keeping Pillaiyar at the entrance is consistent with the Hindu conception of his boundary-guarding capacity, as well as his specific role as the doorkeeper to his mother, Parvati. His presence at the entrance to the Kali shrine perpetuates this Hindu conception through linking Kali and Parvati, a link also maintained between Ambal and Parvati and hence Ambal and Kali.

The daily temple pūjā always commences at the Pillaiyar statue in front of the sanctum and it is simply explained in terms of Pillaiyar's relation to obstacles.

The rest of the temple is made up by a very large un-walled hall, the cantilever roof of which is supported by several large columns. The floor of the hall is a large cement slab which is, on the northern and eastern sides where the ground slopes away, about three quarters of a metre above the ground. The sanctum floor is another metre above this slab making the Kali statue visible from most places in the hall. In front of the entrance stand black stone images of Kali's Lion Vehicle (Sinhavahanam) and the sacrificial balipītham stone. These items further link the temple with Hindu temples generally, except for the important fact that there is no flagpole.

In the northwest corner of the hall stands a Bhairavar shrine with a black statue of Bhairavar standing holding a club. The statue replicates the Bhairavar statue standing in a similar position with respect to the sanctum as in the Munnesvaram temple. Unlike at Munnesvaram, the Kali temple Bhairavar does not hold the temple keys overnight, but his function as temple guardian is the same.

On the columns in the hall and on the wall at the northern end are hung a number of colour pictures of Bathrakali. These pictures are of a better quality than the prints that adorn shop and house walls, but their content is exactly the same. They show Kali in her different forms,



from a two-armed serene goddess to a many-armed furious demoness.

The Bathrakali temple, therefore, contains its own pantheon of a far smaller scale to the Munnesvaram pantheon. The principle deities present are Bathrakali, Bhairavar and Pillaiyar and they are the only three deities worshipped in the temple pūjā. The senior is of course Bathrakali, the other two deities principally act as her guardian. Significantly of these two deities, one is relatively high ranking, benevolent and godlike, while the other, Bhairavar, is demonic. The contrast between them parallels the contrast between the forms of Kali shown in the paintings on the walls and columns, a contrast of divine and demonic that has already been seen to permeate Hindu conceptions of divinity, and the nature of the world.

At the front of the temple stands a metal trident with a small flat stone at its base. This is the site for forms of cursing instituted by the temple priests that will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 11. Beyond the trident is a concrete cylindrical bin into which coconuts are cast as offerings to Bathrakali. Some of these offerings are also curses, but not all. Beyond the coconut - breaking bin is a large unused area of land on which goats given to the temple can be seen grazing. At one side, next to one of the few trees, stands a yellow tombstone for the present incumbent's grandfather and a small flimsy shrine for a guardian spirit thought to inhabit the tree.

Like the Munnesvaram temple, the Bathrakali temple accomodates special characteristics. In particular, the temple is very simple having only a sanctum, adjacent hall (arthamandapam), and one shrine. Space is given to the large hall to accomodate the huge crowds. This hall corresponds to the Munnesvaram flagpole hall with the significant difference being that the Bathrakali temple has no flagpole, no axis mundi that represents the temple. One reason for such an absence is that given the ongoing self-articulation by the Bathrakali priests with respect to Munnesvaram, the absent flagpole or absent centre indicates that the Bathrakali temple stands adjunctly to the Munnesvaram temple, making the entire Munnesvaram complex equivalent to a single temple whose centre is in the main temple.

The priests give a complicated explanation for not having a flagpole. Firstly, they say that their temple is not Āgamic. By this they mean that as they are not Brahmins, a flagpole is inappropriate. They add that the principal activities of the temple patrons - animal sacrifice and cursing - are permissable as long as the temple has no flagpole. Were a flagpole to be erected these practices would have to stop. The only other reason for stopping such practices would be if the priests were vegetarian Brahmins and so the flagpole symbolises the absence of Brahmins. It symbolises the special relationship the temple has to the Munnesvaram temple, standing at the margins of the order Munnesvaram creates.

But why the flagpole, rather than some other aspect of temple design? Is it simply because the flagpole is the axis, marker of the centre that is inhabited by the Brahmins? In fact, there is more to it because the priests do make a ritual object in the place where a flagpole would be. The object is a geometrical representation of divinity made onto the cement with rice flour and is known as a kolum. These figures are drawn around ritual objects such as a grid of special ritual pots known as kumpa and they mark an ordered space. But they are more commonly seen drawn at the entrance to Tamil houses by the women of the house. The kolum marks and orders the threshold of the house and, like the string of mango leaves hung from the door-lintel, it protects the householders against illness and/or demonic attack. The threshold stands at the boundary between the domestic space, which can be characterised as female, and the outer social world. Things and people entering the house pass over the kolum and under the mango leaves and so have the disordering taint of the outside world removed.

At the Bathrakali temple, the kolum marks the temple space as domestic space and hence as female space. This contrasts with Munnesvaram where the flagpole, that is, it will be remembered, Purusa's penis, marks the area as male space. These significant relationships between the two temples will be examined further when I turn to the temple deities, Ambal and Kali.

Importantly, the Bathrakali priests' reasoning about flagpoles is couched in terms of the activities of the temple clientele - sacrifice and cursing. The overall aesthetic is, then, created in the structure of ritual practice performed at the request of the patrons. The nature of Sinhalese Buddhist ritual practice at Munnesvaram requires further examination.

### Pūjā, Archchanam and Sinhalese Participation

Attending the pūjā is distinct from making a personal offering. But the logic of incorporation in the offering follows the incorporative logic of pūjā. The individual offering is called archanam and it is different from pūjā or festival ritual, according to Appadurai (who calls it arccanai), since it is "for the benefit of the worshipper (atmarttam) rather than for the benefit of the cosmos (pararttam)" (Appadurai 1981:27; see also Diehl 1956:56). He goes on to state that the offering is done by those who cannot afford to sponsor pūjās and festivals:

Arccanai offerings are the form of worship that is most widespread and popular among the numerous and less affluent worshippers at South Indian temples who cannot afford the more expensive subsidy of a daily puja or a part of a calendrical festival. (ibid)

This implies that the patrons of grand rites are concerned with the cosmos whereas the practitioners of archanam are simply concerned with themselves. That is, different gifts constitute different personifications of the donors. At Munnesvaram the distinction is not as neat; rich and poor alike offer archanam. The scale of their offerings partly varies according to cost, but the point of the archanam,

the need for which usually stemming from an immediate personal crisis, is that it is done by all social groups. Patrons of large pūjās at Munnesvaram will perform archanam if they feel it is necessary. Their sponsorship of grand rituals is understood to be good for their welfare; but if a problem arises it is dealt with through an offering. Notwithstanding this qualification, Appadurai makes an important observation that will be taken up below.

As with the pūjā, the offering of foods, flowers, incense, camphor, and mantra by the priest in archanam is for the deity. However, and this agrees with Appadurai, archanam is only for the deity and not for the deity in the temple; that is, for the cosmos. At Munnesvaram, archana are made for a number of the deities, but singly. A person makes an offering for Murugan, or one for Visnu, or for Siva and Ambal, or for Ambal alone. It is a personal relationship between the devotee and the deity which is created in the archanam. At the Bathrakali temple the offerings are to Bathrakali.

Each shrine at Munnesvaram has a collection box in front of it. Every archanam includes an offering of money with the other items, and sometimes the devotee will give only a few coins without an offering basket. Appadurai contrasts archanam with pūjā (and the festival) on the basis of the redistribution of offerings. Redistribution is seen as one of the definitive features of the South Indian temple, continually creating links between people through deities (ibid:18)<sup>4</sup>. But where the pūjā and festival create wide

links, especially among the temple staff, archanam involves no "allocation of shares for either the worshippers or the staff" (ibid:35). Thus it is seen to fit a "'reciprocal' model better" (ibid); a point that relates to the personal nature of the rite. The importance of money in the offering baskets at Munnesvaram, as well as the fact that the priest always removes part of the contents of the basket and keeps them, indicates that Appadurai's contrast may be too strong<sup>5</sup>. There is redistribution in archanam. Indeed, the contents of the baskets are often shared with other devotees. But it is controlled by the offerer who has established a relationship with the deity. The distinction, therefore, between pūjā as for the cosmos and archanam as for the person is valuable.

Consistently, Viśnu has more money given to him than any other deity. Next highest is the box for the sanctum, most of which is meant for Ambal, but some for Ambal and Śiva and some for Śiva alone. Altogether, however, this is less than for Viśnu. Next is Murugan and after this the priests were unsure. The reason for these amounts lies with the predominantly Sinhalese Buddhist patronage of the temple. For them, the deities are Viśnu, Amma Deviyo (or Pattini), Iśvara, and Kataragama. As will be seen, the worship of Viśnu relates directly to the importance of Saturn at the temple. The malevolent influence of Saturn is conditioned by the importance of sorcery (see Chapter 11).

At both temples, Sinhalese Buddhists, generally, do not attend the temple pūjā, but come to the temple to give

archana. On several occasions I observed Sinhalese Buddhists waiting, sometimes impatiently, for the pūjā they had chanced upon to be over so that their offerings would be received by the priests. It is as if the normal temple ritual is irrelevant. They attend the temple for a special purpose and construct through the offering basket a special relationship between themselves and the deity involving a request for a boon from the deity. Tamil Hindus do this also, but they will also attend the temple as a religious duty and, moreover, they do so for the pūjā, participating in its movement around the temple. As I have said above, this movement constitutes a circumambulation and it is always clockwise: the right side is always towards the temple. Circumambulation when no pūjā is happening is also a ritual act, called pradakṣīna, an act through which the devotee is encompassed by the order of the temple (Forman 1985:161). But I often observed Sinhalese Buddhists paying no heed to this, at Munnesvaram most commonly because they were going to the Viśnu shrine in the northwest corner by the shortest route. Finally, the practice of prostration (iduthandam), neither simply nor in its specific forms of worship (astāṅga or pañchāṅga namaskāram) is done by any but a handful of the Sinhalese I observed attending Munnesvaram. In other words, Sinhalese Buddhists do not subordinate themselves to the overarching unity of the temple and its deities in the manner expected from Tamil Hindus.

If one were to contrast participation in Hindu temple ritual with participation in Christian church (or Islamic

mosque ritual), the former is highly personal, while the latter are collective actions (ibid:170). A more pertinent contrast for Munnesvaram, between Tamil Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist participation, reveals that there is a 'collective' action for Hindus: the alaththi-like movement around the temple in pūjā. Hindus attend the temple, Buddhists worship particular deities and pay little attention to the deities as deities-in-the-temple. Instead, they are treated as atomised in respect to the encompassing totality that is their source.

The meanings of temple design as they are enacted through ritual and worship, therefore, are for the most part ignored by the majority of the people who attend the Munnesvaram temples. Many Sinhalese Buddhists are more aware of proper action in the temple; but the point is that generally the irregularities in Munnesvaram's temple design are matched by the irregularities of temple practice.

I illustrate this practice with some cases of Sinhalese people I interviewed at Munnesvaram.

Case 1. A Sinhalese Buddhist woman in her mid-40's who came to Munnesvaram with her adolescent son from Kuliyaipitiya. She has been attending Munnesvaram since childhood and knows it to be a powerful place for Amma-deviyo. On this occasion she gave offering baskets to Iṣvara in the sanctum, and to Ganadeviyo (Pillaiyar) and Kataragama (Murugan), asking all of these deities to help her son succeed with his A-level examinations. Both she and her cultivator husband have regularly made offerings at Munnesvaram when they have a special request. They usually speak to the priest on duty explaining their request and follow his suggestion as to which deities to propitiate.

Case 2. A Sinhalese Catholic man in his mid-20's who came to Munnesvaram with his Sinhalese Buddhist wife to give an offering basket to Kataragama. He had asked



Kataragama to help him get a job and had succeeded. He was making the offering with money he had received in his first salary. He and his wife live in Colombo and know Munnesvaram as a famous, powerful Hindu temple.

Case 3. A Sinhalese Catholic woman, in her mid-40's who came to Munnesvaram with her Buddhist husband and child who has a speech impediment. They purchased a metal cut out of a body and one of a tongue which they offered to *Iśvara* (*Śiva*) and *Amma Deviyo* (*Ambal*) as representations of their child<sup>6</sup>. This is their third visit and they have been noticing some improvements with their son's speech since they began attending. Friends in Colombo had recommended to them to visit Munnesvaram.

Case 4. A Sinhalese Buddhist man in his late 30's who brought his family to Munnesvaram on the advice of the priest of a *Ganapati* (*Pillaiyar*) *dēvāle* near their home in Colombo. The priest accompanied them. The man works and lives in Nigeria and was keen to make an offering asking for protection for himself and his family before they returned there. The *dēvāle* priest recited some *mantra* in front of the sanctum before the man gave his offering basket to the Munnesvaram priest who then offered it to *Isvara* and *Amma Deviyo*.

Case 5. A young Sinhalese Buddhist man from south of Chilaw who had made a vow to *Amma Deviyo* after he was bitten by a snake. He survived and had come to Munnesvaram to complete the vow.

In these cases, the devotees had come to Munnesvaram with a particular problem for which they had made their offerings. Similar situations were recorded at the Bathrakali temple. The journeys to the temple were made on the recommendations of friends and, as in Case 4, the advice of Sinhalese Buddhist deity priests. Most importantly, the journeys are special trips away from homes and normal social environments to a well-known special place. There, personal requests are made to the deities while the supplicant ignores the usual Hindu temple practices.

In many cases, the particular deity is informed of the problem and then asked to assist. In both Cases 2 & 5, the devotee had come to the temple as he had promised to do so after already requesting the deity's assistance. The offering basket is, in a sense, a tribute, a payment of a debt to the deity for the help the deity has rendered. It is also food, the devotee feeds the deity. In the case of the metal ornaments, the offering replicates the form of the item or attribute to be blessed and in doing so it absorbs the life of the deity in this metal form. This practice is not simply a Sinhalese Buddhist practice. It is done by Tamil Hindus and also non-Buddhists. My point is that it is the most common practice by Sinhalese who attend Munnesvaram.

#### Archchanam at the Bathrakali temple

Non-participation in pūjā is even more marked at the Bathrakali temple where the offering baskets are generally more extravagant than those given at Munnesvaram temple, and the crowds at certain times much larger. They are greatest on a Friday morning at the time of the special morning pūjā commencing at ten o'clock. That is, the participation in pūjā is limited, but the special pūjā organises the public involvement.

The gesture of alaththi is done by the Bathrakali priests to the statues with the slight modification being an extended encircling action with less emphasis on the central axis of the statue. After the pūjā commences in the sanctum anteroom with offerings to Pillaiyar, the priest

enters the sanctum. The Lion Vehicle and balipītham are next given pūjā and from here he walks out and around to the bo tree at the rear of the temple. After offerings to Bhairavar and Pillaiyar under the tree, the priest, with musicians, walks around the other side of the temple to the Bhairavar shrine and from there back to the sanctum. No-one goes with him apart from the musicians, a helper or two, and occasionally a devotee or two. Everybody else remains crowded around the sanctum entrance or in the large hall where several people will be entering trance.

After a final alaththi in the sanctum, the priests accept the individual offerings of the assembled devotees and call out their names which are recited to the Bathrakali. A portion of each item on the basket is removed, the money taken, and the basket returned. Although part of the pūjā, the offerings are highly personalised, indeed, individualised.

### Interpretation

To return to the two points made by Appadurai: firstly, that archanam is for the person and not for the cosmos and, secondly, that archanam resembles a "reciprocal" model better". Notwithstanding my reservations about these points, they provide a key to understanding the contrast between Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu participation in the Munnesvaram aesthetic. The contrast between pūjā (& festival) and archanam made by Appadurai sits within a completely Tamil Hindu setting. In the setting of Munnesvaram, where there are distinct systems meeting, the

argument is much stronger. Firstly, Sinhalese Buddhists are unconcerned with the cosmological dimensions of Hindu ritual, evidenced by their non-participation in pūjā. Secondly, Sinhalese Buddhist participation in archanam expresses direct reciprocal relations between themselves and the deities, along the lines of offerings for boons (see Ames 1966). Both the non-participation in pūjā and extensive participation in archanam relate to the atomised nature of deities in the Buddhist cosmology; that is, atomised with respect to their primordial source.

As much can be seen in the difference between Sinhalese Buddhist deity shrines and Hindu temples. The Munnesvaram groundplan has, at its heart, the groundplan of a rectangular shrine built in the 1750's. This shrine accords with the general pattern of a Sinhalese Buddhist deity temple (dēvāle), and hence the present Munnesvaram temple, built on a groundplan of the body of Puruṣa, is an extension of the original dēvāle expressing a process of encompassment which transcends this dēvāle and constitutes it as the inner sanctum (garbhagr̥hm). The typical dēvāle, in itself, elaborates no such body joining all the shrines into a complex. For Buddhists, this kind of linkage between shrines is not important, each shrine is discrete. Thus, puja, as it continually links all the temple deities in a certain cosmic hierarchy, is irrelevant.

Buddhist deity shrines are generally in or immediately outside the grounds of a Buddhist temple area where the main temple is for the Buddha, often a dagāba. Deities are

placed at cardinal points in relation to the daḡāba, but many temples do not have the deity shrines in a special order other than relative proximity to the central Buddha shrine. Lower deities stand further removed from the Buddha image. The encompassing principle is not the temple as Purusa, but the Buddha. Gāba is the Pali word for womb, in Sanskrit, gārbha, and it is occupied by Buddha. That is, the primordial encompassing position of the Hindu temple, the gārbhagrhm, is filled in the Buddhist complex by the Buddha himself. Buddha encompasses the pantheon of deities. Moreover, Buddha is often equated with Mahāpuruṣa and hence the primordial Puruṣa.

For example, the Buddhist temple at Munnesvaram, the Pusparamaya Pansala, has a Viṣṇu shrine in its grounds and there were plans in 1985 to build a Saman shrine. The idea is better shown at Kandy where there are four separate dēvāles linked to the Temple of the Tooth (Seneviratne 1978:90). In the annual festival each separate dēvāle is encompassed by the Tooth Relic. A similar relation has been created at Kataragama through the renovation of the Kiri Vihāra daḡāba.

The difference between the Hindu and Buddhist pantheons is shown in the aesthetic presentation of statues in the dēvāle. They are not carved stone but painted and there is no requirement that they be made of stone. Following the logic of form-taking that I argue for the relationship between painted images, stone images, the immanent form śivaliṅgam and the formless stone material, the painted

statues in the dēvāle are manifest in the world. What is outside the Hindu temple, adorning the towers, animated with colourful life, and not the object of worship, is inside the Buddhist temple and is the object of worship. In the Hindu logic, the Buddhist deity is in the world, the Hindu deity is both in it and prior to it. Moreover, through the re-absorbing Makara, the painted images of the Hindu temple are referred back to the primordial stones. Not so for the Buddhist images. This is not to say that Buddhist deities are beyond the vicissitudes of Time, embodied by the Makara. Rather, that they are not referred back to their primordial roots and instead are referred to the order of the Buddha which is in the world.

The lack of reference to the origin is another reason for the discreteness of the Buddhist deity shrine and also for the absence of the pūjā ritual as it is practised for Hindu deities. Offerings are made to the Buddhist deity in the dēvāle, offerings quite similar to those of the pūjā at Munnesvaram; but there is no alaththi and no movement between shrines except with reference to the Buddha. This contrast between Buddhist and Hindu temple aesthetics to some extent explains Sinhalese Buddhist participation in the Munnesvaram temple.

The contrast sheds light on Gopinatha Rao's argument that originally the Hindu statues were painted. It suggests that the emphasis on primordiality in the Hindu image is not prior to Buddhism but is actually a development of Hindu aesthetics vis-à-vis Buddhism. The primordial power

of the stone is extended through the bathing and anointing of stone images. The power is in the stone and it must be acted on instrumentally. In other words, the Hindu conception of primordially became emphasised in the context of the Buddhist critique and its own counter-critique. Notwithstanding its 'modernity', the argument contained in the aesthetic articulates the spirit of the Vedic Purusa myth.

#### Conclusion: The Temple and Power

In the previous chapter I explored the different symbolic meanings of the Hindu temple through the work of textual scholars and through an analysis of the Munnesvaram groundplan and the daily temple ritual, the pūjā. I then demonstrated how Munnesvaram embodies contradictions through its development into an orthodox Hindu temple representing the body of Puruṣa from an existing dēvāle which does not map out Puruṣa's body. These contradictions are resolved through orthodox ritual which elicits a logic of hierarchical encompassment. All the deities in the temple are related to each other and to the temple through pūjā. Pūjā is as much for the deities and for the temple as it is for the devotees who participate. This is evidenced in the performance of the missed pūjā following the death of a temple priest and it is an expression of the nature of the Hindu cosmos as it is subject to processes of creation and dissipation. The contradictions are also resolved through the idea that they are inherent to the sacredness of the temple.

The logic of hierarchy is also important for understanding the multivocality of temple symbolism. This symbolism is possible through the way the temple represents the world in microcosm and is qualified by the temple's replicating the original temple and the original sacrifice, and through it being a representational extension of this original axis mundi. Intrinsic to the temple's having its own identity and its own history is its ability to embody the universal and the particular, to be a Hindu temple and to be the Munnesvaram temple. It is Munnesvaram's history as a king's temple that makes possible the resolution of contradictions in its design and ritual.

The Hindu temple, in all its diverse symbolism, embodies a conception of power. The temple structure and the temple ritual follow the same logic as the creation of sacred ground in the struggle between the divine and the demonic. This logic is hierarchy manifest in its process, a process of creation and dissipation which is more precisely an articulation of power in Hindu cosmology. In other words, the temple explicates an ontology of power which is seen to be primordial, infused into the ground, and manifest through the creative act of the first sacrifice.

The ontology of power embedded in the temple aesthetic stresses its processual nature. As such, power is primordially related to Time which becomes defined as Kāla. The temple, aptly called a monument to time by Kramrisch, seeks, not just to celebrate time's potential, but to control it. The control will only ever be momentary because



the very structure of existence is fragile. Puruṣa "sacrifices himself into existence" (Kramrisch ibid:68) and is "spent" in the sacrifice which must, therefore, be renewed. Similarly, the battle between the divine and the demonic is never resolved "because it is won conjointly".

The efforts to make Munnesvaram an orthodox "Āgamic" Hindu temple essay a conception of power as hierarchical process. I am not saying this is the priests' intention but that this is the ontological framework through which the priests create the Munnesvaram aesthetic, an aesthetic of design and ritual. In this framework there is generated a view of what Munnesvaram temple was, a regal temple patronised by kings. The power of Munnesvaram derives both from its being a temple and from the power of the king, a power itself derived from the relation of the king to the deities in the temple, commencing with Rama.

It is in this way that the historical association between Munnesvaram and Sri Lankan kings has been instrumental in shaping the modern Munnesvaram aesthetic. The consistent explanation for the unorthodoxies in the temple design in terms of the king, is not an empty statement, but a secondary elaboration consistent with the ontology of power the temple embodies.

Sinhalese Buddhist practice in the temple, however, shows that Sinhalese Buddhists do not participate in the hierarchical Hindu cosmic constitution of the temple; but instead treat the deities as discrete entities belonging in

a different hierarchical order. Given the ontology of power elaborated in the temple design and in pūjā as the practice of this design, Sinhalese non-participation has great significance. The Hindu ontology of power makes power primordial, prior to the world of men and to human agency. Sinhalese recognise this power and attend the temple in large numbers, usually because they seek divine assistance in the resolution of personal problems. Their engagement in the ontology of power is, however, conditioned by their Buddhism. Through their Buddhism they are not rejecting the Hindu ontology of power but giving it a different emphasis than their Hindu counterparts. Buddhists do not celebrate the autochthonous nature of power. They acknowledge it but live a world view entailing a different conception of power in which deities are treated as discrete entities with respect to their source. Deities are part of the social and political order as this order structures the fundament of power. Ultimately, all power becomes subordinate to the reason of the Buddha. Referring to the source of power is to refer to a condition prior to the subordination of power under the Buddha's reason and also to refer to the moment at which the subordination takes place. The Hindu temple is for Buddhists, therefore, not a point of origin of the universe, but a point of origin of the encompassment of the power of the universe.

The deities of the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon are Buddhists, a fact of tremendous import. They recognise the ultimate ordering power of the Buddha, because their hierarchically derived power is "dependent on the Buddha."

(Kapferer 1983:126). A striking feature of Buddhist deity worship is to be seen in the hope expressed in concluding a request for help: "May You become a Buddha." That is, if the deity assists the devotee, his or her assistance will accrue merit and so assist the deity in his or her salvation. The Buddhist deity is oriented to the example of the Buddha whose nirvana becomes the goal. As Obeyesekere explains, the Buddhist deity receives a "warrant" (Sinhala: varan) (Obeyesekere 1984a:57) for righteous action in pursuit of nirvana. They develop a "righteous and rational outlook" (ibid). Hindu deities, on the other hand, operate to different degrees with a sense of justice and morality; but ultimately their actions derive a logic from the cycles of rebirth, from the process of creation and destruction, embodied in the temple, controlled by it but only ever momentarily. The deities do not seek salvation. To acquire a "boon" (Tamil: varan) from a deity involves surrendering oneself to the being of the deity and being thereby caught up in the cycle of the world.

Hindu deities's actions are simultaneously past, present and future. Kali has danced on the corpse of Śiva and she will dance on the corpse of Śiva. Everything has happened and is about to happen again. Consider then the consequences for temporality when the concept of nirvana is introduced. The cycles are still there, but now there is a single referent whose importance stems directly from those cycles<sup>7</sup>.

Tambiah argues that in the reorientation made by early Buddhism with respect to Brahmanic Hinduism, there followed an atomisation of social forms in respect to their encompassing unity of Brahman into an "atomic pluralism" (Tambiah 1976:35). The unifying order of all action encompassed by a transcendent process was questioned. This atomic pluralism was, however, fragile because of its basis in negation, in the void. Tambiah quotes Bharati who states that Buddhism had no ontology (ibid:36). It had to acquire an ordering consciousness of itself in terms of the actions leading to extinction, in terms of righteousness or dharma. Dharma becomes the encompassing principle and all entities are invested with consciousness and agency. Among men, the symbol of dharma is the king. The actions of the king are no longer ordered in terms of their expressing the cosmic process, the cycles of existence, they are ordered in terms of the righteous mandate embodied by the Buddha. Atomic pluralism can exist and agency can be valued in relation to the Buddha.

These themes, seemingly grand and embedded in texts, are evident in the everyday ritual practice of Sinhalese Buddhists at the Munnesvaram temple. Each deity is discrete, its relationship to the rest of the temple is unimportant because what is important is its relationship to the outside world, a world conditioned by the principles of Buddhism. The temple stands in an explicit relationship to the state, its sacredness is in part derived from this relationship. But its sacredness is also derived from its relation to pristine power, a power that can potentially

break the state as it can order it. It is a power that the Buddhist conception never loses sight of though it may devalue it. It is not the power of reason, it stands prior to the power of reason; but nor is it simply the power of non-reason. It can be both and, therefore, it is especially potent.

## Chapter 9, The Presence of Śakti

The Munnesvaram aesthetic reveals a dynamic interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism as distinct hierarchical conceptions. The Buddhist view, asserting the discreteness of the deities with respect to their source, simultaneously asserts these deities as being in the world. Their rationality is derived from the reason of the Buddha, and this reason is of and in the world of men and conscious agency. As such it is historical and thus the religious significance of the deities is bound up with history, a history that can value the power of a place created in the tide of historical events. The particular history of the Chilaw area, therefore, informs the religious significance of the Munnesvaram temples to a more positive extent for Buddhists than for Hindus.

Two features of the history are critical, firstly, that Munnesvaram occupies an interface between Tamil and Sinhalese social groups, and secondly, that to the majority of the Sinhalese attending the temple, the area is outside their normal social environment. A third feature must now be considered: the most important deities at Munnesvaram are female. Ambal and Bathrakali are the major figures of the two principal temples and their identity is enmeshed in the religious significance of Munnesvaram, especially to Sinhalese Buddhists.

The peculiar and localised identity of South Indian Hindu goddesses has been noted. Dumont (1959:81), contrasting the god Aiyandar with the village goddess,

remarks that while the god is everywhere the same the goddess is always a distinct manifestation of Parvati. Fuller (1984:8) adds that the relationship between Śiva and his consort generates a balance between unity and multiplicity; the multiple identities of the consort always being tied to a place. The male Śiva on the other hand transcends any particular manifestation, having a universal character in any one temple. Shulman (1980:51) sees this male/female relationship as intrinsic to the Tamil temple. The "chthonic goddess" provides the god with "the firm ground of stability" which is the temple. That is, the transcendent, non-located god is brought into manifestation through the located goddess residing in the very earth itself.

It will be recalled that the origin myths of the Munnesvaram temple associate the temple with kings. Rama worshipped Śiva, Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe was cured of a skin disease by Ambal. The second myth emphasises, not the god, but the goddess, indicating that the goddess's importance at Munnesvaram is especially the case for Sinhalese Buddhists. While goddess pre-eminence is an instance of a general South Indian Hindu phenomenon, it is accentuated at Munnesvaram by the temple's interstitial character and large Buddhist patronage. This accent is revealed in the manner by which the potent aesthetic of śakti is presented.

### Śakti at Munnesvaram

I have argued that the Śivaliṅgam is the primordial Śaivite statue as it symbolises the union of male and

female principles both in its design and substance. The Śivaliṅgam is always found in the sanctum of the Śiva temple, the lingatbavar behind it emerging from the sanctum wall. At Munnesvaram, the lingatbavar was originally in the sanctum but was cracked and for this reason replaced. To make it into the lingatbavar image, the gander, boar and anthropomorphic figure were etched on the stone. This was done in the 1870's, making the liṅgam part of the new temple created by the Brahmins. But the base, the yoni, was left in place and so, not only is it part of the original temple, it is a part that the Brahmins have not altered. There may have been felt there was reason to do so, since the contemporary priests state that a yoni, which represents the female aspect, is normally round, while at Munnesvaram it is square. Once again the priests explain that the square yoni is "something to do with the king". Thus they relate the peculiar presence of the divine female aspect (Śakti) to the king and hence to the pristine and ancient temple. This square yoni is the first indication of the enormous presence at Munnesvaram of the goddess<sup>1</sup>.

Only Munnesvaram temple has statues of the goddess in the sanctum with the Śivaliṅgam. The principal image of Ambal is a metal statue kept in front and to the side of the Śivaliṅgam. The priests say this statue is extremely old, surviving from the pre-Portuguese temple<sup>2</sup>. This links the statue with the ancient yoni left untouched during temple renovations, making both of the central representations of the goddess pristine to the modern temple, transcending the temple history, and according with



the "firm ground of stability" Shulman describes.

In front of the Ambal statue is a metal statue of the Meru Yantram, a three dimensional representation of the Sri Yantram or Sri Cakra which is also Mt. Meru and, hence, a representation of the whole temple. The Meru Yantram was cast over a metal image of the Sri Yantram, the geometric pattern comprising nine intersecting triangles. It has seven tiers and stands beneath the Ambal statue as if Ambal "sits" on the whole image, conforming with her sitting atop Mt. Meru (as Parvati). Five times each lunar month, the Meru Yantram image is taken out of the sanctum and placed in the centre of the mahāmandapam for a special pūjā to be performed to it. Each occasion is a part of the month associated particularly with the goddess and the pūjā is for the goddess through the Yantram. Placed in the centre of the mahāmandapam, the Meru Yantram links the south-facing Vadivambigai (Ambal) statue and the sanctum.

It has already been noted that the principle of the yantram is the binding of the power of deities to their images. Such extensive "binding" ritual for Ambal reveals her pre-eminent position at Munnesvaram as it is reproduced by the temple Brahmins. They continue to make her the most important deity, not only by keeping what they regard as ancient representations of her in the sanctum, which technically they should not do, but also in continually performing ritual to strengthen her presence.

Further evidence of the potent aesthetic of the goddess is in the mahāmandapam. There are eight columns in this hall in accordance with the eight directions and the guardians of these cardinal points. Facing the Vadivambigai shrine carved on column no.4 is a five-hooded cobra. On column no.5, again facing the Vadivambigai shrine, is a human figure standing with its palms joined together in worship to the goddess. The figure wears a sacred thread which leads the priests to conclude it is a statue of a priest. The figure is never included in ritual but sometimes receives a sandalwood mark on its forehead. Both the cobra and the "priest" worship, not the sanctum but Vadivambigai, the goddess. They were probably carved when the hall was built which was at the same time as the Vadivambigai shrine. The priests' identification with the statue symbolises their role as the creators of the śakti aesthetic.

They have not always done so. The human figure could be one of the Śaivite Saints, the Nayanar, who are all represented by metal statues in a shrine outside the mahāmandapam (Chapter 7, Diagram 2 No.18). This is the normal place for the Saints' shrine in Śiva temples; there is a similar shrine for the four principal Saints at Konesvaram temple, Trincomalee. However, Munnesvaram is exceptional for having statues of all sixty-three Saints. The statues were designed by the chief priest in 1942 at the same time that he designed the large statue of the ascetic Śiva, Bhikśadanar, kept in the mahāmandapam (No.3a). Bhikśadanar is the First of the Sages (Munnesvara)

and his statue being cast along with the Saints in 1942 is in the spirit of the temple being for Śiva, First of the Sages, not as a temple for Śiva's consort. At this particular moment in the modern temple history, therefore, the priests underscored the śakti aesthetic, by emphasising the presence of Śiva.

It was around the same time that the chief incumbent ordered the felling of the temple bo tree. According to the Munnesvaram villagers who told of this incident, the attempt failed when the fellers were shocked to discover a margossa tree growing inside the bo tree. This gave the villagers time to petition the A.G.A. who forbade the priests from removing the tree. The villagers then built a protective parapet around the tree. The reason for everyone's shock and, among the villagers, delight, is that the margossa is the tree special to the goddess. The villagers feel that the goddess acted to prevent the priests from completely undermining a Buddhist presence at the temple. The event was a small victory after the lost legal battles.

The sentiment underlying both of these events, the expansion of the Śiva aesthetic and the attempted dismantling of the Buddhist aesthetic, is to be understood in relation to the growing Hindu revivalist influence on the Munnesvaram temple during the 1940's. It was also in this period that the Bathrakali temple tower-work, with its painted Hindu statues, was built into the temple. The efforts were part of a larger process dividing the Hindu

and Buddhist worlds. Importantly, however, this did not include at Munnesvaram any attempt to remove or de-emphasise the śakti aesthetic rather than locate it in a Śaivite milieu. The importance of the goddess was not being made or dismantled rather than being qualified.

That the sixty-three saints relate most directly to Śiva is conditioned at Munnesvaram by the carved statue in the mahāmaṇḍapam that stands worshipping the goddess. This is even more clearly shown inside the Saints' shrine. The central statue in this shrine is Ambal as Mariamman or, for Sinhalese, Pattini. There is also a statue of Aiyandar, placed in the shrine about twenty years ago. When pūjā is done at the Saints' shrine, the priest addresses Mariamman. Therefore, although the Saints emphasise the role of Śiva as the main deity, the presence of Mariamman in their shrine re-asserts the place of the Goddess. Keeping Mariamman, principally a village goddess, and Aiyandar, the village guardian, inside this shrine, additionally expounds a relationship between the sixty-three statues and the sixty-three villages linked to the temple.

Returning to the śakti aesthetic. In Hindu temples there is no specific design for the artwork above the entrance to the mahāmaṇḍapam. At Thirukeethesvaram temple, Mannar, for example, there is nothing. At Konesvaram temple, Trincomalee, there are painted statues of the nucleus of the holy Śaivite family: from the left, Pillaiyar, Parvati (Ambal), the śivaliṅgam, the Nandi bull, and Murugan. All the statues are painted. At Munnesvaram, however, above the

Nadesar mandapam, the statue is of the goddess. But the iconography shows that the goddess is Lakśmi, Viśnu's consort. This is shown by her red sari and the red lotus on which she sits. Behind her on either side are two elephants both raising their trunks toward the goddess. This shows that it is the form of Lakśmi known as Gajalakśmi ("Elephant Laksmi"). Two other statues in the temple are similar, one is above the southern entrance to the mahāmandapam and the other is above the Viśnu shrine. Like all the deities in the temple, these statues are labelled in both Tamil and Sinhala. In each instance she is called in Tamil "Vadivambigai" and in Sinhala "Pattini". If one were simply to define Munnesvaram temple on the basis of these Gajalakśmi statues and with the Viśnu statues on the western side of the sanctum tower, one would think Munnesvaram were a Viśnu temple. It is not, but the theme which emerges is that it is a goddess temple, a Śakti temple, as Śakti embodies all the forms of the goddess, all the distinct expressions of female power (śakti).

#### The Ambal - Kali Relation

The centrality of the goddess at Munnesvaram is extended to the other main temple in the complex, the Bathrakali temple. The relationship between the two temples is shown both iconographically in the Munnesvaram temple and in their spatial relationship. Bathrakali is represented in the Munnesvaram temple in a shrine on the northern wall of the inner sanctum. The statue faces north and shows Bathrakali, called Durga at Munnesvaram, standing on a buffalo head. The statue and its position are the same as

at other Śiva temples such as Konesvaram and Thirukeethesvaram. The buffalo head immediately identifies the deity because it represents Mahiṣasuran, the Buffalo Demon, whom Bathrakali slays. Kali's origin myth, known and recounted by the priests of both temples, describes her creation by the male deities who then invest her with their weapons to do battle with the Buffalo Demon. The Munnesvaram temple statue of Kali (Durga) shows her after the battle, standing on top of the vanquished demon. The statue has only two arms and the potentially demonic status of Kali is indicated by her protruding canine teeth. The Bathrakali temple stands north of the Munnesvaram temple and its main statue also faces north. Thus it extends from the Kali image in the Munnesvaram temple. Most importantly, however, the temple stands outside the boundaries of the village<sup>3</sup>.

The Bathrakali temple statue is quite different from the Munnesvaram temple statue. Firstly, it is very large and its size is understood by the Bathrakali priests to reflect Bathrakali's enormous presence at Munnesvaram. Secondly, the statue is of Kali at the point of victory over the Buffalo Demon. She has eight arms, six of them holding different weapons. Her long hair is loose and flying wildly about her body. The demon is represented as an anthropomorphic corpse; he has just been slain and the triumphant Kali sits, the demon beneath her, with her left foot resting on his body. Her right foot is drawn up onto the seat, her thighs are parted and her groin exposed. As with the Munnesvaram temple statue, Bathrakali has demonic

teeth. In one of her right hands she holds a long gold trident (sūlum), its base resting with her left foot on the corpse of the Buffalo Demon. The trident, purchased by the priests in 1985 for Rs.150,000, replaced a smaller cheaper metal trident. It is the only metal weapon of them all, the others being carved in the stone. Hence it is her principal weapon and it relates her iconographically with Siva as this is also his principal weapon. Often the trident is the sole image representing the guardian, Bhairavar, a demonic form of Śiva.

#### Santhānam Kāppu - Cooling the Goddess

The link between the Munnesvaram Durga statue and Bathrakali is illustrated in a rite common to both temples, Santhānam Kāppu. Literally meaning, "Wearing Sandalwood Protection"<sup>4</sup>, the rite involves smearing a statue with sandalwood paste. It is not expressly done for female deities, although it is far more commonly performed for female deities at Munnesvaram, especially Kali at both temples. It is only done for the stone image of Ambal, known as Vadivambigai, during special days of festivals. The Bathrakali priests perform it every full moon day and more recently during Navaratri and Śivaratri. They place the sandalwood when they regard Bathrakali to be at the height of her powers. They will also perform the rite privately for a fee, although it was rarely requested during my research. The one occasion I witnessed, the sponsor was a businessman from Colombo whose several family problems had brought him to the temple for the rite. Throughout 1986, the Munnesvaram incumbent performed the

rite on the Munnesvaram Kali statue every Thursday evening so that the statue would be covered with sandalwood on the Friday, the special day for the goddess. He explained that he was doing the rite for his own benefit as he had a lot of problems at the time.

Sandalwood is a cooling medicinal substance and is a component of daily pūjā. The forehead mark placed on the statue and the devotee (poṭṭu) is of sandalwood. The location of the protective mark refers to the centre of the mind, the "womb" or gārbha of the person. Covering the entire statue with sandalwood extends its usage in pūjā and increases its effect. This is considered especially important when the demoness is at the height of her powers and when a devotee seeks her help with a misfortune. The sandalwood cools the demoness and the frequency of its use for Bathrakali, compared to its use for Ambal, demonstrates the recognition of the chaotic heat she embodies while at the same time demonstrating its enormous presence at Munnesvaram.

#### Ambal and Kali in Hierarchy

The contrast of the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temple representations of Kali indicate their relative positions in hierarchy. Durga at Munnesvaram, has two arms, she stands with her legs together and her hair drawn up. Bathrakali, on the other hand, is wild, her hair is loose, she has many arms, and her sexuality is exposed. She is demonic power and female sexuality uncontrolled, and thus she embodies the full extent of demonic differentiation and



destructive chaotic potential. This is represented in her many fragmenting arms. Hence, I characterise the two statues as embodying different moments in the battle with the Buffalo Demon. Bathrakali is the demoness at the height of her demonic power, drunk with the blood of her conquest. Durga is the demoness after the battle, in a calmer state, integrated back into the divine order. Both statues stand relative to Ambal inside the Munnesvaram inner sanctum, whose statue bears no demonic characteristics, who stands calmly at the side of her consort Śiva. Together, the three images represent different moments in the hierarchy of female power (śakti)<sup>5</sup>, and indicate the hierarchical relationship of the Bathrakali temple to the Munnesvaram temple, a relationship I have already identified in terms of the caste backgrounds and habits of the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali priests, and one I examine further below.

The relative positions of Ambal and Bathrakali in hierarchy are further indicated in the pantheons represented in their respective temples. At the Bathrakali temple there are relatively few deities: Bathrakali, Pillaiyar and Bhairavar. Pillaiyar is the leader of guardians and the first deity to be propitiated in ritual. He was created by Ambal to guard his mother's chamber. Bhairavar, a demonic form of Śiva, is the main guardian protecting both the Bathrakali and Munnesvaram temples while residing in their respective Bo trees as well as in shrines at the front right hand corner of each temple.

Both Kali and Bhairavar share other similarities along with the trident being their principal weapon. Just as there are many Bhairavars, so there are many Kali's and they are named similarly. For instance, the Bhairavar and Kali of the cemetery have their names prefixed "Sohon". The Bhairavar and Kali of the cremation ground are prefixed "Sudalai". Other forms reside at crossroads, or are active at the dawn or dusk. The common theme is structural ambiguity as this is the principal condition of the demonic. The demonic emerges at points of transition as these points constitute thresholds between levels of existence. A similar ambiguity pervades the margins. The interstitial character of Munnesvaram renders it akin to these demonic conditions, to some extent explaining the importance of Kali there.

#### The Śakti Aesthetic and the Goddess Pattini.

The goddess Ambal has long been understood to be the principal deity by the inhabitants of the area. Village women came to the temple after the birth of their first child and would sit in front of Ambal suckling the child with the idea that Ambal would ensure the quality of their milk and the healthy growth of the child. Many did this only with their first child but some came to the temple with every child they bore. The practice is rare nowadays but several older women in a number of the surrounding villages admitted that they did it. Some of them explained that "Ambal" really stood for "Amma Paal" ( Tamil - "Mother of Milk") and that one of the goddess's powers was the care and nurturance of mothers and babes.

In Sinhala milk is called kiri. The seven Kiri Amma goddesses are described by Obeyesekere (1984a:296) as the historical antecedents of Pattini now otiose, although in certain parts of the island, the seven Kiri Amma still feature in Buddhist ritual (Nancy Russell, personal communication). Ambal is also regarded as Aṃba, aṃba being in Sinhala "mango". Pattini is born from a mango, the fruit representing the womb (in Sanskrit amba is "mother"). In the myth of Pattini's birth, the god Sakra shoots the mango from the tree and the goddess emerges from within it. In the annual Adi festival, the Hunting Festival (Vethaithiruvilla) is also called the Aṃbavidinna, the Mango Shoot and it is explicitly associated by Sinhalese devotees with the birth of the Munnesvaram goddess (see Chapter 12).

Kali belongs to the sacred Pattini complex at Munnesvaram as the Pattini's servant. Their relationship is expressed in a widely known myth first recounted to me by a kapurāla visiting Munnesvaram from south of Colombo. In it, Kali is described as first arriving in Sri Lanka from India at Chilaw. Thus, Munnesvaram is the special place for Kali because it was there that she entered the Sinhalese Buddhist cosmology and sacred geography<sup>6</sup>. The myth continues that Kali was highly demonic when she arrived, desiring to eat human flesh. At Munnesvaram, she spied the Pattini and became consumed with a passion to eat her, a passion that generated violent actions disrupting the whole area. Becoming aware of Kali through this uproar, Pattini caught and subdued her, making Kali her servant and

allowing Kali to receive animal sacrifices from her devotees.

Two features of the myth are central: firstly, the myth makes Munnesvaram the entry point by Kali to Sri Lanka and Sinhalese Buddhism; secondly, the myth of entry is also a myth of subdual. As Kali enters the society, she recognises the authority of Pattini, and her totally chaotic nature becomes relatively subdued. This second feature also accords with other deity myths<sup>7</sup>.

As in the Hindu Ambal tradition at Munnesvaram, where Ambal and Kali stand in a special relation in a hierarchy of śakti, in the Buddhist Pattini tradition Pattini and Kali stand in an encompassing relation of mistress and servant. The two temples are linked hierarchically, both Ambal and Pattini encompass Kali. The nature of their encompassment, however, differs significantly.

#### Male/Female and the Hindu Hierarchy of Śakti

In my analysis of the temple in Chapter 7 I describe a threefold process of hierarchical manifestation whose moments I characterise as "formless", "immanent form" and "differentiated form". The pre-eminent Śaivite object of worship, the Śivaliṅgam, I argue to represent immanent form, the moment of transformation into existence and action. The object symbolises sexual union and thus, it stresses both the cosmogonic power of sexual union and the centrality of sexuality in Saivite symbolism. Sexuality is shown to be embedded in the theory of power described by

the temple.

To reiterate this argument and demonstrate its importance in another major symbol, this same theme is central in the symbolism of the Sri Yantra, the diagram that "summarizes in a single moment the whole sense of the Hindu world of myth and symbol" (Zimmer 1962:140). The representations of male and female, liṅgam and yoni in the Śivaliṅgam, are upward and downward pointing triangles respectively. Five female and four male triangles intersect creating an intricate differentiated pattern that is located inside a representation of an unfolding lotus, itself inside a four-gated square, symbol of the totality. Thus, not only does the Yantram show unfolding differentiated form, it does so through male-female intersection.

The centre of the Sri Yantram is occupied by a single, intact female triangle lying inside equal size female and male triangles intersecting evenly. According to Zimmer, this central female triangle is in union with the absolutely passive, essential male principle which cannot be represented (ibid:147). In other words, it is in union with Puruṣa in his disembodied, formless state, that is simultaneously the total image encompassed by the square. The unrepresented is the void from which Puruṣa sacrifices himself into existence. The female principle, therefore, occupies levels of manifestation with reference to the void which is its source. Female and male are in a continual relational movement that I have called the process of

hierarchy.

As the source and totality, the male principle encompasses the female as a generative action. The process continually returns to itself through encompassment, but encompassment occurs in a condition of unencompassment as the unification of the differentiated. This is the movement from the centre to the outside of the Yantram, an unfolding movement. In terms of creative energy, śakti manifests as creative power as it is encompassed. Its destructive potential is śakti unencompassed, unbridled. But this is its creative potential prior to encompassment. Unbridled destructive śakti is the generative condition of śakti prior to encompassment. Hence, the destructive is an aspect of the creative and vice versa<sup>8</sup>.

The logic of encompassed and unencompassed śakti is described by the Ambal/Bathrakali relationship as each deity stands in relation to the encompassing male figure, Siva. Bathrakali is unencompassed and malevolent while Ambal is encompassed and benevolent. The pair accord with the common observation about Hindu goddesses contrasting the former as the "capricious unmarried" and the latter as the "more benign married" (Wadley 1980:xi; see also Babb 1975:222; Das 1985:186). I do not characterise the difference as married/unmarried, since Kali is known to be married to Śiva also. Kali will in fact dance on the corpse of her husband on the final day of her Age (Kali Yuga). Unlike Ambal, the good wife of Śiva, therefore, Kali is free of her marriage. Apart from dancing on his corpse she

has little to do with her spouse. Hence, it is not that Kali is unmarried, she is beyond marriage, beyond the encompassing male principle. Kali is śakti unbridled. When the destructive possibility of śakti is unleashed, the demonic persona of Kali is revealed. She stands in the midst of the manifest world. This is why she is the female form of Time (Kāla).

Table 1 lists some contrasting characteristics of Ambal and Bathrakali. It is important to remember, however, that these characteristics do not simply mean that the two goddesses complement one another as equally valued moments of a simple dualism. In the same way, Ambal is not absolute encompassment and Bathrakali, absolute unencompassment. It is only together and in contrast that they can be thought of dualistically. Indeed, the following analogy is apposite.

Ambal:Bathrakali::Pure:Impure

This dualistic analogy is, however, synchronic. Its meaning cannot be understood simply in oppositional terms asserting a strict complementarity. Ambal and Bathrakali express different moments of a cosmos in hierarchical formation, each activating the principle of the other. The same holds for the seeming duality pure:impure.

I now return to the absence of a flagpole at the Bathrakali temple, already discussed with respect to the temple's positioning in relation to the Munnesvaram

temple's axis mundi. The flagpole, I have argued, continues the symbolism of sexual union as the male aspect coming into existence. The Bathrakali temple has no flagpole, no symbol of the male principle, and in its place the kolum figures are drawn. These figures relate the temple to the Hindu house.

Table 1: Ambal/Bathrakali Contrasts

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Ambal</u>	<u>Bathrakali</u>
With male spouse:	+	-
Menstruates:	+	-
Served by Brahmin priests:	+	-
Meat-eating & Needing blood sacrifice:	-	+
Trance associated with worship: <sup>10</sup>	-	+
Curse associated with worship: <sup>11</sup>	-	+

Tamil Hindu domestic space, in a variety of contexts is female space, also a quality of the Sinhalese house. The kolum, made by women for the house, specifically refers to the women of the house and through them, to the complete household. The kolum orders the threshold of the female domestic space, ordering it and thereby protecting it from chaotic external influence. The use of kolum at the Bathrakali temple, therefore, identifies the temple, not simply as a domestic space, but as female space, Bathrakali's space. It functions to order this space and to order Bathrakali in this space. In particular, it describes the temple as female, standing in contrast to Munnesvaram temple which is, through its flagpole, male space, albeit with a potent aesthetic of the female<sup>12</sup>.



The Bathrakali temple design with its emphasis on the temple as solely female space, as the female uncontrolled by the male (through the flagpole), is a temple for the chaotic power of Bathrakali to be free and to be sought by devotees. These devotees are relatively free to satisfy Bathrakali's blood-lust and so seek her assistance. The Bathrakali priests maintain the presence of this blood-lusting form of Kali through the temple aesthetic they create. Moreover, they explain their actions with direct respect to the Munnesvaram temple Brahmins and that temple's design.

The relation between Ambal and Kali is hierarchical. It articulates concepts about sexuality, encompassment, and the movement between divine and demonic status. In the hierarchy of female power, Ambal is Kali and Kali Ambal, they are moments in the manifestation of Śakti. Closest to the generative source and thus more pure, stands Ambal, while Kali is in the world and active in its fragmentation and reproduction. The important point is that one cannot understand one without the other. Additionally, one cannot describe the former as divine and the latter as demonic because they both embody these possibilities. In this way, Kali can be represented both as divine, "Ambigai", and demonic, "Bathrakali", "Mahākali" (see note 5).

#### Mistress and Servant: The Buddhist Pattini/Kali Relation

From the Buddhist myth of Kali at Munnesvaram I have already noted how the myth describes Kali's entry to Sri Lanka and the Sinhalese Buddhist pantheon. She is tamed by

Pattini and becomes her servant. Obeyesekere cites song texts that describe Kali's servile actions such as massaging Pattini's exhausted body with oil (ibid:244). Such descriptions are absent from the Hindu mythology, Kali is not posed as Ambal's servant, but as an aspect of the goddess. She is not forced to recognise the authority of Ambal but is cooled in order to become like Ambal. These contrasts reveal the Buddhist myth to express themes of an almost political servitude. Moreover, they do not relate Kali's encompassment by Pattini to an encompassment by the male principle of the female.

The Buddhist Pattini is ascetic and ever-virgin. She never menstruates because her sexuality has been subordinated through her Buddhist asceticism which places her in a special relationship to her spouse Palanga. Ambal on the other hand does menstruate and she stands in a sexual relation to her spouse. Indeed, in the Śaivite mythology it is Śiva who moves between sexuality and asexuality, or eroticism and asceticism and Ambal mediates between these forms of existence.

It has already been noted that the power of Buddhist deities derives from a mandate of the Buddha and, through this they develop what Obeyesekere describes as a righteous and rational outlook (ibid:57). He adds that the outlook gives coherence to the pantheon converting "foreign Hindu and folk deities into Buddhist ones" (ibid:60). The mandate has a regal quality and thus it is fitting that subdued deities such as Kali become servants. Sexuality is a

component of the incorporation in its negation. Pattini is ascetic and contemplating Buddhahood and from this she derives her power to subdue the demonic Kali.

But Kali never becomes Buddhist. She may be subdued by Pattini, but never loses her pristine Hindu status. Gombrich & Obeyesekere argue that Kali is too ghoulish to enter the pantheon and that she must, therefore, remain demonic or be conquered under another guise, that of Vadura Mā Dēvī, the Goddess of Pestilence (Gombrich & Obeyesekere *ibid*:134). Kali as Kali remains Hindu because she is 'beyond the pale' of the Buddha's reason.

Obeyesekere's and Gombrich & Obeyesekere's analysis of the significance of Kali in contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism requires extended discussion, and I shall do so at the end of Chapter 11. For now I wish to emphasise that Kali remains Hindu, 'not necessarily as a function of her ghoulishness. Sinhalese Buddhism boasts several demons equally as ghoulish. Kali remains Hindu because she is worshipped as such by Sinhalese Buddhists. This worship is a modern phenomenon, as is the assertion, running throughout Obeyesekere's (1984a) work on the Pattini, that Pattini is only Buddhist.

This leads to my conclusion to this section and into the next: thus far it appears as if Kali is the product of the Munnesvaram goddess tradition asserting on the Hindu side, Ambal, and on the Buddhist, the Pattini. Both the Hindu Ambal and the Buddhist Pattini hierarchically encompass

Kali, but they do so differently, with different values as the encompassing principles. That Kali results from a Hindu Ambal or a Buddhist Pattini, is not, however, the complete explanation. The specific worship of Kali actually is part of the creation of the Ambal/Kali, Pattini/Kali complex. I now turn to aspects of this worship.

The presence of the goddess Ambal at Munnesvaram is another dimension of the temple's unorthodoxy, but is one in which the temple's priests are nowadays fully active. They are responsible for the potent aesthetic of śakti while at the same time responsible for the development of an orthodox Śiva temple. For the priest in charge, the most important deity is Ambal. He often referred to Ambal's power, once saying that the future of the temple, a future rendered highly problematic by the tense relations between Sinhalese and Tamils, was entirely "in Her hands." He was, nevertheless, curious about Ambal's centrality at Munnesvaram and told me that several times he had asked the older priests why it was so. The answers they gave him were not entirely satisfactory. They would tell him that it was not a very productive line of questioning and to just accept Munnesvaram as it is. When I approached him with the same curiosity, our dialogue was one of the few occasions when he gladly admitted his ignorance and relayed what he had been told years before. In the suggestion that it is better not to ask too many questions about Munnesvaram is revealed the ongoing struggle between Munnesvaram's religious significance and textual orthodoxy.

## Chapter 10, Saradā Navaratri

The annual Navaratri is the festival most explicitly associated with Śakti. There are actually six Navaratris celebrated annually at Munnesvaram, the grandest being the Vasāntha (Spring) Navaratri held towards the end of the Tamil year (February-March). The most popular celebration in the Hindu world, however, is the Saradā (Autumn) Navaratri held around September-October. It also draws the largest Tamil Hindu crowds at Munnesvaram. Kali's battle with the Buffalo Demon is the climax of the Saradā Navaratri.

The Navaratri celebrations at Munnesvaram are striking for the absence of Sinhalese Buddhists, making for a very small attendance. This absence is highly significant, because it throws into relief the contemporary themes of the festival for Tamil Hindus that relate to expressions of the modern Tamil Hindu identity. Additionally, it reveals further aspects of the Sinhalese Buddhist perception of Munnesvaram, and especially the goddess Kali, as Tamil Hindu.

I commence with a description of the Saradā Navaratri at the Munnesvaram temple. Then I turn to the Bathrakali temple and to other celebrations of the festival, especially domestic. The full description then reveals the significance of Sinhalese Buddhist non-participation.

### Navaratri at Munnesvaram Temple

The particular celebration of Navaratri at Munnesvaram

dates from the mid-seventies. One of the most important initiators of the festival is the wealthy Sinhalese Buddhist woman who sponsors the final day. As with other Munnesvaram festivals, both Sinhalese Hewesi drummers and Colombo-based Tamil musicians are employed. The Hewesi play for all the daily pūjā as well as for the processions from one hall to another, while the Tamil musicians play only for the special rites and special processions. The Tamil musicians command a much larger fee than the Hewesi.

The metal statue of Ambal and the Meru Yantram are the objects of worship. They are taken from their usual place in the inner sanctum and kept in the mahāvasāntha maṇḍapam, the hall in the south-west corner of the temple (see Chapter 7, Diagram 2). The Ambal statue is taken there on the first morning, after the first bathing ritual (apiśekem) done to this statue in the vasāntha maṇḍapam in the north-east corner of the temple. The Meru Yantram is only taken to the mahāvasāntha maṇḍapam in the evening when the special pūjā is performed to it. The statue and the Yantram are kept in this hall until the end of the festival. In their place in the inner sanctum, a statue of Siva and Ambal, called simply the Utsavamurti ("Festival Statue"), is taken from the hall immediately in front of the inner sanctum, the arthamaṇḍapam. The priests say this is done because the space cannot be left vacant.

Both the vasāntha and mahāvasāntha maṇḍapa are the locii of events in nearly all of the Munnesvaram festivals. The former is always used for bathing rites while the latter is

used to house the festival images. The movement from one hall to the other and back again is a circumambulation of the temple and is always treated as a festival procession (thiruvilla) with music, umbrellas, fans, and whisks. The festival thus bears in common with the main Adi festival the theme of the deity emerging progressively from the temple to extend her grace (arul) to the devotee. The festival halls are both named for the season Spring (vasānthakālam), the time of fertility, marriage and the harvest. It is the time of origins.

The festival involves the performance of,

1. a special bathing ritual (apiśekem) in the mornings, where 108 conchshells (sangu) containing medicinal items are used; and
2. the performance of the Yantram Puja to the Meru Yantram in the early evenings.

This carries on for ten days. On the ninth evening, the Yantram Puja is interrupted by the performance of a Homa sacrifice of an ash pumpkin. On the tenth evening, after an earlier scheduled Yantram Puja, the battle between Kali and the Buffalo Demon is enacted. The tenth day of the festival is called "Victory" (Vijaya) Day<sup>1</sup>.

### 108 Sangu Apiśekem<sup>2</sup>

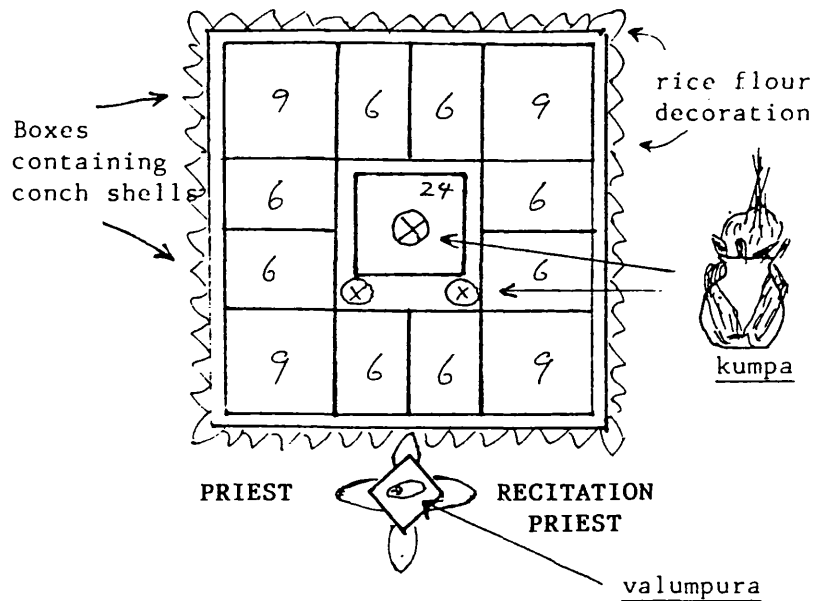
The bathing rite is the smaller version of the rite employing 1008 shells. Both 108 and 1008 are extensions of the numerological whole, "18", which is an operation of nine, the nine śakti or navadurqa. From other sources, 1008 is the number of separate worlds (andama) that make up

the universe (Chelvadurai 1927). This is similarly an extension of eighteen and nine. Thus, the 108 comprise a totality. Through the ritual, this totality is consecrated in relation to the total deity for whom the ritual is performed. Each shell refers to an aspect of the deity.

The 108 conch shells are used with the same logic as the kumpam pots in the Navakiraga Santhi Pūjā which is described in the next chapter. They are arranged in a square configuration, each one containing a different medicinal substance, a mango leaf and a red flower. There are also three kumpa in the arrangement (see Diagram 1). Each shell represents a different part of the deity, a different substantial component. The configuration obeys the rules of the yantram - the geometric pattern binding the energy of the deity. The final part of the consecration of the shells and pots, following the binding of all the different characteristics, is a Homa fire sacrifice where the principal sacrificial item is milkrice. The ritual of consecrating the conch shells and the three kumpa is done in the main flagpole hall. Each morning it commences shortly after the first daily temple pūjā and is completed by the end of the second pūjā. Following the consecration, the Ambal statue is brought in procession to the vasāntha mandapam for the bathing.



Diagram 1: 108 Sangu Apisekem



The bathing items are water, apiseka powder, turmeric, rice flour, a five-fruit mixture, milk, curd, ghee, king coconut water, lime & woodapple juice, milkrice, cow dung ash, and sandalwood paste. They are applied consecutively with liberal amounts of water in between. A lamp is shown and a bell is rung at every interval between bathing items. This tiny pūjā of lamp and bell marks the progressive moments in the entire rite.

A brass representation of the Sri Yantra is kept in front of the Ambal statue during the bathing<sup>3</sup>. The statue is naked save for a silver fan which hangs from a waistband in front of its groin. Like the fans held by the assistants, this fan is to cool Ambal. Keeping Ambal cool is a major priestly activity throughout the entire Navaratri. The statue is constantly fanned by at least one priest from the moment it is taken for the bathing until the grand water bath prior to the final anointments. It

suggests that the goddess is in a heated condition, that her śakti is hot and fragmenting. The position of the silver fan relates this condition to Ambal's sexuality.

The progressive moments of the rite marked by the single camphor lamp and bell, are further marked in the next section. After the bathing, the curtain is drawn across the hall entrance and the statue is covered in milkrice and the red powder (kuṅkuma) used in the forehead mark (pottu) and especially by married women in the forehead hair-parting (sindūra, Fuller & Logan 1985:90). The curtain is drawn back revealing the statue of Ambal covered thus, a five-tiered camphor lamp is waved and the curtain is drawn again. The devotees<sup>4</sup> who have mostly been sitting watching the bathing, all stand when the curtain is first drawn, and place their palms together over their heads when the curtain opens to reveal the rice-covered Ambal. The Tamil musicians, brought from Colombo for the festival, who have been playing throughout the bathing, play more vigorously when the curtain opens. Behind the again drawn curtain, the priests remove the milkrice. Again the curtain opens, again the music reaches a crescendo, and again the devotees worship, many of them prostrating themselves in front of the statue now covered in cow dung ash. This process is repeated once more, the third time with red powder. Then the chief priest pours two pots of water over the statue, and a helper pours an additional number of pots, roughly thirty. Now the bathing with the contents of the conch shells begins.

The process of consecutive stages of revelation is one of the potent moments of the bathing rite accentuated by the devotees' engagement. Hitherto passive, mostly sitting watching the bathing, devotees now engage themselves with the deity far more actively. This is the same as in the daily temple pūjā where the curtain is only employed in front of the inner sanctum. As in the pūjā, devotees address the deity through the lamp, especially a seven-tiered camphor lamp. Such a lamp refers to the ordered hierarchical extension of the deity, ordered through the rite. Devotees engage themselves in this order. This is the expression of their locating themselves within an Hindu hierarchy. Through the use of milkrice, cowdung ash, and red powder, this stage of the Bathing rite models the pūjā but on a grand scale: instead of a handful of rice and a forehead mark, the statue of Ambal is literally covered in the items. Such excess is the major characteristic of this festival and it refers to the degree of effectiveness the priests try to attain.

The conch shells are carried by priests two at a time to the chief priest inside the vasāntha maṇḍapam. They are taken from their place in the flagpole hall from the outside of their square arrangement in a clockwise direction. The last shell to be poured is the auspicious clockwise twisted valampura shell, the central shell in the initial arrangement. Then, the two kumpa are processed around the temple and poured over Ambal. Significantly, before this auspicious shell and the kumpa are poured, their flower garlands and kusa grass crowns are transferred

to the Ambal statue as garland and crown. This specifies the symbiosis between Ambal and the ritual items and indicates how the kumpa and sangu are the instruments by which the priests reconstruct the divine constitution. The statue is then quickly dressed in a piece of cloth and carried back to the mahāvasāntha mandapam to be dressed in a fine silk sari, wig and jewelry. The entire rite lasts about five hours.

The 108 Sangu Apisekem extends the process of homage encoded in daily temple pūjā. Ambal is cooled, bathed, massaged, and anointed with medicinal substances and oils before being extravagantly dressed and bejewelled. She is actually being treated as if she were about to be married. The process is repeated everyday until the day of her battle with the Buffalo Demon. She fights the demon when she is at her most powerful and it follows that the daily repetition of the bathing ceremony relates directly to the incremental growth of her power. More importantly, her preparations for battle are like preparations for her marriage. The implication is that her enemy is her spouse.

### Yantram Puja

The Yantram Puja is a rite that is performed at Munnesvaram five times each month as well as during each night of the six Navaratri festivals. It is always for Ambal. The periods in the month when the rite is done are,

1. The first day of the month when the Sun enters a new asterism
2. The New Moon Day
3. The eighth day of the New Moon which is Ambal's special day

4. The day before the Full Moon
5. The Full Moon day

On these occasions, the Meru Yantram is taken from the inner sanctum and placed on a low table in the centre of the main hall (mahāmandapam). This puts it directly in front of both the inner sanctum and the Vadivambigai shrine. The pūjā is performed in the evening and the image is taken back to the inner sanctum immediately afterwards. Yellow flowers, especially important to the goddess, are offered in the pūjā.

In the Navaratri, the Meru Yantram is placed in front of the resplendent Ambal statue in the mahāvasāntha mandapam. The chief priest sits to the side of the statue on the same pedestal and the priest reciting the mantra sits on the ground in front and to the side of the pedestal. In front of the hall, large geometrical patterns (kolums) are drawn in rice flour. They serve to order the threshold of the hall, things and people passing over the threshold, and consequently the hall itself. Their use relates the hall to the Tamil house.

The Meru Yantram image is a three-dimensional representation of the Sri Yantra. The two-dimensional geometric pattern made by the nine intersecting triangles appears as if it has been drawn out from its centre, in the manner of extending a radio aerial. This results in seven polygonal layers with the first uppermost layer being the smallest and having the fewest sides. The eighth layer is the lotus and the ninth is the square base with gateways

marked in the middle of each side. It is named after Mt. Meru, the axis mundi. The three-dimensional image at Munnesvaram is relatively new, although its baseplate which has the Sri Yantra engraved on it, is said to be very old and to have always been kept in the inner sanctum.

The image is directly related to Ambal. In the sanctum the Ambal statue stands above the Yantram appearing to be surmounting it. The same relation is maintained between the two images both in the morning bathing rite, when a brass plate engraved with the Sri Yantra is kept beneath the statue, and in the evening when the Meru Yantram image is worshipped. They are, then, two aspects of a single image, the image of Ambal.

In the pūjā, after the initial offerings to Pillaiyar and the preparatory exercises by the officiating priest, the image is offered milk and honey from four chalices in front of it. Red and white lotus petals and red and yellow flowers are thrown over the image in hand with the spoon pourings of milk. The successive layers of the image are thus addressed, moving in the course of the pūjā from the outside to the inside, while another priest recites the names of the goddess to a repeated mantram, the goddess's mantram. The recitation and alternation between flowers and milk is punctuated twice by handbell ringing and the waving of a censer and a single-tapered oil lamp. On the second occasion, the image is presented with a small amount of milkrice and this is followed by a single-tiered camphor lamp. After more flowers, the senior priest claps his hands

thrice to indicate the conclusion of the pūjā. Thus, the priest moves from the outside to the centre, offers the milkrice, then moves back to the periphery again before concluding the rite with the three handclaps.

My brief account of the Yantram Pūjā indicates that it follows the same logic of daily temple pūjā. As the statue of each deity is approached and moved away from in the daily pūjā, the priest addresses the outside of the Meru Yantram, moves to its centre and moves away again. At the outside, the image is differentiated; the seventh layer is many-sided. In the centre, however, there is only a triangle, surmounting an empty space (Zimmer 1962:147)<sup>5</sup>.

In my discussion on the nature of the Hindu temple I stressed the importance of the temple as a yantram and also stressed the meaning of the yantram as a binder, binding the energy of things to places. The yantram is a device through which a deity comes to reside in a place and for this reason, yantra are placed underneath temple statues. The same process is activated in the inner sanctum with the Meru Yantram and the Ambal statue. The Meru Yantram binds the power of the goddess to the temple. Moreover, it orders this power as it binds it.

In the Yantram Pūjā, the movement from the differentiated outside to the non-existent encompassing centre, is a hierarchically ordering movement that places each different fragment on the outside in an encompassing unity with the centre. The act of binding expresses this

process and as the rite is repeated, the power of the deity grows. This power is cooled, anointed and propitiated each morning in the apiśekem and increased each evening in the Yantram Pūjā.

### Homa Sacrifice

On the ninth evening of the festival, at the time when the milkrice is presented to the Meru Yantram, an ash pumpkin is sacrificed in an homa firepit. The homa pit is constructed from a square, three-tiered frame that is placed over some bricks on the temple's inner road. The position on the road is fixed in relation to both the mahāvasāntha mandapam and the shrine for Vadivambigai, just as the position of the Meru Yantram for the five Yantram Pūjā each month is fixed to link Ambal and Vadivambigai. The linkage is then made absolute with two lengths of rope noosing the pit and being trailed out, one to the statue of Ambal in the hall, and the other to the statue of Vadivambigai. The ropes connect the deities to the sacrifice and were likened by one priest to an electric cable. People were warned not to straddle the rope at the time of sacrifice and when one child stepped over it after the sacrifice, she was admonished by her father who told her it was dangerous. For the occasion, the statue of Vadivambigai was covered in cooling sandalwood paste<sup>6</sup>.

Once the fire has been lit and some milkrice and ghee added to it, the ash pumpkin is cut in half with a sword by a priest and its hard outer flesh smeared with red powder. Then its seeds are scooped out into the fire. The important



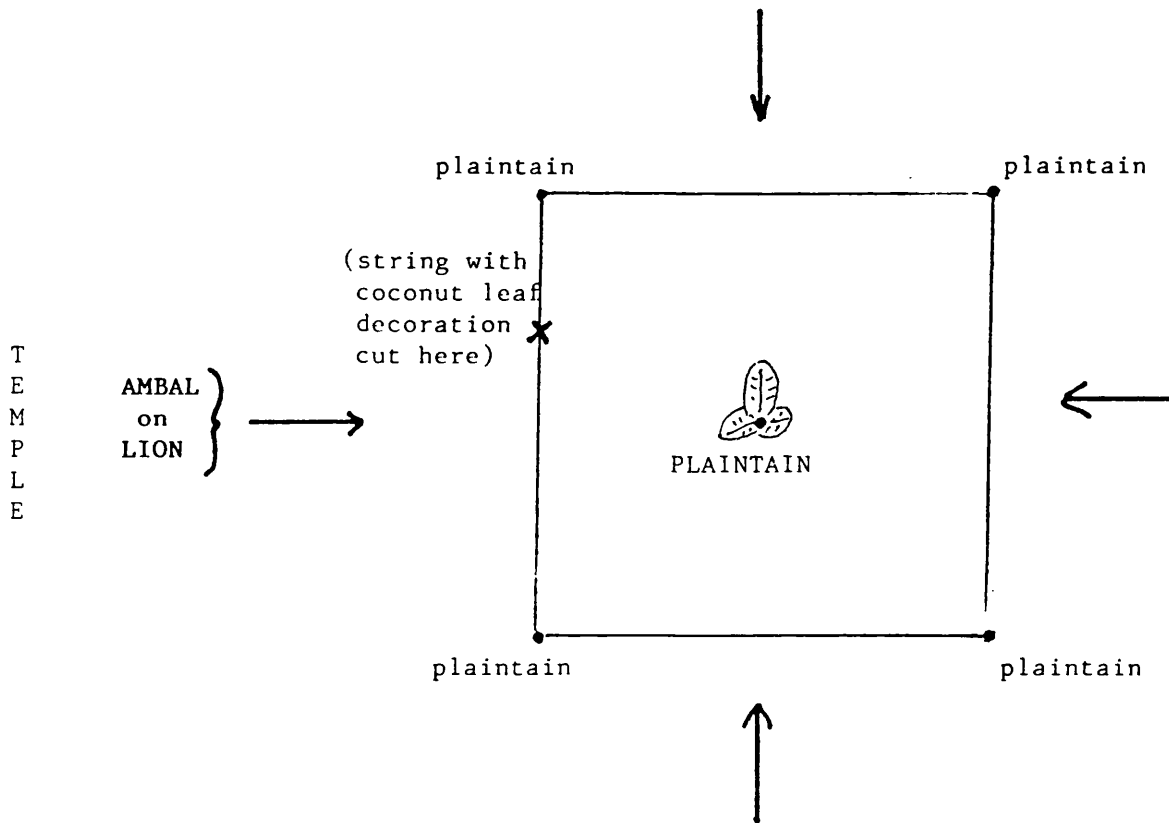
part of the pumpkin for the sacrifice is this inner flesh and seeds.

According to the priests, the pumpkin is a sacrificial surrogate to the vegetarian deities, employed since the shift from animal sacrifice in Vedic ritual. A hierarchy of sacrifice exists; at the top is a man, then an elephant, a horse, a goat, a cock, and then a pumpkin. Below the pumpkin is the milkrice. Not all sacrifices ask for a man for which the pumpkin is the surrogate. For example, in the case of the Aśva Medha Yāgam rite, a horse is the sacrificial object for which the pumpkin is substituted. Sacrifices made to Bhairavar substitute the pumpkin for a man. For the pumpkin sacrifice in the Navaratri festival, however, the priests were not sure exactly for what the pumpkin is the substitute.

The ash pumpkin sacrifice culminates the days of invoking the power of the goddess. It takes place at the time in the Yantram Pūjā when milkrice is offered to the image. Both the milkrice and the inner contents of the pumpkin, its seed, are symbols of semen. They are offered to the sacrificial fire in a metaphorical act of sexual union so expressing the relationship of sacrifice with sexual union that is a key cosmogenic motif in temple ritual. The act is similar to other sacrifices performed immediately prior to movement by deities outside the temple<sup>7</sup>.

Vijaya Thasami: Fighting the Buffalo Demon

On the evening of the tenth day, after an earlier Yantram Pūjā, the resplendent statue of Ambal is carried out of the mahāvasāntha mandapam and placed on a painted wooden statue of a rampant lion, the sinhavahanam, Ambal's vehicle. In procession with musicians, Ambal is carried out of the temple to the area immediately in front of the temple entrance. Here, a young plaintain tree has been stuck in the ground. Four other plaintain trees are planted around it to form a square (about  $6m^2$ ). Between each tree is stretched a piece of string from which lengths of coconut palm leaf have been tied<sup>8</sup>. The chief priest, after breaking a coconut before Ambal at the temple entrance, approaches the western boundary rope. He carries a sword and model of a bow and arrow, with both the sword blade and arrow point stuck with limes that are removed before the battle commences. An elephant, dressed in bright cloths, stands with its keeper to the southern side of the ground. (See Diagram 2). The elephants presence marks the regal and martial nature of the event.

Diagram 2: Vijaya Thasami

When Ambal makes her first charge at the enclosure, the priest cuts through the western boundary rope with the sword and approaches the central plaintain tree. Ambal charges three times from each direction, starting with the west, then north, east, south, and finally a single charge from the west again. Charging involves the dozen or so bearers running at the enclosure, swivelling on their feet and running back the other way. With each charge, the priest either lightly holds the arrow blade against the plaintain tree, or cuts at the leaves with the sword. On the very last charge, the priest severs the trunk and cuts the top piece in half after it hits the ground. Thus, the tree finishes in three pieces with its leaves lying on the ground around it.

The cut limes are part of exorcism, the lime being protective against demonic attack as it absorbs demonic malevolence. Limes are regularly hung with red chillies, especially in shops, to absorb the influence of the evil eye (kodungkan). They are also placed next to the body of an afflicted person and cut to absorb the affliction. Their close association with the demonic is extended in some traditions that hold that Kali was born from a lime. Their use in the Vijaya Thasami celebration reveals the theme of exorcism.

The plaintain tree is inside the Buffalo Demon and the surrounding trees hold his army. Although on the occasion I saw it, the plaintain trunk was cut a second time after it hit the ground, I was told by priests that the officiant must endeavour to cut it before it hits the ground. The most important thing is for three separate pieces, as this ensures the demise of the demon; three signalling the complete fragmentation of the demonic. More importantly, though, the third piece shows that the second cut was done and that it was done, or at least attempted, while the top piece was in mid-air. This is relevant for the way it relates to the myth, and more generally to myths about the destruction of the demonic. The Buffalo Demon has been granted the boon that he cannot be destroyed by a god and that he can always take on another form. Kali destroys him because she is a goddess and also because she decapitates him when he is in-between his human and buffalo forms. She strikes at his ambiguity, at his illusory power. Cutting the top piece of the plaintain tree before it hits the

ground corresponds to that decapitation<sup>9</sup>.

Once the demon is killed, the crowd pushes forward to grab pieces of the plaintain leaves strewn about the ground and members either eat them at once or take them home to eat later. The leaves of the felled plaintain are thought to be a powerful curative. In a jovial atmosphere that is the first instance of excited release in the entire Navaratri festival, adults and children, men and women, fight with each other to get the leaves .

The consumption of the leaves demonstrates the powerful connection between illness and the demonic in Hindu thought. It reveals the relationship between the divine conquest of the demonic, exorcism, and the structure of personal health, so according with Kapferer's (1983) discussion on Sinhalese Buddhist exorcism. But this consumed item is the vanquished demon who, in the Navaratri, also appears to be the goddess's spouse. The act is both sacrifice and marriage and it produces a curative medicine from plaintain tree leaves which are normally employed to eat from, not eat. The tree is, moreover, special for being young; it has not borne fruit.

Following her victory, Ambal is borne triumphantly in procession around the village. The Hewesi, as always, go first. Behind them, the regal elephant leads the Colombo musicians. One trip around the village, stopping frequently to accept offering baskets from people standing at the entrances of their houses, and Ambal returns to the temple

where she is taken back to the mahāvasāntha mandāpam. There, she is given a complete pūjā with a full array of lamps, regalia, devotional hymns, and bundles of red lotus petals thrown by all the priests who work in the temple. This is followed by a long recitation to the statue which is being swung gently from side to side on a swing at the entrance of the hall. The whole tempo of the day is wound down in the course of this segment which seems to be principally concerned with soothing a goddess made fiery by her combat with the Buffalo Demon. As soon as it is finished, Ambal is carried back inside the inner sanctum amidst great turmoil while many of the seventy-odd people attending<sup>10</sup> attempt to touch the statue. The usual evening pūjā then commences and the Navaratri is over.

#### Interpretation: Navaratri as the Formation of Kali's Śakti

The primary meaning of this festival is to be understood in relation to the Hindu myth of Kali's origin. She was created by the gods to fight the Buffalo Demon. The following is the myth as it was recounted by the Bathrakali priest.

The world was being terrorised by a giant Buffalo Demon, the Mahiśasuran, who had conquered Indra's armies and sent the King of the Gods running to other gods for help. The gods joined together and created a many-armed goddess to whom they gave all their weapons. She then went forth and first battled with the Buffalo Demon's armies and then the Demon himself. During the battle, the Demon took a new form every time Kali destroyed the old one. Eventually, though, Kali beheaded the Demon as it was trying to emerge in human form from its buffalo body and thus Kali was able to save the world.

The myth is more elaborately recounted in the Markendeya Purana where the various forms the demon assumes are

described. Zimmer describes Kali's creation from the combined wrath of the gods thus,

Vishnu and Shiva swelled with wrath. The other divinities also, swelling with the power of their indignation, stood about. And immediately, their intense powers poured forth in fire from their mouths. Vishnu, Shiva, and all the gods sent forth their energies, each according to his nature, in the form of sheets and streams of flame. These fires all rushed together, combining in a flaming cloud which grew and grew, and meanwhile gradually condensed. Eventually it assumed the shape of the Goddess. She was provided with eighteen arms. (Zimmer 1962:190)

Kali is born of anger, the combined indignation of the gods. This anger manifests in the destructive possibilities embodied by the gods and represented in the weapons they give to Kali, particularly the conch and discus (cakra) of Visnu, and the sword and trident (sūlum) of Śiva. These weapons are the manifestations of the śakti of the gods.

The Markendaya Purana states that Kali has eighteen arms. These relate to the combination of the nine forms of power (śakti). The Munnesvaram Bathrakali statue, however, has only eight arms; she is elsewhere represented with four, ten or twenty arms. The important distinction is between two and many arms as indicating the movement between divine and demonic status, it is a distinction and movement revealed in the contrast of the Munnesvaram Kali statue and the Bathrakali statue.

"Kali" is the female of "Kāla" ("Time"), an embodiment of the destructive qualities of temporal existence. In one myth of the end of time, Kali dances on the prostrate corpse of Śiva and is known as Mahākali ("Great Kali" or

"Great Time"). Thus, she stands at a pivotal moment in the structuring of existence, embodying destruction as an inherently creative aspect in the cycle of existence. Her power is the power of origination, in her destroying the Buffalo Demon she reconstitutes the order of the world. Furthermore, she demonically embodies evil, incorporating in her person the creative interplay of chaotic disorder and the encompassing order made possible through her actions.

Kali's power is the cumulation of all the gods' powers brought together stage by stage and condensed. This is, in effect, what the Navaratri recreates. The nine forms of Śakti are assembled over nine nights and thus combined they stride out into the world and destroy the Buffalo Demon. By this act, the world is saved and the people can live in health.

The celebration of Kali's victory over the Buffalo Demon by the Munnesvaram priests using the Ambal statue, is the best expression of the Ambal/Kali relationship. Ambal is Kali, they both represent the active force of Śakti. Through the nine nights of ritual this creative power is rendered present and potent. At its climax, the power of Ambal and the power of Kali are at their zenith. Ambal/Kali strides out and fights the Buffalo Demon. The enormous Śakti that has been summoned and condensed through the ritual, is then reordered and cooled through the long pūjā that follows where the Ambal statue is soothed by rocking her on the swing. It is essential to do so because this potency, if left alone, could attain a highly fragmentary



condition. This condition is embodied by the Kali present in the Bathrakali temple. It is demonic and capable of great disorder.

The theme of Kali's demonically fragmentary power, Śakti unbridled, is present in one myth of her battle with the Buffalo Demon where after her victory she is pacified by Śiva in a dance competition. Śiva encompasses Kali, thus ordering her power in terms of hierarchical principles. Similarly, Ambal is pacified after her victory and triumphant procession. Suitably pacified by the priests, the goddess then returns to her spouse, Śiva, in the inner sanctum. The movement in the rite has been away from the spouse in the interior, out to the spouse in the exterior; since the Buffalo Demon is the demonic possibility of Śiva. He is the Demon of Death and he is vanquished by the Demoness of Time.

Time and death are in the world, intrinsic to the phenomenal reality of the world. The movement encapsulated in the festival corresponds to the movement of form-taking that I describe in relation to the temple, a movement from the immanent to the differentiated. Evil or the demonic is thus posited as being of the world. Kali is the manifest world, she is the phenomenal reality of existence.

#### Navaratri at the Bathrakali Temple

The Vijaya Thasami celebration reveals that the Navaratri is the festival of the origin of Kali; yet this is quite understated at the Bathrakali temple. Instead, the

Bathrakali priests, who think there is only one Navaratri festival each year, describe it as a festival for education and prosperity. These views are held by the majority of Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus who also call the festival "Sarasvati Pūjā" after one of its days, the ninth day, which many people celebrate exclusively. Sarasvati Pūjā is celebrated by some of the Munnesvaram Brahmins too.

For the Bathrakali temple festival, the entrance to the inner sanctum is decorated with plaintain trees on each side as well as rope with coconut decoration and coloured streamers. Through drawing lots, one of the priests acts as the chief officiant, having a protective thread tied around his right wrist before the festival commences. He performs all the pūjā, while abstaining from meat, alcohol, and sexual intercourse.

The nine days of the festival are divided into three sections. The first three days are for Durga (Bathrakali, Goddess of Strength), the next three for Lakṣmi (Viśnu's consort, Goddess of Prosperity), and the last three days are for Sarasvati (Brahma's consort, Goddess of Knowledge and the Arts). Thus the festival is for the female consorts of the trimurti, the trinity of Śiva, Viśnu and Brahma. In the first three days, the statue of Bathrakali is dressed in a large ornate red sari and only red lotus petals are given in the pūjā. In the next three days it is a yellow sari with yellow flowers, and for the last three days it is white and white lotus. This tripartite division of the nine nights is similarly done in Tamil houses, but it is not

explicit at Munnesvaram temple where Ambal is addressed every day.

On the tenth day, pens and books are offered with the pūjā and new swords (Kali's weapon) are arrayed in the sanctum. The statue is bathed in sandalwood paste in the same way as on every full moon day and during the annual Śivaratri festival. Bathrakali is thought to be in a very powerful, heated condition by this day. Generally called the Sarasvati Pūjā, the rite is more correctly the Ayūtapūcai and it is said to follow after the Sarasvati Pūjā (Diehl 1956:170; Fuller & Logan *ibid*:99). The objects of worship are tools and implements, such as ploughshares, knives, pens, books, etc. They are smeared with sandalwood and red powder in the manner of a pottu. Historically, this pūjā has close associations with Indian kingship (Breckenridge 1978:82; Fuller & Logan *ibid*).

The festival at the Bathrakali temple is, then, very small and does not explicate any qualities concerning Kali's battle with the Buffalo Demon. This seems odd given that the festival concerns the origin of Kali; but the priests are not interested in this aspect. Along with most Tamil Hindus, the Bathrakali temple priests regard the meaning of Navaratri to lie in the extolment of the value of education. Navaratri is described as being for or about education. The fight with the Buffalo Demon is, therefore, not presented as Bathrakali's fight, but as Ambal's fight staged at the Munnesvaram temple.

Notwithstanding the absence of mythic links in the festival at the Bathrakali temple, the celebrations do convey the theme of cumulative power present in the Munnesvaram celebrations. Colour symbolism is employed. The colours red and white are typically associated with Kali and Sarasvati respectively. Yellow is not typically associated with Laksmi whose colour is also red in most of her eight forms. In her role of mediating between Kali and Sarasvati she comes to be associated with the pre-eminent mediating colour - yellow<sup>11</sup>. The movement from red to white is a movement from hot to cool, a movement of encompassment. In this way, it follows the same logic of the encompassment of fragmentary power as other forms of Hindu ritual such as the Yantram Pūjā.

#### Other Celebrations of Navaratri

In 1984 I observed Navaratri celebrated in the predominantly Tamil Batticaloa District at the university college, schools, hospitals, post offices, as well as in homes. In 1985 in Chilaw, it was also celebrated in the Tamil medium schools in the town, Munnesvaram village, and Maradankulam. Only at the university college and in people's homes, however, was the festival celebrated on each of the nine days. Elsewhere, it was celebrated on the ninth day and was generally called "Sarasvati Pūjā". This alternative name is epithetic for the meaning generally ascribed to the event. Sarasvati is the goddess of learning, of scholastic and artistic skills. She is commonly represented in a white sari, sitting on a white lotus, playing a vīna, with a book at her side. The common

understanding of the meaning of the festival, that it is for education, relates to its being called "Sarasvati Pūjā".

At the Maradankulam school, photos of the two champions of Tamil cultural nationalism, A.Navalar and P.Ramanathan, hang next to the pictures of Hindu deities. In the Sarasvati Pūjā performed in the school, exercise books were offered to the large picture of Sarasvati along with milkrice and some cooked green gram. The pūjā lamp was also waved in front of the photos. All the school children and a few adults attended the pūjā, all of them members of the outwardly Tamil section of the village. The celebration in the school is the only celebration in the village; it is not additionally celebrated in people's homes as it is in Batticaloa, Jaffna and South India (Diehl *ibid*:171-172; Fuller & Logan *ibid*)<sup>12</sup>. One of my best informants and friends, a man in his 60's, commented at this time that until the school came (see Chapters 4 & 6) the villagers knew nothing at all about Navaratri, just as they knew little about a lot of Saivism. In this way he agreed that, in many respects, Navaratri was about the spread of a Tamil Hindu education.

The perception of Navaratri as about education is also held by many of the Munnesvaram temple priests. On the ninth night, the priest who keeps the temple accounts had a pūjā performed in his office to the picture of Sarasvati. Some ola manuscripts were offered to the picture along with flowers and fruit. Another priest performed pūjā on the

ninth day at the Tamil-medium school in Chilaw and accepted the offerings of books and pens to Sarasvati. The son of the chief priest who performed the festival ritual said that as every art is an aspect of the goddess, this particular festival recognises that fact. He also held a pūjā in his rooms which double as a classroom where he tutors some of the village children.

All of these people pointed out the theme of movement from one goddess to another as setting up an order of relative merit as a moral paradigm: "Strength" leading to "Prosperity" leading to "Education" is the way this theme was described and it was cited as a suitable charter for good, dutiful behaviour. It corresponds to the charter for life in which the man engages in the world, establishing and supporting a household, before leaving the world to pursue contemplative asceticism.

The moral paradigm, emphasis on education and predominantly middle class support for the Munnesvaram Navaratri indicate both the novelty of the festival and its links with Tamil Hindu revivalism. Waving the lamp to the photos of Navalar and Ramanathan encapsulates this link. Navaratri is in Sri Lanka the pre-eminent Tamil Hindu festival. The attendance was almost completely Tamil Hindu; Sinhalese Buddhists did not participate apart from those sponsors I have already mentioned and a few others who chanced upon the rituals rather than deliberately involved themselves<sup>13</sup>. Local Tamils were hardly involved either, apart from the last day. Noticeable for their presence in

the small crowds were the four Jaffna Tamils holding senior positions at the Chilaw Post Office. They attended Munnesvaram temple every festival day, usually in the early morning. On a couple of occasions, the only people attending the evening Yantram Pūjā were the sponsors with their families. This changed in the last couple of days; but the crowd was maximally 250 on the Vijaya Thasami.

The low Tamil attendance was not unusual for the times generally because the Jaffna-based Tamil community were rarely travelling, and the numbers of Colombo-based Tamils were much reduced following the rioting more than two years earlier. Many Colombo-based Tamils were also reluctant to travel. What was significant, however, was the low attendance by any of the locally based Tamil Saivites such as the residents of Maradankulam or even of Munnesvaram village. They barely participated. Their absence contrasted with the female Brahmins and the educated Jaffna Tamils living in Chilaw.

It was the same at the Bathrakali temple, although the number of Sinhalese sponsors is greater. The crowd was in proportion with other non-festival periods, rightly indicating that Sinhalese were not attending in order to be involved in the festival<sup>14</sup>. The Sinhalese Buddhists attending the Bathrakali temple were simply not there for the Navaratri. One man, a regular devotee, explained,

We Buddhists [because we are Buddhists] can go to any kind of temple we wish and make worship. Inside our homes, however, there are no objects of worship apart from Buddha. Our houses must be kept pure in this way. This [Navaratri] festival is a household festival,

celebrated by Tamils in their houses. Therefore, Sinhalese people do not get involved. (Transcribed interview, the Bathrakali temple, October 1985)<sup>15</sup>.

The informant has identified a central feature of Navaratri only briefly mentioned. The festival is predominantly domestic and what is generally the only aspect celebrated outside is the ninth day of Sarasvati Pūjā or Ayūtapūcai. The nine nights are a festival of domestic renewal, popularly celebrated in Jaffna and Batticaloa in the house. Indeed, Navaratri should be grouped with the festivals Thai Poṅgal (see Good 1983) and Tipavali (Diehl ibid). This domestic quality of the festival makes it especially alien to Sinhalese Buddhists.

The domestic component of Navaratri has been emphasised in the analysis by Fuller & Logan (ibid). The Madurai celebration they study differs in several ways from Munnesvaram. Most importantly, there are no processions, sacrifices, or explicit battles staged at the temple entrance. It is not the Minaksi statue that is covered in cooling sandalwood (and turmeric) paste, but the interior walls of her shrine. Additionally, the festival is a popular domestic festival with many households building tiered altars (kōlu). Fuller & Logan's analysis is largely based on these aspects as it identifies causal links between them.

At Madurai, the battle with the Buffalo Demon seems to take place inside the goddess shrine. Hence the walls are covered in paste to protect the rest of the temple and the



world from the chaotic heat of battle. The demonic, usually outside the ordered world of the temple, is in the heart, thus destroying the temple order. This is what makes the domestic celebrations critical because the domestic becomes the critical focus for the restoration of the temple order.

Usually, houses are constituted through the temple. For example from my own observations, deity pictures for the shrine room of a new house are first taken to the temple where they are offered through the priest to the deity and returned as prasādam. Taking the consecrated pictures into the new house marks the opening of the house. Its identity is created through the temple with which it shares a metonymic relationship (see Chapter 7)<sup>16</sup>.

Navaratri reverses the relationship, according to Fuller & Logan. In the domestic celebrations of the festival, the tiers (kōlu) resemble temples; their order is the order of the cosmos. Significantly, they are made by the women of the house and the offerings placed on each tier are redistributed to other women (ibid:84-85). As the Madurai temple order breaks down, "temples" are being built up in houses by women. They thus reconstruct the order of the temple as an expression of the cosmogonic action of Śakti (Minakśi) in her fight with the male Buffalo Demon. Instead of temples making houses, houses make temples.

The argument is well made and persuasive. Rightly it stresses the absence of processions and sacrifices - the usual features of temple festivals - as well as the

sandalwood and turmuric pasting of the goddess shrine walls and not the goddess statue. These are the central data of their analysis. But none of these things are absent at Munnesvaram and, moreover, domestic celebrations are rare. It could be argued, then, that this relative absence of domestic celebrations at Munnesvaram explains the presence of the normal festival-fare of processions, sacrifices, etc.. That is, the Munnesvaram order is not allowed to breakdown through an intrusion of the demonic to the heart of the temple, because there is no supporting domestic order with which to rebuild it. But this would be stretching the comparison too far. There is a supporting domestic framework at Munnesvaram, it is just very small. But more significantly, Munnesvaram is not unique for having its share of processions, etc.. Other Navaratri celebrations share more similarities with Munnesvaram than Madurai. For these reasons, Fuller & Logan's complete interpretation must be restricted to the Madurai context, just as my interpretation must remain largely restricted to the Munnesvaram.

Glossing the full extent of Fuller & Logan's analysis, their central point about the close relationship between Hindu temple and house remains. It is identified by my Sinhalese Buddhist informant as the principal reason for his non-participation. The significance of the house in the structuring of identity is the crux of the matter. One of the most important domestic/ temple festivals, is at the same time, the most important Tamil Hindu festival. For this reason, the Navaratri is especially open to historical

transformation in its meaning as it emphasises domestic renewal and the construction of identity in the house.

### Conclusion

The non-participation in the festival by Sinhalese Buddhists, low participation by the ethnically ambiguous local Tamils, and extensive participation by Tamil revivalists, give weight to the interpretation of the festival as a major expression of modern Tamil cultural identity. The expression of this identity in terms of a moral paradigm that has historical roots in the Hindu conception of proper human existence, and contemporary force in the social position of Tamils in Sri Lanka, takes place in a ritual context celebrating the origin of Kali and her actions in the world. Tamil identity attains a cosmological force in the world of the temple and its Navaratri. Tamils celebrate themselves in the context of the encompassment of śakti and the destruction of the demonic.

My interpretation parallels Kelly's (1988) study of the Tipavali (Diwali) festival in Fiji. He argues for the historical function of ritual, ritual-as-praxis, through an account of the decline of the Holi festival and concomitant emergence of Diwali. The shift relates to the rise of Bhaktism in Fiji and the changing awareness of Indians to their place in the country. Rather than celebrate themselves as if in exile, as they did through the Holi festival, Fijian Indians celebrate their Fijian homes through the Diwali festival. In Holi, people purified

themselves through shedding the things around them, while in Diwali, they purify what they already have in order to acquire more (ibid:45). The shift is not simply a reflection of the changing material circumstances of Fijian Indians, but a shift in the consciousness that informs material practice<sup>17</sup>.

Such interpretive fields as these ritual contexts both in Fiji and Sri Lanka, generate powerful historical forces acting in the cosmology, something that is underplayed in Kelly's analysis. Navaratri is about both the Tamil identity as this is cosmologically perceived, and about the creation of Kali in a specific relation to Ambal. Hierarchy is being constructed in a particular way with a particular encompassing principle. Furthermore, it raises the question of the way Sinhalese Buddhist involvement structures the relationship between Ambal and Kali in a different way to the encompassing relationship celebrated by Tamils in this festival. Sinhalese do not celebrate this particular expression of the encompassment. They worship Kali for other reasons, reasons which emerge from their perception of Kali as a Hindu figure. Modern Tamil Hindu celebrations of Navaratri emphasise this Hindu identity of Kali and affirm her role in modern Sinhalese Buddhism. For Sinhalese Buddhists, Munnesvaram and Kali are all about sorcery.

## Chapter 11, Sorcery and Astrology

According to the Munnesvaram Brahmins, Śakti is instrumental in the fulfilment of vows and in the effectiveness of the special rites performed by the priests for devotees. The principal rites performed are planetary, for people whose horoscopes are inauspicious. Navakiraga Santhi Pūjā ("Soothing-the-Nine-Planets Pūjā") is the most common privately sponsored Brahmin rite requested by devotees, taking between half and one and a half hours to perform. On average, three of these rites are performed each day. Apart from these rites, many people attend the temple to make small offerings to the planets without the priests' assistance. The total number of people coming to Munnesvaram for planetary ritual is thus a lot higher than the temple records reveal. The pre-eminence of the goddess Ambal is thought to directly relate to the temple's effectiveness in this planetary ritual by priest and worshipper.

Arguably Munnesvaram's most famous patron, Sirima Bandaranaike, the ex-Prime Minister and leader of the S.L.F.P., attended the temple annually to have such a Nine Planets pūjā performed. Her loss of political power in 1977 was diagnosed as the commencement of her coming under the malevolent influence of Saturn. Munnesvaram temple is regarded as especially powerful for such alleviatory ritual and, according to the priests, this stems from the centrality of the goddess. Alleviating the dis-ease of a political leader has been Ambal's role since Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe in the 1750's.

Inauspicious horoscopes leave the person vulnerable to sorcery (Selvadurai 1976:92). Many of the people having the "Nine Planets" rite performed are mindful of sorcery and Munnesvaram is regarded as a powerful place for this particular alleviation. Significantly, the Bathrakali temple is one of the major sorcery shrines in the country. Vow performance is also one of the most important activities there, Bathrakali devotees keenly seeking her protection from their enemies, but additionally seeking her assistance in attacking these enemies. For these two activities the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples are famous throughout Sri Lanka, but particularly with Sinhalese Buddhists. In this chapter I shall discuss sorcery before returning to its adjunct - astrological ritual.

#### Trance and Sorcery

Trance is the most common means for determining whether sorcery has been committed and it is done both by professional consultants (female māñniyo, male sastara karayo), people who practise trance and mediumship in order to advise others for a fee, and non-professional practitioners who are exploring the nature of their religious experience. The distinction is not too rigid, many non-professionals become professional when they realise their vocation, and many professionals come to the Bathrakali temple and go into trance without clients to advise. A range of people is given below.

The onset of trance is a component of the temple pūjā. When the priest moves from the Kali statue and performs pūjā at the Lion Vehicle (Sinhavahanam) and Seat of Sacrifice (Balipītham) at the sanctum entrance, before moving to the two Bhairavar shrines, the temple musicians play with added energy and, consistently, several members of the audience begin dancing, some of them going into trance. The dance is frenetic. Women loosen their hair and it flies about their heads, like Kali's hair when she is on the battlefield. It symbolises the release or unbridling of their normally bound up power<sup>1</sup>. As the priest re-enters the sanctum and the music ends, the dance becomes trance. The entranced now stilled, speaking rapidly as the mouthpiece of Kali. The energy of the music and the actions of the dancers reveal the immense power of Kali as it has been activated in the pūjā. The power floods out from the sanctum engulfing the audience, transforming a relatively quiet assembly into a group of both frenetic dancers and excited observers. As a momentary calm descends with the brief hiatus in the music, the words flow from the mouths of the entranced, words full of insight on the private lives of certain people there.

The following are five people who went into trance at the Bathrakali temple whom I interviewed.

A. Hema Silva, a Sinhalese Buddhist woman in her early 20's. She was born at Wennappuwa, 30 km south of Chilaw, and now lives at Kurunegala with her husband who is a labourer. From the age of 12, whenever she thought of the Buddha, she would go into trance. After some time, her parents consulted a local Buddhist monk who recommended that she be taken to the Bathrakali temple at Munnesvaram. Nowadays, she sometimes thinks of Munnesvaram when she is in trance at home and will journey to the Bathrakali temple

with her husband on the next Friday. Her husband, Sunil, was keen to point out that he knew about his wife's trances before he married her and that each time she requests to attend the temple, he escorts her. Hema sees nothing special in Bathrakali, rather she sees it as the power of "God" or the Buddha. In her trances she does not speak or give advice to people. Her trance is an ecstatic dance that leaves her quite exhausted, but happy to have such intense experiences. Hema and Sunil have no intention of Hema becoming a specialist consultant.

B. Priyanthi, a Sinhalese Buddhist woman in her mid 30's. She is a professional consultant astrologer who lives near Veyangoda on the Colombo/Kandy road. Consulted at home, she will go into trance and usually recommend that her clients travel with her to the Bathrakali temple. She also travels to the temple with her husband at least once a month, as well as going regularly to the Dādi Munda temple at Alutnuwara and the Sūniyam temple at Kuliyaipitiya. She also takes clients to these temples. On one occasion at the Bathrakali temple she had brought a Sinhalese Buddhist family from Gampaha who were involved in a land dispute with their relations. Priyanthi, dressed in a white sari with a red sash (the usual clothing for these consultants (mānniyo) at the Bathrakali temple), went into trance and talked rapidly with her husband who works with her. They discussed the land dispute and it was decided that each family member should break a coconut. Camphor blocks were lit and placed on the nuts which the entranced Priyanthi held before giving to the family member to break. A positive solution to the land dispute was predicted by Bathrakali speaking through Priyanthi. I met and spoke with Priyanthi and her husband several times after this, but on these occasions they had not brought clients with them. Each time Priyanthi came to the temple for the Friday pūjā, she went into trance, or at least appeared to go into trance<sup>2</sup>.

C. Sarath, a Sinhalese Buddhist man in his mid 40's, was a science teacher living at Moratuwa, south of Colombo. In 1981, the Sri Lankan government sacked all the teachers who had gone on strike. Sarath, whose father had just died and wife left him, fell on hard times, but managed to keep a small tourist guesthouse by converting his house. Convinced that sorcery had been performed against him, he began attending the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples from 1984. Until 1985 he would travel to Munnesvaram on a Saturday and give baskets of fruit etc. at both temples. During the '85 festival, Sarath spent a lot of time at the Bathrakali temple, talking with the many professional consultants who attend the festival. When I next saw him in early July '86, Sarath had changed from wearing his usual jeans and shirt to wearing a white verthi and red sash. He now attended the temple on a Friday and would shake frenetically during the pūjā. He told me then that he was not in trance, but simply unable to control his body when the pūjā and its music happened. The last time I saw Sarath was at the temple and he was clearly in trance. Although he was a Buddhist, he felt that the Bathrakali temple was immensely powerful and



the best place for him to find solace from his many woes.

D. Prema was an eleven year old Sinhalese Buddhist girl from near Bingiriya, about 10km east of Munnesvaram. Her father, who had died about three years before, had held a great attachment to Bathrakali and kept a small shrine to her in his house garden. After her father's death, her family were extremely poor, being supported by the mother's father, an old and feeble man. About eighteen months before I interviewed Prema and her family, Prema began going into trance at home and it was decided to bring her to Munnesvaram. When the family came to the Bathrakali temple, they brought two ritual anklets with them that are from the household shrine. Prema would hold the anklets and go into trance during the Friday pūjā. On the occasion I met them, the entranced Prema was telling her grandfather that a neighbouring Roman Catholic family had cursed them. The curse, said Prema, would come to nothing, but it was important that they curse this family themselves. Her grandfather broke a coconut first held by Prema and it was understood that Bathrakali would now help them to defeat their enemies. It seemed certain that Prema was going to follow a career as a professional consultant.

E. Somadasa, a Sinhalese Buddhist man in his thirties from near Gampaha. Somadasa had been a government servant until he had lost his job about five years before amidst some controversy over misplaced funds. About three years ago, Somadasa had gone into trance one day at home. A friend urged him to come to the Bathrakali temple which he had been doing three or four times a year since then. He was convinced that vows made here had a 100% chance of success, and he came hoping to develop his abilities in the trance in order to become a successful consultant. Somadasa did not dance; he would stand perfectly still with his palms joined at his breast. As the pūjā progressed he pressed his palms together. His hands then began to shake and shortly after this his whole body would vibrate violently. This was not an uncommon way of entering trance, but trance was most usually preceded by dance.

The first two cases, Hema and Priyanthi, are two people who quite accept their ability to go into trance and who do not readily expand a causal theory for why it happens. Priyanthi makes a living out of doing it while Hema sees it as an intrinsic part of her being Buddhist. The cases of Sarath, Prema and Somadasa are far more poignant for the way that personal suffering gains expression in their trances. For Sarath(C), trance was developing after a long involvement with the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples, an

involvement that followed a period of tremendous personal dislocation. It was similar for Somadasa(E) whose trances followed unemployment, itself the result of accusations of embezzlement. But I found the case of the eleven year old Prema the most moving. She was too young to be articulate in the sordid minutiae of inter-household disputes and cursing, something she revealed after her trance. The circumstances surrounding Prema's condition, the early death of her father and the subsequent poverty of her family, were made especially tragic by the way in which her mother and grandfather saw the possibility of her becoming a professional consultant as a way of making ends meet for the family.

Dislocation - being rendered structurally weak by social processes including loss of employment, domestic fission, and poverty - gains expression in the communion with Bathrakali through trance. My evidence agrees with Obeyesekere (1981) and Kapferer (1983:ch4) who report that theories of dislocation are elements of the explanations given by Sinhalese for the onset of demonic illness. Kapferer emphasises, however, that demonic attack is not simply a metaphor of dislocating social tensions which somehow bring about the attack.

In other words, physical, mental, and social disorder can be the idioms of demonic maleficence and not necessarily the other way around. In the demonic conception, each implies the other, and it is integral to the logic of exorcist diagnosis that an individual's suspicion of a demonic experience be reflected and evidenced in emotional, physical, and social disorder. To raise the specter of the demonic as an agent of personal suffering is to generate its key idioms and to 'create' the conditions for the further and elaborated recognition of the demonic. (ibid:87 emphasis added).

This elaborated recognition of the demonic is evident in all of the above cases. Different to Obeyesekere's psychoanalytical perspective, Kapferer adds that with the spectre raised, no particular western theoretical position, be it sociological, psychological, psychoanalytic or medical, can be privileged in the explanation for demonic illness (ibid:88). This point becomes even clearer when the argument is extended from demonic illness to trance<sup>3</sup>. Although radical dislocation is strikingly evident in the cases of Sarath(C), Prema(D), and Somadasa(E), social disorder is not the obvious cause in the cases of Hema(A) and Priyanthi(B). It is therefore to be seen as a significant aspect and not as the single cause.

Most Bathrakali devotees, including the temple priests, explain trance simply as the power of Bathrakali entering the person. Others explain that it is not Bathrakali but one of her many attendants who enters the person, thus making the person into one of this horde who is in communication with Bathrakali<sup>4</sup>. Then there are explanations that account for why it is that some people go into trance and not others. These specifically Sinhalese Buddhist accounts describe the role of gnati preta, the ghosts of dead ancestors, people whose deaths were violent or untimely, people who have not passed onto the next stage of rebirth and so are trapped in a liminal ghostly existence, possibly due to their excessive attachment to the people and things of this world (Kapferer ibid:66, Obeyesekere 1981:116). The preta communicates with Kali's horde who in turn communicate with Kali since its members are aspects of

her. It can also communicate with any number of figures, depending on the temple the person is attending. Priyanthi(B) goes into trance at the Dādi Munda and Sūniyam temples and communicates with these demons as well<sup>5</sup>. Although Prema's mother and mother's father did not argue this way, a possible reason for Prema's trances is that her father is now a preta and that his excessive attachment both to Prema and Bathrakali leads to Prema's trances at the Bathrakali temple<sup>6</sup>.

All of the examples reveal a specific attachment to the world that finds another expression in the preta explanation for trance. Moreover, the trances, with the possible exception of Priyanthi's (B), relate directly to issues of conflict and suffering. Land disputes, sorcery, unemployment, these are the stuff of trance, stuff that is the embodiment of the passionate suffering of the world, of the problematic nature of personal autonomous existence. These are the issues with which the Buddha dealt so specifically and they are the central issues of sorcery.

#### Sorcery and its Symbolism

Both Priyanthi's and Prema's trances were followed by cursing, and Sarath's initial reason for his involvement with the temple was sorcery<sup>7</sup>. It is done in several ways. Making any offering to Bathrakali can be to enlist her support to fight one's enemies. The request is usually made at the coconut-breaking stand at the temple entrance and is accompanied by breaking a coconut. For example, a middle-aged Sinhalese Buddhist woman explained to me how she had

just a broken a coconut to Bathrakali asking the demoness to bring back her husband who had run off with another woman. She wished for this woman to be harmed and her husband back, but if not, then she asked Bathrakali to strike at both her husband and the woman. I recorded several such cases, some of them where the husband was cursing his wife for similar infidelities. Breaking a coconut was the way that Prema's grandfather cursed the Roman Catholic family who had cursed them, and Hema's clients cursed their opponents in the land dispute. The curse is simply an offering, coconut breaking being the most common Hindu offering to any deity. The coconut is a symbol of the head, itself a symbol of the entire person and consciousness. Coconut breaking thus has elements of self-sacrifice. In many instances of coconut breaking at the Bathrakali temple where the action is one of cursing, the coconut is treated differently. Often it is covered in yellow turmeric powder, and often a piece of camphor is burnt on it. Where trance mediums have been consulted they will often hold the coconut muttering to Kali before giving it to the client to break. Often cursers utter a quiet prayer, their lips close to the upheld nut, eyes on it or staring off to the temple sanctum and the object of their prayers. These "whisperings" recounted details of the victim's, or victims', crime and the special request for punishment. Sometimes the anger that had produced the curse manifested in the fury with which the coconut was broken, but not often. The whispered prayer was followed by a calm breaking. It was as if the particular curse was now part of everyday life and required no fuss to make it

conspicuous. Aggression was being "canalized" (Obeyesekere 1975) into a broader cosmic process.

Although more common at the Modera Kali shrine in Colombo (Kapferer 1988:28-32), eggs are also employed for cursing at the Munnesvaram Bathrakali temple. The egg takes on the identity of the person to be cursed, sometimes having the person's name written on it. These eggs are usually thrown onto the waste land in front of the temple, away from the coconut breaking bin. Sometimes the devotee casts the egg into the bin. As with the coconut, egg-breaking is done calmly, often the eggs are simply dropped to smash quietly on the ground. Such cursings may only ask that the accursed person be harmed in some way. The priests say that if the curse is more serious, that is, where the devotee wishes for the annihilation of the accursed, then it is more elaborate. The name of the person to be cursed is written on the egg and the egg is placed in a seeded half of a papaya fruit. Coconut oil and cloth tapers are placed in the fruit-half and after placing the fruit under the temple bo tree the tapers are lit. Afterwards, the items are buried under the tree. The accursed is thus "cooked" inside the sacrificial fruit under the same kind of tree as the Buddha sat attaining enlightenment, which is also a potent demonic guardian's tree.

The major form of cursing instituted by the temple priests is done after the morning pūjā at the stone in front of the trident at the temple entrance. The rite is called paliyādikkuraththu ("striking revenge"). A junior

priest leads the people who have requested the service from the sanctum entrance to the stone. Fresh cow dung is made into a paste with water and smeared across the stone. The person kneels before the stone and, in the case of a man, rubs his forehead, and in the case of a woman, rubs the end of her hair, three times across the stone while uttering the name of the accursed. At its most extreme, when the enemy's death is requested, two Indian coins, used I was told for their copper content, are cut in half by the priest inside the sanctum, and burned with camphor at the stand in the main hall. According to the priests, an average of sixty-five people each week perform the basic form of cursing, but the extreme form involving the coins, is quite rare. People of all ethnic groups and religions do it, although they are mostly Sinhalese Buddhists.

Obeyesekere (ibid:7) reports only two forms of cursing at the Bathrakali temple, chicken and goat sacrifice. A chicken is offered if the curser wishes to simply harm his or her enemy, a goat if the enemy is to be killed (ibid). This information was collected in 1969, a decade before the ban on animal sacrifice, and so the practices may have subsequently altered. Chickens and goats are extensively offered, some of them for cursing; but not all. Moreover, the chicken is not necessarily for injury and the goat for death. Obeyesekere's description is, in fact, incomplete.

Cursing with an egg or a coconut is a sacrifice of the accursed to Bathrakali; but this is only one dimension of coconut-offering as the offering is used to conclude any

request before a deity. So, while the coconut need not be a curse, the egg always is. Similarly, animal sacrifice need not necessarily be a curse. It can also be a request for Bathrakali's protection, especially from another's curse. If it is a curse, the sacrificial item is imbued through the utterance of the curser with the identity of the accursed. This is shown more clearly when the name of the accursed is written on the egg. The egg symbolises cosmic origins (Kapferer *ibid*), it symbolically relates to the stone, the cosmic mountain and the womb (see Chapter 7). Smashing the egg breaks the identity of the accursed and, moreover, breaks the relationship between the curser and the accursed. This can be achieved without the wish for the complete annihilation of the accursed, simply that he or she be harmed and that his or her prosperity be undermined. In destroying the relationship, the curser becomes almost reborn (*ibid*). This is the creative potential of Bathrakali's destructive abilities activated in individual existence. It is in keeping with the sacrificial act of the curse and the multivalency of the symbolic objects employed.

Cow dung has great significance in Hindu thought being one of the five absolutely pure products of the cow. A traditional curative is a mixture of these substances, dung, urine, milk, curd and cheese, substances that relate to the five material elements. Dung is traditionally used to line the floor of the house, many of the Munnesvaram Brahmins still do it. It is thought to be very healthy and very cooling. A New Year activity is to replace the dung



floor as part of general practice of domestic renewal. Needless to say, dung is also a fertiliser. The dung is normally used in the temple in the form of ash that the devotee smears in three horizontal bands on his or her forehead. Priests and the very pious smear the ash on eight other parts of their upper bodies. The ash is pre-eminently Saivite, referring to Siva, frequenter of cemeteries, who covers his body in the ashes of funeral pyres; that is, in the ashes of the dead. As a symbol of death, the cow dung ash is a potent symbol of life, of the origin, of being located within the identity of Siva. Both fresh cow dung and cow dung ash, thus embody notions of life, death, and life in death. The use of fresh cow dung mixed with water, relates to this general symbolic field. The curser, if male, rubs his forehead in the dung. If a woman, she rubs her hair. Both the male's forehead, seat of the womb, and the female's hair, symbol of her śakti, refer to the essence of the curser and articulate this essence into the totality of the demoness. The curser is reborn, making the curse complete. Unlike the egg, therefore, the cow dung curse does not refer to the body of the accursed but specifically to the body of the curser.

The use of coins in the special paliyādikkuraththu rite is an instance of the symbolic association of money, as movable wealth, with the demonic (see below). Most importantly, the money is metal. Metal, especially iron, is employed in protective charms against sorcery. In a similar way to the metal cut-outs offered at Munnesvaram (see Chapter 8), metal embodies the essence of the person in a

converted and converting form. Having been forged, metal gains "in homogeneity and hence in purity." (Bachelard 1964:104). Kali is similarly forged from the combined wrath (fire) of the gods (Chapter 10). She is the fire that purifies and this is the ambiguous power of her curse also present in the cursing with egg in burning oil.

I recorded an account of a sorcery rite performed in Batticaloa that involved coins and milkrice. It took place in a Vāddah village and involved an offering to a Vāddah demon of milkrice that was cooked in front of the demon's shrine. As it was cooking, coins were placed in the pot and the name of the accursed was uttered. As the coins did not bubble back up to the surface of the mixture, it was understood that the demon had accepted the request to smash the accursed. Shortly afterwards, the accursed, his wife and two of his three children died. As in the other cursing ritual, the rite includes symbols of rebirth in its expression of death through the use of milkrice (poṅgal), one of the major Hindu and Buddhist ritual offerings<sup>8</sup>. Themes of death and rebirth are consistent with the demonic and its place in hierarchy<sup>9</sup>. What marks out the demonic especially is the use of coins as a demonic symbol. In the Bathrakali temple instance, moreover, it is not any metal, but Indian money. Its copper content is the alchemy of the forge. This renders the demonic power of the action even more acute, relating it back to the source of demonic power while also relating to the historical context that both created and to an extent maintains the Bathrakali temple; namely, Indian trade. The link between Kali and trade is

examined more closely at the end of this chapter.

### Sorcery at Munnesvaram Temple

While it is possible to curse someone at the Munnesvaram temple, people very rarely did it, either on their own initiative or with the assistance of the priests. In one instance, a Sinhalese Buddhist man cursed his dishonest business partner through a special offering to Dakṣīnamurti (The Sage Śiva, controller of the Sun), of an ash pumpkin. Though sorcery is largely absent, its effusiveness at the Bathrakali temple, penetrates the Munnesvaram temple. My point is that while the Bathrakali temple is the historical product of the Munnesvaram temple, it is also a powerful determinant of Munnesvaram temple's ritual practice. The sorcery of the Bathrakali temple is an element reinforcing and producing the transcendent encompassing nature of the Munnesvaram temple.

It has been noted that one explanation for the vast presence of Śakti in the Munnesvaram temple is the facilitation of private vows. The manipulation of the Meru Yantram image in certain private rites is cited as evidence of the importance of Śakti in these rites. But the question remains, why are such private rites so important at Munnesvaram? Permanently posted above the temple office is a list of the rites Munnesvaram offers and their price. Of all of them, the Navakiraga Santhi Pūjā is easily the most popular. It is a rite for the nine planets and its name indicates that it is a soothing rite (santham - "quiet"). The rite is done for those with bad horoscopes. For

instance, if an astrologer determines that a person is under the malevolent influence of the planet Saturn, he may suggest that his patient makes offerings to Saturn, offerings that may simply involve burning a small bag of sesame seeds or more elaborately involve a full scale homa sacrifice to all of the planets, especially Saturn, and the related deities. At Munnesvaram, offerings to Saturn are so common that there is a separate stand in front of his statue to hold the several bags of sesame usually burning there, and there can be as many as a dozen Navakiraga Santhi Pūjās held daily, albeit with different degrees of elaboration. Put simply, Munnesvaram does big business in bad horoscopes and most of this business comes from Sinhalese Buddhists.

Not surprisingly perhaps, both the chief incumbent, Ratnakailasanathan, and the senior officiating priest, Seeniswamy, are well known astrologers. Ratnakailasanathan is so successful he almost exclusively works in astrology, keeping his consultancy in Colombo and largely working for the Colombo elite and middle classes, both Sinhalese and Tamil. Seeniswamy, on the other hand, makes and interprets horoscopes only as a sideline, but he is well known throughout the pattuva as a reliable astrologer.

The planet Saturn (Sani) is the most malevolent of all the nine planets<sup>10</sup>. His vehicle is the crow and his colour is blue. This colour accords with Viśnu who is his controlling deity and who figures in ritual associated with him. The link with Viśnu is important since Viśnu is also

closely linked with the Sinhalese Buddhist sorcery demon, Sūniyam (Hūniyam), as well as with the cemetery demon Mahāsōna (Kapferer 1983:116). As already noted, Viśnu is the most popular deity in Munnesvaram temple after Ambal. In other words, the temple income is derived in large part from offerings to Viśnu and Saturn<sup>11</sup>.

Saturn's gaze can fall on a person for seven years, during which time misfortune is likely, especially if the gaze is not tempered by the influence of another more benevolent planet such as Venus. Where Venus tempers the effect of Saturn, Saturn may become productively powerful and the person may be successful at work or school. It is more likely, however, to be a malevolent influence manifesting in loss of power and fortune, failure of crops, illness and even death. The priests liken the situation to being caught in a thunderstorm. One may or may not be struck by lightning but one will certainly be drenched in the downpour. The ritual they perform, they add, cannot stop this downpour, but may provide an umbrella as a temporary respite.

The horoscope, which is determined by the precise moment a person is born, and in the case of women again at first menstruation, is generally employed to decide if the planetary influences are bad and misfortune likely. The process may be the other way around, though, and it is concluded that since there is misfortune the planetary influences must be bad. One Sinhalese Buddhist I interviewed after he made sesame seed offerings, followed

this principle. He had not consulted an astrologer since he was fairly certain he was being influenced by Saturn following a decline in his business. He had then travelled with his wife from Negombo to Munnesvaram to propitiate Saturn. He is one of many who reasoned in this way.

Saturn's special day, Saturday, only seemed significant during one month of the year understood to be Saturn's month<sup>12</sup>. On each Saturday in this month, several people, both Hindu and Buddhist, make special offerings to Saturn. During the rest of the year it was not considered important to make offerings on a Saturday rather than any other day.

To return to my earlier point. One is most likely to be afflicted by sorcery when one's horoscope is bad, especially if one is under the influence of Saturn. Someone may curse his enemy and one of the enemy's children may fall ill as a result of the curse and of the fact that the child's horoscope is bad. For this reason, many people who suspect sorcery against them will be especially mindful of their horoscopes as well as their children's. They attend Munnesvaram in large numbers to soothe the planets and thereby erect umbrellas to any possible malevolence that may be directed at them through sorcery.

I hasten to add though, that not all of the people performing ritual to the planets suspect sorcery. I interviewed several who attended Munnesvaram simply because their horoscopes were bad, not because they additionally feared sorcery. But there were many who did and doubtless

others who did but were unwilling to say. The point is that sorcery, seen to be so important at the Bathrakali temple, is also very important at Munnesvaram temple, albeit less obviously. That is, while a large part of the Bathrakali temple income is derived from acts of sorcery, a large part of the Munnesvaram temple income is derived indirectly from the effects of sorcery, both real and potential, especially as they relate to horoscopes.

Sorcery, therefore, constitutes yet another link between the two temples but one that appears determined by the offshoot temple rather than the principal temple. If the Munnesvaram temple made for the Bathrakali temple, the Bathrakali temple continues to provide for the Munnesvaram temple. This is because of the significance of Munnesvaram as a centre for sorcery and for the alleviation of misfortune; the two principal qualities of Munnesvaram for Sinhalese Buddhists.

#### Example of a Navakiraga Santhi Pūjā

The example described here is the most elaborate version of propitiating the planets<sup>13</sup>. It was performed for a middle class Sinhalese Buddhist from Colombo, "Kingsley", and it was the second time he had sponsored the rite for himself and his family. He understood it to be an effective controlling rite over the planetary powers, especially Saturn's. He had not been to an astrologer and did not know if he was under any malevolent influence. Nor did he give any special reason to suspect sorcery at this time, although he was rather reticent about this subject.

Kingsley is one of the emerging wealthy entrepreneurs of the Karāva caste, involved in the transport business, particularly in car rental to tourists. His social background puts him in the group of wealthy entrepreneurial Sinhalese Buddhists who actively practise sorcery (Kapferer 1983:34-35). Hence, I suspect sorcery was uppermost in Kingsley's mind when he contracted for the rite to be performed. I shall say more about sorcery and trade in the next section.

The rite involved a kumpam apiśekem performed in the flagpole hall with two lots of nine kumpa pots surmounted by eight other pots. For a pot to be a kumpam it contains special water (thaneer, water with lotus petals and sandalwood), has mango leaves on its rim, and a coconut on top of the leaves. The coconut is crowned with kusa grass, a long straight river grass. The whole object is the kumpam and it is treated like a statue of a deity, being garlanded and having pūjā performed to it<sup>14</sup>. In the kumpam apiśekem the pots are also consecrated in relation to the subject deity. The nine pots are arranged in three rows of three, a yantram pattern, and the ritual follows the same logic as of the yantram in that the hierarchically differentiated components of the deity are brought together and addressed by the priest. The essential qualities or powers of the deity are thus "tied" together in the consecrating ritual prior to bathing the statue with the contents of the pots, and possibly with sacrificing the coconut to the consecrated statue. In other temples I saw the rite performed where the priest in fact binds the pots together



with a piece of white thread. The rite is an act of consecration, of recreating the presence of the deity and reinvesting the statue with this presence. The theme of binding is essential to it.

Each pot in the yantram is addressed specifically with a pointer made of river grass, called a thodupullu (thodu, to touch or to connect), in the consecration of divinity into each and into the whole configuration. Once both configurations of nine pots were so addressed, given flowers, and shown lamps the homa sacrificial fire was prepared and lit. Three priests joined the two doing the rite, one officiant and one reciter, and each one offered a different item to the fire. Nine types of wood made up the flame and into it each priest offered one of the following: seven types of grass and leaf, nine types of fruit, nine types of grain, sandalwood paste, and small amounts of camphor and dessicated coconut. Kingsley sat with his wife and two children adjacent to the fire with Kingsley closest. He wore a length of grass wrapped around his right ring-finger, called a tethpai. It designates his sponsorship of the sacrifice, his being the yajamana or sacrificer. The ring is similar to the pointer stick in that it creates the connection between the sponsor and the rite (Tanaka *ibid*:209).

The sacrifice is concluded by burning some sandalwood paste in a brass pot. Some of the black paste is transferred onto a betel leaf and is applied from the leaf to Kingsley and his family's foreheads. This is the

protective pottu.

Three of the eight pots on the high table are then taken to the Subrahmaniam shrine in the flagpole hall. The Subrahmaniam statue is washed in turmeric water, curds and water before the contents of the three kumpa are poured. All of these items are cooling.

The nine pots of the southern yantram are then poured over the nine planets in the same order as in daily pūjā (see Note 10). The yantram configuration of the pots is mapped onto the configuration of the planets, the cloth decorating the central pot being transferred to the statue of The Sun.

Saturn is then offered rice cooked in sesame oil, a "hot" food, by the family. But not inside the temple. Kinglsey, his wife and children, took the offering to the Bo tree at the temple entrance, the tree inhabited by the Bhairavar guardian. It is also thought to be inhabited by the Buddha; but on this occasion, the Buddhist Kingsley understood that Saturn was there. The food is typical of offerings to the demonic for being "hot", and it is also special to Saturn given that his central offering is sesame.

Other deities are then worshipped in the manner of Subrahmaniam. They are in order, Dakśinamurti, Viśnu, and Durga. Each of these deities controls a planet, Subrahmaniam aspects Mars, Dakśinamurti aspects the Sun,

Viśnu aspects Saturn, and Durga aspects Rahu (see Note 11). This is where this rite is quite elaborate: in other rites for the planets, the controlling deities are not worshipped. In worshipping the deities, the effectiveness of the rite is increased. The effectiveness is further enhanced by the final part of the rite when Kingsley and his family were bathed with the contents of the northern yantram of pots. They stood directly in front of Saturn at the Nine-Planets shrine each one holding part of a kumpan (coconuts, mango leaves etc.), and after being bathed they gave these items to the priest. Thus not only were the statues bathed but the sponsors were bathed too.

The full rite for the Nine-Planets performed for Kingsley indicates the relationship between deities, planets and people in the Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies. This accounts for the close link between the propitiation of both Viśnu and Saturn at Munnesvaram temple, while also accounting for the link between sorcery and planets ritual; since another aspect of Viśnu is the sorcery demon, Sūniyam.

To return to the Munnesvaram priest's comment about the effectiveness of vows being enhanced at Munnesvaram through the enormous presence of śakti, the Nine-Planets ritual demonstrates the relationship as it derives its effectiveness through the systematic interplay of forms of śakti. In the offerings of woods, grains, and fruits, the rite resembles the Durgapūjā in Bengal, described by Ostör (1980), that links the nine forms of śakti with nine

plants. As Östör states,

The nine plants stand for nine aspects of the goddess, nine kinds of śakti (power). Each plant is associated with one of the goddess's śakti, and the goddess encompasses these aspects of her creative energy. Each one of these<sup>15</sup> is a separate manifestation of Śiva. (ibid:63-64)

The Durgapūjā links the various forms into an encompassing unity through which the rite generates an ordering instrumentality. In the Nine Planets rite each deity is linked to a planet, a plant, and a form śakti. The use of the kumpam, following Tanaka (see Note 14), extends this link and points to the close relationship between the malevolent Bathrakali, sorcery, and bad horoscopes. This is the nature of the Ambal/Bathrakali complex at Munnesvaram. The disruptive and fragmenting effects of sorcery are cooled through the creation of a coherent unity of śakti encompassed ultimately by the Munnesvaram goddess.

In the simplest rite of alleviation, there is only the offering of sesame seeds to Saturn which corresponds to the offering of rice cooked in sesame oil phase of the elaborated rite. The burnt-offering is hot, demonic food, although in other contexts, sesame oil is regarded as cool<sup>16</sup>. It is also an offering of seed and is, like an offering of rice, a cosmogenic symbol. The theme of creative/ destructive interplay is thus reiterated.

### Sorcery and Trade

Having described the link established between the two temples on the level of the association between sorcery and astrology, I shall make some more general comments on

sorcery in Sri Lanka, pointing to the relation between sorcery and trade. As I noted above, Kingsley belongs to that stratum of Sinhalese society that participates extensively in sorcery. This stratum is made up of emerging entrepreneurs. As they actively practise sorcery, so too do they have close links with Bathrakali.

One of the major social developments among the Sinhalese in the last one hundred and fifty years has been the emergence of entrepreneurial elites along Sri Lanka's west coast (Roberts 1982). This development has led to increased caste status of hitherto low castes, especially the Karāva fishing caste, an Indian caste of relatively recent incorporation into the Sinhalese society and ethnic group (ibid:18-32). Indian traders (Chettiar) have also been prominent in this development. These entrepreneurs wield great political power, especially of the illicit kind<sup>17</sup>.

In 1985, a couple of days after another bomb explosion in Colombo, I paid my usual visit to the Bathrakali temple. This most recent bomb had exploded in front of a Sinhalese shop in the area of Colombo where the anti-Tamil riots had broken out just over two years before. It had been immediately assumed that the bomb had been planted by Tamil militants, most likely members of E.R.O.S. whose program concentrated on disrupting the Sri Lankan economy. At the temple were some low-ranking employees of the bombed company making special offerings to Bathrakali. They had been sent by their employer to ask Bathrakali for protection for the employer and his business. Also, they

requested that Bathrakali strike down the employer's business rivals who had been responsible for the bombing. It had not been a Tamil militant bomb after all; but Colombo gang war between rival Sinhalese groups. Bathrakali's assistance was sought.

The list of Bathrakali festival sponsors given in Chapter 6 shows that though not completely their domain, temple patronage features Indian traders in large numbers (43%). Additionally, Sinhalese entrepreneurial groups participate. Moreover, Middle East workers figure highly in the temple patronage (over 10%)<sup>18</sup> and many of them return to Sri Lanka and try their hand at petty entrepreneurship, using their savings as capital<sup>19</sup>. This heavy emphasis on trade and entrepreneurship, therefore, should be accounted for in an understanding of Bathrakali worship.

For western non-Hindus, the most famous association of Kali worship is with the Thagi cult of highway robbers and murderers. While much of their story is apocryphal, it is the case that there was an elaborate ritual life in hand with highway robbery, ritual devoted to the blood-lusty sacrifice-demanding Kali. While they are obviously different to traders, Thugs nevertheless bear the similar characteristic of being outsiders, occupying the highways, on the margins of society. Interestingly, robbers bore similarities with Indian kings as expressions of the double-sided nature of kingship (Shulman 1985:Ch7). This double-ness of the king parallels the ambiguity of Saturn who is most powerful when he is in transition (see Note 12)

as well as the double nature of the sorcery demon, Sūniyam (Kapferer 1983), and the god Viśnu who aspects them both. With the king it is an ambiguous double identity as the source of order and agent of disorder. Bathrakali manifests a similar ambiguity which is at the same time a marginality. This marginality is the aspect of trade I wish to emphasise.

Dumont (1980:165) states that trade is outside the ideology of the normative texts of hierarchical Indian society. The economic as a distinct category is seen to emerge only under the British and, following Weber's analysis, it is therefore consistent that trade was the activity of sects such as the Jains who were outside the society of caste. Essential to his argument is an understanding of the traditional economy as one dominated by the institution of payment for services through shares in the annual harvest, the jajmani system (ibid:Ch4). More recently, Fuller (1989) has rejected the importance of the jajmani system, arguing that it is more a fabrication by anthropologists who uncritically regard the pre-European Indian economy as non-monetary (1989:45). He argues persuasively to this end, employing evidence from different periods and different areas, to demonstrate the long existence of cash levies and property rights, concluding that jajmani relations were part of a traditional order which never really existed.

In the same collection of essays, Parry argues that the Hindu texts are far less disparaging about movable wealth

than European texts (Parry 1989:78). The merchant's acquisition of wealth is seen to be a laudable undertaking in a similar manner to the warrior's plunder (which should I believe be likened, following Shulman, to robbery), as long as the proceeds are then directed to meritorious ends such as temple endowment or the dispensation of dāna (ibid:81). Both warrior and merchant thus fulfil their dharma or, as I argued in Chapter 5 concerning royal temple endowments, realise their acts as righteous through a proper disbursement. This comes back to Dumont's argument: the economic and the political are realised as such, with the political encompassing the economic, in their encompassment by the religious (Dumont ibid:165). Trade as simply trade, as a distinct category, is outside the hierarchical order, and encompassed by the hierarchical order. Similarly, the tax levy is conceptualised in the hierarchical order in terms of jajmani, the jajmani system does not necessarily exist. This conceptualisation or ideology is intellectually prior to the actual state of affairs. It embodies the organising principles by which the situation is reproduced in practice. The specific reproduction in the Munnesvaram context I describe is in the sorcery practice at the Munnesvaram temple complex.

Trade is a converting practice, not specifically tied to state boundaries or, in the South Asian case, to caste boundaries. In South Asian thought, both Hindu and Buddhist, trade is a subordinate practice that nevertheless lies at the heart of the "galactic polity" (Tambiah 1976). The great Asian polities of the Cola empire emerged through



the control of trade (Wolters 1970; Spencer 1983). In the Balinese case, state institutions related to trade "eccentrically" as they were designed "at once to contain its dynamic and capture its returns" (Geertz 1980:87). As with Sri Lanka, the large scale traders in Bali came from ethnic minorities and they were kept at arms length from the central ritual institution of the state (ibid:39). This does not mean they were excluded. Rather, the "disruptive world of commerce" (ibid:38) was the chaotic potential through which order was possible. For example, traders were king makers in the way they supplied mercenary soldiers to usurper princes (Indrapala ibid); a quality that, in a sense, has persisted to the present with Colombo traders being the resource for strong-arm men (see Note 17).

A clear and highly relevant example of the above point is the Sinhalese association between movable wealth and the demonic, noted by Kapferer (1988:106-8). Movable property can attain an independent determination over the entire system, as it stands outside the system and its sources of order. Consistently, Sinhalese Buddhist society poses itself as an agrarian hydraulic state standing removed from the world of trade. In this context, trade, like the demonic, is beyond the ordering principles of the state and hence capable of determining the nature of the state. In this light Kapferer thus interprets the symbolic representations of the demons Sūniyam and Devol Deviyo as traders (ibid:107). Another instance of this theme noted by Kapferer is the way conceptually dangerous movable wealth brought back from the Middle East by migrant workers is

articulated into the hierarchical system through sorcery rites to such figures as Devol Deviyo and Sūniyam (ibid). This interpretation rings true for the large number of such workers attending the Bathrakali temple, and thus, I extend the importance of the demons Devol Deviyo and Suniyam as traders to Bathrakali.

Money is the absolute form of movable wealth after gold and its inherent potential for evil is demonstrated in its use in sorcery. Moreover, the money used in sorcery at the Bathrakali temple is Indian money, it comes from the same source as Bathrakali herself.

For these reasons, trade can be likened to the demonic as the demonic is similarly the chaos out of which divine order is established. The association between the demonic Kali and sources of social disorder is even more pronounced in the example of the Thugs who rose to prominence along trade routes. More relevant to Sri Lanka is the close link between Indian traders and the supply of Indian mercenary soldiers (velaikkāran) to the king as well as to the king's usurpers. In contemporary Sri Lanka, government "thugs", are drawn from the trader underworld of Colombo.

The most important goddess for Indian traders, one whose picture will always be found in Indian shops, is Lakśmi, the consort of Viśnu and Goddess of Wealth. She has pride of place above the entrance to the inner halls of the Munnesvaram temple. With Lakśmi, traders worship Kali, and thus the Munnesvaram complex is, at one level, like an

emporium; it articulates the complex of traders' worship, both of the divine and of the demonic<sup>20</sup>.

It is significant, therefore, that Bathrakali's most important site in Sri Lanka is at a port of historical significance to the Sinhalese state, in an area that has retained a marginal, interstitial location in respect to the state. In light of these points, I turn to what is currently the most developed analysis of Kali in Sri Lanka.

### The Growth in Kali's Popularity

Kali worship has become more popular in Sinhalese Buddhism since Independence, according to Obeyesekere (1984a:448-450). Certain aspects of contemporary Sinhalese society are seen as essential to this phenomenon by Obeyesekere whose argument has most recently been expounded in a book co-authored with Richard Gombrich (1988).

Two themes that permeate much of Obeyesekere's work are central in his argument on the rise of Kali in Sinhalese Buddhism. Firstly, he regards pantheons as projections of psychological constellations. These constellations are imbued in the socialisation process of the child, particularly in the mother-child bond (e.g., see Obeyesekere 1984a:425). Secondly, he regards contemporary Sinhalese society to be caught in a process of degradation from a traditional agrarian order to an urban order. The traditional village-based society of extended kin groups has been broken down by urbanisation. Kin groups have become dislocated by migration to urban shanties and wards

inhabited by nuclear and single-parent families that have generated new and potentially repressive contexts for the childhood socialisation. This development has subsequently had a profound effect on the psychological constellations that constitute the structures of significance of the religious pantheon. This modern order is described as one of "urban anomie" (Gombrich & Obeyesekere *ibid*:130).

The psychological interpretation of the pantheon is informed by the work of Freud, particularly his dual concept of the good and bad mother. In traditional Sinhalese society, the principal goddess is the Pattini who articulates the projection of the good mother and good wife. The Pattini cult, moreover, "had a great deal of emotional appeal to men" (*ibid*:159). She is an agrarian-based goddess, whose cult emphasises the harvest, the threat of famine and epidemic, and the bond between the peasant, the family and the village. Through the growing influence of urban anomie, the Pattini cult has declined, though Gombrich & Obeyesekere also recognise technological changes that redefine the nature and obviate the threat of famine and epidemic to be additional influences in the decline (*ibid*:160). Most importantly, the decline has been matched by a "parallel (and perhaps concomitant) rise of Kali" (*ibid*) who corresponds to the projection of a bad or cruel mother image.

In the traditional order, the mother's interests in the future life of the child are inseparable from the interests of the village. The son follows in his father's footsteps,

tilling the soil and marrying into the extended kin network amidst whose members he grows up. Marriage creates a new nuclear household for the couple, unlike the virilocal system practised in India where the new wife enters into an oftentimes tense relationship with her husband's mother in a strange and alien house. This may manifest in tensions and obsessive attachments between the new wife and her children, a factor that subsequently influences the woman's attitude to her son's wife, and so reproduces the situation, one in which the woman as mother develops a highly unpredictable nature in the eyes of the child; a nature capable of moments of "maternal rage" (see also Kakar 1978). In the Sinhalese case, however, possible tensions between 'mother-in-law' and 'daughter-in-law' are avoided through separate residence in the same natal village, making for a less unpredictable character to develop in the mother. These nuclear households, moreover, are situated in an extended kin environment. The socialisation of children is consequently a village concern meaning that parents assist each other in the instillation of morals and values. Additionally, village monks provide children with the fundamental values of Buddhism<sup>21</sup>. Sexual desire is satisfied in the adolescent by the opportunities for casual sex, "in the neighboring bush, sneaking up the backyard, and so on." (Obeyesekere 1984a:449).

Urban anomie affects the mother-child relationship. In the city a gap exists between the mother's interests and those of the neighboring people who have no connection with each other, other than shared residence. Buddhist monks are

largely absent in this environment of shanties and wards, an environment involving such close living that the opportunities for "sneaking up the backyard" are severely curtailed, resulting in a significant degree of sexual repression (Obeyesekere 1984b:158). Sexual repression is extended by the increased marriage age largely due to the need to spend long years acquiring a formal education (Obeyesekere 1978; Gombrich & Obeyesekere *ibid*:199). This is matched by the puritanism of modern, urban-based "Protestant Buddhism" (*ibid*:Ch7). Then there is the fact that the mother's interests may become highly ambiguous and rarely conveyed because of her frequent absence for employment, and also because she may have been abandoned by her husband to solely fend for her children. In this highly fraught context, the mother may convert from appearing as good to appearing as unpredictable and cruel. In this way, the domestic situation generates tensions of an order of the Indian joint-family household in which the unpredictable and frequently enraged Kali has developed as the projection of an ambiguous mother image. Thus, in the context of urban anomie, the Sinhalese household becomes more like the Indian household, and Kali, who combines in her demonic person "the pragmatic and the emotional" (*ibid*:162), rises to prominence.

Meanwhile, the Pattini, whose relevance has diminished because of technological innovation and the declining relevance of agriculture for urban-dwellers, loses ground on account of her inability to encapsulate anything other than maternal love and the Pattini cult declines. This does

not mean the end of the good mother image, though. Its passivity and still esteemed position lead it to be projected into the person of the Buddha (ibid). That is, it is still esteemed as a good Buddhist value, but it attains such a sense of remoteness that it is projected onto the figure of the Buddha.

The growth of Kali worship, therefore, reflects the breakdown of Sinhalese society, a breakdown that is significantly marked by urbanisation. This theme of social decay is present in other aspects of Obeyesekere's work: in the growth of sorcery (1975) as an urban phenomenon<sup>22</sup>; in the rise of "Bhakti religiosity" evidenced in the popularity of Kataragama for urban-dwellers (1978); and in the emergence of modern violent nationalism (1984b). The popularity of Kali reflects a sick society.

Such an argument has telling antecedents. In the 19th century, European Indologists regarded Vedic India, with its heroic gods such as Indra, as the glorious Indian civilisation that had subsequently become decadent and slothful, eventually open to conquest by virtually a handful of Englishmen. Kali worship reflected this corrupt and degraded society (Madan 1987:147-148). The European interest in Thugs, for instance, reflected this perception of the social and moral decay now endured by ancient civilisations. It is consistent with what Said (1978) has identified more generally as an aspect of Orientalism. Said identifies the spirit of Orientalism to be its metropolitan European outlook on the exotic (and erotic) Orient. It is

expressed in such views as Hegel's on the poverty of Indian philosophy, seen as a result of the failure of Indian philosophy to grasp what Hegel's civilising phenomenology of Spirit had grasped. Similarly, the Indologists' understanding was permeated with European imperial values that saw the spread of Western influence as the spreading light of true reason. India fell because it was corrupt and irrational. The English empire was closer to the ancient world, something it systematically reproduced in the symbols of power it borrowed from the Orient. Such value-ridden analysis would never come to terms with the total phenomenon it could only partially address.

Obeyesekere's analysis has a similar value-orientation; but it is one that identifies the decline of Sinhalese society to have been caused by European colonial penetration, not saved by it. Urban anomie is the result of European mercantalism that created a market economy which the Post-Independence society has reproduced. The traditional agrarian order has pre-eminent value; to borrow from Rousseau, the village has a pre-eminent 'nobility',<sup>23</sup>. In it, mothers are good and loving, and female deities are projections of images of these women.

The argument that the lapse into unreason and anomie has been generated by colonialism rather than saved by it clearly distinguishes Obeyesekere's argument from those of the 19th century. Yet they both share the common theme of decline, or better, of a Fall from Grace. In this way, both arguments manifest forms of utopianist thought<sup>24</sup>, striking



for their historical location of a utopia in the past. Where Obeyesekere appears less utopian and more reasonable is in his silence concerning the possibilities in the future - the spreading light of Pure Reason is not regarded in salvationist terms and the prospects for Sinhalese Buddhist society are grim. It is this pessimistic view which colours Obeyesekere's understanding of the popularity of Bathrakali among Sinhalese Buddhists.

The Munnesvaram temple complex, with temples for Ambal who is regarded by many to be the Pattini, and for Bathrakali, suggests that the cult of the latter has not grown at the expense of the cult of the former. To say otherwise is to view Ambal (Pattini) and Bathrakali's relationship as opposed and complementary; but my analysis of the worship decries this view. I am led to conclude that the dualist conception stems from the forced application of the Freudian dualism in relation to the concept that deities exist as psychological projections, and that female deities exist as projections of the mother image, rather than from within the evidence. Such a position is conditioned by a value-laden historiography of Sinhalese society which conceives of the historical process as a linear movement from an ideal rural order to a ghastly urban order. Good slides to bad in a history that can be characterised as a Fall from Grace. This decline is, moreover, both a decline into a Hindu world order, and into a similar anarchic condition of society prior to the election of Mahasammatta in the great Buddhist origin myth (see Chapter 1). Obeyesekere's argument is not, therefore,

an example of a particular form of European utopianism, it also has profoundly Sinhalese Buddhist elements of the kind that rose to prominence in the 19th century Buddhist revival. What all of this means is that the question of the nature of Bathrakali remains since the ideological field in which her significance has manifested is not adequately examined.

Obeyesekere's (1990a) more recent studies reveal a more pronounced influence of Paul Ricoeur than before, especially Ricoeur's (1970) study of Freudian psychoanalysis<sup>25</sup>. Ricoeur's phenomenological approach to Freudian psychoanalysis is grounded particularly in theories about the nature of symbolism, work Ricoeur has extended to studies of language and metaphor (1977). In this approach, as Obeyesekere emphasises, Ricoeur describes a progressive/regressive dialectic between unconscious and conscious, subject and object, symptom and symbol. While essential psychological conditions can manifest in symbols, the unconscious is not simply a generator of the process, but a participant in it. There is a deep interaction between the unconscious and its symbolic referents, a seemingly disengaged dialectic which continually elaborates new meanings. Webs of significance are spun in the process, webs which acquire a seemingly independent and self-determining identity. In the same way, metaphors participate in the creation of new metaphors as their referential component seemingly collapses and becomes their sense, a potential component in a further metaphorical relation. Ricoeur's dialectical approach emphasises

process, the elaboration of complexity, and the difficulties attached to reducing a complex symbolic form to fundamental psychological grounds.

For example, the child's attachment to the mother is extended to a range of significant others, including females who appear to have an independent autonomy and, through this, a determining capability to shape relations with other significant others, including the mother. Kali is such a figure. She is much more than a projection of a negative mother image. To see her as simply this, as Obeyesekere, Kakar (ibid), and Jung (1982) do, is to neglect the complex symbolism she embodies and, for my purposes, the historical circumstances in which her popularity grows, except as an historical condition of anomie. It is a failure to grasp the dynamism of the progressive/regressive dialectic on which Ricoeur insists, and to offer in its place a reduction of meaning to cause. The Freudian perspective Obeyesekere employs is dualist yet one-sided. The image of Kali he develops stems from a profound negativity with which he describes contemporary Sinhalese Buddhist society and its descent into a Hindu abyss.

The reality of figures like Pattini and Bathrakali, therefore, is as enmeshed in the intricacies of everyday life as the people who worship her. I agree with Obeyesekere that their cults are caught in the ebb and flow of history; but I would extend this and say that these cults are also instrumental in the ebb and flow of history.

That is, they are also productive of the historicity that they embody.

Hence, I have argued that Kali is a traders' deity and that this quality is extended to the nature of the Munnesvaram temple and the Ambal/Kali relationship. The importance of Kali's links with sorcery and the ontological connection between sorcery and trade in Sinhalese Buddhism, are intrinsic to the growth in her popularity with Sinhalese Buddhists in the colonial and post-colonial period. But this does not have to be explained as the development of urban anomie out of an ideal agrarian order. Without doubt, urban anomie is a major phenomenon in contemporary Sri Lanka; but when one is dealing with dichotomies as Obeyesekere is, and one relates these dichotomies to history, one must dichotomise the history, making a past and a present that are distinct. Furthermore, the distinct periods are valued and consequently misrepresented. Hence, I do not believe that "traditional" Sinhalese society was only rural and village-based. Nor do I believe, that in those parts of this "traditional" society that were rural villages, life was so utopian. The history of Sri Lanka makes it difficult to ascertain when the "traditional" stopped and the non-traditional started.

Gombrich & Obeyesekere state that there were no Kali shrines in Sri Lanka run by Sinhalese Buddhists before 1960 (ibid:139). Previously, the Kali shrines were Tamil Hindu and they included Munnesvaram and Modera. The Munnesvaram Bathrakali temple priests say that Sinhalese Buddhists have

been attending their temple for a number of years, in large numbers especially since the 1940's. So it would be incorrect to date the "traditional" society as being pre-1960. Dating it as pre-1940 would also be wrong because Kali has been present in Sri Lanka at least since the late Anuradhapura period circa the 11th century.

But what of the fact that the 18th century founder of the Bathrakali temple at Munnesvaram was a Brahmin with a Sinhalese name (Chapter 5)? And what of the fact that his descendant called himself a kapurāla, a Sinhalese Buddhist deity priest? Munnesvaram shows that the classifications, "Sinhalese" and "Tamil", like the religions associated with them, are not fixed entities but "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983). Scholars must be extremely careful to avoid taking for granted, or treating as common sense, the concreteness of social categories. Failure to do so leaves scholarship not only replicating but, more seriously, legitimating modern nationalist categories as natural facts.

It is, nonetheless, significant that Sinhalese Buddhists have been building dēvāles for Bathrakali in the last thirty years. A consideration of some of the relevant factors is warranted. I see the growth of entrepreneurship among the Sinhalese, in a context of a different articulation of the Sri Lankan economy into the world economy, coupled with the increased involvement in this articulation by the newly independent Sinhalese state to be instrumental. Additionally, there has been the growing

importance of Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Since 1977, these factors have become even more critical.

The tide of political events in the first decade of Independence has been well documented by both Sri Lankan and Western political scientists and my brief summary here will barely do justice to their scholarship<sup>26</sup>. I shall highlight what I regard to be the central issues. The large-scale plantation economy that developed under the British was extended during the Second World War, leaving the newly Independent Ceylon in 1948 with a healthy balance of payments. The country also benefited from the Korean War irreversibly tying the economy to the West. The large-scale economic institutions were then appropriated by the elite who predominated the new governments. Indian traders who had successfully positioned themselves in this plantation economy, and increased their support for temple complexes such as Munnesvaram, continued to benefit, especially after the virtual closure of the Indian economy fed the development of a 'black' Indo-Lankan market.

During the 1950's, however, politicians were increasingly forced to recognise the need to court an emerging Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Failure to do so resulted in the political demise of Sir John Kotelawala and the triumph of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1956 on the "Sinhala Only" platform. Sinhalese/Tamil violence then erupted in 1958. In 1959, Bandaranaike was assassinated by a Buddhist monk and a stable parliament did not emerge until 1960 under the leadership of his widow, Sirima.

Communalism has been a major political force ever since as it has been manipulated by successive governments to gain a popular mandate from the Sinhalese majority. During the 1960's the nationalisation of almost the entire economy has placed economic and political control in the hands of the Colombo-based elite, as well as establishing a vast bureaucracy filled by educated members of the middle class, protagonists of Buddhist revivalism.

The emergence of Kali dēvāles from 1960, therefore, locates this development in a period of increased political turmoil, economic hardship for the Sinhalese peasantry and proletariat, and anti-Tamil sentiment expressed by these groups. What Gombrich & Obeyesekere call "urban anomie" is clearly a significant factor, but it is not the only factor. Communalism and the expansion of capitalist economic classes must be recognised as not simply anomic, but also as fluid, novel, and fraught with competitive tensions. These are ideal conditions for the growth in popularity of sorcery and, in this Sinhalese Buddhist context, the closer identification of the Tamil Hindu Bathrakali with sorcery. The logic is encoded in the relationship between the two religions, but it gains currency and force in historical circumstances contributing to the demonisation of Kali cosmologically and of Tamils ethnically.

In the context of Sri Lanka's open economy and the U.N.P. Government's privatisation drive, new entrepreneurs have emerged and many have begun to patronise the

Bathrakali temple. Both Middle East employment agents and workers travel to the temple, for the workers both before and after their time overseas. Sri Lankan society has been turned over by the open economy which has brought more harm than good to the country's poor. It has enabled the emergence of a new entrepreneurial stratum many of whose members articulating themselves into the society through Bathrakali. That is, they have become major sponsors of temple rites, some of which having been sponsored previously by Indian entrepreneurs. Moreover, the social changes in which these entrepreneurs and the established middle class have been active, have been to the detriment of the quality of life of the poorer people. This also influences these people's religious worship. The enormous power of Bathrakali, her ability to convert, transform and even annihilate, becomes keenly sought by those with no power as well as those who want more. The similarities between the trader and the demoness, therefore, make her the ideal object of worship, as she captures the fluidity of existence and the terrifying beauty of a will to power.

These conditions are most acute in the urban centres, especially Colombo, but the concept of urban anomie does not fully account for them and hence for Kali worship. The emphasis on trade and its modern historical context goes further since it both incorporates anomie while at the same time grounding this concept in the cosmology of Kali. This cosmology cannot be grasped except in relation to the broader context of Munnesvaram and the modern Sri Lankan world in which Munnesvaram's significance grows and



changes.

### Conclusion

Obeyesekere's interpretation of the importance of Bathrakali has been shown to be consistent with his analysis of other aspects of contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism. The enduring Hindu nature of Bathrakali, however, does not fit with these arguments. Of this enduring Hindu characteristic, Gombrich & Obeyesekere suggest that Kali is too ghoulish to be accepted into the Buddhist pantheon. I would suggest that Kali's importance is because she is Hindu. The importance of this Hindu-ness has been constructed by both Tamils and Sinhalese in the modern Sri Lankan society<sup>27</sup>.

The rise in the popularity of Bathrakali with Sinhalese Buddhists has coincided with the increased influence of both Sinhalese Buddhist revivalism at the national level and in the Sinhalese/Tamil ethnic communalism. Revivalism abhorred the so-called folk, "non-Buddhist" religious practices and these have particularly close relations with Tamil Hindu practice, especially with respect to Kali worship. Expressing revivalist sentiments, the Sinhalese government banned ritual animal sacrifice in 1979; yet the popularity of the practice has diminished with neither members of the peasantry and proletariat nor with members of the revival-espousing elite. In large numbers, they still request the service at the Bathrakali temple. So what was the effect of the revival on the Munnesvaram temples? They were made more popular through being exiled from the

heart of modern Sinhalese Buddhism.

The hierarchical relations which pertain at Munnesvaram, between Ambal and Kali, Pattini and Kali, the priests of the two temples, the Munnesvaram priests and the Hewesi drummers they employ, the landed wealth of the Munnesvaram sponsors and the movable wealth of the Bathrakali sponsors, the State and the Traders (or the king and the bandit), all derive their currency in modern practice. They derive from fundamental hierarchical relations between divine and demonic, the transcendent and the manifest, male and female, Reason and non-Reason. But hierarchy does not persist because the people involved are naturally given to it, it persists as a modern transformation. Into this modern transformation enters another relationship, the ethnic relationship. Through temples like the Munnesvaram temples, but especially the Munnesvaram temples for the way both ethnic groups interact there, a hierarchical relationship between the Sinhalese and the Tamils is ideologically constructed. Both groups have contributed to this situation, a situation that is destroying the country. Rather than see Munnesvaram with its seeming co-operation between the two religious groups, as a possible medium of reconciliation, therefore, Munnesvaram should be viewed as displaying the underlying logic of the tragedy. This leads me to the final chapter of this work, on the Adi festival. For it is in this festival that the possibilities of the meaning of the Munnesvaram temples are reproduced.

## Chapter 12, Conclusion - The Adi Festival

The Munnesvaram Adi festival has been referred to throughout as exemplifying the ideas about and the interpretations of the religious significance of the Munnesvaram temples. It is appropriate, therefore, that an analysis of this festival concludes this work. The festival enacts and reproduces a multivocal discourse on religious power as this power is enmeshed in historical practice. In such enactment and reproduction different possibilities of the significance of the relations between Sinhalese Buddhism and Tamil Hinduism manifest and are embodied, revealing both peaceful co-existence and violent antagonism. In the demonic power of Bathrakali reigning supreme at Munnesvaram in contemporary times resides an association Sinhalese Buddhists hold between Tamils and sources of social disorder and chaos through which order is generated. The festival is the most significant event in the Munnesvaram calendar as it is the best attended festival with crowds in excess of 20,000 on the final days<sup>1</sup>. It is the longest festival, running the length of a lunar month, from the beginning of the waning half of the month of Ani (Sinh. Poson, June/July) to the end of the waxing half of Adi (Sinh. Äsala, July/August), and the oldest festival, having been started in 1885. The festival is the most important ritual event for the way it reveals the interplay of all the diverse groups and influences that constitute and reproduce the religious significance of the Munnesvaram complex to modern Sri Lankan society - the complex's "field of active power" (ksetra).

A Siva temple does not normally hold a festival in Adi ("Dawn"). Neither Konesvaram nor Thirukeethesvaram hold festivals like this in Adi. For the god Murugan/Kataragama, and the goddess Pattini, however, it is a major festival period. It is also the major festival period in the old capital and Buddhist centre, Kandy. Both the Kataragama festival and Kandy Äsala Perahära occur at this time, as well as the Colombo Vel festival which is scheduled around the Kataragama festival. Central to the timing of all these festivals is the Yala harvest<sup>2</sup>.

Two studies of Sri Lankan temple festivals held in this time of year, the Eastern Province Tamil Hindu festival at Mandur studied by Whitaker (1986) and the Buddhist Äsala Perahära at Kandy studied by Seneviratne (1978), observe a central theme of each festival to be the articulation of an ideology of state. It is the same at Munnesvaram. Indeed, the Munnesvaram priests regard the Adi festival as the time when Munnesvaram's significance as a king's temple is most acute. The festival is the major moment for the expression of the temple as the centre of the Munnesvarampattuva galactic polity. It is also the most popular festival in the year for Sinhalese Buddhists. These points are closely related and they underlie the institution of the festival in 1885 when the priests were vindicating land titles through inscriptions describing temple endowments by Sinhalese kings.

Seneviratne (ibid) identifies a close link between temple and king in his study of the rituals of the Temple

of the Tooth complex in Kandy and particularly its July/August festival, possibly the largest in the Buddhist world (ibid:70). The complex of temples includes the most important relic house in Sri Lanka, the Tooth Temple, and four temples to the Buddhist deities Visnu, Natha, Kataragama and Pattini. Originally, the Tooth Temple was not involved in the annual festival; but the relic was added to the processions by Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe, the rebuilder of Munnesvaram. The festival commences with the planting of wooden poles at each of the deity temples. These poles (kap) correspond to the flagpole of the Hindu temple; that is they are temporal markers and points of origin (Chapter 7). For Seneviratne they constitute each temple as a cosmic centre that is circumambulated by each temple priest on behalf of the king as an act of symbolic conquest (ibid:72). The festival, therefore, enacts the creation of the state.

Ultimately, the power of the king derives both as a mandate from the Buddha and through the participation of the people. The mandate is symbolised by the king's possession of the relic of the Buddha's Tooth. The people's participation is expressed through the involvement of every caste in the procession (perahāra from the Tamil parivaram - "royal retinue"). The procession represents Kandyan society in microcosm. Both elements, the Buddha's mandate and the people's participation, relate to the Buddhist myth of the elective and elected king, Mahasammatta, which is discussed in Chapter 1.

As the festival celebrates the myth of Mahasammatta, it celebrates the origin of the Buddhist state and world order as it enacts the king's symbolic conquest. It does so through the additional celebration of another myth which links directly with the Buddhist myth of the origin of the Munnesvaram temple. This is the myth of the curing of King Panduvas's mental disorder (ibid:106). As with the Munnesvaram myth of the cure of the king's skin disease by the Munnesvaram goddess, the Kandy myth involves the goddess, Pattini. The condition of the king, a metaphor for the fragmented condition of the state, is restored through the goddess. Thus the festival is not only a celebration of the origin of the state, it is also a celebration of its re-origin or reconstitution. The circumambulatory "conquests" take place in this mythical paradigm. More will be said on this paradigm at the end of this chapter.

The Hindu Mandur Kandaswamy (Murugan/Kataragama) temple festival shares much in common with the Kataragama festival where a central motif is the relationship between the god Kataragama with his lover Valli. As in Kandy, the society of caste is explicit in the procession, although Mandur expresses its own unique configuration<sup>3</sup>. The world of Mandur is critically revealed as a component of the entire cosmic process, represented in the relationship between god and lover, making the festival an ideal context for disputes between competing groups. The festival generates the context for the articulation of concepts of power, authority, and obligation. Most importantly, the god is treated as a king.

The entire July/August festival period, therefore, is critically concerned with the nature of kingly power and with the role of gods and goddesses in creating and recreating it. The period is the principal moment in the year when history is defined, ordered and interpreted mythically. It is a moment of potent origination. This is the dominant paradigm in which the events of the Munnesvaram festival are structured. These events commence in the villages and build up in the course of the festival.

#### The Village Guardian

The discussion begins in the ostensibly Tamil Hindu village of Maradankulam which has been discussed already in Chapters 6 & 10. It is the village which has an extensive involvement in the Munnesvaram temple and which symbolically replicates Munnesvaram through its village temples. The festival commences for this village at its village guardian temple for the regional guardian, Aiyandar, known to Sinhalese Buddhists as Aiyanaayake.

Aiyandar is a well known village guardian deity in South India (Dumont 1959,1986b; Whitehead 1921), whose animal vehicle is generally the horse, although it can be an elephant. In South India terracotta horses are given as offerings to Aiyandar for him to ride the village boundaries and protect the village (Dumont 1959:77). Aiyandar temples are generally found on the bunds of village tanks and in certain areas he is understood to maintain the village water supply (ibid). In the Munnesvarampattuva and surrounding area<sup>4</sup>, Aiyandar or Aiyanaayake (lit. "Lord of the

Water") is worshipped, but he is not offered terracotta horses. Where the village has a tank, its temple will be on the bund. The temples are generally located away from the residential area of the village, near the village boundary.

The character of Aiyamayake in Sinhalese Buddhism resonates with his location away from village houses. He is regarded as a jungle god, a god of the area beyond human habitation. When people enter the jungle they should first break a small branch as an offering to Aiyamayake. The god's relationship to the jungle is shown in his relationship to the untamed elephants once prolific in the Chilaw area. I was told of an incident in the early 1960's when Wildlife Department officers made offerings at Munnesvaram, especially for Aiyamayake, to assist with catching a herd of elephants to transport them to Wilpattu National Park. They felt continually and strangely thwarted in their efforts to capture the elephants until they propitiated Aiyamayake at Munnesvaram<sup>5</sup>.

#### Winslow on Aiyamayake

The Buddhist Aiyamayake is reported as a wandering ascetic, one whose character befits his jungle location (Winslow 1984a:287). The only pictorial representation of Aiyamayake I saw shows an old man holding a Buddhist text wearing a meditator's band. The text is the Sattara Satipatana Sutta a pirit chant for meditation on the decay of the body, the eyes, head, flesh and blood; for meditation on the transience of being in the world. In one Aiyamayake temple the statue of the deity is actually of



Natha or Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva deity who turns back to the world after gaining access to nirvana. Hence the Buddhist ascetic quality is evident as a distinguishing feature of the Sinhalese Buddhist form of Aiyandar.

Winslow argues that this ascetic god-of-the-jungle suits the region where he is guardian because of its peripheral status with respect to the Kandyan kingdom. Inside the kingdom, the deities are higher in the pantheon and so suit the capital. Between the peripheral Aiyandar zone and the secure Kandyan area, is the area of the Bandara deities, localised guardian gods who can be traced back to living persons. Bandara means custodian.

The Bandara gods became more popular in the later Kandyan period when political ties with the interstitial area became more ambiguous (ibid). Where Aiyandar's jungle asceticism is related to lack of political control from the ritual centre, and established deities to the full control of the centre, the idiosyncratic Bandaras are seen to have become popular in an area of fluctuating political control (ibid). Winslow thus identifies a close relationship between the religious pantheon and its historical context. Her emphasis on Aiyandar's asceticism is also an emphasis on Chilaw's political marginality which has been highlighted as being central to Munnesvaram's significance.

The closest Bandara shrine to Munnesvaram is at Madampe and its god, Tanivalla Bandara, was the prince who ruled

the area in the 15th century when Madampe was a fortress of the Kotte kingdom (Bell 1920). Although outside the Bandara territory identified by Winslow, the historical association between political control and the Bandara deities rings true, albeit the Kotte not Kandy polity. Moreover, the link identified by Winslow between the Bandara gods and living people is evident.

Madampe temple, however, suggests closer associations between Aiyanyake and the Bandaras than Winslow argues; associations that reveal Aiyanyake's character is more complex. The temple prominently features a carved, painted statue of a horse. The horse is the animal on which Tanivalla's brother rode into battle against the Muslim pirate Kadirayana, Tanivalla riding an elephant (Rājāvaliya 1954:62). These animals, of course, are martial animals, animals of the state. They are also Aiyandar's animals in South India, animals that attribute a regal warrior status to the Indian god (Dumont *ibid*). They are Aiyanyake's animals as well; several village temples have Aiyanyake sitting astride an elephant or horse, and villagers know him, not only as a wandering ascetic but also as a regal warrior who goes out to the jungle to hunt. Indeed, both aspects, the ascetic and the warrior, exist as possibilities for Aiyanyake. Aiyanyake's asceticism, therefore, is only one aspect of his character that is secondary to his regal warrior character.

#### Dumont on Aiyandar

Aiyanyake's regal warrior qualities are central to the

South Indian Aiyandar according to Dumont (ibid). Dumont's analysis develops through oppositional categories that are related to his structuralist pure/impure formulation. This formulation is represented in the the relationship between Aiyandar and the Black God, Karuppan. Additionally, Aiyandar is related to the village goddess, principally the goddess of epidemics.

In the relation to the village goddess, Dumont argues that only the goddess is a deity for the entire village. Where Aiyandar has a village temple, it is not a temple in which the whole village community participates. Only the goddess has such temples and hence only the goddess cult is strictly a village cult (ibid:78). Secondly, there is no link between the god and goddess as husband and wife or as father and mother. Aiyandar has two wives and neither of them are the village goddess. What connects Aiyandar and the village goddess is their actions in respect to village prosperity. Aiyandar provides water for the village tank, the goddess prevents epidemics. The link between the deities is as ruling lord to ruling lady. Their temples are separate and neither deity is represented in the other's temple (ibid:79).

The relation between Aiyandar and Karuppan is not simply an opposition of divine and demonic, but also a relation of master to servant. Unlike the goddess, Karuppan is present in Aiyandar temples and is acknowledged in ritual. When terracotta horses are offered, one is always offered to Karuppan, who is not a demon but a lower order god. The

relation between them is as superior caste to inferior; the temple "reflects the society in a simplified form, it symbolizes it." (ibid:83). Where Aiyandar is vegetarian, Karuppan is meat eating. The pair "constitutes the simplest and most concentrated illustration of the divine" as Dumont defines it as comprised of structural oppositions. Such structural oppositions are the religious principles organising social relations. In other words, the pantheon is seen by Dumont to reflect the social order<sup>6</sup>.

Aiyandar's regal qualities, his guarding of village prosperity and protecting of village boundaries, are associated with Aiyandar's vegetarian Brahmanical qualities. These relate to his functional association with the village goddess. Aiyandar commands purity like a king.

Aiyandar is the Lord: the Lord as complement to the Lady, the Lord as high caste god ruling low caste gods.... He concentrates in himself the religion and the state at the level of the village while at the same time keeping the value of a god attached to a particular place.  
(ibid:87)

In the original argument, Dumont does not relate the Aiyandar/goddess relationship to the Aiyandar/Karuppan relationship; they are distinct oppositions simply sharing the oppositional characteristic. For instance, Dumont does not acknowledge that epidemics (controlled by the goddess) are understood to be due to lack of rainfall (the domain of the god), something often explained to me by villagers with whom I worked<sup>7</sup>. The more advanced hierarchical perspective would see all the relations as part of the same complex and would therefore take into account the question of links other than functional ones. It is necessary to do so in the

Maradankulam context for the following reasons: 1. because Aiyandar is a village deity; 2. because Aiyandar shares the village temple with the goddess; and 3. because of the relation between the village Aiyandar festival and the Munnesvaram festival.

This brief account of the nature of the village guardian deity reveals his links with the political order, both in his Buddhist and Hindu forms. The significant difference is that in the Buddhist form asceticism is stressed while in the Hindu form the god's vegetarianism does not acquire this label as it is related to the demonic Karuppan's carnivorousness. As a king and an ascetic, Aiyandayake is a world conqueror and a world renouncer. Significantly, his ascetic meditations in the pictorial representation relate to the decay of the body. Mythically, the king's body is a metaphor of the state, and thus Aiyandayake's meditations match his regal status very well.

#### The Maradankulam Aiyandar Festival

All over the pattuva, special festivals are held for the regional guardian in the three days prior to the commencement of the Munnesvaram festival. Mostly these festivals involve milkrice offerings to all the deities at the village temple. In particular, the offerings are made to Aiyandayake, Pattini and a demonic guardian known as Weeramunda or simply Gambara<sup>8</sup>. At Maradankulam the festival is more elaborate and includes holding a Coconut Game, one of the games for Pattini worship (Wirz 1954; Obeyesekere 1984a). These festivals establish the relation between the

village temples and the Munnesvaram temple.

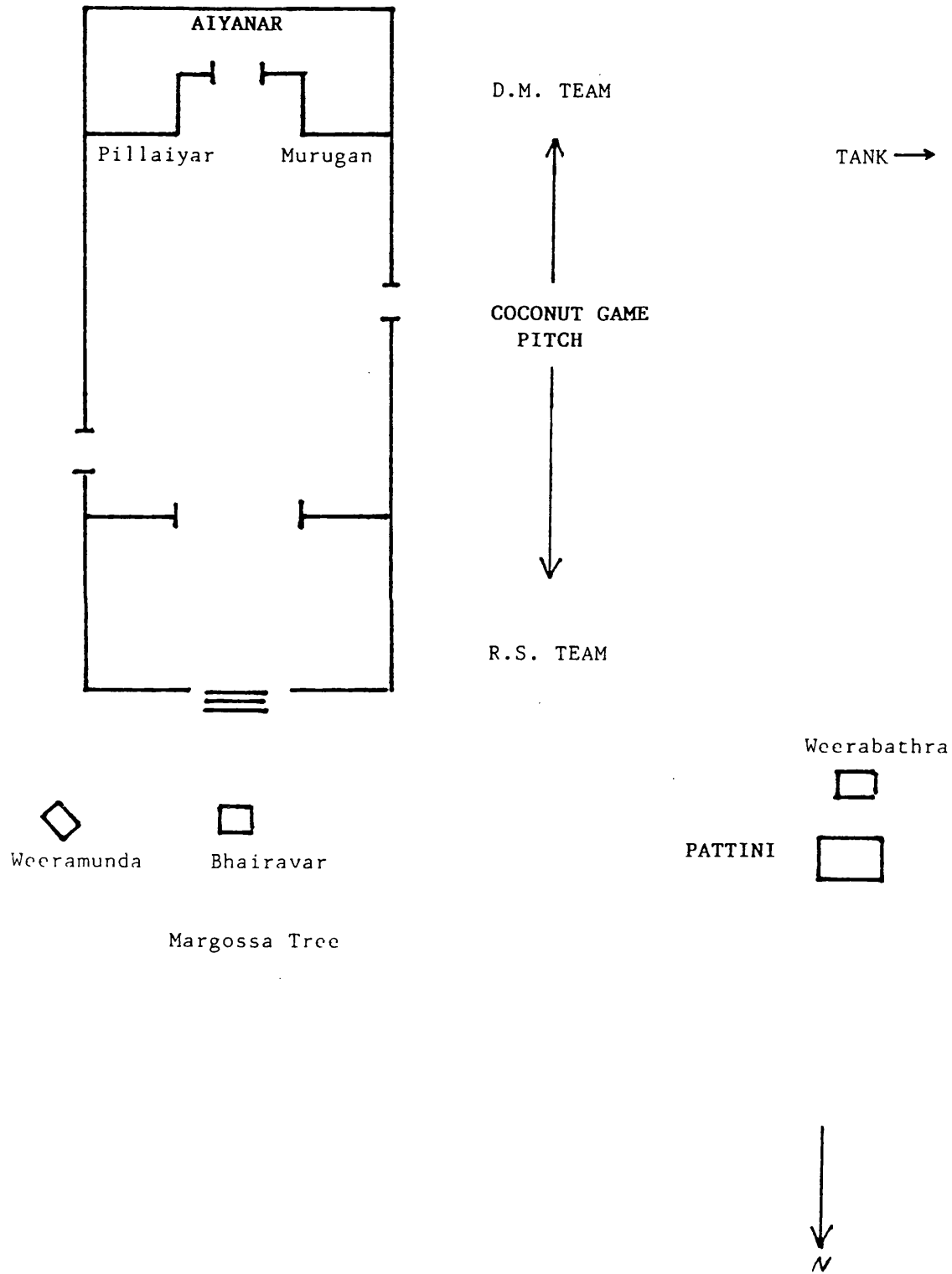
The Maradankulam festival has two stages. The first involves all the deities and demons in the village temple while the second is the Coconut Game.

### First Stage

Seven gods and demons are present at the village temple. They are Aiyandar, Pillaiyar, Murugan, Pattini, Weeramunda, Weerabathra, and Bhairavar. Collectively, they are known as Aiyandar's "Gang of Seven" (hatkattiya). There are six males and one female. Of the males, three are gods and three are demons. I have listed the names with the three gods first, the three demons last and the goddess Pattini in the middle. The gods are kept inside the temple, the demons and Pattini are kept outside (see Diagram 1).

Early in the morning of the 1985 festival the ritual items of the demon shrines, for Weeramunda a wooden spear, Weerabathra a cloven-blade sword, and for Bhairavar a trident, were taken to the Bhairavar shrine with the seven metal anklets of the Pattini shrine, and cleaned with ghee and water. The Bhairavar shrine is directly in front of the temple. From here the items were placed in a wooden box that is wrapped in a white cloth and carried under a white cloth canopy three times in clockwise procession around the temple by the temple priest<sup>9</sup>. The resident Hewesi drummer led the procession, the senior member of one of the lineages which later contested the Coconut Game bringing up the rear. The senior member of the other lineage appeared

Diagram 1, The Maradankulam Aiyandar Temple



briefly at the temple before the procession, which was running late, got underway. Hence, the practice has been for the two lineage members to walk around the temple with the items. After the third turn, the items were carried inside the temple and placed in front of the Aiyandar statue in the temple sanctum.

Pūjā is then performed for Pillaiyar, Murugan, Aiyandar and the demons' and Pattini's symbols. After the puja, the weapons and anklets are returned to their respective shrines.

To understand this stage of the village festival I first return to the Indian case described by Dumont, then to Tanivalla Bandara and other pattuva village representations of Aiyandar. In South India, Aiyandar always stands in relation to Karuppan at the village Aiyandar temple. This same relation exists at the Indian Tamil-settled village of Thimilla, near the Dedura River, but nowhere else in such terms. Instead, the lower god is called Weeramunda, Sūniyam or simply Gambara ("Village Guardian"). At Maradankulam, though, the pantheon is more complex: three gods stand in relation to three lower gods or demons. The relationship is more elaborate but structurally similar. Moreover, as I have already noted, the goddess Pattini also stands in the relationship.

The Tanivalla Bandara temple at Madampe has a special festival after the Munnesvaram festival commences. Madampe has no current connection with Munnesvaram; yet its



festival parallels the Aiyamayake festivals in the pattuva villages with seven milkrice pots offered especially to Tanivalla, Pattini and Sūniyam. The temple priest explained that the seven pots are for the seven Pattini. In the myth of the Tanivalla temple, the wife of Prince Taniyavalla and her six maid-servants committed suicide and became the seven Pattini after learning of Prince Taniyavalla's supposed defeat in battle. Learning this, Prince Taniyavalla also killed himself and became a Bandara deity. At the festival, the doors of the temple are opened for the first time after being closed at Sinhalese New Year. Between New Year and the festival the priest accepts offerings every Saturday in front of the closed door. Following the festival, the doors are opened every Saturday by the priest for offerings. The reason is that for half of the year, Tanivalla Bandara is like a demon and for the other half of the year like a god.

At three Aiyamayake temples this explanation was given to me by the priests in respect of Sūniyam. For half the year a demon and for half a god, it was explained by one priest that this is why Sūniyam remains outside the temple, usually inhabiting a tree in the temple grounds<sup>10</sup>. This divine/demonic movement embodied by Sūniyam, a movement I have identified as the process of hierarchy, is well known by Sinhalese and has been discussed by Kapferer. Sūniyam is addressed in exorcism as dēvāta,

In its usage, devata is a term which is applied to beings who cross the deity/demon distinctions and who represent in their being a major point of articulation in the cosmic hierarchy. As a function of this, they are embodiments of its ambiguity and instability, which are

properties emergent within the dialectic process of the entire cosmic order. (Kapferer 1983:117)

This is also the movement underlying the Aiyandar/Karuppan relationship as well as the Aiyandar & Pillaiyar & Murugan / Weeramunda & Weerabathra & Bhairavar relationship at Maradankulam. The ritual cleaning and procession of the demons' weapons incorporates the demons by the gods inside the temple. The demons are properly subordinated in hierarchical encompassment by the gods. The most important aspect of the rite is that it is done in relation to the goddess Pattini as part of a special festival for the goddess. The Pattini mediates the movement of encompassment. She generates the hierarchy.

Pattini's ritual items in the village temple are seven anklets, the central symbol of the goddess as it relates to her myth. The anklets are both a symbol of sovereignty and of fertility. For Pattini they represent her sexuality; in the myth, they are the last item of her jewels she allows her wayward husband to sell. Her anklets become confused with the Madurai queen's anklets, resulting in the Pattini's husband's execution as a thief which in turn results in the Pattini's furious destruction of the king and his capital. Put simply, the anklets symbolise the turning point between divine and righteous authority and its chaotic fragmentation. These are the icons that are employed in the generation of the village pantheon.

The sense of dynamic movement between the hierarchical opposites divine and demonic, a sense of inversion,

reconstitution, re-inversion, etc., is intrinsic to the hierarchical conception and the values it holds. In the same manner, there is the relationship between the ascetic and the regal, between engagement or non-engagement in the world. Hence, for example, the continuous movement between the ascetic and the erotic for Śiva (O'Flaherty 1973) making a god of striking complexity. So too for Aiyanayake and Aiyanar who also embody these possibilities.

### Second Stage

Having returned the items to the shrines, preparations were then made for the Coconut Game. Sixteen hard unfertilised "fighting nuts" (porapol) were placed on beds of margossa leaves at each end of the 25m pitch next to the temple. The nuts were also covered with margossa leaves. A crowd of about one hundred villagers gathered at the temple to watch the game and this included women and children who mostly stood inside the temple entrance.

Margossa leaves (azadirachta indica) are specifically associated with village goddesses Mariamman and Pattini and are understood to be very cool. A margossa tree in the house compound is felt to be beneficial for family health and also to be protective against demonic attack. The leaves are used to hold the fighting nuts because the nuts are regarded as very hot and dangerous. This is due to their being unfertilised. Coconuts have male and female ends, the germ holes being at the female half. Unfertilised nuts have unbridled sexuality, their fertility has not been encompassed and thus they relate to the unbridled sexuality

of the demoness Bathrakali. The margossa leaves contain this demonic chaotic heat until it is encompassed in the game.

The two teams for the Coconut Game in 1985 were made up of four young men of the two lineages in the village. The lineages are the Rajaguru Senapathi lineage and the Dissinayake Mudiyanalage lineage. The R.S. lineage controls the Aiyandar temple, its priest was a team member for the 1985 game. The R.S. team is known as the upper team (udupila), the D.M. team as the lower (yatapila). In the game, the teams become known as "Aiyandar" and "Pattini", but this name shifts according to the winner that year because Pattini always wins the game<sup>11</sup>.

The teams stand at opposite ends of the pitch. One team member takes a nut and throws it underarm at his opponent who tries to break the thrown nut with the female end of one of his nuts. The one whose nut breaks the other then throws another one of his nuts. Each player had four nuts, although the number of nuts is not specific. The team to first break all their opponent's nuts, in 1985 the R.S. lower team, wins the game. Following the game, milkrice is cooked at the temple entrance and offered to all the members of Aiyandar's hatkattiya.

Villagers say the game is for the goddess Pattini. Its performance helps ensure plentiful rainfall for the village tank and also the general health of the village. Aiyandar is also understood to assist with village health and

prosperity, especially with regard to the water supply, but this day is specifically for the goddess. Coming at the time of the Yala harvest, the game is directly linked to agriculture. The water irrigates the village paddy fields and paddy cultivation used to be the principal agriculture until the 1960's when coconut cultivation, especially toddy-tapping increasingly became the major source of revenue<sup>12</sup>. The function of the Coconut Game has been extended to coconut cultivation. By breaking the economically worthless unfertilised nuts, villagers hope to ensure that there will be fewer unfertilised nuts in the next harvest. Thus, the game is for the village's benefit as it continues to relate to village agriculture and village fertility.

Wirz (1954:174-5) describes a more elaborate game performance that nonetheless has the same concerns as with the Maradankulam game. The game described by Wirz is spaced over one week and involves a large number of nuts both fertilised and unfertilised. The broken nuts are pressed for their oil which is given to the temple priest for the temple lamps. Two nuts, one from each team, remain and they are taken in an elaborate procession, involving villagers dressed up as lions, Vaddahs, demons, holy men, penitents and women, with the oil, to the village temple. The two nuts are covered in cooling turmeric powder inside the temple and then taken outside for a final competition. The upper team throws at the lower. The nuts are then taken back into the temple, the winning nut placed prominently inside the temple sanctum, the losing, broken nut placed

inconspicuously under a table. After three months, both nuts are pressed and their oil is used in the lamps. The result of the final throw is seen to bear directly on the village welfare over the forthcoming year, a broken upper team nut auguring well, while a broken lower team nut meaning that the goddess will be angry and will vent her anger on the villagers.

The teams have the same structure as the Maradankulam patrilineages. As reported by Obeyesekere, keliya teams do not act as "corporate groups" (1984a:409), groups who are constituted in relations of production. This is also largely true of the Maradankulam teams. Hence, although the game is specifically understood to relate to village productive activities, its organisation does not mirror village labour organisation. Since in the case of the Horn Game (Aṅkeliya), women are excluded, and since in the Eastern Province Tamil examples of the Horn Game, the teams are patrilineally organised in a matrilineal context (Hiatt 1973), team organisation of a game between men, is thought to have a deeper, psychological orientation (ibid).

Obeyesekere is quite expansive on this theme. Briefly, the Horn Game, with its sexual symbolism, crude taunts, and male bias is described as a cathartic mechanism for shaming. This shame is the public expression of primary guilt complexes shared by all humans who are raised in families, and includes incest and oedipal conflicts, sibling rivalries, and aggression toward authoritarian parental figures (ibid:501). The socialisation of the

Sinhalese male child, involving prolonged intimate contact between mother and son, is the period for the instillation of these aspects of primary guilt. They manifest in the game which provides an idiom for the expression of impotence and castration anxieties as well as a repressed desire for homosexual intercourse<sup>13</sup>.

In contrast to the Horn Game, the Sinhalese Coconut Game is described by Obeyesekere as more a game than a ritual (ibid:401-2)<sup>14</sup>. Yet the same interpretation can be seen as implicit in the latter. The interpretation is reductionist and in light of the other events at Maradankulam, limited. Following Merleau-Ponty<sup>15</sup>, sexuality and existence are interfused and it is impossible to reduce one to the other. In Obeyesekere's analysis, the psychological meaning is proven by the absence of a material function. That is, if the teams are not corporate groups, their significance must be psychological. Such a functionalist view fails to situate the games in the broader ritual context of the Pattini festival, the gammaduwa.

Where Obeyesekere's psychoanalytic analysis is suggestive is in the way it relates personal existence to the pantheon. This is important in the village game because the village game provides the context for the articulation of the villagers to the broader domain of the Munnesvaram temple.

I identify in the patrilineal structure of the teams representations of the man of the village. The winning team

is the ideal village man now standing in a special relationship to the village deities through the game's enabling him to stand in a special relationship to the villagers. The act of winning is in fact an act of incorporation which establishes the village as a unit in relation to its village temple.

Robert Knox (1966 [1681]:185), describing the Coconut Game in the Kandyan area in the 17th century, calls the game a sacrifice to Pattini. The sacrificial theme is evident in the breaking of the coconuts and in the conflictual nature of the game. The nuts are "fighting nuts" and the competition is a ritual killing of the losers. Thus the losers are incorporated into the being of the Pattini as sacrificial victims. Therefore, as much as the game concerns the sexuality of the goddess, it is also a sacrificial offering to the goddess.

In the first stage of this village festival the movement between divine and demonic is explicit. I have argued that this movement is fundamentally creative as it expresses the process of hierarchy. In the second stage, sexuality is explicit. The unfertilised nuts are fertilised, the game refers to the sexuality of the Pattini, and the villagers state that the game is for rain, the fertility of the crops, and the physical well-being of the villagers. This sexual aspect has also been identified as fundamental to the movement of hierarchy and the creation and recreation of the cosmos. I identified both aspects in the structure of the Hindu temple and in the nature of Hindu symbolism.



Underlying the concept of the temple is the primordial sacrifice. The theme of sacrifice in the Coconut Game is thus consistent with the other themes of generation of hierarchy.

To reiterate Tambiah's description of the galactic polity, its centre is a planet with a constellation of satellites that replicate the character of the centre. This has been noted for the relationship between the pattuva and the kingdom. At a further remove, it can be seen in the village festival prior to the pattuva festival. The village level is the context for the constitution of the individual villager in relation to the village and hence in relation to the pattuva. Successive levels are building up into the broader polity, and they are doing so through specific processes affecting the hierarchical order of the pantheon<sup>16</sup>.

#### Munnesvaram Festival

The articulation of single villages into the Munnesvaram galactic polity is one theme of the Munnesvaram festival that is performed through the village sponsorship of single festival days. The day is more precisely a lunar day, each village sponsoring the evening procession then the following morning procession.

#### The Flag-Raising

The festival officially commences with the flag-raising (kodieṭṭum). On the evening before, offerings are made to village guardians at the Pillaiyar shrine in the paddy

fields south of the temple. Protective threads (kāppu) are tied around a wrist of each deity in the temple as well as the wrist of the senior officiating priest<sup>17</sup>. The festival is regarded as a dangerous period as a function of its profoundly cosmogonic nature.

The raised flag (kodi) signifies the deity's presence. It also signifies an original moment, since the flagpole is a temporal marker. The flag is a long length of white cloth on top of which the vehicle of Śiva is painted with drawings of the Sun and the Moon who represent together the passage of time<sup>18</sup>. The flag is described as both a cobra and as semen, both according with the flagpole being Puruṣa's penis in the logic of temple design. Staying raised during the entire length of the festival, the flag signifies the cosmogonic union and the rebirth of the world.

The Munnesvaram kodietṭum is very well attended by Sinhalese and Tamils<sup>19</sup> with devotees bringing offerings of milk and king coconuts. After the flag is taken from the mahāmaṇḍapam where it has been in the gaze of the god and goddess, it is taken in procession around the temple inner road on top of a brightly caparisoned elephant, a symbol of kingship. Once the flag is hoisted, its tail wrapped thrice around the pole, and river grass tied around the base of the pole, the offerings of milk and coconut water are poured over the base of pole along with a huge volume of water. The temple is awash and devotees fight to consume the poured milk. The bathing of the pole is both a cooling,

purifying action and a symbol of sexual union. The pole is made to appear as if it is emerging from liquid, the mythical Milky Ocean or primeval waters of existence (Zimmer *ibid*). As such, the pole is linked with the lotus stem and with the serpent. Devotees enthusiastically consume this liquid and thus become one with the primordial moment. The kodietttum is thus truly cosmogonic in its symbolic reference to Hindu origin myths.

### Processions

Thiruvilla (procession, lit. "sacred walk") is also how the festival (utsavam) is known. In Sinhala, the term for procession (perahāra) is derived from the Tamil word for royal retinue (parivaram), indicating the closer association made by Sinhalese between the festival and the state. Whitaker translates the term as royal (thiru) celebration (villa) (Whitaker *ibid*:242), but the rendering is imprecise.

The initial processions are only inside the temple, along the inner road (ulvīdi) and they are sponsored by the temple priests. With the movement outside the temple, outside sponsorship begins, the outer processions being first around the temple walls, along what is known as the outer road (velvīdi), then around the whole village (see Diagram 2). The processions are done with movable metal statues (utsavamurti) and signify the deity coming out to encompass the surrounding territory in a progressively expanding action, aptly described by Whitaker as "the ripples of [the deity's] power eddy out encompassing more

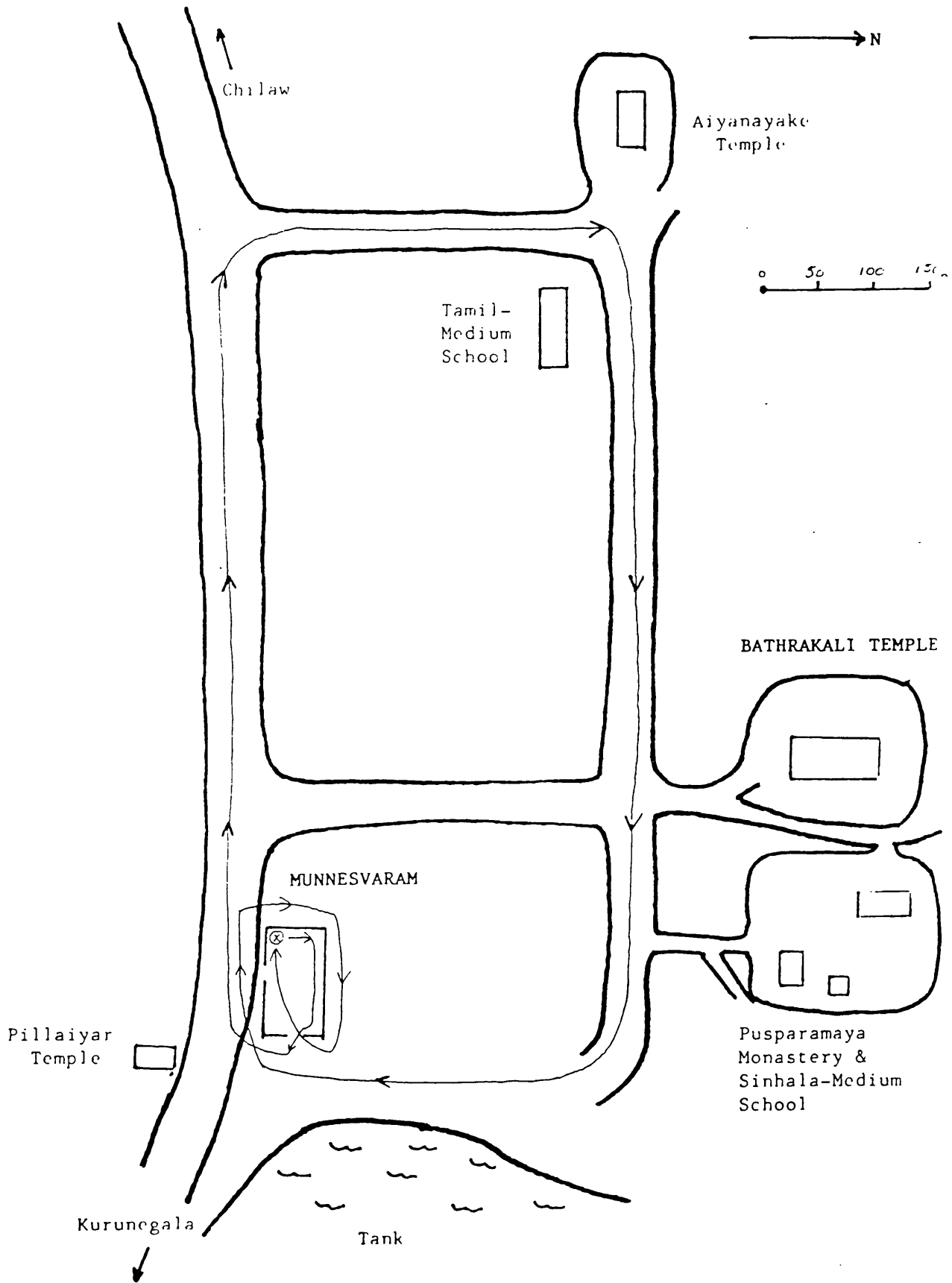
and more" (Whitaker 1984:44)<sup>20</sup>. Though the action seems to reach only as far as the Munnesvaram village boundaries, the involvement by the pattuva villages indicates that the movement is meant for the whole region. As the deity moves out, the villagers move in. The principal festival deity at Munnesvaram is Ambal. Other deities also comprise the processions<sup>21</sup>. They are kept in the festival hall known as the mahāvasānthamaṇḍapam in the south-west corner of the temple. As movement in the temple is always clockwise, every procession outside is a procession along the inner road.

The cosmogonic nature of the festival is further elaborated in the performance of an ash pumpkin sacrifice on the evening of the sixth day of the festival, prior to the first procession outside the temple along the village boundary road. One end of a long bundle of dried coconut leaves is lit in the homa fire at the temple entrance and dragged around the temple and the village. The bundle is called "Vāstupuruṣa" and it recreates the original sacrifice that is the origin of the world.

#### The Use of Regalia after Evening Processions

After every evening procession, a large scale pūjā is done for the festival images in the mahāvasānthamaṇḍapam. A full array of lamps are waved, though they follow the same movement from oil to camphor, etc., as discussed in Chapter 7. The sponsoring village's offerings of rice, coconuts, plaintains and betel leaf are given in this pūjā, the rice being cooked with coconut milk in the temple kitchen. These

Diagram 2: Munnesvaram Village and the Procession Route



offerings are redistributed to the assembled villagers as prasādam.

Most significant in this pūjā is the showing of seven symbols of regalia (called sobāsobasāram): a mirror, a yak's tail-hair whisk, a square flag, a flag with tapered corners, the Sun, and the Moon. These symbols follow the movement to the single oil lamp, single camphor lamp, and holy ash offering, thus falling in the usual hiatus when the pūjā recitation is made. In the recitation, the names of the sponsors are told to the deities, repeating the recitation of names on the first day (see Chapter 6). What is most interesting about the symbols is that they follow the procession. It is the same in Batticaloa<sup>22</sup>, but in Jaffna, the regalia is shown before the procession. When I told the priests that Munnesvaram was like Batticaloa temples in this respect, they were very curious because they do not know why they do it this way. We concluded that perhaps it was a Sinhalese influence. The Sinhalese kings were being used as explanation once again.

The significance of the timing of the display of the sobāsobasāram is the relation between monarch and deity the display elicits. The deity is like a monarch and the king derives his power from his relation to the deity. In the Jaffna arrangement, the regal powers are subordinated to the Brahmins, while in Munnesvaram and Batticaloa arrangements, regal powers are dominant.

### Chariots

The climax of the processions is that of the great chariots (ter, ratha) on the 27th day of the festival. The three carts used in the morning procession are exchanged for great wooden juggernauts<sup>23</sup> and the same order of deities go in procession. The chariots are hauled around the village road, stopping at the junctions for offerings. Their wooden bases are elaborately carved by South Indian artisans with mythical motifs that resemble the carved tower-work of the temple. Indeed, the juggernaut is the temple. The continual movement out by the deities is climaxed by, in effect, the whole temple moving around the village, rendering the entire village as the temple. The priests describe the chariot (ratham) as a fire and associate it with the single camphor lamp; the procession is a pūjā, especially the lamp-waving. Consumed in the movement, the devotee becomes absorbed completely in the ritual order.

Prior to the procession thousands of coconuts are smashed against the wheels of the main chariot, several hundred before the statue of Ambal is installed. In several instances, the coconut is offered in fulfilment of a vow made to the chariot. That is, the chariot itself is regarded as filled with religious potency. The breaking of coconuts is the self-sacrifice of the vow and thus they replicate the practice of ritual suicide under the famous Jagannath chariots.

These features of the Munnesvaram festival - the village sponsorship of expanding processions - accord with Sri Lankan and South Indian Hindu temple festivals generally. Whitaker (1984:51) argues that the dominant theme of the Mandur festival is the elaboration of an ideology of the nation state. In certain respects, the festival resembles the Negara (Geertz 1980), the Balinese theatre state whose ceremony articulated a "poetics of power" (ibid:123). The same themes are present in the Kandy Äsala Perahära (Seneviratne 1978), and in the Kataragama festival.

Adi (in Sinhala, Äsala) literally means "Dawn". The time is the time of rebirth, of the harvest. It is the time for the extraction of the agrarian surplus by the state, the time for the order of the state to be created. The myth of the Pattini and her anklet carries this same theme about the regeneration of the ordered state, and it is present in the rituals of the gammaduwa (lit. "village hall").

#### The Festival as Bazaar

Another aspect Munnesvaram's festival shares with other festivals is that it is also a bazaar. The village procession road becomes lined by traders' stalls selling all manner of items from religious pictures, shoes, household goods, music tapes and sweets. Traders arrive from all over the island to set up stalls, and many villagers renew household goods. Seemingly incidental, this bazaar is highly significant: the agrarian and the mercantile meet in the context of the temple festival. The profits of the harvest are converted into material goods.



The bazaar is not part of the Kandy festival, but is part of Mandur. At Kataragama the bazaar has been moved to the other side of the river, away from the temples in the area from which devotees approach the deities. The river marks an important boundary. Although there is a footbridge, many devotees actually ford the river to get to the temples. The action purifies the devotee before he or she nears the temple. The devotee leaves the everyday world to join with the god, it is the culmination of the pilgrimage to Kataragama. At the end of the festival, this river becomes the demonic Asuras, the temple priest cuts the river and so recreates the world.

Importantly, the separation between bazaar and temple at Kataragama is relatively recent. The removal of traders from the temple side of the river has left that side as a seemingly purely religious ground. As the traders were moved the renovation of the Kiri Vihara was undertaken. This is the dagāba originally built by the heroic king Dutugemunu, rebuilt in the last twenty years by the Sinhalese state. Thus, the purification of the temple ground has been in hand with the stamping of a Buddhist imprint on the temple complex by modern Sinhalese Buddhist revivalists/nationalists (Chapter 6). Their takeover of Kataragama has marginalised the temple complex's commercial aspect<sup>24</sup>. This is not the case at Munnesvaram or at Mandur, or at any of the other Hindu festivals I studied in Batticaloa. The traders are effectively inside the temple; the whole social fabric is recreated at the micro level.

I have, then, outlined some of the features Munnesvaram's festival shares with other festivals in Sri Lanka and my point is that the festival articulates ideas about the regeneration of cosmic political order. The bazaar is not merely circumstantial but intrinsic to this order. So too are the crowds that build up daily. They sign the expanding movement of the processions and generate climaxes in the ritual events of the last few days.

### The Special Rites

Three points are important about the special events. Firstly, Tamil musicians arrive from Colombo to play at the festival, especially at these events. Prior to this, Hewesi drummers have led every procession, and the full-time Tamil musicians have, in the evenings, followed immediately behind them, and in the mornings walked in front of the third cart holding Ambal. Thus, the full-time temple musicians have precedence over the Hewesi. The imported players, superior musicians to the full-timers, take the senior, rearmost place. Secondly, three of the special events are sponsored by the trustees of three pilgrims' resthouses. That is, the final week is sponsored by revivalist Hindus from outside the pattuva. Pattuva sponsorship of morning and evening processions, nevertheless, continues. Thirdly, the special events are the most recent additions to the festival. Table 1 lists the events, their sponsors, and the year of introduction.

Table 1: Munnesvaram Festival Special Events

<u>Day</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Sponsor</u>
23	Firewalking & Nayanar Procession	1956 1947	Temple
24	Bhikshadanar <u>Apiśekem</u>	1947	Mannipel <u>Mādam</u>
25	Nadesar <u>Apiśekem</u>	1947	Nadesar "
26	<u>Vettaithiruvilla</u> ( <u>Ambavidinna</u> )	1920's	Temple (earlier, the <u>Vettaithiruvilla</u> <u>madam</u> )
27	Chariots	1880's	Temple

Huge crowds attend the special rites and queues for the inner sanctum stretch outside the temple entrance. In the queues devotees wait with their offering baskets to make archchanam to the goddess and the god. Visnu is especially well attended and the large collection box in front of his shrine fills with coins. Devotees fulfil vows made to Ambal (Amma Deviyo) made during the course of the year or simply accompany friends or family members who are fulfilling vows and present their own offerings too. The queues are also enormous at the Bathrakali temple, and the Pillaiyar and Aiyamayake temples as well. The festival is thus the only time in the year when devotees visit all of the shrines and temples except for the Pusparamaya Pansala. At this temple, the Buddhist monk sees a few visitors who rest on the shady temple grounds but very few visitors go inside any shrines.

Of the special rites, the Firewalking is expressly for Ambal, the Nayanar procession for Śiva; the apiśeka are

expressly for forms of Śiva - Śiva as an Ascetic and Śiva the Lord of Dance; and the Hunting Festival is for both Śiva - as the regal Chandrasekarar - and for Ambal. The Chariot festival's principal deity is Ambal, though in certain respects the deity is the chariot itself. Significantly, the three rites expressly for Śiva were all added in 1947 under the direction of one priest, Balasubrahmaniam. He sought to assert the orthodox Hindu nature of the temple as a Śiva temple

#### Firewalking & the Nayanar Procession

Firewalking is famous at the Udappu Thiropathi (Draupadi) amman temple<sup>25</sup>, and so was well known to the Munnesvaram Brahmins; but was not put into the Munnesvaram festival until popular demand reached a peak in the 1950's. It was introduced in the same period that Sinhalese Buddhists were taking over the firewalking at Kataragama (Obeyesekere 1978). The Munnesvaram firewalking replicates Kataragama in the way there is an unofficial role given to one man to lead the firewalkers. At Munnesvaram, this man is Tamil Hindu.

Many of the walkers are inhabitants of Munnesvaram, including many children. Pattuva villagers do not participate and the remainder are outsiders, mostly Sinhalese Buddhists. The fire is lit by the senior officiating priest with a single camphor lamp. The wood is of the tamarind tree, a tree associated with the demonic. The Tamil leader, dressed in Brahmin's ochre cloths, bears a pot with margossa leaves given inside the temple, and

leads the walkers around the village attending the Aiyamayake and Bathrakali temples and stopping outside the Buddhist pansala. The walkers carry coconuts or margossa leaves. When they return to the fire-pit at the temple entrance, in the view of the goddess (Frasca 1990:163), the leader has water poured over him, goes into trance and walks over the hot coals towards the goddess inside the temple. The others are also bathed and follow him but none of them come back for the three trips he makes over the coals. After walking, the coconuts are broken and margossa leaves consumed.

Though the tamarind wood is understood to be "hot", the fire is described by many of the walkers as cool. More exactly, it is a cool fire for that person who walks and is not burned. For another it may be hot. The huge crowd that gathers to watch the event knows the fire is hot. In 1986, everyone strained forward to see the spectacle of a woman who tripped over her sari and fell in the red hot coals, burning her arm. Therefore, the demonic heat of the fire is cooled by the goddess for those who are located correctly in her encompassing order.

The firewalking is an act of self-purification and self-sacrifice. One gives oneself up to the fire of the goddess and is reborn. To be burnt signifies a bad rebirth, a rebirth in pain and suffering as a consequence of misdeeds, of poor karma. The act is pre-eminently devotional in the bhakti tradition (ibid)<sup>26</sup>.

The Nayanar (Sixty-three Saints) procession also emphasises the nature of personal devotion. The saints are arranged in seven tiers of nine statues on a special cart that is drawn around the village in front of the evening procession backwards. In this way all the statues face the deities worshipping the deities and not being worshipped themselves.

The Nayanar are the exponents of the Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy, a philosophy that became very popular with Tamil Hindu revivalists. It is part of Bhaktism in the sense that it stresses the dissolution of identity in the godhead through devotion. People are cut off from the godhead unless they submit to its overarching unity and this leads to the philosophy being labelled dualist as distinct from the monist Vedānta school (Dunuwila 1985). With its links with Bhaktism, the celebration of Śaiva Siddhānta in the Nayanar procession is not radically distinct from the bhaktism of the firewalkers; but the procession is linked more closely to Śiva as "Munnesvaram", Śiva the First of the Sages. It is a procession created in 1947 and it does not attract people in the way of the more spectacular firewalking.

The logic of incorporation in the Nayanar procession, however, is the same as what is incorporating the villages into the pattuva whose cosmic centre is the temple. Hence, the association many villagers make between the sixty-three statues and the pattuva villages, a link facilitated by the way the priests keep the village deities, Aiyandar and

Mariamman (Pattini) in the Saints' shrine. Thus, the festival continues to elaborate a theory of state as it elaborates a devotional field. This field draws Hindus and Buddhists. The firewalking marks the first moment after the flag-raising when a large crowd of Tamils and Sinhalese begins to gather.

The Firewalking culminates a Navaratri that is held in the middle of the festival. The Navaratri is celebrated through a Yantram Pūjā performed each evening at the Vadivambigai shrine before the evening pūjā and procession. It commences on the fourteenth day of the festival, the New Moon Day and continues for the next nine evenings. It is a component of the ritual performed by the priests during the festival, one that passes virtually unnoticed by the crowds of devotees that begin to throng the temple. Four days into the Navaratri is the Solstice, known as Adi Pūram. Priests say that this day is the day Ambal menstruates. The date is the traditional date to mark the cresting of rivers following the summer rains, and is considered especially auspicious for bathing (Clothey 1982:176). It links the festival with the harvest, the water supply, and the goddess.

### The Mādam Festivals

The three festivals sponsored by pilgrim resthouse trusts are for Śiva and two of them followed the installation of the Bhikshadanar and Nadesar statues in the 1940's. When these festivals commenced, the Hewesi refused to play, although their strike was short-lived. In 1986,

Karthikkeyan the incumbent, was thinking of adding similar festivals for Pillaiyar and Subrahmaniam. They would involve a morning apiśekem and an evening procession. Karthikkeyan's reasoning included an idea that the festival should elaborate the temple pūjā. The additional festivals for Pillaiyar and Subrahmaniam would do just this. Karthikkeyan's reasoning followed that of his predecessor, Balasubrahmaniam, and his plan would further accentuate the Hindu elements of the special rites.

The apiśekem is the same as in the Navaratri, it calls the deity into the statue and is followed by the deity being taken around the village. Emphasising different forms of Śiva and having the Hindu revivalist sponsorship, the festivals are part of the attempt to stress the Hindu nature of the temple undertaken by the previous chief incumbent, Balasubrahmaniam. The Hewesi vainly opposed it. Currently, the Hewesi create a counter stress. On every procession they stop at the Buddhist shrine in front of the Aiyamayake temple and at the road junction leading to Pusparamaya and play with great zest. Thus they make their offerings as Buddhists to Buddha. Nobody else pays any attention, but the priests do not attempt to stop them.

#### The Hunting Festival as the Birth of Pattini

The most important of the three Siva festivals is the oldest, the Hunting Festival (Vettaithiruvilla). In it a statue of Śiva in a regal form, Chandrasekarar, is taken on procession to the north-west corner of the village and there the god does battle with a demon inhabiting a young



plaintain tree. Next to the battleground is a small shrine for Buddha under an old bo tree. The weapons are sword and arrow, and the statue rides a stallion. The battle is the same as during the Saradā Navaratri except for the location of the event and for the fact that it is also called "Shooting the Mango" (Āmbavidinna) and is understood by the majority of people there, approximately 80% of them Buddhists, to celebrate the birth of Pattini. There are no mangoes in sight and when the tree falls in three pieces the crowd rushes forward to consume the leaves which are thought to be good for one's health.

It is worth noting a few contrasts with other vettaithiruvilla. The Hunting festival in other Hindu temples such as Verugal takes place away from the temple "in the jungle". At Munnesvaram it is near the shrine for the regional guardian, a jungle god, but also in the presence of the Buddha. The Verugal deity, Murugan, is fighting the demonic Asuras, particularly the last survivor Sura Padman, while at Munnesvaram, no-one said that Chandrasekarar was fighting any particular demon rather than all demons. His hunt, or sacrifice, is of the demonic. Finally, at Verugal, the enactment includes a myth of the temple's origin. Returning from his hunt, Murugan sends a servant ahead to tell his wives, Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi, of his return. The servant, anxious to seduce a servant-girl, dallies in his return and eventually lies to Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi who conclude that their husband is out sporting with the servant-girl. The innocent Murugan returns, is severely admonished by his wives until the servant-girl speaks. The

guilty servant is then punished by being lashed by the servant-girl. The whole story is enacted as a dialogue at the temple entrance after the "hunt" in the jungle. This myth relates to the temple history because the servant is an earlier incarnation of the Indian trader who founded the temple (see Chapter 7). The trader's leprosy is a result of this earlier action. The senior trustee of the temple, a descendent of the founder, plays the role of the servant in the dialogue.

The particular elaboration at Verugal, relates the action of killing the demonic, which I have argued is intrinsic to the nature of the temple, to the particular origin myth of that temple<sup>27</sup>. Something similar happens at Munnesvaram, but it emerges out of the variety of interpretations of the same action. Most significantly, Munnesvaram's Hunting festival is understood by Buddhists to be about the birth of the Pattini; yet there is no evidence in its symbolism. Given that it is performed at the edge of the village/temple in front of the guardian deity Aiyanaayake, given that it involves a regal form of the deity Śiva, and given that it elaborates the hierarchical action of the encompassment of the demonic by the divine, it replicates many of the themes discussed in the Coconut Game. And it relates to the origin of Pattini, while taking place in the presence of the Buddha, with the majority of those attending being Buddhists. Above all, the festival establishes that Ambal is the Pattini, and what is more, the Brahmins are the ones who seem to be saying it. The Munnesvaram Brahmins are expounding a cosmic kingship

and articulating this cosmic kingship along Buddhist principles.

"Shooting the Mango" (Amba Vidamana) is one of the important myths of the gammaduwa ritual for Pattini (Obeyesekere 1984a:227-238, 490-495). It tells of Pattini's birth from a mango in the royal orchard of the Pandyan king, the king whom Pattini subsequently subdues and whose capital, Madurai, she subsequently destroys. In the myth of Pattini's birth, juice from the mango obliterates the king's third eye, the eye of knowledge, which the king has developed in his efforts to be the equal of the gods. The mango is then shot down from the tree by Sakra, king of the gods, who has disguised himself in the form of an old Brahmin. The Pandyan king then casts the mango adrift in a gold boat that floats down the Kaveri to the capital Mantundon whose king and queen are righteous rulers, unlike the ambitious and proud Pandyan king.

Themes of righteous kingship pervade the corpus of Pattini myths discussed by Obeyesekere (ibid:ch7). The Pandyan king is contrasted with Karikala, the righteous king who does not pretend to the divine state of knowledge represented by the third eye. In the mango shooting, this status claimed by the Pandyan king is denied by the trickster Sakra as he facilitates the birth of the Pandyan king's nemesis. The Pandyan king's greed for divine knowledge, his greed for the wondrous mango, signs his failure to embody dharma as dharma is only realised in the transcendent encompassment of kingly power by the Buddha.

### The Bathrakali Temple Festival

The Bathrakali temple commences its festival on the 20th day of the Munnesvaram festival and concludes on the evening after the flag is lowered in the Munnesvaram temple. Its festival involves longer and more elaborate pūjās than usual, in which each statue is bathed in a number of cooling substances - sesame oil, turmeric water, rice flour water, red kunkuma powder, a mixture of five fruits, milk, curds, limes, coconut water, holy ash and sandalwood paste. After the bathing of every statue, the Bathrakali statue is dressed in fine red wedding saris<sup>28</sup>. On the final day, the Bathrakali statue is covered in cooling sandalwood paste (santhanam kāppu). These bathings are apiśeka and follow the same logic as the apiśeka in the Munnesvaram temple. They replicate in every respect except the sandalwood pasting what is done every Tuesday and Friday during the year for the Bathrakali statue. The festival extends the rite to all the deities in the temple and makes every one of the ten days the special day for Bathrakali.

The wedding saris denote a bridal status and act with the elaborate pūjā, apiśeka, and santhanam kāppu to incorporate the demonic Bathrakali in the divine order of the Munnesvaram temple. The festival clearly elicits Kali's position in a Hindu order. It draws an enormous Sinhalese Buddhist patronage with hundreds of outsider patrons staying on the temple grounds. More than a dozen Sinhalese Buddhist trance specialists (sāstra karayo and māñniyo) come to the temple and are conspicuous through their dress

of white costume with red sashes, fully red costumes, and for many of the women, the matted hair knots analysed by Obeyesekere (1981). Red is hot, fertile and Hindu, the dress of the specialists matches the saris adorning the statue. The pūjās are marked by the large numbers of people, specialists and otherwise, going into trance, and the specialists do a roaring consultation trade. As one specialist put it, the festival is the time in the year for them to attend the most important Kali temple in Sri Lanka and revitalise their talents. Kali is understood to be especially potent during the festival period and thousands of patrons make offerings and perform sorcery. The potency of the demoness is matched by the potency of her companions. Everyday they all receive the coverings and offerings usually restricted to Kali only on her special days of the week. The festival is like ten consecutive Fridays with the attendance more than ten times the average in the last three days.

As each day passes, the power of Bathrakali is felt to grow, climaxing with the final day, the day of Velvi (see below).

### The Tīrtham

The Tīrtham procession sets out from Munnesvaram temple on the morning of the penultimate day. The single cart holding the deities taken on every evening procession<sup>29</sup> travels into Chilaw town, then about 4km north to the river Dedura. The route through the town passes the houses of the Hindu inhabitants of the town who are the sponsors of the

bathing festival. Many of them are traders. At every point along the route where a devotee wishes to make an offering (archchanam), the procession halts.

At the river, the Sōmaskanda is installed in an octagonal mādam<sup>30</sup> built in the 1930's by a Jaffna Tamil. It faces north-west in the direction of the river. In 1985, as the Sōmaskanda was being installed, more than a dozen Sinhalese Buddhists, most of them professional trance specialists, assembled by a bō tree in front of the mādam. As soon as the Sōmaskanda was settled, all of those by the bo tree went into trance. Some explained that they were possessed by the demon Kadavara who is summoned by Śiva to protect him and his wife and son while they are in the mādam.

In an atmosphere heavily laden with the demonic, the Munnesvaram incumbent appears from the mādam with the statue of the Astara Dēvāta (Bhairavar). He takes it to the river and immerses the statue and himself. As with other temple festival Tīrtha, devotees begin wildly splashing themselves as soon as the statue is submerged. The event marks the origin, it is the flood of rebirth. The event is also regarded as the birth of Aiyandar with the plunge by Bhairavar into the water being the union of Śiva (Bhairavar) and the Mōhini (the river), following the destruction of the demon Bashman. In the same vein, the plunge by Bhairavar is regarded by others to be the act of killing Bashman. This second interpretation fits with the Tīrtham at Kataragama where the priest actually cuts the

river with a sword, giving the popular name to the rite, The Watercutting.

After spending the day by the river, with a vegetarian lunch supplied by the mādam-owner as an almsgiving, the procession goes back to Chilaw town. Most of the devotees who attend the tīrtham leave earlier, many of the trance specialists making their way back to the Bathrakali temple. The procession takes all night to return, spending lengthy periods at two road junctions and by the seaside. Crowds gather at these places to watch a group of transvestites dance in front of the deity cart. As this last procession is sponsored by the Hindu community of Chilaw town, it incorporates the town in the festival and thus in the temple. But the procession is significantly different from the ones earlier involving for the most part agricultural villages. The difference is not simply a manifestation of relative sophistication between town and village. Rather, it relates to where the event sits in the overall festival complex.

The relationship of the divine to the demonic is given a high profile in the Tīrtham. As soon as the deities enter the mādam, the power of the demon in the tree becomes so great that dozens of people become possessed by him. Later in the evening, in the time of the demonic, when Śiva and Ambal are usually asleep in the temple, they are out in the streets being entertained by men dressed as women performing dances. The climax of the festival reveals a moment of active inversion and incorporation: night for

day, male for female, demonic for divine, wakefulness for sleep. As the progressive movement of processions and participation builds a process of order over the preceding month, the boundaries of the temple expanding, the climax of these actions manifests the world in a condition of potent originality. Order and disorder, cosmos and chaos, are generated as a fertile simultaneity<sup>31</sup>.

The final events in which order and disorder manifest in their simultaneity is interpreted by Frasca (ibid) to be the antistructural moment in festivals, dialectically complementing the structural moments that precede it with the order of caste in the sponsorship of processions. The phase is one of *communitas*, which suits the liminal moment in the year between pre-harvest scarcity and abundance (ibid:167 - 178). Following Turner (1967, 1969), the liminal phase of ritual is characterised by the absence of normal temporal ordering and by the ambiguous combination of symbols of life and death. The absence of time, evident in the time of night the events are held, constitutes the phase as a powerful originary moment. The festival processions move to the boundary of the temple order, to the river and to the seaside of Chilaw Town. At the seaside, the deities are entertained by transvestite dancing: men dressed as women embodying both genders in a potent ambiguity which relates to the non-differentiated gender of the immanent form of the Śivaliṅgam. The transvestites are thus part of the liminality of this moment, they embody the immanence of the human order as it is being reconstituted with the recreated divine order. The



event concludes the festival as the dawn of society.

The Munnesvaram flag-lowering takes place as soon as the procession returns from Chilaw, around 5.30 in the morning. There is a final procession at this time when the three guardians - Pillaiyar, Bhairavar and Sandesvarar - are carried around the village and the guardians, installed on the fifth evening along the village boundaries, are given final offerings of milkrice. The festival ends when the protective thread is cut from the officiating priest's wrist and he is led home by the temple incumbent. He will be shaved that day for the first time since the festival began. A quietness settles on the temple.

With the fertile simultaneity the Munnesvaram festival creates, the end of one temple's festival establishes the climax of the other. At the Bathrakali temple the morning pūjā is one of the best attended of the year; everywhere people are dancing frenetically, dozens are in trance and hundreds of coconuts are being broken. This is the day of Velvi, the day when tens of animals would have been sacrificed were it not for the government ban. But as one temple helper put it, an animal must be sacrificed or else Bathrakali will not be satisfied. In 1985, to this end, a goat was prepared to be sacrificed at the temple entrance, but a public execution was thwarted when three Buddhist monks visited the temple and the priests decided that the monks might report the action. The goat was led off to the butchering shed, killed out of public view, and was served up, curried, to the temple deities that evening in the

final pūjā of the festival. With the curried goat, were served alcohol, tobacco, and other stimulants. All of the temple deities were highly intoxicated, full of blood and stimulants. It is at this time that the Brahmins from Munnesvaram used to come to the Bathrakali temple and make offerings.

The heightened activity at the Bathrakali temple contrasts with the quiet of the Munnesvaram temple; yet it parallels the inverted world of license and transvestism seen earlier that morning in the Chilaw town. It thus reiterates the theme of the simultaneity of order and disorder the whole festival achieves. This is the cosmogony the festival articulates, one in keeping with the nature of the temple itself. But the festival does more than describe the nature of the temple, it elaborates a particular cosmogonic idea of power and the state and thus locates the power of the king in the body of the temple. It describes a movement between divine and demonic, between unity and fragmentation, between cosmos and chaos, that is an originary movement. In this movement, devotees locate themselves. What is so striking is that so many devotees locate themselves in relation to the Bathrakali temple.

The incident of the thwarted sacrifice was highly significant. Unfortunately, in the rush and the crowd, I was unable to interview the monks before they departed. I do not know when, from where or why they came. I had never seen them at the temple before. Nor had the temple priests. Their presence that day was not appreciated, mildly by the

priests, and less mildly, once the monks were gone, by some of the Sinhalese Buddhists in the crowd who were anxious for the sacrifice. As strangers they represented the dominant modern Sinhalese Buddhist order, monks known to the priests could have been asked to stay away. The event encapsulates the place of Bathrakali in modern Sinhalese Buddhism.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the festival highlights its cosmogonic nature without exploring all of its aspects or themes<sup>32</sup>. The festival in the village reveals the cosmogony, demonstrating this reveals how the festival builds up from the constituent units of the pattuva and manifests a cosmopolitical theme articulating the villager into the village and the village into the pattuva. As with Kandy, the society presented in the festival is one of caste. Then there is the importance of the timing, the fact of the harvest and the conversion of the agricultural surplus into commodities through the festival bazaar. Put simply, the pattuva becomes a cosmic state.

The Munnesvaram priests explain the popularity of the Munnesvaram Adi Utsavam because of the temple's importance as a King's (Pītham, Sannikrīya) temple. They see this as a major component of this festival more than any other and thus explain its huge popularity with Sinhalese Buddhists.

The cosmic state is created in the dynamic relation between the divine and the demonic, a relation also

understood to be the creation of the Pattini. But as the Pattini is born and installed, the demonic emerges in its full potency. The hierarchical order generates its opposites in their full capacity. Kali is at the extreme of her power as the unity of the pattuva is generated, its relation to the centre articulated, and its marginality accentuated. Order is born from difference and the ordering power of difference revealed. The transvestites' dance in the night before the Velvi displays this moment as a potent Hindu cosmogony about the nature of society, power and the state. This is the moment when the enormous power of the Munnesvaram temples is revealed as a Hindu cosmic order into which Sinhalese Buddhists articulate. As they do so they emphasise an engagement with the demonic aspects of the temple complex.

In the cosmic state created through the Adi festival, Hindu and Buddhist concepts combine and feed from one another. This is best indicated in the Hunting festival when Śiva the King (Chandrasekarar) conquers the demonic at the margins of the village but in the presence of the Buddha, and the whole event is interpreted as the birth of Pattini (Amma Deviyo). Many who know it is Śiva killing the demon do not know the Pattini is being born, and those who think of Pattini do not think the charging statue on horseback is Śiva<sup>33</sup>. Diverse interpretations exist side by side, not antagonising each other, but instead creating a context for an interaction which generates the religious significance of the temples.

The Hunting festival replicates the Saradā Navaratri's Vijaya Thasami with the important differences being the location of the hunt and the deity who does the hunting. In the Navaratri held within the Adi festival, the events of the hunt are combined with other special rites, notably the firewalking which demonstrates the effectiveness of the entire festival for the cool ordering of the heat of the goddess. In India, the Navaratri is also about the state and is pre-eminently a king's rite (Dasāra); but the Munnesvaram Saradā Navaratri emphasises the relation between temple and house and does not draw a Sinhalese Buddhist patronage. The Adi festival, on the other hand, draws an enormous Sinhalese Buddhist patronage as it celebrates an ideology of the cosmic state from which a Hindu and Buddhist conception emerges in a specific relation.

The taming of the Pandyan king suggests that the Pattini has a critical role in the formation of the righteous state. This parallels Ambal's cure of the king's skin disease in the Buddhist Munnesvaram origin myth, and also the role the Pattini plays when she mediates between three demons and three gods in the Maradankulam village festival. The mediatory powers of the goddess in the construction of cosmos are emphasised. Through linking the symbolic motif in the festival and in a related myth, Seneviratne notes a similar theme in the Āsala Perahāra. The myth concerns the curing of King Panduvas's mental illness and skin disease which were a result of the curse of the demoness, Kuveni, the rejected lover of the first Sinhalese king, Vijaya.

Panduvās's malady is noticed by the "goddess of the royal umbrella" (ibid:106), Pattini, who informs Sakra. To cure Panduvās, one not born from a womb must be brought to Panduvās's palace (at Pandevāsnuwara, 30km east of Munnesvaram). This is King Māla. With the aid of the planet Rahu, Māla is lured to the palace while out hunting<sup>34</sup>.

The myth in many respects concludes the story of the origin of the Sinhalese state that begins with Vijaya's grandparents, the lion and the Vanga princess; their twin children, Sihabahu and Sihasivali, who beget Vijaya; and disgraced Vijaya's journey to Lanka where, with the help of Kuveni, the state is founded (Kapferer 1988, Obeyesekere 1989, 1990a). This state is righteous, King Panduvās is a good king, but it is flawed by the very nature of its constitution to be ever under threat of fragmentation. Kuveni's curse ensures this, and so ensures the necessity of powerful curative ritual.

The myth is strikingly close to the Munnesvaram version as well as including the theme of the king's hunt. Thus the Munnesvaram festival, like the Āsala Perahāra, relates to the origin of the state, the constitution of regal power. But it does so as a Hindu temple whose festival includes both Hindu and Buddhist themes standing in close relationship. The themes have a hierarchical character, they relate to the nature of divine and demonic, order and fragmentation, and the process of encompassment. And they relate to the nature of power. Here lies the difference, one epitomised by the contrast between the village

guardians, the Hindu Aiyandar and the Buddhist Aiyandayake. The former bears only regal qualities while the latter is both a king and a renouncer. He derives his reason from the Buddha but does not overturn his Hindu hierarchical nature in doing so. The god in many respects encapsulates the Hindu/Buddhist relationship at Munnesvaram. The god is born in the conclusion of the festival.

The Munnesvaram Adi Utsavam, the most important festival in the year, encapsulates all the themes I have developed in this thesis, themes of hierarchy and of the contrast of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology. The festival constitutes the moment of combination of Hindu and Buddhist ideas about the world and about the relation between these two religions. It does so as the major festival for Sinhalese Buddhists and Tamil Hindus at the most important ostensibly Hindu temple in Sri Lanka. The significance of the Munnesvaram temple as a Hindu temple complex emerges as a result of its location in a sacred geography which has been determined by history, history as it is shaped by Hindu and Buddhist ideas.

Prior to my analysis of the Adi Utsavam, I emphasised the differences between Hindu and Buddhist thought. The Hindu, I argued, refers to and represents original and autochthonous cosmogonic power. It does so in its temple aesthetic, in the creation of form from a state of formlessness and in the centrality of sacrifice as the fundamental cosmogonic act. The temple is thus a centre. The Buddhist locates power in society, in the righteous

power of the king as this is fashioned in the reason of the Buddha, the renouncer. It places the Hindu temple at the periphery. This important contrast, emerges in the history of the two religions as an expression of the dialogue between them. Importantly, the dialogue shapes Hindu and Buddhist historiographies, historiographies that manifest in the Hindu and Buddhist myths of the origin of Munnesvaram, as well as in the historiographies that shape the popular perceptions of the Munnesvaram temple and the debate as to who is its rightful owner, Brahmins or the state. Additionally, the contrast is rendered apparent in the nature of Hindu and Buddhist engagement with the temple, the Hindu participation in the entire body of the temple in contrast to the Buddhist attention for discrete deities in the temple. The history of temple construction and renovation reflects this theme. The marginal character of the temple is evidenced in the specific forms of worship, in the worship of female deities and particularly in the worship of the demonic Bathrakali whose presence manifests in the practices of sorcery at the Bathrakali temple and Planets' ritual at the Munnesvaram temple.

Concluding with the major festival, though, I stress unity over difference, the lack of antagonism between the different conceptions, and the role of the Brahmins in unitarily embracing these differences as an expression of Munnesvaram's significance as a king's temple. The festival articulates a totalising logic, a logic of the whole in which the parts are momentarily assumed. This makes the festival the high point of Munnesvaram's significance as a



temple of the interface, a point of contact between the Hindu and Buddhist, Tamil and Sinhalese worlds; ensuring an income for the priests and the continued dialogue of the two religions.

In this way, Munnesvaram throws certain views on religious syncretism into relief. Gombrich in Precept and Practice describes Sinhalese Buddhism as accretic rather than syncretic, cultural syncretism being defined as the process whereby two or more distinct cultural systems are brought together producing a hybrid culture. In this definition a culture is, if not seen as a thing, seen as a bounded system of parts or elements. The syncretic process is one-directional and it involves a moment of contact and hybridisation. Accretism is preferred for Sinhalese Buddhism because Gombrich identifies a more dynamic interaction governed ultimately by a set of unchanging rules or precepts. In other words, anything goes as long as the precepts are not attacked. I prefer to employ Dumont's theory of hierarchy because it does not place the system of ideas amidst some chaotic miasma of other possibilities. Rather it points to how Buddhism has a very special relationship with Hinduism and also how Buddhism has encompassing values that underlie the precepts. These values, or orientations to experience, to use Kapferer's (1988) concept of ontology, emerge as historical contingencies. At Munnesvaram, these values relate to theories of power and of the state. This, at any rate, is what the annual festival suggests.

The Munnesvaram temples' religious significance is the twenty thousand people attending each day over the last few days of the Adi festival. It is expressed in the myths of the temple they know, the offerings they queue for up to an hour to make, the money they give, the trances some of them experience, others eagerly observe, and the insights these trances provide, the cursing they perform, and in the replies they make to questions about why they attend: "This is a powerful place." The significance can be measured in the attempts by the current Sri Lankan government to use Munnesvaram as a bridge between the two major ethnic groups by naming Munnesvaram as a sacred centre and thereby demonstrating their respect for the Hindu religion. But what I have endeavored to show is that the religious significance of Munnesvaram is conditioned in the very processes that have brought Tamils and Sinhalese into being as distinct ethnic groups at loggerheads over so-called traditional lands and rights. Munnesvaram embodies the significance of tradition as a perpetually modern construction. Its festival is the moment of construction.

It is not that one could solve the ethnic conflict through the abolition of temples like Munnesvaram. Rather, the temples reveal the processes underlying the manufacture of distinct ethnic identities and their relationship as seemingly pristine categories whose actual fluidity derives its force and its mask of timelessness in its religious significance. It also shows how various discursive structures can coexist and be rendered potent in historical circumstance. Religious significance is concerned with

origins, with the mediation between the immediate and sensible and the transcendent and divine. In my pursuit of an understanding of the religious significance of the Munnesvaram temples in modern Sri Lanka, I have revealed that the fundamental ontological concerns that bring devotees to Munnesvaram attain their potency in the mediating processes which shape modern Sri Lanka.

## NOTES

Chapter One, Introduction

1. See Chapter 6 for an extended discussion on the patronage. These proportions were determined through interviews with a casual sample of the temple patronage collected over the year. At various points I shall describe the composition of the patronage on a certain occasion because it was never always uniform. The Navaratri festival, for instance, had virtually no Sinhalese patronage. The significance of this will be discussed.

2. Source, the Census Reports of 1981. The figures reveal that the temple does not have a patronage representative of the ethnic distribution of the island; but that Sinhalese, both Buddhist and Christian, predominate.

3. As far as I know, a detailed study of Kataragama is yet to be done, although Obeyesekere has written briefly on the temple's growing popularity with Sinhalese Buddhists (Obeyesekere 1977, 1978, Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988). He has also written briefly on the importance of the malevolent goddess, Bathrakali, at Munnesvaram (Obeyesekere 1975, 1981, Gombrich & Obeyesekere *ibid*) and his argument is consistent in both instances. It will be closely criticised in this thesis. Otherwise, there is no work specifically on the nature of the interaction between Hinduism and Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

This is not to say, of course, that people have not commented on the Hindu influences in Sinhalese Buddhism; apart from Obeyesekere, many scholars have done so (e.g., Wirz 1954; Leach 1962; Ames 1963; Malalgoda 1970; Gombrich 1971, 1988;). But these discussions have generally been in terms of divisions in Buddhism such as between a Great and Little tradition (see Tambiah 1970; Kapferer 1983 who criticise this) or in terms of religious syncretism (especially Leach and Gombrich). No-one writes of the Buddhist influence on Hinduism or on the dynamic nature of the interaction. This is largely because the orientation of these studies has been from the Buddhist side; but also because the studies view Hinduism as the pristine influence on Buddhism. I am critical of this view.

4. I take this definition of structure from Lévi-Strauss (1963) and distinguish structure from form. Form is what we perceive, structure is what we analytically derive from our perception. This is not to say that analysis radically differs from everyday perception, rather it occupies a different level of consciousness from the forms of analysis attached to perception generally.

5. The question then arises about Dumont's choice of a Biblical image when South Asian examples are evident. I think the choice is deliberate because the Biblical image extends the scope of the concept beyond India to a more universal realm, to a realm that has generated conceptual categories such as of the individual that are of limited

worth for an understanding of Indian caste (Dumont 1980:4). That is, to a realm that has influenced European modernity and created much anthropology. Dumont, however, distinguishes modern Western European society from the non-modern societies usually studied by anthropologists. In his argument, the non-modern corresponds to the more general typification "traditional". Modern societies are those in which hierarchy has been sublimated by egalitarian individualism, those that place greater value on the parts over the whole. Importantly, sublimation is not negation. Where hierarchy seems missing it is latent, having become hidden in the course of history, in the passage to modernity. The first part of Dumont's Essays on Individualism traces this development in European thought. Dumont thus avoids the problems generally associated with the typifications traditional and modern, problems of reification. Instead, the non-modern and modern are abstractions that highlight dominant trends in ideas and ideologies. In the modern nationalist discourse in Sri Lanka, however, the traditional is a reification.

6. Although more specifically this is the stone temple, the point still holds. For stone is said to embody the pristine power. It is "the aboriginal substance of the linga" (Kramrisch 1946:153).

7. Actually, Dumont alludes to this quality when he describes temple ritual as a mixture of both vedic and tantric elements that combine as "the magical side of Brahmanism" (Dumont 1980:281). But he goes no further. I add that the vedic qualities assert the cosmogonic power of the first sacrifice while the tantric qualities assert the cosmogonic power of the union of the divine couple, Puruṣa and Prakṛti, or Śiva and Śakti. Temple ritual as it takes place in Munnesvaram is a combination of the vedic and tantric generating several simultaneous levels of symbol. Both systems operate together, combining to reveal the temple's embodiment of autochthonous cosmogonic power.

Power in the contemporary Tamil conception is "śakti", the active principle standing in hierarchical relationship with the passive principle, Śiva. It is also, female to male. I am not simply discussing the active when I speak of power, however, but the active/passive relationship embodied in the temple. And śakti is not political power, there are several Tamil terms for this such as saththu. I am talking about cosmic power, the power of the motion of the cosmos, of the movement of the planets, into which all people are thought to be inscribed. My reading of Dumont's concept of hierarchy and of the absolute distinction between hierarchy and power as absolute distinction-in-encompassment closely parallels recent critiques of Dumont (Raheja 1988a + b, Dirks 1987, Fuller 1989). However, these critiques attack Dumont for not recognising the distinction-in-encompassment, while I identify this to be the essence of his argument.

8. Thus, I completely disagree with Gombrich when he states that Sinhalese Buddhism adopts Hindu gods and not

Christian ones as "an accident of historical contiguity" (Gombrich 1971:49). My argument is that Hinduism and Buddhism have been intrinsic to their relationship. This is not to deny that special syncretic forms of Sri Lankan Christianity have developed (Stirrat 1977, 1981).

9. The point is taken up again in the discussion of the origin myths of the Munnesvaram temple in the next chapter. My argument follows a recent trend in scholarship, albeit one that several scholars have been arguing for a long time, particularly Cassirer (1946, 1953).

10. Daniel additionally describes the distinction in semiotic terms. Sinhalese objectivist history is a *dicisign*, a sign whose effects are actualised, a sign that seeks to particularise, concretise and instantiate (ibid). The Tamil propensity toward transcendental history is conversely a *rheme*, "not a sign of actuality but one of possibility", a sign that strives to synthesise and primordialise (ibid).

11. William Roseberry (1989) emphasises how different anthropologies construct different histories as they work from different concepts of culture. He is particularly critical of the American culture school evident in the work of Geertz and Sahlins for the manner by which culture is historically reified; treated as if it transcends historical process. Following Eric Wolf, Roseberry argues for a greater recognition of political economy. My historical analysis of Chilaw and Munnesvaram recognises such factors but does not seek to reduce the symbolic meaning of the temples to these factors.

## Chapter Two, Myths of Munnesvaram

1. Most of these accounts were given to me by local inhabitants when I visited various parts of the island. See also Arumugam (1982).

2. The myth is compiled from several informants in the Munnesvaram area including Munnesvaram temple priests, Munnesvaram villagers, the owners of the Manuweriya temple who claim to house the Indian liṅgam in their temple, and villagers of the Munnesvarampattuva.

3. This characteristic of the river is described by others to refer to the sexual union of Siva and the Mohini, the Enchantress form of Visnu, that takes place in the river and results in the birth of the regional guardian, Aiyanar. The union is said to be celebrated in the annual festival in the ritual bath (tīrtham). The Tamil name of the river, "Mayavan" being, I was told, a name of Viśnu.

4. This resonates with the myth of the lingatbavar discussed in Chapter 7.

5. Shukla (ibid) lists the materials for these impermanent liṅga other than sand. They include rice, both cooked and raw, river clay, cow dung, butter, rudraksa seeds, sandalwood paste, kurca grass, jaggery and flour. I do not know rudraksa seeds or kurca grass, but note that all of the other substances are pure.

6. Kapferer (1988:13) refers to leprosy (kūṣhta) as the king's disease and equates the body of the king with the state. Kirthi's disease is an expression of this same idea.

7. Some argue the number was sixty-three and others sixty-two. The latter is incorrect and the former is sixty-four when the central temple village is included. But precision is not the point, rather, the point is that the links are made by inhabitants of the pattuva (see Chapter 6).

8. I note again that these myths have been dealt with at length by Obeyesekere (1984a) who attributes the quality of historical charter to them. More recently, Kapferer has criticised this approach for its "reduction of myth to pragmatic utilitarianism" (Kapferer 1988:44). Kapferer is attempting to show how myth is made congruent with rationalities, including the analysts'. I pursue this discussion below.

9. Hegel, however, argues that in Hinduism there is no theory of history, no means of becoming conscious of the path of development of a Hindu Spirit (Hegel 1956:161-163). This lack of a sense of history is bound up in the absence of a Hindu state, because the abstract will as a component of freedom is missing from Hindu thought. About Buddhism, Hegel has less to say except that the Buddhist view is a concentrated articulation of the Hindu (ibid:167). Hence there is a concomitant absence of history in Buddhism. But these absences are relative to Hegel's specific theory of history as the progressive movement of self-revelation of Spirit. He analysed non-western philosophy as a failure in the same undertaking (Merleau-Ponty 1964:135) without attempting to see non-western philosophy in its own terms. Though I disagree with Hegel on the question of absence, I acknowledge his insightful recognition of difference. Even more interesting is the application of Hegel's argument to a Hindu/Buddhist contrast; since in Buddhism there is both a value placed on the state, and a value placed on history which bears similarities with Hegel's definition of history.

More recently the suggestion that Hindu Indian society lacks a conception of history has been related to its hereditary social stratification and lack of social mobility (Brown 1988). The argument relates a distinction between myth and history to one between open and closed social stratification and is unnecessarily dualist.

Chapter Three, An Historical Background to Chilaw and  
Munnesvaram

1. In the same census, there was no similar ambiguity for areas such as Jaffna where 90% called themselves "Heathens" the census term for Hindus, or Galle in the south where 84% called themselves "Budhoists" (Return of the Population of the Island of Ceylon, 1827). Thus the issue is not whether Hinduism is a European invention; but how the population identified themselves in the broader context of caste, religion and ethnic group.

Unfortunately, in the first census of 1816, the figures for the Chilaw-Puttalam District were indistinct and so excluded. Most of the thirty groups listed are also listed in 1827. Once again, Vellalars are listed first (Return of the Population of the Island of Ceylon 1816).

2. "Mother tongue" was defined only as the language of the race to which the father belonged, not the mother. In the case of Moors, Burghers and Eurasians, it was defined as the domestic language (ibid). Hence, the datum will not provide an accurate picture; but it does illuminate the situation of ethnic flux in the Chilaw area.

3. Note that I am not stating the necessity of a hydraulic state apparatus, the famous Wittfogel thesis, because I recognise the several critiques of this thesis with respect to Sri Lankan material (Leach 1959; Gunawardene 1971; Roberts 1984). Simply argued, the critique of Wittfogel's hydraulic state has been with respect to geographical scale, and the necessity of institutional controls given such scale. Such specialised institutions are absent in Sri Lanka, partly because the systems existed more as the aggregates of a number of systems rather than as a single system. Notwithstanding these critiques, irrigation requires a degree of organisation and, thus, political upheaval does threaten the practice.

4. Instances are recorded of attempts to reassert Sinhalese suzerainty shortly before the Portuguese arrived at Colombo at the beginning of the 16th century. For instance, the account of the Sinhalese Prince Taniya Valla's defeat of the Muslim "pirate" Kadirayana at Chilaw in the Rājāvaliya, points to Chilaw's having been more or less a Sinhalese frontier at this time. Taniya Valla, nephew of the king, rode against the Muslim from his seat at Madampe, a few kilometres south of Chilaw, with his brother Sakalakala. Defeating the Muslims, the brothers bore their prisoners triumphantly to Kotte. Taniya Valla is well known in the Chilaw area as Tanivalla Bandara, one of the guardian Bandara deities (see Winslow 1984a), whose temple stands at Madampe (Bell 1920). Sakalakala went on to become an extremely important king-maker figure at Kotte. The last Kotte king, Don Juan Dharmapala, was his nephew.

5. They successfully fought Kandyan troops at Chilaw in 1599, destroying Munnesvaram again in 1600. But they lost



their fort in a local rebellion in 1603. Chilaw was not firmly back in Portuguese hands until 1605 (Abeyasinghe 1966:32).

6. About sixty years earlier the fishing/trading caste, the Paravas, on the Coromandel coast of India, had converted as a group to Catholicism and so ensured Portuguese protection from the Muslims (Manickam 1983:57-74). In 1532, the Paravas were decimated at Tuticorin by mercenaries of the Muslims. Accepting Portuguese protection also freed the Paravas from existing tribute rights of local petty kings. Parava leaders are termed by Manickam Pattamgattis (ibid:66). De Azevado's proposals for pacifying the western littoral in 1608 included, with the establishment of ten forts along the coast, the settlement of the Paravas in Negombo and Chilaw (Abeyasinghe ibid:61-63, 1983). This never eventuated because the Paravas were mainly interested in chank fishing and the chank beds were larger and more accessible at Mannar. In the end, only a few families settled at Kalpitiya (Abeyasinghe 1966:63).

7. This was possible because Munnesvaram was one of only two places to not claim that their land records had been destroyed in the rebellions of 1603. The other was at Alutgama (Abeyasinghe ibid).

8. There were also a few Augustinians near Negombo, while the Dominicans fared badly getting the highly unstable Sabaragamuwa Province (Don Peter ibid:45-51).

9. The most important shrines for Catholics on the north-west coast are Madhu Church near Mannar, a shrine for Mary, and Talavilla, near Puttalam, where there is a big festival every year for Mary. The Catholic religious complex on the north-west coast, therefore, emphasises female deities, and this does not simply result from Jesuit influence. Indeed, I speculate that the Marian cult has been instrumental in the perseverance of Roman Catholicism in the area and probably island-wide.

10. The fifth temple is Ramesvaram. It is significant that all five temples are located at major ports. On the matter of temple destruction, some temples survived, according to their devotees, through miraculous intervention by the gods. Such is the case for the temples at Mandur and Kokkadicholai on the east coast (Arumugan 1982:52,75).

11. Even as late as 1920 there were attempts to claim ownership of land through bogus documents (see Bell 1920). Land-grabbing was one of the most serious aspects of British rule in the 19th century. Through their laws the British opened the interior, radically altering the nature of Kandyan society in a few years. Of particular relevance is the attempt to control temple lands. The Temple Lands Commission sat between 1856 and 1870, rejecting the vast majority of claims and declaring large tracts to be Crown Land (Wimilaratne 1984). It was in this climate that the Munnesvaram's lands were claimed, the petitioners being fortunate enough to be successful.

12. In this election only 35% of those eligible voted in Chilaw which the A.G.A. explains was due to the one-sidedness of the competition (ibid). In Puttalam where there was a 75% turn-out, the man elected, H.L. De Mel, did not even reside in the District but was eligible on account of his coconut holdings (ibid:18). Thus, the land-owning elite that emerged through the coconut boom were the ones who then won political office in the 20th century. Significantly they resided in Colombo merely using their links with Chilaw to gain political office. De Mel, like the De Soysas and De Silvas who also held large extents of coconut land, were Karāva capitalists from the south of Sri Lanka (Roberts ibid). The much closer link with Chilaw maintained by the Coreas is reflected in the election result.

13. Source: Census Reports 1953. " ~ " indicates the percentage is less than 1. It is important to note that women constituted only 16% of the total workforce in the Chilaw District and 24% nationally. Moreover, nationally, 1 in every 3 gainfully employed women worked on the tea estates. That is, the coconut industry did provide a lot of employment for women, although not on the scale of the tea industry.

Chilaw District was recombined with Puttalam in the late 1950's. I imagine this was because the condition that necessitated the initial split between Puttalam and Chilaw - the control of land sales - was no longer pressing. Unfortunately for this work, census material from 1963 onwards combines Chilaw with Puttalam, making it difficult to get exact figures for the small area I am describing. I would hazard, though, that the coconut industry has not declined, but shifted in its areas of production. Toddy tapping, which would be listed under "Fermented Beverages" has grown.

14. The Bishops' Pastoral Letter of June 10, 1984 deals expressly with the conflict and calls for impartiality by Catholics, both Sinhalese and Tamil. The Church administration's efforts, however, have not been successful (Stirrat 1984); but they have tended to obviate the organised antagonism between Sinhalese and Tamils.

15. In 1984, the territory claimed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as the traditional homeland of the Tamils stretched as far south as the Dedura River, a few kilometres north of Chilaw. Inhabitants of Chilaw generally regarded this claim as ridiculous, Sinhalese nationalists such as Gamini Iriyagolla (1985) as utterly outrageous.

#### Chapter Four, Revivalism in the British Period

1. I use the concept of hegemony from Gramsci (1986) who argued that dominant class ideology achieves its dominance from appearing to represent the natural order of society in both form and content. The distinction between form and

content is critical in the colonial instance because in the creation of neo-ruling ideologies, shifts in content did not exercise an immediate influence on their discursive form. This point is central to understanding the obvious parallels between both Hindu and Buddhist revivalism and the European colonial discourse, a discourse shaped by European Protestantism.

2. One could always see, I was told, such Jaffna Tamils changing their western dress for their Tamil costume on the Colombo-Jaffna train as it neared the peninsula. While such a practice may appear anachronistic, indicative of a brown skin and white mind, its ideology, like those of invented traditions elsewhere (see Cohn 1983), was intrinsic to the emerging indigenous elite's new position in the later colonial society.

3. At the same time, men strove to marry and to retire in Jaffna, not to make a fresh life in the place where they may have spent several years living and working. The father of my research assistant was such a fellow. He retired after more than thirty years in the Malaysian Postal Service. This factor makes better sense of the picture of Jaffna Tamil men changing their dress on the train. Daniel (1984) gives an excellent description of the sense of identity Tamils derive from the soil of their natal village when he describes a wealthy Madras-based businessman bringing his son to his village in Tamilnadu in order that his son learn his roots. This is not simply a pristine aspect of Tamil culture in Jaffna, rather something that has been shaped in modern circumstances.

4. Pfaffenberger (ibid) argues similarly. The revival obviously parallels what Srinivas describes as "Sanskritization" which he distinguishes from "Westernization" and treats as a different phenomenon of modern India; the former being practised more by low castes keen to improve their position, while the latter being the practice of the emerging elite (Srinivas 1967). But the espousal of Brahminic orthodoxy in the 'Navalar Revival' emerged in a Western market economy context and it was espoused by rich and poor within the highest non-Brahmin caste as they also engaged in the dominant westernised order. Hence, the two phenomena are not so distinct from each other.

5. Such a view could be described as a substantialising view of the nature of caste identity, a modern quality of the caste system according to Dumont (1980:222), though one grounded in caste logic (Inden 1976; Daniel 1984).

6. This use of the past accords with what Kapferer says more generally about the reification of culture in nationalism,

The customs, language, and traditions of the nation are often referred to as primordial, the root essence of nationalism and national identity, those that generate the feeling or sentiment of national unity and

legitimate national independence. This primordial value of culture is intrinsic to national religion. It is a value emergent in the historical circumstances of the growth of nationalism. The primordialism of the cultural in nationalism is the construction of nationalism itself and is not to be regarded as independent of nationalism. (Kapferer 1988:1)

Kapferer is critical of the idea of invented tradition argued by Hobsbawm and others (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) because all traditions are invented and reinvented as a function of their engagement in the world. Nationalism makes for a specific kind of engagement, a specific kind of reinvention (Kapferer *ibid*:209-211).

7. It is important to note that this same issue, under the different guise of ethnic conflict rather than caste conflict, has fuelled the bloody fight raging in Sri Lanka today. The leader of the largest militant group, the Tamil Tigers, a non-Vellalar, began his campaign in the 1970's after positive discrimination over university entrance for disadvantaged Sinhalese meant that he failed to get a place. Pfaffenberger (*ibid*:94) argues that the ethnic conflict has eroded many of these caste tensions, collapsing Vellalar suzerainty. Many Jaffna expatriots are taking advantage of depressed land values; but while this may reduce Vellalar dominance, caste tensions are still pronounced.

8. Kapferer argues similarly when he describes the assertion of a "pure Buddhism" as an attack on tradition similar to the rationalist attacks of the colonial authorities. Such an attack is described by Kapferer as "a metaphor of Sinhalese middle class power vis a vis other Sinhalese in the colonial formation of Sri Lanka" (*ibid*:24).

9. Indeed, Batticaloa is regarded as a locus of magic and sorcery. A popular Jaffna view is that Batticaloa women employ magic to seduce eligible Jaffna men and force them to marry into matrilineal uxori-local Batticaloa Tamil society.

10. A common Sinhalese explanation given for non-Buddhist elements of folk Buddhism was the number of Hindu kings and especially queens who reigned in Kandy as the Nayakkar dynasty. This dynasty gained the throne through a Nayakkar princess who married the Sinhalese king. Her brother acceded after the king's death. Other Sinhalese kings who had married Indian princesses allowed them to maintain their Hinduism. Thus women are closely associated with the corruption of Buddhism. This point is significant when one considers that the important deities at Munnesvaram are female.

11. But this explanation is unsatisfactory, especially given Gombrich's ecological explanation for Buddhism's appeal. He argues that the new cities built in warmer climates created a higher morbidity rate and hence a

greater awareness of suffering (ibid:58). Admittedly, and thankfully, he does not make this as a "total explanation for the axiom that life is suffering, but merely as a possible contributory cause," (ibid).

Chapter Five, The Munnesvaram Priests, Brahmin  
and Non-Brahmin

1. These are especially, Appadurai 1981, Fuller 1984, Whitaker 1986, Dirks 1987 and Good 1989. Court cases not only provide the anthropologist with accessible documentary evidence, they reveal important ideas that can be related to observed temple practices. What is striking about every case reported elsewhere is the particularity of that case. Munnesvaram is no exception, it does not fit any of the other cases, largely because the conflict was between Tamil Hindu Brahmins and Sinhalese Buddhist villagers.
2. Dirks (ibid) makes this argument most clearly and sees important comparisons between colonial and post-colonial hegemony. He argues for a critical reading of historical sources to establish a proper ethno-history.
3. It is not surprising that some court officials, who needed to be experts in determining the authenticity of these documents, were also excellent classical scholars. Simon Casie Chetty worked in Chilaw in the middle of the 19th century (Nataraja 1952:269). The eminent archaeologist H.C.P. Bell officiated in Chilaw Court in the early 20th century.
4. I have not seen the documents related to this case and my information comes from the subsequent case between the priests and villagers decided on appeal in 1925.
5. Sarma cites documents pertaining to the determination of land tax on temple lands in 1804 which refer to the temple "padre" (Sarma 1968:59). The British representative in Chilaw argues for a reduction of tax because many of the lands are not cultivated due to the small population. The correspondence also includes mention of a translation of the inscription recording Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's temple endowment some fifty years earlier. Sarma is not listed in the genealogy (Diagram 1), but he is the elder brother of Seeniswamy (34).
6. It is worth noting that Parakramabahu VI summoned the Munnesvaram Brahmin and endowed the temple with lands previously held by the temple as well as additional lands. Parakramabahu VI was the last Sri Lankan king to unite the whole island under his rule from Kotte. The endowment of lands previously held, suggests either that the temple had lost these lands sometime before Parakramabahu established island-wide suzerainty, or that Parakramabahu established his control and then validated the existing order in terms of his authority. His endowment crystallises his newly established control, something indicative of the political

nature of temple endowments by the Sri Lankan state. The decrees are meant to last forever, "while the sun and moon exist", but this statement should more correctly be interpreted as the duration of the kingship. In the period of British rule, however, the area of traditional law meant that authentic documents were permanent.

7. I imagine that Kumaraswamy, as the expert on documents, "proficient in all sciences amongst them", talked his way into the position of Sinnetamby's successor. This is important for the court case of 1925.

8. The court report that has this information contains several typing errors on dates. It states that Muttu Aiyar was dismissed in 1909 and reinstated in 1902 or 1903. Elsewhere it lists the relevant legislation as dated 1907 when it should be 1917.

9. Actually I was informed that the villagers also were sponsored by another group of Indian traders also living in Colombo. Thus the dispute, at one level a dispute between Munnesvaram priests and villagers, was at another level a competitive ground for two separate groups of Chettiars ostensibly having no claim to involvement with Munnesvaram temple. In this light, we can see how the dispute operated at another level, one influenced by political developments outside. Involving as it did competing trading families, the 1925 case continues the relation between the temple and trade which I argue in Chapter 3 to have been instrumental in shaping Munnesvaram's history as a Sri Lankan Śiva temple located at a coastal port. This link between Munnesvaram and trade is discussed from another perspective in Chapter 11.

10. Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe's grant was also evidence for this case along with the stone inscription detailing Parakramabahu VI's endowment. The translation of the 18th century copperplate reads as follows,

By the high and mighty Ruler of the world who reign the eight regions and take tributes to the Kings of Angam, Kalingam, Maradam, Mallayalam and from the Kings of the Fifty Six Kingdoms were granted as alms to the pagoda of Monasparar situated at Moonasaram, the landed property which belongs to the Revenue of the said mighty King as follows:

The Paddy fields called	Carrewetty four	ammonams
" " "	Illooppadeniya six	"
" " "	Peramanantalooway two	"
" " "	Cannengatty three	"
" " "	Madattuvelly one and a half	"
" " "	Paueadee two	"
" " "	Moodaliar Taloovay one and a half	"
" " "	Perapancully Nallanayakan	
	Welymaravan Welli Sawarana	"
	two	

"	"	"	"	Pallawally four	"
"	"	"	"	Collootalooway four	"
"	"	"	"	Ollytalooway two	"

Total Ammonams thirty two together with there belonging Jungles, lands, hills and ditches in order to endure the Charity of Moonesprar till the sun and moon, Thus by order of the King in this copper plate Certificate granted on Sunday the 14th August 1675 in the year Sreemoogam.

Sgd. G. Casie Chetty, (Malabar Translator)

(Cited in Sarma 1968:61)

11. To regard the purity of the caste as the instrumental factor is, however, misleading when seen in the light of the Brahmins' efforts to protect their own family's control of the temple. In particular, the juggling of concepts about the priest married to a non-Brahmin, reveals that caste purity for the Munnesvaram priests is bound inextricably with temple control. Somaswamy's marriage to a Sinhalese Catholic does not threaten the family's hold on Munnesvaram. The issue is problematic for them, but obviously not earth-shattering, or better, temple-shattering. This agrees with Good's (1989:257) conclusion about the differences between Kalugumalai and Madurai priests' articulation of arguments about legitimacy. There is no strict ideology rather an ideological field from which arguments are constructed.

12. The mediatory abilities of the Brahmin have been stressed by indologists and anthropologists (see especially Heesterman 1985, Fuller 1984). The mediated poles can be characterised as renunciation and non-renunciation, or renouncer and householder, and they are determined in the former indological case from the Sanskrit texts and in the latter anthropological case from the Madurai Minakṣi temple. I am describing a situation of Brahmins in a non-Hindu context and, moreover, one where the realm of renunciation is firmly inhabited by the dominant Buddhist order. Ratnakailasanathan's "Brahmin Internationalism" is a renunciation of a different kind. What is interesting is that nevertheless it is mediatory. It demonstrates a peculiar instance of the way Hinduism derives its coherence in relation to renunciation, peculiar for the kinds of historical contingency that have shaped the modern temple.

In Fuller's analysis, the triad of householder/priest/renouncer is mirrored by the triadic exchange relationship between the king, the priest and the deity. This exchange relationship is fundamental to the temple and thus the nature of the temple in Fuller's view accords with Appadurai's (1981:25) definition of the temple as a centre for the redistribution of goods and honours. The triad is more precisely a mediated dyad of king and god, of the temporal and sacred orders. The Munnesvaram Brahmins would fully endorse such a view, but their endorsement is a product of historical contingencies which have brought about their control of the temple. Furthermore, the

Munnesvaram Brahmins mediate between a Hindu and a Buddhist order.

13. Udappu village was studied by Tanaka (1986). I am unsure of the exact relationship between these priests. Udappu also has temples for Aiyandar, Bathrakali and Thiropathi. Its annual Thiropathi temple festival is well known for its firewalking.

14. This establishes an interesting contrast between the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali priests, since the former group is generally S.L.F.P. supporting, and the latter U.N.P. This is clearly demonstrated by the blue (S.L.F.P.) walls of some of the Munnesvaram priests' housing and the green (U.N.P.) walls of the Bathrakali temple office. It would be unwise to emphasise this contrast, however, because the political affiliations of each group are conditioned by specific factors. Importantly, the previous Bathrakali temple administration supported the S.L.F.P. The house inhabited by Letchuraman's uncle's widow is blue and her collection of blue saris indicates her political leanings and those of her dead husband.

15. This makes for another contrast between the Brahmins and the Bathrakali temple priests, because the Bathrakali priests openly admit to their lack of knowledge while the Brahmins were always reluctant to make such admissions. Where the Bathrakali priest would shrug his shoulders, the Brahmin would say that my line of questioning was irrelevant. Often the Bathrakali priest would suggest that I ask the Brahmin, but never did Brahmin make a similar suggestion that I ask one of the Kali priests.

#### Chapter Six, The Structure of Temple Patronage

1. Pattu comprised the Korale. Munnesvarampattuva was part of the Pitigal Korale, one the seven (hath) korale after which the area, which roughly corresponds to the modern Northwest Province, was named.

2. Ryan's argument is persuasive for Dumont's position that Sinhalese caste is caste in name only (Dumont 1980:215-216). The centrality of the king, his ability to create caste through the exercise of power, denies a truly religious hierarchy. But the Sinhalese king and the state he embodies, is both status and power. Dirks argues similarly for the Hindu Pudukkottai king and rejects Dumont's assertion that the king is always power next to the Brahmin who commands purity/status (Dirks *ibid*:304). Hence, the rejection of the Sinhalese system can be criticised with detailed Tamil data. The difference between the Sinhalese king and the Pudukkottai king is that the former derives his encompassing position with respect to the absolute position of the Buddha, the latter does not. Significantly, Brahmins were often present in this Sinhalese order in temples like Munnesvaram. There are differences between the Hindu and Buddhist systems, but



hierarchy is not negated in the latter (see Chapter 1). For these and other reasons, it is therefore incorrect to align the Sinhalese system too closely to a European model of feudalism (Roberts 1984) and hence my use of inverted commas.

3. Winslow describes this as an "onomastic discourse" with etymologies that

point to legitimising sources: to fields, to founders, to recognition by kings and officials, to attention from monks, to caste, all the while identifying a particular village in a particular locale. (Winslow 1984b:86)

Winslow identifies the discourse to belong especially to the late Kandyan political system. The discourse continually implies a history, the village becomes such when a king passes through it, or a monk preaches at it. Tamil villages, on the other hand, are not named with such a sense of historical specificity.

4. Although the Munnesvaram priests expressly reject the association of the villages with the Nayanar, the central statues in the shrine are Aiyandar and Mariamman. Aiyandar is the guardian deity of the area, especially the pattuva, having temples in every village; while the goddess Mariamman, associated by most Sinhalese Buddhists with the Pattini, can be found in nearly all of these village temples. The priests explain that the statues are kept in the Nayanar shrine only because of a lack of space; so rejecting the interpretation they have made possible.

5. That is, the sixty-three Saints with Śiva and the sixty-three villages with the temple. I was told that there are only sixty-three Bandaras, while Winslow records sixty-seven and I suggest that the sixty-three Bandaras find their unity with the state or with Viśnu, the protector of the state and deity with whom Buddhist guardians like the Bandaras are linked. The discrepancies and errors in the links made by informants, both mine and Winslow's, are unimportant. What is important is that the interpretive links are made and that they establish cosmo-political totalities centring on the Munnesvaram temple.

6. Eighteen is also the number of diseases of the Sanni demons (Kapferer 1983:123). Exorcism masks of these demons present each one as part of a single larger mask; each disease is an aspect of an overarching totality.

7. The following list is exemplary. It is a list of information given by three informants about some of the pattuva villages. Informant A is from Weerapandiya, B from Munnesvaram village, and C from Maradankulam village. "A" identifies himself as of the Hewesi (Drummer) caste, "B" as of the Goyigama (Sinhalese Cultivator) caste, and "C" as of the Vellalar (Tamil Cultivator) caste.

<u>Village</u>	<u>Caste</u> *
Weerapandiya	A. <u>Hewesi</u> B. " C. "
Munnesvaram	A. No particular caste other than Brahmin and <u>Pandāram</u> priests B. <u>Badahāla</u> but not the informant C. Unsure
Maradankulam	A. <u>Pandāram</u> B. <u>Batqam</u> C. <u>Vellalar</u>
Olidaluwa	A. <u>Oli</u> B. " C. "
Thimilla	A. Unsure B. " C. <u>Thimilla</u>
Kakkapaliya	A. Unsure B. Conch Blowers ( <u>Goyigama</u> ) C. Conch Blowers
Karawita	A. <u>Navandanna</u> B. <u>Agampadia</u> C. <u>Batqam</u>
Inigodawila	A. Unsure B. <u>Durāva</u> C. <u>Vahumpara</u>

* <u>Caste</u>	<u>Description</u>
	"Sinh" = Sinhalese "Tm" = Tamil
<u>Hewesi</u>	Drummer (Exorcist), also called <u>Beravā</u> (Sinh)
<u>Pandāram</u>	Temple servant (Tm)
<u>Vellalar</u>	Cultivator (Tm)
<u>Batqam</u>	Menial, palanquin bearer, firewood collector, pejoratively called <u>Padu</u> (Sinh)
<u>Badahāla</u>	Potter (Sinh)
<u>Oli</u>	Astrologer, temple servant (Sinh)
<u>Thimilla</u>	Ferryman (Tm)
<u>Goyigama</u>	Cultivator (Sinh)
<u>Navandanna</u>	Smith (Sinh)
<u>Agampadia</u>	Cinnamon peeler; may be a subcaste, but may also be a

<u>Durāva</u> <u>Vahumpara</u>	<u>Vellalar</u> subcaste. More common to the North Central Province (Ryan 1953:140) Toddy tapper (Sinh) Jaggery maker "
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Each informant understands that a caste order did exist but clearly their knowledge of it is vague. Informants B and C both stated their own caste as high although "B" said that "C's" was low. Moreover, he explained that he was an immigrant to Munnesvaram village and therefore not a (Badahāla) Potter like the original villagers. The same response was given by Olidaluwa informants that they were not the original Oli inhabitants. Only the low caste Hewesi of Weerapandiya were ever consistent about their own caste; "A" is one of these.

8. The latter two informants (B & C) who supplied the information in Note 7 both have Goyigama names, even though "C" calls himself a Vellalar. Name changing has been reported elsewhere (Kapferer 1983:40; Yalman *ibid*). Stirrat (1974:147-149) reports the same situation among fishermen on the seaside of Chilaw lagoon, noting that the person with the Sinhalese name may be Tamil. In other words the fluid caste identity is matched by a fluid ethnic identity. This is evident from the shift between 1827, when the majority claimed to be Vellalar, and currently when they claim to be Goyigama.

9. I collected much data from this village in conjunction with my research at Munnesvaram, particularly on domestic ritual, the fluid nature of village ethnicity, and the village history with respect to the decline of paddy cultivation and the concomitant rise of toddy-tapping, as well as the history of temple constructions. This material will be presented elsewhere.

10. I noted in the previous chapter that the construction of these schools was initiated by Jaffna Tamil professionals who had an extensive involvement with Munnesvaram and its pilgrim resthouses. There is no controversy about the other two villages. One is the Munnesvaram village whose Tamil school is attended by the children of the priests and by the Tamil families who have settled in Munnesvaram. The other is the large fishing village of Udappu, understood by many to have been settled by the soldiers of the famous Tamil king Elara. Udappu is the southernmost non-Catholic Tamil village on the Sri Lankan west coast (Tanaka 1986).

11. The nature of this involvement is discussed in Chapter 12. The village is the one that holds the Coconut Game (Porapol) for the Pattini immediately prior to the festival commencing. Paradoxically, such games for the Pattini are largely part of Sinhalese Buddhist practice (Obeyesekere 1984). The village also celebrates the exclusively Hindu festival of Navaratri at the village school with offerings made to photos of Arumugu Navalar and the prominent nationalist, Ponnambalam Ramanathan. (Chapter 10).

12. I discovered him and his family when my random survey of 25% of the village houses brought me to his door. None of my informants ever spoke of him before this. The man lives with his wife and children in a flimsy hut on a corner of the land given to the daughter's father when he settled. Toddy-tapping has been the family's salvation because it is labour a man can do alone, unlike paddy cultivation.

13. The event was sponsored by the powerful villager who extended the Tamil identity of the village. It is a highly prestigious "honor" (Dirks *ibid*:289) to sponsor such an event.

14. In 1985, the sponsors were informed that the Hewesi had asked for a pay increase and this had been agreed to. In 1986, Karthikkeyan told the sponsors that the evening processions would be one hour earlier and that sponsors would no longer be allowed to sleep inside the temple premises after the evening procession. Both decisions were inspired to counteract the drunken rowdiness expressed by several villages on the night of their sponsorship. This factor, however, was not mentioned as several of culprits were present. Significantly, the content of both the '85 and '86 meetings related to the village involvement.

15. Each person interviewed was asked a range of questions about their occupation, religion, residence, age, reasons for coming and which temples they attended. Every time my assistant and I went to the temple we asked some of the people present these questions. The figures listed are for the year and, though they do not constitute precisely a random sample, they do reflect the social composition of the patronage in 1985-6. At various times the composition of the patronage changed, such as during the Navaratri festival which had virtually no Sinhalese patronage. The significance of such periods of non-uniformity is discussed in Chapter 10.

16. It is true that a large number of the Buddhists who come to Munnesvaram, travel there in order to make offerings at the Bathrakali temple and while they are there make offerings at the Munnesvaram temple. But this is not simply a matter of convenient coincidence, rather an aspect of the complex relationship that exists between the goddesses of each temple and their worship. Munnesvaram is different from the other Kali temple studied by Obeyesekere, the Modera temple in Colombo that I visited on a few occasions. There the Kali shrine stands outside a Hindu Pillaiyar temple. Visitors to the Kali shrine do not also attend the Pillaiyar temple. My impression is that Obeyesekere's research at Munnesvaram, done over a two month period at the Kali temple by two assistants during 1969, neglected the main Munnesvaram temple, because he makes no mention in any of his work of the importance of the Munnesvaram goddess, Ambal. Instead he writes,

The temple for Munnesvaram, a form of Śiva, is highly venerated by the Hindus of Sri Lanka, but Sinhala

Buddhists are more drawn to the Kali temple located outside the sacred premises and controlled by non-Brahmin priests (pūsārī, sāmī). (Gombrich & Obeyesekere *ibid*:140)

This is especially surprising for his work on the goddess Pattini (1984a) because many Sinhalese Buddhists believe she is the Munnesvaram goddess.

17. The Bathrakali temple priests state that in the last few years before the escalation of ethnic violence, the number of Tamils coming to the temple had diminished. With the riots of 1983 and the subsequent flight by many Tamils from Colombo to Jaffna, from where travel became very difficult, this declining number had virtually ground to zero. This decrease affected the Munnesvaram temple more than the Bathrakali temple because many Tamils attend Munnesvaram exclusively.

18. It follows, then, that the modern capitalist order and its attendant class processes derive a special expression in Sri Lanka and, thus, cannot be reduced to a European model in the same way that the pre-colonial social order was not "feudal" in the manner of European feudalism.

#### Chapter Seven, The Hindu Temple and Munnesvaram Temple

1. On histories of political relations, see (Stein ed. 1978; Stein 1980; Appadurai 1981; Appadurai & Breckenridge 1976; Whitaker 1984, 1986; Dirks 1987). On temple mythology, the major work is Shulman's (1980), while on the temple priests, see Fuller (1984, 1985, 1988). Festivals have been studied by a number of authors, notably the contributors to the volumes edited by Welbon & Yocum (1982) and Waghorne & Cutler (1985), the latter volume focusing especially on Hindu divinity as it is constituted in statues.

2. Clearly the myth's complexity opens it to a more systematic analysis than what is pursued here. For example, it raises the issue of the relationship between the autochthonous Vāddahs and the Tamils, a relationship that is explicit in the origin myths of several east coast temples (see Whitaker 1986). That the patron is a trader and that he has leprosy also merit analysis. However, these complexities will not be pursued here. I collected the myth at Verugal in August and September 1984, a version is also cited by Arumugam (1982:70).

3. The importance of place is described by Shulman who sees it as an essential characteristic of Tamil Hindu temples, distinguishing them from the northern sacrificial altars. The Vedic altar is the world's centre but, unlike the Tamil temple, it is not tied to specific localities (1980:47). Below I discuss Shulman's argument further (see note 8). Shulman also cites a version of the sand liṅgam myth from Irameccuram (*ibid*:50-51). In this version, the

liṅgam is fashioned by the cthonic goddess, a feature Shulman sees as central to the locatedness of Tamil conceptions of temples.

4. See also Tucci who distinguishes the yantram from the mandala on the grounds of the yantram having no image of a divinity other than the geometrical design. The principles are the same, the former is the "quintessential reduction" of the idea of the latter (Tucci 1961:47).
5. There are differences between temples in the north and south of India, differences analysed by Kramrisch as variations on the same theme of the Vāstupurusamandala. Volwahren states that the fundamental mandala in the south is the sthandīlamandala, where Brahma is in the centre, the gods in a concentric ring around him, humans and terrestrial phenomena around this, and lower order demons and spirits at a further remove (Volwahren 1969:56). The two mandala are the same, sthandīlam is the site of sacrifice (Diehl 1956:56). Munnesvaram temple, and all the other Hindu temples I visited in Sri Lanka were built on the concept of the body of Purusa, not necessarily the mandala. That is, in the popular Hindu view, the temple is the reclining body of Puruṣa. The more sophisticated view divides the temple structure according to the square mandala that is also said to contain Puruṣa. I apply Kramrisch's interpretations of the Hindu temple because they accord with my own understanding of temples in Sri Lanka, one that emerged through lengthy observations and discussions with temple priests. However, she says the body of Vāstu lies face down (ibid:76) and that his head is in the east (ibid:79). Śaivite temples are facing up with, as a rule, the feet in the east.
6. As the head it is also the mind or consciousness. The world is generated from here and so it follows that mind and body are not radically separate. I note this as a further caution against the applicability of Western dualisms in a hierarchical context.
7. Movement into the temple through the feet and up the body corresponds to the movement of energy (kundalini) through the body to the 3rd eye. Meditation and yoga elaborate this idea with the concept of the six cakra. Practitioners of these arts are rare in Sri Lanka; but the concepts are recognised by temple priests. The concepts directly equate the human body, and the energy of consciousness with the macrocosmic energies of world creation.
8. Shulman emphasises the particularity of the Tamil Hindu temple: "Each shrine sees itself as the only center of the universe, the one spot that is directly linked to heaven and the nether world:..." (Shulman ibid:55, emphasis added). I understand that this is possible through the part/whole logic of hierarchy that makes the temple both the centre as a replication and a centre by extension. Eliade sees it as an essential quality of the sacred (hierophany),

The multiplicity, or even the infinity, of centers of the world raises no difficulty for religious thought. For it is not a matter of geometrical space, but of an existential and sacred space that has an entirely different structure, that admits of an infinite number of breaks and hence is capable of an infinite number of communications with the transcendent. (Eliade *ibid*:56).

The relationship of the Muslim and of the local mosque to the Mecca Kaaba, and of the Roman Catholic church to the Vatican St Peter's, suggests that in certain religions, an absolute centre is postulated. That is, Eliade's comments about the sacred require qualification. Nonetheless, for the Hindu case they are apposite.

9. The royal characteristic of Munnesvaram is expressed in areas other than its design. In 1985, the Minister of Hindu Affairs, Rajadurai, organised the performance of an Aśva Mēdham Yāgam ritual, an elaborate horse sacrifice ritual recorded in the Mahābharata, a ritual for the well being of the nation. The Munnesvaram priests were asked to stage it at Munnesvaram with the officiants (and the horse) being brought from India. They said to me that, as the only pītham temple in Sri Lanka, Munnesvaram was the only temple where such a rite could be held. However, they did not want to be involved and so declined saying that such a rite could only be held in the capital. The ritual was held in Colombo, after many difficulties not least of which being the outrage that the horse was not quarantined and that people thought it would be sacrificed. In fact, a pumpkin was sacrificed. The point of all this is that the royal links Munnesvaram temple has are relevant in the priests' eyes to the modern Sri Lankan state which is not seen as radically different to the traditional monarchic state.

10. Clothey (1982:157) sees the division of the cosmic rhythm into segments as microcosmic instantiations of this rhythm. Each segment obeys the logic of the rhythm and, therefore, surface contradictions are resolved in the principles of the encompassing unity. See also Merrey (1982).

11. In the previous chapter, the importance of the Hewesi exclusion from the central temple structure was noted for its relation to the Brahmins' access to the inner sanctum. This creates a ritual caste hierarchy into which the pattuva villagers can place themselves. The contemporary importance of temple entry distinctions, based on this model of exclusive areas, was an feature stressed in Hindu revivalism (see Chapter 4).

12. This is the essence of Dumont's argument in Homo Hierarchicus. Pfaffenberger (1982) who worked in Jaffna, erroneously argues that the paradox of the Vellalars' Śudra status is the principle motivation underlying their contemporary religious practices which are highly orthodox and which place great emphasis on ritual purity and especially female and domestic purity. However, this paradox is Pfaffenberger's construction. Varna are

referents of the hierarchically ordered world of the caste system, not conscious expressions of that system. Pfaffenberger's work both ignores the complexity of 19th century Hindu revivalism in Jaffna, and impoverishes Jaffna religious sentiment when in it he ascribes status as the sole concern of revivalist Brahmanic orthodoxy. More recent research (Pfaffenberger 1990) corrects this perspective.

13. It is noteworthy that carved statues are distinguished as being fully carved (chitram) or in half-relief (chitrardha) and that chitram statues are called "vyakta or manifest" (Gopinatha Rao *ibid*:18). Hence, carving is the act of bringing into being. In Shukla's terms, the architectural motif of the entire temple represents the formed and formless (sakara and nirakara) aspects of divinity (*ibid*:34). See also Forman (1985:158).

14. I am uncertain about the final definition of the Shiva-Hara as The Reabsorber. At Munnesvaram, the lingatbavar is defined as The Giver of Boons. The statue is worshipped especially by people wishing to have children.

15. Daniel (1984) uses the same term in his work on aspects of signification in Tamil culture and the construction of personhood. He connects the village, particularly the village earth, with the substantial being of the villager. This is extended to the village house, male/female relations and ultimately the individual spirit of the person as it is born of the union of substances. The argument follows the work of, among others, Inden (1976) but advances the substance/code argument through an analysis of the iconic movement between categories in terms of Peirce's semiotics. I have presented the symbolic levels of the temple as fluidly interrelated; but I have done so through the part/whole logic of hierarchy and with less attention to semiotics per se. For one thing, Daniel is very precise about the use of the terms sign and symbol. My position is less precise about the universal nature of signs but more precise about the nature of Hindu symbolism. The symbolism I describe operates fluidly as an internal quality of the hierarchical world in which it resides. This quality does not necessarily reside in Peircean semiotics, which is to say that sign systems are not necessarily universal. Daniel's exposition of the semiotic leads to the conclusion that all sign systems function in this way. I agree with Daniel for stressing the importance of the interpretant in the creation of signs. He makes the point that sign systems are dynamically constituted in the world. Relating the temple symbolism to hierarchy similarly essays this point. However, in both the dyadic sign/object structure of semiology and the triadic sign/object/interpretant structure of semiotics (the semiology/semiotics distinction is Daniel's), there is always a separation between sign and object. My position on the simultaneity of symbolic levels accords with Gonda's observation about Vedic symbolism:

The ancients did not conceive symbols as signifying, yet separate from, the concepts and powers with which they



are connected. They allowed the symbol and what it signifies to coalesce so that the one may stand for the other. This explains why they were convinced of the possibility of comprehending, arranging, regulating and influencing the facts and provinces of reality by means of the symbols representing these.... Numbers, for instance, provide the key for controlling all entities united in a complex. (Gonda 1980:28-29)

16. The Makara or Kīrttimūkha (Face of Glory) is understood to incorporate three faces: Kāla, Rahu the Dragon's Head and the Lion (Kramrisch *ibid*:326). Time and Rahu, who swallows the sun in the eclipse, are devourers; but the Lion, according to Kramrisch, represents the Supreme Spirit, Brahma, going out into the world (*ibid*:328). Kramrisch, therefore, sees the Kīrttimukha as a complete symbol in itself, whereas I emphasise its consuming quality in the overall context of the temple.

17. Brouwer was told by craftsmen that there should actually be nine metals that relate to the nine planets, nine jewels, the nine grains, the nine principal deities and the nine śakti. Each collection of nine represents the universe (brahmanda) (*ibid*). The importance of this conception for the use of metals in the statues is that each statue is comprised of every aspect of metal and thus is a totality. This facilitates the presence of a deity in the statue.

18. The striking exception to this is the Ambal statue at Munnesvaram. This metal statue is the principal object of worship at the temple, in both festival and non-festival periods. I shall discuss this more fully below.

19. I am told that archivists have recently discovered that the Dubois manuscript was not written by him in the early 19th century, but some forty years before.

For a discussion of the nityapūjā see Diehl (1956:95 - 158).

20. They liken the meaning to the meditative condition brought about through yoga, a condition in which time is absent.

21. The year is also divided into segments considered particularly important for a deity. This structures the timing of festivals. I explore this broader dimension of the annual cycle in later chapters.

22. For Dubois, this is a separate rite called ārti or āratti which Beauchamp translates as trouble, misfortune or pain (Dubois & Beauchamp *ibid*:148-149). Winslow's English-Tamil Dictionary translates none of these words in this way. The Munnesvaram priests explicitly call the act "alaththi" and translate it as waving or rocking. The dictionary gives the meaning of alaththi as an "offering wave" from alaththibali and arathibali. The stem is the verb to wave, "alattu". Diehl (1956:63) also calls it

āratti, relating it to the same Sanskrit root as alattu, meaning waving. But āratti is the specific word for the action of lamp waving to image or person (ibid). Hence, Beauchamp is guilty of mistranslation. More importantly, following Diehl, so am I, or at least, so is the priest who explained it. I shall, however, persevere with the term, but ask the reader to note that it is also called "āratti".

23. "108" is one of the numbers representing the totality, most of them multiples of nine. Another oil lamp, built on the body of a tortoise and used in the full pūjā, has twenty-seven tapers.

24. In Chapter 10, I discuss the complete pūjā as it is performed at the end of the Navaratri festival, and Chapter 12, the pūjā at the end of the Adi Utsavam evening procession. The interpretation of the camphor burning without residue emerges most clearly in the Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy, the most important philosophical school in contemporary Tamil Śaivite Hinduism.

25. I was informed of this by the anthropologist Serena Tennekoon who happened to be visiting Munnesvaram on the day of the funeral.

This quality of the temple is illustrated by another incident I observed when one of the patrons of the October Navaratri festival, a very old man, fell down and cracked his head on the temple's inner road. The chief priest who was standing nearby when it happened, quickly had the dazed and bleeding man carried out of the temple before anything was done to help him. The first thought was for the temple, the man's condition was second to this.

26. For instance, alaththi is done to a newlywed couple on their homecoming. It is done to them both as a single entity with camphor burning on a metal tray. The incorporative action is revealed in this instance also.

### Chapter Eight, A Closer Examination of the Temples

1. This argument of course is the other side of the renovations argument by which certain villagers claim the Brahmins maintain their control over the temple (see Chapter 6). Thus, for one side Munnesvaram's unfinished nature is part of an ongoing deception while for the other side it is intrinsic to Munnesvaram's Hindu identity. Each argument hints at a distinct temporal conception that I have noted in several instances to be a distinguishing mark between Hindu and Buddhist world views.

2. Most of my informants on this issue are temple priests. Additionally, a descendant of the Indian artisans who did the work in the 1870's and lives in the Munnesvaram Pillaiyar temple, discussed the renovations, but he knew little. The Pillaiyar temple was initially the living quarters of the artisans. Then it became the first pilgrims' resthouse (mādam) and later the artisans'

descendents made it into a private temple. In 1985, the Munnesvaram priests successfully litigated against this use of the mādam which they claimed to be Munnesvaram temple property. Prior to the dispute, the mādam trust sponsored the Hunting Festival in the Adi Festival.

3. One informant, a doctor, explained to me that Nadesar, or Nadaraja, dances the dance of life and death. Therefore, he said, Nadesar rightly belongs in the position of Purusa's heart. He is the very pulse of the world.

4. Appadurai's admittedly condensed definition of a South Indian temple has three aspects.

1. a sacred space which is a royal abode for a deity who is seen to be a "paradigmatic sovereign".
2. a process of redistribution, or a "continuous flow of transactions" between people through deities.
3. a symbol of "key South Indian ideas concerning authority, exchange, and worship" as well as an arena for the articulation of social relations developing in the broader social context (ibid:18).

I do not dispute any of these aspects, since they are all present at Munnesvaram. I simply find them too vague to be of much use.

5. Indeed, it is necessary to be cautious about concepts like the reciprocal model in the Hindu context (see Parry 1986).

6. The use of metal figures for vows is also a common Tamil Hindu practice. The figures represent a number of things: cars, motorbikes, houses, animals, bodies and parts of the body. Often the vow-maker has the figure made in silver by a smith and it is retained by the temple or sold back to smiths for its metal. Figures retained by the temple enable the vow-maker to purchase immediately an appropriate one following a priestly consultation. The figures indicate the close relation between offerings and sacrifice. The relevant part is given to the deity and so becomes ordered in the constitution of the deity. The metal of the figure realises the essence of the thing being offered.

7. Obeyesekere has made a powerful insight when he sees the development of a righteous and, above all, rational outlook in Sinhalese Buddhist deities. Unfortunately, he applies his interpretation to the history of deity cults. As a deity assists the devotee, the deity nears oblivion and so is unable to directly act in the world. Vows are not fulfilled, or rather, vows are not made because the very popularity of a deity indicates that he or she is already too remote to be of any help. The problem with this perspective is that it depicts Sinhalese Buddhism rather like Kapitza's crocodile of science, only ever moving forward, its jaws devouring a host of deities (Feyerabend 1987:35n). Cults wax and wane, they do not wax again. Tying the perspective to history, however, is necessary for Obeyesekere's entire project which I shall discuss at

greater length in Chapter 11 when I consider whether Kali is growing in popularity as Pattini's popularity declines.

### Chapter Nine, The Presence of Śakti

1. Actually, square yonis are quite common in Indian Hindu temples (Forman 1985); but more common in Sri Lanka are round yonis. It is on account of this that the priests believe the square yonis at Munnesvaram is unique and therefore must relate to the temple's unique identity as a king's temple.

2. It seems improbable that a metal statue would have been overlooked by Portuguese soldiers who plundered Sri Lankan temples, unless it was hidden. But how did the priests find it 150 years later? What is more important, then, is that the priests perceive the temple to be ancient.

3. Thus Munnesvaram parallels Madurai where the Cellattamman (Kali) temple stands north of the Minakṣi/Sundaesvarar temple (Van den Hoek 1978:121).

4. Kāppu means protection (Diehl 1956:197). It also means bangle and binding. The protective thread tied on the wrists of people and statues is a kāppu. The creation of the boundary is the act of protection. It is also the act of encompassment. The rite is a further instance of the Hindu conception of religious power being bound up in the sacred image and capable of manipulation through the image.

5. Gombrich & Obeyesekere fail to treat the iconography of Kali worship in such relational terms. Of the popular representation of Kali, dancing the Dance of Death on Siva's corpse on the battlefield at the end of time, her bloodied tongue stuck out, her eyes protruding, in one hand a bloodied sword, in the other the head of her male victim, they state that the tongue is the "most distinctive iconographic feature" (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988:134) They interpret this feature to be a gesture of prudish embarrassment on Kali's part, for having danced on the prostrate body of her spouse (ibid). Their reasoning is that the gesture of sticking out one's tongue is a common gesture of embarrassment in South Asia. Thankfully, the Dance of Death and the holding of bloody swords and decapitated heads are not additional aspects of embarrassment's gestural script in South Asia. That they are not rightly reveals the interpretation to be non-contextual. Kali is not embarrassed, standing alone on the battlefield, she is absolutely demonic.

The particular representation to which they refer must be understood in relation to other representations that broadly fall into three other types: the first is of a serene Kali, with two arms, riding a calm tiger, known on some prints as Ambigai and hence related to Āmba, Ambal and Vadivambigai; the second is of Bathrakali, still with a serene face, but with many arms and riding a ferocious lion

into battle with the Buffalo Demon; and the third is like the one interpreted by Gombrich & Obeyesekere, except that Kali is standing alone. All of these types correspond to the three representations of Ambal/Kali at Munnesvaram: Ambal in the Munnesvaram sanctum, Durga on the northern wall of the sanctum, and Bathrakali at the Bathrakali temple - and they reveal moments in the hierarchy of śakti moving from divine to demonic poles. As she moves to the demonic pole, the tongue is stuck out and the sword is clasped and used to good effect. This suggests a metaphoric relationship between the sword and the tongue, they both cut and draw blood. What is most surprising about Gombrich & Obeyesekere's interpretation is that elsewhere, Obeyesekere (1981, 1984a) describes Kali as the castrating mother. Surely the principal iconographic feature relates to this quality rather than a gesture of embarrassment.

6. Such origin points for Sinhalese Buddhist deities are especially important. The principal shrines to these deities relate to these points. For example, Sinigama is the special place for Dēvol Dēviyo who, like Kali, landed and was tamed by Pattini (Obeyesekere 1984a:150). Thus the myth is not simply the origin myth of the deity, but the origin myth of the deity in Sinhalese Buddhist society. The myth is also part of the gammaduwa texts recorded by Obeyesekere (ibid:261-262).

7. Again, for example, Dēvol Dēviyo who is subdued by Pattini at Sinigama. The relationship is physically represented in the location of shrines. The shrine for the fully demonic Dēvol Dēviyo where cursing is common (Obeyesekere 1975), stands on a small island a few hundred metres offshore. The more divine god's shrine is on the shore.

I take the opportunity to note here an additional relation that will have some bearing below. That is, that Dēvol Dēviyo's myth describes him as a trader, a merchant prince (Obeyesekere 1984a:142,147).

8. This is the logic through which Śiva, the God of Destruction, is also the God of Creation. The cyclical nature of Hindu cosmology is well known; but the implications of this fact are often misrepresented. In the same way, the fierce form of Kali, Bathrakali, is auspicious and good (Sanskrit, bhadra).

9. The Munnesvaram Brahmins state that Ambal menstruates on the 18th day of Adi (Adi Pūram), the winter solstice, which falls during the main annual festival. Bathrakali, on the other hand was not known to menstruate. However, my information on Bathrakali in this respect is lacking.

10. By trance, I do not mean the ecstatic religious engagement with a deity employing dance, mantra, or mortification which are all part of the Bhakti movement (see Obeyesekere 1978). For such examples of Bhaktism can be seen often in both temples, although more commonly at the Bathrakali temple. More precisely, by trance I refer to

the religious state of direct communication with the deity, resulting in the deity's conveying information through the mouth of the entranced. Trance is very much Kali's domain, although it is not specifically so.

11. A very small number of cursings took place at the Munnesvaram temple, in stark contrast to the Bathrakali temple where an average of sixty-five palliyādikkuraththu ("vengeances") were performed weekly. However, this does not mean that cursing is exclusively a Bathrakali temple practice.

12. Kolums are drawn at Munnesvaram temple for Ambal during the Navaratri festival at the entrance to the hall where the Ambal statue is kept. They function in the same way as in the house and Bathrakali temple to order the female space of the special hall. The hall (mahāvasānthamandapam) is the special festival hall and it stands outside the temple, though inside its walls, through being on the other side of the inner road from the actual temple structure. Tamil Hindu marriages that are celebrated in the temple by the Brahmins are done in front of this hall. There is, then, a close link between the hall and domestic space. In a similar way, there is a close link between the Bathrakali temple and domestic space.

#### Chapter Ten, Saradā Navaratri

1. More precisely the day is Thasami, the tenth day after the new moon.

2. This ritual is offered by the temple as a special ritual performed privately for a fee. The same rite involving 1008 shells is also offered; but they are both expensive and rarely performed. Private patrons have permanently booked the Friday and Saturday mornings of the Adi festival for performances of the 1008 shell rite. Through this they identify themselves as festival patrons.

3. The brass plate is about 10cm<sup>2</sup>. Also kept in front of the statue is a small brass image of Murugan's lance, the vel, which is also a representation of śakti. It was donated to the temple by Sirima Bandaranaike.

4. In 1985 an average of twenty devotees attended the bathing rite each day. In several instances, the sponsors were absent in Colombo, not arriving at Munnesvaram until the evening. A large proportion of the devotees were Brahmin women, kin of the temple priests, and nearly all the others were Tamil Hindu residents of Munnesvaram village.

5. The empty centre accords with the principles of the Vāstupuruṣamandala and with yantra generally. See Moore (1989) for a discussion of the empty centre in Kerala house construction where the principles also follow the logic of yantra.

6. I described this rite (Santhanam Kāppu) in Chapter 9 as a cooling rite performed especially for goddesses.
7. The commencement of the Adi festival involves a pumpkin sacrifice to the temple guardians, followed by a re-enactment of the Puruṣa sacrifice. A long bundle of coconut leaves, called Tatpurusa, are lit in the homa pit in which the pumpkin seed has been added, and dragged around the temple's inner and outer roads as well as the village processional road. All other festivals include the pumpkin sacrifice prior to any procession outside the temple. Whereas in the Adi festival though, the sacrifice is to the guardian Bhairavar, in the Navaratri the sacrifice is expressly for Ambal/Vadivambigai.
8. A very common decoration used for marking boundaries which is imbued with special meanings in certain contexts, such as weddings when the small arrow-blade cuts face down and funerals when they face up. In this instance the decorations are facing down.
9. This type of rite, involving the destruction of a demon represented by a plaintain tree, is also celebrated in the Adi Festival where it is called the Vettaithiruvilla ("Hunting Festival"). It involves a different deity, Chandrasekarar, a regal form of Śiva, and a different demon, whose name I could not discover. On the two occasion I observed the Hunting Festival, the priest endeavoured to cut the trunk in three, thus achieving victory over the ambiguous power of the demonic.
10. In 1985, about two-hundred-and-fifty people attended the Vijaya Thasami, but the number dropped markedly during the village procession and there were only about seventy by the end.
11. White and red are respectively Śiva and Śakti; they are the differentiated moments of the totality. Yellow is in several instances associated with red, such as in certain rites where red and yellow flowers are given to the goddess, and in the way the western wall of the Munnesvaram temple is painted in alternating red and yellow stripes rather than the more typical red and white, to denote the importance of Ambal. But yellow is also a mediating colour. It is the colour saffron, the colour worn by Buddhist monks and by Brahmin priests to denote their separation from the world. It is the colour of the sun setting. See also Fuller & Logan (ibid:90-92).
12. According to my village survey, only 10% of the village households celebrate the pūjā, and many of them have close links with Jaffna. Many explained that it was because there were already celebrations in the temple and at the schools. Thus, they differed from families in Batticaloa, particularly the middle class families, where all of the nine nights are celebrated through burning lamps before the pictures of the goddesses in the house, and through the making of tiers (kōlu) with different offerings on each tier.

13. In Chapter 6, I list the sponsors of the Saradā Navaratri at both the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples.

A middle aged poor Sinhalese couple attended the Bathing ritual on the second morning and were ordered out of the temple by the senior priest after the woman began dancing close to where the priests making the recitation were sitting. The incident was one of the many examples of the tension between lay devotees, generally poor, whose ecstatic religiosity riled the more sedate and text-bound Brahmins.

14. What this meant was that hardly anyone attended the Bathrakali temple for its festival. I interviewed some Tamil families from the fishing village of Udappu (studied by Tanaka 1986), who had come to the temple because it was Navaratri, but they numbered about a dozen altogether.

15. The Sinhalese Hewesi employed by the Munnesvaram temple were glad of the work; yet even they had reservations about this festival. One of them, regarded it as another break with Munnesvaram tradition made by the money-grabbing Munnesvaram Brahmins.

16. These shrine rooms are absent from Sinhalese Buddhist houses, signifying that the Sinhalese Buddhist house does not stand in relation to Buddhist temples as the Tamil Hindu house to Hindu temples. This contrast relates to the absence for Sinhalese Buddhists of lineage gods (kūladēvāta) represented in the household shrines. The articulation of the house into the broader society is, thus, markedly different, because temples do not play the same role. These contrasts are discussed in Chapter 6 as being critical to the nature of ethnicity in the Chilaw area.

17. See also Kelly & Kaplan (1990) for a review of recent anthropological discussion on the relationship between ritual and history.

### Chapter Eleven, Sorcery & Astrology

1. Obeyesekere (1981) discusses the meaning of hair at much greater length, criticising Leach who argues that the ascetic's matted hair is a public symbol of withdrawal from the social world. Obeyesekere is particularly critical of interpretation out of context and to this end I interpret the unbridled hair in the context of the Kali image.

2. The issue of whether the person is really entranced is important for all the devotees who come to the temple. Trance fascinates them, oftentimes drawing their attention away from the pūjā. But they are sceptical and doubt the veracity of many people's trance, especially the mānniyos'. The temple priests are even more sceptical and say that most of the people who appear to go into trance are shamming. They give themselves away through being in



trance for too long. "Anyone who becomes entranced by Bathrakali," they say, "is completely exhausted after only two or three minutes". If a māñniyo's trance is doubted, the whole consultation will be doubted.

3. Admittedly, the ability to go into trance is different to being the subject of demonic attack. For one thing, trance may happen regularly while demonic attack may take place only once in a lifetime. For another, demonic attack is an aspect of physical illness whereas trance is not. More correctly, therefore, the two should be regarded as aspects of the same complex; but not a complex of infantile neuroses manifesting in adult life for which there are Hindu (trance) and Buddhist (exorcism) therapeutic options (see Obeyesekere 1990:23); the kind of theoretical explanation of which Kapferer is critical. But his analysis rings true with only some of the above cases, particularly Sarath, Prema and Somadasa (C, D & E). Sarath actually attributed his circumstances to sorcery and began to attend Munnesvaram. Hema Silva (A), however, goes into trance when she thinks of the Buddha and sees nothing problematic about it. She is unusual but nevertheless her case is important to note. Her husband Sunil implied that her skill has a problematic nature of trance when he said that he married Hema already aware and tolerant of her condition. Yet for Hema there seemed to be no problem.

4. Bathrakali is understood to command a large army of ghosts who will join her on the battlefield at the end of Time. This army differs from the host of demons in the Sinhalese Buddhist and Tamil Hindu cosmologies, as well as from the retinues some of these demons command.

5. People who follow this explanation agreed that they could possibly go into trance and communicate with Bhairavar at the Bathrakali temple, but that it was far more likely for them to communicate with Bathrakali herself; since Bhairavar was only her guardian there. Although he also states that the preta explanation is only one explanation provided by the culture, Obeyesekere (1981:84) argues that trance with Kali is the result of a female preta while trance to a male preta will result in trance to a male demon like Hūniyam. I did not interview any people who follow the preta explanation who made this position.

6. He may be what Obeyesekere reports as a "mala yakā" (ibid:116), a spirit of the dead not malevolent like a preta who is reborn out of excessive love of a person rather than a more greedy form of attachment to the world.

7. Following current usage in Sri Lankan anthropology (Obeyesekere 1975; Selvadurai 1976; Kapferer 1988; Spencer 1990), I am equating cursing and sorcery. Requesting Bathrakali to hurt one's enemy is to curse them or to perform sorcery against them. Please note, however, that this does not include all forms of sorcery such as placing certain items in one's enemy's house or house foundations.

8. Poṅgal is offered at most ritual occasions and is especially important in the annual harvest ritual Thai Poṅgal. This rite demonstrates the close association of milkrice with rebirth. The pot of rice and cow's milk cook outside the entrance of the house, facing east. The milk and rice symbolise semen, while the milk is also mother's milk. At precisely dawn the milk should boil up over the rim of the pot, giving the poṅgal symbolic associations with the flag-raising in the temple festival. Good (1983) relates the term poṅkal to poṅku "boiling up" and links its cooking to the process of rice cultivation. The poṅgal is thus the epitome of prosperity and so finds a place in cursing practice. Sinhalese Buddhists also feature milkrice (kiribath) extensively, though they use coconut milk. Nancy Russell reports the use of coin and betel leaf placed in the kiribath pot when a new house is opened. The coin and betel then symbolise the prosperity of the house (Russell, personal communication).

9. This account was given to me by the surviving child, now in his thirties. The Eastern Province Tamil term for sorcery is pillisuṇiyam which literally translates as the cobra (pilli) of zero (sūniyam). It is translated as the cobra of sorcery and even the cobra of annihilation. I noted above in relation to the temple flagpole that the cobra is a vital symbol of rebirth and that cursing is possible at the Bathrakali temple in the absence of the flagpole. Here we see the same potent symbol but now inverted as it signifies death. My point is that symbols of life and death are always combining, especially in sorcery.

10. The nine planets in the order of worship:

	<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sinhala</u>	<u>English</u>
A.	<u>Sūryan</u>	<u>Ravi</u>	Sun
B.	<u>Chandran</u>	<u>Chandraya</u>	Moon
C.	<u>Sevvai</u>	<u>Angaharuwa</u>	Mars
D.	<u>Puthan</u>	<u>Budha</u>	Mercury
E.	<u>Viyālan</u>	<u>Brahaspati</u>	Jupiter
F.	<u>Velli</u>	<u>Sikuru</u>	Venus
G.	<u>Sani</u>	<u>Sani</u>	Saturn
H.	<u>Rahu</u>	<u>Rahu</u>	Dragon's Head
I.	<u>Ketu</u>	<u>Ketu</u>	Dragon's Tail

They are arranged in the shrine in the following configuration facing the directions listed.

H (south)	G (west)	I (south)	
C (south)	A (east)	E (north)	{ -----> N }
B (west)	F (east)	D (north)	

The Sun's central position is marked by his statue being higher than the others. Each statue is anthropomorphic, even Rahu and Ketu.

11. Viśnu's importance is to be seen at the Pillaiyar temple outside the Munnesvaram temple entrance, hitherto

the Vettaithiruvilla Mādam. Inside this temple, run by descendants of the Indian artisans who did the 1870's temple renovation, stands a very large, painted statue of Narayan - Viṣṇu depicted reclining asleep on the Cosmic Ocean. In front of the statue is a small picture of Sūniyam. Both the deity and the demon receive more attention from devotees than any other in the temple. The priest explained that they offer cheaper rites in this temple so attracting the poorer devotees coming to Munnesvaram.

Everyone at Munnesvaram is specific about the relationship between Viṣṇu and Saturn. The Munnesvaram priests link Śiva with Jupiter and, as Dakṣinamurti, the Sun, Viṣṇu with Saturn and Mercury, Kali with the Dragon's Head, Durga with the Dragon's Tail and Venus, Ambal with the Moon and Subrahmaniam with Mars.

12. This month of Saturn is more precisely the period in between the planet's movement into the zodiac houses and retrogression, a period of ambiguity in the planet's influence.

13. This form is known as Navakiraga Murtinjaya Santhi which literally means "Nine-Planets and Their Forms Cooling", and is distinguished from the simpler rite through the offerings made to certain deities before the planets. At its simplest, the rite to Saturn simply involves burning sesame seeds, at its most elaborate it involves all the planets and their controlling deities. I have taken the most elaborate in order to assess the full dimensions of the practice. I shall provide an interpretation of the simplest offering at the end of this section.

14. Tanaka (1986:Ch4) discusses temple apiśeka at length, arguing for their sacrificial nature and the central issue of the flow of energy (śakti) between the deity and the sponsor. On the symbolism of the kumpaṃ, he identifies the relationship between the kumpaṃ and the statue and adds that in the kumpaṃ the dominant symbolic message is of the womb or of the female body (ibid:205). This establishes the close link between the pot and śakti. The coconut symbolises the head.

15. Ostör (ibid:64-65) then lists the nine plants. Saturn's plant is Viṣṇu's, thus indicating the Viṣṇu/Saturn link to be explicit in Bengal also. The link between Saturn and Yama (Death) collected from Tamil Nadu by Diehl (1965:300) more clearly points to Saturn's malevolence, though I was never told of such a link.

16. For example, sesame (gingelly) oil is the most common cooking oil with Tamils who regard it as cool (see also Beck 1969). Coconut oil, the most popular cooking oil with Sinhalese, they regard as hot. Both oils in certain ritual contexts, however, change their quality, gingelly becoming hot and coconut cool.

17. Indeed, one perspective on the inter-ethnic violence, virulent especially in the west coast trade centres since 1977, persuasively highlights how Sinhalese traders have usurped Indian Tamil interests through the violence (Gunasinghe 1984). Many times I was told, by both Sinhalese and Tamils, that before the Sinhalese began to takeover Colombo's trading areas and people it with Sinhalese strong-arm men, such hired labour was controlled by the Indian traders. Significantly, much of the state-sponsored violence of July 1983 was directed at these traders.

18. Many of the devotees at the temple who would not be categorised as a Middle East worker, were actually attending the temple on behalf of a loved one at that time in the Middle East. The issue of going to work in the Middle East was in fact critical in the lives of many temple devotees during my fieldwork. Apart from workers, many employment agents attended the temple.

19. Indeed, I was frequently struck by the range of investment possibilities engaged in by returnees. My observations, however, were not systematic, unlike the large scale survey conducted by the NUFFIC Project in Colombo. Nevertheless, I recognised a pattern of investment. House building topped the list, especially for women. Men, often without entrepreneurial backgrounds, took up petty trade, especially electrical, and private bus ownership. There was an emphasis on fast money rather than long term investment. I acknowledge here the benefit of discussions on this subject with Frank Eeylans, a co-ordinator of the NUFFIC survey, and more recently with Tineke Mook also of the project.

20. The divine located at Munnesvaram temple is sponsored by revivalist Vellalar and landed wealth, the wealth of kings. The demonic located at the Bathrakali temple is sponsored by traders and movable wealth (see Chapter 6). Traders can be linked with robbers. The relationship between the temples thus expresses the relationship between kings and bandits identified by Shulman (ibid) to be an ambiguous quality of the Tamil king.

21. Obeyesekere (1984b) makes this argument in relation to the development of modern Sinhalese nationalism and its anti-Tamil sentiments which he sees as an urban phenomenon.

22. By "urban", Obeyesekere does not restrict himself totally to urban dwellers. Rather he extends the category to include rural-dwellers engaged in "non-traditional occupations" (1975:13). These include masons, garage workers, shopkeepers, and professionals; basically, people not involved in agriculture and/or caste-specific labour (ibid). For this reason, Kali worship though more popular in the cities and towns has a spreading influence in Sinhalese villages that are not immune from the growing influence of urban anomie (Gombrich & Obeyesekere ibid:162).

23. Thus, Obeyesekere is a culprit of the kind of traditionalism that Fuller criticises (Fuller *ibid*:51). Fuller disputes that the jajmani system historically existed, and in my view, Dumont would agree, because he writes of systems of ideas and values. Obeyesekere, on the other hand, treats the traditional Sinhalese village as something that actually and pristinely existed prior to European colonialism.

24. Not precisely of the ideal types described by Mannheim (1972), and possibly better called Arcadian than utopian in Obeyesekere's case. The indologists argue closely to the conservative utopianism identified by Mannheim as the third type in his quadrapartite scheme. It was noteworthy for celebrating the status quo as a civilising high point. Hegel is exemplary of such a scheme (*ibid*:207 - 209). Obeyesekere's utopianism is closer to the liberal humanitarian type, as is the work of Rousseau. Unlike a state of nature, however, Obeyesekere's view posits a noble Buddhist villager. It must be stressed, though, that Mannheim's types are ideal types.

25. While Obeyesekere (*ibid*) claims that Ricoeur's influence permeates Medusa's Hair, it is not as explicit as in his more recent work. Many of the revisions of Medusa's Hair contained therein stem from a more considered reading of Ricoeur.

26. In particular I refer to the work of Jayawardena (1972, 1984), Kearney (1974), Jupp (1978), Gunasinghe (1984) and Tambiah (1986). This by no means exhausts the literature.

27. And so, when Gombrich luridly describes "Hinduizing trends" in modern chaotic Buddhist religion, as in the quotation below, he is actually reproducing modern revivalist thought as western scholarship.

At [Kataragama], at Kālī's temple at Munnessarama [*sic*], and at other shrines to gods which until recently were considered the exclusive cultural property of Tamil Hindus, congregate Sinhala-speaking devotees, nominally Buddhists or even, in a few cases, Roman Catholics, whose ecstatic devotion manifests itself in possession, firewalking, and inflicting on themselves such apparent tortures as hanging themselves up on meathooks - activities in which their guardian deity protects them from pain or permanent damage. (Gombrich 1988:204 emphasis added).

And when Obeyesekere seeks to excuse the nationalist writings of the novelist Martin Wickramasinghe, saying, "What is the point of human life if one cannot construct idealized portraits of the past to hold up a critical mirror to the present?" (Obeyesekere 1990b:295-296); and seeks to excuse his own nationalistic formulations regarding the history of association between the Sinhala ethnic identity and Buddhism, replying to his critic, Jonathon Spencer, "It seems to me that one cannot write

anything if deconstruction is carried to this extreme degree" (of calling him a nationalist) (ibid), then are serious grounds for extreme suspicion about their scholarship as it resonates the nationalist sentiments that have caused modern Sri Lanka to burn. Such scholarship is irresponsible and reprehensible.

### Chapter Twelve, Conclusion: The Adi Festival

1. Priests and locals say that in the 1940's and '50's the crowds were larger, up to 100,000 people would travel up to the temples. Though they are exaggerating, the size of the crowds has diminished partly through the declining numbers of Tamils attending the festival from Jaffna and from Sinhalese areas where the Tamil presence has declined following anti-Tamil riots in 1977, '81, and '83.

2. The Yala rice harvest is timed around the south-west monsoon which runs from mid-May to September, the Mahā harvest around the north-east monsoon from October to January.

3. The importance of caste is common in all the festivals I observed, including ten festivals on the east coast. Of Mandur, I must add that Whitaker stresses how the festival defies a unitary explanation. Instead he describes seven dimensions that I list (sic) below.

(1) A 'Narrative' of the 'family troubles' of Murukan and his two wives, Teyvaanai and VaLLi; (2) An iconic demonstration of the Murukan's divinity; his abstract Godhead; (3) A ritual honouring Murukan's sovereignty, and in which Murukan delegates his sovereign power to his appointed deputies; (4) A retelling, and verification, of the history of the temple and of the social structure that resulted in it; (5) A market, where both goods and rights in the temple itself are bought, sold, and owned; (6) a temple pure and simple, that is, a dimension of pakti (or bhakti) religiosity and self-sacrifice in pursuit of grace; (7) All taking place within a temple which is, also, a body. (Whitaker 1986:244-245)

4. Winslow (1984a:277) reports that "Ayyanayaka's" territory stretches north almost to Puttalam and east right into the Kandyan hills. She determined the deity territories through interview and examination of roadside guardian shrines. I am certain of Aiyanaayake's presence only as far north as Mundel, 30km north of Chilaw, and as far east as Kurunegala, 60km east of Chilaw. During the Munnesvaram festival, when devotees visit all the temples in the Munnesvaram complex, including the village Aiyanaayake temple, I seldom interviewed a devotee who knew anything about Aiyanaayake. Generally those outsiders who did know anything about him came from Kurunegala District.

5. This story was told to me by one of the officers involved and also by the novelist James Goonawardene who features the incident in his novel In A Quiet Place.

6. Such a view has been criticised subsequently by Fuller (1979) and Dirks (1987:303-304). Dumont (1986a:230) has since revised his argument with respect to his more elaborate theory of hierarchy as the encompassing of the contrary. In his original argument Dumont admits to not approaching Aiyandar from the perspective of the encompassing totality but only from the oppositions. He now regards this to be a form of dual classification in an instance demanding a different analysis. Dirks is critical of Dumont unnecessarily linking Aiyandar's vegetarianism with Brahmins. Indeed, the vegetarianism should be linked to the asceticism that is emphasised in the Sinhalese Buddhist Aiyanaŷake.

7. This relationship results in Arokiaswami (1953:154) defining the village goddess Mariamman as the goddess of rain. Significantly, the Kandy Āsala Perahāra is performed to promote rain (Seneviratne *ibid*:100-101).

8. Some villagers refer to Aiyandar as Gambarā. The name generally refers to a village guardian. Sūniyam is also called Gambarā and in some villages, the demonic guardian is known as Sūniyam. Clearly the situation is close to the South Indian Aiyandar/Karuppan relationship except that Pattini, the goddess, is also present. Dirks reports a lower order god/demon called Munisvaran as Aiyandar's demonic companion (*ibid*:297); but not surprisingly, I never recorded any reference to such a figure.

9. The temple priest is a member of one of the two lineages, in many respects the most influential lineage in the village. As the position is controlled, the village temple is in effect a lineage temple. However, as this lineage includes the majority of the villagers and since all the villagers can participate in temple worship, the temple is not strictly a lineage temple as discussed by Dumont (1986b). The lineages are discussed at more length below.

10. Most commonly the tree is a nūga or banyan tree, a tree especially related to the god Śiva in his demonic Bhairavar form; but in the case of the Madampe temple the tree is a bo tree. As I have noted for the Munnesvaram and Bathrakali temples, Bhairavar inhabits the temple bo trees, so the Madampe situation is not unusual. Both trees, highly respected in relation to the supreme entities of Hinduism and Buddhism, are also respected with the extreme demons of these religions.

11. The structure of teams differs from those described by Obeyesekere (1984a) and Wirz (1954) where one team is always the lower team and always called "Pattini". Moreover, the upper team is named after Pattini's husband, Palanga and not Aiyandar. In the more intensively studied game, the Horn Game (Aṅkeliya), the competition is fixed so

that the lower team always wins. This principle is followed in the Maradankulam Coconut Game through shifting the title of "Pattini" to the winner.

12. It was noted in Chapter 6 that toddy tapping has become an important activity in the Chilaw area with Keralan toddy tappers immigrating after the Second World War. Two of them married into the village in the 1960's and taught some village men to tap toddy. The villagers, although most of them tap toddy nowadays, describe themselves as Vellalar or Goyigama cultivators and claim that rice cultivation is still their foremost activity.

Malayalam speaking people have a long history of settlement in the Chilaw area, especially in one village north of Chilaw town. Their day of Munnesvaram festival sponsorship is popularly known as "Cochi Day" (after Cochin). The Keralans associated with Maradankulam, however, are more recently arrived in Sri Lanka. They are active in the sponsorship of the Munnesvaram festival as members of the local Malayalam Society.

13. I am also critical here of Obeyesekere's conception of religious pantheons as psychological projections, as I have been in my discussion on Kali.

14. Obeyesekere argues that Eastern Province Tamil forms of the Coconut Game, known as Portenkai, the Tamil of Porapol, are more ritualised (ibid:566). However, I am unclear as to the distinction between game and ritual. Firstly, the game described by Wirz seems highly ritualised. Secondly, the Sinhalese examples of the Coconut Game given by Obeyesekere, take place in the context of the Horn Game, itself an aspect of the gammaduwa rituals for Pattini. Where does one draw the distinction?

15. From "The Body in its Sexual Being",

The fact remains that this existence is the act of taking up and making explicit a sexual situation, and that in this way it has always at least a double sense. There is interfusion between sexuality and existence, which means that existence permeates sexuality and vice versa, so that it is impossible to determine in a given decision or action, the proportion of sexual to other motivations, impossible to label a decision or act 'sexual' or 'non-sexual'. Thus there is in human existence a principle of indeterminacy, and this indeterminacy is not only for us, it does not stem from some imperfection of our knowledge, and we must not imagine that any God could sound our hearts and minds and determine what we owe to nature and what to freedom. Existence is indeterminate in itself, by reason of its fundamental structure, and in so far as it is the very process whereby the hitherto meaningless takes on meaning, whereby what had merely a sexual significance assumes a more general one, chance is transformed into reason; in so far as it is the taking up a de facto situation. We shall give the name 'transcendence' to



this act in which existence takes up, to its own account, and transforms such a situation. Precisely because it is transcendence, existence never utterly outruns anything, for in that case the tension which is essential to it would disappear. (Merleau-Ponty 1979: 169)

16. Burton Stein (1980) employs the segmentary lineage model to describe the nature of the medieval South Indian polity. The model adumbrates the polity as a fusing aggregation of its constituent units. The process of aggregation appears to take place in the Munnesvaram festival as it builds up from the village level to the temple/pattuva complex. I am employing a concept of hierarchical incorporation which differs from aggregation through its characterisation of levels of transformation in the movement from the parts to the whole. The whole is not simply the sum of the parts as it is in the segmentary model. Instead, the cumulative movement is embraced by the transformations in the hierarchical ordering of the pantheon. The pattuva is not simply the sum of its Aiyanar/Aiyanayake and Pattini temples, but a process of hierarchical transformation of these deities into the deities of the main Munnesvaram temple. Likewise, the pattuva castes transform and derive their identity in transformation as they come together in the centre.

17. Female deities have kāppu on their left wrists, males on their right.

18. For example the duration of Parakramabahu VI's land grant is "while the sun and moon exist". Sun and Moon are sometimes regarded as male and female, thus following the theme of cosmogonic union as with liṅgam/yoni, Śiva/Śakti. However, the Moon is also represented as male, such as in the Munnesvaram statues.

19. Many Sinhalese Catholics attend this event. Catholic church festivals are marked by the use of poles and the pole raising that commences the festival is widely attended. From the guy ropes are hung small flags given by devotees which are understood to bear the sins of the devotee for the twelve months between festivals. The pole raising is thus a fresh start and hence it bears similarities with the Hindu kodietṭum and Sinhalese kap sitawima. At one large church, the pole is made to resemble the tall mast of a square-rigger, signifying in its originary moment, the arrival of the Portuguese.

20. See also Good's (1989) unpublished article on the Kalugumalai temple festival.

21. The festival deities are, in the evening procession on one cart, with the temple to the right,

Subrahmaniam (Murugan)  
with his wives  
Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi

The "Three Guardians"  
{Sandesvarar,  
Astara Dēvāta (Bhairavar)  
Pillaiyar}

Sōmaskanda  
(Śiva, Ambal and Murugan)

In the morning procession, there are three carts. The first consists of

Subrahmaniam  
Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi

The Three Guardians

Arumugan  
(Murugan with six faces,  
the form that battles the Asuras)  
Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi

The second cart,

Sōmaskanda  
atop the Nandi (Bull) vehicle

The third cart,

Ambal  
atop the Lion vehicle

The festival deities, are thus the Śaivite Holy Family of Śiva and Ambal with their two principal sons, Pillaiyar and Subrahmaniam or Murugan. The importance of Murugan, present in three forms, links Munnesvaram with the cycle of Murugan festivals happening elsewhere. The most important figure, though, is Ambal. The Astara Devata is the guardian of the inner sanctum, a Bhairavar, who is also known as one of Śiva's sons with Pillaiyar, Murugan and Aiyanar. Sandesvarar is Śiva's devoted servant who bears the message of pūjā (Chapter 7). With Pillaiyar who is the first deity propitiated in pūjā and Sandesvarar the last, the Three Guardians embody the totality of the temple deities.

22. At Mandur for example, the regalia is part of the procession and the deity's royalty is further indicated by the use of palanquins instead of chariots, and the use of cloth mouth gags by the palanquin bearers (Whitaker 1986:272-275). These gags are also used at Kataragama, but I did not see them anywhere else in Batticaloa. Palanquins rather than chariots are the most common vehicles in Batticaloa festivals.

23. Actually, there are only two chariots. The first one, holding the three guardians and the forms of Subrahmaniam, is a cart with a special canopy. The second chariot holding the Sōmaskanda is the older chariot and it used to be used by Ambal. When the new chariot was built in the mid-1970's, the older one became the Sōmaskanda's.

24. Similarly, traders are absent from the temple complex at Kandy, though I do not know if they were ever present.

25. It is similarly famous at the eastern Thiropathi temple near Kalmunai whose festival I studied in 1984 as it

is closely associated with Draupadi worship (Frasca 1990).

26. Obeyesekere also stresses the theme of karma, but not in terms of sacrifice and rebirth, rather than in terms closer to the Christian concept of sin. I hasten to add that this interpretation in terms of bhaktism does not necessarily account for the long-standing practice in relation to Draupadi worship. For Draupadi worship the practice has a clear mythical association in that the Pandava wife undertakes the ordeal. So too does Rama's wife, Sita, but this association was never pointed out to me by informants. The mythical association with the Pattini is that it is with fire that the goddess destroys the city of Madurai, with fire she generates when she tears off her left breast and casts it over the city (Frasca *ibid*:164).

This fire bears the ambiguous characteristics of sexualised and purifying fire as they are discussed by Bachelard (1964) and mentioned already in relation to metal as the product of fire in Chapter 11. Frasca (*ibid*) interprets firewalking as an indication that the festival has been undertaken successfully and the chastity of the goddess Tiraupataiyamma (Draupadi) protected. He continues that the firewalking spectacle is a moment of mass possession by both the walkers and the observers. In Turnerian terms, it is one of the antistructural phases of festivals which he characterises as embodying a dialectic of structure and antistructure (*ibid*:Ch7).

27. The element of sexual politics resonates with the Mandur "narrative" described by Whitaker (*ibid*), although at Verugal, Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi unite in opposition to the possibility of Mūṛugaṇ taking a third consort, whereas at Mandur the tension lies between Dēvaṇai and Vaḷḷi. Moreover, the Verugal "narrative" relates directly to the temple origin myth, not so at Mandur.

28. The saris are donated by the festival sponsors (listed in Chapter 6) and others. All saris donated that day are put on the statue. On the final day in 1985, six saris were worn, in 1986, five saris.

29. See note 21. Back at the temple, the statue of Ambal is kept in front of the flagpole on top of her Lion vehicle, waiting for the procession to return. In 1985 I joined the procession and remained with it until we got back to the temple the next day. In 1986 I was less ambitious and stayed with the temples to gauge the degree of interest in the Tīrtham.

30. Its full title is the Wadiwalaki Madam. It is used for no other purpose and so suggests that the deities who rest there are themselves pilgrims to the river. The owner is also a sponsor in the Saradā Navaratri.

31. Something similar occurs at Mandur (Whitaker 1984, 1986). When the Murugaṇ statue is taken to the lagoon, people go into trance. Furthermore, when the deity is brought back to the temple, and is on the point of joining

his proper wife, Dēvanai, children are struck down senseless by the power of the angered jealous consort, Valli, and must be carried to her temple where Murugan makes a final conciliatory visit.

32. Several events of the festival have not been discussed such as the initial offering of special foods to Pillaiyar, the special Yāgam Pūjā performed for the guardians, the different ways the participating villages behaved at the temple, activities, or non-activities, at the Buddhist pansala, and various other forms of religious engagement by devotees. Certain events such as the pseudo-trust meeting are discussed elsewhere in the thesis and others will be written up elsewhere.

33. If they know the myth, they say it is Sakra, King of the Gods, who shoots the mango. Incidentally, Obeyesekere's analysis of the enactment of this myth stresses the enactment as the context for the expression of contemporary psychological issues, namely castration anxieties. The actual content of the myth, according to Obeyesekere, is irrelevant: "A commonsense explanation will not suffice" (ibid:495, see also 1990a:46-49). Instead, the āmba vidamana is related to the āṅkeliya, the Horn Game, as a cathartic rite.

34. I noted earlier that Mala is listed as the god who aspects Saturn (Diehl 1956:300). This is the only reference I have of this relationship, everywhere else the aspecting is by Viśnu. Possibly Mala is Viśnu, that is a form of Viśnu in the sense that Saturn is. The information resonates with my interpretation of Munnesvaram: Kuveni curses Vijaya, Vijaya's nephew Panduvas, falls ill, and the god who controls Saturn is enlisted for the cure and Rahu is the planet aspected by Kali.

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