

In sum, each of the chapters in this volume underscores the manner in which various religious cultures of local goddesses are reflexes of larger social processes occurring historically in local and intra-local contexts. The resiliency, adaptability, and flexibility exhibited by these goddess cults as reflected in these findings signal their possible relevancy in any global context for Hindus. In every case, they indicate explicitly that the cults of local goddesses remain indices to the nature and identities of their constituent communities, wherever located.

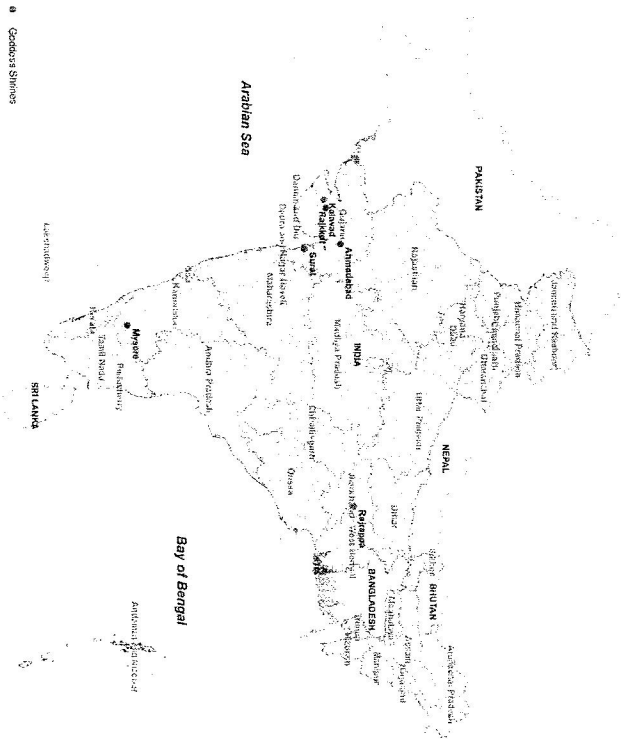


Figure 0.1. India with state boundaries and relevant temple towns

Chapter One

Goddesses Who Dwell on Earth

A Folk Paradigm of Divine Female Multiplicity

Brenda Beck

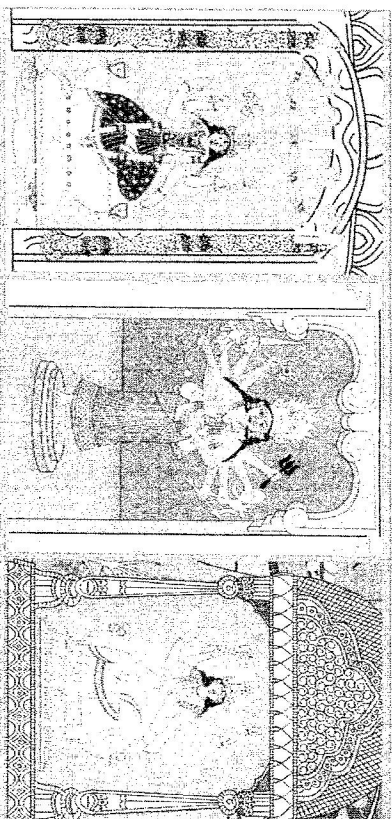


Figure 1.1. The three earth-dwelling goddesses as illustrated in "The Legend of Ponnivala" animated series

Note: It was not possible to include the majority of my selected illustrations in the printed version of this chapter. Only a limited few have been reproduced here, and all are in black and white. To view each and every figure referenced in the pages below, please consult the affiliated website at <http://sophiahilton.ca/foundation/brenda-beck-goddesses-that-dwell-on-earth-figures-and-tales/>. For location information refer to maps 0.1 and 0.2 on the same website.

INTRODUCTION

Students of Hinduism, at whatever level of scholarship, predictably encounter a bewildering and vast array of source materials. They also quickly realize that these source materials are available in many languages and that they cover many millennia and a vast stretch of geography not limited by the boundaries of South Asia alone. Even in modern North America, not to speak of Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia, the curious student can find compelling materials to study. How can newcomers approach all of this variety and find help in compressing the material to create a meaningful basis for understanding? Furthermore, how can a teacher of an introductory course on the subject manage to condense so many colorful types of information, each of which gives importance to the goddesses in its own way (wonderful texts, commentaries, poetry, art, song, dance, epic stories, and more)? Is there some order, some pattern to be found in this rich profusion?

Of course every teacher has their own techniques of compression and organization, strategies they believe will help to make the vast ocean of Hindu thinking and feeling more comprehensible to newcomers. Nonetheless, I believe I have found a fresh and exciting approach to this challenge: an obscure medieval oral folk epic from South India. Why, the reader will ask, should one turn to such an improbable and remote oral source for authority in this matter? There is already so much recognized and time-honored textual material available! Even more poignant, this profusion of source material is easily accessible in a variety of languages and source books. Here is my answer. It comes in three parts:

1. **Cohesion:** Oral epics, by the very nature of their transmission, tend to shake down and organize ideas, simplifying the core concepts and then retransmitting them in story form. Oral stories, especially good ones, use various techniques of logical cohesion in order to enhance the memorability of their subject matter for audience consumption. The same cohesion also helps a bard remember the required sequence of story events and convey it to others accurately. This kind of internal integration is not always present in an oral epic, especially after it has been transformed by the creation of a written version of the story's content. But internal cohesion is a characteristic of oral culture. In my opinion, we have not paid enough attention to its informative power. In the case of *The Legend of Ponnivala*, the story I am going to use in this chapter, the worldview presented is very well integrated. The forty-four-hour tape-recorded performance I reference unfolds in a unified and well-knit way.¹
2. **Teachability:** Oral bards were essentially village history teachers. They performed in front of peasants (and other workers), whose daily

lives were physically challenging. At night such people wanted to sit back and enjoy some form of entertainment, much as we sit in front of the television most evenings today. Traditional storytelling bards helped their audiences to draw their own mental images of the world around them, images they could use to imagine and codify their own cultural history and to locate themselves within it.

3. **Appeal to All Ages and to Varied Social Communities:** Bards sang to mixed audiences, particularly in village India. There would always be masters and laborers, men and women, children, adults, and even grandparents present. The singer had to shape his story (the bards were mostly male performers) in ways that would make the content engaging, noncontroversial, and emotionally rich. For this reason I believe all successful bards made extensive use of visual images. They would skilfully "cast" pictures of events onto the listener's mind-eye. Then they would excite the emotional core of the listener with drum rhythms and songs that used many epithets and repeated lines. These songs would heighten the listener's feelings, creating excitement and character color. The oral, epic-reciting style of storytelling practiced around the Coimbatore area of South India that I studied included both songs and narrative segments. In the spoken passages the bard would voice the thoughts and the conversations of the story's various characters. These narrative segments moved the action of the story forward. From time to time the bards I listened to would also provide short overview descriptions. These passages were used to indicate that time was passing, while something was simultaneously occurring way off in the background.

In sum, I will use an oral epic now known as *The Legend of Ponnivala* (in Tamil traditionally called the *Amannar Kathai*) as my base reference in this chapter. This story is: A) logically laid out; B) rich in visual scenes and in songs that convey strong feelings; and C) attention grabbing because of its skilled telling and use of a continual change-up in presentation styles.²

I now return to my core argument: bards use certain fundamental techniques that enable their stories to be unpacked in a way that reveals a wide range of underlying folk paradigms. In this chapter I hope to show how this fundamental nature of the oral story can serve students of cultural history well. In this chapter I will extract from *The Legend of Ponnivala* what I believe to be a descriptively rich overview of a South Indian peasant's worldview . . . as it concerns the Hindu goddesses. Many deeply cultural ideas (both religious and social) can also be found in the *Ponnivala* story. I will leave much of that exploration to other essays that I plan to write. A curious student can do much of this unpacking work himself or herself. For example, instead of considering the goddesses, they could single out the two key gods

in the story—Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva—and ask: Which of these two divinities is supreme? Does the story present a Vainavite or a Shaivite perspective on the world? Because the Ponnivala legend is well balanced and intended to attract listeners of all persuasions, two reasonable people could argue this matter with neither winning the contest. Indeed, if these competitors were allowed to draw only from this one story in their presentations, this would make a good topic for an Oxford Union debate!

I argue that this epic tale story presents Shiva and Vishnu as divinities of equal stature, and (as is standard in the south of India) it describes them as brothers-in-law (view figures Aa and Ab at the affiliated website). These two great gods exchange taunts from time to time, but their powers remain well balanced throughout the legend. There is even a cameo event that expresses this balance in a nutshell. At one point Lord Shiva asks Lord Vishnu to hand over the conch shell he holds in his left hand. Vishnu does this and Shiva quickly puts his rival's powerful war tool away in a box. He will store it there for the next sixteen years, the exact period during which the three child embryos Shiva sends to earth in the heroine's womb will live out their lives there. Lord Vishnu will be in charge of leading and aiding those three youngsters, two boys and a girl, each of whom is imbued with significant supernatural powers. These three characters-to-be (essentially triplets) grow up learning to follow Vishnu's advice. Their presence on earth lends their mentor and guardian extra options and extra influence over human matters for the period of their lifetimes. Shiva demands that Vishnu hand over his conch as a way of redressing this shift of power. The triplets will add to Vishnu's opportunity to influence actions and events on earth and to steer them as he sees fit. Giving up his conch (an implement used to announce war and various other momentous events) helps to remove a special power tool from his side of the scales, compensating for a new responsibility, just added (view figures Ac and Ad at the affiliated website).

This is only one little scene, but it captures a very basic principle: the need to maintain a cosmic balance of power between these two key divinities. Here we have a simple paradigm of balance: the more human responsibilities and mentoring options a god acquires, the less access he should be given to other kinds of power.

I will proceed to talk about the goddesses in a moment. However, the paradigm they present is more complex. So let me first finish illustrating the procedure I will use by drawing out this simpler and easier-to-understand example presented by Vishnu and Shiva a little further. In *The Legend of Ponnivala* Vishnu is most often a helper. Over and over again he can be seen flying to earth to assist a hero or heroine in some way (view figure Ae at the affiliated website).

Vishnu's compassion comes to the rescue of an orphan, a suicidal woman, an exiled family, and much more. He is always there if called on by a

character for help. But at times Vishnu is also a bit of a flirt . . . especially when it comes to his relationship with one of the key heroines of this Ponnivala tale, Tamara. Vishnu is also seen to tease various characters. At times he will set up an illusion or other type of challenge for a protégée to surmount. He also presents himself here and there in the story using various disguises. At times we see him become a soothsayer or a magician. And there are occasions when he takes an altogether non-human form such as a fly and even (perhaps) the form of a wild boar. Vishnu also plays dice with the heroes . . . suggesting that he likes to gamble and “play games.” Finally there is a very interesting *Bhavagad Gita*-like scene in this legend. There Vishnu echoes but also “bends” (speaking visually) events well known from this sacred text. Here the great god serves as a kind of mirror, reminding us of Krishna's role in that story while also changing it in strange ways. Now he is a teacher, albeit in the folk style. In this final role I find that Vishnu provides fresh insight into one of India's most widely known and very sacred texts.

Lord Shiva, by contrast, is presented as a relatively simple character in *The Legend of Ponnivala*. He appears in just three basic roles. For one, he is seen meditating in the forest, where he is difficult to disturb but is occasionally stirred into action by the fiery heat of a yogi or yogini. Two, Shiva is often seen sitting in his council chambers, where he decides who will be rewarded for good deeds and who will be punished for moral transgressions. In addition, Lord Shiva is capable of generating magical blessings and terrible curses (view figure Af at the affiliated website). These announcements almost seem to depend on his variable moods.

Third, Lord Shiva is portrayed as an ultimate creating and destroying force that lies deep within the cosmos. Shiva does much (but not all) of the creation work in this epic story. His wife, Parvati, also shares in some of it. But only Shiva metes out death and makes sure that important times in the lives of individual humans get written down in a great book kept by his faithful accountant. Clearly Shiva is the more fearsome god, while Vishnu operates as a (generally) kind, sympathetic, and helpful counterpart. What better way to learn about these key differences between two great Hindu divinities? This “simple” folk story sears those contrasts into a student's memory by weaving these many important concepts into a single great story.

With this fairly straightforward example of what I mean by a paradigm behind us, it is now time to tackle the somewhat-more-difficult set of concepts I set out to discuss at the beginning of this chapter. What does the Ponnivala epic have to say about the Hindu goddesses? Basically I will now outline a set of relationships depicted in this epic between four well-known Hindu female deities: Parvati, Celatta (goddess of the locale, known locally as Mariyamman and by many other names elsewhere), Durga, and Kali. Through these four aspects of the great female force called Sakti, I will try to distill what this one particular epic has to say about the female side of divine

power. The paradigm I will unpack is universal in its relevance and can be applied to women's lives and experiences anywhere on the planet. It is no wonder, therefore, that all these variants of the goddess's character are still popular and important to millions of devotees around the world. In the Ponnivala epic there are just four goddesses mentioned, and they appear in a logical order. In a very general sense they also reflect the four *yugas* of time, that is, four successive stages of cosmic decay that are well described in wider and more erudite circles of Hindu thought.

Table 1.1 gives the name of each goddess I have just mentioned and some details about her. The grandson of an actual singer of this story developed these iconographic features. They are also the same illustrations that I have used in the Ponnivala animated video series and in the graphic novels accompanying this large work. Let me be clear at the start: I had no role (advisory or otherwise) in these artistic decisions. All contrasts and oppositions observed below sprung fully formed from the imagination of the artist who drew them. None were of my choosing.

First I will point out the cosmogonic structure represented by these four females. Then I will develop a descriptive account of their personalities, their mythological adventures, and their festival rituals. These four goddesses stand in relationship to one another as depicted in figure 1.2.

Highest up in the diagram (representing a position in the sky or the heavens) sits the lead goddess, Parvati. She resides in Shiva's Himalayan abode, as his bride but can act alone (view figures Ag and Ah at the affiliated website).

From Parvati, according to a very common myth not mentioned in this particular epic, pieces of her body fell to earth after a confrontation occurred between her husband and her father (the last part of the Dakṣa story, sometimes treated as an independent myth).³ Subsequently these pieces materialized into many different representations the goddess on earth, each one found in a different place. The Ponnivala story represents her as having three basic

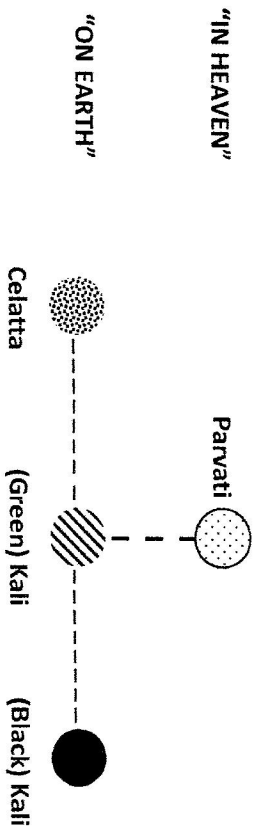


Figure 1.2. The four goddesses (the basic paradigm)

earth-bound forms, roles, and personalities. The first form to appear in the story is Celatta, the goddess of the story's featured family. Celatta watches over the local space where the heroes live and is deeply concerned with its prosperity in all ways: the abundance of its plants, its animals, and its people. The second goddess, whom the story calls (green) Kali, stands for her form as she is worshiped by the heroes' in-laws. And the third goddess, here called "*kari*" (or the black) Kali, represents her form as worshiped by the forest-dwelling hunters. All three of these forms are understood to be manifestations of one great goddess. However, noting the variation in the spatial locations chosen for these various forms provide a key to understanding variations in her personality. On earth these divine females act alone. There may be a pro-forma husband somewhere in the background, but in each case their three separate temples and their separate stories belong to them as independent beings (view figures Ba, Bb, and Bc at the affiliated website).

The first form of the earth-dwelling goddess, called Celatta (figure Ba at the affiliated website) in the Ponnivala story, but more widely known as Mariyamman, is responsible for the well-being of local environs and the health of local human families and communities.

The second form of the earth-dwelling goddess, here called the "green" Kali (figure Bb at the affiliated website), for her complexion in the artist's mind, is generally known elsewhere as Durga. Later in this chapter, when I describe her temple festival, she will have the name Batirakali. This important variation in the story's representation of the earth-bound goddess presents her as an enforcer of correct moral behavior. For this reason, she sometimes becomes very angry and fearful to behold. In our artist's mind this "green" Kali has dark-green skin, red eyes, and ten arms, each of which holds a weapon. I will continue to refer to her as the "green Kali," not because she is particularly vegetal-like or because she is cooling, but to distinguish her from the more ominous "black" Kali. Perhaps her "green" skin color refers to her moderate self-control. She only aims her ten weapons at those who have disobeyed or trespassed social norms. One can think of her ten weapons as her complete "toolkit." Each weapon (presumably) once carried with it a specific myth-story and she stands ready to use any or all of these, under varied circumstances, to achieve specific ends.

The final goddess in this folk paradigm is Karukali (the black Kali). This "true" Kali (in the wider mythology) is ashen-skinned and associated with stealth, death, and dissolution. Sometimes this form of the goddess is depicted as ugly and repulsive, is garlanded with skulls, and/or has a lolling bloodied tongue. At times she even dances on her own husband's body. But in the Ponnivala story (as more typical in the south of India generally) the dark-skinned Kali is more like an ascetic in her demeanor. She is more of a recluse. She is more secretive than fearful or violent. Furthermore, the black Kali of our legend is strongly associated with the forest and is linked to wild,

natural environs in general. She is a huntress who accepts animal sacrifices. Kali likes to be offered black animals, but she is not here seen garlanded with skulls. Looking at these relationships we easily notice a clear progression: from stage one (Parvati) through stage four (Kali). In each successive period or segment of time the goddess's attention shifts her focus further toward strife and dissolution. Matters start with Parvati, who has a cleansed and pleasant focus on primal creation. But when Celatta enters the story concerns shift (stage two) to focus on threats to local ecology and health. When the green Kali (stage three), takes center stage the moral order itself starts to disintegrate, and finally with black Kali (stage four) chaos and death begin to dominate (view figures Bc and Bd at the affiliated website). This progression of goddess roles in the Ponnivala story is identical with the formalized Hindu cycle of the four yugas. Below is a summary chart showing all four aspects of the goddess as the lead Ponnivala artist conceived of them.

Table 1.1. The Four Goddesses—in the Order of Their Appearance in the Story

Story Name	Parvati	Celatta	(Green) Kali	(Black) Kali
Added Popular Name	Uma	Gowri	Durga	Kali
Role #1	Life Giver	Fertility	Punishments	Life Taker
Role #2	Go-Between	Blessing	Curses	Huntress
Status	Married	Single	Single	Single
# Arms	2	4	10	4
	(no weapons)	(2 hold Shiva's symbols)	(all hold weapons)	(2 hold Shiva's symbols)
Skin	Pale Brown	Pale Brown	Dark Green	Ashen
Yuga	Kṛta	Treta	Dvāpara	Kali
Sari Blouse	Pale Green	Red	Yellow	Dark Blue
Sari	Pink	Dark Blue	Red	Red
Territory	Heaven	Heroes' Village	In-Law's Village	Hunters' Forest

Parvati often sits next to her husband, Shiva, in his council chambers. She is also active in and near these chambers (located in Kailasa near the Himalaya's highest peaks) or in "heaven," as some might say. Although there are a number of images of Parvati in the story, none show her looking directly at the viewer. Instead we always encounter this supreme form of the goddess by viewing her from the side. That is to say, she is not pictured as an idol in a temple. There is no direct "gaze" or meeting of eyes between Parvati (as located up in the sky) and the viewer. Furthermore, Parvati (as understood to reside "up there") has just two arms. It is as if she were human. And her

"look" or attitude is always beneficent and mild. Meanwhile, each of the other three goddesses has an angry or at least a scary side. But that is not Parvati. This supreme goddess is most often pictured by the artist as she travels across a sea of shimmering clouds or else as drifting through Lord Shiva's meditation forest on a mission to talk to him. Her gestures are always soft and nonassertive. She is "dreamy" and unsubstantial. By contrast, all three earthly forms of the goddess we encounter in the Ponnivala story are static and fixed to a base. In sum, they are pictured as "temple statues." Here on earth (excepting the rare moments when a goddess moves out of her shrine on a mission) all forms of the earth-bound goddess are conceptualized as icons of worship. In each of these "temple views," furthermore, each earthly goddess stares directly at the viewer. Only where she becomes an active player in the story do we see her form in profile. The key points of contrast are included in table 1.2.

Table 1.2. Parvati/Sakti in "Heaven" versus Her Three Earthly Forms Encountered by Humans

Single Form of the Cosmic Goddess in "Heaven"	All Three Forms of the Goddess on Earth
Pinkish, pastel colors	Saturated, strong colors
Two arms/no emblems or weapons	Ten arms, all but two hold weapons
Hair tied/braided, no crown	Hair loose, wears a crown

Now let us progress to the considerable differences between the three earthly forms of Sakti depicted in this story. Celatta, the goddess of the heroes' own village area, is most often seen while being worshipped. Hence the common items needed for her worship are present nearby. Celatta's sari is dark blue, a cool and reserved color. There is a hint of hot, however, provided by her red blouse. In her upper two hands she holds two emblems that (by iconographic convention) belong to her husband, Shiva. These are her trident and her double-headed drum, mounted on a stick. These "tools" serve to identify Celatta instantly as an earthly form of Parvati, the goddess married to Lord Shiva. Her skin color, furthermore, matches that of the heavenly Parvati. But note one interesting difference. Here on earth Celatta's hair is loose (but not disheveled). Celatta contrasts with Parvati's two other earthly forms in the story, as seen in table 1.3.

Next we will consider the green-skinned goddess, Kali (Durga). She stands out as the most contrastive and eye-catching character of all in our earth-bound triad. Holding eight different weapons in each of her eight hands, the green Kali is clearly the most aggressive of the three forms we encounter. Also note Kali-Durga's active posture. She is standing, her arms

Table 1.3. Form of the Heroes' Family Goddess Celatta versus Forms Allocated to Her Two "Competitors"

Heroes' Goddess	"Other" (Rival) Goddesses
Golden throne	Ashen throne
Dark-blue sari	Red sari
Standard offerings/active worship	No visible offerings/no human presence in the temple

seem to be moving, and her eyes are very, very red. Her sari is bright red and her blouse is a bright yellow-orange. Her trident is black. In addition, there is fire emanating from her crown. This is the goddess affiliated with the heroes' in-laws' family, a group that is repeatedly in conflict with the heroes. This confrontation begins very early on in the story. Their dispute concerns violations of family-unity-enforcing behavior. The issues are not matters of jealousy, but rather a reaction to "splitting" actions, that is, actions taken to cast off, exile, or devalue a recognized group member. At these points the story focuses on rejection rather than inclusion. Table 1.4 includes the key set of visual contrasts.

Table 1.4. The Heroes' Own Deity versus the Heroes' In-laws' Goddess Kali (Goddess of Outsiders)

Heroes' Goddess	In-Laws' Goddess
Lesser/milder skin color	Wildly different/scary skin color
Sitting on a throne	Standing on a dais
Normal eye color	Red eyes
Four arms/one drum and one weapon	Ten arms/all hold weapons
Non-fiery crown	Fiery crown
Only the blouse is red	Both sari and blouse are red-yellow (not)
Has garland of flowers, plus flowered pillars	Has no flowered garlands or other greenery

Finally we must consider the goddess worshiped by the heroes' forest rivals. This is Karukali, a dark or "black" form of Kali. Interestingly, Karukali is not the most violent of the three earthly forms presented by this story. Instead she embodies what we might call "a mirror image" of Celatta. Note that these two divine females have certain key elements in common. For one, both Celatta and Karukali hold exactly the same pair of symbols in their extra hands, a double drum (bound to a stick) on the right and a trident on the left. Furthermore, their seated postures are exactly the same. However, we can also observe three striking inversions: 1) Karukali's skin is ashen-colored; 2)

Karukali's blouse is blue/cool but her sari is red/hot (exactly reversing the colors given to Celatta's equivalent garments); and 3) Karukali's throne is ashen-colored and matches her skin tone, while Celatta's throne is golden, just as her skin is depicted to be a lovely yellow-brown tan. Adding to this is the fact that Karukali's temple is located in the middle of a dark forest. Her worshippers are hunters who carry spears. Celatta's temple, by contrast, is located next to lush fields of sugarcane, varied grains, and sunflowers. Her worshippers are farmers. Table 1.5 depicts the key contrasts in chart form.

Table 1.5. The Heroes' Own Deity versus the Heroes' Hunter-Enemy Goddess

Heroes' Goddess	Hunter-Enemy's Goddess
Bright/light/tan skin	Ashen/colorless/dark skin
Dark blue sari—red blouse	Red sari—dark blue blouse
Golden-colored throne	Ashen-colored throne
Located inside a village near fields and homes	Located in a dark forest, away from any fields or dwellings

Now consider the bigger picture. To my mind this progression in the "look" of the four Ponnivala goddesses, one in "heaven" and the other three "on earth," fits well with the larger concept of a progression along a continuum that contains the four yugas. There is a clear movement from creative and joyful beginnings (Parvati), through issues related to the presence (or lack of) prosperity, social order, and health (Celatta), through strife and moral decay (green Kali has the power to "fix" these problems), and finally to social lawlessness, chaos, death, and dissolution (black Kali's domain). In sum, these four forms of the goddess cover the full spectrum of Hindu cosmological thinking. They also cover, as we shall see below, the full spectrum of human issues, be they related to prosperity and sexual attraction, to aggression and suffering, or to death and decay. All these and more play a role in human experience.

THE GODDESS PARVATIN MORE DEPTH

Now that the barebones of the four goddess forms have been outlined, it is time to describe each of these deities in a little more depth, using only information gleaned from the Ponnivala story. I will start with Parvati as she is the divine figure who gets this entire epic legend started. This great Sakti, wife of Lord Shiva, is present right at the beginning. She and her spouse are first seen drifting across the cloud-filled sky together. Then Parvati looks down and notices a beautiful forested area and remarks in dismay, "I see no

signs of agriculture and no plowed fields down there." As a polite (and deferential) gesture she first tests her new idea, asking her husband if she may be permitted to create some human beings that would be able to till the soil in this wild area. Shiva supports the idea and tells Parvati to do "as she wishes." Parvati then instantly creates nine men and a plow. Next she tells these nine "brothers" to start tilling the fine earth around them. Just a short time later she also creates some women—so that each man can marry and start a family. In sum, Parvati is "the Creatrix" who acts independently (more or less) and at her own initiative, right at the start of the story. Through these opening events it is quickly established that the goddess Parvati watches over the earth, and she wants to take care of it. She also wants to ensure human succession on earth through family bonding and procreation. Parvati is thus depicted as a creator, a nourisher, and a supporter of life in general.

Of course Parvati is the faithful wife of Lord Shiva. In the Ponnivala story she is seen sitting by his side at many (but not all) discussions that take place in his council chambers. But she is more than this. Parvati also acts as a significant go-between when it comes to disagreements between her brother Vishnu and her marital partner, Shiva. The best evidence of this go-between role comes from the period when the Queen of Ponnivala (known as Tamarai, heroine of the second generation of the story) spends twenty-one years in penance at the gates of Shiva's council chambers. During this time, as she tries to attract his attention, Lord Shiva is very cruel to her. He cuts off her head and physically punishes her in various other ways for her sincere efforts. All she wants is to win a boon of fertility after softening his hardened heart. Lord Vishnu, always trying to help her out, even sends several fires up to Shiva's forest meditation place. Shiva is angered by Vishnu's "heat" but he is still not moved to act. Finally this pesky brother-in-law goes in search of his sister Parvati. Vishnu soon finds her in this couple's sky-palace, a lovely abode where this gentle goddess lives with Shiva when he is not meditating. Once in the palace, Vishnu begs Parvati to go and ask Shiva to help Tamarai with her barrenness. Parvati agrees to undertake this mission. Parvati quickly finds Lord Shiva at his place of yogic *tapas*. She greets him and then politely asks him to "do something" for the poor suffering woman Tamarai. After hearing his wife plead on Tamarai's behalf Lord Shiva's heart finally softens. He now grants Queen Tamarai the gift of three magical children. Then he finds the spirits of three eminent figures from the past and "immaculately" places their (rebirth-ready) embryo forms in her womb. This is a turning point in the story, a fulcrum so to speak, where the power to make things happen shifts to the female side of the divine balance sheet. Parvati has succeeded in winning Shiva over. Like the Virgin Mary in Catholicism, this is a goddess to whom humans can pray, hoping that she will mediate on their behalf . . . with a harsh male overlord. Parvati is no push-

over. When she sets her mind to acting independently she does so. Furthermore, she will very likely succeed in anything she sets out to do.

THE GODDESS CELATTA (OFTEN KNOWN AS MARIYAMMAN) IN MORE DEPTH

Celatta directly reflects Parvati's personality and demeanor. But now we see her in a temple setting where she receives offerings from the heroes' family on a regular basis (generally three times a day). In the Ponnivala story she is further honored at a yearly festival where her golden (travel-ready) statue is pulled around her temple once a year in a grand ritual said to greatly please her. Celatta also travels to and through the heavens on occasion. In her biggest travel adventure in the Ponnivala story she goes there to seek help from her brother Vishnu, complaining that her earth-bound temple has been neglected. Celatta travels upward on this occasion and soon locates Vishnu's floating cobra couch. Not finding him there, she continues to search until she finally finds him lying dreamily on his favorite flower-garden equivalent. Celatta uses this meeting to ask her brother to go and find the son of the man who used to be her ardent devotee, the eldest of the first nine farmers in the area. This son's name is Kunnutaiya. Earlier in the story Kunnutaiya was exiled by jealous cousins. That is the reason why Celatta's temple has been neglected. Vishnu finds Kunnutaiya, now grown into a man, and sees to it (via a long list of adventures needed to achieve this goal) that this "son of the land" finally comes home to till his ancestral lands in Ponnivala. When Kunnutaiya does finally return, his first act is to clean Celatta's temple and begin his family's worship of her once more.

Later in the story Celatta becomes Vishnu's helper. Now he asks her a favor. She is to raise Kunnutaiya's twin sons (the two boys Shiva earlier placed in Queen Tamarai's womb) for five years, in a cave secretly located just underneath her home shrine. (Using a fanciful metaphor one could say that Celatta "sits" atop the two infant heroes much as a hen sits on her eggs). But the third embryo, a female, does not get this special treatment. She is raised in Kunnutaiya's palace as a normal child.

Why are the boys given this special treatment? There are many ways to answer that question, of course. But the obvious one is that when the two boys are born they are instantly put in danger because of the jealousy of cousin brothers who want to take over Kunnutaiya's land. Vishnu asks his sister to do the physical work of digging a secret tunnel from the secret room beneath her temple . . . all the way to the birthing room in the heroes' fine palace. Celatta does this well in advance of the birth itself. Then she travels through her freshly dug tunnel to the birthing room, grabs the boys before they are seen by others, and secretly whisks them away in her arms. She

travels with them back through the tunnel and the two boys then live with her in her pre-planned hiding place, for five years. Of course this treatment is similar to the magical upbringing many heroes experience in other folk stories. In a further parallel with many other heroic children, the goddess feeds the twins special foods (tiger milk and elephant milk) and also has them play with elephants. The two boys are also taught the martial arts under her guidance. In sum, we see Celatta, like Parvati, behaving as a goddess who nourishes children. She also is dedicated to protecting farming families, and she especially supports their need to generate male heirs. When the twin boys reach age five, however, Celatta sets off to find their "true" parents. The goddess finally locates this couple, now a poor and impoverished little family who are living in exile. Jealous relatives have long ago taken over their lands, citing the fact that there are no male heirs. Celatta's return of the two boys to their "rightful" parents changes all this. Now the lands of Ponnivala can be reclaimed (and she will again receive worship). Having reached age five these two magical boys are deemed old enough to defend themselves should challengers come forward (which they do).

There is one final and very important point to make about Celatta. She is not just concerned with human well-being. Perhaps most important of all, Celatta (like Parvati) is concerned with the lands of Ponnivala and their prosperity. In this epic there is a clear causal relationship between the soil of the area, its produce, and this key local goddess. The message is clear: worship Celatta and the crops will prosper.

The causal arrow linking Celatta to prosperity almost seems to reverse direction, however, as one comes to know the Ponnivala story in more depth. The prosperity of the lands around the goddess's shrine receives repeated praise, mainly through songs. And every time the lands flourish the goddess is described as happy and content. She wants to see green and abundant landscapes all around her. Just caring for the lands and sharing a token of the produce with her is enough to spell good and happy years ahead. One might even call Celatta the ultimate "ecology goddess." In sum, the prosperity of Ponnivala's lovely lands becomes the key driver that "causes" the goddess to behave benignly and become content.

Significantly, this happy relationship between the land and the goddess starts to decline by the middle of the story. Kunnutaiya's two sons worship Celatta less and less frequently as they grow up. They also neglect farming. All their thoughts focus around their preferred warrior lifestyle. As a direct consequence of the heroes' failure to attend to their role as farmers, the lands of Ponnivala no longer prosper. Instead the fields are ripped up, the dikes holding back the stored irrigation water get broken, while the rice paddies and the sugarcane crop meet with ruin. Celatta is easily viewed as India's story equivalent to today's widespread concern with sustainable land man-

agement. She is the divinity in charge of maintaining Ponnivala's wholesome, balanced, and nonpolluting natural surroundings.

THE "GREEN" GODDESS KALI (ELSEWHERE OFTEN KNOWN AS DURGA) IN MORE DEPTH

This goddess is interesting both because the story assigns her to the village of the heroes' insensitive in-laws and because she is the only divinity in the story to have more than four arms. It is abundantly clear from her red eyes, the many weapons she holds, and the color of her blouse and sari that this green-skinned Kali figure can be angry and violent if she so wishes. The story describes her as more gentle and balanced in her thinking, however, than one would imagine a truly aggressive goddess to be. The "green" Kali appears at only two points in the story. The first point is where Kali helps out a female sow-boar who was rudely kicked by Queen Tamarai at the start of her twenty-one-year pilgrimage to Kailasa. That sow-boar curses Tamarai and vows that it will also do penance in order to obtain a male child. That boar-son will become an opposite force whose sole goal in life is to make trouble for Tamarai's twin boys. The sow-boar mother swears that her son will eventually attack and kill Tamarai's two sons . . . many years hence. While Queen Tamarai prays to Lord Shiva, this sow prays to the "green" Kali. Green Kali grants the boon the sow requests (while Lord Shiva grants the boon Tamarai requests). A great animal adversary is thus born to "balance" the heroine's own childbirth-gift. Note that Queen Tamarai insulted the sow-boar. She was unspeakably rude by lifting her foot to kick it. Hers was a moral trespass that gave the green-skinned goddess Kali an opening to right a wrong.

The second time the "green" Kali appears in the story is when Queen Tamarai's in-laws are frightened by their husbands' younger sister's appearance at their doorstep. Significant, of course, is the fact that Tamarai was blocked at the main doorway to this fine home where she herself was born, years earlier. Everyone in that household knows that Tamarai is childless. Her brothers and their wives fear she will bring evil upon their children. Tamarai is thought to be a kind of witch and therefore her own siblings order a palace watchman to deny her entry and instead to beat her savagely.

Tamarai doesn't submit to this punishment easily. Instead she responds by calling on Lord Shiva and requesting that he send her a fire ball. Tamarai uses this "fire" to balance out the insult she has received. Now she is the aggressor. She throws the fire balls that descends from the sky and burns the poor palace watchman. But far more terrible, Tamarai also uses her special personal power to curse all of her nieces and nephews . . . six children the family have hidden under a large basket inside the palace. These kids fall

down on the floor (under the basket) in a death-like stupor. But Tamarai's anger has not yet subsided. Next she goes to the "green" Kali temple nearby to ask for more help (green Kali is Tamarai's natal family goddess). Standing on the temple steps, she complains to Kali about the injustice meted out to her by her own brothers. She knows that by convention, her brothers are obliged to grant their sister access to her natal home . . . at any time. Instead, her two brothers have broken that moral code by ordering their own sister locked out and beaten.

Tamarai now shows green Kali her wounds. The goddess is sympathetic and tries to find a way to right the wrong done to Tamarai. First the goddess has her priest go to the brothers' palace. There he suggests that they look under the overturned basket. When these men do this they find, to their horror, that all their children are dead! The priest then suggests that the two brothers go directly to the Kali temple. There the goddess advises them to prostrate themselves before their sister (under green Kali's direct gaze) and to ask her for forgiveness. This is done and Tamarai soon agrees to revive her brothers' children. Again we see that a major moral transgression is righted with green Kali's help. This time Kali serves as a mediator who finds a way to create some peace in the family after a terrible incident. She does not even need any of her violent tools to achieve this, though clearly she has the means to enforce a just solution if need be. Yes, this green Kali looks fearsome. But she is also helpful, and she clearly likes to support the weaker party in a dispute. Indeed it can be said that green Kali is especially sympathetic to disadvantaged or insulted females. No wonder women still find her relevant to their lives!

A third intervention by a goddess in the Ponnivala story seems to bridge the two domains I am contrasting: land, prosperity, and wellness (Celatta's domain) versus following accepted social rules and using good moral judgment (green Kali's domain). This is the point when a little female dog becomes offended. Ponnacci is a prominent pet of the palace princess in the third generation. She becomes angry when the two hero-warriors (her brothers) do not take her to war with them. Ponnacci belongs to the palace princess, Tantal, but she has been overlooked (much like this girl herself is frequently ignored by her brothers). In this metaphorical incident, all of the kingdom's fighting men have left with their large, male hunting dogs. They plan to fight their hunter-enemies, but they have not taken Ponnacci along because she is "too small." Ponnacci, in her anger, goes to Celatta and asks for a curse that will make the twin heroes sick and unable to leave their tent when it comes time to fight. This little dog approaches Celatta, not Kali, with her request for moral enforcement help. Celatta backs the little dog's curse and it works its magic. The heroes sicken and then, eventually, learn from a wandering saint/beggar why they suddenly became unwell. Under-standing from this soothsayer that they committed a wrong, the heroes then

quickly apologize to Ponnacci and invite her to join the war effort. As a result of the apology Celatta helps lift the curse and the heroes feel their normal powers return.

Now here is the crunch. There was a kind of "moral" transgression here, the exclusion of one dog because of its small size. Why did Celatta get the job of dealing with this and not Kali? First, I would say this illustrates that the three types of goddesses do not have strictly limited powers and responsibilities. Their categories have a kind of "crossover" quality. We are speaking of a sliding scale and not of absolute, water-tight categories. This is also true in "real life" where a problem may have many dimensions. In this story scenario the little dog is concerned to join a war to defend the lands of Ponnivala. Furthermore, Ponnacci asks that they become ill . . . not that they die. This suggests that the health of men leading this defense fight, brothers of her own master, the Princess Tantal, somehow serves as a metaphor for the health of the kingdom at large. These men have ignored her, the unobtrusive little player whom we later learn holds the key to winning the battle ahead. The enemy, a wild boar, has just torn up the beautiful rice paddies and the lovely sugarcane field the Ponnivala rulers are so proud of. Ponnacci can protect the kingdom. Ponnacci needs to send a signal to these men to let her lead them. Yes, they have made a "moral" mistake in excluding her but they have also overlooked the one player who knows how to defeat the great wild boar and save these lands from further ruin. No wonder Celatta is interested. No wonder helping this little dog send a message to Ponnivala's two warrior-rulers falls to this goddess. Yes, this could have been a complaint taken to green Kali, but from the perspective of the story's heroes, Celatta has "the prime interest" in getting this hunting expedition back on task. She is just as interested in finding and killing a huge, land-destroying wild boar as are the heroes themselves. In sum, here is the borderline case. The job of helping the suffering protagonist could have fallen to either goddess. In this particular story it falls to Celatta and not to green Kali.

THE "BLACK" GODDESS KARUKALI (THE DARK OR BLACK KALI) IN MORE DEPTH

Now we come to the third and final goddess in this story, who I claim "crystallizes" ideas about the Hindu goddesses into a simplified paradigm. Karukali is the goddess associated with the forest, with hunters and (I think, in particular) with the sacrifice of black animals. Karukali is not an active goddess in the Ponnivala story. Instead she serves as a mirror for Celatta. Karukali stands for what one might say is the opposite or flip side of Celatta. Instead of a golden throne she has a dark one. Instead of golden skin hers has an ashen tone. And instead of a blue (cooling) sari she wears a red (hot) one.

The goddess Karukali says nothing in this story. She also never moves or flies. Indeed she never leaves her temple. Instead this third goddess, queen of the forest, seems to be in a state of deep, yogic meditation at all times, similar to the kind of austerities Lord Shiva himself performs in a similar forest setting. Karukali's main devotee in the story is a young girl named Viratanggal (a waitlike form of Tangel or more literally "the brave little sister"). She is the forest princess, sister to the hunters living there. Note that her opposite is simply called Tangel, a girl who is "little sister" to the heroes (third in that set of embryos placed in Tamara's womb by Lord Shiva). Viratanggal's fierce brothers are the heroes' main rivals. These two similarly named teenage girls are of roughly the same age, both have multiple brothers, and they are clear look-alikes. Tangel is always seen wearing a red skirt and blouse (partially covered by a yellow breast cloth) while Viratanggal wears all-blue equivalents. The goddess Celatta, whom Tangel worships, is largely blue while she (Tangel) is largely red.

Viratanggal, by contrast, worships Karukali. This "black" goddess wears red clothing while her female devotee wears blue. Clearly the two pairs (each a goddess + devotee) are presented as opposites (or at least as mirrored forms) of one another. If we take Karukali to be a kind of yogi, we could then say that her skin is ashen because the heat of her meditation has been directed inward (while her potential fierceness is subtly revealed by her sari color). She is not concerned with events in the outer world around her. This Kali is a very "dark" female, and her key followers are hunters who operate in a dark forest. That seems appropriate for a goddess who never responds. Even when a theft occurs right before her eyes she sees nothing and does nothing. I refer to one specific point in the story where the heroes' assistant Shambuga runs off with Viratanggal's huge stash of fine iron, iron that had been stored right in front of Karukali's temple.

It is important to note that the part of the story where Karukali mainly appears is the segment where all the death and destruction occur. In these final episodes the heroes' fields are first uprooted by a great black boar, a demon-pet whom princess Viratanggal is very fond of. But in a very clear inversion, Tangel also has a pet. Her tiny sweetheart is a little brown dog said to be barely the size of one human fist. This dog is female and her name, Ponnacci, could be translated as "little piece of gold." Ponnacci is well domesticated and all of her actions contrast with Viratanggal's huge wild, black male pet, the tusked boar Kompan. Kompan is eventually weakened (to the point of death) when Ponnacci bites his testicles with her poison teeth. While he crumbles in agony, the little dog politely steps to let the younger of the two brother-heroes finish off the grand prize with a huge boar-spear. His violent and muscular action brings death to the attacking "demon." But this is only the beginning. Next there is a rapid counterattack by one hundred Vettuva hunters, Viratanggal's own set of brothers.⁴

It is significant that these forest-dwelling men confront the heroes with only sticks and spears (not swords). More interesting yet, Lord Vishnu himself leads their attack. The twin heroes survive the ensuing melee, while all the hunters (appear) to die. But their defeat is more symbolic than real as Lord Vishnu quickly reveals to the twin heroes that he has also been at work behind the scenes. Vishnu now paints a "vision" in front of the heroes' eyes. He shows how he actually created all those attacking hunter-warriors just moments before the two brothers saw them approach. He did this using his own magical powers and the palm of just one hand. The two see this vision before them . . . as they stand on the battlefield with their swords already bloodied. Now Vishnu asks them just "to fight a little longer." The great hunter-farmer war now becomes Lord Vishnu's own "play," a divinely manufactured illusion.

But why? Why would Vishnu challenge the heroes in such a life-threatening way? The answer comes just moments later when Lord Vishnu acts to end the heroes' lives . . . in a graceful and indirect way. He does this by subterfuge. Indeed he beguiles them into falling forward on their own swords. I use the word "beguile" because Vishnu takes the form of an archer to send his final signal to the heroes via a "love arrow." We see the god appear, not in disguise, but looking very blue and a bit like another familiar divine form . . . Lord Krishna. Vishnu manifests himself as sitting on the branch of a tree hanging over the small mountain river where the twin heroes are busy washing their swords. The two hear a rustling sound, but they do not see Vishnu. He then shoots a flowered arrow (similar to the weapon Kama—or Cupid—would use), straight at the key heroic brother, Shankar. Indeed he and his brother followed Vishnu's instructions. They both fought "just a little longer" and then declared the battle over. They have now gone to wash their swords. The love missile (the flowered arrow) flies directly at Shankar during the very moment he is washing in a stream near the battlefield. Metaphorically his bath resembles a pre-death cleansing in the Ganges river, echoing the importance given to bathing a corpse with (Ganges) water.

But why use a "love arrow" at this point? I believe we can understand Vishnu's gesture as a love-dart that creates a "swoon." After all, the heroes have been "chaste" all their lives. They have never so much as touched their wives, even in the act of marrying them. Virgins both, the two heroic brothers are about to undergo a kind of love tryst moment. The two heroes who meet the goddess (who would be an image before their mind's eye in the moment before their deaths), and are now (due to the arrow) smitten by love for her. Just minutes later the two submit to her charms as they literally fall to earth and become corpses. Both story heroes fall forward (albeit sequentially) on the points of their own swords. (The act is performed in such a way that each blade enters its master's chest near its victim's heart). This is a kind of "piercing-to-death" explained by devotees as a gift to, or personal sacrifice

at, the will of the goddess. The twin heroes die within minutes of each other, but very soon afterward all life in their kingdom also grinds to a halt with the heroes' sister Tangal helping that process of dissolution unfold. She burns the family palace. After the fire has done its job she calls on the rain to cool the remains. Then she wanders in the forest with her hair in tangles, something a young virgin girl would never, never do in normal life. All she knew in Ponnivala has now dissolved and disappeared before her own eyes. Even her clothes are torn.

In sum, Tangal is transformed by her brothers' deaths. Now she is searching for their dead bodies. This is the end of the Kali Yuga. Earlier the great black boar Kompan (the horned one) was speared and his body transformed into a similar sacrificial offering. We now can see that this seemingly simple "boar hunt" was actually a story technique used to foreshadow what would soon happen to the heroes themselves. But there is more. Kompan's head is first given away to Lord Vishnu (who takes the disguise of a washerman to receive it). Vishnu has to beg the heroes for the boar's head. For this purpose Vishnu uses the excuse of his pregnant wife, whom he says craves boar meat. This is the ruse he uses to get a hold of the prized sacrificial head. But note: Vishnu's second wife in the larger mythology is none other than Bhudevi . . . the goddess of the earth herself. And that symbolism is not lost on the two heroes. They soon come to realize that this gesture is indeed intended to foreshadow their own deaths . . . which will happen very soon . . . as they fall to earth while expressing their love for her.

Now let me return to the primary subject in this section of my argument, the goddess Karukali. Who is she? In the local kiramam area Karukali is also known as Angamma or Angalamman. And in the local festival rituals for this goddess that association is backed up by stories about her collected during my fieldwork. Each year Angalamman has a huge pregnant woman fashioned out of mud formed in front of her temple on bare ground. Small black pigs are sacrificed to this huge prone body (using a spear to their chests) at the time of the festival, "to hasten the delivery," as it is said her pregnancy has gone on for an unnaturally long time. After these sacrifices the festival participants "walk on fire," in front of her for the same reason (actually on burning coals carefully prepared in a long, deep trench beforehand). Somehow the pierced piglets and the hot coals achieve renewal. The rebirth, however, is not directly enacted. It occurs in some undefined future era when all springs to life afresh. There is an apparent parallel here with the concept of the Kali Yuga coming to a dark end and then the cycle starting all over again once more.

Another interesting perspective that helps explain why Karukali is an ashen and static goddess comes from popular understandings of the meaning of the Bhagavad Gita.⁵ There some say war is no longer opposed to peace, nor is success opposed to failure, or morality set against immorality. Instead

the entire phenomenal world becomes an illusion in the age of Kali. Everything becomes Vishnu's *maya* or magic in this final *yuga* where measurable time becomes just one great circular movement within a larger set of repeated cycles. A new round will begin after the end of the old as the fruits of all human labor become reabsorbed at this point.⁶ The key idea presented in the Bhagavad Gita, say some, is desire-less action. Katz puts this in epic terms by writing of the need to "cling to heroic values in the face of human tragedy." In the Ponnivala story this would describe the point at which the story's two legendary heroes decide to fall forward on their own swords. Borrowing Katz's words one might say this act expresses the heroes' "subjugation . . . to a certain principle of inner self-determination of action proceeding by the soul's freedom from the tangled law of works. . . . The reward of such desire-less action . . . is liberation, a form of walking meditation." This is not "folk" thinking, but what the folk bard (and the artist interpreting his words) have done is to adapt this concept of renunciation and submission and re-present it in story form. We "see" and "feel" the act of renunciation and the desire to free the soul from the world in the Ponnivala epic, where the same idea has been set forth in a poetic bundle of images. Karukali, the fourth and truly final form of the goddess appearing in this legend, is the goddess of the story whose presence supports this basic philosophical perspective, a theme many authors have found central to the Bhagavad Gita. As Katz has written, "God himself cannot change the inevitable cyclical course of fate. He (for Ponnivala . . . Lord Vishnu) establishes dharma, but does not interfere with fate, that is the progression of the yugas."⁷ Here fate could be said to be present in the story, as a concept embodied by the great goddess Karukali.

Next I will attempt a description of each of these goddesses' annual festivals. But first, it will be helpful to study a map of their respective locations vis-à-vis each other "on the ground." The two maps below show the layout of the four key shrines in spatial terms, in the temples central to Kannapuram Kiramam: in figure 1.3,⁸ from west to east, we see: 1) a temple dedicated to Shiva and Parvati (the Parvati-type of shrine); 2) a temple dedicated to Bairakali (the green Kali/Durga-type of shrine); 3) a temple dedicated to Mariyamman (the Celata-type of shrine); and then lastly (somewhat further north and isolated from this cluster), 4) a temple dedicated to Angalamman (the black or Karukali-type of shrine).

Note that there is a linear progression in status and in orientation from west to east. The main temple dedicated to Shiva and Parvati faces east while the "subsidiary" Bairakali and Mariyamman temples face north. No one remembers which temple was built first. But in concept, we can certainly say that Shiva and Parvati sit at the apex of this local system. Their temple enjoys ritual priority and the highest respect. Bairakali-Durga is next in line. Mariyamman, on the other hand, is thought of as a sort of specialized offshoot of Durga. She localizes Durga and gives her a strong attachment to one particu-

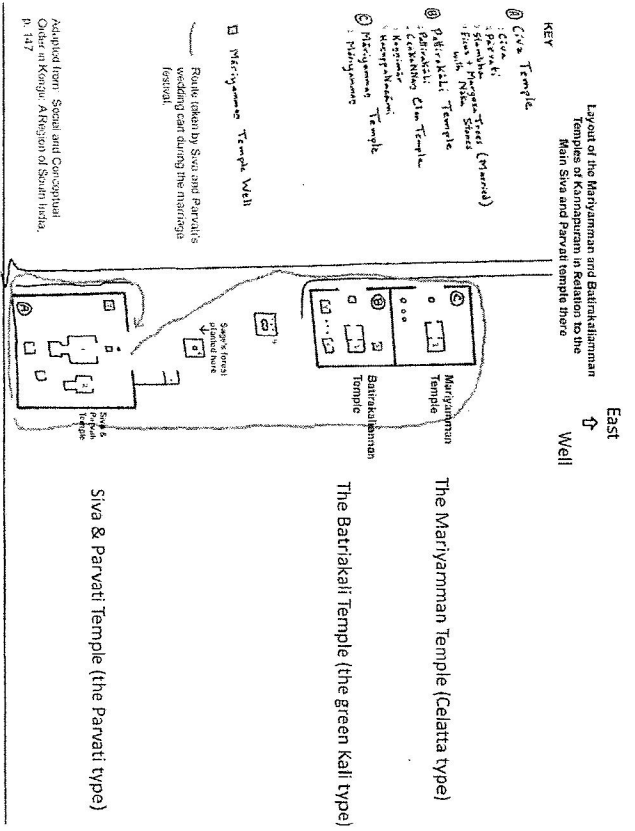


Figure 1.3. Location of three goddess temples

lar space, the local kiraman and its eighteen “villages.” Angalamman is a further “offshoot.” She sits at a deliberate distance from these other three shrines (see figure 1.4).⁹ Angalamman is the goddess of maters that lie outside regular village life . . . and partakes of a wilder, more chaotic surrounding. This goddess has only one temple in the entire area. She does not have one temple per kiraman as Mariyamman definitely does.

HOW DO ACTUAL PATTERNS OF GODDESS WORSHIP RELATE TO THIS SPATIAL MAP?

Of course the situation on “the ground” is more complex than a single epic story can encompass. But, in fact, what I managed to observe during my 1965 and 1966 period of intense local fieldwork does *not* seem to be *that* much more complicated! In the area where this Ponnivala legend is best known, the spatial layout and celebrations performed for the key goddess shrines *do*, in general, correspond to the epic-story paradigm I have just described. I will now expand on this point. The Kongu region of Tamilnadu, as I knew it then, contained four basic types of goddess shrines.

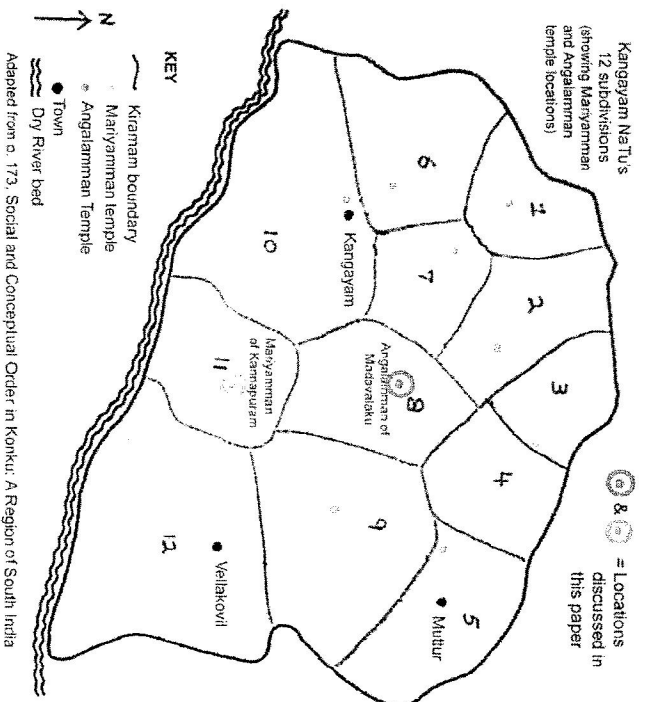


Figure 1.4. Traditional sub-divisions of Kangayam Natu
SHRINE TYPE ONE DESCRIPTION: PARVATI—A TEMPLE LOCATED INSIDE THE LARGER SHIVA COMPOUND

The temples I would place in Shrine type one are easily identifiable. These are the common Shiva temples that dot the landscape everywhere. In almost all cases these temples include an interior shrine dedicated to Shiva’s wife, Parvati. She occupies an important small temple of her own within the larger compound, a sacred enclosure second in importance only to the adjacent shrine dedicated to her great husband, Lord Shiva. The stories told about this divine couple, and which describe the temple’s key festivals each year, all focus on their marriage. These myth-legends also depict the occasional disputes that arise between husband and wife. In some temples there is a nightly ritual where a small brass image of Lord Shiva is physically carried into his wife’s “chambers” for the night, and then removed each morning.

In the temple I am most familiar with, the Kannapuram Shiva temple, the most important festival annually depicts the couple’s marriage. It is celebrated in the month of April–May (Cititai) and the actual wedding day is timed to closely (though not always exactly) correspond to the full moon. As the

Table 1.6. A Four-Point Folk Paradigm for Goddess Shrines (Based on Evidence from the Kongu Area of Tamilnadu)

SHRINE TYPE	SHRINE TYPE	SHRINE TYPE	SHRINE TYPE
ONE	TWO	THREE	FOUR
The goddess Parvati as seen inside a Siva temple compound (a Parvati temple setting)	Family and clan goddesses (a Celatta/Gauri-like temple setting)	Goddesses protecting a specific territory and/or dealing with a core human issue (a green Kaili/Durga-like temple setting)	Goddesses associated with death, chaos, wild places, and the end of time (a black Kaili/Kali-like temple setting)
CREATION and also SUPPLICATION	WELL-BEING, HEALTH, ECOLOGY, and SOCIAL ORDER	WRONG-DOING and also PUNISHMENT	DEATH, FERTILITY, and also COSMIC RENEWAL

story goes, Parvati laments the fact that her first wedding was too fast and not very pleasant (the Daksha story, not described further here) and that now she would like to celebrate it again (and again) in a more relaxed and enjoyable way.

The three preliminary days of the Shiva temple festival represent the period of the pair's engagement. On each of these days the couple circle their temple together, each time using a different "vehicle." On the first day they ride together in a palanquin. On the second day they ride together on a large wooden bull and on the third they ride side by side on a wooden horse and a wooden elephant. The fourth day is the day of the marriage itself. This event is celebrated with elaborate pujas, ritual chants, and poetic recitations. Interestingly, this is the one day when the couple do not exit the temple together to circumbulate their compound in a celebratory parade.

The fifth day constitutes the big public announcement of the marriage. Now the newlyweds circle the temple compound together atop their great wooden chariot. This is the only day of the year that this great chariot is used. On the sixth and seventh days the couple again circle their shrine compound, but this time they sit separately on a horse and an elephant. On the eighth day they ride a horse and an elephant once more, but now a poet reads a story about a temple thief who ran away with the family jewels. On the ninth day, there is another story told. This time the tale describes a marital fight. As re-enacted, Parvati temporarily locks her husband out of the entire temple com-

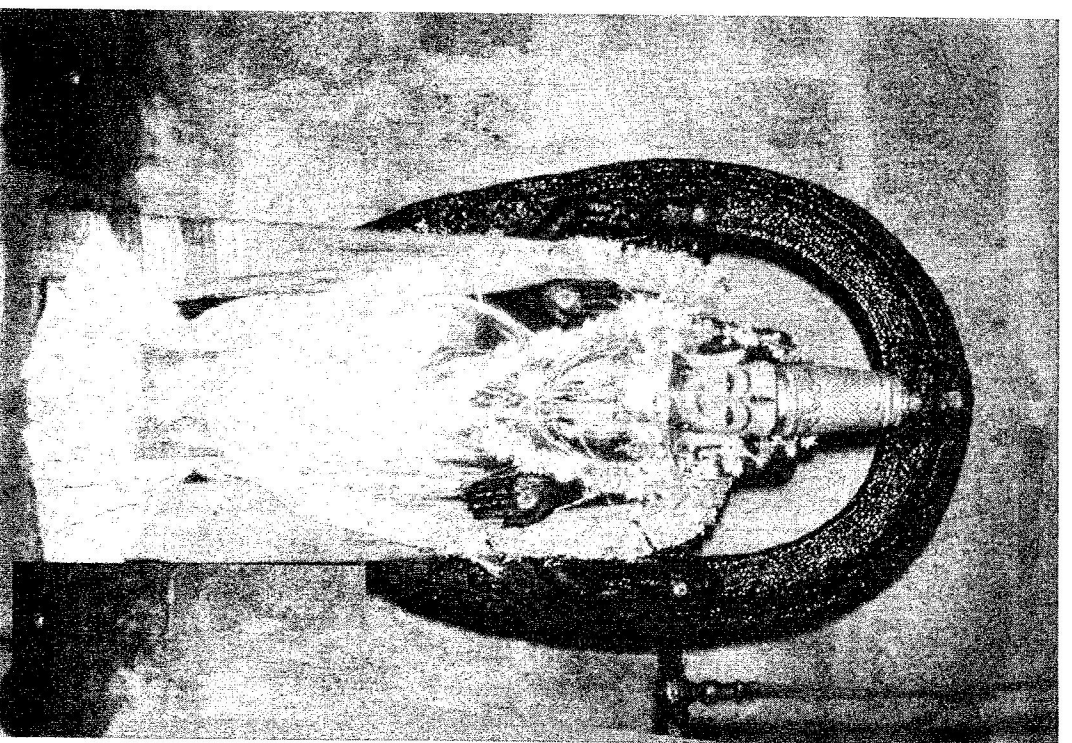


Figure 1.5. Parvati's main image in the Kannapuram Shiva temple (view figures Ea through Eh at the affiliated website).

ound. But all is resolved after some time and she allows the great lord back in. There is no outside-of-the-compound excursion made by the couple on this final day, but there is a more modest internal parade enacted. Now their "son" Ganesh joins them in a trip around the temple's symbolic stone pillar

base, the *stambha*. Following this, a handful of seedlings are placed in the temple well. This gesture would seem to reference the idea that the great divine marriage is now happy once more. Now life will prosper and things will grow well. The ceremonies are over.

SHRINE TYPE TWO DESCRIPTION: CELATTA—LOCALLY KNOWN AS MARIYAMMAN OF KANNAPURAM

I will start with a broad description of this well-known goddess, generally named Mariyamman.¹⁰ Locals believe that she plays a critical role in bringing rain to parched villages and that she is able to protect their local settlements from disease, especially from the ravages of smallpox. According to earlier traditions in the area, only those castes associated with agricultural activities, the farmers and their immediate service allies (the so-called right-hand castes), were allowed to participate in her annual festivities. More importantly, perhaps, Mariyamman has always drawn people from the entire area she oversees (the kiramam). She was and still is a territorial goddess who is primarily concerned with maintaining order, prosperity, and good health for all. And in direct alignment with this responsibility set, all the festival duties linked to her major yearly celebration are interwoven in a way that requires most of the many different communities involved in her worship to all work together. If disputes arise, which is not uncommon, any current disputes will surface at the time of her festival and must be resolved before the key ritual activities can proceed. In this way Mariyamman's festival is a social-control tool that "enforces" order between the several communities involved, by requiring their close ritual cooperation.

The story goes that Mariyamman is approached by an untouchable lover who disguises himself and eventually beguiles her into marrying him. But she is greatly angered when she finds out about his true status. So, in revenge for his deceit, she soon burns (or beheads) him. He dies from this attack (understandably) and she ends up a widow, but only for one day. Then Mariyamman returns to her normal, relatively calm and normal state. Except for the period of her festival this goddess "lives alone" in her temple. Out of respect, however, she is treated as a still-married woman. She wears a colored (rather than a white) sari to symbolize this important fact.

During her festival Mariyamman's "mistaken marriage" is highlighted by a post with three branches that is installed right in front of her temple early on in the proceedings. This post, called the *kambam*, explicitly represents her ill-fated lover. Taking the form of a fire pot, described as hot with her anger, Mariyamman sits on this post each night. During the day that pot is taken away and a (cooling) earthen vessel full of green leafy branches replaces it. Adding to this symbolism of oscillating "hot" and "cool" periods, there are

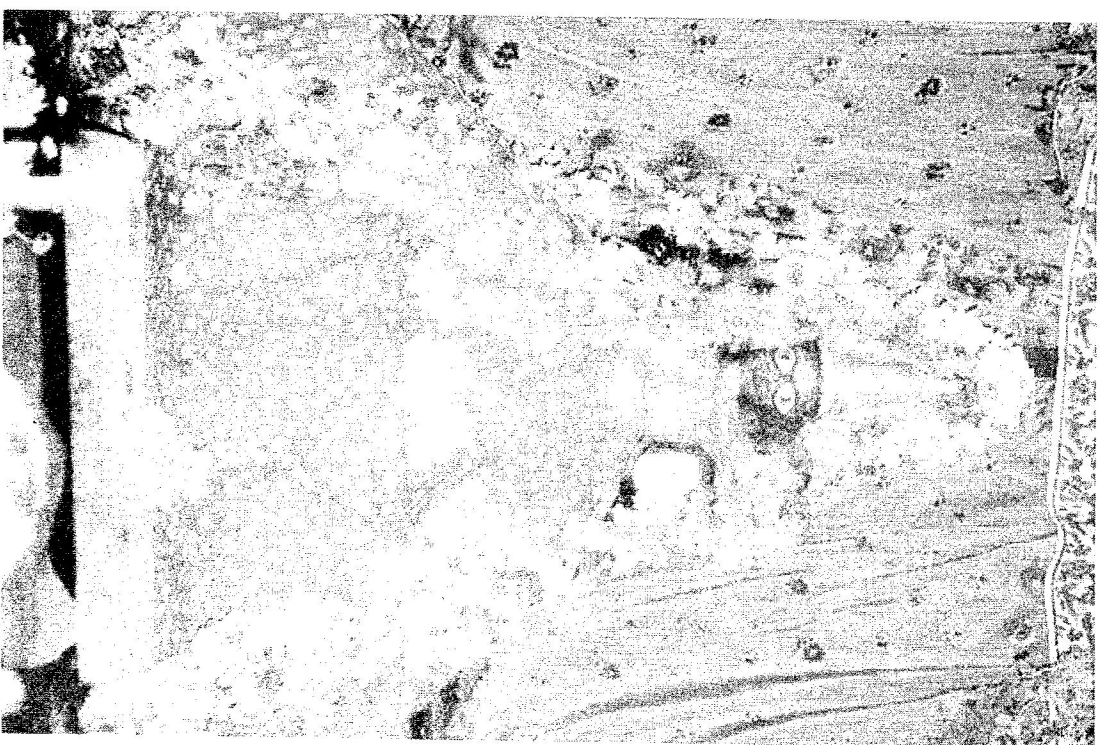


Figure 1.6. Mariyamman in her separate Kannapuram temple (view figures Fa through Fi at the affiliated website).

two important ways in which female devotees participate in Mariyamman's festival. For one, both women and children bring pots of water and pour them around the ritual post to "cool" it. They also circumambulate the temple

(clockwise), pouring yet more water all along this route. By the end of the festival both the temple surround and the ritual post, in particular, sit in a sort of swampy wet sea of mud. All this wetness helps to link the goddess to rain and to the well-being that accompanies good rains in a farming community that is otherwise located in a dry (even parched) upland area.

In the Ponnivala story several women sit on pillars for long periods of time (a theme not developed here for lack of space). This act parallels, in a general way, what we "see" Maryamman doing during her festival. One is reminded of the importance of cosmic pillars (and trees) in broader Hindu mythology. Whatever or whoever sits on a post or pillar is symbolically lifted up toward the sun and toward the source of rain water. Meanwhile, in both the myth and the festival ritual, Maryamman's demon lover gets killed or beheaded. A key sacrifice is performed right at the end of the Maryamman festival (on the tenth day). At this point a sacrificial goat (previously a buffalo kid) is beheaded right in front of the *kampam*. Its head (and traditionally the body as well) are then buried in a hole nearby dug expressly for this purpose. The *kampam* is then immediately "uprooted" and carried to the temple well. It is thrown in there to sink and is abandoned (to the watery deep). In sun, whoever "sits" on the festival *kampam* reaches upward, those sacrificed in front of it get pushed into a deep hole (dug expressly for this purpose). The victim thus enters the world "below" while the pillar-sitter seems to reach out to the world above.

The second ritual activity of note in the Maryamman festival is that devotees, specifically one woman from each family that worships her, bring little flour lamps to the temple (*ma villakka*) and set them before the goddess as their own special offering, on the last day. A similar little light is floated on the temple well after the demon's tree trunk is submerged in its waters at the end of the festival. That latter light is specifically said to represent the goddess herself. Therefore one might say that the lamps the women bring to the temple earlier the same day symbolize these women's participation in the power and the fame of the goddess. Local women do not articulate the connection but locating a bit of Sakti power within every woman fits easily with wider Hindu views. The gift of these little lamps, similar to gifts of food to a god or goddess more generally, involves a two-way sharing. The goddess is thought to "partake" of the offering (incorporate it into her being) but then the devotee takes "the remainder" home, where the family eats it as a special kind of *prasada*. These little lamps are not to hot or too dangerous. They are more like a bunch of cool stars that circle a central pole (the north star), rather than hot like the sun itself. Barefoot men, on the other hand, bring pots of Kaveri river water (*tirtham*) to offer the goddess (which they carry on special wooden frames called *kanadi*). These frames go with empty pots to the river and return with them after they have been filled. There is much dancing and devotional singing along the way. This special water is

then used to bathe and cool the goddess during her worship on the final day. Both Maryamman and her worshippers end up cooled, together.

Like Celatta in the Ponnivala story, Maryamman the goddess is ultimately a local protectress. Women from each family in the area add their bit of "light" to her brighter one, while men help to augment her other key quality, her coolness. All Maryamman's worshippers, therefore, participate in the symbolism of caring for all living things. This is a core idea the goddess herself represents. Just as the original farmer brothers worship Celatta each day in the Ponnivala epic story, here families from the kiraman do their part by worshipping (and identifying with) her counterpart, Maryamman. Maryamman is basically a goddess of a specific territory, and she presides over a collaborative group of hierarchically structured co-workers. These workers are led by a few major landlord-kings, men representing the original three male clans to locate in the area. They are given a set of symbolic roles in the Maryamman festival (not further described here for lack of space) and their wives behave as very small, well-controlled "satellite" goddesses. In sun, despite her "wrong marriage" Maryamman represents the structured well-socialized side of the great goddess's many forms on earth. Maryamman is welcomed into village life annually and celebrated within the bounds of civilized life.

But there is something peculiar in the timing of the Maryamman festival. The celebration begins on the Wednesday just on or just following the dark moon night. The preliminary rituals performed by men from the temple's lead agricultural families (we can call them the temple's managing directors) happen on this day. Then nothing much happens for a week, until the following Wednesday. Now the tree that will become the *kampam* is cut, brought to the temple, and this all-important symbol is put in place. After the planting of this post Maryamman's "upside-down" or wrong marriage begins and it will last for nine days (from the Wednesday evening when the *kampam* is installed upright in its freshly dug hole in front of her temple, until the following Thursday evening when it is removed. Batirakali's wedding and then Parvati's wedding follow. What is odd about this is that one would expect, from normal social protocol, that the highest-ranking goddess would be given ritual priority. Shouldn't she be honored first in any key sequence of ritual events? Why, in this context, do we see a surprising "inversion?" Before answering that questions, let me lay out the ritual sequence more clearly in table 1.7.¹¹

The "good wedding" of Shiva and Parvati allows the year ahead to commence with its best foot forward. But it would seem that this auspicious "kick off" requires some framing. The festival linking of the three temples (whose priests are also one and the same) appears to "remind" local residents of a core symbolic theme: righting wrong. As we can see from the calendar, Maryamman undergoes a "wrong wedding" that has to be brought to an end.

Table 1.7. The Kannapuram Temple Complex—Related Timings of a Three-Wedding Festival Calendar (Held in the Month of Cittrai = April/May)

Phase of the Moon	Day of the Week	A Wedding Celebrated For:	A Wedding Celebrated For:	A Wedding Celebrated For:
Dark or New	(1st Day)	First rituals performed		
	Wednes-day			
Quarter #1	(9th Day)	Kambam cut and erected		
	Thursday			
(10th Day)	Friday			
(11th Day)	Saturday			
	(14th Day)			
Full	(16th Day)			
	Thursday			
Quarter #3	(19th Day)			
	Sunday			

In fact Mariyamman's wedding begins at night, late in the evening, another sign that something has been reversed or is incorrect. Human weddings are not held near midnight, but rather most often in the very early morning. In this complex Batirakalliamman is like a warrior-ally that helps her "sisters." Note that the goddess Batirakali/Durga becomes "active" in her temple the very next day after Mariyamman's undesirable wedding occurs.

SHRINE TYPE THREE DESCRIPTION: GREEN KALI—LOCALLY KNOWN AS BATIRAKALI OF KANNAPURAM

Batirakali first undergoes a symbolic, formal, but very brief marriage herself. Then she (presumably) transforms into a woman who acts on her own (even though technically married). Now she focuses on supporting a broad cleanup of the wrongdoing around her. Her eight arms and fierce personality are needed, though she always lends her assistance in a quiet way. Significantly, Batirakali's priests conclude her rituals late on the Friday night, with the scaring off of evil spirits. All this midnight activity seems to indicate that there has been a battle during the day and there are now "corpses" lying around that evil spirits will come to feed on (view figures Ga through Gf at the affiliated website).

The very next morning, after the ritual "removal" of an unwanted denizen of demons, preparations for Parvati's fully auspicious wedding begin. She is the primary goddess and her wedding is the one that will last. All is well after Mariyamman's wrong marriage has been recognized and all the dangerous, hovering evil spirits have been dispensed with. Interestingly, Shiva and Parvati have their own ritual argument, but her prescribed ceremonies clearly indicate that this wedded couple (unlike Mariyamman and her unwanted husband) quickly patch things up. All ends well. But note a further engaging fact: Shiva and Parvati's festival events, although very auspicious, are not the most popular with local residents. Mariyamman's upside-down wedding is much more raucous, more "fun," and much better attended. Nonetheless, all this feverish festival activity is designed to end on a good note. At the end of the cycle we are left with Mariyamman's wedding terminated, and a happily married, peaceful Parvati. For the entire twelve months to come she will be honored and respected as "first goddess," by all.

Batirakali/Durga's ritual priority (her wedding day occurs four days before Parvati's) may also reflect her very ancient origins. Because of her rather pro-forma and relatively unstressed presence in this local temple complex, it is worth providing some added background on her mythology and its possible significance. Durga is a very "old" divinity, known in one prototype as Vāc, the goddess of victory.¹² Suggestive references can also be found to a similar goddess on Indus Valley seals, and even among early Mesopotamian artifacts.¹³ There are also strong hints of a "Durga-like" presence in early Indus Valley settlements.¹⁴ Furthermore, R. C. Agrawala notes that the first known sculpture of Durga as Mahisasuramardini in Indian Art dates from the first century BC.¹⁵ The same female power is also mentioned in the early Sangam literature from Tamilnadu, where she is named Korrayai. Again in these ancient sources, she is portrayed as the goddess who kills the buffalo demon Mahisasura.¹⁶ Durga is also very prominent in the famous stone carvings at Mahabalipuram, in Tamilnadu, where several sculpted rep-

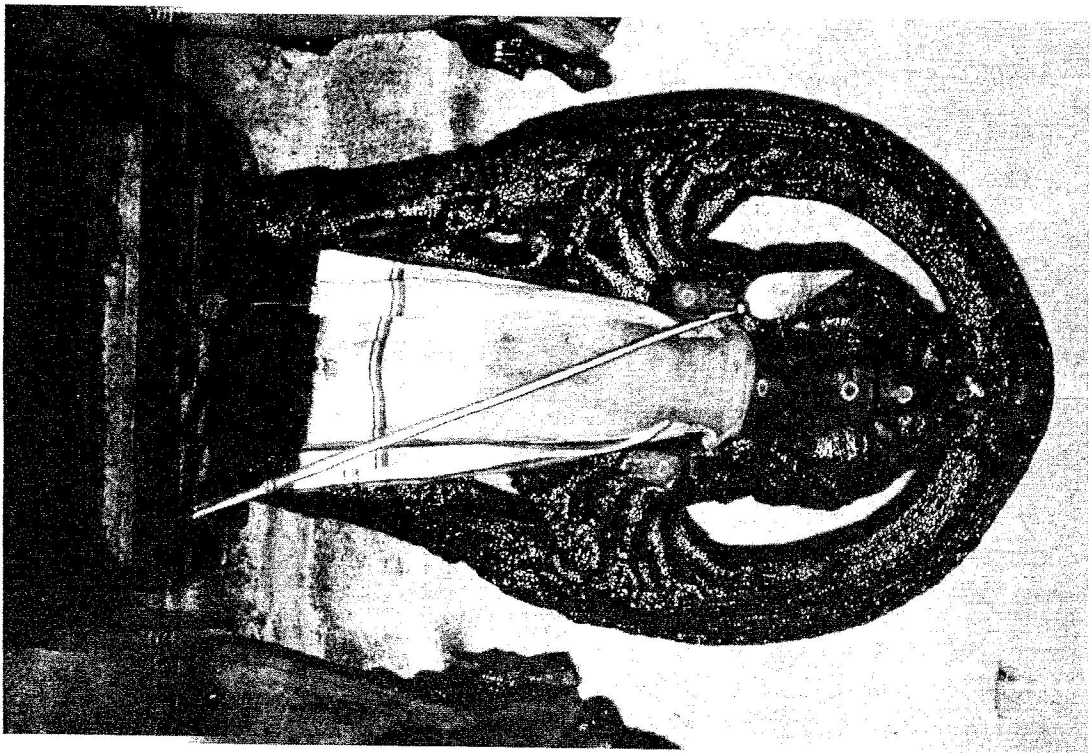


Figure 1.7. Batirakalamma in her Kannapram shrine, without festival clothing. Note: One can clearly see her ten arms

representations of her appear. She has obviously been well integrated into the official iconographic traditions of South India by the mid-seventh century. Durga is also prominent at Ahole, Karnataka, in a temple dating from rough-

ly the same time period. And she is a key figure in Ellora Cave #14, which is said to date from around 600 AD (view figure Gf at the affiliated website where the local Batirakali is shown dressed for worship).

My own contemporary field observations place Durga somewhere in the middle of the range of goddesses most popular on the ground in Kannapuram today.¹⁷ She is fiercer than Mariyamman but not as scary as Angalamman¹⁸ or Kali. Perhaps Durga's early myth-story served as a "foundation" on which later story embellishments were constructed. It seems likely that some stories developed Durga's "social side" as a protectress of particular locales and families. In this form she might have morphed into a Celatta-Mariyamman kind of goddess prototype. At the same time, working on the other side of the same Durga story, other imaginations may have fixed on her wildness, her violence, and then her victim/lover's death followed by renewal as a core theme. These imaginations may have started circulating an Angalamman/Kali-type of proto story and celebrated that idea in rituals concerned with fertility and birth. We know that this kind of "splitting" is a common process worldwide and it has been well documented as having occurred elsewhere in Indian mythology too.¹⁹ In our own Ponnivala story, furthermore, there is an interesting example available of the same concept. The father-king in this legend, named Kunnaiya, is given two sons by Lord Shiva. These boys are explicitly twins. They embody two key opposing aspects of their father's "parental" personality (timid and headstrong, respectively). These differences play out in the third generation of family adventures. The personalities of these "equal but opposite" twin sons expand at some length on an opposition only lightly embedded in the personality of their father.

In sum, then, the local Kannapuram complex of temples depicts, by way of its annual festival celebrations, the outlines of what one might call a popular "Durga cycle." In her mythology Durga is a great sovereign goddess, a woman responsible for enforcing justice, a woman ready to right wrongs committed, a woman ready to apply supernatural force if need be. She is the full equal but opposite in gender to the idea of a powerful male ruler-god. Not allowed to be her lovers, Durga's suitors are swifly transformed into respectful guardians, subservient men who are asked to assist her in upholding a well-structured social order (with all overtones of their sexual attraction to her having been thoroughly quashed). There is one lover-attacker in particular, the great Mahisasura, a horned black buffalo who approaches her violently. He is the prototype demon whose presence clearly underlies the fundamental Durga story. Often Mahisasura has two personalities, one a human male and the other a black (male) buffalo. At times he is portrayed as a buffalo with a human head, and at others as having a human body with a buffalo head.

In essence I suggest that, at least in the area where I did fieldwork, this core Durga myth has been "fleshed out" in two opposing directions (giving

her a disease and ecology focus in Mariyamman and a death-leading-to-renewal essence in Angalamman). Looking back at figures 1.3 and 1.4, we see the Batirakali (Durga) temple placed right next to Mariyamman. In fact they shared a single temple compound wall (until recently when, alas, the old Mariyamman temple was destroyed and a new and more modern, independent structure was built. Interestingly, no one has touched the Batirakali temple. Her shrine still stands virtually the same as I knew it in 1965. She is not a very popular goddess locally. It is Mariyamman who draws the festival crowds. It was Mariyamman to whom people were willing to donate the money needed for this expensive rebuild. But we can assume from her continued presence on the ground here that Batirakali still retains her local "rights." She claims (I think) the valued status of being the "senior goddess," now holding her own as "the" ancestral goddess prototype.

In concluding this section, consider the two maps once more. The Angalamman temple stands at a significant distance from the "cozy" Kannapuram complex just described. Her temple was originally built far from any settlements, right next to a graveyard. Here we find the area's only (Kali-like) temple, a shrine dedicated to a roaming goddess of the wastelands and forests. Within the Kannapuram temple complex several varieties of ritual coexist, but each in its own way stresses the separation of good from evil. Each references the need to establish a viable social order. Outside this complex, and at a significant distance, we find a festival that stresses the opposite . . . that is the coming together of things, in wildness and in death, in order to generate renewal. This marked contrast in festival style will become clearer when I describe the Angalamman annual ceremonies in more detail, below.

SHRINE TYPE FOUR DESCRIPTION: BLACK KARUKALI— LOCALLY KNOWN AS ANGALAMMAN OF MADAVVALAKU

Angalamman's temple lies outside the settled area of Madavvalaku.²⁰ Essentially her temple is located in an empty space, right next to a graveyard. Furthermore, the main events that celebrate Angalamman each year cluster around Shiva Ratiri, the night of Shiva and Kali's wild dance upon the corpses of the dead. Shiva Ratiri lies on the other end of the calendrical cycle. It falls on the new moon day in the Tamil month of Masi (March 10, 2013). This is a wild and dangerous time, suited to graveyard dancing, spirit possession, sword fights in the middle of the night, huge effigies of over-pregnant women, and more. Both the Angalamman festival and the celebrations for the epic's twin heroes (depicted next) enjoy a climax on this scary night. In essence, Angalamman represents the wild side of the great goddess. Here Shiva Ratiri falls on night two of her festival proceedings.

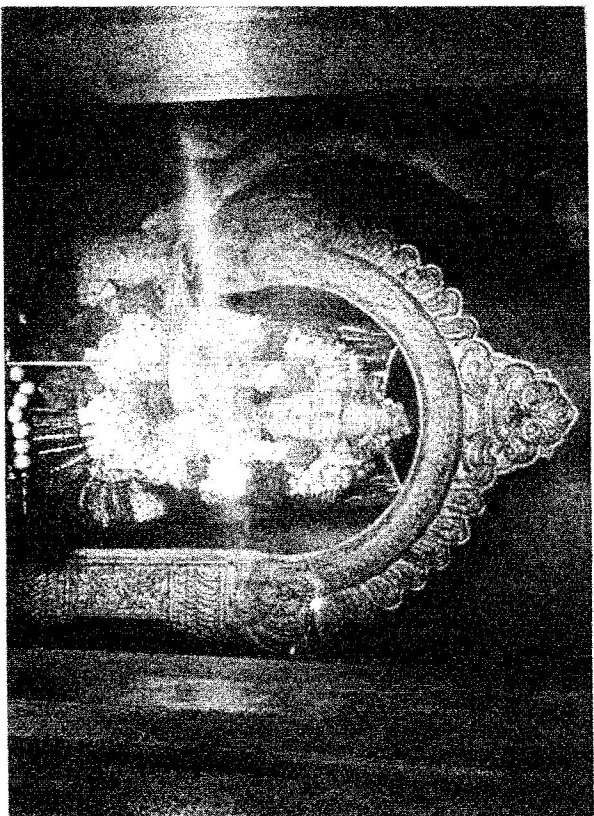


Figure 1.8. The goddess Angalamman in the village of Vervedampalayam near Dharapuram (view figures Ha through Hi at the affiliated website).

THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL FOR ANGALAMMAN IN MADAVVALAKU

First day (and night): The white flag of the goddess is painted with an image of her vehicle, the bull (displayed in reddish yellow) and that cloth is tied to the temple flag pole. Then an upside-down pot inside the temple becomes the target of a handful of castor oil seeds that are thrown at it by two priests who shout, "Uhe, uhe." This is simply a magical word, but the name for castor oil seeds in Tamil is *kottai muttu*. The term "*kottai*" refers not only to castor seeds but also to the testicles of a man. "*Muttu*" simply means "seed." That night a huge sixteen-foot-long by five- or six-foot-wide image of a pregnant woman (the wife of a Raja) is fashioned out of mud so that she lies on the graveyard near the isolated temple. Two white boiled eggs provide her eyes.

Second day: The face of Peychiamman (meaning "troubling ghost-goddess," but here said here to be a kind of midwife/helper) is made by molding her face out of flour paste in the center of an ordinary peasant winnowing fan. This image is carried into the graveyard area by a priest whose body has been covered with ash. He is dressed in red clothes and he then dances and impersonates the ghost, while holding the decorated fan.

Next the goddess Angalamman is invited to come to the graveyard. Then a brass temple image of Peychiamman is brought out to the site on a palanquin. On the way a black goat is sacrificed. Following this, the non-Brahman priest takes lamp black and places a dot in the center of each egg-eye of the prone woman. This "opens" her eyes and brings her to life. A black pig is then speared and buried at the foot of the huge graveyard image. A black chicken is also beheaded. Next the priest lays the Peychiamman winnowing fan down near the head of the huge graveyard image and the crowd shouts, "Graveyard killing, graveyard killing." Meanwhile, inside the temple the goddess is called to the battleground by a special drummer and her bull vehicle is offered cooked pulses and tubers (which are substantial foods that strengthen and heat their consumer).²¹ Finally a light is waved in front of the bull's sculpted image, making sure that the goddess inside can see it.

Third day: Now a new mud pot is taken to a special spring and filled with water. A protective thread is tied around it and it is set in front of the goddess on a small mound of husked paddy. A special temple sword is then laid across its mouth. The priests throw handfuls of rice at the sword while shouting magical verses. This is called "the puja for the beautiful appearance of god." After a time the sword is ceremoniously removed and a very "cooling" green pulse is thrown at the bull statue. The goddess is also offered raw (presumably cooling) foods. At midnight her image is thickly covered in butter, as a trench is dug outside her temple for the fire walk that will take place on day four.

Fourth day: Devotees walk on the hot coals in the fire trench (burning since the night before) as occurs in many goddess festivals, including some for Mariyamman. Many female devotees pray to the goddess asking for a pregnancy. These women make small lamps of five types of flour (ground from grains that have not been previously parboiled). These are the same as the lamps that are given to Mariyamman (see above). These soft little mounds have an indentation in the center used to hold oil. They are brought to the goddess by any woman (not widowed) who wishes to participate (but this time the offering is not restricted to certain castes living in the locale. . . . as are the offerings women set in front of Mariyamman that were described earlier). After this the butter oil on the goddess is removed. There is general feasting to celebrate.

Fifth day: The festival now winds down and the temple flag is lowered. Now the celebrants are joyful and they throw colored water at their "cross relatives" (meaning those who are deemed to stand in a marriageable relationship to them). This final evening a special "child puja" is performed. Now a pregnant female goat is sacrificed and the priest, again playing the role of the troubling midwife-helping goddess (Peychi), dances with that goat's intestines wrapped around his neck. He is possessed by the ghost Peychiamman and he now dances around the graveyard with the goat's liver

in his winnowing fan. The crowd throws coins into the fan. It is then taken to the edge of the village and left there outside the village boundary (after the priest removes the money). Another goat is sacrificed, this time to the boudary guardian Karuppanasami. This ends the festival proceedings.

Interpretation: This festival is, obviously, about a mix of graveyards, death, and fertilization followed by pregnancy.²² Much of the symbolism is too obvious to require a commentary. However, one must mention that winnowing fans are "separators" of grain from chaff. It would seem that the role of both Peychi and the winnow fan here have to do with separating the dangers of pregnancy and birth from its goodness and the desired renewal that a pregnancy will result in.²³ The overturned pot at the beginning appears to suggest that the goddess has hitherto been asleep or in some other way withdrawn. The pot-womb that bears the potential of delivering fresh cosmic-life-energy is unavailable. Castor oil seeds are then thrown at it to awaken the goddess and the heating foods supplied are intended to enliven her husband Shiva (via the vehicle he shares with her, the bull). He is being led to father new life.

In this Angalamman festival setting no "wrong marriage" has occurred, as is the case with Mariyamman. Instead we now have a "wrong pregnancy," a fetus carried for much too long. The raja's wife that has been fashioned in the graveyard (lying on her back with a huge stomach bulge) is said to be fifteen months pregnant! All the sacrifices, especially those of pregnant animals, seem therefore to have a double meaning: these sacrifices help to fertilize the earth (and the goddess who stands for mother earth) while at the same time the liver and intestines of the dead animals are quickly separated from their sacrificed bodies, as if to remove possible contamination or other problems often encountered during delivery. Angalamman is a goddess that is especially worshiped by women wishing for children. Her temple is full of toy cradles that embody the devotee's fervent wish for children. Countless barren women have visited her. Note that a core festival theme seems to be about reversing barrenness. This same theme is also a major focus of the prayers of the Ponnivala story heroine, Tamarai.

The Angalamman festival is colorful, no doubt. But I have described it at length with a different purpose in mind. I want to contrast the general thrust (but not every detail) of this celebration with that of the Mariyamman festival already depicted earlier. Now we witness the same core Durga myth stretched out and reinterpreted in a very different direction. The key symbolic acts that participants observe appear to be about violence, infertility, and death in general. These Angalamman rituals are not focused on righting the social order and casting off a bad marriage. Instead the ceremonies for this goddess are directed at universal issues, and at linking death to new births in general. The first festival, celebrated in honor of Mariyamman, features a post and a degree of verticality. It also highlights hot, dark nights contrasted

with green, bright (and perhaps cool or watery) days. Here the central pot(s) are not intended to generate new life, but rather to represent the personality of a goddess who is trying to enforce social order and suppress ill-directed (sexual) male aggression. The Angalamman rituals contrast with this focus by referring explicitly to the need for sexual activity and the substantial foods that support it. This energy is required to keep the world's yuga cycles turning over. Both the Mariyamman and the Angalamman festivals reference an original proto-Durga core myth, but proceed to unpack and extend it in quite different directions. The goddess Angalamman does not dominate and kill her suitor. Instead she is asked to welcome a correct and proper lover (her husband) into her temple for the sake of both human and cosmic revitalization.

In terms of the epic's parallel story, the Mariyamman festival reverberates with the mid-section of Ponnivala's larger action frame. In a central section of this great legend, Tamarai leaves her husband behind and climbs a pillar as she seeks to reach Lord Shiva's council chambers. She takes this trip largely on her own while her husband rests partway along the pilgrimage path and awaits her return (taking on a death-like trance as he waits). Tamarai proceeds on her own in order to seek fertility from above. The Angalamman festival, on the other hand, best parallels the end of this Ponnivala story. Now the focus is on scenes where the two male heroes (sons of Tamarai) end their lives in a symbolic love-swoon. They submit their lives to the goddess Periyakanti and are then revived by their young virgin sister, Tangal. Ritually, in the Virappur re-enactment ceremonies, a tree is shot with a love arrow, as was the key hero himself (just a little while earlier). Love makes the world go round, but it does not always make for a calm and well-ordered social system! Both order and chaos are needed, in alternation. These festivals represent two poles of the same core dilemma: how to keep the world spinning without letting it devolve into absolute confusion.

A SECOND EXAMPLE OF SHRINE TYPE FOUR: A TEMPLE DEDICATED TO THE PONNIVALA STORY HEROES

I turn now to the festival that actually links directly our core story, *The Legend of Ponnivala*. There is a key temple complex dedicated to these heroes, and an annual festival is held there as well. How does the set of rituals performed there fit into the paradigm I have been developing? The events I am about to describe belong to a place called Virappur, at a fair distance northwest of the well-known city of Trichy (or Tiruchirappalli). These celebratory events occur in a very remote spot, far from any substantial village. To reach this area one must travel deep into a desert-like area that is surrounded by forbidding and mountainous jungle growth. The festival

events last for several weeks but come to a climax on Shiva Ratri, that night in late February or early March (on the dark of the moon) when Lord Shiva is said to dance with his wife Kali in a graveyard (or cremation ground). Remember, this is the very same point in the calendar year when the Angalamman festival (described just above) is also celebrated. In order to be brief, I list the main events of this festival as I know about them, below. The correspondence with events described by the epic story is unmistakable.

THE VIRAPPUR ANNUAL FESTIVAL CELEBRATING THE HEROES OF THE PONNIVALA EPIC

First through seventh day: The festival calendar begins the day after Shiva Ratri, a timing that corresponds to the new moon day of the Tamil month of Māci (February–March).²⁴ On this day the local temple headman (a land-owning Jemindar in the Virappur area where the festival occurs) will tie a thread to his wrist as a sign of his ritual dedication to the goddess Periyakanti. He will now "fast on raw foods," bathe regularly, and sleep inside the temple compound for the rest of the festival period. This is a standard feature of all local goddess festivals, including the rituals undertaken for both Mariyamman and Anglamman.

Seventh night: A procession of the heroes' most committed devotees forms and proceeds to walk to the sacred "battle ground" (*patrikalam*) where the twin heroes are said to have given up their lives. This is a long and stiff hike but the ardent worshippers are ready. Several young virgin girls, between the ages of about ten and twelve, accompany the group. They bring with them small pots of water and in these are small branches of the leafy margosa tree. There are also storytellers in the group and many hand drums (which the storytellers will use as they sing key excerpts taken from the final battle scenes of the story). Upon reaching the battleground the drumming and singing begins in earnest. Gradually, the most dedicated devotees find themselves overcome (possessed) by the spirits of the two deceased brothers. They then pick up the swords they have brought and begin swaying. After some more time they begin mock fighting with one another. Nonpossessed onlookers, including the goddess in her palanquin, stand well back from this dangerous fray.

Eventually most of the possessed men will fall to the ground in a kind of "death trance" and stiffen while lying there, as corpses do. These "corpses" are then carried off to the sidelines, out of danger from the *méléc*, by assistants who first roll each body onto its back. Then two men pick up each surprisingly board-stiff body by the head and the feet only. These bodies of the fallen are lined up alongside one another and covered with white sheets, as the dead in a "real" funeral setting would be. Eventually a greatly re-

spected singer-bard moves forward and begins to sing key verses over the long row of “dead men.” At the very same time the young girls who have come to the ritual site sprinkle water from their little pots over the prone bodies using their margosa leaf twigs as shakers. This makes a fine spray out of the water droplets taken from their pots. A very similar event occurs in the actual epic at the point where the brothers’ virgin sister finally finds her siblings’ bodies lying on their swords at the end of her long and wild forest journey where she searches for them. Tangal, the story heroine, also sprinkles liquids over her dead brothers. She uses several types of watery substances that she has carried to the pattukulam in small pots.

In these ritual proceedings the corpses are finally brought back to life (just as Tangal, in the Ponnivala story, is described as having revived her own brothers). In the epic context the resurrection is brief, simply providing a short period during which the two heroes talk for a few minutes with their sister. In that conversation the twin brothers give their sister several reasons why they must now depart this earth despite her begging them to return with her to the family palace. Following this the brothers lose their lives (once more). Then Vishnu quickly transports their spirits to Kailasa and delivers them to Lord Shiva, in person. By contrast, the festival re-enactment of this story results in a full return to life for the devotees. Made whole once more by the bards’ songs, plus the effect of the magical water sprinkled on their bodies by the several virgin girls, these men stand up. Then they hike back along the forest path and return to the Virappur temple with the others. There they rejoin less adventurous members of the crowd who await their arrival. Having been through a deathlike experience, these men are now whole once more.

Eight day: A new procession, now carrying several icons in palanquin style, leaves the Periyakandiannan temple at the Virappur site for the town of Aniyappur. This small settlement, mentioned repeatedly in the epic story, lies at the edge of the forest. It is interesting to note that this “procession” destination is not a traditional burial or burning ground but rather an actual settlement. In the story at least, Aniyappur is a village associated with the artisans (a group who often behave as the heroes’ adversaries). Aniyappur is also a place that stands “on the very edge” of civilized space.

After reaching Aniyappur, a priest (acting for Ponnar’s statue) shoots a ritual arrow into a banyan tree located there. Following that ritual act, apparently the sole reason for the trip, the entire procession turns back and travels again to the shelter, where the two female statues await them. This “resting spot” is far from any village. Here Ponnar (represented by his icon) is now said to “die.” A local landowner (a Kavuntar by caste) performs a small funeral ceremony. Also, a goat is sacrificed at the precise moment of the hero’s spirit’s leave-taking, helping to mark the moment. The entire party of travelers then spends the night at this shelter. The next morning they return to

the Periyakanti temple in Virappur. It is important to take note of the metaphorical relationship of Vishnu’s “love arrow,” which is shot by his Kama-like form, just before the heroes’ ritual suicide in the epic story (refer to the details provided above in the section of this chapter that describes the goddess Karukali, the “black” Kali). Could the heroes’ bodies in the Ponnivala story be symbolically identified with a cosmic tree (similar to the ritual banyan in Aniyappur)? Could the arrows shot on both occasions be a kind of “tree graft” that precedes new growth?

This is not the only ritual where shooting an arrow into a symbolic tree occurs in local tradition. In Kannapuram, the village area where I did my core fieldwork many years ago, a similar arrow is shot by a Brahmin priest into a plantain stalk (a stand-in for a nonexistent local banyan tree?) during a festival held in the local Shiva temple near where I first collected the Ponnivala story on tape (see figure 1.3).²⁵ That ritual occurs during the Durga festival of Navaratri (held between October 5–13, 2013). Navaratri is linked to imagery about new growth (just as the Virappur rituals are), and to the (lepped-for) re-emergence of an expanding period of light after the period of growing (solar) darkness, a darkness that winter will soon bring on. The rite that occurs in Aniyappur is the last “act” before the hero’s final death and departure heaven-ward. Instead of occurring in October (roughly at the time of the autumn equinox) the Ponnivala hero’s injection of energy into the “cosmic” tree occurs near the time of the spring equinox, that is, eight days after the new moon of February–March (the new moon was on March 10 and the festival climax occurred on March 18, 2013).

In sum, in Virappur we see an officially sanctioned wildness followed by a love-death swoon that is (if we follow the epic’s interpretation of submission) partially self-willed. Earlier we saw that Durga’s story provided a statement about the separation of animalistic desire from structured propriety, a story that depicted passion and then replaced it with submission and the demands of hierarchy. Significantly this is a hierarchy that puts the female “on top.” In the Virappur festival we see a part extension and part rewrite of the Durga story. This festival provides a time where temporary license for violence is accorded a warrior but with little added in the way of sexual overtones. The closest the rituals described come to a visible sexual theme is when the arrow is shot into that banyan tree, an arrow that is perhaps intended to harbour new growth. Furthermore, this violence is enacted in a forest area, far from any center of human social life. The re-enacted violent interlude entails death but is followed by the warrior’s return to life. In a sense each devotee is reborn. But we do not see much hierarchy or any central references to the female being the real conqueror who wields control. Granted, the assumption is that all this is done for the goddess Periyakanti, and that ultimately she reigns supreme. But we do not see that side of the Durga story acted out explicitly and vividly in the festival events themselves.

More interpretation: The whole Virappur festival is associated with Shiva Ratri, the night of Lord Shiva's own wild dance on a graveyard site alongside his wife who, on this occasion, takes the form of Kali. This is a dance of death and destruction, but it also is a dance of renewal. The live festival for the two story heroes mirrors this with its own wild night of flailing swords and dying devotees. Although this festival event is intended to re-enact the death of the two story heroes, it also includes a (danger-filled) resurrection accomplished by their virgin sister Tangal (who is identified by the singer-bard as one of the seven Kannimar).²⁶ Just as Koman the huge wild boar was conceived to balance out the heroes' fearful presence on earth, so is Tangal seems born to counterbalance her two violent brothers' warrior nature. She has been given the power to resurrect them when they die. After this one wild night all subsequent events of the festival seem formal and lacking in emotion. But they are symbolically important nonetheless.

The arrow shot into the banyan tree is an important detail. That ritual tree trunk seems to symbolically parallel a key scene in the Ponnivala story where the heroes' mother, Tamarai, once performed her own long, long penance. The cosmic banyan in this great legend stands very near the spot where Tamarai requests a magical pregnancy from Lord Shiva. Not only do we have the momentary resurrection of the heroes themselves, and the real revival of their fervent devotees, but now we also have a symbolic re-energizing of the power of the pillar that holds up the sky. But we cannot pursue this correspondence very far. A pillar is not a central symbol at the Virappur festival. Nor is anything placed on top of a post as an object said to represent the goddess. However, because a tree does get shot by what we presume to be a "love arrow," it does seem to be (momentarily transformed) into a symbol of passion and potential fertility, a momentary inversion, perhaps of the normal lingam. My personal understanding of the latter is that it is intended to be an icon of control and abstinence (as most ithyphallic representations of Lord Shiva can be viewed).

It is never easy to lay a symbolic paradigm on to social reality. Reality is always messy and the human imagination can take events (and especially ceremonies) in many unexpected directions. Goddess festivals and their related ritualized events vary from place to place and often build on the theme of "contrast." By this I mean that the residents of one village or town will deliberately develop a tradition that states (in some symbolic fashion) that we are different from the people "over there." Levi-Straus has pointed out this tendency, with examples that show themes morphing as they pass from myth, to art, and into ritual.²⁷ For this reason I do not want to assert that one simple paradigm can ever fit all the ethnographic data that is available now or may, in the future, be reported. Nonetheless, I believe we can talk about a likely (perhaps statistically dominant?) pattern. I want to conclude by listing a set of tentative general oppositions that I hope can be verified by further field-

work. I leave it to other researchers to ask if the following set of contrastive ideas and images also appear in other Hindu village arenas. To help other observers ask fresh questions of their own field data, I provide a simple chart of the opposing concepts I see.²⁸

Table 1.8. Key Contrasts Embodied by the Goddesses of the Ponnivala Story

THEMES FOCUSED ON PARATING OFF THREATS, CULTURE, and SOCIAL ORDER (Arata/Maryaman)	THEMES FOCUSED ON JOINING and IMPREGNATION and NATURE and RENEWAL (Angalman/Penyakantaman)
Located in society, in the kramam	Located in the wilds, the forest, outside society
Associated with separating good/bad, especially in relation to marriage or sexual liaisons	Associated with Siva's night possession, graveyards, and transitioning/re-growth from death
Features sacrifice by cutting off an animal's head	Features sacrifice by piercing an animal's body
Festival involves a prominent post or pillar (linked to climbing, standing, or sitting)	Festival features the ground and a drying place (linked to lying down and/or falling down)
Features an active goddess who dominates, is independent, and enforces a gender role reversal	Features an ascetic, whose power derives from her virginal status
Devotees are from diverse communities that must collaborate in daily life within a shared social system	Devotees are mainly individuals, or belong to one single family group or community
The rituals move more or less from chaos to order and end with the goddess in ascendancy	The rituals move more or less from order to chaos and end with enhanced devotee well-being
Focused on this world's rewards: health and prosperity	Focused on rewards after death (especially rebirth)
Symbols may involve an Askokan-like pillar/king's ride	Symbols may involve closed sanctuary/an ashen color, life under or on the ground
Yakshinis and/or fire on a pole in the night sky	There is an emphasis on destruction, war, and graves, plus arrows, spears, or hunting
There is an emphasis on ancestors, perhaps on death, farming, or plowing the earth	The surround is too dry or too wet, activities may involve artisans, craftsmen, and/or hunting
Activities and prayers feature water and/or rain, and perhaps good crops	There may be a reference to the sky, to stars (as in natural shining, celestial), and release from life on earth
There may be alteration, such as a back and forth between day and night, but with an emphasis on overcoming darkness, sickness, or a host of asuralike beings	The seven Kannimar and/or virgin girls linked to the womb of the sky (the Pleiades) may have a role to play
Historically may link to Varuna myths and themes and/or link to Surya's first son, Shani	Historically may link to Mitra myths and themes and/or to Surya's second son, Yama

I have argued that the Ponnivala epic story lays out a conceptual map, a set of structured principles that may prove helpful in understanding the many forms of the goddess in India. Certainly one can find an interesting set of parallels when studying local temple festivals. But in the goddess-on-earth ritual laid out in *The Legend of Ponnivala*, the second goddess in the sequence (Durga) is passed over lightly. This is also true in terms of local temple activity. However, Durga (as Batrakali, the goddess with many arms) is present on the ground. And she is involved in the major festival marriage

celebrations during the April–May hot season. But Durga's wedding re-enactment is short and unspectacular. There are few attendees. Instead, the local imagination has "pulled" themes from her well-known story and stretched her "concerns" in two opposing directions. One elaboration (Marthy-annam of Kannapuram) features protecting territory, the warding off of dangers, and the re-enforcing of violated social norms, especially hierarchical ones. Meanwhile a contrasting elaboration focuses on the natural energies of life that democratize and level out (or even invert) standard participant roles. Those Kali-like ceremonies (Virappur's Periyakantiamman and Matavalku's Angalamman) feature wildness, death, impregnation, and rebirth in a wilderness type of space. These two festivals make little reference to the wider society and its social norms.

But what is most striking, perhaps, is the fact that "Kali's temple images" seen in this area seem quite restrained. The dark end of the continuum I have described, therefore, does not feature violence and chaos so much as transformation through meditation and (perhaps) a participant's passage through a liminal time that is both dark and secretive. Like Shiva himself, the "black" Kali in my field data has to be "awoken" by her worshippers . . . so that she can help the world undergo renewal. Of course, there is a strong precedent for this idea in the classical mythology surrounding Shiva. He is also described as blue or ashen colored much of the time. He spends many hours alone, in a forest setting, deep in meditation. Other beings around him in need of help first have to "wake him up." Only then can they ask for assistance. Furthermore, the Kali yuga lies at the end of time. It is the last period, the point at which the world's vast four-fold cosmic cycle reaches its terminus. In the epic Ponnivala Legend too, Karukali appears near the story's conclusion. This is fitting. She is associated with termination. Her dance, like that of her husband Shiva, brings with it an ending. But we don't experience Kali as an active goddess. Instead she is withdrawn, quiet, and secretive. What is suggested by the story, but not made explicit, is that this odd behavior . . . her death-like stillness . . . points at transition. Each ending that involves Kali's seems to suggest a process of leveling (as in the common expression "dust to dust") but then points to a new beginning.

CONCLUSION

To conclude I will quote a few sentences from the introduction to Dr. Devdutt Pattanaik's brilliant little book called *Myth = Mythology*. The few sentences I have chosen are strung together, with large ellipses for brevity.

Ancient Greek philosophers knew myth as myths. . . . Myths gave rise to oracles and the arts. . . . Myths gave purpose, meaning and validation to existence. . . . Ancient Hindu seers knew myth as mithya. . . . Mithya was truth

seen through a frame of reference. . . . For Rishis . . . mithya served as an essential window to the truth sat (truth that was independent of a frame of reference). If myth is an idea, mythology is the vehicle of that idea. Mythology constitutes stories, symbols and rituals that make a myth tangible. . . . [Their] unrealistic content draws attention to the idea behind the communication. . . . A god with six heads and a demon with eight arms project a universe where there are infinite possibilities, for the better and for the worse. . . . People outgrow myth and mythology when myth and mythology fail to respond to their cultural needs.²⁹

I would add to Devdutt's insights my own conviction that a myth, in this sense a great folk epic, can most certainly provide an attentive listener with a meaningful framework, a foundation stone, a point of reference in our confusing world. But a great story like this has to be told and retold. A person has to live it and revisit it time and time again. This is what has happened to me personally. It is only through the repeated study and re-study of this great legend, and then my years of work spent directing its animation, that have led me to thoroughly appreciate its insights. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana still do have this kind of stature in the minds of millions of South Asians today. Many people in each and every state of India, and well beyond, know these two stories thoroughly and revisit them endlessly. I readily acknowledge that both are great epics. But perhaps because these have not been sung into my ears endlessly, the way I have experienced *The Legend of Ponnivala*, they do not hold as much insight and as much power for me as does this one humble and localized story I have lived with for two-thirds of my life. There is something about the crystallized insights conveyed by the oral storyteller . . . that succeed in presenting India's core cultural paradigms with surprising clarity and force. I believe this relatively simple and comprehensive story can have the same effect on students, especially ones who are newcomers to the Indian Hindu world. The story simply has to be presented to them in a way that allows them to pull out such insights for themselves. Discovery for oneself is the best teacher of all. . . . and there is truly much to discover in *The Legend of Ponnivala*. I have only scratched the surface in this chapter. After all, the great goddess Sakti lives through the stories people tell about her. If not, then how else can her moods and her great powers become known?

NOTES

1. Brenda E. F. Beck, *Elder Brothers Story (Known as the Annammar Katai in Tamil)*, Vols. I and II (a folk epic of Tamilnadu in Tamil and in English, on facing pages), Madras, Panchadai, Institute of Asian Studies, 1992, collected, translated, and edited by B. Beck. There are many Indian folk epics available in the published literature but almost none that have been seriously studied from an analytic standpoint.

2. The Ponnivala epic is now available as an animated series of twenty-six episodes (each twenty-five minutes long). And as of the moment of writing this chapter the full set of episodes

is being broadcast across Canada six times a week (twice in Tamil and four times in English). See www.ponnivala.com for details. To hear a short excerpt from the original tapes go to: <http://www.jalukways.si.edu/TrackDetails.aspx?Itemid=45679>.

3. The Dakṣa story can be found in many places. One useful retelling is Pattanaik, 2006, pp. 168–72; another is Kramrisch, 1981, 319–40.

4. The mythology surrounding Gaṇadhari, mother of the Kauravas, is suggestive here. She, too, underwent a long, long unnatural pregnancy and when her one hundred sons were eventually born they were said to have been formed from one large amorphous lump of flesh. The underlying idea seems to be that these enemies of the Pandava brothers were somehow nonhuman (or sub-human) by birth and likely dangerous. The parallel with the Vetrura hunters who attack the Ponnivāla heroes in “our” story is striking. They are said to number one thousand (a formulaic number, of course) and they too are somehow nonhuman, being a kind of illusion, and created one by one from Lord Viṣṇu’s own right hand. These various stories suggest there may be a constellation of folk images that link the prominent Hindu concept of the *pralaya* (world dissolution) with a very dark form of Kali, with the sacrifice of black animals, and with the concept of the arrival of an undifferentiated “horde” of attacker-destroyers.

5. Ruth Cecily Katz, *Aryjuna in the Mahabharata* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 227.

6. *Ibid.*, 227–28.

7. *Ibid.*, 230.

8. Adapted from Beck, *Peasant Society in Konkni: A Study of Right and Left Subcastes in South India* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, 1972), 147.

9. Adapted from Beck, 1972, 173.

10. See Beck, *Social and Conceptual Order in Konkni: A Region of South India* (London: Oxford University, 1968), 151–69; and Beck, “The Goddess and the Demon: A South Indian Festival in Its Wider Context,” in *Parasurtha: Recherches de sciences sociales sur l’Asie du Sud*, Pt. 5 (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes, 1981), 82–136, for more details.

11. Adapted from Beck, 1968, 158–59.

12. Asko Parpola, “Vae as a Goddess of Victory in the Veda and Her Relation to Durga,” *Departmental Bulletin Paper* (Kuremat: Kyoto University Research Information Repository, Kyoto, Japan, 2000), especially 43 and 118–19.

13. R. C. Agawala, “The Goddess Mahisasuramardini in Early Indian Art,” *Artibus Asiae, Journal of Asian Art and Archaeology*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (Zurich, Switzerland, 1958), 127, as cited in Shivaji Panikkar, *Sapta Matrika: Worship and Sculptures* (New Delhi: D. K. Print-world (P) Ltd., 1997), 167. Also described by Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin: Austin University Press, originally published by the British Museum, 1991), 108–9 (under the name Inana).

14. Panikkar, 1997, 2. Panikkar suggests that Durga has a “dichotomous personality” as do the other *śaktis* known at the time. On p. 24 he further discusses Durga’s intimate connection with Shiva and mentions early references to her as a bridging force that helps to carry devotees through tough times as they cross the “ocean of existence.” Images of her crossing waters to a “further shore” are prominent in the Mahabharata and the Devi Mahatmya. Such crossings obviously reference her role in bridging opposites.

15. Parpola, 2000, 127, 129, and 135.

16. George Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 23. His reference is to Kur, 218, and also to the famous and very early Tamil epic known as the Cilappatikaram. Apparently the story of Korrvai (Durga) is one of very few myths that precede the incursion of Aryan elements into Tamil tradition, 131.

17. Beck, 1968, 148, and later conversations with the priest that works there (Olappalyam Krishna Sundaram).

18. My knowledge of the Angalamman festival events is detailed in Beck, 1982, 46–54.

19. Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), provides an extensive discussion of this.

20. The ritual details to follow are taken from Beck, 1968, 171–86.

21. Beck, 1969.

22. See David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980). In this broad-ranging and very scholarly book Shulman makes the same argument but references a much wider canvas. He essentially finds that the same theme of love in death lies at the core of much, perhaps all, Tamil temple mythology.

23. A winnowing fan is also an important ritual object in the Ponnivāla story, where I believe it foretells the imminent separation of the two heroic brothers from their sister Tāngal, and then their subsequent death, while she will remain alive.

24. These details are from Beck, 1972, 46–54. Regrettably I do not have photos of the key festival proceedings I am about to describe, as practiced at the Virappur site.

25. See figures Ea and Ef at the affiliated website. A small “forest” is also created (figure Fd). Note the small rectangular “planting” located in front of the temple pillar. It is very clear that these tiny plants, set out in a square pattern, are meant to ritually represent a forest even if they are so dry and helpless that we realize they cannot survive.

26. These Kāminīmar are a very interesting group of goddesses and I plan to discuss their importance at length in a separate article.

27. Levi-Strauss, *La voie des masques* (Paris: Plon, 1967) (later translated into English as *The Way of The Masks*).

28. Just hours after I have finished constructing this chart and writing the final lines of this paper I came to know of a new issue of Nidan, a journal published online from South Africa whose latest issue was totally dedicated to recent studies of the goddess, and most of the chapters were focused on South India. I was very gratified to discover that these seven fresh papers roughly confirm my general conclusions (in my view, as outlined above. Indeed, I found it stunning that each and every paper seems to focus on either Celanta-Mariyamman type imagery or on “black” Kali-like themes. Because these papers are so interesting and so relevant I want to make a few observations drawn from details these seven Nidan authors have contributed. Two papers center around Mariyamman and I will discuss them first. The other five either directly discuss Angalamman, or provide case material I consider relevant to that end of the Hindu goddess spectrum. That aside, the general focus of all the authors included in this issue of Nidan is on quite “modern” topics, issues such as emotion, sub-altern status, and the like. To my surprise and delight, therefore, I found that the entire range of articles presented by this issue of Nidan combine to both compliment and reinforce the general conclusions I have (just) reached. It is a happy moment when scholars unknown to each other, more or less unwittingly coincide in their reports of a rough basic understanding of patterns observed. This new issue of Nidan is a good example of how scholars trained in different schools of analysis, and asking very different questions, can reach a fruitful middle ground of common discourse and participate in a process of cross-fertilization. Certainly I gained new insight by reading these eight essays. Hopefully each of these authors will also enjoy a few moments of discovery while perusing mine! Here are a few brief observations drawn from details provided by these seven Nidan authors:

A) Srinivasan: Perundevi Srinivasan presents new and compelling data on Mariyamman that depicts a goddess who, though significantly androgynous, still identifies herself to others as fundamentally female. More importantly, these stories focus on the many ways Mariyamman finds to assert her dominance and her powers of control. First this goddess uses her powers to demonstrate her ability to afflict her own husband, Shiva, with pusule-like sores. Then she turns these same tools (especially the ability to afflict others with a range of pox-like illnesses) against all others who refuse to submit and worship her. These stories describe the endless battles Mariyamman wages against all demons and power mongers, and especially all of her male challengers. Srinivasan helps us to see the essentially feminist perspective Mariyamman presents and reinforces this with specific ritual observations that parallel mine . . . in particular the fact that the goddess sits on a pot, maintains that high ground, and refuses to cede her supremacy to anyone. Furthermore, the myths Srinivasan recounts depict a series of rebirths for Peruvai where this key cosmic female powerhouse takes human form sequentially in figures that closely parallel the personalities and actions of the three women whose lives are threaded through the Ponnivāla epic story in a similar way. The material Srinivasan collected describes the pillar and the needles the goddess sits on while performing her extreme penance in particular detail. These fine points are exceptional for their parallels with the exact descriptions the

Ponnivala story provides of the same core event. And finally, I found the discussion of how Mariyamman kills her own son, Katarivaiyan, powerful evidence for Mariyamman's role as a sovereign ruler. In killing her own son this goddess demonstrates her fairness and her responsibility toward the entire community, by suppressing any feelings of protective compassion she might otherwise be assumed to have for her own closest of kin.

B) Harman: William Harman's article is also about Mariyamman. In the first part of the essay, where he discusses the traditional goddess, he describes a female who has been widowed, raped, expelled, or otherwise abused in some way. The goddess reacts with anger, as also happens in my material. But the details in his description of the goddess and her devotees become strikingly different as he moves on to depict the goddess as she is worshipped by middle class, upwardly mobile devotees. Nonetheless, I still see a related theme in this modern material... a living embodiment of the goddess who now tries to help "her" devotees (he is actually a male) find control over their lives in modern circumstances (career, jobs, etc.). Modernization, here, seems to shift the concern with control away from the deity's powers and onto her individual devotees. With this increased emphasis on individualism also comes a shift in some of the symbolism, particularly as a goddess-possessed man who embodies her. He has a passion for rolling around the core shrine he has popularized, while lying prone on the ground. Here is a shift from vertical to horizontal symbolism consistent with a move away from traditional ideas about social identity and toward a more modern worldview.

C) Craddock: Craddock's essay is specifically focused on Angalamman. And again it is fascinating for the detail it provides. Another set of myths, this time about Angalamman, also provide a progression that parallels (in some ways) the progression I have described from the goddess Mariyamman through Batriakali and then to Angalamman. And there are many ritual details that suggest death, cremation, a prone body, and then some kind of joining of male and female that together presage resurrection. Particularly fresh and fascinating for me is her description of Aravan, son of Arjuna, who agrees to sacrifice himself so that the Pandavas can win the Mahabharata war. This is not just the idea of a pre-battle sacrifice, which I have mentioned above. Even more interesting is the fact that the mother of the Ponnivala heroes did penance in the exact spot where Arjuna is said to have stood. Aravan is a son of Arjuna. The Ponnivala heroes are "sons" of their mother, who is a female stand-in for Arjuna. The two Ponnivala heroes commit suicide, just as Aravan does, with the hope of gifting better times to those who will follow. But there is a difference. Aravan hopes to help the heroes of the Mahabharata fight their upcoming war. The Ponnivala heroes hope for a better future for those (non-relatives) who will live on to till the lands of Ponnivala (hopefully without a future war). Here is another way in which the epic of Ponnivala is entwined with the very essence of the three Hindu goddesses I describe. But as I have also argued (elsewhere) this regional epic inverts or otherwise significantly modifies what we are accustomed to hearing described in the Mahabharata. These Ponnivala heroes commit suicide just after a war is over, and not before it. They are the agents of renewal, not a darkening cloud that presages conflict. Just as Craddock stresses that her Angalamman material is about struggle and the attempt to escape (overthrow) domination, so too is the Ponnivala story an attempt to assert the power and pride of a (previously) marginalized people. Hiltbeitel discusses the god Aravan and the temple rituals performed for him at length in his work (2010).

D) Kondos: The description Kondos provides of the goddess Kumari, as she is worshipped in the Kanhannadu Valley, Nepal, is both unique and exciting. Here we see not just a going down, but dramatic going underground... through water, in order to contact the goddess and her renewing energy. This amounts to the ultimate symbolic affirmation of the presence of a "hidden" and secretive "black" Kali. Kondos discusses this, and the process of disintegration that is so forcefully expressed during Guliyeswari temple worship. She also is well aware of the leveling processes that are present and of the liminal space/time context, as well as of a joining theme... all of which end in transformation. Here the worshiper achieves a "fresh" beginning after reaching into a literal "black hole." Furthermore, this Kaumari festival seems to culminate on Shiva Ratri (here called kalatriri) just as related rituals do for both Angalamman and the epic brothers festival celebrated in Virappur. Note that these two sacred spots are separated by thousands of kilometers (Nepal and South India)! Particularly stunning is the account, in Kondos's retelling of Vishnu's role in the myth of Devi's fall to earth. Kondos writes (91):

I then Vishnu, in order to bring Shiva to his senses, hit Devi's body with an arrow, dismembering it. All the parts fell to earth." Here I have found for the first time a direct (if gender-inverted) parallel to the arrow Vishnu uses in the Ponnivala story to signal it is time for the death. The Ponnivala heroes, just like Devi, fall to the earth as a result of an arrow making contact with them. Kondos also stresses that there is no idol, no pictorial image and even more interesting, mentions that the vision of the devotee is "blocked." This reminds me of the immobile "black" Kali image who never stirs from her temple, no matter what is going on around her. When Kondos speaks of refuse and waste imagery I am further reminded of the two bodies of the Ponnivala heroes as they lie dead, on their own battle ground, which is equally a place of submission and of worship. There is clear reference here to process. First there is a breaking down and then a rebuilding of something new, just as the Ponnivala heroes are resurrected and their spirits then carried back to Lord Shiva's council chambers by Lord Varaha. In sum, this is an amazing, revealing, and very fresh essay that is worthy of continued study.

F) Schuler: Schuler clearly believes in the importance of oral traditions, just as I do. We also agree about the usefulness of exploring story, song, and ritual as one large bundle of symbolic thinking, in order to obtain maximum insight. Furthermore, the stories about Leakyamman she presents and also the descriptions she provides of her devotee's ritual activities do remind me of Angalamman in my materials. There is a marital bed, a lying down, references to an erotic union taking place, and then to renewed fertility. Referencing Schuler's metaphor, that is, the dynamics of emotion as expressed in ritual behavior, her work demonstrates that both female rage and female sexual desire are given positive connotations in Leakyamman's ceremonies. In normal life those emotions would most certainly carry a negative charge, especially when seen in women. This evidence of social "leveling," perhaps even of gender role inversion in the ritual context, strikes me as significant. In my view Leakyamman resides comfortably on the "black" Kali end of my spectrum. In sum, Schuler's overall commentary fits nicely into the paradigm I have put forward here.

F) Zeller: Zeller's essay describes what she calls the goddesses that symbolize or deal with "evil" in Hindu written texts, as well discussing images of them found in such contexts. Her focus is on Dhumavati, a goddess with a medieval/Tantric background. Interestingly, Zeller implies that this goddess is far more fearful than Durga and that she is clearly linked with darkness, inauspicious periods and evil in general. Only in the late nineteenth century, she says (102), are there new texts written that try to "purify" and "sweeten" the image of this most terrifying divinity, a sweetening intended to partially identify her with the more "virtuous" bhairav. Zeller says the texts describe Dhumavati as "pale" (meaning ashen?), as dirty, and as having a crow (associated with funerals) on her banner. Besides all this, Dhumavati often has a large nose, a swollen belly, mighty teeth, and crooked eyes. Furthermore, she is said to be deceitful and to hold a winnowing fan in one hand. I, too, see these attributes as symbolizing someone or something different from "green" Kali (or Durga) who occupies the "mid-range" in my paradigm. Zeller speaks of a female goddess who stands for evil whereas I discuss a similar goddess (the "black" Kali) using words such as "death," "chaos," "social leveling," and "re-awakening." I think these differences are relatively superficial. At the core of our two essays we seem to agree that there is a wider typology at work and that seen through its lens, the most harmful Hindu goddesses are consistently portrayed as dark, very scary, possibly deceptive, and always secretive.

G) Mines: Mines suggests that worshippers of the fierce goddesses use their rituals to generate self-dignity and also to challenge accepted boundaries and sources of power. As her example she uses a roadside goddess named Malayammal. Interestingly, this goddess is located in a mountainous and forested area and her worshippers belong to a community that has both a tribal and a hunting heritage. As in the other essays discussed above, there are clear links to death, to wild places, as well as to danger, waste, and leftovers. Furthermore, this goddess can take her challengers with blindness and in particular the opponents of her forest loving ways - humans who happen to be plowmen. Here we encounter the same opposition we see in the Ponnivala story between forest dwellers (who worship "black" Kali) and farmers (who worship Celata-Mariyamman). A strong theme of transformation is also present, where death and servitude become respect and social equality through rebirth. Mines talks of the dead

exercising a “historical force” on the present that emerges out of a loss (of life and of place) in the past. She also speaks of crossing gender lines (transvestite behavior) by storytellers who tell the goddess’s myth. I encountered this when I met Argalamman’s local storyteller, too (figure 1b). I agree that “the past extends itself into the now” through these goddess stories. And I also see consistency in the opposition of tribal, forest-dwelling, dark-skinned and secretive with mainstream farmer, land-plowing, lighter skin, open (public) and above-ground themes. I do not suggest that this is just an Indian precoccupation. These hunter/farmer contrasts are nearly universal in cultures that now depend on agriculture for their survival. But I would argue that the symbolic unpacking of this historical shift in power and associated modes of livelihood, finds differing expression in different societies. India’s Hindu traditions are unique in the power they give to goddesses while seeking to grasp the deep meaning of this key historical transformation.

29. Devdutt Pattanaikpp. *Myth=Mitihva: A Handbook of Hindu Mythology* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2006), xii–xv.

Chapter Two

Constructing Goddess Worship

Colonial Ethnographic and Public Health

Discourses in South India

Perundeivi Srinivasan

This chapter attempts to trace the genealogy of the worship of Mariyamman, the goddess (Ammān) of *ammai* (varieties of poxes, measles, and certain other infections) and rain, in the discourses of public health administration on smallpox vaccination and ethnographic literature in colonial Tamilnadu during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ It explores the ways in which knowledge of Mariyamman worship within a broader context of village goddess worship has emerged in these discourses, taking into account the introduction of “scientific” smallpox vaccination in India by the British in the early nineteenth century. As we shall see, the discourses of public health administration did not operate in epistemological isolation in producing knowledge about Mariyamman worship; rather, they were largely attuned to ethnographic discourses of missionaries and scholars on village goddesses of that time.

In the existing scholarship on smallpox vaccination as a part of Indian medical history, there is a tendency to locate the correspondence between the discourses related to the public health administration and the “smallpox goddess” within a given dichotomous paradigm of the colonizing, medically intervening self and the colonized, doubting or resisting other. This tendency supersedes the inquiry of how the “smallpox goddess” and her worship are framed at the outset in the colonial discourses of the public health and how this framing is inflected by ethnographic accounts in the colonial period, which often disparage goddess worship by equating the goddess with a demon or devil or petty spirit. More frequently these studies subscribe to the