CHAPTER II

UNIQUENESS OF VEDIC AND FOLK DEITIES
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It is a vast title for discussion. The philosophy behind Hinduism is not a philosophy of single religion alone, but of various religions. It is admitted that Hinduism consists of six religious systems such as Souram, Kaumaram, Ganapathiyam, Saivism, Vaishnavism and Saaktham. There is not one god, but are innumerable. Each religious sect claims its religion as supreme and gave birth to all other religions. Multitudes of literature also support the conflicting nature. In the following passages an attempt has been made to explain the philosophy and origin and development of each religious sect.

2.1. Philosophy of Hinduism

The doctrines of Hinduism, unlike those of Christianity and Islam, are not embodied in any one sacred book, nor does Hinduism have a single historical founder. There are not one but innumerable gods and it is not so essential to believe in the existence of god in order to be a Hindu. Hinduism is rich in contradictions that are common to all Hindus. Every belief considered basic to Hinduism had been rejected by one Hindu group or the other. Popular scholar

Frederic Spiegelberg identifies this as the oldest living religion in the complex of creeds unified into a rough system, or series of systems, that calls it Hinduism.  

Hinduism - the beliefs, practices, and socio religious institutions of the Hindus was introduced in about 1830 by British writers. The term evolved from Vedism, the religion of the Indo-European people who settled in India.

Thus, it integrates a variety of elements; Hinduism constitutes a complex but largely continuous whole and has religious, social, economic, literary, and artistic aspects. As a religion, Hinduism is a composite of diverse doctrines, cults, and ways of life. When analysing the philosophy behind Hinduism one can find various segments and each religious divisions want to prove the supremacy over the other sect. Within these religious divisions there are further subdivisions.

2.2. General nature of Hinduism

Hinduism is both a civilisation and a congregation of religions as well. It has neither a beginning nor a founder, nor a central authority, hierarchy, nor organisation. Every attempt at a specific definition of Hinduism has proved unsatisfactory in one way or another, the more so because the scholars of Hinduism, including Hindus themselves, have emphasised different aspects of the whole.

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A Hindu may embrace a non-Hindu religion without ceasing to be a Hindu, and because Hindus are disposed to think synthetically and to regard other forms of worship, strange gods, and divergent doctrines as inadequate rather than wrong or objectionable, they tend to believe that the highest divine powers complement one another. Few religious ideas are considered to be irreconcilable. The core of religion does not depend on the existence or nonexistence of god or on whether there is one god or many. Because religious truth is said to transcend all verbal definition, it is not conceived in dogmatic terms. Moreover, the tendency of Hindus is to distinguish themselves from others on the basis of practice (orthopraxy) rather than doctrine (orthodoxy).

2.3. Incorporation of all forms of belief

The spectrum that ranges from the level of popular Hindu belief to that of elaborate ritual technique and philosophical speculation is broad and is attended by many stages of transition and varieties of coexistence. Magical rites, animal worship, and belief in demons are often combined with the worship of more or less personal gods or with mysticism, asceticism, and abstract and profound theological systems or esoteric doctrines. The worship of local deities does not exclude the belief in pan-Indian higher gods or even in a single high god. Such local deities are also frequently looked upon as manifestations of a high God.
The above diagram No. 3 represents the assimilation nature of Hindu religion throughout, it absorbed various elements from other forms of worship and have grown into a giant tree. Buddha is also known as Sattan in later days admitted in the spectrum of Hinduism and renamed as Aiyanar. Aiyanar is now called Aiyappan. The folk

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people are easily Sanskritised due to the elements which are similar to folk religious tradition.

In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. It is axiomatic that no religious idea in India ever dies or superseded—it is merely combined with the new ideas that arise in response to it. Hindus are inclined to revere the divine in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and are doctrinally tolerant, allowing others—including both Hindus and non-Hindus—whatever beliefs suit them best.

2.4. Authority of the Vedas and the Vedic priests

Perhaps the defining characteristic of Hindu belief is the recognition of the Veda, the most ancient body of religious literature, as an absolute authority revealing fundamental and unassailable truth. At the same time, however, its content has long been practically unknown to many Hindus, and it is seldom drawn upon for literal information or advice.

Still, it is venerated from a distance by every traditional Hindu, and those Indians who reject its authority (such as Buddhists and Jains) are regarded as unfaithful to their tradition. The Veda is also regarded as the basis of all the later shastraic texts used in Hindu doctrine and practice. Parts of the Veda are still quoted in essential Hindu rituals, and it is the source of many enduring

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7 Vasanth Moon (Ed.), op cit, p. 17.
8 Ibid, p. 28.
patterns of Hindu thoughts\textsuperscript{9} which resulted high veneration to the Vedas.

Also characteristic of Hinduism is the belief in the power of the Vedic priests, a priestly class possessing spiritual supremacy by birth. As special manifestation of religious power and as bearers and teachers of the Veda, they are considered to represent the ideal of ritual purity and social prestige.

\textbf{2.5. Evolution of formal religious systems}

In the beginning there were no formal religious systems. Only the folk religions gave birth to the formal religious system. Almost all institutionalised religions come from the folk religions.\textsuperscript{10} The worship of nature converted into the statue form. The impact of anthropomorphism of the folk people is to give statue form as well as like human. They are not imaginary beings. When they give idol representation to their deities, they do not fail to give the symbolic representation of human power and weaknesses.\textsuperscript{11}

Persistent attempts have been made to relate Hindu religion as it is to the deities hymned in the Vedas, but without success. Not only it is impossible to identify Indra with Vishnu or Siva, impossible to find Kali in the Vedas or the Maruts in modern Hinduism, but Vedic hymns and Hindu religion are expressions of two different attitudes of mind, a straight-forward deification of the

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{ibid}, pp. 69 – 70.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{ibid}, p. 4.
most impressive natural phenomena, and the adoption of one of the resulting deities as a tribal God. Hinduism shows a philosophic bent of mind, a continuous search after an ever more satisfactory explanation of the universe.\textsuperscript{12} In the existing deities and worship of south India one can trace that development.

Among the most ancient elements of Indian religion one may place the worship of the Cobra, the 'good snake'. Cobra worship was dominant among the Dravidians in the Vedic period is as shown by the term \textit{Naga} gradually superseding the other names used in Sanskrit literature for the Dravidians.\textsuperscript{13}

2.6. The Antiquity of Dravidian Civilisation

The Aryans swarmed over India, came into contact with the agricultural and settled Dravidians, or to speak anthropologically, the pre-Dravidian tribes. It was an opposed group, with quite different material and mental culture, and the Aryans did not call them Dravidian-Aryans because, after all they were not. The concept of mankind, which is that all people share the quality of belonging to the same genus had not been developed in those remote times. As Frederick Spiegelberg has rightly pointed out that an Aryan could not say to Dravidian, 'you are a man as I am'\textsuperscript{14} for to the primitive mind mankind did not exist and each tribe was a totality with nothing in common with any other tribe. Besides, the differences between the Aryans and the Dravidians were obvious and marked.

\textsuperscript{12} Gilbert Slater, \textit{The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture}, AES, New Delhi, 1982, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{ibid}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{14} Frederick Spiegelberg, \textit{op. cit}, p. 116.
The Aryans were a hardy, nomadic, warlike tribe, Caucasian in appearance. The Dravidians were, on the whole, and still are short, stocky, and swarthy. They had totally different religions and habits and two different cultures. If inferior in arms and violence, the Dravidians quite probably had a culture much more settled and on a much higher level of development than had their invaders, which of course, produced resentment, incomprehension, and uneasiness on both sides. The Aryans called the Dravidians by animal names, for that was the way, the Dravidians named themselves.

The circumstance which has made possible the belief that the Sanskritic civilisation is more ancient than Dravidian, and that Indian culture has an Aryan and Sanskritic origin rather than Dravidian, is the fact that south India cannot show either writings or buildings of incontestable antiquity. It by no means follows that south India did not possess them, for their complete disappearance is the natural consequence of the perishable nature of the materials used, and the destructive power of a hot, damp climate and superabundant insect life. Manuscripts were written on palm leaves. The most ancient temples cannot be accurately dated, but no one claims that they come either before or very near the Christian era. But these earliest stone buildings (apart from dolmens and other rude stone monuments) unmistakably betray their indebtedness to a more ancient architectural art and tradition. Though built of hard

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15 ibid, p. 116.
16 ibid, pp. 116-117.
17 Gilbert Slater, op. cit, p. 64.
granite rock, a most intractable material, they display the utmost elaboration of ornament.

This must have been worked up slowly through centuries by workers in more manageable materials, so that the earliest builders of temples and palaces of stone, instead of, as in other countries, first experimenting in simple forms, and gradually adding ornament, attempted from the beginning a height of elaboration never reached elsewhere in material of the same character. The result, as in the great temple of Siva and Meenakshi at Madurai, is vastly impressive; disgusting and repellent to most European eyes, but magnificent and beautiful to most Indians. The whole story of Dravidian temple architecture can be read in a day at the ancient sacred city of Kanchipuram, where may be seen one of the most ancient stone temples of south India in ruins; others, less ancient, but still found to be venerable.

In spite of the absence of Dravidian architecture of anything approaching Vedic antiquity, the facts relating to it tend on the whole to point a greater antiquity for Dravidian than for Aryan civilisation. Similarly with regard to literature, there is no extant Tamil literature or literature in any other Dravidian language, to which a high antiquity is assigned. But the character of the Tamil language, the perfection with which has it been developed into an organ for precise and subtle thought, combined with the fact that it

18 *ibid*, p. 67.
19 *ibid*, p. 69.
represents a much earlier stage in the evolution of inflexional language than any Indo-Germanic tongue, suggests, though of course it does not prove, the priority of the Dravidians in attaining settled order and regular government; just as the fact that the Greek language attained its perfection while still highly inflected, and the English language only after its inflections had almost all been lost, was a result of Greek priority in civilisation. Here one may note that a most interesting task is waiting for some philologist well trained in both Indo-Germanic and Dravidian languages, in the investigation of the large number of words which are common to Tamil and Sanskrit. Those which can also be found in some other Indo-Germanic language may be presumed to Tamil borrowings from Sanskrit; those that cannot are presumably Sanskrit borrowings from extinct Dravidian languages of north India. In this way definite information can be obtained with regard to the differences of culture between the two races when Aryan and Dravidian first came into contact. One philologist, who began on this enquiry without taking it far, the words relating to the cultivation of flowers and the making of garlands belong to the latter group. The significance of this statement, if it can be confirmed, is obvious.

2.7. Sanskritic Hinduism

Hinduism is a broader concept. When Aryans penetrate towards India began to Sanskritise everything including religious
beliefs and practices. Sanskritic Hinduism can also be called Vedic Hinduism.

Its salient characteristics include a hoary mythology, an absence of recorded history, a cyclical notion of time, a pantheism that infuses divinity into the world around, an immanent relationship between people and divinity, a priestly class, and a tolerance of diverse paths to the ultimate ‘god’. Its sacred language is Sanskrit.

Hinduism was not a homogeneous religion with at least six contending schools of philosophy. And yet Hinduism has become the most intolerant religion in recent years due to vested interest forces within it. The attempt is to homogenise Hinduism. The votaries of Hindutva are determined to transform a way of life, which Hinduism essentially is, into a religion with dogmas, myths, beliefs, institutions and cults.

2.7.1. Texts

The following are the Hindu sacred texts: (i) Vedas, which are four in number (Rig, Yajur, Sama, and Atharva; 1500 to 1200 BC); (ii) Upanishads (some traced back to the sixth century BC); (iii) Dharma Shastras (sixth and third centuries BC); (iv) Ramayana and Mahabharata (third century BC and first century AD); (v) Puranas (first and tenth centuries AD); and (vi) Tantras (sixth-seventh centuries AD).

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23 Vasanth Moon (Ed.), op. cit, p. 69.
The Vedas are mythopoetic compositions that celebrate the divine guardians of earth (Aditi), sky (Varuna, Indra, and Surya), and fire (Agni). The fire sacrifices were conducted by kings and their priests to acquire prosperity in work, success in warfare, and felicity in domestic life. The Upanishads were collectively called Vedanta. These texts often contain mystical discourses between a virtuoso and his disciples. They are less ritualistic and more introspective in orientation. Many of them impart esoteric knowledge to the aspirant who seeks illumination. The Dharma Shastras are canonical treatises that enjoin upon Vedic people observance of ritual and normative regulations. They uphold a hierarchic social order in which the higher and lower castes are ranked according to the level of their ritual purity. For centuries they have been accepted as the compendia of norms for the social behaviour of the Hindu.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata are records of ancient dynastic struggles. They delineate the heroic deeds of men and women who were pitted against court intrigue, warfare, and turbulence. The themes drawn from them are put into plays, songs, and ballads; up to the present, they have inspired creativity in literary and other cultural outputs. The Puranas are records of theophany that aim at the destruction of evil (symbolised by demons) and the recovery of good (symbolised by suffering people). The Puranas centre on the principal deities of the post-Vedic era: Siva,

24 ibid, p. 30.
Sakthi, and Vishnu. Tantras are a body of formulae and techniques that eliminate the mechanical rituals to seek a direct access to superconsciousness.

2.7.2. Beliefs

The three central tenets of Hinduism on the transcendent level are Dharma, Karma, and Moksha. Dharma is the basic moral force that holds the universe together. By contrast, Karma is individualised. A man or woman's present status in life is a consequence of good or evil deeds in previous lives. Likewise, present conduct holds the key to future existence. Fatalism and free will are two faces of the same synergy. Individuals can cross over metaphysical and social obstacles through sustained effort. Hagiographic accounts of India reveal the success of esteemed men and women who overcame their limitations through determination. Moksha is the transcendence of karmic bondage: the cessation of births and deaths. Even in the present life, one can attain liberation from worldly ensnarements and attain mental peace. The Bhagavad Gita shows the path through which an individual finds detachment in the midst of occupational commitments.

For the numerous householders who constitute the bulk of Hindu society, there are three social pursuits that are normatively defined. These are dharma (ritual and legal obligations), artha (attainment of prosperous life), and kama (satisfaction of sexual and procreative needs). The virtuosi have mainly pursued the

transcendent ends; the laity has usually operated on a normative level. Popular Hinduism has centered on fasts and feasts, pilgrimage to temple towns, and so on. It provides scope for the religious minded people to reach emotional catharsis through collective participation in rituals.

2.7.3. Organisation

Vedic people are in ritual terms, at the top of the caste system. They are the literati safeguarding the sacred traditions of Hindus. They are mostly householders who are often aligned with sectarian or monastic centres. They are not monolithic; only a few of them are priests catering to people's sacramental needs. Many of them have been engaged in secular pursuits both in the past and at present. Although not landed or wealthy, they have retained a high ritual position. Their social exclusiveness and inflexibility have often made them targets. However, a number of Vedic people were absorbed into the heterodox sects because of their intellectual acumen. This was a paradoxical element in the development of Hinduism.

Although there is no central and organised institution in Hinduism, sects have arisen within it from time to time to reform, innovate, and provide a more concise interpretation of spirituality. Hindu orthodoxy has often been challenged by heterodox sects, but Hinduism and its sects have always retained links with each other.

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27 Personal observation.
The main inspiration to innovate has come from orthogenetic sources.

Subsequently, the bhakti sects emerged in south India during the sixth to eleventh centuries AD and in north India during the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries. These sects propagated a liberalism that freed people from ritual and social inhibitions and made them all equal before god. These bhakti sects mediated between the Marga (Sanskrit tradition) and the Desi (folk tradition) and reached out to the common people. Through their literary compositions, they greatly enriched the regional languages, such as Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, and so on.

In the wake of colonial rule, new reformist trends emerged in Indian society. Hindu reformism had three well-known figures: Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda. Drawing upon the Vedantic tradition, they staunchly supported a cultural nationalism. The political awakening came in the early part of the twentieth century. Aurobindo, Tilak, and Gandhi were among the notables who launched the struggle for freedom from foreign rule. All of them made attempts to redefine Hinduism and make it more adaptable to modern times. In the meantime, the colonial policies of the British rulers engendered a feeling of separateness between Hindus and non-Hindus. Amity had persisted between the two

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communities up to the colonial period, in spite of the political rivalries of Hindu and Muslim rulers. The Partition of India (1948) estranged the two groups on a large scale; it was the culmination of a political process that had begun some decades earlier. Hence a careful study of Hinduism will reveal that the phrase Hindu communalism is an oxymoron. Hinduism has been tolerant, while communalism has been overzealous. Despite its traumatic impact on the plural society of India at present, will weaken or fade out in the near future.

2.7.4. Scientific Study of Hinduism

The pioneer sociologist to study India on a comparative basis was Max Weber, who inquired into Hinduism and its sects; he drew upon the Indological literature that was available in Germany. More recent studies have taken as social anthropological approach. Bose has described the religious ties that exist between India's tribes and castes; an index of these ties is the participation of Hindu men and women across the country in celebrations at places of pilgrimage. Ghurye has shown that the major gods and goddesses of Hinduism are symbols of ethnic integration; the complex process of assimilating minor, local deities into the all-India pantheon of major deities - namely, Siva, Vishnu, and Sakthi - has lent unity to an extremely heterogeneous society. Srinivas has depicted the Hinduisation of an indigenous group in a hill area of south India; this study has enabled him to develop the concept of

31 ibid, p. 46.
‘Sanskritisation’ for the analysis of wider aspects of Hindu society. Dumont has traced the worship of a folk deity of south India to the interactions between Aryan and Dravidian liturgical forms. Marriott has studied the encounter between the Great Tradition (derived from Sanskrit scriptures) and the Little Tradition (derived from folk belief and practices) in a village in north India. Singer has highlighted the adaptability of the Great Tradition to modern times in spite of its religiosity and hieratic structure.

Beyond these social anthropological works, economic and psychological aspects have been considered. Mishra has examined economic growth in Hindu society with an emphasis on diachronic aspects. Pocock has analysed the social impact of a Vaishnavite sect on the beliefs and rituals of a village in western India. Ishwaran (1983) has explored the rise of a Saivite sect in south India that, inter alia, contributed to an indigenous model of modernisation. Babb and Haraldsson have analysed different aspects of the cult surrounding the south Indian mystic Sathya Sai Baba. Vidyarthi (1961) has studied the ritual interdependence between the Vedic priests of a sacred centre in north India and the pilgrims of various castes. Oommen has referred to the dominant cultural mainstream that has tended to treat religious minorities as outsiders. Venugopal has shown that the reformist sects in India have contributed to a socio-political ordering of Indian society. In addition to these, there are also studies of temple dancers, ritual specialists, and ascetic groups who belong to Hindu society.
2.7.5. Hierarchical inequality

Because the principle of hierarchical inequality is so fundamental in Hinduism and Indian society, anthropological analysis of the popular religion has often been preoccupied by the problem of religious stratification.32

2.7.6. Dichotomy in Hinduism

In modern anthropology, the debate was opened by Srinivas in 1952 in his pioneering monograph, ‘Religion and Society’ among the Coorgs of South India. In that book, Srinivas introduced the concept of ‘Sanskritic’ Hinduism, defined as “Hinduism which transcends provincial barriers and is common to the whole of India”.33 In contrast to ‘All-India Hinduism’, there are ‘Peninsular’, ‘Regional’ and ‘Local Hinduisms’,34 but most striking throughout Srinivas’s study is the dichotomy between Sanskritic Hinduism and local, village-based, non-Sanskritic Hinduism.35

The phrase ‘Sanskritic Hinduism’ clearly implies a definitive connection with Sanskrit scriptural texts. In fact, Srinivas does not define ‘Sanskritic’ in such terms, but he does list a series of features and characteristics of Sanskritic Hinduism, such as worship of great deities like Vishnu and Siva, the pan-Hindu sacredness of rivers, the importance of major pilgrimage centres, the currency of the two classical epics (the Ramayana and the Mahabharata), the sanctity of

34 *ibid*, p. 214.
the cow, belief in the concepts of karma and dharma, and the preeminent role of Vedic people.36

In Srinivas's analysis, Sanskritic Hinduism is coupled to another concept, “Sanskritisation” – the historical process by which the beliefs and practices of lower castes tend to converge toward those of higher castes, especially Vedic people, as the former try to raise their status by emulating the latter”.37 Sanskritic Hinduism is thereby given a sociological foundation as, in principle, the religion of the high castes, whose pan-Indian universality derives from its roots in the Sanskrit scriptural tradition mainly perpetuated throughout the country. In other words, the division of Hinduism into higher Sanskritic and lower non-Sanskritic strata is explained sociological as the functional correlate of a caste-based, hierarchical social structure.38

2.8. The difficulty of knowing one is a Hindu

It is not easy to identify who a Hindu is. There is neither single founder, nor a supreme god.39 Instead there are numerous gods and a number of founders. Even Hindu religion is not a single religion, but a combination of six religious systems. Each sect has its own deity, history and founder. The sect has been divided into various divisions. For example Vaishnavism is again divided into Vadakalai and Thenkalai. The followers are also divided into various

36 *ibid*, pp. 24 – 25.
37 M. N. Srinivas, *op. cit*, p. 75.
38 C. J. Fuller, *op. cit*, p. 25.
groups. Due to these riddles it is difficult to identify whether one is a Hindu.

It is much contrary that who should be called ‘Hindu’. Still there is no proper definition to identify a person as Hindu. At the time of Census taking there was a guideline issued to the officials and census takers to include all people as Hindus except those who claim Christians, Muslims, Parsi and Sikh.\(^{40}\) Even in this Census Buddhists were incorporated as Hindus. The Atheists and Adi Dravida and Scheduled Tribes were also included as Hindus. It is here to be noted that they did not have single god, principles, philosophy or holy book or founder.\(^{41}\) Still it can be widely seen that there were no such knowledge among the folk people about the Vedic deities and their puranas but, they termed as Hindus.

Most of the students of Indian history have not come across a great fun that outcastes are termed Hindus. It is high time to examine the truth behind this terminology. The Census report for India published by the Census Commissioner at the interval of every ten years from 1870 onwards contains a wealth of information nowhere else to be found regarding the social and religious life of the people of India. Before the Census of 1910, the Census Commissioner had a column called ‘Population by Religions’. Under this heading, the population was shown (1) Muslims, (2) Hindus, (3) Christians, etc. The Census Report for the year 1910 marked a new

\(^{41}\) S. V. Rajadurai, op. cit, pp. 9 – 10.
departure from the prevailing practice. For the first time, it divided the Hindus under three separate categories: (1) Hindus, (2) animists and tribal and (3) depressed classes by untouchables.\textsuperscript{42}

The basis adopted by the Census Commissioner (1910) for separating the different classes of Hindus into (1) those who were cent-percent Hindus, and (2) those who were not. The basis adopted is to be found in the circular issued by the Census Commissioner in which he laid down certain tests for the purpose of distinguishing these two classes.

Among those who were not cent-percent Hindus, were included under castes and tribes which:\textsuperscript{43}

1. deny the supremacy of the Brahmins;
2. do not receive the mantra from a Brahmin or other recognised Hindu guru;
3. deny the authority of the Vedas;
4. do not worship the Hindu Gods;
5. are not served by Brahmins as family priests;
6. have no Brahmin priest at all;
7. are denied access to the interior of the Hindu temple;
8. cause pollution (a) by touch, or (b) within a certain distance;
9. bury their dead bodies; and
10. eat beef and do no reverence to the cow.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} T.H.P. Chentharassery, \textit{Ambedkar on Indian History}, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2000, p. 134.
Out of these ten tests, some divide the Hindus from the animist and the tribal. The test divides the Hindus from untouchables. Those that divide the untouchables from the Hindus are 2, 5, 6, 7 and 10 above.

Every untouchable community has separate quarters outside the village. They do not allow caste-Hindus to enter into their quarters thinking that it will harm them or it will lead to their ruination. The Vedic people also think vice versa. The untouchables or the outcastes, thus, living outside the village was termed as broken men. The broken men were once Buddhists or Jains. As such they did not revere the Vedic people and did not employ the Vedic priests as their priests and regarded them as impure. The Vedic people, on the other hand, disliked the broken men because they were Buddhists who were considered as the number one enemy of the Vedic tradition. They preached against the broken men with contempt and hatred with the result that the broken men came to be regarded as untouchables or Mlecchas or impure. So, they were not allowed entry in the village.

To repeat what has already been said in the first general Census of India 1881, no attempt was made to classify the different Hindu caste either into higher or lower or touchable and untouchable. In the third Census of 1901, a new principle was

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46 _ibid_, p. 135.
47 _ibid_, p. 136.
adopted for classification by social precedence as recognised by the native public opinion. Every Hindu is born in a caste and his caste determines his religious, social, economic and domestic life from the cradle to the grave. That was why caste-wise enumeration was insisted.\(^{48}\)

The Census Commissioner (1911) for convenience sake of denotation, all the untouchables and tribes were categorised as ‘Hindus’ even though they were not really Hindus. That is why, they (the untouchables and the tribes) are now denoted as Hindus (not by belief or affinity) but historically this denotation is untrue and against the facts of history.\(^{49}\) In the light of it is vital to know the etymology as well as the genesis of Vedic deities.

### 2.9. Vedic Deities

Vedic deities are nothing but the deities of Sanskritic Hinduism. However, it is not the intention of the researcher to give historical outline on the genesis of Vedic deities, but, how these deities got victory in due course over the people. Puthumaippitthan, a well known Tamil scholar once said about the deities: “Man created gods and goddesses, since then gods and goddesses created man”.\(^{50}\) In the light of this statement one can understand the creation of Vedic deities. The following passages are attempted to explain the nature and characteristics of Vedic deities.

\(^{48}\) idem.

\(^{49}\) idem.

\(^{50}\) S. Thamizh Selvan, *op. cit*, p. 3.
2.9.1. Siva

The Vedic god of thunder, Rudra was at first associated with Siva, who eventually became the dominant partner.\(^{51}\) Amarnath in Kashmir, Kedarnath in the Himalayas, Visvanath in Banaras, Tarakaswar near Calcutta, Bhuvaneswar in Orissa, Somnath in Kathiawar, Kailasananathar at Kanchipuram, Brahadiswarar at Thanjavur, Nataraj at Chidambaram are a few of the famous temples which are found all over India; named after the various titles of Siva. The Sanskrit language has 1008 different names to designate this god. It is probable that long before, the arrival of the Aryans, the 'great god' (Mahadeva or Maheswara) was worshipped in India. In historical times, his cult flourished especially in Kashmir and in Tamil Nadu yet he is revered.\(^{52}\)

He can create, destroy and sustain the world, at times obscures by his power of illusion (maya) or offers grace to, the suffering world. These are the five-fold activities of Siva, symbolised by the five faces of the god (Pancanama). In the words of Antoine, “He sees the past, present and the future by means of his three eyes (Trilocana). To save the earth, he drank poison and his throat became dark blue. A moon’s crescent or above his central eye, clad like an ascetic with a tiger skin, he holds a trident in his hand; he rides the white bull Nandi”.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{51}\) David L. Sills (Ed.), *op. cit*, p. 359.


\(^{53}\) ibid, pp. 84-85.
2.9.2. Vishnu

Vishnu is the governing lord of the material world, and in himself he is both space and matter. The god of the pastoral region – Mullai was the Black God (Mayon), who was a herdsman, beloved both of milkmaids and of cattle. He was always uttering sweet music with the flute (kulal) and its music moved all nature. Besides singing, he delighted in dancing. Surrounded by a crowd of milkmaids, he or his priest danced most complicated dances, as herdsfolk do today. Milk and milk-products, sometimes mixed with boiled rice were his offering. Pastoral life affords more opportunities than a hunter’s life for indulging in the delights of love, as it also provides occasions for the temporary parting of lovers, which later only heightens the pleasure of re-union. The life of the herdsman is the jolliest of all, because, unlike the hunter or the man who sails far out into the sea whose lives are fraught with risks, he does the easy work of leisurely tending cattle in the forest. Hence the black god of the tenders of cattle is the merriest of the Indian gods.\textsuperscript{54}

One of the chief legends about him deals with his ambition to become prime lord of the universe. To his fellow devas it seemed an overweening ambition; this attitude, incidentally, gives an insight into his historical evolution.\textsuperscript{55} Vishnu latter became a high god,

\textsuperscript{55} Frederick Spiegelberg, \textit{op. cit}, p. 105.
began as only a minor figure, a mere aspect of the sun god. Many ancient myths and different gods have gradually merged and coalesced into the majestic figure of Vishnu. As Siva is the god of the mountains, so is Vishnu the god of the ocean and the god of luminous sky, a solar and cosmic deity, the protector and sustainer of the world.

Vaishnavism, the Vishnu cult followed today all over India, has its roots in the non-Aryan cults of Vasudeva, an ancient hero of the Vrsni tribe, and of Narayana, a cosmic god of uncertain origin, represented as lying on the coiled serpent is seen floating on the primeval waters, the resting place of the worlds; the Vedic priests identified or amalgamated Vasudeva and Narayana with the Vedic god Vishnu, a solar deity, Vishnu's vehicle is the sun-bird Garuda.

Vishnu is believed to have again and again come down into the world of men and animals, assuming diverse forms in order to save the world from various demons. The number of these avatars or descents of the Lord varies but a list of ten such avatars has become extremely popular. In the shape of a fish (matsya), a tortoise (kurma), a boar (varaha), a man-lion (nara-simha), a dwarf (vamana), a warrior (parasurama), as Rama, as Balarama (the elder brother of Krishna), as Buddha and as Kalki, the expected liberator, Vishnu appears in the world.

David L. Sills (Ed.), op. cit, p. 359.
R. Antoine, Et. Al, op. cit, p. 6.
2.9.3. Other Cults

The chief Vedic gods were gradually transformed into the trinity of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the protector and Siva, the destroyer. Brahma does not appear in the Vedas, but seems to have developed during the period of Brahmanas.58 His importance subsequently declined, and nowadays Vishnu and Siva are the two most important gods.

The henotheistic tendency is important in Hindu mythology and ritual; the deity who is being worshipped is praised above all others. Pantheism prevails, but all deities, from Vishnu or Siva to the lowest village deity, are considered to be manifestations of the same god. These ideas have enabled Hinduism to absorb local cults and deities and even accept all other religions as true.59

The sun-god, as a symbol of god’s life and light-giving power, is still invoked daily by reciting the Gayathri mantra. Strange cults arising from a syncretist tendency, have as objects the Harihara (Vishnu and Siva considered as one) the Kalikrishna (the Devi identified with Krishna), the Ardhanariswara (deity half-man; half-woman) which symbolises the identity of Hara-Siva and Gowri-Durga or their union.

Demons, semi-divine beings (Nagas, Apsaras, Yakshas etc) apotheosised heroes and holy men, even mythic animals associated with the gods (e.g. Hanuman), rivers, trees, mountains, sacred

59 ibid, p. 360.
stones, etc, are also worshipped, the Hindus having but rarely distinguished between a saint and a god, the sacred and the divine. Animism, polytheism, pantheism and artistic symbolism have all contributed their shrine in the creation of the Hindu pantheon.  

Those deities whose attributes and modes of worship are described in mythological, liturgical and other texts may be called sanskritic. The Vedic pantheon reflects the syncretism that resulted from the conquest by nomadic Indo-European Aryans of the ancient urbanised civilisations of the Indus Valley and a continuing contact with the aboriginal tribal people of the sub-continent. Most of the deities, major and minor, are nature gods; Indra, the most prominent of all, is the sky god; Agni, the fire god; Varuna, the water god; Surya, the sun god; and so on.

2.9.4. Ganesha

The elephant-headed god, Ganesha is known (by various names in different parts of India and on different occasions) as the remover of obstacles, the god of domestic harmony and of success. He is the most beloved and revered of all the Hindu gods, and is always invoked first in any Hindu ceremony or festival. He is the son of Parvathi (the wife of Siva). There are many stories about how Ganesha got his elephant head, and about his exploits and antics. He was created as an ordinary boy, but was decapitated in battle. Siva's emissaries were sent into the forest and told to get the head of the

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61 David L. Sills (Ed.), op. cit, p. 360.
first animal they found and to fit that head onto the boy's neck. They found a little elephant, and it worked it out!

Throughout India, Ganesha is widely worshipped in both towns and villages (for instance, as a guardian of water sources). He is sometimes a clan deity. But there are few large temples dedicated to Ganesha, even in Maharashtra, where he is an especially popular deity for the entire region, so that his cult rather lacks the splendor of his father's or of Vishnu's.

The invisible deities are represented by a complexity of images and idols symbolising divine powers. Many of these idols are housed within ornate temples of unparalleled beauty and grandeur. The Hindu gods are much alive and live in temples, snow-capped peaks, in rivers and oceans and in the hearts and minds of the Hindus.

2.9.5. Skanda and Hanuman

In most of India, Skanda is fairly unimportant, but in Tamil Nadu, as Murugan, he is the presiding deity of large and wealthy temples in which he is commonly represented as a king. Murugan is almost certainly the most popular deity among Tamils, and he is firmly identified as their regional deity. Murugan is not a tutelary deity of villages, but sometimes he is a clan deity.

But long before these advanced cults, called Agamika, arose, higher gods that the local demons or the spirits inhabiting trees, rivers and hills, were evolved in the country. These gods were evolved in each region separately and in accordance with the geographical characteristics of each region. The god of the hilly
region was the Red God (Seyon), also called Murugan, who was the patron of pre-nuptial love. He was offered by his worshippers balls of rice mixed with the red blood of goats killed in his behalf. He was a hunter and carried the Vel or spear and was hence called Velan, spearman. His priest was also called Velan. This god created the love-frenzy in girls; and when girls were obsessed by him, the priest performed magic rites for curing the love-sick girl. When the priest was in communion with the god, he was also seized with the divine frenzy and sang and danced a devil-dance (Veriyattam). Women, too, took part in priestly functions. Men or women priests, when under the influence of the god, not only sang and danced but also read the dim past, predicted the future, diagnosed diseases (and the particular demons that caused each disease), and cured all the ills that the flesh and the brain were heir too. The means of cure was not solely supernatural for, as the hilly region abounded in simples, the magic of the priests and priestesses were fortified by the use of drugs. Hence the early priest was also the medicine dealing man and even today, notwithstanding millenniums of philosophical evolution, the devil priest-cum-medicine-man of the degraded Kuravar tribe drives a flourishing trade among the elite of society, on the sly.

The most prominent Vaishnava deity to take a comparable role is probably Hanuman, the ‘monkey god’, who is in mythology Rama’s most fervent devotee. Hanuman is popularly said to possess gigantic physical strength. Across much of central India (where he is

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62 T. Paramasivan, op. cit, pp. 148 – 150.
63 X. S. Thani Nayagam (Ed.), op. cit, p. 182.
sometimes seen as a form of Siva), Hanuman is an important village deity, but he is widely worshipped everywhere, especially by people who believe that his sheer strength can crush the malevolent agencies afflicting them.\textsuperscript{64}

2.9.6. Represented as reigning monarchs

Evidently the king plays a central role in Hinduism, and Vishnu and Siva in their temple forms are widely represented as reigning monarchs. Frequently, these forms of Vishnu and Siva rule over lands that are undefined; for instance, the rituals at Siva’s temple in south Indian village where there is considerable emphasis on the god’s sovereignty, but not in relation to any specific realm. In many cases, though, the temple form is identified as the monarch of a specific kingdom. Then Vishnu and Siva are ‘state deities’, taking on forms that portray them as eternal, true kings, for whom human rulers act as regents in this world. In spite of Vishnu’s primary identification in classical texts as the king as opposed to Siva the ascetic renouncer, both gods do in practice assume the royal function.\textsuperscript{65}

As kings, Vishnu and Siva’s principal responsibility is protection of the royal house and the kingdom, its people and territory. Thus in their royal forms, the god’s general powers over the universe become more specifically deployed within the

\textsuperscript{64} C. J. Fuller, \textit{op. cit}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{ibid}, p. 38.
boundaries of a kingdom situated on earth, whether or not such a kingdom actually corresponds to an extant polity.  

Yet the great gods’ powers are made more limited and specific when they become linked to smaller localities and social units. Thus, for instance, in many regions of India, the countryside is dotted with small temples to Siva, as in central Gujarat, where every village contains one or more, each in principle distinguished by a particular name and legend. In some cases, as with the Tamil Pramalai Kallar caste, Siva is the principal god of the lineage temples, so that he is the protector of the Kallars’ local kin units.

It is difficult to say how commonly Siva, as such, is the presiding deity in rural shrines and temples, but in many regions a particular form of Siva, the terrible Bhairava, is the focus of ritual attention. Bhairava, (Bhairon, Bheru, etc.) is then a ‘village deity’ (gramadevata), who may be worshipped as the tutelary deity of a village or another local settlement unit, such as an urban quarter (despite the term ‘village deity’). Sometimes, while still classified as a gramadevata, Bhairava’s protective functions are less clearly identified, although he can also be the protective deity of a kin group, that is, a ‘clan (or family) deity’ (Kuladevata).

66 ibid, p. 39.
68 C. J. Fuller, op. cit, p. 39.
2.10. Vedic deities in the role of subdue of human liberalism

This can be noticed in the iconographical structure of Vedic deities. They are subduing human liberalism. As a mode of oppressive tendancy, backed with the support of Vedic literature never allow the subaltern people to think of liberty. There is no place for female deity, even if they are given place in the temples dedicated to Vedic tradition designed in a small structure. Usually, prominent deities such as Siva, Vishnu, Ganesha and other host of deities are worshipped by the Vedic priest and other caste Hindu people. Whereas the ordinary people are asked to worship the lesser deities like Hanuman and other animistic objects. This is to establish the domination of caste Hindus on the subaltern people.

According to agamic texts, Hanuman, the faithful monkey messenger, should be shown as standing a little in front and also to the right of Rama and should be only so high as to reach the chest, the navel or the hip of Rama. Further, the figure of Hanuman should be sculptured in accordance with the Saptatala measure of 84 angulars. It should be represented as having only two hands, the right of which is placed upon the mouth in token of loyalty and the

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69 'Brahmanical Deities and their role to Suppress the Liberal Thoughts of Humanity', Research article presented by S. Xavier, in the X Session of TNHC at AVVM Sri Pushpam College, Poondi on 12th October 2003.
left is made posture of the image. Hanuman should be such as to evoke compassion and to bring into prominence the ever-ready willingness of his faith.

Vedic religion with its customs, rituals and habits, can be called great or Brahmanical tradition and little or folk tradition. The popular deities such as Siva, Vishnu, Muruga and Vinayaga can be cited as examples of Vedic deities. The names, which are familiar to most of the rural people such as Mariamman, Kaliyamman, Pidari, Aiyanan, Karuppannasamy can be cited as the deities of little or folk tradition. It is important to note that in Manudharmasastra the person who worshipped the deities of folk tradition has been given the punishment of not admitting in the dinner and other social gatherings.

The Aryans, who were the founders of Vedic Hinduism not only acted as a priestly class but also wanted to be an important people in socio, economic and political matters. They wanted to continue the exploitation in various means. As a temple priest, educator, policy makers, administrators, leaders and other means they continued to exploit majority of the sons of the soils. They carefully observed the caste system and untouchability. Their

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72 Personal observation.
occupational differences do not significantly disturb the unity.\footnote{Andre Beteille, \textit{op. cit}, p. 68.} Thus, they created various philosophies, rituals, beliefs, gods and goddesses, which were helpful to exploit others. The Vedic deities revealed the racial superiority of Vedic people. These deities apprehended the devotees with their cruel appearance, dreadful weapons and awful ornaments. It will be understood by means of closure look on the avatars of Vishnu (\textit{Narashimha, Parasurama}) and cruel exposure of these deities. In addition to that, almost all the deities characterised with killing one of the demons, which are normally in black colour, symbolises Dravidian people.\footnote{Periyar, \textit{Dravidar Aryar Unmai}, Viduthalai Pathippagam, Chennai, 2002, p. 9.} The killing posture of these deities revealed the fact that, once upon a time, there was a furious struggle for living between the original inhabitants and the Vedic people.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p. 9.}

The inter mixture of the ethnic tribes and the inclusion of ‘Black Gods’ in the Hindu pantheon, will not absolve Vedic people of its racial chauvinism. The victories of the \textit{Devas} over \textit{Asuras} were celebrated. They were and are still depicted as the victory of good over the evil.\footnote{People’s Art and Literary Association, \textit{Hindutva nothing but Brahmanic Sanatan Dharma}, Chennai, 2003, p. 4.} The concept of the double marriage to the Vedic deities also revealed the glutinous between the Vedic and local culture.\footnote{David Dean Shulman, \textit{Tamil Temple Myths – Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition}, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1990, p. 91.}
The protector Vishnu is the centre of subdue of liberal thoughts of man. Many ancient myths and different gods have gradually merged and coalesced into the majestic figure of Vishnu.\textsuperscript{80} He used to have again and again comedown into the world of men and animals, assuming diverse forms in order to destroy the demons (These were all of probably Dravidian kings and leaders) and killed numerous people on various occasion. The number of these avatars or descents of Vishnu varies but a list of ten such avatars has become extremely popular. In the shape of a fish (Matsya), a tortoise (Kurma), a boar (Varaha), a man-lion (Nara-Simha), a dwarf (Vamana), a Warrior (Parasurama), as Rama, as Balarama (the elder brother of Krishna), as Buddha and as Kalki, the expected liberator, Vishnu appears in the world.\textsuperscript{81} On these occasions, Vishnu used to slay various groups of people and individuals with his Sudarsanachakra and other dangerous weapons. His vehicle is the mystic sunbird Garuda.

The destroyer Siva vested with him all the powers. He rides on the white bull Nandhi and wears a snake as a neck ornament. In historic times, his cult flourished especially in Kashmir and in Tamil Nadu yet, most of the so-called Vedic Hinduism revere him. He creates and destroys; he sustains the world, at times obscures by his power of illusion (maya) or offers grace to the suffering world. These are the five fold activities of Siva, symbolised by the five

\textsuperscript{80} R. Antoine, Et. Al, op. cit, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{ibid}, p. 85.
faces of the gods (*Pancanama*). He also used to slay various groups of people and individuals; with his *Trishul* and other dangerous weapons. His ‘*Rudrathandava*’ has been popular one. On this occasion he used to kill demons. Lord Siva, through his various *Thiruvilayadals* (sacred plays) used to suppress the liberal thoughts propounded by various scholars (e.g. vengeance against Nakkirar) in order to show his superiority over the human.

Besides these *TrimurTI*, now a day Ganesha, Skanda (Muruga) and the monkey-god Hanuman are also made popular. Ganesha, the elephant - headed god is said to be a son of Lord Siva. He has received high veneration among the Hindu majority; he has been called Pillaiyar, Ganapathi, Vigneswara and other names. There is no authentic source material on the birth of Ganesha. E. V. Ramasamy alias Periyar claimed that Ganesha was born out of imagination. Usually, Ganesha is symbolised to be a very calm god; nowadays his posture threatens the devotee and his celebrations in Tamil Nadu have been common dear by the Hindu Munnani. *Viravigneswarar* is an apt example for this kind of fearful look. Even Ganesha statues are characterised with pistols and atom bombs during *Pillaiyar Chathurthi* (Immersion ceremony).

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82 idem.
86 S.V. Rajadurai, *op. cit*, pp. 20 – 21.
87 Personal observation.
Lord Muruga is said to be another son of Lord Siva. His weapon is *Vel* (a kind of spear). He also committed various atrocities on the people but they are overlooked because of his cordial relationship and adjustment nature with Tamil locality.

The Monkey god Hanuman is said to be a son of Siva,\(^88\) called an incarnation of Siva. Hanuman, in the pages of Ramayana remains a subordinate to Rama (incarnation of Vishnu). Hanuman occupies a niche in many Vishnu temples as a model of pure devotion to his master Rama.\(^89\) That is the reason why the Vedic people and Hindu fundamentalists insist on the worship of Hanuman. It is quite clear that the worshippers of Hanuman never get radical ideas.\(^90\) The ignorant masses also commonly wear the image of Hanuman around the necks of the children without knowing the contrivance of religious fundamentalists.\(^91\)

Finally, the wives of these popular deities are the symbols of obedience to the Vedic male deities. They are always smaller than their male consorts. It symbolises the male domination over female.\(^92\) Parvathi, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Sita and other goddesses (unlike the south Indian goddesses of little tradition) are popular for their obedience to their male consorts. They never act against the wishes of their male consorts.

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\(^89\) Andre Beteille, *op. cit*, p. 68.
\(^90\) Puthiya Kalacharam, March – April 2003, Chennai, p. 8.
\(^91\) *ibid*, p. 8.
\(^92\) S. K. Ayyasamy (Ed.), *op. cit*, p. 106.
On the whole these Vedic deities are regarded as the birthplace of human controlling force. The above said thoughts are not against the divinity of gods and goddesses of Vedic Hinduism. But these are the outward signs of to subdue of liberal thoughts.

Vedic religion, which is neither a religion, nor an ideology, is able to keep such a large chunk of Indians enslaved, poor and half-dead.\textsuperscript{93} The power of the Vedic Hinduism lies with its principles. It emanates from the minds of Vedic priests as well as the people who formally practiced the Vedic ideology in their day-to-day life. It is not a physical force but a thought-controlling force.\textsuperscript{94} Intellectuals like Ambedkar, E.V. Ramasamy and Jyotibha Phule questioned the principles behind the Vedic gods and goddesses. They raised questions in a logical manner and criticised the divinity. Finally they prescribed a resolution for admitting all the people to offer pujas and worship without bothering of their caste and racial superiority. And they also emphasised the need of religious conversion. But these lost their support from all the quarters of India due to the highhandedness of Vedic people in political, social, economic and religious level.

It is clear that the Vedic deities play a substantial role in subduing the liberal thoughts, whereas the folk deities are designed to represent the liberal thoughts of ordinary masses. There is a bond

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid}, p. 7.
between folk deities and people, which can be seen at the time of worship.

2.11. Genealogical framework on the deities of folk tradition

2.11.1. Female Deities

2.11.1.1. Mariamman

She is the village goddess, and bears innumerable names, the commonest perhaps being Gangamma in Telugu villages and Mariamman or Mariyattal in Tamil villages. Her characteristics are so similar that one can hardly refrain from identifying her with Kali, with the rounded limbs, wide hips, swelling breasts, exaggerated waist, and with many arms with deadly weapons, tirelessly dancing, so bountiful in her kindly moods, so deadly when the whim takes her. From conceptions Dravidian thought passed on to the conception of a deity at once lavish and terrible, fickle and incomprehensible, and therefore female, from whom comes small-pox, cholera, and famine, but also rich harvests.

In some villages she is worshipped regularly or periodically, once a year, or once in twelve years; in other places only when she

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95 Gilbert Slater, op cit, p. 91.
96 Personal observation.
shows signs of anger, as by repeated failure of the rains, or by pestilence. She rejoices in blood, and demands wholesale sacrifice of male animals, cocks, rams, he-goats, but most of all the male buffalo.

2.11.1.2. Kali

Kali is consort of the Hindu god Siva in her manifestation of the power of time. A destructive mother goddess, Kali is frequently depicted as a black, laughing, naked hag with blood-stained teeth, a protruding tongue, and a garland of human skulls. She usually has four arms: One hand holds a sword, the second holds a severed human head, the third is believed by her devotees to be removing fear, and the fourth is often interpreted as granting bliss. Kali — omnipotent, absolute, and all-pervasive — is beyond fear and finite existence and is therefore believed to be able to protect her devotees against fear and to give them limitless peace. Finally, as absolute night, devouring all that exists, she is sometimes depicted as standing on the corpse of Siva, which, like the garland of skulls, symbolises the remains of finite existence. Kali's worshipers purportedly appeased her in the past.

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97 Interview with Velayutham on 20th December 2006 at Cuddalore.
98 Gilbert Slater, _op. cit_, p. 92.
99 _ibid_, p. 92.
100 Feminine form of Sanskrit kala, 'time' or 'dark'.

with human sacrifices; today she is propitiated with the blood of mammals.

2.11.1.2. Ellamman

Ellamman is the protective deity of border of villages\(^{101}\) represented in a sitting posture, with a red skin, a fiery face, and four arms and hands. On her head she wears a crown, a round that there are serpents; and when they see snakes, they call Ellamman to drive them away. On her forehead she has three streaks of sacred ashes, and on the whole she is adorned like other goddesses. In her four hands she holds a kind of drum, called *damaru*; a trident, called *sula*; a bundle of ropes, called *pasa*, and the skull of Brahma’s fifth head, which was cut off by Siva as elaborated by Mariamman *sthalapurana*.\(^{102}\)

2.11.1.3. Matangi

Matangi according to the legends of Mariamman, is a Pariah woman on whose head Mariamman’s (Ellamman) head was put. She held the heavens in her left hand, and the great serpent, Adisheshalu, in her right hand. She represented with a basket on her left hand and a stick on her right hand. She also held the sun and moon as plates in her hands. She carries two brass plates containing saffron and turmeric with which she marks the forehead of the worshippers.\(^{103}\)

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\(^{101}\) A. Singaravelu Mudaliyar, *Abithana Chinthamani The Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature*, AES, New Delhi, 1982, p. 274.


\(^{103}\) Based on Field Study in Kulithalai.
2.11.1.4. Pidari

In the Tamil districts of Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli and Cuddalore, the names of village deities most commonly met with are Pidari. She is supposed to act as guardian against evil spirits and epidemics, especially cholera. Male buffaloes are commonly killed in front of Pidari’s image at her festival.\(^{104}\)

Pidari is represented in a sitting posture, fire extruding from her whole body, to indicate her great wrath. On her head she wears a crown, various ornaments in her locks, on her forehead the mark of Siva, bulky jewels in the large holes of her ears and two flowers behind them. She has four hands holding in them respectively a drum with a snake, a trident, the skull of Brahma and a goat. Her throne is an altar. Pidari temples contain also an image of Vigneshvara and the entrance is guarded by two horrible door-keepers called Mannadiyar. She has eighteen generals. She holds these two weapons in two of her four hands.\(^{105}\)

Durga is represented with a sheep’s head standing on the giant Simhamukhasura whom she killed. Her head is fiery and adorned with different jewels. On her forehead she wears a crescent made with sacred ashes of burnt cow dung. In five of her six hands she

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\(^{104}\) Iconographical representation of Pidari almost like Vedic tradition goddess.

holds, respectively, a ring, a sword, a trident, a goat and a skull. Pidari is said to be the chastiser of all evil spirits because those who hang or poison themselves, or die any violent death, are turned into malignant demons who would destroy the whole human race if not kept in check by Pidari.\(^{106}\)

### 2.11.2. Male Deities

#### 2.11.2.1. Aiyanar

The need of a benevolent and protective deity has from distant ages past been met in the Tamil country by the god Aiyanar.\(^{107}\) He is the village god, as Gangamma, and her sisters are the village goddesses. Usually he demands no blood sacrifices; but recently a sheep has to be sacrificed to Aiyanar to atone for the broken vow. It is said to be that he emerged during Satavahāna period. He was also regarded as the deity of hunting and son of mother goddess. In due course, Sattan assimilated as the deity of Buddhists and Jains. Later, the very deity Sattan transformed into one of the sons of Siva.\(^{108}\)

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\(^{106}\) ibid, p. 41.


\(^{108}\) ibid, p. 26.
Every night Aiyanar rides round the village to protect it from ghostly dangers. Well-to-do villages provide Aiyanar with a miniature temple to live in, usually placed on the top of any available knoll or hillock from which as extended view as possible can be obtained. On a platform outside are placed two horses, of the size and generally build of shire stallions, built of brick and mortar, covered with plaster, gaily comparisoned, and each with a diminutive statue of an attendant groom holding the horse ready for Aiyanar to mount.

The chief male deity among the gramadevatas is Aiyan or Aiyanar. Now he is also named Ariyaraputtiran (Hariharaputra), i.e., Vishnu-Siva's son or Aiyappan, because he is said to owe his origin to the union of Siva with Vishnu, when the latter took the female form called Mohini. In many parts of Tamil Nadu Aiyanar is called as Aiyappan. Aiyanar is represented by a human form in a sitting posture, with a red skin, a crown on his head and pearls in his locks. On his forehead, he wears the sacred ashes, pearls on his ears and neck and a sort of ribbon on his breast. The arms, hands, feet and the whole body are full of jewels and ornaments. In his right hand he holds a cceptre, to indicate that he is the chief among village gods. Round his body and his left leg he wears a kind of belt called bahuppadai which is also used by sages and others when they sit.

109 Gilbert Slater, op. cit, pp. 93 – 94.
From his shoulders, garlands hang down. The upper part of his body is uncovered whilst the lower is covered with a motley garment.\textsuperscript{111}

Aiyanar's two wives, viz., Puranai (on the right) and Putkalai (on the left) are represented as having, natural bodies of a yellow colour with crowns on their heads and flowers in their hands. Puranai wears on her forehead the mark of musk Kasturi and Putkalai the sacred ashes.\textsuperscript{112} At the entrances stand two door keepers with crowns on their heads, thick clubs in their hands and lion's teeth in their mouth. In the first apartment stand seven small figures of the Sapta-Matris and two of Vignesvara. In the inner apartment is Aiyanar with his two wives and round about them stand seven figures of stone representing virgins which are however not worshipped. In front of the temple is an altar of stone for animal sacrifices. Close by the temple on both sides of it are figures of clay among which are Aiyanar's generals called \textit{palayakkarar}. These figures are presented by the devotees in fulfillment of vows. Aiyanar is worshipped as Sasta in Malabar. Aiyanar is never asked for any positive good. He only protects from harm and his worship consists solely in propitiation.\textsuperscript{113} Like Ganesha and Skanda, the popular deity

\textsuperscript{111} E Hultzsch, \textit{op cit}, p 40.
\textsuperscript{112} Field study and personal observation.
\textsuperscript{113} Interview with Sadasivam on 25\textsuperscript{th} December 2006 at Kuththalai.
Aiyanar is a lord and leader of the demon host and his province is to
 guard the fields, crops and herds of the peasantry and drive away
 their enemies, the devils and fends who are ever on the alert to
 inflict disease, blight and other calamities. According outside
every village in southern India, may be seen the shrine of Aiyanar,
surrounded with rude clay or terra-cotta figures of horses and other
animals often of life size on which he is supposed to ride when
keeping guard. His image is roughly carved, sometimes in a sitting
posture and at other times on horseback. When properly represented
he ought to have a crown on his head, the Siva mark on his forehead,
a scepter in his hand, and ornaments on his person.

After recovery from sickness or to commemorate any piece of
good fortune the villagers place fresh clay horses round the shrine of
Aiyanar, as thanks offerings or in fulfillment or vows. He is also
propitiated by offerings of the blood of swine, goats, sheep, cocks
and other animals or by cooked food and strong liquor. Aiyanar is
only propitiated for emergencies. Every year after harvest time a
festival is held in his honour when numerous animals are sacrificed
and the images of the god are decorated with ornaments and drawn
about through the village streets on rude clay horses. He is also
worshipped with utmost devotion in Tirunelveli region. In most

114 E. Hultzsch, op. cit, p. 40.
115 ibid, pp. 40 - 41.
occasions the temple of Aiyanar can be seen as close to Sudalai Madan.\textsuperscript{117}

2.11.2.2. Madurai Viran

He has always a separate shrine and is not, like Pandyan and Madurai Viran, simply on attendant of a local goddess. The horses are offered by devotees and represent the steeds on which he rides in his night rounds. He is regarded by the villagers as a good and benevolent protector, of for higher character than of the disrespectful Madurai Viran.\textsuperscript{118}

Madurai Viran is the son of Kasiraja, according to astrological predictions disastrous consequence were expected due to his birth. Hence, the child who later came to be known as ‘Madurai Viran’ was abandoned in a forest. Cobra milk to the crying child later a downtrodden couple longing for a progeny happened to pass by and this child was taken care by them. The daughter of Thottiya Nayakkar namely Bommi was since than natural, at the transition days of puberty, the escort work was assigned to Madurai Viran who was twenty years old than Bommi was eager for Madurai Viran’s compass one when it was gaining. Bommi pretended to be frightened by a hypothetical snake. Madurai Viran came to help. Thereafter he was fascinated by Bommi. The latter expressed complete submission

\textsuperscript{117} E. Hultzsch, \textit{op. cit}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{118} Henry Whitehead, \textit{The Village Gods of South India}, Delhi, 1983, p. 98.
to him and request him to marry her. Madurai Viran promises that he would abduct her the following day.\textsuperscript{119} As per the decision they fled away and camped at Amur on the banks of Coleroon. In spite of the huge approaching contingents Madurai Viran continuously toiled. These were watched carefully by the Chola King from a rock fort. Madurai Viran was sent through by the dignities and given a honorary rank. It was the time at Madurai where the atrocities of the Alagarkoil Kallan were on the increase. A strong opponent was being searched to overpower him. To solve this Madurai Viran was sent. Madurai Viran was also looked after by Vellaiyammal a host. The Pandya king loved Vellaiyammal who loved Madurai Viran.\textsuperscript{120} Hence king was offended and ordered to execute Madurai Viran. But this was because of Madurai Viran visit to Vellaiyammal house, only at her request. This fact was known to the king through dream in a later days.\textsuperscript{121}

2.11.2.3. Kathavarayan

Kathavarayan was born into the lower caste family and eloped with a Brahmin girl who loved much namely Arya Mala. Goddess Kamatchi disturbed them throughout their journey, but Kathavarayan with the help of his friend and succeed in his attempt. He also married another three girls. He later converted into the watching

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{ibid}, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{120} A. Singaravelu Mudaliyar, \textit{op. cit}, p. 1255.
\textsuperscript{121} Henry Whitehead, \textit{op. cit}, p. 48.
deity of goddess Kamatchi. The following story by all means represents the slow but steady process of Sanskritisation.\textsuperscript{122}

Once upon a time goddess Parvathi enquired about the reason for the delay Siva replied that he fed all the living beings. Parvathi refused to accept him and laughed at him. Parvathi already caught an ant and saw rice on its mouth. Parvathi apologised Siva; but Lord Siva wanted to punish her and asked her to maintain a park. To protect the park, he appointed a small boy namely Kathavarayan.

One day heavenly Sapta Kannimars wanted to take bath in the park created by Parvathi and they plucked some flowers. In the next day, Kathavarayan took the garments of seventh sister. When she finished her bath not able to found her cloth and she went to Siva and complained about the matter. Siva enquired the matter and wanted to punish Kathavarayan. Before he pronounced his curse Parvathi blessed him with enduring life (\textit{Vega Sudalayil Saagavaram Unakku Thanthaen}) which increased Siva's anger further. She cursed both Parvathi and Kathavarayan to be born as a devil and to be executed respectively.\textsuperscript{123} Folk people worshipped this deity with utmost devotion though this story gives a negative image of deification process.

\textbf{2.11.2.4. Palavesakkar\textsuperscript{a}n}

It is said that he was born out of magical pearls of Lord Siva, when Chanda Mundars occupied the Ponnari hills, which came out of

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid}, p. 51.
Thirupparkadal. When Chanda Mundars transformed into so many faces, Palavesakkaran also transfigured into various faces and destroy them. Hence, he called as Palavesakkaran. He was also associated with Lord Siva later and others say he was born out of the eyes of Siva according to the story of Brahmasathiyamman.

2.11.2.5. Muniswami

A deity possibly older even than the Cobra, and a deity who appears to be purely Dravidian, is Muniswami. The suggested interpretation of the name is 'the angry deity'. He is a malignant spirit who haunts certain trees and houses, and who betrays his presence in a tree by the fall of a branch to the injury or danger of someone below, and his presence in a house by calamities to the inhabitants. When his presence is either known or suspected prudence dictates propitiation. In the case of a tree this is accomplished by the nightly burning of little native oil lamps and occasional offerings of fruit and flowers; in the case of a house an annual puja must be celebrated. Muniswami is much in evidence all over south India, and in Madras, with a Puck-like stroke of humour, he selected among his various haunts a tree in the compound of the museum, and another in...
that of the house of the Anglican Bishop, and beneath these two trees lights burned, and probably still burn, in despite of western science and Protestant Christianity.\textsuperscript{127}

Muniswami's activities as a haunter of houses were brought to the notice by asking to contribute to the cost of an annual Muniswami puja on behalf of a house that originally had been the official residence of the Commander-in-Chief,\textsuperscript{128} and which, after having been put to various uses, had been allotted to offices for various small governmental departments.

\subsection*{2.11.2.6. Karuppasamy}

He is the village god represents right hand with knife and left with Kathayutham. He wears big chain on his chest. He also protected village from ghostly dangers. Among the male deities of folk tradition, Karuppannaswamy fall in that order of priority next to Aiyanar. He is one of the subordinate male attendants of the village goddess. At his shrines worship was offered exclusively by Pariahs, the chief group of downtrodden in the Tamil country.

Karuppasamy is said to be borne out of Lord Vishnu. But, there is a resemblance of Sudalaimadan in his statue. The birth story

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{ibid}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{ibid}, p. 87.
of Karuppasamy which is of later origin linked with Utthirakandam of Ramayana. When Sita decided to perform self-immolation, one of her sons also entered into the sati pyre. It gave much worry to his elder brother, and hence Valmiki came to know the incident. Immediately he gave life to the deceased boy. But he came out of pyre with dark colour in appearance. Valmiki bless him with the power of creation and destruction and asked him to go to earth.\textsuperscript{129}

2.12. Hinduisation of deities of folk tradition

In the 19\textsuperscript{th} century a number of European and Tamil scholars like Robert Caldwell, Gustav Oppert, Sundaram Pillay, U.Ve. Swaminathaier and several others began to study the origin of Tamil. As a result of their study and research, these scholars posited the idea that non-Brahmins were Dravidians and the Brahmins were ‘the Aryan invaders’ from the north. It has been pointed out by them that the Aryanisation of southern India with a preponderant influence of the Brahmins was the chief cause of all social disruption. The Aryan dominated political system drifted away from the centre to periphery.\textsuperscript{130} And in the course of time the Dravidians had been completely subdued by the invading Aryans and all their institutions were supplanted by an imposed Sanskritic ‘Aryan religion’ and caste

\textsuperscript{129} S. Shanmugasundaram, \textit{op. cit}, p. 54.

system. With the result, non-Brahmins had for centuries been kept in an inferior position.\textsuperscript{131}

B. N. Nair in his book, 'The Dynamic Brahmin', gives a socio-historical analysis of the Brahmin domination in south India and of the anti-Brahmin movement. While doing so, he points out how the Brahmins took control of society by introducing in south India, religiously and socially, the Varnashrama Dharma system and the Aryan deities.

'Culturally and linguistically control was won by introducing the Sanskrit language for religio-philosophical intercourse. The basis of the Brahmin dominance in south India is, however, their role in the temple cult'. It is inferred from all this that the high castes particularly the Brahmins, had been responsible for reducing these people to a servile condition. They, by giving a Vedic authority for the caste system, put themselves at the top of this hierarchical set up. Their personal motive behind this was racial superiority over the rest of the communities. Keeping the skill of learning and teaching for themselves as their sole monopoly, the Brahmins put all the other castes at their mercy for learning and skill.\textsuperscript{132}

2.13. Dravidianism is a neglected branch of Hinduism

The deities of folk tradition and other Dravidian gods and goddesses are termed as divinities of Hinduism, yet these are


\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 22 -- 23.
dismissed in the books dealing with Hindu gods and goddesses, meanwhile so many pages are dedicated to the Vedic deities.\textsuperscript{133} Wherever, if they mention these in their books, not as divine beings but as a servants or lesser-dignified deities.

There are many reasons for this neglect of Dravidian religious tradition. First of all there is no systematised teaching connected with the village goddess and their worship.\textsuperscript{134} Their history is contained in the somewhat confused legends recited by wandering singers who attended the festivals and assist in the worship. For example, Mariamman has many stories regarding her history.

Secondly these legends and stories are always recited from memory; and as usual the singers cannot read, the written stories would be of no value to them,\textsuperscript{135} thirdly this worship is found largely among uneducated people, and they are not able to give any connected account of their gods or the principles of their worship. These are filled with superstitious fear, and it is almost impossible for them to tell what they know.\textsuperscript{136} Fourthly, the Dravidians are keeping themselves away from the history of Dravidian gods and goddesses. The priests and those directly connected with the worship of the deities are usually not so communicative, and what they say is fragmentary.\textsuperscript{137} Lastly the domination of Vedic priests is also a reason for the neglect of Dravidian form of religion.

\textsuperscript{133} W. T. Elmore, \textit{op. cit}, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Ibid}, p. ix.
\textsuperscript{135} Henry Whitehead, \textit{op cit}, pp. 142 – 143.
\textsuperscript{136} W. T. Elmore, \textit{op. cit}, pp. ix-x.
\textsuperscript{137} Personal observation.
Some of the popular temples, which yield income, dedicated the village goddesses totally abandoned by the Vedic priests. They are not ready to perform pujas and prayers in these temples unless they are well paid.\textsuperscript{138} Not only economic reason, there are other reasons for this non-performing pujas and prayers. Except some of the deities such as Aiyanan and Madurai Viran all other deities are female. But, the Vedic priests are interested in the male domination. Even this male dominated nature knocks the door of temple. Most of the Saivite and Vaishnavite temple divinities are made in the form of male. If, the female figure is given an honour it is less. But, gramadevatas and other Dravidian deities deified as like female. So, Dravidians give importance to the female as 'source of birth' or 'Sakthi'. The thing that is much interesting is the history of 'Ammavaru' deities. This story is recited by the Asadis\textsuperscript{139} during the annual festivals. A copy of manuscript on palm leaves belonging to village pujari, which contains the story of the village goddess, Ammavaru, now worshipped as Ankamma. This described the story of birth of the new deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.\textsuperscript{140} In the beginning, the great goddess Ammavaru in her desire to create she produces three eggs, from which three great gods they are Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. When she wanted to marry these deities to promote the continuation of creation, they refuse, saying that it would be improper for a mother to have sex with her sons. But one

\textsuperscript{138} Interview with Saptarishi on 27\textsuperscript{th} May 2005 at Laligudi.
\textsuperscript{139} Story tellers in the village festivals.
\textsuperscript{140} Henry Whitehead, \textit{op. cit}, p. 127.
or the other of the gods finally agrees to marry her if she gives him her middle eye, which is symbolic of her primordial power. She agrees, but having given up her power to the god she is destroyed by him. From her body are created many Sakthis who became the village goddesses.\(^{141}\) These made, the theme of village goddesses suffered injustices at the hands of men.

Further, these village goddesses are quite angry and need appeasing with the blood sacrifices.\(^{142}\) But, the growing aversion on the blood sacrifices has been the cause of neglecting of Dravidian form of worship. In addition to that, the oppressed sections of people worshipped the Dravidian deities in a massive manner. Commonly, the Vedic people who have secluded their life from these oppressed section of people and their worship. So, they never mingled with them. These are the reasons for neglecting the Dravidian form of religious tradition.

2.14. Determining Features of the deities of Folk tradition

The followings are the determining features of the deities of folk tradition. One cannot find much difference between the deities and the ceremonies, methods of worship. These are all intertwined.

2.14.1. Relevance to Village life

The folk deities are purely domestic in character. They are not alien or irrelevant to the villages. They are all linked with the day to day living conditions of the people. They reflect the socio, economic

\(^{141}\) ibid, p. 127.

\(^{142}\) Interview with Kanakasabesa Dikshitar on 25th May 2005 at Perambalur.
background of the actual society. In fact, the domestic nature makes folk deities as unique and significant one.

For instance Mariamman has no relation to the universe. She symbolises only the facts of village life. She is related not to great world forces, but to such happenings such as cholera, smallpox and cattle diseases. She is not connected to great forces such as Indhira, Varuna and Devas, but to ordinary asuras, demons and evil of the villagers. Her nature is differed only in Samayapuram Mariamman with the natural forces such as rain and natural disorders. Her domestic nature is also revealed during the worship of Mariamman. The date of worship and the method of worship differ from one place to other.

2.14.1.1. Flag hoisting, tying of Kankanam or Kappu

The flag hoisting ceremony marks the beginning of a festival. The flag is first fastened to the top of a bamboo pole and then curled around the length of the pole. The flag itself is white and has a symbol of such as tiger, the bull or the goddess drawn on it. Often it is soaked in turmeric water that is dyed yellow. The flag will be tied to the permanent flag post, if there is one. Some temples mark the flag hoisting by raising a bundle of darbha grass tied together with mango leaves. On the same day, the Kankanam or Kappu (a piece of string soaked in turmeric) will be tied on the wrist of the pujari.

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143 S. Thamizh Selvan, *op. cit*, p. 21.  
144 Henry Whitehead., *op. cit*, p. 17.  
146 Interview with Vasudevan on 20th September 2005 at Samayapuram.
and other people who participate in the festival and who have to observe certain restrictions during that period.\textsuperscript{147} Those who take part only at particular rituals, e.g. the \textit{Kuntam irankutal}, have their \textit{kappu} tied later. The goddess and the other gods in the temple receive a \textit{kappu} as well. The \textit{Kappu} is not only a safeguard against pollution (\textit{tittu}), but also: when one put on the \textit{kankanam}, “they call the gods and ask them to be present during the festival, to protect them and to watch over them that they do not have fights among themselves. After the festival, when they take off the \textit{kankanam}, they send the gods back (\textit{teli}).”\textsuperscript{148}

\textbf{2.14.1.2. The Pot (Karakam)}

The topic of the \textit{Karakam} is vast and complex. Different names are given by respondents to the \textit{Karakam}, e.g. \textit{punkarakam}, \textit{Sakthikarakam}, instead of \textit{karakam}, the term \textit{kumpam} or \textit{kalasam} is used; furthermore, \textit{karakam} can also be a fire pot, and then called \textit{akkinikkarakam}, which in turn is called \textit{ticcatti}.\textsuperscript{149} The significance of the fire pot is much adorable among the devotees as gleaned from the ballad.\textsuperscript{150} Folk people normally call this as Amman and revered

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{147} Usually dietary restrictions and abstinence from sex.
\textsuperscript{148} Eveline Meyer, \textit{Ankalaparameswari – A Goddess of Tamil Nadu, Her Myths and Cult}, Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden GMBH, Stuttgart, Germany, 1986, pp. 234 – 235. (FRRC)
\textsuperscript{149} Shanmughasundaram, \textit{Noattuppura Theivangal}, Thanannane Pathippagam, Bangalore, 1999, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{150} Folk etymology in \textit{Mariamman ballad}.
\end{flushright}
the same. The pot is generally considered to represent the womb, i.e. the goddess; however, although this may be true in most cases, it is not always so, since the pot can also stand for a male deity. During the festival for *Ankallamman*, the pot is used for a variety of rituals.\textsuperscript{151}

In Melmalaiyanur, the *Punkarakam* is carried from the tank\textsuperscript{152} to the temple. The goddess is said to be sitting in or on the pot. The pot is decorated near the river.\textsuperscript{153} It is a large earthen pot around which string is tied. Turmeric water and *kunkumam* powder are sprinkled on it and 25 paisa is dropped into it; its mouth is sealed with a coconut. Branches of *margosa* leaves are tied around its upper portion, flower garlands are wrapped around these and the whole is topped with a lime of which exactly half has been covered with *kunkumam* powder. Such a pot, representing the goddess Amman is placed on rice which is spread on a banana leaf.\textsuperscript{154} Now these four *kalasam* mark the four corners of the *kuntam*.

For the walking-over-hot coals ritual the priest, who is the first to walk over the coals, will carry on his head a *karakam*. In Villuppuram a *Kalasam* is placed at the head of the figure in the cremation ground. This *Kalasam* contains a *maavilakku* (lamp made of rice flour) and a coin and it is topped with a coconut; whereas the pot with the flame inside which is deposited at the figure’s head in

\textsuperscript{151} Eveline Meyer, *op. cit*, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{152} The water source can be a tank or a river or a pond.
\textsuperscript{153} Eveline Meyer, *op. cit*, p. 235.
\textsuperscript{154} Shanmugasundaram, *op. cit*, p. 39.
Valajapet (during the opening-of the eyes ritual) is not covered with a coconut. A pot sometimes represents the faces of the Kapparai—usually this pot is simply called panai.  

Apart from the instances in which the pot clearly represents the goddess, the exact function of the pot cannot be determined, nor do respondents have adequate explanation about it. In its widest application, the pot is a carrier of life, be it that of a deity or a human. The more specific meaning of the pot depends on what is in the pot, whether it be water (considered cooling), or fire (hot), expressing the goddess’ anger. Here again, however, interpretations may differ. Finally, the pot is simply a convenient vessel for carrying things to and from the temple, especially the water for the abhisekam. Such pots as contain the Tirttam are also decorated with coconuts and usually covered with a yellow cloth and they are carried on the heads of devotees or pujari.

2.14.2. Preponderance of female

It is an essential and noticeable character in the worship of folk tradition. The popularity of the worship of female divinities in the folk tradition make it as unique and vibrant one. This characteristic cannot be seen in the Vedic tradition. Most of the divinities of Vedic tradition are in the form of male. If some deities are deified in the form of female (such as Lakshmi, Saraswathi etc,) do not have independence. Neither these are wives nor

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155 Eveline Meyer, op. cit, p. 235.
156 Interview with Mariappan on 12th January 2006 at Chennai.
subordinate deities. An important point is to be noted that almost all
temples of Vedic tradition, have no place for their female consort.

Out of these goddesses Mariamman tops among the worship of
folk tradition and it is an independent deity. The urban people are
related her to the Hindu triads, but the rural people considered her as
a primeval force. When people were interrogated about the history of
Mariamman, they told that she was not created by any force but by
her own desire. She is not worshipped by the Vedic people due to
her feminine character.

2.14.3. Legionary character of the deities

The common aspects of the folk deities are martial in
cracter. Majority of the folk deities are performing the task as
protector of village, through the martial character. Another
interesting thing can be noticed here; historically these deities come
from ordinary people. Once these deities were living with the people
and they would have lost their lives for certain common or specific
purposes. And also they are all the symbolic representation of the
day to day turmoil of the folk masses. Hence, the legionary
character or aspects of folk deities are unavoidable.

One such deity Mariamman has legionary character and it can
be identified with the possession of offensive weapon in her hands.
In her right hand, she keeps a trishul, a knife and in her left hand she

\[\text{158 K. Sridharan, op. cit, p. 2.}\]
\[\text{159 S. Thamizh Selvan, op. cit, p. 13.}\]
\[\text{160 Interview with Chellaperumal of FRRC on 7th April 2006 at Palayamkottai.}\]
keeps a bow and a *pasam* (bundle of robes). These are symbolising the legionary character of Mariamman.

2.14.4. Terrific posture

The conception of folk deities is made with terrific look. In some rare cases, except face, the expression of the deities may give terrific look. But folk people look this terrific exposure with parental concern. Even, the folk masses never get trepidation over the folk deities. The terrific look or peaceful expression of the folk deities depends upon who is looking at.\(^\text{161}\) If a person looks at folk deities with friendliness, the deity will reciprocate the same. Whereas, if the same look at with sense of apprehension, that will give somewhat fearful or terrific exposure.\(^\text{162}\) Only the Samayapuram

\(^{161}\) Interview with Sadasivam on 25\(^{th}\) December 2006 at Tiruchirappalli.
\(^{162}\) Personal observation.
Mariamman deity gives graceful look and other Mariamman give terrific exposure. Except the facial expression of Mariamman the remaining parts of her gives dreadful look.

The survey from districts of Tamil Nadu identifies the attractive features of the deities of folk tradition. Out of 125 respondents from northern, eastern, southern and western districts 72, 42, 71, 74 identify the simple form of worship as popular feature. A considerable number of devotees responded the community life at the time of festival season. Next to the simple worship feature, majority of the people identify the role of folk deities as protectors from contagious diseases as an attractive feature.163

Chart No. 4
Attractive features of the deities of Folk tradition

163 Based on questionnaire detail and field visit.
The folk deities are represented with offensive weapons such as knife, bow and arrow, long knife (Arival) and Trisul. They are not referred with empty hands, but with dangerous offensive weapons, which are fascinating the village people. These are the main reason for the popularity of folk deities among the rural masses. The folk people considered the possession of offensive weapons by the folk deities are to threat the evil spirits. Mariamman can be considered as a deity of soft (shantha sorubini)\textsuperscript{164} nature. However, originally she had ferocious look. She will give a ferocious look when one observes.

It is said that folk deities possess two facets; they can inflict diseases, but if they are ritually ordered, they cure and bring health. For these characteristics, they earn faithful devotees and frustrated devotees. She can inflict disease and brings health.\textsuperscript{165} The outbreak or spread of contagious diseases is looking at the medium of anger of folk deities over folk people. In order to be cured from these diseases, folk people will go for worship and festivals.

She is also called as Sitala Mata, goddesses of smallpox, as well as cholera and other epidemic diseases. These diseases are thought to be inflicted by village goddesses, either to announce their presence or anger over the disrespectful communities.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{166} C. J. Fuller, \textit{op. cit}, p. 45.
There is no uniqueness in the method of worshipping. Sometimes these deities demanded such worship from their devotees. For instance, both Kannakiyamman and Muttumariyamman demand to be treated properly. If either one strikes a man down with a feverish illness, she will say, “Alas! For I wander from place to place homeless, with no perfection. Give me a home”.\(^\text{167}\) Thus the people build a temple for the goddess to pacify her. She brings rain and good health to the villagers, and does not again inflict infectious, feverish diseases upon them. She equips herself with a retinue of spirits (Pariyalankal), whom she bends to her will to guard the village from evil.\(^\text{168}\)

For instance, one of the peculiar characteristics of worship of Mariamman is an uncommon way. In one place, she is worshipped with the offerings such as beheading of animals and birds. In another place she is worshipped with offerings of food, eatables and flowers. In some places she is worshipped with cruel self-tortures and in some other places, she is simply worshipped with prayers.\(^\text{169}\) During the worship of Mariamman, prayers enchanted by temple priest are not common one. In many places, people are not aware of the prayers. The performance of rituals is also in an irregular way on many occasions.

\(^{167}\) Bryan Pfaffenberger, *op. cit*, p. 164.
\(^{168}\) *Ibid*, p. 164.
\(^{169}\) Interview with Saptarishi on 27\(^\text{th}\) May 2005 at Lalgudi.
To worship the folk deities, one need no proper time frame. They are irregular in character and practice. Even the festivals and celebrations may take place for a day, week or even a month and sometimes to be conducted year together. This depends upon the economic condition and well being of a particular village or a place.

2.14.5. Non-Brahmins Priesthood

Another essential feature of the worship of folk deities are administered by non-Brahmin priests. Sometimes, they are worshipped without any priestly class. To worship the folk deities one need no Vedic priest. Anybody can become priest, and they will be called as pujaris. The pujaris are not by tradition but by his / her virtue allowed to offer pujas and ceremonies on their behalf. They are neither trained people nor well versed in mantras. They will simply offer their worship and perform the ordeals. Even the lower cadre people also offer pujas.

For example at the festival of Mariamman, a Pariah assisted the Vannar during the period of ceremonies, and the Pariahs are even allowed to wear the sacred thread of the twice-born classes. The same class enjoys privileges even now in many places. The origin of which, cannot be explained except by admitting the existence of substantial reason, which have been forgotten. It is noticeable that a Pariah ties the tali round the neck of Egattal (personification of Mariamman), the tutelary goddess of black town in Madras. The

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Pariah, acts as the bridegroom arrives at the temple about ten days before the commencement of the feast and he is treated.¹⁷¹

During the festival time, a Pariah is kept clothed and fed in the temples as the accepted bridegroom of the goddess Mariamman. Tom-toms are beaten in honour of the Pariah bridegroom, and after he has been fasting and bathing, he gets a new cloth dyed with saffron, and the priest fastens a quarter anna paise to the right hand of the goddess and another to that of the Pariah. This ceremony is called *Kaappu* tying.¹⁷² Not only are the Pariahs, and all the non-Brahmins, outcasts engaged during the worship of Mariamman.

**Chart No. 5**

**Conductor of the worship of Folk deities**

The following bar chart No. 5 explains the person who involve in the worship of folk deities. About 55 percent of worshippers

![Chart](chart.png)

identify *pujaris* and elder members of the family. In spite of strong reasons, the *pujaris* perform the worship of folk deities, one can

¹⁷² *ibid*, p. 51.
sensitise the slow but steady interventions of Vedic priest. They can be noticed only in the popular temples.

The following chart No. 6 represents the response of the folk worshippers whether they need Vedic priest for pujas and ceremonies when they worship folk deities. 106, 86, 101 and 88 of 125 in the northern, eastern, southern and western districts responded ‘no’. Only 19, 39, 24 and 37 respondents responded with ‘yes’.

**Chart No. 6**

Need for Vedic priest

2.14.6. Unorthodox form of worship

The worship of folk deities is not based on any traditional rules. There is no fixed customs, belief and practices as explained by R. Balasubramanian. Anybody can worship their folk deities as they like. The worship of folk people cannot be equated with the

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173 Based on questionnaire detail and field study.
174 Based on questionnaire detail and field study.
176 Shanmugasundaram, *op cit*, p. 94.
worship of Caste Hindus and Vedic people.\textsuperscript{177} When they perform rituals and practices will remember the deeds what they performed in the past.

The worship of Mariamman is in violent form. This is done not only by the temple priest but also by the worshippers and spectators of Mariamman’s feast. During the festival of Mariamman, some of them possessed by the goddess, they will dance widely and use obscene language. These things will definitely make consternation and fascination among the other worshippers.\textsuperscript{178}

\textbf{2.14.7. Bloody sacrifices}

The folk deities are almost universally worshipped with blood sacrifices. The Vedic religion does not allow the bloodshed in their temple premises, while folk deities are freely offered with blood and animal sacrifices. The red colour of blood mostly accepted as the symbol of victory by the folk deities over demonic elements.\textsuperscript{179}

Mariamman, Ankalamman and Pidari are almost universally worshipped with animal sacrifices. Buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs and fowls are freely offered to her, sometimes in thousands.\textsuperscript{180} These animal sacrifices are symbolising the defeat of enemy such as those demons, which is related to the contagious disease. But this custom is curiously modified by the influence of Vedic tradition, which has

\textsuperscript{177} Interview with Kailasam on 5\textsuperscript{th} January 2007 at Tiruchirappalli.
\textsuperscript{178} Interview with Shanthi on 10\textsuperscript{th} September 2005 at Tiruchirappalli.
\textsuperscript{179} T. Paramasivan, \textit{op. cit}, pp. 150 – 153.
\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Ibid}, p. 151.
tamed the villagers with the idea that the shedding of blood is low and irreligious.\(^{181}\)

A questionnaire is admitted to selected respondents all over Tamil Nadu and to know their ideas about the bloody sacrifices to the Folk deities. On an average 60 respondents pointed out the need of blood sacrifices to the Folk deities. An average of 35 respondents expressed no need of blood sacrifices. And also an average 30 respondents registered their opinion that bloody rituals can be occasional.\(^{182}\) Hence, one can understand the popularity of blood sacrifices to the Folk deities. The following bar chart No. 7 will reveal the above-mentioned thing.

**Chart No. 7**

**Need for bloody offerings**

![Bar chart showing need for bloody offerings](image)

2.14.8. Self tortures

Self-tortures are an important aspect in the worship of folk deities. There are various methods of self-torture. For instance,

\(^{181}\) Henry Whitehead, *op. cit*, p. 18.

\(^{182}\) Based on questionnaire detail and field study.
Chidi-Mari is a torture in which devotees submit themselves in honour of the goddess Mariamman. Now it is totally banned. Fire walking, piercing metal wire, piercing hooks on the whole body etc. are some of self-tortures. Yet they do not feel any pain. Ordinary self-tortures such as taking Kavadi, severe penance, carrying and fire pots also practiced among the devotees. However, worshippers do not rest satisfy with these methods and they are inventing new methods of self-tortures. For example, a fanatic self-torturers makes a vow to cut half of his tongue off, executes it coolly with his own hands and puts the amputated portion in an open

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183 Shanmugha Sundaram, *op. cit*, p. 90.
coconut shell and offered it on his knees to the divinity. Self-tortures are an important aspect in the worship of Mariamman.\textsuperscript{184} The village people accept all the self tortures to propitiate village gods and goddesses.

2.14.8.1. Fire-walking

Fire walking, called in Tamil \textit{ti-mithi} is one of the popular rituals associated with folk deities such as Mariamman in the whole of Tamil Nadu. It is not possible to enter into the origin of the Mari cult or its association with Renuka and Draupathi. Draupathi according to the \textit{Itihasa} came out of the fire and it is of course appropriate to associate the fire-walking ritual with Draupathi, the fire-walking is also undertaken in her honour to propitiate her and

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{images}
\caption{Photo – 18 \hspace{1cm} Photo – 19}
\begin{tabular}{c}
\textbf{Piercing metal wire through the jaws} \\
\textbf{Kavadi vow fulfillment}
\end{tabular}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{184} Abbe J. A. Dubois, \textit{op. cit}, p. 676.
invoke her blessings.\textsuperscript{185}

It is no doubt a primitive rite, which does require a considerable amount of devotion, courage and dedication but it is not like \textit{Sati}\textsuperscript{186} or like a human sacrifice, said to be prevalent in many parts of India even some decades ago.\textsuperscript{187}

Men and women do it, old and young, the educated and the illiterate, the believer and even the scoffer perform the same. For the moment the scoffer does convert himself into a believer, by undergoing all the rigours and disciplines prescribed for the devotee. No one is able to say what makes such different types of people do it and bear the burning heat, but they do it and nobody has complaint

\textsuperscript{185} M. Arunachalam, \textit{Festivals of Tamil Nadu}, Gandhi Vidyalayam, Tiruchitrambalam, Thanjavur, 1980, p. 296. (Archives Library, Chennai)
\textsuperscript{186} Death of a wife on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband.
\textsuperscript{187} M. Arunachalam, \textit{op. cit}, p. 297.
of any burning of the sores of the feet. All people walk through
the fire with a smiling countenance, and even those who start with
some hesitation and fear end up with smiles and peace.

The occasion for a person to walk in the fire is to overcome
some calamity in the family. He or she ties up a rupee coin (it was
a prestigious silver coin in the past) in a piece of yellow cloth as a
sort of contribution to Mari. The amount is taken out and given to
the temple on the day of the fire-walking.

The fire-walking ceremony is generally on the last day of the
Mariamman temple festival of which culminates on Panguni
Uttiram. During all the ten days, the pujari goes round the streets
carrying a karagam (brass pot, decorated with flowers, and woven
round with thread and filled with scented water into which
Mariamman has been invoked with mantras). This where a dipa-
aradhana is done to the karagam as to Mariamman. Margosa leaves
profusely adorn the pot as well as the pujari.

The arrangement of the fire pit is said to require expert skill.
Any one cannot make the fire. It is traditionally men of the carpenter
class in the rural parts who are skilled in this through hereditary
practice. The pit is about ten feet in length and about three feet
wide, with a depth of nine inches. All and sundry wood cannot be
used for making the fire. Twigs and leaves should be removed. Good

188 'Festivals, Offerings and Ceremonies to the Deities of Folk Tradition with Special Reference
to Mariamman', Research article presented by S. Xavier, in the National Seminar on Role of
Temples in Promoting Spiritualism and Materialism in Tamil Nadu at Annamalai University on
189 M. Arunachalam, op. cit, p. 297.
logs of the black babul (acacia) type are brought down in suitable sizes and the pieces are burnt in the pit. This is commenced about two hours earlier than the time fixed for fire-walking. All ash and small cinders are removed.\textsuperscript{190} The persons in charge beat down the logs a uniform size, so that the top surface is generally even, without any small fires and is a glow of bright red, without any white or black surface.

The fire-walking takes place generally in the afternoon by about 3’o clock or even a little later. The \textit{Karagam} goes round the temple itself and all the walkers follow it. They are generally in clothes dyed yellow in turmeric water and hold in their hands bunches of margosa leaves. Some have them even round their necks. Some even have a large mud bowl of fire in their hand, placed over some margosa leaves.

Just at the end of the fire pit there is a pit of water, about three feet wide and two feet long and it is kept with full of water. The first walker, \textit{pujari} is there with the \textit{karagam}. He walks gently with measured steps and from by looking at his face one cannot say that he feels the burning of heat. Others follow many in equally measured steps, some in a gentle hurry; there are some who rush, out of psychological fear and may be even out of a burning feeling at the soles of the feet.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{190} Interview with Mayan on 26\textsuperscript{th} January 2007 at Karur.
\textsuperscript{191} M. Arunachalam, \textit{op. cit}, p. 299.
The day previous to the day of the fire walking, the walkers follow a routine of intense personal discipline. They eat only light-food, non-vegetarian eschews meat on the two days, and married people live separate. Needless to say they worship in the Mariamman temple on as many occasions as they can. Intoxicants are of course taboo; no tobacco in any form. People sleep on a bare floor or bench as a measure of penance. This kind of physical discipline helps them also to evolve some mental discipline, which is able to overcome actually the heat of the burning embers. An armlet *kankanam* or *kappu nul* in yellow is tied on the right arm of the fire-walker with a rhizome of turmeric round in it. Through the centuries fire has been seen not to scorch those who have undergone this preparatory discipline including the *kappu*. But fire had been seen to burn and blisters the soles of those who enter the fire without undergoing this discipline on the previous day. It is also common knowledge that scoffers and unbelievers have been severely burnt.

On the day of the fire-walking, they have an early morning bath, and fast till the ritual is over. As the karagam goes forward there is loud drum beating and a sort of frenzy works up among the dedicated. There is a general fear that any slackness in the discipline will result in the burning of the feet during the walking.

Following the *pujari* the walkers walk in single file spurred onward by the weird beating of the drum and by the beating of the

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192 *ibid*, p. 299.
193 Interview with Mayan on 26th January 2007 at Karur.
udukkai (a kind of drum tapering in the middle) in the hands of the pujari. Of course he chants the names of Mariamman and also lines from the Mariamman ballad.

Some walk as if in a trance and as they cover the fire pit, they are taken into the arms of friends waiting on the other side. The only prasadam for them is the sacred ash and the kumkum distributed by the temple priests. Fire-walking, ti-mithi is said in some areas to be poo-mithi, walking on flowers! For most of the unmarried women, who undergo what to others is an ordeal, it is indeed not a fire-walking or ordeal, but really a poo-mithi or flower-walking referred by her devotees.

To summarise, Hinduism was not a homogenous religion with at least six contending schools of philosophy. Yet, it has become the most intolerant religion in recent years due to vested interest forces within it. The attempt is to homogenise Hinduism. In order to homogenise Hinduism, they have concentrated on the vast multitudes of folk deities. They want to bring them under hierarchical line of Vedic deities.

Vedic religion, which is neither a religion, nor an ideology, is able to keep such a large chunk of Indians enslaved, poor and half dead, whereas the folk deities are designed to represent the liberal thoughts of ordinary masses. The relation between folk deities and folk people can be seen at the time of worship.

194 Arunachalam, op. cit, p. 300.
195 Interview with Shanthi on 10th September 2005 at Tiruchirappalli.
196 ibid.
Now the deities of folk tradition and other Dravidian gods and goddesses are termed as divinities of Hinduism. Yet these are dismissed by Vedic priests, there are many reasons for this neglect of folk religious tradition. There is no systematised teaching connected with these deity and worship. The legends and stories are always recited from memory. The worship is found largely among uneducated people. Finally the ritual domination of Vedic priests is also a reason for the neglect of folk form of religion. In spite of these reasons, folk temples attract huge people, which resulted high income.

The flow of money in a few popular folk temples tends the Vedic people to change and to alter the features of folk deities. But, they cannot enter these temples, since the features of folk religion and deities are far away from the Vedic religion. The relevance to village life, preponderance to female deities, legionary character, and terrific exposure, uncommon and irregular method of worship, non-Brahmin priesthood and self torture are the popular features of folk religious tradition make it as a unique one.