Chapter-V

Socio-ritual functions of Priests

The priests constituted as the first ritual group here. They were initially the most important because they had the responsibility for serving visiting pilgrims extensively. The percentage distribution of these priests been mentioned in the first chapter according to our responses from them. Through our systematic-interview guide, in all respondents were presented their relevant information.

The respondents comprised of priests of main-complexes, archakas and ritual-specialists. It forms an invaluable framework and suggest a researcher what questions could ask
while looking at their ritual-phenomena and how to interpret and interconnect seemingly data of selected cases in order to reconstruct the nature of them, whom one studies.

Genesis of socio-ritual order: In the sacred-complex of Srisailam, the priests as known as 'Jangamas', a Telugu word normally anglicised as 'Siva-bhakata'. The term is used by the priests as a part and parcel of 'Lingayat's legacy and the same term is employed for the priests of other Saiva-temples here. In Amma temple, the priests are commonly called 'Sakatiyas'. The entire category of Brahmarambhika temple's priests like those of other

1. From the 'Telugu-Jangamas'; written in Telugu-version on palm-leaves; preserved by Siva math, Srisailam, A.P. It bears no date.
temples in South India, belong to the Adi-Saiva subcaste generally considered to be Brahman. They are qualified according to the prescribed texts; can officiate as a priest and don't marry (inter-marriage) with ordinary Brah- 

mans and they are accorded a low rank by the latter. 

The priests at Saiva's and Amma's temples are clearly distinguished from two categories of priests: the Brahman or Smartas (Sakatiyas) priests and Lingayat 

(non-brahman) priests of the non-sanskritic village 

deities temples. Domestic priests are the classical purohitas and they act as priests in the homes, mainly carrying out rituals at festivals and rites of private. 

2. From 'Srisaila-Stanikars' published by Devasthanam, 1941, pp. 3-4. 

3. Ibid...
In Srisailam, however, some of Jangamas also work as chanters, primarily responsible for reciting the Agamic bija-mamtras ritually. As the principal servants of Saktipeetham as well as Jyothirlings, the ritual-priests are closer to the God and Goddess than any other group in the sacred-complex and its hierarchy they occupy, after the deities themselves, the first-rank. The number of main-priests=7; sub-priests=13 and archakas=41 according to my field-data.

In Sociological-terms, the temple's hierarchy may be labelled 'Agamic' for it reproduces the superiority accorded to Adisaiva priests in the texts known as the 'Agamas' and they are ritually
qualified in several significant respects. The sacred complex as a ritual domain and the particular standpoint is its centre. Logically, the perspective is that of the God and Goddess themselves, to whom the priests are uniquely close by virtue of the services that they alone can perform for the deities in close proximity to their images.

In anthropological accounts of Hindu society, it is often stated or assumed that the Brahman's superiority in the caste hierarchy is in some manner contingent upon, or determined by, their priestly role or sacred function. L. Dumont (1970a:47) for example, writes, "the Brahmans, being in principle-priests
occupy the supreme rank with respect to the whole set of castes. It is a universal statement about Hindu society.

My major task in this chapter will be to summarise briefly the ethnographic evidence on this matter. I shall then consider how the relatively equal-status of the Srisailam's temple-priests is explained by my informants.

In February 1991, the priests were working more or less regularly in the main temple here. There are a few others, who are entitled to work there as professional-pujaris, but because the alternative employment, they do not do so. They are
divided into two groups: (1) veer-saiva priests and (2) Smartas or Sakatiyas. The different rights and duties, and the internal constitution of the two groups which comprise several clans and clan-branches will be briefly seen.

All these priests live in houses close to the Shivaji-tower of this main-temple here. Some priests live in combined-families, while others live in nuclear families. With the exception of some of the youngest (who are modernised), most priests live in the

4. From my field-data.
5. Ibid...
style of traditional orthodox Brahmins and all of them, of course, are vegetarians. They are less fastidious about rules of purity than are many Veersaivas. All the priests, who are not 'Jangamas' wear the sacred-thread (Yajnopavitha) given to them at the 'Sanskritized' male initiation-ceremony (Upanayana) undergone in early adulthood. One of the local priests serves them at their private as well as public rites. They are hereditarily linked to all the priests, but is now paid each time he comes to serve them. He also has other clients elsewhere in Srisailam. Some of the younger priests shave themselves, but most continue to rely on the services of a

6. ibid...
barber, who is hereditarily linked to all of them and continues to serve them at various ceremonies. Nowadays he is paid in cash for each job. Previously, the priests also had an hereditary washerman, but this is longer the case. In the traditional manner, many priests continue to dip their clothes in water (Ganga-jal) to purify them, when they are returned by the washermen, whom they now employ. The Jangamas form an endogamous subcaste and recently informants told me that they know of no marriages between them and the Smarta Brahmans in the Srisailam region. They occupy the first place in sacred-complex's hierarchy as principal-servants to pilgrims here.
Dana and its formalisation: The anthropological interpretation of 'gift making as part of the system of exchange of goods or as a mode of recycling of the ritual-resources socially has been ably made in the works of Malinowshi, Marcel Mauss, Raymond Firth, Emile Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard and M.J. Herskovits. A more specialised and comprehensive treatment of the subject had been made by Romila Thapar in her monograph, titled, Dana and Daksina as forms of exchange. Borrowing insights from such eminent scholars, the present analysis of priests covers exhaustively the socio-ritual context of the institution of Dana and its formalisation in Srisailam.
Reciprocity means exchange between pilgrims and ritual-specialists with their equal position of status for blessings. Ordinarily, redistribution means flow of gifts from a superior-pilgrims to a lower remaining pilgrim. The 'dana' appears to fall in the second-category. Vedic-society was reciprocal society in the sense that its surplus was not allowed to accumulate in a few hands but was consumed in fire-sacrifice. The post-Vedic society was temple-based. Hence it became a centre of redistribution. That is to say, people from various ranks donated gifts and charities to temples, in turn the sacred-complexes distributed them to pilgrims, mendicants and the other temple-functionaries like priests, artisans and temple servants. From the Vedic to post-Vedic period onwards
dana was much more than a more ritualistic gift-making to religious-beneficiaries. It became instituted and formal involving gifts to a variety of pilgrims, maths, private-institutions, mendicants, alms to beggars, founding of trusts of public-utility and so on. It could also compassionate act, customary-practice as well as expression of one's egotistic-vanity. In the post-Vedic class society, gift-making enabled the sections outside the appropriating class to share part of social-surplus. The enlargement of the varied categories of donees and aggravation of competitive-spirit among them resulted the more maths or monasteries at Srissailam.
It appears about a charitable institution and it is now in the custody of above Brahmins. A peculiarity of the ledger is at this place clearly states their positions with a particular-group. It was discovered by them in a private house of Jangama-deva here. It appears to be dedicatory in character but the genealogy of the donor named Siva-Dharmanka and the dedicatory portion recording its main spiritual-purpose. The ledger consists of three lines in Telugu and records the reconsecration of inamdar. It is dated in Samvat 25 on the 12th Lunar day of the bright fortnight of the month of Chaitra in the reign of King RajaRayudu. It has been long recognised as the most

7. From my field-data.
dependable source, which can produce in the absence of
genuine and authentic written records of sacred history
and culture of Srisailam's glorious past and socio-economic
conditions. Ritual range in character from relatively simple
acts of private devotion and hospitality to the visiting
pilgrim to their houses according to their genealogical
records and by means of words, gestures and offerings to an
extent at this holy spot from the last few centuries. In
some way it embodies the reality of that religious-sieceia-
lists and they can multileveled performances lasting days
and encompassing the participation of legions of devotees,
families, neighborhoods, villages and cities due to their
inter-jajmany syndrome here.
Jajmani-system: L. Dumont agrees that the jajmani (caste) system entails inequality. Those caste groups here, who own the means of production—primarily land—namely, agraharam—will also be politically and economically dominant. But at the same time the system institutes an interdependence between those, who dispose of these means and those who do not, an interdependence which is finally to the advantage of the latter. The rich also depend on the poor because of the ritual-aspect, since in Hindu tradition and philosophy it is not only a question of belonging to a clean caste, but how to stabilize this cleanliness, which logically means: How to avoid impurity.

Harold Gould expresses the same idea in his analysis of the economic-interaction of tribals in the Nilgiri Hills, when he claims that the specialist groups of the lower orders function as 'contrapriests'. Before a ceremony can occur, the Brahmin-priest, and the domestic surroundings where he performs his sacred-rituals, must be in a specific state of purity. One might say that a certain absence of pollution is necessary for the rituals to be accomplished. This is achieved by employing specialists, who perform different tasks (sweeping, barbering, washing clothes, etc.), which actually remove the impurity in that it is assumed to be symbolically absorbed by these specialists of Sriram. Here, the priests dispenses purity.
downward in the hierarchy, in exchange for their services to pilgrims. By carrying out their tasks, they dispense purity upward in exchange from them. Thus it appears that the ritual and economic domains are linked together, through the concept of natural-purity, become inseparable and in effect interdependent. What is actually measured here by me is interrelationships because it is the result of the interaction between the religious-specialists and the economically service-taking groups, namely, pilgrims. It is true, however, that the jajmani-system causes interaction due to the needs of different pilgrims here. The central point is that both the pilgrim as well as priest have a frame of sacred-ideas in all levels in Srisailam.
The interrelationships of jajmani-system bring together the human and divine-world at specific times and places according to prearranged utterances, actions and ritual-objects. All these events in turn rest on a network of shared beliefs, assumptions, myths, linguistic and gestural-strategies by these ritualists.

In other words such exchanges create or invoke their own worlds of meaning by particular-price to gain the more income or dana as their dashina within their own Brahmanical as well as non-brahmanical (Lingayat) spectarum here. At the center of the phenomenon of Shradha is transaction between the worshippers and the deity or deities. The latter is represented by some
payment in mutual-cooperations in which the bargain is understood to take his or her place during the course of rite and for some specified time thereafter according to their charts or Panchangams. Through the performance of pujas, the deity and devotee move closer together into a special-intimacy with one another; the deity receives homage and food; the pilgrim gains spiritual and existential enhancement. The prevailing metaphor for ritual is that of hospitality and servitude. Both deity and devotee become dependant on one another and receive benefits from their mutual interaction here.

9. From my field-data.
In the non-formal sense, economic exchange would include income to these priests on the basis of family-ties, maintenance of long-standing ties between rich pilgrims of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, credit networks between buyers and sellers (in shops, weekly-markets, hotels or lodge owners), their offer to clients and the later maintenance of family-ledgers, etc. More than anything else, it means personal knowledge of each other at Srisailam, "caring and sharing." It also means knowledge of personal history.

It is necessary to remember that the pilgrims participate

10 From my schedules.
in two kinds of rituals: (1) The public rituals, which are conducted on festivals like Ugadi and Shivarathri;

(2) the private pujas conducted for devotees who can pay like abhishekas, archanas, etc. Here, I would like to give the daily schedule of ritual-activities conducted by the 11 priests.

The chief of these priests conducts morning pujas for VIPS and other pilgrims after the 'subrapatham' (recital of morning-prayer to Divine-powers). The interpersonal agreements and contacts which really achieved here and they involve through some special rituals according to the choice by visiting-pilgrims.

11.Ibid....
12.Ibid....
The important rituals and sevas performed are like rudrabhishekam, ekadasa rudrabhishekam, panchamrutha snanam, astottara satinamapooja and Sagwatha kalyanam. For all these pujas and sevas, pilgrims have to bring the puja-articles and also appoint their nukshikes themselves at fixed-cost according to Devasthanam here.

The devotee then allowed to perform or conduct required rituals to Sri Mallikarjuna Lingam as well as Astothara Satnamama Kumaramarchana to Shri Sramarbha Devi. Such puja(rituals) shares many features common to pilgrims of Srisailam and he or she gains material as well as spiritual-betterment according to karmic-ethos of Hindu cosmology. Thereby, priests receive spiritual-nourishment
themselves with lumpsum amount. I have made a translation
and commentary on this rituals, which I saw it performed
in Srisailam's main-complex recently. This ritual-deve-
lopment represents a professional continuity with their
economic-gains as well as an opportunity for incorpora-
tion of the new pilgrims with their priestly ties. The
ritual-adaptability is the fact here as priest-archaka's
interlinked aspect from the last few generations accor-
ding to their available records in Telugu and Kannada.
The economic-roles of these groups raises good income
as a permanent-resources to temple's 'Mundi'. All those
phenomena lead us quite clear understanding of rituals.
in the cosmology of their hierarchical order according to their professions.

The above priests possess large

estates after exploit a pilgrim's resources and try to avoid the income-tax. They popularly known as tax-

avoiders of 90's here. Karmic-ethos been violated by them.

So, the many improvements in the present conditions of the priesthood were recommended by Justice Challa Kondayya Commission (1983-87) of Andhra Pradesh's government by looking their economy-related causes. Its root idea underlying the religious-institutions of originated wealth, its lands free from their misusing or encouraging corruption at large scale here. Justice Challa Kondayya
strongly emphasized need that the priests must be
adequately liberated from their age old malpractices.

No priest should be permitted to begin work until he
was properly qualified in their required-filids accor-
ding to endovents notificatons and existing semi-
honeditary-rights are irrational at present legally.

The Jury of this commission have come to such a beau-
tiful conclusion for the benefit of all in Srisailam.

This is evidently hypothetical, but

those informants do claim that the priests to be explained
about their residual-rights, which they do possess the full
ability to perform the public-worship in the sacred-sanc-
torum here. They are also protesting from the last few days
against the local-tribal priests, namely, Chenchus who are

the custodians of ruined-complexes, which are located in

the jungles according to the official-information provided

to me by this temple-officials here. In other words, al-

though the priests occupy the first place in the temple

hierarchy as given by their professional-role as Malli-

karjuna's and Sreekarumbhidra's principal-servants.

The changes or ritual-transformations

which they define in terms of the master-pupil line and

there is no stipulation that a master’s successor should

belong to his own descent-group here. However, in all major

temples in South India, priestly-rights are defacto hered-
ditary from the ancient days as stanikars or sayyats of

their temples according to the sacred-tradition of
Hindu social-order. After the final collapse of Vijayanagar
regent and Reddy's predominance in the early eighteenth
century, Srisailam's sacred-complexes came under the inter-
mittent control of Muslim-Chieftains, until the region was
ceded to the English East India Company in 1801. The new
rulers like Thomas Munro as the British-collector took
over many of the functions of their predecessors. He was
soon involved in trying to settle disputes between the
priests in the temple of this area. He detached them from

The accuracy of above socio-
historical account that I have summarised is certainly
not beyond doubt, although there is little reason to

13. From the Imperial Gazetteers of Deccan, AP Archives,
Hyd. 1941.
question its main outline, respectively looking into my field-samples. However, the precise facts are ritually important to priestly groups here. It matters more than the account is set down in documents that are considered authoritative and that its key elements are widely known and generally believed in the sacred complexes. In any case, at this point in my anthro-sociological discussion, the above points are relevant, respectively speaking.