CHAPTER III

RITUALS: WORSHIP AND CELEBRATIONS

Following the Durkheimian tradition, sociologists have emphasised the communitarian aspect of religious experience. The community plays a significant role in legitimising and particularising the religion it follows. This process of being particularised offers an unique vista for a sociological study of indigenisation. The particularising of religion is an ongoing process, involving mutual reactions of the clergy and the people. Nowhere is this as explicit as in worship and associated celebrations. Accordingly, in this chapter we shall focus on worship as the primary facet of indigenisation of Catholicism. As a community-oriented religion, Catholicism gives prime importance to worship in community.

According to Wach (1971:29), 'collective expression is vital to any religion.' The Church has developed a pattern of liturgy, which stresses the community coming together for the purpose of worship and religious exercise. 'Congregation' would be a more suitable designation for this type of religious expression.

Central to the Catholic worship is a community in celebration called 'the Mass.' The Church expects the believers to take part in this community celebration at least once a week. Thus, Sunday is designated by the Church as the day of obligation, a day on which the Catholics are obliged to participate in the Mass.

While considering worship, we need to make a distinction between official and non-official forms of worships. By official we mean those practices that are sanctioned by
the Holy See – Pope, the established Church. The forms of worship which the people follow on their own without the clergy are non-official. In this chapter, we deal only with the official religious practices of the Catholic Church. In the first section our main focus is on the Mass, a ritual which is celebrated daily and which has a central place in all the calendrical festivals. Though the Mass is the constant feature of all liturgical feasts, it is accompanied by varied rituals. Taking into account all the rituals accompanying the Mass celebrated on various occasions, we consider the question: to what extent these rituals are indigenised?

I

WORSHIP

The Evolution of the Mass and the Associated Rituals

The Mass and the rituals associated with it have evolved in the course of the history of Christianity. It is claimed that the Mass originated from the ‘Last Supper’ that Jesus Christ had with his disciples before his crucifixion. However, up to the fourth century, there was neither a definite text nor a fixed ritual liturgical tradition. It was only between the fourth and eighth centuries that Christian texts were composed, but still no uniform ritual was established (Amaladoss [nd]). In the ninth century, Emperor Charlemagne imposed the ‘Roman liturgy’ on the territory of the Roman Empire. It was only from the sixteenth century that liturgy came to be centralised and became a uniform form of worship for all the Catholics (Collins 1994:596-97).

The ‘Roman Rite’ consists of three parts: (1) the introductory rite, (2) the liturgy of the Word, and (3) the liturgy of the Eucharist. The introductory rite begins with the
priest inviting the people for the celebration, followed by a purificatory rite. The *liturgy of the Word* consists of the readings from the Bible. And in the *liturgy of the Eucharist* is enacted Jesus’ offering Himself to humanity: The partaking of the sacred Bread and Wine, which symbolises the Flesh and Blood of Jesus respectively, enables the Catholics to establish communion with the sacred. Thus, the Mass, in its original form, follows a set of specific rituals and is performed in a sequence.

Once the liturgy became centralised it ceased to be an expression of the local traditions of the people, and their religious experience became rootless. Thus, Catholics in different parts of the world felt the need for a liturgy that reflected the culture of their region (Saldanha 1996:57). This need was addressed by the Second Vatican Council, which declared that ‘...the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and nations’ (Flannery 1992:32). Thus was born the idea of an indigenous liturgy.

In India, indigenisation of liturgy was initiated by the Bangalore based National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (hereafter NBCLC), an organ of the Catholic Church. The ‘Indian Rite’ (as different from the ‘Roman Rite’) worked out by the NBCLC was approved in the year 1969. It incorporated indigenous socio-religious symbols and practices (Leeuwen 1990:71). In what follows let us briefly sketch the salient features of the Indian Rite.

As a mark of reverence to the divine, before entering the *kooyil* (church) Catholics leave their footwear outside. In the *kooyil*, as a religious expression of worship to the divine, in place of kneeling down they make *Anjali Hasta*, a bow of the head with joined
hands on the forehead. The celebration of the Mass begins with welcoming of the people with cantanam (sandal paste) and sprinkling of panniir (rose water). The priest wears a cotton saffron-coloured shawl as the liturgical dress (instead of the Roman liturgical dress known as vestments). The people receive the priest with pushpaaratti (aaratti with flowers), and the priest reciprocates this. The candle is replaced by kuttuviLakku (brass oil lamp) placed at the pittTa (low altar). The Mass is celebrated on a pittTa (in place of the high altar) with the priest squatting on the floor (instead of remaining standing). Similarly, the laity too, remain seated on the floor (instead of kneeling, standing and sitting - the different postures assumed during Roman Rite). Bhajans (repetitive rhythmic singing of short verses) and vernacular hymns are sung as part of the ritual.

Once the priest and the people enter the place of worship, the priest blesses the water, kept in a brass vessel, takes a sip (as a mark of purifying himself), and then sprinkles the 'holy water' on people using a mango leaf as a sign of purification. While doing so, the priest recites the Sanskrit sloka ‘om shuddhaya namaha' (praise to the most holy). Preliminary to the second part of the ritual of reading portions from the scripture, the Bible is venerated by offering floral and incense aaratti to it.

The last part of the liturgy, known as the breaking of the Bread, enacts Jesus’ sacrifice. Symbolising the eight directions of the universe, the priest places eight flowers on the altar one by one with the Sanskrit chant om shri yesu bhagavate namaha (Jesus the lord). People offer triple aaratti - of flowers, incense and camphor (fire) - during the consecration of the Bread and Wine. The wheat wafer, known as ‘host,’ is consecrated and partaking of it symbolises communion with Jesus. During the Mass people receive the flame from the light and bring their palms towards the eyes or forehead in reverence.
All the prayers are in Sanskrit, and they are chanted by the priest and responded to by the people. These, in brief, constitute the Indian Rite Mass (see Appendix 3.1).

Response to Indigenisation

The indigenisation of the Mass in the form of the Indian Rite was initially confined to the NBCLC in Bangalore. As this process became more public, it evoked different kinds of responses from various sections of the Catholics. The NBCLC (Leeuwen 1990:93), which has documented the responses of the people who had participated in the Indian Rite Mass, observed that the people respond favourably when the symbols and their meanings are explained to them. However, people feel that the Indian Rite is too long compared to the Roman Rite, and they are not prepared for its contemplative character with long periods of silence.

Objecting to the Indian Rite some lay Catholics and priests had led the ‘Save the Faith Movement.’ Active from the 1960s through the 1980s, its journal Laity carried resistance to the Indian Rite. The use of the word Om was opposed as it stood for ‘Krishna, a Hindu god’ [sic]; anjali hasta, in place of kneeling down, was regarded as insufficient as a mark of respect for the divine; and diipa aaratanai was looked down as a form of fire worship, which is not in keeping with Catholicism. In brief, the Indian Rite Mass was viewed as sacrilegious as it obliterated the Christian symbols embedded in the celebration of the Mass, the very institution set up by the founder of Christianity.

The resistance to indigenisation of liturgy was also defended in terms of the conversion to Christianity. Conversion meant a new set of religious symbols, whereas the Indian Rite used the very same religious symbols of the Hindus. Being familiar with the
Hindu religious symbols, the Catholics could not view them as Christian symbols. Hence, the need for symbols which are unique to Christianity.

It is true that the ‘Save the Faith Movement’ was an urban phenomenon, and those who were in its forefront were educated people. However, the process of indigenisation of the Mass in rural areas and among the uneducated peasant communities presents a different scenario, as revealed in the villages where our study was carried out.

**Worship in Rural Tamil Nadu**

From the 1970s the medium of worship in the villages is Tamil and *puucai* (the Mass) is also celebrated in Tamil. Initially the villagers were reported to be unhappy with the switch over from Latin to Tamil. However, gradually Tamil has come to be accepted as the medium of worship, though the older people still favour the Latin funeral songs, as they feel that it adds to the solemnity of the occasion.

While retaining the Roman Rite largely, in rural areas of Tamil Nadu, the priests have introduced a few native Hindu symbols and have sought to blend the Roman and the Indian rites. For example, *aaratti* is done on special occasions like the patron’s feast to welcome the priest for the liturgical celebration and as veneration to the divine during the worship. Similarly, *kuttuviLakku*, instead of candle, is used on special occasions. Conventionally, the priest places the sacred Bread in the mouths of the laity; but it is now received by some faithful in the hands. This is in keeping with the local custom that the *pracaatam* is received in the hands and not placed in the mouth. However, the people are free to receive the sacred Bread with their hands or to get it placed in their mouth. Thus, the native elements have been introduced only when a consensus prevails between the priests and the people.
Even as the orthodox among Catholics may resist change in the ritual of the Mass, there are several native religious expressions, before and after the Mass, carried on in the sphere of the church. For instance, before the Mass the elderly may be seen making the castaMkapranaam (prostrating) to show their reverence to god, which is a typical native religious expression in worship. Similarly, after participating in the Mass many a Catholic seeks the blessings of the saints and Maata (Mother Mary) by touching their statues three times and passing the hand over the forehead. This is a familiar religious expression observed among the Hindus before their deities. This practice seems to satisfy the need felt by the laity to experience the divine in a more tangible form. Since idol worship has no formal place in Christianity the provision of devotions to Mary and the saints, even by touching their statues, has a great appeal to the Catholics, especially in rural areas.

The deference for men, a characteristic of Tamilian patriarchal society is carried to the place of worship, too. The Tamil women do not address or refer to their husbands by name as a mark of respect. As a consequence of this socio-cultural code, during the Mass, as also at other times of prayer, some women remain silent when they have to utter the word 'faith.' As the Tamil translation of the word 'faith' is 'Visvaasam' and since some men in the village bear the name Visvaasam, the women whose husbands are called Visvaasam do not proclaim their faith! (see Caritas 1961:151).

The Church does not observe the purity-pollution dichotomy of the Hindus. The dead body is taken into the church and women after childbirth and during menstruation enter the church, receive the Mass and touch the statues of the saints and Maata. Nevertheless, though not as their Hindu counterparts, the Catholics have retained some
form of the notion of pollution in the place of worship. Thus, for the Catholics, bath is a precondition to participate in the Mass. The elderly informants in the villages said that though they were engaged in agriculture and allied activities during the week, they would set apart Saturday evening to bathe in order to take part in the Mass on Sunday morning.

It was reported during the fieldwork that until about two decades ago the native practice of untouchability was observed in the church premises. The lower-caste occupied the left wing of the church and the veranda of the church. However, this is no more prevalent in the village churches visited by the researcher. This change was initiated by the church personnel and has been supported by the educated people in the villages.

While the Mass constitutes the mainstay of the Catholic worship, and the Catholics in the villages view it as the highest form of prayer conferring on them religious merits and redeeming them from their sins - 'tinamum puucaikku poonavan, niccayam motcatukku poovaan' (one who attends daily Mass will go to heaven), goes the Tamil saying, and the Mass does not exhaust their religious experience. A series of calendrical festivals and associated rituals mark the high points in the faith-life of the Catholics. Among these calendrical festivals Christmas is the foremost, and it is followed by the New Year celebrations. The period of Lent and Easter and the All Souls Day are the other important festivals in the Catholic calendar. In addition to these calendrical festivals, villages with large concentration of Catholic population celebrate an annual titular feast of the local church. It is in these calendrical festivals and titular feasts that the Catholics have retained or adopted a number of their native practices. In the following two sections we shall discuss the calendrical festivals and titular feasts respectively in the villages covered by the fieldwork.
II

CALENDRICAL FESTIVALS

caami piRantanaal (Christmas)

Christmas, called caami piRantanaal (literally, the day on which the Lord was born) in Tamil, is the most important calendrical festival for the Catholics. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, around whom the religion of Christianity is centred. Right from its origin, Christmas has had a native orientation: It was, in fact, adapted from the pagan feast of ‘Sol Invictus’ or the ‘Unconquerable Sun,’ an important cult in the Roman Empire (Warner 1976 and Lukose 1981:197). The real celebration begins on the 24th of December; but this is preceded by the twenty-one day ‘Advent’ season (waiting for the Lord), during which the Church prepares the people for the great celebration.

From the point of view of indigenisation the celebration of Christmas can be analysed at three levels: home, church and society. In the domestic sphere, people colour paint the walls of their houses, purchase new clothes, distribute home-made native sweets to their relatives and friends. Some hang a paper-work star outside their house.

In the church, the youth and children prepare the paalan kuTil (crib or manger) - an imitation of the setting in which Jesus was born. In Andavoorani the paalan kuTil depicted the prevalent social problems. People participate in the midnight Mass when the birth of Jesus is enacted. Saying aloud ‘the Saviour of the world is born,’ the priest places the child Jesus in the crib. At this time the church bell is rung, the tappu³ (a round-shaped drum) (see Photo 3.1) is played and crackers are burst.
On this occasion people bring *jaggery* (unrefined sugar) to the church. The *jaggery* is placed at the altar, and is blessed by the priest after the Mass and distributed to all those gathered. By incorporating *tappu* and the distribution of *jaggery*, the Tamil Catholics have given a native flavour to Christmas. In the village of Thanichaorani, the Christmas celebration is known as *carkarai tirunaaL* (*jaggery feast*). This is in accordance with the native practice of naming celebrations by reference to the ritual items of the celebration or the day or the month in which it is celebrated: For example, *tiippaavaLi* is the celebration of light, and Tai *poMkal* is the ritual cooking of *poMkal* in the month of Tai. Thus, like the Hindus, the Catholics also name the Christian rituals after objects and terms they are familiar with in their native culture.

Of course, there are regional variations in the celebration of Christmas in Tamil Nadu, especially as regards its peripheral symbols. For instance, Sivasubrahmanian (1988:79-86) records that, in Nellai District, on the Christmas day, the Catholics bring baskets of sprouted grain called *muLaippaari* to the church and place it before the crib. These baskets, made out of palmyra leaves, are prepared eight days before the Christmas by filling it with manure and sowing different grains in its bed. Women and children carry these baskets to the church and stand outside waiting for the announcement of the birth of Jesus. Once this is announced through the singing of a hymn called ‘Gloria,’ they walk into the church as a group and place these sprout-baskets in front of the crib. When the crib is dismantled, eight days after the Christmas, the sprouts are thrown into the wells and scattered in the fields with the hope of a good harvest. In another place, in the same district, women and children perform *kummi* (a group folk dance with the clapping of hands) before the crib where the *muLaippaari* are placed. Sivasubrahmanian’s (1988)
study reveals that the placing of sprouts is basically a Hindu practice, which the Catholics have adopted as part of their Christmas celebration.

Dumont (1986:429) refers to muLaippaari among the Hindus as ‘Adonis Garden.’ In Karai, a Hindu village in Sivagangai District, the Kallars, a non-Christian caste, carry out this ritual as a vow made by women and children. They germinate seven or nine kinds of grain and grow them in a dark room for a week, during which period women even abstain from sexual relationship. The baskets of sprouted grains are brought to the temple on the feast of the village deity, the women dance the kummi around it, and later empty the baskets into the temple pond. Through this ritual they seek the assistance of the Hindu goddess ‘Amman’ to protect them from smallpox and to bless them with prosperity, particularly in agriculture.

The Hindus carry out this ritual during those months when the respective goddesses were believed to have been born (Sivasubrahmanian 1988:66). While retaining the indigenous practice of germinating the grains, the Catholics have related it to the birth of Jesus. The songs called kummi paaTTu are retained, but the invocations to the Hindu deities have been replaced by those to the Catholic divinities (ibid. 1988:84). For instance, the Hindu invocation ‘muunaa naal muntumuLai, amma pattirakaalimuLai’ (the sprouts are to goddess Pathirakali) is replaced by ‘muunRanaattu munTum muLai namma tiviya paalanmuaLi’ (the sprouts are offered to baby Jesus).

The native practices at the peripheral level can also be noticed in the Christmas decorations. On the Christmas day, in the pilgrim centre of Vailankanni, plantain trees with their fruits and mango leaves adorn the entrance of the church. This is in keeping with the decoration of temples during the Hindu festivals. Thus, the prominent native
cultural elements have been retained or adopted for the celebration of Christmas among
the Catholics in rural Tamil Nadu.

(varuTappiRappu (New Year Celebration)

The New Year celebration is also referred as putu varuTappiRappu vizaa or eTTaantirunaaL (literally, feast on the eighth day). On the night of 31st December at 11 p.m. the Mass is celebrated to mark the beginning of the New Year. People bring with them kaapparici (rice mixed with treacle and distributed at the birth of a child), and place it at the altar. After the Mass, this rice is blessed by the priest and is distributed to all those present in the church. The rice so distributed is taken home and mixed with rice and shared among friends and relatives.

Literally, kaappu means protection and arici means rice; thus, kaapparici refers to rice that is protected from pollution. The Hindus have a similar practice in the month of Maarkazi (December-January). They make porridge out of the new rice and offer it at the family altar and then consume. kaapparici is the new rice from the harvest that is first offered to the deity and then consumed. Similarly, the Catholics offer the new rice in the church.

(tapacukaalam (The Season of Lent)

The season of Lent denotes a period of forty days when the Catholics are expected to realise their sins and make reparation for the same. During this period some Catholics abstain from physical pleasures like the consumption of meat and alcohol. As an expression of penance devout Catholics even wear a special kind of indigenous dress called kaavi. Some combine the Lenten ritual with tiruyaattirai (a pilgrimage on foot) to Vailankanni (see Chap. 8).
As prescribed by the Church, the Lenten rituals begin on the *vipuuti tirunaaL* (Ash Wednesday), the day on which the priest applies *vipuuti* (ash) on the forehead of the people during the Mass. Three decades ago, the Catholic women were proscribed from wearing flowers in their hair and *kuMkumam* (red spot) on their forehead during the Lenten season, and the priests were particular about it. Some Catholics recalled that during one Lenten season a priest had refused to give communion to a lady who had gone to the church with *kuMkumam* on her forehead. Today, this is not very strictly followed, and most women wear the *kuMkumam*, though they give up wearing flowers in their hair. For Tamil women *kuMkumam* is an auspicious sign, which is only proscribed for widows. The priests have also come to understand the native symbolism and accordingly respect such practices of the people.

*punita vaaram* (The Holy Week)

Starting with Palm Sunday, the week is called *punita vaaram*. Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday are the three most important days of the Lenten season. On *kuruttu naayiRu* (Palm Sunday) the priest blesses the palms, which then people carry in procession singing ‘Hosanna to the King’ and enter the church. After the Mass, the palms are carried home and made into crosses. These crosses are placed in various parts of the house: at the main entrance of the house, under the pillow of the sick, in the cowsheds, etc.

According to our informants, the palm crosses thus placed in the house reinforce their identity as Christians and ward off evil influences. They believe that *ciluvai* *kanTaal peeykal kiTTa anTaatu* (the devil runs at the sight of the cross). The cross is a typical Christian sign that is used by the Catholics to deal with *peey* (the devil). The belief
in *peey* is an element of the native belief-system that is common to both Catholics and Hindus, which the Hindus seek to ward off with the sacred ash.

The main ritual on *punita viyaazan* (Holy Thursday) is that of *paataMkazuvra caTaMku* (the priest washing the feet of the laity), which recalls Jesus washing the feet of his twelve disciples. In some villages the Catholics make a vow to wash the feet of twelve people. Carried out during the *tapacu kaalam*, this ritual engaged in by the male folk only, begins with a prayer by the *kooyilpiLLai* (catechist). As each person’s feet is washed, the water is collected, and the person who has fulfilled the vow drinks a handful of this water. The rest of the water is thrown in a place not stepped-in by people. Sometimes this water is used to bathe the sick with the belief that their illness will be cured. The influence of the native practice of bathing the sick with the water used to wash the idols of gods and goddess is clear (see E.Q. Martin 1988:255). The Catholics symbolically associate the ‘twelve people’ with the disciples of Jesus and hence the water used to wash their feet is treated as sacred.

After the ritual, the *kooyilpiLLai* and the poor are served food. Before partaking in the meal, the *kooyilpiLLai* prays for the dead persons of the house. The meal on this day is vegetarian, and the number of vegetable cooked is twelve, signifying yet again the twelve disciples of Jesus. As a penance some Catholics eat morsels of food given by the poor from their leaves.

Offerings at the church are a universal practice. But what is offered is specific to the place. Thus, the Catholics in the villages visited offer betel leaves and areca nuts, tamarind, salt, chilly, cereals and vegetable, that is, the produce of their gardens.
punita veLLi (Good Friday) is the day on which the Catholics remember the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. Praying ‘the way of the cross’ is one of the central rituals of this day, and in some churches the laity relive the passion of Jesus in the official fourteen stations. Indigenous practices observed during this ritual include Maata puzampal (Lamentation of the Mother of Jesus at the death of her son); parivaTTam (head-dress worn in mourning) a ritual offering of a piece of new cloth (white shroud) for the body of Jesus (this is same as the kooTi pooTutal [a cloth used as a mourning head-dress] when a person dies); and tuumpa pavani (funeral car procession), the silent procession of the ‘body’ of Jesus through the streets of the village, terminating in the church where the body is laid to rest and the church doors are closed (see Photo 3.2). The flowers used for decorating the tuumpa are distributed to the people, and are preserved by them for use at the time of sowing, or to keep under the pillow of the sick, etc. It may be noted that the decoration of the tuumpa is similar to the paaTai (funeral bier) of the Hindus and the aacanti (funeral cart/career) of the Catholics.

Maata puzampal (Mother Mary’s lamentation for her son Jesus) is sung in Tamil to the tune of a funeral song called oppaari (see Appendix 3.2). Such songs lament the death of a person by making numerous references to his/her personal appearance and excellent qualities. Though the Bible does not refer to the weeping of Mary, this element of local culture of the Tamils has been incorporated by the Catholics into the Good Friday ritual.

Generally women sing the oppaari at the time of the death of a person. However, when the Tamil Catholics relive the death of Jesus, instead of women it is the men folk who sing the oppaari. This is because women have been traditionally excluded from
important positions in official religion. In fact, some twenty years ago they were not even allowed to read the Bible in the church. This may have been due to the survival of the Brahmanical notion of menstrual pollution. Only from the late 1970s have women been taking active part in the church activities.

On these days, the Catholics observe a few more native practices, which are similar to the rituals carried out during any death in the family: On Good Friday, as a mark of sorrow, they consume a bitter herb called *akatti kiirai* (*sesbania grandiflora*) and the associated ritual is called *tanTu tazai* (stems and shoots). On the following day they take oil bath and eat dry fish preparations as a sign of the end of the mourning period. Thus, while reliving the death of Jesus the Tamil Catholics perform death rituals similar to those of ordinary mortals. In this process the ‘alien’ religion becomes indigenised and help the people enter the realm of the sacred. While the sacred is the domain of the religious functionaries (priests), people seek entry into this domain without altering the ritual structure but adding native flavour to the Christian rituals. Thus, people are able to actively participate in the religious rituals.

The centrality of *uyirtta tirunaaL* (Feast of the Resurrection) or Easter Sunday is the Eater Mass celebrated in the late and early hours of the day (11 p.m. on Saturday to 2 a.m. on Sunday) in keeping with the tradition that Jesus rose from the death at midnight. During the Mass, the resurrection of Jesus is dramatised with crackers, smoke, loud noise, and the playing of the *tappu*. At the beginning of the Mass, fire and water are blessed, and the laity take them home. It is believed that the holy water wards off evil from the house and persons when sprinkled. The blessed fire is used to light the oven, a symbolic way of restarting life after forty days of penance. There are no significant native practices
attached to the Easter Sunday ritual. This may be because the idea of resurrection does not have a native parallel to which the local Catholics can relate.

The religious ceremonies of the Holy Week described above, particularly those on the Good Friday, throw up another dimension in the process of indigenisation and, that is, the interaction between elements of an ‘alien’ religion and those of the culture of the converts. The sorrow overtaking the Tamil Catholics while recalling the death of Jesus is expressed through cultural elements such as oppaari is a typical illustration of this. Here indigenisation has taken place by transferring a local custom into the religious sphere after conversion. This is entirely a self-generated process of indigenising religion.

**kallaRai tirunaaL (All Souls Day)**

This falls on the 2nd of November and is dedicated to all the dead by the Church. The rite of All Souls Day was incorporated into the calendrical feast of the Church from the tenth century (Turner 1969:171). That the dead need the prayers of the living is the essential message of the day. This is because of the Catholic belief that the dead do not enter heaven directly, but go through an intermediary state called the uttariikkira aatmaakkal stalam (purgatory) waiting for final judgement. Prayers by the living cleanse the souls of the dead, bringing them into closer communion with god. Catholics not only pray but also ask other intermediaries like the saints and Maata ‘to intercede for those under going liminal ordeal in purgatory’ (ibid.).

Following the native lore of the Hindus, some Catholics believe that failure to pray for the dead in the family would provoke the dead to disturb the living. Thus, misfortune and sickness in the family are often attributed to such failures. Dreams of the dead are considered as reminders to pray for them and/or as signs of impending
misfortune. The Catholics also believe that even as the dead need the prayers of the living, the dead can also assist the living in the material world (Turner and Turner 1978). This is one of the reasons why the Catholics offer the Mass before any auspicious occasion (e.g., marriage) or after a beneficial event (e.g., getting a job).

On the All Souls Day, the Catholics clean the cemeteries and decorate the graves of their family members with flowers. They place lighted candles and agarpattis (incense sticks) on the graves. The priest prays for the dead stressing on the Christian belief that they are not dead but are risen with Jesus. The blessing of the cemetery by the priest is very significant from the point of view of the people, since the notion of the fear of the dead still lingers in the minds of the people. It is symbolic of the dead person’s spirit bound within the grave and the harmful effects being neutralised by the sprinkling of the holy water.

It is this which makes a Christian kallaRai differ from the Hindu cuTukaaTu (burning ghat). The Hindus do not frequent the cuTukaaTu, since the place is considered to be polluting. The cuTukaaTu is generally situated outside the boundaries of the dwelling quarters of the village. On the contrary, the Catholic cemetery lies within the vicinity of the village, and in some places within the church compound itself. Among the Catholics the cemetery is viewed as an interim place and is devoid of the notion of pollution.

There is another reason for people, not only Hindus, not frequenting the cuTukaaTu: it is believed that often the dead linger at this place, becoming peey (devil) and possessing the living. While the Church does not subscribe to the notion of the dead person haunting the world (Turner and Turner 1978:204), the Catholics continue to share
this belief about cuTukaaTu with the Hindus. However, since the cemetery is blessed by the priest, peey cannot reside there.

Offering food in the name of the dead is a native practice, and is distinct from praying for the dead. Through acts of charity, the local Catholics believe, the liminal ordeal of the soul in purgatory could be minimised. In Andavoorani the Catholics bring paddy to the cemetery for distribution among the needy; a share is also given to the kooyilpiLLai. Many Catholic families conduct regular cults to the dead: To obtain the blessings of the dead, candles are lighted and incense is burnt at the cemetery before any important planned event. In a few cases the worship of the cemetery has become regularised as a weekly or biweekly routine. We came across a family that burned incense and offered flowers to the photos of the dead. Besides the individual families honouring the dead, the dead are also occasionally collectively approached, as for instance when the monsoon is delayed (see Mosse 1986:423).

The rituals the Catholics follow on the All Souls Day show the way they have fused their Christian ideas of death with the native practices. The remembrance of the dead ancestors has now become a part of the prescribed prayers of the Church. Thus, the manner in which the Catholics observe the rituals on this day is one of combination, moulding and reinterpreting the Catholic rituals with that of their native beliefs and rituals (cf. Robinson 1998:135).

To sum up, the calendrical feasts of the Catholics have definite rituals and procedures set by the Church. From the foregoing description of the celebrations we observe that the Catholics while retaining the given structure and rituals of the Christian celebration have added native rituals, beliefs and practices. They have done so by
retaining the core Christian symbols and have added on peripheral symbols, which are basically native and not Christian in origin. These native symbols receive Christian attributes as they are incorporated into the Christian celebration. Furthermore, the native symbols which are peripheral do not affect the perception or effectiveness of the ritual which is being performed. This again explains the reason for the people’s resistance to changes in the Mass.

III

uur tiruvizaa (VILLAGE FEAST)

As noted earlier, besides these calendrical festivals, villages with large concentration of Catholic population also celebrate as a calendrical event the patron’s feast of the Christian divinity to whom the local church is dedicated. However, unlike other calendrical festivals, the Church has not prescribed the manner in which this, feast is to be celebrated. Since this is a sphere in which people play an active role, it inevitably draws from the native practices related to the Hindu temple feast. As it will become clear, in the manner of its celebration, the patron’s feast resembles the celebrations in the temples in the surrounding Hindu villages. More importantly, for the Catholics, as for the Hindus, the uur tiruvizaa is the most important celebration. Every member of the village feels obliged to be present. Even those members who reside outside the village claim their belongingness to the village by their presence during the feast and by paying the kooyil vari (church tax). Given its prime of place in Catholic life in rural areas, we shall now discuss the celebration of the uur tiruvizaa in the fieldwork villages.
The church in every village is dedicated to a Christian divinity which is regarded as the patron or guardian of the village. Villagers celebrate the annual feast of their church, which they call *uur tiruvizaa*. The celebration of the patron's feast is both an *uur tiruvizaa* (feast of the village) and a *kooyil tiruvizaa* (feast of the church). As such, the *uur tiruvizaa* is held in honour of the patron and guardian, and they are an expression of the gratitude of people for the favours already received and also a prayer seeking continued assistance of the patron through the following year. Since the Hindus have been holding annual village celebrations in honour of their village deities, the Catholics counterpart of such a festival provides an interesting setting for identifying the influence of native practices. As an illustration, an account of the celebration in the village of Andavoorani is presented here.

**uur tiruvizaa in Andavoorani**

The church in Andavoorani is dedicated to St. Michael, one of the four angels referred to in the Christian fables, the other three being Gabriel, Raphael and Lucifer. Angered by Lucifer's claim for equality with God, St. Michael is said to have killed Lucifer who subsequently became the leader of the devils. Thus, St. Michael has come to represent both loyalty to God and valour to counter the evil. He is the *kraama teyvam* (the village deity) or *uur kaavalar* (the village guardian) of Andavoorani.

As a backdrop for understanding the salient features of Andavoorani's annual festival dedicated to St. Michael, we need to highlight the special characteristics of the social structure of this village. The Catholic community of Andavoorani belongs to the Udayar caste. The Udayars have a council for managing matters of community interest, including the settlement of disputes. The Catholic community is divided into four
segments called karai and each karai has a head called karaikaarar either nominated or elected by the respective karai. The term of office of the karaikaararkal is one year, terminating with the celebration of uur tiruvizaa. In consultation with the priest the karaikaararkal take the initiative to prepare for the celebration of uur tiruvizaa. The significant contribution of the karai is the celebration of uur tiruvizaa, the mega event in the village.

The patron’s feast lasts for ten days: The ritual of koTiyeeRRam (flag hoisting) is followed by nine days of novena to the patron and preparation for the uur tiruvizaa, culminating in the capparappavani (the car procession).

Flag hoisting has an important place in Hindu temple festivals, and so is it with Catholic celebrations. It is a sign and an announcement to all in the village and its neighbourhood that the celebration of the feast is on. Once the flag is hoisted, the Catholics do not leave their village, and if they have to go out for any reason, they are obliged to return for the capparappavani. This is called koTitaTai (the impediment of the flag), meaning prohibition on travel during a temple festival. The Catholics believe that staying away from the feast is a mark of disrespect to the patron saint, which deprives them of the saint’s blessings.

With flag hoisting, the life style of the Catholics is significantly altered: They maintain a chaste life during the period of the feast, and give importance to spiritual life by taking part in the daily Mass and prayer. Reinche looks at such rituals related to the flag as something that brings about a transformation in the lives of the people (quoted in Mosse 1986:297).
The patron’s feast has precedence over all other social celebrations. Thus, during the feast days marriages are not celebrated in the village. This is similar to the Hindu custom in this area of not conducting marriages in the months of AaTi (July-August), PurTaasi (September-October), Maarkazi (December-January) and Pankuni (March-April), months set apart to celebrate the feast of their deities (Somalai 1975:123).

The death of a person during the patron’s feast disturbs the joyful event that is in progress. Such a death is considered to be untimely - ittanai naaLum iluttukkiTTu kiTantuviTTu ippa caavalama (having lingered so long should one breathe her/his last now), goes the local saying – and not a peaceful one. It is viewed as an inauspicious sign not only for the family concerned but also for the village. In such a case the burial takes place on the same day, and the funerary rites are carried out quietly, devoid of any music or outburst of mourning. It was also observed that the spontaneous and explicit expression of sorrow, which is normally invoked by the receipt of an obituary of a relative from another village, is conspicuous by its absence in the village that celebrating the feast.

Unlike their Hindu counterparts, the Catholics do not regard attending a funeral as polluting. This is because the Catholics can approach the divine irrespective of their physical condition of purity, whereas the Hindus refrain, as they fear the wrath of their deity. Thus, participation in a funeral is not an impediment to a Catholic’s participation in the patron’s feast.

The beliefs and practices associated with flag hoisting reveals that the patron’s feast is very much localised. The elders of the church, along with the kooyiippiLLai tie mango leaves on the upper portion of the flag mast and place a cross on the top. The ringing of the church bell accompanied by playing of tappu mark the commencement of
the important event. The kooyilpiLLai reads a prayer to the saint, after which the flag mast is raised to the accompaniment of the ringing of the church bell, playing of tappu, women utter kulavai (chorus of shrill sounds made by women by wagging the tongue, uttered on festive and auspicious occasions) and bursting of crackers. All this creates an atmosphere of excitement and reverence among those gathered. The people raise their hands in reverence to the patron saint, who is symbolised in the flag mast.

The male folk gather before the church to formally invite everybody through the VeRRilai parimaarutal (the distribution of betel leaves). The Vannaan (washerman) spreads the cloth for the people to sit. The male folk sit according to their social position, and those belonging to the ‘untouchable’ castes sit on bare ground. One of the karaikaarar initiates veRRilai parimaarutal (see Photo 3.3). Sandal paste followed by betel leaves are presented to the karaikaararkal, kooyilpiLLai of other villages, representatives from other villages, kooyilpiLLai of the village, and the ‘untouchable’ castes in that order. mutalmariyaatai (the prime-honour) is accorded to the four karaikaararkal of the village and then to the kooyilpiLLai, who as a religious functionary has an important role in the celebration of the feast. The order of ritual invitation follows the social position of each caste group, thus making the caste hierarchy of the village explicit.

Following veRRilai parimaarRutal, the village elders invite the priest to hoist the flag. They garland the priest and bring him to the church in a procession to the accompaniment of tappu. After the priest has blessed the flag, the kooyilpiLLai carries it around the village streets followed by two rows of seven boys each carrying colourful flags and ringing bells (taTTu mani). This announces the patron’s visit to streets -
ullirukkum kaTavuL veLiyil vantu ullaar (patron from the church is present in the street). This is said to remind the villagers of the days when the king's arrival was similarly announced.

It is generally the prerogative of the priest to hoist the flag and in his absence a nominee of the village elders hoists the flag. In the latter case, the kooyilpiLLai gets the flag blessed by the priest. This is rare, as the parish priest makes it a point to be present.

For nine days from the day of flag hoisting, every evening, led by Parayar tappu children carry colourful iTaikkam (flags) around the village, announcing the feast day celebration. Once the children return to the church the kooyilpiLLai recites the prayer to the patron and the rosary to Our Lady, which are followed by the Mass. The first six days are considered to be the days of preparation for the festival, which climaxes in capparappavani (the car procession). The elders of the village bring the priest in procession to inaugurate the capparappavani. On the last three days the capparam (see Photo 3.4) are carried on the streets. The statues of the saint and other tutelaries are decorated with.paTTu (silk clothes), garlands and are carried around the streets. The route through which the saint is taken in procession is referred by Bayly (1992:334) as the ‘deity’s symbolic kingdom.’

Capparappavani (see Photo 3.4) stops at the four corners of the village and the villagers offer prayers. People place a lighted lamp in front of their houses and kneel down in veneration as the saint passes the street. People from houses located outside the route of capparappavani bring their lamps to a street on the route. People shower flowers, salt, and pori (puffed rice) on and offer garlands to the patron saint for the various favours
received. The Catholics take home as *pracaatam* the flowers from the garland of the saint, salt and pepper placed at his feet (see also Bayly 1992:344).

The Catholics believe that the saint goes around the village every night, guarding the people from malevolent forces. Not only is the saint said to protect their property from theft and destruction, he is claimed to have ensured that their village is not afflicted by any famine. During the *capparappavani* the saint is believed to take stock of his people, claim his suzerainty over the territory and its people for which he is the guardian. For the Catholics it is an experience of having come under into direct contact with the saint and his protection.

The ten-day feast is an occasion for the villagers to fulfil their vows. Thus, one can observe within the vicinity of the church complex people sacrificing goats and cocks, cooking food, and offering *kooTTai* (paddy), goat, and hen. *neertikkaTan* (a vow made to god) expresses the reciprocal relationship between the believers and the saint: The vows are a kind of transaction between the saint and the people. This is expressed through the offering of various gifts to the saint for the favours received (see Appadurai 1981: 33 and 34).

During the feast days special Masses are offered to the saint seeking his protection from *pilli cuuNiyam and ceivinai kooLaaRu* (sorcery and black magic). Though belief in sorcery and black magic is alien to the Church theology, the Church offers the Mass respecting peoples belief. From the Church's point of view what is important is the need to pray to a Christian saint, and the belief in black magic is secondary.

On the last day of the feast it is customary to have a cultural show in the evening: a play depicting the life of a saint or an orchestra rendering popular film songs or even
screening some films. As a matter of policy the Church does not endorse the screening of films during the festival, as the films generally deal with ‘profane realities’ and have no place during a festival which is sacred in orientation.\textsuperscript{11}

The patron’s feast concludes with the lowering of the flag and the flag mast. The flag is lowered with a thanks-giving prayer to the patron and then taken ceremoniously into the church. Before the flag is lowered people go around the flag mast praying for their intentions. The flag mast is brought down on the third or fifth day after the flag is lowered.

Sacredness is attached to all the objects that represent the patron saint or are in contact with him. For example, the flag mast, the flag, the \textit{capparam}, and the mango leaves tied to the flag mast are regarded as sacred. The villagers take these mango leaves and keep in the house as protection against evil influences, mix them with seeds to be sown for obtaining a good yield, or place them under the pillow of a sick person for speedy recovery. In a similar manner the people venerate the flag mast and the rope that supports the flag mast. The very same flag mast that lies idle through the rest of the year becomes a sacred object of veneration during the feast. Attributing extraordinary power to the flag mast, people take it as their privilege to have had an opportunity of touching it.

\textit{uur tiruvizaa} is not only a religious celebration of the Catholics, but also a community festival for the entire village and the neighbouring villages, too. Traditionally, the various castes had designated roles to play: In Andavoorani, the Parayars play the \textit{tappu} and carry the gas-lights during \textit{capparappavani}, the Vannaan spreads the cloth to seat people for \textit{veRRilai parimaaRutal}, and the Cakiliyar (the ‘untouchable’ caste person) cleans the streets through which the \textit{capparam} is carried. However, over the decades there
has been a decline in this tradition and the people are no more obliged to perform their caste-related duties, though the elderly still continue with caste-based occupations as a way of earning their livelihood. Interestingly, the Hindu Parayars play the *tappu* at the patron’s feast as an offering to St. Michael, whom they perceive to be powerful and helpful (cf. Basu 1999:90). The Parayars at Andavoorani recalled the sickness and poverty which their families had to suffer earlier when they had refused to play for the feast.

It is important to note that women do not play a formal role in the organisation of *uur tiruvizaa*: Women do not take part in *veRRilai parimaarutal*, and the *capparam* is carried only by the male folk. Persistence of the Hindu idea that woman could be polluting during certain periods and the prevalence of strong patriarchal norms and sentiments seem to explain this.

So far what we have described is the way the patron’s feast is celebrated in Andavoorani. There are some other native rituals related to *uur tiruvizaa* that are performed in other Catholic villages. *maNTakappai* (bearing the expenses of the feast-day celebrations) is a time-honoured tradition in the Catholic villages. There are three types of *maNTakappai*: the village, the caste, and the individual/family *maNTakappai*. In the village *maNTakappai*, the Catholic community in the village as a whole shares the expenses of the celebration. This practice prevails in Andavoorani, and it does not give scope for comparison and competition among families, thereby emphasising the fact that the patron’s feast is an *uur tiruvizaa*.

In multi-caste villages, as for instance in Oriyur parish, the practice of *maNTakappai* follows caste hierarchy. In his study of social organisation and religion in
rural Ramnad, Mosse (1986) also observes that the patron's feast is celebrated on the basis of caste-based manTakappaiTi. Besides endorsing caste hierarchy in a Catholic ritual, this practice had led to unseemly competition between castes. Accordingly, caste specific manTakappaiTi was proscribed by The All India Catholic Bishop's Conference held at Tiruchirappalli in 1981, and the Bishops of Tamil Nadu unanimously resolved that the patron's feast should not be celebrated on the basis of caste. Though the Church conveyed its stance to all the parishes, it took over ten years to stop the caste-based manTakappaiTi in Oriyur.

Under the individual manTakappaiTi, some families in the village bear the expenses of each day's celebration. This practice prevails in Sengudi. After veRRilai parimaaRutal, individuals who wish to meet a day's expenses give their names, and if there is more than one person per day, the expenses are shared. Besides the expenses incurred on the flowers for the Mass, offertory gifts (like fruits, rice, chicken, eggs, etc.), decoration of capparam, and the crackers, on each day after the Mass the concerned family hosts a dinner to the priest and people (one member from each family). The invitation to dinner may be summarily extended at the time of veRRilai parimaaRutal or the women of the host family go round the village to extend personal invitations. The relatives of the family help in the cooking and serving of food and beverages. After the dinner, betel leaves and areca nuts are served. Then the family members and the invitees from the village invite the priest to bless the capparam (car procession). The priest blesses the capparam, and one of the male members of the manTakappaiTikaarar garlands the patron's statue. The capparam is then carried around the village streets.
It must be noted that the organisation and celebration of *uur tiruvizaa* is not necessarily harmonious and peaceful. During the ten days of the feast, tensions may arise between the villagers and the priest. In Andavoorani one issue occasioning such a tension has to do with the timing of *capparappavani*: The villagers prefer to start *capparappavani* late at night and go on till the morning, as the Hindus do. But the priest insists that they start it around 9 p.m. and end by 11 p.m. so that the religious spirit of the feast is not lost. The priest’s apprehension is that if *capparappavani* starts late at night, some people may consume alcohol and their behaviour may affect the *capparappavani*. Even if people do not take alcohol, keeping awake the whole night adversely affects their participation in the next day’s Mass. Nevertheless, in Andavoorani on 29th September 2000 *capparappavani* started around 11 p.m. and ended around 3 a.m., and the priest had to ignore it.

Similarly, tensions can occur during flag hoisting. About forty years’ ago, irrespective of his religion, the *uur amplaar* (the village head) hoisted the flag and received *mutalmariyaatai* (honour). Now it is generally agreed that the priest, as the religious head, hoists the flag. However, in Kokkurani, a Catholic village, this is a contentious issue. Kokkurani consists of Parayar Catholics and their *amplaar*, who belongs to a non-Christian Kallar caste, is from the neighbouring Hindu village. The *amplaar* insists that it is his prerogative to hoist the flag, but the priest refuses to acknowledge this claim. Though the Catholic Parayars are not in favour of the *amplaar* hoisting the flag, they are unable to voice their opinion, as they belong to the ‘untouchable’ caste and depend on the *amplaar*. During the feast in 2000, as the priest
blessed the flag, the *amplaar* without any invitation forced himself into hoisting the flag. Amidst such tension the hoisting went on (see Mosse 1994b).

Any difference of opinion between the villagers and the priest during the year is reflected in the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*. In Sengudi, a Catholic village, due to differences of opinion between him and the people, the priest was absent from the church. With their *uur tiruvizaa* fast approaching, the villagers requested the Bishop to depute a priest to hoist the flag. None of the three priests deputed by the Bishop, however, turned up at the appointed time on the flag hoisting day. Hence, the village elders requested the *kooyilpiLLai* to bless the flag and hoist it. This implied that the presence of the priest is not obligatory for the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*.

If the people could hoist the flag on their own, why then did they request the Bishop to depute a priest for the purpose? According to the informants, only the priest can perform *religious* functions like the celebration of the Mass and the absolution of sins. The *kooyilpiLLai* cannot take the place of a priest; his role being limited to the use of holy water that has been blessed by the priest. Hence, in the absence of a priest the feast would lose its religious significance. While the people may act independently in some rare cases like the above, the Catholics in general recognise the priest as the religious functionary and *uur tiruvizaa* as a religious event.

There are variations in the celebration of the patron’s feast among the different Catholic caste groups: The practice of *veERRilai parimaaRutal* is peculiar to the Udayars. The Udayars, a land owning caste, constitute a significant section of the Catholic population in the villages, and they have retained this native practice to assert their dominant status within the larger community. Differences are also noticed in the number
of capparams carried: The Parayars and the Brahmins carry one capparam, the Nadar and the Vellalars three and the Udayars five. This difference is said to be reflective of the size of the community and their relative economic conditions.

_uur tiruvizaa: In Comparative Perspective_

In describing the celebration of the Catholic _uur tiruvizaa_ above we have alluded to similar practices among the Hindus. Based on the description of the patron’s feast at Andavoorani, we may now highlight the indigenous elements in the Catholic _uur tiruvizaa_. At the onset, it is necessary to clarify the theological difference between the Catholic saints and the Hindu gods: Whereas the Catholic saints derive their power from superior Christian divinities, and specifically from Jesus, the Hindu gods function independently. The saints are persons who have led an exemplary life while on earth and are believed to be closer to god. The saints are in a favourable position to intercede for the people who go to them seeking favours and blessings. Yet, in certain respects the Catholic saints and the Hindu gods perform similar functions, as for instance in their role as the guardian of the village.

_Capprappavani_ may have originally served the purpose of providing an opportunity to lower castes, who were prevented from entering the temples, to view the divine face-to-face when the idols were brought in procession on the streets (Somalai 1975:118-28). The Catholics continued the same practice in their place of worship: The conversion to Catholicism did not bring change in the caste-related practices. Though not approved by the Church, for a long time the ‘untouchable’ caste Catholics were not allowed inside the church, and even when they were later allowed to enter the church, they were seated separately from the higher caste Catholics. Thus, the patron’s feast was
an occasion for all Catholics, irrespective of their caste, to have a view of the patron saint, their protector and guardian. Of course, today all can enter the church and the original function sub-served by capparappavani may not be all that meaningful.

Flag hoisting is a significant event for both the Catholics and the Hindus - koTiyRRam illamal oru tiruvizaava? (can there be a feast without flag hoisting?), so goes the native saying. Along with flag hoisting, the Hindus also have the ritual of kaappu kaTTutil (tying an amulet with yellow string on the flag mast as a token of vow or as a pledge of its fulfilment) carried out by the temple puucaari (priest). While the Catholics have retained flag hoisting and tying mango leaves to the flag mast, they have given up the ritual of kaappu kaTTutil, as it may not have received the approval of the Catholic priests.

The colour of the flag is white, with the cross in the centre marked in red. This combination is significant from the point of view of indigenisation: The temple flag is of the same colour and combination (white and red). teer (the temple car) of the Hindu deity is painted red, the colour which is said to symbolise the increased power and activity of the deity, especially during the feast days. This red is always against the background of white, a symbol of stability and purity (Beck 1969:565). While retaining the colour combination of the flag, the Catholics have replaced the vehicle of the Hindu deity with that of the Christian symbol of the cross.

The capparam of the Catholics is in the shape of their church koopuram. However, the base of the capparam resembles the Hindu teer. In designing the capparam the Catholics have obviously replaced the temple structure model by the church model. Unlike the Catholic capparam, 'in Tamil Hindu temple rites,' as Bayly (1992:344)
observes, 'the teer is at once a war-chariot, a mobile palace and a representation of god's temple.'

Dedication of the church to a Christian divinity is a universal practice among the Catholics, which appears to be in consonance with the practice of the Hindus. The Catholics regard these divinities as their patrons or guardians. By tradition, every village in Tamil Nadu has a deity placed on the village boundary to guard the village against intruders. Ayyanar is one of the popular deities guarding the villages, especially in the southern districts. Though the Catholics do not place their deity on the boundary like the Hindus, the role given to their saint is same as for the Hindu deity. The common belief in the divinities as the guardians of the village has aided the Catholics to replicate the Hindu temple rites in the celebration of the patron's feast. This replication was facilitated by the familiarity of the Catholics with the Hindu rites, as also by the approval of the Church authorities to ensure adherents to the faith. Discussing the feasts of the Paravas, a Catholic community in Tamil Nadu, Bayly (1992:343) draws similar conclusions.

The most notable difference is in the ritual calendar - the Hindus celebrate their *uur tiruvizaa* during the months of AaTi, PurTaaci, Maarkazi and PaMkuni, when the climate is temperate and the farmers are relatively free from their agricultural activities. Thus, the non-Christian calendar is in keeping with the agricultural and seasonal patterns. The Christian calendar, however, has not taken into consideration the agricultural and seasonal practices of the Catholics in Tamil Nadu. Rather, it has been fixed in consonance with the seasons of the West and is meant for Catholics all over the world. Though the Catholic calendar is not particularised, the feasts of the Catholics are particularised by the people.
From the foregoing analysis it is clear that the overall mood and ethos in the celebration of uur tiruvizaa is more or less the same among the Catholics and the Hindus. The distribution of rights/duties runs along the same line in both the communities, and caste plays a dominant role. The secular authorities play a significant role in the decision making process. Among the Catholics, the role of the priest as an ‘outsider’ to the village is measured: As long as the priest recognises the local authority structure, he could have a place of eminence as the religious head.

Thus, we observe that an ‘alien’ religion can not easily subdue the native social structure and culture. Indigenisation is an inevitable process for any religion implanted in a new land and people. The nine days of preparation that marks the Hindu festival and found among the Catholics has its parallel in the concept of ‘Novena’ in the Catholic Church. Novena refers to nine days of collective prayer towards a Christian divinity during which individual seek a favour or favours from the saint. The feast need not necessarily follow the novena. While Catholics retain the structure of the village feast and the nine days of preparation they incorporate Christian novena along with it.

In our discussion of uur tiruvizaa the focus was on tiruvizaa in honour of the guardian and it did not go into the saint per se. It may not be out of place to note that the villagers believe that the saint’s power extends beyond their village. Michael, the Archangel of Andavoorani, has become locally famous for cattiam caital (swearing in god’s name). People use the church as the court and the saint as the judge before whom they make a promise of proving their innocence, thereby semi-institutionalising the saint’s power. This is a serious matter, as the people believe that the punishment for false promises is instantaneous. This is carried out in the following manner: In the event of a theft or cheating on property-related matters, the contending parties reach the church to
settle the issue. It is the affected party who normally calls the other to swear before the saint. He lights the candle and places it on the altar of the church. The other party must swear that what he claims is true by blowing off the candle. Such a practice is found in Hindu temples, (e.g., Kali temple at Kollangudi in Sivagangai District) where the camphor instead of candle is lit and the flame put out. Thus, the Catholics while continuing with the native practice of *cattiam caital*, have only replaced the objects of religious symbolism, e.g., candle in place of camphor.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The rituals in worship and celebrations, when viewed from the point of view of indigenisation, reveal three types of ritual space. One in which the core liturgical element of Catholicism, namely, the Mass is celebrated and in which the official Church exercises a good deal of control. The second space consists of rituals, which are part of the main elements of Catholicism and yet yield ground for inclusion of indigenous practices. The third space contains mainly the indigenous celebrations and rituals which have been Christianised with typical Christian elements.

The celebration of the Mass is central to the Catholic worship and its basic structure is explained in terms of what is popularly known as the ‘Roman Rite.’ Its structure has three elements namely the penitential, the Word of God and breaking of the sacred Bread. The official Church has always been watchful in preserving this rite as it is thought to be the most sacred ritual. However, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, attempts have been made to indigenise this worship by adopting some Hindu rituals and symbols. At the same time, these attempts did not break the basic structure of the Roman Rite. Such attempts were confined to a few centres run by some members of
clergy and did not become widespread practice in the Catholic community. Nevertheless, such attempts had enduring influence and some changes in worship initiated through such attempts reached far and wide in various churches. These attempts also faced mild opposition from some quarters and eventually lost their force.

In the celebration of the calendrical feasts, one observes high density of Catholic rituals. At the same time, sizeable number of indigenous practices has found place in them. It is difficult to establish whether the people or the clergy introduced these practices, as such these practices have been in existence for centuries. It is probable that the people initiated them and the clergy conceded legitimacy considering that many of these practices acquired Christian meaning after they were included. These indigenous practices did not violate the structure or meaning of the rituals accompanying the various calendrical feasts.

The village annual feast is fundamentally an indigenous practice, both structurally and also in its meaning. Almost every element of this indigenous structure has been subjected to a wide range of processes before being integrated as part of the Christian ritual. Some elements that bore the core of Hindu religious elements, such as the deities, have been abandoned. Some elements that are explicitly Christian, like the cross on the top of the capparam, have been added afresh. Some elements that did not bear any typical Hindu symbol were retained by superimposing Christian meaning on them. When some elements could not be included are dropped, parallel elements from Christianity were invented and added. The annual feast being fundamentally an indigenous practice, the
people exercise more control over it and the clergy has been constrained to adopt a cautious path in according legitimacy to it or imposing its control over it.

Endnotes

1. The calendar of the Church, which is built around the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, replaced the indigenous one with its own feasts and celebrations. The Catholics have a calendar demarcating four different liturgical seasons during the year: The Advent, Lenten, Easter and ordinary. Each of these seasons has a set of rituals and feasts.

2. ‘Roman liturgy’ refers to a set pattern of celebrating the Mass which is different from other patterns, as for instance, the ‘Syrian liturgy’ which is practised mostly in Syria and adjoining regions.

3. tappu is a round-shaped native drum played on important occasions, both joyous (e.g., feasts) and sorrowful (e.g., death). The difference is shown in the rhythm of playing. The tappu is beaten with sticks by both hands and the beats are produced in unison with fellow drummers.

4. In Rajakambeeram on the 13th of April 2001, people offered 407 parivāTTam, and there were non-Christians among them. parivāTTam has now become another ritual where in people (not necessarily Catholic) make a vow to offer new cloth for the various favours received.

5. The imitation of Christ in the Philippines, as observed by Cannell (1995:380-83), reveals that the Good Friday rituals are influenced by the Philipino culture. The Philippinos treat the body of Jesus exactly as they would the dead body of a mortal being and follow similar rituals. The statue of Jesus ‘is dressed as an honoured corpse, with a binding-cloth tying up his jaw. A sigh and a shout from the waiting crowd goes up as his body is placed inside a special decorated and glass-sided funeral bier’ (ibid. 382).

6. These four karais are: (1) maanaakarai (the landowners of the village) (2) kuunaakarai (the descendants of kunānti the lineage head (3) naanaakarai (the
descendants of *naTuviliar viiTu*), and (4) *muunaakarai* (the descendants of *muttukuttian viiTu*).

7. The entire Catholic community meets the expense of the *uur tiruvizaa*: During the year 2000, from each of the ninety-three Catholic households (in the village was collected), Rs 250, 5 kg rice, salt and tamarind, to meet the expense of *uur tiruvizaa*. The *karaikaarar* collects the *kooyil vari* (the church tax).

8. In the pilgrim centre of Vailankanni, during the feast days, the flag is hoisted everyday so that people who come to the shrine can leave the same day without violating *koTitaTai*.

9. The researcher observed that on the ninth day the celebration was grand. On this day along with *tappu, meeLam* was also played. There were twenty priests to hear confession and celebrate the Mass. A special sermon was prepared for the occasion, new hymns were sung and a special adoration conducted by a priest. Relatives and friends who had made a vow come to participate in the celebration, fulfilled their vow. At 11 p.m. the elders went with *meeLam* and *tappu* to bring the priest to bless the statue and the *capparam*. The statues of Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Savariar, St. John de Britto, St. Michael and St. Sebastian were brought from the church and were placed on the *capparam*. On the first *capparam* St. Sebastian and St. Michael were carried. The priest blessed each of the *capparam*, followed by a prayer by the *kooyilpiLLai*, after which the procession started. St. Michael is considered as the guardian of all the Catholic villages and his statue leads the *capparappavani* in all villages.

10. By way of an illustration the villagers narrated an event which took place a few years' ago: Thieves who had robbed the people of their belongings could not cross the village boundary and had to abandon their loot at the village boundary.

11. As rain had been forecast, no cultural programme was held during the annual festival covered by the researcher.
3.1 The Parayars Playing *tappu*

3.2 *tuumpa* (Statue of Jesus in Indigenous Coffin)
3.3 Invitation to the Annual church Feast

capparappavani (Car Procession)