CHAPTER VI

RELIGION AND THE QUOTIDIAN LIFE

In the foregoing chapters our discussion was centred on organised and standardised forms of religious rituals and celebrations which are observed periodically. Religious experience and expression, however, are not confined to such periodical observations. In their every day life individuals confront contingencies which are not timed and which need to be addressed and responded to. They not only have to face different kinds of uncertainties, but also have to make meaning of what is experienced. In order to cope with such uncertainties and contingencies, every community evolves a worldview as part of its culture. This worldview, which is significantly influenced by religion, provides a set of beliefs and practices to deal with dichotomies of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness, good and evil, etc.

While Catholicism draws a distinction between good and evil it does not have an elaborate set of norms specifying the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of time, direction, etc. Nevertheless, in practice, the Catholics in South India have drawn a good deal of beliefs and practices from the native culture and have adopted them in their quotidian life. This sphere provides another facet in the study of indigenisation of Catholicism, and we shall discuss the same in this chapter.
I

AUSPICIOUSNESS/ INAUSPICIOUSNESS

The Tamil Catholics believe that every ritual has an underlying principle of how and when it has to be carried out in order to derive its beneficial results. They also believe that things happen at the time chosen by god: ‘To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ... a time to plant ...’ (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, Good News Bible). In making sense of the beliefs held by the Catholics we group them into auspicious time, auspicious direction, auspicious ritual items, and auspicious persons.

Auspicious Time

Time is a matter of everyday concern for people and the belief in the auspiciousness or otherwise of time creates heterogeneity of time. Thus, some months of the year, certain days of the week, and specific time during the day are considered auspicious or inauspicious, while others are regarded as neutral.

The character of a particular month is marked off by lunar days. The cycle of lunar days comprises a fortnight, and every month contains two fortights with some...
overlapping. The first part of the lunar cycle is referred to as the *paurNami* (full moon) and the second part as the *ammaavaacai* (new moon). *vaLarpiRaikaalam* (season of growth) is thought to be auspicious and enterprises begun during this season are believed to meet with success. *teeipiRaikaalam* (season of decrease) is thought to be inauspicious.

Like the months of the year, the days of the week are also qualified. Each week has its cycle of seven days, some of which possess an overall auspicious quality, some are deemed as inauspicious and others remain neutral: Tuesdays and Saturdays are considered to be inauspicious and no important event is carried out on these days. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are regarded as auspicious, which means that one can start a new enterprise or set out on a journey on these days. Tuesday is the most feared day, as the activities beginning on this day are believed to meet with difficulties. As such, it is described as *cevvaai veruvaai* (Tuesday empty mouth).

The best time during the day stretches from dawn to noon and evening to dusk. During these times people go about their work as there is little danger of attack by hostile or mystical forces. With few exceptions, even now the Catholics celebrate marriage when the day dawns and the wedding Mass held between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. Certain times during the day are considered auspicious and the notion of auspiciousness gets particularised in the observation of time. Time assumes a sacred character as people set out to perform the rituals within that specified time of the day. To illustrate this, a reference may be made to an incident of altering the set pattern of the Mass in order that the *taali*-tying ritual could take place during the auspicious time. It was a Wednesday and the marriage Mass was fixed for 9 a.m. as the auspicious time was between 8.45 a.m. and 9.45 a.m. Since the Mass could not begin at 9.00 a.m., fearing that the *taali*-tying ritual will fall outside the
auspicious time, the priest was requested to perform this ritual right at the beginning of
the Mass. The priest mentioned that while the notion of auspicious time is unknown to
Christianity, the Catholics continue to believe in it. As a religious functionary and as a
well-wisher of the people, the priest would rather consent to their wish than hold on to the
belief of the Church that all time is ordained by God and that one section of time is no
more auspicious than another. Moreover, the priest also said that he did not want to be
blamed if the marriage turned out to be a failure, as it would be attributed to the disregard
for the principle of auspiciousness.

Auspicious Direction

Direction is given pre-eminence while constructing a house, while performing
agricultural activities, and while conducting the life-cycle rituals. It is believed that the
East is associated with the rising sun and that beneficial forces emanate from this
direction. Thus, the entrances to the church and the house face the East. The direction
West is considered to be inauspicious and the participants do not face this direction while
performing auspicious rituals. The sun sets in the West and thus the direction signifies the
diminishing of life. For the Hindus, in the South the god of death resides. The cemetery in
the villages of our study lie in the South, and the Catholics refer to South as the place
where the dead rest and say ‘unmai kontu tekkei vaikka’ (keep you in the South). The
direction North is neutral and it is not qualified.

The character of the direction of each day is solely judged by its standing in the
weekly cycle and not by the static point of the four directions mentioned above. The
Catholics in the village Andavoorani gave the following list of cuulam (inauspicious
directions avoided while performing important events) according to the day of the week:
Monday and Saturday  \textit{kizakkey cuulam} (East)
Tuesday and Wednesday  \textit{vaTakkey cuulam} (North)
Thursday  \textit{tekkey cuulam} (South)
Friday and Saturday  \textit{meRkkey cuulam} (West)

While directions, months and days are static, there are variable sources of cosmic influences. The planets are said to influence the auspicious time for the individual. This is more personalised in nature and is advised by an astrologer.

Auspicious Numbers

The Catholics attach great importance to odd numbers while carrying out both auspicious and inauspicious rituals. An odd number signifies incompleteness, and it is this incompleteness which makes the odd number auspicious. According to the Catholics, the incompleteness of the ritual gives scope for making it complete. Life is viewed as ongoing, and in a way the observance of odd numbers is to ensure that life continues. So, when offering a gift of cash it is given in odd numbers, thus signifying that there is more to come. For similar reasons ritual items and persons performing the rituals are also in odd numbers.

In her narration of beliefs and practices of people, Gandhi (1980:187) notes that odd numbers are believed to bring in positive effects and even numbers negative effects. According to her, the Greek thought of even numbers as breakable and therefore weak and feminine. In contrast, they thought of odd numbers as unbreakable and therefore strong and masculine.
The Catholics associate the number ‘three’ with the Holy Trinity. The number ‘seven’ is also associated with fullness and perfection. Apart from these two numbers the Catholics do not find any other number association in the Bible. To the Tamil Catholics the significance of odd number is drawn from the existing native beliefs and practices rather than from the Bible. Odd numbers have ritual value and number three is especially sacred, observes Srinivas (1994).

**Auspicious Ritual Items**

Flowers play a significant role in South Indian rituals. They figure both at auspicious and inauspicious rituals and carry different meanings. Flowers are an indispensable item of worship and a way of expressing joy as well as respect; thus, they are used to honour both the divine and the human. They are offered to the divine, and are used in the rituals of puberty, marriage, and house warming. The women deck themselves with flowers and this signifies their status: Since they are a mark of a *cumamkali*, widows do not wear flowers. Flowers are the only item generally offered to the dead.

The Hindus use only certain flowers in their worship. Each deity has a flower particularly suited to her/his worship. However, such associations do not exist among the Catholics. They generally use jasmine and rose in worship, though other flowers are not proscribed. Flowers have become preponderant in the individual offerings to the divine.

Paddy, the unhusked rice, is the most sacred member of the plant world. It is a sign of *ciiteevi* (a positive force behind worldly prosperity). The Hindus use it in the life-cycle rituals, while Catholics place a measure of paddy at the side of the dead body. According to them it denotes the positive influences of the dead persons and their fertile life in the world.
veRRilai paakku is distributed at the beginning and end of the marriage ritual. It is considered to be auspicious and is believed to induce auspicious (good) feelings.

There is a close link between the ritual items and their colours. Colours are symbolic, conveying specific meaning in specific contexts. The colours white, red, green, yellow and black are associated with certain properties. A combination of these colours is used in South Indian rituals. White is associated with purity, stability and cooling effect, e.g., milk. The overflowing of poMkal, a white substance, is considered as a sign of prosperity. It is cooked and distributed in marriage, house construction and house-warming ceremonies. poMkal is one of the items of votive offering to the divine. The Catholics offer it in the shrines as a thanksgiving for favours received. Milk, a white substance, is also considered pure and becomes a fitting offering to god.

Red, the colour of blood, stands for vitality and fertility and it is associated with femininity. Vermilion symbolises auspiciousness and joy. kuMkumam (vermilion) is the red spot the women wear on their forehead and only women whose husbands are alive can wear it. Since kuMkumam is an auspicious item it is considered an ideal item to use as an offering when inviting guests for such celebrations as house-warming ceremony, puberty ritual, etc. For the Hindus, vermilion is associated with goddess Durga, while the Catholics have not retained such an association or transferred it to any Christian divinity, they continue to use it as an auspicious item.

Yellow is the colour of turmeric, which is considered to be cooling, a sign of prosperity and fertility. It is an edible root and one of the most important spices used by South Indians in their cooking. It is considered to be pure, antiseptic and good for the body. Turmeric paste is used by women in their daily bath. It is an item that widows can
not use. Turmeric plays a prominent place in the rituals, including life-cycle rituals. It can even replace *taali* as the marriage emblem. We came across a woman wearing a piece of turmeric in place of *taali*, as she had offered her *taali* in the shrine of Vailankanni. Turmeric is also used to cast off evil spirits. *aalaattti* that is waved to honour individuals and to avert the evil eye consists of turmeric water, calcium and betel leaves. Turmeric paste is applied on the eyes of the dead body to prevent it from being possessed by the evil spirit.

Green signifies a cooling effect and denotes fertility. The plantain tree itself is auspicious and is used in life-cycle rituals. At the entrance of the *kalyaanTamanTapam* (marriage hall) it is specifically planted to wish prosperity to the newly wedded couple.

Black stands for repelling evil, and that is why while binding the evil black and red cords are used. Red signifies the battle with the demon and consequently the blood of the demon. The hair of the possessed is cut in the exorcism ritual to signify the demon in the hair (see also Beck 1969:558-59). Black is generally used in casting off evil, for example, the black spot put on the cheek of the child. A piece of charcoal is taken when carrying animal flesh. This is because the demon is attracted to the smell of blood and the person becomes vulnerable to the attack of the demon.

Oil and soap-nut powder, which are used in the ritual bath of the dead, are regarded as inauspicious items. Since they are associated with death, these items are not exchanged between people. Women never carry them from their natal home to the house where they are given in marriage. While setting out on an important journey, seeing a person coming with an empty pot is considered inauspicious. We observed that on the day
of *noolvitaieTuttaal* no person went to fetch water during the morning hours, as the sight of an empty pot is a sign of penury.

**Auspicious Person**

A *cummkali* (married woman with children and husband) is the appropriate person to carry out every auspicious ritual, for example, *aalaatti* in the marriage rite, assisting at the puberty ritual, etc. Traditionally the state of a *cummkali* is considered as the ideal for a woman and is desired by women in general. Widowhood is considered inauspicious, as it stands for renunciation of life.

The dead body becomes auspicious under certain circumstances. For example, when a person is on an important journey and meets the people carrying a dead body it is considered auspicious. It is an assurance that the journey will result in success. The dead body anticipates the success, since the dead person has successfully relieved himself from the suffering of this world. The principle of polarity works in this belief, such as those who mourn now will laugh later.

The Vannaan (washerman) is considered to be auspicious when he is met carrying washed clothes, but he is viewed as inauspicious when he is met carrying dirty clothes. The Ampataien (barber) is always considered an inauspicious person, since he is associated with tonsuring which denotes mourning, sorrow, penance, etc. With the onset of an important occasion one would avoid the sight of the Ampataien. The Ampataien too avoids people for the fear of being cursed.

The Catholics maintain a remarkable ambivalence about auspiciousness and inauspiciousness: On the one hand, they hold that everything happens as ordained by god — *‘kaTavuL cittapaTiee naTakkum’* (according to the will of god), as they would say. On
the other hand, they continue with the native beliefs and do all that they can to enhance success, wealth and happiness and try to avoid whatever misfortune is in store for them. Apparently there is a disjunction between their professed faith and actual observances in every life, and they handle this disjunction by invoking the Christian divinity and saying the Christian prayers.

II

SICKNESS

The Catholics do make use of the indigenous methods to deal with sickness. We may consider here smallpox as a case in point and the way the Catholics treat this sickness. In Tamil Nadu the Hindus consider smallpox as a visitation of the goddess Mariamma rather than as a disease. When a person suffers with ammai (smallpox) he/she is accorded the same respect that is given to the goddess. Although the Catholics do not worship the goddess Mariamma they too believe that this sickness has some association with the goddess. Some of them consult the Hindu puucaari who is a specialist in matters concerning ammai and he normally gives vipuuti (the sacred ash) to be smeared on the person and prescribes a treatment with margosa paste and turmeric.

Since the Church does not associate smallpox with any Christian divinity, the Church instituted sacrament of anointing the sick is not done in the case of smallpox. This sacrament is exclusively used in the last stage of a person’s life rather than at other times of illness. People can not associate smallpox with any kind of sickness that could be dealt with by the Catholic priest. Hence, the native belief that the goddess has visited the person still lingers in the minds of the Catholics and they consult a native specialist.
There are cases of Catholics playing a role similar to that of the Hindu *puucaari*. The researcher met a Catholic lady who guides people in times of crisis such as serious illness; she uses holy water in place of *vipuuti*.

### III

**EVIL**

Every religion provides an understanding of evil (see Parkin 1985). Suffering is seen in Hinduism as due to one’s *karma* and the sins of the past. Catholicism sees good and evil as being fundamentally and radically opposed. Every good emanates from god and the saints, while evil is attributed to the devil who is viewed as being antithetical to Jesus and the forces of good. This section focuses on the phenomenon of evil as experienced and interpreted by the Tamil Catholics.

The Catholics view wellbeing of life as emanating from the goodness of god. They consider the blessings of god as the result of one’s prayers and good deeds done to others. On the other hand, the Catholics share with the non-Christians the belief that misfortunes are the result of one’s sins or evil actions caused by others (sorcery) or evil in the form of *peey* (devil).

To be freed from the consequences of one’s sin the Catholics make confession to a Catholic priest and seek forgiveness and mercy of god through the mediation of priest. In addition some go on *tiruyaattirai* (pilgrimage) as a mark of penance, while others fast and pray. These are specifically Christian acts in dealing with suffering as a result of sin.

Misfortunes which are considered to be the workings of the evil spirits and sorcery necessitate consultation with Catholic and/or non-Christian religious specialists (see
Caplan 1985). There is general disapproval among the Catholics about consulting the non-Christian specialists, and the researcher’s queries about it always met with plain denial: ‘We are Christians, and we don’t believe in it.’ Yet, in moments of crisis such as persisting illness Catholics do consult the non-Christian soothsayers, though only discreetly; but they are viewed by the Church as deviants rather than as contributors to the indigenisation of Catholicism. The Church considers consulting non-Christian specialists as a sin, and such sinners are asked to confess their sin to a Catholic priest and seek atonement for the same. There are a few cases where it was believed that because they consulted a non-Christian specialist the Christian divinity has inflicted them with continuous suffering.

The religious beliefs and practices of the Tamil Catholics have to do with dangers that fill day and night. Not only ghosts and malevolent spirits but also fellow human beings consciously or unconsciously become the medium for the functioning of evil forces. The community adopts the well-articulated native rituals in dealing with such sources of misfortunes.

*kaNNu (The Evil Eye)*

The evil eye is referred to as *kaNNu* in Tamil and the Muslims refer to it as *najar* (Pocock 1994:52). It is understood as the envious glance, a result of jealousy and the feeling of one’s deprivation, which can affect the other who has a privileged position. It is believed to cause illness, loss of appetite, stomach-upset, etc. It has no link with religious practitioners and warding it off is carried out by people themselves. It is not discussed publicly, as it is believed that the secrecy of the ritual enhances its efficacy.
The kaNNu and its ill effects can be turned away by performing appropriate rituals. The indigenous methods employed to ward off kaNNu are known as tirusTi kazittal (casting off evil eye). tirusTi Kazittal consists of collecting a little sand at crossroads in the village along with fragments of palm leaves removed from three houses roofs. Together with three or five chillies and a little bit of salt this collection is waved round the person’s head and the person is asked to spit on it thrice. The whole thing is then thrown in the fire. If the smell of the chilly escapes in the air and the sound of the salt crackling is heard then the person is believed to have been affected by evil eye.

Camphor is also used in tirusTi kazittal. It is burnt in front of the house after waving it three times in front of the person. Women generally perform this ritual and they seem to have authority in this ritual (see Pocock 1994:54). It is generally performed at dusk on Tuesdays and Fridays, since on these days the evil is believed to be most active. However, it may be carried out on any day if it is deemed necessary. In chapter five we have referred to the way people seek to avert kaNNu by distracting kaNNu by hanging a pumpkin on a new house and a black spot on the cheek of the child, etc.

When the causes of the problems are unknown the Catholics, like their Hindu counterparts, approach the divine for aid. There are six culturally defined causes for one’s problems. The actual source of the problem is ascertained by tiruvuLacciiTTu or ciiTTu pooTTu paarttal (picking lots to find the divine will) in the church by the Catholics while the Hindus follow the same before their deity. As per the set procedure, people write down on pieces of paper the different sources/causes for their problems. A child is asked to pick up one piece of paper. This is repeated thrice and the problem appearing more than once is identified as the cause of the present suffering. Accordingly, measures are
initiated to counter the sources of this problem. Enumerated below are the possible causes of misfortune and the means to deal with them:

(1) \textit{ceivinai kooLaaRu} (sorcery): The Catholics employ different courses of action to deal with sorcery. Some of our informants sought the intervention of the divine and possible revelations of the wrong doer by staying in the shrine of St. Michael for a week. In another case the affected persons went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Vailankanni to negate the evil power. Some of them consulted a Catholic priest by name Santhanasamby (discussed later in this chapter).

(2) \textit{morappaTTu kooLaaRu} (result of calling on the divine to punish one’s enemy): Addressing St. Michael, the Tamil Catholics say ‘\textit{aanTavare unakku kaNNu illayaa? caamiye niiyee keeLu’} (don’t you have eyes St. Michael? Lord you ask). Such a calling is believed to affect the wrong doer negatively. The divine is called when there is a dispute among individuals, family members and relatives due to jealousy or during division of property. The affected individuals request the person who called the divine to settle the dispute in the church. In the church the \textit{kooyilpiLLai} prays on behalf of the parties in dispute and gives them the holy water (among the Hindus the \textit{puucaari} gives sacred ash).\textsuperscript{1} The divine that was beseeched to punish is now requested to bring peace.

(3) \textit{peey kooLaaRu} (results of demonic possession): This is discussed under exorcism.

(4) \textit{manaikkaTTu kooLaaRu} refers to the belief that the house is the cause of the person’s present suffering. In Andavoranai, a Catholic altered his front door in order to avert the misfortune caused by his house.
(5) *teivak kooLaaRu* is a misfortune resulting from the failure to fulfil the vow made to god. By fulfilling the vow one frees herself/himself from *teivak kooLaaRu*. A woman had made a vow that she would sacrifice a goat in the shrine of St. John de Britto for the wellbeing of her son. There was some delay in fulfilling the vow and meanwhile her son died in an accident. She believed that *kiTaaikkku patilaa eMka kiTaya eTutukiTTaar* (instead of the goat the saint has taken our goat, meaning son). She nevertheless offered the goat requesting the saint to protect the rest of her children. Though the Christian theology does not portray god as being cruel or punishing, the Tamil Catholics view vow as a serious matter, as the failure to fulfil the same angers god and invites misfortune.

(6) *enta kooLaaRum illai* (none of the above mentioned causes): This leaves the Catholics in peace and they seek medical treatment in case of illness, etc.

Similar to the above is *eeTu poTTu paarttal*: The *kooyilpiLLai* brings palm leaves on which Bible verses are written and the persons concerned are asked to pick up one. He then explains the words, which may explain the problem and possibly the cause of the suffering. Alternatively, some Catholics stay at the shrine - *vaarattukkuiruttal* - requesting the saint to reveal to them the cause of their problem. The Church neither objects to nor encourages these practices.

On the other hand, the Church is strongly opposed to some native practices, such as the performance of the following symbolic actions by the Catholics appealing to the saint to take revenge on the evil doer: (a) *paTi kaTTuratu or kaacu veTTipoTutal*: Cutting a coin into two pieces and dropping them in the box for donations. (b) *oolai veTTi vaittal*: Cutting the tender shoot of the palmyra tree and keeping it in the church. (c) Burning a
handful of red chillies after placing it before the statue of St. Michael and beseeching him to punish the evil doer. These native practices instil fear in persons and portray god as the punishing judge.

**Sacred Words**

It is believed that religious icons prevent the evil from entering the house. Similarly certain words are thought to have power when recited. When tormented by evil, for example, the Catholics invoke and address prayers to St. Anthony. The prayers and the icons used in the name of St. Anthony are known as St. Anthony's *yantra* (see Picture 6.1).

We came across a prayer book entitled *punita Anthoniar ceivinai akaRRum japaMkal* (Prayers to St. Anthony to Remove the Effects of Black Magic) which explains the procedure to be followed in enthroning St. Anthony’s statue and saying prayers before it. The author of this prayer book, a Catholic himself, notes that some words used in the prayer are alien to the Christian theology, yet only with those words can the evil be removed. The author’s great-grandfather who had combined his knowledge of *cittarkal* with the use of some Christian prayers composed these prayers about 100 years ago. *cittarkal* refers to a set of mendicants who developed their own philosophy (Bhattacharya 1999:263).

The St. Anthony’s *yantra* and prayers are said to be powerful in dealing with the problems of black magic and demonic influences. As shown in Picture 6.1, the figures of three saints and Mary occupy the four corners of the cross. At the centre of the cross is the figure of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There are six *cakkaram* around the cross and within each of these circles are written jumbled alphabets. These resemble the Hindu *yantras*,
but an obvious variation is that the symbol of *trisul* (Shiva’s trident) has been replaced by the cross.

The direction plays a very important role in the power of a particular *yantra*: ‘In any *mandala* the directions are extremely important, for they guard and frame the sacred universe at its borders. There may be four directional guardians; or eight, counting the intermediate directions; or ten, including a guardian above and below’ (Eck 1994:147). In St. Anthony’s *yantra*, too, there are four corners, eight directions, as well as the sky, the earth and the valleys. The prayer seeks protection from evil spirits coming from all directions. Each direction is entrusted to a Christian divinity to whom a prayer is addressed: East to St. Anthony, South to St. James, West to St. Michael, and North to Mary. And the direction in between are entrusted to the cross of Jesus. The prayer is said with the intention of binding the evil with the help of saints, Mary and the Holy Trinity.

The positioning of the Christian divinities in the *yantra* is based on the Hindu belief that a divine guardian or regent protects each direction: Indra, the Vedic war god, protects the East. The Catholics have replaced Indra with St. Anthony, who is associated with waging war against the demons. Varuna, who rules the waters and is the guardian of the moral order in Vedic times, protects the West. This direction is entrusted by the Catholics to St. Michael, who is also portrayed as the destroyer of evil and the protector of justice on earth. Yama, the Hindu god of death, guards the South; for Catholics, St. James guards this direction. Kuvera, the wealthiest is in the North for Hindus; Mary takes this direction for the Catholics (see Eck 1994:148). Thus, in St. Anthony’s *yantra*, while replacing the Hindu deities, their attributes have been transferred to the counterpart Christian divinities.
The jumbled alphabets in the cross are the mantras addressed to Jesus, the saints and Mary. There are also prayers addressed to the saints, to Mary and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which combine Christian and non-Christian sacred words. In all there are nine mantarāMkal (prayers) and these are written on the reverse of the yantra (see Picture 6.2; for English translation, see Appendix 6.1). Since it is believed that the power is not in the person but in the words, anybody can recite the prayer and control the power of the evil. Similar prayers are found among the Sri Lankan Catholics, too (Stirrat 1992:141).

A closer examination of St. Anthony’s yantra reveals that it is a combination of yantra and mantra, which is based on the principle of mantric tradition of the ancient Vedic times. yantras are diagrams of geometrical patterns engraved or drawn on paper, metal, wood, stone or other substances. In worship, the yantra is an abstract image of the deity, it is a substitute of the iconographic image of the deity. The yantra becomes alive when the sacred words are uttered invoking the deity. In that sense the yantra is a dynamic symbol of the deity’s power (Khanna 1987).

mantra, as different from a prayer, is a sacred formula or a mystical verse addressed to a deity to acquire power. It consists of powerful words, syllables, and names of gods, interjections and exhortations. Sometimes a short sentence stating the case or the wish more plainly is inserted along with words that have no intelligible meaning (see Appendix 6.2). St. Anthony’s yantra consists of letters which when uttered produces a definite sequence of sounds. The central idea is that when the sacred letters are uttered in a prescribed manner it produces cosmic vibrations and energy that can be directed to serve specific purposes of good or evil.
Sacred Knowledge and Persons

People believe that some persons are bestowed with extraordinary power to deal with the evil. One such sacred person who has gained popularity among the Tamil Catholics is a Catholic priest by name Santhanasamy. Since the Church does not recognise individual holy men having power to handle the evil or the native methods in dealing with black magic, this priest has been excommunicated from the Church. This, however, has not affected his clients and they continue to consult him. He is often referred to by some Catholic priests as the mantiracaamy (magic priest) who removes evil spells of all kinds (pilli cuuniam, ceivinai kooLaaRu) by means of Christian prayer following the indigenous principles of acquiring power to avert evil.  

According to villagers, priest Santhanasamy has the power not only to diagnose the source of trouble or disease, but also to cure it. He is a ‘doctor’ as well as a priest and a repository of traditional and sacred knowledge. From those among our informants who have consulted him we gather that he is regarded with respect as a person of prayer and a person capable of helping the people in trouble. They said ‘caamiyaruTya utaviyai naaTi vantaal nammala japam ceiya vaikiraar’ (when we come seeking his help, he makes us pray). When the Catholics consult the Hindu caamiji they do it with a strong sense of ambivalence, since the Church shuns such beliefs and practices. However, the Church does not provide effective assistance with personal crisis believed to be the result of supernatural influences.

In Rajakambeeram, Kollankudi and Thanjavur we came across a few Hindu and Catholic men and women who are believed to possess powers to deal with the evil. In the native idiom possession by the benevolent spirit is referred to as the caamiaaTi (divine-
dancers), and Dumont and Pocock (1959a:58) refer to them as god-dancers. They occasionally enter into a stage of trance, dancing in their own style and speaking in a language attributed with certain divinity by the people around them. The Hindu divine-dancers can be men or women, of high or low caste. While they are in a trance, they scream, and with a commanding voice give orders to their clients. The people around them see a divine spirit in them and these spirits are perceived as deities such as Mariamma, Kali, they all worship. The people consult them for their present problems and seek remedies.

From our field we came across a Catholic woman from Thanjavur, known to be the medium of Mary, who has gained popularity among the Catholics. People come to her throughout the week to consult her as she is seized by Mary. When possessed she becomes thirsty and weak. She asks for water and sits down quietly. Soon we can expect ‘Mary to speak through her.’ She speaks in whisper to a select few, whom she calls out by their name or by the colour of their dress or by the direction of the place from where they have come. She has an assistant who ushers in the individuals whom she beckons.

The difference between a Hindu medium and a Catholic medium is in their external manifestations. The Catholic woman is calm, weak and communicating to individuals. Among the Catholics, the consultation takes place in the privacy of people’s home and not in the church. It does not have official sanction. The Catholics go to her as she encourages people to pray the ‘rosary’ (a prayer the Church has sanctioned). People are familiar with the possession by the divine and this has been modified according to the Catholic tradition of Mary being the gentle mother.
Spirit Possession and Exorcism

Ghosts, demons or evil spirits are other forms of evil encountered by the Catholics, and such malevolent forces are referred as peey-picaacu (spirit of the dead, devil). The peey harms the individuals either by frightening them or by taking possession of them. According to the Catholics, the effect of kaattu (evil breeze) is termed payanta kooLaaRu (problem caused by fright). The indications are suffering from a sudden fever or gazing. When afflicted by kaattu people consult either the kooyilpiLLai or the Hindu puucaari to perform the ritual of mantirittal. The kooyilpiLLai prays and gives holy water to drink, while the puucaari gives sacred ash to eat and to be placed under the pillow.

We came across a Catholic girl who was affected by kaattu. One night as she was returning from a neighbouring town riding on the pillion of her father’s bicycle she experienced sudden fear. The ‘cause’ of her fear was a huge white figure criss-crossing the road and then disappearing. On reaching home she developed fever. Since on inquiry the parents ‘found’ that she was affected by kaattu, the same night a Hindu puucaari was called to nullify its evil effect.

The Tamil Catholics also share beliefs in ‘spirit possession’ prevalent in the Tamil culture. The existence of spirits with the power to influence human beings by attacking and taking control of a person’s body is an unquestioned aspect of everyday reality for the Catholics and non-Christians alike. The Catholic shrines address themselves to this problem and in turn the Tamil Catholics have combined the existing native ritual with the Christian method to deal with such difficulties. The ritual of exorcism is performed when the peey takes possession of the individual. In what follows we shall describe the nature of exorcism as it is practised among the Catholics in the area of our fieldwork.
Exorcism is ‘the act of driving or warding off demons or evil spirits from persons, places, or things that are believed to be, possessed’ (Gratsch 1966:748). According to Catholicism, the demons are the angels who disobeyed god and were cast into hell, where they establish their reign. In the Bible we read that Jesus chases demons from persons (Mathew 12: 2-30, Good News Bible). Following this tradition the early Christians continued to exorcise demons in the name of Jesus by making the sign of the cross. The Church too authorises persons to perform exorcism.

In ecclesiastical language an exorcist is a cleric who has the power to perform exorcism as part of his religious functions (McCafferty 1966:750). During their earthly life, ‘Holy persons’ like St. Benedict, St. Anthony and St. Sebastian had been authorised by the Church to exorcise. The churches dedicated to them continue to attract individuals who are possessed by the demon, as the respective saints are believed to exercise their power over the demon.

In the middle of the twentieth century a Jesuit priest by name Levell (referred to in Chap.5 in connection with pesticides) was well known for exorcism in Ramnad District. He used to command the Satan to leave the possessed person by placing a cross on the person and reciting a Latin prayer. Today the priests rarely perform exorcism, as they believe that the true cases of exorcism are rare and most of the cases are psychological or physical. One priests even refers to peey aaTTam (devil dancer) as talai aaTTam (dance of the head) (Caritas 1938:31). However, the Catholics continue to be afflicted with peey and seek the aid of the persons and places endowed with the power to deal with such matters.
Shrines and Exorcism: Exorcism is often associated with shrines especially those dedicated to St. Anthony at Muthupattinam (Ramnad District), St. Sebastian at Valayampatti, and Our Lady of Health at Valghiramanickam (Sivagangai District). The researcher came across a number of cases in these shrines. From the account given by the kooyilpiLLai of these shrines and the Catholics in the villages of our study we present the peey and peepyiTittal (the act of possession) and peey viraTTutal (chasing the devil) as perceived by the Tamil Catholics.

As believed by the Catholics there are of two kinds of beings which possess and are harmful to people. They are the maleficent spirits of the dissatisfied dead and the inferior Hindu deities. The Catholics hold that all the dead do not become peey, but only those who meet with unnatural or untimely deaths. Those persons who die before their time are certain to desire continued life and the same applies to persons who have attachment to worldly pleasures. It is precisely due to beliefs such as these that Catholics value having a good death. A good death is the one where the person leaves the world willingly and desires to join god rather than remain on this earth. Some of them say that when a proper funeral rite is not accorded to the dead they become peey. They haunt particular places or trees especially when it is dark (see Chap. 3 and 4, and Caplan 1985:113).

Apart from the human dead becoming peey, Catholics recognise the existence of Hindu deities like Muni, Matan, Karupan and Alakar. They do not worship them, but consider them as dangerous bloodthirsty beings capable of inflicting harm (see Deliege 1999:255). Hindu women believe that going past a temple in a state of impurity angers the Hindu deity. Catholic women share this belief and thus they avoid passing by these
shrines especially during their menstruation for fear of being possessed by them. The elderly Catholics warn the young saying ‘anta caami nammala onnum caiakkutTaatu, naama tuura irukkaiyil anta pakkam pooka kuuTaatu’ (these deities should not harm us and you should avoid that direction during menstruation).

In states of bodily impurity (ttiTTu), e.g., during menstruation and childbirth, women are vulnerable to demonic attack. Sinfulness and sexual desires especially in young unmarried women, when they are overcome with the desire to get married render them liable to be possessed. kooyilpiLLai referred to a young woman who had been possessed for four years in succession, whose parents he had advised to get her married off, as he felt that it was her unfulfilled desires which made her vulnerable.

Several persons in the villages affirmed that fear is the main cause of demonic possession: ‘aranTavanukku irunTatellaam peey’ (every dark spot is a devil for the one who is frightened), goes the popular saying. According to our informants, women are by nature weak and can be easily frightened. In fact, women outnumber men in spirit possession. Mosse (1986:470), while pointing out to weakness as the essential precondition in possession, also adds beautification as another cause which increases vulnerability to attack. Thus, the Catholics say that when women go out alone or with a group with their hair left loose or flowers in their hair, with turmeric applied on the face, etc., attract peey.

All the same, the Catholics also hold on to the belief that no good Catholic is ever harmed by peey. One who is steadfast in faith and prays regularly need not fear the peey – ‘kaTavuLmeel pakti uLLavarkaLiTam peey kiTTa varaatu’ (those have faith in god will not be afflicted by the peey). Only persons of weak faith become easy prey to the peey.
The possession usually occurs outside the boundaries of the village, as the divinities of the village guard it (see Caplan 1989:55). The peey can not reside inside the village but frequents places like the forest, cuTukaaTu (the Hindu cemetery), and lonely groves. This is because, as Pfaffenberger (1980:208) notes, ‘the village is considered to be a part of the inside or inner world and is well-ordered and resplendent with fertility, equilibrium, happiness and progress. The “outside world” on the other hand is one torn between wilderness, chaos, ignorance and evil.’ The wilderness is primordially the repository of evil beings which seek to destroy human happiness.

People become vulnerable to the peey’s attack at definite times during the course of the day - mid afternoon, dusk and midnight, when the individual’s defences are supposed to be weak. At these times people try to avoid places where the peey resides.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that the Catholics share with the Hindus beliefs about the nature of peey, its place of residence and conditions under which it is likely to possess a person. While both have some general belief in spirit possession, the Catholics differ on certain grounds. As Deliege (1999:252-53) observes, the ‘Catholics tend to ignore the link which may exist between morality and spirit possession. To them spirit possession is not the consequence of some moral misbehaviour but is rather the unfortunate outcome of their relative neglect of the rules for ritual purity, a neglect which particularly annoys Hindu deities.’ Our informants are also of the same view.

*The ritual of exorcism*: We shall now narrate a case of exorcism at the church dedicated to St. Sebastian, well-known for exorcism, in Valayampatti, a small Catholic village in Sivagangai District.
The exorcism starts with the pilgrimage to the shrine, where the possessed stay for a week or even some months. This practice of staying in the church is known as vaaratukkuiruttal. During the stay, the individuals cook, eat and sleep within the church enclosure. The stay at the shrine can be best viewed as a ‘war of attrition’ in which the demons are exposed to the holy and sacred (Stirrat 1977:140-41).

Those staying at the shrine are given specific instructions by the kooyilpiLLai. They lead an ascetic life fasting, praying and doing penance such as kneeling for hours and praying. They rise early in the morning, bathe and in their wet clothes, circumambulate the shrine and the flag mast three times with hands folded in prayer. It is at this time that some run in a frenzied state towards the flag mast, screaming and crying aloud and the possession is confirmed. They join in special prayers conducted by the kooyilpiLLai. At these prayers a lighted candle is placed on their palms (see Photo 6.1). The melting wax from the burning candles, according to the kooyilpiLLai, activates the spirit, which then becomes restless and reveals its identity. Those who are not possessed do the same as a mark of penance. This ritual in general is understood as an ascetic practice intended to purify oneself in preparation for the exorcising of the peey.

In addition, the persons are asked to look at the statue of St. Sebastian as they pray. The authenticity of possession is established when the person is brought in contact with the sacred. The prevalent belief is that the peey within the person shows up when it comes in contact with the sacred space and objects such as the cross, the saint’s statue, etc. The statue is the key focus of the saint’s power. Thus, the peey can not encounter the saint, which results in restlessness. It was also reported that when they look at the saint’s
statue they experience a burning sensation and scream eriyuteey; some plead for relief from the burning sensation.

After the prayer all of them drink the holy water and some of them eat the leaves of manjanatty maram (Morinda tree) which is believed to have curative value as it is growing in the church compound. These rituals make the peey uncomfortable. All locally popular shrines have such trees with sacred curative significance - Valghiramanickam (a tamarind tree), Andavoorani, (a margosa tree), and in Muthupattinam (a mango tree). Similar beliefs are held by the Hindus, e.g., the margosa tree in Thiruvettriyyur temple is believed to possess curative value.

Both among the Hindus and the Catholics, Tuesdays and Fridays are important as far as the practice of exorcism is concerned. On these days the spirits are supposed to be aggressive. Special prayers are conducted during which St. Sebastian is believed to drive away the spirit. The following is an episode of exorcism witnessed by the researcher herself:

A young woman said that she had been a hard-working person until all of a sudden she lost interest in her work and family. Her husband said that she sat idle all day long and did not respond to his requests. She was possessed and said ‘one day at about 3 p.m. while returning home from the field carrying firewood, I heard a voice. I turned around and found no one and at that moment fear gripped me.’ She was alone, there was a mysterious voice and she experienced extreme emotion, especially fear. All such occurrences are typical of the first signs of possession.
This woman was staying at the shrine for three weeks. In the second week she revealed to the kooyilpILLaI some of the names of the peey. During the third week of her stay, all peeykal (plural form of peey) decided to leave the person.

On a Friday (13 October 2001) morning the woman in her wet clothes ran towards the flag mast and rolled on the ground there. She then returned to the church, stood outside and prayed. Later she went into the church and knelt down to pray. Incense was lighted in front of her while she held burning candles in her palms. She started swinging her head and announced aloud naan poreen (I will go). The kooyilpILLaI asked her to go to the entrance of the church, there the ritual of peey viratTutal (chasing the devil) began (see Photo 6.2 and 6.3).

The kooyilpILLaI asked her to give the names of the peey and she pronounced nine names, which were cross-checked with the names given on Tuesday and they tallied. Some of them were those who had committed suicide in the village and others were the Hindu deities such as muNi. It is important to note that though the possessed person is a Catholic, some of the spirits are from the Hindu pantheon. Not surprisingly, the Catholics, like the Hindus, fear the minor Hindu deities and consequently come under their attack. Belief in the Christian divinity has not rid the Catholics fear of the minor Hindu deities as they belong to the same cultural universe as that of the Hindus.

In the process of peey ooTTutal or viratTutal (chasing the peey), as a sign of the peey’s departure a few strands of hair are given by the possessed, which the exorcist cuts and burns in a place not trampled upon by people. Keeping with this belief the woman took out a few strands of her hair and the kooyilpILLaI knotted them each time she pronounced a name. After all the names were given the woman made the sign of the cross
on the door step of the church three times saying 'mukkaalamum cattiyam naan ini varamaaTeen' (I promise that for all ages I will not return again). While making this promise St. Sebastian is called as a witness saying 'Sabastiyaare niiye caatci.' After burning the hair the person was brought back to the entrance of the church and three pots of water were poured on her. With this the ritual of exorcism was complete. The person later returned to the church and offered candles as a thanksgiving for being delivered from the torment of the peeykal.

The kooyilpiLLai’s role in exorcism is more as a Church functionary and he does not claim any special power, though the Catholics do attribute such power to him. Generally the kooyilpiLLai and individuals who have no fear of peey conduct exorcism. Children and young girls are discouraged from witnessing exorcism rites. It is believed that persons who are easily frightened are vulnerable to the onslaught of the peey and they could be possessed.

Though the Catholics and the Hindus share the same ritual procedure in exorcism, the Catholics have replaced some rites and given up other rites and in that category fall the following: In the Hindu exorcism the possessed rushes from the village beyond the settlement carrying a huge stone. The stone is dropped under a tamarind tree or a palmyra tree. Once the possessed drops the stone the exorcist cuts a few strands of hair and the same is nailed to the tree. Thus, the peey in this case is chased from ‘inside’ the dwelling place to the ‘outside’ the dwelling quarters of the people. The nailing of the hair to the tree is a sign of controlling the activity of the peey with the help of the deity. It is perhaps the possessed rushing from the village beyond the settlement which is transferred to the frantic run from the church to the flag mast. The flag mast in Tamil is koTimaram (flag
tree); the *koTimaram* replicates the tree and eventually the forest that lies out side the settlement of the living quarters. *koTimaram* also lies outside the sacred space of the church, in a way denoting the transition from 'inside' to 'outside.'

The Hindu exorcist beats the drum while the possessed swings his/her head in a trance. He smears the sacred ash on the person demanding the evil spirit to leave the person. In some cases a goddess possesses the Hindu exorcist and he enters into a dialogue with the *peey* on the basis of the power vested in him by the possessing deity (Basu 1999:98). As a final rite the Hindu *puucaari* offers to the *peey* the demanded items, e.g., chicken, cooked rice, egg, fish, etc.

The Catholics have given up the beating of the drum, as it is not used in the worship of the Christians. They use holy water instead of sacred ash. The items demanded by the *peey* are not offered as the saint overpowers the *peey*, and it finally consents to leave without any of its demands being fulfilled. The *kooyilpILLai* or for that matter any other Catholic exorcist is not possessed by the Christian pantheon. The exorcism is purely the work of the saint and the consequence of the ascetic life lived by the individual during the stay in the church.

The differences in the ritual of exorcism between the Catholics and the Hindus no doubt make the former unique; but the way it is practised by the Tamil Catholics certainly carries the stamp of their culture. Thus, the persistence of native beliefs and rituals in exorcism is a high point in the process of indigenisation of Catholicism.

**Sacred Objects**

To protect oneself from evil the Catholics wear *punita Anthoniyar taayattu* (St. Anthony's talisman), cross, holy medal, rosary, scapulars, etc. The *Anthoniyar*
*taayattu* is an imitation of the Hindu *taayattu*, with the difference that a Christian prayer, instead of a Hindu *mantra*, is written on a piece of paper concealed in it. Similarly, like the Hindus, as a precautionary measure against the entry of demons, the Catholics place a broom or a pair of slippers or a pounding stick at the entrance to the house. Iron is also used as a charm, since it is believed that it makes the *peey* burst into flames and disappear. In Sengudi village an iron piece was nailed to the doorframe to avert the evil.

Sacred persons and sacred knowledge together and inseparably provide the setting for a meaningful performance of the rituals that we have discussed. Certainly the access to certain kinds of sacred knowledge by Fr. Santhanasamy, the Catholic exorcists and the Catholic woman who is the medium of Maata, sets them off from ordinary Catholics. They are *sacred persons*, as they are able to deal with the people's notion of evil. They legitimise their role by combining their Christian beliefs and practices with the existing native ones. Thus, the Catholics consulting them find a legitimate way of dealing with their beliefs related to evil.

With the exception of a few, the majority of the Catholic priests ignore the native religious beliefs and practices which the people find quite powerful. The *kooyilpiLLai* carries out exorcism since that has been the practice for centuries. While the priest does not explicitly approve of this practice, neither does he oppose it. Thus, based on the 'need' of the people and combined with the existing native rituals, Catholicism acquires a different dimension from the avowed Church beliefs.
Summary and Conclusion

This chapter was an attempt to look into the complex world of rituals that helps sustain the everyday life of the Catholics which is filled with moments of crisis in the physical, social and psychological realms. Considering the practices associated with the concept of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness and the influence of evil and evil spirits, this chapter sought to understand the process of indigenisation among the Catholics in Tamil Nadu.

We have observed that there is a high degree of resemblance between the practices followed by the Catholics and their Hindu counterparts. How is this to be explained? Catholicism, though known for its elaborate theological teachings, has left some important grounds such as auspiciousness in terms of time and direction, and the influence of evil eye not covered to a great extent. At the level of pastoral ‘monitoring’ the Church did not employ adequate mechanism to ‘control’ the converts as they developed their own methods of coping with life-crises. In the absence of well-articulated official practices coupled with considerable freedom available to them, the Catholics had no difficulty from the beginning to replicate almost in totality the practices of the Hindus. The whole set of practices associated with auspiciousness and inauspiciousness highlight the process of replication in indigenisation.

Previous studies have often recognised the process of superimposition in indigenisation (Sahay 1981). How does this superimposition take place and what is the agency involved in it? It is often the Church that is considered to be the agency of such transmutation. The present study reveals that in the absence of the involvement of the Church, a set of exorcists and soothsayers emerge on the scene, who combine the existing
native methods with that of Christian prayers. The woman considered as being the medium of Mary is a case in point. Similarly, in villages where exorcism is practised, the exorcists have emerged on their own in imitation of the practice of exorcism among the Hindus.

Though the realm of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness and the casting of evil eye are grounds not covered by the Church, and though they give rise to a set of persons acting as an agency, they (soothsayers, exorcists) find themselves facing a limit to their freedom. The question facing them is how to draw upon the meaning system governing such Hindu practices and present it as Christian. They have achieved this by transferring the form and content of certain Hindu practices and placed them within the Christian paradigm. The yantra of St. Anthony is a clear example of how ingeniously the unofficial agents of indigenisation overcome the limits set by the forms and meanings of two different religions. Similarly, the positioning of the possessed Catholic with reference to the notion of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is not that of the Hindu practices. In the latter, the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is defined in terms of the boundaries of the village, whereas in the case of the Catholics, it is defined in terms of the church, entrance to the church and the flag mast outside the church.

There is yet another process of indigenisation that has eluded the attention of the scholars so far, namely, indigenisation under the cover of secrecy. When there are no Catholic soothsayers or exorcists, or when they are not found to be effective, the Catholics seek the assistance of the Hindu specialists. They resort to typical Hindu practices like cutting the coins to wish evil on their foes. The Catholics are not willing to make this open; they feel embarrassed if fellow Catholics come to know.
It may be argued that since such practices are carried out secretly, they cannot be considered a legitimate process of indigenisation. This kind of perspective is borne of certain moral considerations. For sociologists, the social character of an action is more privileged than the moral character of the action. As long as the factuality of the practice can be established, it could be considered one of the processes of indigenisation.

Though the notions of auspiciousness, evil eye, and possession are comparatively marginal to the theological teachings, what needs to be pointed out is the differential disposition of the Church to the adherence of the believers. The disposition of the Church to exorcism is one of acceptance as there are many references to possessions in the Bible and in the traditions of the Church in the medieval period. There have been many well-known cases of exorcism permitted officially by the Church.

With regard to practices associated with the notions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, the disposition of the Church reflects certain ambivalence. These practices are perceived to be superstitious and therefore they are tolerated hoping that when the believers are educated such practices will disappear.

The practices relating to casting or containing evil evoke total disapproval from the Church as they are directed against persons and are destructive in intention. Since the Church does not condone such practices, they are practised secretly. The Church is not willing to consider the supposed possibility of an individual using the faculty of control over evil forces for protection of persons. The excommunication of Fr. Santhanasamy reflects this disposition.

In brief, the quotidian life of the Catholics constitutes a fertile terrain of specific forms of indigenisation.
Endnotes

1. Two cases of *morapaTTu koolaaRu* were observed, one in a Hindu Kali temple and the other in the church in Oriyur. In making up with the enemy the Catholics give to each other the holy water from the church to be consumed, while the Hindus give sacred ash.

2. Among the Hindus, Agni, the Vedic fire god is in charge of Southeast; Nirriti, goddess of death and decay, guards the Southwest; Vaayu, the wind god, is in the Northwest; and in the Northeast is Iishaana. In the St. Anthony's *yantra*, the holy cross is entrusted with all these directions.

3. Fr. Santhanasamy uses the five elements of the universe - fire, earth, sky, water and ether - to affect persons positively by following the ceremonies prescribed in the book of *maantirikam* and by prayers addressed to Christian divinity. These five elements are known as *panja puutaMkal, puutaMkal* refers to the power and strength of each element. He recites the prescribed *mantras* on full moon and new moon days, days which are believed to be endowed with special powers.

4. The term *peey* is derived from the Sanskrit word *preta*, meaning the ‘departed.’ It refers to the spirits of human beings who, from the moment of death until they are in communion with god, remain in a limbo, neither with members of the living nor that of the dead (Blackburn, Reiniche, quoted in Nabokov 1997:299).

5. There are a few studies of exorcism among the Catholics: Documenting the ritual of exorcism among the Sri Lankan Catholics, Stirrat (1977) analyses ‘the demonic possession from the point of view of its existence as a collective representation.’ Discussing the rituals of possession among the Catholics in Kanyakumari District, Ram (1992:93-105) has observed that demonic possession enables women to reinterpret ‘dominant’ symbolic constructs of the female body and sexuality and ‘challenge the daily discipline of living within the confines of respectable femininity.’ Describing the Catholic exorcism cults in Ramnad District, Mosse (1986:478-87 and see also Ackerman 1981:92) examines the continuity and discontinuity in relation to malevolent possession and exorcism between the Hindus and the Catholics. He presents the Catholic saint as representing the forces of absolute good at war with
undifferentiated evil in the indigenous cultural belief system.

6. The *peey* may or may not manifest itself to the victim. According to our informants, the victim is suddenly frightened by a sound, senses that some body is calling and fails to see the person, sees an animal or figure of unnatural proportions, or a dark object, and these are considered as *peey*. A common belief in the villages is that some of the dead persons become snakes. Thus, in one of exorcism observed by the researcher in Marithiammal *kallaRai*, the possessed person revealed that 'I came in the form of a snake, and took possession of her.'

7. The nine names given by the woman are (1) Tankarasu (died consuming poison), (2) Aaraayi (died hanging), (3) Paapaal (died of attack by Muni (Demon), (4) Kaliamma (died by spirit possession), (5) Amurtam (died of mental illness), (6) VaTakaatu Muni, (7) Citalakuntu Muni, (8) Pottukaattu Muni, and (9) Raakumaratu Muni.
6.1 Praying with Lighted Candles on the Palm

6.2 The Ritual of *peey viraTTutal*

6.3 The Possessed Swinging Her Head
6.1 St. Anthony’s Yantra
6.2 Prayer in Tamil to the Saints, Jesus and Mary