ON THE HANDLING OF THE MEAT, AND RELATED MATTERS, IN TWO SOUTH INDIAN BUFFALO SACRIFICES

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It is well recognized that the South Indian village buffalo sacrifice is a rite that has long been in a state of desuetude. Many factors can be cited as contributing to its decline: brahmanical pressures, which for centuries have inveighed against all forms of animal sacrifice; the loss, with the elimination of kingdoms large and small, of a direct ideological link between village buffalo sacrifices and buffalo sacrifices performed by kings, and connected with the royally sponsored "ten day" festival of Dussarā (from Sanskrit *daśāhara* 'ten days'); and most recently, the prohibition since 1947 of all buffalo sacrifices (seemingly because the buffalo is the largest of the conventional animal victims; other animals are not similarly protected) by the post-Independence government.

Because of this situation, information on buffalo sacrifices is both rare and uneven. On the rare side, all of the factors just mentioned, but especially the last, have made it increasingly difficult to get recent ethnological information, whether it be from informants' memories or from actual field observation. But buffalo sacrifices are still performed, not only in South India but in North India as well. As regards the South, which will be our main concern in this study, it is not that the government prohibition is unknown. It may be invoked, as it apparently was on May 14, 1984 when police broke up a buffalo sacrifice at a town near Bangalore, despite the protests of a rock-throwing mob (1). But police presence, as we shall see, provides no guarantee that the prohibition will be upheld. As regards the unevenness of information, it will suffice to say that the accounts which do exist are full of gaps (the rites are in any case too complex and varied to

expect otherwise) and are either selective or random in their treatment of details. On the subject of this study, one can examine the entire bibliography on South Indian buffalo sacrifices which I compiled for a 1980 article (2), and also look at the few studies which have appeared since then (3), and find only minimal information on what is done with the meat of the sacrificial victim (or victims).

Fortunately, however, there is one remarkable exception: the 51 pages of manuscript entitled "Details of the Gráma Devata Festival performed at Serúr – March 1829,", that were handwritten by Sir Walter Elliot in volume I of his three volume *Aboriginal caste book* (4). This stupendous resource, which lies in the India Office Library, London, was written while Elliot was a civil servant in India, centered for much of this time at Dharwar (I suspect that Serur is the Sirur in Bijapur District, Karnataka, about 75 miles northeast of Dharwar). As far as I know, with the exception of an article in which I highlighted another of Elliot's *Aboriginal caste book* entries – recounting a Canarese myth concerning the origins of the buffalo sacrifice (5) – Elliot's work has claimed no other scholarly attention.

We will thus be able to draw on Elliot's rich account for one of our two descriptions of the South Indian buffalo sacrifice. The other will be supplied by our own field study of a buffalo sacrifice held on May 15, 1984 at the town of Gingee (Tamil Ceñci), the administrative headquarters of Gingee Taluk, South Arcot District, Tamilnadu. The bringing together of these two rites into one study results, of course, from the fortuitous nature of the data at our disposal. There is not only a considerable time gap – one hundred and fifty-five years – between these two ceremonies, but a considerable geographical distance as well. The buffalo sacrifice is subject to significant regional variation, and this is a major consideration for our study, for, as several authors have observed, it is precisely in Tamilnadu that it is both most uncommon and, if one may so put it, most transformationally aberrant (6). These temporal and spatial distances are no doubt also interrelated with major sociological differences between nineteenth century Serūr and twentieth century Gingee. We can be only minimally attentive to these various factors in an article of this scope. But we must stress that the distances between our two primary examples also afford us with certain advantages. We can, with some help from accounts of geographically intermediary ceremonies, spot both significant differences and important common elements.

With this in mind, before we turn to our primary data, we should note two things. First of all, the matter of the distribution of the meat of the sacrificial victim cannot be treated in isolation from other aspects of the ceremonial procedures and intentions of the buffalo sacrifice. We must thus attempt to discuss the treatment of the meat in relation to an understanding of the buffalo sacrifice as a whole. Second, in making such an attempt, we must bring into our discussion certain elements of the two ceremonies which contribute to the total configuration of these sacrifices. There is not only a complex ensemble in each local instance, but in the consistency of the elements – despite their local and regional variations and transformations – that constitute the South Indian buffalo sacrifice itself as a multifaceted whole. As we describe these two sacrificial scenarios, we must not lose sight of these wider concerns. We shall proceed by offering first a summary of Elliot's account; then we shall describe our findings at Gingee; and finally we will discuss the relation between our present theme of meat distribution and the buffalo sacrifice as a whole.

1. The buffalo sacrifice at Serur, March 1829

The goddess who is honored at the Serūr ceremonies is called Úr Dyámavva (*ūr* 'village'; *-avva* 'mother'), and is connected throughout the ceremonies with Lakṣmī, the goddess of prosperity (7). The opening rites take place at the Lakṣmī temple on a Tuesday, a «day sacred to all Śakti deities» (8). Úr Dyámavva is dressed for the festival in a yellow saree (generally, in these circumstances, symbolic of auspiciousness and renunciatory chastity or virginity) (9).

Henceforth, with the exception of certain processions, her image is kept either in or in front of the Lakṣmī temple. Participating families assemble. A potter brings five pots for consecration. The sacrificial buffalo (*pattad khulga*) is provided by the two participating untouchable communities, the Mangs and Mahars, who also bring pots to be consecrated for the preparation of the meat offering.

As part of this ceremony a light is lit, which is then kept burning for the next eight days. During this time, a shed is erected for Úr Dyámavva in front of the Lakṣmī temple, and beside a water tank or reservoir.

The main events of the festival then transpire over a six day period which begins on a subsequent monday. We thus present them in their sequential order.

Monday (day one). Signalling the beginning of the festival proper, two pots are placed before the Goddess in the temple. They are worshipped with an offering of lights (*dīpārādhanā*), and then taken to the house of the village headman, the Patel. At the Patel's house, a procession is then formed in which the two pots and the sacrificial buffalo are returned to the temple. There the pots are deposited in the temple and the buffalo is tied up. As noted earlier, it is the Untouchables who provide the sacrificial buffalo; apparently it has been brought to the Patel's house so that he can be represented as its "symbolic" donor (10).

Tuesday (day two). This day begins with the preparation at the temple of large pots of non-vegetarian food. An honorary group of twelve lady dignitaries of various castes calls Úr Dyámavva out of the temple to share the meat offering (*naivedya*) with them. The goddess is then offered the meat in the presence of the whole village community. She then has her marriage badge or *tāli* tied around her neck by an officiant called the Gaṇāchāri, apparently in this context a sort of master of village ceremonies (11). Then her image is "lifted into her car (*Rath*)", and she is taken in procession to the village gate and back to the temple. During the procession, which is led by dancing and music, an officiant called the Potrāj «makes himself very conspicuous, cracking a long whip, lashing himself, and insisting each time on receiving a double fee, while the authorities (the Patel and Rudranna) try to pacify him» (12). The office of Potrāj is normally assumed by an untouchable (13).

When the processional "car" (palanquin?) returns to the temple, Úr Dyámavva is placed before Lakṣmī and the twelve lady dignitaries offer her a "breakfast" *pūjā*. Then the ladies prepare a four-colored pentagonal figure, called a *surgi* (14), in front of the idol, placing pots at each of the five corners. Various articles are placed in the pots, and the pots themselves are joined together by threads. Then other consecrated pots are brought by Mahars and Mangs and a Barhi (a subgroup of the Dhangar shepherd caste?) (15), and also placed at the corners of the *surgi*. These are filled with a kind of pottage called *yembli*. Pūjās are made by Dher (16) choristers (*āsādis*), and the Potrāj's whip is also honored. The *surgi* is then garlanded, and small cakes supplied by Meti Ryots (head farmers) (17) are set on plates around it or hung from the

threads that connect the pots, along with some of the garlands. The hanging of the garlands is the duty of the Naik (18). The ceremonies of the day are then concluded with the sacrifice of two sheep near the *surgi*.

Wendesday (day three). The main event of this day is the sacrifice of the *pattad khulga*, or sacrificial buffalo. «This should be one of those devoted to the goddess in consequence of a vow, which wanders about *ad libitum* doing much mischief to the fields, and being generally very large and fierce, are not amenable to control. On this occasion however it was a small animal purchased for the occasion» (19). In the morning, the *pūjāri* or priest (a Dhangar) (20) gives *haldi* (turmeric powder) to the Mangs, who smear it on the buffalo's forehead. They then lead the buffalo into "the enclosure" (apparently the shed constructed for the ceremonies in front of the Lakṣmī temple). There, amidst much spectacle and confusion, they seek to throw the animal to the ground and lift his legs. «His mouth is firmly held, that he may utter no cry, which would be inauspicious, and the head is then severed with a large knife. One foreleg being at the same time divided at the knee is thrust into the mouth and both are then placed on the *surgi* where they remain to the end of the ceremony» (21). While the animal is slaughtered, a cordon of sword-bearing guardians called Shéksindís or Shetsandis (22) surround the ceremony to guarantee that no stranger touch the blood. Should this happen, they will chase him and, if they catch him, kill him; for if the outsider should take it to his own village, the whole merit of the sacrifice passes on to it (23).

When the Mangs then make a light offering (*ārati pūjā*) over the head (probably placing a lamp on it) (24), the sacrifice is completed and the carcass is divided as follows: the Mangs get two fifths; the Mahars one fifth; the Āsādis (Dher choristers) one fifth; and the Hallabs one fifth (25). The skin goes to the Naik. The head remains for now on the *surgi*.

This is the main meat-dividing event of the festival cycle, but there are related rites that follow. At this point, after the slaughter of the sacrificial buffalo and the division of its meat, there is a rite called "Cherag (Karagam) throwing": on the spot where the buffalo had been sacrificed, a «large pot [*karagam*] ... of the food cooked on the former day for the women's feast is smashed over a round basket into which fall the food and broken shards; over the whole a living kid is hewn in pieces by the Potrāj which is called the Hari Mari kid. The blood and offal of the buffalo are also

mixed in the mess» (26). One of the Mangs then starts off with the basket, followed by other Mangs and the sword-bearing Shéksindís. The Mang, sometimes possessed, scatters the contents of the basket as he goes along, proceeding through the whole village. Evil spirits are thus propitiated. At various points along the itinerary, sheep are sacrificed.

Thursday (day four). This fourth day is dedicated to the fulfillment of private vows and offerings by "caste people" (that is, by Hindus of higher rank than untouchables but lower than Brahmans). These individual rites contrast with those of the previous day, which for the most part entail the whole village. These "private cult" (as opposed to "public cult") rites include the following: certain women coming to the temple dressed only in neem branches (27); Naiks coming before the goddess with skewers set through the flesh of their backs; offerings of goats and buffalos by Hallabs; and various meat offerings.

Friday (day five). "Private cult" offerings continue on this day, which is marked primarily for the fulfillment of vows by Dhers to make further animal offerings. A pile of heads grows from the previous day.

Saturday (day six). On this last day, the «ceremonies [are] more numerous and extraodinary» than on any previous day (28). First, the twelve lady dignitaries gather at the potter's house to prepare a final food offering (*naivedya*); it is for the Patel to give to the goddess. This he does at his own house. There, the participants in the public cult are given fees, and then all breakfast on the remains of the offering. The Potrāj's whip is honored with a *pūjā* and garlanded, and the Potrāj is singled out for special recompense (101 suparis, 101 bidis, etc.). The Barhi's wife, also garlanded and dressed in a yellow turmeric-dyed saree (*haldi seri*), prepares now to carry five pots (*lotas*) on her head in a procession from the Patel's house to the temple.

In this procession, the Patel is supposed to roll all the way on the ground, a rite symbolic of debasement and self-offering to the goddess, and sometimes done by individuals as part of the "private cult" (29) rather than the "public cult", as at Serūr. The Patel, however, did not fulfill this vow himself, but was replaced by his (no doubt younger) brother (substitutions in the handling of impurities and the undertaking of impure tasks are, of course, common et every level of Indian sacrificial ceremonial, from the recipients – gods and demons – to the participants). The procession, led by the musicians and highlighting the Potrāj at several

points, finally stops at a small altar behind the temple. This is «the *Potrāj katta*, a small square stone *chabutra* about two to three feet square and two to three feet high» – «a kind of altar», as Elliot notes in his margin (30). Here the Barhi's wife places the five *lotas*, which are filled with food; then, after making a meat offering himself, the «rolling Patel receives a turban» (31). A turban is also now tied on the *Potrāj katta*, which receives various other offerings (jawar grain, broken coconut, etc.) as well. At this point, let us just note the correspondence between the Patel, the *Potrāj katta* (both turbaned), and of course the Potrāj himself (32).

These ceremonies bring the Potrāj to the point of carrying out his culminating role:

> «The Potrāj is then said to free the village (*úr bidisoṇa*). The sacrificial lamb being concealed, he goes to seek for it and brings it to the altar. He smears it with *bandar* [ash] and feeds it with neem leaves. Then rolling his eyes and appearing to be under supernatural influence, he looks wildly about, seizes the poor little kid, strikes it two or three times with his whip which he places upon it and then shows it to the people lying quite still as if dead. It remains in this apparently insensible state, and he puts it on the ground and takes it up again without its showing the least symptom of animation. The Potrāj being an elderly man and somewhat deficient in teeth transferred on his younger brother the disgusting task that was to follow. He was a lad about sixteen or seventeen and had never practiced before, and all the tribe of Āsādis endeavoured to encourage him. His hair was loose and hung wildly about his shoulders; gradually he became excited, staring and looking wildly round. The unfortunate kid was put before him, which he attacked with his teeth endeavouring to tear it to pieces. When he had eaten through its throat and the poor beast was quite dead the horrid scene closed» (33).

The food in the *lotas* beside the *Potrāj katta* is then presented to the Potrāj in a blanket. «He smells them with his bloody face and they are all buried close to the altar» (34). The Potrāj then gets *pice* (coins) as his "biting gifts" (*kack-ganthi*). A margin note indicates that up till now in this ceremony the Potrāj's hands have been tied behind him, for at this point they are freed. The Potrāj

then rushes off, «leaving the village whence he is not to return for three days» (35).

After this, the Naik heads a coconut-breaking ceremony before the goddess. Then, at the *surgi*, food offerings are divided among the "caste people". Then the heads of all the animals sacrificed are gathered up into a pile near the *surgi*. Elliot indicates that these too are also apportioned, though apparently he is referring only to those of animals other than the buffalo. These latter are accounted for differently:

> «For the remainder a scramble takes place, everyone seizing what he can. A great number of Hallabs, Bedars [traditionally hunters], Dhangars, Dhers and even Lingayats and lads of all castes were immediately rolling in the mass of gore and filth from which a horrid stench arose, the whole being in a state of putrefaction. The heads were shied about in all directions, the Bramins being well besmeared and particularly old Rangapa [no doubt a Brahman] .... The scramble for the buffalo heads is confined to the Mangs and Mahars. Whoever obtained a head, took and buried it in his field with the chaff, thereby obtaining a greater share of the goddess's favor» (36).

It is only the heads of the buffalos offered in the "private cult" that are sought for such "individual" benefits. The head of the *pattad khulga* will be handled separately.

Following this melée, the twelve lady dignitaries offer a *pūjā* to the goddess, and then her image is removed by the carpenter to be taken to the village boundary. In this procession, Elliot has one last remarkable scene to recount:

> «From this moment all distinctions of caste, rank, and station cease and a scene of the wildest disorder reigns. Raniga [a title for the leader of the Āsādis (37)] begins by abusing the goddess in the grossest manner; then directs his fury against the Sircar, the Naik, the Patel, and everyone he sees. The Āsādis and Dhers attack every person they can lay hold of – Bramins, Lingayats, Patels, Zemindars; the dancing women jump on their shoulders and the most ludicrous spectacles ensue. In this manner they proceed to the boundary, but the Serūr lands being very extensive, ... they go only as far as the cultivated lands extend, where there is a small temple of the *devate* [*sic*]. There they set the idol» (38).

It is not clear who this *devate* or "divinity" is, or in which direction his or her shrine lies. In any case, at this interior boundary various vegetarian offerings (a mixture of seeds; five dates, copras, and areca nuts) are offered to the goddess. When the Raniga continues his ritual abuse, he is bribed to be quiet by the Zilladars and Sircar. The twelve lady dignitaries offer incense (*dhūpārati*) to "fumigate" the goddess. And then most of the participants go home.

There remain, however, those which have to do with the final dismantling and discharging of the dangerous power concentrated in the festival. The head of the *pattad khulga*, the main sacrificial buffalo, has also been brought to the boundary line. There it is buried by the Dhers. And the image of the goddess is taken apart by the carpenter, who unscrews its head and arms, puts them in a basket, and «goes quietly home» (39).

For the rest of the day all of the village temples are closed, and no music must be heard. In the evening, the Lakṣmī temple is the only one opened. Apparently she is once again Lakṣmī, goddess of prosperity, in her own right, and no longer defined by her relation to the violent and dangerous cult of Ur Dyámavva. The tank near her temple is filled with turmeric, and a festive atmosphere reigns. The Potrāj alone must not return to the village; he has left, having started off from the boundary, and must not be seen for three days (40).

2. The buffalo sacrifice at Gingee, May 15, 1984 (41)

In turning now to the ceremony held at contemporary Gingee, it must be recognized at the outset that our description will not match that of Elliot either in color or in wealth of detail. The main reasons for this difference – other than the intangibles of anthropological skill and intent – have already been hinted at: the temporal distance that separates 1829 from 1984, and the spatial distance that separates Serūr from Gingee. This is, however, quite a complex matter, and merits a word at this point.

As we have already noted(see n.6), in terms of its spatial distribution the buffalo sacrifice is far more common, and has far greater consistency, in the broad area that comprises and connects the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra than it does in Tamilnadu. We may thus expect to find that certain elements common to buffalo sacrifices in the more northern states

are lacking in the rite in Tamilnadu. In some cases this may be due to loss or forgetting, in others to incomplete diffusion. But there is also evidence that certain of the differences result from transformations which elements familiar from the more northern rites have undergone in the Tamil milieu. Such, as we shall see, is the case with the Potrāj.

The case of Gingee, however, forces one to be extremely cautious about generalizations that distinguish the Tamil area from those areas to the north and west. Between ca. 1190 and 1714, Gingee, with its splendid rock fort and massive fortifications, was the center of a regional kingdom. It achieved its greatest renown and power under the rule of Telugu speaking Nāyaks (increasingly independent "viceroys" of the Vijayanagar Empire), whose period (ca. 1464-1648) (42) was one that brought on an influx of Telugu speaking peoples into the area. It is possible that some "northern" impact was registered on the form of the Gingee buffalo sacrifice by the Nāyaks or other Telugu speaking peoples. But such an influence is at present untraceable in any detail. Nonetheless, there is good reason to suspect that all the "kings" of Gingee, including the Nāyaks, were familiar with the cult of the royal buffalo sacrifice. And this brings us to the subject of the character of the Gingee buffalo sacrifice: to what degree is it a traditional village buffalo sacrifice, and to what degree is it a royal buffalo sacrifice?

Half way up the dramatic six hundred foot high outcropping that forms the Royal Fort (*rāja koṭṭai*), at the very base of its crowning impregnable cliffs, is a small temple to the goddess Kamalakkaṉṉi, the chief beneficiary of the Gingee buffalo sacrifice. Facing this temple, in the position of the *balipītham* (offering stone), is a large stone slab (about three and a half by four and a half feet) on which are incised a bow, five arrows, and the heads of a buffalo, a ram, and four humans. C.S. Srinivasachari, familiar with the annual buffalo sacrifices to Kaamalakkaṉṉi at the bottom of the Royal Fort, is surely right in inferring that the incised heads «refer to the sacrifices of men and animals that were practiced» there (43).

Clearly buffalo sacrifices in Gingee go back at least several centuries. The incised slab is mentioned in a report from 1880 (44). But as of today, it is vigorously denied that the current buffalo sacrifices have anything to do with ancient kings or kingdoms. The local story is that in about 1921 a policeman who was a devotee of Kamalakkaṉṉiyamman volunteered to the public

to mete out the expenses for one day of the festival. His generous act is taken not only to mark the origins of the festival, but the beginnings of police participation in it. But we must note that the story itself has an incongruous feature. If the policeman volunteered to patronize one day of the festival, who sponsored the rest? And how was it known how to structure the festival as a whole? Most likely the story recalls a transitional period in the vicissitudes of the festival. It is possible that there was an interval when the buffalo sacrifice at Gingee was discontinued. In 1893, the population of this once great royal capital was recorded at a remarkable low of 419 (45). Or it is possible that after being maintained minimally for some time, the festival was revived by the policeman's contribution. In any case, we would propose that the story reflects not only an historical period of transition, but a change in the local conception of the sacrifice. For the lost royal patronage of Gingee's kings is substituted the patronage of "Gingee's finest". And in the process, a royal buffalo sacrifice increasingly takes on village characteristics.

There is, in fact, a tradition of a more recent crisis in which the matter of police patronage was put to a stern test. According to informants questioned in both 1981 and 1984, either during the Emergency of 1975 or somewhat earlier in about 1964, the local police inspector – aware of the law prohibiting buffalo sacrifices – stopped the main buffalo sacrifice at the granary (see below). Either that night, or after two or three days, he was stricken with blindness, and other police were at the same time afflicted with vomiting. It was only after the police inspector relented and offered a goat that his eyesight and the digestive systems of his force were restored. After this, all the police have vowed to take part in the festival and meet the sixth day's expenditure. One easily recognizes here a continuation and reinforcement of the story of the founding of the cult. Moreover, both stories have a mythic structure. Stories of the goddess blinding disruptors of her cult are often told of disbelieving kings and British officials (46). Here, however, the story emphasizes that in the present day it is the police whose faith and patronage the goddess most requires, and guarantees by her punishment and forgiveness. It must also be noted in this context that another possible contestant for the main symbolic patronage of this festival has so far been ignored. Since both the Kamalakkaṉṉi and Kāḷyamman temples are within the walls of the Gingee Fort, they fall under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Department of the Central Government of India.

At this point, the Archaeological Department's local officers simply give permission for the ceremonies to continue, and raise no objections. But it may not be long before the blinding vengeance of the goddess finds another possible target.

In any case, the transition from royal to police patronage of a traditional buffalo sacrifice is not unique to Gingee. At Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, certain rites within the buffalo sacrifice are «l'affaire du Police Department, qui est évidemment le substitut de l'armée et, en la personne de son chef, celui de l'autorité royale» (47).

We shall attempt to reach greater precision in our conclusion on the distinctions and continuities between village and royal buffalo sacrifices. But for the present, it suffices to note that in turning from Serūr to Gingee we need to keep these matters in mind.

The main goddess to whom the buffalo sacrifice at Gingee is offered is the above-metioned Kamalakkaṉṉi (Kamala "Lotus"; Kaṉṉi 'maiden, virgin'). She is also sometimes identified as Ceñciyammaṉ, 'goddess/mother of Gingee' (48). But Kamalakkaṉṉi is the joint recipient of this sacrifice along with a number of her sisters. In their greatest plurality they are the seven sisters or seven virgins (*eḻukaṉṉi*) who guard the fort (49). All seven are said to have temples in the area. But for practical purposes, it is only three of the sisters who figure in the ceremonial activities of the buffalo sacrifice. The two who join Kamalakkaṉṉi are Māriyammaṉ and Kāḷiyammaṉ, goddesses of widespread importance in villages throughout Tamilnadu. Kāḷiyammaṉ's temple is set in amidst a group of ledges and caves at the southern base of the Rājagiri, the mountain topped by the Royal Fort. The Māriyammaṉ temple is a self-standing white structure on a flat plain about a mile to the southeast of the fort. Though it appears to be within the southern limits of Gingee town, it is said to be at its center. Theologically, one is told that all seven goddesses are one, and that the same is true – but even more pointedly – for the three involved in the ceremonies of the buffalo sacrifice.

The full festival is a ten day affair, clearly recalling the royal ceremony of Dussarā, which traditionally would entail a buffalo sacrifice in connection with the celebration of Navarātri ('ninth night') and Vijayādaśamī ('victory tenth'). In such royal ceremonies, it seems that the buffalo was sacrificed amidst the tenth day rites. But in connection with the more widely practiced cult of Durgotsava or Durgapūjā, of which the royal rites are a variant, it

is more common for the buffalo to be sacrificed on the ninth day, leaving the tenth for rites of celebration and discharging of the goddess (50). At Gingee, the main days are the first, sixth, ninth, and tenth. The first day is marked by flaghoisting ceremonies, the tying of turmeric-dyed wrist threads (*kāppu*) on the officiants, and by a procession which brings the image of Kamalakkaṉṉi from its temple halfway up the mountain down to join her sister Kāḷiyammaṉ at the latter's temple at the mountain's base. The sixth day is the one on which the police highlight their role as sponsors (*upayatars*) by meting out expenses for various night-time activities: first a drama on social issues; then, between one and two a. m., a fireworks display, musical procession with *karakam* dance (a decorated *karakam* pot is bourne on a dancer's head), and worship of the deities. The ninth day is then that of the buffalo sacrifice, and the tenth celebrates the festival's conclusion. We will focus on the last two days, and especially on the all-important ninth.

The day of the buffalo sacrifice involves coordination of activities at all three goddess temples. The festival as a whole is organized by a committee ideally composed of ten persons, but at present made up of eight due to recent deaths. Their primary connection is with the Māriyammaṉ temple, where certain of them are officials; but they also oversee the management of the other two temples which, because they are small private temples within the fort grounds, have no current trustees. In addition, the committee is comprised entirely of Vaṉṉiyars, that is, members of a locally dominant caste which, despite its Śūdra rank, has long laid claims to a Kṣatriya heritage and to special prominence in the Gingee area (51).

On the ninth day, preliminary activities begin about 11 a.m. Even though Kamalakkaṉṉi's image has since the first day been placed beside that of Kāḷiyammaṉ in the latter's temple at the base of the Rājagiri, a number of people make the steep, hot climb to the Kamalakkaṉṉi temple half way up the mountain. But the main activities take place at and around the Kāḷiyammaṉ temple, and the tank near it. Amidst the boulders and rock ledges in the area, women seek out shady spots to cook pots of *poṅkal* (a sweet rice porridge), which they will take home to share with their families, and also to prepare flour lamps called *māviḷakku* (balls of moistened flour indented so that they can hold oil and a wick, which is lit as an offering to the Goddess). In the same area men and women of various meat-eating castes, but most of them

Vaṉṉiyars, intermittently bring cocks and goats to be beheaded. Whoever cuts off the head – in some cases it is the Kamalakkaṉ-ṉiyammaṉ *pūjāri*, a Vaṉṉiyar – receives it as payment. The rest of the animal is taken home, and cooked and eaten there.

All of these activities form part of what we have called the "private cult" of the festival. The "public cult" activities begin about 1 p.m. First, the *karakam* pot that has been taken on procession on previous days and nights is brought, covered with faded flowers, by a small group to the Kāḷiyammaṉ temple to be redecorated there. This *karakam* represents Kāḷiyammaṉ. Meanwhile, Kamalakkaṉṉi's silver trident – her *cūlam* – is retrieved from a cave near the Kāḷiyammaṉ temple and also decorated and set within a portable frame. It had been placed in the cave at the end of the previous festival, a year ago, in a secret spot; and the person who retrieves it is enabled to do so only because he undergoes possession (*āvēcam*) by the goddess. In some years it is said that the role is taken by the Kamalakkaṉ-ṉiyammaṉ *pūjāri*, but in 1984 it was performed by a man of the Nāṭṭār caste (here fresh water fishermen, apparently used as a title for Cempaṭavaṉs [52]) named Vīrappaṉ, a person who will continue to assume a prominent role. This *cūlam* will henceforth represent Kamalakkaṉṉi.

During the time that the *karakam* and the *cūlam* are being decorated, a second group enters the fort area bringing the main sacrificial buffalo (*erumai-kaṭā*, literally 'male buffalo') in tow. This is the buffalo that is to be sacrificed by the granary, near which it is temporarily tied. In all, the 1984 ceremonies included two buffalo sacrifices (in other recent years there seem to have been three) (53), and four buffalos were provided by donors in fulfillment of vows (*pirārttaṉai*). Of these, it was the two smallest that were selected for sacrifice, while the two largest were auctioned off to raise funds for the temples and the festival.

Finally, as a small crowd continues to assemble in the grounds at the base of the Rājagiri, a third contingent passes by toward the Kāḷiyammaṉ temple. This group includes a number of untouchables of the Paṟaiyar caste, whom all concerned preferred to call Harijans or Ādidravidas. As a whole, this group's mood might be characterized as electrically surly. A number of those within it were in states of *āvēcam* or possession, including the eventual slayer of the buffalo – a Nāṭṭār – who brandished a sacrificial knife with a curved blade of nearly a half inch thickness and a ten inch length.

About fifteen minutes later, at about two o'clock, all is ready. The buffalo is taken to a spot on the path that enters the main gate to the fort. It is in the general area of the granary, but is more specifically beside a now withered tree. In 1982 this tree still had leaves and branches, but in 1984 the branches had been cut back to stumps above the trunk, and not only were all the leaves gone but all the bark as well. Still, it is this tree that marks the actual sacrificial terrain and, still more specifically, the border (*ellai*) of the fort. The tree itself was identified as a *kāṭṭuvākai* (a variety of the flowering *Mimosa flexuosa*); but more interesting, it was also described as a *tūnkumūrci maram*, a "sleepy fellow" or "stupid fellow tree". As the folklore of the water buffalo is filled with references to his lazy stupidity, it is likely that the tree bears this name through its association with the buffalo sacrifice.

Once the buffalo is brought to this spot, it is sprinkled with water and its head is daubed with red *kunkum* and yellow turmeric powders. Then things happen very quickly. A procession brings the two goddesses (*cāmi*-s) from the Kāḷiyammaṉ temple around the side of the granary to face the site of the sacrifice, about twenty yards away. Not only are the two goddesses represented by their now florally decorated emblems – Kamalakkaṉṉi by her *cūlam*, Kāḷiyammaṉ by her *karakam* – but certain other ritual implements are bourne by members of this procession. One carries a firebrand at the end of a long metal pole. And another, the above-mentioned Vīrappaṉ, again in *āvēcam*, carries two articles: in his right hand a pestle-shaped club or mace about three feet long called the *cukku*- or *cekku-māntaṭi*, and in his left and a small stick called *perampu*. The former is of considerable interest, as it is elsewhere the weapon of Māriyammaṉ's guardian-attendant Kāttavarāyaṉ (54), from whose cult it seems to have been detached. It is possible, however, that the wielding of the *cukkumāntaṭi* at this point represents the implicit presence of Māriyammaṉ along with her two other sisters at the slaying of the first buffalo.

In any case, this contingent bearing the two *Cāmi*-s and the various implements reaches the point where it pauses to face the buffalo beside the tree. From this spot the goddesses oversee the proceedings, and the weapon-bearers – most notably Vīrappaṉ – brandish their implements menacingly in the buffalo's direction. Vīrappaṉ in particular shouts commands that the buffalo be slain. Meanwhile, the animal itself is surrounded by the group that includes the sacrificer and the numerous Harijans. In a hectic but

well orchestrated procedure, the buffalo is thrown on his side and his two front and two back legs and feet are tied together above the hooves. Then the sacrificer beheads him while the crowd, rather gleefully, counts the blows: in this case six.

At this point a young Harijan wearing only red shorts rushes in to remove the head and place it on top of his own, face backward. As he runs off, taking the head to the Harijan "colony", the ears flop up and down as if the head were his own, and the buffalo still alive. The blood which falls from the head is supposed to leave a trail for the goddesses and their procession to follow. The four men run poles between the tied up feet of the carcass, and bear off the body in the same direction. While all this is going on, certain people who have become possessed jump up and down on the bloodstain left on the path at the spot of the sacrifice, and others (this was not observed) are said to fall on the ground to drink the victim's blood. In addition, women touch the bloodstained ground with their fingers and then place a smear on the middle of their foreheads as *tilakam*. Among those who come to trample on the spot of the sacrifice are Vīrappaṉ, wielding the *cukkumāntaṭi*, and the bearers of Kamalakkaṉṉi's *cūlam* and Kāḷiyammaṉ's *karakam*. Clearly they enact the goddess's intoxication in her triumph over the buffalo demon (55).

The second buffalo sacrifice then follows rather quickly upon the first. Within fifteen minutes, the procession and the various ritual actors follow the trail of the head and the carcass to a spot at a crossroads about a hundred yards from a place called Mantaiveḷi, traditionally an area for grazing herds and now a large bare-grounded mall. It is at a crossroads on the west-to-east approach from the fort to this Mantaiveḷi that the second buffalo sacrifice takes place. It involves the same procedures as the first, with the exception that this time it takes eight cuts to sever the buffalo's head, and involves a different youth in red shorts to bear it off and a different team of four to haul the body. Here again the bearer of the *cūlam* tramples on the bloodstains.

The route of both heads and bodies from this second sacrificial spot to the Harijan colony passes through the Mantaiveḷi, and then involves a stop at the Māriyammaṉ temple, where these remains are briefly set down, presumably for Māriyammaṉ – impersonated by her *karakam* – to "see". I did not gather information on this stopover. From the Māriyammaṉ temple, the heads and carcasses are then taken to the Harijan colony where the meat from all the remains, including the heads, is divided into

seven portions to be shared among the seven *kottu*-s ('households') of the Paṟaiyar community. It was denied that anything special was done with the heads, or that they went specifically to the families of any of the participants. These *kottu*-s, said to be like Brahman *gotras*, represent divisions within the total Harijan community, which was estimated to have about two hundred families. Over the generations it has developed that one *kottu* may have as few as four families, another as many as thirty.

While these activities conclude the actual buffalo sacrifice, the festival, of course, continues. The first thing to happen is the meeting of the sisters at the Mantaiveḷi. After the sacrifice of the second buffalo, the two *Cāmi*-s who have come from the fort – that is, Kamalakkaṉṉi as *cūlam* and Kāḷiyammaṉ as *karakam* – wait at the site of the sacrifice for about ten minutes until Māriyammaṉ – that is, her *karakam* – is ready to meet them. Presumably Māriyammaṉ has viewed the sacrificial victims in this time interval, as indicated above. Then, when all is ready, the three sisters meet at the Mantaiveḷi: Kamalakkaṉṉi and Kāḷiyammaṉ coming from west to east , and Māriyammaṉ coming from north to south. It is a festive scene of great joy (*irompu camtoṣam*): the sisters unite and play together after a year's separation. When the two *karakam*-s meet, they kiss each other. For some time their images are danced about amidst a jubilant crowd.

Then the three *Cāmi*-s are set in a large, gaily decorated chariot (*tēr*), which has been prepared for them at the center of the Mantaiveḷi. Their weapons – including the *cukkumāntaṭi* – are lodged beside them. The chariot itself is set beside two well carved slabs of a general hero stone type, which stand upright on a concrete platform facing east toward a Nandi which lies at their feet. In back of them, on a direct west-east axis, stands the dramatic outline of the Rājagiri and the Royal Fort, about a kilometre away. Both slabs show "heroes" bearing long pole-like weapons, which could be identified as swords or lances. But attendants of the chariot identified the weapon as a *cukkumāntaṭi*, and further identified the "hero" on each stone as Mahāviṣṇu in his Kalki *avatāra*. It would be interesting to speculate on this odd configuration of Nandi (Śiva's bull), Viṣṇu, and the chariot of the victorious goddess. But it is more tempting to suspect that the original identity of the "hero" on the stones is not Viṣṇu as Kalki, but Māriyammaṉ's attendant Kāttavarāyaṉ, who not only bears the *cukkumāntaṭi* but figures prominently in buffalo sacrifices and other ceremonies for Māriyammaṉ in other parts of Tamilnadu (56).

From this point on, the ninth day ceremonies involve two processions. First, later in the afternoon, the icons and weapons are carried separately in procession through Gingee town. Then in the evening, there is a full-scale "chariot procession" in which the chariot, with the icons and weapons in it, is taken through the town as well. The first procession accentuates the possession of the bearers of the icons and weapons. The second is more triumphal.

Finally on the tenth day the main ceremony is a "turmeric water bath" at the Mantaiveḷi, a rite which frequently closes Tamil festivals, and in which participants sprinkle and douse each other with yellow turmeric water. Such ceremonies "cool" the deities and the participants after the heat of the festival. After this the chariot is dismantled and the *Cāmi*-s and weapons returned to their places. At about 4 p.m., Vīrappaṉ returns Kamalakkaṉ-ṉiyammaṉ's *cūlam* to the cave near the Kāḷiyammaṉ temple.

3. Conclusions: buffalo meat in the Indian festival diet

It would not be surprising, given the many differences between the ceremonies et Serūr and Gingee, if the preceding descriptions led one to suspect that the category of the South Indian buffalo sacrifice might well be a scholarly fiction. We will, of course, discuss some of the prominent differences between the two ceremonies. But first we must insist that there are broad structural features that identity them both as variants of a common type, and allow us to rest comfortably with the above-mentioned category.

First of all, let us address the issue, raised earlier, of the distinction between royal and village buffalo sacrifices. To be sure, our two examples encourage us to underscore such a distinction. But the distinction itself is one within the larger category, as can be seen by an examination of the common features of our two rites. In effect, the one that is most royal (Gingee) has clear village elements; and the one that has most numerous village features also has elements that evoke a royal function. It is perhaps best to think of two poles within a continuum rather than of separate ideal types.

All this is brought out most clearly in relation to the structure of the two festivals. Both involve features of the royal rites of Vijayādaśamī (or Dussarā), as well as features of the more

generally diffused Navarātri of Dussarā and other forms of Durgotsava. Indeed, both are variants of the spring Navarātri that has widely diffused itself in South India in connection with springtime hot season festivals for the goddess, and in effect substitutes compensatorily for the fall Navarātri that is traditionally incorporated within Dussarā, and is far less common in the South than in the North (57). It is just that this structure is much clearer in the ten day Gingee festival that it as at Serūr.

But the festival at Serūr breaks down into two periods: an eight day preparation followed, after an interval, by six days of sacrificial activities. And these six days themselves divide into two, and involve a certain duplication. The first two days clearly build up to the third, on which the main buffalo is sacrificed, the Potrāj hews a goat to death over a basket containing a mess of rice and the buffalo's blood and offal, and a Mang then scatters these contents around the village. Then the last days begin with two days of private offerings followed on the third day by the symbolic self-offering of the "rolling Patel" at the *Potrāj katta*, the Potrāj's sacrifice of a lamb by biting its neck, the "freeing of the village" by the Potrāj, and the final rites concerning the distribution, removal, and burial of the heads. Days three and six are linked together as being the days concerned with the treatment of the main sacrificial buffalo. And more than this, their rituals replicate each other. On each the Potrāj carries out singularly violent and bloody sacrificial acts that are necessary for additional apotropaic rites (the scattering of the mess to evil spirits, the "freeing of the village"). Indeed, there is strong evidence for replication here, for it is more common for the Potrāj to do only one of these violent acts – the biting to death of the ram or goat – and to do so directly before or after the sacrifice of the buffalo (58). Moreover, there is also a certain rapport between the sacrifice of the buffalo and the self-offering of the "rolling Patel". For the latter, as symbolic donor of the buffalo and sponsor of its sacrifice, has offered the buffalo as his own symbolic substitute (59).

In short, the Serūr festival can be reduced to an initial eight days followed by two three day periods each of which highlights one day. And of these two most prominent days within the final six, the first involves the actual buffalo sacrifice (as on the ninth day at Gingee), and the last – in addition to its continuities with the first – culminates in a typical tenth day rite: the filling of the tank near the Lakṣmī temple with turmeric, a ceremony which

finds its analogue in the "turmeric water bath" featured on the tenth day at Gingee. It is as if the Serūr festival has merely amplified the basic features of a typical spring Navarātri, and, more significantly, done so in a way that highlights – through doubling his sacrificial role – the figure of the Potrāj.

Once this basic common structure is perceived, many of the differences that relate to the "village" versus "royal" character of the two festivals explain themselves. In our present context, we need only observe the contrasts, for they result from the variant ways in which each local ceremony develops features of the buffalo sacrifice that have been sufficiently clarified by recent scholars (60). Thus each sacrifice defines a rapport between the village goddess (Úr Dyámavva, Māriyamman) and a conception of the goddess as a totality; in each case, there is a demarcation of the interplay between the center of the agglomeration and various boundaries (at Serūr of the village; at Gingee of the fort); in each sacrifice the function of the sacrificial patron (a role derived from the Vedic *yajamāna*) is well defined (at Serūr by the Patel; at Gingee, more diffusely, by the Vaṉṉiyar sponsors, the police, the Archaeological Department, and the heritage of the king). The goddess to whom the buffalo is offered is also the one who slays the buffalo, through those who are possessed by her. She thus fulfills the warrior function of the king or his surrogate (the *yajamāna*) and acts on his behalf, while he himself sponsors the sacrifice on behalf of the whole agglomeration: its lands and its people.

When we come to the division of the meat in the sacrifice, all of these oppositions and interactions come variously into play. To begin with, it is clear that the division of the meat of the sacrificial buffalo is only one among many food offerings that are made in the course of the two festivals. There are vegetarian offerings and non-vegetarian offerings, and then distinctions among the latter. For our purposes, what is most important is the relationship between these distinctions and the complementary distinctions in the hierarchy of demonic, human, and divine beings.

To begin with, let us observe that the buffalo sacrifice is an exceptional rite within the economy of popular religious ceremonies. Normally, all manner of gods receive a variety of offerings. But the buffalo sacrifice is reserved for the goddess. And in the buffalo sacrifice, whatever offerings might otherwise be made to the gods are made to her. In principle, because buffalo sacrifices involve the handling of exceptional dangers and impurities, the

goddess receives all offerings on behalf of the gods. Her own purity is guaranteed on the one hand by her status as a virgin. Yet this status is ambiguous, because the goddess's arousal in her conquest of the buffalo also has sexual implications. At Serūr, even though one hears nothing of her husband, she is given a marriage badge (*tāli*) at the beginning of the ceremonies, and one knows from mythical sources that the potential partner is none other than the buffalo, her eventual victim (61). In the ritual context, the marriage theme, and with it the themes of sexual danger and conquest, are present only as undercurrents. Instead of a myth accounting for the goddess's triumph over the potentially defiling male buffalo, there are a number of ritual means whereby the goddess's purity is safeguarded by those who perform the ceremonies.

What is most significant in this context is that the entire range of food offerings that are made during the ceremonies are all in principle, and in some sense, offered to the goddess, and shared with her, differentially, by the participants. And by participants, one must not restrict oneself to the human communities involved. As already insisted, the goddess receives her cult on behalf of all the gods (note the closing of all other temples on the last day of the ceremonies at Serūr). Pure vegetarian offerings that might otherwise be made to them are made during the festival to her, and are shared with participants of higher caste status, or form part of the "private cult" which involves the eating of such offerings in the home. Meanwhile, other "private cult" offerings include various animals other than the buffalo (mostly cocks and goats); these, after they are offered, are consumed by families of the meat-eating "Hindu" castes (that is, for the most part Śūdra castes, above the untouchables) in their homes. Then, once the buffalo is offered in the public cult, it is the duty and privilege of those of the lowest rank (usually, and for the most part (62), untouchables) to remove it to their own quarters and consume its flesh there. And finally, it is the privilege of those below the rank even of untouchables to consume the inedible remains of the buffalo. These are the demons and evil spirits who receive the mess of rice, lamb or goat's blood, and the blood and offal of the buffalo that is scattered at the village boundaries (63).

The buffalo sacrifice thus defines the totality of the village community – or at least a symbolic representation of that totality (64) – as existing within a divine-demonic continuum. Indeed, the welfare of the village (or kingdom) requires a proper rapport with

gods and demons which it is the function of the buffalo sacrifice to restore and guarantee. Here we must observe that the hierarchy that defines this human totality is sometimes quite specifically defined. At Serūr it is no accident that one hears frequently of the twelve lady dignitaries of different ranking "Hindu" castes, who perform a variety of ritual roles. They themselves would seem to represent a variant of a widely found notion that shares of the buffalo sacrifice are divided among "twelve office bearers" or "twelve classes of village servants" (65). Indeed, this notion, like much else in the buffalo sacrifice (66), is likely to have a Vedic prototype: in this case, the twelve Ratnins ('jewel bearers') who define themselves in relation to various ranks and caste-like craft groups and who receive shares of the royal *rājasūya* sacrifice for their support of the king (67). In this regard, though it doesn't mention the number twelve, Fawcett's information on a buffalo sacrifice in Karnataka is most revealing: «The Hulusu are the sharers of the pieces of this animal after it has been sacrificed; all the headmen, even when one is a Brahmin, have a certain share or number of shares which they "must" have, but which they may not use; and those of non-flesh-eating sects [read "castes"] pass on their shares to others» (68). Here one has a clear indication that those who consume the meat of the buffalo do so in the service of the other castes, handling the impurity which would otherwise affect them no less than it would affect the goddess.

It is, however, the relation between those at this lowest rank and the Goddess that will concern us now. For it is clearly at these lowest levels that the double issue of sharing impure food with the goddess while at the same time safeguarding her purity is ritually most acute. On the face of it, once the buffalo is sacrificed in the goddess's presence, it is removed from her, and those who partake of its flesh do so away from her image, her temple, and indeed her village. But the "village goddess" is never without her presence in the village's untouchable "colony". Often she has a separate temple there, and there are numerous myths which explain her double location and double character (69). But more than this, one detects in our two examples a persistent "presence" of the goddess in the numerology that pertains to the division of the buffalo meat. At Serūr, where the goddess is repeatedly identified in relation to the number five (as in the *surgi*), the meat is divided in fifths, and shared among four bottom-ranking groups. And at Gingee, where the goddess is worshipped in the sevenfold identity of the seven virgins, the meat is divided among the seven *kottus* of

the Harijan community. The goddess who classically delights in the flesh of animal victims, and in particular in the flesh of the buffalo (70), is thus ritually represented by those who consume the buffalo meat.

In accounting for the handling of meat and other foods in the buffalo sacrifice, however, we can no longer overlook the ritual actors with whom the goddess shares not only her taste for meat but her taste for blood. Most prominent of these is the Potrāj at Serūr, who bites the lamb to death at its jugular. We cannot, within the scope of this paper, do much justice to the complexities of this figure. So it must suffice to say the following. The Potrāj whom one finds as a ritual actor in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and adjacent parts of Andhra Pradesh is himself a multiform of a god bearing the same name (Telugu Pōtarāju, Tamil Pōttu Rāja) in more eastern Andhra and northern Tamilnadu. Like the Potrāj, the god is invariably a servant-guardian of village and local goddesses, and plays his primary role in her cult in its most violent scenes of sacrificial bloodshed. Indeed, it is common in Andhra to find this god, like the human Potrāj, implicated in the buffalo sacrifice. For he may be represented as a form of sacrificial stake. Moreover, in all its variants, the name for this figure has the etymology "buffalo king." It seems, to follow Biardeau, that the Pōtarāju-Potrāj is the form which the buffalo-victim of the goddess takes once she has slain him in his buffalo form, and he has become her devotee. As her devotee, it becomes his service to her to handle the most violent and impure aspects of the sacrifice (71).

While there is no Potrāj at Gingee, it can be argued that many of his functions (as well as Pōtarāju's) are diffused within the Gingee ceremony (72). First, as regards the tasting of blood, it will be recalled that certain ritual actors – most notably Vīrappaṉ – dance on the bloodstain of the buffalo sacrifice, and follow the goddess who herself follows the trail of blood left by the drops from the buffalo's head. It must be understood that there is an allusion here to a myth in which the goddess devours the blood drops of a demon named Raktabīja ('blood-seed') to keep him from reviving himself when his blood drops touch the ground. Those who follow her on this trail of blood implicitly taste it with her (it will be recalled tht it was said that some people actually drink the blood from the ground at the site of he sacrifice). Moreover, there is the striking image at Gingee of young men bearing the two buffalos' heads away on their own heads.

Although he does not mention it in his *Aboriginal caste book* account, Elliot elsewhere describes a scene which may have occurred at Serūr, or at least at a place where the rites were similar. And what is most notable, the buffalo head is carried on the head of the Potrāj:

> «The Potrāj next lifts the head of the buffalo on to his own head and leads a procession of the whole community, preceded by drums, tom toms, and horns, round the boundaries of the village lands, his assistants scattering prepared food, called bhutballi.... The whole proceeding is carefully guarded by armed men with drawn swords, to exclude intruders» (73).

One could hardly imagine a more vivid evocation of the Potrāj as "buffalo king" (74).

The Potrāj's associations with the violent impurity of sacrificial killing also find another important expression in connection with the implements of sacrificial death: the goddess's weapons, and, where it is found, the sacrificial stake. At Serūr the Potrāj bears the whip, a most important weapon for the sacrifice of the lamb because it makes it lie still, as if already dead, before the Potrāj bites its neck. This is likely to be an expression of the ideal – of Vedic origins – that the animal should suffer minimal pain, and submit to its slaughter in a cooled and tranquil state. But the Potrāj is also connected with the *Potrāj katta*, the stone-like altar at which the lamb is bitten, and from which the Potrāj "frees the village". It is likely that all these functions also find diffused analogues at Gingee. As a bearer of the goddess's weapons, the Potrāj clearly finds his counterparts, and most notably in Vīrappaṉ (the retriever of Kamalakkaṉṉi's *cūlam* and bearer of the *cukkumāntaṭi*). The *Potrāj katta* has a likely analogue in the *tūnkumūrci maram*, the "sleepy fellow tree" by which the first buffalo is sacrificed at the boundary of the Gingee Fort. For the stone altar would seem to be a multiform of the sacrificial stake, while the the tree is a likely substitute for the rare *śamī* tree from which the sacrificial stake (identified in Andhra with Pōturāju) is made (75). Finally, a sort of freeing of the village is also accomplished by Vīrappaṉ, who ends the Gingee ceremonies by restoring the *cūlam*, Kamalakkaṉṉi's symbolic weapon of sacrificial bloodshed (a red marked lemon is impaled upon its central point when it is bourne in procession), to the darkness of the cave.

In closing, it must be insisted that the possession of the

Potrāj, and quite possibly also that of Vīrappaṉ (who seems to have connections with Kāttavarāyaṉ, a figure similar to Pōtarāju) (76), cannot be explained entirely as a possession by the goddess. There is also an evocation of the possession of the victim, the buffalo himself, as he encounters the goddess who slays him. Through the Potrāj and other such possessed officiants, who represent the whole village from the bottom up, and bear a special rapport with the sacrificial patron (recall the exchange of turbans between the Patel and the Potrāj), the following point in made: the blood which one tastes, and shares with the goddess, is in some sense one's own.

Notes

1. As reported in a brief notice in the *Indian Express*, May 15, 1984.

2. Alf Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh: the sacrifices of the water buffalo and the bull of heaven", *History of Religions* 19 (1980), pp. 189-190 (see n. 5).

3. See above all Madeleine Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī* et le buffle sacrificiel," in Biardeau, ed., *Autour de la déesse hindoue*, collected for *Puruṣartha* 5 (1981), pp. 215-243. All of the articles in this collection touch on the theme of the buffalo sacrifice; of these one must mention especially Olivier Herrenschmidt, "Le sacrifice du buffle en Andhra côtier. Le 'culte de village' confronté aux notions de sacrifiant et d'unité de culte", *idem*, pp. 137-177. See also Herrenschmidt, "Quelles fêtes pour quelles castes?", *L'Homme* 22 (1982), pp. 31-55.

4. Walter Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, 3 vols. (manuscript: India Office Library [London]).

5. Alf Hiltebeitel, "Sexuality and sacrifice: convergent subcurrents in the firewalking cult of Draupadī", in Fred W. Clothey, ed., *Images of man. Religion and historical process in South Asia* (Madras: New Era Publications, 1982), pp. 88-95.

6. See initially Henry Whitehead, *The village gods of South India* (2nd ed.; Delhi: Sumit Publications, 1976), p. 89. It is, however, Biardeau who has done the most to clarify regional variations and transformation in the buffalo cultus, and to underscore the distinctiveness of Tamilnadu in this regard; see Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī*," p. 230 and *passim*.

7. For a ceremony similar to this one in this and several other respects, see Rao Bahadur R.C. Artal, "The village goddess Dyâmavva," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 7 (1907), 632-647. Artal's etymology for Dyâmavva is 'the mother who gives wealth', 'the mother who gives all prosperity' (p. 646). Artal served as Deputy Collector in Belgaum District, but describes festivals from his native district of Dharwar (p. 646).

8. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 390. Unless quoting directly, or citing a decisive point, we will normally summarize Elliot without citation. Whenever in doubt, we will also record his orthography.

9. See Hiltebeitel, "Sexuality and sacrifice", p. 80 and n. 51.

10. See *mutatis mutandis* Artal, "Dyâmavva," p. 633ff.

11. *Gaṇāchāri* is a title used for a sort of overseer of caste rituals by Vanniyars; see H. V. Nanjundayya and L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, *The Mysore tribes and castes*, 4 vols. (Mysore: Mysore University Press, 1928-1935), vol. IV, pp. 611-619. It is also used as a title by Lingayats; see Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols. (repr. Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975), vol. IV, p. 271.

12. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 410. I am unable to determine the meaning of the title Rudranna.

13. See Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh", p. 10; R.E. Enthoven, *The tribes and castes of Bombay*, 3 vols. (Bombay: Government Press, 1920-1922), vol. II, p. 81 (s.v. Holaya).

14. Cf. Artal, "Dyâmavva", p. 636. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, pp. 411-412 goes into considerable detail on this design. The shape is like a baseball plate (the longest side is opposite a point); the four colors are made from white flour, black charcoal, yellow turmeric, and red ochre.

15. There are a few points where I have been unable to identify certain of Elliot's designations for caste groups and official titles (see above, n. 12); Barhi (variant Barhis) and Hallab are the two most problematic, neither being mentioned by that spelling in any of the standard manuals on castes. I take Barhi as most likely referring the Bargi-Dhangars, a subgroup of the Dhangars or shepherds; see especially Günther-Dietz Sontheimer, *Birobā, Mhaskobā und Khaṇḍobā. Ursprung, Geschichte und Umwelt von Pastoralen Gottheiten in Mahārāṣṭra*, Schriftenreihe des Südasien-Instituts der Universität Heidelberg, vol. 21 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976), pp. 122-124. On Hallabs, see below, n. 25.

16. Dhers or Dhedas are generally field laborers of low status: «The term Dheda is commonly used in the Deccan and Southern Maratha country as a synonym for Mahar, a class occupying a corresponding social position in those areas», (Enthoven, *Tribes and castes of Bombay*, pp. 322-323 ff.)

17. On the Meti Ryot in the singular as "head farmer", see Artal, "Dyâmavva", pp. 633-634.

18. As Naik (Nāyak) is used as a title by many castes, and by early writers to refer to "native captains" or "headmen" it is not possible to determine which caste or official Elliot means; see Thurston, *Castes and tribes*, vol. 5, pp. 138-139.

19. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 416.

20. Dhangars are shepherds, sometimes keeping buffalos; see Enthoven, *Tribes and castes of Bombay*, I, pp. 311-321.

21. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 417.

22. *Idem*, pp. 417 and 392-393.

23. For similar precautions, see Whitehead, *Village gods*, p. 73.

24. See Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh", p. 192 and n. 25; *idem*, "Sexuality and sacrifice", pp. 86-87, 95.

25. With some uncertainty, I take Hallab as Helav, Helava, a low mendicant caste found in Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwar, and Kanara districts; see Enthoven, *Tribes and castes of Bombay*, II, pp. 72-74; Nanjundayya and Iyer,

Mysore tribes and castes, III, pp. 309-319, especially 317-19: they are "custodians of village histories". Less likely, Hallab may refer to outcaste Holayas.

26. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 419; cf. Fred Fawcett, "On some festivals to village goddesses", *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* 2 (1890), p. 279: after the beheading of the sacrificial buffalo «its blood, bowels and viscera are mixed with 30 baskets of Cholum. A sheep of any colour or sex is then laid on the buffalo's carcass and there beheaded. Curiously, this is the Hulusu mari, and while it is being killed and its blood, &c., mixed with the other stuff in the basket, none but the village people can come near».

27. Cf. Whitehead, *Village gods*, p. 76; Fawcett, "Festivals to village goddesses", p. 273; John Irwin, "The sacred anthill, and the cult of the primordial mound," *History of Religions* 21 (1982), pp. 341, 358-360.

28. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 424.

29. As in festivals for Draupadī (Tiraupatiyamman) in Tamilnadu (personal observation).

30. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, p. 428.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 429.

32. Cf. Fawcett, "Festivals to village goddesses'" p. 266 (turban given by headmen to the Potrāj).

33. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, pp. 429-431.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 431.

35. *Idem.*

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 435-436.

37. See Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh", pp. 194 and nn. 34 and 35.

38. Elliot, *Aboriginal caste book*, III, pp. 437-438.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 340.

40. *Idem*; Elliot ends his account with the curious note that «next day (Sunday) they all went out to Shikar» (*idem*). The contrast between the buffalo sacrifice and the hunt (one wonders whether Elliot went along...) is intriguing.

41. I would like to thank my invaluable assistant C.T. Rajan for all his help in the completion of this fieldwork. Initial fieldwork was done in 1981-1982 (my thanks for the support of the Joint Indo-U.S. Subcommission on Education and Culture during that year) and actual observation of the festival was carried out in 1984 (my thanks for the support of the American Philosophical Society and the George Washington University for facilitating the summer trip).

42. On the history of Gingee, see Rao Bahadur C.S. Srinivasachari, *A History of Gingee and its rulers*, Annamalai University Historical Series, No. 2 (Annamalainagar: The University, 1943).

43. *Ibid.*, p. 5. Srinivasachari is the only author I have found who mentions these rites. They were apparently unknown to the British district gazetteer and manual authors. On human sacrifice in the region, for which there is still a rich folklore, see especially K.R. Srinivasan, *Cave temples of the Pallavas*, Architectural Survey of Temples, No. 1 (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1964), pp. 112-115 (self-offerings to Durgā in Pallava art). But human sacrifice can be a symbol of that to which animal sacrifice aspires.

44. Srinivasachari, *op. cit.*, p. 5, citing a report by a certain Colonel Branfill.

45. *Manual of the administration of the Madras Presidency*, Vol. III, *Glossary* (Madras, 1983), p. 393. Today Gingee is still a depopulated taluk, but the town's population is probably about 5,000. The desolation of the area began with the invasions by Bijapur, Maratha, and Moghul forces in the late seventeenth century, and was continued under French and British policies.

46. See for now Hiltebeitel, "Sexuality and sacrifice", p. 77 and n. 43.

47. Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī*", p. 227.

48. According to one of my informants. Srinivasachari, *History of Gingee*, p. 5, indicates that he suspects this identity too.

49. See *ibid.* One informant listed the seven as Kāliyamman̲, Kamalakkan̲ni (= Ceñciyamman̲), Ten̲n̲iyamman̲, Paccaiyamman̲, Māriyamman̲, Pūvatamman̲, and Celliyamman̲.

50. See Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī*", pp. 220-230; P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, vol. V, part I (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1974), pp. 154-194 (especially 168, 179, 181).

51. On Vanniyars and their prominence in the Gingee area, see for now Hiltebeitel, "Sexuality and sacrifice", vol. pp. 72-77.

52. See Thurston, *Castes and tribes*, vol. V, p. 249.

53. According to one informant, the third buffalo was in other years sacrificed near a Mosque cemetery; another said the sacrifice took place at the *Ellai Māriyamman̲* ('Boundary Mariyamman̲') temple. Curiously, both informants were Muslims (the second a policeman). It is not clear whether this is a second Māriyamman̲ temple, different from the main one involved in the ceremonies, and identified with the center of Gingee. Various old gates of the fort were also mentioned as sites of the third sacrifice.

54. In her forthcoming study of Pōtarāju and the symbolism of the sacrificial stake, Biardeau, who has found the *cukkumāntaṭi* associated with Kāttavarāyan̲ and Māriyamman̲ in Tanjore District, gives the spelling *cekku-*. This is intriguing since it evokes an act of pressing (*cekku* means 'oil press') akin to the mortar and pestle sometimes associated with Pōtarāju. But at Gingee the pronunciation was clearly *cukku-*. Moreover, Winslow's *Tamil and English Dictionary* gives *cukkumattati* (*sic*) as «The staff carried by Pandarams of the Śiva sect; the club or weapon of some inferior deities».

55. On relations between the buffalo sacrifice and the myths of the goddess and the buffalo demon (Mahiṣāsura), see the discussion in Alf Hiltebeitel, "The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva', reexamined through reflections on the goddess, the buffalo, and the symbolism of *vāhanas*", *Anthropos* 73 (1978), pp. 773-792. See also Madeleine Biardeau and Charles Malamoud, *Le sacrifice dans l'Inde ancienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976), pp. 146-153 (relevant material by Biardeau).

56. See above, n. 54. One informant (a policeman) identified the statue of an armed figure who guards the crossroad at the eastern entrance to Gingee, and looks straight ahead at the fort, as Kāttavarāyan̲ in the form of Koṭṭai Muni, the "Fort Sage".

57. On spring and fall Navarātri-s, see Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, V, I, pp. 154, 186; Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī*", pp. 224-225.

58. See Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh", p. 190.

59. See discussion in Hiltebeitel, "The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva", pp. 781-782. and following.

60. See especially the works of Biardeau and Herrenschmidt cited in n. 3 above.

61. See above all Biardeau, *Le sacrifice*, pp. 148-149.

62. At Serūr, the list includes low status Hallabs and Dhers; see above, nn. 16 and 25. But usually only untouchables are involved; see Whitehead, *Village gods*, pp. 73-74, 75, 78, 83-84; see also below, n. 65.

63. Of our two examples, this only occurs at Serūr. But such rites are widespread; see Hiltebeitel, "Rama and Gilgamesh", pp. 192-196, and above, n. 26.

64. See Herrenschmidt's reservations on the totality of the village in the articles cited above in n. 3.

65. See especially Nanjundayya and Iyer, *Mysore tribes and castes*, vol. 2, p. 221: «In the night a he-buffalo is sacrificed. The remains of this animal are then divided among the twelve members comprising the village corporation. However, most of them do not eat buffalo flesh; their shares are taken by the village cobbler or Mādiga». See also *idem*, vol. 4, p. 161; Thurston, *Castes and tribes*, Vol. 4, p. 338.

66. E.g., the freedom of the buffalo at Serūr and elsewhere to move about *ad libitum* (see above at n. 19, and Hiltebeitel, "Rāma and Gilgamesh", p. 191 and n.11), which clearly recalls the Vedic Aśvamedha sacrifice (royal horse sacrifice).

67. See J.C. Heesterman, *The ancient Indian royal consecration* - ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1957), pp. 49-57.

68. Fawcett, "Festivals to village goddesses", p. 372.

69. E.g., as Reṇukā, who is often identified with Māriyamman and Ellamma (a buffalo sacrifice receiving village Goddess in Andhra). See Richard Brubaker, "Lustful woman chaste wife, ambivalent goddess , *Anima* 3 (1977), pp. 60-62.

70. The goddess's taste for meat is a Tantric theme that pervades the buffalo sacrifice and related festivals; see Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, V, I, pp. 165-168.

71. See Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī*", pp. 235-238.

72. As noted above, elements of the buffalo sacrifice coherent in Andhra and Karnataka seem to be dispersed in Tamilnadu. But the quasi-royal character of the ceremony at Gingee is also a factor in the absence of a specific counterpart to Potaraju, for the latter is usually linked to the goddess only in her village forms.

73. Elliot, "On a proposed ethnological congress in Calcutta", unattached galley sheet in *Aboriginal caste book*, Vol. I.

74. One is inevitably reminded of the Mahiṣāsura with human body and buffalo head in the Mahiṣāsuramardinī Maṇḍapa at Mahabalipuram. See Hiltebeitel, "Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva'", pp. 780-783.

75. See Biardeau, "L'arbre *śamī*", pp. 232-233.

76. See above, nn. 54 and 56. We cannot deal further here with Kāttavarāyaṉ.