

The Nagarattar Temples and a Priest Training Institution in Chettinad, South India

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This paper reports the results of a religious anthropological survey intensively conducted in August, 2006 and the subsequent field researches made thereafter in south-central Tamil Nadu, southern India, on a Hindu caste group and the associated temple institutions.

1. The Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in Singapore and the overseas expansion of the Nagarattar-s

(1) The Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in Singapore and its background

At the side of a road near the shopping district of Orchard Road, in the city centre of Singapore, stands the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple. "Thendayuthapani" (Sanskrit *Dandāyudhapāṇi*, or Tamil *Taṅṅāyutapāṇi*) is one of the epithets of God Murugan, the Tamil counterpart of Sanskritic Skanda-Karttikeya. God Thendayuthapani, the origin of the temple's appellation, is enshrined in the inner sanctum (*S. garbhagrha* or *sannidhi*) of the temple structure. This temple is famous for the annual festival of Thaipusam (T. *taippūcam*), celebrated on the day of the full moon in the Tamil month of Thai (T. *tai*, late January to early February). This religious event has become one of the biggest international tourist attractions of Singapore, during which tens of thousands of people come to catch a glimpse of the strange spectacle of hundreds of devotees balancing sticks on their shoulders and stabbing the spokes into their bodies in penance.

The Sri Thendayuthapani Temple is also known as "the Chettiyar's Temple" or "the Tank Road Temple" by locals. It was erected in 1859 on Tank Road and maintained by a group of people called Chettiyar-s, or more specifically, the Nattukkottaicchettiyar-s or Nattukkottainagarattar-s (hereafter referred to as Nagarattar-s, meaning "the town's people"). They are a caste group originally hailing from the region of Chettinad (T. *ceṭṭināṭu*), which is where their caste derives its name¹. Chettinad, geographically situated in south-central region of Tamil Nadu, extends over the present Ramanathapuram, Sivagangai, and Pudukottai districts. The Nagarattar (T. *nakarattār*) people living in Singapore are divided into five associations based on their Sri Thendayuthapani Temple membership registration numbers, and those five associations are responsible for the management of the temple by yearly rotation².

(2) Nagarattar-s: their inherited profession and religion

The Nagarattar-s are a prominent merchant community³ in Tamil Nadu. Since the 19th century, their trading activities have expanded overseas. They have travelled back and forth to other countries and areas in South and Southeast Asia, such as Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Java, Sumatra, Singapore and Vietnam. They have derived their wealth mainly through finance and wholesale trade, and built large estates in their hometowns. In cities and villages scattered across this region, many princely houses developed by this group still

remain, and have become reminiscent of the glorious bygone days⁴. The Nagarattar-s are a community with rich cultural heritage. They are non-vegetarians and famous for their spicy Chettinad cuisine⁵.

It is undeniable that their power has gradually weakened since India's Independence, and the presence of the group is diminishing in the face of recently emerging entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, their influence on the business landscape in the Tamil country cannot be ignored. The Bank of Chettinad, the former Bank of Madurai, and the Indian Overseas Bank (est. 1936) were all established by the Nagarattar-s

This community produced many celebrities, including Raja Annamalai Chettiyar (1881-1948), the founder of Annamalai University (est. 1929); A. Vi. Meyyappa Chettiyar (1907-1979), a film producer and the founder of AVM Productions; M. Ct. M. Chidambaram Chettiyar (1908-1954), the founder of Indian Overseas Bank; K. V. A. R. Alagappa Chettiyar (1909-1957), the founder of Alagappa University at Karaikudi; the great poet Kannadasan (1927-1981), known as "The King of Poets (T. *kaviyaracu*)"; Pa. Chidambaram (1945-), who until recently worked as the finance minister and home minister of Manmohan Singh's cabinet; and K. Shanmugam, who is currently the Minister for Law and the Minister for Home Affairs in Singapore.

As the Nagarattar-s carried out their activities both at home and overseas, selected male members of each household were sent abroad to receive higher education and work for three to five years. After this period, they would be replaced by another man from their family. With this rotating system, there were always some family members who stayed overseas and were engaged in their business there. This made their business expansion possible. Women and children usually remained in their homeland and lived in a large family house built with the income earned from their enterprise.

As a merchant community, their princely houses were built using materials of high quality gathered from all over the world. Sumptuous mansions are among them. In one of the houses I was able to visit, I found Japanese tiles and Italian marbles used unpretentiously.

The purpose of their move abroad was to seek business opportunities. The money they earned was spent on investment and asset-building in their home country. With the variety of assets including movable property, real estate, locations and forms, efforts to disperse the wealth in order to mitigate the risks are taken even now. One family surveyed owned a coffee farm in the Mysuru (Mysore) region in Karnataka, paddy fields in Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu, hotels in the hill-station of Kodaikanal and the city of Madurai in the same state, and a banking business in Coimbatore city.

The cultural assimilation and adaptation of Nagarattar-s to their host countries was generally poor. Even in their new settlements, they strongly maintained their own Hindu faith; it has become a tradition to build a Murugan temple in every settlement. A prime example of this phenomenon is the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in Singapore introduced at the beginning of this article.

(3) Nagarattar Temples in Chettinad

The Nagarattar-s lived in 96 villages across Chettinad. They are Saivites and possess nine Saiva temples which are separately managed by the nine paternal exogamous groups called Pangalam (T. *paṅkālam*)⁶. In recent years, though, the number of settlements in this region has gradually reduced. Those nine temples are scattered in rural areas around the city of Karaikudi⁷, located in the villages of Ilaythagudi, Mathoor, Vairavankoil, Pillaiyarpatti, Nemankoil, Surakkudi, Iraniyur, Velangudi, and Illupaiyadi⁸. Despite the

differences among these temples in terms of size and antiquity, there is an equal relationship between them, where dominance and control-based hierarchies are not observed. This is contrary to the concept of a head temple and its subordinate temples as typically found in Buddhist temple organizations in Japan. In these Nagarattar temples, the management committees are reorganized once every three years; this is also a means of preventing fraudulence. Nagarattar families, without exception, belong to one of these nine temples, each representing one exogamous part of the community.

The Sri Karpaka-vinayakar Temple at Pillaiyarpatti⁹, where my field survey was conducted, is one of the above-mentioned nine temples. This old temple is dedicated to God Ganesa-Ganapati or Vinayaka (T. *viṇāyakar*, or *Piḷḷaiyār*), also known as Karpaka-vinayakar or Desi-vinayakar. The divine icon of this elephant-faced God with two arms and a right-curved (S. *valampuri*) trunk, the central deity (S. *mūlavighraha*, *mūlasthāna* or T. *mūlavar*) of the present temple complex, is a rock relief with a height of 180 centimetres. The permanent temple structure was built around the original cave temple, and was finally developed into a typical Dravidian-style Hindu shrine with the South Indian type of gate towers (T. *kōpuram*).

Although inscriptional evidence dates the origin of the cave temple back to long before the rise of Hindu Bhaktism or devotionism in Tamil Nadu, the ownership of this temple by the Nagarattar-s is traced back to around the 13th century¹⁰. The temple is visited by the devotees in hope of gaining wealth and prosperity, as well as removing obstacles. Among its many visitors are non-Tamil pilgrims, who travel from distant places¹¹. The entrance of this temple is often crowded by those who intend to travel or work abroad, as they believe that worshipping God Ganesa can help them obtain their passports or visa without difficulty. In addition to his ability to eliminate obstacles and ensure smooth starts for business and other activities, God Ganesa is said to be the auspicious patron deity for Chettiyar-s who are engaged in foreign trading¹².

2. Sri Karpaka Vinayaka Vedagama Vidyalayam: a priest training institution at Pillaiyarpatti

(1) The outline and faculty organization of a Hindu priest training institution

Next to the temple site is an educational compound (S. *pāṭhaśālā*) for Hindu priests, Sri Karpaka Vinayaka Vedagama Vidyalayam (S. *Śri-karpaka-vināyaka-vedāgama-vidyālayam*, SKVVV). An experienced Brahman priest called Pitchai Gurukkal, who established this boarding school in 1980, is still working as its principal (S. *sthāpaka* or T. *niṛvaṇar*). At the earliest stage of this institution there were only four novitiates. With no school building, classes were conducted outdoors. In 1985 the second campus, Siva Neri Kalagam (*civa-neri-kaḷakam*, "The Gathering of Shiva's Way"), was built some 450 metres away in the neighbouring area. It contained the dormitory and became the origin of the current school compound. Today, although the basic facilities of this school are provided by the temple, all the managerial duties, including raising funds for operating capital, are performed by Pitchai Gurukkal.

There are no financial burdens for the students, such as tuition fees, learning materials, meals, or lodgings. The school is funded by earnings received from performing Ganapati-homa¹³ at the nearby Karpaka-vinayakar Temple, and participating in such rituals as *pūjā-s* (ceremonial worship) and *abhiṣeka-s* (divine consecrations) at other temples and devotees' home shrines¹⁴. Pitchai Gurukkal has worked as the chief priest at this temple of Pillaiyarpatti since the 1960s, long before the establishment of his school.

The operating capital of this school raised through Ganapati-homa is collected as follows. The patron

(T. *upayattār*), usually the head or representative of the family, requesting the Ganapati-homa ritual must pay 8,000 rupees. Most of the money is given to the Devasthanam (viz. the Administrative Office), however a certain amount is given to Pitchai Gurukkal in accordance with the school's contribution, which is estimated by the number of the participating students¹⁵.

There are five instructors in total: a Sanskrit language teacher¹⁶, a Veda teacher, an Agama teacher, an Otuvar (T. *ōtuvār*)¹⁷ instructor, and Pitchai Gurukkal, the school principal. Except for the principal, all instructors have salaries. In addition to the teaching staff, there is a cook¹⁸ employed by the school. All teachers commute to work daily, except the Sanskrit teacher¹⁹ who lives and works on the premises. Apart from full-time instructors, external experts are occasionally invited to teach certain subjects, for example, a one- to two-month *yoga* course. Because these kinds of classes are not part of the regular curriculum, there is no test conducted for evaluation purposes.

Enrolment is held once a year on the day of Vijaya-dasami in the Purattasi month of the Tamil calendar (late September to early October), which means that the application for admission is made only on the last day of Navaratri. Even if the day falls on Sunday, the application for enrolment is open only on that day.

This school consists of four grades, with as many as 40 students in each grade. Although the total number of students should be around 160, there are dozens of students remaining at the school to serve at *kumbhābhiṣeka* (T. *kumpāpicēkam*) rituals as part of a form of internship, and this raises the total number to approximately 200²⁰. Thus, it effectively takes five years before a person can leave the school as a qualified Brahman priest. There is a graduation examination after a student has finished his four-year course. If the student fails, he cannot proceed to the final year of practical training.

The graduation exam consists of oral tests, into which stationery and textbooks are not permitted²¹. In this exam, the teachers of each subject prepare the questions. Students are summoned one by one to respond to the teachers' questions. For example, they are asked to chant certain *mantra*-s. If they can chant them smoothly and without major mistakes, they will pass. If they cannot, they will fail. Some questions also include general knowledge, such as the types and contents of the Vedas. Depending on the conditions, students who fail in their exams are requested to take the remedial class. Passing each test successfully, they can proceed to the next level. There are inevitably a few students who have tried their best but failed to improve their grades, and finally fall short of the standard. They are considered incompetent and there is no exceptional remedy provided for such cases²².

Students receive the title (T. *paṭṭam*) of "Sivacharyar" when they successfully complete their second grade. If they subsequently finish the entire five-year programme, they are awarded the title of "Sivagama Ratnam", which is equivalent to a regular diploma²³.

(2) The background and composition of the students

Most of the students enrol in this school after finishing the 8th or 10th grade of their primary education. The candidates should have undergone the traditional initiation rite (S. *upanayana*) as a Brahman male. Though rare, there are also students who are already married or have graduated college. Therefore, the students here range from 14 to 25 years of age. Due to the nature of a priest school, only male students are accepted.

Inside the temple and the school, the students must wear a uniform of the traditional white attire. This

consists of a sacred thread (S. *yajñopavīta*, T. *pūñūl*), in the case of Brahman-s, the beads of Rudraksha strung together on a string (S. *rudrākṣamālā*), dhoti or loin cloth made of white cotton, and a piece of cotton towel (T. *tuṅṭu*) when necessary.

Most of the students are Adisaiva Brahman-s²⁴. A person of this particular group who becomes a Hindu priest after finishing technical training on temple rituals is called gurukkal (T. *kurukkaḷ*) or Sivacharyar (T. *civācāriyar*). To qualify as a Saiva priest, they must be trained either personally by a particular guru or in a school for priestly education like SKVVV for the prescribed period of time (four years in this case)²⁵.

The school consists of two campuses, which are located next to each other. The first two years are spent at the campus farther from the Karpaka-vinayakar temple, and the final two years are spent at the closer campus.

There are also students who come from the Jaffna region of northern Sri Lanka²⁶. There is a slight difference between the temple rituals in Sri Lankan Hinduism and those in Tamil Nadu²⁷. In this school they learn a number of *mantra*-s and other essentials for temple rituals and other Hindu religious rites in the mainland Tamil way. Once they go back to their home country, however, they are to practice the rituals according to the Sri Lankan style. They say there is no substantial difficulty in the shift of ritual details since the fundamentals are the same.

There are seven to ten students responsible for food preparation with weekly rotation for this duty. The students in charge cut vegetables, prepare the food, and serve it to their classmates during meal time. The seasoning and final flavouring are done by a professional cook. Apart from Brahman candidates, there are also Pandaram (T. *paṅṭāram*), or non-Brahman, sons from abroad enrolled in this school; this will be discussed later in more detail. Although the majority of these candidates are meat eaters, they are all requested to strictly observe vegetarianism while on the school premises²⁸.

(3) The daily routine and curriculum of Brahman students

According to the school's placard, the weekday timetable of Brahman students (2nd and 3rd years) is as follows.

5:00 ~ 6:00	Review hour
6:00 ~ 7:00	Taking a bath, <i>anusthāna</i> (<i>sandhyā-vandana</i>)
7:30 ~ 8:30	Ganapati Upanisad class
8:30 ~	Breakfast
9:30 ~ 10:15	Purana class
10:30 ~ 12:30	Agama class
12:30 ~ 13:30	Lunch
14:00 ~ 15:30	Veda class
16:00 ~ 17:30	Physical exercise
18:00 ~ 20:00	Review hour
20:00 ~	Supper

Regarding the contents of Vedic class, in addition to such important *sūkta*-s as *Puruṣasūkta*, *Śrīsūkta*, *Durgāsūkta*, etc., the students are also taught and asked to memorize part or all of the text of Taittiriya Upanisad in Grantha or Devanagari scripts. In the religion class, they acquire the practical details of

Agamic rituals, including various kinds of *pūjā*-s (such as *vighneśvara-pūjā* and *pañcāsana-pañcāvaraṇa-pūjā*). For example, the purification rituals (*bhūta-śuddhi*, *mandala-śuddhi*, etc.), the invoking of deities (S. *svāmīyāvāhana*), rituals related to protection matters (S. *ācārya-rakṣā-bandhana*), and rituals making use of nine grains (S. *pañca-dhānya*) and the five products of cows (S. *pañca-gavya*).

Although it is not included in the timetable cited above, the basics of astrology (S. *jyotiṣa*) are also introduced. The students need not master precisely how to read the horoscopes (S. *jātaka*) and marital compatibility of a man and woman, but they are required to attain the minimal skill and knowledge of astrology necessary for performing rituals.

Moreover, although it is not included in the normal daily routine, the sacred writings of the Tirumurai (T. *tirumuṟai*) and the theology of the Tamil Saiva religion, called Saivasiddhanta, are also taught. Vedanta is not in the curriculum²⁹.

3. Minaksiyammal Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda Pathasala: a Veda school at Ilayathangudi

In Chettinad, there is another school designated for Brahman sons, Minaksiyammal Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda Pathasala (S. *Mīnākṣiyammāl-kṛṣṇa-yajurveda-pāṭhaśālā*, MKYP)³⁰. This school is located near the Ilayathangudi temple, which is one of the nine Nagarattar shrines mentioned above. This is a facility where the students acquire the Veda, the literal meaning of “Veda Pathasala”. They learn the scriptures of the Black Yajurveda system in an intensive eight-year course. There is no teaching of Vedanta provided here, but those who want to study it are advised to go to the Math (S. *maṭha* or T. *maṭam*) or pitha (S. *pīṭha* or T. *pīṭam*) of Sringeri or Kanchipuram.

Compared with the Pillaiyarpatti counterpart, this school is much smaller, with only eight students currently enrolled, all of whom are younger than those at the Vidyalaya of Pillaiyarpatti. The students enrol themselves in this school after finishing their 5th, 6th, or 8th years in general education. They wake up at five every morning, take a bath after the prayer, and then begin their day. The eight students are studying under the guidance of two teachers³¹.

The difference between this school and the one at Pillaiyarpatti is that the former is designated for Smarta Brahman sons whereas the latter is for the Adisaiva Sect Brahman boys. The graduates of the former school become *purohita*-s or *śāstrī*-s, whereas the graduates of the latter become temple priests (T. *arcakar*) who perform Agamic rituals at Saiva or Ambal (Devi) temples.

This Smarta institution (MKYP) is affiliated with the Kamakoti Pitha of Kanchipuram. The tomb (*samādhi*) of Mahadevendra Sarasvati³², the 65th head (S. *ācārya*) of Kanchipuram Pitha, who passed away in 1891 at Ilayathangudi, is located on the school premises.

According to Mr. J. Ramachandran, then the school principal, the Vidyalayam at Pillaiyarpatti is tainted by commercialism. The circumstances on which his criticism is based may become evident in the next chapter.

4. From Gurukula to Pathasala: A form of changing tradition

Let us go back to Sri Karpaka Vinayaka Vedagama Vidyalayam (SKVVV) at Pillaiyarpatti. One of the characteristics of this school is that, despite the comparatively small number of students, the school trains not only Brahman priests but also the Pandaram, or non-Brahman counterparts. This is fundamentally

different from the exclusive schooling system as practiced in the gurukula way of teaching in the olden days. Although facilities which provide training for Pandaram-s do exist in South India³³, this facility (SKVVV) is considered unique because it has trained Pandaram-s, mostly from Malaysia, to serve as priests in their home country.

Although Pandaram-s are considered an independent caste group, the name “Pandaram” can also refer to Tamil non-Brahman priests in general. The concept of “Pandaram” as a separate community is not always supported by a distinct caste group³⁴. Brahman and Pandaram priests in Tamil Nadu, in principle, serve at separate Hindu temples. They do not work in the same temple with cooperation between the two groups of temple priests³⁵. In Tamil Nadu, based on the nature of priesthood, ritual content, or family or caste tradition, people choose whether they regularly visit Brahman temples or non-Brahman ones. However, in countries outside India it is not unusual for a temple to have both groups, as typically observed in Singapore, though the number of these temples is limited³⁶. In such temples, both Brahman and (non-Brahman) Pandaram priests stay together in one temple³⁷ and share the ritual duties³⁸.

At this school (SKVVV), Pandaram candidates study at the second campus, Siva Neri Kalagam, while they undergo training for one or two years in their regular course. Pandaram students do not go through the internship or participate in Ganapati-homa rituals as their Brahman counterparts do. Brahman students spend their first two years in the same campus as the Pandaram candidates, and although they do not sit together in the same class, it may be true that sharing a campus gives them implicit preliminary training toward their probable co-attendance of the diasporic temples, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia.

At places of worship in India, Sanskrit *mantra*-s are rarely used by Pandaram-s. However, because the Pandaram students pick up a smattering of Sanskrit language and Grantha scripts, the Pandaram graduates of this school are able to partially perform the Agamic rituals, including the chant of simple Sanskrit *mantra*-s³⁹.

According to Pitchai Gurukkal, the school principal, the number of school graduates currently working as priests in Singapore alone is about 40. With all large and small temples combined, there are approximately 50 Hindu temples officially registered in Singapore⁴⁰, which makes “40” quite an impressive number. In fact, many of the Tamil priests I have become acquainted with in Singapore are graduates of this school⁴¹. There are also graduates working in the UK, USA, Thailand, and Malaysia, and even some who are invited to work at Tamil temples in the Jaffna area, in northern Sri Lanka. As previously mentioned, Brahman students from Jaffna also sometimes enrol in this school. With the expansion of the Tamil diaspora around the world, the demand for Tamil priests is globalizing. The dispatch requests may come from abroad either to Pitchai Gurukkal or directly to the candidates trained in this school. Depending on the situation, either a test or an interview is sometimes conducted in India before the employment⁴².

Sri Karpaka Vinayaka Vedagama Vidyalayam as described here is an example of the most successful Hindu priest schools in Southern India⁴³. The scene of young disciples surrounding their *guru* in a hamlet to learn Sanskrit scriptures is becoming a thing of the past. In place of gurukula-s of bygone days, *pāṭhaśālā*-s play a central role at present. This reflects the current situation where the traditional education of priests is increasingly at risk, and is clashing with the urgent need to meet the global demand for priests in the expanding Tamil diaspora. With the success of India’s open-door economic policy from the early

1990s onward, the weakening of Brahman traditional culture has dangerous implications for the age-long *gurukula* style of training. On the other hand, the rapid economic development as a result of the open-door policy has prompted a further expansion of Tamils, while also leading to the flourishing of some *pāṭhaśālā*-s.

Just as Nagarattar-s departed from their villages to the cities and then from the cities to the world, nearly two centuries later the young Hindu priests, thus educated, leave their native villages and fly to temples throughout the world.

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notes

1. “Chetti (*ceṭṭi*)” is the original caste name, whereas “Chettiyar (*ceṭṭiyār*)” represents its plural form. “Nad” (*nāṭu*) means land or country in Tamil.
2. The Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar temple in Chinatown is managed by the same committee and trustee. When the grand festival of Thaipusam finishes, a new administrative group will take over for the subsequent year.
3. “*Ceṭṭi*” is said to be etymologically derived from the Sanskrit “*śreṣṭhin-*” (the head or chief of an association following the same trade or industry, Cf. M. Minier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p.1102). The groups attributed to Chetti-s are not geographically confined to the Tamil land, but distributed throughout southern India. Other than Nattukkottai-chettiyar-s or Nagarattar-s, many sub-castes such as Kongu-chettiyar-s, Vaniya-chettiyar-s, Soriya-chettiyar-s, etc. are also known in Tamil Nadu.
4. However, many mansions have become vacant or abandoned. This is because many families stay abroad and develop their main business there. Moreover, in modern India there is a strong tendency to find business opportunities in urban areas, and subsequently many leave their hometowns.
5. For a comprehensive description of the Chettiyar culture, see S. Muthiah, Meenakshi Meyyappan and Visalakshi Ramaswamy, *The Chettiyar Heritage*, Chennai: The Chettiyar Heritage, 2000.
6. Pillaiyarpatti, meaning “the village of God Ganesa”, is originally the name of the area associated with this temple of Ganesa, but it is also the common name of the temple itself.
7. In my field research I came across a case where Nagarattar tourists had rented a minibus and visited their celebrated nine temples. Many of them were visiting this set of temples for the first time. For many Nagarattar-s, those temples are cornerstones of faith and kinship, and it is their earnest wish to visit them.
8. Cf. Ca. Meyyappan, *Nakarattār Kalaikkalañciyam*, Citamparam: Meyyappan, Tamiḷayvakam, 1998.
9. This village is located 14 km away from Karaikkudi, along the road heading toward Madurai. For a comparison between Pillaiyarpatti and its school for priestly education and its Allur counterpart, see Fuller, C.J., “Religious Texts, Priestly Education and Ritual Action in South Indian Temple Hinduism”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 31 (1), 1997, pp. 3-25. Fuller’s observations differ from mine in some minor details, such as the year when the school was founded and the number

of students in its earliest stage.

10. Ca. Meyyappaṅ, *op.cit.*, p.349.
11. Among the visitors interviewed, there was an Indian scientist couple living in Bengaluru (Bangalore). The Ganapati-homa held on the same day was patronised by an extended family originally from northern India who settled in Chennai.
12. For the history of Karpaka Vinayakar Temple and its *sthala-purāna*, see Tamiḷkkumpam Raviccantiraṅ, *Piḷḷaiyārpatti Stala Varalāru*, Pillaiyarpatti, 2006.
13. *Homa* is a Hindu temple ritual, wherein an oblation or any religious offering is made into fire. The Ganapati-homa-s at this particular temple are scheduled from 9 AM to 1 PM. In busy months they are held up to 20 to 25 times a month. The Ganapati-homa is a set of rituals that include carrying out the fire offering at the Yagasala (hall for fire rituals) with *homakuṇḍa-s* (fire-alters) in the inner part of the temple; entering the temple; and giving various things such as milk, yogurt, *pañcāmṛta* (five nectars), sacred ash, sandalwood, and sacred water for the divine consecration (*abhiṣeka*) to God. I observed that, among participating students, there were 3rd or 4th year students as well as 2nd year ones who single-mindedly chanted the Sanskrit *mantra-s*.
14. According to a couple living in Singapore, during the husband's 60th birthday celebration at the Karpaka Vinayakar Temple at Pillaiyarpatti, they gave presents such as dhoti-s to show their gratitude to each student who took part in the ceremony, in addition to the prescribed fee. In this way, the students informally received the provision of many goods as a reward for taking part in performing temple rituals.
15. In a case where the patron paid more than prescribed 8,000 rupees of his own will, the surplus would not be returned to the donor, as it is considered a votive offering to the temple.
16. He is customarily called "Sastra teacher" by the students, but in fact he is a Sanskrit language instructor.
17. Otuvar-s are non-Brahman professional singers at Saiva temple rituals who chant devotional songs to a tune. The songs sung by them are taken from divine scriptures in Tamil, such as the *Devaram (tēvāram)*.
18. This cook is a Brahman from Andhra Pradesh.
19. The Sanskrit language teacher, Mr. Nagarajan, is from Nagercoil, the capital city of the Kanya Kumari district of south Tamil Nadu. He is the only Smarta Brahman affiliated with this Adisaiva institute.
20. This number also includes Pandaram-s, as will be mentioned later.
21. The exception is Sanskrit language, for which there are both oral and written tests.
22. This information is gained from Mr. A. Vishwanathan, who is a graduate of this school.
23. This title is unique to this school and is considered to be a title of honour among temple priests. The appellation can vary even among schools of the same type.
24. Adicaiva-s form an endogamous group which is a sub-caste among Brahman-s. The Brahmanical rule of *gotra-exogamous* marriage also applies in their matrimonial alliance.
25. If not married, temple priests of this group are subject to certain restrictions based on their traditional rules, such as not being allowed to lead important rituals as a chief priest, or touch the main idol in the innermost chamber. An unmarried priest is not considered to be a fully fledged one. As far as priests from the Adicaiva community are concerned, there are two types of temple priests: those affiliated with a particular temple and those who form a group and move from temple to temple to perform *kumbhābhiṣeka-s* and other important sequences of rituals for days in succession.
26. I learnt that in the month preceding my field work (July 2006), there was a person who had finished the course and returned to Sri Lanka, his homeland.
27. According to my own observations at two Sri Lankan Tamil temples (the Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple, which is a Sri Lankan Tamil temple in the Katong area of Singapore, and the Kandaswamy Temple at Brickfield, Kuala Lumpur), apart from some minor differences in the rituals themselves, the tempo or pace of ritual performance is generally slower and more elaborate. Additionally, the time required for the ritual sequence is longer in comparison with the temple rituals performed in mainland Tamil Nadu.
28. During the field observation, I came across Pandaram students of this school preparing vegetarian fried rice for themselves. As is mentioned later, they were from Malaysia and prepared nasi goreng (Malay-style fried rice) which they used to eat at home. The Tamil Brahman students do not usually eat fried rice. The kitchens of Brahman-s and Pandaram-s were separated. Recently, however, the school stopped accepting non-Brahman novitiates; according to some, this was due

- to some dispute among Brahman circles or some external pressure.
29. Therefore, rather than cultivating the traditional system of knowledge in Sanskrit, classes teach the practical skills required for performing temple rituals, such as mantra recitation, and the *kriyāvidhi-s* prescribed to each ritual performance. As the goal is to be able to perform rituals correctly with the proper accompaniment of *mantra-s* or *sūkta-s*, the contents of Sanskrit scriptures become secondary. Therefore, not even the Sanskrit lesson is intended to convey advanced Sanskrit knowledge. Furthermore, according to Fuller (*op.cit.*, p.6), their class schedule is not rigidly observed.
 30. Here, the name “Minaksi” is not taken from the well-known Goddess Minaksi, but from a female patron who contributed to the establishment of this school.
 31. The school principal and his younger brother.
 32. He is known as Mahadeva, or sometimes Sudarsana. He died in 1891 after 37 years of service. Cf. A. Nataraja Aiyer and S. Lakshminarasimha Sastri, *The Traditional Age of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya and the Maṭhas*, Kanchipuram, 1962, p.146. See Yamashita, Hiroshi, “Kāñcipuram no Kāmakotīpīṭha: sono Rekishi to Shakaiteki Kinou: Josetsu (Kāmakotīpīṭha at Kāñcipuram: An introduction to its history and social function)”, Mizushima, Tsukasa ed. *Minami Indo Tamil Chiiki no Shakaikeizai Henka ni kansuru Rekishiteki Kenkyū (A Historical Study on Social Changes in Tamil Nadu, South India)*, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 2000, pp.147-160.
 33. This Information is obtained from my source, Mr. A. Vishwanathan.
 34. E. Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. VI, Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1975 (first published in 1909), pp.45-52.
 35. However, even if a temple is exclusively served by Pandaram priests, it can be expected that when an invited group of *gurukkaḷ-s* take initiative in performing a series of rituals for several days, such as a week-long sequence of *kumbhābhiṣeka*, both Brahman and non-Brahman priests co-exist temporarily. During a survey conducted in August of 1989 at Hindu temples in rural Tamil Nadu, there were such examples observed by the writer. See Hiroshi Yamashita, “The Forms and Functions of the Aiyāṅar Temple Complex: A Preliminary Study on the Cult of the Male Godlings in Rural Tamil Nadu”, Y. Ikari & Y. Nagano (eds.), *From Vedic Altar to Village Shrine: Towards an Interface between Indology and Anthropology (Senri Ethnological Studies 36)*, 1993, pp.269-303.
 36. In Hindu temples in Singapore either both types of priesthood coexist in one temple premises, or the priesthood is formed exclusively by Brahman-s. Historically, often the Brahman priesthood was introduced to temples served by non-Brahman devotees or a Pandaram priest, and the priesthood gradually or at once shifted from that of non-Brahman-s to that of Brahman-s. For example, in case of the Sri Thedayuthapani Temple in Singapore, at the beginning (early 20th century) when there were no idols (*arcā*), the Nagarattar devotees used stones and spears to mark the presence of the divine and performed *pūjā* by themselves. In time, the stone image of Murugan was installed, and, along with steady financial support, a permanent temple building was constructed. Initially Pandaram priests, and subsequently Brahman ones were invited from India (according to Mr. N. Subbiah, a former trustee of the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple). Now both kinds of priesthood coexist at this temple. For the Sanskritisation (or rather, Agamisation in this case) of Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu induced by the economic improvement of the devotees, see the writer’s “The Forms and Functions of the Aiyāṅar Temple Complex: A Preliminary Study on the Cult of the Male Godlings in Rural Tamil Nadu” cited above.
 37. Even so, there are not many cases where both parties share lodgings.
 38. In India, food taboos are commonly observed among caste groups. Even in Hindu temples abroad, where Brahman and Pandaram priests stay together (where one kitchen is used and the same vegetarian meal is eaten), there are many variations showing how this discipline is maintained. The Sri Mariamman Temple in Singapore is example of separate dining. In the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in the same city, however, both Brahman-s and Pandaram-s eat together (according to Mr. N. Subbiah, the then temple trustee). The Pandaram priests dine out whenever they feel like eating meat.
 39. I witnessed some Pandaram priests using the Sanskrit language during rituals in Singapore and Malaysia. Although it can be viewed as a “Sanskritisation phenomenon in Pandaram-s”, it is prominent particularly among the Malayan Tamil diaspora.
 40. See Okamitsu, Nobuko, “Shuukyō Soshiki no Un-ei to Borantia: Singapore no Hindu Jiin wo Jirei ni shite” (The Management of a Religious Organization and the Volunteers: An Example of a Hindu Temple in Singapore), *Toho*, vol. 21, 2006, p.279.

41. Among the Nakarattar temples in Singapore, the Kamatchi Gurukkal of the Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple, and the Muthuganapati Gurukkal of the Sri Thendayuthapani Temple are also included. The former also participated in educational activity at this school before his departure. As introduced in an above-cited article by Nobuko Okamitsu (pp. 279-286), Mr. Krishnan of the Sri Mariamman Temple, then a 22 year old priest, is a graduate of this school. According to him, many young Brahman priests in Singapore are graduates of the same school.
42. This is a typical recruiting method used by the Hindu Endowments Board (HEB) in Singapore. A committee member of the temple visits the applicant or candidate and conducts a test or interview to see whether he meets the standard.
43. According to my source, Mr. Vishwanathan, there are 13 schools like this in Tamil Nadu, but the majority of them are found in Bengaluru, the state capital of neighbouring Karnataka.