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In the myths and rituals of south Indian Hindu temples dedicated to the great god Shiva and his consort Devi, the goddess, the marital relationship between them is a central theme. In many temples, too, the wedding of the god and goddess is a highlight of the annual festival cycle, and nowhere is this more evident than in the city of Madurai in Tamilnadu, whose Great Temple is dedicated to the goddess Minakshi and her husband Sundareshwara, a form of Shiva.[1] In the Minakshi temple (as it is popularly called), the climax of its principal annual festival - the Chittirai festival - is the celebration of the divine couple's wedding. This festival is also renowned because it unfolds alongside another Chittirai festival celebrated for Kallalagar, a form of the great god Vishnu, who is said to be Minakshi's brother in accordance with the popular Tamil notion that Shiva and Vishnu are brothers-in-law linked by the goddess. The 'double festival' of Chittirai is therefore a deservedly famous example of the centrality of marriage in south Indian temple Hinduism.

In south Indian society, as is well-known, marriage is the supremely important rite of passage, especially for women who thereby attain the valued status of sumangali, 'auspicious married woman' with a living husband. In the importance attached to them, there is plainly a correspondence between divine and

human marriage; moreover, as Shulman aptly observes, 'the divine marriage is regarded as a paradigm for human marriage' (1980: 138). Furthermore, because Shiva's relationship with Vishnu is established by his marriage to the goddess, the Chittirai festivals also appear to dramatise the affinal relationship between brothers-in-law, who are ideally cross-cousins in the south Indian Dravidian kinship system. It is not only marriage, but affinity as constituted by marriage alliance, that is ostensibly symbolised as a 'value' (cf. Dumont 1983) by the double festival of Chittirai.

The crucial importance of the marital relationship between Minakshi and Sundareshwara as expressed in their rituals is indisputable (Fuller 1980; 1992: ch. 8), and Shulman's detailed study (1980: ch. 4) demonstrates that throughout the corpus of Tamil temple myths about Shiva and the goddess, the theme of divine marriage is pre-eminent. A vital aspect of this theme pertains to the goddess's duality as dangerous, single and 'dark', or peaceful, married and 'light' - black Kali or golden Gauri - which in turn is often connected to Shiva's oscillation between his ascetic and erotic modes (Fuller 1992: 44-8). Yet the focus on marriage, and its significance for the qualities of the goddess and Shiva, has meant that less attention has been paid to the constitution of Shiva's 'holy family' as a unit, and specifically to the relationship between parents and son, as opposed to husband and wife. As we shall see, even if divine

marriage can be a paradigm for human marriage, the divine family represents a very mixed model for ordinary people. Furthermore, when the relationship in Madurai between Sundareshwara and his younger son Subrahmanya (Skanda, Murugan) is brought into the picture and compared with that between him and Kallalagar, it suggests that the tie of filiation is ritually constructed as a close one, whereas the tie of affinity is not, despite its normative importance in the Dravidian kinship system. In brief, I shall argue in this article that Shiva's role as a father has been underplayed, and that this has implications for the analysis of his relationships with the goddess and Vishnu, and more generally for our understanding of the connection between divine and human kinship.

The Somaskanda image

In the Minakshi temple, as in almost all other Shaiva temples, the god's immovable 'root image' (mulamurti) housed in the central sanctum is an aniconic stone linga, the phallic emblem of Shiva. Minakshi's main immovable image, also made of stone, is an anthropomorphic figure of the goddess standing alone. In festival rituals and processions, however, the deities appear in the form of movable 'festival images' (utsavamurti). Minakshi's festival image is a smaller replica of her immovable image, but the principal festival image of Sundareshwara is a bronze Somaskanda image, as is similarly the case in many Shaiva temples

in Tamilnadu. The image of Somaskanda (sa-Uma-Skanda: 'together with Uma and Skanda') shows the god seated with his wife Uma sitting to his left and a small figure of their son Skanda standing between them. The composition of Somaskanda images, which are mostly bronze festival images, has been standardised from the tenth century (Kramrisch 1981: 134), and in Tamil temples, they are the principal images of Shiva's holy family (ibid.: 66). Indeed, Somaskanda is one of the most prominent iconographic representations of Shiva in Tamilnadu and I now turn to the significance of its form.

In festival rituals and processions, when Minakshi is represented as a single goddess apart from her husband, her lone image is normally accompanied by separate festival images of Vinayaka (Ganesha) and Chandeshwara. In Tamilnadu (although this is not universal), Vinayaka is Shiva's elder son, but his presence in rituals and processions is, as always, particularly required because he is the 'lord of obstacles' and must take the lead; Chandeshwara is a form of Shiva who must be worshipped to conclude the worship of Shiva himself in Tamil temples and he always brings up the rear of festival processions. When Minakshi and Sundareshwara are represented as a married couple in festivals, Vinayaka again takes the lead, but he is followed by a separate festival image of Subrahmanya by himself; after Subrahmanya come Minakshi, Sundareshwara's Somaskanda image, and finally Chandeshwara. Sundareshwara's consort and younger son

therefore appear twice: as the separate images of Subrahmanya and Minakshi, and as figures within the Somaskanda image. The Somaskanda image - as well as the fact that it is always accompanied by Minakshi's image, whereas hers can appear without his - make manifest the principle that the god must almost always be accompanied by his consort because he cannot normally act without her energising power (shakti). In part, Subrahmanya's presence simply confirms the marital unity of Minakshi and Sundareshwara, which is so crucial for him, rather than her. In my previous analysis of these data (Fuller 1980: 331), however, I largely overlooked the significance of the contrast between the divine couple's elder and younger sons, and hence the distinctive features of Somaskanda as an image of Shiva's holy family. To the best of my knowledge, there are no south Indian images of the holy family that include both Ganesha and Skanda.[2]

Although Vinayaka must always take the lead in rituals and processions, it is significant that even when Minakshi appears apart from her husband, she is still accompanied by their elder son, whereas Sundareshwara, even more patently, is more closely identified with their younger son. The association between Minakshi and Vinayaka, as opposed to that between Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya, is consistent with the mythological description of Shiva's family. In Tamilnadu, as already noted, Vinayaka is Shiva's elder son and in the Minakshi temple his seniority as the elder brother is concretely represented by the consistent

positioning of his images on the right-hand side of Subrahmanya's. In Sanskrit mythology, Vinayaka/Ganesha was created by Parvati herself and was not fathered by Shiva, whereas Subrahmanya/Skanda sprang from Shiva's semen and was not mothered by Parvati (O'Flaherty 1975: 261-2). Moreover, in the Tamil mythology, as much as in the Sanskritic, there is constant sexual antagonism between Shiva and Ganesha, whom the goddess so dearly loves. In one south Indian folktale, Ganesha openly declares that he wants to marry his mother (qu. in Courtright 1985: 110), and his failure to find a bride who can compare with her is often given as the reason for his bachelorhood. Rivalry for the goddess's love between father and son causes Shiva to behead Ganesha or symbolically castrate him, and in all the myths of Ganesha, according to Shulman (1980: 235), 'this rivalry remains constant'. In contrast, there is never any competition over the goddess between Shiva and Skanda who - according to the Tamil mythology - marries Devayanai (Devasena), Indra's daughter, and Valli, a local girl who is the main object of his erotic attachment.

Skanda, who is usually known by his Tamil name Murugan in Tamilnadu, is probably the most popular deity in the state and he is the presiding deity of numerous major temples. Ganesha, by contrast, is a relatively minor god in the sense that he has no elaborate cult of his own in Tamilnadu. Skanda's importance is reflected in the compendious Tamil myths about him and his birth

(Shulman 1980: 243-67); in many of them, including the Kandapuranam (the standard Tamil version of the Skanda myth) and the Tiruvilaiyadal (the myth of Shiva's 'sacred games' in Madurai), Ganesha does not appear as a son at all and the goddess is involved in mothering Skanda.[3] It is this conceptualisation of Skanda as the single son of both his parents that is iconographically represented by Somaskanda. In the Minakshi temple, however, given that Vinayaka/Ganesha is present as the elder son and is more closely associated with his mother Minakshi, the composition of Sundareshwara's Somaskanda image effectively shows that Vinayaka's very role as a son, in his father's eyes, has been eclipsed by his younger brother. Hence the most striking aspect of Shiva's holy family is its incompleteness, for unloved Vinayaka has apparently been expelled by his father, who cannot tolerate any rivalry from a 'mummy's boy', so that only his own favourite son Skanda remains.

In concluding this article, I shall return to the relation between Shiva's incomplete family and the ordinary human family, but now I shall look at the rituals in the Minakshi temple in which the relationship between Sundareshwara and his younger son is most dramatically expressed. These rituals involve a form of the god, known as Subrahmanya, who is the presiding deity of Tirupparankundram temple, about five miles southwest of Madurai. Tirupparankundram is one of the god's most important temples in Tamilnadu and it has also always been closely linked with the

Minakshi temple.[4]

The Chittirai and Avani Mula festivals in the Minakshi temple

Subrahmanya comes from Tirupparankundram to participate in two of the Minakshi temple's festivals: Chittirai and Avani Mula. (As already mentioned, this Chittirai festival coincides with another one celebrated for Kallalagar, which will be discussed below; only the Minakshi temple's own festivals are considered in this section.) The twelve-day Chittirai festival in the Tamil month of chittirai (April-May) is the greatest of all the Minakshi temple's annual festivals. Its key events are Minakshi's coronation (pattabhisheka) on the eighth day, her 'conquest of the world' (digvijaya) on the ninth, her marriage (tirukkalyanam) to Sundareshwara on the tenth, and the great car (ter) procession on the eleventh. After Chittirai, the twelve-day Avani Mula festival in avani (August-September) is the second most important, and its key events are Sundareshwara's coronation on the seventh day, and the enactment of episodes from the Tiruvilaiyadal myth on the eighth and ninth days.

The most prominent single theme in the Chittirai and Avani Mula festivals pertains to the kingship of Minakshi and Sundareshwara. Madurai was the capital city of the ancient Pandyan kingdom, and for their devotees the god and goddess remain to this day the eternal Pandyan rulers from whom subsequent Hindu kings claimed descent. The sovereignty of

Minakshi and Sundareshwara has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Fuller 1985), and for the purposes of this article, the crucial event in Chittirai is the divine couple's wedding. At Avani Mula, the relationship between Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya is ritually elaborated within the context of Sundareshwara's sovereignty, and some of my previous material will therefore be repeated.

The wedding of Minakshi and Sundareshwara is the Chittirai festival's climax and it invariably attracts the temple's largest crowd of the year. It begins with a procession which is said to be Sundareshwara's symbolic 'pilgrimage to Benares (Kashi)', as performed by the groom before a Tamil Brahman marriage. After the procession, the divine couple's images are placed on a swing inside the temple to be entertained by a song. Then the images of Subrahmanya and Pavalakkanivay Perumal (Vishnu), which have come from Tirupparankundram temple, arrive to be greeted by Minakshi and Sundareshwara. The close link between the Tirupparankundram and Minakshi temples is said to be why Perumal is brought from there to give his sister away to Shiva in marriage, and Subrahmanya's priests simply say that he must accompany Perumal to Madurai because the presiding deity always leads a procession outside his own temple. The next ritual is the washing of the groom's feet and then all the images are placed on a stage for the wedding itself. In the centre is Minakshi with Sundareshwara (Somaskanda) on her left as usual; on

Sundareshwara's left is Subrahmanya and on Minakshi's right is Perumal. Two priests act the roles of Minakshi and Sundareshwara; a third actually performs the rituals which make up the wedding.

The first important ritual is the pouring of water over a coconut; this is equivalent to the taraivarttal - the pouring of water to give away the bride - as performed by Vishnu himself in the Kalyanasundara sculpture depicting Minakshi's marriage to Sundareshwara, to which I shall return below. In the temple ritual, however, the priests do not involve Perumal's image in the water-pouring. The next important ritual is worship of the tali, the marriage emblem tied round the bride's neck, which is followed by an exchange of garlands and then of cloths between bride and groom. Then the tali is tied round the necks of Minakshi and the god's consort within the Somaskanda image; this is the act that specifically seals the marriage bond at a south Indian wedding. In the last crucial ritual of the wedding, the two actor-priests walk round a fire three times for the 'seven steps', which seal the marriage in the 'orthodox' Vedic tradition.

In its main features, the wedding of Minakshi and Sundareshwara is identical to a Tamil Brahman marriage ceremony (Good 1991: 173-4), adapted to take account of the bride and groom's representation by images and actors. There is nothing distinctively regal about the wedding, even though Minakshi has

been prominently displayed as the Pandyan queen during the previous two days, and Sundareshwara's status as the king, sealed by his marriage to Minakshi, is displayed when his image goes in procession afterwards riding on a silver elephant, the ceremonial mount of the Hindu monarch.

Plainly, a crucial feature of the wedding ritual is the taraivarttal, which evokes the action of Vishnu in giving Minakshi away to Sundareshwara and thereby becoming his brother-in-law. Yet it is also noteworthy that Perumal's image is not actually brought into the enactment of the pouring of water and nothing whatsoever is done to dramatise the relationship between him and his sister and brother-in-law. Admittedly, Subrahmanya also has no active part in the wedding, but the ostensibly anomalous presence of a son only born later indicates that even on this occasion the divine couple's relationship with Subrahmanya is at least as important as their relationship with Perumal/Vishnu. Hence it is not so much the latter's presence, as the inattention paid to him, that is one of the most salient features of the wedding ritual and I shall return to this point when discussing Kallalagar's role.

Let me now turn to the Avani Mula festival. After Sundareshwara's coronation on the seventh day, the images of Subrahmanya from Tirupparankundram and of Manikkavasagar from Tiruvadavur temple arrive in the Minakshi temple. Manikkavasagar is one of the four leading 'saints' of medieval, Tamil Shaivism;

Tiruvadavur, about twelve miles east of Madurai, was his birthplace. Subrahmanya and Manikkavasagar both play prominent roles in the next two days of the Avani Mula festival, but it is Subrahmanya's role on the eighth day that matters here.

The theme of the eighth day's rituals derives from the second of four Tiruvilaiyadal myths, which recount the life of Manikkavasagar when he was the Pandyan king's prime minister (Dessigane, Pattibiramin and Filliozat 1960, 1: 91-102, myths 58-61). In the first myth, the prime minister was given money by the king to buy horses, but instead he gave it all away to support the worship of Sundareshwara, who told Manikkavasagar that he would send horses to the king. The second myth tells how the horses failed to arrive, so that Manikkavasagar was cruelly punished by the king. He pleaded for Sundareshwara's help, so the god had a pack of jackals turned into horses and promised to follow them disguised as a cavalry commander. Eventually, these horses arrived and were handed over to the king by Sundareshwara, who subsequently disappeared. The king made recompense to Manikkavasagar for unjustly punishing him. In the third myth, Sundareshwara turned the horses back into jackals, and the prime minister was again arrested and tortured. In the fourth myth, which provides the theme for the ninth day's rituals, Sundareshwara responded to Manikkavasagar's prayers by making the river Vaigai flood the city, so that the guards fled and the prime minister escaped.

On the eighth day, the second myth is enacted inside the temple as the ritual called 'exchange of the horses' halters' (kudirai kayiru mariya). Sundareshwara's Somaskanda image is placed alongside Minakshi's image and facing them are the images of Subrahmanya from Tirupparankundram (together with his first wife, Devayanai) and Manikkavasagar. Sundareshwara is portrayed as the cavalry commander and Subrahmanya as the Pandyan king (with his queen), accompanied by his prime minister. A priest recounts the myth and when he describes handing the horses over to the king, a long strip of cloth - the horses' halters - is unrolled from Sundareshwara to the priest and then to Subrahmanya, before it is rolled up beside the latter's image to complete the ritual. The climax of Avani Mula is the ninth day, when the myth of the flood is enacted, but although Subrahmanya's image is present then, the god takes no significant role in the rituals.

At Avani Mula, a striking aspect is that Sundareshwara, although he has been crowned as the Pandyan king, does not appear in this role during the subsequent rituals. Thus in the ritual of the horses' halters, Subrahmanya represents the king instead, and the central act is transferring the halters, which clearly symbolises the delegation of sovereign power and authority, from Sundareshwara the god to Subrahmanya the king, who is his regent. Admittedly, Sundareshwara appears as a cavalry commander, but this is explicitly a disguise assumed by him to deceive the king.

Hence the ritual focus falls on the relationship between Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya, so that the hierarchical relationship between the god and the Pandyan king is made homologous with that between the divine father and son-cum-heir. Principally, this is a ritual of royal legitimation, in which the human king is symbolically identified with Subrahmanya, as if he, the regent, were Sundareshwara's son. It is, incidentally, a crucial aspect of this ritual that, unlike the corresponding myth, there is no enactment of the king's maltreatment of Manikkavasagar, and thus the ritual (like that on the ninth as well) unequivocally proclaims the king's rightful authority as Sundareshwara's regent (Fuller 1985: 24-6). At the same time, however, because Subrahmanya represents the king, the ritual on the eighth day also reciprocally displays him as the loyal, devoted son and successor of his father Sundareshwara, and it thereby re-emphasises the hierarchical solidarity between them.

Minakshi and Sundareshwara, Kallalagar and Subrahmanya

It is now necessary to turn to Kallalagar's Chittirai festival. Much of the Minakshi temple as seen today was built during the period of Nayaka rule over Madurai (1529-1736) and the evidence suggests that the extant form of the main festivals predominantly dates from that period. The Nayaka kingdom reached its height during the reign of Tirumala Nayaka (1623-59), and various innovations in the Minakshi temple's festival cycle are widely

believed to have been instituted by him (Devakunjari n.d.: 302; Jeyechandrun 1985: 225). These include the king's own participation in the deities' coronation rituals in Chittirai and Avani Mula, which were plainly designed to legitimate his role by representing him as the Pandyan regent of Minakshi and Sundareshwara (Devakunjari n.d.: 303-5). Another important innovation was Tirumala Nayaka's alteration of the timing of the Chittirai festival; it probably used to be celebrated two months earlier in masi (February-March) and in the temple today that is said to be why Minakshi's coronation is four, not six, months before Sundareshwara's, even though the divine couple share the crown equally. By moving the festival to chittirai, it was made to coincide with a festival (described in most detail by Hudson 1982), which is celebrated for Kallalagar, the form of Vishnu who is the presiding deity of the Alagarkoil temple situated about twelve miles northeast of Madurai. As a result, the two festivals could be seen as one and indeed, in Madurai today, almost all ordinary people see the Minakshi temple's Chittirai festival as inextricably linked with the nine-day festival celebrated for Kallalagar, even though the two events are actually organised completely separately.

Kallalagar is Alagar of the Kallar, a populous, low-ranking caste still inhabiting much of the countryside around Madurai. On the fourth day of his festival, which I now outline briefly, Kallalagar sets out in procession from Alagarkoil dressed as a

Kallar and guarded by large numbers of Kallar men, and he reaches north Madurai on the next day. On the sixth day, which is full-moon day, Kallalagar, no longer dressed like a Kallar, arrives at the dry bed of the river Vaigai, which bounds the city on its northern side, and there he meets Viraraghava Perumal, a form of Vishnu from a small temple in the city. Kallalagar then turns round and proceeds southeastwards alongside the river to a place called Vandiyur. On the seventh day, the god returns to the riverside to display the ten 'incarnations' (avatara) of Vishnu to his devotees. On the eighth day, he stays in north Madurai and during the last two days he journeys back to Alagarkoil, dressed once more as a Kallar.

For officiants in their two temples, Kallalagar's visit to Madurai is unconnected with Minakshi's wedding. The popular perception, however, is that Kallalagar visits Madurai to give his sister away to Sundareshwara. Unfortunately, as Kallalagar discovers when he reaches the Vaigai, he is late for the wedding, which is normally held two days before full moon. Going ahead without him is a gross insult to Kallalagar and in a rage - mainly directed at Sundareshwara - he refuses to cross the river into the city, although he is said to hand over his wedding-present to Perumal to give to Minakshi. Hence the relationship between Minakshi-Sundareshwara and Kallalagar, which is actually non-existent in ritual practice, is characterised for most ordinary people by Kallalagar's anger towards Sundareshwara.

Kallalagar is closely associated with the Ambalakkarar branch of the Kallar caste, whose traditional lands lie northeast of Madurai and the Vaigai. During the Nayaka period, the Ambalakkarar were a warlike group, who defied the Madurai kings' authority; their history is summarised by Dumont (1986: 9-15) and Nelson (1989, 2: 45), to illustrate the group's defiance, claimed that 'they showed respect only to the Alagar-Swami [Kallalagar]'. Discussing Tirumala Nayaka's alteration of the Minakshi temple's Chittirai festival, Hudson suggests that: 'Politically, the new combination of festivals would be a yearly statement of the unity of the northern part of the region over which he was sovereign, a unity depending on a positive relationship between himself and the Kallar' (1982: 138). Thus despite Kallar resistance, the conjoined Chittirai festivals would symbolically represent a united Nayaka kingdom built upon a complementary relationship between the capital city of the king, the Brahmans and other high castes, and the northeastern rural region dominated by the low-caste Kallar.

Like the other innovations credited to Tirumala Nayaka, the conjunction of the two Chittirai festivals can plainly be seen as a political construction of ritual, even though there is no evidence about its effectiveness in convincing the Kallar or others about the legitimacy of Nayaka rule over the putatively united kingdom. Furthermore, as Hudson also observes (ibid.: 138), Kallalagar's antagonism towards Sundareshwara seems to

reflect continuing tension between, among other groups, the Kallar and the city's high castes, so that division, not unity, is most patently symbolised. In analysing the conjunction of the two festivals and their symbolisation of division, however, another perspective is added by drawing a contrast between Kallalagar and Subrahmanya at Tirupparankundram, which previous studies of Chittirai have missed. Minakshi-Sundareshwara's relationship with Subrahmanya (unlike that with Kallalagar) actually is represented in ritual practice, even if it captures rather less popular attention in Madurai, and, as we have seen, Subrahmanya attends the crucial phases of the Chittirai and Avani Mula festivals, including his parents' wedding, which Kallalagar misses. Moreover, Minakshi and Sundareshwara's parental relationship with Subrahmanya is further reinforced when they attend his marriage to Devayanai at Tirupparankundram in panguni (March-April), during that temple's principal annual festival. Between Minakshi-Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya from Tirupparankundram, therefore, there is a ritually constructed solidarity which stands in obvious opposition to the ritual disconnection and imagined antagonism between them and Kallalagar from Alagarkoil.

This opposition has an interesting sociological dimension. Subrahmanya is linked with the Pramalai Kallar, who traditionally occupy the territory west of the city and south of the river, and describe themselves as slightly inferior to the Ambalakkarar from

whom they separated (Dumont 1986: 16). Historically, the Pramalai Kallar were more closely allied with the central authority in Madurai than the rebellious Ambalakkarar, and they have a single headman whose title was granted by Tirumala Nayaka. Moreover, according to their own tradition, the Pramalai Kallar were the watchmen at the Tirupparankundram temple, whereas the Ambalakkarar took the same role at the Alagarkoil and Minakshi temples, and Tirumala Nayaka also granted them a royal title and special honours at Tirupparankundram to correspond to those enjoyed by the Ambalakkarar at Alagarkoil (ibid.: 149, 153-6). In fact, the Pramalai Kallar's connection with Subrahmanya has always been weaker than the Ambalakkarar's special relationship with Kallalagar, and Subrahmanya is not called a Kallar deity. Nonetheless, the opposition between the two branches of the Kallar, refracted by their connections with Kallalagar and Subrahmanya, has been significant in elaborating the regional socio-religious topography in which the territory from Alagarkoil to Tirupparankundram becomes one vast sacred space whose focal point is the Minakshi temple at the centre of Madurai city. Crucially, though, the space traversed by Minakshi, Sundareshwara and Kallalagar at their Chittirai festivals is bifurcated by the river separating the old city from the northeastern countryside of the Ambalakkarar, whereas the space occupied by Minakshi-Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya seamlessly unites the city and its southwestern hinterland, where the Pramalai Kallar live (cf.

Fuller 1993). Today, the history of the Nayakas and the Kallar is mostly forgotten, but the contrast between Minakshi-Sundareshwara's close relationship with their son at Tirupparankundram and their separation from their brother and brother-in-law at Alagarkoil is still plainly visible in the pattern of Madurai's festivals.

Divine kinship and Shiva's family

In conclusion, I wish to return to the question of the deities' kinship. As already mentioned, many of the festival rituals referred to above are primarily concerned with kingship, but they are obviously about kinship as well. Indeed, for many ordinary people in Madurai - as opposed to the priests and officials in the temples - divine kinship, not kingship, is a theme that probably resonates more closely with their own experience, although it cannot do so straightforwardly, as we shall see.

To open the discussion, let us go back to the connection between Sundareshwara and Kallalagar. Hudson (1982: 138-41; cf. 1978) argues that the conjunction of the two Chittirai festivals derives part of its symbolic logic from the notion that Shiva and Vishnu are brothers-in-law, whose rivalry mirrors that between their human equivalents despite the normative ideal of cooperation between them and the two families united by marriage. As we have seen, Hudson relates this rivalry and its ideal absence to the tensions and postulated unity of the Nayaka

kingdom, but now I want to focus on the significance of the festivals in relation to the Tamil kinship system. This issue is taken up by Harman, who develops Hudson's analysis in various directions, and he shows that the Tamil concern with Shiva's relationship with his brother-in-law - as opposed to that with his father-in-law which is so prominent in Sanskrit mythology - is related to the contrast between the southern preference for cross-cousin marriage and the northern prohibition on marriage between close kin (1989: 91-4). On the other hand, Harman confuses matters by asserting that 'hypergamy is the ideal' in both north and south India (ibid.: 93), and that 'in any southern brothers-in-law relationship there is always a superior and an inferior', so that Shiva, as the wife-taker, must be superior (ibid.: 151). The tension between Shiva and Vishnu, he then claims, is a function of the contradiction between their inequality and their mutual rights and obligations (ibid.: 93, 157).

The main problem with this argument is that among many Tamil Non-Brahmans, isogamy is strongly preferred, so that brothers-in-law are ideally of equal status and, as Beck (1974: 10) observes in her discussion of Shiva and Vishnu's relationship, 'there is a great stress laid on brother-in-law cooperation and friendship', despite the usual presence of some tension. Particularly among Tamil Brahmans, however, hypergamy is the norm - although it is less systematically developed than in many north Indian high-

caste groups - and it does mean that a man's relationship with his wife's brother, his inferior, is less close than in most lower-caste groups (cf. Good 1991: 172-3; Gough 1956: 843-4). Given Minakshi and Sundareshwara's own Brahmanical status, the imagined animosity between Sundareshwara and Kallalagar can be related to the relative distance between Brahman brothers-in-law, and to that extent Harman's assertion about hypergamy and its implications has partial validity. Yet despite the inferiority thereby implied, the wife-giver should of course attend his sister's wedding to give her away, and since Kallalagar fails to do so, it his separation from Sundareshwara - not his unequal association with him - that is emphasised, albeit by omission, in the Chittirai festivals. Moreover, because Kallalagar is identified as a Kallar for much of his festival, even his kinship with Minakshi and Sundareshwara is ambiguous.

Thus the point to be stressed is that both the popular idea of antagonism between Sundareshwara and Kallalagar, and the complete absence of any ritually constructed connection between them, express a negative or non-existent relationship between the two divine brothers-in-law. Normative ideals of friendly cooperation or hypergamous respect and deference between brothers-in-law are conspicuous by their absence in the Chittirai festivals, and Hudson and Harman - in suggesting that these are implied - are looking for a symbolic expression of ideal norms that simply does not exist.

Let us now turn to the relationship between Shiva and Vishnu as it is represented inside the Minakshi temple, rather than in the double Chittirai festival. The famous sculptured image of Kalyanasundara in the Minakshi temple depicts Vishnu giving Minakshi away in marriage to Sundareshwara.[5] The original image, carved on a pillar, is a popular focus for devotion and in 1985 a new Kalyanasundara image was installed within the temple. The new image attracts many worshippers and a notice nearby tells young women that if they worship Kalyanasundara they will find husbands, an apt reflection of the popular preoccupation with marriage prospects and of the notion that a good husband will have the qualities of Shiva, which is most explicitly expressed in the Minakshi temple festivals held in margali (December-January) (cf. Fuller 1992: ch. 8). The very fact that the divine couple's wedding in Chittirai is the most popular event in the temple's year, especially among women, also testifies to the same general idea that the deities' marriage is an ideal model for human marriage.

Nonetheless, despite Vishnu's prominence in the Kalyanasundara image, it is striking that the affinal relationship between him and Sundareshwara is hardly given any ritual emphasis in the temple. Thus even at Minakshi's wedding, when the relationship is being established, Perumal from Tirupparankundram is passively marginal, so that his connection with the bride and groom is practically ignored. Certainly,

Vishnu is always said to be Shiva's brother-in-law, but despite the constant emphasis on the marital unity of Minakshi and Sundareshwara, and the spectacular celebration of their wedding as the highlight of the festival cycle, there is virtually no ritual expression of the affinal tie between the two gods. Nor is any more attention paid to the sibling tie between Minakshi and Vishnu, and although brother-sister relationships among Tamil Brahmans are conventionally more formally distant after a woman's marriage than among most other south Indians (cf. Good 1991: 227; Gough 1956: 848), they are not as completely attenuated as Minakshi's tie with her brother appears to be.

We can therefore see that although marriage, as a dyadic relationship between husband and wife, is a central ritual theme in the Minakshi temple, the affinal relationship between brothers-in-law is almost totally ignored, so that affinity as constituted by marriage alliance is accorded practically no symbolic value. Instead, on almost all important occasions when Minakshi and Sundareshwara are represented together as a couple, their parental relationship with Subrahmanya is most prominently displayed. It is normally Somaskanda, and never Kalyanasundara (of whom there is no festival image), who represents Sundareshwara the husband in his festival rituals, so that as a husband he is equally a father. This emphasis on Minakshi and Sundareshwara's parenthood, which is expressed in the composition and arrangement of their festival images, is greatly reinforced

by their relationship with the important, independent form of Subrahmanya at Tirupparankundram, who takes a leading role at Chittirai and Avani Mula, and celebrates his own marriage in his parents' presence. God the husband and father, but not god the brother-in-law, is consistently brought to the fore in the temple rituals, and it is filiation, not affinity, that is repeatedly emphasised as the concomitant of the marital bond, in spite of the importance of marriage alliance in the Dravidian kinship system.

In this respect, there is a parallel with Beck's analysis of the 'kin nucleus' in Tamil folklore, in which there is a similar emphasis on relationships among immediate family members and hardly any mention of larger consanguineal and affinal groups (1974: 3). In the kin nucleus, a woman occupies the centre 'surrounded and constrained' by her father, brother, husband and son, but she is also the 'material or source of productive energy on which the kinship system is built' (ibid.: 9). Thus among the deities, the goddess at the centre is linked to 'Brahma (her proto father), Vishnu (her brother), Siva (her husband), and Ganesh and Murugan (her sons)' (ibid.: 21). For Beck, the folkloric representation thus provides an alternative, predominantly female perspective of kinship that counterbalances the male-oriented kinship system structured by larger groups.

In Sundareshwara's holy family, this nucleus is reduced still further; Minakshi's father is never alluded to, Vishnu is

marginal and Vinayaka is excluded. Because only the relationships within the holy family between husband and wife, and between them and their younger son, are being fashioned in ritual, the solidarity of Sundareshwara's nuclear family appears to be unthreatened by either external bonds or internal rivalries. In particular, in the absence of any relationship with Vishnu, neither the goddess's tie with her brother nor the god's with his brother-in-law can cast a shadow over their marital unity, and the expulsion of Vinayaka ensures that there is no rivalry between father and elder son, or between male siblings. It is true that the marriage between Minakshi and Sundareshwara is not entirely peaceful, as is demonstrated most clearly in the regularly repeated ritual of the 'lovers' quarrel' provoked by the god's seduction of the sages' wives in the Pine Forest (Fuller 1980: 345-6). Furthermore, their familial harmony is, of course, achieved mainly at Minakshi's expense, because she loses her brother and, more significantly, her favourite son, whose disappearance, at least implicitly, may be a case of filicide according to the 'Indian Oedipus' complex in which fathers kill sons, instead of the other way round.[6] It is also worth noting that Shiva and the goddess never have a daughter, which is itself another silent sign of Minakshi's deprivation, given the importance of the mother-daughter bond. Unlike the larger kin nucleus described by Beck, the goddess relinquishes her central position as the link between a cluster of males, and

Sundareshwara plainly dominates his family.

Nonetheless, even if Minakshi loses out, the internal harmony of Sundareshwara's holy family is made as secure as possible by the elimination of potential strains among close kin, notably those inherent in the father-son relationship and those which flow from the contradiction between strong brother-sister and husband-wife bonds. As Trawick convincingly demonstrates (1990: 157-86), along with the mother-daughter tie, these are the most seriously conflictual relationships for a Tamil family, and it is from them that Sundareshwara, Minakshi and Subrahmanya can hope to escape, whereas ordinary Tamils have to cope with them as best they can.

Sundareshwara's patriarchal holy family, therefore, is probably a mostly peaceful one, but if so, its peace is achieved in ways that human husbands and wives, and parents and children, can never emulate because they are locked into a web of consanguineal and affinal kinship that inevitably generates strain and conflict as well as amity and cooperation, 'longings for freedom' as well as 'longings for continuity' (ibid.: 158). As with so many familial relationships among Hindu deities, like those in the folklore discussed by Beck (1974), Minakshi and Sundareshwara's devotees are not presented with an ideal model of the kinship system. Instead they are given a depiction of antagonisms between close relatives, as well as the means to imagine how marriage, the family and their own personal lives

might be if they could be liberated from social reality.

Notes

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1. For a brief description of the temple, see Fuller (1984: ch. 1).

2. A picture of the holy family including both sons is fairly common in contemporary, popular oleographs and it has been a favourite motif in north Indian painting (Kramrisch 1980: 198-208); a typical example appears on the cover of O'Flaherty (1975).

3. For the Kandapuranam, see Dessigane and Pattabiramin (1967) and for the Tiruvilaiyadal, see Dessigane, Pattabiramin and Filliozat (1960), as well as the analysis by Harman (1989). The Tiruvilaiyadal is the sthalapurana, the 'myth of the site', for the Minakshi temple and contains in particular the story of the god and goddess's marriage.

4. Tirupparankundram is one of Subrahmanya/Murugan's 'six' sacred pilgrimage sites in Tamilnadu; only five are in fact identified and the sixth is said to be each and every other shrine of the god (Clothey 1978: 117). Until the early 1980s, Tirupparankundram temple was under the administrative control of the Minakshi temple, and a section of the Minakshi temple's priesthood also has the right to work in Tirupparankundram.

5. A photograph of the Kalyanasundara sculpture which stands in a nearby hall and is almost identical to the original one inside the temple appears in Dessigane, Pattibiramin and Filliozat (1960, 2: plate XLIII). This photograph is reproduced on the jacket of Dumont (1983); unlike me, the book's designer presumably took the Kalyanasundara image to be an iconographic expression of 'affinity as a value'.

6. As Obeyesekere shows in his extensive discussion of the 'Indian Oedipus' complex (1990: Lecture 2), in which the myth of Ganesha is the paradigmatic expression, the Hindu material actually reveals a variety of patterns, not merely the filicidal reversal of the standard Oedipus complex.

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