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Play and symbolism in rites of passage of Tamil Brahmin women: An interpretation of their social significance

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PLAY AND SYMBOLISM IN RITES OF PASSAGE OF TAMIL BRAHMIN WOMEN: AN INTERPRETATION OF THEIR SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

PLAY AND SYMBOLISM IN RITES OF PASSAGE OF TAMIL BRAHMIN WOMEN: AN INTERPRETATION OF THEIR SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Vasumathi K. Duvvury

Among Tamil Brahmin Aiyars, the world of women is separate yet complementary to the world of men. These women, through their rituals comprising primarily non-Vedic (laukik, oral) life cycle rituals and vows (vratas/nombus), express their domestic concerns, their fears of widowhood and barrenness, and their ambitions of motherhood and eternal 'sumangalihood' (state of auspiciousness).

This study, which deals with rural and urban south Indian Aiyar women aims to show (1) how the various symbolic and 'non-serious' elements in their rites of passage reflect their traditional as well as their contemporary tastes; (2) how the liminal period plays a significant role in molding the women; (3) how marriage leading to motherhood, and not simply marriage, is their most important goal; and (4) how this in turn is a commentary on their position and status in this society.

Part One introduces the reader to the two research sites, highlights the important traditional life-goals of Aiyar women, and delineates the differences as well as the complementary nature of the Vedic and laukik traditions. In Part Two, Chapter VI provides indepth descriptions and analyses of their life cycle rituals, grouped as "separation," "transition," and "incorporation" rites. This reveals that the women are integrated into society in stages. The various 'playful' and symbolic elements clearly emphasize this fact. Chapter VII deals with the important vratas/nombus performed by Aiyar women. All the rites and vratas are explained by means of case studies and photographs. In Chapter VIII Aiyar women's rituals are viewed as a set and two common symbolic elements -- colors and foods -- are explored. In Chapter IX a brief description of the roles of 'auspicious' women (sumangalis) and widows in 'antyeshti' (last rites) as well as an account of the rite of widowhood are included to further exemplify the auspicious/creative/positive and the inauspicious/destructive/negative qualities of women and the importance this society attaches to the state of sumangalihood/motherhood.

Women's rituals, basically performed by women ritual specialists, have hitherto received scant attention from scholars. This study is intended as a contribution toward rectifying this state of affairs.
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PART ONE
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

"In all societies there are two types of mobility or passage, to the successful accomplishment of which ritual is directed: role change and geographical movement" (Wallace, 1966:127). Birth, puberty, marriage, and death are universal occasions of ritual, as on these occasions people enter new states of being and are therefore subject to new dangers and responsibilities.

Van Gennep in his classic Les rites de passage (1908) saw "regeneration" as a law of life and of the universe. From birth to death, human existence is in a state of flux, which is exemplified by the decay and regeneration in nature. This regeneration is accomplished in the social world by the rites of passage. The life of an individual in any society is thus a series of passages from one status or state to another. At various stages in our life, each one of us symbolically 'dies' from one stage and becomes 'reborn' into another, new stage. These changes may be dangerous and traumatic, and, at the least, they are upsetting to the life of the group and the individual. The transitional period is met with rites of passage which cushion the disturbance by incorporating individuals into
the group in their new statuses and returning them to the customary routines of life.

Although van Gennep he intended the term "rites of passage" to include both rites accompanying changes in social statuses of individuals or groups of individuals and rites associated with seasonal changes for an entire society, the term has since come to mean exclusively 'life-crisis' rituals.

Van Gennep was considerably impressed with the importance of the transitional phase that he noted within a ceremony and he emphasized the threatening nature of all liminalities -- intellectual, social, and cosmic. This period, which Wallace (1966), Turner (1974), and Leach (1976) among others, consider "sacred" is the focus of a good deal of symbolic and 'playful' activity. When individuals or groups are separated from their previous condition and are in a state of suspension ('margin' or 'limen,' meaning 'threshold' in Latin) they constitute a threat to themselves and to the entire group until they are properly incorporated into their new states of being. Being unclassifiable, these liminalities have the potential of disrupting the neat order imposed by human beings on their reality. Religious sacraments (which Hindus call samskaras), we know, have the important function of devising ways and means by which the liminalities become manageable and less threatening.
According to Turner (1974:60-61), the essence of "liminality, liminality par excellence" is the "free, or 'ludic' recombination of the various cultural factors "in any and every possible pattern, however weird." Turner goes on to add that in the liminal phases and states work and play are hardly distinguishable in many cases; "... these 'play' or 'ludic' aspects of ... ritual and myth are, as Durkheim says "de la vie serieuse," that is, they are intrinsically connected with the 'work' of the collectivity in performing symbolic actions and manipulating symbolic objects so as to ... turn boys into men and girls into women ..." (Ibid., 64).

In every rite of passage, there are, therefore, three distinct phases: "separation," "transition," and "incorporation." In "separation" the individual is taken from a place or group or status; in "transition" or the liminal period, he/she is subjected to procedures of transformation; and in "incorporation" he/she is formally installed in the new place or group or status.

Further, while each rite is made up of these three essential phases, when taken together the rites can be broadly classified as separation, transition, and incorporation rites. For example, among Aiyar women, the Tamil Smarta Brahmin group that I studied, puberty rite (tirandukuli) is a rite of separation; marriage (kalyanam/vivaha), and valakappu and puchutal (rites performed during
the eight month of pregnancy) are transition rites; and the birth of a son finally incorporates the women as new members of their group. The various symbolic and 'non-serious' (non-scriptural, folk, or laukik) elements clearly emphasize these distinctions.

Although most scholars recognize the importance of motherhood for Hindu women, they don't always point out the fact that a woman is completely incorporated only after the birth of a child/male child. Since marriage is universally considered to be the most important ritual in the life of a Hindu, especially a woman, most scholars concentrate on it and make it seem like a woman's incorporation is complete after she is married. For instance, according to Das (1982:126), "It is well known that the complete incorporation of the child in the social world only takes place with the initiation of the boy and the marriage of the girl." This simplistic view is not valid as far as Aiyar men and women are concerned. My study of Aiyar women revealed that their incorporation (like Aiyar men's) takes place in stages. Rites of initiation only initiate this process and do not completely incorporate the subjects either socially or ritually. A woman's liminal period actually ends only with the birth of a child, preferably a male one, and not just with marriage, as clearly illustrated by the low position barren women occupy in this community. Thus, "... life in the world is not complete if one does marry ..." (Inden and Nicholas,
1977:61, quoting S. Bhattacharya) is only partly true as far as Aiyar women are concerned. Unlike the Hindus described by Gupta (1974:55) for whom marriage is "the most significant event of a person's life," for Aiyars, marriage is only one of the most significant events in their lives.

All symbolic and 'playful' elements in rites before the birth of a child deal mainly with the union of the male and the female which results in procreation. They symbolically convert a woman into an 'auspicious' person (sumangali). A study of the 'non-serious' elements show that all the collective teasing and joking, dancing, and singing of suggestive and amorous songs which form an important part of rites performed before the birth of a child cease after the birth of the child. Instead, the songs in later rites are mainly of a devotional nature and the Vedic or sastric (scriptural) and laukik elements are now essentially concerned with the health and safety of the child. The whole series of rites for Aiyar women clearly reflect these anxieties as the women, from young, are fully aware that even though marriage is the first essential step toward incorporation, they, however, become fully incorporated only after the birth of a child. They, therefore, use the rich symbolic and 'non-serious' elements available to them to act out their anxieties and repressed desires.

As Turner (1974:64) remarks, the "joking is fun, but it is also a social sanction." The songs, which are subtly lewd and which indirectly educate the young women are more
often used as entertainment devices designed to put the young initiate/bride/would-be-mother at ease. Through humor, fun, and play, the serious and important business of bearing a child is made pleasurable.

From childhood, an Aiyar girl (like other females belonging to most of the upper caste Hindu groups in India) is taught that she should stay at home and be submissive. She watches her mother and other sumangalis who play dominant roles in the various rites of passage. They all have a very formative influence on her and she uses them as role models in life. Through the life cycle rituals that her mother and other sumangalis initiate and perform for her, a girl's role in society becomes gradually crystallized.

Although the whole series of traditional ceremonies must be performed for both male and female children, a distinction by sex is made in their performance. For females the Dharmashastras (religious law books of the Hindus) instruct that all rites, except marriage, be performed only to purify the body. They further instruct that they be performed at the proper time in the proper order without the recitation of the sacred texts, which are required at all rites for the males. The recitation of the sacrament in the marriage rite, which also involves a male, and the relative importance that is attached to the various rituals performed during the course of the marriage
ceremony, may be seen as a reflection of the importance of marriage in the life of a Brahmin woman, as it determines her fate to a much greater extent than it does the destiny of a man. It not only leads to a geographical change of residence and a change of responsibilities, but it also leads a woman to motherhood, her most significant life cycle stage and her most auspicious role in society.

At every stage in her life, a Brahmin woman is made aware of her 'inferior' and subordinate position. At marriage, the gift of a virgin daughter (kanyadan) is said to absolve her father of the sin of begetting a daughter and to transfer the onus to his son-in-law. In return for accepting the bride, the groom is placated by the bride's father by giving him gifts and a large dowry in cash, and is treated as a god throughout the ceremony. Though she may die before her husband, a Brahmin woman's soul is not propitiated until after her husband's death. It is believed that a Brahmin wife becomes assimilated by her husband and can attain salvation only through her devotion to him. Just as a river becomes one with the ocean, she is said to merge with her husband's personality. A Brahmin woman is therefore never considered fit to be independent. At every stage in her life, she should be under the domination of a man, her father, her husband, or her son. "The problems of the married woman are centered round her husband's family and her children while how to get herself married and settled in life is one of the greatest problems for an
unmarried girl and her parents" (Sen Gupta, 1970:79).

It is true that men and women are considered to be complementary and the various Vedic rites cannot be performed by a man alone without his wife. But, a woman in general is said to be inferior to a man. She gains status only through her link to her husband. Without it, she is simply categorized as belonging to the Sudra caste. It is only through her husband that a woman becomes a mother, an auspicious human being. Although husbands are dependent on their wives for material welfare and prosperity, superior status and purity reside only in the husbands. The realm of the wife which is the realm of the auspicious/inauspicious is inferior to, subordinated to, and encompassed by the realm of the pure and the impure.

The idea of auspiciousness is very closely related to the cult of the Mother Goddess. Saktism or the tradition of Mother worship is a very important aspect of Hindu religious belief and Hindus conceive the Great Goddess as the personification of primordial energy and the source of all divine and cosmic evolution. It is only as a mother that a woman redeems herself. As an auspicious married woman and a mother she is second to none and is accorded a very high place indeed in society.

Sometimes Western education and modern living conditions may create problems by posing contradictions to these traditional views and values. How then does a modern,
educated Aiyar woman cope with her life in the face of such stringent traditions? Part of the answer seems to lie in the conditioning of attitudes provided by women's rites of passage, that constantly remind women of their important traditional goals and purposes in life, giving these goals an aura of sanctity as well as propriety. Thus women's rituals reinforce the ideals that their belief system has already taught them.

II

Life-crisis rites of Aiyars can be broadly divided into three categories. The first group, which mainly involves a male (for eg., **upanayana** or investiture with the sacred thread, and **chaula** or tonsure) is almost completely bereft of laukik elements; the second one, which involves both a male and a female (for eg., **vivaha**, and **garbhadhana/shantimuhurtam** or impregnation) contain both Vedic and non-Vedic elements; and the third category, which involves only females and are basically non-Vedic rites (for eg., 'coming of age' ceremony, and valakappu) do not require the presence of a **purohit** or **vadiyar** (Brahmin domestic priest) (1).

As the **Grihya-sutras** (manuals dealing with domestic life) and most other books and commentaries about Hindu samskaras, written by both Indian and Western (mostly male) scholars, describe mainly Vedic rituals and since women's
rites are performed by women without the help of a Brahmin domestic priest, most men feel that these laukik women's rites do not really fulfill any useful purpose. Contrary to this essentially male point of view, the rich tradition of 'playful' elements, while providing entertainment to everyone present, actually reinforce man-made ideals of women in society. They also perform the important tasks of educating the young initiate and crystallizing her role in society by enabling her to smoothly make the transition from one role to another. By concentrating on Aiyar women's rites of passage, this research tries to shed light on an important aspect of these women's lives which has hitherto received scant attention.

Research for this project was primarily carried out in the agraharam (Brahmin village) of Danapuram (2) in Tamil Nadu (previously known as Madras state), south India. In order to give the project a broader perspective, both traditional and 'modern' Aiyar families from the southern city of Bangalore, situated in the neighboring state of Karnataka (previously known as Mysore state), were also studied. Even though Bangalore is not traditionally considered to be a part of the Tamil speaking area (since it does not belong to Tamil Nadu), this city was chosen because it was geographically and linguistically familiar to me. Also the city has a large concentration of both traditional and 'modern' Aiyars among its population. Tamilians numbering 419,691 persons (25.37%) form one of
the largest linguistic groups in the city, next only to Kannada speakers who number 525,985 persons (31.80%) (Census report, 1971). Aiyars belonging to the four major groups of Vadaman, Brihacharanam, Vadyaman, and Ashtasahasram from both the places were studied.

My study revealed that some changes had taken place between the rural and the urban Aiyars on the one hand and between the traditional, relatively less 'Westernized' majority and the 'modern' more 'Westernized' minority on the other hand. Whereas the more important Vedic steps are almost completely preserved by both the traditional and 'modern' groups, the less important but equally traditional Vedic elements as well as quite a few of the laukik elements have been abbreviated by the 'modern' group. To a large extent, these changes have been necessitated due to economic reasons. Sometimes new elements which are often Western in character have been introduced mainly in the city (for eg., the reception in the evening on the day of the wedding or the 'tea' during valakappu and cradle ceremony).

While most anthropologists recognize that quite a few of these Brahminic rites and ceremonies have both sastric and laukik elements in them, to a large extent, they have chosen to ignore the latter and as a result very little documented data is available on this topic. When the writers have tried to incorporate elements of both the
traditions, they have primarily described strichar (women's rituals in the marriage samskara). This is understandable since most anthropologists have mainly concentrated on one major Hindu samskara — the marriage samaskara. Basically they have either ignored the other rites of passage completely or have briefly touched upon the symbolic aspects of the various Hindu rites in a very general way. They have also usually lumped people of different castes under one broad regional group and have not pointed out the innumerable differences that exist in the performance of these rites among the castes, since they have been mainly interested in the philosophical rather than the ritual aspects of these rites. Further, they have not necessarily distinguished between male and female rites or talked about the changes, if any, in these rites in a 'traditional' or conventional rural setting and in a 'modern' urban environment. By concentrating on Aiyar women living in both rural and urban settings, this research attempts to present a comprehensive picture of the various laukik rituals of at least one group of people living in south India.

Common to most studies on kinship and religion conducted by Western anthropologists is the imposition of a general grid of terms and concepts on different cultures. "...[W]hat we find is not something 'out there;' rather, it is something in our minds, as social scientists -- distortions of semantic fields, as Levi-Strauss has remarked of
totemism" (Östör, 1980:12). A symbol does not exist by itself; it is a part of a larger context. Most semiological studies, including structuralism, which try to analyse signs without reference to the context, are guilty of trying to infer the meaning of the symbol from the symbol itself, without really referring to the people in the culture who employ it. Unfortunately an indigenous cultural perspective is hampered to a large extent when an anthropologist relies heavily on interpreters. Since my informants were Aiyars, whose language I speak and with whom I share some common cultural features as a result of early socialization, this study presents a more indigenous picture of these people. Being a woman, I had no difficulty in establishing rapport with my female informants who were extremely co-operative and became my friends.

My aim in this research is basically to show: (1) how the various symbolic and 'non-serious' elements in the rites of passage performed for Aiyar women reflect their traditional and, to some extent, their contemporary tastes; (2) how the liminal period plays a significant role in molding these women; (3) how marriage leading to motherhood and not simply marriage is the most important goal of these women; and (4) how this in turn is a commentary on the position and status of women in society.

The critical problems of becoming adult males and females, of relations within the family, and of passing
into old age are directly related to the devices which society offers the individual to help him/her achieve adjustment to these statuses. The continued expansion of industrialization and urbanization, I believed, would have brought extensive changes in social life that would have included increased secularization and a decline in the importance of sacred ceremonies. Although many rites have been abbreviated, I found that not only did the Aiyars perform most of them, if not all of them, but I also noticed a renewed interest in traditional customs and beliefs. This trend seems to be growing among urban Aiyars in particular. While some Aiyars from the agraharam seemed to be embarrassed to admit that they performed all the traditional Vedic and laukik rites, since they felt that this might present them as being boorish and unsophisticated, a sizeable group of Aiyars in the city were seriously trying to revive some of the more traditional, serious as well as non-serious elements. This does not seem to be an isolated instance since Reynolds (1978) in her study of Madurai (urban area) and Vadapalani (rural area) women found that quite often customs and traditions are more scrupulously maintained in the city and not in the village.

Data was collected firstly through participant observation. A minimum of at least one performance of each ritual in the agraharam and at least three such celebrations of each ritual in Bangalore were observed. Tapes of
Tamil songs sung during the various rites were recorded and a number of photographs portraying the different stages of these rituals were taken. Secondly, a short questionnaire was passed out and 88 Aiyar women from 49 families in the agraharam and 57 women from 32 families in Bangalore, belonging to different age groups, diverse socio-economic conditions and educational backgrounds, and exhibiting varying degrees of conservatism and modernization, were interviewed. These interviews were informal, yet highly focussed and detailed. Thirdly, data from available documentary material was collected. Finally, books and manuscripts in Tamil as well as the tapes of Tamil songs, that had been recorded earlier, were translated.

The rites and vratas/nombus (vows) of Aiyar women observed were:

Rites:

1. "Separation" rite: tirandukuli;

2. "Transition" rites: (1) kalyanam -- (a) sumangali prarthane (worship of sumangalis), (b) paligai telikyal (sprinkling of seeds), (c) unjal (swing ceremony), (d) nalangu (bridal couple at play), (e) shantimuhurtam; and (2) (a) valakappu, (b) puchatal;

3. "Incorporation" rites: (1) Kappu (seventh day 'bangle' ceremony after the birth of the child; and (2) rites on the 11th day -- (a) women's rites performed in conjunction with the Vedic natal rites of jatakarman
(casting of the horoscope) and namakarana (naming),
(b) tottil (cradle ceremony).

Vratas (Calendrical):
1. Savitri nombu or Karadaiyar nombu,
2. Varamahalakshmi vrata.

The difficult and special Rishipanchami vrata and women's role in antyeshti (last rites or funeral) were also studied.

Chapter II of Part One presents the necessary historical background. The purpose of this chapter is to mainly provide a backdrop for the ethnography. Since this study deals with Aiyars, who like other Aryans belonged to north India but emerged as one of the dominant groups of Brahmins in the south, which was actually Dravidian territory, it was felt necessary to include in this chapter a brief description of Dravidian south India and how it slowly but steadily became Aryanized. Chapter III focuses on the ethnographic setting and introduces the reader to Danapuram and Bangalore, the two principal research sites chosen for this study. Chapter IV concentrates on Aiyars and highlights the primary goals of Aiyar women in life as upheld by tradition. Chapter V is entirely devoted to Vedic and laukik rites. It first describes the Hindu institution of samskara, then talks about laukik rites before listing the important differences between the two traditions. The chapter ends by pointing out that the two
trading, however, complement one another. This brings us to the end of Part One. Part Two begins with Chapter VI. This chapter details and analyses the various rites of passage of Aiyar women, which have been grouped under three main categories: (a) "separation," (b) "transition," and (c) "incorporation" rites. Chapter VII deals with the important vratas performed by Aiyar women. All the rites and vratas are explained in detail by means of individual case studies. In Chapter VIII, which is an analysis of the important symbolic elements that commonly occur in all these laukik rites, our perspective changes from viewing women's rituals as discrete units to looking at them as a set. Although this study mainly deals with rites pertaining to the different statuses of women until their incorporation into society, a brief description of the role of senior sumangalis/sumangalis and widows in antyeshti (funeral, last rites) as well as a description of the rite of widowhood are included in Chapter IX, the concluding chapter. It was felt that these rites, by graphically distinguishing auspiciousness from inauspiciousness, further exemplify the creative and destructive qualities of women and the importance attached to sumangalihood by this society.

In the text, Tamil and Sanskrit words are underscored the first time they appear and not subsequently.

While it is fully recognized that all generalizations based on particular studies should be made cautiously since
conclusions are quite often caste specific/region specific and not universal, it is, however, hoped that the conclusions of this research, presented in the last chapter, though mainly applicable to the Aiyar women's world would be relevant to the study of women in other Indian settings. This research, which illustrates the importance of 'non-serious' elements in socio-religious rituals, does not aim to make a series of regional comparisons. In this respect the view expressed by Östör (1980:16) quite succinctly describes my own: "I am convinced that this sort of endeavor should precede 'all-India' generalizations that, in the absence of detailed regional studies, would inevitably degenerate into those of all South Asia, thus abdicating any possibility of truly comparative, relational understanding." Thus, anthropological studies of women's rituals and other aspects of their world as perceived by the women themselves, even if the studies are detailed accounts of women belonging to discrete groups, should enable us to better understand the complex world of women.
Notes:

1. See Clarence Maloney, *Peoples of South Asia*, 1974, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, pp. 178-179. Maloney's claim that Brahmin priests perform puberty ceremonies is essentially untrue as far as Aiyars are concerned. These rites are conducted by women who act as ritual specialists in place of the vadiyar, who is conspicuous by his absence.

2. All village names in the text are pseudonyms.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: ARYANIZATION OF SOUTH INDIA

Dravidian Kingdoms of the South:

South India, referred to as Tamilakam (Dravidian or Tamil country) by ancient Tamil works, i.e., Dravidian or Tamil country, which in course of time diversified into Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada states (1), has always been considered a stronghold of the ancient Dravidian (or Turanian) races (2), who are believed to have existed in India long before the invasion of the Aryans. But curiously enough, unlike north India, the history of the south begins much later. "...[T]he ancient political history of southern India is irretrievably lost, and the materials for tracing the development of the high degree of civilization unquestionably attained by the Dravidian races are lamentably scanty... and it is quite impossible to carry back the story of the south, like that of the north, to 600 B.C." (Dutt, Vol. II, 1906:364-365).

The three 'kingdoms of the south,' that stretched all the way south as far as Kanyakumari (Cape Comorin), as recognized by ancient tradition are: the Pandya, the Chola, and the Chera (3). Though the boundaries of these kingdoms shifted from time to time, they are generally believed to have occupied the following regions: the
Pandyas occupied the extremity of the peninsula of India, south of Pudukottai to Kanyakumari; the Chola kingdom extended northwards, all the way to Nellore; and the realm of the Cheras lay to the west and included the Malabar coast. Although all three kingdoms existed in Asoka's time (257 B.C.), their orderly history does not commence until the 9th - 10th centuries A.D. In the 3rd century B.C., the ancient kingdoms of the Cholas and the Pandyas were known to Asoka who also specifies in his inscriptions (2nd and 13th edicts, 260 B.C., which incidentally is the earliest available record that can be dated with certainty) the two kingdoms of Kerala and Satyaputra (exact position of the latter unknown) as forming the Chera state. The prevailing language of the Chola and Pandya states was Tamil while the Chera country traditionally belonged to the Malayalam speaking region.

Aryanization:

It is well known that the ancient Dravidian kingdoms were constantly "in touch with the outer world ... through the medium of maritime commerce, which had been conducted with success from very early times," but "no Aryan language had penetrated into ... [these] kingdoms, which lived their own life, completely secluded from northern India ..." (Dutt, 1906, Vol. II:364). Eventually, however, not only did Aryan ideas and the religion of the Brahmins manage to reach the south, they soon began dominating all aspects of
the people's lives, especially their social and religious life. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to define with any accuracy the exact period when this happened because it was a slow and gradual process, a "colonization" that was affected not "by force of arms, but by the arts of peace" (Menon, 1982, Vol. I:56) and the Dravidian races seem to have willingly submitted to the culture and religion of the Aryans. Though experts generally agree that it is safe to presume that Aryan immigrants, who mainly appear to have been Brahmin priests and Vedic scholars rather than Kshatriya warriors, were firmly established in settlements in various parts of south India sometime between 3rd - 5th century A. D., references from several conflicting historical and legendary sources lead us to suppose that the process of Aryanization must have started a long time before this period, almost as early as 500 B. C., if not earlier.

The great Vedic sage Agastya is said to have been the first Aryan to have entered south India, after crossing the Vindhya mountains. He is believed to have taught the Dravidian people the art of civilization. He is said to have successfully led the first colony of Brahmins all the way to the southern extremity of the peninsula. The popular legend goes on to say that he liked south India so much that he decided to make it his permanent home and he is still believed to be residing on the Agastyakudum, a peak near Trivandrum in modern Kerala.
Oriental scholars like Weber and Lassen regard the story of the Ramayana, in particular, Rama's march through India to Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) with his aborigine friends from the south (who appear to the author of Ramayana as "the monkeys and bears inhabiting the Dandaka forest") as an allegory illustrating a historical fact -- the spread of Aryan civilization to south India and Sri Lanka. "... [T]here were means of communication between the extreme south and the extreme north, ... the route of the hero of the Ramayana from Ayodhya to Lanka can very well be traced on a map of India, and ... it is clear that the author of Ramayana had a clear knowledge of the route he describes ... In the 5th century B. C., Vijaya, a son of the king of Magadha, is said to have gone by sea to Ceylon, conquered the island, and established a Hindu kingdom there; and it is admitted that the conquerors of Ceylon under Vijaya had constant intercourse with southern India. This, at any rate, shows that means of intercourse between the north and the south even by sea was not altogether wanting" (Menon, 1982, Vol. I:69).

The Periplus and the writings of Ptolemy and other early writers testify to the existence of well established Brahmin settlements in south India, particularly along the Malabar coast, as early as the first century. "At the time of the Periplus [about 100 A. D.], the southern point of India was apparently a seat of their [Brahmins'] worship."
A temple to the wife of Shiva stood on Cape Comorin" (Sir William Hunter in *The Indian Empire*, quoted by Menon, 1982, Vol. I:69). Comparatively modern sources further reiterate the fact that the process of Aryanization, which began a long time ago, did indeed continue for several centuries. The Hiragaldi and Pallava grants refer to Brahmin settlements in the south in the 4th or 5th century A.D., and in the Sahyadri Khandam, there is an account of how Mayura Varman of the Kadamba dynasty introduced Brahmins from the north by granting them 64 villages, sometime as late as the close of the 5th century (4). "Thus we find that the conquest of southern India which was commenced at the close of the Epic Period went on through succeeding centuries; that by the 6th century, Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat, and the Deccan had been conquered and Aryanized; and that by the 5th century the Deccan as far south as the Krishna river was the seat of a powerful Hindu Empire. By the 4th century B.C. the whole of southern India [stretching as far south as Kanyakumari] had been Hinduized ..." (Dutt, 1906, Vol. I:203).

The advent of the Aryans into traditional Dravidian country resulted in not only the Aryanization of the south, whereby Aryan ideas embodied in a number of myths, legends, and social practices became an integral part of the civilization of the south, but it also led to the early Aryan immigrants assimilating certain native practices like *naga* or snake worship and ancestor
worship, and borrowing Dravidian gods and goddesses and accommodating them within their own Hindu religion. In due course, there was "a synthesis of Aryan ideas from the north and Dravidian ideas from the south" (Menon, 1978:16).

Agraharam Villages and Temples of South India:

Two important occurrences that greatly helped in the Aryanization of the south were the setting up of special villages, exclusively for Brahmins and the construction and establishment of large temple complexes and monastaries (matas) by the Dravidian rulers.

A well known legend about the Aryanization of the south, narrated in two popular works, Kerala Mahatmyam and Keralolpati, describes how the warrior sage Parasurama once threw his ax which landed near Kanyakumari and the whole strip of land that is now Kerala, rose at once from the sea. The legend then describes that he brought sixty-four families of Brahmins from all parts of India and settled them in sixty-four gramams (villages) on this new land.

Whether we believe in the Parasurama legend or not, we do know from historical sources that villages containing 'communities of learned Brahmins' existed in south India since fairly early times. Many of these exclusive Brahmin villages were created by royal grants. The Brahmanotpatti-martanda, a scriptural history in Hindi which describes the
origin of Brahmins, notes that in the remote past all Brahmins originally belonged to north India and were settled in different parts of the country by various kings.

Since time immemorial, Hindus have regarded and eulogized the gift of land (bhu-dana) as the most meritorious of all gifts. "Whatever sins a king is guilty of in bringing the earth under his control, all those he gets rid of by performing sacrifices with munificent gifts; by bestowing on Brahmanas lands and cows in thousands, the king becomes free from all sins as the moon is freed from darkness (Rahu)" (Kane, 1974, Vol. II, Part II:858-859). It was therefore quite common in those days for kings or rich local chieftains to gift (dana) land to people of extraordinary merit or talent to gain punya (religious merit and virtue) and to expiate an offence (5). Rulers frequently made such gifts of land to groups of learned Brahmins (brahmadeya), temples (devadana), and free feeding houses (salabhoga) immediately after being victorious in a particularly bloody war and during their coronation ceremonies. "Faith in the unique merit of the gift of land ... was very common and frequently acted on by those who could afford it. Thus it came about that new colonies of pious and learned Brahmins were settled in different parts of the country and gained control of local affairs ..." (Sastri, 1955:492-493) (6).

Ancient south Indian kings, especially the Cholas, established a large number of Brahmin villages all over the
south and these villages, particularly those in Tanjavur district, "inhabited by devout, orthodox families engaged in the performance of manifold religious rites" (Chandrasekhara, 1981:1) became very well known. The Chola kings seem to have preferred the giving of dana to the performance of yagas or yagnyas (sacrifices). The succeeding dynasties of south Indian kings, such as the Telugu Nayakas and the Maratas continued the tradition and set up several such villages during their rule. "The kings of Vijayanagar, the Yadavas of Devagiri, the Nayakas of Madurai, the Rajas of Travancore, the Rajput princes, and other rulers patronized scholars and promoted education" (The Gazetteer of India, 1973, Vol. II:432).

The Brahmin villages were referred to as mangalam or chaturvedi-mangalam during the Chola period. Later the word, gramam or agraharam was used to refer to a community of Brahmins, to the street in which they lived -- that contained either a single or parallel row of houses with a temple and a tank, and sometimes to the entire village.

According to the Cyclopaedia of India (1967, I:45), "Agrahara is from two Sanskrit words, agra, first and hara, what receives" and were usually "held as a favorable quit-rent or free from assessment; it may be free from all tax (sarvagraharam), or at a stipulated rent (bilmukta-agraharam), or at a rent which fluctuates with the produce (kattubadiagraharam)."
Agraharams became the nucleii of Vedic learning. Inscriptions in south India referring to education say that the Vedic scholars, patronized by kings and nobles and settled in these villages, as inheritors of Vedic knowledge, took upon themselves the task of transmitting their knowledge to the younger generation and thus helped in preserving the Vedic tradition (7). Endowments called bhattavritti, and brahmadesya lands were given to an individual or a group of Brahmins not as a reward for their learning, but to enable them to support themselves and pursue their religious avocation, which in turn was believed to bestow not only merit beyond reckoning on the giver but also brought extraordinary prosperity to the land.

The inhabitants of an agraharam led such a simple and rigorous life that they commanded the voluntary homage of all other classes of people. The pursuit of knowledge was their main occupation. Time which was not spent in performing religious duties and the worship of the gods was primarily devoted to acquiring and imparting knowledge and it is no wonder that agraharam villages became at once a consequence as well as an important tool in the Aryanization of south India.

"In no sphere is the influence of Aryan ideas ... in early historical times more evident than in that of religion and ethics" (Sastri, 1955:89). Aryanization also led
to the construction and establishment of matas and several important temples, which grew from tiny, obscure village temples into magnificent structures that dominated every aspect of social life by the time of the Cholas. "The Tamil region is well known for its temples. Indeed, it is sometimes referred to as the 'land of the temples.' Temples of Tamil Nadu have not merely been places of worship, but have been foci of the social, economic, and spiritual life of the community... These temples have acted as preservers of fine arts like music, and dance, and of sculpture, and painting. Their influence has also been responsible for the preservation of Vedic recitation" (Subramaniam, 1974:2).

A large number of bhattas (temple priests) were brought in from north India to work in the important religious centers of south India. Furthermore, these temples and matas, which also housed Veda patashalas (Vedic training centers), attracted a number of devout Hindus from both south and north India and were thus responsible in maintaining a continuous flow of pilgrims and Vedic scholars to south India.

An excellent case in point is Kanyakumari, the Land's End of India and the site of the ancient temple of Kanyakumari, the Virgin Goddess. This place, which is about three miles from Danapuram, has been considered since time immemorial as one of the most sacred bathing places for the Hindus, who still believe that in order to complete
their pilgrimage they have to visit both Varanasi (Benaras), 'the abode of Shiva' and Kanyakumari, 'the dwelling place of Sakti.' Also, "... a bath in the sea at Kanyakumari was held to absolve a woman from the sin of incest; at any rate it was accepted as an act of penance for those who had incurred the sin" (Sastri, 1955:91).

We have evidence of Shilapatikaram and Manimekalai, two of Tamil's greatest epic poems, to show that Kanyakumari had been for a long time past, a sacred bathing place constantly visited by Brahmins from the north. Kanakasabhai (1979:21), quoting relevant passages from Shilapatikaram, writes, "Brahmin pilgrims came from Varanasi to bathe in Kumari and absolve their sins. Similarly the Brahmins of south India went round the Potiya hill, which was famous as the residence of the Vedic sage Agastya, then bathed in the sea at Kumari, and traveled northward to the Ganges to bathe in the sacred waters of that river. Pilgrims from the banks of the Ganges to Kumari, and from Tamilakam to Benaras appear to have kept up communication between the northern and southern Aryans."

Thus, the innumerable temples, agraharams, and matas, by becoming centers of Vedic learning and culture, played a very important role in the Aryanization of the south. It is, however, ironic that it was actually the non-Brahmin Dravidian rulers and nobles, by establishing these centers
through their generous grants, endowments, and, gifts, and by showing keen personal interest and actively promoting the growth and spread of Sanskrit studies, who were chiefly instrumental in spreading the Aryan way of life in the south. In fact, Aryan culture became so firmly established in the south, that even today, when things are said to be changing, south India continues to be a strong preserver of Vedic tradition. "The significance of south India and the place of honor and importance that it holds in the preservation of Vedic culture comes home with a terrible contrast when one goes round the north and sees the extent of the loss of Vedic tradition there" (Raghavan, 1962:3).

The Dravidian rulers, by granting special privileges and favors to the spiritually superior Brahmins, enabled them to become a dominant and an elite group of people in the south. The Brahmins by refusing to make their essentially esoteric Vedic knowledge exoteric, established themselves as the sole custodians of the ancient wisdom of the race and soon controlled the social and religious life of the people.
Notes:

1. See The Gazetteer of India, 1973, Vol. II, 192: "Tamil is the oldest among the spoken literary languages of south India. Eighteen or twenty centuries ago, Tamil was the language spoken in south India (south of the Nilgiris and Venkadam). Subsequently, i.e., after the 8th century, the coastal strip to the west of a line extending south from the meeting point of the Western and Eastern Ghats became linguistically isolated and Malayalam began to evolve on independent lines ... Telugu and Kannada might have existed as local dialects before they attained literary status in the early medieval period."

2. See Baden-Powell, 1899, 45-46: "Southern and Western India were peopled chiefly by Turanian or Dravidian tribes (the name is from Dravira, the Sanskrit form of the local name of south India). There are good reasons for believing that the earliest Turanian or Dravidian races originally came from the west frontier -- perhaps by the Bolan and other western passes -- while the [Sanskrit speaking] Aryans came from the further north-west."

3. There was, however, a fourth dynasty, the Pallavas that ruled over south India in varying degrees from time to time, starting as early as the 2nd century B.C. Their realm, which comprised parts of the traditional Dravi-
dian kingdoms, is not generally included in the traditional 'kingdoms of the south' by historians because it is believed that they "were an intrusive, foreign, non-Dravidian race ..." (Dutt, 1906, Vol. II, 365).


5. Even today, the idea of giving wealth of land to gain punya is still a strong incentive among Hindus to give charity or support institutions of learning.

6. Though these gifts were mainly given to learned Brahmin scholars, it was by no means limited only to them. There are several instances where devadasis ('auspicious' temple dancers) were given gifts of land by the king. For example, Marglin (1980) mentions the practice of granting land, free of tax, by the kings of Orissa to the devadasis. Four hundred devadasis, attached to the famous Tanjavur temple built by the great Chola king Rajaraja in the 10th century, were individually given gifts of land by the king for the maintenance of each. Virashekharanangai, a famous dancer is said to have received large grants of land from the ruler Vira Pandya. The devadasis attached to the temples of Vijayanagar were also granted land by their sovereign.

7. See Minakshi, 1938:200-201.
CHAPTER III

ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING: DANAPURAM AND BANGALORE

1. Danapuram:

I

Danapuram, the agraharam where most of the research for this study was carried out, is situated in Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, south India.

Kanyakumari "... was well known to the ancients. It belonged to the Pandyan kingdom, and as such was noticed by the Greek geographers. It is called Kumaria Akron, Cape Kumaria by Ptolemy, and Kumari or simple Komar by the author of the Periplus ... Marco Polo speaks not only of the Cape but also of the country called Comari. The natives call the place Kanya-Kumari, the Virgin Goddess. No doubt it derived its name from the Sanskrit Kumari, a virgin, one of the names of the goddess Durga, the presiding deity of the place" (Menon, 1982, Vol. I, Notes:7-11).

The Virgin Goddess of Kanyakumari is a particularly important goddess of the Hindus and is mentioned in their sacred books, like the Vedas and the Upanishads. "In the Mahabharata mention is made of Balarama's tour to the
sacred shrine of Kanyakumari. It is also said that Arjuna once visited this pilgrim center and worshipped the Devi" (Padmanabhan, 1979:6).

Despite its antiquity the history of Kanyakumari district, the nucleus of the former Nanjilnad (also called Nanjinad or Nanjanad), presents a lot of problems as very little has been written about this area. Prior to the linguistic reorganization of states in 1956, this district belonged to the erstwhile princely state of Travancore whose official language was Malayalam. "Having for over 400 years been under a kingdom whose official language was Malayalam, Kanyakumari's role in the cultural and literary life of Tamil Nadu has not been fully enquired into by the scholars of Tamil Nadu during the last few decades and, to that extent, its history has indeed been a forgotten one" (K.S. Ramakrishnan in Padmanabhan, 1971:1).

Kanyakumari district, which formed a part of south Travancore (i.e., the land between Trivandrum and Kanyakumari), is believed to have been ruled by kings belonging to several dynasties such as the Pandya, the Chola, the Chera, and the mysterious Ay. From the little information we have about this region, we gather that south Travancore, which originally belonged to the Pandyan kingdom, was part of the realm of the Ay kings until about the 10th century A. D. after which it again came under Pandyan rule.
The Ay kings, who later became independent, seem to have been tributary to the Cheras during the Sangam era (first three to four centuries of the Christian era). The Cheras took advantage of the alliance they had formed with the Cholas against the Pandyas, who were involved in a strife with the Pallavas, and ended the quasi-independence of the Ay kingdom in south Travancore.

By about the end of the 10th century, Rajaraja, the great Chola king (985-1014 A.D.) served notice that the alliance with the Cheras had been terminated and invaded south Travancore and throughout the 11th century, the hundred years war between the Cheras and the Cholas continued. By 1070, profiting from the difficulties which the Cholas were experiencing on their northern border, the Chera king Bhaskara Ravi Varman III (1043-1082 A.D.), working in collaboration with the Pandyas, had recovered south Travancore. In 1070, the last of the great Imperial Chola kings, Kulottunga I (1070-1120 A.D.) advanced from the south around Kanyakumari and pushed the Chera defences all the way up to Trivandrum.

Though the Pandyas made frequent attacks on south Travancore in the years that followed, the kings of Venad, the Kulasekharas, who regarded themselves as successors of the Cheras ruled over this region from their little capital of Padmanabhapuram (now part of Kanyakumari district) until the 18th century when Marthanda Varma (1729-1758) began his career of reconquest and formed the state of
Travancore, stretching from the borders of Cochin down to Kanyakumari, which lasted for the next two centuries.

As Woodcock (1967:168) points out, "Owing to the Pandyan and Chola invasions and to the sustained cultural influence of Madurai, a large population of the people of south Travancore remained Tamil rather than Malayali in both language and customs. The spiritual centers -- the great temples of Suchindrum and Trivandrum -- were and still are architectural monuments in the southern Tamil style, with massively ornate gopurams or gate towers and complexes of stone buildings, quite unlike the more modest wooden buildings of the authentic Kerala temples."

The more than 600 temples in the region exhibit a mingling of art, architecture, and sculpture of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. For instance, the ancient Sthanumalaya temple of Suchindrum is built in Pandyan style, while the Nagaraja temple, which incidentally gives Nagercoil (the present district headquarters of Kanyakumari) its name, architecturally represents the Chera style. Even in Danapuram, a predominantly Tamil Brahmin village, the main Krishna temple is built in the Chera style.

"Politically the most important aspect of this situation was the great influence of the Tamil Brahmins, who in Travancore outnumbered the Keralan Nambudiris and controlled the major temples" (Woodcock, 1967:168).
In 1956 when the Government of India decided to re-organize states on linguistic basis, based on the recommendation of the States Reorganization Commission, certain border adjustments had to be made to fit the new states into their respective linguistic patterns. Thus, the Tamil-speaking, rich-paddy-growing area of south Travancore, which had grown much of Kerala rice crop since the days of the Cheras, was now incorporated into Tamil Nadu and became Kanyakumari district (area: 645 sq. miles and pop. 1,222,549 persons), the smallest and the southern most district of Tamil Nadu.

The vast majority of the population of the district consists of Tamil-speaking Hindus followed by small minority groups of Malayalam, Telugu, and Tulu-speaking Hindus. Among religious minorities, Christians, mainly fishermen living along the coast, followed by Muslims are numerically the most important.

The numerous Hindu castes found in this area can be broadly grouped under three main divisions: Brahmin, non-Brahmin, and Untouchable (also referred to as Harijan or Adi-Dravida). This threefold grouping of castes, Béteille (1965:15) remarks, "... is characteristic of Tamil Nadu and, by and large, of south India as a whole ... The non-Brahmins as a category are more diverse and heterogeneous than the Brahmins. Sometimes even Christians and Muslims are included among them, but generally the Adi-Dravidas are excluded."
There are two yearly monsoons, the south-west and the north-east monsoons, and the climate is hot and humid. Agriculture is by far the most important source of livelihood for the people. Paddy is the principal crop grown in the region and usually two paddy crops are cultivated annually. Other crops such as banana and coconut are also grown in the region. By contrast, industry is poorly developed, though a few small-scale industries have sprung up in the last few years.

II

The agraharam with an estimated population of 268 people (Census, 1971) (1) is located about three miles from Kanyakumari, the Land's End of India, and is very close to the main highway that links Kanyakumari with Suchindrum, Nagercoil (both in Tamil Nadu), and Trivandrum, the capital of the adjoining Kerala state.

The resident Brahmin families of Danapuram claim that centuries ago their ancestors (2), who were Vedic scholars mainly from Tanjavur district, were invited by the Chera rulers, who were well known as patrons of Vedic learning, and assigned land for their use and enjoyment. Each Brahmin family was gifted a piece of land and around these original homes and families developed the agraharam of Danapuram (dana, as we know, means 'gift').
Though nothing much is known about the migration of Tamil Brahmins to Chera country, there is some evidence to show that sometimes Tamil Brahmins from Chola kingdom, particularly those living on the banks of the Kaveri river (which included Tanjavur district), migrated to the neighboring Chera state to avoid persecution. The Periya Puranam (12th century A.D.) of Shekkilar mentions a particular instance when a certain Chola chieftain wanted the Brahmins "to invest him with the diadem and thus confer the dignity of royalty on him in recognition of his extensive conquests, they declined to do so on the ground that only the ancient family of the Cholas was entitled to the high privilege, and, to avoid further trouble, migrated to the Chera country in a body" (quoted by Sastri, 1955:106).

We also know that due to the friendly political relations that existed between the Cholas and the rulers of Kerala, the Cheras, there was considerable movement between people from both the states and that the area surrounding Kanyakumari, (as noted in Ch. II), was frequently peopled by Brahmins since Kanyakumari was one of their most sacred pilgrim spots in south India. "Komar, where is the cape of the same name [is] ... a haven. Those who wish to consecrate the closing part of their lives to religion, come hither and engage themselves to celibacy ... [Vogis] were accustomed to walk down into the sea at Cape Comorin, in
order to purify themselves, a custom they have retained to this day ... This is also done by women, since it is related that the Goddess Kumari once on a time resided at the place and bathed" (Menon, quoting the author of Periplus and other ancient writers, 1982, Vol. I, Notes:7-13).

It is not clear how many agraharam villages of Tamil Brahmins were set up by the Chera rulers, but the Brahmins of Danapuram consider their agraharam to be quite unique. They point out, "While most of the other agraharams, not only in Kanyakumari district but also in Tamil Nadu as a whole, are fast becoming multi-caste villages, ours continues to remain an agraharam or an all-Brahmin settlement and we have so far successfully resisted any such drastic change." Thus a distinction between villages with or without agraharams has to be made and today, the number of agraharam villages in Tamil Nadu is said to be slowly decreasing.

In keeping with the practice of those days which specified the attaching of separate settlements of non-Brahmins and Untouchables to an agraharam (3), the Cheras' gift included the settlements of Panchalingapuram, a multi-caste village consisting mainly of non-Brahmin artizans and workers (pop.919 persons, 1971 Census) and the Paracheri or the Untouchable colony of laborers, cleaners, and sweepers. Panchalingapuram is adjacent to the agraharam, while the Untouchables live far away, beyond the rice paddies that surround the agraharam, and no one in the agraharam really
knows the exact location of the Paracheri. They can only vaguely point the general direction in which they think it exists.

The non-Brahmins and the Untouchables were expected to work for the Brahmins and take care of all their needs. Although after the village became a part of Tamil Nadu in 1956 as a result of the States Reorganization Act the people of Panchalingapuram have prospered considerably and many have now become successful businessmen and land-owners themselves, they continue to work for the agraharam Brahmins and are in considerable awe of them.

The land around the agraharam is well suited for rice cultivation and this is the most important economic activity of the Brahmins and the agraharam itself is situated amidst rich rice paddies.

The following description of conditions that prevailed during the Chola period by Sastri (1955:567-585) could very well be a present day description of the district in general and the agraharam in particular: "The vast majority of the people lived a rustic life in the villages, and agriculture was their principal occupation. The prestige attending the ownership of land had a high social value ... It was the deliberate object of everyone, whatever his occupation, to have a small plot of land he could call his own ... Besides the land-owners, great and small, there were others dependent on agriculture. A
fairly large class of landless laborers, an agrarian proletariat, ... assisted in the operations and shared the proceeds of agriculture ... Each village had also a staff of hereditary menial servants ... who were remunerated for their services to the community [in kind] ... Tenancy cultivation was also quite common, both on private estates and on quasi-public land such as that of a temple [or of the samudayam as in the case of the agraharam]; after paying the landlord a fixed melvaram determined in advance, the tenant usually retained as his share what remained after payment of the direct expenses of cultivation, and any minor dues assessed on the land held by him ... [The boundaries of] the land [were] defined by erecting mounds of earth and planting cactus. The number of crops raised each year on paddy lands was two, sometimes three."

Although most of the agraharam Brahmans own land and are agriculturists, no Brahmin has actually tilled his land. Land is leased to either Nadars or Konars, two of the most dominant castes of Panchalingapuram, who then frequently sub-let it to other poor non-Brahmins from Panchalingapuram or to the Untouchables from the Paracheri.

Rice, banana, and coconut are the three chief crops grown in the agraharam land. Coconut trees are mainly grown in people's backyards, though there are also separate coconut orchards surrounding the rice paddies. All coconut
orchards are given on lease to Nadars or Konars. While a small part of the coconuts grown in the backyards is retained for domestic consumption, a major portion is leased to Nadars or Konars. In addition, bananas, mangoes, as well as a few vegetables are grown in the backyards.

Rice and banana are grown only in the wet fields. Two varieties of rice are grown. The Mashi-Panguni crop (harvested around January-February) is white in color and is of a superior kind. As it is believed to contain less starch, the Brahmins consider it more suitable for their consumption. The Avani-Pertashi crop or the coarser variety of red rice (harvested around September-October) is preferred by non-Brahmins and manual laborers as it is said to be rich in starch. In between the two harvests, black gram is grown for three months between March and May, which also happen to be the hottest and the driest months of the year. Growing two varieties of rice as well as black gram during the hot summer months seems to be the standard practice not only in this region but also in Tamil Nadu as a whole (4).

As far as distribution of the yield is concerned, the practice of the agraharam, I was told, was an exception rather than the rule. Even though the government of Tamil Nadu has stipulated that 60% of all produce should go to the tiller, the agraharam Brahmins continue to follow their traditional age-old custom of giving one third of the yield
The agraharam
to the tiller or the lessee and keeping two thirds for themselves.

There are in all 68 separate dwellings in the agraharam, of which a few are unoccupied. The agraharam, as all agrahams usually are, is one long, narrow lane which runs in an almost perfect straight line from east to west and the houses are symmetrically arranged on either side of the lane, facing each other. The houses are so close to each other that there is very little room for expansion. The agraharam is thus closer in structure to what geographers and social anthropologists call a nucleated village or a village in which all the dwellings are clustered in one place rather than a dispersed village where each settlement stands apart and is surrounded by its own plot of land.

As Béteille (1965:28) observes of the agraharam in Sripuram, a village in Tanjavur district, "The physical proximity of houses in the agraharam should not simply be regarded as the cause of the intimate nature of social life within it. In fact, the social life is as much a cause as a consequence. Brahmins come from other places to live in the agraharam precisely because they wish to be close to each other. This gives them a feeling of security and facilitates their participation in the numerous socio-religious activities which constitute an essential feature of the Brahminical way of life."
All the houses in the agraharam are long and narrow and look like elongated rectangles with small gardens in the back. Houses facing north are not only longer than those facing south but the majority of them also have two stories, while only a few facing south have more than one story. However, structurally the houses are not very dissimilar from each other. While most of the houses now have electricity (there are a few that don't have electricity even now), very few of them have proper latrine/toilet facilities. Every house has a well and only water from the well is considered pure and clean enough to be used for domestic and ritual purposes. Recently, a tube-well, constructed in Panchalingapuram by the state government, has been supplying tap water to a couple of houses facing north. But this water is mainly used for washing the cattle.

The vali tinnai (outer veranda/porch) facing the street, with steps leading down to the village lane and which is an open one in most of the houses, occupies an important position in the everyday social life of the agraharam. Men and women gather together in separate porches and gossip all through the day. Because of the close proximity of the houses, there are no secrets in the agraharam. Hence public opinion counts for a great deal in the agraharam.

Besides the houses, there are five temples (kovils), a
Floor plans of two agraharam houses

1. Porch (Valli Tinnai)
2. Closed veranda (Ul Tinnai)
3. Hall/Puja room (Keri)
4. Dining room (Tavaram/Talam)
5. Kitchen (Adukulam)
6. Store room (Pahul)
7. Menstruation/Pregnancy room (Kuchil)
8. Bathroom (Kuliparai)
9. Cowshed
10. Lavatory (Kakus)
11. Open courtyard (Muttam)
12. Cowshed
13. Stairway
14. Extra store room
post office, a library, and two halls that are used by the Brahmins for various socio-cultural and religious activities.

Of the five temples, the Krishna temple (which was part of the original gift and is therefore distinct from the other temples because of its Chera architecture), the Shiva temple, one of the two Ganesha temples, and the tank attached to the temple, now belong to the government and are, theoretically at least, open to non-Brahmins. In the past when the tank belonged to the agraharam, both men and women used to bathe there. But now because it belongs to the state government, it is no longer the exclusive property of the Brahmins and one can occasionally see non-Brahmins from Panchalingapuram using it. Hence Brahmin men don't use it any more as they don't consider it pure enough and only Brahmin women use it these days. The other two temples, a Ganesha temple and a Sasta or Aiyappa temple, the library, and the two halls belong to the agraharam and consequently, only Brahmins are allowed to enter them.

The post office is located in the porch of one of the Brahmin houses and has the only telephone in the agraharam. Though it belongs to the government, it, nevertheless, provides service only to the Brahmins of the agraharam.

The library, a favorite meeting place for the agraharam men, is a small one and contains mostly old and tattered books on Hindu religion and a few current Tamil
SETTLEMENT PLAN OF AGRAHARAM
(NOT TO SCALE)

MUD WALLS • STREET TAPS

1 - KRISHNA TEMPLE
2, 11 - GANESHA TEMPLES
3 - TEMPLE TANK
4 - SHIVA TEMPLE
5 - BHAKANA MADAM
6 - LIBRARY
7 - POST OFFICE
8 - SANUDRAM BUILDING
9 - WELL
10 - SASTA TEMPLE
12 - GOVT. CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY
13 - POND
14 - CARDBOARD FACTORY
15 - COIR FACTORY
16 - CHRISTIAN MISSION SCHOOL

N

TRIVANDRUM
NAGARCOIL
SUCHINDRUM

COCONUT
GROVE

RICE
PADDIES

RICE
PADDIES

RICE
PADDIES

BANANA
GROVE

KANYAKUMARI

PANCHALINGAPURAM
and English magazines and newspapers.

One of the halls in the agraharam is a bhajana madam, where all kinds of religious activities outside of the temple takes place. Also the bhajana madam is used as a kind of Veda patashala and every evening, the grama vadiyar (principal domestic priest, considered to be the religious expert of the agraharam) holds a Veda/mantra (incantation) chanting class for the young boys of the agraharam. The other hall is in the samudayam building, which also has kitchen and bathroom facilities, and is used by the Brahmins for all social activities, performances of various sacraments like marriage, upanayana, etc., as well as for the annual general body meeting of the grama samudayam (agraharam trust, from which the hall gets its name).

Although the agraharam is part of the panchayat system, the samudayam, a private informal trust with no official standing [which was known as sabha during the time of the Cholas (5)] is in charge of all internal affairs, like the general upkeep of the agraharam and the rice paddies owned by the samudayam. This again is a practice that was commonly followed in agraharam villages since time immemorial. "All affairs connected with the temple and the village in general, were managed by the elderly members who met together and deliberated upon them. Their verdict was always final" (Iyer, 1912, Vol. II:316).

The samudayam is made up of only adult Brahmin men who
select, once in three years, a manager and two committee members to take care of the samudayam lands, to oversee the proper working of the library, and to organize the various annual socio-religious activities of the agraharam. The samudayam is also responsible for providing payments in grain to the various people as well as providing houses to Brahmans who solely work for the agraharam, such as the grama vadiyar.

Not all of the Brahmans in the agraharam are members of the samudayam. Only those who are either direct descendants of the original dana families and/or have some land in the original dana territory can become members. According to one prominent samudayam member, since almost half of the original land has been sold to rich Konars or Nadars of Panchalingapuram, very few Brahmin men actually own any land in the original territory. Also since the above rules apply only to men, several women in the agraharam who not only belong to the original dana households but also possess land in the dana area are denied membership. The present manager of the samudayam does not live in the agraharam and, I was told, as no suitable candidate could be selected from the agraharam, this man, who originally lived in the agraharam, was chosen since he possessed land within the dana area.

Religion continues to be a major force in the lives of most of the people in the agraharam. In all matters of life within the agraharam, the Hindu religious calendar
(solar) is followed and the Gregorian calendar is used only with reference to events external to the agraharam. The temples and the two halls are the centers of all social activity and amusement within the agraharam. Thus, socio-religious activities serve as major forms of recreation as the agraharam has no formal recreational facilities. The following is a list of the important pujas and festivals that are celebrated annually by everyone in the agraharam:

Chitrai (April-May):

1. The solar year begins with the Tamil New Year's Day (Tamir Varsha Porapu) being celebrated on the first day of the month of Chitrai, (ie., on the Chitra star day). People buy new clothes and celebrate with a grand feast at home. In the evening, there is a special puja in the agraharam Krishna temple which is followed by a discourse by the grama vadiyar when he talks about the new year, basing his views almost entirely on his reading of the new year's religious almanac (panchanga).

2. Sri Rama Navami (Rama's birthday): Festivities start nine days before the birthday of Rama. Every morning and evening elaborate puja is performed in the temple. In addition, every evening in the bhajana madam, there is a music program or a discourse on Ramayana performed by either the residents of the agraharam or by well known artistes, who are specially invited for this purpose. After the program, everyone takes part in a bhajana
(collective singing of devotional songs) which is initiated by the assistant agraharam Brahmin priest (who is in charge of the temples that belong exclusively to the agraharam). On the morning of the day of the birthday (i.e., on garbotsava day), special puja is performed in the temple and then at the exact time when Rama is believed to have been born, the grama vadiyar gives a small speech on the significance of Rama's birth. At noon, all the residents of the agraharam as well as guests from outside are treated to a sumptuous lunch at the samudayam building, organized by the grama samudayam.

There are no festivals in the next two months of Vaigashi (May-June) and Ani (June-July).

Adi (July-August):

1. The first of Adi is the beginning of dakshinayana (southward going) or the dark and inauspicious six months of the year when the sun moves in a southerly direction and this period is known as 'god's night' and a 'day of the manes (pitrīs).’ Since Hindus believe that periods of darkness are pervasively dangerous and unlucky, this is a day of prayer. Further, the sun's southward movement is believed to protect the pitris, since the path to the south is said to be occupied by the spirits of the dead, and the grama vadiyar performs tarpana or libations (i.e., the pouring of water mixed with black sesame seeds while chanting mantras, performed only by Brahmin men) along with
the agraharam Brahmin men in the samudayam building. The women cook special dishes that are suitable for the occasion and there is a feast in each house.

2. **Adi chchava** (Adi Tuesday): On all Tuesday evenings in the month of Adi, special puja is performed in the temple and **vada** made of black gram dough is distributed to everyone as God's **prasada** (grace or favor). Then for an hour, young girls dance the **kolattam**, a folk dance performed with sticks usually by females, in the bhajana madam.

3. **Upakarma** (sacred thread changing ceremony/renewal of the sacred thread): Depending on the position of the stars, Upakarma, which is primarily a Brahmin male festival, is celebrated by all agraharam Brahmin men separately for the three Vedas of Yajur, Rig, and Sama either in Adi or in **Avani** (August-September) in the samudayam building. It is believed that once every six months the Vedas (symbolized by the sacred thread worn by every Brahmin male) become 'old' and so on Upakarma day, Brahmin men, after taking a purifying bath (**mahasankalpa snaana**) 'make' the Vedas 'new' by removing their old sacred threads and donning new ones while chanting mantras and performing tarpana. The grama vadiyar supervises the entire proceedings and initiates **Vedaramba** when he teaches important sections from the Vedas to the men, after which all the men prostrate themselves before him and give him **dakshina** (money) and paddy. Then they all go to the temple and return home in a procession chanting mantras from the
Vedas. Before each Brahmin enters his house, his wife and another sumangali perform arati by waving a plate of red liquid (a mixture of turmeric powder and slaked lime) in front of him as they are considered to be like rishis (sages) that day since they have studied the Vedas, and have to be therefore offered all the upacharas (attentions) that one would offer to a sage. Then the women serve them a sumptuous lunch and only after that can they eat.

Avani (August-September):

1. Krishna Jayanti (Krishna's birthday): This festival is celebrated at night since Krishna is said to have been born on a stormy night. A specially long and grand puja is performed in the agraharam Krishna temple, at the end of which everyone is given rice pudding as prasada. In every house in the agraharam, a variety of sweet and savory items are prepared and offered to Krishna as naivedya and later eaten by the family as prasada. The agraharam bhagavatar (professional singer of devotional songs), who is a Krishna devotee, performs special bhajana in his house to which everyone is invited.

2. Vinayaka Chaturti (worship of Vinayaka or Ganesha, the elephant-faced god): People buy brightly painted and decorated earthen Ganesha idols and perform puja to them in their homes. Special dishes are prepared and offered to Ganesha as naivedya followed by a grand feast. In addition, the assistant agraharam priest performs elaborate
puja in the Ganesha temple, the cost of which is borne by the grama samudayam. At the end of the puja, prasada is distributed to everyone. In the evening sumangalis perform arati in their homes to the Ganesha idol, invite their neighbors, and give tambula (betel leaves with areca-nut and turmeric root) (6) to them. An auspicious day is chosen by the grama vadiyar when residents carry their earthen Ganesha idols in a procession to the agraharam tank and after performing a small puja, the idol is dropped into the tank.

Purattashi (September-October):

1. **Mahalaya Amavasya** (worship of the deceased ancestors): For fifteen days, i.e., from new moon day until the full moon day, Mahalaya Amavasya is observed when Brahmin men remember all their pitris and perform tarpana for them since the idea of providing nourishment to the manes by means of libations offered by the living is an important Hindu concept. Each Brahmin is allowed to choose the day that is most convenient for him and the grama vadiyar helps him perform tarpana in the samudayam building.

2. **Navaratri** or **Dasara** (worship of Durga): The end of the somber period of Mahalaya Amavasya, i.e., on full moon day, is the beginning of the gay and colorful festival of Navaratri (literally 'nine nights'), which is essentially a festival for females. For nine days, both morning and evening women worship Goddess Durga at home and chant special mantras for her. In addition, there is special
Kolam decoration
Durga puja in the Shiva temple for nine days. Navaratri is also a festival of dolls. Children, especially girls, decorate their dolls and arrange them on special stands along with idols of gods. Women prepare sweets every day and the children invite their friends and distribute sweets to them. In the course of the nine days, Saraswati or the goddess of speech and learning is also worshipped, and on the tenth day, which is the Vijayadashami day or the 'day of victory,' young children are taught the alphabet in the morning. In the evening, the statue of the Goddess from Kanyakumari temple is brought in a huge procession to the agraharam. The procession stops in front of each house, which has been specially decorated with lights and huge kolams (geometric floor designs drawn with rice powder or powdered limestone) and the family performs a small puja to the Goddess. A large number of Brahmins from surrounding towns and villages, such as Nagercoil, Suchindrum, Asramam, Kanyakumari, Kottaram, etc., come to the agraharam to see the Goddess and representatives from the Kanyakumari temple collect contributions from everyone. According to the grama vadiyar, "About 5000 rupees are collected for the Amman (Goddess) that day and everyone has a great time." At the end of the day everyone is treated to a grand meal, organized by the grama samudayam.

3. On all four Saturday evenings, Vishnu sahasranama japa is chanted for about two hours by Brahmin men and boys led by the grama vadiyar in the agraharam Krishna temple,
at the end of which there is a special puja, (which is witnessed by women also), and prasada is distributed to everyone.

Aippashi (October-November):

1. Dipavali or Naraka Chaturti (festival of lights): This is a day of great festivity in the agraharam. Newly married daughters and their husbands are invited home. New clothes are bought for everyone, special sweet and savory dishes are cooked, and after everyone takes an oil bath (which is required), there is a grand feast in everyone's house. In the evening, every house is decorated with lamps and children burn fireworks.

Kartikai (November-December):

1. Tirukartikai: This is also a festival of lights, but because Shiva is the principal deity of worship, it is not as gay or colorful as Dipavali is. On the day of the festival (which falls on the full moon day) and on the following day, in the evening, hundreds of tiny wick lamps are lighted and the front porch of each house is decorated with them. Special sweet dishes are made and offered to Shiva as naivedya which are later eaten by the family as prasada. In the Shiva temple, there is special puja and prasada distribution.

2. On the eighth day after Tirukartikai, i.e., on ashtami day, there is a special celebration in honor of Shiva in the Shiva temple between seven and eleven o'clock in the
morning. A few Brahmins from surrounding villages and
towns are also invited. At the end of the elaborate puja,
the grama samudayam organizes lunch for everyone. All the
Brahmins are fed first and the remaining food is distri-
buted to all the non-Brahmins and Untouchables who work for
the Brahmins.

_Margari_ (December-January):

There are no major festivals in the month of Margari
because it is a month of prayer. Every evening, throughout
the month elaborate puja is performed in the temple, the
cost of which is borne by individual families. Agraharam
Brahmins who are well-to-do, sometimes donate enough money
to cover the cost of the puja for two evenings. Brahmins
who own houses in the agraharam but are living outside it
in cities send the necessary cash for the puja by mail to
the temple. In the event that no donor is available for an
evening, then the grama samudayam bears the cost of the
puja. "But on no account should the puja be stopped for a
day. Also, because the months of Adi and Margari are
considered to be the two inauspicious months of the year,
no marriages or upanayanas are celebrated and only the
annual obsequial rites (_shraddha_) is performed during these
two months," said the grama vadiyar.

_Tai_ (January-February):

1. _Pongal_ or _Makara Sankranti_ (harvest festival): The
month of Tai is very eagerly awaited by everyone as it is the beginning of uttarayana (northward going) or the bright and auspicious six months of the year when the sun enters into Capricorn (Makara) and travels in a northerly direction in relation to the equator. This is the beginning of the period known as 'god's day' as the sun's northward movement is believed to protect the gods. On the first of the month tarpana and surya (sun) puja are performed. It is also the day of Pongal, one of the favorite festivals of Tamil Nadu and is usually observed on the 14th of January. A sweet dish called pongal is prepared out of the newly harvested rice and after worshiping the sun, everyone celebrates with a feast. A special puja is performed in the temple, at the end of which pongal is distributed to everyone.

2. Rathasaptami: It is celebrated on the seventh day after amavasya (new moon) on saptamithi, which is also believed to be the day when Surya actually begins his northward movement in his course in the path of heaven in his ratha (chariot). A well known story from the Mahabharata is attached to this festival. Sage Bhisma, who was mortally wounded in the battle during the inauspicious dakshinayana, was determined to live until uttarayana. He therefore lay on a bed of arrows and just at the commencement of uttarayana he is said to have expired. Even now, most Hindus "are apprehensive of their death during the dark half, and feel happier as to the death of their relations in the light half" (Iyer, 1935, Vol. I:338). It
is also believed that those who die in uttarayana go to heaven and those who die in dakshinayana go to hell. Further, those who die during the bright fortnight of a month (beginning with the new moon, called shukla paksha) are said to attain supreme bliss, whereas those who die during the dark fortnight (krishna paksha) are said to be reborn. On Rathasaptami, after all the Brahmins take a ceremonial ritual bath which is said to rid them of all sins and secure freedom from sickness or sorrow for the year, there are festivities at home. The men perform Bhishma tarpana.

3. During the period between Tai amavasya and Mashi (February-March) amavasya, Brahmin men take a ritual bath before sunrise and pray to Vishnu and Surya. After the bath, which is said to rid them of all their sins, the Brahmins give dana (coconut, paddy, cash, etc.) to the grama vadiyar.

Mashi (February-March):

1. Maha Shivaratri (worship of Shiva): This is essentially a day of prayer and fasting. Shiva puja is performed in every house as well as in the Shiva temple, which is an elaborate puja that begins at eight o’clock at night and goes on until midnight. According to the grama vadiyar, "Though everyone is supposed to stay awake the whole night praying to Shiva, most of the young people in the agraharam go to bed after the midnight puja as they
have to attend offices/schools/colleges the next day."

**Panguni** (March-April):

1. **Panguni Uttaram** (birthday of Sasta or Aiyappa): In the morning, the assistant agraharam priest performs a special in the Sasta temple. All the Brahmins in the agraharam as well as their friends and relatives from surrounding areas attend the puja and accept the prasada that is distributed at the end of the puja. After the puja, everyone is fed sumptuously by the grama samudayam. In the evening, the grama samudayam organizes **dipa puja** and Sasta bhajana for about three hours, at the end of which prasada is distributed to all present.

There are also several minor festivals such as **Chitra- pournami** (worship of Chitragupta, an assistant to Yama, the god of death, in the month of Chitrai), **Skanda shashti** (worship of God Subramanya in the month of Kartikai), and **Vaikunta ekadashi** (worship of Vishnu in the month of Margari) which are celebrated by most of the agraharam Brahmins. Every amavasya day (new moon day) as well as on the first day of each month, especially on the first of Chitrai, Adi, Aippashi, and Tai, the grama vadiyar and the Brahmin men of the agraharam perform tarpana in the samudayam building. Also vratas such as Varalakshmi vrata (in the month of Adi), Rishipanchami vrata (in the month of Avani), and Savitri nombu (in the month of Mashi) are performed by women with or without the help of the grama
Besides the festivals listed above, there are numerous occasions, mostly of a ritual or ceremonial nature, on which most of the Brahmins come together at some place within the agraharam. For instance, every year in the month of February, all the agraharam residents take part in the Radha Kalyana Bhajana, a special celebration in honor of Krishna and Radha, organized by the agraharam bhagavatar, which lasts for three days. Secondly, the various rites of passage are important occasions that bring the residents together.

The agraharam is essentially dominated by a traditional economy and most of the artisans and laborers who work for the Brahmins are paid in grain. This practice was prevalent even during the Chola period. "Paddy was accepted as the most common measure of value in rural economy in the Chola empire of the tenth century and later; the numerous inscriptions of that time furnish unmistakable of the subordinate role of coin in the transactions of everyday life ..." (Sastri, 1955:89). Both Ishwaran (1968) and Srinivas (1966, 1976) also mention the practice of payment in grain to artisans and servising castes in their books. The grama samudayam pays the two agraharam priests (the grama vadiyar and the assistant priest) (7), barber, washerman, and all the laborers who work in the fields annually a certain amount of paddy as payment. Except the two priests who are Brahmins and receive the white variety
of rice, everyone else gets the red variety of rice as payment.

While it is true that these days small payments in cash are being increasingly used in transactions within the aghram, nevertheless, money and its impersonal values are used mainly in transactions with the outside world and, within the aghram, even hawkers are sometimes paid in kind. "... in the villages of south India, housewives may be seen pouring out the grain from their stores into the baskets of hawkers and dairy-women in return for the vegetables, ghee or curd supplied to them" (Sastri, 1955:559) (8). Traditional systems of reading time, and weights and measures are still used in various transactions, especially within the aghram.

No non-Brahmin has ever lived in the aghram. However, the aghram is open to south Indian Brahmins from any part of the country. This again is a practice that was prevalent even during Chola times. "Brahmins evinced a desire not only to live in separate rural communities with sabhas of their own, but as far as possible to exclude other castes from ownership of land in their villages; in both these respects, their attitude seems to have had the general approval of the government and the people" (Sastri, 1955:548).

Originally only Brahmins were allowed to walk through the aghram, but now because it has been brought under
the Panchalingapuram village panchayat, non-Brahmins from Panchalingapuram occasionally take a bath in the temple tank, use one of the two street taps in the agraharam, pray in one of the three state-owned temples, or just walk through the agraharam.

On the whole, men and women of the agraharam continue to wear the standard dress of the Brahmins in the region. Except the grama vadiyar, all other married men wear the white vesti or dhoti without the traditional kachcham. Although their parents disapprove, a few young men prefer to wear the lungi, like the non-Brahmins of the area, when they go to the university, since they consider lungis to be more fashionable as their favorite film stars in popular Tamil and Malayalam movies usually wear them. As far as women's dress is concerned, the traditional nine-yard podavai or sari in the madi-saru style is worn by all elderly sumangalis and widows. Even though the nine-yard sari worn in the madi-saru fashion is traditionally considered to be the proper dress for all Aiyar women after their marriage, young married women prefer to wear the six-yard podavai. However, on ritual occasions married men and women are expected to dress in the traditional manner. Unmarried women, except teenage girls who wear davnis (half-saris) (9), also wear the six-yard sari.

The agraharam Brahmins pointed out to me a number of changes that had taken place in the area during the course
of the last few years. The narrow mud lane of the agraharam is now linked to a major highway, about half a mile away, where buses take people from Kanyakumari and the agraharam to all the major cities of the region. About a mile away from the agraharam, near the highway, a new English medium school run by Christian missionaries has been opened. While most of the agraharam children attend the free government Tamil-medium school, ironically situated in Panchalingapuram and staffed entirely by non-Brahmin teachers appointed by the state government, a couple of boys from well-to-do families in the agraharam go to the new school. Two small-scale industries, one a coir factory owned by one of the sons of a Brahmin from the agraharam where a couple of men from the agraharam along with non-Brahmins from Panchalingapuram work, and the other a cardboard factory owned by a Christian and staffed entirely by Untouchable workers from the Paracheri have sprouted up recently on either side of the lane leading to the agraharam. A small state-run co-operative society and ration depot and a number of small grocery stores, run primarily by the non-Brahmins of Panchalingapuram, have also been opened in the last few years and one can sometimes see Brahmins, mostly elderly widows and children, buying a few essential household items from these stores.

In spite of these changes, which have mainly occurred outside the agraharam, the agraharam itself is, in every sense of the term, a close-knit closed community. The
agraharam "is not only a cluster of habitations, but also the center of social life for the Brahmins. During marriages, and on the occasion of temple festivals arranged by the Brahmins, the customary processions go only through the agraharam, although it is generally said that such processions go around the village. To the Brahmins the agraharam, in more ways than one, is the village" (Béteille, 1965:19).

The agraharam, Panchalingapuram, and the Paracheri form more or less compact and well-defined units that are separated from each other physically as well as socially. "Just as the physical proximity of the Brahmin houses create conditions for the agraharam's being a community, so also the physical separation from the rest of the village makes it possible for this community to be a more or less exclusive one ... For ... [the Brahmins] the agraharam is not only a physical unit; it is a community and a way of life" (Béteille, 1965:29).

Even though the majority of the Brahmins in the agraharam are Tamil speakers, whose families originally belonged to the Tanjavur district in Tamil Nadu, there are a few whose mother tongues are Telugu and Tulu. But everyone can speak fluent Tamil and some of the Telugu speakers actually claim that their ancestors were originally Aiyars. Although all the major sub-sects of Aiyars such as Vadaman, Brihacharanam, Vattiman, and Ashtasahasram are represented in the agraharam, Vadamans numbering 90 persons and
### Chart 1: Caste-wise break-up of agraharam population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-caste</th>
<th>Tamil Brahmins (Aiyar)</th>
<th>Telugu Brahmins (Smarta)</th>
<th>Tulu Brahmins (Potti)</th>
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<td>Number of Families</td>
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<td>Vadaman</td>
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<td>90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brihacharanam</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vadyaman</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashtasahasram</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>124</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chart 2: Age-wise and sex-wise break-up of agraharam population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>0 - 15</th>
<th>16 - 30</th>
<th>31 - 50</th>
<th>Over 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
belonging to 38 families form the dominant group.

Since a sizeable number of the young men of the agraharam have, over the years, left the agraharam in search of better employment opportunities, the agraharam has more females than males as its permanent residents. There are several widows who live alone while a few of them live with their married son and his family. Also, about 38% of the population is over 50 years (mainly made up of elderly couples or widows), since quite a few of the young women have also left the agraharam after their marriage. However, most of the young men/women and their families frequently return to the agraharam to take part in important socio-religious activities such as rites of passage and festival celebrations.

2. Bangalore City:

Bangalore, the urban center where part of this study was conducted, is a cosmopolitan city, a major industrial and electronic metropolis of south India. It is both the headquarters of Bangalore district and the capital city of Karnataka, a neighboring state of Tamil Nadu, and has a sizeable number of Tamilians, both Brahmins and non-Brahmins among its population.
The name 'Bangalore' seems to have first appeared in an inscription of the 9th century A.D. which was discovered at Begur village, situated about nine miles south-east of Bangalore city (Mysore Archaeological Report, 1914-15:16, quoted by Hasan, 1970:1). According to a local legend, the name Bengaluru, which later became Bangalore, is believed to have been derived from bengalu, a kind of dried green beans. The Hoysala king, Vira Ballala (1172-1219 ?) while hunting one day became separated from his attendants and losing his way wandered about until nightfall. At last he reached a solitary hut occupied by an old woman who, having nothing better to offer him, gave him some bengalu beans boiled in water. The king spent the night there. According to the legend, this incident is said to have attracted a number of people to settle down around the hut and the uru (village/town) called Bengaluru (the village/town of boiled beans) was formed.

Historically, however, the foundation of modern Bangalore was in fact laid by Kempe Gowda I (1513-69), the most distinguished chief of the Yelahanka Nadu Prabhus, who, while making a tour through Yelahanka Nadu one day, spotted a place, which he considered would be of strategic importance, near the village then known as Shivanasamudra. With the permission of his emperor, King Achutaraya of Vijayanagar (1529-42), he erected a mud fort at this place in 1537, named it Bengaluru, and shifted his capital from
Yelahanka to the new fort (10). He built several temples, water tanks, and a pettah (a residential/commercial locality), different areas of which were occupied by communities of different professions and the whole locality was surrounded by a deep ditch and hedge.

Ever since its founding by Kempe Gowda, Bangalore has played an important role in the history of south India and it has had a long and chequered history. Exactly a hundred years after its founding, when Kempe Gowda II was its ruler, the Bijapur sultanate conquered it. Mohammad Adil Shah, the sultan of Bijapur, then bestowed the city along with a few other towns surrounding it on his general, Shahji Bhonsley (father of Shivaji, the famed Marata chief, who spent his early years in Bangalore), in recognition of his meritorious service rendered during the Bijapur expeditions in the south. After his demise in 1664, his son Venkoji tried to govern it from his newly established capital at Tanjavur. Finding his distant dominion of Bangalore expensive and difficult to govern, he decided to sell it to the highest bidder. In 1687, while Chikka Deva Raja Wodeyar, the ruler of Mysore, was negotiating a deal to buy it, Khasim Khan, the Mogul ruler Aurangzeb's general, trooped into Bangalore and easily captured it. But, he later sold it to Chikka Deva Raja Wodeyar for 300,000 rupees.

In 1758, the rulers of Mysore gave Bangalore fort and district to Hyder Ali, the father of Tippu Sultan, in
recognition of his distinguished service, who then in 1761 usurped the Mysore throne. Bangalore was then put in charge of Ibrahim Sab, who with Hyder Ali's approval enlarged the mud fort and rebuilt it with stone. In 1791, Bangalore was captured by the British army led by Lord Cornwallis, but was restored to Tippu Sultan the following year. After the fall of Tippu Sultan in 1799, Bangalore was restored to the old Hindu royal dynasty of Mysore and became a part of the newly formed Mysore state.

In 1809, the British Civil and Military Station or the Cantonment was established at Bangalore and soon, this area came to be administered as a separate civic unit. The city proper and the cantonment area, which existed as two independent cities for nearly a century, was merged to form the present city in 1949.

Kempe Gowda is said to have prophesied a great future for Bangalore when he built four watchtowers on four elevated spots at each of the cardinal points around the township and predicted the extent to which he thought the city would grow. His prophesy has been more than fulfilled for the city has grown well beyond these limits.

Being situated at an altitude of about 3000 feet, Bangalore enjoys a mild-warm climate throughout the year. Its climate, its geographical situation in the heart of south India at a point equidistant from the sea coast on either side, availability of land, skilled labor, and the
facilities of communication by road, rail, and air that link Bangalore to all the major cities of India have greatly contributed to its rapid growth over the years.

The city, which continues to grow, was the sixteenth biggest city in the country in 1941, but by 1951 was ranked eighth and by 1961 became the sixth largest city. A number of suburbs known as 'extensions' were added (and continue to be formed) to meet the increasing needs of the heterogeneous population of the city. However, while most of the changes and the growth have occurred mainly in the newer extensions, formed on the outskirts of the city, the core of the city as well as several of its older extensions, which were formed during the British occupation and before, have remained relatively unchanged.

II

According to the Census report of 1971, the area and population of Bangalore are 108.5 sq. miles and 1,653,779 persons with 882,304 males and 771,475 females. Hindus at 78.84% (1,270,790 persons) constitute the most dominant religious group followed by Muslims -- 14.62% (241,781 persons) and Christians -- 7.47% (123,507 persons). Though Kannada is the state language, Tamilians numbering 419,691 persons (25.37%) with 218,788 males and 200,903 females form one of the largest linguistic groups in the city, next
only to Kannada speakers who number 525,985 persons (31.80%) of whom 282,349 are males and 243,636 are females.

Although Bangalore is not traditionally considered a part of the Tamil speaking area as it belongs to Karnataka, a Kannada state, this city was chosen, firstly because it was geographically and linguistically familiar to me. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the city has a large concentration of Tamilian population, including both traditional and 'modern' Aiyars. There are in fact several areas in the city, such as Ulsoor (a suburb situated incidentally around Old Madras Road, the old route to Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu) and the cantonment area, where Tamilians outnumber the local Kannada population. This is not very surprising because Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, being neighboring states, have influenced each other immensely.

History books tell us that, on the one hand, the Pallavas ruled over parts of Karnataka for several decades before the advent of the Kadambas and the Gangas. Also for over a century, considerable parts of Karnataka were under the Cholas and the many temples (such as the Someshwara temple in Ulsoor, renovated and extended by the Kempe Gowda family, and the two temples of Someshwara and Chokkanatha in Domulur), and agraharams (like Nagamangala, Binnamangala, and so on) are reminiscent of Chola rule in Karnataka. On the other hand, the Hoysalas captured parts of Tamil Nadu and have left behind scores of Kannada inscrip-
tions in Tamil Nadu. Vijayanagar rule in Tamil Nadu has left behind many Rayagopuras (gopuras built by the Rayas), and kalyanamantapas and sabhamantapas (community halls) in Vijayanagar style there.

"This long association has naturally brought about a lot of 'give and take' in many aspects of life and culture of the two states ... [T]he word Karnataka itself appears to have been a contribution of the Tamils as it is used as 'Karunat' in Tamil works like Shilapatikaram. The two [state] languages, Tamil and Kannada are so close to each other that some of the expressions in Kannada found in the earliest inscriptions even appear to be like Tamil" (Karnataka State Gazetteer, Part II, 1983:991). Kannada and Tamil, after all, originate from the same proto-Dravidian language, and Kannada is next only to Tamil in antiquity in this group.

In the days of Ramanuja, who took shelter in Karnataka for many years, large numbers of Tamil Brahmins came to be settled in the agraharams founded by him. Kempe Gowda, when he expanded the old village of Halasur (now known as Ulsoor) is said to have built agraharams for Brahmins, who mainly came from the Tamil country. Many Bangaloreans believe that the appointment of Kumarapuram Seshadri Iyer, a devout and learned Aiyar whose ancestors belonged to Ganapati agraharam in Tanjavur district, as Dewan of the princely state of Mysore by the Maharaja in 1883 was an
important event that attracted a number of Tamilians, especially Aiyars to Bangalore and Karnataka. According to them, during his long Dewanship that lasted for 18 years several scholarly and educated Tamil Brahmins from Tamil Nadu were appointed to key administrative positions in the state. Also, when the British formed the Civil and Military Station near Ulsoor many Tamilians came to Bangalore, lured by employment and trade opportunities offered by the city. Since the first railway connection built by the British in the state was between Madras and the Cantonment in Bangalore, it was easy for them to settle down in this area. Consequently this area, even today, seems more a part of Tamil Nadu than of Karnataka and the Tamilians live a life that is hardly touched by the local Kannada culture. While it is true that this area is heavily populated by Tamilians, it should, however, be pointed out that a large number of Tamilians, both Brahmins and non-Brahmins are distributed throughout the city.

III

Bangalore presents a slightly complicated picture as far as Aiyars are concerned. There are at least two distinct groups of Aiyars: the first one comprises Madras Aiyars or Aiyars who speak Tamil and follow the solar religious calendar as well as all the other customs and traditions of Aiyars of Tamil Nadu and are therefore diffe-
Chart 3: Sub-caste-wise break-up of group studied in Bangalore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-caste</th>
<th>Number of families</th>
<th>Number of people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vadaman</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vadyaman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brihacharanam</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashtasahasram</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>135</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 4: Age-wise and sex-wise break-up of group studied in Bangalore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>0 - 15</th>
<th>16 - 30</th>
<th>31 - 50</th>
<th>Over 50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
rent from the second group which includes Kolar Aiyars or Ashtagrama Aiyars, Mysore Aiyars, Manjapattur Aiyars, Mulabagal Aiyars, and Sanketis, all of whom follow the lunar religious calendar, like the Kannada Smarta Brahmins, and speak either Kannada or a language that is a strange mixture of both Kannada and Tamil. Even though the Aiyars belonging to the latter group are believed to have originally belonged to Tamil Nadu, as they now follow many local customs of Kannada Smarta Brahmins, this study deals only with Madras Aiyars of Bangalore who basically follow all the customs and practices of the Aiyars of Tamil Nadu (which, of course, includes Danapuram). In order to make the research compatible, Aiyars belonging to all the four major sub-sects, Vadaman, Brijacharanam, Vattiman, and Ashtasahasram, as well as hailing from the same region as the agraharam Aiyars (i.e., from Tanjavur district) were studied in Bangalore also.

Bangalore also has a considerable number of working women, (52,505 women, Census 1971) both literate and illiterate. However, of the 57 Aiyar women I interviewed only 22 were working women and the rest were illiterate; literate; or highly educated unmarried women/housewives. It is also significant to note that of the 19 graduates and post-graduates studied, only seven were employed while among women with high school diplomas (S.S.L.C.), 15 out of 21 sought jobs outside their homes. This indicates that women who pursue higher education do not always take up jobs. In
Chart 5: Income details of families studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of Aiyar families (Danapuram and Bangalore)</th>
<th>Monthly income of family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Rs. 1000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart 6: Education details of women studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of Aiyar women (Danapuram and Bangalore)</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post-graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
quite a few cases I was told that they had studied mainly to improve their chances in the 'matrimonial market' as well as to "do something to occupy ourselves until we got married." In a way Thomas' description of conditions existing in 1964 seems to be true even now: "... it even became fashionable for parents, whose daughters were remaining unmarried for want of desirable proposals coming or for want of cash to provide dowry, to give out the plausible explanation that the girls were so passionately fond of their studies that it was impossible to put ideas of marriage into their heads" (p.316). Among the graduates there were a few who had done one year of post-graduation and among the high school diploma holders, a few had completed one or two years of college education. They were married while they were studying and so had discontinued their studies.

It should nonetheless be stressed that the majority of the Aiyars, even in a big city like Bangalore, are not too anxious to educate their daughters beyond a certain stage for a variety of reasons: firstly, instead of spending money on educating their daughters, they would rather use it to get them married since education is not considered as important for girls as knowledge of domestic crafts such as cooking, sewing, and so on. Secondly, most of them are aware of the fact that the more educated their daughters are the more difficult it will be for them to find them suitable husbands in their own caste. Consequently, women
with post-graduate and graduate degrees are very often forced to marry men with either graduate degrees or diplomas because the more educated and better qualified the men are the more money they demand as dowry. Finally, most men are themselves not very interested in marrying highly educated women since they believe such women may not always be obedient wives.
Notes:

1. Owing to a number of reasons such as deaths, marriages, better opportunities outside the agraharam, etc., in 1980 when I first visited the agraharam only 178 people lived in it. During 1983-84 when I again visited the agraharam, the population had grown to 182.

2. Most of the agraharam Brahmins, especially the women, are very vague when it comes to numbers. I was told that a very long time ago, 18 families of learned south Indian Brahmins from Tanjavur had been invited by the ruler to settle down in the area and form an agraharam, but this information could not be verified as I was also told that no official document on this subject was available.

3. See Sastri, 1964:96: "Both in towns and villages, the castes tended to live in separate quarters of their own and follow their own peculiar customs and habits. The outcastes (Untouchables) who tilled the land and did menial work ... lived in hamlets at some distance from the residences of the higher castes."


5. See Sastri, 1964:50-51: "From the eighth and ninth centuries A. D., three types of village assemblies are traceable in the Tamil inscriptions, viz., the ur, the sabha, and the nagaram. The ur was the more common
type and included all landholders in the villages. The sabha (also called manru) was an exclusively Brahmin assembly of villages where all the lands were given as gifts to Brahmins to enable them to devote themselves to learning and teaching. The nagaram was quite another type pertaining to localities where traders and merchants dominated."

6. Tambula is given to sumangalis at the end of all auspicious occasions. According to Ayyar (1982), Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is said to abide in flowers, betel leaves, turmeric, and so on and by giving them to sumangalis, one pleases her and receives her blessings.

7. A Potti (Tulu Brahmin) priest, who resides in the agraharam, is in charge of all the agraharam temples that belong to the government and hence gets a small salary from the government.

8. A related activity that is commonly found all over south India is the tradition of trading old clothes for vessels and other essential small household articles. In the past, old clothes and saris used to be mainly traded for stainless steel vessels. But these days with the growing popularity of plastic goods and also as stainless steel articles are becoming increasingly expensive, in the agraharam as well as in cities like Bangalore, old clothes and old silk saris are traded
for plastic utensils.

9. Since a davni is half the length of a normal six-yard sari, it is sometimes referred to as 'half-sari' in Bangalore. While the agraharam teenage girl prefers to wear a davni, an Aiyar girl in Bangalore wears a variety of 'adult' costumes including davni after her puberty.

10. According to a popular legend that describes the founding of Bangalore, Kempe Gowda I, when he was out hunting one day, saw "the strange sight of a hare chasing his dog. Convinced that the place of this incident indicated 'Gandu Bhumi' or 'Heroic Land', he raised a mud fort there and founded a township within it, in 1537 A. D., with the permission of the emperor of Vijayanagar, suzerain of the Yelahanka Nadu Prabhus" (Hasan, 1970:1).
CHAPTER IV

AIYARS

'Aiyar' is the Tamil corrupt form of Aryar or Aryan. In the Tolkappiyam, the earliest and the most comprehensive treatise extant on Tamil grammar, the rishis who first introduced the various samskaras to the Dravidian people of south India are referred to as Aiyars and even now Brahmins are distinguished by the honorific 'Aiyar' in Tamil Nadu.

However, the descendants of the Brahmins from the north, who originally settled in the ancient south Indian Chola and Pandyan empires at the request of the kings of these two kingdoms, today form one specific group of Tamil Smarta Brahmins called Aiyars. Although they have now spread throughout the country, if not the world, even today, the districts of Tanjavur and Tiruchurapalli in Tamil Nadu are regarded as the stronghold of both Smarta and Vaishnava or Sri Vaishnava (Aiyengar) categories of Tamil Brahmins.

The Smartas are the followers of Shankaracharya (788 - 820 A. D.), the famous Advaita Vedanta philosopher, who was actually a Nambutiri Brahmin, born in Kaladi, in the neighboring Chera country. "The name Smarta (traditionalist aspect of religious observances in daily life) is derived from sāṃśriti, the code of traditional
laws, customs, and conduct ... They hold the Advaita theory in philosophy which maintains the absolute identity of soul and supreme spirit, and regards the Universe as illusion (maya)" (Nanjundayya and Iyer, 1928, Vol. II:307).

The Smartas can be broadly divided into two classes: the vaidikas or those who devote themselves to Vedic studies and adhere to Vedic rites and become priests or purohitas, and the laukikas or those who take up secular occupations. The Smartas consider themselves to be less rigid and more non-sectarian than the Sri Vaishnavas as they recognize the Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma trinity in its entirety and worship all gods including Shiva and Vishnu, whereas the latter, who are known for their orthodoxy and intolerance, worship only Vishnu and other Vaishnava gods and goddesses.

All Tamil Brahmins fall under one of the three main divisions, following one of the three Vedas of Rig, Yajur, and Sama, and this three-fold division is important for all ceremonial purposes. " ... [T]he Brahmins claim descent from one or more of the rishis -- Atri, Bhrigu, Kutsya, Vasishta, Gautama, Kashyapa, and Angiras; accordingly some are given the name of the following rishis -- Agastya, Angiras, Atri, Bhrigu, Kashyapa, Vasishta, and Gautama. These are said to have 18 ganas, and for each gana there are a number of gotras [maximal descent labels or exogamous patrilineal clans claiming descent from the rishis] in
all numbering about 230" (Iyer, 1912, Vol. II:289-290). Each rishi adopted one of the three Vedic sakhas, (rescence) and each sakha in turn, is divided into one or more sutras or schools (1) as for example:

Rig Veda -- Asvalayana and Sankhayana

Black Yajur Veda -- Baudhayana, Bharadwaja, Vaikhanasa, Satyashada, Apastamba, and Hiranyakkesin

White Yajur Veda -- Katyayana

Sama Veda -- Drahyayana, Masaka, and Latyayana

Though these divisions are generally not considered to be important, at the time of performing the various sacraments Aiyars, like other Brahmans, are expected to strictly follow the prescriptions given in the Grihya-sutra pertaining to the Vedic sakha to which they belong.

Aiyars are not strictly a homogenous group. Based on the locality in which they had originally settled, they can again be "sub-divided into several territorial groups which will all eat together but will not intermarry with each other ... None of these groups or sub-groups are based on any sectarian differences, as among the Vaishnavites" (Census of India, 1901, Vol. XV, Part I:147-148). Vadaman, Brihacharanam, Vadyaman (Vattiman or Madyaman), and Ashtasahasram are four such main groups, which are further divided into several sub-divisions and from their names, all of these groups and sub-groups appear to be mainly territorial in origin. Members of different groups may
belong to the same Vedic sakha and perform sacraments in accordance with one of the Grihya-sutras belonging to each Veda.

The Vadamans claim to be superior to the other groups of Aiyars and even now prefer to marry only among themselves. They are further divided into two principal sub-divisions: (i) Vada Deshatu (or Vadamans from the northern country) and (ii) Chola Deshatu (or Vadamans from the kingdom of Chola). Of the two, the former group is considered to be superior than the latter in religious status. It is also believed that the Sri Vaishnavas are really Vada Deshatu Vadamans who have recently been converted into Vaishnavism.

The Brihacharanams follow the Vadamans in ritual superiority and are more Shaivites at heart than the Vadamans. There are nine sub-divisions of this sect of which Mankudi, Satyamangalam, and Kandramanikyam are the most important.

The Vattiman Aiyars are considered to be on par with the Brihacharanams in ritual status, while the Ashta-sahasrarams are said to be ritually the most inferior of the four.

Though there are no significant sastraic differences in the customs and manners observed by Aiyars belonging to the above four sects, yet, until recently, intermarriage
among members of these four groups was forbidden but inter-dining was allowed. In matters of marriage, birth, and death, the sub-caste is the real entity to the individual. Although Aiyars even now prefer to marry members from their own sub-castes, sometimes due to paucity of suitable brides and grooms in their own communities, and more importantly to prevent the excessive dowry that would have to be paid otherwise, Aiyars are forced to intermarry. However, Aiyars, like other south Indian Brahmins, continue to observe the gotra exogamy very rigidly which means that persons belonging to same gotra (i.e., father's gotra) cannot marry.

The Women:

For Aiyar women, like other Hindu women, marriage and motherhood are the two most important goals. According to Manu, "The production of children, the nurture of those born, and the daily life of men, (of these matters) woman is visibly the cause. Offspring, (the due performance of) religious rites, faithful service, highest conjugal happiness and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and oneself, depend on one's wife alone" (Manu-smriti, IX:27, 28). Thus to be "... mothers were women created, to be fathers men; religious rites, therefore, are ordained in the Veda to be performed (by the husband) together with the wife (who as patni shares in the sacrifice as well as its reward)" (IX:96).
After marriage, a wife is said to become one with her husband's personality. In Chapter IX which deals with the 'Duties of Husband and Wife,' Manu writes, "Whatever be the qualities of the man with whom a woman is united according to the law, such qualities even she assumes, like a river (united) with the ocean" (IX:22). He gives examples of two women, Akshamala "a woman of the lowest birth" and Sarangi, who after "being united to Vasishta ... (and) Mandapala (respectively) became worthy of honor" (IX:23). "These and other females of low birth," declares Manu, "have attained eminence in this world by the respective good qualities of their husbands" (IX:24).

Men and women are considered to be complementary to each other and the wife is said to be the ardhangini (half body) of her husband. Even god is regarded as half-male and half-female (ardhanarishwara). Although, according to the scriptures, the various karmakandas (Vedic rites) cannot be performed by a man alone, (a bachelor or a widower has no right (adhikara) to perform them), the asymmetry of a wife's status as sharer of her husband's body is symbolized by her participation in these ritualistic obligations as sathadharmi (co-worshipper) with her husband. It is through her husband that she gains status and becomes an auspicious human being. So the husband is like a god to the wife. According to Manu (V:154), "Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or
devoid of good qualities, (yet) a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife." Even though husbands are dependent on their wives for offspring, material welfare, and prosperity (in other words, all happiness both in this world and in the next), superior status and purity reside only in the husbands. It is therefore a relationship of asymmetrical interdependence. Wives are 'auspicious,' but husbands are 'pure.' The realm of the wife which is the realm of the auspicious/inauspicious is inferior to, subordinated to, and encompassed by the realm of the pure and the impure.

To ensure the purity of their offspring, Aiyars like other Brahmins require their women to be chaste and pure. "As the male is to whom a wife cleaves, even so is the son whom she brings forth; let him therefore carefully guard his wife, in order to keep his offspring pure" (IX:9), warns Manu.

Though things are said to be changing these days, generally Aiyar women after the age of puberty wear saris or half-saris and have more restrictions than young girls. Chastity is still considered to be a very important virtue for women. "The Brahmins rigidly insist on virginity in brides and chastity in wives" wrote Srinivas in 1942 (p.63), and to a large extent this statement still holds good as far as Aiyars are concerned. Even though women now attend schools/colleges, take up jobs outside their homes,
and appear to have lesser restrictions within the home and greater freedom of movement outside the home, they are still expected to be back home before dark. The sexes are assiduously segregated and despite holding jobs outside the home, most women are reluctant to speak freely even with their male colleagues let alone strangers. Even in a large city like Bangalore, where women attend co-educational schools and colleges, take up jobs outside the home, marry late, and are generally said to have greater freedom of movement than their counterparts in the agraharam, social intercourse between unmarried men and women is still discouraged. By and large, women are expected to conform to the laws laid down by Manu.

Women are believed to be innately wayward and wanton. "Women," declares Manu, "do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; (thinking), '(It is enough that) he is a man,' they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly. ... (When creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their) bed, (of their) seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct" (IX:14, 17). "Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world)" (IX:15).

"Knowing their disposition, which the Lord of creatures laid in them at the creation, to be such," writes
Manu, "(every) man should most strenously exert himself to guard them" (IX:16). "Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control" (IX:2).

"Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. ... Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations, however trifling (they may appear); for, if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow ..." (IX:3, 5). An unchaste woman can destroy her husband's world and bring downfall to the male line. Therefore, Manu maintains that "... the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives" for he "who carefully guards his wife, preserves (the purity of) his offspring, virtuous conduct, his family, himself, and his (means of acquiring) merit" (IX:6, 7).

From the above we gather that unless a woman is protected and closely guarded by her father/husband, every woman is potentially capable of turning into a courtesan (ganika). Even in ancient India, in spite of the splendor attached to the life of a courtesan, there has always been a certain amount of public contempt for her profession. "It would appear the courtesan envied the respectability of the housewife, and the latter the freedom, [talent], and
splendor of the courtesan" (Thomas, 1964:215). It has always been considered to be highly improper for them to mix or enter each other's living quarters.

Thus, women as mothers and women as courtesans occupy two well-marked divisions each with its own spheres of activities and functions. Vatsayana in his Kama-sutra clearly delineates their respective roles. The duty of the wedded wife is to bear children, preferably sons; to remain strictly faithful to her husband no matter what his nature or activities are; to do nothing that might offend him; and to do everything in her power to enhance his pleasure and prosperity. The greatest virtue of the ganika, on the other hand, is freedom from moral bonds. Shudraka in his Sanskrit play Mrichchakatika (Clay Cart) describes the ganika "as a creeper that grows by the roadside, and like the boat, the creeper, the bough, and the stream, the ganika is accessible to all." Thus, profit and pleasure are the main objects of her life, and her duty the sale of her person; to shirk this duty is something of a sin. As far as the nagarika (man-about-town) is concerned, once he co-habits with his wife during her rtu or fertile period he has discharged his duty toward her, and is free to seek the courtesan for his pleasure.

Although Hindu tradition recognizes two main ideals for women, there appear to be really no sharp distinctions between the two types. In fact, in Hindu mythology, the two ideals are very often infused into one and the same
woman represents both of them. A brahmavadini is considered an ascetic type who strives for the highest philosophical knowledge, and a sadyovadhu is the domestic ideal who dedicates herself to the welfare of her family. However, "... it was by no means obligatory for a brahmavadini to take the vow of celibacy, renounce the world, and carry on meditations in a far off, secluded mountain cave. On the contrary, quite a number of brahmavadinis who came to be blessed with the realization of Brahman were married women. In the same manner, many sadyovadhus were also of a high, spiritual nature, and even in the midst of their multifarious domestic duties, they strove for spiritual perfection and attained realization" (Chaudhury, 1962:603).

Sita, the wife of Rama and the heroine of the Indian epic Ramayana, and Anasuya, the wife of the sage Atri, also described in the Ramayana, are believed to be two perfect examples of the domestic and ascetic types respectively. Nonetheless, there does not seem to be recognizable character differences between the two. Both women are pure, saintly wives who are completely devoted to their respective husbands. Maitreyi, one of the two wives of the sage Yajnavalkya, as described in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad is said to have been one of the many sublime examples of "a sadyovadhu and a brahmavadini rolled into one" (Ibid., 604). In any case, since women, unlike twice-born men, do not have the usual channel of samskaras to purify themselves, the question of women becoming true
ascetics does not actually arise. As Manu clearly points out that while a wife is essential for the fulfillment of the three legitimate objects of life, namely, dharma (religious as well as social duty), artha (acquisition of wealth and material prosperity), and kama (pleasures of life), she is excluded from the fourth, moksha (liberation) which is reserved only for twice-born men and women cannot pursue this path until they are reborn as men.

The samskaras are primarily meant for twice-born men, and women, as they are denied Vedic study are only considered to be Sudras, and can therefore never really attain the purity and strength of character necessary to renounce the world. "For women no (sacramental) rite (is performed) with sacred texts, thus the law is settled; women (who are) destitute of strength and destitute of (the knowledge of) Vedic texts, (are as impure as) falsehood (itself), that is a fixed rule" (Manu-smriti, IX:18).

The first important Vedic sacrament for a Brahmin woman is marriage, which also involves a male, and it is only as a wife that she becomes important. "A wife [grhini] is the ornament of the house [grha]" and "a house without a wife is a burning-ground" are two popular proverbs (quoted in Narain, 1957:158). As a wife (vadu) she "is a bringer of well-being (sumangali)." This explains why the marriage ritual is considered to be the most important sacrament for a woman because it is only
through marriage that she is able to reach her most important role -- that of a mother. "Motherhood is the highest fulfillment of India's womanhood" (Sen Gupta, 1970:72). Unlike the widow who represents the inauspicious, the wife/mother represents the auspicious through her link to her husband. It is only as a wife/mother that a woman helps a man discharge two of his debts, one to the gods by associating with him in sacrifices and the other to the pitris by procreating a son (putra or 'hell sauer') and thus saving him from the hell called put, a hell to which all childless men are said to be condemned.

A woman thus redeems herself by becoming a mother. As a mother, she is second to none and is accorded the highest place in both mythology and popular religious tradition. "In the midst of this dark picture and undeserved condemnation of women there is one very bright spot, viz., the high eulogy of and the reverence for the mother in all smriti works" (Kane, 1974, Vol. II, Part I:580). "It is really interesting to note that on the one hand, women in general were considered to be socially and politically inferior by our Dharmasastra writers but on the other hand, mother in particular was considered more revered, even deified. Apparently it looks as if the deification of motherhood was a due compensation for the general deterioration in the status of women" (Srivastava, 1979:8). To attain this goal, however, she has to be pure and virtuous. A woman therefore is almost like a sacri-
ficial object. She has to be pure so that when her husband approaches her, he can be confident that their offspring will be pure and *sattvic* (2).

Even though both man and woman are necessary to produce a child, the woman has very little to do as far as molding the personality of the unborn child is concerned. "By the sacred tradition the woman is declared to be the soil, the man is declared to be the seed; the production of all corporeal beings (takes place) through the union of the soil with the seed. ... On comparing the seed and the receptacle (of the seed), the seed is declared to be more important; for the offspring of all created beings is marked by the characteristics of the seed" (Manu-smriti, IX:33, 35). Manu gives the example of the earth which "... indeed, is called the primeval womb of created beings; but the seed develops not in its development any properties of the womb" (IX:37). Like the field and vessel, women receive and accept the seed of their husbands. In fact, it is "the husband, after conception by his wife, becomes an embryo and is born again of her; for that is the wifehood of a wife (jaya), that he is born (jayate) again by her" (IX:8). Thus, the woman's role is primarily that of a feeder. "It is the wife who cooks for both the living and the dead members of her husband's lineage. Her role in child bearing and conception is also conceived as one of feeder. She feeds the embryo with her uterine blood ..." (Marglin, 1981:177) and thereby 'increases' not her own but
her husband's line. Thus "before birth, femaleness encompasses maleness [the womb encompasses the seed]; after birth maleness encompasses femaleness in the male line" (Fruzzetti, 1982:25). If, on the other hand, a wife neglects her dharmic duty, then calamity, which is usually spoken of in terms of natural disaster such as drought or disease, will ensue.

Women may be mere receptacles and transmitters that hold, nourish, nurture, and transmit the seed deposited by their husbands, but it is of paramount importance that they be pure and chaste. So they are obliged to maintain social decorum and behave properly in public since it is believed that on the proper behavior of the wife/mother depends the purity of the race and the prosperity and welfare of the household as well as of the ancestors. For her purity, a wife is honored and revered as a mother, a goddess among human beings and is accorded a very high place in society. "Between wives (striyah) who (are destined) to bear children, who secure many blessings, who are worthy of worship and irradiate (their) dwellings, and between the goddesses of fortune (shriyah, who reside) in the houses (of men), there is no difference whatsoever. ... She who, controlling her thoughts, speech, and acts, violates not her duty towards her lord, dwells with him (after death) in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful (wife, sadhvi)" (IX:26, 29). But, on the other hand, an unchaste woman "... for disloyalty to her
husband, ... is censured among men, and (in her next life) ... is born in the womb of a jackal and tormented by diseases, the punishment of her sin" (IX:30).

Thus decreed, Aiyar women like most other high caste Hindu women, lead repressed lives. They are expected at all times to be reserved, chaste, and virtuous. Since it is a woman's sexuality that is considered valuable, her appearance and behavior in public become extremely important, and any dress or action which might attract the attention of other people is censured and meets with strong disapproval. Theoretically only after marriage, but in fact, only after the birth of children and after she herself has reached middle age can an Aiyar woman literally breathe easy. She, therefore, has to prepare herself right from childhood for a virtuous and auspicious life of a wife/mother. They may not actually believe that all the terrible things described by Manu may be in store for them in the future, yet, Aiyar women through years and years of socialization have come to believe so strongly in the chastity and purity of women that they do not really resent their repressed lives. The rites of passage of Aiyar women through their rich symbolism, consisting of both serious and non-serious elements that reinforce and emphasize important life-goals of these women, further uphold Manu's ideals.
Notes:

1. The word *sutra*, by which a special class of literature is designated, originally meant a 'thread' but now it denotes a rule that is brief in form and unambiguous in meaning. The *sutras* are therefore packed with innumerable such terse aphorisms. The *sutra* literature on ritual falls into three distinct classes, dealing respectively with religion (*Srauta-sutras*), law (*Dharma-sutras*), and domestic life (*Grihya-sutras*). Of these the earliest were the *sutras* connected with religion and consist of concise manuals detailing various Vedic sacrifices. "Two collections of these *Srauta-sutras* belonging to the *Rig Veda*, called *Asvalayana* and *Sankhayana*; three belonging to the *Sama Veda*, called *Masaka*, *Latyayana*, and *Drayhayana*; four belonging to the *Black Yajur Veda*, and called *Baudhayana*, *Bharadvaja*, *Apastamba*, and *Hiranyakasipu*; and one belonging to the *White Yajur Veda*, and called *Katyayana*, have been left entire ... Among the *Dharma-sutras* which are lost and have not yet been recovered, was the *Manava-sutra* or sutra of *Manu*, from which the later metrical *Code of Manu* (the present *Manu-smriti*) was complied, and which was held in high esteem in the *Sutra Period*, just as the metrical *Code of Manu* is honored at the present day" (Dutt, 1906, Vol. I:189-190).

The three *sutras* of *Srauta*, *Dharma*, and *Grihya* go
collectively under the name of Kalpa-sutra. As has been pointed out the Srauta-sutras treat of the duties of a worshipper and the Dharma-sutras define the duties of a citizen. "But man has other responsibilities beyond those of a worshipper and a citizen. As a son, a husband, and a father, he has duties to perform towards the members of his family. He has rites to perform in connection with domestic occurrences, which are different from the elaborate ceremonials taught in the Srauta-sutras. A distinct class of rules was necessary to fix the details of the domestic rites, and these regulations are given in the Grihya-sutras ... After a lapse of over two thousand years the Hindus still practise the same rites, sometimes under the same name ..." (Ibid., 190-191).

2. In Hinduism the term guna or quality has a very wide application and is extensively used in its many branches. Generally guna indicates the attribute or property of a thing. Vaisheshika, one of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy lists twenty-four kinds of guna of which sixteen are inherent in material things and eight are inherent in the soul. In Samkhya, the earliest of the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy, the term guna refers specifically to the three constituent principles of prakriti or the primordial substance, namely, sattva, rajas, and tamas. "Sattva, 'goodness,' inherent in purity and brightness, is
equated with reality and intelligence. It is the power that illuminates and reveals all manifestations. It resides in the mind, is white in color and generates goodness and joy, inspires noble virtues such as faith, forbearance, and courage. It is the predominant quality in the *divya* or celestial world of the *deva*, 'deities'. The *sattvika* type of man, in whom *sattva* predominates, is of medium height, slender, 'wheat-colored,' pure in mind and body, long-lived, wise and possessed of great physical strength. *Sattvika* foods are agreeable and bland, like milk, curds, ghee, wheat, and several kinds of fruit and vegetables. *Rajas*, 'passion,' inherent in energy, force, and movement, is the power that activates and excites the other two gunas. It resides in life, is red in color, and produces egoism, selfishness, jealousy, and ambition. It predominates in the world of the *vira* or hero. The *rajasika* type is tall, muscular, passionate, [and] full of physical energy. *Rajasic* foods are bitter, sour, saline, pungent, astringent, and include meat (but not beef), fish, and poultry. *Tamas*, 'darkness,' inherent in mass or matter, is equated with inertia, gloom, and stupor. It is illusive and results from *avidya* or ignorance. It is the power that drives to sensual and material desires, and it tends to restrain and suppress. It resides in the body, is black in color and engenders stupidity, laziness, fear, and immorality. It is the quality that predominates in the world of the *pashu* or
animal. The tamasika type of man is short and corpulent, with an 'animal' nature, and is dull and slow witted. Tamasika foods are cold, flat, putrid, stale, made up of the leavings of others. They include beef, eels, turnips, pork, spirits, dark grains (masha), vegetables that have a 'head shape' (onions, garlic) or a hood (mushrooms). The gunas exist in all individuals in varying degrees, and owing to the attachments to them the embodied soul is bound in prakriti as a slave. If sattva is the predominating guna in a man he goes to the celestial realms after death, if rajas he is reborn as a man, if tamas he reincarnates as a lower animal" (Walker, 1983, Vol. II:264).
CHAPTER V

VEDIC AND LAUKIK RITES (1)

The Institution of Samskara:

According to the Hindu scheme of things, all thought and action can be broadly divided into three branches: (i) jnana-kanda, (ii) upasana-kanda, and (iii) karma-kanda, denoting respectively knowledge, meditation, and action as prescribed by the scriptures. The samskaras "form an important section of the karma-kanda, because they are believed to reform and sanctify the person for whom they are performed, marking various occasions of his life from conception in the mother's womb to the cremation of the body at death; they have influence even beyond death, as they determine the course of the soul" (Pandey, 1962:390). They purify life by removing sin and augmenting merit "so that ... [an individual] may become a full-fledged member of the community" (Ibid., 1969:16). Hence, the samskaras "have been treated from very ancient times as necessary for unfolding the latent capacities of man for development and as being the outward symbols or signs of the inner change which would fit human beings for corporate life and they also tended to confer a certain status on those who underwent them" (Kane, 1974, Vol. II, Part I:192).

"The Sanskrit word samskara is derived from the root
kr with the prefix sam and the suffix ghan added ..." (Pandey, 1962:390). The word, which is loosely used to signify life-crisis rituals or rites of passage, may mean many things: to educate, cultivate, refine, perfect, embellish, fully form, mould, complete, prepare, make over, and above all to sanctify, consecrate, and purify (shuddhi). "Thus it may be seen that the Hindu sacraments aimed at not only the formal purification of the body but also at sanctifying, impressing, refining, and perfecting the entire individuality of the recipient, producing a special merit in him" (Ibid., p.391).

The Grihya-sutras deal with different types of domestic ceremonies like propitiation of ancestors, full and new moon sacrifices as well as those that have to be performed at various rites of passage beginning with vivaha and ending in samavartana or snana (graduation). The majority of them omit antyeshti, though the Grihya-sutras of Paraskara, Asvalayana, and Baudhayana have sections dealing with it. These purificatory rites known as Brahma samskaras, are also prescribed in Manu-smriti "for the purification of a man's whole nature, body, soul, and spirit from the taint transmitted through the womb of an earthly matter" (Iyer, 1912, Vol. II:314). By properly performing vratas and homas (oblations in fire performed during the various samskaras), by worshiping gods, sages, and manes, by studying the Vedas, and by producing sons, Manu says, a man is rendered fit for the attainment of
Brahman. In other words, a man who purifies himself by repaying the three-fold debt (rta) to gods, sages, and ancestors, with which men are born, by performing sacrifices, learning the Vedas, and begetting sons respectively, is said to "attain equality with sages" (Kane, 1974, Vol. II, Part I:193).

"Every samskara is regarded as a transformative action that 'refines' and 'purifies' the living body, initiating it into new statuses and relationships by giving it a new birth. A samskara removes 'defects' (dosha) from the body, such as those inherited 'from the seed' (bajika) and 'from the womb' (garbhika) and infuses 'qualities' ... into it" (Inden and Nicholas, 1977:37). These rites, which begin before the birth of a Hindu, cover his entire life until his death. Even after death, they end only after his spirit reaches pitriloka (the 'world' of the manes). "With holy rites, prescribed by the Veda, must the ceremony on conception and other sacraments be performed for the twice-born men (dvijatis), which sanctify the body and purify (from sin) in this (life) and after death" (Manu-smriti, II:26). These goals are accomplished by kindling agni (the sacred fire) in the beginning of every rite; by bath, immersion, sipping of water, and aspersion of water; by praying, appealing, and blessing; by touching various parts of the body; by donning new and special clothes; by anointing and feeding with auspicious and special substances; and by the recitation of mantras.
Sacrifice and orientation are two important symbolic elements of the samskaras. "The belief is that the gods also, like men, are propitiated by praise and prayer; ... the sacrifice is the symbol of a universal law which requires complete dedication of the person before any act of creation or consummation. This spiritual significance of the sacrifice is the underlying principle of the samskaras" (Pandey, 1962, Vol. I:395). Orientation is based on the symbolism of the path of surya and also on the myth that different directions are associated with different effects. For instance, the "eastern direction is associated with light, warmth, life, happiness, and glory. The western direction is associated with darkness, chill, death, and decay ... the northern direction is associated with soma (moon) symbolizing peace, gentleness, and agreeableness; and the southern direction with Yama ... The recipient of a samskara has to face the direction appropriate to the occasion" (Ibid.).

As with all significant events in the life of a Hindu, the question of auspicious/inauspicious omens (shakunam in Tamil) is of paramount importance in the performance of samskaras as well. It is particularly important here since the samskaras are primarily intended to bring about beneficial results to both the performer and the recipient. Because Hindus believe that points in time have inherently auspicious (benevolent) or inauspicious (malevolent) characteristics related to the relative position of surya,
chandra (moon), grahas (planets), and nakshatras (stars), great care has to be taken to perform the sacraments at the most auspicious time of the day, day of the week, fortnight, and month. Also, the area where the sacrament is to be performed should be cleared of all objects and persons (such as widows and menstruating women) that might bring inauspiciousness and impurity to the proceedings.

Hindus who obey all the sacred laws and perform the sacraments properly and with true dedication are said to gain fame in this world, fulfillment of all their desires and "after death unsurpassable bliss" (Manu-smriti, II:9). "The theory is still current that a man is born a Sudra; he becomes a ... (dvija) by the performance of samskaras; by acquiring the Vedic lore he becomes a vipra (an inspired poet); and by attaining Brahman he becomes a Brahmana" (Pandey, 1962, Vol. II:393).

Kane and Pandey note that there is an enormous divergence of views among the smriti writers as to the exact number of samskaras. The most comprehensive list, which uses the word samskaras in a broad sense, consists of 40 samskaras made up of both Brahma samskaras -- which include bodily (sharira) samskaras and four Veda vratas; and Daiva samskaras -- which include five daily mahayagnyas, seven pakayagnyas, seven haviryagnyas, and seven somayagnyas.

The number of samskaras in the Grihya-sutras fluctuate between twelve and eighteen. However, according to Pandey
(1962, Vol. II:392) in course of time, the following sixteen samskaras came to be practised:

(a) pre-natal samskaras: (i) garbhadhana, (ii) pumsavana (engendering a male issue), and (iii) simantonnayana (parting the hair);

(b) samskaras of childhood: (iv) jatakarm, (v) namakarana, (vi) nishkramana (first outing), (vii) annaprasa-shana (first feeding with boiled rice), (viii) chaula or chudakarana, and (ix) karna-vedha (piercing the ear lobes);

(c) educational samskaras: (x) vidyarambha or akshara-rambha (learning the alphabet), (xi) upanayana, (xii) vedarambha (first study of the Vedas), (xiii) kesanta (cutting the hair), and (xiv) snana or samavarta;

(d) (xv) vivaha; and

(e) (xvi) antyeshti.

Thus, the sequence of samskaras broadly divides the rituals into two basic parts: the first group of rituals leads to the birth of a male child, and the second group converts him into a full-fledged Hindu capable of following his dharma.

The concept of samskaras is also closely linked to the four-fold ashrama scheme of Hindu life. The first two ashramas, brahmacharya (the period of vedic study) and grihasta (the period of family life) relate to pravritti
Upayana
marga (or the period when one grows and gains prosperity in the world) and the second two, vanaprasta (the period of retirement, of solitude, and meditation in the forest) and sanyasa (the period of renunciation and ascetic life) to nivritti marga (or the period when one renounces worldly ties and moves toward the path of salvation).

Even though most Aiyars perform all the essential rites of passage, it should however be pointed out that due to mainly economic reasons, these days, quite a few of them perform the sacraments in an abridged form, a process that seems to have begun as early as the beginning of this century. "The first few samskaras are not performed at the special periods prescribed for each, but are in the case of males postponed to upanayana, and in the case of females to marriage" (Iyer, 1912, Vol. II:314). Sometimes, "... the wedding ritual may be combined with the donning of the sacred thread at the beginning of the ceremony and with ... (garbhadhana) at the end ... [C]hanges seem to have [also] occurred with respect to the kin groups participating in the ritual. The scattering of agnates over a wide area is one of the factors responsible for this change ... The manner in which wedding ritual has been abbreviated is interesting [too]. Formerly, a full-blown Brahmin wedding would last between five to seven days ... There is ... an increasing tendency [today] to compress Sanskritic ritual into a few hours on a single day" (Srinivas, 1966:125-126).
Laukik Rites:

When one considers the rites of passage of Aiyar women, it becomes necessary to distinguish between the literate or codified (sastrachar or Vedic) and the oral or indigenous (lokachar or laukik) traditions, though the two are by no means unrelated. Thus, an assumption that from a study of ancient Sanskrit sacred books one can glean all that there is to be known about rites of passage is misleading as far as women's rites are concerned. Sanskrit books like the Grihya-sutras deal only with those rites that require recitation of the sacred texts. As it was not considered necessary to recite any mantras during women's rites, none of the sacred books deal with women's rites of passage. For instance, the Grihya-sutra of Gobhila merely mentions in passing, "In the same way (the rites are performed) for a girl, (But) silently" (II, 9:22, 23). We know that one of the most effective ways to study women is through an analysis of their rites of passage as these provide reflections of their world through their own point of view by specifically enacting and reaffirming women's roles and statuses in society. Fruzzetti (1982) has rightly pointed out that in the regional societies of India, women constitute a separate but related subculture and the idiom through which their domain is expressed is the world of life cycle rites and vratas.

"Women's society traditionally has a complex social
structure of its own. In it women organize, conduct, and participate in a wide range of work activities, sociability, and ceremonies at a distance from the world of men. To it they bring their own leaders, skilled specialists and loyal followers. The separate structure allows freedom of action for women, away from men" (Peters, 1968). The role of senior sumangalis as ritualists in laukik rites is functionally equivalent to that of the vadiyar in Vedic rites. "Women and Brahmmin priests are ritualists in different contexts. When the one is the chief ritualist, the other is absent or subordinate" (Fruzzetti, 1982:69).

The laukik rites that are enumerated in this study in the form of case studies are, for the most part, undocumented. They are a part of Aiyar women's oral tradition and have been handed down from generation to generation by women. Since it is an oral tradition, there is scope for spot improvisations, additions, and/or omissions according to one's convenience, as long as one keeps within the tradition and performs all the essential steps. For example, it is customary for women to sing songs during the performance of certain rituals. While this tradition is adhered to in principle, the songs as well as the words of the songs may change. Quite often in Bangalore and occasionally in the agraharam younger women sing devotional songs of an amorous nature and romantic film songs rather than the traditional obscene songs.
Part Two of this study presents some of the most important laukik rites including vratas that are generally practised by Aiyar women. As has been pointed out during their performance no mantras are recited and men, with the exception of the *mama* (maternal uncle, mother's brother), have very little to do in these indigenous rites. The mama who mainly plays a behind-the-scene role is the one who has to give saris, gold ornaments, presents, etc. As Tambiah (1973:108) points out, "Of the internal prestation, ... made within the kin group, it is the mother's brother's gift that is important. His gifts are 'oriented' (and given at the birth of a child, at its ... puberty, at its marriage, etc.) while other prestations are 'reversible' ..."

The life cycle rites of Aiyar women have been grouped under three main subdivisions. Although, as van Gennep has shown, each rite individually has the three essential stages of "separation," "transition," and "incorporation," the rites taken as a whole can also be divided into "separation," "transition," and "incorporation" rites. By doing this, every Aiyar woman after the puberty ritual (separation rite) until she gives birth to a child/male child is in a liminal stage. The detailed description of the important laukik rites practised by Aiyar women attempts to illustrate the above contention.
Vedic versus Laukik:

The following lists some of the important differences between Vedic and laukik rites (2):

Vedic:
1. Use of written text
2. Scriptural authority
3. Vadiyar conducts the rites
4. Mantras and homas are essential
5. Ghi (clarified butter), sandalwood paste, darbha grass, holy water, sacred thread, ghi-lamp, and camphor are most frequently used
6. Most of the rites are of purificatory and benedictory nature
7. Rites are performed on auspicious days and at auspicious times determined by astrology
8. Wider applicability of rules in time and space
9. For the marriage the textual tradition of the bridegroom is followed in the Vedic rites performed both at the bride's and the bridegroom's homes
10. Textual rites are essential for the legalization of marriage and legitimization of children
11. The presiding color is white, which stands for purity, and the dominant guna is sattva.

Laukik:
1. Use of personal knowledge transmitted orally
2. Senior sumangalis exercise authority
3. Senior sumangalis lead the ceremonies
4. Songs, prayers, and magical incantations are used, but no mantras or homas
5. Turmeric, vermilion, dal, salt, jaggery, betel leaves, areca-nut, sesame seeds, margosa (neem, vepa), cowri shells, oil-lamp, black thread, pestle and mortar, bangles, winnow, and collyrium are used on various occasions
6. Most rites have magical origin, generally linked to fertility cults
7. Rites are performed in sequence and according to the convenience of the women
8. Rules are bound by living memory and are largely localized
9. For the marriage, the oral tradition of the bride is strictly adhered to in laukik rites performed in the bride's home; the lokachar rites performed in her husband's home follow the tradition of the bridegroom
10. Oral rites are not the essential part of a legal marriage, but have a deep and abiding meaning; most Vedic rites are incomplete without the performance of complementary laukik rites
11. The presiding colors are red and yellow, which stand for auspiciousness, and the dominant guna is rajas (3)

Women's rites, while clearly defining female sex roles and highlighting the separateness of the female world, also, in many ways, complement Vedic rituals and express
the relatedness between the male- and female-dominated spheres of activity and thus link them to Aiyar society as a whole, since both types of ritual are concerned with the same theme: the complementary union of male and female for the sole purpose of securing the immortality of the male line through the birth of a male child. While the Vedic rites uphold 'other-worldly' and sattvic qualities, women's rituals emphasize 'this-worldly' and rajasic qualities, thus acknowledging the fact that in order to produce sattvic sons, the union of male and female which is basically rajasic in nature is essential. However, by chanting the appropriate mantras, this essentially rajasic act gets sublimated. This apparent dichotomy between Vedic and laukik rites is clearly visible in the symbolism of the rites performed by Aiyars.
Notes:

1. Although Vedic rites normally include a wide variety of Hindu scriptural rituals, since we are interested mainly in life cycle rituals, Vedic rites in this chapter specifically refer to samskaras.

2. My list is broadly based on Saraswati's list (1977:165-166) wherein he talks about some of the main differences between sastrachar and lokachar rituals in a Brahmin marriage.

3. Even though the quality of rajas, like sattva and tamas, is usually associated with males, I have used rajas to describe Aiyar women since they display all the essential characteristics of the rajasic type.
PART TWO
CHAPTER VI
RITES OF PASSAGE OF AIYAR WOMEN

I

"Separation" Rite
1. Tirandukuli (1):

"Initiation into womanhood is of more far-reaching significance than into manhood in primitive belief" (Bhattacharyya, 1975:85). Communities of people the world over are said to perform these rites even now. "In India, with its thousands of ethnic groups, menarche is universally a time for rejoicing, even though the customs of the different peoples continue to involve seclusion, taboo, and the prohibition against seeing the sun or touching ..." (Delaney, Lupton, and Toth, 1976:31). Since nature provides more explicit signs of puberty in girls than in boys, and since women grow into womanhood naturally, in male-oriented societies (i.e. patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal societies such as Brahmins/Aiyars) there is a general tendency to treat puberty-initiations of girls as rather insignificant. However, these rites are performed even today by Aiyar women.

According to van Gennep puberty ceremonies are mis-named because not all such ceremonies correspond to the physical attainment of puberty. He instead notes that
'puberty' ceremonies, more than indicating the physical attainment of puberty, mark the transition from an asexual world to a sexual world. In the case of Aiyar girls, although the menarche ritual marks the separation of the girl from an asexual world and her incorporation into a sexual world, the deciding factor to inaugurate the transition is, however, the actual attainment of sexuality signalled by the onset of menstruation.

The following lengthy song, a free translation from Tamil, outlines the various aspects of an Aiyar girl's first menstruation called tirandukuli, which literally means 'bath after menarche:'

**Shobhanam or 'Auspicious' Song**

Vinayaka, Velava, please protect us; Goddess Sarasvati, you also protect us,
I'll sing about Parvati's menarche,
With bakti I entreat you as a humble servant to listen to my song which begins with Goddess Parvati's girlhood.

World famous Parvati Devi was living in Parvata Raja's palace with her girl friends, when one Friday (2) evening in the month of Adi (3) in the auspicious Pura star, she attained her puberty;
Seeing her serious and pale face, her friends joked and made fun of her,
One asked, "Why are you so quiet? Are you displeased or angry with us? Why are you worried? Why has your beautiful
face wilted?"
Another maiden came running and queried, "You who always look like a golden creeper, what is the matter with you today, O Parvati?
She joked, "Why, have you attained puberty?" and began to laugh and dance around Parvati,
"Yes" said Parvati and bowed her head in consternation.
All her friends were quiet for a moment, then they all began to laugh, dance, and sing amorous songs to distract her,
Then they approached her mother; they announced, "Parvati has matured!" Her mother was overjoyed,
She scrubbed the floor with sandal paste and decorated the floor with huge kolams with different colored rangoli powders,
She also decorated the front yard with such patterns.
"Parvati has matured! My daughter Parvati has blossomed!"
Thus exclaiming she invited all her relatives, Parvati's mama and mami (mama's wife) came running;
Then she invited all her neighbors and everyone else on the street.
People from near and far came running, hearing the news, Parvati's parents-in-law, brothers and sisters-in-law, all came running and shouted with joy, "O, a grandson is born to you!"
Her mother with joy and humility replied, "The grandson that is born is yours after all."
There was music and happiness everywhere!
Parvati's mother spread ten measures of paddy on the floor, placed a silken mat on top of it and made Parvati Devi stand on it,
A thousand ladies sang obscene songs and danced the folk kummi dance around her,
All the sumangalis to ward off the evil eye (drishti) performed the yetī yerukal ritual,
Her mother distributed sandal paste, vermilion, and tambula to all the women and sandal paste to the men,
Bananas, flowers, and sugar were also distributed in large quantities to everyone present,
She then made sweet pongal and fried applams (black gram wafers) as big as the rising sun and sago vadam (wafers) as big as the rising moon,
She collected all the small kids, made them sit in the hall and fed them pongal sumptuously,
All the women gathered also ate pongal.
The next day at day break, she pounded the best variety of muttu (pearl-like) chamba rice into very fine white jasmine-like flour,
All the women including Kamala, Sarasvati, and Lakshmi gathered and prepared tasty sweet kali,
She distributed the kali to everyone.
On the third day, again at day break, three hundred measures of fine chamba rice were pounded by thirty women, And one thousand women gathered together and prepared
delicious sweet puttu out of it;  
With golden baskets leaden with puttu they traveled in  
bullock carts accompanied by musicians playing drums and  
blowing trumpets,  
They distributed puttu to everyone on the streets,  
Puttu was carried in huge baskets to the neighboring fifty  
states, accompanied by soldiers, a large band of musicians  
and elephants, and distributed to everyone.  

On the fourth day, at the crack of dawn,  
In order to give Goddess Parvati an oil bath, all her  
maiden friends and her mami smeared oil on her head,  
They all accompanied her to the banks of the Ganga and  
everyone bathed;  
After her bath, Devi coiled her hair,  
Decorated herself with a lot of ornaments,  
Eighteen trumpets blew and drums were beaten,  
With her mama and mami walking beside her,  
Parvati got into a beautifully decorated palanquin,  
All the women stood in a row and each gave her pongal to  
eat; her mama and mami gave them tambula and dakshina;  
Thousand women followed her carrying rice, dal, appalam,  
and vadam,  
Thus Parvati returned to Parvata Raja's palace.  
Her happy mother took arati, then put a black dot, a soot  
mark, on her forehead to ward off the evil eye,  
Thousand women sang amorous songs and many people gathered,  
There was laughter and joy everywhere!
Her mama gave her a thousand gold coins,
All the women who sang also got a gold coin each from Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth,
The children who had gathered were given a gold coin each,
Brahmins were fed eighteen different dishes.

On the fifth day all expenses were met by Parvati's attai (paternal aunt, father's sister),
At dawn she and her friends were fed on the river bank after their bath,
Good fortune to Goddess Parvati!
Good fortune to everyone who sings this auspicious song!
Good fortune to the Mother Goddess of the world!
Good fortune to Uma Devi (Parvati)!
Thus sang all the sumangalis, all the maidens gathered together on that auspicious day.

The present 'coming of age' ceremony in the agraharam, though not as grand and elaborate as the one described in the song, however, follows the same sequence of rituals.

Case 1:

L (14) lives in Madras with her parents, two younger brothers, and a younger sister. L's father works for the government and they are quite well off. Every year, during the summer vacation, L and her family visit her paternal grandparents, who live in their large ancestral house in the agraharam. Her
uncle (father's brother) and his family used to live in the agraharam with her grandparents until six months ago, when her uncle was transferred to Madurai and so now her grandparents live alone. But since L's grandfather belongs to one of the original dana families in the agraharam and her grandmother belongs to a well-known family in Kanyakumari, many of their friends and relatives live either in the agraharam or in nearby towns such as Kanyakumari and Nagercoil. For instance, L's grandmother's brother's family live only a few houses away in the agraharam and L's father's sister and her mother's brother and sister all live just a few blocks away from each other in Nagercoil with their families, and since someone from her large family (i.e., uncles, aunts, or cousins) often visits her grandparents, they are never really alone.

L's grandfather, father, and his two brothers (who live in Madurai) all own land in the agraharam and during the summer they often meet to check with the Nadar who takes care of their land, to see if everything is all right, since her grandfather is quite old.

L has a great time during her vacation because she gets to meet all her cousins as well as all her friends in the agraharam. In the summer of 1984 she was enjoying herself as usual when suddenly one morning everything changed for her because of her menarche. She was, however, not totally unprepared as far as the ceremony
was concerned because only during her previous summer vacation she had witnessed and participated in the tirandukuli ceremonies of one of her cousins and one of her aghraharam friends. Since she was the oldest child to her parents, her parents and her grandmother (pati) were very excited about the whole thing. While her grandmother announced the event to all their relatives and friends in the aghraharam, two of her cousin brothers were immediately sent to Nagercoil and Kanyakumari to inform all their closest relatives. As it was a holiday, L's mami, her attai, and periyamma (mother's elder sister), and their daughters were able to come right away to the aghraharam.

As soon as L attained her puberty (which happened quite early in the morning), the servant maid washed the front yard with water and cowdung to remove pollution and in keeping with the customary practice that is done on all auspicious and joyous occasions, her grandmother drew a big, especially grand kolam on the ground. L was given palum paramum (milk with pieces of banana in it), an auspicious dish, to eat, made to wear a red garment, and her grandmother put a red kumkum mark on her forehead. She was then made to sit separately in the kuchil, a narrow, darkened room found in every aghraharam house that is used specifically by menstruating women, and pregnant women during their confinement (4), on a mat under which some quantity of paddy had been spread.
Her mother (amma) placed a lighted oil lampstand with cotton wicks (kuttu vilakku) in the room and invited three of her close friends and two of her cousins to stay with L and keep her company "so that she wouldn't be frightened of sitting alone in a dark room for three days." They were all made to sit just outside the door of her room.

Her grandmother and four senior sumangalis then performed the yeteyerukal rite to ward off the evil eye (to which all girls during menarche are especially subject) by each waving a measure of rice with tambula, cubes of jaggery, and a coconut placed on top of it held in one hand, and a small lighted wick-lampstand held in the other, in front of L three times (5). Simultaneously sumangalis sang amorous and 'obscene' religious songs such as the following:

1. Rama asks,

"Beautiful and graceful lady, my lovely Sita,
Why are you standing so far away?
When are you going to embrace me, tell me, darling?"

Sita replies, looking up at him shyly,

"I want to come near you and embrace you,
But my jewels made of navaratna (nine gems) stand in the way
They are precious stones; supposing they all turn
into women (6), then what shall I do?
O, poor me!"
(A more elaborate version of the above song is sung during shantimuhurtam, see song 18)

2. Parvati (7) has become a flower today; go change her yellow sari into a red one,
Make Parvati wear a red sari for she has blossomed today;
Parvati, wear all your jewelry and a new sari;
Come, let us dress her up,
Her husband is waiting eagerly to make her into a woman,
Our Parvati has become a flower today.

Parvati is auspicious, Parvati is a woman, Parvati is a mother;
Don't make her husband wait too long, he's impatient!
How lucky you are! A grandson is born!
Parvati has become a flower today;
We have all waited long for this day,
Our Parvati has become a flower today.

Then, all the women gathered together and performed the circular and gusty kummi dance, a folk dance usually performed by women, by clapping their hands and singing the appropriate kummi songs such as:

3. Maidens, friends, come running and gather (repeated
twice),
Merrily sing in praise of he who is blue-complexioned, the tender, lotus-eyed son-in-law of King Janaka,
And who is the most endearing husband of our beloved Janaki (Sita),
He whose touch transformed a stone into a woman, who was grateful to him for his virtuous deed;
The valiant Raghava (Rama), who broke the bow into pieces,
Such a king as this Raghava garlanded by Maithili (Sita),
O, how fortunate is our Janaki to get such a noble and loving husband,
A husband who loves her so tenderly and cares for her so,
A husband who pleases her and thrills her with his passionate touch,
Come, maidens, let us all gather and dance in a group singing their praises, their glorious story.

4. Krishna along with gopis playing in the boat,
Your story we shall sing in praise,
The same story sung by Vedanta Deshikar,
Sriranganatha, You are praised by the whole world everyday,
Including the Lord of Lanka,
Also Lord Shankara, whose head is adorned by Ganga, Brahma praises You with all the Vedas, Parikshit Maharaja and Sukha rishi praise You, They sing Your story and take delight in it. Please bless them.

You, who were born in the ocean of milk, I long for You, I, thirsting with passion come to You, won't You please show me Your love and quench my thirst? O, Lord of the Universe, my heart aches for You, Please be compassionate; please bless us and protect us;

O, Goddess Lakshmi, You, whose beauty enchants the Lord, Who takes pleasure in pleasing You, You, who are a delight to the Lord who sleeps on the cobra, Adisheshan, please bless us also.

Since the performance of tirandukuli makes an Aiyar girl sexually 'operative' and the arrival of her menstruation is a definite sign of her readiness for marriage, friends and relatives while greeting the parents reminded them of this inevitable fact. Women from the neighborhood greeted L's mother by saying, "Now you are a grandmother. You have to become thrifty and start collecting jewelry for your daughter's marriage." Then they joked, "Take good care of her, she's beauti-
ful, some man might snatch her away." I also noticed that right from the time everyone knew that L had matured, she was incessantly teased by the women and her friends. In a lot of the songs, L's name was often substituted in place of the names of the goddesses, which in turn caused embarrassment to L but produced a great deal of amusement to all the women and young girls gathered there. For instance, after song 2 was sung, one of her grandmother's friends sang the second stanza again but this time substituted L's name in place of Parvati. Also since L's name coincided with the name of a goddess, everyone looked suggestively at her while singing an amorous song about the goddess. As no one was allowed to either touch L or enter her room, she sat in her small room and watched the women singing and dancing in the adjacent room. At the end of the morning ritual, everyone was fed pongal and vadam. After the friends departed a feast ensued for all the relatives.

As girls during their menarche have to be fed something sweet everyday, L's grandmother prepared different kinds of sweet dishes and served them as part of her meals for the next three days.

On the third day, in the evening, puttu (a sweet preparation made out of rice flour and molasses) was distributed to friends, neighbors, and all close relatives and they were invited over for lunch on the
following day. L's mother remarked, "In the unlikely event that there were a few who were in doubt or didn't know about it, the distribution of puttu serves as a proper announcement since puttu is distributed only when a girl first menstruates."

The fourth day, the day when the girl takes her ceremonial or ritual bath, is really the big day. Early in the morning, L's mami applied oil on her head and took her to the aghraraham tank where L took her ceremonial oil bath. Her cousins and friends who had stayed with her also bathed. She was then dressed in new clothes given to her by her mama and mami. Her mami explained to me, "From now on L is not supposed to wear 'girlish' clothes anymore. She should either wear a sari or a davni over her long skirt." L wore a garland and a lot of jewelry and went to the aghraraham Krishna temple along with her mami, who later took her to all the neighbors' houses where sumangalis performed arati to her. The women were then given tambula, a banana, and some sugar by her mami.

When L returned home, she was taken directly to the puja room where a special five-faceted silver kuttu vilakku had been lit. On the floor an elaborate kolam had been drawn and five small vessels had been inverted, one each in the center and all the four corners of the kolam, signifying the center and the four cardinal points. Under these vessels various objects such as
cowri shells ('the universal symbol of female generative organ'), a small conch shell with a few drops of milk in it, a small doll, and two varieties of special seeds (karakodi and ammanai) had been placed. When L entered the room, her grandmother and two other sumangalis quickly transferred the various objects from under the vessels to her davni's talapu (free end) which they then tucked in at her waist. Next, she was made to sit on the kolam and seven one rupee coins, which are symbols of prosperity and auspiciousness, were placed on various parts of her body such as her head, shoulders, palms, and feet. Nine sumangalis (which included her grandmother, mami, aunts, and mother) performed yetki yerukal (8) to ward off the evil eye. Once again sumangalis sang amorous songs, performed the kummi dance, and teased L. Gowri kalayanam, an auspicious concluding song, usually sung during the performance of arati, was then sung:

5. Behold the celebration of Gowri's marriage,
   We pray to Lord Ganesha, Goddess Saraswati, and Guru,
   In the decorated canopy, on a high throne happily sits Shankara with his beautiful bride Uma Devi,
   Along with Gowri, he gives darshan to devas and all his devotees,
   Arundati, Saraswati, and all the women join together and sing auspicious songs to Ambika (Parvati).

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Tirandukuli, a davni-clad Aiyar girl decked as a 'bride'
Her grandmother and her mami performed arati and all the objects that were tied to her waist were taken out and put into the rice basket. All her close relatives, in particular her mama, mami, and attai gave her expensive gifts (such as new clothes) and cash. All the friends and neighbors who were invited for lunch also gave her gifts of cloth and/or cash. A grand feast was cooked and everyone was fed. After receiving kumkum, flowers, tambula, banana, and yelunndai, a sweet made of black sesame seeds and molasses and considered to be beneficial in warding off the effects of the evil eye, the friends and neighbors departed to their houses.

In the evening there was a grand arati, which was mainly a social function. A lot of people were invited. L wore lots of jewelry, a garland, and the new clothes that were specially bought for the occasion by her parents and grandparents. Her hair was arranged in an elaborate style and decorated with lots of flowers. The women sang songs and teased her a lot. A photographer from Nagercoil was specially hired to take pictures of L, all decked up like a young 'bride.' The women who did not attend the morning function now gave L gifts of cloth and/or cash. Gowri kalayanam was sung, arati was performed once again, and everyone was given tambula, banana, flowers, kumkum, and yelunndai by L's family.

On the fifth day morning, L went to the agraharam
tank early and took another, but less elaborate ritual bath and it was only after this bath on the fifth day that she was considered to be completely pure and fit to attend to her normal, daily, pre-pollution routine as usual.

What has been described so far is what commonly takes place in the agraharam these days, though sometimes there could be minor variations. For instance, instead of inviting relatives and close friends for the feast on the fourth day (as was done in the case of L), only the relatives were fed and everyone else was invited for the arati function in the evening in the case of H, one of L's friends in the agraharam whose family is not as well off as L's family. I was told that depending on the financial condition of the family, minor changes, such as the above, may be instituted.

I was informed that the present day tirandukuli is, in many ways, a greatly abbreviated one. According to L's grandmother and other sumangalis from the agraharam, "In the past, tirandukuli would be performed on a grand scale because then, although most girls would be married before menarche, only about 15 days after the ritual would she be taken to her husband's house on an auspicious day when garbhadhana would be performed and the marriage consummated. But now because most girls go to school and a few even attend college, they are not married off so early.
Furthermore, since it is becoming increasingly difficult to find suitable grooms who are also reasonable when it comes to dowry demands, most parents are forced to let their daughters attend schools and colleges as many grooms, in addition to demanding a large dowry, want an educated girl as well. But even in those days, sometimes due to circumstances beyond the parents' control, a girl might not be married before her menarche, then the parents would hide the fact that she had matured as it was considered shameful for daughters to remain unmarried after their puberty. In such cases, the first period after her marriage would be celebrated with great fanfare as tirandukuli ceremony. Instead of the six-yard sari or davni that girls wear these days, in those days girls would be made to wear their nine-yard kurapodavai (marriage sari) in the traditional madi-saru style. Also, then menarche would bring relief to the girl's parents because it meant that she was now fit to leave her natal home and go to her conjugal home, and was thus a more joyous occasion. But nowadays because girls are usually unmarried, they feel shy to announce to everyone that they are now 'adults' and parents also become worried as they have to start seriously thinking about their daughters' marriages."

Since in a big city like Bangalore, the neighbors do not always belong to the same caste and hence are not as closely knit as in the agraharam, the celebration of menarche is not such a happy, community affair like in
the agraharam where all the neighborhood sumangalis join together and take part. As Evans-Pritchard (1965:177) points out, "All these experiences are heightened by their being expressed collectively." The urban Aiyar girl, consequently, does not visit the neighborhood houses on the fourth day after her ritual bath, which incidentally she takes at home. But puttu is still distributed on the third day and there is still a small feast for the family members on the fourth day when gifts are given to the girl and a small arati is performed in the evening for which a few close friends and neighbors are invited. This is precisely what happened in the case of S.

Case 2:

S was almost 16 years when her tirandukuli was performed. In fact her younger sister's tirandukuli was performed before S's menarche ceremony. Although the family was happy and greatly relieved when S first menstruated, they decided not to perform the ceremony in a grand fashion since S had already started going to college and was feeling very shy about the whole thing. She, however, did not attend college for four days. As soon as she menstruated her mother fed her palumparamum, made her wear a red sari, performed yetiyerukal, and asked her to sit in a corner in the hall, since their house did not have a kutchil. She was not allowed to enter the kitchen or the puja room and was
forced to restrict her movements to the back regions of the house.

Her mother called a few of their close relatives, who lived in Bangalore, by phone and informed them of the event. Except for an old uncle, a few cousins, and the grandparents -- who all lived in their native village, all their other relatives were scattered all over India and a few even lived in the Middle East. Most of the other important relatives who did not live in Bangalore knew of S's menarche only after the event. Although S's mother wrote letters to them immediately after S matured, her letters, however, reached most of them only after everything was over.

On the third day her mother visited their close relatives in Bangalore, distributed puttu to them, and invited them over for lunch and arati on the following day.

On the fourth day, S's mother helped her take a ritual oil bath at home. Her mami who lived in Bombay was unable to attend the function and so S's mother had to help her with her ritual bath. However, the family had performed tirandukuli ceremonies for S's two older sisters in a grand manner, which were attended by most of their relatives, including their mama and mami.

After her bath, S wore a new sari, flowers, and
jewelry. Her mother and the few sumangalis [like her mother's aunts, cousin sisters, and her periyamma (father's elder brother's wife)], who had come for lunch, performed the yetī yerukal ritual. The sumangalis sang a few amorous songs, teased S a little, and performed arati for her. Then they gave her gifts of cloth and cash, after which a feast was served to all in attendance.

In the evening, S's mother had organized a small arati. A few close friends and neighbors were invited. S wore the same new sari that she had worn in the morning and sat on a wooden chair, that had been decorated with flowers, in a corner of the hall. A large kolam was drawn in front of the chair. A few women sang amorous religious songs and film songs and gave S gifts of cloth or cash. After receiving yelluṇndai, kumkum, flowers, and tambula that S's mother and aunt distributed, everyone left. As the following day was a working day, the relatives departed after eating dinner. After her bath on the fifth day, S attended college as usual.

Although a sizeable number of urban Aiyar women continue to perform all women's rites quite elaborately, puberty rites are comparatively subdued affairs. Generally there isn't as much collective teasing, dancing, and singing of amorous songs in Bangalore as in the agraharam,
probably because the normally hectic and mechanical city life does not provide people with enough leisure time to enjoy fun activities such as these. I was also told that as girls have to go to schools and colleges unchaperoned, most parents felt that a public announcement of the fact might not be safe for the young girls "since it is comparatively more dangerous for young girls to travel alone in a big city such as Bangalore than it is in a small and compact village (like Danapuram)." L's mother told me that they probably would not have performed L's tirandukuli with such fanfare if it had happened in Madras. "She was lucky that it happened during her visit to the agharam," she said. "But, of course, there are people who still perform tirandukuli in a grand manner even in cities," she added. Case 3 graphically illustrates the above point of view.

Case 3:

G (14) is the only daughter to her parents, who were overjoyed when she matured. Her mother sent telegrams to her husband's family and to her mother, sister, and two brothers who all lived in their native village in Tanjavur district, inviting them all to attend the ceremony. G's grandmother, two aunts (one paternal and one maternal), and one of her mamas and his wife rushed to Bangalore so that they would be present for the fourth day ritual. All the others who could not attend sent G
gifts.

As soon as G matured, her mother announced the event to all their immediate Aiyar neighbors. She made G wear a red davni, fed her palum paramum, put a red dot on her forehead, and made her sit on a mat in a corner of the hall. A few neighborhood sumangalis came over and teased G. They sang amorous songs, performed yeti yerukal, and danced the kummi dance. Two of G's friends were invited to stay with G and keep her company.

On the third day, her grandmother prepared a large quantity of puttu. Her mother and her mami then distributed it to all their friends and neighbors. While everyone was invited for the arati and dinner the following evening, only very close friends were invited for the fourth day morning ritual and lunch.

On the fourth day morning, G took a ceremonial oil bath at home assisted by her mami, grandmother, and mother. After her bath, G wore new clothes, flowers, and jewelry. Then she was taken to the puja room where sumangalis first performed yeti yerukal ritual and then performed the kummi dance as they sang a couple of amorous religious and kummi songs. After all the articles tied at G's waist were thrown into the rice basket, arati was performed. Then everyone was fed a grand and sumptuous lunch. Unlike L's case, except for two Aiyar women from the neighborhood who happened to be
very close friends of G's family, no outsider attended the morning ritual and the ritual itself was comparatively a short, formal, and subdued affair.

In the evening, G was very grandly dressed. She wore new clothes, flowers in her hair, a lot of jewelry, and a garland of roses. She was made to sit on a chair that was also grandly decorated with flowers. The women who were invited for the arati brought gifts with them. They sang songs and teased G and her mother. Gowri kalyanam was sung, arati was taken, and then there was dinner for everyone. Before leaving, they all received tambula, flowers, kumkum, and yellunndai.

After taking another oil bath on the fifth day, G attended school. Except for her grandmother, who decided to stay on for sometime, the other out-of-town relatives left after eating lunch on the fifth day.

Since menarche is a rite of separation and as it is also the beginning of a woman's liminal period, segregation seems to be necessary. The girl is consequently considered to be in a state of pollution/ritual impurity called titu or asaucha. According to the law-giver Angiras: "On the first day of the menses, the woman becomes a Chandala, on the second, the murderess of a Brahmin, and on the third day, a washerwoman." This state is, however, different from the less serious state of pollution called virupu. Every Brahmin when he gets out of bed in the morning is in
a state of virupu, since sleep is considered to be a form of death, and only after his bath does he regain the state of madi or ritual purity. Titu, on the other hand, is more serious and demands a period of segregation. After the prescribed period of separation, certain purificatory rites have to be performed to regain the state of madi.

The physiological process of the monthly period as well as the two baths at the end of the period are generally believed to cleanse and purify a woman of even adultery and rape. It should be noted here that on the fifth day following the onset of the period, an Aiyar woman is considered pure after her second ritual bath, even if she is still physically menstruous. The opposite is also true. Even if a woman is not physically menstruous on the fourth day or any other day prior to the fifth day, she is considered ritually impure until she takes her second bath on the fifth day.

However, the state of titu brought about by child birth and menstrual period is essentially different from the state of titu brought on by the death of a person as the former two occasions are 'auspicious' ones. Despite its association with blood, a polluting substance, the state of puberty is welcomed since it is the beginning of an essential function i.e., reproduction. Menstrual blood, which is a sign of woman's fertility, is thus both polluting and auspicious. Thomson (1949:205) describes this
implicit dualism succinctly: "From one aspect the woman who may not be approached is inviolable, holy; from another aspect she is polluted, unclean. She is what the Romans called sacra, sacred and accursed."

Through the various songs sung during tirandukuli as well as the communal teasing that is almost incessantly carried on, the young girl's role in society is crystallized. These days women see the educating role of the playful elements as being somewhat diminished since girls now attend schools and colleges, read books, see films, and are exposed to the outside world to a greater extent than their counterparts in the past and hence are considered to be better informed about life. Also, in the past, because women had very little formal entertainment or recreational facilities, these 'playful' events provided fun for everyone. Even though young Aiyar women continue to lead restricted lives, they are, nonetheless, said to have comparatively more freedom than their mothers or grandmothers and are thus better able to find amusement outside the home.

Nevertheless, the veiled obscenity in the songs, the teasing and dancing perform the two useful tasks of providing a release from the almost 'puritan' lives the women normally lead as well as easing the tension of the young initiates who are fully aware that puberty is only the beginning and until they get married and produce sons, they will not be fully incorporated. But in the past, as women
would be married at a very young age, they would be more tense and hence, I was told, collective singing of lewd songs, teasing, and dancing were more then than it is today. At present, marriage, which also includes garbhadhana, occupies the most important place among rites of passage. In the past, however, it was actually garbhadhana which was considered very important because immediately after the puberty rite, this rite would be performed and the girl (who was married before her puberty) was now expected to produce a son. "Otherwise her parents, her husband, his family, and all his ancestors would be displeased. Now since she is not married at such a young age, the Aiyar woman of today is considered to be better equipped to face all this pressure. So most of the lewd songs have been toned down and amorous 'devotional' and film songs are indeed more popular," explained one of my informants.

However, I noticed at least among a growing section of urban sumangalis a strong desire to revive some of the old traditional songs and customs. One sumangali from Bangalore told me, "I think the women are becoming more and more interested in performing all these old rituals. There is new and renewed enthusiasm now.

Unlike S who was very shy and feeling extremely embarrassed with the whole thing, L, and to some extent G, although a little embarrassed, actually seemed to enjoy all
the attention they were getting. L, especially, greatly enjoyed the songs and the jokes and generally had a good time. Thus the songs, jokes, and the dances by providing the necessary distractions were in fact responsible, to a large extent, in helping the young initiates bear the discomfort, pain, and the knowledge that they were physically no longer children but adult women.

II

Rites of "Transition"

1. Kalyanam/Vivaha:

Before the marriage ceremony, nandi and sumangali prarthane are performed to properly propitiate and invite male and auspicious female (i.e., sumangalis and virgin girls only) patrilineal ancestors to be 'present' during the marriage and bless the couple. They are done separately in the houses of both the bride and the groom and it is therefore not strictly correct to say that nandi ceremony "invites the ancestors of the bride to the marriage" (Srinivas, 1942:69) because both sets of ancestors or "the ancestors of the bridal couple" (Thurston, 1909, Vol. I:369) are invited to bless the marriage.
(a) Sumangali Prarthane:

Unlike nandi where women are only helpmates to their husbands and the officiating Brahmin priests, the sumangali prarthane is a purely woman's ritual with no priests present. In the nandi ritual, generally twelve vadiyars are invited, fed, presented with expensive gifts and are treated as if they were one's male ancestors while in sumangali prarthane, sumangalis (their number fluctuates from function to function) (9) and one young virgin girl (kanya ponnu, literally, 'virgin girl') who collectively represent one's dead auspicious female ancestors are invited, fed, and are given flowers, tambula, dakshina, and a few small 'auspicious' items, mainly articles of feminine toilet, such as a mirror, comb, and bangles as gifts.

Generally sumangali prarthane is conducted on any 'auspicious' day of the week, except on Tuesdays and Saturdays, which are 'inauspicious,' before the marriage celebration by both the families separately. If the families have a number of female relatives living close by, then they can themselves be invited as guests for the ceremony. In case sufficient number of them are not available, then friends are invited to participate in the ritual. For the ritual itself, daughters (who participate in it as sumangalis) and daughters-in-law have to be present. The daughters-in-law only assist their mothers-in-law in performing the ritual but cannot take part in the
rite as sumangalis because they along with their mothers-in-law belong to the same lineage. Thus, a distinction is made between daughters and wives of a line. "Unlike men, who are born (and adopted) into a line, women are both born and married into lines" (Fruzzetti, 1980:20).

Case 4:

P's son was getting married and the family decided to perform sumangali prarthane a week before the marriage on a Friday. The day before the ritual, P tied a rupee coin in a piece of white cloth dipped in turmeric water and placed it in the puja room after praying to their house deity and making a vow to visit the deity's temple along with the married couple and reach the coin to the deity. Then P distributed articles of toilet such as oil, shikakai (soapnut) powder, and turmeric to four sumangalis [one neighborhood sumangali + her mother, her husband's sister (natanar), and her married daughter (ponnu)] and one young girl (P's granddaughter, peti) so that they could all take a ritual oil bath and attend the ceremony the following day.

On the day of the ritual, in the morning, P, the mistress of the house, got up early and touched the end of the new nine-yard sari and a blouse bought for the ceremony, with a little oil and vermilion and dipped it
in water. The sari symbolized the spirits of all the dead sumangalis of her husband's lineage who were invited as guests and this ritual signified that they had all now bathed. After hanging the wet sari in a clean place free from pollution to dry, P and her daughter-in-law bathed in ceremonial oil. Then a wick-lampstand was lit in the puja room and P placed two wooden planks 'in front of the gods.' On one plank the partially dried nine-yard sari was placed and on the other, a long skirt and a blouse, also properly washed and dried were placed. I was told that the two planks along with the 'adult' sari and the 'girlish' skirt symbolically represented all the dead sumangalis and the dead unmarried virgin girls in P's husband's line. P drew a kolam in front of each plank and waited for the four sumangalis and the kanya ponnu to arrive. A grand feast was cooked by which time the sumangalis and the young girl arrived after each had taken her oil bath.

The sumangalis of the family (including P) as well as the invited 'outside' sumangali all wore the traditional dress of married women, the nine-yard madi-saru sari. My informants told me, "Any 'auspicious' bright colored sari except black can be worn. Generally white or somber colored saris are not used for auspicious functions as these colors are normally worn by widows."

The sumangalis and the kanya ponnu were first given turmeric to apply to their feet and water to wash their
feet. Then they were asked to sit down on planks which had all been placed in a row and in front of each a kolam had been drawn. Banana leaves were spread first in front of the two planks in the puja room, then in front of each of the invited guests. P served food on the leaves starting from the leaves in the puja room. Next, all the members of P's family -- men, sumangalis, and children, threw akshada (rice mixed with turmeric powder, used for all auspicious ceremonies), kumkum, turmeric powder, and flowers on the sari and the long skirt and prostrated themselves in front of them, calling out the names of the dead sumangalis and praying to all the dead sumangalis and virgin girls in their lineage and seeking their blessings (ashirvada) to ensure that the performance of the marriage will go on as planned and also entreatng them to bless the bride and the groom with wealth and children. Tīrta (holy tulsi water) was sprinkled on the food in the leaves and each guest was given tīrta to drink. After which the guests began to eat. After food, P gave panaka (lime juice sweetened with molasses) and nirmor (buttermilk-water) to all the guests to drink. She also gave each guest nalangu manjal (a red paste of turmeric and quick-lime) to apply on their feet and marudani (henna paste) to stain their hands red. The guests then chewed vetale paku (areca-nut and lime enclosed in a couple of betel leaves) which turned their lips and tongues red. All the
guests received tambula, banana, sandal paste, turmeric, kumkum, a mirror, a comb, glass bangles, dakshina, and a gift of cloth each. The neighborhood sumangali then left. P and her daughter-in-law then ate the food served on the two leaves in the puja room as prasada from the ancestors. The nine-yard sari was then given to the natanar and the long skirt to the peti.

The sumangali prarthane is one of those rare occasions in an Aiyar home when women are fed before the menfolk. Women are really the main participants in this ritual, but one should not forget that men even if they don't participate actively are still important as it is only because of them that these women are sumangalis and hence auspicious. Red color once again plays a significant part in this rite as in all auspicious rites.

Apart from the fact that men and Brahmin priests are not present during the celebration of sumangali prarthane, there is one significant difference between nandi and sumangali prarthane. In the former, the Brahmin priests who are invited as guests are considered to be one's dead ancestors in human form, whereas in the latter the sari and the skirt placed on the two wooden planks in the puja room symbolize one's dead female ancestors, and the auspicious women who take part are invited to keep them company and are merely their representatives on earth.

Sumangali prarthane is also done before upanayana and
simantonnayana -- a rite performed in the husband's house by his family during a woman's first pregnancy.

After the performance of nandi and sumangali prarthane, i.e., after properly seeking the blessings of one's ancestors, the various rites of marriage begin.

Marriage, which directly leads to garbhadhana is one of the most important Hindu samskaras. "Marriage is a symbolic action that creates a new family by uniting the separate and previously unrelated (i.e., two persons of different gotras) bodies of a man and a woman into a single body" (Inden and Nicholas, 1977:40). It is "entered into and performed to ensure the immortality, continuity, and purity of the male descent line ..." (Fruzzetti, 1982:8).

Thus, according to the Hindu scheme of things the primary reason and purpose of marriage is to procreate a son. Marriage also represents certain basic Hindu concepts -- it symbolizes the supreme marriage or union between Shiva (purusha) and his consort Shakti (prakriti), the essential male and female principles (the lingam within the yoni), the origin and cause of all creation, which is reflected in nature by the symbolic union of the seed and the field and among human beings by the union of the male and the female. It is also the act from which a man is said to acquire the most punya, since one of the greatest gifts a man can bestow on another is the gift of a virgin daughter in marriage.
A Hindu marriage which is an individual and a socio-religious necessity for both men and women, especially for women, is a highly codified sequence of Vedic and laukik rituals. For a woman, marriage is a journey to a new locality, status, role, group affiliation and set of relationships, and, above all, it is the only means to motherhood, by which she is incorporated or integrated into the world of women as well as into society as a whole. It is also an essential rite through which a woman can reach heaven.

Since the various Vedic rites of a Hindu marriage have been described in great detail by a number of scholars, this study will concentrate on the important 'non-serious' women's rites that not only emphasize the important role of sumangalis but also through indigenous means take the bride that much closer to her ultimate goal of becoming a mother. Also the rites enumerated in the next few pages have hardly ever been described in any detail by even the few scholars who have dealt with the various Vedic and laukik rituals in the marriage samskara.

(b) Paligai Telikyal:

In every Aiyar wedding, early in the morning on the day of the wedding, before the various marriage rituals begin the first part of paligai (seeds) telikyal
(sprinkling) ceremony is performed. According to Bhattacharyya (1975:106) "... seeds of five or nine sorts are mixed and sown in earthen pots; the bride and the bridegroom water the seeds for four days and on the fifth day the seedlings ('Gardens of Adonis') are thrown into a river." This is not entirely correct as the bride and the groom do not water the seeds for four or five days. Also, in the past when marriages would go on for four or five days, the grains would be allowed to remain soaked until little shoots came out of them. But now because Aiyar marriages are not usually conducted in the bride's house but in marriage halls, and since it is not economically feasible to rent the hall for so many days, the day after the marriage ceremony before the families vacate the hall, they throw the sprouting grains into a tank or a well, which concludes the ritual.

Case 5:

The day before the wedding, V's (i.e., the bride's) mother had soaked five (10) varieties of grain in a vessel of water. On the day of the marriage, early in the morning, V's mami and attai cleared and cleaned an area in the marriage hall and drew a kolam on the floor. The vadiyar then placed five specially made earthen pots, said to resemble the womb, in a pre-determined position. These pots which are supposed to represent five gods -- Brahma, Indra, Yama, Varuna, and Soma were
placed in the following formation:

\[ \text{Soma} \quad (\text{North}) \]

\[ \text{Varuna} \quad (\text{West}) \]

\[ \text{Brahma} \quad (\text{Center}) \]

\[ \text{Indra} \quad (\text{East}) \]

\[ \text{Yama} \quad (\text{South}) \]

The vadiyar prepared the pots by first throwing in some mud into them. With the assistance of the vadiyar, V's father, on her behalf, and the groom performed puja to the pots separately and invoked (avahana) the five gods into the five respective pots. They sprinkled vermilion, turmeric powder, akshada, flowers, holy water, and a small quantity of the soaked grains three times each into the five pots in the following order: they began with Brahma pot, followed by Indra, Yama, Varuna, and Soma pots. They just initiated the ceremony and then sumangalis took over. Five sumangalis belonging to the families of both V and the groom -- i.e., the mothers of V and the groom, V's mami and attai, and the groom's attai sprinkled the soaked grains three times each into the pots. The two attai's and the mami were given kumkum, tambula, and dakshina separately by the mothers of both the bride and the groom. This concluded the
The five pots used for paligai telikyal
first part of the ritual.

After the garbhadhana ritual (which was performed the previous night), before the families of V and her husband vacated the hall, the second part of the ritual was performed. Several sumangalis gathered around the newly married V and her husband, teased them in sexual terms, told them lewd jokes, and asked them pointed questions about their first night together as V and her husband immersed the sprouting grains from the earthen pots into a huge vessel of water. Then V's husband left and five sumangalis (the mothers of V and her husband, V's mami and attai, and the groom's periyamma) first mixed the grains properly in water and then gathered around the vessel and performed the kummi dance. Afterwards, the water along with the grains was thrown into a well.

This ritual signifies the union of man and woman through the symbolic union of the seed and the soil for the sole purpose of creating progeny, particularly sons. The young couple's family is expected to 'grow' like the paligai shoots. This ritual captures the marriage and impregnation rituals in a nutshell as it were -- chanting the proper mantras and blessed by auspicious women if the seed and the soil are allowed to unite, then a male child who will bring credit to the family and peace to one's ancestors will most certainly be born. Married women's
Paligai telikyal, soaked grains being placed in the pots
Paligai telikyal, the grains from the pots being mixed into a vessel of water
role in this ritual once again emphasizes the strong connection that women have with reproduction and fertility. In women's rituals, the symbols of earth are always tied to female sexuality and the concept of 'femaleness.'

(c) Unjal:

After paligai telikyal and Kashiyatra, when the groom is prevented from going on a mock-pilgrimage to Kashi (Varanasi) by the bride's father and is brought back to the marriage hall after the bride's father promises to offer him his daughter's hand in marriage, and before the couple enter the marriage hall, the unjal (swing) ceremony is performed.

Case 6:

C, the bride, all decked up in an expensive new pattu podavai (gold embroidered silk sari) and lots of jewelry and flowers, met the groom, who had just returned after the Kashiyatra, at the outer veranda of the hall and they saw each other for the first time that morning. Unlike the groom who already wore the traditional ritual dress of Aiyar grooms for the morning muhurta (marriage ritual) -- the vesti worn in the panchakachcham style, C, although traditionally dressed, wore a six-yard sari and not the traditional nine-yard sari in the madi-saru style (11). Before sitting on the unjal, both of them exchanged garlands,
Kashiyatra
assisted by their respective maternal uncles, who lifted them onto their shoulders just as they garlanded each other. Then they were seated on the swing and as the bridal couple in Aiyar marriages is considered to be a divine couple such as Shiva and Parvati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, or Rama and Sita -- all male and female divinities par excellence, C and the groom were treated accordingly. Five sumangalis (the mothers and the aunts of the bridal couple) first washed their feet with water, then a little milk; next wiped their feet with their silk saris; and finally gave them palum paramum to eat. As C and the groom slowly swung themselves, they were teased by both men and women present and odam, lali, and unjal songs, which were subtly amorous in content, such as the following were sung by a few sumangalis:

6. Odam

(How Sitalakshmi was married to Sri Rama by King Janaka):

Rama lifted the mighty bow with his little finger and broke it into a million pieces with his thumb, The bow broke, making a loud explosive noise which frightened the swans away, The gathered people trembled because of the thundering noise caused at Mithila, where King Janaka and Vishvamitra rishi stayed.
Unjal, the bride and the groom being fed palum-paramum
So that Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana will not be frightened,
They started the marriage rites immediately,
After performing vratas, the king jokingly teasing Rama, dressed him up in a pattu vesti.

Carrying a bundle of raw rice on his shoulder,
wearing clogs in his feet, holding an open silk umbrella, with a walking stick, and a book in his hand, Rama started thus,
"Don't go to Kashi, I'll give my daughter in marriage to you;
Don't go up north, I'll give my virgin Sita to you;
Don't go down south, I'll marry my beloved and beautiful Sita to you;"
So saying Janaka gave Rama a coconut, blessed him, and made him mount his (Janaka's) royal elephant,
With Rama wearing a garland, and swinging with Janaki on the swing, the wise Janaka performed kannikadana.

Pouring ghi into the fire, throwing puffed rice into the fire, making Sita step on a stone, and lovingly holding her hand, Rama showed her the star Arundati;
Together they came holding hands and sat close to each other on a single couch tenderly with love in their hearts,
The gods from the sky showered flowers on the glowing couple; 
Rama and lovely Sita ate a heartily meal; 
He then got his brothers married to the girls assembled there.

Accosting him, curbing his pride and snatching the bow from Parushurama, 
Sri Ramachandra returned to Ayodhya with his shy and radiant bride. 
Elelo! Success to Sri Rama!

7. Unjail Songs

Bakti forming the four posts of the unjal, using the Upanishad as hooks, prayer as chains, 
Our God, O Lord Shiva, You swing on the swing.

Brahma, Vishnu forming two pillars for the swing, 
Ishvara forming the connecting rod between the pillars, 
Four Vedas as the four chains, Sadashiva as the plank, 
'Kamakshi (Parvati) and Kameshvara (Shiva) lovingly exchange garlands and sit on the swing.

8. The shy bride Kanchanamala (Parvati) was taking delight in swinging on the golden swing, wearing a lot of ornaments, 
With lots of love in her heart for her lord Shiva,
she was swinging;
With the chains clanking, Urvashi sang at the top of her voice, songs set to perfect beats,
To the appreciation of Minakshi (Parvati) who was swinging.

The virtuous mother who gave birth to such a daughter,
One who is ever blissful, majestic, and perpetually bejeweled,
The Protector of devotees from sins, began to swing.

9. Mother Parashakti swings, Akilandeshvari swings,
Kamakshi and Kameshvara swing, Adishankari swings,
Behold the marriage of Gowri!

The universe forming the ceiling, the Vedas forming the hooks,
The four cardinal points forming the four gold chains,
On such a swing, Narayana swings with his radiant consort.
Behold the marriage of Lakshmi!

The world forming the gold plank, the sastras forming the silken mat,
Your wonderful sight washes away people's sins.
The girl Uma swings,
Behold the marriage of Lalita!
'Om' mantra providing the light, the image of Our Lord inspiring devotion in us, His majestic voice providing the scales for the divine music, Sri Rama swings, Behold the marriage of Sita! Canopy made out of rubies, diamonds, pearls, corals, Emeralds, white stones, saffires, and other precious stones providing luster, Sri Lalita swings, Behold the marriage of Lalita! Narada and Tumburu singing celestial music, Vani and Lakshmi playing the heavenly vina, Adi and Madava providing the beats, Sri Akilandeshvari swings, Behold the marriage of Gowri! Innumerable devas showering flowers on them, With dancing girls walking gracefully like swans, With anklets jingling on her dainty feet, With love in his heart, The playful Krishna and Radha swing. With devotion, the helpless devotees worship Him for wealth and happiness, The One who takes care of the world, the divine Madhava and his loving consort swing.
Vani and Brahma swing, Lalita and Kameshvara swing,
Parvati and Ishvara swing, Lakshmi and Vishnu swing,
Behold the marriage of Gowri!

Janaki and Rama swing, Radha and Krishna swing,
Valli and Shanmukha swing, Devayani and Muruga
swing,
Behold the marriage of Gowri!

Alamelu and Srinivasa swing, Mother Karumari swings,
Mother Mapada swings, Mother Parashakti swings,
Behold the marriage of Gowri!

10. Lali

Half the world worships the beauty of Mother Goddess
in the chariot,
The beauty of the chariot, the beauty of the road,
and the beauty of Lord Shiva with Ganga on his
head, lali!

Temple at Vriddachalam, Manimutta river,
Vritamba, Balamba, and Vridakeshvara, lali!

He who stays at Chidambaram with Shivakami and
Shivaganga,
The famous Lord Shiva, lali!

The peacock dances, the koyel bird coos, the
nightingale sings,
Two parrots make love on the temple gopura, lali!

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While we women wash your feet with milk, wipe them tenderly with silk cloth, go around you with red and yellow colored rice balls to ward off the evil eye, perform arati, and give you a coconut in your hand, lali!

A lot of mirth was generated by C's periyamma and chitti (mother's younger sister), who, I was told, were well known for their creative and fun-loving qualities, by substituting the names of gods and goddesses with those of C and the groom and by making appropriate changes in the songs to suit the occasion as for example:

11. Our beautiful bride C, the loving daughter of ....,
   And her groom, the handsome son of ....,
   Exchange garlands,
   With beautiful garlands of fragrant flowers round their necks and smelling of sweet sandal paste,
   Together they come, the radiant pair, holding hands and sit close to each other on the swing,
   With lots of love in her heart for her Lord (groom's name),
   The shy and bejeweled C is swinging,
   Sitting close to his Devi C and looking at her with passion
   Lord (groom's name) is swinging playfully, oblivious to the presence of all of us.

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To ward off the evil eye, five sumangalis (C's mother, attai, and mami, and the groom's grandmother and mother) rotated red and yellow colored rice balls (i.e., cooked rice mixed with vermillion and turmeric and made into balls) in front of C and the groom as they sat on the swing, first in the clockwise and then in the anti-clockwise directions and threw the balls in all the four cardinal points beginning with east, followed by south, west, and north in that order. This ritual was repeated three times by each sumangali. They then went around the couple thrice in the clockwise direction, one carrying a lighted wick-lampstand, the others carrying the remaining rice balls in a tray, water in a couple of vessels, and a tray containing tambula, respectively and formed "a ring pass-not" (Ayyar, 1982:2). The two sumangalis who carried the water (i.e., the attai and the mami) kept pouring it as they walked around the couple, thus enclosing them in a "'safety circle' -- a circle which the billion evil spirits inhabiting this planet shall not enter" (Srinivas, 1942:71). The rice balls in the tray were carried by the groom's grandmother as bali (food) for the spirits guarding the four cardinal points, so that they would be appeased and would not want to bother the couple either during the marriage ceremony or at anytime in the future. The rice balls were then mixed with the water from the vessels and arati was performed by waving the mixture in front
Unjal, a tambalam (metal plate) of red and yellow colored cooked rice balls being rotated in front of the bridal couple (top); sumangalis forming a 'ring pass-not' (bottom)
of the couple by the groom's grandmother and C's mami and the mami then threw it away as bali for the spirits. Gowri kalyanam was sung and the grandmother and C's attai performed the usual arati with a mixture of turmeric powder, quicklime, and water. The two sumangalis were then given dakshina. Now the bridal couple was ready to enter the hall to participate in the marriage ritual.

The bride and the groom who are in a liminal state are susceptible and should therefore be protected from evil spirits. It is interesting to note that arati, which is done to signify auspiciousness as well as to ward off the effects of the evil eye is performed only by senior sumangalis or women who are themselves free from attacks by evil spirits as they are no longer in a liminal stage but have become fully incorporated. Also by performing their dharma (i.e., marrying and begetting children), these women have been able to control the potential evil found in all women and have become well-adjusted 'auspicious' women and hence are well suited to 'fight' any evil spirits wishing to cause trouble.

(d) Nalangu:

After the morning muhurta, all the guests, who are mostly relatives and close friends, are fed sumptuously. Then a few elderly sumangalis belonging to both the fami-
lies get together and plan the nalangu, which is described as "a dampati (couple) at play" (Ayyar, 1982:60). This ritual is principally a light-hearted affair aimed at bringing the bride and the groom closer to each other. As the sexes are still segregated, it is believed that if a man and his wife are thrown together all of a sudden in a room during the garbhahdhanaka ceremony at night, the experience might quite overwhelm and frighten them. (This is exactly what happens most of the time. My informants told me that it was indeed a very scary time and both partners were filled with anxiety). So under the guise of games and a lot of fun and lewd joking (all of which incidentally provide entertainment to all), and under the watchful eyes of elderly sumangalis, the bride and the groom are properly 'introduced' to each other.

Case 7:

After the marriage ceremony, there was a grand lunch for everyone, and then there was a short break when people rested for a while. After the break, in the afternoon K's (the bride's) grandmother, periyamma, chitti, mother, mother's chitti, and attai, and the groom's mother's attai, his mother, mami, sister-in-law (manni), and older sister (akka), along with a few close naranja sumangali friends, organized the nalangu ceremony. K, all dressed up, was asked to go invite the groom for nalangu. At first he refused and pretended to
be reluctant and then after K coaxed him a little bit more, he agreed. Sumangalis sang amorous songs such as the following as K invited the groom for nalangu with tambula in a tray:

12. After standing on the tip of a needle and doing severe penance in order to get a worthy husband, I came running and garlanded you. Desiring a wealthy husband, I came running and garlanded you, Wishing for a good natured and loving husband, I came running and garlanded you.

13. Tanjavur tasildar is thirsty for love, If you go to quench his 'thirst,' he will garland you and marry you.

14. Men from Kallur, Nellur, Kanattur, and Calcutta had asked for my hand in marriage, From Kumbakonam, Mayavaram, Coimbatur district, the very eligible Govindarajan and the handsome Devarajan had also desired me, But my father said "No" to everyone, After searching high and low he finally got me married to you, my precious ... (groom's name).

15. Come for nalangu, you who have your face imprinted on a coin, Which town, which country, from where have you come? I came to see Mohini at Mohinipuram, where a silken
mat has been spread and everyone is waiting in the hall.
So come for nalangu, my lord, and give me your hand.
In the pearl-studded canopy, green bulbs are tied to the four entrances which look very modern,
Come for nalangu, everyone is waiting.

He replies: "To participate in nalangu, I have no time, girl, my dear,
I'm going to Nagapatinam to study;
I want a diamond ring for the sixth month function (12),
A gold chain and a wrist watch for the first Dipavali festival,
If you don't get them for me, don't invite me, don't even talk to me,
I have no time for nalangu, my girl, my darling,
I have no time for nalangu, my love, my darling."

16. With your body smeared with fresh sandal paste and perfume,
With a new garland round your neck,
Why are you angry, why do you taunt me?
With red and passionate eyes, perspiring face,
Why are you shy?
With your vesti and upper cloth dipped in turmeric water,
Your body looks tired and bathed in sweat,
So please come quickly, come running, my beloved lord, for nalangu.

With sumangalis singing and joking around, K handed over the tray of tambula to the groom, prostrated herself before him, and led him to the place where nalangu was to be performed. The following amorous song which describes the ritual in great detail was then sung:

17. Marutvadi, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, and Arundati asked them both to sit facing each other on a silken mat, In a decorated gold plate lay turmeric paste, salt, dal, and appalam, Also sandal paste in a small gold cup; While a few women sang suggestive songs, the others asked the bride to invite the groom for nalangu.

As per their instructions, she invited her Kameshvara lovingly, Looking at his wife whose eyes were brimming with desire, (The groom's name) touched the coconut and with a smile, began to roll it on the ground; She caught the coconut shyly and rolled it toward him; He firmly caught the coconut and looking at her with lust in his eyes, rolled it toward her, They continued to roll the coconut until their hands turned red.
Then as he looked at her with growing passion, Devi shyly and lovingly smeared turmeric paste on his cheeks, sandal paste on his cheeks, sandal paste on his chest, arms, and smilingly on his back as well, she smeared nalangu manjal on his feet and holding salt in her hand, she gently pleaded,
"I'll give you salt, please give me dal."
Holding the dal in both her hands, she waved it in front of her lord (groom's name) and put it back on the plate;
Then Devi took the appalams and waved them in front of him and broke them into a million pieces,
She garlanded him, whose body was trembling with desire, and with a smile on her lovely face, performed puja to her lord with flowers, sitting in front of him.

The groom ..., who was none other than Kameshvara himself, on the advice of the women, smeared turmeric paste on his love's bright cheeks with both hands,
He gently smeared her chest with sandal paste,
"Give me your hand, my love," he said; she obliged;
Holding her hands with his left hand, he smeared sandal paste on her hands,
Lifting her long plait of hair with his left hand, the dutiful son of ... playfully smeared her back with sandal paste,
"Show me your lotus-like feet, my darling," he said and she shyly did so, Kameshvara with his lotus-like hands smeared nalangu manjal on his Devi's tiny feet; Giving her the dal, he said, "Give it back to me, my sweet one," Ishvari did so, Kameshvara, taking the dal, waved it in front of her; All the gods and goddesses cheered them, He also waved the appalams on top of her head and broke them into a million pieces, He put flowers in her hair and garlanded her and lovingly placed a bouquet on her chest, With all the gods and goddesses cheering them, our Kameshvara and Kameshvari played love games thus.

Most of the nalangu songs were actually like a contest, with some sumangalis from the bride's side singing the bride's part and some from the groom's side singing the groom's part. In addition, since the names of K and the groom were substituted in the appropriate places, a lot of fun was further generated.

Amidst a lot of laughter and teasing, and as song no.17 was being sung, K and the groom were made to perform the ritual as described in the song. They were first made to sit facing each other. K then applied
sandal paste and turmeric on the groom's cheeks and arms and nalangu manjal on his feet. Next, she put a vermilion mark on his forehead and pretended to comb his hair by touching his hair with a comb. Women goaded her to be bold and asked her to really comb his hair. Then she held a mirror in front of him to let him admire his face after all the dressing up she had done. Afterwards she garlanded him and took a small quantity of salt in her hand and asked the groom to give her dal in exchange for the salt. This was done three times, after which she waved the dal around his face and head and put it back on the tray. She then took two dry roasted appalams, one in each hand, and went clockwise with one hand and anti-clockwise with the other in front of the groom's face and broke the appalams into pieces by clapping her hands together and then threw the pieces behind him. She had to do this three times and on the last time, instead of throwing the appalam pieces behind the groom, she threw the pieces on his head. This instantly produced a lot of laughter in everyone except the groom. So by the time K had finished her part of the ritual, the groom looked a sight what with sandal paste, turmeric, and appalam pieces all over his face and hair. Now it was the groom's turn. He had to do everything in the same sequence like K, but instead of garlanding her, he just put some flowers in her hair. After he had made sure K looked equally 'ghastly,' if not worse, with appalam pieces sticking all over her face and hair, he
started rolling the turmeric smeared coconut, which had been placed in front of them as they sat facing each other. After rolling the coconut a few times, while the groom grasped it with one hand K tried to take it from him using both her hands. This was a kind of test of strength. I was told that most brides, like K, since they wanted everyone to believe that their husbands were stronger, pretended it was impossible to grab the coconut from the groom and so gave up rather easily. It was now the groom's turn. While K held the coconut with both her hands, the groom had to grab it from her using only one hand. Here again, I was told, most brides gave away the coconut to the groom rather easily, which was what K did. Then the groom and K were made to sit side by side and arati was taken, to ward off the evil eye, as sumangalis sang Gowri kalyanam.

Ayyar (1982:61) explains that the waving of the dal and the breaking of the thin and crisp appalams over the head are intended to propitiate the invisible beings supposed to surround newly married couples. They also symbolized plenty for the bride and the bridegroom. The loud noise that is produced when the appalams are cracked is said to frighten the evil spirits away.

All through the nalangu, there is a lot of laughter, lewd and sexual joking, teasing, bantering, and singing. In the agraharam since there is usually no reception in the
evening, and since people have a lot of time before they start preparing for the garbhadhana ritual at night, nalangu ceremony can easily run to more than a couple of hours. The light-hearted physical tussle that the groom and the bride engage in, apart from being entertaining, has strong sexual and symbolic overtones. In an apparently playful manner, this 'game' or 'sport' reiterates traditional differences between the sexes and their important goals in life.

Sometimes in Bangalore, if the bride and the groom know each other before their marriage (which, of course, does not usually happen), then the nalangu ritual may either be abbreviated (which primarily means that fewer songs are sung) or altogether dispensed with (as in the case of N, Case 8). Also, occasionally if the marriage ceremony in the morning and the lunch following it take more time than anticipated and since the groom and the bride have to get ready for the reception in the evening (which is of paramount importance in most urban weddings), then nalangu is either performed after the reception and before the garbhadhana ceremony (like in the case of A, Case 10) or is totally canceled (as it happened in the case of N). In such cases, the reception, which smacks of 'Westernization' has to a large extent taken the place of nalangu.
Case 8:

N and her groom worked for a nationalized bank. Although their marriage was an arranged marriage, since they both worked for the same bank, the two had not only seen each other before their engagement, but had also talked to each other a few times. Since N's groom had been very particular about marrying a working woman, he was very happy when his parents announced that his horoscope and N's horoscope matched very well. N and her family were also very happy. Since the groom's family as well as N's family lived in the same city, there was no need for N to move out of town after her marriage and could therefore not only visit her parents as often as she wanted but could also keep her job.

Since the groom and his family had announced that they would not accept any cash as dowry, N's family was more than anxious to please them. They agreed to perform the marriage on a grand scale. As the marriage was fixed to be performed on a Sunday, N's parents knew that the marriage expenses would be very steep. Although no cash was given to the groom's family, all the other things (i.e., dowry in kind) such as two suits, vesti, and a diamond ring for the groom, clothes for his parents and sister, household utensils, silver vessels, some furniture and mattresses had to be bought. Jewelry and expensive clothes for N and her family had also to
be bought. The groom's family in return bought a sari each for N and her mother as well as vesti for her father.

Both N and the groom were born and brought up in Bangalore and their families had always lived in Bangalore. Consequently they had a large number of relatives and friends living in Bangalore and they had to be all invited for the wedding. Since the wedding was on a Sunday, almost everyone they had invited attended the wedding. The morning ceremony and lunch following the ceremony thus went on until late in the afternoon and since everyone had to get ready for the reception in the evening, they decided to perform nalangu after the reception and before the garbhadhana ceremony.

For the reception, the groom wore western clothes (a suit) and a garland, and N, though still dressed in a sari and a garland, was less traditionally attired than during the muhurta. Unlike the traditional silk saris she had worn in the morning, she now wore a grand brocade sari. The traditional long and flower-bedecked braid of the morning had now given way to an elaborate hair style done by a professional hairdresser. N also wore a pair of slippers. Both N and the groom sat in gilded chairs on a platform under a canopy of flowers and colored lights.

Both of them had time during the reception to get
to know each other as well as to introduce each other to their respective friends and colleagues, who all brought them gifts.

The reception like the morning muhurta was a very grand affair. N's parents had hired a photographer to take pictures of the entire ceremony. They had also hired a very well known classical singer and his troupe to perform during the reception. All the guests were treated to a less elaborate and informal dinner.

Although N's family knew that the groom and his family had a lot of friends and relatives, they were totally unprepared for the hordes of people that showed up for the reception. They ran out of food and the cooks had to prepare dinner again. With the result, the reception which was to end at 8:30 p.m. continued well past the anticipated time. By the time all the guests left and the family ate dinner it was past eleven o'clock. Since the groom started complaining that he was feeling tired and sleepy, they had to reluctantly cancel the nalangu ceremony.

(e) Shantimuhurtam/Garbhadhana:

This ritual is nowadays performed in the evening of the marriage day itself. I was told, in the past, since girls would get married before their puberty, an auspicious day would be chosen within 15-16 days after the menarche.
rite when garbhadhana would be performed. But now because women marry in their late teens or twenties, the garbha-
dhana ceremony is performed on the day of the wedding itself.

Case 9:

After the nalangu ceremony, B's (the bride's) family assisted the groom's family in preparing the bedroom in the groom's house for shantimuhurtam. They decorated the room with lots of fresh flowers and lit incense sticks. They also placed on a table in a corner of the room a small lighted lamp, which, I was told, had to be kept burning all night long. Next to the lamp were placed some milk, sweets made of milk, and some fruits. Behind a screen, they kept a change of clothes for the couple, some water, a mirror, and a small container of kumkum.

At the auspicious time fixed for the ceremony, the groom assisted by the vadiyar chanted the proper Vedic mantras and performed a homa so that they will be soon blessed with a son. B wore the kurapodavai in the madi-saru style and the groom wore the vesti in the traditional pañchakachchham style. After the homa, holy water from a kumbha (which is universally equated with the womb) was poured on B's head by the groom. The couple then changed into new clothes -- the bride wore a
six-yard sari and the groom wore a new vesti. Banana
leaves were spread on the floor and everyone was served
a less elaborate (than the one served for lunch) though
sumptuous dinner. B and the groom, who sat side by
side, however, ate a light supper mainly made up of
sattvic food such as banana, milk, and white rice. They
were then led into the beautifully decorated bridal
chamber and everyone crowded near the door. The couple
sat on the bed and the groom assisted by the vadiyar
chanted the proper mantras and then all the men left.
The sumangalis then took over. Amid a lot of suppressed
giggling, they teased the couple, told lewd jokes,
'instructed' the bride, and after closing the door of
the room, sang amorous songs such as:

18. My shapely love, Janaki, why are you standing so
far away, my dear?
Come close and stand near me, my darling,
Wearing jewelry of gemstones, if I come near you, my
husband, and you accidentally touch them then, my
lord, won't everything turn into women?
How could I have suggested something so very
foolish,
I always think of only one girl, you the daughter of
King Janaka,
Only Sita can give me pleasure,
My lord, I am your Sita, your slave, forgive all my
shortcomings and please protect and love me, my
19. Your face is round like the full moon,
Such a Devi is only meant for puja,
Even Kama, the god of love, will feel ashamed to
see me make love to you, my precious,
Don't tarry, my dear, the first hour is being
wasted, my love,
Without wasting a moment, in haste let us go around
the temple, take a dip in the holy water, Devi,
seek God's blessing,
Nothing can then stop us from becoming one, my sweet
one.

20. In spring, when the paddy plants are ripe for
harvest,
Banana plants are loaded with fruit, sugarcane
plants are ready for harvest,
Who is to sleep on the decorated cot? The landlord
Muruga and his virgin Valli;
Who is wearing a clean vesti, perfumes on his body,
and is chewing betel leaves and areca-nut? The
landlord Muruga;
From where do we get the smell of kumkum, sweet
smelling fragrances, and Pears soap? From beautiful virgin Valli's body;
Who opened the door? I did;
Why did you do that, don't you know it is their
first night?
O Lord, for your devoted slave You grant all boons, 
They have climbed all the seven steps, 
Their feet hurt, Ganapati come running, 
Come pray to Ganapati to make this marriage fruitful.

21. Kohl tinted doe-eyed woman, I have come to you feeling tired, 
Fan me, my doe-eyed beauty, smear me with perfumes, honey.

She replies: "You who have Ganga on your head and ash smeared all over your body, 
Why do you require perfumes, my lord? 
Why do you need sweet smelling sandal paste? 
Why, my lord, why?"

He answers: "To perform the six pujas done during the course of the day, my doe-eyed darling, 
I have come to you full of love, dearest, 
The sweet smell emanating from your body turns me giddy, my moon-faced one, 
Come, embrace me without bandying further words, honey."

She asks: "Shankara, why is your whole body bathed in sweat? 
Don't tease me, or play with me, my lord, 
Don't make too much love to me, my lord,
Don't frighten me, O please be gentle with me."

22. In the land of Sripuram where wealth and riches abound,
Let us sing the kummi song for Shiva and Shakti who are deeply involved with each other,
Let Ganapati, son of Nilakanta, Kandan and Goddess Sarasvati assist us,
Let us sing this kummi song in praise of Mother Goddess and make Shakti and Shiva, who are locked inside together like seeds in a fruit,
Come and join in this play of kummi, singing, and dancing,
We seek everyone's blessing on behalf of the bridal couple,
Mother Goddess bless this union,
Shiva, Shakti, bless this pair,
Make them happy, make this union fruitful.

A few sumangalis performed the kummi dance, clapping their hands loudly so that the bridal couple, behind the closed door, would be able to hear the clapping. After two elderly sumangali friends of the family banged on the door and shouted to B to please her husband and to the groom to be gentle and to both of them to take it easy, (all of which produced a lot of laughter) the women left to retire for the night.

I was told, because vadiyars are expensive, often in
Aiyar marriages performed in Bangalore all the proper garbhadhana mantras are chanted and the homa is also performed immediately after the muhurta in the morning itself and only the women's part of the shantimuhurtam ceremony is done at night and this is what I observed in the case of A.

Case 10:

After the muhurta, when the guests were being fed lunch, the groom, helped by the vadiyar, chanted all the appropriate garbhadhana mantras and performed the homa with A, the bride, sitting by his side and family members and close relatives watching the whole thing. At the end of it all, the vadiyar and his assistants were given gifts and dakshina. Then the bridal couple and family members ate lunch.

Since there was not enough time to perform nalangu before the reception in the evening, it was decided to perform the nalangu after the reception and just before A and the groom entered the bridal chamber at night. After tea, everyone got ready for the reception, which turned out to be a grand social affair (though not as grand as N's marriage reception, Case 8).

After the reception, A and the groom were fed a light meal consisting mainly of sattvic food and elderly sumangalis performed nalangu. After nalangu, they were both led into the brightly decorated bridal chamber by
the women who teased them and then closed the door. While A's grandmother and her sister sang a few traditional songs, a few of the younger sumangalis like her mami, and her cousin sang amorous film songs. Amid a lot of laughter, the sumangalis left the premises to retire for the night.

The performance of the impregnation ceremony officially brings the marriage ceremony to a close. But in most Aiyar marriages, considerable tension between the bride and the groom's families which exists right from the start, often continues all through the function and until the groom's family departs the following day. Apart from good looks (extremely important for a woman), wealth, intelligence (more important for a man), 'auspicious' horoscopes (more important for a woman), family connections, and social status (not necessarily in that order) that both families look for, the dowry or bridegroom-price (13), euphemistically called vara-dakshina (ceremonial payment to the bridegroom), can create a lot of financial and mental strain. Bridegroom-price varies with the groom's job, academic qualifications, character, wealth, age, and appearance (in that order). For instance, a man employed overseas or a foreign-returned man with a degree from a foreign university often demands and receives a very large dowry (14).

No price is considered unreasonable or large enough by
the groom's family, since they feel by accepting the gift of a daughter in marriage, they are, in fact, absolving the father of his sin of begetting a daughter. There is therefore no reciprocal obligation on the part of the receiver. This asymmetrical gift giving/receiving relationship between the two families established at the time of the marriage, continues until the first child or a son is born.

In addition to the special gifts such as a ring, a wrist watch, clothes, and the large amount of cash given to the bridegroom, an equally large amount has to be given to the bride by her parents in the form of jewelry, expensive silk saris, silver, brass/copper, and stainless steel utensils for everyday use. Unless the demands of the groom's family are met, most parents fear their daughters will be insulted and ill-treated by her husband and his family. In a very real sense the high bridegroom-price demanded by prospective grooms has been chiefly responsible in forcing people to seek grooms in a different sub-caste. It has also indirectly helped to raise the age of marriage because most parents are compelled to wait until they can find a groom who demands a low-enough price (15).

Another cause of strain during the marriage celebration is the ever-complaining groom's family. The superiority of the bride-receivers and the inferior position of the bride-givers is established by the groom's family right from the beginning. In addition to bearing
the expenses of the marriage, the bride's family should be
 submissive and eager to please the groom's family, who are
 always on the look out for grievances, real or imagined, to
 complain about. Even when the bride is married to her
 mother's brother's son, I noticed that the groom's parents,
in spite of being such close relatives, were demanding and,
at times, even unreasonable. Despite months, sometimes
 years of planning and preparation by the bride's family,
 most grooms' families feel compelled to find fault and very
 often create unpleasantness. "The entire atmosphere of the
 marriage," writes Srinivas (1942:59) "is strained,
 reminding one of anything other than two groups of rela-
tives coming together for the rest of their lives."

Seemingly to lessen the tension, all kinds of distrac-
tions such as concerts by musicians and large feasts are
 provided for the guests by the bride's family. Also, these
 things, though they do not form a part of the religious
 ritual, are necessary because they have very definite
 social significance. They are used by the guests as well
 as the groom's people as markers to evaluate the social
 status and community standing of the bride's parents. All
 the arrangements like the hall for the wedding, the feast,
 and entertainment [sometimes famous singers are invited to
 sing (as seen in the case of N, Case 8)] may well cost the
 bride's family a fortune. Yet in order to impress every-
one, especially the groom and his family, the bride's
 father must be willing to incur this extra expenditure.
This is also important in a practical sense. The bride's parents believe that if the groom and his family are sufficiently impressed, then their daughter will be treated with respect and can therefore look forward to a comfortable life in her in-laws' (sammandi's) house.

In fact the expenses of a marriage start long before the actual celebration. Horoscopes and sometimes, photographs (mainly of brides -- as appearance is more important for a bride) of several eligible brides and grooms are brought to the respective families by intermediaries, who are usually feasted by the families. After the horoscopes are matched separately by the family priests of both sets of families and found compatible and not inimical to each other, the monetary terms of the marriage are discussed and there are protracted negotiations between the families and the go-betweens.

Very often, a dozen or more proposals are actually considered before one is finally accepted. The expense involved for all these things could be enormous for the prospective brides' families (especially if the women are not very good looking) as there is continuous feasting of the many families who come to 'see and interview' the 'girls.' In addition, with each broken negotiation, the bride's chances of a good alliance decrease and her desperate parents are very often forced to pay a higher dowry to the man who is willing to marry her.
In an Aiyar marriage, as in a Bengali marriage, "... the groom's side has the upper hand ... and considerations such as looks, education, and age [of the girl] may be outweighed by an unusually high dowry" (Fruzzetti, 1982:35). When the groom's family is finally confident that the bride's family can meet all their demands, they give the 'green signal' to the bride's parents to start preparing for the marriage.

An Aiyar marriage, like most other Hindu marriages, is an expensive and one-sided arrangement between two families with the bride and the groom playing relatively minor roles as "it is ... considered improper for a young man or woman ... to express a wish to marry; young people of good breeding are expected to leave the question of their marriage to their parents or guardians" (Thomas, 1964:359).

Marriage thus dominates Hindu social life and plays a large part in religion. "It is the most prestigious family ceremony, and at the various social levels constitutes the main occasion on which the greatest number of members of the caste and other persons gather together. It is also the most expensive, and the marriage of a daughter in particular is known to be the main cause of debt among Indian peasants, so imperative are the dictates of prestige, even among the poor" (Dumont, 1980:110).
2. Valakappu and Puchutal:

"It [valakappu] is a non-sastric ceremony performed during the fifth month of pregnancy, but is sufficiently binding on account of long usage" (Iyer, 1912, Vol.II:313). This ritual used to be generally performed in the 'girl's' house before but now, mainly due to economic considerations, valakappu is performed on the same day as the simantonnayana (popularly known as simantam) which is usually performed during the eight month of pregnancy (calculated according to the Tamil solar calendar) in the husband's house. While the simantam is a Vedic rite, valakappu and puchutal are laukik rites.

Case 11:

On the valakappu day, J, who was in the eight month of pregnancy, was made to get up early in the morning and her mother-in-law (mamiyar), an elderly sumangali, put some oil on her head. After she took a ritual oil bath, J wore her nine-yard kurapodavai in the traditional madi-saru style and a garland round her neck. She first made a small Vigneshvara idol with turmeric paste, performed a simple puja by sprinkling flowers and akshada on it, and then prayed to the God, who is said to remove all obstacles, to bless her. Next, she took nine red and green colored glass bangles, which would be later given to the temple of a goddess, and
placed them near the idol. Then she slipped a pair of bangles each onto the arms of two small children, about five years old. While sumangalis (close friends and relatives mainly from her husband's side) sang devotional songs, her mother-in-law first slipped on to each of J's wrists, two 'bangles' made out of two margosa twigs tied together (vepale-kappu). This is said to protect J and her unborn child from evil spirits. After this she was made to wear a pair each of gold and silver bangles (tanga and velli kappus respectively), bought by her parents who had brought these with them along with sweets and gifts to her in-laws' house. Next, sumangalis led by her mother-in-law helped her wear red and green colored glass bangles, nine on the right hand and eight on the left hand. Also a couple of slightly thicker bangles called kankanam were worn by J on both her wrists. Sumangalis then smeared turmeric paste on her arms and feet and nalangu manjal on her feet. J's younger (second) sister-in-law, a married childless woman who was in fact J's husband's older sister, was selected and the sumangalis put the same number of glass bangles as J onto her sister-in-law's arms. Since it is believed that this rite enables all childless married women to conceive, one of their friends who was a young married childless woman also went through this rite. All the other sumangalis and young girls present were also given one/two pairs of bangles, depending on the availability of bangles. Gowri kalyanam was sung and
Valakappu, bangles being slipped onto the pregnant woman's wrists (top); nalangu manjal being applied to her feet (bottom)
arati was taken by two sumangalis who were given dakshina. Since sufficient time was not available before the vadiyar arrived to start the Vedic rite of simantam, puchutal could not be done immediately after the valakappu and had to be performed after the simantam.

For puchutal, J's older (first) sister-in-law gave her a black colored sari, which she wore. As women sang devotional songs, five sumangalis (her mother-in-law and her two sisters-in-law, J's mother, and J's first sister-in-law) put margosa leaves and five kinds of flowers in J's hair, after applying turmeric and nalangu manjal pastes on her arms and feet respectively. Then banana, korakatai (a sweet dish made of rice flour, dal, and molasses), and tambula were placed in her sari's talapu and tucked in at her waist and yeti yerukal was done by sumangalis to ward off the evil eye. J then leaned down and sumangalis sprinkled akshada and flowers on her back all the while chanting, "ambale petta, pombale petta" (she bore a son, she bore a daughter). Arati was performed and Gowri kalyanam sung. After which, J fed cooked rice mixed with cooked dal, banana, and some sweets to five small children, beginning with a boy child, and ate the leftovers herself. After the valakappu/simantam/puchutal, all the relatives and close friends who attended the function were treated to a feast. They all gave presents to the couple and were,
Puchatal, the pregnant woman being decorated with flowers (top); akshada and flowers being sprinkled on the kneeling woman's back (bottom)
in turn, given tambula and sweets.

In the evening, J was grandly dressed and neighborhood sumangalis were invited for arati. This was mainly a social function and the women tried to cheer up J, who looked a little tired, since she had hardly had any time to rest after the long and arduous Vedic and laukik rituals of the morning. While a few women performed the kummi dance, clapping their hands loudly so that the new-born would not be born deaf, others sang devotional songs seeking God's blessing for a successful delivery, as well as songs (like song no.23) that playfully instruct pregnant women about the various aspects of pregnancy and childbirth:

23. My life, my darling, after a long and arduous penance to Shiva, the three-eyed god, I was blessed by Him to beget sons,
Then you entered my womb and slowly developed into a sattvic son;
In the first month, my body slowly expanded,
In the second month, my hips and breasts became big,
In the third month, my face became pale, nipples became black,
In the fourth month, I got rid of my morning sickness,
In the fifth month, I lost my beauty,
In the sixth month, my stomach became heavy,
In the seventh month, I ate what I desired and
became healthy,
In the eight month, you began to move fast in my stomach,
In the ninth month, I couldn't eat much, my face grew thinner, my legs were swollen,
In the tenth month, I perspired profusely and gave birth to you after undergoing a lot of pain;
O son, O child, my treasure lying next to me, thus I brought you forth into this world.

All the women gave J cash and/or a gift of cloth and they were, in turn, given tambula, sweets, and a pair of glass bangles at the end of the arati function.

Case 12:

In the case of I, whose valakappu/puchutal/simantam took place in Bangalore, in the evening, in addition to the sumangalis invited for arati, her husband had invited a few of his male colleagues for 'tea.' While the women sang and danced kummi dance in front of I, the men along with the husband locked themselves up in another room and were served tea and snacks there. I's mother-in-law brought the tea and snacks on a tray to the door, knocked on the door, and waited -- I's husband then opened the door a little, just enough to be able to take the tray inside, and locked the door again. The men never took part in the women's arati ritual and the
women, including I, did not seem to pay any attention to the men. Just before the men left, they gave the husband gifts/cash and he, in turn, got tambula and sweets from his mother and gave them to them. He, however, introduced his wife to one of the men, who, he said, was one of his closest friends, after everyone else had left.

The evening tea is a modern 'Western' innovation like the reception on the wedding day. One of the main reasons I's husband had organized the tea was because he and all his family members were extremely happy since the baby would be the couple's first child. Also since I's husband was the only son to his parents, the family had an additional reason to be happy.

A bangle which is called valai or valayal in Tamil is derived from the verb valai meaning 'to surround' and must be worn by all auspicious women. Bangles become especially important during a woman's pregnancy since pregnant women, like little children, are considered to be more susceptible to the influence of evil spirits than other women and bangles by acting as a sort of "ring-pass-nots" are believed to create barriers that prevent evil spirits from approaching them. As Ayyar (1982:78) points out, "... ring-pass-nots are verily the moats and fortifications surrounding the abode of the soul of a being, making it impossible for the evilly disposed entities to approach the
stronghold."

It is always customary for the pregnant woman to wear an odd-numbered set of glass bangles on her right hand, one more than the even-numbered set on her left hand. All valakappu bangles, especially the glass ones have to be removed after (and never before) the birth of the child and the glass bangles along with the sari worn by the woman during child birth are given to the wife of the dhobi (washerwoman).

Turmeric paste, apart from being auspicious is also considered an antiseptic like margosa. Margosa also has the additional function of acting as a deterrent against the evil eye and hence these two are freely used in this ritual. As a further protection against the evil eye affecting the pregnant woman and her unborn child, black color is especially chosen for the puchual sari presented by the sister-in-law.

Although there is still a lot of singing and dancing and everything, especially in the evening arati function, is seemingly done in a rather light-hearted manner, we notice some changes in this ritual as compared to all the ones described so far. The songs are no longer amorous but are more in the nature of prayers to the various gods and goddesses to bless the pregnant woman with a successful delivery and protect her as she is considered to be in a delicate state subject to the attacks of all kinds of evil
spirits.

However, the instructional songs that are also sung are mock-serious and provide much merriment not only to the pregnant woman but also to all the other women guests. The songs as well as the kummi dance are mainly intended to distract and cheer up the pregnant woman and put her in a jovial frame of mind.

Apart from being a little tired physically, the pregnant woman is also under considerable mental stress. For instance, J (Case 11) was not only very young (18 years) and inexperienced, she was also a little scared of the whole thing since her husband was the older of the two sons and a lot was expected of them. Also since her husband's older sister was still childless, her in-laws were overjoyed and excited when J became pregnant. At the same time everyone was a little apprehensive and both her mother and her mother-in-law had made separate vows to their respective house deities to ensure that J would have a successful delivery.

Thus, in addition to enabling a woman to become fully incorporated into Aiyar society, the birth of a child, especially a male one, is very important and is looked forward to very eagerly indeed by every Aiyar family as it is believed that when a son is born, the first of the three generations of pitris, both male and female, cross over from pitriloka into swargaloka (heaven, the 'world' of
eternal bliss). The monthly amavasya tarpana and the annual shraddha are done mainly to quench their thirst and give them peace. Any breach in this custom will certainly bring the wrath of the pitris on the wrong doer. But one also incurs their severe displeasure if the birth of a son is delayed. Thus the birth of a son is an event of great jubilation. The man also feels relieved that he has at last done his duty to the manes of his forefathers and has enabled his line to attain immortality.

The pregnant woman leaves for her parents' house after the simantam ceremony. The first delivery always takes place in her natal home. She stays there for a few months after delivery, and then returns to her conjugal home.

IV

"Incorporation" Rites

1. Kappu:

Case 13:

On the seventh day after the baby boy was born, D, the baby's attai performed the kappu function in the baby's maternal grandparents' house (where the mother had come for the delivery), mainly to protect the baby from evil spirits. A oral (mortar), which is considered to be the womb, was washed thoroughly by sumangalis with
water to which margosa leaves had been added. Five children, which included one boy child, then went around the oral chanting, "ambale petta, pombale petta," while beating it with bunches of margosa leaves. Next they went around the oral, each rattling a small measure filled with some areca-nut and a few coins. After this, a married woman from the neighborhood who was childless was asked to 'bathe,' 'dress,' and 'feed' a small amikoravi or amii (grinding stone), which symbolizes the new-born child, a little milk. A special sweet called kapparishi, made of rice, dal, and molasses, was distributed to all the children and women who attended the ritual. D then took a pair of margosa kappu (which were first put on the grinding stone), a pair of thin bangles made of a combination of three metals -- silver, copper, and iron, a pair of gold bangles, a pair of thick silver anklets, a gold chain, and aranakayaru (waist belt made of black thread) to the hospital and presented them to the new-born.

In the past, I was told that all these things would be done at the maternal grandparents' home but now because women, even in the agraharam, generally deliver babies in hospitals, the attai carries all her gifts to the hospital.

The kappu ritual, like most of the laukik rituals performed by women after the birth of the child, is primarily intended to protect the child and the mother from
evil spirits. First of all, margosa, as has been noted earlier, is considered to be both an antiseptic and a deterrent against evil spirits and washing the grinding stone and the mortar, which represent the new-born child and the womb respectively, with water mixed with margosa leaves not only symbolically 'cleanses' the womb but also protects the child that has just emerged from the womb from attacks by evil spirits. Putting the margosa bangles and anklets ("ring-pass-nots") that are intended for the child first on the grinding stone is also done for the same reason. Secondly, the children actually perform a kind of yetierukal to ward off evil spirits, when they go around the oral chanting and rattling a measure. The loud noise they produce is supposed to frighten the spirits away. Thirdly, kapparishi, the sweet that is specially prepared for this ritual, as well as the black-thread waist belt for the baby's waist are considered to be two even more powerful antidotes against the attacks by evil spirits. Finally, I was told, putting the bangle made of the three metals onto the baby's hands as well as 'bathing' and 'feeding' the grinding stone first was to make sure that the new-born will become strong and healthy.

The participation of the childless married woman in this ritual is important not only to herself but also to the family of the new-born child. The woman agrees to take part because she feels by doing so she pleases the gods who will soon bless her with a healthy son. The family allows
her to participate for a totally different reason. Childless or barren women, as they are still in a liminal stage and not fully incorporated, are dangerous and capable of casting an evil eye upon the new-born child. By specially choosing one of them and letting her be the first one to touch and feed the ami (in other words, the new-born child by proxy), the family feels that it has honored and pacified such women and hope they will not harm the baby in any way.

2. Rites on the 11th Day:

On the eleventh day, both the mother and the child when they return from the hospital undergo purificatory rites (punyahavachana). The pollution is said to last for ten days and the mother and the baby and in fact the entire house has to be sprinkled (abhisheka) with holy water from a pot with a mango sprig by the vadiyar. Even then the mother is only partially pure and only after a second purificatory bath forty days later can she enter the kitchen or take part in domestic ceremonies along with her husband.

The bathing, dressing, and feeding of the child which are done by proxy on the seventh day are repeated on the eleventh day, but this time they are done for the new-born child.
Apart from the Vedic rites of jatakarmam and naman-
karana done on the eleventh day, sumangalis perform several
rituals mainly to protect the child from evil spirits and
make him strong and healthy. Although all the post-natal
rites beginning with jatakarmam are expected to be done for
all children irrespective of sex, most Aiyar families
prefer to spend money in performing these rites only for
the first born and also if the child is a male one. For a
female child, even if she is the first born, either a
simple ceremony is performed or else just before her
marriage all these rites are gone through rather perfuncto-
riously because, it is believed that one cannot pass into the
next stage without undergoing all the Vedic rites of the
previous stage of life. However, if the female child is
born after the birth of one or two boys then her birth
could very well become an occasion of great joy and the
family is quite often willing to celebrate the daughter's
birth with great fanfare.

Case 14:

R was lucky because her first born had turned out
to be a fair and healthy boy. Her parents and her in-
laws were overjoyed because R was not only the first
daughter to her parents, she was also the first
daughter-in-law to her in-laws. The birth of the boy
was thus an occasion of great jubilation for both the
families.
(a) On the eleventh day, the baby boy's pati (maternal grandmother) bathed him. His aunt then let a few drops of water fall on him through a sieve figuratively signifying the 'freeing' of the child from the net like womb (the sieve) and the water is said to purify the child who has just emerged from the auspicious but polluting womb. He was later placed in a winnow or a grain-sifter (moram or cholagu) which had been decorated. A small piece of jaggery ("to sweeten the child's entry into the world") and a small iron knife (said to make the baby strong like a warrior as well as protect him from evil spirits) were placed on one side of the moram. Sumangalis (mostly relatives and close friends) who were present in the room shouted, "cholagu (moram) naranju ulagam alu" (fill the winnow and rule the world).

Since the mother, until she is bathed, properly purified, and dressed cannot see the baby, R did not participate in any of the above rituals. She had to be bathed first. After she was dressed in a new pattu podavai, sumangalis performed the sieve ceremony to purify her, and then made her eat jaggery and dry ginger (as no eatable that contains salt can be eaten by the mother before she nurses the child) before she was allowed to formally hold her child and nurse him. After she nursed her baby, arati was performed for R and her baby.
All these laukik rites were performed by sumangalis in the morning in conjunction with the Vedic rites of jatakarman and namakarana, which were performed in the presence of the vadiyar. A photographer was hired to take pictures during the performance of the Vedic rites. At the end of the Vedic rites, all the relatives and friends who were invited for the function gave expensive gifts to R, her husband, and the baby. For instance, R's mama and mami gave R and her husband cash and the baby a gold ring. Everyone was then fed a sumptuous lunch. While all the relatives and close friends stayed on for the evening arati, the photographer and the vadiyar (who received dakshina and gifts) left.

(b) Tottil:

In the evening, there was the cradle ceremony. R and her son were grandly dressed and sumangalis from the neighborhood were invited for the arati. The tottil (cradle) where the baby would lie during the ceremony, was also richly decorated with silk saris and lots of flowers. Before the baby was placed in the cradle, one of the baby's aunts, who was a childless married woman, was first asked to wash a small ami, then decorate it with turmeric and vermilion dots, and finally place the stone 'baby' in the cradle. Women then rocked the cradle with the ami in it, sang a few lines from a lullaby, and took the ami out. R's mother then placed
The decorated grinding stone used for tottil
the baby in the cradle. She also placed a small vessel with a sweet preparation made of dal and molasses near the baby's feet. A few other sumangalis joined her and together they rocked the cradle and sang the following lullaby:

24. Jo jo to Sri Krishna, the Ever-Blissful, jo jo to Mukunda (Krishna), the friend of the gopis, jo jo,
You who came out of the ocean of milk on a lotus leaf, the naughty Sri Krishna,
I sing a lullaby for you, jo jo.

I don't care whose son you are, whose diamond, whose ruby you are,
You are mine, O precious baby, I'll sing a song and lull you to sleep, jo jo.

Please go to sleep quickly, I have no time to play with you now,
I have lots of work to do,
O Blissful One, please protect us,
Grant this child the peaceful sleep of a healthy baby, jo jo.

Sumangalis who were invited for the function now crowded around the cradle, rocked the baby, and placed gifts of cash near him. More devotional songs, seeking the blessings of various gods and goddesses to make the baby boy strong and healthy, were sung. Some of the women gave gifts of cloth to R, who as she was tired
Tottil, arati at the end of the ritual
after participating in the morning Vedic and laukik rituals, sat in a grandly decorated chair and watched everything. After some time, the baby was placed on R's lap and arati was performed for both. Tambula and sweets were distributed to everyone.

As in the case of the valakappu-simantam function, the husband sometimes invites a few close friends for tea while the cradle ceremony is being performed by the sumangalis. This, I was told, is a recent addition and occurs mostly in an urban area like Bangalore.

The mock ritual with the ami is performed primarily to fool all the evil spirits that are ever on the look out to cause great harm to innocent babies. By placing the stone 'baby' first in the cradle, Aiyar women believe that all the evil spirits wishing to cause harm to the new-born have all been fooled and whatever evil they had planned for the baby has now been received by the stone 'baby.' The baby can then be confidently placed in the cradle since everyone is now sure that he will not only grow up to be strong and healthy, but will also 'bring fame and fortune to the family.'

Evil spirits that especially attack little children are supposed to be female spirits that begin attacking the foetus itself and continue long after the child has come out of the womb. To make doubly sure that these evil
spirits will not harm the baby, the sweet preparation made of dal and molasses is kept near the baby's feet, since it is believed that the spirits that are not totally fooled by the ammi ritual and still plan to attack the child will eat the sweet dish and be appeased. The dal preparation is later given to the childless married woman, who, in many respects, symbolically represents these evil female spirits.

The end of this ritual signifies the end of an Aiyar woman's liminal period. Now she is fully incorporated into society and no evil spirits can attack her. As a fully incorporated sumangali she can now confidently take part in all Aiyar rituals.
Notes:

1. The puberty rite of the Nayars of Kerala is also called tirandukuli and is very similar to the tirandukuli rite of the Aiyars. According to Bhattacharyya (1968:18), "The girl concerned has to remain secluded in a room ... [where] there must be a lamp ... [The event is proclaimed by a kurava (shouts of joy by women)] ... The event is properly announced among the relatives. The neighboring women visit the girl and dress her in new garments. On the third day the relatives and friends are invited ... [On the fourth day the] ... menstruating girl along with her other girl friends undergoes a ceremonial bath. The whole party then returns in procession. The ceremony is followed by a great feast." See also Iyer, 1912, Vol. II:29-30.

2. Friday is traditionally considered to be an 'auspicious' day for Devi worship.

3. Adi, the fourth month of the Tamil solar calendar, is dedicated to Devi worship. It is also the peak monsoon month when all the rivers (particularly the sacred Kaveri) are said to be in spate.

4. When women in the agraharam used to deliver their babies only at home, the kuchil was used as a confinement room. But now since most women in Danapuram deliver their babies in nursing homes and hospitals,
the kuchil is mainly used by women during their menses. It should be pointed out that the majority of the houses in Bangalore do not have a kuchil and so menstruating women just use a corner of the hall and generally restrict their movements to the back regions of the house and do not enter either the kitchen or the puja room during their monthly period.

5. Aiyars, like other south Indians, believe that odd numbers have ritual value and consider them sacred. Number '3' is especially important and is extensively used in all auspicious rituals. However, number '3' in certain contexts is considered unlucky. For instance, when a man has lost his first two wives in succession, and intends marrying again, it is believed that the third wife will certainly share the fate of the first two. He is therefore ritually 'married' to a banana tree before marrying his third wife. The performance of the 'marriage' and the cutting down of the tree soon after is said to free the human wife from the fate which would have otherwise overtaken her.

6. The reference here is to the well known story of Ahalya (Cantos 48 and 49) in Bala-Kanda, the first kanda in the Indian epic Ramayana. The story goes thus:

On their way to Mithila, on the outskirts of the city, Rama and Lakshmana accompanied by Vishvamitra rishi saw a fine, but abandoned, old hermitage. On
enquiry they were told that countless years ago, the great sage Gautama had lived there with his beautiful and dutiful wife Ahalya (one of the panchakanyas or five maidens remembered by sumangalis in their daily prayers), who having been sorely tempted by Indra, had sinned against the marriage law and was cursed by her husband and ordered to expiate her sin by lying invisible in the dust of the hermitage in the form of a stone until Rama came along and set her free. Rama listened to the story eagerly and scarcely had he entered the hermitage when at his touch Ahalya leaped into life. She looked more radiant and beautiful than ever before on account of her long and arduous penance. The two princes bowed to her. At the same time Gautama, who had retired to the Himalayas after the fall of his wife, knowing that the curse he had laid on her had at last been lifted, appeared on the scene and joined Ahalya in welcoming Rama.

7. The play on the word 'Parvati' is intentional. 'Parvati' is not only a very common proper name for a girl but it also refers to Goddess Parvati who is said to have waited for a long time before becoming one with her lord Shiva. The Goddess is believed to have married Shiva in all her 'births' and the mention of her name in the song graphically brings home the idea that the relationship between a man and a woman is eternal, lasting through the cycle of births. Also,
Parvati or Shakti as mother goddess or prakriti, stands for the eternal female principle and Shiva symbolizes purusha or the eternal male principle and the union of these two principles is believed to be the root cause of all creation.

8. I was told that the yeti yerukal ritual on the fourth day is generally supposed to be done during menarche only if the girl has been married before attaining puberty. But now even though all Aiyar marriages are post-puberty marriages, the tradition continues.

9. Although it is usual to invite four sumnagalis and one virgin girl, six women and one girl or eight women and one girl can also be invited depending on the economic condition of the family performing the ritual.

10. Five is another significant number. It is considered to be a very sacred number as it is used to form many important Hindu religious expressions such as: pancha-bhuta, pancha-indriya, pancha-prana, pancha-agni, pancha-gavya, and so on. The annual Hindu ritual calendar is called panchanga and the ritual costume that all Aiyar men are expected to wear during the performance of religious rites is called panchakachchham "meaning five folds of the lower garment tucked into the waist band or kachcha" (Ayyar, 1982:130).

11. Unlike the groom who doesn't change his clothes
during the morning muhurta, the bride changes her sari just before the tali-tying ceremony. She removes the six-yard podavai that she has worn so far and wears the nine-yard kurapodavai in the traditional madi-saru style.

12. During the sixth month after her marriage, a wife usually visits her natal home and when she returns to her conjugal home she is expected to bring with her expensive gifts from her parents to her husband and in-laws. In fact, all through the first year of marriage, gifts have to be periodically given to the son-in-law in particular during Dipavali, Pongal, New Year's Day, Kartikai, and so on. These gifts are demanded by the in-laws as their birthright and if the parents do not meet their demands, then the young wife could very well be abused and ill-treated.

13. Tambiah (1973:86) and Reynolds (1978:117) refer to dowry as "stridhanam" and "bride-price" respectively. At least, among Aiyars dowry mainly refers to bridegroom-price or the payment in cash made to the bridegroom by the bride's father (varadakshina). Modern Aiyar marriages thus include varadakshina (dowry) + stridhanam.

14. This is an instance where education or modernization has not helped in lessening the problem. In fact, as Tambiah (1973:63) rightly notes, "... under conditions
of modernization and urbanization, parents invest large sums in their sons' education so that they can secure professional or administrative jobs. Parents may therefore feel that these 'investments' on their sons should be 'recouped' at their marriage. Such developments can be expected to manifest themselves fully among the urban middle classes rather than their poorer brethren. This is an instance where modernization may accentuate and distort a traditional arrangement rather than eradicate it!"

15. Occasionally parents resort to exchange or reciprocal marriages (i.e., the simultaneous exchange of women or marriage between two pairs of brothers and sisters) not only to avoid dowry payments but also to minimize expenditure. But these marriages are not very common or popular because it is believed that such marriages are not very auspicious for the couples.
CHAPTER VII

VRATAS

According to Kane (1974, Vol. V, Part I:5, 21) the word vrata, derived from the root yr (to choose or to will), means "command or law, obedience or duty, religious or moral practices, religious worship or observance, sacred or solemn vow or undertaking, then any vow or pattern of conduct ... Gradually ... vrata came to be restricted to sacred vows and rules of conduct to be observed by a person as a member of a community or as an individual."

Apart from the rites of passage described in Ch. VI, there are two important calendrical vratas/nombus that Aiyar women observe: Savitri nombu or Karadaiyar nombu and Varamahalakshmi or Varalakshmi vrata. While the latter is not a mandatory vow or rite binding on all Aiyar women, the former is a compulsory nombu that all Aiyar women, especially sumangalis, have to observe.

Although the word nombu, which is derived from the Dravidian verb nol (to endure, do penance, suffer patiently, or to practice austerities), is often used synonymously with the Sanskrit word vrata, there seems to be a subtle difference between the two words in common parlance. Nombu is a vow which is a purely woman's rite in the sense that the participants and the ritual specialists

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are only women, whereas in a vrata, the presence of a vadiyar is required -- for example, Savitri nombu as opposed to Varamahalakshmi vrata. This appears to be an instance where Brahmins have become Dravidianized as the difference between the two vows seems to be one of non-Vedic and Vedic traditions.

Savitri nombu:

The tale of Savitri is one of the innumerable stories the Hindu epic Mahabharata is replete with. In sections, 292-298 of Vana Parva, which deals with pativrata-mahatmya (significance of sumangalis' love and devotion to their husbands), the long story of Savitri is narrated by Markandeya rishi to Yudhishtira, the Pandava prince, who having lost everything in a game of dice is forced to live in the forest with his wife and brothers, when the latter complains to the former about the suffering of his wife Draupadi in the forest.

"A wife's place is always with her husband; there can be no suffering as long as she has her husband," tells the rishi and recounts the story of Savitri, who is considered to be one of the finest examples of an ideal female/wife in Hindu mythology.

Savitri, the only daughter of Ashvapati, king of Madra, chooses as her husband Satyavan, the only son of Dyumatsena, the blind and exiled king of Salwa, although
she is warned by the sage Narada that the prince has only one year to live. She persists in her choice and after the wedding departs with her husband to his father's hermitage in the forest. Here she lives happily until she begins to be tortured with anxiety as the fatal day approaches. She undertakes the rigorous and severe vow of triratna or penance, fast, and vigil for three days and three nights. On the fatal day, she accompanies Satyavan when he goes out to cut wood. He becomes exhausted and falls dying to the ground. As Savitri supports him, Yama, the god of death, appears and carries off Satyavan's spirit in a southerly direction toward the Land of the Shades. Savitri follows him and when Yama asks her to turn back she refuses saying, "What befalls the wedded husband befalls the faithful wife; where he leads she will follow, be it death or life." Yama is pleased with her devotion and grants her any boon except the life of her husband. Savitri extorts five such boons. Firstly, she asks that her old and sightless father-in-law be granted sight and vigor; secondly, she asks for his wealth and kingdom; and thirdly, she asks that her father be blessed with a hundred sons. Her fourth wish is to have a hundred sons through Satyavan so that her father-in-law will have royal descendants. Yama is now trapped and is forced to restore her husband to life and that becomes her fifth wish. Satyavan wakes up as though from a deep sleep.

The rishi points out that Savitri through her love and devotion to her husband was able "to raise from a pitiable
plight to high fortune, herself, her father and mother, her father-in-law and mother-in-law, as also the race of her husband." Thus blessed, Savitri lived happily with her husband for many years in his father's kingdom, which he eventually inherited.

To commemorate this happy event and to acquire Savitri's merit, Aiyar women observe the Savitri nombu every year exactly at the time when the month of Mashi ends and the month of Panguni begins. My sumangali informants told me, "Married women observe this nombu so that they can remain sumangalis like Savitri for ever and unmarried girls perform the rite so that they will be blessed with good and worthy husbands like Satyavan."

Case 1:

On the day of the nombu, M and her mother-in-law woke up before daybreak, took a ritual oil bath each, wore the traditional nine-yard madi-saru sari, and fasted until the nombu was completed -- i.e., the moment when the new month (Panguri) began. They had already prepared two kinds of rice flour-bean pancakes called adais, one with molasses and the other with salt. The floor in front of the puja place had been cleaned and on a large tray were placed the following items: tambula, flowers, bananas, and two cotton threads yellowed with turmeric to which two small pieces of turmeric root were tied (symbolizing the auspicious tali or marriage badge
that all sumangalis must wear at all times). At the appropriate time, M's mother-in-law placed two banana leaves, one for each of them, on the floor. Then she placed two adais, one of each kind, with small scoops of butter on them on each leaf. Both of them prayed to Goddess Devi. At the end of the puja they said together the following in Tamil: "urugada vennaiyum, ora adai nuten; orukalam yen kanavan piriyada irukavenndum" (butter that doesn't melt, one adai I offer you; so that my husband will never be separated from me) and prostrated themselves in front of the lithograph of the Goddess. Then M's mother-in-law handed one of the yellow cotton threads to M and took the other one for herself and both women tied the threads round their necks. Finally they ate the adais as prasada. In the evening, as M's parents lived nearby, she visited them and got their blessings.

Varamahalakshmi vrata:

Unlike Savitri nombu, Varamahalakshmi vrata (worship of Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity), which requires the services of a vadiyar, is observed by Aiyar women once a year in the month of Adi only if it happens to be a tradition in their families. The performance of this vrata is believed to ensure sumangalis a happy and prosperous conjugal life.
Case 2:

On the day of the vrata, M, her mother-in-law, and her sister-in-law (who was visiting them) got up early in the morning and took ritual oil baths. They cleaned the puja room, drew a huge kolam on the floor, and waited for the family priest to arrive to perform the vrata. They had invited a few women from the neighborhood, who wanted to participate, to join them in performing the vrata. Each woman brought tambula, a coconut, flowers (especially the lotus flower as it is considered to be Lakshmi’s favorite flower), and bananas in a tray with her for the puja. The priest finally arrived and established a kalasha (a pot with ‘holy’ water, on the front of which a small engraving of Lakshmi’s face was hung) in the puja room. While he invoked the presence of the Goddess, M and the other sumangalis performed puja to the kalasha. After chanting the appropriate Vedic mantras, the priest offered payasam, the special sweet dish that M’s mother-in-law had cooked for the vrata, to the Goddess. He performed mangalarati to the kalasha by first waving lighted incense sticks and then waving lighted camphor in front of the kalasha. This signified the end of the Vedic part of the ritual. After receiving dakshina and gifts, the priest departed. The women sang devotional songs, extolling the virtues of Lakshmi and seeking her blessings, after which arati was performed for the
kalasha. M's mother-in-law gave small quantities of payasam to the neighborhood sumangalis as prasada as well as flowers, kumkum, tambula, and dakshina.

Besides the two annual vows listed above, a rigorous, special, and expensive vrata called Rishipanchami vrata, performed in the month of Avani, is observed by Aiyar women after their menopause. According to the grama vadiyar of Danapuram, "During the monthly period, which is a 'curse' for women, several restrictions are imposed on women and they are expected to strictly observe them. Some of them are: menstruating women should not comb their hair or adorn themselves with flowers; they should not view themselves in a mirror; they should not see or talk to their husbands; they should not touch anyone, even another menstruating woman; they should eat a light meal once a day and only after everyone in their families has eaten; they should not enter the kitchen or light a fire or cook; and they should sleep alone at night on the bare floor. But for a variety of reasons, most women do not always follow these restrictions very strictly. It is believed that by performing this vrata, which honors seven rishis -- Kashyapa, Atri, Bharadvaja, Vishvamitra, Gautama, Jamadagni, and Vasishta and his inseparable wife Arundati -- for seven years, these women can permanently rid themselves of all the sins that they might have advertently or inadvertently committed during their menses in their lives."
Briefly the vrata entails the following: the woman performing the vrata, invites seven vadiyars, who signify the seven rishis, to take part in the vrata. The woman as well as the seven priests are expected to strictly follow the required dietary restrictions. Since neither one of them is allowed to eat any food that contains salt in it, they eat only fruits and milk products until the vrata is completed. On the day of the vrata, the woman gets up before daybreak, brushes her teeth with a special twig or stick called nayuruvi and then ritually bathes herself 108 times to thoroughly cleanse herself. The vadiyars establish seven kumbhas, chant mantras, and perform elaborate pujas to the kumbhas. At the end of the vow, the vadiyars are fed sumptuously. They are given expensive gifts and dakshina by the woman. Only after the vadiyars depart can the woman eat. The woman has to perform the vow rigorously for seven consecutive years before she can proclaim herself to be free of her sins.

In addition to the two annual vows and the special Rishipanchami vrata, Aiyar women, both married and unmarried, constantly make vows or resolutions to worship particular deities in order to secure various boons from them. The vows they make clearly reflect their main concerns at different stages in their lives. As unmarried women, they seek God's blessing to help them secure good husbands. After marriage, Aiyar women rarely ask God for anything for themselves. They are always concerned with
the health, wealth, happiness, and welfare of their husbands and children. Even when they ask God to grant them eternal sumangalihood, they are mainly thinking of their husbands. Aiyar women are fully aware of the importance of husbands and children in their lives, since it is only through them that they have gained their rightful place in society and in order to keep their position, they need them at all times.
CHAPTER VIII

SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS: COLORS AND FOODS

After looking at each rite separately, we shall now view Aiyar women's rituals as a set and thus elicit common symbolic elements. The two important themes we shall be looking at would be the use of colors and foods. Different colors and food/flavors are not randomly used but are consciously used by women to further emphasize their primary concerns.

Colors:

Of all the colors in the spectrum that Aiyar women have at their disposal, the following four colors figure prominently in their rites. They are red, yellow, green, and black. Of the four the most auspicious are red and yellow and the least auspicious is black. In fact black is not considered an auspicious color at all but it still has its uses in Aiyar women's rituals.

Red is the color of vitality and earthiness. It symbolizes rajas, the dominant guna of women. "Rajas, 'passion,' inherent in energy, force, and movement, is the power that activates and excites the other two gunas. It resides in life, is red in color ... The rajasika type is ... passionate, [and] full of physical energy" (Walker,
Red is therefore a very common color for all auspicious occasions because it seems to fit in very well with the essential dual nature of anything 'auspicious' and in fact, of womanhood itself. Women are auspicious and inauspicious, creative and destructive -- women share this duality of their nature with goddesses in Hindu mythology. For instance, all women are embodiments of Kali, the dark force, and Parvati, the benign one. Menstruation and the birth of a child cause serious pollution, yet are auspicious and joyous events. Red is a symbol of the female creative energy which in paternership with the male principle represents the creative process. Blood is red; the auspicious vermilion mark worn by women is red; and the auspicious arati water is also red. But red symbolizes both dark and auspicious qualities. It stands for both life and death/destruction. Blood is dangerous and polluting, but it is also a sacred fluid. "Blood is the source of life, a substance imbued with power, a dynamic, creative medium; hence, like other dynamic elements linked with chaos and death, it is potentially dangerous and must be controlled" (Shulman, 1980:105, quoting from Tamil myths). Women, like blood, as expressed by the color red, are dynamic, embodiments of sensuality and sexuality, and potentially dangerous. They must be therefore controlled. Thus, women's sexuality in order to be beneficent must be controlled. Otherwise, through their sexual transgressions
they can introduce impurities into the blood line. Yellow connotes the disciplined and controlled sexuality of married women.

Yellow as represented by turmeric is a cooling color -- a color that cools the essentially hot blooded woman. It is the color of the married woman, a woman whose sexuality is controlled. Red emphasizes a woman's involvement in life processes and yellow signifies auspicious increase. Together red and yellow as signified by the Tamil phrase 'manjal-kumkumum' highlight the fact that when a woman's sexuality (female power) is controlled by marriage then it is a source of wealth, health, and well-being and leads to general familial prosperity. It is for this reason that the auspicious red arati water, one of the chief ingredients of which is turmeric powder, used as a deterrent against the evil eye and as an auspicious ending to an auspicious occasion is handled mainly by senior sumangalis -- fully incorporated sumangalis who by fulfilling their worldly obligations are not only able to impart auspiciousness to people and occasions but are also able to act as protectors against the effects of evil spirits.

By making red and rajas the dominant color and guna respectively of the female world, Hinduism by definition makes the world of women inferior to the sattvic world of men, the dominant color of which is white symbolizing
serenity, purity, intelligence, spirituality and sexual abstinence. Since women's auspiciousness lies in the manifest cosmos and men's purity lies in spirituality and in the transcendence of life involvement, men need women and it is only through them that men are able to perform their essential duties in the social world.

Green as represented by betel leaves also symbolizes fertility. Because of its obvious connection, green is linked to abundance and prosperity in the vegetal kingdom. Like yellow it is also a cooling color and is therefore often combined with red. For instance, during valakappu, the pregnant woman wears red and green colored glass bangles and the barren woman as well as all the women in attendance are given red and green bangles. Also the henna paste (made of green henna leaves) that women apply on their hands and feet and the betel leaves and areca-nut that women chew leave bright red stains on their hands, feet, lips, and tongues. Sumangalis who attend auspicious ceremonies are always given vermilion, turmeric, and betel leaves thus signifying the ideal color combination of red, yellow, and green which the women represent.

We know that all over the world, the earth-spirit is generally regarded as female and presiding deities of agriculture as well as those responsible for natural disasters such as disease or drought are also mainly goddesses "because the idea of fertility and reproduction is concerned with women" (Bhattacharyya, 1975:113). "The
identification of earth and woman pervades the thought of all stages of culture and pages could be filled with the illustrations of the universal equation" (Briffault, 1952:56). Women thus embody wealth, generative powers, and happiness. In menarche rites of Aiyars, the initiate is made to sit on a mat beneath which a quantity of paddy is spread, since paddy is considered to be a symbol of fertility and prosperity. Just as rice emerges from the paddy after it is husked, the catamenial girl after the ritual once and for all leaves behind her asexual state and emerges as a potentially auspicious woman. Also the various objects signifying reproduction, fertility, and wealth in terms of money and children that are tied to the waist of the girl before the yet i yerukal ceremony are later thrown into the rice basket. The paligai telikyal ritual, a ritual that captures the essence of a Hindu marriage, is another ritual that freely makes use of fertility symbols.

'Barren women make fields barren' is a common belief and so sumangalis with children are mainly invited for women's rituals. Widows who represent sexual inactivity as opposed to the active sexuality of the sumangali are, of course, never permitted to come anywhere near the place where an auspicious function is being performed.

Since women are responsible for both reproduction and fertility, it is imperative that they be constantly guarded against attacks by evil spirits. Black color is used as a
deterrent against the evil eye. It is precisely for this reason that (1) the pregnant woman is presented with a black sari by her sister-in-law during the valakappu ritual; (2) a black aranakayaru is tied to the waist of a new born child; and (3) one of the important sweets for the puberty ritual is made of black sesame seeds since pregnant women, little children, and young virgins are especially vulnerable to the attacks of evil spirits. Collyrium (kajala or lamp black), also a representative of black color, is used by women as an eyeliner and drishti dots on the forehead and cheek. For instance, collyrium is applied to the eyes of (1) a girl during the puberty ritual, (2) both the bride and the groom during the marriage ritual, (3) a pregnant woman during the valakappu, and (4) a baby for a year or more after its birth. The young virgin, the bride and the groom, the pregnant woman, and the little baby, who are in a liminal state, are further protected against the attacks of evil spirits by collyrium dots on their cheeks.

Foods:

Sweets of various kinds dominate as the important food items in Aiyar women's rites of passage. One of the main reasons that various kinds of sweets are painstakingly prepared by women to commemorate rites of passage is, I believe, because sweets, which are specially prepared during all festivities and auspicious events, suggest that
these rites are special and momentous occasions in the life of every Aiyar girl/woman. The foods are all foods that are not part of the daily fare, a fact that highlights the significance and importance these rites have for Aiyar women. Feasts and special food preparations such as sweets bring a spirit of joy and celebration to these rites.

Reynolds (1978) commenting on food/flavors used by south Indian women in their nombus (vratas) suggests that sweetness, because it is a flavor that lies midway along a continuum ranging from bland, unspiced, and tasteless at one end to pungent, spiced, and strong taste on the other, is predominantly used to symbolize auspiciousness and controlled sexuality. "Sweetness stands between complete chastity and unbridled sensuality; it is the flavor-essence of auspiciousness and benevolence. What yellow is to the color code, sweetness is to the flavor code" (Ibid., p.449).

Since widows are expected to eat only bland and tasteless food, blandness suggests absence of sexual drive and of all desire in general. On the other hand, spicy food stimulates and excites one's senses. Sweets, unlike bland food does not dullen the senses but promotes responses. However, unlike spicy food, the responses they produce are benign, gentle, and controlled.

Aiyar women's rituals by effectively using color and flavor constantly remind women, who are by nature
said to be passionate and sensuous, of the relative importance of control (but not total self-control which might result in barrenness) brought on by the institution of marriage in their lives. Yellow color and sweetness are cooling agents needed to cool the heat, as represented by red, in women. "In essence, heat is associated with life and fertility. The energy which can both activate and nullify life is a kind of heat. This heat when taken alone, however, can be highly dangerous. It must be focused and controlled in order to become a source of power which humans and superhumans can utilize. In ritual, as in mythology, heat must be encompassed or surrounded by cooling things" (Beck, 1969:553). The use of color and food also very forcefully contrasts the blessed, auspicious, desired, literally, sweet, and colorful life of a sumangali with the accursed, inauspicious, dreaded, literally, bland, and colorless life of a widow.
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

I

The various life cycle rituals of Aiyar women play an important part in preparing a woman for her dominant role of sumangali/mother in society. Through a study of these rites we have learned that marriage, though significant does not necessarily incorporate a woman unless a child, preferably a male one, is born of this union. This explains the discrepancy that seems to exist in the meaning of the word 'sumangali.' Generally the word is taken to mean 'a woman whose husband is alive' or as Reynolds (1978:45) puts it, "a woman with a tali." If this is true then Reynolds seems to be contradicting herself when she claims on p.126 that a barren married woman is not a sumangali. According to the accepted meaning of the word only a widow can be considered a woman who is not a sumangali and not a barren woman, since the latter has a husband. However, the contradiction, we find, is only an apparent one since in the world of south Indian Hindu women, a true sumangali is one who not only has a husband living but has also given birth to children, preferably sons. Thus, while it is true that a barren woman is a sumangali since she has a husband, she is at the same time
not truly a sumangali since she is still in a liminal state and has not become fully incorporated into the world of women.

I therefore believe that Aiyars, like other Hindus, are integrated into society in stages. Thus, the view that rites of initiation integrates a person into society (see Myerhoff, 1982) is only partially true as far as Aiyars are concerned because the rite of initiation does not lead either an Aiyar male or a female to total incorporation but only to the first stage of incorporation.

For an Aiyar male, the first stage of integration occurs after upanayana, an essential educational samskara which leads him into bramcharya, the first of the four Hindu ashramas. After upanayana, through the chanting of the sacred Gayatri (also known as Savitri), he is initiated into manhood and becomes a dvija. But it will be many years before he is incorporated into society as a full, adult member of his culture.

Marriage is his second stage of integration as it leads him into the life of a grihasta or householder, the second important Hindu ashrama. Through Vedic learning (as a brahmachari) and the performance of domestic sacrifices and pujas (as a grihasta), an Aiyar has repayed only part of his debt, i.e., his debt to the gods and sages. But it is only after he has fulfilled his obligations to his ancestors by becoming the father of at least one son that
he is completely free and gets integrated into society because now he has paid back all the three debts that every Hindu is believed to be born with. Thus, the three stages of integration in the life of an Aiyar male would be upanayana—marriage—fatherhood.

Similarly, an Aiyar girl is "separated" after she undergoes tirandukuli and the entire period until she reaches motherhood represents the transitional or liminal phase of her life. Since a woman's life complements a man's life, she becomes a complete person only after she becomes a mother. Hence, the fullest meaning of womanhood is synonymous with motherhood and not with just the state of being married (as graphically exemplified by barren women and the low position they occupy in society).

Thus "to be mothers were women created, to be fathers men" -- this is their dharma according to Manu and the Dharmashastras. Scholars like Das (1982:126) who claim that a Hindu woman or a man becomes incorporated after the performance of the marriage samskara and upanayana respectively are therefore only partially correct since they have failed to point out that these rites do not lead to total integration.

Marriage is described as a woman's Vedic upanayana -- it is equated to pre-marital sacrament, and 'serving' her husband to the life of a brahmachari residing with a guru. "The nuptial ceremony is stated to be the Vedic sacrament
for women (and to be equal to the initiation), serving the husband (equivalent to) the residence in (the house of the) teacher, and the household duties (the same) as the (daily) worship of the sacred fire" (Manu-smriti, II:67).

Marriage converts a woman into a wife, an auspicious person, and she is now ready for final integration. By becoming a mother of at least one son, an Aiyar woman fulfills the aim of marriage which is the continuation of the husband's line. Thus, the three important stages in her life are: puberty--marriage--motherhood and it is only after she attains motherhood that she is considered a full member of her group and can actively take part in all auspicious rituals. However, it will be many years before an Aiyar woman can reach the naranja-sumangali or 'full-auspicious' married woman's status. She reaches this enviable status, which signifies auspiciousness par excellence and which is the ultimate goal of every woman, only after her menopause and after all her children are married and settled in life.

By equating her life in her husband's house to a period of education, Hindu religion vividly underscores the primary concerns of the male and the female worlds. Her basic training is domestic (this worldly), her dominant color is the rajasic and earthy red, and women's rituals are called laukik (societal). His training, on the other hand, emphasizes spirituality (other worldly), his dominant color is the pure and sattvic white, and male sacraments
are primarily Vedic rituals. It is therefore only through his wife that a man reaches the social world and it is she who enables him to perform his essential duties in the laukik world.

II

The liminal period has its own internal structure, and it is possible to observe stages of entry into the period, the period itself, and the departure from the period of transition. Our study of Aiyar women's rites of passage enables us to distinguish two distinct kinds of liminal periods -- the first one, which is more confining and shorter in duration, occurs within each rite of passage and the second one, which begins with puberty and ends with motherhood, covers a longer period of time.

Just as the entry into and the exit from the liminal stage within each life cycle rite requires a ritual bath, the entry into and departure from the transitional phase in the life of an Aiyar woman which begins with the 'coming of age' ceremony (entry into the period) and ends with the birth of a child (departure from the period) each also produces a state of titu or pollution which requires a ceremonial bath. As Beck (1969) points out, every period of transition causes pollution, which is marked by heat, and the ritual bath at the end of the period removes the pollu-
tion and produces a cooling effect. "A woman is separated from the rest of society and considered polluting at precisely those times when her femaleness is most manifest and at its most natural, and hence its most dangerous" (Reynolds, 1978:112). However, as we know, this state of titu is very different from the state of titu that is associated with death, since the former state, unlike the latter, is associated with auspicious rituals that are beneficial to both the family and society at large.

Turner has pointed out that the liminal period, a sacred period when ludic elements predominate, is also clearly a time of instruction -- a period of education. An Aiyar girl's period of training officially begins when she reaches puberty. Through the various rituals, songs, dances, and collective teasing, she is 'educated.' This period of 'serious' training through 'non-serious' and 'ludic' means continues until she gives birth to a child, preferably a male one. The playful, amorous, and subtly lewd songs that are sung during a woman's puberty, marriage, and valakappu ceremonies are no longer necessary after the child is born. The songs now become more devotional in form and content. By singing the glories of god, the women are not only expressing their gratitude, but are also praying to the different gods and goddesses to protect the child from all the evil forces that are constantly trying to harm the new-born baby.

The collective singing, dancing, and joking also serve
another useful purpose. They are used as entertainment devices, designed mainly to put the young initiate/bride/would-be-mother at ease. Through humor, fun, and play the serious and important business of bearing a child is made pleasurable.

Like the African tribes described by Evans-Pritchard (1965:76-101), licentiousness which is normally prohibited by society is permitted during women's rites of passage. Women are generally very shy and embarrassed about sex and the sexual act in particular. By using the form of jokes and songs, which, according to Lakshmi (1984:6) are a sort of "verbal orgasm," they deal with this problem in an acceptable and legitimate socio-religious environment. Nonetheless, it should be noted that in most of the songs the lewdness is couched and the obscenity is elevated by making gods instead of mortals the principal characters. Even during the performance of the rites, the sexual element is elevated by treating the initiates as deities. During tirandukuli, the young girl is treated as Goddess Parvati. Throughout the marriage ritual, the bridal couple is treated as a pair of divine consorts, such as Rama and Sita, Shiva and Parvati, or Vishnu and Lakshmi. The sexual act, which necessarily follows the marriage ceremony, is thus made sacred by treating the bride and the groom as a divine pair.

Since women, on the whole, lead restricted and
repressed lives, the songs, dances, and jokes act as a kind of release. 'Coming of age' ceremony for the young girl (particularly if she lives in the agraharam) is very tedious and, in many ways, it is the beginning of a series of extremely unpleasant days in the months and years to come. To take her mind off this ordeal, 'non-serious' elements in the form of lewd songs, dances, and jokes are introduced that not only distract her but also impress upon her the good fortune (as an auspicious woman/wife/mother) that awaits her in the future. Similarly, throughout the marriage ceremony, the young bride and groom, (in particular the young and obviously inexperienced bride), are constantly aware of the new, 'frightening' and inevitable sexual experience that is in store for them at the end of the ceremony, and the playful laukik elements provide the necessary distractions. Until a son is born the newly married woman especially, is under a lot of tension and the various non-serious elements provide a release, while, at the same time, impressing upon her the importance of the birth of a son.

Modernization has made Aiyar women, particularly those living in Bangalore more self-conscious and I noticed that it was comparatively easier for women to indulge in singing, dancing, and teasing in Danapuram because they were done collectively in the agraharam, which not only heightened the experience but also gave the participants a certain degree of protective anonymity. On the other hand,
in Bangalore, where families are smaller in size and relatives and friends are spread over a larger geographical area, it is quite often very difficult to assemble such a large crowd of people to perform such activities collectively.

Turner (1982:28) commenting on ritual and play frames, points out the basic difference between the two, although the two frames, like the Vedic and laukik rituals, essentially complement one another. "While ritual frames depend upon traditional, immemorial authority (scriptures, ... liturgies held to be transmitted from hallowed antiquity), play frames allow participants to escape from the 'should' and 'ought' character of ritual -- more compelling than the very 'laws of nature' in the view of some religions -- and see themselves as free to fabricate a range of alternative possibilities of behaving, thinking, and feeling that is wider than that current or admissible in either the mundane world or the ritual frame."

In other words, ritual is immutable and changeless as it is bound by the sanctity of its stable frame, whereas play frames, characteristically weak and plastic, with their potential for adaptability and randomized creativity, are more dynamic and are better qualified to portray and express contemporary conditions, since they allow participants to include changes, provided they take care to keep within the broad or prescribed socio-cultural tradition. "Play thus becomes paradoxical, for it is revealed
to have a serious function, a curious objectivity. Seemingly amoral, its moralism may cleave more sincerely and closely to the facts of contemporary life than the moralism of ritual... Play's flexibility contains within it the possibility of exploring new ways of doing things" (Turner, 1982:29). As Caillois (1961:58) points out, "Play is simultaneously liberty and invention, fantasy and discipline."

Thus, what the mantras are to Vedic rituals, the songs, jokes, and dances are to laukik rituals. Like the mantras, they also perform a variety of tasks. More importantly, they set the tone of laukik rituals. While the mantras uphold changelessness or the serious aspect of ritual, the songs, jokes, and dances express the ever-changing quality of the 'non-serious' in ritual.

The words in the songs are frequently changed and updated so as to make them more suitable for contemporary tastes. As Srinivas (1942:80) points out these, "... Rabelaisian songs are not ancient compositions but are quite recent. But they are modelled on the old songs. The spirit is the same though the form is different." For instance, substituting the names of gods and goddesses and the names of ancient kingdoms with either the names of the initiates or those of popular film stars or modern sounding male and female proper names and the names of modern Indian villages, towns, and cities respectively, and including the
names of common contemporary objects such as Pears soap, soda-water, wrist watch, etc., give a contemporary touch to the songs. As has been indicated earlier, romantic film songs are also often sung instead of some of the more traditional amorous songs. Similarly, during the dances new and modern steps are frequently included. All these things not only reflect the imaginative potential of the participants, (who are incidentally complimented profusely by everyone for their ingenuity), but also add to the general merriment of the receptive audience, that greatly enjoys and appreciates any changes from the norm, since, these things manage to make serious life-crisis rituals into 'non-serious' activity that is fun for all, including the young initiates. However, the serious purpose behind all this drollery is never quite forgotten even when everyone is having a good time.

III

In Aiyar culture, various female categories, such as immature girls, virgins/unmarried women, married women, barren women, naranja-sumangalis, and widows occupy very definite and often contrasting positions and their socio-religious life, which is primarily made of life cycle rites, pujas, and vratas, graphically illustrates these contrasts. To some extent, the immature girl is an outsider in the world of women. She is ritually pure because she
has not yet been polluted by menstrual blood, but, at the same time, because her sexuality has not yet been activated through menstruation, she is only a child and has not actually become a woman. However, even young Aiyar girls become aware of the hierarchical differences that exist among the various categories of women by watching their mothers and other women in the community.

There is a contrast between naranja-sumangalis, who are in an auspicious state par excellence; married women, who are in an auspicious state; barren married women, who are in an auspicious but dangerous state; and virgins, who are neither auspicious nor inauspicious since their menstrual impurity has not yet become positive. Only after marriage, does a woman's menstrual impurity become positive, because she is now ready to bear children and continue her husband's line. Thus her ability to bear children through her sacred union with her husband is the only attribute that gives an Aiyar woman her shakti (power) and makes her auspicious.

A woman who remains unmarried for too long, a barren woman, and a widow, since they have disrupted the delicate and natural balance, are a curse to a house and line. A barren woman is like an empty vessel and brings ruin to a line. She is also a 'dangerous' woman who is associated with the evil shakti of spirits that cause infertility. In her supposed state of envy, she is said to be capable of casting an evil eye on pregnant women and babies and is
therefore feared by most women. An unmarried woman, on the other hand, is 'dangerous' because she is a constant temptation to men and hence a threat to herself and her family. As a 'seductress' who is not channeling her reproductive potentials into the continuance of the patriarchal structure, she is capable of bringing the downfall of men. However, an unmarried woman has the potential of becoming auspicious through marriage, whereas a young widow, who is also a 'seductress' and a temptation to men, does not.

Both the unmarried woman and the barren woman are thus dangerous (for different reasons, of course) because they are in a liminal state -- "a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo" (Turner, 1982:202) -- but there is an essential difference between the two. Unlike the former, who is feared as a potential temptress, the latter is identified with a witch capable of casting an evil eye. A barren woman is married but has failed to use her sexuality for the benefit of society. Since male infertility is not recognized in Aiyar society, failure to conceive is entirely a woman's fault. She is a woman who has defeated the purpose of Nature, a woman without shakti, a 'defective' woman, and is hence branded a witch and is feared by society. Women try to cajole and placate her in their rituals, specially those that deal with pregnancy and childbirth. Aiyar women are therefore terrified of barrenness and constantly pray for children.
Widowhood is inauspicious because it is a negation of marriage. As a widow, her sexuality is wasted and is not being used for the good of society. By becoming sexually inactive, a widow becomes an outsider and is no longer a part of the auspicious sexually active world of sumangalis/mothers. She is also associated with death and is therefore shunned by everyone. Being inauspicious, she is not allowed to participate in auspicious rituals. A young widow, in particular, is dreaded because she is in a sexually unfulfilled state. In this respect, she resembles an unmarried woman -- both are vulnerable: "Both can cause potential ruin to a male line by using their sexuality and bearing children in an unmarried state. The difference between the two is evident and culturally defined: a widow is the antithesis of the ... [unmarried woman], who is ... untouched by death. Widows await completion in their own deaths, ... [unmarried women] await completion in marriage" (Fruzzetti, 1982:107).

Despite their association with healing and nurturing, women can destroy lines and are potentially the creators of sickness and other disasters. They can "harm babies, exacerbate illnesses of all types, cause crop failures and weather disasters -- all a perversion of the gynomorphized universe" (Hoch-Smith and Spring, 1978:21). Barren women, widows, and spinsters emphasize the darker aspect of womanhood, an aberration in the normal scheme of things.
A brief description of the rituals connected with death and widowhood will further illustrate the superior position of the naranja sumangali/sumangali and the inferior and unenviable status of the widow.

When an old Aiyar man or a woman who has led a 'full' life and has performed all his/her dharmic duties dies, then he/she is treated like a sacrificial object and is accorded due respect. The death of such a person -- a person who awaits liberation through death -- is referred to as punya death and the corpse of such a person is considered fit to be revered and worshiped. Before the corpse of such a person is taken out of the house to the cremation site, sumangalis bring water and pour it over the corpse. Then they circumambulate the corpse, prostrate before it, and worship it. This ritual washing, bathing, and worshiping the corpse is considered to be a meritorious act.

During the antyeshti of such a person, on the 9th and 10th days, elderly sumangalis beat their chest and sing pilakanam (crying songs). This custom of collective ritual mourning, i.e., singing special funeral songs and lamenting loudly, which may not always express genuine feelings of loss or sadness, is done only when the spirit of the dead person is still in a liminal stage. After the tenth day,
these songs are not sung since the preta (spirit of the dead person) has now successfully completed its journey upwards to the god of death and has been incorporated with the pitris.

Widows, though they are associated with death are not allowed to take part in the ritual worship of the corpse because it is a 'sacred' ritual that brings merit to the living through the sumangalis. In other words, the widow by becoming an amangali (inauspicious woman), is no longer considered a part of the normal female world. Her husband's death has removed her sexuality and femaleness from her. Sociologically, she is a 'redundant' woman; there is no reason for her existence since she cannot bear children. She is therefore beyond the pale of day to day socio-religious activities.

Although widow remarriage is permitted by the government, very few widows actually get married. Right from the time of Manu, Hindus objected to widow remarriage on the grounds that a 'gift' could be given away only once. The stigma attached to widowhood is still quite strong and Aiyar men are generally very reluctant to marry widows. A young widow is thus a burden, a threat to her family's honor.

After her husband's soul has been successfully incorporated into the world of the manes on the 10th day after his death, the widow undergoes a rite, which takes
place very early in the morning, before daybreak on the 11th day, when she is formally deprived of all her symbols of marriage. No sumangali or virgin girl is allowed to see her during the 10th day or attend the morning ritual on the 11th day.

On the night of the 10th day, the widow locks herself in a small room and keeps vigil during the night. The following morning, before daybreak, widows from the neighborhood knock on the door. They remove her tali, wipe off her kumkum from her forehead, tear her blouse, and assist her while she takes her final ritual bath as an active member of the female world. This completes her passage from the state of sumangalihood to that of widowhood. It separates the auspicious and the inauspicious periods in the life of a woman. Thus, a ritual bath once again completes the transition from one stage to another in the life of a woman. From now on, she is expected to be 'pure' to the memory of her dead husband by undertaking pilgrimages, strictly observing all the food and pollution taboos, and by constantly fasting herself.

The 11th day morning rite when a widow is ritually converted into an amangali, is the only rite where widows actively participate as ritual specialists and play significant roles. The very thought of this 'most unfortunate and calamitous of all rituals,' fills Aiyar sumangalis with fear. The sight of a woman undergoing this rite is consi-
dered highly inauspicious and must be avoided at all costs, since they fear that even accidentally witnessing this ritual could make them into widows. This is one of the main reasons why the rite is performed before the crack of dawn, when it is still dark.

If, on the other hand, a wife predeceases her husband, the corpse is decked like a bride, a goddess. This is a punya death and the corpse is worshiped and is referred to as Mahalakshmi. Sumangalis bathe and dress the corpse in a bright colored sari and put a huge vermilion dot on the forehead. The corpse is garlanded and is almost completely covered with flowers. People from the neighborhood pay homage to the corpse as it is taken from the house to the cremation site. This is in sharp contrast to a widow who receives her funeral obsequies unadorned.

Thus, to live and die a sumangali, especially a naranja-sumangali, is the greatest ambition of women and their major fear is becoming a widow. Among Aiyars, the very idea of auspiciousness or blessedness is associated with marriage, married women and mothers. The best examples of auspicious women are the naranja-sumangalis, who symbolize auspiciousness par excellence. They are elderly sumangalis who are past their child-bearing years. These women are truly in a blessed state, since they have fulfilled all their worldly obligations. Reynolds (1978) rightly points out that in south India menopause is in no way ritualized. Women, instead of fearing menopause,
actually welcome it. "Tragedy does not strike the married woman when the menstrual flow ceases; rather it strikes at other points: when fertility fails to be proved and when a husband dies" (Ibid., 171).

Naranja-sumangalis are in great demand during the performance of pujas, life cycle rites, and vrataas as they are considered to be ritual experts or specialists. These women, not only initiate the various women's rituals but play very active and dominant roles in them. As fully incorporated sumangalis, they have blessings to impart and act as protectors against the effects of the evil eye.

The symbols of marriage and sumangalihood such as turmeric, vermillion, bangles, flowers, and tali have all become objects of worship. These symbols that literally add color to a woman's appearance stand for her happiness in this world and her blessedness in the next. Thus, the privileges that are granted to a sumangali and the high status she occupies during her life and the reverence her death produces all unmistakably point to a culture which greatly emphasizes the value of the married state and degrades the status of the widow, who is conspicuous by her drab and colorless appearance.

However, widows who are past the child-bearing age are considered pure but inauspicious. Through a life of prayers, pujas, and self-denial, they have become pure. But, "... this purity is essentially different from the
purity of a Brahmin male. In spite of her pure state, a widow is categorized as belonging to the Sudra caste, since a woman can achieve superior status only through her link to her husband" (Duvvury, 1984:114).

Unlike the Brahmin women described by Roy (1975), older women in Aiyar culture, especially those who have sons, do not lose their power and become unwanted (1). Such women, even if they are widows wield a lot of power within the house. A widowed mother-in-law remains the mistress of the house. In extended Aiyar families, older women (mother/mother-in-law) are still in charge of the domestic world, the private sphere, and they are respected for their wisdom. Unlike the young wife, whose status in her husband's household improves with the length of the marriage and the maturation of her children, the older woman has power and great influence in the running of the family and day-to-day management of household affairs. But both kinds of women have no authority which essentially rests with the male members of the household.

V

The world of women is not just a sub-set, made up of a bunch of local laukik customs that is beyond the pale of the Great Vedic Tradition. Since the world of women complements the world of men, their primary concerns are
closely related and are quite similar in nature, though their approach (laukik and Vedic respectively) is slightly different.

As Fruzzetti (1982:134) points out, women "understand, interpret, and symbolize their world -- the meaning and significance of their lives -- through striachers and vratas: a domain of actions separate from, and yet complementary to, the world of men." The rites of women thus reflect the practical concerns of women, which, however, are related to "Hindu ideologies in general (without the cosmic and abstract concerns of much sectarian Hindu thought)" (Ibid., 66).

Through their rituals, women express their domestic concerns, their fears (of widowhood and barrenness) and ambitions (sumangalihood, eternal domestic bliss, and wealth), and the relative importance of various women's roles in society. Ironically, in so doing, they are in fact reinforcing man-made ideals of women in society. In a community that still greatly respects traditional values and continues to define women largely in terms of their functions as mothers and wives and by the cultural images of their sexuality, economic independence (as a result of increased job opportunities) and better educational qualifications do not necessarily mean a higher status (2). Among Aiyars, women achieve superior socio-religious status only as wives/mothers.
By constantly reminding women of their traditional goals through the performance of the various socio-religious rituals, which give these goals an aura of sanctity, Aiyar women's attitudes are conditioned right from young. Their role models are their mothers and other women in their families and neighborhood, who as thoroughly encultured and incorporated members, uphold the values of their society. Educated working women, who spend many hours a day away from home in paid employment, return home to experience a role overload or a 'double day.'

Modern education therefore does not necessarily pose contradictions to these time-honored and traditional views because women do not feel compelled to question the efficacy of their socio-religious system. On the whole, Aiyar women seem to be content with their traditional roles because they offer them "private power in return for public submission" (Janeway, 1971:56). Srinivas (1942:199) rightly notes that a Hindu woman does not feel oppressed "thanks to a psychological process by which ... [she] has come to believe that the ideals society has created for her are her own. She now believes in, and entirely upholds, the ideals which man once made for her."

Shivashankari, who conducted extensive research among Aiyars for her Tamil novel Palangal (1983) (3), which particularly deals with the socio-religious life of Aiyar women, concludes that Aiyar women, even if they had shown some discontent and rebellion against the traditional
system as youngsters, thus causing a lot of distress and anguish to their parents, when they become mothers, they shock everyone including themselves by upholding conventional values as passionately as their mothers or grandmothers had done when they were young.

In addition to crystallizing male and female roles in society, socio-ritual events provide men and women the most legitimate opportunities for socializing. They are occasions when potential marriage proposals are considered and young men and women have a chance to safely 'see' one another, while their parents socialize and evaluate each other. Hence ritual occasions are welcomed by Aiyars both in Danapuram and Bangalore.

As noted by Tambiah (1973:74), "Despite the growth of modifications over time and dialectal regional variations over space, the main architectural principles of the Indian edifice of family and marriage appear to have remained remarkably intact." When we compare Aiyar life cycle rituals in the agraharam and in Bangalore, we notice that they are basically very similar. It is true that certain changes have taken place over the years. For instance, certain rites (marriage ceremony in particular) are performed in an abbreviated manner. Amorous film songs, and new 'Western' elements (mainly in rites performed in the city) such as the evening reception during the wedding and the 'tea' during valakappu and tottil ceremonies have been
introduced. Nevertheless, our study of Aiyar women's rites shows that tradition can and does coexist with change without creating any contradictions, since change itself is constantly being redefined and understood in traditional terms. As Ross (1961:ix) points out, "... deeply laid patterns of behavior do not respond easily to change. Some of the more superficial aspects may alter fairly readily ... but underlying ideologies and deeply embedded patterns ... are more resistant."

Aiyar women, by continuously updating their ancient and sacred oral tradition by including a few new elements, have not only given their conventional goals a contemporary, 'living' touch, but have also helped generate renewed interest in their traditional belief system even among the so called modern, young, educated, urban women. The various rites of passage of women, by graphically portraying and sanctifying traditional socio-religious goals and values in an environment of fun have been mainly responsible in preserving and perpetuating these goals.
Notes:

1. "One of the most significant observations in the book (Bengali Women), it seems to me, is that of what happens to a woman when, because of her loss of fertility, she also loses power" (Edward C. Dimock, Jr., in his Foreward, xii).


### Questionnaire

1. Age:
2. Native Language:
3. Caste:
4. Education:
5. Occupation:
6. Father's/Husband's Occupation:
7. Father's/Husband's Qualification:
8. Mother's Qualification and Occupation:
9. Monthly income of the family: (Please underline one)
   - (a) Under Rs 1000
   - (b) Rs 1000-3000
   - (c) Rs 3000-5000
   - (d) Over Rs 5000
10. Number of Siblings:
    - Brothers: Elder: Younger:
    - Sisters: Elder: Younger:
11. How would you classify your family:
    - (Please underline one)
    - Nuclear/single family: Extended or Joint
12. Number of people in your family:
13. Please indicate which of the following rites of passage (samskara) (or their equivalents) were performed/are going to be performed -- for you / your children
   - (a) Coming of age ceremony:
   - (b) Vivaha (Marriage):
   - (c) Garbhadhana (Ceremony to cause conception):
   - (d) Pushvavana (Ceremony to cause the birth of a male child):
   - (e) Simantonnayana (performed in the 7th month of pregnancy):
   - (f) Jatakarma (performed at the time of birth):
   - (g) Namakarma (naming the child):
   - (h) Annaprasana (First Feeding):
   - (i) Karnavedha (Boring the ear of the child):
   - (j) Caula (First tonsure of the child):
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