

‘ĒḷUKAN̄NIMĀR’: MODESTY OF THE SEVEN VERSATILE VIRGINS

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Abstract

The Hindus worship deities of anthropomorphic origin, while rural and tribal groups make their own deities *grāmadēvatas* and *kuḷadēvatas* based on their heroic deeds. The Virgin Mother Goddess is prevalently deified all through the nation. The Sapta Mātṛkas are popularly known as Ēḷukan̄nimār ‘the seven virgins’ in Tamil Nādu, especially with the tribal and rural populace, they are also called Sapta Kaṇṇika, Akasa Kaṇṇika and so on in South India. Unlike a formal Brahmanical God with *rūpa*, these village deities are *arūpa* and their power can only be felt, as the Tamil Classical term *aṇaṅku* ‘possessed’ *śakti*. The possessed power of the woman in Tamil tradition is virginity, chastity, and versatile motherhood. These chaste-virgin goddesses are not mere personalities but felt as forces of their natural environments, and their powers need to be used cautiously. It is imperative to comprehend the idea of these goddesses and is supple and mutable from one locality to the other with the relocation of the community settlements. The Seven Chaste women noted in the *Cilappatikāram* through the Sapta Kaṇṇikas reach a stage of maturation in the Sapta Mātṛkas. However, faint imagery of the Sapta Mātṛkas is traced back to the Indic culture whereas the Sapta Kaṇṇikas are frozen in the folk cult and the worship pattern is associated with the femme.

Keywords: Ēḷukan̄nimār, Sapta Mātṛkas, the Chaste, Goddesses, folk cult

The Hindus commonly worship deities of anthropomorphic origin (e.g., Gaṇapati), while rural and tribal groups make their own deities *grāmadēvatas* ‘village deities’ and *kuḷadēvatas* ‘cult deities’ (Fig. 1) based on their heroic deeds. The Virgin Mother Goddess is prevalently deified all through the nation. The Sapta Mātṛkas are popularly known as Ēḷukan̄nimār ‘the seven virgins’ in Tamil Nādu, especially with the tribal and rural populace, they are also called Sapta Kaṇṇika(i), Akasa Kaṇṇika ‘the celestial virgins’ and so on in South India (Figs. 3-6). Unlike a formal Brahmanical god with *rūpa*, these village deities are *arūpa* ‘formless’ and their power can only be felt, as the Tamil Classical term *aṇaṅku* ‘possessed’ *śakti* power’ (Kalidos 2020: 81-86). The possessed power of the woman in Tamil village tradition is virginity, chastity, and versatile motherhood. These chaste-virgin goddesses are not mere personalities but felt as forces of their natural environments, and their power of them needs to be used cautiously. It is important to understand the nature of these deities is flexible and is moved from place to place with the movement of the community settlements (Kent 2013: 109-110). The woman’s modesty is chastity. However, this intelligence of human behavior in the routine life pattern is associated with the femme.

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Naturally, what is expected of the female, *peṇṭir/strī*, applies to the male, *āṭavar/puruṣa*. The *purāṇas* talk of chaste ladies of rank such as Satyavān-Sāvitṛī, Anasūyā-Atri, Vasiṣṭha-Arundadhī, Sītā, Draupadī,ⁱ and so on. Satyavān (“truth” personified), Vasiṣṭha (Rāma’s *guru*) and Atri (“the eater” Dowson 1998: 32) were men of exemplary mark as their *śatīs*. The case of *kṣatriya*-Viśvāmitra could have been differently conditioned by the circumstances. Moreover, the cases of Daśaratha, Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna were entirely different. The proverb is “even if you count the sands on the riverbed, it is difficult to count the number of Arjuna’s wives”. Kṛṣṇa was *gopijanapriya* (lover of milkmaids, Fig. 7)ⁱⁱ who took the hand of several thousands of young brides.ⁱⁱⁱ We read a paradigm episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki that took place after the end of the war with Rāvaṇa, and on the way back of Rāma and Sītā to Ayodhyā, the birthplace of Rāma and the inheritance of the Solar Race. Sītā requests Rāma to alight at Kiṣkindha (far end of the ‘*Yuddhakāṇḍa*’) for a while admiring the chaste women of the woods. The mother, Sītā, was pleased to take a few of these ladies of rank to Ayodhyā.^{iv} It might be a pretext for Sītā setting her foot on the *punyabhūmi* of Virupākṣa, the Lord of Pampā. In Tamil tradition, Kaṇṇaki, the dynamic character of the Jain-Buddhist Tamil twin Epics, *Cilappatikāram*, and *Maṇimēkalai*, is the proverbial Pattinī (virtuous woman, *pativrata* dedicated to her husband, “the chaste” *śati*). The case of Sītā-Rāma is unique in legends and proto-histories because if Sītā was *pativrata*, Rāma was *ekapatnī-vratin*.^v No man or god in the history of religions could be compared with Rāma because when Sītā plunge her into the bowels of Mother Earth, Bhūdevī (‘*Uttarakāṇḍa*’, not the End, beginning leading to the Kṛṣṇavatāra - see note 1), Rāma stepped into the River Sarayū so that both could be united in the Vaikuṇṭha. The earth and river/water are metaphors for *hiranyagarbha*.^{vi} In a cyclic process, all pass-through nature (from the womb to the tomb and vice versa) and are reborn as the *Gītā* (1.37, 2.20) says.^{vii} This is a unique case of unparalleled conjugal fidelity, *prema-pāśa*.

Tamil literary tradition talks of three types of chaste women which is an autochthonous tradition.

- 1) The wife dies the moment seeing or hears the demise of her husband,^{viii}
- 2) The wife plunging into the funeral pyre of her husband, the historical *śati*,^{ix} and
- 3) Those that lead the life of a widow giving up all mundane pleasures, in the case of some castes they have their heads shaven.

The *Cīrīya Tirumaṭal* and *Periya Tirumaṭal* of Tirumaṅkai, the Viṣṇu-mystic, note extraordinary women wedded to their husbands. They are Vaidehī/Sītā (Rāma), Vāsavadattā (Udayana, cf. *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin and *Vāsavadattā* of Subandhu; cf. Macdonell 1979: p. 280), Vegavatī (Dhanañjaya), Ulūpī (Arjuna), Uṣā (Aniruddha), Umā contesting Śiva in dance (i.e., claiming equal status), Manmatha (Ratī) and the inseparable *cakravāka* birds (Rajarajan et al. 2017: 2232-86).

The *Cilappatikāram* ('Maturaikkāṇṭam', ll. 1-35) through the mouth of Pattiṇi-Kaṇṇaki talks of "the Seven Chaste Peṇ, Peṇmai (Feminine Modesty)".^x Let me brief the precedents. Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalan were the daughter and son of rich merchants in the emporium of Pukār, Kāvrippūmpattinam, the venue where the Kāviri confluences with the eastern ocean, *kunakaṭal*.^{xi} Kōvalan was in love with a dancing girl, Mātavi, and lost all his riches. The husband and wife migrated to Maturai to earn a living.^{xii} Entangled in the conspiracy of a goldsmith, Kōvalan was beheaded in an unruly judgment of the Pāṇḍya king (Rajarajan 2016a: 1-12). Kaṇṇaki's legal battle in the Pāṇḍyan Hall of Justice, *Nītimaṇḍapa*, was in her favour. Once the perpetrated injustice was proved, the Pāṇḍya Neṭuñceliyan fell dead from his royal throne. His wife, Kōpperuntēvi, died the moment seeing her husband's end. She is an example of first-rate chastity. Kaṇṇaki (cf. 'Kaṇṇal' in Akam. 54, 236, *kaṇ-avaḷ* "she, the eyes [of womanhood]", *aki* "fire", conflagrating eyes) summoned the women of the Pāṇḍyan metropolis to declare what injustice was done to her.^{xiii} In this connection, she talks of the seven chaste women that earlier existed. They are the epitome of the pinnacle of chastity. She goes on briefly telling the greatness of the exalted women one by one. The aim of *Cilappatikāram* ('Patikam' l. 56), or the *aim-peruṇ-kāppiyam* (five great epics)^{xiv} is to retell the glories of the exalted chaste, *uraicāl Pattiyinik uyartōr ettalum*. Their glories emerge through the mouth of Kaṇṇaki in the form of parables, explained by the *urai-āciriyar* (commentators) in detail. Kaṇṇaki addresses Pāṇṭimātēvi "listen what I have to say, I come from the land of the seven chaste maidens (cf. Figs. 1-2)".^{xv} On hearing these words, the Pāṇḍya Mahādevī did breathe her last (Rajarajan 2016). The seven chaste are listed, not specifying their names.

- 1) The maiden invited the Liṅga, *vanni*-tree (Indian mesquite tree, *Prosopis spicigera*), and *maṭappallī* (temple kitchen) to prove her innocence when abused in the court of law.^{xvi} This event is related to the miracles of Ñānacampantar, the Śaivite mystic.^{xvii} According to the *Tiruvilaiyāṭar Purāṇam*, the event took place at Puṇampayam (see *Tēvāram* 2.166, 4.227, 7.35), the presiding God, called Cāṭcinātar (Lord Śiva who bears witness). According to the *Tiruttonṭar Purāṇam*, the event took place at Marukal.

The theme seems to be archaic that later came to be linked with the miracles of Ñānacampantar (7th-13th centuries).

- 2) Another maiden created an image, *maṇal-pāvai* (sand image) or *pratima*, of a gentleman jovially. Her friends playfully said the idol is her husband. When the floods inundated the Ponni/Kāviri, the idol was not washed away. She had to stand by the side of the idol in the dune (cf. Fig. 10). Perhaps, they were united by a divine marriage. It is not clear whether this may be Raṅganāyaki and Raṅganātha, their temples appearing in the dune-*araṅkam*.^{xviii} See *patukkaikaṭavul* (Akam. 25) "God on sand-mound amid a river", Lord of Kōval[ūr] of the River Peṇṇai, later Trivikrama in whose venue the *mutal-Ālvārs* met to commence the saga of 4000-*pirapamtam* composition. It may presume once

Kōvalūr was on a *patukkai* or *tiṭṭai* in those times, cf. *Tiṭṭai* close to *Taṇcai*, *Tiṭṭakuṭi* (Parthiban 2019 & Rajarajan 2020a).

- 3) Ātimanti was a Cōḷa princess in love with a Cēra prince Āṭṭanatti. When he dived into the Kāviri floods for a water sport, he was washed away. By the grace of Mother Kāviri, the ladylove got her fiancé back. They were married to live long.^{xix}
- 4) A maiden's spouse had gone abroad on merchandise. She stood like a statue on the seashore. On the arrival of her beloved, she regained her human form. The name of the maiden is not given.
- 5) The child of a woman accidentally fell in well. The chaste lady that happened to observe this incident dropped her child also in the well so that the blame may not fall on her. By the divinity of her chastity, she was able to recover the life of the children.
- 6) A man lecherously looked at a chaste maiden. She immediately converted her shining face into a monkey^{xx}, cf. *Kāraikkālammai*yār that turned a ghou, *pēy* that is self-mortification (Rajarajan 2018: 73-92 & 2023). "Beauty provoketh fools more than gold" (Shakespeare, 'As You Like It', I, iii, 113). On the arrival of her husband, her face returned to normalcy. It is added that the maiden's secret parts were hidden by the *mekhala*, *maṇi alkul pūmpāvai*, which means a beauty par excellence. *Maṇimēkalai* is an epic sequel to the *Cilappatikāram* telling the annals of the *bhikṣuni*, *Manimēkhalā*.^{xxi}
- 7) A maiden promised her *tōḷi/sakhī* if she gives birth to a son, he should be given in marriage to her daughter in the future. Years had gone she had forgotten the promise. When at the appropriate time, the other woman asked her to fulfill the promise by performing the marriage she did it. She is a virtuous lady. This chaste one is said to have carried her husband on the head.^{xxii}

The ancient folk people of the south had cultivated their myths and legends that tell the glories of chaste women apart from the annals exemplified in the *itihāsas* and *purāṇas*. The examples of the seven *strīs* narrated above are reverberations of the south Indian, generally called Drāviḍian, archaic memories that seem graced with Jain-Buddhist morals.

The South Indian (Irūḷar) tribals enumerate the *Ēḷukaṇṇimār* as *Kaṇṇiammal* 'virgin-mother', *Akasakaṇṇi* 'sky-virgin', *Aṇṭārakaṇṇi* 'celestial virgin', *Javvatukaṇṇi* 'natural herbal virgin', *Allikaṇṇi* 'water-Lilly virgin', *Cōṇaikaṇṇi* 'virgin of Spring', and *Maṇcaḷkaṇṇi* 'turmeric virgin', the names are more of natural appeal. The Irūḷar tribes still retain the ancient way of worshipping the *Kaṇṇimārs*. Away from the residential area of the tribes, at a particular spot, they worship the natural seven stones as *Kaṇṇimārs* (Fig. 1). Though the Irūḷar worship all the *grāmadēvatas* and *kūḷadēvatas*, their mainstream worship is centered around the seven *Kaṇṇimārs*. The *Kaṇṇimārs* are worshipped through the seven stones, making symbolic images on wooden planks, and terracotta image worship seems to be more popular and surviving

from the ancient days (Figs. 3-6). They mainly worship the Kālī, Muṇi, Karuppu Rāyaṇ, and also Māriyamman.^{xxiii} The Kālī and Muṇi are usually worshipped in the forest region, Karuppu Rāyaṇ is *Kaval teyvam* ‘guardian deity’ and Māriyamman is the common goddess (Thurston 1909: 215). In some parts Tiṇṭukal region, the Hindus identify Mother Mary with Māriyamman (Rajaram 2023b: fn. 1). To start with the Goddess worship was under the regional specific trees, today survives as hypaethral temples in many places in the south. The regional-specific trees have lost their identity, atleast the *kaṭavuḷ* lives in one or another form. In the recent past many *grāmadevatālayas* ‘village temples’ have taken a conversion into Āgamic tradition, good examples are spread across South India, especially the Tiṇṭukal region (Rajaram 2020a: 235 & 2020b: 1-11).

The Brahmanical Sapta Mātṛkas are Brāhmī, Vaiṣṇavī, Maheśvarī, Kaumarī, Vārāhī, Aindrī and Cāmuṇḍā.^{xxiv} A set of seven Liṅgas are installed in the inner *pradakṣiṇapāṭha* ‘circumambulatory path’ of the Vīraṭṭēśvara Temple, Vaḷuvūr, which are believed to be worshipped by Sapta Mātṛkas (Fig. 11). In Kaṭappa region, the goddesses are eight in number, known as Peddammā is the greatest, Isondammā, Mārammā, Ankāmmā, Nukalammā, Vasukōṭa, Ellammā, and Arikammā.^{xxv} In suburban Beṅgaluru, they are: Annamma is the presiding goddess, and the other sisters are Candeśvarammā, Mārammā, Māyeśvarammā, Udalammā, Kokkalammā and Sukhajammā (Rajaram 2020: fn. 23). In Mysūr region, Bisal Mārī, Goonal Mārī, Kel Mārī, Yeeranagere Mārī, Hiridevathi, Chammandamma, and Uttahnahaliamma. Hiridevathi is considered to be the eldest among them (cf. Whitehead 1921: 20-50). In many places, Kālī and Mārī are commonly treated as village goddesses. In some places, these goddesses are referred to as six and the junior most is added, the *aruvar-kilaiyananikai* ‘junior among the six’ (cf. *Cilampu* 20.37, Rajaram 2020a; fn.1).^{xxvi} In Tirukkōṇamaḷai at Śrī Laṅka, the Ēḷukaṇṇimār is worshipped with Śiva-Pārvatī, Mohinī form of Viṣṇu, Pattiṇi-Dēvi an incarnation of Durgā, with another Indigollewe Kiri Amma. The seven Kiriammas are Miriyabadda Kiriamma, Pusmarāga Kiriamma, Unāpāna Kiriamma, Kosgama Kiriamma, Bōwelagedara Kiriamma, Balagiri Kiriamma, and Ginigal Devatāge Kiriamma (Iriyagolle 1990: 80, fn. 6).^{xxvii}

The South Indian village deities are often strongly connected to the mainstream Brāhmanical Hindu pantheon, especially with lord Śiva in South Indian mythologies.^{xxviii} Multiple layered myths confront the Sapta Mātṛkas and the Ēḷukaṇṇimār (popularly Kaṇṇimār) tangentially connected to the birth of Skanda. David Shulman (1980: 243-266) in his work *Tamil Temple Myths* has dedicated a complete chapter ‘Sixes and Seven: The Mothers of Skanda’ related to the Seven Goddesses cult in Sanskrit and Tamil sources. The six Kṛttikās together with Pārvatī make seven goddesses as Sapta Mātṛkas. The Sapta Mātṛkas means ‘seven mothers’ and the regional Tamil terms of the seven virgins are Ēḷukaṇṇimār, Sapta Kaṇṇikas, Sapta Kaṇṇimār. The seven Kaṇṇikas are fertile virgins, usually unmarried virgins are compared to the Kaṇṇikas. In North India, the Mātṛkas are frequently depicted with their children, while the Tamil Kaṇṇimārs are not so (Orr 2005: 24 and Rajaram 2020a: fn. 1).^{xxix} The unique identity of both the regional Kaṇṇimār and classical

Māṭṛkas are same; they are known for the purity, while the former are ‘virgin-goddesses’ and the later are ‘virgin-mothers’.

By way of conclusion, may we suggest the Seven Chaste noted in the *Cilappatikāram* through the Sapta Kaṇṇikas (Figs. 3-6) reach a stage of maturation in the Sapta Māṭṛkas (Fig. 8).^{xxx} However, faint imagery of the Sapta Māṭṛkas is traced back to the Indic culture (Mahadevi 2019: fig. 1 and Rajarajan 2020a) whereas the Sapta Kaṇṇikas are frozen in the folk cult and worship (Fig. 9). We have no material evidence of the seven virtuous women, notified in the *Cilappatikāram* (see note 17). Some confusion prevails regarding the Liṅga, *vaṇṇi*-tree, and *maṭappalli* vis-à-vis the seven virgins. In any case, Kaṇṇaki talks of seven chaste *strīs* not in any way connected with the *itihāsas* and *purāṇas*. These are elements native to the Southern mythic tradition. Maṇimēkalai, the *kaṇṇikā*, embraces Buddhism at a young age. The story says that she was inducted into the Buddhist order by her virtuous mother, ‘a dancing girl’ Mātavi (*Cilappatikāram*, *Kātai* 27, ll. 105-108; Rajarajan 2022a), or to escape the eyes of a mad-lover in pursuit of her beauty (*Maṇimēkalai*, *Kātai* 4). The annals of the “seven *strīs*” are perhaps exemplary archetypes of Jain-Buddhist ethics (see note 14, Balaji 2023: 57-59).

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ⁱ In the case of *pañca*-Pāṇḍavas, even if the mortal frame, the human body, was five, they were one *ātma* according to mythology. In an earlier birth, Pāṇcālī was the *patnī* of a *maharṣi*, who lead a celibate life. At the time of his death, the *ṛṣi* promised to unite with the chaste maiden in the next birth by manifesting in five different human forms, the soul is one. True lovers live in two bodies, the soul one. Another example from southern lore is Ampikāpati, supposed to be the son of poet Kampar, and Amarāvati, a Cōḷa princess. Āṭṭanatti-Ātimanti and Ampikāpati-Amarāvati were popular in the Tamil movie land, but no sculptural evidence has become known so far.

Maturaivīraṇ-Bommi is another genus that needs separate attention and understanding (Cf. Rajarajan 2020a: fn. 13). Though cult value seems to be elevated through the Nāyaka period, the classical definition is denied through its caste identity.

ⁱⁱ The wood carving of the *gopijanapriya* from the folk goddess temple, Kōṇṇiyammaṇ *tēr*, Kōyamputtūr is an interesting sequel depiction. Kṛṣṇa is shown seated on the tree trunk, holding the flute in one hand and the garments of the three *gopīs* ‘Tam. *kaṇṇi*’ in another. All three are depicted fully nude, the first one is hiding behind the tree, the second one pulling the leg of Kṛṣṇa, and the third one is with one hand closing her genital and the other hand raised, in a requesting aspect. In the next order, the nude Kṛṣṇa and *gopī* stand facing each other, and both of them pointing to their genitals are making a conversation. For further reading on literary references, see Kalidos 1997: 117-38 and Rajarajan 2015a: 53-61.

ⁱⁱⁱ Note the following statements of Vaiṣṇava mystics that confirm Kṛṣṇa’s mistresses were countless: *pallāyiram-peruṇṭēvimar* “great Devīs are in several thousand” (Periyālvār *Tirumolī* 4.1.6); *paṭiṇārāmāyiravar-tevimār* “Devīs are 16,000” (Periyālvār *Tirumolī* 4.9.4,

- Nācciyār Tirumoli* 7.9); *palar*-Tēvimār “mistresses are many” (*Periya Tirumoli* 10.8.8). See Rajarajan, 2018.
- iv Vālmiki *Rāmāyaṇa*, ‘*Yuddhakāṇḍa*’, *Sarga* 123, vv. 23-25 cited Rajarajan 2014: 10, note 22.
- v The two *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are principal characters in the hymns of Ālvārs that lead to Rāmaism and Kṛṣṇaism. The polarity from the feminine point of view, Rāma is *ekapatnīvratin* ‘wedded to one wife’ and *maryādāpuruṣottam* ‘exemplar of social propriety’ and Kṛṣṇa is *anekapatnī* ‘desired by many’ and *līlāpuruṣottam* ‘exemplar of playfulness’. They represent two streams *yoga* and *bhoga* of the same religion (cf. Rajarajan 2019).
- vi Tirumaṅkai Ālvār’s *Periya Tirumoli* (11.6.1) hints at *hiranyagarbha* as the deluge and the Cosmic Lord called Aṇṭaṇ as Brahmāṇḍanāyaka, cf. Bṛhadrūpaḥ (*Viṣṇusahasranāma* (272); *tevaṇiṭṭa-muṭṭai* ‘egg laid down by God’ (Maṇimēkalai 27.97), cf. Rajarajan et al. 2017 and Rajarajan 2020: 7.
- vii na jāyate mriyate vā kadācinnāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ|
ajo nityaḥ śāsvato’yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre|| (*Gītā* 2.20)
- viii Such events take place in contemporary times, and such exalted couples are cremated in the same pyre. We have an oral history of a similar occurrence in our family circle that took place some 100 years ago, the great-grandmother’s name being Kāverī-*avvā*.
- ix The Rājput women committed wholesale ‘jauhar’ when their husbands died in a war with the *mlecchas*. See Hutchinson n.d.: figure p. 175.
- x For further reading, see Rajarajan 2022, 2020, 2020a, 2018, 2015, 2012, 2001 and 2000.
- xi According to *Tiruvilaiyāṭṭar Purāṇam*, Śiva invites all the seven seas, Sapta-Samudras to be present in a well in Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal. The mythical Hindu geography refers to seven dvīpa ‘island(s)’, they are Jambūdvīpa, Plakṣadvīpa, Śālmalidvīpa, Kuśadvīpa, Krauñcadvīpa, Śākadvīpa, and Puṣkaradvīpa. These are surrounded by seven seas, called Lavaṇa ‘Salt Sea’, Sea of Sugarcane Juice, Sea of Liquor, Sea of Ghee, Sea of Curd, Sea of Milk and Sea of Water. Jambūdvīpa ‘Bharatvarṣa = Immortal India’ is at the center in which the mythical Mount Meru stands (*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Aṁśa* 2, chap. 2), cf. Rajarajan & Jeyapriya 2013: 44 & Law 1933-34: 4.
- xii The ancient name of Maturai is Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal. According to *Tiruvilaiyāṭṭar Purāṇam*, the surrender of Varuṇa to Lord Sundara laid the foundation of Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal ‘the city of four towers with Liṅga in the center’. The four towers are supposed to be the four clouds that emanate from the *jaṭa* of the Lord. *Nāṇmāṭam* could be the four towers, from which the city takes the name (Rajarajan & Jeyapriya 2013: 83, fig. 57). Shulman (1980: 70) points out that the city Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal derives its name from the four ancient temples to Kaṇṇi, Kariyamāl, Kālī and Ālavāy.
- xiii The *Tirukkuraḷ* (55) says, teyvam toḷāaḷ koḷunan toḷuteḷuvāḷ/ pey enap peyyum maḷai “she will not adulate God, she worships her husband, if she orders it will rain.”
- xiv The other four Jain-Buddhist epics are *Maṇimēkalai*, *Kuṇṭalakēci*, *Nīlakēci* and *Valaiyāpati*, including *Cīvakacintāmaṇi*. All women in these epics are gems, *cilampu* “(precious) anklet”, *mēkalai* (girdle), *kuṇṭalam* (ear ornament), *nīlam* (blue-gem), *vaḷai* (golden bangle) and *cintāmaṇi* (miraculous gem). Kṛṣṇa stealing the precious bangles of *parāṇkuśanāyikā* is a popular notation in the ‘Nālāyiram’ (e.g., *Periya Tirumoli* 3.6.9).
- xv Earlier, the Pāṇḍya enquires about the nativity of the maiden (*Cilappatikāram*, 20. 51-55). At that time, she says she belongs to the country where the ruler of the land was Manuṇṭi-cōḷa (Cōḷa of Manu’s Justice) who drove a chariot on his son who had playfully killed a

calf while driving his *tēr/ratha*. Justice was given because the aggrieved cow rang the bell of justice. The sculptures of this event are present in the Tiruvārūr temple (cf. Shulman 1980: fig. p. 102; Kalidos 1984: 162-63).

- xvi This event is elaborated in the *Tiruvilaiyāṭal* (of Maturai *talapurāṇam*) Episode 64 (cf. Rajarajan & Jeyapriya 2013: pp. 41-42). The bridegroom was challenged in a court of law because he was already married. His first wife moved the wheel of law.

- xvii Nāṭṭār (2011: 216) interprets the myth differently. This authority speaks of *eḷuvaril ilaiyavaḷākiya kaṇṇi* (virgin, last among the seven), Sapta Kaṇṇikas (*Cilappatikāram*, Nāṭṭār ed. p. 216). Her fiancé is said to have died of snakebite. Campantar resurrected the young man so that their marriage could be consummated. The reference to seven virgins is the key motif. In another context, Kaṇṇaki is compared to Cāmuṇḍā, last among the Sapta Mātṛkas[*] (Fig. 8), *aṟuvark-kiḷaiya-naṇaki* (ibidem, ‘Valakkuraikātai’, l. 37). The images of Ēḷukaṇṇimār are found in the Caṅkiliyānpārai folk temple (Rajarajan 2020a: fig. 4) at the base of Ciṟumalai in district Tiṇṭukkal. Tiṇṭukkal linking Maturai with Koṅku (toward Karnāṭaka) is a strategic zone neglected region in historical research. Recently, some effort is on the way to bring this region to the limelight, e.g., R.K. Parthiban in the recent number of QJMS (110: 2, 2019).

[*] The Sapta Mātṛkas usually begin with Vīrabhadra and end with Gaṇapati. In the Ellora caves (e.g., no. XIV) Kāla and Kālī appear following Gaṇapati. Kālī is normally *sthānaka* or *āsana*. However, in recent roadside temples for *sthānaka* and *śayana* Kālī is proliferating due to nascent Hinduism (Fig. 12, Rajarajan 2023b: 59-93, fig. 13). Kālī was Vīrabhadra’s consort.

- xviii The myth seems to be parallel to Umā-Kāmākṣi of Kāñci conducting *tapas* in the River Vegavati (Pālāru) to take the hand of Ekāmparanātha (Fig. 10). She created a sand-Liṅga, which she embraced when floods dashed fast to carry her away. Having embraced the Liṅga, it was the duty of the Liṅgin-Paśuapati to protect Devī (Rajarajan 2020a: 136). Similarly, it is interesting to note that the set of seven Liṅgas worshipped by Mātṛkas in Vaḷuvūr (Fig. 11).

During a festival season, the *utsava* Devī Kālī of the Kālīamman temple ‘village goddess’ Pōṭināyakkappaṭṭi, Tiṇṭukal is transformed into Kāvērīamman (Fig. 14). Kālīamman is depicted with four hands, the front holds the pitcher, as if water is flowing through it, while the back hands are held with crops. Kālī- and Māri-, Ammā[ṇ]s are treated as equals in folk worship, Māri means ‘rain’ (see fn. 23, Rajarajan 2021: 102). Conversion of the local goddess into Brahmanical goddess and as river goddess on special occasions, such as Navaratri festival is quite popular in the South Indian temple worship.

- xix This anecdote is retold in several other Caṅkam poems, e.g., *Akanānūru* (45, 75, 135, 222, 236, 396). Āti-manti means the “primeval monkey”; cf. the chaste wives of Vāli in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. An aesthetic sculpture of the mortally wounded Vāli, and his wailing wives appears on the elevation of the monolithic Kailāsa in Ellora.

- xx See note 3, the monkey-face is an analogy, a phantom. It need not be the literal monkey. Kāraikkālammaiṇār disguised herself as a ghou, which is a metaphor (Rajarajan 2018).

- xxi The *bhikṣuni*-Maṇimēkalai, daughter of Kōvalaṇ and Mātavi, visits Vañci (modern Koṭṭunkallūr) to have a *darśana* of mother-Kaṇṇaki and father-Kōvalaṇ in the *kōṭṭam* “temple” where their *pratima*, *kaṭvuḷ-eḷutiya-paṭimam*, were under worship (*Maṇimēkalai*, 26 ‘Vaṇcimānakaṇ-pukka-kātai’, 1-5). Vañci (identified with Koṭṭunkallūr), Kāñci, Maturai, Araṅkam (Śrīraṅgam) and Pukār were Jain-Buddhist cult centers by about the fifth century CE since the third century BCE (Rajarajan 2007).

- xxii A sculptural illustration of a woman carrying her husband on her head is in the frontal elevation of the 1000-pillared Hall of Sundarēśvara in the Mīnākṣi temple, Maturai (cf.

Rajarajan 2006: pl. 324). In the southern version of mythology, sage Atri tested Anasūyā as a leper who carried him on her head in a basket.

- xxiii In *Devīsahasranāma* (epithets 517 & 519), she is known as Mrtyamārī and Mahāmārī, Māri-ammā[n] is a folk Tamil Goddess, the giver of *māri* “rain” and annihilator of pestilence.
- xxiv Since the Gupta period, the Seven Mothers appears on separate cellas in Indian art. See Rajarajan (2015: 176-177), cites *Devīmāhātmyam* and describes the emergence of the Mātṛkas, their totemic *vr̥kṣas* ‘trees’, the *vahanas* ‘vehicles’ (Rajarajan 2023a) and attributes. According to *Devīmāhātmyam* Cāmuṇḍa is replaced by Nārasimhī/Nṛsimhī. Thus, including Nṛsimhī they are called Aṣṭa Mātṛkā, a good example is the Elephanta group. Shulman (1980: 407, fn. 106) lists eight: Yogeśvarī, Māheśvarī, Vaiṣṇavī, Brāhmaṇī, Kaumārī, Indrāṇī, Yāmī, and Varāhī, citing *Varāha Purāṇa*.
- xxv For a brief discussion on variation in the numbers of Mātṛkas, cf. Rajarajan 2020: fn. 29.
- xxvi Naṅkai refers to Cāmuṇḍā, cf. Rajarajan 2016: 347. Shulman (1980: 246 & 408) finds Naṅkai identical to *aṇaṅku* in the next verse of *Cilampu* (20.38-40), *iṇaiṇai ātal kaṇṭ aruḷiya aṇaṅku* ‘Kālī loves the terrible forest, who kills Tārukaṇ (Tāraka-saṃhāra).
- xxvii Kariyamāl ‘black mother’ is one of the ancient temples of Nāṇmāṭakkūṭal (see fn. 11).
- xxviii The Kāṭṭu ‘forest’ Iruḷar tribe of Tamil region worship Ēḷukaṇṇimār. These tribes are restricted to worship only the Kaṇṇimār, and they do not even bow down to the other Hindu deities. They symbolically worship the goddesses by dressing the wooden planks in female costumes and ornaments. The Iruḷar males keep themselves quarantined from the regular households during the woman's menstruation period, strict restrictions are followed until the pollution is washed away (cf. Rao 1911: 809-812).
- xxix Note the fifth Kaṇṇimār is depicted with a child in the lap (Fig. 13). The recently built Māriyammaṇ Temple, Naṭupaṭṭi is a *grāmadevatālaya* with the *āgamic* form. Similarly, the Ēḷukaṇṇimār *grāmadevatās* are modified into the frame of ‘higher tradition’ Brahmanical goddesses as Sapta Mātṛkas, a reason to depict one of the Kaṇṇika ‘virgin-goddess’ with a child.
- xxx The epithet 263 of *Devīsahasranāma* calls her as Saptasvaramayā (see Rajarajan 2021: 103)

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4. English transl. R.S. Pillai. The Tamil University: Thanjavur 1989.
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Figures

1. Paḷiyar tribe making the ritual process for Ēḷukaṇṇimār worship, Tāṇṭikkuṭi region, Koṭaikkaṇal



2. Ēḷukaṇṇimar temple under the tree, Natham highways, Tiṇṭukal environs with Cīrumaḷai background



3-6. Ēlukāṇṇimār terracottas around Cīrumaḷai and Koṭaikkaṇaḷ, Tiṇṭukkaḷ



7. *Gopijanapriya*, wood carving, Kōṇīyamman temple car, Kōyamputtūr



8. Sapta Mātṛkas, Rock-cut temple, Tirukōkaraṇam



9. Sapta Kaṇṇikas wood carving, temple car for Ammaṇ/Dēvī, Paṭṭiśvarar temple, Pēṛūr



10. Umā embracing Liṅga (modern painting), Ekāmrānātha temple, Kāñci



11. Liṅgas worshipped by Sapta Mātrkas, Vīraṭṭēśvara Temple, Vaḷuvūr



12. Śayanamūrti Kālī (contemporary), Cempaṭṭi-Vattalakkunṭu highway, Tiṇṭukal



13. Ēḷukaṇṇimar, Māriyamman Temple, Naṭupaṭṭi village, Gandhigram to Cempaṭṭi road, Tiṇṭukal



14. Kālī as Kāverīamman, the Kālīamman temple, Pōṭināyakkampatti, Tiṇṭukal