

[published in 2018 in Manu V. Devadevan (ed.), *Clio and Her Descendants. Essays for Kesavan Veluthat*. Delhi: Primus Books, pp.454–478]

## On Cāttan. Conflicting Statements about a South Indian Deity

Gilles Tarabout

**/p.454/**

This essay aims at discussing conflicting representations of a South Indian deity, Cāttan (or Chathan, according to its popular rendition in English). Well known throughout South India for its magical powers, Cāttan is particularly invoked in Kerala. There exist regional variations, and I shall focus my study on observations and discussions I had during two ethnographic fieldworks limited to the Thrissur district in 1991 and 1994, complemented by various published materials.<sup>1</sup> I may have missed recent developments and I am quite unaware of the corresponding traditions in the former Malabar district; it is also clear that another specific study would be required to dwell upon how the media have recently developed their own treatment of Cāttan. As it is, I hope that the following observations may still be of some utility.

One of the issues addressed by this study is how to characterize a deity who is the object of conflicting opinions and practices. As a way to sideline this difficulty in English, I shall use here ‘deity’, but Cāttan has also been variously described as a ‘spirit’, a ‘ghost’, an ‘imp’, a ‘demon’, and a ‘god’. The terminology itself implies a moral judgment—a condemnation, a disregard, a fear, or a devotional feeling, that is, socially and ideologically marked viewpoints. How then is the social scientist supposed to write about Cāttan? I take the case of this deity only as an example, as I trust that the question equally concerns the description of many other ones.<sup>2</sup>

**/p.455/**

Generally speaking, there is already a first difficulty with the usual description made of ‘pantheons’ as constituted of (divine) persons. In a communication pronounced in 1960, the historian of Ancient Greece, Jean-Pierre Vernant, pointed out:

The Greek gods are powers, not persons. Religious thought is a response to the problems of organizing and classifying these powers. It distinguishes among various types of supernatural powers, each with its own dynamic and mode of action, its own sphere and limitations. It imagines the complex interplay of their relations in terms of hierarchy, balance, opposition, and complementarity. It is not concerned with their personal or non-personal aspects. True, the divine world is composed not of vague and anonymous forces but of well-defined figures, each with its own name and status, its own attributes, and its own characteristic adventures. But that is not to say that this world is composed of separate individuals, autonomous focuses of existence and action, ontological units –

persons, in our sense of the word. A divine power does not really have any existence of its own. It exists only by virtue of the network of relationships that make it part of the divine system as a whole. And within this network, it is not necessarily a single entity but can equally well be plural, either as an indefinite plurality or a fixed number of figures.<sup>3</sup>

This inspiring perspective that considers gods as powers, and not as persons, nevertheless presupposes a certain degree of consensus concerning ‘the network of relationships that make it part of the divine system as a whole’; it presupposes as well that the ‘pantheon’ forms a whole, according to an overall structuralist perspective. My argument here is that both assumptions do not necessarily fit facts. In Hinduism at least, the potential list of gods and goddesses is open ended, and, as this essay aims to show, people may disagree about a deity’s relations to others, so that there is no ‘true’ account of the divine hierarchy from an observer’s vantage point. In an earlier work, I suggested that Hindu gods could—following Vernant—indeed be considered as powers; however, the ‘pantheon’ (the word may not apply well) presented a complexity and a fluidity that was not amenable to a structural analysis in terms of the figures involved, though such an analysis could be envisioned in terms of values or functions.<sup>4</sup> In the present essay, I would specifically like to take into account the fact that people may hold conflicting views about some deities, entailing an additional problem for description.

It is well admitted that caste affiliation or/and the level of education largely determine one’s outlook on divine beings in Hinduism. For instance, the general feeling expressed by upper castes or the urban social /p. 456/ elite about the gods and the religions of those castes which are deemed to be of lesser status, or of ‘village people’, is often one of condescension, if not of condemnation of what is seen as ‘superstition’.<sup>5</sup> This feeling finds its echo at the academic level in scholarly views opposing ‘religion’ to ‘folk religion’ and ‘folk deities’, or a ‘great tradition’ to a ‘little tradition’. It typically corresponds to a ‘two-tier’ model of religious ideas and practices which historians of religion have already criticized for other, different contexts.<sup>6</sup> Though agreeing with this criticism, I shall however not enter the debate as my discussion bears on a different issue. Though I reckon that attitudes towards Cāttan are being largely (but not mechanically) informed by social position, my interest here resides in bringing out the existence of conflicting discourses on a given Hindu deity, which therefore suggests a different, supplementary kind of indeterminacy than the one resulting from Vernant’s analysis (gods as powers and not as persons).

## **The First Portrait**

The reputation of Cāttan extends throughout Kerala and in many parts of the other southern states, where his action is regularly attributed to ‘magicians’ from Kerala.<sup>7</sup> He is often also called Kuṭṭiccāttan, ‘child/small Cāttan’; the two terms are synonymous or, at times, establish a contrast between brothers, Cāttan being the eldest and encompassing a multiplicity (hundreds) of Kuṭṭiccāttans—he is thus not only ‘a single entity’ but is equally ‘plural’, as Vernant would have put it. For the purpose of this essay, the two names will be treated as equivalents. The deity has many other names, some of which will be mentioned later on.<sup>8</sup>

As a first step into the diversity of discourses concerning Cāttan, here is an evocation of his activities as conceived and told by Viramma, an elderly Paraya woman of the Pondicherry area in Tamil Nadu:

My three first children were born at Velpakkam, at my mother's. Their births went well and they were in good shape when they died. The imp [Kutticcāttan] who lived in our house at Velpakkam devoured them. My grandfather on my father's side knew sorcery. A friend who was a sorcerer taught him. But we are not of that calling at all. What my grandfather really knew was how to 'bind' a person, how to draw somebody to him by magic. People came to see him at Velpakkam. He didn't ask for money, but they'd bring him a gourd of palm wine, some camphor, some betel and some bananas for offerings. They used to say that he called up the imp, talked to it and asked it to go along with him when he went out. He lived with him, basically! When my grandfather died, we tried to drive that spirit away because he really was a pest. But it was /p. 457/ no use. He'd come back and sit down, assuming the form of my grandfather; he'd join in conversations, calling my grandmother by her name like her dead husband used to. My grandmother used to answer back, 'Ah! The only answer I'll give you is with my broom, you dog! I recognise you! I know who you are! Get out of here!' As for him, he'd just throw tamarind seeds in her face. When a sorcerer came from Ossur to try and get rid of him, he became plainly vicious. The sorcerer told us he couldn't do anything against him. The spirit had taken root in the ground. He was old and cunning: we were the ones who had to go. He destroyed everything! Everything! Not even a garlic clove would grow! My father had to sell his paddy field. I gave birth three times there: none of those children survived. He ate them as and when they were born. Nothing prospered. That's how it is with spirits. Once you start working with them you have to carry on otherwise they'll turn against you. That's also why I haven't gone and given birth at Velpakkam anymore.<sup>9</sup>

We find similar characteristics often expressed in Kerala also: the magical control by a sorcerer requiring Cāttan's help; the risk incurred when the sorcerer dies and Cāttan's cult is interrupted; the (unrequited) intimacy of Cāttan with the affected family; and the possible shift from innocuous pranks to deadly deeds. This type of representation, with some variants, is well established, as a brief survey of English works of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries suggests.

### **Cāttan in Early Works**

In the printed colonial literature in English, which conveys the views of Englishmen or of an educated (generally, high caste) English-speaking Indian elite, Cāttan is spoken of in rather disparaging terms. Perhaps the first reference in English to this deity is to be found in Francis Buchanan's report published in 1807. We learn that a low status 'slave caste' living near the jungles of the Wynad district has as deity 'Cutichatun' (i.e. Kutticcāttan), who has no visible

image but who is offered rice, coconuts and spirituous liquors. Buchanan also mentions that for higher castes the deity's name 'signifies a juggler'.<sup>10</sup> A standard dictionary whose first edition dates back to 1923, upholds the latter view, saying that Kuṭṭiccāttan is a 'Form to be served' (*sēvamūrṭti*) by 'jugglers [*ceppaṭividyakkār*] and others'.<sup>11</sup> It also fits with a remark by the late Shri L.S. Rajagopalan who, in a personal communication, stated that in former days, when a magic show was going on, elders would tell children that the magician's ability came as a result of propitiating Kuṭṭiccāttan.

A demoniacal flavour is offered by Fawcett, who spent three and a half years in the northern part of Kerala in the late nineteenth century, and who writes that Kuṭṭiccāttan is 'one of the many familiar /p. 458/ demons of the Malayalis'; he classifies him as an 'evil spirit' or a 'cruel form' (*durmūrṭti*) used by magicians.<sup>12</sup> This is also the substance of what L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer writes on the subject in the early twentieth century:

The Parayans of Malabar and Cochin are remarkable for their black magic, the secrets of which they never let out even under fear of death. In rural parts, they are consulted in all matters relating to theft, demoniacal influence, and the killing of enemies, for all of which they are amply rewarded. Whenever anything is stolen in a family, a Paraya magician is, by preference, sought after, and informed of the occurrence. Giving hopes of recovery, the wily Parayan receives from his client half a rupee worth of paddy and a few annas with which he purchases some plantain fruits, a cocoanut or two, some toddy, camphor, frankincense, and rice flour. He bathes and goes to his favourite deity Parakutty (a debased form of Vishnu called also Kutty Chathan or little Sastha, which is represented by a stone placed in front of his hut).<sup>13</sup>

A vivid evocation is to be found in a paper by K.V. Krishna Ayyar.<sup>14</sup> The author introduces Cāttan as 'the imp of mischief in South Indian demonology', bent on polluting food, water, even sacred places, with filth. Things can also get worse. Concerning a high caste family in Calicut (Kozhikode), the author writes:

One day Chathan developed into an incendiary. Jackets, petticoats, straw and dried palm leaves were suddenly found to be in flames. Inanimate objects seemed to quicken into life; pictures and mirrors were heard to fall from the pegs on which they had been hung and broken. Pottery, china and cooking utensils of bell-metal, brass and copper, were violently flung about the rooms.

The author adds that Cāttan is said to afflict people only if he has been sent by a magician, at the demand of an enemy of the victim.<sup>15</sup>

About the same time, K.M. Panikkar, writing quite derisively about the religious practices of Nayars in the former Malabar district—'an extraordinary mixture of Hindu and Dravidian cults' where the 'primitive beliefs have survived to a great extent'<sup>16</sup>—considers that 'the spiritual ideas of the Nāyars themselves seem to be confined to ghosts, spirits, and to a comic elf called Kutti-Chāttan'.<sup>17</sup> He elaborates further on the supposed 'comic' dimension of Cāttan:

*Kutti Chattan* (sometimes merely *Chattan*, *Kutti* means boy, a term of endearment, *Chattan* is supposed to be a corrupted form of Satan) is in no sense a god. He is something like Puck, very much inclined to mischief. He is supposed to be a dwarf, though he can assume any other form or remain invisible as he chooses. He never goes out of his way to harm anyone, though if anybody /p. 459/ injures him once, *Kutti Chattan* never forgives and keeps on troubling him for life. His favourite method of annoying anybody is by throwing stones at the house or dropping unclean things in the food. . . . *Kutti Chattan* can, of course, be tamed by magicians and bribed to do whatever his patrons like. There is a story that a Brahmin landlord who was also a magician tamed a *Kutti Chattan* and used him for the purpose of keeping a watch on his things. A Christian tenant of his who had gone to pay the rent, not knowing the existence of the invisible and mysterious detective, stole certain things and took them home with him. But lo! *Kutti Chattan* had followed him, and the man was found dead next morning, and the stolen things were in their place. Such is the power of *Kutti Chattan*, the household elf of Malabar.<sup>18</sup>

In the same epoch, Cāttan could also be presented as the family god among some castes deemed of low status, for instance the Pulayas who, according to Ananthkrishna Iyer, ‘are animists, but are slowly coming on to the higher forms of worship. Their gods are Parakutty, Karinkutty, Chathan, and the spirits of their ancestors.’<sup>19</sup> More recently, writing also about Pulayas, Father Joseph Thaliath ranks Cāttan amongst their secondary deities: ‘The most common form of worship practiced by the Pulayas is a sacrifice to spirits, who are called Chāthān, and to their departed relatives. Both the Chāthān and the spirits of the deceased relatives are feared for their evil designs. The said sacrifice therefore is intended to counteract their evil intentions.’<sup>20</sup> Here also, Cāttan can develop into a multiplicity (there are 335+1 of them), which the author characterizes as evil spirits tempting people to do wrong (for instance, one of them incites people to commit suicide): ‘they have power to inflict sickness, pain, misfortune, etc., upon men. The Pulayas are therefore very anxious to appease them.’<sup>21</sup>

Today, many people in Kerala share some of these ideas: Cāttan is a demon, an evil spirit, a deity in some low status castes, or simply a mischievous imp if not a comic character. He can be called for doing ‘tricks’: jugglery as well as witchcraft, and, in the latter case, the sorcerer may direct him to cure or inflict misfortune.

### **Cāttan and Witchcraft**

Indeed, a frequent affirmation is that Cāttan acts at the instigation of a ‘sorcerer’, a mantravādi (master of mantras), elsewhere in India often called a ‘tantrika’ who performs ‘mantratantras’ (sorcery). In Kerala, people from various castes may be said to be mantravādīs. Two Namboodiri brahman *manas* (Houses) are of particular repute as far as the service of Cāttan is concerned: Kallur and Kattumadam. I had /p. 460/ discussions with members of two distinct branches of Kattumadam in 1991, one in Valanchery (Malappuram district), the other in Vanneri

(Thrissur district). They held very similar discourses concerning the services they perform to Cāttan.

According to them, Cāttan is an *upadēvata*, a ‘secondary’ deity subordinate to the main goddess of the family. In the Valanchery branch, its original place is a jackfruit tree, *plāvũ* (associated with the deity’s birth in local stories); a movable icon has been made for the cult. In the Vanneri branch, he has been fully installed and consecrated (*pratiṣṭha*) in recent years. Kattumadam mantravādis can advise their Cāttan, but the final control is with the *mana*’s goddess. Cāttan’s mantra was acquired long ago by an ancestor through his ascetic exertion, *sādhanam*; nowadays such a *sādhanam* is no more required as the knowledge of the mantra transmitted through generations is deemed to be sufficient.<sup>22</sup>

Both branches affirm to practise only ‘pure’ rituals, offering oblations in fire (*hōma*) and, at times, a substitute of blood (*guruti*, usually a mixture of turmeric and lime in water). Their Cāttans are therefore ‘pure’, ‘vegetarian’—one could say ‘brahmanical’. People confronted with various problems come to Kattumadam, where, according to my interlocutors, protection is exclusively offered: no demand for the destruction of enemies is entertained. The usual procedure follows the standard tantric ritual of *āvāhanam*, transferring the agent said to be at the root of the problem (e.g., a *prētam* or a *bhūtam*, diagnosed during a preliminary consultation with an astrologer) onto an engraved metal leaf in silver or gold which is then ritually disposed of, the metal remaining the property of the mantravādi. For these brahmans, therefore, Cāttan is not a mere imp but a comparatively powerful, though subordinate, deity, honoured by ‘pure’ offerings; the whole of the ritual and the conception of the deity fall within local (right-hand) tantric practices and representations.<sup>23</sup>

I found similar tantric considerations expressed by sorcerers of various castes. The *sādhanam* for acquiring the mantra of Cāttan was for instance described to me by K.N.B. Asan, a Kaniyan astrologer-cum-mantravādi of Thiruvananthapuram belonging to a caste of astrologers formerly deemed to be of ‘untouchable’ status.

There is a kind of sorcery called *cāttansēva*. *Cāttansēva* means pleasing Cāttan and thereby getting control over him. Strict austerities for a period of about two or three *maṇḍalam* [period of forty-one days] are to be observed to win the favours of Cāttan. As a result of chanting mantras with the attendant rituals, /p. 461/ one will achieve a state of purity of mind. This purity will be perceivable only to the sensory organs of the person concerned. Others cannot have any idea about it. Cāttan actually manifests before the person who wins his favour. He can see Cāttan when his mind is concentrated in meditation. . . . A man acquires these powers not only by chanting mantras but also by engaging the mind in meditation. As a result of concentration of mind on a particular object, a strange power emanates within the mind. The chanting of mantras converts this strange power into a divine one. It is this power that enables the possessor to perform acts for and against *abhicāram* [black magic]. . . . He should start practicing magic only after winning the favour of his favorite god or goddess. He should also practice *nyāsam*, *aṅganyāsam*, *bharannyāsam* [imposition of mantras/deities on the body], *prāṇayamaṅ* [control of breath], etc., which would convert him into a

divine person. . . . It is *mantrasādhanam* [ascetic practice with mantras] that a student of magic gets from his guru in oral coaching. It is after repeated practice of *mantrasādhanam* that a magician starts practicing *mantrajapadhyānam* [repetition of mantras and visualization of the god]. As a result of *mantrajapadhyānam* one gets *dēvatasiddhi* [power over a *dēvata*].<sup>24</sup>

A similar conception is conveyed in a poetic way in the story of Cāttan sung by bards of castes deemed to be of low status during the festivals of some Cāttan temples of Thrissur district. An ascetic, Konnan, acquires the vision and the control of Cāttan after strenuous ascetic exertions that follow tantric procedures. Thereafter, whenever Konnan wishes, Cāttan appears ‘at the merest call, at a snap of the fingers’ and grants any boon.<sup>25</sup>

Sorcerers across the caste hierarchy thus share a common discourse about the tantric practice (initially) needed for obtaining the mantra of Cāttan and for making the deity appear and obey. However, while Kattumadam affirms to perform only ‘pure’ rituals for protective purpose, other mantravādis do often offer blood sacrifice (cocks) and alcohol, and Asan admitted that a mantravādi may also launch occult attacks with the help of Cāttan: ‘In case the person who wins mastery over Cāttan sends him on a mission for inflicting harm on a person or for bringing a person before his master, Cāttan will obey the commands.’ This possibility echoes a widespread popular perception concerning the deity’s ambivalence. In fact, he can be quite feared.

A study in psychology was conducted in the 1960s by Dr Jagathambika in Alwaye, using the ‘multiple personality’ paradigm of analysis. Patients complaining that they suffered from spirit possession came; they were put under hypnosis and their ‘secondary personalities’ asked to express themselves; the patients were then progressively cured /p. 462/ in successive séances.<sup>26</sup> One such patient was ‘Anna’, an unmarried Roman Catholic woman aged 35, who said she was possessed by Cāttan, Kuṭṭicāttan, Chovva (another ‘cruel’ deity) and the *prētas* of three different people. Under hypnosis, Cāttan ‘spoke out’:

As soon as I came to Anna’s home, they began to have misfortunes. I was sent by the infant’s [= Anna’s] aunt (her paternal uncle’s wife) and her brother. We were asked to sit in disguise and so we cannot expose ourselves. . . . We create all sorts of illness to the members of the family. We have shown them a sign indicating our arrival. We made a child ill and within 24 hours, it died. We didn’t show any more signs. After the first indication, we were creating some illness or the other to the members of the family and we were remaining disguised in the form of illness like that. The people who sent us had a purpose. They wanted to destroy this family.<sup>27</sup>

## Cāttan as God

By contrast, Cāttan is also installed as the main deity in many family shrines in the Thrissur area and in former Travancore, especially in the Ezhava caste. He receives a type of service which is quite widespread at this level of society for different deities, which at times

includes offerings of cocks and alcohol. This is also the alimentation regime of many castes and there is among them an explicit feeling of intimacy between the people and these non-vegetarian deities. As an Ezhava friend told me when speaking about the food and the drink enjoyed by Cāttan, ‘Svāmi was like that’—meaning he was like us.

His cult was certainly more developed before. The socio-religious reformist movement led by Sri Narayana Guru (1856–1928) at the beginning of the century advocated many reforms for the caste and for its rituals, among which was the suppression of animal sacrifices and offerings of alcohol: Cāttan’s cult, with its attendant cock sacrifices and consumption of alcohol, was singled out many times by the Guru. As a result, the cult has often been discarded and idols of Cāttan have been re-baptized as Ayyappan/Śāstā, with the denial by their devotees that it could ever have been otherwise before.<sup>28</sup>

Cāttan as a lineage god, though discredited in the eyes of an Ezhava reformist elite, was not necessarily a sorcerer’s tool in this context. There are still today shrines dedicated to him, as there are also for other similar deities who have equally dangerous, or dubious, reputes (Māṭan, Yakṣi, etc.) and who have been established as family deities among various /p. 463/ castes. However, some family shrines are also used for *mantravādam* (sorcery). This is the case in the Thrissur area (especially in and around Peringottukkara), where Ezhava family shrines consecrated to Cāttan also publicize their magical expertise.<sup>29</sup> They advertise their capacity to solve all problems, placing advertisements in English and in the four southern languages on boards in various public places (see Fig. 16.1) and in newspapers, besides making a large use of the internet.

People from anywhere and any religion<sup>30</sup> may go there in order to see their difficulties solved; in case they are unable to come personally, they may order the required rituals and get the benefits by correspondence. Like all those who seek magical aid, they may ask for an increase in wealth, a hike in profession and business, the immediate possession of desired things, a return of affection, the removal of effects of black magic, the elimination of enemies, etc. Some shrines have an extremely thriving business, denounced in the press as an exploitation of superstitions, and their services may be requisitioned by businessmen, politicians, or film stars.<sup>31</sup> It is a highly competitive field, and shrines rival with each other, spy on each other, and caution potential clients against going to the wrong address.<sup>32</sup>





Fig. 16.1: Boards advertising rival branches of the Kanadi family in Peringottukkara (1994), courtesy author.

/p. 464/

There, Cāttan is simultaneously a mantravādi’s deity and a lineage’s presiding god, permanently installed and regularly worshipped (see Fig. 16.2 and 16.3 for an illustration of the development of one such shrine between 1991 and 1994).<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 16.2: Kanadi Dēvasthānam in 1991, shrine of Cāttan, courtesy author.

In these shrines, Cāttan is said to directly give his advice by ritually possessing a human medium (which is a hereditary charge): there is no need here of consulting an astrologer. The relationship between the client and the god is expressed in terms of devotion (the fact that temple owners may be doing a brisk business out of devotees' faith may explain the development of this devotional attitude, but does not invalidate the /p. 465/ devotion of the devotees themselves). Many devotees have at home a bronze effigy of the god mounted on a buffalo (see Fig. 16.6), or of a tantric maṇḍalaṃ engraved on a metal plaque that is regularly charged with power at festival times.



Fig. 16.3: Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ in 1994, entrance and maṇḍapaṃ in front of the shrine, courtesy author

**This image was not reproduced in the published version**



Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ (now Peringottukkara Dēvasthānaṃ) in 2016 (website)





Fig. 16.4: Cāttan on Lord Śiva's lap, Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ 1994, courtesy author.

During the festivals of the most successful temples, a huge crowd of /p. 466/ devotees congregates, and the story of the god—already alluded to—is sung as part of the ceremonies. In this story, Cāttan appears as a full-fledged god, also called Māyāttan or Māyā, (illusion) and evoked as a beautiful, golden child. Cāttan is now the son of Śiva and of Pārvati who momentarily took the guise of a tribal girl, Kuḷivāka, for whom Śiva had felt a sudden passion (Fig. 16.5). Kuḷivāka then brings up the child in the forest until he fulfills his mission—to kill an Asura. His purpose accomplished, Cāttan does not wish to go to Kailāsa and prefers to stay among mortals, for he has still a lot of deeds to perform on earth.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 16.5: Kaḷaṃ of Cāttan with Kuḷivāka, Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ 1994, courtesy author.

In this song, the evocation of Cāttan's figure and behaviour sharply contrasts with the dark aspects which had first seemed to characterize this 'imp' or 'evil spirit':

*Nārada Maharṣi*  
*Went near Gold-crowned (ponmuṭi) Māyattān.*  
*Keeping both hands reverentially*  
*Māyattān takes his stance.*  
*To look at the beautiful face of Māyattān,*  
*It is like [looking at] a lighted lamp,*  
*Like the rising of the sun,*  
*Like the ruby kept on the chest*  
*With a fine glow,*  
**/p. 467/**  
*Like the beautiful face of Lord Paramēśvaran.*  
*The Sage grabbed Ponmuṭi Māyattān with his hands*  
*And lifted him up.*  
*Putting him on his lap*  
*He began to speak to Māyattān.<sup>35</sup>*

Indeed, in these Cāttan temples, the deity is addressed as Svāmi, Lord, or Bhagavān, pointing to an ascribed high divine status and stressing a devotional dimension. He is said to be a brother of Ayyappan/Śāstā (Fig. 16.4), and the name Cāttan itself is sometimes said to be a variant of Śāstā.



Fig. 16.6: Bronze cast of Cāttan, similar to the ones cared for in some devotees' house, courtesy author

He gets also another name, Viṣṇumāyā, and some booklets published about Cāttan bear solely this more prestigious name /p. 468/ on the cover. According to one of these publications, ‘Vishnu Maya means the life energy that pervades, preserves and propagates everything by engaging itself in the process of creation.’<sup>36</sup> He is a combination of the powers of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Parāśakti, he is the discus of Viṣṇu, he is ‘the only shelter at any respect in any “yuga”’.<sup>37</sup>

The latter text has been published by one of the most famous, and perhaps ancient, of these family-cum-mantravādi Cāttan temples, the Avanangattu Kaḷari, which Kottarattil Sankunni evoked in one of his stories.<sup>38</sup> It is one of the temples where the devotion due to Cāttan as a higher god is most extolled. It has published numerous bhajans glorifying Cāttan-Viṣṇumāyā and a full purāṇam in verse composed in the early sixties by the then head of the family, and regularly reprinted since;<sup>39</sup> the purāṇam bears as subtitle: ‘The Divine Plays [līlakaḷ] of Lord Dharmaśāstā’, stressing that Cāttan is also Śāstā. This link between Cāttan and Viṣṇumāyā or Śāstā is complex and not necessarily new.<sup>40</sup> What is new is the attempt by the Avanangattu Kaḷari and other shrines to relegate the names of Cāttan or Kuṭṭicāttan to the background and to put at the forefront more prestigious ones such as Śāstā or Viṣṇumāyā, opening up for a full-fledged devotional literature which would probably be more difficult to develop addressing Cāttan by name.

As an example, the text of the publicity found on Avanangattu Kaḷari website<sup>41</sup> concerning a Kathakaḷi play that can be offered as *valipāṭṭu* is significant. Entitled ‘Sreevishnumaya Charitham’ (The Story of Śrī Viṣṇumāyā), it lasts five hours (parts can be separately offered) and costs Rs.34,000. According to the website, it presents the

ancient Vishnumaya story in a holistic method. Narrated as debate between Lord Sree Krishna and Deva Guru Sree Narada Muni. The play beautifully portrays the HOLY HUNT of Lord Parama Siva and the arrival of VISHNUMAYA DEVAN to Sree Avanangattu Kalari; ... The devotees even today offer this as a PUJA offering and the devotees are believed to be showered with blessings of Vishnumayadevan with lots of fortune, peace and family harmony and ASTA AISWARAYA (Eight Blessings viz. Peace, Fortune, Beauty, Wealth, Power, Health, Long Life & Happiness).<sup>42</sup>

Despite this show in devotion, the possible unpleasant aspects of Cāttan may not be totally forgotten, because tales about his deeds, and the fears he embodies, are widespread all over Kerala. However, the devotional rhetoric gives a varnish to Cāttan’s usual reputation. It helps to foster a front of respectability to the temples, which—at least for those economically successful—is useful for publicly staging their high connections. The celebration of the seventieth birthday of the owner of /p. 469/ Kanadi Dēvasthānam in the early 1990s, for instance, was thus graced by the presence of various senior politicians (including a state minister), film stars, a district judge, a religious swami, the owner of a leading newspaper, the head of a former royal family, etc. The celebrations were an opportunity as well for the temple’s owner to show publicly a deep concern for social welfare: distributing free food, funding a public library and two water supplies, sponsoring a relief fund for victims of an earthquake in

Maharashtra, etc. On the website of the present state of this dēvasthānaṃ, now Peringottukkara Dēvasthānaṃ, which advertises itself as a ‘Vishnumaya Bhuvanesvari’ Temple, even more numerous and diverse political connections are currently displayed in an atmosphere of devotional fervor and spiritual advancement.<sup>43</sup>

## Divine Hierarchies

Cāttan in these temples, as a full-fledged god, is part of a wider hierarchy of divine beings. According to ideas shared locally across castes, he resides—together with Hanumān—in the precincts of the prestigious Triprayar Śrī Rāma Temple served by Namboodiri brahmins. However, both deities are invisible, there is no physical figuration of them: it is only a ‘mental conception’ (*sankalpam*). Moreover, according to K.V. Damodaran, then head of Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ (in the 1990s), the god has to attend Śrī Rāma’s pūjā daily in the Triprayar Temple; his service in his own shrine can be performed only after this is over. Besides, according to him, Cāttan goes along with the Lord as an armed escort during the annual procession of Rāma to the mammoth festival of Arattupuzha (this is still a *sankalpam*, a ‘mental conception’, as Cāttan remains invisible, no effigy of him taking part in the procession). Therefore, during this time, Cāttan’s shrine is closed and no pūjā is conducted until Rāma’s procession returns. Cāttan is thus locally considered to be part of the armed retinue of a higher brahmanical god.

But, he has his own retinue too. The compound of the Ezhava mantravādi temples hosts various secondary deities (e.g., Brahmarakṣassū, Bhuvanēśvari, Vanadurga, Malakuravan/Malakuratti, etc.) and, frequently, the *samādhi* of the founding ancestor. Besides, at festival times, groups of specialists arrive and bring their own subordinate deities. In Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ, for instance, one such group called Tiramannars (a Velan sub-caste) was performing (at the two festivals I could observe, in 1991 and in 1994) various dances and rituals, and impersonated various deities. Among these deities is the ‘Hunter of the /p. 470/ Mountain’ (*malanāyāṭi*), a violent and dangerous character, subordinate to Cāttan. This difference in violence is expressed at the ritual level. Cocks offered to Cāttan first have their neck slightly cut in order to let the blood drip on the altar, and are then decapitated and thrown on the ground. By contrast, the cock offered to the Hunter is at once decapitated by the god himself, incarnated in his oracle, and its blood is drunk by the god-incarnate directly at the chicken’s neck. This Hunter in turn has his own following of ancestors and so-called ‘tribal’ gods who are worshipped in the Tiramannars’ own shrine in their family compound in Irinjalakkuda. Additionally, there is a crowd of wild creatures appearing for a masked procession during the festival: a tiger, a buffalo, ‘tribals’ of the mountains, black ghosts of ancestors (some masks bear a similarity with masks put on by performers during another kind of procession called kummāṭṭi, found in the Thrissur-Palghat region particularly during Ōṇam festival). They do not receive any cult, but their impersonators get a small ritual payment. Visually, we are reminded that behind and beneath the lesser gods and their cults, there are a lot of wilder and more obscure powers roaming freely, that are not seated for worship but are eager to present their own respects to the gods for whom they act as attendants.<sup>44</sup>

This divine hierarchy has to be understood in connection with the social setting. This is not to say that the divine world is a replication of human society—it is not—but it should be

stressed that the characterization of the gods and their mutual relationships are dependent on the relations of power and status existing between their human devotees: higher castes tend to talk with some condescension about the gods and the ritual practices of lower status castes (for instance, Brahmans about Ezhavas, and Ezhavas about Tiramannars). Also, gods follow a hierarchical relationship more or less accepted across castes—Cāttan is said to be attending to Rāma, as the Hunter attends to Cāttan. The ordering of this divine realm appears directly linked to the degree of violence involved in their respective ritual practices (vegetarian offerings or blood sacrifice or drinking the blood directly), which are correlated with caste status. In this respect, Cāttan does not present particular, different features when compared to other deities of the same level.

### A Nice Guy in the Film Industry

There is a last set of representations concerning Cāttan that echoes the opinion of K.M. Panikkar at the beginning of the twentieth century, for /p. 471/ whom Cāttan was a comic elf, a kind of ‘Puck’. It is promoted by the film and TV industry—on which I have done no fieldwork and on which I am therefore limited in my comments (there is in particular a question left open: why is it that Kuṭṭicāttan has caught the imagination of movie producers and their audience? Is it the mixture of childhood and magic power that gives him this quasi-iconic quality?).

Hailed as the first 3-D film made in India, in 1984, *My Dear Kuttichathan* was a big success at the box office (with a collection of Rs.1.5 crore, i.e. fifteen million rupees); originally filmed in Malayalam, it was dubbed into Hindi (*Chhota Chetan*) and into Tamil (*Chutti Chathan*), then remastered and enlarged as recently as 2011. Here, Kuṭṭicāttan is enslaved by a sorcerer practicing black magic; usually invisible, he appears as a young boy (played by the child artist M.P. Ramnath), who befriends three other children. One of them is a girl and Cāttan helps her change the attitude of her father who is an alcoholic. In the end, the children help release Cāttan from the sorcerer. Cāttan transforms into a bat and flies away.<sup>45</sup>

The nice little guy full of magic has more recently found new incarnations in Malayalam animation programmes. In *Ōṃ Hrīṃ Kuṭṭicāttan*, for instance, Kuṭṭicāttan is caring for the small animals in the forest; as the advertisement goes, the movie is replete ‘with many humorous stories songs & moral stories which could help the young buds to study & nourish their thoughts & knowledge’. Another animation programme, *Jiṃ Bū Bā Kuṭṭicāttan*, features a Kuṭṭicāttan coming to life out of a computer drawing and befriending the two young children who drew him. In both animation movies, the iconography of Cāttan is strikingly different from the usual local ones, as he now possesses an unmistakable devilish tail very much according to Western—or globalized—conventions.<sup>46</sup>



**These images were not reproduced in the published version**



Ōṃ Hṛīṃ Kuṭṭicāttan  
(from website)



Jim Bū Bā Kuṭṭicāttan  
(from website)

## Conclusion

Recent observations do not actually reveal completely new ‘categories of Cāttan’ when compared to what authors wrote in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. However, there have been changes. If Panikkar in 1918 described Cāttan as a kind of Puck, it is only recently that, in movies, Cāttan has evolved into an endearing chap, with aesthetics that cater to an expected market among middle-class viewers. If connections between Cāttan and forms or manifestations of Viṣṇu are noted down in early anthropological surveys, the move by some temples to substitute Viṣṇumāyā in place of Cāttan as a front name is recent, as is the spectacular development of devotional discourses and attitudes. If /p. 472/ *mantravādam* activity in some family shrines dedicated to Cāttan among Ezhavas (of which the number has declined) is probably ancient, it is only recently that this has become a huge business in the most successful of them. Thus, changes are there, but they seem to follow different trends, requiring a cautious appraisal of what religious ‘modernity’ may mean.

The cult of Cāttan has repeatedly been denounced as a superstitious remnant from a bygone age, a primitive set of beliefs at odds with the development of rational thought in modern Kerala. For instance, under the title ‘Black magic is big bucks for Kerala village’, an article expresses typical views:

Many centuries coexist here and the tradition of rational thought and healthy skepticism that the state is famous for is nowhere to be seen. For Peringottukara is best known for the practice of black magic, especially one involving chathan or kuttichathan. This figure is a dark avatar of Vishnu who rides a buffalo, and whose mastery in removing, or placing, hurdles in mortal life is never questioned by believers. . . .

Those in the know . . . will tell you how easily and seamlessly these priests shuttle between the spiritual and temporal worlds. Many of them have got incredibly rich and run petrol pumps and cinema theatres. They have also put in place a fairly



well-oiled structure to run the faith industry, including staff to woo devotees from far and wide.

According to advertising industry circles, the Kanadi groups spend lakhs on publicity every year. Some of the Malayalam newspapers which were reluctant to carry advertisements of such dispensers of divine blessings have now changed tack. Sociologists say that for all its literacy and Left-dominated political and cultural scene, Kerala is fast falling into the hands of the faith industry. Peddlers of faith-based and magical solutions are active even among the many Muslims and Christians in the state.<sup>47</sup>

The formula ‘many centuries coexist’ expresses the perception that magic and rationality (or faith and science), which are perceived as contradictory, are nevertheless oddly juxtaposed (providing a kind of exoticism quite explicit in other sections of the article quoted). There is also the idea that the cult of Cāttan is ‘false’ as it is part of a faith industry. I prefer to consider that it is not so much a question of anachronistic survival, and I am not sure a faith industry might not be also found operating at temples more prestigious in the eyes of social elites. Cāttan, for all the magic with which he is credited, does not appear so exceptional in this respect. Like many other deities, he caters to fears and desires, which are today as strong as before. The mushrooming of business-like temples is a recent phenomenon, and is actually linked to /p. 473/ new economic realities such as the availability of money among small businessmen, film stars, or migrants to Mumbai or the Gulf countries. Far from being merely a token of the past, the worship of Cāttan in these temples is part of a spirit of entrepreneurship linked to modern relations of production. Temple owners take full advantage of contemporary facilities and many are wealthy and influential enough to benefit from today’s networks of economic and political power. Besides, their success story relies heavily on a set of representations widely shared across all walks of life concerning possible sources of misfortune and concerning the gods’ grace for ensuring health and prosperity. Moreover, many people consider brahmanic/tantric rituals, which are referred to in Cāttan’s cult, to be rational and scientific.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the development of a business-cum-devotion activity centred on Cāttan—only one among the trends affecting the representations of the deity—has to be seen within the broader framework of modern relations of power and prestige in Kerala, and especially in connection with socio-economic upward mobility.<sup>49</sup>

The various aspects of Cāttan are thus part of a complex, multiple ‘modernity’. Beyond his regular association with magic power, he is himself the object of multiple representations, sometimes widely differing from each other: an evil spirit, a demon, a subordinate deity, a magical tool, a full-fledged devotional god, a pretext for a racket, a comic elf, or a nice little devil; he is to be feared and exorcized, discarded, controlled, worshipped, denounced, or watched in entertainment programmes. Diverging narratives account for what he is and does, and exist side by side (sometimes, I would argue, in the very same person as could be the case for people who have knowledge of Cāttan’s tales of exactions, watch Kuṭṭicāttan’s cartoons on the television, and go to mantravādi temples to ask for Viṣṇumāyā’s blessings). In such a situation—which extends much beyond the specific case of Cāttan—there is an inherent difficulty for the social sciences in terms of description. It would be possible to apply a ‘polythetic-prototype’ approach<sup>50</sup> that would recognize a ‘family resemblance’ of all the variants around a core representation of Cāttan as a magical child; this, however, would bring little heuristic value as establishing a ‘family resemblance’ would be a static analysis ironing out contradictions in the

representations as well as social and historical dynamics. The social scientist then has to get to another level of description, renouncing a description of the ‘pantheon’ as such, and shifting to an analysis of contextual, and sometimes contradictory, ‘discourses’ about it.

**/p.474/**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have treated some other aspects of Cāttan’s cult in Gilles Tarabout, ‘Maîtres et serviteurs. Commander à des dieux au Kérala (Inde du Sud)’, in *Religion et pratiques de puissance*, ed. A. de Surgy, Paris, L’Harmattan, 1997, pp. 253–84 ; idem ‘Magical Violence and Non-Violence: Witchcraft in Kerala’, in *Violence/Non-Violence: Some Hindu Perspectives*, eds. D. Vidal, G. Tarabout and E. Meyer, Delhi: Manohar, 2003, pp. 219–54.

<sup>2</sup> For a similar preoccupation, see Amy L. Allocco, ‘Cacophony or Coherence: Ethnographic Writing and Competing Claims to Ritual and Textual Authority’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 21, 2009, pp. 3–14.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, ‘Some Aspects of Personal Identity in Greek Religion’, *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, (French edn. 1965) 1983; repr., New York: Zone books, 2006, pp. 359ff.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Tarabout, ‘Quand les dieux s’emmêlent. Point de vue sur les classifications divines au Kérala’, in *Classer les dieux? Des panthéons en Asie du Sud*, ed. V. Bouillier and G. Toffin, Paris: EHESS (*Puruṣārtha*, n. 15), 1993, pp. 43–74.

<sup>5</sup> On the use of ‘superstition’ as a rhetorical device for establishing hierarchies, see A. Bharati, ‘The Use of “Superstition” as an Anti-Traditional Device in Urban Hinduism’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, n.s., vol. 4, 1970, pp. 36–49.

<sup>6</sup> See Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, Chapter 1; idem, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982, pp. 8ff.; Gregory Schopen, ‘Archaeology and Protestant Presupposition in the Study of Indian Buddhism’, *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1991, pp. 1–23; Brown rightly observes that ‘the category of “popular religion” is, by definition, timeless and faceless, because it exhibits modes of thinking that are unintelligible except in terms of failure to be something else’ (Brown, *Society and the Holy*, p. 12).

<sup>7</sup> For recent studies in Kerala, see John R. Freeman Jr., *Purity and Violence: Sacred Power in the Teyyam Worship of Malabar*, University of Pennsylvania, Ph.D. dissertation, 1991; Tarabout, ‘Maîtres et serviteurs’; idem, ‘Magical Violence and Non-Violence’; Askö Parpola, ‘The Iconography and Cult of Kutticattan: Field Research on the Sanskritization of Local Folk Deities in Kerala’, in *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia, Evidence, Interpretation and Ideology*, Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora vol. 3, ed. Johannes Bronkhorst and Madhav M. Deshpande, Cambridge: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, 1999, pp. 175–205; Vinodan K. Cybil, ‘Anthropology of Possession and the Case of a Non-Brahminical Deity’, *Social Orbit*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015, pp. 159–77.

**/p.475/**

<sup>8</sup> The etymology of the word is unclear. Any link to ‘Satan’ (K.M. Panikkar, ‘Some Aspects of Nayar Life’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 48, 1918, p. 281) has still to be substantiated. Popular etymologies often refer to the god Śāstā.

<sup>9</sup> Viramma, Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine, *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable*, London and New York: Verso/Paris, Unesco Publishing, 1997, pp. 93ff.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, etc.*, 3 vols., London: Bulmer & Co., 1807, vol. II, p. 496.

<sup>11</sup> Srikanthesvaram G. Padmanabha Pillai, *Śabdatārāvali* (in Malayalam), 1923; repr., Kottayam, National Book Stall, 1987, p. 598.

<sup>12</sup> F. Fawcett, 'Nâyars of Malabar', *Madras Government Bulletin*, vol. III, no. 3, 1901, pp. 261, 314.

<sup>13</sup> L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes, vol. I*, Madras, Higginbotham/Cochin Government, 1909, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> K.V. Krishna Ayyar, 'Chathan: a Devil or Disease?', *Man*, vol. XXVIII, 1928, pp. 151–3.

<sup>15</sup> For other stories, see, for instance, M. Paul Dare, *Indian Underworld, A First-hand Account of Hindu Saints, Sorcerers and Superstitions*, New York: Dutton, 1940; Sohaila Kapur, *Witchcraft in Western India*, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1983, pp. 76ff.

<sup>16</sup> Panikkar, 'Some Aspects of Nayar Life', p. 277.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 281ff.

<sup>19</sup> Edgar Thurston and L. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 2, Madras: Madras Government Press, 1909, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Thaliath, 'Notes on Some Pulaya Customs and Beliefs', *Anthropos*, vol. 51, 1956, p. 1033.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1034. Cāttan has also been termed a 'primitive demon of black magic' (K.K.N. Kurup, *Aryan and Dravidian Elements in Malabar Folklore. A case study of Ramavilliam Kalakam*, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society, 1977, p. 36), a 'demon . . . feared by the populace' (V. William, *Devil Dances of North Malabar (Thirayattam or Teyyam Tullal)*, Serampore College (thesis for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity), 1944, p. 20). This last author was relied upon (as far as Kuṭṭicāttan is concerned) by Hans-Joachim Klimkeit who assumes that this cult belongs to an ancient pre-Hindu religious stratum coated with a varnish of Hindu imagery (Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, 'Die "Teufelstänze" von Südindien', *Gustav Mensching zum 75 Geburtstag*, *Anthropos*, no. 71, 1976)—a variant of the 'two-tier' theory.

**/p. 476/**

<sup>22</sup> Kotarattil Sankunni reports a similar rule for another mantravādi centre, Avanangattu Kaḷari. Two ancestors, brothers, in this Ezhava family obtain the mantra of Gaṇapati through ascetic practice, and can make the god appear at will through rituals (*sēviccu pratyakṣamākki*) and execute their magical orders. They find, however, that it is not enough for their purposes and that they do not get enough money. They arrange an exchange with a brahman mantravādi, Panchanallur Bhattathiri, who possesses the mantra of Cāttan but does not want to keep the deity. The Bhattathiri gets Gaṇapati, the brothers Cāttan. There is no need for new ascetic practices, the communication of the mantra and the knowledge of the 'service' to the deity are sufficient (Kottarattil Sankunni, *Aitihyamāla* (in Malayalam), 1909–34; repr., Kottayam: Kottarattil Sankunni Memorial Committee, 1974, p. 579).

<sup>23</sup> A mantra of vision (*dhyānaślōka*) for Kuṭṭicāttan, also called here *kukṣiśāstāvū* (Śāstā of the cavern/of the belly), is thus part of a collection compiled by Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiripad, where he is termed a Kuṭṭibhūta, little 'Bhūta' (Kanippayyur Sankaran

Namboodiripad, *Dhyānaññalaṃ Mantraññalaṃ* (in Malayalam), Kunnamkulam: Pancamgam Press, 1990, p. 129).

<sup>24</sup> Interview 1991, Thiruvananthapuram.

<sup>25</sup> Ayyankolppatti Krishnan Kochumon, *Bhagavān Cāttan Svāmiyute Rūpakkaḷaṃ Pāṭṭū (Tōrṛaṃ Pāṭṭū)* (in Malayalam), Peringottukara: Published by the Author, 1985, pp. 31ff.

<sup>26</sup> R. Jagathambika, *A Case Study of Multiple Personality or Possession-syndrome, Its Aetiology and Treatment*, Ph.D. thesis, Union Christian College, Alwaye, 1968.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> Caroline and Filippo Osella, personal communication.

<sup>29</sup> Ten shrines advertising mantravādaṃ, all situated in the central part of Kerala, have been visited during fieldworks (1991, 1994), out of which seven belong to Ezhavas and serve as a basis for the description. I have more particularly followed one of these shrines, Kanadi Dēvasthānaṃ, now Peringottukara Dēvasthānaṃ (<<http://www.devasthanam.com/>>). There are definitely more shrines of Cāttan, even without taking into account the ones restricted to family use.

<sup>30</sup> In his dissertation for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity, Serampore College, 1944, V. William expressed his surprise: ‘[I]t is very curious to find that even Christians in South Malabar, especially in Cochin State, worship “Chathan” for getting gains in trade’ (William, *Devil Dances of North Malabar*, p. 20). Today, also, some Christians are regular clients of Cāttan shrines in this part of Kerala.

<sup>31</sup> This is also the case for brahman mantravādīs, see, for instance, Meena Narayan, ‘The White Magic Man’, *Society*, March 1991, p. 52; Kalathil Ramakrishnan, ‘Secrets of a Sorcerer’, *The New Indian Express*, 13 /p. 477/ February 2011, <<http://www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/article396290.ece?service=print>>, accessed 22 May 2016.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, Karanayil Dēvasthānaṃ cautions devotees: ‘contact us on xxx telephonically otherwise you will be misguided to other temples by agents’ (Karanayil Dēvasthānaṃ, <<http://karanayildevasthanam.com/>>, accessed on 19.08.2017).

<sup>33</sup> A spectacular expansion of the same shrine since my last visit to it in 1994 may be seen at <http://www.devasthanam.com/images/abt2.png> (accessed 19.08.2017).

<sup>34</sup> Kochumon, *Bhagavān Cāttan Svāmiyute Rūpakkaḷaṃ Pāṭṭū*. The same song, with the exception of its first part, is reproduced in Chummar Choondal, *Nāṭōṭi Viruttam* (in Malayalam), Kannur: Samskrithi Publications/Dialogue Books, 1993; also, see Tarabout, ‘Maîtres et serviteurs’. Different stories occur in William, *Devil Dances of North Malabar*; Joseph Thaliath, ‘Notes on Some Pulaya Customs and Beliefs’, pp. 1029–54; Valentina Stache-Rosen, ‘Bhutas and Teyyams, Spirit Worship and Ritual dances in South Kanara and North Malabar—An Exhibition’, Bangalore: Max Mueller Bhavan, 1978; M.R. Pankajaksan, *Vayanāṭṭile Ādivāsikalute Pāṭṭukaḷ* (in Malayalam), Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1989; M.V. Vishnu Namboodiri, *Tōrṛampāṭṭukaḷ: Oru Paṭhanaṃ* (in Malayalam), Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1990; C.G.N. (C. Gopalan Nair), *Tirayāṭṭavum Añcaṭiyum (Paṭhanaṃ)* (in Malayalam), Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1990; A.V.S. Panikkar, *Śrī Viṣṇumāyā Purāṇaṃ Athavā Śrī Dharmmaśāstā Līlakaḷ* (in Malayalam), 1963; repr., Peringottukara: A.R. Unnikrishna Panicker, 1991. Also, see <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnumaya>>, accessed on 19.08.2017.

<sup>35</sup> Kochumon, *Bhagavān Cāttan Svāmiyuṭe Rūpakkaḷaṃ Pāṭṭū*, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> M.G. Mahajan, *Ōṃ Śrī Viṣṇu Māya* (in Malayalam), Peringottukara: A.R. Unnikrishna Panicker, n.d., p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Sankunni, *Aitihyamāla*.

<sup>39</sup> Panikkar, *Śrī Viṣṇumāyā Purāṇam*.

<sup>40</sup> Kottarattil Sankunni does not mention anything in connection with Śāstā, but states briefly that ‘Cāttan is born to Śrī Paramēśvaran out of Viṣṇu’s māya’ (Sankunni, *Aitihyamāla*, p. 580), a tale which converges with that of Śāstā’s own birth. The ritual song performed for the Cāttan festival in the area calls the god Viṣṇumāyā since in an episode of his life, Cāttan, through his power of illusion, took the guise of Viṣṇu (there is no reference to Śāstā) (Kochumon, *Bhagavān Cāttan Svāmiyuṭe Rūpakkaḷaṃ Pāṭṭū*, p. 17). A link with both Viṣṇu and Śāstā is mentioned by Ananthakrishna Iyer: ‘He [the Parayan] bathes and goes to his favourite deity Parakutty (a debased form of Vishnu called also Kutty Chathan or little Sastha)’ (Ananthakrishna Iyer, *The Cochin Tribes and Castes, vol. I*, p. 76). The *dhyānaślōka* published by K. Sankaran Namboodiripad makes the equivalence between Kuṭṭicāttan and Kuṭṭiśāstāvū, Śāstā of the cavern/of the **/p. 478/** belly (Sankaran Namboodiripad, *Dhyānaślōka Mantraśāstāvū*, p. 129). A similar identification between Cāttan and Śāstā seems also current in North Malabar (Vishnu Namboodiri, *Tōrrampāṭṭukal*, p. 204).

<sup>41</sup> <<http://avanangattikalari.com/>>, accessed 19.08.2017.

<sup>42</sup> An image of the benediction in the final scene of the play may be found at <http://avanangattikalari.com/img/kathakali-19.jpg> (accessed 19.08.2017).

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.devasthanam.com/gallery.html> (accessed 19.08.2017).

<sup>44</sup> The relationship between the ‘attendants’ and the god is in fact a bit more complex, since wild animals (elephant, tiger, buffalo, wild dog, etc.) are hypostases, forms which Cāttan himself (and possibly the Hunter) can take. See Kochumon, *Bhagavān Cāttan Svāmiyuṭe Rūpakkaḷaṃ Pāṭṭū*.

<sup>45</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Dear\\_Kuttichathan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Dear_Kuttichathan), accessed 19.08.2017. Scenes from the movie can be viewed on YouTube.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, in the case of *Ōṃ Hrīṃ Kuṭṭicāttan*, see <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/VSQ6beVHOuQ/hqdefault.jpg> (accessed 19.08.2017); and for *Jiṃ Bū Bā Kuṭṭicāttan* see <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/CORtY3kpYUk/hqdefault.jpg> (accessed 19.08.2017).

<sup>47</sup> T. Ramavarman, ‘Black magic is big bucks for Kerala village’, *The Times of India (online)*, 8 September 2013, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Black-magic-is-big-bucks-for-Kerala-village/articleshow/22408872.cms>>, accessed 22 May 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Kattumadam Narayanan Namboodiripad, head of one branch of Kattumadam *mana* when I visited in 1991, is a good example of this complex reality: a Marxist and literary critic, he also practices mantravādam (*satkarma*) using Cāttan, giving his explanations a psychological flavour. As a journalist simplified, using the time metaphor, ‘he is the ultimate paradox in every sense of the word: a modern rationalist practising the most primitive of faiths’ (Narayan, ‘The White Magic Man’).

<sup>49</sup> Gilles Tarabout, ‘L’évolution des cultes dans les temples hindous. L’exemple du Kerala (Inde du Sud)’, in *Renouveaux religieux en Asie*, ed. Catherine Clémentin-Ojha, Paris: Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1997b, pp. 127–54.

<sup>50</sup> E.g., Gabriella Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, ‘The Polythetic-Prototype Approach to Hinduism’, in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, 1989; repr., New Delhi, Manohar, 2001, pp. 294–304.

\*\*\*\*\*

[References were not separately printed in the publication—they were to be found in the notes; I list them here as is common usage in anthropology]

### References

Allocco, Amy L., 2009. ‘Cacophony or Coherence: Ethnographic Writing and Competing Claims to Ritual and Textual Authority’, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 21: 3–14.

Ananthakrishna Iyer, L.K., 1909. *The Cochin Tribes and Castes, vol. I*, Madras, Higginbotham/Cochin Government; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1969.

Bharati, A., 1970. ‘The Use of “Superstition” as an Anti-Traditional Device in Urban Hinduism’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, n.s., vol. 4: 36–49.

Brown, Peter, 1981. *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———, 1982. *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Buchanan, Francis, 1807. *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, etc.*, 3 vols., London: Bulmer & Co.; repr., New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1988.

C.G.N. (C. Gopalan Nair), 1990. *Tirayāṭṭavum Añcaṭiyum (Paṭhanam)* (in Malayalam), Kottayam: National Book Stall.

Choondal, Chummar, 1993. *Nāṭōṭi Viruttam* (in Malayalam), Kannur: Samskrithi Publications/Dialogue Books.

Cybil, K. Vinodan, 2015. ‘Anthropology of Possession and the Case of a Non-Brahminical Deity’, *Social Orbit*, vol. 1, no. 1: 159–77.

Dare, M. Paul, 1940. *Indian Underworld. A First-hand Account of Hindu Saints, Sorcerers and Superstitions*, New York: Dutton.

- Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi, Gabriella, 1989. 'The Polythetic-Prototype Approach to Hinduism', in *Hinduism Reconsidered*, ed. Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke; repr., New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 294–304.
- Fawcett, F., 1901. 'Nâyars of Malabar', *Madras Government Bulletin*, vol. III, no. 3: 181–322.
- Freeman, John R., Jr., 1991. *Purity and Violence: Sacred Power in the Teyyam Worship of Malabar*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ph.D. dissertation.
- Jagathambika, R., 1968. *A Case Study of Multiple Personality or Possession-syndrome, Its Aetiology and Treatment*, Ph.D. thesis, Union Christian College, Alwaye.
- Kapur, Sohaila, 1983. *Witchcraft in Western India*, Bombay: Orient Longman.
- Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim, 1976. 'Die "Teufelstänze" von Südindien', *Gustav Mensching zum 75 Geburtstag*, *Anthropos*, vol. 71: 555–78.
- Kochumon, Ayyankolppatti Krishnan, 1985. *Bhagavān Cāttan Svāmiyuṭe Rūpakkaḷam Pāṭṭū (Tōṛṛam Pāṭṭū)* (in Malayalam), Peringottukara: Published by the Author.
- Krishna Ayyar, K.V., 1928. 'Chathan: a Devil or Disease?', *Man*, vol. XXVIII: 151–3.
- Kurup, K.K.N., 1977. *Aryan and Dravidian Elements in Malabar Folklore. A case study of Ramavilliam Kalakam*, Trivandrum: Kerala Historical Society.
- Mahajan, M.G., n.d. *Ōṃ Śrī Viṣṇu Māya* (in Malayalam), Peringottukara: A.R. Unnikrishna Panicker.
- Narayan, Meena, 1991. 'The White Magic Man', *Society*, March 1991: 52.
- Padmanabha Pillai, Srikanthesvaram G., 1987. *Śabdatārāvali* (in Malayalam), 1923; repr., Kottayam: National Book Stall.
- Panikkar, A.V.S., 1963. *Śrī Viṣṇumāyā Purāṇam Athavā Śrī Dharmmaśāstā Līlakaḷ* (in Malayalam); repr., Peringottukara: A.R. Unnikrishna Panicker, 1991.
- Panikkar, K.M., 1918. 'Some Aspects of Nayar Life', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 48: 254–93.
- Pankajaksan, M.R., 1989. *Vayanāṭṭile Ādivāsikalūṭe Pāṭṭukaḷ* (in Malayalam), Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi.
- Parpola, Asko, 1999. 'The Iconography and Cult of Kutticattan: Field Research on the Sanskritization of Local Folk Deities in Kerala', in *Aryan and Non-Aryan in South Asia, Evidence, Interpretation and Ideology*, Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora vol. 3, ed.

- Johannes Bronkhorst and Madhav M. Deshpande, Cambridge: Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies, pp. 175–205.
- Ramakrishnan, Kalathil, 2011. ‘Secrets of a Sorcerer’, *The New Indian Express*, 13 February 2011, <<http://www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/article396290.ece?service=print>>, accessed 19 August 2016.
- Ramavarman, T., 2013. ‘Black magic is big bucks for Kerala village’, *The Times of India (online)*, 8 September 2013, <<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Black-magic-is-big-bucks-for-Kerala-village/articleshow/22408872.cms>>, accessed 19 August 2016.
- Sankaran Namboodiripad, Kanippayur, 1990. *Dhyānaññalaṃ Mantraññalaṃ* (in Malayalam), Kunnankulam: Pancamgam Press.
- Sankunni, Kottarattil, 1909-34. *Aitihyamāla* (in Malayalam); repr., Kottayam: Kottarattil Sankunni Memorial Committee, 1974.
- Schopen, Gregory, 1991. ‘Archaeology and Protestant Presupposition in the Study of Indian Buddhism’, *History of Religions*, vol. 31, no. 1: 1–23.
- Singer, Milton, 1961. ‘Text and Context in the Study of Contemporary Hinduism’, *The Adyar Library Bulletin*, vol. XXV: 274–303.
- Stache-Rosen, Valentina, 1978. ‘Bhutas and Teyyams. Spirit Worship and Ritual dances in South Kanara and North Malabar – An Exhibition’, Bangalore: Max Mueller Bhavan.
- Tarabout, Gilles, 1993. ‘Quand les dieux s’emmêlent. Point de vue sur les classifications divines au Kérala’, in *Classer les dieux? Des panthéons en Asie du Sud*, ed. V. Bouillier and G. Toffin, Paris: EHESS (*Puruṣārtha*, n. 15), pp. 43–74.
- , 1997a. ‘Maîtres et serviteurs. Commander à des dieux au Kérala (Inde du Sud)’, in *Religion et pratiques de puissance*, ed. A. de Surgy, Paris: L’Harmattan, pp. 253–84.
- , 1997b. ‘L’évolution des cultes dans les temples hindous. L’exemple du Kerala (Inde du Sud)’, in *Renouveaux religieux en Asie*, ed. Catherine Clémentin-Ojha, Paris: Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, pp. 127–54.
- , 2003. ‘Magical Violence and Non-Violence: Witchcraft in Kerala’, in *Violence/Non-Violence: Some Hindu Perspectives*, ed. D. Vidal, G. Tarabout and E. Meyer, Delhi: Manohar, pp. 219–54 (French edn., 1993).



- Thaliath, Joseph, 1956. 'Notes on Some Pulaya Customs and Beliefs', *Anthropos*, vol. 51: 1029–54.
- Thurston, Edgar, and Rangachari, K., 1909. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 7 vols., Madras: Madras Government Press; repr., New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre, 1983. 'Some Aspects of Personal Identity in Greek Religion', *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*; repr., New York: Zone books, 2006, pp. 353–67 (French edn., 1965).
- Viramma, Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine, 1997. *Viramma: Life of an Untouchable*, London and New York: Verso/Paris, UNESCO Publishing (French edn., 1994, tr. Will Hobson).
- Vishnu Namboodiri, M.V., 1990. *Tōrrampāṭṭukaḷ: Oru Paṭhanam* (in Malayalam), Kottayam: National Book Stall.
- William, V., 1944. *Devil Dances of North Malabar (Thirayattam or Teyyam Tullal)*, Serampore College (thesis for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity).