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978-0-521-04009-9 - Servants of the Goddess: The Priests of a South Indian Temple

C. J. Fuller

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Minaksi, Sundaesvara and their Temple in Madurai

The story of Minaksi and Sundaesvara

The goddess Minaksi was born from a sacrificial fire as the only child of a Pāṇḍyan king, whose capital was the city of Madurai. She emerged from the flames as a 3-year-old girl with three breasts, but a voice told her distressed father not to worry, because the third breast would vanish when she met her future husband. Minaksi grew up, succeeded her father on the Pāṇḍyan throne and set out to conquer the world. After vanquishing army after army, she finally reached Mount Kailāsa, in the Himalayas, where the great god Śiva reposed. Śiva ordered his army to confront Queen Minaksi's, but his forces were defeated. The god himself then descended to the battlefield. On seeing him Minaksi instantly lost her third breast. She trembled with fear, but one of her ministers, recalling the prophecy, fell at her feet and told her that Śiva was to be her husband. Śiva commanded Minaksi to return to Madurai and promised to marry her, and a few days later they celebrated their wedding in the city. Śiva took the name Sundara Pāṇḍya and inaugurated with Minaksi their joint sovereignty over the Pāṇḍyan kingdom. A son, Ugra Pāṇḍya (Skanda), was born to Minaksi and succeeded to his parents' throne. Sometime later, Minaksi and Sundara entered their temple and disappeared. But the god repeatedly returned to perform miracles in the city and in reality he and Minaksi remain the rulers of the Pāṇḍyan kingdom, and the protectors of its land and people.

Such, in brief, is the myth of the goddess Minaksi, the Pāṇḍyan queen who became the wife of the Lord of the Universe and is, to this day, Madurai's principal deity.¹ She is worshipped in the city's Great Temple, dedicated to her and Sundaesvara (Sundara), and her first servants there, the Temple's priests, are the subject of this book.²

The structure of the Temple

The city of Madurai, by rail approximately 350 miles southwest of Madras, is situated in the south Indian state of Tamilnadu and is today a major

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industrial, commercial and administrative centre, with a population that probably exceeds 850 000.³ But it is also an ancient urban settlement, one of the oldest in south India, and was for long the capital of the Pāṇḍyas (c. AD 560–920), one of the great dynasties of the early south.⁴ More than most cities in India, Madurai replicates quite closely an ideal model of the Hindu city as a microcosm of the kingdom and universe (Lewandowski 1977). From map 1, the basic design can be seen. At the city's centre is its Great Temple, formally the Aruḷmiku ('grace-bestowing') Minaksi–Sundaresvara Tirukkoyil ('holy temple') but usually called more simply 'Minaksi koyil' (Tam.), the 'Minaksi Temple'. Around the Temple is a series of expanding, 'concentric' squares described by the Cittirai, Āvaṇi Mūla and Māci Streets. The outermost Vēḷi Streets, the old city's boundaries, are built over fortifications demolished in the early nineteenth century. Southeast of the Temple is the partly ruined royal palace (dating from the seventeenth century) and to the southwest is the city's main Viṣṇu temple, the Kūṭal Aḷakar temple.⁵ The city also contains numerous other temples and shrines. The Vaigai river flows from northwest to southeast past the city's northeast corner.

The Minaksi Temple, shown in maps 2 and 3, is one of the largest in India and covers an approximately rectangular area, 850 feet long by 720 feet wide. The outer walls, about twenty feet high, protect the Temple like a fortified palace, the residence of the royal god and goddess. Its most famous architectural features are its twelve towers (*gopura*), the four highest of which, each about 150 feet tall, straddle the gateways in the outer walls and are visible for miles across the plains surrounding the city. Each tower is covered in brightly painted, stucco representations of deities, demons and devotees. Most of the Temple to be seen today was constructed during the period of Nāyaka rule (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), although some parts of it are much older.⁶

Like all south Indian Śiva temples, the Minaksi Temple is double, incorporating separate temples for Minaksi and Sundaresvara. Here I must clarify my terminology. I shall refer to the entire complex as the Minaksi Temple (upper-case 'T'). The two separate temples are called *ammaṅ koyil* or *caṅṅati* and *cuvāmi koyil* or *caṅṅati*. *Ammaṅ* (cognate with Tamil *amma*, 'mother') and *cuvāmi* (Skt. *svāmi*, 'lord') are the appellations of Minaksi and Sundaresvara normally used in ordinary speech. The term *caṅṅati* (Skt. *sannidhi*), which may be translated as 'shrine', is also used for the chambers housing the deities' images. In order to retain the term 'shrine' for these chambers, I shall refer to *ammaṅ koyil* and *cuvāmi koyil* as 'Minaksi's temple' and 'Sundaresvara's temple' (lower-case 't') respectively.

Minaksi's temple lies southwest of Sundaresvara's. Hence, as both face east, the goddess is on the god's right, which is also the usual positioning of their images during Temple festivals. Normally, a Hindu wife formally

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places herself on her husband's left to signify her relative inferiority, and the inversion in the plan and rituals of the Minaksi Temple is interpreted in Madurai as reflecting the exceptional fact that Minaksi, not Sundaresvara, is the Temple's pre-eminent deity (*pradhāna mūrti*); she is always worshipped before her husband. In reality, though, the Minaksi Temple plan is not exceptional and is the same as other Śiva temples in which the god is pre-eminent. The crucial feature is not the right-left, but northeast – southwest axis, for the northeast is Śiva's direction and the southwest the goddess's (cf. Fuller 1980a: 322). The alignment of the Minaksi Temple in relation to the Kūṭal Aḷakar temple also reflects Śiva's position in the northeast.⁷

Minaksi's temple is smaller than her husband's, but both have the same basic design: two corridors (*prākāra*) surrounding a central sanctum (*garbhagr̥ha*, 'womb chamber'), which is surmounted by a golden tower (*śikhara*) protruding through the roof. To the east of each sanctum – a term I reserve for the two main shrines – is an antechamber (*ardhamandapa*) and to the east of the latter, another hall (*mahāmandapa*). Strictly, only the sanctum and its immediate vicinity is *the* Hindu temple; the outer halls (*mandapa*) of the Temple complex are supplementary elaborations (Kramrisch 1946: 133). But the Minaksi Temple is typical of the great south Indian temple complexes, characterised both by their high outer towers that dwarf the sancta's pinnacles and by their series of expanding, ideally square enclosures focused on the sancta. In Madurai, this series comprises the two pairs of corridors, the Āṭi Streets underneath the outer walls (although East Āṭi Street winds through several halls) and the streets in the city outside.⁸ Although no adequate account can be given here, it may be noted that the symbolic meaning of the Minaksi Temple's design is shared with all Hindu temples. The square plan represents the sacrificial arena on which the Primeval Being, Puruṣa/Prajāpati, sacrificed himself. The Temple rises over this arena and from the residue of the sacrifice comes the germ that develops in the womb chamber. Simultaneously, the Temple is the substantial form of Puruṣa, congruent with its site, and a microcosm of the city, kingdom and universe, which are also ideally represented by the square, oriented by the cardinal directions, that is the archetypal pattern of order and the perfect measure of man, the microcosmic form of Puruṣa.⁹

The sancta both open on the east and are aligned with gateways in the outer walls and two straight roads, known as Ammaṇ Caṇṇati and Cuvāmi Caṇṇati Streets, which respectively terminate at and cross East Māci Street. Those hurrying past the Temple may stop briefly as they cross these roads, turn to face either sanctum and gesture in obeisance to the deity within. Minaksi and Sundaresvara gaze due east along these lines, so that – in accordance with the classical model – they see the sun rise across the river, which would ideally flow along the city's eastern perimeter.

In her sanctum is the main, immovable image (*mūla mūrti*, 'principal,

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original image') of Minaksi, standing some four feet tall and made of green stone.¹⁰ She stands in the characteristic triply-flexed (*tribhaṅga*) posture, her right leg slightly bent at the knee and her body pivoted on the left hip. In the first corridor around her sanctum, in the northeast corner, is the bedchamber (Tam. *paḷḷiyarai*). In the god's sanctum is a cylindrical stone *liṅga*, said to have emerged from the ground (*svāyambhuva*, 'self-existent'), shaded by a golden cobra's hood. In almost all Śiva temples, the main sanctum houses his phallic emblem, the *liṅga*, and not an anthropomorphic image.¹¹ By definition, an aniconic *liṅga* is not an image, but, to avoid circumlocution, I shall often refer to the main 'images', meaning the *liṅga* and Minaksi's image in the respective sancta. In the northeast corner of Sundaresvara's sanctum is an image of the goddess Manonmanī. Facing his sanctum are a series of images of Nandin, the bull who is Śiva's 'vehicle' (*vāhana*) and most fervent devotee, always gazing directly at his lord. Smaller images of the bull also face Minaksi's sanctum. In both temples, at each gateway on the east–west axis, there are images of Vināyaka (Gaṇeśa) and Subrahmaṇya (Skanda, Murugaṅ). Vināyaka, the elephant-headed god and Śiva's elder son, stands to the south of each entrance, so that Subrahmaṇya, the younger son, is on his left. In Sundaresvara's temple, there are also many subsidiary images of forms of Śiva and other deities, the most important of which are marked on map 3, as well as the trunk of a *kaḍamba* tree, specially associated with the god's temple. The chambers housing the movable, bronze festival images (*utsava mūrti*) that are taken out in processions are also inside the god's temple. Minaksi's festival image is about two feet high and shows her standing alone, like her main stone image, but that of Sundaresvara is a Somāskanda image, of similar size. This image shows the god seated with his consort (Umā) on his left and a small figure of their son standing between them (*sa-Umā-Skanda*, 'together with Umā and Skanda') (Kramrisch 1981a: 134–7).

The Temple complex also incorporates a tank, an indispensable feature of any temple, called *poḷḷāmarai kuḷam* (Tam. 'golden-lily tank'). The kitchens (Tam. *maṭappali*) are southeast of the god's sanctum, in the direction of Agni, god of fire. Most of the great open halls are on the Temple's eastern side; they include the 100-pillar hall and the vast 1000-pillar hall in the northeast corner. Even in the Temple's outer precincts there are many images and shrines, and most of the thousands of pillars are carved with images of deities and other figures. At many of these bas-reliefs some devotees worship and the total number of images, of all categories, that do at one time or another receive ritual attention is at least two hundred. Only a minority of them could be indicated on the maps in this book.

It is a vital feature of the Minaksi Temple, as it is of all Hindu temples, that the passage from the streets outside towards the central sancta is one

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from light to dark, from space to confinement. Whereas the halls in the outer precincts are relatively open structures, the inner areas of Minaksi's and Sundaresvara's temples, though still fairly spacious, are enclosed by solid walls, and through their gateways not very much natural light enters. The two thick-walled womb-sancta are 'small cubicles filled with darkness' (Kramrisch 1946: 163) dispelled only by the oil lamps glowing within. Today, the effect of steadily deepening darkness as one approaches the centre has been seriously damaged by electric lighting, but the contrast between the blinding glare and intense heat of Madurai's daytime streets and the 'dim, soothing atmosphere caressing the eye after the fierce light of the day outside' (ibid.: 299) does still remain.

The differences between a great Hindu temple and a Christian cathedral are perhaps worth emphasising to the western reader. The temple, at least its central portion, 'is more a solid monument than a work of "architecture"' that stands oriented in space rather than, like the cathedral, being made to face it (ibid.: 103). The temple's heart is a dark cell, replicating a natural 'Cave in the Mountain' (ibid.: 174), and the vertical piling towards the world of the gods is always firmly rooted in the ground, whereas the cathedral's design emphasises spaciousness, and perhaps ascension from the natural world, through its long nave, high roof and towering spire or dome. Moreover, if the cathedral should always be peaceful and serene, in the temple – though tranquillity is often sought there – conversation is not objected to and children play unhindered. Music and singing at Christian services, however passionate, are ordered and restrained, but during temple rituals there is frequently a deafening noise created by simultaneous music, drumming, bell-ringing and chanting. The senses are assailed too by the odoriferous smoke pouring from camphor and incense that combines with the heavy perfume of flowers. After dark, when many rituals are held, the eye is treated to the spectacular display produced by flames circling through the blackness to illuminate in flashes the bright silks, gold and jewellery of the adorned images. The combined sensual impact is potent, especially when amplified by the press of a large crowd, and is readily observed in the excited emotionality manifested by many devotees.

The devotees

The total number of Minaksi–Sundaresvara's devotees is incalculable. However, their Temple is one of the most popular in south India and, from a survey I carried out in 1977, I estimate that the mean daily number of visitors is at least 15 000, with some 25 000 coming each Friday, the day sacred to the goddess. But the first of the figures is probably an underestimate, at least for 1980, and 20 000 may be nearer the mark.¹² On major festival days, the density of crowds can easily be double that of an

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ordinary Friday. Most devotees appear to come from Madurai and its hinterland, for Minaksi's appeal has hardly spread through the rest of Tamilnadu or India, except when carried there by emigrants from the region. Consequently, the Minaksi Temple is not a particularly important site for most Hindu pilgrims, although many do come, partly because there is merit in visiting any great and ancient temple, and partly because Madurai is on the route to Rameswaram, on the coast to the southeast, where the great Śiva temple is a major pilgrimage centre in its own right.

The evidence suggests that in Madurai, as elsewhere, the favourite god of the Tamils is Murugaṅ.¹³ One of his largest and most popular temples is at Tirupparankundram, a village a few miles from Madurai. Nonetheless, Minaksi is generally considered to be the divine protector of Madurai and its region specifically. She has many fervent devotees who believe that she cares for them, though rather more, it seems, mainly put their trust in Murugaṅ in times of personal trouble. Towards Sundaesvara, on the other hand, attitudes are different. If *ammaṅ* bears some of the connotations of *amma*, 'mother', a term actually used for Minaksi by some devotees, *cuvāmi*, 'lord', rather signifies respect and that is the characteristic inclination towards Sundaesvara. He is the supreme lord whose paramount concern is for the order of the world, not for the petty difficulties of individual human beings. Only a minority of devotees, usually theologically sophisticated, speak of their devotion for Sundaesvara or Śiva; for the majority, that sentiment is mainly commanded by the goddess.

On the sociological breakdown of devotees, I lack accurate data. However, it can be reported that Tamil devotees include men and women in more or less equal proportions, and come from all age-ranges and all occupational groups and economic classes. The highly-educated and illiterate are equally to be found in the Temple, as are the members of all castes, with the notable exception of Harijans (Untouchables), who appear to be seriously underrepresented. They were debarred from the Temple before 1939 (see chapters 2 and 5), but today they seem not to come because, for whatever reason, they prefer not to. There is indirect evidence that the number of visitors to the Temple is probably rising and nothing whatsoever to suggest that its attraction is waning for any significant section of the Hindu population.¹⁴

The attributes of Śiva and the goddess

Let me now turn to the deities themselves. The two great gods of theistic Hinduism are Śiva and Viṣṇu, and in all sizeable Tamil settlements there are temples to each of them. Although the two gods' temples in Madurai, as

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elsewhere, have entirely separate organisations, priesthoods, ritual styles and festival cycles, the complementary opposition between them is nonetheless fundamental; it is epitomised by the fact that, particularly in Tamil mythology, Śiva's wife is said to be Viṣṇu's sister, so that the gods are brothers-in-law. Images of Viṣṇu are few in Śiva's temples and images of Śiva are non-existent in Viṣṇu's temples, but each god's characteristics, as displayed in ritual and mythology, are often incomprehensible unless those of the absent other are also taken into account. As this chapter is not, however, a treatise on ritual, I shall concentrate on aspects of Śiva that are immediately relevant here.

Śiva's various forms (*mūrti*) may be divided into two broad categories. The first of these is the series of distinct forms that he manifests throughout the body of his mythology. In each large Śiva temple in south India, there are images of some (though not all) of these forms. In Sundaresvara's temple, the most prominent are Bhairava (Śiva as the dreadful guardian of the Temple), Bhikṣāṭana (as the ascetic beggar), Candraśekhara (with the moon as his crest), Dakṣiṇāmūrti (as the *guru*), Naṭarāja (as lord of the dance) and Siddha (with all magical powers). Śiva is worshipped as Naṭarāja at Chidambaram, usually held to be the god's pre-eminent temple in the south. There, he dances on his right foot on a 'golden stage' (Tam. *ṇṇampalam*); at Madurai, he dances on his left foot on a 'silver stage' (Tam. *veḷḷiyampalam*), and his images stand, as maps 2 and 3 indicate, along the critical north-east axis leading from Sundaresvara's sanctum. To most readers, Naṭarāja's iconology will be familiar from the bronze figures of the god dancing inside a ring of fire that are justly famed for their aesthetic beauty and power.¹⁵

To convey the logic behind the god's myriad forms without lapsing into pretentious banality is not easy, but Kramrisch (1981b: 428) captures the essence. 'Crazed beggar, savior, necrophiliac, voluptuary, ascetic, he is each wholly on the plane where he acts, while on another plane he is Sadāśiva, the eternal Śiva, who lays out his presence in his five faces, of which the fifth, invisible in principle, is part of the *pañcamukha* [five-faced] *liṅga*, Śiva's concrete, monumental symbol.' The key to the god, in other words, is that he displays a contemporaneous multiplicity of superficially contradictory forms, but is nonetheless one, invisible in his entirety but still able to be given visible representation. '[A] method of seeing Śiva is to consider the several versions of a myth to be like the stations of a mentally performed rite of circumambulation, in which the total meaning shows itself together with its gradual changes' (ibid.: 433). Similarly, within the constraints of a built structure, a physical act of circumambulation around a Śiva temple, such as Sundaresvara's, allows the devotee to see the 'stations' iconographically displayed (cf. Kramrisch 1946: 299–300).

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There is, however, a rather important difference, to which I shall return below, between the meanings given to Śiva in the Sanskrit myths as opposed to the south Indian temple cult.

The second broad category of Śiva's forms comprises his local manifestations. In principle, at each temple, Śiva has a different name – he is only Sundaresvara at Madurai – and a different consort. These manifestations of Śiva, unlike those in the first category, cannot by definition all be present at one place.¹⁶ Every temple has its myth (*sthalapurāna*, 'myth of the place'), which explains why Śiva is worshipped there, as well as his particular characteristics. Throughout these myths, taken as a collectivity, a perennial question is asked: how can the universal Śiva simultaneously have apparently independent, local manifestations (Shulman 1980: ch. 2)? One resolution is exemplified by the story of Minaksi; the universal lord came from Mount Kailāsa to marry a local woman/goddess – an event celebrated in the Temple's most important festival, Cittirai – and then stayed with her to be worshipped in their Temple. In all myths of this kind, writes Shulman (*ibid.*: 51): 'It is the goddess who is identified with the earth and with all that is indigenous and unique in the site of the shrine, who is responsible for effecting the link between the deity [Śiva] and his local home.'

All these goddesses, consorts of Śiva in his different temples, are at one level forms of the one goddess, Devī or Śakti. So too are the wives of Viṣṇu and other gods, as well as the independent goddesses who have no consorts. At first sight, therefore, it might look as if the unity-cum-multiplicity of the goddess is no different from that of Śiva. But that would not be accurate. As portrayed in their temples and associated myths, the goddesses' forms – as the quotation from Shulman indicates (*cf.* also Biarreau 1981: 150) – have a stronger local aspect than the god's, so that on the continuum between universalised unity and localised multiplicity, the goddess, compared with Śiva, is nearer the latter pole. Śiva is more a unity dissolving into localised forms; the goddess is more a severalty coalescing into a universalised form. The difference is subtle and, most critically, is relative (*cf.* Dumont 1970*b*: 26); both god and goddess are one-and-many, but in any single context the balance between unity and multiplicity is tilted to the former for the god and the latter for the goddess.

The element of locality is still stronger in the 'non-Brahmanical' 'village deities' (*grāmadevatā*). In general, village goddesses are unmarried, independent female deities belonging to particular communities (which may in fact be urban or rural), although their characteristics actually differ very little from place to place (*ibid.*: 23–4). Despite their independence, at their major festivals these goddesses often marry, implicitly or explicitly, a bridegroom who is usually, again implicitly or explicitly, a form of Śiva.¹⁷ Consequently, there is a definite continuity between Śiva's consorts and

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independent village goddesses, and the consorts' attribute of locality is but a weaker form of that of the village goddesses who, on our continuum, lie still closer to the pole of localised multiplicity. And it is with the cult of village goddesses that many rituals addressed specifically to Minaksi have their clearest parallels.

In the Minaksi Temple, priests and others are well aware of these distinctions between Minaksi and Sundaesvara. They have a strong sense of Śiva's unity and of the ideal uniformity of ritual in all his temples, and conversely of Minaksi's localised specificity, of her similarities with village goddesses and of the particularities of rituals addressed especially to her alone.

Another aspect of the asymmetry between god and goddess returns us to the difference between Śiva in the Sanskritic myths and Śiva in the south Indian temples. In the myths, as Kramrisch (1981*b*) and O'Flaherty (1973) reveal, there is a perpetual tension between Śiva's asceticism and his eroticism, between his independence and his conjugality, and in many stories the god is depicted, varying the theme of the ascetic, as violent, dangerous, intoxicated or anti-social. In the southern temple, Śiva's character is rather different. Of course, the *linga*, symbolising the god's sexual power and ascetic self-containment, is omnipresent, but, on a less abstract symbolic level, the bias is strongly towards the state of marriage and fatherhood, as the bronze images, especially Somāskanda, most plainly show (Banerjea 1956: 470; Kramrisch 1981*a*: 127). There are images of Śiva in his ascetic and dangerous forms in the Temple and these do take their place in some rituals, but in general Śiva is mostly shown accompanied by his consort, so that his ascetic, anti-social side is played down. Moreover, most notably in Madurai, he can be represented as a monarch, and the relationship between the two great gods partly reverses that in the Sanskritic mythology, in which Viṣṇu the king is opposed to Śiva the ascetic (Biardeau 1976: 105–6; 1981: 107–8, 154–5).¹⁸ The classical Sanskritic Śiva, as I have suggested elsewhere (1980*a*: 323, n. 3), is 'tamed' in the Tamil ritual tradition.

Goddesses, on the other hand, are often ritually represented alone, without husbands, and this is especially true of village goddesses, who are normally assumed to be fiercer, more capricious and potentially more vengeful than are wifely goddesses. In ritual, a connection is postulated between a goddess's regular sexual relations with her husband and her relative pacificity (ibid.: 327). At the same time, as we have already seen, there is no sharp discontinuity between village goddesses and Śiva's consorts, and in the Temple Minaksi often does appear by herself. Unlike Sundaesvara, who has Manonmanī in his sanctum and whose festival image is Somāskanda, Minaksi stands by herself in her sanctum and at festivals, and she regularly appears in rituals without her husband.¹⁹

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Though the more highly valued norm is certainly Minaksi–Sundaresvara’s married unity, much of the Temple’s ritual cycle can be seen to represent continual oscillation between, on the one hand, the goddess’s independence or separation and, on the other, her union with Sundaresvara (*ibid.*: *passim*).

Images and worship in the Minaksi Temple

Obviously, there is much more that could be said about the deities in the Temple, but I must now turn to the way in which they are worshipped there. The vast majority of worship (*pūjā*) in a Hindu temple is performed before images that are believed to contain the deities’ power (*śakti*), brought into them at the installation ritual (*pratiṣṭhā*), which is ideally repeated regularly in abbreviated form. Thus, for example, Minaksi’s main image in her sanctum contains her power, as indeed do all other images of her, in the Temple or elsewhere. In the Temple, it is generally presumed that under normal circumstances Minaksi’s main image contains more of her power than other images, although the proportions are unquantifiable and no one claims to know either the extent or distribution of Minaksi’s illimitable power. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to all other images and deities in the Temple or elsewhere.

In worshipping before the images, a Hindu worships the gods whose power is in the images, *not* the images themselves, and if in this book I sometimes use phrases like ‘worship of an image’ to avoid periphrasis, I do not intend to imply that an image, rather than a god, is being worshipped. The more articulate Hindu can easily explain the distinction between a deity and an image. Others may not be able to and all Hindus often speak of images as if they were gods; for example, they will point to Minaksi’s image and say: ‘There is Minaksi.’ But there is nothing odd about this and the confusion is ours, not the Hindus’, if we interpret such statements with misconceived literalism as matter-of-fact observations about the empirical world. Nobody thinks that if an image is broken the god is destroyed, nobody thinks that a god is confined to one site, its image, and all Hindus can readily explain that any one deity is present in innumerable images and indeed everywhere. The point need not be belaboured, except to remark that temple ritual is incomprehensible if it is thought that images themselves are objects of worship.

Temple worship is divisible into two main categories: public worship and private worship. Public worship (*parāṛthapūjā*) is said to be performed ‘for the well-being of the world’ (cf. Gonda 1970: 76), whereas private worship, normally known in Tamil temples as *arcana*, is performed by or for an individual devotee and is intended to benefit him or her alone.²⁰ By priests and others in the Minaksi Temple, public worship is naturally considered