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The south Indian temple:
authority, honour and redistribution*

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INTRODUCTION

This essay is an effort to present, in schematic form, a systematic frame-
work within which to understand the cultural principles that underlie the
workings of the south Indian Hindu temple.[1] Thus, it does not contain

[1]By south India is meant that portion of the Indian peninsula which was the
territorial base of the Vijayanagara Empire (c. 1350-1550), and which would today
encompass the modern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nāṭu: as for
the region now covered by the state of Kerala, not enough is known, from our point
of view, of the temples in this ecologically and politically distinct region to be certain
that our framework might be relevant there as well. After considerable reflection, we
have decided not to give any overall definition of the kind, or type, or scale of
'temple' that we believe is comprehensible within the framework we propose. We are
confident, however, on the basis of the literature cited throughout this essay, that our
model is not relevant only to large Brahminical temple complexes, but seems also to
fit 'village' temples, goddess temples, lineage temples and the like. At the very margin

elaborate ethnographic details, cannot discuss many important historical issues, and does not seek or claim to exhaust theological understandings of the divine. Rather, the framework represented here is meant to be generative and suggestive, in two senses: firstly, as a fresh perspective from which to view the large body of data that is already available in a host of monographic studies; and secondly, to generate further investigation of particular issues in order to verify (or correct) the argument presented here.

Our present knowledge of south Indian temples reflects the disparate (and partial) perspectives from which scholars have so far conducted their studies.[2] A considerable body of information concerning temple architecture (Brown 1956; Ferguson 1910; Gravely 1936; Kramrisch 1946), ritual and administration is available. Similarly, much is known about temple economics, temple politics and the sociological aspects of temple clienteles. What is absent, however, is a unified perspective from which to comprehend this abundance of empirical data.

Although it has come to be a truism that the temple is of fundamental importance in south Indian history and society, much of the existing literature, either tacitly or explicitly, encourages the interpretation that the south Indian temple simply reflects its broader social context. Temple ritual appears to be a mixture of Vedic sacrificial procedures and the logic of domestic worship (Kane 1974: Ch. 19). The division of labour in the *jājmāni* structure of agrarian society appears to inform the division of ceremonial tasks in the temple (Beck 1972: 44-47). The economic underpinnings of the temple have much in common with the ideas of gift and land tenure in other south Indian contexts (Dumont 1957: 318, 340). Historically, the temple has served redistributive and developmental functions that seem co-extensive with those of the political system (Stein 1960: 163-76). Like sectarian networks and urban formations, temples have been reported to provide the links between caste and lineage organization, and regional/territorial segmentation (Beck 1972; Dumont 1957: Part III). As in royal courts, the public ritual of the temples provides contexts for the

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the uncertain cases would be, for example, family shrines and ancestor shrines (*Samādhi*), where only portions of our model might apply. This question of the range of temples to which this model might apply, is, of course, *par excellence*, a matter for empirical investigation, and any arbitrary definition of the kind of temple to which this scheme applies would, at the present time, be premature and artificial.

[2]Since the primary purpose of this essay is not bibliographic, we shall make no attempt to cover the vast number of monographs that have appeared on south Indian temples, like the following striking studies for instance: V.N. Hari Rao, A history of Trichinopoly and Srirangam, Ph. D. thesis, University of Madras, 1948; Pillay (1953); Burton Stein, The Tirupati temple, Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1958; Sundaram (1969); Viraraghavacharya (1953-54).

codification or manipulation of the rights and privileges of groups in complementary or competitive relationships with one another (Beck 1972: 79; Barnett 1974: 117-204). Like caste associations, political parties and institutions of higher education, temples have recently provided the institutional context for the social mobilization of both low-ranked caste groups (Galanter 1972: 227-314; Hardgrave 1969: 120-29) and incipient political elites (Baker 1975).

Faced with this wide range of evidence and arguments, is it to be concluded that the south Indian temple is a mere reflection, however distorted, of its broader social context? The argument of this essay is that, looked at in its own terms, the south Indian temple falsifies the tempting 'reflectionist' hypothesis. Although, taken separately, many features of the south Indian temple mimic other institutional aspects of south Indian society, the way in which these features are synthesized in the temple is unique, both in cultural and structural terms. The bulk of this essay is designed to demonstrate precisely the way in which the seemingly disparate aspects of the south Indian temple form a single, coherent whole.

Since an attempt is made here to develop a general and schematic statement about the south Indian temple, it is important to note the primary data base on which this model is founded. It reflects an attempt to establish the common features that emerge from two separate, ethno-historical studies conducted in south India[3]: the first is a study of the Śrī Parthasārathi Svāmi Temple in Triplicane, Madras city, a relatively small temple with links to the Teṇkalai tradition of south Indian Śrī Vaiṣṇavism; the second is a study of the Śrī Mīnākṣi Sundaresvarar Temple in Madurai, a considerably larger complex, with Saivite affiliations, which was the centre of a vast network of agrarian relations, and was intimately linked to the growth of the kingdoms of both the Madurai Paṇḍya and Nāyaka kings. The elaboration of the differences between these two cases has been deliberately eschewed in order to clarify the underlying similarities.

Briefly, the four principles that we believe are central to an understanding of the south Indian temple (and which are dealt with serially in the four substantive sections of this essay) are the following:

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[3]Carol Appadurai Breckenridge conducted fieldwork at the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple, Madurai (Tamil Nāṭu) between September 1973 and September 1974: see her forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation on the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple, (University of Wisconsin). Arjun Appadurai conducted fieldwork at the Śrī Parthasārathi Svāmi Temple, Madras City, from September 1973 to September 1974: see his Ph.D. dissertation, Worship and conflict in south India: the case of the Śrī Parthasārathi Svāmi temple 1800-1973, University of Chicago, 1976. Both authors also conducted archival research at the Tamil Nāṭu Archives (Madras City), the Indian Office Library (London) and the Record Room of the Madras High Court.

(1) That temple ritual makes little sense unless it is viewed as the expression of homage to the reigning deity who is conceived as a sovereign.

(2) That this sovereign figure stands at the centre of a set of moral and economic transactions which constitute, in a specific ethno-sociological sense, a redistributive process.

(3) That temple endowments provide the organizational framework, within which individuals and corporate groups participate in this redistributive process, and acquire distinct and autonomous shares in its ritual and economic benefits.

(4) That conflicts generated by this process, between various such shareholders, are resolved by an outside agency, whose mandate is to 'protect' the temple, thus fulfilling one of the primary requirements for human claims to royal status.

DEITY AS PARADIGMATIC SOVEREIGN

At the moral, economic and iconographic centre of the south Indian temple is the deity. This deity, however, is not a mere image or symbol. It is conceived to be, in several thoroughly concrete senses, a person. That the deity is both sentient and corporeal is clear from the diverse and elaborate rituals which constitute worship in the temple. Upon installation the stone figure of the particular deity which is to reside in the temple sanctum sanctorum (Skt. *mūlasthānam*; *garbha grīham*) is vivified in a ceremony known as *prāṇa pratiṣṭai*. Literally speaking, the breath (*prāṇa*) of life is infused into the figure to give it sustenance and nurturance as the permanent and immovable centre of the temple (*mūlavar* or *mūla-vigraham*). Thereafter during daily worship and on calendric festival events the deity is bathed (*snānam*), anointed (*apisekam*), fed (*naivettiyam*), adorned (*alaṅkāram*), processed, etc., in a complex series of acts collectively known as *pūjā*. Still further evidence of the presence of the deity as a person is his or her eligibility for marriage (*tirukkalyāṇam*), capacity of having sexual relations, desire to take holidays, and willingness to engage in conquest, quarrels or other playful acts (*tiruvilaiyāṭal*). Such behaviour on the part of the deity emerges in temple festivals (Clothey 1969, 1975; Hudson 1972).

This state of vivification is permanent unless the deity is dishonoured (i.e., an inappropriate person touches it, the ritual process is halted due to conflict among the worshippers, etc.) in which case the deity is thought to leave the figure. *Samprōksaṇa* ceremonies are performed to re-invite the deity to reside in the stone figure. Similarly, ceremonies of renewal (*mahā-pisekam kumbāpisekam*) are to be performed at regular twelve to twenty-five year intervals during which time the deity leaves the sanctum in a clay

pot (*kumbam*) which is placed on a decorated dais in a separate pillared hall (*yāgasaḷai*) especially prepared for the purpose. Repairs necessary to maintain the walled and fortress-like temple structure are performed at this time.

The problem of how a stone figure can be a person has engaged legal and philosophical scholars for almost the last ten centuries (Sontheimer 1964), and has been peculiarly a subject of contention since the advent of the Anglo-Indian legal system in south India which evolved during the nineteenth century. In the Anglo-Indian legal system, the above qualities and capacities of the deity were interpreted to mean that the deity possessed a 'juristic personality' (Bagchi 1933). By extension, in an ideal sense the deity was considered capable of 'owning property' known as gifts (*tevatāṉam*) which were given to maintain the deity, and its abode, the temple.

This extensive and thorny legal and scholarly literature, which has resulted in the view that the Hindu deity is a juristic personality, has not exhausted the cultural understanding of the Hindu deity who is worshipped in the temple. More specifically, this literature has not taken into account another enduring feature of the popular conception of the Hindu deity in south India, namely, that the deity is seen to be a very special person. All the ethnographic evidence, particularly linguistic signs, suggests that the deity is conceived to be a sovereign, i.e., one who is first in rank, who commands resources, and who is generous in insuring prosperity for the kingdom. Both the temple-deity and the reigning king, for example, live in a temple-palace designated in Tamil as *kōyil*.[4] Both share a rich pool of ritual paraphernalia (i.e., stylus, drum, sceptre, flywisk, umbrella, elephant, etc.) which accompany them during their processional rounds of the kingdom which supports them. Published descriptions of the role of paraphernalia in temple worship as well as in royal ritual, support this analysis (Jagadisa Ayyar 1921; Krishna Sastri 1916; Mahalingam 1967: 65-67; 1972: 14-16; 20-21; 150-52). Both are referred to as omnipresent sovereign (Tam. *iraivaṉ*) or universal lord (*svāmi*). Both maintain a supporting retinue which forms a royal court (Tam. *paricaṉaṅkaḷ*). And finally, the language

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[4]*Kōyil* is a Tamil word meaning palace, sanctuary, temple. *Madras University Tamil Lexicon* (hereafter MUTL), Diocesan Press, Vepery, 1925-38, p. 1190. It comes from the word *kō* meaning king, father, potter, great man. *Ibid.*, p. 1169. *Kō* plus *il* which means place has come to mean the place of the great one. George L. Hart has argued that during the Sangam period in south India (c. 300 B.C.-300 A.D.) the word *Kō* designated the king, and *koyil*, the king's house. Only subsequently did it come to mean temple. The reverse process was true in north India where *deva* (god) came to mean king. (Related cultural and literary elements in ancient Tamil and Indo-Aryan, George L. Hart, Pn.D. thesis, Harvard University, 1970, p. 7.)

of service to the deity is in the idiom of bonded servitude (*aṭimai*).

Still further evidence that the deity is both royal and sovereign is temple ritual which is described by the term *pūjā* (Tam. *pūcai*: worship, adoration). Of the numerous descriptions of worship in the scholarly literature (Diehl 1956; Stevenson 1920: 360-400; Viraraghavacharya 1953: 301-54), the following cameo graphically illustrates the honouring of the deity as a royal sovereign (Krishna Sastri 1916: 3-4):

The ritual followed every day in the temples of Siva and Vishnu may be generally described as *rājōpachāra*, or the paying of royal honours. Thus in rich temples there will be elephants and camels with their appropriate paraphernalia, the royal umbrellas and *chauris* mounted on gold or silver handles, palanquins and other vehicles, a troupe of dancers and musicians, a host of other temple servants to wash the god, anoint him with sandal or decorate him with flowers and so on. Crowns and other rich and costly jewellery, set with gems and pearls. . .and often presented by Rajas and Chieftains or other rich devotees, are a special pride of the wealthier temples.

The Brāhmana priest is to purify himself by bath and prayers early morning, and then open the doors of the sanctum and gently wake up the god, who is supposed to be sleeping, by chanting appropriate hymns in his praise. Then, after duly worshipping the guardian deities, he washes the feet of the chief deity, bathes the image, clothes it properly, decorates it with the usual jewelry, sandal and flowers, waving incense and lamps of diverse pattern. . .in front of the god and finally offering him the cooked food or *naivedyam* and the final betel leaf and nut. At stated intervals the god comes out in procession and perhaps sees to the comfort of his attendant deities. Usually there is an important annual festival, representing in some cases the marriage of the god or some other special event in the doings of the god registered in local chronicles or *Purānas*. On such occasions the procession is carried on different vehicles, both common and special, the latter being such as the *kalpa-vriksha*, the wish-giving celestial tree of the *kāmadhenu*, the wish-giving celestial cow, or the mythic animal *gandabherunda*. The most important procession will generally be the car festival when the god goes round in the huge car through the main streets where his worshippers live and receives worship and offerings at their very homes.

To understand worship more fully, temple ritual may be discussed in terms of *pūjā* which is daily, festival which is occasional, and *Kāmiyam*

pūjā or *arccaṇai* which is 'private'. Each involves the offering of gifts which are honours to the deity.

Pūjā or daily worship consists of sixteen rites of adoration (Skt. *sado-pacaram, upacaram*) which honour the deity.[5] They are as follows: *āvā-kaṇam* (invocation), *stāpaṇam* (fixing), *pattiyam* (water for foot-washing), *ācamaṇam* (water for sipping), *arkkiyam* (water for hand-washing), *api-sekam* (anointing) or *snānam* (bathing), *vastiram kaṇṭam cāttutal* (Skt. *vastropavita*; dressing or perfuming), *puṣpancāttutal* (offering of flowers), *tūpatīpam camarppittal* (offering of incense and light), *naivettiyam* (offer-ing of food), *pali* (sacrifice), *hōmam* (oblation through fire), *nityōtsavam* (daily festival), *vāttiyam* (music), *narttaṇam* (dance) and *utvācaṇam* (send-off). Of the above sixteen, *apisekam* (anointing) and *naivettiyam* (feeding) from the central rites offering adoration and honour to the deity, and are, therefore, the terms popularly used to refer to worship.

Pūjā is regularly performed one to six times daily depending on the size and centrality of the temple (i.e., small village temples may receive dona-tions for only one *pūjā* whereas larger temples situated in cosmopolitan centres may receive donations for the full complement of services dictated by *āgamic* prescriptions). Of the six daily performances, four are obligatory celebrations: morning (*kāla*), noon (*ucci*), sunset (*sāyaṅkālam*) and midnight (*arttayāmam*). Two intermediary ceremonies which occur between the noon performance on auspicious occasions: *upacantikālam* precedes and *pera-tōsakālam* follows. All ritual in south Indian temples, whether daily, occasional or calendrical, reflects this basic model of *pūjā* offered to a sovereign deity, although ritual variations are determined by the specific *āgamic* code which governs a particular temple, as well as other local factors. The ritual codes collectively known as the *āgama*-s provide the textual core of worship in south Indian temples (Dasgupta 1955: 17-18; 91; 123, 175; Diehl 1956: 43-55; Farguhar 1920: 190-95; Filliozat 1961: V-XV).

Festivals, more appropriately translated from the Tamil as royal feasts (*tiruvilā*), and renewal consecrations (*pratiṣṭa, samprōksaṇa*, etc.) form the second cluster of rituals in the temple (Diehl 1956: 158-80; Natesa Sastri

[5]Those rites which collectively form the *upacāram* list vary from author to author, and from temple to temple. The list may be increased or reduced according to how inclusive or exclusive the term *pūjā* is intended to be. Some lists include up to twenty-one rites; others double up related activities such as incense and light in order to include music and dance within the sixteen *upacāram* rites. Variations on the above list are found in: Apte (1924: 1585); Kane (1930-62, II: 729); Monier-Williams (1891: 413-15); Stevenson (1920: 29, 52); Pathar (1974: 234, 289, 290); *Akoracivacariyar Sri Parartta Nittiya Pujaviti*, Devakottai, 1930, p. 117 quoted from the *Karaṇam Pūrvam* 375, cited in Diehl (1956: 90, fn. 1); Gonda, (1970: 186, fn. 196).

1903; Unterhill 1921). Their occasional or calendric nature is what unites these celebrations which are the most visible and public occasions at which the deity is honoured. There are two ways in which dates are set for festivals (Martin 1971: 224-25). The first is by reference to one of the fourteen days in the bright or dark half of the moon in a given month, and the second is by reference to *naksattiram*-s (star-days or lunar asterisms), the twenty-seven named positions that the moon moves through during a month, with a 28th if needed to fill out the month. Tamil months begin on the 14th to the 18th of the months in the Gregorian calendar.

The monthly cycle of festivals consists of the following: new moon, full moon, the two *ekātasi* days (eleventh day after the new and full moons), and the first day of the Tamil month (*Māsappiravesam*), all presided over by the chief deity. Subsidiary monthly events vary from temple to temple.

The basic and most elaborate paradigm for all temple festivals is the great feast (Skt. *Brahmōtsava*; Tam. *Peruviḷā*) for the sovereign deity of the temple which occupies ten to twenty days in a month determined to be auspicious in the temple calendar, often the month of *Cittirai* (April-May). A brief description of this feast will provide a graphic overview of all the other festivals in the temple. The elementary units of the great ten-day festival are two processions (morning and evening) on each of the first nine days of the feast, and one evening procession of the tenth day. The central feature of each of these processions is the *utsava-vigraham*, the metal processional form of the deity, which is a considerably smaller version of the main deity housed in the sanctum and known as the *mūlavar* . Numerous other events embedded in the daily ritual precede and follow the two processions (Diehl 1956: 158-80; Hudson 1972).

While on procession throughout the kingdom, feasting takes place during brief, pre-arranged halts which the royal-divine *entourage* makes before the homes or businesses of worshippers who wish to make offerings to the deity. Depending on the size and elaborateness of the feast which has been prepared by the donor for the deity, these halts are known as either *tirukkaṇ*-s (small and very brief halts in temporarily constructed thatched *pantal*-s) or *maṇṭapappaṭi*-s (more elaborate halts during which the deity 'graciously abides' in a stone pillared hall (*maṇṭapam*) where it is fed and entertained).

A third and final category of offerings made by worshippers to the sovereign deity is known as *kāmiyam pūjā* or *arccaṇai*. Since these offerings are occasioned by the needs of private persons, this is known as private worship, and is intended to be for the benefit of the donor alone and not for the benefit of the cosmos. *Arccaṇai* offerings consist of select *upacāram* items such as flowers, fruits, incense and saffron , which are presented to

the presiding deity while its names and titles are being recited, either one hundred and eight, or one thousand and eight times. *Arccaṇai* gifts may be occasioned by a crisis (illness, court case, sterility, poverty, etc.), a change in status (marriage, parenthood, studenthood, etc.), or gratitude for the intervention of the deity in previous situations (Diehl 1956: 235-36).

If then, the deity is a royal sovereign, it might be asked, over what does this sovereign exercise rule? The most conspicuous answer to this question is, the Hindu temple. But what is the temple? Spatially speaking, the temple consists of dark corridors (*prakāram*-s) around which the worshipper must circumambulate in order to reach the womb-like sanctum, of spacious pillared halls (*maṇṭapam*-s), and of numerous subsidiary shrines which house the divine retinue who serve to form a panoply of supporting deities (*parivāram*). But, the temple is appropriately the place where the deity resides. It does not satisfy the question of over what does the deity rule? It might be argued that the deity is a sovereign ruler, not so much of a domain, as of a *process*, a redistributive process. In what does this process consist?

At one normative level, the deity, however paradigmatically and however provisionally, commands resources (i.e., services and goods) such as those which are necessary and appropriate for the support and materialization of the ritual process described above. But these resources are not merely authoritatively commanded and received by the deity. On receipt, they are redistributed in the form of shares (*paṅku*) to the royal courtiers, the donor (*yajamāna*), and worshippers at large. The authority to command and redistribute resources places the deity at the centre of a transactional nexus in which the deity is expected to be generous. Ritual which constitutes worship provides the schematic and elementary unit in which to observe the transactional network where first the deity and subsequently the donor are the object of gifting activity.

Worship, Redistribution and Honour

From one point of view, temple-worship in south India based on the *pūjā* model reflects an extremely complex process of religious evolution in India, starting from the Vedic sacrificial system, complicated by the developments of the Purānic or Hinduistic period, and increasingly embellished with Tāntric elements (Gonda 1970: 85). In both lexical and structural terms, *pūjā* retains key elements of the Vedic sacrifice (Gonda 1970: 62-86; Kane 1974: 705-40). However, in trying to understand the essential structural contrast between the Vedic sacrifice and temple-worship, it is useful to consider the contrast, in the language of economic anthropology,

between 'reciprocity' and 'redistribution' as types of economic transaction. Marshall Sahlins has argued that the basis of this contrast is the difference between a transaction in which a centre independent of the transactors plays a key role, and one in which this is not the case (1972: 188):

> True, pooling [i.e. redistribution] and reciprocity may occur in the same social contexts—the same close kinsmen that pool their resources in household commensality, for instance, also as individuals share things with one another—but the precise social relations of pooling and reciprocity are not the same. Pooling is socially a *within* relation, the collective action of a group. Reciprocity is a between relation, the action and reaction of two parties.

This view of reciprocity corresponds closely with the classic analysis of Hubert and Mauss, who suggest that all religious sacrifice has a contractual element, in which men and gods exchange their services and 'each gets his due' (1964: 100). There is no doubt that this reciprocal, contractual model of exchange informs some aspects of temple-worship in south India. But of greater importance in the south Indian temple is the 'redistributive' model of economic relationships (Stein 1960; Spencer 1968). In a wide range of societies, however, redistribution is not simply a matter of pooling resources around an arbitrary centre. Synthesizing a number of previous formulations concerning redistribution, Sahlins has demonstrated the widespread association of political chieftainship with this kind of socio-economic system (1972: 189):

> Rights of call on the produce of the underlying population, as well as obligations of generosity, are everywhere associated with chieftainship. The organized exercise of these rights and obligations is redistribution. . . .

This 'chiefly' model of redistribution fits the deity of a south Indian temple perfectly. This sharpens the seeming paradox that the chiefly slot is here filled by a deified stone image, which stands at the centre of the temple as a set of moral and economic transaction. This paradox becomes muted, however, when we recall that the deity is strictly and literally conceived as a sovereign person. In what cultural terms is this 'redistributive' situation conceived and organized?

The gift which places the donor in an active transactional relationship with the deity, initiates a process of redistribution (*viṇiyōkam*) of a part of the offerings to all those involved in the ritual process: the donor himself,

the staff of the temple (*paricanaṅkaḷ*; courtiers), and the worshippers (*cevārtikaḷ*). This is true in the two main forms of worship, *pūjā* (daily worship) and *utsavam* (festival/processional worship), but in the third form of worship, *arccaṇai*, which fits better the 'reciprocal' model, there is no real allocation of shares for either the worshippers or the staff: the offering is simply transvalued by being offered to the deity and returned to the worshipper. But, in the case of *pūjā* and *utsavam*, in which the offering of edible food (cooked and uncooked) to the deity is central, shares in the leavings of the deity accrue to all three categories of participants. The largest garland (*mālai*) worn by the deity during a specified ritual period, and in some cases the silk vestments of the deity (*parivaṭṭam*) are bestowed on the donor, who is also given a share of the left-over food of the deity (*prasātam*) and priority in drinking the water (*tīrttam*) sanctified by contact with the deity's ablutions or meals. Similarly, the staff/courtiers to the deity receive a part (*svatantiram*) of the leavings, generally the food leavings, of the deity. Lastly, the worshippers receive a share in the sacred water and holy food left over from feeding the deity.

This basic apportionment is subject to variation, depending on the particular temple, the particular ritual event, the scale of the celebration, and the largesse of the donor. Although much of the prescription of these shares comes to be customary in particular temples, the role of the donor in initiating the transaction and overseeing the redistribution is, in principle, pivotal. Thus the donor is referred to as *yajamāna* (the Vedic term for the sacrificer) and, in Vaiṣṇava temples, at any rate, the share of worshippers is ascribed to the good-will of the donor, by the term *iṣṭa viṇiyōkam* (the desired redistribution), particularly in processional festivals.

These redistributed leavings of the deity are known as 'honours' (*mariyātai*),[6] and they are subject to variation and fluidity both in their content as well as in their recipients. Recognized sectarian leaders and political figures are often given some prominent combination of these 'honours'.

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[6]This term is derived from the Sanskrit word *maryada*, (Tam. *mariyātai*), which means literally 'limit' or 'boundary', and in various north Indian languages, as well as common parlance in the south, has acquired the more general meaning of 'propriety', 'respect', 'deference', 'honour'. However, in the context of south Indian temples, the term *mariyātai* has acquired a more specific and generic meaning, whereby it denotes a whole series of objects, actions and transactions, linking the deity with its servants, worshippers and protectors, whose substance, order and context, provides a public code for the demarcation of status. In his study of the Pramalai Kallar, Dumont (1957: 318) has noted the link between the concept of *mutalmai* (primacy) and the distribution of honours in temples. The importance of honour has also been noted by Hanchett (1975: 27-59).

In Vaiṣṇava temples, an important 'honour' is the placing of the Śrī Saṭa-kōpaṇ (a gold crown, symbolizing the feet of Viṣṇu) on the heads of worshippers at the conclusion of pūjā and in the course of processionals. Given the public nature of these redistributive acts, the order in which they are distributed amongst a set of individuals is often as important as their content. Finally, particular days are allocated in the temple calendar, during which particular members of the temple-staff, such as the priest, are especially honoured.

But these honours are not simply denotative emblems of culturally privileged roles in relationship to the deity. That is, the receipt of specific honours, in any given context, renders authoritative the individual's share (paṅku) in the temple conceived as a redistributive process. Such a share would be composed of: the right to offer service (kaiṅkaryam) to the deity, either through endowment or through prescribed ritual function; the right to move the resources allocated for the specific ritual event; the right to command the relevant persons involved in the actualization of the given ritual; the right to perform some single part of a complex ritual event; and, finally, the right to worship the deity, by simply witnessing the ritual. Depending on whether one was a donor, a temple-servant, or a worshipper, and depending on the particular ritual event in question, one's share in the ritual process would have a different concrete content. But the sum total of one's rights, over time, would constitute one's share in the ritual and redistributive process of the temple.

This share is given public expression and authoritative constitution by some combination of the finite set of substances transvalued by association with the deity, which are referred to as 'honours'. This powerful function of 'honours' in the redistributive process of the temple, as well as the actual mechanics of redistribution in this cultural context, can be seen very graphically in the following letter of complaint to the trustees of the Śrī Pārthasārathi Svāmi Temple from the agent of a group of donors, protesting the misappropriation by some temple-servants of a share of the sacred food (prasātam) generated by their endowment:

Respected Sirs:

The third day festival of Rapaththu[7] is being conducted through our family by the Reserve Bank of India, Issue Department, Madras, for the last about four decades. On 23-12-1958, 10 Dosais [rice pancakes], 10 Vadais [rice and lentil fritters] and 10 Laddus [sweetmeats] were given

[7] This festival is the second half of a 20-day celebration that falls in two segments on either side of Vaikuṇṭha Ekādasi, the holiest day of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava calendar.

out for distribution in the Thiruvaymozhi Goshti [Public]. Out of that 2 and 3/4 of each item was given as Swathantram[8] according to rules. The balance of 7 and 1/4 of each item was intended for distribution among the devotees present, according to the well-established usage prevalent in this Temple. Out of this above portion, which are purely intended for distribution [i.e., 7 and 1/4 of each item], 2 Dosais, 2 Vadais and 2 Laddus were stolen openly and kept separately by the Temple Staff. This was brought to the notice of the Amin, but he has refused to take notice. It is pointed out that an ubayakar has every right to see his intention of distribution is properly fulfilled and the trustees are equally responsible to see that Prasadams are utilised for the purposes for which they are intended. . . .

The concern of this particular agent of a donor for the proper redistribution of the honours generated, in the form of sacred food, by his endowment, is not unusual or peculiar. Temple servants also, can and do, enter into conflict over honours, as the following example, taken from the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple in the first decades of this century, attests. On 17 January 1923, the Temple Superintendent, M. S. Ramaswamy Aiyar, an appointee of the Temple Committee, sent the following petition, asking for police help, to the Inspector of Police, Madurai Town, wherein he requested police assistance during the M. S. temple car processional which included a stop at the prominent Cellatamman temple. In a long-standing set of conflicts which began *circa* 1915, violence between temple priests (*paṭṭar*-s) and the mahouts who trained, tended and rode the lead elephants in temple processionals, was expected to erupt. The petition read:[9]

Some disputes having arisen between the elephant mahouts in the distribution of betels, etc., at mantagappadies, the [Court] receiver has ordered 'on 8-1-23 that the same should be given to both the mahouts. Still some bhatters and one of the mahouts are throwing obstacles and attempting to create disturbances in the distribution of betels today in the Sellathamman Kovil. The honours and the money have as per practice to be given to the adhikara-parapathyam,[10] and distributed by

[8]The customarily prescribed share of the temple-staff in the leavings of the deity.

[9]*Sinnaswami Nayakkar v. The Minaksi Sundaresvarar Devastanam*, Original Suit 69 of 1923, District Munsif Court, Madura.

[10]An *Adhikārā-pārapaṭṭiyam* is the temple-servant who, among other things, supervises the torch and vehicle bearers in the processional, oversees the display of lights to the deity, and distributes betel-leaf in the *maṇṭapam*-s.

him to all the servants as per *mamool* [custom and usage]. As some dis-
turbance is anticipated in the absence of police bandobust as reported by
the peshkar,[11] I request that police help be given to enable the temple
authorities to peacefully conduct the car festival and other functions
connected therewith.

These examples suggest the importance which attaches to temple
honours, and the connection between honours and other aspects of the
rights of those involved in the temple. The issue of conflict in the temple,
and its resolution, is taken up in the last section of this essay, 'Protection
and Service'. But before that, it is necessary to appreciate that the most
general context for the distribution of honours is provided by temple
endowments. These endowments represent the organizational means by
which donors carve out a share in the redistributive process of the temple,
while retaining significant control over the transactions they subsidize.
This feature of temple organization is dealt with in the following section.

DECENTRALIZED AUTHORITY AND ENDOWMENTS

Worship offered to a sovereign deity, as has been noted, permits the donor
to enter into a transactional relationship with the deity. This transactional
relationship, viewed in terms of honours and shares, links deity-donor-
temple staff and worshipper in a larger redistributive system. This redistri-
butive process, however, is not monolithic. The donor who supports worship
in its multiple forms in a south Indian temple establishes a number of
specific, distinct and enduring relationships to the deity, Moreover, in
principle, every gift implies a distinct donor, a distinct portion of the ritual
calendar, and a distinct set of honours and shares for the donor, worship-
per, temple-staff and deity. This multiplicity in the link between donors,
gifts and ritual may be observed in the enduring organizational distinction
between the numerous endowments that support ritual in a given temple.

Religious endowments have been the subject of lengthy scholarly, legal
(Ghosh 1938; Mukherjea 1962; Nelson 1877; Rajasikhamani 1971; Varada-
chari 1968) and philosophical treatises over the last one hundred years.
Much of this vast and often erudite literature has attempted to elucidate
and to understand the 'law' with regard to endowments with a particular
eye to understanding endowments as 'property' (Derrett 1962: 68-72). This
legal approach to endowments has been the product of a search largely by

[11]The *peskar* is a revenue-agent who represents the temple-trustees, and who
supervises the day-to-day ritual process in the temple.

the Anglo-Indian Courts for a unified and codified approach to conflict-adjudication in temple disputes. In the absence of a well-defined corpus of Hindu law with respect to religious endowments, a judge-made case-law emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which endowments were inadvertently subjected to the law of trusts based impli-citly, if not at times explicitly, on the English law of charitable trusts.[12]

To view temple endowments (Tam. *kaṭṭaḷai*) as trusts, however, does not answer the question of their place in the larger context of the south Indian Hindu temple. Temple endowments are special kinds of trusts. They are the elementary units within which resources are mobilized, organized and utilized in the temple. Thus, resources are *pooled* in so far as an endow-ment generates one portion of the overall ritual process (viz. a single cere-mony in a ten-day festival which is in turn a single event in the annual ritual calendar). But, resources are *separately* enjoyed in so far as that particular portion of the ritual process established by an endowment generates a context in which the donor initiates a transaction with the deity. In and through that context, the donor receives honours (i.e., his or her share of the redistributed *pūjā* offerings), and maintains exclusive access to such things as the surplus (i.e., cash or crops) generated by the capital or land related to the endowment.

To understand endowments more fully, the following four generalizations may be posited for consideration:

> (1) an endowment represents the mobilization, organization and pool-ing of resources (i.e., capital, land, labour, etc.);
>
> (2) an endowment generates one or more ritual contexts in which to distribute and to receive honours;
>
> (3) an endowment permits the entry and incorporation of corporate units into the temple (i.e., families, castes, monasteries or *maṭam*-s, sects, kings, etc.) either as temple servants, (i.e., *stānikar*-s, priests, assistants, drummers, pipers, etc.) or as donors;
>
> (4) an endowment supports, however partially and however incomple-tely, the reigning deity. But, because the reigning deity is limited since it is made of stone, authority with respect to endowment resources and ritual remains in the hands of the donor or an agent appointed by him or her.

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[12]Technically the Indian Trusts Act of 1882, etc. did not apply to Hindu or Muslim religious endowments. But, in the absence of a clear exposition of problems encoun-tered by the Judges in Sanskrit texts, English precedents, where they could be found, were used as guidelines for decisions.

These four points might be explored further so as to sustain the hypothesis that the macro-organization of endowments argues against a monolithic conception of the temple. Conversely, they reveal the temple to be a complex and radically decentralized organization in which endowments provide the means for linking the temple to its agrarian hinterland or urban context. Similarly, endowments link the temple to corporate units in society. These corporate groups retain their separate identities while being accommodated in the larger ritual and economic process represented by the temple.

The first proposition is that through an endowment resources are mobilized, organized and utilized. Resources include land and/or capital (i.e. hard cash, the prerogative to collect certain 'taxes', etc.), and human labour (i.e., the services of cultivators, temple ritual specialists, etc.). Through administrative orders (*sāsanam*), now called deeds, these resources are formally and publicly gifted to the temple. The size of the gift varies from endowment to endowment. Seventy-three endowments, for example, provided the resources for worship in the 1973 ritual calendar of the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple, Madurai. The resources supporting each of these seventy-three endowments varied: Historically, the donor's share from each of twenty-one villages was attached to the Tirumala Nāyaka Endowment; from five to the Tanappa Mutaliyār Endowment; and from two to the Nāgappa Cheṭṭiyār Endowment.[13] Other endowments included plots of land (i.e., flower gardens known as *nandavanam*, etc.) or cash (i.e., voluntary collections known as *mahimai*, etc.).

That the endowment permits the pooling of resources so that temple ritual events might be sustained is the second proposition under discussion. That is to say that separate and discrete endowments variously provide the resources for specified aspects of worship. *Pūjā* items (including milk, curds, ghee, honey, bananas, sugar, coconut, turmeric, sandalwood, rice, etc.) for the six daily *pūjā*-s in the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple, Maduari, for example, are provided by a number of different endowments. In 1973, items for morning *pūjā* (*kālasanti*) came variously and in varying proportions from the following eight endowments: Sirkar, Maturanāyakam

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[13]Given the complexities of the various pieces of land reform legislation over the last century (i.e., Estate Abolition Act, 1908, etc.), the exact nature of control over the lands and villages as shared by the donor, the tenants and the temple today remains unclear. In some cases, endowed lands which have been resumed by the state have been compensated with a cash allowance administered by the H.R. and C.E. Department whose role is discussed in the section on protection and service. In general, however, regardless of such changes, donors retain significant control over endowments, and specified resources continue to be budgeted as endowment-related.

Piḷḷai, Venkaṭa Krishṇappa Nāyakkar, Muttiruli, Lekkaya Nāyakkar, Pūcci Nāyakkar, Amakappa Mutaliyār and Mannarappa.

Festival events follow a similar pattern. Embedded within any given nine to twelve day monthly festival are numerous ritual events. Each separate event is sponsored by a separate endowment. An overview of this process, wherein ritual events are separately sponsored by separate donors, who represent a diverse and geographically widespread body, is provided by the general calendar (*pattirikai*) for the 1974 *Cittirai* (April-May) *Peruvilā* or great feast of the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple popularly known as the 'Wedding Festival'.[14] The donor for the major event for each of the twelve days of the feast is cited or implied under the column which is headed 'place and hall'. They include sequentially from day one to day twelve: the potters (*kuyavar*), Mutturāmayyar, Kalyāṇakuntar Mutaliyār, Villāpuram Pāvakkā, patrons of the Rāmāyaṇa Sāvaṭi, the Sivaganga Rājā (days six and nine), patrons of the Nāyakkar Maṇṭappati, Kaṭṭu Cetti, Nāgappa Cettiyārs, and agents of the Muttambal Mutaliyār Endowment. A similar chart could be presented to further detail the list of donors for each particular day. Such a chart would list the donors for subsidiary but supporting events which elaborate and complicate the festival celebration.

The importance of the discrete sponsorship of ritual events by separate donors lies in the proposition that ritual events are the contexts in which honours are distributed and received in the temple. The first honour (i.e., *akkira-mariyātai* often involves the receipt of a silk vestment, *parivaṭṭam*, which has been presented to and worn by the deity) is received by the donor (or by someone designated by him or her) as the offerer of *pūjā* or worship. Following the ritual, the donor offers fees known as honours (*tirukkai-valakkam mariyātai*) in the form of betel-nut, money, rice-balls, etc. to temple courtiers and servants. Thus, ritual contexts generated by a donor are the occasions when he, the donor, appropriately participates in the distribution and receipt of honours.

The formation of ritual contexts in which honours are generated and moved leads to the third aspect of endowments, namely the entry and incorporation of corporate units in the redistributive process of the temple. The donor of an endowment generally, if not always, represents a social and economic unit. Such units might be a family, a monastery (*maṭam*), a sect, a kingdom, a guild, or more recently, a collection of workers (i.e.,

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[14]'Cittirai Peruviḷā Pattirikai,' Aruḷmiku Mīnākṣi Sundaresvarar Devastānam, Madurai, 1974. A similar list of donors for the Āvaṇi Mūlam, Māci and Skanda-Sashti festivals of the Śrī Subrahmania Svāmi Devasthānam, Tiruchendur is given in Pillai (1948: 54).

court or bank employees, etc.). The formation of an endowment as noted above provides the corporate group an opportunity in which their head-man, a king-like figure, may formally and publicly receive honours. There-after, in the formal meetings of the group, the 'headman' receives honours first, and subsequently distributes them to group members. The receipt of honours from the deity by the 'headman', however, is not fixed or static. Each time honours are distributed, the possibility that conflict might erupt in the form of a contender to the role of 'headman' claiming the right to receive honours first in those contexts sponsored by his group, does exist.

In the context of the temple, therefore, two things occur: separate and diverse groups are brought together to generate a process in which a share in any one aspect of an endowment is a share in the redistributive cycle of the temple. Likewise, individual members of a group are brought together to participate in the formation of ritual events in which group members compete for the receipt of honours.

Finally, the formation of an endowment, however partially and however incompletely, contributes to the support of the reigning deity. But, because the reigning deity is made of stone, and is hence limited in its capacity to function as the decision-maker or as conflict adjudicator, authority with respect to endowment resources and labour, ritual and honours distribu-tion, remains in the hands of the donor or an agent appointed by him or her. It is this decentralized nature of the exercise of authority which in principle most poignantly characterizes temple structure and organization. However, tensions and conflicts are not always resolvable by the endow-ment donor or agent. In that case it becomes necessary to look elsewhere for arbitration.

PROTECTION AND SERVICE

Control over endowment is only one potential locus of conflict in the temple. In addition to donors, conflict can involve trustees, temple-servants and worshippers. In both the Śrī Pārthasārathi Svāmi Temple, and the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sundaresvarar Temple, in the course of the last five decades, major conflicts have erupted between the trustees, between the trustees and the priests, amongst the priests themselves, between the priests and other temple-servants, and between donors and everybody else.[15] This

[15]The following cases are the empirical basis for this assertion. At the High Court of Judicature at Madras are the following cases involving the Śrī Pārthasārathi Svāmi Temple: C.S. 1 of 1932; C.S. 527 of 1932; C.S. 241 of 1933; C.S. 314 of 1935; C.S. 306 of 1946; and C.S. 107 of 1947. Examples of court cases from the Śrī Mīnākṣi-Sunda-resvarar Temple at Madurai come from: The Madura District Munsif Court (viz.

is by no means a unique situation, as a glance at the indices to various digests of court cases will easily demonstrate (Sontheimer 1964: 78-100; Derrett 1968: 482-505). These conflicts often take the form of honour disputes, and given the denotative and constitutive role of honours with respect to the overall share (*paṅku*) of a person or group in the redistributive process of the temple, they are rarely, if ever, trivial (Barnett 1974: 192-93; Beals 1964: 99-113; Beck 1972: 79; Beteille 1965: 91; Dumont 1957: 307-08; Dumont 1970: 230).

Whether they involve donors, trustees, temple-servants or worshippers, these conflicts involve issues raised by the relationship of service (*kaiṅkaryam*) to the sovereign deity. The most important fact about these various forms of service, is that they are all relatively autonomous forms of participation in the overall ritual and redistributive process of the temple. Each person or group involved in service of any kind, thus, possesses an inalienable and privileged relationship to the sovereign deity, concretized in some sort of share, dramatized and rendered authoritative by some sort of honour. What holds these various 'servants' together, is not a simple hierarchy of functions, no single pyramid of authority, but rather (1) their shared orientation to (and dependance on) the sovereignty of the deity they serve, and (2) the sheer logic of functional interdependence, without which the ritual process would break down. Even the managerial roles in the temple, such as that of the trustees, are not conceived to be superordinate in any clear hierarchial way. They are authoritative only in so far as they do not disturb any one of the 'shares' which they must orchestrate in order to keep the moral and economic cycle of temple-ritual going.

This should not imply, however, that the temple is an ill-disciplined collection of independent agents. Particular chains of command do exist, as well as particular norms which govern these chains. But these norms, which vary from temple to temple, are legitimated by a shared idea of the past, of hallowed convention, which is based on a fragile consensus. Thus changes in the social and political environment of the temple tend to fragment this delicate consensus fairly easily. At the best of times, the boundaries within which orders can be given and expected to be obeyed, are tightly defined. When these boundaries are overlooked, and the share of some individual or group is seen to be threatened, conflict erupts.

It is at these moments of conflict that we can see how the many groups and individuals who possess shares of some sort in the temple, recognize

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O.S. 142 of 1931; O.S. 287 of 1935); The Madura District Court (viz. O.S. 2 of 1921); The Madura Sub-Judge's Court (viz. O.S. 63 of 1921; O.S. 58 of 1936); and the Appellate Side of the High Court of Judicature at Madras (viz. A.S. 209 and 210 of 1924; A.S. 375 of 1931; A.S. 63 of 1935; and S.A. 1546 of 1943).

their privileged interaction with the deity as the *only* really authoritative relationship. Thus, the problem arises of how to arbitrate conflicts that arise at any of the complex interphases of these shares, conflicts most often expressed in the idiom of honour. Informants address this problem by invoking another relationship to the deity, the relationship of protection (Skt. *paripālana*; Tam. *kāppāṭrutal*). In what does protection consist and who is qualified to exercise it?

Today, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (Administration) Department of the state of Tamil Nāṭu exercises the mandate of protection, through legal and bureaucratic control of thousands of temples in the state (Mudaliar 1974). In this respect, its role is a direct and self-conscious extension of the classical royal model, which obtained in pre-British south India, whereby the role of the king *(arasan)* was understood to entail the protection of the temple. In this classical model, to protect the temple means to ensure that the services, resources and rules that define the redistributive process of any given temple, are allocated, distributed and defined, so that conflict does not arise and disharmony does not set in. This royal mandate is a delicate one, for the king cannot *rule* the temple. He is himself a servant *(cevārti)* of the deity, and indeed the human agent of the divine sovereignty enshrined in the deity (Sontheimer 1964: 75-76). But since the deity cannot, by its very nature, arbitrate conflict among its servants, the human king is called upon to fulfil this function.

In fulfilling this royal mandate of protection, the king is only the ultimate recourse. Conflicts may be solved amiably by local assemblies. Nor is the protective function of the king in reference to the deity monopolistic. All organized relationships to the deity, relationships of systematic service, are held to be, in a sense, protective, in so far as they safeguard, maintain and nurture some aspect, however finite, of the redistributive process centred on the deity. Thus 'protection' and 'service' are the two extreme (ideal-typical) poles of all relationships to the deity. Just as the protective function of the king is only the highest human expression of service to the deity, so even the most humble form of service to the deity, shares some of the prestigious, authoritative and autonomous texture of the protective role of the king. In this sense, though separated by many other features, the king and the mahout are together servant-protectors of the sovereign deity.

In purely cultural terms, therefore, we can see in the relationship of human kings to temple-deities in south India, an elegant and symbiotic division of sovereignty. The sovereign deity is the paradigm of royal

authority. By serving this deity, in the form of elaborate gifts which gene-rated special royal honours, and by protecting the redistributive processes of temples, pre-British kings shared in this paradigmatic royalty. By being the greatest servant of the sovereign deity, the king sustains and displays his rule over men.

But in operational and empirical terms, this cultural model can become problematic, for it does not clearly specify the boundaries of the temple, both as a political and administrative unit, and as a ritual process. In short, it does not provide a set of rules for temple-control. By temple-control is meant the acknowledged competence of an individual or an agency to authoritatively determine the roles, rights and resources involved in the on-going maintenance of worship. Not even the protective mandate of kings can abrogate what are perceived to be appropriate shares in rela-tion to the sovereign deity. Kings are obliged to interact with temples. This is partly because, enshrining the deity, temples are repositories of kingship, in its paradigmatic sense. By extension, they are concentrations of economic, political and cultural concern for the hinterlands they dominate. But their prerogatives as protectors are always *potentially* subject to challenge from other 'servants' of the deity, who perceive their rights/shares as independently derived from the sovereign deity. To a con-siderable extent, conflicts concerning shares and rights, often expressed in the medium of honour, derive from this structural aspect of the shared sovereignty of kings and temple-deities.

To understand the impact of British ideas and institutions on this com-plex and delicate system of indigenous meanings, would be to undertake a historical exercise that lies outside the scope of this essay. Stated briefly, however, the colonial period has considerably complicated the institutional framework within which the shared sovereignty of the king and temple-deity is conceived. Unlike pre-British kings, who transacted with temples through elaborate gifting and occasional arbitration of temple-conflict, the present state has inverted and distorted this relationship. Given the legal-rational-bureaucratic (in the Weberian usage) basis of the present political order, the H. R. and C. E. Department is a 'protector' of south Indian temples in a much different way than its pre-British royal pre-decessors. It maintains a continuous, centralized and bureaucratic relation-ship with the temples under its management, and it is therefore, in economic terms, more a 'manager' of temples than an 'endower'. Similarly, the ideology of the DMK, in respect to religious matters, is a confusing mix of modern rationalist attitudes and traditional attitudes of veneration and support. Finally, given the division of the state into executive and judiciary (a distinction that goes back to the very beginnings of British

rule), the H. R. and C. E. Department does not have a conclusive role in the resolution of temple-conflict. Not only can litigants take their grievances to the judicial system, but they can contest the actions of the H.R. and C. E. Department in court. In the Śrī Pārthasārathi Svāmi Temple, for example, throughout the 1950s and 1960s members of the local Teṇkalai sect of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas conducted a court battle for control of this temple with the H. R. and C. E. Department, a battle they eventually lost.[16]

Nevertheless, it is clear that officials of the state who have active bureaucratic involvements with particular temples, as well as the staff and worshippers in such temples, share the idea that the government (Tam. *arasu*) is in some fashion carrying on, in its management of temples, the mandate of pre-British Hindu kings to protect such institutions. The persistence o. this conception of the relationship between the state and the temple, in spite of significant changes in the social, economic and political order, suggests its centrality to the south Indian way of ordering the universe.

CONCLUSION

The four principles which we have argued to be at the core of the south Indian temple, both as a locus of meaning and as a functioning institution, can be recapitulated as follows. The sovereign deity, honoured in daily and calendrical worship, is the authoritative centre of the temple. Gifts to the deity, and culturally demarcated shares in the leavings of the deity, are the dramatized and public features of a complex redistributive process, in which tokens of precedence are the constitutive features of roles, rights and resources in the temple. The flexible and dynamic organizational framework for this redistributive process, is provided by temple-endowments, through which men and groups establish an enduring connection with the deity, just as they enact their autonomy and interdependence with respect to each other. Conflict among such participants, unavoidable because of the nature of the deity (which is the source of their rights but is also incapable of arbitrating their conflicts), can only be resolved by the 'protective' mandate of human rulers, who thus render themselves indispensable to the deity who is the paradigm of their own royalty.

It is to this multiplicity of ordered meanings and functions, that the south Indian temple owes its immense importance in south Indian society. Particular temples, in particular times and places, represent this

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[16]See documents in *A.K. Srinivasachariar and others vs. the commissioner H.R. and C.E. and others*, Original Suit 2910 of 1968, City Civil Court of Madras.

complex paradigm in a variety of ways. This concrete variety, however, is itself a testimony to the flexibility and centrality of this south Indian paradigm, whose quintessential sociological expression is the south Indian temple.

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