WORSHIP AND LANGUAGE USE IN TAMIL

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1 THREE TYPES OF LANGUAGE USE IN WORSHIP

In this paper, I investigate the language use employed in Hindu worship in Tamil and among Tamil speakers. One notices three kinds of language in worship - use of Sanskrit, use of Tamil verses, and *impromptu* utterances of devotees in Tamil. These three kinds of language use can be ascribed, in some overlapping manner, to the two types of temples found in Tamilnadu—temples which may be labeled, for want of a better appellation, as **elitist** temples and **folk** temples. While the impromptu utterances of the devotees in Tamil are heard both in elitist and folk temples, the use of Tamil verses and Sanskrit are restricted to elitist temples.

2. FOLK TEMPLES AND ELITIST TEMPLES

Again, while the use of Sanskrit *archana* itself is a defining characteristic of an elitist temple, there are also other characteristics that distinguish an elitist temple from a folk temple and *vice versa*. In folk temples, which include both hypaethral (wholly or partly open to the sky) as well as roofed temples, the deities, which are variously called *ciṛuteyvaṅkaḷ* 'smaller deities,' or *kiraama teevataikaḷ* 'village deities' are worshipped.

1. In elitist temples, generally speaking, the gods and goddesses referred to in Hindu puranas are worshipped.

2. The deities of folk temples, unlike those of the other category, do not find a place in codified Hindu pantheon and mythology, but occupy prominent positions in folk traditions, which could differ from region to region within Tamilnadu, and from caste or other social groups

3. Folk temples are small and do not have much architectural complexity.

4. While elitist temples may follow certain agama or other codified religious prescriptions in terms of temple architecture as well as the placement, number, and kinds of deities, folk temples are covered by folk traditions only.

5. There need be no image even, in folk temples—trees, sticks, pillars, pictures, walls, etc., could be construed as deities and worshipped. In elitist temples, there are always images/idols whether in human form or anthropomorphic form for worship. There could be exceptions here and there.

6. Folk temples and the deities therein may be family-based, in the sense that some families may own the temple, and that exclusively these families may have worshiped

the deities for generations. Others may not worship in such temples, whether or not explicit restrictions have been posted or otherwise made known.

7. Elitist temples are all open temples with no lawful restrictions on Hindus worshipping there except those relating to entry into *sanctum sanctorum* and other reserved areas, entry into which has been allowed by dicta of various sorts only to specified professional groups such as priests relating to the immediate conduct of pujas. At least one major elitist temple (Natajaja temple in Chidambaram) is under the trusteeship of priestly class.

8. A few families whose members are related may also adopt a folk temple and its deities.

9. Folk temples may also be caste-based, and if there are sects within a caste, these temples may be sect-based also.

10. There are also folk temples and deities, which may be multi-caste based.

11. There are folk temples devoted exclusively to male or female deities, in addition to folk temples devoted to both female and male deities. In contrast, in elitist temples both male and female deities are generally accommodated.

12. While deities of elitist temples are invariably given only vegetarian offerings, deities of the folk category may be given either vegetarian or non-vegetarian offerings or both, with the number of those deities offered the non-vegetarian dominating. The vegetarian/non-vegetarian offering is based not only on the perception of the deities as vegetarian or non-vegetarian as eaters/in terms of diet or dietary preference by the devotees, but also on the basis of vegetarian or non-vegetarian character of the caste/family of the devotee and the days of the week during which rituals are performed, etc.

13. There may be a chain of folk temples of a deity with some specific variation making the deity as belonging to a particular caste/sect/family, wherever the members of that caste/sect/family are living in regardless of where members of said caste/sect/family currently reside in the vicinity of these temples. This chain provides a clue to draw the lineage of the groups and the migratory patterns of the groups involved.

14. Both in folk temples (with more than one deity) and elitist temples, one could make a distinction between a deity which is a main or presiding deity occupying the central position in worship procedures and a deity which is one among many in the same temple.

15. There are certain consequences of such a distinction noticed in the linguistic behaviour of the devotee. The devotee spends more time and utters more utterances while worshipping the main deity. There is only a perfunctory linguistic utterance in favour of the latter.

16. Both in folk temples (with more than one deity) and elitist temples, one could make a distinction between a deity, which a devotee worships with great attention and a deity, which he/she worships in a perfunctory and routine manner. There are certain consequences of such a distinction noticed in the linguistic behaviour of the devotee, in the sense that the quantity and quality of linguistic utterances for the former category far exceed those for the latter category.

17. One could also make a distinction between benevolent and malevolent deities. There are certain consequences of such a distinction noticed in the linguistic behaviour of the devotee. A benevolent deity or a deity of indifferent value or a deity, who is perceived to be neutral or indifferent to humans, could be bypassed, whereas a malevolent deity must be worshipped and appeased with conventionally prescribed linguistic behaviour.

18. While the folk temples may not have elaborate daily *pujas*, the deities of the elitist temples are worshipped with a number of frequent pujas on a fixed schedule.

19. Because they generally center around a family, caste, or subject, folk temples may be seen as a variable defining a group, whereas elitist temples which receive varied groups may be seen as having the function of uniting different groups into a composite whole while retaining the diverse elements.

20. The elitist temples may be seen as having a standardizing influence and function, with attendant prestige. While folk temples may be seen as dialects of a language--some with prestige and some without, yet all having their own functions -- the elitist temples must be seen as the venue of the standard dialect of language and functioning as the common medium with prestige and overriding decision-making roles in terms of choice and use of various elements; a standard that requires to be consciously cultivated and mastered.

21. Just as the distinction between a non-standard dialect and standard dialect is a dynamic one in the sense that both dialects could have mutual influence and in rare cases could exchange their roles, and just as the social distinctions which are dynamic and ever changing and which have gray areas, the distinction of *folk* vs. *elitist* temple is also a dynamic one. There are mutual influences as a folk temple could be "elevated" to the level of an elitist temple through various processes. (For linguistic processes, which are diagnostic indices of this elevation phenomenon, see below.)

22. However, movement in the reverse direction is not easily attestable. For this phenomenon, a parallel is to be found not in the dynamism that we notice among the spoken and written dialects of the language; once a written language always a written language, even when it has an aural form.

23. Another parallel is to be sought in the possible elevation of so-called lower castes to a higher level, but an impossibility of de-elevating the already established higher castes and bringing them to a lower social level. For instance, even if one were to order the entire Tamil Brahmin castes or the vegetarian Vellala caste to be politically and economically lower in stature, they would still be considered upper castes at the social level in the Hindu caste system of Tamils.

3. LANGUAGE USE AND WORSHIP IN FOLK TEMPLES

The frequency of *pujas* performed each day in a folk temple depends on many factors, and invariably the greatest of these is the economic prosperity of the supporting families. However, most folk temples will have at least one evening *puja* performed at dusk wherein the priest 'lights the lamp' before the deity with attendant routine rituals. Not all in the village or in the family assemble at this hour for worship. There may be special *pujas* conducted by families

or individuals, and there may be also annual or seasonal festivals. The language use described here covers all the above categories.

(i) Sanskrit, the language of *archana* in elitist temples, is never used. There are no *slokas.*

(ii) Generally there are no verses in Tamil recited during these *pujas*. However, there may be occasional recitation of folk verses recited by the priests or by the devotees. These folk verses are specifically on the deity and are not in codified form.

(iii) The devotees engage themselves only in uttering the various names of the deity—this is in essence a major linguistic behavior of a devotee in a folk temple

maariyaataa! makamaayii! muttumaaii!

'O! Mother Maari!' 'O! Big Mother!' O! Precious Maari!'

(iv) The names of the deity are uttered in their address forms (in vocative case).

Examples are given in (iii).

(v) The devotees utter generally words, which indicate and emphasize the parenthood role of the deity and these utterances are in vocative case: *taayee!* 'oh! mother!, *appanee! 'Oh! father!'*

(vi) The devotees also utter the various appellations of the deity. These appellations are also used in vocative case:

makamaayii! cuṭalaimaaṭaa!

'Big Mother! 'the Lord of the cremation ground!'

(vii) The devotees utter the names of the deity, which allude to the feats of the deity. These appellations are also used in vocative case:

makamaayii! cuṭalaimaaṭaa!

'Oh! the Lady who drove away the ghosts and demons!'

(viii) The devotees may also utter the names of the deity, which are based on the deity's complexion, body parts and quality of deity's mind, and the place or direction of the deity's origin. Again, all the utterances are in known phrase structure with the head noun inflected for vocative case.

makkaN ammaa! – based on eyes

karu maari ammanee! – based on complexion

kauppaa cammii! – based on complexion

iittankaaDu icakki amane! – based on origin, location, or direction, place of the deity

veyilukanta ammanee! – based on what the deity prefers

(ix) While uttering the utterances (such customary or prescribed phrases as are) listed above, the devotees may fold their hands in a worshipful manner or make various other motions of the body such as the soft beating of their cheeks with their palms, raising their

folded hands over their heads, knocking with their knuckles on their foreheads and on top of their heads, etc.

(x) All these utterances are uttered in spoken Tamil, in one's own dialect, a dialect of one's own environment.

(xi) At times, a devotee is influenced by the linguistic and paralinguistic behavior of other devotees. Sometimes, scenes from dramas and films may influence him.

(xii) There are certain linguistic consequences noticed here. While the imitated items of the former category (influence of the demonstrated behavior of other devotees) may be generally in spoken Tamil, the imitated items from the second category may be either in spoken Tamil or in written Tamil in an aural mode. Furthermore, the content and form of worship in the latter category may be innovative or may be adopted from worship procedures from elitist temples. These rituals and linguistic behavioral patterns could be adopted as part of the conventional modes of worship in folk temples with no or little resistance in many cases. The agent for such innovation and imitation is generally the people of younger generation.

(xiii) As we already pointed out, most of the utterances of the devotees are in direct address form in vocative case. When a pronoun form is to be used, the address form chosen is in the second person singular imperative/optative. Note that of the four pronoun forms in a second person—second person non-honorific or intimate singular form *nii*, second person plural and honorific singular forms *niingkaL* and t*aangkaL*, and second person singular honorific/neutral form *niir*—the devotee chooses the second person non-honorific/intimate singular form *nii* to address his deity. This is a convention adhered to also in formal Tamil in Tamil poetry. The gods and goddesses are governed in their speech behavior in plays by speech conventions of the society that worships them. Within poetry, the poetic conventions govern their speech interaction—a mixed bag in the sense that while the male deities address the female deities always in non-honorific second person singular, the female deities sometimes use the non-honorific second person singular neutral.

(xiv) The devotees make their appeal to the deity through a repetition several times of their requests to the deity. Thus, repetition of an utterance is an important feature of worship by the devotees.

> *ammaa, en piLLaiyaik kaappaattu,*
>
> *en piLLaiyaik kaappaattu.*
>
> 'Mother, protect my child, protect my child.'

(xv) The devotees also appeal to their deity through the use of interrogative sentences uttered with a pleading intonation. These interrogative sentences imply pleading for acceptance of their appeal.

> *en piLLaiyaik kaappaattuvaayaa, taayee?*
>
> 'Mother, will you protect/save my child?'
>
> *cuDalai maaDaa! EnkaLai peey picaacu tollaiyeleeyiruntu kaappaattuvaayaa?*

'Oh! cuDalai maaDaa! Will you save us from the trouble of ghosts and demons?'

(xvi) The devotees may appeal to their deity through a use of choice lexical items, which may be terms of endearments.

Again these terms of endearment are also in vocative case.
en teyvamee! en kaNNaa! en mutalaaLii!
'my god' 'apple of my eye' 'my master'

(xvii) The devotees may also appeal to their deity with threats. These threats are couched in conditional clause terms of endearment are also in constructions.

enakenna? itai nii ceyyaaviTTaal ceeval
veTTi ponkaliDa maaTTeenaa
'What is it to me'? If you do not do this, I shall not sacrifice a cock and cook pongal for you'

(xviii)   The devotees may also appeal to their deity by giving promises to the deity as to what they could do if their needs were met with. Here also conditional clause constructions are used.

(xix) For the item in (xvi), one of the two clauses, or even both the clauses, either the main clause or the preceding conditional clause [or both], may be in negative construction. However, in (xvii), the utterances will have, both in the main and preceding conditional clauses, positive constructions.

engkaL kaSTattai tiirttu vaittuviDu.
ellaarukkum kanci vaittu uuttukiReen
'Save us from all our troubles. I shall make porridge for all.'

(xx) The devotees may appeal to their deity using tag questions.

inta poNNe viTTu ooTiruvaay, illai
'You will stop haunting this girl, won't you?'
inimeel tollli koDukka maaTTaay, illai
'You will not give trouble anymore, will you?'

(xxi) The pitch level of the utterances of the devotee reaches a crescendo with the prominent lengthening of the final syllables in the address forms, and with quick successive repetition of the words for every act of worship by the priest, such as garlanding the idol and showing the lamps *(aarti)* before the deity. As regards *aarti,* there is an incremental increase in the pitch of the utterances, with small and single lamps eliciting a short crescendo and elaborate lamps eliciting a prolonged crescendo. In such crescendos, the primary name of the deity is first uttered.

(xxii) It is noticed that generally the devotee rarely uses equational sentences.

(xxiii) In all the above cases, the general form of interaction is one-sided only, with the devotee speaking/appealing to the deity. A high intensity of the feeling/devotion a devotee has for the deity leads the devotee to engage him or her in a conversational or interactional repartee, and the devotee begins an assumed conversation. In this assumed interaction/conversation, the devotee assumes certain facial expressions on the part of the deity and engages himself/herself in the conversation. The devotee supplies assumed replies of the deity in quotative sentences and makes statements of his/her own as well. He/she uses, at the end of each declarative sentence, a tag question for confirmation. The devotee thus engages himself/herself in a sort of mind reading.

(xxiv) Few devotees actually express themselves through linguistic utterances of any sort. There seems to be some difference operating here based on the socioeconomic, educational, and religious training factors. Personality differences also may be in operation here. While many might utter the names of the deities in reverence, all need not utter the other types of utterances listed above. Moreover, one and the same person may not utter all these kinds of utterances listed above. There is a stylistic choice operating here.

(xxv) Giving oneself through linguistic utterances may be a personal style as suggested earlier, but this style may be motivated by imitation, assumed prestige and personal interest in showing off. It may also be influenced by intense emotions, intensity of the need to appeal, and parental instruction.

(xxvi) Giving way to devotion through linguistic utterances is both appreciated and despised. The factors that influence appreciation and deprecation are overlapping. No clear-cut distinction can be maintained. More often than not, the personality factors of an individual lead him/her to either appreciate or deprecate the demonstration of devotion by others, revealed through their linguistic behavior.

(xxvii) All linguistic utterances generally come to an end with the distribution of *vibhuti* by the priest.

The priests of folk temples are generally less educated. This status of the priests has been a guarantee against any change over from conventional worship procedures of folk temples to worship procedures followed in elitist temples. This continuation of conventional worship procedures has ensured the maintenance of direct communion [or communication] between the deity and the devote, with no or little linguistic intervention on the part of the priests.

A consequence of the direct communion [or communication] between the devotee and the deity is that worship-utterances of the devotees contain mostly constructions of address.

It should also be pointed out that while in the past [and also largely in the present] the status of priests in folk temples may be viewed as sustaining direct communion [or communication] between the deity and the devotee, the literacy status of priests need not be the only conditioning factor for this convention. The highly educated young priests also continue this language-free mode of worship in folk temples.

In other words, non-use of language in worship procedures by priests in folk temples is an entrenched convention and a well-established tradition. It has come to be recognized as such.

In contrast to this "silence" of the priest, the individual, on whom the spirit of the deity descends occasionally or during festival days and during elaborate *pujas,* is given to speaking in tongues and prophesy. [I propose to deal with this phenomenon in another article.] The priest in course of his duties in folk temples is not expected to use or use very little language, whereas the individual, who could also be the priest of the temple, on whom the spirit descends, is distinguished by language use. At one level, absence of language use marks a function and at another level presence and exploitation of language marks a different type of function.

4. WORSHIP USING TAMIL BHAKTI LITERATURE

Earlier I suggested that language use in worship in Hindu temples may be classified into three categories: use of Sanskrit, use of Tamil verses, and use of spoken language. The items (iii) to (xxvii) that we have listed as linguistic behavioral patterns of worship by devotees in folk temples are easily identified in the second category of worship as well, namely, the use of Tamil verses.

This shows that the base of language use in the second category may be found in the style of worship utterances of the devotee in folk temples. *Sangam* literature, the earliest among the now available Tamil works, and belonging to pre-and early Christian era, has very few literary works that could be called *bhakti* literature, or devotional compositions in praise of deities.

In poems of secular import, which greatly outnumber the religious ones in *Sangam* literature, wherever there are references to deities, a matter-of-fact reference and description is made. The *Sangam* devotionals are not in the form of *archana* and they are mainly descriptive statements on the abodes and activities of the deities.

The *bhakti* literature proper in Tamil is dated seventh century A.D. and is an initiator as well as a product of Hindu revivalism, in particular of Saivite (worshippers of Siva) and Vaishnavite (worshippers of Vishnu) traditions.

Note that, in general, both Siva and Vishnu do not find a place in folk temples and are treated as leading deities of the elitist temple tradition. The Tamil verses of both the Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions may be seen as an extension of the utterances of worship in folk traditions.

While the immediately preceding and contemporary Buddhist and Jain traditions in Tamil resulted in the composition of didactic works and epics, and *not* in the composition of *bhakti* literature, which comprises poems in praise of gods and goddesses, the Saivite and Vaishnavtie traditions exploited the folk traditions, perhaps also to prove that the beliefs they represented were native to Tamil soil in contrast with the Aryan Buddhist and
Jain traditions.

Whatever is the historical background, at a synchronic level, and based on the semblance between the two*,* namely, the worship utterances of the devotees in folk temples and the use of similar utterances in Tamil *bhakti* verses, one could discern a process of literary elevation

of folk traditions. The properties of spoken language utterances of the devotees are seen absorbed into a codified literary form. However, note that this elevation has not resulted in the literary code absorbing the features of impromptu direct communion [or communication] between the devotee and the deity. Some of the modes of personal spoken language utterances of the devotee have been absorbed into Tamil *bhakti* verses; however, *bhakti* literature accommodated only the general aspects of devotion and not the personal needs or supplications of devotees. A typical result of any codifying and standardizing effort is the removal of personal or rather idiosyncratic elements. And we notice this in the process of literary elevation and in the adoption of modes of impromptu utterances of worship.

The additional characteristics of *bhakti* literature as medium of worship are as follows:

> (i)   As we already pointed out, there is no real *archana* for the deity by the priest in folk temples. Note also there is really no *archana* genre in Tamil *bhakti* literature. There are archana-like poems such as *poRRi* [poems of praise] and *viNNappam* [poems of appeal/request]. These must be considered a derivative of the direct worship by the devotees, presented in literary form with poetic ingenuity. Most of the characteristics we have listed above can be easily found in these poems. Likewise, the linguistic structures of the utterances of the devotees in folk temples may be also found in these poems.

> (ii)   The *bhakti* poems are indeed poetic compositions, a mode of expression the poets had chosen to reveal their intense feelings for the deity. They were not intended for *archana* purposes. Many of these poems were composed in praise of the presiding deities of various elitist temples. It also happens that most of these elitist temples were located in urban or semi-urban places of yore with economic prosperity based mainly on agriculture. Tradition has made these poems fit for recitation by specially appointed individuals during specific *pujas*. Inscriptional evidences are available for this practice. The roots of Tamil *archana* must be found in these traditional practices.

> It is also doubtful whether Tamil was ever used exclusively as a medium of worship in these elitist temples, which from the early period had been employing Sanskrit for *archana* purposes.

> (iii)   It appears that these *bhakti* poems have been composed in written Tamil and in codified poetic form based on the oral expressions of direct communion [or communication] between the deity and the devotee.

> (iv)   These poems were generally on male deities, at least in the early period of the development of *bhakti* literary genre.

> (v)   These compositions are not intended for all gods and goddesses; some choice is made between the gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon. These factors are yet to be spelt out clearly.

> (vi)   Most of these compositions are not marked for specific occasions. Only some poems have been marked as songs for specific occasions.

(vii) Only some of these compositions are marked for specific rituals. Generally speaking, these compositions are not marked for any specific rituals.

(viii) They are not also generally marked for particular days, or festivals, time, etc. Note that such a specification forms an important part of codified *archana* through Sanskrit.

(ix) The poems of Tamil *bhakti* literature have only a supplementary function and not any main role to play in relation to Sanskrit *archana*.

(x) These are accessible only to literate persons and traditions although illiterate individuals may sing some of the poems in memory.

(xi) Individuals need to have formal instruction for the use of such verses. That is, unless one is given instruction at home or at school, one is not in a position to learn these verses.

(xii) The use of Tamil verses for purposes of *archana* is based on institutional arrangements through specially appointed individuals, whereas the utterances of personalized worship in folk temples are an outcome of individualized efforts.

(xiii) A folk deity can be elevated to a more general deity status. This elevation is based on the extent of divine power or *varaprasad* the deity possesses in the perception of the devotees. There is a close parallel between the process of elevation of a folk deity to a more general elitist deity and the process of making of a leader in the multi-caste Tamil society. An individual in the process of becoming a leader of people, not only of his own group but also of everyone in the society or at least of the majority people, loses some of the essential features of his caste and acquires many others from other castes even with conflicting postures. A mark of his leadership is revealed in the composition of his following which is multi-caste based. The elevation process is also similar to the evolution of the standard dialect of Tamil-which demands the elimination of regional and caste-based linguistic features.

The elevation of a folk deity to a more general [elitist] deity status is revealed by an ever-growing multi-caste composition of the devotee population. This elevation is also characterized by the progressive introduction of Sanskrit *archana* and elaborate *pujas*. This elevation is also marked by the increase in offering of vegetarian dishes and avoidance of animal sacrifice. In such an elevation, devotees' impromptu spoken language utterances may continue to be exhibited in worship, but there is a growing gulf between the devotee and the deity; the priest comes to play a greater role and acts as a mediating agent.

(xiv) The Tamil verses of *bhakti* literature used as *archana* have no facility to insert the names of the devotees as done in Sanskrit *archana*.

(xv) The Tamil verses used as *archana* do not also have any facility to seek any specific personal favour from the deity. The verses cannot be elaborated and hence the blessings are sought only in general terms and not in the name of an individual devotee or his concern.

(xvi) All the Tamil verses were sung more or less on vegetarian deities.

(xvii) These compositions may be considered as constituting a literary genre, as an effort to express oneself through literature, and not as an archana devotional.

(xvii) These poems are also characterized by the following:

(a) They are all in written language.
(b) They all use literary language, not the colloquial language.
(c) They are in a specifically codified and rigid form of poetry.
(d) They follow prosodic dicta.
(e) These verses contain lexical items of a classical/literary type which require deliberate effort at interpretation and cannot be understood instantly.
(f) Most of these verses avoid the use of finite verb-ending constructions while a reference is made to a deity. In other words, a lot of descriptive constructions precede the name of the deity and these constructions iterate the deeds and characteristics of the deity in adjectival phrases.
(g) The focus of these poems is on a single deity. Hence the other deities are referred to in participial constructions, which are neutral to plural/singular honorific or non-honorific, whereas the deity on whom the poem is sung is referred to in non-honorific singular.

5. WORSHIP THROUGH SANSKRIT

(i)   *Archana* through Sanskrit is generally restricted to elitist temples.

(ii) *Archana* through Sanskrit can be chosen for different times of the day and for varied occasions.

(iii) In the Tamil context, the contents of *archana* are not understood by most of the devotees, since knowledge of Sanskrit is restricted only to a few, that too, those belonging to certain specified castes.

(iv) Since Sanskrit *archana* verses are not known to most devotees, the devotees cannot recite any of those verses and perform worship on their own. Convention forbids all except the appointed priests to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* and perform *pujas*, unlike the procedures adopted in many North Indian temples. Thus even when verses are known to individuals they cannot perform *pujas* directly; they can only recite the verses either on their own or in close conjunction with the recitation of these verses by the priest. Thus, worship through Sanskrit is conducted only through a mediating priest.

(v) Sanskrit *archanas* have the facility to insert within their verses the name, birth star and other personal information of the devotees in course of the recitation of the verses. In other words, we get a mechanical composition already before us and what the priest has to do is to ask for the details from devotees and insert the same in appropriate places. Some priests ask for details before they start reciting the verses and some ask for these in course of recitation.

6. TO CONCLUDE

Lack of linguistic participation in the use of language of worship, or participation through parallel recitation of verses in the language of worship, or participation through an agent characterizes worship through Sanskrit. Participation only in literate conditions characterizes use of Tamil verses for worship-like activities. Direct participation of devotees in literate and non-literate conditions characterizes the third category of worship, which is restricted generally to folk temples but is found in elitist temples as well.

The impromptu utterances in Tamil of the devotees are given out both in folk and elitist temples and there are personality differences and socioeconomic and education factors which influence the quantum, kinds, and delivery mode of such utterances. The utterances of the devotees in direct communion or communication with the deity are generally in vocative case and reveal a preference for certain linguistic constructions.

The mode of address and preference for specific lexicon and linguistic constructions noticed in the utterances of worship by the devotees are seen in a codified poetic form in Tamil verses used for *archana*-like activities.

The language use in worship in Tamil reveals a complexity evidenced not only in terms of classification of temples but also in the evolution and exploitation of the genre of *bhakti* literature, in the hierarchy of gods, social status, food habits, etc. Parallels could be easily drawn between the types of temples and the relationship between standard and nonstandard dialects, between the process of elevation of a folk deity into an elitist deity and evolution of a leader in Tamil society, and the evolution of a standard dialect of Tamil. There are many other parallels one could identify.

In essence, while the choice of linguistic structures and lexicon may characterize a specific human activity, the general principles that guide all the activities may be the same.

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