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1. A twelve-foot-high statue of an Ayyanar Horse in Tamil Nadu. Photograph by Stephen B. Huyler.

## Horse Shrines in Tamil India Reflections on Modernity

In the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India, each of the numerous villages has a special shrine dedicated to what are called “village deities.” These deities, some of which are dedicated to particular castes, others to local clans, are not part of the Hindu pantheon but protagonists in a complex fabric of mythologies and tales that spell out the conditions of order and morality in the village.<sup>1</sup> The shrines are usually located on the outskirts of town and have at their core a sacred tree in front of which are statues of some of the deities along with a large figure of a horse, sometimes with a rider, sometimes without. Many of the horses that one sees today are concrete and painted in bright yellows, blues, and whites. Some, however, are still created from clay and are left natural. This is Aiyandar (also: Ayyanaar), a god unique to the Tamils. Although he acts as rainmaker and as a god who brings prosperity to the fields, his primary mission is to patrol village borders and protect its inhabitants from harm.<sup>2</sup> Swift and fierce and holding a sword in his hand, he makes the rounds of the village and its nearby fields at night, and should one happen to encounter him in the dark, confrontation is to be avoided if one values one’s life.<sup>3</sup> Despite the need for respectful distance, villagers can communicate with him by placing paper messages against his sword. Often the solutions are revealed in dreams.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the large horse, the village shrine will have smaller horses—sometimes many hundreds of them—that line the pathways to the sacred tree. These horses are thanksgiving offerings made by the priest for individual devotees.

The making of these horses is a sacred act carried out by Aiyandar’s attendant priests who belong to a caste known as Vishvakarma, the “creator of the world,” the “architect of the universe.”<sup>5</sup> The process begins with a nighttime procession from the house of the village chief to the site of the shrine, where a work pit, identified as a sacred womb, is created and ritually demarcated by the blood of a chicken.<sup>6</sup> Over the next fourteen days or so, the horse takes shape to eventually be fired *in situ* with an improvised kiln of mud, bricks, and straw. When the horse is finished, it is dedicated in an elaborate ceremony, known as *kutirai etuppu*, that involves the whole village.<sup>7</sup>

At first glance, given the remoteness of these shrines from urban centers, we might be tempted to see in the Aiyandar cult

a reaffirmation of Émile Durkheim's world of a religiously validated hierarchy involving a folkloric tradition that has survived from some unknown past into modern times. The anthropologist Louis Dumont took this line of reasoning in a 1959 article that argued that the Tamil horses are evidence of what he calls a "relational" view of the world where hierarchy and holism are to be understood as natural to the social fabric.<sup>8</sup> For Dumont, this relational world was dialectically distinct from the modern world as founded on the principles of Enlightenment individualism. A scholar working on India, he argued, has to start without this Enlightenment presupposition about the superiority of free thought. Sheldon Pollock, Nicholas Dirks, and Niels Brimes, among other scholars working in the field of Indian anthropology, have critiqued Dumont's point of view. Though they do not deny the legitimacy of Dumont's desire to avoid Eurocentric perspectives, they note that his understanding of tradition seems to have served, despite what it claims, as a redemptive tool for Western modernity.<sup>9</sup> The fundamental problem with the polarity of modernity and tradition, they point out, is that it makes it difficult to historicize India; it creates the illusion of a stable unity.<sup>10</sup> The ostensible split between "tradition" and "modernity" is, unfortunately, reinforced even in the arguments of Pierre Nora, for example, who writes that "memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name," whereas history is merely "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer." Scholarly effort has to be guided by the former, so he argues, not the latter.<sup>11</sup> I think it should be the other way around, for it is that condition of being "always problematic" that makes history so important if for nothing more than as a corrective to the fallacy of authenticity.

I would like to add two caveats: first, modernization is an instance of modernity and not the other way around; second, tradition, or what is usually meant by that word, is an instance of the broader category, history. The first caveat is needed to dispense with the convention that there was only one modernity and that it was, by definition, Western. The second caveat questions more specifically the tendency to see tradition, and even "memory," as a set of practices that have survived outside the realm of history as part of some "premodern," history-less continuum.

My position is made easier in this case by the recognition in recent scholarship on India of the relationship between Aiyandar and another deity, Ayyappan, who is not a village deity but a more readily accessible and more recently formed god. On the surface, Ayyappan has very different attributes in that he operates not on the level of the village but on the world stage as a champion of egalitarianism.<sup>12</sup> And yet, despite appear-

ances, the Ayyappan, as the anthropologist Lars Kjaerholm has recently argued, is indeed a descendent of Aiyandar.<sup>13</sup> Aiyandar thus has an identity that stretches from a local god of limited reach to a universal deity (and beyond that to a comic book hero known to most Indian school children). In that sense, I will argue that Aiyandar—in a rather complex way—has to be understood through the tropes of modernity rather than through the tropes of tradition.<sup>14</sup> The question that I am asking, therefore, is: what is the *historical* nature of this history?

As deities go, Aiyandar is not particularly old. The first evidence of his existence in visual iconography dates to the rule of the Pallavas in the seventh century CE, the earliest evidence of a temple dedicated to Aiyandar dates somewhat later to the eighth century CE.<sup>15</sup> Clearly he predated this, but not by much. There are two arguments about his origins: one, that he is part of the integration of the Brahmin culture into Tamil areas in the sixth and seventh centuries CE; and two, that he is part of the circa-fourth-century BCE formation of village networks in the area.<sup>16</sup> Asko Parpola, from the University of Helsinki, defends the first of these positions, arguing that the Aiyandar cult emerged as a consequence of the Aryan migration into the Tamil country, for it was the Aryans, after all, who in the first millennium BCE brought the horse to India. Parpola also notes the similarity of the words *Aarya* and *Aiyandar*.<sup>17</sup> Those who defend the second position cite the possibility that horses existed in this area well before the arrival of the Brahmins. They also point to an alternative etymology that links the word *Aiyandar* to the old Tamil word *Ai*, which means “elder, chief, or leader.”<sup>18</sup> For this group of scholars, the Aiyandar cult had its origins with the creation of village society. And indeed, Aiyandar is considered by Tamil villagers to be more than just the village muscle man; he is the chief of the other village gods, and any dedication to the other gods must be preceded by a dedication to him. The horse cult was a mechanism of surveillance and control.

What is important for my argument is not whether the cult was imported by the Brahmins or was more homegrown.<sup>19</sup> To interpret the horses as either “native” or “nonnative” is to want to give to history a causal content—a set of pseudo-civilizational stabilizers—before one accepts the fact that history is by definition causality. The point is not, therefore, how this history began, but how it ended, namely as a new power structure that imposed itself into the life and imagination of the Tamils, a structure that was *added* to the much older sacred tree cult that remains to this day at the core of the village shrine. Almost all Tamil villages still have a sacred tree [*sthala vriksha*] or a “temple forest” [*kovil kaadu*] related

to a shrine to the Mother Goddess in one of her many guises: Kaali, Māri, Amman, or Ellai Pidaari.<sup>20</sup> She is seen as the original *shakti* [female power] and it was from her, according to local lore, that Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahman were created.<sup>21</sup> The goddess wields a great deal of power and if her groves are not properly protected, she can punish the entire community in the form of disease or crop failure. She is worshiped by means of votive offerings that are placed under the trees in the form of cult statues, about twenty centimeters tall and consisting of a cylindrical body and a face usually with big eyes.<sup>22</sup> This type of devotion dates back to the third millennium BCE, if not earlier, and was hardly unique to the Tamils. It stretched across all of Eurasia.

If the Mother goddess shrines date back to prehistory, the Aiyandar horses in front of these trees and groves are by comparison quite new. The situation at the Tamil shrines is not dissimilar to the one at Delphi, which began as a sanctuary to the mother earth goddess but, after the invasion of the Dorians around 1200 BCE, was rededicated to the god Apollo, but without totally obliterating the earth goddess elements of the site. Here in Tamil territory, the Aiyandar cult, even if it was homegrown, has to be seen as “the new” that plugged itself into the mother goddess shrines and its associated landscape of sacred trees and groves. What we have is not a fusion of old and new, but an assertion of power that exposed the rupture of time to both borrow the sacredness of the old and bring into the open a new instrument of control. History, which is identical with its devices of enforcement, asserts the legitimacy of its ruptural logic. In this case, Aiyandar is quite literally history on horseback.

What makes the Aiyandar cult different from Hindu divinities is that it emerged from the fabric of history—human history, that is—rather than out of the mists of mythology. As a result, even though the cult could be studied from the point of view of religion (what kind of devotional practices are associated with it?) and anthropology (what do the stories associated with it tell us about ancient and contemporary Tamil society?), it can also be studied, quite directly, as a problem of history. We should, therefore, separate the “tradition” that keeps the meaning and production of these horses alive, from their historical signification. It is the latter that has to come first.

The Tamil horse stands before us, however, not as direct evidence of the new power structure, but as an X-ray image of a phenomenon that is difficult to perceive since the actual circumstance of the rupture is unknowable. Was it swift or protracted? Was it violent or peaceful? Was it accepted or resisted? When did the horses appear in flesh and blood, and

when (and why) did they disappear and become “gods”? Who knows? It has all been rendered invisible in a body of social activities that we *today* would call “tradition.” But that was not what it was in the eighth century when chieftains rode about on horseback as real people and perhaps already as divinities. It was this transference from the real to the divine—a transference into the realm of the supernatural and its ever-so-human Vishvakarma support structure—that drew the village together and tightened the social bonds, and that now has to be continually reenacted lest those bonds decay.

Just because we do not know all the facts about Aiyandar does not change the fundamental circumstance that what is at stake here is a rupture in the sociotemporal fabric of the cultural subject. The Tamil horses are the *quod erat demonstrandum* of a historical event even though the timing and circumstances of that event are not precisely known. As such they posit history *and* modernity at their most tautological. The knowable and the unknowable are in just as close proximity for today’s scholar as they are—though in a different medium—for the Tamil villager. And this is what the Aiyandar cult, I argue, makes so brilliantly clear. It produces the bonds that hold society together in the same way that it produces history as a projection into the future. But, as I shall now show, this ambiguous relationship between the knowable and unknowable, between history and modernity, and between male god in the external world and the female god in the forest, is inevitably open ended. As the deity developed over time, therefore, it changed in such a way that its message was deconstructed from one of control into one of liberation, and from one that was open to all, to one that was accessible only to men. In the process, as Aiyandar came to be reinvented again and again, some elements of the original were enhanced and others repressed.

The first instance of Aiyandar’s reinvention took place in the thirteenth century, when, with the disappearance of Buddhism in India and the emergence of Hinduism as the state religion, the old village mythologies came to be gradually linked directly and indirectly with the Hindu worldview. Aiyandar was also upgraded, to be defined as nothing less than the son of Siva and Vish’nu; he was born, so the story goes, not through copulation, but from the sperm of Siva when Siva became desirous of Vish’nu, who, though normally a man, took a female form while churning the ocean to get nectar in the Hindu creation myth. In other words, Aiyandar was born *ex utero* to two male gods in a type of conceptual gap that was created when Vish’nu was in disguise as a woman. It is a unique form of procreation that allowed Aiyandar to be placed *post facto*

into the mythology of the Hindu creation story, while allowing him to exist in a parallel world.<sup>23</sup> This newly Sanskritized Aiyanaar was given a new name, Harihara Putra [Sanskrit: Hari (Vish'nu) and Hará (Siva); Putra (prince or son)] and is shown in the iconography with two consorts, *Poora'nai* and *Pushkakai*, holding in his hand either an elephant goad or horsewhip.

The *terminus post quem* of the Harihara Putra cult is 1224, the date a temple to the god was constructed by Narasimha II.<sup>24</sup> The temple no longer exists, but more recent Harihara temples (known also as Sastha temples) do exist and are usually in forests (because the god's parents, according to one story, abandoned him in a forest). This is in line with the older form of Aiyanaar worship which was most often located not in the village proper but at its perimeter.

It has been suggested by Fred W. Clothey, a leading scholar of religious practices in India, that the creation of Harihara Putra was politically driven by the ruling elites as a way to offset friction that had developed between Vishnuites and Shavites.<sup>25</sup> That explains, so Clothey suggests, why at least two Tamil kings assumed the name Harihara, tightening the bonds, as was often done, between king and god. What made this shift possible was Aiyanaar's original position as someone who keeps peace and order. The transformation into Harihara Putra, however, substantially changed Aiyanaar's identity since it introduced metaphysics into the equation. The Aiyanaar cult did not begin as a metaphysical project, since its original mission was to produce and strengthen the inside/outside duality. Furthermore, though there are hundreds of Aiyanaar shrines, each belonging to a particular village, there was no overarching moral message. But Aiyanaar, already modern in the context of one historical framework, could become historicized (and modernized) yet again by drawing on the fact that he was more than just a divine policeman but the "chief" among the deities. In this new version, with his new name and new mythology, he could transcend the scale of the village and in the process obliterate the traditional and institutionalized "obviousness" of the Shiva/Vishnu distinction. He was a new unity rising above an old duality. This god was homegrown, but one cannot rule out the possibility that such a metaphysical postulation was not influenced from other religions, Buddhism included.

Harinhara Putra was a more powerful deity than Aiyanaar, but he probably had an obscure devotional profile in comparison to Aiyanaar given that he was a political construct that appealed mainly to the elites. This changed in the sixteenth century when he underwent a transformation, namely his incarnation — as it was retroactively defined — into an actual

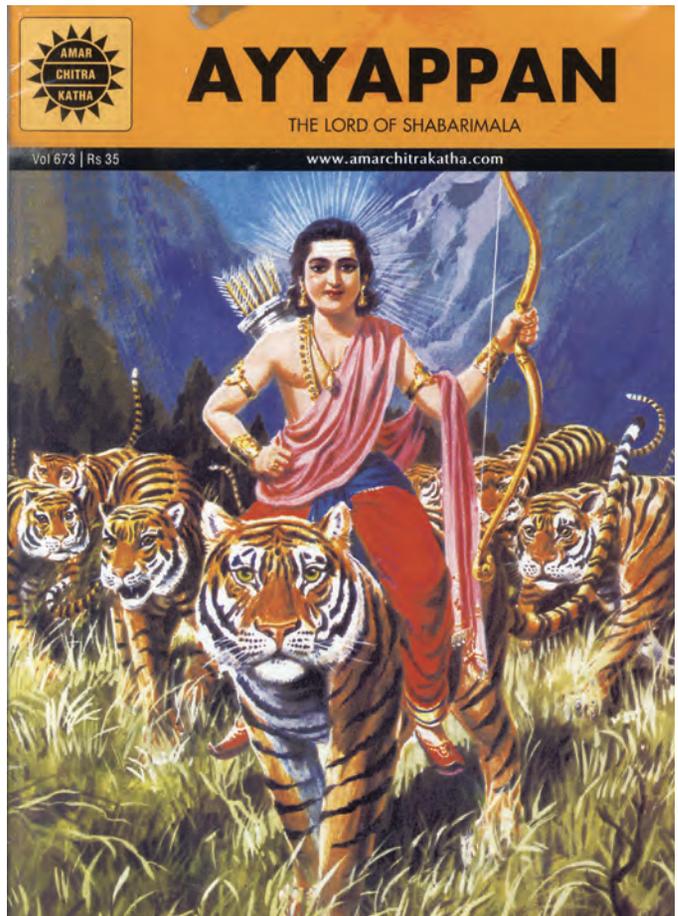


2. Clay statue of a rider in Tamil Nadu.  
Photograph by Stephen B. Huyler.



3. Four-foot-high votive Ayyanar horses in Tamil Nadu. Photograph by Stephen B. Huyler.

4. Anthropologist Lars Kjaerholm regards the recently formed god Ayyappan as a descendent of Aiyandar. Ayyappan has become a children's book hero, as published by Amar Chitra Katha, one of India's leading comic publishers.



5. Clay statues of “village deities” at the base of a sacred tree at a typical Tamil shrine. Photograph by author.





6. In Tamil Nadu in southern India, villages have special shrines dedicated to "village deities." These shrines are usually on the outskirts of the village and are centered around a sacred tree that is surrounded by some of the village deities as well as a statue of a horse, Aiyandar. Photograph by author.

living person, Manikantan, a prince of Pandhalam in Kerala (the state just to the west of Tamil Nadu).<sup>26</sup> Manikantan led the Keralas to victory against pirates in the Arabian sea and robbers in the mountains. For this and a host of other reasons—including the fact that he was an abandoned child found in a forest—Manikantan was so adored by the locals that he was not only seen as Harihara Putra incarnate but given yet another name, Ayyappan, which, like its predecessor, is derived from the words meaning Vish’nu and Shiva, namely *Ayya* and *Appa*, but this time in Tamil not Sanskrit.<sup>27</sup> A cult emerged in his honor that is still celebrated with great fanfare today at Sabarimala (Mount Sabari), a remote temple some sixty kilometers inland from the coastal town of Quilon that was built next to the palace where Manikantan lived.<sup>28</sup> It is not insignificant that at the gate of the palace complex, there is a sacred banyan tree named Manikantanal [shrine of Manikantan].

Manikantan /Ayyappan brings the genealogy of this deity back into the fold of human history. Because of his military training, Ayyappan has a quasi-military theme that is different from soldier-horseman Aiyandar. Whereas Aiyandar was worshiped by means of gifts and offerings, the Ayyappan cult requires forty-one days of sexual continence before the pilgrimage and a difficult hike to the hilltop sanctuary, among other acts of purification. Since menstruating women are not allowed to worship at the shrine, the cult has become akin to a cult of masculinity. This is unusual in Hindu India, where women are banned from temples only during the actual time of their menstruation. Here all women between the ages of ten and fifty-five are banned. For the Ayyappan pilgrimage, men do not travel to the site alone, however, but in small groups from their village or family unit—or perhaps today as a group of business associates—led by a *guruswamy* who guides them along the long mountain paths to the sanctuary.<sup>29</sup> As one scholar has described it, the cult “merges individual men both with the hyper-masculine deity and with a wider community of men” embodied by the other male pilgrims and gurus.<sup>30</sup> Unlike Aiyandar, whom one worshiped through outward signs of appreciation and with some trepidation, Ayyappan demanded that his devotees look inward. If Aiyandar worked his magic through fear, Ayyappan was a messenger of brotherly love. The horse has now disappeared. Ayyappan, in the myth, came into town riding a tiger, and so it is the tiger that figures into this imaginary.

This sixteenth-century update of the thirteenth-century cult took place in three ways. First, it was changed from a religion of the ruling elite to a popular, regional cult. Second, it was given the metaphysical conventions of corporeal deprivation

and spiritual purification, which were typical of most religions of the time. And third, Ayyappan's reentry into human history was augmented by the fact that each of his gurus—which numbered then in the hundreds of thousands—was to be treated by his charges as an incarnation of Ayyappan himself. In other words, whereas Aiyanar could only go as far as the village boundary, Ayyappan, in his multitudinousness, could move about anywhere. The subtext of Aiyanar's equestrian mobility is still there, but the deity is now released from imprisonment in the "local."<sup>31</sup> If no one can "become" Aiyanar (except in the form of a possessed dancer during the village ceremony), any number of people—hundreds of thousands—can "become" Ayyappan to weave themselves in an increasingly dense way into the fabric of contemporary history.

The Sabarimala temple was not always as popular as it is today. Instrumental in its resurgence was the Tamil revival movement that led to the attempt in the early 1920s to renovate the temple. An economic reason must also have been at the core of this ambition, for it seems that the temple's gurus wanted to make Sabarimala an alternative to the cult of Murukan, the god of the hunt and war in Tamil Nadu that attracted many pilgrims from neighboring Kerala.<sup>32</sup> In other words, it was hoped that the Ayyappan cult would bring Tamils to Kerala and thus offset the Murukan cult that had brought Keralans to Tamil Nadu. In the 1950s, the icon of Ayyappan was paraded throughout the towns and villages of Tamil Nadu. Even so the shrine was still relatively obscure.<sup>33</sup> But in the late twentieth century with the expansion of Tamil revival (Madras state was renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969) Lord Ayyappan—as he is now referred to by devotees—became a popular topic in Tamil films and songs, and as a consequence the cult became increasingly widespread, so much so that today the Sabarimala temple is one of the most visited pilgrimage centers in India with some 10 million disciples a year making the trek into the hills.<sup>34</sup> Local cable television channels make daily live broadcasts from the temple during the pilgrimage period.<sup>35</sup>

This new post-World War II, cinema-enhanced Ayyappan is no longer just a Kerala hero/Hindu god; he is now defined as a god who transcends traditional caste boundaries. Just as he was a bit of Shiva and a bit of Vish'nu, he can now be a bit of everything. In other words, this is a *modern* Ayyappan, carrying Nehru's message of equality—or something akin to it—to south India, a message augmented by the effort to enhance the story that a great Muslim had once worshiped at Sabarimala. Even Christians are told that they are allowed to pray

there. Needless to say, as the cult spreads internationally, its message of interfaith harmony obscures its gender specificity.<sup>36</sup>

Ayyappan has thus come to be seen by the locals as rising above the regional, linguistic, and caste barriers and their associated strife. He is no longer just a son of Hindu gods, but a god above gods, who at his core is a global metaphysical proposition that breaks the bonds of mortal birth as only he can do given his *ex utero* identity. Somewhere in all this, Ayyappan came to have a new name, Dharma Sastha. It roughly translates into “The one who teaches the principles of the universe.” But Ayyappan, in comparison with its modern metaphysical competitors such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam, is distinct in that Manikantan never wrote anything down; there is no set of gospels, no Koran, no recorded utterances or moral injunctions. It is his *life story* that is told again and again, even in the scholarship. It is a pure phonocentric religion. There is no space of exegesis, interpretation, and ambiguity. As a consequence, there is a profound tension between Ayyappan’s historicity and the logocentrism of his devotion. Ayyappa is a god who is historical, given his human incarnation, but who, as a divinity, has no history. He was, and is. The only way to worship Ayyappan is to internalize the life story and relive it in “translation” as pilgrimage.

But this is not the end of the story, for there is one last transformation: Ayyappan has become a children’s comic book hero that traces, as its promoters claim, “the strange and fascinating series of divine events that led to the birth of Manikanthan, who had a glorious destiny.”<sup>37</sup> It is published in the Amar Chitra Katha series, one of India’s largest and best-selling comic book series, which was created to teach Indian children about their cultural heritage. The series was created as a bulwark against what was seen as the negative impact of modernity on Indian society; this was a way for Indian children to connect with their homegrown, Indian mythologies. Although the comic book series deals with the whole spectrum of Indian deities, Ayyappan is a bit of a misfit. As a radically deterritorialized project, the cult is more modern—and I mean that here in the sense that it is an instrument of logocentric abstraction—than it is “traditional,” and this even in comparison with the standard logocentrism of the Hindu deities. Ayyappan is a religion liberated from the structures (and strictures) of textuality, which puts it in conflict with the modern laws of India that claim gender equality.

Aiyanar, Harihara Putra, Ayyappan, and Dharma Sastha—not to mention Manikantan—are cognates for a divinity that has an astonishing array of localist, regionalist, nationalist,

supranationalist, human, and comic-book identities, depending on where one puts the emphasis.<sup>38</sup> There are separate temples to each of these deities, although there are also some, such as the Sabarimala temple, that combine them. There are now at least three Ayyappan temples in Madurai, for example, that have had Ayyappan statues installed in them.<sup>39</sup> Aiyandar and Ayyappan, the two ends of the genealogical stream, have, however, different valences with Aiyandar remaining a village cult connected with a particular geographical area. Ayyappan is universalist and populist, promoting an emotional form of devotion. Aiyandar is built around micro-identities, whereas Ayyappan aims, in short, for a type of male-modernity-without-alienation. But Aiyandar, as a species rather than a genus, has been colored by his incorporation into state-sponsored, Hindu mythology; by his “incarnation” into a political figure; and most recently by his parallelism with the newly popular Ayyappan cult and its message of a masculine, egalitarian metaphysics.

The result of these multiple washes of history is that some of Ayyappan’s metaphysics have already begun to rub off on the archaic Aiyandar. He is now thought in many places to protect the poor and ensure justice and self-discipline among his believers.<sup>40</sup> By the same token, one cannot help but wonder that the tendency to paint the Aiyandar horses in vibrant colors overlaps with Ayyappan as a larger-than-life, cartoon figure. One could also argue that Ayyappan’s modernity is reflected in the fact that the Aiyandar horses are now being made of concrete rather than clay. This is not just a convenience but an indication of its new historical position. The use of concrete is not a loss but a gain. A new modernity—with a new set of conflicting realities—is killing off the old one. If Aiyandar suffers from the advances of modernity and the loss of village culture in Tamil lands, Ayyappan thrives on it.

The Tamil horses stand in a liminal space between the ancient and the modern, between the folkloric and the cinematic, between the village and the world, between enclosed geography and a universal metaphysics, and between an endangered anthropological milieu and an expansive, neonationalist pop culture. Given the overlays of these historical, ideological, and disciplinary realities, I shifted the emphasis away from anthropology with its implicit assumption about a timeless past to the issue of modernity to argue that the horses are in every respect, *from their beginning*, and through time, modern things. Their history, which began with their open-endedness and the splitting of the cultural subject, came to be continually reformulated through the mechanisms that brought the cult

into a family of modern religious and metaphysical principles, those of fraternity and love, in particular. But because this history, like a magnifying glass, focused on Aiyandar's identity with such intensity, it turned the original proposition inside out. Aiyandar was at the start a protector of all the villagers, but by the late twentieth century he was a redeemer of all of India, if not of the world itself. A symbol of closure became one for openness; the embodiment of fierceness became the embodiment of tolerance.<sup>41</sup>

A tolerance of a sort. A group of women has filed a lawsuit against Sabarimala's ban on women, taking on the Travancore Devaswom Board that oversees the running of the temple.<sup>42</sup> The situation became a public controversy—and for some, a scandal—when noted Indian actress Jayamala revealed that she had once entered the inner sanctum of the Sabarimala temple and touched the idol of Lord Ayyappa. This prompted a retroactive “cleansing” of the temple and good deal of worry about other possible breaches of the “tradition.”

Although there are parallels between Ayyanaar and Western Enlightenment notions of egalitarianism, it is not the secular modernist project of the European Enlightenment that is at play here, that is for sure. Ayyanaar is what a nonsecular modernism might look like given that the cult ideals of equality do not necessarily have any socially revolutionary message attached to them as would the Enlightenment model. Once the pilgrimage is over, devotees return to their normal lives, caste and all. There are, however, parallels between Ayyannar and Christian and Islamic notions of transcendence, purification, and self-policing, but unlike these other religions, the Ayyappan cult can imply something that is just as much within the conventions of Hinduism as outside it, and in that sense it is very different from Aiyandar, which insists on a clear boundary between inside and outside.<sup>43</sup>

Ayyappan's egalitarian message (or perhaps one should say quasi-egalitarian message) cannot, however, be seen as purely homegrown. There were no doubt influences that could have come just as much from Islamic as from more Western sources. The point, however, just as with Aiyandar, is not to see the question of influence as having an either/or answer. For my argument, the “source” of Ayyappan's metaphysics is irrelevant. What is important is that the originating moment (if one can call it that) was a moment of rupture, and it was from within the space of that rupture that history—as the dialectics of incompleteness—began to play itself out, allowing Aiyandar to be periodically revised, upgraded, and reformulated. It was not a linear progression or inner evolution. A deity who protected everyone in the village became a deity

who can be accessed primarily by men. A deity that was the village policeman became a deity who demanded masculine self-policing.

And yet, despite the apparent differences between Aiyannar and Ayyappan, the two ends of this historical equation have similar metacharacteristics. For just as India's early history is now part of a contested and open-ended discussion, so too is India's possible future a casteless and gender-liberated society. The outside/inside problem of the Aryan/chieftan issue is mirrored in the outside/inside problem of regional/universal metaphysics. The ambiguity of India's past fuses with the ambiguity of India's future. Both provoke the same ideological overdeterminacy. In that sense, depending on where one puts the emphasis, the horses can, for some, represent the idea of a stable and "traditional" India *and* at the very same time be seen as a critique of those very traditions, as the embodiment of a new India altogether. If Ayyappan brings certain elements of Aiyannar into completion, from local chieftan to universal deity, from non-Hindu deity to post-Hindu one, Aiyannar, in reverse, exposes the incomplete, metaphysical ambitions of Ayyappan as a hollow and corrosive populism that promises liberation, and kindergarten fascination, yet excludes menstruating women as contaminations. In some sense the split subject that was Aiyannar (a man-god protecting the female deity within the sacred forest), haunts the new Ayyappan who now survives as a split subject of a man-god inhabiting the sacred forest to the exclusion of women.

Aiyannar, the clay horse, may seem at first glance to be an anthropological wonder but constitutes in reality an unstable, decentered set of significations that point both backward and forward in time. The horses can, at one level, be read, ideologically, as part of the civilizational moment when modern, Indian culture first began to take shape. They can be celebrated as part of the Indian village archetype in all its stability, continuity, and closure. But at another level, they can be read as *anti*historical objects, finding themselves as part of a contemporary, populist movement looking to a utopian future far removed from the narrowness of village life. If that future were to become real, the horses would disappear with the obliteration of the caste that is responsible for making them, or, as is more likely, be multiplied, industrially, *ad infinitum*, given that any one could make them — as is already starting to happen.<sup>44</sup> The Tamil horses (the clay horses) thus contain within their structure a system of meanings that permits their own historical obliteration. They are the ultimate avatars of modernity standing resolutely in one temporal dimension while already moving about in another.

### **Postscript: Preservation as the New Modernity**

Preservation is an instrument of modernity; stated differently, it is the means by which we define ourselves as moderns. I do not mean to point to a particular style or place but to the current, sociopolitical world in which power allies itself with the instrumentalities of preservation and tradition just as much as to those of modernization and industry. The two sides, once thought to be opposed, have become interfused. Heritage (when one adds tourism into the mix, not to mention the pernicious evocations of national imaginaries) is an industry unto its own, meaning that the terms by which we discuss preservation in 2009 are no longer those of 1968 or even 1988. In other words, we need to reformulate the fundamentals of the discussion about preservation. We do this first by noting that preservation (and its associated bureaucracies of authentication) uses history to evacuate the historian's disciplinary leverage against the autonomy of power. If we freeze the historical against the flow of time, then we quickly lose sight of the dynamic energy of history both in our time and in our understanding of the past. Europe, because of its head start, has made itself—or at least tries to make itself—immune to the negative consequences of this dynamic; it is the most regulated geopolitical environment in the world. The highest proportion of preserved buildings and cities are in Europe. One hardly “sees” preservation in Europe since it is everywhere, interfaced with modernity. Every church, cathedral, or castle looks like it was built yesterday. Preservation, as a state-sponsored bureaucracy, is just another name for planning.

In the non-West and Russia, the modernity of preservation is significantly more noticeable, leading us to often complain if buildings do not live up to European standards of preservation. This is why—looking to India—the Aiyandar story, for me, is so interesting, since it flies under the radar of most histories and yet, in the temporal drift between Aiyandar and Ayyappan, we wind up not only with one of India's leading religions but also with a history that is a composite of previous histories. The question at play in this article is not preservation as such but rather the shape of history that brings us into modernity without the instrumentalities of Eurocentric preservation ideals. On the surface, it might seem that some form of preservation is called for; after all, Aiyandar and the traditions associated with the clay horses, is fading under the encroachments of modernity; but Ayyappan, who derives from Aiyandar, has not only thrived under these conditions but constitutes an Indian-grown modernity unto itself. There should, therefore, be no lament for the demise of Aiyandar cult and its magnificent clay horses. Ayyappan undoes Aiyandar.

There is, however, a dialectic at work, for not only did Aiyandar change over time, but the power structures that propelled this history also changed to become increasingly phonocentric, which means that by the time we get to Ayyappan we have a religion that denies its historicity and that becomes, one can say, “anthropology friendly,” since there are no texts associated with the religion. Its modernity has thus come to be hidden behind the construction of a “tradition” that is reinforced from both inside and outside, namely as a regional, Tamil-centric religion and as a metageographical, quasi-egalitarian, universalist religion. In other words, the history of the shift from Aiyandar to Ayyappan is one in which the local Ayyappan actors want their history to not be history, which would make it open to the critique of contingency; they want it to be a “truth.” Anthropologists (not all, but some) can wind up confirming this given that the discipline is primed to capture (and ostensibly “understand”) the structures of orality. The assumption in anthropology is often that orality is endangered by modernity’s disruptions and fragmentations. But with Ayyappan, this is not the case, given that Ayyappan’s phonocentrism is held together—if not actually constituted—by the structure of cinematic populism. Ayyappan is, however, most certainly endangered, *as it should be*, but not by modernity’s cultural fragmentation, rather by the rising modernity of gender equality. The issue of gender in India stands in juxtaposition to the earlier strand of Ayyappan’s modernity, which was a masculine-liberation-from-Brahmin-hegemonies. Will the divine Ayyappan now redefine itself—perhaps in the form of a goddess—to adjust to the inclusion of women, or will the religion resist this transformation in the name of a “tradition”?

If left to its own devices, society will preserve what it needs and get rid of what it does not, and this is because power, for better or worse, always decides what to preserve. Changes in the power structure create shifting preservation realities. This has been the situation for millennia. If, as is so often the approach today, we start with preservation and make *it* into a form of power—one can think of the protocols of the UNESCO—we cannot establish a critique of power’s contingencies. Now if there is anything left of the “liberal” agenda to history—i.e., to serve as a critique of the hegemony of power and reason—then we need history (as a discipline) to keep history (out there) in focus and not let it become logocentric, or if it does become so (which is the inevitable drift of time) not reinforce it. Preservation, as it is conventionally understood, subverts that effort since it hands its own logocentric imaginary back to power, which then easily translates into an instrument of nationalism or, more usually, into a alliance between (local) nationalism and (global) tourism.

What the Aiyandar/Ayyappan story shows, as far as I am trying to argue, is the moment just *before* its dynamic modernity collapses, and it becomes a “tradition” that denies both its history and its modernity.

#### Author Biography

Mark Jarzombek, professor of the history and theory of architecture, is currently associate dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT, where he has taught since 1995. He has worked on historical topics from Renaissance to modern, and extensively on nineteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetics. He is co-author (with Vikram Prakash and noted illustrator Francis D. K. Ching) of the text-book *A Global History of Architecture* (2006) and is currently working on a set of essays on architecture and modernity.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ülo Valk and S. Lourdasamy, “Village Deities of Tamil Nadu” in *Myths and Legends, The Narrated Experience*, special issue *Asian Folklore Studies* 66 (2007): 179–99 at 192. See also Eveline Masilamani-Meyer, “Guardians of Tamil Nadu: Folk Deities, Folk Religion, Hindu Themes,” *Neue Hallesche Berichte: Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte und Gegenwart Südindiens* 5 (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2005), and Diane P. Mines, “The Hindu Gods in a South Indian Village” in *Everyday Life in South Asia*, ed. Diane P. Mines and Sarah Lamb, 236–48 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Valk and Lourdasamy, “Village Deities,” 194. Aiyandar, also known in ancient Tamil texts as Sathanar, is often paired with Karuppusami, a mustached god who carries a large sickle. In each village there are people who take vows to go to an Aiyandar temple once a year and become possessed by Karuppaswami and Aiyandar. They are called *cami adis* (“god dancers”). Whereas Aiyandar usually protects the village from floods, demons, and other outside forces, Karuppaswami protects the villagers themselves. In his capacity as guardian, there are some parallels between Aiyandar and Kāttavarāyan, another Tamil deity, who is also identified with Murukan. See David Dean Shulman, “Outcaste, Guardian, and Trickster: Notes on the Myth of Kāttavarāyan,” in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism*, ed. Alf Hiltebeitel, 35–68 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). Aiyandar is also associated with the deity Karuppu Sami (“Black God”) who is associated with the night and darkness.

<sup>3</sup> Valk and Lourdasamy, “Village Deities,” 196.

<sup>4</sup> Ron du Bois, “Larger than Life: The Terracotta Sculptures of India,” *Ceramics Today*, [http://www.ceramicstoday.com/articles/clay\\_horses.htm](http://www.ceramicstoday.com/articles/clay_horses.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Nanditha Krishna, *The Arts and Crafts of Tamil Nadu* (New York: Mapin Publishing, 1992), 90. *Vishvakarama* is a composite of two words. *Vishva* means the universe, *karama* means deed or action. See also Stephen R. Inglis, “Night Riders: Massive Temple Figures of Rural Tamil Nadu,” in *A Festschrift for Prof. M. Shanmugam Pillai*, ed. V. Vijayavenugopala (Madurai: Madurai Kamaraj University Press, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Inglis, *A Village Art of South India* (Madurai: Madurai Kamaraj University, 1980), 36. Unlike the mixture of sand and clay that one uses for regular pots, these horses are made out of a mixture of sand, rice husks, and clay. The copious amounts of husk makes the high-relief elements of the horse possible. The oldest Ayyanaars and horses are, ostensibly, to be found in Salem district of Tamil Nadu.

<sup>7</sup> The horses are made and fired individually. For larger ones, the parts, like the legs and torso might be made separately but are then joined together, usually on the auspicious tenth day of production. The whole is then baked in a kiln of straw and dried cow-dung, which is then covered with mud. See “The Working Processes of the Potters of India: Massive Terra-Cotta Horse Construction,” *Potters of the World*, film series, filmed and directed by Ron du Bois (1982). His description is online at [http://www.ccenn.net/tcwh\\_3.asp?sort=25&id=4034](http://www.ccenn.net/tcwh_3.asp?sort=25&id=4034). Another documentary is “The Kutiraiyetuppu Festival in the Aiyandar-Temple of Kilakkuyilkkuti,” by U. Niklas and M. Saravanan, concept and script by U. Niklas and M. Saravanan (2001). For a recent shrine, see <http://www.dakshinachitra.net/scripts/tn-ayyanar.asp>. A description of the ceremony can be found in Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). According to Dirks, there is a good degree of fluidity in these rituals. They do not even happen every year and there is sometimes confusion as to how they are to be performed. Some of the important points are here summarized: The installation of the horse precedes and inaugurates all other village festivals. The head of the potters (Velars), who is also the principle priest for Aiyandar, takes a

handful of clay (*pitiman*) from the village tank, which is usually near the Aiyanar sanctuary. The *pitiman* is placed in a brass plate and handed to the village head (*ampalam*), who then returns it to the Velar, along with the ritual dues consisting of some money and betel and areca nut. The head then announces the date of the festival, which had been determined with the aid of an astrologer. The gift is similar to those made by the ancient *yajamana* or sacrificer, who sponsored a Vedic sacrifice and paid all sacrificial fees (*daksinas*) to the priests. The temple is usually situated in a forested area near the boundary of the village, usually to the west of the main settlement. And usually close to a tank thus linking it to the prosperity of the village.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Dumont, "A Structural Definition of a Folk Deity of Tamil Nad: Aiyanar, the Lord," in *Religion, Politics, and History of India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology* (Paris: Mouton Publishers, 1970), 20–32. The article was first published in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (1959): 75–87. Dumont (1911–1998) saw Aiyanar as a Brahmin overlord of the other deities and thus as the god who sets up a proper hierarchical relationship around which the village balances its social and religious identity. There is, in his argument, no discussion how Aiyanar changed over the centuries. Drawing on a long tradition of intellectual critiques of individualism, Dumont argues that the dominance of the individual in the West has infected our view of other civilizations. See Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 204. To understand the Indian caste system, he argued, one has therefore first to exorcise oneself of Western notions of egalitarianism. While I agree that we need to hold individualism in some form of critical suspension, we should be equally suspicious about the myth of holism in the so-called non-West. Dumont's work has been critiqued on several fronts. André Béteille remarked that he "tried to vindicate a world that Indians have left behind, not one they were trying to create." See Béteille, *Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Perspective* (London: Athlone Press, 1991), 246.

<sup>9</sup> Preston Pollock, "Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 19. See also Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4–5, and Shiv Visvanathan, "Official Hegemony and Contesting Pluralisms," in *World Anthropologies: Disciplinary Transformations within Systems of Power*, ed. Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Arturo Escobar (New York: Berg, 2006), 249. See also Awadh Kishore Saran, "Sociology of Knowledge and Traditional Thought," *Sociological Bulletin*, part one, 13, no. 1 (1964): 33–46; part two, 14, no. 1: 41–58.

<sup>10</sup> This was made convincingly clear by Niels Brimnes in "Searching for an Indian Civilization," in *The Avatars of Modernity*, ed. Heinz Werner Wesler, Lars Kjaerholm, and Niels Brimnes, 29–51 (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" [1984], *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–25 at 8, 14, and *passim*. See also "Le Retour de l'événement," in *Faire de l'histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, *Nouveaux Problèmes*, vol. 1, 210–28 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974); translated by Arthur Goldhammer in *Histories: French Construction of the Past*, ed. Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, 427–36 (New York: New Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> The first substantial argument about this connection was made by Marie-Louise Reineche in *Les Dieux et les Hommes: Etude des cultes d'un village du tirunelveli Inde du Sud* (Paris: Mouton Editeur, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> Lars Kjaerholm, "Aiyanar and Aiyappan in Tamil Nadu: Change and Continuity in South Indian Hinduism," <http://www.hindu.dk/1d/ar/Ai-Ai1200.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> It should be clear that I am relying here on the ideas of Michel Foucault. "However, if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. . . . What is found at the beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity." Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. and ed. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 142.

<sup>15</sup> Fred W. Clothey, "Theogony and Power in South India: Clues from the Aiyappa Cult," in *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in South Asia*, ed. Bardwell L. Smith (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1978), 5. Pallava-era Aiyanar sculptures usually have a horse and a dog nearby with Aiyanar seated in *rajalilasana* pose. In the Jaina temples, Aiyanar is usually shown on an elephant. See Marguerite E. Adiceam, "Contribution à l'étude de Aiyanar Sasta," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 32, no. 2 (1969): 458. See also Bredna E. F. Beck, "The Symbolic Merger of Body, Space, and Cosmos in Hindu

Tamil Nadu," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 10, no. 2 (1976): 213–43. For a bibliography of Clothey's work, see [http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/asc/pdf\\_files/about\\_FWC.pdf](http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/asc/pdf_files/about_FWC.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Clothey, "Theogony and Power in South India," 6.

<sup>17</sup> Asko Parpola, "Arguments for an Aryan Origin of the South Indian Megaliths," *Tamilnadu State Department of Archaeology*, publication 32 (Madras: State Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu, 1973).

<sup>18</sup> Clothey, "Theogony and Power in South India," 6.

<sup>19</sup> I might add that the debate about origins is basically logocentric in that it implies that history is something that is exterior to the signified idea. It also almost always degenerates into ethnocentric debates, overtly or covertly. Derrida, in arguing that one should challenge the principles of logocentrism, claims that the play of *différance* between speech and writing is the play of *différance* between interiority and exteriority. *Différance* refers not only to the state or quality of being deferred but also to the state or quality of being different. If we see the horses through that lens (as a project that is being deferred), then the question is not who made them originally but what was made by means of them. The answer—power display—is purposefully obvious, and that alone, with its attendant "traditions," is the history that gets put into motion. The question need not even be *whose* power, since the play of power as signifier is enough to begin to trace the genealogies of modernity.

<sup>20</sup> Nanditha Krishna and V. Bhavani Shankar, "Conserving the Ecological Heritage—Sacred Groves of Tamil Nadu," *Conservation of Forest Eco Systems* 7, [http://www.fao.org/forestry/docrep/wfcsi/PUBLI/PDF/V2E\\_T7.PDF](http://www.fao.org/forestry/docrep/wfcsi/PUBLI/PDF/V2E_T7.PDF). In times of war, a defeated village would have its tree chopped down and burnt by the victors. These groves can be old, as most are, but they can also be formed anew. In one instance the priest, before beginning the process of fashioning the horse, first planted several trees: the neem, itchli, peepul, banyan, and the vembu maram. <http://www.dakshinachitra.net/scripts/tn-ayyanar.asp>.

<sup>21</sup> Valk and Lourdasamy, "Village Deities," 128. For a list of these groves in Tamil Nadu, see <http://arunachalagrace.blogspot.com/2007/07/blog-post.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Whereas the goddess's priest is usually a vegetarian, the priest of Aiyamar is generally a meat eater. Dumont, "A Structural Definition of a Folk Deity of Tamil Nad," 24. Clearly the trees are not that old, but the focus should be on the antiquity of the *practice* not necessarily on the antiquity of the tree.

<sup>23</sup> I am not going to discuss the numerous and complex avatars of Harihara Putra and Aiyanaar. In Sri Lanka, he has various brothers such as Skanda and Kadavara. See Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 138.

<sup>24</sup> Clothey, "Theogony and Power in South India," 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?artid=23537>.

<sup>27</sup> *Ayya* also means "father" but in Tamil is used to designate Vish'nu.

<sup>28</sup> To enter the temple complex at Sabarimala, the devotees have to climb the eighteen gold-plated steps, or the "pathinettu padikal," to a terrace that offers spectacular views of the surrounding mountains and the valleys below. Compared to other prominent temples in Kerala, the shrine atop Sabarimala is relatively small. Rebuilt in 1950 after a massive fire, the complex comprises a sanctum sanctorum bearing a copper-plated roof with four golden finials at the top, two mandapams, a belikalpura that houses the altar, and the "kodimaram" or the flagstaff. The Ayyappa idol was originally carved out of stone. The current idol is an amalgam of five metals and about one and a half feet tall. The complex is located in the far south of India about sixty kilometers inland from the western shoreline. Its coordinates are: 9° 26' 10" N, 77° 04' 53" E. It is located in the village of Perinadu in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala. The Pampa River flows by the foot of the hill about four kilometers away.

<sup>29</sup> The *guruswamy* [*guru*: teacher; *swami*: master] must have undertaken the pilgrimage to Sabarimala not less than eighteen times. The pilgrimage season starts during the middle of November and lasts for two months. It is believed that the forty-one days preparation purifies one's soul and brings one closer to God.

<sup>30</sup> Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Ayyappan Saranam: Masculinity and the Sabarimal Prilgrimage in Kerala" *Royal Anthropological Institute* 9 (2003): 729–53. Women between the ages of ten and fifty-five may not go to Sabarimala, as Ayyappan is considered a bachelor and the menstrual process is believed to defile the sanctuary. The authors point to the hierarchical undertones of the pilgrimage in the context of the psychoanalytic theories of Stanley Kurtz. See also Fred W. Clothey, "Sasta-Aiyanaar-Aiyappan: The God as Prism of Social History," in *Images of Man, Religion and Historical Process in South Asia*, ed. Fred W. Clothey (Madras, Chennai: New Era Publications, 1982); Marguerite E. Adiceam, "Contribution à l'étude de Aiyanaar Sasta," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*,

*University of London* 32, no. 2 (1969): 458; Carl Gustav Diehl, "Who Was Aiyappan?" *Actes du XXI<sup>e</sup> Congress International des Orientalistes*, vol. 2., ed., Jean Filliozat (Paris: n.p., 1976).

<sup>31</sup> Particularly important is the *prasāda* ritual, which involves a type of transubstantiation of food into a divine substance. Though common in Hindu practice, it has a particularly strong resonance for Ayyappans. A devotee makes an offering of a material substance such as flowers, fruits, or sweets, which the deity then "enjoys" or tastes. This food, now divinely invested, is called *prasāda* and is received back by the devotee to be ingested. Given the enormous amount of people who visit the shrine, the Indian government has allowed officials to mail the *prasāda* in a small tin can for a nominal fee. See <http://www.hindu.com/2007/04/03/stories/2007040306650300.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Clothey, "Theogony and Power in South India," 8.

<sup>33</sup> Lars Kjaerholm, "Aiyandar and Aiyappan in Tamil Nadu: Change and Continuity in South Indian Hinduism," <http://www.hindu.dk/1d/ar/Ai-Ai1200.pdf>. Kjaerholm is an anthropologist teaching at Aarhus University who has worked extensively on South Indian religions. See also Lars Kjaerholm, "Myth, Pilgrimage, and Fascination in the Aiyappa Cult," *South Asia Research* 2, no. 2 (1982): 423–45. See also Lars Kjaerholm, *Group Identity and National Identity in Tamil Nadu: An Anthropological Investigation of Ethnicity and Corporate Identity with Special Reference to a Modern South Indian Example* (MA thesis, Aarhus University, Moesgaard, 1981).

<sup>34</sup> For an example of a live broadcast see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=legH7DDmrlc>. For an example of a devotional song and video see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgrBNhblaA8&feature=related>. For an example of a Tamil film about Ayappan see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5A8J9L2bs8&feature=related> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RngJrH3BmOA&feature=related>.

<sup>35</sup> For a larger discussion, see Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Robert L. Hardgrave and Anthony C. Niedhart, "Films and Political Consciousness in Tamil Nadu," *Economic and Political Weekly* 10, no. 1/2 (January 11, 1975): 27, 29–35.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1994/9/1994-9-13.shtml>.

<sup>37</sup> <http://store.nehaflix.com/ackayyappan.html>.

<sup>38</sup> Given the fluidity of Hindu veneration, Ayyappan is also, in some references, considered to be equal to other gods, such as Kaliyuga Varada and, in Sri Lanka, Murugan. I have maintained focus on the more mainstream linkages.

<sup>39</sup> Kjaerholm, "Aiyandar and Aiyappan in Tamil Nadu," 4.

<sup>40</sup> This according to the Wikipedia entry on Aiyandar (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayyanar>). These qualities, however, are new ones.

<sup>41</sup> Though it is beyond the purview of this paper, one could mention Sahodaran Ayyappan (1889–1968), who very much followed the principles of his namesake to argue for a casteless society.

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.countercurrents.org/gender-raji160704.htm>. "The ban was upheld by Kerala's High Court in 1990, but the issue is now being raised by a 42-year-old district collector, K.B. Valsala Kumari, who was ordered to coordinate pilgrim services at the shrine. A special court directive allowed her to perform her government duties at the shrine, but not to enter the sanctum sanctorum." Kumari served for several years as Director of the Social Welfare Department in charge of Women and Children in Kerala. See also <http://www.asiantribune.com/index.php?q-ode/1403>.

<sup>43</sup> Kjaerholm, "Aiyandar and Aiyappan in Tamil Nadu," 8.

<sup>44</sup> With increasing popularity, the horses are being made with molds, this according to an article in *The Hindu*: <http://www.hindu.com/2008/07/25/stories/2008072550470200.htm>.