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SPIRIT POSSESSION AND SPIRIT MEDIUMSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TULU ORAL TRADITIONS

ABSTRACT. The phenomenon of spirit possession is looked at in relationship to the broad cultural context in which it is found to exist in a region of southern India. The author critically reviews various attempts to explain spirit possession as solely a psychological or sociological event. Instead, he turns to the region's spirit possession and mediumship cults, oral traditions and social ideology for an ethnographically relevant interpretation of spirit possession.

Spirit possession and spirit mediumship are common throughout India.[1] Spirit mediumship – the legitimate, expected possession of a specialist by a spirit or a deity, usually for the purpose of soliciting the aid of the supernatural for human problems – is perhaps more common in certain parts of South India than in others. Spirit possession – which we may tentatively distinguish from the above as an unexpected, unwanted intrusion of the supernatural into the lives of humans – is far more common than mediumship and more widely distributed. As might be expected, spirit possession generally creates a disturbance and is regarded negatively with concern and apprehension. It is often reported to be a special form of illness. Exorcistic and apotropaic rituals are regarded as cures. The afflicting spirits are feared and considered dangerous, but are not necessarily impure or malicious. In many areas, however, there is no precise difference between the punitive spirits and the protective spirits, and even household tutelary spirits can be both (see Claus 1973; Gough 1959). The spirits of the deceased are often the very ones (or, at least, often of the same category) that, in the bodies of experienced and appropriate mediums, can be beneficial to society. The medium gains mastery over the spirit by means of training in the proper rituals for inviting the spirits and the use of precautionary foods, items, utterances, etc. to protect the body. Thus, it appears that context – ritual, social and temporal – has much to do with how the intrusion of a spirit is regarded by society.

In areas where there is both mediumship and unwanted spirit possession, there is obviously a cultural association between the behavior exhibited by people in both categories, i.e., they are both possessed by spirits.[2] There is no evidence that a linguistic distinction is commonly and explicitly made between the two experiences. What is distinguished by both language and ritual action is the degree of desirability and legitimacy of the possession. A medium, in Tulu for example, is called a *patri*, or *pujari*. Thus, while we as analysts may seek to distinguish the difference between possession by a culturally designated specialist and an ordinary person temporarily possessed, we should also try to

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explain the similarity between the phenomena as perceived by the societal actors.

There is a third phenomenon which is widely associated with either possession or mediumship or both, that of a person becoming a ghost, a spirit, or a deity. This we may broadly term apotheosis. It is generally true that it is often just such an apotheosized spirit which is believed to be capable and desirous of possessing a person, whether he is a medium or not, and it is the character of that spirit which the possessed displays.[3] Only through possession is the existence of the spirit and its character known, but once revealed, the character of the spirit and his life history become the subject of legends. The legends, then, are an important exegetical source. Presumably there is something in the personal history of the possessed person or something about his or her position in society which is so strongly associated with the character of the possessing spirit that the person is led to acquire the character of the latter. Intense curiosity as to what this might be is not only the subject of Western academic inquiry but also of concern to the Indian villager. Both, alike, seek a satisfactory consistency in the behavior of the possessed individual before, during and after the possession experience. This is especially so in the case of unwanted possession of an individual, since tradition and social structure contribute heavily to identification of the professional medium.

A vast amount of literature has been devoted to the explanation of possession states. Most of this can be segregated into two groups: sociological and psychological. In the first part of this paper I shall review a sample of these kinds of explanation. Then in the remainder of the paper I shall draw upon native ethnographic information to try to explicate certain elements of these cultural associations and to show how they can help to explain the phenomena of spirit possession. The material I shall use is drawn from my field work on the southwestern coast of India, among the Tulu-speaking people of South Kanara District of Karnataka State. There, spirit medium cults are the prevalent mode of worship and spirit possession is a very common phenomenon among the rural peasant population. Long oral legends describe the human history of spirits and state the reason for their apostheosis and the nature of their first incursions in the world of the living.

SPIRIT POSSESSION

Spirit possession is almost invariably viewed by anthropologists in psychological or sociological frameworks. One of the best examples of a psychological explanation is that of Ruth and Stanley Freed in their analysis of possession cases in Shanti Nagar, a village near Delhi (Freed and Freed 1964). There, according to the Freeds, spirit possession is regarded as an illness. Religious

specialists, whom the Freeds call shamans, are able to cure possession with the help of spirit familiars, but the shaman does not become possessed himself. The afflicting spirits are all ghosts. Some of these are purely malicious ghosts and have been inhabiting the village for years, but others are ghosts of respected family members who cared deeply for certain individuals, whom they now possess in order to protect them from some injustice.

The Freeds are less concerned with the nature of the spirits and the practices of the shaman than they are with trying to explain the cases of possession with regard to the individual's social background and psychological history. Spirit possession, they argue, is hysteria. According to them, it is best analyzed as having two conditions:

> ... a basic condition due to the individual's intrapsychic tension, and a precipitating condition due to an event or situation involving unusual stress or emotion. Precipitating conditions have two general characteristics: (1) the victim of spirit possession is involved in difficulties with relatives of the nuclear or joint family, and (2) he is often in a situation where his expectations of mutual aid and support are low. The primary gain of an attack of spirit possession is to relieve the individual's intrapsychic tension; the secondary gains include attention, sympathy, influencing relatives and other manipulation of the individual's current situation. (170)

Their analysis shifts the identification of the patient's behavioral traits from one label to another – possession to hysteria – and the explanation from one paradigm (spiritual) to another (psychological). I question the accuracy of both the labelling and the elements of the paradigm of the psychological and sociological preconditions which are said to produce the resultant behavior.[4]

According to the Freed hypothesis, there are two conditions – that of the general and basic condition of stress, and that of specific precipitating family difficulties. In order to clearly identify these as causal conditions, it is necessary to demonstrate that they exist before the behavioral state they are supposed to bring about, and further, that they are only present, or more severe, in the case of those people in society who become possessed. There is question on both of these counts with regard to both the basic condition and the specific preconditions.

The Freeds analyse in detail the case of a fifteen-year-old Camar girl, Daya, who became possessed by the ghost of a deceased friend soon after she was married and took up residence at her husband's family house. The Freeds attribute Daya's intrapsychic tension to an ambivalent attitude toward sex, combined with a fear of intercourse with her new husband, and consider the precipitating factor to be a result of her position as the subordinate member of her affinal household. There among a household of strangers she lacked moral support and was unable to answer the taunts of a classificatory husband's elder brother. Soon after marriage she exhibited the usual symptoms of spirit possession, and a shaman had to be called in to perform exorcistic rites during

which the ghost spoke its demands and the family avowed their concern for the girl's welfare.

The Freeds apparently took no notice of Daya before her possession, if in fact they knew her at all. Most of their information regarding her state of mind prior to her possession was based on later interviews with her. In these there is no clear evidence that her intrapsychic tensions revolved around an ambivalent attitude toward sex. This is an extrapolation the Freeds make themselves. True, Daya does speak of the fears she had when first sleeping with her new husband. She also speaks of the suicide of her friend (the ghost which possessed) after the latter had been caught in a premarital affair. While it is possible that Daya associated the dire consequences of her friend's illegitimate sexual experiences with her own legitimate relations with her husband, rather more than an interview would be required to convincingly prove this. In any case, Daya's tension during her first nights with her new husband in a household of strangers is by no means extraordinary. Every young girl is raised with strong warnings against illicit sexual relations, replete with vividly fearsome stories of what happens to errant women. Forced suicide and murder of young women for premarital sexual offenses are not uncommon in the villages and everyone would be aware of specific cases. Daya's experience and mental associations do not single her out within her social category.

Nor are the Freeds consistent with the facts they themselves present in identifying the precipitating conditions. Given the rules of both village and clan exogamy, Daya's discomfiture at moving in with stranger-affines is normal for all young brides. In fact, the information they provide would indicate that Daya had an unusually easy transition from family of origin to family of marriage. Daya's mother-in-law and her husband's younger brothers were warm and affectionate toward her, and her mother-in-law was particularly protective of her. She was given a sewing machine as part of her dowry and the income she was expected to earn with this gave her some esteem in her in-laws' eyes. Her mother-in-law was careful not to give her overly strenuous work. The women of the household took pains to quiet the teasing brother-in-law, and defend her to him.

Nor are the other cases the Freeds discuss any more conclusive. Among the cases are men, middle-aged women, childless widowers, and menopausal women, from castes ranging from untouchable to Brahman. Not only is it impossible to single out a particular set of circumstances which might be shown to effect a certain social category, it is not possible to show even a particular category of persons likely to be afflicted. While a common theme of family difficulties seems to run through most of the cases, it is not the same sort of correlation between the nature of the spiritual attack and the prior social situation that was present in Daya's case. In one, for example, a woman of the beggar caste in her

mid-forties was possessed by her elder brother's ghost who demanded to know why her husband mistreated her. However, curiously, the Freeds describe the husband as being 'mild-mannered' and report that there was no noticeable tension between husband and wife either before or after the possession.

The Freeds report that the villagers regard spirit possession as an illness. However, they never discuss the native terms or concepts of disease. In at least one case, it is apparent that the afflicted person is not regarded as ill at all, and in the other cases the illness is at best regarded as a special type. Certainly the particular association of social disturbance, psychological tension and the characterization of the behavioral events as illness is so close to Western notions that it leads one to wonder whether the observations to this effect have ethnographic validity, or instead, are presumptions based on Western diagnostic concepts.

The final stage in the causal relations is the cure. In the Freeds' hypothesis, it is unclear whether the possession attack or the subsequent ritual is the event involved in relieving the intrapsychic tension. The hypothesis is more precise in stating that the secondary gains include attention and sympathy. However, the ethnographic data is quite at odds with both these claims. The act of possession is characterized as agonizing and painful. The villagers themselves view it as a hardship on the victim. In one case, informants identified the possession as a punishment. Ethnographers almost invariably identify possession events as affliction. It is difficult to see how such experiences can be said to directly relieve intrapsychic tension. It is even more difficult to understand how the exorcistic rituals which commonly involve beating the victims, pulling their hair, blowing cow-dung smoke in their faces, squeezing rock salt between their fingers, putting acrid hookah water and chili pepper powder in their eyes and so forth can be viewed as 'gaining attention and sympathy.' The cure can hardly be a satisfying experience for the sufferer.

Surely there is a value in trying to identify a phenomenon which is unexplainable (possession) with one with which we do have extensive familiarity (hysteria). But in doing so we are apt to ignore important differences and assume similar causal relations. That is, even if the state of possession is identical to hysteria (and the Freeds make a good case for this), we are led away from the ethnographically relevant question of why this state is associated with certain people and certain spirits, and we assume that what brings about this state in India is the same as that which brings it about in Western countries. It is well known that many, if not most, manifestations of psychological states have a heavy input from cultural norms. It is not enough to account for this by dressing the preconditions in an Indian setting. Even if there were a strong resemblance between the behavior of a person in the state of possession and the behavior of a person in the state of hysteria, it does not necessarily mean that the

preconditions are the same. This is precisely what must be proven, not assumed. Further, it may even be that a person acts hysterical because he is possessed or fears imminent supernatural influence rather than vice versa. Or, when exhibiting hysterical behavior, he may simply be enacting the known character of a particular spirit or attempting to convince others that he is possessed by some new spirit in a manner in which he is psychically capable, that is, hysterically. Too little attention has been given to symbolic 'causes' of this religious phenomenon.

While there is often considerable overlap between psychological and sociological explanations of spirit possession, the sociological theories tend to include greater attention to identifying particular categories of individuals who are more prone to possession experience due to the relationship of these categories to the greater social structure or social ideology. I. M. Lewis, for example, correlates illegitimate possession by malicious spirits with social categories that are peripheral to the decision-making processes of the society (Lewis 1971). Women in many societies are under represented in the authority structure and downtrodden as a group. Possession by demanding and acquisitive spirits brings attention to the plight of the downtrodden and satisfies their desire for a variety of material and emotional gains. The possessed women are absolved from the responsibility and authorship of their undue claims by the traditional belief that the spirits are capricious and women are weak.

A similar argument in relation to the specifically Indian context has been made by E. B. Harper (1963). Many of the elements of Harper's explanation of spirit possession among Havika Brahmans of the Malnad region of Karnataka are also similar to those presented by the Freeds. However, for Harper, possession is a particular type of role playing, which he identifies as "complete-identification" (1963: 165). Psychologically he labels it a state of dissociation, in which there exists a compartmentalization of the personality to the extent that one aspect is independent of the other. In terms of a set of causal relationships, possession is seen as an individual problem-solving mechanism alleviating stressful social situations. Given these assumptions, Harper directs his attention toward solving the questions as to why it is used in this society by women and not by men, and why women who occupy some statuses are more susceptible to spirit possession than the female incumbents of other statuses. Women in the Havika families occupy statuses subordinate to males in the patrilineal authority structure. Before marriage, restriction and punishment of a girl is relatively more lax in her natal home. But after marriage the potential for stressful situations is greatly increased. Further, the young daughter-in-law has little recourse to resolve stress while she resides with her husband's family. The only influence the girl's parents can exert is by maintaining food relations with these affines. In extreme situations, when all other mechanisms fail, a woman has three personal

alternatives to which she may resort: refusing food, suicide, or spirit possession. Spirit possession is effective because it focuses attention, in the form of exorcistic ritual, on the girl, and because she is relieved of responsibility for her acts and demands. Spirit possession is regarded as a disease (*kata*) by which women are particularly afflicted because they are weaker and more attractive to spirits than are males.

Harper attempts to exemplify these points with short descriptions of four cases, but the specific ethnographic material is entirely inadequate for the generalizations he makes. There seems to be an inconsistency in his claim that a woman who is attacked by a spirit is "shown deference and accorded appropriate special attention . . ." and his observation that "In attempting to force the possessing agent to leave its host, the ceremonial specialist may occasionally beat it (i.e., the woman) . . ." (p. 175). Harper apparently recognizes the inconsistency, for he interjects his own presumptions with ". . . of greater importance for the purposes of this paper (the ceremonial specialist) offers positive inducements to the spirit to make it leave." (p. 175).

Harper correlates the occurrence of spirit possession (affliction) with specific features of the patrilineal Brahman family structure. Ideally, one should be able to demonstrate that among different castes and in different regions, as the kin structure varies, so, too, does the occurrence of spirit possession vary, either in total frequency or in proportions in the social categories. In a matrilineal caste, for example, where a woman has far greater opportunity to alleviate social stress by returning to her natal home where she is always welcome, we would not expect to find a very high incidence of female spirit possession. Or, in a caste of predominantly labor-class families, where women acquire a considerable degree of economic independence very early in marriage, we might expect a low frequency of female spirit possession. Neither of these projections hold true. In South Kanara, the non-Brahman matrilineal castes have far higher incidence of possession and there is an inverse correlation between caste status and incidence of possession.[5] It seems unlikely, therefore, that the occurrence of spirit possession in certain social categories is closely related to specific forms of kinship structures, although this does not rule out the possibility that more general social structure features are significant.

POSSESSION AND MEDIUMSHIP IN THE SIRI CULT

A brief analysis of the Siri cult in South Kanara may help us understand the nature of possession, how it is brought about, and the way it is 'cured.' At the same time we may establish certain aspects of the relationship between possession and mediumship and suggest certain characteristics of the spirits which are associated with their intrusions into this world.

The Siri cult is an annual regional mass possession cult held on full moon nights during the months of March, April and May at some sixteen temples around the District.[6] At the larger gatherings, hundreds of men and women gather at dusk to sing the legend of the Siri 'family' of spirits and to allow themselves to become possessed by these spirits. The Siri spirits are a class of deities unto themselves consisting of four females and a male who are apotheosized beings who originally belonged to three generations of a single matrilineal family.[7] The proportion of male and female cult members (one to four) roughly corresponds to the number of male and female spirits. Another significant difference among the cult members is between the novices who have come for the first time and the adepts who have been coming for a number of years. The latter are mediums in the sense of our earlier terminology. The novices are mostly young men and women who have been subjected to possession (again in the same sense of our earlier terminology) at their homes during the previous year. During the cult rituals and ceremonies they are 'cured', but are then required to attend the cult annually thereafter as adepts.

During field work in 1967–69 and again in 1975–76, I made numerous inquiries into the social context and personal history of initial possession experiences. While it was generally true that the possessed individuals were going through difficult transitional periods in their lives, just as may be discerned from the case histories presented by the Freeds in northern India and Harper in southern India, in only a few cases were the participants subject to exceptionally stressful family situations. Further, one can also find people undergoing extremely difficult times, although not 'transitional' phases of life, who exhibit signs of intense 'intrapsychic tension' and stress but whose behavior is not interpreted as an indication of possession. Thus while it may be true that a detailed psychological study might reveal a history of psychopathological tendencies throughout the lives of certain individuals which would predispose them to emotional outbreaks (which in turn, presumably, would be 'naturally' interpreted as possession), I suspect that it is more a cultural expectancy, supported by the larger framework of cultural ideology, that associates certain periods of transition between life cycle stages with a susceptibility to spiritual influence. Women, first of all, are believed to be more endangered by spiritual influence, particularly during their fertile years and more particularly shortly before and after their first menstruation and pregnancy. Men, that is a woman's father, brother and husband, are responsible for her well-being, the control and regulation of her sexuality and fertility, and the protection of her reproductive potential from outside malice. Lacking protective male control and support, a woman feels defenseless against spiritual attack. The Freeds (1964: 170) and Harper (1963) recognize a lack of support as a precondition to possession, but they underplay the larger cultural ideology which gives rise to an expectancy of

aid and support at certain critical periods in a woman's life. Indeed there is an intrapsychic tension, but this is due to a fear of the possibility of supernatural attack, and not so much a cause of it. While I realize it is difficult for the scientific Westerner to conceive that belief in imminent supernatural dangers could have such powerful emotional effects on the individual, empirical observation has convinced me that such is the case. At the very least, one could say that a combination of social, psychological and religious factors are involved. It seems quite reasonable to me to say that of these, the religious and ideological factors are most fundamental in that otherwise there is no necessary reason why the women would feel such anxiety over the lack of male protection and support against supernatural malice and why their behavior is identified in the language of religious phenomena rather than the language of mental illness (*marlu*). Possession, in other words, appears to be an apt example of Clifford Geertz's idea that religion strengthens beliefs about how an individual should act, given the world as they see it: "... it seems unnecessary to continue to interpret symbolic activities – religion, art, ideology – as nothing but thinly disguised expressions of something other than what they seem to be: attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand" (Geertz 1957).

It is remarkable how similar the case histories of women who have experienced Siri possession are. The first indications of their possession usually begin in their late teens, after their first mensus and during the time a marriage partner is being sought for them. They go through periods (hours or days) of despondency, listlessness and vague anxieties. If others (parents or relatives) catch them staring into space, not performing their normal duties actively, or responding in an exaggerated emotional manner to ordinary circumstances, there is the immediate concern that the girl might be afflicted by some spirit. The likelihood is anticipated, and the supernatural cause is ready at hand. Since it is hard to find a mate for a girl with a history of spiritual affliction, the parents often begin a more intensive search for a groom thus aggravating the anxieties. The behavior which provides conclusive proof that the girl is certainly possessed may be a sudden seizure resembling a catatonic or hysterical fit (actual possession) or a slow but steady deterioration of the girl's health and vitality. If the girl is suddenly seized in possession before she is married, it sometimes happens that her father refuses to acknowledge the presence of a spirit and treats the girl harshly in an attempt to dissuade her from exhibiting behavior which would lessen the family's prestige and her own chances of finding a mate. In any case, this is one way of driving out certain types of unwanted spirits: beating or polluting its vehicles, insulting it, and refusing its demands. If finally convinced the behavior is that of a spirit and not of the girl, the parents or other persons responsible for the girl are apt to take her to a diviner. The varieties of diviners

are many. Some of them read astrological signs, some discover the nature of the affliction by cowrie shells, others who are themselves mediums use the spirits within them, or with whom they communicate, to discover what the nature of the affliction is. Often several such diviners are consulted in succession before it is perceived that a spirit of the Siri family is present. The diviners, along with the parents, try to get the spirit to speak and tell its name and reason for being there. When this is learned, the parents are advised by the diviner to bring the girl to the next annual Siri cult ritual in a location nearest their ancestral home. Only there can a true cure be accomplished. In the meantime, it is sufficient to perform a small ritual (*tortunu*), swearing that the girl will be brought to the cult rituals and will be given an opportunity to be possessed there. Possession will generally not occur during this intervening period even though it may have been frequent up to that point.

Before discussing the nature of the 'cure' that takes place at the cult rituals, it is necessary to see what the attitude toward the Siri spirits is once their presence is known. The first and most important aspect of the character of the Siri spirits to be kept in mind is that they are viewed primarily as benevolent rather than malevolent. While it may be hard to believe that this attitude toward the spirit is maintained in view of the incredible discomfort and agony evident in the bodily contortions and facial grimaces of the possessed young woman, time and again I had informants insist that the Siri spirits are good, that they give no troubles (*upadra*), that they protected[3] their vehicle and that having a Siri vehicle in the family is a blessing. This attitude is most clearly expressed by relatively poor, rural, elderly women of middle to low caste. Most men are at best neutral on the subject, quietly acquiescing to the demands that having a Siri vehicle in the family entails. Higher castes, urban, educated and wealthy families, which are not likely to participate in the cult in any case, are most apt to view the suggestion that a member of their family is a Siri vehicle with indignation, denial and even anger. Men of these families are likely to be quite intolerant of possession behavior and try any means possible to rid the vehicle of the spirit. What they apparently object to is having to bring the vehicle to the annual possession rites and have their women publicly exhibit the unladylike behavior associated with possession. Thus while the traditional attitude toward Siri possession is one of favor, the modern reaction is one of annoyance and nuisance.

A second important aspect of the character of a Siri spirit is its relative purity in comparison to any of the other possessing spirits. A Siri spirit, it is said, will not be able to possess a person if the human vehicle is in a state of impurity, or if another supernatural agent (e.g., another spirit, sorcerer, or a curse) is also present. This is the reason given for a young girl, unaware that she is a chosen vehicle, not taking precautions and then being forced to undergo discomfort and

agony during her first possession experiences. When Siri spirits are unable to freely possess a person because of pollution, Siri spirits bring about the discomfort. The usual sources of pollution upon the body of the vehicle include: sexual pollution due to intercourse; the ingestion of impure items, including meat, feces or urine; and external dirt, such as that washed off during bathing and washing clothes. The cultural explanation of why these essentially benevolent deities should cause such suffering to their recently chosen vehicles is that the vehicle is impure and unfit. The discomfort is a warning to the person and the family to rectify the situation. Of course, the impure state of the vehicle is normally inadvertant, and the family is unsuspecting of the spirit's desires. Even so, and even if the vehicle is kept in a state of purity, the Siri spirit will not fully enter and identify itself in the house. The chosen person must be brought to the Siri shrine if the agonizing unwanted possession is to be turned into mediumship. When it is learned that a young person of a believing family is chosen by a Siri spirit all efforts will be made to ensure that the chosen vehicle will be taken to the sacred place of their ancestors and that it will be ritually pure. To do less than this, or to undermine the spirit's will by secretly polluting the body of the vehicle by slipping minute quantities of impure substances in the food, brings on the wrath of the spirit and extreme discomfort of the young person.

In a previous paper on the Siri cult and legend (Claus 1975), I noted that the people of South Kanara regarded Siri as the paragon of feminine virtue in the matrilineal family structure. In the matrilineal family structure, followed by most castes in the region, males are conscious that their own status and honor lie in the purity of their mother and sisters. Yet in marriage they (or their mother's brothers) yield custody of their women to their brothers-in-law, over whom they have no direct control except to insure a good choice with a high dowry in the beginning. The Siri myth is directly concerned with this dilemma. Once married, Siri's husband neglects her in favor of a prostitute. And while Siri is nearing the time to give birth to her son Kumar, her husband commits an unforgivable sin and dishonors Siri by allowing the prostitute to wear the ceremonial sari meant as a gift to Siri, but which is also a symbol of his paternal claim to Kumar. Ultimately Siri leaves her husband and wanders destitute, lacking any male support save her infant son, Kumar, who stands as protector and sponsor for her. She later contracts an honorable marriage by which she has a daughter, Sonne. After giving birth to her daughter, Siri vanishes to the spiritual realm (*maya*) and the story continues to relate the life of Sonne and the twin daughters, Abbaga and Daraga, she eventually bears.

Siri epitomizes the local concept of virtue and chastity. The South Indian concept of chastity is obviously not the virginal chastity of the Christian tradition, but is rather concerned with proper sexual behavior. Abstention from

sexual activity and infertility are not highly valued. Siri stands as a legendary example of a woman who has maintained propriety and fertility in the absence of adult male support. Her son, Kumar, stands witness to her virtue and righteousness. Siri is a folk heroine.

Having established something of the character of Siri and her spiritual relationship with women, let us now return to the sequence of events which begin with unwanted and agonizing possession of young women and lead to their participation in the Siri cult. The participants of the Siri cult are strangers to one another. They meet once a year to sing the legend of Siri. Soon after they begin, they are possessed by one of the Siri spirits, and until the end of the rites, further communication between them is in terms of the 'personalities' of the spirits which possess them. The novices, whose collective history of possession we have followed up to this point, do not immediately enter into a state of free possession. Generally, they first suffer the same sort of agonizing possession they have been exhibiting in their homes. At a certain point in the legend, their bodies stiffen, their faces contort with the same kind of seizure they experience at home. They are either speechless or moan, howl and hiss, their eyes stare out wildly, and they begin to sway violently from the hips, all actions stereotypic of violent female possession. Soon it takes several relatives to control their violent writhing and to keep the spirit from injuring the vehicle. At this point, one of the male mediums, an adept possessed by the spirit Kumar, comes before her. He calls to the spirit within her in a distinctive melodic chant form, first requesting, then commanding and alternatively reassuringly pleading for the spirit to make itself known. "Mother (Siri), is it you? Sister (Sonne), tell me you are here. Are you the one who plays *cenne mani* (Abbaga and Daraga)? By the warrant of Lord Bermeru (the supernatural lord of the Siri spirits, Brahma), you may speak to me." A female adept will come forward if he is unsuccessful: "Mother, talk to me, I am your child. You must come and be with us. Come and sing with us." If there is no problem involved, nothing inhibiting the free possession of the vehicle, the novice will become fully possessed by one of the Siri spirits and will identify herself. She will be welcomed by her spiritual relatives and they will request her to take her place in the ranks of the possessed. The relatives of the human vehicle will be asked to pay a small 'fine' (*kanike*) to the temple and another to the group of mediums. The singing will then proceed with the new novice fully taking part.

Often, however, getting the spirit to speak through the new medium is a difficult job. If the spirit has not yet identified itself after fifteen minutes or a half an hour, Kumar, with the permission and powers of the Lord Bermeru, tries to divine why it is Siri is unable or unwilling to enter the new vehicle. It may be that one of the girl's relatives has tried to sabotage the attempt of the spirit by polluting the body of the girl. Or there may be some other spiritual power

blocking Siri. For example, sorcery may have been performed on the family, or another spirit (of the *bhuta* category) may be present as well. In these cases it is necessary to carry on an impromptu inquiry into what the family may have done to deserve this secondary supernatural attack, how the unwanted spirit may be appeased and its powers nullified. Sometimes several such difficulties are found, but eventually, after all of these are eliminated, the Siri spirit will respond and identify herself. The Kumar medium receives the spirit of his kinswoman warmly and respectfully, characteristic of the specific relationship in which it identifies itself – mother, sister, or niece. He encourages the spirit to join the group of its relatives. He strengthens its presence with reassuring words. Other adepts will step forward and sing words of welcome and encouragement. Kumar and other mediums will take her hand and embrace the novice. She is then received into the line of singers and warmly accepted by her 'sisters'. One of them will take care of her and help her to sing the legend as they proceed with the ceremony.

The novice, who had been suffering agonizing unwanted possession in her house over the past year, now experiences the warm acceptance of herself as a well-defined spiritual personality. Her tutelary spirit is her protection against malicious spirits and the evil use of supernatural power by her family's enemies. Her tutelary spirit can speak out against injustices, if any, against her by her own relatives. She herself becomes the heroine of her feminine predicament. She finds solace, understanding and acceptance among others of her kind. She finds the support and strength of a spiritual kin group she lacked in her human kin group. In defining herself as the spirit of the legend she gives focus and resolution to her problems. Her unwanted possession is transformed into mediumship. She now knows how to express herself without agony. What is crucial here is the mutual identification of the novice and the apotheosized spirit, which occurs in the process of the transformation from unwanted possession to legitimate mediumship.

Once in the 'service' (*seve*) of the Siri spirits the medium is expected to return annually to the place of the cult's mass possession ceremonies to sing the legend of Siri and to undergo possession. If she does so, she will no longer suffer unwanted possession in her home. I have talked with numerous Siri mediums who affirm that this is the case. It is difficult to say how many women have altogether ceased having possession difficulties after their initial cure regardless of the fact that they do not return. The number of 'drop-outs' must be quite large since otherwise there would be an ever-increasing number of medium-adepts present each year, and the number would be far greater than it is. Presumably, if a woman does not return it is because she no longer feels there is any danger of a relapse of her former unwanted possession. However, the discrepancy is partly accounted for by the ability to substitute an offering in lieu of mediumship service. For example, if a woman is menstruating at the time of

the annual ceremony she may, under a vow, either set another date for her possession service (*seve*) or substitute an offering (*parake*) of flowers and money. Many women continue to offer this substitution year after year, and this arrangement seems to keep them from suffering relapses of unwanted possession. Finally, there are women whose condition is not in any way relieved during the ceremonies, and others whose unwanted possession is not channeled into periodic mediumship. It is difficult to determine the proportion of cases which fall into one of these two categories, since they do not generally return to the Siri ceremonies and seek help through another spirit cult instead. In most of these cases it is determined that their affliction is not caused by the Siri spirits, so strictly speaking the inability to effect a cure does not represent a failure of the Siri cultists. In any case, I would estimate that it is a very small percentage of the total cases treated. The 'cure' rate of unwanted possession by the Siri spirits is, then, close to perfect, and the once-afflicted women are returned to nearly normal social relationships. The requirements of continued participation in the cult are a minor inconvenience to their relatives which can be regarded as an honorable religious practise.

APOTHEOSIS AND THE CULT OF MAYNDALA

It is instructive to look at another Tuluva cult, the cult of Mayndala, in connection with the association between spirits and those whom they are believed to protect.[9] Here we shall first look at the legend which speaks of how a woman became a goddess. In ancient times, a manor lord was troubled by an intruding spirit. In order to avert the devastation of this spirit he promised it an offering, which he would collect from among his tenants. All but one of the tenants freely contributed a tithe. As to the negligent one, the manor lord challenged: "If the spirit is truly a powerful one, worthy of the gifts of my tenants, he will get an offering from this man." During the ceremony in which the offering was to be made, the spirit took the human form of the manor lord and went to the house of the recalcitrant tenant. No one was awake except the man's sister, Mayndala, who had just given birth to a child a few days before. The spirit enticed the girl to the threshold of the house and grabbed her, withdrawing her from the world of the living and into the realm of the spirits (*maya*). Mayndala pleaded that the spirit also take her baby, for a new mother cannot bear to be without her baby. Thus the spirit extracted the offering in the much more painful sacrifice of the kinswoman of the defiant tenant. Sorely regretting his mistake, the tenant rushed to the house of the manor lord with an offering many times greater than what was originally called for. He pleaded with the manor lord to use his power over the spirit to take this offering in exchange for his sister. But the manor lord sarcastically refused the tenant's belated

attempt. Then the spirit of Mayndala appeared to the tenant, her brother and told him, "You need not plead with an unjust lord. I shall show him the suffering he has shown to you." So she went immediately to the inner chambers of the manor lord's house where the niece of the lord was confined after delivering a child of her own. She drew this woman and child into the realm of the spirits, thus causing to the lord the same dire fate that had occurred to her brother.

In this complicated little myth the heroine is Mayndala. There is a cult in her name which is found in many villages around the district. She is worshipped primarily by women seeking protection and aid during childbirth. Significantly, it appears that the cult of Mayndala is expanding in popularity at a time when one would expect a decline in traditional rural possession cults in the face of modernization, reform and increased literacy. There is, in fact, a decline in certain types of village cults which depend on the participation and contributions of the increasingly non-functional landlord class. With land reform and conditions favorable to investment in the growing industrial complex, the manor lords of the past have been turning away from the village and its religious concerns. Even many of the subsistence agricultural tenant class have recently shown signs of being attracted to the urban-based industrial opportunities and a concurrent disinterest in the affairs of the village. There may be some connection between the increasing popularity of Mayndala and the declining interest in certain other village cults.

During the period extending two or three months before and two or three months after childbirth a woman and her baby are felt to be highly susceptible to supernatural attack. For a period of sixteen days after parturition the mother and child are confined to a secluded room. A host of social customs, ritual beliefs, protective charms and the mother's maternal instinct protect the child from supernatural harm. What is feared is precisely what happened to Mayndala in the myth, that she and her newborn will be the target of supernatural attack. Both as a woman who has been subjected to this misfortune every woman dreads, and as a spirit who has caused such a misfortune to avenge her family, Mayndala is regarded as the patron of childbirth. Most spirits worshipped in the village have this dual character of protector–punisher (see Claus 1973). She is worshipped less, however, to avert her influence than to solicit her protection. Her supplicants are not, as was the case with Siri, possessed by her. I have never heard of a single case of a woman being possessed during childbirth. Instead, women make a vow to present Mayndala with gifts of flowers, money, or ceremonial acts at a later time, should she protect the infant child from affliction. The basis of this supplication is that women recognize a certain commonality between their present situation and the situation of Mayndala in the myth which brought about her apotheosis.

A newborn child is highly susceptible to supernatural affliction and any misfortune which should occur is interpreted as a supernatural attack. The male head of the house is supposed to protect the vital sources of the household's fertility and prosperity. In this he is aided by the household's tutelary spirits and the spiritual champions which guard the village borders from external threats. The household head leads the rituals which supplicate the household spirits, and the village manor lords lead the rituals which supplicate the village champions. Should the men be lax in their ritual duties, just as the tenant household head in the Mayndala myth, the village and the houses within it will be susceptible to vengeful and malevolent spirits. The immediate target of their attack will be the women and children, the heart of society's vitality. As women of today witness a decline in their menfolk's attention to propitiation of the spirits which protect the village, they turn their attention to Mayndala in hopes that she will protect them just as she came to the aid of her brother in the myth.

In the Mayndala cult, then, we see an identification of the human supplicant with the apotheosized heroine of legend similar to the ritual act of the women of the Siri cult. In the case of Mayndala, however, the devotee does not become possessed, but instead makes a vow. The ritual act of making a vow shares certain similarities with the ritual act of mediumship: both are regarded as an offering to the spirit, one in the form of a material gift (*parake*) and the other in the form of a ritual service (*seve*). The two are to a large extent interchangeable in many cults, depending mostly on extenuating circumstances and practicality. For example, as already mentioned, should a woman have her monthly menstrual period on the full moon night on which she regularly serves (*seve*) as a Siri medium, she cannot participate in the cult because her body is regarded by Siri as a polluted vehicle. Instead, she must give a ritual gift to the temple. The offering of a gift (*parake*) instead of a vehicle (*seve*) to Mayndala may be explained by the fact that a woman is regarded as polluted (*ame*) after childbirth, and Mayndala requires (desires) those very gifts for which she herself served as a substitute when her brother failed to make an offering to the manor lord's great spirit. This ability to substitute *parake* and *seve*, incidentally, is the way many modern families get around having their women participate in cult ceremonies; they continually offer *parake* and ask the spirit's pardon! Further, vowing a gift to an unwanted possessing spirit is the most common way of enticing the spirit to leave the body of its vehicle, and is a part of all exorcistic rituals.

Again we have in common with the Siri cult the concept that the legendary heroine, with whom the supplicant identifies, is her protector against anticipated malicious attack from other supernatural forces. Another common feature is the theme that the anticipated susceptibility is brought about by absence of support from those whose normal responsibility it is to protect against such attacks.

However, it must be emphasized that the supposed lack of support as well as the supernatural affliction are intimately connected with a set of precise beliefs about the supernatural and a larger ideology in which the roles of men, women and spirits are all interrelated. Without detailed knowledge of this one cannot ultimately 'explain' the occurrence of possession.

THE IDEATIONAL CONTEXT OF POSSESSION AND MEDIUMSHIP

Only a very brief account of the ideology which supports the spirit medium cults and the widespread occurrence of spirit possession in the villages of South Kanara can be given here. It is unfortunate that space does not allow for a detailed documentation of the ideational structure I propose, but that would require a far longer discussion. My main concern here is to establish a possible connection between certain caste specialist mediums and persons in whom spirit possession, though unwanted, is anticipated.

A further discussion of the Mayndala and other myths of South Kanara could demonstrate that there is an implied cosmological structure such that each household (*illu*) and each village (*uru*) replicate interlocking microcosms of the structure of a kingdom each with a supernatural realm (*maya*) and a natural realm (*joga*) coexisting in different modes of reality. The dominant structure at each level is characterized by a multiplicity of dichotomous oppositions defining its inherent categories. The overall interlocking of the levels is through a further axis, at the head of which the king stands. Along this axis we find a dynamic set of feudal-like transactions of power between lord and vassal through exchanges of warrant for honor-bearing services and wealth. While this feudal axis is not immediately relevant to our present discussion, the dualistic structure at each level is. We have also to explain why some women, and not others succumb to possession. The Mayndala legend (and others, Claus 1978) suggests that women in a liminal state in the social process are particularly susceptible to supernatural attack. In the Mayndala legend the liminality is expressed both symbolically – she is standing at the threshold of her house when she is 'taken' by the spirit – and sociologically – she is a *pedmedi*, a woman in the forty-day state of postnatal danger (Babb 1975: 72–8). In the next section of the paper we shall briefly examine the notion of liminality between the natural and supernatural realms and consider how liminal states affect people in specific categories of the social structure and in transitional life cycle stages.

Each household (*illu*), along with its agricultural properties and cattle sheds, is a well-defined domain. Its boundaries clearly demarcate what lies within and without. That which lies within is distinguished between the spiritual (*maya*) and the natural (*joga*). Tutelary spirits (*illuda bhuta*) and the men of the household

share in the responsibility of protecting that which is their domain from the encroachment of outside forces which affect the natural processes which bring about continuity and prosperity upon which, in turn, men and spirits depend for their own fame and fortune. At the center of the domain lies the household's sources of vitality: child-bearing women, food-giving fields, prestige-bearing cattle.

All is well and the household prospers as long as men can maintain the cultural order and prevent encroachment of outside forces of malevolence. The tutelary spirits are encouraged to identify with the fortunes of the family by the promise of a share in its bounty, thereby eliciting their aid in protecting the supernatural dimension of its boundary. Should man fail to offer the spirits their share, they may become avaricious and vengeful, or they may withdraw their support and the human realm will become susceptible to malicious supernatural encroachment. It is also necessary to maintain the boundaries which separate the natural and the supernatural, for any interparticipation of the two categories is potentially dangerous. There are two particular situations in which the two realms conjoin: birth and death. There are times in the life cycle of the individual and in their normal lives when the individuals and the household are susceptible to supernatural influence even if the two realms do not fully meet. When a person is sick (especially with a spiritually caused disease such as measles or small pox), spirits who are desirous of claiming the life of a human try to take advantage of that person's weakened condition. When a woman has her menstrual period she must be careful not to contact the supernatural for fear of polluting them. Examples abound.

The village, too, is conceived on a similar model. Its boundaries are similarly set to define that which lies within and that which lies without. The village headman, manor lord, is the equivalent of the household head; the cultivated fields and the tenants under him are his domain and subjects. There are spiritual defenders of the village domain (*uruda bhuta*). Like the household head, the village lord is responsible for protecting the prosperity of the families (*samsara*) of those within his realm and for propitiating the spirits upon whom he relies to guard against supernatural encroachment. He is responsible for maintaining the order and integrity of the categorical domains within his realm.

It would not be difficult to show that many of the thousands of major and minor ritual acts one encounters in the villages are aimed at boundary maintenance and protection from the encroachment of the elements of one category upon the domain of another. Great concern, for example, is evident when animals of the forest beyond the boundaries of cultivation begin to roam the village. When this happens people see an extranatural significance to the events and it is the duty of the headman to lead a ritual hunt into the forest. The animals most feared – the deadly cobra, the wild boar, the tiger – are

worshipped in rituals, the significance of which is to contain them or utilize their particular potency (fertility, strength, poison) by ritual, symbolizing their control.

Most dangerous and most feared is encroachment of the supernatural (*maya*) upon the natural (*joga*). Yet, at times, it is regarded as necessary that the supernatural be called forth to interparticipate in the realm of the natural. Most villages have an annual ceremony in which the spiritual champions of the village are honored with offerings and invited to physically participate. One type of vehicle into which they are requested to enter is the idol. All attempts are made to make this image (it can be merely a boundary stone or a wooden image carved in the likeness of the spirit) pure and then to ensure that the spirit is contained only in this place. Another vehicle the spirit may enter is a person. A specialist of a particular caste is attired in a costume fitting the specific spirit and paints his face to resemble that of the spirit. He becomes a living idol, able to act and speak the part of the spirit. Obviously the spirit is more pleased with this living, human vehicle than with a dumb stone!

What is remarkable is the selection of the particular castes of specialist mediums. In South Kanara these are very low castes, marginal to society, castes (Nalke, Parava, Pambada) whose other means of livelihood is to collect forest and grove products. It is not possible to say that their low status is due to their occupation as mediums of low spirits, polluting spirits, for the spirits themselves are not necessarily low or polluting. Instead, I believe, they are thought to be fit mediums because their caste occupation identifies them with marginality. In pursuit of their livelihood they regularly transgress structural boundaries between village and forest. They live on the margins of the village, in the wasteland between forest and field. They are themselves, in a sense, boundaries. That such marginal people who are medial to the whole scheme of village structure should be mediums for the spirits seems entirely apt. Examination of other castes whose members occasionally serve as mediums (toddy-tappers and potters) could also easily demonstrate symbolic association between their caste occupation and the concept of mediumship.

I would now like to turn back to the discussion of the association of certain people and the interpretation of their abnormal behavior as possession. It should be obvious from the above discussion that possession is not a 'natural' interpretation of a person's abnormal behavior, but one which is anticipated by the conception of the universe. Certain individuals and any individual at certain times is more likely to be susceptible to possession than others. More specifically, people who are medial in the social structure, whether because they are in a transitory state or because they are in a position of being a target for avaricious or malevolent supernatural attack, are felt to be in danger of possession. They themselves anticipate and fear such attack. Unless they are

guarded by a ritual believed to be adequately efficacious, or protected by those who they feel have a sincere interest in their well-being, they feel anxious, forlorn and neglected. Any abnormality in their behavior is likely to be immediately interpreted as a malicious attack and thereby accentuated into the expected. By making a vow to a particular spiritual protector – one who has suffered a similar state of uncertainty and heroically returned to save others from a similar state – or by actually allowing such a spirit to supplant one's own personality in a carefully defined ritual context, the person can rapidly overcome the escalating anxiety. Even lacking a 'protecting spirit' in which to define one's condition it is sufficient to bring relatives to one's aid with proper rituals to contain the believed spiritual attack, remove it by substitution, and close the boundary gap. Remarkably, the culture of South Kanara is replete with a lively supernatural with which to define both cause and cure for possession and an ideological arena in which anticipated affliction can be utilized beneficially.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Stories and legends about virtuous heroines provide a common model for women all over South India. It is not difficult to understand why their spirits should be honored as tutelary spirits and offerings (*parake*) should be made to the remembrance of them. What is remarkable is that under certain circumstances living women should *become* these spirits; that is, that the spirits come to possess human vehicles.

When the possession occurs in the body of a specialist of a caste of mediums, we look for aspects of that caste which appear to make it appropriate for this role. For the cultures along the southwest coast I have suggested that castes which are associated with boundaries and margins of society are thought fit for this role. Castes such as those that frequently go into the forest gathering materials are those with occupations so regarded. Also, washermen and barbers, whose jobs are removing substances out of place, are skilled in handling spirit intrusions into the realm of the living. On the Deccan plateau (as well as some areas along the western coast), potters are regarded as apt mediums for spirits. Just as their pots serve as containers for liquids, so too are their bodies regarded as containers (rather than vehicles) for the supernatural. They are skilled in the installation of spirits and their very beings are identified with their product.

It does not seem unlikely to me that so-called unwanted possession might also occur in situations where it is expected. There is not the absolute distinction between possession and mediumship in the Dravidian languages which we have built up in the anthropological literature. There is, perhaps, a difference in the kind of association between the castes of medium specialists and the

supernatural in general on one hand, and between non-specialist possession and the particular spirit which causes it on the other hand. In the case of female possession, the individual struggles to live with a condition that is threatening to her propitious conduct, upon which, in turn, the prosperity and reputation of those around her depend. The threat is almost invariably brought about by the lack of male protection which the cultural ideology requires in order that women may be secure against the ravaging intrusion of supernatural and human enemies. Lacking male protection a woman feels herself the target of impending harm. Under such a precarious condition a woman is vulnerable not only in the material world in which she must have sustenance, but also in the supernatural realm in which she is defenseless. By giving herself as a vehicle for one who might be her savior, a spirit of one who had preserved the concept of virtue in her lifetime, a woman chooses the lesser of two dangers. To do otherwise would be to succumb to attacks of less well-defined and malicious spirits. By becoming the vehicle of her spiritual protectress, she brings resolution to vague fears and apprehensions of guilt. The more clearly her tutelary spirit can be defined as virtuous, the more secure and powerful can be the woman's defense against those who seek to destroy her.

Debates over identification of the state of people undergoing possession or trance – whether these are altered states of consciousness or psychotic states, or what type they are within one of these frameworks – are, of course, interesting. Physical and psychic states are common to many cultures. As such, they represent only one interesting aspect of the phenomenon of possession. If we are to understand the cultural meaning of possession, which is manifested as a particular state of consciousness, it would seem that we need to look more deeply into the religious explanation of possession. In this paper I have not argued that possession cannot be looked at as a psychotic state, but rather that, as far as the cultural anthropologist is concerned, labeling it as such is insufficient in regard to its explanation. Spirit possession is not a 'natural' cultural explanation of psychosis. Nor is it enough to merely note that 'belief in supernatural beings' is a necessary condition for the phenomenon. The psychological and sociological 'preconditions' sometimes identified as the causes of possession may only be secondary features. In order for psychic states to be interpreted as possession, and in order that sociological preconditions set the stage for such states, there must be precise ideological correlates that anticipate precipitation of the phenomenon.

The study of spirit possession in the context of the greater ideology of traditional village life, in which it is seen to be related to mediumship, apotheosis and other ritual acts, greatly helps us 'explain' the cause and cure. There is the strong suggestion that possession behavior is expected behavior in at least two senses: the individual fears it will occur under certain circumstances, and the

symptoms of a person's anxieties are readily interpreted as spirit possession under these same circumstances. There is further the suggestion that because it is expected, possession behavior may actually be performed, although never, perhaps, consciously or deceptively. If this is so, then it would seem unwarranted to assume that spirit possession is exactly the same as psychotic states in Western culture and therefore produced by identical causes. More importantly, looking at spirit possession in the wider cultural context allows us to understand how the subject is cured by controlling the ritual context and accentuating the expression of the spirit.

It is apparent there are significant differences in the regional subcultures of South Asia with regard to the occurrence, cause and cure of spirit possession. Before we can come to any more substantial understanding of spirit possession, it will be necessary to have many more reports of what might be called 'popular' Hinduism. While the paucity of ethnographic detail on village ritual is in part attributable to other biases, such as the tendency to look at all Hindu ritual through Brahmanical perspective, the readiness of many ethnographers to interpret village behavior in terms of their own cultural assumptions also remains a perennial problem.

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NOTES

1. Berreman, 1963; Carstairs, 1961; Dumont, 1959; Freed and Freed, 1964; Gough, 1959; Harper, 1957, 1963; Opler, 1958
2. In Tulu there are a number of different terms used to identify possession behavior. The most common are *bhuta pattundu* ('the spirit caught . . .') and *maytu battundu* ('came into the body'). Several verbs describe the motions of the possessed – *kumbarunu*, 'shaking, trembling' – or the movement of the spirit in the body – *ersunu*, 'rising'. In a ceremonial context, the appearance of the spirit in the medium's body is phrased *bhuta durshana atundu*, 'the spirit appeared'. The affliction caused by a spirit is usually described as *upadra*, 'trouble', or *apottu*, 'affliction'. These terms are usually reserved for devastating and violent diseases to man, animals, or crops, but can also include unusual and annoying events (e.g., mushrooms growing in the house, encroachment of numerous ant colonies) and slow wasting diseases. In all of these situations there is considerable ambiguity as to whether the spirit is an external agent of affliction or whether his internal presence is the cause of the trouble.
3. In some areas of India certain deities or categories of deities never, or only under certain highly restricted circumstances, possess humans. Usually the whole of the pan-Indian great tradition deities, such as Visnu, Siva, their incarnations and retinue, are such deities. The deities or spirits which do possess humans are generally those that had been originally human themselves: *preta*, *bhuta*, *pisachi*, *devva*, *daiva*, etc.
4. I would like to thank Marsha Dua, presently a graduate student in Anthropology at California State University, Hayward, for bringing to my attention some of the deficiencies in the Freeds' case study mentioned below.
5. G. M. Carstairs and R. L. Kapur recently conducted a survey of the sociodemographic

correlates of illness symptoms, including cases of hysterical possession, in the South Kanara village of Kota (Carstairs and Kapur 1976). The survey included 426 males and 805 females of the Brahman (high, patrilineal), Bant (high, matrilineal) and Moger (low-middle, matrilineal) castes (see Carstairs and Kapur 1976: 31–45). Possession was found to be far higher among Moger women than any of the other categories (pp. 106–107). This corresponds with my own observations (non-statistical) of a variety of castes in four other villages, spanning the remaining sub-regions of South Kanara District.

6. Further research in India necessitated a correction of my earlier published statement that Siri festivals occur on the full moon of the first month of the Tulu new year. This is so only at several of the most renowned locations. Other temples are now known to hold their festivals on the full moon nights of the two months preceding the new year. Incidentally, the number of Siri cults is not necessarily as fixed as tradition has it, since new cults are known to have originated quite recently.
7. This is one tradition. Another tradition has it that there are seven Siri spirits, and in this tradition the spirits are not all matrilineally related. A much fuller description of the Siri cults and several versions of the Siri myth in both traditions will be included in my forthcoming book-length account of the legends and possession cults of Tulunad.
8. The phrase commonly used is *sirinaklena dristi padudandu*, 'the 'sight' (watchfulness) of the Siris has been placed (on the person).' The word *dristi* does not have the negative connotation here as it does when referring to the evil-eye (also *dristi*), although in both cases there is the concept of 'attraction'. When a goddess places her 'watchfulness' on a supplicant, it means that she protects that person.
9. A translation of the legend of Mayndala and a description of her cult is presently in preparation for a forthcoming issue of *Asian Folklore Studies*.

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