



Fig. 2: Domestic form of Sarasvatī pūjā.

room. For the worship of Sarasvatī people make a sandal paste image of the goddess and take it in procession (1990: 14–17). In addition to these pan-Indian rites with local variations the festival in the novel also includes the more local one of replanting and then uprooting again a *vanni* tree said to symbolize the battle between Sarasvatī and the king of darkness represented by the tree. This rite becomes the centre of a touching love story. So far, Kittappa easily succeeded in the feat of pulling out the replanted tree but this time he has to use his utmost strength and thus ruins his health. His cross-cousin Accintalu had secretly advised the boys digging out the tree to leave some forked branches. She has done so to revenge herself for his presumed betrayal in marrying another woman. However, there was no betrayal but only spiteful misinformation on the part of her envious companions and obligation on the part of his parents. She also marries somebody else and remains soon widowed. He does not get along with his wife and sends her back to her native home. Seeing the harm she has done him, she is filled with remorse. When she finds him fainted in the fields, she lovingly brings him back to consciousness. The two promise each other never to separate again.

If by the end of *Aippaci* (October – November), the second monsoon, crucial for the dry southernmost part of Tamilnadu, is overdo, people think of performing rainmaking ceremonies. Kasirajan (1984) gives a purely ethnographic description of “rice water for rain” and connected rites without adding these to other events. The rice water has

to be collected from all houses of the village. This may be understood either as an intentional disregard of pollution rules or as an intentional lowering of one’s status by incurring in pollution. The rice water is drunk collectively not from a vessel but in the hollow of one’s palm. This gesture I again interpret as an intentional self-humiliation since this is the way ex-untouchable farm workers receive their midday meal in the fields. Self-humiliation as penance in order to induce the gods to make it rain also is evident in the fact that, after having drunk the rice water, youths roll on the ground from the outskirts of the village to the temple in its centre. Another method of rainmaking does not cause suffering to people but to the god. Villagers cover the statue of the elephant-god with clay hoping that in order to dissolve the coating he will use his power to attract rain.

In his “Self-Assertion” (1985: 111–130) Rajanarayanan makes a rainmaking vow, the occasion of what anthropologists call “ritual compensation” for the low castes’ subjugation in everyday life. When he was the servant of a single master, the ex-untouchable was beaten and insulted by him. However, the fact that his wife has the same name as he is considered an auspicious omen in village, so he is called to treat small ailments. His apparent success makes him believe in his special power. During a severe drought when “rice water for rain”, burning an effigy (*koṭumpāvi*, the Tamil version of the scape-goat) and offering blood sacrifice to village deities all prove ineffective to attract rain, he takes a vow. He will sit in front of the temple of the village goddess without eating and