

shoulder and Peciamma's over the right. These special cloths, collectively known as *parivettam*, were kept by Talaimalai for such occasions. (Their use is a contact phenomenon; cf. Tamil *parivaṭṭam* "... cloth; robe ... robes pertaining to an office"; Lifco 1968.) The two samis sang, or chanted, in the same manner which had been used by their seekers during the initial prayers of petition.

During the next hour and a quarter the personal needs of nine people were dealt with. Although most of their concerns were serious, others engaged in a good bit of joking and light talk. For instance, three times, Velan (the 19 year old who had been on watch) placed a 1.5 m stick on the ground straight out in front of the crotch of squatting Ponnusami. All seeing it laughed, including Ponnusami's wife. The victim expressed slight annoyance and pushed it away each time.

At 1:10, three of the people who sought help approached Rakkaci (who had come upon Sappani). Latsmi sat before her, holding her year-and-a-half old son, Tangarasa, and Raman lay face down on the ground with his head by sami's feet. In response to Raman's salutation, sami took him by the hair, urging him thus to rise. He rose to a kneeling stance, with lowered head (Fig. 1). Sami sang briefly, saying "Wait for some time. I shall first see to a young plantain tree [baby], then I will come to you." Raman lay down again as if asleep and remained there until about 2:00, when he went home. Rakkaci spent the next 35 minutes with Latsmi and her son. Latsmi saluted with palms together and said she was unwell. "Don't fear. I will remove all the ailments from your body,



Fig. 1

the *kāccil* [cf. Malayalam *kāccal* "heat"; Burrow and Emeneau 1961: entry 1219] and other harmful things," sami replied. It was explained that Latsmi had been bathing at the cistern of a forest temple 8 or 9 days previously. Hearing a white lizard (*kevali*) screeching, she had become frightened and at once felt feverish. Sami's whole body was trembling rapidly, especially her arms and legs. As she sang, there were great gasps periodically, for 5 to 15 seconds each time. She usually leaned forward quite sharply from the waist with her hands on Latsmi; occasionally, she stood leaning slightly back with her hands folded in her lap. At first, Rakkaci put her hands only on Latsmi's head. Later she placed them on her shoulders then her chest, then she ran them down Latsmi's legs to the ankles. Latsmi asked about her son who had dysentery and fever. Rakkaci promised a cure. She put her hands first on the child then back on Latsmi's shoulders and head. Finally, Latsmi prayed for her husband, who had fever in addition to pain in his feet, ankles, and forearms. Reassurances were offered.

Velan asked his wife, who happens to be Sappani's daughter, to take her child (by a previous union) to Rakkaci. So Muttamma brought her daughter forward, requesting sami's protection. The two year old cried as trembling Rakkaci leaned over and placed her hands on its head, saying "I will watch over you and protect you. Don't fear." By now it was 1:53.

The 20 year old who had been on watch (another Ponnann), mentioning his injured ankle to Velan, went forward a step. Rakkaci came to the two of them, placed one hand on the head of each, lowered her head, and held it sideways against her right arm. Addressing each of them as *tambi* (younger brother), she offered them her protection. Then she stepped back and extended her left arm from the waist, calling for *tinnir* (ashes; cf. Tamil *tiru nīru*, "sacred ashes"; Emeneau and Burrow 1962: entry 211; Burrow and Emeneau 1961: entry 3060) in her cupped hand. They said yes. Ponnann fetched it from the nearest fireplace.

Rakkaci approached the ethnographer, so I greeted her verbally and with a salutation of the hands. She placed a thumb mark of ash on my forehead. She then sang that my wife would have a child; I was asked to watch over all the people in the community, seeing that no one troubled or beat them. Her hands shook as she held her fingers in my hair.

She staggered back again, then went over to Kanniamma, who told me afterwards that her husband had woken her, saying sami had come on "brother," and asked her to go to sami and