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SANNI SIVONEN

**GODS FOR TOURISTS.
STONE CARVING AND TOURIST ARTS IN MAMALLAPURAM,
SOUTH INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on stone carving and tourist arts in Mamallapuram, South India. The term “tourist arts” mainly refers to ethnic art and craft products that are produced for an external audience usually unfamiliar with the culture and aesthetic criteria of the producer’s society. The town of Mamallapuram is one of the stone carving centres of India, but is also a popular international tourist destination that is most famous for its ancient, rock-carved monuments classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition, there is an ongoing, vibrant stone carving industry that attracts both domestic and foreign visitors. Hundreds of carvers produce mainly sculptures of different Hindu gods and goddesses and their work is based on Hindu stone carving tradition. Deity sculptures are made for Hindu temples and shrines around the world but also to be sold as souvenirs for international tourists visiting Mamallapuram. Souvenir carvings are partly similar to the ritual sculptures but usually differ in terms of the stones being used, production techniques, size and even iconography. This research concentrates on stone carvers working on the tourist market, the features of the statues they produce, and interactions with foreign tourists. It also explores the relationship the current carving industry has with international tourism. In addition, the thesis examines the artistic, religious and spiritual meanings and use of tourist carvings based on the views of stone carvers and foreign tourists. These themes are analysed by using the concept of agency following the theory of art and agency by Alfred Gell (1998) and actor-network theory (ANT) by Bruno Latour (2005), in which agency is attributed to both human and non-human material entities, such as stone carvings.

Keywords: stone carving, tourism, art, religion, agency

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirjan aiheena ovat kivenveisto ja turistitaide Mamallapuramin kaupungissa, Etelä-Intiassa. Turistitaiteella tarkoitetaan paikallisia taide- ja käsityöesineitä, jotka on valmistettu ulkopuolisille ostajille, kuten matkailijoille. Mamallapuram on yksi Intian kivenveistokeskuksista, mutta myös suosittu turistikohte, joka tunnetaan erityisesti historiallisista, nykyisin UNESCO:n suojelemista kivimonumenteistaan. Näiden lisäksi kaupungissa on runsaasti kivenveistoteollisuutta, joka houkuttelee niin kotimaisia kuin ulkomaalaisiakin matkailijoita. Väitöskirja keskittyy Mamallapuramin turistimarkkinoilla työskenteleviin kivenveistäjiin, heidän valmistamiinsa veistoksiin sekä vuorovaikutukseen ulkomaalaisten matkailijoiden kanssa. Väitöskirjassa myös hahmotetaan kivenveiston suhdetta turismiin Mamallapuramissa. Sadat kivenveistäjät valmistavat pääasiassa erilaisia hindujumalia ja -jumalattaria esittäviä veistoksia, ja työ perustuu pitkälti hindukivenveistoperinteen periaatteisiin. Jumalveistoksia valmistetaan hindutemppeleihin ja alttareille ympäri maailman, mutta myös turisteille matkamuuistoiksi. Matkamuuistoveistokset ovat samankaltaisia kuin rituaalipatsaat, mutta ne eroavat toisistaan kivimateriaaliin, valmistustapojen, koon tai kuva-aiheiden suhteen. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan ja vertaillaan turistiveistosten taiteellisia, uskonnollisia ja hengellisiä merkityksiä ja käyttötapoja perustuen kivenveistäjien ja ulkomaalaisten matkailijoiden näkemyksiin. Näitä teemoja käsitellään Alfred Gellin (1998) taiteen ja toimijuuden teoriaa sekä Bruno Latourin (2005) toimijaverkkoteoriaa (ANT) hyödyntäen. Toimijuus voi olla sekä ihmisten että materiaalistien objektien, kuten kiviveistosten, ominaisuus. Mamallapuramin turistimarkkinoilla myytävillä veistoksilla voi olla useita erilaisia merkityksiä ja sosiaalisia rooleja, jotka muodostuvat erilaisten toimijuuksien verkostojen kautta.

Avainsanat: kivenveisto, turismi, taide, uskonto, toimijuus

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In Joensuu, on the 26th of August, 2017
Sanni Sivonen

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 INVESTIGATING TOURIST ARTS IN MAMALLAPURAM, SOUTH INDIA

Mamallapuram is most likely the most industrious seat of Hindu idol-making the world over; everywhere you look masons sit on their haunches hammering away at the local dolerite rock. (The Footprint India Handbook 2009: 912)

Many international travel guidebooks describe the town of Mamallapuram in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India in this manner. Known also by its previous name Mahabalipuram, it is a place famous for the ancient rock-cut sculptures from the era of the Pallava Kings in 600–800 CE but also for the current vibrant stone carving tradition. Mamallapuram has also been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1984 and it is one of the most popular tourist destinations in South India. Mamallapuram is situated on the Bay of Bengal, 60 km south of the state capital Chennai. It used to be a famous port some 100 years ago, but nowadays it is more of a quiet small town with only around 12,000 inhabitants. The main sources of livelihood are tourism, stone carving, fishing and small retail. Mamallapuram is visited by hundreds of thousands of Indian and foreign tourists annually, and several different types of small businesses offer services for the visitors.

When a visitor arrives in Mamallapuram, these travel guide descriptions seem correct. Stone carving workshops start to line the sides of the roads even before arriving in the town, and once there, it is hard to escape them since there are shops selling and producing stone sculptures along most of the main streets of the town. Stone carvers are especially concentrated in those areas favoured by tourists. A striking feature of these stone carving studios and shops is that it seems that they all produce and sell the same type of statues. Sculptures of different Hindu gods and goddesses as well as statues of Buddha in different sizes, shapes and forms, made from different varieties of stone, line the shelves and fronts of literally all the establishments that produce and sell stone carvings. There are also some other types of carvings on offer as well, such as various animals, statues of famous people such as Gandhi, or stone figures that look like abstract art, but these are by far the minority. Most stone sculptures on display are in one way or another related to Hindu mythology, and the size range of the statues in general varies from a few centimetres up to three metres in height.

This research is an ethnographic study that focuses on stone carvers and stone carvings on the tourist market in Mamallapuram. It looks at the relationship between the Indian Hindu stone carving traditions and the present-day industry, and discusses the possible changes that have occurred in the carving tradition as a result of international tourism. In addition, it examines how stone carvings are interpreted on one hand as arts or crafts, and on the other as religious or spiritual items based on the views of foreign tourists and local people, mainly stone carvers. These issues are analysed by using the concept of agency, which here emphasises the social relationships and networks between humans and material entities.



Image 1: Mamallapuram is located in the state of Tamil Nadu, India.

Stone sculptures sold in Mamallapuram tourist shops look very similar to the statues of Hindu gods and goddesses that are used for worship in the Hindu temples and in public and private shrines. In Hindu religious rituals, statues are usually dressed in colourful clothes, covered in flower garlands and washed with oil and milk. Devotees say their prayers in front of them and offer gifts to the deities. Hindu priests perform sacred rituals to statues in temples and during religious festivals special festival idols can be seen seated in elaborate and decorative carriages and being carried around in the streets surrounded by people. In Hindu households, statues of gods and goddesses are placed in home shrines in specific worship rooms that form the sacred heart of the household. Certain religious rituals are performed on a daily or weekly basis for these idols. In a similar manner, small shrines dedicated to gods can be seen in many public places such as offices, shops and restaurants. The most popular gods are the male gods: Shiva, the destroyer and Vishnu, the sustainer, as well as elephant-headed Ganesh, Shiva's son and the remover of obstacles. Equally important are the female goddesses that are representations of the feminine principle and energy of the universe. The goddess takes a form in deities such as Parvati, the goddess of feminine power, and Lakshmi, the goddess of beauty and wealth and Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and arts. These gods and goddesses have numerous different forms that may be specific to a certain region in India. Vishnu has ten famous incarnations, of which Krishna and Rama are the most well known. The goddess may take the shape of the ferocious goddesses of Durga and Kali. In addition, there are several local deities that are known and worshipped in only in a particular state, town or a village.



Image 2: Stone carving shops line several streets in Mamallapuram

India has a reputation of being a country with very old and strong religious and spiritual traditions that are very much alive today, and which shape the life of the people in multiple ways. India is usually predominantly known as the land of Hinduism, although there are millions of followers of other faiths, including mainly Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Jains, but also those of indigenous belief systems. Hinduism and its particularities became first known in Europe during the colonial era. This knowledge was heavily influenced by what are now known as the Orientalist discourses which rely on outsider-interpretations that suggest European superiority (Said 1978, see also Jouhki 2006). Later the hippie movement of the 1960s was influenced by various Eastern philosophical and religious traditions (cf. Goldberg 2010; Ramachandran 2014). More recently meditation and yoga practices that are also associated with India and Hinduism have become popular through certain New Age beliefs, as well as through common health and fitness programmes. In the minds of the Western visitors, the concept of spiritual India is often constructed against this background and tourists expect to see at least some evidence of this when travelling in India. Indeed, it is not difficult to see the importance of Hinduism to India since religious images meet the eye everywhere and places dedicated for worship are equally multiple.

For a visitor who is not familiar with the beliefs and practices of Hinduism, these sculptures that fill the shops along the streets of Mamallapuram raise many questions. Are these sculptures automatically religious or sacred since they portray Hindu gods and goddesses? Are they all made for Hindu temples and other religious purposes? How about sculptures sold in the souvenir shops in the tourist areas of the town – are they all the same, equally suitable for ritual use? From a more practical point of view, one cannot help but wonder why all the stone carvers seem to be creating and selling the same type of statues. Who buys them all? After all, it seems that there are hardly enough tourists visiting Mamallapuram to provide business for all the stone carving shops. Equally, the stone carvers are constantly busy making new sculptures, similar to those that are already sitting on the shelves and in the front yards of their shops.



Image 3: Stone carvings are sold as souvenirs for tourists

These and many other questions puzzled me when I arrived in Mamallapuram in September 2009. What makes the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram particularly interesting is that statues are made for Hindu religious use as well as for foreign tourists as souvenirs, but the line between the two categories does not seem clear-cut. In Mamallapuram the stone carving market is dominated by local producers and their work is based on Hindu carving traditions. Also, what makes the souvenir stone carving market in Mamallapuram different from many other tourist destinations is that the stone carvers are also in most cases in direct contact with the tourists. You can find similar-looking deity statues in the souvenir shops of other tourist destinations in India, but often they are sold by people who do not make them. These sculptures can be made in village or town workshops and then sold to shopkeepers, often via middlemen and also to different parts of the country. In comparison, workshops and studios of the stone carvers in Mamallapuram usually also serve as shops and showrooms where the stone sculptures are displayed and sold directly to the customers. As a result of this, the stone carving scene in Mamallapuram is characterised by direct encounters between the producers and consumers of the carvings. These meetings in turn are interesting examples of cross-cultural communication, as it usually takes place between a local person and a foreign tourist. In Mamallapuram, therefore, it is not only the objects that do the “talking” between the makers and potential buyers, which is very common in the souvenir market where the producers and tourists never meet, but stone carvers and tourists are in direct contact.



Image 4: Stone carvings on display on a street outside a carving shop

1.1.1 The concept of tourist arts

Some of the stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram can be labelled as *tourist arts*. This term is commonly used in anthropology and it mainly refers to ethnic art and craft products that are produced for an external audience usually unfamiliar with the culture and aesthetic criteria of the producer's society (Graburn 1976: 8; Cohen 1993a: 1). Sometimes the term "airport art", which means the same thing, can be used (Graburn 1976). Tourist arts are not a clearly defined category of products but it is an umbrella term and a discourse that encompasses a variety of different types of arts, crafts, ritual objects and souvenirs. Their market value may range from cheap to expensive, and the same products can be purchased equally by local people as well as outsiders to the culture. It is also important to note that how certain works are labelled from an outsider's perspective may not be the same in a local context. (Kupiainen 1994.) In this sense tourist arts are a type of conversation between different cultural understandings and are subject to interpretations grounded in different aesthetic criterias and other systems of meaning creation (cf. Jules-Rosette 1984).

Tourist arts production is tied to tourism and the concept of souvenirs, which have always been an important part of travel (cf. Swanson and Dallen 2012). Souvenirs can broadly be defined as prompters of memory that complement travels but also other events (Graburn 2000: xii). It has been noted that the Egyptians, Romans and other travellers of ancient times brought souvenirs back with them (Swanson and Dallen 2012: 489). In Europe, early medieval explorers and later colonial officers, missionaries, scholars and other travellers bought and stole exotic items of interest from their voyages to far-away lands. Before the establishment of museums in the 18th and 19th centuries, objects became part of private collections, also known as cabinets of curiosities. Religious pilgrimage has encouraged the production of souvenirs especially for religious travellers all over the world (ibid.: 489). Today, the souvenir industry is billion-dollar business that takes place in different parts of the world, and tourist art production can be counted as a part of it. (ibid.: 490.)

1.2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON TOURIST ARTS AND MAMALLAPURAM

Anthropologists have investigated tourist art objects produced for the tourist market all over the world. A pivotal starting point for this group of studies is the edited collection by Nelson Graburn "Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World" (1976). This volume is a collection of studies on arts and crafts of various aboriginal and tribal people from all over the world. It showed how many of the traditional art objects and handicrafts have been turned into popular sale items for tourists. In some cases the traditional methods and appearance of the products had been altered in order to please tourists. Social and economic realities were the key factors behind these cultural changes. Paula Ben-Amos compared tourist arts to pidgin languages in her essay "Pidgin Languages and Tourist Arts" (1977). She argued that like pidgin languages, which are a mixture of different languages and dialects and have developed as a result of transcultural encounters, notably under colonial rule, tourist arts are also a mixture of different cultural elements. The main argument in her essay is that tourist arts are simplified versions of traditional arts, in the same way as pidgin languages are often considered to be bastardised versions of languages proper. Both are born as a result of a need for a simplified form of communication between cultures, and are often seen as inferior forms of cultural expression by the dominant society. However, later studies have shown that neither tourist arts nor pidgin languages are "simple" and "easy" versions of a culture, as has previously been assumed; in fact they are complex and valuable expressions of cultures in their own right (Steiner 1999).

Bennetta Jules-Rosette's seminal work "Messages of Tourist Arts: African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective" (1984) was another early ground-breaking study in the field of tourist arts research in anthropology. Jules-Rosette identified attributes that have been attached to tourist arts and caused it to be seen as less valuable as so-called "real art" (1984: 16). The themes that she lists are:

- 1) tourist art objects are mass-produced;
- 2) many tourist art objects are made by inexperienced craftspeople;
- 3) several craftspeople, as opposed to a lone artist, create a single piece;
- 4) consumer demand is more important than the producer's creativity in the production of tourist art;
- 5) the resultant artworks are inferior in quality or are artistically uninteresting.

Jules-Rosette conducted fieldwork in several African countries and analysed her findings in the light of semiotic analysis. She argued that tourists arts should not be dismissed as mere cheap, uninteresting pieces of "airport art" or mass-produced souvenirs. Closer analysis reveals that tourist artists show creativity and artistic skills in their work. This study showed that tourist art markets in Africa form a complex system of sign networks in which the tourist artists, middlemen and tourists all discuss and influence each other through the objects labelled here as tourist arts. Yet, the qualities listed above have remained in tourist art discussions as contested attributes of different arts and craft products in various ethnographic settings (Jules-Rosette 1986, 1990). Equally, Christopher Steiner (1994) has studied the particularities of the African tourist art market that is dominated by wood carvings. He has paid special attention to the selling techniques of objects as well as to the quest for "authentic" objects by tourists.

His work shows that authenticity is a cultural construct and is understood very differently on one hand by the African artists and craftsmen who produce tourist arts, and on the other by the tourists purchasing the objects. Steiner argues elsewhere that tourist arts should not be compared to any single pieces of art but to other mass-produced art forms that are common representations of the industrial and post-industrial era (Steiner 1999). An example of this could be printed fabrics or lithographs that have art value, despite the fact that they can be produced in multiple copies.

Since Nelson Graburn's influential work, another collection on the subject has been "Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds" edited by Steiner and Phillips (1999). This volume deals with topics such as identity, authenticity and reproduction, artistic innovation, gender, collecting and cultural conservation. Tourist arts have also been approached from the perspective of souvenirs in "Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism" (2000), edited by Hitchcock and Teague as well as in Hume's "Tourism Art and Souvenirs" (2014). Also, "Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism" by Valene Smith (1989, see also the revised edition by Smith and Brent 2001) (ed.) includes articles that deal with tourist arts (Deitch; Swain) as well as Riggins' (1994) "The Socialness of Things. Essays on the Socio-Semiotics of Objects" (Blundell).

The Annals of Tourism Research published a special issue on tourist arts in 1993 that presented many of the key debates on the field as well some ethnographic studies. The issue covers case studies around the world such as African tourist arts (Horner); Tibetan ritual paintings, or *thangkas*, made for tourists in Kathmandu, Nepal (Bentor); representations of aboriginal people in Canada (Blundell); the handicraft industry in China (Toops); ancient Greek art turned into souvenirs (Evans-Pritchard); souvenirs in Israel (Shenhav-Keller), and Native American crafts in North America (Littell). Contributions by Cohen explored the concept and discussions of the topic of tourist arts (1993a) and dealt with the issue of "heterogenization" of tourist arts (1993b).

Tourist arts have since been a subject of numerous journal articles. In an extensive literature review under the theme of souvenirs, Swanson and Dallen (2012: 491) list several thematic and conceptual approaches. Their review also deals with tourist arts that have been included under the term. The topics listed that are most relevant to tourist arts are authenticity (cf. Littrell et al., 1993; Revilla and Godd 2003; de Azeredo Grunewald 2006; Wherry 2006; Chang et al. 2008; Maryama et al. 2008), commodification (cf. Gormsen 1981; Graburn 1984; Hume 2009), consumer behaviour; craft production, gender and economic development (cf. Connelly-Kirch 1982; Holder 1989; Swain 1993; Cone 1995; Davis 2007); cultural property rights (cf. Thompson and Cutler 1997; Littrell and Dickson 1999) gift-giving, shopping and retail (cf. Hu and Yu 2007), and lastly souvenir messages and meanings (cf. Gordon 1986; Littrell 1990; Morgan and Pritchard 2005; Scott 2010). A large number of studies have been carried out on all these themes in various ethnographic and geographic contexts.

Authenticity in particular has been a key concept in tourist arts research, as the pieces of tourist art are often claimed to be the opposite: inauthentic, cheap and mass-produced copies of "real" art and craft products (see also Allison 1976; Cohen 1988, 1993a, 1993b; Jules-Rosette 1984, 1986; Shiner 1994; Schefold 2002; Taylor 2008). For example, Ronda L. Brulotte's "Between Art and Artifact. Archaeological Replicas and Cultural Production in Oaxaca, Mexico" (2012) is a study of souvenir wood carvings and clay sculptures in Oaxaca region, Southern Mexico, and their contested status as "authentic" artefacts as opposed to "fake" commodities. Questions of ethnicity and identity politics also play a part in the way these cultural products are interpreted by

different stakeholders. Jari Kupiainen (2000) has also investigated woodcarving on the Solomon Islands and the historical change that has taken place in the carving tradition, some of the recent expressions of it being the influence of tourism and tourist markets. He looks at woodcarving on the Solomon Islands as a long-term process that has been shaped and influenced by various internal and external factors, tourism being only one of them. Therefore, the concept of “tourist arts” is only one of the possible ways in which woodcarvings made and sold on the Solomon Islands can be described, and it forms only a part of a long history of woodcarving tradition.

Then again, anthropological studies that concentrate on tourist arts in the context of India are few. Madoro (1976a, 1976b) has looked at the Rajasthani painting community, that also produces works for tourist consumption. Nita Kumar’s study “Artisans of Banaras: Popular Culture and Identity 1880–1986” (1988) is based on research among different artisanal communities in the holy city of Banaras (now Varanasi) in India, and some of their products are also sold to tourists. Bundgaard’s (1999a) work “Indian Art Worlds in Contention. Local, regional and National Discourses on Orissan *Patta* painting” focuses on paintings in the state of Orissa (now Odisha) in India, which are primarily produced for the tourist market but also for local ritual purposes in smaller numbers (see also Bundgaard 1996a, 1996b, 1999b, 1999c). Her study is founded on tourist arts research in anthropology and she analyses her case study through the concept of the “artworlds”, a concept initially introduced by philosopher Arthur C. Danto (1964) in the study of aesthetics. This approach concentrates on various institutions that signify certain works as art. Bundgaard’s study examines how *Patta* painters, government officials and so-called art specialists define the paintings from different, contesting discourses that encounter each other around the paintings.

Mamallapuram has not been a particular focus of tourist art studies, but previous research has examined stone carving. Most of it has concentrated on the ancient monuments through an archaeological and art historical lens (cf. Sivaramamurti 1955; Lockwood et al. 1974; Sivaramurti 1992; Lockwood 1993; Rabe 2001; Beck 2006; Nagaswamy 2008). William Willetts compiled a bibliography of Mamallapuram, published in 1966 under the name “An Illustrated Annotated Annual Bibliography of Mahabalipuram On the Coromandel Coast of India 1582–1962” that consists of written references, accounts and studies of the place over a period of almost 300 years. A few drawings and photographs are also included in the volume. The early remarks are based on European historical sources, but the later accounts from the 20th century also include various volumes written by Indian authors. Ramaswami’s work from 1989 “Two thousand years of Mahabalipuram” continues from the work of Willetts, including the earlier eras, but continues the references until 1989. Prior to this extensive work, Ramaswami also published another shorter bibliography in 1980 titled “Mamallapuram: An Annotated Bibliography”. Most of the references in all these volumes also focus on the monuments: the style of carving, details and their possible origin, again with with an emphasis on archaeological and art historical factors.

Aspects of the current stone carving tradition in Mamallapuram have been part of only a few studies¹. Chhiber (2005) includes Mamallapuram in a volume that examines stone carving throughout India, and this work presents the granite carving industry as well as soft stone carving in Mamallapuram. In “Tourism and India” Hannam and

¹ I can only refer here to the studies written in English but no Tamil studies on the topic were brought to my attention

Diekmann briefly mention Mamallapuram and stone carving market in the context of heritage tourism in India and related souvenir industry (2011: 64–65, 66). Mosteller (1990) has studied proportion systems of historical Indian stone carving and his work also includes a few references to current methods that he encountered in Mamallapuram during his field research in the 1970s and 1980s. In turn, Procopiou, H. et al. (2013) conducted research on the polishing methods of carvings in Mamallapuram and the role of tactility in the process. Anthropologist Samuel K. Parker has studied stone carving practices extensively in different locations in South India (1987, 1992a, 1992b, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2009, 2010) and his field research also included stone carving in Mamallapuram (1987). Parker's work focuses on granite carvers and the temple carving industry, including sculpture production, but his published work does not include references to soft stone carving or tourist arts.² Parker has looked at the education and identity of stone carvers (1987, 2003a, 2003b) and how the actual carving practices relate to the carving manuals based on ancient texts (1992a, 2003b). His writings also examine value formation (1992b) and the role of creativity in Hindu temple arts (2010) as well as the disposal of temple sculptures, including an issue of disposal related to the sculpture college in Mamallapuram (2009). In addition, Parker has discussed the role and meaning of unfinished carvings in a religious context, especially in relation to the monuments in Mamallapuram (2001).

In turn, this thesis aims to provide an account of the current stone carving industry in Mamallapuram, focusing primarily on soft stone carvers and carving, their relationship with international tourism, and on sculptures produced for the souvenir market. Apart from Chhiber (2005), this segment of the carving tradition has been ignored by previous research, even though soft stone carving is an important part of the industry in Mamallapuram and a source of income for a large number of people.

1.3 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CONCEPTS

Against the background presented above, this research has two main aims. Firstly, stone carving in Mamallapuram is examined as an ethnographic study, concentrating on the part of the carving industry that produces and sells statues for the international tourist market. The first set of main research questions are the following:

1. Who are the stone carvers in Mamallapuram and what are the characteristics of their work?
2. What are the features of stone carvings made in Mamallapuram?
3. What are the characteristics of encounters between stone carvers and foreign tourists at the tourist market?
4. What kind of relationship does the current stone carving industry have with international tourism?

²Parker's unpublished dissertation "Makers of Meaning: The Production of Temples and Images in South India" (1987) may also include soft stone carving but this work is unavailable.

Secondly, the meanings and uses of stone carvings have been explored in the context of categories of art and crafts, and as religious and spiritual objects, again focusing on stone carving at the tourist market. The second set of questions are as follows:

1. Do stone carvers and foreign tourists define stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram as arts or crafts? What kinds of agencies are these definitions based on? How do agencies constitute the meaning of stone carvings as arts or crafts?
2. Do stone carvers and foreign visitors define and use stone carvings as religious and/or spiritual objects? What kinds of agencies are these definitions and use based on? How do agencies constitute the meaning of stone carvings as religious and/or spiritual objects?

These themes were chosen because of the nature of stone carvings in Mamallapuram: they are linked to so called “traditional” Hindu stone carving which is considered to be an art form in India. Statues also portray Hindu gods and goddesses, thus they have a religious or spiritual reference point. The research has aimed to find out how people from different cultures define, classify and use stone carvings. The focus has been on the views of stone carvers and foreign tourists who are representatives of different cultural backgrounds. The issues in the second set of questions are analysed using the concept of agency; a subject to which I will return to in part 1.4 of this chapter.

Before that, central concepts and themes are presented that serve as a conceptual background to the research questions above. These are the concepts of arts, crafts, creativity and religious objects. They are approached here only from the so-called Western³ perspective, as their meaning in the Indian context is the subject of Chapters 3 and 4, which look at stone carving and sculptures from the perspective of Hindu religion and explore the concept of art and craft in India. Although creativity was not part of the research questions, it appeared several times in respondents’ viewpoints and has therefore been included in the discussion. After these, certain other concepts are presented that are central to the thesis.

1.3.1 Arts and crafts

The difference between arts and crafts has been a subject of Western scholarly debates since the 19th century. Yet in the Western context and popular thought, these two as separate categories have become somewhat natural although many may not agree on the ways in which the distinction is made and classifications can be contested. Although there is no essential definition for art, even these days, usually it is considered to be something in which individual expression and imagination are more important than the skills applied to attain them. In comparison, crafts are mainly judged based on the technical skills of their maker, although expression and imagination may also

³I acknowledge that the concept of “Western” is problematic as it suggests a uniform perspective. I use it here following Whitehead (2013: 11), who defines it as an umbrella term with common characteristics. These are for example sharing certain intellectual (Enlightenment), philosophical (Cartesian, Greek philosophy), economic (capitalist, socialist) and religious traditions (Christianity) (ibid.:11).

be important qualities. This distinction became particularly prevalent in the 20th century, when different forms of abstract and concept art such as installations became increasingly popular. There are also different opinions about how important technical skills are for an artist. Artistic skills, such as drawing and painting, have become less important in many new art forms, and mastering them no longer defines one's status as an artist. Larry Shiner notes in his book "The Invention of Art. A Cultural History" (2001: 3), that "today you can call virtually anything "art" and get away with it." As art has become a somewhat all-encompassing category, often labelled as post-modernism, this has led to arguments about the "death" of art as it was previously known. Also, when referring to different types of creative expression as art, this could be interpreted as a kind of urge to get "art" and "life" back together (ibid.: 3).

At the same time, the category of crafts on its own is not clearly defined. It can be constituted in different ways, depending on the cultural criteria and also the political agendas involved (cf. Adamson 2010; Greenhalgh 1997). Often the word "craft" comes with the prefix "hand", referring to its handmade nature as opposed to being mechanically produced, but this is not an absolute requirement for crafts. Crafts may also be considered to be artefacts, things that are intentionally produced but without necessarily being handmade. Both crafts and artefacts may have aesthetic as well as functional value, whereas art in turn is usually considered to be something designed only for viewing and its main function is aesthetic.

The art versus craft set-up also tends to place crafts in a lower position compared to arts, especially in relation to so-called high art. Not all craftspeople would agree on this view, yet this way of thinking is also dominant in popular culture (Greenhalgh 1997: 20). Many craftspeople would also identify themselves equally as artists. Sometimes this distinction and categorisation may have more to do with social rather than aesthetic criteria (Frith 1992). Nevertheless, this distinction plays a part in the Western mind but it can become especially problematic when looking at unfamiliar objects from different cultures that seem to be standing at the boundary between these classifications.

In the English language, the word "art" is derived from the Latin word *ars* and the Greek word *techne*, which mean all types of different human skills, such as painting, riding, making shoes, alchemy or governance (Shiner 2001: 5). The division between fine arts and handicrafts or popular arts was not made before the 18th century and before that, the opposite of art was nature rather than craft (ibid.: 5). This classification was part of the Enlightenment project that aimed for order and rationality (Greenhalgh 1997: 27). In the ancient and medieval eras, this distinction was not as evident (Eco 1985: 161, see also Heslop 1997, Kristeller 1951, 1952). As Eco notes:

Modern aesthetics frequently forgot that the way classical theory of art, from ancient Greece to the Middle Ages, was not so eager to stress a distinction between arts and crafts. The same term (techne, ars) was used to designate both the performance of a barber or a ship-builder, the work of a painter or a poet (ibid.: 161–162).

In the 18th century, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry became part of the category of fine arts, whereas skilled activities such as pottery, embroidery, folk songs, etc. were defined as crafts. Making crafts required skill that was based on rules, at least to some extent, and the main purpose of crafts was to be used and to serve as entertainment. Fine arts then again were seen as a product of inspiration and genius and should be valued and enjoyed only because of the refined pleasure that they of-

ferred. “Aesthetic” was the new name given to these contemplative joys. (Shiner 2001: 5.) Fine art also acquired a spiritual role as it was believed to reveal transcendental truths (ibid.: 6). This split in arts also divided the category of artists into artists and craftsperson or artisans. Prior to the 18th century, the words “artist” and “artisan” were used interchangeably for all people engaged in activities that the words *techne* and *ars* referred to (ibid.: 5).

Thus, the modern system of art, as understood in the Western context, is only a European invention of around 200 years old (Shiner 2001: 3). It is a social institution that emerged from the Enlightenment and has since been treated as a universal category in which non-European cultural expressions have been placed in hierarchical positions – if seen as suitable for inclusion in the first place – and judged against European art forms (ibid.: 3–4). After the 19th century, “fine” was mostly left out of art and it became common only to speak about art versus craft in this context. As a result, if today we ask whether something is art, we do not usually mean to ask whether it is a man-made or a natural product, as the original meaning of art would imply. Instead, what we mean with that question is whether it can be part of the category of fine art, considered as prestigious and valued and above the category of crafts (ibid.: 5). The same line of thinking also separates the makers as artists or craftsman, mainly depending on the meaning we give to their products.

The concept of craft has also undergone historical developments as a term of its own. Originally a word derived from German, the English usage of the term referred to shrewdness in the early 18th century (Burt 2012: 20; Greenhalgh 1997: 22). An English dictionary published in 1773 defines craft as “manual art or trade” and a craftsman as “an artificer, manufacturer or a mechanic” so in this definition craft was not a thing but a practice (Greenhalgh 1997: 22). The notion was extended to also refer to products by the late 19th century (ibid.: 23). Greenhalgh identifies three main threads that have characterised approaches and themes within the history of crafts. These are craft as decorative art, vernacular and politics of work. As decorative arts, crafts were labelled secondary to fine arts, as “the arts not fine”; thus being denied the status of art.

This view was not accepted by everyone, and the Arts and Crafts movement originating in 19th century Britain was one of the projects to elevate the status of crafts. As a result, certain non-functional craft products were occasionally included in the category of fine arts, such as porcelain, gem carving and tapestry. This was mainly based on the cost of production, the value of materials and the status of the patron. The Arts and Crafts movement brought forward the myth of an “authentic” craftsman that was unspoiled by modern industrial developments, thus attaching the idea of the vernacular to the concept of craft. At the same time, questions about the politics of work were raised, influenced by Marx and alienation, that was a result of commodity production and changes in working conditions. Craft became a symbol of a vision of a better society that would improve human conditions through creativity and empowering individual workers (Greenhalgh 1997: 25–36). In the 20th century the Bauhaus movement carried forward the legacy of the Arts and Crafts movement, emphasising the unity of arts and crafts without class distinctions. Crafts as well as art were also then separated from design. Design as a distinct category had started to develop in the late 19th century but it then became more clearly tied to the idea of industry (Greenhalgh 1997: 36–40). Another important theme that emerged in the context of craft during the course of the 20th century was the question of gender and how crafts had historically been particularly attached to female activities, whereas fine arts were seen as the genre of male artists (Burt 2012: 163). Anthropologist Ben

Burt (2013: 20) states that today, Western classifications of arts and crafts are often grounded in the views of art connoisseurs and art institutions as well as the age-old ideas about artistic hierarchy, which may have very little to do with the actual artistic or aesthetic qualities of a piece:

The terms can be used interchangeably of activities from warfare to writing, and of artefacts from sculpture to pottery. Even so, the individual creativity attributed to artists makes an important difference – works of fine art are unique, decorative art is scarce, craft is common and, at the bottom of the scale most industrial products are ubiquitous. Art in the Western tradition is not simply a matter of artistic qualities, however these are judged, but also a matter of rarity and collectability (ibid.: 20).

There are thus different types of images that we attach to things considered as arts and those seen as crafts, and these ideas often also define their value. Creativity, uniqueness, scarcity, rarity and antiquity are qualities that Western art circles judge positively, which also result in the increased market and collection value of pieces. Serial production, commonness and copying are some of the negatively valued attributes, also often seen as features of tourist arts. Due to this hierarchy in which we tend to place arts and crafts, we then often categorise things based on these positive or negative attributes. The aesthetic qualities or craftsmanship of a piece may be the same but in the end some of these other factors define their position in one of the two categories. The official art establishment plays a big role in this process. Art institutions such as museums, galleries and collectors make decisions that define what is interesting, valuable and worthwhile to exhibit, buy and collect, and their opinions also influence the general public. They thus define what is considered as art and what is left out of this category may be then defined as crafts – or something else.

Cross-cultural categories?

The distinction between arts and crafts also depends on who is asking this question. Academics have approached this topic from different angles. Whereas art historians have usually examined the issue from the point of view of the Western aesthetic tradition, anthropologists have also been searching for local meanings (cf. Vogel 1989; Phillips and Steiner 1999). In this context it has also been asked whether aesthetics is really a cross-cultural category (cf. Ingold 1996). In addition, feminist and Marxist approaches have raised the issue of gender and class and how they may be ignored when labelling art works or objects into different categories than arts or crafts (Phillips and Steiner 1999: 7).

Anthropologists have been interested in the difference between arts and crafts in the sense that they have tried to overcome hierarchical thinking. For example, Burt suggests that we should treat art as an aspect of cultural production rather than as a “thing” in itself. Thus, we can think about art as a property of certain artefacts rather than as a category of objects (Burt 2013: 1, 238). This would free us from the burden of classification and would place our attention back to the actual things, their qualities, and cross-cultural definitions of what is considered “artistic”, for example. Then again, the prominent critique and philosopher of art Arthur C. Danto (1993) has proposed that what art is and what artefacts are is only culturally defined. Often what we consider as art cannot be bound to the outer qualities of objects, since their cultural

meanings are not necessarily visible (Danto 1993, 95–101).⁴ This distinction between works of art and artefacts dramatises the differences between these categories. Danto suggests we do not seem to even want to be able to easily distinguish arts from crafts or be able to define what these categories really mean, especially where art is concerned. The allure of art seems precisely to do with the fact that it is not easily defined and categorised, at least in the Western context (*ibid.*: 101).

In the essay “Vogel’s net. Traps as Art Works and Artworks as Traps” (1996), Gell deals with the question of art and artefact distinction and also analyses Danto’s opinions from an anthropological point of view. Gell points out that in order to define something as a work of art, often one of the three criteria or theories is employed. The first one is the aesthetic argument according to which aesthetically superior, beautiful or visually pleasing objects or other works can be art. In addition, the intention and the work of the artist must be the result of these qualities (*ibid.*: 15). The second option is what Gell calls interpretive theory, which does not care about beauty and aesthetics as such but rather something will be art “if it is interpreted in the light of a system of ideas that is founded within an art-historical tradition” (*ibid.*: 16). The interpretive theory deals with art as a historical discourse and is not based only on certain particular qualities found within the art works or the skills of the artists. The last of the three criteria Gell brings forward is the institutional theory that emphasises the importance of various art institutions such as museums and galleries as well as art dealers, critics and collectors. It is them who ultimately decide and judge what is included within the category of art by their collective work of sharing, judging and debating about art works. Here art works no longer need to be connected to art historical tradition, as these representatives have the power to decide what is art and what is not. Institutional theory is also the one that perhaps best describes the present realities in today’s art markets, but from a more philosophical perspective it is not the only option (*ibid.*: 16–17). This last approach also resembles what Nelson Goodman (1978: 57–70) means when asking “when is art?” instead of “what is art?”. When something is placed for example on a gallery stance, it can become art in that situation without specific other criteria (*ibid.*: 57–70). When it no longer functions as art, it neither remains as art. A good example of this could be non-Western ritual artefacts that have been placed in art museums although they may not have any art-like meaning in the originating culture.

Gell notes that Danto (1993) supports the interpretative view with the historical aspect. It is also part of Danto’s idea of “The Artworld” (1964). Here the problem arises when dealing with non-Western objects, as the art historical tradition is different in different cultural contexts. In addition, Gell questions the assumption that in a real life situation such neat categories of arts and crafts would hardly even exist within any culture. These categories may not be supported by all members of society and can be tied to issues of power, ideology and authority (*ibid.*: 24).

⁴Danto provides an example about imaginary African tribes, the Pot People and the Basket Folk, who are both known for their pots and baskets. These objects are beautifully made and look identical in both tribes. However, for the Pot People only pots have important meaning, whereas the Basket Folk have a special relationship with their baskets. The Basket Folk believe their baskets possess some particular powers and they are related to local mythology and notions about god, the universe and magic. The Pot People, on the other hand, attach very similar notions to pots. For them baskets in turn are just ordinary, everyday objects that are made by artisans but do not have any specific importance. This is precisely the way the Basket Folk feel about pots in their culture (Danto 1993: 95–101).

1.3.2 Arts and creativity

It is difficult to avoid the concept of creativity when discussing and researching art. Art and creativity seem to be entangled in our minds, at least in Western thought systems, and they are reflected in the ways we categorise, value, and interpret art or things as art.

As with any other concept, different understandings of creativity are bound to culture, society, the relevant time and a certain historical era. The adjective “creative” has been used in conventional English only from the 17th century onwards and it is a derivative of the verb “to create” (Hirsch & Macdonald 2007: 185). According to Kristellar (1983: 106), it has mainly been used in Western thought in three different contexts: theological, artistic and human. God was seen as the main creator until the 18th century and until then humans, such as artists, only had a restricted and metaphorical ability to create. God, unlike humans, was able to create from nothing (Pope 2005: 37). The Romantic movement changed this setting, attributing primary creative power to artists, poets and writers, and the relationship between arts, artists and creativity has continued until the present day. In the current era we have started to conceptualise creativity with even broader and more democratic terms, and it is seen as a skill or an ability that anyone can have. Today we think that creativity can encompass more or less any form of human activity, thus it is no longer restricted only to arts (Kristellar 1983: 106).

Historically, the concept of creativity in Western thought has also developed alongside the idea of personhood from the 16th century onwards. This emphasised individual difference and distinctiveness, which a person is also morally obliged to realise and express. Life was no longer seen as being controlled by divine forces, but as a responsibility of an individual to seize her opportunities. In addition, the concept of imagination was associated with creativity during the Romantic period, “...which was understood as a mental faculty capable of acts of creation testifying to individual distinctiveness and personal identity”. (Hirsch & Macdonald 2007: 186.)

It is also possible to contrast between two somewhat different understandings of creativity that have prevailed in Western thought and philosophy in the 20th century but which originate from medieval times. One of the understandings holds that creativity is novelty that is about growth, change and coming-into-being. According to the other, creativity equals novelty that is produced from already existing parts. (Hallam & Ingold 2007: 16.) Both of these understandings can be traced back to the medieval notion of novelty seen in conceptions: either as a process of becoming or as a recombination of elements. These notions are not in contrast and can also exist at the same time (ibid.: 16). Hallam and Ingold argue that these two understandings of creativity have coexisted in Western philosophical thought throughout history, but from the 18th century onwards the emphasis shifted towards looking at finished products, a view that these authors call “backward reading” as opposed to “forward reading”, on which the emphasis is processes, emergence and flow (ibid.: 16).

In medieval times until the 18th century, creativity as novelty was also associated with the notion of wonder towards the unexpected and unfamiliar. Creativity as a novel rearrangement of elements was evident for example in the illustrations of monsters and other creatures that were partly human and partly animal. These phenomena were seen as the workings of God and nature, but also as a feature of human agency (ibid.: 17). Medieval Western artists were celebrated for their ability to play with existing motifs rather than inventing new ones. Still, God was considered to be the artist of the highest order and humans could only try to imitate the natural wonders. In

this regard, technical virtuosity was greatly valued and it was placed above so-called creative fantasy (ibid.: 17).

After the 18th century, the understanding of creativity has been shaped by the features associated with the idea of modernisation. Economic developments, technological changes and commodity production have placed a value on new innovations. Liep (2001: 1) emphasises the connection between creativity and modernisation. “We celebrate creativity ... as the spark of incessant innovation of modernity.” Creativity was also seen as a quality of people, part of the individual agency and as something that they possess (Hallam & Ingold 2008: 16). Late modernity and postmodernity have then again appreciated working with the existing elements: recycling of ideas, fusion and improvisation. These features are also associated with creativity (Liep 2001: 4). Still, innovations have also kept their place in our minds as the main form of creativity. Liep (2001: 2) argues:

The term innovation I regard as more or less synonymous with creativity, whereas improvisation indicates a more conventional exploration of possibilities within a certain framework of rules.

As with arts and crafts, it is also important to note that throughout history all the different understandings of creativity have been subject to relations of power and authority. Different ideals have been held in high value by different hierarchical social and cultural systems but not everyone has necessarily shared them. Certain cultural trends have prevailed and dominated during particular eras that as a result have shaped various cultural elements of those particular times and have been historically recorded.

1.3.3 Religious and spiritual objects

Materiality is part of religion and spirituality, as it makes beliefs visible and tangible. Belief can be considered to be one of the key components of religion (cf. Tyler 1924 [1873]; Pels 2012) and Keane argues that “even where belief is crucial, *it must still take material form*” (2008: 230). Words, objects, practices and gestures are some of the main mediums that transmit religious ideas from person to person. Materiality then is “a precondition for the social circulation and temporal persistence of experiences and ideas” (ibid.:230). In fact, it can be argued that immaterial religion cannot exist as things, places and bodies are required in order for it to operate in a society (Meyer et al. 2010: 210).

However, Western attitudes towards objects in a religious context are also ambivalent, and idolatry and iconoclasm have been central to the history of Christianity (cf. Morgan 2005: 115–146; Meyer & Houtman 2012: 14). This reflects the Medieval Christian doctrine that treated material objects mainly as passive media that constructed the relationship between different spiritual agents (Pels 2010: 617). The Catholic Church allowed worshipping through objects but not the worshipping of the objects themselves (ibid.: 618). The use of material objects such as icons was the main point of conflict between Catholics and Protestants after the Reformation. The Protestant Church rejected the use of sacred objects as “idols”, whereas the Catholic Church continued to have icons and relics as part of the devotional practices (Meyer & Houtman 2012: 7). The Protestant ethic emphasised the distinction between humans and material goods and placed humans in a superior position compared to things (Pels 2010: 618; Keane

2008). This view of thinking is part of the general Protestant religious discourse of opposites, which includes ideas about spirit over matter, belief over ritual, content above form, mind above body, and inward contemplation above outward action (Meyer & Houtman 2012: 1). As a result, the relationship between religion, spirituality and things has been problematic in Western societies. Meyer and Houtman (2012: 1) argued that although this ideology has since been challenged, it is still part of the religious discourse in Western societies where people often “speak of spirit and matter as being mutually exclusive”. “True” religiosity can still be considered to be “antimaterialistic”, and many New Age beliefs that are currently gaining popularity emphasise “pure spiritual beliefs”. Ritualistic religions in comparison can be considered to be somehow more superficial and even insincere because of their use of material components. This same division is also evident in atheism, that in turn argues that matter is all that there is as opposed to religious beliefs (ibid.: 1, 7).

At the same time, the concepts of “matter” and “materiality” have had different meanings in European thought throughout history. In classical Greek philosophy they have been opposite to “form”; in German idealist philosophy to “transcendental”; in Christian theology to God; and to “Spirit” and “spirits” in Theosophy and modern spiritualism. (ibid.: 5). In the 19th century Marxian dialectical materialism also took a clear antireligious stance (ibid.: 6), although Marx himself noted that “a commodity appears at first sight a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (Marx 1965: 71; see also Paine 2013: 4).

Western society has also a history of classifying material objects with religious connotations into totems, idols and fetishes. This reflects the prevalent attitudes of the relationship between humans, objects and the divine, and has become evident especially in the stances towards non-Western religious objects. Although the differences between the terms are not clear in practical terms, totems and idols were seen mainly as representations of the spirit, whereas fetishes were seen as objects that are believed to possess some type of power. Out of these three, totems could be said to be the “least offensive”, as they have often been seen as symbols of collective values and abstract norms, as presented in Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1915). (Meyer & Houtman 2012: 14.) Idols as objects of worship then again were almost scandalous from the Protestant perspective, which rejected both the making and worshipping of idols based on the Second Commandment (ibid.: 14). The word fetish most likely originally referred to both Christian and African amulets and charms in the context of trade between Portugal and West Africa in the 15th century (Pels 2010: 617). It may come from *feito*, the past principle Portuguese verb of “to do, to make” and adjective *feitico* that refers to artificial, fabricated and also enchanted (Latour 2010: 3) Latour (2010) describes how the Portuguese accused of people in Guinea for worshipping stone, clay or wood idols they had made themselves as “true divinities” (2–7). The actual word “fetishism” was invented by Charles de Brosses in 1760 that came to refer to the illicit use of objects and things in a religious context and became a discourse of its own in Europe (Latour 2010: 3; Pels 2010: 617). It was used for example by Marx as a way to describe how commodities fooled people (Meyer & Houtman 2012: 15). Latour (2010) has argued that the very act of labelling something as a fetish proved the point that people believed objects and other material things can have power, although this was precisely what the category of fetish was trying to deny.

When it comes to religious objects in a contemporary cross-cultural context, Paine (2013: 6) notes that

... (T)he distinction between the religious and the mundane is not recognised in much of the world, nor in much history, so to define an object "religious" is to say something about one's own thinking and categories, very probably not about the understanding of those who originated the object.

Religious objects may also be considered to be holy and sacred, and the way they obtain their status varies. Equally, religious objects can have person-like qualities and can be seen as a living being or thing, for example in animistic belief systems (Paine 2013: 6–9; see also Harvey 2005). It may also be argued that religious objects have "duties", as they often have a significant role in ritual practices and even have "life histories", because objects also travel and are placed in different situations (Paine 2013: 10–11; see also Kopytoff 1988; Davis 1997). These are some of the approaches through which religious objects have been approached in academic studies. At the same time, things are also difficult to classify because things circulate, move and can have different meanings to different people because of several coexisting qualities (Chidester 2008: 232; Keane 2008: 230). Things may also be perceived as having "magical" qualities; that is when they do something to us rather than being passive material (Pels 2010: 613). This type of magic is often considered a quality of religious objects, such as icons and relics, although here magic is usually interpreted through a religious or spiritual belief system. One way to approach this issue is to consider that objects have agency over humans and, in this sense, subject-like qualities. This line of reasoning will also be considered in more depth in this thesis.

King (2010) identifies various theoretical approaches in which materiality of religion can be studied in the context of popular culture. Firstly, materiality shapes religion in domestic settings as people use images, artefacts and various natural materials such as stones, oils, water and food items as part of their religious practices at homes. Religious objects influence people's lives and their relationships with each other (King 2010: 2). Secondly, what King calls material religion affects our beliefs about who we are, where we belong and our sense of community, but also of our ideas of the other-worldly. She associates these themes with Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) notion of habitus, which is to do with a culturally specific way of doing and thinking, including the role of the body, through which we inhabit the world. Religious practices also become part of our habitus through repeated actions that reproduce culturally meaningful categories (ibid.: 5). We engage with material objects through our bodies as they are touched and looked at. Physical settings, such as temples, mosques and other buildings, also help to incorporate different belief systems through religious experiences. King brings up the notion of agency as a third approach, as well as the way in which material objects can be thought to contain a type of agency, such as though the affective presence of a religious image (ibid.: 8–11). The fourth way is to look at the meanings of images, including their aesthetic qualities and connotations. This includes the changing interpretations of the images shaped by history, time and cultural context (ibid.: 11–14). Lastly, material objects also have a role in passing on religious memory and values between generations. This takes place on an institutional and a collective level in religious establishments but also in private settings (ibid.: 14–16). As well as creating a sense of community and continued tradition, they also serve as markers of difference and create boundaries between "us" and "them" (ibid.: 16). Material objects thus make a difference in a religious context in various ways. In this thesis, the notion of agency is further explored in the context of objects, religion and spirituality.

1.3.4 Other central concepts

Tourist arts

The initial purpose of this study was to concentrate solely on the stone carving scene in the tourist market in Mamallapuram, and the carvers and statues that represent that part of the industry. In other words, the aim was to approach stone carving as an example of “tourist art”. However, as the research proceeded, it became apparent that making a clear-cut distinction between different parts of the industry was very problematic and there were several reasons for that. First of all, tourists that visit Mamallapuram and buy stone carvings are both foreigners and Indians. Therefore, the definition of tourist art as objects and artefacts produced primarily for people coming from outside the local culture does not completely apply to Mamallapuram (Cohen 1993a: 1; see also Graburn, 1976: 8). Also, both types of tourist purchase all types of statues, i.e. monumental granite sculptures, those made for Hindu rituals as well as those intended as souvenirs for decoration only. Equally, and as this research will show, the boundary between a religious artefact and a decorative piece is flexible, as different type of carvings may be used for worship purposes, sometimes even in the Hindu context.

At the same time, it was important to note that when discussing stone carving with foreign visitors, it cannot be assumed that they make any distinction between the different niches within the carving industry in Mamallapuram. Foreign tourists may have been mostly looking at stone carvings in the shops located in the main tourist areas, but equally many of them have seen ritual statues and granite sculptures that are produced in other parts of the town. How they see and understand stone carving in Mamallapuram can thus be influenced by a variety of different factors. Some of the foreigners interviewed had spent long periods of time in Mamallapuram, were especially interested in stone carving, and had a good knowledge of the industry. Others were only passing through and as a result their understanding of stone carving in Mamallapuram was more superficial. I also interviewed foreign visitors who had a background in art studies, the craft business or were stone carvers themselves. For these reasons, it made more sense to approach stone carving as a whole rather than trying to ask people to think about only certain parts of the industry when giving responses to my questions. Therefore, in this thesis the views of foreign visitors should be understood within this framework of various backgrounds, acknowledging the fact that tourists are never a homogenous group of people, including a varying degree of knowledge of the topic that could be labelled “tourist arts”.

Stone carvers themselves did make a distinction between tourist carvings made from and other, mainly large-sized granite carvings. Using the term “tourist arts” is therefore not completely irrelevant in the context of Mamallapuram, although stone carvers used the term “tourist carvings” instead of “tourist arts”. With this they meant soft stone carvings made and sold in the popular tourist areas as souvenirs and decoration, as opposed to granite carvings that are mainly produced for religious worship and monumental decoration for Indian clientele. With carvers it was therefore possible to talk about these two parts of the carving industry separately, as well as separating different types of statues. Although the lines between statue categories are blurred in terms of their meaning and use from the point of view of their buyers, there are nevertheless certain markers that serve as primary ways to differentiate and classify the statues for their makers.

Despite these complications, the focus of this research is on those carvers that work at the tourist market, the sculptures they produce and more specifically, those pieces that depict Hindu gods and goddesses including statues of Buddha. The religious theme of the sculptures is chosen because of the nature of the research questions, and therefore other carving styles receive less attention here.

Tourists and visitors

The labels “tourist” and “visitor” are used interchangeably in this text to refer to all kinds of people visiting Mamallapuram. This includes both foreign and Indian tourists, but these two groups are mentioned separately when applicable. I acknowledge that the word “tourist” is a contested term since there are different types of tourism and also some people would most likely define themselves as “travellers” instead. This is mainly due to the negative associations that is often attached to “tourists” and “tourism”. Tourists are often seen as plain holidaymakers that have no interest or need to learn about the local culture and may also exploit the local resources (cf. McCannell 1976). Travellers, on the other hand, often consider themselves as having more respect for the local people and wish to experience the authentic lifestyle of the travel destination. Since in reality these terms overlap and the traveller scene has become its own niche of tourism, it is impossible to draw a clear line between these two groups (cf. Kostiainen et al. 2004: 15). However, for the purpose of my research it is not necessary to break down these terms, the opinions of people who come from outside India are compared with the views of the local people. People in Mamallapuram refer to all foreign visitors as tourists, no matter how these foreigners would define themselves, as for them the main factor is that these people are not Indians or local residents. What is central to both these terms is that both travellers and tourists visit Mamallapuram temporarily, although they may spend varying lengths of time in the location

Western and Indian tourists

Although most tourists visiting Mamallapuram are Indian tourists, they have been excluded from this research in terms of the interviews and questionnaires collected on site. The main reason for this was that the aim of the study is to concentrate on views of those tourists that come from different cultures, as the definition “tourist arts” suggests. Analysing Indian tourists’ opinions and ways of using stone carvings would undoubtedly have been interesting and would have offered an opportunity for a comparative analysis, but in order to narrow down the scope of the research, they have been omitted from this work. However, Indian tourists are mentioned in some of the interviews with stone carvers and some of these points have been included when applicable to the context. These issues, however, are only presented here from the stone carvers’ point of view and none of the Indian tourists were interviewed as part of the research. Most of the foreign visitors taking part in this research came from so called Western countries,⁵ which in this research have been defined as people coming from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, based on the background of the people interviewed.

⁵ The term “Western countries” may refer to a different combination of countries (cf. Jouhki 2015).

Hinduism

The term “Hinduism” is present throughout the thesis. Today it refers to a religious and inherited identity of a person born to one or two Hindu parents but historically to an regional identity of a person living near the river Indus. In India, Hinduism is the largest but only one of the official religions. Diversity and complexity are features usually attached to Hinduism and some claim that it is a “way of life” rather than a religion as such because of the plurality of sects, philosophies, beliefs and practices that it encompasses (Jacobs 2010: 1). It is debatable whether a person can convert to Hinduism. Also, one can be both an atheist and a Hindu at the same time. Polytheism is one of the well-known features of Hinduism and there are a great number of gods and demi-gods that Hindus worship and have faith in (cf. Eck 1998: 22–31). In India some of these are known and popular all over the country whereas others are regional deities that may be worshipped only in a particular region such as a state, village or even a family (cf. Huyler 1999). Also, many Hindus have their chosen deities that they worship above the others and some believe that all the gods and goddesses are in fact manifestations of one supreme divinity (cf. Huyler 1999: 28–32). Many descriptions of Hinduism concentrate on the two most popular sects that worship the two male deities, that in India are worshipped all over the country (ibid.: 28–32). A third popular sect are the devotees of feminine power, known as *Shakti* in the Sanskrit language, which manifests itself in well-known female deities such as Lakshmi, and Parvati, as well as in various local goddesses often referred as “mother” (cf. Uuksukainen 2008: 77–97). The language of Sanskrit is the literary language that is believed to sacred and has been used in ancient and medieval India. It continues to be used in Hindu rituals and for the transmission of sacred texts (Huyler 1999: 265).

Unlike some other religions, Hinduism is not based on a particular holy text that is taken as the main authority in religious matters. However, there are thousands of different types of Hindu texts and scriptures. They are classified into primary texts, those that *shruti* (“heard”), and secondary texts, which *smriti* (“remembered”), although there is no universal way of signifying different texts into these categories (Jacobs 2010: 12). One of the primary texts is the Vedas (the oldest around 1500 to 100 BCE, but these dates remain debatable) that are considered to be a result of divine revelations to ancient *rishis* – or sages or wise men. The Vedas contain hymns that praise divinities, esoteric knowledge and teachings that deal with ritual performances. The content of the Vedas is mostly only familiar to the priests although Hindus generally know of the Vedas (Jacobs 2010: 12–14; Fuller 12). The secondary literature is better known to a wider part of society and they continue to play an important role in people’s lives. These texts are said to be of human origin and consist of dharma texts (500 BCE to 500 CE), epics (around 400 BCE to 300 CE) and ancient tales (around 250–1500 CE). Dharma can be interpreted as the “righteous path” in life and the Laws of Manu is one of the most important dharma texts that deals with issues such as the social duties of caste, among other things. The Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana are mythical, historical epics and well known and loved by many Hindus. Ancient tales, *Puranas*, are an expression of vernacular Hinduism with an emphasis on worshipping personal gods, and they continue to play an important role in people’s everyday religious practices (Jacobs 2010: 14–18).

One of the particularities of Hinduism is the caste system, a system of social stratification often claimed to be based on ideas of ritual purity and pollution, which classifies people into different caste groups based on their social background (cf. Fuller 1992:

11–16). The term itself comes from the Portuguese merchants who named the different social groups they encountered in India in the 16th century as *casta* (Tenhunen and Säävälä 2007: 43). Caste status is acquired at birth and defined by the parents, primarily by the father. The term caste has come to mean two separate systems: *varna* and *jati*. The concept of *varna* can be traced back to the Vedas but has been outlined more in detail in the Laws of Manu. The Vedas and *varna* are linked to the customs of the *Aryans* who were a group of people living in the subcontinent at the time. As a system *varna* divides society into four hierarchical groups. At the top are *Brahmins*, the priests, followed by *Kshatryas*, the rulers and warriors. Next to that are artisans, farmers and traders who are *Vaishyas*, followed by *Shudras* who those that serve others. The fifth group are those outside the four *varnas* and often generally referred as Untouchables. This label comes from their occupations that are considered to be ritually impure, such as cleaning or disposing of dead bodies. These people also refer themselves as *dalits* that means literally ‘oppressed ones’ as a way of self-designation. In this sense it is also a political term (Jacobs 2010: 62–67). The *jati* system in turn refers to social and community groups that were originally defined mostly by occupation. Thus, each *varna* consists of numerous *jatits* but it is problematic to classify each *jati* in terms of a certain *varna* (Jacobs 2010: 58–60). In fact, some Hindus argue that only *varna* is a religious category whereas *jati* refers to a socio-cultural status (ibid.: 60). The description presented here is only a very simplified summary of the very complex phenomena of caste in India.

In this thesis different expressions of Hinduism are present. On one hand, there are those beliefs based on religious scriptures that are often only known to certain parts of the society, often the Brahmin priests and upper-caste families. On the other, there is Hinduism as a lived experience that encompasses various vernacular beliefs and expressions that may have very little to do with Brahmanic Hindu practices. Both of these can be included in what Fuller (1992: 7) has termed as ‘popular Hinduism’, which he sees, like every religion, as a social and cultural construction that is created and recreated by the society. Fuller’s notion corresponds well with how Hinduism is understood in this thesis: as expressions of Hindu people who interpret and practise their religion in different and personal ways, based on their knowledge, social background and individual beliefs and preferences. They may be a mix of Brahmanic beliefs as well as local and regional practices. Thus, Hinduism should be understood, here, as an umbrella term of lived religion. However, there are certain parts of the thesis, such as Chapter 3 and 4, that present Hindu beliefs and principles of religious stone carving tradition, which are more heavily based on beliefs found in Hindu scriptures. This is explained in the introduction to these chapters.

Caste and society

When doing ethnographic research in India, one cannot completely ignore the matter of caste and the key role this system of social stratification plays in Indian society. Although caste system is tied to Hinduism, it has affected also other religious communities in India. Caste-based discrimination has been prohibited by independent Indian’s constitution but caste-related issues and problems are still at the core of Indian society and affect the lives of people in multiple contexts. India has a system of positive discrimination which means that Hindu people belonging to designated communities are entitled to certain privileges, such as university places, public sector jobs and political representation based on a quota or “reservation” system. The Indian

government has assigned different caste communities into groupings mainly based on their socio-economic status. Dalits and certain low caste communities belong to Scheduled Castes (SC). Other low caste groups are assigned to Backward Castes or Other Backward Castes (OBC). OBC is the largest and a very heterogeneous category. Tribal people belong to Scheduled Tribes (ST). Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are considered to be the most disadvantageous, historically discriminated communities and therefore entitled to reservations. Other communities belong to the Open Category (OC). This refers to the so called “forward castes” or a general class who are not subject to any reservation policies.

Matters of caste in the state of Tamil Nadu have also been the subject of numerous ethnographic studies and anthropological accounts for several decades (Cf. Beteille 1965; Dumont 1970; Gough 1960, 1981, 1989; Moffat 1979; Daniel 1984; Dirks 1987; Delière 1990; Kapadia 1998; Gorringer 2005). The majority of the people living in Tamil Nadu belong to the so-called lower strata of society in terms of their caste status and social hierarchy, and caste-based discrimination and identity politics have been at the forefront of many of these studies as in the political life of the state (Alex & Heidemann 2013: 262). In this research caste has only been investigated as a part of the social background of the carvers and the way stone carving has historically been tied to certain caste groups. Caste-based problems were not mentioned in the interviews conducted with the stone carvers in Mamallapuram, nor did they become apparent during the fieldwork in other contexts. This experience was somewhat different for me personally compared to my previous three-month stay in a small Tamil village in 2006 where I worked as a volunteer for a local NGO. This organisation was focused on caste-based discrimination of the low-caste and dalit people and issues surrounding caste matters were discussed daily. As a result of this volunteering experience, I was already sensitive to possible caste issues at play in Mamallapuram and therefore I did not want to raise them unless people raised them themselves in the interviews. I wanted to keep the research and interview questions focused on issues of stone carving, arts and religion and let the rest unfold naturally. My intention was to ensure that I would not seem intrusive by asking personal questions as I was not close friends with all the stone carvers I interviewed.

What became apparent based on the interviews was that economic realities seemed to play a more important role in people’s lives and social aspirations, or at least they were voiced more directly. Caste and economic status are intertwined when considering one’s position in a social hierarchy in India, but perhaps economic status was something that people felt they could have an impact on and was thus worth discussing. I will return to these issues in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

Tradition

“Hindu stone carving tradition” is another theme that runs through the thesis, also in the form of “traditional Hindu stone carving” or “traditional Hindu sculptures”. The concept of “tradition” usually implies certain beliefs, expressions and behaviours that have meaning and value and refer to the past but also present value to the future. It may suggest continuity, not as a static form but as something that is interpreted, selected and also invented (Barfield 1997: 470–471). In the context of stone carving ‘tradition’ and ‘traditional’ refer here to stone carvings that are made based, or at least claimed to be based, on particular historical religious and artistic guidelines for sculp-

tors that are presented in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Yet, these chapters also discuss the fact that it is another matter whether these rules and standards are always followed in practice, and to what extent. Still, they form the framework in which stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram should be understood, as these guidelines are taught to stone carvers as a part of their training, and the carvers also discussed them as an important part of their carving practices. Stone carvers talked about 'traditional sculptures' as opposed to other carvings, which was one way of making a distinction between different statue styles. Carvers would also emphasise the historical background their carving work was tied to. The terms 'tradition' and 'traditional' thus refer to these carving guidelines and certain sculpture styles. Primarily it is still a discourse that encompasses different carving methods, statues and styles and carving. As this thesis shows, stone carving tradition is also not a concept that implies a historical tradition somehow frozen in time that has been passed on from one generation to the next unaltered (cf. Hallam & Ingold 2007: 7). It has been adapted to serve their current lives and circumstances, and yet it contains certain elements that are considered to be important within the discourse.

Religion and spirituality

The terms "religious" and "spiritual" are used when describing sculptures and the meanings and beliefs attached to them. By the term "religious", I refer to any organised religion, which in this thesis is primarily Hinduism, despite its varying beliefs and multiple practices. By "spiritual" I then again mean more personal and also experienced-based beliefs that often include certain aspects taken from one or several organised religions or other, less formal belief systems but which are not strictly defined by any of them. The definition of spirituality is not straightforward and it encompasses various beliefs and practices (cf. Vincett and Woodhead 2001: 320–337, Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Lynch 2007). Historically in the West, it has originally meant the mystical streams within Christianity and other, established religious traditions. Since the second part of the 19th century the term has become more closely associated with alternative beliefs that contrast mainstream religions (Vincett and Woodhead 2001: 320). Spirituality can also be considered to be more individualistic, in the sense that it does not rely on any particular set of dogmas or authorities (ibid.: 322). At the same time, religion and spirituality can have many things in common, such as a belief in some type of god(s), spirit(s) or a life force that is part of Planet Earth, its inhabitants, and organic and possibly also inorganic matter. The meaning of the terms may overlap and exist simultaneously in the way people conceptualise and practise their belief systems. The purpose of employing these two concepts in this research has not been to map out their varying theoretical or lay definitions, but rather to offer interviewees tools with which they can explain the religious-like beliefs and practices that they may associate with stone carvings. As noted, a large number of Western tourists who come to India are interested in Hinduism, visit ashrams and practise yoga and meditation. Officially it is not possible for them to convert to Hinduism, and also not everyone who follows an Indian guru, for example, would even be interested in doing so. In these instances, spirituality is a useful term, although these people may follow Hindu practices and beliefs more closely than someone who has been born a Hindu. Many visitors choose to practise and believe in only those certain aspects of Hinduism that they feel personally connected with.

Transliteration

Only a few non-English words are used throughout the text, since the research was conducted primarily in English. Some Sanskrit or Tamil language concepts are repeated throughout the chapters, and their meaning has been explained when first introduced. These are first presented in italics and with later usage in the same print form as the rest of the text. Words are transcribed by removing their diacritical marks and some common Sanskrit terms have been written in their popular Anglo-Indian forms. Longer vowels of Tamil words are rendered as “aa” and “ee”. The names of Hindu deities have been written in their popular Anglo-Indian forms and without italics.

Another key concept in this research that has not yet been unravelled is the notion of agency, which has been used as an analytical tool when assessing stone carvers’ and foreign tourists’ viewpoints regarding stone carvings. I will now turn my attention to this concept, including way it has been used and understood in this particular research.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

In order to find answers to the second set of research questions, the aim was to find a theory that would not be primarily based on concepts such as “art” and “craft” or religious and spiritual beliefs that can have different cultural interpretations and emic and etic variations. These concepts and their interpretations are central to the thesis but I did not only want to map out the various meanings and classification of stone carvings by different respondents. Therefore, I have chosen the concept of agency as the main point of departure. More specifically, I am focusing on Alfred Gell’s theory of art and agency (1998) and Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, also known by its abbreviation ANT (2005). These theories acknowledge that both humans and various non-human, material entities can have agency in social situations. Agency is used as a tool to analyse both stone carvers’ and foreign visitors’ views and understandings regarding stone carvings made in Mamallapuram. In other words, the focus is on examining and analysing the various agencies that create the interpretations of stone carvings as arts or crafts and as religious and/or spiritual items. These agency networks still reflect different cultural understandings, but what is more important is that they reveal the way in which meanings are formed and what factors (or here agents) play a role in the meaning-making processes.

The concept of agency itself can have different interpretations, but in this thesis it is defined as a capability for causal action: intervention, change, making a difference, and causing events to happen (cf. Giddens 1987: 216). Here, agency is thus understood not so much as an inherent capacity than as a capacity for action; it is about “doing” rather than “being”. Agency becomes visible in social situations where agents that exercise their agency interact with other agents.

The theories of Gell (1998) and Latour (2005) share certain viewpoints but also differ in some important ways. Next I will look at both of these approaches in more detail and assess their strengths and weaknesses, also in relation to analysing my research material and answering the main questions of this study. Before that I will present some background to the idea of the agency of material objects in anthropology and other material culture studies, a discourse into which also Gell’s and Latour’s theories above should be placed.

1.4.1 Objects and agency

The idea that material entities or inanimate objects can have agency somewhat comparable to that of humans is a controversial claim, but has been advocated by several theoretical approaches in human and social sciences. Marcel Mauss (1954) suggested in his seminal work "The Gift" (1954) that things have a capacity to produce social effects, and Martin Heidegger's writings on technology (1977) also look into the issue of causality in the context of technology (Malafouris 2013:122). Nancy Munn's (1983) study on kula exchange includes the notion of agency of the kula shells that play a role in value formation in the local exchange system (ibid.: 122). Arjun Appadurai's "Social Life of Things" (1986) brings forth the idea that things can have "social life" and a biography, just as human beings do (ibid.: 122). Marilyn Strathern (1988) and Roy Wagner (1991) brought forward the concept of "distributed personhood" in Melanesian ethnography (Jones and Boivin 2010).

The notion about the agency of objects has thus appeared regularly in various anthropological and archaeological studies that concern material culture (ibid.: 122, see also for example Gell 1992, 1998; Pickering, 1995; Graves-Brown 2000; Pinney and Thomas 2001; Buchli 2002; Knappett 2005; Latour 2005; Miller 2005; Henare et al. 2006; Ingold 2007, 2013; Boivin 2008; Knappett and Malafourdis 2008; Candlin and Guins 2009; Hicks and Beaudery 2010). Tilley (2004), in particular, has examined the material aspects and agency of ancient stones in landscapes and architectural spaces in his "The Materiality of Stone. Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology". These studies are all part of what can be called "discovery of matter", which is a step away from linguistic approaches that have been central in social sciences and humanities, especially in the 20th century, which instead emphasises the importance of performances and practices (Pickering 2010: 191–192). This "linguistic turn" that has been dominating various disciplines particularly in the later part of the 20th century could be defined as focusing on knowledge and epistemology, whereas the material approach is more concerned with ontological questions (ibid.: 192).

In this context it is important to ask how we study agency in the context of materiality, such as in the case of objects. Or as Pickering asks "How can we make matter visible, conceptually, empirically and textually?" (ibid.: 194). He then suggests that:

We can thus arrive at an understanding of scientific engagement with the material world as a temporally extended back-and-forth dance of human and non-human agency in which activity and passivity on both sides are reciprocally intertwined. --- And these dances of agency are, I think precisely what we need to focus on empirically and theoretically if we want to grasp the constitutive role of matter and material agency in human culture, scientific and otherwise (ibid.: 195).

Pickering lists six points that he considers crucial in this context. Firstly, he does not think of agency exclusively as an attribute of humans but equally as an attribute of matter, because its actions or performances can have equally causal consequences (ibid.: 195). His second point follows this notion as he argues that these dances of agency are in themselves performative, rather than linguistic or cognitive. They can be started by human or non-human agents who interplay in the material world (ibid.: 195). Performances also make matter visible, both empirically and conceptually (ibid.: 194, 195). Thirdly, agency is emergent in a sense that performances are not known prior to them taking place. Matter can thus act in unknowable ways that are only

recognised as the action is taking place (ibid.: 195–196). The fourth point he makes is that in dances of agency, the human and non-human world intersect as both agents enter each other's worlds (ibid.: 196). As a fifth point to consider, Pickering argues that dances of agency are not only performative but can also include knowledge and representation (ibid.: 196). Lastly, as the sixth point, these dances are visible phenomena but have been devoid of scholarly attention due to the focus on representation and knowledge instead of materiality and agency (ibid.: 196–197).

Pickering also considers what Bruno Latour (1987, 1991) calls purification. By purification, Latour suggests that modernity is characterised by a need to make a clear distinction between humans and things. According to Pickering, this is an important point to consider but it is not only an ideology but rather a good description of the current technological era that characterised by free-standing, independent machines and technology. This may be even somewhat overwhelming as certain technical advancements may appear to have almost overpowering material agency over humans. On the other hand, we may think that humans have complete power over the material world, and objects and things are just results of human agency. This leads to what Pickering calls "asymmetric or practical dualism", as we only focus on products and how they are separate from humans. By bringing materiality and matter back to the discussion, the focus shifts to the dances of agency that concentrates on the interaction between the different agents (Pickering 2010: 197–198).

1.4.2 Alfred Gell, art and agency

One of the most pivotal anthropological theories of art has been formulated by Alfred Gell who, in his posthumously published book "Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory" (1998), argues that art objects can serve as social actors in social interactions in a similar way to human beings.⁶ For Gell, the anthropological study of art is essentially about the study of social interactions that happen and are formed around the art objects (Gell 1998: 4–7). Gell dismisses aesthetic, semiotic and sociological interpretations and argues that these should not be the focus of anthropologists (ibid.: 1–11). As art is always culturally defined, it is not necessary to try to formulate an absolute cross-cultural definition for it for the purpose of an anthropological study of art. Gell argues that the notion of art is formed in situations in which a cognitive process known as *abduction* happens when a person views a piece of art (ibid.: 13–16). The concept of abduction comes from Peircean philosophy and it could also be defined as a sort of a "logical guess", in which a causality of a certain event is evident. In the context of art, this means that the abduction is made from an artwork and this refers to the agency of an artist. In other words, when a person sees a piece of art, he or she will start to think about the intention and skills of the artist who created it but yet cannot be totally sure about all the factors that have contributed to the art work. The technical and aesthetic details of the artwork also contribute towards the abductive processes (ibid.: 23). This approach could also be called "technology of enchantment", which was presented in Gell's earlier work (1992).

Agency is central to Gell's anthropology theory of art, and a social agent in turn is someone exercising their agency in social situations (ibid.: 16). Agency is thus con-

⁶ Alfred Gell died in 1997 and completed Art and Agency just before his death.

tributed to the artist when an abduction occurs from an art work. But in Gell's theory, the actual artwork; labelled as "index", also has agency; "(I)ndex is seen as the outcome, and/or the instrument of, social agency" (ibid.: 15). Other agencies are attributed to the viewer or audience of the piece of art, labelled here as the "recipient", and the model or idea that has been the influence behind the piece of art, known as "prototype" in Gell's theory (ibid.: 24–26). Gell summarises these relational agents or entities as follows (ibid.: 27):

- 1) Indexes: material entities which motivate abductive inferences, cognitive interpretations, etc.;
- 2) Artists (or other "originators") to whom are ascribed, by abduction, causal responsibility for the existence and characteristics of the index;
- 3) Recipients: those in relation to whom, by abduction, indexes are considered to exert agency, or who exert agency via the index;
- 4) Prototypes: entities held, by abduction, to be represented in the index, often by virtue of visual resemblance, but not necessarily.

These four actors: Artist, Index, Prototype and Recipient, form what Gell calls "Art Nexus". Art Nexus is essentially a social network in which the actors interact with each other in hierarchical relationships and it makes visible the networks of social actions between different agents or participants. In social relationships these actors serve both as agents and patients, depending on the type of interaction (ibid.: 21–23; 28–36). All these four actors can serve as agents when they have agency over one or several of the other actors. The recipients of the agency then serve as patients in those situations. These roles are interchangeable and can also overlap, depending on the emphasis of the situation.

Gell also states that "An agent is defined as one who has the capacity to initiate causal events in his/her vicinity, which cannot be ascribed to the current state of physical cosmos, but only to a special category of mental states; that is, intentions" (ibid.: 19). Although in his theory art objects are given a role of a social agent, because of the question of intentionality Gell thus makes a difference between primary and secondary agents. Human beings belong to the first group as they are intentional agents, whereas inanimate objects such as pieces of art belong to the second category, as they receive their agency through humans. Art objects for Gell are not therefore entirely subjects but they can be consciously or unconsciously given a subject-like position in social interactions (ibid.: 19–21; 36–37). To support his arguments, Gell also draws diagrams of the agent-patient relationships that have been labelled as "Gellograms" by Davis (2007). A simple example of a Gellogram would be the following that describes the agency (A) of an artwork (I) over a viewer (Recipient) as the patient (P):

Index-A ———> Recipient-P

Another example would describe how a model (Prototype) would influence an artist that is then translated into an artwork (Index) that will finally impress a viewer (Recipient) (Gell 1998: 52).

[[[Prototype-A] —> Artist-A] —> Index -A] ———> Recipient (P)

In this thesis, Gellograms are not used but they are one way of presenting agent-patient relationships. Also Gell's four actors are written with small letters from here onwards.

Tanner and Osborne (2007: 8, 26) see parallels between Gell's work and some art historical approaches. For example, performative aspects of ritual and religious arts have been the focus of the work of several studies, most notably David Freeberg's "Power of Images" (1989) and Belting's "Likeness and Presence: a History of Image before the Era of Art" (1994). Gell's theory also has similarities with the notion of affect and the way art can "arrest" a viewer, an approach that has been used to complement semiotic analysis of art (ibid.: 9). W.J.T. Mitchell's article questioning "What Do Pictures 'Really' Want?" (1996) calls for looking at the "personhood" of pictures and how vision may mediate social relations (ibid.: 9; see also Mitchell 1996).

In addition to art theories, Gell's concept of abduction does not draw only from Peirce's semiotics but also from Boyer's cognitive psychology, which argues that humans have a tendency to believe in supernatural agencies (Osborne and Tanner 2007: 11, see also Boyer 1994). Similarly to Boyer, Gell thus assumes that the capacity for abduction is part of the human mind and is materially mediated. Other more abstract forms of communication, such as linguistic or symbolic communication, are based on this. Abduction also makes artworks different from other objects and create Gell's "art-like" situations (Osborne and Tanner 2007: 11–12).

Gell's theory has influenced several anthropologists and art historians, and the concept of agency of art has been applied to various ethnographic contexts. The most central works based on this concept have been three edited books. The first, "Beyond Aesthetics" (2001), edited by Pinney and Thomas, is a collection of anthropological works and the range of research topics covered in the book are poetry, classical music, knots, textiles, deity images, websites and local art works and aesthetic systems. The second volume, "Art's Agency and Art History" (2007), edited by Osborne and Tanner, was based on works by art historians and includes writings and studies that focus on different subjects in visual arts and artefacts, such as portraits, pottery and sculptures in different cultural contexts. The third and most recent work, "Distributed Object. Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell" (2013), edited by Chua and Elliot, has more interdisciplinary focus, with writings mainly located in anthropology but also art history and literary history. Many of the chapters in the volume are more theoretical than ethnographic and cover topics such as creativity, routines and performance but also sculptures, books and music. In addition to these volumes, Gell's theory of agency has been used in several published articles, for example Lipset's (2005) analysis of Murik Art in Papua New Guinea, Rodney Harrison's (2006) study of Australian Aboriginal art, that of and Kendall, Vu and Nguyen (2008, 2010) when looking at sacred images in Vietnam. It has also been noted that Nicholas Bourriauds' (1998) concept of "relational aesthetics" shares many similarities with Gell's theory in the context of modern art (Schneider 2003: 57–58).

Despite the excitement that Gell's theory caused in anthropology, it has also been criticised by many for its shortcomings and certain contradictions in the theory (see Layton 2003; Bowden 2004; Arnaut 2001; Rampley 2005; Murphy 2009; see also Chua and Elliott 2013: 11–17). For example, Layton (2003), Bowden (2004) and Morphy (2009) have argued that research into cross-cultural aesthetics and symbolic values should not be left out of the focus of anthropological studies of art and, in fact even Gell's own observations rely on aesthetic and symbolic qualities in his book. Bowden (2004) also argues that Gell's theory ultimately fails to give a comprehensive definition

for art, as his indexes cannot really be separated from other objects with agency. In a sense, Gell's theory is thus more about agency or objects as agency of art (Bowden 2004: 323–324). It has also been noted that although Gell's theory is based on the notion of agency, the concept is not used in the second part of his book when analysing art works (ibid.).

Tim Ingold has also criticised Gell's theory (see Ingold 2000, 2007, 2013: 96) but his criticism also covers the general concept of agency, including other authors who have used the term in their own analysis, such as Bennet (2010) (Ingold 2013: 95–108). According to Ingold (2013), the inherent problem in Gell's theory is the way Gell suggests that the intention of the artist can somehow be read from the artwork – as a type of “backward” reading, as Ingold calls it. He argues that this is never entirely possible as there are always multiple factors that affect the outcome when making something, including a work of art. The intention of the artist may be the starting point of the work but it does not give an exhaustive explanation of the finished object (96). Materials, other people and the environment equally mould the making process and consequently, the final outcome of the artist's work. Ingold also states that it would be impossible to track back all the factors that played a role, and this exercise in itself is futile. Instead, we should focus our attention onto the processes of making and “becoming” in the world. A work of art is never a finished piece since it continues its journey in life even after an artist has stopped working on it. It accumulates layers of meanings based on different interpretations of the people who come into contact with it, and it is shaped by the spaces and locations it has been placed into. A piece of art looks very different in a gallery setting, in someone's living room or in a storage cabinet. From this perspective the intention of the artist cannot possibly be the only interpretation of a piece of art, and the analysis of art works should not end there (ibid.). Ingold writes:

This scenario focuses on an arbitrary starting point (the image in the artist's mind) and an equally arbitrary end point (the allegedly finished work), while missing out all that goes on in between. The living work of art, however, is not an object but a thing, and the role of an artist is not give an idea to a preconceived idea but to follow the forces and flows of material that bring the work into being... The vitality of the work of art, then, lies in its materials, and it is precisely because no work is ever truly 'finished' (except in the eyes of curators and purchasers, who require it to be so) that it remains alive (ibid.).

Ingold thus emphasises the importance of materials and their role in making art. This naturally brings up the question of material agency and agency in general, which he rejects as a useful concept for analysis (2013: 95–108). Ingold's main critique towards the concept of agency is that in his opinion things, such as humans, material entities and objects “leak”, because they interchange their materials on a surface level (2013: 95). This brings into question the separateness of subjects and objects, or people and objects – known as agents in the agency theories – as they are connected in the world through their materiality. This “intra-connectedness”, as suggested by Karen Barad (2007), is also a requirement for their existence and persistence (Ingold 2013: 95–97). Therefore, Ingold suggests we should approach humans and objects simply as “things”; a term that breaks the dichotomy between categories. At the same time, claiming that things are separate objects would deny their connectedness (ibid.: 94):

He questions the use of the concept by asking what is the difference between a practitioner and an agent? Why speak about agencies and agents when we could talk about practices and practitioners? And also, what is the difference between these terms?

I agree with Ingold's arguments regarding the material interconnectedness between people and objects and the way they could be approached as things rather than as separate entities (as subjects and objects). However, I do not think this approach renders the concept of agency completely useless. In fact, I think many of his views may be applied to the way the concept of agency can be understood. What is crucial here is that the notion of agency itself is not clearly defined and therefore, instead of jettisoning it altogether, it is also possible to first see which definition of the term is most applicable when trying to understand the world and the relationship between "things" in it, as suggested by Ingold. I will return to this issue in part 1.4.4 in the context of my own research in Mamallapuram.

Davis (2006) has pointed out that although Gell borrows the terms index and indexicality from Peirce, his theory does not incorporate the Peircean types of signs: icons and symbols (Davis 2007: 200–201). In fact, Gell is against the symbolic and semiotic interpretations of art, but at the same time, as Davis points out, Gell's prototype seems to be based on the idea of iconicity (ibid.: 201). However, Davis suggests that it is possible to view Gell's theory as an investigation of indexicality, iconity and symbolicity as indexes of agency, or in other words, caused by agency. With this line of reasoning, Gell's theory then includes two different notions of index. One of them is a natural sign or Peirce's indexicality, and the other is caused by agency, which refers to Peirce's concept of abduction (ibid.: 201).

Despite these certain problems and contradictions in Gell's theory, its main advantage is the approach that includes multiple agencies that have an effect on works of art in different social situations. As Davis (2007: 212) states:

... Gell's model of agencies of art – and of art's agency – can specify an indefinitely large number of highly differentiated, ramifying, and nested relations of putatively causal or abducted agency. We might address the agency, for example, of a divinity believed to be acting on a patron, the agency of materials believed to be acting on an artist, and the agency of a depicted object or entity (the prototype) acting on a patron, artist or viewer – or other salient abducted (and as it were primary) agencies of abducted (and as it were secondary) agencies.

Gell's theory is therefore in many ways very all-encompassing, in the sense that it acknowledges the different layers present in art as a social phenomenon and with that, also accepts the certain inherent "messiness" that social relations always include. When multiple agents are simultaneously at play, it can be difficult to make sense of them all and how they affect each other. Gell's theory provides a useful tool of analysis to separate the different factors or agents, but at the same time it makes their relationality and the degree of power or agency imposed on one another visible. Or, as Davis summarises:

The real interest of Gell's account then has to be that the degree and type of affiliation and/or disjunction in the logical-cognitive relations (as represented in the Gellograms) might mark a real socio-cultural and historical affiliation and/or disjunction (Davis 2007: 205).

Gell's theory is useful in art history when investigating past social contexts and various factors (or in this case agents) that have shaped the making, reception and role of particular works of art in a particular historical timeframe (Davis 2007). Equally, this approach is helpful when assessing present systems of art and tracking the role and workings of various agents in these networks of art. One example of this is the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram. But before turning to the context of my own research, I will first look at Bruno's actor-network theory (ANT) (2005), which, in a similar way to Gell's theory, has the plurality of different agencies working together as its central theme.

1.4.3 Bruno Latour and actor-network theory (ANT)

Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, also known as ANT, shares many similarities with Gell's theory. Actor-network theory was initially developed by a group of researchers including Michael Callon, Bruno Latour, John Law and others to study technology (cf. Law 1992). Latour's ANT has developed over the years in several of his writings (1985, 1986, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2000) and. A summary of many his arguments on ANT are presented in the volume "Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory" (2005), which has been used in this thesis. Like Gell, Latour holds that also non-human entities such as objects can have agency and equally, intentionality is not a prerequisite for agency. Whereas for Gell intentionality is still part of the human agency, for Latour agency is only created through network situations. Agency is therefore always relational. According to actor-network theory, different types of social actors or *actants*, as Latour calls them, form together networks in social situations. Actants can be humans but equally objects, animals, materials and technological equipment. What is crucial is that all different actants have a type of symmetrical position in theory, although in the actual network situation they form hierarchies and competing positions. Latour argues that this principle is not to deny subject/object dichotomy but rather not to make prior assumptions about their role in networks (2005: 76):

ANT is not, I repeat is not, the establishment of some absurd 'symmetry between humans and non-humans'. To be symmetric, for us, simply means not to impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relationships.

Agency, in turn, has four main characteristics in the actor-network theory (ibid.: 52). Latour writes:

Although we never know for sure who and what is making us act, we can define a list of features which are always present in contradictory arguments about what has happened: agencies are part of an account; they are given a figure of some sort; they are opposed to other competing agencies; and, finally, they are accompanied by some explicit theory of action.

The first point Latour makes refers to the fact that agencies are always doing something: transforming events and making things happen. An agency that is invisible, in a sense that it does not produce any differences to social situations, is not an agency.

The presence of a social agency has to be able to be recorded, traced or demonstrated if being part of the social account (ibid.: 53). Secondly, agency has to have a figure of some sort. This *figuration* means that agency cannot be an abstract entity or a force, but it needs to be present in a form (ibid.: 54–55). Thirdly, agencies criticise other agencies and are constantly transforming, contesting, conflicting and affirming other agencies. Although inanimate objects cannot give verbal criticism, their presence in social situations can have a similar effect (ibid.: 57–58). The fourth point Latour makes is that social actors propose their own theories of action by which they explain their behaviour. Although this again does not apply to non-human actants, this becomes something that the observer of the situation can determine (ibid.: 57–58).

In actor-network theory agency is therefore not based on individual, heterogenous actants but rather their associations in social networks. The role of an actant in social situations is not predetermined but depends on the particular context of the network it is a part of. Relationships in networks are also hierarchical and actants use their power or agency to impact other actors in the network. Networks are not static but they are processes that are in a constant state of movement and becoming. At the same time networks are also subject to various conflicts and disintegration. Therefore, they require constant maintenance and reinforcement. *Translation* is an important concept in actor-network theory, which means that different actants wish to maintain a particular network and prevent it from falling apart. Actor-network-theory has been also been called “sociology of translation” as the term describes the way meaningful associations between actants are generated and reproduced but equally contested (ibid.: 106–108). Latour differentiates between actants that he calls *intermediaries* and those that are called *mediators*. Intermediaries are actants that are part of the network but their role is not crucial to a particular type of network formation. They mainly transfer meanings between actants in a network. Mediators are those whose behaviour can have an impact on the whole network, the way it performs and even dissolve it in some cases. The meaningful translations exist between mediators. The roles of mediators and intermediaries may also shift depending on the focus of a study (ibid.: 57–62, 108).

Latour has also introduced elsewhere (1991a) the concept of *quasi-objects* that may be included in actor-network analysis although they were not included in his work of 2005. By this, he refers to hybrids that cannot be defined in dualistic terms: they are neither objects nor subjects, or part of nature or culture (1991a: 51–55). Various things can be quasi-objects, such as money, technology, microbes, animals and natural resources etc. They are participants in social relationships and can transform human relations. Another concept by Latour (1987) linked to ANT is *black box*, although mentioned only briefly in his work of 2005 (2005: 39). Black box is a complex phenomena that can be simplified by concealing associations inside it. These associations or networks are thus more or less taken for granted. Another term used for this process is *punctualisation*. Intermediaries can be seen as a black box, since their actions within a network are invisible and not considered as translations (1987).

Actor-network theory has been especially influential in science and technology studies, but it has also been employed in the context of anthropology and other social and cultural research in different contexts. For example, Vokes (2007) has used ANT when looking at research techniques in ethnographic fieldwork that engages both people and things. Van der Duin (2005) analysed tourism from the perspective of ANT, utilising the term “tourismscapes”, in which people and things are entangled in networks and perform as part of tourismscapes. Tsing (2010) has studied matsutake mushroom research in Japan, and Thompson and Cupples (2008) mobile phone cul-

ture among young people in New Zealand. In turn, Pitelka (2011) has utilised ANT when studying art networks in 15th century Japan; Lassander (2012) in the research of so-called post-secular religion and paganism. Paju's (2013) research on children's agency and engagement with material culture in kindergartens has benefited from ANT, and Lehtonen (2008) relies strongly on Latour's theories when looking at the relationship between people and things in the context of modern society. Raunola uses ANT as a tool to analyse the spiritual process between different human and non-human participants in Lightprayer, a new kind of religious practice (2017a), and in particular, the role of Christian image of Virgin Mary as a part of Lightprayer (2017b).

One of the main criticism that ANT has received is the question of boundaries of the seemingly endless network possibilities that the theory allows to form (cf. Strathern 1996). Malafouris (2013: 127) poses two crucial questions in this regard: firstly, how do you draw boundaries of the network, and secondly, how do you select the actants that are significant when structuring your analysis? In this sense anything can become part of the network and this creates a problem of closing the network (ibid.). Another point that Malafouris makes is how intentions, beliefs or ideologies can be addressed in an actor-network theory that does not acknowledge the existence of any outside structures due to symmetrical approach (2013: 128–129). He calls this the "problem of the prime mover", as ANT does not provide answers to how certain ideologies or motives emerge in the first place that resulted in action (ibid.). Latour himself has criticised actor-network theory for the same reasons and has not aimed to solve these theoretical problems. Nevertheless, ANT has remained an influential theoretical point of departure when looking at interactions between humans and the material world.

1.4.4 Agency and stone carving in Mamallapuram

In this thesis both Gell's (1998) theory about art and agency as well as Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT) are used to analyse stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram. In order to find out whether stone carvers and foreign visitors view stone carvings as arts or crafts and if the statues have particular religious or spiritual connotations for them, the focus of the study is on different agencies that form the meanings of the sculptures in social situations. The hypothesis is thus that the art or craft status as well as the religious and/or spiritual meanings of stone carvings are *made* through different agencies, and this research aims to examine those agencies and networks in which they operate. The meanings of the stone carvings are not absolute but context-specific, and are formed through the social interactions they are involved in. Although this research focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the statues, at the same time they are not definitive but always tied to their contexts.

The reason for choosing both Gell's and Latour's theories for the analysis is their complimentary nature, with a particular focus on non-human agencies. Gell's theory raises the issue of agency, especially in the context of art works, and I have been interested to see to what extent can it be applied to Mamallapuram stone carvings. Based on my field data, does the agency of stone carvers and sculptures form their status as artists and works of art? Did my respondents view stone carvings as art based on the skills of the carver or did they make their interpretations based on other agents in the art nexus? As previously noted, Gell's theory does not only concentrate on issues surrounding the artist and the making of art works but also the agency of objects (considered to be art works, although not necessarily) in other social contexts, such as

in religious rituals. Therefore, Gell's theory is also suitable for analysing the religious and spiritual agencies in the context of stone carvings in Mamallapuram.

Latour's actor-network theory again concentrates more on the networks and relations between numerous different agents or actants. Although Gell also looks at social relationships, his focus is often more on the hierarchical, dialectical connections – although there can be many of them in any given situation – rather than several assemblages of multiple agents simultaneously at play. Also, Gell's art nexus only includes four primary agents: artist, index, recipient and prototype, whereas ANT can encompass any human and non-human actors as a part of the network. ANT thus allows more options for the possible agencies to be included in the analysis. Based on Gell's theory, the art nexus in Mamallapuram is formed by the stone carvers (artists), the sculptures they make (artworks or indexes), tourists who purchase the statues (recipients), and as the standardised images of Hindu gods and goddesses that serve as the models for the stone statues (prototypes). Then again in the context of Latour's actor-network theory, actants can also be carving manuals, stones, tools, government officials, temple priests, historical rock monuments in Mamallapuram, and so on. For example, in a carving situation, stone carvers, tools and stones all have social agency since they have the power to influence each other in the carving process.

I acknowledge the challenge of using two different theories not only in a balanced way but equally, how it allows multiple and possibly contradicting viewpoints and interpretations of the same situation. In order to combine both of these theoretical approaches, in this thesis stone carving in Mamallapuram is approached as a type of "network situation" that constitutes any number of different agents in line with Latour's actor-network theory. This stone carving network may also include the elements of Gell's art nexus as possible agents that participate in the network, but there can be also other agents present that do not fit into these four categories of agents as suggested by Gell. In the context of this research, the boundaries of a network are based on the views of the people interviewed or situations observed during fieldwork. In other words, only those agents are included in the analysis that are mentioned in the interviews or observed in a particular situation that define the status of stone carvings as arts, crafts and religious or spiritual objects. Networks that are analysed are thus approached here as situational constructs. The focus here is not to map out the network and all the possible agents as a whole – which would be an impossibility as the critique for an endless network suggests – but to concentrate on those particular situations, viewed here as networks, that emerge from the research data.

For the sake of clarity, the intentionality of the agents needs to be addressed as they form contradictory elements between Gell's and Latour's theories. Intentionality is defined here based on the suggestion of Malafouris (2013: 135–140), who differentiates "prior intention" from "intention-in-action". Prior intention is what is put forward by Gell when arguing that human agency contains intention that results in causal actions, and for this reason makes a difference between primary and secondary agents (1998: 19). However, Gell notes that intention can only be realised after it has already happened because agency cannot be detected in advance (ibid.: 20). This resonates with ANT, which also accepts agency only based on performance, although without the need for intentionality. Therefore, Malafouris' concept of intention-in-action is applied here because that is the only form of intention that is relevant when analysing agency. This also partly responds to Ingold's argument, as presented above, according to which intentions cannot be read from an artwork (2013). We can look at artworks as the coming-together of many different agents and display of agencies, which may

also include intentions; but it is only what has actually been made through action and interaction that counts.

Another difference between Gell and Latour is the capability of agencies and agency networks to construct meanings, which is the central point of departure in this thesis. In Gell's approach this is one of the main purposes of his theory: the capability of agencies to make certain works appear as art. Then again, Latour concentrates on mapping the agency networks and does not extend his theory to the meanings and interpretations that the networks may create and allow. This could be viewed as one of the shortcomings of the theory, as at the same time it denies the context in which the network operates and what is left outside of it (cf. Tsing 2010). In this thesis I have taken Latour's theory one step further; following somewhat the experimentations of ANT by Tsing (2010) in the context of the scientific study of mushrooms in Japan, and looking at not only the networks that exist in the stone carving market in Mamallapuram, but also how they create meanings in the eyes of the people participating in the research. As I identify different agents and the agency networks they create based on the views and interpretations of my respondents, the social meaning and context is already present as it is always the starting point of the mapping exercise. These meanings are to do with the status of a stone carving as arts or crafts, and as religious and spiritual objects. Latour's theory is thus utilised in a similar manner to Gell's method, to only allow several different agencies to form the interpretations and meanings.

As also previously noted, I acknowledge the problem with the concept of agency, separate agents and "leaking" boundaries, as argued by Ingold (2013). Can we talk about separate agents and their agencies if in fact everything is connected on a microscopic, material level? I would argue that we can still approach things as separate and independent agents without having to construct strict boundaries between them. Instead, agency can operate on many different levels. This has been noted for example by Bennett (2010), who has looked at networks and assemblages between stem cells. Again, the researcher is able to narrow down the focus of analysis and determine on what level agencies and agents should be examined. In this thesis, agency is used as a tool of analysis to see how social behaviour and relationships between people and things can be used to understand different interpretations of stone carvings in Mamallapuram.

1.5 FIELDWORK AND METHODS

This thesis is based on ethnographic field research and data that was collected in Mamallapuram between 2009 and 2012. The first part of the fieldwork was carried out from October 2009 to September 2010 and two follow-up trips were made during the spring of 2011 (three months) and 2012 (four months). The ethnographic methods used for data collection were semi-structured interviews, open questionnaires and participant observation. The research data also includes a number of photographs, which are used in this thesis in support to the written text.

Interviewing was the primary method of data collection and the data consists of 40 interviews conducted with stone carvers and 28 interviews with foreign visitors to Mamallapuram. Most of the stone carvers interviewed were working for the tourist market but some granite carvers were also included in order to gain information about that part of the industry. Some carvers were engaged in both soft stone and granite carving. The interviews were semi-structured interviews in the sense that a

specific question form was used for all the interviews but the interviews were kept partly open-ended, so that the interviewees were free to expand on the questions or concentrate on specific questions and aspects that they were mostly interested in or familiar with. In addition, a few other interviews were made from specific occupational groups. These were the director and some of the teachers from the Government School of Architecture and Traditional Sculpture in Mamallapuram, a representative from the Board of Handicrafts in Chennai, a representative of Poomphukar; the government-run stone carving unit in Mamallapuram, a representative of the Tourist Office in Mamallapuram, Brahmins priests at a Hindu temple in Mamallapuram, the chairman of Mamallapuram, as well as the officers in the Town Office of Mamallapuram.

All the people that were formally interviewed were given an interview permission form before the interview and were asked to sign it afterwards. The form explained the nature of the research as well the possible use and storage of the data. People interviewed were also given the option of whether they wanted their name to be revealed in the thesis and were asked if an audio recorder could be used during the interview. The participants were only asked to sign the forms after the interview so that the person interviewed could decide if there was any information that they felt should be omitted or even if they wanted to cancel the interview altogether. Although the form was submitted on all occasions, there were a few cases when people did not want to fill them in. They felt it was completely unnecessary and did not want to bother with it. On those occasions I did not force them to fill in the forms, so some of the interviews were done only with spoken consent. In addition, some of the interviewees did not want the interview to be recorded. In those cases written notes were made during the interview. All the photos of people, stone carvings, temple statues and shrines have been taken with a permission.

In addition to the interviews, 65 open questionnaires were collected from the foreign tourists and 20 open questionnaires from the local inhabitants of Mamallapuram. Questionnaires were used to survey people's views about the stone carvings sold in Mamallapuram, why they purchased them and what the statues were used for. Although these questionnaires also give some statistical data, their main purpose was to provide additional information to the interviews. The initial purpose was to have an equal number of questionnaires from both foreign visitors and local people, but it soon became apparent that very few local people actually had stone carvings in their homes. As a result, the number of questionnaires collected from the second group is smaller and this material is namely used as back-up data to the answers given by the stone carvers, who are the main representatives of the local people in this research.

An integral part of my fieldwork was also the classical ethnographic method of participant observation, or "hanging out", as expressed by Staples (2015: 78). In the context of my research this practically meant hanging out in the stone carving shops, speaking to the carvers, socialising with foreign tourists and local people who would spend time in the shops, as well as trying out stone carving myself. Carving was a good way to learn more about the craft as well as to enable me to spend several hours in the shops, chat to various people and observe the events around me in the shop and on the street outside. In addition to the formal interviews and questionnaires, my research data therefore also consists of several informal conversations with the stone carvers, foreigners and other local people in Mamallapuram that I would jot down in my notebook.

1.5.1 A tourist or an anthropologist? Positioning oneself in the field

My personal and professional experience of doing ethnographic fieldwork in Mamallapuram was complex but not highly challenging. As always during fieldwork, several external and internal factors contributed to the overall experience. As Robben (2012: 89) notes, “fieldwork is not a detached activity carried out by an objective observer, but subjective experiences and selfhood are part of the parcel of fieldwork.” Subjective experiences are also part of the “positioning” of an anthropologist in the field. As a concept positioning is not a straightforward term and can be understood in numerous ways in the context of ethnographic fieldwork (Fingerroos 2003:1). Holland and Leander (2004: 127) argue that “positionings are pivotal moments in which social and psychological phenomena come to interanimate and interpenetrate one another.” Following Fingerroos (2003: 1) I understand positioning as the process of doing research that includes subjectivity but also reflexivity, which enables and forces the researcher to become aware and make visible her positioning not only during the fieldwork but also in the analysis and writing of ethnography. In the following I will present some of the key factors and experiences that impacted on my field research in Mamallapuram.

Firstly, as a foreigner it was easy to come and stay in Mamallapuram since it is a popular tourist destination with good transport connections and several services aimed especially at the needs and tastes of Western visitors. Foreigners do not attract any special attention in the streets unless you venture outside the main tourist areas of the town. Next to these somewhat more practical initial issues, the first main task of an ethnographer once she or he reaches the field is to be able to create contacts with the people she or he is aiming to study. This is not always an easy and straightforward task. For example, Korpela (2009) has accounted how researching Western lifestyle migrants in Varanasi for her PhD was initially very problematic, since the people she aimed to study did not accept her as a part of their group. Only after starting to take singing lessons did doors open, as many of these Westerners in Varanasi also studied music. In their eyes being just an anthropologist was not considered to be an equally “serious” reason for her stay in the town. Nita Kumar (1992), who also conducted research in Varanasi (then Banares) among the artisans, also faced initial difficulties when trying to make contact with the people she aimed to research. In both of these cases the anthropologist was at least to some extent part of the same community as her research: Korpela being a Western foreigner and Kumar an Indian national, but there were other social and cultural factors that set them apart from the studied people. Whereas for Korpela the issue was her reason for being in Varanasi, in Kumar’s case it was mainly to do with her different socio-economic background that was different from the artisans she wished to study.

In comparison to these examples, my own experience of finding contacts in Mamallapuram was relatively easy. Many of the foreigners I spoke to felt that Mamallapuram was an easy place to stay for a longer period of time and to get to know local people. This was true in the sense that Mamallapuram is a small town with a very relaxed atmosphere compared to many large Indian cities, for example. It was also easy to make contact with people in the fairly small tourist area. Locals working within tourism were usually the first to approach me and express their interest. Often this was to market their services and businesses that line the streets in the tourist area, but many of them were also happy just to chat about all types of topics. Usually people always had time for a conversation and it was expected in return from the foreigners as a sign of politeness. In a similar manner it was easy for me to make initial contact with

the stone carvers. The first thing I would tell them was that I was in Mamallapuram for my research and it was also my main motive for visiting the stone carving shops, and that I would be interested in conducting an interview if they would be willing to participate. Most of them welcomed my company, were happy to speak to me and help me with the research, although they knew that I was less likely to buy anything from them, at least at that time.

In a similar manner, it was fairly easy to come into contact with foreign tourists, as most people would spend their time relaxing in the restaurants and on the beach in the town's main tourist area after seeing the sights. Many of them also spent time in the stone carving workshops and also tried their skills at stone carving. Carving shops thus became the most popular places in which I made contact with foreigners, as it was also a natural setting to tell them about my research. In Mamallapuram many tourists and locals working within tourism would group and spend time together in various settings, and so getting to know one person, be it a local or a foreigner, would often lead me to meet more new people. Some carvers had foreign friends who visited Mamallapuram regularly and I was introduced to them when they came to Mamallapuram, but this would also happen the other way round. When I told foreigners about my research many of them told me about a carver they knew or a workshop they had visited and told me I should visit that place too. Sometimes this type of encounter also made it easy for me to meet new carvers as I was introduced to them as a "friend" of a friend. Some foreign tourists had also come to Mamallapuram especially to buy stone carvings, either for personal use or to sell them back at home, and they were able to give me lots of valuable information and insights regarding my research topic. All in all, I did not therefore have to walk on the streets and stop foreign tourists to find my contacts for interviews; instead I met people through a somewhat organic process. My research was also an easy way to break the ice and start a conversation with foreign visitors. Some of them had been travelling alone in India for a while and they seemed genuinely happy to have conversations and also found my research interesting.

There were a handful of foreigners who have settled in Mamallapuram as a result of a marriage to a local person or for work and business reasons. These people usually initially visited the place as standard, short-term tourists who have then found a reason to come back and stay. Many of them lead somewhat mobile lifestyles in the sense that they spend at least part of the year away, usually in their native countries. This made these foreigners partly similar to those maybe 20–30 returning tourists who came to Mamallapuram on a yearly basis and often stayed a couple of months at a time. There have also been a number of foreigners working or volunteering in various development or social projects in the villages around the state of Tamil Nadu and some of them came to Mamallapuram on a regular basis, usually over the weekends. Foreign expats living in the nearby city of Chennai also visited Mamallapuram regularly. Many of these returning, long-term foreign visitors became not only my good friends but also an invaluable source of information and peer support. They were able to tell me about the changes that had occurred in Mamallapuram over the years as well as all kinds of general and specific information about my research location, people living there, the tourist scene and their experiences of India. We would often compare and analyse various issues that offered interesting insights to both parties. Some of them were especially interested and knowledgeable in stone carving and came to Mamallapuram to purchase statues. I gained lot of valuable information from these contacts and was also able to compare it to the information that I had been given from the stone

carvers. In a way I would then start to position myself within this group of foreigners, although none of them were anthropologists.

The positioning of an anthropologist in the field is not only a subjective process but she or he is equally positioned by the people she works with (Holland and Leander 2004: 127–128). The local population may often even essentialise the anthropologist and place him or her in a certain category that is familiar to them but to the frustration of the anthropologist (Hoffman and Gardner 2006: 5). This type of outside positioning impacts the “field-self” of the researcher as much as their subjective positioning, and it exposes various local and global stereotypes and hierarchies between different groups of people (ibid.:5). Those local people in Mamallapuram that I spoke to had not heard of anthropology but saying that I did research on stone carving and sculptures was something that everyone could understand. I was told that no one had done such research there before but despite this, I was not identified only as an anthropologist. It seemed that it was considered to be my job and meant that I conducted interviews, collected questionnaires, photographed statues and in general often asked various people questions related to stone carving. Being an anthropologist thus seemed to be something that I did, rather than who I was. In Tamil speech I was often referred to as a *vellakari* (a Tamil expression for a white person) who does research about stone carving and sculptures. This same expression was used to refer to other foreigners, so in this sense I was not separated from the other visitors. Initially many locals asked me if I was a “social worker”, a common term used to refer to people working in development projects. One of the main reasons for this was my choice to wear the typical Indian dress for young women, known as *churidar*⁷ in Tamil Nadu. Apparently this was common amongst the Western volunteer development workers working in the villages in Tamil Nadu, who would sometimes visit Mamallapuram on their days off. Tourists, often unfamiliar with Indian traditions, would usually wear casual Western clothing or hippy-style garments sold in the tourist destinations around India.

Local people were used to the fact that foreign tourists were interested in the stone sculptures but mainly just to look at them and to buy them. Conducting research for a university degree made me also a student. As foreign student groups sometimes visit Mamallapuram, I could easily be fitted into that category as well.

During my time in Mamallapuram I stayed in a guest house in the main tourist area in order to be near the carving shops and foreign tourists. In this manner I was also not too different from the other foreign visitors. Some of them rent houses in Mamallapuram or the nearby villages, but many of them also stay in the guest houses on a long-term basis. In general, I felt that the way local people approached me was not really different from the way the other foreign long-term tourists were treated. In my experience I was simply first a new tourist who then gradually became one of those long-term visitors, but my reason for being there was my study about stone carvings and sculptures. Personally, this positioning suited to me fine, as my work was acknowledged and I was being supported in it, but at the same time I was treated the same way as other long-term visitors and could also have a break from my role as an anthropologist. However, separating those “off-duty” moments from field research

⁷The word *churidar* means tightly fitted long trousers worn by both women and men in India. Women usually wear them with a dress and a long scarf or with a tunic-style shirt. However, in Tamil Nadu *churidar* or *churidar suit* usually refers to the whole outfit consisting of the dress, scarf and trousers of different styles. This type of costume is called *salwar kameez* in many other parts of India.

was not a straightforward matter and raised several ethical considerations, a point to which I will return shortly.

The gender of the researcher is never a neutral matter in ethnographic research, and there is a vast amount of literature that addresses this question (cf. Powdermaker 1967a; Bell 1993; Wolf 1996; Järviluoma et al. 2003; Heikkinen 2010). At the same time, it should be acknowledged that although gender is an important factor, it is not the only attribute that defines a researcher (Wolf 1996: 2). In my case I was female but I was also white, a foreigner, educated and belonged to a certain age group, had a certain type of personality, and so on. My field-self and image was thus a product and a construct of all these variables and their importance and effects would vary between situations. For example, foreign woman would be seen as being more independent and brave than the local, Indian women. One person told me that “Indian women would be scared to go abroad alone.” This is of course a generalisation but it highlights one of the local attitudes that would group foreign and local women differently in some cases.

I can only guess whether my findings would have been different had I been a male or had I been for example an Indian woman doing research in India (cf. Kumar 1992; Ganesh 1993). All the stone carvers in Mamallapuram were men and sometimes I noticed that there was a difference in the way many foreign men were spoken to and approached by the local people. When visiting stone carving shops in the company of a foreign male, I was given less attention compared to my male companion. This reflects the gender roles of a male-dominated society in India. At the same time, as a foreigner I was respected and people in Mamallapuram are used to seeing foreign women travelling alone and making friends with local people. In general, I felt that locals found it quite easy to talk to me about all kinds of issues and they were quite relaxed in my presence. Therefore, I do not think that my gender prevented me from getting any particular information regarding stone carving. As I interviewed both male and female tourists, my status here as a foreigner was also an important factor alongside my gender, as they could relate to me as a foreigner temporarily in Mamallapuram and India.

1.5.2 Fieldwork experiences

At the beginning of my time in Mamallapuram, I made a habit of visiting several of the stone carving workshops in different areas of the town to see both the shops and the people working there in order to introduce myself and the purpose of my visit. It was easy to approach the people in the shops as I was seen as a potential customer. I told them about my research directly in order to avoid any misunderstandings and I also told them that since this was in essence an unpaid research project, I was unable to buy stone carvings from them. Being identified as a student usually made it clear that I would not directly benefit financially from the interviews. For most of the stone carvers this was not a problem at all. They were happy to tell me about their work, background and views, as well as any other things I wanted to know related to sculptures, tourism, Hinduism, Mamallapuram and so on. Sometimes I could see that despite my explanations there was a strong hope that the interview or conversations would result in me buying something in the end. Therefore, I made sure that I kept my word to avoid creating false hopes and unclear promises and also to ensure that I could return to the shop for more information if necessary without the need to purchase anything. I also wanted to avoid creating jealousy among the other carvers in the neighbouring shops. On those occasions when I actually wanted to purchase

something I did that on a separate occasion and usually after I had already established a good working relationship with the stone carvers.

In the memoirs of her fieldwork in Melanesia, Powdermaker (2012 [1967b]) relates how one of the locals asked her why she kept asking the same questions of everyone (96). This issue also surfaced in my fieldwork in the way in which some of my local friends would wonder why I wanted to interview so many carvers. Also, I was often told that I should speak to such and such a carver, for example someone considered to be a master in the craft and who could be able to give me “all the information”. I would then explain that I wanted to get to know different carvers and their work, rather than only learning about the principles of stone carving.

Stone carving and sculptures were generally an easy topic with which to start a conversation with the local people. Also the topic was not thought to be threatening in any way in the sense that it would not include very private information. Finding foreign visitors who were willing to speak about stone carving then again turned out to be more difficult. I met some people who had visited Mamallapuram several times and even bought statues but they told me that they knew nothing about the sculptures so therefore did not want to be interviewed. The main problem seemed to be with the concept of “art”, as I explained to people that I would like to ask them about their opinions about the statues related to the concepts of art and religion or spirituality. Some of them changed their minds when I told them there were no right or wrong answers in this research and they did not have to be knowledgeable about “arts” in order to participate. Then again, other foreign visitors did not find these categories intimidating and were willing to share their views.

My research also included people’s personal views on religious and spiritual issues, a topic that can be considered to be private and something that people may not want to disclose so freely. However, I found out that in Mamallapuram many local people were somewhat open about their personal religious beliefs and did not find it intrusive that I wanted to know more about these issues. Those who followed Hinduism would usually explain what the common Hindu beliefs and practices were that they also conducted in their own lives. This was not the case with many of the foreign tourists, as especially in Western countries religious and spiritual beliefs are usually considered to be rather private issues. However, with foreign tourists it was also easy to talk about the statues and their uses and sometimes my personal interests in issues related to spirituality and Hinduism would also open doors (cf. Strauss 2000; Raunola 2010). Sometimes naming the ritual uses of statues, such as meditation or prayer, would also partly explain people’s beliefs.

Interviewing as a part of ethnographic field practices is far from a “neutral” event, as it involves the researcher and one or more persons to be interviewed. Staples and Smith (2015: 3) call interviews “extraordinary encounters” in which “personal, biographic and social cues and norms are explored and interrogated,” and also it is “a space for mutually constructed reflection and analysis, providing awareness for future encounters.” Interviews in most cases may become an event and create a space during which matters are discussed and information elicited that would not occur in other, everyday situations and conversations. People may become more analytical and reflective regarding their lives when momentarily detached from it as a practised experience, for example (ibid.: 2–3).

The semi-structured interviews of the stone carvers were mostly done soon after I met them and they created a basis for the research relationship as well as providing background information about the stone carver in question. All the interviews with

the carvers were conducted in the stone carving shops or workshops where the carvers would also show me their work, stones and different sculpture types. After the interviews I returned to many of the carving shops on a regular basis to say hello and to have more informal discussions. These later conversations often built on the formal interviews by taking the matters further and provided more in-depth information on the research questions. Compared to the formal interviews, on many occasions these informal conversations and observations about life in Mamallapuram provided some of the main insights, especially regarding the nature of stone carvings on the tourist market and the encounters that occurred between stone carvers and foreign visitors. This has been noted for example by Bharucha (2003), who has studied folk music traditions in Rajasthan, India. He states that the conversations he had with his informant over a cup of tea in the mornings were more “fluid” than the recorded discussions. The presence of a microphone was able to create a shift in the context of their conversations, thus also altering the “field” in which they were engaged (Bharucha 2003: 8–9). Staples (2015), who has done research among people affected by leprosy in India, has used intensive biographical interviews over a long period of time as a part of his research methods in order to account for detailed life histories. Staples writes how we would return to certain events and issues in the subsequent interviews in order to gain more in-depth accounts of his respondents’ lives. This would not have been possible through “aggressive questioning”. (Staples 2015: 78.) Also during my own research, when possible, it was helpful to observe people’s behaviour and sometimes also repeat certain questions again in another, more informal context.

At the same time these discussions could not have replaced interviews, since the formal interview situations created the time and place which was agreed both by me and the informant and hence it was easier for me to keep asking several questions as I was not interrupting any other activities. Still, as a researcher it is important to note that the interview as a situation creates particular conditions during which people may act or perform differently than in everyday encounters. Interview creates an opportunity for building a specific image and narrative of one’s life, and therefore it also requires critical assessment against other findings during the fieldwork. As a result, in anthropology and ethnographic writing, interviews should be viewed not only as a method but also as an analytical category (Staples and Smith 2015: 4).

Interviews with the foreign visitors were usually carried out in quiet restaurants and cafes or on the balconies of guest houses. We would agree the time and place together with the foreign visitor, and all the people I interviewed seemed to be very present in the situations, in the sense that they did not have to hurry anywhere else and there was rarely any time limit for the interview. As a result, these encounters and discussions often became something of a mixture of an interview and an informal conversation and although I followed my list of questions, sometimes the discussions also covered several other topics. Some of the visitors had already been travelling alone around India for a while and it seemed they enjoyed this opportunity for interaction. Many of them were also eager to ask me questions regarding my stay and experiences in India, as well as about things that puzzled them about stone carving – considering me to be something of an expert on the topic! For my research these organised situations were crucial, since most tourists would soon continue their journeys and I would not be able to ask them questions again, unlike with the stone carvers.

As most people working in tourist industry in Mamallapuram had an adequate level of English skills in order to communicate with the foreign tourists, and foreign tourists in Mamallapuram use English to communicate with the locals, English was

also the language used for the research and interviews with both groups of people. In fact, many people working with tourists in Mamallapuram spoke very good English that they had learned either at school or through their interactions with foreigners.⁸ Some local people in Mamallapuram had their own way of speaking English, such as including certain popular local expressions and an atypical order of words in sentences. I learned this in time and was then able to understand people better. On a few occasions, an interpreter was used during the interviews to translate the questions and answers between English and Tamil. This was done at the request of the stone carver. In addition, I conducted two interviews in Finnish with Finnish and Estonian respondents. While in Mamallapuram I took Tamil lessons and learned some basics of the language, but it was not sufficient for the research. The questionnaires that were conducted among the local inhabitants of Mamallapuram were done with the help of the local interpreter, as some people did not speak as good English as was required. I felt that in general it was easier to communicate with the stone carvers directly in English rather than through an interpreter, as then I could be sure of the answers and then ask any additional questions based on them. The conversations also felt more personal and direct.

As with many other anthropologists, I conducted my field research in more than one part. In my case I returned to Mamallapuram on three consecutive years. Returning to the field has many advantages. Korpela (2009: 61) notes in her PhD thesis that conducting her fieldwork in India in two parts enabled her to observe changes that had taken place in her research location and the people she studied. It also allows the researcher to reflect on the research from afar and be better prepared for the continuation of the fieldwork, and to adjust the focus if necessary (*ibid.*). In terms of the practicalities of fieldwork, the second time was also easier for her since she was already familiar with the research location and had several contacts. Epstein (2002), who carried out field research in the villages of Mysore, India on issues of rural development in the 1950s and 1970s and who then returned again in the 1990s, discovered that many of her predictions had been wrong about the future development of the villages. Changes are inevitable over a long period of research but I was able to notice various turns of events in Mamallapuram during the three-year period. The main benefits, however, were the factors that Korpela also describes. Research relationships also deepened over a longer period of time. When I told some of my informants that I was leaving, I was immediately asked when I would return. This enquiry did not reflect their knowledge of the nature long-term ethnographic fieldwork but rather the fact that many of the long-term foreign visitors would go home and then return to Mamallapuram the following year.

1.5.3 Ethical dilemmas

Various ethical considerations are an integral part of the work of an anthropologist and cannot be avoided (cf. Rynkiewich and Spradley 1976; Appell 1978; Cassell and Jacobs 1987; Tierney 2000; Caplan 2003; Fluehr-Lobban 2003; Meskel and Pels 2005; Armbruster and Laerke 2008; Sluka 2012). In addition, every research field has its own specialities and particularities that a researcher has to face and learn to deal with. Although com-

⁸ English is one of the official languages in India and many children attend English-medium schools. In the state of Tamil Nadu the official language is Tamil and the main languages spoken are Tamil and English.

mon ethical guidelines regarding the appropriate code of conduct in fieldwork are necessary and helpful, they cannot usually answer all the dilemmas that arise in the field (cf. Vakimo 2010). For example, there can be a contradiction between the information that the anthropologist comes to collect and what the people studied are willing to give. In essence there is always a “double agency” present in ethnographic research, as the researcher is accountable to both the scientific community and the people she or he is researching – or to “us” and “them” at the same time (cf. Marcus 2015: 40).

One of the main ethical considerations in terms of my fieldwork was the fact that I could not be sure how well people understood the nature of anthropological research and what type of information I was interested in. Mostly I felt that people did not see me “being at work” all the time but rather, my role as an anthropologist was defined by the moments I conducted interviews and asked questions specifically related to stone carving. This was understandable, as after all, I had said I was carrying out research on stone carving. Therefore, from an ethical point of view the most complicated parts of my field research were the incidents and stories that I witnessed and heard that were not directly related to sculpture-making but were more to do with the nature of the international tourism in Mamallapuram. This usually meant personal relationships between local people and foreign tourists that were either platonic or intimate in nature and where money was involved. Although this phenomenon was a very common aspect of the tourist scene in Mamallapuram, it was also something that many local people found to be morally wrong. They would say that it is better to work and honestly sell your services rather than create personal relationships with foreign tourists. In other words, friendships with financial aspects were considered to be a form of cheating. Another reason for this was also jealousy that was common among the people who struggle to make a living from the tourist market. A few foreign tourists were occasionally very open about the friendships they had with the locals and about the money they had given, but locals were usually very quiet about this type of information.

Although for me many of these stories were very interesting and did highlight the nature of the Mamallapuram tourist scene extremely well, I do not think people thought that this type of information would be relevant for my thesis. Sometimes these stories were told to me as a friend in a confidential manner and sometimes it was just gossip. Therefore, I have decided not to include these stories in my thesis but only to mention the issues in brief in the second chapter, which deals with the nature of tourism in Mamallapuram.

Ethical considerations also concern the role of an anthropologist who mostly receives information from locals for free (cf. Kupiainen 1997). Although participating in research was entirely voluntary for everyone involved and I could inform interviewees that I would not make money directly with the information given to me, it would still hopefully benefit me in the form of a degree. I was conducting my field research with the help of a travel grant that did not include payment for the interviews and I was financially unable to do so. I would also have been financially unable to purchase statues from all the stone carvers I spoke to. Although a lack of payment was not an issue for the stone carvers in general, this nevertheless raised some personal questions about the nature of anthropological fieldwork in that setting. I could see that many of the carvers were struggling financially but I was unable to help them in that way.⁹

⁹ Some stone carvers had been interviewed for foreign newspapers and magazines that may financially benefit the journalist.

After all, people's willingness to participate in the research was the main precondition for the success of my research. I felt that if I had started to pay one person for my interviews, I would have had to pay everyone. I also believe this would have distorted the voluntary nature of the research. By not involving money with the interviews, I could better control who I would interview and also cause less stir and jealousy among the respondents in general.

One self-made incentive for some of the stone carvers to participate in the research was that they hoped I could perhaps find them customers or make them famous, as they would appear in my thesis. Although I explained that this was very unlikely to happen, this possibility still seemed alluring to many. Occasionally I would recommend certain stone carving shops to tourists I met if they were interested in buying sculptures. I also purchased some sculptures at the end of my visits and I bought them from those stone carvers that had become my key informants. I felt that this was still a way of thanking them for their assistance but I felt that this did not alter the nature of our research relationship since the statues I bought were not the big and expensive kind.

I used the help of the locals with the some of the interviews as well as for conducting the questionnaires. In those instances I would pay a wage that was agreed in advance and reflected the level of the local salaries. Occasionally this meant that I required help for several hours, such as taking me around workshops that I could not find on my own, for interpreting interviews made in Tamil, or visiting local houses to fill in questionnaires. Therefore, it was only fair that people received compensation for their time and the help they gave me.

Naturally, some of the stone carvers became better friends and some remained as mere acquaintances. Those carvers with whom I got along very well from the beginning and who were interested and supportive towards my research became some of my main informants and also valuable sources of information related to stone carving and Mamallapuram. I got to know their life and work the most and followed them more closely throughout my stay in Mamallapuram. It was impossible to speak to all the stone carvers in Mamallapuram due to their sheer number, but I tried to visit as many shops as possible and speak to people who came from very different backgrounds and had different sized businesses. Malinowski (2012 [1922]: 71) has noted that after a while the "natives" no longer paid special attention to the presence of an anthropologist and ceased to be interested or alarmed by him. In my case in Mamallapuram this meant that when I sat in those stone carving shops where I would spend considerable lengths of time, carvers would go about their duties as usual and concentrate on new foreign tourists and customers rather than chatting to me. Sometimes I would even be left to look after the carving shop if they had to go somewhere for a while. Especially in those cases when there was another foreign person sitting in the shop, often someone who had just arrived in Mamallapuram, the carver would trust me to talk to them and keep them company while they were away. Leaving these tourists alone would be considered impolite but my presence would prevent this issue. I would also be used as an example of a person who had tried stone carving. At the same time, if a potential customer entered the shop, this meant that any questions that I had would have to be delayed as the focus would shift to the tourist. Becoming more invisible to the locals therefore also meant that I no longer required any special treatment either.

1.5.4 An insider and an outsider in the field

Berremen, who studied Hindu people in an Indian village in the Himalayan region in the 1960s, has described that that he “remained an alien” during his fieldwork and felt that most people in the village did not “actively desire” that he stayed there but that nevertheless he was tolerated (Berremen 1972: xxvii). These issues are often given less attention in ethnographic literature compared to the data gathered, although the whole research builds and depends on the relationship between the researcher, informants and the field (ibid.: xviii). When I arrived in Mamallapuram I was told by some long-term foreigner visitors that although the people were friendly and accommodating, on some level you will nevertheless always remain a foreigner and an outsider to the local society. To some extent I agree with this view because I would always be regarded as a foreign person, although I was no longer a tourist to many of the local people. Although I could learn more about life in Mamallapuram, people there would not know about my life back home and therefore achieving reciprocal knowledge was impossible. It was also acknowledged that my stay there was only temporary, as with most other foreign visitors. The fact that foreign people would come and go makes in natural that many locals wish to keep a certain distance from them and see only the other locals as permanent features in their lives. At the same time, I was told by some people that they enjoyed seeing certain foreigners returning since they had started to consider them as part of Mamallapuram. I was also always welcomed back to the town. Although small misunderstandings cannot be avoided when dealing with people, I managed to avoid any “disasters” that can take place in India when different cultural understandings collide (cf. Vera-Sanso 1993). I am sure I made several “mistakes” but since the local people are used to foreigners and their sometimes weird behaviour from the local point of view, I was treated with forgiveness without even realising it at the time.

There are often certain events that may break certain cultural barriers and enable a foreigner, such as an anthropologist, to become a closer participant of the local community. Drawing on the work of Clifford Geertz (1989), among others, Grimshaw writes about the “important moment”, or what she calls “the visionary impulse” in fieldwork (1999: 122):

By this I mean that he refers to the transformative experience of fieldwork – that split-second when something unexpected and remarkable happens which changes not only one’s perception of the world but of one’s own perception of the self. Specifically, the notion of the ‘important’ or ‘decisive’ moment challenges the assumption that anthropological understanding involves the progressive accumulation of knowledge; rather, as Watson implies, a dramatic shift in levels of engagement can occur, transforming the spectator into ‘seer’.

For Grimshaw this moment occurred on New Year’s Eve in Ladakh, India, where she was conducting ethnographic field research in a nunnery. Grimshaw states how she had joined the nuns on a mountainside for a ritual during which they started to chant and call out the names of former, deceased nuns. However, normally the very stoic and resilient nuns started to sob and express their pain and grief in an uninhibited, almost violent manner. This shocked Grimshaw and it forced her to become acutely aware of the contradictions and struggles that the nuns experienced in their lives. It also made her question her own relationship with the community, realising her own ultimate separation from their lives that previously she had started to believe she shared with them (ibid.: 125–127).

There were two pivotal moments during my time in Mamallapuram that I would argue were the decisive moments in terms of my fieldwork and which affected both my understanding of local lives as well as the relationship I had with both the stone carvers and foreign visitors. The first of these moments was the death of a younger brother of one of my informants, and the second was his own cancer diagnosis and subsequent death. Both of them were in their 20s and the main breadwinners of the family, as their father had died years earlier. The first event occurred right at the beginning of my fieldwork, the illness was diagnosed in the middle, and my informant's passing around the end of my fieldwork. With hindsight they now seem like an opening and closing gate to my fieldwork period, as I was not able to visit Mamallapuram for a few years after that. The main effect of these events was that I felt like I had become more of an insider to the local lives and started to better understand the type of hardships people faced. As I had already become friends with these people, they also shared these problems with me. Many people living in Mamallapuram came from relatively poor and low-income families and faced various financial struggles. Deaths of young males were also common in Mamallapuram due to frequent motorcycle accidents, and people from all age groups also died due to various illnesses. Sometimes these deaths could have been prevented with proper medical treatment, but they may have been beyond the reach of the poor families. Hospital trips and funerals are expensive matters in India and cause major financial stress to many people. Coming from Finland, where low-cost health care is available to everyone, witnessing these events caused lots of despair in me. Because of them I also gained a lot of non-stone carving-related information during my time in Mamallapuram, such as information about the Indian medical system, and people's knowledge and attitudes towards illnesses. I had the privilege of attending funerals and I made several visits to a cancer institute in Chennai, as well as to other hospitals. In some instances people also asked for my advice as a representative of a Western culture with advanced medical knowledge. Answering questions concerning the possible death of a person who was still alive was very difficult for me as I had not been in such a situation even in Europe, let alone in a country where I had to be aware of the cultural differences and therefore carefully weigh my words in advance so that they would not cause any additional stress to the people concerned.

These events also changed my attitudes towards the foreign visitors coming to Mamallapuram. During my first month in the town I could easily relate to foreign tourists and view Mamallapuram as a charming, small seaside tourist destination with an interesting stone carving tradition, a laid-back atmosphere and friendly local people. After the first death occurred, it felt as if everything had somehow changed and I started to look at things from a different perspective, better acknowledging lives and events that were taking place below the surface. I spoke about these issues to some of the foreign people I encountered but because they did not know the people I was talking about, they could not relate to my feelings or thoughts or did not really seem to be interested about the realities of the local people. For me this created a new sense of personal separation from the "foreign tourist world" that the foreigners occupied and to which I felt I had also belonged not long before. However, through the foreign tourists I could still return to my initial impressions of Mamallapuram later on during my fieldwork and recognise the way my perspectives had shifted and evolved as new layers of experiences kept being added as time went on. Equally, it was interesting to see how some of my informants encountered foreign visitors when I knew they were struggling with certain issues at the same time. Many of them would share and discuss these issues with me but stop the

conversation when a tourist would come and join us. At the same time, I also realised that having chats with new tourists about topics that to me seemed to be constantly the same and even pointless, were in fact for them a way of forgetting about one's problems for a while. The happy mood of the tourists on holiday could be very uplifting and would also help me to get some distance from the local issues that could sometimes feel too overwhelming to digest. Stone carving also seemed to work in the same way, as you could immerse yourself in the sometimes very meditative activity. However, my own main source of support in these instances were those foreigners who were regular, returning visitors to Mamallapuram and who had witnessed and experienced similar events during their years in town and through their friendships with local people. With them I could share, discuss and analyse what was happening in Mamallapuram, which developed my understanding of the place in an ethnographic sense. This also increased my sense of belonging and positioning with this particular group of people, which was different from the local people but also different from the short-term tourists. Instead, we were kind of intermediators who could somehow comfortably spend time with both groups as we could relate to them both to some extent.

I found these situations to be emotionally hard and I often found myself wishing I had not become so involved. However, in many ways it was impossible since I had already become friends with the people and they were part of my research, a fact that I also greatly valued and enjoyed. Friendships with informants are one aspect of the ethnographic fieldwork that can become problematic for the researcher for different reasons, although they can also offer insights and open doors in the field that would have otherwise remain closed (cf. Järviluoma-Mäkelä 2010). Friendships in the field are also part of the paradox of ethnography that requires the researcher to be both an insider and an outsider and having involvement and distance. It can also be argued that being simultaneously both a participant and an observer is cognitively impossible, but together they form the two sides of the coin in ethnography (cf. Vasenkari 1996: 8; Gobo 2008: 9–11). When sharing my thoughts and predicaments with one of the foreign informants, I was advised to “only look at the sculptures and keep a distance from the local people” and by another to “take a trip to Goa where you can meet many nice Western people.” After these well-meant comments, I realised it was better to keep these issues to myself and only share them with those foreigners who understood better the nature of ethnographic fieldwork.

What I have described above were some of the central internal and external factors that have affected my field research in Mamallapuram and consequently, the written work that is the result of it. There are always inherent contradictions in ethnographic writing in anthropology. As Grimshaw (1999: 123) states:

I flourish in anthropology's liminal spaces. By exploring those marginal areas where conventional categories are confused and difficult to sustain, I frequently encounter exasperation from colleagues anxious to draw lines between what is real, what is remembered and what is witnessed, what is subjectively felt and what is objectively described.

Ethnography contains all these elements and it becomes the job of the anthropologist to try to make sense of the fieldwork experiences and turn them into a coherent piece with analytical arguments understandable and logical to another reader. Yet, despite the high levels of reflexivity that current anthropological tradition aims to engage in, it is impossible to distinguish subjective experiences from objective observations, and every ethnographic account is always produced through the medium of the ethnographer.

In this thesis I have used several direct quotes from my interviews whenever possible. This allows the reader to “hear” the voices from the field through the opinions of the interviewees without interpretation, followed by analytical accounts of the anthropologist. Using direct quotes has not always been possible in those instances when the conversation got side-tracked to other topics or because of the local style of English that would not be so easily understandable to an outsider. The rest of the accounts and descriptions rely solely on my own understanding and interpretation of things, set in a particular time and location with the help of various textual resources.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 2 “Research Location: Mamallapuram” presents the research location by providing information on the state of Tamil Nadu, history and current characteristics of Mamallapuram, including some statistical facts about the people who live there. It also looks at how Mamallapuram has been described in historical European travel accounts and in the contemporary popular tourist images in the travel media. In addition, Chapter 2 describes some of the specificities of the tourism in town. Understanding how the tourist scene operates in Mamallapuram is also crucial for understanding the position of stone carving on the tourist market and the environment in which stone carvers work and encounter their customers. Chapter 3 “Indian Hindu Stone Carving Tradition” presents the religious-philosophical background and ritual role of stone carvings as part of the practices of Hinduism in India. It also forms a framework for the current stone carving industry in addition to tourism. The chapter discusses the meaning of art and craft in the context of so called traditional Hindu arts in India. In Chapter 4, “Stone Carving in Mamallapuram”, the focus is on contemporary stone carving and stone carvers in Mamallapuram. It looks at the education background, training and socio-economic status of stone carvers. Chapter 4 also presents different stone varieties, basic carving procedures and techniques, tools, location of shops and sculpture types produced in Mamallapuram. Chapter 5 “Gods for Tourists: Stone Carving as Tourist Art” concentrates on the particularities of stone carving on the tourist market, with a focus on encounters between the stone carvers and tourists when buying and selling stone carvings. It also discusses the impact of tourism on the stone carving industry.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine stone carvings from an artistic, religious and spiritual perspective, and are more theoretical in nature. They both concentrate on the concept of agency that is used to analyse the findings of the research. Chapter 6 “Sculptors, Artists and Craftsmen: Discussing Arts and Crafts” focuses on how foreign tourists and stone carvers interpret and classify stone carvings as either arts or crafts, and how different agencies form these meanings. Chapter 7 “The Power of Statues: Religious and Spiritual Aspect of Stone Carving” explores the different religious and/or spiritual meanings and the use of stone carvings as outlined by stone carvers and foreign tourists. These themes are also approached as a play of different agencies.

Chapter 8 “Stone carving and Some Later Developments” presents some more recent changes that have taken place in Mamallapuram after the period of field research between 2009 and 2012. These issues have been included in the thesis as they offer some insights into the possible direction in which tourism and stone carving in Mamallapuram is headed. But as they took place after the fieldwork period and thus were not fully investigated, they have been omitted from the main body of work. Chapter 9 “Conclusion” summarises the main findings and arguments of the research.

2 RESEARCH LOCATION: MAMALLAPURAM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the town of Mamallapuram, where the research on stone carving was conducted. It starts by looking at the history of the location and what is known of the site in “Sea trade and Pallava kings: History of Mamallapuram”. This is followed by some of the central characteristics of the state of Tamil Nadu, the present-day town of Mamallapuram and its inhabitants in “Tourism, stone carving and fishing: Mamallapuram today”. The famous rock-carved monuments are also described in brief. The chapter then proceeds to “Foreign visitors in Mamallapuram: a historical overview of travel accounts” that presents examples of historical European travel accounts and other literary sources in which Mamallapuram has been described by foreign visitors throughout the centuries. The main focus of these writings has been on the rock monuments and these accounts have also started the discourse of historical stone carving tradition that continues to the present day. The next part of the chapter, “Images of Mamallapuram in tourist guides”, investigates the way Mamallapuram has been described in the international travel guides and local brochures used by many foreign visitors as a source of information about the location.¹⁰ “Contemporary tourism in Mamallapuram” describes tourism in present-day Mamallapuram. This creates a framework against which also the stone carving industry should be contextualised, although this topic will be explored more in detail in Chapter 5. The last part is a concluding discussion on the main themes of the chapter.

2.2 SEA TRADE AND PALLAVA KINGS: HISTORY OF MAMALLAPURAM

Although archaeological and historical studies of Mamallapuram have been concentrated around the rock monuments made in the 7th and 8th centuries CE during the era of the Pallava kingdom, there are also a few other accounts that reference Mamallapuram before that era. For example, archaeological excavations in the same district have found several megalithic and even older monuments as well as terracotta objects. This suggests that there may have been inhabitants in the region where Mamallapuram is located around 3000 BCE or even before (Ramaswami 1989: 16).

The site of the current Mamallapuram was most probably a port for a few centuries before the monuments were created (Ramaswami 1989: 17). The place was referenced as a port in “Periplus of the Erythraena Sea”, a sailor’s manual written by a Greek of Alexandria. The date of the publication is assumed to be around 60 CE but this has also been disputed. The assumption is based on the “discovery” of south-western monsoons in the Indian seas around the time (ibid.: 17). If this is correct, then Mamal-

¹⁰ Keeping in line with the timing of the field research, the focus here is on the popular international travel guides published before 2012 as well as on travel brochures available to foreign tourists in Mamallapuram between 2009 and 2012. At that time, written guidebooks were still mainly in use as smartphones, wireless internet and travel websites such as Tripadvisor have gained popularity only since then. However, the main attractions listed in Tripadvisor, for example, in 2015 also follow the listings of the guidebooks.

lapuram would have been a port at least in the first century CE. Four Roman authors have written about the large-scale trade between India and the Roman Empire and two of these writings suggest that there was perhaps a port around the site of Mamallapuram. These accounts date to 150 CE, whereas earlier accounts do not provide such implications. However, the names of several ports mentioned in Periplus do not give a definite clarification and therefore it is difficult to know exactly which one of them would have been Mamallapuram (ibid.: 17–23). Two Roman coins have been found from Mamallapuram that date to 400 CE (ibid.: 23). It is likely that Mamallapuram was also on the route to South-East Asia, through which Hinduism and Buddhism spread to these regions (Ramaswami 1989: I, 12).



Image 5: Shore Temple is one of the most famous monolithic rock carvings in Mamallapuram. As the name suggests, it is situated by the sea. It is likely to have been built in the middle of the 7th century CE. It has two principal shrines: one for god Shiva and one for god Vishnu, which is uncommon for Hindu temples that are usually devoted to either one of the deities that represent two different sects within Hinduism (cf. Lockwood 1993: 98–107). Shore Temple is no longer in operation and now looked after by the Archaeological Survey of India that charges entrance fees to the site. Shore Temple is believed to be only a part of larger complex of possibly seven temples by the sea is but the only remaining one, as the others have become submerged by the sea. In December 2004 a tsunami caused by an earthquake in Indonesia affected Mamallapuram, and as the sea reclined people claim that some rock formations resembling temple towers were visible. As the tsunami swept over the Shore Temple site, some new rock carvings were uncovered under the sand. Some recent underwater archaeological studies also support the claim that the original temple complex has been larger than what remains (Mystery of India 2015).

There are also references to Mamallapuram in hymns written by Vaishnava saints that date back to the 5th or 6th centuries. One of them has described Mamallapuram as a busy port where ships with elephants and gems would arrive (Ramaswami 1989: 5; Madhavan 2005: 19). A Chinese traveller of the 7th century writes about Kanchi, a seaport of the Pallava kingdom of South India, which was most likely Mamallapuram since Kanchi, or Kancheepuram as it is today, is located further inland (Sivamurti 1955: 2). The first more certain reference to the region of Mamallapuram as a port can be found in Tamil poetry from the 8th century. In “Peria Thirumozhi”, a Vaishnava saint writes that “Kadalmallai”, that refers here to Mamallapuram, was a port where “boats are full of various luxurious goods” (ibid.: 17). Much later, in 1607 or 1608, in a letter from Indian Venkatapathi Raya of Vijayanagar to King Philip III of Portugal, Mamallapuram was named as an important port (Ramaswami 1989: 43).

A manuscript of a Sanskrit work was discovered in 1916–19 and published under the title “Avantisundari Kathasara”. It is dated back to the 8th century and was written at least partially by an Indian named Dandin who lived in the city Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu. Here can be found the first reference to tourists visiting Mamallapuram. In this fictional story, the author Dandin, who is part of the story and one of the central characters, goes from Kanchipuram to Mamallapuram. In the story Dandin goes to see a temple sculpture of Hindu god Vishnu, whose arm a certain sthapani had repaired and had asked him to evaluate. (Ramaswami 1989: 28–31.) There are clear historical references to this story and Ramaswami states that it is clear that Dandin the author had in fact visited Mamallapuram more than once (ibid.: 30).

Another author, a Tamil named Perudevanar, wrote a quasi-historical poem “Nandikkalambakam” in which several scenes are situated in Mamallapuram. This story praises the Pallava king Nandivarman III who lived around 846–869 CE (Ramaswami 1989: 34). From the period of the Chola kingdom in the 11th century there is an inscription found in the Shore Temple that is related to taxation, which states that there were foreign merchants living in Mamallapuram (Ramaswami 1989: 36). Based on his notes, a great Indian mystic, Sri Krishna Chaitanya, most likely visited Mamallapuram during his pilgrimage to Southern India 1510–1512 (Ramaswami 1989: 40).

Then again P.L. Samy, the author of “Water Cult at Mahabalipuram” (published in Journal of Tamil Studies No. 8. Tuticorin), writes that Mamallapuram seems have been called Nirpeyar before the Pallava period, which would suggest a connection with water. He also suggests that Shore Temple and some other religious structures were also used in an extensive water cult as well as a Naga cult, possibly already before the Pallava era (Ramaswami 1989: 336–338).

The famous rock-carved monument of Mamallapuram were mainly made in the 7th and 8th centuries CE during the era of the Pallava kingdom. The documented history of Tamil Nadu dates back over 6000 years and during that time there have been four great dynasties, known as the Cholas (around 300 BCE to 1300 CE), Cheras (around 300 BCE to 1000 CE), Pandyas (around 600 BCE to 1650 CE and Pallavas (around 300 – 900 CE). (cf. Chaturvedi 2005; Alex & Heidemann 2013: 261–262.) These dynasties ruled different parts of Tamil Nadu and also fought wars over land. Most scholars over the years have agreed that Mamallapuram, including the monuments, were built by the Pallavas but the site itself existed prior to that. The capital of the Pallava dynasty was the current town of Kancheepuram, near Mamallapuram. There has been disagreement in terms of the origins of the Pallavas: for example, it has been suggested that they came from Northern India or Persia, due to stylistic

connections that historians have seen with the Pallava works and North Indian Buddhist rock-cut architecture, the style in the Roman Empire and also in ancient Egypt (Willets 1966: 5), whereas others claim that they were indigenous people of the area (Chaturvedi 2005: 9–82; Rajayyan 2005: 87–91). It is most likely that they belonged to the second highest caste group *ksatriyas*, the warrior caste, because of the uniform name “Varman” of many of the kings (Beck 2006: 22).

There are disputes not only over the authorship of the rock monuments but also over the meaning of them (Ramaswami 1989: 4–5). According to Willets (1966), the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I is often believed to have built the first monuments but in the style inaugurated by his father Mahendravarman. Then later kings Mahendravarman II, Paramesvaravarman and Rajasimha continued the sculptural work (Willets 1966: 6). According to Ramaswami (1989), most monuments were the works of Mamalla and Rajasimha but Nagaswamy (1962) has also suggested that Rajasimha made all of them himself (Ramaswami 1989: 6). What is likely, however, is that several kings took part in the making of the rock carvings since there are over 30 monuments in different styles and some developments can be found, for example in terms of the iconography found in the carvings (Ramaswami 1989: 7). What is more straightforward is the fact that the site of Mamallapuram is almost the only one along the Coramandel Coast that had rock areas suitable for sculptural work and temple excavation on that scale (Ramaswami 1989: 3).

The group of monuments built by the Pallavas consist of temples, caves temples, monoliths and reliefs that have been carved into natural, single rocks. They portray Hindu mythology known these days as Puranas, in a form of architecture rich with sculptures that are tied together and that constitute a single unity. The monuments are scattered around Mamallapuram and on a couple of separate sites just outside of the town. Most of them are situated close to each other on a hill area consisting of mainly large, smooth rocks and cliffs. There are around 30 monuments, some of the famous ones being the Shore Temple, the Great Penance Panel, also known as Arjuna’s Penance, the Descent of Five Rathas or Five Chariots, Ganesha Ratha, Krishna Mandapa, Mahishamardini Cave Temple, Pancha Pandava Cave Temple, Trimurti Cave Temple, Krishna’s Butterball and the Tiger Cave. One of the cave temples, Adivaraha Cave Temple, is the only Pallava monument that is still worshipped (cf. Lockwood 1993; Beck 2006). (See images 5–11 of some of the monuments and descriptions for more details).

Compared to the current Hindu stone carvings, the Pallava figures are thinner and more naturalistic, and some of them depict pastoral scenes with animals and deities in nature. Many art historians have emphasised the fine qualities of the Pallava rock carvings. Scholar Nagaswamy (1989: 8–9) describes the monuments in Mamallapuram as follows:

Mamallapuram art, like other Pallava art, is graceful, serene, svelte. Its sculptured figures are artistically thin, young of face and young of spirit. The Pallava world is a youthful one, gay but seriously religious. It was highly literary in tone and temper. Many of its kings patronised men of letters and one of them was himself an author. Two of them were canonised as saints. Many epic and Purana scenes are depicted in Mamallapuram sculpture... What made the Pallava court for fragrantly literary, so aesthetically delicate? What made the Mamallapuram ethos was this religious and literary sensibility.



Images 6 and 7: The first image presents The Great Penance Panel, also known as “Arjuna’s Penance” and “Descent of Ganga”. It is 30 metres long and 12 metres high, making it the largest open-air relief in India. It was created or commissioned by Pallava King Mahamalla (Narasimha I) in the mid-7th century CE. The relief has been cut into a natural surface of a cliff. The image depicts various Hindu gods, demi-deities and animals that can be related to mythological Hindu stories. Along with Shore Temple, the Great Penance is the best known of the monuments in Mamallapuram. It is located in the middle of the town by the main bus station and the largest temple (cf. Lockwood 1993: 16–46). To the immediate left of the relief panel is a large, unfinished cave temple, known as Pancha Pandava Cave Temple (ibid.:122). Also some other monuments have been left unfinished for reasons unknown. Some historians and archaeologists have suggested that Mamallapuram perhaps served as a training site for ancient stone carvers (see Parker 2001). The second image portrays Five Rathas or Five Chariots that are a group of five monuments just on the outskirts of Mamallapuram. They consist of five different, free-standing single-rock carvings. Four of them represent chariots or rathas, processional temple cars used mainly during religious festivals to house deities. One of the monuments is an elephant. Again, all the carvings have been left unfinished (cf. Lockwood 1993: 64–85).

The monuments in Mamallapuram were not the only carving works that were produced by the Pallava kingdom; several cave temples can be found in Tamil Nadu. However, these earlier works are not considered to have the same level of artistic creativity as the ones found in Mamallapuram. As art historian Elisabeth Beck (2006: i) writes:

It was, however, nothing but a prelude to the outburst of sculptural creativity in Mamallapuram, which is full of magnificent sculptures, carved from their natural background, the walls of the monolithic temples – slim and elegant figures, lyrical in their absorption, noble in their restrained strength and irresistible in action...

It was one of the rare moments in the history of art: on one hand, there was a continuous line of great cultured kings, religious minded with a strong artistic bent, who patronised art and architecture in the most generous way. On the other hand, there was a young religious movement, which would overshadow and relegate the Vedic gods by the great trinity Brahma-Vishnu-Siva and which was not yet bound by the symbolism and orthodox rigidity of later centuries, giving the artists all the freedom to create – to express his visionary inspiration or psychic curiosity or whatever it was by which his imagination was kindled.

When the British architect William Chambers visited the site today known as Mamallapuram in 1772, he did not see all of the monuments, most likely because they were buried under the sand. This led to an assumption that the area was deserted. Tamil poets, however, show that the site was not forgotten. Also the Sthalasayana Perumal temple in Mamallapuram has descriptions on its walls, the last from the 16th century, that show the site was used for pilgrimage at certain times of the year (Ramaswami 1989: 4). Therefore, if the site has been deserted for some periods of time, this would have happened between the last inscriptions in the temple and Chambers' first visit in 1772 (ibid.: 13).

Based on Tamil literature, different names emerge from Tamil literature for the place currently known as Mamallapuram. In one of the ancient Tamil songs, "Tirumangai Aalwaar", Mamallapuram is believed to have been referred to as Kadal-mallai Tala'sayana, which can be translated as "the hill near the sea". This may mean the hill-like granite outcrop in which a large part of the rock monuments have been carved (Willetts 1966: 3). Another Indian name for the site has been Nirpeyarru (Ramaswami 1989: 4). The name Mahabalipuram, on the other hand, can be found to have basis in the Puranas, and the name was already in use when Europeans started to visit Mamallapuram (ibid.: 3). However, in the European accounts dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries, it was known by names with very many different spellings and variations, such as Mavalivarao, Mavalipuram, Mauvelivaram, Mahabalipooram, Mahabalipuram, Mavellipuram, Mavaliveram and so on (Willetts 1966: 3). All these names refer to "Mahamalla", the "Great Wrestler" who is believed to have been one of the Pallava kings, Narasimhavarman I, and also thought to be the founder of Mamallapuram (ibid.: 3). In historical European accounts, especially from earlier periods, Mamallapuram was also often named as "Seven Pagodas", based on the story that there would originally have been seven temples on the sea shore (Ramaswami 1989).

Ramaswami (1989) states that although modern studies of Mamallapuram have improved the knowledge of the history of the site, not just about the monuments, there are questions that remain unclear. What was Mamallapuram like before the Pallavas made it famous and after them, in the Middle Ages? (Ramaswami 1989: 10–11). Historical records show that the history of the site is at least 2000 years old. Just before or after



Image 8: A detail of an open-air relief known as Krishna Mandapa. The image depicts god Krishna lifting the mountain of Govardhana (cf. Beck 2006: 249–255).



Image 9: A detail of Krishna Mandapa relief. When the British architect William Chambers visited the site today known as Mamallapuram in 1772, he did not see all of the monuments, most likely because they were buried under the sand. This led to an assumption that the area was deserted. Tamil poets, however, show that the site was not forgotten. Also the Sthalasayana Perumal temple in Mamallapuram has descriptions on its walls, the last from the 16th century, that show the site was used for pilgrimage at certain times of the year (Ramaswami 1989: 4). Therefore, if the site has been deserted for some periods of time, this would have happened between the last inscriptions in the temple and Chambers' first visit in 1772 (ibid.: 13).

the start of the Christian era, the site was a port and was part of the trade that India conducted with the Roman Empire. In the medieval era the site was used at least for pilgrimage but the artistic work, at least on such a large scale, seems to have ceased after the fall of the Pallava dynasty in the 9th century. After the Pallavas, the site was part of the Chola kingdom, when it remained or became a large trading centre with foreign merchants and continued to be important until the 12th and 13th centuries. After the Cholas the Pandyas came from the north, and they also built the Sthalasayana Perumal temple, the main Hindu temple of the town which still functions today (ibid.: 12).

The British East India Company arrived in the area in 1639 and they created the Madras Residency, which consisted of present-day Tamil Nadu, as well as parts of the neighbouring states of Kerala, Andra Pradesh and Karnataka. The British left the local kings in their positions to collect taxes and exercise power because of their concept of indirect rule. Once India became independent in 1947, the Madras Residency was divided into the current states and Madras became the capital of Tamil Nadu. Madras was renamed Chennai, its former name, in 1996 (Alex & Heidemann 2013: 262). As a result of its close proximity with the capital, Mamallapuram has attracted foreign visitors throughout its colonial history, as will become apparent in the next section of this chapter.



Image 10: A rock known as “Krishna’s butterball” on the hill area in the middle of Mamallapuram in which most ancient monuments are located. Nowadays the area is a park with free entrance. In addition to the monuments, several set of steps have been carved into the cliffs.



Image 11: Ganesha Ratha is a monolithic cave temple carved out of a single rock. This cave temple is also still in operation. It was made in the late 7th century CE by King Paramesvara I. The temple is dedicated to god Shiva. However, the image of Shiva was removed at the turn of the 8th century and has since been replaced by a statue of elephant-headed god Ganesh, who is Shiva's son (Lockwood 1993: 48–49).

2.3 TOURISM, STONE CARVING AND FISHING: MAMALLAPURAM TODAY

The town of Mamallapuram is situated on the Coromandel Coast by the Bay of Bengal, in the Kancheepuram district, in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India. Tamil Nadu is located on the southeastern side of the Indian peninsula and covers an area of 130,000 square kilometres. According to the 2011 census it had a total population of just over 72 million. The state capital is Chennai (formerly Madras) and the official state languages are Tamil and English. Tamil Nadu has different climatic zones and the coastal and river areas are used for agriculture and grow for example rice, bananas, sugarcane, peanuts, mango and tapioca. It has been known as the “ricebowl of India” due to good yields that are a result of efficient practices, including irrigation around the dry regions. Coffee, tea, fruits and spices are grown in the mountain areas (Alex & Heidemann 2011: 261–262).

The economy of Tamil Nadu has enjoyed a very high growth rate over the last decade. GSDP in 2009–10 was 101.2 billion USD, 142.3 in 2012–13 and 161,2 in 2014–15 (IBEF 2017). As of 2012 it has been the second largest economy in India and also the most urbanised state. Tamil Nadu was ranked among the top 5 states in India in the Human Development Index in 2006. The key industries of the state are automobiles and auto components, IT, banking and finance, pharmaceuticals, agro and food processing, electronic hardware, cement, textiles and leather products, and tourism (ibid.). It has a 21.20 per cent share in overall automobile exports from India and is the first state in terms of numbers of factories and industrial workers, for example. Infrastructure in the state is well developed, with road and rail networks and there are many important ports and a number of airports across the state. Tamil Nadu had 16 operational SEZs (special economic zones) for IT industries in 2016. (IBEF 2017; see also Möttölä 2006.) Tamil Nadu, among some other South Indian coastal states, has also attracted the most foreign capital and a significant amount of this has been greenfield enterprises, such as automobiles (Tomlinson 2013: 198). The state has also invested in improving infrastructure for tourism development. For example, Tamil Nadu is one of the leading destinations for medical tourism and hospital facilities have been built for this purpose (IBEF 2017).

Mamallapuram is some 58 km south of the Chennai and the former French colony and nowadays the autonomous state of Puducherry (formerly Pondicherry) is about 90 km south of Mamallapuram. These three places are connected by the coastal highway East Coast Road (ECR), and the state administrative capital Kancheepuram and the important railroad junction Chengalpattu are within few hours’ drive from Mamallapuram. Despite its small size, Mamallapuram has good connections to the neighbouring villages, towns and cities, and several busloads of people commute and travel daily between the places for both work and leisure. The administrative status of Mamallapuram is Town Panchayat, and its official classification is a town.

Present-day Mamallapuram is a small but a bustling heritage town with a lively tourist scene. Its former days as an international port are over but a large part of the town is formed of a fishing community, where fishermen go on daily trips on their boats and sell fish in Mamallapuram and Chennai, depending on their catch. Adjacent to the fishing village are other local communities that together create the town. The Pallava rock monuments attract a large number of both Indian and foreign tourists each year, and most of them have been listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites since 1984. Alongside these historical carvings, a lively stone carving tradition has developed, a phenomena that will be explored in detail throughout the thesis.



Image 12: Fishermen beach is used for fishing but also for swimming and surfing by tourists and locals alike

At the time of my fieldwork the main sources of income and employment for the inhabitants of Mamallapuram were tourism, such as hotels and restaurants, stone carving, different small retail business and fishing, as well as agricultural work in the nearby villages in which some families also own land. Many people also went to Chennai for different types of work, such as factory work, construction and business.

In the 2011 census there were 15,172 inhabitants in Mamallapuram, of which 8036 were male and 7136 female (Census 2011). Some 1,575 of them were aged 0–6 years. Female Sex Ratio is of 888 against Tamil Nadu state average of 996 and the Child Sex Ratio is around 977 compared to the state average of 943. The average life expectancy is above 65 years.¹¹ According to the 2011 census, Literacy rate of Mamallapuram city is 85.52 per cent higher than state average of 80.09 per cent. In Mamallapuram, male literacy is around 91.27 per cent and female literacy rate is 78.97 per cent. The main religion is Hinduism (88,22 per cent), followed by Christianity (7,19 per cent) and Islam (4,48 per cent) (ibid.).

In terms of the official caste groupings in Mamallapuram, 35 per cent of the town inhabitants belonged Backward Castes (BC), followed Scheduled Castes (SC) with 26 per cent. Other Backward Castes (OBC) constituted 24 per cent of the inhabitants and 10 per cent of the people belonged to Open Category (OC). Scheduled Tribes (ST) constituted 5 per cent of the inhabitants.¹² Within these official caste categories there are several smaller groups or communities by which people identify themselves that create further social markers between the people. In addition to religion, caste and community status play an important role, especially when marriages are arranged

¹¹ Information given by Mamallapuram Town Panchayat Office in 2012.

¹² Information given by Mamallapuram Town Panchayat Office in 2012.

between different families. However, economic factors also have an increasingly significant role today and may either enhance or reduce one's social position next to caste and religion also in Mamallapuram (cf. Tenhunen and Säävälä 2007: 43–63). The state of Tamil Nadu has a high number of low-status caste groups, which in turn has created a particular political climate in which political parties rejecting high-caste or Brahmin hegemony have dominated in recent decades. At the same time, there is also a separate, strong Dalit movement in Tamil Nadu that fights against the dominance of caste Hindus and oppression of Dalit people (Alex & Heidemann 2013: 262). This common social ideology was also reflected in Mamallapuram, where middle or high-caste groups formed a minority.

2.4 FOREIGN VISITORS IN MAMALLAPURAM: AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL TRAVEL ACCOUNTS

Historical records and various travel accounts show that Mamallapuram has been visited frequently by various European scholars and travellers throughout the centuries:

Since the early 17th century Mahabalipuram has received a steady stream of visitors – mostly, until fairly recently, Europeans ... antiquarians professional or amateurs; excursionists; artists; photographers; clerics; soldiers; adventurers; excursionists; some bored, some enthusiastic, some informed, some ignorant, critical or credulous, but almost all of them bursting to record their impressions of the site (Willets 1966: 1).

The first European map on which Mamallapuram was mentioned was the Carta Catalana from 1375, which was a world map made in Spain. It was produced for King Charles V of France and has been said to be the most comprehensive cartographic work of the century, including additions for example based on the travels of the Venetian merchant Marco Polo. (Ramaswami 1989: 364.) When Marco Polo came to Santhome, an area nowadays part of Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu; he may have also heard about Mamallapuram although he did not visit the place. As a result, the site was included on the Catalan map and was also situated in the correct place (ibid.: 13, 366.) On it Mamallapuram was named “Setelmelti” but Ramaswami (1989) assumes that is an error and the name should have been Sette Templi. This means “Seven Pagodas”; a name that was used to refer to Mamallapuram at the time the South Asian peninsula appeared on that map for the first time in European history (ibid.: 364). One of the earliest references of Mamallapuram as Seven Pagodas is the account by Gasparo Balbi from 1582, also a Venetian merchant, who travelled to India in the second part of the 16th century (Willets 1996: 9). He sailed from the town of Nagapattinam, also found in present day Tamil Nadu, to Santhome, and saw what he thought to be seven or eight pagodas that he thought resembled Chinese architecture (Ramaswami 1989: 42–43). By around 1660, the site of Mamallapuram was named Seven Pagodas on a Dutch map of South India and it also appears under the same name on other European maps during the 17th and 18th century (ibid.: 42–43). The first English reference to the name “Seven Pagodas” is most likely a letter sent in 1708 to the commander of an English ship (Ramaswami 1989: 43). In 1794 the site was called Mish-bali-puram or Mauvelivaram on a British map (ibid.: 366).

There are several European accounts and studies in which Mamallapuram is mentioned from the 18th century, mostly written by the British and which concentrate on the rock-carved monuments. Authors have tried to describe and understand the architecture and sculptures that they have seen, some of them published in journals focusing on Oriental topics and especially Asia (Willetts 1966: 9–12). Pierre Sonnerat's book "A voyage to the East Indies and China; Performed by Order of Lewis XV. Between Years 1774 and 1781" was considered to be a detailed and in-depth account of Hindu religion and mythology of the time. Mamallapuram is also mentioned in this volume by a reference to a temple named Seven Pagodas. (Ramaswami 1989: 45.) Some writings focused on the people encountered in India, such as the "Sketches chiefly relating to the History, Religion, Learning and manners, of the Hindoos" by Q. Crauford from 1792. The very first systematic European description of Mamallapuram was published in 1788 by William Chambers in the first volume of Asiatic Researches, Calcutta. His article was entitled "Some account of the Sculptures and Ruins at Mavalipuram, a place a few miles north of Sadras, and known to seamen by the name of Seven Pagodas". It was based on his personal visits to the site in 1772 and 1776 (Ramaswami, 1989: 45, 49; see also Willetts 1966: 11).

Portuguese Paolino da San Bartholomo described his encounter with Mamallapuram as follows:

I now pursued my way back to Pudukkeri (from Kovalam) but by a different route, in order that I might see the seven pagodas which are situated on the seacoast between Covalam and Sadras. But how shall I describe this master-piece of ancient Indian architecture? It consists of seven temples, cut out by artist in rock of the hardest stone, in a mountain covered with trees. Never in my life did I behold a work of the like kind. The entrance fronts the sea, from which it is not far distant, and consists of a passage cut out in the solid rock, forming part of the summit of the mountain. The sides of this passage, which is about twenty Roman Palms in breadth and fifteen in height, is covered with figures of different sacred animals cut out, of their natural size. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 54.)

Here the author shows his appreciation for the rock-cut architecture and the account appears in his book "A Voyage to the East Indies; Containing an account of the Manners, Customs and of the Natives, with a Geographical Description of the Country. Collected from Observations made during a Residence of Thirteen Years, between 1776 and 1789, in Districts little Frequented by Europeans" (1800) (ibid.). He also described what could be considered an early form of tourist trade with the locals:

I was attended by five Brahmins, who all spoke Portuguese, and gave me an explanation of everything I saw. The information I received from them I immediately wrote down, and paid them five rupees for their trouble. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 55.)

Similar descriptions and studies but now larger in numbers continued to be published throughout the 19th century. There are several references to Mamallapuram from each decade of the 19th century, some of them letters or published travel accounts from India. Again the focus is on the monuments, their meanings and possible interpretations (Willetts 1966: 12–41). In 1811 M. J. Haafner wrote in his "Voyage dans la Peninsula occidentale de l'Inde et dans l'Île de Ceilan" as follows:

Whatever one might say against the Hindu, one will be convinced on coming to Maweliwaram or Matwalipuram that this people had possessed in ancient times a great degree of culture and the sciences, and that arts have flourished in this country. The ruins which one finds here as well as elsewhere in India surpass all that one knew in this genre, including the famous Egyptian pyramids.

(...)

The sight of these enormous ruins of building, so magnificent in ancient times, filled me with melancholy thoughts on the instability of human beings. It is here, I said to myself, that a great and famous city raised to the heavens 20 towers and 100 places. But today a miserable small village, where some poor Brahmins live in thatched huts. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 67.)

A female traveller Maria Graham described the monuments in detail in her “Journal of a Residence in India” (see Ramaswami 1989: 67–72). Mrs Maria Graham was a daughter of a British rear admiral, niece of an admiral and a wife of a naval captain. She visited Madras and the areas nearby for the second time in 1811 and spent three days in Mamallapuram seeing most of the monuments. Graham’s two books from 1813 and 1814 that dealt with her time in India, included her several drawings of the monuments in Mamallapuram, possibly played an important role in making the place known and popular among the general public back in Europe (ibid.: 72). Also several other British visitors to Mamallapuram also produced sketches, drawings and also photographs that had the monuments as their subject.

At the same time, not all of them were impressed by or admired the rock carvings, as described in some of the examples above. One of them was Dr Benjamin Heyne, who states in his “Tracts, Historical and Statistical, on India; with Journals of Several Tours through parts of the Peninsula; also an Account of Sumatra in a Series of letters.” (1814) as follows:

Let others admire the sculptures on the rock, for my part I consider them hideous caricatures. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 74.)

Heyne was a Moravian missionary, botanist and a mineralogist who served the East India company. He was not an art historian, which may reflect his viewpoint (Ramaswami 1989: 74).

Only a couple of these historical European descriptions mention anything about the local people and their life in Mamallapuram. In Bishop Reginald Heber’s (British) account there is a short reference to the village and its inhabitants, and interestingly it also includes a mention of a form of tourist trade:

These ruins cover a great space; a few small houses, inhabited by Brahmins, are scattered among them, and there is one large and handsome temple of Vishnu of later date and in pretty good repair, the priests of which chiefly live by showing the ruins. One of them acted as our cicerone, and seemed the only person in the place who spoke Hindoostanee. Two boys preceded with a pipe and a small pair of cymbals, and their appearance among these sculptures was very picturesque and beautiful. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 82.)

This account is from his published work "Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824–1825 (with Notes upon Ceylon). An Account of Journey to Madras and Southern Provinces, 1826 and Letters written in India" from 1828. Here, as well as in several other accounts, the local people are usually always named as "Brahmins" that "act as guides and tell about a story of a ruined city that is now under the ocean, in some accounts referred to as "the city of great Bali", that is Maha-Bali-Pooram." (Ramaswami 1989: 81). This again points to the legend of the "Seven Pagodas" that suggests that Shore Temple is just one of the seven similar rock temples that existed on the sea shore but all others are now under the sea.

"A Guide to the City of Madras and its Suburbs" (1875) has a section that informs the reader about Mamallapuram and the sculptures, but also that there is a Brahmin village in the neighbourhood but "no bungalow for the travellers and very little supplies". Yet, here Mamallapuram is listed under "holiday retreats", alongside other places in the area (ibid.: 114). But guidebooks on Mamallapuram especially for foreign visitors had already been published before this title. For example, Braddock, J., et al. published a guide to the monuments in 1844 titled "A Guide to the Sculptures, Excavations, and other remarkable objects at Mamallapur, generally known to Europeans as "the Seven Pagodas". This guide was thought to be the best of the time (Willetts 1966: 26). John Braddock was a lieutenant, and the co-authors of this piece were reverends and civil servants of colonial British India. "The Imperial Guide to India" (1904) states that:

No one should leave Madras without a visit to these most interesting remains at Mahabalipur. The journey to Balipitham [at the entrance to the village] is made by canal boat..." (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 128.)

During the time there was a water-passage between Mamallapuram and Madras, called the Buckingham Canal, and the journey took about 12 hours and would be made usually by night. This was due to the lack of a proper road to the site.

Frequent foreigner visits to Mamallapuram were noted in an April issue of a Tamil magazine from Madras "Viveka Sein Tamil" from 1894. This piece also encourages local Indian people to visit the site. S.M. Natesa Sastri writes:

If any place in our South India is famous for wonderful sculptural works, it is Mahabalipuram. That is why, on every holiday, white men go there and return. Further, they have written many books about it and its sculptures.

Many among ourselves [Indians] cannot have seen Mahabalipuram. Only a few living in Chengalpattu or in Madras have the good fortune of enjoying sights in this town. Everybody should go there and enjoy the rare sights to be found there. (Translated and reproduced in Ramaswami 1989: 118–119.)

In addition to the personal writings and travel guides, the number of academic studies and publications increased further when approaching the 20th century. The emphasis in them reflects the colonial interest when India was still part of the British Empire and information was also obtained from the colonial register, a trend that had started in the previous centuries. One of the forms were archaeological surveys, such as the Archaeological Survey of Southern Indian Annual Reports 1884–1902, in which Mahabalipuram was also included (Willetts 1966: 41).

More English guidebooks were published in the 20th century that introduced Mamallapuram to foreign visitors, such as “Mahabalipuram or Seven Pagodas” (1949) and “Mahabalipuram” (1968). At the time there were no hotels in which to stay in Mamallapuram, and also food would be needed to be carried along. However, the 1968 guidebook already informs the reader that there are now two good roads connecting Mahabalipuram with the capital. (Ramaswami 1989: 170.) Some other 20th century travel accounts also mention Mamallapuram. The vast majority concentrate on analysing Mamallapuram from the perspective of arts, crafts, architecture and archaeology, as well as the history of Tamil Nadu and its peoples. In 1914 J.S. Coombes writes in “The Seven Pagodas” that “People from all parts of the world visit the remains of these ancient sculptures” (reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 140). Then again, F.G. Pierce writes in his article “Silence”, published in the “Modern Review” (Calcutta 1924) as follows:

There is something rather sinister in the silence of that particular place [the Shore Temple] as though events of an unpleasant character had taken place there a long time ago, the effects of which not even centuries of sea-breeze and sea-spray have yet been able to entirely efface. But there is something joyous and light-hearted about the excavated temples. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 179.)

Pierce’s impression of the monuments was thus not only positive; he had felt a gloomy atmosphere around Shore Temple. That may refer to the site being known to have functioned as a site of worship for centuries that could have included different types of rituals. In 1945 the French author Louis Revel writes an admiring account in “The Fragrance of India” about the monuments, which he most likely visited in 1937 (Ramaswami 1989: 220–223). Also the German Count Harmann Keyserling in “The Travel Diary of a Philosopher” in 1959 writes about the monuments, which he considers as works of art, as well as some of his impressions of the town.

Mahabalipuram must, once upon a time, probably thanks to the transient caprice of a rajah, have been one single workshop in which thousands of hands hammered, bored, attempted, improved and rarely perfected, in order to suddenly be deserted again. This is what one suspects, but we know nothing. Today only a few poor fisherman and a handful of Brahmins live here, lean sheep wander among the ruins in search of their scanty food. (Reprinted in Ramaswami 1989: 261.)

Duncan Forbes, in his “Heart of India” (1968), also visits the monuments in Mamallapuram and describes them briefly in his work (Ramaswami 1989: 300).

As well as the above, academic research of Mamallapuram conducted by Europeans continued throughout the 20th century. In 1911 V.A. Smith published “A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon from the Earliest Times to the Present Day” and E.B Havell published “The Ideals of Indian Art”, and also wrote “A Handbook of Indian Art” (1920) (Willets 1966: 44). Another prominent figure focusing on Indian arts was Stella Kramrisch, who included Mahabalipuram in her studies, such as in “Hindu Temple” (1950) and “The Art of India” (1955) (ibid.). Some European studies were also accompanied and co-authored by local scholars, as an increasing number of Indian scholars also focused on studying the monuments as the 20th century pro-

ceeded.¹³ As European understanding of the theories of art and Hinduism changed over time, new approaches and understandings were also used when analysing the carvings found in Mamallapuram.

What becomes pivotal in these accounts from over several centuries is the role of the stone-carved monuments in Mamallapuram that have been mostly admired but also despised in some instances. They also show how foreign encounters and tourism have been a part of the history of Mamallapuram. Local people living in their huts have offered their services to the visitors as guides and told stories that have further created the enigmatic discourse that surrounds the monuments.

These historical accounts also serve as a basis of the image of Mamallapuram in more recent travel media of the late 20th and early 21st century. Contemporary international travel guides and websites portray Mamallapuram primarily as a stone carving centre with a long historical tradition, as will be discussed in the next section. However, what can be noted based on the historical writings is the fact that there are no remarks on an ongoing stone carving tradition. The monuments in Mamallapuram have been viewed as historical ruins and art historical specimens that have remained shrouded in mystery for centuries. What is different today, however, is the current carving tradition that has emerged alongside the historical monuments.

2.5 IMAGES OF MAMALLAPURAM IN TOURIST GUIDES

Travel guides, brochures and websites are important for constructing and creating an image of a travel destination before the actual travel experience, as well as shaping the lived tourist experience at the time of travel (cf. Buck 1977; Britton 1979; Dilley 1986; Wicks and Schutt 1991; Selwyn 1996; Echtner 2003; Salazar and Graburn 2014). Many tourists and travellers wish to find information about their travel destination in advance when planning holidays and travels. Especially with countries like India, where there is a plethora of destinations to choose from, travel guides have the power to influence people's decisions about whether to visit a certain place at all. Salazar and Graburn (2014: 1) argue that "tourism involves the human capacity to imagine or enter into the imaginings of others", and this has been effectively used by destination marketers in the travel media. However, according to Leite (2014: 264) we need to distinguish tourism imaginaries from tourist imaginaries from a theoretical perspective. Tourism imaginaries refer to the factors that are not particularly related to tourism but become culturally important in tourism settings. These are for example conceptions, images and imaginings of the place, people, its history and the social order that are held by both tourists and the local population. Tourist imaginaries then again are "shared, composite images of a place or people, whether as general types or as particular destinations, held by tourists, would-be tourists, and not-yet tourists as a result of widely circulating imagery and ideas." (ibid: 264). When looking at an

¹³ Studies were made by Indian scholars, such as "South Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses" (1916) by H. Krishna Sastri and "The Antiquities of Mahabalipuram" by S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, published in the *Indian Antiquary Journal* in 1917 (Willets 1966: 46–47). P.V. Jagadisa Iyer wrote a work entitled "South Indian Shrines" (1922) and R. Gopalan wrote a master's thesis with the title "History of the Pallavas of Kanchi" in 1928, in which he analysed the monuments and their history (ibid.: 49, 52). However, one of the most prominent art scholars of Indian origin was Ananda Coomaraswamy, who became one of the best known art critics and experts on Indian arts of the era.

image of a place in the context of tourism, both should be considered as they together construct the image or a discourse of place that in turn shape the expectations and consequent experience of a tourist.

Popular travel information sources, such as and brochures, give very uniform information about Mamallapuram. They concentrate on the ancient rock-carved monuments as well as the present-day stone carving. In some guides the beach is also mentioned, though often with less enthusiasm, as well as some of the local festivals. In addition, travel guides emphasise the fact that there are a lot of tourist services available in Mamallapuram and that it can be easily accessed with good transport options.

Travel guides usually all begin by explaining to the reader about the ancient history of Mamallapuram and the origin of the rock-carved monuments. For example, Lonely Planet India, which is the most popular of the guide books and mostly used by backpackers or independent travellers, describes Mamallapuram in its 2011 edition as being famous for its shore temples and for being the second capital and sea port of the Pallava kings in Kancheepuram who established themselves as the patrons of early Tamil culture, and were responsible for the ancient temples and rock carvings in Mamallapuram. The Footprint India Handbook (2009) informs the reader that “Mamallapuram” is the official name of the town that comes from the Pallava ruler Narasimhavarman I Pallavamalla who ruled in Tamil Nadu in 630–668 CE. “Mamalla” means a great wrestler, the name given to the ruler. Eyewitness Travel Guide: India (2011) lists Mamallapuram as a historic site of Tamil Nadu and it is introduced in the text as a UNESCO World Heritage Site that used to be a major port city and was built in the 7th century. According to the Insight Guide South India (2008: 137), Mamallapuram is “a beach resort, a tiny village by the sea and an extraordinary showcase for Tamil art.”

After listing of some of the famous monuments, these guide books inform the reader that the stone carving tradition is far from being over but still very much alive in Mamallapuram. Lonely Planet writes:

Stone carving is still very much a living craft in Mahabalipuram, as a visit to any of the scores of sculpture workshops in and around town testifies (2011: 993).

Mahabalipuram has revived the ancient crafts of the stonemasons and sculptors, and the town wakes up every day to the sound of chisels chipping away at pieces of granite (ibid.: 999).

It continues that many workshops in Mamallapuram make images of Hindu deities for the temples around India and you can buy examples of this work from the craft shops (ibid.: 999).

Equally, Eyewitness Travel Guide: India (2002) states that the stone carving tradition is “still alive and can be witnessed in the number of workshops scattered around the town. The Footprint India Handbook (2009: 912) writes that:

Mamallapuram is most likely the most industrious seat of Hindu idol-making the world over; everywhere you look masons sit on their haunches hammering away at the local dolerite rock.

The Footprint India Handbook (2009: 912) also mentions that there is a Government School of Sculpture that can be visited. In addition, this guide also tells the reader

about “stone temple pilot” Stephen Cox, who is a well-know British artist who, under sponsorship by the British Council, came to Mamallapuram to make his huge stone works for the Indian Triennale and for the national art prize. In the book Cox explains his choice to come to work in Mamallapuram as follows (912):

I didn't go to India to work with like-minded contemporary artists, I wanted people who could work with great big blocks of stone without fear. Mahabalipuram is totally unique in having this unbroken, living tradition of making idols for people to pray to, and that means that they are also used to working with huge monolithic stone so no one is daunted by making my 14-tonne sculptures.

(...)

My raison d'être for working in India is because, in working amongst the temple carvers, I can immerse myself in a living antique tradition.

But he is not impressed with the changes that have taken place in the town with the increase of tourism since his arrival in 1986. Although he greatly admires the ancient monuments, “I only hope fewer and fewer people come,” he says (ibid.: 912).

The same guide summarises Mamallapuram as follows (209):

Mahabalipuram's mix of magnificent historic rock temples, exquisite alfresco bas reliefs and inviting sandy beach bestows a formidable magnetism, and it has matured into a buzzing backpacker hamlet, complete with all the high-power Kashmiri salesmanship and insistent begging that such a role implies. Though the beach and ocean are dirty enough to make you think twice about swimming, the craftsmanship that built the temples continues today and the whole place echoes with the sound of chisels tapping industriously on stone.



Image 13: Scenes of Mamallapuram that include Shore Temple are typical representations of Mamallapuram in the tourism media. The area around the site is also popular for spending free time, especially among Indian visitors and local families.

Guidebooks then continue by presenting some of the annual local festivals that may also interest tourists and inform readers about practicalities such as transportation, accommodation and eating.

The travel brochures of Mamallapuram published by the Tamil Nadu Government's Department of Tourism are not much different from the international tourist guides in their descriptions of Mamallapuram. The same applies to the official website of Tamil Nadu Tourism (Tamil Nadu Tourism 2014). Their brochures are titled "Mamallapuram – Portraits in Sand and Stone" (2002, 2009). The website calls Mamallapuram "Poetry in Stone". The brochures state that "Mamallapuram offers glimpses of the glory of the Pallava kings and the creativity of the craftsman, who is both a supreme artist and a devotee. No wonder that the sunny beach, silvery sand, and splendours of sculpture are visited by tourists from all over the world" (ibid.: 2002, 2009.). The brochures and the website list the most famous monuments and highlight the Dance Festival in January. In addition, they give brief listings of the main tourist services available in Mamallapuram. The brochures are available in the Mamallapuram tourist office as well as in many of the travel agencies and guest houses in the town.

The uniform images of Mamallapuram given to the tourists have an impact on how the tourists view the place and shape their expectations and obligations. Tourists came to Mamallapuram expecting to see some stone carvings and monuments but also feel that they "should" see them in order to make the most of their travel experience. Although during my fieldwork it was in fact difficult to avoid seeing any stone carving workshops since they lined most of the main streets of the town, it was possible not to see any of the famous monuments. Shore Temple and Five Rathas, two of the most famous places of visit, are in fact situated on the edge of the town and quite far away from the beach area where most of the tourist guest houses and restaurants were located. The park where most of the other monuments are situated is also on the other side of the town. Therefore, if a tourist were to venture to the town without any desire to know about or see the monuments, she or he could spend her time for example by surfing and swimming at the beach and sitting in the restaurants. Maybe they could get to know some of the locals and be invited to a wedding ceremony or a fishing trip. During my fieldwork there were also a huge number of souvenir shops in Mamallapuram that sold other items than stone carvings, mainly handicrafts from North India. They looked colourful and often more inviting compared to the dusty and grey stone carving shops. Therefore, tourists could also ignore stone carving if they have no particular interest in the subject.

Bandyopadhyay and Morais (2005) have noted that the American tourist media represents India as a timeless and primitive country, very much in line with colonial discourse. In comparison, India's self-representation in national travel promotions somewhat resisted this image with aspects of postcolonial nationalism, but at the same time it also confirmed and fed the American imaginary. The authors point out that since India's national identity is very much tied to colonial history on one hand and world capitalism on the other, it is difficult to distinguish the foreign and local representations of the country. India markets itself as a brand that attracts tourists, and the travel media corresponds to those views that are beneficial from a commercial perspective (ibid.). Targeting India to foreign visitors in particular has been central to tourism development in India, which led to the "Incredible India" marketing campaign in 2002. The key aspect of this campaign was to brand India as an exotic and diverse destination with contemporary values, and to shift the focus away from the image of India as a poor, developing country (Hannam & Diekmann 2011: 20–24; see also Kant 2009; Gupta et al. 2002; Panda & Mishra 2006; Singh 1998.) One aspect

of tourism development in India has been the promotion of various heritage sites, which often contributed towards the development of a specialised souvenir industry (Hannam & Diekmann 2011: 47–66; Timothy 2005). These themes also correspond with the way Mamallapuram has been constructed as a stone carving centre by both foreign tourist guides but also by the national tourism promotion schemes, since this brand has proven to be successful. According to Dallen (2011: 276–279) there is no clear evidence that the UNESCO listing of a place increases the number of tourists, but nevertheless UNESCO World Heritage Site status is used as a marketing tool and a way to brand a place. This is very much the case with Mamallapuram.

Tourism research has also suggested that one of the reason why so-called Western tourists are so fixated with the past and interested in seeing historical monuments is life in the post-industrial world (cf. MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990). “Modern” lifestyles are complex and stressful and people are believed to long for past times when life was believed to be simpler or more “authentic”. This usually refers to pre-industrial times before the invention of modern machines, time keeping, working hours and the birth of big, busy cities. In turn, this would also partly explain why people wish to travel to so-called developing countries, where they can still get a glimpse of what they believe to be more harmonious and peaceful lifestyles. Historical monuments remind people of times gone by. Any living tradition that can be traced back to historical times is glorified following the same line of thinking, despite the changes that have often affected the tradition over the years. On the other hand, historical monuments can also be seen as “tourist markers” that are important for creating a sense of “authentic tourist experience” (cf. MacCannell 1976; Rojek 1997; Dallen 2011). Different things such as cities, towns, buildings, bridges, towers, rivers, lakes, monuments, activities and so on have become tourist attractions, since they are recognised by tourists. They are familiar to tourists usually in advance based on the information provided by the tourism discourse that is created by guide books, newspapers, postcards, photographs, souvenirs and stories of others. They have become markers, signs and symbols of tourism in a semiotic sense. When tourists see these markers, they recognise the place and they may feel that their tourist experience and obligation is fulfilled. Without seeing them, tourists may feel that something was missing from their experience or they may not recognise the place at all (ibid). In Mamallapuram the most important tourist markers are thus the ancient monuments and stone carving and most tourists come to the town especially to see them.

2.6 CONTEMPORARY TOURISM IN MAMALLAPURAM

Mamallapuram is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the state of Tamil Nadu and South India. Annually it attracts hundreds of thousands of Indian and foreign visitors alike¹⁴. For example, the number of foreign arrivals to Tamil Nadu in 2010 was 2,804 687, which was 15.7 per cent of the total number of foreign arrivals to India that year (Singh et al. 2012: 16). Mamallapuram township was constituted as a health resort in 1964 and today it comes under the Special Tourism Area category. The Department of Tourism in the Tamil Nadu Government advertises Mamallapuram in

¹⁴Based on the number of entrance tickets sold by the Archaeological Survey of India to see the main attractions Shore Temple and Five Rathas, there were 2,143,110 Indian visitors and 99,671 foreign visitors that came to Mamallapuram in 2009 (Tourist Office, Mamallapuram and the Archaeological Survey of India, Mamallapuram).

their various promotional schemes and as noted, the town has also been mentioned in various popular international travel guides.

The main international tourist season in Mamallapuram is during the winter months of the northern hemisphere from late December to March. After this the temperatures start to rise again for the summer, and the uncomfortable hot period of the year from April to June sees very few foreign tourists. A few tourists start to visit the town again from July onwards until the main annual monsoon of South India takes place in November and early December.

Most of the tourists who come to Mamallapuram are Indian visitors. During my fieldwork many of them were weekend visitors from Chennai and other neighbouring places but also from other parts of India. Foreign visitors were mainly backpackers who stopped in Mamallapuram for a few days or weeks on their trip around India. In addition, many groups of Indian or Western origin touring around India came to see the town and the monuments. Very few people came for a holiday to stay only in Mamallapuram, and it has not become a package tour destination comparable for example to Goa, which remains the main tourist destination in India. Those who came to stay in Mamallapuram especially had usually visited the place before and had made local friends who they came to visit again. Mamallapuram indeed had a number of foreign fans that return to the place on a regular basis. Also there were Westerners working in Chennai or in the villages of Tamil Nadu for various development programmes and who came to Mamallapuram to spend their weekends or holidays.

There were no official numbers of the nationalities of the foreign tourists that visited Mamallapuram ¹⁵, but according to the local people in Mamallapuram a large number of them come from Western Europe and the majority of them are French. Many tourists also come from Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Belgium and the US. I was told that Mamallapuram was a popular destination for Russian tourist groups in the 1970s and 1980s during the Soviet era, but nowadays the number of Russian visitors is not as high.

During my research Mamallapuram offered services for different types of tourists and the services were located in different parts of the town. The main tourist area was concentrated around the beach on a few streets, mainly on Othavadai Street and Othavadai Cross Street. The locals sometimes referred to this area jokingly as the "Paris of Mamallapuram". These streets were filled with small budget guest houses, restaurants, travel agencies, internet cafes, Ayurvedic massage and yoga parlours, and souvenir shops. The foreign tourists mostly gathered in this area but some mainly upper-class Indian tourists also used these services. Most visitors of Indian origin usually stayed in the lodges and cheap and mid-range hotels around the bus stand and East Raja Street and ate in the restaurants in the same area. The other main tourist areas of Mamallapuram were Shore Temple Road and Five Ratha Street that both lead to the famous monuments. These streets were lined mainly with stone carving shops and workshops as well souvenir shops selling inexpensive items. In addition, there were a couple of expensive high-quality hotels in the centre of Mamallapuram. One of them belonged to an international hotel chain. There were also a few beach resorts outside Mamallapuram along the East Coast Road leading to Chennai.

Many of the annual Hindu festivals celebrated by local people in Mamallapuram also interest foreign tourists. Trips were organised for tourists to a village located just

¹⁵Based on information given by the Tourist Office, Mamallapuram and the Archaeological Survey of India, Mamallapuram.

outside Mamallapuram to see the typical celebrations. The biggest tourist attraction has been the Mamallapuram Dance Festival that is purely designed to attract tourists. It started in 1999 as the initiative of the Tamil Nadu Tourism Department and it consists of mainly classical dance performances by various groups from different parts of India. The festival was enjoyed by tourists and local people alike.

Apart from the ancient monuments, stone carving shops, the beach and the annual festivals, there were no other major tourist attractions or activities in Mamallapuram itself. Therefore, many tourists continued their journey after a couple of days. Most of the Indian tourists came only to see the monuments and many of them were weekend visitors who did not stay overnight. Some foreigners I spoke to found Mamallapuram a very relaxing place compared to other places in India, and these independent foreign travellers without fixed timetables would to stay there from a few weeks to even months. Many of them also felt that Mamallapuram was an easy place in which to get to know the local people and to learn more about life in India through their new contacts and local friends. Different types of friendships and relationships between foreign tourists and local people working within the tourism industry were also common in Mamallapuram, as it is easy for people to interact within the tourist settings such as in restaurants, guest houses, shops, stone carving workshops and on the beach.

There were a large number of people in Mamallapuram who counted tourism as their main source of income. At the time of my fieldwork most of the tourist businesses in Mamallapuram belonged to the local people so the money gained from tourism went directly to the local purse. The majority of the people working in tourism also came from Mamallapuram itself. There were also a large number of souvenir shops that were owned and run by people from North India, mainly from Kashmir. Due to the political unrest in their home state many of them have migrated to other parts of India and have opened souvenir shops in the popular tourist destinations around the country. These shops sold mainly handicrafts and jewellery from North India, which were not sold in the local souvenir shops. Therefore, there was a clear distinction between the local business and the so-called "Kashmir shops". The number of Kashmir shops had increased over the last few years and competition existed among the local people and the migrants regarding the shop premises. Most of the shops in the main tourist area belonged to the fishermen who were willing to rent them to those offering the highest rent and deposit. Kashmiris have been able to pay more than the local people and as a result some locals have had to move their businesses onto the side streets. However, there have been hardly any conflicts between the local and the Kashmiri people. Over the years, also some foreign tourists have started businesses in Mamallapuram together with local people. Some of these have become successful and were still running but some have ended as a result of business and personal disagreements and problems.

Mamallapuram is also one of the places hit by the tsunami that was caused by the earthquake in Indonesia in December 2004. Although Mamallapuram beachfront was somewhat badly damaged, according to the official reports only one person died. Many people and businesses received financial help from the government and various international aid agencies. There was a post-tsunami building boom and many concrete buildings replaced palm leaf huts in the fishing village on the beach front. Similarly, many guest houses and restaurants were improved and expanded. At the time the number of aid workers and volunteers visiting Mamallapuram was high according to the local people. Most of them were working in rehabilitation programmes around Tamil Nadu and came to Mamallapuram during the weekends to relax.

2.7 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter has presented the research location – the town of Mamallapuram; some aspects of its history and present day, concentrating especially on the encounters with foreign visitors and more recent international tourism. In the eyes of historic travellers, Mamallapuram has had a reputation as an enigmatic and mysterious location of ancient rock carving. Today this image is highlighted by various international travel guides and local travel brochures that reinforce this view and create a somewhat uniform reputation for Mamallapuram as a stone carving centre; nowadays also with a living stone carving tradition that is nevertheless based the ancient Hindu stone carving tradition.

Chapters 6 and 7 will explore the meanings of stone carvings through the concept of agency in the context of categories of art and crafts, as well as religious and spiritual objects. Travel guides and brochures can also be viewed as agents, as they have the power to influence people's views on how stone carving in Mamallapuram is interpreted in these contexts. The historical carving tradition creates a backdrop against which also the current stone carving industry is situated, and in this sense ancient monuments equally have agency in their own right. Another meaningful set of agencies is the religious Hindu carving tradition that is the subject of the next chapter.

3 INDIAN HINDU STONE CARVING TRADITION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the philosophy behind Hindu sculpture traditions that define the principles of religious Hindu stone carving traditions and the way statues are used in rituals and worship in Hindu context. This ideology is based on religious Hindu texts that reflect the Brahmanic, upper-caste understanding of Hinduism. Popular, vernacular Hinduism in turn has been influenced by these beliefs but it does not mean that all Hindus would have knowledge of these principles.

The first part of the chapter, “Philosophical and religious aspects of Hindu stone carving”, presents the way Hindu stone carving has been conceptualised within the Indian discourse of arts and crafts, and the principles behind religious sculpture-making. It also brings forth some of the contradictions between theory and practice. The next part, “Stone carvers in historical descriptions” looks at the work and social status of a stone carver in an Indian society before the present era. “Deity statues in temples and shrines” presents the role of Hindu sculptures in Hindu religious rituals in the public and domestic contexts, such as in temples and household shrines. “Sculptures in rituals: *puja* and *darshan*” focuses on human interaction with statues in religious Hindu ceremonies, including the notions of *puja*, worship and *darshan*, an auspicious, reciprocal sight between a devotee and a deity image. “European encounters with Hindu arts” provides a historical overview of the way Indian arts and in particular images such as sculptures of Hindu deities have been seen by European eyes. The last part offers a concluding discussion to the chapter.

3.2 PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF HINDU STONE CARVING

In the context of Indian Hindu art traditions, there has been no principal distinction between art and handicrafts. The first art schools that were founded in India by the British in the middle of the 19th century, brought the European concept and style of fine art to the Indian art scene (Bilimoria 1993; Kapur 1993). Prior to that, religious and folk arts were the main forms of expression. All forms of arts and crafts are called *shilpa* or *kalaa* in the language Sanskrit. This includes painting, sculpture, architecture, pottery, weaving, mechanics, engineering, metal casting, leather work and perfumery, but the term is also used when referring to dance, music, poetry, drama and medicine. In certain ancient Hindu texts *kalaa* has been analysed as 64 skilled practices. (Parker 1987: 124.) In the context of stone carving the term is applicable to sculpture, architecture, design and production methods (Chhiber 2005: 17).

Equally, there has been no principal difference between the concept of an artist and a craftsman. Parker (1987: 123) notes that no precise equivalent for the English word artist can be found from ancient Indian terminology. The Sanskrit word *shilpi* as the maker of *shilpas* may be used as a translation for artist, artisan and craftsman, but ac-

According to Stella Kramrich these terms are not adequate since those engaged in temple and image-making are believed to possess “magical powers” in a religious sense (ibid.; Kramrich 1958). In some texts *shilpi* is also synonymous with *karu*, which is a Vedic concept that means “maker” and in this sense there is no distinction between these various activities (Chattopadhyaya 1980: 7). Chattopadhyaya has argued that religion as a reason for the emergence of different art forms in India is not correct and instead they are based on activities of everyday life (ibid.: 5).

Shilpa Sastras are a collection of ancient texts of Indian Hindu aesthetic theory and art manuals. The Sanskrit word *shastra* means science, theory or a manual of principles (Ganapati 2002: p. xi – xix, 4). For stone carvers *Shilpa Shastras* explain the principles of Hindu sculpture-making. They state the standards and rules of sculptures such as correct proportions, postures and iconography (Elgood 1999: 29). *Shilpa Shastras* are contained principally in two texts, the *Citralakshana* and the *Citrasutra* that is a section of *Vishnudharmottara-purana*. Their exact dating is not clear but *Citrasutra* is a supplement to *Vishnupurana* that is currently believed to date to the 5th century CE. (Guy 2007: 44–45.) Their purpose is to serve as a guide for sculptors and form a base for their training. *Shilpa Shastras* are closely connected with *Vastu Shastras* that concern architecture such as temple construction (Elgood 1999: 29). The transmission of knowledge of these systems has been the responsibility of artisan guild systems (Guy 2007: 45).

A holistic worldview is the basic principle behind all traditional Hindu art forms. Architectural spaces as well as the human body expressed in painting and sculpture are seen as reflections, parts or reproductions of the universe. Each artwork should aim to reflect the harmony within the universe by having a harmonic expression in itself. This means that any single part of an artwork should be in tune with the artwork as a whole (Hämeen-Anttila 2005: 231). The purpose of art, therefore, is to show and reflect the divine nature of the universe. In other words, there are two reflections of the universe that come together in art. One is the visible world *maya*, which is essentially an illusion and is seen as the playground of divinities. The other one is the invisible but the true, sacred essence of the universe, *Brahman*. *Yantra*, a statue, serves as a means to access the true divine nature of the universe. Therefore, creating an artwork is in fact a sacred ritual as well as a transcendental process in which an artist transforms a piece of material into something sacred. Artwork itself is a tool and a vehicle for prayer, meditation and contemplation of the sacred cosmos and the forces acting within it (Hämeen-Anttila 2005: 232).

In Hindu beliefs, statues are the embodiment and manifestations of the gods and goddesses they portray. They are referred as *murti* in Sanskrit which means bodytaking and incarnation (Eck 1996: 38). Therefore, they are not merely symbolic reminders of the divine but they are believed to be the actual bodies of the divinities on earth. Statues that portray Hindu gods and goddesses are seen as the necessary vehicles or bodies of the deities on earth because through the material forms deities appear and interact with people in a physical form. A sculptor should therefore create a statue that will please the deities so that they should wish to inhabit the sculpture. Statues also should reflect the essential nature of the divinities. As different Hindu gods and goddesses have different qualities, the statues should portray their true personalities rather than always making them “beautiful”, for example. Some deities are ferocious in nature and this should be communicated through the sculpture. Most divinities are portrayed with several hands which refers to their omnipotent nature (Hämeen-Anttila 2005: 232). Correct proportions then again increase the substance of the sculpture (Parker 1987: 124). Interestingly, Guy points out that in fact, *Shilpa Shastras* are

not very explicit about the metaphysical symbolism of Hindu images and concentrate on the technical structure of figurative representations (2007: 46). Guy suggests that this perhaps reflects the shared cultural language of the time that has been taken as given, or iconography belongs to a different form of knowledge of arts. After all, these texts emphasise the interdependence of different art forms, such as visual arts and performing arts and also reference the manual of dramatic arts (ibid.: 46).

Also, an important aspect of sculpture-making is to give it *rasa*, which means to give it a certain “taste” or “flavour” that is then received by the viewer. *Rasa* is the expression of different moods and feelings that are communicated to the audience. The concept is part of various different Indian art forms, such as religious painting, dance, drama, music, poetry and literature. It may be expressed for example through various hand gestures, *mudras*, that are part of classical Indian dance but also used in figure sculptures (Elgood 1999: 33).

Shilpa Shastras state that a sculptor should pay respect to both the stone and his tools before commencing his work. Equally, he should meditate on the divine nature of the god or goddess he wishes to portray in order to receive a divine revelation and inner vision. This appearance will then guide his work. Concentration and mental state of receptivity are important for a sculptor whose work aims to depict the true nature of the universe. In addition, before commencing his work a sculptor undergoes a ritual purification such as cleaning his body, following a pure diet and performing certain religious rituals for the honour of the gods before starting the work. Rituals ensure that the work is blessed and inspired by the gods. There are also certain auspicious dates in the Hindu astrological calendar that should be chosen for starting the work (Elgood 1999: 29; Hämeen-Anttila 2005: 232).

Based on Shilpa Shastras, every artist should have some knowledge of all the different forms such as literature, music, dance, painting and sculpture. For example, it is important for a stone carver to be aware of the traditions of dance and to learn the different positions of the human body. In addition, these ancient texts state that a skilled carver is expected to have thorough knowledge of the various forms and images of Hindu mythology, the different raw materials used for image-making, qualities and descriptions of the images, dimensions of the images, rhythms and proportions, the six basic measurements and plumb lines, physical resemblance to natural objects, hand poses and gestures, body flexion, dance postures, seated poses, costumes and ornaments, symbols and motifs, imaginative features, colour, evocation and expression. These 16 factors should be taken into consideration when making a sculpture for worship as well as for decoration (Ganapati 2002: 4–5).

There are also different rules for making idols for worship and those aimed at only decorative purposes. For example, when making a statue of a deity for temple worship, the height of the statue in its principal dimension, as the erect postural measurement, can be derived from any of the following: the size of the primary deity in the temple, the width of a sanctum of the temple, the size of the doorway, the height of the basement, the height of the pilaster or the height of the patron. Countless other rules define characters of different type of statues. Most rules are based on basic mathematical equations and scales, in which numbers 8 and 9 are central. There are different scales for humans, gods and saints as well as some differences between different deities. Shilpa Shastras also explain different types of scaling systems that can be used for different purposes (Banerjea 1956; Ganapathi 2002).

The principal material for temple construction and religious sculpture in South Indian throughout history has been stone, and it is still considered to be the best

material for statues used for worship. Granite is particularly highly valued and used in the state of Tamil Nadu. There are some differences between the types of granite. Depending on the sound of the stones when hit with a piece of metal, they can be defined as masculine, feminine or neutral. Masculine granite, called *ansila*, makes a clear, bell-like sound and it is considered to be the best quality of stone with the fewest cracks. *Ansila* is suitable for making statues of male deities. *Pensila* is the female granite stone for female deities, next in quality, and the sound is quieter. The worst in quality is the neutral stone *nabunsagar* that is most prone to cracking and makes a drum-like sound. Neutral stones can be used for less important architectural parts but they are not suitable for making statues for religious worship.

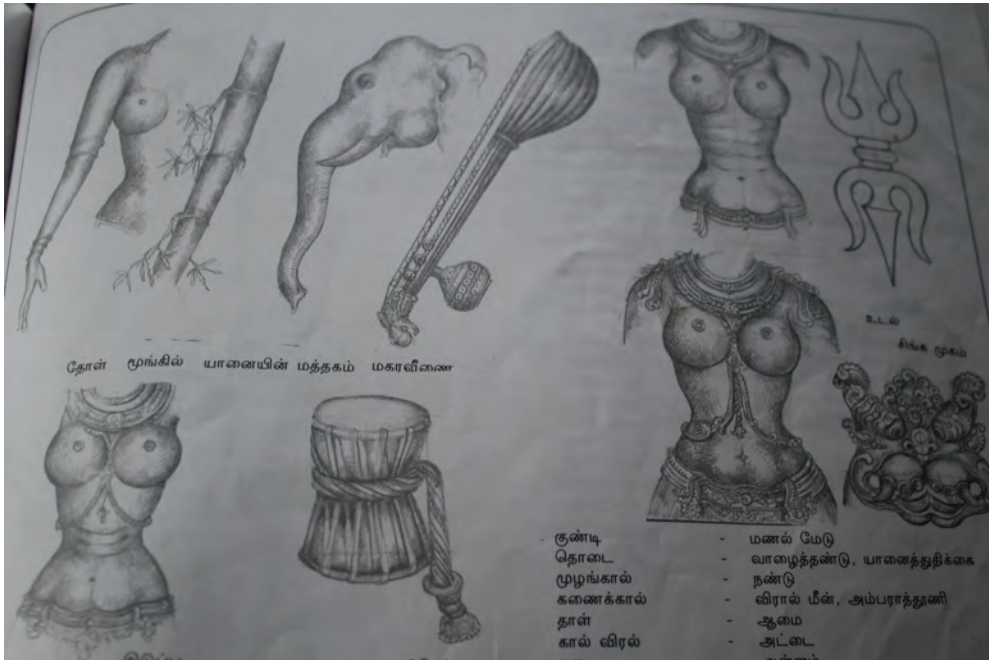


Image 14: Different models for figure sculpture in a Tamil stone carving manual

Although these factors presented above are considered to be general characteristics of Indian Hindu arts and stone carving, they mainly show the ideals behind the work. As Guy (2007: 46) notes in relation Shilpa Shastras: these texts illustrate the aspirational ideals but not the daily practise of image-making in which discrepancies are the norm. Indeed, research on historical Indian sculptures has revealed that not all sculptures are based on these rules as carefully as perhaps has been presumed. Mosteller (1990), for example, has discovered that one reason for this is the different systems of proportion used in different parts of India; for example in South India, some of the measurements are derived from the patron's hand. The artists may also have changed the proportional relationships between different parts on purpose (Mosteller 1990: 389–390). Parker (1987, 1992a) who has studied contemporary Hindu temple construction has noted that architects interpret Shastras based on practical needs and contesting social relationships. There are several people engaged in the process of temple construction such as government officials, priests, architects, sculptors and painters, who may

have different preferences and views of the work. In fact, Parker argues that “(T)o my knowledge, no temple structure in South India, ancient or modern, has ever been built following instructions in a book.” (1992: 113) He has also discovered that architects and sculptors who were considered masters in their work had never even read any written version of Shilpa Shastras in Sanskrit or in their local South Indian language (Parker 2003b: 10). Therefore, Parker argues that the concrete practice of Shastras is quite independent from the written texts (ibid, Parker 1987). Instead, written texts have been a way for architects and sculptors to assert their authority and identity in social negotiations with other figures of power, mainly upper caste, Brahmin priests who dominate the Hindu religious worlds in India (Parker 2003b, 10–11). Gail (1989: 109–113) has suggested that Shastras have probably been written by Brahmin scholars who were familiar with the practices but were not in a position to determine them. Parker therefore claims that Shilpa Shastras should not be approached as manuals in the strict sense of the word, but rather as a discourse consisting of both written and practical knowledge (Parker 2003b). These points resemble what Abe (2002) has noted about historical 4th, 5th and 6th century Chinese Buddha images: there are variations between them and not all of them are made with the same “high” standards (262–270). Abe claims that this “suggest a work not well planned or concerned with orthodox visual forms”, such as “lack of symmetry in the composition of two sides, certain oddities such as large mushroom-like shape, a figure of slightly off-center, leaning to the right, prominent over-sized hands and feet” (264–265). Abe suggests that whereas some styles have been most likely a product of elite patronage, other donors of perhaps lesser status may have been satisfied with work that was less ambitious (269). Although this example is not from India, it further elaborates the fact that historical sculptures based on particular artistic styles can contain more variations between them than one would maybe expect.

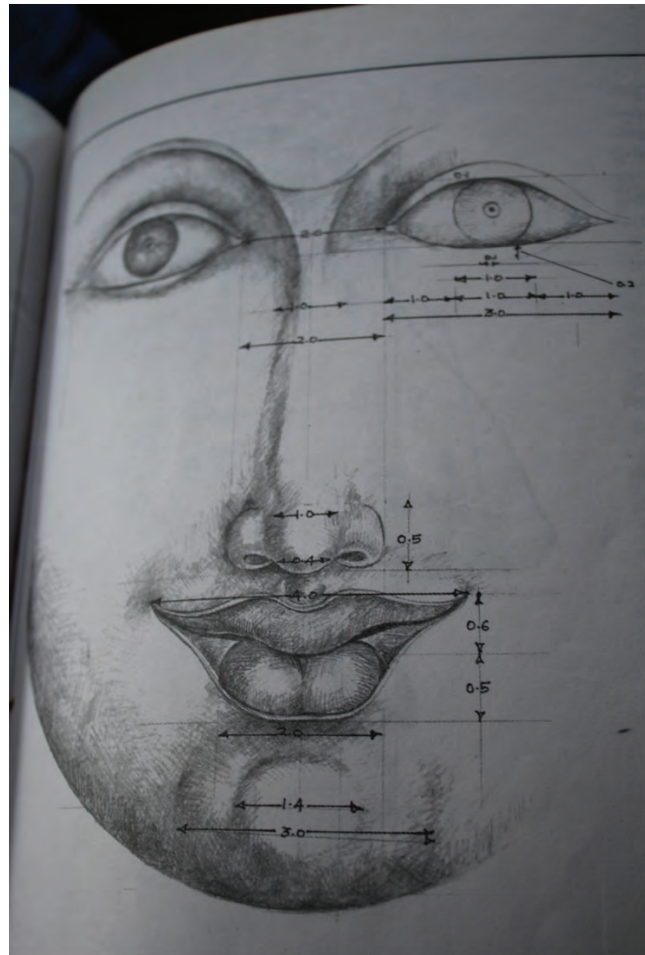


Image 15: Measurements of a face in a stone carving manual

Another important point to consider is the fact that image worship in Hinduism has not always been a universal practice (Granoff and Shinohara 2004: 1). For example, Colas (2004) has looked at the views of different Hindu philosophical systems in relation to image worship between the fifth and eleventh century CE and found several differences. There are variations in thought as to whether images are seen as actual embodiments of deities or only their representations, and also how important images are considered to be in religious worshipping practices compared to reciting *mantras*¹⁶ (see also Granoff 2004). These variations in thought often receive less attention than dominant, popular Hindu beliefs.

3.3 STONE CARVERS IN HISTORICAL DESCRIPTIONS

Legend states that the god *Viswakarma*, the god of arts and crafts, had five sons: a blacksmith, a carpenter, a metal worker, a stone carver and a goldsmith. In this story *Viswakarma* is also identified as the god *Brahman* who in Hinduism is considered to be the absolute and supreme god of the whole universe. This legend is also believed to be the origin of the *Viswakarma* caste group that is characterised by hereditary art and craft occupations. Many artist and craftsmen in India even today belong to the *Viswakarma* caste. *Viswakarma* is a general name for a pan-Indian caste group that includes several sub-castes or communities with different names and social statuses (Thiagarajan 1999: 222–223; Ganapati 2010; Kramrich (1983 [1956]: 53). There are also other common names that imply *Viswakarma* status such as *achari* and *kammalar*. Many identify *Viswakarma* as the god *Brahman* who in Hinduism is considered to be the absolute and supreme god of the whole universe. Yet, *Viswakarmas* in Hindu society have generally been assigned a lower strata caste status that members have contested (Parker 2003a).

The stone carvers in India are also known by the Sanskrit name *shilpi* that refers to an artist and a craftsman. There are four classes of stone carvers. The master carver and design architect is called *sthapati*. Second to him is the surveyor *sutragrahin*, followed by the sculptor or the carver, known as *takshaka* in the third class. Builders, plasterers and painters constitute the fourth class *vardhakin*. These occupational categories primarily reflect temple construction procedures that also include making deity sculptures. When a temple is constructed, a *sthapaka* is involved, who is a supervising architect, as well as a priest responsible for the planning of the religious requirements of a temple (Chhiber 2005: 70). These occupational categories are in use also today.

Stone carving has been a purely male occupation. Historically the *shilpis* learned their skills through an apprenticeship system that was based on their heritage. They usually start their learning at the early age of 10–12 years with simple tasks, and then move on to more demanding procedures. Although they may become masters in their craft, they still continue their learning throughout their lives (Chhiber 2005: 71).

In historical descriptions of Indian society, the *shilpis*, among other artists and craftsmen, have been an integral part of the Hindu community whose main purpose was to construct temples and sculptures for worship. Ananda Coomaraswamy, a

¹⁶ Mantras are sacred words or a word that are repeated continuously. They are used as an aid for meditation and also as part of Hindu rituals in temples (Huyler 1999: 264).

prominent South Asian art scholar of the early 20th century, emphasises the spiritual aspect of Indian arts but also the role that a craftsman plays in an Indian society. In his seminal work “The Indian Craftsman” (1909: 1) Coomaraswamy states that a craftsman was an “organic element in the national life”, by which he meant they were part of that life either as a member of a village community, as a member of a guild of merchant craftsmen based in a city, or as a feudal servant of a temple, king or a chieftain.

In the village context, different craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths and potters served their duties in a society organised around personal relations and duties and received their payments in kind (ibid.: 1–6). They usually worked under the protection of the landowning class and received food in return for their work. In the cities, trade guilds looked after the quality of work, regulated the working hours and also negotiated contracts and payments with clients (ibid.: 7–19). Their work was bought by temples and wealthy people for religious purposes. Many kings in medieval, feudal India showed an interest in the arts and employed several craftsmen (see also Elgood 1999: 135–183). Some craftsmen worked at the court creating arts and crafts for the royal palaces, gardens and temples. The king’s protection also provided craftsmen with security, as they received working materials and a salary for the whole of their lives. Payment to them was distributed in the form of land, cloth and money, and also honours and titles were given (ibid.: Coomaraswamy 1909: 20–28, 36). Some craftsmen were protected by other members of the ruling class.

Coomaraswamy notes that the social status of the craftsman in South India has been equal or superior to the Brahmins, who are the highest ranking caste group consisting of priests and teachers (ibid: 52). Coomaraswamy also emphasises the fact that caste-based society also meant that artisanal work was a hereditary occupation based on the religious organisation of Indian society, in which every person occupied his or her own place and duties accordingly. Craftsmen thus had both an economic but also a spiritual status in society (ibid.: 66–68). According to Coomaraswamy, the skills of the Indian craftsman are not a result of repeated practice but of divine revelation: “beauty, rhythm, proportion, idea have an absolute existence on an ideal plane, where all who seek may find. Their inward inspiration upon which Indian artist is taught to rely, appearing like the still small voice of a god, that god was conceived as Visvakarma.” (ibid.: 73) Craftsmen in India are not individuals expressing their own views but parts of the universe that reveal “eternal beauty” and “unchanging laws”. Thus, the goal was not to make works based on personal imagination but to seek universal ideals (ibid.: 75). However, writings of Coomaraswamy have subsequently been questioned due to their essentialist and idealistic descriptions of Indian craftsman (cf. Parimoo 2000; Parker 2003a). Perhaps in reality the social status of artisans in India was tied to their craft and patrons. For example, stone carvers could have been respected more than blacksmiths due to the religious nature of their work.

When discussing the Hindu stone carving tradition, it is important to note that religious art was not the only genre that has characterised Indian art worlds over the years. Western taste and artistic traditions started to impact the Indian art scene during the years of British rule. Oil portraits, naturalistic landscapes and nude models were some of the results of the influences of Victorian illusionistic art and ideas of artistic individuals and progress (Mitter 2001: 171). Formal art education started in the mid-19th century in the form of art schools and art societies in the main big cities in India. This gave rise to various networks promoting academic art that replaced the previous courtly patronage that had been lost because of the changes in power within the

country in the late 18th century (ibid.: 171–172). The East India Company and British residents had hired artists for economic surveys and ethnographic documentation of people as well as natural history, flora and fauna. Artists that had trained in Western techniques became the main producers of these works. In the 19th century, mechanical reproduction in the form of woodblock and metal printmaking further changed the traditional art scene. The local Indian elite started to collect Western art and the popularity of traditional Indian arts declined (ibid.: 172–173).

Whereas local artists were previously supported by the court and had a somewhat humble social status, colonial artists were seen as free and independent gentlemen, although their income was less secure without the permanent protection of the ruling class. In turn, nationalistic ideologies at the turn of the 19th century also made artists question Western ideals and reassess pre-colonial taste (ibid.: 171). Art was also used as a means of anti-colonial struggle of the early 20th century (ibid.: 189) and was one of the defining features of Indian modernism of the time. One aspect of it was the quest for tribal and rural folk expressions that were particularly seen as a resistance to colonialism. Those local and indigenous art forms had existed throughout history alongside religious art traditions and Western influences. Yet the meeting of elite and folk artists was not unproblematic, as these two genres came from very different backgrounds despite the idealism of the academic artists (ibid.: 192).

This tension remains today and is a characteristic of the division that can be seen between the different groups of artists in contemporary India, such as between those so-called elite, academic artists producing “art for art’s sake”, those making pieces for the religious market, and people working within the souvenir industry, such as in the case of Mamallapuram. Another defining factor of the art scene in the India of today is the influence of the market economy, which forces artists and craftsmen to find ways to make their living. Since the 1970s galleries have supported the so-called elite artists by selling their works in the big cities in India (ibid.: 221). Again, this system again excludes traditional religious art forms, folk and tribal arts as well as the tourist art industry, the artists of which find ways to sell their work through other mediums that do not necessarily define them primarily as art but as religious artefacts or souvenirs. In this sense, the Western division between high arts and lower crafts, as discussed in Chapter 1, has become a characteristic of the contemporary Indian art discourse although religious art in particular, such as current Hindu stone carving, is not easy to categorise because it is founded on a historic tradition that enjoys a prominent role in Indian Hindu culture.

3.4 DEITY STATUES IN TEMPLES AND SHRINES

Sculptures are an essential part of Hindu temple architecture and cannot be separated from the temple itself. Architecture and sculptures have not been treated as independent art forms but as one entity (Gupta 1979: 46). In the temples the statues serve both as decorations on architectural forms and as idols for worship in the sacred centres of the temple. In addition to temples, statues on the walls, pillars and towers constitute part of the beauty of temple architecture and they also tell mythological stories (ibid.; Guy 2007: 69). The towers of South Indian temples in particular are very rich in deity statues, which are often painted in different colours. In newer temples these tower sculptures are usually made from *stucco*, or cement, which is cheaper than stone.



Image 16: A deity statue in a temple shrine in Mamalapuram. Gates to the shrine are closed when the temple is not open.

The main purpose of a Hindu temple is to house the deity (Elgood 1999: 93). A Hindu temple is seen as a sacred space and architectural form that is a representative of the “body” of the god and it also has a “womb” that houses the principle cult image that is usually a statue. Usually this is a small chamber in which the deity is placed on a pedestal. This icon is considered to be the “soul” of the temple and serves as the main focus of worship and prayer by the priests and devotees (Gupta 1979: 46; Guy 2007: 67). A Hindu temple may have several shrines dedicated to various gods and goddesses, depending on which sect the temple belongs to. These other shrines are equally important and are subject of ceremonies, although their position in the religious hierarchy is lower than that of the principle deity to which the temple is usually dedicated. In addition, the decorative deity images in temples are derived

from the principal deity. They are for active manifestations of this deity, close family divinities as well as repeated iconic images of the deity (Elgood 1999: 121).

During religious festivals, one or several of the main temple icons are placed on carts, known as chariots or *rathas*, and taken out on the streets. They may also be set on special floats on temple tanks or other bodies of water. As most temple icons in Tamil Nadu are made from stone, separate, lighter processional images are used instead of stone sculptures. Many religious festivals throughout India are also characterised by temporal festival shrines with deity icons that are made only for that particular festival, and which are immersed in water at the end of the celebrations. A particular group of craftsmen are specialised in making these statues. These days they are often made of plaster of Paris and plastic and show imagination by combining typical Hindu iconography with contemporary themes that can have strong commercial or political connotations. For example, Durga puja, which is the most important annual Hindu festival in West Bengal has become famous for very innovative temporary festival shrines. As Chatterjee (2008: 338) describes:

... (O)ne could find puja pandals that are replicas of an Assyrian palace of Mesopotamia or St. Peter's of Rome or the Kremlin, or of the capsized Titanic (made in the year when the movie was released), or of the school of wizardry attended by Harry Potter, or (why not?) the burning World Trade Center towers.



Image 17: A shrine under a tree on a side street in Mamallapuram



Image 18: A temple dedicated to Tamil god Murugan in Chennai has gopuras or towers covered with deity sculptures typical to Tamil temple architecture.

Another sacred place for the statues are shrines that can be found in streets and squares in India, often under a tree that is considered to be holy. These are usually communal shrines that are taken care of by the local community. The size of the shrine and the statues on it should also reflect the abilities of the community in question, so that it is taken care of and worshipped accordingly.

Puja rooms are sacred places and form the centre of the household's religious beliefs and devotion. A private shrine may include images of one or several deities, depending on which ones are important to the family. Most home shrines consist of images of those gods and goddesses that the family of the house feels closest to and wishes to worship on a daily basis. Many Hindu families have a kuladevata; a particular god or a goddess that is considered to be the protector of the home and family, and has been worshipped in the family for generations (Huyler 1999: 77). Hindus also have ishtadevata, "a chosen deity", who most resonates with the person in question. A chosen deity could be one or many and has been chosen by the devotee for personal reasons, such as a result of a particular life event or an experience, or by having been recommended a spiritual teacher. Many Hindus follow the traditions of their family and choose the same deities that their parents have worshipped, but they can also be drawn towards the attributes and nature of a particular deity (Huyler 1999: 79; Lipner 1994: 282). Different family members may worship different deities whose images are all placed on the same shrine. Larger households can also have a principal family shrine and other smaller, personal shrines of the family members. Some images on the shrine often depict a deity of a particular temple that the family feels connected to. Through the image the particular god or goddess is also present on the home altar. A shrine may also include other types of souvenirs from the temple or other places of pilgrimage. Images of saints, holy men, gurus and photos of deceased family members are part of many household shrines.

The most common item nowadays in home shrines is a printed image of a god or goddess. In addition, small statues are added next to the images. Based on Hindu beliefs the statues are considered to be more powerful and sacred than the printed images and thus they require more elaborate worship rituals to be performed for the honour of the god or goddess they portray. This includes washing and applying oil to the statue on a regular basis as a part of the weekly religious rituals. Therefore, many households may not want to have statues of divinities in their homes unless they are willing to perform all the rituals.

Another reason to avoid statues, especially in smaller houses without separate puja rooms, is due to the beliefs of ritual purity. Sacred statues should not be placed in the same room where people appear unwashed or have marital relations. With printed images this is considered to be less of a problem and they can also be used in one-room households. Images neither require washing or oil. However, before the arrival of printed images of Hindu deities, statues were used almost exclusively as an item of worship. Printed images only became available in India in the 19th century and have slowly partly replaced statues due to their cheaper price and lesser requirements in terms of worship compared to the statues of the deities (Ingليس 1999a)¹⁷.

If a statue is chosen for the puja room in the house, there is a rule that it should not be taller than the length between the thumb and the index finger of the head of the household. In practice, this usually means that the statue should not be taller than six

¹⁷ See Chapters 6 and 7 for more information on the printed deity images.

inches. The statue can also be smaller, depending on the requirements and the social and financial ability of the household. According to the practices of worship in Hinduism, the larger the statue, the more offerings should be made to the deity. In South India items used are flower garlands, bananas, coconuts, betel leaves, nuts and incense sticks. Also various food items such as rice can be used but these then blessed items should be distributed to the people, not be kept to oneself. Therefore, it is considered impractical that a poor man without financial means or enough social status should have a big statue in his house when he cannot afford to buy enough gifts for the deity nor distribute the blessed items accordingly.

For the reasons stated above, in Mamallapuram very few people in fact had statues in their households. Those wanting to have a statue on their home shrine would in most cases have a small statue made from a metal alloy known as brass. The main reason for this is the fact that granite as a material is not suitable for very small-scale, intricate work. Granite statues therefore are mostly too big for a single household use. However, brass as a material is considered to be somewhat equal with granite in terms of its religious power. Some people had a small shrine in their backyard, sometimes under a tree that is considered to be holy. Few households also had a shrine in their backyard that they called a temple that housed bigger deity statues. The shrine could be placed inside a closet that resembled a temple from outside. Doors remained closed apart from the particular times when rituals were performed and also non-family members would participate. Many people in Mamallapuram had statues of the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesh outside their houses for protection and good luck. These statues had their own small shelf on a wall of the house or on the wall surrounding the garden or backyard of the house. These statues were often made of granite and were also larger than the statues in the puja rooms, usually around 15–30 cm tall. If a statue is placed on an outside shrine, the same rules of worship apply as with the statues inside the house, but their outside location protects the deities from the human impurity inside the house. Statues were also often larger in size than the ones inside the house.



Image 19: A domestic shrine inside a house in Mamallapuram. The shrine typically includes images but also statues.



Image 20: A household shrine in a courtyard in Mamallapuram



Image 21: A shrine on the wall protects a building in Mamallapuram, including the shop next to the shrine

During religious festivals Hindu households may make their own, personalised festival statues on temporary private shrines that do not necessarily follow any particular representational guidelines. Ganesha statues made from clay are typical example of this during Ganesha Chaturthi that is popular in several states around India.

Although the focus of this thesis are the Hindu sculptures that are human-made and mainly iconic representations of the different Hindu deities, it is worth noting that Hindus also worship parts of nature, such as certain trees, rivers, mountains and animals. These are not just “images” of deities but also deities themselves. For example, a neem tree is usually considered to be sacred and a shrine is placed underneath it. Rivers in particular, such as the Ganges, are believed to be representations of the goddess Ganga but also Ganga herself. The cow as goddess Lakshmi is another example that is well-known. In addition, there are certain uniconic images that are seen as “self-made”. These are for example the natural stones that resemble Shiva *linga*, the popular pillar-shaped, uniconic representation of the god Shiva (cf. Fuller 1992: 59; Eck 1996: 33–37).

3.5 SCULPTURES IN RITUALS: *PUJA* AND *DARSHAN*

Two central concepts or practices are very central when looking at the meaning of deity sculptures in Hinduism and especially as part of religious rituals. These are known by their Sanskrit language names *puja* and *darshan*. Puja can be loosely translated as worshipping, and the term is used to describe the religious rites in which Hindus express their reverence and devotion to one or several Hindu deities. Communion is an essential aspect of puja, as the devotees believe they have established direct contact with the gods and goddesses. During a puja ritual the ontological status of a deity image changes from a religious perspective, as the image becomes “alive” and turns into the actual embodiment of the god or goddess and is no longer just a representation. Pujas are performed regularly at public temples and domestic shrines as well as in other places on specific occasions (Huyler 1999: 33; Flood 1996: 202). Darshan means “seeing” a sacred, divine image but also reciprocal, auspicious sight in a Hindu religious context. This refers to the fact that Hindus do not only go to the temples to worship and pray but also to see and “to be seen” by the deities. Through sight, the devotees express their devotion to the divine and receive blessings from the deities in return (Eck 1998: 3).

3.5.1 Puja: worshipping divine

Pujas are ceremonial acts that largely follow similar patterns with the same components in different temples around India (Flood 1996: 203; Good 2004: 26). However, they also include certain regional and local particularities and traditions (Good 2004: 26, 37). Pujas incorporate elements of invocation, prayer, song, different types of offerings to the deities, and other rituals. The contact with the deity is facilitated mostly through an image, such as a sculpture, a print, a painting, a vessel or an element of nature such as a rock, a tree, a river or a mountain (Huyler 1999: 33). Temple pujas are usually more elaborate than the ones performed at household altars. Domestic worship includes formal features but it can be at the same time very individualistic (Lipner 1994: 282). Apart from temples and homes, pujas are also performed at workplaces to ensure success in business, in public and private buildings to clear spaces and bring good energy to the premises, bless new vehicles, such as motorbikes and cars, as well as to ensure the health of domestic animals. Pujas are also an important part of Hindu wedding ceremonies and funerals.

The etymology of the word “puja” is not certain, but in Vedic texts the verb *puj* is used in the context of worship. However, the offerings in puja are always strictly vegetarian, whereas animal sacrifice has been common in Vedic and popular religious rituals. Vedic rituals have also been performed exclusively by priests, whereas pujas can also be made by other people. Ancient Indian rituals of worshipping a guest included some elements of puja, such as bathing, feeding and offering light, but not the care and entertainment of the deity statues by waking, dressing and offering food and flowers (Michaels 1998: 241).

In temples, pujas are carried out by special priests, *pujaris* and perhaps their assistants. Several ritual gifts are given to the deities before and during the puja ceremony. These are called *upacharas*, “honour offerings”, and sixteen of them is considered to be a proper number for a complete puja, although how many are presented in each case varies. These are for example water, cloth, food, fresh leaves, incense, sandalwood perfume and betel nuts (Eck 1998: 47). Temple pujas include *abhiseka*, a ritual bathing



Image 22: Priests preparing for puja ceremonies in a temple in Mamallapuram



Image 23: A shrine dedicated to god Ganesh outside a guest house.



Image 24: A priest performing a ceremony with a devotee in a temple in Mamallapuram

of the sculpture, in which the deity is washed starting with water and followed by various other substances such as milk, curd, honey, oil, sandalwood paste, turmeric, coconut water, a mixture of five fruits and *vibhuti*, or sacred ash. After each substance the sculpture is rinsed with water, considered here to be sacred water from the River Ganges in India, before the application of the next one. All the substances are believed to enhance the purity of the deity. Abhiseka is part of the morning rituals in temples when the deities are “awoken”, but they are also carried out at other times of the day. After the ritual baths the sculptures are dressed and adorned with jewellery, perfumes and flower garlands. Their clothing reflects their gender and nature. These rituals are usually carried out behind a curtain in private, but sometimes also in front of the eyes of the devotees. However, public viewing of them can be considered to be invasive. Preparation ceremonies of the deities also involve prayers and chanting (Huyler 1999: 55–56).

The actual puja ceremony usually starts by invoking and awaking deities by ringing a bell. It is believed that with those representations of deities, such as sculptures that have been ritually consecrated and life has been infused in them, ringing of the bells arouses the divinity in them (Bhalla 2005: 291). Fire offerings, also often referred to as *arati*, have an essential role in the puja ritual. The word *arati* means flame but also a flat tray on which a piece of camphor is placed. Camphor or *karpura* has a unique quality to burn without producing any ash, but it creates a bright flame. The flame is first waved clockwise in front of the deity with the right hand. In the case of a full-body image, the flame is first waved around the head of the deity, followed by the middle part and the feet. Oil lamps are also waved in front of the image. After the fire has been offered to the deity, the *arati* circulates among the devotees who touch the flame with their hands and then their eyelids and the top of the heads. Contact with the fire is believed to purify the worshipper and connect with the divine. Next to *darshan*, *arati* is the most important part of puja (Huyler 1999: 60). In fact, the word is often used as a synonym for puja (Flood 1996: 203). In many temple pujas, *arati* is followed by the distribution of holy water. Water that has been blessed by the deity can be sprinkled on devotees’ heads from a brass container or alternatively poured with a spoon into people’s cupped hands. Worshippers then drink the water and put the rest on their head. There can also be other elements in the ceremony, but often it is finished by applying red vermilion powder *kumkum*, *vibhuti*, white ash, or beige-coloured paste made from sandalwood on the devotees’ foreheads. These powders are considered to be sacred and the mark, *tilak*, is a symbol of the communion with the divine. Hindus believe that the human body has seven energy centres, *chakras*, and one of them, the 6th chakra or “third eye”, is located on the forehead between the eyebrows. There are different styles of *tilaks*, which show which deity the person has been worshipping (Huyler 1999: 63).

These practices are followed mantras, prayers and different types of offerings such as fire, flowers, fruits, leaves from particular trees, cooked vegetarian foods and sweets, incense and money. Stone sculptures are washed and decorated either prior to or during the ceremony. They are bathed with water or milk and smeared with oil and then dressed in beautiful garments and jewellery as well as adorned with flower garlands (Lipner 1994: 281; Flood 1996: 203). Essentially pujas, especially in Hindu temples, could be described as a treatment that would be given to royalty or a guest that is highly revered. All the different *upacharas* are in place for honour, well-being and entertainment of the deity (Huyler 1999: 55; Eck 1998: 47). Items such as flowers and food that are offered to deities in the puja become blessed in the ceremony and then distributed back to the devotees through the distribution of *prasad*. Michaels

suggests that this is probably one of the reasons why puja has become popular among Hindus, as it abolishes everyday social boundaries that otherwise define Hindu society (Michaels 1998: 245).

Puja items are known as *prasad* (also known as *prashad* or *prasada*), which literally means favour or grace (Fuller 1992: 74–75; Eck 1996, 106; Huyler 1996: 63). These are different items and substances that are offered to the deities during puja rituals that become sanctified during the process. They are then handed back to the devotees as gifts and blessings. The social position and rank of the devotee does normally affect the amount and type of gifts a devotee offers to the deity. Food is probably the most common form of offering that is used both in temples and household ceremonies that is then distributed to the people as *prasad*¹⁸. In the temple pujas priests keep some of the sanctified food offerings for themselves but all monetary gifts are given to the temple. Part of the flowers are left to adorn deities but the rest are distributed to worshippers. Ash and powders are distributed in the South Indian Shiva temples to the devotees. In the Vishnu temples the main substance is water that is usually sprinkled over the head of the devotees or given to their hands to be swallowed (Fuller 1992: 74). *Prasad* can be viewed as a material symbol of the deities' grace and power which becomes internalised when eaten or placed on one's body. This further connects the devotee with the divine during the puja ritual (ibid.:74).

Most Hindu households in India have a shrine in their homes where they perform pujas in order to secure the well-being and happiness of the family. In Hindu traditions, the home is the centre of various religious activities and in this respect the family shrine is the heart of the household (Narayanan 2013: 50). Pujas can be performed daily as well as on specific weekly, monthly and annually important days based on the Hindu calendar and local customs that vary between Indian regions. During the times of religious festivals, special pujas may be performed for several days in a row in the honour of a certain god or goddess that is the centre of the festival. Senior women of the household usually tend the domestic altar and perform the pujas on behalf of the other family members, although other family members may partake in the ceremony or perform one if they so wish at any time (Lipner 1994: 282).

A family shrine consists of images of deities in the form of paintings, posters or statues as well as of different metalware needed for the religious rituals. Other items needed for the ceremony are bells, incense and incense holders, oil lamps, cups and plates for oil, water and offerings as well as boxes of different powders such as vermilion, vibhuti, sandalwood and turmeric. Private pujas range from very elaborate to simple prayers, depending on the date, situation and the inclination of the family and person performing them.

¹⁸ There are different viewpoints regarding the question of whether deities symbolically eat the food offerings or only consecrate it. According to one view, deities consume the food, thus leaving leftovers for the worshippers as *prasad*. As leftover food is generally considered impure, by eating it a devotee expresses its submission to the deity. This is in line with many of the other services that are performed to the gods and goddesses such as washing, clothing and cleaning their abode. The other view is that a deity does not eat *prasad* but it still becomes blessed through contact with divine. Rejecting food is a sign of high social rank, which would be denied if deities consumed the food. On the other hand, it could be reasoned that since deities accept all the other gifts and services, they also eat the food. This would not abolish the social hierarchy between a deity and devotees, but rather reflect a traditional Hindu marriage when a wife cooks for her husband and then eats the leftovers, demonstrating her subordination. At the same time, even leftovers in the context of puja are pure because of the contact with the deity (Michaels 1998: 244–245; see also Fuller 1992: 74–75).



Image 25: Inside a temple in Mamallapuram, the goddess Kali has been adorned with cloth, flowers, jewellery, vermillion and sandalwood paste. Offerings such as bananas have been placed in front of the deity.

A door or a curtain to a puja room or cabinet is kept closed apart from when rituals are performed. This is to ensure the ritual purity of the shrine. For the same reason shrines are not supposed to be placed in bedrooms where people get dressed and where intimate, physical relations take place. One should also always wash her- or himself before commencing a puja ceremony, and women should avoid making puja as well as going to the temples when menstruating.

Religious worship for Hindus is thus not only about respect and devotion but also about establishing a personal connection with the divine (Dwyer 2008: 40). Although a priest is a facilitator of temple pujas, even in this context puja is still a private

communion between an individual and the deity. Several devotees may be gathered together in front of the idol but they all worship the god or goddess individually. Therefore, despite being a social experience, puja is not usually a communal religious service (Michaels 1998: 245). Fuller (1992: 75) notes that although the structure of Hindu worship creates a connection between the deity and the human, it is always a temporary one and sustains only for a short period of time, despite of parts such as consuming prasad. Therefore repeated performances are necessary. Equally, this emphasises the differentiation between the human and the divine (ibid.: 75).

Image 26: A woman in Mamallapuram preparing her oil lamp for puja by decorating it with turmeric paste and vermillion powder.



Image 27: A domestic shrine in Mamallapuram ready for puja to begin. Women from the neighbouring households will take part in the ritual.



Image 28: Devotees in a temple in Mamallapuram queuing to see the deity and receive darshan.

3.5.2 Darshan: seeing the deity

Darshan is also an important part of puja. Literally translated from Sanskrit, darshan means “seeing and being seen by God” (Huyler 1999: 36). Elgood (1999: 28) describes darshan as a “an act of positive visual and mental engagement with the god or seeing or being in the presence of an image.” Devotees go to temples and shrines to receive darshan from the gods and goddesses, which means that they look at the image, such as the sculpture, here an embodiment of the deity, and savour the presence of the divine (Lipner 1994: 281). In practice this means that a reciprocal, benevolent sight between the worshipper and the deity is exchanged during the puja ritual. Eye contact between a god or a goddess and a devotee is crucial since eyes are believed to transfer devotion and blessings between participants. As previously noted, eyes are also considered to be the most important part of a stone icon, and are ritually opened at the event of consecration in temples. The importance of the eyes in divine Hindu images emphasises the fact that also the god or the goddess sees the devotee. Eck writes that “It is said in India that one of the ways in which gods can be recognised when they move among people on this earth is by their unblinking eyes” (Eck 1998: 6–7). Thus, darshan “connotes a whole range of ideas relating to ‘insight’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘philosophy’”, as Pinney states (2004: 9).



Image 29: A festival cart in Mamallapuram. Deities are placed inside the cart and people come to the streets to view it.

As well as referring to sight, darshan is also associated with personal contact, which often translates in practice to close physical proximity to something considered sacred. Even without actual physical contact, darshan can also be considered to be a form of touching as the sight goes forward to the object and touches it. Touching in turn is the ultimate form of connection between two parties. In addition, darshan is a form of knowing since eyes are believed to be the source of truth (Eck 1998: 9). As contact with a deity is primarily established through eyes, darshan is then more important than receiving prasada. In fact, taking prasada is not part of the official ritual or counted as one of the *upacharas*, although it is part of puja. Darshan may be received from a deity but also from a highly revered or a holy person, such as a *guru* (a spiritual teacher), a saint, a *sadhu* (holy man), a *sannyasi* (renouncer) or a sacred object. It can be achieved in a variety of ways when the devotee feels he or she has established contact with the divine. Darshan may be experienced in the process of puja but also during festivals, pilgrimage, meditation or when viewing something considered sacred such as a sculpture, a tree or different holy places in nature, such as water bodies and mountains (Huyler 1999: 36; Eck 1998: 5). During festivals deities placed on chariots come to greet the people outside the temples and darshan is accessible to all (Lipner 1994: 281–282).

3.6 EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS WITH HINDU ARTS: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Western or more specifically European attitudes towards Indian arts and crafts have varied throughout history. In the context of Hindu art, Partha Mitter has covered the topic in detail in his book “Much Maligned Monsters, History of European reactions to Indian Art” (1977). Different European understandings of Hindu art and crafts have been very much tied to ideas related to Christian religious ideology and classical art, against which the subject of representations, the statues of Hindu gods and goddesses, have been assessed.

Multi-armed monsters and horned devils

The earliest historical accounts of the subject date back to the 13th century when Venetian merchant Marco Polo’s travels to the East also included India. In his travel reports, Polo mentions god and goddess statues only briefly that he had perhaps seen in India or heard being spoken about (Mitter 1977: 3). However, over the following decades and centuries, several other European travellers told their stories, which in turn shaped the European imaginary about the physical appearance of the deity sculptures in India. At the time, European knowledge of the representations of gods and goddesses in India was based purely on literary descriptions, as visual travel reports did not exist before the 17th century (ibid.: 5). Mitter refers to this period from the mid-13th century until the end of the 17th century as the formative phase in the European reception of Indian art, since during those decades European ideas about Indian arts remained more or less the same. They were all a result of the accounts of the privileged few travellers and also their objectivity and truthfulness was usually unquestionably accepted by the readers of the time (ibid.: 2). Different European artists used these stories as a basis for the images they made depicting Indian gods and goddesses. Interestingly, deity

idols were always portrayed as monsters or devils with horns. The earliest traveller reports were thus narratives loaded with imagination, but they also had to do with preconceptions and accepted stereotypical views about the subject (ibid.:2).

These images were partly based on the literary heritage of monsters and “Marvels of the East” common in medieval times that came from classical writers.¹⁹ Ideas and stereotypes of real, living monsters were also projected onto multi-armed images of Hindu deities or huge, rock-carved figures that could be seen in some temples and caves in India. Although monsters were unnatural and contrary to the classical ideal of rationality and order, they could also be seen to be a part of God’s creations and should not be therefore completely rejected (ibid.:7–8). Another factor having an impact on the way Indian gods were depicted in the West were the teachings of the Christian Church, according to which pagan religions were the devil’s creations. Medieval European images of the devil and demons took their shape around the year 1000, which borrowed attributes from the classical Pan figure, the dragon of the Apocalypse and depictions of hell. Similarly, Indian gods as pagan evil spirits were fitted into this category and depicted accordingly. Mitter summarises the issue that “(I)n short, classical monsters and gods, Biblical demons and Indian gods were all indiscriminately lumped together with congenital malformations under the all-embracing class of monsters” (ibid.: 10).

Missionary accounts from the 17th century were some of the first sources of information that enlightened European audiences about the practices of Hinduism and replaced some of the older unsystematic reports. Pagan religions and ethnology became a matter of scientific interest. Studies in Hinduism also caused a major change in the old pictorial traditions as more objectivity was required from the image accounts of India. Old sensational travellers’ tales were jettisoned around 1630, although some of the stereotypical features, such as devil figures, still remained in some images.²⁰ New travellers, mainly ethnographers, were committed to presenting more authentic illustrations from their voyages. Images that copied Indian popular miniature paint-

¹⁹ Contacts between Europe and India were disturbed by the fall of the Roman Empire and the following unrest, as well as the dominance of Islam in the Near and Middle East. Different myths and legends about India dominated the consciousness of people in the Middle Ages due to very limited actual contacts. Many classical stories, going back to Greek writers such as Herodotus, were popular, and some of them were believed to be actual historical accounts. The “Romance of Alexander” attributed to Callisthenes was influential and it had many medieval derivatives. This narrative was also thought to be a fact-based account of Alexander’s adventures and it also included stories about his encounters with different marvels of the East. In addition, medieval encyclopaedias used the supernatural tales of Plinys and Solinus as sources of information about India, and they also covered the topic of marvels. These in turn influenced those few travellers who were actually able to visit India. These preconceptions did not of course only influence the ideas about Indian art or sculpture but also had an effect on natural science, geography, history, maps, etc. Also, they did not vanish consciousness of people in the Middle Ages due to very limited actual contacts. Many classical stories, going back to Greek writers such as Herodotus, were popular, and some of them were believed to be actual historical accounts. The “Romance of Alexander” attributed to Callisthenes was influential and it had many medieval derivatives. This narrative was also thought to be a fact-based account of Alexander’s adventures and it also included stories about his encounters with different marvels of the East. In addition, medieval encyclopaedias used the supernatural tales of Plinys and Solinus as sources of information about India, and they also covered the topic of marvels. These in turn influenced those few travellers who were actually able to visit India. These preconceptions did not of course only influence the ideas about Indian art or sculpture but also had an effect on natural science, geography, history, maps, etc. Also, they did not vanish immediately after new discoveries but continued to affect people’s minds and popular stereotypical views until the 17th and 18th century. (Mitter 1977: 6–7.)

²⁰ There is a drawing made by a European from around 1540 that portrays the three Indian gods, Brahma, Visnu and Shiva, but this image was not well known in the West until the 20th century (Mitter 1977: 60).

ings were an important part of this turn in the pictorial tradition. An encyclopaedia of contemporary paganism was published in 1723, which also included illustrations of Indian gods in a new manner. This period was thus the end of the centuries-long monster myth, although aesthetic appreciation of Indian arts was still non-existent. (Ibid.: 60–72). In the 18th century, interest in sexual imagery and fertility rites in classical religions was also reflected in the studies of Indian art and religion. The discovery of erotic arts in India made scholars realise that this genre also existed outside of the classical world (ibid.: 73–83). Around the same period Indian sculptures were collected in private collections, although interest in them focused on their meaning rather than their aesthetic value (ibid.: 85).

Archaeological discoveries

The end of the 18th century was a time of increased travelling among the elite, known as the “grand tour”, which could be extended to places like India. These first orientalists paid special attention to Indian temple arts and architecture and studied its features in detail. It coincided with the arrival of Sanskrit texts and Indian literature in Europe, which were welcomed with such enthusiasm in certain circles that this period has also been called the Second or Oriental Renaissance (ibid.: 107). Several books were published which also included illustrations of various Indian monuments, temples and sculptures.²¹ Although they were admired, Indian arts were seen to not to have progressed and were thus inferior to Western arts. In some accounts Indian sculptures were also criticised for poor design and realisation, which could be blamed on the fact that they did not try to imitate nature.

These views shifted somewhat with the appearance of new, alternative aesthetic categories of sublime and picturesque. Beauty was no longer considered to be the only important aesthetic criteria, and the traditional concept of strict rules in art was replaced by the notion of taste. Classical formalism of Renaissance also made space for “romantic disorder” and irregularity. They helped to judge Indian arts with a different set of eyes that now made European audiences associate them with romantics, nostalgia and exotic, distant lands. This also encouraged European artists to visit India and draw and paint the sceneries, monuments, temples and sculptures. The monumental rock-cut caves and sculptures of Ellora, Ajanta, Elephanta and Mamallapuram in particular became the focus of several studies as well as illustrations (ibid.: 121–122; see also Inden 1990: 66–69).

Initially, European studies of Indian arts concentrated on architecture. Later research started to pay more attention to sculptures that were seen inside the temples and temple walls. Indian sculptors’ accurate anatomical descriptions and the ability to convey human mental sensations was praised in some instances (ibid.: 143).

Shilpa Shastras did not properly enter into European knowledge before 1834. Until then, travellers and archaeologists had studied and judged Indian architecture and arts based on European standards and methods. Sir William Jones, a founding member of the Asiatic Society in Bengal, established in 1784, had already stressed their importance before but it was not before a young South Indian named Rám Ráz was

²¹ Some travellers of the time also visited Mamallapuram and studied the monuments. See Chapter 2 for more details

given the task of communicating to Europeans about Indian aesthetic systems and the problems faced by local architects. He was given a task to translate Sanskrit texts into English, and as a result a completely new level of information about Indian arts and architecture became available to Europeans (ibid.: 147, 180–182).

Indian arts enter art history and philosophy

Although archaeological findings encouraged systematic documentation of Indian arts, the interpretations of the findings were not at the same level. Art history as a new discipline developed in the latter part of the 18th century and classified itself as a science among the natural sciences. Also Indian art became a subject of art historical studies. Early scholars, such as Winckelmann, focused on the evolutionary progress of artistic styles of the whole world rather than single nations. The dominant view of the era, influenced by ethnologists and social historians, was that all nations were believed to have developed from a single nation. This assumption was equally reflected in the debates about a single origin of arts, which now also included the arts of India (ibid.: 189–190). Sir William Temple argued that all knowledge regarding arts and sciences had come from India instead of Egypt. He also believed that Pythagoras had learned his knowledge from India. Voltaire was a great admirer of India and held India as the original nation of the whole of humanity (ibid.: 191–192). Many scholarly debates of the time were concerned with the role of Egypt, China and India as the inventor of arts by comparing different architectural styles, for example (ibid.: 193–194). Winckelmann, who had evaluated Egyptian art basing on his views on the effects of the climate, also influenced B. Rode and A. Riem to see the hot climate and rich nature of India as the reason for what they saw as “bad taste and uniformity” in Indian arts. For them this meant rich ornamentation, for example. In addition, Indian arts were seen to lack any rules, thus being primitive and archaic (ibid.: 202).

Friedrich Creuzer studied Indian mythology, art and religion and interpreted many symbols and myths present in Indian art in his famous book “Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker” (1810). This work was an important contribution to the study of symbolism that also developed scholarly studies of the actual meaning of Hindu art in Europe. Creuzer saw symbols as being central to Hinduism, as expressions of moral truths and Hindu art also expressed the same principles. However, he accepted the view of the time that Greek art was superior to Oriental arts as it has evolved beyond symbolic representations. In comparison, Indian art was seen as static, also because it was lacking all rules that could contribute to its development. At the same, Creuzer saw that Indian art had an important spiritual purpose as it had to express all the different facets of Hindu philosophy and theology (ibid.: 206–207).

Creuzer’s interest and writings in symbolism had influenced the famous German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel, whose writings in the early 19th century also dealt with Indian religions and art.²² Hegel based his views on his own theories about the world and history as well as on literary sources on India. Hegel wrote about the uni-

²²For Hegel, art represented beauty, truth and freedom, ideals beyond the visible, objective natural world (cf. Kuisma et al. 2013). At the same time he held the view that neither content nor form in art is the perfect vehicle for bringing our minds to the spirit. Art can express truth only partially since its content is limited by the particular form in a piece of art. (Berger 2000: 84). Nevertheless, subjectivity, spirituality and religion were important aspects of art for Hegel (Mitter 1977: 208).

versal history of art, which was tied with and formed a part of his writings about the history of the world's civilizations. In Hegel's philosophy each nation has a unique "national spirit" that unfolds over time and into awareness according to a divine plan. This national spirit and its historical process of becoming was also reflected in art traditions. Indian art naturally reflected the particular national spirit of India and its people. Indian art was spiritual but also symbolic, which dealt more with abstractions than with concrete forms (ibid.: 213–214). Hegel argued that Oriental art, including Indian art, manifested "real symbolism" with "inadequate" symbols as opposed to "consonant" symbols of classical art. With this he referred to the Neoplatonic treatment of ambiguous symbols that never fully revealed their meaning, which was apparent in Indian art. Greek art in turn was clear and easy to comprehend with its messages. In addition, Hegel found Indian art full of fantasy and exaggerations, that were a result of the tension between abstract philosophy and the attempts to depict that in art. He particularly criticised the treatment of the human figure in Hindu art that seemed to disobey any rules and measurements. At the same time Hegel felt that there was a presence of spirit in Indian arts because of the imagination that was apparent in the art works (ibid.: 212–217).

Indian design and decorative arts

In the Victorian era, Western writings about Indian arts were especially concerned with the issue of design and decorative arts. The industrial revolution had had a huge impact on artisan production, especially in Britain. Artisanal training had declined, and as a result traditional craftsmanship was deteriorating. Mass-produced items were turning out to be poor not only in terms of their quality but also in terms of design. In Britain an aesthetic movement was founded by several designers that raised the issue of both better education for craftsmen as well as revitalising the originality of design. They turned their eyes to India, where ornamental design and craftsmanship was seen to be superior to European industrial design. Traditional Indian design and craftsmanship could work as inspiration to bring British industrial arts back to life (ibid.: 221–222).

This movement, known as the Arts and Crafts movement, did not concern Indian visual arts such as painting or sculpture, but the focus was on ornamental design and decorative arts (ibid.: 221). Owen Jones, one of the founders of the movement, analysed Indian design from a theoretical point of view. Jones' work on the topic 'The Grammar of Ornaments' was published in 1856. It focused on the guiding principles of Eastern designs, including Indian, and aimed to formulate principles of "good" and "correct" design (Mathur 2007: 18). The main point of the excitement and appreciation was the fact that Indian design was "non-illusionist" or flat design, as motifs and designs did not have shadow or other naturalistic aims. This was seen as a characteristic of Eastern design in general, including Indian, and in turn lacking in European traditions (Mitter 1977: 223).

Sir George Birdwood was a prominent British spokesman for Indian decorative arts; he was a Victorian art-critic, curator and collector and wrote the highly popular and much cited 'The Industrial Arts of India' published in 1880, which was one of a series of handbooks tied to London's South Kensington Museum's India collection. He especially praised Indian crafts workers who produced all different forms of crafts in harmony with nature and their environment. Birdwood thus attributed the greatness

of Indian design to the social structure of Indian villages. However, his appreciation was limited only to Indian decorative arts. What is interesting is that Birdwood showed little interest in sculpture, painting and Hindu iconography even though he saw Indian art as inseparable from Hindu religion (Mathur 2007: 30–31). Despite this Birdwood saw Indian art as monstrous in nature because of Hindu mythology and its deities (Mitter 1977: 236–237). According to Birdwood these monstrous shapes of deities were not suitable for representing higher forms of art and thus he dismissed Indian sculptures and painting as art. However, Birdwood did like Buddhist art as he saw it as dealing with human stories (ibid.: 237).

Equally, a great British art critic of the time, John Ruskin, did not appreciate Indian arts in general but admitted that the design and craftsmanship in Indian applied arts were both excellent and original (ibid.: 239). Ruskin's writings on Indian art in turn influenced William Morris, one of the main characters behind the Art and Crafts movement.

Museums, collections and continuing research

By the beginning of the 20th century Indian sculptures and paintings were already being exhibited in several European museums and collections. The East India Company Museum in London was founded in 1801 and its contents were later divided between the British Museum and South Kensington Museum. William Morris donated an Indian bronze statue to South Kensington Museum in 1869 which started the present Indian collection. This museum, renamed the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899, started collecting Indian arts from an aesthetic point of view from 1909 onwards. The British Museum was also able to increase its Indian collection by receiving private sculpture donations as well as new archaeological discoveries. A noteworthy Indian collection was also found at the time in Denmark, which was a result of its colonial links with India (Mitter 1977: 252).

New archaeological discoveries coincided with these collecting activities, and systematic research was carried out in order to establish comprehensive historical accounts on Indian arts. Mitter divides the main art historical studies of this era into two groups that are characterised by either an "archaeological" or "transcendental" approach to the subject. The main difference between these two viewpoints was how they evaluated Indian arts in relation to Western classical aesthetics. Whereas the first group held classical as the highest form of art, the second group questioned its superiority and did not place Indian art in an automatically inferior position (ibid: 256).

The year 1910 became important in terms of public recognition of Indian art in Britain. Birdwood, a great admirer of Indian industrial art and crafts tradition, made a public and somewhat berating public statement about a sculpture of a Javanese Buddha displayed at the Royal Society of Art. In the same instance he also referred to Indian sculpture and painting tradition in a belittling manner and dismissed them as not being fine art. This provoked a reaction that resulted in several English artists, art critics and intellectuals writing a letter to The Times newspaper, defending not only the Buddha sculpture but also Indian arts as an important living art tradition. The religious affiliation of the sculptures was recognised as particularly important. It could be argued that this was the first public occasion when Indian arts were valued not only because of their historical importance but also because of their aesthetics (ibid: 270).

One of the main reasons behind this change that was clearly taking place in attitudes towards Indian arts was Ernest Binfield Havell. He had published a volume entitled “Indian Sculpture and Painting” in 1908 and wrote several other volumes on the subject over the next few decades. Havell’s main argument was that Indian art should be judged on the basis of the characteristics of their own tradition and ideals rather than the Western standards of art. Havell himself interpreted Indian arts through one of the Indian philosophies, according to which the visible world is an illusion, *maya*, and emphasis is placed on the metaphysical realm that is beyond our sensory reach (ibid.: 270–273).

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was a cosmopolitan intellectual with a half German and half Ceylonese heritage, and he became one of the leading scholars and promoters of Indian arts in the West in the early 20th century. Coomaraswamy received his education in Britain and also lived and worked in the United States, therefore representing more European than Indian intellectual traditions. He was a philosopher, a mystic and an art scholar who, partly like Havell, interpreted and emphasised the spiritual greatness of Indian arts to Western audiences. Coomaraswamy’s work coincided with the rise in the Indian nationalist movement of the time, which also supported the cultural regeneration that was taking place in India. According to Coomaraswamy, religion had a key role in the development of arts and only religion could maintain the natural, harmonious relationship between life and art (ibid.: 277–278). In this early work Coomaraswamy pointed out that Indian arts and crafts are a living tradition, and therefore art scholars should study the contemporary forms that are at least partly survivors of past forms and styles.

The work of these scholars has then continued by various other European and also Indian scholars throughout the 20th century, who approached Indian arts from different perspectives. Studies include the emergence of different Indian art traditions such as folk art and Indian modernism, which are not only based on Hinduism. Later research also reflects the changes and developments that have happened within art discourses both in the European and Indian context (cf. Mitter 2001, 2007). These histories can also be analysed through the lens of Orientalist theories and discourses that do not yet receive attention in Mitter’s (1977) original work (cf. Said 1978).

3.7 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter has discussed the philosophy and ideals of Indian Hindu stone carving tradition and how stone carvers have been presented in Indian society in a historical context. It has also pointed out some of the contradictions between the ideals and the actual practices. In addition, the chapter has looked at the role of statues in a religious context: as an object of worship and an embodiment of deities in public and private shrines. Statues have a central role in puja ceremonies that offer devotees a chance to interact with the divine through prayer and offerings, and be able to receive a blessing through darshan, a reciprocal and benevolent eye contact with the deity. The last part of the chapter described how Hindu statues have been seen in the eyes of Europeans in a historical context.

Many of these themes are explored further in Chapter 6, which approaches stone carvings as arts or crafts, and especially in Chapter 7, which focuses on the possible religious or spiritual power or agency of stone carvings, including those made for the tourist market in Mamallapuram. Several actors or agents play a role both in the mak-

ing processes and use of stone statues. Some of these agents are human beings, such as stone carvers, priests and devotees, but also the statues themselves can have agent-like power, especially since they are not only seen as representations of the divine but also as actual gods or goddesses in embodied form and are able to interact with humans. Darshan is one example of this. Equally, puja offerings to deities, such as flowers and food, and prasada that is received in return, are able to transport blessings and thus become carriers of meaning, power and agency in material form.

The current stone carving industry in Mamallapuram is based on the principles and ideals of the Indian Hindu stone carving tradition, but equally it has developed its own particular features. Stone carving traditions are also subject to historical changes that occur through changes within society. For example, these days stone carvers work for the tourist market, come from different caste groups and have created different statue styles outside the traditional Hindu iconography. These themes are the focus of the next chapter.

4 STONE CARVING IN MAMALLAPURAM

4.1 INTRODUCTION

There were no official record of the exact number of stone carving units or stone carvers working in Mamallapuram, but according to some estimates there were over 200 workshops in the town and thousands of stone carvers.²³ In September 2010 I counted 162 stone carving units in the main areas of the town. Most carving shops produced either granite statues or soft stone carvings, carvers specialised in either type of work, and their clientele varied depending on the type of sculptures produced. Whereas Indian people were the main buyers of granite carvings for temples, shrines and for decoration, soft stone statues were also bought by foreign tourists.

A very pivotal aspect of the contemporary stone carving tradition in Mamallapuram is the fact that it has developed alongside international tourism. Although many international travel guides give the impression that there has been a consistent, elaborate stone carving tradition in Mamallapuram from the Pallava era to the present day, in reality the stone carving industry has developed to its present state as a result of the establishment of the Government College of Sculpture and Traditional Architecture in Mamallapuram in 1957, and much in connection with the growth of Mamallapuram as a popular tourist destination. In order to revive the old carving tradition, the government of Tamil Nadu established a college in Mamallapuram that teaches traditional Indian stone carving, architecture and painting. The government also sponsored apprenticeship schemes from the 1960s onwards to teach stone carving, although at present they are no longer running. These initiatives have attracted both locals as well as people from different parts of Tamil Nadu to learn stone carving in Mamallapuram. Many of the sculpture college graduates have started stone carving businesses in the town. At the same time, tourist facilities in Mamallapuram have developed as the numbers of international and domestic visitors have increased from the 1960s onwards. Thus, the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram has grown alongside the development of the tourism industry, and some of the stone carvers specialise in the making of carvings for the international tourist market.

This chapter looks at the current stone carving tradition in Mamallapuram. The first part, "Social background and training" presents a background and describes the education of stone carvers. This is followed by "Stone carving as an occupational category and source of income", which looks at the businesses side of stone carving in Mamallapuram. The chapter then proceeds to present the different stone materials used "Varieties of stone", followed by "Techniques and tools" that describes contemporary stone carving processes. The next part, "Location of carving units and shops", introduces the different areas in which stone carving takes place in Mamallapuram. The next two parts describe the different types of carvings produced and sold in Mamallapuram. These are "Granite carvings" and "Soft stone carvings". "Stone carving and the concept of craft" discusses the notion of craft in the context of stone carving in Mamallapuram, followed by a concluding discussion.

²³I visited the Board of Handicrafts in Chennai in 2012, who issue identity cards to registered stone carvers. The new official in the office had just recently began working in his post and was therefore unable to give me any numbers based on their records. The estimates above were given to me by stone carvers and other people I spoke to in Mamallapuram.

4.2 SOCIAL BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

Among the stone carvers interviewed in Mamallapuram, stone carving was a hereditary occupation in many families. Often there was more than one male member in a family who works either as a stone carver in a sculpture unit or as a stone mason on a construction site. Some stone carving units were joint businesses owned by different family members and have been passed on from father to son. Other carvers interviewed had no other family members involved in stone carving, but they had taken up the profession because of personal interests. Family members could be for example farmers or small business owners. A few respondents told me they had not been very interested in studying but found stone carving as a practice interesting. Although many stone carvers had their families in Mamallapuram, many had also moved there from elsewhere in Tamil Nadu because of stone carving or because their families were originally from somewhere else. All the stone carvers in Mamallapuram were male, because stone carving work was considered to require a lot of physical strength and power. This is true when working with granite and large sculptures. Although a large part of the granite work was carried out with the help of electric tools, parts of the carving was still done by hand. During my fieldwork I once saw a girl making decorations on finished sculptures in her family's shop, but all the people I spoke to told me that women do not engage in stone carving. Most carvers I encountered were between 20 and 50 years of age.

Traditionally the stone carvers have been members of the Viswakarma caste communities but nowadays stone carving as an occupation is not tied to any particular caste groups. In South India Viswakarmas have usually been seen as relatively low but respectable community (Parker 2010a: 137). In Mamallapuram some granite carvers came from a Viswakarma background, but in general they came from all parts of society with different economic and social backgrounds. Most stone carvers interviewed belonged to the official SC category, meaning low caste status. People belonging to the fisherman community in Mamallapuram have not taken up stone carving. The majority of the carvers interviewed were Hindus by religion, which is the main religious group in Mamallapuram. Some of the stone carvers were also Christian, since many lower-caste Hindus have converted to Christianity in Mamallapuram. There were a few Muslim-owned stone carving units that also produced Hindu sculptures. However, many people I spoke to felt that they would not like the idea of a non-Hindu taking part in temple construction. Stone carving as an occupation was not common among the Muslim community in Mamallapuram, and even those few businesses that were owned by them had mainly Hindus working as carvers in the workshops.

The stone carvers of Mamallapuram had learned their skills either through an apprenticeship system or by studying it in the college. Many carvers had learned their skills directly from other family members by starting to carve in their workshops and acquiring carving skills through practice. Also those that had studied in the college had been working part-time in a carving shop alongside their studies. Some had already started to try stone carving as a child in their homes since they were exposed to stone carving from an early age through their families. It takes several years for stone carvers to learn carving skills and typically they work for others until they may start their own business.

There is a government-run college in Mamallapuram that teaches stone carving. The Government College of Traditional Architecture and Sculpture was founded in 1957 and was affiliated to Madras University in Chennai. I was told it is the only col-

lege in the state of Tamil Nadu and one of the few in India that specialises in traditional Indian arts. This means that, for example, the teaching of stone carving follows the guidance based on Shipa Shastras and students learn to design and make sculptures based on traditional guidelines of correct forms, measurements and iconography. In addition to stone carving, the subjects taught are traditional temple architecture, wood carving, painting and cement work. Women study only painting. The college offers a bachelor's degree course in fine arts (BFa) that takes four years to complete. There are also two-year pre-diploma courses available to students who have a lower educational background. Studies are practice-oriented but they include also theory and art history. During first-year studies, students learn drawing for stone, and work with soft stones making ornamentations such as flowers and animals. The language of teaching is Tamil and studies also include the history of Indian architecture, painting, iconography and iconometry. Students then move on to harder soft stones in their second year. Theory is taught in English and it includes music, dance, history of Indian religions, and iconography. During the third year students draw and carve full figures such as gods and goddesses. Theoretical studies include Indian philosophy, art, and conservation. During the final fourth year, students work with granite and they also create "modern" sculptures (non-Hindu iconography) and panel carvings based on monuments in Mamallapuram or somewhere else in India. In addition, students learn temple administration, aesthetics and Sanskrit. The sculpture college also organises study trips to see different historical rock carvings. During the first year students visit places in the state of Tamil Nadu, during the second year in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, in the third year in other South Indian states, and during the final year they visit North India. Exams include sculpture-making as well as theory papers.



Image 30: Students practising stone carving at the sculpture college in Mamallapuram

The sculpture college has been financed by the Tamil Nadu government and the college fees are relatively low. According to the teachers I spoke to, around 30 per cent of the students came from Mamallapuram and rest from other parts of Tamil Nadu and other states. Mostly students were 17 to 18 years old when they start the college and only a few of them were women. They were either Hindus or Christians and they came from mixed social backgrounds. However, the number of students had declined by 50 per cent in recent years since these days most young people went to an engineering college. Around 40 students applied each year, of which about 30 accepted the place, but not everyone finished the course. At the time there was no entrance exam, which previously consisted of drawing, maths and language. Temple architecture and cement work were the most popular courses in the school, since the temple construction business brings the best income. Studies in the sculpture college ensure that a stone carver has the knowledge and skills to practise stone carving on a professional level based on traditional guidelines. This creates a division between stone carvers but it is still only a starting point in their career, and it does not guarantee financial success.



Image 31: Instructions on the wall of the sculpture college in Mamallapuram

When the sculpture college was founded, it was located inside the town of Mamallapuram. It has since been relocated just outside the town and the old location nowadays houses a sculpture museum displaying students' work. The sculpture college had its own production unit that took on commissioned work and which employed students and recent graduates. Students were also asked to take part in national craft fairs where they got to display their work.

4.3 STONE CARVING AS AN OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY AND A SOURCE OF INCOME

Most stone carving units in Mamallapuram were privately-owned businesses, but were also a couple of government-run units. All the units consisted of an owner and a number of workers. In many cases the owner was a master carver who was a well-known stone carver and a professional in his craft. Many of them were old college graduates but not all. They could still do the designing of the carvings or take care of the business contacts and have a number of workers who do the actual carving work. Sometimes the owner was only a businessman who had no background in stone carving and had hired professional stone carvers to work for him. Smaller stone carving units had less workers and often the owner was also making the carvings. The smallest businesses were run by a single person.

According to the stone carving I spoke to stone carving was considered to be a respectable occupation since it is skilled labour as well as an art/craft form that has a religious purpose. It is also based on division of labour between people with different levels of education and skill sets. This created a hierarchy between carvers although they could constantly learn more and improve their skills. They started from simple tasks and proceed to more complicated carving processes, and this is also reflected in their salaries. The earnings of stone carvers differed immensely. Those stone carvers who owned big businesses that participated in temple construction could earn hundreds of thousands of Indian rupees per year (several thousand euro). They often had steady business around the year. The complete opposite to this was a carver who owned a small workshop and was struggling to survive by selling small sculptures to foreign tourists who came to Mamallapuram only during the high season. They could earn anything between 0 and 1500 rupees per day, depending on their sales (0–25 euro). If the shops sold any bigger sculptures they could earn more than this on some days. Those stone carvers who worked for others usually had daily wages ranging from 150–500 rupees (2.50–9 euro) per day depending on their skills and the type of work they did. On average people working in the granite carving units on a fixed salary earned 300 rupees per day in 2010. They worked on average eight hours a day, six days per week, with Sunday being a day off. During busy periods when certain orders needed to be completed, carvers worked longer hours. In general, the wages for stone carvers working as labourers were not high but it was usually enough to get by in Mamallapuram.

Most carvers from Mamallapuram were registered as stone carvers, labelled as “artisans”, in the Board of Handicrafts in Chennai. They received an identity card as well as a health insurance card that gave them and three other family members free medical care up to 100,000 rupees annually (around 1,500 euro). There are many health hazards that the stone carvers become exposed to, such as stone dust, noise, and accidents from handling the stones and electric tools. People used very little protective equipment in the workshops. The dust was the biggest problem and many carvers suffered from eye and respiratory problems. The government also sponsored stone carvers with loans that were available through certain commercial banks. However, most carvers I spoke to told me that getting a loan was actually very difficult since a lot of paperwork was required and the process was slow. Many also said that loans were available only for bigger businesses and well-known carvers, and it would be very difficult for a small carver to get a loan. In addition, carvers have an association called *Shilpa Sangam* but I was told it was very inactive and the members were mainly stone carvers from the bigger businesses. They had meetings usually only when there were some important issues to discuss, such as health problems before the government health insurance scheme became available.



Image 32: Stone carvers at work

Many of those carvers who worked in the foreign tourist market told me that they hoped their children would take up a different profession. They thought that there was too much competition and not enough tourists to buy the carvings. In addition, carving work is physically hard since carvers sit in difficult postures and are exposed to stone dust all day long. Some carvers felt that they themselves no longer had other occupational choices but wanted their children to get a good education and have a different type of job. Although most of them loved their work, the fact was that many of them struggled to make a living.

People in Mamallapuram gave me conflicting information regarding changes in the number of workshops over the years. Some said that there were more stone carving shops at the time than before, while others claimed that there were in fact fewer stone carvers since many had closed their shops. During the time I spent in Mamallapuram, some new stone carving shops opened in the tourist areas but also some were closed down. Although the stone carving business was not successful for everyone, there were always new people who wanted to try their luck. Some businesses did very well despite the annual fluctuations in the number of tourists, and many tourists indeed did buy sculptures in Mamallapuram. I will continue this discussion in Chapter 5.

4.4. VARIETIES OF STONE

Stone carving is practised all over India but the types of stones used for carving reflect the regional variation in the availability of different stones. Although all kinds of stones can nowadays be quite easily transported to different parts of the country, in most places the local varieties are mostly used due to lower transport costs, which affect the price of the raw material. Different regional stone varieties can also be seen in the traditional local material culture. In South India, including Tamil Nadu, granite deposits are found in abundance in the ground and as a result of this many of the temples and sculptures have been made in granite throughout the centuries. Granite belongs to the group of igneous rocks. Granite is still used for temple architecture and it continues to be the main material for religious Hindu carvings in Tamil Nadu. Black granite was the mostly used variety in Mamallapuram and usually it came from Chennai and the town of Thiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. However, the stone mostly used in Mamallapuram granite sculpture and usually referred to as black granite was actually a slightly softer version of granite that was called blue metal. Blue metal is 25 per cent basalt stone and it is mainly used for different construction purposes such as for buildings and road construction. Its price was lower than that of pure granite. Blue metal was quarried widely across Tamil Nadu and it was also easy to obtain through illegal sources at an even lower price. Whereas real granite would cost around 40,000 rupees per cubic metre (about 580 euro in 2010), blue metal costs 10,000 rupees (about 150 euro). However, the softer quality and a lower price did not make blue metal less valuable for the carvers, since it is easier to carve and achieve good results. The carvers valued its qualities since it holds the details better than the high density granite and can also be carved by hand if necessary.

In Mamallapuram, pure granite and blue metal were both used for temple construction, religious sculptures as well as for making monumental statues only for decoration. Those statues made especially as souvenirs for the foreign tourist market were made from different soft stones or varieties of marble. Soft stones are easier to carve than granite and are easy to carve by hand. Granite and blue metal, on the other hand, require more force and different tools since the material is much harder.

Workshops working with granite usually had their own sources and dealers where they got their stones. Smaller units that worked mainly for the tourist market and carved soft stone varieties and marble got their stones from a couple of dealers who regularly brought trucks of stones to Mamallapuram, usually a few times a year. Most of the carvers I spoke to got their stones from the same dealer who had been in business for several years. It seemed that there was not much competition in dealing stones in Mamallapuram for the tourist market and it was very much monopolised by one man with good connections around India. He kept the stones in a storage room his house. Stones were cut into small cubes, and the carvers could buy stones according to their needs, storage facilities and ability to pay.

Soft stones are often called soap stones as some of them contain talc that can produce a soapy feeling in hands when touched. There are different varieties of soft stones that vary in their degree of hardness. Some soft stones can take on a very high level of detail and equally require high levels of skills when used for carving. Some very soft stones produce a risk when carved as they can break very easily. The soft stone mainly used in Mamallapuram carving units that produce carvings for the tourist market were gadapa stone and a so-called green stone. In addition, a variety of different types of soft marble were used. Most carvers in Mamallapuram called all the different soft tone varieties simply soft stones or soap stones.



Image 33: Soft stone blocks stored in a house and sold to stone carvers.

Gadapa stone used to be the most popular soft stone in Mamallapuram tourist carving units and it was quarried in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Another name for it is durgi stone and it was often referred to simply as grey stone. The colour of gadapa stone is very plain grey without shade variations, even when polished, and some people even said it looks like cement. However, it was the cheapest and softest stone variety, is easy to carve and was typically used for the Mamallapuram tourist market. In 2010 the price for gadapa stone was around 150–250 rupees per square foot (around 3–4 euro). Another similar-looking grey soft stone variety is stone known as green stone or green granite. It has a slightly green shade and it is harder than gadapa stone. Green stone came from Bangalore (now Bengaluru) in the state of Karnataka, and it cost around 250–300 rupees per square foot in 2010 (around 4–5 euro).

Marble is also a metamorphic rock but a hard stone. There are many different varieties of marble that vary in colour and hardness. In Mamallapuram red and yellow marble were the most commonly used types. These varieties are relatively soft to work on by hand. Marble came from North India, from the state of Rajasthan and near the city of Agra in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The price for it in 2010 was around 300–450 rupees per square foot (around 5–6 euro). During my fieldwork marble was the most popular stone for the souvenir sculptures to use and had replaced gadapa stone in recent years. This was because marble had not been available for that long. Also carvers felt it was the stone that is most preferred by the tourists. Marble can be given a shiny polish that brings out the different colours of the stone.

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4.5 TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS

Stone carvings in Mamallapuram were produced by using both hand and electric tools. The main hand tools of a stone carver were a hand saw, a pen, hammers, a variety of different type of chisels, polishing stones and emery paper. Mechanical aids such as electric saws, drills and grinders were introduced to the business in the 1990s and were used for granite and big soft stone sculptures. As granite is a hard material to carve (including blue metal), granite carvings were made mainly with electric tools since it saves time and labour, but detailing was still done by hand. Soft stone carvings were produced primarily by hand unless electric aids were needed for cutting the stone or the stone happened to be very hard. However, many soft stones are unsuitable for machinery since they break easily.

The process of stone carving started with the basic dressing of the stone. The procedure referred as rough cutting consisted of cutting a stone into the size that is desired for the carving. This was usually also the first task to learn for a new carver and there were often carvers in the workshops that only concentrated on this. For a small soft stone carving, this meant sawing the stone by hand, but for granite carvers used an electric saw. After this the carver drew an image of the statue on the surface of the block of stone. Marker pens of different types were used for this. Once the image was ready, any further extra pieces of stone around the image were cut off with the help of an electric or hand saw and hammer. After this the actual carving work could begin. Throughout the whole process of basic dressing, the stone laid flat on the ground. Most of the carving was also done by keeping the stone in this position as it prevented accidents and possible breakage of the stone. The statue was usually lifted only when it was needed for the finer details in the finishing process.

A stone carver started the carving work by hammering the stone away around the marked portions of a desired figure by using a variety of different sized chisels or alternatively with an electric drill. When carved by hand, the chisel was held in one hand in a slanting position so that the end of the chisel was bent opposite the carver and he could see the point of the chisel. The head of the chisel was placed on the stone at a specific angle and the carver controlled the force he used to hit the end of the chisel with the hammer in his other hand. By manipulating the angle of the chisel and the force used in hammering, he could control the outcome of the carving. Different sizes and shapes of chisels were used that further created variation in the carving and enabled the carver to achieve anything from a rough finish to very fine details such as the eyes of a deity or different ornaments as surface decoration. Usually the whole statue was worked on layer by layer so that the carving proceeded as a whole from the sketching of the image to the rough shape and then to the final finishing touches. Sketching was added to the surface as the work proceeded, and throughout the whole process carvers needed to engage in three-dimensional thinking to visualise the dimensions of the carving starting from a flat surface and proceeding from there bit by bit.

When statues of Hindu gods and goddesses were made, the eyes of the deities were left until last as that were considered to be the most important part of the sculpture and is connected with the notion of darshan. According to Shilpa Shastras, those carvings of deities aimed for temple worship are left with their eyes unfinished or “closed”, and they are only carved in the actual eye-opening ceremony as part of the rituals when a new idol is consecrated in a temple. This is a task that only a master craftsman is allowed to perform and is made with a chisel known as a “golden needle”. However, I was told that it is not uncommon that the statues of idols were technically completed

in the workshops, including the eyes. In the religious temple ritual eyes were then only symbolically opened by a master carver who is present with the temple priests. With soft stone statues, eyes did not have the same ritual significance and they may be carved onto the statue alongside the rest of the work.



Image 34: A carver working on a granite sculpture with electric and manual tools



Image 35: A stone carver finishing a carving made from soft marble



Image 36: A goddess figure in process

It may happen that the statue gets broken in the middle of the carving process. Stone carvers told me that with large monumental statues made from granite and especially with carvings made for temples or other religious purposes, it is not possible to correct the damage. According to religious Hindu beliefs this would greatly diminish the ritual value of a carving since only a perfect statue is suitable and acceptable for housing a deity. Puja procedures involving washing and smearing statues with oil means that breakage would become apparent as glue would rarely hold for very long. In comparison, soft stone statues made for the tourist market could be fixed by using glue with pieces of stone and stone dust. Once the glue has dried and hardened, the surface may be grinded smooth with a chisel and emery paper or sandpaper. On a few occasions I witnessed cases when a part of a statue had been broken, mostly while carving, but occasionally as a result of a small accident such as pushing the statue. Carvers would then assess the damage and if it was something relatively small they would try to fix it.



Image 37: An incomplete statue of Buddha that has a loose head and six fingers on one hand



Image 38: The statue of Buddha fixed and completed



Image 39: A carving workshop and a shop that produces and sells soft stone carvings in the tourist area

Once the carving of a stone statue was finished, it was polished by hand or with a help of grinders. Polishing greatly changed the appearance and colour of many stone varieties. Fully polished granite or blue metal and many marble varieties had vibrant colours. The final look of the statue usually only appeared after polishing, as most stones looked very alike and had a dull grey shade in their unpolished form. Granite and blue metal carvers could use a machine to obtain a full polish, but in the past this was done by hand using coarse and fine sand. There were special polishing stones available that were made from carborundum, which is a mixture of coal and silicon. Carborundum could be used both for hand and machine polishing. Afterwards the polishing was finalised using water and sandpaper of different levels of coarseness, depending on the desired outcome. Granite and blue metal carvings could be fully polished to obtain a very smooth, shiny black surface, or they could be polished only until darker grey with a slightly rough appearance. Handmade polish was considered far superior to machine-made polish, since with machines

the carvings always become fully polished and many people did not appreciate the resultant plastic-like appearance. By hand you obtained a more natural looking polish.

Soft stone and marble sculptures made for the tourist market were polished by hand using manual whetstones that are natural or synthetic and have varying coarseness. Water was used as a lubricant in the process that started with back-and-forth movements followed by a circular movement. The final stage of polishing was performed with emery paper, starting again with water and finishing with dry paper (also described in Procopiou et al. 2013: 145). Sometimes only emery paper was used, especially when carvings were small.

Some grey shaded stones such as a gadapa stone or green stone could be painted black with black ink and were finished off with black shoe polish to give the statue a shiny surface. The appearance resembled those carvings made from granite that had been fully polished by machines. Usually only parts of the carvings were painted black to accentuate those details that were left in their original colour. This style was very common among the carvings aimed for the tourist market. Some soft stone sculptures such as those made from different coloured marble were usually given a final polish with wax that was first applied to the finished statue and then burned with a gas lighter. The result was a hard and shiny surface that brought out all the different colour shades of the stone.



Image 40: A carver polishing a soft stone statue.



Image 41: Black statues are made from green stone, painted black and decorated.

Despite the buzzing carving industry in Mamallapuram there were no shops selling carving tools or machinery in Mamallapuram itself. Chisels came from dealers who come to Mamallapuram and went around workshops a couple of times a year or could be purchased in Chennai. Hammers were usually any pieces of wood that have been found. Electric tools were bought from Chennai, and many soft stone units shared electric tools since they did not need them all the time.

When it comes to stone carving production techniques, an important point to make is the fact that soft stone carvers did not usually follow *shilpa shastras* when making carvings for the tourist market. This was mainly to do with the fact that carvings designed only for decoration did not have to meet the standards of ritual sculptures. In addition, many soft stone carvers who had not studied at the sculpture college did not know the whole system of measurements and proportions and even those who did do not necessary follow them as they were considered to be complicated. "Only measurements!" as one stone carver said, describing the traditional carving system to me. However, all the soft stone carvers I interviewed said that they did follow some basic proportions since otherwise carvings would not "look good". Granite carvers then again are said to follow them when making ritual sculptures and also those who had not studied at the college had to learn the system through their work.

One of the carvers I interviewed was V. Punniyakotti, who had a soft stone carving shop. He told me he had written a book about measurements that are based on *shilpa shastras* but which are simpler and easier to follow. These could be used for all types of sculptures, both religious and decorative, but not for architecture. He felt that the traditional measurements are very difficult with various scalings and so on, and he thought this would benefit anyone studying stone carving. He also uses this new

system in his own work. V. Punniyakotti has a bachelor's degree from the sculpture college in Mamallapuram and a master's degree in art history from the University of Madras. He also completed an Mphil degree at Tanjore University in Tamil Nadu, focusing on sculptures and different measurements. His new measurement system was a result of the research degree at Tanjavur and V. Punniyakotti told me he had presented his book to the sculpture college in Mamallapuram in case they would be interested in using it as part of the teaching.

The carving manuals used in the sculpture college were in Tamil and based on shilpa shastras. Although carvers might not always strictly follow them in practice, they nevertheless knew the systems. During my interviews many of them drew scaling systems in my notebooks and explained different proportion systems. Some old sculpture college students showed me their college books that they kept in their shops and used as guidance when carving. They showed great pride in their knowledge and skills and also stone carving as a complicated, traditional system. In this sense my experience was different from Parker (2003b), who noticed that many carvers had never read any of the texts.



Image 42: A statue is kept flat on the ground during the manufacturing process.

4.6 LOCATION OF CARVING UNITS AND SHOPS

The town of Mamallapuram as well as the main roads leading to the town were lined with stone carving workshops as well as shops selling carvings. Most of the stone carving units were concentrated in certain areas around the main streets and tourist attractions, but there were also a number of home-based workshops along the small side streets that are not visible to passers-by. Big carving units that worked with granite producing architectural pieces, sculptures for temples and large-size decorative carvings were mainly located outside the town itself along the roadsides, because of dust and noise pollution that they create. The main areas inside Mamallapuram where stone carvings were both produced and sold were Five Ratha Street, Shore Temple

Road and Othavadai Streets. In addition, some granite carving units and shops were located along East Raja Street and West Raja Street. There were people selling soft stone carvings from carts along West Raja Street next to the park area in which most of the ancient monuments are located (see map, image 44).



Image 43: Carving shops along Five Ratha Street

Five Ratha Street is the main thoroughfare leading to one of the most popular monuments and tourist attractions of Mamallapuram, known as the Five Rathas or Five Chariots. The other side of Five Ratha Street was completely lined with stone carving units and shops and there were also some granite production units to the rear. Some of them were showrooms: shops displaying granite sculptures made in the big workshops outside the town. The biggest and most elaborate examples of monumental granite carving in Mamallapuram could be seen along Five Ratha Street. Most of these sculptures were made for temples, gardens, houses or other private or public buildings and spaces. Many carving units here took orders from wealthy Indians who ordered temple architecture and sculptures to be transported to other parts of India as well as overseas. The purpose of these showrooms was to display sculptures and entice possible buyers.

Next to the big shops and showrooms on Five Ratha Street there were also smaller stone carving units that produced and sell small-sized stone carvings aimed mainly at tourists as souvenirs. These small sculptures were made mainly from different soft stones. Many big shops also sold small soft stone statues next to the monumental granite work. Five Ratha Street was visited by Indian and foreign tourists alike, who looked at the sculptures and visited shops on their way to the monuments.

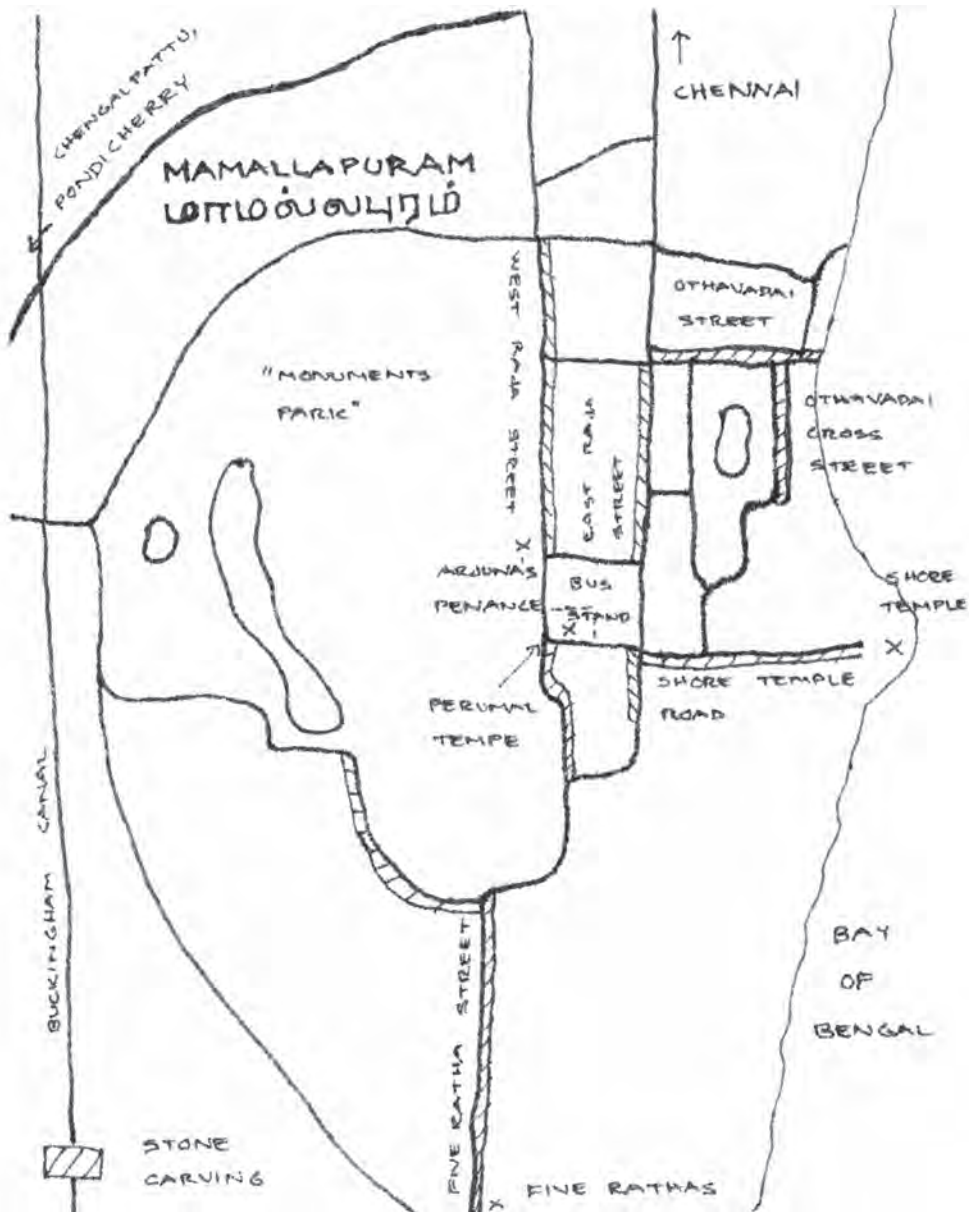


Image 44: Map of the stone carving shops in Mamallapuram

Shore Temple Road, also known as Beach Road, is the main road leading to Shore Temple, one of the main sights in Mamallapuram. This street was similar to Five Ratha Street in the sense that there were several stone carving units that produce and sell both large granite sculptures for temples as well as small soft stone carvings for the tourist market. Next to Shore Temple there is a beach, commonly known as Indian Beach. It was visited and populated mainly by local families and Indian tourists. Foreign tourists usually only came to see Shore Temple but did not spend time on Indian Beach.



Image 45: Shore Temple Road had carving workshops and shops alongside other souvenir shops



Image 46: A granite carving workshop on the outskirts of Mamallapuram



Image 47: Ohavadai Street and Othavadai Cross Street near the fishing village and beach were lined with guest houses, restaurants, souvenir shops and carving shops. The area was favoured by foreign tourists



Image 48: Stone carving shops on Othavadai Street

A third main area producing and selling stone carvings was that around Othavadai Street and Othavadai Cross Street, located near the beach in the fishing area in Mamallapuram. This area was also the main tourist area preferred by foreign tourists, and tourist restaurants and guest houses were located in this part of town. In this area most of the stone carving units were small and apart from a few exceptions, they only produced soft stone carvings. These stone carving units served both as workshops and showrooms and stone carvers sold their works directly to tourists. It was common for foreign tourists to sit in the stone carving shops talking with the carvers and observing people passing by. Many stone carvers advertised that they taught stone carving, which had become a fairly popular activity among foreign tourists.

In addition to these areas there were a few shops selling and producing stone carvings along East Raja Street, the main street of Mamallapuram, as well as along West Ratha Street near the monument park. Most of these units produced granite sculpture and sold soft stone carvings as souvenirs. A few single stone carving shops could be also found along other streets in Mamallapuram.

The big granite carving workshops outside the town served mainly as producing units without actual shops. However, monumental sculptures were placed next to the road so that they could catch the attention of passers-by. There were a number of sculpture workshops in the nearby villages outside Mamallapuram. Big granite workshops were usually only open spaces covered by roofs made from palm leaves to protect the workers from the sun and rain. Blocks of granite lay on the ground and stone carvers worked on their pieces with machinery. These places were covered with stone dust and the noise coming from the drills and grinders was very loud. Granite workshops within Mamallapuram were usually located in the back yards of buildings that housed showrooms and shops in order to minimise dust and noise coming onto the streets. Handmade soft stone carvings were for tourists are usually made by carvers sitting in front of the shops where they can see tourists passing by and stop their work if potential customers come in.

Showrooms and shops displaying stone statues were an important way of marketing stone carvings, since most of the contacts and business deals were made in Mamallapuram directly in person. Mamallapuram is famous for stone carving throughout India and people interested in stone sculptures came to Mamallapuram specifically for this purpose. The tourist market could also offer new business opportunities for some stone carvers through their personal contacts with foreign tourists. A number of foreign visitors came to Mamallapuram to buy sculptures for their own business purposes. Based on my interviews, for example New Age shops, meditation and yoga centres and Indian cultural fairs were some of the popular avenues to sell Mamallapuram stone carvings overseas.

4.7 GRANITE CARVINGS

Granite carvings produced in Mamallapuram could be grouped into two types of carvings: religious and non-religious. Almost all the granite carvings made in Mamallapuram are not smaller than 30 cm tall. The main reason for this is the material that is not suitable for small-scale, detailed work. Small granite carvings always have a somewhat rough finish, at least compared to soft stone or marble statues. The majority of the granite stone carving workshops in Mamallapuram concentrated on carving

pieces for Hindu temples. This included both actual temple architecture as well as the statues of the deities inside the temple. These workshops got orders from all over Tamil Nadu and the rest of India as well from many different countries. The stone carvers I personally spoke to had been involved in temple construction in countries such as the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Belgium, France, Germany, Australia, South Africa, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and Sri Lanka. Indian communities living overseas constructed Hindu temples for their countries of residence but order the temple parts from India. I was also told that wealthy Indians also see temple construction as a good investment for their money, both in India as well as overseas. Many stone carvers have also travelled to many different countries to help in actual temple construction.

Pieces carved for the Hindu temples were made solely in black granite (blue metal). They consisted of various architectural pieces such as walls and pillars and the statues of the various Hindu deities. Large Hindu temples have several shrines with many deities, whereas the small temples may have only one main place of worship. Statues ordered for temple shrines were usually relatively large, usually around 50–100 cm tall. In addition, there may be several other statues of the deities that will be placed outside the temple on the roof, walls or along internal corridors. The size of these statues varies. A number of Buddhist temples, stupas and Jain temples were also made by people from Mamallapuram. These orders came mainly from other parts of India and countries in South-East Asia. These orders included the temple structures as well as statues of Buddha for the stupas.



Image 49: Granite carvings on display outside a granite carving workshop just outside Mamallapuram



Image 50: A showroom that presented and sold granite carvings in the centre of Mamallapuram



Image 51: Monumental granite carvings on Five Ratha Street

In addition to the religious work made for the temples, workshops also made carvings of deities for the shrines in the Indian households. But as explained in Chapter 3, only few people in Mamallapuram had granite statues in their homes. Those local residents in Mamallapuram who had them in their households Mamallapuram usually had ordered the statues for their homes from those stone carvers they already know and trust. In other words, these statues were not bought ready-made from the shops and it is also hard to find small granite statues in the stone carving shops. Usually granite was chosen as a material and the size, appearance and price is negotiated when the order is made. Often an auspicious date based on the Hindu calendar was chosen for the carving of the statue and a traditional version of the deity is used. Those families who had stone carvers in the family could also accept soft stone statues made by the members of their own family. However, other stone varieties were usually considered to be mainly for decorative purposes and lacking the sacred qualities of granite. One stone carver also told me that he preferred to have a statue made by someone else for his puja room. He felt this created more distance and thus respect between him and the god in question. The use of stone carvings in a religious context is explored more in detail in Chapter 7.

The second group of carvings that granite workshops produced were statues for decorative purposes such as for public and private gardens. Although these statues could also be based on Hindu iconography, they were not made for ritual use. These were often very large in size and therefore they were not aimed at tourists as souvenirs. The size of these type of statues usually varied from 50 cm to 3 m in height and they were usually meant to be placed in buildings or gardens as decoration. The material used for these statues was also granite. The motifs nevertheless usually came from Hindu iconography but these statues tended to be larger with more elaborate decorations than the statues made for temples. There were also some statues on display in the workshops with secular motifs such as different animals. In most cases these statues were made on order and were waiting to be sent to their customers. Most workshops were happy to make any type of statues with any motif but only on request. These were usually referred as “modern art” or “natural carvings” and comprised only very a small portion of number of statues made in Mamallapuram.



Image 52: Granite carving on display. This carving was classified as modern art as it depicts abstract figures. The statue also shows different types of surface finish.

4.8 SOFT STONE AND MARBLE CARVINGS

Stone carvings that were especially aimed at the tourist market in Mamallapuram were mainly small items made from different soft stone and marble varieties. These carvings were generally referred as soft stone carvings or “tourist carvings”. They mainly portrayed the main gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon such as the male gods Ganesh, Shiva, Visnu, Krishna and Brahma, as well as the female goddesses Parvati, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. The most common style was to portray them as full figures standing, sitting, dancing or lying down. Brahma was often shown only as a head with several faces showing its omnipotent qualities as the creator of the universe. In addition to the principal Hindu deities, statues of Buddha were also seen in the shops all around Mamallapuram. Buddha was portrayed either as a head or as a full figure. Next to the god and goddess statues there were also carvings of elephants and other animals such as snakes, crocodiles, tortoises, frogs, birds and lions, as well as different type of boxes, ashtrays, chillums, pedants, balls, incense stick holders and lampshades made from stone. The animal statues also often had a reference point in Hindu mythology as most of the main Hindu gods and goddesses are associated with different animals as their companions or vehicles. The size of these carvings varied from approximately 2 cm up to 50 cm and sometimes even taller. However, soft stones were not usually used for carvings bigger than this.



Image 53: A stone carving shop selling soft stone statues



Image 54: A display of soft stone statues. The selection here includes Hindu deities; mainly different images of the elephant-headed god Ganesh, animals such as elephants, dolphins and gecko lizards, candle holders, a chillum, a box and a standing figure of Jesus, which represents a somewhat atypical carving type.



Image 55: A carving of god Ganesh typing on a laptop with an Apple logo. These statues were commonly known as “Computer Ganesh” and could be found in some of the carving shops selling soft stone statues. They represented a novel carving style that still draws on traditional Hindu iconography.



Image 56: A photo in a stone carver's album that shows a carving he made on order for a foreign visitor. This type of carving would be labelled as "natural carving" or "modern art", as it includes elements outside of Hindu iconography. The carving in question is a mixture of the two styles since it portrays a man playing a guitar but also contains a figure of the Hindu god Ganesh.

Some of the statues made for the tourist market resembled the sculptures made for Hindu temples and shrines for worship, but they were small in size and made from soft stone or marble. They could follow the appearance of the traditional religious sculptures defined by the rules regarding correct iconography and proportions. In the tourist market one could also find some quite unusual versions of the traditional Hindu sculptures, such as statues of Ganesh playing cricket, talking on a mobile phone, or typing on a computer with an Apple logo on it. Sometimes stone carvers had united different gods in one statue. These were examples of stone carvers trying to create different types in order to attract customers without stepping too far from traditional Hindu iconography that according to the stone carvers sold the best. This style of carvings may also be linked to temporary Hindu festival statues produced elsewhere that often combine traditional iconography with novel ideas related to contemporary world.

Stone carvers said the statues and carvings that the foreign tourists buy the most are the images of Ganesh, Buddha, elephants and some carved hollow balls usually referred to as lamp shades, as they can hold a candle inside them. The decorations on them vary from simple ornamentation to Kama Sutra motifs. Pendants had also been a popular item of sale for many years. Pendants were flat stone figures of about 3 cm in length, usually with geometrical motifs such as different type of crosses and whirls. Some of them in fact look very much like gothic symbols.

Another group of carvings made for tourists were statues that were usually referred to as “modern art” or “natural” carvings. This meant any images outside the usual Hindu iconography. However, these different types of carvings were outnumbered by the common images of Hindu deities and Buddhas, but therefore also often stood out from the other statues. The ideas for these different carvings come from a variety of sources. In most cases they were made on request only, but sometimes the carver had carried on making similar statues for other customers. Carvers could get ideas from newspapers and books or carvings they had seen in other workshops or even at art galleries. Also they could simply use their imagination. These statues ranged from functional items such as decorative name plates for doors to abstract statues similar to the ones you often see in Western art galleries. Christian religious images or mythological creatures from non-Indian traditions were also found in some carving shops.

Apart from animals and pendants, very few stone carving shops had any of these different types of statues on sale as ready-made pieces. Mostly they were made to order, since stone carvers said that these pieces did not sell as well as traditional Hindu sculptures. Many carving shops in tourist areas advertised that they could create any image from stone based on a photograph, such as a portrait of a family member or friend. Some tourists asked for carvings that portrayed their pets, profession, favourite sports and hobbies, or name and number plates. Occasionally people also had ideas for certain abstract images or mythological figures that they asked the carvers to make. Those stone carvers that I interviewed working in the Othavadai Street area told me that they make a couple of special orders each year. I will return to the Hindu deities and different soft stone carving types and issues of selling stone carvings to tourists in the next chapter of the thesis.



Image 57: A carving made based on a foreign tourist's order



Image 58 and 59: The first image presents selection of mainly North Indian stone carvings on a display table in a tourist shop. The bright red items are made in North India, as are the decorated balls. Elephants, turtles and birds that have a net-like back are also made in North India. These were very popular items in Mamallapuram. The second images shows a selection of statues made in North India. North Indian statues typically had a flat back and was made of marble in rose and lilac shades. This colour stone is not used in Mamallapuram.

Not all the stone carvings sold in the tourist market in Mamallapuram were made locally. Most of the shops also sold statues made in North India in the state of Rajasthan that were transported to Mamallapuram by North Indian dealers for sale. It was possible to distinguish those statues from the home-made ones since North Indian statues were made of white or lilac coloured marble that was not used by the Mamallapuram carvers. Also the deity statues from North India mostly had a flat back whereas carvers in Mamallapuram made round pieces. Animal figures that came from North India were mainly carvings that had a net-like torso which hold a smaller version of the same animal inside it. This type of statue can be found in souvenir shops all over India and it was also a very popular item for sale in Mamallapuram, especially the statues of elephants. These types of carving were not made in Mamallapuram itself.

4.9 STONE CARVING AND THE CONCEPT OF CRAFT

Stone carving in Mamallapuram has a status of a craft based on the identity cards of the stone carvers in which they are defined as “artisans” and registered under Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Co-operation, operated by the government of Tamil Nadu. Stone carving thus has an official status as a craft in a political context, although from a religious point of view it is viewed equally as art, based on shilpa shastras and religious Hindu stone carving tradition.

Labelling stone carvers as artists, artisans or craftsmen may also have political and national ramifications, as they may be harnessed for the benefit of different interest groups. India has a long history of using traditional crafts, primarily weaving, as part of the discourse of nation building and national ideology during colonial struggles (cf. McGowan 2009). Traditional crafts have also retained their political connotations ever since. Stephen Inglis writes that “Contemporary craftspeople are foremost among all artists in exploring the work of both their ancestors and their contemporaries in other cultures” (1999b: 8). He also states that “the more globally conscious we become, the more aware and protective we find ourselves of our local identities” (ibid.: 8). In turn, in her book *Craft Matters – Artisans, Development and the Indian Nation* (2009), Soumhya Venkatesan discusses the different ways and common images in which craft producers and their work are described in contemporary India. She brings forth nine different modes of representations: craft producer as a “natural being”; craft as a national resource; craft production symbolising village life with simple technologies and simple people; the tradition-bound, anachronistic, isolated rural craft producer; craft as an economic and political problem; an unthinking and uneducated craft producer, who wants to change his rightful occupation; a “crafty” artisan wanting unacceptable profit from his work; craft that unites the Indian nation and materialises collective heritage; and finally, craft objects embodying relations between past and present, socially and physically distant people and disparate social groups.

These aspects of representation as well as Inglis’ statement (1999b) applies to the stone carvers in Mamallapuram primarily in connection with tourism imaginaries, as discussed in Chapter 2. Stone carving is an essential part of Mamallapuram and its brand as a stone carving centre in both a historical and a contemporary context, and much of its allure would be lost without the ongoing industry. However, from the perspective of tourism, the most crucial aspect is the fact that carvers work with stone – such as the Pallavas considered as their ancestors – and whether they are labelled as artists or craftsmen is not as important.



Image 60: A sign for a stone carving unit in Mamallapuram.

At the same time, as an occupational category stone carvers as craftsmen are subject to national and government initiatives which are affected by the way the craft is understood as a national treasure and part of the Indian identity against the history of colonialism (cf. McGowan 2009). In this respect, stone carvers are situated within important national and social discourses, over which they themselves can have little effect. However, on a practical level these labels concern the carvers mainly when it comes to possible benefits, such as having free medical insurance or being eligible for a government loan.

4.10 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The current stone carving tradition in Mamallapuram shares features with traditional Indian Hindu stone carving, as presented in Chapter 3, but it has also developed with changing times. One of the more recent changes has been the introduction of electric tools that has made granite carving less labour-intensive and time consuming. Soft stone carving then again is a new niche within the context of traditional, religious Hindu stone carving since these statues were primarily made without ritual purposes. Soft stone carvings in Mamallapuram were still made in most cases entirely by hand, thus resembling more of the traditional carving procedures. At the same time, soft stone carving had a less strict approach towards rules and measurements as laid out by traditional carving manuals. Also traditional Hindu iconography had been modified in order to find new expressions that may interest foreign buyers in the tourist market. Carvings made in Mamallapuram can therefore roughly be divided into two main groups: granite carvings made with electric tools for Indian people for religious

purposes based on traditional iconography and a proportion system; and soft stone carvings made by hand for tourists as decoration and without strict concern for the correct forms and measurements. Stone carvers were mostly specialised in one type of carving work but this does not reflect their educational background.

Stone carving in Mamallapuram has developed and grown alongside tourism development, and carving as an occupational category has always been open to people from various social backgrounds. Although stone carving was still approached as a traditional art and craft that is a hereditary occupation of a particular caste group, Viswakarmas, only a minority of the carvers in Mamallapuram actually belonged to this caste. In this sense the role of the Government Sculpture College has been influential, as it has made stone carving available to people from different backgrounds. Since the establishment of the college in 1957, more than one generation of students have been able to learn carving and as a result, stone carving has become a hereditary occupation in many families despite a lack of caste-based associations with stone carving. Still, many carvers also came from families with no previous carving experience because of their personal interest.

Stone carvers and sculptures in Mamallapuram can also be approached as social actors having agency. As agents they are able to influence causal events in their social environment. Different aspects of stone carving are a result of interaction between various agents or agencies, such as carving manuals, carvers, materials and tools. Chapter 6 of the thesis will investigate how stone carvings may be interpreted as arts or crafts, and all these agents together create meanings for the statues. Stone statues may also have agency as religious or spiritual objects, which is the topic of Chapter 7. Equally, stone varieties, production methods, skills of the carvers and the location of the shops all play a key role in the way statues and carvers are categorised in the religious/spiritual context. However, before turning to these topics, the next chapter will discuss stone carving in the tourist market in Mamallapuram in more detail.

5 GODS FOR TOURISTS: STONE CARVING AS TOURIST ART

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Making and selling stone carvings for tourists was an important part of the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram. Whereas a great number of carvers worked only for the granite industry, another group of carvers specialised in working in the tourist shops and producing and selling sculptures primarily as souvenirs for both foreign and domestic visitors. In this chapter, stone carving in Mamallapuram is approached as “tourist art” by looking in more detail at the relationship stone carving in Mamallapuram has with international tourism, with a focus on the interactions between stone carvers and foreign tourists in the tourist market. The open nature of the stone carving workshops along the tourist streets in Mamallapuram made them popular social spaces, in which local people and foreign visitors met and interacted around stone carving. As noted, calling stone carvings tourist arts is appropriate in the local context in Mamallapuram, as it was the way stone carvers and local people differentiated soft stone statues from religious granite sculptures. Only people would call them “tourist statues” rather than using the term “art”, an issue that will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

In the first part of this Chapter, “Stone carvers in the tourist market”, describes some of the characteristics of a typical working day of the stone carvers in the tourist market and their interactions with foreign visitors. Tourists come to the carving shops not only to purchase statues but also to try their hands at stone carving or just sit around and have informal chats with the carvers and their friends. The next part, “Popular statues”, presents some of the most popular statue types that were on sale on the tourist market and the reasons foreign visitors purchased these statues based on my interviews. “Rough carvings and polished pieces: details and material qualities”, looks at additional visitor criteria for choosing certain carvings. “Business and friendships at the stone carving market” concentrates on buying and selling statues by focusing on bargaining in the carving market and the role of friendships between stone carvers and foreign visitors. “Tourists as stone carvers” continues this theme and looks in more detail at how personally trying stone carving in Mamallapuram affected foreign visitors’ views on stone carving and consequently the way in which they value the statues on the carving market. “Stone carving and seasonal international tourism” discusses the issues related to seasonal tourism and how it affects the stone carving in Mamallapuram, and the last part is a concluding discussion to the themes of the chapter.

5.2 STONE CARVERS IN THE TOURIST MARKET

Most mornings Govinda rode by motorbike from his home village, just outside Mamallapuram, to his stone carving shop near the fishermen’s beach. He usually opened the shop between 10 and 11 o’clock. He pushed up the metal shutter, unlocked the door

and with the help of a friend or a fellow carver, carefully brought out a small table on which different, small-sized soft stone carvings were placed on display. He took his box of carving tools, some small, wooden stools and any unfinished sculptures that he had been working on. A couple of plastic chairs were found inside the shop and he placed them outside, ready for any customers or new tourist friends to sit on. If the ground outside the shop was untidy, from stone dust and sand, he swiped it and poured some water on it. Sometimes he made a puja in his shop in order to bring good luck to his day and ensure business success. Govinda's shop was a typical stone carving shop on Othavadai Street that consists of one room of a few square metres. The walls were covered with shelves filled with different types of soft stone carvings, mainly fairly small in size. A few bigger pieces were placed on the floor or on a separate stand. One of the shelves was made into a shrine with a god picture, tiny metal statues and some puja materials such as flowers, incense and small notes.

Govinda sat down outside the shop and started working on one of his sculptures, sawing the stone, designing, drawing, carving or polishing. He had learned his carving skills from his family and other carvers over the years. While carving Govinda also paid attention to any prospective customers passing by and usually greeted them and invited them in to have a look at his sculptures inside the shop. He usually stopped carving when people came in and showed them different types of carvings and explained the image and stone that had been used. Govinda was very friendly, spoke good English and liked to meet new people. He had lived in Europe for a couple of years and was happy to talk with foreign tourists. At the same time he avoided being too pushy, since he knew that could scare away some people. However, many foreigners liked Govinda and often stayed to sit for a while on one of the chairs outside his shop, talking with him, observing his work and life on the street.



Image 61: Soft stone carvings on display on Othavadai Street

Some tourists returned to the shop on a daily basis while in Mamallapuram, perhaps enjoying a *chai*²⁴ from a nearby tea shop and having a chat on their way to or back from the beach. Govinda also taught stone carving to anybody who was interested. Mostly they were foreigners who stayed in Mamallapuram for a few days or even longer and wanted something to do. Making a small carving, such as a lizard, a tortoise or a pendant, usually took 2–3 days to finish. Govinda did not charge anything for the teaching but took a small payment for the stone. It was typical to see him, a carving student and a customer all sitting outside his shop, carving and talking about something related to India.

Govinda had two workers who took turns working in his shop and at a guest house. They were both still learning carving but already knew how to make many of the popular statues such as Ganesh, Buddha, animal figures and balls. These carvers also helped Govinda with some of the more difficult or bigger statues at some stages of carving and finishing. On those days when Govinda was visiting his granite carving unit outside Mamallapuram, running errands in Chennai, such as sending stone carving parcels around the world, checking his emails or had family matters to take care of, his workers looked after the shop and served customers. They also opened and closed the shop on certain days of the week. Most days they all enjoyed lunch together in the shop at 1 p.m. They brought food with them from home or collected it from one of the restaurants on the main street.



Image 62: A stone carver at work on Othavadai Street

²⁴ A pan-Indian name for a strong, black tea that is made with milk and sugar.

The sun sets in Mamallapuram around 6 p.m. and lights are lit. Evening was a busy time for business in the tourist area near the beach as many foreign visitors were walking around in the streets, visiting souvenir shops and looking for somewhere to eat. Govinda's day continued as above, although during power cuts he could not carve because of the darkness. He was also often concentrating more on business than carving in the evenings. Some days, especially on those that were considered especially auspicious according to the Hindu calendar, he also performed an evening puja. It could be the same as in the morning or more elaborate, such as involving smashing coconuts outside the shop. At the beginning of the week, Govinda usually stayed in his shop until 8–9 p.m. but on weekends he kept it open later, even past 10 p.m. This depended on the business as there were usually more tourists in Mamallapuram on Friday and Saturday nights. On quiet days and during the low season he closed the shop earlier. Sundays and festival times were holidays when the shop was closed. Then Govinda spent time with his family, visited relatives and friends and played cricket. In the event of a death in the family or in the nearby fishing village, the shop also remained closed. This was a typical custom in Mamallapuram to show respect to the family of the deceased.



Image 63: Stone carvers working and waiting for customers on Othavadai Street



Image 64: A stone carver working and waiting for customers in his shop on Othavadai Street

There were several other carving shops near Govinda's shop and all the people from these shops worked outside by the street. They sat, carved, watched the people passing by and talked with each other. The group of workers around Govinda's shop consisted of men of different ages and most of them got along very well with each other. The constant chatting was very friendly in its character, and involved a lot of joking and laughter. Their friends and other local people passing by often stopped for a while and got involved in the conversation and jokes. They were also welcoming to tourists although the conversations then switched from Tamil to English and became more formal and polite. If a customer was looking for a statue that was not found in a certain carving shop, usually the carver tried to find it from one of the other shops. They also looked after each other's shops if someone had to leave for a moment. Occasionally there were small disputes about money if another carver had sold a statue on someone else's behalf. But

in general they all supported each other and formed a community of workers in that particular part of Othavadai Street.

This description shows some of the features of a typical working day of a stone carver who had a shop in the tourist area in Mamallapuram. This was a carving shop I became most familiar with during my fieldwork and I spent most of my time in there. Govinda and his shop, along with the workers, was of course one among many, but these characteristics applied to the daily life of several other carvers whose workshops were found around Mamallapuram. Open stone carving shops were a constant feature of life in Mamallapuram all year round, and days in the shops followed more or less the same rhythm every day.

During my fieldwork I spent most of my time observing life in the carving shops on Othavadai Street and Othavadai Cross Street, since most of the tourist carving shops were located in that area. In addition, I got to know some of the carvers in other areas who I would visit regularly. One of them, who I refer to here as Panneer, had his shop on one of the main roads where traffic was busy, but because of its distance from the beach and the monuments, not that many tourists would venture that way, at least not by foot. However, thanks to a couple of guesthouses and a popular restaurant nearby, he was able to attract enough customers to make a living. The main reason for the location of his shop was that the house of his family was

directly behind the shop. That meant that he also owned the land, which the shop was built on and did not therefore have to pay any rent. That in turn compensated for the lack of business that he could have perhaps had if his shop was located in a more central location.

I would visit Panneer regularly as he would spend most of his days in the shop and I knew I would find him there. He opened the shop soon after waking up early in the morning then kept it open until early evening, depending on what day it was. Despite being a professional stone carver with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the college and many years of carving experience, Panneer was now concentrating solely on selling his sculptures. He was suffering from back pain and did not therefore enjoy carving as much as he used to. There were a few unfinished pieces in his shop that he was still planning to finish, but he also said that did not really have the enthusiasm to do that anymore. He also felt that he already had so many carvings in his shop that he would like to sell some of them first before having new pieces, either made by him or someone else. Panneer indeed had a shop full of beautiful carvings that were neatly displayed on the shelves on colourful walls. The sculptures were arranged in groups partly based on their iconography and sizes and some of the deity statues had vermilion²⁵ marks on their foreheads that made them appear as if they had been part of puja ceremonies. Although the majority of the carvings Panneer had were typical Hindu sculptures similar to those in any of the other carving shops, he also had several pieces that were different; sculptures that people in Mamallapuram would classify as “modern art” or “natural carvings”. These were for example statues of female bodies that did not resemble Hindu goddesses. In addition to these, there were small stone pendants hanging on nails on the wall, and the shelf behind the front glass wall had a selection of different types of carving on display. Like most of the other carvers, Panneer also kept a table outside the shop where he had several small statues to attract passers-by. He would usually also bring out a few of the larger pieces that he placed on the ground by the table. Next to that he had two chairs in which he would sit and follow the life on the busy road, ready to talk to anyone who stopped by.

During the time of my fieldwork, Panneer had made friends with a European visitor who was staying in Mamallapuram for a while and visited the shop almost on a daily basis. I often found them sitting outside the shop and joined them for a conversation. This visitor had initially bought some carvings from Panneer but nowadays he just came to the shop for a conversation. Panneer ended the business.

On many days Panneer and his friend went for a walk on the beach before sunset. That was the time when most local people go to the beach, as the heat of the day gives in to the cooler night air. Sometimes I joined them and we talked about topics such as India, Hinduism, stone carving and tourism, and we share our observations about life in Mamallapuram in general. The foreign visitor also often joined Panneer and his family for a dinner in his home. During the annual rice harvest seasons Panneer closed his shop for some days as he joined his relatives to carry out agricultural work in the nearby village. His family owned some land there, and this served as additional income alongside the stone carving. Panneer told me he enjoyed agricultural work and also staying for a while in the village outside Mamallapuram as for him,

²⁵ Vermillion, also known in India as *kumkum*, is red pigment powder that is used to make a red mark on the foreheads of Hindu devotees, where the third eye is believed to be located. Equally, it is used in a similar manner on the images of deities. Vermillion is used in religious ceremonies and its purpose is to bless devotees and deities (cf. Huyler 1999: 63).

trying to sell stone carvings had become somewhat stressful in recent years. Panneer explained that there used to be certain tour group leaders who he knew and they would regularly bring a group of Western tourists to his shop. But this was couple of years ago and these tour leaders no longer visited Mamallapuram. Also many tours started from Chennai, from where people would visit Mamallapuram and then proceed to other parts of Tamil Nadu. Panneer felt that many people were not eager to buy stone carvings at the beginning of their journey since they did not want to carry stones in their luggage around India. Selling stone carvings was not easy where his shop was located and as a result Panneer was often pondering over whether he should do something else with his life. Previously there had also been another stone carving shop right next to his but due to lack of business it had since been turned into a tea stall and a convenience store used by local people. Panneer was one of two brothers in the family who were the main breadwinners since his father had died. They also had a sister who was waiting to be married. In Mamallapuram traditional marriages were one of the most expensive life events any family has to arrange, and they created a lot of financial pressure on most families. This was one of the main reasons Panneer was worried about his financial future, as he was not able to make as much money from selling sculptures as he would have liked to.

The working life of Panneer thus differed from Govinda's to some extent because of the different location of the shops. Whereas Govinda met several foreign tourists on a daily basis, Panneer's days were characterised by the friendship with one long-term foreign visitor during the time of my fieldwork. Panneer's questions about the number of tourists on Othavadai Streets also reflected the fact that his own business was not as good as he would have wanted it to be. Carvers would also sometimes envy those colleagues whose shops were located in the busier areas of Mamallapuram. While Govinda's statues in his shop were all so-called typical Hindu carvings, Panneer has several different images that were not found in any other shops. This made his shop stand out from other carving shops, as long as tourists' could find the place.

When moving to Five Ratha Street or Beach Road leading to Shore Temple, the number of tourists increased considerably, as these were the main routes leading to the monuments that most visitors come to see in Mamallapuram. At the same time the flow of people could move quickly, since they were either on their way to or back from Shore Temple, Indian Beach or the Five Rathas. I spent time with some of the carvers in these shops and the flow of tourists on the streets was rather constant at the weekends and also on other days during the high tourist season or the local holidays. Like on Othavadai Street, those stone carvers selling sculptures for tourists had their display tables outside the shop and they sat next to them working on their statues. People stopped by and looked at the statues, occasionally also venturing inside the shops. They asked about the prices and made purchases if they were happy with the offer. Many of them were Indian tourists, but foreigners would also stop by. These areas, however, were not comparable to the carving shops on Othavadai Street, where foreign tourists would often sit, hang around and talk to the carvers and other tourists. Beach Road and Five Ratha Street were mainly used to access the monuments and were therefore more places to pass by than to stay. Yet, there were also exceptions as certain foreign visitors I spoke to found Othavadai Street too commercial and were more interested in the shops and carvings in other areas. They would also spend time in these carving shops and learn stone carving in them. Therefore, close interaction between stone carvers and foreign tourists also took place in those areas, although it was more frequent in the shops on Othavadai Street.



Image 65: A display of soft stone carvings on Five Ratha Street

For example, a German visitor that I interviewed had got to know the people in a carving shop on Five Ratha Street as a result of his frequent visits to the shop. He was very interested in stone carvings and knew a lot about the different stone varieties. He told me that during his time in Mamallapuram he would then go around the carving shops, look at the statues, talk to the carvers and ask them questions. He also purchased some pieces from different shops that he thought were particularly well made. On one occasion the German visitor and a stone carver from Five Ratha Street decided to go to visit the locally well-known Hindu temple known as the Eagle Temple in Thirukalikundram, a town nearby Mamallapuram. They also visited another, popular Hindu temple on a way to Chennai. I joined them to these excursions and during our visits the stone carver explained the issues related to the temple, which was also made from stone, and answered our questions related to Hindu beliefs and practises. Here the interaction between the stone carver and a foreign visitor also resulted in temple visits that were related to the topic of stone carving but were also an opportunity for general socialising and spending time together outside the carving shop.

Back on Othavadai Street, Govinda had again new people learning stone carving. These visitors were French girls who were visiting India for the first time. I sat down to talk to them and watched while they carved small pieces of stone squatting on the ground on front of the carving shop. Govinda had gone somewhere but one of his workers was assisting the girls in the carving work. They told me that they were making geckos, a type of small lizard that can be seen on the walls of houses, especially after dark. This is a typical motif that stone carvers suggest that tourists attempt to carve since it is fairly easy to make. Govinda soon returned and told the girls that their accommodation was ready. I learned that the visitors would be staying on the second floor of his family's house. He had just been to his house to make sure that his wife had prepared the room and everything was in order for them to move in. These visitors had come to Mamallapuram only recently but had not been happy with their accommodation. Govinda had then offered them a room in his house, which had a

newly built second floor. The girls were happy to stay there as his family lived in a village just outside Mamallapuram and they would be able to see family life in an Indian village as well as have home-cooked South Indian food. I met the visitors on a few occasions while they stayed in Mamallapuram before continuing their travels around India. They finished their stone carvings and had been happy with the accommodation with the local family. One of them also said to me that she felt Govinda was nice to talk to since he was conversational, explained things about Mamallapuram and Indian culture, and in general made them feel very welcome in Mamallapuram.

I would also often help Govindan with his his emails.²⁶ Although he spoke good English, he was not good at reading and writing words in the Roman alphabet, so he wanted someone to help him with his exchange. We would then sit in a nearby internet café and checked his correspondence. There were several messages from different foreign visitors who had been to Mamallapuram previously. Some of them were planning on coming again and would inform him of their dates of arrival, and were asking if the carver could organise them a pick-up from the airport. Some emails were just greetings, often including photos of the sculptures they had purchased from Mamallapuram placed in their houses and gardens. Other messages were about current or future carving orders. Someone was still waiting for their delivery, something that the carver would have to check with the courier company in Chennai. Someone else had received his statue but it had been partly broken. Another person was asking for Govinda's account details in order to pay for the statue. In one email a customer wrote that he had received a wrong statue: it was a Buddha that Govindan immediately recognised not to be his based on the photo. This would have to be sorted out with the courier company. There could be several emails to act on but sometimes none, in which case the carver would perhaps just send his greetings in turn to some of the messages.

With all these somewhat lengthy and detailed examples above, my aim has been to show how stone carving and statues were the starting point for encounters between foreign visitors and local people, in this case stone carvers, but which often proceed further from simply stone carving. Stone carving shops were the initial places of encounter but often, once people got to know each other better, they could do also other things together. Conversations that followed then dealt with all sorts of issues, typically involving life in India and particularities of Indian culture. Tourists might share their experiences of India with the stone carvers and asked them for explanations about issues that they did not understand. Sometimes the conversations focused on stone carving, as many of the foreign visitors who came to spend time in the carving shops were especially interested in the topic. In other cases, stone carving was just an activity that took place while other things were discussed. Stone carvers could also serve guides, as in the case of the German visitor, and invited people to their houses, as in the case of Panneer. For example, Panneer's foreign friend and I often had dinner in his house after finishing a walk on the beach. Foreign tourists were also popular faces at local Indian weddings, as local people often invited all the foreign visitors they know to join them. Weddings in Mamallapuram were large social events to which the whole town was more or less invited, and the presence of tourists was also a typical feature. Those visitors who knew the families from which the bride and groom came were particularly welcomed to join the festivities.

²⁶ During the time of my visits to Mamallapuram between 2009–2012, Facebook was also used but emails were a common way of communicating in the case of this carver.



Image 66: A stone carver serving his customers on Othavadai Street

All these meetings and interactions between stone carvers and foreign tourists were considered by both parties to be types of friendships, and they often refer to each other as friends. Such as: “My friend from Italy is coming to Mamallapuram next month,” or “That stone carver is a friend of mine. I’ve known him for many years,” and so on. Sometimes people knew each other for several years and had spent time together annually when the visitor had been staying in Mamallapuram. In other cases, people could have met only recently but spending time together in the carving shop for some days could still be considered a basis for friendship. The conversations between people often reflected the depth of the friendship, for example in terms of the depth of personal issues that were disclosed. Stone carvers may share their family matters, or even serious problems, with those tourists who they have known for a long time but have only casual, cheerful chats with. Sometimes the friendships ran their course over a few days that were spent in the carving shop when the tourist was learning how to carve. Goodbyes were said when the visitors continued on their travels and the carvers were ready to meet new people. I was told by some carvers that some tourists had become good friends and they did miss them, but that they felt indifferent towards many others. So many people visit Mamallapuram on a yearly basis, so it would be difficult to become close friends with everyone. I witnessed situations when it was clear that the carver and their new foreign “friend” had run out of things to talk about and the carver was happy to see me coming to the shop. He then sometimes left to attend to his other businesses, and left me to keep the tourist company. It was as if the carver was too polite to leave the visitor alone, as that person was often new to Mamallapuram and was clearly sitting in the carving shop just to have someone to talk to. Once I was there the carver could leave with a clear conscience, since they knew I would speak to the tourist.



Image 67: A stone carver at work on Othavadai Street



Image 68: Ganesh carvings from left to right made from gadapa/grey stone; red marble and another type of soft stone (unknown variety).

It is important to stress that all the stone carvers were of course individuals with different ways and levels of interacting with people, and some of them were keener to socialise with the tourists than others. In my interviews I asked the carvers whether they preferred to carve or sell stone carvings. Whereas almost all the carvers stressed that they did like carving work,²⁷ only a few of them said that they also liked selling sculptures. As discussed in Chapter 4, when present, shop owners usually did the talking with potential buyers whereas his workers would concentrate on their carving. Those who were one-man businesses mostly said that they liked doing both. It was not common to see people only sitting in carving shops; mostly everyone is always busy with carving work that they will only stop the moment a customer comes to see the statues. Even those carvers who liked to socialise and often had tourists sitting and chatting in their shops would also keep on carving most of the time, as it is something you can easily do also while talking with people. Therefore, despite all the socialising it was clear that stone carving and business came first and socialising with people happened only next to that, without losing focus on the carving work.

One of the main characteristics of the Mamallapuram tourist stone carving market was thus the direct interaction between stone carvers and tourists. It is typical of many tourist destinations around the world that souvenir shops are run by people who are only selling the various items, such as local handicrafts, but do not take part in their manufacturing process. The production of items rarely takes place in the same premises as where they are sold. Sometimes there can be a backroom or a production unit nearby where visitors are also free to go and have a look at the making of the products, but usually there is a separate, neat shop that is intended only for the displaying and selling of the souvenirs. The situation in Mamallapuram was somewhat different, especially in the tourist areas around Othavadai Street, on Five Ratha Street and in some of the shops on Shore Temple Road and other areas. Here stone carvings were sold in the same shops that function as the carvers' workshops. Only some granite carving units had separate showrooms, since part of these workshops are located outside the town. In the case of smaller carving shops in the tourist areas, visitors could see directly what is being made and they can get to know the person who made their piece. This creates a more personal relationship between the producer, buyer and the object sold, an issue that I will return to later on in this chapter.

Stone carvings as tourist arts in Mamallapuram were not just about the statues but also to a great extent about the interactions between the stone carvers and the tourists that nevertheless centre around stone carving. The issue of friendships will be returned to later on in this chapter and how it affects the buying and selling of stone carvings. Before that, however, I turn to the actual sculptures and present some of the typical carvings with religious motifs and the reasons foreign tourists bought these particular types of statues.

²⁷This includes those people who are performing carving work. In addition to them, I also interviewed some shop owners, of whom not all were currently carving but concentrated on designing and selling sculptures.

5.3 POPULAR STATUES

The vast majority of the statues made and sold in the tourist market in Mamallapuram were statues of different Hindu gods and goddesses. Some of them were the traditional representations of the deities that were similar to the temple sculptures, while others have details that differentiate them from traditional sculptures. In this section examples are presented of some of the different types of deity sculptures that were available in Mamallapuram tourist shops at the time of my fieldwork. In addition, different views and reasons foreign tourists had for purchasing a particular type of sculpture are outlined, as explained by the tourists themselves in the interviews. Although many tourists visiting Mamallapuram purchased carvings of different animals, such as elephants, lizards, snakes and tortoises, as well as pendants, these are not covered here since the research focused primarily on the deity sculptures, and the interviews and questionnaires reflected that. The first statue type considered here is the elephant-headed god Ganesh, since he is not only most likely the most popular deity in India, whose images can be found all around the country in numerous different forms and contexts, but because Ganesh is also one of the most popular statue types in the stone carving market in Mamallapuram. Carvings of Buddha are presented next, which is the second most popular statue type in the carving shops according to the stone carvers, followed by representations of other Hindu gods and goddesses. The last example is a statue of Lilith, which is founded on an image representing a Mesopotamian goddess and thus not part of the Hindu deity pantheon.

5.3.1 “Do your best, Ganesh does the rest”

Ganesh is the best for all things. Everything! You get good luck, happy, healthy, wealthy and peace. Also Ganesh stops bad karmas²⁸²⁶ and gives happiness to homes. So Ganesh is the very best. A simple and a best god.” – A Hindu priest in Mamallapuram

Lord Ganesh or Ganesha is the beloved, elephant-headed Hindu god with a round belly. Also known by the names Ganapati, Vinyaka, Gajanana and Pillayar, he is worshipped by all types of Hindu devotee, regardless of their sect or spiritual preferences. Ganesh is considered to be a remover of obstacles so he is prayed to when commencing any new endeavour of any kind. This could be for example a school exam, a business venture or moving to a new location. “Do your best, Ganesh does the rest” is an English slogan that sums up the essence of the meaning of Ganesh to Hindu devotees. In addition, Ganesh is also a god of wisdom and knowledge and the patron of art and sciences. There are several temples in India that are devoted only to Ganesh, but most temples where other deities reside also have a separate shrine to Ganesh. He is considered to be the “first god” who should be approached and worshipped before the other deities as he is also the messenger of gods and goddesses (cf. Huyler 1999: 195; Pattanaik 2009: 27–28; Pattanaik 2011; Bae 2002).

²⁸ Karma is a Sanskrit language term that refers to deeds and causality of actions. It is a central spiritual concept in Hinduism that is used to explain to explain events and conditions in one’s life. A person’s karma in the present life can be viewed as the sum of deeds in previous births. Present actions also affect future events, including those in the next birth. According to principles of karma, good deeds and thoughts yield good or positive karma, whereas wrong actions result in negative experiences and bad luck.



Image 69: A statue known as Relaxing Ganesh made from gadapa/grey stone on the left, and a statue known as Computer Ganesh made from red marble at the back on the right.

Ganesh is indeed one of the most popular deities of the Hindu pantheon but also many foreigners recognise the god and like it. All the stone carvers I spoke to told me that most tourists who bought deity statues from Mamallapuram in fact purchased statues of Ganesh. Ganesh is also probably the most easily recognisable Hindu deity for many foreigners, since his images are so widely visible around India and are portrayed in different forms. Ganesh also resembles an elephant, which is often associated with India in popular culture and tourism media. That in turn makes it a perfect souvenir.

Carvings of Ganesh were mentioned in several of the interviews but in only nine of the 65 questionnaires collected. A Danish tourist interviewed had bought a carving of Ganesh for her sister as a present because she had asked for one. She told me “her sister was “crazy” about elephants” but “Ganesh is something different; a real Indian thing.” She had chosen to buy a traditional type of Ganesh carving rather than any of the alternative versions such as the “computer Ganesh”, since she thought her sister would prefer the typical representation. A visitor from Belgium said she had bought a Ganesh because “she liked it” and “it was a symbol of good luck”. Another reason for the popularity of Ganesh could be the fact that its appearance is rather endearing with its round belly and elephant head; none of its depictions are scary, as can the case with some other Hindu deities. Therefore, it is easy to “like” it, as the Belgian tourist said.



Image 70: A Ganesh figure with five faces, also known as Panchamukhi Ganesh that literally translates as “five faces”.

console his wife Parvati in her grief and said he would replace their son’s missing head with the first creature that came by. That happened to be an elephant – no ordinary elephant but Airavat, who belonged to the rain-god Indra. The elephant was found in the direction of the north, which is associated with permanence, stillness and immortality. Shiva placed the elephant’s head onto Vinayaka’s body and declared him Ganesh or Ganapati, who is the leader of Shiva’s followers, known as Ganas (Pattanaik 2009: 29; 2011: 7).

Ganesh is known by his special appearance but he also represents the union of opposites: his father and mother, Shiva and Parvati. Shiva was a hermit who was not interested in worldly life, but Parvati nevertheless married him. Whereas Parvati represents focus on the family and the world with material aspirations, Shiva represents the desire to focus on the soul that is within and spiritual aspirations. Ganesh then represents the balance between these two goals that have always been contradictory to Hindus. At the same time Ganesh also represents a balance that exists between his immortal head, representing the spiritual world, and mortal body, that stands for the material world (Pattanaik, 2009: 29–30).

An Irish visitor, who came regularly to Mamallapuram, told he only buys Ganeshas because he saw them as humorous and he knew that “his head got chopped off”. There are numerous different accounts in Hindu mythology that tell the story of how Ganesh got his elephant head. According to one of the popular versions, the goddess Parvati made a moulded doll from turmeric paste and breathed life into it. Parvati asked her child, that she named Vinayaka, to stay by the door as a guard while she was having a bath. The name Vinayaka means the one who is born without (vina) the help of a man. Meanwhile her husband Shiva came back home and was furious to see a strange male by the door, preventing him from entering. Neither one of them recognised each other since they had never met. In his anger he cut Vinayaka’s neck and his head fell off. Parvati, who came to see what the commotion was, in turn became furious with Shiva for killing their son. Shiva wanted to apologise for his actions and



Image 71: A non-traditional representation of Ganesh, as the figure is very plain and graphic

A German visitor told that she knew the story of Ganesh and when she looks at it she thinks of Ganesh as male god rather than an elephant, although many people seem to think that way. She also stressed the fact that Ganesh is not an elephant. For her Ganesh was also a perfect image of India as it is a very popular part of Hinduism.

One of the questions asked in the interviews was if people knew the meaning of the deity statues they had purchased and many of them said that they knew something. The story of Ganesh is a typical example of that which was known to some, as in this case to the German and Irish visitors. There are also numerous other stories about the deity, such as how he lost his other tusk, but the story about his head is usually the most well known.

Traditionally there are 32 different forms Ganesh as depicted in “Ganesha Purana”, one of the Hindu scriptures. This includes all the different ways in which Ganesh has been portrayed with different types of attributes and features. All the different forms symbolise different stages of life. The deity can have a different number of arms and faces and also hold different emblems in his hands. Mostly Ganesh is portrayed in a sitting position, with his legs crossed in a lotus pose or with only one leg crossed, belly permitting. In one of the forms he is sitting on his mount, the mouse, known as Mushika. Some others depict Ganesh in a standing and a dancing position.



Image 72: Marble Ganeshas playing an instrument



Image 73: Ganesh statues made in the village of Mudyir. These statues tend to be cruder in appearance and have rougher finish than statues made in Mamallapuram.

In the Mamallapuram tourist market there were different types of Ganeshas on sale. Mostly they were of the traditional format in which the deity is depicted sitting, has two or four hands, and holds some of the emblems in them. Often the mouse was also by his feet. Different ornamental decorations may have been added to his crown and on the base of the sculpture. You could also find Ganeshas in standing positions, but dancing depictions were especially common. Some Ganesh statues could also have more arms and emblems, as well multiple faces. In addition to these traditional types, some carvers had invented different versions of this popular deity. These Ganeshas were playing drums or other musical instruments, and some were playing cricket. A carver described how he had made a Ganesh on a surfboard for his friend. “Resting Ganesh” is another popular depiction that resembles the statues of Buddha lying on his side, which is a typical representation in Buddhist art.



Image 74: A standing Ganesh made from gadapa/grey stone

Very abstract and geometrical figures of Ganesh were found in one of the carving shops and these statues did not have any other typical features apart from a shape that made them recognisable as Ganesh. Stone carvers told me that Ganesh is an image that can be played with without any danger of being sacrilegious. This was because of the nature of the deity but in comparison, it would not be possible for example with a statue of goddess Kali, one of the fiercest and most powerful of the Hindu deities.

Most tourist shops offered different types of Ganesh statues in various sizes and made from different soft stone and marble. Many of them were made in Mamallapuram but there were also North Indian varieties on sale. In addition, there was a type of Ganesh carving on sale that could be called “Muduyir Ganesh”. These were small statues made in the village of Muduiyr, near the town of Thiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu, which is about three hours’ drive from Mamallapuram. Muduyir Ganeshas were made from very soft sandstone and were often somewhat roughly made without too much attention to intricate detailing. Muduyir Ganeshas were cheap for stone carvers to buy and they were offered for those customers who care more about price than the quality of craftsmanship. Next to them local and North Indian carvings look finer and can also be sold for a higher price.

5.3.2 “Buddhas are easy to digest”

Alongside Ganesh, carvings of Buddha were very popular statues that were both made and sold in the tourist shops in Mamallapuram. This was also reflected in the interviews and mentioned in seven out of the 65 questionnaires. According to the stone carvers, the main reason for the interest in Buddha sculptures is the popularity of yoga, meditation and Buddhism as a religious philosophy in the West. In fact, I met a foreign tourist from Belgium who ordered several different types of statues of Buddha from different carvers in Mamallapuram and he told me he sells them in yoga and meditation centres in his home country. Another visitor from France who regularly bought statues in Mamallapuram and sold them at art fairs and markets at home said that Buddhas were the most popular item for sale and people ask for them the most. Her customers were also people interested in yoga and meditation. The Belgian visitor said that he feels that for the foreigners “Buddhas are easy to digest”, at least compared to Hindu deities whose appearance and meaning are usually less familiar to non-Hindus. In fact, an Italian tourist, who had purchased a statue of Buddha for her mother, said that she did not want to buy her a Hindu god because her mother would not know about them. Instead she thought that she could relate more to Buddha, even though she was not particularly familiar with Buddhism either.

Although Buddhism was born in Northern India in the 6th century BCE, it had almost disappeared from the subcontinent by the end of the 12th century CE after a slow yet steady decline. However, many pieces of Buddhist art have remained from the earlier periods, including temples, stupas, cave paintings and sculptures. This visual imagery developed alongside the philosophical teachings of Buddha in a large volume and included sculptures of saints, teachers, enlightened beings known as bodhisattvas, and other deities in addition to images of Buddha himself. As a result, a very vast and complex body of Buddhist art was able to develop over the period of two millennia, which contained various forms and styles. Images of the Buddha himself appeared only around the 1st century BCE, and prior to this Buddhist art was primarily aniconic. It has been suggested that the first images of Buddha emerged as a response to devotional practices in other Indian religions but also because of the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism (McArthur 2002: 9–15). This school of thought was based on the belief that salvation was available to all, not only those who were willing to renounce the material world, as the older path, Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism, believes. Mahayana Buddhism emphasises personal devotion, and the figure of bodhisattva became important as an aid towards salvation. Due to these philosophical differences, Mahayana art also represented Buddha in more elaborate ways than the Theravada tradition that favoured more ascetic and meditative images. In Mahayana sculptures, Buddha has several attributes that mark its special qualities. These are for example cranial protuberance that symbolises superior mental powers, hair that is specially curled or in the form of an “endless knot”, as well as a tuft of hair on the forehead. Figures sit in relaxed or yoga-like poses that reflect inner tranquillity and physical control (Fisher 1993: 11–13; McArthur 2002: 119). Buddha figures also have peaceful, meditative facial expressions and their hands are in symbolic gestures, *mudras*, that symbolise different forces or divine manifestations (Frédéric 1995: 39).



Image 75: A reclining Buddha made from green granite with painted, black details



Image 76: A Buddha head made from red marble. The hairstyle depicts the endless knot.



Image 77: A Buddha head and a sitting Buddha figure. Both are made from green stone that has been partly painted black. The head carving has curly hair, whereas the sitting figure has a hairstyle describing the endless knot.

The popularity of Buddha sculptures in the carving shops in Mamallapuram reflect the fact that they sold well, but also some carvers stated that they were somewhat easier to carve than some of the Hindu deities with multiple arms and complex sets of symbolic emblems. Buddha sculptures were also an interesting phenomenon, since Buddhism is not widely practised in India, especially in South India. However, in Hindu beliefs Buddha can be considered to be one of the incarnations of Hindu god Vishnu and therefore also part of the Hindu deity pantheon.

All these different typical features of Mahayana Buddhist art can also be found from the stone carvings sold in the tourist market in Mamallapuram. Different hairstyles, sitting positions and mudras created variety between the sculptures but they all have a tranquil face with closed eyes. These features were also reflected in some of the foreign tourists' decisions to buy a statue of Buddha. For example, a Canadian tourist who had purchased several pieces of Buddha described her decisions to buy them as follows:

First of all I chose Buddha carvings obviously because of Buddha. And because the Buddha symbolises, encompasses all that is. Peace, tranquillity, freedom from human suffering. Because it had a spiritual meaning for me as opposed to buying a statue that was, I don't know, a turtle or a horse!

For her, Buddha statues were important because of what they depicted and the qualities Buddha represents and symbolised for her, based on the teachings of Buddhism. She also stated that the spiritual iconography of the statue was important to her and she wanted to buy such a piece rather than a carving that would not have such a meaning or connotation.

5.3.3 Dancing ladies and goddesses

Sculptures of various female figures were another typical statue type on the carving market in Mamallapuram. Some of them were sculptures of the most well-known female Hindu deities: Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Durga and Kali, but also statues of "dancing ladies" or other female figures are a typical carving type. As the name suggests, these were statues that depict female figures in a dancing position. Stylistically they resembled the female deities but lack the symbols and other markers of typical representations that make goddesses recognisable.

Goddess statues have a key role in Hindu religious practices. Worshipping of the goddess, Devi, is the third main Hindu sect in India next to worshipping Shiva and Vishnu, and is popular in India irrespective of the gender of the devotee (Huyler 1999: 32, 144; Jacobs 2010: 25–27). Devi takes the form of several pan-Indian goddesses. In the villages around India, several local goddesses are worshipped, and these expressions of vernacular Hinduism are often attached to ideas of female fertility and agriculture. All goddesses are embodiments of feminine, universal energy known as Shakti, which is believed to be the force that gives male deities their powers to act. In Hindu temples Devi statues are presented either alone or as a partner of the masculine god. It is thought that there are 108 temples in India that are solely dedicated to Devi. Many of these temples are located on top of mountains or in caves, as it is believed that the goddess is a daughter of the mountains. Also the temple building itself is believed to be an embodiment of the deity, irrespective of the deity that resides in it (Huyler 1999: 140–149; Pattanaik 2000).



Image 78: Goddess Parvati made from gada-dapa/grey stone



Image 79: A female figure made from red marble

Saraswati is the goddess of knowledge, wisdom, arts, education and speech. Saraswati is considered to be the consort of the god Brahma, but in some belief systems Saraswati is the wife of Vishnu, Shiva or Ganesh. Saraswati is usually depicted in a sitting position next to books and holds a *vina*, an Indian string instrument. These features symbolise Saraswati as the protector of music and knowledge and this goddess is prayed to before school exams or concert performances, for example. Lakshmi in turn is the goddess of beauty and wealth and a consort of the god Vishnu.

In iconography Lakshmi usually sits on a lotus flower and next to her there is often an elephant and a stream of coins, both symbols of prosperity. Hindus approach Lakshmi in financial matters and business ventures in particular. The third popular female deity is Parvati, who is the wife of Shiva and especially symbolises shakti, or feminine energy, although all different female deities include this element. For Hindus Parvati is the representation of an ideal wife who is devoted to her husband Shiva and faithfully takes care of him. However, Parvati, as an embodiment of shakti, may also turn into more dangerous and ferocious forms, such as Durga and Kali. These goddesses represent Devi and shakti in their most powerful states, and in Hindu mythology Durga and Kali kill demons and also fight against male deities. Durga is often depicted riding a lion with a sword in her hand, ready for battle. Kali in turn has a necklace made from skulls and she stands on the body of a dead demon with her tongue hanging out and dripping with blood. Whereas Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati show the benevolent side of the goddesses, Kali and Durga show that Devi should also be feared if not respected accordingly. A goddess is thus a loving mother but also a powerful force (Huyler 1999: 143–149; Harshananda 1982: 77–122; Jacobs 2010: 25–26; Pattanaik 2014).



Image 80: Female figures next to a head of Shiva (in the middle) and Krishna (second from the right).

Only two of the foreign people interviewed had purchased a stone carving of a female goddess and none of female deities were mentioned in the questionnaires collected. One of the two was a visitor from Spain who had bought a statue of Parvati. She explained that she liked it because for her the statue represents “a woman who is not so beautiful but still innocent and who would do everything for love”. She also added that although “she would not be quite so patient herself, she also identifies with Parvati a little bit”. The statue of Parvati was thus important for her due to the qualities the goddess represented and that she identified with it, at least partly. This visitor also told me she was somewhat familiar with some of the stories attached to the Hindu deities and therefore knew about the qualities that different deities represented in Hindu culture. Another visitor who had purchased a goddess statue was an American who had bought himself a sculpture of Lakshmi and also a statue of Durga for his sister during his previous visit to Mamallapuram. Like the Spanish visitor, he had also learned about Hindu mythology and beliefs and chose the sculptures based on these meanings. The American visitor also told me that his sister was intrigued by Durga in particular, which made him choose that statue for her. These two tourists thus made the decision to purchase goddess statues because of the Hindu beliefs and mythology attached to them, rather than based on the appearance and physical qualities of the carvings.

5.3.4 Male deities

Alongside the stone carvings of different female figures, sculptures of various male Hindu deities were found from more or less all the carvings shops. These include images of the Hindu male gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva that are also known as the Hindu trinity or *Trimurti* in Sanskrit (cf. Harshananda 1982: 19). Krishna, who is one of the various incarnations of Vishnu, is equally a common depiction. Some of the stone carvers interviewed also listed these male deities alongside statues of Ganesh and Buddha as the most popular statues that the tourists would buy.

In Hinduism, Brahma is considered to be the creator of the universe but he also represents the power of thought and the human mind. In images Brahma usually has four arms and four faces that point in each direction. Worshipping of Brahma has ceased in India and there are only a few temples devoted to him. Brahma is part of the mythological Hindu literature and its depictions in the

tourist carving market therefore reflect this aspect of the cultural tradition more than an ongoing aspect of Hindu worship. The other two gods, Vishnu and Shiva, are the main deities that are worshipped widely around India next to the different expressions of Devi and shakti. Vishnu is considered to be the protector and preserver of the universe that Brahma has created, and Shiva in turn destroys it in order to create it again. Hindus usually worship Vishnu in the form of its many incarnations, of which there are nine that are most common (Huyler 1999: 32; Pattanaik 2009: 123–153; Jacobs 2010: 22–23). The most popular incarnations of Vishnu are Rama and Krishna. Rama is a righteous king, faithful husband and householder, whereas Krishna is a playful cowherd, who plays a flute, flirts with women and teaches lessons of love (Jacobs 2010: 23–25; Jaigo 2014). Buddha can also be considered to be Vishnu's 10th incarnation, which may also be considered to be one of the reasons why statues of Buddha are widely produced in Mamallapuram although Buddhism is not a common religion in South India. The most common depiction of Shiva is the formless *linga* that is a pillar-shaped, phallus-like image of the deity. It symbolises the energy and potential of the god, which may also be attached to fertility. The base of the *linga* is the feminine symbol *yoni*. Shiva is also considered to be the first yogi and an ascetic who lived as a hermit on a mountain top, withdrawn from earthly life and its burdens, which in turn are the field of god Vishnu. In some statues Shiva is portrayed as a yogi sitting in a meditating position with eyes closed. Another typical representation of Shiva is the god as a lord of dance, called Shiva Nataraja. In this image Shiva is dancing inside a ring of fire with his long hair waving around his head, holding various emblems in his hands and standing on a midget that represents the ignorance of humans. Shiva's dance can be seen as a representation of the cycles of the universe, in which destruction and rebirth take their turns (Huyler 1999: 30–33; Pattanaik 2009: 79–103; Jacobs 2010: 21–22).



Image 81: A statue of Krishna made from gadapa/grey stone



Image 82: From the left: a lampshade with the many faces of Brahma made from red marble; a standing figure of Buddha made from green granite and painted black; a Shiva head made from green granite and painted black, and a Shiva head made from gadapa/grey stone.



Image 83: A head of Shiva with many faces. The sculpture is made from green stone and has been partly painted black. The idea for the many-faced Shiva figure comes from a typical representation of the god Brahma that is usually portrayed with four faces. This statue is an example of a carving made for the tourist market in Mamallapuram that combines traditional Hindu iconography in novel ways.

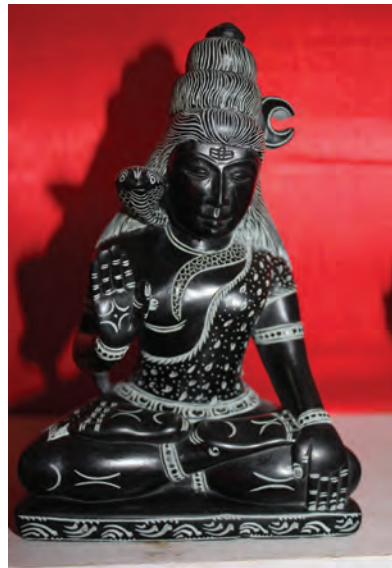


Image 84: A statue of Shiva in a meditation position. The carving is made from green stone and painted black

Of the 65 questionnaires collected, five tourists had purchased a statue of Shiva, of which two were depictions of the god in the linga form and two were dancing Shivas or Shiva Natarajas. One visitor had purchased a statue of Krishna and another one a carving of Brahma's head. From the people interviewed two had bought a statue of Shiva. One of them was visitor from Iceland who had purchased a statue of Shiva alongside a statue of Ganesh, and he told me that he "feels he has a relationship with both Shiva and Ganesh and that they are his type of gods." He had purchased both these statues for "personal reasons", although he may be giving the Ganesh to his son as a gift. The other one was an American visitor who had just seen a statue in the shop, liked it and bought it as a result.

Interestingly, one of the most popular Tamil deities, Murugan, was not a common statue in the tourist market in Mamallapuram. Murugan is the other son of god Shiva usually know as Skanda but he is somewhat unimportant in other parts of India. In Tamil Nadu Murugan is often represented as a king and is the presiding deity of many large, wealthy temples (Fuller 1992: 34, 40). The cult of Murugan can be seen as an expression of Tamil self-consciousness as he has been identified with Tamil cultural heritage (Clothney 1978). Murugan is described as red in colour and riding a blue peacock. In the statues he is usually in a standing position with a side image of a peacock behind him. This god is also known by various other names, such as Karthikkeya, Saravana, Velan, Kumaran, Senthil, Subramanian, Shanmugan and Aramugam, most of which are very common Tamil male names. In Mamallapuram sculptures of Murugan made from granite were found in the workshops and showrooms selling temple sculptures and other granite works but rarely from the soft stone carving shops. Murugan was never mentioned in the interviews when I asked carvers about the type of statues they made and what people usually bought from them. I paid attention to this interesting point only after my fieldwork and thus never asked about it directly. Statues of Murugan could have been advertised to potential buyers with a local, regional reference point and also as a son of god Shiva, as Shiva is well known also to non-Hindus. Perhaps stone carvers thought that the foreigners would not be able to recognise this deity and thus show little interest in it. In this context it created a divide between the local religious presentations and tourist arts, although perhaps unintentionally.

5.3.5 The story of Lilith

The carving of Lilith is an example of a stone carving that is not part of traditional Hindu iconography and was based on an idea of a carver rather than on an order given by a tourist. Arul Murugan was a stone carver in his early 30s who had a carving shop near Shore Temple. He had learned stone carving from his father who had studied stone carving at the sculpture college. Arul made both soft stone and granite sculptures and he knew the correct rules and measurements of religious sculpture. In his shop he was making and selling small soft stone carvings mainly to Indian tourists but also to foreign visitors. Most of his statues were typical Hindu carvings but he also had a couple of different types, such as abstract human figures in yoga positions and statues that he called "Angel Ladies" that were female figures with wings. When I visited his shop he also had one "Lilith" on sale and he told me the story behind it.

Arul had seen a photo of an old Babylonian relief sculpture in a local Tamil newspaper. This relief was depicting a female figure that is either known as Lilith, the female demon in Jewish and Babylonian mythology, or Ishtar, the Mesopotamian

goddess of sexual love and war. Next to the picture there was a brief description of the image. Arul decided to make a copy of this carving by himself and he placed the finished sculpture in his shop for sale. He did not make it because of the meaning behind the sculpture but because he liked its visual representation and he wanted to make something different that perhaps people would be interested in purchasing.

Before meeting Arul I had encountered a British visitor who came almost every year to Mamallapuram and purchased stone carvings to sell in New Age shops and fairs in his home country. He had been looking around carving shops in Mamallapuram in 2001 or 2002 and had seen a different type of carving that had interested him. Arul also showed him the picture in the newspaper where he had got his idea from. Since it was well made the British visitor bought it and took it back home. He did not know what it was until a friend told him it was Lilith, and that there was a similar relief in the collection at the British Museum. Only then did the British visitor find out what it was and subsequently learned more about the image. On his next trip to India he ordered more of these statues from Arul and has been ordering many of them over the years.

Arul told me he has made around seven Lilith carvings in addition to the ones he made for the visitor on order. Three have been sold to other customers and he keeps one or two in the shop for sale. He has also carved statues that he calls “Angel Ladies” that have been influenced by the image of Lilith. These may also be linked to various demigods and spirits that are part of the Hindu mythology. At the time I visited the shop there was one Lilith on display. Arul said that he used to make many more different types of models based on his own ideas but nowadays he concentrates only on making traditional sculptures, since they sell the best. However, he still makes different models to order and has a few different types of carvings on sale.



Image 85: A statue made by Arul known as the “Angel Lady” that has been influenced by the image of Lilith. The roughly cut and unfinished back relief is another special feature of this carving.

It is interesting to note that the female figure in the Lilith sculpture is not too different from the form of Hindu goddesses or other female figures typically made in Mamallapuram. In that sense it is also not too different to carve. Arul told me that he also used the scale of Hindu figure sculptures when making this image. The sculpture of Lilith is therefore somewhat parallel to those Hindu carvings that are a mixture of traditional and new iconography and methods of representation.

The carving of Lilith also brings the question of how foreign visitors understand the image into discussion and whether they can recognise it. Interpreting the image of Lilith also brings with it its own cultural baggage; how Mesopotamia is seen and understood within Western discourse. Therefore, it makes an interesting case among Hindu statues in a carving shop in India that has no obvious links to Mesopotamian sculpture tradition.



Image 86: A statue of Lilith made by Arul. This image has been painted black.

5.4 ROUGH CARVINGS AND POLISHED PIECES: DETAILS AND MATERIAL QUALITIES

In addition, the iconography of the stone carvings, the material and the physical qualities of statues were another important criteria for foreign visitors to choose to buy a certain piece carving. Some of the people I interviewed wanted to buy an image of a certain deity, as described above, and would then look for a carving that they felt met their other requirement in terms of the physical qualities of the carvings, such as its size, stone variety, style and detailing.

For example, the Canadian tourist mentioned in the previous section who had purchased several sculptures of Buddha, also had other criteria why she had chosen to buy those particular pieces:

This one I chose because I pay a lot of attention to detail and I noted that this one was very finely and cleanly carved. And I liked the face of the Buddha. Sometimes the Buddha faces on the sculptures, they don't look very appealing or attractive. So it was really the face that drew me to it... There is something peaceful about this face. And I like the features and the proportions on this face. Sometimes the proportions there are a bit out and the faces don't look very tranquil on the Buddhas. Sometimes they look a bit distorted as well. But this one, everything was in proportion. And it was very finely carved I thought. It was a nice piece of work, a nice clean piece of work. And I liked the spirals, the spirally bits for the hair. Sometimes they don't have that spirally bit on the hair.

...And the other one, which was a rose-coloured soft marble, was the laughing Buddha. And that one I chose again because it was a slightly different Buddha in a slightly different pose. So laughing as opposed to in deep meditation, and I liked the humour of that one. And I liked the colour and again I liked the detail of the carving. It had been carved very cleanly. There weren't any rough bits and the face again was in proportion and quite appealing to look at I thought. And the black one I liked but that one was a present. So I think I chose it and my friend bought it for me. I liked the blacks. The black one is marble, isn't it?"

Here she mentions the proportions of the sculptures, the fineness of carving work, different details and colours of the stones as important factors, in addition to different representations of Buddha. With the first piece she had paid special attention to the face of the Buddha, which she had noticed could be different in different statues and was sometimes out of proportion. She had found a piece that had features and proportions to her liking. She also said that "it was really the face that drew me to it", which she found to be very peaceful. In addition, she liked the style of the hair on that piece that represented spirals as opposed to other hairstyle varieties.

The Canadian visitor emphasised the quality of carving work with the first two sculptures: in addition to the "eye-appealing" proportions, the first statue was "finely and cleanly carved" and the second example didn't have "any rough bits", by which she meant that the polishing of the statue was completely polished. With the second and third statue she also brought up the colours of the stones: one of them was rose-coloured and the other one black, both of which she liked.

For some other foreigner visitors, the iconography was less relevant or just one of the several criteria when choosing a statue. For example, a visitor from Germany said that material was the main reason why he had purchased his sculptures:

Q: What carvings have you bought from Mamallapuram?

A: A dancing Ganesha, a little Parvati, a Buddha head, a Hanuman, two little rats.

Q: Why did you choose these objects?

A: The material – most of them are in granite. I like the hard stone because it is more difficult work. I choose objects only from their appearance so things that I thought it's very good craftsmanship, even artist work.

The materiality of the stone allows various types of handling procedures and that can alter the appearance of the statue, which in turn translates into selling potential. Stone carvers were aware of this and modified the statues accordingly. One of the most common trends in the tourist carving market was painting soft stone sculptures – usually green stone – with black paint and ink, which highlights the intricate details that were carved after the painting has been done. This also made soft stone carvings resemble granite statues, even though they are smaller in size, as in the case with the Canadian visitor above.

Parts of the stone carvings could be left uncarved or unpolished, giving them a rougher and more rustic look. I encountered this type of statue in some of the carving shops, although there were only a few of them among the more finely polished and executed pieces. One of the carvers selling them told me certain tourists preferred those pieces and another carver said these features were part of his style that included also non-Hindu images or so-called modern art. I also interviewed a carver who told me that if necessary, he can make any statue to appear as if it were very old. However,

he was unwilling to disclose details of the techniques and at the time I visited his shop there were none of that style of statues on sale. Material modification is one of the selling techniques of statues and this has also been noted for example by Steiner (1994) in the context of carving in the Ivory Coast. Steiner relates different activities that can help to make the carvings appear more attractive to Western buyers who often prefer old-looking objects with patina and preferably signs of ritual use such as “sweat or grease marks” (ibid.: 140). Objects may be removed from their base or have parts removed, and fractures and erosion are restored or made to appear with the help of sandpaper, chemicals, oil or by leaving pieces exposed to insects. Many tourists are not able to tell the difference between this and genuine wear and tear, thus increasing the attractiveness of the objects, making them appear older than they were (ibid.: 140–155).

In addition, different stones have a different natural texture and colour, which also creates variety between sculptures that otherwise depict similar images. All these factors created variety to the iconographically somewhat uniform carving market in Mamallapuram. Varying colours and textures appealed to different potential buyers in the same way as the different deities and their meanings. Whereas some preferred delicate, perhaps painted and cleanly polished and finely executed pieces, others were drawn to more robust works, with the texture of the stone visible to the eye and hands to touch. From the people interviewed, a visitor from New Zealand said she really liked the half-finished pieces, by which she meant the works that had parts of the stone left uncarved. A British visitor said that the pendant she had purchased had “a very rustic look” to it since it was not polished and that made it look “almost antique”. Then again, a regular visitor who came almost annually to Mamallapuram to purchase stone carvings to sell in his home country in Europe, said that the pieces that sell best in the shops back home were the finely carved and polished pieces, in which great attention has been paid to the details. A stone sculpture is thus potentially a mixture of all these different features and it can be difficult to define which one dominates a piece of sculpture: the image it represents, such as that of a deity or an animal, etc., or the stone it has been made of with its colour and texture.

5.5 BUSINESS AND FRIENDSHIPS AT THE STONE CARVING MARKET

Stone carving in the Mamallapuram tourist market was a form of business with a particular type of logic when it came to selling and buying stone statues to different clientele. There were some differences in the selling techniques when carvings were sold to foreigners compared to Indian visitors, and carvings were also purchased by other traders who sell them in different shops and even overseas. Sometimes friendships between stone carvers and foreign tourists played an important role in foreign visitors’ decisions to purchase sculptures. This section examines some of the aspects of bargaining and the role of friendships in the Mamallapuram tourist carving market.

Steiner (1994) identifies four different types of bargaining in the African art market in the context of establishing the value of objects (62). The first type is extractive bargaining, which means sourcing antiquities or other valuable objects from their owners for the market. The second type is wholesale bargaining, which includes selling new objects, such as items intended as souvenirs, as well as those considered antiquities, to

other traders. The third type Steiner identifies is retail bargaining, which takes place between African traders and Western dealers and collectors. The fourth and final type is performative bargaining, which happens between an African trader and a Western customer, such as a tourist (*ibid.*). Extractive and wholesale bargaining are conducted between other African people, such as owners of antiquities, artisans making wood-carvings for the souvenir market, and other traders selling objects to the market. The last two types, retail and performative bargaining, happen between African traders and foreign counterparts like art dealers, wholesale buyers and tourists. According to Steiner there is a different logic in all these bargaining events based on different cultural traditions, and the price of the objects is established based on different criteria.

If the stone carving market in Mamallapuram is examined in the light of these categories suggested by Steiner, some of them apply but in addition, there are also different ones to be considered. Firstly, the extractive bargaining did not happen in the context of stone carving in the sense that objects that were sold were all new and could only be purchased from other carvers or wholesalers of statues. Statues could be old in the sense that they were made some years ago but they cannot be classified as antiquities and they were never those statues that had already been used for religious rituals.

Wholesale bargaining took place when stone carvers bought ready-made statues to be sold in their shops. Generally, this happened between shop owners and traders who wholesaled North Indian statues. They were either people coming from Northern Indian states or local middlemen who took care of the statue sales in Mamallapuram. I did not become too familiar with this type of bargaining business, but on one occasion I accompanied a stone carver to a house where a North Indian trader had a stock of different carvings. The local carver then chose some of the items for his shop and they negotiated the price. The North Indian trader made a list of the items purchased and a partial payment was made. I was told that the rest of the bill could be settled later, when the items were sold. I also saw North Indian traders coming to visit the shops in tourist areas on many occasions, showing examples of statues that the local carvers could buy for the shops. One of the carvers I knew negotiated the prices with the trader in Hindi and placed an order. Later these items would be delivered to his shop from the stock room in Mamallapuram. In these situations, the local carvers had more bargaining power compared to the foreign trader, since they were not dependent on the North Indian statues. On this occasion, this carver's knowledge of Hindi was also an extra asset as he was able to show his knowledge.²⁹ Local traders were also always locals and in their own environment, whereas the trader coming from another state would always be an outsider. When I asked what would happen if the carvers were not able to settle the bill on time, they said it was not really a problem since the people were coming from elsewhere. In Mamallapuram they did not have a community to support them so they would not be able to start disputing issues with locals. All they could really do was to stop trading with a certain individual.

²⁹ In Tamil-speaking Tamil Nadu, Hindi does not have the status of common language like in the Northern states of India, often referred as the Hindi Belt. Therefore, most Tamils speak only Tamil and also English, depending on their education background and exposure to English. Many Tamils still know some Hindi for different reasons, such as from school, TV and movies, or working in different states. This stone carver in question had an elementary level of Hindi and he was therefore able to use it when addressing North Indian traders. North Indian traders in turn may know some Tamil, or English is used, such as is common with the Kashmiri traders in Mamallapuram.

A second type of wholesale occurred between two local carvers, for example when a carver wanted to supply another shop with his items or a carver needed a certain item for his own shop, for example when a tourist was looking for something specific. In these instances, usually both of the carvers got some profit from the sales and the prices were negotiated depending on the situation and the relationship between the carvers. In addition, those carvers who were friends or relatives and had shops next to each other might place items from each other's shops on display tables for sale. Sometimes carvers even took them to shops in different parts of Mamallapuram. If a customer was searching for a certain piece, carvers could look for them from their friend's shops rather than telling the customer to go somewhere else. In these instances, the carver first asked their friends from the shops nearby but if necessary, they asked the customer to take a seat, then hopped on their motorcycle and went to visit another shop in a different part of town. These types of exchange situations were usually rather unofficial and were made depending on the dynamics and friendships between carvers on different occasions.

The majority of the stone carvers interviewed said that they did not make statues for sale for other shops, but I also interviewed a carver named Doran who said that he liked to do that when people request a piece. When a sale was made, most of the profit went to the maker of the statue but also the person selling it got paid. Sometimes I saw friends having small arguments with each other regarding statues that had gone missing, were apparently misplaced on someone else's display table, or a sale had been made but money was not given to the owner of the statue. However, these events occurred between those carvers who were good friends and already trusted each other enough to leave their shops occasionally unattended.

Retail bargaining took place in Mamallapuram between stone carvers and some foreign visitors who came to Mamallapuram specially to purchase statues. Some of them visited Mamallapuram on a yearly basis and I was able to meet and speak with some of them. There was a time when one of the stone carvers I knew was busy making a Buddha statue and some other workshops were making them as well. I then heard that a man from Belgium was coming soon and he had ordered several Buddhas to be made by different workshops. On another occasion it seemed that all the carving shops in the Othavadai Street area were making piles of pendants. Again I was told that a particular foreign visitor was coming and would buy hundreds of pendants to be sold in his home country. Another carver told he had previously made many pieces of a small Ganesh statue ordered by a yoga centre owner from the United States. Whereas these foreign visitors had divided their orders between several carvers, some other tourists had one or two carver friends who would always make their statues. These tourists had visited Mamallapuram on several occasions, made friends with some of the carvers, and also liked their work. Sometimes orders were given in advance but on other occasions these visitors would just choose some of the ready-made pieces. For example, a French visitor would always purchase some well-made pieces of Buddha and Ganesh that she would sell back home in France at various art fairs. Another regular foreign visitor, already mentioned in the context of Lilith statues, knew a couple of carvers from whom he always ordered statues to be sold in art fairs and New Age shops in his home country in Europe. In these occasions the price of the statue was dependent on the relationship between the stone carver and the visitor. If they knew each other well and for several years, their relationship was often a mixture of a personal friendship and a business deal. Stone carvers could sell statues to these foreign traders at a cheaper price than to the average tourist, especially if purchases were

regular and consisted of several pieces. At the same time, a close relationship in some cases meant that the foreign trader was also willing to pay a higher price, for example if they knew that the stone carver in question was facing financial difficulties. Close personal relations could also result in the fact that despite the business dimension of the acquaintance, certain liberties would be taken in terms of the deal concerned. For example, one foreign visitor mentioned in an interview that he had made an order and sent money in advance for the carver he had known for several years but he did not receive the carvings as agreed:

So last year when I expected something to arrive and it didn't come because he needed the money for the hospital thing for his daughter, I wanted, you know, to organise a little party where I could exhibit things and then ask people whether they want stuff like this or bigger for their gardens. But the thing is that I'm not a professional seller or a retailer. And for the bigger stuff you need, you know little grains or ways of moving them. And I don't have storage space either. But I could imagine some of the stuff you could sell to a really specialised landscape gardening market.

We had been discussing his sale of sculptures in his home country in Europe and he told me how he had been doing it for several years already. He was not a professional salesman but he used to get statues from Mamallapuram during his somewhat regular visits and then sell them mainly to his friends at home. However, on this particular occasion the carver had been using the money sent for the statue order for unexpected medical expenses for his daughter. For his foreign friend this was not a problem as such as the money went to a good cause and he knew he would get his statues later on. I am not sure if this would have happened if the carver and the foreigner had known each other for several years. Advance payment is necessary in order to cover the production costs of the statues as well as shipping them overseas. However, here the carver knew that the delay would not jeopardise their friendship since this foreigner had helped his family in the past and was very understanding in terms sudden changes in their personal circumstances. I think the interview extract above also highlights very clearly the often very different realities in which the relatively affluent foreign visitors and many stone carvers lived in. Unexpected and expensive medical bills were one of those unforeseen events that caused big problems for poor families in Mamallapuram.³⁰ For the carver, stone carving was a source of livelihood. For the foreign trader, selling stone carvings for friends at home is a hobby and an aesthetic endeavour. At the same time, he was also doing it in order to help this particular stone carver rather than to make money for himself.

The fourth and last type of bargaining that Steiner (1994) presents is performative bargaining. This type refers to the interactions between local traders and Western customers. In Mamallapuram, performative bargaining took place between stone carvers and foreign or Indian tourists and this was also the most common type of bargaining situation that happens between stone carvers and their customers. As in this research I have focused only on the encounters between foreign tourists and stone carvers, I did not study the bargaining between stone carvers and Indian tourists. However,

³⁰ On those occasions money was usually borrowed from relatives and friends, including foreign friends. Foreigners were also considered a good source of financial help since they often had some spare money to give and might donate it more easily than any local people, who often had financial problems of their own. There were several private money lenders in Mamallapuram but they charged a lot of interest for their loans.

many of the stone carvers interviewed told me that Indian tourists were not willing to pay as high prices for the statues as the foreign tourists. This referred here only to the tourist market and did not apply to the granite business, which was almost entirely based on Indian markets. One of the stone carvers and his friend that interviewed on Five Ratha Street told me the following:

Q: And is there a difference between the European customers and Indian customers?

A1: Yes!

A2: Big difference.

A1: Big difference.

Q: How is it different?

Q: ...Indian people they came, look at the statue, how much is this? Rs 600. Ok, I give you Rs 300. Like this. But the foreigners, they know the power, they know all the things, that it is very hard to make, it is very difficult to make. So it's good. They like. They understand the work! But Indian people are a little bit...some of them understand the work, some of them don't understand the work.

They just know the price. If we need Rs 4,000, they think we need only Rs 1,000. But there much work. So we ask for Rs 4000 but they only want to pay Rs 1,000.

Q: So Indian people don't pay much?

A1: Rich people they pay much. Middle class, they also pay much. Village people, they don't pay much.

Five Ratha Street was the area where both Indian and foreign tourists stopped to buy stone carvings on their way to see the Five Rathas monument. Therefore, this carver had experience of both types of customers and was able to point out the differences between Indian and foreign buyers. He felt that foreign customers were more understanding of the fact that stone carving was hard work and therefore carvers do not want to sell their statues for very low prices. At the same time he noted that there were differences between the Indian customers and how much they were able to pay.

Beach Road leading to the Shore Temple was another area frequented by both Indian and foreign tourists. A carver in that area told me that he keeps statues of different value in this shop for different types of customers. Most of the statues he had for sale were made by him, and he did not want to sell those pieces at a very low price. This meant that the price of the statue must cover the price of the stone, daily labour and hopefully some profit in addition. If the customers were not willing to pay that price, then he offered them either one of the cheaper North Indian pieces or yet cheaper statues made in the village of Muduyir. Since there was a clear difference especially between the local carvings and Muduyir work in terms of the hardness of the stone and detailing, it was easy to justify these prices. As the stone carver from Five Ratha Street pointed out, the differences in people's willingness to pay certain prices are also related to their capacity to pay. Mamallapuram was visited by Indian tourists from all social and economic classes, and many of them could not afford to buy relatively expensive stone carvings considering the general price levels in India.

In terms of performative bargaining, the encounters between stone carvers and foreign tourists varied. Some carvers were very chatty and invited people from the streets to see their carvings. "Come and have a look, madam! There is more inside! Looking is free!" was a common expression I heard when stopping next to carving

shops in tourist areas and was looking at what they had on the display table outside the shops. Others would be quieter and spoke only when addressed or when I wanted to ask something. When a potential customer came to the shop, carvers would usually stop any carving they were doing and would be ready to serve the customer. If the tourist wanted to go inside the shop they would turn on the ceiling fan and possibly some extra lights. Some carvers would show different types of sculptures and explain what they represented. They lifted the smaller pieces from the shelves and used a cloth to get rid of any dust that might have accumulated on the statue. Other carvers would just let the customers look at the pieces in their own time and only answer any questions that the tourist had. If the tourist wanted to make a purchase, usually a small bargaining session took place. Usually the price was agreed quite quickly, or alternatively either the stone carver or the tourist rejected the price as being too high or low, depending on which one has made the offer. Usually carvers were not willing to go lower than a certain price range that covers their production costs, and they also knew that other carvers have the same requirements and standards. Again, this depended on the carvers' personal financial situation and whether it was the high or low tourist season. Some tourists asked prices at different shops first before making any purchases and agreed the prices once they had established the general price levels between different shops. For example, an Australian tourist who had visited Mamallapuram several times told me the following:

Quite often in India I'm happy with the price, unless... If in some cases they ask for a really stupid price and you know it is way too high, then I'm not going to be made fool of. But if I'm happy with it and I feel like that is a fair price then I won't haggle. I will pay what they want.

Another visitor, who was from Ireland and had also visited Mamallapuram several times, told me that in the beginning before any purchase he would count up the price of the stone, daily wages and labour in order to find out what would be an acceptable price. This was because he knew the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram very well and knew also the wages that the stone carvers were earning when working as labourers. He would also ask the carvers first how long it had taken them to make the particular piece. But he said that stone carvers did not appreciate this tactic and he has since stopped doing it. Nowadays if he is happy with a carving and it is of good quality, he will buy it if the price seems acceptable.

A Swiss tourist told she a habit of bargaining but at the same time she reads the face of the stone carver. She said she is able to see when the price is getting so low that the carver was no longer happy with it, and she also assumed that it would no longer cover the actual production costs of the statue. When approaching that level, she would always stop and then pay a bit more than what the carver was willing to settle for. She thought that in that way she got the correct price but at the same time it was important for her that the carver got a fair price for his work.

The examples above show that foreign visitors considered the issue of price from different angles and although they did not wish to pay a price that they felt was overly high, they also considered the quality of the sculpture and the needs of the stone carvers. As long as they considered not being cheated, tourists were even happy to pay more than it was even necessary. As an American tourist put it:

It depends I think on how much you like the person as well. I mean bargaining and haggling is all about the people who are doing it. For instance, if we get a shave and someone says 20 and you know the price is 20 but other people say 40 or 50 or 60, just because we are tourists. Someone says 20 and they are a really nice person, you give them a 30 or 40. You give them a note rather than oh, give me the change...30, 40, 50 or whatever. So it comes down to the person. I think it depends on whether the people give you the right price, they may be given more. If people ask a lot more, even if they don't have any business or... you have to...if you really want it you try to haggle to get it a bit lower. I find that it is really in the tourist places that people try to ask triple the price.

This last statement also highlights the importance of the personal aspect of the bargaining situation, the actual situation, atmosphere and the personalities of the people doing the bargaining. Therefore, in addition to these four types of bargaining as identified by Steiner (1994), I would also add a type that called friendship-based bargaining because different types of friendships played such a crucial role in the stone carving market in Mamallapuram. This type of bargaining also covers all three types presented above that apply to the context of Mamallapuram. As described above, different types of friendships between stone carvers played a role in wholesale bargaining, they were present in some of the deals between foreign traders and stone carvers in the context of retail bargaining, and they had a particularly pivotal role in the tourist encounters that can be labelled performative bargaining. Friendships shaped all these bargaining encounters and emphasised the personal connection between the people doing the selling and buying. Relationships varied between different people and were also subject to constant negotiations. They added a personal dimension to the mere business relationships, since they came with other social and cultural elements that also in turn shaped the business encounters.

Overall, the fact that the foreign visitor knew the stone carvers already or considered them as a friend played a big role in many instances in the visitor's decision to purchase a carving in the first place. This fact was brought up in several of the interviews when I asked people for the reason why they had decided to buy a stone carving. For example, a Swedish tourist told me how she had given some money to a stone carver she knew after the Asian tsunami hit Mamallapuram on Christmas Day 2004. This carver used to have a shop right by the beach and the waves had destroyed it completely. The carver had bought stones with the money and made the Swedish tourists a group of elephants in return as a thank you for her help. An Irish visitor said he has his favourite carver whose work he values and buys. A Spanish visitor who visits Mamallapuram regularly said she always buys some statues at the end of her stay to support the carvers. In addition, if somebody were in great need of money for any particular reason, she would buy something to help. She felt this type of exchange was better than just giving money directly. A Greek visitor told that he had been taken to one of the carving shops by a young student and in the end he wanted to help the student financially by purchasing something. Equally, a Portuguese had ordered some pendants from a carver she knew just in order to give him some work. She would then give these pendants as a gift to her friends at home.

However, in many of these instances, friendship with the carver was not the only reason for them buying a sculpture and or if it was, people would not buy just any carving but they would look for a piece that pleased them for various reasons. Still, this personal connection was mentioned regularly in the interviews, even though none of my research questions specifically asked about it.



Image 87: The carving on the right is not based on Hindu iconography.

Equally, when it came to negotiating prices, the relationship the visitor considered they had with the carver was also important. In my interviews with foreign tourists I asked them about bargaining, and as examples here are the answers I got from a Canadian tourist (A1) and an American tourist (A2).

Q: Did you bargain? Or did you think you were paying a fair price?

A1: No, I didn't bargain. Because I bought it from my friends. So I knew they were giving me a good price anyway. So I knew he wasn't putting any high profit margin on it or anything. No, that was all very clear-cut for me.

A2: No. Or with the first one I did, because it wasn't a friend of mine. I got the price down quite a lot and it was what I wanted to pay, more or less.

A visitor from Belgium had been taken to a carving shop by a local friend she knew very well and the carver was a friend of a friend. She had also thought that the price was good although she could not be completely sure, but at least she thought the price was fair for her. These three respondents said that in general they were happy with the prices they had been given since they knew the carvers or did the purchasing with a local friend. As a result, they mainly trusted that they would be asking them only a fair price. A visitor from Iceland also said that since he had purchased the statue from Five Ratha Street, rather than from Othavadai Street, which is the main street in the tourist area favoured by foreigners in Mamallapuram, the price he paid was lower. He suspected that had he bought the carvings from Othavadai Street the price would

have been at least double. It is common that people do not want to feel they have been cheated on price, especially when there are not fixed prices and bargaining is part of the culture. Tourists may take pride in the fact that they have been able to get prices down from what was initially asked. When the visitors knew the stone carvers or were accompanied by a local friend, they felt more confident from the beginning and trusted that the prices were reasonable.

In turn, from the perspective of the stone carvers, the prices that the tourists were willing to pay also had an effect on what stone carvers were willing to carve. This is one of the main reasons why all the carvers did almost exclusively Hindu carvings as well as pendants and animal figures. As stone carver Arul put it:

Making different things is OK, but sometimes it is very difficult to make a new kind of statue, so some confusion for the mind. Making these statues takes one week and then I may sell it but the price is not coming high. Just Rs 1000 or Rs 1500 so no profit. Making regular Ganeshas and Buddhas is easy so that is no problem. You make them quickly so that is OK. But different type of work takes much more time.

Arul and many other carvers said that in principle they are also interested in making different types of carvings but since they do not sell well, the incentive to make them was low. This is not uncommon when it comes to tourist arts that are a primary source of income for their producers. This has also been noted by Maduro (1976b: 243) among Rajasthani painters in North India as well by Bundgaard (1999) among Patta painters in Orissa (now Odisha), who both choose their motifs based on tourists' preferences. Nevertheless, some carvers like Arul still occasionally tried out different styles, classified as natural or modern carvings in Mamallapuram, since it also provided a challenge and brought variety to their more routine carving work. When an order had been placed and income was thus guaranteed, carvers in general claimed they were happy to produce different styles and learn new things. Occasionally they repeated these new styles, as in the case of Lilith.

Bargaining can also be something that some foreign visitors do not like to engage in as an activity. In an interview with an American tourist, he told me the following, which also gives a good account of the way friendships between stone carvers and foreigners are formed:

...And I was really adamant to buy something but I had no clue what I wanted. And then I entered the shop, I had been there maybe three or four times before, and he looked at me and then he said to me in this particular Indian accent, "If you want to bargain, this is the wrong shop. The prices I tell you are the prices you have to pay." I said OK, I don't like to bargain so that's good. So we sat down and then we got some tea and then we talked for three days or something!" (Laughter) Lots of tea, lots of talking.

Later on in the interview he also added:

And honestly I still don't know the fair prices here.

This visitor had been coming to Mamallapuram for several years and was friends with the same stone carver. It is also one of the main reasons why he came to Mamallapuram regularly and he also kept on buying sculptures. For him, knowing the correct prices was less important than his personal connection.



Image 88: Female figures that are not based on Hindu iconography

On one hand some foreign visitors emphasised their friendships with the stone carvers and how many of them wanted to support the carving industry by purchasing statues. At the same time, visitors stated that they also bargained and were careful not to pay too high prices for the carvings. As one of them told me “they always say you get ripped off in India.” Another foreigner who regularly bought stone carvings from Mamallapuram to be sold in her home country said that she “sometimes felt the carvers used her.” Apparently she did not know the prices that well and was not given any discount. She also added that in the end she “was not sure which people were honest”. Then again, some of the other visitors who came to Mamallapuram regularly said that they knew the carving prices so they also knew what would be a fair price for both parties. These foreigners thus wanted to find a balance between helping and being friends with the carvers but at the same time wanted to be sure they were also treated fairly in return.

There were also those who, as the American visitor noted above, did not know the prices but still did not care to bargain. For example, a Portuguese visitor said that she never bargained although she did not really know the prices. She felt it was more

respectful not to bargain and just pay what was asked if she was happy with the price. A Greek visitor said that he did not bargain because he bought a sculpture in order to help, not because he really needed it. He also said that “it is part of the social life that you buy something from someone.” He also added that “perhaps the carver could have sold the statue for Rs 500 which he had now paid Rs 1,000 for, but that extra Rs 500 will not make this carver rich – it just provides him with some extra income”. A visitor from Britain said that the pendant she had purchased represented to her the state of the mind she had at the time so she did not even think about bargaining. Nevertheless, she felt the price was fair.

None of the people interviewed clearly stated that they were sure they had been cheated or ripped off when purchasing the statue. The only person who expressed that concern was the regular buyer above who said that perhaps people took financial advantage of her. Being cheated in the market when travelling is not something people are perhaps willing to admit to. It may have to do with an idea of a stereotypical tourist who is unaccustomed to the local culture and value system and is therefore being taken advantage of by some local people. It is perhaps more comfortable to think that the price they had paid was fair, unless they really knew the prices and were able to make that judgement based on that information. At the same time, as some of the examples show, some visitors were also unconcerned about the issue of perhaps being cheated because they had only paid what they personally had been comfortable with or what suited their own financial situation, or they knew that the money they spent went to a good cause as it helped the stone carvers to make a living.

Stone carvers usually priced the statues based on the stone prices and daily labour costs and hoped to make some profit on top of that. Profit margin was usually around 20 to 30 per cent, but during the low season it could be zero or even negative in case the carver is in a situation in which a sale at a low price is better than no sale at all. However, in general many carvers refused to sell the statues for very low prices, as that affects the price levels on the market as a whole. As noted, tourist shops also stocked machine-made statues from North India as well as low-quality Ganesh carvings made in the villages of Muduyir in Tamil Nadu. These carvings were relatively cheap to purchase for the shops and could be sold to customers at lower prices.

The situations in the Mamallapuram stone carving market described above correspond to some extent with what Fancelow (1990) has written about the so-called bazaar economy in the context of a small commercial Tamil town of Kalakkadu. His study focuses on mass-produced commodities and semi-perishable food items such as grains, pulses, lentils, spices etc. What Fancelow notes is that in a bazaar situation, personal relationships between middlemen and traders as well as traders and customers are vital because there is no guarantee of the quality and quantity of the products compared to branded, standardised goods. Also, prices may vary greatly (*ibid.*). An element of uncertainty is always present as one can never be quite sure if the product they pay for is really what is claimed and if the price is fair. Stone carvings in Mamallapuram differ from these products because they are handcrafted objects; this creates natural differences between carvings. Also, defining the “quality” of a stone statue is not straightforward from an aesthetic perspective, as buyers may prefer different styles. But for tourists it is difficult to know the different factors that constitute the price of a statue: how much did the stone cost and how long it took to carve it, has the statue been broken and then fixed and how much do similar statues cost in other shops? It could also be argued that as hand-made products, even art, each carving is unique so their value cannot be defined based only on certain measurable factors.

5.6 TOURISTS AS STONE CARVERS

Another factor that had an impact on foreign visitors' attitudes towards stone carving was trying out stone carving themselves. That experience enabled visitors to gain an insight into what the work was like and how it felt to make carvings completely by hand. Thirteen foreigners out the 28 interviewed and 18 of the 65 who responded to the questionnaires had tried stone carving. The following excerpt is from an interview with a Swiss visitor who reflected on her experience:

Q: And how did you feel making the stone carving? Did it change your ideas about the statues here?

A: Yes. My little stone carving was for hours and hours and hours. And it is unbelievable how much work it is. Not the first shape but the little details in the end. That makes a difference. So much work, that it is unbelievable how cheap they sell it.

Yesterday I heard a little boy say "Rs 30 only or Rs 50 only and I wonder how many hours, even a trained person needs? OK, if time has no value, it's nothing. But if you sit the whole day for the production, you should have the money for the whole day. I mean, I think the money could be about Rs 200 a day here for the lower worker. So if he works the whole day, he should have Rs 200. So if you compare, like if you compare these little elephants with the holes inside or another elephant inside, how many days did he work on this piece? And if you say "OK, Rs 200 a day." Who pays Rs 1,000? Who pays Rs 1,500? No! So it is... It's a little bit sad, isn't it?

A German visitor said that after having spent days trying to carve a Buddha statue and realising how much work goes into it, he had started to feel ashamed of his friends who bargained for the sculptures. Equally, a French tourist who had filled in the questionnaire described her experience of the carving as follows:

It was more difficult than I expected. Very long work. I made a gecko, which seems to be the usual object for stone carving beginners. It changed my view of stone carving in the way I realised it is really hard work, probably less paid than it should be. It's also an introspective experience, which requires concentration and determination. A kind of meditation.

The views of an American visitor were also similar:

Yes, I tried. I made a turtle. It was more difficult than I imagined and it had more steps, too. I gained more admiration for the carvers.

In these examples, a personal experience of stone carving had helped foreign visitors understand the nature of the carving work somewhat better: how easy or difficult it was to carve and also what different stages of work there were when producing a piece. This in turn allowed some of the tourists to reflect on the prices of the sculptures and how much carvers would earn from their work. For example, an Italian visitor told me that she had bought her piece of sculpture after having worked on her own carving in a carving shop for a week. While sitting there she had seen how much work went into carving and also she had heard stone carvers complaining how nothing was sold. At the end she wanted to buy something as a form of support. She also reflected

that unless she had already become friends with the carvers she probably would not have bought anything. Therefore, in her case the most important thing was not only what she personally learned about stone carving while trying it herself, but the time she had spent in the stone carving shop that had led her to making friends with the carvers. She was also able to witness more closely what their daily business was like and as a result wanted to help them by purchasing a piece herself.

Another point that was frequently stated in the interviews and questionnaires was that it was physically hard to sit on the ground and carve the whole day as it made people's backs hurt. Also, holding sculptures with your feet was challenging. This contributed to the general opinion that stone carving was "hard work", as although chiselling and hammering small pieces of stones did not necessarily require strong physical power as such, the static carving position and sitting on the ground was something that many foreigners were not accustomed to. At the same time, stone carving was considered to be very calm work, a type of meditation, as the French tourist wrote. This was also stated in the questionnaires, as described here for example by another American visitor:

I was amazed at how peaceful it was just sitting there working on the stone.

An Irish visitor also thought stone carving was addictive:

I think it is addictive. I have to train my hands a bit because they get sore very quickly. But as soon as you train I can imagine just sitting and carving the whole day. It is very easy for me to.... I am also a person who likes to do things with their hands. I can imagine someone who is in the office and never done anything by hand, then maybe not but for me it is addictive.

Trying stone carving thus had different impacts on the foreign visitors. As well as learning how much work it takes to make a carving, appreciating the skills of the carvers and wanting to pay better prices, friendships were formed that made tourists want to contribute by buying statues, as in the case of the Italian visitor. Many visitors also felt they gained personally from the experience as it was interesting and introspective work. As noted, stone carvers did not usually charge for teaching carving, only for the rough material costs. They enjoyed the company of tourists but that would also sometimes lead to purchases and attracted more potential customers into the shops.

Whereas most foreign tourists made a small carving, such as a pendant or an animal that they could finish in a day or two, some visitors wanted to take up a bigger challenge and try out stone carving for several days or even weeks at a time. I encountered a Dutch visitor who was spending a couple of months in Mamallapuram and had thought it would be interesting see if he could also learn to carve and make something. A friend of his had recommended that he should go and visit one particular carver working in the tourist area and ask if he could teach him. The carver had agreed and suggested that the Dutch visitor carve a statue of Buddha as it would be the easiest religious image to make. This suited the visitor as he told me he really likes and appreciates Buddha and had in fact previously spent many months in a Buddhist country. However, he also added that had the carver recommended that he make another type of deity sculpture, he would have happily agreed. The only thing that was important for him was that the image was religious or spiritual as he did not want to make just an ornament.



Image 89: Stone carvers and a foreign visitor carve together in a carving shop on Othavadai Street

The Dutch visitor had drawn before but it was his first time sculpting. Before starting the work, he had thought it would be difficult and that had turned out to be the case. He also stated that his respect for stone carvers had increased due to the hard nature of the work, and he felt he was not able to bargain for the sculptures anymore. Equally, his perception of sculpting and carving had changed due to first-hand experience. While sitting in the carving shop, the Dutch visitor had also been observing the carvers around him and said it was nice to see how all the carvers worked in a team and helped each other.

One of the foreigners who bought statues from Mamallapuram to be sold in Europe told that in many cases he finishes the statues himself by adding some details and polishing the surface some more to make them more appealing to his prospective buyers. He also noted that sometimes the pieces he had ordered were not of a very good quality and he had had to ask the carvers to redo some of the parts. Apparently the base of the statues was often a problem since the statues are lying down on the back when they are made. Because of this the base may not be completely even and prevents the

statue from standing firmly. His personal engagement with stone carving was thus coming from a professional and economic necessity, rather than a desire to try a new craft.

Mamallapuram also attracted professional foreign stone carvers who mainly came to Mamallapuram to train with the local granite carvers and possibly learn new techniques in granite sculpting. During my stay in Mamallapuram in the winter of 2011, an event known as the 1st International Arts Symposium was organised, which was intended to be an opportunity for both local and foreign artists, such as stone carvers and painters, to engage in their art, work together and show their finished pieces to the public after the event. This month-long symposium was not officially part of my research topic, since it focused on granite carving, but I visited the working site or what then became two sites, on several occasions. The majority of stone carvers taking part in the arts symposium, both Indian and foreign, did something different from typical statues made and sold in the carving shops, and were thus defined as “modern art” as opposed to the traditional Hindu carvings. The majority of the paintings, on the other hand, were related to India and also to Hinduism. Most of the local stone carvers involved were not those working for the tourist market. In terms of stone carving, this symposium differentiated itself

from the rest of the carving industry by exploring different motifs that did not necessarily have any religious connotations. In addition, it was not targeted at tourists per se. Most of the foreigners taking part in the symposium were either professional or amateur artists, such as stone carvers and painters. The finished art works were displayed at the site after the event in a form of an arts exhibition. But like with the rest of the arts industry in Mamallapuram, also most of these arts works were on sale. Similar events have been organised since and also some granite units host annual training camps in which foreign granite carvers can take part. Foreign visitors thus engage in stone carving in Mamallapuram in two different ways and they are comparable to the way the industry is divided between granite and soft stone carving.

5.7 STONE CARVING AND SEASONAL INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

The fact that the tourist stone carving market targeted carvings mainly for the foreign tourists was directly affected by seasonal tourism in Mamallapuram. Most foreign visitors come to Mamallapuram during the cooler winter months between December and March. A second busier season takes place between July and October after the hottest summer months of April, May and June have passed and before the winter monsoon starts around November in South India. During the hot or wet months, some foreign tourists still visit Mamallapuram but their number is very small. Consequently, this seasonal variation had a big impact on the livelihoods of the carvers, as for many stone carving was their primary source of income. This applied mainly to those carvers whose shops and units were on Othavadai Street since this area was frequented mainly exclusively by foreign visitors. Most of the carvers interviewed in this area said that the majority of their customers were foreigners. For example, one of them said that 70–90 per cent of the sales in his shop come from foreign tourists and the rest from Indian customers. Those soft stone carvers whose shops were situated near the monuments such as on Five Ratha Street and Shore Temple Road sold sculptures to foreign tourists but mainly to Indian visitors, so their sales were not as dependent on foreign visitors. The granite industry was not directly affected by seasonal changes, since temple architecture and sculpture orders were submitted by domestic visitors all year round.

Many stone carvers working for the tourist market on Othavadai Street were able to earn a decent income during the high season. Ideally, carvers would sell enough statues during these busier months and save some money, which would then sustain them through the low season. The quiet, hot months could be used to build up stock by making new statues. As one of the stone carvers, Mani, who co-owns and works in a carving shop on Othavadai Street told me, during the low season they could work at a more relaxed pace and also take some time off if needed. They also aimed to produce new carvings for the subsequent high season. During the busier months, stone carvers might sell more sculptures than they have time to produce, so it is useful to have sufficient stock in hand. In the high season, time was also spent talking to actual and potential customers, making sales as well as teaching stone carving to foreign tourists.

Stone carvers working in their shops and carving units were then one of the features of Mamallapuram that were constant throughout the year, as they remained open even during the low season over the hot summer months. Whereas this period on Othavadai Street was otherwise characterised by closed many Kashmiri souvenir

shops,³¹ empty guest houses and partly closed restaurants catering primarily for local Indian visitors, stone carving units seemed to operate as usual. These shops also competed for the few foreign tourists that ventured to Mamallapuram during the low season. were but those stone carvers with struggling businesses also took them to support their family income as well as to pay back old loans if their financial situation has not been very good for some time. In general, family weddings were one of the biggest expenses that families in Mamallapuram face, but in addition there could be children's school fees, hospital bills, new or broken motorbikes, house repairs and constructions, funerals and so on that took up large sums of money. Due to these loans, some of the carvers were in a constant cycle of debt and repayments. Ideally money was borrowed from friends or relatives who charged low levels of interest, but many also used private money lenders who charge high interest rates. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there were also some government loans that were targeted especially at stone carvers available, but as most carvers interviewed said they were very hard to obtain, these were seldom a solution to an acute financial difficulty.

In addition to the seasonal variations in the number of international tourists, the number of visitors can also fluctuate annually, which causes further financial insecurities for those stone carvers whose income was primarily dependent on foreign customers, and even if the number of tourists is high, not everyone is necessarily interested in purchasing stone statues. Many carvers complained that the number of tourists as well as sales had gone down considerably over the last few years. According to them, business had been good before the tsunami hit in December 2004 and also a few years after that. However, when I visited Mamallapuram for the first time in 2009 I was told that the season was not particularly good. Many carvers explained to me that the global economic crisis had affected tourism, as well as the terrorist attacks in India over the last few years.³² I was also often told that even those foreigners who come to India are "only eating and sleeping". By this they referred to the fact that visitors would spend very little money on anything other than essentials, i.e. accommodation and food. For example, in 2012 I was told that the number of tourists was high but at the same time they were not buying many carvings, so the stone carvers did not benefit from them in the same way as guest house and restaurant owners would. This situation could be very problematic for the carvers, who would have been preparing for the high season, perhaps by taking a loan to make new sculptures, which they would then hope to be able to pay off when business was better. As the best season, which is the high season over the winter, is very short, this creates a lot of pressure on the carvers. Over the years, stone prices and general living costs have increased, which in turn affects sculpture prices.

On one evening in 2011, I was sitting a carving shop on Othavadai Street and an American visitor came to chat with the stone carvers and a few other local people that were in the shop at the time. It turned out that the visitor had come to Mamallapuram several times before and had become friends with the stone carver. He sat on the chair offered to him and he took out his iPad and started showing images of

³¹Most of the Kashmiri vendors close their shops from May to July or August when very few foreigners come to Mamallapuram. Many of them take holiday and travel to the Kashmir to visit their homes and families.

³²In 2008 a four-day attack that included bombings and shootings in various locations took place in the city of Mumbai, in the state of Maharashtra. Hundreds of people were killed or injured, many of them foreigners. In 2011 another bombing occurred in Mumbai. In 2010 a bomb exploded in the city of Pune, in the state of Maharashtra in a restaurant favoured by foreign visitors. Foreigners were also killed in the incident.

the cars he collected back in the US. The stone carver and a few of his friends were looking at the photos as well as his iPad with fascination, and from where I was sitting I could also see several images of fine, large cars, many of which I assumed to be old and rare models. After the cars, photos of the visitor's house came up and it was obvious that he had a very big and luxurious home. After they had finished looking at the photos and the visitor started to make a move to leave, one of the stone carvers asked him why he, being so rich, never buys any stone carvings from him even though he had been coming to Mamallapuram for several years. There was clear frustration in his voice. The American visitor was clearly upset by the question, which could be interpreted as an accusation, and said in an unfriendly tone that he would do if they would make some different type of statues, looking at the carvings the carver had on the table for sale. The visitor then took his iPad and left with an angry and upset look on his face. The stone carver was equally upset, saying that he had known this visitor for a long time but he had never bought a single carving from him. I will come back to this question of the style of carvings in Chapter 6, but what was interesting here was the direct confrontation between the stone carver and the foreign visitor, initiated by the stone carver with his question. During my fieldwork I witnessed this type of anger and disappointment due to lack of sales on several occasions, although it was very rarely expressed directly to the potential customer. Here the carver probably felt he could be more direct since he knew the American visitor beforehand. In this case it was also very clear that this visitor was very wealthy, at least based on his iPad, his car collection and his property in the US. This further increased the frustration of the carver, since he knew that money could not be a reason why the visitor never bought anything from him. Often the appearance of tourists does not indicate their level of income, since they tend to wear somewhat uniform clothes that do not clearly reflect any particular financial status, especially in the eyes of the local people.

Due to their financial problems, some soft stone carvers have been forced to close their businesses and start working as a labour in other, more successful units. Others have opened convenience stores or taken up work in guest houses or restaurants in Mamallapuram. I was also told that the granite business was concentrated in the hands of a few big units and many granite workers have started to work in the construction sites in Chennai because of better wages. Many granite units also offered only short-term jobs for particular carving projects. Many soft stone carvers said that they did not want their children to become stone carvers, as the work was hard with an uncertain income. There were also health hazards, such as inhalation of stone dust and occasional accidents.

In a sense, the situation in Mamallapuram was somewhat similar to what Nita Kumar (1986) has observed among different artisan communities in Banares (now Varanasi). Kumar discovered that although poverty was an underlying problem with artisans, at the same time enjoyed the freedom and independence that they experienced with their work. Stone carvers in Mamallapuram who had their own businesses also mostly enjoyed their work but financial struggles were an inevitable part of it for many.

One solution to the financial issues that carvers face is the forming of different types of friendships with both domestic and foreign visitors. There were several success stories in Mamallapuram where friendship with a foreigner has resulted in a considerable economic gain. Some carvers had regular foreign buyers who came to India almost annually and usually buy some sculptures. Sometimes foreigners had given or lent a considerable sum of money, or carvers had been given an opportunity to travel to Europe and even work there. As noted in Chapter 2, there were similar

stories behind some other successful tourist business in Mamallapuram. As a result, foreign tourists in Mamallapuram could be seen as potential entry tickets to a better life. Although not all relationships with tourists, domestic or foreign, result in any particular financial benefits, there was always a hope and aspiration for that. Thus, stone carving remained an attractive career option for many poor families because of the examples of successful carvers and sometimes limited other career options.

Here it is important to stress that since there were hundreds of stone carvers in Mamallapuram, having friendships and personal connections with foreign tourists did not apply to all of them. Some who were doing well financially can be less keen to get to know foreigners more than as passing customers. Equally, some were simply disinterested in making friends with foreigners, irrespective of their financial and business situation. Also there were those carvers who were mainly interested in meeting new people, foreign or local, and wanted to make new friends. If this helped them financially, it was an added bonus so to speak, but not the only reason why they wished to socialise with different people.

5.8 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter has focused on the part of the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram that can be named as “tourists arts” or “tourist carvings”; a label mainly used by stone carvers and other local people in Mamallapuram when talking about soft stone statues that are made primarily to be sold as souvenirs in the international tourist market in Mamallapuram. Stone carvers working in the tourist market interacted with foreign visitors on a daily basis as their shops and workshops were spaces in which tourists were welcome to sit around and watch their work. Many carvers also taught stone carving to tourists, who could learn to make a small piece of carving during their stay in Mamallapuram. Encounters and interaction with tourists often boosted carvers’ sales, as foreigners were more likely to buy statues from the carvers they got to know on a more personal level. Trying out stone carving also changed foreigners’ perspectives towards the work and they were willing to pay higher prices as they get a first-hand experience of the demands of carving work. Statues of various Hindu deities, as well as images of Buddha, were popular items for sale in the Mamallapuram tourist market. Foreign tourists interviewed had different criteria for choosing a certain piece, but recognisable images and good quality craftsmanship were important visual and material factors. Many foreigners also had some knowledge of the stories related to the Hindu deities.

A large number of stone carvers made their living from statue sales to foreign tourists who were the primary customers, especially in the carving shops located on Othavadai Street, an area favoured by foreign visitors. Because international tourism in Mamallapuram is subject to seasonal variation, stone carving did not provide a steady income to these carvers all year round. In addition, there were fluctuations from year to year, which could place carvers in financially difficult situations. Some carvers had shifted to different occupations or looked for additional sources of income alongside stone carving.

Since tourism has such an important and visible role in Mamallapuram, it may also be approached as an agency or a network of agents that impact the way people interpret stone statues in the town. The next chapter of the thesis will focus on this and other agencies in the stone carving market in relation to the concepts of arts and craft.

6 SCULPTORS, ARTISTS AND CRAFTSMEN: DISCUSSING ARTS AND CRAFTS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

When researching tourist arts, the question about the meaning of “art” in different cultural contexts is embedded within the term itself. Whether an object is defined as art or something else by either locals or outsiders is unclear, especially in cases where tourist arts are the same items or items resembling what is considered to be art in the local cultural system and tradition. The question of whether stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram could be classified as arts or crafts, and why, is one of the main enquiries of this research. It was raised in the interviews with both stone carvers and foreign visitors in order to assess the way carvings were viewed both in the local context as well as from the point of view of foreigner visitors. This question is particularly interesting because it reveals possible differences in the way people from different cultural contexts understand and value the same objects, including those often labelled as tourist arts. It also reflects possible differences in the way concepts of art and crafts are understood in different cultures and from a lay as well as from a more professional perspective.

As presented in the introduction to this thesis, in order to analyse stone carvers’ and foreign tourists’ way of labelling stone carvings as arts or crafts, the concept of agency has been used as a tool. Stone carving in Mamallapuram is analysed by using the Alfred Gell’s concept of art nexus (1998), as well as by Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) (2005). Agency is considered here as a characteristic of both human as well as non-human actors or entities, such as stone carvers, foreign tourists, sculptures, tools, stones, etc.

The first part of this chapter, “Stone sculptures as arts and crafts”, discusses the way in which stone carvings were classified as arts or crafts by stone carvers and foreign visitors and on what type of factors and attributes these views were based on. The first section, “Our art is sculpture”, looks at the views of stone carvers, and the second, “Arts or crafts? Foreign visitors assessing stone statues”, concentrates on tourists’ viewpoints. “Masala items and quantity art: issues of copying and seriality”, examines both local and foreign views regarding the issues of repetition of themes and iconography in the stone carving market in Mamallapuram.

The second part of the chapter, “Seeing creativity”, concentrates on the term creativity and how that was understood in the context of the categories of arts and crafts. The reason for considering this issue as a topic of its own was the fact that it was mentioned several times when discussing the topic of arts and crafts, although it was not raised in the actual interview questions. Copying and repetition are also assessed in relation to creativity, since these notions were closely intertwined in many of the answers.

As all the different themes of this chapter were often entangled and mentioned to a separate degree in people’s answers, it became quite impossible to separate respondents’ replies into neat categories with opposing points of view. However, I have attempted to do this to some degree in order to achieve a certain level of clarity for the sake of analysis, but the overlapping of the themes in the respondents’ views is still made clear. Occasionally, respondents’ whole viewpoints are presented in the text as quotes, but not every aspect of their answer is analysed in detail as a similar viewpoint is already presented and analysed elsewhere.

6.2 STONE SCULPTURES AS ARTS AND CRAFTS

6.2.1 “Our art is sculpture”

Soon after I started to conduct interviews with the stone carvers in Mamallapuram, it became apparent that the question regarding the difference between arts and crafts was not clear to most of the carvers I spoke to.³³ Some of them stated directly that they were not able to comprehend what was being asked, whereas others gave answers that were really about something else. In some instances the difficulty was related to people’s proficiency of English, but this was not always the case. Some carvers who had a view on the matter had been to the sculpture college, but at the same time not every carver who was a college graduate understood the question. Thus, a response to this issue was not directly linked to people’s language skills or educational background – it varied between individuals. Instead, what became most evident from the discussions was that stone carvers in Mamallapuram identified themselves primarily as stone carvers and their work was stone carving. They did not think about the difference between the categories of arts and crafts, nor did they find them important in terms of their work or income. However, many of the carving shops featured the labels “arts” or “handicrafts” in the name of their carving shop, such as “Gem Handicrafts” or “Ponni Arts”, and so on.

One of the few stone carvers who distinguished between arts and crafts was Selvam, who was a sculpture college graduate and had his own shop in which he made and sold stone carvings mainly for tourists. He defined the difference between arts and crafts by the physical features as well as the religious use value of statues. Selvam stated that there are three main types of sculptures. Firstly, there are those that are fully or “100 per cent made”, also called “round” or “complete” sculptures. This meant that also the back of the figure sculpture is carved. The second category is the “75 per cent” made sculptures, which meant that the back of the figure sculpture has been left uncarved or flat. The third sculpture type are the reliefs; “50 per cent” made sculptures. The fourth and final category is the unfinished and incomplete pieces. According to Selvam, only the complete, round sculptures are art and the rest are crafts. Complete sculptures are also the only ones considered suitable for worship in Hinduism, at least in the context of temples. Then again, craft items do not have a spiritual or a holy meaning and are only good for business. This group also includes paintings and statues made from terracotta, which are also common in India.

In Selvam’s view, art was thus based on the actual physical qualities of the statues and their ritual value. Although it is not directly expressed here, it is very likely that the use of certain types of statues in religious ceremonies was the main defining factor and came before the physical features of the statues. In Hinduism, sculptures suitable for worship are defined as complete, round sculptures, but if the requirements were something else, that might also have been reflected in Selvam’s definition of art. Whether it is the form or use of sculptures that comes here first, we can analyse both of these criteria more in depth if we approach the statues as material entities with agency that have an impact through their role in a network of different agents.

³³In the Tamil language the word *kalai* means all types of arts and there is no separate word for handicrafts. On the stone carver’s identity cards, there is a label “artisan” written in English and the cards are issued by the Government Board of Handicrafts, under which stone carvers are registered. See Chapter 4 for more details on this subject.

When viewed through Alfred Gell's (1998) art nexus, complete, round statues point to their prototypes: those deity sculptures that are made following the rules of traditional Hindu stone carving and that serve as models for statues suitable for worship. According to Selvam, the religious use value and the completed form of a statue makes it art and therefore it can be argued that here art is defined by prototypes rather than by the individual skills of a stone carver. A viewer does not look at a statue and marvel at the skills of a carver and then interpret a sculpture as art. Instead, a viewer is looking for similarities between the statue and the prototype, as the prototype is considered art. When looking at agent-patient relationships, the prototype is thus an agent exercising its agency over the viewer, who is a patient in this situation. Should the prototype change and have different qualities, the definition of an art object may also change.

Another way of approaching the issue is to omit the reference to the religious use value in Selvam's response and approach statues as agents with different physical features. Here, sculptures need other sculptures as reference points that enable some statues to stand out from the rest. Complete sculptures become separated from the incomplete ones: they become art and the others crafts. This set-up does not necessarily imply any particular hierarchy between carvings, but it does emphasise the differences between items. When approached from the perspective of Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) (2005), different types of carvings create a network that works towards a designation process as varying features are needed in the network in order to separate arts from crafts. Equally, the religious use value may be added to the equation as some of the statues may be used in rituals as a part of another network formed by various agents in a religious context.

Dorai Raj, an elderly stone carver coming from Viswakarma lineage from his mother's side, thought stone carvings were art and not handicrafts. Dorai Raj had graduated from the sculpture college in Mamallapuram and had also worked in temple construction before concentrating on soft stone carving for the tourist market. For him stone carvings were works of art based on ancient rules and measurements. Dorai Raj argued that only people who do not know and understand the nature of stone carving would not see that it as art. At the same, he said there is a difference between carvers and some of them do better carvings than the others. He also held that it was also important to respect the stone as a natural material sourced from the earth and not to waste any parts of it.

In Dorai Raj's view the art status of stone carving was thus tied to carving tradition. Stone carving tradition can be viewed here as a network, based on the principles of ANT. The defining agents in this case are those that constitute the carving tradition such as stone carvers, carving manuals and statues. They transmit carving tradition between different carvers and serve as a proof of ongoing tradition, although certain changes have taken place over the years. This network also has a strong historical dimension as, despite changes, it has been continuing throughout generations and been carried on by people or agents, as traditions always have to be carried on in order to survive (cf. Hallam & Ingold, 2007). The presence of this historical carving network also gives a context to the present carving industry in Mamallapuram as becomes evident in Dorai Raj's answer. Without this, stone carving would perhaps not be art in his eyes.

Dorai Raj stated the importance of the ancient rules and measurements as defining factors. Stone carver's manuals can be seen here as Gell's (1998) agents who exercise their agency over the carvers and stones as patients. Although carvers in Mamal-

lapuram may modify traditional iconography and create new styles, most of them still follow the ancient guidelines at least to some extent, as presented in Chapter 4. Traditional rules and measurements are still considered as key factors that define best statues and ensure that the proportions are pleasing to the human eye as well as to the deities in a religious context. In addition, Dorai Raj hold that stone as a natural material should be respected and not wasted. Following Gell's agent-patient relationships, it can be argued that stones act as agents towards the carver, here the patient, who feels awe and respect when encountering natural stones with an ecological history. Agency of the stone as a natural, powerful material that comes deep from the ground and is difficult to obtain, is also noted by Paton and DeSilvey (2014) in the context of granite quarries in Great Britain.

I raised the question of stone carvings as arts or crafts to a town official who was not a stone carver himself but his family belonged to the Viswakarma community and several of his family members worked in the stone carving business. He had a view regarding the difference between arts and crafts:

When we see it like art, it is art but when you see it like handicraft, when they are doing it, it is handicraft. We cannot give a correct conclusion whether it is art or handicraft. When it is made it is handicraft but when you are looking at it, it is art.

In this answer stone carving was thus defined as art or handicraft depending on the context in which a statue was presented. While a statue is still being carved it is viewed as handicraft but when only looked at, it is art. Here the emphasis is in the making processes which involves working with one's hands, hence the label handicrafts. This can be said to apply to both soft stone carving and granite sculpting since all the tools, including the electric ones, are operated by hand in Mamallapuram. When the activity of making is removed and a statue is there only to be looked at, the item transforms into art. At the same time, the town official stated that both of these labels are part of stone carvings and therefore sculptures cannot be defined only as one or the other.

When analysing the different agencies at play in this viewpoint, we can see it from the perspective of the maker of the statue, a stone carver, but also that of a viewer. When a stone carver is producing a piece he needs to utilise his hands and thus exercise his agency over the statue. When placed in Gell's art nexus (1998) a stone carver is thus an agent and a statue a patient. Yet, stone as a material also has agency as it does not necessarily fully "co-operate" with the hands of the carver, such as being very hard and tough to carve or even break. This in turn also affects the outcome of his work and the appearance of a statue. Therefore, it is truer to say that agent-patient relationships between a carver and a statue keep shifting in the carving process, but it can still be argued that a carver has agency over stone and the statue at least part of the time. When carving ceases and a completed or an unfinished piece is present without the activity of carving, this agent-patient relationship equally ceases to exist. A stone carver may then like or dislike the piece and in this sense the statue practises its agency over the carver by invoking different reactions. Although the carver is responsible for making the statue, he may nevertheless be surprised by the outcome and even marvel his skills. If a statue is finished, a stone carver may place it in his shop for display and sale. The status of the object changes here from being an object that is worked on to something to be looked at. The act of looking is another example of agent-patient relationships when a stone carver uses his agency over the statue by

viewing it. Equally, the statue may have something that “catches the eye”, in this sense having agency of its own by inviting the carver to look at it.

If we approach this situation from the perspective of the viewer or “recipient” in Gell’s theory (1998), the making process of sculptures is equally important. When we look at something being made we concentrate on the actual process that involves working with hands; thus the label handicrafts. But when the maker is removed from the equation we place our attention to the item itself and it can become art in our eyes, as suggested by the town official. As before, according to Gell’s art nexus and agent-patient relationships, a stone carver would be an agent who implements his agency on the statue (at least part of the time) by making it but this time also on the viewer or recipient by demonstrating his carving skills via his hands. Here the statue and the viewer are patients, the recipients of the agency of the carver.

Also in Gell’s theory (1998), a cognitive process known as abduction would take place if a viewer was admiring the skills of an artist when looking at a piece of artwork, or the index as Gell calls it, and then label the piece as art. Equally, a piece may have “captive” qualities in a psychological sense. In the case of the town official’s explanation, Gell’s arguments apply only in part. According to him, when a carving is viewed during the making process it would be labelled as handicraft rather than art. Here, abduction would not happen and a viewer would not be admiring the skills because making as an activity receives the attention. Thus, the agency of the stone carver and his act of carving are here more powerful than the agency of the statue. A statue will be viewed as art only as a finished piece when it is able to exercise its agency over the viewer or recipient.

In addition to asking the stone carvers about the difference between arts and crafts, I also asked the carvers what they thought was art. Far more responses were given to this question compared to the question of the difference between arts and crafts. A fairly common and somewhat interesting answer was that art is paintings. In turn, stone carvings are sculptures and carvings. This way of thinking reflects a conceptual distinction between different art forms that is a modern construct and is not based on the traditional Indian concept of art and crafts in which painting alongside sculpting is one of the eighteen traditional, professional artisanal skills (Häämeen-Anttila 2005: 231). Painting is also one of the traditional subjects that could be studied in the Government College of Sculpture and Traditional Architecture in Mamallapuram. I did not receive any explanation for this common view so I do not know exactly why this view has become prevalent. One of the reasons could be that painting, compared to sculpture, is a popular form of contemporary art in India and paintings are commonly displayed in art museums and galleries, for example in Chennai. Paintings thus dominate the upper-class, urban art scene in which most stone carvings made in Mamallapuram are not included. There are also two shops or studios in Mamallapuram where paintings are made and produced for visitors, and these works were also referred as art.

When it comes to defining stone carving as art, the situation in Mamallapuram was somewhat similar to what Kupiainen (2000) has noted among woodcarvers in the Solomon Islands. Woodcarvers did not typically identify themselves as artists who make art but as woodcarvers who produce woodcarvings (Kupiainen 2000: 234–238). The assignment of woodcarvers and woodcarvings to the category of artists and arts in public discourse had gradually taken place from the 1960s onwards due to a variety of reasons, such as their participation in arts festivals and workshops since the 1970s, appearing in newspaper articles and other forms of the media, the

establishment of a more organised handicraft trade, and especially since the founding of the National Art Gallery in 1992. Still, the concept of “art”, with its European undertones and nuances, remained unclear for most carvers in the Solomon Islands. It was mainly those works that were displayed in the National Art Gallery that were labelled as art (ibid.: 234). This situation may of course shift as the institutionalisation process of art now also encompasses woodcarvers and shapes local identities as a result. In Mamallapuram, stone carving has been assigned to the category of ritual objects in the context of the Hindu religion, but also as traditional Indian art form in tourism discourses. In addition, it has been assigned to the category of a skilled craft in government schemes. In all of these instances or discourses, the emphasis is still on *stone carving*, and that is what is also relevant to the carvers. What made a difference for carvers in terms of their work and daily lives was that enough visitors came to Mamallapuram to purchase stone carvings and that they were eligible for the government health scheme and possibly loans. In none of these cases was there a need to define themselves as artists or craftsmen, since being a stone carver was enough.

What is also worth noting in this context is that the International Arts and Sculpture Symposium organised in Mamallapuram in 2011 actually distinguished between “arts” and “sculpture” in the title. As discussed in Chapter 5, this symposium was a joint co-operative event that included a few of the local granite carvers and painters as well as foreign stone carvers and painters, but stone carvers working for the tourist market did not take part in the event that year. The title of the event reflects the same line of reasoning as that described above, thus separating sculpture from art and at the same time defining painting as art – at least based on the type of activities that the symposium consisted of.

Some of the stone carvers interviewed defined their work and Indian sculpture tradition differently from the naturalistic art tradition that has historically been one of the main characteristics and ideals of Western art. Krishna Venkatesan, an expert in temple construction and granite sculptures, stated that “our art is sculpture, not natural”. By this he meant that stone carving Mamallapuram is based on Hindu sculpture tradition, which does not aim to depict natural forms. Another stone carver, Murugan, who worked in the tourist market and had learned his skills from his family, told me that Asian sculptures could be described as “traditional” whereas European or Western works are “natural”. “Traditional” here points to the Asian sculpting styles ordered by a different set of ideals and rules to the Western naturalistic tradition. Whereas Krishna Venkatesan classified sculptures as art in his response, Murugan did not use this term art but still held a view that there are differences between Indian and Western sculpture styles. Both of their answers thus show awareness of cultural differences in sculpture traditions, whether they are defined as arts, crafts or something else, such as religious items. As noted in Chapter 4, this was also the way carvers grouped carvings into “natural”, “modern” and traditional carvings in the sculpture market in Mamallapuram. What is interesting here is that carvers usually spoke about “modern art” rather than “modern carvings” when referring to statues that portrayed geometric shapes, aniconic figures or Ganeshas typing on a computer, for example. Perhaps this reflects the same way of thinking as calling only paintings art: these statues can be seen in art galleries and fall outside the category of Hindu sculptures that primarily belong to a religious sculpture tradition.

The way stone carvings were conceptualised among the stone carvers in Mamallapuram was thus mainly characterised by notions and categories that were relevant in

the local context and made a difference to their lives and income levels – the religious meaning of the sculptures as well as their stylistic differences. These labels affected the way sculptures could be used but also defined their value in the market because, as previously noted, traditional styles sold better than the “modern” or “naturalistic” statues. Debates about arts and crafts did not play a role in this local system of value and meanings, and therefore the question about the placement of stone carving within one of the categories was simply irrelevant for most carvers.

6.2.2 Arts or crafts? Foreign visitors assessing stone statues

Whereas stone carvers conceptualised stone carvings in relation to Hindu sculpture tradition and were mostly unfamiliar with the concepts of arts and crafts, foreign tourists did not initially have difficulty separating these two categories. At the same time, it became apparent that what these categories actually meant was not clear-cut for the foreigners either. As well as questioning the actual meaning of the concept of arts and crafts, some respondents also found it hard to group stone carvings and would say they were both, based on specific reasons. Some foreigners gave stone sculptures other, additional definitions that defined them as arts or crafts but also as something else, such as religious objects.

A visitor from Belgium thought stone carvings were “mixed objects and reminders of things”. She had purchased three different carvings and felt that one of those, a statue of Ganesh, was “definitely a piece of art”. She classified the others, a Nandi bull and a Buddha head, as handicrafts. She had purchased the Buddha head more as a garden ornament and felt that “there wasn’t that much to it so I wouldn’t say it is particularly art.” Talking about stone carvings in Mamallapuram in general, she thought most pieces were handicrafts, such as pendants and especially carvings made with machinery, such as the statues of small elephants with another smaller elephant carved inside. She argued that some of the bigger pieces could be classified as art but essentially for her art should have transcendental elements in it. It should evoke something inside, not just in one person but in many people. She thought her Ganesh statue was a very finely executed piece and also had a very nice face, and therefore she defined it as art.

A French visitor suggested that there is beauty in stone carvings in Mamallapuram, but for him they “did not speak so much.” He felt that stone statues stood still, did not speak and there was no movement in them. At home in Europe he could see all types of contemporary art that may also be disturbing to see, yet he also said he enjoyed seeing difficult emotions in art. In comparison, stone carvings were too “ordinary” and therefore he labelled them as handicrafts rather than art.

A Portuguese visitor argued that for her, stone carvings were equally art and crafts. They were arts because a carving was “something you can look at and you can have your own opinion about, such as whether you like it or not,” and “something that you create in your head.” However, for her they were equally crafts because carvers make statues by hand and she believed “not everyone could do it.” The work itself is “very precise and difficult” and you have to study to learn the profession of stone carving.

A German visitor thought that it is not possible to make a clear distinction between the categories of arts and crafts in general:

Q: *Do you consider these objects as arts or crafts?*

A: *I think there is no, there is no line in between... For me the line between arts and craftsmanship is very, how you say, flexible. Is not... If it is very good craftsmanship for me can be more art than which is labelled art. And you pay lot of money for because, yeah... Where I live we have the biggest modern art fair worldwide each year. So I look at the art from each year and I think this type of label, what you call art, a lot of things are not that quality of a thing that could be labelled art and could be considered as craftsmanship. Yeah, I think it is not possible to make a line in between.*

(...)

Q: *In this discussion, of the stone carving, do you relate to them, like when you talk about the Western art, do you then think the art here is different? Less to do with capitalism or money or...?*

A: *It has more to do with the high degree of craftsmanship. And I think former times also in Europe, in our culture it was, art was much related to this craftsmanship. And nowadays it has switched much more to thoughts and concepts. And I don't say it has to be related only to craftsmanship but for me too many modern artists, they don't have really the ability to really draw or sculpt, do something very nicely in a naturalistic way. So they go from the beginning doing abstract things, very weird things. And they are considered artists but for me it has also something to do also with ability and patience to learn the technique first, like Picasso, and maybe after that you can modify and seek for new, bring in new ideas and things and alternate it but not to start just with this and not being able to do the naturalistic things, so I think these people here are, yeah, they are very, some of them are doing this for 20–30 years and very patiently. That is why I consider them artists.*

This visitor also described the different pieces of carvings he had bought from Mamalapuram as “very good craftsmanship, even artist work.”

If we consider the views of these foreign tourists presented above, we can see that the central argument of Alfred Gell (1998) regarding art, agency and abduction applies to these views. The abductive process – when a viewer (recipient) admires the skills and imagination of the maker (artist) – happened with the Belgian visitor with the Ganesh but not with the Nandi or Buddha head. In turn, with the French visitor, abduction did not happen as the carvings “did not speak to him” and therefore they did not invoke any reaction that he attaches to the idea of art. For the Portuguese visitor, abduction did occur as she stressed that interpreting stone carvings was an internal process. Gell's (1998; 1992) idea of “technology of enchantment” also applies to the views of the Portuguese and the German visitor. Both of them admired stone carving as a skilled handicraft but interestingly, while the German visitor said the carvings were “even art because of the high level of craftsmanship,” for the Portuguese this defined them as handicrafts for the very same reason. Equally, both of their views also reflect the idea that the Western concept of art may in fact dismiss the importance of craftsmanship and instead emphasise the meaning of interpretation of the works. Therefore, the German visitor felt that for him personally crafts can be more art than what may typically be considered art in the Western sense or by art institutions. A well-made handicraft then becomes art precisely through the process of Gell's abduction, as it causes him to admire the craftsmanship of the carving, which in turn also points to the agency of the carver.

Gell (1998: 68–72, 1992) also writes about the captive power or agency of art: how art works can capture our attention with their complex details and patterns. This is also part of his notion of technology of enchantment. This captive agency of objects

and things considered as art has also been explored by other anthropologists in the context of non-Western art, such as D'Alleva's Tahitian visual representations (2001), Campbell's (2001) Vakutan indigenous aesthetic system in the Trobrian Islands, Bolton (2001) with textiles in Vanuatu in the Pacific, and Laine's (2010) South Indian *kolams*, or geometric and symmetrical designs drawn with rice flour, which are considered auspicious and are made by women daily outside the houses in South India in particular (see also Mall 2007). When it comes to stone carvings in Mamallapuram, my respondents would emphasise the skilled work and intricate details of the carvings but not the particular motifs per se that would capture their attention. The agency of stone carvings is thus based on craftsmanship rather than iconography of carvings.

The stone carving market as a whole also has captive power or agency in the sense that stone carvings are able to attract tourists. Harrison (2006), who has studied Australian Aboriginal stone working practices in the Kimberley region, has argued that the methods of making Kimberley points have had captivating agency towards colonial collectors, for whom the manufacturing processes of Kimberley points have remained mysterious. When the technological aspect of this work is understood, they were still able to retain their captivation as a traditional, "typical" local method. Australian aboriginal people themselves also actively engaged in this process of maintaining the captivating agency of their work, although it has since become mainly a way of producing tourist arts (ibid.). This situation has many similarities with the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram, which is also tied into the tourist discourse of the ancient Pallava stone carving tradition as well as Hindu religious practices that may be unfamiliar to foreign visitors. Stone carving methods then again are less mysterious, as the carving work is mainly done in the open along the streets for everyone to view, and tourists themselves may try the craft. However, this may also increase the admiration of the skills of the carver when visitors find out how difficult it really is to make fine looking statues. These issues play towards the captivating agency of stone carving as a work that requires skill.

Religious arts and handicrafts

Religion was another defining aspect of stone carving that was mentioned by several foreign visitors. A visitor from South Africa who was himself a professional stone carver and knew the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram very well, defined the majority of statues in Mamallapuram as handicrafts but also as "religious handicrafts". He also thought statues sold in the tourist areas were "moving towards sculpture but mainly they are decorations for the tourists in the tourist area." A Norwegian tourist held that stone carvings in Mamallapuram were both art and handicrafts but at the same they were "more than that" as for her they were "very spiritual" and also "living things". Equally, a visitor from Germany said that she thought the stone carvings were handicrafts rather than art in a Western sense, but at the same time she felt the term "handicrafts" was not the right word since stone carvings are mainly "traditional, religious art". Also the tourist from Belgium mentioned above felt that carvings were part art and part religious artefact.

Here we can see religion as an additional component that defines stone carvings and makes them something other than just arts or crafts per se. The idea of "Spiritual India" is a powerful image that is promoted both by the international travel media related to India as well as the strong and visible position that religions and especially

Hinduism have in India. This discourse is constructed and enforced by the presence of a multitude of temples and shrines with deity statues and images seen all over the country, and many foreign tourists are able to witness religious rituals and festivals in public places. Based on ANT, "Spiritual India" is an agency network of its own, comprised of various material (temples, statues, offerings, etc.) and human (priests, gurus, devotees, etc.) agents. The network of Spiritual India also interacts with stone carving in Mamallapuram. Without the religious component, stone carvings would appear to tourists as arts or handicrafts.

Cultural heritage and tourism as defining factors

In addition to religion, other factors identifiable as agents also came up in some of the interviews. A British tourist argued that carvings were art because they "explore certain stories and symbols of the past." At the same time, she held that they were also handicrafts since the "carvers make them appeal to the tourists." This visitor also stated that for her art was essentially a very broad concept in which a range of ideas could be fitted.

Here we can identify two different networks of agencies that play a role in the way stone carvings were classified: one that can be termed "cultural heritage" and the second simply as "Tourism". The stories and symbols mentioned by the British tourist refer to the iconography of stone carvings that come from Hindu mythology, but also point to the historical Indian Hindu stone carving tradition. The network of cultural heritage is then constituted by elements such as ancient Hindu scriptures telling stories as well as monuments, religious sculptures and images that depict these stories. Tourism as a network is formed by the tourists visiting Mamallapuram, the local people who work in tourism, and the services, etc. that have been created for them.

The British visitor thought stone carvings were both art and crafts: cultural heritage made sculptures appear as arts, but at the same time tourism as an agent turned them into crafts. From her perspective, these two networks were thus equally important and they both had the power to alter the status of the carvings. A stone carving may be part of either one of the networks and be defined accordingly. As a part of a cultural heritage network, it would be art as it would be seen alongside traditional Hindu statues and monuments. As a part of a tourism network, statues are sold to tourists in the tourist market and appear as handicrafts.

If we follow the logic of the British visitor's argument, we can assume that if either one of these agency networks were to be removed, it would also change her views and make the carvings appear either more as art or as crafts, depending on which of the networks were to disappear. In a real life situation that would be the case, for example, if tourists were to stop visiting Mamallapuram. Alternatively, stone carvers could start to exclusively make statues that were no longer related to Hinduism, which would break the tie with local historical carving tradition.

In addition and with reference to Gell's (1998) theory, for the British visitor art in this context was not something simply pointing to the carvers' carving skills, but also to their intention and imagination. The agency of a stone carver is acknowledged as they are the ones "exploring of the past", as well as "making the statues to appeal to the tourists" in the context of crafts. However, the agency of the carver was not the main agency that defined carvings as arts or crafts but rather the placement of statues in either one of the networks.

Comparing Western and traditional Indian art training

I also interviewed a few people who were closely linked to the field of arts through their work. Their responses reflected their existing knowledge of arts, and our conversations also dealt with differences between Indian and Western art education and art as a profession. Two of them were American tourists who were fine art students. We had a discussion about being an artist in their home country but we also considered the stone carvers in Mamallapuram. This is an excerpt of that discussion:

Q: Do you think your life as an artist and being an artist here is very different? Like two types of artists?

A1: Fundamentally it's the same. But I think the way they have been taught is very different. The way... these are like apprentices. They approach it very differently...

A2: Well, one thing straight, I think they are not really artists, they are just craftsmen."

A1: Well, wait, no... I don't know!"

Q: I have also been asking them about this, that what is the difference between arts and crafts.

A1: Depends what they say. What do they say?

Q: People say different things.

Here, one respondent felt that there is no fundamental difference between Western and Indian artists apart from the learning techniques. He referred to the fact that many of the stone carvers learn their skills through an apprenticeship system whereas in the Western context, artists usually go to an art school to receive formal training or may learn on their own. This is not of course the case with all the Mamallapuram carvers, since some of them do have formal training from the sculpture college. The other respondent then pointed out that he felt stone carvers in Mamallapuram are not really artist but "just" craftsmen (emphasis added), with his choice of words implying that he places craftsmen in an inferior position compared to artists. The other respondent, however, was less sure about this categorisation and he was also interested in knowing how the carvers identified themselves. He thus brought up the idea of self-determination as one possible way of defining a person's identity as an artist or a craftsman. At the same time, it can also refer to the fact that various types of artists or craftsmen can exist in different cultural traditions, and that these categories may be based on factors that are not universal but culturally specific and are thus unfamiliar to outsiders.

Our discussion continued:

Q: Is there a difference for you between arts and crafts?

A1: Yes, definitely, a big difference.

Q: What is the difference?

A1: Craft is a skill. And art is just, doesn't have to be... Like he said, it's shit, it's art... Art is not something that (at home) now they really teach, it's not taught as a skill. You are not taught, like, how to make money, you know, you are not taught how to use it, how to apply, it's just like a general education, in like making basically, so you are allowed to make. When people talk about what you make and then in the end you are graded on what you finally made.

In this response, the difference between arts and crafts was based on skills. The point of this account was how teaching skills had played only a small role in their art education at home. Skills were taught only as much as they are needed in order to make a certain type of artwork. Craft, on the other hand, was defined initially by skills, whereas in arts they played a smaller role. Art was about making and learning some skills were a part of that process, but not the main part nor the definition of art. Art can also be “shit” in the sense that it may not show a high level of skills. The same definition can also be applied to crafts, as there can be huge differences between their quality in terms of the skills of the craftsperson. But the point here is that the category of art is not dependent on skills, whereas with crafts certain skills must be employed in order to differentiate them from any other objects.

If we think about the education of a stone carver in Mamallapuram, there are also some parallels to this account. Stone carving is also about making and learning by doing. Carving is a skill but it cannot be completely taught, whether you study it at college or as an apprentice in a carving studio. Teachers and other carvers can show you how to carve, but mastering it is a physical process that you really only learn by using your own body and by carrying on carving. You learn how to hold the chisel at the right angle, what force to use when hammering, and how to carve the more intricate details. That is why the learning process takes several years as your body needs to get used to working with different types of stone and tools. The similarities between this description about Western art education and learning stone carving are perhaps the biggest in the case of those carvers who have learned directly in the studios. Students from the sculpture college also study art history, historical designs and most of all about the rules, measurements and iconography of traditional Hindu stone carving. Their training is thus more formal and controlled than with apprentices. However, the greatest similarity in both cases is of course the fact that they work with stone. Although students in the sculpture college also learn to work with other materials, they choose one line to concentrate on. We then returned to the context of Mamallapuram in our conversation:

Q: But you would still classify them as craftsmen?

A1: Well I don't know. Maybe. I mean they are, to a certain extent. They are now like the jeweller, he is like the craftsman. Like a... I mean they make some really artistic jewellery but they are still a craftsman. Like you would normally say a mason, if you were a stone carver, is a craftsman...

A2: A craft is I think is the actual thing. While arts is what is in it maybe. Like, a craft is usually an object that you use, so for instance... a vase is an object of use. The craft is to make the vase, but how you design the vase? You can paint the vase, you can give it a different type of texture. And it becomes art, because you are putting something else into. You are... you know like forging something? Like when you put a piece of iron into a fire and you say abracadabra and that is art. While the actual crafts is a process of... the core, the elements.

A1: I think how they think three-dimensional, that is really artistic. It is very hard to think like that. It takes a lot of mental process to be able to know where to hit the stone.

Here the respondent distinguishes between arts and crafts by separating an idea from a material object. Art is seen as something more ethereal, while crafts are tangible physical objects. An object can also become art through manipulation of its material features. The distinction between arts and crafts remains unclear for the other

respondent and he uses the adjective “artistic” in relation to crafts and also three-dimensional thinking. He states that thinking three-dimensionally as well as hitting the stone in right places are skills, and they are crucial elements of stone carving.

When considering the different agencies at play in the views of these American art students, what becomes most prominent is the existence of two art systems, the American art system and traditional Indian Hindu stone carving. They may be approached as separate networks of agencies following the logic of Latour’s (2005) ANT, that have their differences but also similarities as explored above. In our discussion these networks met and could be compared. The “American Art” network consists of agents such as art schools, teachers, students, artists, art institutions and the public, and in a similar vein, the “Traditional Indian Hindu Stone Carving” network had its own corresponding agents. It can be argued that whereas the American Art network would work towards free expression at the expense of learning particular skills, the Traditional Indian Hindu Stone Carving network emphasises the importance of mastering certain techniques. Agents in both networks maintain these traditions through their actions in various ways and thus keep the network in equilibrium. As long as the purpose of the agents within the network remains the same and they accept the common goal, the network carries on unchallenged. Any changes made by agents would either be accepted or rejected, which in turn would shape the network as a whole. For example, if the Western art system were to suddenly start bringing more attention to the skills of the artists or in India stone carvers were to start being more experimental with different themes, this would also have an effect on the respective art networks and in turn would also perhaps alter the views of these American tourists.

Views based on the questionnaires

The question about arts and crafts was also posed in the open-ended questionnaires for foreign tourists as follows: “How would you describe the stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram? Are they art or handicrafts? Why?” In the 65 questionnaires that were collected, nine respondents said stone carvings were art, 13 said they were handicrafts, and 25 said they were both art and handicrafts. In addition, one respondent defined stone carvings as “religious art”, one as “art-oriented”, one as “replicas of art”. Two respondents also thought carvings were mainly souvenirs. The remaining 16 respondents answered differently or did not clearly define what they thought stone carvings were in terms of the categories of arts and crafts.

Out of those nine who thought stone carving was art, only two defined why:

Art. Kind of pureness. Money goes directly to the ones who makes art. – A Belgian respondent

Art. How can you describe art or see these beautiful carvings as anything else? – A Canadian respondent

Those who defined carvings as crafts gave the following explanations, for example:

Handicrafts. The people who make this need very good skills. – A Belgian respondent

Handicrafts. Very good but it is not art. – A Danish respondent.

Respondents who thought stone carvings were both art and crafts gave many different reasons for it, such as these:

I think some are handicrafts and some are art. I consider art to be inspired and personally directed. Most pieces in Mamallapuram are made according to a specific standard, but there are some pieces that are directed by the carver himself. – An American respondent

Both. Handicrafts for the tourists and art for the people who make them. – A Dutch respondent

I think it's handicrafts because you learn it from a master and anyone can learn it, but it can become art in some occasions. – A French respondent

Art, the nice difficult ones. Others handicrafts. – A Dutch respondent

Three of the respondents did not make a clear difference between art and crafts.

Unbelievable level of skill and artistry. Handicraft is art? – An English respondent

Art is handicraft and vice versa (in my opinion) – A Swiss-Mexican respondent

Art + handicrafts. I think they are artistic and I think this kind of handicraft is also art. – An Austrian respondent.

Other responses were less straightforward or did not stay within the categories of art and handicrafts, such as the following:

The location of the shop has a great impact on the situation, are they art or sold handicrafts. If the shop is located in the middle of the tourist street with the usual clothing shops, the value of the statues goes down and I see them more as souvenirs and tourist trinkets. The shops for example in the main road seem to sell more as art and have higher value." – A Finnish respondent

I am not sure. I don't even know if what I bought was locally made. – An American respondent

It's hard to make with stone but they are doing it with hard work. So it's really nice and something special. – A French respondent

Many are art when the artist pays attention to small details. Others seem to be more of a formulaic exercise. – An American respondent

Special things. The stone cutters are professional and want to make perfection in sculpture art. – A Danish respondent

And finally, for some of the respondents the stone carvings appeared mainly as souvenirs:

I think they are replicas of art. Many figures of gods are used in religious purposes so that kind of makes it art. When people buy them as souvenirs they seem more like trinkets. – A Finnish respondent

Some look very astonishing with their details. Although I don't know much about the topic so for me they remain mainly as so-called tourist trinkets among clothing and other tourist shops. – A Finnish respondent

Souvenirs. The bigger ones look like art. – A Dutch respondent

Based on the examples presented above, we can see that there are certain common themes arising from the questionnaires conducted with foreign tourists. People have paid attention to the details and size of sculptures as well as to the location of shops in different parts of the town. The qualities of sculptures in turn reflected the skills of carvers who were either seen as doing detailed work or standard exercise. Some visitors acknowledged that stone carving was hard and it had to be learned from a master. Religious purpose in the Indian context was another point that was mentioned in the questionnaires. For some respondents, carvings were mainly souvenirs and trinkets that did not really stand out from other items in the tourist shops in the area. Whereas some of the respondents had a clear view of whether stone carvings were art or crafts, many of them also thought they were both at the same time or challenged the difference between classifications. A few defined carvings as “special” things rather than either art or crafts.

Different agents and agencies can be identified based on the factors stated in the questionnaire responses presented above. They share many similarities with the views given in the interviews. Some of those that define stone carvings as art point directly to the agency of the carver, such as skills, being self-made, based on personal ideas and being “difficult” (to make). According to Gell’s (1998) theory, abduction has occurred and art works have been interpreted as art. Other factors listed point to the agency of statues such as “purity”, being beautiful, details and size. They refer to the captive power of art works, as Gell (1992, 1998) would argue. Here, stone carvings as objects have agency, since they are able to invoke emotions the viewer and stir them to interpret them as art, although again we here point to the stone carver and his agency simultaneously. Other agencies present in these answers are the location where statues are sold, and references to local definitions of art and religion. These points can be placed within the framework of Latour’s (2005) ANT, where sculpture shops and statues in Mamallapuram constitute a hierarchical network in which the placement of statues in shops in different areas define their meaning as arts or crafts. Equally, as already discussed in the context of interviews, Hindu stone carving as a local art tradition forms its own networks that comprise different agents. When viewed as part of these separate networks, stone carvings also are defined differently.

Some respondents emphasised skills as a reason for defining carvings as handicrafts. This equally points to the agency of the carver, but here skills are seen as a characteristic of handicrafts. Therefore, Gell’s (1998) idea about admiring skills as one definition of art does not apply here. Personal ideas are seen as more important than standard and formulaic practices that equally point to the agency of the stone carver. Then again, defining “not difficult” (to make) statues as handicrafts as opposed to “difficult” as art corresponds to a low level of skills in handicrafts and a high level of skills in arts. These responses therefore see skills as a quality of both arts and crafts, but

there is a difference in skills. In other words, abduction would only happen if an artist has a high level of skills. In turn, being sold to tourists and thus being part of a tourism network makes statues appear as handicrafts, according to one of the questionnaire respondents. The notions of “standards” and “formulaic exercise” also here refer to copying and repetition, which were mentioned in several interviews and questionnaires. These themes will be explored in the next part of the chapter. But before that, it is worth raising the question of ontology in the context of the issues discussed in this chapter.

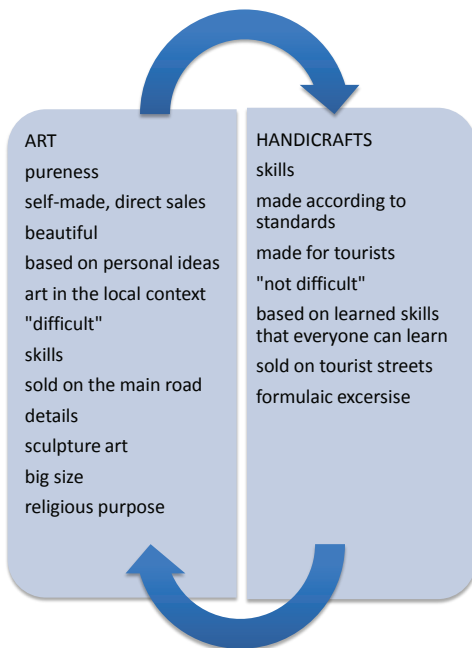


Image 90: In the questionnaires, foreign tourists gave different reasons why they defined stone carvings as arts or handicrafts. Some also said that they were both.

Shusterman (2012) has analysed in detail the philosophies of art by Arthur Danto and identifies two partly different approaches presented in Danto’s “The Transfiguration of Commonplace” (1981) and “Artworlds” (1964). They both deal with the relationships between art and religion but differ ontologically. On one hand, in Danto’s writings art works have a transcendental, Christian theological quality and they belong to a “higher realm” that separates art works from mundane, ordinary objects. Art works may be identical to, for example, readymade objects, such as Andy Warhol’s famous ‘Brillo boxes’ that Danto has used as an example. This view of Danto’s is thus based on ontological differences between art and non-art, the former having a certain sacred quality to it as opposed to the latter (Shusterman 2012: 583). But on the other hand, Danto’s writings also include an approach that does not change the ontological status of art works per se but it is more to do with the way art works are viewed by the audience. Certain aspects of Zen Buddhism can be seen in this method. As Shusterman writes:

... (I)s not a transformation of an object or event into some transcendental otherworldly realm of things, a special artworld of theological sacredness defined by its metaphysical distance from the real world (as the Judeo-Christian God is defined as apart from and above his earthly creation). Instead the Zen concept of art's transfiguration is the suffusion of ordinary objects and events with intensified meaning and value through heightened attention, care, and insight.

(...)

In the same way, the immanent interpretation of art 's transfiguration will assure that our experience of the transfigured ordinary object will be intensified and charged with special meaning, but without implying a radical shift of ontological status, elevating the object into another world defined by its essential contrast to mere real things (2012: 259–260).

If compared to Gell's theories (1998, 1992), there is no ontological difference between art works and other objects in a religious sense as defined above by the first notion that Danto put forward. But the second way of viewing art is closer to Gell's understanding of how art has power to captivate the viewer or, in other words, exercise its agency over the recipient. The second notion suggests that heightened attention is needed to create a sense of enchantment that can make an everyday object appear as art. Gell did not emphasise this type of intense viewing or special care when looking at something, which could imply that the viewer is in fact having agency over the object that enables it to transform into art. For Gell, the features of the object and intention of the artist were more crucial that enabled abduction to take place. But once the object has been transformed into art, either as a result of intense attention or pointing to the skills of the artist, it can be viewed as being "charged with special meaning", as suggested above. As Shusterman writes, this does not require any ontological shift despite the artwork even having a transcendental quality in this context.

In a sense the second point also resembles Hindu darshan, as discussed in Chapter 3, in which reciprocal visual contact creates a momentary relationship and a blessing between the deity and the devotee. During puja rituals sculptures also change their ontological status to divinities according to Hindu beliefs. However, in the religious context sculptures have primarily a ritual meaning as divinities, which is no longer about art per se. But as some of the stone carvers, and also foreign visitors, have defined stone carvings as art based on their religious use value, these carvings are also those that have the potential for the ontological shift. Other respondents defined art based on factors unrelated to religion or rituals yet still involved an element of that could be interpreted as a type of enchanted feeling and perhaps experienced that when looking at the carvings described as "beautiful", "difficult to make", "astonishing details" and so on, as listed above.

6.2.3 Masala items and quantity art: issues of copying and seriality

I asked one of the stone carvers in a shop: how are you able to make so many same type of objects? – A Finnish visitor

Copying, the repetition of motifs and similar-looking statues were themes that appeared in several of the interviews with foreign tourists, as well as with some of the stone carvers. Many foreign visitors stated that copying the existing Hindu iconogra-

phy, rather than making new types of sculptures, was the factor which they thought defined Mamallapuram stone carvings more as crafts than art.

A French visitor admitted that to him all the sculptures appeared the same and looked identical, even if they were not. He therefore found it difficult to choose a piece to buy. Because of this he thought that stone carvings in Mamallapuram were more crafts than art, as the carvers repeated what they had already learned and did not make any new images. He also felt that in the Western context, art was “more about the artist and the artist’s interpretation,” but this was not visible in the statue market in Mamallapuram. An Italian tourist said the same: she felt the stone carvings were handicrafts because from what she had seen, the “work was very repetitive” and the “carvers did the same thing over and over again.”

A visitor from Sweden thought the carvings in Mamallapuram were crafts because “all the carvers did the same type of sculptures.” She believed that there must be differences in the quality of the statues but she had not looked at them closely enough. According to her, one of the well-known stone carvers in Mamallapuram could be classified as an artist, since he is thought to be making very good quality work, but she felt that he should also have his own “visions”. By this she meant that in order to be a true artist the carver ought to be making carvings based on his own imagination, not just making traditional type of sculptures or orders based on other people’s ideas.

A Finnish tourist described the stone carvings as being only partly art because of issues of seriality:

I know that some are made with machinery. Of course a factory-made object can also be art because beauty is in the eye of the beholder. But it is not original art, because there are hundreds of objects. But surely some of the single pieces are art and some bigger pieces. Also some modern statues are worth looking at, they are skilfully made. But it is difficult to say.

Issues of copying, seriality and mass production were also mentioned in several of the questionnaires collected from foreign tourists (in 21 out of 65). They were stated as a response to the question of whether stone carvings were art or handicrafts. Such as:

Handicraft. They are not unique, however most are well crafted. – An Australian respondent

Handicraft. Because it’s all a bit the same, although it is done with passion. – A Dutch respondent.

It’s very hard to define art, and I think I haven’t really been able to make a definition that I think is satisfying yet. I think much of it is handicrafts because of the routine and mass production, but that can also be said of most of the things we consider art.” – A Danish respondent

More handicrafts because they are copies, repeat after repeat of practically the same thing. Except larger, more expensive and custom-made pieces are more exotic and unique. – An American respondent

Art turned handicraft. We keep looking for the one that is different from all the copies – this would be most interesting – but so far no luck. – An American respondent



Image 91: Many foreign tourists thought that all the statues “look the same” and are copies of each other.

I would say the stone carvings are of excellent quality, a wonderful example of fine craftsmanship. Mostly I would say they are handicrafts because everyone is repeating the same designs. There are a few stone carvers who are making art, using stone to express themselves. Yet, since my definition of art is flexible, I could see how they could be viewed as art.” – An American respondent

In all these viewpoints above, stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram were thus defined as handicrafts because they were considered to look alike, be copies of one another, and were routinely made and mass-produced. For these visitors the listed attributes were associated with handicrafts rather than arts. Stone carvings were not seen as unique and carvers did not use their own ideas as a basis for their work; qualities that they considered to be consistent with arts. Two of the answers above state that the carvings were well crafted and of excellent quality and one saw passion in the work, but these factors did not make them art. Although respondents also admitted that there probably was variation between carvings, in their eyes everything still appeared to be the same.

For the Finnish and one of the American respondents, statues that were larger, expensive and custom-made also appeared exotic and unique. Another American respondent thought stone carvings had been art before but had now turned into handicrafts. The Danish respondent also noted that even the things that we consider as art these days can in fact be routine work and mass-produced. However, all these viewpoints stress the same point: unique pieces are art whereas copying and repeating themes, although skilfully made, are handicrafts.

Some stone carvers had very similar views to those of the foreign tourists above. Balan, who runs a large and successful granite exporting business, had the following view on the matter:

Q: Is stone carving art or handicrafts?

A: Actually what we are doing in Mahabalipuram is handicraft. ... We say masala items, we change something but... In my opinion it is a handicraft. Because we are making Ganesha, and maybe 400 years before, what some people were then making, we are now copying that. When you do a copy that means it is a handicraft. I feel like that.

Q: What is then art for you?

A: My idea of art is that you need to make something someone hasn't made. Whatever you make that is new. For example, if I make a baby, that is my art. Because nobody makes the same. But if you see this work, I don't feel like that. You can make some changes but... I think someone might be doing art somewhere in Mamallapuram, but we don't know, we have no guarantee for that.

Balaji labelled stone carvings in Mamallapuram as handicrafts because the sculptures are copies of existing models. For him, art was also something unique, something that nobody had made before. He used the term "masala items"³⁴ by which he referred to the fact that many carvers change some details of the sculptures, combine different Hindu images in one carving, depict certain deities in an untypical way, and include elements that are not part of the typical Hindu iconography (a good example of this would be the statue known as "Computer Ganesh"). However, for him this was not enough to call carvings art rather than handicrafts and he still thought they were essentially copies. Balaji still admitted that it was possible someone in Mamallapuram was making something very different, which could be labelled as art.

Doria Raj, the stone carver who in the previous part of the chapter stated that stone carving was art, also described handicrafts as copies. According to him, making handicrafts was comparable to the work of a machine; all you have to do is copy. Traditional Indian Hindu stone carving in turn is an art form that requires following rules, forms and measurements outlined by ancient scriptures. This is not the same as simply copying existing models.

Whereas copying was seen as a mark of handicraft in the examples above, a visitor from Spain called stone carvings in Mamallapuram "quantity art" because of the "serial production" of statues. She also labelled them "cultural art" because of the strong link to Indian culture. This visitor differentiated between different stone carvers in terms of their status as an artist and pointed out a carver who in her opinion made "real art", as opposed to "quantity art". However, she felt that "also quantity art can give you the same, warm feeling as real art." She had stone carvings at home that she had bought in Mamallapuram on previous visits and they would give her a "cosy feeling". However, she thought that it was probably more to do with the fact that they reminded her of India rather than because of their artistic qualities.

Discussions on the reproduction of images

For the Spanish visitor, quantity and serial production thus did not make objects into handicrafts but instead formed a particular niche within the category of art; what she called "quantity art". Quantity art was able to affect the visitor's feelings the same way

³⁴ Masala is a South Asian term for a spice mix but it is also used in popular language to refer to a combination of different elements

as “real art”, at least to some extent. The views of the Spanish visitor are in line with the arguments of Christopher Steiner (1998), who argues that we should not compare tourist arts with unique art pieces or assess their status as “authentic art” based on their volume or production techniques. Rather, we should define and categorise tourist arts along other objects and arts that are serially produced:

... (If one accepts mass production and mechanical reproduction as legitimate forms of cultural expression – worthy of the same attention and intellectual respect as other categories of so-called art – then the burden of proof necessary to rationalise tourist art as an “authentic” art form requires one to demonstrate only the logic of production and consumption that it shares with other mass-produced things (Steiner 1998: 89).

Examples of similar mass-produced works that have art-like status are various prints such as lithographs, fabrics, posters, or even photographs. Steiner opposes the view of Walter Benjamin who argued in his famous essay “Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (orig. 1936) that the “aura” of art is destroyed by modern reproduction processes and art works cease to be “authentic”.

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.

(...)

The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity.

(...)

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term “aura” and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the realm of tradition (Benjamin 1969 [1936]: 222–223).

Benjamin’s arguments were influenced by German industrialisation in the late 19th century and the transformation of modern media in the form of newspapers, photography and film in the first part of the 20th century. Urban commodity capitalism was becoming more and more important and he was connected to avant-garde artists whose work influenced his writings on art (Jennings 2008). The notion of “authentic” art was a key part of Benjamin’s argument and is equally used by Steiner (1999). Here it is worth noting that this term did not appear in any of the interviews I conducted in Mamallapuram. However, the Spanish visitor spoke about “real art”, which could also be connected to the question of “authentic art”. According to Steiner, it is important to understand that when we look at tourist arts production, there are essentially two conflicting principles at work. On the one hand, buyers look for authenticity in the form of originality and uniqueness of the pieces. At the same time the logic of the tourist art market requires artists to produce pieces that are easily recognisable and appear to be an “authentic” representation of the culture in question. In that sense, Steiner argues, tourist arts “like popular narratives, are structured around heavily redundant messages.” Instead of searching for items that are novel and different, tourists go for the familiar and the obvious. This argument also has similarities with Baudrillard’s (1988) ideas of “simulations”, “simulacra” and “hyperreal”, according to which copies have become more real than the originals.

The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models – and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. (...)

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even a parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself..." (ibid.: 167).

This argument does not correspond to tourist arts in every instance, as the reference to the "original" may be important both to the producers as well as to the tourists buying them, such as in Mamallapuram when religious Hindu sculptures serve meaningful models. Although stone carvers typically only produce statues for the tourist market, they still retain their attachment to the Hindu themes and thus religion. Whereas for Baudrillard simulations disturb the difference between real and imaginary, in the case of tourist arts this boundary can also exist, as tourists view the products differently. Tourist arts may thus be representations of "authentic" cultural products that have not been produced for the tourist market and do not just reference each other as objects made for tourists only.

In the tourist market, placing similar-looking objects on display next to each other reinforces this image of "typical" and therefore "authentic objects" (Steiner 1998: 94–95, 99). For example, Dean McCannell (1976), Culler (1981) and Urry (2002) have argued that tourists look for signs of authenticity in their travels, of which souvenirs such as tourist arts are of one example.³⁵ A souvenir is not a souvenir unless it contains some form of a semiotic marker that links the product to the destination it was purchased in (MacCannell, 1976: 147–151). An individual tourist's preferences of course vary, but many visitors are still on a quest for "authenticity" that links the product to the "authentic local culture" more than to the Western idea of "authentic art". However, in the views of those foreigners stated above, there was no quest for "cultural authenticity" but instead they were looking for markers of "authentic art" as understood in the Western art discourse.

Steiner refers to the important work of Rosalind Krauss (1986), who has pointed out that even in Western art history, repetition is nothing new. Avant-garde artists of the early 20th century were seen as making original art but in fact their work was all based on a grid that was used as a background and support for their paintings. The grid served as a starting point for the artists, who based their sketches and ultimately finished their work on this network of dots and lines (Krauss, 1986: 157–158). From this perspective there has always been an element of repetition present in the works of avant-garde artists. Krauss writes:

But in saying that the grid condemns these artists not to originality but to repetition, I am not suggesting a negative description of their work. I am trying instead to focus on a pair of terms – originality and repetition – and to look at their coupling unprejudicially; for within the instance we are examining these two terms seem bound together in a kind of aesthetic economy, interdependent and mutually sustaining, although the one – originality – is the valorized term and the other – repetition or copy or reduplication – is discredited (ibid.: 160).

³⁵ The semiotic theory about authenticity and tourist sights, such as souvenirs, as signs has been criticised by W.K. Lau (2011). He argues that the relationship between signs and authenticity is incompatible since signs are anti-essential concepts in a semiotic sense, whereas authenticity is an essentialist concept.

Krauss argues that repetition and originality are both qualities of avant-garde art, but they are often judged on different terms as negative and positive in that order. Western ideals of art appreciate originality and despise repetition, and therefore the existence of the latter may be ignored even when present as an art historical fact in certain works, as the example of avant-garde art shows.

Larry Shiner (1994) has pointed out that when it comes to so-called primitive art and tourist arts, ironically the attitude towards them within the Western art discourse is somewhat contradictory to the way art and crafts are defined and separated from one another. Whereas fine art is commonly defined as “art for art’s sake” without utilitarian value, and crafts as something based on skills and its practical aspects, an opposing logic is at work when it comes to judging non-Western artefacts. These ethnographic objects and works have often been labelled as art based on their cultural meaning, which has often entailed a ritual purpose. Those products that have been intended only for decoration and sale, especially for people outside the local culture, have then again been viewed as “fakes” and “inauthentic” (Shiner 1994: 226–227). Steiner (1994) has noted that in the Ivory Coast people considered that all the old art works have been looted by Europeans and those pieces can be found primarily in Western museums. From this perspective all the pieces made after those initial encounters between the Westerners and Africans are copies. These copies can be older or more recent but they are copies nevertheless. The categories local people used were “ancient” and “copy”; the notion of “authenticity” was not used (Steiner 1994: 102).

Machine-printed Indian god posters as arts

Partha Mitter (2003) has examined machine-printed images in colonial India, popularly known as “calendar art”, “bazaar art”, “framing pictures”, “god posters” or “god pictures” (see also Guha-Thakurta 1988; Smith 1997; Inglis 1999; Jain 2003; Pinney 2004) and analysed them against Benjamin’s arguments about the “aura” of authentic art. Lithography was first used in India in the 1820’s and it became very popular due to its cheapness, portability and somewhat easy production methods. (Pinney 2004: 14). Some of these images were single-coloured lithographs and others multi-coloured images, known as chromolithographs, based on a method that was developed from the original lithographic process invented in Germany in 1798 by Alois Senfelder (ibid.: 14). Mechanical mass-production made images widely available to all parts of Indian society and could be thus viewed as a very democratic method (ibid.: 14).

These images, which are still popular in India today, often depict religious themes, mainly Hindu deities, but also have secular motifs such as movie stars, leaders, women, landscapes, babies, flowers and animals (Jain 2003: 34). Their meaning can be devotional but also political and commercial (Pinney 2004: 12). Pinney (2004), for example, has investigated the role of these images in Indian political and national struggles. What is particularly interesting, as Mitter argues (2003: 26), is the way in which these prints are appreciated in Indian society shows a very different logic to that which dominates Western art discourse:

Unlike in the West, in Indian society, there was no special aura attached to an original work of art produced by an artistic genius, even though colonial culture had wrought some changes in India. Hence an original painting was often no more important than the mechanically-reproduced print. The Indian prints were 'autonomous' products intended for the popular market. Many of these prints were based on what we may term 'prototype' templates... The printmakers' eye was on their commercial value, and they were quite different to the originality of these images... All they had in mind was how these lithographs could capture the vastly expanding market for cheap prints.

An exception to this situation was the prints that were reproductions of the works of Ravi (1846–1906), who was one of the most successful Indian painters of the period. Varma was influenced by European art traditions and painted naturalistic landscapes and portraits with Indian themes as well as images of Hindu deities and mythological stories. His original works were oil paintings, but in order to make them available to the masses, Varma established a chromolithographic press near Bombay in 1894.³⁶ He did this due to popular demand for his work as well as because of his patron's encouragement (Inglis 1999: 124–125). Although other equivalent prints were found on the market, Varma's images were of particularly high quality and his religious themes had notably illusionist, naturalistic and complex iconography. In fact, Varma's romantic style influences painters in India even today (Mitter 2003: 26). However, as Mitter points out, what is particularly interesting in the context of Varma's popular prints is that he was aware of the concept of an individual, artistic genius due to his contacts with European artists. A new generation of artists had emerged in India during the colonial period that would identify themselves as elite artists different from the traditional artisans. Varma's popular prints would break this division between artists and artisans, as his original paintings now became mass-produced in the cheap print form. In addition, his themes and name were widely copied; something that Varma was unable to stop despite his efforts. Due to severe losses he was finally forced to sell his press, which continued to produce prints under his name (Mitter 2003: 27). In fact, most of the images produced under his name are not in fact the work of Varma (Pinney 2004: 64). It could be claimed that although Varma's themes and name lost their rarity value due to the high number of original prints and widespread piracy, his oil paintings retained at least part of that "aura of authentic art" as they could be distinguished from the reproduced images because of a different technique. However, based on the arguments of Mitter as previously quoted, the concept of the original and the copy where inseparable and did not therefore follow Benjamin's logic in the Indian context.

Then again Jain (2003), who has also studied these prints in contemporary Delhi, shows that the makers do not necessarily value them as fine art. Those calendar artists that she interviewed said that their work was commercial art rather than pure art. Some of the makers also emphasised that they only did it for financial reasons and felt restricted by the requirements of the market (Jain 2003: 36). British art schools were established in Calcutta, Bombay, Lahore and Delhi during the colonial period, and that had brought the Western discourse of fine art to India. However, Jain points out that the popular image industry and these art schools have always been connected, as some of the earliest lithographic presses were founded by people who had trained in these art

³⁶ According to Steven Inglis, Ravi Varma founded his chromolithographic press in Bombay in 1891 (1999: 124) whereas Partha Mitter writes that the Ravi Varma Fine Art Lithographic Press was set up in 1894 in Lonavla, near Bombay (2003: 26).

schools. The main aim of the schools was to teach industrial arts of refined taste and produce skilled craftsmen, as the colonial state considered people in Indian to be more skilled in decorative than fine arts. Indian traditional crafts were also used as an inspiration to revive industrial arts in Britain. Many calendar artists during the colonial era as well as today had some training in art schools, which as a result made them aware of the distinction between high and low, or fine and commercial arts (Jain 2003: 40–41).

The stone carving market in Mamallapuram resembled Jain's description of current Delhi more than the case of the colonial print industry. Stone carvers would also emphasise the commercial aspect of their work, usually at the expense of the artistic or religious meanings that may be attached to it. The main difference was the way in which stone carvers did not reflect their work against the Western notion of fine art but the ideals of Hindu stone carving tradition, with its particular measurements as well as its religious-philosophical components. When it comes to Benjamin's arguments, it is worth noting that they were also extended to the ritual meaning of artworks. As with traditional stone carvings, religious connotation is equally a key element of deity prints in India and cannot be separated from their popularity and value in the market. I will return to this subject in the next chapter, which analyses stone carvings from the religious and spiritual perspective.

Agency and seriality

The question of agency becomes interesting in relation to the issue of copying, repetition and seriality. For the respondents quoted above, the large quantity of carvings prevented them from being viewed as art. They were not seen as unique, and the repetition of themes suggests that the carvers had not invented the themes themselves. Chapter 4 "Stone Carving in Mamallapuram" describes the variations that can be found in the carving market in Mamallapuram and how many stone carvers invent new types of sculptures but do not usually venture far from the typical Hindu iconography. Because of this reference to Hinduism, in general carvings can easily *appear* to be the same, although there were variations within the themes, stone types and quality of carving. Often these differences do not often stand out unless they are examined more in detail. Although some shops offered "modern" statues that did not represent any images from Hindu iconography, they were in the minority and are not found in every shop.

A large number of carvings together create a situation in which their multitude makes statues appear as handicraft rather than art for some of the visitors. As was stated in many of the responses, a large number of similar carvings prevented them from appearing unique. If there had been only a couple of stone carvers and few Hindu sculptures in Mamallapuram, perhaps respondents would have viewed the situation differently. Based on Latour's ANT, all the carvings together create a network and statues have agency as objects, because they are able to create an image of seriality and mass production in the stone carving market. This is based on their qualities that makes them appear not too different from each other. Despite some variations, similar qualities of the sculptures are more evident, based on respondents' views. The statues have many features in common, such as Hindu iconography, a limited number of stone varieties, and a fairly uniform size. Any differences to this may then stand out. As one of the American respondents wrote in the questionnaire "(M)ore handicrafts because they are copies, repeat after repeat of practically the same thing. Except larger, more expensive and custom-made pieces are more exotic and unique." Thus, the stone carving market

in Mamallapuram as a network emphasises certain qualities, such as copying and repetition, and anything breaking this image will also change the network. "Typical" Hindu carvings serve as agents that create the network and can be viewed as Latour's "mediators", because their similarity with each other is important for maintaining a particular image of the carving market. In turn, should they deviate too far from the norm and stand out from the rest, these agents or actants would also challenge the network or even break it. This would also mean that the stone carving market in Mamallapuram would start to appear more varied and less based on the copying and repetition of themes.

If respondents' views regarding stone carvings, copying and repetition are examined in relation to Gell's theory, it could be argued that sculptures in Mamallapuram lack the artistic agency of their makers. In other words, the stone carvings were not viewed as art because they failed to create abduction and cause admiration in the visitors; the enchantment of technology and the captive qualities of art were missing from the equation. The agency of the carver was present in the sense that people would recognise statues being the work of the stone carvers and products of their hands. However, the stone carvers were not viewed as artists, as their work had qualities that were not seen as art-like because of repeating existing themes.

It is also possible to look at the situation through Gell's idea about prototypes. Prototypes work as models for art works and therefore agency, because they inspire the artists to make their work based on them. In the carving market in Mamallapuram, the most popular prototypes are the traditional Hindu deity sculptures that serve as models for carvings. These can be images of sculptures found in the traditional carving manuals as well as finished sculptures. Because the Hindu carving tradition is based on particular standards and guidelines, in that sense many Hindu sculptures are always copies of one another, at least to a certain extent. Alterations can be made for example in the decorative elements, but the proportions should always be made according to the rules. Although the carvers working in the tourist market do not always follow these principles in the same way as those making carvings for temples, they are still often applied, and this in turn results in the fact that all the carvings look identical with only small variations between them. In Hindu iconography there are a large number of different gods and goddesses as well as several standardised depictions of them, but they are all related to Hinduism and are mostly different types of figure sculptures. In the context of Gell's theory, Hindu iconography can therefore also be viewed as a kind of umbrella prototype that encompasses various carving types.

Hindu iconography as a prototype was also recognisable to foreign tourists since they have most probably seen some type of depictions of Hindu gods and goddesses before coming to Mamallapuram or India. Many tourists also see and visit Hindu temples where they see deity idols. In Tamil Nadu in particular, temple statues are usually made from stone and are thus identical to the ones made and sold in Mamallapuram. Here these prototypes have strong agency because they define the type of sculptures made in Mamallapuram and also confirm the fact that stone carvers did not invent these images themselves. They can also be seen to be part of an agency network as described above in which carvings reinforce the idea that all the statues are the same and are based on same models. On one hand we can think that tourist sculptures are based on religious sculptures and traditional Hindu iconography, at least in theory and from an art history point of view. But on the other hand, it is also possible to say that all carvers do not necessarily think about the cultural or artistic context of carvings but are instead mainly interested in making what they know will sell, what they know how to make, and what is being made in the shop next door, as tourists seem



Images 92 and 93: There are differences between the statues on sale in Mamallapuram in terms of their size, stone material, craftsmanship and the image they represent. However, most of them are based on Hindu iconography.

to visit that shop. Therefore, it can be argued that in fact all the stone carvings serve as prototypes to one another. Here the prototype also has more power or agency than the carver as they define the iconography. Following Gell, the prototype is the agent and the carver the patient. Of course, there are also other contributing factors such as stones, and carvers make alterations to the popular themes, but on one level the prototype remains the starting point. The agency of a large number of prototypes also exceeds the agency of the artist in the eyes of the tourists and prevent carvings from being viewed as individual pieces of art based on the artists' imagination. Again, the prototype is the agent and the recipient, the tourist, is the patient. As a result, the carvings thus become something other than art, such as handicrafts.

6.3 SEEING CREATIVITY

The link between creativity and art came up in several interviews with foreign tourists, but also with some stone carvers when discussing arts, crafts and the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram. In this section of the chapter the concept of creativity is assessed in more detail in relation to the views of both stone carvers and foreign tourists, with the emphasis on creative agency and how it is conceptualised in the context of stone carving. The following discussions also continue with the theme of art and crafts and their differences, but with a particular focus on creativity and the role it plays in people's definitions of stone carvings. This section starts by presenting some of the views of the foreign visitors, as their views were very much linked to the concepts of copying and the mass production of sculptures, as analysed in the previous section of this chapter. This is then followed by stone carvers' viewpoints on the matter.

6.3.1 "Different, cultural creativity": views of foreign visitors

Although creativity was not a subject matter of the interview questions with the foreign visitors, several of them mentioned it as a reason why they would define stone carvings as arts or crafts. The visitor from Spain, who labelled stone carvings in Mamallapuram as "quantity art", also said that they were "cultural art" with "different creativity". She personally defined art as "a single, unique piece that gives some special feelings and is an expression of the creative mind." She argued that the concept of creativity is tied to particular cultural expressions, which in the context of Mamallapuram reflected the ideals of the Hindu stone carving tradition.

A tourist from Denmark told me that personally she thought that the stone carvings in Mamallapuram were art, although she was aware that many people defined them as crafts. She stated that she could not make carvings herself because she felt "you have to be creative in order to make them." Then again, a tourist from Germany mentioned creativity as one of the criteria of buying a certain piece of stone carving. For her, art was "harmony and creativity together," although harmony would be the first criteria. She also defined stone carvings as art rather than crafts but held that "there is also creativity in handicrafts, only technique would come before creativity."

Equally, a British visitor said the following in an interview:

Q: Well I have one question asking whether they are more art or handicrafts? Art, souvenirs, religious items, but these are not mutually exclusive categories.

A: Yeah... No, I would not say they are souvenirs, definitely not. Art... I would like to say they are a cross between art and handicraft. But art... I think art for me has to be a means of expression or manifestation of something which is unique to the artist, whoever is manifesting that particular form. You know, whether it is a painting or a sculpture or a carving. So I suppose there is some essence of this sculptors' manifestation in this but it's not something, it's not a symbol that a sculptor would have created himself uniquely. So it's not unique in that sense. But there is still definitely a contribution and an element of the artist and his form in the work. But form in its entirety, being a statue of Buddha, is not something that a particular carver has created himself.

These views show how creativity is seen as a quality attributed to the stone carver and art is an expression of the "creative mind of the carver", as stated by the Spanish tourist. The Danish visitor felt that she herself did not possess this quality and was therefore unable to make stone carvings. The German visitor also differentiated arts from handicrafts based on creativity. The British visitor emphasised the ability of a sculptor to create, manifest or express something that is unique.

In Gell's (1998) theory, an artist's intention is also part of the artwork or index, and it plays a role in the abductive processes. According to Gell, when a viewer is looking at a certain piece, he or she is not only marvelling at the skills and imagination of its maker, but he or she is also trying to guess the intention of the artist while attempting to understand and interpret the work. Intention can be considered separate from creativity and therefore, artwork is an expression of the creative agency of the artist. Here Gell's understanding is not very different from this statement by master stone carver V. Ganapathi Sthapathi (2002: XIII), who writes about Indian sculptures:

Thus, the artistic guna or characteristic is transformed into the created object. ... Hence the material object, which is part of the inner fire of the artist, becomes capable of attracting the mind and spirit of the observer.

Thus, based on the ideals of traditional Indian stone carving, the creative agency of a carver should become a part of the sculpture and as a result the object itself can exercise agency over the audience. This could be considered part of the "different, cultural creativity" that the Spanish visitor was referring to as it is tied to the local sculpture tradition. However, in this context the idea of creativity is not too different from the way the foreign tourists understood it, as they emphasise the creative agency of an artist that is required to make art as opposed to handicrafts.

Creativity was also brought up several times in the context of copying and the reproduction of the same type of statues. An American visitor stated the following:

Q: These sculptures here then, would you consider them arts or crafts?

A: I would consider them crafts. And I can tell you why I think they are crafts. Because they are standardised depictions of gods and goddesses. There is hardly any difference between what one shop offers to the other, and there is, maybe it is our European way of thinking of creativity, so where something is genuinely new. You don't see anything genuinely new here. I mean like all the things that I had to order, I had to specifically tell them what I wanted. And then they can do it. But for some reason they would never come up with the idea themselves. And I wonder why. Maybe it is too risky for them to try something else and use the stone and not sell it.

A tourist from Italy felt that the stone carvings were not art since she felt carving work was “very repetitive”, and also the images that the carvers made “were not their own ideas.” She said that her definition of art was “more to do with creativity,” and like the American tourist, she also felt that carvers did not do anything new. She thought that a reason for this was because the carvers are trained that way and learn their skills in the same way. As a result, unlike the American tourist above, she argued, “even if they did something different, it is kind of similar.”

The foreign tourists I interviewed did not state that those few carvings that were not based on Hindu iconography would be examples of creativity of a stone carver. Perhaps they had not seen any or they did not stand out between all the Hindu carvings. As noted in the previous chapters, these carvings are made less often, as carvers claim that they do not sell as well as Hindu carvings. In addition, people who were unfamiliar with Hindu iconography are not able to make a distinction between statues that are made based on traditional representations and those that are more novel images and combine features from different sculpture types. “Computer Ganesh”, with its modern references, is perhaps an exception to this, but this statue type is not sold in every shop. However, even certain Hindu attributes create similarities between sculptures in the eyes of the outsider, although stone carvers would view them as new combinations of existing iconography and with additional non-Hindu details. As carvers are mostly used to making Hindu statues, completely different type of motifs may also pose a challenge, as noted in Chapter 5. This may result in what the Italian tourist above argues: that even these new models somehow “look the same.”

An example that illustrates this quite well is a drawing shown to me by another foreign visitor. One of the elderly stone carvers had drawn two images of her based on a photo. This carver was considered to be a master carver but he had nowadays changed his carving shop into another form of business in the Mamallapuram tourist area. One of the drawings was an attempt to depict the visitor in a somewhat realistic manner (image 94), whereas the second one was styled like a Hindu goddess sculpture (image 95). If you look at the images it is quite apparent that both drawings resemble each other, in the sense that their style is quite similar, only the second image is more decorative. Also in the first drawing, the decorations on the torso are similar to Hindu sculptures. As neither one of the pictures is a photographic likeness of this tourist, it becomes quite clear that this carver is probably more used to and also better at drawing stylised Hindu goddesses than naturalistic, photographic images.

These views of the American and Italian visitors show that copying and seriality were seen as opposites of creativity, and as a result the stone carvers were seen to be lacking this quality because they repeated the existing models. The Italian tourist also argued that stone carvers were not even able to do anything very different. The drawings of the elderly stone carver show that Hindu iconography was very much the basis of the skill set, at least in his case. These arguments would then suggest that stone carvers lack creative agency, or if they have it, they are not willing to exercise it in their work.

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, since most of the stone carvers were used to only making Hindu god and goddess statues, some of them openly stated that different types of orders given by tourists can also pose a challenge. Although the American tourist quoted above had been happy with his carving orders, sometimes these carvings may also turn out to be very different from the idea that the tourists had in mind. A visitor from Australia told me the following story of how she had ordered a small, non-Hindu carving based on the same model from three different stone carvers in Mamallapuram. She was planning to start selling these carvings at home but first needed to find a carver for the job.



Image 94: A naturalistic image of a foreign tourist drawn by a stone carver



Image 95: A stylised image of a foreign tourist drawn by a stone carver. Here the model has been depicted in the style of a Hindu goddess

So I gave him the design and then went back in a few days to see what he had done. But at the same time I had met this other stone carver so I asked him if he had come up with a version of it. So then there is the first carver and when I went to get what he had made, he had interpreted my drawing quite differently. The carving itself was fine and it was polished and it was great. But he had actually polished the rock. Now, he had done it in marble and he had polished the rock and he had made it all square and flat. So basically he had taken my design and interpreted it in his own way and added his own kind of twist to it. Which wasn't what I wanted. What I wanted was this crude piece of rock. So I asked him again to make another one actually, my style. But even the second one, it wasn't... He was in a zone of polishing and finishing everything to within the inch of his life! Instead of leaving things natural and raw, he wanted everything polished and finished. So in the end, I didn't ask him to make any more. Also the second carver had made them but they just weren't right. The pieces didn't fit properly and it was all just a bit... a bit too crude. In fact, it was like two ends of a scale. You got one that was really like polished and overdone and the other one was not good enough. And then I was introduced to a third carver and I asked him if he could do and in fact he made it just as I wanted it.

Although all the three carvers had the same design as a model, they completed the work in their own way. One could argue that the first carver had been most creative of the three, since he had interpreted the design in his own way and “added his own kind of twist to it.” Although this was perhaps mostly to do with the fact that the carver was only following a standard procedure of polishing, which was generally believed to be a quality of a well-made statue, this example also shows that creativity, imagination and different interpretations are also a part of the carving work, despite ready-made designs. The story also tells us how these three stone carvers exercised their own creative agency when interpreting the model and ready-made design that the visitor had given to them. Whereas the Australian visitor’s creative agency was based on her vision of a particular type of image that she wanted to be made, the stone carvers’ creative agency was reflected in the interpretation of the task and the methods they applied. However, in this case it was not what was wanted, as this customer wished the carvers had followed her instructions more carefully. The creative agency of the stone carvers had in fact overruled her own creative agency as the designer and only the last carver was able to interpret it the way she wanted.

Based on Gell’s theory (1998), the agent-patient relationship in this situation had been turned around. Whereas the Australian tourist assumed that she was the agent exercising her agency over the carvers as the patient, the carvers became agents using their own agency over her, although perhaps unintentionally. This type of agent-patient relationship may also apply to other instances when foreign visitors order stone carvers to make statues that are not part of their usual repertoire of images. Foreign visitors specify what they would like to be carved but have very little control over how the carving will eventually turn out. Here it can also be argued that foreign tourists enable stone carvers to exercise their creative agency, as orders for new types of images require them to step outside their usual carving processes and try out different images.

Hallam and Ingold (2007) have discussed different understandings of creativity that prevail in Western thought. They disagree with Liep (2001), who suggests that innovation is the “true” form of creativity, whereas improvisation and working within the rules of a tradition is “conventional” creativity (Hallam & Ingold 2007: 2). Even traditions need to be carried on. Hallam and Ingold suggest that instead of treating these two types of creativity as opposites, we should instead look at creativity as a process in which both innovation and tradition are present (*ibid.*: 2–3). From this perspective, soft stone carvings made for the tourist market often show creativity, even if carvers work with existing, traditional Hindu motifs as they may modify traditional depictions and make new combinations. This argument may also be extended to Hindu temple construction. Samuel S. Parker writes that “(T)he improvisational practice of temple construction permits an endless variety of iconographic schemes drawn from the mythology of the relevant deity and customized for the local site and community of devotees.” (2010: 40) This refers to the multitude of deity sculptures as decorative elements on the walls and towers of South Indian temples. In turn, it can be argued that making ritual sculptures allows for less creativity and improvisation, as traditional iconography with somewhat standardised representations should be followed when depicting deities. However, although this may be the case when it comes to the choice of images, there is still space for improvisation and thus creativity in the making processes. I will return to this aspect of stone carving in the next section.

6.3.2 Stone carvers, imagination and creativity

Although the word “creativity” was used less frequently when discussing stone carving with the carvers themselves, many of them stated in the interviews that in their work they follow the traditional rules but they also use their “own ideas” and imagination. These concepts were mentioned much more regularly than making stone carvings that were similar to the ones everyone else was making; that is the typical Hindu deity sculptures, animal figures, lamp shades, balls, pendants and so on. Sometimes these notions were brought up when discussing the art status of the stone carvings or the characteristics of a stone carver. In other cases, they were mentioned in relation to the personal style of the carver and often also when stone carvers explained their plans to develop their careers and carving skills. Many stone carvers expressed a desire or at least an aim to also make different types of carvings than the usual iconography, if they would only sell better. As mentioned in earlier chapters, these carvings would be often classified as “modern art” or “natural carvings”. In addition, I used the concept of creativity in one of my questions to the stone carvers in which, based on my own understanding of the time, I opposed creativity with following the rules when creating art.³⁷ Many of the stone carvers then told me something about using measurements in their work, or only briefly stated that said that they used both creativity and rules in their work. Again this gave me an idea that they did not really know what I was trying to ask them, or just clearly indicated that they did not understand what I meant with that question. In any case, discussions where the word creativity was used rarely followed. However, in this context it is important to note that since the interviews were conducted in English, it is possible that when “imagination” or “own ideas” were mentioned, they could also refer to creativity. In the following examples the exact concepts are presented as used by the stone carvers.

One of the stone carvers who did mention the concept of creativity in the interview was Albert Armugam. Albert mainly made carvings of different faces and figures whose shape and appearance were often largely defined by the natural shape and texture of stone. He described his work and style as “different types of sculptures, creative models and modern sculptures.” Albert sometimes also made traditional sculptures but he told me that he prefers to make “different types of carvings,” that his work was based on his own ideas, and no one else in Mamallapuram made similar ones. This was the case as far as my observations were concerned, and one of the foreign visitors I interviewed had been fascinated by Albert’s work since she had not seen similar carvings in any of the other shops. Albert also defined art as “creative models”. The ideas for his sculptures came from his own mind and sometimes he also got his ideas in a dream. An example of this was a female figure that he had named the Dream Lady. It was based on a dream that he had seen three times in his life and it had become one of his favourite types of sculpture. At the same time Albert observed very closely the innate qualities of the stone when carving. His normal process of working was that he took a piece of stone in his hand and looked at the features of the stone very carefully. It was as if the stone was telling him “look at my face, nose, etc.” He would get a sudden burst of imagination and then started to carve following and enhancing the natural features of the stone. Thus it was his mind, imagination and the stone that were working together to produce the idea

³⁷ The question I asked was: Is art for you a creative process or do you follow a set of rules?

for the sculpture. It was also possible that in the middle of his work he realised that something was missing from the sculpture, for example the shape of the stone did not support his idea after all. He would then see if he could make something from of that piece and give it a different story.

Stone carver Balan also mentioned the concept of creating when we discussed the difference between arts and crafts in relation to stone carving in Mamallapuram:

If you create new things, for example if you see the Buddha under the snake? I am creating this. Do you see some designs under the Buddha? I have never seen Buddha with all these designs so I add all these designs. So I want to come out a little bit and I want to show people that I am doing a bit different type of handicraft.

As these examples show, like the foreign visitors I interviewed, both Albert and Balan defined creativity or imagination based on the designs of the carver and the finished sculptures. Hallam and Ingold (2007) have also suggested that instead of focusing on the end results and finished products, what they call backward reading of creativity, we should shift our attention to forward reading. Creativity, as with life in general, is about change and forward movement, in which we work together with various different elements, actors and circumstances. These are factors such as time, other people and the materials we work with when generating things. The actual practical and physical process of making something is also affected by the whole world around us in which we live and interact with. This applies equally to the act of copying and replication:



Image 96: Carvings of faces made by Albert. Part of the stone has been left uncarved as a stylistic detail.

Copying or imitation, we argue, is not the simple, mechanical process of replication that it is often taken to be, of running off duplicates from a template, but entails a complex and ongoing alignment of observation of the model with action in the world... Indeed the more strictly standards are observed the greater are the improvisational demands placed on performers to get 'it right'. (Hallam & Ingold 2007: 5)

They also emphasise the role of improvisation in creative processes. Improvisation tells us about the whole creative process and journey in which improvisation also has to be used in order to adapt to the prevailing conditions in the life that surrounds us and that we constantly interact with and engage in. There is also always an element of surprise in creativity, as events are rarely completely foreseen. Improvisation does not refer to the fact that we need to find our creative way within the constraints of a static world, but rather that the whole world is in constant flux (ibid: 2–3).

From this perspective, stone carving in Mamallapuram can also be viewed as a creative process, rather than focusing on the debatable creative aspects of finished sculptures. Starting from the very beginning of rough cutting of stones to the final detailing and polishing of statues, we can see how stone carvers have to interact with the stone and the tools throughout the process. Stone is a natural material with varying qualities. Different stone varieties have different densities and also there are differences between the individual pieces that the stone carver happens to be working on. Most stone carvers buy rough pieces of stone as they are the cheaper than the ready-cut pieces. They would then evaluate the size of the stone economically to see what type of sculpture it would be best for, in order to avoid wasting any material. A certain block of stone may be suitable for a statue of Ganesh, for example, and the leftovers can be used to make a lizard. Stones can thus give an idea to the carver in terms of their size but also iconographically, as in the case of Albert. After the stone and image is chosen, the actual carving work begins. Carving a statue is a process in which you actively use your hands to draw the image, as well as a chisel and hammer, and your feet to hold the statue. Sometimes this is effortless work, but occasionally the stone may be very hard to handle. It may be harder or softer than usual and it may also break. I discussed this matter with one of the stone carvers during an interview:

Q: You feel sometimes you make something and you want it in a certain way but the stone is like saying no, it's not working how you want it?

A: It has never happened to me like this but sometimes the stones get broken and then I stop carving because... Then we like spend like 2–3 hours outside, then we get we get a refill in the body... and then we work with different stones.

Q: So you are in charge of the stone?

A: Yes. But one time I was working almost three or four months. Then my statue is broken and my four-month work is finished. Then I get very upset and I drink a lot. It was my big Ganesh.

Q: How many times has this happened to you?

A: The biggest one was the one I told you about but many times with small things.

A breakage can often be fixed with glue in the case of soft stone statues, but with granite it is not possible. Occasionally the breakage was too big or too bad to be fixed, especially if making a very small or intricate piece. In those cases, the stone might be still usable for something else, at least for making pendants. Breakages did not happen too often and can cause a lot of frustration for the carver, depending on the

work. They might be attributed to the stone, or the carver acknowledged making a mistake himself, such as using too much power in chiselling and hammering. Most experienced carvers were very familiar with the different stone varieties and knew the art of chiselling. Also the image they were making is often something they have done before. Yet every time it is different as it is an ongoing process in which you interact with the stone, the tools, the mind and your body. Sometimes your hands just do not seem to work the way you would like them to. Accidents can happen, such as kicking a statue.

In granite carving, the introduction of electric tools has reduced the number of breakages, but at the same time it has forced stone carvers to learn new carving techniques. This was also mentioned in an interview I had with Balan:

Q: Do you think this traditional concept of Indian art is still art for you, following the rules?

A: No. There is a difference of time, you understand? When you don't have a cigarette, what do you smoke? If you don't have whisky, what you drink? It is a time difference. Now we are using machines and whatever latest technology, when quarrying stone we are using so many machines and so many materials. We are using all these changes. After that I cannot say I am making the same one. That time they did not have this kind of machinery, what they did was create. Now we have all this machinery. Now if you want to say I am the best man it is not true. I have best tools. You need some artisan power but at the same time you need all kinds of tools also to do... Before you can see every workshop had 10 or 20 broken statues. Nowadays no. Maybe in my workshop I can show you two small broken statues, that's all. Because of the machinery. Nowadays we are using different machines and...



Image 97: Buddha head sculptures in Murugan's shop made from different stone varieties that create differences between the statues. In addition, all the Buddhas have a slightly different expression on their face.

This explanation by Balan also shows the impact of time on stone carving, as some of the old procedures have been replaced by new ones. For Balaji this makes the contemporary granite carving procedures different from the older, manual practices that he here describes as “creating”. However, this reflects the natural changes that occur in life and traditions, as suggested by Hallam and Ingold (2007). It can be argued here that stone carvers had to use their creativity and improvisational skills in order to make the same statues with new techniques. With ritual sculptures there are rules to be followed, and doing this with new tools is not just a simple act of “copying”. In this context it is also important to note that as described in Chapters 3 and 4, throughout history stone carvers have made modifications based on their needs when it comes to following the rules and measurements of Hindu ritual sculpture and architecture (Mosteller 1989, 1990; Parker 1992a, 2003b). Parker (2003b: 8) has argued in the context of shilpa shastras that:

Texts and formalised practices – what I would characterise as ritual modes of production – are profoundly context-sensitive, which is to say that they must be adaptable, fluid, generalised, imprecise, and above all improvisational if they are to be ongoing and vital... While the explicit rhetoric of sastra may sometimes seem to insist on a timeless, changeless, fixed order, local practices of sastra are typically marked by improvisation, diversity, and change.

Equally, soft stone carvers did this by using only part of the proportion system in their work. It can therefore be argued that creativity as improvisation but also novelty, in the form of rearrangement of elements, has also always existed in classical Indian sculpture beyond mere copying or replicating the ideal models. Another related example of improvisation is the new, simplified proportion system for sculptures developed and practiced by carver V. Punniyakotti as presented in Chapter 4.

Polishing provides the statues with their final appearance and colourful marble, for example, shows its actual colours only after it has been polished with water. Since these stones have white hues among the base colour, the appearance of the final statue may look very different after polishing. Although the images may be the same, the statues are rarely totally identical. This is apparent when looking at the carvings more in detail. Murugan, a stone carver who has made many statues depicting the Buddha head, said that he had favourite ones among them and that he could recall the different moods he was in when making the statues. Once in his shop we were looking at these statues standing in a row on the shelf and he asked me which ones I liked the best. He then pointed out a couple of pieces that he told me were his favourites. Many of the statues were about the same size and they were either made of marble or grey gadapa stone, and some of them were painted black. The pieces made of marble had a different appearance due to variations in the colour and hue between the stones, thus giving each Buddha head an individual appearance. In addition, their hairstyles varied. When looking at the faces more carefully it also became apparent that all the Buddhas had slightly different expressions. Some of them looked somewhat evil, whereas others seemed to be calmer and more peaceful. Essentially, a Buddha statue should invoke a feeling of peace in the viewer. According to Murugan, the most difficult part of making these sculptures is getting both this inner feeling and outer expression right. That is something that cannot really be controlled and also he as a carver would look at the finished pieces, compare them and see how they had come out. Murugan told me that he felt his best statues were

the ones he had made when in a good mood. If he had been experiencing problems in his life and was not feeling happy, the sculptures did not turn out to be as good as he would like them to be.

Murugan's experiences show that stone carving is work that cannot be totally controlled. It involves interaction with stones, tools, the human body and feelings, other carvers and customers. Therefore, the results cannot be fully anticipated and there is always an element of surprise in the process and in how the finished sculpture will turn out. Even replication and copying an existing model is not therefore a straightforward task. A closer examination of the sculptures reveal differences between them. The question the Finnish tourist asked earlier is valid: How are the carvers able to make so many of the same type of sculptures? In fact, making two completely identical carvings by hand is very hard and as a result most sculptures look somewhat different from each other.

Another important aspect of the carving processes is that in workshops, carvings were often done as a joint effort by more than one carver. One of them might cut the stone, two others carve and one more carver does the final details followed by the polishing by yet another carver. Sometimes the designer of the statue did not take part at all in the actual making of the statue. Every person had different skills sets that had an impact on the carving process and therefore also the final outcome.

If the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram is viewed in light of Latour's actor-network theory (2005), we can see that there are several agents holding and exercising creative agency. Agents in a stone carving network may include stone carvers, carving manuals, stones, tools and tourists, as the examples in this chapter have pointed out. They all play a part in the carving work by influencing what type of statues are made, how the process of producing the sculptures unfolds and eventually, what the finished piece will look like. All these actors can also be labelled mediators rather than intermediators, since they can have a crucial effect on the turn of events. The examples have shown how foreign tourists but also the stone itself may give ideas to the carvers, but this is only a starting point for the work. One or several carvers then interpret the design, interact with the stone and different tools, and make decisions if they wish to follow the proportion system. Changes in any of these agencies also has an impact on the carving.

In the context of creativity, I also argue that it would be very limiting to place our focus only on the finished sculptures or on the intention of the stone carver, as suggested by Gell. Ingold (2013: 7) also opposes this view by Gell as it is what he calls "backward reading" of finished products:

By this, he means that it should be possible to trace a chain of causal connections, in reverse, from the final object to the initial intention that allegedly motivated its production, or to the meanings that might be attributed to it.

Due to the creative nature of the processes of making, backward reading is never wholly possible and should not be regarded as the meaning of a piece of art (ibid.: 7). This also applies to stone carving as it is a process that involves several creative agencies whose interplay produces statues.

6.4 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This chapter has examined stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram in relation to the concepts of art and crafts and based on the views of foreign tourists and stone carvers. This theme also included discussions about copying, replication and creativity in stone carving. Many stone sculptures made and sold in Mamallapuram could be labelled as art if judged based on the ideals of the Hindu stone carving tradition, but at the same time the working style of stone carvers today no longer correspond to all the standards of Hindu carving tradition. Equally, these days the Western category of art has become very all-encompassing and a definite line between arts and crafts has become blurred, even within that discourse (cf. Shiner 2002: 3; 277–278). This was highlighted by the answers given by foreign visitors who defined these categories in very different ways.

The status of Mamallapuram stone carvings as arts or crafts can be approached by using the notion of agency and how it is embedded in people's views and understandings. As the examples have shown, there are one or several agents and agencies and also sometimes separate agency networks at play that can be identified in people's views. These agencies play a role in the classificatory processes that define stone carvings as arts or crafts, and their makers as artists or craftsmen. For many foreign visitors, stone carvings pointed to their maker and his artistic skills, in other words to the agency of the stone carver. But stone statues as material entities also have agency of their own, which equally made them appear as art or crafts. The contributing factors here were for example the size and quality of carvings. A religious affiliation and place of purchase were also important to some of the respondents. "Cultural heritage" here meant the image of spiritual India that is promoted by various forms of travel media, to which tourists are usually exposed to before their visit to India. Still, tourism can distort these more "traditional" or "authentic" images of India. Tourism in Mamallapuram has created different niches within the carving scene, something that many local people and foreign visitors are well aware of. Tourism is therefore also one of the agency networks that needs to be considered.

For many of the stone carvers, the categories of arts and crafts were less relevant in terms of their work. Sculptures would be primarily classified as sculptures and carvings, pointing to the Indian culture and Hindu stone carving tradition that does not raise the question regarding the categories of arts and crafts. More specifically, carvings could be classified as religious sculptures and tourist statues, usually as separate categories but also overlapping in certain contexts. The understood differences between sculptures are based on their iconography, material, production techniques, appearance and ultimately the use of the statues. All these various elements can be analysed as agents that form networks and contribute to the ways in which statues are conceptualised within the local context and culture.

Many foreigners claimed that stone carvers in Mamallapuram copy and repeat existing images and therefore stone carvings are crafts rather than art. This was equally seen as a lack of creativity that was associated with the concept of art. This only applies if creativity is defined based on end products, i.e. the finished sculptures. This chapter suggests that following the arguments of Hallam and Ingold (2007), creativity should be viewed as a process that requires improvisation. A close examination of stone carving in Mamallapuram reveals that stone carvers have to improvise throughout the carving process when engaging with stone, standard models and even different orders given by foreign tourists. There are also differences between finished statues

in terms of size, and stone variety, and pieces may present a novel combination of existing Hindu iconography. However, in the eyes of foreign visitors, carvings mainly appeared alike since the vast majority of them are based on Hindu references. Stone carvings can thus be viewed as material agents that constitute a network of sculptures with similar attributes that create an aura of serial production. From a local perspective, standard Hindu iconography is important since it corresponds to the ideals of Hindu sculptures that are used in religious rituals. The role of stone carvings in a religious and spiritual context is the subject of the next chapter.

7 POWER OF THE STATUES: RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF STONE CARVINGS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram are essentially linked to Hindu religion, since a large part of them are specially made for Hindu temples and shrines. In addition to the religious use value of stone carvings in ritual practices, stone carvings also point to the Hindu religion iconographically, since the vast majority of them portray different Hindu deities. This also includes statues made and sold in the tourist market, although not primarily intended for ritual use.

This chapter examines stone carvings as material objects that can have religious or spiritual agency, and it looks at how this is understood from the perspective of stone carvers and foreign visitors. Views of a few other local people in Mamallapuram, such as those of Hindu priests, are also presented. Again, the focus here is on the stone carvings made primarily for the tourist market in Mamallapuram, but as evidenced throughout the chapter, it is impossible to completely separate so-called tourist carvings from ritual sculptures, that is, those intended primarily to be sold as souvenirs and decorations from those that are made to be used in Hindu temples, shrines and home puja rooms. The chapter builds on the themes presented in Chapter 3: “Indian Hindu Stone Carving Tradition”, and it concentrates on the possible religious or spiritual agency attributed to stone carvings, including what factors the agency is based on. In the interviews and questionnaires, stone carvers and foreign visitors were asked whether they thought stone carvings had any particular religious or spiritual power or energy, and if so, why. Another related interview question to the interviewees was how stone carvings could be discarded if necessary, such as in the event of being broken.

British journalist William Dalrymple writes about a South Indian sculptor in his book “Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India” (2009). The sculptor comes from a Hindu family that has been making traditional bronze Hindu deity sculptures in the city of Tanjavur, Tamil Nadu for 700 years.³⁸ These sculptors see deity statues as embodiments of the divine and carriers of religious power, as also discussed in Chapter 3. Based on his conversation with the sculptors, Dalrymple identifies three different ways through which deity sculptures acquire their religious power: through the heart and hands of the sculptor, through the ceremonies of ritual worship, and through the heart of the devotee (Dalrymple 2009: 219–220; see also Paine 2013: 7–8). Although Dalrymple initially found these different ways somewhat contradictory, for the sculptor they existed simultaneously. Without the presence of one or all of these factors, the statue would be only a piece of sculpture and an inanimate object, but ritual interaction with humans would turn sculptures into gods (Dalrymple, 2009: 219).

³⁸ Tanjavur is famous for its bronze idol production that has taken place for generations. I also met a stone carving family in Mamallapuram who comes from Tanjavur and used to make bronze idols but has since shifted to stone carving.

Richard D. Davis (1997) equally identifies three phases during which divine images are established or become animated in India, although partly differently to Dalrymple. The first phase involves careful selection of materials that are considered ritually suitable for making objects of worship, such as wood and stone, and they need to be of a certain quality. Collecting material also involves rituals that designate the material to its purpose as an icon of divinity (Davis 1997: 34–35). The second stage is the physical fabrication of the image, such as carving of the statue. This phase also involves religious rituals carried out with a help of a priest (*ibid.*: 35). The third phase is the awakening and worshipping of the image that commences with the eye-opening ceremony and carries on with continuous puja practices (*ibid.*: 35–37).

All these different ways of how statues acquire their religious power presented by Dalrymple and Davis also apply to stone carvings in Mamallapuram. Based on the interviews, questionnaires and informal conversations with foreign visitors, stone carvers and some other local people, three categories have been identified here that inform us how people conceptualised religious or spiritual status of stone carvings. In line with the theoretical theme of thesis, these different ways are approached as agencies that contribute to the formation of religious and spiritual meaning. Similarly to Dalrymple's example, these three categories also overlap and can exist at the same time in people's minds. They are interrelated and work on different levels, often building up on each other. This also corresponds to the central agency theories of the thesis, as for Gell (1998), objects always acquire their agency from other agents, and for Latour (2005), agency is dependent on the interaction with other agents or actants within the network. Whereas this interconnectedness should be acknowledged, at the same time separating agencies is also helpful for the clarity of analysis and to present peoples' viewpoints that would sometimes emphasise certain factors or agencies over others.

The first type of agency examined is the agency of stone as material that is sourced from the earth and then used for stone carvings. This is presented "Power in the material: agency of stones". The next part, "Iconography and action: agency of statues" approaches statues themselves as agents: as objects with different features, qualities and meanings but also capabilities to act. The agency of statues also becomes evident in the event of disposing of them, although this may not always refer to their religious or spiritual meanings. In addition, issues of copying and seriality are also discussed in the context of the religious or spiritual meaning of stone carvings. The third type of agency examined in "Completing, distributing and feeling power: agency of humans" is the practices of humans and how their actions are attributed to the religious or spiritual status of carvings. The last part presents a concluding discussion on the themes of the chapter.

In this chapter the views of the stone carvers and foreign visitors have not been separated into different sections, since the views are similar in some instances. The chapter is thus divided based on the agencies that were identified in both local and foreign respondents' answers.

7.2 POWER IN THE MATERIAL: AGENCY OF STONES

The first agency that is considered is the agency of stone as the material from which carvings in Mamallapuram are made. Its importance becomes most evident in the local Hindu context, as different stones are valued differently from the religious point of view. That also defines their suitability for ritual objects. As presented in Chapter

3, in Tamil Nadu granite is considered to be the holiest stone. It is the hardest of the stone varieties used in Mamallapuram stone carving workshops and does not wear out very easily, despite the frequent washing, oiling and adornment that sculptures become subject to in puja rituals. Granite is also the only stone used for temple sculptures in Tamil Nadu. Temple deities may also be made of brass but not from any soft stone varieties. Granite is also believed to be the best stone for transferring “divine energy”. A Hindu priest explained to me the following:

Echo power. Material. Stone and brass, echo power...We say the god's name again again again – some power coming. Because that place is made with stone material. Echo power. One time, two times we tell, hundred times echo. Sure some power comes there. That is the way of our forefathers, that is the truth. People always believe.

It is believed that granite stone absorbs the “power” that comes from the sound of the constant repetition of holy mantras, verses and prayers in temples. These sounds create “positive energy”: energy that heals and fortifies. Sounds echo in the stone buildings that are also often constructed at least partially from granite – especially the older temples – and the buildings transmit the energy to the people. Therefore, visiting a temple is considered to be good for the health, regardless of a person’s beliefs. In addition to the temple structures, statues made from granite or brass also absorb the power created by sounds but also that of the human hearts during prayer. It is believed that granite and brass best transmit the prayers and devotion of the worshippers to the divine. In turn, stone idols send out energy stored in them to the devotees, in addition to the possible divine energy. The agency of the stone thus becomes apparent both as a vehicle and a store of positive energy that is transferred between the stones and devotees through sounds and prayer. Stone’s agency is based on its natural, innate capacity as a particular type of material that is believed to be able to hold and convey energy, but it becomes evident only through interaction with other agents such as humans. In this context, stone’s agency is thus dependent on other agents. Only granite is considered to have this particular quality and as a result other, softer stone varieties are not used for ritual purposes in the traditional Hindu context. The agency of stones also becomes visible in the religious Hindu stone carving tradition in the way granite stones are classified into different gender categories based on their sounds, as presented in Chapter 4. Tilley (2004) writes that stones “exert their muted agency in relation to us” for example, in landscapes or temple spaces (219). He argues that it is fundamental to experience the stones in a particular place in order to feel their material impact. Because of this we cannot describe stones in any way we like since the context can have such a powerful effect on us (ibid.:219). Although Tilley does not include any religious or spiritual aspects in his view, he acknowledges the agency of stones in places and architectural spaces.

These factors described above create a clear difference between granite statues and soft stone sculptures made in Mamallapuram in terms of their religious value in the context of the Hindu religion. They also provide further insight into the crucial point that was constantly emphasised to me in Mamallapuram by stone carvers, Hindu priests and other local Hindu people I spoke with: *Only granite sculptures are “proper” religious statues and soft stone and marble sculptures are made for decoration and to be sold as souvenirs for tourists.* This viewpoint summarises to a large extent the local approach towards different types of stone carvings when it comes to their religious value. It

also partly explains why most people in Mamallapuram do not have stone statues in their home shrines. This was the fact that surprised me perhaps the most during my fieldwork. After all, we were in a town famous for Hindu stone carvings and deity sculptures could be found everywhere. The main reason for not having granite statues in household puja rooms was practical: as previously discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, it is difficult to make small-sized granite statues and having a large statue in your personal altar is not considered appropriate as it requires regular, large-scale pujas and handing out prasada to people. Some households had a small “temple” with bigger granite statues in their backyard but also other families and neighbours would participate in these pujas.

However, some households in Mamallapuram also had soft stone statues in their home shrines, especially those families that owned a stone carving business. These statues were made from a stone variety commonly known as green stone or green granite. I did not receive a clear answer as to why this particular stone was the most popular one, but its appearance and colour resembles black granite although it is softer. For example, I visited a household that had a statue of Ganesh on their family shrine made from green granite. It was about 10 cm in height and was the centrepiece of the shrine to which regular pujas were carried out on a daily basis. This Ganesh was washed, oiled and dressed in beautiful attire made from brightly-coloured silk. A garment shop owner in Mamallapuram had a small Ganesh statue made from marble stone in the corner shrine of his shop. When asked about the statue he told me it was a gift to him from one of the foreign tourists, and he did not think there was any obstacle to keeping a marble statue in his altar. It thus seems Hindu people in Mamallapuram acknowledged that whereas only granite or brass has particular religious “power”, other stone varieties can also be used for prayer if so desired – only their potency was less than that of granite. Similarly to the pictures, soft stone statues also portray Hindu deities, which can be considered to be another marker of religious agency even though their material qualities as soft stone and marble were lacking power.

At the same time, soft stones can still be considered to have some energy of their own, even though they are weaker than granite. Stone carver Selvam explained the following regarding embedded energy in stones in general:

Statues have a lot of natural powers. We in India believe in Mother Earth and stones, etc. get a lot of power and energy from Mother Earth. Mother Earth can give many things to you, like gold, silver and also stone, give them lot of energy.

Here Selvam talks about all types of stones and does not refer only to granite. The power or agency of stone is a result of another agent, Mother Earth, which infuses stones with energy. In this sense stones always carry energy with them, but according to Selvam’s view, it is a result of what they have been “given” by nature considered here as Mother Earth as a divine-like force. Although not put forward by Selvam, this agency of “Mother Earth” can also be felt in the event of quarrying stone that is not always an easy process. For example, Paton and DeSilvey (2014) describe human engagement with stone when quarrying granite. Obtaining granite from the deep deposits inside the ground is not an easy task, which in a sense emphasises the power of nature or “Mother Earth”. This process also makes evident the presence of stone and nature as agencies that humans need to acknowledge and interact with in various ways.

The material agency of stone was also apparent in the views of some of the foreign tourists I interviewed. To some of them the iconography of a carving was less relevant than the material that it was made of when it came to the religious or spiritual meaning that the carving had for them. A Spanish tourist had purchased an item commonly known in Mamallapuram as a “lampshade”, which is a round, ball-shaped carving with decorations and holes on the surface with a hollow inside. The ball has a flat base and it comes with a separate stand on which it is placed. A candle or a small lamp can be inserted inside the ball and light will emanate from the holes on the sides. These lampshades come in various sizes and stone varieties, and with different types of decorative iconography. The piece that the Spanish



Image 98: A decorated Ganesh statue made from soft stone placed on an outside wall of a family home in Mamallapuram.

visitor had bought was made from red marble stone had an *OM* sign³⁹³ carved on it. He told me that he had been visiting carving shops and had been looking at the pieces without any specific statue in mind. The physical features of a sculpture were not important for him; he was mainly interested in the “energy of the carving”, as he put it. This visitor had then been given a lampshade to hold in his hands, and he had felt energy going up his spine. In addition, the stone carver had told him the stone in question was a special healing stone and it could be used for expanding the mind and opening any blocks in the body.

³⁹ According to some Hindu scriptures, *OM* (or “*Aum*”) is considered to be the holiest sound and the most sacred word from which the whole universe was born. It has its own special letter in Sanskrit language that is a commonly used as an auspicious symbol in India (cf. Huyler 1999: 264).



Image 99: Decorative, carved balls commonly known as “lamp shades” in Mamallapuram. A candle or a small lamp can be placed inside the hollow ball.

The Spanish tourist had then bought the statue and used it in his meditation. He uses the carving by holding the top part in one hand and the base in the other. It had made him feel energised and also balanced in the *chakras*⁴⁰ or energy centres in his body. He told me that sometimes he would also place these two parts of the carving on different parts of his body where the energy centres are located. Thus, for him the point of the carving was not the appearance of the object but the energy it vibrated. He believed that the whole earth was made of energy and that certain objects vibrate subtle energy; especially those stones and crystals that had been somehow purified carried very special energy. Also he believed that people could relate to the energy of objects in the same way as they relate to the energy of other people. Therefore, for him to say that an object has some spiritual power also means this same energy that it vibrates.

A Swiss visitor that interviewed had a very similar take on the subject. He thought that everything in the world has energy, including stones. He had held a statue made of green stone in a carving shop and had felt a “cooling” energy coming from the stone. He also believed that stones can have the “power to heal”; something that he had learned before coming to India. He explained how a friend had placed a stone on his body when he had a headache and although he had not believed that it would help, the headache had in fact disappeared. For these Spanish and Swiss tourists, stones thus transmitted energy in a similar way to what the Hindu priest described above, although the source of energy was not a human action but rather an idea of a “universal energy” that vibrates in everything. Here, stones were seen as a part of this universal energy but not a particular source of it. The Spanish tourist also hold that

⁴⁰ According to some mystical Hindu beliefs a human body has a seven, vortex-shaped energy centres in different parts of the body (cf. Huyler 1999: 263).

stones and crystals had specific energy in them, thus making them not only channels of universal energy, or energy from Mother Earth as stone carver Selvam suggested, but also having a particular energy of their own.

In these examples above, different respondents hold a somewhat animistic view of the world as an energy-filled entity, and stones become both transmitters and source of that energy that they can radiate to humans. The religious or spiritual agency of statues in this case is based on their material qualities. According to this viewpoint, stones are not passive or dead entities but active agents that contribute towards the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of people.

The idea about agency of stones is in fact common in many cultural beliefs that can be labelled animistic (cf. Harvey 2005). However, not all stones are necessarily considered to be “alive”. The difference between animate and inanimate stones may be based upon different beliefs, such as claims that stones have been seen to move (Harvey 2005: 36–38; 106–107). This relates to the idea that “(P)ersons demonstrate to one another that they are persons by acting towards ones another” (ibid.: 107). In these instances the agency of a stone is therefore tied to its ability to differentiate itself from other stones and show its aliveness. It may also be labelled relational, as it emerges in social situations (ibid.; see also Whitehead 2013: 7). This type of animation of stones is similar to the views of my interviewees presented above. They acknowledged the power or agency being a quality of stones in general, either because of their inherent material qualities or because they were part of the planet that was seen as a living, energy-fused being; the “Mother Earth” as stone carver Selvam put it. The agency of stones becomes evident in their interactions with humans and capacities for causal actions; in these cases as messengers of prayers to the divine, contributing towards the well-being of temple visitors, balancing energy centres of the body and healing headaches. Some of these experiences can be real in the sense that they are grounded in actual events, whereas others are more belief-based without tangible evidence of causality. This also corresponds to the concept of agency put forward by Gell (1998), as he argues that often people believe “objects would act if they wanted to but they only choose not to” (125). A lack of evidence of causality does not therefore prevent non-human actors such as stones from having agency in human eyes, and when we interact with them we treat objects such as statues as if they were alive.

Following Gell (1998), in the examples given by the Spanish and Swiss tourists, stones act as agents imposing their agency on humans as patients. Similarly, in Hindu temples, the granite building and statues act as agents that emanate their energy, which has an effect on temple visitors as patients in this case. Humans contribute towards the energy levels of the granite through their mantras and prayers, a subject that is explored in more detail later on in this chapter. The agent-patient relationships in the temple context are thus reciprocal. Then again, as many stone carvers and other local people claimed that soft stones have less power or agency than granite, their capacity to reciprocate is limited compared to granite. According to this view, soft stones then are mainly patients with humans imposing their agency on them.

The Hindu temple context highlights the interconnectedness of agencies that include not only material qualities of stones but also how they obtain their agency through human interaction. Temples can be approached as networks from the perspective of Latour’s (2005) actor-network theory, in which granite structures, granite statues, priests and devotees interact by creating and sustaining the network. Human action is crucial here in the form of chanting mantras and prayer, thus serving as mediators of ANT. But granite is also an equally important mediator since it absorbs and

transmits the energy of the prayers and sounds within the spaces. Replacing granite with a different stone would not achieve the same results, and removing human agency from stones would not become charged with energy and the qualities of granite would not become evident or experienced. These points partly correspond with Latour's notion that agency is a result of the interaction of agencies within a network and not an inherent quality of the actants. The agency of the stones may also be a result of the presence of a universal energy force or nature, as suggested by the foreign visitors and Selvam. That force encompasses everything in the world as a part of a large energy network and gives stones their power and agency. However, the Spanish visitor referred to above believed that stones themselves contained special, purified energy, thus giving them a special status as well as being part of the network of universal life force.

Kendall et al. (2010; 2008) have argued that materiality is an important part of the process of how objects obtain their sacred status and should be afforded attention next to the agency of objects. In the context of religious Vietnamese goddess statues, good quality wood or metal is an important aspect of the ritual value of the statues, and those made from poor materials are not accepted by everyone as ritual objects. They also highlight artisanal processes in the study, thus responding to Tim Ingold (2007; 2013) who has argued that studies of agency often ignore the material properties and manufacturing processes of things. Although Ingold's critique towards agency goes deeper than this, as discussed in the introduction of the thesis, material qualities can be an important aspect of religious objects and may therefore be approached as an agency, despite the fact that at the microscopic surface level things and entities "leak", as Ingold (2013) suggests. In fact, this interaction on the surface level through touch is where the power or agency of the stone carvings became evident in the examples given by the foreign tourists: the Swiss visitor had felt what he labelled cooling energy coming from a green stone, and the Spanish tourist had also felt energy in his body when touching the lamp shade made from marble in a carving shop.

7.3 ICONOGRAPHY AND ACTION: AGENCY OF STATUES

In the local Hindu context, the iconography of statues was another key factor that defined the religious status of carvings. All the local people I spoke to, including stone carvers and priests, hold that only so-called traditional representations of the Hindu gods and goddesses would be acceptable for worship purposes. Statues should also be made based on the rules of religious Hindu iconography. As stone carvers would often state, statues would not "look good" unless correct forms and measurements were applied.

Standardised iconography that portrays Hindu deities in popular forms also makes them recognisable for lay people. These depictions usually include certain symbolic elements that refer to the qualities of the deity in question, including well-known mythological stories that are attached to them. Iconography thus makes statues identifiable as particular gods and goddesses and sets them apart from other deities. The religious agency of the stone carvings starts from granite but only the finished image reveals which deity may embody the sculpture. Whereas granite effectively assists in the transferral of prayers and energy between the divine and devotees, certain gods and goddesses have their own specific qualities that should be approached in different situations. For Hindu devotees, statues as representations of different Hindu gods and goddesses have the agency of those particular gods and goddesses they portray. Different deities can affect their lives in different ways. For example, if one is experiencing financial trouble, a puja

to goddess Lakshmi is usually considered to be more effective than to Shiva, although all the deities are believed to be able to assist people in their lives. If one's financial luck turns, this may then be attributed to Lakshmi and seen as a result of the puja to a particular deity, often residing in a particular temple. An event like this would also prove the agency of a deity that in this instance took the shape of a stone sculpture.

This logic separates ritual sculptures from those statues sold in the tourist market in Mamallapuram that may be depictions of deities in non-traditional forms, and some are also made without proper knowledge of measurements. If local Hindu people have statues made from green stone in their puja rooms, it is crucial that they are the traditional image of the deity since they already lack the religious power of granite. For example, a Ganesh statue made from green stone that a stone carving family in Mamallapuram had on their family shrine was a traditional, sitting representation of the deity. A statue of Ganesh playing cricket or sitting on a computer would not be acceptable according to the people I spoke with, even though perhaps a devotee would be hoping for good luck in his cricket game next Sunday, or in an upcoming IT exam. This type of novel iconography was considered to be only for decoration for tourists and was separate from the ritual Hindu context of stone carvings.

Agency of the statues was not only linked to the deity they represented but also the stone carving tradition. When local people spoke of "traditional" statues, this referred to the sculptures they were used to seeing in the temples and shrines. Based on Gell's (1998) theory, temple statues are thus the models or prototypes, which in this case hold agency over people by defining "traditional" and what are acceptable types of statues for worship. Also following Gell, it can be argued that in the ritual context the prototypes and statues (indexes) become the same thing as the statues become the deities that they refer to. This has been noted by Määttänen (2001) in the context Tibetan Buddhist Thanga paintings. She argues that Gell's index and prototype cannot be separated in the moment worshippers believe that Thangkas have become divine (idid.: 118). Also in the Hindu context, the making of ritual statues is based on traditional religious iconography, a prototype of a particular deity, but in a ritual they become the deity. Myer (2008: 127) argues that

Indeed, from a perspective of religion as mediation, the divine does not appear as a self-revealing entity, but, on the contrary, is always "effected" or "formed" by mediation processes, while resisting being reduced to mere human-made products. Media and practices of mediation thus invoke the divine via particular, material forms.

As discussed in Chapter 3, for Hindus statues serve as bodies of the divine and enable the deities to appear and interact among humans. The appearance of the statue also reveals qualities of the divine. But as Meyer states above, they also resist their material forms and seek to be something more than objects. This is reflected in the Vedic context in which the Sanskrit term *pratimaa* means an image such as one made from stone, but also a reflection in a mirror. There is thus an association with the original and the copy that is more than symbolic, and although images are never totally identical with the prototype, they cannot be distinguished from them either (De Caroli 2008: 37). Also in this sense, a deity statue is both the prototype of the deity and the deity at the same time, and is not able to completely shed this paradoxical status. This case is somewhat similar to what Tanner (2013) writes in the context of terracotta army in the tomb of Chinese First Emperor Qin Shihuangdi. These life-sized figure sculptures portraying soldiers in the emperor's funerary complex possess material agency as large-sized ter-

racotta figures in great numbers. at the same time they point to the agency and power of the emperor that feels equivalent to that which he possessed while still alive (ibid.: 66). The agency of mausoleums as powerful material agents pointing to the agency of the deceased in China has also been analysed by Rawson (2007), by Wengrow in the context of ancient Egypt (2007), and Tanner (2013) in Greece (2013).

This situation can be viewed as a network based on Latour's (2005) ANT, in which existing ritual statues serve as models for new statues and give them their meaning and agency. Without reference to the temple statues, ordinary people apart from stone carvers would not recognise "traditional" ritual sculptures since few have knowledge of the stone carving manuals. Yet this network includes equally stone carvers, stone carving manuals, stones and devotees who play a role in the process of forming the religious status of a sculpture and also sustain the tradition with their repeated actions. Were Hindu priests to start making pujas with new types of statues, this would more likely also change the way people approach different statues, also in the stone carving market in Mamallapuram.

The meaning of different Hindu gods and goddesses was a common topic in many of the interviews and conversations I had with the foreign visitors regarding stone carvings in Mamallapuram. In addition to asking them whether they thought statues could have some spiritual or religious power, I was interested to understand the reasons why they had chosen to buy a statue of a particular deity, as already discussed in Chapter 5, but also, how much they knew or thought they knew about Indian religions or Hinduism in particular.

Many of the respondents had chosen the statues based on the god or goddess the carving represented, and in these cases they usually knew something about this particular deity. Still, very few felt they had good knowledge of Hinduism. For example, a Spanish tourist thought "she knew nothing about Indian religions because the more she learned the less she felt she knew". This was because "there are so many gods in Hinduism" and different beliefs and stories related to them. An Irish tourist said he knew some basic stories about the deities but he did not feel his knowledge was particularly good. Some of the interviewees also knew stories about some particular deities, such as how the god Ganesh lost his head or the love story of the god Shiva and the goddess Parvati. An Italian visitor said that during her stay in India she had learned a lot more about Hinduism but she thought "you cannot really understand Hinduism unless you grew up with it". For an outsider it would be difficult. She told me she had heard stories about the deities but could not remember or even understand all of them. Equally, she felt that in some cases also the local Hindu people did not always know all the different issues that were related to Hinduism.

However, despite their weak knowledge of Hinduism, most foreign visitors felt that the statues could have some spiritual or religious power, based on the iconography of the god or goddess the statue was depicting. For some of them the statue itself was powerful as a material object, whereas for others it was more to do with its symbolic value as a representation of a certain deity. The main difference between the foreigners' approach compared to the locals' understanding was the fact that for tourists, statues had spiritual or religious meaning or power already *before* the puja ceremonies were performed. The potential agency of the statues was in a sense "complete" when they were standing in the carving shop selves. The religious or spiritual agency was in the statues as objects but it also pointed to the qualities and agency of the deities they depicted.



Image 100: Soft stone statues on a shrine in a carving shop in Mamallapuram

An American tourist who had purchased a statue of Ganesh and goddess Lakshmi during one of his visits to Mamallapuram relayed the following account:

It's a personal reason, when I was on the West Coast, I was hanging out with a sadhu man, an old man and I travelled with him for a while. And... in the Hindu belief system or something, you say that, you know certain gods are more present in one's life than others. And basically... Hindu gods is... when Hindus worship gods, they basically worship not the god as such but the quality, that that god is holding. So if somebody is worshipping Shiva then he is worshipping the ability to destroy something, to finish something, to let go of things. So when you, for instance, you split up and want to overcome that easily, you would go to worship it in a Shiva temple. And Ganesh stands for overcoming obstacles, etc. etc. And this sadhu said that I was, I mean if this is all bullshit, I don't know, but I kind of liked it at the time, that I was the lucky guy who had to, sometimes people have three or four gods that were present in their lives but for me there was supposed to be two and one was Ganesh and the other one was Lakshmi. So that's why I was more inclined towards those two gods.

Here the emphasis is on the different qualities of Hindu deities and the capabilities they believe have an effect on human lives in different ways, depending on the nature of the god in question. This visitor had chosen his statues based on what he knew about deities but also what he had been told by a man he believed to be a *sadhu*, a holy, wise man. Based on the information the visitor was given, he thought he had a close, personal relationship with certain Indian deities and chose the statues accordingly.

as representations of that relationship. The statues became the symbols of the divine agency in a concrete, material form.

This American visitor also believed in the possibility that the physical presence of a statue could influence events, as the following excerpt of the interview reveals:

And then there is a little odd story and I don't know whether it is just coincidental or whether it had something to do with the statue. I used to do in my free time, and I still do, book keeping for a book co-operative. It's a co-operative that sells books. And it didn't go well at all and they had a couple of consecutive bad years. And I put a Lakshmi statue in the store. Lakshmi stands for wealth and health etc. etc. And after that it went ok or even well. But you know, but it could be just coincidental because we did a lot of changes and probably had to more to do with the real time changes and not with the statue as such.

Although this visitor said that he could not know for sure what the real cause of the positive turn of business affairs was, he was nevertheless open to the idea that the statue itself could have had something to do with it. The believed source of the power or the agency of the object was Lakshmi, who is the Hindu goddess of wealth. This statue had not been prayed to or worshipped but simply had been placed inside the shop. Here it was enough that it portrayed Lakshmi who was believed to be present because of the iconography of the statue.

A foreign visitor from New Zealand who I interviewed told me that a statue of Ganesh had protected her son from "spiritual attacks". She told me that only her son could see and feel these attacks but the placement of Ganesh in his bedroom has brought a resolution to this problem. Here the physical presence of Ganesh in the form of a statue had served the purpose. The statue was believed to have agency that was able to protect her son and the power was based on the object itself. In this household the statue of Ganesh had a role that can also be assigned to Christian images and objects (cf. Morgan 2005).

As previously stated, statues of Buddha were one of the most popular items of purchase in Mamallapuram and also many of the people interviewed had bought carvings depicting Buddha. The meaning and use of Buddha statues in a religious or spiritual context was often different from the Hindu sculptures in the foreign visitors' answers. They highlighted the different philosophies and practices of two religions. In addition, this reflected the fact that although people may not follow any particular religion or belief system, even their partial knowledge about the religions may still influence the way they approach the objects related to that particular religion. A Canadian tourist said the following about the Buddha statues she had purchased:

Well, I never really pray on them or to them. For me it is more like what the statue emanates. It just seems emanate some type of tranquillity and calmness and peace. That's what it emanates. When you look at the Buddha in that posture. That's just the sense that I get.

Does it have power? Yes I think. Because it has that association with peace and tranquillity and enlightenment. It has that association so by that association that's what you perceive when you look at it. Anyway that's what I do.

Stone carvers told me that Buddha statues should transmit peaceful energy and especially their faces need to reflect calmness. These factors are clearly expressed in the view above. Here the agency of the statue is explicit in the way it makes its viewer feel. The Buddha carving is an active agent by emanating peace and tranquillity to its surroundings. These qualities are associated with Buddha and Buddhist philosophy. Its power or agency is thus based on its iconography and physical features rather than being the actual embodiment of any divine, otherwise unseen entity, as in the case of Hindu idols. Tanner (2007), who has analysed the agency of Buddhist sculptures in the context of Gell's theory (1998), has noted that their agency lies in the fact that they point to the agency of Buddha or other Buddhist teachers or saints that the statues may portray. In addition, Harris (2001) has shown how Tibetan Buddhist sculptures can also have political agency since they portray leaders and religious teachers who live in exile. In this way Hindu and Buddhist sculptures are similar as they both represent the potential agency of whom they depict.

The Austrian visitor who was a follower of Buddhism had the following view regarding the possible spiritual power of statues

So the object not itself. It is like a dialogue. So if the object is spiritual meaning for me, I look behind the object. But I'm happy about the object. So I like to buy a Buddha who is speaking with me. I mean if the face has something, like I feel happy, I feel relaxed or gives me some idea, I can buy. And I will put it my room and I can put there some incense and I can do everything in front of it, make my meditation, but it means not any spiritual thing is in this statue! Therefore, you can make your meditation on the bus stop! Or the train station! (Laughter)

Although she stressed the fact that the object itself as a material entity did not have any particular spiritual power, it nevertheless has clear agency in this account. It is something she can have a dialogue with, it can make her feel happy, relaxed and inspired, and it can be used as a meditation aid. In this sense it also has spiritual meaning and symbolic value, although its presence is not a requirement for her spiritual practices. Compared to the Hindu sculptures in puja ceremonies, the role of a Buddha statue is therefore different in this account. Following Latour's (2005) actor-network theory, a Buddha statue can be labelled here as an intermediary, an actor who can be removed without breaking the network. The Austrian visitor stated that she can do her meditation in front of the statue but also in a bus station. In turn, when, following ANT, Hindu statues are mediators in puja ceremonies since they cannot be removed without changing the whole meaning of the ritual.

Stone carver Devaraj argued that what makes foreign visitors particularly interested in statues of different gods and goddesses is the fact that they see these statues when they visit various temples in India.

In India there are many many temples. Tourists come to visit the temples. Some people, tourists, go to a Shiva temple, a temple that is especially for Shiva. Guides explain them about Shiva, a certain kind of Shiva, etc. As a result some tourists like Shiva. Some people like Vishnu temples, and again the guide explains them about Vishnu. So the tourists like Vishnu. And also about Lakshmi, there is a temple in Madurai. And in Trichy there is a Ganesh temple, some people like Ganesh. There are also Buddhist temples. There are so many different temples also in Tamil Nadu. As a result people buy that kind of things.



Image 101: A Hindu temple in Mamallapuram

Recognising the gods and perhaps also knowing something about them makes the statues attractive to tourists and in turn easy for the stone carvers to sell. Devaraj thoughtd that tourists might have visited the town of Chitambaram in Tamil Nadu, for instance, which is famous for its temple of Shiva Nataraja, which portrays the god Shiva as the lord of dance. When tourists then see a similar statue of a dancing Shiva in his shop, which is fact is a very popular and also famous depiction of the god, tourists want to buy it because they associate it with the Chidambaram temple. In other words, temples help carvers create the right association and also provide background information that makes statues somewhat more familiar to the foreigners.

At the same time I find Devaraj's line of reasoning has similarities with why Hindus keep items in their home shrines, aacertain sthey are linked to temples and deities that can be famous pilgrimage sites or just personally important places. This way the devotee is connected to the temple deity in her or his home and is able to dedicate the pujas to the temple deity without having to physically be in the temple. This does not replace the importance and auspicious power of visiting the actual site, but it creates a link between the home altar and the temple. Temples are thus the foremost important religious places for Hindus and temple deities are usually considered more powerful than the ones in home altars. It seems that according to Devaraj this religious hierarchy of sculptures also seems to prevail in the tourist market in a way that temple sculptures even have an impact on the market value of tourist statues.

Devaraj's viewpoint also emphasises the importance of temple sculptures as prototypes of "proper", traditional Hindu stone carvings that serve as examples for stone carvers who make both ritual and tourist carvings. From the perspective of Latour's ANT (2005), they have a role here in the network as mediators of stone carvings in the market in Mamallapuram, they serve as reference points for the sculptures on

sale for the tourists and have a direct effect on tourists' purchase. Then again, In Gell's (1998) terminology, temple sculptures exercise their agency over the tourists as patients. Although this line of reasoning reflects the common Hindu understanding of the interconnectedness between temple statues and idols in home shrines, many tourists in India do visit temples and may therefore buy deity statues as souvenirs that remind them of that aspect of their travels in India.

7.3.1 Shiva-Buddha

One day I was having a coffee with one of the foreigners who had been coming to Mamallapuram for several years, and she told me she had seen one of the stone carvers who we both knew, Ravi, near her home. She was renting a house in a village just outside Mamallapuram that was quite a popular among those foreigners who decided to stay in Mamallapuram for a bit longer and wanted to stay in a proper house. She continued that the stone carver had been there to deliver a rather large statue to a German visitor who lived close to her, and that perhaps it would be interesting for me to try to speak to this person. I got the phone number and was happy to be able to organise a meeting.

We decided to meet in the house of the German visitor so I could also see the statue she had purchased. When I entered the house I saw that the statue in question was a piece that I had just recently seen in a carving shop when I had been interviewing Ravi the stone carver a few days before. The carving in question was about 40 cm in height, made from green granite stone, and portrayed a sitting figure of a deity whose body was half Shiva and half Buddha. I had paid special attention to this piece since it was somewhat different and this statue had also been mentioned in the interview with Ravi. What made it special was that this type of statue was not part of the traditional Hindu iconography and that was also the main reason why Ravi was particularly proud of it. In addition, the sculpture was a very fine piece of carving work, as it was well executed with intricate detailing and smooth polishing. Ravi did not carve himself but made designs that the carvers in his workshop would then make based on his instructions. Shiva-Buddha was one of these. Ravi's idea had been to design something different and he kept the statue inside his shop so that local passers-by would see it and quite possibly start copying the motif. For the same reasons he also did not want me to photograph the statue in the shop.

This Shiva-Buddha resembled a typical Buddha or Shiva sculpture in the sense that the figure was in a sitting position and was portraying the subject in meditation, which is a common depiction of both Shiva and Buddha. The idea of combining two figures in one statue then again resembles the figure of *Ardhanarishvara* or *Shivaparvati*, whose body is half male and half female, portraying the sacred union of the god Shiva and his consort goddess Parvati.⁴¹ However, Shivaparvati images mostly portray the figure in a standing position. For those familiar with the common depictions and emblems of Shiva and Buddha, both of these characters were easily recognisable from the sculpture. The right-hand side of the figure for example had a snake on his shoulder, a crescent moon his hair, a yogi's long hair in a bun, and three vertical lines on the forehead, all which are typical marks of the god Shiva. The left-hand side of the figure then again had

⁴¹ Shivaparvati is seen as the perfect union of male and female characteristics, and there are different stories in Hindu mythology about how this merging of bodies happened (see for example Pattanaik 2009: 75–77).



Image 102: A statue of Shiva-Buddha placed in the personal shrine of a foreign visitor's residence in Mamallapuram. The right-hand side of the figure depicts Hindu god Shiva and the left part portrays Buddha. This type of statue is not part of the traditional Hindu iconography but an example of a new type of image created for the Mamallapuram tourist carving market, which may combine elements from traditional sculptures in novel forms.

global popularity.⁴² She explained that she also felt Shiva-Buddha symbolises Oneness since in the statue Shiva and Buddha come together. Oneness ideology for her meant that East and West were coming closer to each other since the followers of the movement come from all over the world. In this way the statue also had a wider meaning and it was this personal interpretation that was the most important for her. As she put it, for her the main thing was the statue "had touched her". For these reasons she had also decided to purchase the sculpture.

draped clothing, curly hair and long earlobes, all common features in the images of Buddha. Shiva-Buddha had closed eyes and a peaceful, meditative look on its face. Both hands were showing different mudras; ritual gestures that were blessing the viewer. Thus, in that sense the statue had uniform facial and bodily features and that made it into one coherent piece and figure rather than appearing to have two half-bodies somehow attached together.

Because of its unique iconography, the statue of Shiva-Buddha stood out for me as a researcher in the Mamallapuram stone carving market. The statue was also placed in a very visible place, in the centre of Ravi's shop. The German visitor who had then been to the same carving shop told me that equally she had "found the combination fascinating." In addition, she "had seen already from a distance that the statue was alive". The German visitor was a follower of the Oneness ideology, an Indian spiritual movement that has attained

⁴² Sri Amma and Sri Bhagavan are Indian spiritual teachers, *gurus*, whose Oneness movement started in 1984 and has become a worldwide phenomenon popular with both Indian and foreign followers. Its main purpose is to spread the message of "oneness" in the world; on an individual, collective and divine level. The main centre, Oneness University, is located 80 km north from Chennai, in the southern part of the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh (Oneness University 2013). Because of its relatively close proximity, many foreigners spending time at Oneness University also visit Mamallapuram.

In her house in Mamallapuram, the statue was placed on a small mat on the floor in front of a large, framed photograph of her *gurus* or spiritual teachers Sri Amma and Sri Bhagavan, the founders of the Oneness spiritual movement. Next to that she had oil lamps and also smaller postcard images of other Indian gods and goddesses. This was her personal shrine that she used for praying. She told me that before she had a statue of Mother Mary on the shrine but it had been replaced by the Shiva-Buddha sculpture.

In addition to her personal spiritual rituals, the German visitor also performed pujas and collective healing ceremonies that also local Indian people would attend. She told me she had a good relationship with the people in the village and would often spend time with them. She had been staying in Mamallapuram annually for several months and had become familiar with life in India. She felt that the locals accepted her in the village and were also happy to participate in the puja ceremonies.

The statue of Shiva-Buddha is a good example of a tourist stone carving that has become a spiritual item for a foreign visitor because of her personal spiritual conviction, although it was not made in particular for religious purposes. What makes this example particularly interesting is the fact that also local people participated in the puja and healing rituals in which this statue was present. For a local Hindu home puja room, this sculpture would be too untraditional and also too big. Only the material being green stone would be acceptable to some, as earlier discussed. I did not witness any of the ceremonies performed at this shrine so therefore it did not come to my attention how much they incorporated elements of typical Hindu puja rituals, but the shrine resembled typical home shrines with god pictures, images of guru and oil lamps. Shiva-Buddha also had a small flower decoration on his head at the time I visited the house.

In the case of Shiva-Buddha, the spiritual agency was located in the sculpture itself and was based on the sculpture as a material entity as well as on the iconography. The German visitor stated that she had felt the sculpture was alive when she saw it inside the shop. Thus, the “aliveness” of the sculpture was not based on the rituals performed on the statue after it was placed in the shrine; for her it was alive before that. This contradicts the common Hindu view according to which religious sculptures need to be “awakened” with puja rituals. The iconography of the sculpture was equally meaningful for the German visitor as a depiction of the merging of Shiva and Buddha into a single figure. As this type of image does not have any specific role or significance in the Oneness movement, the meaning of the sculpture was based on the visitor’s personal feelings rather than on particular features that would be widely recognisable and common parts of the movement. Also, the connection with Oneness did not come from Ravi who designed the sculpture.

At the same time, the spiritual agency was attributed to the sculpture by the German visitor herself. It was based on her personal views and feelings: that the statue was alive and the image had a specific meaning. This follows Gell’s (1998) notion of the agency of objects as something that is given to them by human agents. From the perspective of Latour’s ANT (2005), we can approach the healing rituals an example of a actor-network in which the German visitor, the shrine with different elements including the statue of Shiva-Buddha, and the local Indian people are actors in the network (see also Lassander 2012 in the context of paganism). In these rituals the statue has agency as an actor in the network and it is only this role that gives it its agency. Theoretically, Shiva-Buddha could also be labelled as an intermediary in the rituals because it is replaceable, the German visitor had been using a statue of Mother Mary for the same purposes. I do not know whether Shiva-Buddha had since acquired any

specific significance that cannot be replaced, thus making it a mediator in the rituals, a meaningful actor whose actions shape the workings of the whole network. Equally, the German visitor was in this case mediator herself who had already changed the network by replacing Mother Mary with Shiva-Buddha. It is possible that the shift from Christian iconography to Hindu-Buddhist discourse would have an effect on some of the participants, who would perhaps associate the rituals more with statue and its iconography rather than with the Oneness ideology. However, since I did not participate in any of the healing rituals nor speak with the participants, these are only possible interpretations.

7.3.2 Statues with life histories

The case of the Shiva-Buddha statue was the only occasion during my field research when I had, just by coincidence, seen a statue in a shop and interviewed the stone carver and then not much later seen the statue in the owner's home. This was still only a temporary placement of the Shiva-Buddha as the visitor would take the statue back to Germany on her return. It would not therefore become a permanent feature of the villagers' lives through the rituals, nor would it be part of the visitor's future trips to India since the statue was too big and heavy to be taken back and forth between Germany and India.

Richard Davies (1997) has studied the "life histories" of Indian images based on the theory of Ivan Kopytoff (1986) and shows how material objects such as Hindu sculptures can have an interesting and varying life course. This approach equally maintains the notion of the agency of objects as we can track their histories and even personalities in a comparable way to those of humans. In his article "Journey with Ganesh" (2007), Jayasinh Jhala brings forth a story of two Ganesh statues where he relates part of the "life history" of the statues much like in Davies' book. Instead of Kopytoff, Jhala has followed the writings of Arjun Appadurai and his idea about the "social life of things" (1986) as well as Gell's theory (1998) of agency. These two approaches both attribute agency to two different Ganesh statues but in partly different ways. Following Appadurai's view, one of the Ganesh statues is a patient; "acted upon in the world" and is more at the receiving end of social interactions. In turn, the second Ganesh statue is itself an active agent that has an impact on the people the statue interacts with. Here Ganesh "changes the world", as it were. I have been able to partly follow a journey of a particular Ganesh statue myself as well, although my knowledge of this journey is limited and largely based on accounts that I have been told. Nevertheless, my encounters and the information I've been given about this statue sheds some light on one particular case of an object that has been shifting locations and enjoyed various "life conditions".

I encountered this Ganesh statue for the first time in 2009, not long after I had arrived in Mamallapuram. It was carved from stone like most of the Hindu deity statues you encounter in Mamallapuram and placed on the counter of one of the popular tourist restaurants. I was particularly interested in the fact that it seemed to have been used in puja ceremonies because of the visible kumkum marks and flowers on the sculpture and partly burned incense sticks next to it. At the same time I could see that this statue was not made of granite but of a soft grey stone, also known as gadapa stone, which made it a typical statue on sale in the tourist shop). It was also fairly large in size, around 40 cm in height, which made it much bigger compared to the statues

used in personal shrines. I was told by the people working in the restaurant that the statue had been purchased by a French visitor who visited Mamallapuram regularly. Since the statue was fairly large, she had not taken it home with her just yet. She had left it in the restaurant for the time being as one of the workers was a good friend of hers. He was a Hindu and would therefore make puja with the statue every so often, in order to care for it as well as bring good luck to the restaurant that he considered his second home. Some months later I encountered this Ganesh again by chance in a carving shop opposite the restaurant. The restaurant had been painted and during the painting, a few drops of paint had dropped on the statue. It also had a few scratches on its surface. I found out that this Ganesh had originally been carved in this shop and had been returned for cleaning. "The statue is in a hospital," I was told, and was waiting for his treatment. The marks and damages were very minor so some polishing would make it like new again.

I did not encounter this Ganesh myself again but I heard about its subsequent adventures from the French visitor. After the cleaning, the statue had travelled from Mamallapuram to Chennai to the home of the mother of the restaurant worker, as the restaurant had changed hands and the worker had also changed jobs. In Chennai his mother had kept the statue wrapped in a piece of cloth and then in a plastic bag on the roof of her house. After some months the French visitor had taken the statue when visiting India and discovered that the bag had been full of small bugs, which she did not appreciate. As a result she started to keep the Ganesh in a friend's house who was also a foreigner but practically lived in Mamallapuram. He would also store some other of her belongings, which she would not take with her back home. Initially the statue was kept inside a building and had remained clean, but on a later visit she discovered that the statue had been placed outside again, perhaps due to lack of space in the house. The statue had become dusty as this time it was not covered. When we spoke, the French visitor was not yet sure what to do with the statue because she was considering renting a house in India for her frequent visits. She could then keep her Ganesh there because she still did not want to ship it to Europe because of the expense. At the same time, she told me that she felt guilty for "neglecting the Ganesh", as she put it. The statue was important to her and she wanted it to be taken good care of. She told me that she had purchased it at a particular time in her life that was meaningful for her, and the statue was also a reminder of that period. However, for the time being she had to keep it in storage until she could place it in a more permanent location.

This account serves as an example of an object that moves locations and accumulates a "personal biography"; another element of the agent-like qualities of an object as it moves and "lives" in the world. While in the restaurant it served as a religious object that was ritually worshipped by local people, despite being made of gadaapa stone that was not considered to have religious power. After becoming stained with paint, it moved to the carving shop and then to different locations for storage. Although the statue was no longer worshipped, for the French visitor it still had sentimental value and she did not consider it as "just an object". She stated that she felt guilty for neglecting it, as if it was a person she should look after. At the same time, it had symbolic value for her as a souvenir or a particular time period. The agency of the Ganesh statue thus shifted from a religious, ritual object to a more personal, non-ritual object, but nevertheless retaining its agency as an object that was able to have influence on people. Like Jhala's (2007) Ganesh statues, this carving was both at the receiving end of human agency – and also subject to insects while in storage – but at the same time had agency of its own.

7.3.3 Embedded agency? Issues of disposal

Religious power or agency that is present in Hindu statues used for religious worship also has an effect on the ways the statues can be disposed of. In Hindu religious traditions, statues are usually immersed in a body of water, such as the sea, lake or river (cf. Parker 2009). Water sources are considered to be natural manifestations of the sacred and in many parts of India they are worshipped by Hindus as divinities equal to temple deities. This method of disposal is considered an appropriate way to discard of both old and broken statues as well those temporary deity figures that are used in various Hindu festivals throughout the year. In the case of Mamallapuram this would mean the sea or some of the ponds found near the town.

When it comes to deity sculptures made from stones, those statues that have not yet been awakened in puja rituals are not believed to inhabit a deity and there are no ritual rules regarding their correct disposal. In the stone carving workshops, this means that any broken carvings can also be used for making other sculptures, should the amount of material allow that. Especially the soft stone carvers can use broken pieces for making different small-sized carvings. At the same time, as noted in the previous chapters, soft stone carvers may try to fix broken statues with glue, thus avoiding having any pieces that need to be completely discarded. Repaired statues are not considered suitable for religious worship but soft stone sculptures are not aimed at that.

The issue of disposal of broken statues was also discussed in the interviews with the foreign tourists. I wanted to know how they would discard of their stone carvings portraying Hindu deities should they get broken for any reason. Many visitors said that they would first try to glue the pieces together, but if this was not possible, they would keep the broken statue at least for a while before discarding it. An Italian tourist told me the following:

Ah, good question! I don't know... My initial reaction probably would be to trying glue it together. And if that failed, I would probably end up keeping it somewhere, in a drawer or something. But then if at any point my logical mind takes over, doing spring cleaning, might then just...

An Australian tourist had similar views when asked whether she could put her broken stone carving in a rubbish bin:

No no no, I wouldn't be able to just put it in the bin, it wouldn't go into landfill. It would definitely have some meaning for me but I would probably put it in somewhere special, maybe in a garden or something. Not necessarily buried but I might even fix it and put it back together and put it outside or something so it could live its life outside broken.

An American interviewee had views that that were not too dissimilar from the Hindu perspective:

I've never asked myself this question! I think by now it would have too much energy for me. I mean the first thing I would try is that I would try to fix it. But imagining it would be like completely shattered and it would be useless to try to fix it... I would probably bury it somewhere and I would probably sink it in a close-by pond, which is in a forest close to where I live. That's a spot I like to go in the summer because you can see the big fish. And I would probably throw the pieces in there. But I would definitely not just dump it in a bin or something. No, I couldn't do that...



Image 103: Granite sculptures in a carving shop in Mamallapuram with a shrine on the back shelf.

When talking about disposal, many of them also said that they had never thought about it and had to consider it there and then. This also shows that where they lived there are no standardised ways to dispose of objects that are perhaps considered either sacred or have another significant meaning that differentiates them from ordinary, mundane pieces.

The Austrian Buddhist devotee then again said that she could throw her Buddha statue away like any other thing that needs disposing.

*Q: If your small Buddha would get broken could you just throw it away in the rubbish?
A: I could do it. But I think Buddhists in Buddhist countries wouldn't do it. But I don't feel it is the material. So even if I put it on or off I don't need the material.*

In the interview She stressed the fact that for her images of Buddhas were mere images and symbolic meditation aids. As material entities they did not have specific meaning for her.

The agency of the objects becomes apparent in the instances when they need to be disposed of; many respondents found it difficult to just throw away the objects that have had a certain spiritual or other personal importance to them. The aspect of emotions was present in the responses of the Italian and Australian visitor: the Italian tourist thought she could throw it away only when her “logical mind takes over”, and the Australian visitor suspected that her feelings would prevent her from disposing of it. The American visitor thought the statue he had had in his altar would have too much energy just to be thrown away. For them the statues had acquired agency during their “life” that separated them from mundane objects and consequently made their disposal more difficult. Then again, the Buddhist respondent approached the statue from the perspective of her religious philosophy that emphasises the non-attachment to material things. However, she acknowledged that not all Buddhists had a similar view towards objects once considered spiritual or sacred, so her view on the matter was also partly to do with her personal conviction. The views of the foreign visitors were thus a mixture of religious or spiritual convictions for some, but to others it was more of a personal, non-religious value that they attached to the statues, despite the fact that they depicted Hindu deities.

7.3.4 Serial spirituality

When it comes to the spiritual or religious status of Mamallapuram stone carvings, none of my respondents mentioned that so-called mass production or copying of stone carvings would somehow prevent sculptures from being suitable for ritual purposes and diminishing their value in this regard. That was, after all, one of the central themes that emerged in our discussions in the context of art and crafts, as noted in Chapter 6. Walter Benjamin's arguments in his classic essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1973 [1936]) state that the religious meaning of artworks has changed as a result of mechanical reproduction.

In other words, for the unique value of authentic work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value.

(...)

... (F)or the first time in history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual.

(...)

Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics. (ibid.: 226)

As previously discussed, Benjamin's arguments do not entirely apply to Mamallapuram, as stone carvings are not mechanically reproduced but are made by hand. Paradoxically granite sculptures, including those intended for worship, are made with the help of mechanical tools, whereas non-ritual tourist statues are made almost entirely by hand. Equally, Benjamin does not see copying problematic at such as he notes that "in principle a work of art has always been reproducible" and artisans have imitated each other when producing their work (ibid.: 220). In the case of Mamallapuram stone carving market, the issue is therefore not so much that the religious meaning of the objects would be diminished by copying and reproduction, but the fact that the stone carving industry as an art and craft form has obtained an image of serial production.

It is worth noting that in a Hindu context, even mechanical reproducibility does not prevent an image from becoming a sacred object. For example, Steven Inglis (1999) has researched printed Indian Hindu deity images or "god pictures" from the religious point of view in relation to Benjamin's arguments (see also Guha-Thakurta 1992; Smith 1997; Davies 1997: 20–21; Jain 2002; Mitter 1994, 2003; Pinney 1997, 2004; Taylor 2005). Inglis argues that instead of diminishing the religious "aura", mass production has made images more widely available to all social and economic classes. This means that also poor Hindus can have images of deities in their home shrines and equally the standardised depictions of gods and goddesses in the prints makes them easily recognisable (Inglis 1999: 139)⁴³. At the same time, they point to their "origin", the divinity they are portraying:

⁴³ An Indian English-language newspaper, The Hindu, presented a story in May 2014 about how Hindu god and goddess posters, images as well as statues are nowadays produced in bulk in China and then exported to the Indian market. There are an estimated 30–40 factories in China doing the production and trade. Indian customers all over the country buy these Chinese Hindu deity pictures and statues for decoration but also possibly for worship, and they do not know that these images were in fact made in a factory in China. According to the article the reason for Indian sellers ordering them from China is that it is easier: the trade is much better organised than in India and the images are made in bulk. However, often the quality is not very good. The article also states that at the same time Indian customers are very price sensitive, so the business in China is not as lucrative as it could be (Krishnan 2014).

In India, mechanically reproduced images continue to participate in the reality of the "objects" or personages depicted, and this participation, the active association of the image with its sacred source, helps to account for the nature, popularity and ubiquity of images in modern India (ibid.: 123).

The religious agency of these images is therefore not based on their form, that is as a cheap, printed, standardised poster, but on one hand on the sacred deity they are depicting and secondly, on their role on shrines as part of religious rituals. At the same time, they are members of the larger discourse and practices of Hinduism.

Although stone carvings are not mechanically reproduced in Mamallapuram, they are produced in large numbers and sold as commodities on the tourist market. For foreign tourists they can become religious or spiritual objects that are used for ritual purposes outside the context of India and Hindu religious traditions. If the sculpture industry in Mamallapuram created only big and heavy granite sculptures like the ones used in Hindu temples, only some foreign visitors would be able afford to buy them, and others would not be willing to go to the trouble of sending the statue to home. In theory it could also be possible that religious statues would be somehow sanctified to not be sold to those outside of the religion. The tourist carving industry in Mamallapuram thus applies to a large extent to that which Partha Mitter (2003) has written about in the context of printed images of Hindu deities in colonial India:

The mechanical reproduction of Hindu deities ushers in entirely new functions for these images... not previously envisaged in the case of temple sculptures or painted icons in temples... which were earlier confined to their regions in temples, pilgrim sites or homes as sacred icons, but not widely sold as commodities. Another important aspect of this is the mobility of these cult images: devotees do not now need to visit temples in order to view (darshan) them (11).

Thus, if the cheap prints of Hindu deities made the images of the gods and goddesses also available for the poorer sections of Hindu society, cheap and small statues have made the sculptural form of the deities also widely available to foreign tourists.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Partha Mitter (2003: 7) makes point here by noting that devotees no longer need to visit temples to see the deities for darshan. Although darshan means reciprocal sight in a ritual context and not only the "plain seeing" of the deities, it is still interesting to ask here whether the unrestricted viewing of deity images also has had an effect on the meaning of darshan for the devotees. It could be different to see a god or goddess only on certain dates, for a limited amount of time, in a temple setting and during a ceremony, to seeing the images everywhere on a daily basis and in mundane settings. As noted, Hindus make a difference between the statues in the shops and those in the shrines from a ritual perspective, and when it comes to statues they usually look different in these two settings. The statues in the shops are not dressed and adorned like in the temples. In addition, prints used for worship in the shrines are usually decorated with vermilion powder and flower garlands. These various decorative practices and placement of images in sacred spaces create a distance between the everyday, mundane and special, sacred contexts. Receiving darshan is also restricted to the ritual setting when the deities are considered to be awake and present to the worshippers. Yet, perhaps the need for creating this difference between the sacred and the mundane would be less if India had not developed into an "iconic society", Mitter argues (ibid.: 1). In addition to this, cheap images have changed home shrines by making them a part of almost every Hindu household, which in turn has altered the role of temple visits. Deities can now be viewed outside temples but at the same time temple gods and goddesses are considered to be more powerful than the ones residing at home shrines. According to this line of reasoning, a darshan received from a temple god or goddess is also more powerful than one from home (ibid.: 7). Here Mitter does not develop this argument about darshan any further and does not analyse any possible historical changes that may have taken place.

7.4 COMPLETING, DISTRIBUTING AND FEELING POWER: AGENCY OF HUMANS

One afternoon I was walking along the streets with a local painter towards his studio in Mamallapuram. We had just visited the workshop of one of the well-known stone carvers, and on our way back I asked the painter how he thought religious power comes to Hindu statues. We were just passing one of the temples in the town and we stopped as he pointed at the deity statues on the roof of the temple building. The painter asked me if I had seen those statues and said that they are not charged with power or energy in the same way as the sculptures inside the temple shrines. The reason for this was that those statues are not worshipped but serve mainly as decoration and religious symbols. Thus, they are not believed to be alive in the same sense as the deity sculptures in the shrines are. The painter suggested that I could think of the statues in the same way as mobile phones; if they are not charged regularly, eventually the power runs out. The same happens with deity sculptures unless pujas are performed regularly. Even the statues at shrines will eventually lose their power if they are not given any attention. These idols still remain sacred in the sense that they have been a subject of worship but they can be considered to have fallen asleep or the deities have left them due to lack of care and attention.

This example illustrates how deity statues are generally approached in Hindu belief. The statues are not automatically sacred objects based only on their iconography, but they first need to be awoken and then continuously worshipped so that their religious power stays active. A statue is a mundane object or a piece of stone in the context of stone carving until it is activated by puja ceremonies. From a religious perspective, puja therefore changes the ontological status of a sculpture as it becomes the embodiment of the divine during the ritual. In comparison, this Hindu approach contrasts for example with the case of Vietnamese goddess statues presented by Kendall et al. (2008). Although these statues also go through animation rituals, some people still see them more than “just statues” already beforehand and therefore require special treatment of the sculptures, such as not storing them on the floor and covering them with cloths.

This belief also helps stone carvers since in the process of carving, since statues are usually kept on the floor, often held with feet to keep them in place – feet are considered to be a dirty part in a human body – and sometimes statues break. Carvers can thus concentrate on the technical aspects of their work and do not need to worry that they would somehow disrespect the deities. This does not change the fact that stone carvers are expected to respect their work and traditional carving guidelines emphasise the importance of meditation and certain rituals, as described in Chapter 4. Although this guidance may not be followed in practice, a stone carver told me that he, for example, never drinks alcohol if he has to carve. This is not because he was afraid he would not be able to carve properly but because he respects his profession.

Continuous worshipping therefore has two main functions: firstly to awaken the statues, and secondly to keep them awake, active and powerful. Statues that are alive and potent with energy are important for those devotees who wish to approach the deities with their devotion and requests. Statues become gods and goddesses, who are agents that are believed to be able to influence the life of humans, such as grant wishes and heal illnesses. Deity statues are an avenue for the devotees to approach gods in a more direct manner than simply praying and praising something that is invisible to the eye. Some Hindus also believe that worshipping also enhances the power and agency of the deities. A Brahmin priest I interviewed expressed the matter in the following way:



Image 104: Adorned goddess sculptures in a temple courtyard in Mamallapuram

This logic is very easy. When I am always proud, you get energy. But if I always disgrace you, you get tired. The same logic applies to the temples.

In this quote, “being proud” translates to puja rituals that have an energising effect on the deities. Alternatively, a lack of pujas, expressed here as “disgracing”, results in “tiredness” of the deities when they are believed to lose their power or agency.⁴⁵

Here the agency of humans becomes an essential part of Hindu religious beliefs and practices. The religious power or agency of the statues is based on the actions or agency of humans. In Hindu temples, priests take care of the deity images and often perform elaborate puja ceremonies to them perceived here as gods and goddesses. In households, these rituals are more modest and are usually the responsibilities of the female members of the family. There is a reciprocal relationship between the deities and humans: they both have agency to influence one another and need each other.

According to Gell (1998), the agency of objects is always secondary to humans and it is attributed to them by human beings. The case of Hindu sculptures in a religious context is a perfect example of this logic. In rituals, stone carvings become recipients of human agency and as a result of this they acquire agency of their own. After becoming agents, they are believed to be able exercise their agency over humans. The relationship between humans and Hindu statues can also be analysed by using Latour’s ANT (2005) when we look at puja rituals as a network in which humans, statues and various puja elements such as water, fire, milk, incense, bells, flowers, mantras, etc. are also social actors with agencies. Only the puja ceremony gives a religious meaning and agency to the sculpture. It is also in these ritual contexts that human beings are

⁴⁵Some Hindus I spoke to said that gods are “all-powerful” and are not really dependent on any worshipping.

believed to be able to approach and interact with the deities in a very direct way, since the statues are then believed to be awake and alive, ready to receive the devotion and gifts of the worshippers, and in turn gift them with blessings and answered prayers. As previously noted, puja ceremonies have regional variations and also the materials that are used vary according to the availability, preferences and income of the devotee. The materials used are less significant than the presence of the devotee and an image of a god, in the form of a statue or a picture. Based on ANT humans and statues are then mediators, the meaningful actants in the network whose presence and action have the power to shape the workings of the whole network. Various puja materials then again have the role of intermediary, since although their presence is necessary, not all of them are simultaneously necessary and can also be replaced with different items.

In the context of agency and worshipping of Hindu deity images in an Indian village, Christopher Pinney uses the term “corpotherics”, which emphasises the engagement of the human body in aesthetic practices and the “sensory embrace of images” (Pinney 2001: 158).

Shifting the level of analysis from aesthetics (i.e. anaesthetics in Buck-Morss’s terms) to corpotherics discloses not a lack but a rich and complex praxis through which villagers articulate their eyes and bodies in relation to pictures. The “meaning” of the images lies in their “needs” – the necessity of worshipping them, in “corpotherics” rather than “anaesthetics” (ibid.: 161–162).

... (O)ne that springs from a corpotheric practice in which it is the devotee’s visual and bodily performances which contribute to the potential power – one might say completion – of the image. (ibid.: 167).

By corpotheric practices, Pinney refers to the puja rituals in which the body of the devotee is actively engaged through different sensory practices such as sight, sound and touch. What is interesting in the quotes above is the way in which Pinney suggests that worshipping and puja rituals complete the image. In a religious sense, they are not ready once the sculptor has finished them but only after the rituals have been performed. In other words, they require human agency in order to reach their complete religious meaning, and here Pinney emphasises the importance of bodily engagement in puja practices.

In *Art and Agency* (1998), Gell considers what he calls “a distributed person or personhood”, by which he refers to the agency of a person that can be transferred to objects not only through different actions but also through “parts” of the person.

... (P)ersons may be “distributed”, i.e. all their “parts” are not physically attached, but are distributed around the ambience... (106).

Gell deals the matter of distributed personhood in the context of sight and its meaning in Hindu rituals. He brings the notions of darshan and prasada into discussion (ibid.: 116). Gell sees both of these practices as ways of distributing and transferring divine agency to people through material entities, in this context through the image of the deity and offerings (Gell 1998: 116). Here, images of deities serve as representational and personal aspects of Hindu gods and goddesses rather than as transcendental and otherworldly things that would be difficult if not impossible to approach

and conceptualise. Therefore, their agency in this context, although essentially divine, is also person-like and comprehensible. The same applies to both iconic and aniconic idols, since even aniconic images are representational in the sense that the devotees know them to be certain deities in the context of the worship (ibid.: 99).

In darshan, sight plays the key role as it is a type of extension of the personhood of both the deity and the worshipper. Sight in this context can be viewed as an almost tactile, physical interaction that exercises the agency of both parties. As darshan is a reciprocal exchange of sight, the agent and patient relationships between the deity image and the worshipper are somewhat equal as both parties have both roles. Darshan is usually initiated by the devotee by going to the temple to see the deity; people go to “take” darshan rather than receive it. However, people may also feel that the deities are really looking at them rather than vice versa (ibid.: 118). Gell sees the reciprocal sight between the deity and the worshipper as being central to animation and subjectification of an image. Through seeing, a Hindu image ceases to be a mere image and becomes a living thing (ibid.: 118). Gell (1998) states:

The animacy and imputed subjectivity of the idol is not attained except by surmounting the stark difference between an inert image and a living being. How does this happen? As far as the Hindu material is concerned, the key to the process of animation seems, initially at least, to depend on the logic of looking and being seen. Imagistic devotion is a visual act (as opposed to prayer, etc.) and it is accomplished entirely by looking.” (ibid.: 118).

However, in my interviews in Mamallapuram, sight or darshan was rarely mentioned in the context of stone carving, apart from the fact that I was told the eye-opening ceremony of temple sculptures is very important. One reason for this could be that those



Image 105: Devotees looking at a deity in a temple shrine

carvings made for the tourist market already had their eyes opened, as it were. Also, I did not ask any of the interviewees directly about darshan – only if they thought statues could have any religious or spiritual power. All the Hindu stone carvers who believed in that also emphasised the point that the statues became alive only after puja ceremonies were performed. In the excerpt above, Gell argues that sight or darshan is the most important part of the animation process of the statues from inanimate statues to living gods. Based on my interviews with Mamallapuram stone carvers and a few other local people, I would argue that it is rather the puja ritual that is most important. The first puja also includes an eye-opening ceremony for the temple sculptures. Darshan is an important part of the puja rituals but its significance lies in the ritual context that has first awoken and pleased the deity and made it receptive and active towards the devotees.

Another important point that became apparent in my interviews was that whereas the stone carvers and other local people would stress the importance of puja in making the statues alive, none of the foreign tourists mentioned it. An American visitor I interviewed thought that statues can attain some type of “spiritual quality” when they have been worshipped, but he still did not think the idols have any spiritual power as such:

I personally think it's what you make out of it. I mean the statue as such as such, doesn't gain any spiritual power as such. At least not for me. But when I attribute power to it or maybe use it in a daily ritual or something, I imagine they can have something like a, how shall I say, a spiritual quality. But I think then it is really what you make of it. I mean I have one statue at a little altar at home. And this statue kind of became, you know, something spiritual for me.

During my interview I did not think to ask the American visitor to specify further what he means by the “spiritual quality”. We can only assume that it is an object with some type of spiritual meaning for the person in question, since he emphasised the fact that a statue is “what you make out of it” on two occasions. This expression again highlights the role of human agency. In addition, the American visitor mentions that he has a statue on his altar and it has become spiritual for him as a result of its placement. The view of the American visitor is somewhat similar to that of Jonathan Z. Smith (2005), who emphasises the point of emplacement:

Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains wholly ordinary) becomes significant, becomes “sacred” by simply being there. A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. From such a point of view, there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones. Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement (Smith 2005: 33).

Here Smith emphasises the point of placement of an object in a situation or a place that makes it different from mundane objects. But he also states that focused attention equally changes the status of an object from ordinary to sacred. What Smith calls “a highly marked way” in a religious context is a ritual during which the object is given attention, usually in a somewhat culturally defined and specific manner. Both placement and attention given to the objects point to the role of human agency that is needed in order to make an object religious or spiritual, or sacred in Smith's case. Also we can also approach places as actors that have their own agencies which in the

examples above define the status of an object. Following Latour's ANT (2005), the place itself such as a shrine or a temple, would be also a meaningful mediator in a network that includes humans and objects and aims to create religious meaning for the statues. If we removed the place from the network, it would alter the whole religious or spiritual experience of the other participants. Following Gell (1998), here the place is the agent and humans and objects patients that are affected by their emplacement.

Some other foreign visitors interviewed did say that they practised rituals in front of their statues that included elements of Hindu puja ceremonies. This would include the lighting of lamps, burning incense, offering flowers, singing, praying, meditating, etc. These rituals would be more about their personal happiness than serious devotion to the deities. A Spanish visitor said that she felt it lifted her mood and her day improved. A Swedish visitor said that he did not feel his rituals were religious but they had some personal meaning to him nevertheless. It also made him feel connected to India, where he had visited several times. In this sense the puja rituals had very different meanings for these foreigners compared to the Hindu views. Here the human agency was not targeted to give power and energy to the statues but rather to the people themselves. In addition, the statues were not seen as living gods but material participants in the puja rituals. The statues still had agency by being actors in the ritual context, which again could be viewed as a network as described above, but one could argue that their agency was considered to be less powerful compared to the Hindu ceremonies, in which statues are thought to be alive.

When we discuss the human agency and role of the rituals in making sculptures sacred, it is important to note that in the Hindu context the deities are not considered to be at the mercy of the worshippers, so to speak. Coomaraswamy emphasises the fact that there is what he calls an omnipresence in the images, and the rituals are more for the worshippers than for the gods and goddesses.

It should not be supposed that the deity, by invocation and dismissal, is made to come and go, for omnipresence does not move; these ceremonies are really projections of the worshippers' own mental attitude towards the image. By invocation he announces to himself his intention of using the image as a means of communion with the Angel; by dismissal he announces that his service has been completed, and that he no longer regards the image as a link between himself and the deity (Coomaraswamy 1992 [1934]: 136).

Thus, Coomaraswamy argues that rituals help the devotees to establish a relationship with the divine and work as a way to open the channel for communication. Image works here as a tool for the contact between the deity and the devotee, and the rituals serve as a way for the worshipper to become conscious of the fact that contact has been first established and then closed.

7.4.1 Personal feelings and imagination

Despite the importance of puja rituals in Hinduism, not all the Hindus I spoke to in Mamallapuram thought that statues had any particular spiritual or religious power. Some of them said that although that is generally thought and believed, at the end of the day it is all to do with the personal belief of the devotee. Here is an excerpt of an interview I had with stone carver Devaraj:

Q: You think in these statues there is some special power?

A: I don't know that is. Also you don't know. Who is, I don't know.

Q: You believe?

A: Because I believe. God is a... I think... I believe only one God. And Muslim, and Christian and Hindu. I don't know. But it only comes to one power. It is possible for the power of the god. Only one power. Because you believe for the Ganesh, that power Ganesh power. You believe for the Jesus, that power for the Jesus power. I believe for the Visnu power, that is for the... Only one power. But that is for I believe but that is for I don't know ... But I believe only one power, different for the face.

Q: Do you think the statues can have special power already before puja and praying or only after?

A: I believe, actually. That one, (points to a statue on a shelf) don't have it, maybe I keep it there (points to a shrine in the shop), I will make puja, it comes to power. This is my imagination.

For Devaraj, statues had religious power after he had placed them on his shrine and made puja to them, but still this was based on his belief and imagination. Yet, he acknowledged the fact that neither he nor anyone else could know if this was really true, and if there was some power in the carving, what type of power it would be; or "who is in the statue". Although he was a Hindu he believed that ultimately there was only one god that can have different expressions in different religious traditions. It was down to the person or the believer what god(s) she or he believed in and how to conceptualise divine power.

Stone carver Balan had the following view on the topic of the power of stone carvings:

You see one thing madam, the practical thing is that you cannot feel that. For example, if you take one African god in front of me, I don't feel anything, I feel like it is a toy, I feel like it is a sculpture or something. But when you are related with this, your life is related with this, you feel like it. Even I don't touch with my shoes with my statues. So I have the respect because I am a devotee of this. If you put one Jesus, I don't care. You understand the difference? When I went to France and in a chapel, a church everyone was watching the statue but I was watching the decorative things. You know because I am not used to doing this. It is the same problem for everybody. But if they say to you there is some power, don't believe this. It belongs to you.

Balan did not believe that the statues had power in them, but he still had respect for them because of his religious orientation and cultural upbringing, which made him more closely connected to Hinduism than any other religion. Whereas Devaraj stressed the importance of personal belief, for Balan it was the personal feelings of a devotee that defined how one would approach religious statues. He claimed that only cultural relatedness to a certain religious tradition would grant feelings of closeness to a certain religious statue. Without the feelings of familiarity, one would not be able to attain any religious sentiments towards objects that portray gods. These views correspond with Meyer (2008: 129), who has noted that:

The process of forming subjects, and their incorporation into social formations, it should be noted, does not occur via coercion, but through a longstanding process of socialization into particular religious traditions. It is exactly by working on the body and the senses that sensational forms are naturalized as conveyors of truth and embodied religious subjects.

Any power or agency that may be attributed to the statues ultimately comes from the devotee herself and is founded on her feelings and beliefs.

The example provided by Balan may be approached as an encounter between two different actor-networks (Latour 2005) that constitute the framework for religious sentiments. The Hindu religion is a network with agents such as temples, priests, statues, puja materials and so on, and these are what he is familiar with and has participated in as a devotee. Involvement with this network and exposure to these agencies create feelings that he is not able to experience with a different religious network. Christianity as a network comprises for example churches, priests, the Bible, statues of Jesus and saints, and so on. When visiting a Christian church a statue of Jesus would exercise its agency on Balan by causing feelings of indifference instead of affection created by familiarity.

An Austrian visitor I interviewed had similar views to Balan when it came to the power within the statues, although here it is important to note that she was a follower of Buddhism, which can have a different take on the meaning of statues compared to Hinduism:

Q: Is this Buddha that you have, would you use for more than a decoration, does it have any spiritual power for you apart from being an image?

A: In a way it is more because I made it by myself, and it is a symbol like Buddhism. Buddhism does not mean there is any god who will guide you, who will project you. Buddhism first means go in yourself and find out what is in yourself. So you have every answer in yourself, not only the question. And you have the power in yourself and you will find everything in yourself, you don't have to walk around, you don't need any statue, any church, nothing. Only sit down and relax and go down in yourself and you will find the answers. So it is a little thing I made and I made it by myself and that is the reason or symbol for what Buddhism means.



Image 106: Two Ganesh statues in a stone carving shop. The one on the left is in its original form, whereas the one on the right has been oiled and decorated with flowers, yellow turmeric paste and red vermillion powder. The decorated statue has been used for worship in the shop.

As a follower of Buddhism, the object had symbolic value for her, but at the same time it reminded her that according to Buddhism all the power can be found within the person him or herself. Therefore, according to Buddhism, objects are not needed but they can assist in this journey due to their symbolic and representational value. An interesting aspect to this conversation was also the fact that this visitor had carved the Buddha statue herself in one of the stone carving shops in Mamallapuram, which made the object special for her. It therefore also had a personal meaning in addition to the value as a depiction of Buddha.

In these examples of the interviews I had with Devaraj, Balaji and the Austrian visitor, we can see that the religious or spiritual status of the stone carvings is also based on the personal beliefs, feelings and thinking of the humans that were in a relationship with the statues. Thus, they also bring forth the human agency as the source of the spiritual or religious meaning that can be attributed to the statues, as Gell (1998) argues. It is worth noting that whereas the statue of Buddha symbolises the importance of personal human agency in Buddhist life philosophy, one can also argue here that the statue itself actually had powerful agency simply by strongly denying its religious power or agency in the Buddhist context. At the same time, the Austrian visitor had made the statue herself, which again points to her own agency as the creator of the piece. This also enhanced its importance to her and highlights her personal agency.

7.4.2 Stone carving as energy work

The last aspect of the human agency that I want to present here takes us back to the beginning of sculpture making. This was the idea of the stone carver as a transmitter of his own energy to the statues and it appeared in my interviews with both stone carvers and foreign visitors. For example, stone carver Selvam stated the following:

When I create statues in a spiritual way, I must give spiritual power, support and energy to the people. For example, when people buy Buddhas and Ganeshas and they use them for praying, the statues are more powerful if he as a maker has already put lot of energy in them while making the statues.

Also stone carver Murugan brought up similar issues:

Q: Do you think the statues can have some special powers?

A: Yeah. Sometimes when you work with same statue, we feel something, oh OK, it is something, we are getting energy. So we feel even when we are making. Sometimes we don't feel anything.

Q: So sometimes you feel like...?

A: We feel something, we are making energy work.

Q: Energy work.

A: Yes. Sometimes I get, give energy to the statues.

Equally, a British visitor interviewed had similar views to Selvam and Murugan:

Well it's an inanimate object, isn't it? I mean it's not organic in that sense but... Yeah, but I would like to think that parts of the person who carved this, some of the energy has gone into it. Definitely. Giving it form... So maybe it has retained some of the carver's energy.

Here the human agency is present in the carving work as a transmitter of the carver's own energy, but it is also sometimes experienced as a channel for spiritual energy to come through and become a part of the stone carving they are working on, as Murugan stated. Many other stone carvers also said that they thought that simply the fact that they do carving work by hand means that their personal energy becomes part of the stone carving. This idea is also expressed in the view of the British tourist, who thought that as a result of this otherwise inanimate, inorganic stone, the carving would in fact have some energy in it. Whether this personal energy is considered to be spiritual in nature or just human energy (that may also be considered to be spiritual depending on one's beliefs) does not become clear in this answer. However, for Selvam and Murugan the energy they refer to is divine, spiritual energy that they as stone carvers channel to the statues. Murugan relates how he sometimes feels this energy and sometimes does not. It is something that he cannot control and therefore has an agency of its own, understood here as divine power. He as a stone carver is only the transmitter of the energy but its source is not in himself. Selvam says that carvings must be made in a "spiritual way". By this he refers to traditional stone carving practices that state that the carvers should meditate and pray to the deities before commencing their work and also think of the gods while carving their images. Here, the stone carvers use their own agency when doing carving work, but at the same time they think that another, divine and spiritual agency is present in the process.

Selvam also believes that the stone carvers' energy, which gets transmitted to the statues, also enhances the power of the sculptures when used for praying. Therefore, it is possible to think that the some agency or power of humans is already present in the carvings before any puja has been made but only the ritual practices complete the meaning of the statue, as Pinney argued (2001).

7.5 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In the introduction to this chapter, four different levels of animation of the deity statues were presented, based on the listings by Dalrymple (2009) and Davis (1997). These were the materiality, the work of the sculptor, ritual worshipping, and the beliefs of the devotee. The following statement by stone carver Selvam summarises all these different aspects and also the themes covered in this chapter. In addition, he also differentiates between the spiritual objects and the tourist carvings:

Q: Is there a difference between the tourist objects and spiritual objects?

A: Yes, spiritual objects are granite, tourist objects like red marble are less spiritual. For temple objects and puja objects, people make special puja, give them special energy, they become alive. Before that they have natural energy from the Mother Earth and from the sculptors' work. Statues can help you, but they cannot do it for you. You need to believe in the religious ideas and energy. Gods cannot do and give you things directly, you need to do the work yourself.

Statues thus become laden with energy in various stages, considered as agencies in this chapter. Starting from Mother Earth, which energises the stone, a statue is then amplified by the energy of the stone carver through his carving. Consecration fuses the statue with the deity's energy, and continuous pujas by the priests and devotees keep the statue's energy levels high, so to speak. The personal belief and faith of the devotee is equally important; one has to believe in all of this for it to work. However, Selvam's view emphasises the responsibility of the devotee in terms of the course of their life. Although sculptures are seen as embodiments of the deities and full of power, at the end of the day their agency cannot replace the agency of the devotee when it comes to living their life.

In this chapter the factors presented above were analysed as agencies and were divided into three different yet overlapping and interconnected categories: materiality, statues and humans. As Selvam's statement explains, the religious or spiritual meaning of a stone carving in the local context is a combination of all these agencies. Local Hindu people would also differentiate ritual sculptures from tourist statues primarily based on stones, but also on the iconography of the statue. Foreign tourists then again did not make this categorisation and would also use tourist carvings in their ritual practices that combined elements of Hinduism or Buddhism and personal beliefs. Unlike in the discussions with arts and crafts, the foreign people interviewed did not find seriality of motifs and repeated Hindu iconography problematic when it came to the religious status of stone carvings.

Stone carvings may also be defined as animistic based on the material agency, but also as idols because of their agency as objects that are worshipped and believed to be alive. Equally, many of the issues discussed in this chapter could be approached from the perspective of theories of affect that emphasise the importance of emotional responses that may be embodied reactions (see for example Wetherell 2012). Winter (2007: 42–43) calls for the study of affective power of art in addition to the study of agency in line with Gell's theory (1998):

... (O)ne must distinguish between agency ascribed by the analyst of a given work from agency marked by cultural practice, and even grammar, within the originating culture, if we are to understand the historical role(s) accorded to artwork.

Winter notes this problem, particularly in an art historical context when studying ancient Mesopotamian art, as there is often a difference between the folk notions and experiences and those inscribed by analysts. For this purpose, she finds the concept of affect useful as it takes into consideration people's different, personal experiences. Ahonen (2010) has emphasised the importance of affective feelings of the devotees when encountering the popular South Indian guru, Mata Amritanandamayi, commonly known as Amma, "the hugging mother". Her informants describe feelings of "energy and vibrations" that are similar to the way some foreign tourists in Mamallapuram described their reactions when touching stone carvings. Equally, Pinney's (2001) notion of "corporetics" and sensory encounters with sculptures in puja ceremonies, for example in darshan, highlight the bodily sensations of devotees. At the same time, the statue itself is seen as the body of the divine, and various practices during puja concentrate on caring for the "body" of the deity. Stone carvers Balaji and Devaraj emphasised the emotional responses that they had with Hindu statues as opposed to other types of sculptures. Taylor (2005: 206) parallels the idea of affect with Indian rasa theory, which is the intricate theory of Indian aesthetics, founded in

the 5th century theory and practice of dance and theatre that has since spread also to other forms of visual arts. The idea of *rasa* is to cause affective responses in the viewers and has also extended to religious experiences. Therefore, the idea of affect is also an inherent part of the religious Hindu sculpture tradition from the Indian perspective.

When discussing the religious and spiritual meaning of stone carvings in Mamallapuram, it is also important to note that since the vast majority of stone carvings available in Mamallapuram depict Hindu gods and goddesses, including statues of Buddha, tourists who want to buy stone carvings often have just a few alternatives unless they place an order for something different. This does not mean that all the foreign visitors who purchase statues will buy them for devotional purposes. For many foreigners, statues are a part of an unfamiliar religion and culture but at the same time are typical representations of Indian culture and traditional craft, which makes stone carvings ideal souvenirs. As Paine notes, "(B)y no means all religious objects are 'holy' or 'sacred'; some may merely throw light on religion, and help to tell its story." (2013: 6).

8 STONE CARVING AND SOME LATER DEVELOPMENTS

This thesis is based on field research carried out in Mamallapuram between 2009 and 2012, and as a result the findings are also tied to the observations and information gained within that particular period. Certain changes have already taken place in the Mamallapuram stone carving scene since finishing my official field research. I will cover some of them in this section as these changes offer some interesting points to consider. But as they were not part of the timeframe of my official fieldwork and I have not been able to fully investigate them, I have kept them separate from the main body of work.

I visited Mamallapuram during a holiday in February 2014 and one of the stone carvers I had previously interviewed told me how rules regarding sending stone statues overseas had changed drastically after my previous visit in 2012. Whereas at that time stone carvers were able to send small and medium-sized stone carvings overseas via the post office in Mamallapuram at relatively low cost, now they have had to start using expensive courier companies for all types of stone carvings. I was told that the reason for this change was the theft of several valuable antique Hindu deity idols from temples in Tamil Nadu. These stolen statues were then smuggled overseas and sold on to museums at very high costs. (cf. Srivathsan 2013a, 2013b). Idols have been discovered in places such as the US, Australia and Singapore, and Indian authorities have been able to retrieve some of them and return them to their origins (Rajaram 2014). Stealing of Indian antiquities including Tamil Nadu is not a new phenomenon as it happened regularly during the colonial era and also after (cf. Singh 1999, 179–189; Davi, 1997). Still the recent cases have made authorities to take action. As a result, the government of Tamil Nadu has issued rules that require the detailed declaration of any statues sent outside India. Although these stolen sculptures were made of bronze rather than stone, these new rules also apply to stone carvings. As a result, the cost of sending the statues had also become many times higher and also requires filling in several forms. The stone carver told me that for example he had sold a statue for 15,000 rupees (around 230 euros) and sending it to a European country would now cost him about 12,000 rupees (around 190 euros), which was almost as much as the statue itself. Previously, the cost of sending it through post office would only have been about 2,000 rupees (around 30 euro).

This new change was greatly lamented by stone carvers, as it hampered their work and business. Easy parcel procedures and relatively cheap postal costs have been an asset for the carvers when trying to sell statues for foreign tourists who were unable or unwilling to carry carvings with them while travelling in India. As sending costs are added to carving costs, the prices of the stone carvings have become much higher if sending is required. As a result of these changes, the carver I spoke with said that the best option for buyers is to take the stone carvings with them in their luggage, as this would still not require any special declarations at customs.

Of course, it is difficult to say whether these rules will continue to be in place in the future. The carver I spoke to thought that the Tamil Nadu government should find a way to make postage cheaper, since the state government should look after its carvers. After all, a vibrant stone carving industry is an integral part of the allure of Mamallapuram, along with the ancient monuments that attract visitors. For many, earning a

living from stone carving was difficult before these new rules were implemented and this causes carver further financial challenges.

It is also possible that changes such as this would mean that stone carvers would concentrate only on small and large sculptures at the expense of the medium-sized ones that are too heavy to carry around but expensive to send via courier. Large statues that cannot be lifted by hand and require special handling had been sent through courier companies before, so this new rule does not have an impact on that type of business. Small pieces then again are easy to carry around, even when traveling. On my last visit in February 2014 I did not notice any changes in the carving market regarding the size of the sculptures. After all, statues of all sizes can still be purchased by people for whom a higher sending price is not an obstacle. Also, local Indian customers do not require postage and Indian dealers who buy statues to be sold overseas take care of the sending themselves, so this does not impact the carvers directly. The future will show whether these rules will change and if not, whether it has a noticeable effect on the size of the statues being made.

Another more recent development is that it seems some parties have become worried that stone carving in Mamallapuram is in fact in decline. On 26 July 2015, The Times of India newspaper's Chennai edition published a story entitled "Reviving Pallava Art Through Sculptor's Kids" (Sajul 2015). The article said that a three-day workshop had been organised in the village of Kadambadi,⁴⁶ just outside Mamallapuram, to teach 30 school children "heritage art". The idea was to train the children of sculptors and artisans in order to revive the ancient Pallava sculpture tradition, as many of their parents had moved on to other occupations or did not follow the traditional Pallava style of sculpting. The workshop was organised by a local NGO "Friends of Heritage Sites" with the help of the Tamil Nadu Handicrafts Development Corporation. Prior to the workshop the children had gone to see the monuments in Mamallapuram in order to gain a better understanding of traditional Pallava art and in the workshop they worked with clay, paper and paint. The article quotes one of the participants, P. Sherudhin: P. Sherudhin, who studies in Class 6, said he wanted to create something new. "My father always repeated what he made. I want to change this. I am going to take art seriously. This workshop helped a lot," he said

My father always repeated what he made. I want to change this. I am going to take art seriously. This workshop helped a lot.

Also, adult sculptor K. Murugan was quoted in the paper, sharing his view of the initiative:

We created curios to survive. We love our tradition. It's because of lack of sponsorship and encouragement, we take up other jobs. We are happy that our children are being trained to help revive the traditional art.

The article also says that a similar workshop had been organised a year before for the adult sculptors and had been well received. This second workshop was targeted at their children.

⁴⁶The village of Kadambadi is located around 6km from Mamallapuram and there are several granite carving workshops near the village and along the road between Mamallapuram and Kadambadi.

The statements of the student and the carver correspond with the findings of my research. The student said that his father “repeated what he made”. This follows the views of many of the foreign tourists and also some of the stone carvers interviewed, as discussed in Chapter 7. The sculptor in the article then again stated that carvers have had to turn to other jobs due to “lack of sponsorship and encouragement.” Equally, the workshop organisers had been worried about the diminishing number of carvers due to the attraction of alternative occupations. Another reason for this has also been the lack of work in the carving sector. In fact, during my visit in February 2015, one of the carvers working for the granite industry told me that orders in that sector have diminished by around 40 per cent over the last 1–2 years. He was not sure why this had happened but assumed that one reason could be the global recession.

What is interesting with regard to this newspaper article was that the aim of these two workshops has been to revive the old Pallava carving tradition. Another worry for the workshops organisers had been that even the current carvers do not follow the Pallava style. Although there is no direct link between the Pallava carving tradition and the present carving day industry, Pallava style has been highly valued in an art historical perspective and used as a context, even for the present-day carving industry, and especially in tourism discourses. Therefore, it is not surprising that it has been taken as an example of “great tradition” that should be aspired to and “revived”, as the article suggests. However, what remains unclear in this context is how carvers both old and new should follow Pallava tradition without repeating what has been already made. What does “reviving Pallava tradition” exactly mean? Perhaps the biggest difference between the present-day carvings and the Pallava monuments is that the latter used a greater level of naturalism when portraying figures. Pallava sculptures have also been described as “slim”, “elegant”, “noble” and “lyrical” (cf. Beck, 2006). However, it would be difficult to define exactly what this means or deny that many of these attributes can also characterise the present-day works. The special aura around Pallava carvings is partly an art historical construction, but it is also based on admiration for the skills of the carvers when working with natural rocks as their material. Translating these ideals directly into the present-day carving industry is therefore problematic.

Another factor that is mentioned in the newspaper article is that stone carvers make “curios to survive” but also that “we love our tradition”, as told by the carver in the story. Whether he is referring to the Pallava monuments or stone carving in general as a continuation of traditional Indian Hindu stone carving is unclear. Even if the Pallava tradition were to somehow be revived in the future, the question that then arises is who would buy these artworks? Would they lose their allure if they became part of the tourist trade, just like the present-day sculptures? Or would they offer better sources of income for the carvers because of the new themes, stylistic variations and higher level of artistic qualities, for example? The article does not provide answers to these questions.

These new developments in Mamallapuram also impact the agency relationships that have been discussed in this thesis. We can say that new agents have entered the network that distort the relationships and hierarchies between various existing agents. Those include the stolen idols and the Tamil Nadu government, which has been imposing new rules regarding the postage of the statues. One of the possible consequences of this would be that carvers would start to concentrate on only making statues of certain sizes, such as those that are very small and therefore easy to carry, or very big that need to be sent via courier in any case. Would this then raise the rarity

value of the medium-sized statues and consequently make them appear as art? After all, one of the foreign tourists already stated in the questionnaire that according to him some of the larger sculptures were art. Then again, if different changes were to put many carvers out of business and the number of stone carvings on sale in Mamallapuram were to drop drastically, perhaps the aura of serial production would become distorted. Stone carvers would no longer appear to be making “quantity art” in the eyes of the foreign tourists as defined in the previous chapters.

Another possible scenario is that carvers will start to make several different types of statues in the future, for example by making replicas of the famous monuments. If certain statues were defined as particular “Pallava sculptures”, they could become a new statue type that could be labelled differently to the other carvings. Those making them could become an exclusive group of “Pallava carvers”. This would create different stylistic niches within the market and could cause new forms of hierarchies between the sculptures and between their makers. Would Pallava-style carvings be classified and valued differently from other carvings in terms of their status as art or crafts or as religious and spiritual items? There are different possible future scenarios, should the carvers start to venture in this direction.

I have partly followed the lives of some of my stone carver informants after finishing my fieldwork in 2012. Some of them I have kept in touch with over the phone and the internet, and I also met a few during my later visits to Mamallapuram between 2015 and 2014. Most of them were still continuing with their stone carving work as before, but changes had taken place. These changes were a result of different developments in their lives, partly due to financial as well as other personal reasons. For example, one of the carvers had sold his shop and become a guest house owner, three carvers had met European partners and had left India, one had retired, and another previously working as a labourer had now opened up his own shop. Another carver had given up his own shop and started working for someone else, and finally changed that to a job in agricultural retail. Yet another stone carver had started to make surfboards (see Perur 2015).

In fact, surfing has been gaining popularity in Mamallapuram, especially among the young male adults in the fishing community, as well as children, including some girls. I noted this in 2015, and even more during subsequent visits in July-August 2016 and February 2017. Surfing has not only become a popular pastime but also a way to earn a living by teaching surfing to Indian and foreign tourists alike. There are a couple of shops in Mamallapuram that rent surfboards and at least one of them also teaches surfing with a qualified, local instructor. In addition, Mamallapuram has its very own surfboard workshop founded by an Australian expatriate, which specialises in making surfboards suited for Indian conditions. Local Indian newspapers as well as some online portals and magazines, both domestic and international, have dedicated space to the topic of surfing in Mamallapuram (cf. Wiese 2013; Prince Mathews 2015; Perur 2015; Rashmika 2015; Raqshan 2015). These stories have focused on the benefits of surfing, for example as a popular part-time activity that in turn reduces alcohol consumption among local youngsters and creates better awareness of the environmental factors through beach cleaning campaigns that the surfers have organised (cf. Kannadasan 2015; Nath 2017). Mamallapuram has also been promoted as one of the best places to surf in India (cf. Hashwanth 2015). Since 2011 an annual surfing festival has taken place on certain years that attracts visitors and surfers from other parts of India and the rest of the world (cf. *The Outdoor Journal* 2015). The festival also includes other activities such as skateboarding, games and evening entertainment.

As of 2017, surfing has become a more and more visible part of Mamallapuram's tourism industry. It has a lot of potential and will inevitably attract more tourists, both foreign and Indian, if the scene keeps developing. Also, after my visit in 2017 a scuba diving centre was opened in Mamallapuram, run by people coming from outside of Mamallapuram. Whereas local surfers mostly come from fishing families who have rarely been involved in stone carving (with a few exceptions), surfing has not become a substitute for carving in Mamallapuram but for fishing in these particular families. It is still possible that more local people from various different backgrounds will take up surfing in the future. For fishermen, engaging in surfing can be somewhat easier due to their already close relationship with the sea and their experiences of riding the waves on boats.

As noted in this thesis, so far stone carving has been popular almost solely among foreign visitors; surfing, however, also attracts Indian visitors. Foreigners are usually used to swimming in the sea, whereas for many Indian tourists surfing can be the first experience of being in the water.

Perhaps water sports are also considered to be more fashionable and exciting for young people and stone carving does not have the same type of appeal. But should surfing attract more foreign tourists to Mamallapuram, these visitors may also be interested in buying sculptures or trying stone carving as another type of leisure activity. Also, one of the attractions of scuba diving in Mamallapuram is to see the remains of the ancient stone monuments that are now under the sea, thus also creating a link to stone carving. Surfing and stone carving may thus be mutually beneficial and add to the general allure of Mamallapuram in the eyes of both local and foreign tourists.

9 CONCLUSION

The main aims of this research have been twofold. For one, it presents an ethnographic account of some of the key characteristics of the current stone carving industry in the town Mamallapuram, South India, concentrating on the part of the carving industry that makes and sells statues for the tourist market. This research has looked at the stone carvers who work in the tourist market: their educational background and training, social status, financial situation and interactions with foreign tourists. It presented features of the stone carvings made and sold at the tourist market and how they possibly differ from the traditional, religious Hindu carvings designed for worship. This part of stone carving in Mamallapuram has been approached as a form of “tourist art”, acknowledging the wide range of connotations attached to term. Primarily tourist art has been defined here as an art or craft form that is made for an outside audience that may not be familiar with the culture and aesthetic criteria of the producer’s society (Graburn 1976, 8; Cohen 1993a: 1). Often tourist arts are made to be souvenirs for foreign tourists and other travellers. However, in the context of Mamallapuram, the use of this definition is not straightforward as stone carvings are purchased equally by Indian tourists as souvenirs or for religious use. Therefore, the term has been used here more as a discourse rather than as a definite label, and it refers to the close relationship between stone carving and tourism in general in Mamallapuram. In Mamallapuram, people talked about “tourist carvings” rather than “tourist art”, and by this they referred to the pieces that are were from soft stones and marbles to the tourist market for decoration as opposed to the granite carvings designed for religious use.

Secondly, this research has aimed to find out how people coming from different cultural and geographical backgrounds understand, interpret and use carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram in the context of categories of art and crafts as well as religious and spiritual objects. Here, the focus has been on the views of stone carvers as representatives of local culture and foreign tourists as those coming from elsewhere. All of the foreign tourists interviewed were from so-called “Western countries”, which in this research refers to people coming from Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The research investigated whether these two groups of people define stone carving on one hand as arts or crafts, and on the other hand as religious or spiritual objects. Arts and crafts were treated here as distinct categories, whereas religion and spirituality were approached as complementary notions. However, none of these terms were considered to be mutually exclusive, and thus stone carvings could also be defined as both arts and crafts by the respondents.

These themes were chosen as a focus of research because of the nature of the stone carvings in Mamallapuram: most stone carvings represented different Hindu deities and thus have strong religious connotations. Equally, Hindu sculpture-making is considered to be a traditional art and craft form in India, thus linking stone carving to the notion of art. This thesis has focused on statues that portray different Hindu deities, as they were the most common statue type made and sold in Mamallapuram.

Before commencing the research, an underlying assumption was that people coming from different cultural backgrounds would possibly interpret and use the stone carvings produced in Mamallapuram differently. It assumed that respondents’ understanding of the notions of art and crafts and religious and spiritual objects would reflect at least to some extent the Western and Indian understandings of the

terms that share similarities but also differences. However, these concepts can also be interpreted differently on a personal level, and various lay understandings of the concepts may not correspond with academic art theories or orthodox religious beliefs. Therefore, in this thesis the main purpose has not been to make cultural comparisons per se, although they have been part of the research. Instead, the research has aimed to discover what the main factors are based on which respondents have made their definitions. These factors have been approached here as different agencies. The notion of agency is used as an analytical tool following the theory of art and agency by Alfred Gell (1998) and actor-network theory (ANT) by Bruno Latour (2005). Different agents and the agency networks they create have been based on the views and interpretations of the respondents. Agency has been understood in this thesis as the capacity to make causal differences to one's milieu and as a quality that can be attributed to both animate and inanimate entities, such as stone carvings. Intentionality is not a prerequisite for agency, although it can be a part of it. The most important marker of agency is that it becomes visible through social action. Agency is therefore always relational rather than personal and it requires interaction with other agents. Most importantly, agency makes the meaning-making processes that define stone carvings as arts and/or crafts and as religious and spiritual objects visible. The research has shown that people coming from different cultural backgrounds interpreted and used stone carvings in different ways in the context of these categories but they also shared some viewpoints.

This study can be located as a part of the research continuum of so-called Western encounters with Indian arts throughout different eras, as outlined in Chapter 3. Hindu sculptures as tourist arts are a more recent addition to these complex histories. Previous studies on tourist arts in the context of India have been scarce despite the huge tourism industry in the country (cf. Maduro 1976a; 1976b; Kumar 1988; Bundgaard 1996a, 1996b, 1999b, 1999a, 1999c). Previous tourist arts studies have not analysed ethnographic material through networks of agencies as understood by Gell (1998) and Latour (2005). Agency as a tool of analysis can reveal the interconnectedness of different human and non-human actors in a complex social phenomenon, such as so-called tourist arts. Stone carving in Mamallapuram has been a subject of research but mostly in the archaeological and art historical context and concentrating on the historical rock carved monuments that are now protected by UNESCO (cf. Sivaramamurti 1955; Lockwood et al. 1974; Lockwood 1993; Sivamurti 1992; Parker 2001; Rabe 2001; Beck 2006; Nagaswamy 2008). Only a few studies in the present day context have included the current carving industry in their scope (Parker 1987; 2009; Mosteller 1990; Chhiber 2005; Hannam and Diekmann 2011; Procopiou, H. et al. 2013). None of these studies deal exclusively with soft stone carving in Mamallapuram or present an in-depth ethnographic analysis of the subject. Also, this study offers a more recent addition to the histories of foreigners visiting Mamallapuram, as outlined in Chapter 2. The aim of this research has therefore been to fill the void in all these contexts.

Stone carvers in Mamallapuram

Stone carving in Mamallapuram has become an occupational category that is available for people from all different social backgrounds. Whereas historically stone carving has been primarily a caste-based occupational group and carvers have belonged to the artisan caste groups commonly known as Viswakarma, today stone carvers come from

various caste backgrounds. The main reason for this in the context of Mamallapuram has been the founding of the Government College of Traditional Sculpture and Architecture in the town in 1957, which has made training in stone carving possible for all. What needs to be stressed is the fact that only the founding of the college officially started the recent stone carving industry in Mamallapuram. The town is famous as a historical stone carving centre because of the rock-carved monuments commissioned by South Indian Pallava Kings around 600–800 CD and is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. However, stone carving has not taken place in Mamallapuram throughout history, at least not on the same scale. The government of Tamil Nadu wished to revive the carving tradition in Mamallapuram and it has only been since the establishment of the college that stone carving has become one of the main occupations in the town. People could also train as stone carvers through the apprenticeship system in one of the workshops. Entering the industry was easy and did not require any specific skills or qualifications in advance. A college education creates a division between carvers in terms of their knowledge and traditional carving method skills, but it does not determine the career and the financial success of a stone carver. All the stone carvers in Mamallapuram were male and belonged to different age groups. Some of them owned their own carving units and shops whereas others worked as labour. Their income varied greatly. Usually stone carvers who owned granite units earned more than those producing soft stone carvings for the tourist market.

Granite and soft stone carving: two carving industry strands

The majority of stone carvings made and sold in Mamallapuram depicted the plethora of deities of the Hindu pantheon but there were different strands within the carving industry that served partly different clientele. The main categories were granite carving and soft stone carving, and these differences in material also defined the carving procedures, size and use of the statues to a great extent. Granite carvings were made with the help of electric tools and could be very large as granite does not permit very intricate, small-sized work. Granite was also the main material used for temple construction and for deity sculptures in Hindu temples because of its religious properties based on Hindu beliefs. In turn, different soft stones were used for small statues that in Mamallapuram were produced in most cases entirely by hand and were made for decoration and souvenirs for the tourist market. Soft stones were not believed to possess any “power” in a religious sense.

However, these two strands of the carving industry also overlapped, since soft stone carvings were sometimes used in Hindu household altars. In addition, granite carvings were made for decoration but since they were large and very heavy pieces, they did not make ideal souvenirs. These sometimes monumental-sized granite carvings were mostly purchased by Indian customers as decorative elements for gardens. Small soft stone carvings were equally bought by Indian and foreign tourists in Mamallapuram, thus making the concept of tourist art problematic, if the objects are understood mainly to be sold for people outside the producer’s culture (Graburn 1976: 8; Cohen 1993a: 1). At the same time, in Mamallapuram many stone carvers sold soft stone statues almost exclusively to foreign tourists, since their shops were located in the areas favoured by foreign visitors.

Granite work and soft stone carving were also characterised by different types of working procedures. In addition to granite carving involving machinery and soft

stones carved entirely by hand with chisels and hammers, there were also differences in the way the proportions of the statues were defined. Religious carvings should be made based on the forms and measurements outlined by the traditional carver's manual based on Shilpa Shastras, an ancient collection of texts that define the iconography and correct proportions of religious Hindu sculptures. According to the carvers interviewed, granite statues made for temples have to be made based on these traditional guidelines in order to ensure that their appearance is pleasing to the eye and also to the deities that they portray. This is important from the Hindu perspective, which considers the sculpture as the body of the god or goddess on earth through which the deity may interact with devotees. As soft stone carvings were made only for decoration and as souvenirs, they did not require the same level of rigidity as temple sculptures. Soft stone carvers claimed that they still followed the traditional rules and measurements to some extent, even when making tourist statues, as otherwise the statues would not "look good". Equally, soft stone carvers sometimes combined traditional Hindu iconography in novel ways in order to create new types of statues and attract customers.

This division between granite and soft stone carving also influences carvers' skills. Granite carvers had to learn how to use electric tools and they needed to know the complex proportion system based on traditional carving guidelines. Soft stone carvers then again practised intricate handicraft work and interpreted the rules more loosely. Also, granite and soft stones as materials are different and need to be handled accordingly. As the stone carving industry was based on division of labour, this means that not all carvers worked on the same production levels. The basic dressing of the stones requires different skills than drawing the image, detailing, or polishing procedures. Therefore, not all granite carvers were experts in the proportion systems and not all soft stone carvers were able to carve the most intricate features. Depending on their educational and training background, stone carvers usually started with the simple procedures and worked towards mastering the more challenging operations. Most stone carvers I encountered during the research had been working either in the granite industry or soft stone carving, and they had rarely changed between the two streams during their career.

Stone carving and international tourism

Stone carving industry in Mamallapuram has developed alongside international tourism. Both domestic and foreign tourists come to Mamallapuram to see the monuments but also to buy stone carvings. In tourism discourses, such as in popular international guidebooks and the Tamil Nadu government's tourism brochures, Mamallapuram has been portrayed as a historical stone carving town: both as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and as a home of living stone craft. This backdrop of the ancient monuments in the town has created a feeling of a historical continuum of stone carving, from the era of the ancient rock-carved monuments to the present day. It has also made the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram seem like a living example of the ancient carving tradition. As noted, in reality stone carving in Mamallapuram has been a result of the founding of the sculpture college in the town, which has led to an increase in stone carvers and carving units in Mamallapuram. This in turn has benefited from the popularity of Mamallapuram as a tourist attraction. A special tourist carving industry has developed alongside temple architecture and sculpture production.

In the context of the tourist market in Mamallapuram, it can be argued that tourists have become a new type of patron to the stone carvers, replacing traditional, historical or religious patronage systems such as temples, kings and noblemen as supporters and buyers of their work. Direct encounters with foreign visitors in the carving shops in Mamallapuram create contacts and friendships that may result in increased carving purchases. Several foreign tourists interviewed in this research mentioned “friendship with carvers” as one criterion for buying a sculpture from a particular carving shop. Some of the soft stone carvers were aware of this potential and make an effort to make friends with foreign visitors. Stone carvers at the tourist market also taught carving to visitors, which equally influences people’s decisions to make purchases and their willingness to pay a higher price for the statues after experiencing first-hand the effort that is required to produce them. Foreign tourists also give stone carvers orders for pieces that were not images of Hindu deities or any of the other typical carving types. This gave carvers an opportunity to try out different types of statues, which challenges their skills and enables them to learn new things. Many carvers interviewed mentioned that they enjoyed this type of work despite the difficulties that different motifs may pose. Mostly carvers only created statues of Hindu deities, as they argued that they sell the better than any novel images.

International tourism was the primary source of income for those carvers producing soft stone statues. Although stone carving was a good source of livelihood for many, others struggled to make a living from it. There were too many carvers and statues on the market in relation to demand. Heavy competition, dependence on foreign visitors, and seasonal tourism with annual fluctuations created challenges for the units concentrating on souvenir sales. Especially on Othavadai Street, stone carvers depended primarily on foreign visitors, which made them financially vulnerable. Granite carvers were not affected by tourism patterns, and carvers in the Five Ratha Street and Shore Temple areas enjoyed steady annual business because of domestic tourists. However, the whole stone carving industry suffers from heavy competition and rising production costs. Because of this, several carvers have shifted to alternative employment and do not necessarily encourage their children to take up carving as a profession.

Stone carving as arts and crafts

Stone carvers and foreign tourists assigned stone carvings in a somewhat different way in the context of categories of arts and crafts. What became most apparent was the fact that Western understanding of the difference between the notions of “art” and “craft” was far from clear for both groups of respondents. While foreign visitors pointed out the various different factors and attributes of sculptures on which they based their views, for the majority of the stone carvers a distinction between these categories was unclear. The views of stone carvers reflect the fact that in the context of traditional Indian Hindu stone carving, the difference between arts and crafts is non-existent. In the local context, sculpture-making was essentially seen as a category of its own and traditionally serves the needs of Hindu religion. Art in turn was often defined as paintings in the interviews. This view perhaps reflects the knowledge that there exists a contemporary, urban upper-class art scene that concentrates on galleries and other art institutions and but does not include traditional Hindu stone carving. Stone carvers were labelled as “artisans” on their identity cards issued by government, which entitles them to free health care up to a certain limit and possibility to apply

for loans. Even in this context, the label itself does not play a role and stone carvers do not have to define themselves or their work as arts or crafts in any other situation. Categories of arts and crafts thus were irrelevant in terms of their work, which was essentially defined as stone carving or sculpting. Nevertheless, exposure to both Western and modern Indian art forms have created categories of “modern art” and “natural carvings” in the stone carving market in Mamallapuram. Modern art was a term used to refer abstract, graphic and aniconic statues, whereas natural carvings were statues of different animals or depictions of humans. In comparison, Hindu sculptures were defined as “traditional” sculptures. Stone carvers would use these terms instead of the labels “arts” and “crafts” when defining different types of carvings, since they had meaning for them in the context of their work and business.

Foreign visitors had a different take on the subject and would assign carvings either as arts or crafts or both, depending on the way they understood these terms. Lay understanding of the concepts varied and different attributes were pointed out as the reason why stone carvings would be defined in either was. The outflow of the statues and the skills of the carvers were important factors, as well as stone carving as a historical tradition. However, the most common theme that arose from the interviews in relation to the concept of art was the notion of creativity. Many respondents defined art as an expression of an artist’s creativity and saw that stone carvings lacked this quality. The main reason for this was the fact that stone carvings were seen as copies of the same images, thus giving the impression of serial production. This apparent lack of creativity was also the reason why many foreign visitors defined stone carvings as crafts rather than art.

This view contradicts the ideals of traditional religious Hindu stone carving, which requires carvers to follow certain iconography, forms and measurements and leaves the carver with less room to experiment with different ideas. In this sense, two different understandings of art would come face-to-face, as foreign visitors would interpret stone carvings based on their understanding of art. However, some stone carvers would also share this view and equally define pieces based on novel images as art. In turn, some foreign visitors would state that stone carvings were examples of a different art form that was defined by religion or a different cultural logic.

This issue also raises the question of how creativity is understood. Creativity may be defined as the production of something completely new but equally as experimenting with existing elements and new ways through improvisation (Liep 2001; Hallam and Ingold 2007). If stone carving in Mamallapuram is approached through this latter interpretation, it becomes apparent that creativity is very much part of it. The stone carving industry, which produces items for the tourist market in Mamallapuram, has developed its own characteristics that separate tourist carvings to some extent from traditional Hindu stone sculptures. Many stone carvers make soft stone statues that portray popular Hindu deities in novel ways. Some examples of this are variations of the elephant-headed god Ganesh that may be depicted playing cricket or typing on a computer. Buddha heads have also been used as a model to make heads of Hindu gods, such as Shiva or Vishnu. In addition, carvers occasionally create statues completely outside of Hindu iconography, although mostly only based on the orders of foreign visitors. Novel Hindu statue styles can also be linked to temporary festival statues produced all over India for various Hindu festivals. These statues often combine traditional iconography with contemporary themes.

It is difficult to say how literally stone carvers in the past have followed the traditional guidelines of traditional Hindu sculpture making. In fact, art historians that

have studied the measurements in Indian sculptures have suggested that perhaps Shilpa Shastras have never been followed religiously (Gail 1989; Mosteller 1989, 1990; Parker 1987, 1992a, 2003b). Therefore, it has been suggested that rather than as absolute manuals, they should be seen as relative guidelines to local practices (Parker 1987:128). This argument makes sense if we remember that stone is a natural and also surprising material that requires improvisation from the carver in order to master it. Carving work is always a negotiation between the materials, the carving process and iconography, and creating two identical pieces is impossible. In this sense, stone carving is a very creative affair in its entirety if we do not judge creativity based on the end results alone, as argued by Hallam and Ingold (2007).

From the perspective of the agency theories of Alfred Gell (1998) and Bruno Latour (2005), in Mamallapuram stone carvers, stones, statues, tourists and Hindu shrines were the main agents that interacted in the carving market and formed networks that produced meanings for stone carvings in the eyes of the tourists. The way stone carvings were interpreted as arts, crafts or both was a result of the presence, practices and interactions of these different agents. The agency of stone carvers was most crucial since their creativity and skills – or the lack of them – were attributed to the stone carvings, and was the basis of defining statues as arts or crafts. The size and quality of the statues were other important factors for some respondents that point to the agency of stone carvers but equally that of statues as being able to captivate the viewers. Stone carvings also had agency as material, physical objects that in large numbers created and reinforced the image of serial production. Although a closer inspection of statues reveals that there were differences between them in terms of their size, stone materials, iconography and quality of work, carvings nevertheless resembled each other sufficiently so that they created an impression that carvers only copy existing images. One key element was the reference to Hinduism, since tourists were usually not able to make a distinction between traditional iconography and new variations. It was also true that not all carvers were willing to experiment with novel styles, thus making claims about copying appropriate.

Hindu religious belief, stone carving as art in the local context, and tourism may also be approached as agency networks that were equally able to influence respondents' views of the statues. Some defined stone carvings as art because they saw current statues as part of Hindu religion or with a different logic than Western understanding of art. For others, tourism in Mamallapuram made the statues appear as craft, since they were made as souvenirs. Placing stone carvings as part of these networks also changed their definition as arts or crafts. Noting these agencies is important in order to understand the way art and craft items can be interpreted cross-cultural, as they reveal the various influences and factors that play a part in the meaning-making processes.

Stone carvings as religious and spiritual objects

Despite its close relationship with international tourism, the majority of the stone carving industry in Mamallapuram creates Hindu temples and sculptures from granite stone for religious purposes, purchased by Indian customers from different parts of the country as well as overseas. Although this thesis has focused on carvings made and sold on the tourist market, the religious or spiritual meaning of soft stone statues in the local context was tied to the meaning of granite statues in local religious beliefs.

The production methods of granite Hindu stone sculptures have changed in recent decades, following the introduction of electric tools in the 1990s, but the religious meaning and use value of the statues in the ritual Hindu context has not changed. New production methods have allowed faster and cheaper carving practices. Also, one may consider that these granite statues were still made partly by hand, since the drills and grinders were hand-operated, and part of the work was still made by using non-electric tools such as chisels and hammers. The local people interviewed considered granite to be the most "powerful" stone in the Hindu ritual context and thus the best material for making statues aimed for worship. Granite stone was believed to transmit worshippers' prayers to the divine, and it also contains "positive energy" in itself. As an architectural construction material in temples, granite echoes prayers and mantras that are repeated, thus multiplying the vibrations of positive energy in those spaces. This energy was considered to be healing and fortifying.

These beliefs attached to granite created a clear difference between granite sculptures and soft stone statues from a religious perspective in the local context. Although soft stone statues equally portrayed Hindu gods and goddesses, their religious value was less significant and were therefore rarely used for ritual purposes. Few people have soft stone statues in their home shrines. Granite statues were rarely made in small sizes, as the stone has rough qualities that does not support very intricate work. Large statues then again were not considered suitable for private worship based on religious beliefs. As a result, most people who want to have a statue in their puja room would have brass statues, a material considered almost as powerful as granite. However, few people would still have soft stone sculptures on their shrines, as the religious value of a statue was equally dependent on regular worship. Only rituals would "awaken" the sculpture and turn it into a living deity. Even granite statues were believed to be only stone unless they became subject to worship, which would activate their full potential. Statues also required continuous worshipping so that they do not to lose their potency as religious agents.

Foreign tourists did not make a distinction between different stone materials and they did not emphasise the importance of worshipping when discussing the religious or spiritual value of stone carvings. Some foreign visitors who come to India are interested in Hinduism or aspects of it. These visitors may also purchase stone carvings for religious or spiritual purposes, even if they are not followers of Hinduism. For them, the religious meaning of statues was founded primarily on the image; the god or goddess the statue portrays. In turn, for some foreign visitors, stone as a material was more important but they did not prefer granite and instead felt "positive, healing energy" coming from soft stones such as marble.

Equally, local Hindu people in Mamallapuram identified deities based on the images and for worship purposes sculptures had to portray deities in their traditional forms, as identified by religious carving manuals and what they were used to seeing in temples. The main distinction here between the local and foreign tourists was the fact that foreign visitors would not necessarily be aware of the traditional iconography and would be happy to also use different representations of deities in their religious or spiritual rituals. One example of this was a statue that combined the Hindu god Shiva and Buddha, which is not part of traditional Hindu iconography.

Statues of Buddha are also a popular item of sale on the tourist market in Mamallapuram and several foreign visitors who were interviewed had purchased soft stone Buddha sculptures and used them for meditation. Buddhism was not commonly practised in Mamallapuram and these images are not used in Hindu rituals. Compared

to Hindu statues, in Buddhism statues also have a different significance as they are often seen as an aid for meditation rather than an object of worship.

The different approaches to stone carvings as religious and spiritual objects show the presence of various agencies in the way people attributed meaning to statues. Different stone materials had agency that was hierarchical: granite was considered to be the most powerful from the Hindu perspective, but soft stones could also be seen as powerful agents. Equally, statues as living representations of deities had almost human-like agency. They could be prayed to and darshan, the reciprocal and benevolent eye contact between a deity and a devotee, is considered to be an important aspect of Hinduism, although this was rarely mentioned in the interviews in Mamallapuram. Accounts by foreign tourists equally showed a belief in the agency of a certain deity, in the way the presence of particular statues had been able to influence the course of events. In these instances, the agency of statues was not based on them only as material objects but as the deity they represented. The statue itself was not irrelevant, since it served as the body of a god or goddess and was identified based on the image it depicted. Agency of devotees was another pivotal type of agency, as it was required to awaken the statues by performing rituals and through worship. Although stone carvers and foreign visitors interpreted stone carvings differently from the religious or spiritual point of view, they thus also shared various beliefs when it came to the power or agency of statues.

All these different agencies interact in a ritual context, where stones and images as part of statues connect with humans through their material and visual qualities. In these situations, different agencies may be viewed as hierarchical, as suggested by Gell (1998) and Latour (2005), as they exercise their agency on each participant or agent in various degrees. In Hindu temples, priests are conductors of ceremonies, but in home shrines Hindu families or foreign tourists perform their ceremonies based on personal preferences. Deity statues are prayed to and worshipped, but it may be believed that in return gods and goddesses bless devotees via their material and visual representations. Religious rituals may be also approached as a network of different actors that all possess different levels of power or agency in the ceremonial context. These are, for example, a Hindu temple building made from granite stone, a shrine with a granite statue, a priest, devotees and puja materials such as flowers and fruits. In a Hindu religious ritual all these different elements interact and have an important role. Participation in this network gives a sculpture a different meaning and ontological status from a religious perspective, than an object of sale in a stone carving shop.

Continuity and change in the carving market in Mamallapuram

There were several unofficial and official discourses that surrounded stone carving in Mamallapuram. On one hand, stone carving was highly valued as a traditional art/craft form that is needed for the practices of the Hindu religion, as well as being a tourist attraction that provides business and income for hundreds of families. Stone carving has been widely used in official tourism promotion schemes and presented as a part of the local historical heritage and Indian Hindu culture. This is further emphasised by the fact that a group of monuments in Mamallapuram is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site – an internationally highly-valued recognition. Also, local people in Mamallapuram and Tamil Nadu in general were proud of it. On the

other hand, despite this public appreciation and respect towards stone carving in the official discourses, it became evident through my research that many of the stone carvers struggled to make ends meet and felt that they could receive more help from the government.

Due to these problems, it is difficult to predict the future of stone carving in Mamallapuram as the existing carvers grow older and may not be replaced by the younger generation as has been the case in the past. The tourist carving market is affected by fluctuations in the number, purchasing power and interest of foreign visitors. In addition, the granite industry, which has in general been somewhat immune to changes in foreign tourism, has also seen a recent decline in business as mentioned in chapter 8. On the whole, the state of Tamil Nadu still remains as one of the most popular tourist destination in India so tourism itself does not show signs of decline at the moment (cf. Mathurl 2017).

It is likely that stone carving will continue in the town but the number of carvers and workshop will decline to better correspond to the level of competition and the needs of the market. Whereas many young people from stone carving families will undoubtedly choose a different profession given the opportunity of the financial means for studying, some of them become stone carvers out of personal interests or lack of other career options. Government initiatives can play a role in the way stone carving is encouraged and financially supported, but short-term sponsorships and loans do not offer a viable long-term solution for those who are not able to make enough money in the market.

There are plenty of opportunities for stone carvers to develop motifs and techniques in order to produce new types of statues that would refresh the existing stylistic system. However, I am inclined to think – as well as hope – that the style of the carvings will not drastically change, at least in the near future, and at least some of them will continue to reflect the Hindu carving tradition and be based on Hindu iconography. Part of this is of course to do with the practices in Hindu rituals and the role of the sculptures in them. Also, it is most likely that foreign visitors who are attracted to the material representations of the Hinduism will always come to India. These tourists will be happy to own so called traditional items through which they can reflect and explore their personal spiritual belief systems, as well as their travel and relationship with India, even once they have returned home.

If the current stone carving industry in Mamallapuram is compared to the historical descriptions of the craft, certain differences are noticeable. Local people in Mamallapuram claimed that stone carving today has become much more of a business than a traditional art and craft form. Although there were many skilled and qualified carvers in Mamallapuram who produce high-quality statues with finely executed, detailed work, many people said that money, success and competition are the main features that define stone carving market today. This applies to both the granite and the soft stone carving industry. Stone carvers themselves argued that today sculptures are made and produced mainly with profit in mind and this has also affected in quality of carvings. Although statues have not lost their significance in the religious context, it was claimed that monetary concerns were the main factors that influenced today's carving industry in Mamallapuram. As stone carver Balan put it:

But one thing, madam, I am telling you openly, it is for living. What we are doing is for living. Not to sacrifice our soul. That's the truth.

These arguments raise the question of whether changes are a negative thing. After all, traditions are not static and unchanging – in fact they are in a constant state of flux as they need to adjust to the rest of the life and conditions around them (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 7). It is also natural that stone carving traditions have to meet the requirements of the modern world. Old patronage systems have been replaced by the capitalist market that stone carvers need to adjust to. New skills are needed to carve with electric tools and novel ideas to create new types of sculptures that would interest foreign tourists in a saturated carving market. Some of the international travel guides described Mamallapuram as a place where a visitor would hear the sounds of chisels hitting stone from dawn till dusk. This was also noted by some of the visitors I spoke to who had visited Mamallapuram since decades. You could still hear chiselling on Othavadai Streets but in other areas such as Shore Temple Road and Five Ratha Street, the dominant sound was the loud noise from electric saws, drills and grinders. Chatterjee (2008: 335) has noted that changes are an inevitable part of art traditions and our scholarly focus should be on the new adaptations:

... (W)e must, I believe, stay away from the conservationist instinct of preserving the "dying arts and crafts." This effort has its place, and it may even make some difference to the real world of artisans and craftspeople. But it is not, I think, consistent with the method of investigating how disciplines of traditional artistic production have succeeded or failed to reinvent their practices to cope with the changing conditions of popular culture.

Stone carving in Mamallapuram makes a particularly interesting focus for ethnographic study since it has already developed its own particular features that differentiate it from the Hindu stone carvings accounted in existing art historical research. It remains to be seen in what direction the carving industry will develop in the future. As presented in this thesis, the uncertain nature of tourism as a steady source of income may force many carvers to look for alternative forms of employment. Future research may address these changes. Equally, the concept of agency offers an opportunity for future exploration, as existing agency relations may shift and new agents can enter the scene. These can be changes in the number and origin of tourists and their preferences, social and economic changes in Mamallapuram, and practicalities that affect stone carvers work, as discussed in Chapter 8. Agency as a tool of analysis enables us to map out both the human and non-human entities and meaning-making processes that take place in social relations and processes that are part of our lives.

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SANNI SIVONEN

This thesis focuses on stone carving and tourist arts in Mamallapuram, South India. Local people and foreign tourists interpreted and used Hindu deity carvings made and sold on the Mamallapuram tourist market in partly different ways, in the context of categories of art and craft, as well as religious and spiritual objects. These themes are analysed by following the theories of agency, in which agency is attributed to both human and non-human material entities.



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