Folk religion in Hinduism can be loosely defined as non-brahmin and non-Vedic worship of village deities by different caste groups. In Tamilnadu, folk religious practices are characterised by vibrant festivities involving votive offerings, animal sacrifices, storytelling events, the procession of deities and trance occurrences. They are also intimately related to ballads and narratives sung or performed during ceremonial functions, describing the birth and growth of the deities and relating folk deities to classical Hindu Gods such as Viṣṇu or Śiva. In Tamilnadu, folk deities such as Aiyanār, Maturai Vīraṇ, and Kāṭtavarāyan are referred to as guardian deities and are also worshipped as caste or clan deity. Others, such as Sutalaimāṭasāmi and Pachaiamman are regarded as burial ground goddesses. After delineating the general features of Tamil folk religious practices, I will present ethnographic details of a festival involving Aiyanār and some aspects regarding Sutalaimāṭasāmi to elaborate how gender and caste boundaries work in their contexts and permeate folk religious practices.
Caste and Gender in Folk Religious Practices of Tamilnadu

Gastvortrag von
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