

Myths and beliefs of the Kišta

Jyri Lehtinen

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This document collects short texts concerning the beliefs and world views of the Kišta and more broadly the people inhabiting the region surrounding the Tenni sound. It will also include short myths relating to the discussed themes.

1 The structure of the world

Throughout the Tenni region the world is understood to consist of three main layers. These are the upper, the middle and the lower world. Both the upper and the lower worlds can be divided into an equal number of sub layers, depending on the particular tradition, but this finer structure has no central mythological meaning.

The upper world is associated with the sky and it is the location of celestial bodies as well as the world creating and preserving forces and is connected with the cosmic order. The lower world is more chaotic and the spirits inhabiting it represent less predictable though more easily approachable forces. The lower world is also the location of the dwelling of the dead where a shaman may visit to ask for advice from the ancestors. Between the upper and lower worlds is the middle world which is the layer inhabited by humans. Sometimes the middle world is divided into two parallel planes, one of which is the material every day world and the other the plane of the spirits inhabiting the middle world. Typically this division is not made, however, and the spirits of the middle world are seen to inhabit the same plane as the material world, only keeping themselves mostly invisible.

The sky is seen to rest on top of the earth supported by six equally spaced pillars on its edges so that one of them lies directly to the south and the opposite directly to the north. In the middle it is supported by a tall mountain located at the centre of the world. There is also typically described to be a tall tree or a pillar on the top of the mountain. The tree is usually seen as a conifer but it can also be a birch when the

centre of the world is associated to the possession of knowledge. Both the tree and the pillar are commonly said to be made from metal.

The world mountain, tree and pillar are paths from the middle world to the upper world. Correspondingly, their roots or bases are seen as paths to the lower world. On the other hand, the lower world is more easily accessible than the upper world and it can be entered through all kinds of holes in the ground or by descending under water. As an element water is connected to the dwelling of the dead and if this is distinguished from the rest of the lower world, it is entered through water while other places in the lower world are entered through holes on dry ground.

2 Conception of souls

The most typical view of souls among the Kišta is that each living being has two of them, the spirit *timma* and the memory *jerön*. *Timma* represents the life force which is found in everything living while *jerön* is connected to the memory and consciousness. *Timma* is an immortal spirit and lives quite separated from the material world. Before the birth it finds itself a body and settles to it, giving it life as it does so. Since it nevertheless has difficulty to have a close contact with its surroundings, it creates the *jerön* as its companion to observe the world and interact with it. *Jerön* is also responsible for the consciousness and is the more developed and independent the stronger the consciousness of the being is. Passive beings like plants have a very weakly developed *jerön* while on humans it is particularly strong and independent.

Moreover, an undifferentiated primal *timma* is understood to permeate through the whole world, meaning that life force can be found in everything. This must not be confused, however, with the view that inanimate objects can also have separate master spirits. These are independent and conscious spirits that settle into inanimate objects and may function as helper spirits. Master spirits may also inhabit certain living things like trees despite these being animate already on their own.

In death the *timma* and *jerön* separate from each other but continue both their existence. After separating from the body, will the *timma* typically seek a new connection with the material world which more or less resembles its previous life. It may also try to create itself a new *jerön* without a material body and continue its life as a spirit being. The old *jerön*, on the other hand, will usually descend to the realm of the dead where it will stay permanently. It might alternatively be so attached to the world that it does not want to let go of it. In this case it clings to the *timma* even after the death and remains on the middle world as a ghost. Ghosts can be very harmful to whomever encounters them. The surest way to get rid of them is to try sending their *jerön* to the

lower world and letting their *timma* free.

A *jerön* that has passed to the realm of the dead has no independent life of its own any more but it still carries all the memories and wisdom it has gathered during its life. A shaman visiting the lower world may meet it and ask counsel from it. It is also considered possible to create idols which achieve a more permanent, although much weaker, connection to the *jerön* of a dead ancestor for the purposes of asking advice. Even during the life will the *timma* and *jerön* at times lose their close connection with the body. A weakened connection between the body and *timma* is understood as a factor in illnesses. When curing a sick person, is strengthening the connection between their body and *timma* thus always a part of the treatment. On the other hand, dreams, visions and trance states are understood as the *jerön* either temporarily separating from the body or becoming sensitive to the spirit world.

The *timma* is not considered an indivisible unit but rather an individuated part of the universal life force. It is thus possible for it to divide into multiple parts or to merge into another *timma*. It may also be able to completely lose its identity and dissolve into the undifferentiated primal *timma* from which it originates. The concept of an individuated *timma* is somewhat problematic but it is necessary since also the *timma* is able to carry some influences from one life to another independently of the *jerön*.

Each human being is also considered to possess a shadow spirit *šelke* which either precedes or follows them but never makes itself visible except for moments when the *timma* is close to detaching from the body. It might be either a helping or a disturbing force but usually it is regarded with a reservation because of its role as a sign of coming death. It should still be treated with respect so that it would not start being harmful for its bearer. The *šelke* is sometimes paralleled with the *timma* and *jerön* and counted as the third soul. Usually it is understood as a separate spirit, though, which has a specially close relation to its bearer.