

HINDU FESTIVALS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari district is a land of colourful festivals, which is situated in the southern most part of Indian sub-continent. Its extreme length was 174 miles and extreme breadth was 75 miles. It was one of the most picturesque areas of India. The people of this area belonged to different castes. Most of the people of this kingdom belonged to Hinduism, Christianity and Muslims also formed a major portion of the population. It has a long history and tradition behind them. The major festivals of Kanyakumari district with National character are Deepavali. All the others have local and regional characters with Hindu origin. Kanyakumari district is situated in the southern tip of the Peninsular India. Kanyakumari plays a vital role in the socio-economic life of the people. In Kanyakumari, three seas merge which symbolizes unity. Moreover it is a place of pilgrimage. Pilgrims appear to have kept alive the link between north and south India. Once, this district was a part of Travancore. It was merged with Tamil Nadu on 1st November 1956.

Key Words : Kanyakumari District, Saiva Festivals, Vaishnava Festivals, Thirukarthigai, Margali vila, Arattu, Teppotsawam, Car Festival, Kodai Festival, Vishu, Shivratri, Gohulashtami, Vriscikavilaku, Sratha Festival, Vaikunda Ekadasi, Deepavali, Onam, Vavubali Festival, Navaratri.

Introduction:

People of Kanyakumari used to give more importance to the religions. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are the important religions in Kanyakumari district. Majority of the people tag on Hinduism. Most of the Hindu temples in Kanyakumari district are historical. Saivism and Vaishnavism are very popular in the district. Hinduism profited considerably through the extensions of Saivites and Vaisnavites alike. The rituals and Saivism and Vaishnavism were such as commanded the approval of the Agams.

Hinduism is the predominant religion in Kanyakumari district. Saivism is the most popular sect. Siva is worshipped in different appellations such as Mahadeva, Samba, Eswara, Digambara and Ardhanarishwara by the Hindus of Kanyakumari district. Some of the notable centres of Siva

worship are Suchindrum, Bhoothapandi, Parakkai, Vadiveeswaram, Thirumalai, Arumanai, Thirparappu, Thikkurichi and Thiruppanticode.

Vishnu, next in importance in the Hindu pantheon is the God of love and humanity, the preserver of virtue and the punisher of evil. He is also extensively worshipped by the Hindus. The chief temples dedicated to Vishnu are many, of which perhaps the most is the Puravaseri Vishnu temple. The Vishnu temple in Koochapidaram is of great sanctity and is very old. Thiruppathisaram, Krishnancoil and Thiruvattar are the chief centres of Vishnu worship.

In most of the temples dedicated to Siva, there is always an image of his consort Parvathi or Durga consecrated for worship. The goddess Durga is worshipped in different localities under different manifestations. In Kanyakumari district she is worshipped under the name of Bhagavathi. Her presence in a village is to protect the people from epidemic and other disasters and from the evil influence of the devils.

Saiva Festivals

i. Thirukarthigai

Karthigai festival is conducted in the Siva Temples. It is celebrated in the Tamil month of Karthigai (October-November). It is also known as Thirukarthigai festival. It is celebrated on the full moon day. The temple premises are very deep lighted with the traditional earthen lamps. This festival is mentioned in inscriptions as vrischikavilakku.

ii. Margali vila

This festival is mentioned in the Sangam poems. During this period the women bath in cold water and practised ritual fasting. It has been suggested that the time of this festival seems to have undergone change.

iii. Arattu

Arattu is also another festival in the Siva temples. Normally it is celebrated in the last day of the temple fair. The main deity is taken to the river or sea nearby for the

holy immersion. The main deity is well decorated and taken around as a procession to all important streets of the village before coming back to the temple. The devotees worship the Lord Siva deity by liberal offering.

iv. Teppotsavam

In the month of Chithirai the Teppotsavam or floating festival takes place after the Arattu. The floating festival conducted on the 10th night of annual festival lasts from about 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the next morning. The images of Shiva and Parvathi are placed in a decorated wooden frame and taken as procession at 3 rounds within the tank. Finally a Diparathana is conducted for the deities in the centre of the tank. In the case of Avani Utsavam it is the only Arattu which is celebrated. The Avani Arattu is doubtless and grand ceremony.

v. Car Festival

In Kanyakumari District Car festival is celebrated in many temples. Among them Suchindram Car festival is well-known one. It is celebrated in the month of Markali attract a large crowd. It is a custom among the people of Kanyakumari that every newly married couple should visit the temple and witness the festival is celebrated in the 9th day is the most important day at the annual festival.

vi. Kodai Festival

Kodai festival was celebrated in the month of kumbam. It is celebrated in the amman temples in Kanyakumari district. It usually falls on the last Tuesday at the month. On every Friday a traditional ceremony called Valia Padukkai is conducted. On Tuesday night another ceremony called Odukku Puja is conducted.

vii. Vishu

The Malayalam New Year Day is known as Vishu. It is celebrated by the large people of Kanyakumari district. It falls in the month of April-May. It is common belief that

whatever one sees first on that morning will influence their fortune for the whole year. The most important ceremony connected with Vishu is the Kanikandal which is literally means the first sight. On the previous night to the Vishu day they make arrangements to kanikandal ceremony which is a bell metal vessel called uruli filled with raw rice, gold ornaments and karantham a folded newly washed cloth, a mirror, a cucumber, a coconut, a jack fruit and some mangoes are neatly arranged in a conspicuous part of the house and yellow flowers of Konnai tree are spread all over. The day is observed by a large number of Hindus by having darshan of their favourite deity in some of the famous temples instead of seeing vishukani at home.

viii. Shivratri

Mahasivratri or the great night of Siva is celebrated by the Hindus in the month of Kumbham (February-March). It is supposed to commemorate the day on which Lord Shiva consumed the deadly poison to save the world from destruction. On this occasion people spend whole night in prayer and meditation of shiva without any thought of food and sleep and offer bilwa leaves to the Sivalinga.

Sivalaya Ottam on Sivaratri day is sacred to Shivalayas in Kanyakumari district. On Shivarathri devotees wear saffron robes and uttering the words Govinda Gopala start from Tirumala and finish their marathon at Nattalam Siva temple covering nearly miles within twenty four hours.

Vaishnava Festivals

The Vishnu temples vaishnavism flourished from a very early date. Many shrine erected in memory of Vishnu are many in this district. The chief centres of Vishnu temples are Thiruvattar, Parakkai, Parvathipuram, Suchindram, Puravaseri, Thiruvithancode, Krishnancoil, Thirupathisaram and Kochapidaram.

The analysis of various festival conducted in Vishnu temples reveal a very important fact that ceremonies in Vishnu temples are almost alike in all District.

i. Gokulashtami

Lord Krishna the 8th incarnation of Vishnu was born on this day at midnight on a full moon day at Mathura. This festival is celebrated in the month of August-September every year throughout the district in all Vishnu Temples especially in Krishna Temples with great enthusiasm devotees of Vishnu celebrate this day. The temples and houses are decorated. Devotees observe fast devotee their time in rectifying Bhagavata purana and Gita and singing devotional songs in praise of the lord. After midnight prasadam is distributed among pilgrims.

ii. Vriscikavilakku Festival

Vriscikavilakku is considered to be a favourite festival for Srikrishna. Padmasomhita a medieval Sanskrit text book states that this festival at Krishna is celebrated on the full moon day in the month of Karthika. On that day lamps are hit in hundred and thousands on wall porches and towers. This festival also can be traced back to the early part of the Sangam age.

iii. Sradha Festival

Another rare festival conducted in the Vishnu temples of Kanyakumari district is Sradha. Though a simple function, Sradha involves some prerequisites to be done carefully. The person who want perform Sradha should refrain from taking rice three time the previous day. He can take it once whatever takes should be taken only after the morning bath. The person who comes for Sradha has to take a purificatory bath after which he enters the temple wearing a new and washed cloth dipped in water. He has to wear it in the style of Panchakatcham. The person sits on an altar inside the temple facing the deity Parasurama. Women also come for the observance of Sradha.

iv. Vaikunda Ekadasi

Generally, Ekadasi is a sacred day to Vishnu. It is celebrated both in the day and bright foot-night in every month of the year. Devotees of Lord Vishnu observe fasting and non-sleeping. In the early morning of the next day the devotees go to temple and after worship. There is a special entrance to the lord's presence in all important Vaishnava temples. It is called Swarga Vasal (Gate way to Heaven) and is generally kept closed all through the year. It is opened for the devotees for darshan on the morning of Ekadasi. The entry of devotees through that gateway signifies entry into Vaikunta itself.

v. Deepavali

Deepavali is celebrated all over the district as the festival of lights. It is mainly celebrated by the Hindus. It falls on the proceeding day of the new moon in the Thulam(October-November). It is supposed to commemorate the destruction of the Demon God, Narakasura by Sri Krishna. It lasts for two days that is the 13th and 14th of the dark half of Karthika according to some, or the 14th or 15th according to others. On this day people dress as their best go around to greeting their friends and exchange gifts.

vi. Onam

Onam is one of the important festivals of this district. It falls in the month of Chingam (August-September). It is a harvest festival. There are several legends reading its origin. The most important days of the Onam festival are Utratam and Tiruvonam days. On the day of Thiruvonam a grand feast is held in every home. The people of Kanyakumari made Onam a unique festival of their own. The celebration Onam keeps unity among the people.

vii. Vavubali Festival

Vavubali is one of the important festival celebrated every year by the people. It is celebrated on the day of Adi Amavasai. It is celebrated in a grand manner on the day of Adi Amavasai. On that day on the river bank of the Kuzhithurai Thamaraparani river in Vilavancode taluk of Kanyakumari district.

viii. Navaratri

Navaratri is celebrated by the Hindus. It is called Dasara in Karnataka and Kali Puja in Bengal. The festival is dedicated to Devi the Devine mother. It is celebrated in the month of September- October. The festival is observed for nine days primarily as Saraswathi Puja. Goddess Saraswathi is worshipped as the Goddess of learning.

Kanyakumari district is a thickly populated area and its population according to the census of 2011 was 34,63,899. People of Kanyakumari district followed Hinduism, Christianity and Islam as the Major religious faith. Hinduism is very popular among them. According to the census of 2011 the Hindus are about 60 percent of the total population. An analysis of the main Hindu, Christian and Muslim festival shows that in spite of the diversities and differences that mark the various celebrations there is still an underlying unity in them. There are several features, which are common to these festivals.

Eg. Musical concerts, Dances, Kathaprasangams, Religious discourses and Fireworks etc. The Christian festival at Kottar St. Xavier church has become a tremendous success because of the visits by a section of the Hindu pilgrims. Similarly, during the car festival at suchindram people belonging to all religious harmony and communal unity that have characterized the life of the people of Kanyakumari district through the centuries and have become an essential part of Tamil culture.

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