

JALIKKATTU- A HEROIC SPORT AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH MARIAMMAN TEMPLE AT NARTHTHAMALAI IN PUDUKKOTTAI DISTRICT

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Introduction

Tamil culture is classified into two different characters. One is heroism and another one is love (romantic life). The classic Sangam poem describes the life of the people in these two aspects. (ic) Love and heroic war. In the early period the heroic sport Jallikattu was associated with the love and selection of a bride groom for a virgin girl. Sangam literature Mullaikali elaborately describes the life of a cattle raiding society called Ayar.(Cattle keepers). The Tamil land was divided into four different geographical sections.(ie) Kurunji (Hilly tracts) Mullai (forest tracts) Marutham (wetland area) and Neythal (sea shore area) by Tholkappiyar.¹ Later on in Sillappathikaram, the first Tamil Epic introduces the fifth land mass as Palai. It describes

“Mullaiyum Kurunjiyum Muraimayil thirunthu
Nalliyalbu Illanthu Nadunku thuyar uruthu
Palaiyen pathor Padiman kollum”.²

So, according to Sillappathikaram, Palai land mass was a combination of Mullai and Kurunji tracts which had a deserted outlook. In these five land masses Mullai land was the dwelling place for cattle Keepers (i.e.) Ay community. Their life was completely depend upon cattle's and so even the girls and boys of that group play with only the cattle. The cattle's form a part and parcel of their life. Their ordinary sport with the bulls later on specified to display the heroism of the youngman and by that way he has to select his better half for his life. It is mentioned in so many poems of Mullaikkali.

“KolerrukKodu anjuvanai Marumaiyum
Pullaley aya makal”.³

It means girls who are ready for marriage never select the youth who afraid to tam the heroic bull and ready to bear the wound by that. By this one can learn the life of Ay people and their association with love and war. The Virgin girls were ready to embrace the hero who successfully tam the bull.

“Vilai Ventaar, emminathu thayar makalir
Kolaiyerrak kottidaith tham veelvar marbin
Mullai yidaip pola Puken”.⁴

The girls never demand money (dowry) from the bride grooms but the youth should be ready to tam the deadly horned bulls and bear the injury on their chest. These are the ample evidences for the existence of Jallikkattu or bull taming in ancient Tamil Society.

Indus valley civilization which existed around 4000 BC to 1500 BC is named as Dravidian civilization by the scholars like Iravatham Mahadevan. In this civilization more than 2000 clay seals were unearthed with different pictograph. One among them, a hero taming a vibrant bull is engraved which is considered as the earliest reference for Jallikkattu in ancient India.⁵

Tholkappiyam, when describes the early life of Tamil People they had seized the cattle from one village and the people who lose their cattle by the robbers would react and re-capture their cattle. It is mentioned in a separate chapter of the grammar known as Puraththinaiyiyal⁶ Nirai Kavarthal. Niraimeettal. etc. These seven sections are namely Vetchi. Vagai, Vanchi, Karanthai, Ulinjai, Thumbai and Kanji. In these seven Karanthai thinai refers to the cattle raids.

Stone Inscriptions are the ample reliable evidences for writing the social history of the people. In the early Tamil hero stone inscriptions datable to 6th to 9th CCE elaborately narrate the cattle capturing and recapturing of the people and the hero-stones were erected in memory of the deceased heroes who engaged in that warfare.⁷ But no earlier evidence for the hero stones who deceased in Jallikkattu sport. Only one such evidence is so far noticed at Karuvanthurai village in Selam district. It reads as

“ Kovuri Sankan
Karuvanthuraiyil
Eruthu vilaiyadi ppattan
Avan makan sinnappayalu
Natta kallu”.⁸

Jallikkattu Sports in Tamil Nadu

As noticed earlier, the heroic sport Jallikkattu was played ever since the Indusvalley civilization, Some selective village people are adopting this practices even today. Particularly in Madurai district at Alanganallur, Palamedu, Siravayal, Araniparai, kandipatti, Nedumaram, Kandra manikam and Avaniyapuram this sport is conducted in the next day of Thai Pongal the harvest festival of Tamils.⁹

The term Jallikkattu, literally derived from Sallikkattu, means the bunch of coins will be tied on the horns of the bull. The hero who successfully tam the bull can take that coins. By this practice this sports was named as sallikkattu or Jallikkattu. Salli means in Tamil small denomination coin. Nowadays this sport has attracted millions of people and every year this game in celebrated with great pomp and pride. This practice is differently called as Manju virattu or Mainthu virattu and Erthaluvuthal. The term mainthu means mainthan, son. So the bull is brought up like a son or herd. Jallikkattu sport is slowly incorporated with the pongal festival and particularly in Pudukkottai district it is associated with yearly car festivals of different village goddesses.

Mariamman Worship in Pudukkottai District

The earliest worship of Tamils was the mother goddess worship. The copper image unearthed at Athichchanallur excavation during 1904 by Alexander Rey¹⁰ is a mother goddess with the well grown breasts and a full formed stomach. During the excavation conducted at the same place in 2005. Also revealed a pottery with a mother goddess a deer, a reptile, a paddy plant, a crane and fish.¹¹ These two evidences in the early excavations confirm the early mother goddess worship of the Tamils. This tradition of mother worship still exists in various parts of Tamil Nadu in various names. Ex. Mariamman, Kanniyamman, Isakkiamman, Drawpathi Amman, Kaliyamman, Pidari amman etc.

In Pudukkottai district Mariamman worship is very famous and it is conducted every year with the grand participation of local community Seven special seats of Amman festival in Pudukkottai district are, Narthamalai, Vaithikkoil, Konnaiyur, Tennangudi, Thiruvappur, Kannanur and Ilanjavur.¹² The Mariyamman worship in TamilNadu can be traced back from the period of Silappathikaram chera king Senkuttuvan erected a memorial temple for Kannagi, the heroine of Sillappathikaram for her chastity. It was called as Pathni cult or Kannaki cult and it had spread even into Ceylon. Later the worship of Kannaki has developed into the worship of Mariamman and Bhagavathi amman.¹³

Even though in all villages Mariamman temples existed only in the above mentioned seven village temples attracted large number of gathering and this festival is celebrated grand by these festivals are conducted for these seven village deities during the month of February to April (Masi to Chittirai) in every year. Car festivals are conducted for these seven Mariamman in these months separately. Jallikkattu festival is associated with these mariamman festivals in the same months. Totally this festival is celebrated for 16 days. Last day will be the car festival. The first day morning begins with Jallikkattu and it is followed by Puchchoriyal festival in the evening or night. But on the eighth day after Puchchoriyal, kappukkattu ritual is conducted at Narththamalai mariamman temple. On the previous day Jallikkattu will be conducted usually in Narththamalai. In this Jallikkattu festival bulls from all over Tamil Nadu are participating. Separate ground is prepared for this sport and it is named as Manthai. The bulls collected at one place and they are let loose one by one and that place is called Vadivasal.

Narththamalai and Mariamman Festival

Narththamalai is the corrupted form of Nagaraththarmalai. Nagaraththar are the separate mercantile population in this area. So at first this place was named as Nagaraththarmalai later on it was corrupted as Narththamalai. In the records of Rajaraja Chola I,¹⁴ this village is referred to as Thelunga Kulakalapuram, named after his epithet Thelunga Kula Kalan. Which means the yama for the Telugu kings? Puram is the suffix which denotes a trade centre. This place is famous for Saivaite Vaishnavite and Jain temples, particularly cave temple dedicated to Vishnu can be seen here. Even though the gods and goddesses of vedic cult is celebrated here village goddess worship (Amman worship) also carved its due position.

At Narththamalai Mariamman car festival is celebrated in the month of March- April public holiday is observed and it attracts large population of pilgrims from far and near¹⁵ Wearing of mouth lock, piercing of the body with sharp needles and other modes of self torture often gruesome, carrying Kavadis, shaving of the heads and offering of salt, Jaggery, cotton seed, grain, fowls, sheep, goats etc. are some forms of vows performed here on this occasion.¹⁶

Puchchoriyal Ritual

This car festival is preceded by Puchoriyal, on covering the goddess with flowers for which flowers are sent to the temple from all over the district of Pudukkottai and surrounding districts. On the eighth day of Puchchoriyal Kappukkattu ritual is conducted Jallikkattu is conducted on the previous day of Kappukkattu. Large number of bulls is brought by the people from near by villages. Likewise, numerous youths in special attire are gathered to tam the bulls. On the ninth day of Kappukkattu car festival is celebrated. The goddess will be taken in Procession in all the main streets of the village.

Present Condition of Jallikkattu

Jallikkattu was conducted regularly in all over Tamilnadu. But some animal saving organization (BETA) approached the Judicial court and demanded ban for Jallikkattu. Accordingly government banned this regular sport. But natural spirit of the youth raised against this ban order and demanded the permission for Jallikkattu. Lakhs of youth from various walks of life assembled at Marina beach at Madras demanding the lift of ban. Simultaneously youth from other important towns of Tamilnadu assembled and fought spontaneously for lifting ban on Jallikkattu. After a week long struggle Tamilnadu government enacted a special resolution and act for lifting the ban. Supreme court also given its consent for conducting Jallikkattu in the year 2017. Court recommended certain norms and regulations for the smooth functioning of Jallikkattu. It ordered no way the sports bulls would be torched and no causalities of bull taming heroes to take place. Accordingly government has taken enough precautionary measures and regulating crowd of heroes.

Special uniforms are provided for the participating heroes and they are strictly banned to consume drugs before participating the game. Like wise the bulls are also tested to avoid the consumption of drugs and any other malpractices. Because of such precautionary measures, for the past three years this Jallikkattu festival is going on smoothly.

Government Participation and Gifts to the Participants

Government, Particularly the district authorities provides police protection for the functioning of Jallikkattu. Court also appoints mediators to conduct the festival according to the rules and regulations prescribed by the government. Tourism department provide special arrangements for the foreign tourists. Who assembled to witness Jallikkattu.

Gift to the Participants

The able bodied youth assembled in large number for taming bulls. They are not only got the Salli (money) tied on the horns of the bull but the successful heroes are rewarded equally by special gifts. Even cars, Motor Cycles, Scooters, Washing Machine are given as gifts for the successful players. Costly vessels by silver, gold rings, gold chain, purse of money are also given by the VIP's and the organizers of the festival. The bull owners are also rewarded heavily if their bull is not caught or tamed by the heroes. By this manner both the bull owners and the players are satisfied by the arrangements.

Purpose of the Jallikkattu

Jallikkattu is regularly conducted for the welfare of the people and rich harvest for the farmers. People believe by conducting Jallikkattu and Amman festival heavy rain will be showered and their famine will be relieved. For conducting Jallikkattu in most of the villages separate Jallikkattu Thidal are prepared and maintained. Heavy rain showering will protect the people from hot sun and from epidemics. Some important Jallikkattu Thidal at Kavinadu Kanmai Thadikonda Ayyanar temple, Singamuthu Ayyanar Koil and Narththamalai near pudukkottai are to be noted.

Conclusion

Jallikkattu is a popular one in Tamil Nadu. The heroes who are participating Jallikkattu are covered by insurance none a days, they are clicked and derived drugs or any other hot drinks consumption. Number of precautionary measures is taken for the security and protection of participant heroes, bulls and common visitors. Jallikkattu is one the prominent culture to the Tamils.

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