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# SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND FESTIVALS OF VIJAYANAGARA-NAYAKS IN TAMILNADU

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## Introduction

Krishnadevaraya ascended the throne of Vijayanagara after the death of his father Narasimha II. Krishnadevaraya, who undertook a large-scale expedition to the Tamil nation in 1512, determined the amount to be paid by subordinate chiefs and sent Telugu chiefs in charge of Madurai, Tanjore and Jinji and other important provinces. King Nayak of Madurai and Tanjore rose to fame by completely conquering the Tamil country under the rule of the Tuluwa dynasty. Although the Najaks were nearly independent after the Battle of Taikottai or Rakshasi-Tangadi, they accepted Vijayanagara sovereignty at their convenience. These people brought the artistic and literary traditions of Vijayanagar to the Tamil region. Customs and social institutions acquire new dignity and value for those who see them as the expression of the common will and the crystallization of a shared experience. The Indian social system consists of a group of groups whose members perform certain functions together rather than as separate groups. These groups are therefore interdependent, and they are interdependent in a particular arrangement. Wedding ceremonies and temple fairs are considered social gatherings. Some important social customs that prevailed during the reign of Vijayanagar-Nayak such as marriage, pregnancy, birth and death rites are depicted in sculpture and painting.

## Marriage

Contrary to the prevailing custom in other countries, marriages of young people and girls in India are arranged and performed by their elders as parents or guardians. The use of the recognizance and preliminary formalities may be unique in the South. Preliminary procedures like marriage day suitability and other six astrological suitability tests i.e. Rasiporutham, Rasiadipathiporutham, Vasyapporutham, Rajjupporutham, Vedaipporutham and Nadipporutham. Once the marriage has been decided, the wedding must take place on a specific auspicious day.<sup>1</sup>

In Nayak's time, marriage was considered a sacred ceremony. The Vijayanagara-Nayak rulers preferred sacred marriages. Holy matrimony is considered the model of human marriage. The necessity of Lord Shiva's marriage is actually explained in terms of the necessity of God as an example for mankind. The underlying social attitudes and assumptions are often expressed in myths in extreme forms. Celestial marriages are performed in Madurai for Meenakshi, Kamakshi in Kanchipuram, Neelayatakshi in Nagapattinam, Akhilandeswari in Tirunelveli etc. A city's main shrine is usually named after the goddess only, although it is also dedicated to her consort. The great temple in

Madurai is dedicated to Siva and Parvati, but it is still known as the Meenakshi Temple. Marriage is central to the universal ideals of fertility, regeneration and pollution. It is this vital goal in the real world that devotees pursue, and since life springs from dark and dangerous sources, the dark goddess figure provides the essential focus of marriage myths.<sup>2</sup>

The name of the celestial marriage or Tirukkalyanam Meenakshi is mentioned in Tiruvilayadal Puranam. It contains detailed descriptions of marriage rituals and marriage patterns of Nayak society. The wedding scene is the representative sculpture of the Madurai Meenakshi temple complex. Dating to the time of Tirumalai Nayak, this sculpture shows the marriage of Shiva and Parvati, where according to Hindu mythology, the bride's brother Vishnu performed the Kanyadanam (presentation of the bride) ceremony with silver. water from the Kamandalu (bucket). right hand to greet the bride and placed her right hand on hers, Parvati obediently bowed her head with a shy smile on her lips. She is much smaller than the two gods whose size was greatly increased by their long kritas.

The goddess wears a spherical headdress that curves down her left side. The three figures are loaded with jewels. Another marriage panel, but mostly similar, was found in in the Kambatadi andapam of the Meenakshi temple complex in Madurai. But this carved panel is of a later date, and some consider it superior in some respects, although the latter looks almost like a copy of the earlier model, except that it has a carved panel in the Pudu Mandapam. Another famous example of a wedding scene is depicted in the Vasantha Mandapa panel in Alagakul, where the wedding of Rama and Sita is performed by a Brahmin, and saints, monks, sage Putni, kings and queens, musicians are also represented.

The god is a god followed by Brahmins in South India. Other castes may have entirely different customs, but the basic principle that Hindu marriage is a sacrament rather than a contract remains the same.<sup>3</sup>

## **Pregnancy and Birth**

The site of pregnancy and birth rituals is depicted in sculpture and painting. And literature too. During the Nayak period, they placed more emphasis on pregnancy and childbirth rituals. From conception, mothers-to-be receive the greatest care, mothers-to-be are instantly the most enviable women, entitled to be surrounded by unique and loving attention.

Special attention is given during pregnancy and pregnant women are treated with Ayurvedic medicine. Towards the end of her pregnancy, she was expected to become completely lethargic, and her frailty forced her to give up. Most of her jewelry and other adornments, as well as her body, are coated with ghee to prevent miscarriages. Images of pregnant women appear in all major temples in Tamil Nadu. She is depicted in a standing pose, with no clothes or ornaments. For example, on the pillars of the Kambathadi Mandapa at the Meenakshi Sundaresvara Temple in Madurai, on the pillars of the Maha Mandapa at the Subramanya Swamy Temple in Tirupparankundram, at the Nellaiaapper Temple in Tirunelveli and at the Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam Women uphold it these days. Rub ghee on the image of a pregnant woman.

The scene of the birth of the epic hero Rama appears on the panel of Vasantha Mandapa

in Aragakul. The birth scene here is depicted according to the cultural background of the prefecture, and some women represented by circles cover the birth scene with cloth or sari. The passage is made in the concealment of the fabric. The baby is then sprinkled or bathed in holy water and placed on the mother's lap while a resin wooden amulet is tied around the neck with the umbilical cord buried outside. The family astrologers did the calculations and revealed the details of astrology to the scribes who carefully recorded the predictions. For ten days after his birth, the child Rama and his parents remained unclean and neither was allowed to participate in religious ceremonies. In the painted panels of Alagarkoil, a ritual called peyarsuttu, or infant baptism, is depicted. On the tenth or twelfth day, a religious ceremony is performed to allow the mother to return to ritual presence and name the baby for daily use. Meenakshi Ammai Pillai Tamil by Kumarakurubarar describes the ten stages of a child's life. Sitirparuvam siruparaiparuvam and sirutherparuvam are the last three of the ten stages and are reserved for boys. The Amanai, Niradal and Usal stages are for girls only. <sup>4</sup>

## Sati

The word "sati" meaning "virtuous woman" was misused by early British officials and missionaries for the self-immolation of sati. The history of customs brings us back to the first cultures. Many ancient people buried or burned a man's widow, his horses, and other valuables along with his body so that he could have everything he loved and needed in another world. According to legend, Parvati was reincarnated before becoming the wife of Shiva. She was born as Sati, the daughter of sage Daksha, and later became the consort of the Great God. When her father quarreled with her god-lord, she threw herself into his sacrificial fire, and the ashes of her yoni, or body, were scattered throughout India in the form of pithas, or sacrificial shrines, where she was worshipped. The presence of a large number of Satikas during this period indicates the existence of the Sati cult. In sculpture, these brutal events are represented symbolically, as, a depiction of the sun and moon, a linga or phallic symbol, and carvings of uprights protruding from piers or piers. This sign is A.H. Longhurst identified as Sati Stone. This satikal or sati stone is found in different parts of South India.

In addition to these satikals, there are also a number of sculptural panels related to the practice of sati. On the outer southern prakara wall of the Varadaraja Perumal temple at Thadikkombu, the sun and moon are depicted above the Linga emblem (Pl.M.1). This representation is identified using Sati.<sup>5</sup>

The following is an interesting description of mindfulness during the Vijayanagarayanayake period. Theoretically, the on-site cremation of Sati had always been voluntary, but if we judge by later analogy, social and family pressures may have compelled some high-caste widows, especially those of the warrior class, to have to do so. . According to the 15th century traveler Nicolo de Conti, as many as three thousand wives and concubines of King Vijayanagara swore to be buried with their sovereign after his cremation. Nuniz Barradas and Linschoten write that wives commit sati soon after their

husband's death. Proenza noted in a 1659 letter that "the greatest obstacle to his (Tirumalai Nayak's) conversion was his 200 wives, the most honorable of whom were burned at his funeral pyre, according to the barbaric custom of those men".<sup>6</sup>

Another letter from Trichinopoly, written by the same missionary in the same year, describes the case of an ordinary woman: "It is known that the custom of burning women with the corpses of their husbands exists in heroic courage, if the men knew the role of demons in these cruel rites, they would not doubt it." Martin's letter of 1713 mentions the sati of some 47 women of Kilavan Setupati who died in 1710, and the earlier sati of Mangammal's daughter-in-law Case, "Queen of Trichinopoly (Muttammal), mother of the reigning prince, was pregnant when her husband died about 20 years ago (24 years ago in 1689), and once she gave birth to a son, she did the same (burn herself), and for the same reason, her mother-in-law Mangammal could not accompany the cremation of King Chokkanatha, but after giving birth, she pretended that no one else was escaped on fire Rukmangada Charitra by Praudhakavi Mallanarya.<sup>7</sup>

Praudhakavi Mallanarya describes Sati's performance. It is therefore recommended that a woman set herself on fire at the stake of her husband instead of continuing to live after the death of her husband. Such a woman is so great that even the gods praise her. Another Tamil folklore Ramayyan Ammanai gives a detailed description of Sati. Although contemporary accounts describe mindfulness in detail, it is represented in sculpture symbolically. Death rituals are one of the many customs of Hindus. This is shown on the panels of Vasantha Mandapa at Alagarkoil near Madurai. The Dasaratha's death ritual is described in the Ramayana. Dasaratha's body is placed on the panel. Here his mouth is bound with a cloth, he is carried in a cremation litter and Bharata is buried on the burning ground. It is seen most often in the daily life of villagers in Tamil Nadu. This canvas reveals the indigenization of culture.<sup>8</sup>

## Festivals

Festivals, although religious, have many political, economic and social aspects in the activities associated with their celebration. Originally, they were intended to be celebrated on certain religious occasions. Over time, they were used by emperors as opportunities to loosen their power. The idea of kingship as a divine condition can be completed more eloquently by considering the forms of public ritual, especially in the late Middle Ages in southern India. One of these public ceremonies is the Mahanavami (Great Nine Days) festival.

Mahanavami first appeared in the medieval kingdom of Vijayanagara, the largest kingdom in southern India. This annual ceremony is celebrated by King Vijayanagara in the lunar month of Asvina (Tamil month: Purattasi), which corresponds to mid-September to mid-October. The festival is organized by the first commentators of the 15th and 16th centuries and lasts 9 days. The latter was a foreigner in Vijayanagar, the capital of the kingdom. Since then, the festival has become famous in many parts of South India.<sup>9</sup>

Foreign tourists described the celebration of this festival as enthusiastic. It was an

opportunity for the emperor to deploy his military power to repel enemies inside and outside the kingdom. During this festival, there are activities to show the wealth of the empire, so that spectators pay homage to the emperor. Testimony of Abdur Razzak. Naturally, Paes and Numz were completely overwhelmed by the wealth, military might, pomp and glory of the Vijayanagara-Nayak rulers.

During Mahanavami celebrations, people demonstrate their skills in different sports like wrestling, fencing, and entertainment like music and dancing.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of the Mahanavami celebrations, Paes writes: "Many women came here to play many trumpets, drums and flutes, violas and many other types of instruments". On the sculpture panels of the Vijayanagara-Nayak period, there are various musical groups playing on different instruments. Dancers appear in the southern prakara of the Varadaraja Perumal temple in Thadikkombu. Among them are musicians playing clarinet, drums, cymbals and flute.

Dance poses and instrumental playing are featured in most Nayak monuments such as Kalyana Mandapa at Venkatachalapathi temple in Krishnapuram, Nellaiappar temple in Tirunelveli, Meenakshi-Sundaresvara temple in Madurai, etc. Although religious in nature, Mahanavami celebrations also served their purpose of showing off the wealth, pomp, and military might of the empire. This view is supported by the account of Paes: "The feasts of those days were over, and the king held a review of all his troops, and so ordered the review. The king ordered his velvet tent to Mecca to leave the city a whole league. , at a place already determined, in this tent were placed all these festival idols. From this tent to the palace of the king, the chiefs with their armies and their crowds, each in the house of the king according to his rank.

So the soldiers stand in line... the marchers are in front of the horses, the elephants are behind the horses, and in line are each general and his men. A variety of infantry, cavalry and elephants are displayed in the Vijayanagara-Nayak temple, corresponding to the Mahanavami parade. Infantry are depicted in painted panels at Tirupparankundram and cavalry are depicted in carvings at Tirupparankundram, Pudu Mandapam and Ranganathaswamy temples in Srirangam. Elephants are depicted on panels by Alaga Cole.<sup>11</sup>

### **Spring Festival (Vasantotsava)**

The holiday described by Nicolo Conti has been identified as Holi by Robert Sewell, B.A. Saletore, A.H. Longhurst, et al. But Anila Varghese suggested the festival could be more accurately described as vasantotsava, which falls on the full moon of Chitrai (March-April), rather than Holi, which is celebrated on the full moon of phalgun (February-March). There are no inscriptions on Holi, but literary and archaeological dates for the celebration of vasantotsava in Vijayanagar can be found. Vasantotsava is centered on the worship of Kama (Madana or Manmatha), the god of love. Seeing the grief of Manmatha's wife Rati after Siva reduced Kama to ashes, Shiva relented and accepted a certain day of the year when Kama regained his physical form and commemorated vasantotsava on that day. Kama deva is known as Vasanta, the demigod of spring, and the commander of his

forces is Chitra. Spring festivals associated with Madana range in India from at least the third to the twelfth century, while Holi is mainly celebrated from the fourteenth century. Vasantotsava continued to be celebrated until the 16th century when Holi became popular. Over time, the worship of Madana faded and the great celebration associated with it moved to the holiday of holi.<sup>12</sup>

Nandi Timmana in his Parijatha Paharanam says that Krishnadevaraya listened to poetry in his court during the celebration of Vasantotsava. Sculptural evidence of the festival is also plentiful. Reliefs of Kamadeva, usually accompanied by his retinue, are found in the Vijayanagara-Nayak monument. Manmatha or Kama is depicted with his usual cane bow and is often seated on a chariot drawn by his parrot Vahana. He is depicted on the pillars of Pudu Mandapam in Madurai, Andal Temple in Srivilliputtur, Alagarkoil near Madurai and Ranganathaswamy Temple in Srirangam. Representatives of Kama are associated with Vasantotsava. The Madurai Chokkanathar Ula, a Tamil literature written by Puranathirumalai Nanthar in the early 16th century, details a seven-day festival, but the work makes no mention of the month in which the festival takes place.<sup>13</sup>

### Chitrai Festival

The holy marriage of Meenakshi-Sundaresvara is celebrated in the month of Chitrai. This month of chitrai is honored in Madurai temple and in Tirthavari of Chitrai for namam (full moon) at Portamaraikulam (vat of lily) the end of the festival also has its own uniqueness as on this day Indra worships the Sundaresvarar and the established temple by Madurai. The temple passes by erecting the Indra Vimana carried by eight elephants. In fact, the annual chitrai festival must have been popular long before the time of Tirumalai Nayakkar.

This is reinforced by the fact that there are two important Vasantha (spring) festivals before and after the Chitrai festival, namely kotai vasantham (before summer) and Vasantavila (after summer) in the month of Pankuni (February-March) in the month of Vaikasi (April-May). Tirumalai Nayak probably made Vaikasi Vasantha Vela very picky by creating Pudu Mandapam. The sculptural representation does not give us the identity of adopting a particular party. But dance and musical instruments are staples of temple celebrations and public ceremonies and festivals.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

Sculpture and painting represent social practices such as marriage, pregnancy and childbirth, mindfulness and death rituals. During festivals such as Mahanavami, Vasantotsava or the Tet and Chitrai festivals, the sculptures are represented symbolically. Some entertainment is also represented, such as acrobats, wrestling and hunting expeditions. These peculiarities are confirmed by contemporary literature and foreign reports.

### End Notes:



1. David, D.Shulman, *Tamil temple myths*, New Jersey, 1980, p.138.
2. Tiruvilayadal Puranam, 765-780.
3. P.V.Jegadisa Ayyar, *op.cit.*, p.47.
4. Meenakshi Ammai Pillai Tamil, 1-10.
5. A.H.Longhurst, *Hampi Ruins*, New Delhi, 1982, pp.36-40.
6. R.Sathianathaier, *Tamilaham in the 17th century*, University of Madras, 1957, p.181.
7. Rukmangada Charitra, 4-92 and 96.
8. Ramayan Ammanai, p.65.
9. Burton Stein, *All the kings' Mana, Papers on Medieval South Indian History*, Madras, 1984, p.311.
10. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. IV, Allahabad, 1969, pp. 116-17.
11. Robert Sewell, *op.cit.*, p.273.
12. B.A.Saletore, *Social and Political Life in the Vijayanagara Empire (1346-1646)*, Madras, 1934, pp.396-97.
13. U.V.Swaminathaiyar, (ed.) *ChokkanatharUla of Purana Tirumalainathar*, Madurai, 1931, p.5.
14. A.V.Jeyechandrun, *Madurai Temple Complex*, Madurai, 1985, p.219.