

THE PRACTICES OF PUBERTY RITUALS AMONG THE IDAYARS OF TAMIL NADU – A FOLKLORE PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Puberty ritual is performed for women, like other tribes the Idayars perform this ritual with their own traditional value. The puberty of a girl symbolises, she is ready for marriage and for child birth. Further, it shows the maturity of the girl. Idayar called this puberty as samaithal which means maturity. It is important to mention that, according to tamil tradition the women attain puberty after crossing different stages based on age from childhood. Among puberty stage is considered as blooming of girl. To welcome this stage rituals are performed with their traditional value. Earlier to the tribal people of Pudukottai area it was expected a girl to bloom within the age of 16. But in today's context of climate and change of diet girl attain puberty within 10 to 13 years. The girl attainment of puberty in Tamil mention as Poopadaithal, Vayasukkuvanthuvittal, Paruvamadainthuvittal, Periyamanusiahittal, Sadanguayittal.

Attaining Puberty

There is a belief among the Idayars that the mother should not see her girl child attaining puberty. It is said that the mother think about of pain of a girl and thinking that our child is also going to suffer the hardship that we have gone through. They say that the mother should not look at it because it affects her mood. Even if the girl tells her mother that she has attained puberty, the mother will ask to see another woman to confirm it. If a girl attained puberty in place where she works, an elder woman gives neem leaves with that girl and brought her to home without inform anything in the workplace.

Giving information and Participation of Relatives

It was customary to first tell the maternal uncle about the presence of a girl. There is a custom that the mother will told this news to her relatives at home. The house is considered as a dirty house. So the mother didnt enter into the house to inform the news. The mother told the news from outside the house of neighbours and relatives. This custom also exists in all communities today.

Then the friends and neighbours visited the blossoming woman with peanuts and sugar. Although it is brought only to the betrothed woman, some people have the habit of offering it to the visitors as well. Today the custom of offering 'chocolate' (candy) is also practiced. It is important to mention that the father or brothers of the girl did not share the news of the girl's puberty. Thus puberty was an important ritual practiced in Idayar's home. Similarly for making a stick the gents were not participated in larger extent, since puberty function is considered for womenfolk. Thirumalaichamy a traditional cattle rearer said our ancestors

followed this system for generations without any deviation. Even today Idayar men participation in puberty ceremony is very low.

Water Pouring

At the back or rear of the house the girl is rested, she is not allowed to enter the house directly. Because this event considered as impure for about 16 days. Another important customs followed by Idayars during puberty is called **Kandathanniutruthal**, it means pouring water on the girl's head on the same day (at that time) when she blossomed and keep it aside. After it is confirmed that the woman has flowered, the girl is made to sit in a separate place. The news that the girl has flowered... is first told to the maternal uncle's house. Then a ritual called '**Kanda Water Pouring**' takes place. Often it is the aunt (mother's maternal uncle's wife) of the flowered girl who pours water on the girl. After that 5 or 7, 9, 11 odd number of nearby Sumangali women pour water on her, it is usually oil bath, then she put to sit on the pialinfort of the house. Now this system is not vogue, she is kept aside in a room. Broom stick, **ulakkai** were placed near to the girl.

Tying of Kutchu

After pouring '**Kanda water**' on the besotted girl, they tie a stick around her alone. The maternal uncle would come and tie it with a strip of coconut. For this they use only green leaves. People who don't have a mother and father call someone related to them to tie the **Kutchu**. In the past, this kind of stabbing has been compulsory. But, today it is slowly disappearing. Some people use sarees, blankets, and sackcloth as an alternative to tying the **Kutchu**. Some people make the girl to sit in a part of the house without that. They cover themselves with a saree. Plunger, black pepper and neem are also kept inside the stick. Historically, the shepherds of Mullai land rested the puberty girl on the outskirts of their settlements, mostly they built separate hut for the girls who attain puberty. An elder woman was settled along with the girl in hut. After some period the girl was allowed to mingle with family members. This age old custom is still now practiced by telugu speaking community residing in hilly areas.

Offering Healthy Foods

When a girl attains puberty there was a custom among the Idayars that they ask the girl to drink the cow's milk by putting the seeds of saffron. Like a spinach seed that sprouts quickly and bears fruit, it is also mentioned that the girls who drinks the seed is given to have a child in her life, with a view to girl's hips are strong the women gave kali (a food prepared with Urad dhal). Some said that it was given because it will be simple during time of giving birth. When the girl is inside the kutchu, the in-laws and other relatives make a lot of food and present it to the girl. As soon as the girl's maternal uncle's family gets the news of the girl's puberty, they bring chicken eggs, black pepper, and ghee. If the maternal uncle is not present, the women of the household provide them. Country chicken eggs are served as raw without being cooked. They also give ghee in the nest and make them drink it, even the girl don't like it. When no one is looking, leave the ghee to drink later. It is customary to pour the oil down.

Some Idayarwomen report that they have more pelvic pain and if they had taken egg and ghee earlier they would not have had pelvic pain. It is customary to give chicken eggs and ghee daily.

A lot of sweets are given to the puberty girl resides in kutchu. This is why relatives make sweets and bring them. Some part of this custom was the 'puttu tying custom' which eases bleeding. This is considered as age old custom of shepherd, being settlers of Mullai land tinaimavu was their principal food item. Folklorists have opinion that the shepherd women prepare puttu (mixture of honey with tinaimavu) and give it to the girl who attained puberty. They believe that tinaimavu will eases the body pain and hip ache occurred during the puberty period. This system is now continuing even today among Idayars.

Life Skill Training through Games

A girl on Kutchu is accompanied by her friends during the day. They are also involved in some games like playing **Thayam**, **Audubuli** and **Pallankuli**. Since a girl is denied to out for sportive activities after attaining puberty, she is allowed to play the above mentioned indoor games. Usually the girl plays these indoor games for about 16 days. The Idayars believe that by playing these games the girl learns a lot for leading the life. According to them by playing **Pallankuli**, the girl's finger got energy and valour in addition to that the girl learns how to lead a successful life in maintaining family, increasing the wealth of the family, distribution of family property among the sibling and relatives. An elder woman of Idayar clan teach those lesson through playing Pallankuli with her. Like wise Thayam is also played by them with girl, through this the girl got mathematical knowledge which enables her to maintain family. As mentioned earlier the Idayar women involved in selling milk products in adjacent villages where they lived, for that they need some mathematical knowledge. So that the community elders use this 16 days to teach some of the basic calculations needed for life. In the same way Adupuli game also taught for the because Idayar women assisted their husbands in grazing cattle in forest areas on that circumstances she need valour to overcome danger occurred from wild animals. It is important to mention that playing indoor games is now become tradition of all communities of southern Tamilnadu.

Important Practices and Customs

At night the old women lay guard near the Kutchu, she has been given separate vessel to eat dring since the first day she bloomed (Puberty), usually plate, tumbler (mug) and copper are given to her. A comb is also provided for combing the head. She serves food on that plate. It is said that while serving food and pouring water, the utensil and hand should not collide with each other. Such a collision is considered defilement. Those who come to see her and her friends sitting with her take a bath and go to their homes, they were forced to do so. The girl in the Kutchu cleaned vessels used by her, the bathing water is replenished in a separate pit. The Idayars not allowed to mingle it in common outside area. But now this is not practiced due to availability of land and place.

In the puberty house priest, priestly families, the persons who observe penance did not eat food. If they enter, that house they did not touch anyone there. If they touch anyone, they

enter into home after washed their clothes and bathing, they deem that the impurity considered to be removed. The defilement caused by a woman being puperty is also referred to as 'KannithDeetu'. People have the idea that this deed should not be given more than other deed. Female plantains with pistils, elumbitchai, curry leaves etc, It is said that if the puberty girl touch the plants, it will burn. There are those who say that even water should not fall on those trees.

It is also said that the girl should not see any men during this period particular uncle. It is also believed that more pimples will appear on her face. Before dawn, she is taken with her face hidden from the sight of any man. It is also mentioned that every day the hair of the talisman should bloom a lot. The cloth that is used to wipe the dirt is dug and buried somewhere, the mother did this, because there was a belief that, magicians take the cloth and use it, this was also done during the night time. It is believed that if it done on day time, the shadow of the birds flying overhead will fall on it, and if it happened so, the woman will not have children. Shadow of birds referred to as 'PatsiDosha'. Similarly, it is said that even if the cloth is dragged by dogs and foxes, even if a snake crawls into it, a child will not be born to the girl. Once upon a time, the women of the Vannar household used to wash these clothes. The ppubertygirl were expected to stay away for 16 days. On the morning of the 16th, the kutchu would take away and had been planted and burn it in the outside village. No one should see it so this ritual should be done before dawn. An elder woman, mother or any other woman who has reached the old age to burn the kutchu. But in today's era, there is a custom of burning kutchu by brother of the girl. When the woman is taken to the place where the Kutchu burnt, they were given a lamp, karukariwal, and neem leaves in their hands.

Conclusion

As soon as the girl attains puberty the mother first tell it to their uncle's house, the mother inform Vannathi (Washer woman) who used to give clothes for the puberty girl every day. On the 16th day, when the water is poured, the cloth worn by the flowered woman is given to Vannathi. Some even buy new clothes. After burning the kutchu the girl bath and sit somewhere. A couple of days before the 16.th The house is whitewashed and cleaned finally Puniyadanam will be held. The priestly class Iyer usually did this ritual. In short as far as puberty ceremony among the shepherd clan are concerned the Idyars followed traditional methods of rituals. Some of them did the ritual without involving priestly class. They think the girl must be cared for 30 days carefully, even to the puberty girl cared for 30 days after that only she allowed to go to school.

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