



# Culture of the People of the Northern Province



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# *Culture of the People of the Northern Province*



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## Message of the Hon. Governor, Northern Province



The XV Governors' Conference could be considered a very special event for the peoples of the Northern Province, especially for those in the Jaffna peninsula as they would play host to the Hon. Governors of the different provinces of Sri Lanka, their Secretaries and the respective families.

The three decades of war devastated the Northern Province. However the leadership of His Excellency, President Mahinda Rajapaksa brought about peace to the country and development is now taking place at a rapid pace.

On this accord, the Northern Province is presently experiencing the fruits of development that has never been seen earlier. Thanks to the guidance provided by Hon. Basil Rajapaksa MP, Minister of Economic Development, and Chairman, Presidential Task Force for the Development of the Northern Province whereby "Uthuru Wasanthaya" was executed.

This has given rise to the people to freely involve themselves in their cultural activities without restraint. Similarly their Livelihood, Agriculture, Fisheries and such enjoys a boost.

Amidst all these, being host to the Hon. Governors of all the Provinces of Sri Lanka is an Honour and necessitates the issuance of a brief resume on the Cultural Aspects of the People of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

This exclusive publication would no doubt be of value to most of our distinguished and valuable guests, if not all of them, as it dwells into the afore mentioned areas in as brief a manner as presentable.

Thank you.

**GA Chandrasiri**  
Governor  
Northern Province.



# INTRODUCTION



**T**he **Northern Province** is one of the nine provinces of Sri Lanka. The provinces have existed since the 19th century but did not have any legal status until 1987 when the 13th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka established Provincial Councils. Between 1988 and 2006 the province was temporarily merged with the Eastern Province to form the North Eastern Province. The capital of the Northern Province is Jaffna. Parts of the present day Northern Province were part of the pre-colonial Jaffna kingdom. Other parts were ruled by Vanniar Chieftains who paid tribute to the Jaffna kingdom. The province then came under Portuguese, Dutch and British control. In 1815 the British gained control of the entire island of Ceylon. They divided the island into three ethnic based administrative structures: Low Country



Sinhalese, Kandyan Sinhalese and Tamil. In 1833, in accordance with the recommendations of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission, the ethnic based administrative structures were unified into a single administration divided into five geographic provinces. Jaffna District, Mannar District and Vanni District formed the new Northern Province. Now the Northern Province consists of Jaffna District, Mannar District, Vavuniya District, Kilinochchi District and Mullaitivu District.

### The population of the province as 2011

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Total</b>	997,754
	<b>Sri Lankan Tamil</b>	934,392 (93.65%)
	<b>Muslim</b>	32,659 (3.27%)
	<b>Sinhalese</b>	21,860 (2.19%)
	<b>Indian Tamil</b>	8,432 (0.85%)
	<b>Other</b>	411 (0.04%)
<b>Religion(2011)</b>	<b>Hindu</b>	755,066 (75.68%)
	<b>Christian</b>	187,663 (18.81%)
	<b>Muslim</b>	33,185 (3.33%)

## SYMBOLS



*Flower: White Lotus,*



*Tree: Maruthu*



*Bird: Seven Sisters*



*Animal: Male Deer*

The Northern Province of Sri Lanka has some distinguishing features. Geographically the Northern Province is located in the north of Sri Lanka and is just 22 miles (35 km) from India. It is connected with the Indian mainland by the mythical Adam's Bridge (also known as Sethu Paalam or Rama's Bridge). The province is surrounded by the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Bay to the west, the Palk Strait to the north, the Bay of Bengal to the east and the Eastern, North Central and North Western provinces to the south.

The province is divided into two distinct geographic areas: the Jaffna peninsula and the Vanni. the Jaffna peninsula is irrigated by underground aquifers fed by wells, whereas the Vanni has irrigation tanks fed by perennial rivers. Major rivers include: Akkarāyan Āru, Aruvi Āru, Kanakarāyan Āru, Kodālikkallu Āru, Nāy Āru, Netheli Āru,, Pāli Āru,, Pallavarāyankattu Āru,, Parangi Āru,, Pēr Āru,, Piramenthal Āru,, Therāvil Āru,. The province has a number of lagoons, the larger ones being Jaffna Lagoon, Nanthi Kadal, Chundikkulam Lagoon, Vadamarachchi Lagoon, Uppu Aru Lagoon, Kokkilai lagoon, Nai Aru Lagoon and Chalai Lagoon.

Most of the islands around Sri Lanka are to be found to the west of the Northern Province. The larger islands are: Velanaitivu (Kayts), Neduntivu (Delft), Karaitivu, Pungudutivu and Mandativu.

Jaffna is one of the main districts of the Northern Province. The name Yālpāṇam or Yālpāṇapaṭṭinam, gains in prestige in its occurrence in literature, as in the Kokila Sandesa, a Sinhalese Sandesa Kavya of the middle fifteenth century composed by the priest of Irugalkulapriyena at Mulgirigala near Dondra Head in the Southern Province, in order to send his blessings to Sapumal Kumārāya who was then reigning in Jaffna. In this literary text Yālpāṇam is referred to under the name Yāpapaṭuna:

246 රන් දද කිකිණි දැල් බැඳි පා පෙළැති  
 රුඳු නැත් නැත් සැඳු මිණි මුතු දිගහ  
 අලු වීදු සිරි සපිරි නිති කිඳුරිඳුගේ  
 පුර බඳු සත් නොස් වෙමින් ගොස් යාපා පටුන් වදු  
 Enter thou, Yapapatuna, graced with stately buildings  
 Emblazoned with golden flags;  
 Gems and stones shedding brilliance transplendent,  
 In charm and splendour vying with Vaishravana's City,  
 Alakamanda"

There is a legend regarding the name Yālpāṇam. This place earlier was a sandy waste land and was called Maṇarriṭar 'sand dune'. A blind Pāṇan (an artiste) played his Yāl (the lute) and made the King of Jaffna happy. Pleased with his music, the king rewarded this Yālpāṇan by the grant of the sandy waste land Maṇarriṭar. Because this place was bestowed on a Yālpāṇan, it became known as Yālpāṇam.

The Northern Province has had the privilege of receiving two distinguished and venerable women in the past. One was Kannaki Amman of the Tamils, Goddess Pattini of the Sinhalese. The other was venerable Sanghamitta Theri who brought the sapling of the sacred Bo-Tree. Both seemed to have landed at the present Thiruvadinilayam (which was known as Jambugola).

A legend that has been popular among the Tamils in Jaffna, Vanni and Batticaloa is that Kaṇṇaki Amman visited Sri Lanka and had been wandering about in Jaffna, Vanni and Batticaloa and ended up



in Kandy. It will be useful to have a glimpse of the Tamil twin epics known as Cilappatikaram and Manimekalai. The former relates the tragic story of Kōvalan and his wife Kaṇṇaki and the latter gives a romantic account of Kōvalan's daughter who became a Buddhist nun. Kōvalan, a son of a rich merchant married Kaṇṇaki and lived happily in Pukār under Chola rule. Kōvalan having seen a brilliant performance by Mātavi fell in love with her. Mātavi accepted the rich merchant as her lover. They lived happily and in course of time Mātavi gave birth to a beautiful daughter Maṇimēkalai. Kōvalan had forgotten his wife Kaṇṇaki. But time changed. Kōvalan left Mātavi and returned to Kaṇṇaki. At the time when he saw his wife he grieved and said "I am ashamed of myself because I have wasted all the wealth given to me by my parents on a deceitful actress." Kaṇṇaki assured him that she has a pair of anklets that have invaluable gems. Kōvalan convinces Kaṇṇaki to accompany him to Madura where he was planning to sell the anklet and to trade again to regain the lost wealth. But in Madura, he was accused as a thief who had stolen the queen's anklet and was beheaded by the Pandya King's soldiers. This was the scheme of the king's goldsmith to protect himself from the theft of the queen's anklet. Hearing the death of her husband, Kaṇṇaki rushed to the king's palace with her other anklet and convincingly proved that the king had made a grievous mistake. Realizing his fault the king died on the spot. She was furious and burnt Madura and later her wrath was appeased. She left Madura with grief and ascended the hill sacred to Murugan. On the 14<sup>th</sup> day after the death of her husband, she ascended to heaven. The Chera king erected a beautiful image of Kaṇṇaki. He consecrated the image with a grand ceremony in the presence of Gajabahu, the king of Lanka and the kings of Kongu and Malava. King Gajabahu is said to have brought a Kannaki statue to Sri Lanka and inaugurated the cult of Goddess Pattini. When he brought the statue he seemed to have landed at Thiruvadainilayam and it is believed that he first erected a temple for Pattini at Anganāmakakṭavai (Ankaṇ Ammai Kaṭavai) which is being worshipped by people even now. A limestone sculpture showing feet with anklets had been found in this place.

There are many popular versions of the epic Cilappatikaram. One of them relates that Goddess Kaṇṇaki after the death of her husband had been wandering in Pandya country and entered Sri Lanka through Jambugola and a temple seemed to have been erected for her by the people. She had been going to various places in Sri Lanka and temples had been built for her. The Ūrcuruk Kāviyam which is popular in the Northern and the Eastern provinces mentions this story. It may be possible that Gajabahu's attempt to bring the statue of Kannaki could have made the people think that Kannaki herself had visited Sri Lanka.

The second distinguished person to visit the Northern Province was Venerable Sanghamitta Theri who had brought a branch of the sacred Bo-tree from Buddhagaya. She seemed to have landed at Jambugola Patna and proceeded to Anuradhapura. The Bodhivamsa illustrates this historical event. The author of **Ancient Jaffna**, Mudaliyar C. Rasanayagam says:

“Sanghamitta and the Bo tree landed at Jambugola, where Devanampiya Tissa had repaired earlier for the purpose of receiving them. He also built a superb hall called ‘Samuddhasanna Sala’ near the beach for the reception of the Bo tree.

Of the first eight plants (Bo) raised out of the seed of the tree at Anuradhapura, one was planted at Jambugola paṭṭana on the spot where the Bo-tree was deposited on its disembarkation. This may be the very old Bo tree standing by the side of the Paralay Kandaswamy temple at Chulipuram, about half a mile from the port.”

In the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, the teacher holds a position of respect on account of the function he performs in society. There is a proverb in Tamil “Eluttu arivittavan Iraivan Avan” (எழுத்து அறிவித்தவன் இறைவன் ஆவான்), ‘The one who teaches the alphabet is God’. The teacher not only imparted knowledge to children, but also moulded the lives of the children and on account of that the others gave a place of honour to him in society. Nowadays, this is deteriorating in society. “Why?” is the burning question in everyone's mind. It is

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because the students in this technological world are learning sometimes without a teacher. The students now are developing a respect for the Machine!

The Northern Province is proud to have two temples that are not only satisfying the religious needs of the people but also the spiritual-social needs. Before the foreigners (westerners) came to this land, the temples in this region were economically sound and each temple was looking after all needs of the people. Education was provided there. People learnt arts such as music, dance, drama, etc. at the temple. Food was provided there. It was also like the hospital where medicine was available. But when the foreigners entered our country and destroyed the places of worship, we were deprived of our culture and faith. When we regained from disaster and started rebuilding the temples the foreigners had taken our education out of it. The economic strength of the temple had been cut off. From then, the temples have been there to look after only the spiritual needs of the people. In spite of such a situation there are two temples that are exception from the others. One is the Sri Nagapūshani Amman temple in Nagadīpa. The devotees of this temple all over the world contributed to help the temple put up a hall where the people who come to the temple are fed. **Amutacurapi (Amirta Surabi)** is the name given to that hall. We have to understand what Amutacurapi (Amirta Surabi) is. For this we have to turn to **Manimekalai**, the Tamil Buddhist epic. In it the heroine Manimekalai is taken by the goddess to Manipallavam which is the other name for Nagadīpa. There she meets the Goddess Tīvatīlakai, who shows the Buddha seat and says,

“In front of this seat there is a little pond full of cool water overgrown with lotuses. From that pond will appear a never failing alms bowl, by the name Amrita Surabi (Endless Nectar). The bowl once belonged to Āputra and appears every year on the full moon day in the month of Rishabha, in the fourteenth asterism, the day on which the Buddha himself was born. That day and hour are near. The bowl will presently come into your hand. Food put into it by a pure one will be inexhaustible.”



Like this bowl, the Amutacurabi Annatāna hall at Nagapushani Amman Temple at Nainātivu has been providing food to several thousands of people. The Secretary of the Amutacurabi Annatāna Sabai told us that the Annatāna Sabai feeds about thousand people in an hour.

The other temple is Turkkapuram Tevastanam. This temple's services are multi-faceted. It not only feeds people but also looks after children, widows, old-aged people and provides facilities for students and devotees. Details could be found in the Seventh Chapter of this book.

The Jaffna mango called 'Karuttak Kōlumpān' is supposed to be a very tasty variety. Any one who has tasted it will never forget it. Though this tree has been affected by the war situation in the North, in some areas of the Province, it is still flourishing. From the Northern Province bananas used to be sent to Southern Sri Lanka. Neervely in Jaffna has been producing good bananas.





The Northern Province is famous for its palmyrah trees.. It is closely connected with the culture of the people. The growth of the tree is very slow and it takes from 15 to 30 years to bear. It is a very useful palm. There are two kinds of the palmyrah viz, the male and the female. The male tree bears no fruit, but both are used for drawing toddy. Palmyrah toddy is sweet when quiet fresh, but bitter when fermentation sets in. The spathes of the palmyrah trees exhibit themselves in January and the toddy-tapper forthwith commences his operations.

To sweeten the toddy a little lime is put into the pot before it is tied to the spathe. The sweetened toddy is called **karuppani** or **patanir**. If intended to be made into jaggery (**panankatti**), the sweetened toddy, after being boiled down to





the consistency of syrup is poured into small baskets made of palmyrah leaf (called **kuttān**), where it cools, and a partial crystallization ensues. If the syrup is of a lighter consistency than jaggery it is called **pāṇi** which retains its fluid state for years even if cooled. In it is preserved the palmyrah jelly. The fruits of the palmyrah tree could be seen in the following picture:



The juice of the palmyrah fruit is dried in the sun and cut up into slices in which form it is preserved for months and used with other food. This jelly is called **panāṭṭu** (palmyrah chocolate) in Tamil mixed with the **pāṇi** (syrup) these slices will last for years.

The seeds, if planted, germinate in three months or so and in the first stages of growth it forms into a pulpy substance called **panankiḷanku** (palmyrah yam) which is also used as food. **Panankiḷanku** is dried in the sun and it becomes hard which is called **oṭiyal**. It could be pounded on a mortar to make it a flout. **Piṭṭu** is a kind of food made out of flour. It could be rice-flour or corn flour or millet flour. **Oṭiyal** flour is also used to make **oṭiyal piṭṭu** which is a typical food of the people of the Northern Province.

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On the right you could see there is a kind of **piṭṭu** made out of red rice flour. But below you find the **piṭṭu** made out of **oṭiyal** flour. It is mixed with fish.

The **oṭiyal kūl** is a kind of soup made out of **oṭiyal** flour. In a large pot vegetables like beans, tapioca, jack seedser are cut into pieces, Murungai leaves (drumstick leaves) are added. After sometime turmeric is added. While the cooking takes place in low flame, **oṭiyal** flour mixed with crushed chillies, tamarind paste and little water are added. It is stirred until all the flour is cooked and the mixture is thick but runny. The **oṭiyal kūl** is ready for serving. This is also a typical food of the people of the Northern Province.



The wood of a fairly old palmyrah tree is hard, strong and durable and is generally used for roofing. The leaf when green is a good food for black cattle. The leaf is largely used for covering the roof and for screening the fence. Ola books, fans, umbrellas and baskets are made of it. The fibre is used for making brushes. The ridge of the leaf called **ekku** and the polished cover of the stalk called **nār** are used for making ropes.

Regarding palmyrah, a magnificent scene is found in the photograph found below:

Usually the palmyrah has single trunk. But in this picture you could see the palmyrah tree having some branches. The branch in Tamil is



**kilai** and the branched palmyrah is referred to as **kilaippanai**. This is found only in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

Coconut trees are also found in the Northern Province. In Jaffna and in other areas the use of coconut in curries is a common habit. The coconut is scraped and ground over the **ammi**, (the grinding stone,) the ground stuff is gathered and rounded in a ball of paste. The ground coconut freely enters into the composition of all curries, fish, meat or vegetable. Now the practice is to use the pressed milk of the scraped coconut. The scraped coconut is used for **sambal** of various kinds.



# THE LANGUAGE



## 2

Tamil is the language spoken predominantly in the Northern Province. The Muslims living in the Northern Province speak Tamil. Sinhala language is also spoken in some parts of this province. In this chapter a detailed explanation is given about the Tamil language. Tamil is a language with a long and ancient literary tradition that has been spoken in Southern India for several hundreds of years. Tamil belongs to the southern branch of the Dravidian languages, a family of around more than twenty-five languages native to the Indian subcontinent. The Dravidian language family is distinct from the Indo-European language family, including Hindi and many other Indian languages, Farsi, and the Germanic and Roman languages. The closest major relative of Tamil is Malayalam. Until about the ninth century, Malayalam was a dialect of Tamil.

Although many of the differences between Tamil and Malayalam evidence a pre-historic split of the western dialect, the process of separation into distinct language Malayalam was not completed until sometime in the 13th or 14th century.

As a Dravidian language, Tamil descends from Proto-Dravidian. Linguistic reconstruction suggests that Proto-Dravidian was spoken around the third millennium BC, possibly in the region around the lower Godavari river basin in peninsular India. The material evidence suggests that the speakers of Proto-Dravidian were the people associated with the Neolithic complexes of South India. The next phase in the reconstructed proto-history of Tamil is Proto-South Dravidian. The linguistic evidence suggests that Proto-South Dravidian was spoken around the middle of the second millenium BC, and that proto-Tamil emerged around the third century BC. The earliest epigraphic attestations of Tamil are generally taken to have been written shortly thereafter.

Tamil literature has existed for over two thousand years. The earliest epigraphic records found date from around the third century BC. The earliest period of Tamil literature, Cankam literature, is dated from the 300 BC – 300 AD. Inscriptions in Tamil Language from 1st century BC and 2nd century AD have been discovered in Egypt and Thailand. Scholars categorize the attested history of the language into three periods, Old Tamil (300 BC - 700 A.D), Middle Tamil (700 - 1600) and Modern Tamil (1600–present).

The Tamil language is spoken in a wide range of countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa, and parts of East Africa, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Trinidad, Guyana, and Mauritius. It is now spoken in a number of European countries also. It is an official language in India, Sri Lanka, and Singapore.

Tamil is a diglossic language, which means there is a large difference between the written form of the language and the spoken form. These differences include grammatical, vocabulary, and

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pronunciation differences. The literary form is considered prestigious, while the spoken form is used in informal settings by all social classes. The foreigner, therefore, has to note the distinction and learn the two forms separately for the two purposes. An English man had been learning formal Tamil from a Tamil Pundit. One day he at a public market used the formal literary or written Tamil to buy some fruits. The shop-keepers were smiling and he was told that you should learn to use the spoken Tamil at that situation.

Tamil has been influenced by other languages. Sanskrit, an Indo-European language and a parent language of Hindi, Bengali, and other North Indian languages has influenced Tamil significantly. However, since colonial times increased cultural interaction with the British, English has become the most influential language on the Tamil language

The dialect used in the Northern Province is the oldest and closest to old Tamil. The long physical isolation of the Tamils of this province has enabled their dialect to preserve ancient features of old Tamil that predate *Tolkappiyam*, the Tamil grammatical treatise belonging to the 3rd century BC. Their ordinary speech is closely related to classical Tamil. In the case of Tamil, even though it had gone through several changes, a number of words, phrases and sentences found in early Tamil poems are still used by Tamil speaking people in the North of Sri Lanka. Sanmugadas (see, Sanmugadas, A. "Jaffna Tamil and Cankam Tamil", <http://www.viruba.com/tamilwritings/00010.aspx>, retrieved 1 April 2010.) has compared some sentences and phrases from **Kuruntokai (Recently translated into Sinhala)**, one of the Cankam anthologies, with the Tamil spoken even now in the North of Sri Lanka. Among the 400 poems of this anthology, a number of sentences are found which are comparable with those from Northern Sri Lankan Tamil.

According to Kanapathi Pillai (1958:219-20), "little before the Christian era, Tamils had made settlements in Sri Lanka and got mixed up with the indigenous people called Nagas. By that time when the



third Tamil Academy flourished in the city of Madura, Tamil literary men from this part of the country had received recognition from the Tamil Academy. The poems of Īlattup Pūtan Tēvanār (Pūtan Tēvan of Īlam) are included in the Sangam collection of Tamil poems. Īlam was the name of Ceylon during the early period... It is not totally wrong to assume that the colloquial dialect prevalent at present in North Ceylon is a continuation of the speech spoken during the period under discussion". This is only an assumption. Since we do not have any records regarding the spoken form of Tamil during the Christian era, it is difficult to prove it.

The Northern Province Tamil (The term 'Jaffna Tamil' mostly represent the Provincial dialect) seemed to have a long history. The question is when it would have separated from the Indian Tamil. Suseendrarajah (1973) in his study of the pronouns of Batticaloa Tamil has shown many similarities between Batticaloa Tamil and Indian Tamil. On the strength of these similarities and of the preservation of an older state of language in Jaffna Tamil, he suggests (p.179) "Jaffna Tamil would have separated from Indian Tamil long before Batticaloa Tamil separated from Indian Tamil." There is evidence for some more similarities between Batticaloa Tamil and Indian Tamil. Especially the i/e and u/o alternations in Batticaloa Tamil and Indian Tamil may help us to fix the period for the separation of Batticaloa Tamil and Jaffna Tamil from Indian Tamil (see, Sanmugadas, 1983).

Tamil phonology is characterised by the presence of retroflex consonants, multiple rhotics. Tamil does not distinguish phonologically between voiced and unvoiced consonants; phonetically, voice is assigned depending on a consonant's position in a word. Tamil phonology permits few consonant clusters, which can never be word initial. Native grammarians classify Tamil phonemes into vowels, consonants, and a "secondary character", the āytam.

Classical Tamil had a phoneme called the Āytam, written as / and the Tamil grammarians of the time classified it as a dependent phoneme. It is very rare in modern Tamil. The rules of pronunciation given in

the Tolkāppiyam, a text on the grammar of Classical Tamil, suggest that the āytam could have glottalised the sounds it was combined with. It has also been suggested that the āytam was used to represent the voiced implosive (or closing part or the first half) of geminated voiced plosives inside a word. The Āytam, in modern Tamil, is also used to convert pa to fa when writing English words using the Tamil script.

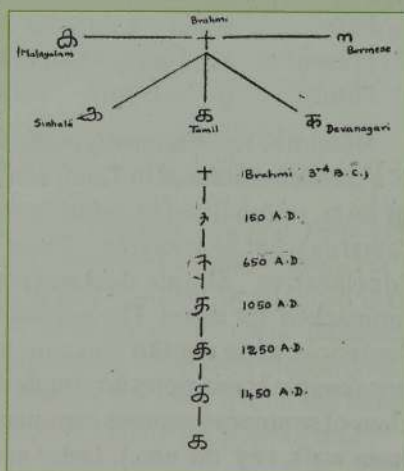
Apart from the usual numerals, Tamil also has numerals for 10, 100 and 1000.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	100	1000
௦	௧	௨	௩	௪	௫	௬	௭	௮	௯	௧௦	௧௦௦	௧௦௦௦

Though the Tamil numerals are not popular among the Tamils, their use was evident in old and pre-modern writings. Even now the traditional doctors and astrologers use these numerals.

Tamil employs agglutinative grammar, where suffixes are used to mark noun class, number, and case, verb, tense and other grammatical categories. Much of Tamil grammar is extensively described in the oldest known grammar book for Tamil, the Tolkāppiyam. Modern Tamil writing is largely based on the 13th century grammar, Nannūl which restated and clarified the rules of Tolkāppiyam, with some modifications. Traditional Tamil grammar consists of five parts, namely, eḷuttu 'letters/sounds, col 'words', poruḷ 'meaning and content of poetry', yāppu (Poetics) and aṇi (Alankara). Of these, the last two are mostly applied in poetry.

Tamil scripts, along with the scripts of Malayalam, Sinhala, etc. have developed from the South Brahmi. As an illustration, the letter க k is cited:



Tamil nouns (and pronouns) are classified into two classes “rational” and the “irrational” which include a total of five genders (pāl, which literally means ‘sides or sections’). Humans and deities are classified as “rational”, and all other nouns (animals, objects, abstract nouns) are classified as irrational. The “rational” nouns and pronouns belong to one of three genders masculine singular, feminine singular and rational plural. The “irrational” nouns and pronouns belong to one of two classes - irrational singular and irrational plural. The pāl is often indicated by the suffixes. The plural form for rational nouns may be used as an honorific, gender-neutral, singular form.

Tamil verbs are inflected through the use of suffixes. A typical Tamil verb form will have a number of suffixes, which show person, number, mood, tense and voice. Like the case for the noun, the tense is typical and definitive for verbs. The category of tense is related to time and is expressed by systematic grammatical contrasts. Three such contrasts were recognized by the traditional grammarians in the analysis of Tamil. There are various signs which denote tense in Tamil. These signs are infixed between the verbal stem and the suffix that denotes person, number and gender. The following are the tense signs:

Past	:	t-/-nt-/-t-/-in-/-n-/	cey-t-ān
Present	:	kiṛ-/-kinr-/-kkir-/-kkinr-/	cey-kiṛ-ān
Future	:	p-/-v-/-pp-/	cey-v-ān

Mood, like tense is mostly realized by inflecting the verb. There is a class of sentences in Tamil which express simple statements of facts, unqualified in relation to the attitude of the speaker towards what he is saying. These sentences are named, **ceppu** “declarative”. Simple declarative sentences of this kind are ‘unmarked’ for mood. The normal finite verbs are used in these sentences. **avan vantān** ‘He came’ and **manitan ceytān** ‘man did’ are a couple of examples for simple declarative sentences. Another class of sentences express commands or instructions (**vā** ‘come’, **naṭa** walk, **cey** ‘do’ etc.). These are imperative sentences (**ēval**



order or command' in Tamil). In many languages, the imperative sentences are associated with the 'second person'. The uninflected verbs are used for the imperative sentences in Tamil. It has already been stated that it is the normal practice in Tamil not to inflect verb for 'second person singular'. The imperative verbs with the addition of the suffix - **ka** will express 'wish' or 'respectful command': e.g **cey-ka** 'may you do', **vaḷar-ka** 'may it grow', etc.

Aspect, a grammatical category of verb, is common in modern Tamil. It is expressed by modifying the verb by means of auxiliaries'. Compare verbs **cey-t-ēn** 'I did' and **ceytu-muṭi-tt-ēn** 'I finished doing it'. The former does not say whether the 'action' was completed or not; it merely tells us that the speaker spent some time doing a work. But the latter carries with it the positive implication that the 'action' or doing was completed (the completive marker in this case in an auxiliary **muti** 'finish' which is attached to the verb: **ceytu-muṭi-tt-ēn**).

Negative in Tamil is expressed by the inflexion of verb not by adding any particle to the verb as in English or Sanskrit. The most common negative marker is -**ā-**. This is in complimentary distribution with the tense markers. That is in the place of the tense sign the negative marker is inserted which gets assimilated with the next vowel so that one can say the absence of tense sign in a verb shows that it is negative.

e.g : paṭi-kkir-ān	'he is studying
paṭi- ān → paṭiyān	'he studies not'

Tamil is a consistently head-final language. The verb comes at the end of the clause, with typical word order Subject Object Verb (SOV). However, word order in Tamil is also flexible, so that surface permutations of the SOV order are possible with different pragmatic effects. Tamil has postpositions rather than prepositions. Demonstratives and modifiers precede the noun within the noun phrase. Subordinate clauses precede the verb of the matrix clause.

Tamil exhibits concordial relationship between the subject and the verb of a sentence. That is, the subject and the verb agree in person, number and gender. Mostly the personal pronouns are used as subjects in colloquial Sri Lanka Tamil. The verbs of such subject nominals take certain pronominal terminations to agree with the nominals. For example, the following sentences in Sinhala,

ohu kāvā  
āya kāvā  
ēkā kāvā

would be translated as follows:

avan cāppiṭṭān  
avaḷ cāppiṭṭāl  
atu cāppiṭṭatu

In Sinhala the predicate form is same for all three sentences. But in Tamil the predicative forms are added with the **masculine -ān**, the **feminine -āl** and the **neuter -atu** endings respectively.

Tamil has borrowed words from various languages with which it has come into contact. At one time Sanskrit was the lingua Franca of the whole of India. Its religious philosophical political and literary influence spared no language in the sub-continent in Sri Lanka and in some south East Asian countries. Tamil was no exception to this. The earlier borrowings came from Prakrit and Pali of the Buddhists and the Jains. Words like **vaci** for **varsa** "rain" **Kaṇṇan** for **Krisna** "Lord Krishna", **vittai** for **vidya** "arts" etc., were borrowed from Prakrit and Pali.

Although Tamil has borrowed many words from other languages, it is interesting to note that verbs are never borrowed. The verbs system in the written Tamil is a closed one. But in spoken language a number of English verbs are used. Even then those verbal forms are not used alone. An auxiliary **paṇṇu** 'do' is always added with a foreign verb. Hence: **drive - paṇṇiran** 'I am



driving' **meet - paṇṇiran** 'I am meeting' **wash- paṇṇiran** 'I am washing' etc.

### Idiomatic usages in North Sri Lankan Tamil

Northern Tamil possesses many linguistic peculiarities at all levels namely, phonological morphological, syntactic and semantic, that make it a distinctive dialect of Tamil. The linguistic peculiarities also include numerous idiomatic usages.

The word "idiom" is sometimes used to describe the form of speech peculiar to a people or nation. It is also used for the meaning expressed by those forms of expression, of grammatical construction, or of phrasing, which are peculiar to a language and approved by its usage, although the meanings they convey are often different from their grammatical or logical signification. Idiomatic usages are those words or phrases that are verbal anomalies, which transgress, that is to say, either the laws of grammar or the laws of logic. For example, let us consider the following phrase: **nāṅku vaḷaipparkaḷ**. **Nāṅku** in normal usages shall mean 'tongue' and **vaḷaipparkaḷ** shall mean 'they will twist'. The literal translation for the phrase will be 'they will twist tongues'. But in North Sri Lanka it is used to mean: 'they will tease'. This idiomatic usage is not found in the Indian dialect of Tamil. For convenience, the idiomatic expressions are cited from a Tamil novel written by K. Daniel. Daniel is from Jaffna. He has written several novels and short stories. He has succeeded in portraying realistically the life of the people in the Northern Province. He has employed the Tamil spoken in this Province. As a creative artist he has chosen several interesting idiomatic expressions to express feelings and the meanings of certain behaviours. **oppēttipōṭṭan** 'I have managed to complete (it)' (234)

**oppu** 'equal'

**ēttu** 'cause to rise'

**pōtu - an** 'put-I'

nakkalaṭikkirār 'he passes sarcastic remarks' (25)

nakkal 'licking'

aṭi - kkir-ār 'he lashes'

vāypākkattē 'Am I to watch while you eat?' (109)

vāy 'mouth'

pā(r)-kk-aṭṭē- 'am I to see?'

This usage originated due to the practices observed in partaking meals among the people of Jaffna. One is not expected to stay at a place where someone is having his meals. Children are told, in a Jaffna house, not to look at the mouth of a person who eats. In other words, they are reminded that they have no business to stay at a place where a person is having his meals unless they are also invited to partake in it.

paṇṇippaṭaikkappōrār 'he is not going to do anything better, (410)

paṇṇu 'do, make'

paṭai -kk-a-pō-rār 'he is going to offer'

This usage is associated with a religious practice. Paṭai-tt-al is offering sacrifices to the deity. It is an elaborate process. One has to make a lot of arrangements to do this offering. If a person does not make any efforts or if he boasts to do certain thing although he cannot do so, then this usage is found to be appropriate to describe it.

The above idiomatic usages are often used in the spoken Tamil of the North Sri Lankan People. A creative artist is also a keen observer of the life of the people. Language is a part of human life. Daniel, a keen observer of various aspects of the life of the people of the Northern region, has carefully recorded the idiomatic usages which give full of information about the people and also widen the semantic contents of ordinary expression. These idiomatic usages are found only in the Jaffna dialect of Tamil.

vay nanaikka 'to drink or eat' (26)

vāy 'mouth'

nanaikka 'to wet'

## Culture of the People of the Northern Province

This usage originated due to the strict practices observed by the people of high caste in Jaffna. A high caste man is not expected to drink or eat at a place that belongs to a low caste man. The expressions *vāynaikka*, *vāynanaittal*, etc., are always used in such a situation. *taṭṭumaṛikka* 'to dodge. to resist arguments' (105)

The word *taṭṭu* refers to a traditional game played in Sri Lanka. It is called *kiṭṭitaṭṭu*. Two teams of players participate in this game. A number of squares are drawn within a large rectangle on the ground. One team of players have to guard the squares to prevent other team of players. The former is called *taṭṭu maṛittal* while the latter is called *taṭṭumāral*. The expression *taṭṭu maṛikka* is used as an idiom in Jaffna Tamil meaning 'to dodge or to resist any arguments'

*kaimaṇṭai* 'hand hollowed and closed to receive water to drink' (206)

*kai* 'hand'

*maṇṭai* 'vessel'

This idiom too is associated with another practice connected with the caste system in Northern Province. People of the low castes were not allowed to draw water from the wells that are located in high caste area. They had not been allowed to use cups to drink water. If a man of the low caste feels thirsty, then a high caste man has to draw water from the well and pour it on his hand to drink. *Kaimaṇṭai* is used to describe the manner of drinking. If cups are not available, anyone may drink in this manner. *cāviṭṭai* 'a bumper harvest or victory' (206)

*cā* 'death'

*viṭṭai* 'growth'

There is a belief among the Northern Sri Lankan Tamils that if some enjoys a thumping harvest anytime, then a death might occur in his family. The origin of this belief is not clear. But it is still current among the people Sri Lanka Tamil writers felt that by portraying any aspects of the life of the Tamils of this country and their dialect would contribute to make their writings be distinguished from those of the South Indian writers. Among them, K. Daniel and others excel in using the Northern Sri Lankan dialect of Tamil.





# TAMIL LITERATURE



3

The Tamils of Sri Lanka, for administrative purposes, are often divided into two groups, namely, Sri Lanka Tamils and Indian Tamils. Linguistically and racially all Tamils of Sri Lanka are considered to be belonging to one race. However, certain dialectic and minor cultural differences are found among them. Studies on Sri Lanka Tamil language and culture reveal Jaffna Tamils preserve certain archaic types of the language and culture. (1) The Jaffna District is situated in the northernmost region of the Island Sri Lanka. The Tamil name for that region is **Yālppāṇam** an abbreviated form of the earlier name **Yālppāṇapattinam**. (2) Since it is in close proximity to Tamilnadu, a State in the Indian Sub-continent consisting more than 50 million Tamils, the Jaffna Tamils were able to have close contact with their counterparts in

Tamilnadu. Among all the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, Jaffna has the credit of producing more literary works starting from an early period.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of Tamil scholars from Jaffna had gone to Tamilnadu and made their valuable contributions to the development of Tamilology. Jaffna also has preserved a number of ancient Tamil customs which are not found in any other Tamil – speaking regions. Their customs have to be explored in detail.

According to legends, the origin of Sri Lankan Tamil literature dates back to the Cankam age dated variously from 300 BC to 300 A.D. The poet known as Īlattu Pūthantēvanār is believed to be a Tamil poet from this period. He has composed a number of poems. For example, the following poem is found in one of the Cankam anthologies called **Kuruntokai** – 343. The Tamil text of the poem, the Sinhala transliteration and translation, and English translation are given below:

நினையாய் வாழி தோழி நனைகவுள்  
அண்ணல் யானை அணிமுகம் பாய்ந்தென  
மிகுவலி இரும்புலிப் பகுவா யேற்றை  
வெண்கோடு செம்மறுக் கொளீஇ விடர்முகைக்  
கோடை யொற்றிய கருங்கால் வேங்கை  
வாடுபூஞ் சினையிற் கிடக்கும்  
உயர் வரை நாடனொடு பெயரும் ஆறே.

ஈழத்துப்பூதந்தேவனார்

தோலி ஐபிர்

நினைசாய் வாழி தோலி நனைகவுள்  
அண்ணல் யானை அணிமுகம் பாய்ந்தென  
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கோடை யொற்றிய கருங்கால் வேங்கை  
வாடுபூஞ் சினையிற் கிடக்கும்  
உயர் வரை நாடனொடு பெயரும் ஆறே.

பேர்துல் ஐந்தெனார்

ප්‍රදේශය: කාන්තාරය ආශ්‍රිත ප්‍රදේශය

අවස්ථාව: නායකයා සමඟ පළා යන ලෙස යෙහෙළිය නායිකාවට පවසයි

මහත් ශක්තිවන්ත කොටියා මුඛ හයාගෙන

කිසි මද තෙත් වූ කන් තල ඇති ඇතු මුහුණට කඩා පැන

සුදු දළ රුහිරෙන් රත් පැහැ ගත්වයි

පැතිරුණු කඳු ඇති උඩු සුළගෙන් ගෙනවිත් දමන ලද

කළු පැහැ වියළි ගම්මාළු අත්තේ මල් පරවී ගොසින්ය

උස්වූ කඳු ඇති දෙසෙහි වසන්නා සමඟ

යෑමට ඇති හැකියාව සිතා බලනී

**රිළක්කුප් පුතත්තේවතාර්**

(Translated by Wimal Saminathan, Manonmani  
Sanmugadas & A. Sanmugadas)

In his mountain land

a strong black, male tiger,

with open mouth

leaped on a huge, wet-cheeked elephant

with a beautiful face,

and was killed.....leaving red stains

on white tusks;

now that tiger lies in a cave of split rock,

like a branch of a black-stemmed vēnkai tree

with old flowers

felled by the west wind:

May you prosper, my friend,

and resolve

to go away with him

(Translated by M. Shanmugam Pillai and Davia E. Ludden)

After Īlattu Pūthantēvanār's compositions, we come across an astrology book **Caracōtimālai** written in 1310 AD by Pōcrāca Paṇṭitar who launched his book at the Court of Parakramabhahu IV who ruled from Dambadeniya.

In the history of Sri Lankan Tamil literature, the Northern Province plays a major role from the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Jaffna Kingdom that included the Northern Province was established in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. But Tamil literary activities seemed to have accelerated during the reigns of Cinkai Cekarācacēkaran (1380-1414) and Nallur Pararācacēkaran (1478-1519). During Cinkai Cekarācacēkaran's rule, an academy for the propagation of Tamil language on the model of ancient Tamil Cankam was established in Nallur. This academy performed a useful service in collecting and preserving ancient works in the form of manuscripts in a library called *Saraswathy Mahal*. Cinkai Cekarācacēkaran's cousin Arasakēsari is credited with translating the Sanskrit classic Raghuvamsa into Tamil. During the period of the Jaffna Kingdom several medical, astrological and literary texts had been composed. During the reign of Cayavīra Cinkaiāriyan, **Cekarācacēkaram**, a book on medical sciences, **Cekarācacēkaramālai**, a book on astrology and **Kaṇakkatikāram**, a text on mathematics were composed. During the rule of Kunavīra Cingaiāriyan, a work on medicine known as **Pararācacēkaram** was completed.

Books of historic importance were composed during this period. The details are given below:

**Vaiyā Pāṭal** speaks of the lineage of the Sri Lankan kings and of the settlements of various people. This was composed by Vaiyāpuri Aiyar.

**Kailāyamālai** relates the story about the building of Kailāsanātar Temple in Nallur, Jaffna by Cinkaiāriyan. This was composed by Mutturācakkavirācar.

**Kōṇēcar Kalvettu** was composed by Irācavarōtaiyan. It describes the services rendered by King Kuḷakkōṭṭan and also by King Gajabhahu.

Historically important two Temple Puranas were composed during this period. They were Takshiṇakailāca Purāṇam and Tirukkaraicaip Purāṇam. Takshiṇakailāca Purāṇam seems to be an old Temple



## Culture of the People of the Northern Province

Purana on Tirukkōṇēcuvaram. Tirukkaraicaip Purāṇam sings the glory of Lord Siva at the temple situated in Karaicai, a place along the Makāvali River.

**Katiraimalaip Paḷḷu** which praises the glory of God residing in Katirkāmam was composed during this period. Since it portrays the life of Paḷḷar, the peasants in the paddy fields, this literary text has been named as **Paḷḷu**.

During the Portuguese and the Dutch periods (1619–1796) several literary and other texts had been produced. The Catholic Missionaries during the Portuguese period propagated their religious activities through Tamil literary texts. The biblical stories and the life stories of the Catholic Saints were the contents of the literary forms that had already been introduced in Tamil. Such literary forms were popular ones and helped the ordinary people to understand the contents. **ñānap Paḷḷu** and **Saint Yākkappār (St. James) Ammānai** are two literary compositions during the Portuguese period. **Yākkappār Ammānai** was composed by Peturup Pulavar.

Considerable Tamil literary activities had taken place during the Dutch period (1658-1796). Eminent poets like Nallur Cinnatampi Pulavar, Tellippaḷai Pulōkacinka Mutaliyār, and Kūlankait Tampirān lived in the Northern Province during this period.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an active literary development in the Northern Province. Ārumuganāvalar (1822-1879) wrote and published a number of books. He outdid Christians by employing their strategies (printing tracts, prose versions of old texts in verse, school texts, polemic writings) to fight back what he called Christian intrusions. For more than thirty years he campaigned vigorously and unceasingly towards establishing a system of education in harmony with the traditional and cultural background of the child. The movement he set afoot spread throughout the Northern Province and beyond. He restored the Northern Province to the glories of its heritage as the stronghold of Saivaism. He was described as the “Venerable Anakarika Dharmapala Thero” of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka.

Among the galaxy of revivalists and scholars who wrought the intellectual milieu of 19<sup>th</sup> century Northern Sri Lanka, C.W. Thamotharampillai was one who was responsible to bring out the classical literary texts and grammatical treatises of Tamil language in printed books. The Tamil world will remember this scholar from the North for ever. If not for him some of the Tamil classics would have perished.

The period of joint missionary activities by the Anglican, American Ceylon and Methodist Missions saw the spread of modern education and the expansion of translation activities. Scholaras from the North actively participated in translations and in compilation of dictionaries.

Badurudeen Pulavar from Jaffna was a Muslim representative who had contributed to the Tamil literary development of the Northern Province. He wrote **Mukaitteen Puranam** which has some beautiful poems that exhibit the poet's literary talents.

Some of the significant characteristics of the Northern Province Sri Lankan Tamil were by this time easily distinguishable. They were: dichotomous development of religio-literary traditions, namely, Saiva-Tamil, Christian-Tamil literature and Islamic-Tamil literature and secular literary developments, each enjoying popularity at its own level.

The beginning of the twentieth century produced the first traditional woman poet of Sri Lanka. We are proud that she is from the Northern Province. At the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a women poetic tradition in Vadamaratchy, Northern Province. Pārvathi Ammaiyaṛ who had a traditional learning in Jaffna taught two young girls to sit for the Madurai Tamil Pantitar Examination. Both of them were successful at the examination. One of them was Pathmasany Ammāl from Point Pedro. She composed one hundred poems on the God who resides at Puloly Pacupatisvarar Temple. It was published in 1925. She had also translated some poems of Thomas Gray.

Prof. Sivathamby summarizes as follows as to what happened between 1950 and 1960 in the field of Tamil literature:

In a culture where literature had been the handmaid of social conservatism, it soon led to bitter polemics in defining the role of tradition and the social function of literature. A debate ensued, and the progressives (this writer was involved in it deeply) and the punditry were locked in a bitter controversy. This, of course, was in the arena of polemics. But its social reverberations were far-reaching. Almost all, from people in the academia to the average member of the reading public, were involved. But in the field of creative writing there was another confrontation. Progressive writing was condemned by some persons as too doctrinaire and by some others as unaesthetic too. The progressives insisted on the message. Realism as a literary strategy was very much a debating point.

Of the counter-positions expounded and argued effectively, the most important was that of M. Thalayasingham, a socio-literary activist. He argued that one has to take cognizance of a dimension beyond Marxism, and spoke of a sense of spiritualism as essential to literature. He did not deny the validity of Marxism but argued for a spiritualism that lies beyond Marxism. Looking back, it was his perception about the emerging political trauma that is significant.

The period from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1960s with its literary debates and creative efflorescence marks an important phase in the development of modern Sri Lankan Tamil literature.

With the establishment of modern universities and a free education system in post-independent Sri Lanka, the 1960s saw a social revolt against the caste system in Jaffna which had an impact on Tamil literature. S. Ganeshalingam, K. Daniel, Dominic Jeeva and others were the products of this period. In fact, K. Daniel, the eminent novelist who wrote **Pancamar**, is considered the forerunner of Dalit writing.

The dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the beginning of the modern Tamil literary history in the Northern Province. In the field of poetry, the first half of the century witnessed both traditional and new trends. But at



the beginning of the second half, young poets have been injecting new vigor and style to Tamil poetry. In the sixties, poets like Makākavi, Murukaiyan, Navatkuliyūr Natarajan, and others have been creating poems with new content and form. The emergence of Progressive Writers' Association created an unprecedented literary impact on all writings in the North too. It brought about a certain togetherness among the emerging young writers of the various regions, especially the Upcountry region and the Southern districts (Muslim writers), and it was forging ahead as a truly Sri Lankan Tamil literary movement with the writers from the North and the East playing an important role. Equally important was the writing this movement triggered against social exploitation and the caste system in the North. For the first time in Tamil literature, the victims of social oppression wrote about their sufferings, their humiliations and deprivations. Tamil Nadu had to wait till the 1990s for Dalits to write about themselves. As mentioned above, K. Daniel from the North Lanka is considered as the pioneer of Dalit literature. In spite of this development, there was a sharp debate between the progressive and non-progressive writers.

The ideological controversies that raged in the sixties have been loosing the sharpness. A second generation of writers in both the progressive and the non- and anti-progressive fronts, who were able to make a rich contribution to the growing corpus of Sri Lankan Tamil poetry came into the scene. Among the poets of the 1970s one could notice Puthuvai Rathnadurai, Sivasegaram, Mu. Ponnambalam and Vilvaratnam were highly articulate. 1980s had highly sensitive issues. The pattern of life changed in the North. K. Sivathamby summarizes as follows the state of the poetry at this time:

“Poetry, understandably, was the first to record these new changes and experiences. An anthology of poems edited by Nuhman, Cheran and Jesurajah was titled **Marapaṭṭuḷ Vālvōm** (We Live Amidst Death), 1984, and it summed up the emotional climate of these areas. Living amidst death had become the order of the day. Nuhman's translation of Palestinian poets opened up a new vista



to young Sri Lankan readers. It was Cheran, the son of Mahakavi, a new arrival of the 1980s, who recorded with authenticity and sincerity the changed feelings and emotions. His anthologies, **Iraṇṭāvathu Cūriya Uṭayam** (The Second Sunrise) and **Yaman** though slender in size, left a deep impression."

Among the poets mentioned by Sivathamby, Cheran and Jesurajah are from the North of Sri Lanka, though Cheran at the moment is living in Canada.

Modern literary forms like the novel and short story were introduced to Tamil literature by the Europeans. Thus Sidde Lebbe Maraikkar was able to write the first Sri Lankan Tamil novel in 1885. Just after this C.V. Sinnappapillai from the Northern Province wrote a historical Tamil novel called **Veerasingan Katai** (the Story of Veerasingan). Novels portraying the life of the people of this province were written only from the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Sri Lankan Tamil woman novelist Mangalanayagam Thambiah published her novel **Norunkunṭa Irutayam** (The Broken Heart) in 1914. Though it is a Christian propaganda novel, it portrays the social pattern and the dialect of the people of the Northern Province. After 1930 a number of novelists were actually interested in portraying the typical Northern Province social problems such as dowry, caste and religious problems. Writers then were Jaffna Thevan, A.S. Murugananthan, Professor K. Kanapathipillai, T. Shanmugasundaram, Cokkan, S. Ponnuthurai, S. Ganesalingan, K. Daniel, S. Dominic Jeeva, and Senkai Āliyān

Tamil short stories have been written from 1930 onwards. The names in the list of novelists are also included in the list of Northern Province Tamil Short story writers. The pioneers of Tamil short story in this country are all from the Northern Province. Ilankaiyarkōn, Sampanthan and Vaithilingam were the pioneers of Tamil short stories in Sri Lanka.

North Lanka Tamil fiction inspite of its ups and downs had a better development. Varadar, Daniel, Dominic Jeeva, Raghunathan, Kavalur Rajathurai, Se. Ganesalingan, S. Ponnudurai, K.V. Nadarajan, Nanthi,

Senkai Āliyān, Sembian Selvan, Muttulingam and Bhavani Alvapillai were important contributors to this development. All the torment of living in war-torn environs in the North and the agony that characterises human relations in such uprooted, disjointed situations, are brought out well in the short stories of Ranjakumar and Uma Varadarasan. The intensity and the depth of suffering, its unprecedentedness, must be read to be believed. Ranjakumar's **Kōsalai** (the mother of Rama in Ramayana) is a brilliant portrayal of the helpless mothers whose sons run away from home.

Traditional dramas were rendered mainly in verse form. From the beginning of this century, as a new development in the Tamil dramatic literature prose has been replacing verse. After Professor K. Kanapathipillai who skillfully employed the Jaffna dialect for the first time by the early fifties to depict the social life of the people of North Sri Lanka. Cokkan, A.T. Ponnuthurai, Jaffna Tevan, Kanaka Senthinathan, Makakavi and many others have been contributing to the development of the Tamil dramatic literature of North Lanka. Sivathamby's observation on the development of dramatic literature in the North is as follows:

"A theatrical upsurge since the late 1970s has brought about a rich theatrical culture, especially in the North, and there are now some eminent playwrights. They stand shoulder to shoulder with Professor Kanapathipillai of the 1940s and 1950s. Shanmugalingam's theatrical writings constitute another artistic diagnosis of the ethnic war. Children's theatre and educational theatre too have done well. Murugaiyan and Mahakavi had in the 1960s and the early 1970s written commendable verse dramas."

The Northern Province produced two literary magazines which are worthy of mention here. Dominic Jeeva's **Mallikai** was the chief forum for the publication of progressive writing and the role of Jesurajah's **Alai** in bringing out other writings was significant.

# CEREMONIES AND CELEBRATIONS

In Bringing up a Child in North  
Sri Lankan Tamil Society



A complete and systematic study on the culture of the Tamils of the Northern Province is yet to be undertaken. It will be useful to investigate how customs and beliefs in the life of the people of this province have been helping to shape up their society and its culture. A number of customs and beliefs are related to the bringing up of a child in the Tamil society of Northern Sri Lanka. They are briefly outlined here.

## CHILD IN THE SOCIETY

The Child occupies an important position in the society. **Tirukkural**, an ancient Tamil text, has the following to say:

mañkalam enpa manai māṭci marratan  
nankalam nanmakkaṭ pēru

“A virtuous wife is a blessing, and good children are its adornment”



A new born child is much valued in all societies. Whenever a child was born it was considered as an addition to the family and the society. Certain customs and restrictions regarding child birth were observed by the members of the family and the society in Northern Sri Lanka.

When a woman conceives a child, from that time onwards, she causes certain changes in the attitudes of the members of the family and the neighbours and also in the daily work of the house-hold. In order to prevent any imbalance being created due to those changes, certain customs were introduced. These preventive customs were meant to be observed both by males and females. Thus, customs and beliefs in the life of a man begin as soon as he became an embryo in his mother's womb. Some aspects of the Tamil culture are preserved in customs and beliefs that are connected with the child-birth and bringing up the child in the North. The Tamil word *tuṭakku* is significant in this way. It is used in two senses, namely, 'acquisition' and has to establish his relationship with it. The word *tuṭakku* is associated with three important events in Northern Tamil society, namely, the child-birth, puberty and death. In the case of child – birth, the arrival of the new member in the family forces the members to acquire it and establish its relationship. **Tuṭanku**, the intransitive form of **tuṭakku**, means 'to begin or start'. When a new member arrives into the world or a member departs from this world or a member ceases her childhood and attains adolescence, then a certain amount of imbalance is created in the family and the society. The members of the family and the society have to begin to adopt themselves to the new atmosphere and changes created by these events. It is highly probable that the Tamils have been observing the custom called *tuṭakku* in this sense. That is, beginning to adopt themselves to the new situation created by any one of the events, namely, child – birth, puberty or death.

## CHILD – BIRTH AND BELIEFS

Birth of a child is considered to be an important occasion among the Jaffna Tamils. They believe that a new wealth has been acquired by it. If a couple has a child within an year of their marriage then they



are considered to be members of a good and fortunate family. Earlier no discrimination was made between male and female children. Later, in Northern Tamil society, a family was considered to be socially respectable and auspicious if it had a boy as its first child. Women, immediately after wedding have been observing certain customs and rites in order to have a child at the earliest possible time. A man without a child is called **malaṭan** ('a barren man') and a woman **malaṭi**. Both **malaṭan** and **malaṭi** are denied the right to perform any rites in auspicious ceremonies and functions. Therefore, in order to have a child, man or woman in Northern Tamil society is prepared to observe any customs or rites that are prescribed for it. The following are some of them.

### 1.1 Fasting

To attain certain objectives one reduces food or refrains from it and by doing so he or she learns to control the mind and senses. Fasting of this type is always accompanied by regular worship of the family gods. This is a popular custom observed by several men and women of the Northern Province who are anxious to have children. Fasting is performed only on certain days. **Tinkaḷ** (Monday) and **Velli** (Friday) are considered to be suitable days for this purpose. **Āṭi** (July – August) and **Aippaci** (October – November) are regarded as suitable months for fasting. The term used to refer to the custom of fasting is **viratam** which occupies an important place in the lives of the Tamils. In Jaffna, those men or women who have not been blessed with a child for a long time observes a religious **viratam** called **Kantasaṣṭi**. One who observes this **viratam** refrains from eating any food for a period of six days and shall take only seven pepper seeds and seven gulps of water in the evening on each day. Along with this fasting, some may take a vow to carry a **Kāvaṭi** (carrying the sacred pole to the temple) or **Karakam** (Carrying the sacred pot) or **pāl cempu** (carrying milk pot) or to perform fire walking. The observance of these difficult viratams explains the importance of possessing a child in the Northern Tamil society.

## 1.2. Pouring Water

There is a strong belief among the Jaffna Tamils that a woman would conceive a child if she pours water at the bottom of a tree of her own temple called **tala virutcam** 'temple tree'. **Itti** (Ficus), **Āl** (Banyan), **Aracu** (Ficus religiosa), **Mā** (Mango) **Vēmpu** (Margosa), **Ilantai** (Zizibus jujube), **Makiḷ** (a precious flower tree), etc., are considered to be some of the sacred trees found in most of the temples. Women, after bathing, are expected to pour twenty one pots of water at the foot of those trees for twenty one days without interruption. Women cannot perform any religious rites during their menstruation period. If a woman starts pouring water from the fifth day after her menstruation, she should be able to complete the vow before the next menstruation period. Hence the time limit is 21 days. Men are unable to perform this rite continuously for 21 days due to their work outside the house. Thus this rite is confined only to women.

## 1.3. Tying Coins on Temple Trees

A few coins tied as a knot in a piece of cloth is tied at a branch of a temple tree. This is done in token of a vow taken to perform a ceremony or rite at that temple when they were blessed with a child. The coin cloth tied at the temple tree will always remind him or her of the vow taken. From the day on which they tied the coin-cloth, they would start saving money to complete the vow. People who can not enter the temple get the help of those who can enter the temple.

## 1.4. Collecting Alms in the Lap-fold

Some parents who wish to have a child makes a peculiar kind of vow. That is, they go from house to house begging paddy or rice. A person who has taken this vow goes to each house in his or her locality stands at the entrance saying "give me maṭippiccai" (**maṭi** a fold in the cloth wrapped round the waist, answering for a pocket; **piccai** 'rice and other food given as alms'). The person of the house-hold without opening his or her mouth (i.e. without speaking) puts rice or paddy into the fold. This custom has been popular among the people belonging

to the low caste. People of the low caste who are also poverty stricken have to depend upon the people of the high caste who are also rich. In order to complete their vows taken, they have to collect food items and funds from the people of the high caste. This custom though exhibits the man's generosity, also reveals the inequality in the Tamil society. Because of this caste stigma, this custom is not practiced now.

### **1.5. Planting Young Coconut**

Sometimes the bride, just after marriage, plants a young coconut. Watching the growth of the tree, the elders forecast the possibility of having children by that couple. A Couple who has not been blessed with a child for a long time makes a vow to gift a handful of coins and a young coconut to a particular temple. The Jaffna climate is suitable for the luxuriant growth of the coconut trees throughout the year. All parts of the coconut tree are used for some purpose. It has all the potentialities that are useful for the people irrespective of seasons. The Woman is also regarded as possessing such potentialities. It is because of this, the young coconut is related to child – birth. The vow is usually completed at the end of the eighth month after the child – birth. At that time, a young coconut and a handful of coins are given to the temple. The coins are given by the child to the priest.

### **1.6. Cradle and Child**

As a final attempt, a couples who has no children for a long time, makes a vow to present a replica of a cradle and child made either in gold or silver, if they were blessed with a child. The presentation is made at the temple after the child is born.

### **1.7. Selling the Child in the Temple**

The couples, sometimes, take a vow that if they were blessed with a child, then they would sell the child in a particular temple. On the 41<sup>st</sup> day after the birth, the child is taken to the temple and the priest shall request the devotees congregated there to buy that child. Usually, a relative of the child pays the highest bid and buys the child. After the temple ceremony, the child will be returned to the parents. Sometimes,



the child grows up with the relative till he is seven years old. After that the child goes back to live with the actual parents.

The above customs and beliefs show the important place a child has in the society. Several such customs are observed to stabilize the social set up in the society.

## MOTHRHOOD AND BELIEFS

Attaining motherhood is an important phase in the development of a woman. She, at this time, is compelled to change her attitudes and habits. Some physical changes take place in her. Members of the family and the society usually look after her well in order to drive away any fear that she may develop due to her physical changes. Probably this situation might have been the main cause for the origin of a number of customs and beliefs that are connected with motherhood and child – birth. They are now being observed as social customs and beliefs. These customs and beliefs are observed by the members of the Northern Tamil society at three levels. They are from the points of view (a) of the pregnant mother, (b) of the members of the family, and (c) of the members of the society.

### 1.1 Of the Pregnant Mother

A married woman realizes that she is pregnant when her usual monthly menstruation stops. She comes to know this fact by the experience of her elders. Earlier in the North, a woman in menstruation confines herself to a secluded place in the house without participating in any normal house hold activities. **Tiṭṭu** (ceremonial impurity from menstruation), **māta vilakku** (monthly prohibition), **cūtakam** (ceremonial impurity from menses), etc., are terms used to denote this situation. “**Toṭa māṭṭāl**” (touch, she will not) is the common term used in the North to denote a woman in menstruation. That is, a woman in menstruation is considered to be polluted and she is not allowed to touch any house-hold items that are usually handled by her. In ancient Tamil texts, reference to this custom is found (see, Sanmugadas, 1983b for further details). Therefore if a married woman



is seen to handle the house-hold items without any interruption, then the members of the house – hold will come to know the fact that she is pregnant (there are, of course other symptoms by which the elders would decide whether a woman is pregnant or not.). This custom also helps the elders to watch the behaviors of the young unmarried girls in the house. Vomiting, giddiness, dizziness, dislike for food, oozing of saliva in the mouth are some of the symptoms by which a young woman confirms her pregnancy. Due to physical changes, she sometimes develops a fear in sexual intercourse with her husband. Therefore, it is customary that she lives in her mother's house for some months. If it is the first child, then it is also customary that she should live in her mother's house for six months even after the child-birth. **Pillai –t-tāycci** is the term used to refer to a pregnant woman. It means "a woman who gives her milk to her child" (Tamil Lexicon, p.1839). It also means "mother bearing child". Sometimes, she is also referred to as **karppini** (pregnant woman). But the former is the most popular usage in Jaffna. A pregnant woman is expected to give up certain habits and customs that she was observing as wife. Particularly, changes are made in her food, sleep and rest. She will be given nourishing food and complete rest. Usually a Tamil wife waits for husband to have her meals. But this practice, her usual duties to the husband and the normal house-hold duties are waived. She is not expected to devote her time fully to these duties. Since she is carrying the family off-spring, she receives such cares; she is permitted to eat whatever food she likes. The desire that a pregnant woman develops towards food is called "yā". Sour fruits, ash, a kind of clay, etc., are some of the items that are desired by a young pregnant woman. The relatives and neighbours use to bring these items and give them to her secretly. There is evidence in one of the ancient Tamil texts to the practice of eating a kind of clay by pregnant women.

### 1.8. Of the members of the Family

Motherhood is cared by every member of the family. They are all expected to take care of her health. Only experienced women are

allowed to do anything to a pregnant woman. She is not allowed to go out during the first three months of her conception. In the nights, a piece of iron is kept under her pillow without her knowledge. It is believed that ghosts and unholy spirits shall not go near an iron. The custom of keeping an iron rod under the pillow of a pregnant woman is observed in order to drive away any feeling of fear that may disturb her pregnancy. She is prohibited from sitting at the door-way; sitting on a mortar; crouching her body while sleeping; sewing with needles, seeing disabled persons; splitting hair and killing lice; milking a cow; eating fruits that are scooped by birds; standing on one leg; etc. The family members are always vigilant to see that the pregnant woman does not do any one of the above prohibited acts. She is not allowed to sleep long during the day time. It is strongly believed that if she gives salt to anyone, the embryo in her womb would abort.

The Husband usually grows a beard when his wife expects a baby and he is not expected to cut the nails of his fingers. This custom seems to be important. It might have been initiated to prevent the man going to other women when his wife is pregnant. It also helps in a way to prevent him causing any damage to the embryo. On the 31<sup>st</sup> day after the child-birth, the father shaves his beard and cuts the finger-nails. Once the pregnancy is confirmed, marriage ceremonies, entering a new house, starting a new business, etc., are postponed till the birth of the child. The husband is also prohibited from participating in any religious ceremonies and ancestral rites.

### 1.9. Of the Society

Since a new-born child is an important member of the society, certain customs relating to pregnancy are observed at the social level too. A pregnant woman is not allowed to cross over the gate-way of any temple. This indirectly helps to prevent her moving freely. Husbands of expecting women are not allowed to participate in temple ceremony called *maṭai*. The women who attend to the delivery of the child is known as **maruttuVICCI** 'medicine woman'. She and the dhoby woman are some of the members of the society who do all the

help that a pregnant mother needs. Buying **nāl carakku** (Buying the necessary ingredients on an auspicious day) brings about a relationship at commercial level. During the seventh month of pregnancy is **nāl carakku** bought. A couple who has already been blessed with children usually performs this function. When they buy those ingredients the names of them are not mentioned. The trader knows this custom very well. He knows what he should give and he also comes to know the news that a certain family is going to have a new member. Corriander, pepper, Cumin seeds, garlic, turmeric, assafetida, ground ginger are some of the ingredients that are found in the **nāl carakku**. If one falls short, then it is considered to be a bad omen. By counting the pepper or garlic the elders would decide whether the baby to come would be a boy or a girl.

During the tenth month, if the delivery is found difficult then there is a custom by which this news is announced to the members of the society. Tom – tom beater will immediately be summoned and will be requested to beat the drums in front of the village temple. A particular kind of drumming is resorted to at this time. **Mulankutal** (roaring or thundering) is the term used to refer to this particular type of drumming. Three persons will go round the temple beating the drums. They will perform this act thrice. When the villagers listen to this sound, they will immediately come to know that a pregnant woman in their village is in difficult condition at her delivery of a child. The villagers will do whatever possible they can do to the family and to make the delivery easy. The tom-tom beaters do this on a humanitarian ground. They really pray and beg the god or goddess in the temple to help that poor woman in labour. Tears use to roll down their cheeks when they beat the drums.

The above customs and beliefs help us to realize the importance of motherhood in the society. The wisdom of the North Sri Lankan Tamil society is reflected in these customs and beliefs. The experiences gained by the elders were handed down to the younger generation of the society. These experiences are reflected in several customs and beliefs and some of them are now forgotten.



## MOTHER-CHILD CARE BELIEFS

The state of **pillai-t-tāycci**, i.e. the mother and child being together, will be over once the child is delivered. Only after the **pillai** 'child' is separated from the woman, she attains the highest status called **tāy** 'mother'. She is honoured and respected for giving birth to a new life. It is at this stage, a woman somewhat exhibits her divine qualities. By feeding the child with her breast milk, she shows to the world the fact that she had been feeding that child with her blood when it was in her womb. Therefore, it is the duty of the members of the family and the society to take care of the mother and the child. Several customs and beliefs were observed in connection with mother and child care. They too are observed at three levels: (a) at mother's level, (b) at family level and (c) at social level.

### 1.1 At Mother's Level

Those days a separate hut was used for the delivery of the baby. A mid-wife and an old woman will always be with the woman in labour. A branch of Margosa leaves is tied at the gate of the parturition hut. The pregnant woman receives the first training at this moment to bear her own pains.

Alutāl – um	pillai	ava -tān	pera	vēṇum
'even if (she) cries'	'the Child'	'she-herself'	'to deliver'	'must'
"Even if (she has been) crying, she herself has to deliver the child"				

This proverb becomes not only her first lesson but also an experience. A North Lanka woman realizes her position through her daily experience. She herself has to observe the customs that bind her and the child with members of the family. Within the period of 31 days after the child-birth, the mother gains more knowledge of the medical customs that are useful for her and the child. The young mother begins to know about the type of food that she has to eat. As a young woman she has been hearing about several customs and practices in relation to child-birth. Now as a young mother she is able to practice them and gain direct experience. She learns certain appropriate terms that



have to be used daily at that situation. For example, **kuḷi** is a verbal stem meaning 'to bathe.' The causative form of this verb in North Sri Lankan Tamil is **kuḷi-pp-āṭṭal**. But this term is never used in relation to the bathing of a child. It is exclusively used to bathe a corpse just before the funeral rites begin. The popular term that is used for bathing a child is **kuḷi-kk-a vār-tt-al**. The young mother learns this from her elders. If the child sneezes once, then the mother (learning it from her elders) has to bless the child saying **nūru** 'hundred'. If the child sneezes twice, then for the second one she has to say **nūrrāṇṭu** 'hundred years'. The young mother is not allowed to do anything other than feeding the child with breast milk. The mid-wife who has been attending to everything during the delivery also becomes the teacher to the young mother teaching in bringing up the new-born child. She will be taught to give appropriate medicine (the native type) to the child. She will learn to apply oil to the limbs of the baby (in Northern Sri Lanka it is a common practice to apply gingely oil to the limbs of the baby and to expose him or her to the morning sun light for a little time. It is believed that the baby would develop proper features); to extract phlegm from the vocal tract; to apply incense (Frank incense is burnt and the child is exposed to the smoke just after every bath. It is believed that the child would not develop cold); and to nurse the umbilical cord of the child. Males are not allowed where the young mother lives. Even her husband could see her only on the 31<sup>st</sup> day after the child-birth.

**Vennīr vārttal** 'hot-water pouring' is the special bathing of the young mother. There are some customs that are connected with this special bathing. She is not bathed at the common well. Those days a special bathing place covered by palmyrrah leaves is made for this purpose. The leaves of **Nocci** (*Vitex negundu*, a class of ever-green trees whose leaves pungent and stimulating are used in fermentations), **Pāvaṭṭai** (*Pavitta indica*, a flowering shrub), **Pillai āmaṇakku** (young castor plant), **Vēmpu** (margosa) and **Ponnāvarasu** (gold-colored flower tree, *Cassia sophera*) are boiled in water in a big pot on the previous day evening. Once the leaves are well boiled, a pungent

smell is emitted. At this time, the pot is removed from the fire and left to cool down. On the following morning, appropriate amount of hot water is mixed and the young mother is bathed. This bathing, called **vennir vārvai**, is done daily for seven or nine days. On the eleventh day, the young mother will have a head-bath in cool water. The juice of the leaves of **Murukku** (a thorny species of *Butea frondosa*) **Ilantai** (*Ziziphus jujuba*) and **Cevvarattai** (shoe-flower shrub) is applied on the head of the child and bathed. From the 12<sup>th</sup> day **kiranti eṇṇai** (a medicinal oil for correcting bad humors in the system) is applied on the body of the child. After the 11<sup>th</sup> day, the child will start wearing clothes. Until then, the child would have been covered with a piece of cloth called **cāṇai-t-tuṇṭu** (this is a piece of cloth usually given by the child's uncle, i.e. the brother of the child's mother). If the child is a baby-girl, then it is customary that the **tāy māman** (maternal uncle) puts **cāṇai-k-kūrai** (baby bridal cloth) on her and ascertains that she would become the bride for his son (see, Daniel, 1982:37 for this custom in Jaffna) After the 11<sup>th</sup> day, for the first time, Chicken meat will become an important item in mother's diet. Until then, fish or dried fish would have been given in the form of curry. This curry is called **kāyam** (a composition of vegetable stimulants) or **carakku-t-taṇṇi** (the water of curry-stuffs) or **pattiyam** (curry according to a prescribed diet). Fish that can easily be digested is given to the young mother. Young shark fish is considered to be one of them. Only two meals are given to the mother till the 11<sup>th</sup> day. After that three meals are given. Thus 11<sup>th</sup> day is an important one for the mother and the child. Food without any pungent taste is usually given to the young mother. But after the 11<sup>th</sup> day, milk, eggs, gingely oil, gingely seeds (i.e. sesamum seeds) are added to the food of the mother.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> day, the mother will again be given a head-bath in cool water. The menstruation after child-birth also might have stopped by this time. Thus 21<sup>st</sup> day is also considered to be an important one. Falling hair from the child's body stops after three weeks. Since an important physical change takes place both in the mother and child, 21<sup>st</sup> day is considered to be an important one.

## Culture of the People of the Northern Province

On the 31st day, mother and child are bathed in water mixed with turmeric. After this bath, they are brought to the main house called **tāy manai** ('mother house'). On this day the priest will be invited to the house in order to purify it. The priest will have a small ceremony to purify the house, mother, child and members of the house hold. At this ceremony the father will hold the child on his lap while the priest perform the necessary rites. After the 31<sup>st</sup> day, vegetables are added on to the mother's food. The young mother by this time has come through several restrictions. A woman is made a mother during this period of one month after the child-birth. Therefore, she has to bear those restrictions and thus she is respected both in the family and in the society.

A Young mother comes to know certain beliefs like **nāvūru** (blight from the tongue, words of praise of admiration spoken by unlucky persons, supposed to produce evil) and **kannūru** (the blight of the eyes, an unlucky look supposed to cause sickness). Since the young mother feeds the child with breast-milk, she is expected to cover her breasts properly so that no one can see them. She neither eats nor feeds the child in the presence of others. If a new-comer to the house or a stranger says: "this child is very beautiful," then the mother has to defile the child's cheek with her saliva. By doing so, it is believed that the child would not get the blight of the tongue. In order to avoid the blight of the eyes, it is customary to put a large black spot on the forehead of the child. It is believed that the black eye would be disturbed by this black spot. Black eye, it is believed, would cause fever or diarrhoea for the child. Whenever a child gets these diseases, the mother or an elder in the house, without uttering any words, shall touch the baby's body with margosa leaves, salt and dried chillies and finally throw them into a well. Sometimes the baby's body is touched with camphor and burnt in the middle of a junction.

It is customary that the confinement be held in the pregnant woman's maternal house. By this, it is believed, an atmosphere is created for the young mother to welcome her off-spring happily. Strange environment



should not disturb the young mother's mind at this time. A young woman's shyness is removed by allowing her to have the delivery in a separate hut - A hut usually put up behind the main house (tāy manai). The parturition is held in this hut. On the 31<sup>st</sup> day after the child-birth, all things used in that hut would be thrown away. By this, all thoughts regarding the child-birth are removed from the mind of the young mother. This custom also helps to create a feeling in her mind that she and her child are rejoining the family as new members.

### 1.10. At Family Level

Care for the mother and the child is closely connected with the family. Since there is a new-comer to the family, the members of it too have to observe certain customs. From the day the child-birth and upto 31 days, the members of the family are expected to observe **tutakku**. All blood-relations of that family wherever they are have to observe it. For this purpose, the blood-relations mean the paternal relations. The news of the arrival of the new member is conveyed to the family by following certain customs. The old lady who was helping the mid-wife in the parturition hut will come out as soon as the baby is born and shall throw a pestle over the roof if it was a baby-boy; a broom if it was a baby-girl. The main aim of this custom was to inform the ancestors the news about the arrival of the new member in the family. Therefore, a pestle and a broom are always kept in front of the parturition hut for this purpose. Later, the news of the birth of a baby-boy only was conveyed to the ancestors by tapping on the roof with a pestle. Earlier, every child, whether male or female, received equal importance. Members of the family in which a child was born, cannot participate in ceremonies or rites for a period of 31 days. They cannot perform any ancestral rites. New agricultural enterprises are not undertaken within that period. The husband shall come daily from his mother's house and inquire about the health of the mother and the child. On the 11<sup>th</sup> day all members of the family have to take a head-bath. A small feast is also organized on that day in the maternal house in which the father of the child will also participate. Meat will be one

of the main items of food on that day. On the 31<sup>st</sup> day, a bigger feast is organised for which all relations and blood-relations will be invited.

‘Thirty first day’ is considered to be an important function at the family level. All members of the family who are polluted by the birth of the child are purified only on this day. The house-hold is cleaned; the house well is drained and is allowed to be filled with new water. Holy water mixed with *panca kavviyam* (five ingredients i.e. the five products of a cow, used in ceremonial purifications, viz: milk, curds, ghee, urine and dung; the same mixture is administered to the woman after child-birth, also sprinkled on the child at the time of purification) is poured into the well. A new cot (**toṭṭil**) would have been bought for the child. The first shaving of the child’s hair, putting the child into the new cot and presenting Jewellery to the child are done ceremoniously on this day. The maternal uncle following certain rites and customs shall perform these functions. Whether the child is male or female, its ears are pierced on the 31<sup>st</sup> day in Jaffna. By piercing the ears, it is believed that, the child would be immune to all kinds of fits and polio. If the child’s hair is to be shaved at a particular temple, then that ceremony will not take place in the house on the 31<sup>st</sup> day. If the ceremony takes place, then the child’s maternal uncle shall cut the first hair. The uncle shall cover his head with a shawl and will sprinkle milk on the child’s head before cutting the first hair. It is customary to bestow the grandfather’s or grandmother’s name to the child. It is because of this reason the grandson is called **pēran** or **peyaran**, i.e. one who has the name (of the grandfather).

The 31<sup>st</sup> day ceremony is also called **tuṭakku-k-kaḷivu** (pollution dispelling). After this the mother and child are ceremoniously declared pure to live with the other members of the family. This occasion marks the completion of all special customs that were observed during the 31 days after the child-birth. The family ties are strengthened by the arrival of the new member. The parents of the child attain a special status as father and mother. The grand-parents will rejoice to see their second generation in the new member. Therefore, **tuṭakku-k-kaḷivu**

has become an important ceremony in Northern Province.

### 1.11. At the Social level

The customs related to the new mother and the child reveals the relationship among the various social groups in this area. All social groups that have been helping the new mother and the child gather together on the occasion of **tuṭakku-k-kalivu**. By the arrival of the new baby an addition is made to the society and by this new strength is attained. It is celebrated on the 31<sup>st</sup> day after the birth of the child. Gifts were bestowed on all those members of the different social groups who have been helping to nurse the new mother and the child. But those different social groups were identified as various castes. In those days various social groups have been living in harmony without any high-low distinction. It is highly probable that similar situation should have been prevailing in ancient North Lanka too. The author of **Ancient Jaffna** (1926: 149) says:

“The caste system which was introduced by the northern Aryans had not during the early centuries of the Christian era, taken a strong foothold in the country. The people were in those days classified according to the nature of the land in which they lived”

But later they were classified according to their professions. But after wards a group among them became economically dominant due to various reasons and it started treating other professional groups that were depending on it as its vessels and slaves (**kuṭimai** and **aṭimai** respectively). Jaffna must have had this situation only at a later period. It is probably because of this the caste system of the South Indian Tamils differ from that of the Jaffna Tamils. Yasumasa Sekine has studied the pattern of the Jaffna caste system and its hierarchy (1983). The emergence of the caste system influenced various cultural aspects of the Jaffna Tamil society. **Tuṭakku** is an important term connected with birth and death among the Northern Tamils. Certain changes must have been taking place in observing the custom of **tuṭakku** due to the caste division and the influence of Aryan religious customs and rites.



When the distinction of high and low castes became clear, the high caste which was heavily influenced by the Aryan culture preferred the term *asūsam* to *tuṭakku*.

**Tuṭakku-k-kaḷivu** is an important religious rite among the Saiva Tamils of Jaffna. Suseendirarajah (1979) while writing about the religious consciousness of a Saiva village in Jaffna says that the new mother and child go to the temple on the 31<sup>st</sup> day. This practice is very much modern. A traditional Saiva family will not allow this practice. It is customary that the mother and the child go to the temple only on the 41<sup>st</sup> day after the child-birth. This custom has been observed out of necessity. A menstruating woman never enters a temple. The mensuration after the child-birth usually stops within one month. But for some women it continues even after that period. Therefore the custom of taking the child to the temple on the 41<sup>st</sup> day must have originated. On the day of **Tuṭakku-k-kaḷivu** the mother and the child will have the first opportunity to see their family members and other relatives. The members of various social groups too come only on this day to see the child, the new comer to the society. Therefore it was not possible for the mother and the child to go to the temple on that day. Sometimes the physical conditions of the child too delayed the temple visit. But some Tamils who do not have faith in culture and customs and hurry themselves to take the new borns to the temples on the 31<sup>st</sup> day itself. Even women who are employed could observe the traditional custom of taking the child on the 41<sup>st</sup> day as the government grants them six weeks maternity leave. **Kōyilukku eṭukkutal** (carrying to the temple) is the phrase used to refer to the ceremonial practice of taking the child to the temple. It is believed that the new-born must first go to the temple before going to any other place. Usually the child is first taken to the family temple which is normally situated closer to the house. The child's maternal uncle shall carry the child to the temple, while other uncles, aunts and grand parents go with them. On that day a special ponkal maṭai is done at temple.

If a vow was made to shave the first hair of the child at a particular temple then this ceremony too is performed on the 41st day. At the temple the child will be laid down in such a way so that it could see the sanctum sanctorum. If the child passes urine at that time then it is considered to be a good omen. From that day onwards the child begins to feel the sounds of the tom-tom beating and ringing of bell and noises of the people. From the temple, the child will be taken to close relatives' houses. The relations shall make presentation in the form of cash or Jewellery to the child. Forty-first day is considered to be very important. With regard to the mother-child care most of the restrictions are lifted on this day. Both the mother and child become purified to participate in any functions at the family or social levels. From this day onwards mother alone is entrusted with the duty of looking after the child. Daniel, a novelist from Jaffna refers to the practice of taking the child to the temple on the 41st day and other ceremonies related to it in his novel *Aṭimaikal* (1984).

If the mother or the child falls sick the members of the society are always ready to help. If the mother is indisposed, then the neighbours or some elderly women would look after the child or they would help the young mother to nurse the child. Many would help to find the necessary herbs for medicine and to find the necessary things for the appropriate diet. It is believed that the mother and child would recover from their illness if they are washed with the water obtained from the black-smith's workshop. Some innocent mothers are sometimes cheated by unscrupulous persons who would tell them that they have been possessed by spirits. These mothers are sometimes tortured in the name of sorcery (see Daniel's *Aṭimaikal* where the novelist gives specific instances that are connected with this practice).

### CUSTOMS, BELIEFS AND THE GROWING CHILD

After the 41<sup>st</sup> day, there are some important stages in the development of a child. Customs and beliefs that are related to these stages are of social nature.

## 5.1 First Rice Meal

The day when the child starts taking solid food is considered to be an important one. Since the child changes his food from breast milk to one that is common to all members of the society, that day is marked by a ceremony. This occasion in some villages in the Northern Province has been referred to as **pāl parukkutal** (milk feeding). Mother feeding the child with her breast milk is termed **pāl koṭuttal** (milk giving). Giving any food other than the mother's milk, for example, cow's milk or powdered milk etc. is called **pāl parukkutal**. A simple ceremony is held when this alternate food is introduced to the child. Giving first rice meal to the child is another occasion which is celebrated. This occasion is referred to as **cōru tīrrut-al** (rice feeding). It is done during the fourth or sixth or eighth month in the case of a male child and during the fifth or seventh or ninth month in the case of a female child. Reasons for this difference are not clear now. But the difference between the odd numbers and the even numbers is often observed in various other instances too.

Ceremony making the introduction of alternate food is normally held in the temple. A little portion of the ponkal (rice gruel) that is offered to the deity is given to the child by the priest. After that the parents and elders shall feed the child with a little portion from the ponkal. This custom has been dealt in detail by K. Navaratnam in his book on **Hinduism in Ceylon** (p.148). Sometimes during this ceremony some people are fed at the temple. The child is bestowed with gifts on this occasion too.

### 1.12. Teething Ceremony

Mother and other members of the family will naturally be delighted to see the first tooth of the baby. It marks another stage in the development of the child and it causes another ceremony called **koḷukkattai tūvutal**. When the first tooth comes out, an auspicious day will be selected for this ceremony. Any day other than **Viyālan** (Thursday) **Canī** (Saturday) or **Cevvāy** (Tuesday) is considered to be



an auspicious one. Relatives and neighbours will gather in the house and will prepare various kinds of **koḷukkattai** (Made out of rice flour in oblonged shape and the edges would look like teeth, Boiled green grams are placed inside of it) One kind will consists of very small ones that would resemble various kinds of teeth. Many of these items will be made and collected in a new ola basket. This is called **pallu-k-koḷukkattai** (Winslow explains this as follows. "A kind of pastry covered with roasted pulse or rice in imitation of teeth made on the appearance of the child's first tooth). The child will be seated on a mat and the head will be covered with a white cloth. The basket of **koḷukkattai** will be showered on the child's head. The child shall pick up those small **koḷukkattai** and eat. The child's maternal uncle is expected to perform this act. From the shape of the **koḷukkattai** that is eaten by the child, further addition to the family is predicted. If the **koḷukkattai** resembles molar tooth, then it is believed that the next child would not be born soon. But if it resembles the canine tooth then the addition to the family would be soon.

There is a belief among the Tamils of the North that the sprouting of the teeth should not take place at a very early stage. They believe that if the child's speech and teeth develop at a later stage within one year, then the child would live for a long tome.

### 1.3 Ēṭu Toṭakkutal

The child's education starts at the age of three. A ceremony is performed to mark this occasion. This ceremony is called **ēṭu toṭakkutal** (**ēṭu** 'the alphabet written on an ola leaf', **toṭakkutal** 'caused to begin to read') A child at the age of three is able to speak to his or her family members or to the members of the society. The ceremony marks the child's attempt to learn the writing system. An auspicious day is selected for this ceremony. On that day the child is bathed in the morning and dressed with new clothes. Usually a small **vēṭṭi** is wrapped round his waist. According to the early practice, only the male child was to learn to read and write. At the beginning of the ceremony the child's maternal uncle will break

a coconut. Then the father will have the child on his lap and teach the alphabet and the numerals. In front of them red rice will be spread. The child's father will hold his finger and teach him to write the alphabet on the heap of rice. First the vowels and then the consonants and finally the numerals are written. In order to help the child to remember the alphabet and the numerals, they are written on an Ola leaf (**ēṭu**) and handed over to him. After the lesson the child has to fall down at the feet of his father and uncle and worship them. There is a proverb in Tamil that a person who taught the alphabet shall be equal to god. Hence the child worships both persons who initiated the ceremony of **ēṭu toṭakkutal**. On that day the relatives are invited for a feast.

When the school system started in the North, a teacher is invited to the house to initiate this ceremony. The teacher will be given a present in the form of money or in kind. After the coming of the westerners, girls were also provided with education. After that **ēṭu toṭakkutal** ceremony is performed for girls too. Education is coupled with certain religious rites in Jaffna. A religious ceremony called **navarāttiri** (nine nights; the goddess of valour, the goddess of wealth and the goddess of learning are worshipped for nine nights allocating three nights for each goddess) is celebrated. The day after **navarāttiri** is called **vijaya tacami** (victorious tenth day). Nowadays, **ēṭu toṭakkutal** is performed in temples on this day. But there is no change in the prescribed age i.e. three years. At the age of five, a Saiva child receives **camaya tītcai** (initiation of a disciple into the saiva religion by a Guru who with appropriate ceremonies communicates the appointed mantras) Due to modern changes, customs and ceremonies like **cōru tīrrut-al** (feeding the child with first rice) **kolukkaṭṭai tūvutal** (teething ceremony), etc, are given up by the Tamil society in the North. However, ceremony connected with education is still performed.

#### 5.4. PIERCING THE NOSE

A female child has to wear a nose ring at the age of five or seven or nine. It was a simple ceremony observed only at the family

level. On a Friday (**Velli**) the girl will be bathed and dressed with new clothes. Her maternal uncle will break a coconut to begin the ceremony.

A gold-smith shall perforate her nose and her aunt would fit the nose ring. It was customary that the nose-ring be made by the child's maternal uncle. It has been the practice to perforate the nose on the day called **tai-p-pūcam** (the day when the moon is in the star called pucam) in the month of Tai (January 15 - February 15). The nose ring has been considered as a sacred ornament of the women. If a woman dies before her husband all ornaments except the nose - ring are removed before cremation. A woman was expected to wear nose-ring at least at the time of her marriage if she has not worn it already. A woman whose nose is not perforated has been regarded as an obstinate person.

Wearing nose-ring by girls is not a custom based on beauty. Ear ring has been a common ornament for both boys and girls. But nose ring belongs only to girls. The female child must have been more powerful than a male child. By perforating the nose of a bull, our elders believed that it could be subdued. A Similar device must have been adopted to reduce the strength of women. The Nose-ring might have also been worn to make the sex distinction. Before the arrival of the Europeans, both men and women had long hair and wore ear-rings. At an early stage the custom of perforating the nose must have originated to distinguish the females from the males.

### 5.5. PUBERTY

In the development of a child, attainment of puberty is considered to be very important. In the case of a boy, when he becomes adolescent many changes are overtly seen. But in the case of a girl there is an important announcement too. It also announces the readiness for fertility and reproduction. It amounts to not only physical growth but also mental growth. Normally a



girl attains puberty between nine and fifteen years. Thus, a girl's development at this stage is carefully watched by the members of the family and the society.

In the development of a female child, especially when her breasts start developing, mother gives her private and confidential advice. She would not be allowed to play with boys and to touch the clothes of the males. Some may wrongly feel that this sort of restriction interferes with the freedom of a girl. But on the other hand, these restrictions would definitely give chance to girls to train themselves to undertake responsibilities and excite them properly in future. That is why certain customs have arisen at the social level.

If a girl attains puberty, then it has to be announced to the members of the society. Attaining puberty is called **pakkuva-p-paṭal** (arriving at puberty); or **periya piḷḷai-y-ātal** (grown up – child- become); or **kumar – ātal** (virgin – become). Once a girl attains puberty, it has been customary to inform the news first to the maternal aunt. The girl will have to wait at the backyard of the house. Her aunt would bring paddy, pulse, coconut, gingely oil etc. A white ponkal is immediately made. The girl would be asked to stand on a heap of rubbish (**kuppai**) and the aunt and her mother would bathe her. This ceremony is called **kuppai-t-taṇṇīr varttal** (heap of rubbish – water - pouring). After that the girl will be allowed to stay in a separate small hut thatched by cadjan leaves. A **pākku veṭi** (a kind of scissors for cutting arecanuts in slices “Nut cracker”) will be hept with her as a guard against evil spirits. An old woman will always be with her. But now they do not make a separate hut for this purpose. At a particular place in the house, she will be requested to sit within an area marked by lines drawn with charcoal. Charcoal is also believed to be a guard against evil spirits. She has to be at that place till the seventh day.

More care is taken on her diet. Two raw eggs will be given every morning. The two egg shells will be filled with gingely oil which the girl has to drink. The menstruation at this time is called

tīṭṭu. Therefore, the people in the house-hold have to observe **tīṭṭu- t-tuṭakku** (ceremonial impurity from catamenia). On the seventh day, ceremonial bathing would take place. All the relatives will be invited for this ceremony. The girl will be taken to the well and will be bathed. When she is taken out from the hut to the well, her head and face will be covered with a cloth and she will hold betel leaves in both her hands. Her aunt will conduct her to the well where she will be seated facing the east. **Aruku** (a kind of grass deemed sacred, *Agrotis linearis*) with milk will be placed on her head. This will be placed first by her aunt. After that women who have been blessed with children will be allowed to do it. The girl will be bathed with water mixed with turmeric. After the ceremonial bathing, her head and face will again be covered with a white cloth. Carrying fresh betel leaves in both both hands, she will be conducted by her cousins to the main house (tāy manai) where she will be dressed with new bridal cloth and be adorned with ornaments. While she stands in the middle of the house, the ceremony of ālātti or āratti will take place. Ālātti is a ceremony of waving lighted camphor to avert the blight of the eyes of unlucky persons on special occasions. But in this particular ceremony several such wavings are done with different items. Two elderly women are entrusted with this ceremonial act. They stand facing each other in front of the girl. Each plate holding a particular item will be taken by them and waved in front of her thrice and over her head thrice. The first plate will have a measure filled with paddy; the second with flowers; the third with fruits; the fourth with kumpam (a small pot filled with water is placed on a heap of grain on the plate and on the top of the pot a coconut will be placed) the fifth betel leaves; the sixth with turmeric water; the seventh and several others with certain items of food; and finally the light. After this ceremony the girl has to fall down on her maternal uncle's feet and worship. He will present cash or gold Jewellery to her. Following him, others will make suitable presentations to her. It is customary to note down the names of persons who have made

presents and the amount of cash presented. The ceremony will be over with a feast.

At the social level, all customs and beliefs related to puberty originated to remind us the importance of a woman. A cultivable land is ready for the sowing of seeds. Similarly, puberty announces to us that a woman is ready for the job of reproduction. The Tamil word for puberty is **pūppu** from the verbal stem **pū** 'to blossom'. Puberty is a sign of the blooming womanhood. Tamils metaphorically referred to this aspect as **pūppu**. In order to mark this event as an important one, several customs originated. The observance of **tīṭṭu-t-tuṭakku** was introduced to remind the family members to take care of her. For hygienic reasons, the menstruating girl was kept aloof from the others. During that period, her house hold duties are shared by others. From this event onwards, the members of the house-hold learn to share her work every month when she has her monthly menstruation called **māta-tīṭṭu** (monthly menstruation)

The puberty announces the physical potentiality of a woman in adding new offsprings to the family and society. After the puberty, she is respected as a bright woman. A woman who has not attained puberty is called **iruḷi** (a woman of darkness, i.e. a woman who is not suitable for marriage). The next stage of development of a woman is the attainment of motherhood. Therefore, similar customs are observed at the time of puberty and child-birth. Those customs can be listed as follows;

1. Observance of **tīṭṭu-t-tuṭakku** for 31 days.
2. Staying away from the main house (**tāy manai**)
3. Prescribed dietary and special diet.
4. Reduce the amount of water drunk daily.
5. Placing arecanut cutter (**pākku veṭṭi**) as guard.
6. Ceremonial bathing.



7. The importance of maternal uncle and his wife.
8. Averting the blight of the tongue and the eyes.
9. The use of new house-hold utensils.
10. Relationship with other professional social groups.
11. Casting horoscope.
12. Bestowing gifts Presents.
13. The event is announced to the members of the society.

Though the changes in a male child are observed by the parents, there are no customs or ceremonies related to them. However, the words **kumaran** or **iḷantāri** are used to refer to a boy who had reached the stage of adolescence.

# WEDDING CEREMONY



**M**arriage, among the Tamils of the Northern Province, is related to the people at three levels. Firstly, at the level of individuals, namely, a man and a woman; Secondly, at the family level where the relatives of the individuals are integrated; and thirdly, at the social level where the members of the society are taken into consideration. Consideration of marriage at these three levels caused a number of customs, traditions and ceremonial rites among the Tamils. These are recorded in **Tamilar Tirumaṇa Naṭaimuṇaikaḷ** (Marriage Customs, Traditions and rites of the Tamils, eds. A. Sanmugadas and Manonmani Sanmugadas, 1984). 'Marriage', among the Tamils, has not been regarded as a mere union of a male and a female due to natural instincts or biological needs. The custom of establishing relationship as husband and wife

in front of many people has been regarded as 'marriage'. It is described as **nal maṇam** (good marriage) in old Tamil literary texts. **Kaliyāṇam** and **caṭanku** are two terms that are used to refer to marriage. Marrying is **kaliyāṇam kaṭṭutal** 'marriage binding' or **caṭanku ceṭtal** 'marriage making'. The word **kaliyāṇam** (derivation of the Sanskrit form *kalyāṇa*) means 'good fortune, prosperity, felicity, etc. Thus **kaliyāṇam kaṭṭutal** means a man and a woman getting married to attain good fortune, prosperity, felicity etc. **Caṭanku** means ritual or ceremony. **Caṭanku ceṭtal** means a man and a woman getting united by performing the necessary ceremonial rites and by observing the relevant customs which will help them to lead a systematic and orderly family life. Union of a man and a woman is necessary for bearing offsprings. Marriage signifies that useful union. There are three types of marriages that are prevalent in Jaffna. The first type of marriage, though very rare, seems to have been developed from an ancient Tamil marriage system. The second type too is not very common now. But it exhibits a little Aryan influence. The third type, which is described in detail, is a common one in the Northern Province.

### 1. MARRIAGE BY GIVING RICE (**Cōru Kuṭupittal**)

As individuals, a young man and a young woman may get united secretly. Usually, the girl's parents will come to know it sooner or later. Pregnancy, sometime, reveals to them the secret love affair of their daughter. They may wait to trap the young man who has been visiting their daughter in the night secretly. As soon as the young man enters their daughter's room, they may remove his shawl or his foot-wear that is usually left outside the house and hide it. It will be produced later as an evidence of his secret visit. Sometimes they may lock the room and wait till the morning to open it in front of the village headman. Thus the secret visit of the young man is made known to the others. A simple ceremony called **cōru kuṭupittal** 'giving rice' is usually performed to declare the young man and the girl are duly married. After bathing the young woman shall cook rice and curry in



new pots and pans. The young man shall have a bath and shall sit on a mat. The girl will serve the cooked rice and curry on a plantain leaf that is placed in front of him. Usually a plantain leaf (frond) is cut into pieces. The front half is used in such occasions. The tip of the leaf should be placed on the left hand side of the bridegroom. The curries are first served, and then rice is served three times. The bride sits in front of him and mixes the rice and curries served on the plantain leaf and makes three rice-balls. She then places each rice-ball in the right palm of the groom and he eats it. After eating all the three rice-balls, he will wash his hand. Then the bridegroom shall make three rice-balls from the leftover food on the plantain leaf. He will offer the rice balls to the bride thrice. After washing her hand, the bride shall offer betel and arecanut to the bridegroom for chewing. This is called *verrilai maṭittuk kuṭuttal* (betel – fold – giving) She too will chew betel and arecanut. This simple marriage ceremony is performed by an elderly lady who has been blessed with children. After this ceremony the young man shall stay with the girl in the night and shall go back to his parents house in the day time to work in their fields. In the early days, it was not customary for a young man to live with his wife in a separate house until the work responsibilities were transferred to him from his parents. At that time, he took his wife to live in his parents' house. This custom allowed the young man to look after his parent and their work. It must have been prevailing long before the origin of the feudal society. The **cōru kuṭupittal** ceremony announced to the society relatives and the members of the society the secret relationship that was known only to the girl's parents. It also helps to preserve the unity of the society and the virtue of the girl. This type of marriage has been very common among the poor and the so-called depressed class of people. Earlier, it must have been common among all the members of the society. I am told that my great grandparent's marriage was of the **coru kutuppittal** type. They were supposed to be belonging to the high caste. It shows that this simple marriage ceremony was common among all Jaffna Tamils.

## MARRIAGE BY PERFORMING PUJA TO PILLAIYAR

This is also another type of marriage that is performed with a simple religious ceremony. the marriage takes place in the presence of the members of the two families. Once the parents of the bridegroom and those of the bride agree to a marriage between them after considering their age, physical fitness, conduct and complexion, this religious ceremony is held on an auspicious day. Among the relatives, an elderly married man who has children and whose wife still lives, conducts the marriage ceremony. First, he takes a handful of cow-dung and kneads it into a conical or mini-mountain shape. The mini- mountain or conical shaped cow-dung symbolizes god Piḷḷaiyār or Ganesha who is worshipped by Tamils at the beginning of any ceremony or any religious functions. On the tip of it a few aruku (*agrostis linearis*) grasses are stuck. It is placed on the front-half of a plantain leaf. Paddy or red rice is spread in front of it. A kumpam is placed on the spread red rice. The kumpam is made with a small copper pot filled with water and placing a coconut on its top. Five or seven mango leaves are placed on the brim of the pot underneath the coconut which prevents the leaves falling down. In front of Piḷḷaiyār (i.e the mini- mountain shaped cow dung) betels arecanuts, turmeric and flowers are arranged as though offerings are arranged in a maṭai (a term used in cankam literary texts to refer to ceremonial offerings in the forms of food, songs and dance, and to various rituals that were performed while worshipping the deities.) Incense is smoked. A thread dipped in turmeric water is placed on the coconut and a turmeric root is tied on to the thread. A plate containing the coconut and the yellow thread is kept in front of the kumpam. The bridegroom and the bride after the ceremonial bathing and wearing the bridal dress shall sit on two small stools in front of the kumpam. Tōḷan (bride- man) and Tōḷi (bride – maid) will sit one either sides of the bridegroom and the bride, and will perform a simple puja by offering flowers to the deity. Lighted camphor will be waved over the yellow thread and it is handed over to the groom who will stand up facing the east and will tie it round the bride's neck. The thread is always tied

with three knots. The elderly man who conducts the ceremony shall break the coconut that had the yellow thread on its top. After that the couple goes round Piḷḷaiyār and kumpam thrice. At that time their little fingers will be tied together. Their clothes too are sometimes tied together. The thread that is tied by the bridegroom round the bride's neck is called **tālikkayiru** 'tali thread'. This is an auspicious thread where the sacred marriage ornament called **tāli** is tied.

Later, at the **tāy manai** (lit mother – house; the principal room in the house), in front of **kuttu viḷakku** (auspicious lamp) the bride shall serve food to the bridegroom. After that the relatives will participate in the feast. They will bless the couple and sometimes will give presents to them. Soon after the feast, the couple will visit the bridegroom's house and will return to the bride's house on the same day. This custom is called **kāl mārutal**. It is customary that the wedded couple stay in the bride's place. Therefore, the couple just after the marriage visits the bridegroom house and then return to their permanent house of stay on the same day. This type of wedding ceremony takes place only with a limited number of guests. Only relatives participate in such weddings and others are not invited. People who can not afford an elaborate ceremony, prefer this type of simple marriage ceremony. Usually cross – cousin marriages took place in this fashion and this simple ceremony was found to be adequate. Later, people began to observe certain customs prior to this ceremony. Comparing the horoscopes of the bride and the bridegroom (**poruttam pārttal**, 'Studying the horoscopes to find the necessary agreements for marriage') and presenting bridal saree (**kūrai kuṭuttal**) are some of them. Jaffna Tamils wish that the relationship established between a man and a woman by marriage should last long. Therefore, even if the groom and the bride are cross – cousins, their horoscopes are compared and studied closely by an astrologer. If the horoscopes do not agree, then the marriage is often give up or sometimes postponed till certain planetary changes take place which would favour the marriage. Presenting the bridal saree by the bridegroom has become a custom at a later period. Earlier, the bride used to wear the bridal saree that was worn by her mother. That



saree was called **Āki vanta puṭavai** 'hereditary saree'. But later the custom of giving a new bridal saree to the bride by the bridegroom came to be observed and the saree is called **kūraip puṭavai** (bridal saree). It has now become a common practice. The bride has to wear the **kūraip puṭavai** just before the tāli is tied on to her neck.

## MARRIAGE BY TYING TALI IN FRONT OF THE SACRED FIRE

This is the most common type of marriage that takes place in Jaffna. The marriage ceremony is not restricted to the members of the family only. It is performed at the social level. Since blood relations, distant relations and other members of the society participate in this type of marriage, a number of customs and procedures are to be observed. Most of these customs are the result of Aryan influence on Tamil marriages. The marriage ceremonies are conducted according to the rites and procedures prescribed in Vedas and grhya sutras. Brahmins conduct the marriage ceremony. Chanting Sanskrit hymns and kindling the sacred fire occupy important place in the ceremony. The caste distinction which developed from the Aryan varna (four fundamental classes of society, namely, Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras) become prominent in this type of marriage. Social status became an inevitable basis for marriage relationship. The customs of offering wealth to establish relationship in a high caste also originated.

The European impact in Jaffna sharpened the high – low distinction among various professional groups. The western rulers recognized the land- owners as people belonging to the upper class and regarded those people who assisted the landed people as their vassals and slaves. The spread of Christianity, in a way helped the people of Jaffna to observe closely a number of Aryan customs and ceremonial rites. At the level of worship, a marked distinction was made between higher gods and minor deities. The Dravidian gods were pushed down to the level of minor deities. Those who

worshipped the minor deities and who observed non – Aryan religious rites and customs were regarded as people belonging to the low castes. Caste began to play a major role in marriage ceremonies too. Consideration of family background and caste became inevitable in establishing marriage relationship. The people belonging to the high caste regarded the marriage customs, ceremonies and rites as social procedures that express their status and position in the society. Instead of cross – cousin marriages, proposed marriages that involved many rituals and ceremonies and much wealth were preferred. Marriage ceremonies were performed where eighteen types of castes rendered eighteen types of services and offered eighteen types of **cīr** presents. The importance of woman in marriage system was underestimated. The male's importance was stressed. One of the aims of marriage is to produce children to build up the family units and the society. But this has been given up for wealth and savings. The husband and wife have now become a part of an institution that is interested in owning property and saving money. Most of the weddings in Jaffna take place within this set-up. this will become clear if one studies the customs, ceremonial rites and other practices of the type of marriage that involves kindling sacred fire and tying **tāli**. They can be classified as follows:

### 3.1. MARRIAGE TALKS

The girl's parents and relatives look for a suitable young man for their daughter. Once they come to know of such a boy, they begin marriage talks. This is called **pēccukkāl** 'marriage talk'. It is not customary for the male's side to look for a bride and to begin marriage talks. Generally a person who is known to both sides acts as a 'mediator' or a 'go between' in marriage talks. Now there are professional marriage brokers who act as 'go betweens'. They help to exchange details regarding the horoscope, age, caste and status of the boy and the girl and their families. In Jaffna, there are some women brokers also engaged in 'marriage business'. Some of them are specialized in arranging marriages for the children of the Jaffna parents who live in foreign countries.

### 3.2. COMPARING HOROSCOPES

Comparing the horoscope of prospective bridegroom and bride is considered as an important procedure in the Jaffna Tamil marriage system. In marriages arranged outside the family group, utmost care is taken to have an excellent agreement between the horoscopes of the bridegroom and the bride. Both parties never go to the same astrologer to compare the horoscopes. The astrologers consult the Tamil Almanac (Called *Pancāṅkam*) and calculate and find the agreements between the two horoscopes. Irakunathaiyar's (a Brahmin from Jaffna) *Pancāṅkam* gives the following guidelines regarding comparing the horoscopes with regard to marriage:

“Among the ten agreements starting from *natcattiram* to *vētai* the following five are important: *natcattiram* (asterism) *kaṇam* (asterisms are classed under three heads as indicating human, infernal and divine interference in their influence of birth of children), *yōni* (agreement in genital organs), *irāci* (agreement in zodiacal signs) and *iraccu* (asterisms are classed under five heads indicating death, barrenness and separation) *Atipati* for Brahmins, *kaṇam* for *kshattriyas*, *stritirkkam* for *vaishyas* and *yōni* for *sutras* must primarily agree. If more than five of the ten aspects agree, then it is considered to be an excellent one; if it is five then it is not bad. Planetary agreements are considered to be more important than the agreements obtained by comparing the planetary positions of a man and a woman.

The strength of the marriage relationship is valued only by the degree of agreement between the horoscopes of the groom and the bride. Everyone believe this even up to now. Therefore the agreement of the horoscopes is given more importance than the agreement in the minds of a boy and a girl.

### 3.3. TALKS ABOUT DOWRY

Wealth occupies an important place in Jaffna marriages. The wealth given by the parents to their daughter is called **cītanam** (marriage gift). Earlier, the parents used to distribute their wealth and property



among their daughters. But later the practice of giving the necessary amount of wealth and property that is demanded by the parents of the bridegroom has become a common one. House, land, Jewellery and cash are given as **citanam**. Apart from these, the parents of the bridegroom sometimes request the bride's parents to give cash to meet the expenses for the marriage ceremony. This has now become a common practice in Jaffna marriages. Usually the 'go between' or the marriage broker negotiates between the two parties regarding the dowry. The marriage broker gets 2% from the amount of cash given as dowry. He or she may get this amount from both parties. If the bride's side is unable to give the stipulated amount as dowry, then the marriage talks will break. A bridegroom in Jaffna is like an animal or any other object that is bought by paying the necessary amount of money as its price. The amount is decided according to the number of sisters of the bridegroom. The amount obtained in this manner is in turn distributed as dowry for the marriages of his sisters. Recently in a Jaffna marriage, the bride's parents had been requested to pay an additional amount of money for the daughters of the bride groom's sister. Even educated parents and their sons in Jaffna are still continuing to demand dowry from the bride's parents. Education has not changed this attitude. The parents of an educated son, sometimes, may demand the bride's parents to pay the amount of money they spent on his education. But on the other hand, the bride's educational qualifications or her job is never taken into consideration in this type of marriage bargaining. The amount of dowry is increased according to the qualifications of the bridegroom. But they are not prepared to reduce the amount even if the bride is also suitably qualified. Only the male's side is considered in talks about dowry and the other side is never taken into consideration.

### 3.4. CARRYING GIFTS.

If the talks about the dowry are successfully completed, then the bride's parents and relatives will visit the boy's house. At that time it is customary to carry three **mūṭal** (small square baskets made from palmyrrah leaves.) The first **mūṭal** will contain betels, arecanut white

flowers, kum – kum (powder made from saffron) and salt. The second **mūṭal** will have three clusters of plantains (a variety called kappal is chosen for religious and auspicious functions in Jaffna). The third will have well prepared **koḷukkattai** (made out of rice flour in oblonged shape and the edges would look like teeth. Boiled green grams and sugar are placed inside of it) in it. The skin of the plantains that are taken for this occasion should not be black. The three baskets are carried by three auspicious women (i.e who are blessed with children and whose husbands are living). The baskets are covered with white cloths. The whole procedure is called **vēḷvu eṭuttal** (taking marriage presents). After accepting these gifts, the bridegroom's parents shall give them tea and short – eats. Drinking tea at the bridegroom's house is called **vāy nanaittal** 'wetting the mouth'. The bride's parents, for the first time, will see the bridegroom in person. Sometimes, the marriage talks may break even after the ceremony called **vēḷvu eṭuttal**. Therefore, mere acceptance of the presents brought by the bride's parents does not mean that the marriage is fixed. The baskets are not returned on the same day. The **koḷukkattai** brought in one of the baskets are distributed among the groom's relatives. By that the news is conveyed among his relatives that marriage talks are in progress. But the decision is not conveyed at this juncture. **vēḷvu eṭuttal** is usually performed in the night.

### 3.5. SELECTING AN AUSPICIOUS DAY

If the bridegroom's side agrees to the marriage proposal, then they will proceed to select an auspicious day for the marriage ceremony. They will inform the bride's party that they would be visiting them on a convenient and auspicious day. They also will take three **mūṭal** carried by three auspicious women. An astrologer will accompany them. They will avoid the days on which the girl will have her monthly periods. This information is sought well before their visit. At the bride's house, the astrologer will calculate the planetary conjunctions according to the horoscopes of the groom and the bride and will select an auspicious day for the marriage ceremony. In this connection too, the girl's monthly

menstruation days are avoided. The westerners during their occupation of Sri Lanka, brought a law that every marriage had to be registered with the government. After the introduction of this law, a custom selecting a separate date, prior to the marriage ceremony, for the registration of marriage (this ceremony is called **kaliyāṇa eḷuttu** (marriage—writing) or **kacātu eḷututal** (kacātu is a Dutch word meaning registration of marriage.) In Jaffna it is commonly called **eḷuttu** ‘writing’) is also observed. The date for the registration of marriage is also selected at a time when the groom’s parents visit the bride’s house. The custom of melting gold for **tāli**, ‘the auspicious marriage ornament’ is also a later one. Therefore, another auspicious day is selected for this purpose too. The groom’s party will be served with tea and short – eats. The bride will be introduced to the groom’s parents and relatives on this occasion. The information needed to draft the wedding invitation will also be exchanged. But the practice of sending wedding invitation was introduced by the westerners. Earlier, the time and the date of the marriage in a high caste house were informed to the others by a man and his wife from koviya (assistants to the people of high – caste) caste. But the practice is not found in Jaffna now.

### 3.6. FIXING KANNIKKĀL AND MELTING GOLD

A special shed, usually in front of the house, is erected for the marriage ceremony. Though the ceremony takes place in the bride’s house, it is also customary to erect a pandal in front of the bridegroom’s house. Planting the first pole for the marriage pandal is called **kannikkāl nāṭṭal** (fixing the first marriage pole or maiden pole). First it is planted in the bridegroom’s house and then at the bride’s house. It is also called **pantal kāl** (pole for the pandal). A long pole from the *erythrina indica* tree will be cut and mango leaves will be tied on to it with silk cloth. Nine kinds of cereals will be placed in the hole where the pole (**kannikkāl**) is fixed. This ceremonial rite is usually conducted by an elderly man who has his wife and children. The marriage pandal is erected only after the performance of this ceremonial rite. Melting gold for **tāli** is fixed. Melting gold for **tāli** became an important



procedure during the Dutch rule in Ceylon. During their rule, there was a restriction in the use of gold for ornaments. Therefore, the bridegroom's parents at whose house the ceremony of melting gold is to take place, had to make special arrangements for a Dutch officer to be present on that occasion. The amount of gold used for tali was weighed in front of him. Later, it developed into an elaborate ceremony. The gold needed for **tāli** is melted by the goldsmith at the bridegroom's house. The bride's parents and relatives will be invited to be present at this ceremony. **Pillaiyār** (deity worshipped at the beginning of any function) will be made out of cow-dung and puja is performed. In a new **caṭṭi** (a low rimmed broad mouthed earthen vessel) which contains chaff, fire is kindled and the gold is melted in it. The melted gold is dipped in water and is placed for everyone to see. It will be placed on a coconut which is decorated with flowers and kum-kum (powder made from saffron). The groom's party will offer rice, vegetables, coconuts, cash, etc., to the goldsmith for this service. The guests then depart after a sumptuous feast. But the bridegroom's parents will not forget to send food to the bride who will not be present at this ceremony. This food is called **ponnurukku cōṟu** (lit. melting gold – rice). It is usually carried by the bridegroom's sister. This ceremony, sometimes, is performed at the goldsmith's house in order to avoid expenses. It also preserves the caste distinction in Jaffna. While melting the gold, if the flame rises high, then it is considered to be a good omen. The people will say that the couple will lead a better life. Sometimes the longevity of their wedded life is also predicted.

### 3.7. PURCHASING BRIDAL CLOTHES

After the ceremony of melting gold for **tāli**, the bridal saree and clothes for the bride and the bridegroom are bought on an auspicious day. The girl's people pay for the boy's clothes and vice versa. Even upto now a bride in a Jaffna wedding always wears the traditional dress called **kūraip puṭavai** 'bridal saree'. But due to western influence, males refrain from wearing their traditional dress. In early times, the weavers used to take sarees and other dresses to wealthy houses

where marriage ceremonies to be held. The house – hold would select whatever dresses needed for the ceremony. The **kūraip puṭavai** (bridal saree) is bought by the boy's parents. Usually an expensive saree is bought for this purpose. Either red or yellow colour is preferred. The bride's parents shall purchase another saree which is called **pantal cilia** (marriage pandal saree). The bride shall wear this saree when she enters the marriage pandal for the first time during the ceremony. Black and white colours are avoided in choosing dresses for the couple. Silk vetti (cloth wrapped around a man to cover from waist to foot) and shawl are bought for the bridegroom. Special dresses are also purchased for the bride man and the bride maid. Parents, brothers and sisters of both sides will be given new clothes for this occasion.

### 3.8. DECORATING THE MARRIAGE PANDAL

After fixing the kannikkal a special shed which is called **pantal** (pandal) for the marriage ceremony will be erected in front of the bride's house. It is customary that the roof of the marriage pandal should not be a flat one. The entrance of the pandal and the decorated enclosure (**maṇavarai**) within it should face either north or east. The inside roof of the pandal will be covered with white cloth and coloured cut-papers will be pasted on it. The enclosure in which the couple will be seated during the ceremony is usually decorated with flowers. But now imitation gems and cut-glasses are used. The couple shall sit on the bench that is provided within that enclosure. A pole of the *Erythrina indica* tree will be fixed in front of the enclosure. It will be wrapped round with red and white clothes. Mango leaves will be stuck on to it. The bride's house is also repaired and decorated. White sand will be spread from the entrance of the house upto the marriage pandal. Two plantain trees with well ripened bunches of fruits shall be tied at each side of the gate. Bunches of king coconuts are also tied with them. Spathes of coconut trees are sometimes tied with them. A separate hut will be erected at the back of the house for cooking. New ovens will be placed there. Sometimes the whole house is painted or colour – washed.

Those days it was fun to have a group of youngsters and some elders putting up the marriage hall throughout the night. Now this is being forgotten as many marriages are held in permanent marriage halls. The following photograph shows the entrance of a typical wedding hall in the village:

### 3.9. COLLECTION OF ARTICLES AND FOOD – STUFFS

The decoration of pandal takes place about three days before the marriage ceremony. After that, baskets, mats and cooking utensils are collected. Different kinds of pastries (**palakāram**) are then prepared. An auspicious elderly lady shall make the first fire in a hearth and a vessel with oil will be placed on it. This is called **palakāra caṭṭi vaittal** (placing vessel for oil cakes). Women, among the relatives, will specially be invited for this purpose. The house will be filled with the loud noise their talk and the sweet smell of the oil cakes. Everyone will be in a happy mood. Experienced men and women shall collect or purchase the necessary amount of rice, vegetables, coconuts,





etc., for the cooking. Earlier, the people who produced such things used to present them. But this has changed. Now all these things are purchased in the market. The rice, Vegetables, etc., are collected in new baskets. The potters used to present new vessels for cooking at this occasion. But now these too are bought at the shop. Plantains, betels and arecanuts are collected. at the bride's house, special items that are needed for the ceremonial rites like kindling the sacred fire, throwing fried paddy, stepping on **ammi** etc. are carefully collected and kept. Several bunches of plantains are bought. A pit will be cut at the back of the house. The bunches are placed in it and smoke will be produced in the pit. It will cause the plantains to ripen soon.

### 3.10. INVITING THE BRIDEGROOM

Once the marriage is fixed, the boy is called **māppillai** (**Māppila** in spoken Tamil) and the girl is **penpillai** (**Pompila** in spoken Tamil). The next important procedure is **māppillai alaippu** (inviting the bridegroom.) On the day of the marriage ceremony, a few hours before the **mukūrttam** (auspicious time for solemnizing a marriage), some relatives of bride shall go to the bridegroom's house to invite him for the marriage ceremony. The bride's parents do not go with them. Only blood relations participate in this procedure. The bride's brother dressed almost like the bridegroom shall accompany them. He is called **māppillai tōlan** (bridegroom's bestman). The number of persons who accompany the **tōlan** (including him) must not be even. The elders will take special care on this custom. Three auspicious women will carry three trays called **palakāra taṭṭu** (pastry tray) **para taṭṭu** (fruit tray) and **pū taṭṭu**, (flower tray). The first tray will contain different kinds of pastries. The second will have plantains, betels, arecanuts, turmeric and salt. The third will have white flowers, garlands, kum-kum sandal rose water and coconut. The trays will be covered with white clothes. Earlier, a **pallakku** (palanquin) used to be taken to conduct the bridegroom to the marriage pandal. But now a motor car is used. If the bride's house is closer to that of the bridegroom, then he will be taken in a procession right from his house.

The ceremony of **māppillai alaippu** (inviting bridegroom) begins once the bride's party goes to the bridegroom's house. The ceremony begins with the bridegroom's wedding bath. The **tōlan** (brides-man) and other relatives who came from the bride's house shall pour milk and shall place **aruku** (a kind of grass : *Agrostis linearis*) on his head. After that his relatives will pour water on his head. The bridegroom after the wedding bath will be taken to the main house for dressing up for the occasion. Once he is dressed, the brides-man will sit on a special stage (**maṇavarai**) prepared in the pandal. In front of the **maṇavarai**, a lamp will be lighted and a **niraikuṭam** (auspicious water-pot) will be placed. The goldmith, after a simple puja to Ganesha, will fix the ear studs on to the bridegroom's ears. This is called **kaṭukkan pūṭṭatal** (ear - ring- fixing). This ceremonial rite is performed with the accompaniment of musical instruments. After that close relatives or friends shall give gifts to the bridegroom in the form of gold chains, rings or cash. Everyone will be invited for a feast before they depart for the marriage ceremony. This is called **capai vaittal**. All those who went from the bride's house have to participate in this feast.

After the feast, the bridegroom will worship his parents before he leaves for the ceremony. At the gate, a **kuttuvilakku** (standing lamp) and **niraikuṭam** (auspicious water-pot) are placed and a white saree entwined will form a circle round them. The bridegroom and the brides - man, before leaving the house, have to go round the circle thrice. Then the ceremony of **āratti** will take place. **Āratti** or **ālātti** is a ceremony of waving lighted camphor or any form of light to avert the blight or unlucky persons. Rose water will be sprinkled on them. The auspicious musical instruments will be played this time. The musical accompaniments shall lead the bridegroom's procession. He and the brides-man shall walk on a floor cloth (**nila pāvātai**) under a coloured umbrella. Besides them, the bridegroom's sister will carry the **tālippeṭṭi** (bridal box) on her head. **Tālippeṭṭi** will contain the wedding saree, the tāli, turmeric, kum-kum, salt, white flowers, betels arecanuts, silver coins and gold ring. The procession shall move with

slow measured steps, stopping briefly in front of temples or in front of his relatives' houses. The relatives may sometimes garland him.

Once the procession reaches the entrance to the bride's house, the bride's father shall wash the bridegroom's feet and shall garland him. Now these two ceremonial rites are performed by the brides-man. When he performs these rites, the bridegroom is expected to give a gold ring to the brides-man. The waving of **āratti** and sprinkling rose water will take place after that. The bridegroom has to make the first step with his right leg when he enters the house to go to the marriage pandal. He will be seated in the **maṇavarai** (marriage – stage with an enclosure) along with the **tōlan** (brided-man)

### 3.11. INITIAL RITES

**Pillaiyar pūcai** (Puja to lord Ganapathy), **puṇṇiya yākam** (kindling the sacred fire) offering **panca kavviyam** (five ingredients, i.e., the products of a cow, used in ceremonial purifications, viz.: Milk, curds, ghee, urine and dung) and **kāppu kaṭṭutal** (binding the protective band) are the initial rites that are performed by the chief priest of the ceremony. By another ceremonial rite, the ancestral blessings are invoked. After that the bridegroom's sister shall conduct the bride to the **maṇavarai**. The bride's face will be covered with a thin silk cloth. She will be seated on the right side of the bridegroom. The rites of **kāppu kaṭṭutal** and invoking ancestral blessings are performed to her too.

### 3.12. OFFERING THE BRIDE

Next the offering of the bride as a **tānam** (donation) by her father to the bridegroom takes place. This ceremonial rite is called **kannikā tānam** (presenting the bride). A Brahmin priest shall announce the names of the parents, grand-parents and great grand-parents of the bride and the bridegroom. Then the bride's hand will be offered with auspicious objects to the stretching hand of the bridegroom. The bride's father shall wash his hand with water indicating that he has offered a **tānam**.



### 3.13. PRESENTING CLOTHES

The bride shall present to the bridegroom with new **vēṭṭi** (cloth wrapped around a man to cover from waist upto foot) and shawl along with auspicious things. Similarly, the bridegroom shall present to the bride with the new bridal saree along with auspicious items.

### 3.14. TYING TALĪ

When the bridal saree is presented to the bride, she departs only to return attired in the new saree. She takes her seat again on the right side of the bridegroom. The chief priest shall give the tray that contains the **tālī** (auspicious marriage ornament) which has already been purified and charged with divinity by an Agni puja (offering worship to fire –god) to an elderly man to take it round for everyone to see and bless. The man has to cover his head while taking the tray round for blessing. An elderly woman shall take it among the women for their blessings. Once the **tālī** is handed over to the bridegroom by the priest, he shall stand up and tie it round the bride's neck. At this moment, it is customary for an auspicious woman to hold a small lamp behind the bride. The **tālī** is usually joined either to a gold chain or to a thread that is soaked in turmeric water. A trident is usually carved on the **tālī**. It sometimes has a face with two horns. This is called **kōmputtālī** (horn **tālī**). Nowadays, the figures of linga or Ganesha or lakshmi and lotus flower are carved on it. When the ceremony of **tālī kaṭṭutal** (tying tali) takes place, the bride shall sit on the left side of the bridegroom.

### 3.15. AKKINI PŪCAI

Then, while the priests chant vedic hymns, the couple shall make offerings to gods by dropping fried paddy and flowers into the sacred fire. This is called **akkini pūcai** (fire worship).

### 3.16. TAKING SEVEN STEPS

The bride and the bridegroom holding their hands and facing the north shall take seven steps round the sacred fire. It is done thrice. The couple goes round the sacred fire taking seven steps to obtain from

Vishnu, the lord of marriages, the food, strength, opportunities to fulfill acts, healthiness, cows, wealth and fruits of all six seasons.

### 3.17. STEPPING ON AMMI

While going round the sacred fire, the bridegroom shall lift the right foot of the bride and shall place it on an **ammi** (a grind-stone). This ceremonial rite indicates that the woman has to live with a strong mind; she, on her life-path may encounter difficulties as strong as a rock, then she has to step on it and proceed. Sometimes, a **minji** (toe-ring) placed on the ammi will be put on to the second toe of the bride's right foot by the bridegroom. Many people believe that stepping on ammi indicates the idea that the woman has to live preserving her virtue and chastity.

### 3.18. OFFERING MILK AND FRUITS

While in the **manavarai** (marriage stage with an enclosure), the couple shall partake the first meal in the form of milk and fruits. The bride shall offer them first to the bridegroom. Then the bridegroom offers them to her. It is done thrice. When this ceremony takes place, a white curtain provided by the dhoby shall be held between the **manavarai** and the guests.

### 3.19. LOOKING AT A COW

The married couple, immediately after the ceremony, is expected to see a cow as an auspicious sight. A white cow is always preferred for this occasion.

### 3.20. SHOWING ARUNTATI

The bridegroom shall show the **aruntati** (North star) to the bride. This ceremonial rite too is based on the belief that women should live preserving their virtue and chastity. It is believed that **aruntati** a woman of chastity becomes a star by God's wish.

### 3.21. BLESSING

Blessing is the last item that is connected with all the ceremonial rites that are performed in the marriage pandal. The couple will be

blessed by their parents, relatives and friends. Their parents bless them first. A mixture of aruku grass, red rice and turmeric, is sprinkled on their heads three times when the couple is blessed. The mixture indicates that the couple should firmly be rooted like the aruku grass; should be blessed with a fertile life like the red rice; and should be pleasant to all like the smell of the turmeric.

### 3.22. THE FIRST RICE MEAL

The rice and curry served for the first time by the bride to the bridegroom in the *taymanai* (main house) of her parents' house is called **pūtākkalam**. Earlier, the rice and curry were prepared by the bride herself. The curries prepared for this occasion must be odd in number. Bitter gourd (*pākal kāy*) is one of the vegetables that is avoided in this cooking. The bride should take adequate care not to make any noise when dishing out rice or curry from the pot or catti. Sometimes the bride mixes the rice and curry and feeds the bridegroom three times. The bridegroom then repeats the performance. After that both shall chew betel and arecanut.

### 3.23. FEAST

The feast held in the bride's house after the marriage ceremony is an important procedure in a Jaffna wedding. It is called **capai** 'company, congregation, assembly, etc.' First the males will be invited to participate in the feast. Special care will be taken to seat them according to their status and social position. The bride's father must identify the most important person (due to age, status, close relationship, etc.) among the bridegroom's relatives and should invite him first by offering water in a brass pot (*cempu*) for him to wash his hand. If a wrong man is selected or if the custom of offering *cempu* is not observed at all, then there will be serious trouble at the **capai**. Sometimes, it may turn out to be a big quarrel. But there will always be some elderly men with well balanced mind to settle these petty quarrels. The ladies are fed after the males. After the meals, all guests will be given betel and arecanut to chew.





This is a typical **capai** where the guests are seated on the floor and having meals on banana leaves. In the present day weddings are held either in Wedding Halls or in temples. In the Wedding halls they make seating arrangements with chairs. Many marriages take place in Tondaimanaru Selvasannithi Temple where the feast is held at the Sannithiyan Achiramam. There the guests are seated on the floor and have meals on banana leaves.

### 3.24. COUPLE VISITING BRIDEGROOM'S HOUSE

The bridal couple, after observing all marriage customs, rites and ceremonies in the bride's house on the wedding day, proceeding to the bridegroom's house is called **kāl māṛal** changing legs. If the bridegroom's house is situated closer to the bride's house, then the bridal couple will be taken in a procession. At the entrance to the house, the aratti ceremony will take place. Rose water is sprinkled on the couple. Taking the first step with the right foot, the couple enters the house. They go straight to the **tāy manai** and shall sit on a mat. Tea and short – eats will be served to them. After sometimes, the couple will

come out and will be seated in the **maṇavarai**. After a few hours, they return to the bride's home. The hereafter, only on special occasions they will visit the bridegroom's house.

## MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AND THE SOCIETY

Customs and rites of Jaffna marriages tend to unite various professional groups and others at social level. The distinction found among various professions later turned out to be caste distinctions. Land owners declared themselves as belonging to a high caste. Eighteen types of low castes have been identified. If there was a marriage ceremony in a high caste house, then the eighteen low caste people were expected to render their services.

In early stages, a marriage ceremony must have provided an opportunity for various social groups to unite together and to work together. **Piḷḷaiyār pūcaik kaliyāṇam**, a non- Aryan type of marriage, did not draw any high – low distinction among those groups. But the Aryan customs and ceremonial rites that were introduced later seemed to have favoured this high – low distinction.

Several proverbs that express caste consciousness in marriages are commonly used in Jaffna. The following are cited as examples:

1. Kōttiram aṛintu peṇṇai-k koṭu; pāttiram aṛintu piccai iṭu

“After knowing the family of the suitor give your daughter in marriage, and after knowing the beggar give him alms.

2. Tuḷāvi-k kāycciyatu kanciylumalla; vināvi-k kaṭṭātatu kaliyāṇamumalla

“If it is not properly stirred while boiling, it is not rice gruel; if it is not properly inquired and made relationship, then it is not marriage”

3. Attattil piṛanta ampaṭṭan aracan vīṭṭil peṇ kēṭpān

“A barber who is born in Attam (tha 13<sup>th</sup> lunar mansion) may propose a marriage (for him) to the king's daughter.

Dance and music programmes are sometimes arranged in the night on the day of the marriage ceremony. Sometimes, there used to be a keen competition between the bride's side and the bridegroom's side in arranging such music programmes. Weddings are now held in temples and public halls. This practice, in a way, has provided opportunity for not only the relatives but also various types of friends to attend wedding ceremonies. Mixed marriages always resort to this practice. Marriage between a man and a woman from different castes is sometimes performed without any ceremonial rites. Only the registration of marriage takes place and no other ceremonies are held. Even the ceremonial rite of tying tali (auspicious marriage ornament) is also avoided. But, however, everyone in Jaffna prefers to a marriage that is held by observing all the relevant customs, rites and ceremonies. **Cītanam** (dowry) is another interesting aspect of the Jaffna wedding. **Tēcavaḷamai** (the code of Tamil customary law drawn up in 1706.) gives more details about the customs observed in connection with the dowry system in Jaffna. The property and wealth brought by the bride are called **Cītanam** (dowry). The properties given by the bride's parents are listed in a deed prepared by an attorney at law and it is registered with the Government land registry. This deed is known as **cīтана uruti** (dowry deed) land, house, gold ornaments and cash given by the parents are mentioned in the deed. In observations on **Tēcavaḷamai**, "it is agreeable to the people and especially it conserves the rights of women, they could have separate property, a portion of the acquired property, and their husbands cannot dispose of their property." **Tēcavaḷamai** is "both a personal and a local law. It is personal in that it applies to certain persons only in Jaffna, and local in that it applies to Jaffna only." These two traits of **Tēcavaḷamai** distinguish it from such laws as the Roman- Dutch law. Thus **cīтана uruti** is well guarded by the **Tēcavaḷamai**.

Even if the girl is not beautiful or even if she is handicapped, a fat dowry – deed will always bring a bridegroom for her. The following proverbs reveal this fact;



1. Kaliyanam enkē? kācup paiyilē “Where is marriage? It is in the money- bag”
2. Peṇṇin kōṇal ponnilē nimirum  
“The bride’s hunch gets straightened by gold”
3. Peṇṇukkuk kuṇam cītanantān  
“The character of the bride is only the dowry”
4. Peṇṇait tiruttum pon  
“Gold shall make the bride look beautiful.”

The importance given to dowry has made most of the fathers in Jaffna toil themselves to earn as much as possible so that they could give a fat dowry to their daughters. Some literary works composed in Jaffna have portrayed this situation well. Any scholar who had studied the culture of the Jaffna Tamils has inevitably included his observations regarding the existing dowry system.

## OTHER TYPES OF MARRIAGES

Apart from the three types of marriages mentioned above , there are certain other types which are found in a small scale.

### 5.1. ELOPEMENT

If a secret relationship between a man and a woman is not approved by their parents or if they think that they would never get their parents’ approval for the marriage, then they go to another place and live as husband and wife. They will be referred to as otiponavarakal (those who ran away) . The main reason for this type of marriage has been the caste difference found between the man and the woman. A high caste woman may elope with a low caste man. But this had sometimes resulted in high caste people hiring professional killers to murder the young man who eloped with their woman. A woman who eloped with a man is always looked down by the Jaffna Tamil society. She will be referred to as **ōṭippōṇaval** (Upon she who ran away). But there is no corresponding masculine form for this expression. The Jaffna society,

during the British administration and sometimes after that, allowed the land owners and people from the high caste to have several unofficial wives from the low castes.

## 5.2. KIDNAP MARRIAGE

If a young man likes a girl and if her parents refuse to give her in marriage to him, then he with the help of his friends kidnaps her to another village. There he may persuade her to marry him. The parents, with the help of the police, may trace her where-about and bring her back. Young men in a village do not like to get married to a girl who had been kidnapped. Thus she may have to spend the rest of her life time without marriage. A girl who had been kidnapped by a young man had sometimes been deserted by him when his lust had been satisfied. There must have been a number of cases like this and hence the proverb: *Ācai arupatu nāl mōkam muppatu nāl* “love is for sixty days and lust for thirty days.”

## HOME FOR THE MARRIED PEOPLE

The newly married couple living with the bride's parents is the most common practice in Jaffna. Since the mother's house is usually given as dowry to a marrying daughter, the couple must have been compelled to live there. Even if the house given as dowry is different from that of the bride's parents, the couple shall live in the latter at least for some time. After having the first child they will go to live in the former. Farmers have been observing a custom that is slightly different from this. After the marriage, man shall stay with his parents during the day time and shall return to his wife's house only in the night. He helps his parents in their lands. He will continue to observe this practice till his parents die.

A married couple, sometimes, lives with the bridegroom's parents too. If the mother-in-law (*māmi*) does not treat her daughter-in-law (*marumakaḷ*) as one of her daughters, then there will be intermittent quarrels between them. Some mothers – in – law had been very cruel to their daughters – in – law. A number of proverbs portray this situation.

The following are cited as examples from those proverbs that are commonly used in Jaffna:

1. pānai oṭṭinālum oṭṭum māmiyār oṭṭāl  
A "Broken pot may be mended but not a mother – in – law"
2. makan cettālum cākaṭṭum marumakaḷ koṭṭam aṭankaṭṭum  
"Let a son die; but the daughter – in – law's pride must be subdued"
3. māmi meccina marumakaḷ illai  
"No mother – in – law praises her daughter – in – law"
4. Mamiyārukku cuvamiyār ivaḷ  
A "Daughter – in – law is the god to her mother – in – law"
5. māmiyārum cākāḷō manakkavalai tīrātō?  
"Will not my mother – in – law die and put an end to my distress and misery"
6. māmiyār uṭaittāl maṅkalam marumakaḷ uṭaittāl ponkalam  
"If the mother – in – law breaks a pot, it is only clay (of no consequence), but if the daughter – in – law breaks one, it is gold (of great consequence)"

Even the modern creative writings of Jaffna portray the hostile relationship between the mother – in – law and the daughter – in – law. The marriage customs of the ancient Jaffna people were of the Dravidians. Though those customs and rites were subject to foreign influence, they did not lose their forms and distinct qualities. The customs and rites mentioned in ancient Tamil literary texts are still preserved in Jaffna. At the same time we find some Dravidian Aryan customs which are also portrayed in Tamil literary texts. Therefore, in order to understand fully the marriage customs, rites and traditions of the Tamils, one should not fail to study carefully the marriage customs and rites of the Jaffna Tamils too.



# FESTIVALS IN THE NORTH



There are several festivals celebrated in the Northern Province. Taip Ponkal, Cittirai New Year, Āṭi Amāvācai, Kārttikait Tīpam, Christmas, Ramzan, Vesak-Poson, etc.

## Taip Ponkal

**Tai ponkal** in the Northern Province is essentially a harvest festival. The Ponkal day generally falls on the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> of January. According to the lunar calendar the full moon is counted as the first day of the month. Therefore, the fifteenth day of the first lunar month is the first day of the Tamil first month called '**Tai**'. The first day of the lunar month is considered as the Ponkal day. The observance of Ponkal is spread out over three days. The previous day of the Ponkal is devoted to cleaning up the place. Generally the old clothes, the

fence and other objects are burned in the evening. The well is also cleaned so that fresh new water could be fetched next day morning for the Ponkal. After getting rid of old things in and around the house, a sacred space is prepared for the next day's Ponkal. Mango leaves are hung from a rope which is then used to cordon off a sacred area in front of the house where ponkal would be prepared.

On Ponkal day, the elder of the house goes to the well and draws new water. In some places the water is drawn at a temple well. In olden days, Ponkal was made near the well and offered to the water deity. Mango leaves are tied round the neck of the new pot in which the new water is carried. Facing the east, the the master of the house or his wife make offerings to God and places an earthen pot on the fire. Milk is poured into it. This is done in the early morning within the sacred space that was prepared the previous day. The milk soon comes to a boil and overflows the pot. If the milk overflows on the eastern or northern side, it is considered lucky and prosperous. In olden days, when the milk overflows the people around it usulay shout "PonkalōPonkal! Ponkalō Ponkal!". The literal meaning of the words is "It has boiled! Grow fruitful". Since this is mainly an agricultural festival, the people wish that more and good harvest be bestowed by God.

The newly harvested paddy brought home is used for the Ponkal. The household is up before sun rise and everything is made ready to cook the pongal in a new pot decorated with a design of the rising sun. The pot of rice with the flavoring and sweetening ingredients such as payaru, juggary or white sugar, cloves, sultanas and nuts is set to boil. The sight is rather exhilarating. The children and the young, crowd round the pot watching the boiling mass. As the sun peeps over the eastern horizon, the pongal is ready. The pot is now taken out of the fire, and its contents emptied over a large plantain leaf, spread on the floor. The pongal is first ceremoniously offered to the sun-god with a coconut split into two halves. This seems to be a thanks-giving festival for

Sun-God for giving the people a bountiful harvest. Just after it, a small portion of gruel is put on a banana leaf and it is placed on a top place where crows could reach it. Once it is placed on the top, in order to call the crows the people shout "Kā! Kā! Kā! Kā!" In response to it, crows would come flying toward the place where the gruel was kept. After this everyone has a good feed of the tasty pongal. A season of gaiety and friendliness as of spirituality vows are made or fulfilled at the temples.

In the olden days, on the Ponkal day another interesting custom of beating the trees with the wooden spoon (lable) that was used to make Ponkal took place. An elderly person in the house used to take the wooden spoon and start beating the coconut, mango, banana trees around the house. As he did this, he would say:

Kāyppiō "Are you going to bear fruit or not"

Pūppiō "Are you going to bear flowers or not"

This sort of magic rite, in which fruit trees are pledged to abundance, was found every where. But now it has become a forgotten rite.

The day after Ponkal is the day of Paṭṭiponkal (Paṭṭi is 'cattle'). It means the Ponkal ceremony for cows. The shed of the cows is newly done and a ponkal is made there. Cows are considered not only sacred animals, but also partners in the farming and other work. Therefore, in order to thank them, this ceremony has been done every year. The cows are decorated and the Ponkal gruel is offered to them. In the Northern Province on this day Cart Races take place.

### **Cittirai Tamil Hindu New Year**

Another national day of all round rejoicings is the Hindu New Year day. The day is the same as that of the Sinhalese New Year. The correspondence is one that extends to customs of observance. A forecast is made of the prognostics of the year.



The Tamil New Year called Cittirai Varusha Pirappu or Puttāṇṭu usually falls on the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> of April every year. Chitterai is the first month of the Tamil solar calendar. The New Year means hope, new beginning, new life, new possibilities and joy and happiness. You could see during this season Neem trees blooming with their flowers and the first batch of mangoes hanging prominently.

Tamil New Year is a significant day for Tamil Hindus with religious values, and is celebrated accordingly with religious rituals, including visiting Hindu Temple.

On the New Year day people take the ritual bath. It is called Maruttu Nīr Bath. Maruttu Nīr is made of various herbs. Lotus flower petals, Maḱilampū 'Pointed-leaved ape-flower' (*Minusaps elangi*), Tālampū 'Screw-pine flower' and Tulaci 'Sacred basil' (*Ocimum sanctum*) are boiled in water added with turmeric. The Maruttu Nīr will be available in all the Hindu temples a day before Tamil New Year. (Sinhalese Buddhists also take the ritual bath with herbal mixture called Nanu). People use to collect the Maruttu Nīr in the evening on the previous day at the temple nearest to their houses. After the ritual bath, Kōlam (artwork on the floor with flour and colour) is drawn at the entrance of the house. It is believed Kōlam at the entrance of the house brings good fortune to the household. The entrance is also decorated with mango leaves (Mā ilai).

The family joins together in the Puja Room to offer prayers to Gods and Goddesses, asking for divine blessings. They start their prayers by lighting Kuttu Viḷaku (traditional lamp), placed beside Nirai Kuṭam (brass bowl with water and decorated with coconut, mango leaves etc.) and it is a symbol of fullness and prosperity. Once the prayers at home are completed all go to Hindu Temples of their choice to pray and receive blessings for a prosperous new year. Returning home every one sits for the first meal of the day a meal of milk- rice (kiribath of the Sinhalese) special to the New Year. Homemade cakes as kolukaṭṭai and fruits come last in the menu.

Presenting money to family members, unmarried young, particularly children, friends, etc. at an auspicious time, as a token of good fortune is part of the Tamil Hindu New Year traditions, and it is known as “Kai Vishesham.” Having Lunch and/or Dinner as a family, and visiting or welcoming relatives and friends on the Tamil New Year day is part of the Tamil New Year celebration..

For the cultivator it is the day of first ploughing and to all a day of rejoicing for friendly calls and social visits.

### **Āṭip Pirappu**

**Āṭip Pirappu** a famous Tamil festival celebrated in the month of Āṭi (July) usually on the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> of July. It is observed on the first day of Āṭi month to welcome the fresh water forces into the earth. The first rain shower we have during this month.

According to the Tamil calendar, Aadi is the fourth month of the year. The first day of this month is celebrated. The Aagamas and the Vedas ascribe no special significance to the day and so it is seen and celebrated more as a traditional festival.

Aadi is also a sacred month. The birth of di is known as Āṭi Pirappu and it is important on that day to prepare special food like the aadi kool, a porridge which is served to all who may call on that day.. Despite all these important days, the month of Aadi is considered an inauspicious month for occasions like weddings, housewarming ceremonies etc.



Āṭi Kūl and Kolukkattai (see the picture below: a plate made out of Palmyrrah contains two Kolukkattai) are two important food items related to Āṭi Pirappu.

A famous Tamil poet Cōmacuntarappulavar from Navaly, Jaffna has composed a beautiful poem about Āṭi Pirappu:

ஆடிப் பிறப்புக்கு நாளை விடுதலை  
ஆனந்தம் ஆனந்தந் தோழர்களே!  
கூடிப் பனங்கட்டிக் கூழங் குடிக்கலாம்  
கொழுக்கட்டை தின்னலாம் தோழர்களே!

வில்லை வில்லையாக மாவைக் கிள்ளித் தட்டி  
வெல்லக் கலவையை உள்ளேயிட்டுப்  
பல்லுக் கொழுக்கட்டை அம்மா அவிப்பளே  
பார்க்கப் பார்க்கப் பசி தீர்ந்திடுமே

புவைத் துருவிப் பிழிந்து பனங்கட்டி  
போட்டுமா வருண்டை பயறுமிட்டு  
மாவைக் கரைத்தம்மா வார்த்துத் துழாவுவள்  
மணக்க மணக்கவா யுறிடுமே

குங்குமப் பொட்டிட்டுப் பூமாலை சூடியே  
குத்துவிளக்குக் கொழுத்தி வைத்து  
அங்கிள நீர்பழம் பாக்குடன் வெற்றிலை  
ஆடிப் படைப்பும் படைப்போமே

வாழைப் பழத்தை உரித்துத் தின்போம்நல்ல  
மாவின் பழத்தை அறுத்துத் தின்போம்  
கூழைச் சுடச்சுட ஊதிக் குடித்துக்  
கொழுக்கட்டை தன்னைக் கடிப்போமே

Tomorrow is a holiday for Āṭi Pirappu  
"Friends! We are happy! We are happy!  
We could get together to taste palmyrrah juggary kūl  
And Friends! We could also eat kolukkattai!



## Culture of the People of the Northern Province

Having made the flour paste into round shapes  
The sweet mixture (of juggary and scraped coconut) is put in  
Mother will make kolukkattai by steaming  
The very sight of it will end our hunger

Having squeezed the scraped coconut and mixing with juggary  
Putting in flour balls and payaru  
Mother will pour the flour mix and will stir  
The sweet smell will wet our mouths

Putting on the Kunkum and the flower garlands  
The auspicious lamp would be lighted  
Young coconut fruits and betel with arecanut  
Spread on the floor as offering for July (Āṭi) month

Peeling off the bananas and we will eat  
And cutting the mangoes and we will eat  
We shall taste the hot kūl  
And we will have a bite of the kolukkattai

This poem found in the Sri Lankan Tamil text books gives a vivid description of the Āṭip Pirappu festival celebrated in Northern Sri Lanka. The Tamil first of July will remind every one of the Āṭik kūl and Kolukkattai.

### Āṭi Amāvāsai

The new moon day is considered something special in almost all civilizations for one reason or the other. While some civilizations ascribe demonic qualities to this day, others consider this day as auspicious and benevolent. As far as the Tamils are concerned they have mixed feelings. They consider the new moon day not as auspicious and benevolent. But the new moon day in the month of Āṭi is considered different. In Tamil society, the two new moon days which matter most in a calendar year are the Tai Amāvāsai and Āṭi Amāvāsai. Āṭi Amāvāsai comes during the period generally from middle of January to middle of July and the Tai Amāvāsai comes in during the period of middle of July and middle of

January. The Āṭi Amāvāsai day is specially marked for offering prayers and food to the dead forefathers. This resembles the All Souls Day that is celebrated in Roman Catholic Churches.

“The ancestors are believed to come to this world during the new moon day of the month of July, and they stay here till the 15th or 16th of January”

On the Ponkal Day, they are believed to get back to the ancestors' world. Since the forefathers are in our midst in the month of July, we believe that the offerings we make during this month would reach them and appease them quickly.

Keerimalai is famous for the people to perform Tarppaṇam on the Āṭi Amāvāsai day. Taking a holy dip in the sacred water fronts like Keerimalai, the people believe that their mental and physical impurities are washed away. After that one is fit to perform Tarppaṇam and to make offerings to the ancestors.

A special vegetable called **Kāttōṭṭikkāy** which has a bitter taste is consumed on the Āṭi Amāvāsai day. It is consumed only on that day. The people have to wait for another year for the next consumption of that vegetable.

### **Kārtikait Tīpam**

Kārttikai Tīpam or Kārttikai Viḷakkīṭu is essentially a festival of lamps. The month of Kārttikai (November) brings in darkness in our regions. It becomes more in December. More light is needed. Providing more light starts with the festival of Kārttikai Tīpam. Rows of Agal vilakkus (oil lit lamps) are lit in every house during this festival. The lighted lamp is considered an auspicious symbol. It is believed to ward off evil forces and usher in prosperity and joy. While the lighted lamp is important for all Hindu rituals and festivals, it is indispensable for Kārttikai. On this day, people clean the houses. In the evening, they draw kolams in the front of the house and also place some lamps on it. The lamps are placed in the pooja and then they are moved to different places in the house. The lamps glow all over the streets on



this day. The lamps are arranged near the doors and windows and also in the balconies. In this way, people celebrate Kaarthigai Deepam

One of the earliest references to the festival is found in the Akanānūru, a book of poems, which dates back to the Cankam Age (300 B.C. to 300 A.D.). The Akanānūru clearly states that Kārttikai Tīpam is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Kārttikai. It was one of the most important festivals of the ancient Tamils. Avaiyyar, the renowned poetess of those times, refers to the festival in her songs. Karthikai Tīpam is one of the oldest festivals celebrated by the Tamil people. The people of Northern Sri Lanka celebrate this festival even now.

### Christmas

The Christians in Northern Sri Lanka celebrate **Christmas** and some other festivals connected with their Saints. Christmas is celebrated as **Oji Viḷā** in the North. This seems to be a universal one. In India and Sri Lanka the month December is regarded as a darker period. Thus when they celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ they all regard Him



as a source of a large tower of light. The Hindus too looked at Lord Shiva as a tower of light during the Tiruvempāvai period in December.

### **Ramzan**

**Ramzan** and **Prophet Mohmed's Birthday** are celebrated by the Muslims in the North. Their disciplined life is best reflected in the institution of the month of Ramzan, a month of dedication to the fundamental concepts and values of their faith. After a long period of strict spiritual discipline and physical abstinence and fasting, holy Ramzan stands as a symbol of blessedness and rejoicing and fulfillment.

### **Vesak and Poson**

Vesak and Poson are celebrated at the Naga vihare in Jaffna and in Nayinātīvu. The Tamil people are curious and are pleased to watch the colourful Vesak lanterns. Buddhists who are living in the North go to these Viharas.

# THE CULTURE OF WELLS IN THE NORTH



Water is indispensable to us. The government of any country holds the responsibility of providing clean drinking water to all the citizens. Rivers, lakes, ponds and wells provide drinking water. In Sri Lanka, there are many rivers in the places where Sinhala people live. Their use of the river has created a 'river culture' among them.

The Northern Province does not have natural rivers. Thus several wells have been dug for water. The use of the well has created a 'well culture' among the people of the Northern Province.

Climatically considered, the two major Zones of Sri Lanka are the Dry and the Wet Zones with intermediate Zones between the two. An ecological area with a character of its own is the Northern part of the Dry Zone which is known today as the Northern Province.



Jaffna, a part of this province has the arable soil that is generally of a reddish colour (see, the picture above), from the admixture of iron and being largely composed of lime from the Coromandel coral, it is susceptible to the highest cultivation, promises crops of great luxuriance, though it has undergone certain amount of bio-degradation due to the war. Cultivation in the Jaffna peninsula is carried on exclusively by irrigation from innumerable wells, into which the water raises fresh from the madrepor and sands; there being no streams in the district unless those percolating can be so called which may find their way underground and rise through the sands on the margin of the sea at low water. This account in a way gives an explanation why so many wells are dug in the Northern Province. When we speak of the wells in the Jaffna Peninsula, one cannot avoid the remarkable well at Puttur. The Puttur tidal well is intriguing. Though popularly known as bottomless well of Puttur, it is really a tank in its rectangular proportions, about forty feet by thirty.

Folklore speaks of this Puttur well as opened by Sri Rama by a stroke of his arrow to provide water to refresh his men. Another story alludes to an old Hindu shrine, with an underground cave where hermits meditated. The spot is hallowed in the mind of the villagers



with the name it bears, Nilavarai. This well the villagers say is anything over 200 feet in depth. It defies plumbing. It is remarkable that the waters never overflow its limestone banks nor does it recede, except for the phenomenon that it rises and falls by a few inches once in every twelve hours. This oscillation has remained a mystery. A folklore belief assumes that the well has an underground channel connecting it with the sea at Keerimalai.

From the known literary evidence and popular tales we understand that Jaffna has been a dry Zone from ancient time. It has already been mentioned that an artiste called Yālppāṇan who exhibited his artistic excellence by playing a Yāl was bestowed with a land called Maṇṇṇiṭṭar 'a sand dune' which later was called Yālppāṇam. However, this sandy place became a viable place to live. There are no mountains in the Jaffna Peninsula though we have place names like Keerimalai, Kamparmalai which have a postposition 'malai' meaning a mountain. Absence of mountains results in the absence of any natural rivers in Jaffna. Therefore, people have to preserve water for their drinking and for the irrigation of the paddy fields and vegetable gardens. This resulted in digging innumerable wells in the Northern Province.

Every house, if affordable, has a well for their drinking and bathing purposes. Common wells are dug for those who could not afford to have individual wells. Earlier there were many common wells than individual ones. This has caused a number of human behaviors, customs, beliefs and ceremonies related to the wells. That is why it is said that there is a 'well culture' among the Tamils living in the North of Sri Lanka.

### Use of Well Water

Well water has been extensively used by the people of the Northern Province. The Main usefulness of well water is that it will be cold if someone bathes during the hot season and surprisingly it will be warm during the cold season. There is an interesting verse in Hitopadesa:

“Gold colour woman and the Banyan’s shadow,  
Well-springs and a brick-built wall  
are all alike cool in the summer  
And warm in the winter.”

Apart from this, well water sometimes is considered sacred. The ‘Thirty first day’ after child birth is considered to be an important function at family level. All members of the family who are polluted by the birth of the child are purified only on this day. The house-hold is cleaned; the **house well** is drained and is allowed to be filled with new water. Holy water mixed with panca kavviyam (five ingredients i.e. the five products of a cow, used in ceremonial purifications, viz: milk, curds, ghee, urine and dung; the same mixture is administered to the woman after child-birth, also sprinkled on the child at the time of purification) is poured into the well. After draining the house well, the new water that is filled is taken for certain rites in house-hold ceremonies. For the Tai Ponkal ceremony, Ponkal is made in the morning. To prepare Ponkal the new water is fetched from the house well.

### Digging a Well

Before digging a well a suitable site where good water is available has to be found. The elders used to say that good water would be available under a **Marutu** tree which is tree of the Northern Province. There are traditional experts who could discover the spot where good drinking water could be found and so that a well could be dug. Late Arutkavi Dr. S. Vinasithamby was an expert in this profession. Each village used to have a team of workers who could dig wells. Because of the lime stone rocks, there may be wells with spring water and sometime without water. In such case the workers have to dig deeper. They would be eagerly digging to find the springs. At Āyakkaṭavai Piḷḷaiyār temple, workers were digging for some days and they could not find the springs. Mahavidvan Brahamasri K. Kanesaiyar composed a poem in praise of Piḷḷaiyār:

“Āṭṭātē enkaḷ aranār tirumaknē  
Kōṭṭālē kutti kūvattaik kāṭṭiuvāy”

“Son of Lord Siva! Do not play with us.

Pierce with your tusks and show us the water springs.”

The next day all were happy that water started springing. Once the work was over, the workers who participated in the digging of the well make Pongal and offer to God. This is a thanks-giving rite connected to wells in the Northern Province.

### Common Wells

Unlike today, there were many common wells in the villages. Irrespective of age and sex anyone could use these wells for bathing, washing and to fetch water for drinking. Since a number of persons use these wells, there is an opportunity for exchanging news. Sometimes these common wells may be the spots for breaking news. For some, this may be the only place where they could gather news.

These wells may be very hot spots where a lot of quarrels may spring up. These may be very convenient places for lovers to exchange talk while bathing or washing clothes. Common wells are also considered as safe places where the murdered corpses could be deposited or an ideal place for someone to commit suicide.

Common wells in the Northern Province, especially in Jaffna were not readily available for everyone to use them. There were wells where only the high caste people could draw water. They will pour water into the pots brought by low caste people. The low caste people were not even allowed to dig a well for their use. K. Daniel, Sri Lankan Tamil novelist from Jaffna in his novel **Taṇṇīr** (Water) shows how the high caste people in Karaveddy poured poison into a well dug by low caste people. This is not a fictitious story. It really happened in the area referred to. But it has been artistically portrayed in his novel by Daniel.

There are certain beliefs and customs in relation to wells in the Northern Province. Women are not allowed to go to the wells in the



night. If they are common wells one cannot say who come there in the night. Therefore, the women folk are frightened by the belief that in the night there would be ghosts that attack specially the women.

During the Portuguese and Dutch periods Hindu temples were destroyed and the idols were taken away. In order to safeguard the idols made out of bronze and some in gold or silver were thrown into deep common wells. Some of them had been recovered after two or three centuries.

### **Temple wells**

There are many wells with saline water. But usually the wells that are located in temples in the Northern Province always have good drinking water. In some villages, people go to the temple wells to collect their drinking water.

# THE PLACES OF WORSHIP IN THE NORTH



The Northern Province has beautiful and sacred temples of the Hindus, Dagobas of the Buddhists, Churches of the Christians and the Mosques of the Muslims. Regarding the Hindu temples, it is said that there were five recognized Iswarams of Siva, which claimed and received the adoration of all. These were Tirukētīsvaram near Mahatittha; Munnēsvaram dominating Salavatta and the pearl fishery; Toṇṭīsvaram near Mantota; Tirukkōnēsvaram opposite the great bay of koṭṭiyār and Nakulēsvaram near Kānkēsanturai. Among those five Īsvarams, two of them, namely, Tirukētīsvaram and Nakulēsvaram are in the Northern Province.

## TIRUKKĒTĒSVARAM

8

**Kētēsvaram temple** is an ancient Hindu temple in Mannar, Northern Province in

Sri Lanka. Overlooking the ancient period Tamil port towns of Mānthai and Kudiramalai, the temple has lay in ruins, been restored, renovated and enlarged by various royals and devotees throughout its history. Tirukkētīsvaram is one of five Īsvarams dedicated to the Hindu deity Shiva. Throughout its history, the temple has been administered and frequented by Sri Lankan Hindu Tamils. Its famous tank, the Pālāvi tank, is of ancient antiquity and was restored from the ruins. Tirukkētīsvaram is one of the 275 Pāṭal Perṛa Sthalams of Shiva glorified in the poems of the Tēvāram.

Literary and inscriptional evidence of the post classical period (300BC-1500AD) attests to the upkeep of the temple during the ancient period by kings of the Pallava, Pandyan Dynasty and Chola dynasties who contributed to its development up to the late 16th century. In 1575, Tirukkētīsvaram was largely destroyed by Portuguese colonials, with Pujas terminating at the shrine in 1589. Following an appeal by Arumuka Navalar in 1872, the temple was rebuilt at its original site in 1903.

Tirukkētīsvaram is one of the most reputed ancient temples of the Northern Province. Tirukkētīsvaram is the monumental shrine of the village of Mantota of North Sri Lanka known to the Buddhist chronicles as Mahatittha. Legends speak of the temple having been built by the Mayan father of Mandodhari, wife of Ravana. Sri Rama, on his way back to Ayodhya from Lanka, is reputed to have worshipped Siva at Tiruketheeswaram. Legends speak too of Arjuna visiting the temple in the course of his pilgrimage to the south where he met the queen Alli Arasāṇi, who ruled over the region in the vicinity of Mantota. Reputed in historical annals, as Rajarajeswara Mahadevan Kovil the name recalls the patronage to the temple by Rajendra chola II.

An idea of the splendor and prosperity of the place has been pictured in these words (Sir Kanthaiya Vaithiyanathan, **Tirukeetheeswaram Papers**, 1957.): "Waves of the sea adjoining the temple reached the skies and its roar vied with the festival



drums and all other sounds of the thickly populated countryside. The harbor was a safe refuge for many ships from various countries which crowded into it. The city of mantota was rich with gold, pearls and precious stones. In groves of coconut, mango, arecanut and plantain, the denech and flocks of peacocks danced in their cool shade. The scent from the flowers of the well-laid gardens oppressed the air and the hum of swarms of bees which kept on flitting from flower to flower, shrub to shrub competed with the strains of music from the halls of citizens."

"The temple enjoyed the patronage of the Pandyan and Chola dynasties of kings and flourished down to the sixteenth century, since when it suffered decline from natural causes and the politics of the times. The Portuguese ravaged the coast and sacked the temple, and nothing remained of the shrine except a few fragments of sculptured figures, broken tiles and pieces of pottery."

Efforts to restore the temple date back to 1872. A new era opened in the chronicle of the temple with the founding of the Tirukkētīsvaram Temple restoration society at a public meeting held in Colombo on October 19, 1948. A planned programme of development steadily materialized and has been steadily under implementation.

According to the Sri Lankan historian, Dr. Paul E. Peiris, Tirukkētīsvaram was one of the five recognized Eeswarams of Siva in Lanka very long before the arrival of Vijaya in 600 B.C. The buried ancient Tamil trading port of Manthottam (Mantotai/Manthai) in the Mannar District where Tirukkētīsvaram is located — has provided historians extant remains of the culture of the area during the ancient period. This includes the vestiges of its ancient temple tank (the Palavi tank), and the ruins of a former Hindu city built of brick. During the ancient period, Mathoddam was a centre of international trade, with Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians, Arabs, Ethiopians, Persians, Chinese, Japanese, Burmese and others vying with each other to monopolise the trade of North Ceylon with Tamil traders. Mathoddam is currently

ancient Temple of Tirukkētīsvaram to worship Shiva. According to one Hindu legend, Maharishi Bhrigu worshipped Shiva at this shrine. Another tradition holds that the Hindu planetary god Ketu worshipped Shiva at the shrine, thus creating the shrine's name "Kētīsvaram". Another legend is found in the **Skanda Purana**, an ancient work in Sanskrit, the antiquity of which is unknown. It consists of 2500 verses grouped into 27 Chapters and had been handed down in accordance with the traditional custom as oral discourses by the Guru to his disciples in this case by Sootha Munivar to the Naimisaraniya Munivars. Three Chapters of the **Skanda Purana** which have been given the title **Dhakshana Kailasa Mānmiam** deal with historical events in ancient Ceylon. The first chapter narrates about the **Puranas** in general and the splendour that was of ancient Ceylon; the second chapter relates about the celebrated places of religious importance in Ceylon and the story of "Thiruketheeswaram." In this chapter is narrated the incident of how, at one time long ago, the God of Wind (Vayu) uprooted the three towers of the great mountain Maha Meru in order to keep off Athichedan — who fought against him, obstructing the great mountain with thousands of adorned summits resembling serpents' heads — and deposited one of these towers at Tirukkētīsvaram. The Lord established Himself there, at Tirukkētīsvaram. According to the Mānmiam, Tirukkētīsvaram along with Konēswaram are two of the nine most sacred sthalams of the Hindus. The other seven are in India.

### KĪRIMALAI NAKULĒSVARAM TEMPLE

**Kīrimalai Nakulēsvaram temple** is historically known as the **Tiruttampalēsvaram Kōyil of Keerimalai**. This is a famous Hindu temple in Keerimalai, located north of Jaffna in the Northern Province, Sri Lanka near the ancient port of Kānkēsanturai. One of the oldest shrines of the region, it is the northernmost shrine on the island of the five ancient Īsvarams of Lord Siva, venerated by Hindus across the world from classical antiquity. Its adjacent water tank, the Keerimalai Springs, is believed to have curative properties. Keerimalai is 50 feet above sea level, and situated west of Palaly. The fresh water comes

from an underground spring source. Hindus flock in large numbers on "Aadi Amaavaasai" day which falls during the Tamil month of "Aadi," to carry out rituals for their forefathers and take a divine dip in the natural springs. These rituals are usually carried out by men. "Keerimalai" is particularly famous for this festival.

Keeri-malai in Tamil means Mongoose Hill. Keeri in Tamil and Nagula in Sanskrit mean Mongoose. The temple is situated adjacent to the mineral water springs. The legendary sage Nagula Muni, shrunk by age and austerity while meditating at a cave in Keerimalai was likened to mongooses that frequented the area. He developed a mongoose face. The sage bathed in the springs and was cured of his mongoose face. In gratitude, Nagula Muni constructed a small shrine and worshipped the Lingam enshrined there. This became known as the Thirutambaleswaram Kovil of Keerimalai and also the Naguleswaram Kovil of Keerimalai alluding to the sage.



The Pandyan princess Maruthapura Veeravalli had a horse face. She too was advised to bathe in the Keerimalai springs and she was cured. She built the nearby **Māvittapuram Murukan Temple** after she was cured by the Keerimalai springs.





The temple is referenced in religious treatises such as **Dakshina Kailasa Puranam** and **Skanda Puranam**. After 1620 ACE it was destroyed by Portuguese colonialists. The final destruction was recorded in 1621 ACE. The local Brahmin priests are said to have hid the main icons before fleeing the temple. After a gap of almost 400 years, in 1894 ACE, local Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu people under the urging of Hindu reformer Arumuka Navalar came together and built the present temple. However the temple was destroyed by fire in 1918 and had to be rebuilt. The following are some of the old sculptures of this historic temple.

On Monday, February 06, 2012, the reconstruction of the temple had been complete and under the authority of the chief priest, Sivasri Naguleswara Kurukkal, the Mahakumbhabhishekam took place. It was a monumental event with thousands of devotees who came to pray and receive blessings. While the reconstruction was taking place, the Editor of **Explore Lanka**, Mr. Udeshi Amarasinghe visited this





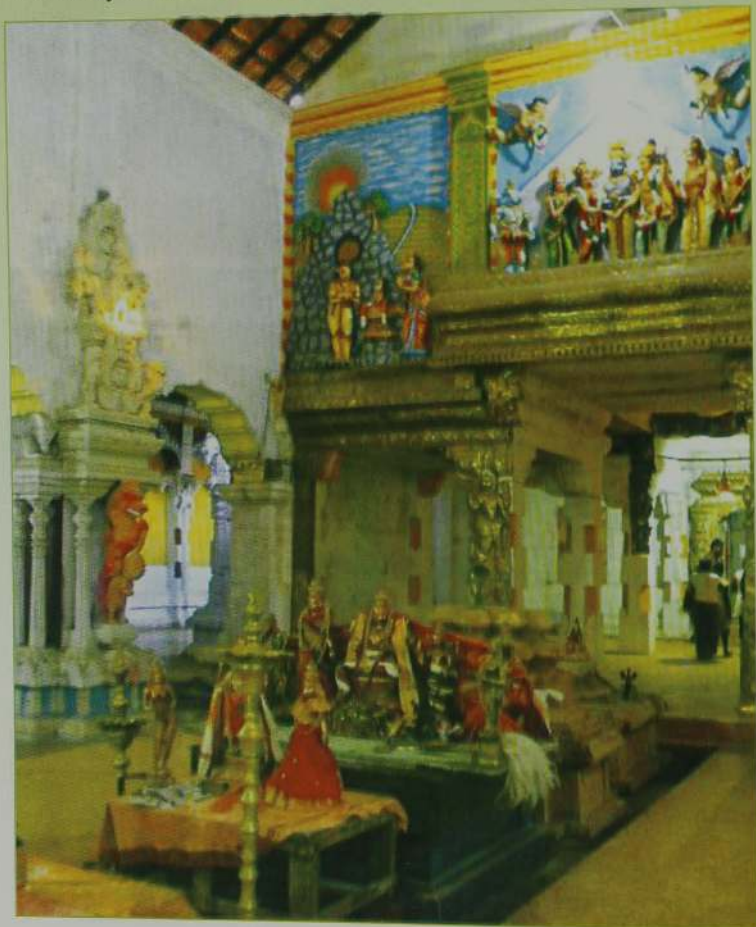
temple along with the photographers Menaka Aravinda and Mahesh Bandara. They wrote an article “Keerimalai A Land of Spirituality”. I reproduce here with their permission some of their words about this temple and the photographs:

“I was at the Naguleswaram Temple in Keerimalai, Jaffna, which is considered to be a place of great spirituality in the country. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva the creator of life and is one of the five ancient Shiva temples in Sri Lanka. Being one of the oldest temples of Lord Shiva, its history predates the arrival of Prince Vijayan to Sri Lanka.

The temple exudes serenity and this is enhanced by the calm surroundings. As I stepped inside a group of Amme’s (elderly women) clad in white streamed into the temple. They had arrived from the Southern part of the country and were reverently walking towards the priest to show their respect. With heads bowed down in devotion they stood while the priest tied a thread on their wrist as a blessing, so that they would be protected from harms way. The interior is a simple blend of colours; the gold plated sections

of the walls enhanced the simplistic beauty of the large hall. At the centre was a stone structure where bronze statues of deities had been placed. A sequence of archways led to the sanctum where the largest Sivalingam in Sri Lanka lies. It is said Sivalingam has been made out of a very rare material.

Naguleswaram Kurukkal is the high priest of the temple and his family has been an integral part of the temple for more than six







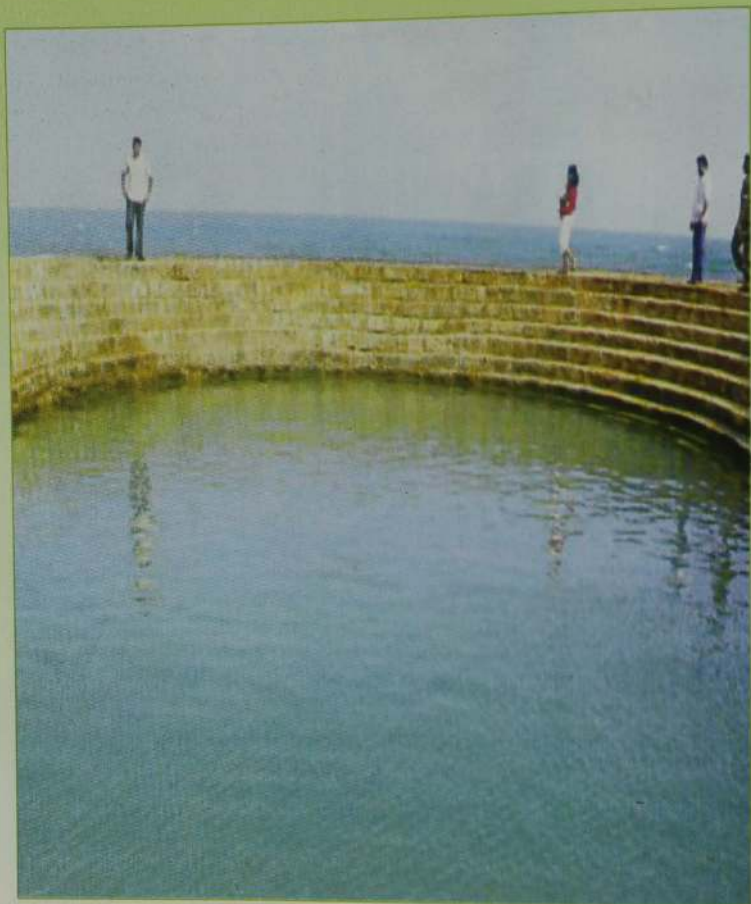
generations..... The high priest's wife we affectionately called 'Amma' showed us around the temple.

I left the temple and walked along the path through the ruins to the road, which led to the Keerimalai spring water pond. The water of this pond is said to have medicinal properties and many visit this site to dip in the clear blue water to cleanse themselves. It is believed that a sage by the name of Nakula Muni meditated in one of the caves nearby.



There are two ponds; one for males and another for females. Though the ponds are in close proximity to the sea, the water is non-saline and smooth to the skin. It is said that a Princess who was born with a facial deformity had a dip in the pond and her face was transformed.

There is a temple in the vicinity with overgrown shrubs and two statues that seemed to be of human form from afar, I was curious... as I walked towards the statues I could see that though the



torsos of the statues were human, the faces were non-human. It was apparent that one was female and the other a male. There was no one around who could tell me whom these statues represent. (This is my (A. Sanmugadas,) note: The female statue is of the Princess Marutappuraveekavalli who had a dip in the pond and got rid of her horse face. The male statue is of the sage Nagula Muni (Nakula – Sanskrit, Keeri – Tamil) who had a dip in the pond and got rid of his mongoose face).

The author of the above article finally concludes as follows: "As I left Keerimalai, having been to the Naguleswaram Temple and Keerimalai spring water ponds, I could not help but wonder, could it be possible that we were in the midst of Gods?"





## A UNIQUE TEMPLE IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA

Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam at Tellippalai is a unique temple. "That sacred building which stands today about 300 feet behind a huge architecturally arched entrance on to the western side of Jaffna-Kankesanturai motor at Tellippalai, with a beautifully constructed holy pond on the northern side, and the massive Maha Gopuram, towering to a height of 63 feet, based on eastern architectural design, niching hundreds of statues of varied size and hues depicting puranic stories, artistically painted with dazzling colours standing in front, flanked by shady trees on one side, and with a beautiful background of lushly green and glistening leaves of palmyrah palms in clusters, projecting a magnificent view, is venerably called the Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam of Tellippalai." (V.T. Kumarasamy, 2002).

Tellippalai Sri Durgadevi Temple was actually started in a small hut under a mahua tree by a devotee called Kathirgamar in 1760 at Ulukudaipathi, in Tellippalai. It now has become one of the most popular Sakthi Peedas in Jaffna today. It has a history of over 300 years. The presiding deity of the temple in the sanctum sanctorum



is Durga Devi. In 1968 the annual Mahotsava started and continues upto now. It has been considered as the people's temple. The first day of the annual festival, when the flag hoisting ceremony takes place is called **Koṭiyērrat Tiruviḷā** (Flag hoisting ceremony). The first day's festival is sponsored by the common people. This explains to us how this temple has been called the people's temple.

In 1978 the newly designed chariot (**Cittirat Tēr**) was made. In 1981 the Rajagopuram and the beautiful arch at the entrance were completed. In 1982, The Pushkariṇi Sacred Tank where the Mother Goddess takes a sacred bath at the end of the Mahotsva was built. Annapūraṇi Hall was built for devotees who flock in during the festival days to be fed. The year 1985 had a busy schedule of putting up a number of buildings in the Durgapuram premises. A new Capparam was built. Annapūraṇi Wedding Hall, a guest house for the devotees who come from far away places, a hall for music and dance learning, a house for refugees, residential facilities for the priests and others who work in the temple were put up.

Unlike other temples, Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam is not just a temple for worship alone. It rendered many services to the people. The people all over the world send a lot of money as their **kāṇikkai** (Till). They have faith in the Management and its transparency and accountability. No one has a doubt or fear that their worthy money would be swindled or spent on useless projects. It is appropriate to introduce the person who was behind this unique temple and its worthy activities. Sivatamil Celvi Paṇṭitai Dr. Thangammah Appakuddy (Popularly known as "**Ammā**") is known nationally and internationally. A Management Board was set up for Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam in 1977 and she was elected unanimously as the President of the Board and she continued to hold that post till her demise in 2007 unanimously elected every year. This is the only temple that had a woman as the boss of its administration. Ammā had a clear vision and long sight. She wanted poor and destituted female children to be taken care of. A **Maklir Illam** (Girls' Home) was built. Several girls

found shelter there. It not only gave them food, clothing and lodging but also education for their better future and for some a wedded life. Two of those girls had their weddings at the Annapūraṇi Wedding Hall at Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam. There were women without anyone to look after them and there were widows who lost their husbands in the abnormal situation that prevailed in this country. She wanted to give them a Home. It is called **Annaiyar Illam** "Home for Mothers".

As a scholar, Ammā made use of the surplus of the income from the temple to build a Research Library in the Devasthanam premises. The Management decided to donate a sum of money for various good services on Ammā's birth day on the 7<sup>th</sup> January every year. Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam has made donations to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital for better services to the people.

In this Temple every day Ammā delivers a religious talk after the morning Puja. When Ammā departed from this world a lot of people missed this morning sermon at the temple. Ammā knew that this unique Temple has to continue to render its services to the people even after her demise. Dr. Aru. Thirumurugan, the present President of the Management was trained by her. Sri Durgadevi Devasthanam continues to satisfy the religious, social and cultural expectations of the people.

### Nainātīvu Temple and Vihare

**Nainātīvu** or **Maṇipallavam** or **Nāgadīpa** is a small but notable island off the coast of the Jaffna Peninsula, in the Northern Province, in Sri Lanka. The word **naicci** means 'a kind of snake'. The Sanskrit name for serpent is **nāga**. The names, **Nainātīvu** and **Nāgadīpa** of the island allude to its aboriginal inhabitants, the Nāga people. The ancient Hindu shrine of Shree Nagapooshani (Bhuvaneswari) Amman; one of the prominent 64 Shakti Peethas, and the Buddhist shrine Naga Vihare are situated here. **Maṇipallavam**, the other name for this island is mentioned in the ancient Tamil literature, **Maṇimēkalai** and ancient Buddhist chronicle **Mahavamsa**. The other names found in legends:



**Mañittivu** and **Camputtatīvu**. A name that highlights its character as the abode of the Naga is **Nagalesvaram**. A halo of spirituality endears the island to the Hindus, with its dedication to Naga, enhanced by its legendary links with the adventurous career of Mañimēkalai. Almost the only big shrine in Sri Lanka dedicated to the cult of the Naga, the temple draws vast crowds of worshippers and sightseers, during its annual ten-day festival in June to July.

Ptolemy, a Greek cartographer, describes the Jaffna peninsula including islands around as **Nagadibois** in the first century AD. Now several Hindu and Buddhist devotees visit the Hindu temple and the Buddhist Vihare. Motor launch helps people to cross the lagoon to the temple and the Vihare.

Nāka Tivu / Nāka Nadu was the name of the whole Jaffna peninsula in some historical documents. There are a number of Buddhist myths associated with the interactions of people of this historical place with Buddha. The two Tamil Buddhist epics of **Kuṇṭalakēci** and **Mañimēkalai** describe the islet of **Mañipallavam** of Nāka Tivu/Nadu which is identified with this islet of the Jaffna peninsula. **Mañimēkalai** describes the ancient island of **Mañipallavam** from where merchants came to obtain gems and conch shells. The Tamil language inscription of the Nainativu temple by Parākramabâhu I of the 12th



*Nagapooshani Amman temple*



*Nainativu Naha Vihara*



*Nainativu boat service*

century AD states that foreign merchants must land at Kayts before entering the island, and for other ports. The Hindu temple was destroyed by the Portuguese in 1620 AD. It was restored and re-established in 1788. A portion of the inscription slab is built into the wall of the present restored temple.

The name **Nāgadīpa** is linked with one of the legendary visits of the Buddha to Lanka. **Rasavāhini**, a thirteenth century Pali work, highlights a story interwoven with a pilgrimage by sixty Buddhist monks to the sacred Buddhist dagoba in the island, the dagoba reputed to be built on the spot where was planted a Rajayatana tree (*Buchananla latifolia*) brought over by God Samiddhi Sumana from India when he accompanied the Buddha on his second visit to Lanka. The monks, as was their wont, walked about the village to beg their morning food. Naga, a poor woman on her way to fetch water, saw the monks and with all reverence enquired of them whether they have had their food, and they replied: "This is still forenoon". At these words, Naga, so as to assure them of her good faith, left her water pot on the ground and rushed to her master and get an advance of sixty Kahapanams. At each of the sixty houses of the village, she gathered food worth a Kahapanam each. With the food thus collected, she rushed back to the monks awaiting her. The monks impressed at her devotion invoked blessings on her. The tidings soon reached the king who sent for her and made a gift of the island that came to be known as **Nāgadīpa**, the land of the woman, Naga. This seems to be a fascinating story. But the derivation suggested by Mahavamsa that this island was a seat of one of the Naga kingdoms of protohistoric times is more convincing.

Nāka people were snake-worshippers, a Dravidian custom, and could have spoken Tamil. The Nākas were an offshoot of the Kerala Nayar community, at that time the Chera kingdom of ancient Tamilakam. The interchangeable names Nāyar and Nāka or Naga, meaning Cobra or Serpent were applied to and self described by these snake-worshiping people from classical antiquity. The Nākas lived among the Yakkha, Raksha and Deva in Ceylon according to

the Manimekalai and Mahavamsa. Cankam literature details how the ancient Tamil people were divided into five clans (*Kudi*) based on their profession during the Cankam period, where the *Nāka* clan, who were incharge of border security guarding the city wall and distant fortresses, inhabited the Coromandel Coast - South Tamil Nadu, East Tamil Nadu and North Sri Lanka. The name *Nāka* as either a corrupted version of the word *Nayanar* or may have been applied to this community due to their head covering being the shape of a hydra-headed cobra in reverence to their serpentine deities. The rulers and society of *Nāka-Tīvu* and *Nāka-Nāṭu*, meaning *Nāka* island (*Tīvu*) or country (*Nāṭu*) are described in the Vallipuram gold plate inscriptions and Manimekalai for many centuries.

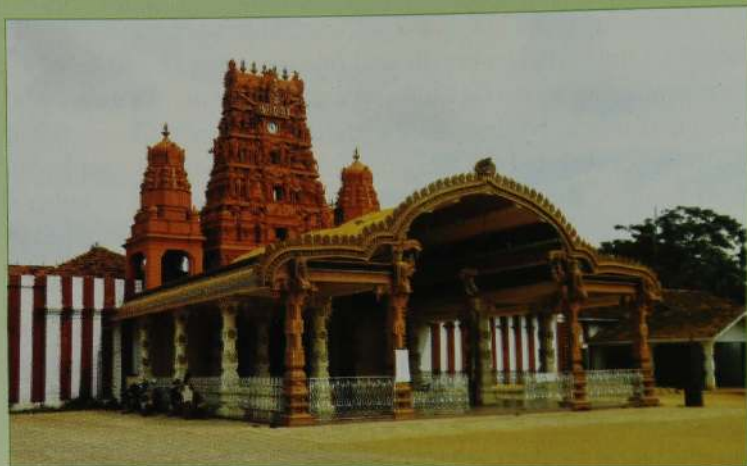
The Nagas are likely to have lost their identity over time, due to their loss of power and the formation of alliances with the new settlers of Sri Lanka. It is believed that the original populations control over the island declined and they moved to their stronghold in the North of Sri Lanka. Nainativu being called *Nayinaartheevu* and *Nagadeepa* since ancient time attest to this. The Sri Lankan Tamil people of Nainativu, are descendants of the Naga people. They continue to worship their patron *Nayinaar* deity within the sanctum sanctorum of the Nainativu Sri Nagapooshani Amman Temple.

## NALLUR KANDASWAMY TEMPLE

**Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil** or **Nallur Murugan Kovil** is one of the most significant Hindu temples in the Jaffna District of the Northern Province, in Sri Lanka. It stands in the town of Nallur. The presiding deity is Lord Muruga in the form of the holy Vel. The idol of the Nallur Devi or goddess was gifted to the temple in the 10 century A.D. by the Chola queen Sembiyan Mahadevi, in the style of Sembian bronzes.

The Nallur Kandaswamy Temple foundation year was 948 A.D. According to the **Yālppāṇa Vaipava Mālai**, the temple was developed at the site in the 13th century by Puvēnaya Vaku, a minister to the Jaffna King Kalinga Magha. Sapumal Kumaraya (also known as Chempaha





*Entrance to the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil in Jaffna,*

Perumāl in Tamil), who ruled the Jaffna kingdom on behalf of the Kotte kingdom is credited with either building or renovating the third Nallur Kandaswamy temple. Nallur served as the capital of the Jaffna kings, with the royal palace situated very close to the temple. Nallur was built with four entrances with gates. There were two main roadways and four temples at the four gateways.

The rebuilt temples that exist now do not match their original locations which instead are occupied by churches erected by the Portuguese. The center of the city was Muttirai Cantai (market place) and was surrounded by a square fortification around it. There were courtly buildings for the kings, Brahmin priests, soldiers and other service providers. The old Nallur Kandaswamy temple functioned as a defensive fort with high walls. Cankiliyan Tōppu, the facade of the palace of King Cankili II, can still be found in Nallur. The fourth and the present temple was constructed in 1749 A.D. during the Dutch period by Krishna Suba Iyer and Ragunatha Maapaana Mudaliyar in the 'Kurukkal Valavu', which is the original temple premises. Initially the temple was built using bricks and stones and had a cadjan roof. The original shrine had only two main halls and didn't have a clock



*On 21 August 2011 at 7:00am local time the temple unveiled its newly built 100-foot Gopuram at the southern side.*

tower, surrounding courtyard, enclosing wall, or any ornately carved towers or Gopuram.

The first clock tower was erected in 1899, and the main hall where the **vēl** or lance of the deity resides was re-furbished using rocks in 1902. The first enclosing wall was erected in 1909. Likewise, the temple has been gradually renovated from time to time with contributions from the general public. In 1964, the 'Vasantha Mandapam' or grand hall was renovated to have the present look and feel.

The temple has the main entrance facing the east. It has an ornately carved five-story tower or Gopuram in the Dravidian architecture style at the main entrance.

In the surrounding inner yard, it has shrines for Lords Ganesh, Vairavar, Sun and Sandana Gopala. In the southern part of this temple, the holy pond and Thandayudhapaani shrine dedicated to another aspect of Lord Muruga can be seen. In the northern side there is a big holy garden.

The temple is a socially important institution for the Sri Lankan Tamils and it is also a culturally important shrine in the Jaffna Peninsula. There was a shrine dedicated to an Islamic sufi saint in the temple complex from 1734 to 1749 when the temple was built. The *dargah* was relocated in 1749 when the temple structure was built.

## CELVA CANNITI MURUKAN TEMPLE, TOṆṬAIMĀNĀRU

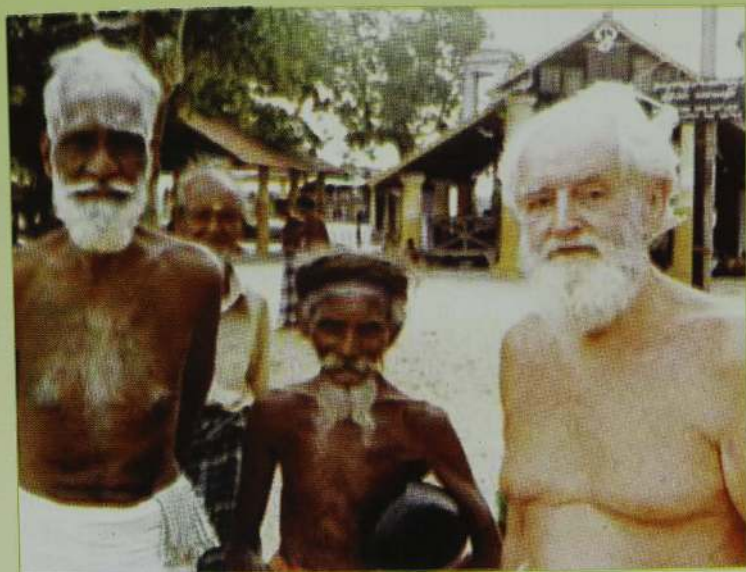
Toṇṭaimānāru Celvac Canniti Temple is the place of worship mainly for the Vadamaratchy people. But it has become a world famous temple. Several studies have been done on this temple. The Lord Murukan who resides in Nallur Temple is known as an Alankārak Kantan (Decorative Murukan). But the Lord Murukan who resides in Toṇṭaimānāru is known as Annatānak Kantan (Murukan here prefers bestowing food to people). Celvac Canniti Temple is situated

at a place where several Sannyasins lived. They have long found this temple to be a most congenial environment for sadhana. Swami Gauribala Giri who was known as German Swami was living here in an Ashram. In the following photograph ( by Patrick Harrigon, 1981) German Swami, Cinna Swami and Mr. M.K. Kanapathipillai are seen:



Mr. Kandiah Neela kandan, Attorney-at-Law, General Secretary of the All Ceylon Hindu Congress





has written a long article about this temple. I have reproduced below some parts of his article:

“Celvacanniti Murukan Temple is situated in Tonṭaimannaru in the Vadamaradchy division in the district of Jaffna in the North-Eastern province of Illankai (which is the Tamil name for Sri Lanka). Celvacanniti is revered as Sella Katirkāmam of the North. This temple of Sri Murugan at Thondaimannaru is about 20 miles north of Jaffna Town. Here too, as at Kathirkamam, a free atmosphere for worship pervades.

The origin of this sthalam, which is not so very ancient, is known history. The waters of Thondaimannaru (teertham where fresh water outflows into the sea) flowing past the site, elevates the location to a sthalam blessed with the triple adjuncts of tīrtham, sthalam and mūrti. This is a water way that is said to have been excavated under the supervision of Karunagaran Thondaiman. He was sent here for procurement of salt supplies by Kulothunga Cholan, who reigned in Chola Nadu. The temple by the side of the newly cut waterway was

the place of worship of the settlement that was founded in the locality. The temple however suffered the fate of devastation like all other Hindu temples, in the hands of the foreigners in the 16th century. Later, during the era of revival of Hinduism in Jaffna, a temple was erected at the site.

At this stage, the story shifts to one Kadirgamar, a keen devotee of Murugan, who proceeded to Katirkāmam, and was rewarded there with the gift of a silver Vel, the emblem of Murugan. He brought this sacred Vel and installed it in a madam at the site and performed daily pujas to it. Later, he was permitted to use the temple itself, which he took over and he and his group have been managing and officiating ever since, to the satisfaction of all devotees.

Today, the Selva Sannithy Murukan shrine is a well established institution, with a temple and several madams in the locality. Daily hundreds of devotees and mendicants throng the place.

The historical Thondaimannaru lagoon enhances the sthalam with tīrtham facilities and there is always food available in some matam or other in the locality for the mendicants. Several devotees come here and distribute annadānam, fulfilling their vows for favours received from high. It has become a place noted for this, so much so, that the deity Himself is known as Annatāna Murukan.

The worship at Selvasannitti is unique. It is the piety, with which the devotees worship which acquire for them His Almighty Murukann's Grace, takes precedence over rituals and traditions. The devotees surrender to Murukan and their thoughts and acts are merged with Him. The priest covers his mouth with a cloth and does poja. This tradition is said to have commenced with pojas being done without chanting mantram. Prasadam (offerings) is presented to Sannittiyan in banyan leaves. Sixty-five leaves are spread for that purpose. The rice offered as such prasadam is taken by the devotees as medicine."

Readers are directed to the following publications for further details about this temple:

## Culture of the People of the Northern Province

1. Special souvenir published on the occasion of inaugural procession of the artistic charriot of Selvasannitti Murukan (1984)
2. Article about this temple by Prof. K. Sivathamby in the above Souvenir.
3. Prof. A. Sanmugadas & Dr. Manonmani Sanmugadas, Ārankaraiyān, 1985, Revised Edition in 2010

The pilgrimage from Celvac Canniti to Katirkāmam has been a spiritual journey to gain mystical experiences. About this spiritual journey Shanmuga Priya (Nallur Kanthaswamy A Spiritual Experience, Valluvar Press, Nallur, 2004) describes as follows:

“The journey starts from Selva Sannithy and a batch of dedicated devotees set off on foot. They are joined by the pilgrims from Nallur. The group then proceeds to Vattappalai Amman temple in Mullaiteevu. They journey through idyllic Veruhal Murugan temple in Trincomalee and reach picturesque Sithandi Murugan temple in Batticaloa.

Even as the journey proceeds pilgrims engage in personal walking meditation which offers an opportunity to observe the inner self and experience mystical happenings and learn to read subtle signs and understand the spiritual meaning of life. They also engage in religious devotional songs fostering bakthi, promoting love and oneness with God. The ritual sharing of food and shelter promotes universal love and creates an awareness of the oneness of all beings.

The spiritually bonded group journeys on to sacred Mandur, holy Tirukovil before reaching hallowed Katirkāmam.

The German Swamy Gauribala, a disciple and good friend of Yogaswami walked this Patha Yatra twenty five times. Yogaswami undertook the yatra in 1910. Patrick Harrigan, an American Kaumaran has walked several times.

Many devotees have undertaken the return pilgrimage from Katirkamam to Selva Sannithy via Nallur temple.



## VAISHNAVA TEMPLES IN THE NORTHERN PROVINCE VALLIPURAM TEMPLE

Historically an important temple is the Vallipuram temple to God Vishnu, a rare shrine situated in a region where Saivaites live predominantly. This temple is famous for various reasons:



*Sri Vallipura Alvar Temple, Vallipuram*



*Punnalai (Ponnalai) Varatarajap Perumal Temple*

1. A gold plate which belongs to the first Christian century was found here. The gold plated and its inscriptions received considerable notice after it was first read by Prof. Paranavithana in 1938. According to this Gold Plate inscription Jaffna mainland was the Nagadipa of the pre-Christian times of Ceylon History. Thus Vallipuram Temple is known to historians because of the Vallipuram Gold Plate.
2. Vallipuram temple is for Lord Vishnu. But the rituals and most of the religious activities are done as though the temple is for Lord

Shiva. One day I was at this temple. After the Vacanta Maṇṭapa Puja I was asked to sing Tēvāram. Thinking this is a Vaishnava temple I started reciting some hymns composed by the Vaishnava Saints. Someone whispered in my ear that I have to sing Pancapurāṇam. I was surprised. Pancapurāṇam is sung only in a Saiva temple. But here we find a religious toleration. In South India this will never happen in any Vaishnava temple. Thus Vallipuram temple becomes famous this way.

3. Vallipuram is the only temple where the divine Cakkara as the object of worship is placed at the Sanctum Sanctorum. The author of **Ancient Jaffna** says that Kokila Sandesa mentions two shrines in Yāpapaṭuna, one to Rama and another to Cakra. Interpreting this, author of **Ancient Jaffna** observes: "The temple of Rama was at Vallipuram and the other where Krishna is worshipped is at Punnalai near Moolai". Here the author has misunderstood what is said in the Kokila Sandesa. The temple dedicated to Cakra is Vallipuram and the one dedicated to Rama may be Punnalai. The Gopurams of Vallipuram and Punnalai temples are seen below:

## CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Christianity is a religion introduced by the Europeans and it has become a part of the life of the people of the Northern Province. The Portuguese introduced Roman Catholicism and Protestantism by the Dutch. Protestantism of the Dutch times being known by the distinctive name of the Dutch Reformed church. The Anglican Church was introduced by the British.

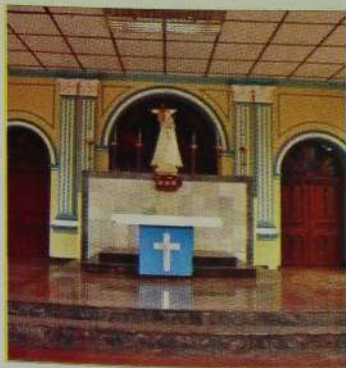
Catholicism is the predominant one in the Northern Province. Christianity took stronghold in the Northern region after the Portuguese established control over the land. Philip d'Oliveira was a devoted Catholic and was keen in the spread of Christianity. He captured the kingdom of Jaffna and it resulted in the success of the Portuguese in their missionary endeavour. Rigorous suppression of the indigenous religions, Hinduism and Buddhism facilitated their policy.





We see many impressive Catholic Churches in the Northern Province. The most important one is the Madhu Church in Mannar. Some photographs below show the majestic and the spiritual phenomena of the Church:

The American Missionaries concentrated in Northern Sri Lanka. They started a Seminary in Vaddukoddai and it was called 'Batticota Seminary'. This seminary produced some eminent Tamil scholars. C.W, Thamothersampillai, the first graduate from University of Madras edited the classical works in Tamil. Arnold Sathasivampillai, Wyman Kathiravelpillai, Nevins Sithamparapillai, Carrol Visvanathapillai were some of the scholars produced by Batticota Seminary. The





Church of South India was established in Vaddukoddai and in other areas in the Northern Province. The main Church in Vaddukoddai could be seen in the following photograph:

The present Jaffna College at Vaddukoddai represents the historical Batticotta Seminary.

The Christian Church architecture and that of the Hindu temples sometimes look alike. See the following photographs. The first one is a Church in Jaffna and the other one is a Hindu temple in Inuvil:

Both have separate clock towers. But in another set of photographs of Church plus Hindu temple we find two clock towers are added with the main structure:





## Buddhism

In the early days Buddhism flourished in North Sri Lanka. Jaffna and the outlying islands had important monasteries and viharas. The Tamil epic Manimekalai refers to Nagadipa and also about Buddha's one foot-print in the North. The site is believed to be the present **Tiruvati Nilai**. The Buddhist ruins at Kantharodai are well known. The following photograph shows some of those remains:

The constructions of the dagabas seen in the photograph above bear different features from other Buddhist dagabas elsewhere. According to Dr. Paul E. Pieris who first discovered these dagabas, the constructions are more than 2000 years old.

During the archeological excavations in this area a Buddha statue, Bodhisathva statue, a stone scripture and some coins believed to have been used in the 1st and 2nd centuries were found

It is legendary that the relics of 60 Arahats who passed-away due to a famine while preaching Dhamma and practicing meditation in Jaffna peninsula about 2000 years ago are deposited in those small dagabas. There is a record that a special dagaba with Lord Buddha's relics was also in these premises.







It is believed that the bodies of those Arahats had been cremated and the ashes were deposited in the small dagabas.

Now the Buddhists in the North have two important Viharas. One is the Naga Vihara in Jaffna town and the other is the Naga Vihara in Nagadipa. Nainativu Naga vihara and the Nagatipa temple are seen in the following photographs.

### Islam

We learn from the memoirs of the Dutch Governors that the muslims have been a population factor in Jaffna in the days of the Dutch. The first Muslim settlement in the Jaffna peninsula was at Mirusuvil and Usan. The island of Mannar had an arab settlement from very early times. At Mannar to this day one can discern the racial characters of the Arab, comparatively unmixed with other racial strains. The Muslims of Mannar were the allies of the Arya Chakravarties, in the attempts of the latter, to re-capture the Island of Mannar from the Portuguese.

A sly reference to the Muslims, we have in the Sinhalese poem, Kokila Sandesa in eulogy of the conquest of Jaffna by prince Sapumal Kumaraya. The Muslims are here termed Jonas (spelt in the poem, as Junes).

# TEMPLE ARTS AND FOLK ARTS



The three principal temples of Jaffna the Sivan Kōvil of Vaṇṇārpaṇṇai, the Nallur Kandaswami Temple and the Māvittapuram Temple each maintained its own troupe of dancing girls. Dedicated to the temple they live in the temple premises. The dancing was done in the temple precincts only and not outside it. At the temple festivals the devadasis headed the procession of the gods on all the days of the festival. Some temples which did not maintain their own staff of devadasis engaged professional dancing girls for the days of the festival.

This contemporary evidence of the sacred dance in Jaffna is valuable as we have no literature in Jaffna narrating the art as the Sandesa Kavyas of the Sinhalese. This sacred dance has been performed for a long time at the Muthumari Amman Temple at

Arali and the Nallur and Mavittapuram Temples. It is also reported that some of the smaller temples too engaged dancing girls at the temples. The dancing was commonly expressed by the term **Cinna Mēlam** – suggestive evidently of the soft drumming that accompanied the dances. But due to various reasons, this temple art deteriorated and we have lost it.

Some Temples in the Northern Province have been centres for the performance of dramas, earlier traditional plays and later the musical plays.

The Nadagam, the art of the drama has been so much a feature of Tamil culture. Speaking of the Sinhala Nadagamas Prof. Sarathchandra observes that they might have been influenced by the Tamil Nadagams. Of the music of the Sinhalese Nadagamas Sarathchandra makes these remarks: "The Nadagama is a lyrical play consisting largely of verses and songs. The verses are in Tamil metres and they are chanted without measured time. A large number of metres are used and the commonest among them being the viriduwa (Tamil Viruttam).

The Portuguese made capital of the indigenous dramatic element and used the stage to further the propagation of their faith. Baladaeus, the Dutch minister and historian testifies to the activity in these words: "Most of the churches here have certain scaffolds or theatres near them especially that of Telipola (Telipallai) where the Jesuits used to represent certain histories of the bible to the people on holidays".

## FOLK PLAYS AND FOLK DANCES

### Kōlāṭṭam and Kummi

The **Kōlāṭṭam** and the **Kummi** belong to the category of dances classified as the community or the choral dance. The **Kummi** dancers move in a circle with swaying and swinging movements in varying turns and reels keeping time by rhythmic



clapping of hands. The accompanying songs and tunes are simple but varied and graceful. The themes of the songs in the **Kummi** cover a wide range from poetical descriptions of Nature to the simple joys of life and romances of the gay spring season from plentiful harvest of the fields to the worship of gods and goddesses and a practical philosophy of life. The movements of the hands are single or double co-ordinating and harmonizing with the foot work and the movement of the group in pleasing gyrations.

The **Kummi** is played on all joyous social occasions as at domestic events as celebration of the coming of age of girls besides at school functions as the annual demonstrations of sports and pastimes.

The main distinction between the **Kummi** and the **Kōlāṭṭam** is that while in the **Kummi** the players keep time by hand clapping in the **Kōlāṭṭam** the rhythm is kept up by the striking of sticks (Kōl 'stick') which has given rise to the name **Kōlāṭṭam**. There are many varieties of them. By origin the **Kōlāṭṭam** was a play in the cult of the gods as may be seen from an understanding of the accompanying songs.

### Folk Songs

North Sri Lanka has a long tradition of Folk songs. Most of them are related to work in the paddy fields, to fishing in the sea, in digging a well, drawing the fishing net along the sea-coast, etc.

Many of the folk songs express the feelings of various people of the society. A few of them are given below:

All alone in her hut a maiden sits lamenting her lot. She has to cook for her aunt two uncles and a grandfather all out in the paddy - fields. Her aunt will soon appear to fetch food for the hungry males. But the maiden has made no headway with the pounding of the paddy. Presently she gives vent to her feelings in words which evoke sympathy.

1. காயாப் புழுங்கலொடும்  
கப்பியொடும் மாய்கிறேனே.  
எனக்கெழுந்த சூரியனே,  
எனக்கொருவன் வாரானோ!

With parboiled paddy undried and  
And grain in coarse grits,  
I wear myself to death  
O, sun who has risen with me  
won't a man come for me!

2. தோயத் தயிரொடும்  
மத்தொடும் மாய்கிறேனே:  
எனக்கெழுந்த சூரியனே  
எனக்கொருவன் வாரானோ!

With uncurdled milk and the churn in hand,  
I wear myself to death  
O, sun who has risen for me  
won't a man come for me!

Paddy pounding is essentially the work of a women. One woman begins a lyric. The other replies in the same tenor. The theme of the lyric may be love may be a comment on the suitors. Here is a comment on the dress. One wore a saree dipped in the Jaffna dye in the wont of the well-to-do in the days when the chayaroot (*oddenlandia umbellate*) was much in vogue. Dress is a tickler to damsels. Envey in the other springs with a sting:

வட்ட வட்டத் திட்டையிலே  
வரகரிசி தீட்சையிலே,  
ஆர் கொடுத்த சாயச் சோமன்  
ஆவவட்டம் போடுதடி?

Friend, who gave you that dyed dress of yours?  
That circles fan wise round and round  
As you polish the millet,  
And the rice in the shallow mortar.

The wearer of the dyed dress pops out a sharp answer:

ஆருங் கொடுக்கவில்லை,  
அவிசாரி யாடவில்லை.  
கை யெரியப் பாடுபட்டுக்  
கட்டினேன்டி சாயச் சோமன்.

No one gave it me  
Nor did I wallow in wanton life,  
With smarting hands worked I hard,  
and donned that dyed dress.

The funeral songs of the Tamils have a ring of their own. A widow is ostracized from society. She is kept out of the auspicious ceremonies like house warming and wedding. She dare not wear colored clothes, Jewellery of any kind, hair locks, and the like which beautify women. Here is a dirge of such a woman who has just lost her husband:

1. கறுப்பும் சிவப்பும் - எனக்குக்  
கலந்துடுக்கக் கைநோகும்:  
மன்னாருக் கச்சு இப்போ  
மடித்துடுக்க நாளாச்சே.

To wear in change the black and red  
my hands would be weary  
the day is now on for me to drape in folds  
the long cloth of Mannar

2. பட்டும் பணிதிகளும் -நான்  
பல தினுசாய்ப் பூட்டினுவேன்  
பட்டைக் கழற்றி வைத்தேன் - இப்போ  
பாடகத்தை வாங்கி வைத்தேன்.

Silks and jewels  
I vary in wear  
Silks I have doffed,  
Anklets I am casting off now.



3. ஆண்ட நகை கழற்றி நானும்  
ஆபண்ச் செப்பி லிட்டேன்














The long used ornaments I took off me  
and put them back in their caskets.













It is the way of women to rock infants in their laps. Whereas men take them on their shoulders, and walk to and fro patting them with their shoulders, and walk to and fro patting them with their hands. Even today when simplicity has been much robbed these manners continue. These are thrown out in the following song.

அத்தை மடிமேலும்  
அம்மான்மார் தோள்ளேயும்  
வைத்து முத்தாட்டும்  
மரகதமே கண்வளராய்.

Sleep emerald, sleep,  
Caressed in the laps of your aunts  
And on the shoulders of your uncles.

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