

Exploring The Cultural Significance And Societal Impact Of Festivals In Sivagangai

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the captivating realm of festivals in Sivagangai, a culturally rich region in Tamil Nadu, India. The study aims to comprehensively explore the cultural significance and societal impact of these festivals, shedding light on their historical and religious underpinnings, as well as their contemporary relevance. By examining the multifaceted aspects of these celebrations, including rituals, traditions, and community participation, this research elucidates how festivals in Sivagangai serve as powerful agents of cultural preservation and social cohesion. Furthermore, it investigates the manifold ways in which these festivals contribute to the region's economy, tourism, and overall well-being, thereby accentuating their broader societal impact. The findings underscore the enduring cultural vitality and transformative influence of festivals in Sivagangai, making them integral to the region's identity and social fabric.

Key Words: Vinayagr Chathurthi, Kavadi festival, Karthigai Deepam,

Introduction

Festivals hold a significant and integral role within the cultural tapestry of Sivaganga. They are a source of profound affection among the populace, fostering unity and exuberant celebrations. The people in this region fervently participate in a plethora of festivals that manifest with

unwavering regularity, ensuring that no fortnight passes without a festival to mark. Many of these festivities are intricately intertwined with religious observance, in a district where the majority of the population identifies as Hindu. In the state of Tamil Nadu, where Sivaganga is located, the Hindu populace adheres to the Tamil calendar, meticulously observing the festivals that it designates.

The temples stand as the central epicenters for these jubilant celebrations, and consequently, these are often referred to as Temple festivals. Sivaganga district, in particular, is renowned for hosting a profusion of such festivals, some of which have achieved widespread recognition. Among them, the Kalayarkoil float festival, Nattarasankottai car festival, Kandadevi car festival, Thayamangalam's 10-day festival, and Pillayarpatthi Vinayagar Chathurthi rank among the most illustrious. It is not solely the grand temple festivals that light up the district, as every village and town also revels in its unique local festivities. Furthermore, within the Hindu tradition, certain days are deemed especially auspicious and pure, such as Prathosam, Kirthigai, and Sashti.

On these auspicious occasions, communities congregate at their local temples, beseeching the divine for health, prosperity, and the well-being of their families. These gatherings not only serve as religious gatherings but also provide the younger generation with the opportunity to immerse themselves in an age-old, yet still vibrant, living tradition. In accordance with Webster's dictionary, the term "festival" signifies a day or period of religious or other celebration, distinguished by feasting, ceremonies, or observances. In Sivaganga, festivals transcend mere definitions; they represent a cultural heritage, a testament to the enduring vitality of tradition, and an avenue through which people come together to celebrate and strengthen their bonds with each other and the divine. Sivaganga District is one of the 38 districts in Tamil Nadu State, India. This district was formed on 15th March 1985 by bifurcation of Ramanathapuram district. Sivangai district has history. It has also some historical movements like. The people to know about the historical importance, religious importance, cultural importance and special features of places in Sivangangi district.

PILLAYARPATTI

Vinayagr Chathurthi

The celebration of the birthday of Lord Vinayaga, also known as the 'elephant-headed god,' is a significant event observed in numerous households and Saivite temples, as well as temples dedicated to Lord Vinayaga. The festivities held at the Pillayarpatti shrine of Lord Vinayaga are particularly renowned. Annually, during the months of August and September, the Ganesh Chathurthi festival is joyously commemorated at this sacred location over a span of ten days. One of the highlights of this celebration is the preparation of an enormous kozhukatta (modhaga), a sweet dumpling. This delectable treat is crafted using approximately 80 kilograms of rice, jaggery, coconut, and dhal.

The process of making this kozhukattai involves several steps, and it takes about three to four days to steam-cook this delectable dish to perfection. Once the kozhukattai is ready, it is humbly offered to the deity on the auspicious day of Vinayagar Chathurthi. Known as 'kozhukattai' in Tamilnadu and 'modhaga' in Sanskrit, this sweet cake holds a special place in the hearts of devotees. People from various regions of the state converge at the Pillayarpatti shrine, not only on the day of the celebration but throughout the festival season. The place witnesses a significant influx of pilgrims and devotees who gather to seek blessings and partake in the festivities dedicated to Lord Vinayaga, the beloved elephant-headed god.

KUNNAKKUDI

Karthigai Deepam: A Time-Honored Festival of Tamil Nadu

Karthigai Deepam, an ancient and culturally significant festival, stands as one of the oldest celebrations in the vibrant state of Tamil Nadu. References to this revered occasion can be traced back to the Sangam literature, demonstrating its enduring historical importance. This festival, often referred to as the "Festival of Lights" in Tamil Nadu, is a time of great enthusiasm and communal

celebration. The term "Deepam" itself signifies light, and during Karthigai Deepam, rows of clay lamps are meticulously kindled in front of households as the sun sets.

The atmosphere comes alive with the vibrant glow of these lamps, creating a spectacle that enchants the onlookers. To amplify the jubilant ambiance, the night sky is illuminated with the brilliant burst of crackers, filling the air with resounding joy. As is customary during this festival, families prepare a delectable array of traditional snacks, including 'appam,' 'pori,' and 'adai.' These offerings are made with utmost devotion and later presented to the deities as a mark of reverence and gratitude. Karthigai Deepam holds special significance for devotees of Lord Shiva. The festival is widely celebrated in all Siva temples across Tamil Nadu. It serves as a time for the faithful to come together in worship, deepening their spiritual connection with the divine. A noteworthy event within this grand celebration takes place annually during November and December in Kundrakudi, where the Karthigai Deepam festival reaches its pinnacle. Lakhs of devoted pilgrims congregate from various corners of the district to participate in this extraordinary celebration, reinforcing the festival's communal spirit and cultural importance. In essence, Karthigai Deepam is not merely a festival; it is a celebration of heritage, devotion, and the enduring cultural legacy of Tamil Nadu, a vibrant tapestry that continues to thrive through the ages.

Kavadi festival

The Kavadi festival is a significant Hindu religious celebration that is observed primarily by Tamil-speaking communities in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and other parts of the world where Tamil Hindus reside. This festival is dedicated to Lord Murugan, also known as Lord Subramanya, the Hindu god of war and victory. The festival is named after the "kavadi," which is a physical burden that devotees carry as an act of penance and devotion. Devotees undertake a pilgrimage to temples dedicated to Lord Murugan, with the most famous being the Palani Murugan Temple and the Batu Caves in Malaysia. Many devotees make vows to Lord Murugan in exchange for his blessings or as an act of

gratitude for wishes granted. They often perform various acts of penance, such as carrying the kavadi.

The kavadi is a physical burden or offering that devotees carry on their shoulders as a form of self-mortification. It typically consists of a wooden or metal frame decorated with flowers and peacock feathers, which symbolize Lord Murugan. The kavadi is often affixed to the devotee's body using sharp metal hooks or spears, and they carry it as they climb stairs leading to temples. The festival is accompanied by music and dance, including the playing of traditional instruments like drums and flutes. Devotees often dance in a trance-like state during the procession. Devotees observe strict fasting and engage in rituals to purify themselves before participating in the festival.

The main highlight of the Kavadi festival is a grand procession in which devotees, often in large groups, carry their kavadi and walk to the temple. This procession is a colorful and lively event with a festive atmosphere. Devotees may also offer various items such as fruits, coconuts, and other symbolic offerings to Lord Murugan during the festival. The Kavadi festival is not only a religious event but also a cultural and social one that brings communities together. It is a time for communal worship, devotion, and celebration. The festival usually takes place during the Tamil month of Thai (January-February) and is a significant occasion for Tamil Hindus to express their devotion to Lord Murugan.

THIRUKOSHTIYUR

Vikunta Ekadesi

This festival is a Vaishnavite celebration, with the belief that on this day, the gates of paradise are swung wide open. In Thirukoshtiyur, an ornate gateway known as the 'Vaikunta Vasal,' or the threshold to paradise, is erected. Bhajanas, or devotional songs, are conducted, and the day is observed as a day of fasting. Through the night, while abstaining from food, people remain awake and conclude their fast with a sumptuous feast the following day. A captivating spectacle unfolds as bhajan groups, referred to as 'Bhajana Koshti,' sing the name of Lord Vishnu with fervor, their voices soaring in pitch, and their bodies swaying in a trance-like

dance around the temple. This annual celebration takes place during the months of October, November, and December.

MANAMADURAI

Chandana Koodu Festival

The Anjanamar Pallivasal (mosque) at Manamadurai is considered to be holy as it has been built over the remains of five Muslim saints. The festival of Chandana Turuseis celebrated every year which lasts for two days, when all communities take part in the worship. During those days, a festival car, called 'Candana Koodu' is dragged along the streets.

Chithirai Festival

The chithirai festival is also celebrated in Manamadurai and Thiruppuvanam. It is celebrated for 10 days.

The Chithirai festival begins on the 5th day of the bright half of the month of Chithirai. Everyday 'Urchavar' or the processional deity is carried in procession on different vahanas like horse, bull, swan, lion, sun, moon, etc. the key events fall on the 8th, 9th and 10 days of the festival. The eighth day of the Chithirai festival witness the coronation of Meenakshi and procession on thrones, while the 9th day is the digvijaya festival. the 10th day (Chitra Purnima day) marks the wedding of Meenakshi and Sundareswarara. Lakhs of people throng the temple during these festivals. It is to be noted that the Thirukkalyana festival is celebrated on Chitra Purnima in all Shiva temples celebrating the annual Bhramotsavam in the month of Chithirai. Legend has it that Vishnu gave his sister away to Siva. During this time, Kallazhagar from Veera Azhagar kovil makes a visit to the Vaigai river. It is believed that Kallazhagar on realizing that he is too late for his sister wedding refuses to cross the river and returns disappointed to Veera Azhagar kovil .

KANDADEVI

Car festival

The Anai Urchavam is very famous festival in Kandadevi temple. It is celebrated every year during the month of June

(in the Tamil month of Aani) by the people of 75 villages. Arulmigu Sorna Moortheswara temple, popularly known as Kandadevi temple, is located at Kandadevi village. the village Kandadevi is situated 3 km away from Devakottai town in Sivagangai district. The temple is also known as Siragilinathan. The Amman is called as Periyamayaki Amman. This 350 years old temple is maintained by the Sivagangai devasthanam, which is one among 84 temples. The temple is owned by the legal heirs of the Sivagangai Raja. Here Hanuman is said to Rama as 'Kanden Deviyai'. Hence this place is called is Kandadevi. The 9th day of festival is car festival. During the festival time police protection is granted by the Tamil Nadu Government to avoid caste struggles. The collector of Sivagangai is ordered by the government to conduct the festival safely.

KALAYARKOIL

Kaleeswarar Temple Float festival

The Float Festival, a cherished and renowned event in this region, holds a special place in the hearts of the locals. Celebrated annually during the Vaikasi season, which typically falls between May and June, this festival is an enchanting spectacle that captivates the spirit of the community. At the epicenter of this grand celebration lies a vast tank, positioned on the southern periphery of the temple. This tank serves as an impeccable replica of the revered Madurai Mariamman temple teppakulam, albeit on a smaller scale. Its primary purpose is to host the magnificent float festival. During the days dedicated to the festival, the float, a beautifully adorned creation, is ceremoniously lowered into the tank. This transformation of the tank into a canvas of vibrant colors and intricate decorations is a sight to behold. It draws the attention and admiration of thousands of onlookers who gather in reverence around the temple, yearning for a glimpse of this extraordinary display. The Float Festival is more than just a visual spectacle; it is a spiritual experience. Special services and rituals are performed throughout the festival day, adding a profound sense of sanctity and devotion to this extraordinary celebration. It is a time when the community unites, and the culture of the region shines brightly, making

the Float Festival a truly magnificent and unforgettable event.

THAYAMANGALAM

Mariamman Temple Festival

Mariamman temple is located at Thayamangalam. Thayamangalam is situated 20 kms from Sivagangai in Sivagangai district. In the Mariamman temple grand festival is celebrated in April-May (in the Tamil month of Chithirai) every year for 10 days. Mariamman is the presiding deity here. It is believed that the goddess is capable of curing diseases. Thousands of people assemble here during the festival time. Special bus services are offered from Madurai and other surrounded towns during the festival season.

NATTARASANKOTTAI

Kannudayanayaki Amman Temple Festival

Kannudayanayaki Amman temple is located at Nattarasankottai. Nattarasankottai is situated 9 kms from Sivagangai. On the mid way between Sivagangai and Kalayarkoil, in Sivagangai. On the mid way between Sivagangai and Kalayarkoil, in Sivagangai district. 'Nattarasankottai' is derived from the word 'Nattu' which means country, 'arasan' means king and 'kottai' means fort. Kannudayanayaki is one of the Ashta kalies (eight kalies of kaleeswari of Kalayar koil). She is ascribed as goddesses of Sakti, famous for curing eye diseases. People come here from far and near especially on Tuesdays and Fridays. Vaikasi festival in May is unequalled by any in these parts. The silver chariot worth about Rs.2.5 lakhs is the main attraction during the festival. This festival is celebrated at late night of the festival day. Thousands of devotees wait to see the silver chariot on the street in lines. Some of people come with their night dinner packets. During this festival day, the Government offers special buses from the main cities.

THIRUPPATHUR

Jallikattu

The bull baiting festival is celebrated for ten days at Araliparai in Tirupathur taluk in the month of February every year. A game which is peculiar to this district and one of the very few manly sports, which survive in southern India, is the Jallikattu. The word Jallikattu literally means 'tying of ornaments'. On a day fixed and proclaimed by the beat of drums at the adjacent weekly markets a number of cattle with cloth and handkerchiefs tied to their horns, are loosened one after another, in quick succession from a large enclosure amid furious tom-toming and loud shouts from the crowd of assembled spectators. The animals here first run to the gauntlet down along the lane formed by the country carts, and then gallop off widely in every direction. The sportsman in the game endeavours to capture the bits of cloths tied to their horns. This requires swiftness of foot and considerable luck, and those who are successful are considered as the heroes of the hour. The sport has been prohibited on more than one occasion, but seeing that no one need run any risks, unless he chooses, existing official opinion is inclined to the view, that it is pity to discourage a manly amusement which is not really more dangerous than foot ball, steeple-chasing or hunting. The keenness of the more virile sections of the community (especially the Kallars) in this game is extraordinary, and in many villages cattle are bred and reared specially for it. The jallikattu begins at Pongal and goes on till end of May.

Conclusion

The exploration of the cultural significance and societal impact of festivals in Sivagangai reveals a rich tapestry of traditions and practices that have endured through generations. These festivals serve as more than just occasions for celebration; they are integral to the identity and heritage of the region. The cultural significance of these festivals lies in their ability to bring communities together, transcending differences in caste, creed, and class. They offer a platform for the preservation and propagation of art, music, dance, and other forms of cultural expression. The rituals and customs associated with these festivals have been passed down through the ages, connecting the present to the past and ensuring the continuity of cultural values. Furthermore, festivals in Sivagangai have a profound

societal impact. They foster a sense of belonging and unity among the people, reinforcing the bonds that tie them to their roots. Festivals often serve as a medium for promoting social causes, spreading awareness, and even providing economic opportunities for the local population, as they attract tourists and generate income for the region.

In the modern era, the importance of these festivals extends beyond local communities. They have become markers of cultural diversity and heritage, drawing attention from scholars, anthropologists, and enthusiasts from around the world. Sivagangai's festivals are a testament to the power of tradition and its ability to adapt to the evolving dynamics of society. As we delve into the cultural significance and societal impact of festivals in Sivagangai, it becomes evident that these celebrations are not just moments in time but living expressions of the region's rich history and cultural tapestry. They continue to evolve and adapt, reflecting the changing dynamics of the society they serve. These festivals remain an integral part of Sivagangai's identity, connecting the past, present, and future through the vibrant threads of tradition and community.

END NOTES

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