NATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

EXPLORING THE CULTURAL TAPESTRY OF KANNIYAKUMARI: A CONFLUENCE OF FAITHS AND FESTIVALS

24-25th August 2026

Sponsored by

INDIAN COUNCIL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH [ICHR]

[Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, New Delhi]

Chief Editor

Dr.G.M.Sunder Singh

Organized by

Department Of History & Research Centre

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ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS

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Prof.Dr. A.J.S. Pravin
Correspondent/ secretary

24-08-2026

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

I Prof. Dr. A.J.S. Pravin extend my heartfelt congratulations and sincere appreciation to the Organizing Secretary and the entire team of the Department of History & Research Centre for organizing the prestigious ICHR National Conference entitled "Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals." The selection of this theme is highly significant, as Kanniyakumari represents a unique meeting ground of diverse cultures, faiths, traditions, languages and communities. The region's temples, churches, mosques, festivals, folk traditions, rituals and historical monuments together reflect a rich cultural heritage shaped by centuries of interaction and coexistence. Organising a national-level academic conference on such an important theme is indeed a commendable achievement. It provides an excellent platform for historians, researchers, teachers, scholars and students to exchange ideas, present new research and develop a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural dimensions of Kanniyakumari.

I particularly appreciate the dedication, academic vision and meticulous efforts of the Organising Secretary in bringing together distinguished scholars and creating an atmosphere conducive to meaningful intellectual dialogue. Such initiatives contribute greatly to the documentation, interpretation and preservation of the cultural heritage of the region. I am confident that the scholarly deliberations of this conference will generate valuable insights and encourage further research into the history, culture, religious traditions and festivals of Kanniyakumari. It will also inspire young researchers to explore the rich historical resources of South India.Once again, I warmly congratulate the Organising Secretary and the entire organising committee for this remarkable academic initiative. I wish the ICHR National Conference grand success and hope that its proceedings will make a lasting contribution to the study and preservation of Kanniyakumari's rich cultural heritage.

Prof.Dr. A.J.S. Pravin

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23-08-2026

Congratulatory Message

I am delighted to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the organizing Secretary and the entire organizing team for the successful publication of the conference proceedings of the Two-Day National Conference entitled "Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals," held on 24th and 25th August 2026 at Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam. The publication of these proceedings is a significant academic achievement. It preserves the valuable research papers, ideas, discussions, and scholarly contributions presented during the conference. The proceedings will serve as a useful reference for students, research scholars, teachers, historians, and all those interested in the rich cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari.

I sincerely appreciate the vision, commitment, and hard work of the organizing Secretary in bringing this important academic publication to completion. The conference has provided a meaningful platform to explore the diverse traditions, faiths, festivals, and cultural practices that have shaped the identity of Kanniyakumari.

On behalf of Nesamony Memorial Christian College, I place on record my appreciation to all the contributors, editors, faculty members, and participants who supported this scholarly endeavour. Once again, I congratulate the Organising Secretary for this commendable achievement and wish the publication great academic value and wider recognition.

Dr. C.H. Arun

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MARTHANDAM – 629 165
Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu.
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Dr. M. Glory Bai,
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22-08-2026

Greetings to all.

On this historic occasion, let me first thank Almighty for providing me this wonderful opportunity in the Department of History, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam. With profound gratitude, I congratulate the organizing Secretary, Dr. G. M. Sunder Singh, for his excellent efforts in organizing this ICHR Sponsored National Conference on the theme "Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals." Kanniyakumari district occupies a prominent place in Tamil Nadu and India. Its natural beauty, cultural diversity, religious harmony, educational progress, political strength, and economic contributions have given it a unique place in Indian history and attracted the attention of both Indians and foreigners. The district is also known for its multifaceted development and numerous tourist attractions. The confluence of the three seas the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal along with the breathtaking sunrise and sunset views, the Thiruvalluvar Statue, the Gandhi Mandapam, and the Hanging Bridge at Mathur, continue to attract tourists from across India and abroad. In the present scenario, the theme of this conference highlights the rich cultural heritage, religious harmony, and the greatness of the people of Kanniyakumari district.

Dr. M. Glory Bai

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Message

It is a matter of immense pleasure that the Department of History & Research Centre, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam, Kanniyakumari, Tamilnadu, is organizing the two days National Conference on *Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals,* on August 24-25, 2026. I believe, the deliberations in the conference will through light on the unexplored area and key aspects of faiths, traditions, languages, and customs of Kanniyakumari's cultural and pluralistic heritage.

This conference aligns perfectly with its objectives, offering a valuable opportunity for young researchers, educators, postgraduate students, and experts from various research and development fields to come together. Such academic initiatives not only deepen our understanding of India's composite culture but also contribute to its preservation and promotion for future generations.

I am sure that this conference will not only address the pressing issues but also provide meaningful solutions and identify new avenues for exploration and study on the theme for the posterity.

I extend my best wishes to the organizers (especially **Dr. G.M.Sunder Singh**) and wish the programme a great success.

(VINOD KUMAR)

Place: New Delhi



S. RAJESH KUMAR
MINISTER FOR TOURISM

SECRETARIAT,
CHENNAI - 600 009.

Date. 19-08-2026

CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE

I am delighted to extend my warm congratulations to the Organising Secretary and the entire team of the Department of History & Research Centre for organising the prestigious ICHR National Conference on "Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals."

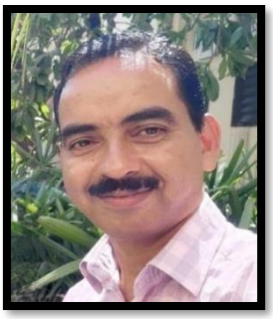
Kanniyakumari is a remarkable land where diverse faiths, traditions, languages and communities have coexisted and enriched one another over centuries. The theme of this conference is therefore highly relevant and timely. It provides a valuable academic platform for historians, researchers, scholars and students to explore the region's rich heritage and its traditions of cultural harmony.

I sincerely appreciate the dedication and academic vision of the Organising Secretary, Dr.G.M.Sunder Singh in bringing together distinguished scholars for meaningful intellectual deliberations. Such initiatives greatly contribute to documenting, preserving and promoting the historical and cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari.

I wish the conference every success and hope that its deliberations will inspire further research and strengthen our commitment to safeguarding our shared cultural heritage.

With my warm congratulations and best wishes for the grand success of the conference.

S. RAJESH KUMAR
Tourism Minister
Tamil Nadu



South Indian History Congress

(Established in 1979)

www.southindianhistorycongress.org

Dr. Sivadasan. P
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Senior Professor
Department of History
University of Calicut, Kerala, 6736

Date: **July 16, 2026**

Congratulatory Message

On behalf of the *South Indian History Congress*, I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Department of History & Research Centre, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam, for organising the Two-Day National Conference on 'Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals,' sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

This scholarly endeavour reflects a noble commitment to cultivating a scientific temper and fostering social harmony through rigorous historical research. By bringing together diverse perspectives on the cultural and spiritual traditions of Kanniyakumari, the organisers are not only enriching academic discourse but also strengthening the values of inclusivity and mutual respect that lie at the heart of our society.

The South Indian History Congress deeply appreciates this initiative and wishes the conference great success in inspiring young researchers, advancing historical knowledge, and promoting dialogue across communities.

May this confluence of ideas and scholarship continue to illuminate pathways toward a more harmonious and enlightened future.

Dr. Sivadasan. P
General Secretary
South Indian History Congress

PUDUCHERRY WORLD HISTORY CONGRESS

web:puducherry world history congress.org



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Puducherry World History Congress,
Puducherry-605013
Cell: 9488050654

Associate Professor & Head
Department of History
Tagore Government Arts & Science College
Pondicherry

Greetings from the Puducherry World History Congress!

I am delighted to learn about the upcoming ICHR-sponsored National Conference on "Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals," scheduled for August 24th and 25th, 2026, organized by the Department of History and Research Centre at Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam. Having known Dr.G.M.Sunder Singh for a long time as an eminent scholar, a dedicated researcher, and above all, a fine human being, I have always admired your tireless zeal for historical inquiry and academic excellence. Your active involvement in national seminars, the South Indian History Congress, and the World History Congress has consistently added immense value to our academic fraternity.

The themes you have envisioned for this conference ranging from the sacred landscapes, folk traditions, religious pluralism, and social harmony to the indispensable role of women, foodways, heritage conservation, and cultural tourism—reflect a deep, nuanced understanding of regional history. Much like the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa Kanyakumari stands as a landmark cultural epitome at the southern tip of India, a true meeting point of traditions, faiths, and heritage.

I particularly commend your ambitious initiative to publish the conference proceedings prior to the inaugural session. Releasing pre-conference proceedings is a commendable endeavor that ensures immediate scholarly impact and enriches the discussions over the two days. I am confident that this national seminar will bring together scholars who will shed profound light on the rich regional history of Kanyakumari.

On behalf of the Puducherry World History Congress and on my personal behalf, I extend my heartfelt congratulations and warmest best wishes to you, the organizing team, and Nesamony Memorial Christian College for a highly engaging and grandly successful conference!

Dr. Sandeep K. Dasari

தமிழ்நாடு மத்தியப் பல்கலைக்கழகம்
(நாடாளுமன்றச்சட்டம் 2009-இன் படி உருவாக்கப்பட்டது)
तमिलनाडु केन्द्रीय विश्वविद्यालय
(संसद द्वारा पारित अधिनियम 2009 के अंतर्गत स्थापित)
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(Established by an Act of Parliament, 2009)
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Message

I am pleased to convey my warm greetings and sincere congratulations to the Department of History & Research Centre, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam, for successfully organizing the Two-Day National Conference on "*Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals*," with the generous support of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi.

The well-known cultural centre, Kanniyakumari, located at the southernmost extremity of the Indian subcontinent, occupies a notable place in India's historical and cultural landscape. Renowned for its extraordinary cultural diversity, rich historical heritage, and enduring tradition of religious coexistence, the region stands as a remarkable example of unity amidst diversity. Over the centuries, Kanniyakumari has functioned as a dynamic crossroads where different faiths, communities, languages, and cultural traditions have interacted, creating a vibrant social fabric founded upon mutual respect, tolerance, and harmony.

The district has long been a meeting point of major religious traditions, including Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Jainism, each of which has made significant contributions to its cultural, social, and intellectual evolution. The region's magnificent temples, historic churches, mosques, sacred sites, colourful festivals, folk traditions, and artistic expressions collectively reflect a rich heritage shaped by centuries of cultural interaction, adaptation, and accommodation. This unique confluence of faiths and traditions has endowed Kanniyakumari with a distinctive identity, making it an important centre for understanding India's pluralistic ethos and composite cultural heritage.

In this context, the theme of the conference assumes great significance and contemporary relevance. By focusing on the exploration of Kanniyakumari's cultural tapestry, the conference seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the historical processes that have nurtured the region's pluralistic character. It offers an important platform for scholars, researchers, academicians, and students to examine the dynamic interplay of faiths, festivals, traditions, and social practices that have contributed to the formation of the district's distinctive identity. Moreover, the deliberations are expected to highlight the enduring values of harmony, inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue that continue to inspire the people of the region. At a time when the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of social cohesion have become increasingly important, the conference serves as a timely initiative to celebrate, document, and critically engage with the multifaceted legacy of Kanniyakumari.

I commend the organizers for bringing together eminent historians, scholars, researchers, and students from across the country to engage in meaningful academic discussions and exchange innovative perspectives. Such scholarly initiatives contribute significantly to the advancement of historical research and foster a deeper understanding of India's composite culture.

I am particularly pleased to learn that the proceedings of this conference will undoubtedly serve as a valuable repository of knowledge and an important reference source for future researchers interested in the history, culture, religion, and social traditions of Kanniyakumari and South India.

I convey my best wishes to the organizers, participants, and contributors for the grand success of the conference and the publication of its proceedings. May this academic endeavour inspire further research and enrich the field of historical studies.

With warm regards and best wishes.

(Dr. K. Mavali Rajan)

A diamond thus far and beyond

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We are delighted to share that the Conference Proceedings with ISBN for the National Conference on 24th 25th August 2026

"Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals" will be released on the day of the conference.

Your valuable research papers and invited lectures have made this volume possible. Thank you to the Department of History & Research Centre, NMCC, Marthandam, Dr. G.M. Sunder Singh, Dr. M. Glory Bai, and the entire organizing team for this remarkable achievement.

This proceeding stands as a lasting record of unity in diversity and the rich cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari.

Prof. KM Rohitha Dasanayaka
B.A.(Pera.),M.Sc.(Kel.)Ph.D Madras)
Department of History
Faculty of Arts

தமிழ்நாடு திறந்தநிலைப் பல்கலைக்கழகம்
எல்லோருக்கும் எப்போதும் கல்வி
NAAC 'A+' Grade with CGPA 3.32 (Cycle - 1)



Prof. (Dr.) N. Dhanalakshmi
Professor & Director,
Dept of History &Tourism studies
Chairperson, School of Social Sciences
Tamilnadu Open University, Chennai-15

I am pleased to extend my warm congratulations to Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam and the Department of History & Research Centre for organizing the ICHR-sponsored National Conference on "***Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals***" to be held on 24th and 25th August 2026.

The chosen theme is both academically significant and culturally relevant as it highlights Kanniyakumari's layered heritage, sacred landscapes, plural traditions, vibrant festivals, folk expressions and social harmony. By addressing cultural preservation, food practices, heritage conservation and tourism, the conference will contribute significantly to the regional history, cultural studies and the wider discourse on Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).

I deeply appreciate the vision of the college, the academic commitment of the Department of History and the dedicated efforts of the organizing team in creating a platform that brings scholars, researchers and students into a meaningful dialogue. Such initiatives undoubtedly strengthen historical inquiry, encourage documentation of local knowledge systems and reaffirm the importance of preserving diverse cultural identities with sensitivity and scholarly rigour.

I convey my best wishes to the organizers and participants for a fruitful and successful conference. May the deliberations generate fresh perspectives, inspire further research and contribute meaningfully to the understanding of Kanniyakumari's rich civilisational and cultural legacy.

With warm regards and best wishes,

Prof. (Dr.) N. Dhanalakshmi



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(Established by the State Legislature Act No. 21 of 1969)

Ref. No. 176/Hist
Dated 17-07-2026

Dr.G.M.Sunder Singh
Organizing Secretary
ICHR National Conference
Department of History & Research Centre
Nesamony Memorial Christian College
Marthandam, Kanniyakumari District

Sub: A congratulatory Message for Publication in the Conference Proceedings

I congraulate Dr. GM Sunder Singh for being selected by ICHR to conduct two days National Conference on the Title: Exploring the cultural Tapestry ok Kanniyakumari: A confluence of Faiths and Festivals of Kanniyakumari. I wish him good luck for the successful completion and conduct of such academic initiatives in future also.

Dr. Manu Sharma
Associate Professor ,
Head,Dept of History
Guru Nanak Dev University
Punjab



Dr. G.M.Sunder Singh
Chief Editor & Organizing Secretary
ICHR National Conference 2026

Editorial Message

It gives me immense pleasure to present the proceedings of the National Conference entitled "Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals," sponsored by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). This conference is a significant academic initiative to explore, document, and critically understand the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari.

Kanniyakumari occupies a unique position in the cultural history of South India. Situated at the meeting point of three seas, the region has historically served as a vibrant space of cultural interaction, where different faiths, traditions, languages, communities, and social practices have flourished together. Its temples, churches, mosques, festivals, rituals, folk traditions, monuments, and oral histories collectively reflect a remarkable tradition of cultural coexistence and shared heritage.

The conference brought together historians, researchers, academicians, scholars, and students to deliberate upon various dimensions of Kanniyakumari's cultural landscape. The scholarly contributions included in these proceedings examine the historical evolution of religious traditions, festivals, folk practices, social customs, architectural heritage, cultural interactions, and the processes through which communities have preserved and transmitted their traditions across generations.

As the Editor of these proceedings, I believe that this volume will serve as a valuable academic resource for researchers and students interested in regional history, cultural studies, religious traditions, folklore, and heritage studies. The papers presented here demonstrate that the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari is not a single, isolated tradition but a dynamic and evolving tapestry woven from diverse historical experiences.

I express my sincere gratitude to the Indian Council of Historical Research for its valuable sponsorship and encouragement. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr Pravin Kumar Sharma and Dr Vinodh Kumar, Deputy director [research] Indian council of historical research for their help. I also acknowledge the contributions of the organizing committee, authors, reviewers, delegates, and all those who supported the successful conduct of the conference. I express my gratitude to Ms. Sangeetha and Ms. Akalya, research scholars for their help

May these proceedings encourage further research, documentation, and preservation of the rich cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari for future generations.



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THREADS OF TRADITION: THE ROLE OF LMS MISSIONARIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LACE AND EMBROIDERY CRAFTS IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Lace and embroidery constitute an important part of the traditional craft heritage of the present-day Kanniyakumari District. During the period when the region formed part of the erstwhile Travancore State, the L.M.S. missionaries played a significant role in introducing, developing and institutionalising these crafts, particularly as avenues for women's education and vocational training. The present study examines the contribution of missionaries to the economic development of women through lace-making and embroidery in the Kanniyakumari region. It focuses on the emergence and growth of lace and embroidery centres associated with missionary organisations, boarding schools, orphanages and technical institutions. Particular attention was given to the training provided to girls and women in lace-making, embroidery, needlework, sewing and related skills, and to the opportunities created for women to earn an income through craft production. The study highlights the contribution of the London Missionary Society, in promoting vocational education and craft-based employment. The training of orphan girls, poor women and women from coastal communities demonstrates the relationship between craft education and economic opportunity. The production of different varieties of lace and embroidery, the expansion of markets, participation in exhibitions and the receipt of awards indicate the growing recognition of these industries. The study also examines the changing fortunes of the industry in response to fluctuations in demand, economic conditions and changing fashions.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional handicrafts form an essential part of India's cultural, social, and economic history, carrying forward skills and knowledge that have been passed down through generations. Among these, embroidery and lace-making are especially notable for blending artistic expression with fine manual skill. These crafts have also provided a source of livelihood, particularly for women who had limited access to formal employment, and they offer valuable insight into both artistic traditions and women's economic participation. Kanniyakumari District, which was formerly part of Travancore, experienced significant educational and social transformation during the 19th and 20th centuries. Missionary activity played an important role in this change by establishing schools, orphanages, and vocational training centres that provided women and girls with practical skills alongside formal education. Within this vocational setting, lace and embroidery gradually developed as structured crafts. Missionary institutions introduced training in needlework, especially for orphans, widows, and women from economically weaker backgrounds. This training helped many women convert their skills into income-generating work, gradually shifting craft from a purely domestic activity to a means of livelihood. Missionary organisations also supported these activities by supplying materials, improving techniques, assisting in production and marketing, and displaying finished work in exhibitions. Women were central to this system, not only as trainees but also as workers, producers, and instructors. Many continued their craft after leaving the institutions or practised it from their homes, thereby supporting their

families and contributing to the continuity of these programmes.

Arrival of the LMS Missionaries and Emergence of Lace and Embroidery in Kanniyakumari District

The formation of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and its arrival in South Travancore marked an important turning point in the social, educational Cand economic history of the present-day Kanniyakumari District. The LMS was established in London in 1795 through the cooperation of different Protestant denominations. Its missionary activities in South Travancore began in 1806 with the arrival of Rev. William Tobias Ringeltaube at Mylaudy on 25 April 1806. He established missionary activities among the local population and, with the assistance of Vethamanickam, promoted education and Christianity. In 1809, the first Protestant church in Travancore was established at Mylaudy.

After Ringeltaube, Rev. Charles Mead arrived in 1817 and shifted the LMS headquarters from Mylaudy to Nagercoil, which subsequently became an important centre of missionary activities. Mead established the Travancore Mission Press in 1820 and developed educational institutions, including the LMS Seminary. Rev. Charles Mault and his wife Martha Mault arrived in Nagercoil in 1819. Their contribution was particularly significant in the field of women's education and economic development. Martha Mault established a boarding school for girls and encouraged women to acquire useful vocational skills. It was in this context that lace-making emerged as an important cottage industry among women. The expansion of missionary activities into other parts of the district further strengthened the craft tradition.

Traditional Forms, Designs and Techniques of Lace and Embroidery

Lace is a delicate ornamental textile produced by arranging and interlacing threads to form open and decorative patterns. In the missionary centres of Kanniyakumari, lace-making developed as an important vocational skill for women and girls. The lace varieties include Torchon, Maltese, Duchess, Honiton, Limerick and Carrickmacross. Among these, pin lace or pillow lace was an important technique in which threads were arranged over a prepared pattern on a lace pillow and controlled with pins and bobbins. The production of fine lace required patience, concentration and considerable technical skill. Different floral, leaf, geometric, border and open-work designs could be produced according to the variety of lace. The use of different patterns and specialised techniques indicates that lace-making was a skilled vocational craft rather than merely decorative needlework.

Embroidery refers to the decoration of cloth by stitching threads onto its surface with a needle. In the missionary institutions, embroidery was taught along with sewing, knitting and lace-making as part of women's vocational education. Traditional designs included flowers, leaves, creepers, geometric forms, borders and other decorative motifs. Techniques such as running stitch, back stitch, chain stitch, stem stitch, satin stitch, cross stitch, buttonhole stitch, cutwork and smocking were used in different forms of embroidery. The materials generally included cotton, silk or linen threads, needles, cloth, embroidery frames or hoops and scissors. The training in these techniques enabled women to produce articles such as handkerchiefs, table mats, sarees, children's garments, covers and other decorative items. Thus, lace and

embroidery became important forms of vocational training and contributed to the preservation of specialised craft knowledge among women.

Development of Lace and Embroidery Centres in Kanniyakumari District

The missionaries established educational, social and welfare institutions in different parts of the region. Their activities extended beyond religious instruction and included female education, vocational training and the development of skills that could provide women with opportunities for productive employment. Lace-making, sewing, knitting, needlework and embroidery were introduced as useful forms of vocational instruction at different places.

1 Nagercoil:

Nagercoil was the earliest major centre of the missionary-supported lace industry in South Travancore. The development of the organised lace industry at Nagercoil is closely associated with Mrs. Martha Mault. She and her husband, Rev. Charles Mault, arrived in Nagercoil in 1819. Martha Mault established a girls' boarding school and, in 1821, introduced lace-making among the girls. She also taught embroidery and other needlework. By 1827, twelve girls were learning lace-making. The girls were taught lace-making, embroidery, sewing and related needlework. The industry gradually expanded beyond the school. Women received patterns and materials and were able to complete the work in their own homes. By 1894, the Nagercoil Lace Industry had about 100 workers, including many widowed women. By 1897, approximately 350 women in the district were making lace under the supervision of Mrs. Allan Duthie. The lace produced at Nagercoil also received recognition at major exhibitions. Its products were exhibited at the London Exhibition of 1851, Madras Exhibition of 1855 and Paris Exhibition of 1867and received medals. The profits from lace production were also used to support female education and mission schools. Thus, Mrs. Martha Mault can be presented as the pioneer of the Nagercoil lace industry and an important figure in the development of women's vocational training.

2.Neyyoor:

Neyyoor became an important centre of women's education and needlework after Rev. Charles Mead moved to the Western Division and established the mission station at Neyyoor in 1828. A girls' boarding school was established there under the care of Mrs.Johanna Mead, where girls received practical training including embroidery and lace work. Mrs. Louisa Abbs, wife of Rev. John Abbs, also played an important role in teaching girls at Neyyoor. Historical accounts record that she and Mrs. Martha Mault taught lace-making and embroidery to local girls. Neyyoor embroidery was noted for its prettiness and durability. In 1914 they received a silver medal at the Mysore exhibition. Thus, Neyyoor can be presented as an important centre where female education and craft training developed together.

3.Santhapuram:

Lace-making was introduced at Santhapuram by Mrs. Emily Lewis, with the initiative of Mrs. Mault. It records that fine pillow lace produced at the mission schools was exhibited at Madras, London and Paris, where it received prize medals. Santhapuram therefore deserves separate mention as one of the early centres through which lace-making was extended beyond Nagercoil.

4 Marthandam:

Marthandam has a particularly important history in relation to embroidery. The first

resident missionary at Marthandam was Rev. I. H. Hacker and Mrs. Elizabeth Hacker. Mrs. Hacker established an Embroidery and Sewing School, providing women with practical training and employment opportunities. Later, Rev. Robert Sinclair and Mrs. Bessie Sinclair played an important role in the further development of the industry. During the Sinclair period, Marthandam embroidery became well known, and products were sent to London and European countries. The finished articles were also exhibited at Paris and London and received prizes. Mrs. Bessie Sinclair's worked for the uplift and economic development of women through lace and embroidery. The industry attracted poor women from surrounding places such as Kanchirampuram, Karungal, Pacode, Kuzhithurai, Attoor and Arumanai.

Impact on the life of women

The craft provided women, particularly those from marginalised communities, with opportunities to acquire skills, earn income and improve their position within the family and society. Their earnings enabled women to wear decent clothing, which was particularly insignificant during the period of caste-based restrictions on women's dress. Mothers taught their daughters the techniques, patterns and skills, ensuring continuity of the women's craft tradition. The products produced by them demonstrated the quality of women's craftsmanship and got international recognition. It helped women to achieve greater dignity and recognition in society. The profit of this industry was spent to upkeep the orphanages, girls schools and girls homes. This craft continued beyond the early LMS period and remained connected with women's livelihood and skill development under later institutions, including the CSI.

Contemporary Challenges

The traditional lace and embroidery industry in Kanniyakumari faces several challenges in the contemporary period.

- Competition from machine-made products
- Time-consuming production
- High production costs and low returns
- Marketing difficulties
- Limited digital and technological exposure
- Changing consumer preferences
- Insufficient institutional support and finance
- Need for preservation of traditional skills
- Need to balance tradition and innovation

Suggestions for the preservation of the craft:

- Documentation of traditional techniques like stitches, patterns, lace varieties and embroidery methods systematically.
- Training for younger generations in short-term and long-term training programmes by experienced artisans.
- Combining modern designs with traditional techniques without losing the original character of the craft.
- Marketing and exhibitions by government departments, educational institutions and voluntary organisations to promote lace and embroidery craft.
- Training in digital cataloguing, photography and online marketing can help artisans reach customers beyond the local market.
- These institutions should be encouraged to continue their training programmes and preserve their

historical collections, patterns and records.

- Experienced women artisans should be recognised as craft trainers and custodians of traditional knowledge, enabling them to pass their skills to younger generations.
- Universities and research institutions should undertake further studies on the history, techniques, economic contribution and present condition of lace and embroidery in Kanniyakumari District.

CONCLUSION

The history of lace and embroidery in Kanniyakumari District reflects an important phase in the development of women's education, vocational training and economic activity under the missionary movement. During the period when the region formed part of the erstwhile Travancore State, the LMS missionaries established educational and vocational institutions that provided women and girls with opportunities to learn practical skills. The introduction of lace-making at Nagercoil marked an important beginning in the organised development of the craft. The subsequent growth of lace and embroidery centres at Nagercoil, Neyyoor, Santhapuram and Marthandam demonstrates the expansion of these activities beyond the classroom. Despite many challenges, women continued to preserve these skills. Their labour, knowledge and creativity played a major role in maintaining the continuity of lace and embroidery traditions. The history of these crafts should be viewed not merely as the history of decorative needlework but as an important part of the social, economic and cultural history of women in Kanniyakumari District. The preservation of Kanniyakumari's lace and embroidery heritage ultimately depends on preserving not only the threads and techniques but also the knowledge, skills and experiences of the women who have carried this tradition across generations.

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MARTYR SHAKUNTALA DEVI – A NOTABLE ICON FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The District Kanniyakumari is located in the southern tip of India. It is a land of honey and milk flowing area, as noted for economic growth. The district possessed a degree of civilization which enabled the various races and communities to live in peace and amity and pursue their several avocations. The Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers established their political sway in this district. The Sangam works highlighted about the contribution of the district towards Chera, Chola and Pandya rulers. Their affinity made the people to lead a life of peace and tranquillity.

Significance of the District

The district is a coastal area in Tamil Nadu. It was known as cape Comorin during British rule and is popular for watching sunrise and sunset over the ocean. It is also noted pilgrimage site thanks to its Bagavathi Amman Temple, dedicated to a consort of Shiva and its over Lady of Ransom Church, centre of Indian Catholicism.

Kanniyakumari's unique ocean confluence popularly known as Triveni Sangamam is a rare geographical meeting point. Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Thiruvalluvar statue express the uniqueness of the great philosopher and poet. The district is the smallest district in Tamil Nadu. Even though it is the smallest in the terms of area 167sq.km the density of population in high.

Contribution of Christian Missionaries

Kanniyakumari was a part of Travancore region. The rulers ruled the region with prosperity and popularity. But the women in Travancore lived in darkness and under the threat of cruelty. The right for a life and for freedom always ignited rebellious nature in the minds of women. There were a number of women who participated in the rebellions during the administration of Travancore rulers. One such rebellion was the 'Upper Cloth Movement'. The Christian Missionaries rendered meritorious services by promoting Western education, alerted the mind of both men and women against the evils of the society. Especially through social work they invested their energy for the upliftment of women. Women missionaries like Mrs. Mead, Mrs. Martha Mault, Mrs. Leah James Duthie, Miss. Annie Lee Duthie, Miss. Beatrice Jessie Duthie etc. did their pioneering work in the promotion of women education.

Role of Shakuntala Devi

In Kanniyakumari District women were treated as slaves and bonded slavery system was existed. In such situation Shakuntala Devi, one of the unsung heroes and the first martyr among women was born. She was recorded as the first martyr in the renaissance movement of Travancore region. She was born in a Nadar family in 1793, when Kanniyakumari was a part of Travancore region. She was born and brought up in Hindu faith. At the age of 20 she was married to Kalaperumal of Thachanvila family. The Thachanvila family earned name and fame because Anandapadmanabhan saved the life of Marthandavarma, Travancore Maharaja. Anandapadmanabhan belonged to the

family of Thachanvila. Right from that time onwards this family was enjoying taxfree benefits of the Travancore King. But Dalavoy Veluthampi started collecting heavy taxes from this family too. This made the Thachanvila family to adopt Christianity. Shakuntala Devi changed her name as Yesuadiyal and her husband Kalaperumal to Vedamanikkam.

In the beginning of the 19th century the low caste women were forbidden to wear any cloth above the waist. But Shakuntala Devi opposed this worst treatment. In addition to that there was a custom of labour prevailed during that time was called 'Uzhiyam'. Uzhiyam means the low caste people were forced to do work to the high caste without payment Shakuntala Devi opposed this system vehemently. She started struggle against this oppressive attitude in 1828. Especially the people of Thachanvila and surrounding areas started against the Uzhiyam specially on Sundays. This was termed as a cold war between the low caste and high caste. This wounded the feeling of the King and the Nair soldiers. Palm leaves were collected from Thachanvila to Padmanabhapuram palace. This was carried by low caste and the Nair soldier. This ignited the anger of Nair soldiers. The Nair soldiers attacked the low caste people in different places like Palliyadi, Krishnankovil, Agasteeswaram etc. The royal army and the Nair soldiers attacked Thachanvila family. At that time Yesuadiyal and her children also present in their house. Yesuadiyal (Shakuntala Devi) was ordered to come out from her house without her upper cloth. But the brave lady locked her children in her house and came out with a sword to attack the soldiers. She started her fight furiously, but she cannot withstand alone infront of a group of armies. She was caught and brutally fettered for about three km tied upon to the horse leg. She shouted against the army. At last, she was stripped and hanged upside down in a tree without dress. This type of harassment should never happen to women that was a last cry of her and she lost her breath. Thus, she became the first martyr in the struggle against draconian law Uzhiyam. Followed by this incident there were many protest started against Uzhiyam throughout Travancore region. In 1851 government banned this practice and in 1854 it was completely eradicated by enacting law.

CONCLUSION

Shakuntala Devi known as Yesuadiyal laid the real foundation stone for the women empowerment in Kanniyakumari District. Her death paved the way for the involvement of women in nation building, decision making and creation of ideology. Women played a vital role in the freedom movement and merger of Kanniyakumari District with Tamil Nadu in 1956.

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P. JEEVANANDAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIO- POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

Jeevanandam, popularly known as Jeeva, hails from Boothapandi of Kanniyakumari district located at the southern most district of the Indian Nation. Young Jeeva was drawn towards the National Movement right from his youth. He was in public life for more than four decades. He was a man of the masses and he stood for equality and justice. Though he was born in a middle class high caste family, he was determined to fight against caste distinction, untouchability, and he has sacrificed his comfortable life in his household to fight for and get the rights of his fellow brethren, most of them belonging to the backward or the "oppressed classes" of those days.

Jeevanandam was born as the third child of Pattan Pillai and Umayambal, on 21 August, 1907, at Boothapandi in Kanyakumari district. He was named 'Sorimuthu' after their family deity Sorimuthu (Sastha). Jeeva's father was working in the irrigation section of the Public Works Department of Kanyakumari District, which was part of the State of Travancore then.

Jeevanandam had early education at the Boothapandi English Middle School, and then at the Kottar High School, Nagercoil. He was a very studious student all through his academic days and was very smart and competent in the subject Mathematics. He was vigorously after seeking knowledge right from his young days. He was a voracious reader and he used to read many books and poems, especially those of Subramania Bharathi, the national poet of India. He had the strength of mind and a staunch spirit of patriotism in him, and he was very mindful of fulfilling the task he undertook, with firm determination. He used to write 'Vande Matharam' on the walls of his neighbourhood houses along with his school mates and other friends. He was very fond of the National Poet Subramania Bharathi's patriotic songs, especially the song "Achchamillai, Achchamillai …" (There is nothing to fear).

Drawn toward Nationalism

Jeevanandam was so much drawn towards a national spirit to the extent of sacrificing his academic as well as his professional career that he dropped from school when he was in the Sixth Form (S.S.L.C.) of those days. He had paid the government examination fees for the S.S.L.C. examination. When he heard about the Vaikom Struggle enthusiastically participated by E.V.R. Perivar at Vaikom (in present Kerala) for fighting against untouchability and rights for temple entry, he left the school and took part in that struggle. He was beaten up and chased for his participation in the struggle, but he was firm in his spirit for the rights of the untouchables. He could never continue his studies, as circumstances made him abandon his studies and join the team of social reformers. while he was still in his S.S.L.C. finals. Such is the sacrificial mind of Jeevanandam, who was 'Jeeva' for his friends and family.

Jeeva being a voracious reader, he was regularly visiting the library started in the name of Gandhiji in Boothapandi, his

native town. He could get valuable information about the rules and restrictions imposed upon the so called oppressed classes through his wide exposure to books and due to his acquaintance to his neighbourhood customs and habits. He became an austere follower of Gandhiji in all his ways and even started spinning in the 'charka'. Along with he was regularly taking part in all the activities related to eradication of untouchability as well as fighting for the rights of the depressed classes, like their entry into the temples managed by the high caste people. What started by Periyar in Vaikom was followed by many at Suchindram Thanumlayan Temple also, and Jeeva too joined the struggle to fight for the rights of 'entry into temples'. He had to come across many opposition and animosity for his acts, when Jeeva and his coactivists were spit with betel remnants (Vetrilai). But Jeeva was firm in his beliefs and he progressed on his path singing the song "Vazhi viduveer, Vazhi viduveer…" (Move on, move on…), composed by Jeeva himself.

Jeeva's Thirst for Patriotism

One of Jeevanandham's significant contribution was his support for the demand to integrate the Tamil majority areas of southern Travancore with the Tamil speaking region of Madras state. The movement was not reorganisation it was also connected with language, cultural identity, political representation and social justice. Jeevanandam recognised the importance of linguistic identity in democratic politics. His support helped connect the local demands of the people of Kanyakumari with the broader Tamil political movement.

He was a strong advocate of Tamil language and culture. He believed that language was an important element of social and cultural identity. His political activities contributed to the growth of Tamil consciousness among the people. In Kanyakumari, where Tamil speaking peoplelived under the political administration of Travancore, the assertion of Tamil linguistic identity became particularly significant. His ideas strengthened the intellectual and political background in which the demand for Tamil linguistic rights developed. Those were the days when the nation was brimming with patriotic thoughts and activities and people were keenly watching the developments and day to day happenings in the country. Many youth and elders were attracted to the national movement and drawn towards fighting for the independence of the country. Jeevanandam was one among those who were determined to act for the interests of the nation.

Mahatma Gandhi started the Non-cooperation Movement during that time, and Jeeva was beginning to develop that spirit against the British rulers of the country slowly. The freedom movement, rejection of foreign clothes, wearing only khadi clothes and others were some of the activities undertaken by these social activists who became political activists later on. Jeeva was very much drawn towards the ideals of Gandhiji's and the Congress Party.

Jeevanandam was inspired and influenced by the ideals and national activities of Gandhiji right when he was in his teens. The Khadi Movement of Gandhiji being for people to be self-dependent, there were protests and processions carried out all over the country, propagating these national ideals. Inspired by this national thought, Jeevanandam took part in this movement and started wearing khadi right at that young age. At a meeting held at the helm of Trikooda Sundaram Pillai at

Boothapandi, foreign clothes were burnt. At that time, Jeeva too removed his clothes made of foreign material and threw them into fire. He went back home wearing only his underclothing.

Jeeva had also made a Harijan boy join the library he started on Gandhian ideals. When he brought those boys of backward classes into the temple street, it was objected by the people of the village, his father admonished him for that. But Jeeva was adamant and justified his cause; he vowed to abolish untouchability at any cost. His father could not join his thinking, or change his stance. Their arguments and attacks reached a point wherefrom there was no escape, and ultimately Jeeva resolved to leave his parental home forever.

Jeeva's firmness and conviction for principles was seen at many other instances. Soon after leaving the comforts of his father's house, Jeevanandam went straight to Suchindram where the struggle to fight for the rights of the depressed class people to entry into temples was going on, which was continuance of the Vaikom Satyagraha some time back. Jeeva jumped into that fray of Satyagraha and made himself the leader of the Satyagrahis.

Jeeva and promotion of social equality

Jeevanandham's political philosophy was strongly influenced by the ideals of social equality. He opposed caste discrimination, social oppression, and economic exploitation. He believed that political freedom would have little meaning without social and economic justice. These ideas were relevant to Kanyakumari society wherestruggles over caste,social status education access to public spaces, and economic opportunities had shaped the region's history. His emphasis on equality contributed to the wider development of democratic and socially progressive political consciousness.

Once during the time of the temple festival in his native town. barricades were erected around the temple and the high caste temple neighbourhood, to check the entry of low caste people into it. But Jeeva could not be restricted with this check; he brought his friend Manickam with him to enter the temple street and the two made their presence inside the temple. The high castes who saw the violation of customs and traditions carried out by Jeeva and his friends were shocked and they had already made up their mind to enforce more restrictions related to this. Jeeva's father was fined for this act of Jeeva and they complained to him against Jeeva's unlawful practices. Jeeva had to face the wrath of his father, when things took more eventful turns and Jeeva was finally ousted from his own household. Thus Jeevanandam became aloof from his home and his community and got himself merged with the national movement at the tender age of fifteen.

Jeevanandam was closely associated with and moving with the Adi Dravida friends of him, due to which he earned the irritation of his parents. In spite of their warnings and chastisement Jeeva continued his activities and friendship with those people many of whom belonged to the depressed classes. Ultimately he had to leave his house forever, discontinuing his studies.

Soon after leaving his native and homestead, Jeevanandam got himself involved in public service and also to take part in the national movement against untouchability and other ill practices against the unfortunate depressed classes in the country. Seeking temple entry for the low caste people was a cause which attracted the attention of the freedom fighters and other nationalists at that time. Jeevanandam resolved to make his contribution in all these struggles and

straight proceeded towards Vaikom to make his presence established at the site.

The caste system in the Hindu social set up had split the then Hindu society into several watertight compartments, as low castes and high castes. The low castes were made to undergo many difficulties and segregations while the high castes enjoyed all the good things and facilities from the government. Untouchability was the most heinous crime committed against the depressed classes and that poor lot were not allowed to come near the people of the high caste and not even allowed to enter the portals of the temples. Jeevanandam acted as the champion for the removal of untouchability. His participation in the temple entry movement of Vaikkam struggle mooted by EVR Periyar heading a band of volunteers during the year 1924 served as the inauguration of that venture.

The Vaikom Temple Entry struggle started on 30 March, 1924 and went on for a long time; it came to a close on November 3. 1925.He participated and faught against this social irrespective struggle. As a result of the Sathvagraha, the three road except the eastern road, around the Vaikom Temple was let open to all devotees, irrespective caste and class.

After the Vaikom episode Jeevanandam turned his attention towards Suchindram Thanumalyan Temple at Suchindram. situated about 8 km south of Nagercoil. In January 1926, Jeevanandam with his associates Gandhiraman, M.E. Naidu and more Harijan friends made attempts to enter the Suchindram Temple and the roads surrounding the temple, in the midst of strong opposition. Following this, the Vaikom and Suchindram temple matter was represented to the then Regent Queen of Travancore Sethulakshmi Bai. The struggle had spread up to the Guruvayoor Temple in Kerala too.

Gandhiji's policies like eradication of untouchability, prohibition of liquor, wearing only Khadi, and others attracted the younger generation in various parts of the country towards the freedom struggle launched out by Gandhiji. Jeevanandam from Kanyakumari region was one of those who were inspired and instigated by this national movement. He found identity of interest between himself and the Congress in matters like eradication of untouchability and social justice.

Jeevanandam stood for equality and justice and he had a liberal outlook. He could not tolerate anyone treated as out caste or untouchable. No doubt Jeeva was drawn towards the national movement spearheaded by the Indian National Congress which had similar ideals. Mahatma Gandhi's call to the youth of India to take part in the national movement in large numbers had an electrifying effect in drawing large number of youth toward the struggle.

The boycott of foreign cloth was raging high in Kanyakumari district and meetings to highlight the importance of boycott of foreign clothes was held at several places. At the end of one such meeting in 1922, at Thittuivilai adjoining Boothapandi, when foreign clothes were set on fire, Jeeva too removed the all the foreign cloth he was wearing, except his underclothing, and threw them into that fire. This was a turning point in the life of Jeeva's political life.

During the ongoing struggle for temple entry by the backward communities in the then Travancore, a great struggle was being organized at Vaikom near Trivandrum. Great leaders of the times participated in it and the social reformist Narayana Guru of the Ezhava community was among the leaders

who encouraged the struggle. The Congress leader E.V. Ramasamy Naicker of Dravida Kazhagam, accepting the invitation to lead the struggle, came to the site of the struggle with a strong contingent of supporters.

Jeevanandam had by this time was deeply aroused by the feelings of equality and justice for the downtrodden and backward classes and was on a war path with his parents at home regarding the issue of low caste people's right to enter the precincts of the temples.

Jeevanandam had been constantly fighting against untouchability in his native district Kanyakumari. Dr. M.V. Naidu, Gandhiraman, Sivathanu Pillai, and Akarai Neelakanda Pillai organised a Satyagraha in front of the Famous Suchindram Temple, with Jeeva's participation as a volunteer. Gradually Gandhi's reconstructive programmes drew Jeeva towards the national struggle. As he could not intensify his struggle in Kanyakumari district due to various causes, he moved to the neighbouring Tirunelveli district and worked for the cause of eradicating untouchability and instilling the spirit of equality at various levels.

CONCLUSION

P.Jeevanandam occupies an important place in the socio, - political history of Tamilnadu. His contribution to Kanyakumari can be understood through his support of Tamil linguistic identity, the aspirations of the Tamil speaking population social equality, workers rights, socialist ideals and democratic political participation. His ideas and political activities had an important influence on the socio political consciousness of the people of Kanyakumari.

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P. CHANDRA SHEKHARAN FROM SIDDHA MEDICINE TO COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION IN IYTHULLY, KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Chandrasekharan is a traditional Siddha practitioner whose life reflects the close relationship between traditional medicine, indigenous knowledge and rural community development in Kanniyakumari District. Born in 1926 at Munchirai, he belonged to a traditional Vaithiyar family. His father, C. Pavul Nadar, was associated with Siddha medicine and the Siddha Medical Association, while his grandfather, Chinnan Asan, was known for his knowledge of Siddha medicine, Varma Kalai and Kalari. Chandrasekharan inherited this traditional knowledge and developed his own practice in Siddha medicine. After his marriage in 1953, Chandrasekharan moved to Arumanai and later settled at Iythully around 1963. At that time, Iythully was a hilly and relatively undeveloped area with poor transport, water and other basic facilities. His contribution gradually extended beyond medicine. He encouraged people to settle in the area, supported poor people in obtaining land, provided land for a road, worked for bus transportation, and made efforts to obtain electricity and water facilities. A Government bus service to Iythully began in 1989 .

His contribution also included religious and social service. A Nilal Thangal was established at Iythully in 1964 with the important involvement of his wife Chellatchy. He started Annathanam for people who came to the area without food. He also donated seven cents of land for the establishment of a L.M.S church Iythully . The study is based mainly on oral history, supported by church records and original land documents. Interviews with twelve local respondents, together with interviews with Chandrasekharan and members of his family, provide information about his life and contribution. The study argues that Chandrasekharan's significance lies not only in his role as a Siddha practitioner but also in his contribution to the social and infrastructural development of Iythully.

Keywords: *P. Chandrasekharan, Siddha medicine, Iythully, Varma Kalai, Nilal Thangal, Annathanam, community development, oral history, Kanniyakumari.*

INTRODUCTION

Local history is not shaped only by rulers, political leaders and major historical events. The lives and contributions of ordinary people also form an important part of history. Oral history helps to recover such experiences, especially when they are not fully represented in official records. Kanniyakumari District has a rich tradition of Siddha medicine, Varma Kalai and other indigenous knowledge systems. The life of P. Chandrasekharan provides an example of how traditional knowledge could be combined with social and community service.

P. Chandrasekharan was born in 1926 at Munchirai and belonged to a traditional Vaithiyar family. His father, C. Pavul Nadar, was associated with Siddha medicine, while his grandfather, Chinnan Asan, was known for Siddha medicine, Varma Kalai and Kalari. Chandrasekharan inherited this traditional knowledge and later became a Siddha practitioner.

After his marriage in 1953, he moved to Arumanai and settled at Iythully around 1963. At that time, Iythully was a hilly and relatively undeveloped area with poor transport and limited basic facilities.

Chandrasekharan contributed to the development of the settlement through medical service, assistance to poor people, provision of land for public purposes, efforts to improve transport and basic facilities, and religious and charitable activities.

This study examines his contribution through oral-history interviews, including twelve local respondents, together with interviews with Chandrasekharan and members of his family. Church records and original land documents are also used as documentary evidence. The study therefore seeks to understand Chandrasekharan not only as a Siddha practitioner but also as a person who contributed to the social, cultural and infrastructural development of Iythully.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and oral-history approach. Primary information was collected through personal interviews with twelve local respondents and key informants, including P. Chandrasekharan and members of his family. The interviews focused on his Siddha medical practice, traditional knowledge, land-related activities, social service and contribution to the development of Iythully. The study also uses documentary sources, particularly church records relating to the donation of seven cents of land and original land documents associated with Chandrasekharan. Oral testimonies and documentary evidence are compared wherever possible. Information obtained mainly through oral accounts is presented as oral testimony, while documentary evidence is used to support specific historical details.

Family Background and Early Life

Chandrasekharan was born in 1926 at Munchirai. He belonged to a traditional Vaithiyar family. His family had a long association with indigenous medicine and traditional knowledge. His father, C. Pavul Nadar, was a Siddha practitioner and was associated with the Siddha Medical Association. He also served as its head according to the family account. His grandfather, Chinnan Asan, was known for his knowledge of Siddha medicine, Varma Kalai and Kalari. The term Asan traditionally denotes a teacher or master. This family background played an important role in Chandrasekharan's early exposure to traditional knowledge. Chandrasekharan received his primary education at Munchirai. He knew both Tamil and Malayalam. Some of the palm-leaf manuscripts associated with his learning were in Malayalam. His knowledge was therefore shaped not only by formal education but also by the traditional learning environment of his family. During his youth, he was reportedly not interested in joining the Travancore army. Instead, he concentrated on Siddha medicine, preparation of medicines, Varma Kalai and Kalari. This decision became significant in his later life because Siddha medicine became both his occupation and an important form of service to the people.

Chandrasekharan and Siddha Medicine

Siddha medicine formed one of the most important aspects of Chandrasekharan's life. He learned traditional medical knowledge through his family and developed practical experience in the preparation and administration of medicines. According to the oral accounts, his medical practice included the preparation of medicinal oils and Kashayam. Oil preparation was an important part of his treatment practice. Oil massage was also available during his period of practice. He used Varma-related treatment when necessary, particularly

when the condition of a patient required such knowledge.

His practice attracted patients from different parts of Kanniyakumari and Tirunelveli districts. Interviewees recalled that large numbers of patients, described in the oral accounts as thousands, came to his home for treatment. This indicates the reputation he developed as a traditional practitioner among the local population. His contribution to Siddha medicine was not limited to treating patients. He also possessed traditional medical knowledge preserved through palm-leaf manuscripts. However, he made a distinction between useful medical knowledge and practices that he considered harmful. According to his oral testimony, he burned palm leaves containing materials relating to black magic and sorcery because he believed that such knowledge could be harmful if passed on to future generations. At the same time, he copied and preserved necessary Siddha medical information and treatment methods. His contribution to Siddha medicine also continued through his family. His son, C. S. Ravi Sekharan, is a Siddha practitioner and runs Chandra Vaithiyasalai at Kuracode.

Knowledge of Varma Kalai and Traditional Practices

Chandrasekharan also possessed knowledge of Varma Kalai. Varma Kalai is an important component of the traditional knowledge system of southern Tamil regions. His family background, particularly the influence of his grandfather Chinnan Asan, provided an important foundation for this knowledge. According to his oral testimony, Chandrasekharan had considerable knowledge of Varma Kalai but did not practise it extensively. He knew basic Varma pressure points and used Varma treatment only when necessary. He also believed that Varma knowledge required patience, discipline and responsible training.

For this reason, he did not teach the complete Varma knowledge to his children. He reportedly felt that they did not possess the patience necessary for proper learning and that the knowledge could be misused if not handled responsibly. This reflects the traditional belief that certain forms of knowledge should be transmitted carefully. His son Ravi Sekharan is also said to use Varma knowledge in emergencies. Thus, the family's connection with Varma Kalai continued, although its transmission was limited. The Chandrasekharan family therefore represents an important example of the transmission of traditional medical knowledge from one generation to another. Siddha medicine, Varma Kalai, medicinal preparation and traditional knowledge existed together within the family tradition.

Settlement and Development of Iythully

After his marriage to Chellatchy in 1953, Chandrasekharan moved from Munchirai to Arumanai. Around 1963, he settled at Iythully. At that time, Iythully was a hilly and mountainous area with forests and wild animals. The region contained plantain, mango ,jackfruit trees betal l creeper, pepper creeper, areca nut tree, coconut tree, tapioca, cashew nuts, teak and wild jack trees, as well as medicinal plants. The settlement was comparatively undeveloped. According to the oral accounts, there were very few settled families in the particular area. Transport facilities were poor and people had difficulty travelling to nearby markets. People had to walk long distances to places such as Thoduvetti, Marthandam or Arumanai to purchase and sell goods.

Chandrasekharan played a role in

encouraging people from other areas to settle at Iythully. His house was known as Vazhavilakam. Local oral tradition also connects him with the naming of Iythully and associates the name with the hardships and emotional struggles he experienced while developing the area. His role in settlement development was therefore not simply that of a landowner. He became associated with the growth of a community. His willingness to provide land and support facilities gradually contributed to the transformation of the area from a relatively isolated settlement into a more connected habitation.

Land Rights, Social Service and Community Assistance

Chandrasekharan's contribution to the poor was closely connected with land rights and social justice. According to the oral accounts, he became involved in disputes concerning land that had allegedly been occupied or usurped by others. He fought a legal battle to recover the land and, after succeeding, helped poor and landless people obtain land for settlement. In some cases, he reportedly permitted people to construct houses and settle on the land even while the legal proceedings were continuing and later gifted land to them. The names of beneficiaries remembered in the oral accounts include Arul, Appukuttan, Rajayyan, Jayusu and Muthayyan Nadar.

His involvement in land-related struggles was also connected with his social and political activities. Chandrasekharan is remembered as an executive member of the Communist Party in Vilavancode and as someone who was associated with Communist Party leaders G. S. Mani and Kochu Mani. According to an oral account, Cheriyan Peruvattan recovered about 60 acres of land through Chandrasekharan's efforts, with the support of G. S. Mani and Kochu Mani. Since this information is based on oral testimony, it is presented here as a remembered local account and requires documentary verification before being treated as an established land record.His community service extended beyond helping people obtain land. He also donated seven cents of land for the establishment of a L.M.S church Iythully, according to the church record. His original land documents further provide documentary evidence concerning his landholding. The church later came under the CSI Diocese and is popularly known as the CSI Church, Iythully.These activities reveal that Chandrasekharan's relationship with land had a wider social meaning. Land was not viewed only as private property but also as a resource through which people could obtain a place to live and community institutions could be established. His support for poor settlers, his association with social and political activities, and his donation of land for a church demonstrate his broader concern for the welfare and development of Iythully.

Contribution to Roads, Transport, Electricity and Water

The development of transport and basic facilities was another important aspect of Chandrasekharan’s contribution to Iythully. According to the oral accounts, he provided land for a road in 1979 . It was laid from the beginning of his land area to the end of his property. The road was approximately one kilometre long and 24 feet wide.Later the road was tarred by the State Government. It is important to distinguish between his contribution and the actual construction: Chandrasekharan provided the required land, while the State Government constructed the road. The road significantly improved accessibility to

Iythully. For a settlement that had previously faced difficulties in transport and communication, the development of a proper road was an important step in its integration with surrounding areas. Chandrasekharan also made efforts to bring bus transportation to Iythully. According to the oral accounts, a bus service was introduced in 1989 during the period of M. Sundaradhas, MLA of Vilavancode Constituency. Chandrasekharan provided space for the bus stand. During his period, the bus route was: Marthandam – Arumanai – Karode – Iythully. The present route is remembered as: Marthandam – Kaliyakkavilai – Panachamoodu – Mancode – Iythully. The introduction of bus transportation reduced the isolation of the settlement and made travel easier for residents. Chandrasekharan also made efforts to bring electricity to the area. According to the oral accounts, he took considerable effort to obtain electricity connectivity for Iythully. He also worked towards providing a water pump. These efforts addressed two basic needs of the developing settlement. The oral testimony concerning roads, buses, electricity and water therefore reveals an important dimension of his community service. His contribution extended beyond individual assistance and included efforts to improve facilities that benefited the wider population.

Nizhal Thangal and the Role of Chellatchy

A Nizhal Thangal was established at Iythully in 1964. Chandrasekharan's wife, Chellatchy, played an important role in its establishment. According to the oral account, she personally prepared the foundation using clay and sand. A wall was subsequently constructed over the foundation. The sanctum was approximately eight feet high and four feet in length and breadth. There was no idol worship in the Nizhal Thangal. Traditional objects associated with the place included a conch, wood cradle,small size copper weighting scale, sacred lamp, bamboo stick, mirror, copper vessel, a small piece of sandalwood and a bell and stick. The Nizhal Thangal attracted people from different parts of the surrounding region. At that time, transport facilities were limited. People came to the area for worship and also for work such as collecting grass and firewood. The establishment of the Nizhlal Thangal had both religious and social significance. It became a place where people could gather and worship without depending on conventional temple structures. The institution was also connected with Chandrasekharan's broader service activities.

Annathanam and Service to the Poor

The establishment of the Nizhal Thangal was closely connected with Chandrasekharan's concern for the poor and needy. People from different places travelled long distances to the hilly region of Iythully for their livelihood. Poor people came there to collect firewood for sale, gather grass and undertake other kinds of labour. Because they had to walk a long distance to reach the area, many of them arrived tired and hungry. According to the oral accounts, Chandrasekharan observed the difficulties faced by these people and decided to provide food for them. He therefore started Annathanam at the Nizhal Thangal. The purpose was not limited to serving people who followed the Ayyavazhi tradition. Poor people and workers who came to the area, irrespective of their religious background, were also given food. This service reflects Chandrasekharan's concern for the basic needs of ordinary people. The Annathanam became an important part of

the social activities associated with the Nizhal Thangal. According to the oral testimony, it continued until 1990. People who came to the area for work, including those who collected firewood and grass, benefited from the food service.

Political and Social Involvement

Chandrasekharan was also associated with social and political activities. According to the oral accounts, he was an executive member of the Communist Party in Vilavancode. G. S. Mani and Kochumani are remembered as Communist Party leaders with whom he had connections. He also worked with Marshall A. Nesamony during the linguistic struggle associated with the demand for the integration of Tamil-speaking areas of southern Travancore with the Tamil region. The political developments eventually resulted in the transfer of Kanniyakumari District to Madras State in 1956.

Present Condition of the Nizhal Thangal and Preservation of Tradition

The present condition of the original Nizhal Thangal reveals the changes that have taken place over time. The old Nizhal Thangal has been completely destroyed. However, the religious tradition has not disappeared entirely. Chandrasekharan's daughter C. Thangam and her husband K. Sivadhas continue to have strong faith in the tradition. They have not constructed a separate Nizhal Thangal, The traditional objects associated with the original Nizhal Thangal are currently in the custody of his daughter C. Thangam. This is significant because the preservation of these objects represents a form of family-based cultural heritage conservation. Thus, although the original physical structure has disappeared, elements of its religious tradition continue through family memory, worship practices and preservation of traditional objects. This demonstrates that cultural heritage can survive even when its original physical institution no longer exists.

CONCLUSION

The life of P. Chandrasekharan demonstrates several dimensions of rural leadership. His contribution can be broadly understood through four areas: traditional medicine, social welfare, infrastructure development and religious/community service. As a Siddha practitioner, he served patients from Kanniyakumari and Tirunelveli districts. His preparation of medicinal oils and Kashayam, oil massage and limited use of Varma treatment formed part of his medical practice.

As a social worker, he helped poor people and supported settlement through land. His efforts in land-related matters and his willingness to provide land for public purposes are remembered by local people.

As a contributor to infrastructure, he provided land for a government road and for the bus stand. He also made efforts to bring electricity and water facilities to Iythully. These activities helped reduce the isolation of the settlement. As a religious and community leader, he supported the Nilal Thangal, started Annathanam and donated land for a Christian church. His activities therefore demonstrate an inclusive approach to community welfare. The combination of these activities makes Chandrasekharan an important subject for local history. His contribution was not based on a single institution. Instead, it developed through several forms of service over a long period. Chandrasekharan moved from Iythully to Kuttaicode in 1998. Later, he and his son C. S. Ravi Sekharan jointly continued Siddha medical practice through Chandra Vaithiyasalai at

Kuracode, with C.Kumari Thangam also associated with the medical practice. Thus, his medical tradition continued through the next generation. His family became an important link in preserving and continuing the Siddha knowledge inherited from earlier generations. At present, Chandrasekharan is under the care of his daughter C. Kumari Thangam. His long life and contribution were honoured by his family when his nine children , relatives , grandchildren and friends gathered together to celebrate his 100th birthday

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ALAPPANCODE TEMPLE : A SYMBOL OF IDENTITY AND HERITAGE IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Alappancode Temple is one of the important religious and cultural landmarks in Kanyakumari District. It serves not only as a place of worship, but also as a symbol of the region's identity, heritage, and cultural continuity. The temple preserves both tangible heritage, including its architecture and sacred structures, and intangible heritage, such as rituals, festivals, oral traditions, and community practices. This paper explores the historical evolution, architectural beauty, religious traditions, and socio-cultural contributions of Alappancode Temple. It also examines the temple's role in preserving the collective identity of the local community and promoting cultural values across generations. Alappancode Temple is a living heritage institution that continues to strengthen cultural identity and social cohesion in Kanyakumari District. The paper also highlights the importance of heritage conservation to protect this valuable cultural legacy for future generations.

Keywords :

Alappancode Temple; Cultural Heritage; Identity; Temple Architecture; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Religious Traditions; Temple Festivals; Community Identity; Heritage Conservation.

INTRODUCTION

Temples have played a central role in shaping the religious, social and cultural life of South India for centuries. They are not only sacred places of worship, but also centres of education, art, architecture, community interaction and cultural preservation. In Kanyakumari District, temples continue to influence the everyday lives of people by sustaining traditional beliefs, rituals, and festivals. Among these sacred centres, Alappancode Temple occupies a unique position as an important symbol of identity and heritage. The temple represents the historical continuity of the local community and reflects the cultural values that have been transmitted from one generation to another. Through its religious ceremonies, annual festivals, architectural features, and oral traditions, the temple strengthens the emotional and spiritual connection of the people with their ancestral heritage.

Temple as a symbol of identify and Heritage

The Alappancode Temple stands not merely as a place of worship but as a profound symbol of identity and heritage for the people of the village. It is located in Kanniyakumari District, the temple embodies the collective memory, emotional attachment and historical continuity of the community. It represents a living link between the past and the present, preserving both spiritual devotion and cultural distinctiveness. In rural societies, identity is closely tied to place and tradition. The temple serves as the most recognizable landmark of the village. For residents living within the village and those who have migrated to distant cities, the temple remains the primary symbol associated with their native place. When individuals introduce their village to outsiders, they often refer to it through its temple. Thus, the temple becomes an

emblem of geographical and cultural identity.

The emotional attachment to the temple begins from early childhood. Children are brought to the temple for blessings soon after birth. As they grow, they participate in festivals, observe rituals, and absorb stories related to the deity. These early experiences create deep psychological bonds. The temple becomes intertwined with personal memories, family traditions, and life milestones. Life-cycle rituals further strengthen this symbolic identity. Ceremonies such as naming rituals, first hair-cutting ceremonies, thanksgiving offerings, and pre-marriage prayers are conducted at the temple. By associating personal life events with the sacred space, individuals integrate their private lives with collective heritage.The temple thus becomes a silent witness to generational continuity.

Historical narratives associated with the temple also contribute to its symbolic significance. Stories regarding its origin, miraculous events or the devotion of ancestors are preserved through oral tradition. These narratives give the community a sense of pride and uniqueness. Even when historical records are limited, collective memory preserves the temple's importance across generations. The architectural presence of the temple enhances its symbolic value. Its structure, sanctum and sacred surroundings reflect traditional South Indian temple aesthetics. The temple's physical permanence contrasts with the changing nature of modern life. While houses may be rebuilt and landscapes may change, the temple stands as a constant symbol of stability. During festivals, the temple's symbolic role becomes even more visible. Decorations, processions and communal gatherings transform the entire village into a sacred landscape. The deity's procession through village streets symbolically blesses every household. This ritual act reinforces the idea that the temple is not isolated, but deeply integrated into the social fabric.

For migrants and diaspora members, returning to the temple during festival seasons is an emotional experience. It reconnects them with childhood memories and ancestral roots. Even those who adopt urban lifestyles maintain spiritual attachment to the temple. Contributions and donations from such individuals reflect their continued identification with their heritage. The temple also symbolizes moral and ethical identity. It stands as a reminder of values such as honesty, charity, respect for elders, and communal harmony. When villagers speak about maintaining the dignity of their village, they often refer to protecting the reputation of the temple. Thus, the temple influences not only spiritual behavior but also social conduct. In times of crisis, natural calamities, health emergencies or social tensions, the temple becomes a symbolic center of hope. Collective prayers are organized to seek divine protection. This shared faith strengthens psychological resilience and reinforces collective identity. The temple becomes a source of emotional security. The preservation of traditional rituals at the temple contributes to heritage conservation. Even in the face of modernization, villagers consciously retain customary practices. This conscious preservation reflects pride in ancestral traditions. By maintaining ritual authenticity, the community safeguards its cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the temple functions as a symbol of intergenerational continuity. Elders narrate past events associated with the temple, while youth participate in organizing contemporary celebrations.

This collaboration ensures that heritage is not static but dynamically renewed. The temple thus bridges generational gaps. The temple's sacred status also encourages collective responsibility for its maintenance. Renovation efforts are viewed not merely as construction projects but as acts of devotion and heritage preservation.

Villagers feel morally obligated to protect the temple structure for future generations. In academic terms, the temple may be understood as a cultural institution that embodies tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage includes architecture, ritual objects, and sacred spaces. Intangible heritage includes oral traditions, devotional songs, ritual practices, and collective beliefs. The Alappancode Temple preserves both dimensions.

The Alappancode Temple in Kanniyakumari District stands as a powerful symbol of identity and heritage. It represents historical continuity, emotional attachment, moral guidance, and cultural pride. Through life-cycle rituals, festivals, collective memory, and intergenerational participation, the temple sustains the community's sense of belonging. As both a spiritual sanctuary and a cultural landmark, it defines the social identity of the village and preserves its heritage for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Alappancode Temple is a living symbol of identity and heritage. It preserves the religious faith, cultural traditions, historical memory, and social unity of the local community. By protecting its architecture, rituals, festivals, and traditions, future generations can continue to appreciate and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Kanyakumari District.

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SACRED LANDSCAPES AND SOCIAL HARMONY: A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY OF KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of India, is a cultural crossroads where myth, history, and geography intertwine to create a distinctive identity. Revered for its sacred landscapes, particularly the Kanniyakumari Amman Temple, and celebrated for its natural beauty at the confluence of three seas, the region has long been a site of pilgrimage, trade, and philosophical reflection. Its cultural identity has been shaped by layers of mythological traditions, colonial encounters, reform movements, and modern tourism. This article explores Kanniyakumari's cultural identity in depth, tracing its evolution from sacred landscapes to social harmony. It argues that Kanniyakumari's cultural heritage is not static but dynamic, continually reshaped by historical forces and communal practices, making it a living symbol of unity in diversity.

KEYWORDS

Kanniyakumari, cultural identity, sacred landscapes, social harmony, temples, mythology, colonial history, Vivekananda, pluralism.

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari, often described as the "Land's End" of India, is a place where geography and culture merge seamlessly. The district is geographically unique, as it is the meeting point of the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean, a natural confluence that has long been interpreted as symbolic of unity. Yet Kanniyakumari is not merely a geographical landmark; it is a cultural landscape where mythological traditions, sacred monuments, and social practices converge. The Kanniyakumari Amman Temple, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, and the Thiruvalluvar Statue stand as enduring symbols of devotion, philosophy, and cultural pride. Over centuries, the district has absorbed influences from maritime trade, colonial powers, and reform movements, while maintaining its spiritual essence. This article seeks to elaborate on how Kanniyakumari's cultural identity has evolved, highlighting its sacred landscapes, historical encounters, festivals, and social harmony.

Historical Background

The cultural identity of Kanniyakumari is deeply rooted in mythology. The legend of Goddess Kanniyakumari, the virgin goddess who embodies purity and sacrifice, forms the spiritual foundation of the region. According to tradition, she was destined to marry Lord Shiva, but her marriage was thwarted, and she remained a virgin goddess, symbolizing eternal devotion. The temple dedicated to her continues to be a central cultural landmark, drawing pilgrims from across India. Historically, Kanniyakumari was a hub of maritime trade, connecting South India with distant lands through its coastal routes.

Traders from Arabia, Rome, and Southeast Asia frequented its shores, making it a cosmopolitan center of exchange. The arrival of colonial powers—the Portuguese, Dutch, and British—introduced new architectural styles, educational institutions, and religious practices, leaving indelible marks on the district's cultural fabric. During the

freedom struggle, Kanniyakumari became a site of nationalist awakening. Swami Vivekananda's meditation at the rocky islet, later commemorated by the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, symbolized spiritual awakening and national integration. Reform movements, missionary education, and local initiatives further shaped the district's identity, promoting literacy, social mobility, and communal harmony.

Sacred Landscapes

Sacred landscapes define Kanniyakumari's cultural essence. The Kanniyakumari Amman Temple, perched at the edge of the sea, is both a spiritual and cultural anchor. Its rituals, festivals, and legends embody the district's devotion to the goddess. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial, built in 1970, commemorates the philosopher's meditation and serves as a symbol of India's spiritual and intellectual heritage. The Thiruvalluvar Statue, towering beside the memorial, celebrates Tamil literary tradition and philosophical wisdom, reminding visitors of the region's intellectual contributions.

Beyond monuments, the natural landscapes themselves are sacred. The confluence of three seas, the spectacular sunrise and sunset views, and the coastal ecology create a spiritual aura that blends nature with devotion. These landscapes are not merely physical spaces but cultural symbols that reinforce Kanniyakumari's identity as a place of unity and transcendence.

Cultural Practices and Festivals

Cultural practices and festivals in Kanniyakumari reinforce its identity as a land of devotion and communal participation. The rituals at the Amman Temple, performed daily and during annual festivals, attract thousands of pilgrims. Festivals such as Chaitra Purnima and Navaratri bring together diverse communities in shared celebration, fostering social bonds.

Traditional art forms, music, and folklore also play a vital role in preserving cultural memory. Folk songs narrating the legend of the goddess, local dances performed during temple festivals, and storytelling traditions ensure that Kanniyakumari's heritage is transmitted across generations. These practices not only strengthen religious devotion but also create a sense of belonging and identity among the people.

Social Harmony And Identity

Kanniyakumari is widely recognized for its spirit of social harmony. Hindus, Christians, and Muslims coexist peacefully, reflecting the pluralistic ethos of the district. Missionary schools and local institutions promoted literacy and social mobility, contributing to the region's progressive outlook. Reform movements emphasized equality and integration, ensuring that cultural identity was not confined to one community but shared across diverse groups.

In modern times, tourism has further reinforced Kanniyakumari's identity. Visitors from across the globe experience its cultural richness, spiritual depth, and natural beauty, making it a global symbol of unity in diversity. The district thus stands as a living example of how cultural heritage can foster harmony across communities.

Statement Of The Problem

Kanniyakumari, despite being celebrated as a cultural and spiritual landmark, faces the challenge of preserving its identity amidst rapid modernization, tourism pressures, and socio-economic changes. The sacred landscapes and communal harmony that define the district are increasingly

influenced by urbanization, commercialization of pilgrimage sites, and shifting cultural practices. While Kanniyakumari is often portrayed as a symbol of unity in diversity, there is limited scholarly work that systematically examines how its cultural identity has evolved across mythological, historical, and contemporary contexts. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of comprehensive academic analysis that connects Kanniyakumari's sacred landscapes with its social harmony, thereby highlighting the need to understand its cultural identity in a holistic manner.

Scope Of The Study

The scope of this study extends to exploring Kanniyakumari's cultural identity through multiple dimensions. It covers the mythological origins of the Kanniyakumari Amman Temple, the historical influences of maritime trade and colonial encounters, and the contributions of reformers such as Swami Vivekananda. The study also examines sacred landscapes including the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Thiruvalluvar Statue, alongside natural features like the confluence of three seas. Furthermore, it analyzes cultural practices, festivals, and folklore that sustain communal bonds. At the social level, the study focuses on religious coexistence, educational reforms, and tourism's role in shaping modern identity. Geographically, the research is limited to Kanniyakumari district, but its implications extend to broader discussions of cultural integration in South India.

Significance Of The Study

This study is significant because it provides a comprehensive understanding of how Kanniyakumari's cultural identity has been constructed and sustained over time. By analyzing the interplay between sacred landscapes and social harmony, the research highlights the district's role as a living example of unity in diversity. The findings contribute to academic literature on cultural geography, heritage studies, and socio-religious integration. For policymakers and cultural institutions, the study offers insights into preserving heritage while promoting tourism responsibly. For local communities, it reinforces the importance of safeguarding traditions that foster communal harmony. Thus, the study is both academically valuable and socially relevant.

Limitations Of The Study

- The study is geographically limited to Kanniyakumari district only and does not extend to neighbouring regions with similar cultural traits.
- The reliability of primary data may be affected by the availability of respondents and the subjective nature of their interpretations of cultural identity.
- Historical records, literature, and other secondary sources used in the study may reflect the biases and perspectives of their time.
- The study emphasizes cultural identity and does not provide an extensive analysis of economic or political dimensions, except where they directly influence culture.
- Cultural identity is inherently subjective, and findings may vary depending on the perspectives of respondents and researchers.

Review Of Literature

1. Gwilym Beckerlegge (2022) in his article *Celebrating Heritage, Promoting Tourism, and Relocating Svāmī Vivekānanda: A Study of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial* examines the cultural and

spiritual significance of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanniyakumari. He argues that the memorial not only commemorates Vivekananda's meditation but also reshapes his legacy as a "spiritual nationalist." The study highlights how heritage and tourism intersect in Kanniyakumari, projecting the district as a site of cultural pride and national integration.

2. Dr. S. Mary Judit (2022) in her work *Historical Monuments in Kanyakumari District: A Study* focuses on the temples, churches, and tombs that define the district's historical landscape. She emphasizes how these monuments serve as cultural testimonies of past dynasties and religious transitions, blending Tamil and Malayalam traditions. The study underscores the importance of monuments in shaping socio-cultural identity and attracting tourism, thereby reinforcing Kanniyakumari's heritage significance.

3. J. R. Alish John and G. Kasthuri Thilagam (2025) in their paper *Cultural Transformations Among the Kani Tribes of Thiruvattar Taluk, Kanyakumari District* investigate the cultural shifts among the indigenous Kani tribe. Their research documents how modernization, migration, and religious conversions have altered traditional practices, dialects, and social structures. The study highlights both opportunities for social mobility and challenges of cultural erosion, offering insights into identity struggles within Kanniyakumari's tribal communities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical design. It is descriptive because it presents the socio-cultural profile of respondents in Kanniyakumari district, and analytical because it interprets patterns in cultural practices, social perceptions, and demographic features.

Sources Of Data

- **Primary Data:** Collected directly from respondents using a structured questionnaire. Questions covered age, gender, religion, education, occupation, temple visits, festival participation, views on sacred places, social harmony, tourism impact, awareness of heritage sites, language preference, sources of cultural knowledge, youth participation, and the role of women.
- **Secondary Data:** Gathered from books, journals, government reports, newspapers, and online resources to support the analysis and provide background context.

Research Tools

The main instrument was a questionnaire with both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Analytical tools included percentage analysis, averages, and cross-tabulation for quantitative data, and content analysis for qualitative responses.

Sample

A total of 50 respondents were selected using simple random sampling. The sample ensured representation across age groups, genders, religions, education levels, and occupations, reflecting the cultural diversity of Kanniyakumari district.

Period of the Study

The study was conducted over six months (January 2026 – June 2026), covering data collection, tabulation, and analysis.

Objectives Of The Study

1. To examine the demographic profile of respondents in Kanniyakumari district.
2. To analyze cultural practices such as temple visits, festival participation, and views on sacred places.

3. To study social perceptions including harmony among communities and the impact of tourism.
4. To assess awareness of heritage sites like the Vivekananda Rock Memorial.
5. To evaluate the role of youth and women in sustaining cultural identity.

Analysis And Interpretation Of Data

Table 1.1. Age Distribution of respondents

Different age groups contribute uniquely to cultural life, with elders preserving traditions, middle-aged balancing modernity and rituals, and youth shaping future identity.

Age Group	Number	Percentage
18–30	12	24%
31–45	15	30%
46–60	14	28%
61+	9	18%

Source: Primary data

The age distribution shows that most respondents fall within the 31–45 age group (30%), followed closely by those aged 46–60 (28%). This indicates that middle-aged and older adults are the most active participants in cultural practices. Younger respondents (18–30) form 24%, suggesting that while youth are involved, their engagement is comparatively lower. The presence of 18% respondents aged 61+ highlights the role of elders in preserving traditions and transmitting cultural knowledge. This age spread ensures that perspectives from different generations are represented, reflecting how cultural identity is shared and reshaped across age groups.

Table 1.2 Gender Distribution

Men and women both play vital roles in sustaining culture, with men often visible in public rituals and women maintaining household traditions and festivals.

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	28	56%
Female	22	44%

Source: Primary data

The gender composition shows 56% male and 44% female respondents. This near balance suggests that both genders are actively engaged in cultural life. While men slightly outnumber women, the strong female representation highlights the important role women play in rituals, folklore, and community activities. In Kanniyakumari, women often lead household traditions and temple rituals, so their participation is crucial for sustaining cultural identity.

Table 1.3. Religion of Respondents

The presence of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims reflects Kanniyakumari's diversity, where peaceful coexistence enriches the district's cultural identity.

Religion	Number	Percentage
Hindu	30	60%
Christian	12	24%
Muslim	8	16%

Source: Primary data

Religious diversity is evident, with Hindus forming 60%, Christians 24%, and Muslims 16%. This distribution reflects Kanniyakumari's pluralistic ethos, where multiple faiths coexist peacefully. The majority Hindu presence aligns with the prominence of the Kanniyakumari Amman Temple, but the significant Christian and Muslim representation shows that cultural identity is not confined to one religion. This supports the theme of social harmony, as different communities contribute to the district's cultural mosaic.

Table 1.4. Educational Level

Literacy and education influence how traditions are understood, preserved,

and adapted, linking knowledge with cultural awareness.

Level	Number	Percentage
Primary	8	16%
Secondary	12	24%
Higher Secondary	15	30%
Graduate	10	20%
Postgraduate	5	10%

Education levels reveal that 30% of respondents have higher secondary education, while 20% are graduates and 10% postgraduates. This indicates a literate population with access to formal education. The presence of educated respondents suggests that cultural identity is not only preserved through tradition but also interpreted through modern perspectives. Schools and colleges play a role in transmitting folklore and history, while educated individuals often balance traditional practices with contemporary values.

Table 1.5. Occupation

Livelihood patterns such as farming, trade, service, and student life shape involvement in rituals and festivals, connecting work with cultural practices.

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Agriculture	15	30%
Business/Trade	10	20%
Service Sector	15	30%
Students	10	20%

Source: Primary data

Occupational data shows agriculture and service sector each at 30%, business/trade at 20%, and students at 20%. This mix reflects Kanniyakumari's dual identity as both a traditional agrarian society and a modern service-oriented district. Farmers sustain rituals linked to land and harvest festivals, while service sector employees and traders bring urban influences. Students represent the younger generation who are exposed to both traditional and global cultures, shaping future identity.

Table 1.6. Frequency of Temple Visits

Devotion is expressed through daily, weekly, or occasional temple visits, showing the central role of rituals in everyday life.

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Daily	10	20%
Weekly	20	40%
Monthly	12	24%
Occasionally	8	16%

Source: Primary data

Temple visits are most common weekly (40%), followed by monthly (24%), daily (20%), and occasional (16%). This shows strong religious devotion, with weekly visits forming the cultural norm. Daily visitors represent deeply spiritual individuals, while occasional visitors may be influenced by modern lifestyles. The data highlights that temple rituals remain central to cultural identity, even as frequency varies.

Table 1.7. Festival Participation

Community spirit is reinforced through active festival participation, while occasional involvement reflects selective engagement in celebrations.

Participation	Number	Percentage
Active	25	50%
Occasional	18	36%
Rare	7	14%

Source: Primary data

Half of respondents (50%) actively participate in festivals, 36% occasionally, and 14% rarely. This indicates that festivals remain a vibrant part of cultural life, fostering communal bonds. Active participation reflects devotion and community spirit, while occasional participation suggests selective involvement. Rare participation may be due to migration, work commitments, or

changing values. Overall, festivals continue to reinforce Kanniyakumari's identity as a land of shared celebrations.

Table 1.8. Perception of Sacred Lanscapes

Sacred sites are valued differently, with many seeing them as highly spiritual while others view them neutrally, highlighting their cultural importance.

Response	Number	Percentage
Highly Sacred	30	60%
Moderately	15	30%
Neutral	5	10%

Source: Primary data

Sacred landscapes are viewed as highly sacred by 60%, moderately sacred by 30%, and neutral by 10%. This shows that most respondents attach deep spiritual meaning to places like the Amman Temple, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, and the confluence of seas. The minority neutral view suggests that some see these landscapes more as tourist attractions than spiritual sites. This dual perception reflects the tension between heritage preservation and commercialization.

Table 1.9. Views on Social Harmony

Unity among communities is generally seen as strong, confirming peaceful coexistence as a defining feature of Kanniyakumari's social life.

Response	Number	Percentage
Strong Harmony	28	56%
Moderate	15	30%
Weak	7	14%

Source: Primary data

Social harmony is perceived as strong by 56%, moderate by 30%, and weak by 14%. The majority view confirms Kanniyakumari's reputation for peaceful coexistence among Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. Moderate and weak perceptions highlight challenges such as modernization, migration, or occasional communal tensions. Overall, the data supports the idea that social harmony is a defining feature of the district's cultural identity.

Table 1.10. Impact of Tourism

Tourism is viewed both as a promoter of heritage and a challenge to authenticity, reflecting mixed opinions about cultural preservation.

Response	Number	Percentage
Positive	20	40%
Neutral	15	30%
Negative	15	30%

Source: Primary data

Tourism is seen positively by 40%, neutral by 30%, and negatively by 30%. This mixed response shows that while tourism brings economic benefits and global recognition, it also raises concerns about cultural erosion and commercialization. Positive views emphasize tourism's role in promoting heritage, while negative views reflect fears of losing authenticity. This dual impact is crucial for policymakers to balance development with preservation.

Table 1.11. Awareness of Vivekananda Rock Memorial

Knowledge of the memorial strengthens pride in heritage and spirituality, linking Vivekananda's legacy with national identity.

Awareness	Number	Percentage
High	30	60%
Moderate	15	30%
Low	5	10%

Source: Primary data

Awareness is high among 60%, moderate among 30%, and low among 10%. This indicates that Vivekananda's legacy is widely recognized, reinforcing Kanniyakumari's identity as a site of spiritual awakening and national

integration. Moderate and low awareness suggest gaps in cultural transmission, especially among youth or non-local visitors. Strengthening awareness can enhance pride in heritage.

Table 1.12. Language Preference

Tamil dominates as the cultural language, with Malayalam and English also present, showing how communication shapes identity.

Language	Number	Percentage
Tamil	35	70%
Malayalam	10	20%
English	5	10%

Source: Primary data

Tamil dominates with 70%, followed by Malayalam (20%) and English (10%). This reflects Kanniyakumari's linguistic identity as primarily Tamil-speaking, with Malayalam influence due to proximity to Kerala. English is used by educated respondents and in tourism contexts. The data shows that language plays a key role in cultural identity, with Tamil serving as the primary medium of folklore, rituals, and literature.

Table 1.13. Sources of Cultural Knowledge

Traditions are mainly learned from families, supported by schools, religious institutions, and media, proving oral transmission remains strong.

Source	Number	Percentage
Family	20	40%
Religious Inst.	15	30%
Schools	10	20%
Media/Internet	5	10%

Source: Primary data

Family traditions are the strongest source (40%), followed by religious institutions (30%), schools (20%), and media/internet (10%). This highlights the importance of oral transmission within families, where elders pass down rituals and stories. Religious institutions reinforce spiritual practices, while schools provide historical context. Media plays a smaller role, suggesting that cultural identity is still rooted in traditional sources rather than digital platforms.

Table 1.14. Youth Participation in Culture

Young people join cultural practices actively or occasionally, highlighting their role in ensuring the continuity of traditions.

Participation	Number	Percentage
Active	15	30%
Occasional	25	50%
Rare	10	20%

Source: Primary data

Youth participation is occasional for 50%, active for 30%, and rare for 20%. This shows that while youth are involved, their engagement is not as strong as older generations. Occasional participation reflects selective involvement in festivals or rituals, while rare participation suggests cultural detachment. This highlights the need for cultural revival programs to engage youth more actively, ensuring continuity of traditions.

Table 1.15. Role of Women in Cultural Activities

Women contribute significantly, whether leading, supporting, or minimal, and their role is vital for sustaining and transmitting cultural identity.

Role	Number	Percentage
Leading	18	36%
Supporting	22	44%
Minimal	10	20%

Source: Primary data

Women play supportive roles in 44%, leading roles in 36%, and minimal

roles in 20%. This indicates that women are central to cultural practices, often organizing rituals, festivals, and household traditions. The growing percentage of women in leading roles reflects empowerment and changing social dynamics. Minimal roles may be due to work commitments or social restrictions. Overall, women's participation is vital for sustaining cultural identity.

FINDINGS

- The majority of respondents are in the 31–45 age group (30%), followed closely by 46–60 (28%), showing middle-aged and older adults are the most active in cultural practices.
- Gender distribution is nearly balanced (56% male, 44% female), highlighting that both men and women play vital roles in sustaining traditions.
- Religious diversity is evident with Hindus 60%, Christians 24%, Muslims 16%, reflecting peaceful coexistence and pluralism.
- Education levels show a literate population, with 30% higher secondary, 20% graduates, and 10% postgraduates, indicating modern perspectives influence cultural practices.
- Occupations are split between agriculture (30%) and service sector (30%), with business/trade and students forming 20% each, showing both traditional and modern livelihoods.
- Temple visits are most common weekly (40%), proving rituals remain central to identity.
- Festival participation is strong, with 50% active, reinforcing community spirit.
- Sacred landscapes are valued highly (60%), showing deep spiritual attachment.
- Social harmony is perceived as strong (56%), confirming peaceful coexistence.
- Tourism impact is mixed (40% positive, 30% neutral, 30% negative), showing both benefits and concerns.
- Awareness of Vivekananda Rock Memorial is high (60%), strengthening pride in heritage.
- Tamil dominates as the cultural language (70%), with Malayalam and English also present.
- Family is the strongest source of cultural knowledge (40%), followed by religious institutions (30%).
- Youth participation is mostly occasional (50%), showing moderate involvement but weaker than older generations.
- Women play supportive (44%) and leading (36%) roles, proving their central importance in sustaining traditions.

Suggestions

- ❖ Encourage youth participation through cultural education, workshops, and revival programs to strengthen continuity of traditions.
- ❖ Promote women's leadership in cultural activities, recognizing their growing role in rituals and festivals.
- ❖ Balance tourism and heritage preservation by promoting responsible tourism that safeguards authenticity.
- ❖ Strengthen awareness programs about sacred sites and Vivekananda Rock Memorial to enhance pride in heritage.
- ❖ Integrate cultural studies in education so schools and colleges can transmit folklore, history, and values alongside modern learning.

- Support farmers and traditional occupations with cultural festivals linked to agriculture, ensuring rituals remain connected to livelihoods.
- Use media and digital platforms to engage youth and urban populations, making cultural knowledge more accessible.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that Kanniyakumari district maintains a strong cultural identity rooted in traditions, sacred landscapes, and social harmony. Middle-aged and older generations are the most active participants, while youth show moderate involvement. Gender balance highlights the vital role of women, and religious diversity reflects peaceful coexistence. Education and occupation influence cultural practices, while family remains the strongest source of transmission. Tourism brings both opportunities and challenges, requiring careful management. Overall, the findings confirm that Kanniyakumari's cultural identity is vibrant, but sustaining it requires active youth engagement, women's empowerment, and balanced development policies.

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT: A HISTORICAL STUDY (1800–2025)

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari district, the southernmost tip of India, has one of the highest literacy rates in the country today. This did not happen by accident. It is the result of more than two hundred years of continuous change, beginning with the arrival of Christian missionaries in the early nineteenth century and continuing through the reforms of the Travancore state, the freedom movement, and the policies of independent India. This article traces that journey in simple language, using primary and near-primary sources such as missionary records, the Travancore State Manual, government gazetteers and census data. It shows that education in this region was never separate from society. Every step forward in schooling — new schools, new subjects, new teachers — was tied to a step forward in social life, especially for communities that had earlier been kept at the margins because of caste, gender or poverty. The article covers seven broad phases from 1800 to 2025 and closes with an assessment of the district's present position and the challenges that remain.

1.INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district lies at the meeting point of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Before 1956 it was known as South Travancore and formed part of the princely state of Travancore, ruled from Thiruvananthapuram. When the States Reorganisation Act redrew India's internal boundaries on linguistic lines in 1956, this Tamil-speaking region was transferred from Kerala to Tamil Nadu and became a separate district on 1 November 1956. That single administrative fact is important for understanding its education story, because for a century and a half the schools, teachers and reform movements of this land grew under Travancore's rules, while its later growth has taken place under Tamil Nadu's. The central argument of this article is simple: education and social change moved together in Kanyakumari. Missionaries opened schools to spread their faith, but the unintended result was that children of fisherfolk, toddy-tappers and agricultural labourers — groups that upper-caste society had denied learning to for centuries — began to read and write. Literacy gave these communities the confidence to demand dignity, most famously in the long struggle of Nadar women for the right to cover their upper bodies. Education, in other words, was not just a service handed down from above; it became a tool that ordinary people picked up and used to reshape their own social position.

2. Education Before The Missionaries: The Traditional Setting

Before the nineteenth century, whatever formal learning existed in this region was organised on caste lines. Village schools called ezhuthu pallis taught reading, writing and elementary arithmetic, mostly to boys from land-owning and priestly families. Sanskrit learning was confined largely to Brahmin households, and temple-attached institutions served the same narrow group. Large sections of the population — Nadars, Ezhavas, Dalits, and most women

regardless of caste — had no access to letters at all. Slavery of agricultural labourers was still practised in parts of Travancore in the early 1800s, and it was formally abolished only by royal proclamation in 1813. This was the social soil into which modern schooling was about to be planted.

3. The Missionary Beginning of Modern Education (1806–1857)

Modern English education in this region is usually traced to the arrival of Rev. William Tobias Ringeltaube, a Prussian-born missionary of the London Missionary Society, who reached South Travancore in 1806. He preached and taught among the poor for about a decade, and by the time he left in 1816 he had laid the foundation for both Christian congregations and regular schooling in the area, working mainly among fishing and agricultural communities that caste society had excluded from learning. After Ringel Taube, a series of missionaries expanded this work steadily. Rev. Charles Mead, assisted by his wife Johanna Mead, is remembered as an educator and administrator who was later put in charge of the mission's schools; he toured the region frequently, merged small vernacular schools with English-medium ones, and used income from mission-held paddy land to fund a boarding seminary for boys at Nagercoil. By 1827 there were about forty-four schools functioning under the London Missionary Society in the region, and in 1828 a dedicated girls' boarding school was opened at Neyyoor, in an area with a large Nadar population — a deliberate step towards female education access to schools before.

Higher education followed the same missionary path. A school that began at Nagercoil in 1805 grew over time into a full college by 1817, becoming the first college in the whole of the Travancore state; it survives today as Scott Christian College. Roman Catholic missionaries, who had reached the coastal fishing communities even earlier than the Protestants, focused particularly on the education of girls and received government support for this work because of its social value. Later, individual missionary women left a lasting institutional mark: Beatrice Duthie, who worked in Nagercoil from the 1890s, used income from a lace-making industry she supervised to build the Duthie Girls' school, which grew into a major institution for women's education in the town.

Two features of this missionary phase deserve attention. First, education was not confined to converts; missionaries taught "Christian and non-Christian poor children" alike, so the schools became genuinely open institutions in a caste-segregated society. Second, education for girls, which was almost absent before 1800, became a deliberate missionary priority, producing some of the earliest women's schools anywhere in South India.

4. Schooling and the Struggle for Social Dignity: The Channar Revolt

The clearest evidence that education changed society, rather than merely serving it, is the long agitation remembered as the Channar Revolt or Maru Marakkal Samaram (the Upper-Cloth Struggle), which unfolded between roughly 1813 and 1859. Custom in Travancore had long denied Nadar and other lower-caste women the right to cover their upper bodies in public, a rule meant to visibly mark caste rank. As mission schools spread literacy and a new sense of self-worth among Nadar Christian women,

some of them began wearing blouses in defiance of custom. Upper-caste reaction was often violent, including riots and attacks on Nadar homes and churches in and around Nagercoil, and the Travancore government at times deployed its army to suppress the unrest.

The struggle drew strength from two directions at once: Christian missionaries who supported the right of converts to dress with dignity, and homegrown reform. The Tamil social reformer Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal, active in the same decades, organised a Society for Equality (Samatva Samajam) in 1836 and mobilised women directly for the cause, giving the movement a base that was independent of the missions. After repeated agitation, the Travancore government issued a royal proclamation in 1859 permitting all women, including Avarna castes, to cover their upper bodies, though social resistance continued informally for years afterward. Historians treat this episode as one of the opening chapters of what is called the Kerala Renaissance, and it is a direct illustration of how a new ability to read, argue and organise translated into a demand for bodily dignity and civic equality.

5. The Travancore State Takes Charge (1860–1947)

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the Travancore government moved from merely tolerating missionary schools to actively building a state education system, which benefited South Travancore, present-day Kanyakumari, along with the rest of the kingdom. A Vernacular Education Department was created under Diwan T. Rama Rao, and in 1871 it was decided that every pokuthy or village division should have its own school, a major step towards universal access. In 1879 the government extended grant-in-aid rules to all private schools that taught vernacular education to an approved standard, which allowed mission and community schools to receive public funding while keeping their own management.

The most decisive step came in 1904, when the Travancore government took direct responsibility for providing free primary education to all children in the state, abolished fees in government schools, and began paying salary grants to private schools serving backward classes. Scholarships were also introduced to draw more students, particularly from communities that had previously stayed away from formal schooling. Because Travancore's rulers were unusually supportive of missionary and vernacular education compared with many other princely states, the combined effect of royal policy and missionary effort gave this region, including South Travancore, an educational head start that is still visible in comparative literacy figures today.

This period also saw education spread more evenly across communities. Nadars, having gained both confidence and schooling through the missions, increasingly entered trade, government service and the professions. Temple-entry and civic movements elsewhere in Kerala in the early twentieth century, and the general climate of social reform, reinforced the idea that literacy was the surest route to social mobility for communities placed low in the caste order.

6. From Princely State to Separate District (1947–1956)

India's independence in 1947 did not immediately change the administrative

map of this region. South Travancore first became part of the reorganised Travancore-Cochin state in 1949. The turning point came with the States Reorganisation Act of 1956, which redrew Indian states along linguistic lines. Because the population of this southern strip spoke Tamil rather than Malayalam, it was separated from Kerala and merged into Tamil Nadu, emerging as a new administrative unit, Kanyakumari district, on 1 November 1956.This transition mattered for education in a subtle but lasting way. The district entered Tamil Nadu already carrying nearly a century and a half of missionary schools, government-aided vernacular schools and a comparatively high base level of literacy inherited from Travancore's education policy. Economic historians studying literacy trends on either side of the old Travancore-Cochin border have found that this region continued to perform well above the Tamil Nadu average in subsequent decades, a pattern they trace directly to the institutional foundation laid before 1956.

7. Expansion of Education in Independent India (1956–2000)

After becoming part of Tamil Nadu, Kanyakumari district benefited from the wider educational reforms of independent India. The Madras state government's post-independence reservation policy, which set aside a share of college seats and government jobs for socially and educationally backward classes, opened higher education further to communities that were still catching up. School networks expanded steadily through government and government-aided institutions, and Tamil Nadu's broader push for near-universal primary enrolment brought almost all children in the district into the classroom by the later decades of the twentieth century.

Higher education also grew substantially in this period. Scott Christian College and other older missionary institutions were joined by new arts and science colleges, teacher training institutes, and eventually engineering and polytechnic colleges, many affiliated first to Madurai Kamaraj University and later to Mononmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, for arts and science, and to Anna University, Chennai, for engineering. Women's education, which had a long missionary head start in the district through institutions such as Duthie Girls' School, continued to expand, narrowing the gap between male and female literacy that had been very wide in the nineteenth century.

8. Kanyakumari District in the Twenty-First Century

By the early twenty-first century, Kanyakumari had become one of the most literate districts in India. According to the 2011 Census, the district recorded a literacy rate of 91.75 per cent, the highest of any district in Tamil Nadu, well above the state average of about 80 per cent, with male literacy at 93.65 per cent and female literacy at 89.9 per cent — a gap far narrower than the national gender gap of the same period. More recent labour force survey estimates for 2023–24 put overall literacy in the district above 93 per cent, with the male-female gap continuing to shrink.

The district's higher education landscape today includes more than a hundred colleges spanning arts and science, engineering, teacher education

and medicine, along with three medical colleges approved by the National Medical Commission and a growing base of nursing and paramedical institutions. Engineering colleges affiliated to Anna University and arts and science colleges affiliated to Mononmaniam Sundaranar University together serve not only local students but also draw students from the neighbouring Kerala districts, a reversal of the nineteenth-century pattern in which South Travancore depended on missionary initiative rather than local institutions.

This expansion has brought its own social consequences. Wider access to professional education has accelerated migration of skilled workers from the district to jobs across India and abroad, particularly in nursing, engineering and government service, a trend closely tied to the district's historic strength in schooling. At the same time, researchers note that gains in raw literacy have not always translated evenly into quality learning outcomes or into proportional gains in employment for the most disadvantaged groups, suggesting that the social-mobility function that education served so powerfully in the nineteenth century still requires active policy attention today.

9. Education as an Engine of Social Transformation: A Summary View

Drawing the different phases together, four patterns stand out across the two-hundred-year period covered in this study:

- Access widened caste by caste. Learning that was once confined to a few land-owning and priestly families spread first to fishing and toddy-tapping communities through missionary schools, then to the wider population through state-run vernacular and free primary education after 1904.
- Women's education moved from near-total absence to a defining strength of the district, beginning with mission boarding schools for girls in the 1820s and continuing through institutions such as Duthie School into today's near-equal male and female literacy rates.
- Literacy became a tool of dignity, not just employment. The Channar Revolt shows a direct line running from a village school to a public demand for the right to be treated as a full human being, a pattern later echoed in other social reform movements across the former Travancore region.
- Administrative change reinforced rather than reversed the trend. The shift from princely-state rule to Travancore-Cochin to Tamil Nadu after 1956 did not disrupt the district's educational momentum; if anything, the institutional base built before 1956 gave Kanyakumari an advantage that is still measurable in comparative literacy statistics today.

10. CONCLUSION

The history of education in Kanyakumari district is, at its heart, a history of who was allowed to read and write, and what they did once they could. What began as scattered missionary schools among poor fishing and toddy-tapping families in the early 1800s grew, through the deliberate policies of the Travancore state and later of independent India and Tamil Nadu, into one of the most literate districts in the country. Along the way, education repeatedly became the ground on which excluded communities pressed their claim to dignity and equality, from the Channar Revolt of the nineteenth century to the professional mobility of the

present day. The district's experience suggests a broader lesson for the study of Indian social history: schooling and social reform in India rarely moved as separate stories, and in Kanyakumari, more than in most places, they were really the same story told from two different angles. As the district moves further into the twenty-first century, the challenge is no longer simply to bring people into classrooms, but to ensure that the same tool of learning that once broke old hierarchies continue to open new opportunities for those still left behind.

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HERITAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT:

In the rapidly changing global economic scenario, tourism is considered to be one of the largest and fast growing industries. The occupation of tourism is providing very useful and fruitful avenues especially to those people who are engaged in tourism activities because through this smokeless industry, they are not only enhancing their standard of living but also generating income and employment opportunities. In the contemporary era of globalization and industrialization, the whole world has shrunk into a global village. The tourism has played a very decisive role to transform the world into a globalized economy where all nations can exchange free trade and culture and share their interest of mutual benefits based on tourism industry. India is one of the major destinations of the foreign tourists particularly the state of Tamil Nadu which has a rich cultural heritage among the Indian states. All over the world, the tourists are visiting it due to its climatic, scenic beauty and ecological resources.

KEYWORDS:

Arrival, Development, Tourist

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in India and plays a vital role in economic development, employment generation, and cultural exchange. Kanyakumari District, located at the southernmost tip of mainland India, is one of Tamil Nadu's most famous tourist destinations. The district is known for its unique geographical location where the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean meet. It is also rich in natural beauty, historical monuments, religious centers, cultural heritage, beaches, waterfalls, and wildlife. The development of tourism in Kanyakumari has significantly contributed to the district's economy by creating employment opportunities, promoting local handicrafts, improving infrastructure, and attracting both domestic and international tourists. The district receives millions of visitors every year who come to witness the spectacular sunrise and sunset, visit historical monuments, and experience its religious and cultural diversity. This article discusses the tourism resources, development, economic importance, challenges, and future prospects of tourism in Kanyakumari District.[1]

Motives for Tourism

From the motivational point of view, a distinction can be made between a recreational tourist and a motivated tourist. The primary urge of the first type of tourist is travel for pleasure with its entertainment value or recreation as an end in itself. The primary urge of motivated tourist (as defined here) may be altogether different, to him, traveling for pleasure is there, but not as a primary motive. For instance, a commercial traveller travels widely from one place to another to form or renew his business connections. His choice of place of tourism is determined primarily by business

considerations though he may often mix business with pleasure. Similarly the primary urge of a pilgrim, whether traveling alone or in a group is not to enjoy the scenic surroundings of the place of pilgrimage but to fulfill some inner religious urge and to perform some religious rites sanctioned by some commonly held religious norms. The sense of fulfillment of his religious urge may increase (rather than decrease) with the hardship of the journey. A student going abroad for higher study or to attend a summer school selects the university or college as his place of study not by the same consideration that would reign supreme for a vacation tourist. Similarly in the case of a group of students accompanied by their teachers on an education tour, the declared motivation is not only pure enjoyment but educational also.[2] But, in practice, such educational tours may often be a camouflage for an outing or picnic. It may be pertinent to add here that different motives for a tour need not necessarily lead to different types of tour. The mode of behaviour of a person attending a business convention or a seminar or a conference would be more or less same whether he is by profession, a businessman or a government official or an educationist. Similarly the same motive for tourism (say, business or education) may leads to different types of touristic behaviour pattern. Thus, the continuous nature of journey of a commercial traveler may not be observed in the case of a business magnet attending a convention held abroad or within the country. Similarly, the nature of tourism of an educationist attending a seminar would be different from that of an exchange student. Besides, as usually it is said, all forms of travel are educational in nature. Hence, education may be regarded as a generalized motive, if not the primary motive for all forms of travel.

Importance of the Study

When many people consider tourism, they think of international travel to exotic destinations. However, most tourism is domestic that is, it relates to tourists traveling within their own country. Both international and domestic tourism are dominated by industrial countries. Europe, North America and the Pacific region receive more than two thirds of international visitor arrivals. However, tourism is a major industry worldwide. In the mid-1990s the tourism industry contributed more than 6 per cent of the value of all the goods and services produced throughout the world. It also accounted for more than 7 per cent of global capital investment and 13 per cent of world consumer spending. Experts estimated that tourism supported more than 130 million jobs worldwide and contributed more than 5.6 per cent to total tax payments. The tourism industry is made up of all the businesses that directly provide goods or services for the business and leisure activities of tourists.[3] The industry includes international and domestic airlines; shipping lines and ferry operators; railway, bus and taxi operators; accommodation suppliers; restaurants, clubs, and other catering establishments; tour and excursion operators, travel agents; managers of entertainment facilities; theme parks; national parks and heritage attractions; manufacturers and retailers of souvenirs; visitor information centers; and conference, convention and meeting centers. Many of these businesses serve non-tourists too. Tourism creates many job opportunities. Tourism is a labour-intensive industry that is; it requires a large number of workers. But most tourism is seasonal, that is, there are

times in a year when visits to a destination reach a peak, especially at seaside and ski resorts. As a result, many tourism jobs are part time and casual. The majority of tourism jobs are also low skilled and low paid. However, the large numbers of people that tourism employs and the links it has to other industries, such as catering and restaurant work, mean that governments actively encourage tourism development. The following palaces are very popular and tourist part in Kanyakumari District. Vivekananda Rock, Kanyakumari Temple or the Kanyakumari Bhagavathiamman Temple, Kanyakumari Beach, Padmanabhapuram Palace, Gandhi Mandapam, Thiruvalluvar Statue. Sri Sthanumalayan Temple, Tirparappu Water Falls, Mathoor Hanging Bridge, Vattakottai Fort, St Xavier Church, Government Museum, Pechiparai Reservoir, Sothavilai Beach, Kamarajar Manimandapam and Chitharal.

Geography of Kanyakumari District

Kanyakumari District is situated at the southern end of Tamil Nadu. It shares its borders with Kerala on the west and Tirunelveli District on the north. The district covers an area of approximately 1,684 square kilometers. The climate is pleasant throughout most of the year, making it suitable for tourism. The district has coastal plains, hills, forests, rivers, waterfalls, and fertile agricultural lands. Such geographical diversity makes Kanyakumari an attractive destination for different forms of tourism, including beach tourism, eco-tourism, religious tourism, and adventure tourism.[4]

Historical Background

Kanyakumari has a long and rich history dating back to ancient times. It was ruled by the Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas, and later by the Travancore Kingdom. After India's independence, Kanyakumari became part of Tamil Nadu in 1956 following the linguistic reorganization of states. The district has historical monuments, ancient temples, churches, forts, and memorials that reflect its cultural and historical importance. The influence of different dynasties and religions has made Kanyakumari a unique cultural destination.

MAJOR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Kanyakumari Beach

Kanyakumari Beach is one of India's most famous beaches. It is known for its spectacular sunrise and sunset views. During certain seasons, visitors can witness both sunrise and moonrise simultaneously. The meeting point of the three seas makes this beach unique. The beach attracts tourists throughout the year and supports local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, and transportation services.[5]

Vivekananda Rock Memorial

` The Vivekananda Rock Memorial is one of the most important landmarks of Kanyakumari. Built in memory of Swami Vivekananda, the memorial stands on a rocky island in the sea. Visitors reach the memorial by ferry. It symbolizes India's spiritual heritage and attracts thousands of pilgrims and tourists every day.

Thiruvalluvar Statue

Adjacent to the Vivekananda Rock Memorial stands the 133-foot-tall Thiruvalluvar Statue. It honors the great Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar, the author of the Tirukkural. The statue represents Tamil culture and literature and has become one of the symbols of Tamil Nadu tourism.

Kumari Amman Temple

The Kumari Amman Temple is an ancient Hindu temple dedicated to Goddess Kanyakumari. It is one of the

important pilgrimage centers in South India. Thousands of devotees visit the temple every year, especially during festivals such as Navaratri.

Padmanabhapuram Palace

Padmanabhapuram Palace, located near Kanyakumari, is an architectural masterpiece built by the Travancore rulers. The palace is famous for its wooden architecture, murals, carved pillars, and traditional Kerala-style construction. It attracts history lovers, architects, and cultural tourists.

Vattakottai Fort

Vattakottai Fort is an eighteenth-century coastal fort built by the Travancore Kingdom. It offers panoramic views of the sea and surrounding hills. The fort has become a popular destination for photography and sightseeing.[6]

Tirparappu Waterfalls

Tirparappu Waterfalls is one of the most beautiful tourist attractions in Kanyakumari District. Surrounded by greenery, the waterfalls provide a refreshing environment for families and nature lovers. The nearby Shiva Temple also attracts pilgrims.

Mathur Aqueduct

The Mathur Hanging Trough, popularly known as the Mathur Aqueduct, is one of Asia's largest aqueducts. It is a remarkable engineering structure that attracts visitors interested in architecture and scenic landscapes.[7]

Muttom Beach

Muttom Beach is famous for its peaceful environment, rocky coastline, lighthouse, and beautiful scenery. It is becoming increasingly popular among domestic tourists and photographers.

Pechiparai Dam

Pechiparai Dam is surrounded by forests and hills. It is an important irrigation project as well as a tourist attraction where visitors enjoy boating and nature.

TYPES OF TOURISM IN KANYAKUMARI

Religious Tourism

Kanyakumari is home to temples, churches, and mosques that attract pilgrims from across India. Religious tourism forms a major component of the district's tourism industry.

Cultural Tourism

Traditional festivals, folk arts, local cuisine, and historical monuments provide rich cultural experiences for visitors.[8]

Eco-Tourism

Forests, wildlife sanctuaries, waterfalls, rivers, and hills promote eco-tourism. The district encourages environmentally friendly tourism practices.

Beach Tourism

The beautiful coastline offers opportunities for sightseeing, photography, boating, and relaxation.

Heritage Tourism

Ancient palaces, forts, memorials, and monuments preserve the district's historical heritage and attract researchers, students, and tourists.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The Government of Tamil Nadu and the Ministry of Tourism have taken several initiatives to promote tourism in Kanyakumari.[9]

These include:

•Improvement of roads and transportation.

- Modernization of ferry services.
- Beautification of beaches.
- Construction of tourist information centers.
- Development of parks and public facilities.
- Promotion through digital marketing and tourism campaigns.

- Organization of cultural festivals and tourism events.
- Encouragement of private investment in hotels and resorts.

The district administration also works to improve sanitation, safety, drinking water facilities, and public conveniences for tourists.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM

Tourism plays an important role in the economy of Kanyakumari District.

Employment Generation

Hotels, restaurants, transport services, travel agencies, tour guides, handicraft shops, and entertainment industries provide employment to thousands of people.

Income Generation

Tourism contributes significantly to government revenue through taxes, entry fees, transport, accommodation, and commercial activities.

Development of Small Businesses

Local artisans, fishermen, flower sellers, photographers, handicraft makers, and food vendors benefit from tourism.

Infrastructure Development

Tourism encourages improvements in roads, airports, railways, communication facilities, sanitation, and public transportation.[10]

Promotion of Local Culture

Tourism helps preserve traditional arts, music, dance, handicrafts, festivals, and cuisine by creating demand among visitors.

CHALLENGES FACING TOURISM

Despite its popularity, Kanyakumari tourism faces several challenges.

- **Environmental Pollution**
  Plastic waste, water pollution, and overcrowding affect beaches and tourist sites.
- **Traffic Congestion**
  Heavy tourist traffic during holidays and festivals creates transportation problems.
- **Seasonal Tourism**
  Visitor numbers fluctuate during different seasons, affecting business income.
- **Coastal Erosion**
  Natural erosion threatens beaches and coastal infrastructure.
- **Insufficient Facilities**
  Some tourist destinations require better accommodation, parking, toilets, and information centers.
- **Climate Change**
  Changing weather patterns and rising sea levels may affect coastal tourism in the future.
- **Sustainable Tourism Development**
  Sustainable tourism aims to balance economic growth with environmental protection.

Important measures include:

•Reducing plastic usage.
•Protecting marine ecosystems.
•Conserving forests and wildlife.
•Promoting eco-friendly transportation.
•Encouraging responsible tourist behavior.
•Supporting local communities.
•Preserving historical monuments.
•Improving waste management systems.
•Increasing environmental awareness among visitors.

Sustainable tourism ensures that future generations can continue to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of Kanyakumari.[12]

Government Schemes Supporting Tourism

Several government schemes support tourism development in Kanyakumari.

These include:

- Swadesh Darshan Scheme.
- PRASHAD Scheme for pilgrimage tourism.
- Incredible India Campaign.

• Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) initiatives.
• Heritage conservation projects.
•Infrastructure development programmes.
• Skill development and hospitality training.

These programmes improve tourist facilities and encourage both domestic and international tourism.

Future Prospects

Kanyakumari has excellent potential for future tourism development.

The district can further develop:

• Adventure tourism.
• Cruise tourism.
• Medical tourism.
• Rural tourism.
• Cultural tourism.
• Eco-tourism.
• Water sports.
•Digital tourism services.
•Smart tourism infrastructure.

Improved international promotion, better transport connectivity, modern accommodation, and environmental conservation will further strengthen the tourism industry.

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari District is one of India's most attractive tourist destinations because of its unique geographical location, historical significance, religious importance, cultural richness, and natural beauty. Tourism has become a major source of income, employment, and regional development. Government initiatives, improved infrastructure, and active participation of local communities have greatly contributed to the growth of the tourism sector. However, sustainable management is essential to protect the district's environment and cultural heritage. By promoting responsible tourism, improving facilities, conserving natural resources, and encouraging community participation, Kanyakumari can continue to grow as a world-class tourist destination. In conclusion, tourism development in Kanyakumari District not only strengthens the local economy but also preserves its unique identity, making it an important contributor to the overall development of Tamil Nadu and India.[13]

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WOMEN'S POSITION IN TRAVANCORE DURING THE 19TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the status of women in 19th-century Travancore, highlighting caste-based inequalities and patriarchal practices. While some upper-caste Nair women enjoyed limited privileges, most women faced discrimination in education, property, and personal freedom. Missionaries, rulers, and social reformers gradually challenged these customs, paving the way for early advances in gender equality.

KEY WORDS

Travancore, Women's status, Caste system, Matrilineal society

INTRODUCTION

The 19th century in Travancore saw women's status shaped by caste, religion, and patriarchy. While matrilineal Nair women enjoyed limited autonomy, most women, especially from lower castes, faced discrimination, restricted education, and social oppression. Reform efforts by missionaries, progressive rulers, and social activists gradually challenged these practices, laying the foundation for improved women's rights and social equality.

Objectives

- Understand how caste, religion, and traditional practices influenced women's lives.
- Highlight the differences between upper-caste, lower-caste, and marginalized women.
- Focus on practices like the denial of upper-body clothing, seclusion of women, and denial of education.

Material and method

Analytical method of historical research is used to conduct the study. Both primary and secondary sources are used. The primary sources include various reports and documents collected from different repositories, while the secondary sources are primarily books.

Position of women in Travancore

In the 19th century, many bad practices and customs existed in South Travancore. Feudalism spread everywhere, and feudal lords became the real rulers. Slavery, untouchability, dowry, and the Devadasi system caused great suffering for women.[1]

Women were considered inferior to men.[2] People believed that girls who learned reading, writing, and arithmetic would become widows. Widowhood was the most painful experience for women in society.[3] Many young girls under the age of eleven became widows. After reaching puberty, girls were not allowed to go outside because people feared they would be harmed by evil spirits.[4] The majority of women spent their time mostly within the four walls of the kitchen. They had to follow the laws and customs of the land. Social evils like untouchability and unapproachability badly affected their

lives. Early marriage was very common during that time.

Many young girls were given to temples as devadasis when they were very small.[5] Widows suffered in many ways. They were not allowed to marry again. They could not wear ornaments or colourful clothes. Women in the family had to eat only after the men finished. Men used tables, chairs, and spoons to eat. But women sat on mats on the floor, wore simple clothes, and ate with their hands.[6] Women were not allowed to see any men except close family members.

The Dowry system

The dowry system was an old custom in India. It was mostly followed by the higher castes in Hindu society. Dowry was the share of family wealth given to a woman at the time of marriage. This practice was accepted by society and religion. A daughter who received good dowry brought respect to her family. Over time, the dowry system spread to all communities. However, it was not practiced by those who followed the Marumakkattayam system, like the Nayars, Ezhavas, Parayas, and Pulayas. [7]

Divorce

Divorce was easy and common among the Nayars. A marriage continued only as long as both partners wanted it. To end the marriage, they did not need to follow any difficult process. If a woman no longer wanted her husband, she simply placed her sandals outside the house. This meant he was no longer welcome.[8] In due course of time, the Sambhandam (alliance) and Marumakkathayam made chaos in the society particularly in Nayar families.

Widowhood

Widowhood was seen as a punishment for sins from a woman's past life. So, people treated widows as sinners. Among upper castes, widowhood was like social death. It was painful, shameful, and dangerous. Widows faced social and economic problems. They also suffered from loneliness, emotional pain, and mental stress.[8] Widow remarriage was allowed among the lower castes, but some people still did not like it.[9]

Impact

In 19th-century Travancore, women faced severe oppression due to patriarchal traditions, caste discrimination, and rigid social customs. Upper-caste women experienced restrictions on freedom, widowhood, and remarriage, while lower-caste women endured poverty and social stigma despite limited freedoms. Education and public participation were largely denied. Practices such as the devadasi system and feudal control further undermined women's dignity, leaving most without equality, independence, or basic rights.

CONCLUSION

The position of women in Travancore during the 19th century was marked by oppression, inequality, and lack of freedom. Deeply rooted social customs, caste discrimination, and patriarchal norms controlled every aspect of a woman's life—from childhood to widowhood. Practices like the devadasi system, dowry, and the denial of education further weakened their status in society. While a few exceptions existed, most women had limited rights and were subjected to emotional, social, and economic hardships. This period reflected a time when women's voices were silenced, and their roles were confined to serving the needs and traditions of a male-dominated society.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN KANYAKUMARI: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism has emerged as one of the most important sectors of the global tourism industry, contributing significantly to economic development, heritage conservation and cultural exchange. Unlike conventional tourism, cultural tourism focuses on experiencing the history, traditions, customs, architecture, religion, art, literature, festivals and lifestyles of a destination. Kanyakumari, located at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula in the state of Tamil Nadu, is one of India's most significant cultural tourism destinations. The district is home to ancient temples, churches, monuments, palaces, memorials, traditional arts, handicrafts and vibrant festivals that attract millions of domestic and international tourists every year.

This study examines the importance of cultural tourism in Kanyakumari and explores its contribution to the regional economy, employment generation, heritage preservation and social integration. The paper also highlights the major cultural attractions of the district and discusses the opportunities and challenges associated with tourism development. The study concludes that cultural tourism plays a crucial role in preserving the cultural identity of Kanyakumari

Keywords: *Cultural Tourism, Kanyakumari, Heritage Tourism, Economic Development, Cultural Heritage*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world and serves as an important source of income, employment, foreign exchange earnings and cultural interaction. Over the last few decades, tourism has expanded beyond leisure and recreation to include specialized forms such as eco-tourism, medical tourism, adventure tourism, rural tourism, spiritual tourism and cultural tourism. Among these, cultural tourism has gained considerable importance because modern tourists increasingly seek authentic experiences that allow them to understand the history, traditions, values and lifestyles of different societies.

Cultural tourism refers to travel motivated by an interest in experiencing the cultural heritage of a destination. It includes visits to historical monuments, archaeological sites, museums, religious places, art galleries, festivals, traditional performances, local cuisine and handicrafts. Cultural tourism not only provides visitors with educational and recreational experiences but also contributes significantly to the preservation of cultural heritage and the economic development of host communities.

Kanyakumari occupies a special place due to its exceptional geographical location and cultural significance.

Situated at the southernmost point of mainland India, Kanyakumari is where the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean meet. The district is renowned not only for its breath taking sunrise and sunset views but also for its historical monuments, religious sites, architectural marvels and multicultural traditions.

The district has witnessed the influence of several dynasties, including the Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas, and the Travancore Kingdom. As a result, Kanyakumari possesses a unique blend of Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions. Hindu temples, Christian churches, Jain monuments, Islamic heritage and colonial architecture coexist peacefully, reflecting the district's rich cultural diversity.

One of the most famous landmarks is the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, where Swami Vivekananda is believed to have meditated before beginning his mission to spread Indian philosophy worldwide. Nearby stands the majestic 133-foot Thiruvalluvar Statue, symbolizing the timeless wisdom of the Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar. The ancient Bhagavathy Amman Temple attracts thousands of pilgrims throughout the year, while the Padmanabhapuram Palace, built primarily of wood, represents one of the finest examples of traditional Kerala architecture.

Apart from monuments, Kanyakumari is known for its traditional festivals, folk arts, music, dance forms, handicrafts, seafood cuisine and vibrant local markets. Annual temple festivals, Christmas celebrations, Easter processions, Navaratri and Pongal reflect the religious harmony that characterizes the district.

Cultural tourism has become one of the major contributors to the district's economy. Hotels, restaurants, transportation services, travel agencies, handicraft industries, photographers, local vendors and tour guides depend heavily on tourist arrivals. Tourism has created thousands of direct and indirect employment opportunities and has improved the standard of living of many local residents.

This seminar paper seeks to examine the importance of cultural tourism in Kanyakumari by analysing its economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions. It also identifies the major cultural attractions of the district and suggests measures for promoting sustainable cultural tourism.

Meaning of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism refers to travel undertaken to experience and appreciate the cultural heritage of a destination. It includes visiting historical monuments, museums, archaeological sites, temples, churches, traditional villages, festivals and cultural performances. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), cultural tourism is tourism in which the visitor's primary motivation is to learn, discover, experience, and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions of a destination. Cultural tourism enables visitors to understand the identity, history, beliefs, customs and artistic achievements of local communities. It also encourages respect for cultural diversity and promotes international understanding.

Major Cultural Tourism Attractions In Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari offers numerous attractions that draw pilgrims, history enthusiasts, nature lovers and international tourists throughout the year.

1. Kanyakumari Bhagavathy Amman Temple

The Bhagavathy Amman Temple is one of the oldest and most sacred temples in South India. Dedicated to Goddess Kanya Kumari, the temple is associated with several Hindu legends and attracts thousands of pilgrims every day. The temple is an outstanding example of traditional Dravidian architecture with beautifully carved pillars, sculptures, and intricate stonework. Religious festivals held at the temple significantly contribute to cultural tourism in the district.

2 Vivekananda Rock Memorial

The Vivekananda Rock Memorial is the most iconic landmark of Kanyakumari. It was built in 1970 in memory of Swami Vivekananda, who meditated on this rock before beginning his mission to spread Indian philosophy. Located about 500 meters from the mainland, the memorial attracts visitors from all over the world. The peaceful surroundings and spiritual atmosphere make it one of India's most important cultural and religious monuments. The memorial symbolizes India's spiritual heritage and serves as a centre for meditation, education and cultural awareness.

3 Thiruvalluvar Statue

Standing 133 feet tall, the Thiruvalluvar Statue is one of the tallest stone statues in India. It honours the great Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar, the author of the Tirukkural, a classic work on ethics, morality and human values. The height of the statue represents the 133 chapters of the Tirukkural. It has become a symbol of Tamil culture and literature and attracts scholars, students and tourists from across the world.

4. Padmanabhapuram Palace

Padmanabhapuram Palace, situated about 35 kilometers from Kanyakumari, is one of the finest examples of traditional wooden architecture in India. It constructed during the reign of the Travancore kings, the palace contains beautifully carved ceilings, mural paintings, wooden pillars, antique furniture, royal chambers and intricate craftsmanship. The palace reflects the artistic excellence of ancient South Indian architecture and remains an important cultural heritage site.

5. Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple

The Suchindram Temple is renowned for its remarkable architecture and artistic beauty. Dedicated to the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—it represents religious unity. The temple is famous for musical stone pillars, massive gopuram, magnificent sculptures, large hanuman statue and ancient inscriptions. Thousands of pilgrims and architecture enthusiasts visit the temple annually.

6. Vattakottai Fort

Built during the Travancore period, Vattakottai Fort overlooks the Arabian Sea and offers panoramic coastal views. It constructed mainly from granite stones, the fort served as a defensive structure against invasions. Today, it attracts history lovers and tourists interested in military architecture.

7. Gandhi Memorial Mandapam

The Gandhi Memorial marks the place where Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were kept before immersion. Its architecture is unique because sunlight falls directly on the exact spot where the ashes were placed every year on Gandhi's birthday, 2nd October. The memorial symbolizes India's freedom struggle and attracts visitors interested in modern Indian history.

8. Our Lady of Ransom Church

This magnificent Gothic-style church is one of the most important Christian pilgrimage centres in Tamil Nadu. Its impressive architecture, peaceful atmosphere and annual religious

festivals attract thousands of devotees and tourists. The church also reflects the influence of European missionaries on the cultural history of Kanyakumari.

9. Traditional Handicrafts

Kanyakumari is well known for its traditional handicrafts, including shell handicrafts, palm-leaf products, coconut shell crafts, coir products, wooden carvings and handmade souvenirs. These products provide employment to local artisans while preserving traditional craftsmanship. Tourists purchase these handicrafts as souvenirs, contributing significantly to the local economy.

10. Festivals and Cultural Celebrations

Festivals are an essential component of cultural tourism. Major festivals celebrated in Kanyakumari include Chithirai festival, Navarathri, Pongal, Christmas, Easter, Temple car festival and Onam. These celebrations include traditional music, dance, processions, folk performances and local cuisine, providing visitors with authentic cultural experiences.

11. Local Cuisine

Food is another important aspect of cultural tourism. Kanyakumari's cuisine reflects both Tamil and Kerala culinary traditions. Popular dishes include Fish curry, Meen varuval(fried fish), Appam with stew, Idiyappam, Puttu and kadala curry, Tapioca with fish curry, Coconut rice, Banana chips and Traditional Tamil vegetarian meals. Local cuisine enhances the tourist experience while supporting restaurants, fishermen, farmers and food vendors.

Economic Importance Of Cultural Tourism In Kanyakumari

Cultural tourism is a major contributor to the economy of Kanyakumari district. Every year, millions of tourists visit the district to experience its religious sites, historical monuments, cultural festivals and scenic landscapes. The expenditure of tourists on accommodation, transportation, food, shopping and entertainment generates substantial revenue and supports local economic development.

1. Employment Generation

Tourism creates both direct and indirect employment opportunities. Direct employment includes jobs in hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, transport services, tour guiding, photography and hospitality. Indirect employment is created in handicraft production, agriculture, fisheries, food processing, construction and retail businesses. Many local families depend on tourism for their livelihood.

2. Growth of Local Businesses

The tourism industry stimulates the growth of small and medium enterprises. Shops selling shell crafts, palm-leaf products, textiles, spices, souvenirs, and local food benefit from tourist spending. Homestays, cafés, and local transport services also contribute to the district's economy.

3. Infrastructure Development

The increasing number of tourists has encouraged improvements in roads, public transportation, sanitation, street lighting, communication facilities, healthcare services and accommodation. These developments improve not only the visitor experience but also the quality of life of local residents.

4. Promotion of Handicrafts

Traditional handicrafts are an important component of Kanyakumari's cultural economy. Shell crafts, coconut-shell products, wooden carvings and coir products are popular among tourists. Tourism helps preserve these traditional skills by creating a market for locally made products and encouraging younger generations to continue these crafts.

5. Contribution to Government Revenue

Tourism generates revenue through entrance fees, taxes, hotel occupancy, transportation and tourism-related services. These funds can be used for infrastructure development, heritage conservation and public welfare programs.

Social And Cultural Significance Of Cultural Tourism

Beyond economic benefits, cultural tourism has a profound impact on society and culture.

1. Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Tourism creates awareness about the importance of protecting historical monuments, temples, churches, forts, museums and traditional architecture. Revenue generated through tourism supports restoration and maintenance activities, ensuring that these heritage assets are preserved for future generations.

2. Promotion of Traditional Arts

Folk dances, devotional music, temple arts, storytelling traditions and local cultural performances receive greater recognition because of tourism. Cultural festivals provide opportunities for artists and performers to showcase their talents and sustain traditional art forms.

3. Strengthening Cultural Identity

By promoting local traditions, customs, cuisine and literature, cultural tourism strengthens the identity and pride of local communities. Residents become more aware of the value of their heritage and are encouraged to preserve it.

4. Cultural Exchange

Visitors from different regions and countries interact with local communities, promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect for cultural diversity. Such interactions encourage intercultural learning and strengthen national and international relationships.

5. Community Participation

Local communities actively participate in tourism through guiding services, handicraft production, cultural performances, accommodation and hospitality. Their involvement ensures that tourism benefits are shared more equitably and that local traditions remain central to the visitor experience.

Role of Government in Promoting Cultural Tourism

The Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu have undertaken several initiatives to promote cultural tourism in Kanyakumari.

Major Government Initiatives

- Development and maintenance of roads and tourist infrastructure.
- Conservation of historical monuments and heritage sites.
- Improvement of cleanliness and sanitation at tourist destinations.
- Promotion of tourism through digital platforms, travel fairs and advertising campaigns.
- Support for cultural festivals, exhibitions and heritage events.
- Skill development programs for tourist guides, artisans and hospitality workers.
- Encouragement of public-private partnerships to improve tourism facilities.

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) has played a significant role in promoting Kanyakumari as a major tourist destination by improving accommodation, transportation and visitor services.

Challenges Facing Cultural Tourism in Kanyakumari

Despite its immense potential, cultural tourism in Kanyakumari faces several challenges.

1. Environmental Pollution

Large numbers of visitors generate plastic waste and litter, particularly near beaches and popular tourist attractions. Pollution affects the natural beauty of the district and poses risks to marine ecosystems.

2. Overcrowding

During weekends, public holidays and festival seasons, major attractions become overcrowded. This creates pressure on transportation, accommodation, sanitation and public services, reducing the overall visitor experience.

3. Heritage Conservation Issues

Some heritage structures require continuous maintenance and scientific restoration. Weathering, neglect and heavy tourist footfall can damage monuments if conservation measures are inadequate.

4. Commercialisation of Culture

Excessive commercialisation may reduce the authenticity of local traditions, festivals and handicrafts. Cultural practices should be preserved primarily as expressions of community identity rather than solely as commercial attractions.

5. Seasonal Nature of Tourism

Tourist arrivals often fluctuate depending on weather conditions, school holidays and festival seasons. Seasonal demand can affect the stability of employment and income for tourism-dependent households.

6. Limited Awareness

Many tourists visit only the well-known attractions and remain unaware of lesser-known heritage sites, traditional villages, museums and cultural experiences that the district offers.

Suggestions for Sustainable Cultural Tourism

The long-term success of cultural tourism depends on balancing economic growth with heritage conservation and environmental protection. The following measures are recommended:

1. Strengthen conservation efforts for monuments, temples, churches and heritage buildings.
2. Promote eco-friendly tourism by reducing plastic use, encouraging waste segregation and improving recycling facilities.
3. Increase community participation in tourism planning and decision-making.
4. Improve transportation, public amenities, parking and visitor information centres.
5. Organise cultural festivals, handicraft exhibitions and folk art performances throughout the year.
6. Support local artisans through training, financial assistance and marketing opportunities.
7. Develop digital platforms and mobile applications to provide information about heritage sites and cultural events.
8. Promote lesser-known tourist attractions to reduce overcrowding at major destinations.
9. Conduct awareness campaigns encouraging responsible tourist behaviour and respect for local customs.
10. Encourage collaboration among government agencies, educational institutions, tourism operators and local communities to achieve sustainable tourism development.

Findings of the Study

The study reveals the following key findings:

- Kanyakumari is one of India's most important cultural tourism destinations because of its rich historical, religious and cultural heritage.
- Cultural tourism significantly contributes to employment generation and regional economic development.

- Historical monuments, temples, churches, memorials and festivals are major attractions that draw domestic and international tourists.
- Tourism promotes the preservation of traditional arts, handicrafts, literature, cuisine and local customs.
- Government initiatives have improved infrastructure and destination promotion, though further investment in conservation and visitor management is needed.
- Environmental pollution, overcrowding, commercialisation and inadequate awareness remain major challenges.
- Sustainable tourism practices and active community participation are essential for ensuring the long-term success of cultural tourism in Kanyakumari.

CONCLUSION

Cultural tourism has become a vital component of Kanyakumari's economic, social and cultural development. The district's unique combination of historical monuments, religious harmony, traditional architecture, literary heritage, festivals, handicrafts and natural beauty provides visitors with a rich and meaningful cultural experience. Tourism has created employment opportunities, stimulated local businesses, encouraged infrastructure development and contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage.

However, the continued growth of tourism must be managed responsibly. Heritage conservation, environmental protection, community participation and sustainable tourism policies should remain central to future development strategies. Responsible tourism not only safeguards cultural and natural resources but also ensures that the benefits of tourism are shared by local communities.

With effective planning, improved infrastructure and greater awareness of sustainable practices, Kanyakumari can continue to strengthen its position as one of India's leading cultural tourism destinations. Protecting its cultural heritage while embracing responsible tourism will ensure that future generations can continue to appreciate the district's unique history, traditions, and identity.

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ARCHITECTURAL CONFLUENCE: WOODEN PALACES, CHURCHES, AND TEMPLES OF KANNIYAKUMARI - HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari district occupies a unique geographical and cultural position at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, where the architectural traditions of Tamil Nadu and Kerala converge. This paper examines the architectural confluence reflected in the region's wooden palaces, Hindu temples, and Christian churches, highlighting how these monuments embody centuries of political patronage, religious interaction, artistic exchange, and environmental adaptation. The study focuses on the Padmanabhapuram Palace, the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, the Kumari Amman Temple, St. Xavier's Church, Kottar, and the Our Lady of Ransom Church, Kanyakumari. Adopting a historical and comparative approach, the paper analyses the use of indigenous materials such as teak wood, laterite, granite, and lime mortar, together with traditional construction techniques suited to the humid tropical climate.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Architectural Heritage, Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Temple, Travancore, Wooden Architecture, Church Architecture, Cultural Confluence.*

INTRODUCTION

Architecture is one of the most enduring expressions of human civilization, reflecting political authority, religious beliefs, technological advancement, and artistic creativity. Kanniyakumari district occupies a unique geographical position where Tamil and Kerala cultures have interacted for centuries. Consequently, its architectural heritage demonstrates an exceptional blend of Dravidian temple architecture, Kerala wooden construction, Travancore palace architecture, and European ecclesiastical designs. The district preserves several outstanding monuments, including the Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Temple, Kumari Amman Temple, St. Xavier's Church at Kottar, Our Lady of Ransom Church, and numerous village temples and churches that collectively represent centuries of architectural evolution.

Historical Background

Kanniyakumari has a rich historical heritage shaped by various dynasties, kingdoms, and colonial powers. Owing to its strategic location at the southern tip of the Indian subcontinent, it became a meeting point of Tamil and Kerala cultures as well as Indian and European architectural traditions. Over the centuries, the region witnessed significant political, religious, and cultural transformations that influenced the development of its temples, palaces, and churches.

Major Historical Phases

- Sangam Period (300 BCE–300 CE): Kanniyakumari was part of the ancient Pandya kingdom and flourished as a center of maritime trade, culture, and early Tamil civilization. The foundations of Dravidian religious traditions and temple worship were established during this period.

- Pandya Rule: The Pandyas strengthened Hindu religious institutions by constructing and renovating temples with characteristic Dravidian architectural features such as gopurams, mandapas, and intricate stone sculptures.
- Venad Kingdom: From the 12th century onward, Kanniyakumari came under the Venad rulers, who introduced elements of Kerala architecture, particularly in residential and palace buildings using timber and sloping roofs.
- Travancore Kingdom: During the 18th century, Travancore rulers, especially Maharaja Marthanda Varma, promoted the construction of magnificent wooden palaces, including the Padmanabhapuram Palace, while also supporting temple renovation and preservation.
- Portuguese Missionary Period (16th Century): Portuguese missionaries, led by figures such as St. Francis Xavier, established churches along the coast. They introduced European architectural styles, including Gothic arches, bell towers, and vaulted ceilings.
- Dutch Influence: The Dutch contributed to military and administrative architecture and influenced certain construction techniques and building layouts during their presence on the Malabar Coast.
- British Colonial Period: British rule brought modern civic buildings, educational institutions, roads, and churches, blending colonial architectural styles with local traditions.
- Post-Independence Heritage Conservation: After India's independence and the merger of Kanniyakumari district with Tamil Nadu in 1956, government agencies such as the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology, and the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Department have undertaken conservation and restoration of the region's historic monuments, ensuring the preservation of its unique architectural heritage.

WOODEN ARCHITECTURE OF KANNIYAKUMARI

Padmanabhapuram Palace

The Padmanabhapuram Palace, located in Padmanabhapuram near Thuckalay in Kanniyakumari district, is one of the finest examples of traditional Kerala wooden architecture in India. Originally built in 1601 CE by Iravi Varma Kulasekhara Perumal of the Venad Kingdom and later expanded by Maharaja Marthanda Varma in the 18th century, it served as the capital of the erstwhile Travancore Kingdom.

Major Features

- Constructed mainly of durable teak, rosewood, jackwood, and other hardwoods.
- Intricately carved wooden ceilings, pillars, doors, and brackets showcasing exceptional craftsmanship.
- Sloping tiled roofs designed to withstand heavy monsoon rains.
- Natural ventilation through spacious courtyards, windows, and corridors, ensuring thermal comfort.
- Earthquake-resistant timber framework using traditional mortise-and-tenon joints without iron nails.
- Highly polished black floors prepared from a mixture of lime, charcoal, burnt coconut shell, egg white, plant extracts, and other natural ingredients, providing remarkable durability and a smooth finish.
- Courtyards and building layouts planned according to Vastu Shastra, ensuring proper light, ventilation, and spatial harmony.

Architectural Components

The palace complex consists of several interconnected structures, each serving a distinct administrative or residential purpose:

- Mantrasala (Council Chamber): The royal audience hall where the king conducted administrative meetings and received ministers.
- Thai Kottaram: The oldest section of the palace, noted for its exquisite wooden carvings and traditional Kerala architectural style.
- Natakasala: A performance hall used for classical dance, music, and cultural programmes during royal ceremonies.
- Upparikka Malika: A multi-storeyed mansion that housed the royal treasury, private chambers, and ceremonial rooms.
- Queen's Palace: Residential quarters reserved for the royal women, featuring elegant wooden interiors and private courtyards.
- Clock Tower: A historic clock tower equipped with a centuries-old mechanical clock that continues to function.
- Secret Passages: Concealed corridors believed to have been used by the royal family during emergencies.
- Wooden Corridors: Long, pillared verandas connecting different sections of the palace, providing shade, ventilation, and ease of movement.

Temple Architecture

Kumari Amman Temple

The Kumari Amman Temple, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent in Kanniyakumari, is one of the most revered Shakti temples in India. Dedicated to Goddess Kanya Kumari, an incarnation of Goddess Parvati, the temple has been an important centre of pilgrimage for centuries. The present structure reflects a harmonious blend of classical Dravidian temple architecture and Kerala architectural traditions, adapted to the coastal climate of the region. Successive Pandya, Chola, Vijayanagara, Nayak, and Travancore rulers contributed to its construction, renovation, and maintenance.

Architectural Features

- Granite Sanctum (Garbhagriha): The sanctum houses the idol of Goddess Kanya Kumari carved from stone. Thick granite walls provide structural strength and protect the shrine from the harsh coastal environment.
- Gopuram: The temple entrance is marked by a beautifully constructed Dravidian-style gopuram adorned with sculptures of deities, celestial beings, and decorative motifs, symbolizing the sacred nature of the temple.
- Mandapas: Several pillared halls are provided for devotees to assemble, perform rituals, and participate in religious festivals. These mandapas display finely carved stone pillars and traditional architectural ornamentation.
- Circumambulatory Path (Prakaram): A spacious pathway surrounds the sanctum, enabling devotees to perform pradakshina (circumambulation), an important ritual in Hindu worship.
- Sculptured Pillars: The temple contains intricately carved granite pillars depicting Hindu deities, mythological scenes, floral patterns, and geometric designs, reflecting the artistic excellence of South Indian sculptors.
- Temple Tank: A sacred temple tank located within the complex is used for ritual purification and forms an integral part of traditional temple planning.
- Coastal Orientation: The temple faces the confluence of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Its

architectural layout is designed to withstand strong sea winds and saline conditions, while offering a unique spiritual connection with the surrounding seascape.

The Kumari Amman Temple is not only a significant religious centre but also an outstanding example of South Indian temple architecture, illustrating the successful integration of Dravidian structural design with Kerala-style roofing elements suited to the climatic conditions of the region. It remains one of the most important cultural and architectural landmarks of Kanniyakumari.

OTHER IMPORTANT TEMPLES OF KANNIYAKUMARI

Nagaraja Temple, Nagercoil

The Nagaraja Temple is a renowned shrine dedicated to Nagaraja (Serpent King) and is an important centre of serpent worship in South India. The temple is unique for its blend of Dravidian and Kerala architectural styles, featuring a traditional wooden roof, granite structures, and intricate carvings. It attracts devotees seeking blessings for prosperity and relief from Naga Dosha.

Adikesava Perumal Temple, Thiruvattar

The Adikesava Perumal Temple is one of the oldest and most sacred Vaishnavite temples in South India. Dedicated to Lord Vishnu (Adikesava Perumal), the temple is noted for its massive stone walls, beautifully carved pillars, granite corridors, and Kerala-style wooden roofing. It is considered an architectural precursor to the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.

Thirparappu Mahadevar Temple

Located on the banks of the Kodayar River, the Thirparappu Mahadevar Temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva. The temple is famous for its picturesque setting near the Thirparappu Waterfalls, granite sanctum, pillared halls, and traditional Dravidian architectural features. It is an important pilgrimage and tourist destination.

Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Temple

The Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Temple is one of the most revered temples dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathi in southern India. The temple reflects Kerala-style architecture with sloping tiled roofs and simple yet elegant structures. It is especially famous for the annual Mandaikadu Kodai Festival, which attracts thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

St. Xavier's Church, Kottar

St. Xavier's Church, located at Kottar in Kanniyakumari district, was founded by St. Francis Xavier in 1544 CE during his missionary work on the Fishery Coast. It is one of the oldest and most important Christian pilgrimage centres in South India and reflects the influence of Portuguese ecclesiastical architecture blended with later Gothic elements.

- Gothic Arches: Pointed arches enhance the height and elegance of the church interior.
- Bell Towers: Prominent towers house church bells and serve as important architectural landmarks.
- Long Nave: A spacious central hall accommodates large congregations during worship.
- Ribbed Ceilings: Vaulted ceilings supported by ribs provide structural strength and aesthetic appeal.
- Decorative Stained Glass: Colourful stained-glass windows depict scenes from the life of Jesus Christ and Christian saints.
- Portuguese Façade: The front elevation displays classical Portuguese architectural features, including symmetrical design, ornamental detailing, and a grand entrance.

The church stands as an important symbol of the spread of Christianity and the fusion of European and South Indian architectural traditions in Kanniyakumari.

Our Lady of Ransom Church

The Our Lady of Ransom Church, located on the seashore at Kanniyakumari, is one of the most prominent Catholic churches in South India. Dedicated to Our Lady of Ransom (Our Lady of Ransom Shrine), the church is an important pilgrimage centre and a landmark overlooking the confluence of the Bay of Bengal, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean. The present structure, completed in the early 20th century, reflects the influence of Neo-Gothic architecture introduced by European missionaries.

Architectural Features

- Neo-Gothic Architecture: Characterized by pointed arches, vertical emphasis, and elegant decorative details.
- White Façade: The bright white exterior symbolizes purity and stands out against the coastal landscape.
- Twin Towers: Two tall spires dominate the skyline and serve as a prominent visual landmark.
- Coloured Glass Windows: Beautiful stained-glass windows depict scenes from the life of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.
- Decorative Interiors: The church features finely carved altars, statues, and ornamental designs that enhance its spiritual atmosphere.
- High Vaulted Ceiling: The lofty ceiling provides spaciousness, improved ventilation, and an impressive visual effect typical of Gothic churches.

The Our Lady of Ransom Church is an outstanding example of the fusion of European Neo-Gothic architectural traditions with the cultural and religious landscape of Kanniyakumari, making it one of the district's most significant heritage monuments.

Village Churches

Numerous village churches across Kanniyakumari district reflect a harmonious blend of European missionary architecture and local Tamil–Kerala building traditions. These churches were constructed using locally available materials and indigenous craftsmanship while incorporating Christian architectural planning.

Key Features:

- Kerala-style timber roofing suitable for the tropical climate.
- European church floor plans with a central nave and altar.
- Tamil decorative motifs incorporated into doors, windows, and façades.
- Indigenous wooden craftsmanship visible in roofs, pillars, and interior furnishings.

These village churches demonstrate the successful adaptation of European ecclesiastical architecture to the local environment and cultural traditions, illustrating the architectural diversity of Kanniyakumari.

Architectural Confluence

The architectural heritage of Kanniyakumari is distinguished by the coexistence of Dravidian, Kerala, Travancore, Portuguese, British, and local Tamil architectural traditions. Temples display monumental granite structures and sculptural excellence, wooden palaces represent the mastery of Kerala timber architecture, and churches introduce European Gothic and Neo-Gothic styles. This fusion of diverse traditions reflects

centuries of cultural exchange, religious harmony, and artistic innovation, making Kanniyakumari one of the most unique architectural landscapes in South India.

Decorative Arts

The monuments of Kanniyakumari are enriched with diverse decorative elements that showcase the artistic skills of local craftsmen.

- Wooden Carvings
- Floral and geometric motifs.

Mythological scenes from Hindu epics.

- Birds, elephants, and lotus medallions.
- Intricate carvings on ceilings, doors, and pillars.
- Stone Sculptures
- Images of Hindu deities.
- Sculptures of dancers and musicians.
- Mythical Yalis and lions.
- Finely carved temple pillars and mandapas.
- Church Decorations
- Statues and sculptures depicting Biblical themes.
- Colorful stained-glass windows.
- Beautifully carved wooden altars.
- Ornamental pulpits and decorative interior woodwork.

These artistic elements not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the monuments but also reflect the rich cultural, religious, and artistic heritage of Kanniyakumari.

CONCLUSION

Kanniyakumari district represents a unique architectural landscape where wooden palaces, Hindu temples, and Christian churches coexist as enduring symbols of its rich historical and cultural heritage. The Padmanabhapuram Palace exemplifies the excellence of traditional Kerala wooden architecture, while temples such as the Kumari Amman Temple and Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple showcase the grandeur of Dravidian architectural traditions. Historic churches, including St. Xavier's Church at Kottar and the Our Lady of Ransom Church, reflect the influence of Portuguese and European ecclesiastical architecture. The architectural heritage of Kanniyakumari is the result of centuries of interaction among the Chera, Pandya, Venad, and Travancore rulers, together with the contributions of European missionaries and indigenous craftsmen. This fusion of Tamil, Kerala, and European architectural styles demonstrates the region's cultural diversity, religious harmony, and artistic excellence. Preserving these monuments through scientific conservation, sustainable heritage management, and community participation is essential for safeguarding this invaluable legacy. As a living repository of history, religion, and architecture, Kanniyakumari continues to inspire scholars, architects, conservationists, and visitors, reaffirming its significance as one of South India's most remarkable centres of cultural and architectural heritage.

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SACRED VOWS AND SHARED HERITAGE: WOMEN AS CUSTODIANS OF THE ANNUAL URUS AND APPAN KAVU TRADITIONS AT THUCKALAY PEER MOHAMMAD OLIYULLAH DARGAH

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the critical yet under-documented role of women as custodians of living heritage at the Peer Mohammad Oliyullah Dargah in Thuckalay, Kanniyakumari district. The Dargah exemplifies religious syncretism where Muslim, Hindu, and Christian communities participate in shared devotional practices within a region historically recognized as a confluence of diverse faiths. This study draws on oral history interviews, field observations conducted during the annual Urus in the month of Rajab, and secondary historical sources. The study argues that women function as the primary drivers of ritual continuity, inter-faith participation, and cultural transmission. Islamic institutions often appear through patriarchal administrative lenses, yet women demonstrate agency through the orchestration of sacred vows (nercha), the ceremonial preparation of Appan Kavu offerings, and the intergenerational transfer of oral traditions, Tamil Sufi verses, and local folk narratives. The findings reveal that women serve as informal yet powerful custodians of a syncretic heritage. This heritage reinforces communal harmony and pluralistic identity in Kanniyakumari. This research contributes to the broader discourse on women's roles in preserving non-formal, female-driven religious traditions in South India. The study highlights the necessity of documenting such practices for a holistic understanding of regional history. The study also addresses the theoretical implications of female custodianship in Sufi shrine traditions. Conventional historiographical frameworks privilege institutional and male-centered narratives, and this study challenges such frameworks. The study foregrounds women's voices and experiences. The study seeks to recuperate a marginalised dimension of religious history. The study offers a more inclusive account of Kanniyakumari's cultural tapestry.

Keywords: *Peer Mohammad Oliyullah, Thuckalay Dargah, Urus, Appan Kavu, Women's Agency, Syncreticism, Kanniyakumari, Sufi Traditions, Oral History, Intangible Heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu, occupies a unique and hallowed position in the cultural and religious geography of the Indian subcontinent. People describe the region evocatively as "the land's end where the Indian Peninsula dips in the confluence of the Arabian Sea on the west, the Bay of Bengal in the east and the Indian Ocean on the south." This region has historically served as a vibrant meeting point for diverse faiths, languages, and traditions. The district's strategic location at the tip of the Indian subcontinent made it a crossroads of maritime trade, cultural exchange, and religious interaction from antiquity. Hindu mythology accords the district sacred status. The renowned Kanyakumari Temple stands dedicated to the virgin Goddess who slayed the demon Banasura. The region also bears deep imprints of Christian missionary activity dating back to the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in the sixteenth century. Islamic Sufi traditions travelled along the Malabar Coast and entered the Tamil hinterland. The Travancore kingdom, of which Kanyakumari formed an integral part until its merger with the Indian Union in 1956, nurtured this pluralistic ethos. Scholars have termed these spaces "shared sacred landscapes" where multiple communities

co-existed, intermarried, traded, and co-created religious spaces over several centuries. This historical legacy of coexistence has rendered Kanniyakumari a microcosm of India's composite culture. Religious boundaries remain permeable in this region. Communal harmony is not merely an administrative ideal but a lived reality. Within this rich tapestry of faiths and festivals stands the Peer Mohammad Oliyullah Dargah at Thuckalay, a shrine of considerable historical and cultural significance. The shrine takes its name from the Sufi saint Peer Mohammad Oliyullah. The saint is also renowned for his Tamil Islamic mystical poetry collectively known as Gnana Pugazh (Songs of Wisdom). The Dargah represents a distinctive syncretic tradition where communal boundaries dissolve in shared devotion. Unlike many Muslim shrines that maintain linguistic and cultural distance from local populations, this Dargah is distinguished by its intimate and organic connection to Tamil Sufi literary traditions. The saint's compositions in Tamil represent a remarkable synthesis of Islamic theology and Tamil devotional poetics. These compositions draw upon the rich heritage of Bhakti literature. They articulate Sufi metaphysical concepts in an idiom accessible to the local populace. This linguistic and cultural embeddedness facilitated the Dargah's appeal beyond Muslim communities. The shrine created a sacred space where Hindus and Christians could participate in shared devotional practices without compromising their own religious identities. The annual Urus commemorates the saint's death anniversary. This festival transforms the shrine into a vibrant carnivalesque space. Thousands of devotees converge on the shrine during this period. Women across religious affiliations assume central roles in sustaining rituals. They prepare ceremonial offerings. They transmit cultural knowledge across generations.

Statement of the Problem

Analysts often examine Islamic institutions and Sufi shrines through patriarchal administrative frameworks that privilege male clergy, trustees, and theological authorities. The lived reality of shrine-based devotional traditions reveals a markedly different picture. Women remain historically marginalised in formal religious hierarchies. Yet women emerge as the primary custodians of intangible heritage at the Thuckalay Dargah. Their contributions range from votive practices and culinary preparations to the preservation of devotional songs, oral histories, and ritual protocols. These contributions constitute the very backbone of the annual festival. Scholarly attention to female religious participation in southern Travancore's Sufi shrine culture remains conspicuously limited. Existing historiography has largely focused on prominent shrines in urban centers such as Nagore, Ervadi, and Thiruparankundram. These studies examine institutional structures, pilgrimage economies, and political dimensions of these sacred spaces. The southern Travancore region possesses distinctive social and religious dynamics. This region has received less attention. The role of women has been almost entirely overlooked. This paper seeks to address this significant lacuna. The study foregrounds women's agency. The study documents their multifaceted roles in sustaining the Urus and Appan Kavu traditions. This research contributes to a more inclusive and nuanced

understanding of regional religious history.

Objectives of the Study

1. This study examines the agency of women in carrying out sacred vows (nercha) during the annual Urus, including the practice of overnight prayer stays (Iratnam) and other votive observances.
2. This study documents women's roles in the preparation of ceremonial offerings (Appan Kavu / Niyath), including the large-scale production of sweet rice cakes and the organization of communal feasts.
3. This study analyzes the ways women foster communal harmony and inter-religious solidarity within the shrine space. The study examines how women facilitate participation across Muslim, Hindu, and Christian communities.
4. This study explores the intergenerational transmission of oral traditions, devotional songs, festival customs, and ritual knowledge through women's networks.
5. This study situates these practices within the broader historical and cultural context of Kanniyakumari's tradition of religious pluralism and syncretic worship.

Literature Review

The Peer Mohammad Oliyullah Dargah traces its origins to the Sufi saint of the same name. The saint is believed to have lived and preached in the Thuckalay region during the seventeenth or eighteenth century. This period witnessed Islamic mysticism making deep and enduring inroads into Tamil-speaking territories. Unlike many Sufi orders that maintained Persian or Urdu as their literary languages, the Thuckalay tradition embraced Tamil as its medium of spiritual expression. The saint's compositions in Tamil bear the collective title Gnana Pugazh. These compositions represent a remarkable literary and theological achievement. They synthesize Islamic monotheism with the emotive vocabulary of Tamil Bhakti poetry. These verses continue to be sung during the Urus festival. They articulate Sufi concepts of divine love, spiritual yearning, and mystical union in a language that resonates with the local population's devotional sensibilities. The saint's tomb forms the focal point of the Dargah complex. This tomb has become a site of pilgrimage over centuries. Muslims, Hindus, and Christians seek the saint's intercession for various needs. The architectural features of the Dargah include its distinctive dome, courtyard, and ancillary structures. These features reflect a synthesis of Islamic and local building traditions. This synthesis further attests to the shrine's embeddedness in the regional cultural landscape.

The historiography of Sufi shrine culture in Tamil Nadu has largely concentrated on prominent and well-documented shrines in urban centers and coastal towns. Scholars such as Susan Bayly, Richard Eaton, and others have examined the institutional structures, pilgrimage economies, and political dimensions of these sacred spaces. These scholars have explored the ways Sufi shrines functioned as nodes of social organization, economic exchange, and political patronage. More recent scholarship has attended to the literary traditions associated with Tamil Sufism. This scholarship includes the works of authors such as Umaru Pulavar, Kunangudi Mastan Saheb, and others who composed in Tamil. The southern Travancore region possesses distinctive social, linguistic, and religious dynamics. The Travancore kingdom's policies and the region's unique demographic composition shaped these dynamics. This region has

received considerably less attention. The role of women in sustaining shrine traditions has been almost entirely absent from this historiography. This absence reflects broader trends in religious studies that have privileged male-centered narratives. The present study addresses this dual lacuna. The study focuses on a lesser-known shrine in an under-studied region. The study foregrounds the role of women. The study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that seeks to recover women's religious agency in South Asian contexts.

The concept of syncretism offers a useful and analytically robust framework for understanding the Thuckalay Dargah's significance within the broader landscape of Kanniyakumari's religious culture. Some spaces maintain rigid religious boundaries. The Dargah functions differently. The Dargah operates as a "shared sacred landscape" where multiple religious communities participate in common devotional practices. Participants do not necessarily relinquish their distinct religious identities. Women serve as primary agents of domestic religious practice and cultural transmission. Women navigate these boundaries with remarkable fluidity. They participate in Islamic devotional rituals such as offering prayers at the saint's tomb. They distribute niyath (offerings). They participate in the communal feast. They simultaneously maintain their own religious affiliations and practices. This cross-faith participation resonates with broader regional patterns. Kanniyakumari's religious landscape encompasses Hindu temples with their elaborate rituals. It includes Christian churches with their liturgical traditions. It features Muslim shrines with their devotional practices. This landscape has historically accommodated cross-community participation and exchange. The Thuckalay Dargah thus exemplifies a living tradition of religious pluralism. This tradition challenges both orthodox theological positions and secular theories of religious conflict.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology. The methodology combines intensive fieldwork observations, in-depth oral history interviews, and archival research. The research team conducted semi-structured interviews with forty women pilgrims, local female residents of Thuckalay, and shrine attendants during the annual Urus festival. The team purposively selected interviewees to represent diverse age groups. The sample included young women in their twenties. It included elderly women in their eighties. The sample represented diverse religious affiliations including Muslim, Hindu, and Christian communities. The sample also represented varied levels of involvement in festival activities. Some participants were occasional participants. Others were lifelong devotees. The research team conducted interviews in Tamil, the spoken language of the region. The team later translated the interviews into English for analysis. The interviews explored women's experiences of participation in the Urus. They examined women's understanding of ritual practices. They documented women's knowledge of the saint's traditions. They captured women's perspectives on the significance of their roles. The research team carried out participant observation over three consecutive days during the Urus in the month of Rajab. Local contacts assisted the researcher in gaining access to the shrine and its activities. The observations

focused on ritual performances, spatial dynamics within the shrine compound, culinary preparations, and inter-faith interactions. The researcher maintained detailed field notes throughout the observation period.

District gazetteers form an important component of the secondary source base. These gazetteers provide valuable historical and ethnographic information on the region's demographics, economy, and religious institutions. Historical records of the Travancore region offer insights into the region's social and religious dynamics during the colonial and pre-colonial periods. These records include administrative reports, settlement records, and missionary accounts. Tamil Sufi literature provides the textual foundation for understanding the shrine's literary and theological traditions. This literature includes the works of Peer Mohammad Oliyullah and other Tamil Muslim poets. Published academic papers on Sufism in South India provide the scholarly context for the study. Papers on religious syncretism and women's religious agency provide additional scholarly context. The Census of India reports offer demographic data on Kanniyakumari's religious composition and population trends. The research team has critically evaluated all sources for their biases and limitations.

The research team obtained informed consent from all interview participants. The team paid particular attention to ensuring that women understood the nature and purpose of the research. The team ensured that women understood their right to withdraw at any time. The team guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality. The research output uses pseudonyms instead of participants' names. An institutional ethics committee reviewed and approved the research protocol.

Women's Agency In Rituals And Sacred Vows (Nercha)

The practice of making vows (nercha) to the saint constitutes a central and highly visible element of the Urus festival. This practice encompasses a wide range of devotional observances undertaken by women pilgrims. Women typically make these vows in times of personal crisis, illness, infertility, or family distress. These vows involve promises to perform specific acts of devotion if the saint intercedes on the devotee's behalf. Upon the fulfillment of their petitions, women return to the Dargah during the Urus to fulfill their vows. They often bring family members who witness and participate in the ritual. The most common votive practice involves Iratnam, which refers to overnight prayer stays in the Dargah compound. During these stays, women engage in continuous recitation of prayers, devotional songs, and the dhikr (remembrance of God). These overnight vigils are physically demanding. They require women to remain awake and engaged in worship through the night. Women often undergo these vigils with minimal rest or food. Yet women undertake these observances with remarkable devotion. They regard these practices as acts of spiritual discipline and gratitude to the saint.

The significance of these practices lies not merely in their ritual content. These practices also afford women agency within social contexts that often restrict their mobility and autonomy. Women exercise choice in making and fulfilling vows. They negotiate familial responsibilities and expectations. They assert their spiritual autonomy within the domestic sphere. The Dargah provides a legitimate and socially sanctioned space for women. Women can articulate their concerns in this space.

They can seek divine intervention. They can participate in public religious life beyond the confines of their households. For many women, the Urus offers a rare opportunity to travel, socialize with other women, and participate in a collective religious experience. This experience affirms their identity and agency. The vows themselves reflect women's concerns and priorities. These concerns include health, family welfare, fertility, and prosperity. These concerns may differ from men's more public or political concerns. In this sense, the votive practices at the Dargah constitute a form of women's religious agency. This agency operates parallel to formal institutional structures. It sometimes operates in tension with those structures.

Spatial Dynamics

Thousands of pilgrims converge on the Dargah compound during the high-density festival days. Women navigate the physical space with strategic awareness and careful negotiation during this period. Overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure create challenges. The absence of formal gender segregation in certain areas creates additional challenges. Despite these challenges, women establish their presence in key ritual spaces. They achieve this through a combination of collective action, temporal strategy, and embodied practice. Observations reveal that women often gather near the saint's tomb during peak hours. They maintain proximity to the sacred center. They exercise their right to access the most sacred space. They achieve this through forming small groups or clusters. These groups create protective spaces that enable movement through the crowds. They time their visits to avoid the most congested periods. They still participate in the key ritual moments.

The spatial negotiations reflect women's determination to access spiritual resources. They also accommodate the practical constraints of festival participation. Older women, in particular, command respect and receive space from younger pilgrims. This pattern reflects age-based hierarchies that coexist with gendered dynamics. Women also claim space through their bodies. They sit, kneel, or prostrate in specific locations. These actions mark their presence and assert their right to participate in the rituals. The courtyard spaces become predominantly female spaces during certain hours. Communal meals are served in these spaces. Women organize the distribution of food. They manage the logistics of feeding thousands of pilgrims. The domestic sphere extends into the public space of the Dargah. Women bring their household skills and organizational capacities to bear on the festival's requirements.

Crossing Faith Boundaries

The enthusiastic participation of Hindu and Christian women in Islamic devotional rituals represents one of the most striking and significant features of the Thuckalay Urus. This practice has deep historical roots in the region's syncretic traditions. Hindu women appear in large numbers and participate visibly. They offer prayers at the Dargah. They distribute niyath (offerings) to other pilgrims. They tie threads or cloths on trees or railings as votive markers. They participate in the communal feast. These women often describe their devotion to the saint in terms that blend Islamic and Hindu devotional idioms. They refer to Peer Mohammad Oliyullah as a "peer" or "saint" whose blessings transcend religious boundaries. They may also maintain practices at Hindu temples and

Christian churches. They engage in a pluralistic devotional repertoire. This repertoire reflects the region's composite religious culture.

This cross-faith participation reinforces the Dargah's status as a shared sacred space. Religious identities coexist without conflict or competition in this space. The absence of overt proselytization creates conditions that enable inter-faith participation. The emphasis on healing and blessing facilitates this participation. The inclusive hospitality extended to all visitors facilitates this participation. The Dargah offers a relatively accessible religious space for women. This contrasts with Hindu temples that maintain strict purity regulations, spatial restrictions, or caste-based exclusion. It also contrasts with Christian churches that have established liturgical structures and hierarchical priesthoods. The fluidity of women's participation across religious boundaries thus serves as a microcosm of Kanniyakumari's broader tradition of religious pluralism and communal harmony.

Culinary Heritage And The Tradition Of Appan Kavu

The ceremonial preparation and distribution of Appan (sweet rice cakes) constitutes one of the most visible, materially significant, and culturally symbolic expressions of women's central role in the Urus festival. This tradition bears the name Appan Kavu. This tradition involves the large-scale, meticulously organized preparation of rice-based offerings. The community subsequently distributes these offerings as niyath to pilgrims, visitors, and the poor. The process begins several days before the festival. Women organize the procurement of ingredients such as rice, jaggery, coconut, ghee, cardamom, and other flavorings. They coordinate the complex logistics of cooking in domestic and community settings.

The preparation of Appan is governed by traditional recipes and techniques. Families have preserved these recipes within households. They have transmitted these recipes across generations. The cook soaks and grinds the rice to a specific consistency. They mix the ground rice with jaggery and coconut. They shape the mixture into small cakes. They fry or steam the cakes until golden and fragrant. The recipes are not written down. Women carry them in their embodied knowledge and memory. The scale of production during the Urus is extraordinary. Some households prepare hundreds or even thousands of cakes to contribute to the communal offering. The preparation involves extended networks of women. Mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, and neighbors come together to work collectively. They transform the domestic kitchen into a site of festive labor, social exchange, and religious service.

Domestic to Public Sphere

The transition of culinary knowledge, labor, and products from domestic kitchens to public distribution during the festival illustrates women's remarkable ability to expand their sphere of influence and visibility. Families preserve recipes and techniques within households. They transmit these through intimate intergenerational teaching. During the Urus, this domestic expertise is mobilized for explicitly communal and public purposes. Private culinary skill transforms into public religious service and social contribution. The spatial journey of the Appan moves from the kitchen hearth to the courtyard of the Dargah. From there, it travels to the hands of thousands of pilgrims. This journey mirrors the journey of women's labor from the private to the

public domain. It renders visible work that is normally invisible.

The sheer scale of production requires extensive coordination among women from multiple households. This coordination necessitates communication, planning, resource pooling, and division of labor. Women who may not interact regularly in their daily lives come together during the festival. They strengthen social bonds and community networks. The distribution of the Appan as niyath carries religious merit. Women who contribute their labor and resources earn spiritual rewards (sawab). They believe these rewards will benefit them and their families. The public acknowledgment of women's contributions occurs through the acceptance and consumption of their offerings by the community. This acknowledgment provides recognition and validation of their labor. Their labor is often taken for granted in domestic contexts.

Socio-Economic Dimensions

Beyond its ritual and symbolic significance, the Appan Kavu tradition has substantial socio-economic implications that shape women's lives and community dynamics. Women play a central role in sourcing ingredients. This role often involves significant financial expenditure and planning. The cost of ingredients, particularly during festival periods when prices may rise, represents a substantial investment for many households. Women manage these household budgets. They make decisions about resource allocation for festival contributions. They balance these decisions against other domestic expenses.

The organization of family gatherings and the hosting of visitors during the Urus also falls primarily to women. Women manage accommodation, additional food preparation, and hospitality for relatives and friends who travel to Thuckalay for the festival. The Urus serves as a major social occasion. It strengthens kinship ties. It reinforces community bonds. It provides opportunities for social exchange and marriage negotiations. Participation in the niyath distribution carries prestige and religious merit for families. The scale and quality of offerings reflect on the family's social standing and piety. Women manage domestic resources, social networks, and cultural capital. Women orchestrate these complex activities. They ensure the successful management and perpetuation of the festival's economic, social, and symbolic dimensions.

Oral Traditions And Cultural Transmission

The preservation and transmission of oral traditions constitutes another crucial and perhaps the most enduring dimension of women's custodianship at the Thuckalay Dargah. Women preserve and transmit a rich repertoire of lullabies, devotional songs, ballads, and local folk narratives. These oral forms recount the life, miracles, and teachings of Peer Mohammad Oliyullah. Women compose and perform these songs in Tamil. They blend Islamic themes with local folk motifs, musical forms, and devotional sensibilities. They create a distinctive genre that resonates with the broader Tamil devotional tradition exemplified by the Bhakti and Sufi poetic heritage.

The study of proverbs and oral forms used by women in Kanniyakumari district reveals that women employ traditional oral forms not only for religious expression. They also use these forms "to advise their children and to comfort them when they are in distress." Similarly, the devotional songs associated with the Dargah serve both didactic and emotional functions. These songs convey moral

stories and religious teachings. They provide spiritual solace and emotional support. Women perform these songs in domestic contexts. They sing while they work, care for children, or observe religious practices. They also perform these songs in public contexts during the Urus festival. In this context, the songs become part of the collective devotional experience. The melodies and lyrics are deeply embedded in women's embodied knowledge. These songs evoke emotional responses. They reinforce community bonds through shared performance.

Intergenerational Transfer

The transmission of festival customs, ritual protocols, taboos, sacred narratives, and devotional songs occurs primarily through women's networks. The intimate relationships between grandmothers, mothers, and daughters form the core of these networks. This intergenerational transfer is largely informal. It is remarkably systematic. It ensures the continuity of traditions in the face of modernization, urbanization, education, and social change. Younger women learn through observation, participation, oral instruction, and embodied practice. They learn the proper procedures for preparing offerings. They learn the significance of specific rituals. They learn the protocols for entering sacred spaces. They learn the stories associated with the saint. They learn the songs that express devotion.

Grandmothers play a particularly significant role in this transmission. They serve as bearers of long-term memory and tradition. They recount stories of the saint's miracles. They describe how festivals were celebrated in earlier times. They explain the meanings behind specific practices. These narratives connect contemporary practitioners to their history. They provide a sense of continuity and identity. Mothers reinforce these traditions through their own practice. They invite their daughters to participate in preparations. They encourage their involvement in the Urus. In this way, the traditions are not only transmitted but also adapted and re-contextualized for each generation. They remain living traditions rather than static relics of the past.

Women's role as preservers of oral traditions assumes added significance in the absence of extensive written documentation. The saint's Gnana Pugazh exists in written and published form. Many of the local songs, stories, ritual practices, and customary observances are transmitted orally. These are not recorded in any textual source. Women serve as primary storytellers, singers, and ritual practitioners. They maintain this intangible heritage. They contribute to the community's collective memory and identity. The loss or attenuation of women's knowledge would represent an irreplaceable loss to the region's cultural heritage.

Discussion And Findings

The findings of this study reveal that women function as informal yet powerful custodians of living heritage at the Thuckalay Dargah. They actively shape the character, continuity, and meaning of the annual Urus tradition. Women are far from passive attendees, marginal participants, or mere spectators. Women are central to the festival's organization, performance, and intergenerational reproduction. Their agency manifests through multiple, interconnected dimensions:

- Ritual Performance: Women lead votive practices and prayer sessions. These include the physically demanding overnight vigils (Iratnam). They organize collective recitations of devotional songs.

They ensure the proper performance of rituals.

- Culinary Production: Women organize and execute large-scale food preparation. They manage the procurement of ingredients. They coordinate collective cooking. They distribute offerings to thousands of pilgrims.
- Spatial Negotiation: Women actively claim and maintain presence in sacred spaces. They navigate crowded conditions. They establish their visibility through collective action and embodied practice.
- Oral Transmission: Women preserve and transmit devotional songs, narratives, ritual knowledge, and customary practices across generations. They ensure the continuity of intangible heritage.
- Inter-faith Bridge-Building: Women facilitate cross-community participation. They create conditions that enable Muslim, Hindu, and Christian women to participate together in shared devotional practices.
- Socio-Economic Organization: Women manage the economic and social dimensions of the festival. This includes resource allocation, hospitality, and social networking.

These multiple roles reveal that women's custodianship is not confined to a single domain. Their custodianship encompasses a comprehensive range of activities that sustain the festival and its associated traditions. This custodianship is informal. It is not institutionalized or codified. Yet it is powerful because it is grounded in everyday practice, embodied knowledge, and social networks.

Pluralism in Action

The Thuckalay Dargah exemplifies the broader theme of religious pluralism that characterizes Kanniyakumari's cultural landscape. This pluralism distinguishes the region from areas marked by communal conflict or religious polarization. The visible and enthusiastic participation of Muslim, Hindu, and Christian women in shared devotional practices demonstrates that communal harmony is not merely an abstract ideal. It is not just a governmental slogan or administrative objective. It is a lived reality enacted through embodied ritual practice. The Dargah provides a space where participants can experience and express their devotions. They do not require compromise of their own religious identities.

The female experience at the Dargah reflects what scholars have termed "syncretism from below." This refers to grassroots religious co-existence that transcends formal theological boundaries, institutional structures, and official religious doctrines. This syncretism is not a product of theological reflection or elite patronage. It emerges from the everyday interactions, shared needs, and common aspirations of ordinary women. It is grounded in the practical concerns of healing, family welfare, and economic security. These concerns transcend religious differences. The Dargah offers a solution to these concerns. Women respond to this offer. They participate in its traditions, regardless of their formal religious affiliations.

Implications for Understanding Kanniyakumari's Cultural Tapestry

The study contributes to the conference sub-theme on "The Role of Women in Preserving Cultural Traditions and Festivals of Kanniyakumari." The study demonstrates that women's contributions are integral and indispensable to the region's cultural fabric. They are not peripheral or supplementary. The Dargah traditions

highlight the complex interplay of gender, religion, and heritage. This interplay occurs in a district characterized by religious diversity, social complexity, and historical pluralism. Women's role as custodians of intangible heritage aligns with observations from other local contexts. Women in tribal communities, for instance, "play a crucial role in the stewardship of natural resources and biodiversity and provide environmental services at local, regional and international levels." In both cases, women's knowledge, labor, and agency are vital for community sustainability and cultural continuity.

The study also challenges conventional historiographical frameworks. These frameworks privilege institutional structures, formal leadership, textual traditions, and male-centered narratives. The study foregrounds women's experiences and contributions. The study proposes a more inclusive and decentralized approach to documenting and understanding religious history in Kanniyakumari and South India more broadly. This approach has implications for heritage preservation. Efforts to document and safeguard intangible heritage must attend to women's roles. They must incorporate women's perspectives and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the critical and under-documented role of women as custodians of the annual Urus and Appan Kavu traditions at the Thuckalay Peer Mohammad Oliyullah Dargah. The study conducted extensive fieldwork. The study conducted oral history interviews with forty women participants. The study engaged with secondary historical sources. The study has documented the ways women exercise significant agency in ritual performance, culinary production, spatial negotiation, oral transmission, inter-faith bridge-building, and socio-economic organization. The Dargah serves as a shared sacred landscape. Muslim, Hindu, and Christian women participate in devotional practices in this landscape. These practices reinforce communal harmony, religious pluralism, and regional identity. Women's agency operates through informal networks. It operates through embodied knowledge. It operates through everyday practice rather than through formal institutional structures. Yet this agency is no less powerful or consequential for the sustainability of the tradition.

This research makes several significant contributions to scholarship on Sufi shrine traditions in Tamil Nadu, religious history in South India, and gender studies. The study foregrounds the role of women. Existing historiography has almost entirely overlooked this dimension. The study challenges male-centered narratives. It proposes a more inclusive understanding of religious traditions.

The study contributes to gender studies. It demonstrates that women's agency in religious contexts is not necessarily mediated through formal leadership, official titles, or public recognition. This agency is enacted through lived practice, cultural performance, and the reproduction of everyday life. The study highlights the importance of documenting non-formal, oral, and female-driven traditions. Such documentation is essential for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Tamil Nadu's historical and cultural landscape. The study also contributes to the growing body of scholarship on religious pluralism and syncretism in South Asia. It provides a detailed ethnographic and historical account of a specific site and tradition.

The study opens several avenues for further research. Comparative studies could examine the ways regional variations in social structure, religious demography, and historical context shape women's participation in Sufi shrine traditions across different parts of Tamil Nadu and South India. The role of women in preserving intangible heritage in other religious traditions of Kanniyakumari merits systematic investigation. This includes Hindu temples with their festival traditions. It also includes Christian churches with their celebrations. This research could be compared with the findings of this study. Research on female devotion in other Sufi shrines across the region could explore whether similar patterns of female custodianship operate elsewhere. This research could examine what factors enable or constrain women's participation. Longitudinal research could examine the ways women's roles are changing. Changes in response to modernization, education, urbanization, social mobility, and religious and political contexts could be examined. Finally, the implications of these findings for heritage preservation policy and practice deserve further attention. This is particularly important in light of the vulnerability of intangible heritage to loss through social change and the marginalization of women's knowledge.

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RITUALS AND RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MASI FESTIVAL AT SUCHINDRAM THANUMALAYAN TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT

The Masi Festival at Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple is one of the most significant annual religious celebrations in Tamil Nadu. The festival combines Agamic temple rituals, processional worship, music, and community participation, reflecting the continuity of South Indian temple traditions. This paper examines the historical background, ritual practices, and religious significance of the Masi Festival and analyses its role in preserving the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple.

Keywords: *Suchindram, Thanumalayan Temple, Masi Festival, Temple Rituals, Agama, Religious Heritage, Tamil Culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Temple festivals occupy a central place in the religious, cultural, and social life of Tamil Nadu. They are not merely occasions of worship but also serve as living expressions of the state's rich cultural heritage, preserving centuries-old religious traditions, rituals, art forms, and community values. Celebrated according to the Tamil calendar, these festivals commemorate the divine presence of the presiding deity and provide opportunities for devotees to participate in collective worship, fulfil vows, and seek divine blessings. Temple festivals also promote social cohesion by bringing together people from different communities and regions, thereby strengthening local identity and preserving intangible cultural heritage. In addition to their religious significance, they contribute to the local economy through pilgrimage, trade, handicrafts, and cultural performances.

Among the ancient temples of South India, the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, situated in Suchindram of Kanniyakumari District, occupies a distinctive position in the religious history of Tamil Nadu. The temple is dedicated to Thanumalayan, a unique manifestation of the Hindu Trinity Sthanu (Lord Shiva), Mal (Lord Vishnu), and Ayan (Lord Brahma) represented in a single Lingam. This concept symbolizes the unity of the three principal deities of Hinduism and reflects the inclusive religious philosophy of South Indian temple tradition. The temple is renowned for its magnificent seven-tiered Rajagopuram, exquisite granite sculptures, musical stone pillars, towering Hanuman idol, Kerala-style wooden roof structures, and numerous inscriptions belonging to the Pandya, Chola, Vijayanagara, Nayak, and Travancore periods. These architectural and epigraphical features make the temple an important centre for historical, archaeological, and religious studies.

The Masi Festival (Masi Mahotsavam), celebrated annually during the Tamil month of Masi (February–March), is one of the grandest festivals of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple. Conducted according to Saiva and Vaishnava Agamic traditions, the festival includes a series of sacred rituals such as Dwajarohanam (flag hoisting), daily abhishekam, alankaram,

deeparadhana, vahana processions, temple car (Therottam), Theerthavari (holy bath), and Dhwaja Avarohanam (flag lowering). Thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala participate in these celebrations, transforming the temple into a vibrant centre of devotion and cultural activity. The festival not only reinforces religious faith but also preserves traditional temple music, ritual arts, folk performances, and community participation that have continued for centuries.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SUCHINDRAM THANUMALAYAN TEMPLE

Geographical Location

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple is situated in Suchindram, a historic temple town in Agastheeswaram Taluk of Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. It lies approximately 13 km from Kanyakumari, 7 km from Nagercoil, and is well connected by road and rail. The temple occupies a strategic location between the fertile Nanjil Nadu region and the Arabian Sea, an area historically influenced by both the Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions. Owing to its location within the erstwhile Kingdom of Travancore, the temple exhibits a remarkable blend of Dravidian and Kerala architectural styles, making it one of the most distinctive sacred monuments in South India.

Historically, Suchindram formed an important religious centre on the ancient pilgrimage route connecting Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Kanyakumari. Pilgrims travelling to the Kumari Amman Temple traditionally visited Suchindram to worship Thanumalayan, thereby enhancing its importance as a major centre of Shaiva and Vaishnava devotion.

Origin and Legends of Suchindram

The name "Suchindram" is derived from the Sanskrit words "Suchi" (purity) and "Indra" (the king of the gods). According to the Sthala Purana, Indra incurred the sin of seducing Ahalya, the wife of Sage Gautama. Cursed by the sage, Indra wandered in search of absolution. It was at this sacred place that he performed severe penance and worshipped the Trimurti. Pleased with his devotion, the deities absolved him of his sins and restored his purity. Consequently, the place came to be known as Suchindram, meaning "the place where Indra became purified." Another tradition states that the Divine Trinity—Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma—manifested themselves in a single Lingam to bless the devotees and demonstrate the unity of the three principal deities of Hinduism. This unique manifestation distinguishes the temple from other South Indian temples. The temple is also associated with the Ramayana tradition. It is believed that Hanuman visited Suchindram while searching for Sita, and the temple enshrines one of the tallest Hanuman idols in Tamil Nadu, measuring about 22 feet in height.

The Trimurti Concept (Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma)

The presiding deity of the temple is Thanumalayan, a composite form representing the Hindu Trinity:

- Sthanu – Lord Shiva
- Mal – Lord Vishnu
- Ayan – Lord Brahma

The name Thanumalayan is derived from these three divine manifestations. Unlike most Hindu temples dedicated to a single deity, the Suchindram Temple symbolises the philosophical unity of creation, preservation, and destruction represented by Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva

respectively. This unique theological concept promotes harmony among the major Hindu traditions Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Brahma worship. Rituals performed in the temple incorporate both Saiva and Vaishnava Agamic traditions, reflecting religious inclusiveness and spiritual unity. The temple therefore occupies a special position in South Indian religious history as an important centre of syncretic worship.

Contributions of the Cholas, Pandyas, Vijayanagara Rulers, Nayaks and Travancore Kings

The architectural evolution of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple reflects the patronage of several South Indian dynasties over many centuries.

- The Early and Later Pandyas were among the earliest royal patrons who expanded the temple and endowed it with lands for ritual maintenance. Several inscriptions record grants for daily worship, temple festivals, lamps, and feeding houses.
- During the Chola period, structural additions were made to the temple complex. The Cholas encouraged the construction of stone mandapas, sculptural embellishments, and institutionalised temple administration. Their patronage strengthened Suchindram as an important regional pilgrimage centre.
- Under the Vijayanagara Empire, the temple witnessed considerable architectural development. Large pillared halls, festival mandapas, and elaborate sculptures displaying Vijayanagara artistic traditions were added during this period.
- The Madurai Nayaks further enriched the temple by constructing additional halls, corridors, and decorative sculptures. The famous musical stone pillars, noted for producing different musical notes when gently struck, are among the outstanding artistic achievements associated with the later medieval phase of the temple.
- The greatest patronage, however, came from the Travancore Kings, particularly from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Since Suchindram formed part of the Travancore Kingdom before the reorganisation of states in 1956, the rulers generously endowed the temple with lands, ornaments, and financial assistance. They renovated the sanctum, maintained the temple festivals, strengthened the administrative structure, and preserved both the Dravidian and Kerala architectural elements visible today.

Temple Inscriptions and Architectural Features

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple is an important repository of epigraphical and architectural heritage. Numerous inscriptions engraved on the temple walls belong to the Pandya, Chola, Vijayanagara, Nayak, and Travancore periods. These inscriptions record royal donations, tax exemptions, land grants, maintenance of perpetual lamps, temple festivals, renovation works, and administrative regulations. The imposing seven-tiered Rajagopuram, rising to approximately 40 metres (about 134 feet), dominates the eastern entrance. Among its most celebrated features are the musical stone pillars, which produce distinct musical tones when tapped, demonstrating the advanced knowledge of acoustics possessed by medieval South Indian craftsmen. The temple also houses a monumental 22-foot Hanuman statue, one of the tallest monolithic Hanuman images in Tamil Nadu.

MASI FESTIVAL: ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Meaning of the Tamil Month Masi

The Tamil month Masi (mid-February to mid-March) is the eleventh month in the traditional Tamil calendar and occupies an important place in the religious life of Tamil Nadu. The month generally coincides with the Kumbha (Aquarius) phase of the solar calendar and is considered highly auspicious for temple worship, sacred baths, and annual festivals. The month is also associated with Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu, and Shakti, making it a spiritually significant period for temple festivals throughout South India. At the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, the Masi Festival reflects these traditional beliefs through a series of elaborate rituals conducted according to Saiva and Vaishnava Agamic traditions, emphasizing devotion, community participation, and the continuity of sacred customs.

Temple Administration and Festival Organization

The successful conduct of the Masi Festival depends upon systematic planning and coordinated participation by temple authorities, priests, hereditary functionaries, artisans, musicians, and devotees. At present, the temple is administered by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR & CE) Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu, which oversees financial administration, maintenance of temple properties, festival arrangements, and preservation of heritage structures.

The religious rituals are performed by trained priests according to Agamic injunctions. Various temple functionaries including Archakas, Oduvars, Vedic scholars, Nadaswaram musicians, Thavil artists, flower decorators, craftsmen, and volunteers participate in different aspects of the festival. The festival generally begins with Dwajarohanam, followed by daily Abhishekam, Alankaram, Archana, Deeparadhana, Vahana Processions, Temple Car Festival (Therottam), Theerthavari, and concludes with Dhwaja Avarohanam. Thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala participate in these ceremonies, while local communities provide voluntary service (Uzhavara Pani and Annadhanam) to support pilgrims.

The temple administration also coordinates security, sanitation, traffic management, medical facilities, and cultural programmes to ensure the smooth conduct of the festival.

Rituals of the Masi Festival

The Masi Festival (Masi Mahotsavam) is the most significant annual celebration of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple. Conducted according to the Saiva and Vaishnava Agamas, the festival usually extends over several days and consists of a sequence of sacred rituals symbolizing purification, divine grace, and the renewal of the spiritual relationship between the deity and devotees. Every ceremony is performed according to long-established temple traditions, with the active participation of priests, hereditary temple servants, musicians, artisans, and thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Dwajarohanam (Flag Hoisting): The Beginning of the Festival

The Masi Festival formally begins with the Dwajarohanam (Kodiyetram or Flag Hoisting). This ceremony marks the official commencement of the annual festival and invites all celestial beings and devotees to participate in the sacred celebrations.

The ritual begins with special Ganapati Homam, Punyahavachanam (purification ceremony), Vedic chanting, and Agamic worship. The sacred festival flag, bearing the emblem of Nandi, the

divine vehicle of Lord Shiva, is ceremonially hoisted on the Dwajasthambam (flag mast) amidst the chanting of Vedic hymns, temple music played on the Nadaswaram and Thavil, and the enthusiastic participation of devotees.

Daily Pujas

Daily worship during the Masi Festival follows the prescriptions of the Agamas and includes a series of sacred rituals performed at fixed intervals throughout the day.

 Abhishekam, Alankaram, Archana, Deeparadhana, Vahana Processions, Silver Rishabha Vahanam, Simha Vahanam,

CONCLUSION

The Masi Festival of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple is one of the most important religious and cultural festivals of southern Tamil Nadu. Rooted in the Agamic tradition and enriched by centuries of historical development, the festival reflects the continuity of Tamil temple worship and the enduring spiritual heritage of the region. The unique worship of Thanumalayan, representing the Hindu Trinity of Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma, distinguishes the temple as a symbol of religious harmony and theological unity. The study has demonstrated that the rituals associated with the Masi Festival including Dwajarohanam, Abhishekam, Alankaram, Archana, Deeparadhana, Vahana Processions, Therottam, Theerthavari, and Dhwaja Avarohanam are not merely ceremonial observances but expressions of profound religious symbolism. Each ritual conveys philosophical ideas of purification, divine grace, protection, renewal, and the intimate relationship between the deity and devotees. The festival also illustrates the integration of Agamic prescriptions with local customs that have been preserved through generations. Historically, the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple has enjoyed the patronage of the Pandyas, Cholas, Vijayanagara rulers, Nayaks, and Travancore kings, whose contributions ensured the expansion of the temple, the establishment of permanent endowments, and the regular conduct of annual festivals. The inscriptions, architectural features, and ritual traditions of the temple provide valuable evidence for understanding the political, religious, and cultural history of South India.

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ROLE OF SELF-HELP MOVEMENT IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Self-Help Movement has emerged as one of the most effective approaches for promoting women empowerment particularly in developing countries like India. Through, the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), women from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds are encouraged to save regularly, access credit, develop entrepreneurial skills and participate in income generating activities. Beyond economic benefits, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) contribute to enhancing women's self confidence, leadership abilities, decision making power and awareness of their legal, social and political rights. This study examines the role of the Self-Help Movement in empowering women by exploring its contribution to economic independence, social development, educational advancement, political participation, psychological empowerment and community development. It also highlights the evolution of the Self-Help Group (SHG) movement in India, the support provided by government agencies and financial institutions and the challenges faced by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in achieving sustainable development. The study concludes that, the Self-Help Movement is a powerful instrument for poverty allevation, financial inclusion, gender equality and rural development. By fostering collective action and self-reliance, Self-Help Groups have significantly improved the socio-economic status of women, enabling them to become active contributors to their families communities and the nation's overall development. Women Self-Help Movement is an important movement in the process of development of women in rural areas.

Keywords
Distinctive, Affordable, Predominantly, Philosophy, Revolutionized.

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute nearly half of the world's population and play a vital role in the social, economic, cultural and political development of every nation. Members contribute regular savings, participate in meetings, discuss common issues, share experiences and make collective decisions regarding financial and social matters. This process not only improves their economic conditions, but also strengthens democratic participation and social solidarity. Self-help is based on the principle that, individuals can achieve greater success collectively than individually. Through group participation, members gain confidence, acquire new skills and develop leadership abilities that enable them to improve, both their personal lives and their communities. A Self-Help Group (SHG) is a small voluntary association of individuals, generally consisting of 10–20 members, who come together to save regularly, create a common fund, and provide financial assistance to one another through small loans. Most Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India consist predominantly of women belonging to economically weaker sections of society.

Characteristics of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are small, voluntary groups of individuals who come together with a common purpose of improving their social and economic conditions. They are usually formed by people from similar socio-economic backgrounds who face common challenges and are willing to support one another. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become an effective tool for promoting financial inclusion, poverty reduction, women empowerment, and community development. Their success depends on several key characteristics that distinguish them from other community organizations.

One of the most important characteristics of an Self-Help Group (SHG) is **voluntary membership**. Individuals join the group of their own free will without any force or pressure. Members share common interests, needs and goals, which helps create unity and co-operation within the group. Since participation is voluntary, members are generally committed to the group's activities and actively contribute to its success. Another important characteristic is the **small size of the group**. An Self-Help Group (SHG) typically consists of 10 to 20 members. A smaller group allows members to know each other well, build mutual trust and participate effectively in discussions and decision making. It also makes it easier to manage meetings, maintain financial records and resolve conflicts whenever they arise.

Regular savings form the foundation of every Self-Help Group. Each member contributes a fixed amount of money at regular intervals, such as weekly or monthly. Although the amount saved may be small, the combined savings create a common fund that can be used to provide loans to members in times of need. This habit of saving encourages financial discipline and helps members develop the ability to manage their money wisely. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are based on the principle of **mutual trust and cooperation**. Members trust one another to save regularly, repay loans on time and support group decisions. This trust reduces the need for collateral when loans are provided within the group. Cooperation among members strengthens relationships and creates a supportive environment where individuals work together to solve common problems.

A key feature of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is **democratic functioning**. Every member has an equal opportunity to express opinions, participate in discussions and vote on important decisions. Leadership responsibilities are often shared or rotated among members, ensuring that no single person dominates the group. Democratic practices encourage transparency, accountability and equal participation.

Regular meetings are another defining characteristic of Self-Help Groups. Members meet at fixed intervals to discuss savings, loan repayments, financial matters and issues affecting the group or the community. These meetings provide a platform for sharing experiences, solving problems, planning future activities and strengthening unity among members. Consistent meetings help maintain discipline and ensure the smooth functioning of the group.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) maintain **proper records and transparency** in all financial transactions. They keep registers for savings, loans, repayments, attendance and meeting minutes. Accurate record-keeping ensures accountability and builds

confidence among members. Transparency in financial management reduces misunderstandings and promotes honesty within the group.

One of the major characteristics of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is **internal lending**. The money collected through members savings is lent to members who require financial assistance for emergencies, education, healthcare, agriculture, small businesses, or other productive purposes. Loans are provided at reasonable interest rates and members are expected to repay them within the agreed period. This system enables members to access credit without relying on moneylenders who often charge very high interest rates.

Another important characteristic is **financial discipline**. Members are expected to save regularly, attend meetings, repay loans on time and follow the rules established by the group. This discipline helps build a strong financial culture and improves member's creditworthiness. Groups with good financial discipline often become eligible for loans from banks and other financial institutions.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) also emphasize **self-reliance and self-management**. Members manage the affairs of the group independently, including decision making, financial management and conflict resolution. They learn to solve problems collectively without depending entirely on external agencies. This develops confidence, leadership abilities and organizational skills among members.

A significant characteristic of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is their focus on **women's empowerment**. In many countries, especially India, most Self-Help Groups (SHGs) consist primarily of women. Participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) helps women gain financial independence, improve their decision making abilities, develop leadership skills and increase their participation in family and community affairs. As a result, women become more confident and contribute more effectively to household and community development.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) also promote **social development** in addition to economic growth. Members work together to address issues such as education, health, sanitation, nutrition, environmental protection, gender equality and social justice. They organize awareness programs, encourage children to attend school, support healthcare initiatives and participate in community development activities. Thus, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) contribute to the overall well-being of society.

Another important characteristic is the **collective responsibility** of members. Every member shares responsibility for the success of the group. Members support each other during financial difficulties, monitor loan repayments and encourage responsible behavior. Collective responsibility creates a strong sense of belonging and motivates members to work for the common good.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) often establish **linkages with banks and government institutions**. After demonstrating good performance through regular savings, meetings and loan repayments, many Self-Help Groups (SHGs) become eligible for bank loans and government development programs. These linkages provide members with greater financial resources, skill development opportunities, entrepreneurship training and access to welfare schemes.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) encourage **income generation and entrepreneurship**. Members use loans and training to start or expand small businesses, engage in farming, livestock rearing, handicrafts, tailoring, food processing and other income-generating activities. These initiatives increase household income, create employment opportunities, reduce poverty and improve the overall standard of living.

Self-Help Groups are characterized by voluntary membership, small group size, regular savings, mutual trust, democratic functioning, transparency, financial discipline, internal lending, self-reliance, collective responsibility, women's empowerment and community participation. These characteristics make Self-Help Groups (SHGs) an effective model for improving the economic and social conditions of individuals, particularly women and marginalized communities. By promoting cooperation, financial inclusion and sustainable development, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) continue to play a vital role in empowering people and strengthening communities.

Objectives of the Self-Help Movement

The Self-Help Movement pursues multiple economic, social, educational and developmental objectives.

Economic Objectives

The economic objective of the Self-Help Movement is to improve the financial condition of its members. It encourages people to save small amounts of money regularly, helping them build financial security and develop good saving habits. Another important objective is to provide easy and affordable access to credit. Members can borrow loans from the group's common fund at reasonable interest rates, reducing their dependence on moneylenders and costly sources of finance. The Self-Help Movement also promotes income-generating activities. It supports members in starting small businesses, farming, livestock rearing, handicrafts and other self-employment opportunities, enabling them to earn a stable income.

A further objective is to reduce poverty and improve the standard of living. By increasing income and creating employment opportunities, the movement helps families meet their basic needs, such as food, education, healthcare and housing. The Self-Help Movement aims to achieve long-term economic self-reliance. It encourages financial discipline, entrepreneurship and effective use of resources, enabling members to become economically independent and contribute to the development of their communities.

Social Objectives

The social objective of the Self-Help Movement is to promote unity and cooperation among its members. By working together, members develop mutual trust, strengthen social relationships and solve common problems collectively. Another important objective is to empower women and other disadvantaged groups. The movement encourages them to participate in decision making, develop leadership skills and gain confidence to improve their social status. The Self-Help Movement also aims to improve education, health and sanitation. It creates awareness about literacy, children's education, healthcare, nutrition, hygiene and clean living practices, leading to a better quality of life. A further objective is to promote gender equality and social justice. The movement works to reduce discrimination, encourage equal opportunities and support the rights and dignity of all members, especially women. The Self-Help Movement seeks to

build stronger and more responsible communities. It encourages members to participate in community development activities, protect the environment and work together for the overall welfare and sustainable development of society.

Educational objectives

The educational objective of the Self-Help Movement is to promote literacy and education among its members. It encourages adults and children to attend school, continue their education, and understand the importance of lifelong learning. Another important objective is to create awareness about financial literacy. Members are taught how to save money, manage household finances, maintain records and use credit responsibly, helping them make informed financial decisions.

The movement also aims to develop knowledge and skills through training programmes. Members receive training in entrepreneurship, vocational skills, modern farming techniques, handicrafts and other income-generating activities to improve their employment opportunities. A further objective is to educate members about health, hygiene, nutrition, sanitation and environmental protection. Through awareness programmes, the movement helps people adopt healthy lifestyles and contribute to a cleaner and safer community. The Self-Help Movement seeks to build leadership and decision making skills. It encourages members to participate in group discussions, solve problems collectively and take active roles in community development, making them more confident and responsible citizens.

Political objectives

The political objective of the Self-Help Movement is to encourage active participation in democratic processes. It motivates members to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens and to take part in local governance. Other important objective is to develop leadership qualities among members, especially women. By participating in group activities and decision making, members gain the confidence and skills needed to take up leadership roles in their communities.

The movement also aims to increase awareness of government policies, schemes and welfare programmes. Members are encouraged to access these benefits and work with local authorities for the development of their communities. A further objective is to promote transparency, accountability and collective decision making. Members learn to discuss issues openly, make democratic decisions and ensure that group activities are managed fairly and responsibly. The Self-Help Movement seeks to strengthen grassroots democracy by encouraging members to participate in local bodies such as village councils and community committees. This helps ensure that the needs and concerns of the people are represented in the planning and implementation of development programmes.

Historical Evolution of the Self-Help Movement

The philosophy of self-help has existed for centuries through community cooperation, rotating savings groups and mutual aid societies. However, the organized Self-Help Group (SHG) movement developed during the late twentieth century.

International Development

Several developing countries introduced community based microfinance programmes during the 1970s and 1980s to combat rural poverty. These initiatives demonstrated that poor

households, especially women, possessed the capacity to save regularly and repay loans with high reliability. The success of community lending models inspired governments and development organizations worldwide to promote group based microfinance as an effective strategy for poverty reduction.

Development in India

India witnessed rapid expansion of the Self-Help Movement during the 1980s and 1990s.Initially, several voluntary organizations organized rural women into small savings groups. Their success attracted the attention of policymakers and financial institutions. A major milestone was the launch of the Self-Help Group (SHG) Bank Linkage Programme by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 1992. The programme connected Self-Help Groups directly with commercial banks, regional rural banks and Co-operative banks, enabling members to obtain institutional credit without collateral. This initiative revolutionized rural finance and expanded financial inclusion for poor women. Subsequently, the Government of India introduced several poverty allevation programmes that incorporated Self-Help Groups (SHGs) as key institutions for rural development. Schemes such as, the Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) and later the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) strengthened Self-Help Groups (SHGs) by providing financial assistance, capacity building, skill development and market support.

Dimensions of Women Empowerment

Economic empowerment enables women to earn income, own productive assets, manage financial resources and become economically independent. Social empowerment improves, women's status within families and communities while reducing discrimination and promoting gender equality. Education enhances women's knowledge, skills, confidence and employment opportunities while improving family welfare.

Political empowerment enables women to participate in governance, leadership, policy formulation and democratic institutions. Psychological empowerment develops self confidence, self esteem, leadership qualities, motivation and decision making abilities. Legal empowerment promotes awareness of constitutional rights, legal protection, inheritance rights, property ownership and access to justice.

Relationship between the Self-Help Movement and Women Empowerment

The Self-Help Movement directly contributes to women empowerment by integrating economic development with social transformation. Regular savings and access to credit enable women to establish small businesses, increase household income and reduce dependence on informal moneylenders. Participation in group meetings enhances communication skills, leadership abilities and confidence. Women become more aware of health, education, sanitation, legal rights and government welfare schemes. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) also strengthen women's collective bargaining power within families and communities. Through collective action, women address issues, such as domestic violence, child marriage, alcoholism, dowry, sanitation, education and environmental protection. The movement therefore promotes holistic empowerment by improving women's economic security, social recognition, political participation and psychological well being.

Importance of the Self-Help Movement

The Self-Help Movement plays an

important role in improving the economic and social conditions of people, especially women and low-income families. It encourages individuals to work together, solve common problems and become self-reliant through collective effort. One of the major contributions of the movement is the promotion of regular savings and access to affordable credit. Members can save small amounts of money and obtain loans when needed, reducing their dependence on moneylenders and improving their financial security.

The movement also creates opportunities for employment and income generation. Through training, skill development and support for small businesses, members can increase their earnings and improve their standard of living. Another important aspect of the Self-Help Movement is the empowerment of women. It builds self-confidence, develops leadership qualities and encourages women to participate in decision-making within their families, communities and local institutions.

The movement promotes social development by creating awareness about education, health, sanitation, gender equality and environmental protection. It helps members adopt better practices that contribute to healthier families and stronger communities. The Self-Help Movement strengthens community participation and sustainable development. By encouraging cooperation, mutual support and democratic decision-making, it helps build responsible citizens and contributes to the overall progress and development of society.

CONCLUSION

The Self-Help Movement has become one of the most significant grassroots initiatives for women empowerment and rural development. By encouraging collective savings, access to institutional credit, entrepreneurship and mutual Co-operation, Self-Help Groups have transformed the lives of millions of women, particularly those from economically and socially marginalized communities. Beyond financial assistance Self-Help Groups (SHGs) foster self-confidence, leadership, awareness and active participation in community development, enabling women to exercise greater control over their lives and contribute to the well being of their families and society. Women empowerment is a multidimensional process that encompasses economic independence, social equality, educational advancement, political participation, psychological confidence and legal awareness. The Self-Help Movement supports all these dimensions by creating opportunities for women to develop skills, access resources, participate in decision making and strengthen their collective voice. As a result Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become a powerful mechanism for reducing poverty, promoting inclusive development and advancing gender equality in India.

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A CONFLUENCE OF FAITHS AND FESTIVALS AT KANYAKUMARI BAGAVATHY AMMAN TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari,the southernmost district of India, is renowned forits unique cultural landscape, where diverse religious traditions, historical influences, and vibrant festivals have coexisted for centuries. The district represents a remarkable confluence of faiths, with its temples, churches, and mosques reflecting a shared legacy of spiritual harmony and cultural diversity. Among its many cultural celebrations, the Navaratri Festival atthe Kanyakumari Bhagavathy Amman Temple stands as one of the oldest and most significant festivals, embodying the district's rich religious and cultural heritage. This paper examines the historical evolution, mythological foundations, and cultural significance of the Navaratri Festival while exploring its role in preserving the traditions of Kanyakumari. It highlights the festival's contribution to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage through temple rituals, classical music, Bharatanatyam,traditional processions, and active community participation. The study also discusses the festival's influence on heritage tourism, local livelihoods, and the transmission of cultural values across generations. By presenting the Navaratri Festival as a representative expression of Kanyakumari's cultural identity, the paper demonstrates how festivals continue to strengthen communal harmony, preserve Tamiltraditions, and reinforce the district's enduring legacy as a vibrant confluence of faiths and festivals.

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari is one of India's most culturally significant districts, located at the meeting point of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean. Beyond its geographical importance, it is recognized as a land where different religions, languages, and traditions coexist harmoniously. The district reflects the shared heritage of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, making it a living example of cultural unity.

Festivals are an essential part of Kanyakumari's identity because they preserve rituals, folklore, music, dance, and community values that have evolved over centuries. Among the various festivals celebrated, the Navaratri Festival of the Kanyakumari Bhagavathy Amman Temple is one of the oldest and most revered. Dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathy, this nine-day celebration symbolizes the triumph of good over evil while showcasing Tamil traditions, classical arts, and collective devotion. This paper explores how the Navaratri Festival reflects the cultural tapestry of Kanyakumari and demonstrates the enduring relationship between faith, history, and community life.

Objective of the Study

•To study the historical evolution of the Navaratri Festival in Kanyakumari.
•To understand its cultural and religious significance.
•To examine its role in preserving traditional arts and community identity.
•To analyze its contribution to heritage tourism and cultural sustainability.

History Of Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari has been an important cultural center since the Sangam period. It was ruled by the Pandyas, Cheras, Cholas, Venad rulers, and later the Travancore Kingdom before becoming part

of Tamil Nadu in 1956. Due to its strategic coastal location, it became a meeting place for merchants, pilgrims, and scholars from different regions.

The district's name originates from Goddess Kanya Kumari, the virgin form of Goddess Parvati, who is believed to have performed penance here. Over centuries, the temple became one of South India's most sacred pilgrimage centers.

Period	**Historical Development**
Sangam Age (300 BCE–300CE)	Early references to Kumari in Tamil literature and trade routes
Pandya Period	Expansion of temple worship and religious traditions
Chola Period	Development of temple administration and arts
Travancore Rule	Renovation and preservation of temple festivals
1956	Kanyakumari merged with Tamil Nadu
Present	International pilgrimage and heritage tourism destination



Cultural Importance

Kanyakumari is known for:

• Religious harmony among Hindus, Christians, and Muslims.

• Rich traditions of temple architecture, folk arts, and classical music. • Coastal customs influenced by maritime trade.

• Handicrafts, weaving, and traditional cuisine.

• Pilgrimage and culturaltourism.

Why Festivals Are Important

Festivals:

• Preserve ancient customs.

• Strengthen family and community relationships.

• Promote traditional music, dance, and handicrafts.

• Encourage intergenerational knowledge transfer.

• Boost local businesses and tourism.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Navaratri Festival is more than a religious celebration; itis a living expression of Kanyakumari's cultural identity. The festival strengthens social unity by bringing together people from different communities in acts of worship, cultural performances, and voluntary service. It preserves classical arts such as Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music, devotional poetry, and temple craftsmanship while passing these traditions to younger generations. The celebration also reflects the values of compassion, discipline, and collective responsibility that are deeply rooted in Tamil culture. Through its rituals and public celebrations, the festival demonstrates how faith becomes a medium for cultural continuity, making Navaratri an integral part of Kanyakumari's intangible cultural heritage.





HISTORY OF NAVARATRI FESTIVAL

Historical Origin

The Navaratri Festival has been celebrated in Kanyakumari for several centuries. Historical records indicate that the temple received royal patronage during the Pandya and Travancore periods, enabling the development of elaborate rituals and annual processions.



Mythological Background

According to Hindu tradition, Goddess Kanya Kumari performed intense penance while awaiting her marriage to Lord Shiva.

When the marriage did not take place, she remained an eternal virgin goddess dedicated to protecting the world. Navaratri celebrates the divine power (Shakti) of the Goddess and her victory over evil forces.

Ancient Traditions

•Lighting of traditional oil lamps.
•Daily Vedic chanting.
•Temple chariot processions.
•Offering flowers and coconuts.
•Classical music performances.
•Community feasts.
•Folk storytelling based on the Goddess.

Tamil Literature References

From புறநானூறு (Purananuru 1G2):

"யாதும் ஊரே, யாவரும் கேளிர்.."

Meaning: Every place is our home and everyone is our kin. This line beautifully reflects the inclusive spirit seen during Kanyakumari's festivals.

Temple Inscriptions

The Bhagavathy Amman Temple contains inscriptions from different historical periods, especially during the Pandya and Travancore administrations. These inscriptions record:

•Donations by kings
•Gifts of land
•Temple maintenance
•Festival expenses
•Endowments for lamps
•Ritual arrangements
•Administrative records

These inscriptions prove that the temple has continuously functioned as a religious and cultural institution for many centuries. They also show that festivals such as Navaratri received royal patronage and community support. Collections of Kanyakumari inscriptions have been published by the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology under the editorship of R. Nagaswamy.

Mythological Background Legend of Goddess Kanyakumari

According to the temple's Sthalapurana, Goddess Parvati incarnated as Kanya Kumari, an eternal virgin goddess, to destroy the demon Banasura, who had obtained a boon that only an unmarried maiden could kill him.

The goddess performed severe penance at Kanyakumari to marry Lord Shiva. Due to divine intervention, the marriage did not take place, allowing her to remain a virgin goddess. She later defeated Banasura and became the protector of the region.

This legend forms the religious foundation of the Bhagavathy Amman Temple and is central to the rituals observed during Navaratri, which celebrates the divine power (Shakti) and victory of good over evil. The temple's official history preserves this tradition.

Cultural Significance

The Navaratri Festival functions as a living repository of Kanyakumari's intangible cultural heritage. Beyond its religious purpose, it preserves traditional knowledge systems, ritual practices, temple architecture, devotional music, Bharatanatyam, local craftsmanship, and oral traditions. The festival also reinforces intergenerational transmission of cultural values, ensuring continuity between historical traditions and contemporary society.

Cultural Impact

Social Impact

•Strengthens community relationships.
•Promotes religious harmony.
•Preserves cultural identity.
•Encourages youth participation.

Economic Impact

•Supports local vendors.
•Benefits hotels and restaurants.
•Promotes handicraft sales.
•Generates employment during the festival season.

Tourism

The Navaratri Festival attracts thousands of pilgrims and tourists every year. Visitors experience not only the spiritual atmosphere but also Kanyakumari's architecture, coastal landscape, local cuisine, and traditional arts, making the festival an important driver of heritage tourism.

Preservation

Future preservation efforts should include:

•Digital documentation of rituals and oral traditions.

•Cultural education programs in schools and colleges.
•Sustainable tourism practices to protect heritage sites.
•Financial support for traditional artists and temple musicians.
•Collaboration between cultural institutions and local communities.

CONCLUSION

The Navaratri Festival of the Kanyakumari Bhagavathy Amman Temple represents the enduring cultural heritage of Kanyakumari. It reflects the harmonious coexistence of faith, art, history, and community values that define the district's unique identity. By preserving ancient traditions while adapting to contemporary society, the festival continues to inspire devotion, cultural pride, and social unity. Protecting such living traditions is essential for safeguarding the rich cultural tapestry of Kanyakumari for future generations.

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CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Religious festivals are celebrations organized by specific groups that adhere to a specific Religion or set of beliefs. Finding out more about the cultural significance of religious holidays in Kanyakumari District is the aim of this project. It facilitates the friendly unification of individuals from various cultures and religions, eliminating any miscommunication. Additionally, it's a fantastic opportunity to spread love and peace around the globe. A festival is an exceptional occasion observed by a community that focuses on one or more distinctive features of that community, its religion, or its cultures. A festival is a typical example of both the interrelationship between high and low cultures and globalization. Agriculture is a major origin, second only to religion and folklore. Since food is such an essential resource, harvest season is often linked to festivals. Autumnal celebrations combine religious remembrance with gratitude for bountiful harvests. In Tamil Nadu, Dravidian culture is important.

KEY WORDS: *Holiday, Entertainment, Folk dance, Festivals, and Religion.*

INTRODUCTION

Entertainment played a crucial role in every Tamil person's life portion. More ancient Tamil literary works mention about a few of the popular celebrations and events. Within For the most part, Dravidian culture embodies the spirit of chivalry. Kanyakumari District was a significant early Chera country, which had a glorious and far-off past. The Epics and Ithihas as discuss it in terms of festivals, fairs, and cultural significance. Back then, people didn't have any kind of caste-based discrimination. Every king commemorated religious and cultural holidays starting in the eighth century. Additionally, they might offer entertainment, which was especially significant to nearby communities prior to the arrival of entertainment produced in large quantities. Celebrations that highlight Ethnic or cultural subjects also aim to educate the community. Members of their customs; elders' participation in sharing Experience and tales offer a way to bring people together. Between families. Festival attendees are frequently inspired by a need for companionship, socialization, and escape; the Practice has been viewed as a way to establish geographical Connection, a sense of belonging, and flexibility. Usually, a festival is only accessible to groups that adhere to a specific deity or phenomenon, despite the fact that members of other faiths taking part. For example, non-Hindus also savor the Hindu religious holiday of holi in a secular country such as India. Every year, Kanyakumari District celebrates festivals. Lengthy and as diverse and vibrant as the nation's people and landscapes. We express our opinions and emotions. Through fairs and festivals, which are a

crucial part of Dravidian customs. Every community observes its own holidays and Festivities, but people who practice different religions are not excluded. From commemorating them as well. Dravidian culture emphasizes a Secular country, and a variety of celebrations Communities and religions each have official holidays. Kanyakumari commemorates several religious and cultural celebrations, and the ambiance is filled with excitement and enjoyment. While holidays like Navratri are with much fanfare, the Cape Comorin October's festival adds a little bit or grandeur to the celebrations over the course of three days, there are a number of cultural events that present guests to the different facets of Kanyakumari. There are a few of the important Kanyakumari festivals. They are cars made by Sucindram. Festival, Vavubali festival, Pogal festival, and Mandaikadu Annual Festival, Onam festival, Peer Mohammed Dargah festival, Christmas and Easter celebrations, etc.

An Overview of History

The Dravidian tradition has included festival celebrations. Since the beginning of time. The literature and texts of the Dravidians have abundance of details about festivals, which were times to Respect Mountains, rivers, plants, and gods. Dravidian celebrations And European celebrations focus more on community Services. During Kanyakumari's holidays, fasting, prayer, and Festivities that are significant to society and culture. Among them are Challenging physical activities in addition to dance, music, and Performances in theater. Other events featured Karakattam, Folk Dances, Mayil Attam, Kavadi, Therukkuttu, Chilampattam, and Kummi Villupattu, Karadi Attam, Puli Attam, Oyil Attam, and Attam. The most important holiday is the Sucindram Car Festival. It was Held to commemorate the event. There were many festivals. By Muslims, many of whom had ties to the Shia religion. Imam Husain's martyrdom and the birthday of the Prophet were the two main holidays. A significant Dravidian occasion that was The Tamilnadu people celebrated the Pongal Festival of Gathering. People organize cultural events for this occasion and Prayed to a god of nature to increase their agricultural output. One more The Onam is a traditional Indian celebration. It commemorates the triumph of Superior to evil. It continues for an entire week. Disagreements between during the celebration, colors appear. Individuals splash one another with paint and colored water. Festival festivities have been a component of the Lemueria era's Dravidian cultural legacy. There is a lot of information in Dravidian texts and literature. During festivals, which were times to honor plants, gods, Mountains and rivers. Prayer, fasting, and social significance are all parts of Kanyakumari's celebrations. Holidays are celebrated for a variety of religious and Communal festivities in India, a secular country. Since certain holidays are on the "limited list," which gives the employer the Choice of whether or not to declare them a holiday. Even foreign when visiting India, tourists incorporate festivals into their trip. Because they are crucial to comprehending Indian culture as In addition to Dravidian culture. There are two categories of festivals. They are both secular and religious festivities. On the same day, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and others Religious organizations observe their own holidays, either by themselves or If all of them celebrate the same holidays. It's a holiday. That different communities that adhere to

a particular Faith or philosophy. Most religious organizations have important celebrations in their local communities. Individuals who follow a specific religion and its customs take part in religious celebrations. It's a holiday. That different communities that adhere to a particular Faith or philosophy. People of all faiths are welcome to attend a festival. Despite the fact that it is usually restricted to the communities that Adhere to a specific god or phenomenon Celebrations are a Substantial portion of the cultures of most religious Groups.

Features of religious festivals

Religious ceremonies of various kinds are carried out in tandem with nearly all of them. There are two components to any customary occasion. One is worship, which takes place In conformity with specific religious traditions. Hindus, for Worship their gods and goddesses, for example, either individually or collectively. Family during holidays like Ram Navami, Diwali, and Holi. During Id, Muslims go to mosques to offer namaz because Collective prayer is highly valued in their faith. Likewise with On Christmas Day, Christians go to church. The Most of the festivals are accessible to individuals from all Communities. The festivities that accompany a festival are attended by people from every community. Consequently, despite having a significant religious component, the holidays are used to Draw attention to the commonalities, encourage unity, and advance a feeling of belonging. Most Hindu holidays are seasonal in nature. The natural world. They announce the harvesting seasons and Beginning of each. The two seasons of harvesting, August's kharif Through October) and Rabi, when all of the seasonal Celebrations take place from March to April. Furthermore, spring is a period of seasonal festivities. Observations at Muttam, Citharal, Kanyakumari, It is evident from Munchirai and Attoor that Dravidian culture. Has been significant to society since 30,000 B.C. Religious holidays are very important to society. They are valuable for Integration. They are also crucial for socialization. The Relationship between man, nature, and society: The "planned Alternating times of holiness and profanity, festivities and in the annual social cycle of life, "work" takes place. The celebrations demonstrate that the majority of religious festivities take place during transitional Intervals between the three distinct rainy seasons, summer and winter. The Emotional Social Security of the Individual is disclosed in the programs. Festivals with an emotional Security frequently has a mystical undertone. Religious holidays have social ramifications for identification and group cohesion. As well as for discord and conflict both within and between groups.

Religious Festivals' Difficulties

Numerous religious festival venues have been found since 1974 in several locations within the Kanyakumari District. Religious festivals have a head and a tail, just like every coin. A few difficulties. Although the Indian Constitution states that since the state is completely indifferent to all religions, the community has deeply rooted in religion and religious celebrations. The blending of Religion in terms of religious celebrations and politics that is Mobilization of votes based on fundamental identities such as Indian secularism has been impacted by caste, religion, and ethnicity. Peril. Certain religious celebrations have served as the inspiration for Violence and tensions within the community, especially when

where religious customs are thought to be in danger or Cultural customs. The politicization of a particular religion causes other groups to become politically competitive, thus leading to conflict between religions. Among the manifestations Communal riots are a manifestation of communalism. Additionally, in the recent past, the secular world has been shown to be seriously threatened by communalism. The structure of Indian politics. Nonreligious concepts that are developed as Religious holidays may cause mob lynchings on Simple problems. More work needs to be done to uphold the law and Order during religious holidays. Restricted access certain sections can only attend certain religious festivals. Of society, especially women, who might encounter limitations on their involvement in public Festivities.

CONCLUSION

Since 1974, prehistoric research has been conducted throughout Tamil Nadu. Have produced Dravidian culture and its importance from The Mesolithic era. Literarians and historians observed the Dravidian Caste divisions that split the nation into different factions. They made a sincere effort with their wrings. Indian holidays are now frequently seen worldwide with more Zeal. There are lots of enjoyable activities, like the Fundamentals of engaging in religious activities and praying to the gods Celebrations and traditions. Even foreign visitors to India Incorporate festivals into their vacation because they are significant. To comprehend Dravidian and Indian cultures. In Tamil Fairs and festivals in Nadu are an amazing, wonderful, and Joyful assortment of occasions that symbolize the birth rituals, Death as well as rebirth. South India observes its national holidays. To honor its gurus, gods, goddesses, heroes, and heroines, Prophets, saints, and to commemorate their valiant actions. Holidays in Tamil Nadu are now widely observed worldwide. With greater zeal. There are lots of enjoyable activities, Such as the necessity of offering prayers to the gods and taking part in Religious holidays and traditions.

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ST. FRANCIS XAVIER'S CATHEDRAL KOTTAR

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ABSTRACT

St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral is situated in Kottar, a suburb of Nagercoil, which was formerly a well-known commercial hub. It is one of India's most well-known pilgrimage sites. Additionally, it is among Tamil Nadu's oldest churches. St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral in Kottar, which is located next to Goa and houses the incorrupt body of St. Francis Xavier, is a well-known pilgrimage site honoring the saint. People from all walks of life, regardless of caste, creed, language, or religion, come here to worship. Pilgrims come here to thank St. Xavier for the favor they have already received or to make their requests. Because of the great favor that St. Xavier has bestowed upon this church, his followers have given him the nickname "Ketta Varam Tharum Kottaaru Saveriar", which translates to "St. Xavier of Kottar, the Grantor of all favors". Although the Church was dedicated to St. Xavier in 1605, records indicate that he was canonized and became a saint in 1622. As a result, Kottar's St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral is the world's first to be devoted to St. Xavier.

Key Words: *St. Francis Xavier's, Kottar, Church, Christian, Nagercoil.*

INTRODUCTION

Once a renowned commercial and business hub with its own name, Kottar is now a small town in the municipality of Nagercoil. Kottar is located beside the "Pazhayaru" River. The river bends at this point and heads south toward the sea. The town's name comes from the Tamil word "Kottaru", which refers to the river's bend.Ptolemy visited this location in the first century and named it "Metropolis". Periplus also makes reference to this town in the second century. People from various castes and creeds made up Kottar. One of them were "Chavalakars", who were related to the "Paravars". St. Francis Xavier traveled from Goa to impart Christian values to them and their counterparts in the Manappadu region. Because of the influence of St. Thomas, who had visited Travancore in the first century, Christians were residing in Kottar even prior to the arrival of St. Xavier. The Travancore Kings forbade the construction of Christian churches until 1602. Only in the coastal regions of the fishing villages were they permitted to construct small, makeshift churches with thatched roofs made of mud, bamboo, and palm leaves.

St. Francis Xavier

St. Francis Xavier left Lisbon, Portugal, in 1541, and arrived in Goa, India, in May of the same year. After beginning his missionary work in Goa, he traveled to the southern coast in October 1542 to instruct the Catholic populace. He began his missionary work in Manappadu, Tuticorin, and subsequently in Kottar and the surrounding areas of Travancore. The

Viajayanagar army, along with the Pandian and Chola armies, marched to take Venad at that time under the command of Captain Vittal Rao. The residents of Kottar fled in terror as the Padagas army arrived. Living in a hut in Kottar at the time, St. Xavier hurried to an elevated spot in Vadasery, two kilometers away from Kottar, where he stood like a colossus while clutching a cross. This sight terrified the Padagas, who withdrew from the invasion. The King, Unni Kerala Varma, greatly valued this and grew closer to the priest. The King gave him a plot of land at Kottar to build a Catholic church, according to Church records.

St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar

Since 1544 A.D, where the St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral now stands had already a church dedicated to Mary the Mother of Jesus. St. Xavier prayed at this Church when he stayed at Kottar. The current St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral was constructed in 1600 A.D., according to church records. St. Francis Xavier died in 1552 A.D. The Travancore Maharaja gave Fr. Andreas Pucchario his land in Kottar in 1602 A.D. so that he could build a church. At the location of St. Xavier's prayers, Fr. Andreas Pucchario built the church in 1603 using wood and mud. The church was known as Trinity Church at the time. The church was named "Saveriar Koil", or Xavier Church, after Fr. Andreas Pucchario dedicated it to St. Francis Xavier in 1605.

Growth of ST. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar

The history of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral spans more than 400 years. The miracles that had occurred at Kottar drew people in. The "Bull of Canonization", which Pope Urban VIII issued in 1623 A.D., mentioned numerous miracles. The revival of a dead baby who was only one month old is one of the miracles. For burial, it was transported to the cemetery. Because of their faith, the parents pledged to name the child Francis if it lived. The child was revived as a result of the miracle. It is said that this church received enormous offerings at the start of the 17th century, which helped to maintain five other nearby churches. But over time, those five churches were destroyed as a result of wars and other disasters.

However, St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral endured because it was shielded by both Hindus and Christians. The Church was rebuilt using stones in 1640 A.D. (Report of the Society of Jesus, 1644). The holy relics of St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius Loyola were protected here in 1643 A.D. Devasagayam Pillai's mortal remains were interred at St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral in 1752 A.D. Fr. Gomes Andreas, the leader of the "Society of Jesus" in Cochin, wrote to Fr. Gonzales, the leader of the "Society of Jesus" in Rome, in 1752 A.D., reporting that a large church at Kottar had been constructed close to the small stone church. According to another Society of Jesus report from 1733 A.D., "Kottar was a big town". All of the local Christian churches had their headquarters there. St. Francis Xavier, the first foreign missionary to visit Kottar, was honored in a large church.

Church Extensions and Renovations

St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral was expanded in 1865 A.D. to form a cross on its west, north, and south sides. Above the main alter, a tall dome was built in place of the tiles. At the small church of St. Mary, a dome was also built. The main altar was designed in 1876 A.D. by Kollam architect Jokin Fernandes. Additionally, the altar's wooden statue of St. Francis Xavier was imported from Goa. Architect John Louis Fernandes created a mandap with large stone pillars in front of the

church in the 19th century. The Indian culture is symbolized by the mandap. Architect John Louis Fernandes was buried inside the mandap after his passing. This St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral features a variety of architectural styles. The vaulting and the ancient church were Romanesque. Both the exterior and the extensions are Gothic. The Mandapam in front is made entirely of Indian stone. The St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral has an attractive appearance.

Kottar Diocese's Formation

On January 5, 1938, Mt. Rev. Lawrence Pereira, the first Bishop of the Kottar Diocese, was laid to rest in the church. The saintly Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger OCD of Kollam suggested in 1930 that the southern portion of the Kollam diocese be divided into a new diocese called Kottar. The Kottar Diocese was established on May 30, 1930. St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral was established at St. Xavier's Church in Kottar. Its first bishop was Msgr. Lawrence Pereira.

The bishop lived in the rectory until it was relocated to the current lactation. On the northern side of the church, a tower with a statue of St. Xavier atop it and a nearby grotto of St. Lourdes were built in 1942 A.D. to mark the 400th anniversary of St. Xavier's arrival in India. J.A.D. Victoria of Manapad of the Tuticorin Diocese gave it.

The cathedral grounds now have a small shrine dedicated to St. Ignatius, who sent him to India. Additionally interred in the main altar of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral was Mt. Rev. Leon Dharmaraj, the fourth bishop of the Kottar Diocese. The western, southern, and northern sides of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral were expanded in 1956 A.D., during the tenure of Fr. Barnabas as its priest. The St. Mary's Church was assimilated into the church. On November 24, 1956, Mt. Rev. T.R. Agnisamy, the Diocese's bishop, blessed a tall tower that had been built on the northern side of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral in honor of the Kottar Diocese's silver jubilee celebration.

Feast of St. Francis Xavier

Every year, from November 24 to December 3, people celebrate St. Francis Xavier's feast with a lot of fanfare, pomp, and show. Every year on December 3, the Kanyakumari District is declared a public holiday by the District Administration. In India, the government only grants local holidays to a select few Christian churches. The magnificent Temple Car procession featuring the statues of St. Francis Xavier and the Virgin Mary is the main event of the tenth day celebration. The Virgin Mary Mother is adorned with ornaments and jewels. To observe their vows and penance, people bow down in front of the Temple Car Procession. This Temple Car Procession is a Hindu tradition in which even Hindus participate with great faith.

Foreigner's Travelogues

The first-century A.D. travelogue of Pliny and the second-century A.D. book of Ptolemy both highlight Kottar's commercial prowess. Pliney the Elder, a Roman naturalist and author who lived from 23 to 79 A.D., describes Kottar as a commercial city with connections to Italian traders.

One of the most reputable Indologists of our day, Dr. Galdwell, notes that Ptolemy, a Greek mathematician, astronomer, and geographer who lived in Alexandria circa 130 A.D., called Kottar Kottora Metropolis. This will attest to the fact that, even before the first century A.D., Kottar, which is now a part of Nagercoil, was a separate trading emporium.

CONCLUSION

In order to carry on his missionary work in Travancore, Protestant Christian missionary Williams Tobias Ringel Taube travelled to Mylaudy in 1806. Following that, in December 1817, Charles Mead visited Mylaudy to carry on Williams Tobias Ringeltaube's work. Charles moved to Nagercoil in April 1818 after realizing he couldn't carry out his missionary work in Mylaudy. In a letter dated April 24, 1818, Charles Mead made reference to Nagercoil. This may be the first mention of the recently renamed city of Nagercoil. The book "History of Christians in Travancore" by C.M. Augur contains this letter (pages 683–684). Marry Miller, the wife of William Miller, who travelled from England to perform missionary work, lived here for five months before passing away on January 21, 1828. On her grave in the cemetery behind the home church, this information was inscribed. This incarnation, which identifies this city as Nagercoil, is thought to be the first incarnation discovered to represent this city. Both Tamil and English have been carved on it.

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A HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT (1957–1987)

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari district has historically been recognized for its religious diversity and long-standing tradition of peaceful coexistence among Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. Nevertheless, the district has also witnessed periods of communal tension arising from the interaction of religious identities, socio-economic competition, caste dynamics, political mobilization, and historical grievances. This article examines the nature and causes of religious conflict in Kanniyakumari district with particular reference to the Mandaikadu communal violence of 1982, one of the most significant incidents of religious unrest in the history of Tamil Nadu. It was analysing the historical background of communal relations following the merger of Kanniyakumari with Tamil Nadu in 1956 and explores the social, political, and religious factors that contributed to the escalation of tensions during the annual Masi Kodai festival at the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple. It examines the course of the violence, the response of the Tamil Nadu Government through police intervention, curfew, and peace committees, and the subsequent restoration of communal harmony. Based on historical records, government reports, newspapers, and secondary sources, the study concludes that the Mandaikadu conflict illustrates the complex relationship between religion, politics, and society in southern Tamil Nadu and highlights the importance of dialogue, effective governance, and interfaith cooperation in preventing communal violence in a religiously plural society.

Keywords: *Religious Conflict, Mandaikadu Riot, Communal Violence, Hindu–Christian Relations, Masi Kodai Festival, Communal Harmony.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu, occupies a distinctive place in the social and religious history of South India. Owing to its strategic geographical location and unique historical development, the district has long been characterized by religious diversity, with substantial Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities coexisting for centuries. Its incorporation into Tamil Nadu in 1956, following its separation from the former Travancore State, further shaped its political, cultural, and religious identity. Although Kanniyakumari has often been recognized for its traditions of interfaith coexistence and cultural interaction, it has also witnessed periods of religious tension and communal conflict.

In 1957 to 1987, the district experienced several episodes of religious disputes that reflected the complex interplay of social, political, economic, and religious factors. These conflicts were not merely the result of doctrinal differences but were also influenced by caste relations, competition over resources, political mobilization, missionary activities, local leadership, and disputes concerning public spaces and religious

processions. Among these incidents, the 1982 Mandaikadu conflict remain the most significant episode of communal violence in the district's history, drawing widespread public attention and prompting intervention by the state government.

Historical Background of Kanniyakumari

The Kanniyakumari, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, has a rich historical and cultural heritage shaped by diverse political, religious, and social influences. The district is bounded by the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal, making it an important centre for maritime trade and cultural interaction since ancient times. Historically, the region formed part of the ancient Tamil kingdoms, particularly the Pandyas, and later came under the rule of the Cheras, the Venad Kingdom, and the princely state of Travancore. These successive political administrations contributed to the district's multicultural character and religious diversity.

The Kanniyakumari district was Before the linguistic reorganization of Indian states, it was part of the princely state of Travancore and later the Travancore-Cochin State after Indian independence. The majority of the population in the southern taluks of Travancore spoke Tamil, while the state administration functioned primarily in Malayalam. Differences in language, culture, and administrative practices gave rise to political movements demanding the merger of Tamil-speaking regions with the then Madras State. Following sustained public agitation and the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission, Kanniyakumari district was officially transferred to Madras State (now Tamil Nadu) on 1 November 1956 under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956.

The district is characterized by considerable religious diversity. Hinduism has historically been the largest religion, while Christianity has maintained a significant presence due to the activities of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian missionary organizations from the sixteenth century onwards. Muslim communities, though smaller in number, have also contributed to the district's commercial, educational, and cultural development. Religious institutions, including temples, churches, and mosques, have played an important role in shaping the social life of the district.

Kanniyakumari has also experienced significant social transformation through educational advancement and reform movements. Christian missionary institutions established numerous schools, colleges, and healthcare facilities, contributing to high literacy levels and social mobility. Simultaneously, Hindu religious organizations and social reform movements worked toward educational development and the upliftment of marginalized communities. These developments produced positive social change but also intensified competition among religious groups in certain areas, particularly regarding education, conversion, public religious activities, and community leadership.

The district's social structure has historically been influenced by caste as well as religion. Communities such as the Nadars, Mukkuvars, Nairs, and Scheduled Castes experienced changing social and economic conditions during the twentieth century. The upward mobility of several communities, combined with political mobilization after independence, altered existing social relationships. In some instances, caste interests overlapped with religious identities, making local disputes

more complex than purely religious disagreements.

Nature of Religious Conflict (1957–1987)

During the period from 1957 to the late 1970s, most religious disputes remained localized and were generally resolved through district administration and community negotiations. However, several recurring issues contributed to communal tension:

- Disputes regarding church and temple processions through mixed localities
- Allegations of religious conversion and counter-conversion campaigns
- Conflicts over religious symbols and public celebrations
- Competition for political representation and local administrative influence
- Disputes concerning educational institutions managed by religious organizations.

Although many incidents remained minor, they gradually reinforced communal identities within the district.

The Mandaikadu Communal Violence, 1982

The Mandaikadu communal violence of March 1982 was the most significant episode of religious conflict in Kanniyakumari district during the period under study. Mandaikadu is situated in Manavalakurichi Village of Kalkulam Taluk in Kanniyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. Mandaikadu is one of the most significant religious and cultural heritage sites in Kanyakumari district, serving as an important centre of pilgrimage and regional religious traditions.

The village is renowned for the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple, one of the most important Hindu pilgrimage centres in southern India. Located approximately three kilometres east of Colachel and sixteen kilometres west of Nagercoil, the temple stands close to the Arabian Sea coast and attracts devotees from both Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Prior to the reorganization of states in 1956, the temple was administered by the Travancore Devaswom Board. Following the merger of Kanniyakumari district with the erstwhile Madras State, its administration was transferred to the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu. The presiding deity, Goddess Bhagavathi Amman, is worshipped in the form of a sacred anthill (burrow), a distinctive feature that has contributed to the temple's religious significance. Owing to the large number of women devotees who undertake pilgrimage to the shrine, the temple has often been referred to as the "Women's Sabarimala."

The annual ten-day Masi Kodai festival, celebrated during the Tamil month of Masi (February–March), attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The festival is one of the largest religious gatherings in Kanniyakumari district and has historically been an important occasion for regional religious and cultural interaction. Until the early 1980s, Kanniyakumari district was widely regarded as an area characterized by relatively high literacy, religious diversity, and harmonious coexistence among Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. Although localized disputes had occasionally occurred between various caste and occupational groups, including fishermen and Nadar or fishermen and Muslims, the district had not experienced major large-scale communal violence between Hindus and Christians.

The immediate trigger for the violence was a dispute over the use of

loudspeakers between the Hindu Seva Sangam, which had installed loudspeakers at the Bhagavathi Amman Temple, and the Christian community gathered at St. Louisa's Shrine, situated approximately 300 feet from the temple premises. As devotional programmes from both religious centres intensified, each side increased the volume of their public address systems, leading to what contemporary reports described as a "loudspeaker war." Although the police attempted to mediate and regulate the use of loudspeakers, the dispute rapidly escalated into a confrontation between groups belonging to the two communities.

On 1 March 1982, communal clashes broke out during the temple festival. Violence quickly spread through Mandaikadu and adjoining coastal villages, resulting in attacks on persons and property. During police efforts to restore order, firing was ordered, leading to the deaths of six Christian fishermen. In addition, approximately twenty-five police personnel and fifteen civilians sustained injuries. The violence exposed the fragile communal situation that had developed in the district over the preceding months and transformed a localized dispute into one of the most serious communal disturbances in the history of Tamil Nadu.

The disturbances did not end with the Mandaikadu incident. During the following weeks, retaliatory attacks and communal violence spread to several coastal settlements, including Melamanakudy, Pallam, Colachel, and neighbouring villages. On the night of 15 March 1982, another Police firing at Melamanakudy resulted in the deaths of two fishermen. In Pallam, houses belonging to fishing families were attacked, household articles and fishing nets were looted or destroyed, and several dwellings were set on fire. Contemporary official estimates placed the value of property damaged at more than ₹30 lakhs, although no fatalities were reported in that particular incident. Further communal tension was witnessed at Colachel on 9 April 1982, where police resorted to firing in the air to disperse an advancing mob and prevent further violence.

The Mandaikadu riots demonstrated that the causes of communal violence extended beyond the immediate loudspeaker dispute. The conflict reflected the cumulative impact of historical grievances, socio-economic competition, religious mobilization, political intervention, and growing communal polarization in the district. Competition over religious space, the expansion of religious organizations, missionary activities, identity-based mobilization, and rumours circulating among both communities contributed significantly to the escalation of violence. Thus, the loudspeaker dispute served primarily as the immediate catalyst rather than the fundamental cause of the conflict.

Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, the Government of Tamil Nadu imposed curfew in affected areas, deployed additional police and armed reserve forces, and strengthened security arrangements throughout the district. Peace committees comprising representatives of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities were constituted to facilitate dialogue and restore communal confidence. A series of peace meetings conducted during April and May 1982 gradually reduced tensions and helped restore normalcy. Enhanced police surveillance during religious festivals, improved intelligence gathering, and continuous inter-community consultations prevented the recurrence of major communal violence after March 1982.

The Mandaikadu communal violence remains a landmark event in the modern history of Kanniyakumari district. It illustrates how long-standing social, economic, religious, and political tensions, when combined with immediate provocations, can rapidly escalate into large-scale communal conflict. At the same time, the restoration of peace through administrative intervention, community participation, and institutional dialogue demonstrates the importance of effective governance and interfaith cooperation in preserving communal harmony within a religiously diverse society.

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VATTAKOTTAI – A PORTAL FOR TRAVANCORE'S GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

"Kanyakumari" has a strong flavour of Hindu connotation and cultural specificity, both derived from the virgin Goddess Bhagavathi, the presiding deity of Cape Comorin. It is in the southern tip of Indian peninsula and forms the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu state. Kanyakumari acts as a channel of communications, migration, trade and cultural transfusion. The invading armies of ambitious king's vessels passed through this area. Many an invasion from the Pandya country, the Cholas, the Muslims and Nayaks passed through this route. Of the innumerable ports the Cape was a famous and busy commercial centre referred to differently as Cape Komaria (Ptolemy) and Komar or Komarie (Periplus). The port disappeared permanently due to erosion of the sea. About five kilometers of Vattakottai lays the fishing village of Chinnamuttom with a small bay. In one of the fifteenth century inscriptions it is referred to as Kumarimuttom. The village had busy overseas trade and vessels passed through it very frequently. Local tradition alludes that the Romans and Greeks anchored their vessels here and transported their merchandise through head load to the trade emporium at Kottar. About three kilometres west of the Cape, is situated the parava hamlet of Kovalam. Their traditions indicate that Kovalam was yet another busy port.[1] In Kanyakumari, from here many commercial activities are undertaken to western side of the Travancore state. Many products like Jangary, Spices, are exported to western part of the Travancore state.

INTRODUCTION

"Kanyakumari" has a strong flavour of Hindu connotation and cultural specificity, both derived from the virgin Goddess Bhagavathi, the presiding deity of Cape Comorin. It is in the southern tip of Indian peninsula and forms the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu state. Kanyakumari acts as a channel of communications, migration, trade and cultural transfusion. The invading armies of ambitious king's vessels passed through this area. Many an invasion from the Pandya country, the Cholas, the Muslims and Nayaks passed through this route.

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The Dutch Fortification in Travancore

The smooth sail of the trade faced a rough weather in the form of the Portuguese at the close of the 15th century. They were followed by Dutch and the English. With the advent of the Europeans the Golden age of the Indian trade came to an end. The success of the Portuguese trade in Travancore was to a large extent due to the well-organized trade system. The system of factories and fortresses was devised to impose spice trade monopoly. The arrival of the Dutch and English gave the final blow to the Portuguese maritime power. Dutch relation with Travancore in the beginning was confined to trade only. On the basis of a treaty signed between king of Travancore and the Dutch in 1662, the former agreed to give Pepper monopoly to the Company and to accept passes from Dutch commander for all vessels. Steven Van Hasen was the first admiral of the Company to reach North Kerala in 1604.2 He reached Calicut and met the zamorine near the village of Cerruvay. Batvice became the supreme government of the Dutch East India Company. A Dutch warehouse was built at Quilon in 1650. Rijckloff Van Goens was the founder of Dutch settlement in Malabar. He captured Quilon and constructed a mud fort to garrison the Dutch forces.

The Dutch hegemony started in Malabar in 1663 and lasted upto 1795. They took-over the commercial monopoly over Cochin and fortresses at Palliport, Uypeen and Porakkad were to be constructed for the protection of the Dutch in Cochin. The Dutch company was not satisfied with trade alone, but had serious political motives. A Dutch relation with Travancore in the beginning was confined to trade only on the basis of a treaty signed in 1662. The question of Pepper monopoly rights aggravated the situation leading to the war between Travancore and the Dutch.3 In 1741 a Dutch army came from Ceylon and forcibly occupied Colachel. Its object was to seize the whole country from Colachel to Cape Comorin, where the Company had a sale depot with food and garrison.

The Dutch built a mud fort at Colachel and other Dutch stations between Colachel and Cape were fortified. Further reinforcement arrived from Ceylon and Batavia. The Dutch army, with its added strength, attacked Travancore outposts at Thengappattinam, Midalam and Kadiapattinam and advanced to Eranielenroute to Padmanabhapuram. Marthanda Varma, who was engaged in Kanyakumari expedition in the north took immediate action to relieve Colachel. He even opened negotiations with the French in Pondicherry. Marthanda Varma reached Colachel and personally conducted the war preparations. The Battle of Colachel commenced on 10th August 1741. The Dutch were defeated and their mud fort was destroyed. The Battle of Colachel is considered as a decisive one by the Travancore Historians. The Dutch defeat at Colachel was the first set back to their colonial interest. I paved the way for rise of English East India Company and the consolidation of Travancore.4

Cape continued to be their factory. In order to check further movements of the Dutch and other possible enemies Marthanda Varma built a chain of batteries between Porakkad and Cape, Government monopoly on trade had adversely affected the Dutch. Commercial Travancore in general was conducive to the development of trade and industries. The demand for Indian textiles was relatively higher in Arabia and Africa and

the Dutch procured much of the piece goods from the West Coast. In the 1630's textiles accounted for about 43 percent of the total value of the Dutch exports from India and a yielded a net profit. The Muslim competition in textile trade increased the demand for Travancore textiles and it created a situation where anything the weavers produced was purchased. The Dutch imposed monopoly on certain items. They fixed both selling prize and the purchasing rates, which were not commensurate with the prevailing taxed. It resulted in large scale illegal transportation of Pepper, Piece, goods etc. In order to arrest the illegal trade the Dutch established a chain of fortified ports on the coasts of Thengapattinam, Porakkad, etc., with lodges built on stone.5

The Dutch extended their trade network over south Travancore on the advice of the Batavian Castle. It instructed the Dutch commander in Malabar to occupy the leading harbours in Travancore. Their settlements in South East Asia, Ceylon and coromandal necessitated them to have some holdover the southern tip of Malabar Coast. Naturally the coastal villages of the study region were frequented by the Dutch vessel and the tri-sea junction at Cape became a Dutch lake due to its richness and remarkable beauty. The Dutch wanted to occupy the land between Colachel and Cape Comorin.

The importance of Colachel as a port town increased under the Dutch rule. Colachel assumed more significance after the battle of 1744. All the European nationals expressed their desire to have their establishment at Colachel. But after the defeat of the Dutch Marthanda Varma became aware of its potentiality and wanted to develop it further for the use of Travancore. He constructed a warehouse and even ship-building industry was introduced. By 1760 trade centre like that of Calicut Coir and copra industries slowly emerged. In and around Colachel weaving was given fillip and weaving centers were opened at Colachel.

Cape Comorin was another sale factory of the Dutch with a fort and a garrison. It continued to be an important centre of Pepper trade. The Dutch entanglement with Travancore had an adverse effect on textile trade. The establishment of the government monopoly in textiles also sheltered the Dutch interest. The trade metropolis of Kottar0 assumed significant importance during the Dutch period as a centre of cloth trade. The rise of Travancore gave a severe blow to the Dutch commercial interest in the area.

History of the Fort

Vattakottai fort is a symbol of military history of India, which formerly was a Dutch and then a British colony. Vattakottai fort is a specially erected fort on the sea coastline in the southern tip of India (Kanyakumari). Vattakottai fort is set up as the southernmost sea coast defence point by the Dutch. The fort was reconstructed under the command of Captain Do-Lannoy.6 In Kanyakumari District, there were two Taluks namely Thovali and Agasthiswaram said to be Nanjil Nadu. These two Taluk's were rich in prosperity. Because of this prosperity the people who stayed in eastern side attack them continuously. Vattakottai fort is also built on the Kanyakumari coast in order to protect Nanjil Nadu from the invaders. A portion of South Travancore was formerly known as Nanjil Nadu. The word Namjil means Bastion or Fort.7

The word Vattakottai is derived from the Tamil word Vattam. (Circular = Vattam in Tamil). Originally the coastal region between Kanyakumari and Rameswaram

was a centre of pearl trade. There was considerable export and import trade. Around 12th and 13th century A.D., it was under the Pandya rule. In order to develop and safe guard the sea trade, the Pandya rulers constructed this fort, a fact confirmed by the fish emblem found in the fort. In 1740 the Cholas plundered the area.8 The British troops in 1809 demolished the major part of the Travancore lines, leaving the present Vattakottai fort as intact. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Tamil Nadu.

The fort at Aramboly was built from Kadukkarai, the small village at the fort of disfigured extension of the Ghats, up to Cape Comorin. Thus the eastern frontier was well protected. Not satisfied with this Valia Ejaman wanted to have a constant watch on the sea, so he took efforts to build a fort on the shore. Leepuram, a small village 3 km north east of Cape Comorin was chosen as the convenient place for the construction of the fort. This fort familiarly known as Vattakottai is built in such a way that it is washed by the Bay of Bengal on the eastern side. Though long years have passed the fort still retains its past glory. Rubbles of large size have been used in its construction. In certain portions burnt bricks have been used.

Structure of the Fort

Structurally, the circular fort is not a circular one. It is a rectangular one. But, the corners of the fort are just like curve type. However, the name of the fort is the circular fort. It is very difficult to see the fort from a very long distance.[9] The reason is that it was one side covered by sea and other side it was covered by thinly forest. This structure was naturally happened in this fort. Thus the fort had an area of 1,71,800 square feet. On the top of the gate one gopuram like structure with a height of 10 feet had been seen. In the front side of that gopuram Travancore Kings symbol was carved. On both sides of the gate, a stage is made by the stone. A fish symbol was carved on the bottom of the stone. Despite this, some are of the view that there was a relationship between Pandyas and this fort. But some opine that the fort was constructed by the workers from Pandyan Empire. For the remembrance of their own Kings they carved the fish symbol. On entering the fort just to the left side there are 12 steps. After crossing the steps, on the left side of the fort there is an evidence for a temple constructed by Valia Ejaman for his personal prayer. But this part was now broken in condition. And in the wall of the fort there is one hole with 12 cm with a shape of half circle. This hole was used by the soldiers who can see through this hole at a very long distance a person from outside. But anybody from outside cannot know they being watched through this hole.

This fort walls have 29 feet height and the fort has an area 3½ acres surface.10 Inside the fort, it has watch towers with the measures from 3 to 6 feet. There are big and small holes and openings to shoot from the fort by guns and canons. Inside the fort, there is a ramp built in order to move the canon up the top of the wall to attack the enemy who come through the sea. The ramp remains majestically till today very strongly.

Inside the fort a stone wall was constructed at a height of 10 to 15 feet. This place is looking at fort within the fort. A place in between these two forts is with sand of 25 feet height. Hence this fort was not easily demolished by the artillery weapon. It was protected in such a way. This place is also used by soldiers to attack the enemies very easily. Outside the

fort wall a place was specially made for keeping artillery weapons. A hole was also made with a size of four meter.[11] It was used to keep artillery weapons. The inner part of the top of the fort was flat in shape; the outer side of the place is slanting position. From this one can easily see the enemy and attack the enemies. The artillery place side in the fort was very elaborate but on the outer side it was very small. The enemies cannot see an attack of the soldiers of the inner side of the fort.[12]

On the North western side of the fort, there is a ground with a length of 200 feet and breadth of 120 feet in long shape ground is located. To claim that ground there are 20 steps. For carrying artillery weapons a slope model was also built in the centre of the steps. In this slope 52 stones were laid to make it strong. The nearest parts of the walls were constructed with very strong stones.13 Each stone is of five feet in length and 1½ feet breadth. This part was looking towards the sea. This ground was used to giving training to the soldiers and also artillery training was also given. To carry artillery weapons to the ground a stone path was laid. It helped to carry artillery weapons.[14]

South Travancore Defense Line and Vattakottai

Another significant step taken by De-Lannoy for ensuring the safety of the kingdom was the formation of a new line of defence. De-Lannoy connected the Vattakottai fort with the South Travancore Line, the whole of which was also known by the name 'Vattakottai'. These lines formed the west coast, 3/4th of a mile to the West of Cape Comorin, with bastions at intervals of 165 yards. They ran north wards 1.5 miles to Cheverakotta, built on rocks which pass through Malayan Puthoor where there were two gateways. From this point the old lines ran at an obtuse angle with the new one which till continued up to the Pinnevaram Gate.15 from where it ran in the same direction to the steps to the Nedumalai Hill and appeared again on the steps of the opposite side and ran five furlongs to the Rameswar Gate and then to the slopes of Kattadi hill, a distance of two miles and thence 2¾ miles to Vattakottai, a strong irregular reduit on the coast, which was the only part connected with the South Travancore Lines that has not been demolished.[16]

CONCLUSION

There were some earthen works even before the time of De-Lannoy, but they were improved and extended by General De-Lannoy in about 1757 A.D., Large portions of the lines were demolished by Colonel St. Leger's army in 1810 A.D.17 But the Vattakottai fort was left undisturbed. A guard consisting of one Naik and six sepoys was stationed at the Fort for some time after the war. The fort was provided with two ramparts.[18]

A third fortification was built stretching from Azhllwarkarai on the sea beach at Cape Comorin up to the hill at Aramboly, as a barrier between the sea and the hills. De-Lannoy appointed Marthanda Pillai (Valia Ejaman) to supervise the work. This defence line covering a distance of 25 kilometers was strengthened with bastions, batteries and power magazines placed at regular intervals according to the plan designed by Thaikkattu Nambuthiri. Thus the eastern frontier was protected against external threats.

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Folk Traditions and Community Life: The Cultural Heritage of Kanniyakumari

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari, situated at the southernmost tip of India, possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage shaped by its geographical location, historical development, religious traditions and community practices. The district represents a cultural meeting point where Tamil and Kerala traditions have interacted over centuries. Folk songs, oral traditions, festivals, rituals, traditional occupations, performing arts and local beliefs constitute important elements of its cultural identity. These traditions are closely connected with the everyday life of agricultural, coastal and rural communities.

This paper examines the role of folk traditions in the community life of Kanniyakumari. It focuses on festivals, folk arts, oral traditions, religious practices and traditional occupations and analyses their contribution to collective identity and social harmony. The study also discusses the challenges posed by modernisation, urbanisation, migration and changing lifestyles. It argues that systematic documentation, educational initiatives, community participation and responsible cultural tourism are essential for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Folk Traditions, Community Life, Cultural Heritage, Folk Culture, Festivals, Oral Traditions, Traditional Occupations, Cultural Identity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is an important expression of the identity and historical experience of a community. It includes both tangible elements such as monuments, temples and historical buildings and intangible elements such as songs, stories, beliefs, rituals, festivals and traditional knowledge. These traditions connect the present generation with the experiences and values of previous generations.

Kanniyakumari occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of South India. Historically associated with the region of Nanjil Nadu, it has experienced the influence of different political and cultural traditions. Its geographical proximity to Kerala has also contributed to interaction between Tamil and Malayalam cultural practices. The district's official history records the historical importance of Nanjil Nadu and its connections with the Pandyan and other regional traditions (Kanniyakumari District Administration, n.d.). The geographical environment of Kanniyakumari has also influenced its cultural development. The district has an extensive coastline, fertile agricultural areas and portions of the Western Ghats. Consequently, fishing, agriculture and other traditional occupations have played an important role in shaping community life.Folk traditions provide an important means of understanding this social history. Unlike formal written traditions, folk culture is largely transmitted through oral communication, observation and participation. Songs, stories, rituals, festivals and traditional knowledge reflect the everyday experiences of ordinary people.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The major objectives of this study are:

- To examine the major folk traditions of Kanniyakumari.
- To understand the relationship between folk culture and community life.
- To analyse the importance of festivals and rituals in preserving cultural identity.

- To examine the role of traditional occupations in cultural heritage.
- To identify the challenges faced by folk traditions in the contemporary period.

The study follows a descriptive and historical methodology. It is primarily based on secondary sources, including government publications, historical accounts, tourism publications and studies related to folklore and cultural heritage. Information relating to festivals and cultural practices has been obtained from the official website of the Kanniyakumari District Administration and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

3. Folk Traditions of Kanniyakumari

Folk traditions constitute an important part of the cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari. They include folk songs, dances, stories, rituals, traditional games, beliefs, festivals and occupational practices.

3.1 Folk Songs and Oral Traditions

Folk songs are an important form of oral heritage. They are associated with different stages of community life, including marriage, religious celebrations, agricultural activities and other social occasions. Such songs preserve memories, emotions and social values. Oral narratives and local legends also contribute to collective memory. Stories associated with temples, village deities, historical personalities and sacred places have been transmitted from one generation to another. Although such narratives may not always correspond with written historical records, they are valuable for understanding how communities remember and interpret their past.

3.2 Folk Arts and Performances

Traditional performing arts provide another important dimension of Kanniyakumari's cultural identity. Folk performances are often connected with religious festivals and community celebrations. Music, dance, costumes and storytelling create opportunities for collective participation.

The Ministry of Tourism identifies Kumari Thiruvizha as an important cultural festival in which traditional arts and music are presented. Performances associated with the festival include Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam and Kathakali (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, n.d.).

Such festivals provide opportunities for artists to continue traditional practices and introduce younger generations to the region's cultural heritage.

4. Festivals and Community Life

Festivals are among the most visible expressions of folk culture. They bring people together for worship, cultural performances, social interaction and collective celebration.

The Kanniyakumari District Administration records several important festivals, including Kumari Thiruvizha, Pongal, the festivals of Devi Kanyakumari Temple, Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram and Mandaikadu Kodai Festival (Kanniyakumari District Administration, n.d.).

The Mandaikadu Kodai Festival is particularly significant because it attracts people from surrounding areas and neighbouring Kerala. The festival includes rituals, processions and traditional forms of worship. Such events demonstrate that religious festivals function not only as spiritual occasions but also as important centres of community interaction.

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple also represents the historical and religious heritage of the district. Its festivals bring together devotees and visitors and contribute to the continuation of traditional ritual practices.

Festivals therefore perform several social functions. They strengthen community relationships, transmit traditions to younger generations and provide opportunities for local artists and cultural practitioners.

5. Traditional Occupations and Community Identity

Traditional occupations have contributed significantly to the cultural development of Kanniyakumari.

5.1 Fishing Communities

The coastal environment has supported fishing communities for generations. Traditional fishing knowledge includes an understanding of tides, winds, seasons, weather conditions and marine resources. Much of this knowledge is transmitted orally from elders to younger members. Fishing is therefore not simply an economic activity. It is connected with food traditions, community relationships, religious practices and local identity. Changes in technology and modern fishing methods have transformed traditional practices, but aspects of the cultural identity of fishing communities continue to survive.

5.2 Agricultural Traditions

Agriculture has also influenced the social and cultural life of Kanniyakumari. Traditional agricultural practices developed in response to seasonal changes, rainfall, soil and water resources. Festivals such as Pongal reflect the cultural importance of agriculture and the relationship between human communities and nature. Agricultural traditions also demonstrate how economic activities become integrated into religious and social practices.

6. Religion, Folk Beliefs and Social Harmony

Religious traditions form an important part of the cultural landscape of Kanniyakumari. The district contains numerous temples, churches and other religious institutions. Alongside organised religious practices, local beliefs and village traditions continue to influence community life.Temple festivals and village celebrations provide opportunities for collective participation. Processions, music, rituals and community gatherings create shared cultural experiences.

Kanniyakumari's cultural landscape also reflects interaction among different religious and social communities. The coexistence of diverse traditions has contributed to the district's pluralistic cultural character. Cultural events and festivals can therefore serve as spaces for social interaction and mutual understanding.

7. Role of Women in Preserving Folk Culture

Women have played an important role in transmitting folk traditions. Domestic songs, food traditions, rituals, stories and household knowledge have often been passed from mothers and grandmothers to younger generations. Women also participate actively in religious festivals and community celebrations. Their contribution is particularly important in preserving traditions that are not formally documented. Recording women's oral histories can therefore provide valuable information about the everyday cultural history of Kanniyakumari. Recognising women's contribution is essential for a comprehensive understanding of folk heritage.

8. Challenges to Folk Traditions

The continuity of folk traditions faces several challenges in the contemporary period. Modernisation, urbanisation, migration, changing occupations, technological development and mass media have transformed traditional patterns of community life.Younger generations may have fewer opportunities to learn traditional songs, stories, dances and occupational knowledge directly from elders. Economic pressures may also

encourage traditional artists and artisans to move towards other occupations. Commercialisation is another concern. When traditional practices are presented only as tourist attractions, their original social and cultural context may gradually be weakened. Therefore, preservation programmes should focus on the communities that sustain these traditions.

9. Preservation of Cultural Heritage

The preservation of folk traditions requires cooperation among communities, educational institutions, researchers and government agencies.

First, systematic documentation of folk songs, oral histories, festivals, rituals and traditional occupations should be undertaken. Audio-visual records can be particularly useful for preserving oral traditions.

Second, schools and colleges can conduct field studies, heritage walks, exhibitions and oral-history projects. Students can interact with traditional artists and community elders to understand local heritage.

Third, community participation should remain central to heritage preservation. Traditional practitioners should be recognised as knowledge holders and encouraged to transmit their skills to younger generations.

Finally, responsible cultural tourism can provide economic opportunities for local communities while creating awareness about Kanniyakumari's heritage. Tourism should, however, respect local customs and cultural values.

10. Conclusion

The folk traditions of Kanniyakumari represent an important component of the cultural history and identity of the district. Folk songs, oral traditions, festivals, religious rituals, performing arts and traditional occupations demonstrate the close relationship between culture and community life. The district's unique geographical position and historical interactions have created a rich cultural environment in which different traditions have developed and interacted. Festivals such as Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Kodai Festival and temple festivals continue to provide spaces for collective participation and cultural expression.

However, rapid social change poses challenges to the transmission of traditional knowledge. Therefore, documentation, education, digital preservation and active community participation are essential. Folk traditions should not be regarded merely as remnants of the past; they are living cultural practices that continue to evolve with society. Preserving the folk heritage of Kanniyakumari will strengthen cultural identity, encourage intergenerational learning and contribute to a deeper understanding of the social history of the region.

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FESTIVALS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari district is well known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse traditions. The festivals celebrated in the district reflect the religious beliefs, social customs, and cultural identity of its people. Major festivals such as the Kumari Thiruvizha, Kanyakumari Amman Temple Festival, Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Kodai Festival, Suchindram Temple Festival, Onam, Vavubale Exhibition, Pongal, Navaratri, Christian Festivals, and Muslim Festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm. These festivals bring people from different communities together and promote unity, harmony, and cultural exchange. The study focuses on the historical background, religious significance, traditional practices, and social importance of festivals in Kanyakumari district. It also highlights the role of festivals in preserving the cultural heritage and strengthening the identity of the local community.

INTRODUCTION:

Kanyakumari District is situated at the southernmost part of Tamil Nadu, It is well known for its natural beauty, historical monuments, religious centers, and rich cultural traditions. The district has a unique cultural character because Tamil and Kerala traditions have influenced its society. Festivals play an important role in the social and cultural life of the people of Kanyakumari.

Festivals are celebrated throughout the year in temples, churches, mosques, and other public places. They bring people together, preserve traditional customs, encourage cultural activities, and contribute to tourism and the local economy.

Major Festivals Of Kanyakumari District

Kumari Thiruvizha

Kumari Thiruvizha is an important cultural festival conducted in Kanyakumari. It promotes the traditional arts, music, and dance of Tamil Nadu. Bharatanatyam, folk performances and other cultural programmes are presented during the festival. The Ministry of Tourism describes it as a festival celebrating native art and music, with participation from artists from different parts of Tamil Nadu.

Kanyakumari Amman Temple Festivals

The Kanyakumari Amman Temple is one of the important religious centres of the district. Several festivals are celebrated here, including Vaikasi Visagam, Navarathri, Thirukarthigai, Aadi Ammavasai and Thai Ammavasai. Vaikasi Visagam is celebrated for ten days, while Navarathri is also observed as a ten-day festival. These celebrations include special worship, processions and participation by large numbers of devotees.

Mandaikadu Kodai Festival

The Mandaikadu Bhagavathy Amman Temple festival is one of the most famous festivals of Kanyakumari District. It is celebrated during the Tamil month of Masi. The festival extends for ten days and begins with the hoisting of the temple flag. Processions and special rituals are conducted during the festival. The festival attracts devotees from Kanyakumari and neighboring parts of Kerala. In 2026, the

annual Koda festival again attracted thousands of devotees during its ten-day celebration.

Suchindram Temple Festival

The Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram is an important heritage and religious centre. Several festivals are celebrated here, including the Masi festival, Avani festival, Margazhi festival and Chithirai festival. The temple festivals are known for religious rituals, processions and cultural traditions. They attract devotees from different parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Onam

Onam is widely celebrated in Kanyakumari District, particularly in its western areas. The festival reflects the historical and cultural connection of the district with Kerala and the former Travancore region. Onam is generally celebrated during August–September according to the Malayalam calendar. Families prepare traditional food, decorate their homes and participate in cultural activities. The celebration demonstrates the cultural diversity of Kanyakumari District.

Vavubali Exhibition

The Vavubali ceremony and exhibition are associated with Kuzhithurai. It takes place during the Malayalam month of Karkidakam, corresponding roughly to July–August. Along with the traditional religious observance, an exhibition is conducted, attracting people from Kanyakumari and neighbouring Kerala. The event is significant as a combination of religious tradition, public gathering and local commerce.

Pongal

Pongal is one of the major Tamil festivals celebrated throughout Kanyakumari District. It is a harvest festival that expresses gratitude for nature, agriculture and cattle. Families prepare Pongal, decorate their houses and participate in traditional celebrations. The Kanniyakumari district administration officially lists Pongal among the district's annual festivals.

Christian Festivals

Kanyakumari District has a significant Christian heritage, and many churches conduct annual feast celebrations. Church festivals commonly include special prayers, processions and community gatherings. These celebrations demonstrate the religious diversity of the district and contribute to its distinctive cultural identity.

Muslim Festivals

Muslim communities in the district celebrate festivals such as Ramadan and Eid with religious prayers, family gatherings and community activities. Local religious centers also conduct annual celebrations that bring together people from surrounding areas.

Cultural Importance of Festivals

Festivals have several important functions in Kanyakumari District:

- **Preservation of tradition:** Festivals help preserve traditional rituals, music, dance and customs.
- Community unity: People from different communities participate in social and cultural activities.
- **Religious significance**: Festivals provide opportunities for worship and spiritual activities.
- **Tourism development:** Major festivals attract visitors from other districts and neighboring Kerala.
- **Economic development**: Local shops, transport services, food vendors and artisans benefit from increased visitor activity.

- **Cultural exchange**: Kanyakumari's Tamil and Kerala influences can be seen in many festival traditions.
- **Promotion of folk arts**: Traditional performances and cultural programmes provide opportunities for artists.

Festivals and Tourism

Festivals are an important part of Kanyakumari's tourism potential. Visitors can experience not only the district's beaches and historical monuments but also its religious and cultural traditions. The combination of temples, churches, mosques, traditional celebrations and cultural programmes makes the district culturally diverse.

Kumari Thiruvizha, for example, specifically promotes traditional art and music and attracts artists and spectators.

CONCLUSION

Festivals are an essential part of the cultural life of Kanyakumari District. They represent the district's religious diversity, historical background and cultural traditions. Festivals such as Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Kodai Festival, Kanyakumari Amman Temple festivals, Suchindram Temple festivals, Pongal, Onam, Vavubali and Christian and Muslim celebrations bring people together and strengthen community relationships.

Therefore, the festivals of Kanyakumari District are not merely religious occasions. They are important expressions of cultural heritage, social unity, tourism and local economic activity. Preserving these festivals and their traditional practices is important for future generations.

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HERITAGE IN HER HANDS:
WOMEN AS LIVING ARCHIVES OF CULTURE IN KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT:

Heritage is not found only in monuments, temples, inscriptions and archaeological remains. It also lives in the memories, traditions and everyday practices of people. In Kanyakumari, women have played an important role in preserving this living heritage. Through songs, stories, rituals, food traditions, folk practices, traditional knowledge and family customs, they pass cultural values from one generation to another.

Kanyakumari has a long and diverse history connected with the ancient Tamil region, the Cheras, Pandyas, Ay rulers and later Travancore. Its coastal communities and cultural traditions also reflect this historical continuity. This seminar explores how women act as "living archives" by carrying cultural memories and practices from the past into the present. It also connects these traditions with references from Sangam literature and Tamil literary works.

The seminar highlights that women are not merely participants in cultural traditions; they are important carriers and transmitters of heritage. Their everyday knowledge helps preserve the cultural identity of Kanyakumari. Therefore, understanding women's role is essential forunderstanding and protecting the region's living and intangible heritage.

Keywords:
Intangible cultural heritage, Kanyakumari, women, oral tradition, coastal communities,gender and culture, cultural sustainability

INTRODUCTION

When heritage is discussed in policy and academic circles, attention gravitates toward monuments, manuscripts, and museum collections heritage that can be photographed, catalogued, and fenced off. Far less visible is the heritage that lives in bodies, voices, and daily routines: the lullaby a grandmother sings, the exact fold of a saree draped for a temple festival, the proportion of tamarind to coconut in a fish curry passed down without a written recipe. This paper treats women in Kanyakumari not as passive custodians of tradition but as active archives in the fullest sense repositories that store, interpret, and re-transmit cultural knowledge with each generation, adapting content to present circumstances the way any living archive must.

Kanyakumari occupies a unique cultural position: it is the meeting point of three seas, the historic frontier between Tamil and erstwhile Travancore (Malayalam-influenced) cultures, and home to a dense mix of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities, many of them fishing families. This plurality means that the "culture" women in Kanyakumari carry is not singular but layered Tamil temple ritual, Latin Catholic maritime devotion, Nadar community trade and toddy-tapping traditions, and Mukkuvar fishing-caste custom all run through the same households, often through the same women moving between roles as ritual specialists, economic providers, and knowledge-keepers.

In Colachel and Muttom, elderly Mukkuvar women are frequently the ones consulted before a fishing boat is launched or renamed, because they are understood to hold the community's memory of which rituals were performed for which vessels in the past — a role increasingly documented

by local cultural researchers and heritage-tourism guides as an example of gendered oral authority.

The Cultural Landscape of Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari's geography as a literal confluence — of seas, states, languages, and religions — produces a cultural landscape unlike much of the rest of Tamil Nadu. The district was historically part of the princely state of Travancore before its merger into Tamil Nadu in 1956, leaving a hybrid Tamil-Malayalam linguistic and culinary sensibility still visible in dishes, temple architecture, and dress. Its economy has historically rested on three pillars: agriculture (notably coconut, banana, and rubber), fishing along its roughly 71-kilometre coastline, and, since the late twentieth century, tourism centred on the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, the Thiruvalluvar Statue, and Kanyakumari's famous sunrise-sunset viewpoint.

Within this landscape, cultural transmission has historically occurred through household and community structures where women occupy central positions: the joint family kitchen, the temple courtyard during festival preparation, the shoreline where nets are mended and fish is sorted, and the veranda where children are minded by grandmothers while parents work. Because much of this transmission takes place in informal, unrecorded settings, it has often escaped the attention of heritage documentation projects that privilege the temple inscription or the printed text over the spoken instruction and the demonstrated gesture. Contemporary heritage-tourism operators in Kanyakumari town have begun explicitly marketing "village experience" tours that place visitors in women-run kitchens and craft workshops, implicitly acknowledging that the region's most marketable cultural authenticity resides in women's everyday domestic and craft practices rather than solely in its monuments.

Oral Traditions and Folklore:

Women as Storytellers and Memory-KeepersOral tradition remains one of the least formally documented yet most actively practised forms of heritage in Kanyakumari. Lullabies (thaalattu), work songs sung while sorting fish or husking coconut, proverbs used to discipline or advise children, and origin stories explaining local shrines and landmarks are transmitted almost exclusively through women, most often grandmothers and mothers, in informal domestic settings. These oral forms encode not just entertainment but practical knowledge: songs sung during net-mending often contain weather lore and tidal warnings, while lullabies frequently reference local deities and geography, quietly anchoring children's earliest sense of place and belonging.

This form of heritage transmission is particularly vulnerable to disruption because it depends on sustained intergenerational co-residence and unstructured time together — both of which are eroded by nuclear family formation, women's increased participation in wage labour, and children's engagement with television and smartphones from an early age. Where a grandmother once had an uninterrupted afternoon with a grandchild, that time is now frequently mediated by a screen.

Community elders' associations in villages such as Kovalam and Enayam have begun organising periodic "storytelling evenings" where older women are invited to narrate folk tales and local legends to children in a semi-formal setting, a response that treats oral

memory as a resource requiring active institutional support rather than something that will simply persist on its own.

Ritual and Religious Practice:

Women as Custodians of SacredKnowledge Kanyakumari's religious landscape — anchored by the Kumari Amman Temple, numerous village deity (kaaval deivam) shrines, and a dense network of Catholic and Protestant churches serving fishing communities — depends heavily on women's ritual labour and knowledge. Women typically oversee the preparation of kolam (ritual floor drawings) at thresholds each morning, the assembly of items for temple offerings, the observance of household vratas (religious vows) and fasting calendars, and the preparation of prasadam or festival food according to precise, memorised proportions considered inseparable from a ritual's efficacy.

In Latin Catholic fishing villages along the coast, women play an equally central role in preparing for feast days of patron saints, organising processions, maintaining household shrines, and passing down devotional songs and novena practices. In both Hindu and Christian contexts, ritual competence is rarely taught through formal instruction; it is absorbed through years of watching and assisting, meaning that a woman's authority to lead a ritual is itself a form of accredited cultural expertise, even though it carries no formal certificate or institutional recognition. During the annual Ayyappan Vilakku or temple festival seasons in villages near Nagercoil, it is frequently the senior women of a household who determine the precise timing and sequence of rituals, correcting younger family members and even visiting priests on customary practice specific to that lineage or locality — a striking contemporary instance of women functioning as the final authority on local ritual correctness.

Culinary Heritage: The Kitchen as an Unwritten Library

Kanyakumari's cuisine, shaped by its coastal geography and Travancore heritage, blends Tamil and Kerala influences into distinctive dishes such as meen kuzhambu (fish curry) made with kudampuli (gambooge), kappa (tapioca) served with fish curry, idiyappam, and a variety of coconut-based vegetable preparations. Almost none of these recipes exist in standardised written form within households; they are held as embodied knowledge — a "pinch," a "handful," a texture or aroma recognised by experience-transmitted from mother to daughter or, in matrilineal-influenced communities of the region, from grandmother to granddaughter.

This culinary knowledge functions as a genuine archive because it encodes agricultural history (whichcrops were locally available), trade history (the arrival of chillies and tomatoes via colonial-era trade routes), and evenclass and caste history (which ingredients marked festival versus everyday food). As younger women increasingly enter formal employment and turn to packaged spice mixes or online recipes, this embodied culinary archive faces a genuine risk of simplification and homogenisation with generic "South Indian" food marketed to tourists.A number of women from fishing families in and around Kanyakumari town have begun running smallhome-based "meals" businesses and Instagram or WhatsApp-promoted tiffin services specialising in authentic Nadar or Mukkuvar-style fish curry, effectively monetising and thereby actively preserving culinary knowledge

that might otherwise have faded from daily practice as families adopt faster, less labour-intensive cooking.

Textile Arts and Handicrafts: Weaving Identity into Cloth

Textile and craft traditions in Kanyakumari, including cotton weaving traditions historically associated with the wider Kanyakumari-Kerala border belt, palm-leaf and screw-pine (kaitha) mat and basket weaving, and the distinctive drape and colour conventions of sarees worn for specific rituals, represent another domain where women function as both producers and cultural interpreters. The particular way a nine-yard or festival saree is draped, or the specific colour reserved for a widow, a bride, or a temple volunteer, carries coded social meaning that women learn to read and reproduce without formal instruction. Screw-pine leaf weaving, practised largely by women in coastal hamlets to produce mats, baskets, and bags, has historically served both domestic and economic functions, providing supplementary household income particularly during lean fishing seasons. However, competition from cheap plastic alternatives has placed real economic pressure on this craft, threatening the survival of the specific weaving patterns and techniques that distinguish Kanyakumari's craft tradition from similar traditions elsewhere in South India.

Women's self-help groups (SHGs) operating under Tamil Nadu's Mahalir Thittam programme in Kanyakumari district have revived and repackaged screw-pine and coir craft products for urban and tourist markets, including sales through government emporia and online platforms, converting a declining domestic craft into a small but growing livelihood and, in the process, keeping the underlying weaving techniques alive in practice rather than only in memory.

Performing Arts: Music, Dance, and Festival Traditions

Women's participation in Kanyakumari's performing arts spans devotional music sung during temple and church festivals, participation in Kummi and Kolattam folk dance forms performed by groups of women during harvest and temple festivals, and the oral transmission of Villu Paatu (bow-song) ballad traditions in some pockets of the district. These performance forms are frequently collective and participatory rather than staged for an audience, meaning their survival depends on enough women within a community continuing to learn and perform them together, rather than on a single virtuoso practitioner.

Government cultural policy and school curricula have periodically supported these forms through festival competitions and Republic Day or Pongal cultural programmes, which provide occasions for intergenerational teaching, since older women are typically recruited to train schoolgirls for such performances. This creates a semi-formal, recurring channel for cultural transmission that operates alongside, and partly compensates for, the decline of purely informal transmission within the home. Ahead of Pongal celebrations, women's groups in villages such as Thengapattinam and Kadiapattinam regularly organise Kolattam practice sessions in temple courtyards, with senior women directly teaching steps and songs to schoolgirls — a living, recurring classroom for a folk dance form that has no standardised textbook.

Women of the Fishing Communities: Custodians of Maritime Culture

Although fishing itself is predominantly male labour in Kanyakumari, the broader maritime cultural complex depends heavily on

women. Women dominate the post-harvest fish trade, running the auctions and retail sale of fish at markets such as those in Colachel, Chinnathurai, and Kanyakumari town, and it is women who typically manage household finances earned from a volatile, weather-dependent income. This economic role gives women deep, practical knowledge of seasonal fish varieties, sustainable harvesting concerns, and the informal credit and mutual-aid networks that sustain fishing families between good and poor catches. Women are also central to the ritual life surrounding fishing: blessing new boats, observing specific taboos and practices believed to ensure safe voyages, and leading household prayers during storms or when boats are overdue. Following events such as cyclones or the 2004 tsunami, which struck Kanyakumari's coast with significant impact, it was frequently women who held communities together through both practical resource management and the ritual and emotional labour of collective mourning and recovery.

Women fish vendors in Kanyakumari district have organised into cooperative federations and SHGs that negotiate better prices, provide micro-credit, and increasingly use mobile phones and digital payment systems to run their trade, demonstrating how a traditionally informal, heritage-rich economic role is being actively modernised by the very women who sustain it.

Contemporary Challenges: Tourism, Migration, and Cultural Erosion

Kanyakumari's cultural fabric faces several converging contemporary pressures. Mass pilgrimage and leisure tourism centred on the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the district's beaches has commercialised aspects of local culture, sometimes reducing rich ritual or craft practices to simplified souvenirs or photo opportunities stripped of their original meaning. Out-migration of men for work in Gulf countries and elsewhere in India has left many households managed primarily by women, which paradoxically increases women's authority over cultural decision-making even as it strains the time and resources available for non-economic cultural activity.

Simultaneously, rising female literacy and workforce participation, both broadly positive developments, have reduced the unstructured time historically available for oral transmission, while smartphone and social media use among younger generations has shifted leisure time away from grandmother-led storytelling or craft learning toward digital entertainment. Climate change and coastal erosion additionally threaten the very geography — specific beaches, groves, and shrines — around which much local ritual and oral tradition is organised, raising the prospect that some heritage may lose its physical anchor even if the human memory of it persists a while longer. Cultural researchers documenting Kanyakumari's coastal heritage have noted that some younger fisherwomen can no longer recall the specific songs their grandmothers sang while sorting the day's catch, even though they can describe the general practice, illustrating how content-level cultural knowledge can erode within a single generation even while awareness that a tradition existed persists.

Empowerment and Revival: Women-Led Preservation in the Digital Age

Rather than passively witnessing this erosion, women across Kanyakumari are increasingly acting as active curators of their own heritage. Self-help groups under Tamil Nadu's Mahalir Thittam scheme

have diversified from micro-credit into heritage-linked livelihoods, including craft revival, culinary enterprises, and homestay or heritage-tourism ventures that package local culture as a marketable, dignified livelihood rather than an incidental domestic activity. Non-governmental organisations and local colleges have also begun oral-history and documentation projects that specifically target elderly women as primary informants, formally recording songs, recipes, and ritual knowledge before it is lost.

Digital tools have opened a further avenue: younger, digitally literate women are increasingly recording their mothers' and grandmothers' recipes, songs, and craft techniques on smartphones, sharing them via YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp groups, effectively creating an informal, crowd-sourced digital archive that runs parallel to formal institutional heritage documentation. This dynamic positions women not merely as sources to be recorded by outside researchers but as archivists and broadcasters of their own culture, significantly expanding the reach and permanence of knowledge that was previously confined to a single household or village.

Several young women from Kanyakumari district have built modest but genuine followings on YouTube and Instagram by filming their mothers and grandmothers cooking traditional dishes or narrating local legends in Tamil, subtitled for wider audiences a grassroots digital heritage archive created entirely outside formal 7 museum or university structures, and one that simultaneously generates income and visibility for the older women whose knowledge is being documented.

CONCLUSION

Across ritual, cuisine, craft, oral narrative, performance, and maritime economy, the women of Kanyakumari function as an integrated, living archive of a culturally plural region shaped by its unique position at the confluence of three seas and two linguistic-cultural worlds. This heritage has historically been undervalued precisely because it is embodied, informal, and domestic rather than monumental and textual. Contemporary pressures — tourism commercialisation, migration, digital distraction, and coastal environmental change — pose genuine risks to its continuity. Yet the same forces of modernisation, particularly women's growing economic agency and digital access, are also producing new, women-led models of cultural preservation that treat heritage not as a static inheritance to be protected behind glass, but as a living practice to be adapted, monetised, and passed on. Recognising women formally as heritage-bearers, and channelling policy and research attention toward supporting their existing preservation efforts, offers the most promising path to sustaining Kanyakumari's distinctive cultural identity for future generations.

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INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN THE FESTIVALS OF KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT:

Kanyakumari is located at the southernmost tip of India in Tamilnadu. This place has a unique feature, in the entire world where one can witness both the rising and setting of the sun. It has a rich tradition of religious festivals and feasts celebrated by the all-religious people. It is one of the few districts in Tamilnadu known for its religious harmony. Kanyakumari is a peculiar place where all the three seas join together, the Arabian sea, Indian sea and the Bay of Bengal. Likewise, the religion that has been exist in Kanyakumari as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and fusion of Tamil- Kerala people live together for centuries. The people of Kanyakumari celebrate all religious festivals and at the same time, they also celebrate common festivals that has occurred in Kanyakumari. It shows their unity and safeguard their culture at any cost.

Key Words:

Tradition- a custom, belief or doing something continued from the past to present. Harmony-a state of agreement or of peaceful together.Fusion-process or result of joining different things together to form one. Occurred-to happen Unique-being the only one of its types.

INTRODUCTION:

Kanyakumari is located at the southernmost tip of India in Tamilnadu. This place has a unique feature, in the entire world where one can witness both the rising and setting of the sun. It has a rich tradition of religious festivals and feasts celebrated by the all-religious people. It is one of the few districts in Tamilnadu known for its religious harmony. It has a rich tradition of religious festivals and feasts celebrated by the all-religious people. It is one of the few districts in Tamilnadu known for its religious harmony. Kanyakumari is a peculiar place where all the three seas join together, the Arabian sea, Indian sea and the Bay of Bengal. Likewise, the religion that has been exist in Kanyakumari as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity and fusion of Tamil- Kerala people live together for centuries.

Common Festivals:

Cape Festivals:

Kanyakumari was also known as Cape camorin during the British rule in India. It is one of the important places for the pilgrims due to temples. The cape festivals are one of the main tourist attractions in Kanyakumari. It has been celebrated in the month of October for around three days. According to historical significance of the cape festivals, if you take a dip in this water, during this occasion, it will bring happiness and prosperity in one's life. So many people visit during these festivals. It reflects the rich and diverse culture of the country. In the cape festivals, many cultural programs like dance and music were organised by local people. There are many food stalls and delicious were tasted by the people.

Kumari Thiruvizha:

Department of Tourism, Tamilnadu conducts an annual festival to celebrate the native art and music, as Kumari vizha during the month of April and May. The main aim was to encourage the thousands of artists to perform on the stage. The program took place on the urban ghat ground. The Kumari Thiruvizha includes traditional artists from all around the state to perform Bharatnatyam, Mohiniattam and kathakali. Performances of folk dance such as oyilattam, Devar attam, Karagaattam, kavadiattam, Kaluattam, kolaattam, Theru koothu, Kazha koothu, villu pattu, chakkai aattam, kai silambuaattam, kummi and Puli aattam. Music performances include pannisai, Nadhaswaram, thavil and Carnatic music, where all communities perform and participate together.

Vivekananda Jayanthi:

It has been taken place at January 12 at Rock memorial at Kanyakumari every year. It is also celebrated in memory of Swami Vivekananda. It is absorbed as Youth Day.

Kumari Kalai Vizha:

Among the common festivals took place in Kanyakumari were Kumari kalai vizha. From June 26 to 30 th at Triveni Sanganam (Mukkadal sanganam) beach every year without fail. It has been organised by Tamilnadu Tourism Department. Traditional showcases of silambam and Kalari, classical and folk arts like Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Thapppattam, kaargattam, oliyattam and poikkal kuthirai yattam. Apart from this, regional folk music, Therai Isai, Thenmazhi and debate were also conducted.

Kumari Vizha Or Kalai Vizha:

It is a cultural festival organised to promote local arts. Department of Tamilnadu Tourism conducted usually 2 nd or 3rd week of December (3 days). Every evening from 6-10pm at Gandhi mandapam ground, seashore, Kanyakumari. During this vizha, various competitions like essay writing, drawing and dance competition were conducted for school and college students. It is a festival of unity in diversity. Its aim was to promote culture and unity among the people.

Religious Festivals:

Our Lady Of Ransom Church Annual Festival:

Our lady of Ransom, statute of Mother Mary was brought from Rome. Annual feast is celebrated for 10 days in the month of December's feast commences with the flag hoisting, which is scheduled to take place on Friday, that immediately follows the feast of St.Francis Xavier, on 3rd December. Daily morning mass and evening special prayers and preachers take place. On the 8th day evening, Corpus Christi procession is held. On 9th and10th day, our lady of Ransom and St. Joseph are taken in a massive golden car procession. Our lady of ransom is taken in the procession in first car and St. Joseph, spouse of Mary is taken in the Second car. In the procession, the traditional Natheswaram music and the great praising of Mother Mary by the art of pala padal. Masses will be on Tamil, English and Malayam also.

Arulmigu Devi Kanyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple Festival:

Arulmigu Devi Kanyakumari Bhagavathi Amman celebrates several major Annual festivals, includes car procession, cultural events a special ritual.

Major Festivals:

Vaikasi Visagam:

The most important festival, featuring daily grand processions of the goddess

utsaval idol. It is celebrated for 10 days in the month of May-June. Morning and evening, street procession and 9 th day Thoni Ezhunellathu /Boat festival, where the deity is taken on decorated boat.

Navaratri:

It is celebrated from 9-10 days in the month of September-October. Classical music, dance performances and intense religious devotion mark this autumn celebrates of goddess Shakthi hold in Navaratri Mandapam.

Chithra Pournima:

It has been celebrated on full moon day in the month of May. Large number of pilgrims for rituals baths and special prayers were offered.

Aadi And Thai Ammavasai:

Single day sacred occasion for ancestral prayers and rituals dips at Triveni sangamam.

Significance Of Inter-Religious Harmony:

Kanyakumari is a unique district which has the significance of the meeting point three seas. If we take on religion aspect, three major religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have been exist and the people lived together for many years without any major communal clashes. This town is called as “Model Town of Unity”.

During religious festivals like Deepavali, Eid, Christmas, Chaitra purima, people exchange their joy and happiness in giving sweet, inspect of religion. Business like hotels, handicrafts shops, shell shop, street vendor, Boat services, autos etc. Were run by people belonging to all community. At the time of season, all will get benefitted. Only sometimes, due to communal drawbacks, strikes were contacted and it rarely affect the trade in cape. There were not only the major Tamil people but there is a fusion of Tamil Kerala mixed culture and it shows in food, music and language. There were also minority communities feel secure and living in peace. Educational institutions belonging to the major religion, all students were given the opportunity to get educate and it removes the religious diversity from childhood. It develops secular and tolerant attitude from childhood. The people of kk join together from their basic needs for roads and water. During the emergency period like flood, they recuse the people those who were in water and they stayed in the holy places like temples, church and mosque were open to people for shelter and they distributed the food. Self-help group is also running successfully in the name of Kumari Suvai. Women from all community put food and handicraft stall during festival and seasonal time.

Kanyakumari proves “Diversity is not a problem to solve, but it is a strength to celebrate”. Inter religious harmony in kk is a real monument -bigger than Rock Memorial. Leaders from all communities work together from their development of their district.

CONCLUSION:

Kanyakumari is a place of diversity of unity. There is not three religion people alone, but at the same time, there is also people belonging to another race (Kerala). It is located at the border of Kerala. Even though there were religious harmony and the people will celebrate onam also. Collector announces local holiday for onam. It shows religious harmony.

During the common festivals, all community people join together and they celebrate with job. They put various food stalls and craft expo during the festivals time. During the religious festivals, people share their traditional sweets and food to their other religious friends. Some of the

famous foods and savouries were banana chips, sea food, Masi, Pananpazham, Nei sooru.

Kanyakumari is considered as a popular tourist place because of its scenic beauty. Festivals and celebration give the people to enjoy and at the same time, it also makes us unite together in all sense. Kanyakumari is a place of three major religious people living together as it is called as Triveni Sangam (merge of three seas) .

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KANNIYAKUMARI, THE LAND OF PROSPERITY AND CULTURAL TRADITION

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ABSTRACT

The beautiful land of Kanyakumari is a Gift of God to the State of Tamil Nadu. Tamil the ancient language is the language of this district, which has been conferred classical status. All the four types of land viz. Kurinchi (hills), Mullai (forest), Marutham (fields), Neithal (seas) as described in literature are found here, which make the land a place of wholesome beauty and utility. Fishing is an important occupation of this coastal land. Kanyakumari district flourished in cottage industries during the early days. The district is also famous for Siddha and Ayurvedic medicines, as well as herbal extracts. People belonging to different religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and others live a harmonious life in Kanyakumari district.

Key Words:
Kanyakumari, Travancore, Cultural and Social Heritage, Agriculture, Fishing Industry

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari is an administrative district of Tamil Nadu. Kanyakumari occupies a unique place, by its location, in the history and geography of India. It is lying between 77.5 0 and 77.36 0 eastern latitude and 8.3' and 8.35' northern latitude. [1] Thus it is known to lie within the equatorial belt. It has an area of 18,153 sq.km. Nagercoil is the district headquarters of Kanyakumari district. Kanyakumari lies 19 km to the southeast of Nagercoil. It is connected withTrivandrum, the capital of Kerala, by an 88 km long road. [2]

Kanyakumari is a Tamil country and it has the pride of being ruled by ancient Tamil rulers, mainly the Chera Dynasty. Kanyakumari, the sacred village at the Land's End of India,formed a part of the Pandyas for a long time. Earlier the Travancore region, presently known as Kanyakumari district, had two parts named Nanchil Nadu and Idai Nadu. The Cheras, the Pandyas and the Cholas were contesting with each other to have a hold on Idai Nadu and Nanchil Nadu.

Kanyakumari District

Kanyakumari district situated at the southern tip of the Indian peninsula is positioned between hills and seas. The three seas namely the India Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal surround the State on all three sides with only a small portion bordered by land. This land is blessed by both the seasonal rains namely the Southwest monsoon and the North east monsoon. Kanyakumari district was carved out of the erstwhile State of Travancore to form a separate Tamil district, with the purpose to unite the Tamil speaking areas and to make it part of the then Madras State. The merger came into effect on 1 November 1956 and Kanyakumari district came into existence on the same date. Blessed with a rich variety of flora and fauna, the land abounds in natural beauty. There are good

forest coverage and many varieties of wild animals like elephants, tiger, wild buffalo, panther, bear, deer, monkeys and peacocks are found in the forests of Kanyakumari district. In addition to the sturdy trees like cedar, teak, rosewood, sandalwood, etc. the district enjoys cash,crops like cardamom, tea, coffee and pepper, cultivated along the hilly region. The district is in 3 the process of becoming a bird sanctuary and varieties like pelican, flamingos, crane, stork, goose are migrating to this place from far-away lands, from as far as Siberia, to this place of natural wealth. Other native birds of this place are peacock, parrot, crane, stork, quail etc.

Landscape

All the four types of land viz. Kurinchi (hills), Mullai (forest), Marutham (fields), Neithal (seas) as described in literature are found here, which make the land a place of wholesome beauty and utility. Mahendragiri hills, the highest peak in Kanyakumari, is at a height of 2500 ft. which lies at the terminus of the Western Ghats. [3] The Travancore coast (presently Kanyakumari) is today known for its rich deposits of Ilmenite, Monazite and Silicon which has considerably added to the strategic importance of the State on the world map.

The vegetation of Kanyakumari has all the lushness associated with the tropics. The region is watered almost uniformly by the numerous streams that have their sources in the Ghats and flow into the ocean. These factors individually and collectively account for the high vapor content and humidity of the atmosphere. Also, the small diurnal variations of temperature form the striking feature of the climate of Kanyakumari.

Cultural Advancement

Tamil the ancient language is the language of this district, which has been conferred classical status. Ceylon, Malaysia, Myanmar are the countries where Tamil people have established their identity, effort and language. There is also minority Malayalam speaking population found in this district. There is multi-religious and multiethnic population in this district, although some of the ethnic groups are predominant from time immemorial.

Kanyakumari district has the highest literacy rate in the whole of India. Schools and colleges abound in the district. Higher education is given top priority in the district and the district claims to have cent percent literacy. Women's education scores high among all the communities of the district. Nagercoil is greatly known for its educational institutions where the early Christian missionaries made their educational enterprises. The people of this land are studious, industrious and intelligent.[4]

Agriculture and Horticulture of the District

A great variety of fruits and other agricultural products are cultivated in this land. Paddy is grown as the main crop of this region, and it is the staple food of the people of the land. Irrigation schemes are very active and the fields are served by channels constructed all across the district. The fields along the Nagercoil belt are named 'Nanjil Nadu' because of the abundance of paddy fields in this area. Nanchil Nadu means 'land of the one who holds the plough'. Coconut tree, also known as 'Karpaga Tharu', is an important crop of this district. Coconut plantation adds to the rich cultivation of the district. Paddy and coconut crops together promote the agrarian wealth and vegetation scenario of the district. Coconut is used in food processing and almost in all food items in Kanyakumari kitchen, ground or as a garnishing item.

Coconut tree yields a good variety of sub-products like fiber, shells, leaves and other things. Coconut oil is a valuable item and a constituent of many herbal medicines Tapioca an important product of this land is cultivated throughout the year. Cashew nut is a special item cultivated in Kanyakumari district. Cashew nut has huge export value, earning good foreign exchange. Cashew nut factories are found in many parts of the district. Pepper the world-famous spice is cultivated mainly in the western part of the district. It was the demand for the pepper (black gold) of Travancore that brought the European powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French, to this land which led to the European domination over the country. Palmyra, the State Tree of Tamil Nadu, is a mark of this part of land, which was an important livelihood of the people of this place earlier. The sap named akkani or padaneer, derived from palmyra tree is boiled to get jaggery, locally known as karuppukatti, which is of high nutritive value. Palmyra was on the decline due to large scale felling of the trees. Now the government is encouraging palmyra products, and palmyra is being planted across the district to revive the palmyra industry. The three fruit varieties plantain, mango and jackfruit are together named "Mukkani" and it is served on auspicious occasions. Mango and jack fruit season continues till early August, and plantain is available throughout the year. Mangoes are found in many varieties which are named Neelam, Bangalura (kili mookku in Tamil), kola, etc. Rumenia, Alphonsa and Mulgova are some[5] special varieties of mangoes. Banana (ethan) variety of the plantain is very nutritious and delicious and it is an export item too. Chenthozhuvan matti, chingan, tholuvan (red and white), peyan, rasakathali, poonkathali, and palayamkottan, are other common varieties of plantains. Karpooravalli and robesta are the new varieties.

Fishing Industry

Fishing is an important occupation of this coastal land. The district is renowned for a variety of fish population. The coastal region of Kanyakumari is inhabited by Paravas and Arayas professing catholic faith. The Paravas, who are also known as Mukkuvars, go to the seas in catamarans or vallams which are country boats to catch fish. The fish catch is sold at the market which brings money for their livelihood. Nowadays motor boats have come on the scene and fishermen form groups and go for deep sea fishing in motor boats. They stay at the sea for weeks and catch fish which they bring ashore. The fish they bring is auctioned at the shore which is purchased by big business men and women to be sold at the market. Export of fish is an important occupation of this district which fetches huge money for the fishermen. Fishnet making is a good cottage industry through which the women make good money.But Nowadays due to the fishnet factories cropping all over the district, this cottage industry has been on the downward path.

Religion in Kanyakumari

Important religions observed in the district are Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, with some population following Jainism, Ayyavazhi etc. In spite of these many religions and many worship practices, people belonging to the religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and others live in harmony, like brothers and sisters. They visit each other and share their customs and delicacies with people of other religions; they participate in the feasts and festivities of the other

communities and enjoy together. Also, people hold the people of other castes in mutual love and respect, without hurting one another's sentiments and values. Thus, Kanniyakumari district remains a conglomerate of many religions and castes, but united in all their day-to-day activities. There are differences existing in the worship practices of the people of this place; however, their culture coincides in many aspects, and they all live in peace and harmony. It is to[6] be noted that their food habits and practices are very much similar to each other. In cultural aspect also people follow the customs in unison with each other. Thanumalayan temple at Suchindram, St.Xavier's Church at Kottar and the Vaikundapathy at Swamithoppu are religiously important places. The famous Chitharal Cave Temple, a Jain temple, is found in this district.

Cultural and Social Heritage

The rock where now stands the Vivekananda Memorial has been regarded as a sacred place, since early times. In Puranic tradition, it was known as 'Sripada Parai', meaning 'The Parai that has been blessed by the touch of Sripada which refers to the feet of the Goddess. It was on this rock that the Goddess Kanya did 'Tapasya'. It is widely believed that the original Kumari temple was on this rock or somewhere near it and the rock was a part of the mainland. It is widely believed that the original Kumari temple was on this rock or somewhere near it and the rock was a part of the mainland. Sometime in the distant past, the sea encroached upon the main land and turned the rock into an island, with the result that the old temple had to be rebuilt on its present site. 6 There is the tradition embodied in the so-called Lemurian theory which maintains that there lay a large mass of land to the south of Cape Comorin, later swallowed up by the sea.

Sangam works like Purananuru, Manimekalai and Silapathikaram refer to this place. Tolkappiam provides ample testimony to prove that this region was from very early times the southernmost boundary of Tamil Nadu. Silapathikaram refers to this place as an important pilgrim centre, where the people from all over India took sacred bath. It seems to have got its name Kanyakumari from the virgin goddess Parvathi or Durga to whom the important temple in the place is dedicated.[7]

Water Reservoirs

Kanyakumari has a number of water ways and water stations. There are ponds, lakes and streams, which provide water wealth for the livelihood of the people of this place. The main water reservoirs Pechiparai and Perunchani dams supply water for irrigation to the entire district.

Mathoor Thottipalam is an important center of attraction for the tourists. This is the 'Thottipalam', where a bridge with the two sides covered with parapets (walls) is constructed connecting two hills. It is borne by tall sturdy pillars, through which water flows from one end to the other end. The tributary of Paraliyaru with serene waters flows below the bridge.

Palaiyaru passing via the outskirts of Nagercoil, irrigates the lands of this region and empties itself in the Indian Ocean at Manakudi. Poigai dam is built near Aralvoimozhi across this river. River Valliaru originates at Velimalai and after passing through 16 km across Kalkulam taluk it enters the Arabian Sea at Kadiapattanam. Toovar is one distributary of Valliaru across which the Mambazhathuraiyaru dam is built.

The river valleys of Valliyar and Kuzhithuraiyar are blessed with coconut groves. The Manakudy estuary region has wide expanse of coconut belt eastward up to Agastheeswaram and westward up to

Rajakkamangalam across Eathamozhi. Mangrove vegetation borders the estuary of Manakudi Kayal. Aralvoimozhi is a mountain pass from Kanniyakumari district to other parts of Tamil Nadu.

Commerce and Industries

Kottar was a commercial center since ancient times which is also the former name for Nagercoil. The name Nagercoil (Nagarkovil) was derived from the ancient Nagaraja temple. Kottar being its former name, it was visited by merchants from far and wide. The Kottar market, with varieties of merchandise items is famous even now. Kulasekharam is an important centre for business and other activities, which serves as the axle of the social and economic life of the people of the district.

Kanyakumari district flourished in cottage industries during the early days. The Kanyakumari Co-operative Spinning Mills located at Aralvoimozhi and Nagammal Mills P.Ltd. in Vetturnimadam, Nagercoil are important enterprises in the realm of cotton industries. Surgical glove production is carried out at many centres in Kanyakumari district. The Indian Rare Earths Limited in Manavalakurichi, one of the top government organizations, is a public sector undertaking functioning under the Department of Atomic Energy at Manavalakurichi village near Colachel in Kanyakumari district. Salt manufacture is an important industry in Kanyakumari district. Colachel salt pan, Puthalam salt pan, Swamithoppu salt pan, Manakudy salt pan are important salt production sites.

Coir industry is another industry very active in Kanniyakumari district. Coir production is carried along the coasts where coconut fibre is treated and coir produced from that. Fishnet factories are found at many places in Kanniyakumari district. Muttom, near Manavalakurichi, was a health resort during British days. Muttom has a magnificent light house which serves the ships on transit. Kanniyakumari district is also famous for Siddha and Ayurvedic medicines, as well as herbal extracts. A great number of these medical units are found all over the district, helping in the health enrichment of the people of the district.

Great Personalities of Kanyakumari District

Kanniyakumari is the home for many great personalities like Kumari Thanthai Marshal Nesamony, Communist Leader P.Jeevanandam and Comrade S.Hemachandran the unparalled force in the communist world of Kanyakumari. Important among these notable leaders is Social Reformer and Freedom Fighter P.Jeevanadam who hailed from Boothapondi of Kanyakumari district. He fought conscientiously for the upliftment of the untouchables, the depressed classes, and battled for their right to entry into Hindu temples. He conducted Satyagraha in front of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, in spite of much resistance from conventional Hindus who disagreed with him for his principle of equality and justice. Undaunted and determined for the cause. Jeevanandam entered the temple singing his jargon song: “Vazhi viduveer! Vazhi viduveer!”, overcoming all obstacles.

CONCLUSION

The beautiful land of Kanyakumari is a Gift of God to the State of Tamil Nadu. The lush green forests and the serene coastal fringes endow the ancient land with special prosperity and beauty. Though nature is getting corrupted due to human interference and misuse, attempts are continually made to maintain the original glory of the land and stabilize the

recommended percentage of forests and plains in it. Natural calamities often strike this peninsular district as it is largely exposed to the seas. But people strive hard to make their way out of all the obstacles with the zeal to fight against all odds and ends, and establish their identity to build up aarmonious society, working towards growth and development in all walks of life.

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KUMARI THIRUVIZHA: A CONFLUENCE OF FOLK CULTURE, TRADITION & CULTURAL HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari is a culturally significant region situated at the southernmost tip of India, where diverse religious traditions, folk practices and various arts have developed. Among the cultural celebrations of the region, "Kumari Thiruvizha" occupies an important place as a platform for celebrating and presenting the cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari. The festival brings together various forms of "Folk arts, Classical performances, Traditional music and Cultural programmes", providing an opportunity for artists and communities to showcase their talents and cultural traditions. Folk performances like "Karagattam, Oyilattam, Devarattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kali Aattam, Kolaattam, Therukoothu, Villuppattu, Kummi and Puliyattam", along with traditional musical forms and performances. This festival also provides a space for Tamil folk traditions of Kanniyakumari to be presented before a broader audience. It also explores how the festival contributes to cultural continuity and tourism. It also shows that Kumari Thiruvizha is not merely a festive celebration but also a significant platform for "preserving, transmitting and promoting the living cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari". Thus, this paper focuses on Kanniyakumari's folk arts, traditional performances, community participation and their role in preserving cultural heritage.

Keywords:

Kumari Thiruvizha, Kanniyakumari, Folk Arts, Cultural Heritage, Cultural Identity, Festivals, Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of Tamil Nadu. The cultural landscape of Kanniyakumari is not represented by a single tradition. It is a combination of historical experiences and cultural practices that have developed over a long period. Festivals play a major role in expressing cultural diversity. Among the cultural festivals of the district, Kumari Thiruvizha provides an important platform for the presentation of traditional arts and music. The Kanniyakumari District administration records Kumari Thiruvizha as one among the district's annual festivals and notes that various cultural activities are conducted during the celebration. It is an annual festival celebrating the classical, folk and musical traditions of Tamil Nadu. It is jointly conducted by the Department of Tourism of Tamil Nadu and the Kanniyakumari District Administration. Thus, Kumari Thiruvizha can be studied as an important cultural expression through which Kanniyakumari presents its artistic traditions and regional identity.

Objectives

The major objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the cultural significance of Kumari Thiruvizha in Kanniyakumari.
2. To examine the role of community participation in sustaining cultural traditions.
3. To examine the importance of Kumari Thiruvizha in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage.
4. To identify the challenges in preservation of culture in Kanniyakumari.
5. To suggest measures for overcoming the struggles in cultural preservation.

Kumari Thiruvizha

Kumari Thiruvizha is an annual cultural festival associated with

Kanniyakumari, conducted by the Ministry of Tourism and Kanniyakumari District Administration. Kumari Thiruvizha is an Artistic, Cultural, Seasonal, Dance & Music Festival. According to the Ministry's description, the festival celebrates native art and music and provides opportunities for numerous artists to perform before the public. The festival has included a range of classical and folk performances. These include Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam and Kathakali, along with folk forms such as Oyilattam, Devarattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kali Aattam, Kolaattam, Therukoothu, Villuppattu, Kummi and Puliyattam. Musical performances have also included traditional instruments and musical forms such as Nadaswaram, Thavil, Pannisai and Carnatic music. Kumari Thiruvizha has been conducted as an important cultural festival of Kanniyakumari for several years. In 2018, it was held from 21 to 25 June with various traditional cultural performances. In 2023, the festival was conducted from 26 April to 2 May at Urban Ghat Ground, Kanniyakumari. In 2024, a five-day festival was held at Kanniyakumari Beach to promote tourism and provide a platform for folk artists. In 2026, another five-day edition was organised from 26 to 30 June at Triveni Sangam. Kumari Thiruvizha adds a cultural dimension to Kanniyakumari tourism by allowing visitors to experience traditional performances along with the region's tourist attractions. Thus, it creates a cultural platform where different forms of performance can be presented together.

Folk Arts and Cultural Expressions in Kumari Thiruvizha

Kumari Thiruvizha provides an important platform for presenting the rich folk traditions of Tamil Nadu. The festival includes many types of folk dances, folk theatre, storytelling and traditional performances. The folk arts associated with the festival include Oyilattam, Devarattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kali Aattam, Kolaattam, Therukoothu, Kazhai Koothu, Villu Paattu, Chakkai Aattam, Kai Silambu Aattam, Kummi, Bhagavatha Nadanam and Puliyattam. Oyilattam is a group dance performed with coordinated movements and rhythm. Devarattam is an energetic traditional dance of southern Tamil Nadu. Karagattam is performed by balancing a decorated pot called karagam on the head. Kavadi Aattam is a devotional dance connected with Murugan worship. Kali Aattam is an energetic folk performance with lively movements. Kolaattam is a group dance in which performers use sticks and move rhythmically. Therukoothu is a traditional folk theatre combining acting, dance, music and storytelling. Kazhai Koothu involves physical skills, balance and entertainment. Villu Paattu is a musical storytelling tradition in which stories are narrated through songs. Chakkai Aattam and Kai Silambu Aattam are rhythmic folk performances involving traditional movements and sound. Kummi is a group dance performed with rhythmic clapping and coordinated movements. Bhagavatha Nadanam combines storytelling, music and dance. Puliyattam, or tiger dance, is a colourful performance in which artists imitate the movements of a tiger. Alongside folk arts, Kumari Thiruvizha has also provided a platform for classical performances such as Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam and Kathakali. Traditional musical programmes have included Pannisai, Nadaswaram and Thavil, as well as Carnatic music.

These folk arts show the richness and

variety of Tamil cultural traditions. Through Kumari Thiruvizha, traditional dances, music and storytelling are brought before a wider audience. Therefore, this festival helps to preserve, promote and pass traditional cultural practices to younger generations. It also provides opportunities for folk artists to showcase their skills and strengthens the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari.

Folk Arts as Living Cultural Heritage

The folk performances of Kumari Thiruvizha should be understood as living cultural traditions rather than merely entertainment programmes. Forms such as Villu Paattu and Therukoothu carry storytelling traditions, while Kummi, Kolaattam and Oyilattam demonstrate collective participation. Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam and other performance forms connect artistic expression with religious and social traditions. The festival provides artists with a public stage and introduces these forms to residents, tourists and younger audiences. The Kanniyakumari District administration describes Kumari Thiruvizha as an annual event in which residents and visitors participate and various cultural activities are conducted. The Tamil Nadu Department of Art and Culture also lists Kumari Vizha among the festivals for which Regional Cultural Centres conduct cultural programmes in coordination with other cultural and government institutions. Therefore, Kumari Thiruvizha can contribute to the continuity of folk traditions by creating spaces where artists can perform, audiences can experience traditional arts, and younger generations can become familiar with regional cultural practices.

Challenges in Cultural Preservation

Despite the importance of festivals such as Kumari Thiruvizha, several challenges exist in preserving traditional cultural expressions. First, some traditional art forms may receive less attention than popular entertainment. Second, younger generations may have fewer opportunities to learn traditional performance practices. Third, commercialisation can sometimes change the character of traditional performances. Fourth, artists who possess specialised knowledge may require greater institutional and financial support. Therefore, cultural festivals should be supported through long-term programmes rather than being treated only as occasional entertainment events. Training programmes, artist support, documentation, school and college involvement, cultural workshops and research projects can contribute to the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage.

Suggestions for Cultural Preservation

The following measures can strengthen the cultural significance of Kumari Thiruvizha:

- Traditional artists should be provided regular opportunities to perform.
- Folk artists and cultural practitioners should receive appropriate recognition and support.
- Schools and colleges can organise educational programmes connected with the festival.
- Traditional performances can be documented through audio-visual archives.
- Oral histories of senior artists and cultural practitioners can be recorded.
- Workshops can be conducted to introduce younger generations to folk arts.
- Local communities should have an active role in planning cultural programmes.
- Greater attention can be given to lesser-known folk traditions of Kanniyakumari.

• Researchers can undertake systematic studies on the history and changing nature of Kumari Thiruvizha.

CONCLUSION

Kumari Thiruvizha occupies an important position in the cultural landscape of Kanniyakumari. It provides an opportunity to understand how cultural traditions are presented, preserved and transformed in contemporary society. Unlike the other traditional religious festivals of Kanniyakumari, Kumari Thiruvizha is relatively a modern cultural festival organised through the state tourism and district administration for promoting the cultural and artistic heritage of Kanniyakumari by providing a common platform for folk artists, classical performers and traditional musicians. In these ways, Kumari Thiruvizha adds an important dimension to the rich cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari. As Kanniyakumari continues to experience social and cultural change, Kumari Thiruvizha serves as an important space for preserving, celebrating and communicating the region's cultural heritage.

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KANYAKUMARI'S HIDDEN COASTAL GEM - VATTAKOTTAI FORT

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ABSTRACT

Vattakottai Fort, whose name translates literally to Circular Fort despite its actual rectangular footprint, is an 18th-century coastal defense fortification situated approximately 7kilometers north of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu, India. Nestled right along the coastline, the fort was constructed during the reign of King Marthanda Varma of the erstwhile Travancore Kingdom to protect the southern coastal borders and safeguard the historic Kumari port, a vital trade hub of the region. The modern granite structures seen today were engineered under the supervision of Captain Eustachius De Lannoy, a Dutch naval officer captured during the Battle of Colachel in 1741 who went on to serve as the Senior Commander of the Travancore Army. Fish motifs carved into the ceiling of the fort's inner pillared halls suggest that the site held military or cultural importance even earlier, dating back to the reign of the medieval Pandya Dynasty. Spanning nearly four acres, Vattakottai Fort is constructed entirely of massive granite blocks engineered to withstand naval assaults. Its formidable outer walls stand 25 to 26 feet high, with a front thickness extending up to 29 feet. The inner layout includes defensive watchtowers, storage rooms for weaponry, ramps for moving heavy artillery to elevated bastions, and a central freshwater tank. Local history and popular legend also refer to a sealed subterranean tunnel roughly four feet wide that reportedly connected Vattakottai Fort to Padmanabhapuram Palace, the royal seat of Travancore located over 30 kilometers away.

Recognized for its historical and architectural value, the fort was declared a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in 1965. Today, it remains one of the regions most famous historic landmarks, offering visitors panoramic views of the sea on one side, the Western Ghats on the other, and adjacent black-sand beaches.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important remaining coastal defense fortifications of 18th-century Peninsular India is Vattakottai Fort, which is located on the coast of Tamil Nadu Kanyakumari District. This coastal granite stronghold, which literally translates to Circular Fort, spans around 3.5 acres close to the southernmost point of the Indian subcontinent. Constructed under the rule of King Marthanda Varma of the Travancore Kingdom and later altered by Dutch naval commander Eustachius De Lannoy, Vattakottai was ideally situated to keep an eye on naval movements in the Bay of Bengal and guard Nanjil Nadu coastline. The fortification is situated right at the maritime threshold, where its structural components are constantly impacted by high relative humidity, a steady saline wind, strong wave dynamics, and tropical monsoon precipitation. The fort's main building elements, granite masonry veneer, lime binder, and structural brickwork, have suffered significant material deterioration over ages due to these environmental

variables. A comprehensive conservation framework that incorporates lime-based chemical restoration, marine shoreline engineering, non-destructive diagnostic techniques, and sustainable visitor management practices is needed to address these issues.

The Travancore Military Strategy

During the mid-18th century, the Kingdom of Travancore underwent rapid consolidation under King Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma. Following the pivotal Battle of Colachel in 1741, where Travancore forces defeated the Dutch East India Company, the captured Dutch commander Eustachius De Lannoy was integrated into the Travancore military structure. De Lannoy was tasked with modernizing the kingdom's defenses, introducing European fortification concepts that combined massive stone masonry with strategic artillery embrasures.

Historical Development Chronology	
Era / Year	Strategic & Architectural Milestones
Pre-1740s	Earthwork coastal watch-posts established in Nanjil Nadu
1741 CE	Battle of Colachel; capture of Eustachius De Lannoy
1750s CE	Reconstruction of Vattakottai in heavy coastal granite
1956 CE	Reorganization of States; transition to Tamil Nadu
Present	Protection under Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

Strategic Maritime Positioning

Vattakottai Fort was engineered to complete a coastal defense network anchored by Udayagiri Fort inland and Padmanabhapuram Palace as the royal seat. Occupying a small promontory, the fort provided overlapping field-of-fire capabilities over adjacent sea lanes, protecting local trade routes and preventing amphibious landings by rival regional powers or European merchant fleets.

Structural Typology and Architectural Analysis

Vattakottai Fort's layout demonstrates a functional synthesis of traditional Indian granite stonemasonry and 18th-century European fortification principles. The structure features ramparts ranging from 25 to 26 feet in height, supported by a heavy outer stone revetment and an inner core of packed soil and rubble masonry.



Vattakottai Fort coastal wall

The Ramparts and Watchtowers

The elevated rampart walkway surrounding the interior courtyard enabled rapid troop movements during coastal engagements. The walls are topped by crenellated parapets featuring angled embrasures specifically designed for field cannons. At strategic points along the curtain wall, elevated watchtowers project outward, offering clear sightlines along the surrounding shoreline.

The Internal Parade Ground and Quarters

The interior enclosure housed barracks, ammunition storehouses, and fresh-water wells designed to support garrison troops during extended

blockades. The center of the fort features a large open parade ground that allowed assembly and drill maneuvers clear of enemy artillery fire.

Seaward Elevation / Cross-Section			
Outer Ocean	Granite Facing	Rampart Fill	Inner Courtyard
Waves	Cut Blocks & Lime Mortar	Compacted Soil & Rubble Core	Open Ground & Officers Quarters

Saline Corrosion and Haloclasty

The primary chemical decay mechanism at Vattakottai is salt weathering, or haloclasty. Airborne sea spray deposits sodium chloride () and magnesium sulfate () inside the microscopic pores of the granite facing and lime mortar joints.

Pore Solution Evaporation→ Salt Supersaturation→

When trapped moisture evaporates during hot daytime cycles, these salts crystallize, exerting internal crystallization pressures () that exceed the tensile strength () of historic lime binders and granite surfaces. This leads to continuous surface flaking, granular detachment, and spalling along vulnerable wall sections. Direct wave impact during monsoon sea surges causes severe hydrodynamic scouring at the seaward foundation wall. The continuous push and pull of water strips mortar from lower stone joints, undermining structural stability and creating voids where localized wall collapse can occur.

To protect Vattakottai Fort from wave erosion and rising sea levels, structural interventions must combine traditional stone conservation with coastal engineering solutions. Installing geotextile-lined boulder riprap off the seaward wall breaks incoming wave energy before it reaches the fort's base. This reduces hydrodynamic pressure on lower foundation courses without altering historical sea views. Rainwater accumulation on top of the ramparts can seep into wall cores, causing internal structural degradation. Restore original stone drainage gargoyles and channels to keep water moving off wall tops. Lay breathable geotextile membranes beneath rampart gravel pathways to direct rainwater away from core masonry.



Inner enclosure and stone stairs

Sustainable Cultural Tourism Management

Balancing visitor access with structural preservation requires managing tourist footfall and protecting sensitive historic surfaces. Peak footfall should be managed through dynamic ticketing systems that cap visitors to a maximum of 250 individuals inside the enclosure at any given time, preventing structural congestion along narrow stairways and ramparts. To prevent wear on historic granite stones, elevated composite walkways should be installed along primary tour routes, keeping foot traffic clear of historic surfaces while maintaining accessibility.

Digital Heritage Documentation & Interpretation

Documenting heritage sites through digital technologies preserves architectural records and enhances visitor engagement without physical alterations.

3D Laser Scanning Photogrammetry: High-density LiDAR mapping generates precise digital twins of the fort, providing architectural baselines to track structural shifts over time.

Augmented Reality (AR) Signage: Weather-resistant QR code plaques allow visitors to view historical digital reconstructions of fort operations, cannon placements, and garrison quarters on their smartphones.

Effective conservation requires coordinating effort across local, state, and national bodies under established legal frameworks.

Archaeological Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR)

Enforce strict 100-meter prohibited and 200-meter regulated zones around the fort to prevent unauthorized construction. Establish joint oversight committees uniting the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TNTDC), and local municipal authorities.

CONCLUSION

Vattakottai Fort stands as a key monument of Peninsular India's coastal military heritage. Preserving this historic structure requires an integrated approach that balances traditional masonry techniques with modern marine engineering and sustainable tourism practices. By deploying specialized desalination techniques, breathable lime mortars, offshore wave barriers, and controlled visitor access, conservation authorities can protect Vattakottai Fort against severe coastal environments, ensuring its survival for future generations.

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THIRUVITHAMCODE ARAPPALLY: ANTIQUITY, HISTORICAL CONTINUITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
A HISTORICAL STUDY OF ST. MARY'S ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH, KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Thiruvithamcode Arappally, officially known as St. Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church and popularly called Thomayar Kovil, is an important Christian heritage monument in the southern Tamil–Kerala region. Church tradition associates the site with St. Thomas the Apostle and dates its foundation to AD 63. It is also identified with the traditional "half church" among the seven and a half churches associated with St. Thomas. This article examines the antiquity of the church through early Christian literary traditions, South Indian maritime history, the Saint Thomas Christian tradition, early-modern documentary references, architectural evidence, and field observations. It argues that the site possesses a long historical continuity, although the surviving architectural core is more cautiously associated with the seventeenth century and later additions. The stone cross in the inner chapel is traditionally attributed to St. Thomas, but its personal authorship has not been established by epigraphic or scientific evidence. The church is best understood as an ancient Christian sacred site with an early-modern architectural core and continuing cultural, religious, and social significance.

Keywords: *Thiruvithamcode Arappally; Thomayar Kovil; St. Thomas tradition; Chera kingdom; Christian heritage; Kanyakumari; historical memory; church architecture.*

1. Introduction

St. Mary's Orthodox Syrian Church or Arapalli, is situated in Thiruvithamcode in the present-day Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. It is maintained by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, it is also known as Thomayar Kovil. The church occupies a distinctive place in the religious and cultural history of South India because its tradition connects the site with the mission of St. Thomas the Apostle. The church tradition holds that St. Thomas established the church in AD 63. The site is also associated with the Ezharapallikal, or seven and a half churches. The name Arappally has two meanings as "half church" and as "Royal Church." The second meaning connects the site with royal patronage, sometimes attributed to the Chera ruler Uthiyan Cheralathan or Nedum Cheralathan. A historical study should distinguish between the age of the tradition, and date of the surviving building. The aim of this article is not to reject the church's tradition, but to examine it critically and to establish the strongest historically defensible account of its antiquity.

2. Sources and Method

This study draws on early Christian writings, later Saint Thomas traditions, Portuguese and Dutch records, modern historical studies, institutional publications, field observation, and an interview with Rev. Barsleebi Ramban, Manager and Vicar of the church. The evidence is considered under three categories: traditional evidence, documentary evidence, and material evidence. Traditional sources - oral accounts, church pamphlets, pilgrimage narratives, and liturgical memory are essential for understanding community

identity. Documentary sources must be examined according to their date, authorship, and proximity to the events described. Material sources, including the walls, inner chapel, stone cross, baptismal font, and carved elements, require architectural and archaeological analysis. The method adopted here therefore separates what is historically documented from what is preserved as religious tradition.

3. Early Christianity and the Saint Thomas Tradition

Maritime trade connected South India with Arabia, Persia, the Red Sea and the wider Indian Ocean. These connections made the movement of merchants, religious teachers, and Christian traditions historically possible. The Acts of Thomas, a Syriac Christian work generally dated to the early third century, is the earliest major literary source associated with the eastern mission of Thomas. It supports the antiquity of a tradition connecting Thomas with India or the East, but it does not mention Thiruvithamcode. Eusebius of Caesarea recorded a tradition that Pantaenus travelled to India and met people familiar with Christian teaching. The sixth-century traveller Cosmas Indicopleustes also referred to Christians in India and the Malabar region. These references support the existence of Christianity in India by late antiquity, although they do not specifically identify the church at Thiruvithamcode. South Indian Christian tradition preserve in oral memory and text like the Ramban Pattu St.Thomas is associated with the founding of the Seven and a half churches. This is a traditional account. Thiruvithamcode is identified as the "half church." Such an early foundation may have been a small shrine, cross, or prayer house rather than the granite building visible today. Kerala Tourism notes that the traditional early places of worship were not necessarily large structures. This distinction allows the sacred site to possess an older history even if the standing building is later. The present structure may represent a later reconstruction or expansion of an earlier sacred place.

4. Chera Patronage and the Meaning of Arappally

The church tradition connects Thiruvithamcode with royal support. The name Arappally is interpreted by local tradition as "Royal Church," and few accounts identify the patron as thiyan Cheralathan or Nedum Cheralathan. This association is historically meaningful because the church stood within the wider cultural region of the Cheras, Ayas, Venad, and later Travancore. Local tradition says that, the ruler supported St. Thomas and permitted or assisted the establishment of the church. The royal connection also explains why the church is popularly called Arappally. However, no securely published contemporary inscription, copper-plate grant, or royal charter has yet been identified that records St. Thomas's meeting with this ruler or names him as the founder of the church. The association should therefore be presented as a later regional tradition of royal patronage. Royal support for religious communities was historically plausible in South India, but general historical possibility cannot prove this particular attribution. The safest historical formulation is that Thiruvithamcode Arappally preserves a tradition of Chera royal patronage, traditionally connected with Uthiyan Cheralathan, at the same time the precise identity of the patron remains unverified. This does not reduce the cultural importance of the tradition. It may preserve a memory of political protection, the social status of the Christian

community, or a later interpretation of the name Arappally.

5. Documentary Evidence and Historical Continuity

The Synod of Diamper of 1599 and the early-modern reports associated with Francisco Roz are important for understanding the Saint Thomas Christians. Roz's Report on the Serra, dated 1603–1604 and associated with British Library MS Add. 9853, records traditions known among the Christian community during the Portuguese period. These documents do not prove a first-century foundation, but they demonstrate that the apostolic and geographical traditions of the Saint Thomas Christians were firmly established by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Duarte Barbosa's early-sixteenth-century account and Dutch records connected with Adriaan Moens provide broader regional context. Any direct identification of a place-name in Barbosa's text with Thiruvithamcode should be compared with the original Portuguese text and a reliable translation. Similarly, the exact title and date of the Moens reference require verification. The available historical and institutional descriptions identify the three principal sections of the surviving church with the seventeenth century and the entrance hall with the twentieth century. The most defensible chronology is therefore:

- An ancient apostolic tradition.
- Possible earlier sacred activity.
- Early-modern documentary visibility.
- A principal architectural core generally dated to the seventeenth century.
- Later additions, include the twentieth-century entrance hall.

This chronology indicates that the church has a long history even if the present structure cannot be dated entirely to the first century.

6. The Inner Chapel and the Stone Cross

The inner chapel is traditionally regarded as the oldest and most sacred part of the church. A stone cross is engraved on the southern wall near the granite baptismal font. During the field visit, church authorities stated that the cross was engraved by St. Thomas himself. Published accounts likewise describe the cross as traditionally attributed to the apostle. The cross forms an important part of the church's sacred memory and pilgrimage tradition. However, no contemporary inscription or scientific archaeological study has yet established its first-century date or confirmed that it was personally carved by St. Thomas. The cross should therefore be treated as a significant material expression of apostolic tradition rather than as independently verified proof of apostolic authorship.

7. Architectural and Cultural Heritage

The church preserves a distinctive regional form of Christian architecture. Its granite walls, stone steps, arched entrances, corridors, baptismal font, stone troughs, pedestals, carved doorway, and traditional roof display local craftsmanship. The building does not simply reproduce European colonial forms. It reflects the adaptation of Syrian Christian worship to Tamil–Kerala materials and construction practices. The use of locally quarried stone and traditional workmanship gives the church a strong regional character.

The monument has both tangible and intangible heritage.

Tangible heritage

The tangible heritage includes:

- Granite walls.
- Stone steps and pathways.
- Arched doorways.
- Inner chapel.
- Stone cross.

- Granite baptismal font.
- Stone troughs and pedestals.
- Carved doorway elements.
- Traditional roof structure.
- Heritage-centre collections.
- Historical documents and photographs.

Intangible heritage

The intangible heritage includes:

- The tradition of St. Thomas's mission.
- Devotion to St. Mary.
- The identity of Thomayar Kovil.
- The interpretation of Arappally as a Royal Church.
- The tradition of the seven and a half churches.
- Pilgrimage practices.
- Oral memory.
- Ritual use of the stone cross.
- Inter-community devotional practices.
- The memory of royal patronage.

The church remains a leading institution. Its designation as an International St. Thomas Pilgrimage Centre, the St. Thomas Heritage Centre, the clinic, and the palliative-care programme demonstrate that its historical identity continues to be connected with present religious and social service.

8. The Church as a Living Heritage Centre

The significance of the church is not limited to its historical structure. It continues to function as a place of worship and pilgrimage. The St. Thomas Heritage Centre includes a historical museum, conference hall, pilgrimage- centre office, accommodation facilities, and guest rooms. Such a centre is important for preserving the church's historical materials and presenting its traditions to visitors. The church also conducts social-service activities through St. Thomas Clinic and palliative care. According to the information collected during the field visit, the clinic provides medical assistance to local people, while palliative care serves elderly and homebound persons. These activities demonstrate that Thiruvithamcode Arappally is not merely an old monument. It is a living heritage institution that continues to serve religious, cultural, and social purposes.

9. Historical Chronology

The historical development of the church may be understood through the following approximate chronology:

First century CE

According to church tradition, St. Thomas established the church in AD 63. This remains an important religious tradition but is not independently verified by a contemporary inscription or document.

Early Christian period

The maritime connections of South India and early Christian references to India make the emergence of Christian communities historically plausible. Direct evidence for a first-century church at Thiruvithamcode, however, has not yet been established.

Medieval period

The sacred memory of the site may have continued through a local Christian shrine, cross, or community. This possibility requires archaeological and documentary investigation.

Sixteenth century

Portuguese contact led to greater documentation of the Saint Thomas Christians. The Synod of Diamper in 1599 marked a major moment in the recording and regulation of their traditions, believes and customs.

Early seventeenth century

The writings and reports associated with Francisco Roz demonstrate that Saint Thomas Christian traditions were well established. This period is also important for the reconstruction and development of church structures in the region.

Seventeenth century

The principal surviving architectural sections of Thiruvithamcode Arappally are approximately associated with this period.

This is the most defensible approximate date for the present architectural core.

Twentieth century

The entrance hall and other modern additions were built or added during the twentieth century. This chronology demonstrates historical continuity from an ancient tradition to an early-modern structure and a modern living institution.

10. CONCLUSION

Thiruvithamcode Arappally possesses a long and complex history. The tradition of a foundation by St. Thomas in AD 63 is central to its religious identity, at the same time early Christian literary references and South India's maritime connections make an ancient Christian presence historically plausible. The seven-and-a-half-church tradition preserves the site within the sacred geography of the Saint Thomas Christians. The connection with the Chera ruler Uthiyan Cheralathan reflects an significant regional memory of royal patronage, although the exact identity of the patron cannot presently be confirmed by a contemporary inscription or charter.The available evidence does not establish that the present granite structure was built entirely in the first century. The surviving architectural sections are more cautiously associated with approximately the seventeenth century, with later additions. This does not weaken the antiquity of the church. Instead, it suggests that the present structure may represent the later rebuilding or continuation of an older sacred site. The inner chapel and stone cross preserve a powerful apostolic tradition. The cross is traditionally attributed to St. Thomas, but its personal authorship remains unverified. It should therefore be described as an important material expression of apostolic memory and Christian heritage.

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TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION: CHANGING SOCIAL LIFE OF KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari District occupies a distinctive position in the social history of South India because of its geographical location, multicultural composition, and historical association with the erstwhile Travancore State. The district has experienced significant transformation in its social life through the interaction of tradition, religion, education, social reform, economic change, political mobilisation, migration, urbanisation, and tourism. This study examines the changing patterns of social life in Kanniyakumari District from the late Travancore period to the contemporary period. The study adopts a historical and descriptive methodology based on primary and secondary sources, including census reports, district statistical records, government publications, historical writings, scholarly studies, and research articles. The study finds that traditional caste hierarchies, occupational patterns, gender restrictions, and community practices have undergone considerable transformation. Missionary education, social reform movements, the struggles of marginalised communities, expansion of modern education, political change, and improved communication have contributed to social mobility. At the same time, traditional festivals, religious practices, family customs, food habits, and local cultural identities continue to survive, often in modified forms. The study concludes that social change in Kanniyakumari is neither a complete rejection of tradition nor a simple acceptance of modernity; rather, it represents a continuous process of negotiation between tradition and transformation.

Keywords: *Tradition, Social Change, Kanniyakumari, Social Reform, Modernisation, Cultural Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari District, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, possesses a distinctive historical and cultural character. The district has been influenced by Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions because of its geographical position and historical association with Travancore. Until 1956, the region formed part of the erstwhile Travancore State. The movement for the merger of the Tamil-speaking areas of southern Travancore with Tamil Nadu eventually resulted in the transfer of Kanniyakumari District to the Madras State in 1956. The district administration identifies the period between 1945 and 1956 as particularly significant in its modern political history.The social history of Kanniyakumari is marked by the coexistence of different religious communities, caste groups, occupational communities and cultural traditions. Historically, social status was strongly influenced by caste, occupation, religion and customary practices. During the nineteenth century, social reform movements challenged several restrictions imposed on disadvantaged communities. The struggles of the Nadar community and the Upper-Cloth movement are important examples of social transformation in the region. Scholarly studies have also highlighted the role of Christian missionary activities in education and social reform in South Travancore. Education became one of the important forces of social transformation. Missionary institutions introduced new forms of

education and created opportunities for sections of society that had previously experienced restrictions. Later, the expansion of government schools, colleges and higher educational institutions further contributed to social mobility. A recent study specifically examining Muslim women in Kanniyakumari identifies education as an important factor in socio-economic change and women's empowerment. The social transformation of Kanniyakumari must therefore be understood as a long historical process. Changes in caste relations, women's status, education, occupations, family structure, religious practices, migration, urbanisation and tourism have gradually reshaped the everyday lives of its people.

Research Problem

Kanniyakumari has undergone substantial social transformation, yet tradition continues to influence social behaviour and cultural identity. Modern education, technology, migration, employment and tourism have introduced new lifestyles, while traditional festivals, religious practices, kinship relationships and community identities continue to remain significant. The research problem of this study is therefore to understand how traditional social structures and cultural practices have changed under the influence of modern social, economic and political forces, and how people continue to negotiate between tradition and modernity.

Importance of the Study

The study is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to the understanding of the social history of a historically distinctive region of Tamil Nadu. Second, it examines the relationship between tradition and modernisation. Third, it highlights the role of education, social reform and women's advancement in social transformation. Fourth, it examines how cultural practices survive by adapting to changing circumstances. Finally, the study may help future researchers understand contemporary social change in Kanniyakumari from a historical perspective.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are to examine the traditional social structure of Kanniyakumari District and trace the major historical forces responsible for social transformation. It also focuses on the role of education changes in the status of women, changes in occupations, family life and community relationships and the impact of migration, urbanization and tourism. Finally the study seeks to understand how traditional cultural practices have continued while adapting to changing social conditions.

Review of Literature

The social transformation of Kanniyakumari has been examined through different historical and sociological perspectives. V. Nagam Aiya The Travancore State Manual is an important historical source for understanding the political, administrative, economic and social conditions of Travancore. Although it was published in 1906, it provides valuable historical information about the region during the Travancore period. R. N. Yesudas, in A People's Revolt in Travancore, examines the Nadar-led struggles against caste-based restrictions and presents the movement as a struggle for social freedom and dignity. The work is particularly relevant for understanding caste relations and social reform in southern Travancore. The work of Rev. Dr. M.Christhudhas on the London

Missionary Society examines the development of education and healthcare in South Travancore. His study gives particular attention to educational activities, girls schools and the wider social impact of missionary institutions in the region that later became Kanniyakumari District. Recent researchby Shifana and Shyla Kumari specifically examines socio-economic changes among Muslim women in Kanniyakumari and identifies education as an important factor in women's empowerment and social development. A recent study of Parthivapuram Sree Parthasarathi Temple also demonstrates that religious institutions can function as agents of social transformation by influencing caste relations, gender roles and community integration.

The existing literature therefore provides valuable information about caste, religion, education, women and social reform. However, there remains scope for an integrated study examining tradition and transformation together, particularly by connecting historical social structures with contemporary changes in family, occupation, education, migration, tourism and cultural practices. The present study attempts to address this gap.

Methodology

The study adopts a historical, descriptive and analytical approach. It combines historical interpretation with an examination of contemporary social change.The study uses both primary and secondary sources.The Kanniyakumari District Administration currently provides District Statistical Handbooks, including the 2024–2025 edition, which can be used for contemporary statistical understanding of the district. The study area is Kanniyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The district is historically significant because it was part of Travancore until its merger with Tamil Nadu in 1956. It contains coastal, rural and urban settlements and has a diverse social and religious population. Official district sources provide census, demographic and statistical information for studying these variations. The study compares traditional social practices with their contemporary forms to identify both continuity and transformation.

Transformation of Caste Relations

One of the most significant changes in Kanniyakumari has been the gradual transformation of caste relations. Earlier social life was strongly influenced by caste hierarchy and customary restrictions. The struggles of disadvantaged communities challenged this restrictions. The Nadar movement and the Upper-Cloth Agitation are particularly significant. The struggle of Nadar women for the right to wear upper clothing became an important episode in the history of social dignity and gendered resistance in South Travancore. In contemporary society, legal equality, education, political participation and occupational mobility have weakened many traditional caste restrictions. However, caste identity has not completely disappeared. It continues to influence aspects of marriage, social networks and community organisation.

Expansion of Education

Education has emerged as one of the strongest instruments of social transformation. Missionary education played an early role, particularly in creating educational opportunities for disadvantaged communities and women. Later, government education and the expansion of higher education widened access. The development of education has encouraged occupational mobility,

political awareness and social participation. Contemporary studies also show the relationship between education and women's socio-economic advancement in Kanniyakumari.

Changes in the Position of Women

Women lives have undergone considerable transformation. Earlier, women from certain communities faced restrictions concerning dress, mobility, education and public participation. The Upper-Cloth struggle represents an important historical challenge to gender and caste restrictions. Modern education, employment, women organisations and legal rights have expanded women's participation in public life. Women increasingly participate in education, professional employment, politics, entrepreneurship and community organisations. Nevertheless, traditional expectations concerning marriage, family responsibilities and gender roles continue to influence women lives. Thus, women's transformation represents both progress and continuing negotiation with tradition.

Transformation of Occupations

Traditional occupations such as agriculture, fishing, palm-related work, handicrafts and small-scale trade remain part of the district heritage. However, the occupational structure has diversified. Education and urbanisation have encouraged movement into government service, teaching, healthcare, business, banking, industry and other professional occupations. Migration has also contributed to occupational diversification.

Family and Marriage

Traditional joint and extended family relationships have gradually changed under the influence of education, employment, migration and urbanisation. Nuclear families have become more common, particularly among urban and professionally employed groups. Marriage practices have also experienced changes. Education and employment have increased the participation of young people in decisions concerning marriage. Nevertheless, family involvement, community identity and customary expectations continue to influence matrimonial practices.

Religious and Cultural Change

Kanniyakumari has a rich religious environment involving Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities. Religious institutions have historically played important social roles. Missionary institutions contributed to education and healthcare, while temples, churches and mosques continue to function not only as religious spaces but also as centres of community identity and social interaction. Research on Parthivapuram Temple, for example, highlights the relationship between religious institutions and social structures.

Urbanisation, Migration and Tourism

Urbanisation and improved transportation have reduced the social distance between rural and urban communities. Migration for education and employment has connected Kanniyakumari households with other parts of Tamil Nadu, India and overseas destinations.Tourism has also influenced local culture and economy. Kanniyakumari religious sites, beaches, monuments and geographical uniqueness attract visitors. Tourism creates employment and commercial opportunities but can also encourage the commodification and modification of traditional cultural practices.

Continuity of Tradition

Despite modernisation, many traditions continue to survive. Religious festivals, family ceremonies, local food practices, temple and church celebrations, folk customs and community associations remain important. However; these traditions are increasingly being practised in modified forms. Social media, modern technology, changing lifestyles and commercialisation have altered the manner in which festivals and ceremonies are organised.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that social change in Kanniyakumari is a complex process rather than a simple transition from tradition to modernity. The historical experience of Travancore created a distinctive social structure in which caste, religion and customary practices were deeply interconnected. The emergence of social reform movements challenged this structure. The Nadar struggles illustrate how disadvantaged communities actively participated in their own transformation rather than simply receiving change from external agencies. Education was another major transformative force. Missionary education introduced new forms of knowledge and created opportunities for social mobility. The development of girls education was particularly significant because it challenged conventional assumptions about women's roles. Research on the London Missionary Society activities in South Travancore demonstrates the importance of educational and healthcare initiatives in the region. Women's social position also changed substantially. The Upper-Cloth struggle demonstrates that clothing itself could become a symbol of caste and gender inequality. The struggle for the right to dress with dignity represented a wider demand for social recognition.

The transformation of culture, however, does not mean the disappearance of tradition. Instead, traditional practices have adapted to new circumstances. For example, religious festivals continue, but their organisation increasingly involves modern transport, digital communication, social media, commercial sponsorship and professional event management. Family life similarly demonstrates the interaction between continuity and change. Modern employment and migration encourage nuclear households and individual decision-making, while kinship networks remain important during marriage, religious ceremonies and family events. Kanniyakumari therefore represents a useful case study for understanding "transformation within tradition." Modernity has modified social practices, but cultural identity continues to provide meaning and social belonging.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that Kanniyakumari District has experienced profound social transformation from the late Travancore period to the contemporary era. Traditional caste structures, gender restrictions, occupational patterns and social customs have undergone considerable change through education, social reform, political mobilisation, economic development, migration, urbanisation and technological advancement. The historical struggles of disadvantaged communities, particularly the Nadar movement and the Upper-Cloth Agitation, contributed to the questioning of established social hierarchies. Education emerged as a major instrument of social mobility, while women's access to education and employment significantly

expanded their participation in public life. At the same time, tradition has not disappeared. Religious festivals, family ceremonies, community identities, local customs and cultural practices continue to influence social life. What has changed is the manner in which these traditions are interpreted and practiced. The central conclusion of this study is that social change in Kanniyakumari is a process of negotiation between tradition and transformation. Modernity has not simply replaced traditional culture; instead, traditional practices have been selectively retained, modified and sometimes reinvented. Future research can examine social change at the village level, the impact of overseas migration on family structures, women's participation in the digital economy, youth culture, tourism and cultural commoditization, and the changing relationship between caste identity and modern education. Oral-history studies would also provide valuable evidence about how ordinary people experienced these transformations across generations.

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NGOS AND THE PRESERVATION OF LOCAL HISTORY AND COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play an important role in preserving local history, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and community traditions. In many communities, oral histories, folk songs, traditional crafts, festivals, rituals, indigenous knowledge, local architecture, and customary practices are increasingly threatened by urbanization, globalization, migration, technological change, and the weakening of intergenerational transmission. NGOs can help communities identify, document, protect, and transmit these forms of heritage through research, oral-history projects, cultural programmes, education, digital archives, skill-development activities, and community participation. UNESCO emphasizes that communities, groups, and individuals should have a central role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, while NGOs can provide expertise, resources, training, and organizational support. This article examines the role of NGOs in preserving local history and community traditions, reviews their major activities, analyses their contributions and challenges, and offers suggestions for strengthening community-based heritage preservation.

Keywords: *NGOs, Local History, Community Traditions, Cultural Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Oral History, Traditional Knowledge, Community Participation, Documentation, Heritage Preservation.*

INTRODUCTION

Local history and community traditions are important components of cultural identity. They provide communities with knowledge about their origins, social relationships, customs, beliefs, occupations, festivals, arts, architecture, and ways of life. Local history is preserved not only in written records and historical buildings but also through oral traditions, folk stories, songs, dances, crafts, rituals, food traditions, traditional occupations, and indigenous knowledge.

However, many traditional practices are facing serious challenges. Globalization, migration, rapid urban development, changing lifestyles, environmental pressures, and the influence of mass media can weaken traditional systems of knowledge transmission. Younger generations may have fewer opportunities to learn traditional skills from elders. As a result, valuable cultural knowledge can disappear when its practitioners die without passing it on. In this context, NGOs can serve as important links between communities, governments, educational institutions, researchers, and cultural organizations. UNESCO recognizes the importance of involving communities and relevant NGOs in identifying, defining, documenting, and safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. NGOs are particularly valuable because many are closely connected with local communities. They can organize documentation projects, conduct oral-history interviews, support traditional artists and craftspeople, establish cultural centers, organize exhibitions and festivals,

train young people, and create digital archives. UNESCO also identifies community-based inventorying as a participatory method through which communities identify.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this article are to examine the role of NGOs in preserving local history and community traditions and to identify major methods used by NGOs to document and safeguard cultural heritage. The another one is importance of community participation in heritage preservation. Analyse the contribution of NGOs to intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge and identify major challenges faced by NGOs in cultural preservation.

Review of Literature

The preservation of intangible cultural heritage has increasingly moved from a government-centered approach toward a community-centered approach. UNESCO's framework emphasizes the participation of communities, groups, and individuals who create, maintain, and transmit intangible cultural heritage. It also recognizes the contribution that competent NGOs can make to safeguarding activities. UNESCO's work in India similarly emphasizes that heritage conservation should be people-centered. Its programmes highlight the importance of involving local communities in conservation and ensuring that communities can participate in heritage management and benefit from heritage-related Research and practice concerning NGOs also demonstrates the importance of oral-history documentation. Community-based organizations can record memories, narratives, songs, traditional knowledge, and other forms of cultural expression. Digital audio, video, photography, and archival technologies have made it easier for communities and NGOs to create heritage repositories. In India, UNESCO maintains a list of accredited NGOs working in the field of intangible cultural heritage. Organizations such as Contact Base have undertaken identification, documentation preservation, transmission, education, and revitalization activities connected with traditional cultural These studies and programmes indicate that preservation is most effective when communities are not treated merely as subjects of research but as active participants and custodians of their own heritage.

ROLE OF NGOS IN PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY AND COMMUNITY TRADITIONS:

Documentation of Oral History

One of the most important contributions of NGOs is the documentation of oral history. Elderly people and traditional knowledge holders possess memories about historical events, village development, family histories, traditional occupations, festivals, migration, local leaders, and social practices. NGOs can conduct interviews with community members and record their memories in written, audio, or video formats. Such documentation creates a permanent record of community knowledge that can be used by future generations, schools, researchers, and cultural institutions.

Preservation of Traditional Arts and Crafts

Traditional crafts such as weaving, pottery, basketry, wood carving, embroidery, metalwork, and handicrafts represent both cultural identity and economic knowledge. NGOs can support artisans by organizing training programmes, exhibitions, markets, workshops, and cultural festivals. Such activities can make traditional occupations economically sustainable.

When traditional practitioners can earn a livelihood from their skills, there is a greater possibility that these practices will continue.

Preservation of Folk Songs, Dance and Performing Arts

Folk songs, dances, theatre, storytelling, and musical traditions often communicate community history and values. NGOs can organize performances, competitions, workshops, recording projects, and cultural festivals. Young people can be trained by experienced artists so that cultural knowledge is transmitted from one generation to another. UNESCO's community-based approach similarly emphasizes transmission and capacity-building as important elements of safeguarding intangible heritage.

Preservation of Festivals and Rituals

Community festivals, religious ceremonies, seasonal celebrations, traditional games, and rituals provide opportunities for communities to maintain collective identity. NGOs can document these activities and support their continuation while respecting the beliefs and decisions of community members. The role of NGOs should not be to artificially preserve traditions exactly as they existed in the past. Instead, they should help communities maintain the cultural meaning of traditions while allowing them to adapt naturally to changing social circumstances.

Preservation of Traditional Knowledge

Traditional communities possess knowledge relating to agriculture, food preparation, medicinal plants, water management, architecture, weather patterns, animal care, environmental management, and handicrafts. NGOs can document this knowledge with the consent of knowledge holders and support educational programmes through which younger generations can learn it.

Development of Digital Archives

Digital technology provides new opportunities for heritage preservation. NGOs can create digital repositories containing photographs, historical documents, oral interviews, maps, recordings, manuscripts, videos, and information about traditional practices. Digital archives are particularly useful when physical documents are vulnerable to deterioration. However, NGOs should establish appropriate rules concerning ownership, privacy, intellectual property, and community access.

Heritage Education

NGOs can collaborate with schools and colleges to introduce local history and traditions into educational activities. Heritage walks, storytelling programmes, exhibitions, school museums, craft workshops, and interactions with traditional practitioners can make local history more meaningful to young people.

Community Museums and Cultural Centers

NGOs can help communities establish small museums, archives, libraries, cultural centers, and interpretation spaces. These institutions can preserve objects, photographs, documents, tools, costumes, crafts, and other materials associated with local history. Such centers can also become places where older and younger generations interact and exchange knowledge.

Analysis

The role of NGOs in cultural preservation can be analyzed through four major dimensions**:** documentation, participation, education, and sustainability. First, documentation helps prevent the permanent loss of historical and cultural information. Oral histories

and traditional practices that previously existed only in community memory can be recorded and archived. Second, participation makes preservation more democratic. UNESCO's heritage framework stresses that communities should participate in identifying and safeguarding their heritage. UNESCO Therefore, NGOs should work with communities rather than simply collecting information from them. Third, education is essential for long-term preservation. Documentation alone cannot guarantee that traditions will survive. Young people need opportunities to learn traditional skills, languages, songs, stories, crafts, and customs. Fourth, preservation must be economically and socially sustainable. UNESCO's community-oriented heritage programmes recognize the relationship between heritage conservation, livelihoods, education, and sustainable development.

An important example from India is the work of Contact Base, which has supported documentation, education, skill transmission, and cultural tourism while working with rural traditional practitioners. UNESCO reports that its initiatives have documented numerous intangible cultural heritage elements and supported large numbers of traditional practitioners.

The evidence therefore suggests that NGOs can be particularly effective when they combine cultural preservation with community empowerment, education, livelihood development, and local participation.

Findings

The major findings of the analysis are as follows:

NGOs are important facilitators of heritage preservation**.** They can connect communities with governments, experts, researchers, and funding organizations. Community participation is essential. Heritage preservation is more sustainable when local people participate in identifying, documenting, managing, and transmitting their own traditions. Oral history is a valuable source of local history**.** Interviews with elders and cultural practitioners can preserve knowledge that may not exist in written records. Digital technology provides new preservation opportunities**.** Audio, video, photography, and digital archives can help protect cultural materials and make them accessible for educational purposes. Young people are central to cultural continuity**.** Training programmes, school activities, apprenticeships, and cultural clubs can encourage younger generations to learn traditional practices. Economic support can strengthen cultural preservation**.** Traditional crafts and cultural activities can provide livelihoods when appropriately connected with fair markets and community-led cultural tourism. NGOs face financial and institutional challenges. Many organizations depend on grants and project-based funding, which can make long-term preservation difficult. Preservation must respect community rights**.** Cultural knowledge should not be commercially exploited or publicly shared without appropriate consent and recognition.

Suggestions

The following measures can strengthen the role of NGOs in preserving local history and community traditions:

Establish Community Heritage Committees

NGOs should establish local committees involving elders, youth, women, traditional artists, teachers, researchers, and community leaders.

These committees can decide which traditions should be documented and how the information should be used.

Create Local Digital Archives

NGOs should develop secure digital archives containing oral histories, photographs, documents, songs, videos, maps, and other historical materials. Copies should be maintained in more than one location to reduce the risk of data loss.

Encourage Intergenerational Learning

Traditional practitioners should be encouraged to teach young people through apprenticeship programmes, workshops, cultural clubs, and school-based activities.

Provide Financial Support to Tradition Bearers

NGOs should help traditional artists and craftspeople access fair markets, exhibitions, training, grants, and appropriate livelihood opportunities.

Develop Partnerships

NGOs should collaborate with universities, schools, libraries, museums, local governments, cultural departments, and international organizations. Such partnerships can provide technical expertise and financial resources.

Protect Intellectual and Cultural Rights

Community knowledge should be documented with informed consent. NGOs should develop policies concerning ownership, attribution, privacy, copyright, and the commercial use of cultural materials.

Promote Local Heritage Tourism Responsibly

Cultural tourism can provide income and visibility, but it should be community-led and environmentally and culturally responsible. Tourism should not turn sacred or culturally sensitive traditions into commercial spectacles.

Encourage Government Support

Governments should provide grants, training, infrastructure, and policy support for NGOs working in heritage preservation. NGO activities should complement rather than replace public responsibility for cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

NGOs have an important role in preserving local history and community traditions. They can document oral histories, preserve traditional arts and crafts, support festivals and rituals, establish cultural archives, provide heritage education, and create opportunities for intergenerational transmission. The most important principle is that communities themselves should remain at the centre of preservation. UNESCO's approach emphasizes the active participation of communities, groups, individuals, and relevant NGOs in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Local traditions are living forms of culture that can adapt to contemporary circumstances while retaining their identity and meaning. NGOs can help create this balance by combining documentation with education, community participation, livelihood opportunities, digital technology, and responsible cultural management. Ultimately, successful heritage preservation depends on cooperation among communities, NGOs, educational institutions, cultural professionals, and governments. When local people are empowered to become custodians of their own history and traditions, cultural heritage can remain a living and meaningful resource for present and future generations.

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND CULTURAL TOURISM IN KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari, positioned at the southernmost convergence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean, represents a vibrant, centuries-old crossroads of religious luralism, shared festive traditions, and maritime history. Shaped by royal patronage from the Venad-Travancore dynasties alongside early Portuguese and Dutch colonial encounters, the region has fostered a syncretic landscape where Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam seamlessly coexist. Landmark sites such as the ancient Bhagavathy Amman Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, the 16th-century St. Xavier's Cathedral in Kottar, coastal dargahs, and modern cultural monuments like the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Thiruvalluvar Statue attract millions of pilgrims and tourists each year. However, high- density footfall, rapid commercialization, infrastructural sprawl, and high coastal salinity increasingly threaten both tangible monuments and the delicate socio-cultural fabric of living sacred traditions. This study examines the critical intersection of heritage conservation and cultural tourism planning in Kanniyakumari using an interdisciplinary qualitative framework. By analyzing historical records, site-level visitor management, and stakeholder perspectives across local religious trusts, municipal bodies, and community members, the research identifies systemic gaps in current tourism-driven development models that frequently neglect carrying-capacity thresholds and intangible ritual continuity. In response, the paper proposes a participatory heritage management model focused on decentralized conservation, environmentally sensitive zoning, and inclusive multi-faith narrative curation. Ultimately, the study demonstrates how strategic, sustainable cultural tourism can protect Kanniyakumari's distinct spiritual topography and fragile coastal ecology while continuing to support local economic livelihoods.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Cultural Confluence, Multi-Faith Heritage, Heritage Conservation, Sustainable Cultural Tourism, Sacred Topography, Living Heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

The geographic terminus of peninsular India, Kanniyakumari historically known as Cape Comorin occupies a singular position in South Asian sacred geography and maritime history. Situated at the Triveni Sangamam, the natural confluence of three major water bodies, the headland has served as an ancient navigational landmark and an enduring center of pilgrimage. For over two millennia, trans-oceanic trade routes linked the region with Roman, Arab, Southeast Asian, and European mercantile networks, creating an open cultural corridor where diverse civilizations intersected. Unlike pilgrimage destinations dominated by a single sectarian tradition, Kanniyakumari is distinguished by its deep multi-faith pluralism. The architectural and cultural landscape features ancient Hindu temple sanctums, Latin and Syrian Christian ecclesiastical monuments, historic Islamic dargahs, and modern civilizational memorials in close spatial proximity. In recent decades, rapid infrastructural expansion and national highway connectivity have transformed the town from a seasonal pilgrimage site into a year-round mass tourism center. While this influx fuels the local economy, the absence of an integrated preservation strategy has created severe environmental strain, structural weathering, and the commodification of sacred traditions. This

study addresses the urgent challenge of balancing monument preservation with sustainable cultural tourism across this delicate multi-faith coastal territory.

Historical Context and Cultural Syncretism

The regional identity of Kanniyakumari was established through centuries of political, economic, and spiritual evolution. Early Sangam literature, including the Akananuru and Purananuru, along with classical Western accounts like the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, identifies the cape as a renowned port and spiritual center dedicated to the maiden goddess Kanya. Over the centuries, the territory was governed successively by the Ay chieftains, the Early Pandyas, the Cholas, and the rulers of Venad, culminating in its integration into the princely state of Travancore.

Under the visionary patronage of rulers such as Marthanda Varma, the region developed distinctive socio-cultural and administrative institutions, visible in its regional stone epigraphy, traditional water management systems, and hybrid architectural styles combining Kerala timber joinery with Tamil Dravidian stonecraft. The district's religious fabric expanded significantly during the medieval and early modern periods. The 16th-century arrival of Portuguese missionaries, led by St. Francis Xavier, established Christianity firmly along the Fishery Coast, transforming coastal fishing villages into centers of Catholic devotion. Concurrently, centuries of peaceful maritime trade with Arab merchants gave rise to vibrant Muslim settlements along the littoral, marked by coastal mosques and Sufi shrines honoring revered saints. The subsequent Dutch presence and Protestant missionary initiatives under British paramountcy further enriched the region's linguistic, educational, and institutional legacy. This multi-layered past produced a resilient syncretism where communities developed shared festive traditions, sacred geographies, and mutual cultural respect.

Built Heritage and the Sacred Topography

Kanniyakumari's physical heritage reflects its historical pluralism through an extraordinary density of sacred architecture. At the water's edge stands the three-thousand- year-old Bhagavathy Amman Temple, characterized by its classical Dravidian stone prakarams and centuries-old rituals aligned with oceanic tides. A few kilometers inland, the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple stands as a monument to sectarian synthesis, enshrining the Hindu Trimurti in a single lingam and showcasing a blend of Travancore timber craftsmanship, towering granite gopurams, and musical stone pillars.

Christian built heritage is anchored by the historic St. Xavier's Cathedral in Kottar, built upon foundations dating back to the 1540s. The church represents an elegant fusion of Indo-Portuguese design, featuring intricate timber carvings, historic burial vaults, and venerated miraculous shrines. In close proximity, coastal Muslim dargahs, associated with early saintly lineages including traditions tracing back to Malik Dinar, offer quiet examples of vernacular coastal Islamic architecture designed to withstand marine air.

Offshore, the mid-twentieth-century Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the monumental 133-foot stone statue of the Tamil poet-philosopher Thiruvalluvar integrate classical Silpa Shastra stone-dressing techniques with modern coastal marine engineering. Together, these sacred and secular landmarks form an interconnected spiritual topography where

coastal geography and sacred architecture mutually reinforce one another.

Living Heritage, Shared Festive Landscapes, and Ritual Continuity

The cultural vitality of Kanniyakumari is sustained not only through its stone and timber monuments, but through its living heritage of festivals, rituals, and artistic expressions. Annual festive cycles serve as active bridges between different communities.

During the ten-day Annual Feast of St. Xavier at Kottar, hundreds of thousands of devotees, including substantial numbers of Hindu and Muslim pilgrims, gather to fulfill personal vows (nercha) and purchase items at the sprawling historic fairgrounds. Similarly, the Chithirai Car Festival of the Bhagavathy Amman Temple and the Margazhi Car Festival of Suchindram draw broad community participation for the physical hauling of monumental wooden temple cars (ther), a communal undertaking historically supported by multi-caste and inter-village cooperation.

Coastal Sufi dargahs observe annual Urs festivals characterized by communal meals (kanji distribution), traditional music, and maritime blessing ceremonies that welcome participants regardless of faith. Additionally, hereditary craft communities specializing in palm-leaf weaving, sea-shell ornamentation, and granite carving maintain artistic traditions passed down through generations. These living practices represent intangible cultural heritage that gives meaning to the physical monuments.

Heritage Vulnerabilities and Tourism Pressures

The surge of mass tourism and unregulated coastal development has introduced significant vulnerabilities that threaten the integrity of Kanniyakumari's historic landscape. Environmentally, the monuments face severe deterioration from marine salinity, airborne salt spray, and cyclical monsoon humidity. Historic granite structures suffer from salt efflorescence and sub-surface flaking, while traditional timber elements in historic churches and temple roofs experience moisture retention and biological decay. Inappropriate twentieth-century modernizations, such as replacing traditional lime plaster with impermeable Portland cement, have trapped moisture within ancient stone walls, accelerating deterioration.

Tourism-induced pressures exacerbate these physical vulnerabilities. During peak pilgrimage seasons, visitor numbers far exceed the carrying capacity of local transit, water, and sanitation systems. Unplanned commercial development—marked by multistory concrete hotels, informal plastic stalls, and large commercial billboards—disrupts historical sightlines and obscures views between the monuments and the ocean. Furthermore, rapid commercialization risks turning sacred ritual sites into transactional attractions, undermining the quiet, contemplative character of historic worship spaces and displacing local artisanal communities in favor of mass-produced tourist merchandise.

Integrated Heritage Management Framework (IHMF)

Preserving Kanniyakumari's sacred shore requires a transition from reactive preservation to a coordinated, sustainable management strategy. The proposed Integrated Heritage Management Framework (IHMF) operates across four key areas:

Material Conservation and Eco-Resilience: All physical interventions on historic monuments should use compatible, traditional materials, such as hydraulic lime mortars and micro-desalination

treatments, to protect salt-exposed stone and timber. Strict enforcement of Coastal Regulation Zone guidelines is necessary to maintain a clear buffer zone around historical monuments and protect coastal vistas.

Carrying-Capacity Management: Municipal and tourism authorities should implement dynamic crowd-management strategies, including timed-entry digital passes for high-density sites like the offshore ferry terminals and rock memorials. Pedestrianizing the core historic loop connecting the Bhagavathy Amman Temple, coastal churches, and the shore will reduce vehicle congestion and exhaust pollution.

Integrated Multi-Faith Cultural Curation: Tourism authorities should create thematic heritage trails that present Kanniyakumari's monuments as an interconnected network of interfaith history rather than isolated attractions. Multilingual, context-sensitive interpretive signage and community-led walking tours can help visitors understand the districts syncretic heritage.

Community-Led Stewardship: Conservation efforts must involve local religious trusts, diocesan councils, mosque committees, and traditional artisan guilds. Establishing a local Public-Private-Community partnership ensures that a portion of tourism revenue is reinvested directly into grassroots conservation, craft preservation, and sustainable public infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

Establish a single administrative body uniting municipal authorities, the Archaeological Survey of India, the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation, and representatives from local temple, church, and mosque administrations to ensure cohesive site management. Eliminate single-use plastics from core heritage zones, deploy zero-emission electric shuttle buses along pilgrimage corridors, and establish decentralized waste-water treatment plants to prevent untreated discharge into coastal waters. Allocate a dedicated percentage of municipal tourist levies and ferry revenues to establish craft centers that provide fair wages, training, and direct retail markets for traditional local craftspeople. Given Kanniyakumari's exposure to sea-level rise, cyclonic storms, and coastal erosion, create site- specific disaster preparedness and climate adaptation protocols for all coastal heritage sites. Kanniyakumari stands as an enduring symbol of spiritual seeking, artistic achievement, and interfaith coexistence. Preserving its multi-faith landscape requires a balanced approach that respects both material monuments and living cultural traditions. By implementing an integrated heritage management model centered on sustainable tourism, ecological care, and community stewardship, the sacred shore of Kanniyakumari can maintain its historic character, support its local economy, and protect its civilizational legacy for future generations.

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ROLE OF NAIR WOMEN IN PRESERVING ORAL TRADITIONS AND CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the oral traditions and cultural challenges of Nair women. It examines the different forms of oral traditions maintained by Nair women and analyses their social, religious, and cultural significance. Folk songs, lullabies, proverbs, myths, legends, ritual chants, and storytelling have long served as important means of preserving the history, beliefs, customs, and values of the Nair community. Women have traditionally played a central role in transmitting this cultural heritage from one generation to the next, making them key custodians of the community's identity and collective memory.

Keywords: *Oral tradition, Nair women and their identity, Folk culture, Cultural heritage, Storytelling, Folk songs, Cultural challenges*

INTRODUCTION

The term "Nair" was first used in the context of Vijayaragadevan in Thirukodithanam (Trikodisthanam) in the ninth century. The Nairs ruled in small kingdoms along the Malabar Coast for a significant portion of Kerala's history. Some of the first significant commercial networks with the Middle East and East Asia were created by their kingdoms. Their caste constituted the main militia in medieval Kerala. The community moved from Northern Malabar to Central Kerala in the eighteenth century, and their military endeavours began to wane. Later the surviving Nair kingdoms were finally disbanded in the 19th century as a result of protracted conflict with the British.

Nair is known for their professions, which included writing, music, royal scribes, and rulers. They became wealthy feudal lords in the 20th century after taking on administrative positions in the government. They upheld the family heritage of pursuing varied vocations while pursuing science, fine arts, philosophy, teaching, and law. They were well-known for their scholarship in contemporary Kerala and Kanyakumari.

The Nair women of Kerala have played an important role in preserving oral traditions, family customs, folklore, songs, rituals, and cultural practices. Their role was particularly significant because, much of Kerala's traditional knowledge was transmitted orally from one.

Transmission of family traditions

Children and younger members of the household were taught stories by elder Nair women about their ancestors, family histories, rituals, and traditional values. Nair women were crucial in passing on lineage, family history, customs, and traditional values from one generation to the next. These women, especially mothers and grandmothers, were the crucial guardians of family memory under the old matrilineal family structure. They narrated the tales about their ancestral lineup, significant occasions of the family, the accomplishments of previous generations, and the history of the Tharavadu (ancestral homes). Younger

members learned about their family identity, ancestry, duties, and social connections through these oral narratives.

The Nair women instruct their children about customs and behaviours related to festivals, marriages, childbirth, worship, cuisine, and domestic rituals. They passed down the moral etiquettes which includes respect for elders, hospitality, cooperation, responsibility over the families and society, family loyalty, and concern for the community in addition to customs. A large portion of these instructions were transmitted casually through discussions, narrative, observation, and involvement in routine activities. As a result, even when family customs were not documented in writing, Nair women served as living archives of cultural knowledge and family memory.

Preservation of folk songs

Traditional songs related to childbirth, marriage, festivals, religious observances, and daily life were conserved and passed down by the Nair Women to their children and young generations is a remarkable one. These songs frequently included details about regional history and social norms.

a) Learning through older women

Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and other elderly women frequently chant the songs while doing household works casually where the younger ladies progressively memorised the lyrics of the songs, melodies, rhythm, and suitable timely performance because they grasped them orally. This led to generational continuity among the Nair clan.

b) Songs connected with child birth

When discussing significant phases of labour and early parenting, women employed songs and oral expressions. Through participation and repetition, older women passed on their knowledge about child birth, blessings, lullabies, and ceremonies. As a result, the singing tradition incorporates into women's ritual and household knowledge. The work of Seeta A. Pai "Family, Childbirth, Marriage, and Schooling among Nair Women in Kerala: Portraits in Cultural Change" helps for comprehending how Nair women's roles evolve in these domains.

c) Marriage songs

A significant context for women's communal singing is marriage. Marriage-related songs that convey blessings, humour, affection, family ties, and expectations of a wedded life could accompany various stages of the wedding and its rituals. By joining in with more seasoned singers, group singing is also assisted by younger women to learn those songs.

d) Festival and religious songs

Through repeated performances during the festive seasons and ceremonies, women retained songs associated with the festivals, temple observances, and devotional practices. Religious songs have the power to spread moral lessons, to know about mythologies, tales of gods, and communal beliefs. The Smithsonian's study of Ayyappan Pattu, for instance, reveals a Nair performance on the traditional ritual song about the worship of God Ayyappan. Kerala's wider ritual-song legacy includes forms tied with certain communities and religious festivals.

e) Songs of everyday life

Songs by Nair women are associated with domestic work, children's activities, recreation, and other ordinary experiences. Their everyday performance exhibits cultural knowledge which transmit naturally rather than any formal

teaching or trainings. Women take the central roles in ceremonies and rituals in most stages of life. The songs, blessings, practices, and oral instructions associated with these ceremonies helps to conserve the cultural continuity.

f) Women as custodians of oral memory

In the framework of the traditional Nair matrilineal family structure, women's contributions to the preservation of traditional songs are unique. Nair society highlights the significance of matrilineal family ties and women in the ancient Tarawad system. The family system and the domestic way of life enhance the conservation of traditional practices and promotion of oral traditions over centuries.

g) Repetition and collective performance

Oral traditions survived because songs were repeated at the same types of ceremonies and occasions. Group performance helped preserve the words and tune and allowed younger generations to learn through participation in all the religious rituals and ceremonies. Obviously, this practises itself promote the best way to conserve the culture and traditional system of Nair.

Storytelling and folklore

Mothers and grandmothers are the important sources of promoting folktales, proverbs, myths, legends, and moral tales among the younger Nair generations. Children acquire social and cultural values, beliefs, and learn the dogmas of community life through storytelling. Nair's mothers and grandmothers contributed significantly to the preservation of traditional myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, and moral tales to their younger family members. For them, home is a crucial location for disseminating the oral culture because storytelling typically occurs in domestic and informal contexts. Historical accounts of Nair society make the importance of elder Nair women as a knowledge carriers which are evident in the families of Nair. According to the study of Kerala, an elderly Nair's grandmother, who attended a traditional village school, would frequently recite sections from the Bhagavad Gita to their children and grandchildren. This offers a specific illustration of an elderly Nair woman passing on literary and theological knowledge orally within the family.

Myths and religious stories

Stories about Hindu gods and goddesses, temples, spirits, heroes, and religious customs were told by grandmothers. Children are better able to comprehend the religious environment of their society due to the receptive knowledge of stories. Hundreds of myths and legends depict Kerala's social and cultural landscape which are preserved in the renowned Aithihyamala, compiled by Kottarathil Sankunni. Religious leaders, fighters, scholars, supernatural creatures, and mythical persons are all featured in the stories. Because many stories that were previously passed down orally then later documented in books. These written collections are significant because they enable us to examine customs that were previously passed down verbally.

Mothers and grandmothers adapt stories according to the age and understanding of the child. Repeated narration helped preserve the plot, characters, moral lessons, and cultural meanings of the stories. Oral narratives could also change slightly with each generation, allowing traditions to remain relevant while retaining their basic cultural identity. The Government of Kerala's discussion of traditional narratives notes that fairy tales, customs and legends function as oral history and

popular beliefs transmitted from generation to generation, while ballads and epic poetry were also preserved through oral tradition.

Proverbs and sayings

Proverbs provide a succinct and memorable means of conveying social values and knowledge. Proverbs used by Nair's mothers and grandmothers intend to counsel their children for ensuring moral conduct, relationships, employment, respect to elders, integrity, tolerance, and accountability. Oral tradition is especially significant because it preserves societal values and traditional knowledge throughout generations by passing down sayings, anecdotes, ballads, songs, chants, and stories.

Moral stories

Children are taught informally through moral stories. Older women convey ideals through stories about characters who faced good and evil, reward and punishment, devotion and treachery, strength and folly, rather than by offering clear directions. In this sense, storytelling evolves as an unofficial moral education method. Kerala's traditional stories, according to the collection Lore & Legends of Kerala teaches the qualities like regard for parents and teachers, respect for elders, dedication, compassion, and care for the young.

In the present era Nair Women act as a custodian of oral tradition. This role was not only unique to Nair women, but it is particularly relevant when studying women's cultural history. The academic work Gender and Story in South India specifically examines women- centred oral narratives and the role of female narrators in everyday and performative settings.

It shows how women's storytelling provide insight into their moral, social, material, and spiritual worlds. women are traditionally the repositories of oral traditions which preserve the social identity, religious practices, ethical values, customary laws, folktales, sayings, songs, and other forms of knowledge. Nair women play a vital role in promoting cultural heritage and traditional intangibility.

Matrimonial Heritage of Nair Women

The traditional Nair Marumakkathayam system also provides an important social context. In the matrilineal tarawad, family identity and inheritance were connected through the female line. Studies of Nair society therefore emphasize the importance of women in family and household affairs. Women therefore became important carriers of family memory, genealogy, customs, and household traditions. Renjini's Nayar Women Today examines Nair women, matrilineal kinship, family customs, marriage practices, and the changing tarawad system.

Rekha Govindan Kurup's "Rising Daughter", "Silent Mother" and "Fading Grandmother" reconstructs the aspects of the matrilineal Nayar's past through conversations with mothers and grandmothers which includes female-centred rituals and women's experiences in day-to- day life. Nair women preserved information about marriage rites, delivery ceremonies, death rituals, festivals, domestic rituals, and auspicious activities. Instead of using written materials, a large portion of this knowledge was acquired through oral instruction and observation.

Traditional knowledge of everyday life

Women disseminate knowledge about the traditional food preparation, herbal medicines, household remedies minor health issues, clothing, childcare, and agricultural practices. These skills are the unique feature and integral part of

Kerala's cultural heritage. The cultural role of Nair women in Kerala and Kanyakumari is significantly influenced by traditional wisdom. Mothers and grandparents serve as stewards of information about cooking, house keeping, traditional medicine, child care, rituals, songs, oral histories, and family traditions. In the tarawad, a large portion of this knowledge is conveyed down orally, through participation, observation, and repetition. The maternal household is significant in preserving family identity and cultural customs which are further reinforced by the matrilineal structure of traditional Nair society In Kerala, traditional wisdom plays a significant role in the cultural lives of Nair women. Rather than traditional schooling or learning, this knowledge was gained by participation, observation, oral instruction, and repeated practice. Younger generations within the family and tarawad received cultural and practical knowledge from mothers, grandmothers, and other senior women. Understanding the cuisine and household customs Traditional food preparation, food preservation, home administration, child care, and seasonal customs were all preserved by Nair women. Younger women learned from their mothers and grandmothers for the preparation of traditional meals, choice of food, use regional plants and spices, and adhere to traditions related to celebrations and family rituals.

Participating in daily household tasks help to spread this understanding. In addition, women are knowledgeable about traditional healing methods, postpartum care, medicinal herbs, and home medicines. Younger women are frequently taught orally by the elder women. Studies of traditional healing in Kerala show the significance of orally transmitted medicinal knowledge, even though not all such practices can be solely attributed to Nair women.

Oral Cultural Heritage of Nair Women

Oral tradition is particularly important because it transmits not only stories but also sayings, anecdotes, ballads, songs and chants, thereby preserving social values and customary knowledge across generation. Everyday conversation, idioms, proverbs, riddles, and traditional expressions were passed from older women to younger generations. This helped preserve regional forms of Malayalam and culturally specific ways of expressing ideas. Language and proverbs are the integral part of the oral cultural heritage of Nair communities in Kerala. Malayalam is the principal language through which family histories, customs, beliefs, social values, and practical knowledge were transmitted. Within the traditional tarawad, older members particularly mothers and grandmothers used everyday.

Malayalam has historically been used by Nair families for communication, storytelling, ceremonial instructions, family stories, and the sharing of traditional knowledge.Children learned language and expressions as well as culturally acceptable behaviours, relationships, respect, and social duties through regular conversation.

The importance of Malayalam oral traditions is reflected in the collections of Kerala folk songs, proverbs, legends, and sayings, which preserve forms of language that are traditionally transmitted orally. The collection of Kerala folk songs, proverbs, stories, and sayings demonstrate the significance of Malayalam oral traditions by preserving linguistic forms that are typically passed down orally. Proverbs also offer a succinct and memorable means of conveying social values and knowledge. Proverbs used by

mothers and grandparents help to counsel youngsters keep them morally conduct, maintain healthy relationships, seize placements, deference to elders, integrity, tolerance, and accountability.

Proverbs (pazhamchollukal) were concise expressions of experience, practical wisdom, morality, and social values. Nair women use some Malayalam proverbs while advising children and younger members of the family. They were particularly effective because their short and memorable form made them easy to remember and repeat.

For example:

 “Mulline mullukond edukkam.”
A thorn can be removed with another thorn.
→ A difficult problem may sometimes require an equally appropriate method to solve it.
 “**Kakka kulichaal kokkaakumo?”**
Can a crow become a crane by bathing?
→ External appearance alone does not change one’s fundamental nature.
 “Ariyethra? Payar anpathu.”
How much rice? Fifty measures of beans.
→ Used humorously when someone gives an irrelevant or inappropriate answer.

Within the family, proverbs are highly helpful for informal instruction. Elders convey teachings through a proverb rather than giving direct instruction to children.

Thus, proverbs served as a compact form of intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Malayalam as a vehicle of cultural transmission

Nair’s mothers and grandmothers were important in transmitting traditional expressions because much of children’s early learning occurred within the household. Through lullabies, stories, songs, proverbs, riddles, and everyday conversation, women helped preserve vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and culturally meaningful forms of speech.

The major portion of children’s early education takes place in the home itself. In which, Nair’s mothers and grandparents’ significant role are remarkable. Women contribute to the preservation of vocabulary, colloquial idioms, and culturally significant speech patterns through lullabies, tales, songs, proverbs, riddles, and casual conversation. The traditional Nair matrilineal marumakkathayam system provides an important context for understanding women’s role in transmitting language and oral knowledge. The tarawad was a major social and domestic institution, and women were central to the continuity of family life and cultural practices.

Family histories, rituals, beliefs, societal norms, and useful knowledge are passed down from one generation to the next generation mostly in Malayalam language. Mothers and grandmothers introduce their children culturally relevant words, idioms, stories, songs, riddles, and proverbs within the traditional tarawad. The accumulated knowledge of past generations was distilled into Malayalam proverbs (pazhamchollukal), which conveyed values about family responsibilities, respect for elders, patience, caution, and proper social behaviour. The majority of Malayalam proverbs are not uniquely Nair, but their usage in Nair homes was a part of the larger oral tradition that conserved cultural knowledge.

Adaptation of Traditions

The Nair community of Kerala provides an important example of how traditions are preserved while simultaneously adapting to social, economic, educational, and political changes. Nair traditions were

not static. Practices associated with matriliny, the tarawad, marriage, inheritance, rituals, dress, food, and women's roles changed considerably during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This process allowed elements of Nair cultural identity to survive even when older social institutions declined.

Nair women did more than only to uphold customs. In addition, they allow cultural practices to endure throughout generations by adapting myths and conventions to shifting social conditions.

The modification of Marumakkathayam, the traditional matrilineal system, was one of the biggest shifts. The tarawad served as the primary joint-family institution, and inheritance and descent were traditionally traced through the female line. The old joint family steadily declined as new legal systems, individual property rights, modern education, and jobs were introduced.

Matrilineal inheritance changed legally as a result of the Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1933 and other laws. Nairs modified their conception of family life to fit the new nuclear-family structure rather than totally giving up on family identity and bonds.

There was also a significant change in traditional Nair marital customs. More formalized, monogamous marriages that resembled those seen elsewhere in Indian society increasingly replaced earlier matrilineal marriage and relationship patterns. Nonetheless, marriage remained a significant event for preserving family customs, songs, ceremonies, food traditions, kinship ties, and rituals. As a result, the structure of marriage evolved but certain cultural aspects persisted.

Modern education, work, public life, and political participation became more accessible to Nair women. As a result, they took on new roles outside the home to augment their customary duties within the tarawad. Traditional culture did not necessarily vanish entirely as a result. Songs, stories, rituals, recipes, family memories, and customs were still passed down by women, who frequently altered them to fit modern situation Traditions are frequently altered rather being outright abandoned, which is an important aspect of Nair cultural adaptability. For instance, customary rituals are condensed, rearranged, or carried out in a contemporary home while keeping the symbolic components from the previous custom.

Similarly, traditional songs and stories that were once transmitted orally have increasingly been written down, collected, published, performed on stage, and recorded, allowing them to survive beyond their original social setting.

As literacy and education increased, Nair oral traditions also evolved. Previously passed down mostly through mothers and grandparents, stories, legends, proverbs, and songs are now accessible through books, schools, cultural organizations, archives, radio, television, and digital media.

Another example of how traditionality can be adapted is food tradition. Though ingredients, cooking techniques, and presentation have changed to reflect contemporary living, traditional Nair cuisine connected to festivals, marriages, and domestic rituals has persisted. Nowadays, it's common to create traditional recipes for special occasions rather than regular eating.

As modern education, urbanization, and work increased, traditional attire and household customs also changed. However, customs and traditions of Nair community may persist at festivals,

temple ceremonies, marriages, and other cultural events.

CONCLUSION

Nair women therefore be understood as important custodians of Kerala's intangible cultural heritage. Through storytelling, songs, rituals, family histories, food traditions, proverbs, and everyday practices, they helped transfer cultural knowledge from one generation to the next. Their role is most significant in preserving the traditional and cultural practices existed before. The present study is a spectacular perception within the traditional matrilineal social structure of many Nair communities, where women were closely connected with the continuity of family and household traditions as well as social entities.

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FOLK ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPRESSION OF KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari, anchored at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, presents a singular historical and cultural landscape shaped by maritime geography, agrarian lifeways,and centuries of interfaith coexistence. This study interrogates the folk arts and performative expressions of Kanniyakumari, examining how traditional genres function as dynamic conduits of community memory, religious devotion, and communal solidarity. By analyzing key regional folk forms such as Villu Pattu (bow song), Kaniyan Koothu, Kavadi Attam, Kappal Pattu (boat songs), and Chakkai Attam the paper delineates the convergence among oral historiography, ritual performance, and sacred pageantry across temple, church, and community spaces. Historically influenced by both the Travancore cultural milieu and Tamil literary heritage, Kanniyakumari's performing traditions crystallize a fusion of Hindu, Christian, and indigenous folk motifs. Employing a historical-descriptive methodology grounded in primary ethnographic documentation and archival historical accounts, this paper demonstrates how local art forms bridge sectarian divides, safeguard oral lore, and sustain a resilient syncretic ethos amid ongoing modernization and cultural transition.

Keywords *: Kanniyakumari Folk Traditions, Cultural Syncretism, Villu Pattu, Performing, Arts & Rituals, Interfaith Confluence, Oral History, Sacred Festivals*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari district occupies an exceptional geopolitical and cultural position in the broader historiography of South India. Situated between latitudes 8 o 03'N and 8 o 35'N and longitudes 77 o 05'E and 77 o 36'E, the district constitutes the southern terminus of the Indian landmass. This distinct landform is demarcated by the Western Ghats along its western flank, Tirunelveli district to the north and northeast, and the open ocean across its southern perimeter. The physical convergence of three major bodies of water at Triveni Sangamam gave rise to two interconnected ecological zones (Tinai): the interior river basins (Marutham) fed by the perennial flows of the Pazhayar and Kodayar rivers, and the extensive littoral tract (Neithal) stretching from Neerodi to Kovalam. This ecological division shaped two distinct socio-economic systems-an interior agrarian peasant economy and a coastal marine fishing society-each fostering its own performative and expressive arts.

Historically, this territorial domain was ruled successively by the ancient Ay dynasty, the medieval Venad rulers, and the expanded princely state of Travancore. Because the administrative apparatus of Travancore operated for centuries from Padmanabhapuram before shifting north to Thiruvananthapuram, the southern taluks - Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode—developed a bilingual and composite cultural ethos. Following a sustained linguistic movement led by the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress, the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 integrated the district into Madras State (subsequently Tamil Nadu). Consequently, Kanniyakumari preserved an intricate dual heritage: an organic foundation in classical Tamil literary and folk traditions coupled with institutional

and aesthetic influences from Kerala's performative landscape.

Simultaneously, Kanniyakumari's historical trajectory fostered an enduring pluralism. Autochthonous Dravidian spirit and ancestor worship (Sastha, Sudalamadan, Isakki Amman, Bhadrakali, and Mutharamman) existed alongside classical Brahmanical temple institutions like the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple. The sixteenth century witnessed the widespread establishment of Roman Catholic communities along the coastal Mukkuvar belt through the missionary work of Saint Francis Xavier, followed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Protestant London Missionary Society (LMS) establishments in the agrarian interior.

These Christian communities developed alongside historic maritime Muslim trading settlements at Kottar and Colachel. Within this multi-confessional environment, folk performing arts evolved not as isolated sectarian practices, but as shared public mediums through which collective memory, social ethics, and communal solidarity were expressed.

Historiographical Framework and Research Methodology

The study of folk performing arts as historical sources requires an interdisciplinary method that links oral literature with written archival records. Traditional South Indian historiography has often prioritized monarchical epigraphy, copper-plate grants, and temple inscriptions. While these records document royal genealogies and land revenues, they largely omit the everyday experiences, caste negotiations, and emotional life worlds of subaltern agrarian and coastal communities. In contrast, folklore anthologies and oral performances serve as vernacular historical documents that record local conflicts, legendary martyrs, and collective social memories.

This study employs an interdisciplinary historical-descriptive and ethnohistorical methodology. Primary documentation is drawn from recorded oral performances, field transcriptions of narrative folk lyrics (Villu Pattu and Amba Pattu cycles), and direct observation of festive performances across Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode taluks. These ethnographic materials are critically cross-examined with secondary archival sources, including V. Nagam Aiya's Travancore State Manual (1906), T.K. Velu Pillai's revised Travancore State Manual (1940), the Travancore Archaeological Series, regional gazetteers, and foundational Tamil folklore scholarship compiled by N.Vanamamalai and K.K. Pillay. Through this dual approach, the study evaluates both the historical evolution and the contemporary performative realities of Kanniyakumari's folk arts.

Typology and Structural Mechanics of Folk Arts

The traditional expressive arts of Kanniyakumari encompass a wide range of musical, narrative, kinetic, and martial genres. Functionally, these traditions can be categorized into three domains: ritual-narrative forms associated with sacred worship, celebratory and martial traditions performed during communal gatherings, and occupational songs that coordinate daily manual labor.

Villu Pattu: The Bow Song as a Living Archive

Villu Pattu (The Bow Song) is the defining musical narrative genre of Kanniyakumari and the neighboring southern plains of Tirunelveli. The performance centers on a massive bow (Villu), measuring seven to eight feet in length, made from seasoned palmyra wood

or bamboo and strung with a taut cord. Along the length of the bow, numerous bronze bells (Mani) are suspended. The lead bard (Pulavar or Vildhari) sits at the center, striking the bowstring with two slender wooden rods (Veesukol) to produce a syncopated chime that sets the tempo of the performance.

The acoustic ensemble supporting the lead bard provides rhythmic and melodic counterpoints. The Kudam player strikes the mouth of a heavy, inverted earthen pot seated on a coir ring using a flat leather or rubber pad (Veesu Palakai), producing a deep, resonant bass pulse. The Jalra (brass cymbals) and Kattai (hardwood clappers) players maintain the metric framework (Talam), while the Udukku (an hourglass-shaped pressure drum) provides rolling rhythmic flourishes. The supporting chorus (Pinpaattu) echoes narrative lines, responds to the lead singer's queries, inserts humorous or moral commentary, and clarifies complex poetic passages for the audience.

In historical terms, Villu Pattu functions as a vernacular archive. The narrative repertoire is divided into two broad categories: Padukalam (heroic or martyr ballads) and Deiva Valaipaadu (deific invocations). Ballads such as Muthupattan Kathai, Chinnathambi Kathai, and Venkalarajan Kathai memorialize historical figures who died resisting oppressive social hierarchies or defending village frontiers. These bards preserved subaltern perspectives on caste disputes, agrarian relations, and local resistance that were omitted from state chronicles.

Furthermore, Villu Pattu exhibits notable syncretic flexibility. During Catholic parish festivals in coastal settlements like Kottar, Vadasery, and Muttom, troupes adapted the traditional Villu Pattu ensemble to perform Christian epics, such as the Devasahayam Pillai Kathai and Arulananthar Saritham (the life of St. John de Britto). The bards retained traditional Tamil poetic meters (Asiriyappa and Chindu) while setting biblical and Christian historical narratives to the same rhythm of the bow and bells, demonstrating the shared structural language of regional folk expression.

Kaniyan Koothu: Rhythmic Acoustics and Sacred Possession

Practiced exclusively by the Kaniyan community, Kaniyan Koothu (also known as Balan Pattu) is an indispensable ritual performance during the annual Kodai festivals of village guardian deities, including Sudalamadan, Bhadrakali, Pechiamman, and Bhairavar.

The performance is structured around the Magudam, a double-headed wooden cylinder drum played with rapid palm strikes. The ensemble employs two distinct Magudams: the high- pitched Melam (Uccha), which executes complex rhythmic breaks, and the low-toned Mandhiram (Mandham), which maintains a steady acoustic drone. The performance troupe is led by the Annavi (head singer and teacher) and features two male dancers (Adum Kaniyan) dressed in ritual female attire, wearing pleated skirts, ankle bells (Salangai), and decorative headgear. The songs narrate cosmogonic myths and battles between the divine feminine (Sakti) and malevolent spirits. As the Magudam rhythms accelerate through structured metric cycles (Iruppu and Muthppu), the dancers enter trance states (Arulvaakku). In this state, they act as spiritual intermediaries, speaking on behalf of the deity to resolve village grievances, offer agricultural predictions, and provide collective catharsis for the assembly.

Celebratory and Martial Performing Traditions: Chakkai Attam, Kavadi, and Silambam

In addition to narrative and spirit-invoking arts, Kanniyakumari maintains vibrant physical and celebratory dance genres. Chakkai Attam is performed during post-harvest celebrations and temple festivities in the Thovalai and Agastheeswaram regions. Performers hold four flat, rectangular pieces of polished teakwood (Chakkai) between their fingers. By flexing their hands in rapid coordination, dancers produce sharp, rhythmic clacking sounds while executing complex circular footwork and leaping turns, singing verses in praise of Murugan, Sastha, and agricultural prosperity.

Kavadi Attam is closely tied to Murugan shrines across the district, such as those at Kumarakoil and Marungoor. Dancers balance heavy wooden arches (Kavadi) decorated with peacock feathers, silk hangings, and brass pots on their shoulders. Accompanied by the rapid tempos of the Nagaswaram, Thavil, and Chenda, performers execute feats of physical endurance while singing Kavadi Chindu—a rhythmic folk song form structured to match the marching pace of pilgrimage processions.

The region's martial heritage is represented by Silambattam (staff combat) and Varma Kalai (the science of vital pressure points). Historically maintained by local martial lineages and patronized by the Travancore state military, Silambam transitioned into a performance art featured during temple Kodais and church Thiruvizhas. Demonstrations feature synchronized staff rotations, mock sparring, and the handling of flaming torches (Theepantham), accompanied by the martial rhythms of Thappu and Naiyandi Melam drums.

Maritime Lore and Littoral Labor Songs: Kappal Pattu and Amba Pattu

Along the maritime perimeter of the district, the fishing communities of the Mukkuvar and Parathavar developed specialized work songs (Amba Pattu or Thoni Pattu) and narrative sea ballads (Kappal Pattu). Amba Pattu is an ergonomic work chant sung while launching catamarans into heavy surf, rowing to offshore fishing grounds, and hauling large shore-seine nets (Karamadi). The lead singer (Thalaivan) delivers call verses that are answered by the crews rhythmic chorus "Ailasa... Ailasa"), synchronizing collective muscle exertion against oceanic drag.

In contrast, Kappal Pattu comprises extended narrative ballads sung during overnight sea voyages. These songs serve as oral navigational records, preserving practical knowledge regarding ocean currents, weather patterns, and celestial navigation by stellar constellations. The lyrical themes blend invocations to Kadalamma (Mother Ocean) with Christian prayers to the Virgin Mary (Arokiya Madha) and Saint Antony, reflecting how maritime labor synthesized ancestral nature reverence with Christian faith.

Cultural Syncretism Across Sacred Spaces and Festivals

The sacred calendar of Kanniyakumari provides a dynamic setting where performative, material, and musical traditions cross denominational boundaries. The district's festivals are not insular religious rites, but shared public celebrations that draw participants across community lines.

A prominent example is the annual Mandaikadu Kodai festival at the Bhagavathi Amman temple, often referred to as the "Sabarimala of Women" The festival attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from across Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The ritual space is filled with

continuous performances of Villu Pattu, Kavadi Attam, and Karagattam. Coastal Christian communities participate extensively through economic trade, the provision of pilgrim amenities, and the fulfillment of personal vows, reflecting centuries of shared geographic and social ties.

Similarly, the annual feast of Saint Francis Xavier at the St. Xavier's Cathedral in Kottar incorporates traditional South Indian festive elements. The liturgical processions through the town are led by traditional temple instrumental ensembles, including the Nagaswaram, Thavil, and Chenda Melam. The saint's statue is carried on monumental multi tiered wooden processional cars (Ther) whose architectural structure directly mirrors South Indian Hindu temple chariots (Rathas). Local Hindu families participate by offering flower garlands and lighting oil lamps along the processional route, continuing ancestral customs of mutual respect.

In the interior town of Thuckalay, the annual Urs of the seventeenth-century Sufi poet-saint Peer Mohammed Sahib Appa represents an important literary and spiritual confluence. The festival centers on the communal recitation of the saint's Gnana Pattu (Songs of Wisdom), composed in classical Tamil meter and drawing on regional philosophical idioms. Devotees of diverse religious affiliations attend the Urs to listen to these choral recitations and seek spiritual blessings.

Likewise, the Ratholsavam (Car Festival) of the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple demonstrates a cultural synthesis between Tamil and Kerala traditions. The temple rituals incorporate Kerala Panchavadyam and Chenda Melam percussion alongside Tamil Villu Pattu and Silambam demonstrations, while multi-caste occupational groups cooperate in drawing the massive temple chariot.

Through these shared festival spaces, the performative culture of Kanniyakumari functions as a common language. The structural elements of celebration—processional cars, percussive ensembles, narrative song meters, and public vows—are shared across Hindu, Christian, and Islamic contexts, reinforcing social harmony across the district.

Socio-Economic Transitions and Conservation Imperatives

Despite their historical resilience, the folk arts of Kanniyakumari face significant challenges in the contemporary era due to shifting economic structures, technological changes, and demographic transitions.

The decline of traditional patronage systems has impacted the financial stability of folk performers. Historically, annual temple Kodais and village performances were funded through the Vari system—a community-pooled agricultural fund collected from village households. As the local economy shifted from agriculture to service sectors, remittances, and formal employment, community contributions declined, leading to shorter festival schedules and reduced earnings for traditional bards and dancers.

Technological changes have also altered the auditory landscape of village festivals. High-decibel electronic public address systems, digital synthesizers, and recorded popular music have increasingly replaced overnight live storytelling performances like Villu Pattu and Kaniyan Koothu. The nuanced vocal delivery of traditional bards is frequently overshadowed by amplified commercial tracks, reducing public engagement with long-form oral epics.

Furthermore, traditional arts face generational attrition. The mastery of instruments like the Villu, Magudam, or Chakkai requires years of dedicated apprenticeship under master practitioners (Annavis). Younger generations, pursuing formal higher education and urban employment, are increasingly alienated from hereditary performing traditions. Consequently, the number of active, fully trained troupes has steadily decreased over recent decades.

To ensure the survival of this intangible cultural heritage, systematic preservation measures are necessary:

First, educational institutions and universities, such as Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, should establish structured performance workshops and accredited certificate courses led by traditional masters (Vildharis and Annavis), providing institutional recognition and transmission of these art forms to younger students.

Second, academic departments should undertake digital humanities initiatives, creating high-resolution audio-visual documentation of surviving oral repertoires and systematically digitizing fragile palm-leaf manuscripts (Olais) preserved in private family collections across the district.

Third, state agencies, working through the Tamil Nadu Folk Artists Welfare Board (Nattuppura Kalaignarkal Nala Variyam), must expand financial protections by offering sustained artist pensions, performance insurance, and regular festival grants, ensuring economic security for practicing artists.

CONCLUSION

The folk arts and expressive cultural traditions of Kanniyakumari constitute a living historical record of South Indian social life. Shaped by the unique geography of the triple-sea confluence and centuries of political transition between Travancore and Tamil Nadu, these genres have bridged religious, linguistic, and social divisions. Through the bell-strung rhythms of the Villu Pattu, the percussive intensity of the Magudam, the coordinated steps of Chakkai Attam, and the rhythmic labor chants of maritime Amba Pattu, the people of Kanniyakumari have preserved their shared memories, sacred devotions, and social ideals. Recognizing, documenting, and supporting these performance traditions ensures the continuity of a unique regional heritage an enduring model of cultural syncretism where diverse faiths and artistic expressions continue to coexist at the land's end.

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FOOD, CUSTOMS AND LIFESTYLE OF KANYAKUMARI: A STUDY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari district, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, occupies a distinctive position in the cultural and tourism geography of Tamil Nadu. The district is characterised by the confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, while its historical location between Tamil and Malayalam cultural regions has produced a rich and diverse cultural landscape. Festivals and pilgrimage constitute important components of this cultural landscape and have contributed significantly to the development of tourism and the local economy. The annual festivals associated with the Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple and St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral attract devotees and visitors from different parts of India and neighbouring regions. In addition, cultural events such as Kumari Thiruvizha provide a platform for classical and folk arts, music and traditional performances. The Government of Tamil Nadu identifies several festivals as important tourism events, while the Ministry of Tourism has promoted Kumari Festival and tourism cultural festivals in the district. This paper examines the relationship between festivals, pilgrimage and tourism in Kanniyakumari and analyses their contribution to the cultural economy of the district. It argues that festivals are not merely religious celebrations but also generate employment, stimulate small businesses, support transport and hospitality services, encourage cultural production and strengthen local identity.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Festivals, Pilgrimage Tourism, Cultural Economy, Cultural Heritage, Religious Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Local Community.*

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the collective expression of a society's values, beliefs, traditions, knowledge, customs and ways of living. Food, festivals, religious practices, occupations, language, dress, architecture and social relationships are among the major components through which culture is transmitted from one generation to another. In this context, Kanyakumari district provides an important field for understanding the relationship between geography, history and cultural life. Kanyakumari is geographically distinctive because the district has the sea on three sides and the Western Ghats on the northern side. The Government of Tamil Nadu notes that the region contains four traditional ecological zones Kurunchi, Mullai, Marutham and Neidhal, and has a diverse agricultural pattern ranging from paddy in the plains to tea and coffee in the higher elevations. The cultural history of the region is also very old. According to the Kanyakumari District Administration, archaeological evidence indicates prehistoric occupation, including Neolithic artefacts, while material remains from the megalithic or early historic period have also been identified. Thus, the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari has evolved over a long historical period. The district is particularly significant because it represents an interaction between Tamil and Malayalam cultural traditions. This influence is evident in food, language, architecture and social customs. The official district cultural profile identifies Tamil and Malayalam as important languages and describes the presence of Hindu, Christian and Muslim

communities. Consequently, Kanyakumari's culture should be understood as a cultural synthesis rather than as a single homogeneous tradition. Food and everyday customs provide especially useful evidence for understanding this synthesis.

Historical and Geographical Background of Kanniyakumari

Kanyakumari occupies a special position in the history of South India. Its location at the meeting point of different geographical and cultural zones encouraged interaction between communities from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Historically, the region was associated with the Tamil country and subsequently came under the influence of the Travancore kingdom. These historical developments contributed to the formation of a distinctive regional identity. The geographical environment has had a direct influence on people's occupations and food habits. The fertile plains support paddy cultivation, while coconut cultivation is widespread. The coastal areas support fishing and other marine occupations, and the hilly areas provide suitable conditions for plantation crops. The district dministration identifies paddy as the principal food crop and notes that coconut is an important plantation crop. The sea is not merely a geographical feature; it is an important element of the social and economic life of coastal communities. Fishing, boat-building, fish marketing and seafood preparation have historically formed part of the coastal way of life. At the same time, agriculture has shaped the lifestyle of inland communities. The cultural landscape therefore reflects the interaction of land, sea, agriculture, religion and trade. The historical development of the region has produced a society in which traditional Tamil practices coexist with Kerala influenced customs.

Food Culture of Kanyakumari

Food is one of the most visible expressions of cultural identity. Traditional food reflects geography, agriculture, occupation, religion, climate and historical contact. Kanyakumari's food culture is particularly distinctive because it combines elements of Tamil and Kerala culinary traditions. The Government of India's Incredible India tourism portal describes Nanjil Nadu cuisine as a combination of Tamil Nadu and Kerala culinary traditions. Coconut is an important ingredient, while fish and rice are prominent components of the regional food system. Traditional preparations mentioned in connection with Nanjil Nadu include Theeyal, Vendhaya Kuzhambu, Thoran, Avial, Nanjil Fish Curry and Mutta Avial.

Thus, food in Kanyakumari can be viewed as a form of cultural memory. Recipes passed from mothers and grandmothers to younger generations preserve knowledge about local ingredients, cooking methods and community traditions. Rice and Agricultural Food Traditions Rice occupies an important position in the traditional food culture of Kanyakumari. The district's agricultural economy has historically been closely connected with paddy cultivation. The district administration identifies paddy as the main food crop and records two major cultivation seasons. Rice-based meals traditionally form the centre of everyday food. Rice is commonly accompanied by vegetables, pulses, curries, fish preparations, pickles and other side dishes. The availability of locally cultivated rice influenced not only diet but also agricultural festivals and social practices.

Pongal, for example, demonstrates the relationship between agriculture and culture. It is a celebration of harvest, gratitude and rural life. The official district website lists Pongal among the important festivals celebrated in Kanyakumari.

Coconut in Local Cuisine

Coconut holds an important place in the local cuisine of Kanyakumari and the southern districts of Tamil Nadu. Because of the region's tropical climate, coconut palms are widely cultivated, and coconut has traditionally been used in everyday cooking as well as in festive and religious food preparations. It is valued not only for its taste but also for its nutritional and cultural importance. Fresh coconut is commonly grated and added to vegetables, poriyal, kootu, aviyal and curries. Grated coconut gives dishes a pleasant aroma, richness and slightly sweet flavour. Coconut is also used to prepare different types of chutneys, particularly coconut chutney, which is an important accompaniment for idli, dosa, vada and other breakfast foods. Coconut milk is another important ingredient in local cooking. It is prepared by grinding grated coconut with water and extracting the milk.

Coconut milk is used in vegetable curries, fish preparations, stews and special rice dishes. In coastal areas of Kanyakumari, coconut milk and coconut-based masalas are often combined with fresh fish and other seafood, creating distinctive local flavours. Coconut oil has traditionally been used for cooking and seasoning. It is especially valued for its characteristic aroma and is used in frying, tempering spices and preparing various traditional dishes. Coconut oil also forms part of the culinary traditions of many households in the region. Coconut is also associated with festivals, weddings and religious ceremonies. Tender coconut is consumed as a refreshing natural drink, while mature coconuts are offered in temples and used in auspicious ceremonies. Coconut-based sweets and snacks are prepared during special occasions. Dishes such as coconut rice, coconut-based sweets and traditional snacks demonstrate the versatility of the coconut. Coconut is therefore more than an agricultural product; it is an important part of the food culture, economy and traditional lifestyle of the local people. Its use in curries, chutneys, sweets, beverages, seafood dishes and ceremonial practices reflects the close relationship between the natural environment and local culinary traditions. Thus, coconut continues to contribute significantly to the distinctive identity of Kanyakumari's local cuisine.

Seafood and Coastal Food Culture

Kanyakumari district has a rich and distinctive coastal food culture because it is surrounded by the sea on three sides. Fishing has been an important traditional occupation of the coastal communities for generations, and seafood forms an essential part of their everyday food habits. Fish, prawns, crabs and other varieties of marine food are commonly used in traditional cooking. Fresh fish is usually purchased directly from local markets or fishing communities and prepared in different ways according to family traditions. Fish curry is one of the important dishes associated with the coastal food culture of Kanyakumari. Coconut, tamarind, chilli, turmeric and other local spices are commonly used to give the curry its distinctive taste. Coconut plays an important role in coastal cooking and is used either as grated coconut, coconut milk or coconut oil. Different communities have their own methods of

preparing fish, depending on local availability and family traditions. Fried fish, fish curry, fish pickle and other seafood preparations are commonly served with rice. Karuvadu, or dried fish, is another important traditional food of coastal communities. Fish is traditionally cleaned, salted and dried in the sun so that it can be preserved for a longer period. This method reflects the traditional knowledge of coastal people and their adaptation to the marine environment. Karuvadu is often used to prepare different types of curries and side dishes. Seafood is also closely connected with the social and cultural life of coastal communities. During family gatherings, festivals and special occasions, traditional seafood dishes are prepared and shared among relatives and neighbours. Food therefore strengthens family relationships and community bonds. Traditional methods of cleaning, cutting, drying and cooking fish are often passed from parents and grandparents to younger generations. The coastal food culture of Kanyakumari also reflects the influence of Tamil and Kerala culinary traditions. The use of coconut, spices and rice-based foods shows the cultural interaction between the two regions. The food habits of fishing communities also reflect their close relationship with the sea, nature and their traditional occupation. However, modernisation, tourism, urbanisation and changing lifestyles have influenced traditional seafood practices. Fast food, restaurant culture and modern cooking methods are becoming increasingly popular among younger generations. Despite these changes, traditional seafood dishes continue to have an important place in local households and cultural celebrations.

Traditional Food and Social Relationships

Food has an important social function. Meals are associated with family gatherings, festivals, religious events, weddings and community celebrations. Traditional dishes are often prepared in large quantities during important occasions and shared among relatives and neighbours. In this sense, food functions as a means of strengthening social relationships. The preparation and serving of food can also transmit knowledge about hospitality, gender roles, ritual practices and community identity.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Religious Diversity

Kanyakumari is known for its rich religious diversity and harmonious coexistence of different communities. The district has historically been a meeting point of different cultural and religious traditions. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have made significant contributions to the social and cultural life of the region. This diversity can be seen in its temples, churches, mosques, festivals, pilgrimage centres and religious customs. Hindu religious traditions have a strong presence through important temples such as the Devi Kanyakumari Temple, Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram and Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple. These temples are not only places of worship but also important centres of festivals, rituals, music, traditional arts and community participation. Festivals such as Navaratri, Mandaikadu Kodai and Pongal attract devotees and strengthen social relationships. Christianity also has a long-standing presence in Kanyakumari. Churches and Christian institutions contribute to education, social service and community life. Christmas, Easter, St.Xavier's Day, Mariyan Festival's and other Christian celebrations are observed with religious and cultural significance.

Muslim communities also contribute to the district's diverse cultural landscape through mosques, religious observances and social activities.

Religious diversity has also influenced food habits, architecture, dress, festivals and everyday social practices. The interaction between different communities has contributed to the distinctive cultural identity of Kanyakumari. Thus, religious diversity is not simply the presence of different religions; it represents a tradition of cultural interaction, mutual respect, community participation and social harmony, making it an important feature of the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari.

Temple Traditions

The temples of Kanyakumari are important repositories of cultural heritage. The Devi Kanyakumari Temple, Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram, Kollemcodu Bhagavathi Amman Temple and Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple are associated with important festivals and traditional practices. The district administration records festivals associated with the Devi Kanyakumari Temple, including Vaikasi Visakam, Navaratri, Thirukarthigai, Aadi Ammavasai and Thai Ammavasai. At Suchindram, the Thanumalayan Temple is associated with festivals celebrated during different Tamil months, while Mandaikadu is famous for the Mandaikadu Kodai Festival during the Tamil month of Masi. These festivals combine religious worship, processions, music, decoration, traditional food and community participation.

Mandaikadu Festival

Mandaikadu Festival is one of the important religious and cultural festivals of Kanyakumari district. It is celebrated at the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple, located near the coastal region of the district. The festival is particularly significant for women devotees and attracts large numbers of people from Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Kerala. The festival is popularly associated with the worship of Bhagavathi Amman, and devotees participate in various religious rituals and offerings. The festival is traditionally celebrated during the Tamil month of Masi and continues for several days. One of its important features is the gathering of devotees carrying offerings and participating in prayers. Women devotees often observe religious practices and visit the temple seeking the blessings of the goddess for the well-being and prosperity of their families. The famous Masi Kodai festival includes special rituals, processions and other religious activities. Mandaikadu Festival also reflects the cultural relationship between Kanyakumari and Kerala. People from both regions participate in the festival, demonstrating the historical interaction between Tamil and Malayalam cultural traditions. The festival provides an opportunity for communities to come together, share traditions and strengthen social relationships. Thus, the Mandaikadu Festival is not merely a religious celebration; it is also an important expression of the folk traditions, cultural identity, communal participation and regional harmony of Kanyakumari.

Pongal and Agricultural Customs

Pongal is one of the most important harvest festivals celebrated in Kanyakumari and other parts of Tamil Nadu. It is closely connected with agriculture, nature, cattle and the traditional rural way of life. The festival marks the completion of the harvest season and expresses the farmers' gratitude to the Sun, nature, cattle and

the agricultural resources that support their livelihood. The first day, Bhogi, is associated with cleaning houses and removing old or unwanted things. Thai Pongal, the main day, is celebrated by preparing the traditional sweet dish Pongal using newly harvested rice, milk and jaggery. The Pongal pot is decorated, and the dish is offered to the Sun as a symbol of gratitude. Houses and entrances are decorated with beautiful kolams, often made with rice flour. Mattu Pongal is dedicated to cattle, especially cows and bulls, which have traditionally played an important role in agricultural activities. Cattle are bathed, decorated and worshipped, and special food is offered to them. In some rural areas, traditional cattle-related customs and community gatherings are also held. Pongal therefore represents more than a harvest celebration. It reflects the close relationship between farmers, land, cattle, nature and community life. Agricultural customs associated with Pongal preserve traditional knowledge and strengthen family and community bonds. In Kanyakumari, the festival also forms an important part of the region's cultural identity and traditional rural heritage.

Marriage and Family Customs

Marriage customs in Kanyakumari vary according to caste, religion, locality and community. However, weddings traditionally involve extended families, relatives and community members. Food, music, rituals, clothing and exchange of gifts are important components of wedding celebrations. The family has traditionally been a major institution for transmitting cultural practices. Elders teach younger members traditional recipes, religious customs, stories, manners and social values. Modern education and changing occupational patterns have transformed many aspects of family life, but family-based cultural transmission continues to remain important.

Lifestyle of the People of Kanyakumari

Agriculture has played a major role in the traditional lifestyle of kanyakumari. Paddy cultivation is particularly important, while coconut, banana and plantation crops contribute to the agricultural economy. The district's varied terrain and rainfall conditions support diverse forms of cultivation. Agricultural life traditionally followed seasonal rhythms. Sowing, transplantation, harvesting and post-harvest activities were closely connected with community life and festivals. Traditional agricultural knowledge is also an important part of local heritage. A recent study documenting indigenous technical knowledge in Kanyakumari recorded practices relating to agriculture, banana cultivation, stingless-bee rearing and rubber production.

Fishing Communities

Fishing is an important traditional occupation and cultural activity among the coastal communities of Kanniyakumari. Their livelihood is closely connected with the sea, and fishing practices have developed through generations of practical knowledge and experience. Traditional boats, fishing equipment, fish markets and methods of seafood preparation form an important part of their cultural life. The occupation also influences family relationships, community cooperation and everyday social practices. Knowledge about sea conditions, weather patterns, fishing grounds, tides and fishing techniques is traditionally transmitted from elders to younger generations through practical experience. Fishing communities therefore

represent not only an economic group but also a significant part of the living cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari. Protecting their traditional knowledge and supporting their sustainable livelihoods are essential for preserving the coastal cultural identity of the district.

Rural and Urban Transformation

Kanyakumari has experienced significant social transformation through education, transportation, communication, tourism and urbanization. The Census District Handbook provides demographic and socio-economic information for villages and towns and documents infrastructure and amenities across the district. Traditional occupations remain important, but many people now work in education, government services, business, tourism, industry and other modern sectors. This has changed patterns of dress, food, housing, family relationships and leisure.

Language and Cultural Interaction

Language is a particularly important feature of Kanyakumari's cultural identity. Tamil is dominant, while Malayalam has also had a significant cultural influence because of the district's geographical proximity to Kerala and its historical connections. This linguistic interaction can be observed in everyday speech, vocabulary, food terminology and cultural practices. Language therefore represents an important example of the cultural interaction that distinguishes Kanyakumari from many other districts of Tamil Nadu.

Dress, Architecture and Material Culture

Traditional dress in Kanyakumari has been influenced by both Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions. Clothing styles have varied according to gender, occupation, religion, social status and occasion. Modern clothing has increasingly replaced many traditional forms in everyday life, although traditional dress continues to appear during festivals, weddings and religious ceremonies. Architecture provides another important expression of cultural heritage. The region contains temples, churches, forts, palaces and traditional houses. Padmanabhapuram Palace, although historically associated with Travancore, forms an important part of the heritage landscape of the region. Vattakottai Fort is another significant historical monument. The national tourism portal identifies Vattakottai as an eighteenth-century fort overlooking the sea. Traditional architecture reflects environmental adaptation. Houses, temples and other structures were historically designed according to local climatic conditions and available materials. The interaction of Tamil and Kerala architectural traditions is particularly important for understanding the built heritage of the region. Handicrafts also contribute to the material culture of Kanyakumari. Tourism authorities identify cane, bamboo, wood and seashell-based handicrafts among products associated with the region.

Festivals and Community Life

Festivals represent an important component of the cultural identity of Kanyakumari. They bring together religion, food, music, art, dress, processions and community participation. Important festivals and cultural events include: Pongal, Kumari Thiruvizha, Navaratri, Vaikasi, Visakam, Thirukarthigai, Aadi Ammavasai, Thai Ammavasai, Masi festivals, Mandaikadu Kodai Festival, Festivals at Suchindram, Christmas, New Year and Easter celebrations, Muslim religious festivals . The official district website lists Kumari

Thiruvizha as an annual cultural event in May involving residents and visitors and featuring various cultural activities. Festivals have several social functions. First, they reinforce religious beliefs. Second, they create opportunities for family and community interaction. Third, they provide a platform for traditional arts and performances. Finally, they contribute to the local economy through tourism, trade and small businesses.

Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Kanyakumari is one of India's important tourist destinations because of its geographical, religious and historical significance. Tourism has created opportunities for the promotion of local food, handicrafts, festivals and historical monuments. The national tourism portal highlights attractions such as the Gandhi Memorial, Vattakottai Fort and traditional handicrafts, while the district administration maintains tourism information and promotes local attractions. Tourism can therefore contribute positively to cultural preservation by creating economic value for heritage. Local cuisine, traditional handicrafts, festivals and historical buildings can become resources for cultural tourism. However, commercialization can also create challenges. Traditional practices may sometimes be simplified or modified to satisfy tourist expectations. Therefore, cultural tourism should maintain a balance between economic development and authenticity.

Changing Lifestyle and Cultural Transformation

Kanyakumari's culture is not static. Globalization, modern education, migration, technology, social media, television, changing employment patterns and urbanization have transformed everyday life. Traditional food is increasingly supplemented by fast food and commercially prepared foods. Nuclear families have become more common, and traditional occupations have changed. Younger generations may have less direct experience with traditional agricultural and fishing practices. At the same time, modernization has created new opportunities for cultural preservation. Digital media can document traditional recipes, festivals, folk practices, oral histories and handicrafts. Educational institutions can encourage students to conduct field studies and oral-history projects. The challenge is therefore not to reject modernization but to ensure that modernization does not result in the disappearance of valuable cultural knowledge.

Decline of Traditional Knowledge

Kanyakumari has a rich tradition of indigenous knowledge related to agriculture, fishing, food, medicine, crafts and folk practices. However, traditional knowledge is gradually declining due to modernisation and changing lifestyles. Younger generations often prefer modern occupations and have less opportunity to learn traditional skills from elders. The decline of traditional occupations such as farming, fishing and handicrafts also affects the transmission of local knowledge. Modern technology and changing food habits have reduced the use of many traditional practices. Oral traditions, folk songs, stories and indigenous methods may disappear when they are not properly documented. Environmental changes can also affect traditional knowledge connected with natural resources. Migration and urbanisation further weaken the connection between younger people and their traditional communities. Therefore,

preserving traditional knowledge requires proper documentation and community participation. Schools and colleges can encourage students to learn about local traditions and practices. Elderly knowledge holders should be encouraged to share their experiences with younger generations. Protecting traditional knowledge is essential for preserving the cultural identity and heritage of Kanyakumari.

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari represents a remarkable cultural landscape in which geography, history, religion, occupation and community life have interacted over centuries. Its food, customs and lifestyle provide valuable evidence of the region's cultural identity. The food culture of Kanyakumari, particularly the traditions associated with Nanjil Nadu, demonstrates the interaction between Tamil and Kerala culinary practices. Rice, coconut, vegetables and seafood reflect the agricultural and coastal environment of the region. Its festivals and religious traditions demonstrate the continuing importance of community participation and cultural memory. Pongal, Kumari Thiruvizha, festivals at the Devi Kanyakumari Temple, Suchindram and Mandaikadu illustrate the diversity of religious and cultural practices. The lifestyle of Kanyakumari has changed considerably because of education, urbanization, tourism, technology and new occupations. Nevertheless, traditional knowledge continues to survive in agriculture, food preparation, religious practices, crafts and community celebrations. Contemporary research on indigenous agricultural knowledge in the district also demonstrates the continuing value of local knowledge systems. Therefore, the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari should be understood as a living heritage rather than merely a collection of historical monuments. Preserving food traditions, customs and lifestyle means preserving the knowledge, memories and identities of the communities that created and sustained them. A balanced approach combining documentation, education, community participation, responsible tourism and digital preservation can ensure that the rich cultural heritage of Kanyakumari remains meaningful for future generations.

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UNPACKING K. KARUNAKARAN'S VISIONARY ROLE ON KERALA'S EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

K. Karunakaran, a towering figure in Kerala's political landscape, served as the Chief Minister of Kerala four non-concurrent times between 1977 and 1995. His tenure marked a transformative period in the state's socio-political history. This study explores Karunakaran's legacy, focusing on his contributions to industrial growth, infrastructure development, and social reforms. Karunakaran's leadership was instrumental in shaping modern Kerala. He founded the United Democratic Front (UDF), consolidating the Indian National Congress's position in a predominantly left-leaning state. His strategic acumen and administrative skills earned him the title "Leader," reflecting his significant influence within the party and the state. Under his leadership, Kerala witnessed substantial industrial growth, with initiatives to attract investment and promote economic development. His tenure also saw the implementation of key infrastructure projects, including expanding road networks and establishing new industrial zones. These efforts laid the foundation for Kerala's emergence as a key player in India's industrial landscape. Karunakaran's social reforms were equally impactful. He championed policies aimed at improving education, healthcare, and social welfare, ensuring that the benefits of development reached all sections of society. His commitment to public service and his ability to navigate complex political situations earned him respect and recognition both within the state and at the national level. This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of K. Karunakaran's educational growth and the enduring influence of his leadership on academic evolution.

Education sector

The government of Kerala spends approximately half of its revenue for education and the severe resource for crunch did not allow the state to spend more on the advancement of technical education in the state. In these circumstances the government opted for self-financing system under government sector. Under this system the education agency has to provide the infrastructure and salaries to the employees and teachers of the institution. In return they are allowed to collect fee from the students at a rate to run the institution on "no-profit-no loss" basis.

General Education Sector

In the primary education sector, the position in respect of people strength and school facilities, including teachers in respect of separate schools and separate divisions for linguistic minorities, will be continued without diminution.

In General education department Government has examined the matter in detail and are pleased to order that the benefit of counting re – admitted students for the purpose of preventing existing teachers from being thrown out, will be extended to the academic year 1982–83 also.

Pre degree board

Under the Karunakaran ministry of 1982- 87 the education minister T.M Jacob claimed that the UDF government

had revised the secondary school syllabus which remained the same for 12 years and this was taught from 83-84 onwards. The UDF government took the initiative to delink the pre degree course from the University system. Finance minister K.M Mani presented the budget for the year 1986-87 and stated that "A predegree board which will be responsible for revising and updating the curriculum the plus 2 stage will be established to conduct pre degree courses and examinations"

In 1986 may 15, T.M Jacob proclaimed the proposal for taking away the pre degree from the University as follows:

1. The pre degree course to be delinked from the universities will be bought under the control of separate pre degree board.
2. The pre degree course offered by the College's should be permitted to continue there. But they will be bought under the control of the proposed pre degree board.
3. Trivandrum will be the headquarters for the new pre degree board.
4. Concurred departments of the government may be dealt with the relevant matter in this regard .

The LDF came to power in 1987. The new LDF government cancelled the decision of the previous government. LDF appointed justice Narendran commission to enquire into the malpractices include in hasty implementation of the PDC Board.

However, the UDF was not ready to keep away from their policy. They have given a new shape, to the whole issue of plus two when they have come to power in 1991. A separate directorate for higher secondary education was started following the same provisions for admission etc" as available for PDC Tin colleges"- The relevant government order was issued by introducing higher secondary courses.

Mahatma Gandhi University

During the reign of UDF and LDF ministries between 1982 and 2000, university legislation was made 27 times. During the tenure of the UDF Ministry (1982–87) bills regarding Higher Education were passed . Twice University Laws were amended. Three Acts dealt with the establishment and other matters related to the Gandhiji University , with the intention of utilizing the surplus teachers and equipping them for vocational subjects. The Centre for Training of College Teachers was started at the Cochin University .

Major job oriented courses like Forestry, Travel and Tourism , Micro biology ,Mass Communication and Journalism, Plantation Management, and Biotechnology – technology were introduced at degree level and the courses were restructured by introducing vocational subjects. Vocational groups had be aligned with agriculture , the service sector and various programmes of rural development as well . It should also prepare young people for Self employment .

Totally against the policy of state control of education initiated by the communist government in late 50's , there was a gradual acceptance of privatisation during the year 1964 and 1981. In the mid 90's the UDF ministry adopted 80 alarming a policy decision to give away education to self - financing sector.

CONCLUSION

Our former chief minister of Kerala, hon. K. Karunakaran made tremendous contributions to the growth and development of women in Kerala. His life long dedications to upliftment of women ,

especially in rural areas played an transformational role in the women life conditions and empowerment.

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The Cultural Heritage of Kanyakumari District: A Socio-Historical Synthesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a historical and socio-cultural investigation of Kanyakumari District, the southernmost peninsular region of India. Situated at the geographic convergence of the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean, the region possesses a distinct historiographical identity shaped by its transition from an integral territory of the princely state of Travancore to its linguistic merger with Tamil Nadu under the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. Drawing upon Sangam literature, epigraphic records, architectural remains, and colonial documentation, this study analyzes the syncretic evolution of Kanyakumari's heritage. It examines the interplay between Dravidian traditions, Digambara Jain monasticism, Hindu temple architecture—notably the Suchindram and Thiruvattar complexes—and the transformative influence of Christian missionary movements following the 16th-century arrival of St. Francis Xavier. Additionally, the paper evaluates the region's linguistic dynamics (Nanjil Tamil), performing folk traditions (VilluPattu), coastal maritime trade, and early modern social reform movements. The study demonstrates that Kanyakumari functions not merely as a territorial boundary, but as a dynamic cultural nexus where diverse religious, linguistic, and trans-oceanic influences continue to coexist.

Keywords:

Kanyakumari District, Travancore History, Nanjil Nadu, Cultural Syncretism, Dravidian Architecture, Christian Missionaries, Socio-Historical Study.

1. Historical Evolution & Multi-Religious Fabric

The antiquity of Kanyakumari is attested in classical Tamil Sangam literature, notably within the epics *Silappathikaram* and *Manimekalai*, which document its status as a sacred coastal emporium and pilgrimage site (*Tirthasthan*).



Chitharal Rock-Cut Jain Monuments. Source: sisyphuszirix / Getty Images



SuchindramThanumalayan Temple Gopuram. Source: Satish Parashar / Getty Images



Padmanabhapuram Palace Wooden Architecture. Source: Wirestock / Getty Images



Vattakottai Coastal Fortification. Source: sundrawalex / Getty Images

1.1 Hindu Sacred Geography

The district derives its name from Devi Kanyakumari, the ascetic virgin deity whose shrine anchors the peninsula's southern tip. The regional sacred landscape is marked by monumental Hindu complexes:

SuchindramThanumalayan Temple: Renowned for its *Trimurti* iconology, uniting Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma within a single core deity (*Linga*), alongside a 133-foot *gopuram* and single-granite musical pillars.

ThiruvattarAdikesavaPerumal Temple: A major *DivyaDesam* exhibiting classical *Vattazhi* (circular sanctum) layout, pre-dating and structurally influencing the Padmanabhaswamy Temple of Thiruvananthapuram.

1.2 Jain And Buddhist Monastic Legacy

During the early medieval period (8th–11th centuries CE), Digambara Jainism established prominent monastic hubs along the granite outcroppings of the Western Ghats:

Chitharal (Thirucharanathumalai):
A rock-cut cave complex featuring bas-relief carvings of Tirthankaras, including Parshvanatha and Padmavati, along with Vatteluttu inscriptions documenting royal patronage from Ay kings like VikramadityaVaraguna.

Kalugumalai Integration:
Structural traces confirm that ascetics maintained an interconnected web of *pallis* (educational monasteries) across the region before gradual assimilation into mainstream Shaiva and Vaishnava bhakti traditions.

1.3 Christian Evangelical History

The coastal demographic shifted significantly following the arrival of Jesuit missionary St. Francis Xavier in 1542. Operating under the Portuguese *Padroado*, Xavier converted substantial populations of the *Parava* (fisherfolk) and *Mukkuvar* communities in the Kottar region. Subsequent Protestant initiatives, led by William Tobias Ringeltaube of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the early 19th century, introduced institutional schooling, printing presses, and social reform movements. Key heritage sites include St. Xavier's Church in Kottar, St. George Church in Parassala, and Our Lady of Ransom Church in Nagercoil.

2. Architectural Typologies: Syncretic Formations

The architectural landscape reflects a stylistic hybridity resulting from two centuries of Travancore governance overlaid onto indigenous Tamil Dravidian forms.

Architectural Domain	Key Sites / Structures	Structural & Stylistic Features
Temple Vernacular	Suchindram, Thiruvattar	Combination of tall Dravidian *gopurams* with Kerala-style steeply pitched tiled roofs (*Srikovil*) engineered for heavy monsoon resistance.
Palatine Architecture	Padmanabhapuram Palace	Masterpiece of teakwood joinery, featuring *Charupadi* (carved wooden benches), *Manichitrathazu* (ornate locks), and polished black granite floors sealed with egg-white and coconut shell charcoal mixtures.
Coastal Military Forts	Vattakottai Fort	Coastal stone bastion designed by Dutch naval commander Eustachius De Lannoy following the Battle of Colachel (1741); incorporates granite blocks and seaside ramparts.
Modern Commemoratives	Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Gandhi Mandapam	Modern syncretic monuments utilizing traditional stone masonry styles to honor spiritual and nationalist legacies.

3. Linguistic Dynamics, Folk Traditions & Social Fabric

3.1 Linguistic Contact: Nanjil Dialect

While Tamil serves as the official administrative medium, the local vernacular (*Nanjil Tamil*) displays profound phonological and lexical borrowings from Malayalam due to historical administrative integration under Travancore. Scholars of Dravidian linguistics note the retention of archaic Tamil forms alongside Malayalam verbal endings within local agrarian (*Nanjil*) and coastal communities.

3.2 Folk Performance & Literary Production

Literary history spans early palm-leaf manuscripts to modern Protestant print culture; the Nagercoil Mission Press (est. 1821) produced some of the earliest printed Tamil instructional texts and translations. Local performance traditions preserve rich oral histories:

- **VilluPattu (Bow Song):** A narrative folk form utilizing a tall, stringed wooden bow accompanied by bronze cymbals, delivering historical epics and ethical lore during village *Koda* festivals.
- **Ritual & Martial Performances:** *Mayilattam* (peacock dance), *Kavadiyattam*, and *PoikkalKuthirai* (dummy horse dance) remain staple ritual offerings at rural shrines.
- **Maritime Oral Lore:** Traditional *Amba Song* (boat songs) maintained by Mukkuvar seafaring communities encode oceanic navigation routes and ecological knowledge.

3.3 Culinary & Customary Formations

The regional gastronomy explicitly mirrors this bi-state identity, blending coconut-heavy, spiced gravies typical of Kerala (*Puttu*, *Appam*, *Fish Stew*) with Tamil staple pulse preparations (*Sambar*,

Rasarn). Socially, while patrilineal structures dominate today, historical vestiges of the *Marumakkathayam* (matrilineal inheritance) system formerly practiced among Nair and allied social groups left distinct impacts on property ownership laws throughout the Nanjil region.

4. Maritime Trade, Global Contacts & Modernization

Owing to its strategic position along Indian Ocean trade networks, Kanyakumari served as a critical nexus for maritime exchange:

Early Commerce: Ancient ports along the coastline facilitated spice, timber, and pearl exports to Greco-Roman, Arab, and Chinese merchants.

Colonial Encounters: The 1741 Battle of Colachel—wherein King Marthanda Varma of Travancore defeated the Dutch East India Company—marked a pivotal moment in Asian naval resistance against European powers.

Institutional Modernization: Protestant and Catholic missionary networks accelerated literacy, built medical facilities, and challenged caste-based restrictions (such as the *Channar revolt* regarding dress codes), establishing Kanyakumari as one of the most literate districts in modern southern India.

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari District presents an exceptional case study in cultural synthesis. Rather than functioning purely as a geographic boundary, it operates as a dynamic cultural crossroad where Tamil and Malayalam traditions, ancient monastic movements, Hindu ritual architecture, European maritime influence, and Christian evangelical history converge. Preserving its built monuments, linguistic dialects, and oral performance traditions remains vital for contextualizing southern India's broader socio-historical trajectory.

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CULTURAL PRACTICES IN KANYAKUMARI: THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE AND DOWRY

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari, located at the southernmost tip of India, is a region where Tamil and Malayalam cultures intersect, creating a unique social and cultural landscape. Among its many cultural ractices, the institution of marriage and the practice of dowry occupy a central place in shaping family relations, gender roles, and social status. This article examines marriage as a social institution in Kanyakumari and explores the historical evolution, cultural significance, and contemporary transformations of dowry practices in the district. It argues that while marriage continues to function as a vital cultural institution preserving community identity and kinship networks, dowry has increasingly become an economic and social burden despite legal prohibition and changing educational and occupational opportunities for women.

Key Words: *Kanyakumari, Cultural Practices, Marriage, Dowry, Women.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district has been shaped by the cultural traditions of both Tamil Nadu and the erstwhile Travancore kingdom. This unique geographical and historical background has created distinct cultural practices that differ from other regions in Tamil Nadu. Marriage is not just a personal choice but is seen as a significant social and religious event that connects families, communities, and generations. Alongside marriage, the practice of dowry has played a major role in shaping relationships, family status, and a woman's position in society. While modernization, education, and legal changes have affected many traditional customs, marriage and dowry continue to influence daily life in Kanyakumari.

Marriage as a Cultural Institution

In Kanyakumari, marriage has always been viewed as a sacred and socially acceptable union. Historically, families, rather than individuals, were responsible for arranging marriages. Choosing a bride or groom involved considering factors such as caste, religion, family reputation, economic situation, and education. The Kanyakumari district is home to various communities, including Hindus, Christians, Muslims, Nadars, Mukkuvars, and others. While marriage rituals differ among these groups, they share some common cultural elements. Hindu weddings typically involve exchanging garlands, tying the thali (mangalsutra), receiving blessings from elders, and performing temple- related ceremonies. Christian weddings are usually held in churches, followed by community meals and celebrations. In both traditions, marriage ceremonies serve to strengthen family bonds and community ties. One unique feature of Kanyakumari is the blend of Tamil and Malayalam traditions. The district's historical connection with Travancore introduced customs related to inheritance, property, and ceremonies that continue to shape marriage practices even after the district became part of Tamil Nadu in 1956.

Social Functions of Marriage

Marriage plays several important roles in Kanyakumari society. It helps in forming families, managing inheritance, and continuing social norms. It also builds alliances between families and

strengthens support networks. In many communities, marriage signals a woman's transition into new domestic roles, reflecting traditional gender roles. Arranged marriages were the norm in the past, with a strong preference for marriages within the same caste or religious group. Although love marriages and inter-community marriages are becoming more common among younger people, arranged marriages still hold significant influence, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.

The Practice of Dowry

Dowry has been a key part of marriage arrangements in Kanyakumari for many years. Traditionally, dowry included items like gold jewellery, cash, land, household goods, and other property given from the bride's family to the groom or the newlyweds. Gold, in particular, was considered a symbol of family honor, social status, and economic success. During the twentieth century, the practice of dowry became more widespread as communities experienced greater social mobility, educational opportunities, and involvement in trade and business. Among certain communities, especially the Nadars, the amount of gold and property given during marriage became closely linked to social standing and upward movement. Marriage negotiations often involved detailed discussions on jewellery, land, and financial support, placing significant pressure on the bride's family.

Impact on Women and Families

The dowry system has had a major effect on women and their families. Parents of daughters often face heavy financial costs when arranging marriages, leading many families to take on debt or sell property. In some cases, dowry expectations can cause delays in marriage and create emotional pressure within the household. For women, dowry can offer some financial security in the form of jewellery or property, but it also reinforces traditional gender roles by treating marriage as an economic exchange. Dowry demands can lead to marital disputes, harassment, and emotional stress. Although the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 made giving and receiving dowry illegal in India, the practice continues in different forms, such as gifts, jewellery, property transfers, and wedding expenses.

Historical and Cultural Context

Understanding the continued presence of dowry in Kanyakumari requires looking at its historical background. During the Travancore era, social structure, land ownership, and family honor were deeply connected to marriage alliances. The growth of education and trade within communities like the Nadars changed traditional social systems but also led to more competition in showing wealth through marriage events and the wearing of gold ornaments. Religious groups and community groups have sometimes worked to reduce the practice of giving too much dowry. Churches, temples, women's groups, and social reforms have increasingly promoted simple weddings and the idea of not giving dowries. However, cultural expectations around jewellery and the cost of weddings are still deeply rooted in many parts of society.

Contemporary Transformations

In recent years, Kanyakumari has experienced major social changes. Greater female education, jobs in various fields, migration to countries like the Gulf and elsewhere, and increased access to global media have shifted views on marriage. More educated women are now involved in deciding whom to marry, and many families now value education and work

more than traditional dowry practices. Simple weddings, registered marriages, and marriages based on personal choice are becoming more common, especially among urban middle-class families. Still, gold jewellery holds a strong symbolic value, and dowries often continue in different forms such as voluntary gifts or property exchanges. Thus, the current marriage practices in Kanyakumari show a blend of traditional and modern values.

CONCLUSION

Marriage remains one of the most lasting cultural customs in Kanyakumari, helping to keep community identity, religious beliefs, and family ties alive. At the same time, the practice of dowry shows the complex link between culture, gender, and the economy. Even though legal changes and social movements have challenged old dowry practices, economic expectations around marriage still affect how people choose partners and influence women's lives. Studying marriage and dowry in Kanyakumari offers important insights into the area's history, social organisation, and ongoing cultural changes.

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COASTAL TOURISM AND HERITAGE IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari District, located at the southernmost tip of India, possesses diverse tourism resources encompassing beaches, waterfalls, backwaters, historical monuments, spiritual centres and cultural heritage sites. This article examines the tourism potential of selected destinations, including Sothavilai, Sanguthurai, Thengapattinam, Thekkurichi, Muttom, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Gandhi Memorial, Kamaraj Manimandapam, Mathoor Hanging Trough, Thirparappu Waterfalls and Colachel Victory Memorial. These attractions demonstrate the close relationship between natural landscapes, cultural traditions, maritime history and modern tourism. The study highlights the importance of infrastructure development, accessibility, environmental conservation and responsible tourism practices in promoting lesser-known destinations. Sustainable and community-oriented tourism can diversify the district's tourism circuit, strengthen local livelihoods and enhance Kanniyakumari's position as a year-round destination for nature, heritage, spiritual and recreational tourism.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari; Beach Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Natural Attractions, Sustainable Tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari District, located at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, is endowed with a remarkable combination of natural beauty, cultural diversity and historical heritage**.** Its scenic landscape includes majestic hills, pristine beaches, rivers, waterfalls and picturesque rural environments. The district also reflects a distinctive cultural synthesis, where the architectural traditions, customs and cultural influences of neighbouring Kerala coexist with the rich heritage of Tamil Nadu.

Although Kanniyakumari and Padmanabhapuram Palace have traditionally been the major attractions for visitors, the district possesses numerous lesser-known destinations with considerable tourism potential. Recognizing the need to diversify the tourism circuit, the district administration has undertaken initiatives to promote these emerging attractions. The provision of basic amenities, improved accessibility, visitor facilities and tourism infrastructure has encouraged tourists to explore destinations beyond the traditional centres.

These initiatives can contribute to the development of sustainable and community-oriented tourism, while also generating employment opportunities and supporting local economies. With effective conservation, infrastructure development and responsible destination management, Kanniyakumari District can further establish itself as a diverse year-round tourism destination**,** integrating nature, heritage, culture and recreation.

Beach tourism has become an important component of contemporary tourism, attracting visitors through scenic landscapes, recreational activities, coastal environments and opportunities for relaxation. Along with heritage sites, religious centres, historical monuments and cultural attractions, beaches continue to draw tourists from different parts of the world. The human desire to explore unfamiliar landscapes has encouraged

travel since ancient times. In this context, Kanniyakumari District, situated at the southern tip of India, offers remarkable opportunities for coastal tourism. Its beaches are distinguished by sandy shores, shallow waters, coconut groves, estuaries, backwaters and rich maritime traditions.

Sothavilai, Sanguthurai and Thengapattinam: Diverse Coastal Attractions

Sothavilai Beach, located near Nagercoil and Kanniyakumari, is one of the prominent natural beaches of the district. Its shallow waters, gentle waves and attractive sand dunes create a pleasant environment for recreation and family tourism. Basic facilities such as drinking water, shaded shelters, a viewing tower, children's play areas and restrooms have supported its development as a tourist and picnic destination. The West Coast Road also provides visitors with a scenic coastal journey. Although the beach was severely affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami, subsequent restoration and infrastructure development have helped revive it as an important tourism attraction.

Sanguthurai Beach, situated in the Rajakkamangalam area, is another developing coastal destination. Its white sandy shoreline, peaceful surroundings and accessibility from Nagercoil make it popular among local visitors. The beach offers opportunities for relaxation, photography and seasonal recreational activities. Its coastal landscape also provides attractive views towards the Vivekananda Rock area. Improved infrastructure and transportation facilities have enhanced its potential for further tourism development.

Thengapattinam Beach offers a distinctive combination of beach tourism, backwater recreation and maritime heritage. Located on the western coast near Painkulam, it is surrounded by coconut groves and lies close to the Thamiraparani estuary. The region has a significant maritime history, with historical trading connections with Arabia and other coastal centres. Traditional commodities such as copra, dried fish, coir and shark fin were associated with its earlier coastal trade. Today, the estuary, coconut landscapes and backwaters provide opportunities for boating, leisure activities and nature-based tourism. Thus, Thengapattinam represents an emerging destination where coastal scenery, ecological resources and maritime heritage converge.

Overall, the beaches of Kanniyakumari District offer diverse tourism experiences ranging from leisure and recreation to backwater tourism and heritage exploration. Sustainable infrastructure, environmental conservation, visitor safety and responsible tourism management can further enhance their role in the economic and cultural development of the district.

Thekkurichi and Muttoms

Thekkurichi Beach is a relatively lesser-known coastal attraction in the Rajakkamangalam area of Kanniyakumari District. Its calm shoreline, shaded casuarina trees and peaceful surroundings make it suitable for short excursions and leisure tourism. The village is also associated with traditional coir-making, which adds a local cultural and livelihood dimension to the tourism experience. Its accessibility from Nagercoil through the West Coast Road provides potential for developing sustainable community-based beach tourism.

Muttom Beach, located on the western coast of the district, is distinguished by its dramatic rocky shoreline and powerful waves. The

interaction between the sea and large rock formations creates a distinctive landscape that attracts visitors, photographers and filmmakers. Muttom has also gained recognition as a film-shooting location for Tamil and Malayalam cinema. Its historic lighthouse, established during the British period in the nineteenth century and subsequently improved, adds considerable heritage value. Sunset views, seating areas, shelters, parking facilities, solar lighting and safety measures further enhance its tourism potential.

Vivekananda Rock Memorial: A Landmark of Spiritual and Cultural Tourism

The Vivekananda Rock Memorial is one of the most significant cultural and spiritual attractions of Kanniyakumari. Situated offshore near the confluence of the Indian Ocean**,** Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, the memorial commemorates Swami Vivekananda, who is traditionally associated with meditation on the rock during his visit to Kanniyakumari in December 1892. The memorial complex includes the Sri Pada Mandapa and Vivekananda Mandapa, combining spiritual significance with distinctive Indian architectural features. Ferry services connect the mainland with the memorial, making the journey itself an important part of the tourist experience. Today, the monument represents the intersection of spirituality, architecture, history and coastal tourism, and remains an important symbol of the cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari District.

Thiruvalluvar, Gandhi and Kamaraj Memorials

The coastal landscape of Kanniyakumari is enriched by several monuments that reflect the region's literary, national and political heritage. The Thiruvalluvar Statue, standing 133 feet high on a rocky island near the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, commemorates the celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar. The monument has become an important attraction for visitors interested in Tamil literature and cultural identity.

The Gandhi Memorial commemorates Mahatma Gandhi and marks the place where his ashes were kept before immersion in 1948. Constructed during the 1950s, the memorial combines traditional architectural elements with symbolic design. Its prayer hall and multilingual inscriptions highlight Gandhi's ideals and his association with Kanniyakumari. The memorial also serves as a repository of books and materials relating to his life and philosophy, making it both a tourist attraction and a centre of historical remembrance.

The Kamaraj Manimandapam commemorates K. Kamaraj, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and an important freedom fighter and national political leader. The memorial honours his public service and preserves his memory as one of Tamil Nadu's influential political figures.

Mathoor Hanging Trough: Tourism and Engineering Heritage

The Mathoor Hanging Trough, situated near Mathoor in Thiruvattar area, is a distinctive example of irrigation engineering and rural development. Constructed in the 1960s, the elevated trough carries water across the valley and was originally developed to support irrigation and address drought-related needs in the region. Its impressive height, length and supporting pillars have transformed it into a popular tourist attraction. The surrounding landscape, viewing points, recreational facilities and accessibility make Mathoor attractive to families and visitors of different age

groups. Thus, the site demonstrates how infrastructure created for agricultural development can evolve into an important form of engineering and tourism heritage.

Thirparappu Waterfalls

Thirparappu Waterfalls is one of the prominent nature-based tourism attractions of Kanniyakumari District. The waterfall is formed by the Kodayar River as it passes through the rocky landscape near Thiruvattar. During the monsoon, increased water flow creates an impressive cascade surrounded by hills and dense vegetation. The combination of flowing water, forested surroundings and scenic landscapes makes the site attractive for photography, recreation and family tourism. The waterfall is also popular as a bathing destination and is often regarded as the "Courtallam of Kanniyakumari District**."** Its natural environment and accessibility have made Thirparappu an important stop in the district's tourism circuit.

Colachel Victory Memorial: A Maritime Heritage Site

The Colachel Victory Memorial commemorates the historic Battle of Colachel of 1741, in which the Travancore forces defeated the Dutch East India Company. The battle marked an important episode in the military history of Travancore and the European presence on the Kerala–Tamil Nadu coast. A victory monument was subsequently established at Colachel to commemorate this achievement. Located along the Arabian Sea coast, the memorial combines maritime history, military heritage and coastal tourism. Today, it serves as a reminder of the region's historical resistance to European expansion and attracts visitors interested in the history and heritage of southern India.

Findings

1. **Diverse Tourism Resources:** Kanniyakumari District possesses a rich combination of beaches, waterfalls, backwaters, hills, monuments, spiritual centres and cultural heritage sites, providing a strong foundation for diversified tourism.
2. **Emerging Coastal Destinations:** Sothavilai, Sanguthurai, Thengapattinam, Thekkurichi and Muttom have significant potential for beach, recreational, eco-tourism and community-based tourism.
3. **Integration of Nature and Heritage:** Thengapattinam and Muttom demonstrate how natural landscapes can be combined with maritime history and cultural heritage to create distinctive tourism experiences.
4. **Growth of Heritage Tourism:** Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Gandhi Memorial, Kamaraj Manimandapam and Colachel Victory Memorial strengthen the district's spiritual, literary, political and historical tourism profile.
5. **Nature-Based Tourism Potential:** Thirparappu Waterfalls and the surrounding landscapes provide opportunities for recreation, eco-tourism and family-oriented tourism.
6. **Engineering and Rural Heritage:** Mathoor Hanging Trough illustrates how irrigation infrastructure can acquire tourism significance through its architectural, engineering and scenic value.
7. **Infrastructure as a Tourism Driver:** Improved roads, transport facilities, shelters, safety measures, sanitation and visitor amenities have enhanced

the accessibility and attractiveness of emerging destinations.

8. **Need for Sustainable Tourism:** Environmental conservation, responsible visitor management and protection of coastal and natural resources are essential for long-term tourism development.
9. **Community Participation:** Tourism development can create employment, strengthen local livelihoods and encourage community participation, particularly in lesser-known coastal and rural destinations.
10. **Potential for an Integrated Tourism Circuit:** Connecting coastal, natural, spiritual, historical and cultural attractions can reduce dependence on major tourist centres and establish Kanniyakumari as a diversified year-round tourism destination.

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A CONFLUENCE OF RELIGION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari is a significant historical, religious, cultural, and tourist centre situated at the southernmost tip of India. Renowned for the meeting of the Bay of Bengal, Indian Ocean, and Arabian Sea, it attracts pilgrims and tourists because of its natural beauty and sacred traditions. The history of Kanyakumari is closely associated with Nanjinad, the Pandya kingdom, the erstwhile Travancore State, and the rich Tamil cultural heritage of the region. The Kanyakumari Temple and the Sthalapurana preserve important legends associated with Goddess Parasakthi and her victory over the demon Banasura. The Suchindrum Temple, sacred bathing ghats, annual festivals, Gandhi Mandir, Vivekananda Rocks, Vattakottai Fort, Chakra Thirtha, and Maruthuvamalai further enrich its cultural landscape. The region also reflects religious diversity through Hindu, Christian, and Muslim traditions. Thus, Kanyakumari represents a unique synthesis of history, mythology, religion, architecture, natural beauty, and cultural traditions, making it an important heritage destination in India.

KEYWORDS: *Kanyakumari, Cultural Heritage, Parasakthi Temple, Historical Traditions, Religious Tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari occupies a unique place in the history and cultural heritage of South India. Situated at the southernmost tip of India, it is distinguished by the confluence of three seas and its rich religious traditions. The region has historical connections with the Pandyas and Travancore and reflects strong Tamil cultural influences. Its temples, legends, festivals, monuments, and natural attractions have made Kanyakumari an important centre of pilgrimage and tourism. The traditions associated with Goddess Kanyakumari, Suchindrum Temple, and the *Sthalapurana* reveal the close relationship between mythology, religion, and local culture. At the same time, monuments such as the Gandhi Mandir, Vivekananda Rocks, and Vattakottai Fort demonstrate its wider historical and national significance. This article examines the historical traditions, religious practices, cultural heritage, festivals, monuments, and natural attractions that make Kanyakumari a distinctive cultural landscape.

Kanyakumari: History, Tradition and Cultural Heritage

Kanyakumari is one of the few places in the world that leaves an indelible impression on the memory of a visitor. Apart from being one of the most beautiful places in India, it is also one of the holiest pilgrimage centres in the country. It is the Land's End of India, where one can stand on the shore and watch the sun rise over the Bay of Bengal and set over the Arabian Sea. Hundreds of tourists and pilgrims of different faiths and backgrounds visit the place to bathe in the holy waters of the ocean, offer worship at the sacred shrine, enjoy the magnificent natural scenery, and pay homage to the Father of the Nation at the Gandhi Memorial.

This Cape, from which the newly formed district of Kanyakumari derives its name, is surrounded by three seas: the Bay of Bengal to the east, the Indian Ocean to the south, and the Arabian Sea

to the west. It is famous for its shrine dedicated to Goddess Parasakthi and is revered throughout India. According to Hindu tradition, devotees are expected to have the *darshan* of the Virgin Goddess of Kanyakumari.

History and Tradition

Kanyakumari forms part of Nanjinad, which was the southernmost region of the erstwhile Travancore State. According to legend, Parasurama, the sixth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, reclaimed the land now known as Kerala from the sea, extending from Goa to Kanyakumari. According to the legend, when the warrior-sage Parasurama wished to give land in charity to the Brahmins, he requested Varuna, the God of the Sea, to grant him permission to throw his battle axe into the waters. The axe, which was thrown from Goa, fell at Kanyakumari, and the sea receded, leaving the land that came to be known as Kerala. This is a traditional legend rather than established history. Historians, however, state that Nanjinad was under the control of the Pandya kings for many centuries. The architecture, customs, and traditions of the region also indicate a strong Tamil influence. The temples, in particular, display features of Tamil architectural design. Historical evidence suggests that Kanyakumari formed part of the Pandya kingdom for a considerable period. Some Tamil Sangam works, including the *Purananuru*, refer to the worship of Goddess Kumari as the family deity of the Pandya kings. Kanyakumari was evidently a well-known sacred place many centuries ago. Hindu Puranas mention its sanctity, while the ancient Greek geographer Ptolemy referred to it as a harbour.

Apart from the Parasurama legend, there is another tradition associated with the so-called Lemurian theory, which maintains that a large landmass existed to the south of Kanyakumari and was later submerged by the sea. Like the Parasurama tradition, however, this theory is not accepted as established historical fact.

The Sthalapurana

The principal source of the legends connected with the Kanyakumari Temple is the *Sthalapurana*. The *Sthalapurana* of Kanyakumari, as well as that of Suchindrum, claims an association with the famous *Skanda Purana*. Legends and folklore cannot always serve as reliable sources of history, but they should not be dismissed entirely. Careful study may reveal occasional elements of historical or cultural significance. It should also be remembered that *Sthalapuranas* were generally composed to glorify the sanctity of particular temples and sacred places. Their authors may also have intended to communicate philosophical and ethical ideas, such as the power of devotion and the triumph of chastity and righteousness.

According to one traditional account, India derived its name *Bharata* from the legendary monarch Bharata, who is said to have ruled over the country in ancient times. He had eight sons and a daughter named Kumari. When King Bharata decided to retire, he divided his kingdom into nine parts and allotted one part to each of his children. The southernmost portion fell to Kumari, and the region subsequently came to be known as Kumari. According to tradition, Goddess Parasakthi came to this place to perform penance. The temple was later developed under the patronage of the Pandya kings, as indicated by various inscriptions.

The Legend of the Virgin Goddess

According to the traditional legend, the

Asuras once gained supremacy over the Devas, and Dharma declined while Adharma increased. Evil, ignorance, injustice, and various social vices spread throughout the world. Banasura, the king of the demons, caused great destruction and suffering in the three worlds. He drove the Devas from heaven and subjected saints and sages to cruel treatment. Mother Earth, distressed by these events, sought the assistance of Lord Vishnu, the protector of the universe, to destroy the forces of evil. Vishnu advised the Devas to worship Parasakthi, who alone was capable of defeating Banasura. Accordingly, the Devas performed a great *Yajna* to propitiate the Goddess. Parasakthi appeared before them and promised to restore righteousness by destroying the forces of evil led by Banasura.

Parasakthi then came to Kumari in the form of a virgin girl and began performing penance. When she reached marriageable age, arrangements were made for her marriage with Lord Shiva, who had fallen in love with her. Narada, the divine sage, realised that the marriage would prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy that Banasura could be killed only by a virgin. He therefore devised a plan to prevent the marriage. Lord Shiva started for Kanyakumari in order to arrive at the auspicious hour fixed for the wedding. When he reached Vazhukkamparai, about three miles south of Suchindrum, Narada assumed the form of a cock and crowed, falsely indicating the arrival of dawn. Believing that the auspicious time had passed, Lord Shiva returned to Suchindrum. The Goddess consequently decided to remain a virgin forever. According to the legend, the food prepared for the wedding was transformed into sand. This tradition is associated with the small rice-like pebbles and the different colours of sand found along the coast. Banasura eventually heard of the beauty of the Virgin Goddess and came to see her. He desired to marry her, but when she rejected his proposal, he attempted to force her into marriage. A fierce battle followed between Banasura and the Goddess. Finally, Goddess Parasakthi defeated and killed the demon with her *Chakrayudha*. The Devas expressed their gratitude to the Goddess, who blessed them. After their departure, the Goddess continued her penance.

The annual Navaratri festival held in October is traditionally associated with the destruction of Banasura by Parasakthi. During the festival, the deity is taken in procession from the temple to Mahadanapuram, a village about two miles north of Kanyakumari. The battle between the demon king and the Goddess is symbolically enacted by the temple priests. This ceremony is known as *Parivettai*. Symbolically, it may be interpreted as representing the eternal struggle within the human mind between the forces of good and evil.

The Suchindrum Temple

Since Suchindrum is situated close to Kanyakumari and its principal deity is associated with Shiva, the consort of Sakthi, legends and local traditions have connected the two sacred centres. The Suchindrum Temple is rich in religious traditions and Puranic lore. Its importance arises not only from the worship of Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswara, the three principal deities of the Hindu tradition, but also from the ancient belief that Indra worshipped Lord Shiva at this sacred place.

According to tradition, the great sage Atri and his wife Anasuya, renowned for her chastity, performed penance at an ancient hermitage known as Gnanaranya, the former name of Suchindrum. When Atri had gone to the Himalayas, Brahma,

Vishnu, and Shiva decided to test Anasuya's chastity. Disguised as three Brahmins, they visited her hermitage and asked for alms. When Anasuya prepared to serve them food, they placed an unusual condition before her. Confident of her purity, Anasuya sprinkled holy water upon them and transformed the three deities into infants. She then cared for them as children. Later, the wives of the three Gods came to the hermitage in search of their husbands. Anasuya restored the Gods to their original forms. Atri, who had returned by then, and Anasuya received the *darshan* of the Trimurti. According to tradition, the temple at Suchindrum commemorates this event, and the three deities are worshipped there.

The name Suchindrum is traditionally associated with Indra and is interpreted as the place where Indra was purified. According to legend, Indra incurred the anger of the sage Gautama after offending against the sage's wife, Ahalya. Gautama cursed him, and Indra, distressed by his suffering, went to Gnanaranya and performed penance. Through the grace of Lord Shiva, he was eventually purified.

There is also a traditional belief that the water, oil, or milk offered to the deity during *Abhisheka*, or sacred bathing, at Suchindrum passes through an underground passage and reaches the sea at Kanyakumari. This sacred place is known as Sthanuthirtha.

The corridor of the Suchindrum Temple is one of the largest in South India and is remarkable for its symmetry, architectural beauty, and vastness. It is traditionally regarded as second only to the corridor of the Rameswaram Temple. The huge image of Hanuman, the four musical pillars, and the architectural beauty of several *Mandapas* contribute to the temple's fame. The annual car festival in December and the float festival in April attract large numbers of devotees and visitors.

The Bathing Ghats at Kanyakumari

The sea surrounding the Kanyakumari Temple contains several sacred *Thirthaghats*, including Savitri, Gayatri, Saraswati, Kanya, Sthanu, Mathru, and Pithru Thirthas. The bathing ghat and the sixteen-pillared *Mandapa* situated at the confluence of the three seas are especially important. A sacred bath at this place is traditionally believed to purify the soul. The Tamil Buddhist epic *Manimekalai* refers to a woman who, after losing her chastity, travelled from Banaras to Kanyakumari to bathe in the sea and worship the Virgin Goddess. The *Vanaparva* of the *Mahabharata* also refers to the sacred *Thirtha* called Kanya on the seashore and associates bathing there with purification from sins and the attainment of spiritual merit.

Annual Festivals at Kanyakumari

Apart from the Navaratri Festival celebrated in October, Kanyakumari observes another important festival during the month of Visakha, usually in May. The festival continues for ten days, during which the deity is taken in procession along the main streets both in the morning and in the evening. The car festival is held on the ninth day, while the final day is marked by the float festival. During the float festival, the Goddess is taken in procession around the temple tank on a beautifully decorated *Teppam*, or ceremonial float.

Comforts and Facilities at Kanyakumari

Visitors to Kanyakumari can find accommodation at the Government Choultry and the Devasthanam buildings. The Cape Hotel and the Government Rest

House also provide facilities for visitors. A swimming pool was constructed on the seafront, providing visitors with the enjoyment of bathing without some of the risks associated with sea bathing.

The Village of Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari was historically a small coastal village. According to the 1961 Census referred to in the source, its population was about 7,000. Roman Catholics formed a significant part of the population and were mainly fishermen living in small houses near the eastern coastline. Their church was described as one of the largest and oldest churches in the region and was capable of accommodating about a thousand worshippers. According to local tradition, St. Francis Xavier visited Kanyakumari, stayed among the fishermen, and worked for their welfare. A Muslim mosque was also present in the village, reflecting the religious diversity of the locality.

The Gandhi Mandir

On 12 February 1948, the mortal remains of Mahatma Gandhi were consigned to the sea at Kanyakumari. Before the immersion, the urn containing his ashes was placed on a pedestal. The erstwhile Travancore-Cochin Government decided to construct a memorial at the site as a tribute to the Father of the Nation. On 20 June 1954, Acharya Kripalani, one of the prominent interpreters of Gandhian philosophy, laid the foundation stone of the memorial. The memorial, constructed at a cost of about Rs. 3 lakhs, was completed in October 1956.

A special feature of the memorial is its architectural design. On 2 October, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, the rays of the sun at noon fall directly upon the pedestal through an opening in the roof. This feature gives the memorial a distinctive symbolic and architectural character.

The Vivekananda Rocks

The twin rocks situated to the east of Kanyakumari are associated with Swami Vivekananda. During his travels throughout India in 1892, Swami Vivekananda visited Cape Comorin after travelling through Rameswaram and Madurai. According to tradition, he stood before the Goddess in deep devotion and later swam across the sea to the rocks. He remained there in meditation for a considerable period. The experience is remembered as an important moment in his spiritual and national awakening. From this place, he is believed to have reflected deeply on India, its spiritual heritage, and the condition of its people.

The rocks subsequently became associated with Swami Vivekananda's memory and spiritual legacy. The source mentions plans for a memorial building and a statue of Swami Vivekananda, together with a Mandapa around the footprint traditionally associated with Goddess Kanyakumari. A ferry service was also organised to provide visitors with access to the rock.

Swami Vivekananda Library

A library was established by the public in memory of Swami Vivekananda's visit to Kanyakumari. According to the source, it contained more than 5,000 volumes and had a particularly valuable collection of books on Hindu religion, philosophy, and literature. Mahatma Gandhi and other distinguished visitors are said to have visited the library and recorded their appreciation in the visitors' book.

Chakra Thirtha

About a mile north of Kanyakumari on the main road stands the Kasi Viswanatha Temple. According to the *Sthalapurana*, the *Chakra* of the Goddess,

after defeating Banasura, pierced the earth at this place and brought forth a freshwater spring. The Viswanatha Temple, the Pathala Ganga nearby, and the cremation ground on the eastern side are traditionally regarded as features reminiscent of Banaras.

Vattakottai Fort

About three miles along the eastern coast lies Vattakottai, where the remains of an old fortification can still be seen. According to the source, the fort formed part of the defence system developed by D'Lanoy, the Commander-in-Chief during the reign of Maharaja Marthanda Varma. The fort was well constructed and is regarded as evidence of the military planning, efficiency, and foresight associated with D'Lanoy's defence arrangements. In later times, the site was used as a camping ground by Boy Scouts and for recreational visits.

Maruthuvamalai

No tourist or pilgrim visiting Kanyakumari can afford to miss Maruthuvamalai, situated about four miles north of the Cape. Known in Tamil as *Marunthuvazhmalai*, meaning the hill of medicinal herbs, it is associated with the traditional story of Hanuman carrying the Sanjeevani mountain. According to legend, a portion of the mountain fell here and formed Maruthuvamalai. It is traditionally believed that even a short stay on the hill can bring relief from illness and bless pilgrims with peace of mind and spiritual well-being.

Natural Beauty and Spiritual

The sight of the sea at Kanyakumari has a unique power to inspire visitors. The high waves rolling towards the shore and breaking upon the multicoloured sands create a magnificent natural spectacle. The meeting of the three seas, the sacred temple, the legends of the Virgin Goddess, the historic monuments, and the surrounding landscape together give Kanyakumari a distinctive spiritual and cultural character. For the visitor with a religious inclination, a bath in the sacred waters and worship at the temple of the Virgin Goddess provide an experience of devotion and inner peace. Thus, Kanyakumari represents a remarkable combination of natural beauty, religious faith, historical tradition, architectural heritage, and cultural diversity.

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari is a remarkable blend of history, religion, culture, architecture**,** and natural beauty. Its temples, legends, festivals, monuments, and sacred landscapes preserve the rich traditions of the region. The combined heritage of Kanyakumari continues to attract pilgrims, tourists, and scholars, making it an important cultural destination of India.

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RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF THE SAMBAVAR COMMUNITY: DEITIES, WORSHIP AND RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

The religious traditions, folk deities, rituals, and cultural practices of the Sambavar community in southern Tamil Nadu. Their traditional worship is centred on village deities, guardian spirits, ancestral beings, Vaathais, Isakkis, Sudalai Madan, Kanni deities, and Amman traditions. The study highlights the importance of Kodai festivals, offerings, ritual performances, samiyattam, Villupattu, and community participation in maintaining religious traditions. These practices reflect the community's historical experiences, collective beliefs, social relationships, and cultural identity. Changes in temple structures, ritual practices, and forms of worship are also examined. The article argues that Sambavar folk religion represents a significant aspect of Tamil folk culture and continues to preserve community memory, identity, and cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Sambavar Community; Folk Deities; Worship; Rituals; Cultural Heritage*

The religion, deities, forms of worship, and associated rituals of the Sambavar community form an important part of its social and cultural identity. Worship is found in almost every human society and serves to unite people through shared beliefs, rituals, and traditions. Religion and worship, however, are not identical. Religion generally refers to an organized and institutionalized system of beliefs, doctrines, and practices, whereas worship may exist within less formal and locally specific traditions. Different communities may have their own deities, beliefs, rituals, and priestly practices. Worship originated in the early stages of human society when people attempted to understand the forces of nature and the uncertainties of life. Natural elements such as earth, water, fire, air, and sky were regarded as powerful and sacred. Later, ancestral spirits were also worshipped. Memorial stones were erected at burial places, and ritual offerings were made to the dead. These practices gradually contributed to the development of ancestor worship and image worship. The religious practices of the Sambavar community can be understood within this broader historical development. Their traditional deities, rituals, festivals, and methods of worship reflect their religious beliefs, social identity, cultural continuity, and community traditions**.**

Emergence of Religion and Rituals

Religion gradually developed from early forms of worship into an organized system of beliefs, principles, institutions, and practices. As human beings developed greater intellectual awareness, they began to recognize powers beyond the physical and natural world. This led to the development of religious beliefs, philosophical ideas, and moral values. Religion is not limited to beliefs in supernatural powers; it also provides ethical principles for individual and social life. It emphasizes values such as love,

mutual respect, compassion, and social responsibility**.** The idea that "Truth is God" **r**eflects this moral dimension of religion. Religion may broadly be understood as the relationship between human beings and supernatural or transcendental powers. It consists of beliefs, symbols, rituals, and practices through which people understand and relate to these powers. Over time, simple forms of belief developed into more organized religious systems.

With the institutionalization of religion, worship and rituals became integral parts of religious life. Rituals preserve traditions transmitted from one generation to another and are deeply connected with the collective memory of communities. They are often performed according to customs inherited from ancestors. Rituals also play an important role in social integration. People belonging to the same caste, clan, ethnic group, or community often follow similar rituals from birth to death. These shared practices strengthen unity, preserve cultural traditions, and create a sense of belonging. At the same time, distinctive rituals help communities maintain their separate cultural identities. Thus, the development of religion brought worship and rituals into an organized framework. The preservation and transmission of these rituals across generations have contributed significantly to community solidarity, cultural continuity, and collective identity**.**

Hinduism and the Oppressed Communities

In the Indian subcontinent, Hindu religious life developed through several traditions, including Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism, Kaumaram, Sauram, and Ganapatya, associated respectively with Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Subramanya, Surya, and Ganesha. Historically, religious institutions and access to sacred knowledge were influenced by caste-based social divisions. Marginalized communities were often restricted from Vedic learning, temple entry, and participation in certain religious practices. The *Manusmriti* is associated with restrictions on the access of lower social groups to Vedic education. Such practices contributed to the religious and social exclusion of oppressed communities.

The denial of religious rights also affected their social and economic life. The writings of European missionaries and observers, including Abbé J. A. Dubois, describe the difficult social conditions experienced by communities placed at the lower levels of the caste hierarchy. Such historical accounts indicate the close relationship between caste discrimination, religious exclusion, and social inequality. Temple entry was denied to many oppressed communities for long periods. Social reform movements and later legal measures gradually challenged these restrictions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Sambavar community also experienced such forms of religious and social exclusion.

The Sambavar Community and Religious Identity

The writings of Samuel Mateer provide observations on the social and religious life of marginalized communities in South India. He describes their disadvantaged social position, involvement in agricultural labour, and distinctive food and religious practices. Traditional practices such as spirit worship, possession rituals, and the role of *samiyaadis* formed an important part of their religious life. Although Sambavars were historically restricted from entering many Hindu temples, they maintained their own deities, rituals, ancestral traditions, and village-based forms of

worship. Thus, Sambavar religious traditions should not be viewed merely as a result of exclusion from mainstream Hindu worship. They also represent a distinctive cultural tradition that has developed through community experience, local beliefs, ancestral practices, and folk religious traditions.

Deities of the Oppressed Communities and Hinduism

The deities worshipped by the Sambavars and other oppressed communities are associated with numerous oral traditions, myths, and local legends. Many of these deities are not prominent in the classical Hindu Puranas and are commonly described as folk deities, village deities, or local guardian deities. During the colonial period, attempts were made to classify Indian communities according to religious and social categories. Census authorities used various criteria relating to Brahminical authority, Vedic practices, temple access, priestly traditions, major Hindu deities, burial practices, and food customs to classify communities. The classification of marginalized groups as the Depressed Classes and later as Scheduled Castes became increasingly formalized during the colonial period, particularly following the Government of India Act, 1935, and the Constitution of India, 1950. These developments show that religious practices and forms of worship were closely connected with the social identity and classification of communities. Therefore, studying the deities, rituals, myths, and worship practices of the Sambavar community is important for understanding its historical identity, cultural heritage, and religious traditions.

Deities Worshipped by the Sambavar Community

The deities worshipped by the Sambavar community were historically regarded by socially dominant groups as inferior deities and, in some cases, as spirits or malevolent beings associated with animal sacrifice. However, the traditional religious practices of the Sambavars reveal a rich and distinctive system of folk worship. Among the important deities worshipped by the community are Anancha Perumal, Aathi Sami, Aladi Sami, Isakki, Pechiyamman, Amman, Udaiyar, Oosikkaattan, Kaalan, Kaaliyatha, Sudalai Madan, Servai Rayan, Pannimadan, Palavesakkaran, Nondi Madan, Boothathan, Mayana Sami, Maasanamuthu, Madasami, Muthumari, Vannara Madan, Vaathais, and Vilmurthi.

Many of these deities are believed to have originally been human beings. According to community traditions, persons who died unnatural or violent deaths were believed to become powerful spirits and were subsequently worshipped as deities. Professor A. Sivasubramanian classifies deities associated with the worship of the dead into four broad categories:

1. Deities associated with people who died naturally.
2. Deities associated with people who were murdered.
3. Deities associated with people who died accidentally.
4. Deities associated with people who died by suicide.

In the present period, many Sambavars also worship major Hindu deities. Nevertheless, when worship is conducted at the common village shrine, traditional folk deities continue to occupy an important place. Some members of the community also converted to Christianity, particularly in response to social discrimination and oppression. Their

religious practices and way of life consequently differ in certain respects from those of Sambavars who continue to follow Hindu traditions.

Sudalai Madan and the Question of Religious Identity

Nagam Aiya describes the Sambavars as Saivites while also referring to their worship of spirits and folk deities such as Mariamman, Kali, and Ponnamman. The Bharani festival at the Bhadrakali Temple at Kodungallur has also been associated with their religious traditions. During the festival, ritual specialists and *samiyaadis* traditionally participate in worship accompanied by musical instruments. Field observations indicate that Kali and other folk deities continue to be worshipped in Sambavar households. The practice of applying sacred ash (*vibhuti*) to the body may also have contributed to the identification of some of their religious practices with Saivism. However, the identification of Sudalai Madan with Lord Shiva requires careful examination. There are significant differences between the worship of Sudalai Madan and the ritual practices followed in major Shiva temples such as Chidambaram and Suchindram. Animal sacrifice, for example, is not a normal feature of worship in such mainstream Shiva temples. Moreover, Sudalai Madan has traditionally been associated more strongly with marginalized communities than with dominant caste religious institutions.

The legends of Sudalai Madan also differ considerably from the classical Puranic narratives associated with Shiva. Local traditions connect Sudalai Madan with communities such as the Pulayars and Kanikkars and portray him as a powerful folk deity associated with cremation grounds and spirits. His legends therefore appear to belong primarily to a later and localized folk-religious tradition rather than directly to the classical mythology of Shiva. Sudalai Madan is also closely associated with the Vaathais, or spirits of persons who suffered violent deaths, worshipped particularly in southern Tamil Nadu. According to local traditions, these spirits were feared by the people and gradually came to be worshipped in order to obtain protection from their perceived supernatural powers.

Vaathais and Isakkis

The Sambavar community worships both male and female folk deities. Male supernatural beings are generally known as Vaathais, while female folk deities are known as Isakkis. They are regarded as powerful supernatural forces and are worshipped with both reverence and fear. Traditionally, twenty-one Vaathais are recognized, each associated with particular local beliefs and legends. The term *Vaathai* is associated with suffering, illness, or affliction. Isakki refers to female folk deities, among whom Pazhavoor Isakki and Pechiyamman are prominent. Some Isakkis are believed to have originated from women who died violent or unnatural deaths. Their shrines are commonly found near streams, groves, boundaries, and wooded areas. Thus, Vaathai and Isakki worship preserves local legends, ancestral memories, and traditional beliefs and forms an important part of Sambavar cultural identity.

Sudalai Madan Worship

Sudalai Madan is one of the important traditional deities of the Sambavar community. His shrines are generally located near cremation grounds and are usually simple structures consisting of a stone or a small platform. A sickle or billhook may be placed near the shrine as a symbolic weapon. The deity is worshipped by offering flowers and

lighting oil lamps. Local belief considers Sudalai Madan highly powerful. In some traditions, chicken or goat sacrifice is offered to appease the deity. Sudalai Madan worship is widely practised in Kanyakumari District.

Female Deities

Female deities occupy an important position in Sambavar worship. Isakki Amman, Kaaliyatha, Muthumari, Pechiyamman, and Munnuthitha Nangai are among the prominent deities. Kali and Bhadrakali are also important in the religious traditions of several marginalized communities of South India. These deities are associated with protection, health, fertility, family welfare, and community well-being.

Kanni Deity Worship

The Kanni deity is traditionally believed to be the spirit of a child who died young or of a person who died before marriage. The spirit is believed to protect or influence the family. A small shrine or platform is established in the Kanni Moolai of the house. Before important family functions, offerings such as flowers, fruits, incense, lamps, and new clothes are made. After the safe birth of a child, some families offer milk and fruits as thanksgiving. Names such as Kannimuthu and Kanniyamma are traditionally associated with this belief.

Isakki Worship

Isakki Amman worship continues to be important among the Sambavars. Some families traditionally name children after Isakki, such as *Isakkimuthu*. However, such practices are becoming less common among younger generations. In contemporary practice, Isakki is sometimes identified with Parvati, the consort of Shiva. This reflects the interaction between local folk traditions and wider Hindu beliefs.

Kodai Festival

The Kodai festival is an important religious and social celebration conducted in honour of traditional deities. It is performed to express devotion, seek divine protection, and promote community unity. The festivals are generally conducted twice a year, often after the harvest, during months such as Panguni, Chithirai, Vaikasi, Aippasi, and Karthigai. Community contributions known as *vari* are collected to meet the festival expenses. Larger villages may conduct the festival for three days, while smaller villages may celebrate for one or two days. Festivals are commonly associated with Tuesday, Friday, Sunday, Amavasya, or Pournami. A temporary pandhal made of coconut leaves is erected and decorated with flowers or coconut-leaf strips. In the Vilavancode region, coconut-leaf decorations are particularly common.

Changes in Temple Structure

The structure and appearance of Sambavar temples have undergone considerable changes over time. Before the 1960s, these shrines generally did not have conventional temple towers (*gopurams*). Earlier, worship was often conducted in open spaces beneath sacred trees such as neem, peepal, or banyan trees. A simple earthen platform was constructed, and weapons such as billhooks and sickles were placed on it as symbols associated with the deity. Such sacred spaces were traditionally regarded as temples by the local community. In recent decades, many of these shrines have been transformed into more permanent structures, with statues and other architectural features being introduced. After the 1980s, several temples were enlarged using cement construction, and small *gopurams* were added.

Ritual Practices and Religious Changes

During the Kodai festival, the priest decorates the deity with flowers, *vibhuti*, sandalwood paste, and new clothes, and performs *arati* with camphor. Women participate through *kuravai*, followed by *samiyattam*. Traditionally, animal sacrifice and communal distribution of meat formed part of the ritual. Villupattu was an important cultural programme, although cinema screenings have become increasingly common. The community has also traditionally maintained beliefs in *seivinai*, *sooniyam*, and other supernatural practices, though such practices have declined in modern times.

Sambavar worship has gradually changed with the increasing worship of Murugan, Vinayaka, Shiva, and Vishnu, particularly following greater temple access. At the same time, traditional village-deity worship continues. Christianity has also influenced sections of the community, particularly through the Salvation Army, CSI, Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal traditions. Christian Sambavars participate in Sunday worship, Bible reading, prayer meetings, and celebrations such as Christmas and Good Friday. Despite religious differences, Hindu and Christian Sambavars continue to share many social and cultural practices. Traditional beliefs in spirits and supernatural forces may also continue among some Christian families. Thus, Sambavar religious life reflects a combination of folk traditions, Hindu practices, Christianity, and changing social conditions.

CONCLUSION

The religious life of the Sambavar community represents a combination of folk traditions, village-deity worship, Hindu religious influences, traditional rituals, supernatural beliefs and Christianity. Although modernization, education, temple-entry movements and Christianity have brought significant changes, traditional worship continues to contribute to the community's cultural identity.

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THE CULTURAL MOSAIC OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT: FOODWAYS, CUSTOMS AND LIFESTYLE

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari District, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, possesses a distinctive cultural landscape shaped by its geographical position, historical experiences, ecological diversity and social interactions. The meeting of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, together with the Western Ghats, fertile agricultural lands and coastal settlements, has contributed to the development of diverse patterns of food, customs and everyday life. The cultural identity of the district is reflected not only in its temples, churches, festivals and historical monuments but also in household practices, culinary traditions, dress, occupations, social ceremonies and folk expressions. Foodways in particular demonstrate the relationship between environment, agriculture and culture, with rice, coconut, vegetables, seafood and locally available agricultural products occupying an important place in the traditional diet. Customs and festivals reveal the coexistence of different religious and social traditions, while changing occupations, education, urbanisation, migration, technology and tourism have gradually transformed everyday lifestyles. This paper examines the cultural mosaic of Kanyakumari District through its foodways, customs and lifestyle, while highlighting the continuity of traditional practices alongside processes of cultural transformation.

Keywords: Kanyakumari, foodways, customs, lifestyle, cultural heritage, traditions, cultural change

INTRODUCTION

Culture is expressed through the everyday practices of people as much as through monuments, literature and institutional traditions. Food, family customs, festivals, dress, occupations, religious practices and forms of social interaction provide important ways of understanding the cultural history of a region. In this context, Kanyakumari District presents a particularly interesting field of cultural study because of its geographical location and historical background.

Kanyakumari is the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu and occupies an area of approximately 1,672 square kilometres. The district has a coastline of about 71.5 kilometres and is bordered by the Western Ghats to the north. Its landscape includes coastal areas, fertile agricultural regions, coconut groves, rubber plantations and forested mountain areas. The district administration identifies four of the five traditional Tamil ecological classifications Kurunchi, Mullai, Marutham and Neidhal within the district. Such ecological diversity has contributed significantly to variations in occupations, food resources and patterns of settlement.

The historical depth of the region further enriches its cultural character. Archaeological evidence indicates prehistoric and early historic activity in the region, while its later history has been associated with the Chera, Pandya, Travancore and colonial periods. The historical relationship with neighbouring

Kerala is particularly significant in understanding the cultural development of the region. The district therefore represents an area in which Tamil, Malayalam and wider South Indian cultural influences have interacted over a long period.

The present study explores this cultural diversity through three closely related dimensions: foodways, customs and lifestyle. Rather than treating culture as something static, the paper considers it as a continuously changing process in which traditional practices are retained, modified and sometimes replaced.

Geographical Setting and Cultural Formation

The geographical environment of Kanyakumari has played a major role in shaping the cultural practices of its people. Unlike many districts that possess a relatively uniform ecological character, Kanyakumari contains mountains, plains, agricultural lands and coastal areas within a comparatively small geographical territory. Agriculture has traditionally been an important component of the district's economy and culture. Paddy is identified by the district administration as the principal food crop, while coconut is a major plantation crop. Rice cultivation occurs during different agricultural seasons, and pulses are also cultivated. Tea and coffee are grown in higher elevations. These environmental conditions have influenced local food habits. The availability of rice, coconut, vegetables, fruits and marine resources has contributed to a cuisine that reflects both agricultural and coastal environments. Thus, food culture in Kanyakumari cannot be separated from the physical landscape in which people live. The geographical proximity to Kerala has also encouraged cultural interaction. Culinary practices, vocabulary, dress patterns and certain social customs demonstrate the historical connections between the two regions. At the same time, the district retains strong Tamil cultural characteristics. This interaction makes Kanyakumari an important example of cultural convergence.

Foodways and Culinary Traditions

Food is one of the most visible expressions of cultural identity. The foodways of Kanyakumari reflect the relationship between agriculture, environment, household knowledge and social customs. Traditional meals are closely connected with locally available ingredients and seasonal conditions. Rice has historically occupied an important place in the regional diet because of the importance of paddy cultivation. Coconut is another essential ingredient and is widely used in cooking in different forms. Vegetables, pulses, spices and locally available greens contribute to the diversity of everyday meals. Coastal communities have also developed food practices associated with fish and other marine resources. Traditional cooking methods were closely associated with household knowledge. Grinding stones, traditional vessels, firewood stoves and other domestic implements were once important elements of everyday food preparation. Although many such practices have declined with the spread of modern kitchen technology, certain traditional preparations continue to be associated with festivals, family functions and special occasions. Kanyakumari's food culture also demonstrates the interaction between Tamil and Kerala culinary traditions. The region's historical connections with Travancore and its geographical proximity to Kerala have encouraged the exchange of ingredients, cooking techniques and food preferences. The importance of local food heritage has also received renewed attention in contemporary cultural

initiatives. In July 2026, the district administration publicised a Nanjil Nadu Food Festival, demonstrating the continuing recognition of regional cuisine as an element of cultural heritage. Food is therefore not merely a means of satisfying hunger. It functions as a carrier of memory and identity. Recipes passed from older generations to younger generations preserve knowledge about local ingredients, preparation techniques and social occasions. Traditional food can consequently be understood as an important form of intangible cultural heritage.

Customs and Social Practices

Customs provide continuity between generations. Birth ceremonies, naming practices, puberty-related rituals, marriage ceremonies, funeral observances, religious vows and household traditions have historically formed important parts of social life in Kanyakumari. Marriage customs in particular demonstrate the importance of family and kinship. Although contemporary marriage practices have changed considerably because of education, urbanisation and changing economic conditions, ceremonies continue to retain elements of traditional symbolism. Food, clothing, music, religious observances and the gathering of relatives remain important components of many marriage celebrations. Household customs also reveal the relationship between domestic life and cultural values. Practices associated with welcoming guests, preparing special food, observing auspicious occasions and participating in religious festivals demonstrate the continuing importance of family-based cultural transmission. The cultural life of Kanyakumari is also characterised by the coexistence of Hindu, Christian and other religious traditions. Temples, churches and religious festivals form important cultural spaces. The district's official cultural record includes major festivals associated with the Devi Kanyakumari Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Mandaikadu Temple and St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, among others. This religious diversity contributes to the cultural mosaic of the district. Festivals often extend beyond purely religious observance and become occasions for social interaction, exchange, trade, artistic performances and collective participation.

Festivals as Expressions of Cultural Identity

Festivals constitute an important link between religion, society and cultural memory. Pongal, temple festivals, church feasts and local celebrations are observed in different parts of Kanyakumari throughout the year. The district administration records the Kumari Thiruvizha as an annual cultural event involving residents and visitors and featuring various cultural activities. The festival demonstrates how traditional culture can be presented in a contemporary public setting. Temple festivals such as the Mandaikadu Kodai Festival involve processions, ritual practices and community participation. The official district account records a ten-day festival sequence and several associated observances. The annual festival of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar is another significant example of the district's religious and cultural diversity. Such celebrations demonstrate that festivals serve multiple functions: they reinforce religious faith, create opportunities for social interaction, preserve traditional practices and contribute to the cultural economy of the region. Festivals also provide spaces for traditional food, dress, music and

decorative practices. Consequently, they represent a meeting point between tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Dress, Occupations and Everyday Life

Dress is another important expression of cultural identity. Traditional clothing has historically been influenced by climate, occupation, social customs and regional cultural interactions. Sarees, traditional men's clothing and ceremonial garments continue to be used during festivals and important family occasions, although everyday dress has become increasingly modernised. Occupations have similarly influenced lifestyle. Agriculture, fishing, coconut cultivation, rubber cultivation, trade and small-scale industries have historically contributed to the economic life of the district. The diversity of occupations corresponds with the diversity of geographical environments. The coastal environment has supported fishing-related livelihoods, while fertile agricultural areas have supported paddy cultivation and other agricultural activities. The hilly regions have encouraged plantation and forest-related economic activities. However, the contemporary occupational structure has changed significantly. Education, government employment, private-sector opportunities, migration, tourism and service-sector development have expanded the range of occupations available to residents. These changes have affected traditional lifestyles. The joint family structure has increasingly given way to nuclear households in many areas. Traditional occupations are sometimes replaced by salaried employment, while digital technology has transformed communication, education, shopping and entertainment.

Cultural Heritage and Material Life

Kanyakumari's cultural identity is also visible in its historical buildings, temples, churches, palaces, traditional settlements and archaeological remains. Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Temple and other historical sites provide material evidence of the region's political and cultural history. The district administration identifies these and several other locations among its important heritage and tourist sites. Material culture includes household objects, agricultural implements, fishing equipment, traditional cooking vessels, ornaments and architectural forms. Many of these objects are gradually disappearing from everyday use because of technological change. The preservation of material culture is therefore important for understanding historical lifestyles. Museums, archives, archaeological documentation, local history projects and community-based heritage initiatives can contribute to recording these practices. The Department of Archaeology has also published works relating specifically to Kanyakumari inscriptions and the historical documentation of the district. Such resources demonstrate the importance of systematic documentation for understanding regional heritage.

Changing Lifestyle and Cultural Transformation

Culture is never completely static. Kanyakumari, like other rapidly changing districts, has experienced considerable transformation during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Education has played a major role in changing social attitudes and occupational aspirations. Urbanisation has influenced housing patterns, family structures and consumption habits. Migration has created connections between local households and wider national and international economies. Modern communication technologies have also altered cultural transmission.

Traditionally, cultural knowledge was primarily transmitted orally through parents, grandparents, elders and community institutions. Today, younger generations encounter culture through schools, television, social media, digital platforms and tourism. Food habits provide a clear example of this transformation. Traditional meals continue to be prepared, particularly on special occasions, but packaged foods, fast food and restaurant culture have become increasingly visible. Similarly, traditional clothing is often reserved for ceremonies while contemporary clothing dominates everyday life. Nevertheless, cultural change does not necessarily result in complete cultural disappearance. Traditional practices may be selectively retained and adapted. A family may use modern kitchen appliances while continuing to prepare traditional dishes during festivals. A younger generation may adopt contemporary occupations while participating in ancestral religious celebrations. This coexistence of tradition and modernity is a defining characteristic of contemporary cultural life in Kanyakumari.

Cultural Preservation and Future Directions

The preservation of Kanyakumari's cultural heritage requires attention not only to monuments but also to everyday practices. Food traditions, oral histories, folk practices, traditional occupations and domestic knowledge deserve systematic documentation. Educational institutions can play an important role by encouraging students to document local history and cultural practices. Oral-history projects involving elders can record traditional recipes, customs, songs, occupational knowledge and memories before they disappear. Digital documentation can further strengthen preservation. Photographs, audio recordings, video interviews, digital archives and local-language publications can make cultural knowledge accessible to younger generations. Tourism can also contribute to cultural preservation when it is approached responsibly. Kanyakumari is already an important tourist destination, and heritage sites such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Temple and the Devi Kanyakumari Temple attract visitors. Cultural tourism can provide opportunities to promote local cuisine, handicrafts, festivals and traditional knowledge while generating economic benefits for local communities. However, cultural tourism should avoid reducing living traditions to commercial spectacles. Preservation should prioritise authenticity, community participation and intergenerational transmission.

Conclusion

The cultural identity of Kanyakumari District emerges from the interaction of geography, history, religion, agriculture, occupation and social life. Foodways, customs and lifestyle together form a cultural mosaic that reflects both continuity and transformation. Traditional food practices demonstrate the influence of rice cultivation, coconut production, coastal resources and regional interaction. Customs and festivals reveal the continuing importance of family, religion and community participation. Dress and occupations demonstrate the relationship between environment and everyday life, while historical monuments and material culture preserve the memory of earlier generations. At the same time, education, urbanisation, migration, technology, changing occupations and globalised consumption have transformed many aspects of everyday life. Yet tradition has not simply disappeared. Instead, many

practices have been modified and incorporated into contemporary life.

The cultural heritage of Kanyakumari should therefore be understood as a living and evolving heritage rather than as a collection of static traditions. The preservation of its foodways, customs and lifestyle require documentation, community participation and meaningful transmission to younger generations. In this sense, the cultural mosaic of Kanyakumari represents not only its historical inheritance but also its continuing capacity to adapt while retaining distinctive regional identities.

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LUTHERAN MISSION AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN THE CAUVERY DELTA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The Lutheran mission occupies an important place in the religious, educational, and social history of the Cauvery Delta region of Tamil Nadu. The arrival of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau at Tranquebar (Tharangambadi) in 1706 marked the beginning of an organized Lutheran Protestant mission in India. The mission gradually expanded from Tranquebar into the wider Tamil region, including areas associated with Tanjore and the Cauvery Delta. The study is important because the history of Lutheran mission should not be understood only as a history of religious conversion. It was also connected with education, social mobility, literacy, women's education, institutional development, and the changing consciousness of marginalized communities. Research on Tamil Lutheran Christians indicates that many converts came from communities that had experienced poverty, social exclusion, and caste discrimination, while education and Christian institutions created new opportunities for social advancement. The study adopts a historical and qualitative methodology. It uses secondary sources including books, scholarly articles, historical studies, missionary literature, and institutional materials. The study examines the development of Lutheran mission activity in the Cauvery Delta and interprets its contribution through the themes of education, caste, social mobility, women's empowerment, healthcare, literacy, and indigenous leadership. The study finds that Lutheran missions contributed significantly to the educational and social empowerment of marginalized communities in the Cauvery Delta. Mission schools expanded access to literacy and created opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Printing and Tamil-language education encouraged wider circulation of knowledge. Women benefited from educational initiatives, while the emergence of indigenous teachers, catechists, pastors, and other Christian leaders strengthened local agency. At the same time, missionary institutions did not completely eliminate caste discrimination, and caste identities continued to influence Christian community Lutheran mission activity in the Cauvery Delta represents an important chapter in the history of social change in South India.

Keywords: *Lutheran Mission; Cauvery Delta; Marginalized Communities, Dalit Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

The Cauvery Delta has historically been one of the most important agricultural and cultural regions of Tamil Nadu. The fertile areas surrounding the Cauvery and its branches supported extensive agriculture and the development of villages, towns, temples, educational institutions, and commercial centres. At the same time, traditional society was characterized by social hierarchy, caste distinctions, unequal access to education, and economic dependence. These conditions created a complex environment in which religious and social movements could influence the lives of disadvantaged communities.The arrival of the Lutheran missionaries Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plütschau at Tranquebar in 1706 introduced a new Protestant missionary movement into Tamil society. The Danish-Halle mission subsequently developed schools, printing activities, churches, and other institutions. The Tranquebar mission is particularly

significant because education was an integral part of its missionary strategy. Within a few decades, the mission developed a school system that provided basic education to a relatively broad section of Tamil society. The importance of the Lutheran mission, however, extends beyond the establishment of churches. Protestant Christianity interacted with Tamil social structures and provided some marginalized people with access to education, literacy, new religious identities, and institutional networks. Modern scholarship also emphasizes that Tamil people were not simply passive recipients of missionary activity. Different caste and religious communities responded to Lutheranism in different ways and contributed to the development of indigenous forms of Tamil Christianity.

Research Problem

The major research problem of this study is to determine the extent to which Lutheran missionary activity contributed to the empowerment of marginalized communities in the Cauvery Delta. Mission histories have often concentrated on missionaries, churches, conversion, and institutional expansion. Such an approach can overlook the experiences and agency of the communities who encountered the mission.. Historical research on Protestant schooling in South India shows that missionary education could challenge existing exclusions while simultaneously reproducing some caste-based inequalities. The study therefore asks whether Lutheran institutions genuinely contributed to social empowerment and, if so, through which mechanisms. It also asks how far marginalized communities themselves used education, conversion, employment, and church participation to improve their social position.

Importance of the Study

The study is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to the social history of the Cauvery Delta by examining religious institutions as agents of social change. Second, it highlights the relationship between education and empowerment. The Tranquebar mission's schools represented an important early stage in the development of organized schooling in the region. Third, the study contributes to the history of Dalit and marginalized communities. Research on Tamil Lutheran Christians indicates that conversion and missionary institutions were associated with changes in education, social consciousness, economic opportunity, and dignity among disadvantaged communities. Fourth, the study provides a more balanced interpretation of missionary history. It recognizes missionary contributions while also considering colonial power, caste discrimination, cultural conflict, and the agency of local Christians.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives are to examine the role of the Lutheran Mission in the social and Economic empowerment of marginalized communities in the Cauvery Delta region of Tamil Nadu. It seeks to analyse the contributions of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran church in the fields of education, healthcare, women empowerment and social welfare, and to understand its impacts on improving the social status and living conditions of marginalized communities. The study also to aims to explore how Lutheran missionary activities contributed to social transmission and social harmony in the region

Review of the Study

The history of Christianity in India has been examined extensively by

historians such as Stephen Neill and Robert Eric Frykenberg. Neill's *A History of Christianity in India* contains a substantial treatment of the Tranquebar mission, Protestant expansion, education, and the relationship between Christianity and Indian society. D. Dennis Hudson's *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians 1706–1835* is particularly relevant to the present study. Hudson examines the origins of Protestant Christianity at Tranquebar and emphasizes how people of different castes and religions responded to Lutheran Christianity. His study is valuable because it gives considerable attention to Tamil responses and indigenous Christian development rather than treating the mission exclusively from the European perspective. Studies of education demonstrate another important dimension of missionary history. The Tranquebar mission developed schools as part of its religious and educational strategy, and these institutions contributed to the wider history of schooling in South India. Recent research on Tamil Lutheran Christians further strengthens this perspective. Studies of Tamil Lutheran Dalits and Kallars examine the social, educational, economic, and religious consequences of conversion and missionary activity. Such scholarship argues that education helped marginalized Christians develop greater self-consciousness and seek social mobility, while also recognizing the continuing influence of caste. Peniel Rajkumar's work on Dalit theology provides a useful conceptual framework for understanding empowerment, agency, resistance, and liberation. His emphasis on the relationship between theology and social praxis is especially relevant when examining whether Christian institutions merely provided charity or contributed to structural and personal transformation. The existing literature therefore provides substantial information about the Tranquebar mission, Protestant Christianity, education, caste, and Dalit Christianity.

Historical Background of the Lutheran Mission

The Lutheran mission began at Tranquebar in 1706 when Ziegenbalg and Plütschau arrived under Danish patronage. Tranquebar became the centre from which Lutheran missionary activities developed in Tamil-speaking South India. The mission placed considerable importance on learning Tamil and communicating Christian teaching through local languages.Ziegenbalg's engagement with Tamil culture and language was particularly important. The development of Tamil Christian literature and printing allowed religious and educational material to circulate beyond the immediate missionary community. The mission's use of Tamil also created opportunities for local teachers and catechists to participate in its activities. The significance of Tranquebar continued after the first generation of missionaries. The Lutheran tradition eventually became associated with institutions that contributed to the development of Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Christianity.

Education and Empowerment

Education was perhaps the most significant long-term instrument of Lutheran social influence. The Tranquebar mission established schools and developed a system of elementary education. Historical evidence indicates that these schools enabled a broad segment of Tamil youth to obtain basic education. For marginalized communities, literacy could have consequences beyond reading and writing. Education could

provide access to employment, improve communication with government authorities, increase awareness of rights, and create opportunities for social mobility. Missionary schools also challenged the idea that formal education should remain restricted to privileged social groups. Nevertheless, access was not always equal, and caste continued to shape educational experiences. Thus, the educational contribution should be understood as an important but incomplete challenge to traditional inequalities.

Caste and Marginalized Communities

Caste was one of the most important social realities confronting Christian missions in South India. Marginalized communities experienced discrimination in access to land, education, religious spaces, employment, and social interaction. Lutheran Christianity offered an alternative religious identity based on Christian teachings concerning human dignity. For some marginalized people, becoming Christian could therefore be associated with the hope of escaping aspects of caste oppression. Research on Tamil Lutheran communities indicates that Dalit converts and other socially disadvantaged groups experienced changes in their educational and social circumstances However, conversion did not automatically abolish caste. Caste distinctions continued to influence social relationships within Indian Christian communities. Consequently, the Lutheran contribution should be interpreted as a process of negotiation rather than a complete destruction of caste.

Literacy and Printing

The Lutheran mission's commitment to Tamil literacy and printing had consequences extending beyond the church. Printed materials helped create new channels for the transmission of religious and educational knowledge. The relationship between missionary activity and Tamil-language knowledge is particularly important because it encouraged the development of written materials accessible to local populations. The printing press therefore became both a religious and educational institution. Literacy also strengthened the capacity of marginalized people to participate in institutional life. Individuals who could read and write could become teachers, clerks, catechists, and church workers.

Women's Education

Women's education was another important dimension of missionary educational activity. Protestant missionary movements in India contributed to the expansion of female education, although the extent and character of this contribution varied from region to region. Research on missionary education demonstrates that Protestant missions played a significant role in expanding opportunities for female schooling in colonial India. In the Cauvery Delta, educational opportunities for girls challenged the assumption that formal education was primarily a male activity. Female education could contribute to literacy, family welfare, employment opportunities, and greater participation in community life.

Healthcare and Social Welfare

The missionary concept of service gradually developed beyond evangelization and education. Medical assistance, welfare activities, care for vulnerable people, and support for rural communities became important aspects of the wider Christian institutional presence. The later Tamil Evangelical Lutheran tradition continued to combine religious ministry with educational and medical service. The

Lutheran World Federation has described the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church as a church involved in educational and medical missions, particularly among rural and disadvantaged communities. These activities contributed to empowerment by addressing practical needs. Healthcare could reduce vulnerability, while educational and welfare institutions could provide long-term opportunities.

Indigenous Leadership

A major aspect of empowerment was the development of indigenous Christian leadership. Local converts became teachers, catechists, pastors, translators, writers, and administrators. Hudson's study emphasizes that Tamil Christians actively interpreted and reshaped Protestant Christianity rather than merely receiving a European religious system. The development of indigenous Christian thought and practice is therefore an essential part of the history of the Lutheran mission. Indigenous leadership transformed the mission from a purely foreign enterprise into a developing Tamil Christian institution.

Economic and Social Mobility

Education and church institutions could provide new opportunities for marginalized communities. Literacy allowed individuals to seek employment outside traditional caste occupations. Church organizations also provided opportunities for service as teachers, catechists, pastors, and other workers. The relationship between conversion and social mobility should nevertheless be treated carefully. Conversion could create opportunities, but it could also generate conflict with existing social structures. The experience differed according to caste, gender, locality, economic circumstances, and historical period.

Continuing Institutional Legacy

The historical importance of Lutheran mission activity can also be seen in the institutions that survived beyond the original missionary period. Churches, schools, colleges, hospitals, and other organizations became part of the social landscape of Tamil Nadu. The continuing educational and social work of Tamil Lutheran institutions demonstrates that the mission's historical influence cannot be limited to the eighteenth century. Contemporary Lutheran institutions continue to identify rural communities and socially disadvantaged groups as important areas of service.

Findings

The study identifies the following major findings.

Education was the strongest instrument of empowerment

The Lutheran mission's educational work created opportunities for literacy and schooling among sections of society that had experienced limited access to formal education. The Tranquebar school system was an important early contribution to the development of organized education in South India.

Education contributed to social mobility

Literacy and schooling gave marginalized individuals opportunities to seek occupations and forms of social participation beyond traditional caste-based roles. Education therefore functioned as both a religious and secular instrument of empowerment.

Missionary activity challenged some forms of caste exclusion

Christian teaching and missionary institutions created spaces where people from disadvantaged communities could develop alternative identities. For some converts, Christianity represented dignity and equality in contrast to experiences of caste discrimination.

Caste was not completely eliminated

The study also finds that caste remained a powerful social reality. Missionaries themselves sometimes struggled with caste practices, and Christian communities could reproduce social distinctions. Thus, Lutheran Christianity challenged caste in certain contexts without completely removing caste hierarchy.

Women's education expanded

Missionary educational initiatives helped increase opportunities for female education. Education contributed to women's literacy and their participation in family and community life.

Local agency was essential

Marginalized communities were not passive recipients of missionary activities. They made strategic decisions concerning education, conversion, employment, religious participation, and leadership. Tamil Christians contributed to the development of local forms of Christianity.

Lutheran institutions created long-term social resources

Schools, churches, medical institutions, and welfare organizations created structures that continued to serve communities beyond the initial missionary period. The later Lutheran institutional tradition demonstrates the long-term relationship between Christian mission and social service.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Lutheran missionary activity in the Cauvery Delta needs to be interpreted through the broader concept of social transformation. The mission's most significant contribution was not simply the number of converts but the creation of institutions that could change the conditions under which marginalized people lived. Education was central to this process. By establishing schools, missionaries introduced forms of learning that could reach beyond the traditional social boundaries of education. Schooling allowed marginalized individuals to develop literacy and acquire knowledge that could be converted into employment and social status. The historical significance of the Tranquebar schools lies precisely in their contribution to the emergence of wider educational possibilities in South India. At the same time, it would be historically inaccurate to describe missionary education as completely egalitarian. Research on Protestant schooling in South India demonstrates that schools could become sites of conflict concerning caste and social hierarchy. Missionary institutions could challenge exclusion while also reproducing some of the inequalities of the societies in which they operated. The question of conversion also requires a balanced interpretation. For marginalized people, conversion could provide a new religious identity and access to institutional resources. Recent research on Tamil Lutheran communities associates Christianity with educational advancement, dignity, and social mobility among sections of Dalit and other disadvantaged communities However, conversion should not be interpreted solely as the result of missionary influence. Local people possessed their own motivations. Some were attracted by education, some by new religious beliefs, some by opportunities for social mobility, and others by the possibility of forming new communities. Hudson's study demonstrates the importance of examining how Tamils themselves understood and reshaped Protestant Christianity. The concept of empowerment is therefore more useful

than the simpler concept of missionary "benefit." Empowerment suggests that people acquired resources, knowledge, identity, institutional access, and leadership capacities. These resources could then be used independently by local communities. The history also demonstrates that empowerment was gradual and incomplete. Caste remained influential within Christian communities, and missionary institutions operated within colonial structures. Therefore, the Lutheran mission should neither be presented exclusively as an instrument of colonialism nor idealized as an institution that completely liberated marginalized people. A balanced historical interpretation recognizes three simultaneous processes: missionary intervention, institutional transformation, and local agency. The interaction of these processes shaped the experience of marginalized communities in the Cauvery Delta.

CONCLUSION

The study of Lutheran mission and the empowerment of marginalized communities in the Cauvery Delta reveal a significant relationship between Christianity, education, social change, and local agency. The Lutheran mission began at Tranquebar in 1706 and gradually became an important institution in Tamil religious and social history. Mission schools promoted literacy and provided access to education for sections of the Tamil population. These educational opportunities could lead to employment, social mobility, and greater participation in institutional life. The mission also provided marginalized communities with new religious and social identities. For some Dalit and disadvantaged communities, conversion to Lutheran Christianity was associated with greater dignity, education, and opportunities for social advancement. The study further finds that women benefited from the expansion of missionary education and those Tamil teachers, catechists, pastors, and other local Christians played an important role in transforming the mission into an indigenous institution. Nevertheless, the impact of Lutheranism should not be exaggerated. Caste discrimination did not disappear with conversion, and missionary institutions sometimes reflected the social inequalities of colonial India. The relationship between mission and marginalized communities was therefore characterized by both empowerment and limitation. Overall, the Lutheran mission contributed to the empowerment of marginalized communities in the Cauvery Delta primarily through education, literacy, social organization, healthcare, welfare, religious participation, and opportunities for indigenous leadership. Its most enduring contribution was the creation of institutions through which marginalized people could acquire knowledge and develop new forms of social identity and agency. The history of Lutheranism in the Cauvery Delta therefore demonstrates that religious missions can become important agents of social transformation, but their impact must be understood critically within the contexts of caste, colonialism, gender, economic inequality, and local agency.

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THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN PROTECTING LOCAL TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Local traditions are an important part of the identity, history, and cultural life of every community. They include traditional languages, festivals, songs, dances, stories, food, clothing, crafts, ceremonies, beliefs, and traditional knowledge. In the modern world, local traditions face challenges from globalization, urbanization, migration, technological development, and changing lifestyles. Young people have a significant responsibility in protecting these traditions because they represent the generation that will carry cultural knowledge into the future. This article examines the role of young people in preserving local traditions through cultural education, participation in festivals, intergenerational learning, preservation of traditional languages, digital technology, and support for traditional arts and crafts. It also discusses the challenges young people face and the importance of cooperation among families, schools, communities, and cultural organizations. The article argues that protecting traditions does not mean rejecting modernity. Instead, young people can combine traditional knowledge with modern ideas and technologies to keep cultural practices meaningful and relevant. When young people actively participate in their cultural heritage, they become a bridge between the past and the future.

KEY WORDS: *Young People; Local Traditions; Cultural Heritage; Cultural Identity; Cultural Preservation*

INTRODUCTION

Every community has its own traditions that reflect its history, beliefs, values, and way of life. Traditional songs, dances, festivals, food, clothing, stories, languages, crafts, and ceremonies help people understand their cultural identity. These practices are passed from one generation to another and provide a connection between the past and the present. UNESCO describes intangible cultural heritage as practices, knowledge, skills, and expressions that communities recognize as part of their cultural heritage and transmit across generations. Local traditions are important because they create a sense of belonging. They bring families and communities together and help people understand their origins. However, many traditional practices face challenges in the modern world. Globalization has made international cultures increasingly accessible, while urbanization and migration have separated many young people from their traditional communities. Changes in education, employment, entertainment, and lifestyles can also reduce young people's involvement in cultural activities.

Young people are particularly important in protecting local traditions because they are the future cultural carriers of their communities. They have the opportunity to learn from older generations and use modern communication methods to share cultural knowledge with others. Their participation can prevent traditions from becoming forgotten. The preservation of local traditions does not require young people to

reject modern technology or global culture. Instead, young people can combine traditional knowledge with modern ideas. For example, traditional stories can be recorded digitally, traditional crafts can be promoted through social media, and traditional music can be introduced to younger audiences through contemporary performances.

Therefore, young people should be viewed not simply as learners of culture but as active participants in cultural preservation. Their involvement can help ensure that local traditions remain living and meaningful for future generations.

Importance Of Local Traditions

Local traditions are valuable because they represent the history and identity of a community. They contain knowledge and experiences that have been developed over many generations. Traditional practices can teach younger people about their ancestors, environment, social relationships, and cultural values.

Festivals and ceremonies, for example, bring people together and strengthen community relationships. Traditional food connects families with their history, while songs and stories preserve memories and beliefs. Traditional crafts demonstrate the creativity and skills of community members.

UNESCO recognizes oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, festive events, traditional knowledge, and craftsmanship as important forms of intangible cultural heritage ("Text of the Convention"). These forms of heritage are living practices rather than objects that simply belong in museums.

For young people, understanding local traditions can strengthen cultural confidence. In a world where young people are exposed to many international influences, knowledge of local culture provides a strong sense of identity. It also encourages respect for cultural diversity because young people who value their own traditions can learn to appreciate the traditions of others.

Protecting local traditions is therefore important not only for cultural reasons but also for strengthening community relationships and maintaining cultural diversity.

Young People As Cultural Learners

The first step in protecting local traditions is learning about them. Young people can learn cultural practices from parents, grandparents, teachers, community leaders, artists, musicians, and craftspeople. Older people often possess valuable knowledge that may not be available in books. They may know traditional songs, stories, recipes, ceremonies, languages, and craft techniques. Young people can learn by listening to elders, asking questions, observing traditional practices, and participating in cultural activities.

Families have an especially important role in this process. Parents and grandparents can teach children traditional recipes, stories, songs, and customs. They can encourage children to participate in cultural festivals and communicate with older relatives in the local language. Schools can also contribute by including local culture in the curriculum. Students can conduct interviews with elders, research local history, organize cultural exhibitions, and participate in traditional music, dance, and art programmes. UNESCO emphasizes education and community participation as important methods of transmitting intangible cultural heritage.

Young people should understand that cultural learning requires respect.

Traditions should not simply be copied without understanding their meaning. By learning the history and significance of cultural practices, young people can become responsible protectors of their heritage.

Preserving Traditional Languages And Stories

Language is one of the most important parts of cultural identity. Local languages contain traditional expressions, proverbs, songs, stories, and knowledge. When a language is no longer used by younger generations, important cultural knowledge can also disappear. Young people can help preserve local languages by using them in daily communication with family and community members. They can also participate in language clubs, cultural programmes, and educational activities.

Oral traditions are equally important. Many communities have preserved their histories through folk tales, legends, songs, and storytelling. Young people can record interviews with elders, with their permission, and create digital collections of local stories. Modern technology makes this process easier. Smartphones and computers allow young people to record audio, video, and photographs. These materials can become valuable resources for future generations.

However, cultural information should be documented responsibly. Young people should respect the privacy and wishes of people whose stories and knowledge are being recorded. Sacred or private cultural knowledge should not be shared publicly without appropriate permission. By preserving traditional languages and oral histories, young people can protect important elements of cultural identity.

Participation In Festivals, Arts, And Crafts

Active participation is essential for keeping traditions alive. A tradition cannot survive if it is only remembered but no longer practiced. Young people can participate in local festivals, traditional dances, music programmes, storytelling events, traditional sports, and community celebrations. Their participation can encourage other young people to become interested in cultural activities.

Traditional crafts are also important. Weaving, pottery, embroidery, wood carving, basket making, painting, and other crafts require practical knowledge and years of experience. If young people do not learn these skills, they may eventually disappear. Young people can learn traditional skills from experienced craftspeople and then introduce them to wider audiences. They can use modern marketing methods to support traditional artists and craftspeople.

UNESCO recognizes traditional craftsmanship as an important part of intangible cultural heritage. Traditional crafts can also contribute to livelihoods and sustainable development when they are practiced and marketed responsibly. Young entrepreneurs can therefore contribute to cultural preservation by developing businesses based on authentic traditional skills while respecting cultural ownership and giving proper recognition to traditional knowledge holders.

Using Digital Technology To Protect Traditions

Digital technology provides young people with new opportunities to preserve and promote local traditions. Social media, websites, podcasts, online videos, and digital archives can make cultural knowledge accessible to wider audiences. Young people can create videos about local festivals, interview cultural practitioners, photograph traditional crafts, and produce educational content about local history.

Social media can also help communities connect with people who have moved away from their hometowns.

Technology can make traditional culture more attractive to younger audiences. A traditional song can be presented through a digital recording, while a local story can be transformed into an educational video or podcast. However, young people must use digital platforms responsibly. Traditional knowledge should not be copied or commercialized without appropriate permission. Cultural practices should also be presented accurately and in their proper context.

UNESCO's ethical principles emphasize respect for communities and the people who create and maintain intangible cultural heritage ("Ethics and Intangible Cultural Heritage"). Responsible use of technology can therefore strengthen cultural preservation without exploiting cultural traditions.

Intergenerational Cooperation

Young people and older generations have different strengths that can complement one another. Elders possess traditional knowledge and experience, while young people often have greater familiarity with modern technology and communication.

Intergenerational cooperation can combine these strengths. For example, an elder can teach a traditional craft while a young person documents the process. A grandparent can tell a traditional story while a young person records it and creates an educational digital resource. Such activities benefit both generations. Young people gain knowledge and develop respect for older community members, while elders receive an opportunity to share their experiences.

UNESCO encourages cooperation between communities, cultural practitioners, and educational institutions in transmitting cultural heritage ("About Living Heritage and Education"). Intergenerational programmes can therefore play an important role in ensuring cultural continuity. Schools and community organizations can organize storytelling sessions, craft workshops, traditional cooking classes, music programmes, and oral-history projects that bring different generations together.

Challenges Faced By Young People

Young people face several challenges when trying to protect local traditions. One major challenge is the influence of global popular culture. International music, fashion, films, and social media trends can sometimes make local traditions seem less attractive. Another challenge is migration. Young people may leave their communities for education or employment, reducing their opportunities to participate in local cultural activities.

Economic conditions can also affect cultural preservation. Traditional occupations may not provide enough income to encourage young people to continue them. As a result, traditional skills may decline. Lack of cultural education is another problem. If schools and families do not provide opportunities for young people to learn local traditions, they may grow up without understanding their cultural importance.

Digital technology can also create challenges. Although it can help preserve culture, it can also lead to inaccurate representations, cultural appropriation, and inappropriate commercialization. These challenges demonstrate that young people need support from families, schools, communities, governments, and cultural organizations. Cultural preservation should provide young people

with knowledge, opportunities, resources, and meaningful participation.

Balancing Tradition And Modernity

Protecting local traditions does not mean rejecting modern life. Traditions have always changed as societies develop. Young people can help traditions adapt to contemporary conditions while maintaining their essential cultural meaning. For example, traditional music can be introduced through modern recording technology. Local stories can be shared through podcasts and videos. Traditional crafts can be promoted through responsible online businesses. Festivals can use social media to attract participants while maintaining their cultural significance.

Young people can therefore become a bridge between tradition and modernity. Their creativity can help make local culture relevant to contemporary audiences. The most important principle is respect. Modern adaptations should not destroy the identity of a tradition or exploit cultural knowledge. Young people should work with cultural practitioners and community members when introducing new forms of cultural presentation.

CONCLUSION

Local traditions are an important source of cultural identity, historical knowledge, community unity, and social belonging. However, globalization, migration, urbanization, changing lifestyles, and economic pressures can threaten their survival. Young people have a central role in addressing these challenges. They can learn traditions from elders, participate in cultural activities, preserve local languages and oral histories, support traditional arts and crafts, and use digital technology to document and promote cultural heritage.

The cooperation of families, schools, communities, and cultural institutions is essential. Young people should be provided with opportunities to learn and practice traditions rather than simply being told that they have a responsibility to preserve them. At the same time, protecting traditions does not mean preventing cultural change. Young people can combine traditional knowledge with modern creativity and technology. Through this approach, traditions can remain relevant while maintaining their cultural meaning.

Ultimately, young people are the bridge between past and future. Their knowledge, creativity, enthusiasm, and technological skills can help ensure that local traditions continue to live and develop. When young people actively participate in their cultural heritage, they not only protect the achievements of previous generations but also create a strong cultural foundation for generations yet to come.

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BEYOND THE DRAVIDIAN MODEL
THE EVOLUTION OF TAMIL NADU LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS IN KANNIYAKUMARI, 1967–2026

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari district holds a unique spot in Tamil Nadu's electoral history. Unlike the rest of the state, where political rivalry after 1967 increasingly revolved around the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Kanniyakumari has maintained a diverse political landscape. Here, the Indian National Congress (INC), Communist parties, Dravidian entities, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and newer political groups have all wielded significant influence. This paper delves into the rise and decline of political parties in Kanniyakumari from the 1967 to the 2026 Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly elections. It scrutinizes electoral results across the district's constituencies, shifts in voting patterns, party alternation, candidate-centric politics, and the impact of social and religious divides, along with the historical legacy of the former Travancore State and the influence from neighboring Kerala.

Kanniyakumari's inclusion in Tamil Nadu in 1956, due to the linguistic reorganization of states, fostered a distinct political climate, unlike the rest of Tamil Nadu. The district's historical ties with Travancore, bilingualism in Malayalam and Tamil, a significant Christian populace, Nadar political mobilization, and its plantation and fishing economies, alongside the later rise of Hindu nationalist politics, have cultivated a unique electoral culture. This district has served as a key battleground for Congress-BJP rivalries while the broader state remains dominated by DMK-AIADMK bipolarity.

The study posits that Kanniyakumari's political journey is best understood not as a straightforward shift from Congress to Dravidian politics but as a complex, multi-layered electoral competition shaped by historical memory, regional identity, religion, caste, class, candidate reputation, Kerala's political influence, and evolving state-level alliances.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Tamil Nadu, Legislative Assembly Elections, Congress, DMK, AIADMK, BJP, Communist Party, Kerala, electoral politics, political parties.*

INTRODUCTION

Post-1967, Tamil Nadu's electoral history is often linked with the decline of the Indian National Congress and the rise of Dravidian parties, particularly DMK and AIADMK, as the primary competitors for power. However, Kanniyakumari stands as a notable deviation from this general trend. Situated at the southernmost tip of mainland India, the district shares political, cultural, and geographical ties with Kerala. Until November 1, 1956, Kanniyakumari was part of the erstwhile Travancore State. The transfer of the four southern taluks—Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode—to Madras State during the States Reorganisation process led to the creation of Kanniyakumari district. This historical context is crucial to comprehending its electoral dynamics. Entering Tamil Nadu, Kanniyakumari brought with it a political culture honed in

Travancore. The movement to merge with Tamil Nadu, notably led by A. Nesamony and the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress, sparked a robust regional and linguistic political consciousness. This merger movement became a vital source of legitimacy for Congress politics in the district. The 1967 Assembly election marks an apt starting point for investigating the post-merger political transformation.

Objectives Of The Study

The study aims to:

- Track the electoral rise and decline of major political parties in Kanniyakumari from 1967 to 2026.
- Analyze the electoral performance of individual Assembly constituencies.
- Compare shifts in party vote shares and winning margins.
- Explore why Kanniyakumari's political landscape differs from the rest of Tamil Nadu.
- Investigate the impact of neighboring Kerala on the district's political culture.
- Examine the roles of religion, caste, language, occupation, and historical identity.
- Identify key phases of political dominance and decline.
- Study the emergence of the BJP and other new political forces.
- Evaluate the significance of the 2026 Assembly election in the district's long-term electoral history.

Methodology

This historical-electoral study relies primarily on secondary quantitative data. The main source is the Election Commission of India's statistical reports for Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. The ECI provides historical Assembly election reports for 1967, 1971, 1977, 1980, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021, and 2026. Additional data sources include government records from Tamil Nadu/Kanniyakumari District, constituency-wise election results, academic literature on caste, religion, and political mobilization in South India, studies on Kerala's political influence, and contemporary electoral analyses.

The quantitative analysis examines:

- Winning party
- Runner-up party
- Votes obtained
- Winning margin
- Vote share where available
- Changes in constituency boundaries
- Continuity and discontinuity of party support

A significant methodological limitation is the changing constituency boundaries over time. As such, the paper does not treat each constituency as geographically identical across the entire 1967–2026 period. From 1967 to 2006, the district had seven Assembly constituencies, while post-delimitation, it has six: Kanniyakumari, Nagercoil, Colachel, Padmanabhapuram, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor.

Historical Background: From Travancore To Tamil Nadu

Understanding Kanniyakumari's electoral behavior requires a look into its political history before 1956. The southern taluks of Travancore had a significant Tamil-speaking population. The language issue gained prominence as Malayalam became dominant in Travancore's administrative structure, leading to a major political movement demanding integration with the Tamil-majority Madras State. Under leaders like A. Nesamony, the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress played a pivotal role in this movement, which involved demonstrations, hartals, political mobilization, and tragic events like police firing and loss of life. The States

Reorganisation process in 1956 resulted in the transfer of four southern taluks to Madras State, creating Kanniyakumari district. Thus, unlike many Tamil Nadu districts, Kanniyakumari entered the post-1956 era with a robust political memory rooted in: Travancore → Tamil identity → merger movement → Congress mobilization. This legacy helps explain Congress's notably enduring presence in the district.

The 1967 Turning Point

The 1967 Assembly election was a pivotal moment in Tamil Nadu politics, with DMK emerging as the state's dominant force, winning 138 of the 234 Assembly seats according to historical election data. Yet, Kanniyakumari displayed a more complex pattern. In 1967:

- Congress won Kanniyakumari;
- DMK won Nagercoil;
- Congress won Colachel;
- Congress won Padmanabhapuram;
- Congress won Thiruvattar;
- Congress won Vilavancode;
- Congress won Killiyoor

Congress secured six of the seven constituencies, with DMK only winning Nagercoil. This indicated that the district did not simply follow the statewide anti-Congress/Dravidian trend. The 1967 results marked the start of a distinctive pattern: statewide political shifts did not automatically translate into district-wide realignments.

The Congress Phase: 1967–1971

The 1971 election highlighted the strength of Congress-related politics in the district's southern parts. While DMK retained Kanniyakumari, Congress/NCO won Colachel, Padmanabhapuram, Thiruvattar, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor, with the Swatantra Party winning Nagercoil. This signifies a multi-party competition rather than a simple Congress vs. DMK scenario. The 1971 election underscored the ideological competition among:

- Congress;
- DMK;
- Swatantra Party;
- Communist parties. Electoral data revealed particularly strong Congress performances in southern constituencies. For instance, the Congress candidate in Vilavancode secured 61.79% of the vote, and in Killiyoor, 62.25%

The 1977 Transformation: Rise Of Aiadmk And The Left

The decline of Congress dominance was not immediately succeeded by DMK dominance. The 1977 election saw the rise of a new political force: AIADMK, founded by M.G. Ramachandran. In Kanniyakumari:

- AIADMK won Kanniyakumari;
- AIADMK won Nagercoil;
- Janata Party won Colachel;
- Janata Party won Padmanabhapuram;
- Janata Party won Thiruvattar;
- CPI(M) won Vilavancode;
- the remaining constituency also showed strong non-Congress competition

This marked a significant shift from the Congress-heavy map of 1967. The 1977 election signifies the first major phase of Congress's decline and the fragmentation of the district's electoral space.

The 1980s: A Multi-Party District

The 1980 election further illustrated that Kanniyakumari could not be easily classified within the conventional Tamil Nadu political model. AIADMK won Kanniyakumari and Nagercoil, while DMK won Colachel, Janata Party won Padmanabhapuram, CPI(M) won Thiruvattar and Vilavancode, and other

political forces remained competitive. The 1984 election brought another major shift. AIADMK won several constituencies, while Congress remained competitive, and the Left maintained influence in the district. The 1989 election was particularly significant as the division of AIADMK at the state level added political complexity. DMK, Congress, CPI(M), AIADMK factions, and Independents competed across the district. Thus, the 1980s can be described as a period of competitive pluralism.

The 1990s: Emergence Of BJP And Continued Left Influence

The 1991 election brought another significant change. AIADMK won Kanniyakumari and Padmanabhapuram, while Congress retained several constituencies, and the Left continued to hold influence, especially in the district's western parts. The 1996 election was particularly noteworthy. The BJP won Padmanabhapuram, marking its breakthrough in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. C. Velayuthan's victory in Kanniyakumari district became a milestone in the BJP's electoral history in Tamil Nadu. Constituency-wise data show BJP winning Padmanabhapuram while DMK and TMC dominated other district parts. This wasn't an isolated event but represented the emergence of a new ideological axis: Congress/DMK/Left competition → Congress-BJP competition alongside Dravidian politics.

The Kerala Factor

A crucial aspect of Kanniyakumari politics is its geographical proximity to Kerala. Although the district was historically part of Travancore, the social and political relationship persisted after the 1956 merger. This influence operates through several channels:

Historical political memory

The district's political institutions developed under Travancore before integration with Tamil Nadu.

Language Tamil and Malayalam coexist in many district parts

. Research and contemporary reports note the substantial Malayalam influence on local speech and culture.

Communist politics Communist politics in Kerala had a strong ideological and organizational impact on parts of Kanniyakumari

. CPI(M) leaders from Kerala, including prominent figures from the state's Communist movement, addressed meetings in the district. The Communist movement found particular support among plantation workers and segments of the Malayalam-speaking population. The repeated success of CPI(M) candidates in Vilavancode and neighboring constituencies illustrates this influence.

Religious and social networks

The district's churches, educational institutions, fishing communities, and social organizations historically maintained connections beyond the state boundary.

Economic linkages

Trade, employment, migration, education, and family networks connect Kanniyakumari with Thiruvananthapuram and other Kerala parts. Therefore, the Kerala factor should be seen not just as an electoral influence but as a social, cultural, economic, and historical force.

Religion, Caste, And Electoral Behavior

Religion and caste have played significant yet evolving roles in Kanniyakumari. The district has a considerable Christian population and a historically important Nadar population spread across religious communities. Contemporary analyses identify the interaction between Christian political mobilization, Hindu political mobilization,

and caste as a key feature of electoral competition. A notable aspect is that Nadar identity crosses religious boundaries. Consequently, caste cannot be simply equated with religious voting, making Kanniyakumari different from oversimplified models of Hindu-versus-Christian electoral behavior.

The district's political competition is better understood as an interaction between: religion + caste + candidate + party + local institution + historical memory. Academic research also demonstrates how the political relationship between Christianity, Congress, and the rise of Communist and Hindu nationalist forces historically developed in Kanniyakumari.

The 1982 Mandaikadu Conflict And Political Realignment

The Mandaikadu communal conflict of 1982 was a major turning point in Kanniyakumari's political history. The conflict contributed to a more visible Hindu-Christian political divide and subsequently strengthened the ideological space occupied by Hindu nationalist organizations. The development of the BJP's political presence in the district must therefore be studied alongside:

- the Mandaikadu conflict;
- the growth of Hindu organizations;
- the Vivekananda Rock Memorial;
- Christian institutional influence;
- Congress's minority-oriented politics. The BJP's rise was not merely an extension of the party's national growth but developed through a specific local historical context.

2001–2011: The Return Of Congress And The Dravidian Parties

The 2001 election demonstrated continued competitiveness between AIADMK, DMK, Congress, BJP, and the Left. AIADMK won Kanniyakumari and several other constituencies, while CPI(M) retained Vilavancode, and other parties remained competitive. The 2006 election again showed fragmentation:

- DMK won Kanniyakumari;
- DMK won Nagercoil;
- Congress won Colachel;
- DMK won Padmanabhapuram;
- CPI(M) won Thiruvattar;
- CPI(M) won Vilavancode;
- Congress won Killiyoor. Thus, even when the DMK-led alliance was strong statewide, the district retained a distinctive combination of Congress, DMK, and Communist influence

Delimitation And The Six-Constituency Structure

Post-delimitation, the district's Assembly structure is: Kanniyakumari – 229 Nagercoil – 230 Colachel – 231 Padmanabhapuram – 232 Vilavancode – 233 Killiyoor – 234 The earlier Thiruvattar constituency ceased to exist as a separate Assembly constituency. This change is crucial when comparing long-term electoral performance. Direct comparison of constituency results across all years must be approached cautiously.

2011: Congress And The Left Regain Space

The 2011 election produced intriguing district-level results. The six constituencies were divided among:

- AIADMK – Kanniyakumari and Nagercoil;
- Congress – Colachel, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor;
- DMK – Padmanabhapuram. The results show that even during an AIADMK wave in Tamil Nadu, Congress remained exceptionally strong in Kanniyakumari. The winning vote shares ranged from 40.01% in Nagercoil to 48.22% in Kanniyakumari, while Congress won Colachel, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor with approximately 40–44% vote shares

2016: Congress And DMK Versus BJP

The 2016 election highlighted the BJP's emergence as a significant runner-up. Results included:

Constituency	Winner	Party	Winner Votes	Runner-up	Party	Runner-up Votes
Kanniyakumari	S. Austin	DMK	89,023	Thalavai Sundaram	AIADMK	83,111
Nagercoil	N. Suresh Rajan	DMK	67,369	Gandhi M.R.	BJP	46,413
Colachel	J.G. Prince	INC	67,195	Ramesh P.	BJP	41,167
Padmanabhapuram	Mano Thangaraj	DMK	76,249	Rajendra Prasad	AIADMK	35,344
Vilavancode	S. Vijayadharani	INC	68,789	Dharmaraj C.	BJP	35,646
Killiyoor	S. Rajesh Kumar	INC	77,356	Pon. Vijayaragavan	BJP	31,061

The BJP's performance is especially noteworthy in Nagercoil, Colachel, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor.

2021: BJP's Consolidation And The Persistence Of Congress

The 2021 election presented an important contrast. The six constituencies were won by:

- AIADMK – Kanniyakumari;
- BJP – Nagercoil;
- Congress – Colachel;
- DMK – Padmanabhapuram;
- Congress – Vilavancode;

Congress – Killiyoor.

The BJP's victory in Nagercoil marked a significant expansion of its Assembly presence in the district. Simultaneously, Congress retained three constituencies, demonstrating that its historical organizational and social base had not disappeared. The 2021 results show that Kanniyakumari had become one of the few districts in Tamil Nadu where the Congress-BJP competition could coexist with the DMK-AIADMK contest

2026: A New Electoral Phase

The 2026 election introduced another major political force: Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK). The statewide election itself was a significant departure from the earlier DMK-AIADMK pattern, with TVK emerging as the largest party by seats according to the Election Commission's 2026 results. However, Kanniyakumari again demonstrated its exceptional character.

The district results were:

Constituency	Winner	Party	Votes	Margin
Kanniyakumari	N.Thalavai Sundaram	AIADMK	75,045	214
Nagercoil	Austin	DMK	69,880	7,570
Colachel	Tharagai Cuthbert	INC	66,207	2,833
Padmanabhapuram	R. Chellaswamy	CPI(M)	68,938	15,569
Vilavancode	T.T. Praveen	INC	70,755	20,970
Killiyoor	S. Rajesh Kumar	INC	66,434	1,311

The ECI results confirm the victories of AIADMK, DMK, Congress, and CPI(M), with Congress retaining three of the six seats. Notably, TVK did not win any of the six constituencies, although it became a substantial challenger in several seats. For instance, TVK was runner-up in Nagercoil, Colachel, Padmanabhapuram, Vilavancode, and Killiyoor according to constituency-wise results. Thus, 2026 should be viewed as the rise of a new challenger rather than the complete replacement of established parties.

Comparison With The Rest Of Tamil Nadu

Kanniyakumari differs from the broader Tamil Nadu electoral pattern in several ways: **Weaker Dravidian exclusivity Post-1967,** Tamil Nadu developed a relatively stable DMK-AIADMK competitive structure. Kanniyakumari retained strong Congress, Communist, and BJP bases. **Strong national-party presence** Congress remained electorally relevant in Kanniyakumari far longer than in many other districts. The BJP also established an early Assembly presence here. **Kerala political influence** Few Tamil Nadu districts have such a strong historical relationship with a neighboring state's political culture. **Religious pluralism** The substantial Christian population and the institutional role of churches make the district distinct from many interior Tamil Nadu constituencies. **Communist survival** The CPI(M)'s repeated success, particularly in the district's western parts, reflects the influence of Kerala-style Communist politics. **Candidate-centered voting** Local personalities frequently cross party boundaries in voter support. Contemporary reporting observes that voters increasingly assess candidates rather than simply voting for a permanent party label. Narrow margins and competitive politics The 2026 Kanniyakumari result was decided by only 214 votes, illustrating how closely balanced electoral competition can become in the district.

Major Phases Of Political Rise And Fall

Period	Dominant/Major Forces	Character
1967–1971	Congress + DMK	Congress dominance with emerging DMK
1977	AIADMK + Janata + Left	Congress decline and fragmentation
1980–1989	AIADMK + Congress + Left + DMK	Multi-party competition
1991–1996	AIADMK + Congress + Left + BJP	BJP emergence
2001–2006	AIADMK + DMK + Congress + CPI(M)	Coalition-era competition
2011	AIADMK + Congress + DMK	Congress revival
2016	DMK + Congress + BJP	BJP becomes major challenger
2021	Congress + BJP + DMK + AIADMK	Four-cornered competition
2026	Congress + AIADMK + DMK + CPI(M) + TVK	New multi-party phase

The Rise And Fall Of Political Parties: A Synthesis

Congress

Initially, Congress was the overwhelmingly dominant party, rooted in the merger movement, national identity, Christian institutional networks, and A. Nesamony's legacy. Its decline was gradual, not sudden. Even after losing statewide dominance, Congress repeatedly rebounded in Kanniyakumari. Its three-seat victory in 2026 highlights its significant organizational and social base.

DMK

DMK's rise in Tamil Nadu didn't immediately translate into district-wide dominance. Though strong in Nagercoil and Kanniyakumari during certain periods, it later became a key force in Padmanabhapuram and other constituencies. However, the party hasn't enjoyed the uninterrupted dominance in Kanniyakumari that it has in other regions.

AIADMK

AIADMK became a formidable force post-1977, benefiting from M.G. Ramachandran's popularity. It won key constituencies repeatedly and remains capable of defeating Congress and DMK. Its 2026 victory in Kanniyakumari by only 214 votes demonstrates both resilience and vulnerability.

CPI(M)

The Communist movement is one of Kanniyakumari's most distinctive political traditions, closely associated with Kerala, plantation labor, working-class politics, and Malayalam-speaking communities. CPI(M)'s victory in Padmanabhapuram in 2026 shows that the Left is not merely a historical memory in the district.

BJP

The BJP's rise is among the district's most significant recent electoral developments. Its 1996 breakthrough was followed by increasing vote shares, particularly in Nagercoil and other constituencies. Its Nagercoil victory in 2021 marked the conversion of a long-term vote base into Assembly-level success.

TVK

The 2026 election introduced a new political possibility. Although TVK didn't win a Kanniyakumari constituency, it emerged as a major challenger in several seats. Its performance indicates that the district remains open to new political alternatives, especially when traditional party loyalties wane.

Findings Of The Study

The study's key findings include:

1. The study's key findings include:
2. Kanniyakumari doesn't fully conform to the conventional Dravidian political model of Tamil Nadu.
3. Congress experienced a longer electoral life in Kanniyakumari than in many other Tamil Nadu parts.
4. The Communist movement wielded a disproportionately strong influence due to the district's historical connection with Kerala.
5. Kerala influenced Kanniyakumari through language, migration, political ideology, social networks, and economic ties.
6. Religion affected electoral alignments, but religious identity alone can't explain electoral outcomes.
7. Nadar identity spans religious communities, making caste and religion overlapping rather than identical electoral categories.
8. The BJP's rise is linked to specific local history, including the growth of Hindu organizations and communal polarization.
9. Candidate personality is particularly important in several constituencies.

10. Electoral volatility is high; parties winning one election can lose decisively in the next.
11. The 2026 election confirms continued political pluralism. Congress retained three seats, while AIADMK, DMK, and CPI(M) each secured one.
12. New political formations can rapidly become competitive, as TVK demonstrated in 2026.
13. Kanniyakumari's political history is best described as competitive pluralism rather than simple two-party alternation.

CONCLUSION

Kanniyakumari's electoral history from 1967 to 2026 presents a fascinating case of political continuity and change. The district began the period with a strong Congress tradition. The rise of DMK and AIADMK transformed the political environment, but neither party entirely displaced Congress. Meanwhile, Communist politics survived with unusual strength due to the district's historical and geographical connection with Kerala. The emergence of the BJP in the 1990s introduced a new ideological dimension. BJP's 2021 victory in Nagercoil demonstrated the transformation of this ideological presence into electoral power.

Yet, the 2026 election once again revealed Kanniyakumari's uniqueness. Congress retained three constituencies, AIADMK won Kanniyakumari by a mere 214 votes, DMK returned in Nagercoil, and CPI(M) captured Padmanabhapuram. TVK emerged as a serious challenger without yet becoming a winning force in the district. The central argument of this paper is that Kanniyakumari's political history can't be explained solely through the rise and fall of individual political parties. It must be understood through the interaction of historical identity, the Tamil linguistic movement, Travancore's legacy, Kerala's political culture, caste, religion, economic interests, candidate personality, and state-level political waves.

Kanniyakumari isn't an electoral outlier without explanation. Rather, it's a borderland political society whose electoral behavior reflects both Tamil Nadu and Kerala while remaining distinct from both. Its politics illustrates an essential principle of Indian electoral studies: Political geography matters, but historical memory matters even more. Continuing electoral competition in Kanniyakumari suggests no political party can assume permanent ownership of the electorate. Parties rise when they successfully connect their ideology with local identity and organization; they decline when voters perceive a disconnect between the party and the district's changing social aspirations. The 2026 election, therefore, should not be seen as the end of one political era but as the beginning of another phase of competitive politics in India's southernmost district.

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THE ARCHITECTURAL STYLES OF SUCHINDRAM SHREE THANUMALAYAN SWAMY TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT:

Suchindram temple is fine, large fane, with a beautiful tank. It is one of the few temples in the country where the Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Isvara, are worshipped. The Linga, named Sthanumalaya, is in three parts. The top represents Siva, the middle Vishnu, and the base Brahma. "Sthanu" is a name of Siva, "Mal" of Vishnu, and "Ayan" of Brahma. It is believed that the Trinity appeared here at the request of a sage, Atri, and his wife Anusuya. According to another tradition, Indra, who was under a curse, performed severe penance here at the request of a sage, Atri and his wife, Anusuya. Finally, Lord Siva allowed him to return to heaven if he worshipped in Suchindram every night. The belief is that he performs the midnight worship in the temple. The officiating priests are changed daily, and they are under oath not to divulge what they see.

The temple is a growth of many centuries. The early Pandyas established it, and then the Cholas, the Venad kings, the Nayaks and the Maharajas of Travancore added to it from time to time. The oldest of more than a hundred epigraphs in the temple belongs to the seventh century.

Two chief attractions are the giant size Statue of Hanuman (Monkey God) rising 25 ft. and the statue of Vinayaki (female form of Vinayaka) as bas-relief.

Key Words: Legend, History, Architecture, Religious significance, A view of the temple from outside, Musical and Sculpted Pillars.

INTRODUCTION:

The *Thanumalayan Temple,* also called *Sthanumalayan Temple,* is an important Hindu temple located in Suchindram in the Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, India. The Thanumalayan Temple is of importance to both Shaivaite and Vaishnavite sects of Hinduism, as the name *Stanumalaya* denotes the Trimurti; "Stanu" means Shiva; "Mal" means Vishnu; and the "Ayan" means Brahma.(1) It counts among the Abhimana Kshetrams in Vaishnavite traditions. It is one of the 108 Shiva Temples revered by the Kerala Hindu culture, though this temple is now in Tamil Nadu, after Kanyakumari District was merged into Tamil Nadu from Travancore. The temple complex covers around two acres and has two gateway towers called *gopurams.* The tallest is the eastern tower with 11 stories and a height of 44 metres (144 ft). The temple has numerous shrines, with those of Sthanumalayan and that of Hanuman being the most prominent. The temple has six daily rituals at various times from 5:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., and many yearly festivals on its calendar, with the festival during Margazhi being the most prominent. The present masonry structure was built during the Chola dynasty in the 9th century, while later expansions are attributed to Thirumalai Nayak and the Travancire Magharajas. The temple is maintained and administered by the Dharmapuram Aadhenam. The temple is associated with Indra whose sin was propitiated after worshiping the presiding deity and also Anasuya known for her chastity. The temple is maintained and administered by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Legend:

The place got the name of Suchindrum

from the Sthala Purana. Hindu mythological legend has it that king of devas, Indra got relieved of a curse at the place of the main linga in the temple. The term "Suchi" is Suchindrum is believed to have derived from the Sanskrit meaning that stands for "purity". Accordingly, Indra is supposed to visit the temple for performing "Ardhajama Pooja", or worship, at midnight every day. As per another legend, sage Atri and his wife Anasuya stayed at Jnaranya. Sage Anasuya was highly devoted to her husband. The trinity of Hinduism, namely, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva wanted to make her name eternal with their divine act. They came to the sage's hermitage as Brahmin mendicants. Anasuya treated them with utmost care. The Brahmins put forth a condition that they would accept her hospitality with a condition that she would come out nude. With her power of chastity, she converted the three to small kids and served them with her breast milk. Atri returned to the hermitage at the behest of Parvathi, Saraswathi and Lakshmi (the wives of the trinity) to restore their husbands to their original form. Anasuya obliged immediately and restored the kids to their original form. The trinity blessed the couple for their devotion. The three emanated in the form of three Lingas and the place where the couple worshiped the trinity is believed to be the temple.(2)

History:

There are several inscription from the period of early and medieval Cholas along with other Pandya rulers and Chera rulers in the region. There are two records from Kopparakesarivarman who took Madurai and Eezham (Sri lanka) from The 30th and 40th regnal year of Parantaka I (907-950) CE).(3)

The current temple was renovated by Madurai Nayak kings in the 17th century and is famous for its sculptures. It was previously administered and controlled by "Thekkumon Madam", famous Namboothiri priest family. The main deity of the temple is Lord Shiva, Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma in a single form called Sthanumalyam. This 17th century temple is famous for its architectural grandeur. The seven-storey white gopuram (gateway tower) is visible from a distance. Its 44 m (144 ft) façade is covered with sculptures of Hindu deities. The Travancore Maharajas, under whose administration the temple remained till Kanyakumari's merger with Tamil Nadu, have made many endowments for its upkeep. During the reign of Ayilyam Thirunal Rama Varma Maharajah of Travancore, a lottery scheme was introduced in 1875 CE, to raise funds for rebuilding a portion of the temple and a sum of over Rs.40,000 was realised.

Architecture:

The temple is one of the few temples in the Kanyakumari region in both Kerala style architecture and Tamil style architecture. The Navaratri Mandapam built during the 16th century has a typical wooden structure like Kerala temples.(4) The temple is known for its quality of workmanship in stone. There are four musical pillars carved out of a single stone, and which stand at 18 feet (5.5 m) in height; these are an architectural and design highlight of the temple grounds. They are in the Alankara Mandapam area, and they emit the sounds of various musical notes when struck. There are an additional 1035 pillars with carvings in the area known as the dancing hall.(5)

There is an Anjaneya (Hanuman) statue which stands at 22 feet (6.7 m) and is carved of a single granite block. It is one of the tallest statues of its type in India. It is also of historical interest that this statue was buried in the temple in 1740 and was

subsequently forgotten. It was rediscovered in 1930, and subsequently restored for viewing by the then Devaswom Board Commissioner Raja Seva Praveena Sri K.K. Neelankantha Iyer of Kottarathu Mathom, Moncompu.[5] There is also a Nandi Statue, made of mortar and lime, which is 13 feet (4.0 m) tall and 21 feet (6.4 m) long, it is one of the biggest Nandi statues in India. There are also various scenes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharathe* depicted in various pillars in the temple.[6]

Religious significance:

The religious significance of the temple stems from the fact that the main statue of linga represent Shiva (Sthanu), Vishnu (maal) and Brahma (Ayan) (as well as giving the temple its name). The representation of the three central gods of Hinduism in one linga makes it unique in India. The 10-day procession including the car festival in the last few days is celebrated in this temple between December and January, attracts crowds of thousands of people. Special worship practices are followed and the festival in the last few days is celebrated in this temple between December and January, attracts crowds of thousands of people special worship practices are followed and the festival images of Sthanumalayan, ARAM valartha Nayagi and Vinayagar are taken in the temple car around the streets of the temple. Another festival known as Teppam is celebrated during between April and May every year. The Sanskrit work *Suchindrastalamahatmya* gives a full-fledged legendary account of the origin and development of this temple.[7] The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple stands majestically with its 134-foot white gateway tower (gopuram) covered in detailed sculptures from Hindu scriptures.

Administration:

The temple is maintained and administered by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu.[8]

Musical and Sculpted Pillars:

Shree Thanumalayan Sway Temple in Tamil Nadu is famous for its four musical pillars and a massive dancing hall with 1,035 sculptured pillars.

The Musical Pillars:

- **Single Stone Carving:** The temple has four musical pillars located in the Alankara Mandapam area. Workers carved each 18-foot pillar out of a single block of stone.
- **Musical Notes:** When you tap these pillars gently, they produce the seven basic musical notes (Sapthaswaras).
- **Ancient Engineering:** Artisans shaped these stones centuries ago with incredible precision to create this unique acoustic effect.

The Sculptured Pillars:

- **Dancing Hall:** The temple features a grand hall with 1,035 intricately carved pillars.
- **Detailed Art:** Every pillar displays unique figures, dancers, and scenes from Hindu scriptures.
- **Dravidia Style:** The carvings reflect the rich architectural traditions of South India.

CONCLUSION:

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple is more than an architectural wonder. It remains a living symbol of spiritual synthesis, pointing researchers and devotees alike to a profound legacy of unity, faith and artistic devotion. Thanumalayan Temple in Suchindram stands out for its amazing architectural elegance and divinity has 11 stories and is 44 meters tall.

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FAITH IN DIALOGUE, SOCIETY IN HARMONY: REASSESSING BISHOP CHRISTDHAS'S ROLE IN RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari, located at the southern tip of India, has a long history of diverse religions and communities. Within this pluralistic environment, strong church leadership is needed to maintain social harmony. This paper reassesses the historical and socio-religious contributions of Rt. Rev. G. Christdhas, who served as the third Bishop of the Church of South India (CSI) Kanyakumari Diocese from 1980 to 1997, examining his tenure as a foundational period for interreligious dialogue and pluralism. The communal disturbances in Kanyakumari District between 1980 and 1982 present a critical case study of how religious pluralism is tested and sustained in a diverse society. Triggered by political mobilization and disputes over religious symbols, the period witnessed attacks on churches, violence against Christian communities, and widespread fear. Amid this crisis, the role of religious leadership became pivotal in preventing further escalation and in restoring social cohesion. A central focus of the study is the response of religious leadership, particularly Bishop G. Christdhas of the Kanyakumari Diocese, C.S.I. along with other interfaith leaders played a critical role in peace-building through joint prayers, relief work, rebuilding of churches, and dialogue with the state government under M.G. Ramachandran. This paper examines the causes, courses, and consequences of the riots by drawing on primary and secondary sources, including commission reports and church records.

Keywords:

Kanyakumari Riots, Communal disturbances, pluralistic environment, Interfaith Peace-Building, Social cohesion.

INTRODUCTION:

Kanyakumari District occupies a distinctive position in the social and religious history of Tamil Nadu. Its geographical location, historical development, and interaction among different religious communities have contributed to a pluralistic social environment. Hindus, Christians, and Muslims have historically lived in close proximity, creating both opportunities for cultural interaction and, at particular moments, communal tensions. The period between 1980 and 1982 witnessed serious communal disturbances in different parts of Kanyakumari District. Religious processions public meetings, competing claims over religious identity, political mobilization, and incidents involving places of worship contributed to an atmosphere of tension. The disturbances resulted in deaths, attacks on houses and churches, destruction of property, and disruption of ordinary social life. It was within this difficult context that Bishop G. Christdhas, Bishop of the Kanyakumari Diocese of the Church of South India, played an important role. His contribution was not restricted to protecting ecclesiastical institutions. He became involved in relief activities, communication

with government authorities, peace initiatives, and efforts to encourage mutual respect between religious communities.

This paper therefore examines Bishop G. Christdhas as a religious leader who responded to communal conflict through humanitarian action, interreligious cooperation, and advocacy for religious freedom.

Historical Background Of Communal Tension:

One of the issues associated with religious sensitivities in the region concerned the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. The memorial had emerged within a contested religious and cultural environment surrounding the Vivekananda Rock and the existing religious traditions associated with the area. The broader religious atmosphere of Kanyakumari became increasingly sensitive during the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to the material examined for this study, organizations such as the RSS conducted Hindu Awakening Conferences and Hindu Unity Conferences. Public meetings, processions, and pamphlets contributed to the intensification of religious consciousness and, in some circumstances, communal polarization.

The demographic composition of the district was also used within communal arguments. The 1980 census was cited in discussions concerning the relative population of Christians and Hindus in the district. Such demographic questions became part of a wider discourse about religious identity and social power. Thus, the disturbances cannot be understood merely as isolated incidents. They developed within a wider atmosphere of religious competition, political mobilization, and competing perceptions of community identity.

Major Incidents Of Communal Violence:

Several incidents contributed to the escalation of communal tensions. On 26 November 1980, the Agastheeswaram C.S.I. Church and the residence of its pastor were attacked. This incident demonstrated that religious institutions and clergy residences had become vulnerable during the period of tension.

The situation became more serious in March 1982. During the Ammankovil festival at Mandacaud, six Christian fishermen were reportedly killed in police firing near Meenavar Gramam on 1 March 1982. The incident generated widespread unrest.

On 15 March 1982, two more Christian fishermen were killed in police firing at Melamanakudi. These incidents contributed to the rapid spread of communal tension across different parts of the district. The violence affected not only individuals but also houses, churches, mission buildings, and other institutional properties.

Destruction Of Churches And Christian Institutions:

The communal disturbances caused extensive material damage in areas under the Kanyakumari Diocese.

In Samathanapuram, 22 families were affected. Houses were reportedly set on fire and property was looted. Several churches also faced threats and attacks. The churches at Kovilvilai, Parakkai, Pulluvilai, Puthalam, Kulathuvilai, and Manavalapuram were reportedly threatened with demolition. The Arputhapuram Church was attacked and articles inside the church were burnt. At Krupasanapuram Church, the door was broken, property worth approximately Rs. 10,000 was looted, and other materials were burnt in the vestry. The pastor's residence was also attacked. Further damage was reported at Yecovarnagar,

Kurungudi, Vadivilai, Saralur, Cottaram, Eraniel Junction, Thalakkulam, Muttam, and Kannankurichi. These incidents reveal that communal violence extended beyond direct confrontation between individuals. Religious buildings became symbolic targets, and their destruction threatened the institutional and cultural presence of affected communities.

The Role Of Bishop G. Christdhas

The role of Bishop G. Christdhas during this crisis can be examined through three major dimensions.

Communication with Political Authorities

When Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran visited Nagercoil and the riot-affected areas, he met victims and consulted political and religious leaders concerning the restoration of peace.

Bishop G. Christdhas was among the religious leaders with whom the Chief Minister communicated. This interaction demonstrates the importance of religious leadership in government efforts to control communal conflict. Bishop G. Christdhas served as an important representative of the affected Christian community while also participating in the larger process of peace restoration.

Relief and Protection of Affected Communities

The Diocese responded to the damage suffered by Christian families and institutions. Financial assistance and relief were provided through church organizations and wider Christian networks. The South India Church, Tamil Nadu Christian Council, and National Council of Churches in India provided financial assistance and relief to affected people. The demolished churches were subsequently rebuilt. The Diocese's Secretary, Mr. P. Dharmaraj, and Advocate Mr. Gnanayya played significant roles during this period. The leadership of Bishop G. Christdhas therefore functioned within a wider institutional network involving clergy, administrators, lawyers, and relief organizations.

ADVOCACY FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: Perhaps the most significant aspect of Bishop G. Christdhas's response was the principle underlying his approach. The material emphasizes that Christianity should not be viewed as a foreign religion and that Indian Christians possessed the same rights as other citizens. The argument was based on the principle that religious freedom is an essential component of a free India. Individuals should have the freedom to worship according to their faith while respecting the religious rights of others. This position transformed the response from a narrow defense of Christian interests into a broader argument for religious liberty and social equality.

Interreligious Peacebuilding

An important feature of the response to the 1982 disturbances was the participation of religious leaders from different traditions. Kunrakkudi Adigalar and his associates came to Kanyakumari District and participated in peace activities. Joint prayers were conducted, and people were encouraged to live peacefully. Several religious and social leaders participated in these efforts, including Kunrakkudi Adigalar, Andal Arokkiyasaamy, Bishop G. Christdhas, Porur Adigalar, Saravanapuram Adigalar, Neelagiri Adigalar, Swami Ponnusamy Ayyappan, Haji Muhammad Yusuf, Arunai Sri Kumar, Muthukrishna Pillai, George Mathew, Ahmad Khan and Other peace-oriented religious and social leaders

The participation of people belonging to different religious traditions demonstrates that communal conflict was not universally accepted within either community. Instead, religious leaders could become agents of reconciliation.

The participation of Bishop G. Christdhas in this interreligious network is particularly significant because it shows that his response was based not only on defending his own community but also on cooperation with leaders from other religious traditions.

Bishop G. Christdhas and the Idea of Religious Pluralism

The response attributed to Bishop G. Christdhas reflects an important principle of religious pluralism. Religious pluralism does not simply mean the coexistence of different religions. It also involves recognition of the dignity, rights, and freedom of people belonging to different faith traditions. The argument that every Indian has the right to worship the God of his or her choice provides an important foundation for understanding this approach. His position can therefore be interpreted through three principles: Freedom of religion – Individuals should have the freedom to practice their faith. Mutual respect – Religious communities should respect the beliefs and practices of others. Human solidarity – Religious differences should not prevent communities from recognizing their shared humanity. These principles were particularly important in a district where religious communities lived in close social proximity.

Peacebuilding as a Form of Religious Leadership

The Kanyakumari disturbances demonstrate that religious leadership can operate beyond the boundaries of worship and ecclesiastical administration. The activities associated with Bishop G. Christdhas during the crisis involved:

1. Communicating with political authorities.
2. Representing the concerns of affected Christians.
3. Supporting relief activities.
4. Participating in peace initiatives.
5. Cooperating with leaders of other religions.
6. Supporting the reconstruction of damaged churches.
7. Advocating religious freedom.
8. Promoting peaceful coexistence.

Thus, his leadership can be understood as a form of peacebuilding leadership. In this sense, the response of Bishop G. Christdhas had both immediate and long-term significance.

Humanitarian Relief And Institutional Reconstruction:

Communal violence produces consequences that continue even after physical violence ends. The destruction of churches, mission buildings, houses, and personal property created significant difficulties for affected communities. The rebuilding of damaged churches therefore had a significance beyond physical reconstruction. Religious institutions often function as centres of education, social service, community organization, and spiritual life. The involvement of the Diocese and Christian organizations in relief and reconstruction helped restore a sense of security among affected people. The contribution of individuals such as P. Dharmaraj and Advocate Gnanayya also illustrates that institutional recovery depended upon cooperation among religious, administrative, and legal actors.

Although the immediate violence was brought under control, communal tensions did not disappear completely. The source material notes that areas such as Pulakkarai, Idaivilagam, Panavilai, Melakrishnanputhur, Bagavathipuram, and Gandhinagar continued to experience tension. Attempts to construct new churches sometimes encountered opposition. This indicates that restoring peace requires more than stopping physical violence. Social distrust, competing religious identities, and memories of violence can continue to influence community relations. Therefore,

the peace efforts associated with Bishop G. Christdhas and other leaders should be understood as part of a longer process of reconciliation.

Critical Interpretation:

The role of Bishop G. Christdhas can be critically assessed from three perspectives.

First: Religious Leadership

As Bishop of the Kanyakumari Diocese, he represented a major Christian institution during a period of crisis. His position gave him the ability to communicate the concerns of affected Christians to government authorities.

Second: Humanitarian Leadership

His involvement was connected with relief, reconstruction, and protection of affected communities. The institutional network surrounding the Diocese contributed to the recovery of victims.

Third: Interreligious Leadership

His participation alongside Hindu and Muslim religious leaders in peace initiatives demonstrates a willingness to move beyond communal boundaries. This third dimension is particularly significant for understanding his historical legacy. Rather than interpreting communal violence solely as a conflict between religious communities, his response demonstrates that religious institutions could also become instruments of reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

The communal disturbances in Kanyakumari during 1980–1982 were a significant episode in the district's modern social history. The violence resulted in deaths, destruction of houses and religious institutions, displacement, and the weakening of trust between communities. Within this difficult context, Bishop G. Christdhas played an important role in representing the affected Christian community, supporting relief and reconstruction, communicating with political authorities, and participating in interreligious peace initiatives.

Bishop Christdhas exemplified a model of "faith in dialogue." His efforts in relief, rehabilitation, and peace-building demonstrate how religious leadership can uphold constitutional values of secularism, fraternity, and freedom of religion during times of conflict. . By re-reading this historical episode, the paper argues that Kanyakumari's experience offers enduring lessons on managing diversity, countering communal polarization, and building a society rooted in mutual respect. It positions Bishop Christdhas not just as a religious head, but as a social mediator whose pluralistic vision helped preserve harmony in Kanyakumari.

His collaboration with religious leaders such as Kunrakkudi Adigalar and Haji Muhammad Yusuf demonstrates the possibility of cooperation across religious boundaries during periods of communal crisis. The historical significance of Bishop G. Christdhas therefore lies not merely in his position as a Church leader but also in his contribution to a broader vision of religious freedom, social equality, and communal harmony.The Kanyakumari experience suggests that religious pluralism becomes meaningful when it is expressed through dialogue, humanitarian action, mutual respect, and cooperation. The central lesson from this is that religion can become either a source of division or an instrument of reconciliation. The leadership of Bishop G. Christdhas demonstrates the potential of faith to contribute to peace, social recovery, and harmonious coexistence.

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St.FRANCIS XAVIER'S CATHEDRAL CHURCH AT KOTTAR

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ABSTRACT

St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar is an important historical and religious monument of Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. St. Francis Xavier's missionary activities in Kottar during the sixteenth century contributed to the growth of Christianity in the region. The cathedral has developed into an important centre of religious and cultural activities. It is also associated with the history of Devasahayam Pillai. This paper focuses on the historical development, architectural features, religious significance and cultural heritage of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Kottar.

KEYWORDS

St. Francis Xavier, Kottar Cathedral, Christian Mission, Religious Heritage, Devasahayam Pillai.

INTRODUCTION:

The St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral Festival at Kottar is one of the most important Christian festivals of Kanyakumari district. The cathedral is situated at kottar, Nagercoil, and is an important pilgrimage centre dedicated to St. Francis Xavier. The annual festival is celebrated from 24 November to 3 December for ten days. The main feast is observed on 3 December, the feast day of St. Francis Xavier. The Cathedral Church Festival is a special annul celebration held by Cathedral.

Historical Background

The history of the Kottar church is closely associated with St. Francis Xavier, who come to the southern coastal region of Indian in the 16th century. According to the Diocese of Kottar, Xavier visited Kottar and build a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, where he celebrated Mass. He also travelled through the coastal region and ministered to thousands of fisherman. After the death of St. Francis Xavier in1552, Kottar gradually developed into an important pilgrimage centre associated with Xavier was present at Kottar by 1616. The pilgrimage tradition therefore has a history of more than four centuries.

Development of the Cathedral

The church underwent several stages development.

- In 1865, the church was enlarged and renovated.
- A shrine dedicated to Our Lady was also developed.
- In 1930, when the Diocese of Kottar was established, St. Francis Xavier's church became the Cathedral of the new diocese.
- In 1942, during the 400 th anniversary commemorations of St. Francis Xavier's arrival in India, a tower dedicated to the saint and other religious structures were added.
- Further renovation took place in 2017, including the construction of two uniform towers.
- The cathedral in architecturally distinctive became it combines Romanesque, Gothic and Indian architectural elements.

Ten – Day Festival

- The annual festival begins on 24 November and concludes on 3 December.
- During these ten days:
  - Special Holy Masses are celebrated.
  - Novena prayers are conducted.
  - Priests and devotees from different places participate.
  - Various groups and communities in the solemn feast of St. Francis Xavier on 3 December.

The diocese states that the festival attracts very large numbers of pilgrims from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, with the crowds increasing substantially during the novena and feast days.

Car Festival- Ther Thiruvizha

The car procession is the most spectacular feature of the Kottar festival. It takes place on 1,2 and 3 December. The statues of St. Francis Xavier and the Blessed Virgin Mary are placed on decorated cars and taken through the surrounding streets.

The procession attracts thousands of people. Devotees offer prayers and fulfil vows during the procession. The participation of the people from different religious communities makes the event particularly significant in the social and cultural life of Kanyakumari district.

Religious Harmony

One of the special Characteristics of the Kottar festival is religious hormony. The festival is not attended only by Christians. People belonging to different communities also visit the shrine and participate in the celebrations. The Diocese specifically records that Hindu devotes also participate in the car procession and offer vows. Thus, the festival represents the long-standing tradition of communal coexistence and religious harmony in Kanyakumai district.

Shrine of Our Lady

An important part of the cathedral complex is the Shrine of Our Lady, According to the Diocese, the shrine stands on the traditional site associated with the chapel of Our Lady built by St. Francis Xavier. The Shrine is visited by pilgrims throughout the year, and it becomes especially croed during the annual festival. Devotees offer prayers and perform acts of devotion as part of their vows.

Pilgrimage Centre

Kottar Cathedral is an important pilgrimage centre in South India. Pilgrims come from: Kanyakumari district People visit the cathedral to seek blessings, offer petitions and express gratitude for favours received. The Diocese describes Kottar as a major shrine of St. Francis Xavier outside Goa.

Public Importance

The festival is so important to the people of Kanyakumari that the District Administration has regularly declared 3 December as a local holiday on account of the St. Xavier Church festival. For example, the district administration declared a local holiday for the festival on 3 December in Kanyakumari District. This demonstrates the festival's importance not only as a religious event but also as a major social and cultural event of the district.

Cultural Importance

The Kottar festival has an important place in the cultural history of Kanyakumari because it brings together: Religious and Spirituality, Traditional processions, Local customs, Community participation, Pilgrimage traditions, Religious harmony. The car procession is particularly important because the tradition of taking religious images in decorated cars has become an integral part of the festival's cultural identity.

Economic and Tourism Importance

The festival also contributes to the local economy. Large numbers of pilgrims and visitors come to Kottar during the festival period. This benefits: Local shops, Transport services, Small traders, Food vendors, Accommodation providers, Other local businesses. It also increases the visibility of Kottar and Nagercoil as religious and cultural tourism destinations.

CONCLUSION

The Kottar St. Francis Xavier Cathedral Festival is one of the most significant festivals of Kanyakumari district. Beginning on 24 November and ending on 3 December, the ten-day celebration combines religious devotion, pilgrimage, traditional processions and community Kanyakumari District. More importantly, the participation of people from different religious communities makes the festival an excellent example of religious harmony, cultural unity and shared heritage. Its long history, large-scale pilgrimage and continued recognition by the district administration have made the Kottar Cathedral Festival an important part of the religious, social and cultural heritage of Kanyakumari district.

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NAVARATHRI GHOSHAYATHRA IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT: HISTORY, TRADITION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.

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ABSTRACT

The Navarathri Ghoshayathra is an important religious and cultural tradition associated with the historical region of Travancore and present-day Kanyakumari district. The procession reflects the close relationship between temple traditions, royal heritage, ritual practices, and popular participation. The movement of sacred images and ceremonial objects during the Navarathri festival represents a long-standing cultural connection between Padmanabhapuram, Suchindram and other important centres of worship. This paper examines the historical origins and evolution of the Navarathri Ghoshayathra, with special emphasis on its association with the Travancore royal tradition. It also analyses the rituals, music, traditional art forms, processional practices and community participation associated with the festival. The study highlights how the Ghoshayathra has preserved elements of the shared cultural heritage of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It further explores the contemporary relevance of the procession in sustaining regional identity, cultural memory and religious traditions. The paper argues that Navarathri Ghoshayathra is not merely a religious procession but also a significant expression of the historical and cultural heritage of Kanyakumari.

Keywords: *Navarathri Ghoshayathra, Kanyakumari, Padmanabhapuram, Travancore, Cultural Heritage, Temple Traditions, Royal Tradition.*

INTRODUCTION

Temples formed the nucleus of social life in the country. They integrated the various segments of the society from diversity. Temple is a place of worship. A sacred house of gods and goddesses, it catered to the religious needs of the people and provides a link between man and god and the earthly life and the divine life. Worshipping gods in temples not only infuses divinity and purity to the heart of the devotees but also it is natural outlet of their religious impulses and sentiments. They believed that if gods and goddesses were appeased, there would be rain and prosperity. So, the heavenly beings were pleased with offerings of *abhishekhas* (sacred bath) oblations, rituals and festivals according to *agamic* prescriptions. The South Indian temples have always played a vital role in the religious, social, cultural and economic life of the people.[1]

While singing the glory of our motherland, the national poet Subramania Bharathi says: *All the nations in the world it is Bharat that nurtured the highest culture and civilization*. From his words we learn that India had been considered as a holy piece of land in the whole world. Why India is called a holy land? Why it is known as *Punya Bhoomi* (Holy Land)? In his poem Bharathi has given a list of reasons why India is called as a holy land. The first and foremost feature of India is its divine affinity. The poet says that India is a land of temples which elevate the people to spiritual dignity.

Kanyakumari District is having temples of great antiquity and cultural importance. Temples also functioned as a source of history. Music and dance formed a regular part of the temple festivals. Educational institutions were also run by the temples. A copper plate inscription dated A.D.866 informs us that an

institution of learning in literary and martial arts was established in the campus of the Vishnu temple at Parthibhasekarapuram. The temple of Nagaraja at Nagercoil which unifies the four streams of Indian religion Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism is a fine example of religious integration. The temple also serves as an arena of sports. On Shivarathiri several devotees start from the temple at Thirumalai and finish their marathon pilgrimage at Thirunattalam covering nearly 100 km. in 12 hours. That is called as Shivalayaottam. Thus, we have seen the Hindu temples were not only places of worship but the very focus of society.[2] *The Navarathri Ghosha Yatra (Navarathri procession) in Kanyakumari district is a significant religious and cultural tradition associated with the Navarathri celebrations. It reflects the historical and cultural connections between the erstwhile Travancore region and Kanyakumari.* The procession is connected with the worship of Goddess Saraswati and the Navarathri festival.

Historical background

The tradition is closely associated with the Travancore royal tradition. Padmanabhapuram, located in present-day Kanyakumari district, was the capital of Travancore before the capital was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram. The Navarathri celebrations were an important part of the Travancore royal religious tradition. Even after the political reorganisation of the region, the ritual connection between Padmanabhapuram and Thiruvananthapuram has continued.[2]

Thus, the procession can be studied not merely as a temple festival but as an important example of historical continuity, royal tradition and cultural interaction between present-day Tamil Nadu and Kerala.The three principal deities.The procession is centred on three sacred images: Saraswati Devi – Padmanabhapuram

The Saraswati idol is kept at the Thevarakettu[3] of Padmanabhapuram Palace. During the procession, Saraswati Devi is traditionally carried on a decorated elephant. She represents knowledge, learning, wisdom and the arts.Kumara Swamy – Kumarakovil/Velimala.The idol of Kumara Swamy (Murugan) comes from Kumarakovil at the foot of Velimala. During the procession it is carried in a decorated palanquin and, later in the journey, traditionally displayed on the famous silver horse. Munnuttinanka/ Munnoottinanga – Suchindram. The goddess associated with Suchindram Sthanumalayan Temple is the third important deity. Her idol joins the procession after travelling from Suchindram to Padmanabhapuram. She is traditionally carried in a decorated palanquin.[4]

The sacred sword – Udaval. One of the most distinctive features of the ceremony is the ceremonial royal sword (Udaval). Before the procession begins, the sword is ceremonially handed over at Uppirika Malika in Padmanabhapuram Palace. The sword symbolises the authority and continuity of the Travancore royal tradition. Contemporary reports show that the ceremony continues to involve officials from Kerala and Tamil Nadu and representatives connected with the Devaswom administration. The presence of the sword gives the procession a special royal and historical character, distinguishing it from an ordinary temple procession.[5]

Beginning of the procession

The three idols converge at Padmanabhapuram Palace.

The procession generally begins after the ceremonial rituals at the palace. Saraswati Devi leads the procession on an elephant, while Kumaraswamy and Munnuttinanka travel in decorated palanquins. Traditional music, devotional chants, ceremonial honours and the participation of devotees add to the grandeur of the event.[6]

Route towards Thiruvananthapuram

The procession travels from Padmanabhapuram in Kanyakumari district towards Thiruvananthapuram, crossing the present Kerala–Tamil Nadu border.[7]

Important stopping and reception points have included:

Padmanabhapuram, Kuzhithurai, Kaliakkavilai, Neyyattinkara, Karamana. East Fort, ThiruvananthapuramThe journey takes place over several days, with the idols being received and worshipped at important temples along the route. Contemporary accounts describe a journey of more than 100 km and the participation of a large accompanying group.[8]

Reception at Kaliakkavilai

The procession receives a ceremonial welcome at Kaliakkavilai, where Kerala police, revenue and Devaswom authorities participate.[9] This is particularly significant because Kaliakkavilai represents the crossing between the Tamil Nadu and Kerala regions.Therefore, the procession symbolically demonstrates the continuing cultural relationship between Kanyakumari and Kerala despite the modern state boundary.[10]

Halt at temples

During the journey, the idols are kept at important temples for overnight stays and ritual worship. For example, recent processions have included a halt at Kuzhithurai Mahadeva Temple, followed by a halt at Neyyattinkara Sree Krishna Swamy Temple, before proceeding towards Thiruvananthapuram. These halts transform the journey into a moving religious pilgrimage, with local communities participating in welcoming and worshipping the deities.

Arrival at Thiruvananthapuram. On reaching Thiruvananthapuram, the procession enters the historic East Fort area.

The sacred sword is ceremonially received near Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple, and the deities are taken to their respective places of worship.[11]

The three deities are traditionally placed as follows

Place of worship during Navarathri Saraswati Devi Padmanabhapuram

Navarathri Mandapam,Thiruvananthapuram.

Kumara Swamy Kumarakovil/Velimala Aryasala Devi Temple

Munnuttinanka Suchindram Chenthitta Temple

Religious significance

Navarathri celebrates the power of the Goddess and the triumph of good over evil. It is particularly associated with the worship of Shakti and, in the Kerala tradition, with Saraswati worship, learning and Vidyarambham. The presence of Saraswati Devi in the procession gives the festival a strong association with knowledge, education, music and the arts. Kerala Tourism also notes the importance of Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati worship during Navarathri.

Cultural significance for Kanyakumari

For a historical study of Kanyakumari district, the Navarathri procession is especially important because it demonstrates:

- Historical continuity – The tradition preserves memories of the Travancore period.
- Tamil–Malayalam continuity – The tradition preserves memories of the Travancore period.
- Tamil–Malayalam cultural interaction – Kanyakumari was historically connected with the Malayalam-speaking Travancore kingdom, while today it forms part of Tamil Nadu.

Shared religious traditions – Temples and communities on both sides of the present border participate in the festival.

Royal heritage – The Udaval and Padmanabhapuram Palace connect the festival with the Travancore monarchy.

Living heritage – The tradition is not simply a historical memory; the annual procession continues to be performed.

Community participation – Devotees, temple authorities, government officials, police and local communities participate in different stages of the journey.[12]

The Navarathri Ghosha Yatra of Kanyakumari district is much more than a religious procession. It is a living symbol of the historical relationship between Kanyakumari and Travancore. The journey of Saraswati Devi from Padmanabhapuram, Kumara Swamy from Kumarakovil and Munnuttinanka from Suchindram to Thiruvananthapuram preserves a remarkable tradition that crosses the modern Tamil Nadu–Kerala boundary.[13]

Navaratri, which literally means nine nights, falls in the months of September / October, every year. These nine days are marked by the worship of the nine forms of Goddess Shakthi/Devi. The festival is celebrated in different ways in various parts of India. In Kerala the final three days of Navaratri - Ashtami, Navami, and Vijayadashami-are set apart for the worship of Goddess Saraswati - the goddess of wisdom and learning.[14]

Books are placed in the pooja rooms (worship rooms) of houses and temples for worship on the Ashtami day. On Vijayadashami day, the books are taken out ceremoniously for reading after the worship of Goddess Saraswati. In Kerala, this day is also considered auspicious for initiating the children into the world of letters which is called Vidyarambham. Thousands of children move their little fingers in rice or sand spread on a platter to write their first letters guided by an elder. Ayudha Pooja (Worship of Implements) is also practiced in Kerala. On the Navami day the implements are worshipped along with the images of goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati.

Navaratri, was one of the most famous annual festivals celebrated in the Travancore Maharaja's palace at Padmanabhapuram. From 1015 (Malayalam era) onwards the festival was being celebrated in the palace at Thiruvananthapuram alone. The festival begins with the procession of the idols of Goddess Saraswati from the Padmanabhapuram palace, Velayudha Perumal from Veli Malai Kumarakovil and Munnuttinanka from Suchindrum. While the idol of Saraswati would be carried on a caparisoned tusker, the idols of Velayudha Perumal and Munnuttinanka are carried on a decorated 'silver horse' and palanquin respectively.[15]

In the afternoon, prior to the festival, the procession would reach Karamana, a suburb of Thiruvananthapuram from where it would achieve a greater grandeur. The procession enters the fort through the east gate. The head of the Travancore royal family will offer worship to the idol. The

idol of Saraswati would be alighted and taken inside the Kuthiramalika palace, Velayudha Perumal to the Aryasala temple and Munnuttinanka to the Chenthitta temple.[16]

Navarathri, meaning 'Nine Nights,' is a vibrant and multifaceted festival celebrated throughout Kerala. Typically occurring in September or October, these nine days are dedicated to the special worship of the nine forms of Goddess Shakti/Devi. The final three days of Navarathri Durgashtami, Mahanavami, and Vijayadashami are particularly significant for the worship of Goddess Saraswati, the deity of wisdom and learning. During this period, devotees place their books and work tools in the pooja (worship) rooms of homes and temples, a practice known as Ayudha Pooja (worship of vocational tools).[17]

On Vijayadashami day, a unique tradition takes place in Kerala. Words symbolizing the name of God are written on the tongue of a child with a golden ring, and the child is made to write letters on a plate of rice with the help of elders. This practice, known as Vidyarambham, marks the introduction of children to the world of knowledge and letters. Ceremonies are held across the state, with prominent locations including Panachikkadu Saraswati Temple in Kottayam, Thunchan Parambu in Malappuram, Attukal Bhagavathy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Guruvayur Sree Krishna Temple in Thrissur, and Chottanikkara Devi Temple in Ernakulam and other temples of Kerala and Kanyakumari districts.[18]

Navarathri, celebrated in various ways across India, is marked by worship of the nine forms of Goddess Shakti/Devi. In Kerala, the last three days – Ashtami, Navami, and Vijayadashami – are dedicated to Goddess Saraswati. Books are placed in pooja rooms on Ashtami day, and on Vijayadashami, they are ceremoniously taken out for reading after the worship of Saraswati. The day is also significant for initiating children into the world of letters through Vidyarambham. Thousands of children write their first letters in rice or sand spread on a platter, guided by elders.[19]

Ayudha Pooja, the worship of implements, is another unique practice in Kerala. On Navami day, tools and instruments are worshipped alongside the images of goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Parvati. Historically, Navarathri was one of the most famous annual festivals celebrated in the Travancore Maharaja's palace at Padmanabhapuram. Since 1015 (Malayalam era), the festival has been celebrated in Thiruvananthapuram alone. The festival begins with the procession of the idols of Goddess Saraswati from the Padmanabhapuram palace, Velayudha Perumal from Veli Malai Kumarakovil, and Munnuttinanka from Suchindrum.[20]

The procession reaches Karamana, a suburb of Thiruvananthapuram, where it achieves greater grandeur. It enters the fort through the east gate, where the head of the Travancore royal family offers worship to the idol. The idol of Saraswati is taken inside the Kuthiramalika palace, Velayudha Perumal to the Aryasala temple, and Munnuttinanka to the Chenthitta temple.[21]

Navarathri also commemorates the legend of Goddess Durga defeating the demon Mahishasura. Blessed with immortality by Lord Brahma, Mahishasura could only be defeated by a woman. Over time, he became a powerful force, attacking people on Earth. Finally, Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu, and Lord Shiva created Goddess Durga, equipping her with weapons to destroy

Mahishasura.[22]After a fierce battle lasting ten days, Durga defeated Mahishasura when he transformed into a buffalo, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.[23]

Conclusion

The Navarathri Ghoshayathra in Kanyakumari district is an important example of the region's rich historical and cultural heritage. Its roots in the Travancore tradition reveal the close historical relationship between Kanyakumari and Kerala. The ceremonial procession, temple rituals, music, and participation of local communities preserve a cultural tradition that has continued across generations. Although Kanyakumari became part of Tamil Nadu, the Ghoshayathra continues to reflect the shared cultural memories of the former Travancore region. Thus, the Navarathri Ghoshayathra can be viewed not merely as a religious celebration but also as a living symbol of historical continuity, cultural interaction, and regional identity.

Ends Notes

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16. *Accounts and local records relating to the Navarathri festival and the ceremonial procession from Padmanabhapuram to Thiruvananthapuram.*
17. *Oral traditions and interviews with temple authorities, local residents and cultural practitioners may be used as primary sources for documenting contemporary practices of the Ghoshayathra.*
18. *Field observations and photographic documentation of the Navarathri Ghoshayathra can be incorporated to examine its present-day ritual and cultural significance.*
19. *Ibid.*
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SAFE GUARDERS OF TRADITION: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PERPETUATING KANYAKUMARI'S CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu specifically the region known as Nanjil Nadu—is world-renowned for its ancient traditions, artistic treasures, customs, and culinary heritage; All of the above reinforce its distinctive and rich cultural heritage. Despite being frequently undervalued or marginalized in society, women have made an essential contribution to maintaining and enriching this cultural mosaic. Although women have encountered historical challenges and societal expectations, they have been instrumental in shaping and preserving India's cultural traditions over successive generations. Moreover, Indian women have contributed substantially to the preservation and promotion of traditional arts and cultural heritage. Women have played a vital role in sustaining cultural heritage and traditional customs, while also ensuring the transmission of ancestral knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. Their contributions have also been noteworthy in traditional handicrafts such as weaving, pottery, and embroidery, as well as in classical performing arts and martial traditions, including Kathakali, Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and Kalaripayattu. By learning traditional art forms and passing them on to the next generation through teaching, women artists, artisans, and performing artists have taken on the responsibility of preserving and safeguarding this rich cultural heritage. Through their dedication and expertise, they have made significant contributions to the continued growth and sustainability of traditional art forms, ensuring that they remain vibrant, preserved, and continue to flourish in the present era. The objective of this study is to explain the various contributions made by women in ensuring the sustainability of Tamil culture, while also examining the challenges they face and the opportunities available for enhancing their progress and recognition. By analyzing the historical, social, and familial factors that influence women's participation in cultural activities, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between gender roles and cultural traditions in Kanyakumari district. The topic " Safe Guarders of Tradition: The Role of Women in Perpetuating Kanyakumari's Culture addresses a central theme in South Indian sociological and folkloric studies. It focuses on the pivotal role women play in preserving the intangible cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu's southernmost district, adapting these traditions to changing times, and passing them on to the next generation.

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari. Nanjil Nadu, a district in Tamil Nadu, is known all over the world for its historical traditions, artistic treasures, customs and culinary legacy; all of which strengthen its distinctive and rich cultural heritage. Women, sometimes devalued or neglected in society, have been vital in the maintenance and enrichment of this cultural mosaic. Women have been pivotal in shaping and safeguarding India's cultural traditions across generations, yet history and society have often been stacked against them. Indian women have made enormous contribution in preserving and promoting traditional arts and cultural heritage. Women have been crucial to the preservation of cultural heritage and traditional rituals as well as to the transmission of ancestral knowledge and abilities from one generation to the next. Their inputs have been no less remarkable in conventional handicrafts like weaving, ceramics and embroidery,

classical theatrical arts and martial arts like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Kathak, Bharatanatyam and Kalaripayattu. Women artists, crafters and performing artists have taken upon themselves the task of maintaining and safeguarding this rich cultural heritage by mastering ancient art forms and passing them on to the next generation through instruction. its commitment and knowledge have been integral to the ongoing expansion and sustainability of traditional art forms, ensuring its vibrancy, preservation and continuous flourishing today. The present study seeks to illuminate the multiple ways in which women contribute to the sustainability of Tamil culture, and to examine the obstacles they confront and the opportunities that exist for them to enhance their growth and acknowledgment. The present study attempts to explain the complicated relationship between gender roles and cultural traditions in Kanyakumari area by evaluating the historical, social and familial elements that affect women's participation in cultural activities.

The paper 'Safe Guarders of Tradition: The Role of Women in Perpetuating Kanyakumari's Culture' deals with one of the central themes in South Indian sociological and folkloric studies. It highlights the important contribution of women in the transmission of the intangible cultural heritage of the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu, to adapt these traditions to the changing times and to transmit them to the next generation.

Social Background Of The Women In District Of Kanyakumari

The Kanyakumari district, situated near the southern extremity of Tamil Nadu, is a unique place that combines the cultural history of the former Kingdom of Travancore and the traditions of Tamil Nadu. Women have traditionally played a central role in this region where the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean converge. The matrilineal structure of the Travancore tradition has made women the caretakers of the family and community's cultural history, conserving and transferring traditions to successive generations[i].

Kanyakumari has a unique socio-cultural milieu formed by the customary rights of the tribal communities (Kani tribe) on forest, livelihood practices along the coast, the fusion of different religions (Christianity, Hinduism and folk worship of the region) and local agricultural methods. Women in this region perpetually conserve these traditional integrations through home-based arts, the conduct of rituals, social networking, economic management, and the maintenance of oral histories[ii].

Key Elements Of The Women's Role In The Kanyakumari Culture

Tribal Women Knowledge and Ancient Traditional Medicine (Kani Tribe): In the Agasthyamalai region at the foot of the Western Ghats:

- Sharing of traditional knowledge of plant species: The Kani tribe women retain traditional medicinal knowledge which includes usage of plants and therapeutic procedures passed on orally from generation to generation.
- Environmental Conservation: They still conduct and preserve native agricultural rituals, forest conservation methods and folk songs celebrating local flora and fauna[iii].

Mukkuvar social heritage and ocean region societies:

The women of the coastal fishing communities of Kanyakumari possess a

unique position in the socio-cultural fabric:

Market as a cultural hub Men are engaged in the fishing sector at sea, while women are involved in post-catchment work, processing and local fish selling operations; they are the financial and cultural pillars of coastal households[iv].

Rituals and Catholic folk customs Women uphold folk-Catholic traditions associated with coastal saints and sea deities, sacred vows, arrangements of seasonal festivals and oral storytelling[v].

Performing Arts & Home Rituals:

Folk Music & Oral History:

Women sing community history and myth into memory, from rhythmic bow-song recitals of Villu Paattu at temple meetings to intensely emotional Oppari songs sung in times of loss and celebration[vi].

Home is sacrosanct. Female elders are the bearers of sacred heritage: they create elaborate Kolam designs from rice flour, observe seasonal Vratam fasts and are the pillar of the family's birth and marriage customs[vii].

Assault on the holy mountain

One of the biggest movements for women's liberation in the southern Tamil Nadu was the 'Upper Cloth Struggle' (also called the 'Thol Seelai Porattam') during the early 19th century, the time of the Travancore Kingdom. During that time, Nadar women were not permitted to cover their upper body in the presence of upper castes This practice was a symbol of the oppression of women and gender discrimination[viii].

Christian missionaries preached education and human dignity to downtrodden communities. Nadar women protested and signed petitions against the discriminatory clothing code. It was only after a protracted battle that the Travancore government formally gave them the right to wear upper garments in 1859. The revolution was a milestone in the struggle for women's dignity, equality and cultural history[ix]. The traditional arts rooted in nature are the custodians of rural women in Kanyakumari who perpetuate them as a livelihood and a cultural identity.

Lace Making (Bobbin Lace and Hand Lace)

Women have carried on the crafts of bobbin lace-making and needlework down the generations. Nagercoil and Mulagumoodu. These talents were introduced by the London Missionary Society (LMS) and Carmelite nuns in the 19th century[x].

Palm Leaf Handicraft:

Women, especially in Thovalai and Agastheeswaram, are the main artists who produce different types of artistic objects using palm leaves[xi].

Screw Pine Mat and Pineapple Fiber Weaving

Women in the Kalkulam area still keep alive the traditional craft of mat and bag weaving from the fibers obtained from the leaves of pineapple and the fronds of the screw pine plant growing along the banks of water bodies[xii].

Oral literature and the country side

Mothers and old ladies have a very important part in preservation of folklore and oral traditions of Kanyakumari.

Lullabies & Dirges:

The lullabies and dirges of rural women are a traditional oral record of the history and social organization of the area[xiii].

Herbal Knowledge of Kani Tribal Women:

Forest dwelling Kani tribal women in Pechiparai, Kothaiyar and Agasthiyarmalai have traditional knowledge of herbal treatment and devotional songs for forest deities[xiv].

Festival Songs and Villuppattu:

During temple festivals, ladies sing Villuppattu (bow-song) and other traditional festival songs, which pass on the history and customs of the region's folk deities to subsequent generations.

Women are the spiritual center of the family and are key to maintaining and passing along religious and domestic customs[xv].

Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple & Festivals:

The Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple is often called "Sabarimala for women" where women are an integral part of the Irumudi Kattuthal (preparation of the sacred offering bundle) and fasting ceremonies[xvi].

Domestic Rituals:

Senior women of the household are responsible for the faithful performance of traditional rituals during events like as the Kolam (floor art) ritual during the Margazhi month, Karthigai Deepam celebrations and wedding rites, e.g., Thali Perukku and Mulaippari Eduthal[xvii].

Women have successfully adapted traditional arts to the new economic context through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and economic empowerment. This is how the evolution goes: The traditional status changes into a modern micro-enterprise, production methods shifting from individual home-based work to collective production by SHGs, market linkages expanding from local markets and middlemen to Poompuhar, NABARD and e-commerce, and economic outcomes improving from minimal income to stable monthly income and financial independence[xviii].

Future Needs and Challenges

Kanyakumari district is a place characterized by its own natural beauty and cultural heritage. In the rural sections of the district, women have kept their traditional arts and handicrafts alive for generations. But the introduction of mass manufactured machine-made goods and exploitation by middlemen had an adverse effect on their economic well-being. Here, the rise of digital technology and direct selling through e-commerce and social commerce platforms are not only reigniting the livelihoods of these village women but also fast-forwarding their role in showcasing and sustaining Kanyakumari's culture and traditional handicrafts at a global level[xix].

These are manufactured in family enterprises and in self-help groups in coastal and rural villages rich in palms. Manakkudi and Chinnamuttom are famous for the manufacture of 'Madapetti' (boxes used by fisherman for storing fishing implements) and 'Olai Kadagams' (food containers made of palm leaves). Today, women in villages like Rajakkamangalam and Ganapathipuram are running traditional centers producing palm-leaf mats, boxes, food-covering fans and a variety of palm-fibre products, including baskets and ropes[xx].

There are many small-scale industries and export operations in the Nagercoil area making handcraft items like bowls, spoons, candle holders and jewelry and toys from coconut shells[xxi]. In the areas of Myladi and Suchindram, which are famous for wood and stone sculptures, there are many women craftsmen who make bird feeders and ornamental lamps by sanding and polishing coconut shells, and these items reach a global market. Their effort in reviving heritage of Kanyakumari is tremendous[xxii].

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari district's culture is not just in its monuments or historical

documents, but continues to live in the everyday lives, traditional crafts and oral legacy kept by the women of the region. With proper training and access to larger markets and assistance in contemporary design, the custodians of tradition of Kanyakumari's cultural heritage can get wider attention in the global arena and further boost the livelihoods of rural women.

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"PEN AND PON": THE GOLD ORNAMENT CULTURE OF KANYAKUMARI AND IT'S HISTORICAL INFLUENCE FROM ANCIENT TAMIL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The tradition of gold ornamentation among women has long historical perpetuation in Tamil society, with evidence from Sangam literature indicating the significance of ornaments in women's adornment, pulchritude, social identity and culture. From the early historic period, gold ornaments were not merely decorative objects but also expressed a symbol of prosperity, social position, and cultural values. Building upon this historical background, this paper tends to focus on the progression and perpetuation of gold ornament culture among women in Kanyakumari from the ancient period to contemporary. It examines how the use of gold ornaments has remained an important form of cultural representation through festive like marriage, religious ceremonies, and other significant social and family occasions. The historical association of Kanyakumari with erstwhile Travancore state also contributed to the interaction of regional traditions, customs and craftmanship adding new dimensions to existing culture of ornamentation. The paper further considers the continuity of traditional gold craftmanship in the region, including the importance of Vadaserry as a centre of indigenous gold ornament production and its subsequent recognition through Geographical Indication (GI) status. Rather than treating gold ornaments merely as material objects, the study views them as cultural symbols through which women have continued to express identity, status and regional heritage. By tracing the tradition from the literary evidence of the Sangam period to contemporary practices, the paper seeks to demonstrate how gold ornaments have survived across historical changes while continuing to hold cultural significance in the lives of women in Kanyakumari.

Keywords: *Kanyakumari, Women gold ornament culture, Travancore, Vadaserry, GI Tag, Ceremonial culture, Traditional craftmanship, Sangam literary evidence.*

Historical Background

The ornamentation also known as "Anikalalan" or "Abarnam", is essentially a part of an oldest forms of cultural expression in Tamil society.[xxiii] From the earliest stages of human evolution, people have used objects obtained naturally like bones, animal teeth, shells, pearls etc, to decorate their bodily features. With transformation of human society, these objects taken shape into an elaborate ornament through use of metals and precious stones like pearls, ivory, lapis lazuli, silver, gold etc.[xxiv] Thus, the history of ornamentation is closely associated with the development of human civilization, craftmanship, social stratification and organisation. In Tamil cultural context, ornamentation occupies a primitive place in the history of social, cultural and economic life. The practice of decorating the body through ornaments was not limited to the expression of physical beauty, but overtime transformed to wider cultural notions and became associate with social identity, prosperity, status and beliefs, and customary practices.

The Sangam literature provides significant sources for understanding this early history of ornamentation. Sangam literature contains numerous references

to ornaments worn on different parts of the body and limelight's that, adornment had already become an established aspect of Tamil social life. Women (pen) in particular, are frequently described through references to the ornaments they wore, which depicts their cultural and social position. Terms associated with adornment occur extensively in Sangam literature, demonstrating that ornamentation had acquired a distinct place. Several notable poems of the Sangam corpus frequently refer to women ornamenting them with objects like beads, pearls, bangles (kai ani), necklace (maar ani), earing (kaathu ani), headgears (thalai ani), rings (viral ani), anklets (Kaal ani) and other forms of jewellery.[xxv] The corpus also associate ornamentation with emotional and social experiences of women. This sources and evidential records depicted especially in Sangam literature of Natrinai, Kalitogai,[xxvi] Ainkurunuru,[xxvii] Agananuru, and Kurunthogai[xxviii] poems represent the historical evidence of women ornamentation. In giving examples from the poetic work of Sangam literature translated in English, can highlight the aspect of jewellery used by Tamil society women.

- The verse from Akananuru (176), there is a poem depicting about the ornaments worn by women,

"மலர்தர் உண்கண் நான் இமை
முன்னகைக்
குறுந்தொடி துடக்கிய
நெந்தொட்டார்
விடுத்து உடன்றனள் போலும்".

- அகம். 176

"With her dark, beautiful eyes and a shy smile, Wearing short bangles and long chains of gold, she appeared as though she had adorned herself with ornaments".[xxix]

- The verse from Natrinai (258), there is a line highlighting women wearing ornaments in town Narungur (present day Kanyakumari),

"நறுங்கூழிப் பட்டினத்து அன்ன,
இவள்
நெறுங்கு ஏர் எல்லவை ஓடும்
கண்படை".

— நற்றிணை 258

"She is like the women of the prosperous town of Narungur; I have seen her moving about with closely fitting ornaments adorning her".[xxx]

- The verse from Akananuru (75), there is line depicting ornamentation in chest of a female body.

"ஆயிழை மகளிர் ஆரம் தாங்கிய
அலர் முலை ஆகத்து..." (அகம். 75)

"Upon the blossoming breasts of the women adorned with beautiful jewels, the necklace rests".[xxxi]

- The verse from Akananuru (39), a line denoted as,

"திருந்து இழைப் பணைத்தோளி".

- (அகம். 39)

"The women with broad, palm like shoulders adorned with beautiful ornaments".[xxxii]

- The verse from Natrinai (188), a line depicts the women wearing rings on her finger,

"இழை மகளிர் இயங்கு வளையத்
தொடும் மெல்விரல்
மோதிறம் போல"

(நற். 188)

"Like a ring worn on the soft fingers of women adorned with jewels, touching the moving bangles".[xxxiii]

These few examples of Sangam literary works not only give historians the substantiation of sources, but also limelight the cultural aspects of Tamil society. Apart from Sangam literary evidences even Tamil epics (Aimperumkappiyangal) enlists the different types of jewellery worn by women. Connecting ornaments with the five Tamil epics gives valid evidence of a tie between women and jewellery. Women depicted in these epics were praised by ornamentation related with her. That includes Civaka Chintamani, Kunadalakesi, Manimegalai, Valaiyapathi and Silapathikaram. In these epics insights of ornamentation predominantly seen through identity and values. Silapathikaram prominently connects Kannagi with Silambu (anklet),[xxxiv] Manimegalai reflects women's adornment of waist chains,[xxxv] Civaka Chintamani describes women adorned with ornaments like (headgear, makarakunatalam, totu, ponnolai, katippu, maanimakaram, mutta vatam, kinkini, patakam, velvalai etc)[xxxvi] ,Valaiyapathi as represented as bangle ornament and Kunadalakesi represents kundela which means ear ornament.[xxxvii] But there are other ornaments also mentioned in the epics notably pulagam (hair ornament), poorpaanai (hair ornament), theyagam (forehead jewellery), sevipoo (ear ornament), vaanai pathavai mothiram (rings), pariyagam (hathpoo), sudagam(bangle at end), pavalavalai (bangle at middle), aadaikattu (ornaments hanging at waist), virisikai (waist jewel), kadagavalai tholvalai (arm bracelet), veerasangili (ornament wore under chest), muthaaram (aaram chain), vagumaalai (chain), evadi (choker), kuthampai (earing), thangthalam (hair ornament), alagasudam (forehead accessories), kaamar kantikai (bangles), cuutagam (bracelets), nuntotar (necklace), toyyakam pullakam (head ornament), pariyakam, nuupuram, paatakalm, satangai and ariyankam (anklets) etc.[xxxviii] All this Sangam sources gives us a detailed explanation of how women were related with ornaments and how that transformed into a cultural aspect is seen through the evolution of Tamil society.

Bloom Of Gold Ornamentation

From the ancient Tamil society gold (pon) became one of the most valued materials in context of prosperity, prestige and social position. As already given, the Sangam literature particularly Akananuru, Natrinai, Kurunthogai and Purananuru refers anthology pon (gold) in connection with women in several poem lines (adigal). The use of gold in jewellery also reflected the economic capacity and social recognition. The historical background of gold's importance bloom only after the development of maritime and inland trade between ancient Tamilaham and Rome (yavanas).[xxxix] The circulation of Roman gold coins and the accumulation of gold, increased usage of the material in different forms. The usage of gold gradually became preferred material of wealth and prestige expression. To express the beauty, culture and status of gold, there evolved artisanal experts (Kaivalkamiyar). The existence of skilled craftsman with specialised skill made ornamentation of gold into different forms of jewellery. The evidence of gold smelting has been found at Pattanam in present Kerala, which is also mentioned in Akananuru poem 149 and Purananuru poem 126 and 343,[xl] can be evidence to limelight the connectivity of Tamilagham and Kerala. Particularly denoting about

the researcher's specificity of the topic about only district Kanyakumari. The gold ornamentation of Kanyakumari in contemporary times can be related much due to historical connectivity of Kerala and Tamilagham gold culture from historical aspects.

Connection Between Kanyakumari And Kerala Through Historical Background

The prolonged connection between Kanyakumari and Kerala turns tables back to, association of district with Travancore. The southern parts of the present districts were incorporated into Travancore and remained within princely state until the linguistic reorganisation of states in 1956.[xli] During the period, Kanyakumari was not an isolated Tamil region but part of a larger political and economic system that extended into present day Kerala. Political integration created opportunities for continuous interaction between Tamil speaking and Malayalam speaking peoples cultural exchange in all aspects. From the ancient period traders, craftsman, agricultural workers, officials and other communities moved through the region that further strengthened these connections. As the paper tends to talk about gold ornamentation culture, it widely connects both these states culturally. Unlike language, food, clothing, architecture, religious practice, festivals, customs etc, the similarities between gold ornamentation culture of both the state are also similar in many ways. Especially the gold ornament names of Kanyakumari widely resemble Malayalam in linguist notably, nagapadam, palakka mala, Poothali, Pulinakha mala, pathakkam, pichimottu mala, mulla mottu mala, manga mala, Elakkathali, Kazhuthila, Karimani mala, kandasaram, vanki, etc.[xlii] The custom of gold jewellery ornamentation during the weddings and festivals was one important unspoken historical connectivity.

Why Gold?

The social meaning and ownership of ornaments varied according to community, and family status labelling. So, gold can connect both economic value and cultural significance. The historical importance of jewellery is also connected with women's economic and cultural position. Gold possesses the advantage of being portable and durable. Unlike other movable and immovable property, the gold jewellery can accompany a woman when she moves from her parental household to another. Women and gold are always interconnected with each other, notably both are related with purity and godliness. To highlight this, from the ancient Tamil society the terms like Lakshmi (ilakumi), Swarnam (gold), are even used till date to represent, the women society and also gold.

Gold Ornamentation In Kanykumari's Customary Practices In Contempoary Society

Kanyakumari's customs in prominent occasion like wedding and other festivals were most important event to display the gold ornaments in the contemporary times. In order to showcase the historical touch in their ornamentation, the amount of jewellery worn by the women became a visible indicator of the family's economic status. Due to connectivity of Kanyakumari with Kerala, the gold ornamentation in southern parts of Tamilnadu mostly choose heavy ornamentation among both the women and men than the other parts of the state. The men and women both decorate themselves with several necklaces, chains, and other ornaments and each piece of jewellery may have

different histories and meanings connected with culture. Although women historically wore a greater variety and quantity of ornaments, contemporary functions particularly weddings, have increasingly expanded the use of gold for both the genders. This development reflects broader changes in the nature of the wedding ceremony. The weddings now have increasingly become a public representation of the economic wealth of both the families. The expansion of education, employment, urbanisation, migration has altered economic conditions of the society. What began as an ornamentation ultimately transformed to cultural memory.

The Significance Of Kaivalkamiyar To Contemporary Gold Craftmanship

The Kaivalkamiyar of ancient Tamil society were skilled artisans of jewellery making. The word Kaivalkamiyar from Natrinai verse 94, Nedunal Vaadai verse 57 and Nedunal vaadai verse 85, refers to artisans of today's goldsmith community.[xliii] These craftsmen according to Natrinai verse 77 were considered as intricate ornament workers with knowledge of smelting and metal working techniques. The smelting of gold was notably seen in work of Kalitogai verse 137 and Natrinai verse 94.[xliv] These evidences show that the ancient Tamil societies ornamentation was not merely decorative but cultural.

From ancient Tamil society this temple jewellery has a deep historical root from devadasi nadanargal (nityasumangali), queen ornaments to present day bharatha natiyam and temple god ornaments. The cultural transformation of gold ornamentation through ages came up with local and regional craftmanship. And in order to highlight that, Vadaserry jewellery is one of the important craftmanship that is popularly spoken all over Tamilnadu. Vadassery, located in Nagercoil, has an important place in the traditional jewellery-making heritage of Kanyakumari. The area is particularly associated with skilled craftsmen who have practised the art of making traditional temple jewellery and other gold ornaments. Their work represents a long-standing tradition in which specialised techniques, designs and knowledge have been passed down through generations. They are distinguished by its detailed workmanship and traditional motifs. Artisans produce a variety of ornaments, including necklaces, bangles, earrings, rings, armlets and waist ornaments using gold, silver, red stones (ruby) and green stones (emerald). Designs commonly feature motifs such as Lakshmi, parrots, bells, paisley forms and coin patterns. These elements reflect the religious, artistic and cultural traditions of the region. The Government of India recognises Nagercoil Temple Jewellery as a Geographical Indication product, highlighting the distinctive nature of the craft and its geographical association with the area. This recognition also reflects the importance of the local artisan community in preserving a specialised jewellery tradition. Vadassery craftsmen have traditionally relied on hereditary knowledge. Skills were taught within artisan families, with younger generations learning techniques through observation and practical training. This system enabled craftsmen to preserve established designs while also modifying them according to changing tastes and customer requirements. The importance of Vadassery's craftsmen extends beyond the production of jewellery. They have played a significant role in maintaining the

continuity of Kanyakumari's material and artistic culture. Although political boundaries and administrative arrangements changed over time, traditional jewellery-making practices continued within local artisan communities. Their work therefore represents more than a profession. It is a form of cultural inheritance through which traditional designs, technical knowledge and regional artistic identity have been preserved and passed from one generation to another. Their continued association with jewellery making contributes to the distinctive character of Kanyakumari's gold culture.

CONCLUSION

The culture of gold ornaments in Kanyakumari represents a dynamic historical process shaped by cultural continuity, regional interaction, craftsmanship, and changing socio-economic conditions. Its roots can be situated within the broader Tamil tradition of ornamentation, where gold gradually acquired meanings extending beyond physical adornment to encompass beauty, prosperity, social distinction, and material security. The region's historical association with Travancore further enriched this tradition through sustained interaction between Tamil and Kerala cultural practices. The development of Nagercoil and Vadassery as important centres of jewellery craftsmanship contributed significantly to the formation of a distinctive regional jewellery tradition. The continuity of specialised craftsmanship, particularly in temple jewellery, demonstrates how traditional knowledge and artistic practices have been transmitted and adapted across generations. These traditions also reveal that the history of gold in Kanyakumari cannot be separated from the development of local artisanal communities and their specialised skills. Gold gradually acquired a deeper social and economic significance, particularly in relation to women's possession of movable wealth, family resources, status, and social identity. The history of gold ornamentation in Kanyakumari should therefore be understood neither as a static tradition nor as a practice belonging exclusively to a particular historical period. It is an evolving cultural phenomenon in which ancient Tamil traditions, the historical influence of Travancore, regional craftsmanship, women's economic agency, and modern consumer practices intersect. The persistence of gold in contemporary society demonstrates the ability of material culture to preserve historical memory while simultaneously adapting to changing social conditions. Ultimately, gold in Kanyakumari represents more than jewellery. It embodies the region's historical experiences, artisanal heritage, economic practices, gendered forms of wealth, and most importantly women's cultural identity. Its continued significance illustrates how an object of material culture can survive across historical transformations while acquiring new meanings in different social contexts.

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THE CULTURAL TAPESTRY AND SOCIAL HARMONY OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari District, located at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, represents a rare convergence of geography, history, and culture. Bordered by the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean, the region has long served as a gateway for maritime trade and cross-cultural interaction. Over centuries, it transitioned through the rule of the Chola, Chera, and Pandya dynasties before becoming part of the Travancore kingdom and eventually integrating into Tamil Nadu in 1956. This paper explores how Kanyakumari's unique historical trajectory, architectural synthesis, linguistic diversity, religious coexistence, and economic interdependence have collectively fostered a stable and enduring model of social harmony. The district stands as a compelling example of how diversity can be transformed into unity through shared practices and mutual respect.

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari District occupies a distinctive place in India's cultural and geographical landscape. Positioned at the southernmost tip of the country, it forms a natural meeting point not only of three major water bodies but also of diverse cultural traditions. This strategic coastal location historically facilitated trade, migration, and the exchange of ideas, making the region a vibrant center of interaction between different communities.

For centuries, Kanyakumari was an integral part of the princely State of Travancore, which introduced administrative systems, architectural styles, and social practices influenced by Kerala traditions. However, the linguistic and cultural identity of the population remained largely Tamil. This duality culminated in the mid-20th century with the Kumari Liberation Movement, led by Marshal Nesamony, which advocated for the integration of the region into Tamil Nadu. The successful implementation of the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 marked a turning point, giving rise to a unique regional identity that seamlessly blends Tamil and Kerala influences. Today, Kanyakumari is not merely a geographical boundary but a cultural bridge. Its ability to harmonize differences in language, religion, and tradition makes it an important case study in understanding pluralism and social cohesion.

1. Geopolitical Fusion and Geographical Confluence

The socio-cultural identity of Kanyakumari is deeply rooted in its geography. Located at the confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean, the district has historically functioned as a crossroads of civilizations. This geographical advantage made it a vital center for maritime trade and attracted traders, missionaries, and settlers from different parts of the world.

The region's political history further enriched its cultural fabric. During the Sangam period, Kanyakumari was a contested frontier among the Chola, Chera, and Pandya dynasties, each contributing to its evolving identity. Later, under the rule of the Travancore kingdom, the region adopted several Kerala-based administrative and social systems, including matrilineal traditions and distinctive architectural forms. Despite these influences, the Tamil language and

cultural ethos remained deeply embedded in everyday life.

The integration of Kanyakumari into Tamil Nadu in 1956 did not erase its past but instead reinforced its hybrid identity. The district today represents a harmonious blend of multiple historical layers, where communities have learned to adapt and coexist within a shared cultural space.

2. Architectural Synthesis and Material Culture

The built environment of Kanyakumari vividly reflects its dual cultural heritage. Unlike the typical temple-centric architecture of Tamil Nadu, many structures in the district incorporate elements of Kerala's architectural traditions. These include sloping tiled roofs, extensive use of wood, intricate carvings, and designs adapted to withstand the humid coastal climate. One of the most striking examples of this synthesis is the Padmanabhapuram Palace. Though geographically located in Tamil Nadu, it remains under the administration of Kerala, symbolizing the historical connections between the two regions. The palace is renowned for its exquisite wooden craftsmanship, polished floors, and innovative ventilation systems, which highlight the advanced architectural knowledge of the period.

Religious structures also demonstrate this cultural blending. The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, for instance, is unique in representing the Trimurti—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—in a single form. This integration of different religious concepts within one sacred space reflects an early attempt to promote unity among diverse sects. Such architectural and religious synthesis underscores how material culture in Kanyakumari serves as a tangible expression of social harmony.

3. Religious Diversity and Shared Sacred Spaces

Kanyakumari is distinguished by its balanced religious composition, with Hindus, Christians, and Muslims coexisting in significant numbers. Unlike regions where one group dominates, this balance has encouraged a culture of mutual respect and interaction.

The spread of Christianity in the region can be traced back to the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle, followed by later missionaries such as St. Francis Xavier and Protestant leaders. Similarly, Islamic traditions were established through trade and cultural exchange. Rather than forming isolated communities, these religious groups developed interconnected social practices.

A notable feature of Kanyakumari's religious landscape is the presence of shared sacred spaces. For example, festivals at St. Xavier's Church in Kottar attract devotees from multiple religious backgrounds, many of whom participate in rituals traditionally associated with Hindu worship. Likewise, the Peer Mohammed Dargah serves as a center for spiritual dialogue, drawing visitors from different faiths.

Cultural expressions further strengthen this unity. Folk arts such as *Villu Pattu* have been adapted to narrate stories from various religious traditions, while *Chavittu Nadakam* blends European theatrical elements with local performance styles. These shared artistic practices demonstrate how culture can transcend religious boundaries and promote a sense of collective identity.

4. Linguistic Fluidity and Social Reform Movements

Language in Kanyakumari acts as a bridge rather than a barrier. While Tamil serves as the official language, the local dialect incorporates a significant amount

of Malayalam vocabulary and phonetic influence. This linguistic blending reflects the region's historical interactions and facilitates communication across communities.

Social reform movements have also played a crucial role in shaping the district's inclusive character. During the 19th century, reformers such as Ayya Vaikundar challenged rigid caste hierarchies and promoted equality through institutions like *Nizhal Thangals*, where people of all backgrounds could gather for worship and communal meals. These initiatives laid the groundwork for a more egalitarian society.

In the 20th century, the Kumari Liberation Movement addressed issues of linguistic identity and economic marginalization. The successful integration of the district into Tamil Nadu not only resolved these concerns but also reinforced the region's commitment to cultural inclusivity. Together, these movements highlight how social change in Kanyakumari has consistently moved toward greater unity and equality.

5. Economic Interdependence and Festive Syncretism

Economic cooperation is a fundamental aspect of life in Kanyakumari. The district's coastal economy, particularly the fishing industry, relies heavily on collaboration among communities of different religious and social backgrounds. Shared resources such as fishing grounds, markets, and transportation networks necessitate cooperation, reducing the potential for conflict.

This interdependence is mirrored in the district's festivals, which serve as platforms for collective participation. Events such as the Suchindram Car Festival bring together people from various communities to engage in shared rituals. Similarly, during the Mandaikadu Kodai festival, members of different religious groups contribute to the organization and support of the event, demonstrating a spirit of unity.

These practices illustrate how economic and cultural interactions reinforce each other. By working together in both daily life and celebratory occasions, the people of Kanyakumari transform diversity into a source of strength.

6.Cultural Elements: Folk Arts and Performing Traditions

The cultural richness of Kanyakumari is further expressed through its vibrant folk arts and performance traditions. These forms of expression act as common platforms where individuals from different communities can interact and connect.

Traditional art forms such as *Villu Pattu*, *Kaniyan Koothu*, and *Tholpavakoothu* are integral to the region's cultural identity. These performances often narrate stories of local heroes, historical events, and spiritual themes, making them accessible and relatable to diverse audiences. The communal nature of these art forms fosters a sense of belonging and shared heritage.

Unlike more rigid cultural expressions, the folk arts of Kanyakumari are highly adaptable. They incorporate elements from different traditions, reflecting the region's dynamic cultural environment. This adaptability ensures their continued relevance and strengthens their role in promoting social harmony.

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari District stands as a remarkable example of how geographical position, historical evolution, and cultural interaction can come together to create a harmonious society. Its unique blend of

Tamil and Kerala influences, combined with its tradition of religious coexistence and economic cooperation, has resulted in a resilient and inclusive social structure.
The district demonstrates that diversity need not lead to division. Instead, when supported by shared practices, mutual respect, and adaptive cultural systems, it can become a powerful force for unity. As societies around the world grapple with issues of identity and coexistence, Kanyakumari offers valuable lessons on how differences can be integrated into a cohesive and cooperative social fabric.

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CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL FAIRS TO THE REGIONAL ECONOMY: A CASE STUDY OF THE VAVUBALI EXHIBITION, KUZHITHURAI

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the contribution of the Vavubali Exhibition in Kuzhithurai to the local economy, focusing on its evolution, visitor spending patterns and commercial character. The study adopts a descriptive case study approach, using primary data collected from 50 visitors. The findings show that consumer spending at the exhibition is predominantly moderate. Rides and games accounted for the largest share of expenditure, followed by food and fancy items or household goods. Field observations also reveal diverse commercial activities, including temporary stalls, food outlets, entertainment and parking services. The study concludes that the Vavubali Exhibition has evolved beyond its religious significance into an important cultural and commercial event that contributes to local economic activity.

Keywords: *Vavubali exhibition, local economy, consumer spending*

INTRODUCTION

Local fairs and religious events play an important role in regional economic development. They generate employment, trade, and revenue, while offering a variety of entertainment and recreational activities that attract visitors and encourage spending. In addition, such fairs often function as markets for locally produced goods, particularly agricultural produce, linking cultural tradition directly to economic exchange. Vendors, farmers and informal traders depend on these fairs for seasonal income. Similarly, they contribute to government revenue. Taken together, these functions mean that local fairs are not merely social or religious occasions, but sites of significant, temporary, economic activity.

Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu, is one of the most culturally significant regions in the state, home to several cultural and religious events of considerable local importance. These events play a key role in attracting visitors and promoting economic activity within the district. The Vavubali Exhibition is one such event that is held annually on the banks of the Thamirabarani River at Kuzhithurai and organised by the Kuzhithurai Municipality. The exhibition coincides with Vavubali, a ritual of ancestral offering observed on Aadi Ammavasai, the new moon day of the Tamil month of Aadi. Originally a modest gathering that began accompanying the ritual in 1926, the exhibition has grown steadily over nearly a century into a major regional event. Now the fair runs for twenty days and draws visitors from across Kanniyakumari district as well as neighbouring Kerala. Existing literature on India's religious fairs is largely concentrated on major events such as the Kumbh Mela, with comparatively little attention paid to smaller regional fairs that nonetheless play a crucial role in sustaining local

livelihoods year after year. This is a significant gap: while mega-events attract scholarly and policy attention because of their scale, it is often smaller, recurring regional fairs like the Vavubali Exhibition that form a more consistent part of the local economic calendar, generating trade and income annually rather than as a one-time or occasional phenomenon. This study aims to address this gap by examining the contribution of the Vavubali Exhibition to the local economy of Kuzhithurai.

Objectives

1. To trace the historical evolution of the Vavubali Exhibition from a ritual gathering to a major regional economic event
2. To examine the visitor spending patterns
3. To describe the commercial character of the Vavubali Exhibition through field observation

Review Of Literature

Kumar (2022) studied the economic impact of Kumbh Mela in Uttar Pradesh. The study employs mixed methods and uses both primary and secondary data to assess the economic impacts of the event on tourism, job creation, infrastructure development and environmental externalities. It quantifies the direct and indirect effects through input-output modelling. The study finds that the Kumbh Mela generated ₹1.2 lakh crore in business revenue, created around 6 lakh temporary jobs and stimulated ₹4.5 crore in infrastructure investment. The environmental cost amounts to ₹ 200 crore.

Maurya (2020) aims to study the economy of fairs in India. Micro and macro fairs happen in rural areas of India to promote tourism. It studies the role of these fairs in supporting the growth of indigenous goods and rural employment. The study finds that these fairs brought an overall economic and social stimulus to the region.

Kim and Dombrosky (2016) studied the economic impact of Canfield Fair, a small-scale event, on the local economy. Primary data were collected through an on-site survey of fair visitors. The study employs the IMPLAN Input-Output model. The study found that the fair generated $ 13.4 million for the local economy. Both out-of-town visitors and local attendees contributed to this.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive case study approach to examine the economic significance of the Vavubali Exhibition in Kuzhithurai. Primary data were collected from 50 visitors through a structured questionnaire. In addition, direct field observation was used to examine the commercial character of the exhibition. The collected data were analysed using charts, while the historical evolution and commercial development of the exhibition were examined using relevant secondary information collected from news articles.

Evolution Of Vavubali Exhibition

The Kuzhithurai Vavubali Exhibition, held annually on the banks of the Kuzhithurai aaru (Thamirabarani River) in the Kanyakumari district, stands as a premier cultural and commercial landmark in South India. What began centuries ago as a localised religious gathering has transformed into a massive 20-day trade fair. This evolution highlights a powerful intersection of faith, governance, and commerce, demonstrating how a traditional ritual can successfully pivot to become a vital engine of regional economic growth. The foundational bedrock of this event is the Karkidaka Vavu Bali, an ancient Hindu ritual where people offer Bali or Tharppanam (ancestral rites) on the new

moon day of the Tamil month Aadi or the Malayalam month of Karkidakam. The banks of the Thamirabarani River in Kuzhithurai were historically favoured for these rituals due to the river's perceived spiritual purity. For generations, the gathering remained strictly religious, attracting local pilgrims who dispersed immediately after performing their rites.

The transition toward an organised event began in 1926 under the rule of the Travancore princely state. Recognised as a unique gathering of people, local visionaries, most notably lawyer T.C. Kesava Pillai, conceptualised an agricultural exhibition alongside the rituals. Initially managed by the Kuzhithurai Bar Association, this modest three-day exhibition sought to showcase indigenous cattle, cottage crafts, and regional agricultural products. Integrating trade into a religious space planted the seeds for an economic marketplace.

The turning point in the exhibition's economic trajectory occurred in 1962, when the Kuzhithurai Municipality assumed formal administrative control under the leadership of Municipal Chairman P.P. Munusamy. This changed the scale of the event. The municipality extended the exhibition's duration from three days to a 20-day fair. Municipal management introduced structured infrastructure, divided plots for commercial vendors, and standardized entry fees. This institutional framework provided stability, transforming the exhibition from a casual local market into a highly organised, revenue-generating enterprise

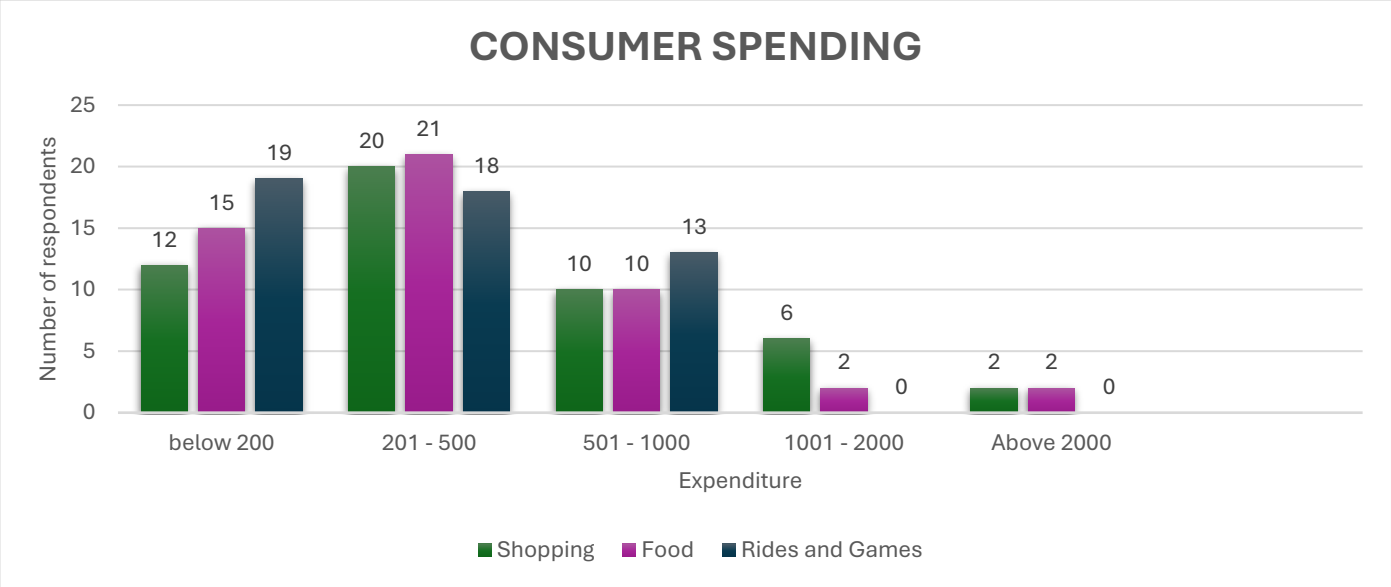
Today, the Vavubali Exhibition serves as a major commercial hub. The event generates substantial direct revenue for the local municipality through tender auctions, stall rentals, and amusement ride contracts. For local traders, craftsmen, and horticulturists, the fair represents a high-volume sales window that often defines their financial success for the entire fiscal year. Giant Ferris wheels, Columbus boats, and stunt shows attract thousands of daily ticket-buying visitors, creating seasonal employment for hundreds of technicians and performers. True to its 1926 roots, the exhibition remains a massive marketplace for rare plants, agricultural tools, and organic seeds, driving transactions between rural farmers and urban consumers. In addition, Temporary food stalls, handicraft stalls, household utility markets, and toy stalls experience high transaction volumes, circulating capital directly back into the local economy.

Consumer Spending Pattern

The figure presents the expenditure pattern of the respondents across three major categories: shopping, food, and rides and games. The analysis is based on 50 respondents. In terms of shopping expenditure, the largest proportion of respondents spent between ₹201 and ₹500. This was followed by 12 respondents who spent below ₹200 and 10 respondents who spent between ₹501 and ₹1,000. Only 6 respondents reported spending between ₹1,001 and ₹2,000, while 2 respondents spent above ₹2,000. This indicates that shopping expenditure was generally concentrated in the lower and middle expenditure categories. Regarding food expenditure, 21 respondents spent between ₹201 and ₹500, making this the most common category. This was followed by 15 respondents who spent below ₹200 and 10 respondents who spent between ₹501 and ₹1,000. Only 2 respondents each spent between ₹1,001 and ₹2,000 and above ₹2,000. Thus, food expenditure was also predominantly within the ₹201–₹500 range. For rides and games, 19 respondents spent below ₹200, while 18

respondents spent between ₹201 and ₹500. A further 13 respondents spent between ₹501 and ₹1,000. None of the respondents reported spending more than ₹1,000 on rides and games. This suggests that expenditure on rides and games was largely concentrated in the lower expenditure categorie

Figure 1: Consumer Spending on Shopping, Food, and Rides and Games



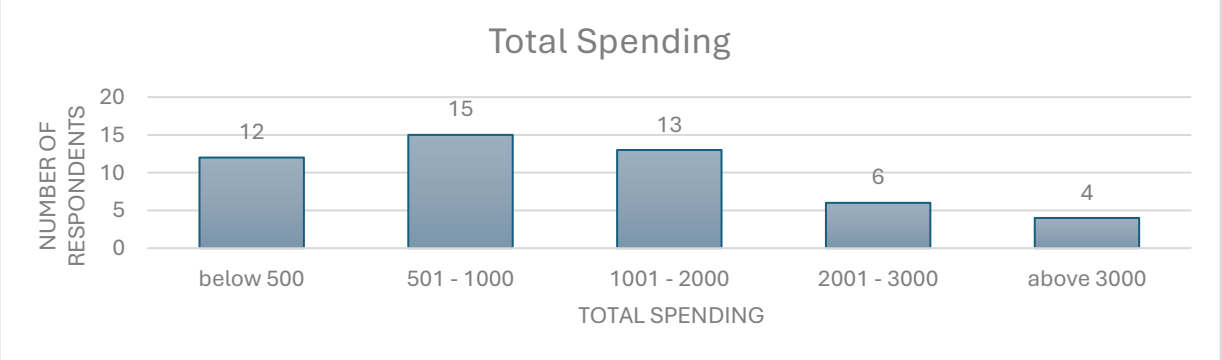
Source: primary data

Overall, the findings indicate that ₹201–₹500 was the most common expenditure range for both shopping and food, whereas ₹200 or less was the most common range for rides and games. Very few respondents reported expenditure above ₹1,000 in any of the three categories. The pattern therefore suggests that consumer spending at the Vavubali Exhibition was predominantly moderate.

Figure 2 indicates that consumer spending at the Vavubali Exhibition was predominantly concentrated in the ₹501 - ₹2,000 range. Almost 30 per cent of respondents reported spending ₹501 – ₹1,000, followed by 26 per cent who spent ₹1,001 - ₹2,000. A further 24 percentage of respondents spent below ₹500. In contrast, only 12 per cent spent ₹2,001 - ₹3,000 and 8 per cent spent above ₹3,000. Thus, 56 per cent of the respondents spent between ₹501 and ₹2,000, indicating that moderate levels of expenditure were most common among visitors.

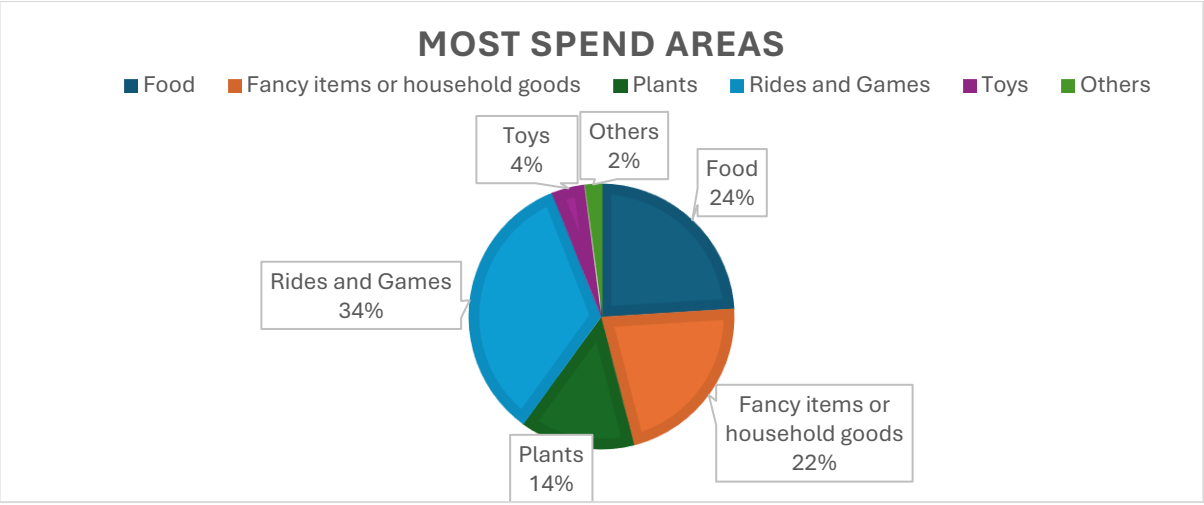
Figure 3 shows the areas where respondents spent the most in Vavubali. It indicates that rides and games constituted the largest area of consumer spending at the Vavubali Exhibition, accounting for 34 per cent of the total.

Figure 2: Total Spending by consumers in Vavubali Exhibition



Source: primary data

Figure 3: Most spent areas in Vavubali Exhibition



Source: primary data

Food was the second major expenditure category, representing 24 per cent of spending, followed by fancy items or household goods at 22 per cent. Plants accounted for 14 per cent of expenditure, while toys and other items represented relatively smaller shares of 4 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively. Overall, the results suggest that consumer expenditure at the exhibition was primarily driven by recreational activities and food consumption.

Commercial Character Of Vavubali Exhibition

The following observations are based on the researcher's direct observation of the Vavubali Exhibition. It exhibits a strong commercial character. The entry fee for adults and children is ₹20 and ₹10, respectively. The exhibition brings together a variety of vendors and commercial activities within a concentrated area, creating an environment where visitors are encouraged to spend on goods, food, entertainment and other services. A prominent feature of the exhibition is the diversity of temporary stalls. Vendors sell a range of products including household articles, fancy items, toys, plants and other consumer goods.

The variety of products available appears to encourage visitors to browse and make purchases even when shopping may not have been their primary reason for visiting. The presence of different vendors selling similar or competing products also creates a market-like atmosphere. People who own land near the exhibition change their land into parking lots in exchange for a small fee.

Food and refreshments form another important component of the commercial activity. Numerous food stalls attract visitors throughout the exhibition, and spending on food appears to be integrated into the overall visitor experience. Sweets like thenkuzhal attract consumers. Food consumption is therefore not merely incidental but forms an important part of the economic activity generated within the exhibition. The exhibition also has a significant recreational component, particularly through rides and games. These activities require direct expenditure and contribute to the commercial character of the event. Maranakinar, a car and bike stunt show, has a separate fan base.

Findings

- The exhibition has a dual character. On one hand, it retains its cultural and religious significance; on the other, it generates substantial commercial activity by bringing together consumers, vendors, food sellers and entertainment providers.
- The exhibition generates considerable consumer activity. However, the spending is largely within a moderate range for most visitors.
- Rides and games accounted for the largest share of spending. Food expenditure also forms a significant part.
- The commercial activity is not limited to vendors. Local landowners use nearby land as temporary parking areas for a fee, while food sellers, entertainment providers, technicians and performers also participate in the event's economic activity.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the Vavubali Exhibition has evolved from a religious gathering into an important cultural and commercial event in Kuzhithurai. The spending pattern shows that most visitors engage in moderate expenditure, particularly on rides and games, food, and household or fancy items. The presence of diverse vendors, food stalls, entertainment activities and temporary services demonstrates that the exhibition generates significant local economic activity. Thus, the Vavubali Exhibition represents a strong link between cultural tradition, consumer spending and the local economy.

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FESTIVALS OF KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari district hosts vibrant multi-religious festivals blending Tamil and Kerala traditions. Key features include massive temple car processions, unique folk rituals like the Kollemcode Thooku, large coastal gatherings, and communal harmony where people of all faiths participate in celebrations like the Suchindram Car Festival and Kottar Church feast. Kanyakumari district unify diverse religious and cultural communities, boost regional tourism, preserve ancient Dravidian folk arts, and honor agricultural and ancestral traditions. Key events like the Suchindram Car Festival, Mandaikadu Kodai Festival, and Cape Festival drive community bonding and local trade.

Key Words:
Kanyakumari District, Thirukarthigai, Margali vila, Arattu, Teppotsawam, Car Festival, odai Festival, Shivratri, Vaikunda Ekadasi, Deepavali, Onam, Vavubali Festival, Navaratri.

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district Located at the southernmost tip of peninsular India where the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean converge, Kanyakumari district possesses a rich cultural heritage reflected in its distinct religious and communal festivals. Due to its unique geographical position border-adjacent to Kerala, the cultural celebrations in Kanyakumari seamlessly blend Tamil and Keralite traditions, featuring grand temple chariot processions, beachside rituals, Christian feast days, and vibrant seasonal harvests. The district's unique history as part of the historic Travancore kingdom creates a vibrant fusion of Tamil and Keralite customs, visible in celebrations like Onam, Vishu, and local temple Kodai festivals. Kanyakumari district hosts a rich blend of traditional Tamil and Kerala cultural elements, featuring prominent temple chariot processions, regional folk festivals, and vibrant multi-religious celebrations held throughout the year.

Pongal Festival

In Kanyakumari district, the Pongal festival is celebrated every year around January 15th as a vibrant four-day harvest celebration to thank nature, the sun, and farm animals. Local communities, schools, and village groups such as those in Arumanai host grand public events, traditional cooking in earthen pots, and cultural programs.

· **Bhogi:** People clean homes and burn old items to welcome a fresh start.

· **Thai Pongal:** Families cook sweet rice in decorated pots outdoors, shouting "Pongalo Pongal" as it boils over.

· **Mattu Pongal:** Farmers honor and decorate cows and bulls for their help in the fields.

· **Kaanum Pongal:** People visit family, friends, and local tourist spots.

Kumari Thiruvizha

The Kumari Thiruvizha held every year of the May. All residents and visitors take part in the festivities Various Cultural Activities were conducted in this festival put up too and the festival draws many visitors from nearby places. Kanniyakumari, the southern tip of Tamil Nadu, hosts an annual festival to celebrate the native art and music of the state. During the months of April and May, the Department of Tourism,

Tamil Nadu hosts the —Kumari Thiruvizha", encouraging hundreds of artists to perform on the stage. The Urban Ghat Ground, a perfect venue hosting thousands of spectators, serves as the event's location. The following the programmes organized by department of Tourism. Dance performances include - Bharathanattiyam, Kathakalli, Karagaattam, Oyil attam, Silambattam, etc. and Music Performances include - Pannisai, Nadhaswaram, Thavil, and Carnatic music.

Vavubali Exhibition held at Kuzhithurai

Every Year Tourism Department a Tourism pavilion was set up with important Tourist Places of Tamilnadu and Kanniyakumari District Photographs were exhibited for promoting Tamilnadu Tourism. The Kuzhithurai Vavubali Exhibition is a major annual regional festival in the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu. The 101st edition was recently held from July 29 to August 17, 2026, at the Vavubali Exhibition Ground in Kuzhithurai.

Festival of Devi Kanyakumari Temple

An ancient Arulmigu Devi Kanyakumari Bhagavati Amman Temple at the southern tip of India celebrates several major annual festivals. The most prominent events include the 10-day Vaikasi Visagam, the grand 10-day Navarathiri festival ending in the traditional Parivettai and the yearly Car Festival. The main sanctum's eastern doorway remains closed year-round and is flung open for only about an hour on rare, highly auspicious festival days—such as during Navarathiri's final hunt, Vaikasi Visagam, and specific new moon days. Processional idols are routinely brought down to the *Triveni Sangamam* (where the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Bay of Bengal meet) for ceremonial holy immersions.

Vaikasi Visagam

Vaikasi visakam is celebrated as the birthday of lord Murugan. It is celebrated during visakam nakshatra in tamil month vaikasi. The day devoted take out a procession and carry milk to subramania temple to perform milk abhishekam to the deity.

Navarathiri

In Kanyakumari district is famous for a unique 200-year-old inter-state tradition. Sacred idols of deities—including Goddess Saraswathi from Padmanabhapuram Palace, Velimalai Kumaraswamy, and Suchindram Munnoottinanga—begin a grand ceremonial procession from Tamil Nadu to the Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The grand procession of idols in connection with the Navaratri festival, which began from the Padmanabhapuram Palace in Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district, reached Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The grand procession of idols in connection with the Navaratri festival, which began from the Padmanabhapuram Palace in Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district, reached Sree Padmanabha Swamy Temple here. It has been a centuries old custom to bring idols including those of Goddess Saraswathy as a procession from Padmanabhapuram, which was the seat of power of the Travancore royal house before the capital of the principality was shifted to Thiruvananthapuram. The idols would be taken back to the Padmanabhapuram after the nine-day Navaratri festival.

Thirukarthigai

Thirukarthigai Karthigai festival is conducted in the Siva Temples. It is

celebrated in the Tamil month of Karthigai (October-November). It is also known as Thirukarthigai festival. It is celebrated on the full moon day. The temple premises are very deep lighted with the traditional earthen lamps. This festival is mentioned in inscriptions as vrischikavilakku.

Aadi Ammavasai

Aadi Ammavasai is celebrated with great fervorat the Triveni Sangamam area in Kanyakumari, where the three seas meet . During this festival, thousands of devotees take a holy dip in the sea and perform Tithi and Tarpana pujas to their ancestors.

Onam

Onam is one of the important festivals of this district. It falls in the month of Chingam (August-September). It is a harvest festival. There are several legends reading its origin. The most important days of the Onam festival are Utratam and Tiruvonam days. On the day of Thiruvonam a grand feast is held in every home. The people of Kanyakumari made Onam a unique festival of their own. The celebration Onam keeps unity among the people.

Festival of Kollemcode Devi Temples

Kollemcode festival is like a feast for eyes with its treasure of green paddy fields, lotus ponds and a variety of trees which will take a visitor to the lap of the nature The famous _ThookkaMahotsavam‖ is also known as MeenaBharani festival has been celebrated in the birth date of the goddess Bhadrakali. Thookkam festival is celebrated in Malayalam month of meenam (March-April) every year. The thookkam ritual is held at Venkanjimudippura situated just one kilometer away from kollemcodemudippura. Thookkam is an offering which is held at the Bhadrakali temple in kerala and Tamil Nadu during the month of meenam. Kollemmcodethookkkam is celebrated irrespective of cast, creed and race. The festival is celebrated annual for 10 days and Thookam is on the final day of the festival.

Thai Ammavasai

Thai Amavasai, thousands of devotees gather at the **Triveni Sangamam** (the sacred confluence of the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and Bay of Bengal) in Kanyakumari to take a holy dip and perform *Tharpanam* and *Thithi* rituals to honor their departed ancestors.

Festival of Arulmigu Thanumalayan Temple

Suchindram is an important pilgrim centre and the site of the famous Thanumalayan Temple. There is an Anjaneya (or Hanuman) statue that stands at 22 feet (6.7 m) and is carved from a single granite block. There are two important festivals, one in Markazhi (December/January) and the other in Chiththirai (April/May). During the Markazhi festival, on the 9th day the deities are taken out in procession around the streets on three festival cars.

Vaikunda Ekadasi

Generally, Ekadasi is a sacred day to Vishnu. It is celebrated both in the day and bright foot-night in every month of the year. Devotees of Lord Vishnu observe fasting and non-sleeping. In the early morning of the next day the devotees go to temple and after worship. There is a special entrance to the lord‘s presence in all important Vaishnava temples. It is called Swarga Vasal (Gate way to Heaven) and is generally kept closed all through the year. It is opened for the devotees for darshan on the morning of Ekadasi. The entry of devotees through that gateway signifies entry into Vaikunta itself.

Shivratri Mahasivratri

The great night of Siva is celebrated by the Hindus in the month of Kumbham (February March). It is supposed to commemorate the day on which Lord Shiva consumed the deadly poison to save the world from destruction. On this occasion people spend whole night in prayer and meditation of shiva without any thought of food and sleep and offer bilwa leaves to the Sivalinga. Sivalaya Ottam on Sivaratri day is sacred to Shivalayas in Kanyakumari district. On Shivarathri devotees wear saffron robes and uttering the words Govinda Gopala start from Tirumala and finish their marathon at Nattalam Siva temple covering nearly miles within twenty four hours.

Deepavali

Deepavali is celebrated all over the district as the festival of lights. It is mainly celebrated by the Hindus. It falls on the proceeding day of the new moon in the Thulam(October-November). It is supposed to commemorate the destruction of the Demon God, Narakasura by Sri Krishna. It lasts for two days that is the 13th and 14th of the dark half of Karthika according to some, or the 14th or 15th according to others. On this day people dress as their best go around to greeting their friends and exchange gifts.

Festival of Sree Narayana Guru Jayanthi

Sree Narayana Guru Jayanthi marks the birth anniversary of the philosopher and social reformer Sree Narayana Guru. In parts of Kanyakumari District close to the Kerala border, local administrative bodies grant regional holidays and communities organize processions, prayers, and cultural events at local shrines and SNDP union halls to honor his message of equality.

Festival of Swamithoppu Ayya Vaikundar Pathi

The main festivals at the Swamithoppu Ayya Vaikundar Pathi in Kanyakumari district include the grand **Thai Thiruvizha** (flag hoisting in the Tamil month of Thai), **Vaikunda Avataram** (incarnational day around Masi 20), and the festivals starting on the first Friday of Avani and the second Friday of Vaikasi. Thousands of devotees gather for these car processions and rituals like Kali Vettai. **Ayya Vaikunda Avataram** Celebrated around the 20th of the Tamil month of Masi (March), marking the incarnation of Ayya Vaikundar. Large processions arrive from Tiruchendur and Thiruvananthapuram

Festival of Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple

The Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple Kodai Festival is a major 10-day annual celebration held in February or March in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Known as the "Sabarimala of Women," it centers on the final Tuesday of the Tamil month of Masi, drawing lakhs of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Large numbers of female devotees visit the shrine, leading to the moniker "Women's Sabarimala". A regional public holiday is usually declared in the district on the final peak day of the celebration.

Festival of Francis Xavier's Cathedral

St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral, Kottar, also known as **St. Xavier Church**, is a Roman Catholic Latin Rite shrine in Kottar, Nagercoil, in the Kanyakumari district. While Francis Xavier was doing missionary work in Kottar and its neighbourhood, he averted an invasion of Vadugas with the help of the army of Paravars. and Padayatchi nadars of Kottar, at Vadasery, thus protecting the people of the Venad kingdom from that

attack which was appreciated by the king, Unni Kerala Varma, who became closer to the priest and befriended him from then on. In recognition of Xavier's services, the king allotted him a piece of land to construct a Catholic church, as a gesture of goodwill, as per the church records. There was already a small church, in the same place where St. Xavier's church stands at present, dedicated to Mary the Mother of God, since AD 1544 .[2] Church records indicate that St. Xavier Church was built in 1600. In 1865, the Shrine of Mary was renovated and enlarged. In 1930, the church was raised to the status of a cathedral. The annual festival is celebrated during November – December, lasting for 10 days.

Festival of Thuckalay Peer Mohammed Appa

The Thuckalay Palli festival is the annual anniversary observance at the Peer Mohamed Oliyullah Dargha in Thuckalay, Tamil Nadu. Dedicated to the revered 17th-century Sufi philosopher and Tamil poet Peer Mohamed Appa, the festival falls during the Islamic month of Rajab. It draws diverse crowds from Tamil Nadu and Kerala in a shared tradition of communal harmon It appears there is no traditional "mask festival" in Thuckalay. You might be thinking of the famous Peer Mohammed Appa Dargah anniversary festival or perhaps traditional mask dances from nearby Kerala like *Kummattikali* celebrated during Onam. If you meant a specific cultural performance, a regional mask dance from a different state.

CONCLUSION

The festivals of Kanyakumari capture the living cultural heritage of India's southernmost region. Positioned where three oceans converge and serving as the geographic bridge between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the district's celebrations reflect a harmonious blend of Dravidian traditions, coastal heritage, and cross-cultural unity. The district's unique history as part of the historic Travancore kingdom creates a vibrant fusion of Tamil and Keralite customs, visible in celebrations like Onam, Vishu, and local temple Kodai festivals. Ultimately, the festivals of Kanyakumari are more than seasonal religious observances; they are an enduring testament to pluralism, spiritual devotion, and shared community heritage at the tip of the subcontinent.

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CULTURAL PRACTICES OF KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari District, situated at the southernmost tip of Tamil Nadu, possesses a distinctive cultural heritage shaped by its geographical location, historical development, religious diversity, coastal environment, and interaction with neighbouring Kerala. The district has historically been associated with Nanjil Nadu and the erstwhile Travancore region before becoming part of Tamil Nadu in 1956. Its cultural practices include temple worship, church festivals, folk arts, traditional food, fishing customs, agricultural practices, marriage ceremonies, community celebrations, and traditional forms of music and dance. Festivals such as Pongal, Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Kodai, festivals of the Kanniyakumari Amman and Thanumalayan temples, and the annual feast of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral demonstrate the diversity of cultural life in the district. The Kumari Thiruvizha also provides a platform for traditional performances including Oyilattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Therukoothu, Villu Paattu, Kummi and other folk arts. This paper examines the major cultural practices of Kanniyakumari and discusses their importance in preserving local identity, social relationships, traditional knowledge, and cultural heritage.

Keywords

Kanniyakumari, cultural practices, folk arts, festivals, coastal culture, traditions, religious heritage, Tamil culture

INTRODUCTION

Culture represents the collective traditions, beliefs, customs, practices, values, arts, food habits, occupations, and ways of life of a community. Kanniyakumari is particularly significant because its culture has developed through centuries of interaction between different historical and geographical influences.

The district has a long history extending from prehistoric and early historic periods. Historical records identify the region with Nanjil Nadu and show the influence of Pandya, Chola, Venad and Travancore rulers. The district became part of Tamil Nadu following the reorganisation of states in 1956. This historical background has contributed to the distinctive cultural character of the region. Kanniyakumari is also geographically unique. It has a long coastline and is influenced by both maritime and agricultural environments. Paddy cultivation, coconut cultivation, fishing and other traditional occupations have influenced local food, festivals, social relationships and everyday life. The district is officially described as having Tamil as its principal language and Nagercoil as its headquarters.

The cultural identity of Kanniyakumari is therefore not limited to a single tradition. It represents a combination of Tamil cultural practices, coastal traditions, religious customs and historical influences from the former Travancore region.

Historical and Cultural Background

The cultural development of Kanniyakumari is closely associated with its long political and social history. The region was historically connected with Nanjil Nadu and came under the influence of several South Indian dynasties. Later, it became part of the Travancore kingdom. Until 1956, the area was part of the erstwhile Travancore state; following linguistic reorganisation, four taluks—Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode—were transferred to Madras State and formed the present Kanniyakumari District.

This historical transition is significant for understanding the district's cultural character. Tamil traditions exist alongside cultural elements associated with the former Travancore region. Architecture, religious practices, food habits, language traditions and social customs consequently display a rich regional character.

MAJOR CULTURAL PRACTICES

Religious Practices

Religion forms an important part of community life in Kanniyakumari. The district contains important Hindu temples as well as historic Christian institutions. Temple worship includes daily rituals, special offerings, processions and annual festivals.

The Kanniyakumari Amman Temple is one of the important sacred centres of the district. The official district tourism information lists festivals such as Vaikasi Visagam, Navaratri, Thirukarthigai, Aadi Ammavasai and Thai Ammavasai among the temple's celebrations.

The Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram is another major religious and cultural centre. Its annual celebrations bring together ritual, music, processions and community participation. Christian traditions also form an important part of the district's cultural landscape. The annual festival of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar is celebrated over ten days during November–December.

Festivals and Community Celebrations

Festivals are among the most visible expressions of Kanniyakumari's cultural traditions. They provide opportunities for communities to gather, perform rituals, prepare traditional food, participate in processions and transmit customs to younger generations.

Pongal is an important agricultural festival celebrating the harvest and expressing gratitude for nature, cattle and agricultural labour. Traditional decorations, kolam, preparation of Pongal dishes and family gatherings are associated with the festival.

Kumari Thiruvizha is particularly important for cultural presentation. According to the Ministry of Tourism's Utsav portal, the festival celebrates native art and music and features classical and folk performances.

Mandaikadu Kodai Festival is another important local celebration. The district administration records a ten-day festival involving flag hoisting, daily rituals and processions around the temple streets.

These festivals demonstrate how religious devotion and cultural expression often operate together.

Folk Arts and Traditional Performances

Folk arts constitute an important part of Kanniyakumari's intangible heritage. Traditional performances preserve stories, beliefs, social values and collective memories. Important folk forms associated with cultural programmes in the region include: Oyilattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kummi,

Therukoothu, Villu Paattu, Kali Aattam, Kolaattam, Puli Aattam, Silambattam.

The Kumari Thiruvizha provides a significant platform for presenting such traditions. The Ministry of Tourism specifically lists Oyilattam, Devarattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Therukoothu, Villu Paattu, Kummi and other folk forms among its performances. These arts are important because they allow traditional knowledge to be transmitted through performance rather than written texts alone.

Coastal and Fishing Traditions

Kanniyakumari's coastal environment has strongly influenced the lives and cultural practices of fishing communities. Fishing is not merely an occupation; it is connected with community organisation, traditional knowledge, food habits and relationships with the sea. Traditional knowledge concerning weather, tides, fishing locations, boats and marine resources has historically been passed from older generations to younger members of fishing communities.Seafood also occupies an important place in the food culture of coastal areas. Fish and other marine products are incorporated into everyday meals as well as special occasions.

Agricultural Practices

Agriculture is another important influence on the cultural life of the district. The landscape includes paddy fields, coconut groves and other agricultural areas. The district's geographical and environmental characteristics have supported both agricultural and coastal livelihoods. Agricultural practices are reflected in festivals such as Pongal. Traditional activities associated with farming, cattle, harvest and seasonal cycles form part of the cultural memory of rural communities.

Food Culture

Food traditions in Kanniyakumari reflect the district's geographical and historical location. Rice, coconut, fish, vegetables and locally available agricultural products are important components of regional cuisine.The food culture also demonstrates the interaction between Tamil and Kerala traditions. Coconut-based preparations, seafood dishes, rice-based foods and traditional festive dishes form part of the region's culinary heritage. Food is particularly significant during festivals, weddings, religious occasions and community gatherings. Traditional recipes are often transmitted within families, especially from older generations to younger members.

Marriage and Family Customs

Marriage ceremonies are important social and cultural occasions. They involve the participation of family members, relatives and community networks. Traditional dress, music, food, ritual practices and ceremonial gatherings contribute to the cultural significance of marriage. Family relationships and respect for elders are also important components of traditional social life. Although contemporary lifestyles have changed many customs, several ceremonial practices continue to survive through adaptation.

Traditional Dress and Material Culture

Traditional clothing such as sarees and veshtis continues to have cultural importance, particularly during religious festivals, weddings and other formal occasions. Material culture also includes traditional household objects, agricultural implements, fishing equipment, palm-leaf products and other objects associated with local occupations. Such objects provide evidence of the relationship

between cultural practices and everyday life.

Music and Performing Arts

Music is closely associated with festivals and religious ceremonies. Traditional instruments such as the nadaswaram and thavil are used in temple and cultural performances. The Ministry of Tourism's description of Kumari Thiruvizha also identifies Nadaswaram, Thavil, Pannisai and Carnatic music among its musical presentations. Music therefore serves both religious and cultural functions and contributes to the preservation of traditional performing arts.

Role of Women in Cultural Preservation

Women play an important role in maintaining cultural practices within families and communities. Traditional knowledge about food preparation, household rituals, festival observances, kolam, clothing, marriage customs and family ceremonies is frequently transmitted through generations. Women also contribute to the preservation of folk traditions and community celebrations. Their participation ensures that cultural knowledge is not restricted to public performances but continues within everyday domestic and social life. In contemporary society, women's participation in education, employment and cultural organisations has created new ways of preserving and presenting traditional culture.

Cultural Practices and Social Harmony

Kanniyakumari provides an important example of cultural diversity. Hindu, Christian and other community traditions coexist within the district. Religious festivals, local celebrations and cultural events provide opportunities for people from different backgrounds to participate in public life. The coexistence of different religious and cultural institutions contributes to the district's plural social character. Cultural practices can therefore function not only as expressions of identity but also as instruments of social interaction and community solidarity.

Cultural Practices and Tourism

The cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari has considerable potential for cultural tourism. Visitors are attracted not only by natural landmarks but also by temples, churches, historic buildings, festivals, traditional performances and local food. The Government of India's Incredible India portal highlights Kanniyakumari's historical and cultural heritage, including the Padmanabhapuram Palace, Vattakottai Fort, religious sites and cultural festivals. Cultural tourism can generate economic opportunities while encouraging communities to preserve traditional practices. However, tourism development should avoid reducing living traditions to mere performances for visitors. Local communities should remain central to the interpretation and preservation of their heritage.

Challenges to Cultural Preservation

Several factors may affect the continuity of traditional cultural practices:

1. Rapid urbanisation and modernisation.
2. Changes in traditional occupations.
3. Migration of younger generations.
4. Declining transmission of oral traditions.
5. Commercialisation of traditional festivals.
6. Reduced use of some traditional crafts and performance forms.
7. Environmental changes affecting coastal communities.
8. Changing food and lifestyle patterns.

These challenges make documentation and community-based preservation increasingly important.

Suggestions for Preservation

The following measures may strengthen the preservation of Kanniyakumari's cultural heritage:

- Document traditional songs, stories, rituals and folk performances.
- Encourage schools and colleges to organise cultural heritage programmes.
- Support local artists and traditional performers.
- Establish digital archives of oral traditions and folk arts.
- Encourage younger generations to learn traditional performing arts.
- Promote responsible cultural tourism.
- Record traditional food practices and recipes.
- Support traditional craft workers and fishing communities.
- Organise seminars, exhibitions and cultural festivals.
- Encourage community participation in heritage conservation.

CONCLUSION

The cultural practices of Kanniyakumari represent a rich combination of history, religion, occupation, environment and community life. The district's unique historical relationship with Nanjil Nadu and Travancore, together with its incorporation into Tamil Nadu in 1956, has contributed to a distinctive regional identity. Festivals, religious practices, folk arts, food traditions, agricultural activities, fishing customs, family ceremonies and performing arts continue to express the cultural identity of the people. Events such as Kumari Thiruvizha demonstrate how traditional arts can be brought into contemporary public spaces and introduced to younger generations. The preservation of Kanniyakumari's cultural practices is therefore not simply the protection of the past. It is a means of strengthening community identity, encouraging intergenerational learning, promoting social harmony and supporting sustainable cultural tourism. Future preservation efforts should combine documentation, education, community participation and responsible tourism so that the living traditions of Kanniyakumari continue to flourish.

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THE KAMUGU EZHUNTHU ARULAL FESTIVAL IN ITTAGAVELI

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ABSTRACT

The Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal ("the rising, or gracious ascension, of the areca palm"), a distinctive folk-religious ceremony performed at the Sree Neelakeshi Amman Mudippura Temple in Ittagaveli village, near Kulasekharam in Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Unlike Sanskritic temple worship built around a consecrated anthropomorphic murti, this shrine venerates the goddess in the form of three clusters of hair recovered from a temple tank, and the rites are conducted exclusively by the Kaniyar community. The Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal, staged during the temple's annual Amma Iraakkam festival, re-enacts a foundational myth of familial cruelty, caste-based humiliation and divine retribution through the symbolic uprooting, tug-of-war, submersion and burning of an areca (betel-nut) palm tree. This report situates the ritual within its oral mythology, describes its sequence of performance and discusses its social significance as a folk narrative that inverts caste hierarchy by making an oppressed community's ritual authority central to the goddess's power.

KEYWORDS

Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal – Neelakeshi Amman – Mudippura – Kaniyar community – Amma Iraakkam Thiruvizha – Thookka Nerchai – Ittagaveli – moola sthanam.

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari District, at the southern tip of Tamil Nadu, is home to a dense network of Amman (mother-goddess) shrines that blend Tamil Dravidian folk religion with Kerala-influenced temple customs, a result of the region's history as part of the erstwhile Travancore kingdom. Among these is the Ittagaveli Sree Neelakeshi Amman temple, locally referred to as a "Mudippura" (hair-shrine), a term used in Kerala tradition for temples believed to house especially potent, non-idol forms of Shakti.

The temple's central annual event, the Amma Iraakkam Thiruvizha ("festival of the Mother's descent"), draws devotees for a sequence of vow-fulfilment rites, the best known of which are the Thookka Nerchai (an infant-blessing suspension ritual) and the Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal, the subject of this report. This report draws on regional Tamil press coverage of the 2023 festival (Vikatan, April 2023) and the oral history recounted by temple functionaries and local devotees.

Temple Profile

The Ittagaveli Sree Neelakeshi Amma Mudippura Temple is located in Ittagaveli village, near Kulasekharam in Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. The presiding deity, Sree Neelakeshi Amman, is worshipped in the form of three clusters of blue-black hair, regarded as the moola or root deity, rather than as an anthropomorphic idol. As the temple's designation "Mudippura" (hair-shrine) suggests—a term drawn from Kerala temple tradition denoting a particularly potent, Shakti-charged shrine—its worship centres on this non-idol form of the goddess. The Kaniyar (Kani/Ganaka) community exclusively performs the poojas at the sanctum, with other communities traditionally not permitted to

conduct worship there. The temple's principal festival is the Amma Iraakkam Thiruvizha (Amman Descent Festival), an annual multi-day observance, within which the two key rituals are the Thookka Nerchai (infant-suspension vow ritual) and the Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal (areca-palm ritual).

The Foundational Legend

The temple's origin myth, as narrated by the local community, is set roughly seven hundred years ago in Ittagaveli. A brother and sister shared a close bond; after the sister was widowed, leaving her with a young daughter, she came to live in her brother's household. The brother's wife resented their presence, while the brother continued to treat his sister and niece with affection, which provoked the aunt's determination to drive them out.

In an era before matchboxes were common, households borrowed a live ember from neighbours to kindle their cooking fires, typically carried in half a coconut shell. One day the aunt sent the little girl to fetch embers, deliberately giving her the unsafe "female" half-shell rather than the safer "male" half. The girl visited the house of a family from a socially oppressed community to collect the embers, and as she carried them back, the ember burned through the shell's opening and scalded her hand; she instinctively put the burnt hand to her mouth.

Seeing this, the aunt accused the child of having eaten food in the house of the oppressed family she had visited, a grave transgression by the caste norms of the time, and reported this to her husband. The uncle scolded the girl without hearing her side. Distraught, the child fled into a nearby forest and hid herself. An elderly man from the same oppressed community, returning at night from a folk performance (kaniyattam), found the girl, gave her tender coconut water and fruit, and sent her home. Unwilling to return, and in despair, she instead jumped into a nearby temple tank. When her mother and grandmother learned of this, they too leapt into the tank in anguish, and search parties dived repeatedly but could not recover the bodies.

A local astrologer consulted about the disappearance divined that the three women had attained divinity and merged into the tank, and that only a member of the oppressed community, entering the water with a plate, would be able to retrieve them. When this was done, three clusters of hair rose from the water. Recognising that the three had become divine, the villagers began worshipping the hair as the root deity; because the hair was blue-black (neelam), the goddess came to be called Neelakeshi ("she of the blue/dark tresses"). Local tradition holds that the girl-turned-goddess subsequently exacted retribution on her aunt's family, destroying them root and branch, a fate that the Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal ritual re-enacts and commemorates each year.

The Amma Iraakkam Festival

The wider Amma Iraakkam festival, within which the Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal occurs, typically runs for about a week. Reported highlights from the 2023 observance illustrate its overall structure. The festival commences with a flag-hoisting ceremony marking the start of the Amma Iraakkam. This is followed by the Thookka Nerchai, in which infants are ritually "suspended" or swung as a vow-offering for the goddess's protection; in the 2023 festival, one hundred and fifty-three infants were presented for this rite. The Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal, the areca-palm ritual central to this study, is performed

on a specified day within the festival, and the observance concludes with the distribution of prasadam in the form of turmeric powder together with other concluding rites.

Underlying the Thookka Nerchai is the belief, prevalent among devotees, that Neelakeshi Amman, herself once a wronged child, functions as a protector of children, and parents undertake this vow seeking her blessing for their infants.

The Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal Ritual

"Kamugu" denotes the areca or betel-nut palm (Areca catechu), and "Ezhunthu Arulal" translates roughly as "the deity's rising forth, or gracious ascension." The ritual unfolds through a defined sequence of stages. It begins with the selection and worship of a living areca palm, at whose base (the mottu, or root portion) rites are first performed in situ. The tree is then uprooted along with its root ball and carried toward the temple precincts, where a ritual tug-of-war ensues: devotees of the goddess hold the crown or frond end (mudu) of the tree, while members of the Ittagaveli family, representing the lineage of the aunt in the legend, hold the root or base end (kondai), and the two groups pull the tree back and forth in a repeated contest. The tree is subsequently dragged into the temple tank within the festival grounds, where the contest continues in the water. The devotees holding the crown end are made to prevail in this symbolic victory, following which the areca tree is planted upright in front of the temple, and finally the root end of the tree is set alight and burned.

Temple tradition explicitly interprets this sequence as a re-enactment of the goddess's destruction of her aunt's lineage "root and branch, root and soil" (verodum veradi mannodum), that is, an annihilation so complete that not even the earth around the roots remains untouched. In this reading, the uprooting represents the severing of the aunt's family from its foundation; the tug-of-war dramatizes the contest between the goddess's devotees and the aunt's lineage; the submersion recalls the tank in which the goddess and her kin died; the eventual planting of the tree before the temple signifies the goddess's own triumphant, rooted presence; and the burning of the root end enacts the final, irreversible destruction of the aunt's family line.

Ritual Offerings and Restrictions

Worship at the sanctum follows several distinctive conventions. Only Kaniyar community priests are permitted to conduct pooja at the moola sthanam (root sanctum), with other communities excluded from officiating. Prasadam is distributed in the form of turmeric powder (manjal thool), while naivedyam (food offerings) consist of tender coconut, raw uncooked rice, banana, areca-palm flower, jackfruit and nungu (ice-apple or palm fruit). Notably, cooked or fire-prepared food is never offered to the deity, a restriction consistent with the myth's central motif of fire, embers and the tragic misunderstanding surrounding food.

Social and Symbolic Significance

Scholars and local commentators frame this temple's ritual order as an inversion of conventional caste hierarchy. The origin myth turns on an oppressed-community household being wrongly implicated in an act, sharing food, treated as polluting by the girl's upper-caste relatives; the girl's death and deification, and the fact that only a member of that same oppressed community could retrieve the divine hair from the tank, together place ritual agency and legitimacy in the hands of a community otherwise marginalised in caste society. The temple's

continuing restriction of priesthood to the Kaniyar community, and its rejection of fire-cooked offerings, can be read as institutionalising this reversal: the shrine's sanctity depends structurally on the very community whose everyday social position the myth's antagonist tries to stigmatise.

The Thookka Nerchai further extends the goddess's identity as a wronged child into her contemporary role as guardian of infants, linking personal tragedy in the myth to a living protective function invoked by present-day parents. As a ritual complex, the Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal also exemplifies how Tamil folk religion encodes moral narrative into performative, embodied action: tree, water, fire and directional pulling stand in for lineage, death and retribution, offering a rich case study in the anthropology of South Indian goddess worship, oral mythology, and caste and ritual authority.

CONCLUSION

The Kamugu Ezhunthu Arulal at the Ittagaveli Sree Neelakeshi Amman Mudippura Temple is a striking example of a localized Kanniyakumari folk tradition in which myth, ritual performance and community identity are tightly interwoven. Centred on a goddess who is herself a deified victim of caste cruelty and family betrayal, the temple's worship practices—hair as the moola deity, exclusive Kaniyar priesthood, uncooked naivedyam, and the annual re-enactment of the aunt's lineage's destruction through the areca-palm ritual—together constitute a coherent symbolic system. The festival merits further ethnographic and folkloric study, both for its ritual uniqueness and for what it reveals about caste, gender and moral narrative in Tamil folk religion.

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THE PALLIYADI PAZHAYAPALLI FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

The Pazhayapalli Shrine, popularly known as the Palliyadi Palliyappan Shrine, is located in the village of Palliyadi in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, approximately 25 kilometres from Nagercoil. For over four centuries, this modest yet remarkable shrine has stood as a living symbol of religious harmony, where Hindus light oil lamps, Christians light candles, and Muslims offer incense at the same sacred space, without distinction of faith. The shrine is best known for its annual Samabandhi Virundhu (community feast), held on the first Monday of the Tamil month of Panguni, preceded by an Interfaith Harmony Festival. This paper presents a descriptive study of the shrine's origins, its legend, its central ritual practices, and the socio-cultural significance of its community feast, drawing on locally preserved oral tradition. The study highlights how the shrine's practice of aniconic worship (worship without an idol), centred instead on an ever-burning sacred lamp, and its tradition of communal dining across caste and religious lines, offer a distinctive model of pluralistic coexistence rooted in shared faith rather than doctrinal uniformity.

KEYWORDS

Pazhayapalli Shrine - Palliyappan - Samabandhi Virundhu - Aniconic Worship - Ever-Burning Lamp - Annadanam.

INTRODUCTION

India's religious landscape includes numerous shrines that transcend sectarian boundaries, and the Pazhayapalli Shrine at Palliyadi, at the southernmost tip of Tamil Nadu, is one such example. Unlike conventional single-denomination temples, churches, or mosques, it draws Hindu, Christian, and Muslim devotees alike, each worshipping according to their own tradition within the same sacred precinct. This reflects the wider religious geography of Kanniyakumari district, where temples, churches, and mosques often stand in close proximity and even share in one another's festivals — as seen in the cross-faith participation at the December feast of Our Lady of Ransom Church, Kanyakumari town. A similarly named but unrelated site, the historic Pazhayapalli Mosque at Changanassery, Kerala, reflects a comparable regional tradition of shared sacred space. This paper deals about the historical background, ritual practices, and cultural significance of the Palliyadi shrine and its annual festival, drawing on locally preserved oral tradition and available secondary material.

Location

The Pazhayapalli Shrine is situated in the village of Palliyadi, in Killiyoor block of Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, administered under the Nattalam Panchayat, about 25– 26 kilometres from the town of Nagercoil and roughly 5 kilometres from Killiyoor. The village is accessible via National Highways NH 66 and NH 44, and is surrounded by neighbouring villages such as Kattathurai, Paloor, Killiyoor, Mathicode, and Azhagiamandapam.

Historical Background

According to local tradition, around 400 years ago the area where the shrine now stands was covered with dense forest and inhabited by tigers. At that time, the

land belonged to a monastery (matham), but it later passed into the control of a local family. Beneath a tamarind tree on the property stood a vertically placed black stone (karungal), before which the family began lighting oil lamps and offering worship. Later, the family installed a second stone beside the first, to symbolically represent the Divine Mother (Amman) and the Divine Father (Appan), establishing the shrine in a form recognisable to Hindu modes of worship. Because the two stones representing the Mother and Father were worshipped together as a pair, devotees over time began referring to the deity collectively as Palliyappan — the name by which the shrine and its presiding presence are known today.

During this early period, epidemics such as cholera and smallpox swept through the region, causing widespread death. Frightened by the outbreaks, the villagers turned to the Palliyappan Shrine in prayer. They took a collective vow that if the loss of life ceased, they would prepare and distribute kanji (rice porridge) to the entire village as an act of thanksgiving. When the epidemic eventually subsided, the villagers fulfilled their vow.

The kanji distribution that began on that occasion gradually evolved, over generations, into the tradition of Annadanam — the charitable offering of free meals — that continues at the shrine to this day. This legend forms the origin narrative for the shrine's most distinctive and enduring practice: communal, charitable feeding open to all.

Ever-Burning Lamp

The tamarind tree under which the original black stone was placed is itself about 400 years old, and its spreading canopy serves, quite literally, as the natural roof of the shrine —there being no constructed sanctum in the conventional sense. Devotees take special care to ensure that the oil lamps lit upon the black stone remain continuously burning and are never allowed to go out, making the ever-burning lamp the enduring spiritual centre of the shrine across the centuries.

The responsibility of keeping the lamp lit is treated as a shared communal duty rather than the task of a single family or caretaker, with local devotees taking turns to replenish the oil and tend the flame. Over the centuries, this unbroken act of tending has itself become a form of worship, understood by devotees to sustain the shrine's sanctity independently of any priestly office. The lamp's continuous burning is also read locally as a quiet parallel to the shrine's wider ethos of coexistence: just as Hindus light lamps, Christians light candles, and Muslims offer incense in their own ways, the ever-burning flame stands as a shared point of reference around which all three traditions converge.

Annual Festival and Schedule

The festival day itself follows a customary rhythm from morning to evening. In the morning, devotees take part in the lighting of sacred lamps, silent prayers, family worship, and thanksgiving offerings. By midday, the community gathers for collective prayer, community blessings, and religious songs and devotional gatherings. The afternoon is centred on the Samabandhi Virundhu, the community feast, at which food is served equally to everyone. The day draws to a close in the evening with lamp worship, final prayers, and the distribution of sacred offerings.

Beyond these calendar occasions, devotees of all three faiths are also known to visit the shrine daily, treating it as common devotional ground rather than a

site reserved for festival days alone. In addition to this principal annual festival, the shrine also draws large numbers of devotees during other significant occasions such as Thirukarthigai, Christmas, and Maha Shivaratri — festivals rooted in different religious calendars, all observed at the same sacred site. Devotees offer sweets, bunches of bananas, coconuts, and similar items as tokens of devotion, irrespective of their religious background.

Community Feast – Samabandhi Virundhu

Every year, on the first Monday of the Tamil month of Panguni, the shrine hosts the Samabandhi Virundhu (community feast). The undisputed highlight of the festival is the Samabandhi Virundhu, the communal feast in which the shrine's founding legend finds its living continuation. The feast is built on a set of clear and consistently observed principles: everyone sits together, with no separate dining arrangements, and no distinction is made on the basis of caste or religion. The food served is prepared entirely through public donations, and thousands of devotees participate in the feast each year. This communal meal, in which strangers of every background sit and eat side by side, is widely regarded as a powerful lived expression of equality and unity, translating the shrine's abstract ideal of religious harmony into a concrete, shared, everyday act.

Harmony and Cultural Significance

One of the shrine's most defining characteristics is the manner in which devotees of different faiths worship side by side, each according to their own custom. Hindus light oil lamps (deepam), Christians pray, traditionally lighting candles (mezhuguvarthi), and Muslims visit and offer prayers, traditionally through incense (thoopam); people of other faiths also participate freely. This coexistence of three distinct ritual vocabularies — lamp, candle, and incense — performed at a single location is presented in local memory as evidence of long-standing communal amity rather than as a recent or engineered gesture of unity. The absence of any single, sect-specific ritual structure allows each devotee to worship according to their own belief system while still sharing the same sacred space — a feature that distinguishes the shrine from most conventional single-faith places of worship.

The Palliyadi festival is valued within the region for several interconnected reasons. It promotes communal harmony among diverse religious communities and preserves a centuries-old local tradition passed down largely through oral memory. In concrete practice, it demonstrates the peaceful coexistence of different religions and highlights the broader multicultural heritage of the Kanyakumari region. Above all, it exemplifies grassroots religious syncretism arising from shared local history rather than top-down interfaith initiatives.

Absence of an Idol

Local tradition places particular emphasis on the shrine's aniconic character — that is, the deliberate absence of any idol — grounded in three core ideas: that God is understood to be beyond physical form, that light is taken to represent the divine presence, and that worship is centred on faith itself, rather than on any image or icon. It is this understanding that makes the ever-burning lamp — rather than any carved or cast image — the true spiritual centre of the shrine.

This absence of a fixed image is also part of what allows devotees from different religious backgrounds to worship at the same site without contradiction. Since there is no iconographic representation identified exclusively with one tradition, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims are each able to approach the shrine on their own terms — the Hindu devotee reading the lamp as a manifestation of divine presence, the Christian and Muslim devotee approaching it more as a shared sacred space than as an object of worship in the conventional sense. In this way, the shrine's aniconic character functions not merely as a theological position but as a practical foundation for its interfaith character.

CONCLUSION

The Palliyadi Pazhayapalli Thiruthalam is not simply a place of worship — it is a living symbol of unity across faiths. Its annual festival centres on shared prayer, the sacred ever-burning lamp, and the Samabandhi Virundhu, reflecting values of equality, compassion, and communal harmony that have been preserved across centuries. While much of the shrine's history rests on local oral tradition rather than formal historical records, available accounts consistently describe it as an interfaith shrine with a long-standing reputation for welcoming devotees of every background without distinction. Read alongside the broader religious geography of Kanniyakumari district, the shrine offers a valuable case study of how sacred space, ritual practice, and shared community meals can together sustain religious pluralism at the grassroots level.

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LANDSCAPES OF BELIEF AND BELONGING: SACRED ECOLOGY, INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY AMONG THE KANI TRIBES OF KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between human communities and landscape is not merely ecological but also cultural, spiritual and historical. Among the Kani people of the southern Western Ghats, particularly those inhabiting the forested landscapes of Kanyakumari, the natural environment constitutes an important foundation of cultural identity, traditional knowledge and collective memory. Forests, hills, streams, plants and other natural resources are embedded within systems of belief, livelihood and indigenous knowledge transmitted across generations. This paper examines the Kani conception of landscape as a lived cultural space in which ecology, spirituality, traditional knowledge and identity intersect. Particular attention is given to the significance of forests and mountains, ethnobotanical knowledge, landscapes. The paper argues that Kani sacred ecology should not be understood simply as a collection of religious beliefs concerning nature; rather, it represents an integrated knowledge system through which the community interprets, uses and protects its environment. The transformation of forest governance, modern education, market integration, changing livelihoods and the expansion of conservation frameworks have altered this relationship, creating both challenges and possibilities for cultural continuity. The study therefore proposes that the conservation of the Kanyakumari landscape should recognise indigenous cultural knowledge and community memory as important components of heritage conservation. The Kani experience demonstrates that sacred landscapes can function simultaneously as ecological spaces, cultural archives and repositories of indigenous identity.

Keywords: *Kani – Kanyakumari - Sacred Landscape - Indigenous Knowledge - Sacred Ecology - Cultural Identity - Traditional Ecological Knowledge - Western Ghats*

INTRODUCTION

Landscape is more than a geographical space. For communities whose social and cultural lives have developed in close interaction with nature, landscape becomes a repository of memory, belief, knowledge and identity. Mountains, forests, rivers, plants and pathways can acquire meanings that extend beyond their physical characteristics. Such landscapes constitute what may broadly be understood as cultural landscapes, where human experience and the natural environment are continuously interconnected. The Kanyakumari district provides an especially significant setting for examining this relationship. Situated at the southern end of the Western Ghats, the district contains diverse ecological and cultural environments. Its western and north-western highland areas are connected with the Agasthyamalai landscape, a region recognised for exceptional biological diversity. The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve, designated by UNESCO in 2016, encompasses parts of Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli districts in Tamil Nadu and Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam districts in Kerala. UNESCO records the presence

of Kani communities within the reserve and notes their dependence on biological resources for sustenance. [1]

The Kani or Kanikkar are recognised as a Scheduled Tribe in Tamil Nadu, including specifically in Kanyakumari district. [2] Their historical association with the forests of the southern Western Ghats has resulted in the development of a rich body of traditional ecological and ethnobotanical knowledge. Research conducted in the Kani settlements of the Pechiparai Hills in Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary, for instance, documented extensive knowledge of medicinal plants and identified 138 medicinal plant species belonging to 60 families. [3]

This paper approaches the Kani landscape not simply as a natural environment but as a landscape of belief and belonging. It explores how ecological knowledge, spiritual understanding, medicinal practices, oral traditions and cultural identity become interconnected through the community's relationship with place. The central argument of this paper is that Kani cultural identity is spatially embedded the forest is not merely a resource base but a cultural landscape in which knowledge, memory, belief and identity are continuously reproduced.

Kani and the Cultural Landscape of Kanyakumari

The Kani communities of the southern Western Ghats have historically maintained close relationships with the forest environment. The Agasthyamalai region contains a remarkable variety of flora and fauna and has been recognised as an important biodiversity landscape. UNESCO identifies more than 2,250 species of higher plants in the biosphere reserve, including approximately 405 endemic species. [4] For the Kani, however, biodiversity is not simply an inventory of biological species. Plants and other natural resources are embedded in systems of knowledge acquired through observation, experience and intergenerational transmission. The forest therefore functions simultaneously as a source of food; a source of medicinal resources; a livelihood environment; a space of cultural memory; a site of social interaction; and a landscape associated with spiritual meanings. This integrated relationship challenges the conventional separation between “nature” and “culture.” What may be classified by modern institutions as forest resources can have multiple cultural meanings within Kani society. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department records the presence of Kani settlements within the Kalakad–Mundanthurai landscape and recognises the continuing relationship between Kani settlements and protected forest areas. [5] Thus, the Kani landscape should be understood through both ecological and cultural perspectives.

Sacred Ecology and Kani Worldview

The concept of sacred ecology provides a useful framework for understanding indigenous relationships with the natural world. Sacred ecology refers to systems of knowledge and practice through which communities understand the relationship between human beings, other living organisms and the physical environment. In the Kani context, the forest can be understood as a living cultural environment rather than an inert geographical space. Hills, trees, plants, water sources and other elements of the environment may acquire meanings through traditional knowledge, belief and collective memory. This relationship produces an ethical dimension to environmental interaction. Knowledge of the forest is accompanied by knowledge

concerning where resources are available, when they should be collected and how they can be used. Such knowledge is not necessarily expressed through written scientific texts. Much of it has traditionally been transmitted orally through everyday practices and interpersonal relationships. The significance of this system becomes particularly visible in traditional medicine. Studies of Kani communities in the southern Western Ghats have documented substantial ethnomedicinal knowledge. Research in the Agasthiyamalai Biosphere Reserve recorded traditional knowledge involving numerous medicinal plants, while another study in the Tirunelveli hills documented the use of 90 plant species for treating different ailments. [6] Consequently, medicinal knowledge cannot be separated completely from the landscape in which it developed. The plant is not simply a medicinal commodity, its identification, collection and application are components of a larger knowledge system.

Forest as a Repository of Indigenous Knowledge

One of the most significant characteristics of the Kani cultural landscape is the depth of its traditional ecological knowledge. Ethnobotanical research has repeatedly demonstrated that Kani communities possess detailed knowledge of medicinal plants. A study conducted in the Pechiparai Hills of Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary documented 138 medicinal species and examined their methods of preparation and use.[7] Earlier studies in the Agasthiyamalai region similarly demonstrated the importance of ancestral botanical knowledge among Kani traditional healers. Research published in 2008 noted that traditional medicinal knowledge continued to be transmitted orally, although the researchers also observed concerns about the weakening of knowledge among younger generations. [8] This creates an important conceptual point that the forest itself can be viewed as a cultural archive. A conventional archive preserves information through documents. A cultural landscape preserves knowledge through practice. A Kani elder identifying a medicinal plant, explaining its use, describing the appropriate part to collect or narrating knowledge received from earlier generations is participating in a process of cultural transmission. In this sense, knowledge is embodied in people and places simultaneously. The loss of access to particular landscapes can therefore potentially result in more than an economic change. It can affect the transmission of cultural knowledge associated with those landscapes.

Sacred Landscape and Cultural Identity

Identity is often understood through language, kinship, customs, religion and social institutions. For indigenous communities, however, identity can also be deeply connected with territory and landscape. For the Kani, the forest has historically provided the geographical setting in which social and cultural practices developed. Their knowledge of plants, animals, food resources and medicinal practices reflects long-term interaction with the Western Ghats environment. The concept of belonging is therefore particularly useful here. Belonging does not simply mean physical residence. It refers to an emotional, cultural and historical relationship with place. A landscape becomes part of community identity when it is associated with ancestors, memories, knowledge, practices and stories. This perspective allows the Kani landscape to be interpreted as a cultural memory-scape. The mountains and forests are not merely

locations where Kani settlements happen to exist. They are places through which cultural knowledge has been accumulated and transmitted. This understanding also broadens the meaning of cultural heritage. Heritage need not be limited to temples, churches, monuments, buildings, festivals or material objects. Indigenous ecological knowledge, oral traditions, medicinal practices and cultural relationships with nature can also constitute important forms of intangible cultural heritage.

Oral Tradition and the Transmission of Landscape Knowledge

Traditional knowledge is sustained primarily through intergenerational transmission. In communities where written documentation historically played a limited role, oral communication assumes particular importance. Among the Kani, knowledge relating to plants and traditional medicine has been documented as being transmitted from one generation to another. [9] Such transmission is not simply an educational process. It is part of the reproduction of cultural identity. Elders function as repositories of knowledge, while younger generations become potential carriers of that knowledge. However, this transmission is vulnerable to social change. Formal education, changing occupations, migration, market integration, modern medicine and changing patterns of forest access can alter the contexts in which traditional knowledge is learned. The challenge, therefore, is not to romanticise the past but to understand how indigenous knowledge can survive while communities themselves experience social transformation. Cultural continuity does not necessarily require the rejection of modernity. Instead, it requires the creation of conditions in which traditional knowledge can coexist with education, healthcare, technology and contemporary livelihoods.

Protected Areas and the Transformation of the Kani Landscape

The establishment of protected areas has introduced new forms of regulation into landscapes historically used by forest-dependent communities. The Kanyakumari landscape is connected with the wider Agasthyamalai ecological system, which includes protected areas such as the Kanyakumari Wildlife Sanctuary and the Kalakad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve. The Tamil Nadu Forest Department notes the existence of Kani settlements within the protected landscape of the tiger reserve. [10] Conservation has undoubtedly become essential because of the ecological significance of the Western Ghats. Yet conservation policies can also create complex relationships between biodiversity protection and traditional livelihood practices. The central question should therefore not be framed as, “Should forests be protected or should communities use forests?” and “How can ecological conservation and indigenous cultural continuity be strengthened together?” This approach recognises that indigenous communities may possess knowledge relevant to biodiversity management while also acknowledging the need for scientifically informed conservation. UNESCO's description of the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve itself recognises the importance of the relationship between tribal communities and biological resources. [11] the future of conservation in Kanyakumari therefore requires an approach that recognises both ecological value and cultural value.

From Sacred Landscape to Cultural Heritage

The contemporary concept of heritage increasingly includes living

traditions, indigenous knowledge and relationships between people and nature. The Kani landscape provides an excellent example of why heritage should not be understood exclusively through monuments and archaeological remains. A forest pathway can hold memory. A medicinal plant can hold knowledge. A mountain can hold spiritual meaning. An oral narrative can preserve historical consciousness. A traditional healing practice can represent generations of accumulated ecological observation. Together these elements constitute a living heritage system. The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve's recognition within UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves creates an important framework for understanding this intersection between biodiversity and culture. [12] The Kani experience also suggests that cultural tourism, if developed responsibly, should not reduce indigenous culture to performance or spectacle. Instead, tourism and heritage initiatives should prioritise community participation, informed consent, cultural dignity and equitable benefit-sharing.

Challenges to Cultural Continuity

Several factors influence the contemporary transformation of Kani cultural landscapes.

- **Changing livelihoods**

Traditional dependence on forest resources has increasingly interacted with agriculture, wage labour, government programmes and other forms of employment. Such changes may improve economic security but can also reduce everyday interaction with traditional environments.

- **Generational transformation**

Younger generations encounter formal education, digital technology, urban culture and new occupational opportunities. These developments create new possibilities while potentially weakening certain forms of oral transmission.

- **Decline of traditional knowledge**

Research has already drawn attention to the possibility of declining knowledge concerning medicinal plants, particularly when older knowledge holders pass away without adequate transmission to younger generations. [13]

- **Conservation restrictions**

Protected-area regulations can alter access to traditional resource areas. Such transformations need to be studied carefully rather than interpreted solely as either positive or negative.

- **Commercialisation of indigenous knowledge**

Traditional medicinal knowledge has increasing value in pharmaceutical, herbal and commercial contexts. This creates questions concerning intellectual property, community ownership, ethical documentation and benefit-sharing.

Therefore, documentation should not mean extracting knowledge from the community. Documentation must be accompanied by community rights and participation.

Towards a Community-Centred Conservation Model

The Kani case provides an opportunity to rethink the relationship between cultural heritage and environmental conservation. A future-oriented model should incorporate five principles.

1. Community Participation: Kani knowledge holders should be involved in research and conservation planning.
2. Intergenerational Transmission: oral knowledge can be documented through community-controlled archives, educational initiatives and cultural programmes.

3. Ethical Research: sensitive knowledge, particularly medicinal and ritual knowledge, should not be published or commercialised without appropriate consent.
4. Landscape-Based Heritage Conservation: conservation programmes should recognise culturally meaningful places in addition to biological resources.
5. Sustainable Livelihood Integration: cultural preservation should not require communities to remain economically marginalised. Sustainable livelihoods, education and cultural continuity should be pursued together.

Such an approach transforms the Kani from being perceived merely as beneficiaries of conservation into knowledge holders and partners in conservation.

Conclusion

The Kani cultural landscape of Kanyakumari demonstrates that the relationship between people and nature can simultaneously be ecological, economic, spiritual and historical. The forest is not simply a source of material resources; it is also a repository of memory, knowledge and identity. The concept of sacred ecology provides a useful framework for understanding this relationship. Kani ethnobotanical knowledge, traditional medicine, oral transmission and environmental practices reveal a cultural system in which knowledge is closely connected to place. At the same time, this relationship is undergoing transformation. Modern education, changing livelihoods, conservation regulations, market forces and generational change are reshaping the relationship between the Kani and their traditional landscapes. The appropriate response is neither to freeze Kani culture in an imagined traditional past nor to assume that modernisation necessarily results in cultural disappearance. Instead, the objective should be cultural continuity through adaptive transformation.

The Kani landscape should therefore be recognised as a living cultural heritage system in which biodiversity and identity are interconnected. Protecting the forest without recognising the cultural knowledge embedded within it would provide only a partial understanding of conservation. Likewise, preserving culture without protecting the ecological landscape on which that culture depends would also be incomplete. Ultimately, the Kani experience offers a broader lesson for Kanyakumari, a landscape becomes truly meaningful heritage when both its ecological life and its human memory are protected. The future of Kani cultural heritage therefore lies not simply in preserving traditions as museum objects, but in enabling the community to continue creating, transmitting and adapting those traditions within a living landscape.

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KUMARI THIRUVIZHA AND THE PROMOTION OF TAMIL CULTURAL HERITAGE: ART, MUSIC AND FOLK TRADITIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Culture represents the collective identity, memory, values, creativity and traditions of a society. It is expressed through language, literature, religion, festivals, music, dance, food, dress, customs and various forms of artistic expression. In the context of Tamil society, performing arts and folk traditions have historically played an important role in transmitting cultural knowledge from one generation to another. Kanniyakumari district has a distinctive position within Tamil cultural history. Located at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, the district has a unique geographical and cultural environment. The district administration describes Kanniyakumari as a coastal district with a 71.5-kilometre coastline and as the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, where the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal converge. The historical interaction between Tamil and Malayalam cultural regions has produced a rich cultural landscape. Religious institutions, festivals, folk traditions, architecture, music, dance and local customs reflect this historical interaction. In this environment, festivals function as important spaces for cultural expression. Among the cultural festivals of Kanniyakumari, Kumari Thiruvizha has particular significance. The official Kanniyakumari District Administration lists Kumari Thiruvizha among the important festivals of the district and states that it is held annually, with residents and visitors participating in cultural activities. The Ministry of Tourism's Utsav portal gives further importance to the festival by identifying it as an Art & Culture, Seasonal and Dance Festival. It records that the festival is organised by the Department of Tourism, Tamil Nadu, and provides a stage for hundreds of artists. Therefore, Kumari Thiruvizha deserves academic attention not simply as a festival but as a mechanism of cultural preservation, artistic promotion and cultural tourism.

Kanniyakumari: A Distinctive Cultural Landscape

Kanniyakumari is geographically and culturally distinctive. The district is the smallest district in Tamil Nadu by area but has a dense population and a significant cultural and tourism profile. The district headquarters is Nagercoil, and Tamil is identified as the district's language. The district's location at the meeting point of three seas has given it a special place in India's geographical imagination. However, its cultural importance extends beyond geography. The district contains temples, churches, historical monuments, traditional settlements, coastal communities and agricultural landscapes. The cultural environment of Kanniyakumari reflects both continuity and interaction. Tamil traditions coexist with influences from neighbouring Kerala. Religious practices, architecture, food traditions and folk culture demonstrate the historical interaction of these regions. Festivals provide a particularly visible expression of this cultural diversity. They bring together

ritual, music, dance, food, dress, artistic performance and community participation. Kumari Thiruvizha therefore needs to be understood within this broader cultural landscape. It represents an organised effort to place traditional Tamil artistic practices before contemporary audiences.

Origin and Nature of Kumari Thiruvizha

Kumari Thiruvizha is a cultural festival associated with Kanniyakumari and organised through the Department of Tourism, Tamil Nadu. The Ministry of Tourism records that the festival is conducted during April and May and provides a platform for hundreds of artists. The Urban Ghat Ground in Kanniyakumari has served as a venue capable of accommodating large audiences. The official description emphasises that the festival celebrates the native art and music of Tamil Nadu. This makes the event significant from the perspective of cultural heritage preservation. The festival combines classical and folk traditions. This combination is important because Tamil cultural heritage consists not only of highly institutionalised classical forms but also of community-based folk traditions. The presence of both forms creates a broad cultural platform. Classical dance represents established traditions of formal training and performance, while folk arts often reflect the social life, beliefs, occupations and collective memories of rural communities.Thus, Kumari Thiruvizha creates a cultural bridge between classical heritage and folk heritage.

Classical Dance Traditions

Classical dance traditions form an important part of Kumari Thiruvizha and contribute to the promotion of Tamil and South Indian cultural heritage. Performances such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali and Mohiniyattam provide audiences with opportunities to experience traditional forms of dance, music, expression and storytelling. Among these, Bharatanatyam has a strong association with Tamil cultural traditions and presents stories through rhythmic movements, gestures, facial expressions and music. The inclusion of Kathakali and Mohiniyattam also reflects the historical cultural interaction between Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Kerala. Through Kumari Thiruvizha, these classical art forms reach wider audiences and encourage younger generations to appreciate and preserve traditional performing arts. Thus, classical dance serves as an important medium of cultural transmission, artistic expression and heritage preservation.

Bharatanatyam

Bharatanatyam is one of the most prominent classical dance traditions of Tamil Nadu and forms an important part of South Indian cultural heritage. It combines rhythmic movements, expressive gestures, facial expressions, music and storytelling to communicate religious, mythological and cultural themes. The dance is traditionally performed with Carnatic music and includes intricate footwork, hand gestures (*mudras*) and expressive movements (*abhinaya*). In the context of Kumari Thiruvizha, Bharatanatyam provides an important platform for artists to present Tamil classical traditions before a wider audience. It also encourages younger generations to learn and appreciate traditional dance. Through public performances and cultural festivals, Bharatanatyam contributes to the preservation, transmission and promotion of Tamil intangible cultural heritage and strengthens the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari.

Kathakali and Mohiniattam

Kathakali and Mohiniattam are important classical dance traditions of Kerala that contribute to the multicultural character of Kanniyakumari. Kathakali is a highly expressive dance-drama known for elaborate costumes, colourful makeup, powerful gestures, facial expressions and storytelling based mainly on Indian epics and traditional narratives. Mohiniattam is characterised by graceful movements, gentle expressions and elegant rhythmic patterns, traditionally performed by women. Their inclusion in Kumari Thiruvizha reflects the historical and cultural interaction between Tamil Nadu and neighbouring Kerala. These art forms enrich the festival by presenting the diversity of South Indian performing arts and providing opportunities for cultural exchange. They also help audiences, particularly younger generations, understand the shared cultural heritage of the southern region. Thus, Kathakali and Mohiniattam contribute to cultural preservation, artistic appreciation and the promotion of cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari.

Folk Dance and Traditional Performance

Folk dance and traditional performances are important components of Kumari Thiruvizha, representing the cultural identity and community traditions of Tamil Nadu. Folk forms such as Karagattam, Oyilattam, Devarattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kummi, Therukoothu and Villu Paattu combine dance, music, storytelling and traditional customs. These performances often reflect the everyday life, religious beliefs, social values and collective memories of local communities. Kumari Thiruvizha provides traditional artists with opportunities to present their skills before wider audiences and encourages the younger generation to learn and appreciate folk traditions. Such performances also strengthen cultural tourism by offering visitors an authentic experience of Tamil heritage. Therefore, folk dance and traditional performances play a vital role in preserving intangible cultural heritage, supporting traditional artists and strengthening community identity.

Oyilattam

Oyilattam is a traditional Tamil folk dance known for its rhythmic movements, coordinated steps and graceful body gestures. The term *Oyilattam* is generally associated with graceful or rhythmic movement, and the dance is traditionally performed by groups of dancers wearing colourful costumes and moving in coordinated patterns. It is accompanied by folk music and rhythmic beats, creating an energetic and visually attractive performance. Oyilattam has traditionally been associated with village celebrations, religious occasions and community gatherings. In Kumari Thiruvizha, its presentation provides an important platform for preserving and promoting Tamil folk traditions. It introduces younger generations and visitors to the artistic heritage of rural Tamil society and supports the continuity of traditional performance practices. Thus, Oyilattam contributes to cultural identity, community participation, heritage preservation and cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari.

Karagattam

Karagattam is a popular traditional folk dance of Tamil Nadu, characterised by balancing a decorated pot (*karagam*) on the head while performing rhythmic movements. The dance is closely associated with village festivals, religious celebrations and community gatherings, and traditionally has connections with the

worship of Mariamman and other village deities. Performers display remarkable balance, physical coordination and artistic skill through graceful movements accompanied by folk music and percussion instruments. Costumes, rhythmic steps and colourful decorations add to the visual appeal of the performance. In Kumari Thiruvizha, Karagattam provides an important platform for presenting Tamil folk culture to local communities and visitors. Its inclusion helps preserve traditional performing arts, supports folk artists and encourages younger generations to appreciate their cultural heritage. Thus, Karagattam contributes to cultural preservation, artistic expression, community participation and cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari.

Kavadi Aattam

Kavadi Aattam is a traditional Tamil devotional folk dance closely associated with the worship of Lord Murugan. Devotees carry decorated *kavadi* structures on their shoulders and perform rhythmic movements accompanied by traditional music, drums and devotional songs. The performance represents devotion, discipline, faith and spiritual commitment, and is commonly seen during Murugan festivals and religious processions. In Kumari Thiruvizha, Kavadi Aattam provides an opportunity to present the religious and folk traditions of Tamil society to a wider audience. Its colourful decorations, rhythmic movements and devotional character make it an important form of cultural expression. The performance also helps younger generations understand traditional religious practices and folk arts. Thus, Kavadi Aattam contributes to the preservation of Tamil intangible cultural heritage, religious traditions, community participation and cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari.

Kummi and Villu Paattu

Kummi and Villu Paattu are important traditional folk forms of Tamil Nadu that combine music, movement, storytelling and community participation. Kummi is a group dance traditionally performed mainly by women, often with rhythmic clapping and songs during festivals, weddings and community celebrations. It reflects the social life, customs and collective spirit of Tamil communities. Villu Paattu, or bow-song tradition, is a distinctive narrative folk art in which performers use a bow-shaped musical instrument along with percussion and singing to narrate stories, legends, religious themes and social messages. In Kumari Thiruvizha, both forms provide opportunities to present Tamil oral traditions before wider audiences. They help transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to another and preserve traditional forms of music, storytelling and performance. Thus, Kummi and Villu Paattu contribute significantly to Tamil cultural identity, intangible heritage preservation, community participation and cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari.

Traditional Music and Musical Heritage

Music forms an important dimension of Kumari Thiruvizha, reflecting the rich musical heritage of Tamil Nadu and South India. The festival provides a platform for both classical and traditional musical forms, bringing together artists and audiences through performances that connect cultural memory with contemporary celebration. Pannisai, Nadaswaram, Thavil and Carnatic music are among the musical traditions associated with the festival. Pannisai represents the long-standing Tamil tradition of devotional and temple-

oriented music, while Nadaswaram and Thavil are closely connected with temple festivals, religious processions and auspicious social occasions. Their powerful rhythms and distinctive sounds create an important cultural atmosphere during festival celebrations. Carnatic music, with its sophisticated system of ragas, talas and compositions, further demonstrates the classical musical heritage of South India. The presentation of these musical traditions during Kumari Thiruvizha provides opportunities for musicians to perform before wider audiences and encourages younger generations to learn and appreciate traditional music. It also supports the transmission of intangible cultural heritage by connecting oral, performing and musical traditions across generations. Moreover, traditional music enhances the cultural experience of visitors and strengthens the potential of Kanniyakumari as a destination for cultural tourism. Therefore, the preservation and promotion of traditional music through Kumari Thiruvizha are essential for protecting cultural identity, supporting artists and sustaining the musical heritage of the region.

Kumari Thiruvizha and Intangible Cultural Heritage

The concept of intangible cultural heritage includes practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills transmitted between generations. Festivals are particularly important because they provide living spaces where these traditions are performed. Kumari Thiruvizha can be understood as an institutional platform for such transmission. A folk performance becomes heritage when it is continuously practised, remembered and transmitted. However, modernization and changing lifestyles may reduce opportunities for traditional performance. Urbanisation, migration, changes in entertainment preferences and the increasing popularity of digital media may influence the survival of traditional art forms. In this context, public festivals can provide an important performance environment. The Department of Art and Culture, Tamil Nadu, identifies Kumari Vizha among the cultural festivals supported through the state's Regional Cultural Centres, alongside Folk Arts Vizha, Tamizhisai Vizha and other cultural programmes. This institutional support is significant because heritage preservation requires not only community interest but also opportunities, documentation and financial support.

Role of the Festival in Cultural Transmission

One of the major contributions of Kumari Thiruvizha is its role in the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to another. Cultural traditions are often transmitted through a continuous process of Artist → Performance → Audience → Younger Generation → Future Practice. Through folk dances, traditional music, storytelling, costumes, rituals and other performances, the festival provides younger generations with opportunities to observe and understand cultural practices that may not always be taught through formal education. In this sense, Kumari Thiruvizha functions as an informal cultural classroom, where knowledge is acquired through direct observation and participation. Young people can learn about the history, social significance, instruments, costumes, techniques and values associated with different art forms. Schools and colleges can strengthen this process by organising educational visits, workshops, demonstrations and

interactive sessions with traditional artists during the festival. Folk artists may also be encouraged to explain the origin and significance of their performances and demonstrate traditional techniques to students. Digital documentation of performances can further support cultural transmission by making these traditions accessible to future generations. Such initiatives can create greater respect for traditional artists and encourage young people to participate in cultural activities. Therefore, Kumari Thiruvizha serves not only as a celebration of culture but also as an important mechanism for experiential cultural education, intergenerational learning and the preservation of Tamil intangible cultural heritage.

Economic Significance

Although Kumari Thiruvizha is primarily a cultural celebration, it also has considerable economic significance for Kanniyakumari. The arrival of tourists, devotees and cultural enthusiasts increases demand for transportation, hotels, restaurants, local food, handicrafts, souvenirs, photography, event services, retail shops and tour guides. Small traders, local entrepreneurs and service providers can therefore earn additional income during the festival period. Traditional artists also form an important part of the cultural economy, as performances provide opportunities to earn income and sustain their artistic livelihoods. The festival can thus connect cultural heritage with employment generation and local economic development. However, the economic benefits should be distributed fairly among traditional artists, small businesses and local communities rather than being concentrated mainly among large commercial enterprises. A community-centred approach to festival tourism can ensure that cultural celebration contributes to inclusive and sustainable economic development in Kanniyakumari.

Social and Cultural Significance

Kumari Thiruvizha has considerable social and cultural significance as it creates a shared public space where artists, local communities, students, tourists, cultural organisations and government institutions can interact. Such interaction promotes social participation, cultural exchange and appreciation of diversity. The festival provides opportunities for people from different social and cultural backgrounds to experience traditional dance, music, folk performances and artistic practices together. It also strengthens the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari by presenting the district not merely as a geographical tourist destination but as a living centre of cultural traditions. Through direct cultural experiences, visitors can gain a deeper understanding of local customs and artistic heritage. This is particularly important for cultural tourism, as modern tourists increasingly seek meaningful experiences rather than simply visiting physical attractions. Thus, Kumari Thiruvizha strengthens community identity, cultural interaction, social cohesion and the cultural tourism potential of Kanniyakumari. .

CONCLUSION

Kumari Thiruvizha represents an important expression of the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari and Tamil Nadu. Its significance extends beyond entertainment because it provides a public platform for the preservation and presentation of classical music, folk music, classical dance and folk performance traditions. The official Ministry of Tourism description demonstrates the diversity of artistic

forms associated with the festival, including Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Mohiniattam, Oyilattam, Devarattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kummi, Therukoothu and Villu Paattu, along with Pannisai, Nadaswaram, Thavil and Carnatic music. The Kanniyakumari District Administration also recognises Kumari Thiruvizha as an important annual cultural event in which residents and visitors participate in various cultural activities. The festival therefore acts as a bridge between tradition and modernity. It connects older cultural practices with contemporary audiences and creates opportunities for artists to continue their traditions. However, cultural preservation should not depend solely upon annual performances. Sustainable preservation requires documentation, education, financial support and active community participation. Kumari Thiruvizha can become a stronger model of cultural heritage preservation if it is developed as a comprehensive cultural programme involving artists, educational institutions, government departments, local communities, researchers and tourism organisations. Ultimately, the festival demonstrates that Tamil cultural heritage is not merely a collection of monuments and historical records. It is a living tradition expressed through movement, music, rhythm, storytelling, ritual and collective participation. Preserving Kumari Thiruvizha and the traditions represented through it is therefore an important contribution to safeguarding the cultural memory and artistic diversity of Tamil society.

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RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SOCIAL HARMONY IN KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari District, located at the southernmost tip of India, is widely known for its geographical uniqueness as well as its rich religious and cultural diversity. Hindus, Christians and Muslims have lived in the region for centuries, contributing to a pluralistic social environment. Religious pluralism refers to the peaceful existence, recognition and interaction of people belonging to different religious traditions. In Kanyakumari, religious diversity has influenced social institutions, festivals, traditions, education, architecture and everyday community life. This paper examines the historical development of religious pluralism in Kanyakumari and its contribution to social harmony. It also discusses the role of shared cultural practices, religious institutions, education, community interaction and local traditions in strengthening peaceful coexistence. At the same time, the paper identifies challenges such as religious intolerance, political polarization, social divisions and the spread of misinformation. The study argues that mutual respect, dialogue, inclusive education and preservation of common cultural values are essential for maintaining harmony in a religiously diverse society. Kanyakumari provides an important example of how diversity can become a source of social strength when communities recognize their common humanity with respecting differences.

Keywords*: Religious Pluralism, Social Harmony, Kanyakumari, Religious, Culture, Community.*

INTRODUCTION

India is a country characterized by considerable religious, linguistic, cultural and social diversity. Religious pluralism is an important feature of Indian society because different religious communities have historically interacted with one another in various social and cultural contexts. Kanyakumari district is a particularly significant area for studying religious pluralism because of its long history of interaction among different religious communities.

Kanyakumari lies at the Southern tip of the Indian subcontinent and forms part of Tamil Nadu. The district has rich historical heritage influenced by the Tamil, Travancore and wider South Indian cultural traditions. Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have had a significant presence in the district. Temples, Churches, Mosques and other religious institutions form an important part of the social landscape. Religious pluralism does not simply mean the presence of different religions in the same geographical area. It involves recognition of religious differences, mutual respect, peaceful interaction and cooperation among communities. Social harmony, similarly, refers to a condition in which people belonging to different social, religious, and cultural groups live together peacefully and participate in common social life.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of religious pluralism in Kanyakumari and to analyse its contribution to social harmony. It also considers the challenge to peaceful coexistence and suggests measures for

strengthening inter-religious understanding.

Historical Background Of Religious Diversity In Kanyakumari

The history of Kanyakumari is connected with the cultural history of southern Tamil Nadu and the former Travancore region. The area has witnessed movements of people, trade, cultural exchange and the development of different religious traditions. Hindu religious traditions have a deep historical presence in the region. Temples and sacred places have played an important role in shaping local culture and community identity. The worship of deities such as Bhagavathi Amman and other village and regional deities forms an important part of the cultural traditions of Kanyakumari.

Christianity also has a long history in the district. Missionary activities contributed to the development of educational and social institutions in several parts of the region. Churches became important religious and community institutions. Christian educational institutions, in particular, contributed to the spread of modern education and social awareness. Islam has also been part of the social and cultural history of the southern coastal region. Muslim communities were associated with trade, commerce and maritime activities. Mosques and muslin educational and social institutions became important parts of local community life. Thus, religious history of Kanyakumari is not history of a single community. It represents a continuous interaction of different religious and cultural traditions.

Religious Pluralism In Kanyakumari

Religious pluralism in Kanyakumari can be understood throught the everyday interaction of different communities, people belonging to different religious participate in common economic, educational and social activities. Villages and towns often contain religious institutions belonging to different communities within the same social environment. The presence of Temples, Churches and mosques demonstrates the religious diversity of the district. However, the significance of pluralism lies beyond the physical existence of these institutions. It can be observed through social relationships, cultural exchanges and mutual participation.

Local festivals provide opportunities for community interaction. Festivals associated with temples, churches and other religious institutions attract people from different social backgrounds. In many places, religious occasions also become community occasions where people exchange greetings, assist one another and participate in social activities. Educational institutions have also played a significant role. Students belonging to different religious backgrounds study together, participate in cultural programmes and develop friendships. Such interactions can reduce social distance and promote understanding among young people.

Religious And Social Harmony

Religious can play an important role in promoting social harmony when its values of compassion, service, justice and peaceful coexistence are emphasized. Religious institutions often functions not only as places of worship but also as centres of social service. In Kanyakumari, religious organizations have contributed to education, charity, health services and assistance to economically weaker sections. Such activities can bring different communities together around common social concerns.

Social harmony is strengthened when individuals recognized that religious difference need not prevent cooperation. People may follow different religious beliefs while sharing common values such as honesty, kindness, family responsibility and concern for society. Community cooperation is particularly important during natural disasters, economic difficulties and other emergencies. When people from different religious communities assist one another during difficult situations, social trust is strengthened.

Role Of Education In Promoting Religious Understanding

Education is one of the most effective instruments for strengthening religious pluralism. Schools and colleges provide opportunities for students from different background to meet and interact. Educational institutions can promote social harmony by teaching students about india's religious and cultural diversity. Lessons on constitutional values, equality, secularism, human rights and social responsibility can help young people develop respect for differences.

Inter-religious cultural programmes, seminars, debates and community service activities can also encourage students to understand different traditions. Such activities help replace stereotypes with direct knowledge and personal interactions. Teachers have an important responsibility in this process. They can create an inclusive classroom environment where no students is discriminated against on the basis of religion. Education should encourage critical thinking and discourage prejudice, hatred and misinformation.

Role Of Religious Institutions

Religion forms a Temples, Churches and Mosques are important institutions within Kanyakumari's social structure. Religious leaders can contribute significantly to peace building by emphasizing messages of compassion, tolerance and respect. Religious institutions can organize community welfare programmes, blood donation camps, educational support, environmental activities and disaster relief programmes. When such activities involve people from different communities, they create opportunities for cooperation.

Interfaith dialogue is another important mechanism. Representatives of different religious communities can meet to discuss common social problems and develop cooperative solutions. Such dialogue helps reduce misunderstanding and strengthens mutual confidence. Religious leaders also have a responsibility to discourage hate speech and discrimination. By promoting peaceful values, they can positively influence their followers and contribute to a harmonious society.

Challenges To Religious Harmony

Despite the strong traditions of coexistence, religious harmony can face several challenges. Religious intolerance, political polarization, social prejudice and misinformation can create tensions between communities. The rapid spread of information through social media has created both opportunities and risks. False information, inflammatory messages and rumours can spread quickly and influence public opinion. Such misinformation may crate unnecessary suspicion between communities.

Economic inequality and social competition can also affect community relationships. When social or economic problems are interpreted through religious identities, they may create divisions. Another challenge is the weakening of traditional forms of community

interaction. Modern lifestyles, migration and changing social relationship can sometimes reduce opportunities for direct interaction between communities. Therefore, maintaining social harmony requires continuous effort rather than assuming that peaceful coexistence will automatically continue.

Measures To Strengthen Social Harmony In Kanyakumari

Several measures can be adopted to strengthen religious pluralism and social harmony in the district.

First, interfaith dialogue should be encouraged, regular meetings among religious leaders, educators, social workers and community representatives can address local issues peacefully.

Second, educational institutions should promote awareness of different religion and cultures. Students should be encouraged to understand diversity through discussion, cultural programmes and community activities.

Third, common cultural festivals and local heritage programmes can be used to strengthen a share regional identity. Cultural activities should highlight the contributions of different communities to Kanyakumari's history.

Fourth, religious institutions can cooperate in social service activities. Join programmes related to education, health, environmental protection and disaster relief can build stronger community relationships.

Fifth, responsible use of social media should be encouraged. People should verify information before sharing messages that may create religious tension.

Finally, constitutional values such as equality, liberty, fraternity and freedom of religion should be promoted. These values provide an important foundation for peaceful coexistence in a diverse society.

CONCLUSION

Religious pluralism is an important characteristic of the social and cultural life of Kanyakumari. The coexistence of Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities has contributed to the district's distinctive cultural identity. Religious institutions, educational organizations, festivals, economic relationships and community activities have created numerous opportunities for interaction and cooperation. The experience of Kanyakumari demonstrates that religious diversity does not necessarily lead to social conflict. When differences are respected and communities cooperate on common social concerns, diversity can become a source of strength. Social harmony depends on mutual respect, dialogue, equality and recognition of shared human values.

At the same time, religious harmony cannot be taken for granted. Intolerance, misinformation, political polarization and social prejudice can weaken community relationships. Therefore, educational institutions, religious leaders, civil society organizations and local communities must work together to promote peaceful coexistence. Kanyakumari's pluralistic heritage is a valuable social resource. Preserving this heritage requires respect for religious differences as well as commitment to common cultural and constitutional values. By strengthening interfaith dialogue, inclusive, education, community cooperation and responsible communication, Kanyakumari can continue to serve as an important example of religious pluralism and social harmony.

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A STUDY ON FISH DISTRIBUTION FROM CATCH TO CONSUMERS IN THENGAPATTANAM HARBOUR, KANNIYAKUMARI.

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ABSTRACT

Fish distribution plays an important role in connecting marine fishers with consumers and ensuring the availability of fresh fish in local and regional markets. This paper examines the movement of fish from the point of catch to final consumption and analyses the various marketing channels involved in the distribution process. The study focuses on the roles of fishers, auctioneers, commission agents, wholesalers, retailers, processors, transporters, and consumers. It also considers the costs and margins at different stages of distribution, along with factors affecting fish quality and price. The distribution process is influenced by the perishable nature of fish, availability of ice and cold-storage facilities, transportation, market information, seasonal fluctuations, demand, and the bargaining power of market participants. The study proposes to analyze the major distribution channels, marketing costs, price differences, post-harvest losses, and the share of the final consumer price received by fishers. Primary data may be collected from fishers, traders, retailers, and consumers through interviews and field observation, while secondary data may be obtained from government reports, fisheries departments, and relevant research studies. The study is expected to identify major constraints in the fish supply chain and suggest measures to improve distribution efficiency, reduce post-harvest losses, ensure fair returns to fishers, and provide quality fish to consumers at reasonable prices. The findings may support better fish-market management and contribute to the sustainable development of fishing communities.

Keywords:
Fish distribution, fish marketing, supply chain, fishers, intermediaries, consumers, marketing margin, post-harvest losses.

INTRODUCTION

Fish is an important source of food, income, employment, and livelihood for coastal and inland communities. After being caught, fish passes through several stages before reaching consumers, including landing, auctioning, sorting, icing, transportation, wholesaling, retailing, and processing. This distribution network connects fishers with consumers and supports the functioning of the fish-marketing system. Fish is highly perishable and requires proper handling, adequate ice, hygienic storage, suitable transportation, and timely marketing. Inadequate facilities can cause deterioration in quality, post-harvest losses losses, and reduced income for fishers and traders. The presence of several intermediaries may also influence the price received by fishers and the final price paid by consumers.

This study, entitled "A Study on Fish Distribution from Catch to Consumers," examines the major distribution channels, the roles of market participants, marketing costs, price margins, and challenges in the fish supply chain. It also aims to identify measures for reducing post-harvest losses, improving market efficiency, ensuring fair returns to

fishers, and providing quality fish to consumers at reasonable prices.

Objectives

1. To study the major distribution channels through which fish moves from fishers to consumers.
2. To analyse the price margins, and problems faced at different stages of fish distribution.
3. To suggest measures for reducing post-harvest losses, improving market efficiency, and ensuring fair returns to fishers.

Review Of Literature

Vala et al. (2020) studied the fish marketing system in Himmatnagar, Gujarat, focusing on marketing channels, market facilities, price structure, hygiene and cold-storage facilities. The study found poor infrastructure, inadequate cold storage, hygiene problems and price fluctuations. It suggested improving market facilities, sanitation, cold storage and hygienic fish handling to strengthen the fish marketing system.

Aktar et al. (2013) studied fish species availability and marketing systems in seven markets of Noakhali, Bangladesh. The study identified five marketing channels and found 43–71 fish species across the markets. Major constraints included lack of capital, high transport costs, middlemen exploitation and inadequate storage facilities. The study recommended better infrastructure, institutional support and improved fish handling and preservation facilities.

Jadhav (2024) examines marine fish distribution channels in Palghar, Maharashtra. The study finds that Channels 2 and 3 are more efficient, providing fishermen a higher share of the consumer price. It highlights problems such as inadequate infrastructure, cold storage, transportation and marketing, and suggests improved storage facilities, auction systems and market infrastructure.

Methodology

The study is based mainly on primary data collected directly from the major participants in the fish distribution process. The respondents include marine fishers, auctioneers, wholesalers, retailers, traders, transporters, and consumers. The study focuses on understanding the movement of fish from the point of catch to final consumption.

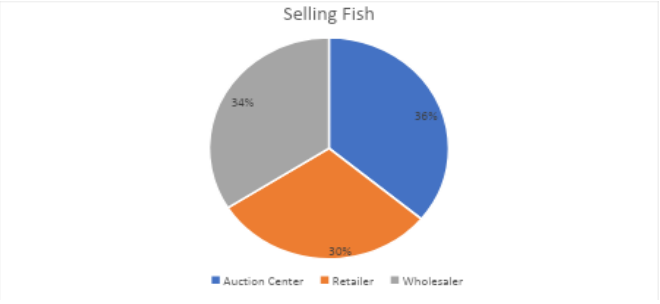
Primary data will be collected using a structured questionnaire, personal interviews, and direct field observation. The questionnaire covers fish catch, quantity sold, selling and purchasing prices, marketing channels, transportation, storage facilities, post-harvest losses, market information, and problems faced by the respondents.

The collected primary data will be systematically classified, tabulated, and analysed using percentage, average, marketing cost, marketing margin, and price-spread analysis. The analysis will help identify the major distribution channels, problems in fish marketing, fishermen's share of the consumer price, and measures needed to improve the efficiency of fish distribution.

DATA ANALYSIS

Figure 1 shows that auction centers are the main channel for selling fish, accounting for 36% of the respondents. Wholesalers account for 34%, while retailers represent 30%.

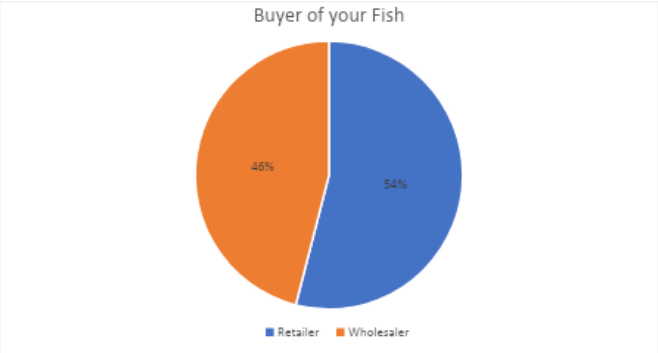
Figure 1: Channel for selling fish



Source: primary data

This indicates that fish distribution is fairly balanced across the three channels, with auction centers playing a slightly more prominent role in the marketing of fish.

Figure 2: Buyer of the fish



Source: primary data

Figure 2 reveals a near-balanced split in fish sales between Retailers (54%) and Wholesalers (46%). While retailers make up the slight majority, offering higher profit margins at the cost of smaller individual order sizes, wholesalers capture nearly half the market, providing steady bulk volume. This distribution highlights a healthy, diversified supply chain where the business avoids over-reliance on a single buyer type, balancing the higher margins of direct retail with the operational scale of wholesale distribution.

Figure 3: Average Price Received for fish



Source: primary data

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of survey respondents across three average price ranges received for fish. The 300 – 1200 price bracket recorded the highest representation with 19 respondents, followed closely by the 100 – 1000 range with 17 respondents, while the 150 – 1000 group saw the lowest count at 14 respondents. Overall, the data points toward a market leaning heavily toward higher price potential, with the majority of sellers operating within ranges that cap at Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,200.

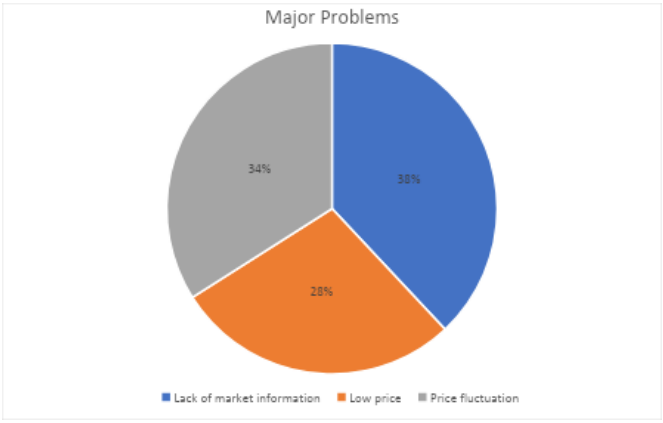
Table 1: Preservation techniques

	Storage	Transportation	Grand Total
Cold storage	19		19
Ice	17		17
No preservation		14	14
Grand Total	36	14	50

Source: primary data

The table highlights a clear divide in fish preservation techniques across different operational stages, covering 50 total respondents. During Storage (72% of respondents), active temperature control is universally applied, split between Cold storage (19 respondents / 38%) and Ice (17 respondents / 34%). Conversely, all 14 respondents associated with Transportation (28% of total) report using no preservation. This pattern reveals that while sellers prioritize cold-chain maintenance during static holding phases, transport remains a vulnerability where temperature preservation drops completely.

Figure 4: Problems faced by fisherman



Source: primary data

Figure 4 highlights that market transparency and stability are the primary challenges faced by respondents, with Lack of market information emerging as the leading problem at 38%, followed closely by Price fluctuation at 34%. Together, these two information and volatility issues account for over 70% of total concerns, while direct financial pressure from Low price represents the smallest share at 28%. This indicates that seller dissatisfaction stems less from baseline low pricing itself and more from a lack of clear market visibility and unpredictable price swings.

Findings

The study reveals that the fish distribution system involves several stages, beginning with the fishermen and ending with the final consumers. Most fishermen depend on wholesalers, commission agents, retailers, and other intermediaries for marketing their catch. Due to the involvement of several intermediaries, fishermen often have limited control over the final selling price of fish.

The study also finds that price fluctuation is a major problem in fish marketing. The price of fish varies according to fish availability, season, demand, quality, and market conditions. There is often a considerable difference between the price received by fishermen and the price paid by consumers. This reduces the share of fishermen in the final consumer price.

Another important finding is the lack of adequate storage and preservation facilities. Insufficient availability of ice, cold-storage facilities, and proper transportation can lead to fish spoilage and post-harvest losses. High transportation and marketing costs also increase the overall cost of distribution.

The study further indicates that many fishermen have limited access to current market-price information. Because of this, they may depend on buyers and intermediaries for information about prices. Seasonal variations in fish catch also affect the regularity of supply and the income of fishing households.

Overall, the study finds that the fish distribution system can be made more efficient through better infrastructure, improved market information, reduced dependence on intermediaries, direct marketing, and stronger cooperative institutions.

Suggestions

It is suggested that direct marketing facilities should be developed to enable fishermen to sell their catch directly to consumers. This can reduce unnecessary intermediaries and help fishermen obtain a better share of the final consumer price.

Fishermen's cooperative societies should be strengthened so that fishermen can collectively market their catch, improve their bargaining power, and reduce dependence on middlemen. Cooperative marketing can also help fishermen obtain better prices and reduce marketing costs.

Adequate ice plants, cold-storage facilities, and refrigerated transportation should be established near fishing harbours and landing centres. These facilities can reduce fish spoilage and post-harvest losses and help maintain the quality of fish until it reaches consumers.

A proper market information system should be introduced to provide fishermen with daily information about fish prices, demand, and market conditions. Mobile applications, digital platforms, and electronic display boards can be used for this purpose.

The government and fisheries institutions should provide training,

institutional credit, marketing assistance, and awareness about government schemes. Training in modern fish handling, packaging, preservation, value addition, and digital marketing can improve the income-generating capacity of fishing communities.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the distribution of fish from catch to consumer is an important economic activity that provides employment and income to fishermen, traders, retailers, and other participants. However, the distribution chain faces several challenges, particularly price fluctuations, dependence on intermediaries, high transportation costs, inadequate storage facilities, post-harvest losses, and lack of market information.

An efficient fish distribution system requires better coordination among fishermen, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers. Strengthening cooperative marketing, promoting direct sales, improving cold-chain infrastructure, providing timely market information, and ensuring fair prices can improve the efficiency of the distribution system.

Therefore, appropriate government policies and institutional support are essential to increase fishermen's income, reduce distribution losses, control unnecessary marketing costs, and provide quality fish to consumers at reasonable prices.

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EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN KANNIYAKUMARI: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Education has played a significant role in shaping social inclusion and mobility in Kanniyakumari. The region's educational history is closely connected with its experience under Travancore, the growth of missionary and community-based education, and the expansion of State policies after its integration with Tamil Nadu in 1956. This paper examines the historical relationship between education and social inclusion, with particular attention to caste, community, gender and access to educational opportunities. It traces the transition from a socially stratified educational order in nineteenth-century Travancore to the expansion of modern schooling and higher education in post-independence Kanniyakumari. The study highlights the contribution of missionary institutions and community initiatives to educational advancement and examines how education created opportunities to challenge traditional social inequalities. It also considers the role of Tamil Nadu's social-justice policies, particularly reservation in educational institutions, in widening opportunities for historically disadvantaged communities. The paper argues that educational inclusion was not the result of a single policy or institution but developed through the interaction of missionary activity, community participation, State intervention, reservation and socioeconomic change. Education contributed to literacy, occupational opportunities and social mobility. The study concludes that Kanniyakumari's educational history reflects significant progress towards wider inclusion while continuing to reveal caste, gender and socioeconomic inequalities.

Keywords :*Kanniyakumari, Education, Social Inclusion, Caste, Reservation, Social Mobility, Travancore, Tamil Nadu.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important institutions through which societies reproduce or challenge existing social inequalities. Access to education influences literacy, employment, economic opportunities, social mobility and participation in public life. Consequently, the history of education is also a history of social inclusion and exclusion. Kanniyakumari provides a particularly significant regional case study for understanding this relationship. The present-day district has a distinctive historical background. Much of the region was associated with the princely state of Travancore before it became part of the Madras State following the reorganisation of states in 1956. Its social history was shaped by caste hierarchies, religious diversity, missionary activity, community organisation and educational change. The development of education in the region cannot therefore be understood merely as the expansion of schools and literacy. Education was closely connected with questions of caste, social status and access to opportunities. For communities that experienced social exclusion,

education became an important means of seeking social advancement and challenging inherited inequalities. The central argument of this paper is that the history of educational inclusion in Kanniyakumari represents a gradual transition from restricted access towards wider participation. This transformation was not produced by a single institution or policy. Missionary education, community initiatives, social reform, government intervention, reservation policies and broader socioeconomic changes interacted with one another. The paper therefore examines education as a historical instrument of social inclusion, with particular attention to caste, community, gender and reservation.

Education and Social Hierarchy in Travancore

Before 1956, present-day Kanniyakumari was part of the princely state of Travancore. Its society was strongly influenced by caste hierarchy, which affected access to social institutions, including education. Educational opportunities were not equally available to all communities, as caste status, social position and economic circumstances influenced access to schooling. Education therefore had a dual role. Limited access to education could reinforce existing social inequalities, while the expansion of education created opportunities for disadvantaged communities to challenge traditional social hierarchies. Missionary institutions and community initiatives contributed to the spread of education in southern Travancore and provided new opportunities for literacy and social advancement. For communities such as the Nadars, education became one of several factors contributing to social and economic mobility. The expansion of schooling, together with community organisation and economic advancement, gradually opened access to new occupations and improved social participation. Historical studies of nineteenth-century South India also indicate that access to schooling was closely connected with caste and social status. Schools could therefore become spaces where questions of social inclusion and exclusion were contested. Thus, education in Travancore can be understood both as a mechanism that reproduced existing inequalities and as an instrument through which disadvantaged communities pursued social mobility. This historical background provides the foundation for understanding the later expansion of education and reservation policies in Tamil Nadu.

Missionary Education and Social Change

Missionary education played an important role in the educational development of southern Travancore. Christian missionary institutions established schools and contributed to the expansion of literacy among sections of society that had previously experienced limited access to formal education. The impact of missionary education extended beyond religious instruction. Education provided opportunities for literacy, employment, social awareness and occupational mobility. It also encouraged communities to value education as a means of improving their social and economic position. This process was particularly significant among communities such as the Nadars, for whom education, along with economic advancement and community organisation, contributed to wider social mobility. Thus, missionary education became one of the important factors that gradually challenged traditional social inequalities and contributed to the

emergence of new educated groups in southern Travancore.

Community Initiatives and the Expansion of Education

Community organisations also played an important role in expanding education in southern Travancore. As the value of education increased, families and communities began to view schooling as a means of improving social status, employment opportunities and economic conditions. Educational qualifications gradually opened access to occupations beyond traditional caste-based roles. This encouraged greater investment in schooling and created a process of intergenerational social mobility, where educational advancement in one generation could improve opportunities for the next. Thus, community participation in education complemented missionary and government initiatives and contributed to the gradual expansion of educational opportunities in the region.

Post-Independence Educational Expansion

After independence, education became an important responsibility of the democratic State. The Constitution of India provided a framework for equality and social justice, including provisions for socially and educationally backward communities through Articles 15(4), 16(4) and 46. The integration of Kanniyakumari with Tamil Nadu in 1956 brought the region under the State's expanding educational and welfare policies. Government schools, higher educational institutions, scholarships and welfare measures gradually widened access to education. Reservation also became an important instrument for improving educational opportunities for historically disadvantaged communities. However, educational expansion cannot be attributed to reservation alone. State intervention, community initiatives, missionary institutions, economic development and welfare policies collectively contributed to the changing educational landscape of Kanniyakumari.

Reservation and Educational Inclusion

Reservation became an important part of Tamil Nadu's approach to social justice and educational inclusion. Its development can be traced from the earlier system of communal representation in the Madras Presidency to the constitutional provisions and State policies introduced after independence. The Tamil Nadu Act 45 of 1994 provided reservation in educational institutions and State services for Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This created institutional opportunities for communities that had historically experienced educational and social disadvantages. In Kanniyakumari, reservation needs to be understood within the region's distinctive social and historical background. The State's official community classifications include certain entries specifically referring to Kanniyakumari, reflecting the importance of regional social conditions in the implementation of affirmative action. Thus, reservation can be viewed as an important institutional mechanism for expanding educational access and promoting social mobility in Kanniyakumari.

Education and Social Mobility

The expansion of education contributed to social mobility by creating access to new occupations, professional opportunities and government employment. As educational opportunities increased, individuals could increasingly move beyond occupations traditionally associated with their caste or community. Education therefore contributed to

occupational diversification, economic advancement and greater participation in public life. Reservation further supported these opportunities by providing institutional access to educational institutions and public employment for eligible disadvantaged communities. However, social mobility cannot be attributed to education or reservation alone. Factors such as family income, quality of schooling, economic development, migration, community support and government welfare programmes also influenced individual and community outcomes. Thus, education and reservation should be understood as important components of a broader process of social transformation in Kanniyakumari.

Women and Educational Inclusion

Women are an important part of the history of educational inclusion in Kanniyakumari. Historically, gender, caste and economic conditions influenced women's access to education. The expansion of girls' education gradually created new opportunities for literacy, employment, economic independence and participation in public life. Education also contributed to greater awareness of rights and influenced changing aspirations within families and communities. However, educational inclusion among women has not been uniform. Differences in caste, economic status and rural–urban location can continue to affect educational opportunities. Therefore, women's educational progress should be understood as part of the wider process of social inclusion, while recognising that gender intersects with other forms of social and economic inequality.

Education, Social Transformation and Emerging Challenges

Although education has expanded considerably in Kanniyakumari, educational inclusion remains an ongoing process. Access to schooling does not always ensure equal quality of education, and economic conditions can affect opportunities for higher education. Differences between rural and urban areas, along with caste and gender inequalities, also continue to influence educational outcomes. The study finds that education has historically played an important role in challenging social inequalities and promoting mobility. Missionary institutions, community initiatives and post-independence government policies contributed to the expansion of educational opportunities, while reservation provided an important institutional mechanism for improving access among disadvantaged communities. Educational advancement has also supported occupational and social mobility. However, education and reservation alone have not eliminated caste, gender or socioeconomic inequalities. The transformation of Kanniyakumari should therefore be understood as a continuing process of social inclusion, in which educational progress exists alongside persistent inequalities and the continued preservation of diverse cultural identities.

Conclusion

The history of education in Kanniyakumari reflects a gradual expansion of educational opportunities within a society historically influenced by caste and social inequalities. During the Travancore period, access to education was uneven, but the growth of missionary institutions and community initiatives created new opportunities for disadvantaged sections of society. After independence, government policies

further expanded access to education. The integration of Kanniyakumari with Tamil Nadu in 1956 brought the region within the State's broader framework of educational and social-justice policies. Reservation became an important mechanism for improving access to educational institutions and supporting social mobility among eligible disadvantaged communities. However, the progress achieved through education and reservation cannot be viewed in isolation. It was shaped by the combined influence of community participation, educational institutions, government intervention, welfare measures and economic development. The study therefore shows that education contributed significantly to literacy, educational advancement, occupational opportunities and social mobility in Kanniyakumari. At the same time, inequalities related to caste, gender, economic status and access to quality education continue to influence educational opportunities. Thus, the experience of Kanniyakumari represents a gradual movement from restricted educational access towards wider educational participation. While significant progress has been made, social inclusion remains an ongoing process requiring continued attention to equality of opportunity and access to quality education.

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INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM IN UPPER CLOTH REVOLT: INTERVENTION OF CASTE AND GENDERED NORMS

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ABSTRACT

The Upper Cloth Revolt in nineteenth-century Kanyakumari exemplifies the intersection of caste and gender oppression in Indian feminist history. Unlike Western feminist frameworks that often universalize women's struggles, this movement reveals the specificity of Indian women's experiences, where caste hierarchies compounded patriarchal control. Lower-caste women were subjected to humiliating practices such as the breast tax, forcing them to negotiate dignity and survival through both resistance and religious conversion. Figures like Nangeli transformed personal sacrifice into collective defiance, challenging the legitimacy of casteist and patriarchal domination. By situating the revolt within intersectional feminism, this study underscores the necessity of contextualizing feminist movements in India's socio-cultural realities. Digitizing such regional histories ensures their continued relevance, offering critical insights into how localized struggles enrich global feminist discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Intersectionality in Indian feminism is one of the notable features that stands in difference from western feminism. Often times western feminists club together Indian feminism in their own line without looking into the unique oppressive factors present in India. Postcolonial feminists like Mohanty claim that Western feminists tend to rely only on their value system and view themselves as saviours for other women. By assuming that global sisterhood exists, they fail to realise that the women across the world do not necessarily share the same conditions of discrimination as women in Western countries.[xlv] feminism may hold a different meaning for rural Indian women who struggle to access necessities like food, healthcare and education. Issues like equal pay, sexual harassment and reclaiming public spaces will mean little to them.[xlvi]

In intersectional feminism the ways through which oppressive forces existed overlap. It might be colour and gender, race and gender, caste and gender in cases like India. In the aspect of upper cloth revolt, it was caste and gender. the Indian perspective speaks that exposure of upper body was the norm in the ancient period and the coverage was the weird way also the coverage was something brought along with colonialism. But one cannot deny the existence of the breast tax etc. for the gratification of oppressive caste.

Caste Used As Double Marginalization

The women from ancient times were put through humiliation and abuse constantly due to patriarchy. This is common for both the oppressed class and oppressor class women. But the oppressed class women have to go under double marginalization of caste and then the patriarchy. Thus, the burden was heavier for women in India according to their birth by gender and by class. upper cloth movement is not just the result of male domination or misogyny but the result of casteist domination and expectation of

blind belief on the same caste. Reformed dress would change the whole position of women.[xlvii] As we look into the ancient clothing norms of women, it is normal for women to go uncovered her upper body. The oppressor caste women did the same but she was made to move around only in the confined spaces. Only the men in her own household sees her. But this was not the case for oppressed class women. They had work in the lands of their oppressors, do all their menial jobs and still had to wear and look according to the desire of those men. Later when the movement began clothing choice and the tax intertwined with it became an oppressive tool to shut the mouth of the oppressed class. The lower caste women were expected not to wear any upper garment and this was seen as a way of respect towards high caste men. They were forced to walk around public places with their breasts exposed.[xlviii] Thus their livelihood depended in the hands of oppressors, their respect and dignity was forced to be written off just to live. Moreover, they had to pay breast tax if they wanted to cover their upper body along with many other ridiculous taxes

Religion As A 'Way Out'

What came to their rescue or to say the 'way out' was something foreign. The tool the women of the movement took to break their chain was a religion that's entirely new to their geographical location. Religious conversions have always been controversial in nations like India because it has its pros and cons to the native traditions. But it's important to realise that the oppressed people saw this as their hidden pathway, way out of their oppressed lives. Thus, Christianity became the "way out" to the Kanyakumari people especially the women. At this point of time missionaries were helping by introducing new kind of upper garment called the kuppayam. They were helped and educated by this foreign religion which was naturally adopted them as their new order of religious life. That's how the religion which was linked to the oppressive system was rejected by the people. Culture and tradition should protect the people rather it became a weapon in the hands of oppressor.

Resistance To Patriarchal And Casteist Control

while the necessity of covering the female body was advocated as an extreme urgency, the aestheticizing functions of modern female sartorial codes were also highlighted as important, especially for modern family life.[xlix] It is not difficult to understand that the control over dressing of women runs deeply patriarchal. The upper caste men's notion of stripping the clothing rights of women to fulfil their pleasure is a classic example. gender ideology legitimises not only structures of patriarchy but also the very organization of caste.[1] While they try to protect the women in their house by relating their body to purity, they view the women from other communities as an object to their pleasure. The idea of protecting the women itself arise from viewing them as their properties and tainting them would be viewed as something like taking away their property. Oppressed caste women were made to work in public spaces and it was turned against them by claiming that men of the oppressed caste gave up on protecting their women. Social labour of women was seen as a cue for the accessibility to her body. Breast was sexualised and thus the need for upper cloth movement. There was one instance in the upper cloth revolt in which a woman named Nangeli cut her breasts off refusing to pay the tax on her very own body part thus losing her life. Nangeli's protest was not just against the exposure of breast as it was common for even woman of upper

caste to move around with their breast exposed or covered with just a shawl. Nangeli's protest was against the different tax lower caste people had to pay.[li] It was at this juncture that the female question of dignity and the indifferent attitudes of the upper caste towards the dignity of women and also the question of the male gaze came into discussions. These deliberations underlined the significance of Nangeli's sacrifice as a revolutionary act as it not only challenged the system of levying tax on breasts but was also seen as her revolution against the caste system that further divided men and women.[lii] Thus, women were to take extreme steps at times to go against the oppressive society. The gateway for the oppressors to exercise and justify this hideous patriarchal objectification practice was the caste.

Intersectional Feminism Extracted From The Revolt

Caste and gender norms have been proven as a double-edged sword for Indian women. Upper cloth movement is one such proof for the same. The feminist movement must, therefore, mould itself whilst considering the historical and cultural context of the issue.[liii] The upper cloth movement is the best example for the regional contribution to feminism from the kanniyakumari district. As the streams like digital humanities and digital history is getting importance these days, the records of such regional movements made digitized with primary evidences makes history well reached and well informed.

CONCLUSION

The Upper Cloth Revolt in Kanyakumari stands as a landmark in the history of intersectional feminism in India, revealing how caste and gendered norms intertwined to produce double marginalization for oppressed women. Their struggle was not merely about clothing but about reclaiming dignity, autonomy, and equality in the face of systemic humiliation. By resisting both patriarchal and casteist control, women like Nangeli transformed personal suffering into collective defiance, exposing the exploitative structures that sought to regulate their bodies. The adoption of Christianity as a "way out" further illustrates how oppressed communities sought alternative frameworks to escape entrenched hierarchies.

Ultimately, the revolt underscores that feminist movements in India cannot be understood through Western paradigms alone; they must be situated within local histories of caste, religion, and labour. Intersectional feminism, as evidenced in this revolt, insists that struggles for women's rights are inseparable from struggles against caste oppression. Digitizing and preserving such regional histories ensures that these voices of resistance continue to inform contemporary feminist discourse, reminding us that autonomy over one's body and clothing remains a deeply political act.

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VILLU PAATU : A LIVING FOLK TRADITION OF KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Villu Paatu, popularly known as the "bow song," is an important narrative folk art tradition of southern Tamil Nadu. In Kanniyakumari, it forms an integral part of the region's cultural heritage, bringing together music, storytelling, religious narratives and local History through the unique use of bow. Traditionally performed during temple festivals and other social occasions. Villu Paatu has served as an effective medium for communicating stories, beliefs, values and knowledge within predominantly oral communities. Its significance extends beyond entertainment to the preservation and transmission of cultural memory. This paper examines the tradition of Villu Paatu in the cultural life of contemporary Kanniyakumari. It also explores the traditional features of the art form and analyses its role in expressing the beliefs, customs, narratives and collective identity of local communities. Particular attention is given to the changes that Villu Paatu has undergone in the modern period. The study is based primarily on secondary sources, including scholarly works and available records relating to the folk culture of Kanniyakumari. It also highlights the importance of local documentation and oral sources in understanding the tradition from the perspectives of its practitioners and communities. The paper argues that the continuity of Villu Paatu does not depend on preserving it as a static tradition but enabling it to remain relevant and meaningful in contemporary society. Recognising, documenting, and supporting the artists who sustain this tradition are essential for safeguarding its continuity as a living expression of Kanyakumari's cultural heritage.

***Keywords**: Villu Paatu, Kanniyakumari, Folk Art Tradition, Folk Performance, Oral Communities, Cultural Heritage.*

INTRODUCTION:

Culture is not preserved only through monuments, inscriptions and written documents. It is also preserved through the voices, songs, stories and performances of ordinary people. Folk arts are therefore important sources for understanding the social and cultural History of a region. Villu Paatu is a distinctive form of musical storytelling tradition that occupies an important place in the folk culture of southern India. The Tamil word "Villu" means Bow, the age- old weapon of warriors and "Paatu" means Song or Music. It is also known as "*Villadichanpaatu*". It is an oral storytelling tradition in which a group of performers narrates stories through music, rhythm and dialogue. Research describes Villu Paatu as an old form of musical storytelling associated particularly with southern Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The performers weave epic stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata and other local tales. Some performances focus on social issues, moral teachings and legends of deities.

The district has a rich cultural heritage with numerous temples, festivals and local traditions. The official Kanniyakumari district cultural information records a range of festivals, including the festivals of the Kumari Amman Temple, Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram and Mandaikadu Temple. These festival environments have traditionally provided important spaces for folk performances one among them was Villu Paatu. Villu Paatu is not merely a performance watched by an audience. It creates a relationship between performer

and listener. The story is narrated through songs and spoken passages, while accompanying artists provide rhythmic responses. Humour, questions, repetition and interaction make the performance accessible to people of different ages and educational backgrounds. The tradition is therefore significant from a historical and cultural perspective. It provides an opportunity to understand how communities remembered stories, expressed beliefs, transmitted values and participated collectively in cultural life. Therefore, Villu Paatu can be considered as a cultural bridge connecting the past and present of Kanniyakumari.

The Legend Behind the Origin of Villu Paatu :

Villu Pattu is believed to have originated over 300 years ago. The legendary story behind the origin of this folk art has been traditionally transmitted orally among the Villu Paatu artist community for generations. However, there is no written evidence documenting this story. The story is believed that it belongs to a period when kings ruled the prosperous regions of India. A king named *Citrarasan,* who governed a small province in the southern region of present-day Tamil Nadu (Then Paandi Naadu) ruled by the Pandiyan kings, once went on a hunting expedition with his soldiers and some ministers. After spending the entire day on hunting, the king became tired and decided to rest beneath the shade of a tree. The animals he had hunted were placed before him. Seeing the young and old animals lying dead made the king deeply reflect on his actions. He questioned himself, wondering who he was to take away the lives of innocent creatures and what he had done. The king felt sorrowful because he believed that he had committed a sin. Seeking guidance, he approached his minister. The minister advised him to express his thoughts by singing them aloud. Following his minister's advice, the king took the bow that he had previously been used as a weapon for hunting and transformed it into an instrument for creating music. An earthen pot, which was traditionally used to store water or honey, was placed in such a way as to balance the bow. The king then began to sing, using the bow and the earthen pot to create music. The king sought forgiveness for his action to the divine. The soldiers joined him in the process of asking questions and reinforcing what the king had said with an *"Ammam Ammam"* translated to "yes yes". The king felt the healing process within himself. The king was surprised to see the animals in the forest to listen to the song. When he returned home, he continued spreading the art of playing the bow. Some versions of the story say that he used this art in the war field to encourage and motivate soldiers during difficult times.

Later, people learned this art and began singing stories about Gods and Goddesses of local folk deities. Mostly it was performed during the time of festivals in temples .The art became popular in Southern India. Subbu Arumugam Aiya , an Indian musician, writer and Villu pattu theatre art exponent beautifully stated that "*Kolai Karuvi Kalai Karuvi aanadhu"*- "A War Weapon Transformed into an Artistic Expression".

The Performance of Villu Paatu :

The performance of Villu Paatu is usually collective rather than individual. A main storyteller narrates the story by striking the bow. Other co-singers listen to the narration provide musical accompaniment, repeat important lines, respond to the narrator and sometimes introduce humorous or dramatic elements. The main instrument is the villu

or bow. The bow rests on the neck of a mud pot. The supplementary instruments used in performances include
Kudam – a clay-pot percussion instrument
Udukku – a small drum played by fingers of right hand Thala kattai – wooden rhythm instrument
Veesukol – sticks used by the performer in striking the bow

The entire villu pattu performance can be divided into seven segments. The performance depends heavily on interaction. This creates a lively atmosphere. The audience also becomes part of the performance. Laughter, responses and emotional reactions help create communication between the artists and listeners. Thus, Villu Paatu is not simply a song performed for people. It is a performance combined with music , drama and oral storytelling which creates a cultural tapestry that educates and entertains the gathering.

Villu Pattu in Kanniyakumari District:

In Kanniyakumari, Villu pattu has been traditionally developed into a communal art form that is performed during temple festivals, village meetings and other special occasions. It is usually performed for festivals associated with deities such as Sudalai, Madan, Mutharamman, Pechiamman, Isakkiamman etc. Villu Pattu was the chosen artform in the temple "Kodai Festival" . It is a prominent festival that is celebrated glorifying the folk god and goddesses where on one side, this villu pattu will be performed on the temple halls. The Poojas usually done in the late evening. In the festivals of the Kumari Amman Temple, Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram and Mandaikadu Temple have traditionally provided important spaces for folk performances one among them was Villu Pattu .It is during this time the Villu Pattu artists sing the deities. Politically, Villu pattu once held power as a voice for social and political commentaries. They could subtly or directly comment on the ruling powers, speak out against injustices or call for social reforms. It also created awareness regarding various health issues like AIDS, Family planning ,various Government schemes and policies.

Nowadays, villu pattu was developed new themes and shorter formats including stories about Kattabomman , Bharati, Gandhi etc. The Tradition survives both in festive contexts and staged events. Other than Hindu Temples, the Church of South India under Kanniyakumari diocese also gives importance to this folk art by conducting competition every year. Here, the themes will be from the Bible. This competition will be among the younger generations which they could be pass from one generation to another.

Contemporary Challenges :

The Villu Pattu is in dying stage. With the rapid modernization and digitalization of entertainment , this centuries old art is fading into obscurity. The challenges faced in these contemporary days are mentioned below:

- **Declining audience and competition from modern entertainment**

Cinema, television, and digital entertainment have reduced the space available for traditional folk performances. In temple festivals, Villu Paatu performances that once continued for several days may now be limited to much shorter periods.

- **Economic difficulties faced by artists**

Villu Paatu artists often depend on festival performances for their livelihood. The decline in opportunities made difficult for traditional artists to continue the profession full-time. The requirement of

travelling with an entire troupe also increases performance costs.

- **Declining participation of younger generations**

The tradition requires a combination of poetry, storytelling and dramatic performance. Younger generation find it difficult to connect with the art form due to changing entertainment preferences. Finding performers who possess all these skills has become increasingly difficult. Some artists therefore move towards other forms of employment or musical performance.

- **Loss of oral knowledge**

Villu Paatu has traditionally been transmitted through listening, observation and practice. When elderly performers cannot pass their songs, stories and performance techniques to younger artists, valuable oral knowledge can disappear. This is particularly important in Kanniyakumari, where many traditional narratives relate to local temples and communities were unknown to today's generation.

Preservation Measures

❖ **Documentation and digital archiving :**

One of the most important preservation efforts is systematic recording. The Archives and Research Centre for Ethnomusicology (ARCE) has preserved approximately 175 hours of Villu Paatu recordings collected through fieldwork in villages of Tirunelveli and Kanniyakumari. These recordings include narratives such as Vallarakkan, Muthupattan and the stories of Kunju Thampi and Valiya Thampi.

❖ **Inclusion in cultural festivals:**

Villu Paatu continues to receive a platform through government-supported cultural events. For example, the Kumari Thiruvizha organized by the Tamil Nadu Department of Tourism has included Villu Pattu among its folk-art performances. Such events provide opportunities for artists to perform before larger audiences.

❖ **Government and institutional support:**

Tamil Nadu's Department of Art and Culture was established to preserve traditional Tamil arts and culture and to support artists through cultural schemes and institutions. Such institutional support can help sustain folk artists and transmit traditional arts to younger generations.

❖ **Adapting to contemporary themes**

Preservation does not necessarily mean keeping Villu Paatu completely unchanged. Artists have adapted the form by introducing historical, social and contemporary themes and by shortening performances for modern stages and television. This adaptation can help the tradition remain relevant to younger audiences.

❖ **Encouraging young performers**

Schools, colleges, cultural organizations and local communities can organize workshops, demonstrations and training programmes where experienced Villu Paatu artists teach younger generations. This would help preserve not only the songs but also the storytelling techniques, instruments and performance conventions.

CONCLUSION :

Villu Pattu is a cultural treasure of Kanniyakumari which represents oral tradition, religious stories and social issues. It fosters community bonding, preserves Historical narratives and promote moral values. The major challenge facing Villu Paatu in contemporary Kanniyakumari is not simply the disappearance of the art form, but the weakening of the social and economic environment that traditionally supported its artists. At the same time, documentation, cultural festivals,

institutional support and adaptation to contemporary themes provide important opportunities for its survival. The future of Villu Paatu depends on combining traditional knowledge with modern methods of preservation and presentation. In this way, Villu Paatu can remain a living cultural tradition of Kanniyakumari rather than becoming merely a memory of the past.

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KANNIYAKUMARI: A MEETING POINT OF TAMIL AND KERALA CULTURAL TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of South India. Although it is presently a part of Tamil Nadu, the region remained under the political influence of the erstwhile Travancore State for a long period. This shared historical experience, together with geographical proximity and continuous social interaction, contributed to the development of a distinctive regional culture. Tamil traditions form an important part of the identity of Kanniyakumari, while its historical links with Travancore are reflected in architecture, language contact, food habits, festivals, family customs and everyday social practices. Padmanabhapuram, the former capital of Travancore, remains an important symbol of this historical relationship. The cultural life of Kanniyakumari is also enriched by religious diversity and a rich tradition of local festivals and folk practices. This paper examines the historical foundations of Tamil–Kerala cultural interaction in Kanniyakumari and its expression in the everyday life of the people. It argues that the region represents a distinctive cultural space shaped by continuity, interaction and adaptation rather than by a rigid division between two separate cultural traditions.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Tamil Culture, Kerala Culture, Travancore, Padmanabhapuram, Cultural Interaction, Cultural Identity, Folk Traditions.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari has a unique place in the cultural history of South India. Its present political identity as a district of Tamil Nadu does not fully represent its historical and cultural background. For several centuries, the region maintained close connections with the Kingdom of Travancore. This long association brought Tamil-speaking and Malayalam-speaking communities into contact and created conditions for cultural interaction. The result of this interaction can still be seen in many aspects of life. Language, architecture, food habits, dress, festivals, family customs and folk traditions reflect the historical relationship between Kanniyakumari and the neighbouring Kerala region. At the same time, Tamil language and cultural traditions remain central to the identity of the district. Therefore, Kanniyakumari cannot be understood simply through present-day political boundaries. Its cultural character has been shaped by a shared historical experience and by the continuous movement of people, ideas and practices across the Tamil–Kerala region. This paper studies Kanniyakumari as a meeting point of Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions and examines how historical interaction contributed to the development of a distinctive regional identity.

Historical Foundations of Tamil–Kerala Cultural Interaction

The historical connection between Kanniyakumari and Travancore forms the foundation of the region's cultural relationship with Kerala. Until 1956, the present Kanniyakumari district was part of the erstwhile Travancore region. The Tamil-speaking areas of southern Travancore had their own linguistic and cultural character while remaining connected to the political and administrative system of Travancore. During this long period, trade,

administration, migration, marriage and religious activities brought different communities into regular contact. These interactions encouraged the exchange of customs, language and social practices. The formation of Kanniyakumari district in 1956 was an important political change. The taluks of Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode were brought into the then Madras State and formed the new Kanniyakumari district. However, the change in administration did not remove the cultural influences and historical memories created during the Travancore period. The history of the region therefore shows that political boundaries may change, while cultural relationships can continue for generations.

Padmanabhapuram: A Symbol of Shared Heritage

Padmanabhapuram occupies a central place in the history of Kanniyakumari's relationship with Travancore. Originally known as Kalkulam, the town developed as an important political centre of the Venad rulers and later became the capital of Travancore. Padmanabhapuram Palace is one of the most significant monuments of this shared history. The palace complex represents the indigenous architectural traditions of southern Kerala and preserves the memory of the Travancore rulers. Its wooden structures, sloping roofs, carved panels and traditional building techniques reflect an architectural heritage closely associated with the former Travancore region. The importance of Padmanabhapuram is especially significant because the palace is located within present-day Kanniyakumari district while being maintained by the Kerala State Department of Archaeology. This arrangement itself reflects the continuing historical connection between the two regions. Thus, Padmanabhapuram is not merely a historical monument. It is a living symbol of the cultural and historical links that connect Kanniyakumari with Travancore and Kerala.

Tamil–Malayalam Linguistic Interaction

Kanniyakumari presents a distinctive linguistic environment shaped by its historical association with the Travancore region and its proximity to Kerala. Tamil is the predominant language of the district, while Malayalam continues to be spoken by sections of the population, particularly in areas close to the Kerala border. The long interaction between Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking communities has created a multilingual social environment in which people may use or understand both languages in different contexts. This linguistic contact is also reflected in the local variety of Tamil, commonly associated with Nanjil Nadu, which has developed distinctive vocabulary, expressions and patterns of speech through prolonged contact with Malayalam. The coexistence and interaction of Tamil and Malayalam therefore form an important part of Kanniyakumari's cultural identity and demonstrate how linguistic traditions can cross political boundaries and evolve within a shared regional environment

Architectural Fusion

Kerala and Kanniyakumari's vernacular architecture share several common features shaped by their similar climatic, cultural and social conditions. Both regions traditionally use courtyard-centric house plans, where spaces are arranged around

a central open courtyard that provides natural ventilation, daylight, and opportunities for social and ritual activities. In Kerala, this is prominently seen in the Nalukettu, with four wings surrounding the nadumuttam, while traditional houses in Kanniyakumari also show similar spatial arrangements suited to family life. Both traditions make extensive use of locally available timber, clay tiles, thick walls and shaded verandahs, demonstrating sustainable and climate-responsive construction practices. Their sloping roofs, however, vary in pitch, with Kerala houses generally having steeper roofs and Kanniyakumari houses having moderately pitched roofs.

Food as Cultural Fusion

Food is one of the clearest expressions of the cultural relationship between Kanniyakumari and Kerala. The Nanjil Nadu cuisine of Kanniyakumari shares several features with Kerala cuisine, particularly the extensive use of coconut, rice, spices and locally available vegetables. The coastal environment has also shaped similar food habits, with fish and other seafood forming an important part of traditional meals. Dishes such as appam, puttu, avial and coconut-based fish preparations illustrate the culinary connections between the two regions. At the same time, Kanniyakumari has developed its own food traditions based on local resources and Tamil cultural practices.

Festivals and shared ritual traditions

Due to its historical connection with Travancore and its location between the Tamil and Malayalam cultural regions, the district has developed a festival culture in which traditions from both sides are found together. Festivals and shared ritual traditions .The Kumari Amman Temple represents the strong Tamil devotional tradition of Goddess Kanniyakumari, while the Sree Adikesava Perumal Temple at Thiruvattar reflects the Vaishnava traditions associated with the Travancore region. The Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram also represents this cultural meeting, combining a strong Tamil religious character with its historical association with Travancore. Kerala influence is particularly visible in Bhagavathi worship at Mandaikadu, where the Mandaikadu Kodai festival attracts devotees from Kanniyakumari and neighbouring Kerala. The practice of women devotees carrying Irumudi with offerings and the observance of the Ayyappa Mandala season further connect Kanniyakumari with Kerala's Sabarimala pilgrimage tradition. Similarly, the celebration of Vishu alongside Puthandu, and Thrikkarthika alongside Karthigai Deepam, demonstrates the presence of both Kerala and Tamil festival traditions. Through these temples, forms of worship, festivals and pilgrimage practices, the people of Kanniyakumari continue to preserve a religious culture in which Tamil and Kerala traditions exist together.

Folk traditions and cultural memory

The artistic heritage of Kanniyakumari includes diverse dance, storytelling and martial traditions shaped by its historical connections with the neighbouring Kerala region. Thiruvathirakali, a traditional Kerala group dance, is known in parts of Kanniyakumari and is associated with festive and cultural occasions. Kathakali, the renowned dance-drama tradition of Kerala, is also performed in

Kanniyakumari as part of cultural and religious programmes. The martial tradition of Kalaripayattu, closely associated with Kerala, has historical connections with the southern region, where related martial practices such as Adimurai developed. Alongside these Kerala associated traditions, Villu Pattu remains an important folk storytelling tradition of Kanniyakumari and represents the strong Tamil cultural heritage of the district

Family, Dress, and Social Customs

The people of Kanniyakumari follow some family and social customs influenced by Kerala traditions, along with their traditional Tamil practices. Families traditionally maintain close relationships, with importance given to respect for elders, kinship and family gatherings. Social life is centred around marriages, religious occasions, festivals and community gatherings, where certain customs and practices show similarities with those followed in Kerala. These shared practices reflect the historical and cultural connections between Kanniyakumari and the neighbouring Kerala region.

Some people of Kanniyakumari also wear traditional Kerala-style dress, particularly during festivals, marriages and other special occasions. Women may wear the Kasavu saree, with its white or cream colour and golden border, while men may wear the traditional mundu, especially during religious ceremonies and temple visits. Alongside these Kerala-influenced styles, traditional Tamil forms of dress are also widely worn in the district. This combination of dress practices reflects the cultural interaction between Tamil and Kerala traditions in Kanniyakumari.

Conclusion

Kanniyakumari represents a distinctive cultural space where Tamil and Kerala traditions have interacted through historical, geographical and social connections. This interaction is reflected in its language, architecture, food, festivals, religious practices, folk arts, dress and family customs. The heritage of Padmanabhapuram and Kerala-associated practices in Bhagavathi and Ayyappa worship further demonstrate these connections. At the same time, Kanniyakumari has preserved its strong Tamil identity while adapting cultural influences from Kerala. Thus, the region is not merely a boundary between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, but a meeting point where traditions interact and develop local expressions. Its cultural heritage demonstrates the continuity of shared traditions across changing political boundaries.

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PORUNAI MUSEUM IN TAMIL NADU: A STUDY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE, MUSEUM PRACTICE AND CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

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ABSTRACT

The Porunai Museum at Reddiyarpatti in Tirunelveli district represents a significant development in the museumisation of archaeological heritage in Tamil Nadu. Named after the ancient designation of the Thamirabarani River, the museum has been conceived as a regional archaeological museum that brings together material evidence from important archaeological sites of southern Tamil Nadu, particularly Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Korkai and Thulukkarpatti. The museum was inaugurated in December 2025 and opened to the public shortly afterwards. Its significance lies not merely in the preservation of antiquities but also in its attempt to construct a coherent cultural narrative around the Porunai river basin, linking settlement, burial practices, metallurgy, craft production, agriculture, maritime exchange and early historic development.This article examines the historical significance, objectives, scope, museological characteristics and educational potential of the Porunai Museum. It also compares the museum with selected museums in Tamil Nadu, particularly the Government Museum, Chennai and the Keezhadi Museum, and with an international institution, the British Museum.

Keywords: *Porunai Museum; Thamirabarani; Adichanallur; Sivagalai; Korkai; Tamil archaeology; museum studies; archaeological heritage; maritime trade; cultural tourism; Tamil Nadu.*

INTRODUCTION

Museums have evolved from institutions primarily concerned with the collection and preservation of objects into spaces for research, interpretation, education, community participation and cultural dialogue. The International Council of Museums (ICOM), in its 2022 definition, describes a museum as a permanent institution that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage while promoting accessibility, inclusion, diversity and sustainability.

Within this changing museum environment, archaeological museums have a particularly important role. Archaeological excavations generate objects that acquire historical meaning only when they are properly documented, conserved, contextualised and interpreted. A museum therefore provides the bridge between archaeological research and public understanding.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is centred on the Porunai Museum at Reddiyarpatti, Tirunelveli. It examines:

1. The historical and archaeological background of the Porunai river basin.
2. The museum's objectives and interpretive approach.
3. The significance of archaeological material from Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Korkai and Thulukkarpatti.
4. The museum's architectural and technological characteristics.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives are:

- To examine the historical significance of the Porunai Museum.
- To understand the archaeological importance of the Porunai/Thamirabarani river basin.
- To analyse the representation of Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Korkai and related archaeological sites.

Historical and Archaeological Context of the Porunai Region

The Thamirabarani is one of the important perennial rivers of southern Tamil Nadu. Its historical significance is reflected in literature, settlements, archaeological sites and the development of agricultural and maritime communities. The archaeological landscape associated with the river includes Adichanallur, Sivagalai and Korkai. These sites represent different aspects of the cultural development of the region.

Adichanallur

Adichanallur is particularly important for the study of Iron Age and early archaeological cultures of southern India. Excavations have produced burial urns, pottery, iron objects, bronze objects, ornaments and other materials. The Government Museum, Tirunelveli, also preserves and exhibits archaeological material associated with Adichanallur. The importance of Adichanallur lies in its evidence for burial practices, material technology and social organisation. The presence of different classes of artefacts allows researchers to reconstruct aspects of economy, technology and cultural practices.

Sivagalai

Sivagalai has emerged as an important archaeological location in the Porunai region. Excavations have produced evidence relating to habitation, agriculture, pottery and technological development. The integration of Sivagalai material within Porunai Museum allows visitors to understand archaeological evidence within a broader regional framework rather than viewing individual finds in isolation.

Korkai

Korkai occupies a special place in the archaeological history of Tamilakam because of its association with the ancient Pandyan maritime world. Excavations have produced evidence including pottery, shell-working materials, terracotta objects, iron-related materials and other remains. Archaeological reports have also documented terracotta structures associated with the management or filtration of liquids. Korkai is particularly valuable for understanding the relationship between inland production centres and maritime trade. Its inclusion in Porunai Museum therefore provides a transition from riverine civilisation to maritime networks.

Thulukkarpatti and the Wider Landscape

The inclusion of Thulukkarpatti expands the geographical and chronological narrative of the museum. Contemporary descriptions of the museum identify Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Korkai and Thulukkarpatti as major archaeological components represented in the institution. Thus, the Porunai Museum can be understood as a **river-basin museum**, in which archaeological evidence from multiple sites is organised into a larger regional story.

Porunai Museum: Development and Museum Architecture

The proposal for a Porunai Museum was announced by the Tamil Nadu Government as part of an initiative to present archaeological discoveries from the Porunai region. The original project proposal envisaged a museum at Reddiyarpatti with traditional architectural features including courtyards, pillars and corridors. The completed museum was inaugurated in December 2025. Contemporary reports describe the complex as occupying approximately 13 acres, with around 54,000 square feet of exhibition space and separate blocks associated with the major archaeological themes. The museum's

architecture is significant because it attempts to combine contemporary museum requirements with regional architectural aesthetics. Rather than functioning simply as a conventional enclosed gallery, the complex incorporates open spaces and visitor-oriented facilities.

Museum Interpretation and Technological Innovation

One of the major strengths of Porunai Museum is its attempt to combine archaeological objects with audiovisual and immersive interpretation. Reports describe audiovisual presentations and immersive experiences explaining the Thamirabarani landscape, ancient Korkai and maritime connections. Such facilities can be especially valuable for younger visitors who may find conventional object displays difficult to interpret. The use of 5D and virtual-reality-type experiences can create an emotional and sensory connection with archaeological history. However, technology should remain subordinate to scholarship. The primary function of technology should be to interpret archaeological evidence rather than replace it.

A strong museum narrative should therefore follow the sequence:

Archaeological evidence → Scientific interpretation → Historical context → Digital reconstruction → Visitor participation.

This model can prevent the museum from becoming merely an entertainment centre.

Findings

The study identifies the following major findings.

Finding 1: Regional Integration

Porunai Museum successfully provides a regional framework for understanding archaeological discoveries from several sites. This is one of its strongest conceptual advantages.

Finding 2: Strong Archaeological Identity

Unlike general museums containing multiple unrelated collections, Porunai Museum has a focused archaeological identity centred on the Porunai river basin.

Finding 3: Link between Archaeology and Public History

The museum transforms excavation results into a public historical narrative. Visitors can encounter archaeological evidence without travelling individually to every excavation site.

Finding 4: Potential for Research

The museum can become an important research centre if object catalogues, excavation reports, scientific dates, provenance records and conservation information are made available to scholars.

Finding 5: Educational Potential

The museum has considerable potential for school and college education, especially for teaching archaeology, ancient Tamil history, heritage studies, anthropology and museum studies.

Finding 6: Heritage Tourism

The museum can function as a gateway to a wider archaeological tourism circuit including Tirunelveli, Adichanallur, Korkai, Sivagalai and other heritage locations.

Finding 7: Technology as an Interpretive Tool

Immersive technologies provide an opportunity to reconstruct ancient landscapes and maritime activities, but these should be accompanied by clear distinction between archaeological evidence and digital reconstruction.

Comparison with Museums in Tamil Nadu

Table 1. Comparative Analysis

Feature	**Porunai Museum**	**Keezhadi Museum**	**Government Museum, Chennai**
Primary focus	Porunai river-basin archaeology	Keezhadi archaeological civilisation	Multi-disciplinary heritage
Location	Reddiyarpatti, Tirunelveli	Keezhadi region, Sivaganga	Egmore, Chennai
Major period/theme	Prehistoric/Iron Age–Early Historic regional archaeology	Early historic urban culture	Prehistory to modern periods
Site connection	Multiple archaeological sites	Strong single-site connection	Large regional and international collections
Major themes	Burial, technology, craft, agriculture, trade and maritime links	Urban life, craft, literacy, material culture	Archaeology, bronzes, anthropology, numismatics, art and natural history
Technology	Strong audiovisual/immersive component	Digital and interpretive displays	More traditional gallery model with modern elements
Museum model	Regional archaeological landscape	Site-centred archaeological museum	Encyclopaedic/general museum
Research potential	High	High	Very high
Tourism potential	High	High	Very high
Distinctive feature	River-basin narrative	Archaeology of an excavated urban settlement	Long-established multi-disciplinary collection

The Government Museum, Chennai, established in 1851, is one of the major museum institutions in India. It has extensive collections in archaeology, anthropology, numismatics, sculpture, natural history and art and includes 46 galleries across its complex.

Porunai differs fundamentally from Chennai's encyclopaedic model. It is geographically and thematically concentrated. The Chennai museum represents a wide chronological and disciplinary spectrum, whereas Porunai constructs a more focused regional archaeological narrative. The Keezhadi Museum provides another important comparison because it similarly connects museum interpretation with archaeological excavation. Porunai, however, has the advantage of presenting several archaeological sites within one river-basin framework.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations.

First, Porunai Museum is a relatively new institution. Consequently, long-term visitor studies, conservation assessments and independent evaluations of educational impact are not yet sufficiently available.

Second, the museum's future research potential will depend on the

publication and accessibility of detailed excavation reports and object catalogues.

Third, public descriptions of the project sometimes provide different figures regarding the total project expenditure and built-up area. Therefore, future academic publications should rely on official project documentation for final statistical values.

Fourth, visitor experience may vary according to language, age, educational background and familiarity with archaeology. Systematic visitor surveys are therefore required.

Fifth, digital and immersive technology can create a powerful experience but may also encourage visitors to interpret reconstructions as established historical fact unless the distinction between evidence and reconstruction is explicitly explained.

Recommendations

Establish a Research and Documentation Centre

A dedicated research facility should be associated with the museum. Archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, conservators and museum professionals should be encouraged to undertake collaborative research.

Develop a Digital Catalogue

Every significant artefact should receive a digital record containing:

- Accession number
- Site and excavation context
- Material
- Dimensions
- Chronology
- Scientific dating where available
- Photograph
- Conservation status
- Bibliographic references

Multilingual Interpretation

Tamil and English should form the core interpretive languages, with selected information also available in Hindi and other international languages. This would support both domestic and international tourism.

Academic Partnerships

The museum should establish formal collaborations with universities, archaeological institutions and research centres. Student internships and dissertation projects can strengthen the museum's academic role.

Community Participation

Local communities should not be treated merely as museum visitors. Oral traditions, crafts, traditional ecological knowledge and local memories associated with the Thamirabarani landscape can be incorporated through ethically designed community programmes.

Archaeological Tourism Circuit

A coordinated tourism circuit could connect:

Tirunelveli → Porunai Museum → Adichanallur → Sivagalai → Korkai → Thulukkarpatti → associated heritage sites.

Such a circuit would transform the museum into a gateway for archaeological tourism.

Conservation Laboratory

A modern conservation laboratory should be developed for pottery, metals, organic materials and other archaeological objects. Preventive conservation training should also be provided.

Digital and Virtual Museum

Following international museum practice, Porunai should develop a comprehensive virtual museum. The British Museum demonstrates how extensive online collection access can broaden the reach of physical collections

Evidence-Based Immersive Technology

5D, VR and audiovisual presentations should clearly distinguish between:

Excavated evidence – Scientific interpretation – Historical hypothesis – Digital reconstruction.

This distinction is essential for maintaining academic credibility.

CONCLUSION

` The Porunai Museum in Tirunelveli represents a significant milestone in the public presentation of Tamil Nadu's archaeological heritage. Its importance derives from the concentration of archaeological evidence associated with Adichanallur, Sivagalai, Korkai, Thulukkarpatti and the wider Thamirabarani river basin. The museum transforms archaeological discoveries into a coherent regional narrative concerning settlement, burial, technology, agriculture, craft production and maritime exchange.Its greatest conceptual strength is the **Porunai river-basin approach**. Instead of presenting isolated artefacts, the museum has the potential to demonstrate relationships between landscape, people, technology and trade. This makes it complementary to, rather than a competitor with, museums such as the Government Museum, Chennai and Keezhadi Museum.

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CHEKKARGIRI MURUGAN TEMPLE: A STUDY OF SACRED LANDSCAPE, SIDDHAR HERITAGE FESTIVAL PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The Kanyakumari district is a distinctive cultural setting with a wide range of religious customs, houses of worship, festivals, folk beliefs, and cultural practices all intricately linked. The Subramania Swamy Temple, situated on Chekkargiri Hill in Thovalai, has evolved into a unique sacred landscape within this multicultural environment. This sacred site's cultural identity is formed by its hill, cave, Siddhar customs, Murugan worship, beliefs about sacred water, oral traditions from the area, and yearly festivals. This article explores the Chekkargiri Murugan Temple as a "sacred cultural memory" that has grown within Kanyakumari's cultural landscape, rather than just as a place of worship. The natural surroundings of Chekkargiri Hill, cave worship, Siddhar customs, regional customs related to Ladhu Swami and Avudaiyammal, beliefs about Lord Murugan, and celebrations like Soorasamharam, Thaipusam, Vaikasi Visakam, and Kavadi are all specifically highlighted in this study. The study also looks at how the local community's religious identity and cultural memory are preserved through oral histories related to the temple.

Keywords: *Chekkargiri Murugan Temple, Sacred Landscape, Siddhar Tradition, Cave Worship, Oral Tradition, Cultural Memory, Festival Practices, Kanyakumari.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district , located at the southernmost tip of TamilNadu, region of great historical and cultural significance . its identify has been shaped by a combination of natural elements , including the sea, hills , river, agricultural field churches, mosques and folk places of workship, and siddher traditions hold on important place in the religious and cultural heritage of Kanyakumari. The Subramania Swamy Temple in Thovalai, which is located on Chekkargiri Hill, is an important site of worship in this regard. Several websites have identified the Chekkargiri Murugan Temple in Thovalai, Kanyakumari district, as a significant Murugan shrine. The temple has a unique sacred-landscape identity because of its hilltop location. The concept of sacerd landscape does not refer only to the location of a religious building, Natural surroundings people‘s beliefs , worship practices historical memories, festivels and community experiences come together to transform a place into a sacred space . in this sense, chekkarigiri Hill, its cave , temple, Siddhar traditions, and festivels collectively form aunique cultural landscape.

Objective Of The Study

The main purpose of the study of this to understand the religious , cultural , and social importance of the chekkargiri Murugan temple. The study focuses on the temple’s location , local traditions ,

siddher beliefs, worship practices, festivals and the beliefs of the people connected with the temple. it also aims to understand how these tradition are preserved and passed on from one generation to another as an part of the cultural identity of the local community.
The present study following some objectives:

The present study aims to understand the geographical location and cultural setting of the Chekkargiri Murugan Temple and to document the Siddhar traditions, oral beliefs, and practices associated with the temple. It further seeks to examine the cultural significance of cave worship and hill worship and to explore their role in shaping the religious and cultural practices of the local community. The study also focuses on the social role and cultural importance of major festivals and religious observances such as Soorasamharam, Thaipusam, Vaikasi Visakam, Kandha Sashti, and Kavadi. In addition, it attempts to explain the place and significance of Chekkargiri Murugan Temple within the sacred landscape of Kanyakumari and to understand its relationship with the broader religious traditions of the region. Finally, the study examines how the beliefs, rituals, traditions, and practices associated with the temple continue to be preserved and transmitted among local people as an important part of their cultural memory and collective identity.

Chekkargiri Murugan Temple

Thovalai is one important region of Kanyakumari district. It is also well know for its flower and flower market. The location of Chekkargiri Murugan temple within this natural and agricultural cultuaral environment further enhances the cultural significance of the temple.chekkargiri hill is not considered an ordinary hill from the prepective of devotees. The natural formation of the hill, the cave and the Siddhar traditions and associated with it have transformed the hhill into a sacred place.one of the most important unique features of this site is the tradition that Lord Murugan blesses devotees within the cave.In tamil religious traditions both mountains and caves are associated with meditation , penance , spiritual wisdom , siddhar life and spiritual experiences. Therefore, the sacredness of Chekkargiri Hill is not created only by the temple structure; it is also shaped by the natural landscape and the beliefs of the people associated with it.

The Role Of Chekkargiri Temple In Local Community Life

The local community's religious, social, and cultural activities are significantly influenced by Chekkargiri Murugan Temple. Everyday worship, special prayers, festivals, kavadi, and annadhanam are all held here. Celebrations like Soorasamharam and Kanda Sashti unite locals and devotees and foster a sense of community. By transferring them from older to younger generations, the temple also contributes to the preservation of regional customs, beliefs, tales, and oral traditions. As a result, Chekkargiri Temple serves as a hub for community involvement and cultural preservation in addition to being a place of worship.

Nature And Spirituality At Chekkargiri

Chekkargiri Hill demonstrates the intimate relationship between spirituality and the natural world. A serene setting for worship and meditation is created by the hill, rocks, trees, natural surroundings, and cave. The hill's natural features are regarded by devotees as a component of the temple's sacred area. The relationship

between religious belief and the natural environment is further reinforced by the Murugan shrine located within the hill. This connection demonstrates how nature is seen as a significant component of spiritual experience as well as a physical setting. As a result, Chekkargiri symbolizes a hallowed area where local culture, worship, nature, and belief coexist**.**

Cave Worship And Tradition Of Murugan Devotion

One of the significant features of the chekkargiri Murugan temple is its tradition of the worship associated with the cave.with the cave. According to local traditions, Lord Murugan is belived to bless devotees from within the cave . the cave being a natural place isolated from the outside world is regraded as a space for meditation , penance and spirituals experiences. The combination of Murugan worship and cave workship at chekkargriri reveals the unique religious and cultural character of this sacared site. Many belifes associated with this temple have been passed down among the local people from another. Although some of these belifes do not have historical documentary evidence, they are important for cultural studies as the part of oral traditions and folk belifes. Therefore , tather than treating such accounts as established historical facts , it is more appropriate to study how these traditions are preserved in the collective memory of the local community.

Chekkargiri And The Siddhar Tradition

According to local customs, Siddhars were connected to Chekkargiri Hill. The Siddhar tradition of this hallowed location is reflected in the statue of a Siddhar named Lada Swami on the temple grounds as well as the purported samadhi of Avudaiyammal, a female disciple connected to him. Local accounts describe Lada Swami as wearing a Rudraksha garland, a kamandalu (ascetic water pot), and matted hair. According to traditional narratives, Lada Swami's disciple Avudaiyammal assumed responsibility for temple worship following her passing, and subsequently a samadhi was established in her honor. It is especially noteworthy that Avudaiyammal is mentioned as a female spiritual figure. It draws attention to the necessity of considering women's contributions to Chekkargiri's spiritual traditions rather than assuming that men alone have shaped its spiritual legacy. Therefore, Chekkargiri can be viewed not only as a Murugan temple but also as a cultural location that integrates local worship customs, female spiritual traditions, and Siddhar memory.

The Milk Well And Belief In Sacred

The "Milk Well" is a significant folk belief connected to the Chekkargiri Hill Temple. Local customs state that the water from the hilltop well tastes like milk and doesn't dry up even in the summer. According to reports, this water is given to devotees as sacred water (theertham), and they think it can heal certain illnesses. From the standpoint of cultural research, it is more appropriate to look at how these beliefs function as part of devotees' religious experiences and beliefs rather than validating them as medical facts. In a similar vein, the porridge served following Lord Murugan's abhishekam is connected to local beliefs. It is specifically believed that pregnant women who eat it will give birth to a healthy child. These beliefs demonstrate the connections between religion, health, family values, and social customs within the local community's cultural practices.

Oral Tradition Associated With Chekkargiri And Avvaiyar

Another interesting tradition associated with Chekkargiri Hill is the story of Avvaiyar and Lord Murugan, commonly known as the “Roasted Fruit – Unroasted Fruit” story. The conventional narrative states that Lord Murugan asked Avvaiyar a question while appearing to her as a small boy. In addition to being well-known in Tamil literary and devotional traditions, this tale is also connected to Chekkargiri Hill through oral tradition in the area. From an academic standpoint, it is more significant to look at how people relate a well-known religious tale to a specific sacred location rather than attempting to establish this story as a historical event. These ties contribute to the location's increased spiritual and cultural significance. This custom aids in our comprehension of the cultural relationship between sacred landscape, oral tradition, and literary memory. The Avvaiyar story thus becomes a part of the living cultural memory connected to Chekkargiri Hill.

Festivals And Community Participation

A temple's festivals should be examined to understand its cultural significance. Special events like Kandha Sashti and Soorasamharam are reportedly held at the Chekkargiri Murugan Temple. Among these festivities, Soorasamharam is regarded as one of the temple's major festivals. Devotees witness the symbolic conflict between Lord Murugan and the demon Sooran during this event. According to a report on the Soorasamharam celebration at Thovalai, the Chekkargiri Subramania Swamy event took place on the ground near the temple's base. Other events during the festival include a ceremonial procession, the departure of Sooran, the deity's procession, and a special abhishekam. According to reports, thousands of devotees take part in the Soorasamharam celebration, while devotees observe fasting and special worship during Kandha Sashti. In addition to being a religious ceremony, Soorasamharam is a significant community occasion. Participants in the celebration include locals, traders, devotees, and tourists from various locations. As a result, the festival forges a close bond among worship, social cohesion, cultural memory, and community involvement.

Chekkargiri As A Cultural Memory

A cultural memory is not confined to an ancient building or historical monument. It can also refer to a location where a community's customs, traditions, worship rituals, celebrations, and cultural identity are conserved and transmitted from one generation to the next. According to this viewpoint, the Chekkargiri Murugan Temple is a significant cultural relic of the neighborhood. The hill and its natural surroundings, cave worship, devotion to Lord Murugan, Siddhar customs, and the memories connected to Avudaiyammal and Lada Swami all contribute to the sacred location's identity. This cultural bond is further reinforced by regional beliefs regarding the sacred water, oral traditions related to Avvaiyar, and customary celebrations like Soorasamharam, Thaipusam, and Vaikasi Visakam. Maintaining the relationship between the temple and the community is also greatly aided by the custom of Annadhanam and the carrying of Kavadi. These customs offer chances for people to gather and exchange cultural experiences, making them more than just religious pursuits. As a result, Chekkargiri can be seen as a living cultural memory where religious convictions, oral traditions, celebrations, and communal customs coexist. These customs preserve the local

identity connected to Chekkargiri and assist younger generations in appreciating the temple's cultural significance.

Pilgrimage And Religious Tourism At Chekkargiri

Chekkargiri Murugan Temple attracts devotees who visit the hill for worship, prayer, and spiritual experience. The site is a significant local pilgrimage destination because of its hilltop location and the religious customs connected to the temple. In addition to visiting the temple on festivals and special occasions, some devotees make pilgrimages as part of their personal vows and devotional rituals. These visits link Chekkargiri to Tamil Nadu's larger network of Murugan pilgrimage sites. People can learn about the customs, beliefs, and cultural practices connected to the temple through religious visits. As a result, pilgrimages to Chekkargiri support regional cultural heritage preservation and dissemination in addition to religious devotion.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Chekkargiri Murugan Temple demonstrates that it is more than just a site of religious devotioTogether, its hill, cave, oral traditions, festivals, Siddhar customs, and communal practices form a unique cultural landscape. The temple still plays a significant role in the local community's religious and cultural life. Chekkargiri's cultural identity is enriched by customs related to Lada Swami and Avudaiyammal, as well as beliefs about the sacred water and the oral tale of Avvaiyar and Lord Murugan. The memories and experiences of the locals are primarily responsible for the preservation of these customs. Therefore, even though some accounts are based on oral tradition rather than recorded historical evidence, they are useful for comprehending the region's living cultural heritage. The relationship between the temple and the community is further strengthened by religious celebrations such as Thaipusam, Kandha Sashti, and Soorasamharam. People can come together and share their cultural experiences by taking part in worship, Kavadi, Annadhanam, and festival activities. All things considered, Chekkargiri Murugan Temple can be viewed as a living hub of religious conviction, cultural memory, and community involvement. Its customs still serve as a link between the current generation and earlier cultural customs. The cultural identity associated with Chekkargiri Hill depends on the preservation of these oral traditions, festivals, natural features, and community customs. In this sense, the temple continues to play a significant role in the Kanyakumari district's cultural legacy.

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TEMPLE FESTIVALS OF KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SIVALAYA OTTAM FESTIVAL – A HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

Kanniyakumari District is known for its temples and festivals which reflect the customs, traditions, and culture of the society. Temple festivals have historical origins and impact the society. This study focuses on important temple festivals of Kanniyakumari with special reference to the Sivalaya Ottam. In this work, based on books, research articles, and historical records, the study focuses mainly on the historical background and cultural history of temples, which understand their importance and social harmony. The findings of this study reveal that the temple festivals at Kanniyakumari district are not merely religious celebrations but also valuable symbols of the region's history, culture, and traditions. These festivals have been preserved and passed down from one generation to another. They reflect the rich heritage of the district. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the present generation to preserve, protect, and develop these festivals for future generations. Understanding their historical and cultural significance will help safeguard the unique identity of Kanniyakumari.

1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural landscape of Kanyakumari District is enriched by traditions that have continued through generations, preserving the collective memory and identity of its people. Temple festivals form an important part of this cultural landscape because they combine religious belief, ritual practice, social participation and local traditions. Among these traditions, Shivalaya Ottam stands out as a distinctive expression of faith, heritage and community participation. Beyond its religious significance, Shivalaya Ottam reflects the continuity of an age-old cultural practice that connects the present generation with its past. Devotees participate in a pilgrimage linking twelve Shiva temples, creating a sacred route that is both geographical and cultural. The practice also brings people together through shared participation, strengthening social bonds and a sense of collective identity. The historical roots, legends, ritual practices and continuing social relevance of Shivalaya Ottam therefore deserve attention as part of the cultural history of Kanyakumari District. A study of the tradition helps us understand how religious practices are transmitted, adapted and preserved in changing social circumstances.

2. Historical Background of Shivalaya Ottam

Among the unique temple festivals of Kanyakumari District, Shivalaya Ottam holds a special place. On the occasion of Maha Shivaratri, devotees traditionally undertake a pilgrimage to twelve Shiva temples in a single circuit. A distinctive feature is that the temples are spread across approximately 90 kilometres and are traditionally visited within a prescribed period of about 24 hours. The journey is undertaken as an energetic pilgrimage, traditionally involving running from one temple to another. At every temple, devotees offer prayers and receive darshan before continuing towards the next shrine. The sequence gives the festival a special identity and transforms a group of individual temples into a connected sacred landscape. The tradition is significant not only because of the

physical journey but also because of the shared discipline, devotion and cultural memory associated with it. The route, temple sequence, rituals and oral narratives together form an integrated cultural practice.

2.1 Legend of Purusha Mriga

According to a traditional legend associated with Shivalaya Ottam, Purusha Mriga was a mythical being with the upper body of a human and the lower body of a tiger. He was described as an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and was unwilling to worship any deity other than Shiva. Traditional accounts further state that he could not bear even to hear the names associated with Lord Vishnu. The legend describes Krishna as wishing to teach Purusha Mriga the spiritual truth that Hari and Hara are one. Krishna therefore approached Bhima, one of the Pandavas, and

explained that the assistance of Purusha Mriga was necessary for the Pandavas' victory in the Kurukshetra War. The milk of the mystical being was also required for a sacred yajna. Krishna instructed Bhima to approach Purusha Mriga while chanting the names Govinda and Gopala. He gave Bhima twelve Rudraksha beads and warned him that Purusha Mriga would chase him when he heard the names associated with Vishnu. Whenever the creature came close, Bhima was to drop one Rudraksha bead. According to the legend, each bead transformed into a Shiva Linga. Purusha Mriga would stop to worship the Linga, allowing Bhima time to run ahead.

The process continued until all twelve Rudraksha beads had been dropped. Traditional accounts associate the first bead with Tirucalcal and the twelfth with Nattalam. At Nattalam, Shiva and Vishnu appeared together as Sankaranarayana, revealing the unity of Hari and Hara. This vision enlightened Purusha Mriga, who then permitted his milk to be used for the yajna. The legend provides a traditional explanation for the sacred sequence of twelve temples and gives Shivalaya Ottam a narrative foundation. It also expresses an important theological idea: religious traditions can emphasize unity and harmony between different forms of worship.

2.2 The Twelve Temples of Shivalaya Ottam

No.	Temple	Location
1	Thirumalai Mahadeva Temple	Munchirai
2	Thikurichi Mahadeva Temple	Thikurichi
3	Thirparappu Mahadeva Temple	Thirparappu
4	Thirunanthikarai Nandeeswarar Temple	Thirunanthikarai
5	Ponmanai Thembilankudi Mahadeva Temple	Ponmanai
6	Thiruppannippakam Shiva Temple	Thiruppannippakam
7	Kalkulam Neelakanta Swamy Temple	Kalkulam
8	Melankodu Shiva Temple	Melankodu
9	Thiruvidaikodu Sadaiyappa Mahadeva Temple	Thiruvidaikodu
10	Thiruvithamcode Mahadeva Temple	Thiruvithamcode
11	Thiruppanrikodu Mahadeva Temple	Thiruppanrikodu
12	Thirunattalam Sankaranarayana Temple	Nattalam

Starting Temple: Thirumalai Mahadeva Temple – Munchirai
Ending Temple: Thirunattalam Sankaranarayana Temple

3. Sources for the Study

The narrative and cultural understanding of Shivalaya Ottam draw upon broader Hindu mythological traditions, including narratives associated with the Mahabharata and Skanda Purana, together with local traditions. The present form of the festival has also been sustained through temple practices, oral traditions, community participation and ritual observance. For a historical and cultural study, oral accounts are particularly important because many elements of the festival are transmitted from elders to younger generations. Templerecords, photographs, inscriptions where available, field observations and publishedstudies can supplement these oral sources. The combination of textual, institutional and
community-based sources helps to understand Shivalaya Ottam as a living tradition ratherthan merely as a story preserved in written literature.

4. Shivalaya Ottam and Maha Shivaratri

Shivalaya Ottam is closely associated with Maha Shivaratri, one of the major annualfestivals dedicated to Lord Shiva. Devotees undertake the pilgrimage to the twelve Sivalayas as part of the observance. The festival is also connected with night-longworship, prayer, fasting and temple rituals.Traditional accounts describe four forms of Shivaratri: Nitya Shivaratri, Masa Shivaratri,Magha Pradosha Shivaratri and Maha Shivaratri. These classifications illustrate the widerritual framework within which Shiva worship is understood.

4.1 Four Forms of Shivaratri

• Nitya Shivaratri: A daily observance associated with the worship of Lord Shiva, particularly at midnight.

• Masa Shivaratri: Observed every month on Chaturdashi of the Krishna Paksha.

• Magha Pradosha Shivaratri: Observed in the month of Magha, corresponding to Masi in the Tamil calendar, with traditional worship during the night.

• Maha Shivaratri: The major annual Shivaratri, observed on the 14th day of the dark fortnight of the month of Magha/Masi, when devotees worship Lord Shiva through the night.

4.2 Four Pujas on Maha Shivaratri

Traditional descriptions of Maha Shivaratri worship divide the night into four major puja periods.

• First Puja – 6:30 PM
• Second Puja – 9:30 PM
• Third Puja – 12:30 AM
• Fourth Puja – 3:30 AM

These timings may vary according to temple schedules and local observance.

5. Historical and Cultural Significance of Shivalaya Ottam

Shivalaya Ottam has significance at several levels. It is a religious pilgrimage, a community festival, a form of cultural transmission and a living expression of the sacred geography of Kanyakumari District. Its distinctive identity emerges from the combination of the twelve temples, the prescribed route, the Maha Shivaratri observance and the collective participation of devotees.

5.1 The Twelve Sivalayas: Their Significance and Sacred Connectivity

The twelve Sivalayas form the central sacred circuit of Shivalaya Ottam. Their collectivesignificance lies not only in the individual importance of each temple but also in their ritual and spiritual connectivity. The pilgrimage links twelve sacred centres into a single route and gives the festival its distinctive character. The approximately 90-kilometre route, completed within the traditional prescribed period, transforms the individual temples into a connected sacred

landscape. The journey creates a relationship between devotees, temples, roads, villages and local communities. In this sense, the physical route itself becomes part of the cultural heritage of the festival. The starting temple, Thirumalai Mahadeva Temple at Munchirai, and the concluding temple, Thirunattalam Sankaranarayana Temple, provide the traditional beginning and end points of the circuit. The sequence creates a sense of continuity and completion in the pilgrimage.

5.2 Religious and Ritual Significance

The festival expresses devotion to Lord Shiva through pilgrimage, worship, fasting, prayer and temple rituals. Visiting the twelve Sivalayas during Maha Shivaratri gives devotees a shared religious experience. The prescribed route and sequence of temple visits also preserve the ritual character of the tradition. The act of moving from one shrine to another can be understood as both a physical and spiritual journey. Each temple visit forms one part of a larger pilgrimage, while the completion of the circuit represents collective religious commitment. The rituals performed at the temples help maintain the continuity of traditional worship.

5.3 Social and Cultural Significance

Shivalaya Ottam is not only a religious observance but also an important social and cultural tradition of Kanyakumari District. It brings together devotees from different communities and regions and creates a sense of social unity and collective participation. The involvement of families, local residents, volunteers and temple communities demonstrates the importance of shared cultural values. The festival preserves traditional practices, beliefs, rituals and customs associated with Shiva worship. The journey through the twelve Sivalayas provides a common cultural experience for devotees and strengthens their connection with temples and local communities. The stories and legends associated with Shivalaya Ottam are also transmitted orally from elders to younger generations. Such transmission is important because cultural heritage survives not only through monuments and written records but also through memory, practice and participation. Shivalaya Ottam can therefore be viewed as a form of living cultural heritage representing religious beliefs, social relationships, traditional practices and the cultural identity of the people of Kanyakumari District.

5.4 Continuity and Preservation of Tradition

The continuity of Shivalaya Ottam is maintained through the active participation of devotees, temple authorities, local communities and younger generations. Traditional rituals, practices and beliefs continue to be observed in the modern period, even as the social environment around the festival changes. Modern developments have affected transportation, communication and the way information about the festival is shared. Devotees can now travel and communicate more easily, and photographs and digital information can circulate rapidly. Nevertheless, the basic religious practices and traditional character of Shivalaya Ottam continue to be important. Oral traditions, temple records, photographs, interviews and field observations can help document and preserve the history and cultural practices of the festival. Academic documentation can further assist future researchers in understanding changes and continuities in the tradition. The preservation of Shivalaya Ottam is therefore important not only for religious purposes but also for

protecting the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari District. Encouraging younger generations to participate, recording oral histories and documenting temple practices can help ensure the continuity of this unique tradition.

6. CONCLUSION

Shivalaya Ottam is an important religious and cultural tradition of Kanyakumari District. The festival has a close connection with historical traditions, religious beliefs, rituals and cultural practices of the local people. The legend of Purusha Mriga and the association of the twelve Sivalayas provide an important traditional background to the pilgrimage. The twelve Sivalayas together form a sacred pilgrimage circuit and give Shivalaya Ottam its unique identity. The participation of devotees from different places promotes social interaction and strengthens the cultural relationship between temples and local communities. The festival also helps preserve traditional rituals, beliefs, oral traditions and customs that have been transmitted from one generation to another. Although modernization has brought hanges to transportation, communication and the organization of pilgrimage, the basic religious and cultural character of Shivalaya Ottam remains significant. It can therefore be considered a form of living cultural heritage of Kanyakumari District. Proper documentation, community participation and the involvement of younger generations are essential for preserving this tradition. Continued scholarly study, oral-history collection and documentation of temple practices can help future generations understand and value the cultural significance of Shivalaya Ottam.

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CAVE TEMPLES IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT: AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari District occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of South India because of its geographical location at the intersection of Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions. Its temples, rock-cut monuments, sculptures, inscriptions and mural remains provide valuable evidence for understanding the evolution of religious architecture in the southernmost region of the Indian subcontinent. Among these monuments, cave temples are particularly significant because they represent an early and distinctive phase in the transition from natural rock shelters to architecturally developed structural temples. The cave shrines of Kanyakumari District also demonstrate the interaction of Jainism, Saivism and Vaishnavism and reveal changing patterns of religious patronage and worship. The present study examines selected cave and rock-cut shrines in Kanyakumari District, with particular attention to the Chitharal Jain Monuments, Thirunandikkarai Cave Temple, Kurathiyarai Cave Temple, Sivagiri Sri Mahadevar Cave Temple, Boothalingaswamy Cave Temple and Devendra Cave Temple at Marunthuvazhmalai. Their location, architectural features, sculptural traditions, religious affiliations and cultural significance are analysed comparatively. The study argues that these monuments should not be viewed merely as isolated religious structures but as important cultural landscapes that reflect the artistic capabilities of the sculptors, the patronage of ruling authorities, the movement of religious traditions and the continuity of local worship. The survival of these monuments also demonstrates the close relationship between architecture, landscape, religion and community memory in the historical development of Kanyakumari District.

***Keywords**: Kanyakumari District, Cave Temples, Rock-cut Architecture, Chitharal, Thirunandikkarai, Kurathiyarai, Jainism, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Pandyan Architecture, Temple Art.*

INTRODUCTION

Temple architecture constitutes one of the most important expressions of India's cultural and religious history. The development of temples was closely associated with the evolution of religious practices, royal patronage, artistic traditions and social institutions. Indian temple architecture is broadly discussed in terms of the northern Nagara and southern Dravida traditions, although the architectural history of the subcontinent is considerably more diverse than this broad classification suggests. In South India, the transition from natural shelters and excavated rock sanctuaries to elaborately constructed structural temples represents an important stage in the history of architecture. Kanyakumari District is particularly significant in this context. Located at the southern extremity of the Indian peninsula, the region historically formed part of the cultural zone of the erstwhile Travancore and southern Tamil regions. Its geographical position facilitated interaction between Tamil and Kerala traditions. This cultural interaction is visible in its temples, sculptures, inscriptions, mural paintings and architectural forms. The district contains numerous temples dedicated to

Siva, Vishnu, Devi, Sastha and other Hindu deities, besides important Jain monuments. Within this architectural landscape, rock-cut and cave temples occupy a special place. They were created by excavating the natural rock surface and adapting the geological environment for religious purposes. In some cases, the original cave became the nucleus around which later structural additions were constructed. Consequently, several cave temples in Kanyakumari District represent architectural palimpsests in which different historical periods and religious traditions can be identified. The present paper examines selected cave temples and rock-cut shrines of the district from archaeological, architectural and cultural perspectives. It seeks to understand the relationship between the natural landscape and religious architecture and to assess the contribution of these monuments to the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari District.

Historical Background of Cave Temple Architecture

Rock-cut architecture represents an important phase in the history of Indian architecture. Before the widespread construction of independent structural temples in stone, religious communities frequently utilised natural caves and rock shelters. Gradually, artisans began modifying natural rock formations by excavating chambers, sanctums, pillars and niches. This process eventually produced sophisticated rock-cut temples. The Pallavas played a major role in the development of rock-cut architecture in South India, particularly during the seventh and eighth centuries CE. The Pandyas and other southern ruling houses also contributed to the development and diffusion of rock-cut shrines. The architectural traditions of the Tamil region interacted with those of Kerala, particularly in areas that historically shared political and cultural connections with the Chera and Travancore regions. The cave temples of Kanyakumari therefore need to be understood within this broader historical context. Their architectural forms cannot always be attributed to a single dynasty or period because several monuments underwent modification and expansion over time. Inscriptions, sculptural style, architectural elements and local traditions are therefore essential for establishing their historical significance.

Major Cave Temples of Kanyakumari District

The main cave and rock-cut monuments of Kanyakumari District include the Chitharal Jain Rock-cut Temple, Thirunandikkarai Cave Temple, Kurathiyarai Rock-cut Cave Temple, Sivagiri Sri Mahadevar Cave Temple, and the rock-cut shrine associated with the Boothalingaswamy Temple at Boothapandi. Among these, Chitharal is the best-documented protected monument. Together, these monuments provide valuable evidence of the Jain, Saiva and Vaishnava religious traditions of southern Tamil Nadu.

Chitharal Jain Monuments

Chitharal is particularly important because it represents the Jain religious and artistic tradition of the southernmost part of Tamil Nadu. The rock-cut sculptures on the hill include representations of Tirthankaras and attendant figures. Their arrangement on the natural rock surface shows how the existing landscape was adapted for religious purposes. The inscriptions found at the site are also valuable historical sources because they provide information about the religious activities and patronage associated with the monument. The combination of sculpture, inscriptions

and natural rock formations makes Chitharal an important archaeological site. Its later association with the Bhagavathi tradition further illustrates the changing religious use of sacred spaces. Thus, Chitharal represents not only Jain architectural and sculptural heritage but also the continuity and transformation of religious traditions in the region.

Thirunandikkarai Cave Temple

Thirunandikkarai is significant for both its rock-cut architecture and its association with mural painting. The cave was created by cutting into the natural rock and represents an early stage in the development of temple architecture in the region. The remaining traces of paintings are particularly valuable because they provide evidence of the artistic traditions that once decorated the interior of the shrine. Although the murals have suffered considerable deterioration, the surviving portions demonstrate the importance of religious painting in the temple tradition. The monument is also significant from the perspective of cultural interaction because Kanyakumari historically formed a region where Tamil and Kerala artistic traditions came into contact. Thirunandikkarai therefore provides useful evidence for studying the relationship between architecture, sculpture and painting in early South Indian religious monuments.

Kurathiyarai Cave Temple

Kurathiyarai is important for understanding the development of Early Pandya rock-cut architecture. The cave is relatively small, but its architectural and sculptural features demonstrate careful planning and artistic workmanship. The principal image of Vishnu provides evidence of the Vaishnava tradition in the region. His standing posture and the presence of the chakra and sankha are important iconographic features. The image of Ganesha near the entrance adds another dimension to the sculptural programme of the cave. The unfinished portions of the excavation are also significant because they provide an opportunity to understand the techniques used by the rock-cut artisans. The local association of one of the images with Avvaiyar illustrates how archaeological monuments can acquire new meanings through local memory and worship. Kurathiyarai is therefore significant both as an archaeological monument and as a living part of the local cultural landscape.

Sivagiri Sri Mahadevar Cave Temple

The Sivagiri Sri Mahadevar Cave Temple provides important evidence of the Early Pandya rock-cut tradition. The shrine was excavated into the natural rock of the hill, and the Sivalinga is closely associated with the living rock. This feature demonstrates the importance of the natural environment in the creation of sacred spaces. The temple also helps in understanding the transition from simple rock-cut shrines to more developed temple complexes. The surrounding structural additions indicate that the sacred site continued to develop after the original excavation. Such architectural development reflects the continuing importance of the shrine to the local community. Sivagiri therefore has significance not only for the study of Saiva iconography but also for understanding the evolution of temple architecture in southern Tamil Nadu.

Boothalingaswamy Temple, Boothapandi

The Boothalingaswamy Temple at Boothapandi is significant because its present architectural complex reflects the growth and development of a major religious centre. The temple contains prakaras, mandapas, subsidiary shrines

and gateway structures, while the rocky hill landscape forms an important part of its setting. The sculptures and architectural elements associated with Siva and other deities demonstrate the richness of the temple's artistic tradition. The presence of several subsidiary shrines indicates the expansion of the religious activities of the temple over time. The temple also continues to function as an active place of worship, making it an important example of living heritage. For an academic paper, however, it would be preferable to describe the rock-cut portion cautiously unless its exact date and architectural sequence are established through archaeological evidence.

Devendra Cave Shrine, Marunthuvazhmalai

The Devendra Cave at Marunthuvazhmalai is best understood in the context of the sacred landscape of the hill. Unlike the better-documented archaeological cave temples of Chitharal, Thirunandikkarai, Kurathiyarai and Sivagiri, this shrine is closely associated with local religious traditions and oral beliefs. The rocky environment, elevated location and difficult approach contribute to its sacred character. Local traditions connect the shrine with Devendra or Indra and with the wider religious traditions of Suchindram. Such beliefs are valuable for understanding the cultural memory of the local community. The shrine demonstrates that caves and rocky landscapes continued to be incorporated into religious practices even after the development of more elaborate structural temples. It can therefore be discussed as an example of the continuing relationship between natural landscapes, sacred spaces and local traditions.

Architectural Characteristics of the Cave Temples

The cave temples of Kanyakumari District display several common architectural characteristics.

- Integration with Natural Rock
- Cave as the Nucleus
- Rock-cut Sculptures
- Pillars and Architectural Components
- Iconographic Diversity
- Relationship between Rock-cut and Structural Architecture

The most distinctive feature is the integration of architecture with the natural rock surface. Instead of constructing the entire shrine from separately quarried blocks, the sculptor transformed the existing rock into a sacred architectural space. Several monuments demonstrate a clear relationship between the original cave and later structural additions. Boothapandi and Sivagiri are particularly useful examples of this process. The cave constituted the original sacred core, while mandapas, prakaras, gateways and subsidiary shrines were added subsequently. The monuments contain sculptures of major Hindu and Jain deities. Vishnu, Siva, Ganesha, Jain Tirthankaras and other figures illustrate the diversity of religious traditions represented in the region. Some caves contain architectural components such as pillars, pilasters, potikas, uttira, adishtana and other elements associated with South Indian temple architecture. These features provide evidence for the technical knowledge of the artisans. The sculptures reveal a rich iconographic tradition. Attributes such as the chakra and sankha of Vishnu, the linga of Siva and the distinctive iconography of Ganesha demonstrate the development of religious sculpture alongside architectural experimentation. The monuments illustrate that rock-cut architecture did not exist independently from structural temple architecture. Rather, both traditions interacted with one another.

The subsequent enlargement of several cave shrines demonstrates the gradual transformation of sacred spaces.

Religious and Cultural Significance

The cave temples of Kanyakumari District are important evidence of the religious diversity of southern India. Chitharal demonstrates the historical presence of Jainism, while other monuments reflect the development of Saiva and Vaishnava traditions. The religious history of these monuments also reveals processes of transformation. Sacred spaces could acquire new religious identities over time while retaining elements of their earlier architectural and artistic character. Such transformations demonstrate the dynamic nature of Indian religious culture. Temples were not merely places of worship. They functioned as centres of social interaction, cultural transmission and community identity. Festivals, rituals, music, dance and other forms of collective activity were closely associated with temple institutions. The continuing worship at several of these sites has enabled traditional practices to survive across generations. Local legends and oral traditions have further strengthened the cultural significance of the monuments. Thus, the cave temples represent both tangible and intangible heritage.

Cave Temples and the Natural Landscape

An important feature of the cave temples of Kanyakumari is their close relationship with the natural environment. Many of them are located on hill slopes, rocky elevations or near rivers and forests. The natural landscape was not simply a background to the temple; it formed an essential part of its sacred character. Chitharal, Marunthuvazhmalai, Sivagiri and Boothapandi demonstrate this relationship particularly well. The elevated location of the shrines created physical separation from ordinary settlements and contributed to the perception of the sites as sacred spaces. The combination of natural rock formations, vegetation, water resources and religious architecture has also created distinctive cultural landscapes. These landscapes possess considerable potential for heritage tourism, provided that tourism is developed without damaging the archaeological integrity of the monuments.

Preservation and Conservation Challenges

Despite their historical and artistic significance, several cave temples face challenges related to environmental deterioration, human intervention and inadequate documentation. Natural weathering, moisture, biological growth and uncontrolled visitor movement can gradually damage rock surfaces and sculptures. The application of oil, paint or other substances to ancient sculptures can also obscure original artistic details. Modern construction and modifications around ancient monuments may further affect their archaeological character. Conservation therefore requires a balanced approach. The religious significance of living temples must be respected while ensuring that original archaeological features are protected. Detailed documentation of inscriptions, sculptures, architectural measurements and mural remains is essential. Digital photography, three-dimensional documentation, archaeological surveys and digital archives can contribute significantly to the preservation of these monuments. Public awareness programmes involving local communities, students and visitors can also encourage responsible heritage practices.

Cave Temples as Sources for Historical Reconstruction

The cave temples of Kanyakumari provide evidence for reconstructing several aspects of regional history. Their inscriptions can illuminate questions of patronage, religious affiliation and social organisation. Sculptural features provide information about iconography and artistic development, while architectural forms help establish chronological relationships. More importantly, these monuments reveal the interaction of different cultural traditions. The presence of Jain, Saiva and Vaishnava monuments within the same broader geographical region demonstrates that Kanyakumari was part of a complex religious landscape rather than a culturally isolated area. The monuments also demonstrate the movement of artistic techniques across political boundaries. The interaction between Tamil and Kerala architectural and artistic traditions is particularly relevant to understanding the historical character of the district.

Heritage Tourism and Educational Significance

The cave temples possess considerable potential for heritage tourism. Chitharal and other hill-based monuments already attract visitors because of their archaeological significance and scenic surroundings. However, tourism should be developed within a framework of sustainable heritage management. Interpretation centres, information boards, guided heritage trails and digital resources could help visitors understand the historical significance of the monuments. Universities and colleges can also use these sites for field studies in history, archaeology, architecture, art history and heritage management. The integration of local communities into heritage conservation is equally important. Local residents possess valuable knowledge of oral traditions, festivals and customary practices associated with the monuments. Their participation can contribute to both preservation and sustainable tourism.

CONCLUSION

The cave and rock-cut monuments of Kanyakumari District form an important part of the architectural and cultural heritage of southern India. Chitharal, Thirunandikkarai, Kurathiyarai, Sivagiri and Boothapandi reflect different aspects of the region's rock-cut religious tradition. Chitharal is particularly significant for its Jain sculptures, while Kurathiyarai provides evidence of the Early Pandya rock-cut tradition. Thirunandikkarai is also important for its architectural features and surviving mural remains. The monuments demonstrate how natural rock formations were adapted for religious purposes and how sacred spaces developed over time. They also provide valuable evidence for the presence and development of Jain and Hindu religious traditions in the region. At the same time, some sites continue to be associated with local worship and traditions. Therefore, these monuments should be studied not only as archaeological remains but also as elements of living cultural heritage. Proper documentation, conservation and responsible tourism are essential for preserving them for future generations.

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SIVALAYA OOTTAM: ORIGIN, TRADITION AND CULTURAL IMPACT IN KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Sivalaya Oottam is a unique religious pilgrimage associated with twelve Shiva temples in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. It is traditionally performed during Maha Shivaratri, when devotees travel from one temple to another by running or walking. The pilgrimage begins at Thirumalai and ends at Thirunattalam, covering a long route through the historic Kalkulam and Vilavancode regions. The practice combines religious devotion, physical discipline, temple worship and community participation. It is also significant because devotees chant the names "Govinda" and "Gopala" while visiting Shiva temples, expressing the idea of unity between Shiva and Vishnu. This article examines the traditional origin of Sivalaya Oottam, its historical background, religious meaning and cultural importance in Kanyakumari.

Keywords: *Sivalaya Oottam, Kanyakumari, Maha Shivaratri, Shiva temples, Sankaranarayana, Saiva–Vaishnava unity, Travancore heritage, pilgrimage, Tamil culture.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district has a rich religious and cultural heritage shaped by Tamil and Kerala traditions. Among its many temples, the twelve Shiva temples connected by Sivalaya Oottam have a special place. The pilgrimage is conducted during Maha Shivaratri and is popularly known as Sivalaya Oottam, meaning the "run to the Shiva temples." The twelve temples form a sacred network rather than functioning only as separate places of worship. A study published in the International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education describes these temples as having spiritual, historical and architectural importance and identifies the Oottam as a pilgrimage connecting all twelve shrines.

Origin of Sivalaya Oottam

The traditional origin of Sivalaya Oottam is connected with a story involving Bhima, one of the Pandavas and a powerful devotee of Shiva known in the tradition as Vyaghrapada or Purusha Mriga. According to the traditional account, Bhima and the powerful being became involved in a race or pursuit associated with the twelve Shiva temples. The story explains the sacred connection between the temples and is preserved mainly through religious tradition and oral accounts. However, it is important to distinguish this traditional story from documented history. The legend should not be treated as archaeological proof of the origin of the pilgrimage. The actual historical development of Sivalaya Oottam

requires evidence from temple inscriptions, administrative records, archival material and oral history. The temples themselves are considerably older than the modern form in which the pilgrimage is experienced today. For example, an inscription associated with the Ay ruler Kokkarunandadakkan is recorded at Thirupparappu Mahadevar Temple. A historical study of the temple also notes the influence of Kerala and Tamil architectural traditions in the region.

The Twelve Temples

Sivalaya Oottam connects twelve Shiva temples in a fixed traditional sequence. The pilgrimage starts at Thirumalai and proceeds through Thikkurichi, Thirupparappu, Thirunandikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannippagam, Kalkulam, Melancode, Thiruvidaikodu, Thiruvithancode and Thiruppantricode before reaching the final shrine at Thirunattalam. Academic literature also identifies these twelve temples as the sacred Dwadasalayam of Kanyakumari. The temples are important not only for religious reasons but also for their architecture and history. The region was historically connected with Travancore and many temples show characteristics associated with Kerala temple architecture. At the same time, Tamil architectural influences can also be seen. The result is a distinctive cultural landscape in which Tamil and Kerala traditions meet.

The Sivalaya Oottam Pilgrimage

The Oottam takes place during Maha Shivaratri. Devotees traditionally begin at Thirumalai and visit the temples one after another. Some devotees run, while others walk according to their physical ability. The journey is demanding because of its long distance and the need to visit several temples within a limited period. According to documented descriptions of the tradition, devotees traditionally wear simple or saffron-coloured clothing and carry a palm-leaf fan. They also chant “Govinda, Gopala” during the journey. At the temples, devotees receive sacred ash and offer worship before continuing to the next shrine. The physical effort involved in the pilgrimage is an important part of its religious meaning. The long journey requires discipline, determination and endurance. Thus, Sivalaya Oottam is not simply a temple visit; it is a form of religious practice in which the devotee's physical effort becomes part of the act of worship.

Religious Meaning

One of the most interesting features of Sivalaya Oottam is that devotees visit Shiva temples while chanting names associated with Vishnu. This has a deeper religious meaning. The final temple at Thirunattalam is associated with Sankaranarayana, a form that represents Shiva and Vishnu together. For this reason, Sivalaya Oottam is widely understood as a symbol of Saiva–Vaishnava unity. The 2021 academic study of the twelve temples specifically presents the pilgrimage as an expression of the unity between Saivism and Vaishnavism. This aspect makes the tradition culturally significant. Instead of presenting Shiva and Vishnu as completely separate religious traditions, the pilgrimage expresses the idea that different forms of Hindu worship can exist together within a larger spiritual tradition.

Historical and Architectural Importance

The twelve temples provide valuable evidence for understanding the cultural history of southern Tamil Nadu and the former Travancore region. Their

architecture reflects the interaction between Tamil and Kerala traditions. The temples contain different forms of sculpture, inscriptions, woodwork and other architectural features. Thirupparappu Mahadevar Temple is an important example. Historical research records an inscription connected with the Ay ruler Kokkarunandadakkan. The temple also displays architectural characteristics that reflect both the historical environment of the region and the development of South Indian temple architecture.The wider temple network is therefore important to historians and heritage researchers because it connects religion with architecture, political history and local culture.

Cultural Impact

Sivalaya Oottam has had a strong influence on the cultural life of Kanyakumari. The pilgrimage brings together thousands of devotees and creates a shared experience across villages and communities along the route. A historical account published through the Kanyakumari Devaswom-related documentation describes Sivalaya Oottam as one of the notable festivals of the district and notes that it covers the district through the connected temple celebrations. The pilgrimage also helps preserve local traditions. Stories associated with the temples, traditional methods of worship, devotional chants and knowledge of the pilgrimage route are passed from one generation to another. In this way, Sivalaya Oottam is a living cultural tradition rather than simply an annual religious event. The event also strengthens community participation. People living along the route become involved in welcoming pilgrims and supporting the journey. The pilgrimage therefore creates a connection between temples, villages and devotees.

Cultural Identity of Kanyakumari

Sivalaya Oottam has become an important part of the cultural identity of Kanyakumari. The district itself has a unique historical position because of its connection with both Tamil Nadu and the former Travancore region. This historical background can be seen in the language, architecture, food, religious practices and festivals of the region. The twelve temples provide a physical representation of this shared heritage, while Sivalaya Oottam provides the living tradition that connects them. The pilgrimage therefore demonstrates how religious practices can preserve regional identity even when political boundaries and social conditions change.

Sivalaya Oottam as Living Heritage

The importance of Sivalaya Oottam goes beyond the physical buildings of the twelve temples. The temples are tangible heritage, while the pilgrimage itself represents intangible cultural heritage. Its intangible elements include traditional stories, devotional chants, religious practices, pilgrimage routes, community participation and knowledge passed from older generations to younger generations. This combination of tangible and intangible heritage makes Sivalaya Oottam particularly valuable for cultural studies. Protecting the tradition therefore requires more than maintaining temple buildings. It also requires preserving the knowledge, customs and community practices connected with the pilgrimage.

CONCLUSION

Sivalaya Oottam is a distinctive pilgrimage tradition of Kanyakumari that brings together twelve Shiva temples through a long journey during Maha

Shivaratri. Its traditional origin is preserved through stories involving Bhima and Vyaghrapada or Purusha Mriga, while the historical development of the pilgrimage must be studied through inscriptions, archival records and other reliable evidence. The tradition is important because it combines religious devotion with physical endurance and community participation. Its practice of chanting "Govinda, Gopala" while visiting Shiva temples and its association with Sankaranarayana at Thirunattalam give it a special message of Saiva–Vaishnava unity. More broadly, Sivalaya Oottam represents the cultural history of Kanyakumari. The twelve temples preserve architectural and historical memories, while the annual pilgrimage keeps those memories alive through community participation. It is therefore not merely a religious marathon but a living tradition that connects faith, history, architecture, community and regional identity.

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PARTHIVAPURAM TEMPLE AS A SPACE OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

Temples served as spaces where different deities, rituals and devotional practices could exist together, reflecting the pluralistic nature of the religious practices of South India. Parthivapuram Temple situated in the historical region of Kanyakumari is an important temple connected with the Vaishnava tradition. The temple is also historically significant because of its inscriptions and its association with the Salai, an educational institution. Apart from its main Vaishnava tradition, the sacred space associated with Parthivapuram also reflects the worship of different deities and forms of Hindu religious practice. The presence of worship connected with Krishna, Shiva, Naga and Ayyappa provides an interesting area for understanding religious diversity within the temple environment. This paper examines Parthivapuram Temple as a space of religious pluralism and social harmony. It focuses on the temple's Vaishnava tradition, the worship of various deities and Tamil–Kerala cultural interaction. The study argues that the coexistence of different forms of worship within a shared sacred environment reflects the flexible and inclusive nature of local religious traditions.

Keywords: Parthivapuram, Religious Pluralism, Multiple Deity Worship, Vaishnavism, Shiva, Naga Worship, Ayyappa, Salai.

INTRODUCTION

Religion has played an important role in shaping the history and culture of South India. Temples were among the major institutions through which religious and social life developed. A temple was not only a place where people worshipped a particular deity. It could also function as a centre of education, cultural activities, economic exchange and community life. Therefore, the study of temples helps us to understand not only religious history but also the society of a particular region. Parthivapuram Temple is an important historical temple situated in the present Kanyakumari district. It is associated with Lord Parthasarathy and the Vaishnava tradition. The temple has historical importance because of its inscriptions and its connection with the Salai, an educational institution. These features show that the temple had a wider role in the society of its time. The historical region in which Parthivapuram developed was also a meeting place of Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions. The sacred environment associated with Parthivapuram also includes the worship of different deities and religious practice. The present study examines Parthivapuram Temple as a space of religious pluralism. Here, religious pluralism is understood mainly as the coexistence of different deities and forms of worship within the same sacred environment. The worship associated with Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva, Naga and Ayyappa provides an important aspect of this study. The paper does not claim that all these forms of worship originated at the same period or that they have always existed together. Instead, it considers their present and historical association with the sacred space and asks what this diversity

tells us about the religious and social culture of the region.

Historical Background of Parthivapuram Temple

Parthivapuram is located in the southern part of the historical region associated with Travancore and present-day Kanyakumari district. The area has a long history of religious and cultural interaction between Tamilakham and Kerala. The Parthivapuram Temple is dedicated to Parthasarathy, a form of Lord Krishna and Vishnu. The temple is connected with the early medieval history of the region. The temple was built by Ay ruler Karunandadakkan in 857 CE. Its inscriptions are important sources for understanding the history of the temple and the society around it. The temple is particularly famous for its connection with the Salai. The Salai was an important educational institution connected with the temple. Its presence shows that the temple was not only concerned with religious worship but was also associated with education and intellectual activities.

The historical importance of Parthivapuram therefore comes from the combination of its religious, educational and social functions. The association of Parthivapuram Temple with the Salai is one of its most important historical features. The educational role of the temple shows that religious institutions had wider functions in society. Education, religious learning and temple administration were connected with each other. The temple and Salai together created a centre of religious and intellectual activity. Students, teachers and other people connected with the institution formed part of the social environment.

Vaishnavism as the Main Religious Tradition

Vaishnavism played an important role in the religious history of Tamilakham and Kerala. The main religious identity of Parthivapuram is connected with Vaishnavism. The deity Parthasarathy is associated with Krishna and Vishnu. The temple therefore forms part of the history of Vaishnava worship in South India. Devotional traditions connected with Vishnu developed through temples, sacred literature and pilgrimage. Parthivapuram's importance within this tradition is strengthened by its historical inscriptions and temple institution. The temple provides evidence of the relationship between religious devotion, political patronage and social organisation. The Vaishnava identity therefore remains central to understanding Parthivapuram. Religious pluralism should be seen as an additional feature of the temple's sacred environment rather than as a replacement for its primary Vaishnava identity.

Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony

Religious pluralism refers to the coexistence of different religious beliefs, traditions or forms of worship within the same social or cultural environment. In the case of Parthivapuram, the idea can be used to understand the presence of different devotional practices within the sacred space. The temple's primary identity is Vaishnava, but the association of other forms of worship shows that the religious environment is broader than a single form of devotion. The coexistence of Vishnu, Krishna (incarnation of Vishnu), Shiva, Naga and Ayyappa worship can be understood as a form of religious diversity. These traditions do not necessarily have to be seen as competing with each other. Instead, local religious culture often allows devotees to participate in different forms of worship according to their beliefs and traditions. This type of religious coexistence is important for

understanding the cultural history of South India. At the same time, it is necessary to distinguish between religious pluralism and religious equality. The existence of different forms of worship does not automatically prove that all religious groups had equal social status. The concept should therefore be used carefully when studying the medieval period.

Religious pluralism can contribute to social harmony when different traditions are able to exist without destroying each other. Shared sacred spaces can create opportunities for interaction and mutual understanding. The religious environment of Parthivapuram can be studied from this perspective. Different forms of worship are associated with the same sacred environment, while the temple continues to maintain its main Vaishnava identity. Such coexistence can create a sense of shared cultural belonging. However, social harmony should not be interpreted as complete equality in the society. Medieval society contained caste divisions, social hierarchies and different forms of inequality. Therefore, the argument of this paper is not that Parthivapuram was a completely equal society. Instead, the temple can be understood as a shared cultural and religious space where different forms of devotion and social interaction could take place.

Worship of Various Deities

One of the important aspects of the religious diversity associated with Parthivapuram is the worship of different deities. Along with the Vaishnava tradition of Parthasarathy, the sacred environment includes worship connected with Shiva, Naga and Ayyappa**.** However worship of lord Ganapathi is common in every temple. The worship of Krishna is closely connected with the main identity of Parthivapuram because Parthasarathy is a form of Krishna. Therefore, Krishna worship represents the Vaishnava foundation of the temple. It is important to note that Krishna and Parthasarathy belong to the same broad Vaishnava tradition. Therefore, they should not be treated as completely separate religions. Instead, the different forms of worship can be understood as representing a plurality of devotional traditions within Hindu religious culture.

The presence of two forms of Shiva-linga introduces a Shaiva dimension into the sacred environment. Vaishnavism and Shaivism developed as important religious traditions in South India. The presence of both forms of worship within a sacred environment can be studied as an example of religious coexistence.

Naga worship represents another important aspect of local Hindu religious culture. Serpent worship has a long tradition in Kerala and the southern parts of the Indian subcontinent. Naga worship is often associated with sacred groves, fertility, protection and ancestral beliefs. Its presence in the temple environment shows the influence of local religious traditions. The worship of Ayyappa represents another important form of devotion associated with the Kerala–Travancore cultural region. Ayyappa worship became particularly important in Kerala and neighbouring regions. Ayyappa is regarded as the son of Shiva and Mohini (female form of Vishnu). Therefore, Ayyappa is associated with both Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions. Ayyappa is also called as Hariharaputra : Hari means Vishnu, Hara refers to Shiva and putra means son. Its association with the sacred environment of Parthivapuram can therefore be studied in relation to the

wider cultural traditions of southern Kerala and Kanyakumari.

Shaiva and Vaishnava Interaction

The relationship between Shaivism and Vaishnavism is an important part of South Indian religious history. Both traditions developed strong temple institutions and devotional traditions. The presence of Shiva-linga in association with the sacred environment of Parthivapuram provides an opportunity to study this relationship at the local level. It shows that the religious landscape of a region cannot always be divided into separate Shaiva and Vaishnava spaces. In many places, devotees and communities interacted with different traditions. This interaction can be understood as an important part of the cultural history of the region.

Tamil–Kerala Cultural Interaction

Parthivapuram is situated in a region where Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions interacted for centuries. This interaction can be seen in the region's architecture, religious traditions, language and social practices. The temple's history is connected with this wider cultural interaction. The association of Ayyappa and Naga worship with the temple environment can also be considered in relation to Kerala traditions, while the Vaishnava identity of Parthasarathy connects the temple with the wider Tamil religious tradition. Thus, Parthivapuram provides an important example of how cultural traditions can meet and develop within the same historical region.

Festival and Community Participation

Temple festivals are important occasions for bringing people together. During festivals, the temple becomes a centre of collective activity. Devotees participate in worship, processions and other religious activities. Local people also become involved in arrangements connected with food, decoration and other services. Festivals therefore strengthen the relationship between the temple and the surrounding community. When different forms of worship are present within the temple environment, festivals and religious occasions may provide further opportunities for interaction among devotees. The festival tradition can therefore be studied as one of the mechanisms through which the temple contributes to social relationships.

CONCLUSION

Parthivapuram Temple is an important historical institution for understanding the religious and social history of the Kanyakumari region. Its primary identity is connected with the Vaishnava tradition and the worship of Parthasarathy, a form of Krishna. However, the sacred environment associated with the temple also reflects the worship of different deities and religious traditions. The presence of Krishna, Shiva, Naga and Ayyappa worship provides an interesting example of the plurality of Hindu devotional practices. These forms of worship belong to different traditions and cultural backgrounds, but their association within the same sacred environment demonstrates the ability of local religious culture to accommodate diversity. The temple's association with the Salai further strengthens its importance as a social and educational institution. The temple was connected not only with worship but also with learning, cultural activities and community life. The historical position of Parthivapuram between the Tamil and Kerala cultural regions also contributed to the development of its diverse religious

environment. Vaishnava, Shaiva, Naga and Ayyappa traditions can be studied as part of the religious landscape of the region. Therefore, Parthivapuram can be understood as a space of religious pluralism and social interaction. The existence of different forms of worship does not mean that medieval society was free from caste or social inequalities. Rather, the temple provides an example of how different devotional traditions could exist within a shared cultural space. The study of Parthivapuram thus shows that temples should not be studied only as places of worship. They were also institutions that connected religion, education, culture and society. The coexistence of different forms of worship within the sacred environment makes Parthivapuram an important subject for understanding religious diversity and cultural interaction in the historical Kanyakumari and southern Travancore region.

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FESTIVALS, PILGRIMAGE AND TOURISM: THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari district, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, occupies a distinctive position in the cultural and tourism geography of Tamil Nadu. The district is characterised by the confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, while its historical location between Tamil and Malayalam cultural regions has produced a rich and diverse cultural landscape. Festivals and pilgrimage constitute important components of this cultural landscape and have contributed significantly to the development of tourism and the local economy. The annual festivals associated with the Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple and St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral attract devotees and visitors from different parts of India and neighbouring regions. In addition, cultural events such as Kumari Thiruvizha provide a platform for classical and folk arts, music and traditional performances. The Government of Tamil Nadu identifies several festivals as important tourism events, while the Ministry of Tourism has promoted Kumari Festival and tourism cultural festivals in the district. This paper examines the relationship between festivals, pilgrimage and tourism in Kanniyakumari and analyses their contribution to the cultural economy of the district. It argues that festivals are not merely religious celebrations but also generate employment, stimulate small businesses, support transport and hospitality services, encourage cultural production and strengthen local identity.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Festivals, Pilgrimage Tourism, Cultural Economy, Cultural Heritage, Religious Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Local Community.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the important sectors contributing to economic development, employment generation and cultural interaction. In contemporary society, tourism is no longer restricted to leisure and recreation. Cultural tourism, heritage tourism, pilgrimage tourism, eco-tourism and community-based tourism have become significant forms of travel. Among these, pilgrimage tourism occupies a special position in India because religious traditions have historically encouraged mobility across regions.Kanniyakumari district is particularly suitable for examining the relationship between pilgrimage, festivals and tourism. The district is located at the southernmost tip of India and has a coastline of about 71.5 kilometres. It is surrounded by the sea on three sides and connected with the Western Ghats in the north. Its geographical uniqueness, religious institutions, historical monuments, beaches and cultural traditions have made it an important tourism destination. Kanniyakumari is simultaneously a sacred landscape, cultural landscape and tourist destination. The Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple, churches, mosques, palaces and heritage sites together create a diversified tourism environment. The official district tourism portal identifies temples, churches and other heritage attractions as important tourist resources. Festivals add another

important dimension to this tourism landscape. They transform ordinary sacred spaces into dynamic centres of collective participation. During festival periods, pilgrims and tourists require accommodation, food, transportation, shopping, guiding services and other facilities. Thus, religious festivals generate a temporary but significant economic ecosystem around pilgrimage centres. The cultural economy of Kanniyakumari therefore cannot be understood only through conventional tourism statistics. It must also be examined through the value created by cultural performances, rituals, traditional occupations, local food, handicrafts, transportation, accommodation, small-scale trade and community participation.

Geographical and Cultural Setting of Kanniyakumari

Kanniyakumari has a unique geographical identity. It is the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu and occupies an important position at the meeting point of three major water bodies. This geographical uniqueness has contributed to its symbolic importance in Indian culture and tourism. The official district website describes Kanniyakumari as the place where the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal converge. The district also possesses a distinctive cultural character because of its historical connections with both Tamil and Malayalam cultural regions. Language, architecture, food traditions, religious practices, festivals and folk customs demonstrate this cultural interaction. The cultural landscape includes Hindu temples, Christian churches and Muslim religious institutions. This diversity has created a pluralistic social environment in which religious festivals, pilgrimage practices and cultural activities form an important part of community life. The tourism attractions of Kanniyakumari extend beyond religious sites. Padmanabhapuram Palace, Chitharal Jain Rock-cut Temple, Mathoor Hanging Bridge, Thiruparappu Waterfalls, Vattakottai Fort, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue and Gandhi Mandapam contribute to the district's heritage and tourism potential. Consequently, the visitor experience in Kanniyakumari frequently combines pilgrimage, heritage, nature, culture and recreation. This combination provides the foundation for a diversified cultural economy.

Festivals as Living Cultural Heritage

Festivals are among the most visible expressions of intangible cultural heritage. They preserve rituals, oral traditions, music, dance, dress, food practices, processions and community memories. Unlike monuments, which represent physical heritage, festivals represent living heritage because they are repeatedly performed and transmitted between generations. The Government of Kanniyakumari District lists several important festivals, including Pongal, Kumari Thiruvizha, festivals of Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Mandaikadu Temple and the annual festival of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral. The Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple celebrates several important festivals including Vaikasi Visagam, Navarathiri, Thirukarthigai, Aadi Ammavasai and Thai Ammavasai. Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple has celebrations associated with Masi, Avani, Margazhi and Chithirai. The Mandaikadu Kodai Festival is another significant religious and cultural event. According to the district administration, the festival begins with flag hoisting and continues for ten days, with daily

processions around the temple streets. The festival also attracts devotees from different parts of Kanniyakumari district and neighbouring Kerala. Special bus services are operated to facilitate the movement of devotees. This demonstrates that a festival has implications beyond religious ritual. It requires transport arrangements, temporary markets, food stalls, accommodation, security, sanitation and other services. Therefore, festivals create a temporary cultural economy involving both formal and informal sectors.

Pilgrimage and the Tourism Landscape

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest forms of human mobility. Religious journeys have historically connected sacred places with wider geographical regions. In India, pilgrimage centres frequently function simultaneously as religious, cultural and economic centres. Research on pilgrimage tourism in Tamil Nadu indicates that religious institutions can perform multiple functions in social, cultural and economic life. Temples may operate not only as places of worship but also as employers, cultural institutions, pilgrimage centres and community organisations. Kanniyakumari illustrates this relationship particularly well. The Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple is an important pilgrimage destination, while the confluence of the seas has symbolic religious significance. The Ministry of Tourism's Incredible India portal highlights the spiritual significance of the Bhagavathy Amman Temple and the practice of taking a holy dip at the confluence. Pilgrimage tourism also interacts with non-religious tourism. A visitor may arrive for religious purposes but subsequently visit the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Gandhi Mandapam, beaches and other attractions. Similarly, a tourist visiting Kanniyakumari for scenic attractions may participate in a temple festival or cultural event. Thus, the district demonstrates the interconnected nature of pilgrimage tourism and cultural tourism.

Kumari Thiruvizha and Cultural Tourism

Kumari Thiruvizha provides an important example of the transformation of cultural heritage into a tourism resource. The Ministry of Tourism describes Kumari Thiruvizha as an art and culture festival conducted in Kanniyakumari and notes that it features classical and folk dance and music traditions. The festival provides opportunities for artists to perform Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam, Kathakali, Oyilattam, Devarattam, Karagattam, Kavadi Aattam, Kali Aattam, Kolaattam, Therukoothu, Kazhaikoothu, Villu Paattu, Kummi and other traditional forms. Music performances include Nadaswaram, Thavil, Carnatic music and other forms. Kumari Thiruvizha therefore performs at least three important functions. First, it preserves traditional performing arts by providing a public platform for artists. Second, it creates cultural experiences for visitors. Tourists are able to experience forms of Tamil cultural expression that may not otherwise be easily accessible. Third, it creates economic opportunities for artists and service providers. Performers, event organisers, vendors, transport operators, food sellers and accommodation providers can benefit from increased visitor activity. The festival demonstrates that cultural tourism need not depend exclusively on monuments. Performing arts themselves can become tourism resources when they are presented responsibly and meaningfully.

Festivals and the Cultural Economy

Festivals play an important role in

strengthening the cultural economy of a region by connecting cultural traditions with local economic activities. In Kanniyakumari district, festivals such as Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Festival, Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Festival and Suchindram Temple Festival attract devotees, tourists, artists and visitors from different places. During festival periods, traditional dance, music, folk performances, handicrafts, local food and cultural practices receive greater public attention. This creates opportunities for artists, musicians, craftsmen, small traders, transport operators, hotel owners, food vendors and other service providers. Festivals also provide a platform for traditional artists to earn income and continue their cultural practices. In particular, cultural programmes such as Karagattam, Oyilattam, Kummi, Villu Paattu, Therukoothu and Nadaswaram performances contribute to the preservation of Tamil intangible cultural heritage while generating economic opportunities. Festival tourism further promotes local products and encourages visitors to explore the historical, religious and natural attractions of Kanniyakumari. However, excessive commercialization may affect the authenticity and traditional character of cultural practices. Therefore, festival planning should balance cultural preservation, community participation and economic development. Government departments, local communities, cultural organisations and tourism stakeholders should work together to ensure that the economic benefits of festivals reach local people and traditional artists. Thus, festivals can function not only as celebrations of faith and culture but also as important drivers of employment, entrepreneurship, cultural preservation and sustainable local development.

Small Businesses and Informal Economy

Small businesses and the informal economy play a significant role in the economic life of festival destinations such as Kanniyakumari. During major festivals such as Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Festival, Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Festival and Suchindram Temple Festival, the arrival of large numbers of devotees and tourists creates increased demand for various local goods and services. Small shops, street vendors, flower sellers, handicraft traders, food stalls, tea shops, souvenir sellers and temporary market operators benefit directly from festival activities. Transport providers, auto-rickshaw drivers, local guides, photographers and other informal workers also obtain additional income during festival seasons. These activities provide livelihood opportunities for people who may not have access to formal employment. Festival-related business also helps promote local products, traditional food, handicrafts and cultural items, thereby connecting cultural heritage with the local economy. Women and family-based enterprises can particularly benefit from the sale of food products, flowers, handicrafts and other traditional goods. However, informal businesses may face challenges such as inadequate vending spaces, lack of sanitation, waste generation, traffic congestion and limited access to financial support. Therefore, local authorities should provide organised vending areas, basic infrastructure, sanitation facilities, financial assistance and skill-development programmes for small traders and informal workers. Proper regulation should be combined with support rather than restricting their livelihood opportunities. Thus, small businesses and the informal economy are important components of the festival economy,

contributing to employment generation, local income, entrepreneurship and inclusive cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari.

Hospitality Sector

The hospitality sector plays an important role in the development of festival and cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari. During festivals such as Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Festival and Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Festival, the arrival of pilgrims, tourists and cultural visitors increases the demand for hotels, lodges, guest houses, restaurants and other accommodation facilities. Local restaurants and food vendors also benefit by providing traditional and regional food to visitors. The growth of festival tourism creates employment opportunities for hotel workers, cooks, housekeeping staff, transport providers and other service personnel. It also encourages the development of small-scale accommodation and family-run businesses. Therefore, the hospitality sector contributes significantly to local income generation, employment and tourism development. At the same time, proper sanitation, waste management, affordable accommodation and quality services are essential for sustainable hospitality development in Kanniyakumari.

Festivals, Community Participation and Social Interaction

Festivals are important spaces for social interaction. They bring together people from different villages, towns, districts and states. Such gatherings create opportunities for cultural exchange and strengthen social networks. The Mandaikadu festival illustrates this regional interaction because participation extends beyond the immediate locality to different parts of Kanniyakumari and neighbouring Kerala. Similarly, Kumari Thiruvizha brings artists and audiences together through cultural performances. The festival therefore creates a shared public space in which cultural traditions are performed, observed and appreciated. Kanniyakumari's religious diversity also makes the study of festivals significant from the perspective of social harmony. Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities have contributed to the cultural landscape of the district. The annual festival of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar, for example, forms part of the district's officially recognised festival calendar. Festivals can consequently contribute to social cohesion, cultural understanding and collective identity, provided that their management remains inclusive.

Tourism and Local Economic Development

Tourism is an important factor in promoting local economic development in Kanniyakumari district. The district attracts pilgrims, domestic tourists and international visitors because of its religious centres, historical monuments, cultural traditions, beaches and festivals. Events such as Kumari Thiruvizha, Mandaikadu Festival and temple festivals increase the movement of visitors and create economic opportunities for local communities. Tourism generates income through hotels, restaurants, transportation, shops, handicrafts, local food and cultural services. It also provides direct and indirect employment for guides, drivers, vendors, artists, hotel workers and small entrepreneurs. Local artisans and traditional performers can benefit by selling cultural products and presenting folk arts to visitors. Tourism further encourages the development of roads, transport facilities, sanitation, communication and other basic

infrastructure. In this way, tourism can contribute to the overall development of rural and urban communities. Local people should be actively involved in tourism planning and should receive greater opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship. Thus, responsible tourism can transform Kanniyakumari's cultural and natural resources into sustainable sources of income, employment, social development and community empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Festivals, pilgrimage and tourism together constitute an important dimension of the cultural economy of Kanniyakumari district. The district's geographical uniqueness, religious traditions, historical heritage and cultural diversity have created a tourism landscape in which spirituality and tourism coexist.Festivals such as those associated with Kanniyakumari Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple and Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple demonstrate the continuing importance of religious traditions. The annual festival of St. Francis Xavier's Cathedral reflects the district's Christian heritage, while Kumari Thiruvizha provides a platform for classical and folk arts. The official tourism sources recognise these events as significant components of the district's cultural and tourism profile. The economic importance of these festivals lies not merely in the number of visitors they attract but in the network of livelihoods and services they activate. Hotels, restaurants, transport operators, shopkeepers, artists, guides, photographers and informal vendors all participate in the festival economy. Tourism studies of Kanniyakumari similarly identify the sector as a source of employment, income and business opportunities. At the same time, tourism development must not undermine the very culture that attracts visitors. The future of Kanniyakumari's cultural economy depends upon balancing religious authenticity, cultural preservation, economic opportunity and environmental sustainability. Therefore, festivals should be understood not simply as annual religious occasions but as living cultural institutions and economic spaces. A community-centred and sustainable approach can transform Kanniyakumari into an exemplary destination for cultural and pilgrimage tourism while preserving its heritage for future generations.

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AADI PERUKKU, RIVER-WORSHIP FESTIVAL OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Aadi Perukku, also known as Pathinettam Perukku ("the Eighteenth-Day Rising"), is a Tamil folk festival observed on the eighteenth day of the Tamil month of Aadi (mid-July to mid-August), when the south-west monsoon swells the region's rivers and streams. While the festival is most widely associated with the Kaveri delta, it is observed with equal devotion in the far south of Tamil Nadu, in Kanyakumari district, whose rivers — the Thamirabarani (locally called Kuzhithuraiyar), Pazhayar, Kodayar, Paraliyar and Valliyar — sustain the district's paddy fields and coconut groves. This paper presents a descriptive study of Aadi Perukku as it is practised along the riverbanks of Kanyakumari district, examining its agrarian origins, its ritual vocabulary of river worship, its association with women's devotion and fertility, and its role in binding riverside communities to the water bodies on which their agriculture depends. The study draws on the district's river geography, recorded oral and journalistic accounts of riverside celebration in Nagercoil and Thiruvattar, and the wider Tamil literary and folk tradition of Aadi Perukku.

Keywords: *Pathinettam Perukku ; Mulaipari ; Thamirabarani (Kuzhithuraiyar) ; Pazhayar ; Kodayar ; Paraliyar ; Valliyar.*

INTRODUCTION

Tamil Nadu's agrarian calendar is dotted with festivals that give thanks to the natural forces on which cultivation depends, and among these Aadi Perukku holds a distinctive place as a festival addressed not to a deity housed in a temple but to the river itself, personified and worshipped as a nurturing mother. The word Aadi names the fourth month of the Tamil solar calendar, falling between mid-July and mid-August, and perukku means "a rising" or "a swelling" — together describing the moment when monsoon rains push the district's rivers over their banks and into the irrigation channels that feed the coming season's crop. Although the festival is celebrated across Tamil Nadu, and is most prominently associated with the river Kaveri in the delta districts, it is also a living tradition in Kanyakumari district at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, where a distinct network of shorter, monsoon-fed rivers descending from the Western Ghats performs the the Kaveri performs further north. This paper documents how Aadi Perukku is observed along these rivers, situating the festival within the district's particular geography and riverside social life.

The Rivers

Kanyakumari district, occupying the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, is drained by a distinct set of short, west-flowing rivers rather than by any single major river system. Its principal river is the Thamirabarani, known locally as the Kuzhithuraiyar, which rises in the Western Ghats and meets the Arabian Sea near Thengapattanam. This river is fed by two major tributaries, the Kodayar and the Paraliyar, dammed respectively at the Pechiparai and Perunchani reservoirs, with the Kodayar in turn fed by the Chittar streams. A separate small river, the Pazhayar, rises near Shorlacode and flows through Nagercoil town before reaching the Manakkudy lagoon, while the Valliyar and its tributary Thoovalar drain the

Velimalai hills in the district's west. These rivers, though individually modest in size compared to the great rivers of the Kaveri or Vaigai basins, are the lifeline of the district's paddy cultivation, and it is on their banks — rather than a single dominant river — that Aadi Perukku is observed in Kanyakumari district, giving the local festival a more dispersed, village-by-village character than its counterpart on the Kaveri.

Historical And Agrarian Background

Aadi Perukku is counted among the oldest continuously observed Tamil folk festivals, with references to riverside celebration by Tamil women traceable to early Tamil literature, including the Sangam corpus and the epic Silappathikaram. Its underlying logic is agrarian: the Tamil proverb "Aadip paatam thaedi vidhai" (sow the seed once the Aadi flood has marked the field) reflects the belief that only land watered by the Aadi rise will yield a harvest by the Tamil month of Thai. The festival therefore falls at the hinge point of the agricultural year, marking the transition from the dry pre-monsoon months to the sowing season, and is treated as an occasion to thank the river for the water on which the coming harvest depends.

In Kanyakumari district specifically, this agrarian logic is reinforced by the district's dependence on its short monsoon-fed rivers for paddy irrigation across the Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks, so that the rising of the Pazhayar, the Thamirabarani and their tributaries in the month of Aadi is watched with the same practical and devotional attention that delta communities give to the Kaveri.

Ritual Practices

The core ritual of Aadi Perukku is simple and is performed by families, and especially by women, on the riverbank itself rather than inside a temple. Devotees bathe in the river at dawn, and offerings of turmeric, kumkum, flowers, fruit, and cooked rice dishes are made to the water, together with the lighting of oil lamps at the water's edge. A distinctive custom associated with the day is Mulaipari, in which nine varieties of grain are sown in a mud pot some days before the festival; the sprouted shoots are carried to the river and immersed in it on the day itself, as a living symbol of the harvest to come.

Unmarried girls tie a turmeric-dyed thread invoking the goddess in the hope of a good marriage, while married women pray for the long life and wellbeing of their husbands and families, reflecting the festival's strong association with women's devotion and fertility. It is customary for the whole month of Aadi to be treated as inauspicious for weddings and other formal ceremonies, being regarded instead as a month set apart for devotion to the divine feminine associated with water and nature.

Aadi Perukku On The Rivers Of Kanyakumari District

Riverside celebration in Kanyakumari district is recalled in local accounts as a settled feature of everyday life in towns and villages along the Pazhayar and the Thamirabarani. In Nagercoil, families settled along the banks of the Pazhayar have traditionally gathered on the eve of Aadi Perukku beneath old peepal trees by the river, preparing and sharing festive rice dishes such as chitranna as part of the occasion, with a nearby Shiva shrine and a Ganapathi shrine forming part of the same riverside devotional landscape. Further north, at Thiruvattar, the Adikesava Perumal

temple stands at the confluence of three rivers — the Kothai, the Paraliyar and the Thamirabarani — a setting that has earned it the local description of being the "Srirangam of the Chera kingdom" on account of its river-girt position, and which makes the temple town a natural focus for river worship during the monsoon rise. Along the Thamirabarani in the neighbouring Tirunelveli region, which shares the same river system with northern Kanyakumari, Aadi Perukku is marked by formal river poojas and ceremonial offerings, a pattern of worship that mirrors what is practised on the Kanyakumari stretches of the same river and its tributaries, the Kodayar and Paraliyar.

Because the district has no single dominant river comparable to the Kaveri, Aadi Perukku in Kanyakumari takes the form of numerous smaller, village-level observances distributed along the Pazhayar, the Thamirabarani, the Kodayar and the Valliyar, rather than one large centralised gathering — a pattern that reflects the district's own fragmented river geography.

Festival Day

The day follows a customary rhythm shared with Aadi Perukku observances elsewhere in Tamil Nadu. Devotees rise before dawn and bathe in the river, after which turmeric, kumkum, flowers, fruit and cooked offerings are placed at the water's edge and oil lamps are lit. Where Mulaipari is observed, the sprouted grain shoots are carried to the river and immersed at this time. Through the late morning and afternoon, families gather for a shared festive meal on or near the riverbank, and in many localities children and young people set up rope swings, called thoories, on riverside trees as part of the day's festivities. The occasion closes with informal visiting among neighbours and the exchange of sweets, flowers and small gifts, particularly between married women and their natal families.

Socio-Cultural Significance

As a festival that is centred on the open riverbank rather than on any single temple or priestly office, Aadi Perukku functions as an inclusive, community-wide occasion, drawing together families from a locality irrespective of caste distinctions that might otherwise govern temple access. In the specific context of Kanyakumari district, where cultivation is spread across several short river valleys rather than a single delta, the festival also serves a practical function of collective attention to the district's water resources at the point in the year when their condition most directly determines the coming harvest.

The festival additionally functions as an occasion for the reaffirmation of kinship and neighbourly ties, through the customary visiting, gift-exchange and shared riverside meals that accompany the day, and as a marker of the wider seasonal transition from the dry months into the agricultural calendar proper.

Women, Fertility, And The River As Mother

A defining feature of Aadi Perukku, in Kanyakumari district as elsewhere in Tamil Nadu, is its close association with women's ritual life. The river is addressed and worshipped as a mother goddess, a figure understood to nurture the land in the same way that Amman deities are understood to protect a village, and the rituals of the day — bathing, the tying of the turmeric thread, and prayer for marital and familial wellbeing — are performed predominantly by women. This framing of the river as a maternal, life-giving presence, worshipped directly at

the water's edge rather than through an intermediary image, gives Aadi Perukku a devotional character distinct from temple-centred Hindu worship, and links the festival's agrarian purpose — the rising of water for the fields — to a wider cultural understanding of fertility, both agricultural and human.

CONCLUSION

Aadi Perukku, though most closely identified in the popular imagination with the river Kaveri, is a living and locally rooted tradition in Kanyakumari district, carried by the district's own network of monsoon-fed rivers — the Thamirabarani, Pazhayar, Kodayar, Paraliyar and Valliyar. Observed through riverside bathing, offerings, the Mulaipari grain ritual, and shared festive meals, the festival binds the district's riverside communities to the water on which their agriculture depends, while also serving as an occasion of women's devotion, family reaffirmation, and neighbourly exchange. Read against the district's fragmented river geography, Aadi Perukku in Kanyakumari offers a valuable local variant of a pan-Tamil festival, illustrating how a shared ritual calendar can take distinct, locally adapted forms depending on the particular rivers a community depends upon.

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THE POLITICAL TAPESTRY OF KANYAKUMARI: FROM FEUDAL HEGEMONY TO IDEOLOGICAL BIPOLARITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the political evolution of Kanyakumari—the southernmost district of India—tracing its transformation from a feudal princely periphery into a complex, multi-polar arena of ideological competition. Situated at the geographic junction of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean, Kanyakumari occupies a distinct socio-cultural locus where Travancore feudalism, Tamil sub-nationalism, Christian socio-religious activism, Left agrarian unionism, and Hindu nationalist consolidation intersect. By examining four distinct historical phases—feudal foundations and missionary intervention, the linguistic reorganisation movement (1940s–1956), communist agrarian-coastal mobilization, and late-20th-century communal polarization—this study illustrates how local caste dynamics, institutional networks, and ideological shifts transformed the district's political structure. Unlike much of mainland Tamil Nadu, where the Dravidian movement established a dominant duopoly, Kanyakumari presents a nationalized political model characterized by dynamic competition between Congress-Left alliances and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Keywords: *Kanyakumari Politics, Political Evolution, Ideological Bipolarity, Subaltern Mobilization, Political Sociology*

1. INTRODUCTION: The Spatial And Socio-Political Locus

The political evolution of Kanyakumari district constitutes a unique case study in Indian sub-national politics and political sociology. Located at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, the region occupies a spatial frontier where three major bodies of water converge: the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean. Historically, this geographic position exposed the territory to maritime trade networks, foreign religious interventions, and inter-state territorial shifts, forging a heterogeneous social matrix distinct from the hinterlands of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

For centuries prior to India's independence, Kanyakumari was an integral part of the princely state of Travancore. Consequently, its political development was shaped by Travancore's socio-economic, administrative, and legal structures rather than those of the British administered Madras Presidency. The district's historical trajectory reflects the intersection of three socio-political forces:

- **The structural disruption of feudal caste hierarchies** via Christian missionary institutions and subaltern social movements.
- **Sub-national linguistic mobilization** spearheaded by the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress (TTNC) during the reorganization of Indian states (1947–1956).
- **Ideological polarization** along class and religious axes, giving rise to both Left trade unionism and Hindu nationalist consolidation.

While mainland Tamil Nadu's post-independence electoral politics became dominated by the Dravidian duopoly—the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)—Kanyakumari maintained a distinct electoral behavior. Here, national party identities (the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party) and radical Left organizations have retained substantial

electoral and institutional footprints, making the region a unique micro-polity within South India.

2. PHASE I: Feudal Foundations And Social Stratification (18th–Mid-19th Century)

The Agrarian Feudal Order under Travancore

Under the princely state of Travancore, the political economy of Southern Travancore (encompassing modern-day Kanyakumari) was governed by the *Jenmi* system—an agrarian feudal structure anchored in orthodox Brahminical patronage (*Jenmis*) and landed upper-caste hegemony, primarily executed by Nair elites (*Madampis*). The agrarian land tenure system was divided between *Sircar* (state-owned) lands and *Kanam* (leased feudal properties), reinforcing strict caste hierarchies and economic servitude.

At the base of this social hierarchy were subaltern agrarian and laboring communities, including the Nadars (historically Channars), Pulayas, Paraiyars, and the Mukkuvar fishing communities along the coast. These groups were subjected to pervasive systemic oppression:

- **Severe Civil Disabilities:** Severe restrictions on physical mobility, dress codes, architectural choices, and access to public spaces or water sources.
- **Extortionate Taxation:** Arbitrary levies (*Oozhiyam*) requiring uncompensated labor for state and temple projects, alongside specialized caste taxes such as *Thala-karam* (head tax) and *Mula-karam* (breast tax).

Christian Missionary Interventions and Social Mobility

The arrival of European Christian missions in the early 19th century fundamentally altered Southern Travancore's social matrix. Two primary organizations established deep institutional networks in the region:

1. **The London Missionary Society (LMS):** Led by Protestant pioneers such as William Tobias Ringeltaube (who established a base at Mylaudy in 1806) and later Charles Mead, the LMS focused its primary efforts on the interior agrarian belts, converting large numbers of subaltern Nadars.
2. **The Catholic Church (Diocesan and Religious Orders):** Concentrated heavily among coastal Mukkuvar fishing communities, establishing parish-centered social networks along the littoral belt.

Missionary intervention provided these marginalized groups with an institutional counterweight to the feudal state. Converts gained access to formal education, basic healthcare, and legal representation through the British Resident's office in Travancore, challenging traditional landlord authority.

The Channar Revolt (Upper Cloth Agitation)

The structural friction between feudal orthodoxy and subaltern assertion culminated in the **Channar Revolt** (or Upper Cloth Agitation), spanning from 1822 to 1859. Lower-caste Nadar women, supported by LMS missionaries, began wearing the upper-body cloth (*Melmundu*)—a attire privilege legally reserved for upper-caste women under Travancore's caste edicts.

The agitation developed through three distinct phases:

- **1822–1823:** Initial localized conflicts following royal decrees that enforced traditional dress restrictions on lower-caste converts.
- **1828–1830:** Widespread civil disobedience as Nadar women increasingly adopted upper garments, leading to violent attacks on mission

schools and churches by upper-caste landed elites.

- **1858–1859:** Final, intense clashes sparked by the proclamation of Queen Victoria in 1858. Subaltern groups interpreted the royal charter as a guarantee of civil equality, leading to broader revolts that forced the Travancore State, under pressure from the Madras Presidency's Governor Sir Charles Trevelyan, to abolish all dress restrictions for low-caste women in July 1859.The Channar Agitation served as a foundational civil rights struggle in South India, establishing the Christian church as an institutional anchor for subaltern emancipation and organizing in Southern Travancore.

3. PHASE II: The Linguistic Reorganisation Movement (1940s–1956)

Sub-National Identity and the Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress (TTNC)

Following the end of British colonial rule and the integration of princely states into the Indian Union, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin were merged in 1949 to form the state of Travancore-Cochin. Within this newly created administrative unit, the Tamil-speaking population of the southern taluks—Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode—found themselves politically and culturally marginalized within a Malayalam-dominated state administration.

This linguistic tension sparked the formation of the **Travancore Tamil Nadu Congress (TTNC)** in 1947. Led by **A. Nesamony** (popularly recognized as *Marshal Nesamony*), along with prominent regional leaders such as A. Kunjan Nadar, T.T. Daniel, and Nathaniel, the TTNC organized a popular movement demanding the merger of the Tamil-majority Southern Travancore taluks into the Tamil-speaking Madras State.

Institutional Mobilization and State Repression

The TTNC's agitation mobilized cross-caste Tamil constituencies, bringing together Nadar Christians, Hindu Nadars, and agrarian labor groups under a unified sub-national Tamil identity. The political demand was driven by several core issues:

1. **Administrative Neglect:** Inadequate allocation of developmental funds, irrigation infrastructure, and civic amenities to the southern Tamil-speaking districts by the Trivandrum administration.
2. **Language Rights:** Restrictions on Tamil-medium instruction in local schools and the dominance of Malayalam in local courts and official administration.
3. **Agrarian and Land Grievances:** Resistance to land revenue policies enacted by the Travancore-Cochin government that disproportionately impacted southern agriculturalists.

The struggle escalated into mass civil disobedience, strikes, and hartals between 1948 and 1954. The Travancore-Cochin state government, under the Chief Ministership of Pattom Thanu Pillai, responded with police action. The crisis peaked on **August 11, 1954**, when police fired upon peaceful TTNC demonstrators in **Marthandam** and **Puthukkadai**, resulting in several deaths and widespread arrests.

The 1956 Reorganization and Political Realignment

The recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) led to the passage of the **States Reorganisation Act of 1956**. On **November 1, 1956**, the four southern Tamil-speaking taluks of Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode (along with parts of

Shenkottai) were severed from Travancore-Cochin and merged into Madras State (renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969), forming the newly created **Kanyakumari District**

The successful merger established Marshal Nesamony as a key political figure in the region. Following the dissolution of the TTNC, its cadre integrated into the **Indian National Congress (INC)**. Consequently, the Congress party established strong political dominance in Kanyakumari during the 1950s and 1960s, while much of Tamil Nadu began transitioning toward Dravidian nationalist politics.

4. PHASE III: The Agrarian Left And Coastal Mobilization (1960s–1980s)

Rubber Plantations and Inland Peasant Unions

While high politics in the post-1956 era was initially dominated by the Congress party, radical Left organizations developed grassroots trade union networks in the district's interior and high-range agrarian belts. Geographically contiguous with the Left-leaning strongholds of Southern Kerala (such as Trivandrum and Kollam), Kanyakumari's western hinterlands became fertile ground for communist unionization.The **Communist Party of India (CPI)** and, post-1964, the **Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]** focused their organizational efforts on two major labor sectors:

1. **Rubber Plantation Labor:** In the hilly terrains of the Western Ghats foothills (Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks), thousands of plantation workers were employed in rubber estates. Unions affiliated with the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) mobilized these workers around minimum wage enforcement, housing security, medical benefits, and land reform.
2. **Agrarian Paddy Workers:** In the interior valleys, agricultural labor unions mobilized subaltern landless laborers against traditional land-owning elites, demanding fair wages and fixed working hourFleets

Coastal Marine Resource Movements

Concurrently, the Left and church-affiliated labor organizations mobilized traditional coastal fisherfolk. Spanning 68 kilometers of coastline along the Arabian Sea, Kanyakumari's littoral villages were populated primarily by Catholic Mukkuvar communities reliant on artisanal fishing methods. During the 1970s and 1980s, the rapid introduction of mechanized deep-sea trawling led to conflicts over marine resource access:

- **Artisanal vs. Mechanized Trawling:** Mechanized trawlers destroyed local ecological breeding grounds and damaged traditional nets close to the shore, threatening the livelihoods of artisanal fishers.
- **Unionization and Mobilization:** Left-wing activists, alongside progressive Catholic clergy operating through the *Fishermen Service Society* and artisanal trade unions, organized sea blockades, coastal marches, and legal challenges to establish protected coastal zones reserved for non-mechanized traditional craft.

Legislative Footprints

Grassroots mobilization in the labor sector yielded durable electoral strongholds for the Left in western Kanyakumari:

- **Vilavancode Constituency:** Became a long-standing legislative base for the CPI(M), which repeatedly secured this assembly seat through organized plantation and agrarian labor support.
- **Killiyoor and Padmanabhapuram:** Exhibited strong Left electoral presence, establishing communism as an enduring

third ideological force alongside Congress secularism and emerging Dravidian politics.

5. PHASE IV: Religious Polarization And The Rise Of Hindutva (1970s–Present)

Demographic Dynamics and Early RSS Outreach

Kanyakumari's political trajectory underwent a structural shift in the late 20th century, driven by the district's demographic composition. Unlike most Tamil Nadu districts—where non-Hindu populations typically constitute small minority pockets—Kanyakumari features a nearly balanced demographic profile between its Hindu and Christian populations, alongside a smaller Muslim minority.

Beginning in the late 1960s and accelerating through the 1970s, the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)** expanded its institutional infrastructure throughout the district. Seeking to build a consolidated Hindu electoral base and counter the influence of Christian institutional networks, the RSS deployed key strategies:

- Establishing local *shakhas*, cultural centers, and educational trusts (*Saraswati Shishu Mandirs*).
- Organizing community projects in subaltern Hindu settlements to counter church-led social programs.
- Promoting regional cultural symbols, such as the construction of the **Vivekananda Rock Memorial** in Kanyakumari town (completed in 1970 under Eknath Ranade), which served as a focal point for Hindu nationalist mobilization across South India.

(Nationalized Electoral Contests in TN)

The Mandaikadu Clashes (1982) and Socio-Religious Divide

The escalating friction between Hindu nationalist organizers and Christian church structures culminated in the **Mandaikadu Clashes of March 1982**. The violence originated around the annual festival at the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Temple, located near a coastal Christian settlement.

The confrontation rapidly expanded into a district-wide crisis:

- **Widespread Violence:** Over two weeks, violent clashes, arson, and police firings swept across coastal and interior villages, resulting in multiple casualties and extensive damage to property.
- **Institutional Separation:** The riots fractured long-standing socio-economic ties between interior Hindu communities and coastal Christian fishing populations, leading to localized boycotts and religious consolidation.
- **The Venugopal Commission:** The Tamil Nadu state government appointed the Justice P. Venugopal Inquiry Commission to investigate the cause of the riots. The commission's findings highlighted deep-seated institutional rivalries and recommended regulations on religious conversions, church construction near temples, and religious processions.

Electoral Consolidation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

The post-Mandaikadu political realignment transformed Kanyakumari into the primary electoral springboard for the **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** in Tamil Nadu. The consolidation of Hindu votes produced key electoral milestones:

- **1996 Assembly Elections:** C. Velayudhan won the Padmanabhapuram constituency as a BJP candidate, marking the party's first legislative assembly victory in Tamil Nadu.
- **1999 Lok Sabha Elections:** The BJP, running in an alliance, secured strong vote shares across the district's assembly segments.
- **2014 Lok Sabha Elections:** Senior BJP leader **Pon. Radhakrishnan** won the Kanyakumari parliamentary constituency during a multi-cornered contest, serving

as a Minister of State in the Union Cabinet.

- **Local Body and Municipal Elections:** The BJP established lasting representation in municipal councils (e.g., Nagercoil) and rural panchayats, creating an electoral base alongside the Congress party.

6. STRUCTURAL COMPARATIVE MATRIX

To understand the interaction of these political forces, the table below compares the four political traditions that shape modern Kanyakumari:

Feature / Dimension	Christian Action & Congress	Communist Left (CPI / CPI-M)	Hindu Nationalism (BJP / RSS)	Dravidian Parties (DMK / AIADMK)
Demographic Base	Coastal Mukkuvars, Nadar Christians, urban minorities	Rubber plantation workers, agrarian labor, subaltern peasants	Inland Hindu agrarian castes, urban Hindu middle class	Cross-caste electorate, regional Tamil nationalists
Geographic Hubs	Coastal littoral belt, Vilavancode, Killiyoor, urban Nagercoil	Western high-ranges, Vilavancode, Kalkulam interior	Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Nagercoil municipal area	District-wide secondary presence, urban trade hubs
Institutional Anchor	Diocesan networks, church trusts, Christian educational hubs	CITU, AIKS, trade unions, plantation labor associations	RSS Shakhas, Hindu Munnani, Vivekananda Kendra	State patronage networks, local party committees
Ideological Framework	Secular nationalism, minority rights protection, welfare	Class struggle, land reform, anti-feudal labor rights	Cultural nationalism, Hindu unity, anti-conversion stance	Language rights, regional autonomy, Dravidian welfare state
Key Milestones	Channar Revolt (1859), TTNC Movement (1956), Post-56 dominance	Plantation unionizations (1960s), Vilavancode legislative victories	Mandaikadu (1982), Padmanabhapuram win (1996), MP win (2014)	Coalition partner roles, periodic assembly constituency wins

7. The Contemporary Political Landscape

Nationalized Multi-Polarity vs. The Dravidian Mainstream

In modern Tamil Nadu electoral politics, Kanyakumari remains a unique arena. In most districts, elections revolve around direct contests between Dravidian majors (DMK vs. AIADMK). In Kanyakumari, elections consistently present a nationalized bipolar dynamic:

1. **Secular Democratic Alliance (Congress + Left + DMK):** Draws support from the coastal Christian belt, minority voters, plantation unions, and traditional Congress loyalists.
2. **National Democratic Alliance (BJP + Partners):** Leverages a consolidated Hindu vote in the inland agrarian belts, Nagercoil municipal areas, and foothill agricultural regions.

Key Electoral Issues

Modern political campaigns in Kanyakumari revolve around recurring socio-economic and environmental issues:

- **Rubber and Agriculture Prices:** Fluctuations in natural rubber import tariffs directly impact thousands of small growers and plantation laborers in the western taluks.
- **Coastal Infrastructure & Marine Rights:** Coastal erosion, demands for sea walls, deep-sea fishing safety, and port development projects (e.g., the proposed Enayam transshipment port) trigger debate between coastal communities and commercial development proponents.
- **Inter-State Transit and Water Rights:** Regional transport links with Trivandrum and water-sharing arrangements with Kerala remain central civic issues.

8. CONCLUSION

The political tapestry of Kanyakumari illustrates how spatial, historical, and demographic factors shape sub-national political developments. Over two centuries, the region transformed from a feudal princely hinterland into an arena of ideological competition.

The early interventions of Christian missionaries dismantled traditional caste hierarchies through education and civil rights struggles, establishing a socio-political base for subaltern empowerment and the Indian National Congress. The linguistic movement of the 1940s and 1950s, led by Marshal Nesamony and the TTNC, integrated the region into Madras State while solidifying local Tamil identity. Meanwhile, Left trade unions mobilized plantation and agrarian labor in the western hills, establishing a durable communist presence. Finally, late-20th-century demographic friction and the Mandaikadu clashes facilitated the growth of Hindu nationalism, making Kanyakumari a key electoral stronghold for the BJP in South India.

Kanyakumari stands as a distinct political ecosystem within Tamil Nadu—a region where national party identities, religious affiliations, and class mobilization frequently take precedence over traditional Dravidian party duopolies.

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RECOGNITION WITHOUT REDISTRIBUTION: THE TEMPLE ENTRY MOVEMENT IN TRAVANCORE, 1905-1936

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ABSTRACT

The Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation of 12 November 1936 is usually read as the moral high point of social reform in south-western India. This article argues that it is better understood as the moment when a demand for material redistribution was converted into a grant of symbolic recognition. The case rests on setting two archives against one another. The first is the familiar record of satyagraha at Vaikom, Suchindram and Guruvayur, produced largely by savarna reformers, the Indian National Congress and a hostile princely police. The second is the proceedings of the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha, where Ayyankali sat from 1912 and where the Dalit members who joined him from 1913 pressed a different agenda of land, wages, schooling and freedom of movement. Read together, these records show that temple entry was never the leading demand of the communities in whose name it was pursued. The article further argues that the Proclamation answered a crisis of religious demography rather than any finding of the state's own Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, which had declined to recommend entry as late as January 1934. It closes by placing Travancore beside the Ambedkarite satyagrahas at Mahad and Nashik, where a similar conclusion was reached from the opposite direction. The Travancore case is an early and unusually clear instance of a state granting symbolic inclusion in order to avoid material redistribution.

Keywords: *Travancore; temple entry; caste; Dalit history; princely states; Ayyankali; recognition and redistribution; Kerala*

1. INTRODUCTION

On 12 November 1936 the Maharaja of Travancore opened the temples under his government to all Hindus. Gandhi called the Proclamation a miracle of modern times, and the phrase has lasted. Almost a century later the event still anchors a story in which Kerala moves steadily from exclusion towards equality, and in which 1936 marks the point where the moral argument was finally won. This article argues that the story has the causation backwards. The Proclamation was not the moment when a demand from below was at last conceded. It was the moment when a state under demographic pressure offered a symbolic concession in place of a material one.

The claim rests on comparing two bodies of evidence that are rarely read side by side. The first is the well-known archive of the movement: the satyagrahas at Vaikom (1924-25), Suchindram (1926 and 1930) and Guruvayur (1931-32), documented in Congress papers, the nationalist press, Gandhi's correspondence, and the files of a police force that treated the campaigns as a problem of public order. The second is the record of the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha, Travancore's popular assembly, where

Ayyankali sat from 1912 until 1939 and where a small line of Pulaya, Paraya and Dalit Christian members joined him from 1913. The first archive is loud about temples. The second is comparatively quiet about them, and insistent about land, wages, school admission and the right to walk. The distance between the two is the subject of this article.

2. Terms, Sources and Method

The vocabulary of this subject is contested and none of it is neutral. Official records of the period use 'depressed classes', 'low castes' and 'untouchables'. Reformist writing uses *avarna* for those outside the fourfold *varna* order and *savarna* for those within it. This article uses *avarna* and *savarna* when describing how contemporaries divided the population, because the distinction did real administrative work. It uses 'Dalit' for the Pulaya, Paraya, Kurava and related communities, following current usage in the field, while noting that the term was not used in Travancore at the time.

The distinction between Ezhavas and Dalits requires emphasis, because collapsing it produces most of the confusion in the older literature. The Ezhavas were *avarna* and were excluded from savarna temples. They were not an agrestic slave caste. By the 1920s they included substantial landholders, professionals, newspaper proprietors and religious institutions of their own. Their exclusion was a disability of status. For the Pulayas and Parayas, exclusion from temple roads was one element of a condition that had been legal slavery until 1855 and remained bonded agricultural labour afterwards. Treating both as a single category of 'the untouchables' obscures exactly the divergence of interest this article traces.

The evidence used here is of four kinds. The first is the archival record of the Travancore state in the English Records of the Kerala Secretariat at Trivandrum: cover files on pollution prosecutions of 1849 and 1892, the confidential file on temple entry propaganda of 1921, the Vaikom note files of 1924, and the file constituting the Enquiry Committee in 1932. The second is the deliberative record of the Praja Sabha and the Legislative Council. The third is the police correspondence of the Suchindram agitation, above all the reports of the Inspector of Police at Edalakudi in early 1926. The fourth is the printed and periodical record, including the Report of the Temple Entry Enquiry Committee, *Young India*, *The Hindu* and *Desabhimani*.

Each has a characteristic distortion, and the argument depends on naming them. The police files are the most vivid source for the violence at Suchindram and the least disinterested. They were produced by an administration that treated the satyagraha as disorder, and they record Dalit participants overwhelmingly as objects: persons obstructed, warned, arrested or assaulted, seldom persons with stated reasons. When the Edalakudi Inspector reports that volunteers were struck and their clothing torn, the fact is credible precisely because the office had no interest in recording it. When the same office is silent on why a Paraya volunteer walked towards the barricade, the silence is institutional and should not be read as absence of motive.

The nationalist sources present the opposite problem. *Young India* and the Congress correspondence are rich in the reasoning of leaders and nearly empty of the reasoning of participants, and they have an interest in the outcome they narrate. Gandhi's description of the 1925

Vaikom settlement as a bed-rock of freedom is evidence of what Gandhi wished the settlement to be, not of what it delivered.

The Praja Sabha proceedings are used as a partial corrective, and their limits should be stated. Members were nominated, not elected; Ayyankali sat because the state placed him there; the Sabha had no legislative power and its resolutions were advisory. What the proceedings nonetheless provide is a dated, continuous, first-person record of demands formulated by Dalit representatives and entered into the state's own account of itself. That is rare for the period. Two further limits should be acknowledged: Malayalam and Tamil materials are used here in translation and through secondary citation, and the article does not draw on oral testimony, which has proved productive in recent work on central Travancore.

3. The Architecture of Exclusion

Untouchability in Travancore differed from its northern Indian forms in the elaboration of distance pollution, or *theendal*. Pollution travelled by proximity, not only by contact, and it was calibrated by caste. An Ezhava was required to stay sixteen feet from a caste Hindu or a temple road; a Pulaya, seventy-two feet. Because a Pulaya might approach unseen, he was expected to announce himself by calling out. Those who wished to worship stood at distances of up to a furlong from the outer wall.

The prohibition reached well beyond the shrine. It covered the roads encircling the temple and the streets where caste Hindus lived, and it was marked physically: bamboo screens, *teru maraccan*, were erected at the mouths of the main streets to publish the ban.

Two features of this system matter for the argument. The first is that it produced revenue. Secretariat files from the nineteenth century record prosecutions in which Parayas were induced across a pollution boundary so that proceedings could be brought; where the accused could not meet the cost of the *sudhikalasam* or purificatory rite, further penalties followed. Pollution was not only a belief. It was a mechanism through which fines and labour were extracted.

The abolition of slavery in Travancore proceeded in two stages, by proclamations of 1812 and 1855, and neither transferred land or capital to the freed. The 1855 measure ended the legal status of the slave without ending the relations of dependence that had produced it. Freed labourers held no title to the plots they worked, retained obligations of customary service to landholding families, and remained subject to the same restrictions on movement. Abolition was thus a change in legal category rather than in material position, and the pollution regime survived it intact - indeed became more important, since after 1855 spatial restriction did work that legal ownership had previously done.

The second is that the geography of exclusion was also the geography of work. Restrictions on road use bound agricultural labourers to particular fields and particular masters, and raised the cost of seeking work elsewhere. Slavery had been formally abolished in Travancore in 1855, but abolition did not create a market in free labour. It left an agrarian order in which the Pulaya and Paraya castes remained tied by debt, custom and spatial restriction. On this reading the closed temple road was not principally a religious disability with economic side effects. It was an instrument of labour control carrying religious sanction. That is

why the question of what a temple entry proclamation could and could not achieve is not a rhetorical one.

4. Two Vocabularies of Redress, 1905-1923

Between 1905 and 1923 two distinct languages of grievance were addressed to the Travancore state. Both were spoken in the Praja Sabha. They have been conflated in the historiography, and separating them is the central move of this article.

(a) The temple entry vocabulary

The first vocabulary is the one the historiography remembers. In 1905 Kunju Panicker, a nominated member, raised the practice of *theendal* at the sixteenth session of the Praja Sabha and asked for its abolition. In 1916 Kumaran Asan, poet and Ezhava reformer, pressed the point that public roads were closed to *avarnas* solely because a temple stood nearby. In 1917 a retired High Court judge, C. Raman Pillai, called publicly at Quilon for the opening of all state temples, and in December of that year T. K. Madhavan opened the question in an editorial in *Desabhimani*, the Malayalam weekly he had founded in 1915.

The social location of this vocabulary is worth marking. Panicker was a nominated member; Kumaran Asan an Ezhava intellectual associated with the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam; Raman Pillai a retired savarna judge; Madhavan an Ezhava newspaper proprietor. The demand was formulated by men with access to print, to the professions and to the assembly. It was a demand about standing.

It also travelled outward through savarna channels. Madhavan met Gandhi at Tirunelveli in September 1921. Gandhi's first advice was that the depressed classes should begin with wells and schools; he accepted temple entry as the priority only after Madhavan pressed the case. Gandhi's initial instinct is itself evidence for the argument advanced here, since he too read the material claims as the more urgent. At the Kakinada session of the Congress in December 1923 Madhavan carried a resolution on the eradication of untouchability, and the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee authorised K. Kelappan Nair, Madhavan, V. Sankaran Nambudiripad and K. Velayudha Menon to act on it.

(b) The Dalit vocabulary

The second vocabulary was spoken in the same chamber and asked for other things. Ayyankali founded the Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham in 1907 to contest the exclusion of Pulayas from roads and marketplaces. Its stated objects were education, employment, land and legal aid; it went on to establish schools and to publish its own journal. Comparable bodies formed around it, including the Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha under Poykayil Yohannan, the Thiruvithamkoor Paraya Maha Sabha and the Cheramar Sangathanam. Earlier, Ayyankali had driven a bullock cart along a road forbidden to Pulayas: an act of mobility, not of worship. In 1907 he led what is generally regarded as the first agricultural labourers' strike in the region. It ran for more than a year, and its demand was the admission of Pulaya children to school.

Ayyankali entered the Praja Sabha in 1912 and sat until 1939. The record of what he raised there is the counter-archive this article proposes. Across nearly three decades his interventions concerned the admission of Pulaya children to schools, the representation of Dalits in public employment, wages and the conditions of agricultural labour, land and housing, and the right to use roads and markets. Temple entry is not the organising theme of that record. He was

joined by other Dalit members from 1913: Charakan Solomon, a Dalit Christian, in that year; Vallikkara Chothi, a Pulaya, in 1914; Kandan Kumaran, a Paraya, in 1915; Paradi Abraham Issac in 1916; Kurumban Daivathan in 1917. From the mid-1910s the Sabha therefore contained a small but continuous Dalit presence with a legible and consistent agenda.

The results of that pressure are documentable and instructive. A government order admitting Pulaya children to state schools was issued in the wake of the strike, and a further order in 1914 required strict adherence to the educational policy after Ayyankali had repeatedly raised non-compliance in the Sabha. Neither order produced immediate access; head teachers and caste-Hindu parents obstructed admission for years afterwards. But the sequence - agitation, order, obstruction, renewed agitation - is the characteristic rhythm of Dalit claim-making in Travancore, and it is a rhythm of material entitlements rather than ritual ones. A parallel development in neighbouring Cochin makes the same point: denied land on which to assemble, Pulayas of the Cochin Pulaya Mahajana Sabha held their conference of 1913 on boats lashed together on the backwaters, the Kayal Sammelanam. The demand voiced there was for education and civic standing.

The divergence should not be read as Dalit indifference to religion. It is a matter of sequence and of cost. A community whose members could not send children to school, could not command a wage, and could not walk to a market had reasons to place those disabilities first. The temple mattered; it did not come first. When Gandhi told Madhavan in 1921 to begin with wells and schools, he was briefly speaking the second vocabulary rather than the first.

5. Vaikom, 1924-1925: The Making of a Savarna Satyagraha

Vaikom was selected because its topography made the prohibition legible. Four broad roads ran along the walls of the Siva temple, and none was open to *avarnas* or to non-Hindus. Low-caste households living beyond the temple reached their work by a long and stony detour. On 30 March 1924 three volunteers - a Nair, an Ezhava and a Pulaya - walked towards the prohibited road, declined to give bonds, and were sentenced to six months. The composition of that first party is the argument in miniature: it was assembled to be representative, which is to say it was designed by organisers rather than convened by a community.

Further arrests followed. K. P. Kesava Menon and T. K. Madhavan were taken first, and subsequently A. K. Pillai, K. Kelappan and K. Velayudha Menon were tried at Kottayam for defying the District Magistrate's order. The four-month sentences frequently attributed to the second group cannot be traced in the printed record; Jeffrey states only that some nineteen satyagrahis were imprisoned between 30 March and 10 April 1924, and that figure is followed here.

Gandhi shaped the campaign from a distance, and each of his interventions narrowed it. He directed that no force be used under any provocation. He rejected a proposal to scale the barricades, holding that this would be uncivil rather than civil disobedience, and instructed volunteers to sit in relays until arrested. He objected when George Joseph, a Syrian Christian, assumed the leadership, on the ground that the reform of Hinduism was properly the work of Hindus.

Each decision is defensible on its own terms, and the cumulative effect was

substantial. Defining caste as an internal Hindu matter excluded from leadership precisely those communities that had converted in order to escape it - in Travancore, a very large number of Pulayas and Parayas. Restricting the repertoire to arrest and relay ensured that the campaign's tempo was set by the state's willingness to prosecute. And insisting on non-violence where violence was being done to Dalit participants, rather than by them, placed the burden of restraint on the least protected. The reception of Sree Narayana Guru's reported remark that volunteers should simply climb the barricades illustrates the gap: Gandhi read it as an endorsement of force and disapproved. The disagreement was not about violence. It was about whether the barrier was a moral fact to be dissolved by suffering or a physical object to be walked past.

Sri Mulam Thirunal died on 7 August 1924 - the date is often wrongly given as 6 August - and Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai assumed the regency, ordering the release of the imprisoned volunteers. The campaign then took a decisively savarna turn. A *jatha* of caste Hindus left Vaikom under Mannath Padmanabhan on 1 November 1924, and a second marched from Kottar under Dr M. E. Naidu. A memorial bearing more than twenty-five thousand caste Hindu signatures was submitted on 12 November, and a deputation of twelve was received by the Regent on 13 November 1924. The form of that intervention deserves notice: the decisive political act of the Vaikom campaign was a petition by caste Hindus asking the sovereign to relieve a disability borne by others. The resulting resolution was nevertheless lost in the Legislative Council by twenty-two votes to twenty-one.

Gandhi reached the district in March 1925 and negotiated with the Regent, the Dewan and W. H. Pitt, Commissioner of Police. The settlement concluded in November 1925 opened the northern, southern and western roads. The eastern road, by which Brahmins approached the *gopuram*, remained closed, and so did the temple; both were opened only after 1936. The government additionally built diversionary roads so that *avarnas* might pass without polluting the shrine. That detail is the most revealing in the settlement and the literature passes over it. The state's solution to pollution by proximity was to construct new infrastructure that preserved the principle while relieving the inconvenience. Gandhi called the settlement a bed-rock of freedom; E. V. Ramasami called it a betrayal. Neither description is adequate. What was conceded was a right of passage; what was preserved was the ritual order that made passage a question at all. That Gandhi himself worshipped at a temple still closed to *avarnas* during the same visit is the sharpest available measure of the settlement's scope.

6. Suchindram and Guruvayur, 1926-1932

Vaikom furnished a template, and Suchindram tested it against a more hostile local society. At a meeting at Dr M. E. Naidu's residence at Kottar on 19 January 1926 a temple road satyagraha was resolved upon, with M. Subramoniya Pillai as President, Naidu as Secretary, H. Perumal Panickar as Treasurer, and C. Muthuswamy, known as Gandhidas, as captain. Several accounts place the start of the agitation on 19 January, conflating the planning meeting with the launch; the satyagraha began on 19 February 1926. The first party of five comprised two Parayas, one Brahmin, one Ezhava and

one Vellala. It was obstructed by anti-satyagrahis under S. K. Velayudhan Pillai, and both parties sat down in the road.

The Edalakudi correspondence records an escalation the nationalist press largely omitted. On 11 February a party under Govindaraja Naidu announced an intention to enter the streets by force; the caste Hindus rang the bell of the *Perambalam* in warning; Muthuswamy and Chinnathampi Samban were struck and their clothing torn. Thirteen boys of the depressed classes were beaten while returning from a function at the Mission School, Nagercoil; G. Devasahayam of Kakkad complained and was answered with a threat to destroy his village.

The state's response is the analytically significant fact. It restrained the reformers rather than the assailants: Naidu was prohibited from speaking in public and from entering specified areas. The agitation was suspended on an undertaking that the roads would open within a month. The undertaking was not honoured. Satyagraha resumed on 12 May 1930 under Gandhi Raman Pillai of Eraviputhur, who was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment and acquitted on appeal, the High Court directing that the streets be open to all as of right. Accounts placing an episode in February 1929 cannot be reconciled with the 1926 and 1930 sequence and appear to derive from a transcription error. Even after the judgment the Reserve Police were deployed during the festival to exclude untouchables from the streets.

Suchindram therefore demonstrates what Vaikom obscures, and it is the strongest single piece of evidence for this article's general claim. A right can be declared by a superior court and simultaneously nullified by the routine deployment of police. The gap between the judgment and the festival is the gap between recognition and enforcement, and it would open again after 1936.

Guruvayur, in British Malabar rather than Travancore, makes a complementary point. The Calicut conference resolved to launch temple entry satyagraha on 1 November 1931. K. Kelappan led the campaign with A. K. Gopalan as volunteer captain, fasted in September 1932, and broke the fast on 2 October at Gandhi's request. A poll of caste Hindus in Ponnani taluk followed, and its handling in the literature is a small case study in how evidence becomes celebratory. Gandhi reported that of an electorate of sixty-five thousand, fifty-five per cent voted for temple entry, nine per cent against, eight per cent were neutral and twenty-seven per cent abstained. Secondary accounts frequently give seventy-seven per cent, which is the pro-entry share of votes actually cast rather than of the electorate; the two are not interchangeable, and the higher figure has been used to overstate the margin. The temple did not open. What the poll established was that a majority of caste Hindus in one taluk would say yes when asked, and that saying yes changed nothing without a state able to act. Travancore had a sovereign who could proclaim. Malabar did not, and waited for the Madras enactments of 1938 and 1939.

7. The Enquiry That Refused, 1932-1934

Travancore answered the agitation with an enquiry. A committee of nine was constituted under V. S. Subramanya Iyer, a retired Dewan, including two members drawn from the depressed classes. It was announced in November 1932 and reported on 11 January 1934. A questionnaire was circulated to 5,774 persons and 3,122 replied. The Committee affirmed the right of all castes to use public roads, wells, ponds and inns. It did

not recommend a proclamation of temple entry.

This refusal is the pivot of the argument about 1936, and the existing literature does not give it the weight it carries. As late as January 1934 the state's own expert body, sitting with Dalit members and having consulted more than three thousand respondents, declined the central demand of the movement. Whatever produced the Proclamation less than three years later, it was not the accumulated force of the enquiry's reasoning.

What the Committee did register was the pressure of conversion. It recorded that many Ezhavas and Nadars, still excluded, were disposed to become Christians. That observation belongs to a wider sequence. The Nivarthana or abstention agitation ran from 1932 to 1935; C. Kesavan delivered the Kozhencherry speech in May 1935 and was imprisoned for it; Ambedkar declared at Yeola in October 1935 that he would not die a Hindu. The Christian share of Travancore's population had risen from roughly a fifth in 1875 to roughly a third by 1931. Conversion was not a rhetorical threat for the Dalit communities. It was an existing practice with a century of history, carrying material consequences: mission schools, literacy, some protection from the pollution regime, and an institutional identity outside the caste order. A state whose legitimacy rested on Hindu sovereignty had reason to treat that practice as a problem of governance.

8. The Proclamation of 1936: Consolidation as Statecraft

On 12 November 1936, his twenty-fourth birthday, Maharaja Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma proclaimed that, subject to such rules and conditions as might be laid down for preserving the temples' proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should thenceforth be no restriction on any Hindu by birth or religion entering or worshipping at temples controlled by the state. Gandhi called it a miracle of modern times; C. Rajagopalachari described it as a silent and bloodless revolution; it was later styled the spiritual Magna Carta of Travancore.

The operative clause repays close reading. The grant is made subject to rules to be laid down by the sovereign; it extends to temples controlled by the state; and it is confined to persons Hindu by birth or religion. Each qualification does work. The first reserves the power to regulate what has just been conceded. The second leaves private and community temples untouched. The third makes the benefit conditional on remaining within, or entering, the Hindu fold - which is to say that it withholds the concession from precisely those Dalits who had converted, and offers an incentive to those considering it.

Three arguments tell against the language of miracle. First, the Proclamation exceeded the recommendation of the state's own enquiry, so it answered a political calculation rather than an evidentiary finding, and the calculation is what requires explanation. Second, its timing coincides with the accession of Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar to the Dewanship in 1936; Jeffrey notes that his two immediate predecessors, a European and a Muslim, were not positioned to innovate in the administration of Hindu temples. Third, the demographic arithmetic supplies the motive. Jeffrey's conclusion is difficult to resist: opening the temples served to constitute all Hindus as a single community without distinction of caste,

and thereby to arrest the drift towards Christianity that threatened the character of a Hindu state. He adds, importantly, that the franchise was too narrow for electoral danger to have been the operative concern; what was at stake was the composition of the community itself.

This reading does not impute cynicism. It takes the state's own stated interest seriously. The older literature records the defensive motive approvingly, as a bold protection of Hinduism against foreign incursion. The present article records the same motive as the interest of a princely state managing a demographic problem, and notes that the two descriptions refer to the same act. The consequences followed the logic of the grant. Access was extended to state-controlled temples on conditions the state reserved the right to set. Land tenure was untouched. Agricultural wages were untouched. The structure of agrestic labour in which the Pulaya and Paraya communities were embedded was untouched. What the Proclamation altered was the ritual boundary; what it left in place was the labour regime that boundary had helped to police.

The immediate aftermath bears out the reading. The Proclamation covered temples under the Travancore Devaswom administration; a large number of shrines controlled by families, castes and private trusts fell outside it. Entry where it was granted was regulated: rules on dress, on bathing before entry, and on the parts of a temple accessible to worshippers governed how the right could be exercised, and those rules were made by the same authority that had issued the grant. Reports of avarna worshippers being turned away, or admitted only to outer enclosures, continued after 1936. None of this makes the Proclamation insignificant. It does mean that what was proclaimed and what was practised diverged from the outset, in a pattern already established at Suchindram after the High Court judgment of 1930.

9. Gender and the Silences of the Record

Women are almost absent from the historiography of the temple entry movement, and their absence is an artefact of the sources rather than of the events. Three observations can be made from the existing record.

First, the pollution regime was enforced on women's bodies in ways it was not enforced on men's. Dalit women were prohibited from covering the upper body and, in some accounts, required to wear stone necklaces marking servile status. The upper-cloth question in nineteenth-century Travancore was not a separate episode from temple entry but an earlier instalment of the same contest over who might occupy public space and in what condition.

Second, women appear in the official record chiefly as an aggregate. Of the 3,122 replies to the Enquiry Committee's questionnaire, eight came from women. That figure is usually reported as a curiosity. It is better read as evidence about who the state considered competent to hold an opinion on the question.

Third, the Dalit women who did enter public life did so on terms set by the same reformist milieu that ran the satyagrahas. Dakshayani Velayudhan, born in Cochin in 1912 into a Pulaya family, became the first Dalit woman graduate in India, was nominated to the Cochin Legislative Council in 1945, and was the only Dalit woman in the Constituent Assembly. Her wearing of an upper cloth to school was itself a contested act. Her career postdates the events treated here, but her later positions -

Gandhian in method, Ambedkarite in analysis, and independent of both - suggest that the alternatives available to Dalit politics in the region were not exhausted by the choice between satyagraha and separation. A fuller treatment would require sources this article has not used: the records of the *stree samajams*, Malayalam women's periodicals, and family and oral testimony. The point registered here is narrower. The archive of temple entry is an archive of men addressing a state composed of men about the status of a community whose women bore the regime's most intimate impositions.

10. Mahad, Nashik and the Ambedkarite Turn

The Travancore sequence is not unique, and placing it beside western India clarifies what is at stake. In March 1927 Ambedkar led the Mahad satyagraha for access to a public tank. In March 1930 he led the Kalaram temple satyagraha at Nashik, where thousands of Dalits surrounded the temple over a sustained period and were refused.

Two features of the Ambedkarite experience bear directly on Travancore. The first is the explicit reasoning about purpose. Ambedkar was clear that the object at Nashik was neither idol worship nor integration into Hindu society, but a means of making the depressed classes conscious of their position. Temple entry was instrumental: a device for political formation rather than an end. The second is the withdrawal. By 1934 Ambedkar was advising against continuing the Nashik satyagraha, and by the Yeola declaration of October 1935 he had concluded that reform of Hindu society from within was not available. His position on the temple entry bills of the early 1930s followed the same reasoning: the elevation of the depressed classes lay in education, employment and livelihood rather than in access to shrines.

Read against this, the Travancore Proclamation appears differently. It arrived in 1936, one year after Yeola, in a state whose Dalit and intermediate-caste populations were visibly weighing conversion. It granted, from above and by sovereign act, precisely the thing that the most prominent Dalit leader in India had by then publicly concluded was not worth pursuing. E. V. Ramasami, imprisoned at Vaikom in 1924, reached a comparable judgement from the Tamil side, characterising temple entry as an arrangement that permitted caste Hindus to claim generosity. The convergence of Ambedkar's and Ramasami's assessments, arrived at independently and from different political positions, is substantial contemporary evidence against the celebratory reading of 1936.

11. CONCLUSION:

Recognition without Redistribution

The temple entry movement accomplished real things. It made distance pollution publicly indefensible in a way it had not been in 1900. It brought *avarna* communities into organised political action on a scale without precedent in Travancore. It generated a repertoire of protest - the relay, the *jatha*, the disciplined obstruction - that outlasted the specific demand and was available to the labour and communist mobilisations that followed. None of that is diminished by scrutiny of what it did not achieve.

But the gains must be stated exactly, and stated exactly they form a pattern. Vaikom opened three roads and left the shrine closed, while the state built new roads to keep the principle of pollution intact. Suchindram secured a declaration of right from the High Court

which the Reserve Police then set aside at the next festival. Guruvayur produced a favourable poll of caste Hindus and no opening at all. Only the Proclamation of 1936 delivered entry, and it delivered entry to state-controlled temples, to persons Hindu by birth or religion, subject to conditions the state reserved the right to impose.

Set beside the Praja Sabha counter-archive, the significance of that pattern becomes clear. Across nearly three decades, Dalit representatives in Travancore's own assembly asked repeatedly for schools, wages, land, employment and the right to move. In 1936 they were granted access to a sanctum. These were not the same demands, and the substitution was not a failure of implementation. A recognitional grant is cheaper than a redistributive one, and it is available to a state that cannot or will not touch the agrarian order. That is why it was made, and why it took the form it did.

The subsequent legal history confirms the reading. The Malabar and Madras enactments of 1938 and 1939, the Cochin proclamation of 1947, Articles 17 and 25(2)(b) of the Constitution, and the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965 progressively secured entry in law. Formal access was won and then re-won. The material subordination that the closed road had helped to enforce proved considerably more durable than the closed road itself. The afterlife of the question in Kerala is instructive in the same way. Section 3 of the 1965 Act declares every place of public worship open to all classes and sections of Hindus, and the litigation of 2018 over Sabarimala turned on a rule framed under that very Act. Nearly a century after 1936, the shape of the dispute is unchanged: a general grant of access, a reserved power to regulate, and the exercise of that reserved power to sustain an exclusion. This is not an argument that nothing changed. It is an argument that access granted by a state which retains the power to condition it remains, in an important sense, provisional. The Travancore case therefore has a claim on the attention of historians working well beyond Kerala. It is an early, well-documented and unusually legible instance of a phenomenon that recurs across the twentieth century: a state, faced with a demand it cannot afford to meet, conceding the symbolic component, retaining the material one, and being praised for its generosity in doing so. Gandhi's word for it was miracle. A more exact word would be exchange.

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PALLIYAPPAN: A RELIGIOUS CENTRE BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

Palliyappan, associated with the Pazhayapalli Thiruthalam at Palliyadi in Kanniyakumari district, Tamil Nadu, represents a distinctive example of religious pluralism and shared sacred space. Located in the culturally diverse region of Palliyadi, where temples, churches and mosques exist within the surrounding landscape, this sacred centre provides an alternative understanding of religious identity and worship. Traditionally believed to be more than four hundred years old, the Pazhayapalli Thiruthalam is described as a common place of worship that transcends distinctions of religion, caste, creed and community. Unlike conventional religious institutions, the site is noted for having neither an idol nor a priest, while a lamp remains continuously illuminated as a symbol of devotion and spiritual unity. The annual common worship and feast, traditionally held in March, further demonstrate this spirit of collective participation. Thus, Palliyappan can be examined as a living expression of religious pluralism, social harmony and cultural coexistence. This paper explores how Palliyappan challenges rigid religious boundaries and demonstrates the possibility of a sacred space where humanity becomes more important than religious identity.

1. Origin and Historical Evolution of Palliyappan

Palliyappan, associated with the Pazhayapalli Thiruthalam at Palliyadi, is a distinctive sacred centre in Kanniyakumari district. The site is traditionally believed to be more than 400 years old and is located near a tamarind tree. Unlike conventional places of worship, it is described as having no idol and no priest, while a lamp burns continuously at the site.

According to local oral tradition, there is also a story connected with the tamarind tree that a wandering monk or ascetic once sat beneath it and engaged in meditation for a long period, attaining spiritual enlightenment before eventually moving elsewhere. This account has not been independently verified through reliable historical or documentary sources, and therefore it should be presented as an oral tradition rather than established historical fact. Nevertheless, such traditions contribute to the sacred memory and cultural significance of Palliyappan. The association of the site with meditation, spirituality and the continuously burning lamp helps explain how the place gradually came to be regarded as a sacred space beyond the boundaries of a single religion.

2. Palliyappan as a Centre of Religious Harmony and Shared Worship

The spirit of religious harmony at Palliyappan is reflected in its sacred lamp (vilakku), which has three branches or symbolic sections associated with three major religious traditions: the Cross representing Christianity, the "Om" representing Hinduism and the crescent moon and star representing Islam. The lamp can be interpreted as a powerful symbol of the coexistence of different faiths within a common sacred space. It conveys the idea that religious differences need not prevent people from sharing spirituality, community and human relationships.

The annual feast and common worship, traditionally observed on the third Sunday of March, is another important expression of this religious harmony. During the occasion, people from different religious and social backgrounds gather for prayer and the

Samabandhi/common feast. The Sarva Matha Prarthana (common/interfaith prayer) is particularly significant, as religious representatives from the three major faith traditions participate together Christian priests/fathers, Hindu priests, and Islamic religious scholars or representatives such as the Ulema/Alim. Their participation creates a visible expression of interfaith cooperation. Students from nearby govemment and government-aided schools also participate with the permission of their respective school authorities. Children from different communities sit together, share food and participate in the occasion without religious discrimination.

3. Kanniyakumari and Its Regional Religious Pluralism: Opportunities and Challenges

Kanniyakumari district presents a distinctive example of regional religious pluralism, where Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities have historically lived alongside one another, while Jainism and other traditions have also contributed to the region's religious history. The forms of worship vary widely from temple worship, village deity traditions and Hindu festivals to Christian prayers and celebrations and Islamic congregational worship. Each community continues to preserve its own beliefs, rituals, institutions and cultural practices while participating in the wider social life of the district. This diversity is one of Kanniyakumari's major cultural strengths because it encourages cultural exchange, mutual understanding, social interaction and respect for different traditions.

At the same time, religious pluralism can also present challenges. Differences in religious beliefs, rituals, dietary practices, festivals and social customs can sometimes create misunderstandings, stereotypes or social distance between communities. The numerical difference between majority and minority communities can also raise questions about equality, representation and the protection of minority identities. Religious boundaries may become more rigid when communities focus more on differences than on their shared social relationships. Therefore, maintaining pluralism requires mutual respect, dialogue, tolerance and equal treatment, rather than simply allowing different communities to exist separately.

4. Religious Pluralism and the Indian Constitution

Religious pluralism in India is closely connected with the constitutional principle of secularism. The Indian Constitution does not establish any particular religion as the official religion of the State. Instead, it provides citizens with equality before the law and protects their freedom to follow and practise their religion. Article 25 guarantees freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality and health. Articles 26-28 further provide protections relating to religious affairs and religious instruction.

The constitutional values of equality, liberty and fratemity, expressed particularly through the Preamble and Fundamental Rights, provide the foundation for peaceful coexistence among different religious communities. In this context, religious pluralism does not mean that people must give up their individual religious identities; rather, it means that different faiths can exist with equal dignity and mutual respect. The example of Palliyappan can therefore be viewed alongside these constitutional ideals, as its shared worship, common prayer and community participation illustrate how

people belonging to different religions can come together while retaining their individual beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Religion has always been an important part of human society, shaping people's beliefs, values, traditions, customs and ways of life. At the same time, the existence of different religions makes religious pluralism an essential value in a diverse country like India Religious pluralism does not mean that people must give up their individual faiths, rather, it teaches people to respect different beliefs while maintaining their own religious identity. Diversity in religion should become a source of mutual understanding and cultural enrichment rather than a reason for division or conflict. Humanity must remain above religious differences. People may worship in different ways, follow different traditions and hold different beliefs, but they can still live together with mutual respect. Religious pluralism therefore becomes meaningful when diversity is accepted, equality is protected and humanity is placed above religious boundaries.

Thus, Palliyappan is not merely a religious centre but a living example of unity in diversity. Its importance lies in showing that beyond religious customs, rituals and institutional boundaries, there exists a common human bond based on equality, fraternity, tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

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RITUALS AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF THE SUCHINDRAM THANUMALAYAN TEMPLE FESTIVAL

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ABSTRACT

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, situated in Kanniyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, is one of the important sacred and cultural centres of southern India. The temple is particularly significant because the principal deity, Thanumalayan, represents the combined forms of Siva, Vishnu and Brahma, providing an important example of the interaction of religious traditions within the sacred landscape of southern Tamil country. The temple's ritual system, festivals, inscriptions, architectural features, musical traditions, processions and community practices constitute an important body of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The annual festival is not merely a religious observance but also a complex cultural institution involving ritual specialists, devotees, musicians, artisans, temple servants and the wider local community.

This paper examines the rituals and cultural expressions associated with the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple Festival through an interdisciplinary historical approach. Particular attention is given to epigraphic evidence, temple records, architectural remains and published archaeological documentation. The inscriptions of the temple and the surrounding region provide valuable evidence for lamps, gifts, endowments, temple administration, landholding, ritual services and the organization of religious institutions. Early Chola-period records, including inscriptions associated with Parantaka I and Rajaraja I, demonstrate the antiquity of the temple's institutional and ritual traditions. Later Travancore records reveal the continuing importance of Suchindram within the political, religious and cultural history of the region.

The study argues that the Suchindram festival should be understood as a form of living heritage in which ritual, music, architecture, procession, social participation and collective memory intersect. It further examines the role of the festival in sustaining local identity and cultural continuity. The paper concludes that systematic documentation of inscriptions, ritual practices, traditional performances and community memories is essential for preserving the cultural heritage of Suchindram in the context of modernization and expanding religious tourism.

Keywords: *Suchindram, Thanumalayan Temple, Temple Festival, Rituals, Epigraphy, Cultural Heritage, Kanniyakumari, Chola, Travancore, Religious Traditions*

INTRODUCTION

Temples in South India have historically functioned not only as places of worship but also as important institutions of social, economic and cultural life. Their activities included ritual worship, festivals, music, dance, charitable endowments, management of land and resources, and the maintenance of communities connected with temple services. Inscriptions engraved on temple walls constitute one of the most important primary sources for reconstructing these institutional histories. The Archaeological Survey of India itself recognizes inscriptions as authentic historical sources capable of providing information about the religious, social and administrative life of earlier communities.[1]

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple occupies a particularly important place within this tradition. Located near

Nagercoil in present-day Kanniyakumari district, the temple was historically situated in the cultural zone of Nanjinadu and later within the political sphere of Travancore. Its location at the meeting point of Tamil and Kerala cultural influences contributed to the development of distinctive architectural, ritual and artistic traditions.

The importance of Suchindram is also related to the theological identity of the temple. The name Thanumalayan combines the names of Sthanu, Māl and Ayan, representing Siva, Vishnu and Brahma. The temple therefore provides an interesting example of a sacred institution in which multiple strands of Hindu religious tradition became integrated within a single ritual environment. The annual festival is an important expression of this religious and cultural heritage. The festival brings together worship, processions, music, ritual objects, temple architecture and community participation. Its significance extends beyond the temple precinct because the surrounding settlement becomes part of the ritual landscape during festival periods. The principal aim of this study is therefore to examine the festival as a historical and cultural phenomenon rather than merely as a religious celebration. The paper uses inscriptions, archaeological publications, temple records and historical documentation as its principal evidence, supplemented by secondary scholarship where necessary.

Historical Background of Suchindram

The ancient name of Suchindram appears in epigraphic sources in forms such as Tiruchchivindiram or related variants. The place belonged to the historical region of Nanjinadu, an area that occupied an important position between the Tamil country and the Kerala/Travancore region. The historical importance of the place is demonstrated by the number of inscriptions associated with the temple and its surrounding areas.

An inscription discussed in Epigraphia Indica, Volume V, records a grant to the temple at Tiruchchivindiram during the reign of a Parakesarivarman identified with Parantaka I. The record is particularly significant because it refers to gifts for perpetual lamps and identifies the temple as a functioning religious institution.[2] Such records demonstrate that the temple possessed organized systems of endowment and ritual maintenance.

Another inscription from the temple is dated to the tenth regnal year of Parantaka I and records a merchant's gift of lamps to Vishnu shrines within the temple complex.[3] This evidence is especially important for understanding the plural religious character of the institution. The temple was not simply a static monument but a complex sacred institution containing different ritual associations. The early inscriptions also provide information about the economic basis of temple worship. Donations of sheep, money and other resources were converted into perpetual arrangements for lamps and ritual requirements. Such practices indicate the institutional character of medieval temple religion.[4]

The Rajaraja I inscription at Suchindram is another important source. The inscription belongs to the fifteenth regnal year of Rajaraja I and is documented in the Travancore Archaeological Series. Its presence at Suchindram demonstrates the continued importance of the [5] temple during the Chola period and provides evidence for the political and religious connections between the Chola state and the southern

regions. The epigraphic evidence must therefore be read together rather than in isolation. The inscriptions demonstrate continuity of worship, endowment, administration and institutional development over several centuries.

Epigraphic Evidence and Temple Ritual

Inscriptions are particularly valuable for reconstructing temple ritual because they frequently record the material arrangements necessary to maintain worship. Gifts of lamps, livestock, land and money reveal the economic foundations of ritual activity. One early Suchindram inscription records the provision of a perpetual lamp. The donor gave sheep whose produce was intended to provide ghee for the lamp. The responsibility of maintaining the endowment was associated with the local assembly. This is significant because it demonstrates [6] that ritual continuity depended upon an organized relationship between donors, local institutions and temple authorities.

The inscription also reveals the importance of measurement and accountability. The quantity of ghee required for the lamp was specified, indicating that temple ritual was supported by a carefully regulated economic system. The lamp therefore became more than a religious [7] object: it represented a permanent charitable endowment whose maintenance required institutional supervision. Another record associated with Suchindram mentions the gift of money for lamps. The use of capital and its investment for producing income demonstrates the financial mechanisms through which temple services were sustained. Such evidence challenges the [8] assumption that medieval festivals were spontaneous religious events. They were supported by organized economic arrangements. The inscriptions consequently provide an important historical background for understanding present-day festival traditions. While the exact ritual sequence may have changed over time, the underlying principle of organized temple service has considerable historical depth.

The Thanumalayan Concept and Sacred Space

The theological identity of Thanumalayan gives the temple a distinctive place in the religious geography of southern India. The deity represents the combined presence of Siva, Vishnu and Brahma. This theological synthesis is reflected in the ritual environment of the temple. The sacred space of Suchindram consists not only of the central shrine but also of subsidiary shrines, mandapas, sculptures, processional spaces and associated ritual structures. The architecture itself becomes part of the festival because processions and ritual activities activate different parts of the temple complex.

The temple's sculptural and musical traditions are particularly noteworthy. Its famous musical pillars demonstrate the close relationship between architecture and performance culture. The presence of such features indicates that the temple served as a space where visual art, architecture and sound were integrated into religious experience. The festival consequently transforms the temple from a permanent architectural monument into a dynamic cultural space. Ritual movement through the temple creates a relationship between sacred architecture and human participation.

Rituals Associated with the Festival

Temple festivals generally consist of a sequence of ritual activities rather than a single event. These include preliminary ceremonies, special worship, processions,

offerings, music, decoration and concluding rituals. At Suchindram, festival practices traditionally involve the participation of priests, temple servants, musicians, devotees and other members of the local community. The deity is ceremonially brought into processional contexts, allowing devotees outside the innermost shrine to participate in the sacred event.

The processional movement is culturally significant because it expands the sacred geography of the temple. The deity moves through spaces that ordinarily belong to everyday social life, temporarily transforming streets and public spaces into ritual landscapes. The festival therefore creates a temporary sacred geography in which ordinary boundaries between temple and settlement become less rigid. Streets become procession routes; homes become spaces of hospitality; markets become centres of temporary economic activity; and musicians and performers contribute to the ritual atmosphere.

Procession as a Cultural Expression

The temple procession is one of the most visible expressions of festival culture. Processions historically enabled the wider community to participate in the festival even when they could not enter every part of the temple. The movement of the processional deity is accompanied by ritual music, traditional instruments, decorations and devotional participation. Such activities transform religious belief into a public cultural performance. The procession also has a social dimension. Different groups associated with temple services may have particular roles. Their participation reflects the historical division of ritual responsibilities within South Indian temple institutions. Epigraphic evidence concerning temple servants, donors and local assemblies provides an important historical background for understanding such institutional participation.[9]

Music and Performing Traditions

Music is an essential component of temple ritual. In South Indian temple culture, music has traditionally accompanied worship, processions and ceremonial occasions. Suchindram is particularly important because its architectural heritage includes celebrated musical pillars. These pillars are evidence of the close relationship between temple architecture and musical culture. They also contribute to the broader cultural identity of the temple.

Festival music creates an auditory environment through which devotees experience the sacred event. Traditional instruments, devotional singing and ceremonial sounds contribute to the atmosphere of the procession. The preservation of this musical heritage is therefore essential. Documentation should include not only architectural features but also the repertoire, instruments, performance contexts and traditional knowledge associated with temple music.

Folk and Cultural Expressions

Temple festivals provide important spaces for the continuation of folk traditions. Decorations, processional practices, traditional craftsmanship, devotional songs and community performances can all form part of festival culture. Such traditions should not be viewed merely as entertainment. They represent forms of cultural memory transmitted between generations. The festival also provides opportunities for artisans and traditional service communities. The production of ritual objects, decorations, garlands, lamps and other materials connects local economic

activity with religious culture. Thus, the festival represents an interaction between religion and everyday livelihood.

Temple Economy and Festival Organization

Historical inscriptions show that temple institutions required substantial economic resources. Land grants, livestock, money and other forms of endowment supported regular services. The Suchindram records are particularly useful in demonstrating this institutional character. A record associated with Parantaka I refers to the provision of lamps through gifts of sheep, while other records document monetary endowments.[10]

The economic organization of ritual also indicates the existence of accountability. Local assemblies and temple officials had responsibilities for receiving and managing endowments. Such evidence demonstrates the administrative sophistication of medieval temple institutions. The annual festival would consequently have depended upon a broader institutional structure involving resources, personnel, ritual objects and arrangements for public participation.

Community Participation

The festival is an important occasion for collective participation. Devotees, residents, visitors, temple employees, musicians, artisans and vendors contribute to the festival environment. Community participation also helps maintain cultural memory. Older generations transmit knowledge about ritual sequences, songs, routes, food traditions and customary practices to younger generations. The festival therefore functions as an informal educational institution. Much of the knowledge associated with it may not be recorded in written form but survives through repeated participation. This oral and practical transmission is an important component of intangible cultural heritage.

Festival and Regional Identity

The Suchindram festival contributes to the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari. The district itself has a distinctive historical character because of its association with both Tamil Nadu and the former Travancore region. The temple's inscriptions contain references to historical territorial divisions and settlements, demonstrating the integration of Suchindram into wider political and economic networks.[11]

The festival preserves this historical memory in contemporary cultural form. Although modern participants may not consciously interpret the festival through medieval political geography, the continued celebration of the temple's traditions provides a sense of continuity.

Suchindram in the Chola Historical Context

The Chola-period inscriptions at Suchindram are especially significant. The Rajaraja I inscription demonstrates that the temple was part of the wider political and religious landscape during the period of Chola expansion. The fifteenth-regnal-year inscription is traditionally associated with Rajaraja I and is documented in the Travancore Archaeological Series.[12] The inscription's historical significance is enhanced by the wider evidence for Rajaraja's activities in the southern region. The appearance of Chola inscriptions in Suchindram also demonstrates that political boundaries did not prevent religious and cultural interaction. Temple institutions could become important points of connection between political authority and local society.

Suchindram and Travancore

The later history of Suchindram is closely associated with Travancore. The

temple remained an important religious institution within the region and continued to receive attention from political authorities and local communities. The Travancore Archaeological Series, published under the authority of the former Travancore government, remains an important primary source for the study of the region's inscriptions. The series contains detailed documentation of inscriptions from Suchindram and other sites of southern Kerala and present day Kanniyakumari.[13] The survival of these records is particularly important because many historical traditions cannot be reconstructed from architecture alone.

Ritual Continuity and Historical Change

It would be incorrect to assume that the contemporary festival is identical to its medieval predecessor. Ritual traditions change in response to social, political and institutional circumstances. Nevertheless, inscriptions establish the long-term importance of temple worship, endowment and festival-related services. A record from the Chola period, for example, demonstrates the existence of organized ritual endowments.[1] Later records show the continued [4] institutional importance of the temple. The concept of cultural continuity should therefore be understood as continuity through adaptation rather than complete ritual sameness.

Women and the Transmission of Festival Culture

Women have an important role in sustaining temple and festival traditions through domestic and community practices. Preparation of offerings, festival foods, decorations, devotional observances and family rituals frequently involves women's participation. Although epigraphic records often emphasize male donors and institutional authorities, this does not mean that women were absent from ritual culture. The inscriptional record represents only one part of historical society. Oral history and ethnographic research are therefore essential for reconstructing women's contributions to festival traditions. Such research can document forms of cultural knowledge that are rarely represented in stone inscriptions.

Food and Festival Culture

Food forms an important component of festival culture. Religious festivals involve specific forms of offerings, communal meals and household preparation. Traditional food practices provide an important connection between ritual and everyday life. Recipes and methods of preparation can preserve regional ingredients, culinary techniques and social customs. At Suchindram, festival-related food practices can therefore be examined as intangible heritage. Documentation of these practices would contribute to a broader understanding of the cultural history of Kanniyakumari.

Inscriptions as Primary Sources for Festival History

The inscriptions of Suchindram constitute the strongest primary evidence for reconstructing the institutional history of the temple. The Epigraphia Indica record of Parantaka I provides evidence for lamp endowments and temple services.[1] The inscriptional corpus also [5] contains records relating to donations, local institutions, temple personnel and financial arrangements. The Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department currently provides an online listing of inscriptions associated with the Thanumalayan Temple, including records relating to lamp lighting, endowments, appointments and

other temple matters.[1] Such records should be critically compared with the older publications of the [6] Archaeological Survey of India and Travancore archaeological authorities.

Archaeological Documentation

Archaeological publications are important for understanding the physical context in which the festival developed. The Archaeological Survey of India emphasizes that inscriptions found on temple walls, pillars and other architectural elements constitute important historical evidence.[1] The architectural environment of Suchindram should therefore be documented [7] alongside its inscriptions. Mandapas, sculptures, musical pillars, processional spaces and subsidiary shrines all contribute to understanding the cultural setting of the festival. The preservation of these features is essential because damage to the physical monument can also result in the loss of historical information.

Cultural Heritage and Tourism

The Suchindram temple is an important cultural attraction within Kanniyakumari. Religious tourism brings visitors to the temple and contributes to the local economy. However, tourism should not reduce the festival to a spectacle. Its religious significance and community ownership must be respected. A sustainable cultural-tourism model should emphasize interpretation, conservation and community participation. Visitors should be provided with historically accurate information concerning inscriptions, architecture and ritual traditions.

Challenges to Festival Heritage

Modernization creates several challenges for traditional festival culture. Changes in occupation, migration, media consumption and lifestyles can affect intergenerational transmission. Commercialization may also transform traditional practices. Some ritual and artistic forms may be shortened, modified or replaced by contemporary forms. The preservation of the festival therefore requires documentation before significant elements of traditional knowledge disappear.

Need for Documentation

A comprehensive Suchindram cultural-heritage project should document:

- Temple inscriptions and their locations.
- Published epigraphic references.
- Ritual sequences.
- Processional routes.
- Traditional musical practices.
- Festival-related food traditions.
- Oral histories.
- Roles of temple service communities.
- Traditional crafts.
- Historical photographs and archival records.
- Such documentation would create a valuable research resource for future scholars.

CONCLUSION

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple Festival represents an important example of the relationship between religion, ritual, architecture and community culture in Kanniyakumari. Its importance is rooted in a long historical tradition that can be traced through inscriptions, archaeological publications and temple records. The early inscriptions of Parantaka I demonstrate that the temple possessed organized ritual endowments and institutional arrangements. The Rajaraja I inscription and later Travancore records demonstrate the continuing historical importance of

Suchindram. The epigraphic evidence relating to lamps, donations and temple administration reveals the material foundations upon which ritual culture was maintained. At the same time, the festival cannot be understood solely through inscriptions. Its cultural significance also lies in living practices: processions, music, devotional activity, food, craftsmanship, oral traditions and community participation. These elements transform the temple from a historical monument into a living cultural institution. The Suchindram festival therefore deserves to be studied as both religious heritage and intangible cultural heritage. Its preservation requires an integrated approach combining epigraphic documentation, archaeological conservation, oral-history research and community participation.

The festival's greatest significance lies in its ability to connect past and present. The inscriptions preserve the voices of historical donors, assemblies and temple institutions, while contemporary festival practices preserve collective memory through repeated performance. Together, these sources reveal the cultural continuity and historical depth of Suchindram. The study of Suchindram consequently contributes to the larger theme of Kanniyakumari as a confluence of faiths, festivals and cultural expressions. Preserving its ritual traditions is not merely an act of protecting religious practice; it is also a means of safeguarding the historical and cultural identity of southern Tamil Nadu.

ENDNOTES

1. Archaeological Survey of India, Bharat SHRI: Publications on South Indian Inscriptions, Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India. The ASI describes inscriptions as important primary historical sources for South Indian history.

2. E. Hultzsch, "Vatteluttu Inscriptions of Chola Kings," Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 43–48. The Suchindram records discussed there document early Chola-period temple activity.

3. Hultzsch, "Vatteluttu Inscriptions of Chola Kings," Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, pp. 65–66. The record is dated to the tenth year of Parantaka I and refers to gifts of lamps to Vishnu shrines at Tiruchchivindiram.

4. Ibid., pp. 64–66.

5. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. II, pt. II, Government of Travancore, 1912. The Suchindram inscription of Rajaraja I is identified as belonging to his fifteenth regnal year.

6. Hultzsch, Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, Suchindram inscription, pp. 64–65. The record concerns an endowment of sheep for maintaining a perpetual lamp.

7. Ibid.

8. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyar, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. IV, Government Press, Trivandrum, 1923. The series provides primary epigraphic documentation for the historical institutions of southern Travancore.

9. Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department, "Arulmigu Thanumalayan Temple, Suchindrum—Inscriptions." The official temple record includes inscriptions concerning lamp lighting, endowments and appointments.

10. Hultzsch, Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, pp. 64–66.

11. "Suchindram Inscription," Travancore Archaeological Series, historical inscriptional documentation concerning Nanjinadu and settlements connected with Tiruchchivindiram.

12. Gopinatha Rao, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. II, pt. II, 1912. The published image and catalogue identify the Suchindram inscription as that of Rajaraja I in his fifteenth regnal year.

13. Travancore Archaeological Series, vols. I–VIII, Government of Travancore, 1910–1938. The Travancore Devaswom Archives bibliography confirms the series as a major archival publication collection.

14. Hultzsch, Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, pp. 64–66.

15. Ibid.
16. Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department, "Arulmigu Thanumalayan Temple, Suchindrum—Inscriptions."
17. Archaeological Survey of India, Bharat SHRI: Publications on South Indian Inscriptions. 18. Hultzsch, Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, Suchindram records.
19. Gopinatha Rao, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. II, pt. II.
20. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyar, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. IV, Government Press, Trivandrum, 1923.
21. Archaeological Survey of India, Indian Archaeology: A Review, 1958–59. The report specifically records a Suchindram inscription dated Kollam 404 (A.D. 1228), concerning the reorganization of the Brahmasvom into eight divisions and conditions of service, illustrating the administrative history of the temple.
22. Ibid. The same report records another Suchindram inscription of Solantalaikonda Virapandya concerning a monetary gift for lamps at Tiruchchivindram. 23. Topographical List of South Indian Inscriptions, Archaeological Survey of India, entry for Suchindram, Kanyakumari district. The listing identifies a Suchindram record under the relevant archaeological classification.
24. Archaeological Survey of India, South Indian Inscriptions. The SII series is the principal ASI publication corpus for published South Indian epigraphy.
25. E. Hultzsch, Epigraphia Indica, vol. V, Archaeological Survey of India. The Suchindram Vatteluttu inscriptions provide primary evidence for temple endowments, lamps and institutional arrangements.
26. T. A. Gopinatha Rao, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. II, pt. II, 1912. The work preserves early epigraphic documentation from Suchindram and neighbouring areas.
27. K. V. Subrahmanya Aiyar, Travancore Archaeological Series, vol. IV, 1923. The volume belongs to the early twentieth-century Travancore archaeological publication programme.
28. Archaeological Survey of India, Indian Archaeology: A Review, 1958–59, section on Epigraphy, Madras. The report's Suchindram entries demonstrate the continuing importance of temple inscriptions for historical reconstruction.

FOOD CULTURE OF CAPE COMORIN: THE CRUCIBLE OF COASTAL CUISINE OF TAMIL NADU

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ABSTRACT

Food is an integral part of cultural identity and is closely connected with the geography, history, livelihood and social practices of a community. Kanniyakumari, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, developed a distinctive food culture through its fertile agricultural landscape, long coastline and historical association with the kingdom of Travancore. Within this larger region, Nanjil Nadu emerged as an important rice-producing area, and its food practices developed around rice, coconut, fish, pulses, vegetables and other locally available produce. These food habits were not isolated culinary choices but were closely connected with agriculture, fishing, household economy and the historical experiences of the region.

This paper traces the historical development of the food culture of Kanniyakumari with particular reference to Nanjil Nadu. It examines the agrarian foundations of Nanjil cuisine, the influence of its long association with Travancore, the importance of coastal fisheries and traditional fish-preservation practices, and the continuities that remained after Kanniyakumari became part of Madras State in 1956. It also examines the decline of paddy cultivation, changes in fishing and agriculture, migration and the transformation of household food practices in the post-independence period. By locating food within these historical processes, the paper argues that Nanjil cuisine represents a continuing cultural memory of Kanniyakumari's agrarian and coastal past. Food therefore becomes an important source for understanding historical continuity and change in the everyday life of the region.

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari occupies a distinct place in the history of South India. Situated at the southern end of the Indian peninsula, the region has historically remained connected with both the Tamil country and Travancore. A. Perumal, Literary Historian's historiographical study of Kanniyakumari identifies the region historically associated with Kanyakumari/Nanjil Nadu as having come under the Ays, Pandyas, Cholas, Cheras, Venad rulers, Vijayanagara authority and the Nayaks of Madurai at different periods (Perumal 2013). He also draws attention to the close connections that existed across the Ghats in language, customs and religious practices. The history of Kanniyakumari is therefore not the history of an isolated geographical corner but of a region situated within overlapping political and cultural worlds.

The history of food in Kanniyakumari must be understood within this larger historical setting. Food habits develop through the resources available in a region, the occupations of its people and the movement and interaction of communities over time. Arjun Appadurai, an Indian - American social and cultural anthropologist, argues that cuisines are historically and culturally constructed and that the identification of particular foods as regional cuisines is connected with wider processes of cultural representation and identity formation

(Appadurai 1988). This approach is useful for Kanniyakumari because what is today recognised as Nanjil cuisine developed over a long period in a region whose political boundaries and affiliations changed repeatedly.

Nanjil Nadu forms an important part of this history. Historical and archaeological writings consistently associate the region with agriculture. The Travancore Archaeological *Series* describes Nanjil Nadu as the "land of ploughs" and as an exceptionally agricultural district, while its discussions of political disturbance also refer specifically to the destruction and plunder of paddy and seed grain. Such references show that paddy cultivation was not merely a modern agricultural development but had long been associated with the economic identity of the region (Travancore Archaeological Series 1924).
Food therefore provides a useful way of examining the history of Kanniyakumari from below. Paddy cultivation, fishing, coconut use, preservation of marine products and household preparation connect political and economic history with everyday life. Rather than treating Nanjil cuisine simply as a collection of regional dishes, this paper examines how its food practices developed through the changing agrarian, coastal and political history of Kanniyakumari (Appadurai 1988; Perumal 2013).

Nanjil Nadu: An Historical Agrarian Region

The historical identity of Nanjil Nadu predates the formation of modern Kanniyakumari district. Epigraphical materials discussed in the Travancore Archaeological Series place Nanjil Nadu within larger territorial divisions of the Chola period and identify it as one of the subdivisions of *Uttama-Chola-valanadu*. The inscriptions indicate that the region was incorporated into different political formations while retaining Nanjil Nadu as a recognisable territorial designation. The continued appearance of the name in inscriptional and later historical sources indicates the persistence of a regional identity across changing political administrations (Travancore Archaeological Series 1924).

Agriculture was central to this identity. The description of Nanjil Nadu as a "land of ploughs" is particularly significant for food history because it connects the name of the region itself with cultivation. Historical references to paddy fields, seed grain and agricultural disruption indicate the importance of wet-rice cultivation to the economy. The later prominence of rice within Nanjil food culture therefore has a historical material basis in the agrarian organisation of the region rather than being merely a culinary preference (Travancore Archaeological Series 1924).

This agrarian character continued into the modern period. Kanmony, an Economist and Elpinston (a Professor in Economics) describe Kanniyakumari as having once been regarded as the "rice granary" of the former Travancore State and identify rice as the staple food of the district. Their study also demonstrates the close relationship between cultivation, ecological conditions and the rural economy of Kanniyakumari (Kanmony and Elpinston 2014). The historical importance of rice thus links the agricultural landscape of Nanjil Nadu with the everyday diet of its population

The connection between production and consumption can be seen in the place occupied by rice in Nanjil cuisine. Rice appears not only as the principal cooked grain but also in preparations using rice flour and in combinations with pulses and

coconut. Mathew's (a Professor in Food Science) study of regional food traditions identifies *ulunthuchoru*, prepared from rice and black gram, as characteristic of Nanjil Nadu and records its combination with *varuthu araicha thuvaiyal*, a roasted-coconut accompaniment (Mathew 2020). These foods demonstrate how ingredients produced or readily available within the regional agricultural economy became part of established household food practices.

Nanjil Nadu under Venad and Travancore

The political history of Nanjil Nadu also shaped its cultural development. Following periods of Pandya and Chola authority, the region became increasingly associated with Venad and subsequently Travancore. Perumal's survey of the historiography of Kanniyakumari identifies the succession of these political authorities and stresses the historical connections between southern Travancore and the Tamil country. Consequently, the cultural practices of the region developed within a space where Tamil language and customs existed alongside the institutions and social world of Travancore (Perumal 2013).

This political history is important when interpreting the apparent similarities between Nanjil Nadu and Kerala food traditions. Preparations involving coconut, roasted coconut, coconut milk and mixed vegetables cannot automatically be described as later “Kerala influences” entering Tamil cuisine. For a substantial period, present-day Kanniyakumari formed part of the Travancore political and economic region. Culinary similarities therefore need to be understood within this older history of geographical proximity and political integration rather than through the modern Tamil Nadu-Kerala border alone (Perumal 2013; Mathew 2020).

The widespread use of coconut provides a good example of this continuity. Mathew identifies coconut as a staple ingredient in Nanjil cuisine and records the use of coconut along with ginger, green chilli, garlic and locally available produce. The importance of coconut in Nanjil cooking thus reflects the culinary environment that developed in southern Travancore and continued within Kanniyakumari after its political integration with Madras State (Mathew 2020).

Dishes such as *aviyal* and *theeyal* further demonstrate this shared culinary space. Mathew includes both among the characteristic preparations of Nanjil Nadu. Aviyal brings together locally available vegetables and coconut, while theeyal is distinguished by the use of roasted coconut. Their presence in Nanjil food traditions illustrates the difficulty of applying present-day state boundaries to culinary practices that developed when southern Travancore and the Tamil-speaking areas of the region were historically interconnected (Mathew 2020; Perumal 2013).

The Coastal Economy and the Historical Place of Fish

Agriculture was only one foundation of Kanniyakumari's food economy. Its coastline supported fishing settlements whose livelihoods were closely connected with marine resources. Lazarus and Joel's (both researchers from Central Institute of Fisheries, Vizhinjum) study of the pelagic fisheries of Kanyakumari recorded a coastline of approximately 67.59 kilometres and 43 fishing villages in the district in the late 1970s (Lazarus and Joel 1979). Their study also estimated a substantial fisher population,

demonstrating the importance of fishing as an established coastal occupation.

The historical importance of fisheries is also visible in studies of the social organisation of the Kanniyakumari coast. Ajantha Subramanian, a historian and socio-cultural anthropologist from Harvad, traces the transformation of coastal fishing communities from the 1950s through the post-liberalisation period and examines the effects of development programmes, industrialisation and changing relations between artisanal and mechanised fishing (Subramanian 2003). Her work demonstrates that fishing on the Kanniyakumari coast was not simply a subsistence activity but a livelihood around which community organisation, technological change and political claims developed .

Fish became an important element of the regional food environment. Mathew identifies fish as a staple within the food practices of Kanniyakumari and discusses the place of seafood in Nanjil Nadu cuisine. The prominence of fish in regional cooking therefore needs to be located within the larger history of coastal livelihood rather than treated merely as a matter of culinary preference (Mathew 2020; Lazarus and Joel 1979).

Nanjil cuisine may therefore be understood not simply as a mixture of Tamil and Travancore culinary traditions, but as a cuisine shaped substantially by its geographical location. The recurring presence of rice and coconut alongside fish and other seafood reflects the interaction between the agrarian and coastal environments of Kanniyakumari. Its culinary character was thus formed through the meeting of the paddy field, coconut-growing landscape and the sea. The historical association with Travancore added another cultural layer to this geographical foundation, making Nanjil cuisine both a product of its environment and of the political and cultural history of the region.

Fish Preservation and the Mid-Twentieth Century Coastal Economy

One of the strongest historical sources for the food economy of Kanniyakumari as per the 1966 study by R. Srinivasan and K. C. Joseph (Researchers from Fisheries) on salt-cured fish. Based on investigations conducted in Kanyakumari district, their work records the widespread practice of preserving fish through sun drying, dry salting, wet salting and other curing methods (Srinivasan and Joseph 1966).. The study documents food preservation practices at a time when refrigeration and modern cold storage facilities had not yet transformed the coastal fish economy.

The methods of preservation also varied according to the type and size of fish. Srinivasan and Joseph record sun drying for smaller varieties and salting and curing practices for other fish. Such methods allowed a highly perishable marine resource to be stored and transported beyond the immediate site of landing. Dried and salted fish should therefore be understood not only as food preparations but as products of an older technological response to the problems of preservation, transport and seasonal availability (Srinivasan and Joseph 1966).

The same study demonstrates the economic importance of cured fish during this period. The processing of substantial quantities of the catch indicates that preservation connected fishing villages with markets beyond immediate household consumption. Fish curing thus stood at the intersection of livelihood, technology and food practice in mid-

twentieth-century Kanniyakumari (Srinivasan and Joseph 1966).

This evidence also helps us place present-day dried-fish consumption within a longer history. What may now appear as a particular taste or traditional preparation originated partly from the practical need to preserve marine catch in a tropical coastal environment. Food preservation therefore provides an example of how culinary practices develop from material conditions and later become embedded within regional food culture (Srinivasan and Joseph 1966).

Tapioca: A Later Addition to the Food Culture of the Region

Unlike rice, which had a much older association with the agrarian landscape of Nanjil Nadu, tapioca was a comparatively later addition to the food culture of Travancore. Cassava (*Manihot esculenta*) originated in South America, and while sources differ regarding the date of its earliest arrival in India, its widespread cultivation as a food crop in Travancore is closely associated with Maharaja Visakham Thirunal in the late nineteenth century. The crop was encouraged because it could provide an inexpensive and productive alternative to food grains, particularly during periods of scarcity (ICAR-CTCRI).

By the early twentieth century, tapioca had moved beyond its initial role as a famine or subsistence crop and had become increasingly important in the diet of Travancore. The *Travancore State Manual* of 1940 records that the poorer sections of the population had begun consuming the root several decades earlier and that its value as food subsequently became widely recognised. It gradually came to be consumed by other social groups as well. This suggests that tapioca did not enter the regional diet as an established staple but acquired that position over time through changing economic and food-security conditions (*Travancore State Manual*).

The food shortages of the Second World War further strengthened its position. Travancore faced a severe food crisis when the availability of imported rice was disrupted. During 1943–44, tapioca cultivation increased considerably and became one of the most important substitutes for rice. Contemporary official assessments even recognised the expansion of tapioca cultivation and consumption as an important factor in Travancore's response to the food crisis. Thus, by the mid-twentieth century, a crop that had been promoted only several decades earlier had become closely integrated into the everyday food economy of Travancore (Famine Enquiry Commission; modern historical analysis of the Travancore food crisis).

The presence of tapioca in the later food culture of Kanniyakumari and Nanjil Nadu can therefore be read as evidence of historical adaptation rather than ancient culinary continuity. Mathew is correct in identifying tapioca as part of the food repertoire associated with Nanjil Nadu, but its presence should be historically qualified. Unlike rice, tapioca represents a relatively modern layer in the region's cuisine, shaped by state intervention, scarcity and the wider food economy of Travancore. Its eventual acceptance demonstrates how foods introduced in response to particular economic circumstances can, over generations, become incorporated into what is later remembered as “traditional” regional cuisine (Mathew 2020; Appadurai 1988).

Food, Household and the Historical Role of Women

The history of food is also a history of labour. Many of the practices associated

with traditional Nanjil cuisine—processing rice, preparing vegetables, grinding coconut and spices, cleaning fish and producing elaborate foods for domestic and festive occasions—were located within the household. Mathew's discussion of Tamil food traditions specifically notes the intergenerational transmission of culinary knowledge through mothers and mothers-in-law, indicating the importance of women in maintaining household food knowledge (Mathew 2020).

Such transmission is historically significant because much culinary knowledge was not recorded in written texts. Knowledge concerning combinations of ingredients, methods of roasting or grinding, proportions, consistency and preparation for large gatherings was often acquired through observation and practice. Appadurai's discussion of cookbooks reminds us that the textual codification of cuisine represents only one stage in the construction of culinary knowledge; much regional cooking historically existed through household transmission before its incorporation into printed culinary literature (Appadurai 1988).

A historical approach must therefore recognise women not simply as the "preservers of tradition" but as workers whose domestic labour sustained culinary practices. The continuation of a regional cuisine depended upon repeated household labour and the transmission of skills across generations. Reading food historically thus brings domestic work which is often absent from conventional political archives, into the study of regional social history (Appadurai 1988; Mathew 2020).

Festive Foods and Social Memory

The transformation of ordinary agricultural ingredients into festive foods provides another way of understanding regional culture. Mathew records preparations such as *kinnathappam*, *elayappam, achu murukku* and *mundhiri kothu* within the food traditions of Nanjil Nadu. These foods use ingredients such as rice, coconut and jaggery but involve preparation methods different from the ordinary daily meal (Mathew 2020).

Their importance lies not only in their ingredients but in the occasions on which foods are prepared and shared. Regional cuisines are created through the association of particular preparations with households, celebrations and community practices. Appadurai's analysis of cuisine as a cultural category is useful here because it shows how collections of dishes acquire meaning when they are identified with particular social and regional identities (Appadurai 1988; Mathew 2020).

These foods can therefore be treated as carriers of social memory. Their continued preparation connects contemporary households with earlier generations even when cooking technologies and patterns of work have changed. At the same time, the documentation of such dishes in modern writings represents a shift from predominantly household transmission towards the textual preservation and public representation of regional cuisine (Appadurai 1988; Mathew 2020).

1956: Political Change and Culinary Continuity

A major political turning point in the modern history of the region came with the linguistic reorganisation of states. The Tamil-speaking southern areas of Travancore-Cochin were separated from that state, and Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam and Vilavancode became part of the newly constituted Kanyakumari

district in Madras State in 1956. The change created a new administrative relationship with Tamil Nadu after a long history within Travancore (Perumal 2013).

The significance of 1956 for food history lies as much in what did not change as in what changed. Administrative integration into Madras State could draw a new political boundary, but it could not immediately alter agricultural crops, fishing livelihoods or household cooking practices formed over generations. The continued prominence of coconut-based dishes, aviyal, theeyal, fish preparations and rice-based foods recorded in later descriptions of Nanjil cuisine demonstrates this cultural continuity (Mathew 2020).

This continuity makes Nanjil cuisine historically important. It carries elements of the Tamil cultural world while also retaining practices developed during centuries of association with Venad and Travancore. Rather than labelling individual dishes exclusively "Tamil" or "Kerala," Nanjil cuisine is better understood as the product of a historical border region in which political authority, language, agriculture and everyday cultural practices interacted over a long period (Perumal 2013; Mathew 2020).

The history of food thus complicates the history created by political boundaries. The boundary of 1956 is clearly visible in administrative history, but it is far less visible in culinary history. Household practices demonstrate that cultural practices can survive political reorganisation, making food a particularly useful source for studying the relationship between territory and identity (Appadurai 1988; Perumal 2013).

Post-Independence Changes in the Coastal Economy

The decades following independence brought important changes to the coastal economy. Subramanian's historical study of the Kanniyakumari coast traces the effects of development programmes and mechanisation from the 1950s onwards. Technological changes altered relations between artisanal fishing communities and mechanised fishing interests and transformed the economic and political organisation of coastal society (Subramanian 2003).

These changes are relevant to food history because transformations in production affect the movement and availability of food. The fisheries documented by Srinivasan and Joseph in the 1960s and Lazarus and Joel in the 1970s belonged to an economy undergoing technological change. The shift from older curing and artisanal practices towards mechanisation and expanding markets altered the relationship between fish landing, preservation, sale and consumption (Srinivasan and Joseph 1966; Lazarus and Joel 1979; Subramanian 2003).

The history of coastal cuisine should therefore not be represented as an unchanged survival from the past. The importance of fish remained, but the economic system through which fish was caught, preserved and marketed underwent substantial transformation through industrialization, mechanisation and use of technology in the fishing craft during the second half of the twentieth century. Continuity in food preference could coexist with major changes in production and livelihood (Subramanian 2003).

Decline of the Paddy Landscape

The agrarian side of Nanjil food culture experienced an equally significant transformation. Kanmony and Elpinston's study documents a marked decline in rice farming in Kanyakumari district and

associates it with ecological and economic pressures including labour problems, irrigation difficulties and inadequate returns to cultivation. Their research shows that the agricultural foundation upon which Nanjil Nadu had historically built its reputation as a rice-producing region weakened considerably in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Kanmony and Elpinston 2014).

This decline is historically striking when compared with the older description of Nanjil Nadu as a "land of ploughs." The Travancore Archaeological Series presents agriculture and paddy as defining features of the region, while modern agricultural research records the contraction of rice cultivation. Read together, these sources reveal a long-term transition from an agricultural landscape strongly identified with paddy to one in which rice farming faces serious economic and ecological pressures (Travancore Archaeological Series 1924; Kanmony and Elpinston 2014.

This transformation has consequences for food culture. A cuisine that developed historically from a rice-producing landscape can continue even when households increasingly obtain rice through commercial markets rather than directly from the surrounding agricultural economy. The food may therefore survive longer than the production system that originally sustained it. This distinction between the continuity of consumption and the transformation of production is important for understanding modern Nanjil cuisine (Kanmony and Elpinston 2014; Appadurai 1988).

From Household Cuisine to Regional Cuisine

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have also changed the way regional food is identified and represented. Appadurai's study of Indian cookbooks shows how the classification and codification of dishes contribute to the construction of regional and national cuisines. Once household recipes are written, published and grouped under labels such as "Tamil cuisine" or a particular regional cuisine, everyday cooking practices acquire a more formal public identity (Appadurai 1988).

This process can be seen in the contemporary identification of "Nanjil cuisine." Foods once transmitted largely within families are increasingly discussed as a distinct regional culinary tradition. Mathew's academic discussion, for example, groups a set of preparations and ingredients under the category "Cuisine of Nanjilnad," identifying characteristic foods such as ulunthuchoru, aviyal, theeyal, fish preparations and regional sweets. Such documentation helps preserve culinary knowledge but also participates in defining what counts as Nanjil cuisine (Mathew 2020; Appadurai 1988).

The emergence of a consciously identified Nanjil cuisine therefore represents both continuity and change. The dishes themselves may have older household histories, but their presentation as a distinctive regional cuisine belongs to a modern process of documentation and cultural representation. Food becomes not only something consumed but something through which regional history and identity are narrated (Appadurai 1988).

Food as a Source for the History of Everyday Life

Conventional histories of Kanniyakumari have understandably concentrated on dynasties, Travancore administration, social movements, linguistic identity and the political struggles surrounding the merger with Madras State. These remain essential to the history of the district. Yet the study of

food reveals another layer of the same history: the everyday relationship between people, environment, labour and culture (Perumal 2013).

Rice connects present food practices with the long agrarian history of Nanjil Nadu; fish connects cuisine with the coastal economy; cured fish records older technologies of preservation; coconut-based preparations preserve the historical relationship with southern Travancore; and the decline of paddy cultivation records the transformation of the region's agricultural economy. These are not separate culinary facts but different forms of evidence through which historical practices and change can be studied (Travancore Archaeological Series 1924; Srinivasan and Joseph 1966; Kanmony and Elpinston 2014).

Food also allows historians to move beyond political boundaries. Kanniyakumari's incorporation into Madras State in 1956 was politically significant, but Nanjil cuisine demonstrates that cultural practices do not necessarily change at the same speed as political institutions. Rice, coconut, fish and the dishes created from them preserve the traces of an older historical geography linking Nanjil Nadu, southern Travancore and the Tamil country (Perumal 2013; Mathew 2020).

In this sense, cuisine may be read as an archive of everyday life. Unlike a government order or inscription, food does not provide a written record of a particular event. Its historical value lies instead in continued practice and in the relationship between ingredients, production systems, occupations and communities. When used carefully alongside documentary and academic sources, culinary practices can contribute to the reconstruction of regional social history (Appadurai 1988).

CONCLUSION

Epigraphical and historical sources establish Nanjil Nadu as an old territorial and agricultural region whose food culture was closely connected with its environment and livelihood. The importance of rice reflects the region's long history of paddy cultivation, while coconut, vegetables and pulses were part of its agricultural landscape. At the same time, Kanniyakumari's long coastline supported generations of fishing communities and ensured the importance of fish in the regional food system. Traditional practices of drying, salting and curing fish further demonstrate how coastal resources were incorporated into everyday life. Nanjil cuisine thus emerged from a geographical setting where an intensive agrarian landscape existed in close proximity to the sea.

Geography alone, however, does not explain the cuisine. Nanjil Nadu's long political and cultural association with Venad and Travancore also shaped its food practices. The extensive use of coconut and preparations such as aviyal and theeyal belong to a culinary landscape that developed before the creation of the present Tamil Nadu–Kerala boundary. The reorganisation of 1956 altered the political identity of Kanniyakumari but did not immediately change established household food practices. Cuisine therefore provides an interesting example of how cultural continuities can survive changes in political boundaries.

Nanjil cuisine also reveals that traditions are neither ancient in every respect nor resistant to change. The decline of paddy cultivation and the mechanisation and commercialisation of fishing transformed the economic systems that had supported older food practices. Tapioca presents a particularly useful example of this process. Unlike rice, it was

a comparatively later addition to the Travancore food economy, but over time it became integrated into the regional diet. What is now recognised as traditional Nanjil cuisine consequently contains different historical layers created through continuity, adaptation and changing economic circumstances.

Its distinctiveness becomes more visible when placed within the wider regional cuisines of Tamil Nadu. Chettinad cuisine developed within the social and geographical setting of the Chettiar region, Madurai cuisine within an inland urban and agrarian environment, and Kongu cuisine within the agricultural landscape of western Tamil Nadu. Nanjil Nadu occupies a different geographical position where fertile paddy-growing plains, coconut cultivation and a productive coastline occur within close proximity. This combination allowed rice, coconut and fish to become defining elements of the same culinary landscape, while its Travancore past added another historical dimension to its development.

Nanjil cuisine can therefore be read as more than a collection of traditional dishes. It is a record of how the people of Kanniyakumari responded to their geography, available resources, livelihood and changing historical circumstances. Its culinary history brings together the paddy fields of Nanjil Nadu, the fishing communities of the coast, the cultural legacy of Travancore and later changes in agriculture and fisheries. In this sense, food becomes a valuable source for understanding the everyday history of Kanniyakumari, revealing how regional identity is formed not only through political events and boundaries but also through the continuing relationship between people, place and food.

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF SCHOLARS AND PRESS TO DRAVIDIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

The development of Dravidian literature and consciousness was greatly influenced by the writers, scholars, intellectuals, and Tamil press. Being a unique historical and cultural region, Kanniyakumari made its contribution to the development of the intellectual and literary heritage through the activity of numerous scholars, literary figures, journals, newspapers, and publishing houses. This article focuses on examining the role of scholars and the press in the development of Dravidian literature as well as preservation and promotion of cultural consciousness. Particular attention is paid to print media's role in bringing messages of humanism, rationalism, literature, Tamil consciousness, and social reform to the people. The article also focuses on how scholars' works helped to collect, preserve, and pass on folklore, traditions, social habits, cultural memories, and other elements of culture heritage. By analyzing the works of selected publishing houses and intellectual scholars, the article demonstrates their attitude toward developing cultural consciousness and literacy among the citizens of Kanniyakumari. The study concludes that scholars and the press play a significant role in promoting the region's cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Dravidian Literature, Kanniyakumari, Tamil Press, Scholars, Cultural Heritage, Tamil Consciousness, Social Reform.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature and the press have historically played an important role in shaping the intellectual, cultural, and political consciousness of society. In South India, the development of Dravidian thought was closely connected with the growth of Tamil literature, linguistic awareness, print culture, education, and social reform movements. Scholars, writers, journalists, publishers, and intellectuals contributed significantly to the spread of ideas relating to language, culture, equality, rationalism, and social justice. Kanniyakumari occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of Tamil Nadu. The region has experienced the interaction of Tamil and Malayalam linguistic traditions because of its historical association with the erstwhile Travancore State. Its geographical location at the southern tip of India and its multicultural environment contributed to the development of a unique cultural identity. The people of the region participated actively in literary activities, religious movements, educational development, social reform, and linguistic struggles. The contribution of scholars and the press was particularly important in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of Kanniyakumari. Through books, journals, newspapers, magazines, literary associations, and publishing activities, intellectuals documented local history, folklore, traditions, biographies, religious practices, and social developments. The

emergence of print culture enabled ideas to move beyond traditional institutions and reach a wider section of society. This article examines the contribution of scholars and the press to Dravidian literature and cultural heritage, with special reference to Kanniyakumari.

Contribution of Scholars to Dravidian Literature

Scholars have played a major role in the development and preservation of Dravidian literature. Their contribution includes literary criticism, historical research, translation, documentation, editing of ancient texts, and the study of regional traditions. Tamil scholars helped to preserve classical and medieval literary traditions by collecting manuscripts, editing texts, and publishing literary works. The growth of modern education and printing technology further increased opportunities for literary scholarship. Scholars introduced literary works to new generations of readers and encouraged the systematic study of Tamil language and literature. In Kanniyakumari, intellectuals and researchers contributed to the study of regional history and culture. Local scholars documented temples, churches, historical monuments, folk traditions, social movements, and prominent personalities. Such works are important because regional history often remains outside the major narratives of national and state history. The study of folklore is another important contribution of scholars. Folk songs, stories, proverbs, rituals, and oral traditions contain valuable information about the social and cultural life of ordinary people. Through documentation and research, scholars transformed oral traditions into written cultural records. This process of preservation is particularly important in a rapidly changing society. Modernization, urbanization, migration, and technological development have affected traditional cultural practices. The work of scholars ensures that cultural memories are not completely lost. Scholars also contributed to the development of critical thinking. Through essays, lectures, books, and public discussions, intellectuals encouraged people to question social inequalities and outdated practices. This intellectual tradition was closely connected with the broader Dravidian emphasis on rationalism, education, equality, and social reform.

The Role of the Tamil Press

The emergence of the press brought a major transformation in the intellectual life of Tamil society. Newspapers and journals became powerful instruments for spreading information and shaping public opinion. Print media enabled writers and reformers to communicate directly with large sections of the population. The Tamil press contributed significantly to the development of linguistic consciousness. Newspapers and magazines promoted the use of Tamil language and encouraged public discussion about literature, education, culture, and society. Literary articles introduced readers to classical and modern Tamil literature. The press also provided a platform for social reform. Issues relating to caste discrimination, education, women's rights, poverty, religious reform, and political participation were discussed in newspapers and journals. Print culture therefore contributed to the democratization of knowledge. In Kanniyakumari, newspapers and periodicals played an important role in connecting local society with wider developments in Tamil Nadu and South India. Readers gained access to political ideas, literary movements, educational developments, and cultural debates. The

press also helped create a sense of public consciousness. People who were geographically separated could participate in common discussions through newspapers and magazines. Editorial articles, letters, literary contributions, and reports created a public sphere in which ideas could be exchanged. The growth of local journalism further strengthened regional identity. Reports relating to local problems, educational institutions, cultural events, social movements, and historical developments helped people recognize the importance of their region.

Press and the Promotion of Social Reform

One of the most significant contributions of the press was its involvement in social reform. The Dravidian intellectual tradition emphasized human dignity, equality, rationalism, and opposition to social discrimination. Newspapers and journals became important instruments for spreading these ideas. Print media questioned traditional social hierarchies and encouraged public discussion about caste-based discrimination. The spread of education through newspapers and magazines helped people understand their social and political rights. The press also contributed to women's education and social awareness. Articles and discussions relating to women's rights, literacy, employment, and participation in public life gradually expanded the intellectual horizons of society. Humanism was another important theme promoted through literature and journalism. Writers emphasized the importance of human dignity and social responsibility. Literature became a means of representing the lives and struggles of marginalized communities. The press therefore acted not merely as a source of information but also as an institution of social transformation.

Preservation of Folklore and Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage includes monuments, literature, traditions, rituals, music, folklore, language, and collective memories. Kanniyakumari possesses a rich cultural heritage resulting from centuries of historical development. Scholars played a vital role in preserving this heritage through research and documentation. Folklore is particularly significant because it represents the cultural experiences of ordinary people. Folk songs associated with agriculture, fishing, festivals, marriage, religion, and community life provide valuable evidence regarding the history of society. Kanniyakumari's coastal communities, agricultural populations, religious institutions, and traditional occupational groups have developed distinctive cultural practices. The documentation of these traditions is essential for understanding the social history of the region. Scholars also studied historical monuments and religious institutions. Temples, churches, and other heritage structures provide important evidence about architecture, patronage, religion, and social development. Publications relating to these monuments have contributed to the preservation of historical knowledge. The press assisted this process by publishing articles about local history and cultural traditions. Newspapers and magazines often reported cultural festivals, literary events, anniversaries, and heritage activities. Such coverage increased public awareness about the importance of cultural preservation.

Publishing Houses and Literary Development

Publishing houses played an equally important role in the development of literary culture. Without printing and

publishing institutions, the work of scholars and writers could not reach a large audience. Publishers made literary works accessible to students, researchers, and general readers. Books dealing with history, Tamil literature, religion, folklore, biographies, and regional culture contributed to the expansion of knowledge. Small and regional publishers were particularly important in preserving local history. Major commercial publishers generally focus on works with wider markets, whereas regional publishing institutions often provide opportunities for local writers and researchers. The publication of books relating to Kanniyakumari's history and culture has therefore contributed significantly to the preservation of regional heritage. Such publications enable future generations to understand their cultural roots. Publishing also encouraged new writers. Literary magazines and journals provided opportunities for young authors to publish poetry, short stories, essays, and research articles. This created a continuous literary tradition.

Scholars, Press and Tamil Identity

The combined contribution of scholars and the press strengthened Tamil identity in Kanniyakumari. Language became an important symbol of cultural belonging. Through literary activities and print culture, people developed greater awareness about the historical richness of Tamil civilization. Tamil consciousness was strengthened through the publication of literary works, historical studies, newspapers, and educational materials. The celebration of Tamil writers and literary traditions encouraged younger generations to appreciate their linguistic heritage. At the same time, the intellectual culture of Kanniyakumari reflected its multicultural character. The region demonstrates that cultural identity can develop through interaction rather than isolation. Tamil traditions interacted with Malayalam influences, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and local folk cultures. The study of Kanniyakumari therefore provides an important example of the diversity within Dravidian cultural traditions.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of scholars and the press to the development of Dravidian literature and cultural heritage has been significant and enduring. Scholars preserved literary traditions, documented folklore, studied regional history, and encouraged intellectual inquiry. Their work transformed cultural memories and oral traditions into permanent records. The Tamil press played an equally important role by spreading literacy, social awareness, linguistic consciousness, rational thought, and reformist ideas. Newspapers and journals created a public space for the discussion of literature, culture, society, and politics. In Kanniyakumari, these developments acquired special importance because of the region's distinctive historical and cultural background. Scholars, writers, journalists, publishers, and intellectuals contributed to the preservation of Tamil identity while documenting the diverse cultural traditions of the region. The relationship between scholarship and print culture demonstrates that cultural heritage cannot survive merely through monuments and institutions. It must also be continuously documented, interpreted, discussed, and transmitted to future generations. The scholars and press of Kanniyakumari therefore represent important agents in the preservation and promotion of Dravidian literature and cultural heritage. Their contributions

continue to provide valuable foundations for contemporary research on regional history, Tamil identity, folklore, literature, and cultural studies. In the modern digital age, their legacy remains relevant because the preservation of cultural heritage requires the continued participation of scholars, writers, publishers, journalists, and the wider public.

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LOCAL HOLIDAYS AND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS: PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND COMMUNAL HARMONY IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Religious festivals constitute an important component of India's cultural heritage and play a significant role in strengthening social relationships, preserving traditional values, and promoting communal harmony. Kanyakumari district, situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, is distinguished by its religious diversity and long-standing tradition of peaceful coexistence among Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities. One of the unique administrative practices of the district is the declaration of local holidays for major religious festivals celebrated by different communities. These local holidays not only facilitate religious observance but also represent the government's recognition of the cultural and religious diversity of the district. This study examines how local holidays associated with major religious festivals contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, promotion of social unity, and strengthening of communal harmony in Kanyakumari district. The study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on secondary data collected from books, research articles, government publications, historical records, and official documents.

Keywords: *Local Holidays, Religious Festivals, Cultural Diversity, Communal Harmony, Kanyakumari District, Cultural Heritage, Unity in Diversity.*

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district occupies a distinctive place in the cultural landscape of India because of its geographical location, historical importance, and religious diversity. Situated at the confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean, the district has historically served as a meeting point of different civilizations, cultures, and faiths. Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam have flourished in the region for centuries, creating a multicultural society that values mutual respect, religious tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. The district is therefore regarded as an outstanding example of India's pluralistic cultural tradition, where people belonging to different religious communities live together in harmony while preserving their individual identities and cultural practices.

Religious festivals are among the most visible expressions of this cultural diversity. Festivals such as the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple Festival, Suchindram Temple Car Festival, Ayya Vaikundar Jayanthi, Aadi Amavasai, Onam, Mahashivaratri, Thuckalay Palli Festival, and the Kottar St. Xavier's Church Festival attract thousands of devotees and visitors every year. These festivals are not merely occasions for religious worship; they also serve as platforms for preserving traditional customs, promoting folk arts, encouraging social interaction, and strengthening the cultural identity of the district. They contribute significantly to

the local economy by promoting pilgrimage tourism, handicrafts, trade, transport, and hospitality services. A distinctive feature of Kanyakumari district is the declaration of local holidays by the district administration for important religious festivals celebrated by different communities. This administrative practice reflects the constitutional values of equality, secularism, and respect for religious freedom. By recognising festivals belonging to Hindu, Christian, and Muslim communities, the district administration.

Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple Festival

The Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple Festival is one of the most significant religious and cultural festivals celebrated in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. The temple, located at Mandaikadu near Colachel, is dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathi, a manifestation of Adi Parashakti, and is popularly known as the "Women's Sabarimala" because thousands of women devotees, particularly from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, undertake vows and participate in the festival with deep devotion. The annual Maasi Kodai Festival, celebrated during the Tamil month of Maasi (February–March), extends over ten days and includes rituals such as flag hoisting (Kodiyettu), special poojas, processions, Valiya Padukka, Periya Chakkara Theevetti, and the concluding Odukku Pooja. The festival attracts lakhs of devotees every year and is recognised as one of the major religious events in southern Tamil Nadu. Owing to its cultural and religious importance, the Kanyakumari District Administration declares a local holiday on the principal festival day, enabling devotees to participate in the celebrations while acknowledging the district's religious heritage.

Beyond its religious importance, the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple Festival is a symbol of cultural diversity and communal harmony in Kanyakumari district. Devotees from different regions and communities participate in the festival by offering voluntary services, organising Annadhanam (free meals), and assisting pilgrims. Local people, irrespective of their religion, cooperate in the smooth conduct of the celebrations, promoting mutual respect and social unity. The festival also preserves traditional rituals, devotional music, folk arts, and local customs while attracting a large number of pilgrims and tourists, thereby contributing to the district's economy. Thus, the festival serves not only as a religious event but also as a cultural platform that strengthens communal harmony and reflects the spirit of "Unity in Diversity" in Kanyakumari district.

Ayya Vaikundar Jayanthi

Ayya Vaikundar Jayanthi is an important religious festival celebrated annually during the Tamil month of Masi (February–March) at Swamithope Pathi in Kanyakumari district to commemorate the birth anniversary of Ayya Vaikundar, a renowned social and spiritual reformer. Thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala participate in special prayers, processions, and charitable activities. In recognition of its cultural and religious importance, the Kanyakumari District Administration declares a local holiday for the festival. Beyond its religious significance, the festival promotes cultural diversity and communal harmony by bringing together people from different communities,

spreading the values of equality, brotherhood, and peaceful coexistence while preserving the rich spiritual heritage of Kanyakumari district.

Maha Shivaratri Festival

Maha Shivaratri is an important Hindu festival dedicated to Lord Shiva and is celebrated with great devotion in Kanyakumari district. The festival is observed during the Tamil month of Maasi (February–March), and Kanyakumari district is declared a local holiday on this occasion. The celebration promotes communal harmony and cultural diversity, as people from different communities come together to support the pilgrims and participate in the festivities, strengthening unity and mutual respect. On this day, thousands of devotees undertake a sacred 140-kilometre padayatra (pilgrimage on foot) to worship at the 12 Shiva temples: Tirumalai, hirparappu, Thirunandikkara, Ponmanai, Panthivackam, Kalkulam, Melancode,Thiruvidaicode, Thiruvithancode, Thirupannicode, Thirunattalam, and the remaining temple in the traditional pilgrimage circuit. Devotees visit all twelve temples in a single day while chanting the name of Lord Shiva. They observe fasting, offer special prayers, and remain awake throughout the night in worship, believing that this brings spiritual merit, peace, prosperity, and the blessings of Lord Shiva.

Onam Festival

Onam is one of the most important harvest festivals celebrated by the Malayali community during the Malayalam month of Chingam (August–September). It is also celebrated with great enthusiasm in Kanyakumari district, where a local holiday is declared on the occasion. Historically, a large part of present-day Kanyakumari district was under the rule of the Travancore Kingdom, and therefore a significant Malayali population continues to live in the district. As a result, the government gives importance to the celebration of Onam by declaring a local holiday. The festival commemorates the annual visit of the legendary King Mahabali and is celebrated with Pookalam (floral decorations), Onasadya (traditional feast), cultural programmes, and traditional games. Onam promotes communal harmony and cultural diversity, as people of different religions and communities participate in the celebrations together, share meals, respect each other's traditions, and strengthen the spirit of unity, equality, and brotherhood.

Aadi Amavasai

Aadi Amavasai is an important religious observance celebrated during the Tamil month of Aadi (July–August). It is regarded as a sacred day to perform tithi (ancestral rites) and offer prayers to departed ancestors, seeking their blessings for the well-being and prosperity of the family. In Kanyakumari district, a local holiday is observed on this occasion, and thousands of devotees gather at seashores, rivers, and temples to perform rituals such as tarpanam and other ancestral ceremonies. The day reflects the people's deep respect for their ancestors and preserves the district's rich spiritual and cultural traditions.

Suchindram Car Festival

The Suchindram Car Festival is one of the most famous temple festivals celebrated at the Thanumalayan Temple in Suchindram, Kanyakumari district. It is held annually during the Tamil month of Margazhi (December–January), and Kanyakumari district observes a local holiday on the day of the

car festival. The beautifully decorated temple chariot carrying the deities is pulled through the streets by thousands of devotees, accompanied by traditional music, devotional songs, and cultural programmes. The festival attracts devotees from different parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, promotes communal harmony and cultural diversity, and reflects the rich religious heritage and traditions of Kanyakumari district.

Kottar St. Xavier's Church Festival

The St. Xavier's Church Festival at Kottar, dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, is one of the most important Christian festivals celebrated in Kanyakumari district. The annual feast is usually observed during November–December, and Kanyakumari district declares a local holiday on the main feast day. Thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and other parts of India visit the church to participate in special Holy Masses, processions, and prayer services. The festival promotes communal harmony and cultural diversity, as people of different religions and communities join the celebrations with faith and mutual respect, reflecting the district's rich cultural and religious heritage.

Thuckalay Palli Festival

The Thuckalay Palli Festival is an important Islamic religious festival celebrated at the Peer Mohamed Oliyullah Dargah (Thuckalay Palli) in Kanyakumari district. The annual Kandhuri (Urs) festival attracts thousands of devotees from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and Kanyakumari district observes a local holiday on the main festival day. Devotees participate in special prayers, religious gatherings, processions, and charitable activities to honour the saint. The festival promotes communal harmony and cultural diversity, as people from different religions and communities take part in the celebrations, reflecting the spirit of unity, peace, and religious tolerance in Kanyakumari district.

Nagaraja Temple Ther Thiruvizha

The Ther Thiruvizha (Car Festival) of the Nagaraja Temple in Nagercoil is one of the most important religious festivals celebrated in Kanyakumari district. The festival is held annually during the Tamil month of Thai (January–February), and Kanyakumari district observes a local holiday on the day of the car festival. Thousands of devotees gather to witness and participate in pulling the beautifully decorated temple chariot through the streets while offering prayers to Lord Nagaraja, the serpent deity, seeking blessings for health, prosperity, and protection. The festival promotes communal harmony and cultural diversity, as people from different communities participate in the celebrations with devotion and mutual respect, reflecting the rich cultural and religious heritage of Kanyakumari district.

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari district is unique and different from other districts of Tamil Nadu because of its rich blend of religions, cultures, and traditions. It is widely recognised for promoting communal harmony and cultural diversity, where people of different faiths live together peacefully and participate in one another's festivals with mutual respect. The local holidays of the district provide opportunities for people to take part in religious ceremonies, cultural programmes, and traditional celebrations. These holidays strengthen unity, religious tolerance, and social integration while preserving the district's unique

customs, languages, and cultural heritage. Thus, local holidays play a significant role in maintaining peace, harmony, and the multicultural identity of Kanyakumari district.

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TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT UNDER Dr. M. KARUNANIDHI MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of tourism and heritage conservation in Kanniyakumari district during the tenure of Dr. M. Karunanidhi as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu (1969–2011). Kanniyakumari, located at the southernmost tip of India, is renowned for its natural beauty, religious significance, historical monuments, and cultural heritage, making it a major tourist destination. The research analyses government policies aimed at improving tourism infrastructure, protecting heritage sites, and promoting cultural and regional development. The study finds that Karunanidhi's governments treated tourism as a tool for economic growth, employment generation, and cultural identity promotion. Major investments were made in transport, accommodation, coastal development, and tourist facilities. Iconic projects such as the Thiruvalluvar Statue and improvements at the Vivekananda Rock Memorial enhanced global visibility. Heritage sites like Vattakottai Fort and Padmanabhapuram Palace were also preserved and developed. The study concludes that these initiatives transformed Kanniyakumari into a leading tourism hub, balancing development with heritage conservation and sustainability.

Key Words

Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC), Tamil Culture

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of mainland India, occupies a unique place in the history, culture, and tourism of Tamil Nadu. Known for the confluence of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean, the district possesses immense natural beauty, religious significance, and historical importance. It is home to renowned landmarks such as the Kanyakumari Amman Temple, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Vattakottai Fort, Padmanabhapuram Palace, Thirparappu Falls and numerous churches, temples, forts, waterfalls, and ecologically sensitive landscapes. During the successive governments headed by M. Karunanidhi (1969- 1976, 1989 - 1991, 1996 - 2001, and 2006 -2011), tourism was recognised as an important instrument of regional development, employment generation, cultural preservation, and economic growth. His administrations adopted a comprehensive approach that combined infrastructure development with the conservation of heritage and the promotion of Tamil culture.

Tourism Policy under Karunanidhi

The governments led by Karunanidhi viewed tourism as an

essential component of Tamil Nadu's economic development strategy. Tourism was not merely considered a recreational activity but also a means to generate employment, encourage private investment, strengthen regional economies, and preserve the state's rich cultural heritage. The Tamil Nadu Tourism Department and the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) played a pivotal role in implementing these objectives. Special emphasis was given to improving connectivity, accommodation, tourist facilities, publicity, and integrated tourism circuits that linked important destinations throughout the state. Kanniyakumari, owing to its geographical location and religious significance, became one of the priority districts under these tourism development initiatives. Government investments focused on creating world-class tourism infrastructure while ensuring that historical monuments and natural attractions remained protected.

Development of Tourism Infrastructure

One of the most notable achievements during Karunanidhi's administrations was the systematic improvement of tourism infrastructure. Roads leading to major tourist attractions were widened and modernised. Public transport facilities connecting Nagercoil, Kanniyakumari town, Thirparappu, Mathur, Padmanabhapuram, and other tourist centres were strengthened. Bus terminals, parking facilities, drinking water supply, public toilets, street lighting, landscaped parks, and pedestrian pathways were developed to accommodate the increasing number of visitors. Accommodation facilities also witnessed significant expansion. TTDC established and upgraded tourist lodges, restaurants, and information centres to cater to domestic and international tourists. Private sector participation in hotels and hospitality services was encouraged, contributing to the growth of the tourism economy in the district.

Promotion of Coastal Tourism

Kanniyakumari's coastal landscape has always been its greatest attraction. The meeting point of three seas offers spectacular sunrise and sunset views, attracting millions of visitors annually. During Karunanidhi's administrations, the coastal area received considerable infrastructural improvements. Seafront beautification projects, protective sea walls, improved sanitation, landscaped gardens, illumination, and organised pedestrian spaces enhanced both the safety and aesthetic appeal of the shoreline. Special attention was given to maintaining cleanliness in tourist zones and improving civic amenities, making Kanniyakumari one of the most attractive coastal tourism destinations in India.

Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Tourism Promotion

The Vivekananda Rock Memorial, inaugurated in 1970, rapidly became one of India's most visited national monuments. Successive Karunanidhi governments ensured continuous improvements in ferry services, passenger waiting halls, ticketing systems, safety arrangements, and visitor facilities. Coordination between the Tourism Department, local administration, and the Vivekananda Kendra contributed to efficient management of tourist inflow. The memorial strengthened Kanniyakumari's image as a destination that combined spirituality, patriotism, and natural beauty.

Construction of the Thiruvalluvar Statue

Among the most enduring contributions of Karunanidhi to

Kanniyakumari tourism was the construction of the Thiruvalluvar Statue, inaugurated on 1 January 2000. Standing 133 feet tall, representing the 133 chapters of the *Tirukkural*, the monument symbolises Tamil literary excellence and universal human values. The project transformed Kanniyakumari into an international centre of cultural tourism. Infrastructure around the statue including ferry services, lighting, viewing platforms, and safety measures was substantially improved. The monument became a landmark representing Tamil identity and attracted scholars, tourists, and admirers from around the world.

Religious Tourism

Religious tourism occupied a central place in the development strategy. The Kanyakumari Amman Temple, one of India's revered Shakti Peethas, continued to receive government support through improvements in roads, sanitation, lighting, drinking water, and crowd management. The district's Christian heritage was also promoted through improved accessibility to churches such as Our Lady of Ransom Church and other historic places of worship. The peaceful coexistence of Hindu, Christian, and Islamic religious traditions strengthened Kanniyakumari's appeal as a destination reflecting India's cultural diversity.

Heritage Conservation

Karunanidhi consistently advocated the preservation of Tamil heritage and historical monuments. His governments worked with the State Department of Archaeology and the Archaeological Survey of India to conserve monuments of historical significance. The Vattakottai Fort, an eighteenth-century coastal fort, underwent conservation measures that included structural maintenance, improved visitor access, landscaping, and interpretative facilities.

Similarly, the Padmanabhapuram Palace, one of the finest examples of traditional Kerala architecture, received continued support through improvements in road connectivity, tourist amenities, and inclusion in official tourism circuits. Although administratively maintained by the Government of Kerala under historical agreements, Tamil Nadu actively promoted the palace as one of the district's premier heritage attractions.

Eco-Tourism and Nature Conservation

The Karunanidhi governments also promoted eco-tourism by improving access to natural attractions such as Thirparappu Falls, Mathur Aqueduct, Pechiparai Dam, and the forests of the Western Ghats. Infrastructure development included approach roads, viewing platforms, parks, rest houses, sanitation facilities, and recreational spaces while emphasising environmental sustainability. These initiatives diversified tourism beyond pilgrimage and helped protect the district's ecological resources.

Role of the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation

The Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) significantly expanded tourism services during Karunanidhi's administrations. It established tourist information centres, operated package tours, developed hotel facilities, published promotional literature, and marketed Kanniyakumari in national and international tourism campaigns. Kanniyakumari was integrated into broader tourism circuits connecting Madurai, Rameswaram, Tirunelveli, Courtallam, and Thiruvananthapuram, thereby increasing tourist arrivals and encouraging longer stays.

Promotion of Tamil Culture

Karunanidhi's commitment to Tamil language and culture strongly influenced tourism policy. The construction of the Thiruvalluvar Statue reflected his vision of presenting Tamil civilisation to the world. Government support for literary festivals, Tamil cultural programmes, museums, memorials, and historical research enhanced the cultural significance of Kanniyakumari.The district increasingly became a destination not only for sightseeing but also for understanding Tamil literature, philosophy, and heritage.

Socio-Economic Impact

Tourism development generated substantial employment opportunities in hotels, restaurants, transport services, handicrafts, fisheries, photography, guiding services, and local commerce. Women's Self-Help Groups benefited from the sale of handicrafts, food products, and souvenirs. Small-scale entrepreneurs, local artisans, taxi operators, and fishermen experienced improved livelihoods through increased tourist arrivals. The expansion of tourism also encouraged investments in roads, electricity, drinking water, communication, and urban infrastructure, benefiting both residents and visitors.

CONCLUSION

The successive governments led by M. Karunanidhi made significant contributions to the growth of tourism and the conservation of heritage in Kanniyakumari district between 1969 and 2011. Through improvements in infrastructure, transport, accommodation, civic amenities, monument conservation, cultural promotion, and environmental protection, the district evolved into one of India's premier tourist destinations. Landmark initiatives such as the promotion of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, the construction of the Thiruvalluvar Statue, the development of coastal tourism infrastructure, and the preservation of historical monuments reflected a broader vision of combining economic development with cultural preservation. Karunanidhi's tourism policy recognised that heritage and development are complementary rather than contradictory. By integrating tourism promotion with the conservation of historical monuments, religious centres, natural landscapes, and Tamil cultural traditions, his administrations strengthened Kanniyakumari's position as a model of sustainable cultural tourism. The legacy of these initiatives continues to shape the district's tourism economy and reinforces its identity as a destination where history, culture, spirituality, and natural beauty coexist harmoniously.

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CHANGING FAITH AND CULTURAL PRACTICES AMONG THE KANI TRIBES OF THIRUVATTAR TALUK

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ABSTRACT

The Kani or Kanikkar, community of the southern Western Ghats represents one of the indigenous communities whose social and cultural life has historically been closely connected with forests, hills, agriculture, medicinal knowledge, oral traditions and localized systems of belief. In Kanyakumari District, particularly around the Pechiparai and adjoining hill regions of Thiruvattar Taluk, the community has experienced considerable interaction with education, government institutions, markets, modern healthcare, transportation, digital technology and neighbouring populations. These changes have influenced not only livelihood and material life but also religious beliefs, rituals, festivals, family practices, food habits, traditional knowledge and patterns of social interaction. This paper examines the changing faith and cultural practices of the Kani community by comparing traditional forms of cultural expression with contemporary tendencies. The study uses historical and ethnographic literature, government records, census materials, published studies on the Kani community and field-oriented observations from the Kani settlements of the Pechiparai region. Particular attention is given to the relationship between indigenous belief systems and wider Hindu religious practices, changes in ritual life, the transformation of traditional occupations, the changing role of medicinal knowledge, education, migration, welfare measures, healthcare, communication technology and interaction with neighbouring communities. The study argues that cultural change among the Kani should not be understood simply as cultural disappearance. Instead, it is a process of negotiation in which some traditions continue, some are modified and others become less prominent. The contemporary Kani identity therefore represents both cultural continuity and adaptation.

Keywords:*Kani Tribes, Kanikkar, Faith, Cultural Change, Indigenous Knowledge, Kanyakumari, Thiruvattar*

INTRODUCTION

The Kani, also known as Kanikkar, are an indigenous community of the southern Western Ghats whose social and cultural life has historically been shaped by forests, hills, agriculture, medicinal knowledge, oral traditions and localized religious beliefs. In Kanyakumari District,their settlements are particularly associated with the Pechiparai and adjoining hill regions of Thiruvattar Taluk. Their traditional knowledge, rituals, food practices and healing methods were largely transmitted orally from one generation to another through family and community life. In recent decades, education, government welfare programmes, modern healthcare, transportation, markets, wage

employment and digital technology have brought significant changes to Kani society. These developments have influenced their traditional occupations, religious practices, family life, food habits and the transmission of indigenous knowledge. Younger generations, through education, migration and digital communication, are increasingly exposed to the cultural practices of neighbouring communities. Religious change is particularly significant. Traditional Kani beliefs included the worship of localized hill and forest deities, supernatural powers and healing practices along with elements of wider Hindu traditions. Today, participation in regional festivals and temple-centred worship has increased, while certain traditional beliefs and practices continue. Thus, religious transformation represents not only the decline of some customs but also their adaptation and coexistence with newer practices. This paper examines the changing faith and cultural practices of the Kani tribes of Thiruvattar Taluk, with particular focus on the Pechiparai region. It explores the relationship between cultural continuity and transformation in religious beliefs, rituals, traditional knowledge, food practices and social life. The study argues that Kani culture is not simply disappearing but is undergoing a process of selective adaptation in response to changing social, economic and technological conditions.

Historical and Cultural Background of the Kani Tribes

Historical accounts of the Kani community are available through colonial ethnographies, administrative records, anthropological studies and later ethnobotanical research. Edgar Thurston's *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* remains an important source for understanding the historical classification and social organization of communities in southern India, although its descriptions should be read critically. The Kani traditionally maintained a close relationship with the forest, depending on agriculture, forest products, hunting, fishing and medicinal plants for their livelihood. Studies by Ayyanar and Ignacimuthu (2005) and later research in the Pechiparai Hills have documented extensive knowledge of medicinal plants, demonstrating that Kani ecological knowledge was closely connected with everyday interaction with the natural environment. Their social life was also shaped by kinship, customary authority and oral transmission, through which elders passed knowledge of plants, food, agriculture, rituals and community traditions to younger generations.

The oral tradition of the Kani is an important source of cultural memory. Songs, stories, ritual performances and healing practices were transmitted through community participation and played a significant role in maintaining social and religious identity. The *Chattruppattu*, involving the ritual specialist *Pilatthi*, performers and the traditional instrument *Kokkarai*, illustrates the close relationship between healing, religion and oral culture. However, the traditional economic base of the community has gradually changed due to forest regulations, changing land use, market expansion and new employment opportunities. These developments are particularly visible in the Pechiparai region, where increased interaction with markets, government institutions and modern development has contributed to the transition from a predominantly forest-dependent way of life towards a more diversified socio-economic pattern.

Traditional Faith and Religious Practices

Traditional Kani religious life was closely connected with the natural environment. Mountains, forests, particular places and supernatural beings formed part of a religious landscape in which the human community was understood to exist within nature rather than independently of it. Earlier descriptions record worship of Hindu deities alongside localized hill and forest deities. The Madras Government Museum publication specifically mentions worship associated with Siva, Parvathi and Vishnu as well as Satan or a hill deity, forest deities and Madan. It also records the importance of a protective or guardian deity associated with the settlement.Such evidence suggests that Kani religious life historically contained multiple layers rather than a single, uniform system. Elements recognizable as Hindu worship existed alongside localized beliefs associated with hills, forests, ancestors and supernatural forces. It is therefore more appropriate to understand Kani religion as a dynamic indigenous religious world that interacted with the wider religious environment of southern India.

Nature was not simply an economic resource in this belief system. Forests provided food and medicine but also occupied a cultural and spiritual position. Hunting and forest gathering could be associated with ritual preparation and offerings. The relationship between ecological knowledge and religious belief is also visible in traditional healing. Medicinal knowledge was transmitted within the community and often accompanied by understandings of illness and ritual protection. Traditional ritual practices also included healing performances. The *Chattruppattu* tradition is particularly significant because it combines healing, ritual, oral poetry and musical performance. The ritual specialist and performers occupy an important role in maintaining this cultural knowledge. Such traditions show how religion functioned as a social institution rather than merely as personal belief. Ritual created collective participation and reinforced relationships among community members.The available literature also indicates the importance of festivals and seasonal celebrations. Kani communities have participated in festivals that have become widespread in the wider Tamil and Malayalam cultural environment. Earlier descriptions and later regional studies mention celebrations connected with festivals such as Onam, Deepavali and Karthigai, along with localized forms of worship. This illustrates that Kani religious culture has never been completely isolated from surrounding society. The Historical sources should not be treated as direct descriptions of contemporary Kani life. Colonial ethnographies, government publications and later studies were produced at different periods and in different locations. They can establish that certain practices were documented, but they cannot automatically demonstrate that the same practices remain unchanged in present-day Thiruvattar. This distinction is essential when studying cultural change.

Traditional Cultural Practices

Traditional Kani cultural practices developed around the forest environment, kinship and collective life. Agriculture, forest gathering and knowledge of plants formed important parts of their traditional livelihood, with medicinal knowledge remaining one of the best-documented aspects of Kani culture. Research in the Pechiparai Hills has recorded 138 medicinal plant species associated with

Kani knowledge, demonstrating the depth of their relationship with the natural environment. Food practices also reflected this relationship, with tubers, wild plants, forest produce and locally cultivated foods forming part of the traditional diet. However, increasing market access has introduced commercially produced foods. Housing has similarly changed from structures adapted to the hill environment to houses using modern materials as roads, electricity and government development programmes have expanded. Marriage, family life and dress have also undergone changes due to education, legal awareness, improved communication and interaction with wider society. While traditional customs may no longer be followed uniformly, festivals, kinship networks, food traditions and community gatherings continue to provide important expressions of cultural identity.

Oral traditions are another important but vulnerable aspect of Kani cultural heritage. Songs, stories, plant knowledge, rituals and traditional practices were traditionally transmitted from elders to younger generations through observation and participation. Increasing involvement in formal education, employment and life outside the settlements has reduced some opportunities for this intergenerational transmission. As a result, certain traditional forms of knowledge may gradually become less familiar to younger members. At the same time, modern communication technologies offer new possibilities for recording and preserving oral traditions, medicinal knowledge, cultural practices and community memories. Technology therefore has a dual role: it can contribute to the weakening of traditional transmission while also providing valuable opportunities for cultural documentation and preservation.

Changing Faith and Religious Practices

One of the significant transformations in Kani religious life is the increasing interaction between indigenous beliefs and the wider religious practices of neighbouring communities. Historically, Kani religious life included Hindu deities along with localized beliefs associated with hills, forests, ancestors and supernatural powers. In the contemporary period, temple-centred worship, standardized Hindu rituals and common regional festivals have become more visible. However, this does not necessarily indicate the complete disappearance of indigenous beliefs. Instead, religious change often occurs through incorporation, with community members participating in wider religious practices while continuing to maintain particular beliefs connected with local sacred places, healing and protective powers. Thus, Kani religious change can be understood as a process of adaptation and layering rather than complete replacement.

The connection between religion, place and healing has also undergone transformation. As Kani settlements gain better access to roads, schools, electricity, hospitals and government institutions, traditional sacred landscapes and healing practices are increasingly influenced by modern institutions. Traditional medicinal knowledge continues to hold importance, but hospital-based treatment and modern medicines have become more accessible. Similarly, traditional ritual performances face challenges as younger generations pursue education and employment outside the settlements, reducing opportunities for learning from ritual specialists. Festivals, however, continue to provide occasions for community

gathering, although their rituals may become shorter or influenced by practices of neighbouring populations. These changes demonstrate that Kani religious traditions continue to survive through selective adaptation and changing forms of participation.

Changing Socio-Cultural Practices

Education is one of the strongest forces influencing contemporary Kani life. Formal schooling has expanded the range of opportunities available to younger members of the community. Education has encouraged greater interaction with institutions outside the settlement and has created aspirations for employment beyond traditional forest-based occupations. This development should not be treated as a cultural threat in itself. Education can also strengthen awareness of legal rights, political participation, health, environmental protection and the value of cultural heritage.Occupation has undergone a similar transformation. Traditional dependence on agriculture and forest products has been supplemented by wage labour, government employment, small-scale business and other occupations. The changing occupational structure is significant because livelihood and culture were historically closely related. When a person spends less time in the forest, opportunities to learn plant identification, hunting knowledge, traditional food collection and ecological practices may also decrease.

The Pechiparai region provides an important illustration. Research on the reservoir area has documented the historical dependence of Kani communities on agriculture and forest resources while also recording their changing relationship with fishing and resource rights. This demonstrates that livelihood change is connected with larger questions of state regulation, economic opportunity and access to natural resources.Housing and infrastructure have also changed. Electrification, improved roads, transportation and access to public services have reduced the physical isolation of many settlements. The Kanyakumari District administration records infrastructure programmes specifically directed towards tribal hamlets in the Western Ghats. These developments can improve living conditions while simultaneously increasing exposure to external cultural influences.Food habits are another area of visible transformation. Market access makes rice, packaged foods, cooking oils, snacks and other commercial products more readily available. At the same time, traditional tubers and locally known foods continue to be remembered and, in some cases, prepared during family events. Recent research on traditional food knowledge among tribal women in Tamil Nadu indicates that Kani communities in Pechiparai have experienced a decline in certain traditional food practices in the context of greater market exposure, even though elders continue to transmit knowledge about particular foods.

Dress and communication patterns have changed even more rapidly. Mobile phones and social media have created forms of communication that were unavailable to earlier generations. Young people can maintain contact with relatives outside the settlement and participate in wider social networks. This creates a new cultural space in which Kani identity can be expressed alongside broader popular culture. Healthcare has also undergone major change. Earlier dependence on forest-based medicinal knowledge has increasingly been complemented by access to hospitals and modern medicine.

Research demonstrates that traditional medicinal knowledge remains extensive, but contemporary healthcare has altered the circumstances in which such knowledge is used. The coexistence of traditional and modern healthcare illustrates the broader pattern of selective adaptation.

Factors Responsible for Cultural Change

Cultural transformation among the Kani is the result of several interconnected processes rather than one single cause. Education has increased interaction with wider society and has influenced occupational aspirations, marriage practices and attitudes towards traditional customs. Modernization has brought changes in housing, clothing, food, transport and communication. Government welfare programmes have also contributed significantly. Tribal welfare policies, educational initiatives, infrastructure development, healthcare and social security have altered everyday life. The state is therefore not merely an external administrative authority; it has become an important institution in the contemporary social experience of the Kani. The Kanyakumari District administration's tribal welfare initiatives illustrate the continuing institutional attention directed towards Kani settlements.

Economic change is another major factor. Traditional livelihoods dependent upon forests are affected by changes in forest governance, market conditions and employment opportunities. Access to wage labour and markets provides new sources of income but can reduce dependence on traditional occupations. The transformation of livelihood consequently has cultural consequences. Migration and mobility also influence cultural practices. Younger people may travel to nearby towns for education, employment, healthcare or administrative purposes. Such mobility increases exposure to wider social practices and may contribute to changes in language, dress, food and religious behaviour.Transportation has reduced geographical isolation. Roads and public transport facilitate access to schools, markets, hospitals and government offices. Improved connectivity is undoubtedly important for social development, but it also increases the circulation of cultural practices between Kani settlements and neighbouring communities.

Digital technology has introduced a particularly new dimension. Television, smartphones, internet access and social media expose younger generations to national and global cultural forms. Yet digital communication can also be used for cultural preservation. Oral histories, songs, traditional knowledge and community events can potentially be recorded and archived with the consent and participation of community members. Interaction with neighbouring communities has historically influenced Kani cultural life and this process continues. Kani settlements are not completely isolated social spaces. Contact with Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking populations, agricultural communities, religious institutions, markets and government agencies creates continuous cultural exchange.

Cultural Continuity and Adaptation

The most useful way to understand contemporary Kani culture is through the concept of adaptation. Cultural identity does not require every traditional practice to remain unchanged. Communities continually reinterpret their traditions in response to economic, political and social circumstances. The Kani community

demonstrates this process in several ways. The continued significance of traditional medicinal knowledge indicates cultural continuity, while the use of hospitals indicates adaptation. Participation in wider religious festivals can occur alongside local religious beliefs. Modern education can create new occupations without necessarily eliminating kinship identity. Similarly, smartphones and social media can introduce external cultural influences while also helping families maintain connections across settlements. This perspective also avoids romanticizing the past. Some traditional practices were associated with material hardship, geographical isolation and limited access to healthcare and education. Improvements in infrastructure, schooling and medical facilities can therefore represent positive changes in the everyday lives of community members. Cultural preservation should not mean preventing communities from accessing development.

The development should not require cultural uniformity. The challenge is to ensure that modernization does not unintentionally erase forms of knowledge that remain meaningful to the community. Traditional ecological knowledge, oral history, medicinal knowledge, ritual songs and local food practices have historical and cultural value. Their preservation should therefore be based on community participation rather than external attempts to freeze Kani culture in an imagined traditional form.The idea of cultural adaptation also places agency with the Kani themselves. Rather than viewing them simply as recipients of modernization, it is more appropriate to recognize their ability to select, reject and reinterpret outside influences. Cultural change is therefore an active process.

Challenges to Cultural Preservation

The greatest challenge to Kani cultural preservation is the weakening of intergenerational transmission. Oral knowledge exists through people. If elders possessing knowledge of plants, songs, rituals, stories or traditional food practices are not able to transmit that knowledge to younger generations, parts of the cultural archive may become difficult to recover. Traditional medicinal knowledge requires particular attention. Studies from Pechiparai and other Kani areas demonstrate its considerable richness. However, documenting knowledge without protecting the interests and intellectual rights of the community can create ethical problems. Preservation should therefore involve informed community participation and appropriate recognition of knowledge holders.

Language-related practices also require consideration. The Kani linguistic tradition exists within a Tamil-Malayalam contact environment. Increasing exposure to standard Tamil, Malayalam and English through education, employment and media may influence everyday speech. Language change is normal, but the loss of distinctive vocabulary, oral narratives and ritual terminology can reduce access to cultural memory. Traditional performance traditions may face similar challenges. Ritual songs and performances require collective participation and specialized knowledge. If ritual specialists become fewer, the cultural context supporting the performance can weaken. Documentation through audio, video and written records may be useful, provided that communities decide what knowledge can be recorded, shared or restricted.

Food heritage is another area of concern. The growing dependence on

market foods can reduce familiarity with traditional ingredients and preparation techniques. Nevertheless, the survival of selected foods during celebrations indicates that food can become an important vehicle of cultural memory.The preservation of Kani culture should therefore not be reduced to museum-style preservation. A living culture must remain capable of adapting. The aim should be to preserve knowledge, memory and identity while allowing community members to determine how these elements should function in contemporary life.

CONCLUSION

The changing faith and cultural practices of the Kani tribes of Thiruvattar Taluk reflect a continuing interaction between tradition and modernity. Their historical connection with forests, indigenous medicinal knowledge, oral traditions, localized beliefs and customary practices remains important, even as education, healthcare, government welfare programmes, markets, migration, improved transport and digital communication influence everyday life. Religious practices increasingly interact with wider Hindu traditions, while traditional medicine and food practices continue alongside modern alternatives. Thus, Kani culture should not be understood simply as disappearing. Instead, it is undergoing selective transformation in which some traditions are retained, others are adapted and certain practices face decline. Cultural preservation should therefore focus on documenting and transmitting valuable knowledge while allowing the Kani community to determine how its traditions can continue within contemporary society. The Kani experience ultimately demonstrates that cultural identity can remain meaningful through adaptation, continuity and connection with historical memory and the natural environment.

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FORGOTTEN WATERWAY: REASSESSING THE AVM CANAL AS A CORRIDOR FOR INLAND TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The Anantha Victoria Marthanda Canal, popularly known as the AVM Canal, was one of the least discussed yet historically significant water bodies of southern Travancore. This Canal was conceived as a water link between Thiruvananthapuram and Kanniyakumari districts, two ends of the then Travancore kingdom. The AVM Canal was an infrastructure that acted as the water-based connectivity for the entire of Travancore kingdom. It was literally a golden project, meant to link about 20 coastal villages, like Pozhiyoor, Kollemcode, Marthandanthurai, Colachel, Chinnathurai, Thoothoor, Thengapattianam, Mandaikkadu, etc. The main aim of AVM canal was to make transportation of goods and people by water easier, help farmers with irrigation, and give a boost to fishing communities who were depended on the coast for their livelihood. Even though the canal was never completed the way it was originally planned, it still ended up serving that purpose for a long time. But today the canal was in a dilapidated condition due to years of neglect and the discharge of untreated sewage and industrial effluents in it. The canal which once carried goods, people and their daily life was now shrinking day by day to a position of drainage to the local inhabitants. The main aim of this article is to revisit the history of the age-old AVM Canal and examine its present ecological and administrative condition in Kanniyakumari district, such that it explores the untapped potential of AVM Canal as a corridor for inland tourism and sustainable, low-carbon transportation in Kanniyakumari district.

Key Words: *AVM Canal, Inland waterway, Sustainable transportation, Kanniyakumari heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

Transport is the basic infrastructure of economic development, indispensable to the welfare of all countries. Rail, road, water, air and pipelines constitute the major modes of transport today. Inland water transport has been regarded as the first transportation system in the world from time immemorial. It is also the cheapest mode known ever since ancient times.[1] The Travancore kingdom had natural existence of a large number of rivers and backwaters parallel to the coast at right angles.[2] The idea of connecting the backwaters erstwhile Travancore by canals was taken up by Dewan Venkita Rao. This became the starting point of AVM Canal which later played a significant role in the socio-economic, political and marine history of Travancore. This waterway, served as a major inland transportation route connecting the coastal areas of South Kerala and present-day Kanyakumari district. The construction of AVM Canal had significant contributions to the Travancore state. It gave employment opportunities like fishing and trading, improved the livelihood and connectivity for rural areas. The canal also preserved the cultural heritage and historical significance, showcasing the regions rich history. It had long term benefits, diversifying state revenue streams and fostering sustainable development. The total length of the AVM canal is approximately 86kms but it is broken down into many sections. The

Poovar to Colachel section of the AVM Canal was originally 27 kms but now, it was reduced to 11 kms, of which roughly 3 kilometres lie in Kerala and the remaining 8 kilometres lie within present day Kanniyakumari district.[3] The AVM Canal which was once a symbol of cultural heritage and economic boon to the local population has now been partially extinct in Kanniyakumari district. Bringing that 'golden waterway' back would give Kanniyakumari district something genuinely its own piece of local history, restored, on the district's own terms, for the district's own people. This article takes a fresh look at that downward spiral, explores what the canal looks like now in Kanniyakumari district, and the possibilities it may hold, if provided sufficient administrative commitment and a renewed sense of social responsibility.

Major Sources And Methodology

There was only a very little written information about the AVM Canal on its own terms, and almost nothing written from Kanniyakumari's side. Three broad categories of source material inform this study. The first is administrative and documentary which includes the nineteenth-century Travancore state records referenced in later gazetteers and waterway listings, which establish the date of conception, the reigning sovereign under whom the project was inaugurated. The second is standard secondary literatures on Travancore's administrative history, specifically focused on the Nanjilnadu taluks that became Kanniyakumari district in 1956. The third is present-day materials like the districts newspaper and news-portal coverage and Kanniyakumari districts own official records, which offers the clearest available window into current policy thinking about inland waterways in the region.

Methodologically, the paper combines documentary reconstruction with a comparative and policy-oriented reading. Only a very little dedicated scholarship exists on the AVM Canal specific to Kanniyakumari district. So, the approach here is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing on economic history to understand the canal's role in coastal trade, on infrastructure and transport studies to understand its decline relative to road and rail, and on heritage and tourism studies to assess its revival potential.

Making Of The Avm Canal

The AVM Canal, one of the historical monuments of Kanniyakumari district has a rich history, dating back to 1860. It was conceived during the reign of Uthradam Thirunal Marthandavarma, Maharaja of the Travancore state.[4] AVM project was read as a continuation of an established royal idiom in which control of water was simultaneously an agricultural, commercial, and symbolic act of governance, concerned with connecting produce to port.[5] Of the title AVM, 'A' stands for the Travancore deity Anandapadmanabha swamy who was called Ananda, 'V' stands for the name of the British queen Victoria whose representation was there in Travancore and 'M' stands for the then Travancore king Marthandavarma. The construction work of the Canal was undertaken in two phases.

In the first phase only a short link of communication was completed. By the year 1860, the canal between Pozhiyoor and Colachel was completed. By this canal salt from Manakudi and rice from Nanjilnadu easily reached the Colachel port do that easily transported to other areas. In the second phase efforts were taken to extend the canal up to Kanniyakumari, but it was never

completed. In 1860, Ramavarma succeeded Uthradam Thirunal Marthandavarma, and revived the construction work of the Canal in 1863. By 1864 a further length of 10 miles between Poovar and Thengapattianam was completed. Subsequently the canal was cut up to Colachel and Mandaikkadu temple complex. In 1867 the project was put on hold due to various reasons. At that time the Varkala canal work of Kerala had started and the Travancore Government has stopped the AVM canal work. However, the Travancore government realized the need and importance of this canal and the reach between Poovar and Colachel was reportedly completed by 1867.[6]

Advantages Of Avm Canal

For about hundred years, the finished parts of the canal were that working infrastructure that Travancore kingdoms coastal households actually relied on. Raising of sea level was a major issue which led to the salination of coastal aquifers, affecting agriculture made the coastal villages unfit for survival. So, the Travancore King Marthandavarma constructed the AVM canal which separated the sea and land of the coastal villages. The AVM canal not only acted as a link between the coastal villages, it also connected the major rivers in Kanniyakumari district including Thamiraparani, Valliyar, Ponayar, Pazhayar and Pambar and also links with other water reservoirs like Thengapattianam Lake, Manakudi Lake, Pechiparai Reservoir, Perunchani Reservoir and Ariyankavu Reservoir etc. Due to these connections during floods, the overflowing water is evenly distributed to the nearby areas, so that flooding could be effectively controlled.[7] At the same time during the time of droughts, water from various Reservoirs easily reaches the irrigation fields though the canal. The AVM canals shoreline and aquatic ecosystem also enhanced the fresh water fishing opportunities in Travancore kingdom.[8] During 1860's the road, rail and air transports were not much developed at this time the AVM canal was constructed which become the most important means of transportation and communication. The AVM Canal was a waterway parallel to the coastal highway. So that it also served as a conveyance route for tourist attractions among the coast.

Decline Of The Avm Canal And Its Present Condition

Nothing on sudden killed the canal. Decline of the AVM canal in Kanniyakumari district was due to the slow and steady arrival of better roads. After independence, Nagercoil grew into a proper town and bus routes began reaching villages that had once depended entirely on boats. The canal was largely abandoned after the 1956 reorganisation of states, when the Nanjilnadu taluks, carved out of Travancore and Cochin joined to Madras State to form what would become Kanniyakumari district.[9] Without regular dredging or embankment repair, the stretches running through Kanniyakumari's own villages silted up, narrowed, and were quietly occupied over by adjoining landowners.

The present condition of the AVM canal is a shock and shame to the administration and the inhabitants of the district. Now it serves as a drainage canal for the people of the locality, soak pit to coir manufactures, swimming pool to the pigs of the local settlements and a nursery for mosquitoes.[10] Already a better portion of the canal has been taken away by encroachment. The canal is completely polluted and no one dares to have a bath in this Canal. It is choked with aquatic

Macrophytes, favoring the propagation of mosquito larvae. The weeds like water hyacinth flourish well because of the nutrients added by the mixing up of the domestic sewage in the canal water.[11] In some places like Enayam and Mullurthurai, the canal has completely disappeared due to wanton encroachment. This is being done by some influential people with the help of revenue officials. Most of the encroached areas are converted into coconut gardens. They also manage to get the patta for cultivated lands. In the Mandaikkadu region the coconut husk retting operation is going on near the Canal bank, in some places like Neerodi and Kollemcode the coconut husk retting takes place in the canal itself. Once served as an excellent ground water replenisher, the canal has now become a serious threat to public health and hygiene. Obnoxious odour, unsightly appearance and unpalatable taste of water are common in the retting zone of the canal, due to drastic release of Hydrogen Sulphide. This also resulted in drastic fall in biodiversity and spread of nuisance flora, rendering the system unfit for public use. AVM Canal which was once a blessing and economic boon to the local population for a century has now turned out to be a bane to the community. The following picture gives a clear representation of how the AVM Canal has been polluted in Kanniyakumari district.

Revival Prospects And Steps Taken By The Government

Kanyakumari district, the lands' end of India by nature, is a gifted area.[12] It was blessed with innumerable ponds for storing water for its multi-use. Freshwater will be a boon to the coastal villages if the Canal is renovated.[13] The estimated fresh water supply of AVM Canal is 1000 MLD (Million Liters per Day), this could fulfill the drinking water needs of about 1 million people. The AVM canal if revived and extended up to Kanniyakumari will save the coastal aquifers from salination. The canal act as a natural filter to the saline water and improves the quality of water. The viability of the canal will fulfill a number of needs of fisher folks like restoration of transportation. Traffic congestion is one of the major problems in highly populated area like Kanniyakumari. Idling of the vehicles emit harmful emissions and the concentration of emissions increases with the number of vehicles. Traffic congestion leads to increased time and costs and on the other hand reduces accessibility. It also increases the risk of road accidents. All these could be avoided with the revival of AVM Canal. The AVM Canal is designed with the aim to minimize traffic congestions, promoting efficient and sustainable transportation. If the canal got revival the local people need not waste their precious time on traffic blocks. Eventually, there is a possibility to extend the canal from Kanyakumari to Tuticorin and Kayalpattinam, where the Nellai Thamiraparani River meets the sea. The Second Five-Year Plan also mentions the extent to which the scheme can be re-implemented. There are proposals to examine how best this Inland water way can be developed.

Considering all the positive prospects, the government of Tamil Nadu have taken several measures for the revival of AVM canal. The former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu J. Jayalalitha was the one who considered the revival of AVM canal.[14] The National Water Ways act of 2016 declared AVM canal as the part of 3rd National Waterway among the 13 National Waterways in India. The Inland Waterways Authority of India lists the route among the national waterways still awaiting

substantial development, reflecting the gap between statutory designation and physical realisation that has characterised much of the canal's history.[15] This establishment created greater potential for development of Kanniyakumari district. But it all went into lumbo after the death of Jayalalitha on 5th Dec 2016. In 2016, about 1,212 crores of money was allotted to deepen, strengthen and construct bridges over all the canals in Tamil Nadu including the AVM Canal. Though revival measures of AVM Canal took place since 2016, all the efforts are in vain due the political confusions.

In 2023 a discussion took place about AVM canal in legislature. Accordingly, Rs.2.6 crores are allotted for the Detailed Project Report (DPR) for 9 canals in Tamil Nadu, and one among it is AVM. In 2024, P.N. Sreedar Collector of Kanniyakumari District personally inspected the AVM Canal from Colachel to Neerodi along with Sub-Collector Kaushik, Special District Revenue Officer (National Highway-Land Survey) Revathi and others. They officially reported that the Canal has not been dredged for many years and the water is stagnant and there is a lot of algae. In February 2025, the District Collector Tmt. R. Alagumeena, also personally inspected the AVM Canal.[16] Such inspections, however, need to be followed by sustained desilting, encroachment removal and pollution-control measures. Any how single site visit, however well-intentioned, cannot undo more than a century of accumulated neglect.

Heritage Conservation And Future Possibilities

Bringing the canal back is not only a matter of dredging and embankments, it is also a matter of Kanniyakumari claiming a piece of its own heritage that it has, for decades, simply let go quiet. Done properly, reviving the canal would not just add one more stop to Kanniyakumari's tourist map but would hand back the district's own coastal villages a working relationship with a piece of infrastructure that was genuinely theirs. It would also give the visitors another reason to see Kanniyakumari as more than a sunrise and a photograph. In order to achieve this a few practical things would need to fall into one place. An action committee AVM canal should be appointed to probe out the possibilities of the canals revival and make a viable proposal. This committee must include Constitute a joint Tamil Nadu–Kerala task force, working with the Inland Waterways Authority of India, eminent environmentalists, people's representative civic body leaders and NGOs.

- AVM Canal should be extensively recut from Thengapattianam and laid up to Kanniyakumari (Manakudi). This should take place as a tourism development project of the central government and the central government should establish boating on canal for tourism with the help of shipping department. The district administration should strictly enforce Coastal Regulation Zone norms around sand-mining operations near the canal, and require mining agencies to restore sand dunes and ridges that serve as natural protective barriers for the canal and adjoining farmland. Public awareness campaign is necessary in order to keep the canal clean and useful to the public. Alternative measures for garbage disposal (like compost manure pits), avoiding open defecation and prevention of retting effluent inlets into the canal are possible only by mass movements.

CONCLUSION

The AVM Canal is a small waterway carrying an outsized history. Conceived

with royal ambition in 1860 and inaugurated with a golden spade, it has spent the better part of a century quietly slipping into irrelevance, reduced today to a polluted, silted and encroached channel along the Kanniyakumari coast. Yet its formal status as National Waterway 13, its compact and manageable length, and the renewed regional momentum around inland waterway revival in neighbouring Kerala together suggest that this neglect is not irreversible. The canal is not merely seen as an engineering asset to be dredged and gazetted, but as a piece of living coastal heritage that once served, and could again serve, the ordinary people who live along its banks. Restoring the AVM Canal, in the end, is not just about reviving a waterway; it is about honouring a promise the coast was made more than a century. It is quite unfortunate to see the failure of the government to think about the renovation of the AVM canal while it relentlessly speaks about the promotion of tourism and protection of environment. If it is renovated properly, it can be used for the easy and safety transportation of men and materials at a lesser cost. Its renovation will promote tourism by making Kanniyakumari district a first-rate tourist center. Free flow of freshwater in the canal after deepening and widening would improve the health and hygiene of the people and also widen the scope of fish cultivation. This piece of work may keep the groundwater position of the adjacent villages so sound to find a permanent solution to drinking water problem of Kanniyakumari district. Taking the cultural, economic and social benefits of the scheme into consideration once again the people of the district as a whole are anxiously looking forward to the revival of the scheme. The time at which their ambition is going to be cherished is a question of bigger dimension.

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HERITAGE, MEMORY, AND RITUAL: THE HISTORICAL FESTIVALS OF KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari District, occupying the southernmost littoral apex of peninsular India where the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal converge, represents a dynamic geographic and cultural crossroad in South Asian history. For centuries integrated within the agrarian and political ecology of the ancient Ay kingdom, the medieval Venad principality, and subsequently the princely state of Travancore prior to the 1956 linguistic reorganization of states, the territory constitutes an exceptional zone of cultural synthesis bridging Tamil and Malayali civilizational idioms. This paper investigates the historical festivals of Kanniyakumari through the conceptual triad of heritage, collective memory, and ritual performance. Focusing on primary ceremonial traditions—the Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple Margazhi Ratholsavam, the Mandaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Kodai, the annual trans-border Navaratri Procession from Padmanabhapuram Palace, and the maritime festal traditions of coastal Catholic communities centered around Kottar and Kanyakumari town—the study examines how ritual practices serve as commemorative vessels that preserve socio-political lineages, spatial allegiances, and intangible cultural memories across centuries. Utilizing historiographical evidence, epigraphical contexts, and ritual analysis, the paper demonstrates how the performative enactment of festivals maintains communal solidarity, negotiates historical caste and state power dynamics, and resists the flattening forces of modern administrative demarcation.

Keywords: Kanniyakumari, Intangible Heritage, Collective Memory, Ritual Studies, Travancore State, Suchindram Temple, Mandaikadu Kodai, Syncretism, Processional Culture.

INTRODUCTION:

The Geopolitical And Sacred Landscape Of The Southern Cape

The study of festivals within regional South Asian historiography has increasingly moved beyond viewing religious celebrations merely as cyclic devotional expressions or recurring dates upon a liturgical calendar. Contemporary historical and anthropological scholarship recognizes festivals as complex performative arenas where historical memory, political legitimation, territorial hegemony, and communal identity are ritually enacted, contested, and reproduced. Located at the Land's End of the Indian subcontinent, Kanniyakumari presents an extraordinary case study for examining the intersection of physical geography, dynastic state formation, and ritual continuity.

Historically designated as Kanya Muna or Cape Comorin in classical navigation literature and Greco-Roman travel accounts like the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, the district occupies an ecological landscape encompassing three distinct traditional eco-zones: the littoral fishing coasts (*Neythal*), the fertile alluvial paddy plains fed by the Thamirabarani and Pazhayar river basins (*Marutham*), and the forested foothills of the southern Western Ghats (*Kurinji*). This

environmental diversity corresponds directly to the district's complex political history. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, the territory formed the core southern agrarian base of the Venad dynasty, whose rulers later expanded their domain into the Kingdom of Travancore under the foundational leadership of Maharaja Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma during the eighteenth century.

Consequently, the socio-religious institutions of Kanniyakumari absorbed and integrated two distinct cultural currents: the classical Tamil Saivite and Vaishnavite traditions of the Coromandel and Pandya plains, and the distinctive Kerala Tantric ritual models, matrilineal social structures, and Malayalam administrative systems of the Malabar and Travancore realms. When the States Reorganization Act of 1956 transferred the four southern taluks of Agastheeswaram, Thovalai, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode from the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State to Madras State (subsequently Tamil Nadu), it established a modern political boundary across an ancient cultural continuum. The historical festivals of Kanniyakumari continue to exist as living archives of this composite heritage. They provide an institutional apparatus through which communities perform rituals that remember pre-modern territorial unities, commemorate royal charters, and preserve artistic, musical, and folk traditions that would otherwise disappear under modern administrative standardization.

Theoretical Framework: Ritual, Embodied Memory, and Intangible Heritage

To systematically analyze the historical festivals of Kanniyakumari, this inquiry synthesizes three distinct theoretical paradigms from sociology, performance studies, and heritage theory. The foundational conceptual pillar draws from the theory of collective memory formulated by Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs demonstrated that memory is fundamentally a collective, socially situated phenomenon that requires concrete physical spaces—what he termed social frameworks—to endure across generations. In the context of Kanniyakumari, the physical environment itself functions as a sacred mnemonic. The confluence of the three seas at Triveni Sangamam, the granite boulders associated with the penance of the virgin goddess Kanya, and the specific processional roads of medieval temple settlements serve as spatial anchor points where historical and mythical memory are continually reenacted.

Complementing this spatial perspective is Paul Connerton’s seminal work on how societies remember through incorporating practices. Connerton argues that collective historical memory is preserved far more effectively through non-inscriptional, embodied bodily performances—such as rhythmic marching, devotional singing, public mourning, fasting, and physical labor during festivals—than through written historical documents alone. In Kanniyakumari's festivals, the bodily participation of thousands of devotees in pulling colossal wooden chariots, carrying heavy Kavadi structures on their shoulders, preparing open-hearth Pongala on coastal sands, or marching across state lines with ceremonial weapons constitutes an embodied transmission of ancestral vows and historical relationships. The physical exertion demanded by these rituals acts as a somatic inscription, ensuring that the participants do not merely recall their past intellectually, but experience it kinesthetically.

Furthermore, within the framework of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, festivals represent the ultimate synthesis of performing arts, oral traditions, social practices, rituals, festive events, and traditional craftsmanship. The temple festival in southern India is an economic and cultural nexus that historically mobilized entire guilds of artisans, including woodcarvers who engineered temple chariots, brass-smiths who cast sacred lamps, master weavers who produced processional canopies, musicians who specialized in the double-reed Nadaswaram and Thavil, and traditional temple percussion ensembles such as Chenda Melam and Panchavadyam. Analyzing festivals through this theoretical triad reveals how the ceremonial events of Kanniyakumari function simultaneously as living heritage, mnemonic performance, and socio-economic institutions that preserve regional identity amidst rapid modernization.

Classical Agamic Synthesis: The Suchindram Thanumalayan Ratholsavam

Among the major inland temple complexes of the district, the Thanumalayan Temple at Suchindram stands as a premier example of architectural grandeur, epigraphical richness, and liturgical syncretism. Situated along the fertile banks of the Pazhayar River, Suchindram holds an exceptional theological position within South Indian Hinduism due to its core worship of the composite deity Thanumalaya, representing the unified presence of Shiva as Thanu, Vishnu as Mal, and Brahma as Ayan. The architectural evolution of the complex reveals successive structural additions patronized by Chola, Pandya, Vijayanagara, Nayaka, and Travancore sovereigns, as documented extensively by K. K. Pillay in his foundational monograph.

The institutional zenith of the temple calendar is the ten-day Margazhi festival, celebrated annually during the months of December and January. The ritual calendar of the festival unfolds through precise canonical stages, commencing with the ritual flag hoisting upon the golden flagstaff, proceeding through nine days of deity circumambulations atop diverse animal mounts, and culminating in the grand chariot festival on the ninth day and the sacred water-bath ritual on the tenth. Each day of the festival highlights a specific aspect of the temple's multifaceted theological identity, combining grand public spectacle with private sanctum rites governed by the strict codes of medieval Tantric manuals.

The Ratholsavam is an extraordinary performative spectacle of civic mobilization and spatial reordering. Three colossal wooden cars, intricately sculpted with hundreds of narrative panels depicting episodes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Skanda Purana, are drawn around the four concentric car streets. The primary and largest chariot, designated for the presiding deity Thanumalayaswamy, weighs dozens of tons and requires the concerted physical labor of thousands of devotees pulling thick coir ropes. Flanking the main chariot are the smaller cars of the goddess Aram Valartha Nayaki and Vinayaka. The movement of these towering wooden structures through the historic settlement transforms the static physical geography of the town into an active cosmological arena.

Historiographically, the Suchindram

Ratholsavam presents a striking intersection of Kerala's high-caste ritual control and Tamil popular participation. While the internal sanctum sanctorum rituals were strictly governed by high-caste Malayali Nambudiri Tantris and Pottis following the Tantrasamucchaya tradition, the external car festival represented a public, cross-caste arena. Royal proclamations from the Travancore administration historically mandated the participation of specific agrarian communities, temple servants, and royal soldiers to pull the chariots. During the car procession, the rigid spatial boundaries of ritual exclusion that historically characterized caste relations in southern Travancore were temporarily suspended in the open street, creating a temporary civic communion centered around the visual display of the sovereign deity traversing his spatial territory.

Folk Roots and Maternal Deities: The Mandaikadu Bhagavati Amman Kodai

In sharp contrast to the elite, Sanskritized, Agamic liturgy of Suchindram, the Mandaikadu Bhagavati Amman Kodai, celebrated during the Tamil month of Masi, exemplifies the enduring power of indigenous Dravidian folk ritualism, maternal goddess traditions, and subaltern pilgrimage networks. Located on the coastal belt near Colachel, the Mandaikadu shrine is popularly designated as the Sabarimala of Women due to the massive congregation of female devotees who undertake rigorous ascetic disciplines prior to participating in the festival.

The primary object of veneration at Mandaikadu is not an anthropomorphic stone sculpture carved according to Agamic iconometry, but a continuously growing natural anthill that has reached several feet in height, decorated with silk vestments and a silver face mask. This aniconic representation directly connects the shrine to archaic pre-Agamic earth and fertility cults, evoking the fierce, protective aspects of the ancient Tamil goddess Kotravai as described in Sangam literature. The physical presence of the anthill serves as a direct link to the subterranean powers of the earth, embodying an indigenous sacred ecology that stands independent of classical temple architecture.

The ten-day Kodai festival incorporates a sequence of distinctive folk rituals that emphasize bodily penance and community solidarity. Devotees observe a forty-one-day period of ritual purification, adopting simplified dietary practices and ascetic dress, before traveling to the shrine carrying the two-compartment pilgrimage cloth bundle containing coconuts, rice, camphor, and ritual ingredients. On the penultimate days of the festival, thousands of women occupy the expansive coastal sand flats surrounding the temple to boil sweetened rice pots using earthenware vessels and dried coconut leaves, an act of ritual communion and agrarian thanksgiving. Observed during the midnight hour of the festival's conclusion, the deeply esoteric Oduku Pooja involves the conveyance of cooked offerings from a designated ritual kitchen to the inner sanctum by temple officiants dressed in traditional red waistcloths, accompanied by complete silence and the extinguishing of general lighting. Throughout the festival nights, traditional bards perform epic narrative ballads utilizing the musical bow, chanting the mytho-historical genealogies of the goddess, local warrior legends, and tales of divine retribution and protection. The Mandaikadu Kodai serves as a crucial historical corridor between southern Kerala and southern Tamil Nadu, as millions of pilgrims from Kerala continue

to undertake the annual pilgrimage, sustaining a community of practice rooted in pre-modern regional mobility.

Royal Memory and Cross-Border Procession: The Navaratri March from Padmanabhapuram

Perhaps the most singular performative preservation of pre-modern political geography anywhere in South Asia is the annual Navaratri Procession that travels from the historical palace complex of Padmanabhapuram in Kanniyakumari District to Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city of Kerala. This ritual journey represents an explicit survival of the royal administrative apparatus of the Travancore Kingdom, transformed into a permanent ritualized commemoration of dynastic sovereignty. Historically, Padmanabhapuram served as the ancient capital of the Venad kingdom. Even after Maharaja Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma shifted the official seat of royal administration to Thiruvananthapuram in 1795 due to strategic and military considerations, the emotional, genealogical, and ritual heart of the dynasty remained anchored in the ancestral palace at Padmanabhapuram. To maintain this sacred lineage, the rulers established the annual ritual practice wherein the family deities of the royal house were conveyed from the old capital to the new capital for the nine-night Navaratri festival.

The processional train carries three sacred icons: Goddess Saraswathi Devi, housed permanently in the private royal chapel inside the wooden palace complex of Padmanabhapuram; Lord Velayudha Perumal, brought from the ancient hill shrine of Kumarakovil mounted atop a grand silver peacock mount; and Goddess Munnuthankanga Devi, conveyed from the Suchindram complex atop an ornamental palanquin. The procedural choreography of the march is deeply embedded in royal protocol. Prior to departure from Padmanabhapuram Palace, the ceremonial royal sword is officially handed over by state archaeological authorities and royal representatives to the processing chief in the grand court hall. The three-day journey along the historic trunk road covers roughly fifty-five kilometers, stopping at traditional royal rest houses and ancient temples along the route. What makes this festival exceptionally profound from the perspective of modern political anthropology is the border ceremony at Kaliyakkavilai. When the processional deities reach the administrative border dividing Tamil Nadu and Kerala, they are received with formal state honors. The armed police detachments of both Tamil Nadu and Kerala present arms, buglers play the state salute, and district administrative officials exchange ceremonial courtesies. This state-level institutional participation confirms that the procession is not merely a sectarian march, but an officially recognized diplomatic ceremony that ritually reconstitutes the pre-modern integrity of the Travancore socio-political space.

Maritime Syncretism and Catholic Festal Traditions of the Coast

Any comprehensive assessment of the festive heritage of Kanniyakumari must address the profound transformation of its extensive coastal fringe following the sixteenth-century arrival of Portuguese maritime power and the missionary activities of the Society of Jesus, led by St. Francis Xavier among the indigenous fishing communities of the Paravars and Mukkuvars. Rather than entirely erasing existing Dravidian aesthetic models and festive structures, the newly converted Catholic communities synthesized Christian sacred history with indigenous South Indian temple festival

architecture. This syncretic process is dramatically visible in two premier coastal festive centers: the Cathedral of St. Francis Xavier at Kottar and the Shrine of Our Lady of Ransom in Kanyakumari town. The annual ten-day feast at Kottar, celebrated between November and December, follows an architectural and liturgical structure that directly mirrors the classical Hindu temple festival calendar. The celebrations commence with the ceremonial blessing and hoisting of the sacred flag upon a tall mast, proceed through nightly processions accompanied by traditional percussion ensembles, and feature the fulfillment of physical vows including the offering of miniature metal anatomical models and ceremonial sea vessels. At both Kottar and Kanyakumari town, the primary visual climax of the feast is the public street circumambulation of the Chapparams, which are massive, multi-tiered wooden wheeled cars intricately carved and illuminated by thousands of electric lamps, carrying golden statues of the saints and the Virgin Mary. Devotees pull these massive chariots through the coastal streets with physical gestures, devotional shouting, and collective vows identical to those seen at Suchindram or Mandaikadu. Furthermore, the economic life of the maritime community is ritually integrated into the festival, as fishermen dedicate their entire first catch after the flag-hoisting directly to the maintenance of the shrine. This shared festive grammar demonstrates that the coastal populations of Kanniyakumari preserved an integrated regional aesthetic and ritual methodology for communicating with the sacred realm regardless of theological distinctions.

Socio-Cultural Transitions and Contemporary Challenges

In the contemporary era, the historical festivals of Kanniyakumari navigate a complex matrix of socio-economic pressures, state interventions, identity politics, and environmental challenges that alter their structural dynamics. The transformation of the socio-legal landscape since the mid-twentieth century has fundamentally altered traditional festival patronage. The administration of major historic temples has transitioned from royal household oversight to modern state regulatory bodies, notably the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu and the Kanyakumari Devaswom Board. While this transition modernized accounting practices and dismantled historic caste exclusions, it also introduced bureaucratic friction regarding hereditary priesthood rights, traditional ritual honors, and funding allocations for complex multi-day ceremonies.

Simultaneously, the physical environments that sustain these festivals are experiencing severe ecological and urban stress. The coastal convergence zone at Kanyakumari town and the beaches of Mandaikadu suffer from rapid coastal erosion, plastic pollution from mass tourist influxes, and unauthorized urban constructions that encroach upon historical processional pathways. The sacred temple tanks connected to the Suchindram and Kanyakumari shrines face siltation and urban runoff, threatening the conduct of the traditional float festivals. These spatial disruptions alter the physical pathways through which collective memory has been enacted for centuries, forcing communities to adapt traditional processional routes to modern municipal constraints. Culturally, the intangible artisanal heritage that sustains these festivals is increasingly precarious. The master woodcarvers capable of engineering forty-foot temple cars without iron nails, the specialized hereditary

lineages that cast bronze mounts, and the traditional bards who perform the multi-night Villu Pattu epics are rapidly dwindling due to a lack of economic incentives for younger generations. The replacement of acoustic traditional ensembles such as Panchavadyam and Nadaswaram with digitized sound amplifiers during processions further alters the auditory landscape that historically defined the phenomenological experience of the sacred. Without deliberate institutional interventions to protect these traditional craft guilds, the material and sensory dimensions of Kanniyakumari's festive heritage risk permanent impoverishment.

CONCLUSION:

Safeguarding the Intangible Heritage of the Southern Cape

The historical festivals of Kanniyakumari are far more than seasonal religious assemblies; they are dynamic, living archives that preserve the historical, artistic, and social memory of peninsular India's southern frontier. Through the classical Agamic majesty of Suchindram's Ratholsavam, the primal maternal devotion and trans-border pilgrimage circuits of Mandaikadu, the living sovereign geography of the Navaratri Procession, and the syncretic pageantry of coastal Catholic feasts, Kanniyakumari demonstrates an exceptional ability to maintain cultural continuity across centuries of political, linguistic, and religious transformations. Safeguarding this multifaceted heritage requires a holistic approach that connects regional historiography with active preservation policy. Academic institutions must prioritize the systematic audio-visual archiving of vanishing oral performance traditions, regional ballad variations, temple folk liturgies, and artisanal construction techniques. Furthermore, environmental authorities must enforce rigorous protection over sacred processional routes, beach congregation spaces, and temple tank watersheds from commercial overdevelopment. Direct institutional patronage and economic security must also be extended to hereditary craftspersons, musicians, and performers whose labor sustains the material culture of festivals. Continued institutional collaboration between the state governments of Tamil Nadu and Kerala remains vital to protect the historic, cross-border ceremonial routes that maintain shared regional identity. By recognizing the historical festivals of Kanniyakumari as indispensable components of India's intangible cultural heritage, scholars, administrators, and local communities can ensure that the rich collective memory encoded at this geographic crossroad continues to thrive for generations to come.

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BREAKING GENDER BARRIERS: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN KALARIPAYATTU IN KERALA

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ABSTRACT

Kalaripayattu, the 3000-year-old martial art of Kerala, was long perceived as a male-dominated discipline rooted in warrior tradition. Over the past three decades, women in Kerala have actively reclaimed this heritage, transforming Kalari from a space of exclusion to one of empowerment. This article examines the historical context, current participation, challenges, and impact of women in Kalaripayattu. Through case studies, training methods, and socio-cultural analysis, it argues that women's involvement is not only reviving tradition but also redefining concepts of strength, safety, and leadership in Kerala.

Keywords: Kalaripayattu, Women Empowerment, Gender, Kerala, Self-Defence, Tradition

1. INTRODUCTION

Kalaripayattu, often called "Kalari," originated in Kerala and is considered one of the oldest surviving martial arts in the world. Historically linked to temple defense, warfare, and Ayurvedic healing, Kalari training took place in Kalaries under male Gurukkals. For centuries, women's participation was limited to supportive roles or excluded entirely due to notions of ritual purity, physicality, and lineage. That narrative has changed. Today, in districts from Kannur to Thiruvananthapuram, women are students, instructors, performers, and masters of Kalari. This shift reflects broader changes in Kerala regarding education, gender equality, and cultural pride. Women are not merely learning Kalari for fitness; they are using it for self-defence, mental health, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation. Kalaripayattu, often called the "mother of all martial arts," is a 3000-year-old indigenous combat and wellness system that originated in the state of Kerala, India. The word itself comes from two Malayalam words: Kalari meaning training ground or battlefield, and Payattu meaning fight or exercise. Rooted in the Sangam era and later refined by warrior communities such as the Nairs, Thiyyas, and Muthuvan tribes, Kalari was historically more than just fighting. It was a complete lifestyle system that integrated physical training, Ayurvedic medicine, spiritual discipline, and weapon mastery. For centuries, Kalari served multiple roles in Kerala society. It was used for temple defense, royal security, dispute resolution, and protection of trade routes. The training also included Marmachikitsa, the science of pressure points and healing, and Uzichil, therapeutic oil massage. This made Kalari both a martial art and a medical tradition. Training took place in traditional Kalaris — low-ceilinged, mud-floored arenas built facing east, symbolizing respect for the earth and sun. These spaces were governed by strict codes of discipline under a male Gurukkal or master. Within this historical framework, women's participation remained largely invisible in public records. While oral histories and

matrilineal traditions of Kerala suggest that women in Nair tharavads did learn basic Kalari for home defense, formal public training was restricted. Colonial bans on martial arts in the 19th century, followed by Victorian ideals of femininity, pushed Kalari further into male domains. By the mid-20th century, Kalari was seen as a "man's art" — aggressive, ritualistic, and physically demanding. Women were expected to be spectators, caretakers of the Kalari, or performers of folk songs, not practitioners of combat.

This article explores how women are breaking gender barriers in Kalaripayattu and the procedure through which this transformation is happening.

2. Historical Context And The Shift

Traditional texts and oral histories suggest that women did practice Kalari in matrilineal Nair and Thiyya households for home defence. However, with colonial bans in the 19th century and later commercialization, public Kalaries became male spaces. The revival began in the 1980s–1990s due to three factors:

Cultural Revival Movements: Kerala's folk art revival brought Kalari to stages, and women performers gained visibility.

Self-Defence Need: Rising concern about women's safety pushed parents and colleges to seek indigenous solutions.

Role Models: Pioneers like Meenakshi Gurukkal of Kadathanadan Kalari Sangam, Kozhikode, proved women could lead a Kalari and train both men and women. Today, an estimated 40% of Kalari students in Kerala are women, according to field reports from major Kalaries. The barrier is no longer permission, but access, infrastructure, and social acceptance.

3.Complete Procedure: How Women Are Entering And Leading Kalari

The participation of women follows a structured pathway from entry to leadership. This is the 5-stage procedure observed across Kerala today.

Stage 1: Entry And Basic Training - "Meyy Payattu"Duration: 3 to 6 monthsWomen begin with Meyy Payattu or body exercises. This stage focuses on flexibility, stamina, and body awareness without weapons.Procedure:

Warm-up: Oil massage and joint rotations based on Ayurvedic principles.

Footwork: 18 types of Chuvadu to develop balance and agility.

Breathing: Pranayama integrated to manage fear and build focus.Classes are now offered in women-only batches in the mornings or evenings to ensure safety and comfort, especially in rural areas.

Stage 2: Weapon Training –

"Kol Payattu" to "Val Payattu"Duration: 6 months to 1 yearAfter mastering body control, women progress to wooden and metal weapons.

Procedure: Kol - Long stick: Teaches distance and coordination**.**

Otta - Curved wooden weapon: Builds wrist strength.

Val and Paricha - Sword and Shield: Develops confidence and reaction time.Instructors emphasize technique over brute force, making Kalari accessible regardless of body type.

Stage 3: Advanced Training And Healing - "Marmam" and "Marmachikitsa" **Duration:** 1 to 2 yearsWomen learn pressure points Marmam and basic healing. This knowledge is critical for non-lethal self-defence.

Procedure: Study of 107 Marmam points on the human body. Training in Uzichil-therapeutic oil massage. Application in demonstrations and wellness programs.Many women use this stage to

transition into health and wellness careers.

Stage 4: Teaching And Performance

Women who complete 3–4 years of training often assist Gurukkals. They lead school programs, college workshops, and tourism demonstrations.

Procedure: Pedagogy Training: Learning how to teach children and beginners.

Stage Performance: Choreographed Ankathari fights to showcase skill and change public perception.

Outreach: Conducting "Kalari-Safe" 10-day camps in schools and hostels.

Stage 5: Leadership And Entrepreneurship -The final barrier broken is ownership. Women are now opening their own Kalaries.

Procedure: Register a training center under Dept. of Sports/Youth Affairs. Partner with Kudumbashree, schools, and tourism boards.

Develop niche programs: Kalari for IT professionals, for seniors, for trauma recovery.

4. Challenges And How They Are Being Addressed

Despite progress, barriers remain:

Social Stigma: "Martial arts are not feminine." Addressed through media representation and mothers teaching daughters.

Infrastructure: Few Kalaries have separate changing rooms.

Solution: Community halls and school tie-ups.

Safety Concerns: Parents fear injury. Addressed by emphasizing Ayurvedic injury care and non-contact drills for beginners. Government schemes like Khelo India and Kerala Sports Council now include Kalari, giving women athletes stipends and competition platforms.

5. Impact Of Women's Participation

On Self-Defence: Women report increased confidence and reduced fear in public spaces.

On Health: Regular Kalari improves posture, menstrual health, and mental resilience.

On Culture: Women performers are documenting songs and oral histories previously lost.

On Economy: Women-led Kalari tourism and fitness centers create local jobs.

6. CONCLUSION

Women's participation in Kalaripayattu is more than learning to fight. It is about reclaiming heritage, building physical autonomy, and leading cultural institutions. The 5-stage procedure from Meyy Payattu to leadership shows that the entry of women is systematic, not symbolic. As Kerala moves forward, supporting women Gurukkals, including Kalari in school curriculum, and funding women-led Kalaries will ensure this ancient art continues to empower future generations. Breaking gender barriers in Kalari is ultimately about breaking the idea that strength has a gender.Word.

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EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION IN COASTAL VILLAGES OF KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT, 1956–2020

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ABSTRACT

Education has played a significant role in transforming the social, economic, and cultural life of the coastal communities of Kanniyakumari District. The district, which became part of Madras State on 1 November 1956, inherited a long educational tradition shaped by indigenous institutions, Christian missionary activities, and the educational policies of the erstwhile Travancore State. After 1956, government intervention, the expansion of primary and secondary schools, improvement in transport and communication, growth of social welfare programmes, and increasing awareness among fishing communities gradually changed the educational landscape of coastal villages. The development of education was particularly important for children belonging to fishing families, economically weaker groups, and communities that had historically faced difficulties in accessing formal education. During the period 1956–2020, education in the coastal region progressed from limited access to primary schooling toward wider participation in secondary, higher secondary, collegiate, technical, and professional education. At the same time, poverty, occupational insecurity, migration, gender inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and the traditional dependence on marine fishing continued to influence educational participation. This article examines the major stages in the evolution of education in the coastal villages of Kanniyakumari District between 1956 and 2020 and analyses its contribution to social mobility, women's education, occupational diversification, and community development.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, coastal villages, education, fishing communities, literacy, women's education, social change, 1956–2020*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important instruments of social transformation. In a society dependent upon traditional occupations, access to education can create opportunities for economic diversification, social mobility, and improved living standards. This is particularly relevant to the coastal villages of Kanniyakumari District, where fishing has historically been an important source of livelihood. The coastal belt of the district extends along approximately 71.5 kilometres of coastline and contains numerous fishing settlements.[1] The geographical position of these settlements, Together with their dependence upon the sea, influenced the educational experiences of generations of coastal families.

The history of education in Kanniyakumari did not begin in 1956. Before the district became part of Tamil Nadu, the region formed part of Travancore. Indigenous village teachers known as Asans provided instruction in local communities, while Christian missionaries later played a major role in the development of modern education and English-language instruction. Rev. William Tobias Ringel Taube, who arrived

in the region in 1806, is associated with the early development of English education in South Travancore.[2] Missionary institutions subsequently contributed to the spread of education among communities that had previously experienced limited educational opportunities. The year 1956 was therefore an important turning point rather than the beginning of education in the region. Following the States Reorganisation process, the four southern taluks of Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode were transferred to Madras State and formed the new Kanniyakumari District, with Nagercoil as its headquarters.[3] The integration of the district into Tamil Nadu brought the coastal villages more directly within the educational administration and development programmes of the state.

This article studies the evolution of education in the coastal villages from 1956 to 2020. It concentrates on the expansion of educational institutions, changes in accessibility, women's education, the educational conditions of fishing communities, government intervention, and the relationship between education and social transformation.

Educational Background of the Coastal Region

The educational development of Kanniyakumari was influenced by the distinctive social and religious history of South Travancore. Missionary organisations established schools in different parts of the region and contributed to the spread of literacy, particularly among socially and economically disadvantaged communities. Education was gradually transformed from a privilege available to particular sections of society into a wider social institution. The coastal villages had their own specific educational circumstances. Fishing communities traditionally depended on the sea for their livelihood, and children's participation in household and fishing-related activities could affect regular school attendance. Fishing was also influenced by seasons, weather, monsoon conditions, and fluctuations in income. Consequently, education competed with immediate economic responsibilities in many households.

The development of roads, public transport, electricity, communication facilities, and administrative institutions gradually reduced the isolation of coastal settlements. Schools became more accessible, and parents increasingly recognised formal education as a means of obtaining employment outside traditional occupations. The growth of government schools and aided schools was therefore an important factor in changing the educational aspirations of coastal communities.

The availability of historical statistical records is particularly useful for examining this transformation. Census records for Kanniyakumari are available for 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, and 2011, while district statistical handbooks provide additional information on educational and socio-economic development.[4] These sources demonstrate the importance of viewing educational change over several decades rather than through a single census year.

Education after the Formation of Kanniyakumari District, 1956–1970

The first phase, from 1956 to approximately 1970, was primarily a period of institutional consolidation and expansion. When Kanniyakumari became part of Tamil Nadu, the educational administration of the newly formed district was integrated into the Madras State system. Contemporary accounts indicate

that the education department was headed by the Director of Public Instruction and that Kanniyakumari was initially placed under the Madurai educational division.

During this period, elementary education remained the principal educational requirement in coastal villages. Many settlements needed schools within reasonable walking distance because transport facilities were limited. The establishment and expansion of primary schools therefore represented an important step in increasing access.

The expansion of schooling was accompanied by increasing parental awareness. Families that had previously regarded literacy as useful mainly for religious or basic social purposes increasingly began to view education as a route to government employment, clerical occupations, teaching, commerce, and other non-fishing occupations.

However, access was not uniform. Coastal villages differed in their geographical accessibility, population size, economic conditions, and institutional resources. Some villages benefited from missionary and aided schools, while others depended heavily upon government institutions. Poverty remained a major barrier for some families, especially where children were expected to assist their parents.

The early decades after 1956 thus witnessed a gradual transition from limited village-level schooling to a more organised educational system. The expansion was significant, but the process was incomplete.

Expansion of Primary and Secondary Education, 1970–1990

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s witnessed a substantial expansion of educational opportunities. Primary education became increasingly widespread, while the demand for middle and secondary education grew. The expansion of secondary schooling was particularly important because students previously had to travel longer distances to continue their education beyond the primary level. The development of roads and public transportation improved access between fishing villages and nearby educational centres. As mobility increased, students from coastal communities gained greater opportunities to attend higher-level schools. The educational aspirations of parents also changed as they observed the economic limitations and uncertainties associated with dependence upon fishing.

The education of girls was one of the most significant aspects of this transformation. In earlier periods, girls in some traditional communities had faced restrictions arising from domestic responsibilities, social attitudes, and limited economic resources. The expansion of schools and increasing awareness of women's education gradually challenged these limitations. Girls increasingly entered primary and secondary schools, and some continued to higher education. The growth of women's education had effects beyond the classroom. Educated women contributed to improvements in household decision-making, children's education, health awareness, and family economic planning. Education also enabled women to seek employment in teaching, health services, administration, banking, and other sectors.

The expansion of education also contributed to the gradual diversification of occupational aspirations among coastal youth. While fishing remained an important occupation, young people

increasingly sought careers in government services, the armed forces, teaching, engineering, medicine, commerce, transport, and other professions.

Education and Social Mobility, 1990–2000

The decade of the 1990s represented another important stage in the educational transformation of coastal Kanniyakumari. By this period, the idea that education was necessary for social advancement had become firmly established among many families. The expansion of higher secondary schools created opportunities for students to continue their education within or near their own localities. Students who successfully completed higher secondary education could pursue college education, vocational training, teacher education, nursing, engineering, and other professional courses.

Education also contributed to changes in social identity. Traditional occupational boundaries became less rigid as educated members of fishing communities entered occupations outside the fishing sector. In this way, schools functioned not only as educational institutions but also as instruments of social mobility. The educational transformation of the district must also be understood within the broader context of its comparatively strong literacy performance. The official district website describes Kanniyakumari as the leading district in Tamil Nadu in literacy and notes its distinctive geographical position and long coastline.[6] The high literacy environment of the district created favourable conditions for educational participation in coastal settlements.

Nevertheless, educational development was not free from challenges. Economic instability remained an important concern for fishing families. The income of fishing households could fluctuate according to weather, fish availability, seasonal restrictions, and market conditions. Such instability could affect expenditure on school materials, transportation, uniforms, tuition, and higher education.

Education, Government Schemes, and Coastal Communities, 2000–2010

Between 2000 and 2010, education in coastal villages was influenced increasingly by government welfare measures, school infrastructure programmes, and policies aimed at improving access and retention. The expansion of educational facilities was accompanied by improvements in school buildings, sanitation, drinking water, transport, teaching resources, and student welfare.

The spread of secondary and higher secondary education reduced the educational disadvantages associated with geographical isolation. Students from coastal villages were increasingly able to continue their studies without immediately leaving their communities. The importance of education also increased because employment opportunities were changing. Mechanisation and technological changes in fishing altered the nature of the traditional occupation. At the same time, the younger generation was exposed to a wider range of employment possibilities through schools, mass media, transport, and higher education.

Education became particularly important for families seeking greater occupational security. A government job or professional career could provide a more stable income than dependence solely on fishing. As a result, parents increasingly encouraged children to remain in school for longer periods. Girls' participation in

education continued to improve. The expansion of female education was especially significant because educated women increasingly became teachers, nurses, office employees, professionals, and entrepreneurs. Their achievements helped strengthen the belief that education could improve the social and economic position of the entire family.

Educational Transformation, 2010–2020

The period from 2010 to 2020 witnessed the consolidation of many earlier educational developments. By this time, the educational landscape of Kanniyakumari had expanded from basic primary schooling to a network that included secondary and higher secondary schools, colleges, professional institutions, and vocational opportunities. The 2011 Census provides an important benchmark for understanding the district's educational progress. The District Census Handbook for Kanniyakumari was published as part of the Census of India series and contains detailed information on population and related village-level characteristics.[7] The district's strong literacy position demonstrates the cumulative effect of educational development over the preceding decades.

For coastal communities, the expansion of higher education was particularly significant. Students who had once been expected to enter fishing or other traditional occupations could now aspire to university education and professional careers. The growth of educational institutions in and around Nagercoil, Marthandam, Colachel, Kuzhithurai, and other centres improved opportunities for students from rural and coastal backgrounds.

The period also witnessed the growing importance of digital technology. Computers, internet facilities, mobile phones, and digital learning resources gradually entered the educational experience of students. However, digital access was not uniform across all households. Differences in income, infrastructure, and technological familiarity continued to influence educational opportunities.

The year 2020 represents an important endpoint because the COVID-19 pandemic exposed new inequalities in educational access. The shift from classroom teaching to digital and online learning created difficulties for students who lacked smartphones, computers, reliable internet connections, or suitable study environments. For coastal families dependent upon uncertain incomes, the cost of digital learning could be an additional burden. Thus, by 2020, education in coastal Kanniyakumari had achieved considerable progress, but the experience of the pandemic demonstrated that educational equality required more than the physical availability of schools.

Role of Education in the Transformation of Fishing Communities

The educational transformation of coastal villages produced important social consequences. First, it contributed to occupational diversification. Education allowed young people to seek employment beyond fishing, thereby reducing complete dependence on marine resources. Second, education contributed to social mobility. Members of fishing communities entered government service, teaching, healthcare, engineering, business, and other professional occupations. The success of educated individuals also encouraged subsequent generations to pursue higher education.

Third, education strengthened women's social position. The increased

participation of girls and women in schooling and higher education challenged traditional gender expectations. Women's education contributed to improved employment opportunities and increased participation in family and community decision-making. Fourth, education strengthened political and civic awareness. Literacy enabled individuals to understand government schemes, legal rights, electoral processes, welfare programmes, and community development initiatives. Educated members of coastal communities increasingly participated in local institutions and public affairs. Fifth, education influenced attitudes toward health and social welfare. Schooling encouraged awareness of sanitation, nutrition, public health, family welfare, and environmental issues. Such knowledge was especially relevant to densely populated coastal settlements.

Problems and Limitations

Despite significant progress between 1956 and 2020, several problems remained. The first was economic insecurity. Fishing families whose income depended upon seasonal marine activities could experience financial difficulties that affected children's education. The second problem was the distance between some coastal settlements and higher educational institutions. Although primary schools became more accessible, students seeking specialised secondary, collegiate, or professional education sometimes had to travel considerable distances. Third, dropout and irregular attendance could occur when children were required to support family occupations. Seasonal fishing activities and household economic pressures could interfere with continuous education. Fourth, educational quality was not always uniform. The availability of teachers, laboratories, libraries, computers, and other learning resources differed among institutions.

Fifth, gender-related barriers, although reduced considerably, did not disappear completely. Domestic responsibilities and economic constraints could continue to influence the educational choices of girls. Finally, the digital divide became increasingly visible toward 2020. The experience of online education demonstrated that access to a school building did not automatically guarantee equal access to digital education.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of education in the coastal villages of Kanniyakumari District between 1956 and 2020 represents a significant process of social transformation. When the district was integrated into Madras State in 1956, coastal education was still shaped by historical inequalities, limited infrastructure, traditional occupations, and geographical constraints. Over the following six decades, government intervention, missionary and aided institutions, improved transportation, expansion of schools, welfare measures, increasing parental awareness, and the growing demand for professional employment transformed the educational environment. The most important change was the movement from limited access to wider educational participation. Primary education became more accessible, secondary and higher secondary education expanded, and higher education became an increasingly realistic aspiration for coastal youth. Women's education also developed substantially and contributed to broader changes in family and community life. Education did

not eliminate all the problems of coastal communities. Poverty, occupational insecurity, geographical limitations, uneven infrastructure, and digital inequality remained important challenges. Nevertheless, education provided coastal communities with new opportunities for occupational diversification, social mobility, gender advancement, and civic participation. The history of education in coastal Kanniyakumari between 1956 and 2020 therefore demonstrates that education was not merely an institutional development. It was a major force in transforming the aspirations and social structure of fishing communities. The expansion of education helped connect traditional coastal societies with wider economic, social, and technological changes. The educational journey of these villages continues to be an important area for historical research, particularly through oral histories, school records, government statistics, missionary archives, and the personal experiences of students, teachers, and fishing families.

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THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT'S IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT, 1956–2025

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari District occupies a distinctive position in the tourism geography of Tamil Nadu because of its combination of religious, historical, cultural, and natural attractions. The district has developed from a predominantly pilgrimage and scenic destination into an important national and international tourist centre. This article examines the historical development of tourism projects in Kanniyakumari District from 1956 to 2025. The study focuses on major memorials, heritage attractions, coastal tourism, transport and visitor infrastructure, and government-led tourism development. The construction of the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial in 1956 marked an important stage in the development of modern memorial tourism. The completion of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in 1970 further strengthened spiritual and cultural tourism, while the Thiruvalluvar Statue added a major symbol of Tamil literary identity. During the twenty-first century, government tourism programmes increasingly emphasized integrated infrastructure, coastal tourism, eco-tourism, sustainability, and destination management. The historical development of these projects demonstrates the close relationship between government planning, cultural heritage, natural resources, and regional economic development.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, tourism development, tourism projects, heritage tourism, pilgrimage tourism, coastal tourism, Tamil Nadu, 1956–2025.*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become an important sector of regional development in Tamil Nadu. It contributes to employment, transport, accommodation, trade, cultural exchange, and the preservation of historical and natural resources. Kanniyakumari is especially significant because it combines religious attractions, national memorials, beaches, coastal landscapes, historical monuments, and cultural sites. The official district tourism portal identifies attractions including the Gandhi Memorial, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Kamarajar Manimandapam, Mathoor Hanging Trough, and Thirparappu Waterfalls. The year 1956 provides an important starting point for a historical study of tourism development because Kanniyakumari entered the administrative framework of Madras State during the reorganization of states. This transition provided a new institutional framework for infrastructure and regional development. Tourism subsequently expanded from traditional pilgrimage and sightseeing to organized cultural, heritage, coastal, and recreational tourism. The purpose of this article is to examine the major stages of tourism development in Kanniyakumari District between 1956 and 2025. It particularly considers the development of important tourist attractions and the changing role of government in tourism infrastructure and destination management.

Tourism Development after 1956

In the early post-1956 period, tourism in Kanniyakumari was largely based on religious pilgrimage, natural scenery, and coastal attractions. The Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Suchindram Temple, beaches, and the distinctive geographical location of Kanniyakumari already attracted visitors. However, the creation of modern memorials gradually expanded the tourism character of the destination.

The Mahatma Gandhi Memorial was completed in 1956. It commemorates the place where Gandhi's ashes were kept before immersion in the sea. The official district administration describes the memorial as an important monument associated with Gandhi's visits to Kanniyakumari and notes that it was completed in 1956. The memorial was therefore one of the earliest important post-independence tourism landmarks and helped establish national memorial tourism alongside religious tourism.

During the following decades, roads, rail connectivity, accommodation, restaurants, shops, and public amenities gradually expanded. These facilities were essential because tourism development depends not only on attractions but also on accessibility and visitor services. The increasing number of visitors encouraged private businesses to participate in the tourism economy.

Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Tourism Transformation

A major turning point occurred with the development of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. The memorial was completed in 1970 and became one of the most important attractions of Kanniyakumari. The Government of India's tourism perspective plan describes the memorial as a major attraction on the offshore rock and notes the importance of the associated ferry service.

The memorial transformed Kanniyakumari's tourism profile by combining spirituality, architecture, maritime travel, and national identity. Boat transportation to the rock became an important part of the tourist experience. The growth of visitor movement around the ferry area also stimulated hotels, restaurants, shops, transport services, and other tourism-related businesses.

The development of the memorial also strengthened the cultural significance of Kanniyakumari beyond its traditional religious importance. The destination increasingly attracted visitors interested in Indian spirituality, national history, architecture, and scenic coastal experiences.

Tourism Diversification after 1990

From the 1990s, tourism in Kanniyakumari became increasingly diversified. Improvements in transport, communication, accommodation, and domestic tourism contributed to the expansion of sightseeing and leisure tourism. Visitors increasingly combined pilgrimage with visits to beaches, memorials, forts, palaces, waterfalls, and other attractions.

Heritage tourism also became more important. Padmanabhapuram Palace, Vattakottai Fort, Suchindram, historic churches, and other cultural resources contributed to the development of wider tourism circuits. This helped shift tourism from a single-centre model concentrated around Kanniyakumari town toward a district-level network of attractions.

The development of the Kamarajar Manimandapam further strengthened the role of national and political memory in the tourism landscape. Together with the Gandhi Memorial and Vivekananda Rock

Memorial, such monuments gave Kanniyakumari a distinctive identity based on religion, spirituality, nationalism, and Tamil culture.

Thiruvalluvar Statue and Twenty-First-Century Tourism

The development of the Thiruvalluvar Statue added a major cultural landmark to Kanniyakumari. The statue stands on an offshore rock near the Vivekananda Rock Memorial. According to the official district administration, the complete height of the monument is 133 feet, symbolically representing the 133 chapters of the Thirukkural.

The statue strengthened Kanniyakumari's identity as a centre of Tamil literary and cultural tourism. Together, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Thiruvalluvar Statue created an important offshore tourism complex. Ferry services became a significant part of visitor circulation, while the surrounding coastal area developed as a major tourism zone.

During the 2000s, tourism infrastructure increasingly included visitor facilities, public conveniences, accommodation, transport, commercial services, and destination promotion. Kanniyakumari was increasingly promoted not simply as a pilgrimage centre but as a destination for cultural, heritage, coastal, and leisure tourism.

Government Tourism Projects and Sustainable Development, 2010–2025

The 2010s witnessed an important change in tourism planning, with increasing emphasis on integrated tourism circuits. Government tourism programmes sought to connect different attractions and improve infrastructure rather than developing isolated monuments.

The Government of India's tourism planning documents have recognized Kanniyakumari as an important destination within Tamil Nadu's tourism network. The Coastal Circuit approach connected Kanniyakumari with other important coastal and cultural destinations. Such planning emphasized connectivity, visitor facilities, interpretation, safety, and destination infrastructure. In the later period, sustainable tourism and eco-tourism became increasingly important. Kanniyakumari possesses beaches, coastal ecosystems, waterfalls, forests, hills, and rural landscapes that require protection from excessive tourism pressure. Waste generation, traffic congestion, water consumption, coastal erosion, and unplanned construction are important concerns.

The contemporary tourism policy approach therefore increasingly emphasizes responsible and sustainable destination development. The district's official tourism portal presents both conventional tourist attractions and eco-tourism locations, demonstrating the broadening of the tourism concept.

By 2025, tourism development in Kanniyakumari had therefore moved toward a more integrated model involving cultural tourism, heritage tourism, coastal tourism, eco-tourism, pilgrimage, and modern visitor services.

Socio-Economic and Environmental Impact

Tourism projects have generated important socio-economic benefits in Kanniyakumari District. Hotels, restaurants, transport services, boat operations, retail shops, guiding, photography, handicrafts, and other activities provide direct and indirect employment. Tourism expenditure also supports local suppliers and small businesses.

Tourism infrastructure can provide benefits to residents as well as visitors.

Improved roads, public sanitation, drinking-water facilities, transport, lighting, communication, and public spaces contribute to regional development.

However, tourism also creates challenges. Concentration of visitors in particular locations can produce traffic congestion, waste, pressure on water resources, and environmental degradation. Coastal and heritage resources are particularly sensitive. Future tourism projects therefore need to balance economic development with conservation.

CONCLUSION

The historical development of tourism projects in Kanniyakumari District between 1956 and 2025 demonstrates a gradual transformation from pilgrimage and scenic tourism into a diversified tourism economy. The Gandhi Memorial in 1956 established an important national-cultural landmark, while the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in 1970 transformed Kanniyakumari into a major spiritual and cultural destination. The development of the Thiruvalluvar Statue further strengthened the district's Tamil cultural identity.

During the twenty-first century, tourism planning became increasingly focused on integrated infrastructure, heritage, coastal tourism, eco-tourism, and sustainability. The growth of accommodation, transport, public amenities, commercial services, and government tourism projects contributed to the district's regional economy.

The historical experience of 1956–2025 shows that the future of Kanniyakumari tourism should not depend only on increasing tourist numbers. Protection of coastal ecosystems, conservation of heritage monuments, improvement of public facilities, local community participation, and sustainable destination management are essential. Thus, the development of tourism projects in Kanniyakumari represents not only the growth of a tourist destination but also the changing relationship between government policy, cultural heritage, natural resources, and regional development.

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DIVERSITY, PLURALISM AND UNITY: CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS INTERACTIONS IN THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT.

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INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari District is a unique region of Tamilnadu known for its rich culture, religious diversity, and social harmony. Its geographical location and historical background have contributed to the development of a multicultural society. The cultural and religious diversity of Kanyakumari district is not merely a coexistence of different communities ;it has also created opportunities for interaction, mutual respect and unity. Therefore, Kanyakumari can be studied as an important example of unity in diversity in south India

Geographical unity

The land of Kanyakumari is a gift of God to the state of Tamilnadu. Tamil the ancient language is the language of this district, which has been conferred classical status. All four types of land Kurinci (hills), Mullai (forest), Marutham (paddy field), Neithal (sea) as described in tamil literature are found here which make the land a place of wholesome beauty and utility. Tamil people have established their identity, effort, and language in Ceylon, Malaysia, and Myanmar etc. There is also minority Malayalam speaking population found in this district. There us multi-religious and ethnic population are having this district.

Linguistic Diversity

India has 179 languages and 544 dialects according to the Linguistic Survey of India. The four major Dravidian languages – Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam district has a distinctive linguistic history because it was a part of the Travancore have rich literary traditions

Kanyakumari state until 1956, and later became part of Tamilnadu. This historical background has produced a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam linguistic influences. Tamil is the predominant and official language of Kanyakumari district and is used in education, administration, literature, and every day communication. But Malayalam has a strong historical and cultural influence because this district was formerly areas close to the Kerala border. In Kanyakumari Malayalam speaking community is minority, so minority Malayalam institutions, schools, and colleges were established here. In many schools, and colleges, the students preferred Malayalam as their first language.

Kanyakumari tamil has distinctive words, pronunciation and expressions influenced by Malayalam and the regions historical connections with Kerala. The people who migrate from place to place for education, employment, and business has introduced many Indian lauguages including English, Hindi, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarathi, and Kannada particularly in towns and educational institutions. In Kanyakumari language played an important role in the Kanyakumari merger movement. The demand to merge the tamil speaking areas of Travancore with the Madras state was closely connected with linguistic identity and political representation. This linguistic diversity of Kanyakumari is a product of its border location, historical Travancore connections, migration, and cultural interaction. Many people living near the

Kerla- Tamilnadu border understand or speak both Tamil and Malayalam. This bilingualism has encouraged cultural interaction between the two linguistic communities. The coexistence of Tamil and Malayalam along with other language, demonstrates how linguistic diversity can contribute to the districts broder cultural identity and unity.

Religious Diversity

India is home to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism alongside significant Muslim, Christian, Jewish and Parsi populations. Hinduism is not a single creed but a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices. It accomodate various deities, philosophies, and rituals emphasizing inclusivity. Islam has 90 million followers in India ,while Buddhist Jains ,Parsis and Christians also contribute to the nations religious diversity. This coexistence of multiple faith has made India a cultural mosaic. In Kanyakumari district people lived together in unity without differences based on caste, ethinicity, religion, or language. In particular, people continue to live together harmoniously despite their religious differences. People of all communities participate in and celebrate the festivals of different religions.

Onam – As a symbol of unity

In Kanyakumari district, people belonging as Pongal, Deepavali, Ramzan, Onam and Chrismas together. In particular onam is celebrated by Tamil people across the district. Overtime, onam has revolved from being primarily a regional festival into a celebration shared by people across Kanyakumari district. People from different religious, and cultural backgrounds participate in the celebrations, reflecting the distyricts spirit of unity in diversity , mutual respect and communal harmony. Kanyakumari district is an important example of religious pluralism , where people belonging to different religious traditions live together while maintaining their own beliefs and practices. Religion has played an important role in shaping the history and culture of south India. Temples were among the major institutions through which religious and social life developed. Religious pluralism can contribute to social harmony when different traditions are able to exist without destroying each other. Shared sacred spaces can create opportunities for interaction and mutual understanding.

Parthivapuram temple as the best example of Tamil – Kerala religious and cultural interactions. Parthivapuram temple is situated in a region where Tamil and Kerala cultural traditions interacted for centuries. This interaction can be seen in this regions architecture, religious traditions, language and social practices. The temples history is connected with this wider cultural interaction. The association of Ayyappa and Naga worship with the temple environment can also be considered in relation to Kerala traditions, while the Vaishnava identity of Parthasarathy connects the temple with the wider Tamil religious tradition. Thus this temple as an one of the important example how cultural traditions can meet and develop within the same historical region.

In Kanyakumari district, the village Palliyadi near Marthandam is associated with the celebration of a samathuva virunthu (Equality Feast). The event brings together people belonging to Hindu, Christian, Muslim communities. Before the meal is served readings emphasizing the principles of equality, brotherhood, and harmony from the respective religious traditions are presented. People

belonging to different faiths then participate together in the common feast and celebrate the occasion. The samathuva virunthu is a significant example of religious pluralism and equality and communal harmony in Kanyakumari district.

Moreover in Mondaikadu Bhagavathi Amman temple hosts the Masi thiruvizha once a year. A large number of women from Kerala come to the temple to worship the goddess . A notable feature of the temple is that a Christian church is located right beside it. All those who come to worship Bhagavathi Amman also visit the Christian church before returning . Thos close proximity and shared practice of visiting both places of worship reflect the religious pluralism, mutual respect, and communal harmony found in Kanyakumari . It demonstrates how religious differences can be transcended through shared cultural practices and collective participation , strengthening the spirit of unity and social harmony among the people.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Kanyakumari can be understood as a significant example of religious pluralism and unity in south India. Its diversity characterized not simply by the presence of different religions, but by coexistence, cultural exchange, participation in one another's celebrations and a shared sense of community. This makes Kanyakumari an important case for studying religious pluralism and unity in diversity.

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EXPLORING THE CULTURAL TAPESTRY OF KANNIYAKUMARI: A CONFLUENCE OF FAITHS AND FESTIVALS

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari, situated at the southernmost tip of mainland India, represents one of the most distinctive cultural landscapes of South India. Its identity has been shaped by a complex interaction of geography, history, religion, language, migration and political transformation. Positioned at the confluence of the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, the region has historically functioned as both a geographical and cultural meeting point. Its cultural landscape includes ancient temples, churches, Islamic shrines, pilgrimage centres, folk traditions and festivals that collectively reflect the diversity of its social life. The region's historical association with the Pandya, Chera, Chola, Venad and Travancore political formations, followed by its incorporation into Tamil Nadu in 1956, has further contributed to its layered cultural identity.

This paper examines the cultural tapestry of Kanniyakumari through the interconnected themes of faith, festivals, sacred geography and social coexistence. Adopting a qualitative and interpretative approach, the study explores how Hindu, Christian and Islamic traditions have contributed to the formation of a shared regional culture while maintaining their distinct religious identities. Particular attention is given to major sacred centres and festival traditions associated with the Bhagavathy Amman Temple, Suchindram, Mandaikadu, Christian shrines and Islamic sacred spaces. The paper argues that festivals in Kanniyakumari should not be understood merely as religious observances; they are also important spaces for cultural performance, collective memory, social interaction and the transmission of intangible heritage. The study concludes that Kanniyakumari's cultural identity is best understood as a living and evolving tapestry in which diversity does not necessarily fragment society but can contribute to a richer sense of regional belonging. The preservation of this heritage requires sustained attention to monuments, rituals, oral traditions, artistic practices and the everyday relationships through which cultural coexistence is maintained.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, cultural tapestry, religious pluralism, festivals, sacred geography, cultural heritage, social harmony, collective memory.*

INTRODUCTION

Culture is neither a fixed inheritance nor a simple collection of customs passed unchanged from one generation to another. It is a continuing process through which communities remember their past, negotiate their present and imagine their future. Cultural identity is particularly complex in regions where different religious traditions, languages, political histories and geographical influences have interacted over long periods. Kanniyakumari provides an important example of such a cultural landscape. Located at the southernmost extremity of mainland India, the district is widely recognised for the confluence of the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Yet its cultural significance extends far beyond this geographical distinction. The region represents a meeting point of historical traditions, religious communities and cultural practices that have collectively shaped a distinctive regional identity. The historical

development of Kanniyakumari reveals the multiple layers that constitute its present identity. The district has associations with ancient Tamil political formations and later passed through the spheres of influence of the Pandya, Chola, Venad and Travancore traditions. Until the reorganisation of states in 1956, the present district formed part of the erstwhile Travancore region, and the movement for the integration of Tamil-speaking areas into Madras State eventually resulted in the formation of Kanniyakumari district within Tamil Nadu. This history created a cultural environment in which Tamil traditions coexist with influences historically associated with Kerala and Travancore.

Kanniyakumari is therefore an appropriate site for studying the relationship between faith and culture. Its landscape contains Hindu temples, Christian churches, Islamic shrines and other sacred institutions that have become part of the region's historical and social memory. These institutions do not merely function as isolated places of worship. They are connected to festivals, pilgrimages, music, food, local economies, family traditions and collective gatherings. Sacred spaces become cultural spaces when communities continuously interact with them through rituals, stories and public participation.

The present paper explores Kanniyakumari through the metaphor of a cultural tapestry. A tapestry is created through the interweaving of different threads, each retaining its own character while contributing to a larger design. Similarly, the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari cannot be reduced to a single religion, language or historical tradition. Its distinctiveness emerges from the interaction of multiple traditions. Hindu, Christian and Islamic practices, together with regional folk customs, historical memories and artistic expressions, have contributed to a complex cultural world. The objective of this study is to understand how these traditions have interacted and how festivals have functioned as important spaces for the expression and preservation of cultural diversity.

Historical and Cultural Foundations of Kanniyakumari

The cultural history of Kanniyakumari must be understood in relation to its geographical position. The district stands at the southern edge of the Indian peninsula and has historically been connected to coastal networks, political movements and cultural exchanges. The official history of the district traces human habitation and cultural development in the region to an ancient past and records the succession of political formations that exercised influence over Nanjil Nadu and the surrounding areas. The region has been associated with the Pandyas, Cholas, Venad rulers and the Travancore kingdom, demonstrating that its history cannot be confined to a single political or cultural tradition.

The association with Travancore is particularly significant in understanding the modern cultural character of Kanniyakumari. The region remained part of Travancore until the mid-twentieth century, and this historical relationship influenced language, administration, architecture, food habits and social customs. The movement for the merger of the Tamil-speaking taluks with Madras State eventually resulted in the formation of Kanniyakumari district on 1 November 1956. The modern district was thus created through a historical process in which questions of language, identity and political belonging became deeply interconnected.

This history produced a cultural environment characterised by overlapping influences. Tamil remains the dominant cultural and linguistic framework, yet the historical proximity to Kerala and Travancore has left visible traces in everyday life. Architecture, cuisine, ritual practices and artistic traditions frequently reveal these connections. The cultural identity of Kanniyakumari should therefore be understood not as a homogeneous structure but as the result of continuous interaction between different historical experiences.

The geographical environment has also played an important role in shaping culture. The district combines an extensive coastline with agricultural landscapes, coconut groves, rubber cultivation and the influence of the Western Ghats. The relationship between sea, land and sacred imagination is especially important. For centuries, coastal communities have developed distinctive economic and religious traditions connected to the sea, while inland communities have maintained agricultural and temple-centred cultural practices. The cultural diversity of the district is therefore closely connected to the diversity of its physical environment.

Sacred Geography and the Plural Religious Landscape

Sacred geography is one of the most significant dimensions of Kanniyakumari's cultural identity. Geography in this context is not simply physical territory. Certain places acquire sacred meaning through mythology, religious practice, historical memory and collective experience. The coast, the sea, temples, churches and shrines become part of a symbolic landscape through which communities understand their relationship with the region.

The Bhagavathy Amman Temple occupies a central position in this sacred geography. The district itself derives its name from Goddess Kanniyakumari, whose mythology is closely associated with the identity of the region. Situated near the sea, the temple represents the relationship between sacred belief and geographical imagination. Its annual car festival and Navaratri celebrations bring together religious devotion and public participation, transforming the sacred centre into an important cultural space.

The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple represents another important layer of the region's sacred heritage. Sacred institutions such as Suchindram are significant not only because of their religious functions but also because they preserve architectural, artistic and historical traditions. Temple culture historically provided space for music, ritual performance, sculpture and collective gatherings. The festivals associated with such institutions continue to connect religious practice with community participation and cultural memory. The district administration records festivals at Suchindram as important elements of the regional cultural calendar.

The plural sacred landscape of Kanniyakumari is equally visible through its Christian institutions. Churches and cathedrals have become integral components of the district's historical and cultural environment. Our Lady of Ransom Church in Kanniyakumari and St. Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar are among the prominent Christian centres recorded by the district administration. Their annual celebrations attract large gatherings and demonstrate how religious institutions become associated with collective memory, pilgrimage and public

culture. The ten-day annual festival of St. Xavier's Cathedral, for example, illustrates the manner in which Christian devotion becomes part of the larger cultural rhythm of the region.

Islamic sacred traditions also form part of this cultural landscape. The Peer Mohammed Durha at Thuckalay is particularly significant because the annual celebration associated with the shrine draws participants from Tamil Nadu and Kerala and is described by the district administration as attracting people irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Such sites demonstrate that sacred spaces can sometimes develop cultural meanings that extend beyond the boundaries of a single religious community.

The sacred geography of Kanniyakumari is therefore plural in character. The district's cultural landscape cannot be understood merely through one religious tradition. Instead, temples, churches and shrines collectively form a network of sacred and cultural spaces through which communities express faith and construct regional belonging.

Faith, Festivals and Collective Cultural Memory

Festivals occupy a central place in the cultural life of Kanniyakumari because they transform religious belief into collective experience. A festival is not merely an occasion on which a particular religious ritual is performed. It is a temporary cultural world in which devotion, music, movement, food, commerce, memory and social interaction converge. The significance of a festival lies partly in its ability to bring private faith into public space.

The festivals associated with the Bhagavathy Amman Temple demonstrate this relationship between religion and collective cultural expression. Annual celebrations such as the car festival and Navaratri create occasions for large-scale participation. Religious rituals are accompanied by movement, visual decoration and public gathering, enabling individuals to experience faith not only as a personal conviction but also as a collective identity.

The Mandaikadu festival is another important example of the cultural significance of religious celebration. The district administration describes the Masi festival as extending over several days and involving flag hoisting, ritual purification, daily processions and special ceremonies. The festival also attracts participants from different parts of the district and neighbouring Kerala. This movement of people across geographical boundaries illustrates the wider cultural significance of festivals. They create temporary communities that extend beyond individual villages and localities.

Festivals preserve collective memory because they depend upon repetition. A ritual performed annually connects the present generation with earlier generations that participated in the same cultural practice. The continuity of a festival does not necessarily mean that every aspect remains unchanged. Modern transportation, technology, media and tourism may alter the manner in which a festival is organised or represented. Yet the recurring nature of the celebration creates a sense of historical continuity.

This process is particularly important in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Buildings and monuments can survive without active human participation, but festivals, songs, oral narratives and ritual performances survive only when communities continue to practise them. A festival is therefore a living archive. It contains memories that

are transmitted through participation rather than through written documents alone.

Kanniyakumari's cultural calendar also includes festivals and events that extend beyond strictly religious traditions. Kumari Thiruvizha, for instance, has been promoted as a cultural celebration featuring artistic performances and attracting audiences and artists. Government documentation describes the festival as a platform for the presentation of dance and music traditions, including Bharatanatyam, Mohiniattam and Kathakali. Such events demonstrate the cultural connections between Tamil Nadu and Kerala and reinforce the idea that Kanniyakumari's identity has been shaped by more than one regional tradition.

Christianity, Coastal Culture and Festival Traditions

Christianity has played an important role in the historical and cultural development of Kanniyakumari, particularly in its coastal regions. The relationship between coastal communities, maritime networks and Christian traditions has contributed to the formation of a distinctive religious culture. Over time, Christian institutions became deeply rooted in the local environment and developed practices shaped by Tamil language, regional customs and community participation. The churches of Kanniyakumari function not merely as religious institutions but also as centres of cultural memory. Annual feasts, processions, devotional music and collective gatherings create forms of public participation comparable, in their social function, to other festival traditions in the region. The St. Xavier's Cathedral at Kottar has a long historical association with the Christian presence in the district, and its annual festival remains a significant event in the regional cultural calendar.

Christian festival traditions demonstrate the process through which global religious traditions become localised. Christianity may have historical connections extending beyond the Indian subcontinent, but its practice in Kanniyakumari has developed within a particular regional context. Tamil devotional expression, local musical traditions, regional food practices and community customs have contributed to the manner in which Christian identity is experienced and expressed. The coastal setting has also influenced the symbolic imagination of Christian communities. For communities whose economic life is historically connected to fishing and maritime activity, faith is often intertwined with experiences of the sea, danger, livelihood and collective survival. Religious festivals and pilgrimage traditions therefore become opportunities through which communities express gratitude, seek protection and reaffirm social bonds.

The cultural significance of Christianity in Kanniyakumari thus extends beyond theological belief. Churches, festivals and pilgrimage practices have contributed to the social and cultural landscape of the district. They form one of the many threads that together create the larger tapestry of regional identity.

Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony

Religious pluralism is often understood simply as the presence of different religions within the same geographical area. However, the mere coexistence of communities does not automatically produce meaningful interaction. A deeper form of pluralism involves recognition, dialogue and the

development of shared social spaces. Kanniyakumari provides an important context for examining such processes because its cultural history includes long-term interaction among Hindu, Christian and Muslim communities. Religious traditions in the district retain their distinct beliefs and practices, yet they exist within a shared regional environment. Markets, educational institutions, neighbourhoods, workplaces and public celebrations frequently bring individuals from different communities into contact with one another. Regional identity can therefore operate alongside religious identity rather than necessarily replacing it.

Research on interreligious dialogue in Kanniyakumari has documented programmes in which festivals associated with Hinduism, Islam and Christianity have been celebrated through multi-religious participation. The study notes that Diwali, Ramzan and Christmas have been occasions for dialogue programmes in both urban and rural settings, sometimes including representatives of different religions and shared meals. Such practices illustrate one possible form of cultural interaction in which religious difference becomes an opportunity for communication rather than complete separation.

The existence of sacred spaces that attract diverse participants also contributes to the cultural understanding of pluralism. The annual celebration at Peer Mohammed Durha, for example, is described by the district administration as drawing participants irrespective of caste, creed and religion. Such examples suggest that cultural participation can sometimes extend beyond formal religious boundaries while still respecting the distinct identity of a sacred tradition. At the same time, social harmony should not be romanticised. Every society contains differences and tensions related to religion, caste, politics, economics and identity. The importance of pluralism lies not in the complete disappearance of these differences but in the ability of communities to negotiate them through institutions, dialogue and everyday coexistence. Cultural harmony is therefore a continuing process rather than a permanent condition.

Kanniyakumari's history demonstrates that regional identity itself is complex. The district's connection with both Tamil cultural traditions and the historical world of Travancore has created multiple layers of belonging. This layered identity can provide a useful framework for understanding diversity. A community may preserve its religious identity while also participating in a wider cultural identity associated with Kanniyakumari and Tamil Nadu.

Festivals as Spaces of Cultural Performance and Interaction

Festivals can be understood as forms of cultural performance through which communities communicate values, memories and identities. Processions, devotional songs, music, dance, ritual costumes, decorative practices and public gatherings transform abstract religious ideas into visible and participatory experiences. In Kanniyakumari, festival spaces often bring together people who occupy different social positions. Devotees, priests, musicians, traders, artisans, visitors and local residents participate in the cultural economy created by a major celebration. A festival therefore produces both symbolic and material forms of interaction. Religious belief provides the central framework, but surrounding activities such as food preparation, travel, commerce and artistic

performance extend the experience into wider social life.

The Cape Festival and other cultural celebrations demonstrate how geography itself can become part of festival culture. Government tourism documentation describes Kanniyakumari as a place where natural landscape, spirituality and cultural performance intersect. The cultural environment of the district is represented through music, dance and traditional performances, demonstrating the connection between heritage and public celebration. The Kumari Thiruvizha further illustrates this process. By bringing together artists and audiences through dance and music performances, the festival creates a platform for cultural expression that is not limited to one religious community. Traditional artistic forms associated with Tamil Nadu and Kerala can appear within the same cultural space, reflecting the historical hybridity of the district.

Festivals also create opportunities for cultural transmission. Younger generations learn songs, rituals and customs by observing and participating in them. Cultural knowledge is often embodied rather than formally taught. A child may learn the significance of a festival by accompanying family members, participating in a procession, listening to devotional music or observing ritual practices. In this sense, festivals function as informal institutions of cultural education.

Heritage, Tourism and the Challenges of Cultural Preservation

Kanniyakumari's rich cultural heritage has also made it an important centre of tourism. Visitors are attracted by its geographical uniqueness, sacred institutions, historical monuments and cultural traditions. Tourism can play a constructive role by increasing public awareness of heritage and generating economic opportunities for local communities. Government tourism initiatives continue to present Kanniyakumari as a destination in which natural beauty, spirituality, monuments and cultural celebrations are closely interconnected.

However, the relationship between tourism and heritage requires careful management. When cultural traditions become primarily commercial attractions, there is a risk that religious and cultural meanings may be overshadowed by spectacle. Sacred spaces must therefore be protected not only as tourist destinations but also as living institutions with continuing significance for local communities. The preservation of Kanniyakumari's heritage should also extend beyond monuments. Temples, churches and historical buildings represent tangible heritage, but the cultural life associated with them constitutes intangible heritage. Oral traditions, festival practices, devotional music, folk performances, culinary knowledge and local narratives are equally important components of cultural identity.

Modernisation presents another challenge. Younger generations may experience traditional culture differently from their predecessors because of urbanisation, migration, digital technology and changing lifestyles. Yet modernity does not necessarily require the disappearance of tradition. Cultural preservation can involve adaptation. Digital archives, documentary projects and educational initiatives can help communities preserve cultural knowledge while making it accessible to new generations.

Environmental preservation is also essential. Kanniyakumari's cultural identity is closely connected with its coastal environment, agricultural landscapes and geographical setting. Damage to the environment can therefore affect not only economic life but also cultural practices and collective memory. Heritage preservation must recognise the relationship between natural and cultural environments. Educational institutions can play an important role in this process. Colleges and universities can document local traditions, conduct oral-history projects and encourage students to engage with the cultural heritage of their region. Such initiatives can transform heritage from an abstract subject into a living field of study and community participation.

CONCLUSION

Kanniyakumari is far more than a geographical landmark at the southern edge of India. It is a complex cultural landscape shaped by historical transformations, religious diversity, sacred geography and collective traditions. Its identity has developed through the interaction of ancient Tamil heritage, Travancore influences, coastal culture and the presence of multiple religious communities. The historical incorporation of the district into Tamil Nadu did not erase these earlier layers but added another dimension to its evolving cultural identity. The temples, churches and Islamic shrines of Kanniyakumari demonstrate the plurality of its sacred landscape. These institutions preserve religious traditions while also functioning as centres of cultural memory and public participation. Festivals associated with these sacred spaces transform faith into collective experience and bring together ritual, music, performance, food, pilgrimage and social interaction.

The cultural importance of festivals lies in their ability to preserve intangible heritage. Through repeated participation, communities transmit memories and traditions across generations. At the same time, festivals are not static. They respond to changing technologies, patterns of mobility and cultural expectations. The survival of cultural traditions therefore depends not upon preventing all change but upon ensuring that change does not destroy the meanings and practices that give those traditions their identity. Religious pluralism represents another significant dimension of Kanniyakumari's cultural world. The coexistence of Hindu, Christian and Muslim traditions has created opportunities for interaction, dialogue and shared participation. Documented examples of multi-religious festival celebrations demonstrate the possibility of engaging religious diversity through cultural exchange and conversation. The metaphor of a cultural tapestry is therefore especially appropriate for understanding Kanniyakumari. A tapestry is created through different threads, and its beauty emerges not from uniformity but from the relationship among diverse elements. Similarly, the cultural identity of Kanniyakumari cannot be represented by a single faith, tradition or historical narrative. Its richness lies in the coexistence of many traditions that have contributed to a shared regional world.

The future preservation of this cultural heritage requires a comprehensive approach. Monuments and sacred architecture must be protected, but equal importance should be given to festivals, oral traditions, music, food practices, folk arts and collective memory. Communities must remain active participants in the preservation of their own heritage, while educational

institutions and cultural organisations can contribute through documentation and research. Ultimately, Kanniyakumari demonstrates that cultural diversity need not weaken social identity. When traditions are allowed to maintain their individuality while participating in shared cultural spaces, diversity can become a source of collective strength. The confluence of faiths and festivals in Kanniyakumari thus represents not merely a feature of the region's past but a continuing cultural resource whose preservation remains essential for its future.

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A STUDY ON ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES OF FESTIVALS IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the economic dynamics and developmental impact of religious and cultural festivals across Kanniyakumari District, Tamil Nadu. Situated at the southernmost tip of peninsular India, the district possesses a distinct pluralistic demographic characterized by major Hindu, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Notable celebrations such as the Suchindram Car Festival, Mandaikadu Kodai, St. Xavier's Feast at Kottar, and coastal parish festivals serves not only as cultural cornerstones but also as vital micro-economic catalysts. Using qualitative and descriptive economic analysis, the paper investigates how festive seasons stimulate local markets, drive informal sector employment, and accelerate short-term capital velocity. Key focus areas include revenue generation across hospitality and local transit, temporary vendor monetization, the livelihood support of rural artisans and folk performers, and the economic multipliers created by Diaspora remittances during peak festive seasons. The findings indicate that while festivals significantly enhance local liquidity, cross-community trade, and informal business income, they also present structural challenges, such as seasonal revenue volatility, unorganized labour instability, and municipal infrastructure strain. The study concludes with policy recommendations for local governance and tourism bodies to transition seasonal festive spikes into sustainable, year-round economic frameworks through better infrastructure planning, institutional financial support for traditional artisans, and structured religious tourism integration.

KEYWORDS:

Festival Economics, Kanniyakumari, Micro-Enterprise, Informal Economy, Cultural Tourism, Rural Livelihoods, Inter-Faith Trade.

INTRODUCTION:

Kanniyakumari, situated at the southernmost tip of peninsular India, features a distinct socio-cultural landscape shaped by religious diversity, a long coastline, and rich heritage. The district hosts significant Hindu, Christian, and Muslim populations living in close proximity. Major celebrations such as the Suchindram Rathotsavam, Mandaikadu Kodai, Kottar St. Xavier's Church Feast, and the Peer Mohammed Ooliya Dargah Festival regularly draw hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists. Beyond their spiritual importance, these festivals serve as major economic engines for the district. They stimulate micro-level commercial ecosystems, drive seasonal tourism, generate short-term employment, and mobilize local trade across communities.

Review of Literature:

- **Gartner and Holecek (1983):** Highlighted the temporary direct economic impacts of major cultural events on rural trade, noting that seasonal surges create vital liquidity buffers for informal small businesses.
- **Raj and Morpeth (2007):** Explored religious tourism as a driver of local economic development, emphasizing how faith-based events sustain regional transport, hospitality, and handicraft sectors.
- **Gautam (2012):** Analyzed the socio-economic impact of religious festivals in South India, arguing that inter-faith trade during temple and church fairs builds strong cross-community economic interdependence.

- **Rao and Vijay (2018):** Examined the informal economy during festival seasons in Tamil Nadu, concluding that while temporary markets provide critical short-term employment, they suffer from high income volatility during off-peak months.

Scope of the Study:

The study focuses geographically on key festival hubs across Kanniyakumari District including Suchindram, Mandaikadu, Kottar (Nagercoil), and Thuckalay. Subject-wise, the research covers micro-level economic activities, seasonal employment patterns, informal street commerce, transportation revenue, hospitality surges, and cross-community trade dynamics generated during annual festival cycles.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To evaluate the direct economic impact of major religious festivals on local businesses, street vendors, and hospitality operators in Kanniyakumari District.
2. To analyze the extent of seasonal employment and income generation among informal workers, artisans, and cultural performers.
3. To examine inter-faith trade participation and diaspora capital inflows during festival seasons.
4. To identify key economic constraints faced by vendors and propose policy recommendations for sustainable festival economy management.

Methodology:

This study utilizes a mixed-method descriptive research design combining primary survey data with secondary documentation.

Methodology Component	Details
Study Area	Kanniyakumari District (Key nodes: Suchindram, Mandaikadu, Kottar, Thuckalay)
Sampling Technique	Purposive Convenience Sampling
Sample Size	200 Respondents (100 Small Vendors/Traders, 50 Transport & Lodging Operators, 50 Festival Visitors/Pilgrims)
Data Collection Tools	Structured Questionnaires, Direct Field Interviews, and Direct Field Observations
Secondary Sources	District Census Handbooks, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TNTDC) reports, and published journals

Limitations of the Study:

- **Seasonal Bias:** Field data collection was restricted to specific festival peak periods, which may reflect higher revenue spikes than annualized averages.
- **Informal Data Constraints:** Many small-scale street vendors do not maintain formal accounting records; income figures rely on self-reported estimates.
- **Geographical Sample:** Findings are tailored to Kanniyakumari District and may not be fully generalizable to non-coastal or culturally homogeneous districts.

Data Analysis:

Data collected from 150 business operators and vendors across major festival sites in Kanniyakumari District.

Average Daily Income Surge During Festivals:

Business Category	Non-Festival Average Daily Revenue(Rs.)	Festival Peak Average Daily Revenue(Rs.)	Revenue Increase (%)
Street Vendors (Flowers, Puja/Pooja Goods, Toys)	600	2,800	+366.7%
Food Stalls & Eateries	1,200	4,500	+275.0%
Local Transport (Auto-rickshaws, Local Taxis)	800	2,400	+200.0%
Lodges & Homestays	2,500	7,500	+200.0%
Handicrafts & Souvenirs	700	2,200	+214.3%

Employment & Trade Composition:

Festival Economic Structure (Sampled Traders)

├── Business Type
│ ├── Permanent Local Shops: 32%
│ └── Temporary/Mobile Stalls: 68%
├── Vendor Community Background
│ ├── Same Faith as Festival: 61%
│ └── Inter-Faith Traders: 39%
└── Primary Source of Funding
├── Self-Savings: 54%
├── Informal Loans / Money Lenders: 31%
└── Microfinance / Bank Credit: 15%

Findings:

- **Substantial Revenue Multiplier:** Small vendors, food stalls, and local transport operators experience a 200% to 366% surge in daily revenue during festival peaks compared to regular business days.
- **Dominance of the Informal Sector:** Approximately 68% of commercial activity during key events is driven by temporary and informal vendors who rely on these windows for a major portion of their annual income.
- **Inter-Faith Economic Integration:** Nearly 39% of stall owners at major religious festivals belong to different religious denominations than the organizing institution, demonstrating strong inter-faith trade ties.
- **Reliance on High-Interest Informal Credit:** Over 31% of seasonal vendors finance their temporary inventory through informal money lenders, paying high interest rates that compress their net profits.
- **Infrastructure Strain:** Rapid visitor influxes create acute challenges in traffic routing, public sanitation, and solid waste management, placing extra financial burdens on local municipal bodies.

Suggestions:

1. **Micro-Credit & Formal Vendor Support:** District administration and local banks should establish short-term micro-credit schemes or low-interest festival loans to reduce vendor reliance on informal money lenders.
2. **Designated Vendor Zones:** Municipal authorities should set up organized, pre-allocated vendor zones with basic amenities (electricity, clean drinking water, and waste bins) to reduce congestion and improve vendor efficiency.

3. **Formalization of Cultural Tourism:** The Tamil Nadu Tourism Department should integrate local festival schedules into broader heritage tourism circuits, promoting year-round cultural tourism rather than hyper-seasonal spikes.
4. **Sustainable Waste Management:** Allocate a small portion of temple/church festival committee funds alongside municipal funds for eco-friendly waste management and post-event sanitation operations.

CONCLUSION:

The festival economy of Kanniyakumari District serves as a primary driver of micro-level economic activity, cross-community integration, and informal employment. While these events generate rapid capital flow for local traders, transport operators, and hospitality providers, structural issues such as credit access, high seasonality, and municipal infrastructure strain remain key hurdles. By formalizing support systems for informal vendors, improving seasonal infrastructure, and promoting integrated heritage tourism, Kanniyakumari can build a more sustainable and resilient local economy around its rich festive traditions.

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FOLK ARTS AND CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF KANNIYAKUMARI: NEGOTIATING FAITH, MEMORY AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of South India, where Tamil and Kerala traditions, diverse religious communities and varied ecological landscapes have interacted over centuries. The cultural identity of the district is expressed not only through temples, churches, mosques and sacred centres but also through the folk arts that emerge from village life, ritual practices, occupational communities and festivals. Folk songs, Villu Pattu, ritual performances, dances, oral narratives, processions, decorative traditions and other community-based expressions constitute an important body of intangible cultural heritage. This paper examines folk arts as cultural expressions through which the people of Kanniyakumari negotiate faith, memory and collective identity. Particular attention is given to Villu Pattu as a narrative tradition, folk performances associated with village festivals, the cultural significance of coastal communities, and the interaction of Tamil and Kerala performing traditions in the district. The paper argues that the folk arts of Kanniyakumari are not merely forms of entertainment or remnants of an earlier rural society. They function as living repositories of historical memory, religious belief, local knowledge and social relationships. At the same time, modernization, migration, changing forms of entertainment and declining transmission between generations have placed several traditional practices under pressure. The preservation of Kanniyakumari's folk heritage therefore requires not merely documentation but the continued participation of the communities who create, perform and reinterpret these traditions.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari - Folk Arts - Villu Pattu - Folk Performance - Oral Tradition – Festivals - Cultural Identity - Religious Pluralism - Intangible Cultural Heritage*

INTRODUCTION

The cultural landscape of Kanniyakumari cannot be understood through monuments and written history alone. Much of its cultural memory survives through songs, stories, dances, processions, rituals and oral traditions transmitted across generations. Kanniyakumari occupies a unique cultural position shaped by its historical association with Travancore, Tamil traditions, diverse landscapes and coastal communities. This has produced a rich interaction of Tamil and Kerala cultural forms, alongside varied occupational and local traditions. Religion further enriches this cultural landscape. Hindu, Christian, Muslim and Ayyavazhi communities maintain distinctive traditions while sharing a common regional environment. Festivals therefore become more than religious occasions; they bring together music, storytelling, dance, procession and collective memory. Within this setting, folk arts provide an important lens for understanding how communities express their history, faith, environment and identity.

Folk Arts as Living Cultural Memory

Folk art is fundamentally connected with community life. Unlike art produced exclusively within formal institutions, folk traditions are generally learned through participation, observation and oral transmission. The performer is

simultaneously a bearer of memory, a participant in community life and a transmitter of cultural knowledge. This characteristic is especially important in Kanniyakumari because many local traditions have existed outside formal written records. A community song may preserve a local legend; a ritual performance may retain elements of an older belief system; a festival procession may preserve the memory of a sacred place; and an occupational song may encode knowledge associated with agriculture or fishing.

Thus, folk art can be understood as a living archive. Its archive is not made of paper alone. It exists in voice, rhythm, gesture, costume, movement, ritual space and collective participation. When a traditional performance is repeated, the community does not merely reproduce an old artistic form; it also renews its relationship with the past. This explains why the disappearance of a folk tradition represents more than the loss of entertainment. It can also mean the disappearance of vocabulary, local narratives, historical memories and forms of community knowledge that may not exist elsewhere.

Villu Pattu: Narrative, Devotion and Historical Memory

Among the folk traditions associated with Kanniyakumari, *Villu Pattu,* or bow-song, deserves particular attention. Its distinctive feature is the use of the bow as a principal musical instrument accompanied by other percussion instruments. More importantly, it combines music, narration, dialogue and storytelling. The tradition has historically been closely associated with temple festivals in villages. A study specifically on the bow-song tradition of Kanniyakumari records that performances were conducted during temple festivals and could narrate stories of local deities, heroes, love, historical events, epics and Puranic traditions. This makes *Villu Pattu* significant beyond its musical character. It represents a form of popular historiography. Stories that may not appear in formal historical records can survive in performance. Local heroes, sacred places, moral values and community memories are transformed into narratives that can be understood by audiences across generations.

The performer therefore occupies a role somewhat different from that of a conventional entertainer. The *Villu Pattu* artist becomes a storyteller, teacher, religious narrator and custodian of collective memory. The tradition also demonstrates the close relationship between faith and folk culture. A religious story is not simply recited; it is performed in a manner that creates participation. The audience listens, responds and becomes part of the performance environment. In this sense, the boundary between ritual and art becomes fluid. The historical significance of *Villu Pattu* is also revealed by its changing status. Research on the tradition notes that songs relating to heroes, love stories and historical and epic narratives have become less common under the influence of modernization. The decline therefore represents not merely an artistic change but a transformation in the way communities transmit cultural memory.

Folk Performance and the Ritual World

The folk arts of Kanniyakumari become particularly meaningful when examined within the ritual environment of village festivals. Performance is often embedded within a larger sequence involving worship, procession, offerings, music and communal gathering. The *Mandaikadu* festival, for example, is

described by the district administration as a ten-day festival beginning with flag hoisting and involving the procession of the goddess around the temple streets on successive evenings. Such ritual movement transforms the surrounding streets into temporary cultural spaces. Sacred and social life become interwoven. The importance of such festivals lies in their participatory character. The audience is not completely separate from the performer. Villagers may organize the event, prepare decorations, accompany processions, provide music, narrate stories or participate in associated rituals. Consequently, folk art functions as a social activity rather than merely a staged performance.

Studies of folk performing arts in Kanniyakumari have identified *Villuppattu, Kanuyankoothu, Karagattam* and *Kalialattam* among the traditions associated with the social and ritual life of the district. One study particularly emphasizes the importance of *Villuppattu* in village-deity temples. The significance of these forms therefore lies in their relationship with the community. They create collective experiences through which religious belief, entertainment and social identity become connected.

The Tamil–Kerala Cultural Interface

One of the most distinctive features of Kanniyakumari is that its folk culture cannot be placed neatly within a single cultural category. The historical relationship of the district with Travancore created an environment in which Tamil and Kerala traditions interacted. This is visible in performing arts as well as language, ritual practices and festivals. Research on Kerala-associated folk performing arts in Kanniyakumari records traditions such as *Margam Kali, Thiruvathirakali, Thiyattu, Chakyarkoothu, Koodiyattam* and *Chavittunatakam* as having existed in parts of the district, particularly in the historically associated Kalkulam and Vilavancode regions. The same study notes that several of these traditions have declined and survive only in limited ritual or cultural settings. This historical layering makes Kanniyakumari culturally distinctive. Its folk heritage demonstrates that cultural boundaries are not always rigid. Traditions can travel, interact, adapt and acquire local meanings. Therefore, the folk culture of Kanniyakumari should not be viewed simply as either "Tamil" or "Kerala" culture. It is more accurately understood as a regional cultural synthesis shaped by centuries of interaction.

Coastal Life and Folk Expression

The sea is another important element in the cultural imagination of Kanniyakumari. The district's coastal communities have developed ways of life closely connected with fishing, navigation, weather, seasonal changes and the marine environment. For coastal communities, occupational knowledge can become cultural knowledge. Vocabulary, songs, stories and customary practices can preserve memories of the sea and the experiences of generations of fishing communities. This is important because folk culture does not emerge only around temples and religious institutions. It also develops around work and environment. Agricultural songs, occupational practices, fishing traditions and community celebrations demonstrate how people translate their relationship with the natural world into cultural expression. Kanniyakumari's geographical diversity from its coastline to agricultural plains and the Western Ghats—has therefore contributed to a diverse cultural vocabulary. The district's cultural landscape is partly a reflection of

the different environments in which its communities have lived and worked.

Festivals as Confluence of Faiths and Cultural Expressions

The central theme of a cultural tapestry becomes most visible during festivals. Festivals create temporary spaces where religion, art, memory and social interaction meet. The importance of festivals in Kanniyakumari extends across religious traditions. Temple festivals, Christian feasts, Muslim celebrations, *Ayyavazhi* observances and broader cultural festivals each have their own religious meanings, yet they exist within the same regional social landscape.

The district's cultural calendar includes *Kumari Thiruvizha*, temple festivals and other public celebrations, while the Tamil Nadu Department of Art and Culture explicitly includes Folk Arts *Vizha, Kumari Vizha*, Pongal *Kalai Vizha* and Communal Harmony Festival among the programmes conducted through its regional cultural centres. This institutional recognition is important, but the deeper significance lies in the community character of the celebrations. Festivals allow cultural knowledge to become visible. A tradition that remains within the memory of a small group can become publicly experienced through performance. In this sense, festivals act as cultural bridges. They provide opportunities for communities to encounter one another's music, food, artistic practices and public rituals without necessarily erasing their distinctive religious identities.

CONCLUSION

The folk arts of Kanniyakumari reveal culture as a continuing process of remembering, performing and reinterpretation. Villu Pattu preserves narratives through music and storytelling, while ritual performances and coastal traditions express the community's relationship with faith, place and the sea. The coexistence of Tamil and Kerala-associated forms further reflects the district's unique historical position. Folk traditions also demonstrate how faith and culture intersect. Festivals transform temples, churches, village spaces and public grounds into cultural arenas where communities reproduce memory, identity and belonging. Kanniyakumari's cultural richness lies in its ability to sustain diverse traditions within a shared regional landscape. Their preservation requires more than documentation; these traditions must remain part of community life and continue to be transmitted and reinterpreted by younger generations. Thus, the folk arts of Kanniyakumari are not merely relics of the past, but living expressions of faith, memory, place and identity.

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CULTURAL TOURISM AS A CATALYST FOR SUSTAINING THE TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS OF KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Traditional festivals are important forms of intangible cultural heritage that preserve collective memory, religious practices, folk traditions, and community identity. Kanniyakumari district, at the southernmost tip of mainland India, has a distinctive multicultural heritage shaped by Hindu, Christian, and Islamic traditions. Festivals such as the Navaratri procession, Suchindram Car Festival, Thookkam, Vavubali, Cape Festival, and church feasts remain important expressions of this heritage. This study examines the role of cultural tourism in sustaining these festivals and the challenges arising from tourism-led cultural transformation. A qualitative approach was adopted using field observations, stakeholder interviews, historical records, government publications, and scholarly sources. The findings indicate that cultural tourism supports festival sustainability through employment generation, local livelihoods, artisan support, promotion of traditional arts, and greater heritage awareness. However, commercialisation, overcrowding, environmental pressure, unequal distribution of tourism benefits, and commodification of sacred traditions pose challenges to long-term preservation. The study argues that sustainable festival tourism requires community-centred governance, participatory planning, ethical tourism practices, digital heritage documentation, and institutional support for cultural practitioners. The study contributes to sustainable cultural tourism discourse and offers policy directions for balancing heritage conservation with tourism development in Kanniyakumari.

Keywords: *Folk Traditions, Cultural Tourism, Sacred Traditions, Festival Tourism, Cultural Practitioners, Heritage Conservation.*

INTRODUCTION

Traditional festivals are enduring forms of intangible cultural heritage that preserve community beliefs, customs, artistic practices, social relationships, and historical memory. As dynamic cultural practices, they adapt to changing social conditions while maintaining cultural identity, strengthening community cohesion, transmitting indigenous knowledge, and supporting local livelihoods through tourism. Kanniyakumari district occupies a distinctive position in India's cultural landscape. Located at the southernmost tip of mainland India, it reflects the historical interaction of Tamil and Kerala traditions and the coexistence of Hindu, Christian, and Islamic communities. Its festivals, including the Navaratri procession Suchindram Car Festival, Thookkam, Vavubali, Cape Festival, and church feasts, continue to preserve rituals, folk arts, traditional knowledge, and community practices. The growth of cultural tourism has increased the visibility and economic value of these festivals. Tourism creates opportunities for artisans, performers, vendors, transport providers, and other local enterprises while supporting traditional arts, festival infrastructure, and heritage awareness. However, commercialisation, commodification, overcrowding, environmental pressure, changing visitor expectations, and unequal distribution of tourism benefits may weaken cultural authenticity and community ownership. Without appropriate heritage

management, living traditions may increasingly be transformed into commercial tourism products. Although cultural tourism has been widely studied, limited research has examined its specific relationship with the sustainability of traditional festivals in Kanniyakumari. Existing studies largely focus on pilgrimage tourism, coastal attractions, heritage sites, and tourism development, with less attention to festival continuity, cultural authenticity, and community participation.

Against this background, the present study examines the role of cultural tourism in sustaining traditional festivals in Kanniyakumari. It evaluates tourism-related economic, social, and cultural opportunities, identifies threats to festival authenticity and continuity, and proposes community-based policy measures for sustainable festival management. The study contributes to sustainable cultural tourism discourse by providing locally relevant insights for heritage conservation and tourism planning.

Review of Literature

Cultural tourism in India increasingly links traditional festivals, religious practices, folk arts, and community celebrations with destination development, local livelihoods, cultural identity, and heritage conservation. However, tourism expansion also raises concerns about commercialisation, authenticity, and community ownership. Singh (2004) highlights the role of pilgrimage and festivals in cultural continuity and local economies, while Bandyopadhyay et al. (2008) emphasise the relationship between heritage tourism, cultural identity, and sensitive heritage representation. Bandyopadhyay (2016) further stresses community perspectives in protecting religious heritage and cultural authenticity. Raj (2013) identifies festivals as resources for employment, entrepreneurship, traditional arts, and destination development, while cautioning against environmental and infrastructural pressures from unmanaged tourism. The UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (2003) and Operational Directives (2022) emphasise community participation, documentation, education, and sustainable safeguarding of living traditions. Indian tourism policies similarly recognise festivals and cultural heritage as tourism assets requiring conservation and community involvement.

Studies of Kanniyakumari largely focus on pilgrimage, coastal attractions, monuments, and tourism infrastructure, with limited attention to festival sustainability and community ownership. Thus, the relationship between tourism, cultural authenticity, economic opportunities, and environmental pressures remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap through a localised analysis of traditional festivals in Kanniyakumari, integrating cultural tourism, community participation, and intangible cultural heritage perspectives.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine the relationship between cultural tourism and traditional festival sustainability in Kanniyakumari district. The study focuses on the Navaratri procession, Suchindram Car Festival, Thookkam, Vavubali, Cape Festival, and selected church feasts. Primary data were collected through field observations and semi-structured interviews with religious administrators, artists, artisans, vendors, tourism officials, residents, guides, and visitors. Secondary sources included scholarly literature, government reports, district

records, Census publications, tourism documents, historical sources, and academic theses. Purposive sampling was used to identify stakeholders with relevant knowledge of festival activities and tourism. Data were analysed thematically, focusing on cultural preservation, economic opportunities, community participation, commercialisation, environmental impacts, and heritage management. Historical interpretation and triangulation of interviews, observations, and documentary evidence strengthened the findings. Ethical principles, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for religious customs, were maintained throughout the study.

Historical and Cultural Context of Traditional Festivals in Kanniyakumari

Kanniyakumari occupies a distinctive position in the cultural history of South India because of its geographical location and historical evolution. Situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula, the district has long been a centre of pilgrimage, maritime exchange, and cultural interaction. The successive influence of the Chera, Chola, Pandya, Venad, and Travancore kingdoms has produced a cultural landscape combining Tamil and Kerala traditions. Although Kanniyakumari became part of Tamil Nadu following the States Reorganisation Act of 1956, its religious practices, architecture, rituals, and festival traditions continue to reflect the legacy of the former Travancore kingdom.

Traditional festivals in the district function as living expressions of cultural identity, collective memory, and social history. They preserve indigenous knowledge, oral traditions, religious practices, performing arts, and customary forms of community participation. Their continuity depends largely on religious commitment, local involvement, and intergenerational transmission. The coexistence of Hindu, Christian, and Islamic traditions further demonstrates Kanniyakumari's multicultural character, with temples, churches, and mosques serving as important centres of spiritual and community life.

Among Hindu festivals, celebrations associated with the Bhagavathy Amman Temple, including Chithirai, Vaikasi, Navaratri, and the Car Festival, combine religious worship, processions, traditional music, and community participation. The historic Navaratri procession linking Padmanabhapuram, Kumarakoil, Suchindram, and Thiruvananthapuram represents the enduring cultural relationship between Tamil Nadu and Kerala despite modern administrative boundaries. The Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple Car Festival similarly combines religious rituals, music, devotional performances, community service, and local economic activities involving artisans, vendors, musicians, and traders.

The Thookkam festival at Kollemcode Bhadrakali Amman Temple represents a distinctive devotional tradition associated with fulfilment of vows. Its continued participation from Tamil Nadu and Kerala, together with voluntary service and charitable food distribution, reflects both religious continuity and social solidarity. The Vavubali festival at Kuzhithurai, observed during Aadi Amavasai, centres on ancestral remembrance and ritual offerings while also incorporating agricultural exhibitions, traditional crafts, and local commerce. Its evolution illustrates the capacity of traditional festivals to respond to changing social and

economic conditions without losing their spiritual foundations. Christian and Islamic traditions also contribute to the district's cultural diversity. Annual church feasts involve religious processions, liturgical services, cultural programmes, charitable activities, and community gatherings, while Islamic festivals reinforce religious solidarity and community participation. Collectively, these traditions demonstrate the district's long-standing cultural coexistence and communal harmony.

Festivals also provide important platforms for preserving folk music, devotional songs, Nadaswaram, Thavil, Villupattu, Karagattam, Oyilattam, traditional crafts, ceremonial objects, floral decoration, and other forms of indigenous knowledge. Thus, festivals function as living cultural institutions through which artistic skills and specialised knowledge continue to be transmitted. The historical evolution of Kanniyakumari's festivals demonstrates their ability to adapt to political, economic, social, and technological changes while retaining their essential cultural significance. Improved transportation, communication, and tourism have increased visitor participation and influenced festival organisation and presentation. However, the growing tourism presence also creates a need to protect authenticity and community ownership. Kanniyakumari's festivals should therefore be understood as interconnected systems of faith, history, art, social organisation, and identity. Their long-term sustainability depends on maintaining community participation and cultural transmission while responsibly managing the opportunities and pressures associated with cultural tourism.

Emerging Opportunities

The growth of cultural tourism in Kanniyakumari has created opportunities to sustain traditional festivals while supporting local economic and social development. Cultural tourism encourages visitors to engage with local history, religious practices, performing arts, customs, and community life. In Kanniyakumari, traditional festivals complement major religious and coastal attractions, increasing public awareness of local heritage and strengthening recognition of intangible cultural heritage. A major opportunity is the contribution of tourism to the economic sustainability of festivals. Increased visitor arrivals generate expenditure on accommodation, transportation, food, handicrafts, religious offerings, and other services. Local vendors, flower sellers, artisans, musicians, photographers, transport operators, and small businesses benefit from increased seasonal demand. Such income provides incentives for communities to continue supporting festivals and maintaining associated cultural practices.

Tourism also creates markets for traditional artisans whose skills include flower decoration, wood carving, metalwork, textile production, musical instrument making, and ceremonial crafts. Greater visitor demand for traditional products, festival decorations, religious souvenirs, and ritual objects can improve artisan livelihoods and encourage younger generations to continue traditional occupations. Similarly, festival tourism supports performing arts such as Nadaswaram, Thavil, Villupattu, Karagattam, Oyilattam, devotional music, and folk performances by providing wider audiences and opportunities for cultural practitioners.

Cultural tourism can strengthen community identity and pride by increasing recognition of local traditions. Festivals provide opportunities to preserve customs, traditional food, dress, oral traditions, ritual knowledge, and the distinctive Tamil and Kerala cultural influences of Kanniyakumari. Tourism also encourages documentation through photographs, films, oral histories, digital archives, and academic research, supporting the transmission of intangible heritage to future generations. Infrastructure development represents another important opportunity. Improvements in roads, transportation, sanitation, lighting, water supply, parking, accommodation, and communication facilities can facilitate festival organisation and improve conditions for both visitors and residents. Enhanced accessibility also enables devotees and visitors from distant locations to participate in traditional celebrations.

Community participation remains central to festival sustainability. Local residents contribute through voluntary service, processions, decoration, community meals, hospitality, cultural performances, and small-scale enterprises. Tourism can strengthen this participation by creating opportunities for home-based businesses and local cultural products. Women's participation is particularly significant through traditional food preparation, flower decoration, handicrafts, self-help groups, and community services. Tourism-related markets can enhance women's income and their role in cultural preservation. Festivals also possess considerable educational value. Cultural tourism provides visitors and younger generations with opportunities to understand local history, religious practices, traditional arts, and cultural diversity. Educational visits and heritage interpretation can strengthen awareness of the importance of preserving traditional knowledge. The coexistence of Hindu, Christian, and Islamic festivals further enhances Kanniyakumari's potential as a destination representing cultural diversity and religious harmony.

Finally, cultural tourism can encourage collaboration among government agencies, religious institutions, local bodies, tourism stakeholders, and community organisations. Such coordination can improve festival management, infrastructure, cultural promotion, and heritage planning. These opportunities demonstrate that tourism can support festival sustainability when guided by cultural sensitivity, community participation, and responsible heritage management. Economic development should therefore reinforce, rather than replace, the cultural and religious values that sustain Kanniyakumari's living festival traditions.

Challenges of Tourism-Led Festival Development

The growing integration of tourism into Kanniyakumari's traditional festivals creates challenges for cultural authenticity, community participation, and long-term sustainability. Commercialisation through stalls, sponsorships, promotional activities, and entertainment may shift festivals from religious and community purposes towards visitor-oriented consumption. Cultural commodification can similarly simplify rituals, folk arts, and ceremonial practices, weakening their spiritual and cultural meanings.

Increasing visitor numbers create overcrowding, traffic congestion, waste generation, noise pollution, and pressure

on coastal and heritage environments. Unequal distribution of tourism benefits may favour larger businesses over traditional artisans, performers, vendors, and local communities, reducing incentives for cultural preservation. Competition from mass-produced products and commercial entertainment also threatens traditional crafts and performing arts. Youth migration, changing lifestyles, and declining intergenerational participation further affect the transmission of ritual knowledge, oral traditions, songs, and craft skills. Digital promotion can improve visibility but may also encourage superficial representation, inappropriate recording, or misinformation about sacred practices. Weak coordination among tourism authorities, religious institutions, local bodies, and communities can further complicate festival management. Climate-related risks, including heavy rainfall, cyclonic conditions, and coastal vulnerability, add emerging pressures. These challenges highlight the need for integrated planning that protects cultural authenticity, strengthens community ownership, ensures equitable benefits, and promotes environmentally responsible and culturally sensitive tourism.

Policy Imperatives and Strategic Framework

The sustainable development of Kanniyakumari's traditional festivals requires an integrated framework balancing heritage conservation with responsible tourism. Community-centred governance should involve temples, churches, mosques, artisans, women's groups, youth, local bodies, and tourism authorities in planning and monitoring. A district-level Festival Heritage Council could coordinate conservation, tourism management, documentation, and stakeholder collaboration. Community-Based Tourism should promote local ownership and equitable benefits through handicrafts, traditional food, cultural interpretation, heritage walks, and community enterprises. Visitor protocols should protect sacred practices and encourage respectful behaviour. Digital documentation of rituals, oral traditions, music, dance, and crafts can support intergenerational transmission, supported by heritage interpretation centres and multilingual digital resources. Environmental measures should address waste, plastic reduction, carrying capacity, sanitation, and coastal protection. Training for guides, volunteers, artisans, and officials can strengthen heritage interpretation and visitor management. Financial support for traditional practitioners and continuous monitoring of economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts are also essential. Such an integrated approach can strengthen community ownership while ensuring culturally sensitive and sustainable festival tourism.

CONCLUSION

Traditional festivals are vital components of Kanniyakumari's intangible cultural heritage, preserving religious practices, folk arts, traditional knowledge, and community identity. The study finds that cultural tourism enhances festival sustainability through greater heritage visibility, livelihood opportunities, infrastructure development, and support for traditional arts. However, commercialisation, commodification, overcrowding, environmental pressure, unequal benefits, and declining youth participation may weaken authenticity and community ownership. Sustainable festival tourism therefore requires community-centred governance, equitable benefit sharing,

responsible visitor management, environmental protection, digital documentation, heritage education, and institutional coordination. The study contributes to cultural tourism research by linking economic development with cultural continuity and community empowerment. Although district-specific and qualitative, it provides a basis for future comparative and mixed-method research.

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CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FAIRS AND FESTIVALS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Fairs and festivals are celebrated to mark various life milestones and cosmic events, including births, passing away, coming-of-age transitions, weddings, lunar phases, solstices, and equinoxes. They are also held to prepare for journeys, seek healing, or commemorate major events. Customs teach mankind how to lead a life filled with truth, kindness, duty, love, devotion and affection. These traditions become unbreakable when religions endorse and encourage them. Because of these admirable qualities, he is able to observe and abide by the laws and customs of the nearby community or nation and embrace any customs that are beneficial to his own. The Kanyakumari district is renowned for a number of historic temples, churches, and mosques that had a significant impact on the people's way of life and culture. These temples have received numerous endowments and benefactions. The residents of this district have a diverse culture that is heavily influenced by Travancore. Travancore is the birthplace of the distinctive drama known as Kathakali. The Villu Pattu, or Bow song, is one of the many artistic expressions of the ancient culture and customs. It is a traditional musical storytelling technique from southern Tamil Nadu. In addition, Karagam dance is a popular dance style in rural areas. The Ayyavazhi followers celebrate the eleven-day Kodiyettru Thirunal at Swamithoppu Pathi. This is observed three times a year in the Tamil months of Vaikaasi, Thai, and Aavani. There are several Christian festival celebrates in Kanyakumari district. In every Christian household, Christmas is celebrated with much value. People attend the church's midnight mass prayer and adorn their Christmas trees at home. Muslims in Kanyakumari district also enthusiastically celebrate Bakrid, the feast of sacrifice. Since wealthy people travel to Mecca for the Haj, this is also known as the festival of Haj or I'd ul Alha. No wonder, Kanyakumari district has promising cultural heritage and religious legacy.

KEY WORDS

Fairs and festivals - Cosmic events – Customs – Devotion – Endowments – Travancore – Kathakali - Villu Pattu - Karagam dance – Christmas – Bakrid - Religious legacy - Cultural heritage

INTRODUCTION:

Fairs and festivals are celebrated to mark a vast array of life events and natural cycles, ranging from births, marriages, and coming-of-age milestones to deaths, lunar phases, solstices, equinoxes, journeys, and healing rituals. Conceived by ancient sages, Hindu festivals recur at specific times throughout the year to offer moments of communal joy and celebration, effectively breaking up the monotony of daily routines.[1] While most of these celebrations are deeply rooted in religion, temple festivals specifically operate under *Nimitika Puja* (occasional worship). Although holding these festivals is not mandatory for a temple, doing so significantly enhances its prestige, draws in wealth, and attracts devout followers. Furthermore, these events offer valuable insights into the core traditions, customs, and behaviours inherent to Hinduism. Most festival celebrations centre on the Hindu Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Additionally, historical inscriptions discovered within temple walls reveal that monarchs across various dynasties frequently provided patronage and

encouragement to ensure these fairs and festivals were conducted properly.[2]

The Role and Significance of Hindu Fairs and Festivals

Fairs and festivals are celebrated to mark various life milestones and cosmic events, including births, passing away, coming-of-age transitions, weddings, lunar phases, solstices, and equinoxes. They are also held to prepare for journeys, seek healing, or commemorate major events. Crafted by ancient sages, Hindu festivals recur at specific times throughout the year. Historically, these occasions brought the community together in joy and merriment, offering a much-needed escape from the repetitive monotony of daily life. They are also observed to seek blessings before embarking on journeys, during healing rituals, and to commemorate significant historical milestones. Within Hinduism, these recurring celebrations were intentionally structured by ancient sages to break the mundane routine of daily life, offering communities a vibrant outlet for public joy and togetherness. Historians and the Philosophers of art may argue that the 'religious sense' is secondary. But throughout the world, the temples of Hindus, the Churches of Christians and the Mosques of Muslims have their significance only of religious, not for their history or aesthetics. In essence, temple is the light-house of religion. Rituals serve as a focus for what you wish to accomplish and as a reminder of our connection to the web of power. Most Hindu festivals are a soul-purifying experience for the believer. Festivals are instrumental in diluting the humdrum of everyday life by adding their special touch to it. India is a land of various religions and multiple cultures. Along with Hindu, Muslim and Sikh festivals, Christian festivals are also celebrated with deity and devotion in different parts of Kanyakumari district.[3] Customs teach mankind how to lead a life filled with truth, kindness, duty, love, devotion and affection. These traditions become unbreakable when religions endorse and encourage them.

Because of these admirable qualities, he is able to observe and abide by the laws and customs of the nearby community or nation and embrace any customs that are beneficial to his own. People will therefore continue to want to maintain such beliefs and practices free from mistakes and omissions. The district of Kanyakumari may have the most religious celebrations throughout the year. The majority of temple celebrations occur in the post-harvest months of March through June and in September through October.[4] Each festival lasts an additional three to 10 days. The primary god is decked with extremely precious and uncommon pieces of jewellery from a bygone era and is dressed in vibrant, glittering clothes. The god is carried in processions around the temple atop specially built carriers known as "Vahanams." For this reason, Madurai, Srirangam, and a few other towns have been designed, with each street bearing the name of the temple festival that runs through it. The purpose of bringing out the portable deity in such a procession is to allow the sick, elderly, disabled, and members of communities that are prohibited from entering temples to see the deity up close and to worship. The district of Kanyakumari was formerly a part of the state of Travancore. This region was part of the southern section of the state when it was split into Northern and Southern divisions in 1835. The present Kanyakumari district remained a part of Kerala state's Trivandrum district when the United States of Travancore and

Cochin was established in July 1949. The southern divisions of the erstwhile Travancore were constituted by the Taluks of Agasteeswarem, Thovalai, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode. The majority of the residents in these regions spoke Tamil. They pushed for this region to be merged with Madras State. This was also suggested by the State Reorganization Commission. As a result, in 1956 the States Reorganization Act was passed.[5]

The Kanyakumari district is renowned for a number of historic temples, churches, and mosques that had a significant impact on the people's way of life and culture. These temples have received numerous endowments and benefactions. Every day, especially during holidays, large numbers of tourists and followers swarm these places of worship. The people who live in the temples have frequently provided them with a variety of free services. The two most common languages spoken in this district are Tamil and Malayalam. There are several areas in the district where Muslims predominate, while a sizable portion of the population is Hindu and Christian.[6]

However, everyone who lives here is friendly. The residents of this district have a diverse culture that is heavily influenced by Travancore. Travancore is the birthplace of the distinctive drama known as Kathakali. The story-dance, or kathakali, is a relatively new evolution of earlier dances that originated from religious expression through symbolic action. In the Kanyakumari district, it is presently performed twice a year during the holiday seasons in the temples of Kuzhithurai, Thiruvattar, Ponmana, Thirparappu, Neyyoor, and Munchira.[7] The Villu Pattu, or Bow song, is one of the many artistic expressions of the ancient culture and customs. It is a traditional musical storytelling technique from southern Tamil Nadu. The Villu Pattu artists employ the bow, an ancient weapon used by warriors, as their main musical instrument. Udukku, Kudam, Thala-Kattai, and several additional instruments are used in the performances. Ancient Tamil literature refers to Udukku as Thudi. It is a little drum with a thin central section that is played with the fingers of the right hand while being held in the left. It can be observed in the statues and images of Lord Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, who is shown loving his left hand. The Villu Pattu team also splits into two groups, each of which conducts a program called Lavani Pattu in which participants exchange questions and replies in an effort to demonstrate opposing viewpoints on a certain topic. The traditional folk tunes are primarily used by Villu-Pattu musicians. A significant part of the Kanyakumari district's cultural life is the folk dance known as Thiruvathirai Kali. It is primarily played during the Onam period and is similar to Kummi. Young girls make up the players. For each dance, eight, ten, twelve, or sixteen girls are needed. They sing in unison while moving around. Each girl hits the Kole or stick she is holding in each hand, and her movements and stick strikes are timed to the melody. As a result, a significant portion of Kanyakumari district’s culture consists on the many folk dances. In addition, Karagam dance is a popular dance style in rural areas.[8]

Men and women play it at weddings and festivals. This temple, like the majority of other temples in the Kanyakumari district, offers Kerala Tantram as a form of worship. Thousands of people from all around the state attend the Tirukkalyanam, which is an enactment of the holy marriage. In the

month of Panguni, the seven-day celebration starts under the star of Anuradha. Similar to other Murugan temples, Skanda Sashti is observed for six days, whereas Vaikasi Visakam is observed for ten days. On the final Friday of the month of Aavani, pilgrims gather to celebrate Pushpabishekam by covering the picture of Kumaran with hundreds of flower baskets. Ayyavazhi was born in the Kanyakumari district. The 19th century saw the emergence of the dharmic belief system known as Ayyavazhi in South India.[9] Numerous publications, official documents, and scholarly studies mention it as a separate monistic religion. However, the majority of its adherents identify as Hindus in Indian censuses. Ayyavazhi is significant in the social history of the Kanyakumari district in the middle of the nineteenth century in addition to his position in the religious realm. Ayyavazhi devotees commemorate the Ayya Vaikunda Avataram on the twentieth day of the Tamil month of Masi. On this day, they believe that Lord Vaikundar, the son of Mummorthies, ascended from the sea at Thiruchendur to vanquish the wicked spirit of Kali. The Ayyavazhi followers celebrate the eleven-day Kodiyettru Thirunal at Swamithoppu Pathi. This is observed three times a year in the Tamil months of Vaikaasi, Thai, and Aavani. The religious headquarters of Swamithoppu-pathi, Manavai-pathi, Thamarai-pathi, or Thalaimaippathi are the primary pathi of the Ayyavazhi, the head of all Ayyavazhi worship centers, and the location where Ayya Vaikundar is said to have performed the Tavam.[10]

The festival for the month of Vaikasi is regarded as the most sacred. The Hindu temples in the Kanyakumari district host lavish fairs and festivals. Churches, mosques, and temples all host a variety of festivities. In January, a lot of people come to Suchindram for the vehicle festival. The Kodai festival takes place throughout the Malayalam month of Kumbam (February–March), concluding on the final Tuesday of the month. It takes place in the Kalkulam taluk's Mondaikadu temple. Many individuals came together to appreciate this. After being observed for 10 days, the festival evolved into a social event, particularly on Sundays. Another is the Thirukalyana Utsavam, which is held in March and April at the Kumarakoil temple in the Kalkulam taluk. It is recognized as one of the significant holidays. Hindu communities also celebrate and rejoice at Pongal in January and Deepavali in November. The Malayalis of the Kanyakumari district celebrate Onam with sports and feasts. This neighbourhood is well-known for its many folk arts and dances. They are performed in temples during festivals, as well as at various school ceremonies. These include Thiruvathirai Kali, Kalial, Kathakali, Ottam Thullal, Karagam Dance, Kalari, and Bow Song.[11]

Christian Festival:

There are several Christian festival celebrates in Kanyakumari district. In every Christian household, Christmas is celebrated with much value. People attend the church's midnight mass prayer and adorn their Christmas trees at home. They share gifts and dress in new outfits. Another significant celebration is Ester, which takes place in the spring and is a religious holiday honouring the resurrection of God's son Jesus Christ. The churches celebrate Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon that falls on or after the spring equinox, which is the third day after his crucifixion.[12] Easter celebrations begin on Good Friday, which commemorates the fructification of Jesus Christ, and can take place as early as

March 22nd or as late as April 25th. Christians attend mass at the mare at the church and have a feast rejoicing thereafter.

Muslim Festivals:

Muslims in Kanyakumari district also enthusiastically celebrate Bakrid, the feast of sacrifice. Since wealthy people travel to Mecca for the Haj, this is also known as the festival of Haj or I'd ul Alha. This celebration takes place on the tenth day of "Dul-Haj." This Dargah uses the Dargah budget to make some arrangements for the Bakrid holiday celebration. The tenth day of the month Bagreed, also known as Zilhujja, is Bakrid. Another name for Eid ul Adha is Bakrid, or the festival of sacrifice. Goats, sheep, cows, camels, and other domestic animals are sacrificed on the Hajj. On the tenth day of Duhl Hijja, it is typically observed. Muslims offer the Iid Prayer first thing in the morning.[13] Following the Iid Prayer, Muslims offered animals as sacrifices to their loved ones and the underprivileged. In remembrance of Prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son in Mecca, Muslims dress up and joyfully celebrate this event by offering a variety of goats, camels, or cows, depending on their financial situation. Muslims around the world observe Milad un-Nabi, a holy holiday honoring the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad, who was sent to earth on the twelfth Monday in the month of Rabi-ul Awval (August 20, 570 AD). The 12th of Rabiul, or Awwal, is Maulood's final day. Muharram is a celebration that holds particular meaning for Shia Muslims. Ten days of deep mourning are observed in honor of Hussain, the Prophet Mohammed's grandson. Although some orthodox Shias observe a forty-day mourning period, the mourning period is ten days. The event culminates in groups of young people using whip lashes to inflict injuries on tazias, which are elaborately decorated floats, while shouting the names of the Prophet's grandson and son-in-law.[14]

Festivals and Culture

Festivals in the temples, churches and mosques are not conducted for the sake of fun and festivity in Kanyakumari district. They have a serious and admirable goal in mind. It is intended for the nation's prosperity and peace as well as that of its citizens. The state's citizens come together to take part in these celebrations, putting aside their caste divisions and focusing all of their disagreements on other matters. The majority of these celebrations have a religious focus. This is due to man's innate desire to establish communication with God in order to make both his earthly existence and his afterlife blissful and joyful. People become more religious during festivals.[15] Additionally, they help to revitalize the relationship between God and humanity. Churches and temples serve as reminders of God. Festivals are events that help keep traditions alive. They help the Kanyakumari district's society become cohesive, purposeful, and forward-thinking.

Fairs and festivals can help people from many parts of a community come together and maintain their integrity. They are useful in estimating cultural heritage because of their religious foundations. Devotees must demonstrate their faith and engage a large number of people in religious activities, which leads to the expansion of religion. Public entertainment is frequently limited to the temple's grounds. These entertainments benefited both the rich and the poor. In the Kanyakumari area, guests are provided

with free accommodation and food in the restrooms or choultries connected to the temple during the celebrations. Fairs and festivals are joyous occasions that bring society's members together. As one of the oldest cities in India and the epicentre of Tamil culture, the relics left by the ancient kingdom's rulers still attest to its cultural significance and reveal much about the political and religious inclinations and aspirations of the people of the past. The festivals, which frequently lasted two or more days, eventually turned into fairs. To barter or sell things, merchants and small-time traders from nearby and distant locations travelled there. All civic and social life revolved around the spiritual centres. The temple played a significant role in the Kanyakumari district's economy due to its influence, which went beyond the strictly religious and spiritual spheres.[16] Among the significant holidays observed by Christians in the Kanyakumari district are New Year's, Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter. On certain occasions, Christians dress to impress and attend church early in the morning. The social ties within this group are reinforced because they typically attend church with their families. The smoking of the vibrant firecrackers in the Kanyakumari district, which briefly brighten the night sky with fire dots, is an example of how the local culture affects Christians.

Socio-Cultural Impact:

The socio-cultural impact of festivals results from the interaction between hosts', or local people, and guests, and can be regarded as changes in customs, lifestyles, values, and cultural and social activities in Kanyakumari district. These temple festivals greatly improve a temple's reputation, attract pious pilgrims, and increase its financial resources, even though they are not strictly required. Additionally, these occasions highlight the triple-dimensional character of temples and provide a window into the fundamental practices and traditions of the Hindu faith.[17] The history of these festivities is well-documented; historical temple inscriptions show that rulers from different reigning dynasties regularly offered financial support and royal patronage to make sure these fairs and festivals were held in a spectacular manner. The degree of community support and participation in the event may increase as a result of these modifications, but they may also cause discontent and rejection among the community. As a result, it's critical to comprehend how festivals affect a host community on a sociocultural level. Festivals have an impact on society and culture in many different ways. For example, they both affect lifestyles, customs, behaviours, and life values. Furthermore, some researchers believed that one facet of the social impact were the cultural experience. The socio-cultural impact of events is often related to the pilgrim-host relationship, which was considered as an impact effects on the host community in Kanyakumari district. It was strongly correlated with participant types, activity types, and event styles. The likelihood of changes occurring increased with the residents' involvement in events and interactions with other participants. Additionally, it was much easier for changes to occur in the quality of life, value systems, behavioural patterns, family relationships, and preferences in host communities in Kanyakumari district if there were cultural and economic differences between residents and sponsors, vendors, pilgrims, and other parties involved. In interactions with local stakeholders, the host community was frequently the weaker side for a variety of

reasons.[18] They were compelled to leverage the interests of event stakeholders and endure a variety of outcomes brought forth by events. Even worse, it was occasionally challenging to quantify and define the socio-cultural impact. It even took a while for certain cultural elements to emerge. In the Kanyakumari district, festivals were typically hosted within a complex network of individuals or entities that either influenced or were influenced by the acts of an organization.

Communal Harmony:

In addition, the nature of a festival and improvements going along with the festival's development may create socio-cultural impacts on the community and residents. Many stakeholders became involved, cooperated, and shared one or more common aims for the festival since festivals or events in the Kanyakumari district may meet a variety of social, cultural, and economic purposes. The success or failure of a festival can be directly impacted by the major stakeholders; hence it is important for festival and ceremonial organizers to identify them. The parties that festivals relied on for resources or other forms of assistance were the most significant sponsors. To ensure success, festival organizations must be adept at identifying stakeholders and managing their relationships. When Muslims celebrate births and marriages, they also create a sound known as kulavai, which is a blend of Islam and Hinduism. It has some effect over the district's local traditions. In the Kanyakumari district, Muslim festivities are essential to the advancement of civilization.[19] The advancement of both individuals and society depends on ideas, convictions, education, and training. Muslim festivals emphasize spirituality and education while spreading positive ideas and beliefs. Muslim festivals in the Kanyakumari district symbolize the elimination of non-Islamic traditions and rituals that have infiltrated Muslim culture. The social, moral, and intellectual advancement of Muslim culture is another goal of Muslim festivals. The creation of exemplary citizens is the festivals' greatest social contribution.

National Integration:

Fairs and festivals may be a powerful tool for fostering national cohesion. People voluntarily participate in fairs and festivals. Hinduism celebrates more festivals than other religions, despite the fact that festivals are observed worldwide. A festival is a great way to use the track-two diplomatic barometer of affinity and proximity. The entire fabric of tradition and nature is thus threatened by festivals, which cause traditional human settings to vanish and are replaced by towers of manufactured concrete concepts, ethics, and morals.[20]

CONCLUSION:

Fairs and festivals in Kanyakumari district are a cultural mirror of the life of our people, their feelings and sentiments, beliefs, their art and thought, their acts and activities, revealing the heart and its stirrings in music, dance, paintings and craftsmanship, and drama and play. For it is during these festivals that they let themselves go, play about freely, and express themselves in worship, music and merriment, living their life in its intensity, its variety, its moods of joy and jubilation. Festival helps to create better citizens and human beings and improve human relations. Festivals and ceremonies tend to be a social activity being an interaction between different cultures. Fairs and festival in Kanyakumari district contributes greatly to the export earnings of the country and improves the balance of

payment situation. In Kanyakumari district the fairs and festivals in the different religious centres make their contribution to the development of habits, attitudes and qualities of character, which enable its citizen to counteract all those fissiparous tendencies which hinder the emergence of a broad, national and secular outlook. Festivals are a happy occasion to unite the people of the society. Fairs and festivals are celebrated willingly by the people. Fairs, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations and rituals are aspects that assist the preservation of customs. They assist society to be self-conscious, united, purposive, and prosperous and progressive. No wonder, Kanyakumari district has promising cultural heritage and religious legacy.

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TRIBAL CULTURE AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN KANIYAN COMMUNITY OF KANNIYAKUMARI - A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Kaniyan community of the Kanniyakumari is an integral part of this region's diverse tribal and cultural heritage. The unique traditions, customs, indigenous knowledge, beliefs, folklore, occupations and social institutions of these people were formed on the basis of interaction with nature. The purpose of this paper is to explore the cultural heritage of the Kaniyan community and identify ways to preserve ancestral traditions in the context of ongoing social transformations. Particular attention is paid to the concepts of cultural identity, knowledge, rituals, folklore, material culture and community practices. In addition, this paper highlights the main challenges for maintaining tribal traditions and identifies the role of government, local communities and cultural organizations in solving these problems. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the importance of community-based approaches to the sustainable preservation of the cultural heritage of the Kaniyan tribe.

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari district is the unique frontier of Tamil Nadu in terms of culture. It is situated on the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula. Thus, the area had a historic crossroad of Tamil and Malayalam cultures as well as religions. Apart from the developed cultural heritage of temples, churches, mosques, palaces, and coastal culture, the region is also famous for its tribal cultural history. One of such tribes is Kaniyan (also spelled as Kanyan). The Government of India includes this ethnic group in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Tamil Nadu, separate from Kanikaran, Kanikkar. The cultural heritage of the tribal people refers not only to the ancient monuments and objects uncovered by archaeologists. It also includes oral history and traditions, cultural practices and rituals, beliefs, knowledge, and skills, social organization, and relations with the surrounding environment. Therefore, the study of this district's cultural heritage involves researching the unique Kaniyan tribe, which is presented in the region of Kanniyakumari.

Historical and Geographical Background

The Kaniyan tribe has historical connections with the former state of Travancore that was merged with Tamil Nadu in 1956, of which the territory of modern-day Kanniyakumari was once a part. According to the Tribal Museum, the tribe traditionally inhabited the foothills of the northeastern region of the district, including the areas of Nagercoil, Kuzhithurai, and Padmanabhapuram, which were previously part of Travancore. Another account indicates that Kaniyan people could also be found in the districts of Tirunelveli and Coimbatore. The unique

location of the area plays an essential role in understanding the history of the tribe. Within the boundaries of what is now the Kanniyakumari district, numerous natural conditions conducive to human habitation and activity could be found, including mountains, forests, farmland, rivers, and coastal areas. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the terrain has played a crucial role in shaping the local community's traditions and lifestyle. To further understand and appreciate the cultural heritage of the Kaniyan tribe, it is important to consider their historical context and interactions with the environment and other societies. As per the 2011 census of India, the Kaniyan, Kanyan and Kanikaran, Kanikkar are listed as separate items in the list of Scheduled Tribes. According to the census data, in the year 2011, the number of Kaniyan people living in the Kanniyakumari district was six hundred and ninety one. Thus, the size of the population of this tribe is significant for this area. The separation of these tribes is of great importance for the study of Indian history, since the similarity of the names could lead to confusion.

Kaniyan Community and Cultural Identity

Language constitutes an important element of Kaniyan cultural identity. The Tribal Museum's account states that Kaniyans traditionally used Malayalam within the family and kinship circles, while Tamil was used in interactions with outsiders; it also notes that younger generations increasingly receive education through Tamil-medium institutions. This linguistic situation reflects the historical position of Kanniyakumari as a cultural zone where Tamil and Malayalam traditions have interacted for centuries. The coexistence of languages is not simply a matter of communication. Language carries collective memory, oral knowledge, family traditions and cultural expressions. Changes in language use can therefore influence the transmission of traditional knowledge from older generations to younger generations. The gradual movement towards dominant regional languages and formal education can create new opportunities for social mobility, while simultaneously creating challenges for the preservation of indigenous linguistic practices. Kaniyan cultural identity may also be approached through family relationships, customary practices, beliefs and community institutions. Oral traditions are particularly significant because many aspects of tribal history and social memory are transmitted verbally rather than through written records. Songs, stories, traditional narratives and memories of ancestors can preserve information about migration, settlement, occupations and relationships with the landscape.

Traditional Knowledge and Livelihood Practices

Traditional knowledge is one of the most precious aspects of tribal legacy. It usually comes down to experience and observations passed down from generation to generation. The knowledge about the forest, its flora and the local agriculture, food sources, and the environment is especially important for the communities of kanniyakumari. This information, along with environmental knowledge, needs to be detailed and described, and it is not only important to understand it, but also to preserve it. Not only can traditional knowledge bring economic benefits, it constitutes the intellectual heritage of a tribe, and should be respected as such. The knowledge of the environment and its intricacies and specifics has been formed over centuries, and each tribesman that

possesses it has contributed their part. The census of India provides occupational categories of the scheduled tribes such as Kaniyan, Kanyan and others – for many of them, cultivation as a way of occupation as well as agricultural labour and work of another kind is recorded. The process described could be applied to the people of kanniyakumari to learn more about their traditional occupations, and to see how they evolved with time. Modernization and access to education and other opportunities can change the traditional way of life, taking some people away from their past professions and habits. It is not always a bad thing – education can be beneficial and open up new career opportunities. However, the loss of traditional knowledge, however small, will always mark a cultural shift downwards.

Rituals, Beliefs and Oral Traditions

Religion and local beliefs are also essential aspects of the cultural heritage of the tribe. The religious practices of many tribes reflect the social organization and relationship of the community with the environment and supernatural powers. Rituals are often passed down through generations and are usually related to family celebrations, local festivals, agricultural cycles, births, deaths, and other social events. Oral history is often the only source of information about the past of tribal people because it has been preserved in the memories of elders and is passed down from generation to generation. It is vital to document oral history since it contains a lot of information about the migration, settlement, traditional careers and professions, social relationships, and cultural traditions of people. Thus, oral history should be considered a precious source of information for studying the cultural heritage of the Kaniyan tribe. However, oral history may become lost over time if the younger generations are not interested in preserving it. The new generation often moves away from their native community to study and work somewhere else, and the local community is gradually forgotten and neglected. Therefore, it is essential to record oral history for future generations with the active participation of the local community.

Challenges to Tribal Heritage Conservation

There are several key issues related to the conservation of the Kaniyan cultural heritage. First, the social and economic changes constitute a severe threat to cultural heritage. Education, urbanisation, new job opportunities, migration, and advances in technology have led to a deviation from traditional domestic routines and social lifestyles. While these changes promote development and create more opportunities, they might interfere with the transmission of culture. Second, there is inadequate ethnographic documentation of the community. While official census documents contain much demographic and economic information, they lack much cultural information. There is a need to create comprehensive lists of oral traditions, cultural knowledge, traditions, material heritage, and local history. Third, traditional knowledge requires intergenerational transfer. Most traditional knowledge is acquired through domestic interaction rather than formal education. Fourth, there is a danger of cultural simplification. Tribal culture is often presented simply to naïve tourists, so it is at risk of being reduced to ethnographic entertainment. The conservation of cultural heritage should be guided by the principle that the tribal community, not the tourists, is the primary actor in tourism.

Role of Documentation and Heritage Institutions

Documentation is the first step towards any kind of conservation. Universities, research institutes, museums, government departments, and local authorities can work together with the Kaniyan community to document the community's cultural heritage. Oral history projects can record the memories of the community elders. Recordings of songs, performances, oral traditions, and rituals can help preserve their rich cultural legacy. Photographs can be taken to document traditional items, objects, homes, dress, and methods of farming among others. Digitization can also be done to make such resources freely available online while still respecting and protecting the rights and sensitivities of the community. The already existing Census data of India can serve as an important resource. Not only has the Kaniyan/Kanyan been identified as a Scheduled Tribe in the census process, but there is also data on occupation, as well as mother tongue. This information can be built upon by employing people in local research projects on history and anthropology.

Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Heritage

I believe that cultural tourism can indeed offer another opportunity for promoting tribal heritage, however, it has to be used wisely. Sustainable cultural tourism should not exoticise indigenous traditions, but rather promote active participation and involvement as well as share the benefits with the tribal communities. It is important that, if Kaniyan heritage is integrated into the cultural tourism programs, the focus is on sharing the knowledge and educational experience, rather than presenting the sacred beliefs and rituals in a tourist-friendly way. The local guides, community groups, organisations, and cultural representatives can be actively involved in the development of such programs. This way, there is a prospect of connecting cultural conservation and sustainable tourism. For instance, a proportion of tourism benefits could be allocated to the local community to fund social services or motivate young people to engage in cultural heritage keeping. Moreover, this type of initiative would allow more visitors to appreciate the unique cultural diversity of Kanniyakumari, while respecting its traditions.

Government and Community Participation

The role of Government policy in the protection of Scheduled Tribe communities and their cultural heritage is far more critical than it may initially appear. Firstly, the very fact of official recognition serves as a vital legal and administrative foundation for the protection of tribal societies and their uniqueness. The list of the Government of India's Scheduled Tribe communities includes the Kaniyan, Kanyan people of Tamil Nadu. Secondly, census data on Scheduled Tribes may help in drawing up plans for their social and economic development. However, it should be stressed that tribal cultural heritage cannot be protected and promoted solely by the government. It is necessary to involve the Kaniyan people themselves in the work of compiling the list of cultural values that need to be preserved and the ways of their preservation and promotion. In addition, universities in southern Tamil Nadu may be able to contribute significantly to the study and preservation of the cultural values of the Kaniyan tribe. For example, they could develop interdisciplinary research projects on various aspects of tribal history and culture, with the involvement of the local

Kaniyan people. Such projects could be held in the framework of postgraduate and doctoral studies in history, anthropology, sociology, botany, folklore and tourism.

CONCLUSION

The Kaniyan community is an indelible part of the culturallegacy of Kanniyakumari that deserves more attention than it currently receives. This ethnic group's linguistic, oral literary, cultural, customary, traditional knowledge, and social heritages are invaluable assets that demand urgent and systematic preservation and research. Active community engagement and institutional support can help ensure that these traditions are not lost in the wake of social change, modernisation, and urbanisation. By doing so, authorities and society at large will be able to fully appreciate the cultural diversity of this region and better protect its cultural assets for years to come, including its tourism potential.

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: A STUDY OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS IN KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of India, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, historical monuments, and religious significance. Monuments such as the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Thiruvalluvar Statue, Padmanabhapuram Palace, and Vattakottai Fort represent the district's architectural, cultural, and historical legacy. These monuments attract millions of domestic and international tourists every year, contributing significantly to the local economy. However, factors such as environmental degradation, coastal erosion, pollution, urbanization, and inadequate maintenance threaten their preservation. Conservation of these monuments is essential to protect cultural heritage and ensure sustainable tourism development. This seminar examines the importance of conserving historical monuments in Kanniyakumari, the challenges involved, and their impact on tourism. It also highlights the role of government agencies, local communities, and tourists in safeguarding these heritage sites for future generations.

KEYWORDS: *Heritage Conservation, Historical Monuments, Tourism, Sustainable Development, Kanniyakumari, Cultural Heritage.*

INTRODUCTION

Historical monuments are important symbols of a nation's culture, history, and identity. They preserve the architectural, artistic, and social heritage of past generations. Kanniyakumari, located at the southern tip of India, is famous for its historical monuments, temples, forts, and memorials that attract thousands of tourists every year. Conserving these monuments is essential to protect cultural heritage and promote sustainable tourism

Historical Background of Kanniyakumari

Kanniyakumari has a rich historical and cultural heritage dating back to the ancient Pandya, Chera, and Travancore kingdoms. The district has been an important center for trade, religion, and culture for centuries. Its historical monuments reflect the architectural styles and traditions of different dynasties, making the region one of the most significant heritage destinations in South India.

Major Historical Monuments in Kanniyakumari

Kanniyakumari is home to several important historical monuments that reflect the region’s rich cultural and architectural heritage. The **Vivekananda Rock Memorial**, built on a rocky island where Swami Vivekananda is believed to have meditated, is one of the most famous landmarks in the district. The **Thiruvalluvar Statue**, dedicated to the celebrated Tamil poet and philosopher Thiruvalluvar, stands majestically nearby. Other notable monuments include the historic **Padmanabhapuram Palace**, known for its traditional Kerala-style architecture and beautiful woodwork, and the **Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple**, famous for its magnificent sculptures and cultural significance. Together, these monuments attract visitors and showcase the historical, religious, and artistic heritage of Kanniyakumari.

Importance of Conservation

The conservation of historical monuments in Kanniyakumari faces several challenges, including natural weathering, heavy rainfall, strong coastal winds, and the effects of salt from the sea. Pollution, overcrowding, improper maintenance, and the growth of plants and weeds can also damage old structures. In addition, increasing tourism and urban development may put pressure on heritage sites. Lack of awareness, insufficient funds, and limited conservation efforts further make it difficult to protect these monuments. Therefore, proper maintenance, scientific conservation methods, public awareness, and responsible tourism are essential for preserving the historical heritage of Kanniyakumari.

Challenges in Conservation

Historical monuments in Kanniyakumari face several threats, including coastal erosion, heavy rainfall, pollution, urban expansion, vandalism, and lack of regular maintenance. Natural weathering and increasing tourist activities also contribute to the deterioration of these heritage sites. Addressing these challenges requires effective conservation strategies and public cooperation.

Government Initiatives

The Government has taken several initiatives to conserve and protect the historical monuments of Kanniyakumari. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology, and local authorities work to maintain important heritage sites and preserve their architectural and cultural value. Measures such as regular maintenance, structural repairs, cleaning, restoration, security arrangements, and the development of tourist facilities help protect these monuments.The government also promotes heritage tourism and creates public awareness about the importance of conservation. These initiatives help ensure that the historical monuments of Kanniyakumari are preserved for future generations.

- **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** protects and maintains monuments of national importance.
- **Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology** works to identify, document, and conserve important heritage sites.
- **Restoration and repair works** are carried out to protect old buildings and monuments from damage.
- **Cleaning and maintenance programmes** help keep historical sites in good condition.
- **Security arrangements and CCTV surveillance** are used at important tourist and heritage locations.
- **Tourism development projects** improve roads, lighting, sanitation, and visitor facilities around monuments.
- **Heritage awareness programmes** educate students and the public about the importance of conservation.
- **Responsible tourism initiatives** encourage visitors to protect monuments and avoid littering or damaging structures.
- **Government funding and special conservation projects** support the preservation of important historical sites.
- **Cooperation with local communities** helps protect heritage monuments and promote sustainable tourism.

Role of Local Communities

Local communities play a vital role in protecting and conserving the historical monuments of Kanniyakumari. Local residents help maintain cleanliness around important heritage sites such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram

Temple, and other historical places. They can prevent vandalism, report damage to the authorities, and guide tourists to behave responsibly. Community participation in awareness programmes, heritage walks, cleanliness drives, and cultural activities also helps preserve the region's rich history and traditions. The active cooperation of the people of Kanniyakumari is essential for protecting its historical monuments for future generations.

Impact on Tourism

The conservation of historical monuments has a significant positive impact on tourism in Kanniyakumari. Well-preserved monuments such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, the Thiruvalluvar Statue, and Suchindram Temple attract a large number of domestic and international tourists. This increases employment opportunities and supports local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, transport services, and shops. Heritage tourism also promotes awareness of Kanniyakumari's rich history, culture, and architecture. Therefore, conserving historical monuments helps develop tourism and contributes to the economic and cultural growth of the region.

Economic Importance

Historical monuments contribute significantly to the local economy by generating revenue through tourism-related activities. Visitors spend money on accommodation, food, transport, handicrafts, and souvenirs, supporting small businesses and local artisans. Heritage tourism also encourages infrastructure development and improves the overall standard of living in the region.

Sustainable Heritage Tourism

Sustainable heritage tourism in Kanniyakumari aims to protect historical monuments and cultural sites while promoting tourism in a responsible manner. Important places such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Temple, the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, and the Thiruvalluvar Statue attract many visitors. Sustainable tourism encourages cleanliness, waste management, protection of monuments, and responsible behaviour among tourists. It also involves local communities in tourism activities and provides them with employment opportunities. By balancing tourism development with conservation, Kanniyakumari can preserve its rich historical and cultural heritage for future generations.

Suggestions for Sustainable Tourism in Kanniyakumari

- **Protect historical monuments and heritage sites** through regular maintenance and scientific conservation.
- **Promote responsible tourism** by educating visitors not to litter, damage monuments, or disturb cultural sites.
- **Improve waste management** by providing more dustbins, recycling facilities, and regular cleaning near tourist places.
- **Reduce plastic pollution** and encourage the use of eco-friendly and reusable materials.
- **Involve local communities** in tourism activities so that local people can gain employment and income.
- **Develop eco-friendly transport** such as public transport, electric vehicles, cycling paths, and walking routes.
- **Control overcrowding** at popular tourist destinations to protect monuments and the environment.

- **Promote local culture and handicrafts** to support traditional artists and local businesses.
- **Conserve coastal and natural areas** by preventing pollution and protecting beaches and marine ecosystems.
- **Create awareness programmes** for tourists, students, and local residents about the importance of sustainable tourism.
- **Use renewable energy** such as solar power in tourist facilities wherever possible.
- **Encourage responsible behaviour** among tourists to preserve Kanniyakumari's heritage and natural beauty for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Historical monuments are valuable cultural assets that connect present generations with the past. Their conservation is essential not only for preserving history and architecture but also for strengthening tourism and economic growth in Kanniyakumari. With the combined efforts of government agencies, local communities, and tourists, these monuments can be protected and preserved for future generations while continuing to serve as important attractions for visitors from around the world.

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HERITAGE TOURISM IN KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanyakumari is a significant cultural and tourist destination in Tamil Nadu, known for its rich historical heritage, religious traditions, monuments, architecture, and natural beauty. The region contains several important heritage sites such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, Udayagiri Fort, and St. Xavier's Church. Heritage conservation plays an important role in protecting these historical and cultural resources from deterioration, pollution, overcrowding, and other threats. Cultural tourism provides an opportunity for visitors to understand the history, traditions, festivals, art, food, and lifestyle of the local communities. It also contributes to employment generation and the development of local businesses. However, increasing tourism can create challenges if heritage sites are not properly managed. Therefore, sustainable tourism practices, public awareness, proper maintenance, and community participation are essential for protecting Kanyakumari's heritage. This study focuses on the importance of heritage conservation and cultural tourism in Kanyakumari and highlights the need to balance tourism development with the preservation of cultural and historical resources for future generations.

Keywords:

Heritage Conservation, Cultural Tourism, Kanyakumari, Cultural Heritage, Historical Heritage. Sustainable Tourism, Heritage Management, Tourism Development, Cultural Preservation. Local Community, Traditional Culture, Heritage Sites, Historical Monuments. Tourism Promotion, Cultural Identity, Conservation Practices, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari is one of the most important tourist destinations in Tamil Nadu. It is located at the southernmost tip of India and is famous for its natural beauty, rich history, culture, and religious importance. The meeting point of the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean makes Kanyakumari a unique tourist destination. Kanyakumari has many important historical and cultural places such as Padmanabhapuram Palace, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple, Udayagiri Fort, Vivekananda Rock Memorial, and St. Xavier's Church. These places represent the traditional architecture, history, beliefs, and cultural identity of the region. Heritage conservation means protecting and maintaining historical monuments, traditional buildings, cultural practices, and other valuable heritage resources. Proper conservation is necessary to protect Kanyakumari's heritage from pollution, natural damage, neglect, and uncontrolled development . Cultural tourism allows visitors to learn about the history, traditions, festivals, food, art, architecture, and lifestyle of the local people. It also provides employment opportunities and supports local businesses and handicrafts.

Therefore, heritage conservation and cultural tourism are closely connected in Kanyakumari. Proper management, public awareness, responsible tourism, and local community participation can help preserve its heritage while promoting sustainable tourism and economic development.

Heritage Conservation in Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari has a rich historical and cultural heritage that reflects the development of society, religion, architecture, and traditions over different periods. The inscriptions and archaeological remains found in the region provide valuable information about its past. These heritage resources are important sources for understanding the historical and cultural development of Kanyakumari. Heritage conservation involves the documentation, protection, maintenance, and preservation of historical and cultural resources. The study and recording of inscriptions are important parts of conservation because they provide evidence about the past. The Tamil Nadu Department of Archaeology has published works related to Kanyakumari inscriptions and archaeological heritage, supporting the systematic documentation and preservation of these resources [a].Conservation of heritage is important for maintaining the cultural identity of Kanyakumari and passing historical knowledge to future generations. It also creates awareness among local people and visitors about the value of heritage resources. Proper maintenance, scientific documentation, government support, and participation of local communities can help protect Kanyakumari's heritage while supporting responsible and sustainable cultural tourism[1].

Environmental Impacts of Tourism

Tourism can create several environmental impacts when tourist activities increase without proper planning and management. Large numbers of visitors can contribute to pollution, waste generation, pressure on natural resources, and damage to sensitive environments. Therefore, tourism development needs to consider the carrying capacity and environmental conditions of the destination. In Kanyakumari, responsible tourism practices can help reduce these negative effects and protect the natural and cultural resources that attract visitors. Proper waste management, environmental awareness, conservation measures, and careful planning can help maintain the quality of the destination while allowing tourism to develop sustainably[2].

Heritage Interpretation and Awareness

Heritage interpretation plays an important role in helping visitors and local communities understand the historical and cultural value of Kanyakumari. Information about heritage resources can be presented through signboards, museums, guided visits, educational programmes, exhibitions, and digital platforms. Such interpretation helps people understand the importance of protecting cultural heritage. Creating awareness among tourists is also essential for responsible tourism. Visitors should understand the importance of keeping heritage areas clean, respecting cultural traditions, and avoiding activities that may damage historical or cultural resources. Awareness programmes can encourage tourists to adopt responsible behaviour and contribute to heritage conservation[3].

Cultural Tourism in Kanyakumari

Cultural tourism is an important form of tourism that allows people to experience the history, traditions, customs, festivals, arts, architecture, and cultural practices of a region. Kanyakumari has considerable potential for cultural tourism because of its historical and cultural significance. The development of cultural tourism can create greater awareness about the

heritage of the region and encourage visitors to value its cultural resources [b].

Kanyakumari is also associated with cultural and pilgrimage tourism, where traditional practices and religious activities form an important part of the visitor experience. Cultural tourism can therefore provide opportunities for visitors to understand local traditions while supporting tourism-related activities and the local economy. Proper planning is necessary to ensure that tourism development does not negatively affect local culture and heritage. Responsible tourism, conservation of cultural resources, and participation of local communities can help develop Kanyakumari as a sustainable cultural tourism destination[4].

Role of Heritage Conservation in Tourism Development

Heritage conservation plays an important role in the development of tourism in Kanyakumari. Kanyakumari is known for its historical monuments, temples, churches, traditional cultural practices and other heritage attractions. Proper conservation of these places helps to preserve the historical and cultural identity of the district and attracts tourists who are interested in the heritage of the region. According to S. P. Gupta's Heritage Tourism in India, conserving heritage resources increases their value as tourism attractions and helps to connect visitors with the history and culture of a place [c] .In Kanyakumari, the conservation of important heritage places can support the growth of tourism and provide economic opportunities for local people. Tourists visiting heritage attractions may also spend money on local transport, accommodation, food, handicrafts and other services. This creates employment and supports small businesses in the local community. Therefore, protecting Kanyakumari's heritage can contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to the economic development of the region [d].

Heritage conservation also helps to promote sustainable tourism in Kanyakumari. Proper maintenance of heritage sites, responsible visitor management and participation of local communities can reduce damage to cultural resources. When heritage sites are protected and presented properly, they can remain attractive to tourists for a long period. Thus, heritage conservation acts as an important foundation for the sustainable development of tourism in Kanyakumari[5].

Importance of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is important for the development of Kanyakumari because it helps visitors understand the history, traditions, art, architecture and cultural practices of the region. Kanyakumari has a rich cultural background influenced by different communities and traditions. Important attractions such as temples, churches, historical places and traditional cultural sites provide tourists with opportunities to learn about the heritage of the district. Cultural tourism therefore helps to preserve and promote the unique identity of Kanyakumari.

Cultural tourism also provides economic benefits to the local community. Visitors spend money on transportation, accommodation, food, handicrafts and other local services. This creates employment opportunities for local people and supports small businesses. In addition, local artisans and traditional workers can promote their skills and products to tourists. Thus, cultural tourism can contribute to the economic development of Kanyakumari while

encouraging the preservation of local traditions.

According to Greg Richards, Cultural Tourism*:* Global and Local Perspectives, cultural tourism helps connect tourism with the cultural resources and identity of a destination. In Kanyakumari, responsible cultural tourism can encourage visitors to respect local traditions and heritage. Therefore, cultural tourism is important not only for attracting tourists but also for protecting Kanyakumari's cultural identity and supporting sustainable development[6].

Challenges in Heritage Conservation

Heritage conservation in Kanyakumari faces several challenges due to increasing tourism, environmental conditions and changes in the local community. Important heritage places may be affected by overcrowding, pollution, improper waste disposal and lack of regular maintenance. Natural factors such as heavy rainfall, humidity and coastal conditions can also cause deterioration of old buildings and monuments. These problems can reduce the historical value and attractiveness of heritage sites if proper conservation measures are not taken [e] .

Another major challenge is the pressure created by modern development. Construction of roads, buildings, commercial establishments and other tourism facilities may affect the traditional character of heritage areas. In some places, lack of awareness among visitors and local people can also lead to improper use or damage of heritage resources. Therefore, balancing tourism development with the protection of historical and cultural resources is an important challenge for Kanyakumari. According to J. M. Fladmark, Cultural Tourism*:* The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage, successful heritage conservation requires cooperation between tourism authorities, local communities and heritage-management organisations. In Kanyakumari, proper planning, regular maintenance, visitor awareness and community participation are necessary to overcome conservation challenges [f]. Protecting heritage resources while allowing responsible tourism can help preserve the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari for future generations[7].

Sustainable Heritage Tourism Practices

Sustainable heritage tourism is important for protecting the historical and cultural resources of Kanyakumari while promoting tourism. Proper maintenance of heritage sites, cleanliness, waste management and controlled tourist activities can help reduce damage to heritage places. Tourism facilities should be developed carefully without affecting the traditional character of important cultural sites. Sustainable practices can also encourage tourists to respect local customs, traditions and heritage.

Local people can participate in sustainable tourism through handicrafts, traditional food, cultural activities and local guiding services. This provides economic benefits to the community while encouraging them to protect their cultural resources. According to Swarbrooke (1999), Sustainable Tourism Management, sustainable tourism aims to balance tourism development with the protection of environmental, cultural and social resources. Therefore, sustainable heritage tourism practices can help Kanyakumari achieve long-term tourism development while preserving its cultural heritage[8].

Role of Local Community in Heritage Conservation

Local communities play an important role in protecting the cultural

heritage of Kanyakumari. People living in the region have knowledge about local traditions, festivals, customs, traditional arts and historical practices. Their participation in maintaining heritage places, guiding tourists, promoting handicrafts and sharing local cultural knowledge helps preserve the identity of Kanyakumari. Community participation also creates employment opportunities and encourages local people to take responsibility for protecting their heritage.

According to David Throsby (2001), Economics and Culture, cultural heritage has both social and economic value, and its protection requires community involvement. In Kanyakumari, cooperation between local people, tourism authorities and conservation organisations can help protect heritage resources while supporting tourism development. Therefore, active participation of the local community is essential for the long-term conservation and sustainable tourism development of Kanyakumari[9].

Government and Institutional Initiatives

The government and various institutions play an important role in protecting and developing the heritage resources of Kanyakumari. Government departments can support the preservation of historical monuments, temples, churches, traditional sites and other cultural attractions through maintenance, renovation and proper tourism management. They can also provide basic facilities such as roads, sanitation, information centres and visitor facilities without affecting the cultural character of heritage places.

Government institutions and tourism organisations can also promote Kanyakumari as an important cultural tourism destination through awareness programmes, festivals and heritage-related activities. According to Peter Howard (2003), Heritage: Management, Interpretation, Identity, effective heritage management requires proper planning, institutional support and public participation. Therefore, cooperation between government agencies, tourism institutions and local communities is essential for protecting Kanyakumari's heritage and promoting sustainable tourism[10].

Future Prospects and Recommendations

Kanyakumari has good opportunities for the future development of heritage tourism because of its rich cultural, historical and religious attractions. Heritage sites can be improved through regular maintenance, better tourist facilities, cleanliness and proper interpretation centres [f].

Digital technology can also be used to provide information about important heritage places and local traditions. Promoting traditional handicrafts, local food and cultural activities can further improve the tourism experience and provide income opportunities for local people [g]. It is recommended that heritage conservation and tourism development should be planned together. The government, tourism organisations and local communities should work together to protect heritage resources and manage tourist activities responsibly. According to David Throsby (2001), Economics and Culture, proper management of cultural resources can support both cultural preservation and economic development. Therefore, sustainable planning and community participation can help Kanyakumari become a stronger and more responsible heritage tourism destination[11].

CONCLUSION

Kanyakumari is an important heritage and cultural tourism destination with a rich combination of historical, religious and traditional attractions. Heritage conservation plays a major role in protecting these cultural resources and supporting tourism development. Proper maintenance, sustainable tourism practices, government support and local community participation are essential for preserving the heritage of Kanyakumari. Cultural tourism provides economic opportunities for local people while helping visitors understand the history and traditions of the region. By balancing tourism development with heritage conservation, Kanyakumari can protect its cultural identity for future generations. Therefore, responsible and sustainable heritage tourism can contribute significantly to the long-term cultural and economic development of Kanyakumari.

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EDUCATION, CULTURAL PLURALISM AND SOCIAL HARMONY IN TRAVANCORE: THE VISION OF SIR C. P. RAMASWAMY AIYAR AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE CULTURAL TAPESTRY OF KANNIYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari constitutes a distinct geopolitical and cultural region where linguistic, religious, and historical traditions have intersected over centuries. Its administrative continuity with the erstwhile princely state of Travancore prior to the 1956 States Reorganisation makes the educational, institutional, and social history of Travancore deeply relevant to examining the district's cultural heritage. This paper analyzes education not merely as functional literacy instruction, but as an institutional catalyst for cultural pluralism, social inclusion, and communal harmony. Examining the transition from traditional learning systems (pial schools, kalaris, vedapatasalas, sabhamatts) to modern state and missionary schooling, the study explores the educational philosophy and administrative measures of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore.

Particular attention is given to:

- *The expansion of women's collegiate education*
- *Targeted structural support for Muslim and disadvantaged communities*
- *Rural school-library networks and vocational instruction*
- *The founding of the University of Travancore and cultural institutes such as the Swathi Thirunal Music Academy*
- *Visual media pedagogy and integrated, non-sectarian youth movements*

The study argues that Sir C. P.'s educational schema offers an enduring pluralist paradigm: sustainable social harmony requires inclusive institutions that enable diverse communities to interact, learn, and cooperate under conditions of substantive equality.

Keywords: *Kanniyakumari, Travancore, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, Cultural Pluralism, Social Harmony, Women's Education, Muslim Educational Advancement, University of Travancore.*

Introduction And Regional Historiography

The cultural and social history of Kanniyakumari cannot be evaluated in isolation from the historical trajectory of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore. Official records of the Kanniyakumari District Administration confirm that the territory formed an organic part of Travancore until November 1956, when the four southern taluks of Thovalai, Agastheeswaram, Kalkulam, and Vilavancode were separated from the Travancore-Cochin State and merged into Tamil Nadu under linguistic reorganization. This deep administrative and geographical connection establishes that the socio-educational policies,

institutional networks, and cultural debates of Travancore directly shaped the social fabric of modern Kanniyakumari. Engaging with the conference theme— *"Exploring the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari: A Confluence of Faiths and Festivals"*—demands a rigorous institutional approach. The primary source, *"Educational Endeavours of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar,"* provides an extensive educational and administrative history of Travancore. Rather than introducing speculative claims about regional rituals or local festivals not verified in archival records, this study investigates the structural conditions that make cultural pluralism possible. Cultural pluralism does not emerge spontaneously; it relies on institutional spaces where diverse communities can interact, access shared knowledge, and build mutual respect. Throughout Travancore's modern history, education was conceptualized as an instrument for creating a cohesive social order. As Dewan, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar viewed education not as a mechanical process for examination certification or administrative recruitment, but as an intellectual, cultural, and moral enterprise designed to cultivate civic responsibility and inter-communal fellow-feeling.

The Layered Educational Landscape of Traditional Travancore

Prior to the introduction of Western-style schooling, Travancore maintained a multi-layered educational network shaped by Dravidian, Sanskritic/Aryan, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. These influences gave rise to varied indigenous educational institutions:

- **Pial Schools (*Asan Kalaris*):** Village-level primary institutions conducted on the front verandas (*pials*) of instructors' homes, delivering elementary vernacular literacy, basic literature, and practical arithmetic.
- **Kalaris:** Centers dedicated to physical training, gymnastics, and martial arts, designed to build bodily stamina and collective discipline.
- **Vedapatasalas and Sabhamatts:** Collegiate and scholastic institutions focused on Vedic studies, Sanskrit literature, philosophy, and canon law.

While these centers sustained classical traditions, historical records show that they were stratified along caste and social lines. Higher scriptural and Sanskrit education remained restricted to dominant social groups, creating structural inequalities in access to learning. Travancore's early heritage combined cultural depth with social exclusion.

The nineteenth century marked the beginning of a major shift, as British administrative contact and Christian missionary initiatives introduced standardized curricula, open admissions, and integrated institutional schooling.

Missionary Initiatives and the Rise of State Responsibility

Christian missionary societies played a transformative role in establishing modern education across Travancore. Organizations such as the London Missionary Society (LMS)—which operated extensively across the southern taluks that now comprise Kanniyakumari—and the Church Mission Society (CMS) established vernacular schools, English seminaries, printing presses, and teacher-training institutions. The Travancore University Committee Report of 1923 formally noted the pivotal role of these missionary organizations in introducing English education and developing collegiate institutions.

Missionary schools also had a profound social effect: their classrooms brought together students from diverse caste and religious backgrounds under a common curriculum and shared institutional rules. While missionary organizations were guided by religious objectives, their schools functioned in practice as public spaces where language, ethics, literature, and science crossed traditional social boundaries. Concurrently, the Travancore state assumed direct responsibility for public instruction. A key milestone was the Royal Rescript of 1817, issued by Rani Gouri Parvathi Bai, which established elementary vernacular schooling as a state obligation funded from public revenue. Subsequent administrations reinforced this policy through grant-in-aid codes, institutional inspections, and the creation of a formal Department of Public Instruction, establishing education as a core public service.

Social Exclusion and the Transition to Substantive Educational Parity

The expansion of state and missionary institutions did not immediately eliminate social inequality. Formal legal decrees opening schools to all subjects were often undermined by local prejudice, social ostracism, and administrative reluctance. Disadvantaged communities, particularly the Ezhavas and Dalits, faced significant resistance when attempting to enroll their children in government schools. Grassroots leaders such as Sree Narayana Guru, Kumaran Asan, and Ayyankali led sustained struggles to translate formal access into actual classroom admissions, highlighting the critical gap between statutory rights and real social inclusion.

This distinction between nominal access and genuine inclusion provides an essential insight for cultural historiography. A region's cultural vitality cannot be judged solely by its monuments, temples, churches, or external festivals; it depends on whether its public institutions are open to all communities.

During his administration as Dewan, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar focused on establishing educational parity. He maintained that state resources, scholarships, and school admissions must be administered without discrimination based on caste, religion, gender, or political alignment. For Sir C. P., enduring social harmony required institutional fairness that enabled every community to participate fully in modern civic and cultural life.

Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar's Educational Philosophy

Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar advocated a comprehensive educational philosophy that integrated intellectual training, moral character, practical capability, and cultural awareness. Upon assuming office as Dewan, he appointed an Educational Reorganisation Committee to identify structural weaknesses in the educational system and propose modernizing reforms.

He criticized curricula that were purely theoretical and aimed solely at preparing candidates for clerical government posts. Instead, he championed vocational, agricultural, and technological education to support economic modernization.

At the same time, Sir C. P. insisted that technical training must rest on a broad humanistic and cultural foundation. He argued that true culture required intellectual curiosity and liberal inquiry before narrow professional specialization. In his view, culture was an integral element of personality development rather than an ornamental addition to schooling.

His educational framework integrated three core components: knowledge, character, and social responsibility. He emphasized that discipline should foster empathy, mutual understanding, and civic tolerance, drawing on the shared ethical teachings of Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism to strengthen social cohesion.

Institutional Pluralism: Targeted Policies and Muslim Education

A central feature of Sir C. P.'s administration was his conviction that religious and cultural minorities required specific institutional support to participate fully in civic life while retaining their cultural traditions. He maintained that education should cultivate the capacity to understand different perspectives, helping to reduce communal friction and sectarian prejudice. Working in collaboration with community organizations such as the Travancore Muslim Educational Association, Sir C. P. enacted targeted measures to address educational disparities among Muslims:

- **Targeted Financial Assistance:** Broad fee remissions, stipends, and scholarships for Muslim boys and girls.
- **Dedicated Secondary Institutions:** The establishment of an English High School for Muslims at Alleppey to facilitate entry into higher education.
- **Linguistic and Cultural Inclusion:** Incorporating Arabic as a formal elective language in state vernacular and secondary schools, supported by the appointment of qualified *Munshies* (instructors).

Sir C. P. frequently highlighted the contributions of Islamic civilization to world learning, citing its advancements in mathematics, astronomy, physical science, architecture, and literature. His policies reflected an important pluralist principle: minority cultural achievements form part of the shared heritage of humanity, and public education must serve as an instrument of integration without requiring cultural assimilation.

Gender Equity, Collegiate Access, and Cultural Transmission

The expansion of women's education was another major priority of Travancore's social policy. Long recognized for pioneering female literacy in the subcontinent, the state maintained an extensive network of girls' primary and secondary schools, alongside specialized institutions of higher learning such as the Maharaja's College for Women at Trivandrum. Sir C. P. supported women's access to both specialized and co-educational university curricula, arguing that educated women were indispensable to social reconstruction and public progress.

The significance of women's education extends beyond literacy statistics and economic independence. Within the cultural landscape of South India, women have historically served as the primary custodians and transmitters of cultural memory, linguistic traditions, folk arts, domestic rituals, and community music.

Sir C. P.'s policies affirmed that cultural heritage is preserved and revitalized when its custodians receive modern education, enabling women to interpret, adapt, and lead cultural traditions within an evolving, inclusive society.

Decentralized Knowledge: Rural Libraries and Vocational Schools

To ensure that educational progress reached beyond urban centers, Sir C. P. implemented reforms in rural libraries and vocational training:

- **Rural Library Networks:** The administration reorganized rural libraries,

establishing subsidized reading rooms connected directly with village primary schools to support adult literacy and civic awareness.

- **Vocational Curriculum:** Applied vocational schools were established offering instruction in carpentry, blacksmithing, modern agriculture, bookkeeping, and typewriting to align schooling with regional economic life.
- **Higher Technical Quotas:** The administration secured reserved quotas in premier engineering and medical colleges across British India for Travancore students, connecting local talent with advanced scientific institutions.

This institutional framework recognized that cultural heritage is rooted in everyday trades, traditional craftsmanship, and regional livelihoods. By linking education with practical vocations, the state sought to support local economic self-reliance while preserving practical skills.

The University of Travancore and Cultural Institutionalization

A major institutional milestone of Sir C. P.'s administration was the founding of the University of Travancore, established by Royal Proclamation on 18 November 1937, with Sir C. P. serving as its first Vice-Chancellor. He conceptualized the university not merely as an examination board, but as a center for research, character development, open intellectual inquiry, and cultural preservation. The university integrated regional culture and scientific inquiry into higher education through key specialized institutions:

- **The Swathi Thirunal Music Academy:** Established to preserve, formalize, and teach classical Carnatic and indigenous Kerala musical traditions.
- **The Marine Biological Research Institute:** Founded to conduct oceanographic and marine science research to support coastal resource development.

The University of Travancore provided a model of higher education that paired indigenous artistic heritage with scientific and technological research.

Visual Media, Fine Arts, and Non-Sectarian Civic Movements

Sir C. P. recognized early on that visual and auditory media—such as radio broadcasts, educational cinema, and gramophone recordings—could help bridge social divides and overcome geographic isolation. The administration utilized these media in public instruction to teach geography, hygiene, agriculture, and languages, viewing technology as a tool to broaden social outlooks and build inter-group empathy. This inclusive approach extended to physical culture and youth movements:

- **Physical Education:** The administration introduced a physical culture curriculum combining traditional Indian gymnastics (*Vyayam*) with Western team sports to build discipline and teamwork.
- **Scouts and Guides Movement:** Sir C. P. supported the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides movement for promoting character, outdoor skills, and public social service.

Importantly, when proposals were made to establish separate communal scout troops for Hindu and Muslim youth, Sir C. P. firmly rejected the policy. He maintained that communal segregation in youth organizations undermined the movement's universal character, affirming that social harmony requires shared civic spaces where individuals cooperate under common humanitarian ideals.

Relevance to the Cultural Tapestry of Kanniyakumari

The administrative connection between Kanniyakumari and Travancore until 1956 establishes that the institutional reforms and pluralist principles of the

Travancore state form a foundational part of the district's social fabric. The relevance of this historical experience to the conference theme can be summarized in four core propositions:

1. **Pluralism Requires Inclusive Civic Spaces:** Inter-communal coexistence flourishes when schools, universities, and libraries serve as shared institutions for cross-cultural interaction.
2. **Harmonious Diversity Demands Institutional Parity:** Genuine coexistence requires fair educational access and targeted support for disadvantaged communities.
3. **Heritage Preservation Must Balance Modernity:** Regional cultural traditions thrive when supported by formal artistic education alongside modern scientific inquiry.
4. **Social Harmony Requires Active Cooperation:** Tolerance is sustained through active participation in shared civic, athletic, and community endeavors.

These principles offer a framework for understanding Kanniyakumari's cultural landscape not as a static collection of traditions, but as a living social process sustained by inclusive institutions.

CONCLUSION

The educational history of Travancore illustrates a transition from exclusive, hereditary learning models to an integrated public educational system. Within this transformation, Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar connected intellectual education with ethical character, cultural preservation, and social reconstruction. His administrative initiatives—spanning women's collegiate education, targeted minority inclusion, rural libraries, vocational training, university research, classical music, and integrated youth organizations—demonstrate an enduring approach to civic unity.

For Kanniyakumari District, this history provides a grounded model for regional pluralism. It demonstrates that a vibrant cultural tapestry is sustained not merely by inherited traditions, but by inclusive public institutions that bring communities together to learn, work, and cooperate. Ultimately, Sir C. P.'s vision affirms that education should preserve cultural memory, widen democratic participation, dismantle social prejudice, and transform diverse religious and cultural traditions into enduring social harmony.

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FESTIVALS OF SHREE THANUMALAYAN SWAMY TEMPLE IN SUCHINDRAM-A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Suchindram Thanumalyan Temple, located in Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, is a historically renowned sacred site combining spiritual importance with remarkable historical and sculptural art. Shiva and Brahma are represented together in a single linga as Thanumalayan. The site is associated with the Puranic story of Indra's relief from a curse. Various mandapams were developed through the contributions of Vijayanagara rulers, Chera, Chola and Pandiya kings, and Thirumalai Nayak. The temple is noted for its rare musical pillars, a 134.6-foot-high gopuram, a grand Anjaneya and a bronze Nandi. This article describes the temple's historical background, architectural features and major festivals held throughout the year.

KEYWORDS: *Suchindram temple, Kanyakumari District, art and architecture, Festivals, Annual Celebrations.*

INTRODUCTION

Among the historically significant spiritual places of Kanyakumari District, Suchindram is one of the most important, next to Kanyakumari. It is situated about 5 km from Nagercoil on the road to Kanyakumari, in a naturally beautiful setting surrounded by fields and coconut trees. The temple has a close Puranic connection with the Kumara Amman Temple and is one of the major temples of Tamil Nadu. According to the Puranic tradition, Indra, the king of the gods, came here and worshipped Shiva to obtain relief from his curse. The name 'Suchindram' is associated with 'Suchi', meaning purity. The temple is also called Thanumalayan Temple because Brahma (Thanu), Vishnu (Maal) and Shiva (ayan) are represented together in a single linga.

Historical Significance And Architecture

The Suchindram Temple covers approximately 93,900 square feet and has an impressive seven-tiered rajagopuram rising to a height of 134.6 feet. Its mandapams demonstrate the architectural preferences and artistic excellence of rulers from different periods.

Historical background of the mandapams: The first eastern gopuram is attributed to the Vijayanagara rulers. The Shenbakaraman Mandapam is attributed to a Chera ruler, the Veerapandiya Mani Mandapam to a Pandya ruler, and the Garudalwar Mandapam to Thirumalai Nayak. The roof of the Alankara Mandapam is carved from a single stone. Historians consider that this remarkable mandapam may have been constructed in the 11th century by Rajaraja Chola I, who is associated with changing the name of the place to 'Chaturvedimangalam'.

Sculptural art techniques: The temple contains the Oonjal Mandapam, Chitra Sabha, vasantha Mandabam, a

magnificent bronze Nandi, a monolithic Anjaneya described in the source as approximately 16 feet 4 inches (5 metres) high, a distinctive Vinayagar sculpture, and rare artistic forms of women carrying lamps. The temple also has musical pillars that produce resonant musical sounds when struck, wall paintings depicting the story of Indra, and a historically valuable stone inscription.

The sculptures display exceptional craftsmanship. For example, the source describes a sculpture carved with such precision that a small stick can be inserted through its nostril and brought out through its ear. Sculptures of Thirumalai Nayak, dancing woman, women offering betel leaves, and an elegantly formed woman holding a pot are presented as lively works of art.

Important Festivals:

Margazhi Grand Festivals: The primary festival of the suchindream temple takes place over 10 days in the month of Margazhi (December-January). Beginning with flag hoisting, the deity goes on street processions daily. On the night of the eighth day, the ancient 'makkal kanaku' (people's Accounts) ritual takes place, where temple income and expenditure records are displayed in front of the public. The ninth day features the famous car festivals (Therottam), where massive chariots carrying the lord, goddess, and Vinayaka parade through the streets. On the tenth day, the festival concludes with arattu (holy immersion) in the Pazhayaru River and the Arudra Darshan of lord Nataraja.

Chithirai festivals and Floating festivals (Theppotsavam): A 10-day spring festival celebrated during the month of Chithirai (April-May). The 'theppotsavam' held on the night of the ninth day is immensely famous. The sight of lord Thanumalayan and the Goddess riding the illuminated floating raft across the temple tank captivates the mind.

Anjaneya Jayanti festival: The Jayanti festival for the 18-foot-tall monolith Anjaneya located in the southwest of the temple takes place on Margazhi Amavasya (New Moon). On that day, milk, curd, sandalwood, and gold abhishekam are performed, alongside offering a vada garland made of hundreds of thousands of vadas. Thousands of devotees gather to witness the Deeparadhana performed after decorating the deity with butter.

Masi Festivals and Celestial wedding: In the Masi (February-March), the Thirukalyanam (celestial wedding) of lord Thanumalyan and Goddess Aram Valartha Nayaki is the main highlight. Witnessing this is believed to strengthen family relationships. Furthermore, on Masi Shivaratri, four- period special pujas and a unique oil-application abhishekam (Thaila kaapu) take place.

Other Annual Celebrations

During the month of Purattasi, the Navarathri Golu display is set up at the shrine of goddess Aram Valartha Nayaki, accompanied by special pujas and cultural programs for all nine days. Additionally, on the days of Thai and Aadi Amasaya, thousands of devotees customarily bathe in the Pazhayaru River, offer ancestral rituals (Tarpanam), and worship Lord Thanumalayan.

CONCLUSION

The Suchindram Thanumalayam temple is not merely a place of worship; it is a historical treasure trove witnessing the architectural and sculptural mastery of the Chola, Chera, Pandya, and Nayak rulers. Through its rare musical pillars, detailed stone carvings, the historically unique 'Makkal Kanakku' ritual, and

colourful year-round festivals, the temple stands as an unmatched centre preserving Tamil Nadu's culture.

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CHARLES MEAD AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN EDUCATION IN SOUTH TRAVANCORE: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

The development of modern education in South Travancore during the nineteenth century was an important factor in the region's social and cultural transformation. Rev. Charles Mead of the London Missionary Society played a significant role in this process through the establishment and expansion of educational institutions, particularly in and around Nagercoil. This paper examines his contribution to the growth of modern education, focusing on mission schools, female education, teacher training, educational materials and the development of higher education. It also considers the educational conditions of South Travancore before the expansion of missionary institutions and the changes that followed.

The study draws upon missionary reports, correspondence, educational records, contemporary writings and Travancore administrative sources to understand the nature and significance of Mead's educational activities. His initiatives provided wider opportunities for literacy and formal education and contributed to the gradual development of an organised educational system. The expansion of schools also created the foundation for higher education and contributed to the emergence of Nagercoil as an important centre of learning. The paper argues that Mead's educational contribution extended beyond missionary instruction and formed an important part of the wider socio-cultural transformation of South Travancore.

Keywords: *Charles Mead, South Travancore, Modern Education, Mission Schools, Female Education, Higher Education, Nagercoil, London Missionary Society.*

INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes one of the important foundations of social and cultural transformation. In nineteenth-century South Travancore, the transition from traditional forms of learning to organised modern education was a gradual process involving indigenous institutions, the Travancore State and Christian missionary organisations. The London Missionary Society (LMS) played a significant role in this transformation through its network of schools and educational institutions. Before the expansion of missionary education, learning in South Travancore was largely associated with traditional systems and religious institutions. Access to education varied according to caste, gender and social status. The emergence of organised schools gradually changed this situation by introducing regular instruction, new subjects, printed educational materials and opportunities for wider sections of society.

The educational activities of the LMS began before the arrival of Rev. Charles Mead. Rev. William Tobias Ringeltaube established an English school

at Mylaudy in 1809. Charles Mead continued this educational initiative after succeeding Ringeltaube and shifted the school to Nagercoil in 1818. The Nagercoil Seminary subsequently became one of the most important educational institutions in South Travancore. Contemporary and later institutional accounts describe Mead's ambition that the seminary should eventually become a mission college for South India.

Charles Mead's contribution to education was not confined to one institution. His educational activities formed part of a wider network of mission schools, including schools for different communities, schools for girls and institutions connected with teacher training. His wife, Johanna Mead, also played an important role in the development of female education, particularly through the establishment of a girls' boarding school at Nagercoil.

The significance of Mead's educational work therefore lies in the institutional foundation that he helped establish. The development of schools, the Nagercoil Seminary, female education and teacher preparation contributed to the gradual emergence of a modern educational environment in South Travancore.

Educational Conditions In South Travancore Before Charles Mead

The educational system of South Travancore in the early nineteenth century was predominantly shaped by traditional forms of learning. Education was imparted through indigenous teachers, religious institutions and traditional centres of learning, with instruction generally concentrating on languages, religious literature, arithmetic and customary knowledge. However, access to education was not equally distributed throughout society. Caste, social status, gender and economic circumstances influenced educational opportunities, and women and socially disadvantaged communities had comparatively limited access to formal learning. The absence of an extensive network of institutional schools also restricted the spread of literacy. Education was therefore largely confined to particular sections of society, while the majority of the population had limited opportunities for systematic schooling.

A significant change began with the arrival of Protestant missionaries and the establishment of organised educational institutions. The London Missionary Society became an important force in this development. Rev. William Tobias Ringeltaube established an English school at Mylaudy in 1809, providing instruction in English, Tamil and Sanskrit along with religious teaching. This early initiative created an institutional foundation for the subsequent expansion of missionary education. When Charles Mead arrived in South Travancore, he inherited this educational work and developed it further. In 1818, the educational centre was shifted to Nagercoil, where the Mission Seminary was established. Thus, Charles Mead should not be regarded as the originator of missionary education in South Travancore, but rather as one of its most important early organisers and expanders. His contribution was particularly significant in transforming an earlier educational initiative into a more extensive institutional network.

Charles Mead's Educational Vision

Charles Mead's educational activities represented an important stage in the development of organised modern education in South Travancore. His work was undertaken within the framework of the London Missionary Society, but education under his leadership extended

beyond elementary religious instruction. The development of the Nagercoil Seminary demonstrates the broader nature of his educational vision. The institution was intended to provide more advanced education and to become a central educational establishment for the South Travancore mission. The institutional history of Women's Christian College records Mead's vision that the seminary should eventually develop into a mission college for South India. This indicates that higher education was already part of the educational thinking associated with the institution during its formative period. Mead's educational approach emphasised literacy, languages and useful knowledge. The curriculum included English, Tamil, Malayalam and Sanskrit, while subjects such as history, geography and arithmetic were gradually incorporated into the educational programme. Missionary schools were also extended to villages and to communities that had previously experienced limited access to formal education. Education consequently became an instrument through which literacy and new forms of knowledge could be introduced to a wider population. Mead's educational vision can therefore be understood through three interconnected objectives: expanding basic education, creating permanent educational institutions and establishing a foundation for advanced learning. His work at Nagercoil was particularly important because it connected elementary schooling with the possibility of higher education and helped establish Nagercoil as an emerging centre of learning.

Establishment And Expansion Of Mission Schools

The establishment and expansion of mission schools formed the central component of the educational transformation associated with Charles Mead. After continuing the educational work initiated at Mylaudy, Mead shifted the principal educational centre to Nagercoil in 1818. The establishment of the Nagercoil Seminary marked an important development in this process. According to the institutional history of the college, Colonel Munro offered his bungalow to Mead in 1818, after which the Mission Seminary was established. The institution was intended to provide advanced instruction and eventually develop into a college. Alongside the seminary, the missionary educational network expanded through village schools, day schools, boarding schools and other forms of educational institutions. This expansion enabled education to move beyond the central mission station and reach communities in different parts of South Travancore.

The growth of mission schools also introduced new forms of institutional discipline and classroom-based learning. Regular instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic and languages gradually became characteristic of the schools. English education was particularly important because knowledge of English subsequently became associated with higher education, government employment and professional opportunities. The missionary educational programme was not restricted to literary instruction. Practical and vocational education also formed part of the wider educational activities. Accounts of educational development in Nagercoil refer to commercial and industrial instruction, indicating an attempt to provide students with useful skills alongside academic learning. The combination of elementary schooling, English education, practical

instruction and advanced learning created a developing educational network.

The expansion of mission schools also had a wider social dimension. Schools were established among communities that had traditionally possessed fewer opportunities for formal education, including sections of the socially disadvantaged population. The missionary educational network consequently became one of the mechanisms through which literacy spread into areas and communities that had previously remained outside the established educational system. The growth of these schools also created a demand for trained teachers and educational materials, encouraging the development of a more organised educational infrastructure. Thus, the importance of Mead's contribution lies not merely in individual school establishments but in the wider process of institutional expansion that gave modern education a permanent presence in South Travancore.

Development Of Female Education

The development of female education was one of the most significant aspects of the educational transformation associated with the missionary movement in South Travancore. During the early nineteenth century, women had considerably fewer opportunities for formal education than men. The establishment of schools specifically for girls therefore represented an important change in the educational structure of the region. Johanna Mead, the wife of Charles Mead, played a particularly important role in this development. Historical studies record the establishment of a girls' boarding school at Nagercoil in 1819 under her initiative. The institution provided girls with access to formal learning and also incorporated practical instruction such as stitching, weaving and embroidery. The development of boarding education was particularly significant because it allowed girls from areas outside Nagercoil to receive schooling.

Female education gradually developed beyond elementary literacy. Girls were introduced to subjects such as history, geography and arithmetic, while practical skills were also incorporated into the curriculum. The development of female teacher training was particularly important because educated women could subsequently serve as teachers in girls' schools. This helped create a self-sustaining process in which the expansion of women's education produced trained women capable of contributing to the further expansion of female schooling. The educational work associated with Johanna Mead should therefore be considered alongside Charles Mead's broader institutional contribution. While Mead was central to the development of the missionary educational structure, the participation of women such as Johanna Mead was crucial to extending education to girls. Female education consequently became an important element of the wider social transformation of South Travancore.

Higher Education And The Growth Of Colleges

The development of higher education in South Travancore was closely connected with the growth of the Nagercoil Seminary. Charles Mead's vision for the seminary extended beyond elementary and secondary instruction, as he hoped that it would eventually develop into a mission college serving South India. The seminary provided advanced education and became an important centre for the training of students associated with the mission schools. Its curriculum included languages and other branches of

knowledge, giving students an educational experience beyond the basic instruction available in village schools. The institution therefore represented an important transition between elementary missionary schooling and the later development of collegiate education.

The transformation of the seminary into a college, however, occurred after Charles Mead's active period and should not be directly attributed to him. In February 1893, the institution was raised to the status of a Second Grade College under the name Nagercoil Christian College. It began with thirteen students, including Christian and non-Christian students, and subsequently developed into the institution associated with Scott Christian College. The institutional sequence from the Mission Seminary to Nagercoil Christian College demonstrates the long-term significance of the educational foundation established during Mead's period. Mead therefore should be regarded as a foundational figure in the development of the institution rather than as the direct founder of the later college. The growth of collegiate education created opportunities for advanced study and contributed to the emergence of an educated population capable of entering teaching, government service and other professions. It also strengthened Nagercoil's position as an important centre of higher learning in South Travancore.

Curriculum, Teacher Training And Educational Materials

The emergence of modern education required more than the establishment of school buildings. A systematic curriculum, trained teachers and suitable educational materials were essential for the effective functioning and expansion of schools. The missionary educational system introduced a curriculum that extended beyond traditional religious learning. English became an important component of education, while Tamil, Malayalam and Sanskrit continued to be taught. History, geography and arithmetic were also incorporated into the curriculum. The introduction of English was particularly significant because it opened access to new forms of knowledge and later became increasingly important for higher education, government employment and professional opportunities. The combination of traditional languages and new subjects reflected the changing educational environment of nineteenth-century South Travancore.

Teacher training was equally important in the expansion of the school network. As the number of mission schools increased, the demand for competent teachers also grew. The training of local teachers enabled schools to expand without depending entirely upon European missionaries. Female teacher training was particularly significant for the development of girls' schools, as educated women could become teachers and extend educational opportunities to other communities. Educational materials also played a major role. Schools required textbooks, reading materials and other printed resources, and missionary printing activities in Nagercoil helped meet these requirements. The availability of printed educational material facilitated the spread of literacy and helped standardise classroom instruction. Curriculum development, teacher training and printing therefore formed an essential part of the educational infrastructure that accompanied the growth of mission schools.

Social Impact And Historical Significance Of Mead's Educational Reforms

The educational initiatives associated with Charles Mead produced consequences that extended beyond the immediate objectives of missionary education. The expansion of schools increased opportunities for literacy and formal learning among different sections of South Travancore society. Mission schools reached communities that had previously experienced limited access to institutional education, and the spread of English and vernacular literacy introduced new forms of knowledge. Education gradually became associated with opportunities for employment and social advancement. Students who acquired literacy and English education could seek new forms of employment, while those who progressed to higher education could enter teaching, administration and other professions. The educational movement therefore contributed to the gradual emergence of an educated section of society and strengthened the role of education as an instrument of social mobility.

Female education produced another important dimension of social change. The establishment of girls' schools and boarding institutions expanded women's access to formal learning, while the training of women teachers allowed female education to spread further. The development of educational institutions also contributed to cultural transformation by exposing students to new subjects such as history, geography and English. The growth of printing and the circulation of educational materials further widened access to knowledge. Nagercoil gradually emerged as an important educational centre, and the subsequent development of the Nagercoil Seminary into collegiate education demonstrated the long-term institutional consequences of the missionary educational movement.

At the same time, Mead's educational contribution should be examined within its historical context. Missionary education was closely connected with evangelisation and therefore possessed both religious and educational objectives. It would be historically inaccurate to separate the educational programme completely from the missionary context. Nevertheless, the consequences of the educational institutions extended beyond their original religious purpose. The expansion of literacy, female education, teacher training and higher learning contributed to broader social and cultural changes. The historical significance of Mead therefore lies particularly in the institutional foundation he helped establish and develop. The transition from village schools to the Nagercoil Seminary and eventually to collegiate education illustrates the cumulative nature of educational change in South Travancore. Mead's educational legacy consequently continued beyond his lifetime through institutions and educational practices that influenced later generations.

CONCLUSION

The development of modern education in South Travancore during the nineteenth century was a gradual process involving missionaries, local communities and the Travancore State. Within this process, Rev. Charles Mead occupies an important position because of his role in expanding and institutionalising missionary education. Mead inherited the educational work initiated by Rev. William Tobias Ringeltaube at Mylaudy and shifted its central focus to Nagercoil, where the development of the Nagercoil Seminary became one of his most important educational achievements. The expansion of mission schools created wider opportunities for education and literacy,

while female education associated with Johanna Mead opened new opportunities for women. The later development of the seminary into Nagercoil Christian College in 1893 demonstrates the long-term institutional significance of the educational foundation established during Mead's period, although the later college should not be attributed directly to Mead himself. The curriculum, teacher training and printing activities associated with the missionary educational movement further strengthened the transformation of education in South Travancore. His contribution should therefore be understood not simply through the number of schools established but through the creation of an educational infrastructure that continued to develop after his lifetime. The transition from mission schools to the Nagercoil Seminary and eventually to collegiate education represents an important chapter in the history of modern education in South Travancore and forms an important part of the region's wider socio-cultural transformation.

1. Charles Mead continued the educational work and shifted the central school to Nagercoil in 1818.
2. The Nagercoil Seminary became the central institution of missionary education.
3. Mead envisioned the seminary developing into a college.
4. A girls' boarding school was established at Nagercoil in 1819.
5. Teacher training helped expand the school network.
6. Printing and educational materials supported the development of modern education.
7. In 1893 it became Nagercoil Christian College.
8. The institution later became associated with Scott Christian College.
9. His educational legacy formed part of the wider socio-cultural transformation of South Travancore.

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FROM TRADITION TO TRANSFORMATION: CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND WOMEN'S CULTURAL LIFE IN KANNIYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Kanniyakumari district, the southernmost tip of Tamil Nadu, as part of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore was considered as a laboratory of missionary social intervention for over a century. From the arrival of the London Missionary Society (LMS) pioneer W. T. Ringeltaube at Mylaudy in 1806, through the long tenure of Charles Mead and the Nagercoil Seminary, Protestant and Catholic missions reshaped the everyday cultural life of women in the region. Their access to literacy, their dress, their domestic roles, their economic participation, and their public visibility are all shaped by the Christian missionarirs. This article examines the missionary encounter with women's cultural life in Kanniyakumari through four interlocking themes: female education, the Channar Revolt (Maru Marakkal Samaram) over the right to cover the upper body, the introduction of new economic skills such as lace-making and tailoring, and the reordering of domestic and marital norms. It argues that missionary intervention did not simply "modernize" women from outside but interacted with existing caste and gender hierarchies to produce a layered, contested transformation, that also expanded certain freedoms for lower caste and Christian women. The article draws on both nineteenth-century missionary accounts and later historical scholarship to present a balanced assessment of this transition from tradition to transformation.

KEYWORDS: *Kanniyakumari, Travancore, London Missionary Society, Nadar women, Channar Revolt, female education, missionary history, women's cultural life*

INTRODUCTION

Kanniyakumari district, carved out of the former princely state of Travancore and merged with Tamil Nadu in 1956, occupies a distinctive place in the history of Christian missions in South India. Unlike many other regions where missionary activity remained peripheral, South Travancore became one of the most intensively missionized areas of the subcontinent, owing to nearly a century and a half of continuous work by the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, and Roman Catholic orders among the coastal and agrarian communities of the region. The two important Protestant agencies that operated in nineteenth-century Travancore were the Church Mission Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS), both of which took a keen interest in the spread of western education. The cultural life of women in this region prior to missionary contact was structured tightly around caste. Norms of dress, labour, ritual purity, and public conduct differed sharply by caste status, and women of lower-ranked communities, particularly the Nadars (then called Shanars or Channars), Ezhavas, and fisherfolk communities such as the Mukkuvar; bore the heaviest social restrictions. In nineteenth-century

Travancore, baring one's chest before higher-status people was considered a mark of respect for both men and women, so that lower-status castes such as the Nadar climbers and Ezhavas had to bare their chests before the higher-ranked Nairs, who in turn did so before the still higher-ranked Nambudiri Brahmins. It was into this rigidly graded social order that Protestant missionaries introduced a new set of ideas about female dignity, literacy, and domestic respectability ideas that were themselves shaped by early Victorian notions of womanhood even as they collided with, and sometimes dismantled, indigenous caste practice. This article traces that encounter across four domains of women's cultural life: education, dress and public dignity, economic skill and livelihood, and domestic/marital reform. It draws on missionary records, later academic scholarship on the Nadar community and South Travancore missions, and recent historiography that has sought to recover the agency of Indian women themselves within this process, rather than treating them merely as passive recipients of missionary benevolence.

The Missionary Presence In South Travancore: A Brief Background

The London Missionary Society began its work in the region when Rev. W. T. Ringeltaube arrived at Mylaudy, near present-day Kanniyakumari, in 1806, met the Tamil catechist Vedamanickam. Ringeltaube established the first English school in the region at Mylaudy in 1806, and the mission that grew out of his work focused on areas where oppressive customs and slavish social attitudes prevailed, aiming at both educational and social uplift. The mission's institutional centre soon shifted to Nagercoil, where Charles Mead arrived in 1817 as an LMS missionary and began work from the circuit bungalow of the British Resident Munro, with Travancore's Rani Lakshmi Bayi herself contributing to the mission. A seminary was established at Nagercoil, and notably the first girls' school in Travancore was founded by Mrs Charles Mead. This seminary would later grow into Scott Christian College, one of South India's oldest institutions of higher learning. The Church Missionary Society was also active nearby, while Roman Catholic missionaries present in the coastal belt for far longer worked mainly among the lower castes, particularly the fishermen communities of the coastal belt, and took great interest in the spread of female education. By the turn of the twentieth century, missionary educational infrastructure in the wider Travancore region was extensive as the London Missionary Society alone ran 384 schools with 15,641 students by 1904. It is important to recognize that missionary work in this region was never solely religious. As one recent study notes, missionary intervention in Travancore extended well beyond religion to shape education, including women's education, and to reconfigure perceptions of sanity, morality, hygiene, and social relationships. It is this broader, culturally transformative dimension rather than conversion narratives alone that is of central interest here.

Female Education: From Domestic Seclusion To The School Room

Before missionary intervention, formal education for girls in South Travancore was almost non-existent outside a narrow elite. Missionary wives were often the first to organize systematic girls' schooling, frequently working from their own homes. A comparable pattern is visible across Travancore: in Kottayam, for

instance, Amelia Baker, working with the Church Missionary Society, founded the first CMS girls' school in Travancore, later expanded into what became Baker Memorial Girls' High School the first Indian school to introduce uniforms as a means of promoting equality among students. In South Travancore itself, the seminary model pioneered by Mead combined religious instruction with secular subjects; boarding arrangements for girls allowed missionaries to remove pupils, at least temporarily, from the domestic labour and early-marriage pressures that otherwise foreclosed schooling. Recent scholarship situates this within a broader professionalization of missionary women's roles as lady missionaries and missionary wives in nineteenth-century South Travancore were represented within a "mission of sisterhood," bringing single and married British women out of the domestic sphere and into paid educational and medical work among Indian women. The effect, deliberately or not, was to model female professional labour as teachers, nurses, and Bible-women for local Christian women themselves, who increasingly found employment within the mission's own institutions.

Economic historians examining the long-run effects of this activity have found it substantial as colonial-era Christian missionary activity is consistently associated with better female education outcomes in both the colonial and post-colonial periods, a pattern researchers attribute partly to the competitive dynamic missionaries created among rival religious and educational providers. Sport and physical culture were folded into this reform agenda as well; mission schools in Travancore, historians note, represented a radical departure from tradition by establishing girls' schools that included physical education in the curriculum, giving women opportunities to move beyond purely domestic roles. Yet this educational transformation was neither uniform nor uncomplicated. Missionary curricula, as later scholarship on female education in colonial Bengal and elsewhere has observed of the wider missionary project, produced an indigenous debate about Christian domination versus women's emancipation, since the schooling offered by missionaries was inseparable from an effort to fashion converts into particular models of Christian womanhood. In Kanniyakumari, too, education was bound up with conversion, and access to schooling for many girls came hand in hand with a broader reorientation of family religious identity a point historians continue to debate in terms of agency versus imposition.

Dress, Dignity, And The Channar Revolt

Perhaps the most dramatic and best documented episode of missionary involvement in women's cultural life in this region is the so-called Channar Revolt or Maru Marakkal Samaram ("Upper-Cloth Struggle"), which unfolded largely within the boundaries of present-day Kanniyakumari district between roughly 1813 and 1859. The revolt refers to the fight of Nadar women in what is now Kanniyakumari district for the right to wear upper-body clothing covering their breasts, a right customarily reserved for higher-caste women. The controversy began when Colonel John Munro, the British Resident and Diwan of Travancore, issued an 1813 order permitting Nadar women who had converted to Christianity to wear an upper cloth. An order soon withdrawn after members of the Raja's council objected that it would erode caste distinctions and cause ritual "pollution."

Christian converts were nonetheless allowed a distinct garment: Nadar women were forbidden the Nair-style shawl but permitted to wear the kuppayam, a jacket associated with Syrian Christians, Muslims, and Mappilas a compromise that satisfied neither the women themselves nor the missionaries who supported them.

Missionary involvement is well attested in the historical record, though its precise weight relative to indigenous agency remains debated among historians. One recent case study traces the proximate spark to a converted couple: the immediate cause of the wider unrest is often traced to Poothathaankutty Channan and his wife Ishakki Channathi, agricultural labourers who, after converting to Christianity, adopted new dress styles modelled on their former employer's wife after which increasing numbers of converted Channar women began covering their breasts at missionary prompting, provoking opposition from higher castes. Tensions escalated into open violence during the 1820s, with this defiance provoking increasing violence against Nadar women and the burning of mission schools and churches. The dispute was only partially resolved by royal proclamation. On 26 July 1859, under pressure from the Madras Governor Charles Trevelyan, the King of Travancore proclaimed that all Nadar women Christian or Hindu could cover their upper bodies by wearing a jacket in the Christian Nadar style or tying coarse cloth in the manner of fisherwomen, though still not in the specific style reserved for Nair women; missionaries themselves regarded this compromise as unsatisfactory, since they held that all men and women should be treated equally before the law. Even so, the episode is widely remembered as a foundational moment. As one historian summarizes, the eventual victory of the Channar Lahala, after roughly half a century of struggle, is widely regarded as the transformative event that triggered a broader wave of social reform in the region. The Channar Revolt is therefore best understood as a genuine convergence of interests: missionary theology, which insisted on the moral equality of converts, provided institutional cover and legal advocacy, while Nadar women and their communities supplied the sustained, often physically dangerous, defiance that ultimately forced a change in law.

New Livelihoods: Lace-Making, Tailoring, And Economic Skill

Alongside literacy and dress reform, missionaries introduced vocational training that reshaped women's economic role within the household economy of South Travancore. Girls educated in mission seminaries and boarding schools at Nagercoil and surrounding stations were commonly trained in needlework, lace-making, and tailoring skills that, over the following century, evolved into a distinctive regional cottage industry for which Kanniyakumari remains known even today. This vocational dimension of mission education reflected a broader pattern across South India, where, as one study of missionary education notes, after their general education, students in mission institutions were trained to take up specific vocations. This economic dimension of missionary work is significant because it altered women's position within the domestic economy: skills acquired through mission schooling could be converted into home-based income, giving Christian and convert women a modest but real degree of financial agency that was largely unavailable to their mothers and grandmothers. At the same time, this

training reinforced a gendered division of labour rooted in Victorian domestic ideology women were trained principally in "suitable" feminine occupations (needlework, teaching, nursing) rather than in trades or professions open to men, a pattern historians of missionary "women's work" describe as central to the broader project of remaking converts into "good wives and mothers," a model that in practice reinforced indigenous conventions of marriage as the primary social relation available to Indian women, even as missionary-provided education and training allowed Indian Christian women to be employed as mission nurses and teachers.

Reordering Domestic And Marital Life

Beyond schools and dress codes, missionaries sought to reshape the interior life of the household: marriage age, widow remarriage, monogamy, sobriety, and domestic hygiene were all targets of missionary preaching and pastoral supervision. Congregational discipline in mission churches often meant direct intervention in family disputes, marriage arrangements, and even naming practices, as converts were drawn into a new moral community defined by the mission station rather than by caste assembly alone. This process must be read alongside the missionaries' involvement in the wider struggle against caste-based bonded labour and social disability in the region, since women's domestic burdens were inseparable from the broader system of agrarian servitude that missionaries also opposed. The London Missionary Society and Church Missionary Society activities, which spread through the areas between Kanyakumari in the south and Quilon in the north, were widely welcomed by low-caste communities such as the Nadars precisely because they suffered severe social disabilities and burdens under the orthodox feudal order, and mission activity created a new consciousness among these oppressed groups. For women in bonded or semi-bonded agricultural households, the erosion of these obligations however gradual and incomplete altered daily cultural life as much as any school curriculum.

Assessing The Transformation: Continuity, Change, And Contested Agency

Any balanced assessment of this history must hold two things together. On one hand, missionary intervention demonstrably expanded the horizons of cultural life available to many women in Kanniyakumari district: literacy, salaried work, physical mobility, legal standing in dress disputes, and a vocabulary of rights that could be and was turned against caste orthodoxy itself. On the other hand, this transformation was neither disinterested nor free of its own disciplinary logic. Missionary "upliftment" was bound tightly to conversion, was shaped by Victorian ideals of domesticity that prescribed new (if different) constraints on women's roles, and unfolded through an unmistakably colonial institutional apparatus.

Historians remain divided on how to weigh these dimensions. Some scholarship stresses missionary agency and benevolence in dismantling caste practice; other work insists on centring the agency, calculation, and courage of Indian women and communities themselves, who adopted, adapted, negotiated, and sometimes rejected missionary offers according to their own social calculations. The Channar Revolt illustrates this tension particularly well: it was at once a missionary cause and a Nadar cause, and

separating the two analytically risks flattening a genuinely collaborative if unequal history. What is clear is that the cultural life of women in Kanniyakumari district was irrevocably altered across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that the region's present-day identity its schools, its lace industry, its unusually high rates of female literacy relative to much of Tamil Nadu, and its living memory of the Upper Cloth struggle carries the visible imprint of this long missionary encounter.

CONCLUSION

The history of Christian missions in Kanniyakumari district offers a rich case study in how colonial-era religious institutions became entangled with local struggles over caste, gender, and cultural dignity. From the founding of the Nagercoil seminary and the region's first girls' schools, to the decades-long Channar Revolt over the right to cover the body, to the quieter transformations wrought by vocational training and domestic reform, missionaries acted as catalysts, not simply architects of a transformation that ultimately belonged to the women and communities who lived it. The passage "from tradition to transformation" in this region was therefore neither a simple story of colonial imposition nor one of straightforward liberation, but a genuinely contested and collaborative process whose consequences remain visible in the social and cultural fabric of Kanniyakumari today. Future research, particularly work that recovers women's own voices from mission archives, court records, and oral testimony, remains needed to further balance the missionary-centred narratives that have long dominated the historiography of this region.

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WOMEN AS CUSTODIANS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: SUSTAINING TRADITIONS, RITUALS AND FESTIVALS IN KANYAKUMARI

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ABSTRACT

Cultural heritage encompasses the traditions, beliefs, rituals, festivals, knowledge and practices through which communities express their collective identity and preserve their connection with the past. Although heritage preservation is often associated with monuments and formal institutions, intangible cultural heritage survives primarily through everyday practices and intergenerational transmission. Women have historically played an important role in this process as bearers, practitioners and transmitters of cultural knowledge. Kanyakumari District possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage shaped by its geographical location and historical interaction among different social, linguistic and religious communities. Its cultural traditions include temple festivals, seasonal celebrations, household rituals, folk practices, traditional foodways, oral traditions and artistic in ritual practices, festival preparation, traditional food, oral traditions, folk arts and intergenerational cultural transmission. The paper also considers the changing nature of Women's cultural roles in the context of modernisation, education, migration, urbanisation and technological development. It argues that women should be viewed not merely as participants in cultural practices but as active custodians who maintain, transmit and adapt cultural heritage across generations.

Keywords: *Women - Cultural Heritage - Cultural Continuity – Rituals – Festivals – Kanyakumari - Cultural Memory - Tradition*

INTRODUCTION

Culture represents the collective identity, values, beliefs and memories of a community. It is transmitted through language, customs, rituals, festivals, food, oral traditions, artistic practices and everyday social activities. Cultural heritage therefore extends beyond monuments and historical structures to include intangible practices that communities continue to perform and transmit.

Women occupy an important position in the preservation of such intangible heritage. Within families and communities, women have traditionally participated in rituals, prepared festival foods, maintained household customs, transmitted songs and stories and introduced younger generations to traditional practices. Much of this cultural labour takes place within domestic and community spaces and therefore receives less attention in conventional historical narratives.

Kanyakumari provides an important context for examining this relationship between women and cultural heritage. Situated at the southern tip of Tamil Nadu, the district has a diverse cultural landscape shaped by its geographical position and historical interaction between different communities. Its cultural traditions include religious festivals, village celebrations, folk practices, traditional foodways, oral traditions and artistic expressions. The Kanyakumari District Administration records several important festivals, including Pongal, Kumari Thiruvizha, festivals associated with the Devi

Kanyakumari Temple, Suchindram Thanumalayan Temple and Mandaikadu Temple. Within these traditions, women perform significant cultural roles. They participate in festivals and rituals, prepare traditional foods, preserve household customs and transmit cultural knowledge to younger generations. Their role demonstrates that cultural preservation is not simply the protection of the past but a continuing process of cultural transmission and adaptation.

Women as Custodians of Cultural Heritage

The concept of cultural heritage includes both tangible and intangible forms. Intangible heritage encompasses traditions, knowledge, skills, rituals, performing arts and practices that communities recognise as part of their cultural identity. Women function as important custodians of this heritage because cultural knowledge is frequently learned through everyday experience. Mothers and grandmothers may teach children traditional songs, stories, food preparation, ritual procedures and customary practices. Such knowledge is often transmitted through observation and participation rather than through formal written instruction. Women therefore act as links between generations. Their cultural role can be understood through several interconnected activities: preserving cultural memory, practising rituals, participating in festivals, maintaining traditional foodways, transmitting oral traditions and teaching younger generations. This process is particularly important when cultural practices have limited written documentation. The memories of elderly women can provide valuable information about earlier forms of festivals, rituals, food practices, dress and community life.

Women and Ritual and Festival Traditions

Festivals are important expressions of cultural identity because they combine religious belief, social interaction, food, artistic expression and community participation. Kanyakumari's cultural calendar contains numerous religious and seasonal festivals. Women contribute to festivals from the preparation stage itself. Cleaning and decorating homes, preparing ritual foods, arranging offerings and preparing traditional clothing are often part of women's festival responsibilities. These activities connect domestic life with wider community celebrations. Women also participate in religious rituals through prayers, offerings and customary observances. Their participation provides younger family members with opportunities to observe and learn traditional practices. Festival food is another important area of women's cultural contribution. Traditional dishes associated with particular festivals carry knowledge about local ingredients, preparation methods and cultural meanings. Recipes are frequently transmitted orally from mothers and grandmothers to younger generations. Women also contribute to decorative and artistic practices such as kolam, floral arrangements, traditional ornamentation, folk songs and other forms of festival expression. Through these practices, aesthetic knowledge and cultural symbolism are transmitted across generations. Kumari Thiruvizha illustrates the broader cultural environment of Kanyakumari, incorporating traditional art and music into a public cultural celebration. Such events provide spaces in which cultural practices are performed, remembered and communicated to wider audiences.

Women and Cultural Memory

Cultural memory refers to the ways in which communities remember and

reproduce their past. Women are important bearers of such memory because many traditions survive through oral narratives and everyday practices. Stories, folk songs, proverbs, family histories, festival memories and traditional recipes can preserve information about earlier generations. Elderly women, in particular, may possess memories of cultural practices that have changed or disappeared. Oral transmission is therefore an important source for understanding local history. A woman's recollection of how a festival was celebrated in her childhood may reveal changes in ritual practice, food, dress, social relationships and community participation. Traditional food is also an important form of cultural memory. The preparation of particular dishes during festivals or religious occasions creates continuity between generations. Similarly, traditional arts and crafts survive when older women teach younger members of the family. Women thus preserve cultural heritage not only by performing traditions but also by remembering and explaining their meanings.

Intergenerational Transmission and Changing Cultural Roles

Cultural continuity depends upon the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. Women contribute to this process through observation, participation and instruction. However, the conditions of cultural transmission have changed considerably. Education, employment, migration, urbanisation, nuclear families and digital technology have transformed traditional patterns of family and community life. Younger women may therefore experience a balance between inherited cultural expectations and contemporary lifestyles. Some traditional practices may be reduced because of time constraints or changing social values, while other traditions may be retained selectively, particularly major festivals, food practices and important family rituals. Modernisation does not necessarily result in the disappearance of culture. Instead, women may adapt traditional practices to contemporary circumstances. Traditional food may be prepared only during festivals, traditional clothing may be reserved for special occasions and rituals may be modified while retaining their symbolic significance. Digital technology has also created new possibilities for cultural preservation. Women can document recipes, songs, rituals, festivals, photographs and oral histories through digital platforms. Thus, contemporary cultural transmission increasingly combines traditional face-to-face learning with digital forms of documentation and communication.

Women and Indigenous Cultural Knowledge

Kanyakumari's cultural heritage also includes the knowledge systems of indigenous communities. Studies of the Kani communities of the Western Ghats have documented extensive traditional knowledge concerning medicinal plants and forest resources. Research in the Pechiparai Hills recorded significant ethnobotanical knowledge among Kani communities. Another study documented 120 medicinal plant species associated with Kani traditional knowledge in Kanyakumari District. Such research demonstrates the importance of indigenous knowledge as part of the region's intangible cultural heritage. A gender-sensitive approach is important because knowledge relating to food, household remedies, childcare, plants and ritual practices may be transmitted differently among women and men. Although indigenous knowledge should

not be generalised across all women or communities, its documentation highlights the need to recognise women as potential holders and transmitters of culturally significant knowledge.

Women, Tradition and Modernity

The role of women as cultural custodians is dynamic. Women do not simply reproduce traditions exactly as they were practised in the past. They interpret, select and adapt cultural practices according to changing circumstances. Modern education, employment and migration have altered traditional gender roles. At the same time, these developments have provided women with new opportunities to document and promote cultural heritage. The contemporary woman can therefore be both a bearer of inherited traditions and an agent of cultural transformation. Cultural continuity occurs when traditions remain meaningful while adapting to changing social conditions. This perspective challenges the idea that preservation means maintaining culture in an unchanged form. Instead, heritage survives through continued practice, reinterpretation and transmission.

CONCLUSION

Women occupy a significant position in sustaining the cultural heritage of Kanyakumari. Their contribution extends from household rituals and festival preparation to traditional food, oral traditions, folk arts and cultural memory. Through observation, participation and instruction, women transmit cultural knowledge to younger generations. Kanyakumari's diverse cultural landscape provides a valuable setting for understanding this process. Its festivals, rituals and community traditions demonstrate that cultural heritage exists not only in monuments and formal institutions but also in everyday practices. The transformation of women's social roles through education, employment, migration, urbanisation and digital technology has altered the mechanisms of cultural transmission. Nevertheless, women continue to play an important role in negotiating the relationship between tradition and modernity.

Women should therefore be understood not merely as participants or passive preservers of inherited customs but as active custodians of cultural heritage. Their ability to remember, practise, transmit and adapt traditions ensures that cultural heritage remains a living part of community identity in Kanyakumari.

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கன்னியாகுமரி மாவட்டப் பண்பாடும் கலை இலக்கியங்களும்

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தஞ்சாவூர் - 10.

தொடக்கம்

கன்னியாகுமரி மாவட்டம் ஆயக்கலைகளுக்குச் சிறப்புப் பெற்றது. ஓவியம், நாடகம், சிற்பம், இசை, நடனம் எனக் கலைகளில் சிறந்திருக்கும் பண்பட்ட மக்கள் வாழும் பகுதியாக விளங்கி வருகிறது. சங்க காலத்திற்கு முற்பட்ட காலத்திய வரலாற்றை இம்மாவட்டம் பெற்றிருக்கிறது. கடல் கொண்ட குமரி இருந்திருந்தால், தற்காலத்தில் பழம்பெருமை வாய்ந்த சமூகமாகத் தமிழ்ச் சமூகம் இருந்திருக்கும். இருப்பினும், தொடக்கக் காலத்தில் இருந்த பண்பாடுகள் இன்று வரை இம்மக்களிடம் இருக்கிறது. இந்துச் சமயம், இஸ்லாம் சமயம், கிருத்துவச் சமயம், சமண சமயம், பௌத்த சமயம் எனப் பல சமூக மக்களின் பண்புகளும் பண்பாடுகளும் இம்மக்களிடம் நிறைந்திருக்கிறது.

பல்வேறு சமயத்தவர்களின் கட்டடக் கலையும், கோட்டைகளும், அரண்மனைகளும், ஆலயங்களும் இதற்கு சான்றாதாரமாக இருக்கிறது. அதுபோலவே, இம்மக்களின் இலக்கிய உருவாக்கங்களும் இருக்கின்றன. வழக்குச் சொல் அகராதி, நாவல், கவிதை, நவீன இலக்கியங்கள், கதைப்பாடல்கள் எனப் பல்வேறு படைப்புகள் கன்னியாகுமரி மாவட்ட எழுத்தாளர்களால் வெளிவந்துள்ளன. கலை எவ்வாறு இவர்களிடம் ஒன்றிப்போயிருக்கிறதோ, அதுபோலவே இலக்கியங்களும் பின்னிப் பிணைந்துள்ளன. ஆகவே, கன்னியாகுமரி மாவட்ட மக்களின் வாழ்க்கையில் இடம்பெற்றுள்ள பண்பாடுகளையும், கலைகள் குறித்தும், இலக்கிய ஆக்கங்கள் குறித்தும் விளக்குவதாக இவ்வாய்வு அமைகிறது.

உலகமறிந்த குமரி அறிஞர்கள்

உலகப்புகழ் குமரியைத் தன்னகம் கொண்ட கன்னியாகுமரி மாவட்டம் தமிழ்வளர்த்த சான்றோர்களைச் சங்கம் தோன்றும் முன்பே ஈன்ற நன்னிலம். தமிழ் மொழியின் பழம்பெரும் நூலான தொல்காப்பியம் இயற்றிய தொல்காப்பியனும், ஆரிய அரசனாக இருந்தாலும் தொல்காப்பியம் அரங்கேற்றியபோது அரசவையில் இருந்த மன்னன் அதங்கோட்டாசானும், மலைபடுகடாம் இயற்றிய இரணியமுட்டத்துப் பெருங்குன்றூர் பெருங் கௌசிகனாரும், அதியமான அஞ்சியையும் நாஞ்சில் பொருநனையும் பாடிய தோவாளை தந்த ஔவையாரும், நாஞ்சில் பொருநனைப் பாடிய ஒரு சிறைப் பெரியனாரும் நம்மாழ்வாரும் இந்நிலத்தில் தோன்றியவர்களே. சிலர் நச்செள்ளையாரும் திருவள்ளுவ நாயனாரும் இம்மண்ணில் பிறந்தவர்கள் என்று கூறுவரும் உளர்.

அதுமட்டுமல்லாமல் சங்க காலத்திலிருந்து இம்மண்ணில் அறிஞர் பலர் தோன்றி இருக்கின்றனர். கி.பி. 19 மற்றும் கி.பி. 20ஆம் நூற்றாண்டுகளில் கவிமணி தேசிகவிநாயகம் பிள்ளை, செய்குத்தம்பி பாவலர், வையாபுரிப்பிள்ளை, தாழக்குடி இளையப்பெருமாள், ஆபிரகாம் அருளப்பன், கே.என். சிவராச பிள்ளை, பன்மொழிப் புலவர் அப்பாத்துரை, ஆறுமுக நாவலர், பீர்முகமது

ஒலியுல்லா, ஆர் வீரபத்திரன், பேரா.வி.மரிய அந்தோணி, தோவாளை தொம்மை முத்து, சாத்தான் குட்டி, முத்து சண்முகம், மு.சண்முகம்பிள்ளை, ஜீவானந்தம், வ.அய்.சுப்பிரமணியம், அகத்தியலிங்கம், நாஞ்சில்நாடன், ஜெயமோகன், குமாரசெல்வா போன்ற பல பேரறிஞர்கள் இம்மண்ணில் தோன்றி வாழ்ந்தவர்கள். இவர்களின் படைப்புகள் இன்றளவும் பெரிதும் போற்றுவதற்குரியதாக இருக்கிறது.

கலை

ஆய்மன்னர்கள் காலத்தில் கல்விச்சாலைகள் இருந்த கட்டிடங்களைப் பற்றிய குறிப்புகள் மட்டும் கிடைத்துள்ளன. கி.பி.7ஆம் நூற்றாண்டில் கோட்டாற்றில் பெரிய கோட்டை இருந்ததைப் பாண்டிக்கோவை என்ற நூல்,

"குருமா நெடுமதில் கோட்டாற் றரண் கொண்ட தென்னன் கன்னிப் பெருமாள்"

எனக் குறிப்பிடுகிறது.

பிற்காலச் சோழ மன்னனான முதல் குலோத்துங்கன் கோட்டாற்றைத் தீக்கிரையாக்கியதைக் கலிங்கத்துப்பரணி நூல் பதிவு செய்கிறது. சோழர் காலத்தில் கி.பி.11ஆம் நூற்றாண்டில் கோட்டாற்றிலும், உதயகிரியிலும், வலிமையுடைய கோட்டை இருந்திருக்கின்றன என்பதற்கு எழுத்துச் சான்றுகள் உள்ளன. குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் மருந்துக் கோட்டை, பத்மநாபபுரம் கோட்டை, வட்டக்கோட்டை எனப் பல கோட்டைகள் இங்கு காணப்படுவது நோக்கத்தக்கது. மண் கோட்டையானது காற்றாடி மலை, ஆரல்வாய்மொழி வழியாக அமைந்திருந்தது. கன்னியாகுமரியின் அருகே அமைந்துள்ள வட்டக்கோட்டை $3^{1/2}$ ஏக்கர் பரப்பளவு உடையது. மதிலின் உயரம் 26 அடியாகும். மூன்று புரம் அகழியும் ஒருபக்கம் கடலும் சூழ்ந்தவாறு இக்கோட்டை அமைந்திருந்தது. வேணாட்டு மன்னன் காலத்திலேயே இது துறைமுகப் பகுதியாக இருந்ததைக் குமரி முட்டம் கல்வெட்டுக் கூறுகிறது. கி.பி.1774ல் வட்டக் கோட்டை டச்சுத்தளபதியான டிலனாயின் ஆலோசனைப்படி புதுப்பிக்கப்பட்டது.

கல்குளம் வட்டத்தில் உள்ள உதயகிரிக் கோட்டை பழமையானது. இக்கோட்டையைப் பல்வேறு மன்னர்கள் ஆட்சிப் புரிந்துள்ளனர். இக்கோட்டையின் மீது நின்று பார்த்தால் 6 மைல் தூரத்திலுள்ள அனைத்து கிராமங்களும் தெரியும். பத்மநாபபுரம் அரண்மனை திருவிதாங்கூர் கட்டடக் கலைக்குச் சான்றாக உள்ளது. இது மந்திரசாலை, ஆயுதசாலை, ஊட்டுப்புரை ஆகிய பகுதிகளைக் கொண்டது. ஒரே கல்லில் செய்யப்பட்ட கட்டில், 64 மூலிகைகளால் ஆக்கப்பட்ட கட்டில், ஓவியக்கூடம், நடன அரங்கம் ஆகியவை இவ்வரண்மனையில் குறிப்பிடத் தகுந்தன.

திருநந்திக்கரையில் உள்ள குகைக்கோவில் அனைத்து குகைக்கோவில்களுக்கும் மிகப் பழமையானது. பார்வதிசேகரபுரம் விஷ்ணு கோவிலின் விமானம் முழுக்கவும் சோழர் கட்டடக் கலை பாணியில் உருவானது. சோழபுரம் சோழிஸ்வரர் கோவில், கன்னியாகுமரி குகநாதேஸ்வரர் கோவில் ஆகியன முழுக்கவும் இம்மாவட்டத்தில் சிறப்புற்றுக் காணப்படுகின்றன.

இயேசுநாதரின் மறைவிற்குப் பின்னர் அவரது 12 சீடர்களில் ஒருவரான புனித தாமஸ் கி.பி.52ஆம் ஆண்டு கேரளத்திற்கு வந்தார் என்றும், பின்னர் தமிழ்நாட்டு மயிலாப்பூருக்கு கன்னியாகுமரி மாவட்டம் வழிச் சென்றார் என்னும் மரபுவழிச் செய்திகள் தமிழகத்திலும் கேரளத்திலும் பேசப்படுகின்றன. திருவிதாங்கோட்டில் உள்ள பழமையான அரைப்பள்ளியை இதற்குச்

சான்றாகக் காட்டுகின்றனர். புனித சவேரியார் கோட்டாற்றில் தங்கிக் கத்தோலிக்க சமயத்தைப் பரப்ப ஆரம்பித்த பின்னர் இது வேகமாகப் பரவியிருக்கிறது. கடற்கரை மக்கள் கத்தோலிக்கராக மாறுவதற்குரிய சூழ்நிலை அன்று இருந்தது.

சிற்பக் கலை

சுசீந்திரம், திருவட்டாறு, பத்மநாபபுரம் ஆகிய ஊர்களில் உள்ள கோவில் சிற்பங்கள் கலைத் தன்மை வாய்ந்தவை. இவ்வனைத்தும் சோழர் காலத்தில் செதுக்கப்பட்டவை. சோழநாட்டில் இருந்து குடிபெயர்ந்து வந்தவர்கள் இதைச் செய்திருக்கின்றனர். சுசீந்திரம் தூணுமாலயன் கோவிலில் பிற்காலப் பாண்டியர், சோழர், நாயக்கர், திருவிதாங்கூர் மன்னர்கள் ஆகியோர்களின் ஆகச்சிறந்த கொடையால் உருவானவையே. அதுமட்டுமல்லாமல் சுசீந்திரம் கோவிலின் சுப்பிரமணிய சுவாமி கோவிலில் உள்ள மாலைக்குட்டி, ஸீதம்மா என்னும் இரு தேவதாசிகளின் உருவங்கள் தமிழ், மலையாளக் கலாச்சாரத்தை வெளிப்படுத்துகின்றன.

மேலும், திருவட்டாற்றில் உள்ள கல் சிற்பங்களும் பத்மநாபபுரம் கோவிலில் உள்ள இராமாயண மரச் சிற்பங்களும் உலகப் புகழ்பெற்றவை.

ஓவியக் கலை

குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் பண்டைய கால ஓவியங்கள் குறைவாகவே உள்ளன. திருநந்திக்கரை கோவிலில் உள்ள ஓவியங்கள் கி.பி.9ஆம் நூற்றாண்டைச் சார்ந்ததாகக் கூறுவர். மேலும், பத்மநாபபுரம் அரண்மனையில் உள்ள ஓவியக் கூடத்தில் கி.பி.18 மற்றும் 19ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு காலத்திய ஓவியங்கள் நிரம்பக் காணப்படுகின்றன. சுசீந்திரம் கோவில் கோபுரத்தின் 7 மாடிகளிலும் சுவரோவியங்கள் காணப்படுகின்றன. இதுமட்டுமல்லாமல் சிறுதெய்வக் கோவில்களிலும் நாட்டார் ஓவியங்கள் காணப்படுகின்றன. குறிப்பாக, முத்தாரம்மன் கோவிலில் உள்ள ஓவியங்கள் 200 ஆண்டுகளுக்கு முற்பட்டதாகப் பார்க்கப்படுகிறது.

இசைக்கலை

ஆய் மன்னர்கள் ஆட்சியின் இறுதிக்காலத்தில் குமரி மாவட்டச் சாலைகளில் மூன்று வேதங்களும் இசையோடு பாடப்பட்டன. புரவசேரி கல்வெட்டு வேதத்தை இசையுடன் பாடுவதெற்கென்றே நிபந்தம் விதிக்கப்பட்டிருந்ததைக் கூறுகிறது. பிற்காலச் சோழர் காலத்தில் தமிழகக் கோவில்களில் நடனமாடிய தேவனடியார்கள் குமரி மாவட்டக் கோவில்களில் குடியேற்றப்பட்டனர். இவர்கள் இசை மற்றும் நடனக் கலையில் சிறந்து விளங்கினர். கி.பி.12ஆம் நூற்றாண்டு காலத்தில் இவர்கள் கோவில் திருப்பணிகளைச் செய்திருக்கின்றனர். மேலும், திருவாய்மொழி மற்றும் திருப்பள்ளியெழுச்சிப் போன்றவற்றைக் கோவில்களில் பாடியுள்ளனர்.

கி.பி.18 மற்றும் 19ஆம் நூற்றாண்டுகளில் நீலகண்ட சிவம், லட்சுமணபிள்ளை, பிடில் செல்லம்பிள்ளை, பிரம்ஸ்ரீ ராகவ அய்யர், பறக்கை நாலாயுதக்கம்பர் போன்றோர் வாழ்ந்திருக்கின்றனர். நீலகண்ட சிவத்தை குமரி மாவட்டத் தியாகப் பிரம்மம் என்று கூறலாம். பூதப்பாண்டி அருணாசல அண்ணாவி, பறக்கை பிடில் செல்லம்பிள்ளை, பிரம்ஸ்ரீ ராகவ அய்யர், நாகஸ்வர கலைஞர் நாலயுதக் கம்பர் போன்றோர் இந்த நூற்றாண்டு பாதியில் மறைந்த இசை மேதைகள் ஆவர். குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் செவ்வியல் இசை மட்டுமல்லாது, நாட்டார்

இசையும் சிறப்புற்று இருந்தது. வில்லுப்பாட்டு தமிழில் நிகழ்த்தப்படும் ஒரு நாட்டார் கலை. தல்லுக்கவி, கட்சிப்பாட்டு அல்லது மல்சரப்பாட்டு, களமெழுத்தும் பாட்டு, திருவாதிரைக்களி ஆகிய கலைகள் மலையாள மொழியில் பாடப்படும் நாட்டார் கலை வடிவங்கள் ஆகும்.

நடனக்கலை

குமரியில் கிடைக்கப்பெறும் நடனக்கலை குறித்த சான்றுகள் கி.பி.17ஆம் நூற்றாண்டிற்கு பிற்பட்டவையாகவே காணப்படுகின்றன. பிற்காலச் சோழ மன்னர்களால் அறிமுகம் செய்யப்பட்ட தஞ்சைத் தளியிலார்கள் குமரி மாவட்டக் கோவில்களிலும் நடனமாடி இருக்க வேண்டும். குமரியில் இருந்த தேவரடியார்கள் கோவில்களில் மட்டுமே நடனமாடி இருக்கின்றனர். பொது இடங்களில் ஆடவில்லை. இவர்கள் பிற பெண்களுக்கு அந்தக் கலையைக் கற்பிக்கவும் இல்லை. இதனால் நடனக்கலை என்பது குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் கோவில் கலையாக மட்டுமே இருந்துவிட்டது.

நாடகக்கலை

பிற கலைகளைப் போன்று நாடகக் கலையும் இம்மாவட்டத்தில் சிறந்திருந்தது. கல்குளம் தாலுகாவில் உள்ள மணலிக்கரையில் நங்ஙையார் கூத்து என்ற நடனவடிவத்தை நிகழ்த்திய கலைஞர் இந்த நூற்றாண்டு ஆரம்பம் வரை இருந்தவர். பரதபதங்களை ஒத்த நங்ஙையார் கூத்து இன்று மறைந்துவிட்டது. சுசீந்திரம் கோவிலில் நாடகச்சாலை ஒன்று காணப்படுகிறது. இது ஒரு காலத்தில் தேவதாசிகளின் நடனநிகழ்ச்சிகள் நடைபெற்ற இடமாக இருந்தது. மேலும், கழியல் ஆட்டம், கணியான் ஆட்டம், தோல் பாவைக்கூத்து போன்றவை இப்பகுதியில் நிகழ்த்தப்படுகின்றன. கி.பி.19 மற்றும் 20ஆம் நூற்றாண்டின் ஆரம்பத்திலும் தமிழகத்தில் வாழ்ந்த நாடகக் கலைஞர்கள், குமரி மாவட்டத்திலும் நாடகம் நடத்தியிருக்கின்றனர். இந்த நாடகங்கள் தெருக்கூத்தைப் போன்ற வடிவங்களுடனும், பார்சிய நாடகக்காரர்களின் புனர் வடிவமாகவும் இருந்தன. நாகர்கோவிலில் திரை அரங்குகள் வந்தபின்பு, இந்நாடகங்கள் செல்வாக்கை இழந்து விட்டன. உலகம் அறிந்த நாடகக் கலைஞர்களான டி.கே.சண்முகம், என்.எஸ்.கிருஷ்ணன் போன்றோர் குமரி மாவட்டத்தைச் சேர்ந்தவர்கள் ஆவர்.

நிறைவுரை

பண்பட்ட தமிழ்ச் சமூகத்தின் எச்சங்கள் குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் நிரம்பக் காணப்படுகின்றன. கலைகளின் தோற்றுவாயாகவும் இம்மாவட்டம் விளங்கி வருகிறது. சமூக ஒழுக்கங்களையும், பண்பாடுகளையும், ஒழுங்குமுறைகளையும் தம்முடைய வாழ்வியலில் இம்மக்கள் பின்பற்றி வந்திருக்கின்றனர். கட்டமைக்கப்பட்ட வரலாறாக இல்லாமல், கட்டற்ற காட்டாற்று வெள்ளம் போல் இம்மக்களின் பண்பாடுகள் காணப்படுகின்றன. ஓவியம், நடனம், நாடகம், கலை, இலக்கியம், சிற்பம், இசை எனப் பெரும்பாலான கலைகள் இங்கு பரிணாம வளர்ச்சிப் பெற்று சிறந்திருக்கின்றன. குமரி மாவட்ட இலக்கியவாதிகளும் ஆக்கங்களைக் கொண்டு சமூகத்தில் நிலைபெற்று இருக்கின்றனர்.

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முன்னுரை

இசுலாம் ஒரு நிறுவன சமயம். அது தனக்கேயுரிய ஒழுங்கமைப்பினையும், உறுதியான சமயக் கோட்பாடுகளையும் கொண்டுள்ளது. நாட்டார் வழிபாடுகள் இதற்கு எதிரானவை. நாட்டார் வழிபாடுகள் நிறுவனங்களையும் இறுக்கமான அமைப்பினையும் கொண்டிருப்பதில்லை. தர்காக்களை நாட்டார் வழிபாட்டு இடங்களாகக் கொள்ள வேண்டும்.

இசுலாமியச் சமயக்கோட்பாட்டின் அடிப்படையில் இன்று தர்காக்களின் இருப்பு கேள்விக்குள்ளாக்கப்படுகிறது. என்றாலும், தர்காக்கள் மக்களை ஈர்க்கும் வழிபாட்டிடங்களாகவே இன்றும் நிலை பெறுகின்றன. தர்கா வழிபாட்டு முறை, தர்காக்களைப் பொறுத்து மாறுபடுகிறது. வழிபாட்டு முறை மரபாகத் தொடர்ந்து வருகிறது. எழுத்து வடிவிலான வழிபாட்டு முறை இதற்கில்லை. தர்காக்கள் அவற்றைச் சார்ந்த வாய்மொழி வழக்காறுகளில்தாம் நிலைகொள்கின்றன.

தர்கா வழிபாட்டு முறை

அனைத்துத் தர்கா வழிபாடும் ஒன்றுபோல் அமைவதில்லை. தர்காக்கள், பள்ளிவாசலைப் போன்று ஒழுங்கமைவிற்கு உட்பட்ட வழிபாட்டிடமாக அமைவதில்லை ஒவ்வொரு வாரத்திலும் ஓரிரு நாட்களில்தான் வழிபாடு நிகழும். சிறப்பு வழிபாடு, வருடத்திற்கு ஒரு முறை நடைபெறும் விழாக்களின் போதுதான் நிகழும் ஒவ்வொரு தர்கா வழிபாடும் அதற்கே உரிய தனித்தன்மைகளைக் கொண்டிருக்கும் படைக்கப்படும் பொருள்களிலும் வேறுபாடுகள் இருக்கும். எடுத்துக்காட்டாகத் திட்டுவிளையில் மகான் வாகையடி 'பக்கீர் பாபா' (வலியுல்லா) தர்காவில் குறிப்பிட்ட வகைப் பழம் மட்டுமே முக்கியத்துவம் பெறுகிறது. இதற்குக் காரணமாக வாய்மொழிக்கதை ஒன்றும் கூறப்படுகிறது. 'பக்கீர் பாபா' அப்பகுதியில் வாழ்ந்து வந்தபோது குழந்தைகளுடன் விளையாடுவது வழக்கம். மண்ணில் தன்னைச் சமாதி செய்யச் சொல்லிவிட்டு, பின் வேறொரு வழியாய் வெளிப்படுவார். ஒரு நாள் குழந்தைகளிடம் "பாளையன்கோட்டான்" பழக்குலையை மண்ணில் புதைக்கச் சொன்னார். பின். தோண்டிப் பார்த்தபோது அதிலிருந்து அவர் வெளிப்பட்டார். இக்காரணத்தினால் இத்தர்கா வழிபாட்டில் "பாளையன்கோட்டான்" பழம் தவறாது இடம்பெறுகிறது. குறிப்பிட்ட இப்பழம் படைக்கப்படுவது இத்தர்கா வழிபாட்டின் தனித்தன்மையாக உள்ளது.

விராலிக்காட்டுவிளை "வர்தாரி பெத்த அப்பா" தர்காவில் வறுத்தமாவு முக்கியமாகப் படைக்கப்படுகிறது. இவர் வாழும் காலத்தில் அவரை நோக்கி வருகிறவர்களுக்கு வறுத்த அரிசியைப் பிரசாதமாகக் கொடுத்தார். இதனால், வறுத்தமாவைப் படைப்பதின் மூலம் இவர் அருளைப் பெறமுடியும் என்ற நம்பிக்கை எழுகிறது. சமய வேறுபாடின்றி

அனைத்து மக்களும் வறுத்தமாவை இத்தர்காவில் படைக்கின்றனர்.

சுலைமான் சாகிப்' தர்காவில் 'நெல்' படைப்புப் பொருளாக அமைகிறது. இவர் வாழும் காலத்தில் உணவுத் தானியங்களை ஓர் இடத்திலிருந்து மற்றோர் இடத்திற்குக் கொண்டு செல்வதற்கான தடை இருந்தது. அதையும் மீறி, தான் பிச்சையாகப் பெற்ற நெல்லைக் கொண்டு போக முயன்றபோது களியக்காவிளையில் காவலர்களால் தடுக்கப்பட்டார். 'விடு' என்று கூறி மறைந்தார். பின் தன் சொந்த ஊரான நேமத்தில் வெளிப்பட்டார். இந்நிகழ்வின் குறியீடாக அறுவடைதோறும் புதுநெல் இத்தர்காவில் படைக்கப்படுகிறது. இந்த எடுத்துக்காட்டுகள், தர்கா வழிபாட்டு முறைகள் தர்காவைப் பொறுத்து வேறுபடுவதை உணர்த்துகின்றன. இப்பண்பு தர்கா வழிபாட்டையும் நாட்டார் வழிபாடாக இனங்காட்டுகிறது.

நம்பிக்கைகள்

தர்கா வழிபாட்டின்போது, இயற்கைக்கு அப்பாற்பட்ட சக்திகளின் மீது வழிபாட்டுக்குழுவினர் முழுமையான நம்பிக்கை கொள்கின்றனர். தகவலாளியிடமிருந்து பெறப்பட்ட தகவல்கள் இதனை உறுதிசெய்வனவாக அமைகின்றன. எடுத்துக்காட்டாக, பார்வதிபுரம் ஷேக் ஜாண் முகம்மது பஸ்ஸீர ஒலியுல்லா" தர்காவில் நடந்ததாகக் கூறப்படும் நிகழ்வைக் குறிப்பிட வேண்டும். இத்தர்கா நன்செய் நிலங்களின் நடுவில் அமைந்துள்ளது. தற்போது தர்காவின் அருகில் இசுலாமியக் குடியிருப்புகள் இல்லை என்பதும் குறிப்பிடத்தக்கது. தொலை தூரங்களிலிருந்து இசுலாமிய மக்கள் வழிபாட்டிற்கு வந்து செல்கின்றனர். ஒரு சமயம் தர்காவின் முன்னால் தர்கா பயன்பாட்டிற்காகக் கிணறு வெட்டும் பணி நடந்து கொண்டிருந்தது. நன்செய் நிலத்தில் உழவுத்தொழில் செய்து கொண்டிருந்த விவசாயி ஒருவர் தன் நிலத்திலிருந்து தன் மாடுகளைக் கிணறு வெட்டும் இடத்தின் அருகில் கொண்டு வந்தபோது, திருப்பணியில் ஈடுபட்டுக் கொண்டிருந்த மக்கள் விலகிச் செல்லுமாறு வேண்டுகோள் விடுத்தனர். அதைப் புறக்கணித்து மாடுகளை அருகில் கொண்டு வந்தபோது, ஒரு மாடு கால் ஒடிந்து விழுந்தது. அதை எழுப்ப முயன்றபோது, மற்றொரு மாடு தர்காவிற்கு முன்னால் ஓடி வந்து விழுந்து இறந்தது. விவசாயி தர்காவிற்குள் சென்று ஷேக் ஜாண் முகம்மது பீரஷாகிப் ஒலியுல்லா"விடம் வேண்டியபோது கால் ஒடிந்த மாடு எழுந்து நின்றது. அவர் செய்த குற்றத்திற்குத் தண்டனையாக ஒரு மாடு மட்டும் பலியானது. இப்படி ஒரு நிகழ்வு உண்மையில் நிகழ்ந்ததா என்ற கேள்விக்கே இடமில்லை. நிகழ்ந்ததாகவே மக்கள் நம்புகின்றனர். இயற்கைக்கு அப்பாற்பட்ட சக்தி தர்காவில் நிலைகொண்டுள்ளது என்னும் நம்பிக்கையின் அடிப்படையில்தான் தர்கா வழிபாடு நிலைகொண்டுள்ளது. வழிபாட்டுக்குழுவினர் முழுமையான நம்பிக்கையை இதில் கொண்டுள்ளனர். நாட்டார் வழிபாட்டுக் கூறாக இதனை உறுதியாக இனங்காண முடிகிறது.

திட்டுவிளை "வாகையடி பக்கீர் பாபா" தர்காவில் இதற்கு இணையான கதைகளைச் சேகரிக்க முடிந்தது. ஒரு சமயம் வாகையடி தர்கா இருந்த இடத்தில் மாற்று மதத்தைச் சார்ந்த எட்டுவீட்டுப் பிள்ளைமார் பிணம் ஒன்றை அவர்கள் எரித்தனர். இச்செயலை வாகையடி தர்காவில் நிலைகொண்டுள்ள "பக்கீர் பாபா" விரும்பவில்லை. பிணத்தை எரித்தவர்கள் வீடு திரும்பிய போது திகைத்து நின்றனர். எரிக்கப்பட்ட பிணம் அங்கே இருந்தது. இந்நிகழ்வும் வழிபாட்டுக் குழுவினரின் நம்பிக்கையில் நிலை

கொண்டுள்ளது. தர்காவில் சமாதியாக இருக்கும் பக்கீர் பாபாவின் இயற்கைக்கு அப்பாற்பட்ட சக்தி மீதான நம்பிக்கையே வழிபாட்டு மரபைக் கட்டமைத்துள்ளது. இம்மரபு காலம் கடந்து தொடரவும் செய்கிறது.

இதே தர்காவில் அண்மையில் நிகழ்ந்ததாகக் குறிப்பிடப்படும் நிகழ்வையும் சுட்ட வேண்டும். தர்காவில் வருடாந்தர விழாவிற்காகக் கொடியேற்றும் சடங்கு நிகழ்ந்து கொண்டிருந்தது. அப்போது இறந்தவரின் அஸ்திக் கலசத்தைக் கடலில் கரைப்பதற்கு இரு வாலிபர்கள் "பைக்கில்" எடுத்துச்சென்றனர். வழிபாட்டுக்குழுவினர் மாற்றுப்பாதையில் செல்லுமாறு வேண்டினர். அஸ்திக் கலசத்தைக் கொண்டு வந்தவர்கள் உடன்பட மறுத்து, தொடர்ந்து பயணம் செய்ய முற்பட்டனர். பைக்கின் இயந்திரம்" செயல்பட மறுத்தும் பிடிவாதமாகப் பைக்கை அதே வழியில் உருட்டிச் சென்றனர். மூன்று நாட்களுக்குள் சாலை விபத்தில் பைக்கை ஓட்டியவர் மரணமடைந்தார். இந்நிகழ்வில் வழிபாட்டுக் குழுவினர் முழுமையான நம்பிக்கை கொண்டுள்ளனர்.

இவ்விரு நிகழ்வுகளுமே மரணம், இறுதிச்சடங்கு தொடர்பானவை. தர்காவின் புனிதத்தை மாற்றுச்சமயத்தினர் ஏற்க மறுத்ததின் விளைவு இது. முதல் நிகழ்வில் புதைக்கப்பட்ட பிணம் மீண்டும் வீடு போய்ச் சேர்ந்தது. தர்கா சமாதியாக இருந்தாலும் அது சமாதி மட்டுமல்ல. சமாதியாக மட்டுமே அதை எடுத்துக் கொள்பவர்கள் அதன் சக்தியை ஏற்க மறுக்கின்றனர். எனவே தான், மற்றொரு பிணத்தை அங்குப் புதைக்க முற்பட்டுள்ளனர். பக்கீர் பாபா தன் சக்தியை வெளிப்படுத்தி. அந்த இடத்தின் புனிதத்தை நிலைநாட்டியுள்ளார். இரண்டாவது நிகழ்வும் இதையே சமகால மொழியில் உணர்த்துகின்றது. தர்காவில் இறந்தவரின் மிச்சம் இருப்பதாகக் கருதியதால் தான் அஸ்திக் கலசத்தை அவ்வழியாக எடுத்துச்செல்ல முற்படுகின்றனர். இப்போதும் தர்கா ஒரு சமாதி மட்டுமே அல்ல என்பதை மேலான சக்தி உணர்த்தி விடுகிறது. இத்தகைய ஒரு சக்தி இருக்கின்றது என்ற நம்பிக்கை தான் தர்கா வழிபாட்டைத் தொடரச் செய்துள்ளது. நாட்டார் வழிபாட்டின் முக்கியக் கூறாக இதனைக் கொள்ள வேண்டும்.

நாட்டார் வழிபாடு. பல வழிபாட்டு நடத்தைகளை அடிப்படையாகக் கொண்டுள்ளது. சமய வழிபாட்டு அனுபவங்களோடு பல வழிபாட்டு நடத்தைகளும் அடிப்படையாகக் காணப்படுகின்றன. சாந்தி செய்தல் (Propitiation), தூய்மை, கழுவாய், தவிர்த்தல், விலக்குத்துறவு, கேளிக்கைக் கூத்தாட்டம் (Orgies), வெளிப்படுத்தல் (Revelation), குறிகூறல் (Divination) சடங்கு, மந்திரம் பேன்றவை அந்த அடிப்படை நடத்தைகளாம். இந்த வழிபாட்டு நடத்தைகளைத் 'தர்கா வழிபாட்டிலும் இனங்காண முடிகிறது. எடுத்துக்காட்டாக, தர்கா வழிபாட்டில் இடம்பெறும் குறி கூறுதல் நடத்தையைக் குறிப்பிட வேண்டும். குறிகூறுதல் தற்போது எல்லாத் தர்காக்களிலும் நிகழ்வதில்லை. குமரி மாவட்டத்தில் தக்கலை 'பீரப்பா' வடசேரி 'மகான் துல்ஹாஷா கடையாலுமூடு 'தைக்காயு சாகிப் ஒலியுல்லா விராலிக்காட்டுவிளை வர்தாரி பெத்த அப்பா தர்கா முதலிய தர்காக்களில் இன்றும் குறிகூறுதல் நிகழ்கிறது.

விராலிக்காட்டுவிளை தர்காவில் குறி சொல்லும் வழக்கம் காணப்படுகிறது. இங்கு ஒரு பெண்மணி குறி சொல்கின்றாள். குறி கேட்கப் போகிறவர்கள் போனவுடன், குறி சொல்பவர் தன்னைத் தூய்மைப்படுத்திக் கொண்டு தர்காவில் அமர்ந்திருக்கும்

மகானின் கோரிமுன் அமர்கின்றாள். பின்னர். திரி கொளுத்தி வைத்து விட்டு மகானிடம் வேண்டுதல் செய்கின்றாள். அப்போது அவள் உடம்பில் மகானின் அருள் நடுக்கம் கொள்கின்றது. பின். வந்தவர்களின் தேவை என்ன என்பதைக் கூறுகின்றாள். முடிந்தபின் அவர்கள் கொடுக்கும் காணிக்கையைப் பெற்றுக்கொண்டு, தீர்த்த நீர் கொடுக்கின்றாள். சிலருக்கு எண்ணெய்யை மந்திரித்துக் கொடுப்பதும் உண்டு. ஆலூர் 'சேனம்மா' தர்காவிலும் இன்றும் குறிகூறுதல் நிகழ்ந்து கொண்டிருக்கிறது.

குறிகூறுதல் என்பது. குறி கேட்பவர், குறி கூறுபவர் ஆகிய இருவரும் இணைந்த நிகழ்வாக அமைகிறது. இசுலாமிய மக்கள் மட்டுமின்றி, அனைத்துச் சமயத்தவரும் குறி கேட்பவர்களாக அமைகின்றனர். குறி கூறுபவர் இசுலாமியச் சமயத்தவராகவே அமைவர். குறி சொல்பவர் பள்ளிவாசல் வழிபாட்டிற்குப் பொறுப்பானவராக அமைய வேண்டும் என்பதில்லை. தர்காவில் குறிகூறும் வரம் பெற்றவர்கள் இந்நிகழ்வை நிகழ்த்துகின்றனர். "ரலியுல்லா" என்னும் பெண் தர்காக்களில் பெண்ணும், "வலியுல்லா" என்னும் ஆண் தர்காக்களில் ஆணும் குறி கூறுகின்றனர். குறிகூறும் நிகழ்வு குறிப்பிட்ட நேரத்தில் மட்டுமே நிகழ்கிறது. குறி கூறுவதற்கு முன், குறி சொல்பவர் தன்னைத் தூய்மை செய்து கொள்ளுவார். பெண் தர்காக்களில் குறி கூறுபவரின் மாதவிலக்கு நாட்களில் குறி கூறுவது நிகழ்வதில்லை. தூய்மை வற்புறுத்தப்படுகிறது. குறிசொல்பவர். மேலான சக்தி ஒன்றைத் தன்னில் இருத்திக் கொள்ளத் தன்னைத் தயார்படுத்திக் கொள்ள வேண்டும். குறி சொல்பவர் உடலில் மேலான சக்தி புகுந்ததற்கான அடையாளம் தோற்றம் கொள்கிறது.

குறிகேட்பவர் தன் வாழ்வில் நடந்த நிகழ்வுகளுக்கான காரணங்களை அல்லது தன் எதிர்பார்ப்பு நிறைவேறுமா என்பதற்கான பதிலை அல்லது தன் நோய்க்கான காரணத்தை, பின் அதிலிருந்து விடுதலை பெறுவதற்கான வழி என்ன என்பன போன்ற எத்தனையோ காரணங்கள் நிமித்தம் குறிகேட்கும் நிகழ்விற்கு வருகின்றனர். ஆலூர் சேனம்மா தர்கா, குளச்சல் செய்கு வாப்பு ஹுசேன் தர்கா, தக்கலை பீரப்பா தர்கா முதலிய தர்காக்களில் குறிகேட்பவர் தன் குறை நீங்கக் குறிப்பிட்ட நாட்களில் அங்குத் தங்கிச் செல்லுமாறு பணிக்கப்படுவர். இவ்வாறு பணிக்கப்படுபவர்கள் முழு நம்பிக்கையுடன் தங்கிச்செல்கின்றனர். எடுத்துக்காட்டாக, சேனம்மா தர்காவில் தோல் வியாதியின்பொருட்டுத் தங்கி இருக்கும் தகவலாளி ஒருவரைக் குறிப்பிட வேண்டும். தோல் வியாதியின் காரணமாகத் தர்காவை வந்தடைந்த அவர். 41 நாள்கள் தங்கியிருக்குமாறு பணிக்கப்பட்டார். முதலில் நோய் அதிகரித்ததின் காரணமாகத் தர்கா கிணற்றில் குதித்து உயிரைவிடத் துணிந்தார். பின், காப்பாற்றப்பட்டு நம்பிக்கையுடன் தொடர்ந்தார். நோய் முழுமையாகக் குணமடைந்தது

குறிகேட்க விரும்புபவர்கள் பூ, ஊதுபத்தி, பழம் முதலிய பொருள்களைக் கொண்டு செல்ல வேண்டும். குறி சொல்பவர் அதனைப் பெற்றுக் கொண்ட பின், அதற்கான தொழுகையை நிகழ்த்துவார். தனக்குள்ளாக மந்திரங்களைக் கூறிக் கொண்டு படிப்படியாகச் சக்தியைத் தனக்குள் இருத்திக் கொள்கிறார். இப்போது குறி கேட்பவர் வருகை தந்ததற்கான காரணத்தை அவரால் கூற முடிகிறது. அக்குறை எதனால் தோற்றங்கொண்டது என்பதையும் உணர்த்துகிறார். அதற்கான பரிகாரமும்

கூறப்படுகிறது. மக்கள் இதனைக் "கணக்குக் கூறுதல்" என்று கூறுகின்றனர். இக்கணக்குக் கூறுதல், நாட்டார் சமய வழிபாட்டில் சிறுதெய்வ வழிபாட்டுக் கூறுகளுள் ஒன்று. அதற்கான பரிகாரமும் கூறப்படுகிறது. தொடர்ந்து குறி சொல்பவர் தன் பழைய நிலைக்குத் திரும்புகிறார். அப்போது, குறி கேட்பவர் தரும் காணிக்கையைப் பெற்றுக் கொண்டு. சில ஆலோசனைகளையும் கூறுகிறார்.

குமரி மாவட்டத் தர்காக்கள் அனைத்திலும் கணக்குச் சொல்லுதல் என்ற குறிகூறுதல் நடைமுறையில் இருந்தது. அண்மைக் காலங்களாகப் படிப்படியாக மறைந்தும் வருகிறது. 'ஜமாத்துகள்' இதற்கு எதிரான நிலைப்பாடுகளைக் கொண்டுள்ளன. எடுத்துக்காட்டாக, தக்கலை பீரப்பா தர்காவில் மிக அண்மைக்காலமாக நடைமுறையில் இருந்த கணக்குக்கூறுதல் இன்று தடை செய்யப்பட்டுள்ளது.

இடலாக்குடி "அஸ்ரத் பாவா காசிம் ஒலியுல்லா" தர்காவில் குழந்தைப்பேறு இல்லாதவர்கள் குழந்தைப் பேற்றிற்காக வேண்டுதல் செய்கின்றனர். வேண்டுதல் நிறைவேறினால் தர்காவில் தொட்டில் கட்டுவதாகவும், பிறந்த குழந்தைக்கு அவர் பெயரில் ஒரு பெயரைச் சூட்டுவதாகவும் நேர்ந்து கொள்கின்றனர். தொட்டில் கட்டுவதையும் பெயர் சூட்டுவதையும் தர்காவிலிருந்து பதிவு செய்ய முடிந்தது. பிறந்த குழந்தைக்குக் கொடுக்கப் பால் இல்லாத தாய்மார்கள், தர்கா வருட விழாவின் போது பால்குடம் எடுப்பதாக வேண்டிக் கொள்கின்றனர். இவ்வாறு வேண்டுதல் செய்த தாய்மார்கள் விழாவின் போது பால்குடம் எடுப்பதையும் பதிவு செய்ய முடிந்தது. தர்கா சமாதியில் இருக்கும் புனிதர் வாழும் காலத்தில் விரும்பி உண்ட உணவுப்பொருள்கள் குறை தீருவதற்கு வேண்டுதலாகப் படைக்கப்படுகின்றன. புலியூர்க்குறிச்சி ஹானஸா ஒலியுல்லா தர்காவில் அவர் விரும்பி உண்ட சேவல் கோழி பிரியாணியைக் குறை தீர்த்ததின் நன்றிக்கடனாகப் படைக்கின்றனர்.

தர்காவில் நிறைந்திருக்கும் புனித ஆன்மாவிற்கும், நாட்டார் தெய்வங்களுக்குமிடையில் தொடர்பும் சில தர்காக்களில் கற்பிக்கப்படுகிறது. 'சேனம்மா' தர்காவில் புனிதரான சேனம்மாவிற்கும் அதன் அருகில் இருக்கும் மாடனான சேனாண்டனுக்கும் இடையே நட்பு இருப்பதாக நம்பப்படுகிறது. இருவரும் உயிருடன் வாழும் பொழுது நண்பர்களாக இருந்தவர்கள். அதன் நினைவாக, சேனம்மாளுக்குப் படைக்கப்படும் நேர்ச்சைப்பொருளில் ஒரு பகுதி சேனாண்டனுக்கும் படைக்கப்படுகிறது. "பார்வதிபுரம் 'ஷேக் ஜாண் பக்கீர் ஒலியுல்லா' தர்காவிற்கும் அருகில் உள்ள மாடன் கோயிலுக்கும் தொடர்பு இருப்பதாக நம்பப்படுகிறது." மண்டைக்காடு காதர் பீவி தர்காவில் நிறைந்திருக்கும் புனிதருக்கும் மண்டைக்காடு தேவிக்கும் தொடர்பு இருப்பதாக நம்பப்படுகிறது.

முடிவுரை

பெரும்பாலும் இத்தகைய நம்பிக்கை, தர்காவின் இந்துப் பக்தர்களிடையே நிலவுகிறது. ஆளூர், பார்வதிபுரம் ஆகிய இடங்களில் தர்காவில் இந்து வழிபாட்டாளர்களிடமிருந்துதான் தகவலைப் பெற முடிந்தது. ஆனால், மண்டைக்காட்டிலுள்ள இசுலாமியரிடமும் இந்த நம்பிக்கை உள்ளது.15 நாட்டார் வழிபாட்டாளர்கள் தர்காக்களையும் சமய வேறுபாடின்றி நாட்டார் வழிபாட்டிடமாகக் கருதியதன் விளைவாக இதனைக் குறிப்பிட வேண்டும். இசுலாம் சமயம் நிறுவப்பட்ட,

வரையறுக்கப்பட்ட சமயமாக இருப்பினும், தர்காக்கள் நாட்டார் வழிபாட்டிடமாக மட்டுமே அமைந்துள்ளன. அண்மைக்காலங்களில் இசுலாமியச் சமயத்தில் கோட்பாடு சார்ந்த விழிப்புணர்வு வளர்வதின் காரணமாகத் தர்கா வழிபாடு சமயப் பற்றாளர்களால் எதிர்மறையாக அணுகப்படுகிறது.

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