

**IMPORTANT FESTIVALS OF THE KRISHNAVAKKA COMMUNITY - A STUDY****Dr.V. SANTHIYA**

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Melaneelithanallur**Abstract**

Krishnavakkas is a Malayalam speaking microscopic minority community mostly confined with the Kalkulam taluk of Kanyakumari District due to various reasons. The name Krishnavakkas was given by King Udaya Marthanda Varma, the Maharaja of Venadu (ancient Travancore) during the commencement of the Kollam Era also known as Malayalam Era (A.D. 825). Their fairs and festivals would give a fair idea about the socio-economic and religious life of the Krishnavakkas. The important festivals in a year are Onam, Vishu, Pongal, Deepavali and Krishna Jayanthi.

**Keywords :** Gogulatami, Vijayadasami, Shivarathiri, Thiruvathirai, Khandasasti.

**Introduction**

Krishnavakkas is a Malayalam speaking microscopic minority community mostly confined with the Kalkulam taluk of Kanyakumari District due to various reasons. The name Krishnavakkas was given by King Udaya Marthanda Varma, the Maharaja of Venadu (ancient Travancore) during the commencement of the Kollam Era also known as Malayalam Era (A.D. 825). Their fairs and festivals would give a fair idea about the socio- economic and religious life of the Krishnavakkas. The important festivals in a year are Onam, Vishu, Pongal, Deepavali and Krishna Jayanthi.

**Krishnavakkas and their festivals - Month wise****Chithirai Vishu**

The Vishu festival falls on the first day of Chithirai (April-May). as per the astronomical Tamil New Year and it is celebrated by the Hindus all over the State. It is the common belief that the fortunes of the coming year depend on the first object they see on the Vishu. Hence the most important ceremony connected with Vishu is the Kani Kanal which literally means the first sight.

On the day prior to the Vishu day, 'Kani' is arranged in every Hindu home. The Kani which is arranged in a convenient room is seen by every member of the family after he or she is woken up in the early hours. Kaineettam which means gift of money is given to the children and poor people by the elder members of the family. The day is observed by a large number of Hindus by having darsan of their favourite deity in some of the famous temples instead of seeing Vishukani at home.

The Krishnavakkas, who are staunch Vaishnavites, will begin the first day of Tamil New Year with Kani Kanuthal event. Due to the close nexus with the Royal family of Travancore, they give importance to it. The elders of the Krishnavakka families will liberally present coins to the children which is called Kaineetam. Even now it is very popular and available among the Krishnavakkas. After that they will visit the temples for worship.

**Vaikasi - Visaham**

Visaham is the birth star of Lord Subramaniya. Thiruchendur Subramania Swamy temple is one among the six abodes of Lord Muruga. This temple is famous for Surasamharam. The Krishnavakkas of Kanyakumari District have the practice of worshipping Tiruchendur Murugan during the month of Vaikasi. Unlike the Masi festival in which the Krishnavakkas are taking Kavadies to Tiruchendur. During the month of Vaikasi (May - June) majority of the Krishnavakkas are visiting Tiruchendur temple for worship.

**Aani**

EventhoughtheKrishnavakkasare staunch Vaishnavities,nowadaysthey are visiting Shiva temples also for worship. During themonth of Aani, they will visit the Shiva temples

on Uthiram Star falls and participate in the special prays including Abeshekas. It is important to mention that the Krishnavakkas have much faith on that event in order to strengthen their life, and the bachelors will pray for early marriage.

### **Aadi**

Aadi, a Tamil month is famous for Amman worship. It is the practice of the women folk, irrespective of caste, colour and creed will visit the important amman temples. The Krishnavakka women folk have the practice of visiting Awaiyar Amman temple, situated near Thazhakudi. On that occasion they will prepare a sweet food Kozhukattai and is offered to goddess Awaiyaramman for their early marriages. On that occasion thousands of people throng the temple.

The Krishnavakka women will visit Mondaikadu Bhagavathi temple and Muppandal Esakki amman temple on any one of Tuesday in the month of Aadi.

### **Aavani**

Aavani, the Tamil month is called as Singam in Malayala era. Because of the royal influence and the influence of Nairs, the Krishnavakkas are celebrating the first day of Aavani as auspicious. On that day it is the practice of men and women of Krishnavakkas will throng any one of the Krishna' temple and attend the prayers.

### **Onam**

Onam, the most important national festival of India in general and Kerala in particular, falls in the month of Chingam (August- September). It is the harvest festival of Kerala, Chingam being the month of the harvest. There are several legends regarding its origin. The most popular legend is that Mahabali, the legendary king who ruled over Kerala and was pushed down to the internal regions by Vishnu in the form of Vamana, returns to see his people once a year. The celebration of Onam as a national festival was taken up on Government initiative in Kerala in 1961. The celebrations start formally on the day of Atham asterism.

The non-Hindus in the state also celebrate Onam on lesser scale fully sharing in the carnival spirit, that prevails all over the state during the season.

### **Gogulashtami Celebration**

Birth day of Lord Krishna is called as Gogulashtami. On that occasion, Krishnavakka houses are decorated. Mango leaves are tied to the doorways to mark the auspicious occasion. Colour Rangolis are drawn on the front yard. Baby Krishna idol is decorated with flowers and crown and jewellery at times. Most of the Krishnavakkas will keep fasting on that day and will worship in the Krishna temples. All of them will visit the Krishna temples for darshan.

### **Purattasi**

Purattasi, the Tamil month is famous for Brahmotsavam. In North India it is celebrated as Durgapooja in Karnataka it is celebrated as Desarah and in Tamil Nadu it is celebrated as Saraswathi Pooja. On that occasion, the school going children of the household will perform Saraswathi pooja through submission of their books and notes and sweet food to Goddess Saraswathi for her blessings.

On the next day, it is celebrated on Vijayadasami on which the parents will visit the temples along with their small children for Vidyarambam (in Tamil Edu Thodanguthal). On that occasion the temple priest will educate the children in front of the presiding deity. All the Saturdays in the Purattasi month are very auspicious. The Krishnavakkas, the followers of Vaishnavism, will visit the Krishna temples of this district on any one Saturday.

On that occasion Annadhanam, special pujas decorations, and special bhajans will be performed. Thousands of Krishnavakkas will attend all these religious ceremonies.

### **Aippasi Deepawali**

Deepavali is celebrated all over the country as the festival of lights. In Kerala too it is celebrated, but mainly by the people of Tamil origin. It falls on the preceding day of the New Moon in the month of Thulam (October - November). It is supposed to commemorate the destruction of the Demon God. Narakasura, by Sree Krishna. In Kanyakumari District, the celebration is accompanied by the display of fire works and bursting

of crackers in every Hindu house particularly the Krishnavakkas. The Krishnavakkas celebrated the occasion in a colourful manner. Presenting new clothes and dresses to the family members, preparation of varieties of sweets, taking oil bath in hot water, visiting Krishna temples are some of the special events of that day. Significantly the newly married couple will celebrated Deepavali in the bride's house.

### **Kandhasasti**

The Tamil month Aippasi is also very popular in which Kandha Shasti festival is celebrated in a grand manner. The Krishnavakkas observe fasting for six days and stay in the premises of the temple. On the sixth day Sura Samhara (destroying the demon king Sura) will be performed.

### **Karthikai - Tirukkarthikai**

Tirukkarthikai is another Hindu festival which is celebrated in the month of Vrichikam (November - December) and its salient feature is the display of lights in every Hindu home in the auspicious evening. The day is observed in many temples too. The Krishnavakkas are celebrating Thirukkarthigai in a suitable manner. Special sweet foods like Kolukattai and Thirali are prepared and offered to Lord Muruga and after that lighting of oil lamps in the late evening are special events to be mentioned on that occasion.

### **Margazhi**

Margazhi, the Tamil month is famous for bhajans and fastings. The early morning bhajans are very famous during this month. It is also famous for Andal worship. A human being, Andal extended love with Lord Krishna and did a divine marriage with him. Originally Vaishnavities, the Krishnavakkas are even now following the Andal worship and visiting the Krishnan temple during this month. Added to this all the Saturdays of this month are celebrated as auspicious. During that month a forty one day ritual is performed and on the last day a divine marriage is performed between Andal and Lord Krishna.

### **Thiruvathira ritual**

It is considered highly auspicious to worship Siva on this day and the preference is therefore for the Siva temples. The maidens make themselves merry in various ways. It is customary for the women to chew betel and redden their mouths and lips. Thiruvathira is a day of restricted fasting and women avoid the ordinary rice meal on this day, taking only Chama (*Panicum moliaceum*) or wheat. Other items of the food include plantain fruits, tender coconuts and a delicious preparation of arrow-root powder mixed with jaggery. Unjal swinging by the women folk is an important amusement during the Thiruvathira season. The first Thiruvathira coming after a girl's marriage is called Poothiruvathira and it is celebrated on a large scale in the Krishnavakka house.

During the month of Margazhi, Aaruthra Dharsan is celebrated in a grand manner. The Krishnavakkas of Kanyakumari District have the practice of visiting the Sthanumalayan temple, Suchindrum on the previous day night and attending the Saphthavnam celebrations. After that a Marathon Abisheka will be performed to Lord Siva. The Krishnavakkas are attending the Aaruthra Dharsan regularly, after taking holypath in the temple tank (Theppakulam).

### **Thai - Pongal**

Pongal is a harvest festival. The Krishnavakkas, as a peasantry community celebrates this festival in a grand manner. It is celebrated on the first day of the month of 'Thai' (Jan 15 or 16) on the auspicious day of Mahara Sankranthi. On the festival occasion of Bogi festival, old and rotten things found in the house are collected and to be burnt in front of the house. Second day is Pongal day, and the third day is known as Mattu Pongal.

On the occasion of pongal festival, The Krishnavakkas get up early in the morning and prepare pongal in three (or) one mud pots in the courtyard of the house. Pongal is prepared before the sunrise. When the sun rises the sweet Pongal is offered to the Sun god and all the household will pray to God for prosperous. On the third day it is celebrated as on which sweet pongal food is prepared and offered to the animal. The horns of the cows and bullocks are painted in different colours and garland the horns of the animals.

**Maasi - Shivarathiri**

It is believed that Shivarathiri (Shiva's night poojas) is a spiritual festival celebrated throughout India in order to get the blessings of Lord Shiva for the removal of sin. Even though it is a national festival in India, it is a unique one in the district of Kanyakumari.

The twelve Shiva temples closely related with the celebrated "Shivalaya Ottam" are situated in the two taluks of Vilavancode and Kalkulam of present Kanyakumari District, where the Krishnavakkas come and settled.

The temples at Thirumalai, Thikkuruchi, Thirparappu, Thirunandikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannippaham and Thirunattalam are situated in the Vilavancode taluk and the rest of the temples situated at Kalkulam, Melancode, Thiruvidaicode, Thiruvithancode and Thiruppantricode come under Kalkulam taluk.

Nowhere else in the country, except in Kanyakumari district, where it is celebrated as an integration of Saivism and Vaishnavism the two major sects of Hinduism. It is a rare example of Saiva-Vaishnava unity.<sup>87</sup>

The race of pilgrims on Shivaratri uttering the name of Lord Vishnu "Govinda Gopala" substantiates the truth that Shiva and Vishnu are one supreme being but two manifestations.

More than one lakh pilgrims from southern Tamil Nadu and southern Kerala are participating in this marathan travel every year touching twelve Shivalayas situated in the Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks of Kanyakumari district. The total distance of this journey is 110 kilometres. The twelve sacred shrines of Shiva which are situated around Padmanabhapuram are called as Dwadasalayam. On the day of Shivaratri, the devotees wearing the saffron coloured robes and uttering the words "Govinda Gopala" and will start from Thirumala and will finish their marathan running at Thirunattalam. Earlier the pilgrims visited all these Shiva temples by walk. Now the pilgrims are reaching all the twelve temples by vehicles.

Those who participate in this marathan journey will start their fasting since Ekathasi of Masi month and will take food once in a day. On the previous day of Shivarathiri, they will start their journey without taking any food and chanting the slogans like Govinda, Gopala. Significantly these slogans are associated with Lord Vishnu and they are using these slogans while going to the Shiva temples. This is a rare and unique one in India.

Regarding the art, architecture and sculpture, these temples are very good examples for Dravidian and Travancore style. The temple at Thirnanthikarai attracts much attention due to its Jain influence where a Rock-cut temple is also there. A cone shaped vimana is available in the Thirunattalam Sankaranaraya temple.

On the day of Shivaratri, the devotees wearing the saffron coloured robes and uttering the words "Govinda Gopala" starting from Thirumala and finish their marathan running journey at Thirunattalam touching Thikkuruchi Thirparappu, Thirunandikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannippagam, Kalkulam, Melancode, Thiruvidaicode, Thiruvithancode, Thiruppantricode covering nearly 110 kilometres within 24 hours.

Like other communities of Kanyakumari District the Krishnavakkas are participating in the Sivalaya Ootam in large number. The Krishnavakkas will visit all the 12 temples by marathan run. Nowadays due to the availability of transportation women folk will visit the temples by cars and vehicles.

**Kaavadi Procession to Thiruchendur**

Thiruchentur is one among the six abodes of Lord Muruga the titular head of Kurunchi, an agricultural division mentioned in the Sangam literature. In that temple Masi festival and Avani festival are popular. During the Masi festival a large number of Krishnavakkas will visit the Thiruchantur temple with Kaavadi, a vehicle of the Muruga devotees. On that occasion a procession will start from the famous Rathakrishnan temple, Monday Market of Kanyakumari District. On that occasion thousands of people will throng the temple.

In this regard the activities and dedicated services of "Thiruchendu Kavadi Velmuruga Sanga", is very prominent. On that day in almost all the Krishnavakka pidagais Annathanam is provided to all. Only those people who are selected through lot system are eligible to participate

in the Kaavadi procession to Thiruchenthur.

### **Pankuni**

Just like Kerala, Tamil Nadu is famous for Sastha worship during the month of Pangkuni particularly on the Uthram day. People have the practice of visiting their family Sastha temples and performed poojas. It is called as Kula deiva valibaadu. As per Hindu astrology, this unique festival is very important for the welfare of the family. It is significant to mention that Sastha temple will expose the original home of the particular family. It is strongly believed that the present population of Kanyakumari district would have migrated from various parts of Tamil Nadu. In order to worship the family deity it is essential to visit these temples on Pangkuni Uthram day. As far as Krishnavakkas are concerned, the Sastha temples are available in all pidagais along with other temples. So it is the paradise of the Krishnavakkas to visit their Sasta temple on the auspicious occasion and offered special prayers, poojas, sweet food, flowers, clothes to the god, for their betterment.

### **Superstitions and Omens**

The Krishnavakkas in general believed in spirits, devils and supernatural powers. Sorcery and Wit craft were prevalent. During the past there were a number of superstitious beliefs regarding the occurrence of small pox and cholera. The people believed that the wrath of some deities like madan were for recovery from illness. Devil dance was common among them. They gave importance to auspices like the sound of owls and lizards on the time of the commencement of any important event.

Though originally they were a pastoral community they became in due course a pre-eminently agricultural section. They cultivated the lands given to them by the Maharajas of renad and Travancore. They supplied peas to the Thiruvampadi temple as tax in kind for lands given to them and also supplied flowers. Besides peas they also cultivated paddy, cotton, sesame and black peas. They had agricultural fields in Kalkulam, Eraniel and Koottumangalam areas.

Education has played a major part in changing their social set up that once prevailed among these people does not exist any more. With regard to division of property, equal share is given to all children. Nowadays though worship of Lord Krishna occupies an important place, all Hindu Gods are worshipped and all Hindu festivals are celebrated by them now. Superstitions and omens no longer find a place in their life now. Thus with the spread of education and contact with other major communities we find a transition in their socio- economic life.

### **Petty Goddess Worship**

The Krishnavakkas came and settled around the Padmanabha Swamy temple, Thiruvanathapuram. They began to worship Ampadi Krishnan, their family deity. Later they were directed to settle the region crossing after three rivers. ie. present day Kalkulam Vilavancode taluk of Kanyakumari District. Existence of close contact with the royal family of Travancore, the Maharanis and Maharajas came forward and built Krishnan temples for the vibrant Krishnavakkas. An Ambadi Krishnan temple was also built with in the premises of Tiruvattar Adikeshava Perumal temple.

Significantly the Nadars who were famous for toddy tappers got majority and prominent in this region. This Nadars faced social inequality, untouchability, unapproachability and unseeability. They were not permitted to the temples and temple streets. To avoid the social discrimination a number of them embraced Christianity. A considerable number of populations began to follow petty goddess worship, instead of worshipping Siva and Vishnu.

The net result was the emergence of a number of Sudalai Madan temples and Essaki Amman temples. When the Krishnavakkas began to settle in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks due to the Royal order they began to worship the petty gods, and goodesses. Surprising, a number of Sudalaimadan temples and Esaki Amman temples emerged in the Krishnavakka Pidakais. It is particular to mention that animal sacrifice is very common in the petty goddess worship. So automatically the Krishnavakkas also began to sacrifice the animals.

Though the Krishnavakkas were originally Vaishnavities, they is got converted to petty goddess worship and follow the animal scarifies also.

In the Sudalaimadan temples annual three days Kodai (festival) is celebrated in which they follow the submission and sacrifice of animals to Sudalaimadan. During the midnight of second day, animals like goat or hen are sacrificed and the flush and blood are presented to the god as Nerchai. The flush of the animal will be converted into a tasty food and it will also be presented to the god.

### **Conclusion**

The national poet Subramania Bharathi says, All the nations in the world it is Bharat that natured the highest culture and civilization. From his word we learn that India had been considered as a holy piece of land in the have played an important role in the life of the people. A study of temples helpus to know about the services rendered by temples for the development of fine arts, social life of the people history of the land etc. All the festivals were very related to temples. They have the greatest influence in strengthening the spiritual and cultural aspects of our country.

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