

Cultural Practices & Rituals Of Nagarathaars

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ABSTRACT

There are a quite number of rituals followed in the Nagarathar community. From birth to death there are a lot of important ceremonies and rituals that followed them. The present paper discusses their traditional beliefs, age-old, customs, ceremonies, and other religious attributes.

KEYWORDS: Birth ceremonies, Marriage customs, Family Orientation.

INTRODUCTION

The Nagarathar community is an elite and wealthy community practiced various types of trade and commerce since the beginning of the 6th century B.C. During the early centuries of the Christian era, there is ample evidence to reveal their foreign trade as attested by Ilango Adigal of the Tamil classical work Silapathikaram. From the early centuries of the Christian era itself, the Nagarathar community members are following unique and distinct ceremonies right from the birth to death ceremonies which deserve a special mention. Hence, the author of this paper gathers unique information and data about the Nagarathar community and discusses certain cultural traits and traditions here.

HOLY WATER INTAKING

It is a unique ritual consisting of encompassing the conceiving mode of a female. The holy water is prepared by the sister-in-law of the pregnant woman. This in fact in course of time culminated in the spiritual features which are attributed to the long-time community practice of Nagarathars. Normally, this ritual is followed in the 5th or the 7th month of pregnancy. The pregnant woman is served with the holy water three times. The primary idea behind this ritual is both the women and the child should enjoy

sound health and there will be a safe delivery. Herbal leaves include thalaisuruti leaf, koliavarai leaf, vedukilachi leaf, cotton leaf, and anjalampitchai leaf along with onion and cumin seed powder will be mixed in proportion quantity and served to the pregnant women. After intaking the holy water, the Nagarathar family members along with other relatives start a spiritual journey to Ramanathaswamy temple at Rameswaram. At Rameswaram, the family members have a holy dip in the sea and this became a religious practice in the modern-day. Further, in connection with pregnancy two ceremonies are performed which are known as marunthidal (offering medicines) and thirthamkudithal (drinking holy water).

PUDUMAI

Pudumai is a ceremony ascribed to a newly born baby in the Nagarathar house. It is normally celebrated usually for the firstborn child. The normal age for celebrating this ceremony varies between 1-5 years of age. In this ceremony, the child will be sanctified with turmeric, soaked thread, gold or diamond chain on its neck, and dressed in fine cotton cloth. Then the child is placed in front of the relatives gathered in the hall followed by the visit of the maternal and paternal uncles. The uncles, then rotate the round tray in which the baby was

kept. All the relatives can see the baby by this technique. After a few days, later the child's hair will be shaved off in the clan temple of Nagarathar, a customary practice to ward off the evil eye.

VILAYATUPETTI VEVU

In this ceremony, the pregnant mother will be taken to her maternal home during the 8th month and left there in the care of her mother. This will go on till the woman delivers the baby and hence it will continue till the baby is grown up to 4 to 5 months old.

SUPPIDI

Every youth belonging to the Nagarathar community has to perform a ceremony known as supidi before the marriage. This ceremony will be done on a kirthigai star. During this ceremony, the youth will be driven on a horseback to a nearby Ganapathi temple. In front of the temple, the youth burn some sacred grasses and collects the ashes, and later mark those ashes on his forehead. After that while returning home, at the entrance of the houses, which he passes through lamps held with rice husk are waved before him. This type of Nagarathar ceremony is known as 'alathy'.

THIRUVATHIRAI CEREMONIES

Thiruvathirai ceremony commences in the month of Tamilmargazhi day, especially from December to January. In this festival, the daughter of the family will represent and present to the public the family values and other societal commitments.

MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

A token form of family agreement which constitutes the people to confirm the exact date of marriage. It is quite interesting to note that the Tamil classical work Silapathikaram has reference to it as cited below.

“Irupeerunkuravarumoruperumnalil
Manavani kana maithanar”

The translated poetic lines read as follows. It reveals that the members of both families have the arrangement to fix the date of marriage. As this ceremony will be taken place at the bride's house. The marriage arrangement is affixed in a two-way statement adhering to the family

values and cultural sets of attributes of the Nagarathar tradition. The poetic statement reveals all the details such as exchanging gifts, and dowry along with flowers, betel, and betel nut to shower happiness and prosperity.

KALUTHURU

The term kaluthuru refers to a gold chain worn on the neck by the bride. The mangalsutra belongs to the bridegroom's family. This ceremony will be held on an auspicious day along with gold, turmeric, and Kumkum being offered to the bride.

POLE CEREMONY

This ceremony is held just one week before the marriage in the center of the hall. At the northeast corner of the house, a pole with yellow turmeric is fixed on top of a bamboo stick and tied with mango leaves. Then the coconut will be broken and a fire will be lighted. Further, the same pole will be planted in the northeast corner of the house for giving auspicious and positive vibrations to the members of the family.

MARRIAGE INFORMATION

In this ritual, the parents will be inviting their bride and bridegroom. The house is cleaned and decorated with drawings of rice husk and colour powders. The parents of the bride and bridegroom will sit on the mat and offer their blessings to their respective lineages. It is to be noted that this ritual has been referred to by the author of Silapathikaram.

“YanaiErutathuAnielaiyarMelare
ManarkuEnthaarManam”

MARRIAGE REGISTERING

The study reveals that in all the Nagarathar temples, marriage registers are properly maintained. In this connection, it is to be noted that the garlands of the respective bride and groom come from the temples, then only the actual wedding ceremony will take place.

POORAM KAZHITHAL

A cleansing ritual involving both the bride and the groom. The bride will stand on a mat made of palm leaves, and the aunt of the bride will place the neem leaves crown on her shoulders than on the hips, and on the feet accordingly. Further, the neem leaves will be pushed by an

iron rod and this ritual is followed by the Vinayaka and Varnakumba pujas.

THIRUPOOTA RECITING

A coconut is placed on the vessel along with that, they would bring two lamps and betel nuts in a vessel and another vessel full of rice. Further, the bride's saree, garland, holy ash, and Kumkum are kept on a square plate which is meant for the bride. In Silapathikaram it is referred to that the things like thali or mangalsutra are given to the bride so that she will wear it followed by the conch festivals on special occasions have been recorded.

THIRUPOOTUTHAL

The saree and other garments brought by the family members of the bridegroom will be worn by the bride and she will be standing towards the east. The bridegroom will be asked to hold coconut, betel leaves, betel nut, and turmeric. The bridegroom will smear the holy ash on his forehead, brought from the clan temple. Then the garland from the clan temple will be placed around the neck of the bride followed by the wearing of mangalsutra consist in this ceremony. The mangalsutra will be tied forming three knots. The first two knots will be done by the bridegroom and the third knot will be done by the sister-in-law. Simultaneously, a gold mangalsutra will be put around the neck of the bride. Various items such as holy ash, turmeric, and Kumkum are placed near it. Further, the bride will be asked to place the coconut on a plate after that the garlands will be exchanged between the bride and the bridegroom about three times auspiciously. Hence, the bride will be the first one to put the garland around the neck of the bridegroom. Then, the newly married couple will make a move towards the entrance of the mandapa and seek the elder's blessings for further happiness and longevity.

WEARING ORNAMENTS IN THE BODY

The mother of the bridegroom will present a bangle to the bride to be worn on her right hand. This ritual symbolizes the practice of the mother of the bridegroom offering her jewels and property to run the family with love, happiness, and longevity.

SETTING THE FAMILY

It is to be noted that after one year of marriage, especially the parents of the bridegroom choose a house to settle the newly married couple in that house with their blessings for longevity and happiness. This family custom is an age-old one and it is mentioned in the Tamil classic known as Silapathikaram as cited below.

“Var olikonthali pole per iyalkilathi
Marappu – arum kenmai yodu, araparisaramum
Virunthuparantharu um perunthanvalkaiyum
Verupaduthiruvinveeruperak kana
Urimaisuttamoduoruthanipunarka
Yandusilakalinthanairpeungkilamaiyin
Kanthagusirapinkanaguthanaku”

The above-cited poetic lines refer to the practice of the Nagarathars who set up a separate family for themselves as mentioned in the epic Silapathikaram written by Ilango Adigal.

CONCLUSION

Hence it is surmised that the Nagarathars have rich and age-old customs and traditions since the 3rd century B.C as evinced from the Tamil epic Silapathikaram. Moreover, the cultural attributes of Nagarathars are followed till now in many areas of the Chettinadu region and their inherited places. So far this research article highlights only certain types of Nagarathar ceremonies which will contain high ethical and traditional systems.

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