

Marginalization of Women with reference to the Folk Religion Narratives of Tamil Nadu.

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Abstract

Women in every age, society, faith and religion have been subverted, suppressed and marginalized in all the areas of the day to day life. In majority they are circumscribed to household works since ancient times. They are regarded as unholy, mild, weak, submissive emotional, frightened. There is always a pulling of power and most institutions are possessed by men so all the social arrangements and institutions manipulate power to establish and prolong the dominance of men and sub-ordination of women¹. In India men have always been the beneficiaries, transcribers and whisperers of the religious doctrines, were as women have always been the inert receivers of the religious doctrines and dedicated practitioners of religious rituals. Religion been often used as a tool to manipulate the masses, women bear the brunt of the consequences of the cultural attitudes and the impact of religion and religion in their particular milieu. This study enables to understand three important components on the Marginalization of Women in Folk Religion, firstly the representation of goddesses in folk temples, secondly the socialization process adopted by the people in through the folk religion and last the discrimination of women participants in the folk religion. The study was carried out in Tamil Nadu state, the data is presented through a narrative form by analysis 10 case studies which is been substantiated by the Primary & Secondary data. The data obtained through the study illustrates that women are marginalized and also to become victims due to certain aspects in the folk religion namely harassment, lack of representation and ill-treatment in the temples

Key-Words: Folk Religion, Folk Goddesses, Marginalization, & Discrimination

Sub-Theme: Violation of Women Rights

Introduction: -

Religion in India is characterised by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices.it is one of the most powerful, deeply felt and influential forces in the human society. It has sharpened people's relationships with each other, influencing family, community economic, and political life. Religion is a significant aspect of social and social dimension is an important part of religion. Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of the societies

and human experience, the status of women showcases contrasting facets shrouded in ambiguity. Women have been exalted as Goddess, their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard and being identified with nature, shaping how individual react to the environments in which they in live. Since religion is such an important part of societies around the world, sociologists are interested in studying it. It's complex phenomenon. The folklores and folktales have been an eternal part of every culture since ages. When it comes to Indian folk tales, the country of diverse religions, languages and cultures has a complete range of tales and short stories. Indian folklore has a wide range of stories and mythological legends, which emerge from all walks of life. It involves a meaning system with an inter-related set of beliefs, rituals symbols, values, moods, and motivations. Each of these interacts in diverse and complex ways with one another; it is a structural system with established statuses, Indian women still face many problems and are subject to the same social pressures. It is more acute among women who belong to economically or socially backward communities, and women who are uneducated or solely depend upon their men for survival and sustenance, organisational patterns and even bureaucratic dilemmas.

Sociological study of religion is viewed both as a belief system and as a social institution, religion is pattern of social action organised around the beliefs and practices that people develop to answer questions about the meaning if existence. Some sociologists of religion explore the theoretical analysis of the sociological dimensions of religiosity. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organisational structure into the which members are socialised. In viewing religion as an institution, religion has operated to standardise the religious emotions, beliefs and practices, and to spread and perpetuate them. It is powerful instrument of social control and social integration. It is a strong bond of social unity through promoting a community of thought. It deals with divine sanctions as well as with present and rewards and punishments. Through this, it exercises a profound influence on one's behaviour. Sociologists like Durkheim have also evaluated its impact on indusial and the society has a whole. Classical, seminal sociological theorists of the late 19th and early 20th century such as Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx were greatly interested in religion and its effects on society. Like those of Plato and Aristotle from ancient Greece, and Enlightenment philosophers from the 17th through 19th centuries, the ideas posited by these sociologists continue to be examined today. As an institution, religion is characterised by its universality, its ritual, its sacredness and its persistence. Religion can be viewed from the individual and societal points of view of both. The function of social cohesion and social control are oriented

towards the larger society while providing emotional and social support and other psychological explanations are more oriented towards the individual. It is way of being in the world which makes strong claims and demands upon and while they are concerned with socialisation as they primary function is to address the question of ultimate meaning at a bodily and temporal level in which human beings make sense of their experience. In other words, religion are responses to the human encounters with what is beyond us to encounter with mystery, paradox, and the overwhelming force of these beings anything at all.

For Max Weber, religion is best understood as it responds to the human need for theodicy and soteriology. Human beings are troubled, he says, with the question of theodicy – the question of how the extraordinary power of a divine god may be reconciled with the imperfection of the world that he has created and rules over. People need to know, for example, why there is undeserved good fortune and suffering in the world. Religion offers people soteriological answers, or answers that provide opportunities for salvation – relief from suffering, and reassuring meaning. The pursuit of salvation, like the pursuit of wealth, becomes a part of human motivation.

Whereas for Karl Marx believed that religion as the sigh of the oppressed culture, the heart of heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. According to Marx people need the comfort of religion to make the world bearable and to justify their existence. In this sense, religion is analogous to sedative. Though Marx acknowledged the comforting and exploitative qualities. He further conceptualised religion as an offering ideology that justify existing inequalities or downplay their importance. In particular, religion is a source of false consciousness in the religious teachings encourage the oppressed to accept the economic, political, social arrangements that constrain their opportunities in this life because they are promised compensation for their suffering in the next world. Religion, Marx held, was a significant hindrance to reason, inherently masking the truth and misleading followers. As we will later see, Marx viewed alienation as the heart of social inequality. The antithesis to this alienation is freedom. Thus, to propagate freedom means to present individuals with the truth and give them a choice to accept or deny it. In this, "Marx never suggested that religion ought to be prohibited."

Religion is a significant aspect of social and social dimension is an important part of religion. Women status is ambiguity Women have been exalted as Goddess, their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard and being identified with nature as one in harmony Thus., status of women in India with male dominating society.

The folklores and folktales have been an eternal part of every culture since ages. Which played a vital role in forming mythology aspects and which shaped the sociological behaviour of the Indian society in diverse and complex ways.

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The aim of the present paper is to study folk deities of Tamil Nadu in their social context. In Tamil Nadu the Folk-Kula Deities of Usilampatti taluk are studied and presented descriptively using narrative and ethnographic Techniques. The study is an attempt to document the information related to history and “*village beliefs system on women as deities and devotees*” The Knowledge gained through this research enhances the status of little tradition in the context of Indian woman’s studies.

The Importance of kula deity’s: -

The kula deity play a importance in the temple of usilampatti taluk, because each individuals are respected and recognized based on their kula deity he or his family follow which is passed from generation till date.

Meaning of kula deity’s according to folk tales of Usillampatti: -

“Kula Deity refers to ancestral god, the forefathers and relatives who have been worshipped for age, as there is a bound between the family and divine Being”

One of the major significance of all these kula temple is the way in order it function within the term of region, to certain contract to that of the temple because thou disciples of the temple are kallars¹ community people, but the priest of the temple various in some temple. It was clearly visible in all the temples; the temple priests were not Brahmins but belongs to other caste groups.

Temple followers

¹ These are certain caste of people.

This particular temple is being minted and worshiped by the piramalaikaalar community of usilampatti taluk, Madurai. The kallars community are the clan who ruled the chola, Chera & pandyan dynasties of The south India, the kallar had been referred as the military tribe of the South India by the early British writers, they also classified as criminal tribe at the end of the 19th century. The Maravar & Agamudaiya communities constituted the Kshatriya or warrior class of Tamil Nadu.

Karmathur Moonu Chammi Temple.

This temple is also known as Virumandi Temple or Peechiamman Temple. This particular temple is been worshiped by the piramalai kaalar community of Karmathur Village, usilampatti taluk, Madurai. The temple hold the deities of Virumandi(Lord Brahma), Perumal Sammy(Lord Vishnu), Adi Shivan(Lord Shiva) and Peechiamman(Goddess Peechi). This temple is predominately a Brahma and Peechi. This temple holds the distinction of worshipping Lord Brahma who is otherwise does not receive any offering in the mainstream Hinduism.

Ochand Amman – karmathur and Pappavatti Village.

The temple is located within Usilampatti taluk, Madurai The temple original located in karmathur and also in pappavatti, the interesting factors is that temple both village worship one goddess, but The karmathur Ochand amman temple is the oldest temple and first built, the pappavati Ochand amman temple was built was built by the eldest daughter of karmathur Ochandamman temple priest due to conflict with her parental house as she married a person who's not with in her cast. The karmathur & pappavati are divided within the Usilampatti taluk, Madurai. As the in the kallar community after migration from Tiruchinapalli² by forming Uppagrammas.³ Malai Melai Naddu⁴ and Palla Siluk naddu.⁵

Angalameshwari Temple, Valandure Nadu

The temple is also located in valandure district, Usilampatti taluk, Madurai. This temple mainly worshiped and maintained by Dhever community people, who live there. But the temple priest is from Naikar Community in valandure district, Usilampatti taluk, Madurai

Structure of the temple.

Every temple there is a clear defined hierarchical structure having different levels. This hierarchical is based on the function and the duties. Each member who is worshipping the

² Original place of Inhabitation.

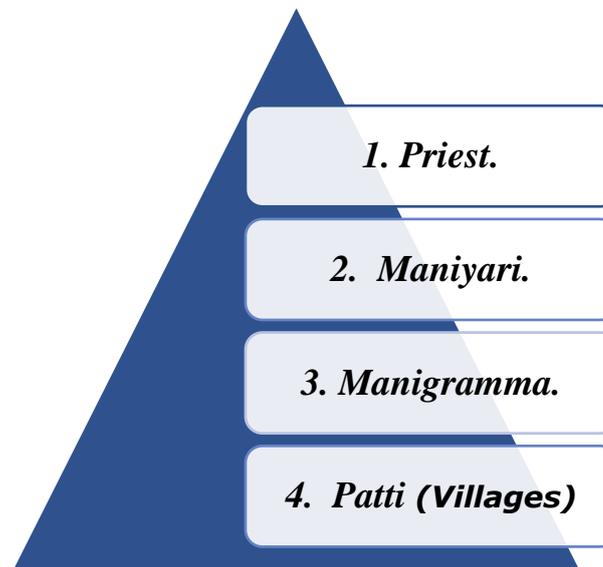
³ Formations of villages.

⁴ Same cast of people, but different clan or Sub clan.

⁵ Same cast of people, but different clan or Sub clan.

temple is assigned certain duties that decide their position that co-ordinate and function for temple, especially during the festival times and solar and lunar solstices days which occur, the temple is at its pick of its customs & tradition of the temple of Usilampatti taluk, Madurai.

There are mainly four layers in temple: -



1. Priests: -

The position of the priests constitutes the top of the layer who occupy highest position and is the dominate section. They are the ones who have the right to highest power in the temple, they are the ones who have authority in the temple to larger context, they play significant role in framing the rules, regulations and norms of the temple. Usually no one can object their words they are simple excepted, respected and followed.

2. Maniyar:-

In the second level, the maniyari's who are next to priest they are given present. They enjoy the importance in the temple next to priest, they play a major role in the functioning of the temple and all the demands of the temple, as well as the administrative function and day to day function

The Maniyar are further divided and a hierarchy, there is a head maniyar who act as a guide to other maniyar they are endogamous group with in the same caste, the other main function is to perform the temple necessary ritual which is special meant for this group.

3. Manigramam: -

The third level, the manigramam is the representation of few selected villages. These villages will not come direct preview under the temple, they stand behind maniyars while conducting of ritual's in temple, these manigramam do not have any connection to the

temple, but are presenters of their own village in order to show respect to the deity on the day of festival's or special rituals of the temple. There is 22 manigramam which are indirectly connected to the temple.

4. Patti: -

The final layer is patti(Village) it the place where the devotees of the temple reside and also the patti is the place were the main devotees reside. They are the main devotees reside and worship the temple have settled. It also the territory of the temple by which it is surrounded by patti, also representation of the successors of the Kula deities have resided in. It is these people who show a large representation during the festival or ritual of the temple.

Kinship relationship, In respect to kula worshippers.

Kinship is one of the universals in the human society especially in India, and therefor plays a important role in regulation to the behavior and the formation of social groups, kinship also depends on the social recognition and cultural implementation of relationship which are derived from descent and marriage and normally involve a set of kinship terms and an associated set of behavioral patterns and attitudes which together make up the systematic whole, the kinship relation is mainly based on the temple that each of the members worship or belong. The most important factor is that the kinship relation that could be observed in the this region is mainly Endogamy in nature. This kinship based relation mainly started to ensure that there is a caste identity formed and at the same time to maintain the caste purity. Till tis date the Kallar community practice's endogamous marriage in order to ensure that member are within the social setting of the community, which was also evident with the words of Palchammi a member of the Kallar Community:

“Along with me we are four brothers and five sisters, my son/daughter will marry my sister's daughter/son as it forms a maternal uncle relationship so they can get married. If we don't follow this norm we cannot be in our caste, if he goes out and marries from then on he is not a Kallat at all.”

Role of women in folk temple.

Folk religion is totality of all those views and practice of the religion that exist among the people. The strictly theological and liturgical forms of official religion. In the following As goddesses they have their own importance's and priority among the people and are worshiped, but as we look on to the status of women of the kallar community within the temple and is a question which is yet to be answered because though female goddess are given a different importance's then compared to the female as ditty who worship the temple.

Their status and role is very minimal when compared to that of male members of the temple. Men are the most dominant and powerful in the entire temple structure and especially even in the goddess's temple. The women enjoy in these temples a very minimal status and role of the temple. There are restrictions that are imposed on the women and these restrictions are not based on biological factors but on social structure factors that she is not a permanent member of the family.

Another interesting factor is that they are kula deities that were established by women, but even then in these temples the role and status of women was very less and on also their certain amount of subjugation that was present in the temple. For instances in Pappavatti Andae establishes the temple in her husband's village by her own efforts, but she does not place her children or her husband as the temple priest. She makes follow the same patrilineal system by positioning her brothers as the temple priest. Andae though had an opportunity to break patrilineal systems, women does not do it rather she follows her father and holds on his way of worshipping and performing rituals within the temple. In some temples there were also restrictions led on the bases of the biological reason, but among all the reasons of the main reason that was accepted by the most of the respondents (During the data collection) was that she is not the member of the temple her kula deity is not determined by her father, but her husband whom she married to and within the kula deity of her husband. It is again the Husband (male) who gains lot of importance in the temple than that of the wife.

In Karmathur village there is a custom in the village. This practice was a clear cut picture to show that there was matrilineal system practice in the village. This was explained by the temple priest of the Moonu Chammi temple⁶.

According to virumandi

“if u look at the Karmathur village there is a saying in the temple that daivathai kuduthu poonukudukurudu” which mainly refers to if a girl is given to other family within the community they are given the kula deity in other words if a family arrange a alliance with the girls of Karmathur village then they also worship the kula deity of the girls family as their own kula deity on of his temple this practice is not seen in the nearby villages but can be seen only in this village and also in this temple alone.”

This practice is questionable as to what extent this practice is been allowed or is it really followed even today in the village. As this custom established a matrilineal system in the

⁶ Local folk God of the village.

village, but reality there were no instances to show that this practice still exists or been practiced among the members of the village in karmathur.

According to Selvaraj

“here there is nothing like that giving a status and role to women in the temple, except for a codangi (is a person on who it is assumed that the god or goddess coming as a spirit form telling what’s right and what’s wrong to the people) there will be a garland put on her as a respect but nothing more than that.”

These two narrations give the contrast of idea that is existing within the one kula deity because according to one priest women are given a lot of importance in the temple. According to the other priest women do not have any status and role without any pause or without any hesitations, there is only one female representative in the temple and this is done in order to represent peechi amman, during the time of festival and not for any other purpose. It is the evidence from the above information that patriarchal structure is seen irrespective of whatever starata the community belongs to. The male dominance over the female is common. This shows that women do not have any representation or status or role in the temple. In certain temple their role and practice is minimum and in certain temples it was relatively nil. This fact is further to be researched for the reason women in the main stream religion have some specific purpose and role to play but why it is folk religion not so.

On an overall the status of the women within the kula deity temple is by enlarged determined by membership that has obtained in the family and due to this factor she is not able to gain any kind of status in the temple as she is considered to be a temporary member in the family. She is always recognized by the kula deity that her husband worship but she as from the father family kula deity to the husband family as it is her due to get marry and move to her in law’s house and perform her deity’s as a wife and daughter-in-law and in the process the duty can be observed with in this community is the worshipping of the kula deity that been worshiped by the husband and his family. The another aspect that would be seen here in this is that even though when there is an opportunity to make changes within the society, most of the women would prefer to stick to traditional patriarchal system rather breaking the system and establishing the new form of structure in the society which ensure equality to all. The next major aspect that was viewed in the area was the status and position of women gets in the folk religion. Through this aspect there is no definition or clear picture or status that was enjoyed by the women in the folk religion. They do have significant role to play, Marriage decides most of the things in the women’s life, her status in terms of the women with in kula Deity temple is determined by membership that has obtained in the family particular her

husband's membership. Due to this factor she is not able to gain any Kind of status in the temple as she is considered to a Tempera member in the family orientation. Another aspect that would be seen here in this is that even though when there is an opportunity to bring about changes in the society, women would prefer to stick to the traditional patriarchal system rather than breaking the system and establishing the new form of structure in the society which ensures equality to all. Women in the myths and to certain extent in reality accept the dominance of male and find comfortable in the patriarchal system. Gender discrimination is one of the unchanged factors that were found in the temple. This was one factor that was strongly practiced in the temple and among the people. Though there are female goddesses but still even there was no female representative in the temple. All the position and status was completely dominated by the male member of the community. The discrimination was not affected by the biological reason of the women, but rather social condition of herself in the family and not of father's family. In most of the temple she was denied of the status or a role as because after marriage she has to move to her husband family and become a permanent member there so she was not allowed or provided to obtain any status or role in the temple. Though women are given a lot of respect within the community but their participation in folk religion is in the way contrasting to that of the mainstream religion, women prefer certain festivals and rituals which are also exclusively woman based, there are also rituals which are performed certain rites without his wife these are also occasions in folk religion particularly in kula deity.

Conclusion

According to the oral history there are more than 200 Kula Deities within the Usilampatti Taluk. Even today there is no written document on the exact number of Kula Deities that are present in the Taluk. Each and every Kula Temple as a defined structure with defined objectives and roles that are to be performed. These structural bodies administer the temple during the time of festivals and auspicious days. It also acts as a consulting body for the temple during the time of conflict and problems in order to ensure smooth functioning of the temple. It was also noticed that Kula Deity were connected to people who worship them. The kinship and the Kula Deities are two interlinked concepts that cannot be studied in isolation especially among the Kallar Community in Usilampatti Taluk. One of the major aspects that was found in the study was in terms of Status and Position of Women. It was found that there is no clear definition picture that portrays the status of women in region, neither they had any significant role to play in temple. Marriage plays a very important role in Women's life as her status in the folk religion in the Taluk is perceived only through her marital status. The status

of women within the Kula Deity Temple is determined by membership that she has obtained by her husband's family, due to this factor she is considered to be a temporary member in the family orientation. Another aspect that would be observed was even when there were opportunities been provided for establishing a new system of society, they would rather prefer to stick to the establish traditional patriarchal system. Women in myths and to certain extent in reality accepts the dominance of male and find comfortable in the patriarchal structure.

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