

SOME BRIEF REFLECTIONS ON CHANGE AND CONTINUITY OF AGRARIAN PRACTICES AND RITUALS OF CHITTOOR- THATHAMANGALAM

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Social continuity cannot simply be defined as the absence of social change, that is, things remaining the same for a long period, because social change is a continual process in all societies. Nothing "remains the same". However, within societies there are structures which are inherently resistant to change, and remain intact for a long period of time. In this sense, we can talk about them as being social continuities. This paper gives us reflections on change and continuity of some agrarian practices related to paddy cultivation in the Chittoor- Thathamangalam area of Palakkad district in Kerala. Many of the agrarian practices and rituals which may be discarded at hand by scientific community are still practiced. Here the present and the past are so fused that the present includes manifestations of the past too. Chittur is a town in Palakkad district of Kerala, South India. It is the headquarters of Chittur taluk, situated 13 km away from Palakkad. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people and is the area contributing maximum rice production in the state.

Thathamangalam is a place with the pretences of a small town where the virtues of a typical countryside still lingers. It is the confluence of Tamil Malayalam cultures. A land that predominantly depends on the income of Agricultural Sector for survival, mostly unpolluted by any major industries. Folk arts, Practice of customs and worships are all here. 'Muniyappan' (the traditional, local, patriarchal, past-middle-aged male god-spirit) is still believed to protect the farm land. whereas, the protective spirit for cattle is 'Mundiyan'. Both these spirits are propitiated through timely worships. However, for the alienated present generation these customs have become less relevant compared with the past.

FARMING RITUALS AND CUSTOMS OF THATHAMANGALAM VILLAGE

Thathamangalam is a place where the ancient rituals and customs are meticulously followed and hereditary paddy farming is taken up as a sacred tradition. Even with the advent of modern farming techniques, the traditional ways of farming are still intact. This paper deals with some of the traditional agrarian practices and rituals still followed in this area. The farming year starts on the first of Medam the day of Vishu. Interestingly, farmers' calendar starts in Medam and ends in Meenam.

There are many rituals related to farming associated with Vishu. Chief among them is the ceremonious "carving a patch in the field". After worshipping the Sun and the earth and remembering the ancestors, the elders of farm labourers hand over the agricultural tools to the farmer. Using the tools the farmer carves out three patches in the field. If cattle and plough are available the patch is tilled. This ritual is meant to create a bonding between landlord and labourers.

Kathiruthsavam in the month of Vrischikam is a festival celebrated by both the farmers & the labourers. The labourers prepare boxes of ear by using ear of corn, sheaf, palm leaves, straw etc which are gathered by the farmer. These boxes are dedicated to the Bhagavathi temple accompanied by their own celebrations. The snake temples built close to the ancient 'tharavads' is believed to have the ability to control the surrounding climate and in effect are considered nature's air conditioners. The snake Gods of the temples are propitiated through Poojas performed on 'Ayyilyam' day.

The fertility worship

The fertility worship is conducted in 'Makaram' month. After harvest the fields are tilled up. Pooja is conducted on field partitions for the protective Gods like 'Mallan' 'Mundiyan' and Muniyappan. Farmers and farm workers celebrate making offerings to these Gods making rice pudding made of freshly harvested paddy and locally brewed liquor and meat.

Uchcharal- the culmination

The granary is kept closed during the last 3 days of Makaram. The granary is ceremoniously opened on the first of kumbam burning incense and cleaning up sprinkling with cow-dung. This is done as a reverence to mother Goddess earth.

Poorakkali and Pallupattu

The belief is that Lord Parama Shiva and his consort in the disguise of local farmers go to the fields and do farming. Based on this myth the play starts. The kings of Pandya, Chera and Cholakingdoms went up to the celestial world to seek seed and rains to make it grow and get their requirements. The song is about the seeds being sown by Lord Shiva.

There are songs which talk about which seeds suit which type of soil. Modan, CheruModan and Poothadan that can be farmed clearing the forest yields crop even with a mere spattering of water. ParambanKazhama suits the dry land. The Malayudumban seed grows even in stony land. **Porattukali**

Porottukali is a play performed by Panas after the harvest of second crop. It is still practiced in Chittoor as well as many areas of Palakkad district. It is satirical in tone and the foolish deeds of people of different castes, are exposed in play. It echoes the feeling of discontentment of the oppressed against the oppressors.

This art form of the outcastes of society presents the deprivations and worries, the affections and cheatings of these people who are made to live on the fringes of society for a long time in the past. It is the 'Pana' community who dominate in this art form. It is a dance and musical drama played out in humour, Questioner, the protagonist of the play interferes at will and drives the drama asking humorous probing questions involving the public and criticising the ways of the society. Porattukali is staged during 'mariammanpongals' of Thathamangalam village.

Beliefs, customs, rituals-appeasing nature, to invoke rains

The grave sinner (kodumpaapi)

Even in modern times, certain deep rooted blind beliefs hold its sway over generations. This ritual is practiced till date in Chittoor and many areas of Palakkad district. When there is drought in the land all the people crave for rains. In such occasions the Pandaras (a lower caste), who are worshippers of Lord Shiva are engaged to make the symbolic image of a 'grave sinner' which is then dragged across the hamlet. The image is made of straw and is laid on a flat sheet made of corrugated iron. Pariahs lay on the thappalta and the crowd following in procession cry aloud.

The gravest sinner of this land is dead. They plead and pray to Lord Varuna to make it rain. People donate liberally with money and corns. The belief is that by the time the image of the grave sinner is casted away in the river, the rains might have started.

The word 'Gopiyalla' means call by clapping hands. The VeeraSaiva women of 'Pandara' community also perform Gopiyalla to invoke rains. They dress up holding on the platter in their hands saffron, sacred ash and flower. A small wick-lamp and tiny figures made rolling up cow-dung are placed in front of every household and they clap their hands, sing and dance:

The belief is that by the time they finish visiting, singing and dancing all the households of village and come home after floating downstream the things used in worship, rains might have started. They come back singing the hymns to Mother Ganga. The aim of these rituals is to tame nature's power holding supremacy over human power through prayers. However, the present generation seem to be alienated from these customs, perhaps because they have better grasp of nature and feel confident to be able to control them.

The Seven -Times play or Paati Play

This dance form performed by Paanar in front of Bhagavathi temple is also known as the partner dance. There is a story behind this. A Paanar named "Rari" and a Paatti named 'Kanni' went to forest to cut reed to make certain domestic artefacts.

They made their living by making hand-grip umbrella and cap-like umbrella of reed. By the time they finished cutting, shaping and bundling the reed it grew quite dark. They trembled in fear losing their way in the forest infested with wild animals. They lost hope and thinking their end is near made fire collecting dry wood and fortified around them tying up wild-plant ropes. (It may be to symbolize that, two people fold up a cloth and hold it in the front when they perform this art form.) The panic stricken Paanar prayed and sang for saving them from danger. His 'paatti' danced to the song.

By this time they finished song and dance seven times round the flaming fire it dawned. The way out was visible. The belief is that Bhagavathy thus rescued them.

It is more of a prayer than a dance. It is insisted that, the dance could only be performed in front of temple. Paanar should sing and paatti has to dance. Nowadays, in Thathamangalam women knowing this art are minimum in number.

Sociological significance of agrarian rituals

Ritual is usually seen in its conservative function, they are products of complex culture-nature interactions as they have been formed in the course of traditional land management as well as different semiotic

practices, Ritual in this sense serves to reproduce and transmit the values and structures of a society from one generation to the next and to maintain those values and structures over time, Ritual is a functional mechanism or expressive medium in the service of social solidarity and control. Ritual activity illuminates the complex nature of power relations Foucault's ideas help to understand the purposes of ritualization as an effective way of acting, namely, how the production of ritualized agents is a strategy for the construction of particular relationships of power effective in particular social situations.

The act of ritual can be considered as a common thread that has linked humanity throughout the ages, regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion Rituals exhibit a number of latent social functions, in particular the promotion of social cohesion and the reproduction of social order as a process of "collective effervescence," a concept first introduced in the context of rituals by Emile Durkheim This socially derived emotional energy, as Durkheim says, is a feeling generating confidence, courage to take action, boldness in taking initiative. It is the energy that makes the individual feel not only good, but exalted, with the sense of doing what is most important and most valuable

In modern sociological theory, this approach is reflected in the works of Randall Collins Collins focuses on ritualized interaction in a sense proposed by Erving Goffman (1967), He assigns a key role to his concept of "emotional energy," which is generated when actors mutually engage in various forms of "interaction ritual chains.

An Individual is the precipitate of past interactional situations and an ingredient of each new situation." This "emotional energy," Collins holds, can take the form of collective emotions and contribute to the emergence and reproduction of social solidarity

THE CONCEPT OF CULTURAL INDUSTRY

Many of these art forms are now the products of the culture industry and are designed for profit. According to Adorno and Horkheimer this means that every work of art is now turned into a consumer product and is shaped by the logic of capitalist rationality

'SWAYING' BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE--THE CONCEPT OF LIMINALITY

Taking the ideas of Victor Turner We may say that the agrarian society studied is in a liminal phase Anthropologist Victor Turner made a huge contribution to anthropology by introducing the concept of "liminality" into the anthropological discourse. Turner was concerned with understanding cultures on the basis of dynamism and, seeing society not as a "thing" but rather as a dynamic and dialectic process.. *Victor Turner argued that the liminal phase - that period 'betwixt and between' - was marked by "two models of human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating": structure and anti-structure (or communitas).*

Liminality, in terms of social structure and time, is an intermediate state of being "in between" in which individuals are stripped from their usual identity and their constituting social differences while being on the verge of personal or social transformation, Turner, recognizes that "religious beliefs and practices are something more than 'grotesque' reflection or expressions of economic, political, and social relationships; They are the tools for understanding how people think and feel about those relationships, and about the natural and social environments in which they live *Society's religion is its repository of values and ways of interpreting not only their individual and social lives, but also their universal relationship with nature*

SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF RITUALS

Nature is a social construct and that conceptualizations of the environment are the products of everchanging historical contexts and cultural specificities Social institutions and specific cultural features were seen as adaptive responses to, or mere expressions of, basic environmental or genetic constraints Conceptualizations of nature are not the inventions of individuals but arise through historical contingency, linguistic constraints, metaphorical extension, ritual prohibitions and so on. As parts of belief systems, they are the productions of interactions, elaborations and condensation

.Every person, society and environment is located in time and is changing through time and is adapting to change with a blend of traditional and improved practices In Thathamangalam as in many parts of India Agriculture remains a key driver of change and source of dynamism for the rural economy concerned with long-term continuities and discontinuities in the structures

The processes of globalization and liberalization have affected rural life in general and educational, familial, religious and structures in particular. The study revealed that most of the rituals have been originated from an ancient agrarian society which had a deep-rooted stand in farming culture. It was also seen that these rituals, through superstitions, taboos, etc. prompted the public to conserve the ecosystem

Many of modern society's rituals have lost their importance because their performance is not as effective as it used to be, and because new issues important to people are not being addressed by those traditional rituals in the contemporary busy world. The purpose of a ritual is to impress and influence people, but too many of society's standard rituals are being done for the sake of tradition or dogma or habit alone and those

who are leading them are no longer impressed or influenced by them. Many of the rituals and, festival required the cooperation from several castes. But with the modernization these practices have been abandoned. As agrarian rituals change into urban rituals and the people who perform them become more urban and less agrarian, the rhythm of the ritual and most of its delightful character remain and the hard work and the painstaking effort of the agrarian labour are forgotten. Old routines are performed in entirely new contexts where there occurs a structural transformation or mutation. Countless rituals revolve around myths and superstitions originating from people's need to understand the world at a time when there was little scientific know-how. Therefore, continuing to uphold rituals seems to be ignorant, when we are clearly aware that the reasons behind these traditions are flawed.

It is true that not all rituals are built on false beliefs. Many traditions have a religious background and there's a purpose behind them. However, after performing these rituals again and again over hundreds of years, they begin to lose their significance, and are mostly regarded as mere formalities.

In modern mechanized age, the observance of rituals may appear to be old fashioned, but their inner meanings and the scientific principles have to be examined and the possibilities to utilize them in the modern age to be explored. Each ritual has its own significance in the ecological niche. Rituals have a conservative function. Ritual in this sense serves to reproduce and transmit the values and structures of a society from one generation to the next generation and to maintain those values and structures over time. Rituals are fascinating because they reflect the diversity of the human experience. Ritual is seen as action, but action heavily constrained by past culture—something between a manifestation of what the underlying culture prescribes, and a device for generating new culture. Ritual does not disappear from human life. As a cognitively shaped feature of human functioning and relational positioning in any society, it provides an action frame that does what words or rhetoric perhaps cannot do. Since ritual certainly has the power to be used for conserving the values and structures of a society, it is fair to, explore how ritual may be used innovatively to instill new values and structures in a society.

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