CHAPTER V

PUJAS AND FESTIVALS

Pujas and festivals are a source of joy for all. They exist in all countries, at all levels of society, in all races and has been celebrated through all the ages. If man has been described as a social animal, festivals are the occasions for a close joyous coming together for the members of the social group and they give full expression to the social instinct. The festivals seem to constitute in a sense the eternal religion of India, particularly Tamil Nadu.

The performance of the pujas to the deities in the respective shrine was followed from the early period in the Kongu region. Inscriptions at Tiruchchengodu, Tirumuruganpundi, Avinasi, Bhavani, Venjamankudalur, Karur and Kodumudi attest the fact that the pujas and festivals were performed in a grand manner. The temple inscriptions state that the Siva Brahmanas and hereditary priests were employed in the temple to perform pujas. Commonly pujas are of three types namely Nitya Puja (daily worship), Naimittika puja (occasional worship)-the worship once in a week or once in fifteen days and Kamapuja (Special puja).
Daily pujas have been performed in the temple from an early period. The records mention that the patrons encouraged daily pujas in the temples according to the Agamas. The priests who were appointed to conduct the pujas performed them regularly\(^2\). There are inscriptive evidences to prove that a few devotees arranged for the food offerings to the deities by making gifts in the form of Lands, Panam, endowment of Pon, in all the seven Saivaite temples. The devotees were very particular to supply oil for the lamps kept before the Gods and Goddesses. They belonged to different categories and donated Coins, Panam and Pon for sandhi lamp and perpetual lamp for the Gods and Goddesses in the Saivaite temples. Gifts in the form of villages were offered by the devotees to meet out the expense towards sacred bath and also for embellishing the deities with sandal paste\(^3\). The same donation is continued even today in all the temples by the devotees for various forms of worship. Pujas are performed four times or five times in all the Siva temples according to Karana and Kamika Agamas. These gurukkals should duly initiate with Sivadhikshai and Acharyabishigam to do the pujas.

Besides daily worship of god, there are some special occasions or festival days where the deity in the temple is worshipped more ceremoniously on a grand scale. Some inscriptions and other evidences confirm that no month passed without a festival. A record from
Tiruchchengodu during the 26th regnal year of Parantaka I (933 A.D.) speaks about Tiruvadirai (Arudra) festival in the temple by feeding the Brahmanas by a special body called the *Tiruvadrai Ganapperumakkal*. In the 27th regnal year (934 A.D.) of Parantaka I in the temple of Tiruchchengodu an endowment was made by Kukari Sundari, a native of Pugaliyur, for feeding the Brahmanas on the days of Duvadasi through the agency of *Duvadasi Ganapperumakkal*. Another inscription of the 28th year of Parantaka I (935 A.D.) mentions about the gift of 3 kalanju of gold for feeding the Brahmanas from out of its interest (Palisai) on Duvadasi, Tiruvadrai and Tiruvonam every month. Another inscription belonging to the 14th regnal year of Raja Raja I (999 A.D.) registers an endowment of 20 kalanju of gold for feeding 20 Brahmanas on the day of Arudra festival every month by Muri Kamakkanar, the wife of Ilangonadigal on behalf of a person named Ekavira Divakaradevar.

An inscription belonging to the 13th and 14th regnal years of Raja Raja I, at Tiruchchengodu, mentions about feeding the Brahmanas on Ekadesi days. The 20th year of Rajendra I inscription records the gift of 8 kalanju of gold to the deity Tirumalayil Elundaruliya Udaiyar at Tiruchchengodu for various offerings during Uttarayana Sankaranti festival.
Another inscription from Kodumudi in the 27th regnal year of Vira Narayana Ravi Varma (a feudatory of Kulottunga) records the tax free gift of the village Unjalur in Melkarai Araiya Nadu of Adhirajaraja Mandalam. The income from the same was allotted to Lord Tirupandikkodumudi Mahadeva at Karaiyur in Kaveri Nadu, a sub division of Adhirajaraja Mandalam to meet expenses of offerings, worship and celebrating the monthly natal star of the king and the grand festival (Magham) in the month of Masi\textsuperscript{10}. From the same place undated records of the Kongu Pandya king, Vira Sundara Pandya records a gift of villages for the Masi Magham festival for the sacred bath, food offerings, anointment and other services. Another inscription from Kodumudi registers an order of the king granting revenue of 30 Pon to meet the expenses of worship, offerings and various other expenditures that incurred during the special festival in the month of Masi\textsuperscript{11}.

Another inscription during the 24th year of Kulottunga Chola Deva III from Karuvur registers the tax free gift as Iraiyili Devadana to meet the expenses on the special festival Tiruk-karthigai\textsuperscript{12}. A copper plate inscription from Tiruchchengodu during the period of Krishnaraja Udaiyar records the agreement among the people of 18 villages for meeting the expenses of the Karthigai festival\textsuperscript{13}. An inscription from Tirumuruganpundi belonging to the Kongu Chola king Vira Rajendra Deva registers the gift of money by
Vanarayadevan, for food-offerings to be made on the days of Sivaratri festival\(^\text{14}\).

At present the following festivals are celebrated in all the seven Saivaite temples:

The annual festival in the month of Chittirai is celebrated in a grand manner in all the seven Saivaite temples even today. The festival celebrated in the month of Chittirai in Avinasi is the most important one. The *temple car* of Avinasi is one of the biggest in Tamil Nadu and the festival can be compared to the car festival of Tiruvarur. The practice of taking the idols of god through the main streets of the place in a beautiful temple car drawn by thousands of people present there with their friends, relatives and families to offer prayers to the local deity has come to be known as car festival\(^\text{15}\).

Generally the first day in the month of *Adi* is known as *Thalai Adi* and the 18\(^{th}\) day of this month which is known as *Adipperukkuu or Adi Paddinettu* are celebrated on the banks of river Bhavani. Because of its sanctity river Bhavani’s praise is equated with Ganges and is called as *Kudal*. The Sthalapuranam states that a stream sprang out of the Amudha Theertham to join the confluence. The spring is believed to be invisible and is therefore called Antharvani. The confluence of the three rivers is known as Triveni Sangamam which is compared to Prayaga in Allahabad\(^\text{16}\).
Adipperukkuu is celebrated in a grand manner in the temples of Bhavani and Kodumudi. During this time the image of gods and goddesses are brought to the river banks and special abishekas and pujas are performed. Since it is a Kudal, it gains more sanctity. Apart from these holy days, people throng here during the Solar and Lunar Eclipse days. They believe that during the eclipse days if one takes a holy dip in the confluence, he is sure to attain salvation\textsuperscript{17}. A large number of pilgrims congregate at this part, to have a dip in the river and worship the Lord. Generally in all Saiva temples on the day of Uttira in the month of Ani, Abhishekam and Thirumanchana Neerattu Vizha are offered to Lord Nataraja. In memory of Lord Siva uniting with consort Karunambiga, Adi Pournami Thabasu Vizha is celebrated in the month of Adi\textsuperscript{18}.

In Avinasi Adi Pournami Thabasu Vizha is celebrated. It is supposed to be the marriage day of the holy consorts. It is believed that Goddess Karunambigai adorned Lord Siva with a garland by name Uthirasa Lingam made up of Navarathana lingams. A festival signifying this event is celebrated for 3 days\textsuperscript{19}.

In all the seven Siva temples where there are the shrines of Lord Muruga, the seventh day of Skanda Sasti festival is celebrated with grandeur. It is unique to note that the people who have no children believe
that god will bless them with a child if they adhere to Skanda Sasti fasting. It must be remembered here that a total fasting will set right physiological imbalances and that will enhance the possibilities of conceiving\textsuperscript{20}.

The Karthigai star in the Tamil month Karthigai is celebrated in all the Hindu houses. This Tirukkarthigai festival is celebrated for two days. In the first day they light (ahal vizhakku) small lamps in the temples. In the second day the front yard (vasal) of the houses of the Hindus are decorated with a number of (Deepams) lamps made up of clay with a bonfire called Chokkappanai, thus Karthigai festival comes to an end. In all the entire Siva temples the function is observed by keeping a big lamp lit in front of the temple and is known as Karthigai Jothi. People believe that by lighting the lamps the obscurity and darkness in their minds and life can be eliminated with the blessings of the Almighty\textsuperscript{21}.

The records of the Kongu region mention the festival of Tiruvadhirai. Tiruvadhirai is the asterism associated with Lord Siva\textsuperscript{22}. This festival is observed in the month of Margazhi (December-January) when the asterism Arudhra holds sway. The occasion is favorable to propitiate Lord Siva by worshipping him. This festival is celebrated in all the Siva temples in Kongu Nadu in a befitting manner. Tiruvadhirai is celebrated grandly even today at Chidambaram. Appar and Sambandar have given us glowing descriptions of
the Tiruvadirai festival at Tiruvarur. This festival is popularly known in the Tamil country as Arudhra the asterism going by the name of Arudhra as its presiding deity Rudra symbolizing the destructive force in the universe. It was on this auspicious day ladies in different age groups observed Tiruvadirai Nonbu to gain the grace of Lord Siva.

Even now women go on fasting for a whole day on Tiruvadirai. They end this fasting after providing a ‘Padaiyal’ offering to Ganapati with powdered raw rice mixed with sugar and a piece of yellow thread. Men take this to the temple of Ganapati and return after performing puja with this offering. After their return women folk come out to see the full moon, end their fasting around 7 p.m., then they remove the worn out yellow thread round their neck and wear a new one to be replaced next year. This is also an occasion for a get together of one’s kith and kin. Instead of celebrating Tiruvadhirai in every house, the young couples gather in a particular house whose head or house wife may be related to them in some way or other. They disperse after getting the blessings of the elderly people. This is supposed to bring in good health to their husbands and make them united for a longer spell.

Vaikundaekadesi is celebrated in a grand manner in Tiruchchekanodu, Kodumudi and Bhavani where the temples have shrine for Lord
Vishnu. During Vaikundaekadesi, the Kongu people assembled in the shrine of their family deity and worshipped together. This has become a traditional form of worship. Further it indicates the fusion between the all India pantheon and a local folk deity. Thus in the Kongu region religious festivals serve as a basis for cultural synthesis.

A number of holy places in Tamil Nadu are visited by the pilgrims. The pilgrim centre creates religious spirit among the people. The people followed the habit of walking long distance to meet the saints and later on, this paved the way for the development of pilgrimage. Thayumanavar, a Saiva seer, stresses the importance of pilgrimage. Few festivals of specific nature too invite devotees to visit the holy shrines and temples on pilgrimage. Many of the Siva temples of this region have shrines for Subramanya. So the celebration of Thaipoosam is a note-worthy one among the people in Kongu Nadu.

Pongal is celebrated on the first day of the Tamil month Thai (Jan-Feb). It is also known as Makara Sankaranti. The Tamil term Pongal Pandigai indicates that the newly harvested rice is cooked first. The preparation goes by the name of Pongal where the rice boiled with milk. It is generally cooked in the front-yard of the house. The Tamil word Pongu means boil. Hence the rice cooked is known as Pongal. Lord Siva is said to
have been pleased by the offering on Pongal day. People light a lamp filled with ghee. There is a custom of lighting two lamps on Sankaranti day, one fed with oil and the other with ghee, and it is believed to be the Sankaranti-vrata-deepa-dhyapanam to reach Lord Siva or Lord Vishnu after death. By this mode of worship people thank the Sun god, their family deity, ancestors and others. In some quarters it is known as Suryan Nonbu i.e., a festival to thank sun god for having blessed the farmers with a rich harvest.

Maha Sivaratri is an important festival for the Saivaites and it is celebrated throughout the Siva temples in Tamil Nadu. According to Puranic evidences, Goddess Parvathi in order to protect the living souls worshipped Lord Siva on that night and hence it is called Maha Sivaratri. This festival has existed from early period.

There are five Sivaratris in a year. They are the Maha Sivaratri, Yoga Sivaratri, Nitya Sivaratri, Paksha Sivaratri and Maha Sivaratri respectively. The Sivaratri night is to be divided into four equal parts (jamam) and each jamam is to be worshipped differently. Siva is worshipped with lotus flowers, vilva leaves and lily flowers. Sweet Pongal, Sweet Payasam, Salted Pongal and pure cooked rice are the offerings made to the deity.

People observe strict Vradha (fasting) from the previous day. They go to the Siva temples and also visit the shrines of their family deities. They
believed that the observance of fasting without sleep would redeem them from any sin committed knowingly or unknowingly. The temples considered especially holy for the worship of Lord Siva on Maha Sivaratri nights are those at Tiruvaikavur near Papanasam, Omampuliyur near Vaitheeswaran Koil, Srisasilam and Kalahasti\textsuperscript{32}. Maha Sivaratri is considered to be the most favourable day to get the blessings of Lord Siva. It has been testified by inscriptions that such celebration existed as far back as 7\textsuperscript{th} or 8\textsuperscript{th} century A.D\textsuperscript{33}.

Panguni Uttiram is one of the most important festivals to the people of Kongu region as many of the village people involve in it with commitment and devotion. It is celebrated for ten days. As a festival of folk tradition, maximum number of village people participates in it. Singing of folk songs, Kavadiattam and folk music are the common features of this festival\textsuperscript{34}.

This is celebrated during the full moon day of the Tamil month Panguni (April-May). It reminds the seasonal changes. Spring season brings brightness to the land. There is a reference to Panguni season in Tiruthakkadeva’s ‘Jeevaka Chinthamani\textsuperscript{35}. It is during this season the celebration of celestial marriage between deities Siva and Parvathi takes place. The fasting undertaken is known as Kalyana Nonbu. The priests fix
the Utiram day as an auspicious occasion for the marriage of Siva and Parvathi\textsuperscript{36}.

Devotes taking the bath in the holy places is an important religious sentiment prevailing in India. The Saiva saint Appar says that taking bath in the holy places alone is not enough for a devotee to get salvation. He should also worship god fervently\textsuperscript{37}. The devotees believed generally that taking a dip in the holy places would relieve them from all sorts of evils\textsuperscript{38}. This tradition of taking a holy dip is traced to the Puranic period and this region is not an exemption.

In almost all the villages of this region people celebrate local festivals during the hot summer season to please the village deities. They cool the deities with water, tender coconut, sandal paste, curd, milk, turmeric, etc. The same tradition is applied to Lord Muruga worship during the festivals. The devotees believe that the god and goddess would be much pleased if they are appeased by such of abhishekam\textsuperscript{39}.

Provisions made by the kings, nobles and local donors for conducting such pujas are well documented in the inscriptions. Pujas were performed on every important day particularly in Tiruchchengodu temple and they were supervised by a group of people called Ganapperumakkal which is mentioned in the inscriptions. Festivals are celebrated in all 12 Tamil
months. Chittirai New Year, Full moon festival, Vaikasi Visakam, Navarathri, Karthigai Deepam, Panguni Uttiram are some of the important festivals recorded in the inscriptions. Adipperukkuu, an important festival celebrated every year at Tirunana (i.e.) Bhavani Sangameswara temple is also studied.

Thus these festivals paved the way for social harmony among different classes of people. The devotees expressed their devotion by engaging in folk art such as Kavadi, Karagam and Kummi. Women also participated in the celebrations. The festivals of this region, from very early times, were related to the temples allied to religious sentiments. As the people were involved in agriculture which involved continuous toil, they needed rest and joy. The festivals were a kind of relaxation for them. From the Tamil New Year day upto the Uttiram festival in the month of Panguni, many festivals were celebrated in the Kongu region. During certain festivals there was only a small gathering, but during religious festivals a lot of devotees, even from outside of Kongu Nadu participated. Hence these festivals throw light on the cultural heritage of this region.
CHAPTER V

References


15. Personal Survey on 20.05.2009.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p.92.


33. Ibid.


CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters, the researcher comes to the conclusion that these seven Saivaite temples reveal some of the salient features of the Tamil people of the medieval period. The historicity of the medieval period of Kongu Nadu also comes to light. The people of Kongu Nadu were pious and generous. They were known for their hospitality and culture.

The seven Saivaite temples played a multifaceted role in religious, social and economic life of the people. The traditions of the Tamil people found from the primary sources explain the distinguished role of the temples. These temples were part and parcel of the medieval Kongu people. Literary and archaeological sources also help to analyze and interpret the history of the Kongu region.

The early history of Kongu Nadu reveals its separate identity. Its boundaries, the various divisions and sub divisions of the region based on water sources and other demarcating points were identified. During the medieval period the Kongu Nadu had 30 territorial subdivisions out of which 20 Nadus can be brought under the label of Vada Kongu. The identification of seven sacred temples in Vada Kongu, their location and geographical
divisions are studied. A total of 178 inscriptions from the seven temples have been thoroughly studied to further add authenticity.

A proper perspective of the history of seven Saivaite temples cannot be obtained without the knowledge of its historical background. The epigraphical and literary evidences ascertain the existence of these temples from the 7th century A.D. itself. The visit of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar and the mentioning of these seven temples in their hymns provided ample evidences about their establishments and significance. Arunagirinadhar, a 15th century poet who visited a few of the seven temples further adds testimony. Every temple had its own myth and miracle which is now known to us through the sculptures and the historicity has also been passed down through the ages. These centres each have a Sthalaviruksham and Theertham signifying that a natural form of worship is adhered to even today. Another interesting feature is the presence of separate shrines for Sundarar and Karurdevar at Avinasi and Karur respectively. This indicates that these saints were considered god-like and their blessings were sought. The etymology of these places is also of great lexical interest. These temples are famously called 'Padalpetra Thalangal of Kongu Nadu'. These places had been considered as holy illustrious religious centres, which attracted the attention of the kings and queens and several prominent officials who patronized it and made donations. Earlier these centres were seen in the
Vada Kongu and now they exist in the present day districts of Erode, Karur, Namakkal and Tiruppur.

The inscriptions throw light on the reign of imperial Cholas - Aditya I, Parantaka I, Raja Raja I and Rajendra. It is believed that the ornamental gold used for the covering made by Aditya I at Chidambaram temple was taken from Kongu Nadu. This fact ascertains the rule of Aditya I over Kongu. The rule of the successors is testified by the evidences found from the seven centres and the matrimonial alliances they made with neighboring state of Kodumbalur. A number of inscriptions assure the long rule of Kongu Cholas and also the fact that a few of them bore the title of the imperial Cholas. The rule of the Pandyas, Hoysalas, Vijayanagara rulers, Madurai Nayaks, the Umattur chiefs, Mysore Udaiyars and Getti Mudaliyars is also evident from the sources available. Though the region witnessed the rule of many a different dynasty, it did not involve itself in any major war but North Kongu became a cocktail to the rulers of South India and witnessed many political vicissitudes.

The following social groups like Vettuvas, Brahmanas, Siva Brahmanas, Kaikolars, Puluvas, Vellalas and artisans etc was studied. Their contribution in the form of lands and coins for temple activities, renovations and repairs showed their involvement and their participation in social work.
The Devaradiyars were highly respected and were regarded as the servants of God. They held an esteemed status in the society and their contribution to temple activities shows their involvement for the development of temples. A very interesting point of view is that a certain section of people like Devaradiyars, Uvachars, Nimandakkarar, Drummers and Kudiraiberigai could build the second tier of the house for which coating was allowed. The donation in the form of crops to the temple proves that agriculture was a major occupation and it flourished during that period.

The prevalence of tax terms like Chekkirai, Erutirai, Kilirai, Melirai, Tariyirai, Eraipuravu, Vari, Nattavari, Tiruchchulavari, Kadamai, Ayyam, Pattam, Kanam, Viniyogam, Kurradendam and Sarigai show the able administration. These taxes were imposed on tenants, agriculturists, looms and lands; levied on goods and collected as judicial fines. They indicate the source of revenue to the government and the financial stability of the country. The reference to Sungam, Sungam Charigai and Sumai Sunga Charigai establishes the transfer of goods from one place to another. The usage of coins like achchu, palanajalagai achchu, sriyakki proves the wealth of the region. The mentioning of a place called Seenapuram near Avinasi proves that the Chinese people stationed here for trade purposes. Moreover the mentioning of Adikilthalam, Erirapattinam gives an idea about the
The existence of highways like Kongu Peruvali and Rajakesari Peruvali levied the growth of business transactions both inside and outside Tamil Nadu. The emergence of merchant guilds like Sonnatupperumakkal, Tiruvona Ganaperumakkal, Duvadesi Ganaperumakkal and Pannirandunattu Perumakkal shows their keen business acumen in trade activities. Thus the well defined social and economic structure paved way for the emergence of urbanization.

Each temple has its own unique architectural marvel. A few noteworthy features like Jalaka at Tiruchchengodu, Vedupari at Tirumuruganpundi, Jvrahareswara sculpture and the lotus panel on the ceiling at Bhavani, bronze sculptures of Kodumudi, and a panel of Mudalaivai Pillai at Avinasi capture the awe of viewers. Though various ruling families have done their might for the development of art and architecture of this region, the structural pattern of the temples has remained the same. The basic components of these temples comprising of Adhistana, Bhitti, Prastara, Griva, Shikara and Stupi have not been altered. An interesting point to note here is that Lingam is the presiding deity in all the six temples, whereas in Tiruchchengodu Ardhanariswara (half male and half female) is seen in the sanctum sanctorum.
Another noteworthy observation from the temples at Tiruchchendodu, Kodumudi and Bhavani shrines is that Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu are seen together. This brings out the oneness of Saivism and Vaishnavism and the peaceful co-existence of the two sects. The Kongu Nadu witnessed an important outburst of sculptural art in the medieval period clearly indicating a heightened aesthetic conscious of the people. The Kongu artists however excelled in the casting of metal images and bronze images of Kodumudi and several other deities rank as some of the finest sculptures of India. In these seven temples the Dravidian style may be said to have reached its supreme expression. The temples have undergone renovations and repairs constantly and the original monuments have been disturbed to some extent.

Pujas and festivals confirm the celebration in all the temples on various occasions. The endowments made by the devotees during the festival occasions to meet out the expenses of sacred bath and decoration of the deities are attested though the inscriptions. Temple chariots and palanquins of Kongu Nadu in which images of Gods and Goddesses are carried in procession during the scared festivals are the elaborate works of art covered with mythological carvings.

The pujas and festivals also show the religious fervor with which all classes of the society irrespective of their social indifferences came together
as one and prayed for their well being. There is reference to festivals like Arudra, Masi Magham, Sankranti, Kartigai etc which are celebrated even today. These festivals turned to be the occasion of great social gatherings and commercial transactions. Thus the festivals paved way for social harmony among different classes of people. Thus literature and inscriptions of seven Saivaite temples help in reconstructing the history and traditions of the temples in Kongu Nadu.

**Suggestions of the Study**

1. The seven Saivaite temples of Kongu Nadu are the earliest artistic grandeur of this region. The inscriptions of these temples could be propagated to the local folk and by that a number of visitors and devotees can be drawn.

2. The historical background of these temples and the kings who constructed these temples, important donors who made generous contributions to these temples could be written in small brochure forms and distributed to the public and visitors.

3. Tourism is a flourishing industry. Particularly for Heritage tourism, a circular pilgrimage trip of these seven temples may be arranged for local as well as foreign tourists.
4. Trekking camps can be organized to climb the Tiruchchengodu hill temple and by that the awareness to preserve the historicity and sanctity of the place can be instilled.

5. Each and every temple may be studied in detailed manner by the future scholars and separate monographs may be created.

6. Heritage clubs can be formed in these seven Saivaite temple towns to inculcate awareness about the temple art, architecture and historic significance.