CHAPTER - 2

THE PEOPLE OF PERAIVOURANI TALUK
AND THEIR CUSTOMS

Humanity throughout the world is in the habit of forming customs and cherishing them valuably. As such customs become part and parcel of Tradition, which is handed down from generation to generation. According to T.S.Eliot, Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It can not be inherited. If one wants it, he has to obtain it by great labour. Tradition involves the historical sense which enables one to have in his mind not only the pastness of the past but also of its presentness.¹

The activities by individuals habitually become the customs of the social group in which they are anchored.² The semantics of tradition is followed either knowingly or unknowingly. Tradition is handed down by means of social customs in which people come to contact with each other.³ Compact Oxford Dictionary defines tradition as the passing on of customs or
beliefs from generation to generation. It is said that tradition by virtue of its long observance has acquired almost the validity of law in a society.

Another nomenclature related to tradition is ‘culture’. Professor Vaiyapuri Pillai points out that the Tamil equivalent to this term is ‘Panpaadu’ which has been coined by Rasigamani T.K.C. in the year 1937. Culture in the words of E.B. Taylor is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. W.U.S. Encyclopaedia defines culture as the way of life adopted by a social group.

Practically speaking culture refers to the seasoned state of affairs and artistic bent of mind which people opt to acquire. However, all the general acquirements in a society be may ultimately be termed as the culture of the said group. Culture is flexible in nature. All that is not conducive towards the social good would disintegrate. Culture differs from country to country, society to society, and time to time. However there are
certain cultural elements which are eternal and applicable to the humanity at large.

Culture of a community or race is discernible from its literature, style of life, language, arts, ideals, religious tenets, political ideologies, social set up, status of women and scientific accomplishments.  

Culture refers to refined thinking based on intellect, character, virtue and that of living. Matthew Arnold’s remarks hold good at this context that is ‘what we have, comes under civilization; How we are, under culture’.  

Tamil culture talks about Panpu i.e. good or virtuous character (Panpenappaduvathu Paadarin thozhugal - Neytharkali). Parimelazhagar comments on Valluvar’s couplet entitled Panpudaimai as follows : “Behaving in tune with honour and humanitarian values.” The attributes of culture were discussed widely in Europe during the 19th century. Distinguishing between ‘culture’ and ‘anarchy’ Matthew Arnold observed that culture has the sense of protection of an individual and that of the society. But tradition does not rest content with
individuals alone. It encompasses individual race and the society as well.

Tradition and religion depend upon the society. Eliot strongly believes that traditional habits and cultural traits are the outcome of religious ideologies, which effect changes in the very fabric of tradition. Customs are not always static. They are subject to vissicitudes. Old customs give place to new ones due to the call of time and the social set up, and political exigencies. Ralph Lynton observes that “tradition is a configuration of learned behaviour and the results of behaviour and whose compound elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society.”

The customs of a particular generation are handed down to the next one. It is upto the later generation to follow or disregard them. Evidently meat, liquor and the association of harlots were not treated as evil during the Sangam period in Tamil Nadu. But in the post Sangam period they came to be condemned due to political and religious factors prevailing in the society. We find a lot of instructions in this regard in the couplets of Thirukkural. It
is remarked that tradition does not resort to individual. In the other hand it is connected with a group, society or a race.\textsuperscript{13}

Tradition, culture, customs etc., do reflect the ethnic characteristics. Men, being part of them has to follow them either directly or indirectly. In addition to economic needs, man has to fulfil himself of the artistic, aesthetic, and spiritual needs. Artefacts and mentifacts take shape in accordance with the cultural needs. Customs, lores, habits, ideals, establishments all these make up the social living. They change the society and in turn get changed by the society. Resultantly anthropologists club them under culture and tradition.\textsuperscript{14}

In the words of Malinowsky, tradition reflects the finesse of man. In order to meet with personal necessities man has paved the way for tradition - so remarks C.C.Nath. Falson holds that the material objects, accomplishments, symbolic acts, beliefs, knowledge, social values etc., form the subsidiary traits of tradition. Tradition is a natural process but its manifestations are prone to social conditions and human nature.\textsuperscript{15} Tradition
involves a kind of learning from the society and in turn imparting to the society. Hence it is designated as a learned behaviour.16

**Behaviours**

Behaviours determine human actions and thoughts and vice versa. Behaviours if repeatedly exhibited in rites and rituals form the patterns of customs in a particular society. Each and every ethnic group has its own rituals.17 In fact rituals mobilize their living. They acted as unifying force besides confirming the social values. Individuals were facilitated to utilize the social gains by means of such rituals involving the life circle ceremonies and death ceremonies.

**Rituals**

Rituals are neither instinctive nor anticipatory. Not do they involve any rational base.18 Most societies do have rituals which are based on certain fixed code of conducts and traditional following.19 Rituals and customs enable one to understand the culture of a given community. As oral language serves as a means of communication of information rites and rituals serve as
instruments of studying the cultural fabrications of a society.\textsuperscript{20} Frederick Heim observes that rituals are symbolic representation of social relations.

**Rituals and Beliefs**

The root cause of rituals is said to be based on certain beliefs. The actual meanings of beliefs are not overtly exposed. Consequently an amount of fear is associated with it. The belief is continued by means of rituals though the rituals themselves come to lose the meaning and significance. It is feared that failure to the continuance of rituals would invite evil effects. Rituals differ from region to region and community to community.\textsuperscript{21} They serve as mirrors to know about the cultural life of people.

Beliefs are of two types viz, rational and those that are not rational. The belief that the tenth born female child is inauspicious, has an indirect message that a family without planning will meet with disaster. But the cawing of the crow as a sign of arrival of the guests is not superstitious, but based on experience.\textsuperscript{22}
Peravourani Taluk is no exception to the general cultural mainstream of Tamil Nadu. People here are having faith in superstitions, customs and rituals as elsewhere. They form part and parcel of their cultural mosaic. Beliefs are in vogue pertaining to ceremonies right from conception, birth, death and so on.

Beliefs prevalent among people are firm. They may even be superstitious. However they reflect their culture. Be they true of false, we can not dismiss them as meaningless.\textsuperscript{23}

The cawing of the crow presupposes the arrival of the guests. Similarly that of the Ku:kai, death. These beliefs find place in Tamil classical literature also, a fact of the continuance of certain, beliefs right from the past as evident in

- Anju varu Kuzaark kuralin Karrum (Puram)\textsuperscript{24}
- Maruvil Thaavich Chirukarung Kaakkai\textsuperscript{25}
- Anbudai marabinil kilai yodaara (Kurunt)\textsuperscript{26}

Habits found with individuals become customs in the social level.\textsuperscript{27} Beliefs and customs are interlinked in one way or other. Though many of them are commonly prevailing in the entire society, some of the beliefs and customs are exclusively
found with certain communities in a specified area. We come across both of the above, in the Peravourani area. The following are some of the common beliefs.

**Burnt cloth**

Retention of partially burnt cloth, in the house is considered to be unauspicious due to the belief that elders would die consequently. Hence care is taken to remove at the earliest any cloth if it gets burnt or scorched.

**Trimming of hair, nail etc**

While trimming, the cut off nail or hair is removed and disposed safely. Otherwise inimical persons would make use of them for harmful black magic. After hair cutting, it is customary to take bath for hygienic reasons. Strangely, people believe that if a piece of hair is accidentally found in the food staffs, it would strengthen the relationship.

**Prophecy (omen)**

The habit of relying upon prophecy is rather universal. Ancient Tamils has strong faith in seeking ‘Nan nimitham’ or pul. Things connected with good or evil or communicated in
nature by means of certain symbols. Nimittham is associated with belief. If one comes out of his house he should see that nothing hinders his legs. Otherwise he returns to his house drinks some water, and resume his walk. Some people would start coming out after ensuring themselves that there is no ill omen. Dining in dark, sneezing while some body is seriously discussing good affairs, eyeing a sole Brahmin or crossing a carpenter, pusari (Archagar) are all cautiously avoided by people who are in pursuance of journey.

**Landscape of Peravourani Taluk**

Peravourani area is rife with scenic beauty reminding one of the Sangam literatures which speak about Thazai, Thengu, Punnai and other trees. Coconut trees abound where water is abundant. In and around peravourani Taluk we find a kind of coconut belt which imparts an aesthetic delight to the onlookers.

In fact coconut groves serve as substantial source of income to the people of the aforesaid area. Coconut is exported to northern States. Every part of coconut is economically worthwhile. Coconut fibers are used for thread making. Dried
leaves are knitted to make keerru (woven leaf). Tender coconuts, always a delicious drink for the maintenance of peoples health, and palai is used for tying purposes. In short coconut trees are a boom to the inhabitants of the area more than that of other places.

Houses are built amid green coconut groves - a pleasant sight to look at and a peaceful place to live in. Harvested ripe coconuts are amassed nearby the dwellings an indicator of a definite monetary income.

Taking the flourishing coconut trees in this area into account, Government of Tamil Nadu established a coconut research farm at Veppangulam near Pattukkottai which benefits the farmers considerably by adopting improved techniques and devices besides issuing seeds and plants in addition to manures and pesticides. It is but natural that people, particularly women folks in this area are looking fair with good complexion due to the philanthropy of nature. A shadowy, breezy style of living at the lap of coconut trees nearby watery stretches and the hygienic air-all these might have been conducive towards the above congenial conditions.
Peravourani Taluk is no different from other regions of Tamil Nadu. It has most of the religious rites and rituals as prevalent elsewhere. At the same time certain unique customs found in the area add to the interest of anthropological, social, economical and cultural interests. The origin of religion has had its roots in the fear in man and the unknown onslaughts perpetrated by natural forces such as thunder, lightning, earthquake, flood whirl wind and the like. Unable to find appropriate reasons for them, man thought that they were the results of some supreme powers and the spirits of the dead which by worship could be assuaged and there by he could gain congenial living. From then onwards rituals and festivals and animal sacrifices started taking place in the society. They are in vogue in most of the religious practices of the world. The worship of Nature has its impact in almost all of the agricultural operations all over the world. Scholars such as Robert Redfield has classified the religious practices of the people of America into two, namely Great Tradition and Little Tradition. His bibartite mode of analysis is equally applicable to many of the world religious worships including India. In Tamil Nadu we come
across the existence of the Great and little Traditions in the religious ways life.

Ritual - Kinds

Ways of religious worship differ in many respects. Residential deity, family deity, minor deity and major deity - all these have their own modes of worship. The first three of the above come under little Tradition and the last one under Great tradition. Each family has its own family deity to which offerings are made. Children are named after the deity. Ethnic deity takes care of the interests of the ethnic group is the belief. This in course of time has led to the formation of village deity and many villages have taken recourse to area deities.

The Mukkulatthors of Thanjavur District belong to Saivism and Vaishnavism though the later mentioned one has the minority. There is no marked difference in the matter of marriage alliances among them, based on the above religious sects, for the reason that the people worship both Lord Muruga and Perumal.
The verse of Tolkappiam, as given below reveals the Ainthinai divisions of Tamil Land, assigning with each land its respective deity and other features.

Mayon Meya Ka:durai ulagum
Seyon Me:ya maivarai ulagum
Ve:ndan meyath theempunal ulagum
Varunan me:yap perumanal ulagum
Mullai, kurinji, marutham, neythal enach
Colliya muraya:r collavam padume.

Accordingly Vishnu, Muruga, Vendhan and Varunan are the deities of forest land, Kurinji (mountainous region), fertile area, and water logged areas respectively. The ancient Tamils held Korravi (K:ali) as the deity of desert and they worshipped her for victorious results in war and worldly affairs.30

**Major Deities**

Major deities are those which attract ceremonious status and worship, in accordance with the provisions of Vedhas and Puranas. Worship of both major and minor deities is in practice in the study area, among the Ahamudaiyars particularly. Rituals and festivals related to major deities call forth planned agenda and prescribed time limit.
Male Deities

People in general worship Shiva, Vishnu, Muruga, Pillaiyar the greater deities of Hindu pantheon. Animal sacrifices are barred in the rituals related to the above deities. Shiva temples abound in Thanjavur District the reason being the contribution made by ko:cchengan:an in constructing around 92 temples? on either side of river Kaveri. People of Peravourani used to commence transplanting of crops operation after making due prayer to lord Ganesha. The Thiruneelakandap Pillaiyar temple at Peravourani is the most important one in this regard.

Female Deities

The Ahamudaiyars of Thanjavur District hold in high esteem the goddesses like Parvathi, Valli, Deivanai and Kalaimagal when they have occasions to worship their counterparts namely Shiva, Muruga. Kalaimagal or Goddess Saraswathi is worshipped during the Ayuthapooja festival.

Minor Deities

The practice of folk worship is ancient. People started worshipping the deities so as to get relieved of their bodily
diseases, and ghosts. They prayed them for providing with sumptuous rain and also for getting due offspring. Folklorists like S. Shanmugasundaram point out that the worshipping of folk deities commenced earlier than that of the major deities.

In the study area no temples are found pertaining to the folk deities except Mariamman for whom either structures or pictures are found. Pandals are erected before them during festive seasons. It is to be noted that trees are often associated with folk deities such as margosa, vilva etc. Even certain stones erected are worshipped in addition to square pedestals. Sculptures made up of sands and stones are a common sight in such places. Watery sources are indispensably available nearer to them. Rituals involving tonsuring, of head lifting of kavadis, offering fire-walking, carrying fire pots, arranging cradles and cooking pongal - all these are carried out customarily. Animal sacrifice is also made wherever deemed necessary.

**Male Folk Deities**

The Ahamudaiyars of Thanjavur District are in the habit of worshipping male folk - deities like Ayyanar, Sudalai Madan...
Muniyasamy, Karuppan and the like. They are construed to be their guardians and physicians. Ghosts, Saamis are some other names by which they are identified at times.

**Ayyanar**

The etymology ‘Ayyan’ has various connotations like captain, sage, master, father, guru, and one who is honorific. Naturally Ayyanar leads other minor deities. He was also identified as Sathan (Sastha) said to be the the variont name of Buddha. In due course Ayyanar came to be acknowledged as Arihara Puthran (Lord vishnu and shiva) born out of the union of Hari in the of Mohini and Haran. Shrines to Ayyanar are located at the outskirts of villages. He is worshipped by people for favor of getting good health protection, and driving the evil sprits away. Animal sacrifice is made. Ayyanar has horse as his convoy. Nearby Amman shrines is located Sudalaimadan shrine. Muniasamy shrines are situated nearby lands. He is also called Muniyandavar whose favourite drink is liquor which finds place amidst offerings. Karuppan swamy is held as the guarding deity of village. He is also named as Sangili Karuppan and
Karupanasamy. He is found seated under the tree with a sword in hand.

**Female Deities**

Varied female deities like Kaliyamman, Mariyamman, Veyilukkaatha Amman, Muppidari amman and Pethanachi amman are worshipped by people in the study area. Kali is associated with multifaceted traits. She is considered to be the protecting force and the one who cures illness, a hunter, and fertility goddess. She is appeased by sacrifices.

Mari means rain. Mari Amman therefore relieves her devotees of the heat and the resulting diseases. Myths are prevalent with reference to her birth. She is called Muthu Mariamman since she saves people from small pox. Not only the Hindus but also Christians do worship Mariamman if they are affected by Ammai (Small pox). Mavilakku, Kavadi, Sacrifice all these form the worshipping modes. A Hindu multt functioning at a village called Nadiyam in the Peravourani area, is worth mentioning for its services rendered to the folks. It is managed by one Thattha Namagiri who used to distribute mud pots, textiles
and other things to the poor people during festivals such as Deepavali, Pongal as the case may be, and through out the month of Markazhi Tiruppucci (Sugared pongal) is distributed. The lands of the multt are leased to the Ahamudaiyars and Ambalak karars.

**Worship - Origin and Kinds**

The term worship refers to various semantic nuances like following, rituals etc. People during ancient times followed certain practices either for getting good harvests or for children. The fertility cult culminated in due course in worships and rituals. Some of the kinds of worship are: Paternal worship, Maternal worship, Tulasi Worship, Totemic worship, Virgin worship, Animistic worship of the spirit of the dead and Lamp worship.32

**Paternal Worship**

It is remarked by scholars that the worship of Lord Shiva is nothing but the crux of paternal worship. Shiva’s names in the district are: Sankara lingam, Dhanukkodi, Ramalingam, Sivanar, Natarajar, Thillai Ambalan, Ambal Nathan. Folk songs make
mention of them. No village is existing without a Shiva temple in the study area.

**Mother Goddess Worship**

It is pointed out by historians that Mother Goddess worship was prevailing in ancient times. Diverse reasons are ascribed to this view. As women folks, holding power, wielded more than men, they in course of time acquired the status of being worshipped which in turn led to the treatment of women as Gods. Women being the fundamental source of progeny is held in worship in both stages i.e. as Virgin as exemplified in the worship of seven virgins (Ezhu Kanniyargal) and as mother. Obviously the figures of woman are styled with larger breasts, belly and back, as symbols of motherhood. Female deities are at times worshipped by women folks with songs and the accompaniment of kummi. Fire walking, Pongal, drawing patterns (Kolam) in front of the shrines, sacrifices, Karagam performance, wearing yellow garments holding Neem bunches - all these are existing in the incumbent area as is the case with other regions of Tamil Nadu.
Natural Forces

Objects and forces of Nature like sun, moon, rain are naturally held in worship. Moon worship has been in practice, right from the past in Tamil Nadu. A verse of Tholkappiam refers to the habitual walk of people during night with the notion of the moon following them for safety. (Thol : ceyy : 191:1). Folk songs make mention of the supporting nature of moon when mothers sings lullaby to her child Chitra Pournami is celebrated in the locality with involvement and interest.

Sun Worship

Worship of sun is one of the oldest and lingering customs in the country specially in Tamil Nadu as evident in Pongal celebration during the month of later part of January. Both on the auspicious and inauspicious occasions sun is worshipped in the study area.

Worship of Rain

Rain worship is a widespread cultural element in the Tamil Society. Good crop depends upon good rain and hence people give due regard and respect to rain Cilappadhikaram exhorts rain
as “Maa Mazhai Porruthum!”. Tolkappiam speaks of Varunan as the deity of rain. Many customs regarding the imploring of rain are found in the study area as they are prevalent in other districts. At the same time certain exclusive customs are found in existence.

Folks used to entreat the God of rain as Vaanatthu Raajaave! (King of the sky) and narrate their pitiable plight due to draught and make requests for imminent rain for their subsistence.

A folk belief is jotted down. White powder is diluted with water and patterns (Kolam) are drawn on the street and shandy with the underlying hope that the hands of rain would erase them. People believe that the God of rain would turn to be merciless if social evils become abundant. For appeasing him, Kodumpaavai is made and drawn on the street and burnt at the end. Mazhaikkanji (a kind of gruel) is taken up by women without salt, and dance is performed praising the Lord of rain during the Kummi Aattam. Lightning appearing to the North East direction is taken up for the sign of the arrival of rain.34
Indiran

Indiran is described as the God of Marudham tract, by Tolkappiam (Tol.Porul.verse 5). The worship of Vendhan also give place to that of Indira. Folk songs like lullaby contain numerous references to the father, paternal uncle, grand father of the child who are compared with that of Indiran. Agricultural operations regarding crop transplantation start after having made prayer to Indiran the God of rain. His bow, Indira Vill is always subject to appreciation in folksongs.

Totemic worship

Tribals generally have had a belief that a particular animal or tree had given place to the origin of their ethnic race. Consequently they started piously worshipping such symbols which is characterized as totemic worship. The above objects are not meant for food or disgrace or misuse and they are worshipped with due offerings as evident in the worship of neem tree or Pipal tree.
**Animism**

People generally are of the belief that the departed souls of the persons either murdered, or who have committed suicide or tortured or driven to self immolation, live in trees and haunt about to take vengeance against the culprits and therefore worshipping the spirits would redeem them of the evil effects. The deities considered to be controlling the spirits are also worshipped. It is usual in the area under study, to construct houses nearby Amman Shrines after allowing some vacant passage which is meant for the movement of the spirits. Spirits prefer to dwell on the trees, and watery places. Doing worship of them for the incumbent’s well being is called animism.

**Ancestral Worship**

Ancestral worship is largely present in the cultural context of Tamil Nadu. Annually people pay respect to the souls of the ancestors, and the material objects used by them while living, are preserved piously. Pilgrims used to go on pilgrimage after duly worshipping the birth place of the Saivite and Vaishnavite Saints namely Nayanmars and Azhwars respectively, besides visiting the holy shrines glorified by them in their divine verses. Shrines
and temples are located on mountains and islands, beeches riverbeds etc., Such glorious temples are not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra, Uttarpradesh and Maharashtra and in countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal. The philosophical under current of the location of these temples points out that the culture of the Tamils finds expression in regional national and international perspectives.36

The ancestral worship has yielded place to the worship of minor deities like Madan Karuppan, and the like. In fact the ‘hero stone culture’ vindicates this considerably.37 Annual Divasam is observed with reference to the dead relatives. Minor structures called Samathi on the burial ground are raised and during the death anniversary poor people are fed. This custom is widely witnessed not only in the study area but also in the entire state of Tamil Nadu.

Burial Ceremony

A peculiar custom associated with the village Marungappam in Peravourani region is the ceremony made in connection with a treasure hold presumed to be buried under
ground in the precinct of Aushathapureeswarar temple, at the said village. Folks do this with the fond hope of getting the treasure. A lore in this regard prevailing among the people is given below.

Ezhuva:nukkum
Thozhuva:nukkum
Idaiyile :
Ka:kka: Mu:kkin
Nizhalile:
Kal.var Po:kum
Vazhiyile:
Kanda:lum
Kamma:lan
Ka.nn.ile:

It has been a staunch belief among folks that a hidden treasure would become known if sacrifices are made towards it. So, Animal sacrifices are made towards obtaining the ‘buried hoard’.38
**Worship of Sacred objects**

Either out of fear for personal safety or out of giving regard to sentiments, people are in the habit of revering certain objects, plants, and structures.

**Worship of Lamps**

Worship of lamps (vil.akku) is a common cultural among people as lamp is identified with the Goddess of wealth (Thirumaga.l). Lamps are of various names such as Sridevi, Lakshmi, and Kamatchi.

In the evening water is sprinkled on the courtyard of houses and Patterns are drawn. Lamps are oiled and lit and worshipped as a gesture of welcoming the goddess of wealth. The prayer would be in the form of requesting oil for lamps, food for the individuals, child for the cradle and cow for milk, tali for longevity of husband and means for God’s grace. It is believed that the lamp cult would remove evil deeds and protect the family. Tuesday and Friday are the auspicious days for the above. Karthikai Deepam, the minor Hindu festival is widely known for the celebration with lamps.
Evil Eye

It is believed that Kanne:ru either due to (evil eye) human being or animal will cause harm to the persons. This belief is prevalent worldwide. Certain preventive and post preventive measures are carried away to avert or alleviate the harmful effects of evil eye. One who is affected by evil eye is asked to sit; chilly and salt taken in the hand are thrice rounded the head of the incumbent and then they are left in the burning oven. If any smell comes out of it would be thought that the affected person is redeemed and the one who caused the evil eye would alone be affected hare after.39

Various measures are taken to prevent the ill effects of evil eye. A small black dot is laid on the cheek of a child, which is called Thrishtip pottu. A pumpkin is left hanging with the figure of a man drawn on it whenever people hold house warming ceremony. If the vegetable goes rotten, the evil eye is cleared. There is yet another device called Cholakkollai Bommai (Tattered figure in the field) which is kept in the fields of ripe corns tied to a wooden post for the purpose of averting evil eye and driving away the poaching animals and birds.
Festivals

A contributing factor for the seasoning of human mind and spirit lies in the celebration of festivals be they social or spiritual or entertaining kinds. Festivals infuse a new vigour and hope into people’s minds. They help augmenting co-operation, aesthetic sensibility, general understanding and also for steering good habits, artistic way of doing and virtuous behaviours. The origin of festivals may be traced back to the rituals in assemblage, of the primitive society. Life sans festivals would rather become insipid despite their negative aspects. No culture or race in the world is devoid of celebrating festivals.

In India festivals are combined mostly with religious overtones. Tamil Nadu is no exception to this. Traditional festivals right from Deepavali, Karthikai Deepam, Pongal, Tamil New year, Navarathri, Ekathasi, Masi Magam, Panguni Uthiram are in tune with Hindu religious dictates. We have festivals related to the people belonging to other religious communities. This being the case, certain festivals transcend religious barriers and are celebrated by all as evident in New Year Eve, Pongal. Aadiperukku and so on. Religious practices, it is observed, are
meant for prosperous human life, and transcending the mundane affairs and enabling one to acquire spiritual powers. Religion therefore has become the conglomeration of beliefs, rituals and emotional expressions. People believe that religious ways of life offer them strength, support, peace and progress. ‘Samayam’ the Tamil equivalent for religion found in Manimekalai one of the five major epics of Tamil Literature. Another word ‘Madham’ reforming to religion came into existence from the time of Tiruvasagam, the sacred Tamil verse by Saint Manicka Vasagar.

A folk song makes mention of the pilgrimage made to Tiruppathi by Ahamudaiyars and Kallars. The lines of the verse are as follows:

“Naalu Saruvangondu
Naduch Charuvam
Theerttham Kondu
Nadanthe:n Tiruppathikku
Naalu latcham
Sannathikku”

Tamil New Year Day

Generally the first day of the month of Chithirai is observed as the Tamil New Year Day. Many of Ahamudaiyars have
lineance to the Dravidian Movement. Hence they are disinterested in celebrating the above day.

A change effected by the erstwhile Govt of Tamil Nadu to celebrate the 1st day of Thai as Tamil New Year Day, had positive and negative effects. The Subsequent party which came to power reverted the matter and restored the former by accustomed month of Chithirai. This being the case people do their routine rites and rituals involving the worship of sun, conducting sports, and exchanging greeting cards in addition to preparing special dishes like pongal, vadai, and Payasam which mark the occasion with colour and pomp.

**Chitra Pournami**

The full moon day in the month of Chitirai is no less significant in the Tamil country. The traditional affairs related to the above day are carried out in the study area though without much difference. Newly wedded couple used to cook pongal and offer the same to the deity of the Temple. Those who are devotees of Lord Muruga are in the habit of exhibiting bunches of tender coconuts, plaintain saplings, branches of country dates.
What is significant is the rendering of the Chithra puthra Nayanar story during this occasion. People used to distribute the food stuffs, fruits and sugar cane to the neighbours. Some make a trip to Poompukar in order to do worship.

**Aadi Azhaippu**

Wedded couple are barred from physical union during the month of Aadi. The wife is therefore called back to her parental home wherein she had to pass the month of Aadi and then will she be united with her husband. If the child is born in Chithirai it would be regarded as inauspicious.

**Aadip Pathinettu**

The eighteenth day of Aadi is celebrated as Aadip Pathinettu. Wedded couple are invited to the brides residence wherein they will be feasted with sweet items and new dresses.

Farmers celebrate Aadip Pathinettu with all piety. Particularly the function is associated with the inundation of River Kaveri, the life blood of Thanjavur District. Consequently men and women throng to the river on the particular day. Mixed rice, jaggery, karugamani (black bead), turmeric, camphor, bhathi,
betel leaves and arecanut all these form the ingredients offered by women to the river in the process of worship. Kids used to draw smaller chariots (siruther) and dispose them in the river. Some would muse the verses of Bharathi, the national poet on the day an unusual sight in the state.

**Aadi Irupathettu**

The people of the area hold the twenty eighth day as the last date of the month of Aadi. Fasting is observed. It would end in feasting. Men and women make trip to Thiruvaiyaru for the purpose of bathing in Kaveri combined with the worship of Lord Aiyarappan therein.

**Purattasi**

Vaishnavites would abstain from taking non-vegetarian items during the month of Purattasi. Residences are to be kept clean. Untouchability is still the order of the day. Touching a Dalit by a caste Hindu necessitates bathing and washing of dress. Ladies are not allowed inside the house during menstrual period. In general Purattasi is held as a Peedai (non sacred) month. However Navarathri festival has its own sway during this
‘otherwise inauspicious’ month. It was the kings of Vijayanagar empire and the Madurai Nayaks who popularised and patronised the Navarathri festival in the length and breadth of Tamil Country. The Sethupathis of Ramnad also had their part in the above affair. Exhibiting multi-coloured dolls (kolu) is common during the aforesaid nine nights. Songs are rendered. Women, with their children gather and enjoy the Panoramic display of the artifacts. It is highly remarkable that the custom is not at all prevalent among the Ahamudaiyars of Thanjavur District.43

The underlying reason for the absence of Kolu in the above community is subject to certain interpretations based on the details obtained from informants. According to the views expressed by them it is due to caste hierarchy. Navaratri has rather been assigned with the Brahminical cultural hegemony which therefore naturally becomes subject to discard by other communities which are put up at the lower rung of the social ladder. However it is prone to further investigation in this regard to arrive at the actual truth.
Deepavali

The common practices such as waking up in the early morning; taking oil bath; enjoying sweets and savouries; wearing new dresses; distributing sweets to the neighbours and known persons, are found among the Ahamudaiyars in respect of celebration of Deepavali. Newly married couple are invited to the father in laws house which is called Thalai Deepavali. They are provided with new dress and golden chain. The fact that the very function of Deepavali is the outcome of the cultural diffusion from the Aryans to the Dravidian race, which the people in the area of study rely upon. The death of Naragasuran at the hands of Lord Vishnu marks the Deepavali festival. The prevailing Dravidian sentiment however has not put an end to this function. The elders, at least for the sake of younger generation, have to make compromise with their own ideologies. Resultantly many such functions are continued either willy or nilly in the state of Tamil Nadu and find their echoes in the Peravourani Taluk People.

Karthigai Deepam

One among the religiously warranted festivals of the Tamils, is Karthigai Deepam i.e., festival of lighting of Lamps
(Deepam) in the Tamil month of Karthikai (Nov-Dec). Ahal (an earthen cup like structure) is meant for keeping the oil for lamps. Some people are in the habit of lighting the lamps throughout the month of Karthikai as it is meant for getting the grace of Lord Muruga. The rows of lamps lit and kept along the sides of the strict will offer a spectacle of beauty and a sense of enthusiasm. Chokkappanai, a conical structure made up of dry sticks and palm leaves, would be set fire during night as a form of worship of Lord Shiva. Pori, Kadalai, Sundal would be distributed to the young and old alike. Even crackers are fired now a days.

**Thaip Pongal**

An exclusive festival of Tamil people happens to be the Pongal which is celebrated with all fanfare and exemplary spirit. An age old festival as it is, Pongal is meant for thanks giving to sun, nature, land, cattle and all that has extended a helping hand to the riparian people. It is celebrated for about four consecutive days. Bogi, Perum Pongal or Vasal Pongal, Mattup Pongal, Karinaal or Kaanum Pongal are the names of festive days. Houses would wear a new look for the above festival. Plantain bunches,
sugar cane, turmeric and paddy are given prominence during the offering. Jallikkattu otherwise called Bull fighting is a notable enterprise for showing the velour of the youths in the area, by controlling the tempestuous bulls maintained for the specific purpose. Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu are noteworthy in the performance of Jallikkattu. Of course celebration of Pongal makes no noteworthy difference in this region. But it is to be emphasized that the Ahamudaiyars have the best of mind to take sides with the Traditional customs as part and parcel of their living styles.

**Kaaman Pandigai:**

It is celebrated in the month of Masi, on full moon day. Kaman symbolically represents lust. He is the husband of Rathi noted for beauty in its core. He is otherwise called Manmadhan. He unduly invites the wrath of Lord Shiva by disturbing his meditation. Shiva burnt him by opening up his third eye on the forehead. Manmadhan is reduced to ashes ultimately due to the devotional power. Rati impleaded shiva to give back her husband. Her request was granted and Manmadhan i.e., Kaman came alive. This myth has resulted in the creation of various art
forms such as Leavani wherein the subject whether Kaman was really burnt or would be discussed in the form of verse, with musical accompaniments, before the assembled audience, during night, in an open stage set up. Two groups vehemently participate in this verse debate which is an instructive entertainment to the people. The underlying motive for this performance is to entreat the Gods for adequate rain an essential element in the agrarian area. But the above art form is in the stage of breathing its last, due to disinterested attitude of the patrons and the public.

**Masi Magam**

A special feature of this religious affair is to carry on the idols of deities to watery places and after duly washing and decorating, they would be kept exposed for the purpose of worshipping by the devotees and then brought back to the temples. As the festival takes place in the month of Masi it has earned the name Masi Magam.

**Panguni Uthiram**

Panguni Uthiram is meant for the festivities connected with Lord Muruga the son of Shiva. Around ten days of worship marks the occasion. The nuptial affair of Muruga with his
consorts, would take place. His spear (vel) would also be exhibited in the sandy riverside or any other fit place during the occasion. Orchestral performance during night has attained a significant place now a days.

**Amavasai Viradham:**

Ahamudaiyars unfailingly observe Amavasai Viradham meaning fasting on the New Moon day each and every month. Though this custom is prevalent in the whole of the state, people in the Peravourani area are more devoutly observing this. It is a ritual meant for the males who have lost their parents, and as a means of paying respect to them. Fasting by them in the morning and evening is common. Houses are cleaned either with water or with cow dung as the case may be. Meals cooked afresh would be served on banana leaf. Coconut would be cut in to two halves. Comphorare lit. Incense is raised. After praying and having finished the offer, crows are provided with some food and then alone the inmates the house would take up their lunch. Aadi Amavasai and Thai Amavasai call forth strenuous religious practices in the Tamil Country by the folks and they are observed with more devotion in the study area.
Neelakandap Pillaiyar and the Grant of Land:

At Muda Pulikkadu in the Peravourani Town the Temple of Tiruneelakandap Pillaiyar is a highly popular one. Pillaiyar in general in the State of Tamil Nadu is an endearing God to the devotees. Similarly the Pillaiyar at the foretold temple is held in great reverence by the people of the area.

We find often myths are associated with the deities. Neelakandap Pillaiyar is said to be a recipient of a piece of land in the following myth which is familiar in and around the study area.45

King Tulasendira’s minister of Thanjavur was affected by diabetes. In order to get treatment for it he was travelling to Tiruperundurai via Peravourani with his men. As night approached he had to take sheter under a Bodhi tree with them. He, by chance looked at a pair of devotees performing poojas to the Neelakantap Pillaiyar located at Endhal nearby Peravourani. A large crowd was also waiting at that place. The minister told the pair of devotees about his disease. They did prayer to the
Pillaiyar and gave the vibuthi (sacred ash) to him saying that it he stayed there for the night and bath in the temple and worship the Pillaiyar, he would be cured of his diabetes. The minister did accordingly and to his surprise found that his complaint was completely over. The king on hearing this, donated some lands for the pillaiyar. Sometimes later Pillaiyar appeared in his dream and asked him for a piece of land for his pujas which Tulasendran granted. The land is called Sengollai situated now near the Peravouran Railway station. In due course a temple was created therein and poojas are performed till now. The temple referred to above was renovated and the Maha Kumbabisheham (anointing of the temple Kalasam atop the vimana or Gopura) was made on 09.02.2000. During Sundays classes on spiritual matters are conducted. Around twenty students attend to them. The classes are conducted out of the intention to familiarize the younger generation with the religious and cultural knowledge ingredients of our land and also to inculcate moral sense into them in addition to understanding our traditional excellences at least to a certain extent. This kind of thing is rather unusual but essential at the present context of deterioration of moral aptitude among the youngsters and also the elders possibly, remarked the informants.
More significant is the fact that this temple attracts more number of functions involving marriages, earboring, and nichayathartham (confirmation). It comes to be known that around sixty marriages are performed at a particular day.

In the Peravurani Taluk temples abound such as Arulmigu Balasubramaniyar, Prasanna Venkatesapperumal, Muthumariamman and Oushadapureeswarar. Among them the last named one deserves special mention for various reasons particularly for the medicinal contexts and connotations.

**Medicinal Perspectives**

Oushadam in Sanskrit means medicine. The very name Oushadapureeswarar stands for all that is conducive to wards hygienic human affairs. The area in which the temple of Oushadapureeswarar is filled with various kinds of medicinal plants and shrubs. Some of them are Sombara, Brahmathandu, Pappadam, Neeli, Ammam Paccharisi. More than forty kinds of medicinal plants are available here. They are said to be highly powerful in curing even the risky and serious diseases. What is
interesting is the change of the name Ooushadapureeswarar into Marundheeswarar in Tamil, by which the locality was called Marundhappallam. In due course it attained the distorted name of Marungappallam. Symbolically God himself serves as a kind of medicine curing the diseases connected with human soul. Guided by astrologers and Kanda Josyam, People from distant regions come for worshipping the Marundeeswarar and to get rid of their woes. As an instance some years back a couple by name Chokoumoto, Mosakou from Japan thronged to this temple and lit one Thousand eight ahals and prayed the Marundheeswarar so as to get relieved of their orthopedic complaints; Informed sources revealed this.

It is assumed that there is a hoard of treasure underground this campus. Pon kitaana an dement of gold and Kuvai the allay for melting gold are some of the materials availabe here. Royal officials in the past might have frequented this area. This is evident from the names like Aranmanaith Thoppu, Maniyakkaran Thoppu, Maniyakkaran Kuttai and so on.
Miscellaneous

In the census records of India 2001, the above-mentioned area has been marked as a holy place. It shot into publicity after Mr. M. Karunanidhi made frequent visits and wrote his the article work named, ‘Puthaiyal’ (hidden treasure).

Eye Catching Manora

It is a beautiful historical monument located at Sarabendra Rajan Pattinam near by Mallippattinam. Called as Manora it attracts both the local and foreign tourists since about two centuries. The background from the construction for this turner (minaret) like structure is historical.

It was the ambition of the British empire to bring the world under its control. France with its emperor Napaleon Bonoparte posed a challenge to the British, since Napaleon had a well equipped force behind him to subdue any foe. Far beyond the expectations, Napaleon was defeated at waterloo by the British forces and it marked a turning point in the annals of British history. Since the Marattha ruler Serfoji II of Thanjavur at that time was friendly with the British he decided to create a
monument to celebrate the victory of the British. The result, was the construction of this Manora in 1814.

The Manora as its name indicates is a minaret styled on the Kumbha architecture. Its height is 22.30 mts. (75 feet). It is nine storeyed and in sexo genal (leadings steps) shape with surrounded by strong parapet walls and trenches it at times served as the resting place for the Marattha ruler. The British were highly pleased with it. The Manora at the Sarabendra Rajan Pattinam has now become one of the coastal tourist attractions in Tamil Nadu.