CHAPTER - III

CUSTOMS
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From time immemorial different races of mankind had an inner urge to preserve their identity in some way or other. Such identities were expressed by customs. Men belonging to different continents were blessed with rich resources provided by nature and they also experienced the fury and wrath of nature from time to time. These occasions made people believe the importance of nature. Most of the civilisations of people are associated with various river banks like Nile, Indus etc. Initially people started worshipping nature and made offerings to nature for the sake of prosperity and protection. So the necessity made them to see the different forms of nature like sun, rain, air, fire and earth as their protectors and started to worship them systematically. These beliefs or customs had values and desired results were obtained. Thus customs were concerned with constant and fundamental needs of society. People practiced customs regularly and passed them on assiduously to the subsequent generations and over the years they formed into traditions.

By tradition is meant the sum of all the ideas, habits and customs that belong to a people and are transmitted from generation to generation. It has not inaptly been described as the social heritage, for its mode of operation closely resembles that of biological heredity. Like the former it moulds actions and determines behaviour, like the latter it is essentially a principle of continuity, and transmits to future ages the achievements of the past.

Different races of mankind have tried to maintain their identity by practising their own customs and traditions. The uninterrupted observance of these customs and traditions proved to be beneficial. It had the effect of saving new generations from having to re-learn by a costly process of trial and error what has been learnt by former generations.

"Social customs and institutions have a new dignity and value to those who regard them as expressions of the communal will and the crystallizations of the communal experience. They are the self expressions of the racial genius and are designed to secure the greatest good of the greatest number. Sister Nivedita has well called custom 'the jewel casket of humanity'"\(^2\)

Not even a single one of the Hindu customs, however unimportant and simple, is without a religious basis or principle behind it. Therefore the Hindus hold that their customs and usages are inviolable though they appear to be meaningless and unintelligible at the present moment. Essentially religious, the customs and usages prevalent in the land are, in

\(^2\) P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, *South Indian Customs* (New Delhi, 1985), Foreword.
the opinion of Hindus as sacred as religion itself⁴. One of the most strategic contrivances made use of by the early Hindus for preserving their custom had been that of wrapping them up with ceremonies, which provide a strong impression on the senses and communicate something holy to the practice. Consequently ceremonies are rigorously observed⁴. The Hindu legislators of old had the good sense to give stability to these customs and regulations by associating them with many outward ceremonies, which, by fixing them in the minds of the people, ensured their more faithful observance⁵.

Source materials for the study of customs of ancient castes and tribes are only limited. Several foreign scholars have collected details of castes, habits and customs during the advent of the British. Abbe Dubois, Francis Buchanan and Edgar Thurston are prominent among them. Abbe Dubois' work, "Hindu Manners Customs and Ceremonies" deal mainly with Brahmin traditions. Francis Buchanan's travelogue "A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar" (3 volumes) give detailed account of the occupation of the people and refers to Brahmin traditions to a large extent. Edgar Thurston, for the first time has collected manners and customs of south Indian castes and tribes in a methodical way. He has dealt with manners and customs and physical character of more than three hundred castes and tribes.

⁴ Ibid., Preface.
⁵ B.N. Banerjee, Hindu Culture Custom and Ceremony (New Delhi, 1979), p.142.
representing more than 40,000,000 individuals and spread over an area exceeding, 1,50,000 square miles. His writings of Thuluva vellalas and their customs are very meagre. The interviews conducted with senior members of the community brought out informations regarding the various customs and traditions of the Thuluva vellala community. The literature provided by the Thuluva vellala associations were also useful in this collection of customs and traditions. The exact date of the origin of these customs are difficult to determine. Many of the customs got stabilised over the years inspite of change of time and place. Some of the customs have become extinct due to hurried nature of the life and modern concepts of the present day. Hence a proper recording of the social customs becomes all the more essential from the point of view of social history.

Customs and traditions are practiced initially at the single unit level, namely a family consisting of father, mother and children. In a simple way its starts from the respect and regard shown to the father, the head of the family by the mother and other family members. Further it developed into groups respecting the chieftain of a village, honouring him on special days etc. or even in a joint family with two or three generations living under a single roof observing certain protocols. Gradually it broadened with new arrivals, through marriages for the kith and kins. In a man’s life the customs and traditions dawns right from birth.

6 Edgar Thurston and K.Rangachari, Castes and Tribes of Southern India Vol.I (New Delhi, 1987), Introduction, Page XIII.

7 Ibid., Vol.VII (New Delhi, 1987), Pages 381 to 385.
In the modern set up the presence of Thuluva vellalas spread to the entire Tamilnadu with density of high order in some districts and scattered or low in others. Chennai, North Arcot and Chenglepet districts have greater number of Thuluva vellala population. Karnataka, Andhra, Maharashtra are some of the states where Thuluva vellala have settled for the sake of business and other professional compulsions. But still the heritage of Thuluva vellala is vividly seen by their customs and traditional approach made at various occasions like marriages, festivals etc. These customs help them to maintain their identity at places far away from their home namely Tamilnadu. It is worth mentioning here the views of Abbe Dubois on the people's firm commitment to observance of customs.

"Even when they migrate or travel from one province to another, native of India, never throw off what I may call the characteristics of their natal soil. In the midst of their new surroundings they invariably preserve their own language and customs."

8 Ibid., p. 373.

9 The Associations of the Thuluva Vellalas are functioning at 31, Osborne Road, Bangalore - 560 042, 230/3, R.T. Vijayanagar Colony, Hyderabad - 500 054 and at C-3, Kumar Co-op Housing Soc. Ltd., Vakola Mumbai - 400 055.

The social customs of the Thuluva vellalas are many. They are found in every stage of the life of the individual right from the cradle to the grave. The customs can be broadly divided into three important stages. The first stage begins with the birth of a child, passes through the earboring ceremony and ends with 'Manjal Nirattu' if the baby is female. The marriage ceremonies form the second part. The death rites form the third and last stage.

The birth of a child especially the first one or first issue for the parents was considered as a great event in the household of Thuluva vellalas. Though subsequent issues were of equal importance pomp is attached to the first issue called 'Thalaichan' referring to the first position in the family hierarchy. It is more so because the first child gives the status of parenthood which is held in high esteem in the society. Of all the wealth that a man could acquire in life begetting wise children is regarded as the foremost.

"I know of no greater blessing than one's children, who grow with well-instructed discernment"11

According to Hindu religious tradition, husband and wife have a sacred duty to conceive a child especially a son. The son is called putra-one who releaves the parent from 'put' or hell. The rite of marriage (vivaha) contains

prayers with this object in view. In Hindu society, therefore, barrenness is considered to be the worst-evil, one that has to be counteracted by all possible means.\textsuperscript{12}

After delivery the mother and the newborn would be kept in seclusion for a stipulated period. This only shows how they were treated scientifically to avoid any possible infection. Family traditions concerning child care are mainly transmitted through women from one generation to another from grand-mothers and mothers-in-law to mothers, and from mothers to daughters from early childhood onwards. There is a great deal of magico-religious significance underlying the customs and gestures that mothers use when nursing or caring for their babies. The oilbath is of great importance in the Hindu tradition. The mother sits on the ground, the baby lying on her outstretched legs, sometimes on its back, sometimes on its stomach. A light massage of the eyes and head using oil is followed by a massage of the whole body.\textsuperscript{13} Afterwards a paste made of beans is applied. This is followed in turn by a heavy sprinkling of lukewarm water on both the head and the body. The water is meant to purify both the body and mind of the child. And just when this activity is over, the mother makes an odd gesture. Holding the pot containing water, the mother quickly makes three circular

\textsuperscript{12} Julia Leslie (ed), Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women (New Delhi, 1992), p.90.

\textsuperscript{13} Phaseolous Mungo, Linnaeus (Pachai Payaru; Tamil) is commonly used.
movements around the body of the baby before throwing away the water contained in the pot. The practice is believed to cast away the evil eye and is apparently of magico-religious origin. After the bath, the baby’s scalp and body are dried and perfumed with incense smoke. The basis of this custom is that fire and fumigations had the power to drive away evil spirits, disease etc. The procedure of bathing the baby would not be complete without the child swallowing a herbal mixture which is believed to protect it from the small ailments common to this age group: chills, cough, worms, dysentery and stomach-ache. Numerous decoctions prepared for infants are composed of medicinal plants, garlic, betel, dry ginger and so on. The child, boy or girl, is then dressed up. ‘Ink for the eyes’ (Kanmai) is applied around each eye in order to make them stronger and more beautiful. In the case of girls, a beauty mark is placed in the forehead. In the case of both girls and boys a round black spot (dirstippottu) is painted on one cheek. The latter is a special mark intended to protect babies from the evil eye. The sanskrit word denoting evil eye (drsti) comes from the verbal root meaning ‘see’ or look. When all these procedures are over black bangles are worn round their wrist. A black string made of cotton is tied at their wrist. Insistence on black colour is because of the fact that it is considered an unattractive colour and is believed to repel, any hostile glance. Later these black ornaments would be exchanged for real jewels made of silver or gold, according to the economic status of the family\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{14} Julia Leslie (ed), \textit{Roles and Rituals for Hindu Women}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.99-100.
After the stipulated period of seclusion which is usually ten days, on the eleventh day a ceremony called punyatchanam is performed. Both the mother and the child are given bath. The brahmin priest is called to the house. The woman who has just been confined shall hold the child in her arms and move along with her husband to take her seat on an elevated platform. The brahmin priest pours a small quantity of the consecrated sacred Ganges water into the hands of the father and mother of the child. They drink a portion and pour the rest over their heads as a kind of blessings to them. The priest also sprinkles this water over the whole house and all who are living in the house. The priest is then presented with some gifts and offerings for commissioning prayers for the baby and the whole family. Usually in the evening of the same day or on an auspicious day the cradling ceremony is performed. This is a part of the custom of the Thuluva vellalas popularly called 'Thottil Iduthal' before placing the child in the wooden cradle decorated with flower and in a bed made of soft clothes, the child is placed in a basket with paddy straw. Cradling ceremony is performed in the mother's place. From paternal side presentations were given in the form of jewellery, clothing etc. The honour of placing the child in the cradle is invariably given to the eldest sumangali in the family. The invitees are usually close relatives. Thuluva vellalas have a special custom of giving a small amount of gingelly oil, aricanut powder and sweets to the
people when they extend the invitation for the cradling ceremony. On that
day naming of the child also takes place. Name of the child is usually
selected from among the names of gods, goddesses or fore fathers which also
should suit the birth star of the child\textsuperscript{15}.

Following the cradling ceremony is earboring ceremony and tonsuring
the head. The tonsuring and earboring customs provide a chance to involve
people of other communities in the society and thereby underlying the need
to preserve a harmonious society. The earboring and tonsuring ceremony is
usually conducted in the temple of the family deity (Kula deivam). The
function is carried out before the child completes one year. Otherwise it is
postponed to the third year. Barber is engaged for tonsuring the head and
gold smith for earboring. The child is made to sit on the lap of the maternal
uncle. This is due to the familiarity of the child with, the maternal uncle
and similarly the uncle's concern for the child. During both the activities of
tonsuring and earboring adequate care is given to the child. Later the child
is given a bath and the tonsured head is given a coating of sandal wood
paste to cool and reduce the irritation and also act as an antiseptic.
Immediately after earboring kunkum is applied and a small stud or gold
ring is fixed. Barber and goldsmith were paid in cash and kind. The

\textsuperscript{15} Interview with Mrs.R. Manimegalai (Age : 80 years) Anna Nagar, Chennai - 40.
presentation given on the occasion by the maternal grand parents of the child were kept in plates called Varisai. Then the close relatives of the child who were invited to the ceremony offer the gifts. Here a kind of protocol is followed. Paternal and maternal grand parents followed by aunts and uncles offer gifts and blessings to the child. The two important acts performed during this occasion has its own significance. In the act of tonsuring the hair over a period of year is shown the hygienic way of living. Earboring amounts to stimulating the nerve centre with a similarity to acupuncture. The function concludes with a feast hosted by the paternal side\textsuperscript{16}.

A lull period for practicing customs is during the period from childhood to adolescence. Once again the practice of customs is exposed when a girl baby attained puberty. It is virtually unknown to a city born, the elaborate customary aspects connected and practiced by the community in villages and in semi-urban areas. When the girl attained puberty she is kept in a stipulated period of seclusion, with a strict schedule of rich diet followed by celebrations. Efforts are taken to make the girl understand physiological change and prepare her mentally and physically for the womanhood. The period of seclusion varies from five to eleven days. The

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
celebration popularly called 'Manjal Nirāttu' is held after the period of seclusion. Incidentally it amounts to the announcement of the eligible bride in the family. Once again the gifts to the girl comes from her maternal grand parents house in the form of 'Varisai. Nalangu is performed to the girl. The celebration is conducted with due importance to the maternal uncle and paternal aunt because the customary arranged marriages took place among cousins. The celebration comes to an end with the feast organised by the parents of the girl.\(^{17}\)

The next important event in the life of an individual is one's marriage. The purpose of marriage is continuity of the family. At various places and at various stages of human development, the institution of marriage came into existence in different forms. According to some anthropologist, marriage is almost always more than simply a legalized sexual union between a man and a woman and children born to the woman out of that union are the recognised legitimate offspring of both parents.\(^{18}\) To a Hindu marriage is the most important and most engrossing event of his life. It is a subject of endless conversation and of the most prolonged

\(^{17}\) Interview with Mrs.B. Soundari (Age : 65 years) Arcot, North Arcot District.

\(^{18}\) John Beattie, Other Cultures, Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology (New York, 1971), p.117.
preparations. They are not said to be husband and wife who merely sit together. Rather, they alone are called husband and wife who have one soul in two bodies. It is this joining of two individuals that happen is many different ways that form the basis of a wedding in India. What makes an Indian wedding more elaborate is the deep belief that it is not merely the union of two people, but of whole families all sharing joy in this relationship. As a result uncles, sisters, brothers and parents, all have critical roles to play in any Indian marriage.

"Marriage is a sacred duty for the Hindus except, of course, for men of those religious sects the rules of which require celibacy; no ordinary man is considered respectable until he is married and parents incur the antipathy of the gods and opprobrium in the eyes of their neighbours if they fail to marry off their daughter."

The present age, with its marvelous facilities for travel and consequent bringing together of peoples and races, is not favourable to the preservation of old customs. In fact, they are fast dying out every where,

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and, era long, most of them will be as dead as the mammoth, or other extinct monsters. Hence, it is highly desirable that the old customs connected with betrothal and marriage should be brought together and presented to the public in some convenient compact form.20

Regarding the marriage customs of the Thuluva vellalas, marriages were mostly arranged ones. Matching of horoscopes of bride and groom assumes importance in deciding the alliance. Generally it was termed as "poruthamparthal". Marrying among first issues is generally discouraged. The custom of marriage of one with a daughter of maternal uncle and the marriage of one with a daughter of paternal aunt does exist. Hindu law books are generally known as Dharma Sutras and Dharma Sastras. The Dharma Sastras refer to this custom. These marriage alliances are still in vogue in South India21. Once the final decision is made, to make it public a kind of agreement is made in a function called Nitchayathārtham (Betrothal). Once again 'Varisai' appears but on this occasion it is presented by the groom’s parents. The items presented exhibited the social and economic status of the groom’s family. The date of the wedding is announced by the purohit22.

20 M.N. Hutchinson, Marriage Customs of the World (New Delhi, 1978), Preface.
21 Dr.R. Nagaswamy (ed), South Indian History and Culture, Prof.V.R.Ramachandra Dikshitar Centenary Volume (Chennai, 1997), p.95.
22 Interview with Mrs.C.Sakunthala (Age : 70 years) Salem.
In the past marriage celebrations of the people of Thuluva vellala community were conducted for five days. But realising the importance of time, constraint of resources and the spreading of people to distant places from home town made it to cut short into three days. The present day expectation to present everything in a capsule with less consumption of time applies to the conduct of marriages as well. But in a traditional set up the commencement of the marriage was marked by 'Pandakkāl', a kind of anchoring or forming a base for the stage. The bride is taken to the side of the dais where the marriage is to be performed and seated for the conduct of the ritual ‘Nalangu’ by the women folk from both bride and grooms side. Later Nalangu is performed to the groom at his residence. During, this period in the groom’s house certain things essential for the wedding day is prepared. A cotton saree, deep red in colour with checked design called Kūraippudavai; a dhoti and towel were dipped in water mixed with turmeric powder and dried in shade. Later a big sized coconut with fibre intact is prepared in a traditional way. This coconut is called the ‘Muhūrtha thenkāi’. It is neatly done with turmeric coating and kumkum applied on it. A long thread made out of 108 cotton fibrils coated with turmeric paste is taken and the "Thirumāṅgalayam" with markings inscribed as per family traditions is inserted into the thread and the thread is tied with two knots around the coconut. Later this ‘Muhūrtha thenkāi’ with clothes that have been prepared for the marriage and four small sized lavender garlands were placed on a wooden plank and worshipped with offerings to God which
includes a sweet item. In another separate basket the following items were placed. Five coconuts, bananas, flowers, camphor, ghee, sacred thread and two small copper pots half filled with pepper in one and betelnut and turmeric in another. The mouth of these copper pots are neatly covered with clothes dipped in turmeric water. The bride is expected to bring these vessels in full when she enters the groom’s house. The brides party in an informal way arrives and invites the bridegroom and the best man usually the brother-in-law of the groom to the venue where marriage is to be performed. While accompanying the groom in a procession, a close relative, an elderly sumangali woman is assigned the job of carrying the saree, dhoti, towel, garlands and thirumanangalayam which were kept in an aesthetically designed wooden container called "Pettagam". The arrival of the bridegroom party in a procession is called "Māppillai alaippu". The Nayanam and thavil were the musical instruments played and the sound announces the arrival of the groom. The groom is received with "Ārathi". Nalangu for the groom and bride is followed. ‘Pettagam’ is handed over to the bride’s party.

On the wedding day the various sequences to be followed as part of the celebrations unfolds before sunrise, starting with Ennai Nalangu to the bridegroom. After a neat shave, groom comes to the dais and women from

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both the bride and groom's family apply gingelly oil on the head of the bridegroom as a prelude before taking bath. Likewise the act is repeated for the bride. The cloth worn by the groom and bride is handed over to the washerman. An elderly sumangali prepares pongal (boiled rice) which is called 'Manappongal' in two mud pots in front of the dais. After bath the bridegroom arrives at the dias and is seated with parents on his either side. The blessing of family gods are invoked and the bridegroom performs Pādapuja to his parents. He is made to wear the sacred thread by the priest officiating the marriage.

The next ritual in the Thuluva vellala marriage is called Kasiyātra (mock flight to Benares). The bridegroom with Cadjan (Palmleaf) and a bundle of rice on his shoulder pretend to be setting out to Benares, there to lead an ascetic life and the girl's brother, meeting him, performs Pādapuja to the groom, begs that he would accept the hand of his sister. The groom receives the dhoti, towel, garlands specified for the occasion and he is asked to wear them and come to the stage.

Meanwhile the purohit sets a port called Arasānīkkāl with five sumangalis and perform the ārathi. It is a branch of ficus religiosa supposed to represent the tree itself, bringing nature to participate in the act. Then the bride comes to dais and perform Pādapuja to her parents. She is presented the kūrappudavai and is asked to wear the wedding dress and come to the dais.
When both the bride and the groom have arrived they perform puja to the Manappongal which is placed in five plantain leaves and then they are taken to the dais and made to sit there with the bride seated on the right side of the groom. The parents of the bride does the "Kannikādānam" (gift of the virgin) or handing over the bride to the bridegroom. The sacred fire (homam) is prepared and worshipped with oblations of ghee, (clarified butter) the blessings of god are invoked and a thread with a turmeric tied to it is tied round the Arasānikkāl. Similar threads are tied on the right wrists of the groom and the bride. This ceremony is called ‘Kāppu Kattuthal’. After getting blessings from elders the thirumāṅgalyam or ‘Thāli’ is tied with three knots to the neck of the bride by the bridegroom at the most auspicious time called Muhūrthancram already fixed by the priest. The sister of the bridegroom holds a traditional lamp. (Kamāṭchi Vilakku) on this occasion of the auspicious time. During this important event mangala isai (gettimelam) is played with Nagaswaram and thavil. This noise is intended to drown any sounds of weeping, sneezing, quarrelling etc. which are considered bad omens. The sanctity of performing a traditional and customary way of conducting a Thuluva vellala marriage comes to a grand finish24.

Certain other events follow which are intended to make the couple feel free and to associate with other members of the family. Thrice the couple exchange their garlands. Aunt, uncle and sisters tie a small token

24 Ibid., p.27.
like structure made of gold on the forehead of the bride and groom called "pattam". Then the bride is made to sit on the left side of the groom. Elders in the family come to the dais and offer their blessings by holding a hand full of rice and slips it through fingers steadily. This is called the "seshā ceremony". This rite brings to our mind a parallel picture referred to in the Sangam work Akanānuru. The rice is later given to the washerman. Then the couple go round the sacred fire in a clockwise direction for three times. While doing so the bridegroom does certain rituals like putting a metti (silver ornament) on the second toe of the bride by placing her feet on a black grinding stone called ammi, showing the direction of star Arundhati to her and presenting a gold ring called 'pori mōdhiram' to the bride's brother. Again the couples led by the groom's sister holding a lamp with number of young girls having small earthen pots full of grains go round the homam. She and the young girls must be gifted some money by the parents of both the bride and the bride groom. Finally the couple will be taken to the rest room and offered milk and fruit. This act is a sort of breaking the fast, the couple were subjected to from the morning of the day. Once again the couple comes to the dais and removes the kāppu that was

25 Akanānuru 86' 15-16.

26 The bride is exhorted to be as fixed in constancy as the stone, on which her foot has been thus placed.

27 Arundhati was the chaste and devoted wife of Vasishta Rishi and when the couple look at this star they make a vow that they too will live like Vasishta and Arundhati.
tied on the beginning of the ceremony. This ritual is called ‘Kāppu Kalaidhal’. This act declares the completion of the function. The invitees to the wedding offer their gifts called ‘moi’ to the bride and bridegroom. A grand feast is served to the invitees by the bride’s family.

It is easy to see the allegorical meaning of most of the ceremonies which are the most solemn and important of the whole proceedings. The kaniyādāna for instance, typifies the handing over of the girl by the father to the son-in-law and the renunciation of paternal authority over her. The son-in-law for his part fastens the tāli round his wife's neck to show that he accepts the gift, and that from henceforth she is his property. The sacrifice of the homam and the thrice repeated circuit of the newly married couple round the fire are a mutual ratification of the contract they have just made with one another, for there is no more solemn engagement than that entered into in the presence of fire, which Hindus look upon as the purest of their gods, and which for this reason they always prefer to any other when they wish to make an oath specially binding. The ceremony of the seshā is the outward expression of the wish that they may enjoy an abundance of this world's goods, or that their union may be fruitful, or perhaps both.

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28 Interview with Mr. N. Vedachalam (Age: 75 years) Chrompet, Chennai - 44.

Some other practices are included in the wedding day with the intention of making the married couple come closer and understand each other. One such act is making the couple to put their hands simultaneously and search for certain articles like a ring, kept in a big pot filled with water. Finally, according to family traditions all the close relatives of the family, married couple and their parents assemble and thamboolam (Coconut betel nut, betel leaves, fruits and clothes) is distributed. Here a definite protocol is followed. First thamboolam is exchanged among the parents of the couple. Then the newly married couple are presented the thamboolam. The best man is specially honoured. Next comes the representatives of the families that had already entered into matrimonial alliances with the family of the bride and bridegroom. All others who assisted in the conduct of marriage were also thanked and due presentations given to them. They were the purohit who conducted the marriage, the gold smith who made the thirumáñgalayam, the potter who made the mud vessels necessary for the marriage, the barber who did the shaving for the bridegroom and the washer man and his wife, whose duty was to pour necessary oil on the lamps in the dais and see to it that they burn continuously. This is a clear indication of co-operation and mutual understanding of the different communities in the society. Almost all these formed the duties of the bride’s party. In return at groom’s place a feast is
arranged subsequently called `Maruvirundu'. Nuptial ceremony is usually arranged in the bride's place. So the bride and bridegroom turns into wife and husband after the nuptials.

Customs once again surfaces when the girl becomes pregnant. In the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy a celebration called "Simandam" is conducted by the people of the Thuluva vellala Community. Once again varisai or line of gifts appear from the house of the girl's parents. Nalangu is performed to the pregnant girl. The girl arrayed in her wedding garments then stands in the middle of the pandal, bending forward her body and resting her hand on a wooden mortar which is placed before her and the ladies who are related to her on the husbands side take some milk in a spoon and in turn drop it on her shoulders. Feast is arranged by the groom's family. The parents of the girl takes her to their place after this function for delivery. The mother and child returns after three or five months. The first and second deliveries were always taken care by the girl's parents. But the third delivery takes place only in the groom's house. In a modern set up seldom a third pregnancy occurs. Then the attention of the parents in the years to come is directed towards the education of children and their welfare.

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30 Interview with Mr.N. Vedachalam (Age : 75 years) Chrompet, Chennai.

31 Interview with Mrs.B. Ramani (Age : 65 years) Chetpet, Chennai - 30.
So the saying that the child is the father of a man completes with one cycle. A child of yester years turns into an adult and continue to perform the duties. The circle to be completed invariably ends with death of an individual. Customs play a meaningful role in arranging the funeral and conducting various rituals connected to it. The set of rituals performed in the sad hours also identify the community. At the present day many Hindus disregard certain ceremonies, in the celebration of which their forefathers were most scrupulous. But many did not dare to abandon the death ceremonial, and annual Sradh ceremonial rite. The funeral ceremony is the greatest single important ritual of the Hindus to whom the value of the next world is higher than that of the present.

"The object of a Hindu funeral is nothing less than the investiture of the departed spirit with an intermediate gross body - a peculiar frame interposed, as it were parenthetically between the terrestrial gross body, which has just been destroyed by fire, and the new terrestrial body, which it is compelled to ultimately assume".\(^{32}\).

In the Thuluva vellala community when death occurs in a family, it is made known to the community by blowing a conch in the case of Saivites. This was performed by men belonging to a creed called pandarams. In the case of Vaishnavites the announcement is made by blowing the bugle by men belonging to a creed called dāsaris. Their role is to perform certain rites in the house where death has happened involving women and children who do not go over to the burial ground. They walk in front of the funeral procession, blowing the conch or the bugle as the case may be to the burial ground. His role comes to an end when the corpse is handed over to the Vettiyan (the official of the burial ground) either for burrial or cremation on the occurrence of death in a family, females collected together squatting around the dead body bewail the loss of the departed soul. Dead body is either buried or burnt. The Saivites follow the custom of burying the dead and the Vaishnavites follow the custom of cremating the dead. A lamp would be kept burning by the side of the dead. Performing the ritual is the prerogative of the eldest son in the event of mother's death and the youngest in the case of death of the father. The corpse being washed after rubbing on head some gingelly oil and expressed Illippe seeds, is habited in a new garment before being taken to the funeral ground. In the case of death of the woman the new garment is brought from her mother's house. Thus the bond with her maternal sides lasts till the last event in her life. In the case of death of a male member the garment is provided by the family members. In the event of the death of an elderly person, all grand
children hold ‘neipantam’ and go round the body. On the funeral day, according to customs the **sampanthis** of the family take up the duty of serving dinner. The second day is observed as ‘Pāl Iduthal’, when the ashes are collected in a pot and kept to be immersed in some sacred river or sea. If the dead body has been buried milk is sprinkled on the place of burial. Every day for sixteen days some offerings is made to the soul in the place where the corpse has been placed. On the seventh day of death the same is performed on a grand scale. On the fifteenth day night a ceremony called **Nadappu** is performed. The daughters and **sampanthis** offer sweets, fruits and other items to the departed soul in full plantain leaves. The wife of the departed soul is relieved of her **thirumāṅgalavam** and other symbols of a **sumangali** like **metti**, **tilak**, flowers etc. The sixteenth day ceremony is called **karumathi**. On that day the sons pay obeisance to the departed soul. This rite is usually performed on the river bed. The sons remove their moustache and have a clean shave done by the barber, for which he is paid. The ceremony is performed by the **purohit**. The sons are made to wear the sacred thread, which they remove after the performance of the rite. The **purohit** is paid in cash and in kind (rice, vegetables etc) for conducting the rituals. Finally the eldest son is made to wear a turban as if to mark that the future responsibilities of the family is passed on to his shoulders. The married sons of the family receive new garments from their inlaws which they wear after the ceremony. They are also presented new dress by their sisters who were married off. The sisters in turn receive new garments from their parental side. A feast is arranged on the sixteenth day and the period of pollution comes to an end.
During this period of sixteen days the family members abstain from performing the daily prayers, visiting temples or participating in any happy event. In the case of non-vegetarian families on the seventeenth day non-vegetarian food is cooked and eaten. The period of abstinence is restricted to three days for the daughters of the family who were married off. The surviving relatives continue to offer certain oblations in memory of the deceased on the anniversary of his/her death.

"The constant periodical performance of commemorative obsequies is regarded in the light of a positive and peremptory obligation. It is the simple discharge of a solemn debt to ones forefathers, a debt consisting not only in reverential homage, but in the performance of acts necessary to their support, happiness, and progress onward in the spiritual world. A man’s deceased, relatives, for atleast three generations, are among his cherished divinities, and must be honoured by daily offering and adoration or a nemesis of some kind is certain to over take his living family."34

33 Interview with Mr.A. Balakrishnan (Age : 78 years) Arcot, North Arcot District.

34 Edgar Thurston, Ethrographic Notes in Southern India, op. cit., p.132.
Thus customs have their role in every act of social life from birth to death. In various occasions of life, customs facilitate the individual to perform a balanced act thus doubling the joyous moments and reducing the sorrow in the hour of distress. What was seen in an individual life as customs, at a different scale it involved the caste as a whole. These occasions are marked as festivals. Customs and traditions webbed so intricately with festivals, they are reflected in every acts of daily life and on special occasions. The domestic functions and festivals had their lions share in expressing the customs practiced by the caste. These customs and traditions formed a chain and linked the generation.

"Festivals are in fact a cultural mirror of the life of the Hindus - their feelings, their sentiments, their beliefs, their aspirations, their values, their art, their dance, their music, their drama, their acts, their involvement."

Hindu festivals are mainly based on the seasonal fluctuations as well as religious mythology or legends. Some festivals are noted for their

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austerity and religious observances, while others are conspicuous for pageantry, some still combine both. It is but a truism when we say that the life of an orthodox Hindu consists in the observance of large number of feasts and festivities. The origin and rationale of most of these are lost in obscurity by the lapse of centuries. The traditional explanations found scattered in certain rare manuscripts, proverbs, sayings, nay even in some of the nursery rhymes of the Hindus have been lost and in the course of time are sure to be completely beyond the reach of humanity, if early steps are not taken to gather and preserve them.

Festivals paved the way for congregation and rejoice in one another’s company. People of Thuluva vellala community celebrate a number of festivals during the different months of the year. For Tamilians the year starts with the month ‘Chithirai’ and ends in Panguni. Under normal circumstances the first day of the Tamil New Year falls on 14th April of English Calendar. Almanac of the year is worshipped along with other deities on the Tamil New years day. Almanac or the Indian calendar is named Panchangam since it is comprised of five limbs, and they are (1) the Tithi, (2) The Vāram (3) The Nakshatram (4) The yogam and (5) The Karnam.

P.V. Jagadisa Ayyar, South Indian Festivities (New Delhi, 1982), Introduction.
A man desiring property pays attention to tithi, one desirous of long life understands everything about vāram or the days of the week. The nakṣatraṃs are resorted to be freed from sins and the voyam for obtaining immunity from disease. The karnam is said to secure for the observer success in all undertakings. Hence has arisen the proverb "wise men rule the stars". From time immemorial, the Hindu conception of an ideal life has been one of sacrifices and religious observances. They consequently desire to be posted with information as to the most suitable time for the observance of particular rites or ceremonies. This information is furnished by the Hindu astrologer and astronomer in their almanac called 'Panchāṅgam'. It is the common desire of the people to know in the beginning of the year the position of the various planets with reference to the sun and their effects on men, animals and plants on the earth of ours. They also want to know whether the position of the planet would bring them rains in the proper seasons to adjust their agricultural operations. So the customs of viewing the planetary influence over the earth by a study and the expounding of the statement reduced to writing by the astronomers arose among the people. It is but natural that the almanac was an essential item of worship in the New Year Day celebration of Thuluva vellalas who were essentially agriculturists. On the Tamil New Years day, offerings to God includes apart from the traditional ones, a unique

Ibid., p.69.

Ibid., p.66.
preparation called veppam poo pachadi. It is made of neem flower, jaggery, mango etc. It has a philosophical significance. The flowers symbolise bitterness. The flowers of bitterness blossom forth for the jivas to participate with the advent of the New Year. Let the jivas make it as palatable as possible and take the happenings during the year as light heartedly as they could. In the villages temple priests read out the important events, auspicious days, eclipses to occur, inauspicious times, likelihood of annual rainfall, hot summer days that are in the offering for the year from the almanac39.

In the second month Vaikāsi (May-June) occurs a festival connected to Saivites but confined and celebrated in certain regions alone. The festival is Vaikāsi Visagam and is celebrated in a grand manner in the abodes of Lord Muruga40. The fourth month Ādi which corresponds to July-August of the English Calendar is unique. This month experiences a different velocity of wind and is ideal for broadcasting of seeds. In fact there is a Tamil proverb ‘Ādipattam Thedividhai’ meaning month of Adi is ideal for sowing seeds which is attributed to this month by the agriculturists. The advent of seasonal changes and direction of wind also bring about certain diseases. Hence prayers to Amman deities supposed to be Goddess of protection from diseases. In every Thuluva vellala house they follow a

39 Interview with Mr. A. Annamalai (Age: 72 years) George Town, Chennai 79.

40 Ibid.
practice of making a porridge out of ragi flour and broken rice which was offered to the Amman god and later distributed to the poor people along with certain other side dishes. The eighteenth day of Ādi month is very important to people living on the river banks. Usually the rivers and rivulets will be in spate during this period. Worshipping the river and offerings to it are common. This festival is called Ādi Perukku. It is celebrated on the particular day, the 18th of Ādi and is not associated with any star or phase of the moon (nakshatra or tithi). The 'Ādipperukku' festival is a worship and a welcoming felicitation to the waters that begin to flow in and start the cultivation season. A chitrānnam (dishes of rice food) with more than half a dozen varieties are prepared in the house and on return from the river, all the people have a feast which is naturally a welcome change from the routine⁴¹.

Another important Viradam or vow practiced every year during this time is Varalakshmi viradam. This festival is celebrated on the last Friday of the bright fortnight in the months of Ādi which corresponds to the English month July - August. It is a festival to propitiate the Goddess Lakshmi, the concert of Vishnu, one of the Hindu Trinity. The history of the origin of Varalakshmi Viradam is rather interesting Lakshmi is said to have visited a pious women by name Charumathi living in the city of Kundinapura in Magadha (Bihar) in one of her dreams, and expressed her

⁴¹ M. Arunachalam, Peep into the cultural Heritage of Hinduism (Tanjore, 1982), p.76.
satisfaction at her devotion to her children. When she woke up from her sleep, she took bath and she worshipped Lakshmi to ensure her blessings. When the other ladies heard of her dreams and her worship of Lakshmi, they too began to worship her and the custom is then said to have spread everywhere throughout land in course of time. This festival is peculiar in the sense that a kalasam is set up in a copper pot and using turmeric paste the face of the deity is formed and adorned with flowers. It is placed under a small leafy canopy erected for the occasion. After the puja the female members of the house wear a red or saffron coloured thread on their right wrist.

Month of Ávani (August-September) witnesses the festivals of national level Vinayaka chaturti (celebration to Lord Ganesa) and Krishna Jayanthi (Birthday Celebration of Lords Krishna). Vinayaka chathurthi is observed on the fourth day in the bright fortnight of the month to obtain knowledge and success in all undertakings. There is not a single Hindu ceremony that commences without a puja to Lord Ganesa. The reason for this is obvious. Grit and strength of will are necessary for success in all undertakings. Intelligence also must play it part well. The trunk of this elephant headed god symbolises grit and strength of will, and the head of the elephant symbolises wisdom. So by worshipping Vinayaka, one makes

43 Interview with Mrs.C.J. Sathyabama (Age : 80 years) George Town, Chennai - 79.
up his mind, to use grit and strength of will wisely, in the undertaking he is going to set his hands to. The whole family rises at dawn, anoints with oil and bathes. A new plaster image of the deity riding on his stead, a rat, is often bought annually and consecrated and is immersed in water at the close of the festival. As Lord Vinayaka is supposed to be very fond of rice puddings, these dishes are cooked on a large scale in every Thuluva vellala house and offered to God. On Krishna jayanthi day many delicacies are prepared and especially milk and milk products are offered to Lord Krishna.

The month of Purattāsi, (September - October) is exclusive and connected to Lord Venkateswara of seven hills situated in Tirupathy, Andhra Pradesh. Especially all the Saturdays of this month are considered sacred. It is worth mentioning in this context, that Tirupathy was one of the four sub-divisions of Thiruvengada Kottams, one of the 24 kottams of Tondaimandalam. The temple of lord Venkateshwara at Tirupathi was constructed by king Thondaman. In Thuluva vellala families offerings are made to the God on a grand scale in one of the Saturdays of this month.

45 Interview with Mrs.C.J. Sathyabama (Age : 80 years) George Town, Chennai 79.
Another very important festival spreading for a period of 9 days and exclusively connected to the 9 nights in worshipping the three different forms of goddess as Lakshmi, Parvathi and Saraswathi is known as Navarathri celebrations. Stressing the need to evoke the blessings to get strength, wealth and wisdom form the part of the festival. The ninth day of the festival is called Ayuda puja. The festival is unique in the sense that on this day the object of worship is not any God or Goddess but implements. All men does reverence to the tools and implements of their profession, the writer to his pen, the mason to his trowel and so forth. Tenth day is Vijayadasami, a victorious one where evil is destroyed. This day is considered auspicious for starting of new ventures in the field of education, fine arts, business etc. During these ten days people arrange a ‘kolu’ where dolls are exhibited. Thulava vellalas celebrate Navarathri with pomp but the arrangement of ‘Kolu’ is not figuring as a must.47

In the month of Aipasi (October - November) once again a national festival Deepavali is celebrated. A demon Narakasura is said to have been destroyed by Sri Krishna on that day and the festival is intended to commemorate the incident. Deepavali is one of the most important events in the calendar in Tamilnadu. People of all classes look forward to this day for a period of happiness and satisfaction. The festival occurs on the night of the 14th day of dark fortnight called chaturdasi of Aippasi month.

47 Interview with Mr. Sivaraj (Age : 70 years) Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai-41.
On the day of the Deepavali feast every Hindu gets up at about 4'0 clock in the morning and bathes in oil before sun rise. From the baby to eldest member in every Hindu household every male and female has to go through this oil bath before sunrise. Bath taken at this time is equated with having taken bath in the Ganges river held in high esteem by pious Hindus. The newly wedded couple are invited to the house of the parents of the bride and there they celebrate their first Deepavali after the wedding with great rejoicing. The bridegroom is the recipient of many presents besides clothing on this day. The people of the Thuluva vellala community perform Kedareeswara Nonbu on this occasion. Like the Varalakshmi Viradam, a kalasam in prepared in a copper pot, and the face of the Goddess is made on it with turmeric paste and adened with the flowers and it is placed under a small leafy canopy erected for the purpose. Offerings are made to Gouri the concert of Lord Siva and the red or saffron colour thread is tied to all members in the family. Adirasam a sweet item made from a mixture of riceflour and jaggery is a must for this occasion. Some Thuluva families do not have the tradition of preparing a kalasam at home but they would take the nonbu threads to the temple, get it sanctified there and later wear the same. The festival going by the name of Skandasashti is observed by the people of the community on the sixth day of the bright fortnight in this month of Aippasi. The observance is to propitiate lord Subramaniya, the second son of Siva in his aspect of Kameswara for having overcome and destroyed the asura called Surapadma and his followers. This
festival is celebrated with great reverence at Thiruchendur, one of the six abodes of Lord Subramaniya, the place of occurrence of the war between the God and the Asura and subsequently the victory of the Lord over the demon.\textsuperscript{48}

In the month of \textbf{K\text{\textae}rthigai} (November - December) the \textbf{Deepam festival} is celebrated by the people of the community. It falls on the fullmoon day of this month. The main concept of this festival is propitiation of Agni (fire) and all the houses are profusely lighted and illuminated after sunset. The reason why fire is given prominence is furnished in the allegorical and deeply spiritual myth in which Lord Siva, one of the Hindu trinity, is said to have appeared in the form of a pillar of fire to teach the creative and preservative aspects - Brahma and Vishnu the knowledge of infinity beyond time, space and limit on this particular occasion. Thiruvannamalai is a sacred place of the Hindus where thousands of people throng on karthigaideepam day for celebration of the festival.\textsuperscript{49} People fast for the whole day and take their food only after this Jotidarsan. A special offering is made to Siva on this day, consisting of fried or puffed rice mixed with treacle. Karthigai festival has been the most ancient among the Tamil festivals dating to pre-Sangam times and it was the ancient Tamil

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Interview with Mr.W.T. Balakantham (Age 65 years), Chetpet, Chennai - 30.
equivalent of the north Indian Deepavali. Saint Sambandar refers to this ancient celebration at the famous temple of Kapāliswarar at Mylapore.

The month of **Margali** (December - January) is very important for both Saivites and Vaishnavities of the community. Young girls practice **Pāvai Nonbu** during this month especially to be blessed with good life partners. Thiruppāvai the religious hymns sung in praise of Lord Vishnu by Andal one of the twelve alwars and Thiruvenbāvai the religious hymns sung in praise of Lord Siva by Thiru Gnana Sambandar one of the sixty three nayanmars were recited during this month. The early bhajans, mist, ozone filled air makes a serene atmosphere highly conducive for religious activities. It is believed that of twleve months in a year, Lord Krishna identified himself with the month of **Margali**. **Vaikunta ekādesi** or **Mukkootu ekādesi** as it is called, is observed on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight in the month of Margali. The observance of the **viradam** could secure freedom from birth and death and liberation from bondage. The observance of **viradam** consist in rigid fasting followed by the worship of Vishnu. People also do not sleep the wholenight. The Hindu festival going by the name **"Bhogi Pandigai"** is observed in the last day of this month. It is the last day of the **Dakshināyana** or the period of sun’s southernly

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51 *Tirumurai*, 2: 47.3.

52 *The Bhavadgita*, Chapter 10, Text 35.
The day is also one, which precedes "Makara Sankrānti" the occasion when the sun enters capricorn. The festival is observed in honour of Indira on elephant, the god of the heavens who is supposed to control the clouds and usher into the world seasonal rains causing thereby abundance of prosperity in the country.

The term Bhogi Pandigai means "The festival of physical enjoyment". The name had its origin perhaps from the bringing in of the harvest which is the source of all enjoyment. The ryots have then their well earned rest after a period of strenuous exertion in the fields, for raising crops and bringing in the harvest. Moreover, it is the commencement of the Hindu marriage season. At any rate the festival is considered to be the harbinger of the coming period of marriage and enjoyment, and is consequently observed by the people in a fitting manner. A good deal of scrubbing and cleaning goes in all the houses. Prior to day break on the festive day, the dust and rubbish accumulations of the past year are swept out and burnt. The houses present a smart and tidy look. As the northerly course of the sun commences, the six months beginning from that date go by the name of Uttarāyanam and the occasion itself is called Uttarāyana punyakalam.

Month of Thai (January - February) is the month of harvest, a month so near and dear to agriculturists. Thuluva vellalas celebrate the festival of

Pongal in this month. There is a proverb that Thai always helps people to find the way out, for the cultivator, for the indebted, for the unemployed, for maids to be married and many more. Thai offers solutions. This only signifies the relative affluence in which the month places every one. The first day of this month is celebrated as Thai Pongal. Newly harvested rice is first cooked and the preparation goes by the name Pongal. In villages it is done at the courtyard of the house which is a sine-quo-non in all houses of a South Indian village. It is for this reason that the festival is called Pongal in the south of India, the word being derived from Pongaradhu in Tamil signifying to boil. Figuratively it is to swell up with joy. Parents bless their daughters, and brothers wish their sisters, and send them not paper greetings, but presents of some of the good things of life and try to light up their home. Women folk today remember on this occasion the homes of their birth with joy and bride. The festival is specially dedicated to the sun. The second day is given the name of Mattu Pongal from the custom of cooking pongal for the cow to feed on. Cattle form the chief asset of an agriculturist and consequently it is but proper that their services during the year are recognised. On the third day of the festival it is customary for the people of the community to visit friends and relatives.

The festival of Mási Magam which occurs in the month of Mási (February-March) is confined to certain areas. Mahamagam occurs once in

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54 Interview with Mr.A.J. Janarthanam (Age : 78 years) Natham Village, Madhuranthagam, Chengleput District.
twelve years and thousands throng to Kumbakonam in Tanjore district for the celebration of the festival. The idols of Kumbeswarar temple are brought to the Mahamagam tank for a dip and elaborate rituals are practiced. **Mahasivaratri** is observed on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight of **Mási**. It means the night of Siva and the ceremonies take place chiefly at night. This fast is said to have been observed by a powerful king named Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvakudynasty, who ruled over the whole of Jambu-Dwipa, another ancient name for India. On this day a celebrated deformed sage, Ashta Bakra, came to his court with some pupils and finding him fasting asked the reason. The king said that in his previous birth he had been a hunter and one day while searching for game, he shot at a deer, but was overtaken by darkness. He climbed to the top of a bel tree for safety. Thinking of his wife and children who were without food he wept bitterly. His tears fell, together with bel leaves onto a linga at the foot of the tree. Lord took it as offerings made to Him. The next day the hunter with the food he bought after selling the deer returned home. When the hunter and his family were commencing the meal a stranger arrived and he was first fed according to custom. The hunter lived for many years without knowing that he had by chance fasted on the day of Sivaratri, but when the hour of death drew near, two messengers from Lord Siva appeared to conduct his soul to paradise, and he learnt that it was reward for having fasted on **Sivaratri**. His soul remained in various heavens until it reached the highest, and he was afterwards reborn in high rank as a king. He was
gifted with the knowledge of his previous life. Pious Hindus abstain from food and drink during the day and at night worship God Siva by dropping water with bel leaves onto the emblem of Siva. The recital of the story of the hunter during the night is believed to give much merit to the listeners.\footnote{55}{C.H. Buck, \textit{Faiths, Fairs and Festivals of India}, op. cit., pp.84-85.}

\textbf{Panguniuthiram} of the month of \textit{Panguni} (March - April) is another festival practiced by Thuluva vellalas. The religious significance of the function is that the marriage of Lord Siva with Sakthi is supposed to have taken place at this time. It falls on the fullmoon day of this month. \textbf{Rama navami} or birth of Rama is celebrated in this month on the ninth day of brightfortnight. Lord Rama, the hero of the epic \textit{Ramayanam} personification of highest virtues won victory over the demon Ravananan. Prayers to Lord Rama on Rama navami is believed to bring both wealth and wisdom to the family.\footnote{56}{P.Sri, \textit{Vizha, Viratham, Pandigai} (Chennai, 1960), p.87.}

The year long festivals are mostly either directly or indirectly connected to mother nature. The necessity to live with nature and more so not to tamper with nature is emphasized in these festivals. Thus the ceremonies and festivals of the people of the Thuluva vellala community are many. Festivals are fountains of joy for all. They exist in all countries, in all levels of society, in all races, and had been existing through all ages. If man has been described as a social animal, festivals are the occasions for a
close and joyous coming together for the members of the social group and they give full expression to the social instinct. Festivals are the outward social expression of the communal joy of the people and they have helped to retain the best in the past culture, and by the celebrations in the present hand it down to the future generations. The customs and traditions of a community and the various festivals celebrated by it go a great way in shaping its culture.

Culture is the adherence to certain mental and spiritual values which had been handed down in a race through several centuries or even millennia. Culture is acquired through family training, religious belief, education, tradition and literature and art. Culture is a subtle instrument shaping man in self control and restraining him from self indulgence. It cures him from meanness, dishonesty and cruelty. It is culture that makes community life pleasant and radiates joy in social life. Culture is now defined as "an extra somatic means of adaptive systems that is employed in the integration of a society with its environment and with other socio-cultural systems. Hence we have to agree that like environment evoke like cultural responses."

57 M. Arunachalam, Peeps into the Cultural Heritage of Hinduism, op. cit., p.74.

Thuluva vellalas being basically an agricultural community hailing from fertile plains naturally have many festivals, functions and ceremonies that are associated with agriculture. It is a recognised element of national psychology that when a society is on the defence it cherishes every inherited tradition and holds fast to all things good and bad which it has inherited. Conservation becomes a national virtue; the maintenance of what has been a point of national honour. Each unit of society in their own way and interest maintain the customs by conducting the festivals in their life journey. So is the case for Thuluva vellalas too.

Belief in the Supreme Being is an ancient concept. What started as worship of nature gradually developed through the ages into worship of tuteleries and religions with well defined codes and principles. Agriculture being the main occupation of vellalas had necessitated the worship of earth, rain, wind, sunlight etc. The vellalas called themselves as sons of soil. Epigraphic evidences throws light on the fact that the vellalas had raised temples for goddess of earth. Thuluva vellalas being the offshoot of the main stock the vellalas naturally worshipped these forces of nature which is expressed in the various festivals celebrated by them. Later when well

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defined religious sects like Saivism and Vaishnavism developed vellalas keeping in tune with the advances in religion began to practice the traits of those religions.

**Sivagnanabodam**, one of the fourteen texts of Saiva Siddhantha principles was authored by Meikandar who was a vellala. Among the sixty three Nayanmars who rendered service to Saivism thirteen belonged to the vellala class. Of the thirteen Nayanmars four hailed from Tondaimandalam region. They were Thirunāvukkarasar, Mūrkkar, Chakkiyār and Vayilār. Periapuranam the Tamil literary work on an epic pattern which gives detailed account of the life and services of sixty three Nayanmars was written by Sekkilar who was a vellala from Tondaimandalam.

In the community of Thuluva vellalas there are followers of both Saivism and Vaishnavism. Epigraphic evidences mention the endowments made by the members of the Thuluva vellala community to many saivite temples. Since 1882, every year in a particular day the members of the community conduct puja in the temple of Lord Subramaniya at

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Thiruchendur. Ramiah pillai in his book Thuluva velālar varalāru had brought out the written deed of the members of the community which refers to the maintenances of a mutt in Palani hills. The members of the Thuluva vellala community have played a keyrole with regard to the temple of Lord Siva called Kapālīswarar temple in Mylapore. As early as 16th century Muthiappa Mudaliār son of Nainiappa Mudaliār had contributed to the construction of the temple and its maintenance. An association of Thuluva vellalas called Poonamallee Uyar Thuluva vellala Association has been sending two trustees and one Overseer from its members for the management of the temple since as early as 1862. This practice continued even when there were changes in the temple administration, like the temple coming under the control of Board of Revenue and the establishment of Hindu Religious Endowment Board. In 1947 three trustees of the temple were appointed from among the community members. In 1948 when the Government appointed an Executive Officer for the temple, it was stipulated that one of the trustees of the temple should be from the Thuluva vellala community. This practice continued till 1976 when the Board of Trustees were removed during the period of emergency. In 1980 when the Board was reconstituted and no member of the community was appointed,

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63 Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, Thuluva Vellala Sangam (Madras, 1999).

64 R.Ramiah Pillai, Thuluva Velālar Varalāru (Madurai, 1934), pp.43-44.
the matter was taken to the court. The judgement of the High Court dated 4/2/1982 stated that one post of trusteeship of the temple must be reserved for the member of the Thuluva vellala community. Thus the members of the community were connected with Kapāliswarar temple from 16th century. Even in the present day every year on the sixth day of the annual Pangunifestival of the temple the entire rituals of the day and float festival on the full moon day of month of Thai are conducted by the members of the community. Vaikāsi Visāgam, kedariviradham, karthigai deepam, Sivarathiri and Panguniuthiram are some of the important festivals celebrated by the Saivites of the Thuluva vellala community.

The vellala class had its share of contribution to Vaishnavism as well. Nammālvar who is considered the heart and soul of Vaishnavism was a vellala. The members of the Thuluva vellala community have made liberal contributions to Vaishnavite temples as well which is known from inscriptions. A point worth mentioning in this context is that the temple of Lord Venkateswara at the sacred hills of Tirupati which is considered one of the 108 sacred shrines of Lord Vishnu was constructed by king

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65 Judgement of the High Court dt 4/2/1982 - Vide Appendix - IV.
Thondaman. The Vaishnavites in the Thuluva vellala community devote all Saturdays in the month of purattasi (October - November) to Lord Venkatesa and observe fasting on those days. Krishna jayanthi, Rama navami, Varalakshmi viradam are some of the important festivals celebrated by the Vaishnavites of the community.

Thus the Thuluva vellala community has a tradition of its own and the members follow their customs which identify the community. In the modern set up, no community even the most isolated, can be taken to represent tradition unaffected by innovation and change. Many new concepts like womenfolk taking to employment, single family system, children going abroad for studies or employment have their impact on these customs and traditions. Inspite of all these, even today a community’s identity is made possible only through these customs which are practiced right from birth to death and expressed in festivals celebrated by the members.