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REVIEW ARTICLE

WORSHIP OF VIRALI TURMERIC IN VARAGUNAPANDEESWARAR TEMPLE AT RADHAPURAM – TAMILNADU

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ABSTRACT

The goddesses of South India were quite often described as bloodthirsty by early missionaries and are still described as wild by many Brahmans. In this paper we study the way of worship to goddess Nithya Kalyani. The *virali turmeric* is viewed within the purview of Hindu religion among the women. The three sacred items (turmeric, kunkum and flower) are the women's main adornment and the most cherished possession rather than other ornaments made of metals. The worship, offering and importance of *virali turmeric* is been seen.

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INTRODUCTION

The sub continent, India is a democratic country as well a secular nation. Indian Epics the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, 18 Puranas, 64 Finearts, 4 Vedas and 78 Sastras (scriptures) throw vivid light upon the fact that spiritualism is the indigenous phenomenon of this land. The various places mentioned in the Epics, Puranas, Scriptures, Vedas and Literatures, where the celestial gods, hosts of goblins, saints, ascetics, sages and hermits lived and performed their penitence's and sacrifices, have come up as religious centers and holy places established with temples well planned and beautifully –sculptured discussed by Arumugham (1975). A famous holy temple situated in Radhapuram near Nanguneri, Tamilnadu, 68 kilometers away from Tirunelveli.

The main deity enshrined in the temple is Sri Varagunapandeeswarar. Goddess Nithya Kalyani is also enshrined facing south on the northern part of the temple studied by Subramaniya Pillai (1944). The Hindus in Tamilnadu follow different ways of offerings and vows to the deities. Like caring the kavadi to accomplish their vow to Lord Muruga at Palani and offer tonsuring to Lord Venkatesa at Tirumalai, Tirupathi. In the temples of Goddess Mariamman, people offer salt and pepper, parts of human body made of silver for her grace that recovered them from some serious ailments. Similarly, in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple, people offer *Virali* turmeric to accomplish their vow to goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani. This kind of offerings and accomplishment of their vow to the Deity is the special worship in this temple examined by Rajavelu (1982). A verse in Dhanvanthiri Kulanthai Vakatham (Dhanvanthiri

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child health treatise) declares the medicinal use of turmeric thus:

talaivali ni:retrari calaiya:tha meka
mulaitharu pi:ratthi nu:d_vilisurabu
vica kadvishamum vi:ruvi:ra nangalum
po:
ma ca kilakukku ma:l.

These lines mean that the turmeric root is an easy and successful remedy for headache, cold, poisonous snake bite. To this turmeric is referred to by different terms such as kanchini, nisi, peetham and arisanam. The turmeric tree is one of the celestial trees along with Karpagam (that Yield everything one desires), bael tree and basil. Turmeric powder and paste are effective remedies for cold, cough, headache, sinusitis, corn (in the sole of foot) trench-foot, etc. The aims, importance and significance of the offerings of the *Virali* turmeric to the Deity and also the benefits, the devotees obtained by the grace of goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani are to be studied in detail in this paper.

THE LOCATION OF THE TEMPLE

Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple is situated in Radhapuram which is on the south-east direction from Valliyur in Nanguneri Taluk, at a distance of 68 kilometers from the District Head Quarters, Tirunelveli. The deity Sri Varagunapandeeswarar is enshrined in the sanctum facing the east. A few yards before the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Eshwar, the sanctum sanctorum of Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani is enshrined on the right (on the north) facing the south.

THE ORIGIN OF GODDESS NITHYA KALYANI

A daughter, namely Kalyani was in a chettiyar's family who lived in a village called Udayatthur, at a distance of 2 kilometers, away from Radhapuram, on the east. Once, the chettiyar family had been to Kerala, the neighboring state, to find a suitable bridegroom for their daughter. To the rude shock for the family, the daughter was missing on the way back. The members of the family were very much worried on the missing of their daughter Kalyani. At that juncture, they heard a voice of

Oracle from God Eshwara, "*We have adopted Kalyani as our Devi, and you can worship us both and get what you need*". Immediately after this incident in compliance with the divine order the temple of Sri Nithya Kalyani was built and Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani was enshrined and consecrated. Moreover, the people of this village and its surroundings believe that goddess Kalyani is incarnation of goddess Parvathi. As evidence to this, there is short reference in the inscriptions found in the temple. The deity Kalyani is called Nithya Kalyani simply because marriages were performed everyday in the premises of this temple just in front of the deity Kalyani, so as to get the wedded couple showered and blessed with the Grace of the deity. The great poet, Mahakavi Bharathi has referred to this deity Kalyani in one of his poems as

"Neela Jwala Nirmithavani Nirrantharare Nikila Logaesanee. Nerubama Sundari Nithya Kalyani Nijammam" Bharathiyar (1992).

WORSHIP OF *VIRALI* TURMERIC

The devotees worship deity Nithya Kalyani, by offering coconuts, plantain, betel nuts, fragrant bathis, camphor, garland, rose water etc, and pray to her for the fulfillment of their needs. At that time, the *Virali* turmeric (at least 100 grams) would be placed at the feet of Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani. When the devotees get their prayer fulfilled, they would do the same offerings to the deity, with a large heap of *Virali* turmeric in kilograms. This worship of *Virali* turmeric is evident that the devotees of this area have such a staunch belief in the Grace of Nithya Kalyani.

The worship or offerings of *Virali* turmeric is of three types. The details are furnished here under.

Offerings of *Virali* turmeric roots to the deity. Offerings of *Virali* turmeric powder (pounded in the mortar). Offerings of *Virali* turmeric with an exchange between the bride's party and bridegroom's party on the betrothal ceremony of a marriage seen in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Thirukovil Kumbabisheka Malar (2005). The picture 1 shows large amount of *virali* turmeric offered by the devotees to the temple, which is been stored in the temple.



Picture 1

OFFERINGS OF *VIRALI* TURMERIC TO THE DEITY

People offer the *Virali* turmeric roots (in kilograms) to deity Sri Nithiya Kalyani with prayers to redress their grievances, to fulfill their acute needs, extend prospects, profit in their business, bless their Childress with good health and education. The Figure 1 represents the year wise from 1960 to 2010 of the turmeric in kilograms offered to the temple. From this figure we can see that the devotees to the temple year wise come in a large amount from various parts of the country.

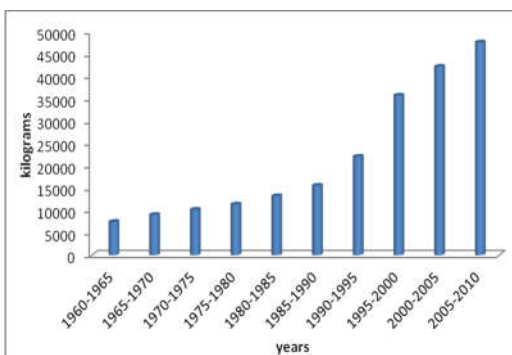


Figure 1

OFFERINGS OF *VIRALI* TURMERIC POWDER (pounded in the mortar)

This offering is to be performed when a devotee's prayer is fulfilled. The devotees get pooja items

(coconut, plantain, betel nuts, flower, fragrant bathis, camphor, rose water, etc.,) and two packets of *Virali* turmeric. First the devotee would worship Lord Vinayaka enshrined before the flag pillar (*Kodi Sthambam*). Then he or she would pound the turmeric of one packet in the mortar. While pounding turmeric, the devotees would pray to deity Sri Nithya Kalyani thus "Goddesses, please redress our grievances", "please fulfill our felt-needs", "please recover the child/son/daughter from the ailment". They offer the coconut (*soorai thengay*) to Lord Vinayaka and enter the temple to worship Lord Sri Varagunapandeeswarar. After worshipping the Swami, they enter the Amman Sri Nithya Kalyani Sannathi. Here, they offer other packet *Virali* turmeric at the feet deity Sri Nithya Kalyani and perform their vow to the deity. This has been the custom for a quite long period shown in Thinathandhi (2005). In Picture 2 the temple priest K.S. Chandrasekar Patter is pounding and powering the *virali* turmeric offered by devotees.



Picture 2

OFFERINGS OF *VIRALI* TURMERIC WITH AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE BRIDE'S AND BRIDEGROOM'S ON THE BETROTHAL CEREMONY OF A MARRIAGE

Traditionally, the Hindus will have the betrothal ceremony in the bride's or bridegroom's place. Most of the residents of Radhapuram and surrounding villages perform betrothal ceremony in the premises of Radhapuram temple, specifically in the front hall of Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani Sannathi, and especially people of Yadava community performed the betrothal ceremony only here in this temple. The official records of this temple give information on this tradition of performance. In the betrothal ceremony, the bride's party and the groom's party bring all the usual Puja with *Virali* turmeric in two different salvers (thambulams) to Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple. First they would worship Lord Vinayaka with an offering of archana. Then both groom's and bride's party (with groom's father, mother and maternal uncle) would offer an archana to Lord Sri Varagunapandeeswarar and goddess Nithya Kalyani. After this offering, the *archakar* would hand in the archana salvers to the respective maternal uncles of the bride and groom. Finally those maternal uncles would exchange the salvers (of puja items and *Virali* turmeric offered to the deity) an auspicious time as a mark of betrothal discussed by Kalyanasundaram (1960).

The people of Radhapuram and the near by villages perform this *Virali* turmeric worship for the following.

- a. The maidens perform this worship for early marriage.
- b. The married women perform this worship for their long prosperous life with their *mangle sutra* (thali) around their neck.
- c. The married women do this *Virali* turmeric offering to goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani praying for protection from evil of Mangalya dhosam.
- d. People perform *Virali* turmeric offering for their complete recovery from chronic diseases and for successful surgical treatment.
- e. People offer this *Virali* turmeric to goddess Nithya Kalyani praying for welfare and protection of children from fear and affects of evil – eyes.

The issueless women do this *Virali* turmeric offering praying the goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani to bless them with begetting of children.

THE SALIENT FEATURES OF *VIRALI* TURMERIC

Every Hindu woman would cherish the turmeric, kumkum and flower as her sole property of her soul studied by Sathasivan (1960). These three things are regarded as sacred ones inclusive of the *thirumangalyam* (thali) by the Hindus as part and parcel of religious tradition and social culture. It is worth mentioning that these three sacred items (turmeric, kumkum and flower) are the women's main adornment and the most cherished possession rather than other ornaments made of metals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF *VIRALI* TURMERIC

Saint Ganapathi Somasundaran says in one the verse,

“*Thiru manjal kappale noy neekum chelvi
Thiruneerral meynanam cerum*” Subramaniya Pillai (1944).

These lines say, the devotees, who perform this *Virali* turmeric offering to Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani and apply sacred powder *Virali* turmeric on their forehead, would attain wisdom.

The *Panchaga venba* says,
“*Devi Kalyani peyar ceppuvorkkillai
mevalar kalendrum vinai*”

These lines say there would be neither evils nor adversities for people who chant the name Nithya Kalyani. The *Virali* turmeric offered by the devotees always found to be heaped as a hillock. Wonder indeed is to find *Virali* turmeric offered to Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani, is fresh even after years have passed. Hundreds and thousands of people have offered *Virali* turmeric to goddess Sri

Nithya Kalyani and got rid of ailments and redress of grievances. The *Virali* turmeric offered to Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani, pounded into powder, mixed with water and made into a paste form, is the holy *Prasatham* of goddess shown in the paper Sri VaragunaPandeaswarar Thirukovil Kumbabisheka savinier (2005) this prasatham is distributed to all devotees.

In addition to the regular offerings and worship with *Virali* turmeric special pooja performed on the auspicious days such as the Tamil New year day. The first day of the Tamil month, Birth days of the children, Chitra Pournami, Chitrai Utthiram, Vakasi Visakam, Ani thiru Manjanam, Adiperukku, Adivelli (Friday in adi), Adi Krithikai, Adiporaum, Sri Varalakshmi viratham, Purattasi Navarathiri pooja (inclusive of Ayudha pooja, Sarasvathi pooja and Vijayadasami), Deepavali, Thirukarthikai, Markali, Thiruvathirai, Vaikunda Ekadasi, Thai pongal, Thai amavasai, Karadayan nonbu, Panguni Uthuiram, Sivarathiri.

CONCLUSION

The *Virali* turmeric worship performed by devotees in the shrine of goddess Nithya Kalyani in Sri Varagunapandeaswarar temple situated in Radhapuram a special religious significance and importance and beyond any doubt it is worth finding a place in the history of Tamilnadu. It is evident from the inscriptions found in this temple that Pandiya King Varagunapandeya not only built this temple but allocated fertile lands with alluvial soil for maintenance of temple. It is worth mentioning and heartening to note that all people, irrespective of their caste, creed or religion, come to this temple and perform the Sri Varagunapandeaswarar temple offerings to goddess Nithya Kalyani. It throws light upon the faith in goddess Nithya Kalyani, their religious tolerance, religious harmony and human relation that prevails among people of this area. For the people from distant areas who come to this temple for first time, the enormous hill-like heap of Sri Varagunapandeaswarar temple is a great wonder indeed to see. The *Virali* turmeric worship is performed mostly by the Brahmans, Nagarathars and Yadhavas of Tirunelvi district. The people of Yadhava community have a traditional practice of

performing the betrothal ceremony only in this temple, with a specific ritual of *manjal matru* (exchange of *Virali* turmeric).

Hence it is historical record, that special phenomenon of '*Virali* turmeric worship' reveals the belief of people, glory of this temple and Grace of the Goddess Sri Nithya Kalyani. So, this temple remains to be centre of historical and religious importance. Only in Tamil Nadu this chapter of this temple *Virali* turmeric worship and *Manchal matru* system should followed by the devotees of Radhapuram and its surroundings area people. Further the history of this temple in Tamil Nadu this temple getting very important and special as we find out through this research article.

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