

Goddess Kali in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

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Abstract: This study is to discover about Mother Goddesses in Tamil background, history of Goddess Kali and Goddess Kali in Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Qualitative approaches with narrative and descriptive designs were used for this study. The researcher used multiple sources as journals and books to analyse informations about Goddess Kali. Findings about Goddess Kali from Malaysian Tamil folk songs were described under seven titles.

Keywords: Goddess Kali, Mother Goddesses, Malaysia, Tamil Folk Songs

INTRODUCTION

The Malay land and India have a long historical relationship. Sababathy (2015), divided this relationship into two main sections labeling them as before British colonization and after British colonization. He mentions that the second period is crucial. This British colonization in Malaysia which started by the year of 1786, continued until 1957. In this era, especially during the end of the 19th century, a countless number of South Indians were brought to Malaysia to recruit as contract basis workers. 80% of them are Tamils (Hindhuja & Parameswari, 2020). So, the British colonizers built Tamil schools and temples for them (Parameswari, 2019). Besides that, the Tamils also tended to build temples for individual usage. These types of temples were particularly built for the deities which they brought along with them during migration to Malaysia in varieties of shapes like spheres, tridents, and a hand of soil (Manimaran, Sivapalan & Rajenthiran, 2016).

Tamils depict these things in the form of gods such as *Kalyamman*, *Mariyamman*, *Throubathy*, *Idumban*, *Angalamman*, *Bhairavar*, *Karuppannaswami* and *Muniswarar* and classify them “*Iṣṭa teyvam*” (Idealistic deities) or “*Kula teyvam*” (Clan deities) (Hindhuja & Parameswari, 2020). Tamils who worked as road and railway constructors also built shrines for “*Kāval teyvam*” (Tutelary deities) based on their wealth status (Parameswari, 2020). In a nutshell, we can conclude that Tamils who migrated to Malaysia during British colonization built plenty of temples for deities and endeavored to maintain a fine relationship with the deities. Besides building temples and shrines, Tamil people also sung folk songs to praise, to appeal and to express emotions towards deities. These Malaysian Tamil folk songs provide the wholesome information about deities worshiped by Malaysian Tamils during British colonization. Due to multiple deities sang in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs, this research only sheds light on goddess Kali and how she is portrayed in Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

There are altogether 531 documented Malaysian Tamil folk songs. For the purpose of this research, only 9 songs which portraying goddess Kali were analysed. Since the folk songs engage with the experience and spiritual essence of the Tamil laborers, the researchers found a qualitative method to well suit the study. The data obtained from folk songs through descriptive and explanatory designs were studied using narrative and discourse analysis. Narrative analysis describes the content of the folk songs while discourse analysis explains the usage of terms and words used in the folk songs that can be related to the deities, especially goddess Kali. The researcher also used document analysis method in this research. Informations from Tamil literature books, articles on Malaysian Tamil folk songs and goddess Kali were used to analyze and explore more informations about goddess Kali.

FINDINGS

This paper categorized the findings as follows:

- Mother Goddesses (*Tāyt teyvam*) in Tamil background.
- History of Goddess Kali
- Goddess Kali in Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

Before analysing the portrayal of Goddess Kali in Malaysian Tamil folk songs, it is important to comprehend the development Mother Goddesses in Tamil Background (South India), the ancestral land of the Tamil Laborers in Malaya and depiction of Goddess Kali in Tamil Literatures. This procedure will help us to deeply understand Goddess Kali and her development.

Mother Goddesses (*Tāyt teyvam*) in Tamil background

Tamils glorified Mother Goddesses worship for a long time. We can affirm this by considering the number of female deities among Tamils. Besides Tamils, various types of people all around the world have also worshipped Mother Goddesses for a long time. Kandasamy (2019), states that female deities worship transformed into Mother Goddesses worship after people starts glorifying females as a symbol of motherhood and fertility. Sami (2011), also states that portraying Mother Goddesses as virgin ladies or as a mother is the norm that lying among Tamil for a long period.

According to Jeya Veeran and Anju (2018), Mother Goddesses have boundless powers naturally. Apart from this characteristic, Jeya Veeran and Anju also say that Mother goddesses are also worshiped by Tamils due to their fertility capabilities. This Mother Goddesses or fertility worship creates a unity between worships found Indian continent (Chermanathan, 2012). Mariyappan (2017), describes the physical appearance of Mother Goddesses as having enormous breasts and stomachs. He also added that Mother Goddesses have this type of physical appearance to resemble the function of the earth which grows seeds into crops. Thus, they are called “Modi” which means having an enormous stomach. This name was given to Mother Goddesses since an enormous stomach shows the potential to carry a fetus and fertility to produce offspring. Mother Goddesses are also often called “Modi” because of the development of the agricultural sector. Scholars who researched the history of primitive humans, state that there was a period when women held headship. But, this matriarchy starts to deteriorate after the hunting-based economy dominated the primitive community. Then it starts to glorify again after agricultural beginning to develop on large scale. Agricultural is a predominant invention of women. Hence, they are given importance upon that.

Padma (2013), points out that these Mother Goddesses were also worshipped due to their divinity and capability of guiding humankind. Some of the Mother Goddesses worshipped on particular days and a part of them worshipped throughout the year. Mariyamman worship held during the summer, especially on “Aadi” month is a perfect example of Mother Goddess worship on particular days. Lewis (2016), also points out that numerous village female deities are called “Mother”. This name is to

establish the multiples roles such as chicken-pox curer plays by Mother Goddesses. Pande (2016), is telling that female deities figures excavated in Indus Valley telling the importance of fertility worship. These female deities play dual roles as primary divine energy and consorts of male gods. In addition, the article written by Kanagaraju (2019) entitled “Tolliyal pārvaīyil māṇṭaviyal” tells that the female figures excavated in the “Athicanalur” excavation reinforce the worship of Mother Goddesses among indigenous people. So, we can conclude that Mother Goddesses worship is historic.

Sangam literature says that Mother Goddesses are living in nature such as waterfalls, mountains, oceans, and springs (Ilango, 2020). Mother Goddesses chose these places to live due to the excellence of these places that provide food and shelters to living things. In conclusion, Mother Goddesses were worshipped by Tamils to praise their fertility and mercy.

History of Goddess Kali

Kali worship begins in east India. She is a symbol of Matriarchy. Thus, the male heads that she is holding and stepping on are the heads of male chauvinists who opposed the supremacy of females (Vasanthakumar, 2017). *Kalingattuparani* described her briefly. Kali lives in the desert. She resembles the elixir which Lord Shiva adores. Her temple basement was built using the ornaments of wives of kings who were killed by King *Kulothunga*. The walls of her temple were built using the heads of warriors and their's body fat. The temple's pillars were constructed from jungle trees that were used by rival nations to defend themselves. Besides that, heads of warriors, newly born babies, and peacocks also hung up on her temple surrounding. Goddess Kali who is residing in this temple has a terrific appearance (Keshigan, 2015: Suppureddiyar, 1962).

She is also wearing anklets made up of serpents like “*Athishesha*” and “*Vasuki*”. She is wearing a red color *pottu* on her forehead. She also has applied “*thiruneeru*” (The Holy Ash) on her breasts. She is also wearing elephant skin as a dress and a torsion of elephant intestine and snakes on her hip. Snakes are decorating her upper body elegantly. Her neck is also decorated with gold, pearl, and coral ornaments. Everyone praises her as a mother who delivered Vinayaga, Muruga, Bhramma, and Indra. Kali is besotted to drink blood. As a consequence of that, her hands are red. She is also black because always washes her body using elephants temporin (Kandiah, 1938).

Ghosts are serving here (Selvakkesavaraya Mudhaliyar, 1915). Kali is holding the head of *Asura* and a curved knife. She is swift by heart and giving boons to her devotees and grants it without any impediment. Her tongue is lolling to suck blood. This Devi is standing on Lord Shiva (Dupuche, 2012). According to Singapore historical documents, Kali is worshipped predominantly by Hindus who worked as butchers and grooms. (Clothey, 2006). Pioneer generation Tamils who migrated to Malaya also worshipped her full of faith (Arumugam & Subramaniam, 2014).

Goddess Kali in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Kali is mentioned in nine songs in Malaysian Tamil folk songs. These songs were explained in seven titles.

Guardian

Kali demolishes evils by aggressiveness (Sritharan, 2000). So, a mother in Malaysian Tamil folk songs pleading Mother Kali to protect her son from the disturbances of evil spirits. The song which sounds like,

“.....
Kāliyam'mā uṇ kāval
Kaliyamma your guard
eṇ kaṇṇē uṇakku
My eyes to you
kāttu piṇi aṇṭāmal..
Don't wait..
(Thandayutam, rāmarōṭa paṇcumettai, pg.108)

“.Mother Kali will protect you
Oh my Darling
From any evilness
.....”
(Thandayutham, rāmarōṭa paṇcumettai, pg.108)

describes the feelings of a mother who believes Goddess Kali as a Child protector. Thus, we can conclude that mothers believed in Goddess Kali and always prayed for her to remove evilness from their lives and give prosperity to their children.

Mother

Kali also expressed as mother in three Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

.....
Kanakāḷi um am'mā
Kanakali is your mother
.....
(Thandayutam, cittiram pōl mōtiram, pg.115),

“.....
Tēḷukku reṇṭu kaṇṇu
Scorpion has two eyes
eṇṇa petta am'mā
What a mother
makāḷiyē tēṇkālī oru poṇṇu
Mahali Tengali is a girl
uṇ tērukku muṇṇālē
In front of your chariot
eṇṇa petta am'mā
What a mother
makāḷiyē tēḷā tuṭikkirēṇ!
the scorpion is beating!
.....”
(Thandayutam, eṇṇaip petta am'mā, pg.129),

“Oh my mother Kali!
Im suffering in front of your chariot
Like a scorpion which has two eyes!”
(Thandayutam, eṇṇaip petta am'mā, pg.129),

and

“.....
Tēḷukku reṇṇu kaṇṇu
Scorpion has two eyes
eṇṇa petta am'mā
What a mother
makāliyē tēṅkali oru poṇṇu”
Mahali Tengali is a girl
.....”
(Thandayutam, tūcipaṭṭu aṇaiyātu, pg.153),

“Oh my mother Kali!
I am your daughter”
(Taṇṭāyutam, tūcipaṭṭu aṇaiyātu, pg.153),

are the songs which sung mothers as Goddess Kali. Kali is a supreme mother who is praised by all creatures (Marsman, 2019). So, women in Malaysian Tamil folk songs adapted this noble motherhood quality of Kali within themselves and expressed it verbally through songs.

Supplication

Tamils also fell to her feet in supplication. A song entitled “*Tāli aḷukkāccu; talaimayirum cikkāccu!*” illustrates the supplication by a girl to Kali on behalf of her mother. She pleaded with Goddess Kali to save her mother, who was dying from a sickness. But, Goddess Kali did not accept her supplication, and her mother died. This scene was shown in the following verses,

“.....
Karuṅkaṭalai mattākki
Making black sea into paddle
iṇṇaikkuk kāliyam'mā kōvililē
Today at temple of mother Kali
nā kaiyēntip poyyāṇē!
I lied by hand!
.....”
(Thandayutam, tāli aḷukkāccu; talaimayirum cikkāccu!, Pg.175),

“Today I supplicated at the temple of Kali!
But, I got cheated!”
((Thandayutam, tāli aḷukkāccu; talaimayirum cikkāccu!, Pg.175).

So, the girl cried helplessly. This is showing that Tamils will cry out loudly if the supplication was not granted by deities.

Uruṭṭāṇ / Ring

Goddess Kali is the ultimate power or energy which can be found in each creature, including non-living things. Poet Bharatiyar has sung her this quality in the verses which sound as “Yātumāki niṇṇāy kālī enṅum nī niṇṇāy”. Tamils in Malaysian Tamil folk songs encapsulated this characteristic of Goddess Kali in the following verses:

“Oru uruṭṭāṇ oru mōtiram
One Uruṭṭāṇ one ring
atiliruppā patrakālī
Patrakali will be in it
pūmi kiṭuṅka kiṭuṅka pōra kaṇṇē!”
Oh my dear, You are going to shake the world!
(Thandayutam, kālī tēvi, pg.274),

“Oh my dear!
Padrakali will be in uruṭṭāṇ and a ring
You will shake the world by her grace!
(Thandayutam, kālī tēvi, pg.274).

From this song, we can conclude that Goddess Kali have abilities to be in various types of things. This is showing her unboundness.

Daughter

Kali worships in various forms and shapes. She is worships as a playful child, a warrior, and an old lady (Sapkota, 2013). Tamils in Malaysian Tamil folk songs praise Goddess Kali as their daughter. This following song depicting this norms of Tamils.

“.....
Eṅkam'mā mavakālī
My mother daughter kali
nā avamārāṇ cēla
me her saree
.....”
(Thandayutam, kālī tēvi māri, pg.275),

“Mother Kali is my daughter
I am her saree which covers up her breasts”
(Thandayutam, kālī tēvi māri, pg.275).

From this song, we can understand a tradition where Tamils celebrate deities as their family member.

Supreme Deity

Kali is a supreme deity (Chakravarty, 2017). A folk song entitled “*Pāmpu*” describing her supremacy.

“.....
Cittiraputtirā kaṇṭāṅki! Cittira puttara kaṇṭāṅki
A type of saree
eṭuttuṭuttuvā māriyāyi – ava
Take it Mariayi
ēkāntam pōṭuvā kāliyāyi!”
she Give me solitude, Kali!”
(Thandāyutam, pāmpu, pg.278),

“Mother Mariyamman will take Cittira puttara kaṇṭāṅki saree
Mother Kali will provide solitude!
(Thandayutam, pāmpu, pg.278).

These verses explain the supremacy of Goddess Kali. She has the ability to be solitude and controls everything.

Breaking hands

Kali is a powerful deity. Nobody can control her. So, Tamils tend to injure others in her temple. Both songs describe those manners.

“.....
Kāliyam'maṇ kōvilāṇṭa ēṇṇā
Near Kaliyamman temple
kōvilāṇṭa
near temple
kaiya nāṇē muṛikkattumō!
May I break the hands
(Thandayutam, cuyapulampal!, Pg.310),

“May I break your hands
Near Kaliyamman temple”
(Thandayutam, cuyapulampal!, Pg.310),

and

“.....
Kāliyam'mā kōyilla nā
Me in Kaliyamman temple
kaiya muṛikkattumā?”
may I break your hands?
(Thandayutam, cāpam, pg.322),

“May I break your hands
In kaliyamman temple?
(Thandayutam, cāpam, pg.322).

Kali is a striving deity. She can create and destroy everything on her own (Sapkota, 2013). So, Tamils sang about breaking hands in her temple frankly.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, Goddess Kali worshipped by Tamils with full of faith. She is worshipped by them as a child protector, a mother, a place to express their feelings, a deity who founds in everything, a daughter, a supreme deity and a striving deity.

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