



The Idea of Equality in Regional Cultural Festivals: An Ecological Reading Based on the ‘Kottiyoor Festival’

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Abstract:

Kottiyoor is the most visited festival in Kerala. The land is a transfer of conservation values linked to beliefs. The myth of Kottiyoor can be seen as a place of the fall of human pride and love without hatred. Along with this, the idea that human survival is improbable due to the environment is also shared.

Keywords: Tribal groups, Environment, Myth, Space, Tradition

Introduction:

The Western Ghats are rich in their biodiversity and abundant flora and fauna. The tribal groups who lived in harmony with them are today facing the crisis of forced conversions and displacement. Aralam, Kottiyoor and Cheruvanchery are places that are adjacent to the environmentally sensitive areas of Wayanad district and belong to Kannur district. These places include population centers in the Western Ghats. In the early stages, there were popular protests against this necessity of resettlement. However, today the villagers are prepared to be transformed in ways that are inappropriate for environmental protection measures. But here there are many people belonging to communities like ‘Kurichyar’ and ‘Paniyar’ who live



with unique customs and ways of life. Their traditional ways are being eroded and forced to undergo changes.

Kottiyoor festival as the construction of existence of backward communities:

Once a man belonging to the Kurichya community was hunting in the Kottiyoor forest and rubbed a stone to sharpen his arrow. Seeing blood coming from it, he reached the Manathana land and told the information to the main family members. This is how the presence of the temple inside the forest was identified. Unveiled by a person belonging to a backward community, this legend also conveys a lesson of denial of casteism.

Kottiyoor is the most visited festival in Kerala. This is the main Shiva temple in this village on the banks of Bavali river. At 'Akkare Kottiyoor' Temple, 'Vaisakha Mahotsavam' is held for 28 days (May-June) from 'Choti Nakshatra' in 'Idava' month to 'Chitira Nakshatra' in 'Mithuna'. It is during these 28 days that important ceremonies take place in the 'Ikkare Kottiyoor' temple. That is, 'puja vidhis' are not performed at both places at the same time. Dense forest land with no human access is maintained adjacent to 'Ikkare Kottiyoor'. This forest area is known as the abode of Shiva 'Bhuta Ganas'(demons).

The land is a transfer of conservation values linked to beliefs. The eco philosophy that developed in the 1970s exists in four branches. They are Deep Ecology, Eco Feminism, Eco Marxism and Social Ecology. These festivals can be observed in relation to the socio-ecological argument. Here we can learn how humans interact with the environment around them and how this interaction affects society and the environment.

Myth and environmental relations

Akare Kottiyoor Temple has no architectural structures other than the nature-friendly 'parnasala'(tent) that are built only during the festival every year. It is believed that gods and demons perform 'pujas' here, which is forbidden to humans except during festivals. Therefore, during every festival, forested areas are cleared and thatched sheds are built.

The myth of Kottiyoor can be seen as a place of the fall of human pride and love without hatred. Along with this, the idea that human survival is improbable due to the environment is also shared. The legend of 'Akkare Kotiyur' temple is related to the mythological 'Daksha Yaga' (Sacrifice). Against the wishes of her father, Daksha, Sati seduces Lord Shiva, who lives in Kailasa. Daksha performs the 'yaga'



without inviting only Shiva and Sati.

Sati reaches the ‘Dakshayaga bhoomi’(Place of Sacrifice) to meet her loved ones. But at the land of Daksha Yaga, after hearing insults from her father and blaspheming Shiva, Sati became depressed. She committed suicide by jumping into the sacrificial fire. This place is the floor known today as ‘Ammarakal’. Here worship takes place under a small thatched roof with a lamp lit. After learning of Sati’s sacrifice, Shiva sends his follower Virabhadra to the sacrificial ground. Disrupting the sacrifice, Virabhadra cuts off Daksha’s head. Later, a saddened and angry Shiva stood as ‘Swayambhu’ (self begotten) near where Sati committed suicide. In the middle of the lake, the ‘Sivalinga swayambhu’ deity is at ‘Manithara’ next to Ammarakal. These floors are made of stones from the river. In this temple which is surrounded by water, all kinds of circumambulation are done through water.

It is believed that Daksha was resurrected with a goat’s head to complete the sacrifice. During the festival, people buy bamboo flowers (Odappoovu) specially made from bamboo and hang them in their homes with the belief that they are Daksha’s beard. Bamboo flower manufacturing is quite eco-friendly. ‘Odas’ (Bamboo) treated in water and combed with a special type of wire will remain intact for years. Making these requires special skills. The bamboos are collected after taking permission from the forest department to make bamboo flower for each year. Bamboo maintenance starts before the festival. After each year’s festival, bamboo cultivation is also in full swing while waiting for the next one. The Kottiyoor festival called Vaishakhotsavam emphasizes environmental conservation efforts beyond celebration-beliefs.

Ritual and Myth: In Environmental Observation

Each year the festival ends with incomplete ‘pujas’ and the next year begins with its continuation ‘pujas’. This festival is characterized by caution of continuances and restraint of letting go. In ‘Akkare Kottiyoor’, the festival schedule for each year is determined with the ‘Prakoozham’ ceremony. After the ‘Avalalav’ (taking quantity of beaten rice) and ‘Nellalav’ (taking quantity of rice), the festival days and timings are noted down under the leadership of the ‘Uralas’, ‘Kanakkappillas’, and ‘Samudhayi’ who are the temple attendants. Later, for the ceremony at ‘Neerezhunnallath’ (Procession of tender coconut), a group led by ‘Padinjeetta Namboothiri’, ‘Bhattathiripad’, and ‘Ottappilan’, a ‘Kurichyasthanika’ (Leader of Kurichya cast), will bathe in the Bavali river and collect the Bavali ‘Theertham’



(Holy water) in 'Koovala' leaf. Here you can see the peculiarity that the holy water is not collected in a vessel. With this holy water one will reach 'Akkare' temple and purify 'Swayambhu' and 'Manithara' by sprinkling the holy water. This is a ceremony commemorating the discovery of the 'Swayambhu' idol. Even when it is not the festival season, it is a small group (Kurichya) who are the custodians of Akkare Kottiyoor. Another ceremony is 'Vaal Ezhunnallippu' (Procession of Sword), which is brought from 'Mutirerikkavu' in Wayanad. Along with the belief that Daksha was killed with this sword, the reciprocity of the festival can also transcend areal boundaries. The sword, wrapped in greens and brought on foot, becomes a sign not of arrogance, but of resistance to the common people.

'Ilaneerattam' (Stream of tender coconut water) is a ritual of anointing the 'Shiva Lingam' (Idol) with tender coconut water brought by the 'Thiya' community in Malabar. During the first 11 days of the festival, tender coconut water appeases the angry Lord Shiva. The covert and overt involvement of the green environment is evident at the beginning and end of the festival. Lord Shiva's anger, unappeased by being anointed with ghee and milk respectively, is finally turned away by water found in the tree, not in the soil. There is a hint here that even extreme grief can be remedied by nature. Even God, who controls all things, gets his solutions from nature. The first 'Abhishekam' (Unction) should be performed by Ottappilaan, a priest of 'Kurichya' sect. Carpenter gives quantity for construction works only for festival period. The thatched umbrellas are made by the 'Kaniyans' and the ghee for anointing is brought by the Nair cast. The Thiyya cast should raise the tender coconut water for the 'Ilanirattam' and the 'Vannathan' cast should bring the wick. In this way, the lesson that identity should not be denied, but accepted, is clear by considering caste characteristics. Caste is accepted here in the way of stating the greatness of jobs, not skin color or economic status.

'Aalingana Pushpajnali' (hug with floral tribute) or 'Rohini Aradhana' is a ceremony not seen in other temples in Kerala. 'Aalingana Puja' commemorates Lord Brahma comforting Lord Shiva who had lost his sati. It is done by showering flowers and the priest wraps both hands around the idol and holds the head close to the idol. A man who embraces God, adores nature itself.

Myths are related to the social life of human being. That is, the distinction between past and present disappears and myths serve as reality. "We need imaginative forms as we work towards the construction of a new society that creates new relationships with nature" (N M Pearson, 2005:142). The importance and relevance of the study of Kottiyoor festival increases when it is read in connection with the



concept of eco-spirituality. It can be found here as well as ecological balance and rejection of anthropocentrism.

Conclusion:

The Kottiyoor 'Vaisakha Mahotsavam' is a good example of the possibility of a spiritual connection between the environment and man. The interrelationship of humility with envisaging an ecocentric frugal culture and meek style is also evident here.

Reference

Pearson N M. Environmental Ideology and the Marxian Crisis. Current Books Kottayam, 2005.