

**TRADITIONS AND RITUALS AMONG THE SYRIAN CHRISTIANS OF KERALA****Indra Antony¹ & Abhishek Tripathi², Ph. D.****Abstract**

This article examines some of the traditions, rituals and social life among the Syrian Christians of Kerala. Most of these traditions and rituals exist even today among the Syrian Christian community.

Introduction

The Syrian Christian community has preserved the continuity of their faith and traditions from one generation to the next generation. The Syrian Christians were mainly traders, farmers and land owners and were equal to other higher classes in the social hierarchy. They were economically a vital group to anyone who wished to rule Kerala. The ability and usefulness of these Christian groups were recognized by the local kings. Accordingly they were not only given grant of land but also grant of concessions and privileges recorded on copper plates by these kings. They were given charge of the collection of revenue for the kings in certain places. They controlled the lucrative pepper trade industry.

During the course of time some Hindu traditions become an integral part of Syrian Christian rituals making significant life events. Milk boiling ceremony that take place during the blessing of a newly built house, the groom tying a golden jewellery called minnu (thali-cross- the thread for the minnu are taken from the wedding cloth) around brides neck during the marriage ceremony and the yearly celebration of sradham feast commemorating the death of a relative are some of them. This study looks in to some of the customs and traditions followed by this Christian community.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The Syrian Christian women have many peculiarities in their customs and manners which distinguish them from the other women folks of Kerala. They cover their heads while in worship. This is tradition among the Jewish descendents of Abrahamic religion. Their dress for church service had a veil like outer garment, with gold brocade, reaching to the ground. This is observed by the entire Syrian Christians until this day. For important functions they wore a white cloth seven yards long and one and a half yard broad. A number of fringes forming a fan like appendage behind rendered their dress artistically elegant. The upper portion of the body including the belly and arm is

completely covered with the loose blouse called kuppayam or chatta. Many of them follow this tradition even today. -

2. The architecture of the early church reflected a blend of Jewish and Kerala styles. The art and architecture of the Syrian Christian churches found across Kerala has unique features. The church architecture has close resemblance to the Hindu temple architecture.
3. Pesaha, the ritual supper which is the narration of the Paschal event is celebrated amongst Syrian Christians. The observance of Pesaha at home is an unbroken tradition which only the Syrian Christians has in the whole Christian world.
4. Most of the Syrian Christians even today use Biblical names like Jews. Biblical names along with Greek and Armenian names are the popular names in the Syrian Christian Community throughout existence. They prefix and suffix Kerala names to these traditional names.
5. Another surviving tradition is the use of “Muthukoda” (ornamental umbrella) for church celebrations, marriages and other festivals. Even today traditional drums and Arch decorations and ornamental umbrella are part of the church celebrations. Because of the harmonically co existence of religions in Kerala this became quite popular with other communities also.

Conclusion

The Syrian Christians of Kerala borrowed many social customs and traditions related to birth, marriage etc. from the Brahmin class. The unique feature of the life of the Syrian Christians was that while they upheld their Christian faith, they were culturally integrated with mainstream Hindu community.

Footnotes

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