



Draupadi Cult In Tamilnadu: Interconnection Between Agrarian Rituals And Vedic Narratives

VARUSAKKANI K

**Research Scholar, Department of Folklore and Culture Studies, School of Performing Arts, Madurai
Kamaraj University, Tamilnadu – 625021**

Abstract

The Mahabharata myth has spread across most regions of India in various versions and variations. The epic Mahabharata is presented as a local myth reflecting the cultural elements of the respective region by mixing with the local cultural elements or absorbing the local cultural elements into itself at the regional level. In that sense, the Mahabharata myth has had an impact on the folk worship system in Tamil Nadu. Draupadi Amman worship is a widely performed folk form of worship in north Tamil Nadu. The cult of Draupadi is performed by the performing arts known as "Therukoothu" and by the rituals of "Aravan Sacrifice" and the "Navadhania seedling". According to MN Srinivasan, "Contrary to the claim that folk deities become sanskritic and become classical deities, worship of draupadi came from a classical character in the folk tradition. The scholar Alf Hiltebeitil, who studied the worship of Draupadi, called Draupadi worship a part of Hinduism. But the rituals performed in the worship of Draupadi Amman are agrarian rituals. The story of The Mahabharata, which took place in the North Indian region, became the deity of a particular ethnic group in Tamil Nadu, the worship practices of Draupadi character of Mahabharata and the impact of the story of Mahabharata on Tamil society are discussed in this paper.

Keywords:

Droupathiyamman worship, Mahabharatha, Folk Religion, Fertility Rituals, Sanskritation

Introduction:

The Mahabharata, an enduring epic of India, has been interpreted and adapted across various regions, reflecting and incorporating diverse local cultural elements. This process of localization has notably influenced folk worship practices, particularly in Tamil Nadu. Among these, the worship of Draupadi Amman stands out as a significant folk tradition in Northern Tamil Nadu. This worship is vividly expressed through performing arts such as "Therukoothu," a traditional street theatre, and is intertwined with specific

rituals like "Aravan Kalapali" and the subsequent "Navadhanya seedlings" ceremony. Scholar Alf Hiltebeitel has observed that Draupadi worship forms an integral part of Hinduism while also embracing unique agrarian rituals characteristic of Tamil Nadu (Alf Hiltebeitel, 1991). This blend of the epic's narrative with local agricultural practices highlights the adaptability and cultural resonance of the Mahabharata's stories within different communities. The narrative of the Mahabharata, especially the portrayal of Draupadi, has left a profound impact on the social and religious fabric of Tamil Nadu, influencing specific ethnic groups and their ritualistic practices.

This paper delves into the multifaceted influence of the Mahabharata on Tamil society, focusing particularly on the Draupadi Amman worship. It aims to uncover new insights into how this epic myth has been seamlessly woven into the local traditions and everyday lives of the people in Tamil Nadu. By examining the intersection of the Mahabharata's mythological elements with regional cultural practices, the paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between epic literature and local worship traditions, highlighting the ongoing relevance and transformation of ancient narratives in contemporary settings. The Mahabharata, the great epic presented in India, is made up of a variety of sub stories (Samy B.L 1976). These stories are by nature to accept different people within themselves. It has gone beyond its cultural boundaries and has had an impact on people of different countries and different cultures. People living in various parts of the world have combined the characters of the Mahabharata story with their cults. In this sense, Mahabharata's history transcends national borders and becomes universal. The history of this Mahabharata is multi-faceted and not singular.

The epic is spread across different versions with different variations. This Multiplicity is due to the locality that the Mahabharata has absorbed. Because of this locality, the story of Mahabharata is seen as a reflection of different cultures. The story of Mahabharata, a classical story, is presented as a local myth that is mixed with the local cultural elements at the local level and reflects the cultural aspects of the respective region. In that sense, the Mahabharata myth has had an impact on the folk worship system in Tamil Nadu.

Draupathi Tamil Narrative:

Draupathi is a folk ethnic deity in North Tamil Nadu. Alf Hiltebeitel is a Colombian Professor of Religion and human science. He specialized in ancient Sanskrit epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, together with Indian religious tradition and folklore. He strongly advocated that Draupathi Worship belongs to Hinduism. However, it is part of folk Worship.

According to M.N. Srinivas folk deities get Sanskritized and evolved into classical deities. But this case is a Contradiction. My perspective is how Draupathi, an agrarian folk goddess has been connected with classical Character of Draupathi.

There have been stories about Mahabharata in Tamil oral traditions. Kurava are tribal people who lived in the Mountains (Shanmugam Pillai, M, 2003). Pandians who lived in the wetland Draupathi which can be read as "tharai-pathi"; tharai which means "land" and "pathi" as "goddess", hence it can be interpreted as "goddess of land". Tharaipathi can also be a metaphorical indication to land.

Hence the fight for the land “tharaipathi” might has been linked with the fight for the women “dhraupathi” in Mahabharata.

In a historical perspective, *Chithra mezhi periya Nattar saba* is a federation of farmers who called themselves “boomiputras”. Their ethnic deity is boomadevi (another name tharaipathi)

There is a possibility that the myth of Dhraupathi and Bhoomadevi were merged when Mahabharata was propagated through “Koothu” during the Pavallas Period.

Since the temple is named after a female-deity and there are fertility rituals which take place there, we can conclude that this Dhraupathi is a Folk Deity which belongs to an Agrarian society.

Drupathi Worship

The worship of Draupadi Amman is an ethnic deity worshipped in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu. This deity is worshipped as the ethnic deity of the Vanniyar community in Tamil Nadu. This Tiropathi Amman deity will be performed in the form of a performing art form called Therukoothu. The story of Mahabharata will be performed for 18 days. The place where this street dance is performed is called Bharatha Mandapam and those who preach the story of Mahabharata are called Bharatha Vaathiyar. On the days of Theropathi Amman festival, the street dancers perform the story of Mahabharata in the Form of Koothu in the Bharatha Mandapam in front of the temple.

On the last day of the festival, it will end with a fiery performance. The priest of this temple belongs to the Vanniyar community. The temple is a folk form of worship when examining the rituals of this temple. Moreover, it is believed that the worship of mother goddess may have originated because it is named after Tiropati in the Mahabharata story and the worship of the mother goddess is mixed with the story of Mahabharata.

According to MN Srinivasan, "Contrary to the claim that folk deities become Sanskritized and become classical deities, draupadi worship has come from a classical character to the folk tradition. The scholar Alf Hiltebeitil, who studied the worship of Draupadi, called draupadi worship a part of Hinduism. But the rituals performed in the worship of Draupadi Amman are agricultural rituals.

Prosperity rituals performed in draupadi amman worship

With the transition of primitive man’s life from nomadic to settled agriculture, the need for magical rituals also increased. In a cattle community, cattle graze on their own and reproduce on their own. But in an agrarian society, there was extra work of ploughing, sowing and reaping. So it took patience, foresight and faith. Thompson (1980:18) says that the agrarian community therefore needed magical rituals.

Generally, folk deities are often oriented towards prosperity. Fertility rituals have a twofold purpose, namely the production of people's goods, especially agriculture, and the birth of more children to increase the population. Fertility rites are performed in the temples of folk mother goddesses to appease the deity through sacrifice and to increase prosperity (Deviprasad Sattopadhyaya, 1959). This is because Mother Goddesses are believed to be symbols of prosperity by the people. Draupadi, a classical character who is

considered to be an orthodox deity on the cultural front, is a folk deity in the cultural arena of Tamil Nadu who accepts the rituals of prosperity symbolized by the sacrifice of life (Sivasubramaniyan. A., 2015). In this article, we will see the ideas of the richness embodied in those rituals by removing the orthodox mythology of those rituals. Draupadi, a character associated with the Mahabharata purana, is worshipped as a village deity and ethnic deity in north Tamil Nadu. Draupadi Amman festival consists of prosperity rituals such as Aravan Kalabali, Sowing of Navadhanam and Duryodhana Padukalam. The types of idols performed during the above rituals, the rituals, the beliefs expressed by them, the beliefs of the people regarding the desecration of the idol, etc., are the symbols of the ritual of prosperity in the category of public sacrifice. Aravan Kalabali rituals are performed as a continuation of the ritual of sacrifice of life.

Public scapegoat

Fraser (1976 e: 170) calls the sacrificial rituals that create prosperity through the sacrifice of life as the Public Scapegoat Method. It is the sacrifice of a life for the good of the people or for the group. It is believed that coolness creates prosperity and anger produces heat which hinders the production of prosperity. It is believed that offering sacrifice reduces the anger of the gods and brings prosperity.

In northern India, the Gond tribes sacrifice one person as a victim to increase the fertility of their lands. This is celebrated as a social festival among the people. There was a belief that those who died in this way would go to heaven (Bhakthavachala Bharathi, 2003). It is believed that burning the victim and scattering its ashes on the fields and smearing it on houses and granaries will bring prosperity. Although the sacrificial rites for the creation of prosperity have ceased, the rituals of its alternative form continue to be performed.

Animal sacrifice and human sacrifice were in vogue in the sacrificial rite. M. Shanmugam Pillai (2003:33) says that in the Tamil cult, different types of terms such as Avibali, Athmapali, Narabali, Thalabali and Navakandam refer to human sacrifice. From the time of the formation of the state, there is evidence of human sacrifice and sacrifice of human lives for the sake of the prosperity of victory.

Aravan Sacrifice

The Mahabharata kootam performed at draupadi amman temple will continue for 16 days throughout the night and will end the next morning with the aravan kalabali. On the ground in front of the temple, there is a huge image of Aravan made of mud. An earthen pot is lit with a lamp made of rice flour near the head of this Aravan figure. When the Aravan field sacrifice begins, they sacrifice the goat and mix its blood with the rice in an earthen pot. In the form of Aravan, in nine places, they cut it off with the sword and put the soil in the rice. This blood rice is sprinkled around the Draupadi Amman temple. With this, the Aravan Kalabali ritual will end. People believe that if this blood rice and the soil of the Aravan figure are placed on the roof and field of the house, prosperity will increase.

Navadhanya Sowing

Draupadi Amman temple festival is celebrated in the first week of Masi month on the waxing moon day. On the day of flag hoisting, the people of the village under the leadership of the priest bring the soil from the lake on the outskirts of the town in an earthen pot and erect a small fence near the place where the Aravan Kala sacrifice takes place and sow the grains like paddy, sesame, tur, black gram, green gram, bean, kollu, bengal gram and karamani lentils. Draupadi Amman temple festival begins with the navadhanam sowing ritual. After the Aravaan kalabali ceremony is over, people pluck the millet saplings and the soil. They believe that if the plucked soil and millet saplings are put in their fields, the yield will increase. The millets grown in the temple are believed to be the image of Aravan. Just as the sacrifices of the Gond tribes take the ashes and bury them in the ground, so here they take the grains and the soil of the form of Aravan and sprinkle it on the fields.

Duriyothana Padukalam

During the Draupadi Amman festival, the utsava idols of Draupadi, Arjuna, Dharman Bhima, Nakula, Sahadeva, Kannan, Pothuraja and others will be brought to the padukalam where the image of Duryodhana is placed. There will also be street dancers dressed as Duryodhana, Bhima and Draupadi. Bhima attacks Duryodhana's thigh and kills him. Draupadi, according to her vow, would climb on to the chest of duryodhana's earthen statue and finish her head with a comb there. She would take the flower hidden in her stomach and put it on it. Here the comb is considered to be the chest bone of Duryodhana, the flower is considered to be duryodhana's intestine and the vermilion in the thigh is considered as duryodhana's blood.

The statue will then be desecrated by the people. People will take home the soil of the idol. With this, duryodhana padukalam festival will conclude. As a symbol of achieving prosperity through duryodhana padukalam ritual, the idol made of clay is considered to be duryodhana's body and the soil of the idol is taken away and placed in the fields and seed pots as if carrying the flesh from her body. The above rituals of prosperity allow us to be regarded as originating from the belief that the need for prosperity can be fulfilled through a sacrifice. In the events of Duryodhana's Padukalam and Aravan Kalabali, people consider the statue to be a symbol of their prosperity creation beyond the fact that it is made of just mud. It can be seen from these events that these rituals are a symbol of prosperity.

Conclusion.

People believe that prosperity will be created through sacrificial rituals. As remnants of the belief that the fertility of the land can be increased through sacrifice, fertility rituals such as aravan kalabali, duryodhana padukalam, and the sowing of navadhanam are followed by the people as alternative forms of sacrifice. Through these prosperity rituals, the classical mythological character, Vaidika Draupadi, is worshipped in the rural areas of north Tamil Nadu as a folk goddess who accepts the rituals of prosperity. The Western conception that folk deities arose from the Puranas, and the Indian concept that folk deities are exalted and transformed into classical deities, do not fit the worship of Draupadi.

Draupadi worship is a folk deity associated with prosperity rituals. Apart from performing the story of the Mahabharata as a ritual, these events have also shifted away from the story of the Mahabharata and have become events that fulfill the needs of the people who are celebrating it as cultural events.

Reference

- 1) Alf Hiltebeitel, 1991, *The Cult of Draupadi: On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess*, University of Chicago Press.
- 2) Samy, B.L, 1976, *Mother goddess worship in Tamil Literature (Tamil)*, New century Book House, Chennai.
- 3) Shanmugam Pillai,M., 2003, *Sangam Era Tamils worship and Rituals(Tamil)*, World Tamil Research Institute, Tharamani, Chennai
- 4) George Thompson, 1981, *Human Essence*, Chennai Book House PVT, Chennai -17
- 5) Siva Subramaniyan. A. 2015, *Magic and Rituals (Tamil)*, Kalachuvadu, Nagarkovil, -01.
- 6) Bhakthavachala Bharathi, 2003, *Cultural Anthropology(Tamil)*, Adaiyalam Publisher
- 7) Bhattacharya, Narendra Nath, 1977, *The Indian Mother Goddess*, Manohar Book Service, Delhi.
- 8) Bouisson Maurice, 1960, *Magic its Rites and History*, Rider & Company London.
- 9) Chattopadhyaya, Deviprasad, 1959, *Lokayata*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi.
- 10) Frazer George James, 1976, *The Golden Bough – A Study in Magic and Religion Vol – I*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., London.
- 11) Thomson, George., 1980, *Aeschylus and Athens*, Lawrence & Wishart, London.