

Food Practices in *Perumpanatrupadai*

S. Aathirai Nallaal

Introduction

Food stands as an inevitable part of life and culture of human beings. It is food practices that basically differentiates human from other species of the world where human beings are the only Mammals who cook their food. People of various ages and various parts of the world follow food practices that is different from each other. This paper focuses on food practices followed by ancient Tamil people of Sangam Age as portrayed in *Perumpanatrupadai*.

Objectives

*To explore the food practices of Sangam people through 'Perumpanatrupadai', on the basis of their geographical divisions.

*To understand the culture of the ethnic group 'Perumpanar'.

*To imply how food practices of the same society has now changed at post-modern period.

Background

"Perumpanatrupadai" is one among the "Pathupattu" (The Ten Idylls). It belongs to Aatrupadai type of Literature where the poems are narrated by "Perumpanan", a singer who got patronized by a wealthy generous King, directs the poor to the King, that he may also receive the same benefits. 'Perumpanar' was a sect of people who are experts in Isaitamil. They sing Tamil songs along with instruments like KUZHAL (Flute), YAAZH (Harp), etc.

Perumpanatrupadai was written by Kadiyalur Uruthiran Kannanar. It contains about 500 lines. The work is all set in Thondaimandalam. Though it is absurd about the meeting of the two 'Perumpanars', it is clear that the Panan who got patronized by the Thondaimanadala King Ilanthirayan, praises him and directs the poor Panan towards the land of this wealthy King.

Division of Geographical Areas and Their Food Practices

The categorization of Land into Five, based on their characteristic features is based on their unique practice of lifestyle which cannot be found in other than Tamil culture. All these types are referred with "THINAI" after each of its name. It divides Land into Five,

1. KURINJI
2. MULLAI

3. MARUTHAM
4. NEIDHAL
5. PALAI

Perumpanatrupadai speaks of all these categories of land, except on Kurinji land.

Palai: A Mixture of Mullai and Kurinji

“Suramum suram sarndha nilamum”

Palai is not a separate region but Mullai and Kurinji are referred as so, when any of these two loses its fertility and becomes a dry, wasteland due to some reasons like summer, drought, famine, etc.

The main source of food for the people of this region is robbing from the trespassers. But sometimes they do also cook their food like the people of other regions.

Perumpanatrupadai depicts what and how people of this Palai region cooked their food. The Vettuvar sect of people belonged to this region. They cooked Tamarind curry for rice. They were also familiar with the art of Grilling, where Perumpanatrupadai speaks about how they grilled the flesh of “AAMAA”. (P.A-175-177).

Perumpanatrupadai also states that the people of PALAI consumed “ Pullarisi” and “Uppukanda” and the other dish is salad made up of Udumbu (Monitor lizards).

The following lines capture the process of making meals with Pullarisi as practiced by the people of Palai region,

**“...Nonkaal
Irumbuthalai yaatha thirunthukanai vizhukolil
Ulivaich churayin milira mindi
Irunilak karambaip paduneeradi
Nunpulladakiya venpal Eyitriyar
Paarvai yaatha paraithaal vilavin
Eelan mundrinilavurar peidhu
Kurungalulagai yochi nedunginatra
Vallootruvari thondi thollai
Muravuvai kulisi muriyadupu potri
Vaara thatta vaadoon pulukkal...”**

-(Perumpanatrupadai:90-100)

Mullai: The Forest

“Vanamum vanam sarndha nilamum”

Mullai Thinai refers to the Forest regions of Tamilnadu. Mullai or Jasmine is the flower of the forests. The major food items consumed by the people of Mullai are Foxmillet flour, Honey and Root vegetables.

Perumpanatrupadai also captures the food habits and practices followed by people of Mullai . The book states that these people ate boiled foxtail millet along with milk. They also prepared a dish named ‘KUMMAYAM’ using Kodo millet in combination with Hyacinth bean. (P.A-192 -195).

They also cooked reddish Hyacinth beans, Bamboo rice and rice from Paddy altogether in Tamarind water and consumed it as Gravy. (P.A.-434-436).

They also cooked rice of equal size along with meat of a lamb and ate with foxtail millet flour (Thinai maavu).

Marutham: The Cropland

“Vayalum vayal sarndha nilamum”

People of Marutham regions were majorly farmers. As this is the Urban kind of region, people of this region tend to have spent a luxurious life when compared to the other regions. Perumpanatrupadai attempts an gastronomical observation on this region. People of Marutham exchanged sugarcanes and Aval with people of Kurinji, for some amount of meat of deer and toddy. Marutham people of Thondaimandala consumed smashed Aval. (P.A:223-226). They also cooked paddy rice and salad of meat of hen. (P.A:356-366)

Neithal: The Coastal Region

“Kadalum kadal sarndha nilamum”

The prominent gourmet of Neithal land is fish. Neithal people harvested Salt from sea water with a natural chemical process. Salt was supplied to the other regions with the help of Barter system.

In the coastal areas of the Thondaimandala (the present Mammallapuram), people fed their swine livestock with rice flour in order to make them healthy and fluffy. When once the pigs turned healthy and fluffy, people of Neithal region cooked pork out of it and served it. Neithal citizens, too had the habit of enjoying Toddy.

Neithal people travelled in families carrying the fish they caught in sea, to the other regions in vehicles along with Salt they harvested, and Pickle prepared by them. They exchanged these food items with the people of other regions for the items produced and cultivated there.

Food Practices Of Marayavar

MARAYAVAR were a sect of people who learnt and preached holy scriptures. They also offered burnt sacrifices to God. They lived in almost all the regions and they were highly praised by

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Kings and the common public. Hence, they had royal cuisine of meals. They were usually vegetarians and thus they ate healthy rich food like tender coconut, palm fruit, etc. The cooked meals of Marayavar contains, Rice mixed with milk, rice cooked pulses and cereals, and ‘Aaguthi’ made up of rice from paddy, etc. The rice taken from paddy which is commonly used, and the staple food of present age were once tasted only by Royals and luxurious people during Sangam Age. They added pepper grounds and curry leaves to melted butter in order to season the Pomegranates and they mixed this along with paddy rice. They named this dish as Aaguthi. They also had the practice of adding Maavadu (tender mango pickle) to their meals.

**“...Karpin nudhal
Valaikkai maguduu vayinarindhatta
Sudarkadai paravai peyarpaduvattam
Sedha narumor vennayin maadhula
Thurupuru pasungaai polodu karikalandhu
Kanjaga narumuriyalai Ippaindhunar
Nedumara kokkinaruvadi vidhirtha
Thagaimaan kaadiyin vagaipada peruguvir”**

Perumpanatrupadai:303-310

Feast of the Royal Court

The Royal Court of Tamil Nadu has always known for their Hospitality. The courts of Tamil Kings served its guests with meals that fed their hearts, beyond their appetite, which made the people to speak about it for ages.

Perumpanatrupadai speaks about the hospitality of the Thondaimandala King Ilanthirayan. In his palace at Kanchipuram, King Ilanthirayan had appointed an expertise Master chef who cooked varieties of meat, Red rice, Sarkarai Adisil (sarkarai pongal) and more and the King served it to his guests with pleasure and honor.

Perumanatrupadai also tells about how the food was served in the Royal courts. The King presented the above-mentioned dishes for Panars. The children were served in “Star-like” small silver utensils, whereas the adults were served in large “Moon-like” utensils. (P.A: 471-480).

Drinks

“Illadu kallin thoppi parugi”

- Perumpanatrupadai:142

This line from Perumpanatrupadai reveals that the people had the practice of preparing Toddy at their homes from a particular variety of rice called “Thoppi”. This variety of rice is found in Madurai. The book also speaks about how the Valayar sect of people prepared Toddy. (Perumpanatrupadai:275-281). Apart from that, almost all the sect, class and age of people had the habit of consuming Toddy which is taken from not only Thoppi but also from coconut, palm fruit, etc.

Food Habits of the Present

The food habits of the people of present age is no more similar to their ancestors, who was depicted in Perumpanatrupadai. The average amount of hard work put by a person of this age, is ghastly low when compared to the people of Sangam Age. In Post-modern society, people run behind “Fast food” that would end their lives so fast. But this was not the state of the Sangam people. They cultivated their own food, that suits the place they live in and for their metabolism. They never practiced any act against Nature and to be more precise, worshipping and being one with Nature is their culture, unlike the present.

Conclusion

Perumpanatrupadai is a strong piece of evidence to understand not only the food practices of Sangam people, but also the culture of that age. The differences in the gourmet of people according to their sect, class and region is evident through this paper. The paper also attempts to notify the absence of THINAI- the geographical divisions, in the present age. Thus the paper concludes with the finding that, this absence of geographical divisions and relevant tradition, is the reason which is leading the health of people into remarkably bad state, as they follow food tradition of foreign land which does not suits their body.

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S. Aathirai Nallaal
I M.A. English Literature
Department of English and Foreign Languages
Bharathiar University
Coimbatore - 641010
aathiraisga5@gmail.com