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Somasundaram, Chandrika In recent years, citizen of Tamil Nadu have come out with more religious activities grounded in basic Hindu cultural and ethics. True, Hinduism is being affected by conversions, but at the same time, Saivite organizations, temples, ministries and other faculties concerned with Hinduism are asking tremendous steps to revive and engender Saivite feelings among every Hindu. It gives immense pleasure to say that organizations act as a vital tonic to the world's oldest faith.

The role of women in particular is prominent, and their most important propaganda instrument as the puja, offered by them in various forms.

One of the most popular is the puja offered to only lamp or kuthuvillaku, performed in the privacy of one's home or as a religious gathering to promote feelings of harmony and love of God. In many cases a cross section of Saivite society, from top to bottom, is thus assembled under one roof.

One such gathering, now regular throughout Tamil Nadu, was organized on October 21st at the Mylapore Kapaleeswarar Siva Temple. The function was initiated by Mrs. Rajammal Veerappan, wife of Minister M. Veerappan of the Tamil Nadu Department of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments. Three hundred and eight lamps were utilized for the puja and 2,000 observers were in attendance. In explaining the purpose and benefits of the sacred rituals, participants offered various perspectives. One lady from Mylapore explained that the five faces (Pancha mukham) of the sacred lamp are a reminder of the five essential qualities of the woman in Hindu culture: love and affection; strong will; patience; tolerance and intelligence. Another added. "The housewife is respected as a sacred lamp of the family. The sacred lamp is worshipped as a form of the Lord. The light enlightens the world and the darkness - unconsciousness of Lord Siva - is thus removed by the holy light."

It is commonly understood that the four principle elements of the kuthuvillaku - the lamp itself, the oil, the cotton wick and the light produced - are analogous to the four fundamental objects of Hindu life - virtue, wealth, pleasure and liberation (dharma, artha, kama and moksha). The lamp filled with oil absorbed by the cotton wick produces light, just as wealth utilized with virtue to bring about a pleasurable life brings the rewards of heaven.

To perform the puja, a clean, well-polished lamp is placed on the ground atop a layer of unbroken rice. The lamp is then decorated with sandalpaste, kumkum and flowers. The oil used may be of several kinds according to the result desired: gingeli (sesame) oil prosperity, ghee for wisdom, castor oil for health and olive oil for wealth. Once the lamp is lit at the start of the puja, it should not be allowed to go out until the puja ends. Throughout the ceremony, each woman worships the light as Lord Siva, Praying for prosperity, wealth, health and eternal heavenly life.

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