

## Some Archaic Word forms Dropped by Jaffna Tamil Society

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### Abstract

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The people of Jaffna are considered one of the archaic society which tries to maintain its social economic and cultural values even in the well advanced scientific and technological world. Though they maintain these values it is essential to undergo changes when world is advancing. These changes are reflected in their ceremonies, (birth, puberty, marriage and death which are the mile stones of the human life), trade, communication, profession etc. The archaic word forms that had been in use have been replaced by other words with the mixture of English, their second language. After the colonization there formed two societies called the English educated and the vernacular educated. The English educated were dominative and they were the ones who held the administrative posts. Their lives and life styles had been a model for the poor under privileged people and between these two extremes, formed a mixture of language. As some archaic forms were considered inferior and looked down upon, new ways of usage together with English vocabulary were used to express them. There hasn't been any research done so far on the above title or in relation to this title. But some of the word forms have been used in some researches by some scholars such as S. Suseendiraraja (1997), K Navaratnam (1959), C Sivaratnam (1968) to express the culture and other aspects of the society. This paper gives a description of the Jaffna society and its culture now and then. This analysis gives a description of the archaic word forms used by the people belonging to the Hindu religion of the Vellala caste in the Jaffna society. The goal of this paper is to document and preserve the archaic spoken word forms that had been used by the Tamil Jaffna society and to bring out the cultural changes that the society had undergone due to the advancement of technology, education and fusion of cultures, as this is one of the less explored languages. Data were collected from the people of the second and third generation elder to me through interviews and also through reference of some books. This paper focuses mainly on the spoken word forms used among the Hindu Tamil Vellala society during their ceremonies like birth, puberty, marriage and death. This is the initial step taken by me and more researches could be done among the other caste, religion, profession, trade etc.

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### Background of the Study

Once when I was talking to a very old lady in an occasion I came across many new words, actually very old words, used during the twenties and before, whereas, youngsters of my age and among the people of my mother's age didn't know about them. I tried to check them with the internet and books, but I failed. So as a Jaffna Tamil, I thought it is my duty to document those archaic word forms which would show the lost culture through words. Speech shows the culture and since the culture has been changing by the development of technology and fusion of cultures, it is very much important to document the archaic word forms. A research question was raised into my mind, 'Why is it important to document words?' and the answer made me to write this article.

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## Objectives of the Study

To document the archaic word forms, preserve them and to bring awareness among the young Jaffna Tamil generation to show how our ancestors lived, showing their culture using words.

## Methodology

Interviews with 7 old women and 3 old men, age above 70, were the main source for this research and some books about Sri Lankan and Jaffna culture were referred. The IPA (International phonetic Alphabets) are used for transcription, and the alphabets which are used had been given in the annexure 1.

## Literature Review

The Tamils of Sri Lanka are direct descendants of the early Dravidian settlers who occupied Sri Lanka long before the advent of the Aryan. The language of the people in Jaffna is Tamil. Tamil is one of four important Dravidian languages. As an ancient, but still living language, Tamil enjoys the patronage of a considerable group of scholars in many countries of the world who have done extensive research and written scholarly treatises on the language for over a century. The word 'Tamil' means 'sweet' and is no doubt it is sweet to the ears of those that speak it, as their native tongue can be expected to be. Tamils are proud of their language; as well they might be in view of its ancient literature and great age. The culture consist not only the habits but also the language of the people. The language used by the ancestors has changed a lot. In Tamil language, there is a practice of categorizing colours and foods which is of interest of outsiders. Red, orange, yellow are 'warm' colours, while green and blue are 'cool' colours. Common (neutral) colours are: white, grey and beige, where black is unclassified. Foods are classified as 'cooling' (milk, curd, cucumber, ladies finger, onions, mutton and all fruits) and 'heat' (chicken, chillies, pepper, cinnamon, ice-cream etc.) The language plays another major role while calling others, among the Jaffna Tamils, according to the age, kinships, formal and informal situation the salutations differ. Culture among the Tamils had changed a lot. But still the religious rituals are mostly maintained by the people still.

## Research

The research was focused on Tamils of the Jaffna society. Among them the samples are from the Hindu Vellaalla caste, since there are other religions and many castes prevail, and it will be a vast area to study which will be too long for a research paper and it consumes more time. The word forms those were used during birth, puberty, marriage and death, as they are the important mile stones of a man, had been taken in for the research.

## "Birth", in Jaffna Society

Jaffna society gives more important to a pregnant mother. However during this period, people took more care when a woman was baring or had given birth to a child. Then the families were attached together and the girls when they got married continued to live under the same roof with their mother. The older generation continued its strict food and medical habits on the younger generation. In the early days, the pregnant lady was let to deliver the baby outside the house in a small hut like thing especially built for this purpose. As soon as she had delivered the baby, the midwife takes handfuls of sand from their courtyard tie it in a piece of cloth and keeps it on the young mother's stomach. Within 24 hours of delivery the young mother was given a bit of musk with the betel to eat; this, they believed it would give the energy which was wasted on the delivery. A culture of lighting the lamp with the Neam oil was followed in the early days believing that it kills the germ in the air and is good for the eyes of the baby. They also swept the house with the Neam leaves and not with the broomstick from the period the baby was born and continued for nearly two to three months. Words that had been used by our ancestors during birth, which are completely forgotten by the younger generation, are given below.

1. [piLLaytta:cci] - 'Pregnant woman' – now it is not used since it seems like an illiterate word, everyone uses the word 'pregnant' in English.
2. [kuTilkaTTatal]- 'a hut with four pillars, thatched by Palmyra or coconut leaves. This was built prior to the confinement date and the delivery was done by local mid-wives.
3. [na:Lsarakku]- 'the first sundries brought before the delivery'
4. [pe:Ruka:lam] - 'the period of confinement' now, the English word 'Date' is in use.
5. [no:kka:Tu] - 'suffered by pains at the delivery time by the mother'

6. [kuRi] - 'signs prior to the delivery such as pains or splitting of the water bag'.
7. [kuLattaNNi:R] - 'certain herbs were added to the water and boiled, and the mother was bathed'.
8. [paTTattaNNi:R] - 'the bark of the Neem tree was boiled in the water and given to the young mother to drink and bathe'.
9. [ka:yam]- 'certain items of sundries were grinded together and given to the mother to eat'.
10. [u:Ral] - '21 particular kinds of sundries were pounded together and mixed with a bottle of arrack and buried in the soil. It was left there for 5 months and when the baby is born it was given to the mother to drink, as they believed that this herbal arrack would cure the mother's internal wounds.
11. [kuRukkukaTTatal] - 'a piece of cloth worn by the young mother, when nursing the baby. But now this term is used to a piece of cloth worn at bathing.
12. [koTTiku: TTatal]- 'the baby on its 7<sup>th</sup> day was taken and placed on the winnowing fan by the midwife and then the sundries such as pepper, cumin, garlic, ginger, betel, areca- nut and paddy were kept one by one near the head of the baby, then the midwife slowly swings the winnowing fan and sings a song related to the sundries.
13. [ko:vilukkueTuttal]or [piLLaiyeTuttal] - 'the new born child was taken to the temple on the 41<sup>st</sup> day of birth, offered to the God and bought back by the mother giving some money'.  
But now the word '[piLLaiyeTuttal]' is used during the caesarean.
14. [piLLaykaraytal]- 'abortion'.
15. [malaTi] - 'a woman who is unable to conceive a child'. Now this term is considered as taboo.

### “Puberty” in Jaffna Society

In Jaffna society the maturation of a female takes more importance than of a male. When the first sign of puberty was noted, the girl was kept in a separate place and she was treated tenderly and carefully. Certain kinds of sundries were ground by the hand to prepare the curry. Chilli powder and other spicy things were strictly excluded. Only the mother and other women who took care of the girl were allowed to meet her and not the others. The girl's family obeyed 31 days' exclusion from mixing with the society. It was called as '[tuTakkul]'. The girl after her puberty was allowed to wear saree. After the first menstruation, the girl during every period of menstruation was kept alone and didn't take bath for the first 3 days. Then on her 4<sup>th</sup> day she used a kind of powder called '[arappu]' (taken from, a kind of nut and powdered) to take 'head bath', 5<sup>th</sup> day she took an oil bath, on the 6<sup>th</sup> day with a normal bath and on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, turmeric bath (they dissolve turmeric in the water for bathing). After her 7<sup>th</sup> day she was allowed to go the temple. The girl who had attained puberty was not allowed to wander alone. She was expected to obey certain rules and regulations of the society and was not allowed to speak with gents other than her family members. Even though certain phrases were used to denote puberty of a male which were not marked as much importance as the female. Below are the words that had been dropped by the society during puberty ceremony.

1. [puttiyaRital]or[samanciTTa:]or[perisa:xira:]or[periyapiLLaya:kira:] - 'the girl who attained puberty'. But now the English word 'age attain' is used.
2. [kaTikkaNkaNTuvita :N]- 'the boy who had attained'.
3. [kuppayttaNNi:rva: kkiRatu]- the girl on the day of puberty was seated on the heap of the garbage and bathed'.
4. [tu:macci:lay]- a cotton saree worn by the girl during menstruation'.
5. [vaNNa:nma:ttu]- 'a cotton saree worn by the girl during menstruation which is brought by the laundry man who is called as 'dhobi'".
6. [ma:ttuci:lay]- 'a piece of cotton cloth worn by the girl during menstruation'
7. [karikko:Tu]- 'a circle drawn by charcoal around the girl during her periods'. The girl was not allowed to step out of the circle because they believed that the girl would be haunted by evil spirits. If the girl has to go outside for natural necessities, she was given a piece of iron or charcoal to protect her from evil spirits.
8. [su:taxam] or [ti:TTu]or[toTama: TTa:L]or[vi:TTukkuve Liyilay] - 'menstruation'.
9. [ti:TTuiRayttal] or [perumpa: Tu] - 'over bleeding'.
10. [kuLi]- 'a pit was dug to keep the girl when she was bathing during her period'.
11. [ma:Ra:Ti] - 'the piece of cloth used to cover the physical changes of a girl'.

### “Marriages”, in Jaffna society

“[tirumaNamenpatua; yiramka: lattuppayir]” - 'marriages last forever'. This is the concept of the Jaffna society. When people decide marriages, they were very careful in choosing the correct pair. In those days they took into consideration of the caste, race and religion. A social group would not accept to marry in another group.

Before fixing a marriage they followed a traditional pattern. They expected that the horoscope of both the girl and the boy to match with 10 units of at least 75% that should match. Dowry system was another important feature which still prevails, where the bride's family should give according to the demand of the groom. As people didn't like to share their property with strangers in the earlier days, marriages were fixed within the same group or the relations. After all these arrangements had been success, a ritual called '[pompilaypa: tal]', which means the first visit of the bridegroom and his parents to the bride's house. If the girl is not satisfied for the groom and his parents, they deny the girl. In order to satisfy the groom and his family, the girl has to dress smartly and display all her talents especially in cooking, where she has to cook the meal and serve. While serving, her behaviour and manners are keenly observed. If the girl tap the rice pot with the ladle more than 2 times they denied the girl as they thought that she was not fit to run the family. In some families the girl was given a small silver vessel called '[sempu]' with water and was observed how she had used the water fugally or was given a box of matches to light a lamp with several wicks to see how many sticks she had used to light them, the less, more chance of getting married. If all the barriers were successfully passed, the date for the marriage would be fixed according to the '[panna: Ngam]', an auspicious date calendar.

The following are the words dropped by the society during marriage.

1. [ve:Lvuka:vuRatu]– 'exchange items of food such as traditional sweet-meats, before the wedding to ensure the marriage'.
2. [kattiva:Ngiratu] – 'a shaving knife was borrowed from the family male barber to the groom and from the female barber to the bride'.
3. [ka:lse:v] – 'the knife borrowed from the barber was used to shave the arm-pit and the hair below the stomach'.
4. [saTaNguseytal] – 'marriage/wedding'.
5. [nilappa:va: Tay] – 'a long piece of cloth was spread on the ground for the groom to walk on it on the wedding day'.
6. [kaTukkaN] – 'piercing the groom's ear to wear a stud'.
7. [veLLa: ppu]– 'a piece of cloth used to cover the rice (3 measures) brought from the dhobi'.
8. [pu:ta:kkalam] or [na:Lpa:nNay] or [pu:ta:kkalappa:Nay] – 'the rice brought from the groom's house was used to cook the special meal for the couple on the wedding day'.
9. [ammiasa:Ni]– 'the traditional grind stone kept at the place of wedding to be tread on by the bride'.
10. [ka:lmo:tiram] – 'a ring for the 2<sup>nd</sup> toe of the groom'. But now it is worn by the bride and is used as [meTTi].

### **“Death”, in Jaffna Society**

Death is a static end of every human. Jaffna people face it with sobs and weeps. Though they believe in re-incarnation, lament loudly with certain lyrics of mourning called '[oppa:ri]'. They follow certain rituals at the funeral. A dead body is laid formally heading to north. A traditional lamp with one wick is lit and placed above the head. It is kept blazing till the body is taken to the cemetery. The traditional task soon begins to be performed with the Saiva Priest (not a high class priest) making arrangements for the funeral, using the [kiriyaicca:ma:n], (a collection of ingredients used during funerals). Many of the items just purchased are put into nine pots of water which had been placed before the priest under the '[pantal]', which is rapidly being constructed and decorated with coconut and mango leaves. The body is washed and dressed and placed in the coffin. The Dhobi decorates the frame of the corpse with a highly ornate fashion crepe paper. Prayers and songs are sung and then the body, on a simple frame, is taken away. Next day the son or the person who did the cremation, along with the relatives will go to the cemetery and take the ash and they will go to a nearby sea – the famous one is Keerimalai among the Jaffna Tamils, where they would dissolve the ash in the sea water. On the 31<sup>st</sup> day the Brahmin (high class priest) would come to the funeral house and do the rituals called '[antiraTTi]'. After 31 days are over, the people related to the dead person mix with the society. And every year the death anniversary is remembered by giving alms. The words that have been completely dropped by the society during the funeral and its rituals are listed below:

1. [ma:ttu]– 'a white cloth tied around the dead body' – Now the dressing is done by the undertakers and the body is embalmed.
2. [pa:Tay] - 'a palanquin used to carry the corpse to the cemetery'. – Now hearse is used.
3. [ka:Ta:ttu]– 'the ash of the cremated body is collected in a vessel'.
4. [sevaNTi] - 'alms giving to the priest, rice and vegetables are given.'

5. [nakkiyata:nam]– ‘all necessary items used by a man, is freshly brought from the shop and offered to a priest’. It is replaced by the word [e:xataTTam].
6. [paccappanna:Ngu]- ‘green coconut leaves are cut down and thatched and kept instead of the coffin and placed on the palanquin. Now the word [savappeTTi] is used as the coffin is used nowadays.
7. [ma:raTittal] - ‘beating of women on their chests saying [oppa:ri] (a folk song sung about the behavior of the deceased person).

### Conclusion

Jaffna is said that it has been preserving its culture from then to now. It isn't hundred percent true. When we analyze the culture from its beginning to the moment, there is a vast change. But the people are trying to preserve it and they find it difficult to fight against the advancing technology and development. Education which is now opened to all caste to enter into any profession, the caste system according to the profession is fading. Another factor is the women's independence. Women are all-rounders in all their activities from their house-hold to the outside activities of the world. This had many changes in their culture including the language usage. The education or the importance given to English language had made a vast change that the Jaffna society thinks that using words from English in their speech would give respect and higher status. This reason made many Tamil words to be dropped and many English words to join in their speech. Some words expressed in Tamil seems to be vulgar for the educated people and they had replaced them with English form. Since culture is an important phenomena in a society and the language expresses it, to preserve the language or the archaic word forms, we must form associations and contribute a lot to it. During 1990-1995 an association called [tami Lva LLa Rccikka Laxam] started forming equal pure Tamil words for the English origins, such as [kuLi Rka Li] for ice-cream and [vetuppaxam] for bakery etc. People can be given awareness about our culture and at-least dress according to our culture and respect our customs during functions and festivals should be made compulsory. But these kinds of suggestions can't be said how far it would give a good result in preserving the culture, because of the globalization, and fast migration among the youngsters. Furthermore, there are many researches that could be carried out to document the archaic word forms of Tamil, for e.g., the words used among castes, religion, food habits, festivals, trade etc. can be taken into account.

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**Annexure 1**

The IPA chart for consonants that is used in Jaffna Tamil is given here with the Tamil orthography. Some IPA symbols are simplified for the purpose of typing. Symbols given in the brackets are allophones of the phonemes.

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosives	p (b)	t (d)		T (D)	c	k (g)	(x)
	பு	த		ட	ச	க	
Nasals	m	n		N	ɲ	ŋ	
	ம	ன, ந		ண	ஞ	ங	
Fricative		s	(ð)				
		ச					
Tap		r					
		ர					
Trill			R				
			ர				
Central approximant	V			L	j		
	வ			ழ	ய		
Lateral approximant		l		L			
		ல		ள			