

Panel III: Ritualized Repasts & Food Offerings

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RITUAL COOKING & FOOD OFFERINGS IN AGAMIC & NON-AGAMIC
TEMPLES IN JAFFNA

Abstract:

Hindu religious practices in Jaffna are a combination of agamic and non-agamic traditions. In both traditions, offering food plays an important role in daily rituals as well as special rituals. It varies from offering water, milk and fruits to elaborate cooked food. Hence, cooking and offering food is also a form of worship.

In the agamic temples, the ritual kitchen known as ‘madappalli’ is a crucial part of the temple design. In this kitchen, the food is cooked away from the public’s gaze by a member of the Madappalli caste (one of the nine castes assigned for temple cooking) or by a Maddappalli Brahmin. In agamic temples, offerings called neivedyam takes place three times a day, during regular pujas. There are different food offerings for different deities and for special occasions like Markali Thirvathirai, Ani Utharm , Karthigai etc.

In contrast, non-agamic temple devotees, either collectively or individually, are directly involved in temple rituals and the offering of food such as velvi, madai and pongal. The entire temple site is transformed into a public kitchen for mass cooking. In a few non-agamic temples, non vegetarian offerings are also permitted. Today, Hindu temples in Jaffna follow a mixture of agamic and non-agamic practices. This visual presentation will attempt to highlight the differences and commonalities of offerings within agamic and non-agamic traditions.

Biography:

Sutharsini Vignamohan completed her BA in Art History and MA in Cultural Studies from the University of Jaffna. She is presently teaching at the College of Education, Jaffna while reading for her PhD in Art History at the University of Jaffna. She is also a Visiting Lecturer at the Department of Fine Arts, University of Jaffna.

Biography:

Kumutha Umakanthan, a vocalist and Veena player, teaches at St. John's College, Jaffna. She obtained her BA degree in Art History (Fine Arts) from the University of Jaffna. Her research on Madam and Madam culture was published in Tamil, as a book.