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PUBERTY CEREMONY FOR TAMIL HINDU GIRLS

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1. Introduction

When a girl attains puberty, significance is attached to the day of the coming of age. It is the custom to consult a book of omens. The month, the day and the time are noted. If it happens to be a Monday, the girl will be eminently chaste. Tuesday is not favourable, as she is likely to be a widow early in her days of wedlock. If Wednesday, she will be wealthy. Thursday is good, too, for she bids fair to be virtuous. Friday is not considered auspicious. Saturday and Sundays are also bad days as she runs the risk of being poor. The time, too, has its meaning. Morning is best. After mid-day, not so good. If she happens to wear a white cloth it is lucky. Red cloth, unlucky. If the girl herself first sees the marks, it is considered to be unlucky. These customs seem to be a reflection of the South Indian customs.

2. Ceremonial Rites at Attainment of Puberty

On the very day a girl attains puberty, the uncle on the mother's side pours water three times on her head. And thence she has her bath. The clothes she had worn are to be discarded. For seven or sixteen days she is kept in an isolated place and given gingerly oil, eggs and selected (*pathiyam*) food.

Day of Ceremony

1. At the top of the entrance door nine or eleven mango leaves are tied. The number must be always be an odd number.
2. A *Nirai Kudam* is set up at the entrance of the house using the following steps:
 - (a) Place a head-banana leaf on the floor with the tip of the leaf towards the left when facing the entrance from inside the house and spread paddy or rice in it.
 - (b) Fill the *kudam* (copper or silver pot) with clean water and put a ten-cent

coin in it and place some on the top of the spread paddy or rice.

- (c) Put the dressed coconut on the top of the *kudam* and evenly spread five mango leaves around it.
 - (d) Place a *kuttu villakku* (brass or silver lamp) on the head side of the banana leaf if one lamp is used or both sides if two lamps are used.
 - (e) Mix turmeric powder with a little water to make a *Manjal Pillaiyar* and stick a few stalks of *arugam* grass on the top and place the same at the tip side of the banana leaf.
 - (f) Place three betel leaves with areca nuts and two bananas in front of the *Manjal Pillaiyar*. Stick five incense loss sticks on one banana.
 - (g) Put *pottu* with *santhanam* (sandalwood paste) and kumkum for the *kudam* (three positions), coconut (three positions) and on the *kuttu villakku*.
 - (h) Put a flower on the top of the coconut and the *kuttu villakku*.
3. Another *Nirai Kudam* is set up where the girl is going to sit during the ceremony. The pointed end of the head banana leaf is to face East or North.
 4. Aunt of the girl bring her with a veil over her head with one roll of three betel leaves and a whole areca nut in each hand.
 5. The girl is allowed to sit on a low stool, which is covered with a piece of white cloth in front of the *nirai kudam*, and she preferably faces east. In front of her will be a tray with milk, *arugam* grass and coins.
 6. Now the camphor is lit and the ceremony begins. The first person (a male) collect grass, coins and some milk in the palms of both his hands. And while he places some on the girl's head, her maternal uncle cracks a coconut.
 7. The placing of milk-*arugu* on the head of the girl is repeated by an odd number of close relations as couples. The last couple will be parents of the girl.
 8. Aunts and cousins take her for her bath. When the first person (a male) pours the first pail of water on her head, a coconut is cracked again by another uncle. This is

again repeated by an odd number of couples.

9. While the bathing is going on, all the *nirai kudam* etc., except that at the entrance, will have to be removed and cleaned. Similarly the place too is cleaned. And a new *nirai kudam* is set up.
10. The girl has to be dressed up with silk saree and shining jewellery.

3. Final Ceremony to Counteract Evil Influences

1. The girl is brought with a veil over her head and face. She will be carrying a small *sembu* having mango leaves and a whole dressed coconut.
2. She stands in front of the *nirai kudam*. Her uncle and aunt put crossed garlands on her.
3. Meanwhile a total of eleven arthi items would have been arranged in sequence and kept in different trays as indicated below:
 - (a) **Nirai Naazhi**: A container full of paddy with a lighted *kamadchi* lamp sitting on the iron piece or nail) in the centre of the paddy.
 - (b) **Puddu**: three triangular cone-shaped pieces with *kumkum* pottu.
 - (c) **Ulutham Kalli**: three lots of *urid* flour paste with *kumkum* pottu.
 - (d) Either **Rice and curry or Pongal**: Cooked rice and vegetable curries on a banana leaves and green beans or rice cooked with cow's or coconut milk – only three lots with *kumkum pottu*.
 - (e) Three **dressed coconuts**.
 - (f) **Different types of fruits** – total to be an odd number.
 - (g) **Betal leaves and cut areca nuts topped with a lemon** – arranged in around tray.
 - (h) Indian sweet-meat (**palakaram**) in odd number.
 - (i) **Loose flowers** – different types
 - (j) **Paneer set** – tray containing *Paneer*, Sandalwood paste and *Kumkum*
 - (k) **Paal Roti** (not counted as one of the odd number of items) – made of coconut milk and rice flour – three in number.
 - (l) Finally, an **arthi** is given using three *thiris* embedded in three pieces of banana and surrounded by coloured

liquid formed of a mixture of turmeric powder, quick lime and water.

- If one wish more items could be added, but the total should always remain an odd number without taking into account the *Paal Roti*. A roll of white cloth (twisted) to surround all the items or piece of lace to cover each tray.
4. The actual ceremony begins now. The girl's veil is pulled back.
 5. At the start of the ceremony, an uncle cracks a coconut.
 6. Thence the *arthi* begins with the first item (*Nirai Naazi*), being used for that purpose by two married old ladies. It is passed over the head of the girl to be received by two other married ladies after the *arthi* has been executed.
 7. After the *arthi* of every subsequent item by two married ladies, the said tray is given over the girl's head to be received by two other married ladies.
 8. *Paal Roti* – one of the *Roti* is given to be put under the girl's foot and crushed. The remaining two are collected by a single lady, taken around the head of the girl three times split into four pieces and thrown in the four directions, viz East, South, West and North.
 9. Finally an *arthi* is given using three *thiris* embedded in three pieces of banana and surrounded by coloured liquid formed of a mixture of turmeric powder, quick lime and water. On extinguishing the flame, the two ladies proceed to place a pottu on the girl's forehead and the remainder is thrown out.
 10. The maternal uncle and aunt carry the *Nirai Naazhi* and the girl follows them with the *sembu* in her hand to the altar room of the house. Alternatively, she remains where she is and her uncle and aunt bless her. She is given a tray in place of the *sembu* and they give the first gift made of gold. Thence she is made to sit on a chair. Others bless her and give her presents preferably made of gold. The ceremony is now over.

Meanwhile, all the arthi items are collected in a bag including the dress she had worn before bath and all are thrown away in running water.

If the puberty ceremony is not done immediately on attainment of puberty, and is done just before the wedding then the bridegroom's people will have to participate.

GODDESS MAHALAKSHMI



Obeisance to Goddess *Mahalakshmi* who has the Lotus in Her hands, who has a cheerful countenance and who bestows fearlessness with both her hand, who is decked with precious jewels of all kinds, who bestows on Her devotees their desired fruits, who worshipped by Hari, Hara and Brahma, who is surrounded at all time by *Saktis* and who has *Nidhis* (treasures) known as *Sankha, Padma* and *Mahapadma*.

Mahalakshmi is the *Shakti* of blessing of the Lord. She is not separate from the Lord. All forms of blessing constitute *Mahalakshmi*. Invoking Her in the form of *Grahalakshmi* is to convert one's dwelling place into a home of happiness. So too when we invoke Her as *Varalakshmi* we have martial happiness. Happiness through progeny is the blessing of *Santanlakshmi*. Happiness through wealth is *Dhanalakshmi*. Happiness gained in terms of success is *Jeyalakshmi*. Any blessing is traced to Her Grace.

A girl who attained puberty should be treated as *Mahalakshmi* because of her ability give happiness to her parents and family. A happy married life is considered essential for all Hindu Tamil girls and none can match this happiness. Being wife and mother, she expands her love to her husband, children, parents and in-laws. She sacrifices her time to benefit her family. She is happy when she sees others in her family happy. There is no doubt that she is the *Grahalakshmi*.

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