

# THE MIGRATION OF TIRUNELVELI TAMIL CHRISTIANS TO MALAYA AND THEIR WEDDING TRADITIONS IN MALAYSIA

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**Abstract**---The major objective of the research is to explain the migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christian to Malaya and their wedding traditions in Malaysia. Qualitative approach was used for this study. The two methods such as field work and table work were used for this study. In the table work, research thesis, books and research articles were selected and the data from these were analyzed using descriptive approach. Moreover, for the field work, the researcher had collected data by attending Tirunelveli Tamil Christian marriage functions and had relied on his own personal experiences. The findings show that in the early 20th century, a sizeable number of converted Tirunelveli Tamil Christians had migrated in families to Malaya to start their own small businesses. Today they live in groups in the Malaysian cities of Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. This diaspora of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians brought along their traditions and culture as well. Even though these Tirunelveli Tamils were converted into Christianity, they adapted their original traditions and culture to that of Christianity. As a matter of fact, the marriage patterns of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians have similarities to the marriages that were practiced during the Tamil Sangam and Medieval Period. This study is useful in finding out the pattern of migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians to Malaya and their wedding traditions that are still in practice in Malaysia. The research claims to be the first such attempt to do a study regarding the migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians to Malaya and their wedding traditions that are still in practice in Malaysia.

**Keywords**---Migration, Wedding, Traditions, Tirunelveli, Tamil, Christians, Malaysia.

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## I INTRODUCTION

Tamil community is considered as the oldest community in the world. Tamils are separated into various regional and ethnic groups. Among them, Tirunelveli region Tamils possess unique features. They possess 3000 year old traditions that have been evidenced through the archaeological studies held in various places of Tirunelveli such as Adichanallur and Korkai. 45 percent of Tirunelveli Tamils follow the Christian faith. After the introduction of the reformed Christian Church in Tirunelveli in 1778, through the mission of spreading the gospel by Rev. Charles

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Theophilus Ewald Rhenius, Rev. Robert Caldwell, and Rev. G. U. Pope, the conversion of the Tirunelveli Tamils into the Christian faith spread from village to village.

Tirunelveli is an old district in Tamil Nadu, situated in the southern part of India. It is located in the world map at the latitudes between 08.8' and 09.23' and the longitudes between 77.09' and 77.54'. The district is spread over an area of 6.823 sq. km. In the 1500s, the fishermen living along the coastal areas of this district followed the Catholic Christian faith. In the 1680s, the Catholic Christian faith began spreading to the interior of Tirunelveli district. In 1778, the Reformed Christianity spread to the Tirunelveli district. During this period, the Tirunelveli Tamils converted themselves, village after village, into this new order of Christianity. 45 percent of the people living in Tirunelveli district are followers of Christianity [1].

Adichanallur and Korkai are the oldest places in Tirunelveli district. Through archeological excavations carried out in these places, ancient civilizations of the Tamils were found. Through these findings, Tirunelveli has been identified as a 3000 year old city. Among the found artefacts, were burial urns of old-aged people. The skeletal remains included ancient Tamil characters, preserved husks, and rice. They also confirmed that the materials in the urn were of 2800 years old. Through this discovery it is identified that people of Tirunelveli had lived there since the Stone Age [2].

Apart from, Sangam literature, the medieval literatures too, have made references to this region and people of Tirunelveli. Sambandar in his Thevaram had sung about Tirunelveli district in his song entitled 'At every corners of Tirunelveli'. Furthermore, a special note could be read in *Sekkizhar's Thiruthondar Puranam* as 'His great country'. On the 1st of September 1790, Tirunelveli fell into the hands of the British after the reign of the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Nayak and the Nawab [2]. Even though the rulers of the land and patterns of living had changed, the 3000-year long-standing Tirunelveli Tamils are still following the marriage rituals and practices that are mentioned in the Sangam and Medieval literatures.

The distinctive Tirunelveli Tamil Christians migration to Malaya increased along with the rise in the total number of Tamil population in Malaya in the beginning of the 20th century. Among them, many of them belonged to the reformation Church. They took to small businesses such as grocery, bakery, butchers and newspaper vending and began living in clusters in the big cities of Malaya such as Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Although living far from the homeland, they were faithful in retaining their traditions and culture.

## II LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many research articles and books written in Tamilnadu regarding the weddings of Tamils. But, in Malaysia, there are only a few books and research articles which narrate about Tamil weddings. Books and research articles published in Tamilnadu and Malaysia describe the entire Tamil wedding traditions. Nevertheless, no books or research articles are published about the wedding traditions of a particular community or a region especially about Tirunelveli Tamil Christian wedding traditions.

A book entitled *Tamil Wedding Method* has published. In this book, the details of the rituals, causes, theories and ways of arranging marriages are clearly explained. Furthermore, he has explained about Vedic marriages, Tamil

weddings, reform weddings and legally registered weddings. This book caters to the Tamil traditionalists, conservatives and reformists as well as atheists. Furthermore, the writer has pointed out, how the old and new traditions have been adapted with the passage of time. Moreover, this book is useful to conduct Tamil marriages in a traditional way without Vedic rituals and Sanskrit mantras. However, there is no mention of the marriage methods of the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians in this book [3].

The researcher has written an article entitled "The role of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians in the development of the Tamil education in the state of Perak". In this article, the researcher discusses about the migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians to Malaysia and the role of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians in the development of Tamil education in the state of Perak, Malaysia. The conventional and traditional marriages of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians are not discussed in this article [4].

Kanni [5] has conducted a research for his Master's Degree in the University of South Africa entitled, 'A Descriptive Visual Analysis of the Survival of Tamil arranged Marriage Rituals and the Impact of Commercialism.' This research is about the marriage ritual of Tamils in general.

Buckley [6] published an article at the Grand Valley State University entitled, 'A Cross-Cultural Study of Weddings through Media and Rituals: Analyzing Indian and North American Weddings.' In this article, the researcher has compared the wedding ceremonies of India and North America. There is no information on the marriage of Tamil Christians in Tirunelveli in this article.

Varghese [7] in his article entitled, 'The Indigenous Tradition of Syrian Christians of Kerala – a Perspective Based on Their Folk Songs: Marriage, Customs and History' has described about the wedding ceremonies and history of the Syrian Christians living in Kerala.

Paul Roche has written an article entitled, 'The Marriage Ceremonies of the Christian Paraiyans of the Kumbakonam Area, India.' This article describes the wedding ceremonies of the parish Christians living in Kumbakonam area. The ceremonies are quite different from the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians.

Thamburaj [8] has published a book entitled, *Tamil Weddings*. In this book, Tamil wedding rituals in general are described. The book, also describes the Tamil marriages of the Tolkappiyar period, the Sangam period, Silapathikaram period, Manimagalaiperiod, medieval period, and the modern era. This book has also not discussed about the marriages of any particular society or about the contemporary Tamil community.

Govindasamy [9], Kannadasan [10], Pillai [11] and Tesigan [12] from Tamilnadu have published books entitled, *Tamil Wedding*, *Tamil Wedding and Thali*, *Explanation of Marriage* and *Matches for Marriage* respectively. All these books explain the Tamil marriages in general, but not of the above researched community.

While analyzing the previous studies mentioned above, it was found that no studies have been carried out by anyone about the wedding procedures of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians. Furthermore, no research articles or books on the marriage methods of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians were found till now, though they migrated 100 years ago in Malaysia. Keeping this in mind, the article discusses about the migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians to Malaya and their wedding traditions in Malaysia.

### III RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative approach was used for this study. The two methods such as field work and table work were used for this study. In the table work, research thesis, books and research articles were selected and the data from these were analyzed using descriptive approach. Moreover, for the field work, the researcher had collected data by attending Tirunelveli Tamil Christians marriage functions and by using the personal experiences of the researcher himself.

### ***ANALYSIS DATA ANALYSIS***

The data analyses are based on two themes such as migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians to Malaya and marriage methods of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians in Malaysia.

#### ***Migration of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians to Malaya***

More Tamils were brought to work in the rubber plantations opened by the British in Malaya. In the early days many people from Chennai and Nagapattinam came to Malaya to work in the estate plantations. After the spread of Christianity in Tirunelveli, Tirunelveli Tamil Christians had an excessive awareness. Tirunelveli Tamil Christians went in search of material to Colombo and Malaya [13]. In the same manner, the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians migrated to Malaya in the beginning of the 20th century. They migrated to Malaya through two systems— British aided independent settlement system and business settlement system. Those who migrated to Malaya took up different job positions like government jobs, teaching jobs and own business ventures [4].

#### ***Migrated for Business***

Tirunelveli Tamil Christians migrated to Malaya for the sake of business in the beginning of the 20th century. Most of them settled in the big cities like Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang and started small businesses, namely butcher shops, grocery stores, bakery, newspaper vending, fish mongers, oil business, spicy products business, etc. In the beginning, only the men had business in Malaya. Males who came on their own to Malaya offered their businesses to other Tirunelveli Tamil Christians and returned to India. In due course, some brought along their families to Malaya. They established their businesses and settled in Malaya [4].

#### ***Migrated for Government Work***

Some slightly educated Tamil Christians from Tirunelveli migrated to work in the government sectors. Most of them took up jobs in the railway transport department and garage industry department. These Christian migrants brought along their families to work railways and to settle down in the cities of Ipoh, Taiping, Prai, Kuala Lumpur, Seremban and Johor Bahru [4].

#### ***Migrated for Teaching***

The Reformed Christian Church spread to Tirunelveli in the late of 1700s and in the early of 1800s. From 1820 to 1835, 371 villages were converted into Christian villages due to the evangelization of Rev. Charles Theophilus Ewald Rhenius [14]. Schools were started to educate the children living in villages that were converted into Christian villages. Many teachers were wanted to work in these schools. Theological College (Seminary) was founded in 1818

as an institution to train teachers and to work in these churches and schools. This college is currently working as a Bishop Sargent Teacher Training School[14]. Due to the increase in the need of teachers in the church schools, Sarah Tucker Teacher Training School (1858) and the Ooliyasthanam Teacher Training School (1895) were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The number of Tamil schools in Malaysia was increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the demands of Tamil teachers were high. Hence, trained teachers from the above mentioned three teacher training schools in Tirunelveli migrated to Malaya [4].

### ***Tirunelveli Tamil Christians Wedding Ceremony***

The Tirunelveli Tamil Christians who migrated to Malaya brought along with them their culture and traditions. During the initial periods, they followed the rich wedding traditions but later, changes were made by the younger generations. Nevertheless, this article narrates the wedding traditional rituals from seeing the bride to the end of the third day of marriage function.

### ***Seeing the Bride (Pen Paartal)***

The first book which had described the Tamil marriages is the *Tolkappiyam*. This book illustrates a man and a woman are betrothed in two types of marriages. If a man and a woman are unaware of the past, the mate's mate suddenly finds herself united by love and then marries with the parent's consent. Such marriages are described by Tolkappiyar as love marriage. The second type of betrothal is where the parents take care. Tolkappiyar claims that this type of marriage is the arranged marriage[15]. Tirunelveli Tamil Christian marriages occur in these two ways. The children who do not fall in love and when they reach the age of marriage their parents, relatives, friends or marriage brokers will choose appropriate life partners for them. In the medieval period, the habit of seeking the bride is termed as chatter of bride. During this period, they will ask for the hand of the bride by informing all the conventions of the bride's family[16].

Tirunelveli Tamil Christians often marry their own relatives. Cross-cousin marriages are the most common form among them. In olden days there prevailed a tradition through which, when the cross cousin girl attains puberty, the cousin boy will be present in the puberty ceremony to adorn her with bangles and to confirm their marriage. There is another tradition whereby, if there is no girl among their relatives then a girl from another place will be sought after. Such cross cousin marriages are decreasing at present. The references to the marriage of the cross cousins are found in the Tamil epic *Manimegalai*[17]. Tirunelveli Tamil Christians are still practicing this ancient tradition.

Both the love marriages and arranged marriages are still practiced among the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians. For both these types of marriages, 'seeing the bride' is the first step. The bride groom's family members will see the girl in the churches or in public places and if they like the girl they will visit bride's home and propose her according to the tradition of 'seeing the bride'. During this tradition, only the bride groom's parents and his close relatives visit

bride's home. If they like the bride, they offer match money to her. Or else the match money will be offered on a different occasion.

### ***Offering Match Money (PoruttapanamKoduttal)***

*Tolkappiyam* narrates that there should be ten matches between a bride and a bridegroom who joins in a family life. It also says the ten matches between bride and bridegroom will lead to a happy family life and they are, birth, civic, masculinity, year, figure, beauty, completeness, grace, emotion and satisfaction [15].

In the modern wedding there are ten matches, *moment*, *mahendrati*, *sasthideci*, *vani*, *rai*, *valliyam*, *rajjo*, *vedi* and *nadi* [18]. Tirunelveli Tamil Christians do not follow these matches since they are based on Hinduism.

Generally, the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians give importance to five matches with ABCDE (age, beauty, caste, dowry and education) while choosing the bride. These are connected with the four matches such as year, figure, birth and beauty as mentioned by *Tolkappiar*. Moreover, according to this modern age, they expect that the bride should be educated. If all these five matches exist, the family and close relatives of the bridegroom will offer the match money and finalize the marriage. It is not customary to offer more match money. In the initial periods, they offered only five or ten Ringgits. At present, they offer fifty or one hundred Ringgits. It is a tradition to include fruits while offering this money. Usually, after the 'offering match money' tradition is over, neither the groom's parents nor the bride's parents do not fail in their agreement. If there are any changes then they will return the match money to the groom's home. Hence, the bride's home has to keep the money safe without spending it. After marriage, when the couple goes to church for the first time, they will offer the money to the church.

Moreover, there is another form of marriage known as 'offering gifts & marry' that is practiced in the Sangam age. In such marriages, only the bride's parents demand gifts and the demands are fulfilled. The groom will offer gift, land, or jewelry to marry the bride [16]. In the medieval period, the dowry system from bride's parents to groom's home came to exist and hence it is assumed that the procedure to offer match money may be fixed on the engagement day.

### ***Fixing the Wedding Date***

The usual tradition to fix the wedding date is on the day of offering match money. The most appropriate time for a wedding in the Sangam period was prescribed as the morning in the end of winter on the day when the moon comes to the house of the star Rohini [16]. The practice of fixing the date for marriage according to the astrologers is also found at that time [18]. But, Tirunelveli Tamil Christians do not fix the marriage date by selecting a good day. They select a date which is convenient for everyone. In the beginning, marriages took place at 10.00am. After the wedding, the lunch will be at the bride's residence and the dinner will be at the groom's residence. In the modern age, most weddings take place on Saturdays at 5.00pm. The wedding reception dinner will be held in the same night after the marriage, on behalf of both the bride and groom.

### ***Reading Wedding Banns***

The wedding invitation is printed after wedding date is fixed. The wedding banns of the marriage will be read in the church for three times in three Sunday masses before the marriage. These wedding banns will provide information about the proposed bride and groom. Furthermore, it will be announced, if the groom and the bride have any reasons not to get married, it shall be reported to the church priest by a written letter. It is a usual procedure for all Christian marriages. At present, this method is practiced in registered marriages. Also in registered marriages, the information about the couple will be placed on the notice board three weeks before the wedding. The Tirunelveli Tamil Christians wedding invitations are given to relatives and friends only after reading the first wedding banns in the church.

### ***Preparing the feast (Ponggipodutal)***

When there is a couple of weeks before marriage, the relatives, especially the bride's mother's brother, so called uncle, will bring all the necessary ingredients to the marriage house to cook, eat and drink. This tradition is called as 'cook and serve' or *Ponggipodutal*. If it's a large family, a goat will be brought and slaughtered. The close relatives of the marriage family will attend this party. It is also a custom that this will commence for four or five days before the wedding and they will stay in the house until the wedding day. This getting together will create enthusiasm at the wedding home.

### ***Wedding Preparatory Prayer Meeting***

A wedding preparatory prayer meeting is held three days before the wedding. Usually, the prayer meeting is organized by the women's association of the church. If the bride and groom are the members of the same church, this meeting is held first at the groom's home and then at the bride's home. The purpose of this prayer meeting is to ask God to accomplish the marriage in a good way. The church priest will also attend this prayer. After the wedding preparatory prayer meeting, marriage tent and banana tree decorations are done.

### ***Going to the Bride's Home***

Tirunelveli Tamil Christian marriage is held in the church of the bride. The bride is taken to groom's place only after the marriage at the bride's church. Tamil marriages that took place at the bride's home during the earlier times are found in the sangam literature [16]. This practice is followed by Tirunelveli Tamil Christians still this day. At the beginning of the wedding, all close relatives of the groom meet at the groom's house. Before leaving to the bride's house, the groom prostrates at his parents' feet and the elderlies to get their blessings. This is followed by the groom's father garlanding the groom. After the prayer by the church priest, the groom's relatives leave for the bride's house. The groom's sisters and sisters-in-law bring the wedding saree, wedding garlands, fruits, and other necessary accessories items like comb, mirror and ornaments in separate salvers. In *periyapuranam*, evidence is found of the bridegroom Paramadattan, adorned with gold garland, going to his bride's house with his parents and relatives [16]. The wedding ceremony which took place in the medieval period is similar to the marriage of the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians.

### ***Receiving the Groom or Etirmalai Santhanam***

When the groom is close to the bride's house, the bride's brother or who is a brother in relation will receive him by garlanding him, applies sandal on his hands and holds his hands and takes him into the house. In some customs, the groom is received by holding an umbrella. In rich families, it is a custom to wear a chain with cross as locket or a ring to the groom. This culture is narrated in *periyapuranam*. When the groom Paramadattan comes to the town of Karaikal, the bride's relatives receive the groom by garlanding him with a *mullaimalai*, in keeping with the tradition of the *vanikarcaste* [16]. This custom is similar to that of the Tirunelveli Tamil Christian wedding.

### ***Reception at Bride's Home***

Once the groom's relatives reach the bride's house, the bride's relatives serve the groom and his relative's with drinks and snacks. At the same time, they deck up the bride in her wedding saree. The church priest presents a short prayer at the wedding house. After which the groom and his bestman go to the church. In most occasions the bride's brother acts as the bestman for the groom and both proceed to be seated inside the church.

### ***Bride Entering the Church***

After sending the groom and bestman to the church, the groom's relatives return to the bride's house in their car, to bring the bride, bridesmaid and the bride's father to the church. The sister of the groom is usually the bridesmaid. The bride's face is veiled with a netted cloth while going to the church. The bride's father holds her hand to guide her into the church. The groom and the bride are to sit in chairs placed in front of the church.

### ***Marriage Procedure in the Church***

The wedding begins with the song of the hymns or lyrics related to marriage. Before conducting the wedding, the church priest looks at the congregation and announces that those present can voice out their reasons or objections immediately, if there are any, that the bride and groom should not get married. After waiting for a few minutes and if there are no expressions of any obstacles, the priest would announce that from then onwards, even if there are reasons, nobody should utter anything about them and proceeds to conduct the marriage ceremony. To begin, the priest calls the person who is giving away the bride and to hold the hand of the bride and join with the hand of groom, which is the *kaipidithukoduttal* ceremony. This ceremony is done by the father of the bride. If the bride's father is not alive, the brother or any other close relative of bride will do this. In the medieval period, there was a practice of *niirvaartal* and this can be seen in the medieval literature, epic *Chulamani*. The ceremony of giving the bride *Suyampirapaiyai* to the groom *Nambi* by the father *Sadiyaran* is found in this epic [19]. It is believed that this practice is still followed by the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians.

After the *kaipidithukoduttal* ceremony is over, the church priest ensures that the bride and groom accept their marriage. Then the church priest gets a confirmation from the bride and groom that they will live together till death apart them. After this, the priest asks the groom to wear the *tali* around the bride's neck as a symbol of marriage. It is not a custom to wear *tali* in thread among Tirunelveli Tamil Christians. They wear the *tali* chain in gold called as *tangachankili* (gold chain). According to the capacity of the groom the gold chain will be of five sovereigns to fifteen

sovereigns. The sovereign of the chain should be in odd numbers. After the wedding lock, a marriage sermon is given by the church priest. Then, the practice to sign in the wedding register by both the bride and groom is carried out. Then, the church choir sings songs of wedding blessings. Finally, the church priest declares the groom and bride as husband and wife by adding, 'God hath joined together, let not man put asunder'. As soon as the marriage service is over, the groom and bride leave the church first before the others.

### ***Wedding Party***

In the early days, it was customary to have separate parties at the groom's house and at the bride's house. At present, if the groom's house and the bride's house are located nearby, they both arrange a wedding party in any public hall. Often, this is a dinner party. If the bride's house and the groom's house are distant, they arrange separate wedding parties.

### ***FeedingMilk and Banana***

After the wedding party, the bride and groom go first to the bride's house. The closest relatives of the bride exchange the garlands of the bride and the groom and feed them with milk and banana. In the marriages that take place in the rural areas of Tirunelveli, the married couple go to the bride's closest relatives' houses to get blessings at the feet of the elderlies. This process of getting blessings is called *pattanapprevesam*. And the couple will be given money called *kumputtukettu* during the process of *pattanapprevesam*. Moreover, they will be blessed with milk and banana. This practice of visiting closest relatives' houses and getting blessings, *pattan apprevesam*, is not practiced in Malaysia. Instead, all the closest relatives of the bride assemble at the bride's house to exchange the garlands and to bless them by giving milk and banana. After having milk and banana at the bride's house, the married couple go to the groom's house.

### ***First Visitation (Mutal Maruvidu) and Offering the Mother In-law a Variety of Sweets (Maamiyar Madippalakaram)***

After the marriage, the bride and the groom, going to the groom's house for the first time, is known as *mutalmaruvidu*. In the village of the groom is also found, *pattanapprevesam*, where the couple get blessings from the groom's relatives and it is practiced elaborately among the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians. When the bride and groom reach the groom's house, they both prostrate at the feet of the groom's parents and get blessings. The bride has to give sweets like *athirasam*, and *murukku* to her mother-in-law before prostrating. This is called as *maamiyarmadippalakaram*. At present, the north Indian desserts like *laddo* and *jilapi* are given. After the bride gets blessings from her mother-in-law, the mother-in-law presents the bride a gift according to her capacity in the form of gold-ring, gold-chain, necklace and bangle as *kumpudukettu*. The practice of giving gifts to daughter-in-law by mother-in-law was practised in medieval period and this information is found in the epic *Kamparamayanam*. When Rama's mother came to know that Sita was the right match for Rama, she gave a gift to Sita and this can be seen in

*Kamparamayanam*[20]. Then, at the groom's house, garlands of the groom and the bride are exchanged and given milk and banana. Moreover, they stay for three days in the groom's house.

### ***Second Visitation (Irandam Maruvidu) and Offering Dowry***

On the third day of marriage, the couple are taken to the bride's house by the bride's relatives and is called as *irandammaruvidu*. A feast takes place at the bride's house that night. In this feast, the closest relatives of the groom are also present. This feast is arranged to foster close bondage among the two families. They mingle freely among themselves in order to become stronger in their relationships.

Often, after the feast, the bride's father gives dowry to the groom's father and is called as *churulkoduttal*. It is customary to give the dowry to the groom's home which was promised before marriage. And this is known only to the groom's family. The small part of dowry is given on the *irandammaruvidu* and is known only to the closest relatives, this is also called as *churulkoduttal*. In ancient times, the bride's father used to divide his property equally between his children and to them as dowry for the daughters. This form of dowry is given only on the *irandammaruvidu*. At present, it is customary to give the dowry before marriage to the groom's family. A small portion of dowry is only given on *irandammaruvidu* for name sake. In the epic *Chivakachinthaman* mention had been made that the father of the bride gave things as dowry to the groom [16]. It is believed that the giving of dowry to the groom by the bride's father could have started in the medieval period. Nowadays, giving of dowry has been reduced very much in Malaysia. As all the women are wage earners, giving of dowry is rarely found in Malaysia.

### ***Third Visitation (Munram Maruvidu)***

On the fifth day after marriage, the couple are taken to the groom's house by the members of the groom's family. There is a feast thereon that particular night. Only the closest relatives of the groom partake in this feast. This feast is arranged to strengthen the relationship between the closest relatives of the two families. With this feast, the wedding ceremonies come to an end. After this, the bride becomes a member of the groom's house and begins her life there.

### ***Relative's Party***

Once the third visitation is over, the close relatives of both the bride and groom invite the couple to their homes for a feast. The couple are then blessed and given new clothing that includes a costly saree for the bride and a suit for the groom. This is to foster a bondage between the groom and the bride's family.

### ***Tirunelveli Tamil Christians Marriage Ceremonies and Researcher's Experience***

As mentioned in the research methods, data were also collected by attending some Tirunelveli Tamil Christian Marriage ceremonies held in Malaysia especially in Ipoh and also from the researcher's own experience.

While attending some the Tirunelveli Tamil Christian Marriage ceremonies which took place in the past, the researcher observed that only a few Tirunelveli Tamil Christian Marriage traditions are followed in Malaysia. The traditions such as, seeing the bride (*Pen Paartal*), fixing the wedding date, wedding preparatory prayer meeting, going to bride's home, receiving the groom (*Etirmalai Santhanam*), bride going to the church, procedure of marriage

in the Church, wedding party and first visitation are practiced among them. Also, the researcher has experienced all the Tirunelveli Tamil Christian Marriage traditions which had been followed in his own marriage, 20 years back, which started from 'seeing the bride' (*Pen Paartal*) to the 'relative's party'.

#### IV CONCLUSION

In the changing world, the customs of the wedding procedures are also changing among the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians. In Malaysia, the wedding traditions which were practiced by Tirunelveli Tamil Christians till the 20th century have undergone changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Tirunelveli Tamil Christians, who were inspired by the British, tend to follow the British style of marriages. The marriage ceremony of Tirunelveli Tamil Christians which took place for a week in the past has been reduced to a single day celebration. In this modern era, the wedding ceremony comes to an end in a single day with the wedding service at church and a feast on the same night.

#### *Limitation and Study Forward*

Many ethnic groups of people have migrated to Malaya. The researcher has only selected the Tirunelveli Tamil Christians and their traditional wedding procedures as a study corpus.

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