

## **Nadduvar, the custodians of temple art forms in Jaffna society**

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The study focuses on the role of the Nadduvar, a caste of the Tamil community which plays a pivotal role in preserving and maintaining temple art forms. Nadduvar are the temple musicians of the Tamil community who still preserve the age old traditions and customs and play a pivotal role in the temple rituals and other religious and auspicious events. While they mainly use traditional instruments such as Thavil and Nathaswaram, they also play a key role in promoting Carnatic music and Baratha Natyam, the traditional music and dance forms of India. This caste did not exist in the Jaffna society prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its members migrated from India only after the Hindu revival spearheaded by Arumuga Navalar. The only caste-based survey conducted by the Dutch in 1790AD does not mention this caste. This caste is now referred to as Isai Vellalar. There are only a few hundred families of this caste living in the entire peninsula. Unlike other castes, their traditions are alive since the income generated through these art forms are usually high and most of the families belong to the high income group. All caste members are Saivites with many practising strict vegetarianism as their vocation is closely associated with temples and auspicious events. In India, this caste is sometimes associated with the Thevathasi tradition. However, this is not the case in Sri Lanka now, even though some women from this caste followed certain practices of the Thevathasi tradition until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The methods adopted in this study are participatory observation, interviews and discussions.

**Key words:-** Nadduvar, Thavil, Nathaswaram, Baratha natyam, Isai Vellalar, Saivites, Thevathasi.