

## The curse of loving Tamil Nadu

The curse of loving Tamil Nadu Debarati Halder India is indeed a land of diverse culture but the diversity becomes more prominent when you come down to south from northern region be it any part of north... east, north or west. In this article I would like to highlight the typical cultural and mental shocks one receives when you plan to settle down in south particularly Tamil Nadu.

**THE ROSY DREAM:** In my childhood we visited Tamil Nadu as tourists and I was immensely impressed by the Marina Sea Beach, the clean roads, green foot paths, huge temples and of course idlies and dosas and particularly the tasty sambars and coconut chutneys. I decided then and there at the age of 7 that I am going to settle down in Tamil Nadu and marry a Tamil. Well, I really was lucky to have a loving friend from Tamil Nadu itself as my dream was... who was very scholarly, had high ambitions and like the general Tamils very intelligent. I started nurturing the dream of getting married one day to this man and finally fulfill my dream of settling in Tamil Nadu. I started attending Tamil language classes just for the curiosity to learn the Tamil culture and history more closely than from the view of just a tourist. Well, all went well, I married this Tamil boy and entered Tamil Nadu and there began the cracking of the glass world.

**THE FIRST SHOCK**

**THE CAST DISCRIMINATION** I never knew being a Brahmin will fetch such a high respect from some groups and such hatred from others. I was put up in a hostel opposite to the Parthasarathy Swami temple in Triplicane, Chennai. In fact I loved the hostel building as it was architecture in the model of Tamil houses with strong pillars, Tamil style carvings on the ceiling, and three portions, the front, the inner and the back portions.. Just like I have seen in Tamil movies. I happily occupied my seat near a large window from where I could see the temple. The next morning I woke up to have coffee and then my favorite dhoosai and chutney. Well, I really didn't mind these peculiar looks in the eyes of inmates and staff towards this north Indian. In the lunch hour I felt very hungry and went for some lunch in the dining hall, and found the hall closed ohhhh the hostel has a rule of serving both the breakfast and lunch together and I couldn't follow the Tamil instructions of the head cook. I managed with some snacks and waited patiently for the evening. The dinner hall was full of girls and ladies working in different sectors... I joined one of my roommates who were hesitant enough to take me with her. Suddenly I found one stout lady patting on my back asking me which cast I belong to. I was first stunned and shocked and then managed to answer I am a Bengali Hindu or no... There she was asking my cast. Not my religion. I had to remember for a while which cast do I really belong to Ahh yes I am a Brahmin. (In West Bengal, we never knew to discriminate our friends on the basis of cast ... yes I admit some old grandmas were there who used to follow this untouchability towards the milkman, vegetable vendors, or sweepers and how we youngsters used to make fun of these prehistoric oldies). And see the ripple in the dining hall hey I belong to THEM some women suddenly moved off from me... well they are not WE. I began to introduce myself as a lawyer who intends to marry and settle down in Tamil Nadu. Some hailed the decision some kept staring at this creature from Mars but none came to introduce themselves. Well, that's the Tamil mentality, you tell about yourself, they will hear but you will never be included in them. The next shock came from my would be husband the very next morning. When I narrated the story, he nonchalantly told me to forget that I am a Brahmin..ohhhh so he was the group of not us. Tamils are fanatic about their religion and cast. But to my respite I found my father-in-law accepting me not whole heartedly though, but not mentioning anything about my cast, religion. Well, in Tamil Nadu I can understand cast system is very much prevalent even when Dr. Abdul Kalam becomes the president and rockets are being experimented by renowned Tamil scientists. Tamil Nadu still remains in the prehistoric age of Varna subsystem while the other part of Tamil Nadu excelled in education, science, technology.

**LANGUAGE** One more thing that you tend to note when you visit Tamil Nadu is their fussiness for Tamil language. Since Nehru tried to impose Hindi on Tamils, the war of north and south began. Tamils love Shahrukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Abhishek Bachchan and every Tamil man loves to marry Aishwarya Rai in their dreams. But... no Hindi please. When you are in Tamil Nadu, no matter where you come from, either from Meghalaya, West Bengal, Orissa, Delhi, Rajasthan, or Gujarat, you are a dam Hindiwala. I was not accepted by Tamil community until I could bully them in perfect Tamil. Indeed I am still not accepted by the Tamil community by my looks. I tried to be like them with long plaits, bindis, flower and sari. But how do I give up my nativity My in-laws family criticized my every move which is NONTAMIL, my cooking is not taken by my own family because of the touch of North Indian hands, my neighbors love to hear my Tamil.. How I speak Tamil just like them and my daughter is praised and hated for being a Bengali's daughter fathered by a Tamil. Well, I decided, I should be my own self... rather be praised for my work than be hated for trying to become a Tamil. And one more shock the day I cut off my long plaits, switched over to my old salwar kameez and still spoke in Tamil, I was mobbed by the same Tamils who refused to include me in their group when I tried my level best to become one of them. Now they love to see this Tamil marumaghal from Bengal in her own version. Well, my friends who were from Delhi, Gujarat, and even eastern region, first cursed Tamil Nadu for being so rigid and awesome and then cursed me for taking up life time decision to stay back with a Tamil and left Tamil Nadu.

**THE PECULIAR TAMIL CULTURE OF MARRIAGE IN THE FAMILY** I was again awestruck when my father-in-law introduced me to a cousin of my husband telling that she was about to marry her own cousin brother that is my husband. Well, this peculiar custom of first cousins getting married, men marrying their sisters daughters is awesome. It is an indication how Tamil society is closed to other Aryan cultures. I have seen many girls from northern India getting married to Tamils and then flying off to their land after being chased off by these customary rules. And then of course the death scenes. A very unfortunate scenario that I had to witness was my would be mother-in-law's death. As my parent-in-law had a love marriage that too between two sub casts, relatives deserted them.... the moment I heard the news, I wanted to rush to give mental support to the bereaved lonely family. I was first mistook the house for a marriage house as they were beating drums and very joy full and then by the presence of all the relatives who looked at me like a dirty creature because I was north Indian, don't belong to their sub casts, casts, and not wearing a single gold jewellery. Yes, here in Tamil Nadu Tamils demonstrate their gold in which ever occasion they can, even for the death ceremonies too.

**ABUSE OF WOMEN** Last but not the least, women in Tamil culture is the subjects of regular abuse by fathers, brothers, and husbands. Until two years back girl children were buried alive for couple of minutes symbolically.. when this brutal system was banned by Jayalalitha government. The wives get to hear every morning that they pigs, dogs, bloody bulls and they are used to it. I really didn't believe this until

I saw that my daughter is not welcomed to her own grand fathers house the first time she entered after her birth because it is a girl Tamil nadu is one of the states in India where parents want to send their children for higher studies; it is a state with beautiful natural treasures, temples, architecture, monuments. It is the true history of India. But the tamil culture is awesomely backward, rigid and orthodox. Every tourist who has visited tamil nadu complained about the language barrier and about food, nonetheless many have suffered cast discrimination too. This article is dedicated to all those who suffered in tamil nadu and felt never to come back.

## About the Author

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