



## Odhuvars in Tamil Nadu

**For Prelims:** Odhuvars, Saivite, Pathigams, Tirumurai, Thevaram, Avvaiyar, Bhakti Tradition

**For Mains:** Recognition of Odhuvars will legitimize the age-old tradition and benefit the community at large.

[Source: TH](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, Tamil Nadu government handed over appointment orders to **15 Odhuvars** (among them five are women), who were assigned to **Shaivite temples** in the Chennai region as they **serve the deities by singing the hymns and praise**.

### Who are Odhuvars in Tamil Nadu?

- **About:**
  - Odhuvars sing devotional hymns in Tamil Nadu's Hindu temples but are **not priests**. They are in the service of Lord Shiva by singing his **praise from Thirumurai in Saivite temples**. They sing devotional hymns **but do not enter the sanctum sanctorum**.
- **Origin of Odhuvars:**
  - The tradition of Odhuvars can be traced back to ancient times, **with its roots firmly embedded in the [Bhakti movement](#)**, which flourished **between the 6th and 9th centuries in Tamil Nadu**.
  - During this period, **several saint-poets known as Alvars and Nayanars** composed devotional hymns in **praise of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva, respectively**. The Odhuvars emerged as **custodians of this rich musical and devotional heritage**.

### Alvars and Nayanars: The Saints of Tamil Bhakti Tradition

- **Alvars:**
  - **Devotion to Lord Vishnu:** The Alvars were a group of **twelve Vaishnava (devotees of Lord Vishnu) saint-poets**. Their compositions primarily centered on their deep devotion to Lord Vishnu and emphasized the **concept of surrender (*prapatti*) to attain salvation**.
  - **Poetic Works:** The Alvars' devotional hymns and poems were collected in the **Naalayira Divya Prabandham**, a significant Vaishnavite scripture. These hymns were composed in the Tamil language and celebrated the divine qualities and forms of Lord Vishnu.
- **Nayanars:**
  - **Devotion to Lord Shiva:** The Nayanars were a group of **sixty-three Shaiva (devotees of Lord Shiva) saint-poets**. They were deeply devoted to Lord Shiva and composed hymns and poems in praise of him, emphasizing the path of **bhakti (devotion) and love for the divine**.
  - **Poetic Works:** The Nayanars' hymns and poems were collected in the **Thirumurai, a**

**corpus of Shaivite scriptures.** These compositions, written in Tamil, celebrated the various manifestations and attributes of Lord Shiva.

## What is the Significance of Odhuvars in Present Context ?

- **Religious Significance:** Odhuvars continue to hold a crucial place in the daily and festive rituals of Tamil Nadu temples. **They are responsible for reciting Thevaram and Thiruvasagam**, two ancient Tamil texts filled with hymns and praises for Lord Shiva.
- **Community Engagement:** Odhuvars often come from **marginalized communities, and their role in temples offers economic opportunities.** Moreover, their performances bring the local community together, **fostering a sense of unity and belonging.**
- **Preservation of Tamil Language:** Odhuvars contribute to the preservation of the Tamil language. Through their recitations, they ensure that the ancient Tamil texts are **understood and appreciated by successive generations.**
- **Promotion of Devotion:** Odhuvars help create a devotional atmosphere within the temples. Their soul-stirring renditions instill a **sense of piety and spiritual connection among the worshippers.**

## What are the Challenges and Issues of Odhuvars in Tamil Nadu?

- **Economic Vulnerability:**
  - Many Odhuvar families struggle to make ends meet, as their **income depends largely on temple donations and offerings.** This economic vulnerability can lead to the decline of the tradition.
- **Lack of Recognition:**
  - The Odhuvars' contribution to temple rituals and preservation of Tamil culture often goes unnoticed. **They receive limited recognition,** which can be demotivating.
- **Declining Interest:**
  - The younger generation may not be as interested in continuing the tradition, as it can be financially unstable and offers limited social prestige. **This raises concerns about the continuity of the tradition.**
- **Technology and Modernization:**
  - The advent of recorded music and modernization has altered the way people consume religious and devotional content. **Odhuvars may find it challenging to compete with digital media** and contemporary musical forms.
- **Lack of Institutional Support:**
  - Recognised government institutions like [Sangeet Natak Academy](#) etc have been **non-committal to Odhuvar's concerns** as their expertise and competence in the field can alleviate the suffering of the community.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:(PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q 1. With reference to India's culture and tradition, what is 'Kalaripayattu'? (2014)**

- (a) It is an ancient Bhakti cult of Shaivism still prevalent in some parts of South India
- (b) It is an ancient style bronze and brasswork still found in southern part of Coromandel area
- (c) It is an ancient form of dance-drama and a living tradition in the northern part of Malabar
- (d) It is an ancient martial art and a living tradition in some parts of South India

**Answer: D**

**Q 2. With reference to the cultural history of medieval India, consider the following statements: (2016)**

1. Siddhas (Sittars) of Tamil region were monotheistic and condemned idolatry.
2. Lingayats of Kannada region questioned the theory of rebirth and rejected the caste hierarchy.

**Which of the statements given above is/are correct?**

- (a) 1 only  
(b) 2 only  
(c) Both 1 and 2  
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

**Answer: C**

**Mains:**

**Q 1. Evaluate the nature of Bhakti Literature and its contribution to Indian culture.(2021)**

**Q 2. The Bhakti movement received a remarkable re-orientation with the advent of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Discuss.(2018)**

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