

Ways of Making: *Kattuch Corupam* of Virgin Marry in Our Lady of Miracle Church at Jaffna

The term Corupam or Curupam in Tamil is derived from the Sanskrit word rupa, and another Tamil equivalent is Uruvam (form). It has long been used in the Tamil language tradition and refers to likeness, resemblance, image, icon, beauty, deity, and nature. In Tamil-Christian vocabulary, the term Curupam occupies a significant place. It designates the anthropomorphic figurative depiction of divinities as opposed to the aniconic items seen in the common domain of worship. It plays a vital role in religious practices, art history, and related fields.

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In religious contexts, icons, or curupam, are constructed in two primary ways: either permanent or temporary. These statues, throughout religious history, have been expressed either naturally or stylistically. They serve as both visual embodiments of the divine and tools for inducing trance-like states in religious practices.

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A notable example within the Christian tradition of Jaffna is the '*Kattuch Curupam*', a disappearing tradition of temporary or impermanent idols. This practice involves assembling selectively sculpted body parts of celestial beings using various connective materials like wood and cloth to create an anthropomorphic divinity representation. A significant instance of this tradition can be observed in the transformation phase of the Our Lady of Miracle Church at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jaffna, located in Gurunagar, a suburb of Jaffna in northern Sri Lanka. Originating in 1614 CE as Our

Lady of Victory inside the Jaffna Fort, the church was relocated and renamed Our Lady of Miracles, attributed to miracles associated with a new Virgin Mary statue by local sculptor Annaicutti. The Kadayar, the artisan community of Catholic Karavas, has been the custodian of this church to date.

The *Kattuch Curupam* tradition is a shared tradition among the Jaffna Caivam that represents a fusion of religious traditions across cultures. In varying degrees, both agamic and non-agamic temples in Jaffna continue to employ these image-making practices. Similarly, wood and linen cloth were utilized by early Christians to create images. The wood was wrapped in linen and the linen represents the garment that was draped over Jesus in the tomb during his entombment.

At the Our Lady of Miracles Church, the *Kattuch Curupam* of the Virgin Mary exemplifies these intersecting traditions. The icon features the Holy Virgin's face and hands, especially carrying infant Jesus, carved in ivory as minimal representational units, connected to wooden pieces and draped cloth. This cloth formation not only creates her bust but also envelops her entire figure. In some respects, it aligns with the Uddaku tradition in Catholicism, encompassing both ritual and visual object-making with performative acts.

This essay aims to delve into the visualization, visibility, and viewership of this impermanent image-making practice, highlighting it as a distinctive method of iconography within the context of Tamil Christianity.

Keywords: *Kattuch Curupam*, Iconography, Virgin Mary, Kadayar, Our Lady of Miracles Church