CHAPTER II

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL FEATURES
MAP 2
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Location of Tiruvi\lilmilalai

Tiruvi\lilmilalai is a village of roughly 3 km long from east to west and 2 km broad on the average. It is in Nannilam T\luk, Quaid-e-millat district of Tamilnadu (Map 1 and 2) and is 10 km west of Punthottam, a town which is 23 km from Mayil\duthurai and 94 km from Tanj\vur. The village is well connected with Tiruv\arur, Kumbakonam, Mayil\duthurai, via Punthottam and Tanj\vur by road. The village is reachable from Madras by rail and road with a distance of 303 km. A revenue division, Tiruvi\lilmilalai has a total area of 480.38 hectares with a population of 2583 persons of whom 50 percent is women.

Tiruvi\lilmilalai is the sixty first place on the banks of K\vveri in Venn\odu, a sub division of Ulaguyva Ch\ola Valan\du.\1 The village is located on the northern bank of Arisil\ru a branch of river K\vveri that facilitates water for daily consumption and irrigation. The roads and streets in the village are comparatively broad, and the houses in the four streets around the temple, are long and narrow in a congested state.

Origin of the name Tiruvi\lilmilalai

There are no inscriptions of the pre ch\ola period to refer to the name of Tiruvi\lilmilalai. We have saiva saints like Tirug\n\nasambandar to rely on the literary sources to find out the same. Tirun\vukkarasar and Sundaram\rthi have sung hymns of fourteen, eight, and one, respectively in praise
of the main deity Vīlināthaswāmy of the temple² with a total of twenty three hymns which may be the earliest reference that has survived to this day. Mēḻṅānamunivar (17th century) a disciple of Maragṅānadēsikar the second head of Tiruvāvuduthurai math has sung six hundred and seventy eight hymns on the people and deity. The above literary evidences refer to the name of the village.

The name Tiruvilīlimalai is made up of three words - Thiru-Viḷi-Milalai. Tirugṅānasambandar, Tirunāvukkarasar and Sundaramūrti address the place as Viḷīlimalai in their hymns. In the post Tēvāram period due to the association of Tēvāram hymns the place was considered sacred and the prefix Tiru³ (a Tamil word meaning sacred) was added. Further Tiru is taken to mean Lakshmi, the word Lakshmi is a sanskrit word derived from Lakshmā meaning aim and auspicious.⁴ The second word 'viḷi' denotes a medicinal plant⁵ (Botanical name clemos Fruiteose) found in abundance in those days which of course is rare now.

The third word miḷalai (literal meaning subtle speech)⁶ denotes a village or a small territory.⁷ Hence the word Tiruvilīlimalai on the whole may be described as a sacred place with vili plants.

The place is also known as Bhā Kailāsam (heavenly abode on earth) as tradition says that Śivā came in Vinnīli Vimāna (a heavenly chariot) from Kailāsa (heavenly abode) chariotted by Indira to Tiruvilīlimalai to marry Kāthyaṇyanī (Paṟvathī).⁸ It is also known as Kalyāṇapuram signifying the marriage, (the word Kalyāṇam means marriage) of the Lord Śivā with Paṟvathī.
The other names of the place are Dakshina Kāsi (Kāsi of Dakshinā i.e. South India) (Kāsi a place which is considered a holy abode of Śivā in the North), Suvēthakānanam (a place that signified Śivā's blessing to Suvethakāethu who was the son of Jayandand (North Indian ruler) against Yama (god of death). The place is also known as Tējinivanam, on account of Tējini a (medicinal plant) being found in abundance. Nēthrapuram a place where Vishnu offered his nēthra meaning eye in the place of a lotus flower and for the above legends or collection of traditional literature are attributed.9

Temple in Tiruvilimilalai

Vīlināthaswāmy temple is the biggest and the oldest temple in the village. The temple occupies 200 hectares of land which is approximately half of the total area of the village. There are four streets immediately around the temple and now are called as mādavidis. The other streets are Mēttu street, New street, with a Harijan colony on the outskirts of the village. Besides Vīlināthaswāmy temple there are other temples such as Māriamman temple, Vināyakar temple, Vishnu temple, Abimukteswarar temple, Kāliamman temple, Aiyyanār temple and all of them are smaller shrines compared to Vīlināthaswāmy temple and of recent origin.

Physical features

The river Kāveri begins its course at Coorg or Kudagu meaning the western land and runs through Mysore but falls rapidly into Tamil country.10 It flows through Tiruchirapalli, Tanjāvūr and Quaide-e-Millet districts. In Tiruchirapalli it
branches into two; Kollidam at Srirangam and Marudāru called so because of the river passing through a place full of Marudu trees, (a species of Trees Terminalia Alaba) and cultivated land. In Tanjāvūr it branches out into two again, the northern branch taking the name Kāvēri itself, and the southern branch being known as Vennāru. About twelve miles west of Kumbakōnam, the Arisilāru river branches off from Kāvēri. The site where the diversion takes place is called Arisil. On the bank of Arisilāru a fierce battle was fought between the Pāṇḍya ruler Srimana Srivallabha and the Pallava king Nirupatunga varman, and the latter became victorious. This is attested by the Bāhur plates of Nirupatungavarman. Arisilāru travelling from Arisil about 112 km through a number of places including Tiruvālimilalai within the limit of Nannilam Taluk, flows from west to east.

The earliest reference to the river is made in the Sangam work Eṟṟuthogai. Rivers in Tamilnādu are often named with certain specific meaning like Tēnāru (honey) Pālāru (milk) Neiyyāru (ghee) and Arisilāru takes its name of a place Arisil where it branches out, and an inscription of Kājarāja I dated 997 AD states that water was brought from Arisilāru for the holy bath of the deity of Vīlināthsāswāmy temple three times a day.

Fertility of the soil

Tiruvālimilalai is marked by cultivable land on the south and residential area in the north. The immediate surrounding of the village have paddy fields, and coconut grove. A view
from the peak of the Rajagopuram gives a panoramic view of the Arisilaru moving towards south east. The temple tower looks magnificent amidst paddy fields with rich green overview. Thirugnanasambandar refers to the village as Elilsul Milalai\textsuperscript{17} (milalai village surrounded and struck by beauty) and Nambiandar Nambi has referred to the fertility of the soil as Selumai konda milalai\textsuperscript{18} (milalai village containing fertile soil). True to such narrations the surroundings of the village still have the fertility and rich water sources. Cultivation of paddy, bananas, coconuts and flower gardens are in abundance.

The soil is somewhat black and red colour having clay mixed with considerable proportion of land. The area is largely benefitted by north east monsoon from October to mid - December getting a rainfall that is quite heavy. Climate is uniformly hot and the month of May is the hottest month the mercury touching 42°C and the mean temperature about 33°C.

People of the village

In the total area of 480.38 hectares\textsuperscript{19} barring the temple area, about 280 hectares have been occupied by residential quarters. About 574 houses are constructed in the village, the land being owned by Thiruvavaduthurai Adhinam. The total population of 2583 persons\textsuperscript{20} have agriculture as their main occupation with of course other activities like carpentry. The major communities living in Vilimilalai are Brahmins, Vellala, Vanniar, Vadhava, Padayachi and Asari. The Harijan colony consisting of three hundred scheduled caste families\textsuperscript{21} is
located on the outskirts of the village. There are nearly 20 families of scheduled tribe (Thombas) living in this village. Hunting and agriculture are the main occupation of these families. Six muslim families are living in the village for two generations. The Brahmin families at present are few in number living in the street adjacent to the temple.

Material culture of the people

The agricultural census shows the recent trends. According to its findings while the number of operational holdings has increased by 18%, the operated area has increased by only 1.5% resulting in further decline in the average size of holdings to 1.08. There has been a decline in the number of and area operated by large holders who formed 0.5% of the total land holders and operated over 8.5% of the total land area. There has been a perceptible increase in both the number (25%) and area (23.2%) of marginal (below 1) holders, accounting for 69.4% of total land holders and 25% of total operated area. 17% of holdings covering 21.5% of the operated area, are small holdings and the number and area of which increased by 5.2% and 4.8% respectively. All these point out that agriculture appears to be only on small scale yet it happens to be the main occupation of the people of Vilimilalai.

The distribution of rainfall affects the cropping pattern. The maximum rainfall is obtained during monsoon period which benefits the rice crop. North east monsoon promotes the cultivation of mostly rain fed crops such as oil
seeds, millets and pulses. The ground water potential is also seen. Vilimilalai has potable drinking water facilities through river, tap and hand pump.\textsuperscript{25} The village has not experienced famine or flood in the near past.

While most of the people irrespective of sub communities have taken up agriculture as their occupation, some work in industries in near by places in Nannilam taluk. An important small scale industry is the production of pip (called in tamil as śivaḷi or narukku) used for a musical instrument called Nāḍaswarnam (wind pipe). (Plate 1) The manufactured pip is exported to Malaysia and Singapore. Some muslim families have resorted to business. Yādhava, Vellalā, Padayachi communities have livestock bulls, bullocks, cows, goats, buffalow, sheep and poultry.

Life pattern of the people

The people have adapted themselves according to the change of time. The economic status of the people in the village is almost on the poverty line, and their monthly income does not exceed Rs.500. The produce from the paddy fields is 60 kalam per acre out of which 3 kalam should be given as temple share as an offering. The remaining produce goes to the cultivator and he should manage the anticipatory expenditure, for next crop cultivation, and manage the household expenditure too. The price of paddy for sale varies from time to time. When the crop fails due to natural calamities the cultivator is put to a lot of financial constraints. Since their income from cultivation of land is
not adequate people take help from government through Integrated Rural Development Programme.

The village is governed by a panchayat, and the immediate officer-in-charge of the village is rural development officer. Rural electrification is a key factor in the socio-economic transformation of the area. Extension of power has helped industries in the village such as rice hulling, flour milling, oil pressing, cotton pressing, cotton ginning, small work shops, and residential power use contributing to recreation facilities like television and radio. Light irrigation by electric pumps benefits agriculture by bringing a change in the cropping pattern and it helps farmers raise more than one crop.

Social inputs like education, and health, make physical inputs active and thereby contribute to economic development. Education is both a means and measure of economic development. It helps the use of sophisticated machines and also modernises the attitudes of the people. It moulds the consciousness and character of persons which are considered as the end products of economic development. Though small in area, Vilimilalai has an awareness to the benefit of education, and there are two primary schools and one middle school. Illiteracy rate is only 8.5% of the total population. Commutation through bus to the nearest town is possible. People have the motivation to send their ward for higher education. Performance of adult literacy has also been considerably seen through night schools and government programmes. The rate of drop outs at primary school level is mainly due to poverty and diversion of
occupational need.

Improved health conditions, improved labour efficiency and thereby labour utilisation, determine the mortality and fertility and consequently population trends as well. The health of the people is always considered as an index of the wealth of the country. Primary health centre is being operated in the village of Vīlimilalai, apart from a registered private practitioner. People resort to indigenous and allopathic systems of medicine though they function as separate water tight compartments. Prevention of epidemic, communicable, and non-communicable diseases receives priority.

With relevance to nutrition, the gap between the intake and requirements is always found to be more pronounced in the lower income groups. The bottom of 10% of the population accounted for 4.67% of the calories consumed while the top 10% accounted for 16.35%. The state government organised Kulanthaigal Kāppagam (child care centre) to take care of preschool children particularly of the vulnerable section of the population and Chief Minister's Nutritional Meals Scheme benefit the children of the village to come out of nutritional deficiency.

Pollution is not seen in the villages due to absence of industries and automobiles. Health and sanitation programmes are undertaken by the village panchayat union to eradicate Malaria by spraying DDT, and preventive care against bee bugs that habitat due to thatched condition of roofing of the houses. Traditional life is in vogue that cowdung paste is
used to keep the house front clean and act as a natural preventive measure against diseases.

A view of the social life of the people reveal not much of discrimination on account of caste system. Number of sub-communities exist. The position of women is seen as one of the sub-ordination to men, normally confined to household work, not educated or employed, mainly serving the menfolk at home. But in recent years due to financial needs and changing times, some women work in fields and cottage industries. Food habits of the people are in relevance to modern times, same in the case of dress, cosmetics and ornaments. The past time of the people is mainly watching the television available in households of comparatively better economic status, and listening to radio available in panchayat office and in houses of middle and upper income groups. People reconcile themselves to strict economy yet events like marriage necessitate the incurring of expenditure which are disproportionate to their income. Their awareness of worldly matters is not much and they happily celebrate the annual festivals of local deities.

Festivals celebrated are Dipavali (festival of light; the Tamil word Dipa denotes lamp) Pongal (first day of tamil month Thai (January-February) during which month the harvest is done in the fields) Karthigai (festival of lights on which day the temple and the houses are illuminated) and also Mattu Pongal (a festival celebrated on the next day of Pongal) when cows, and bullocks are decorated and worshipped; this is a typical rural festival signifying the importance of bullocks and cows in rural life.
An important local deity worshipped by the village folk is Karuppu. He is considered as the most ferocious deity among the village Gods and he has a separate temple situated outside the village. The Thombās (Scheduled Tribe) affectionately and respectfully named the Karuppu as Karuppannan or Karuppannaswāmi. Another famous sub-deity worshipped by the same community is MaduraiViran. The cult seems to have developed from the hero worship some time in the 16th Century. It is said that Maduraiviran was a Chakkiliya (shoe maker) by birth, as such he was considered as a favourite and family God of Chakkiliyas (listed under scheduled tribes) but now the worship is not confined to the above community only. He has no separate temple. He is enshrined as a sub-deity in the temples of Aiyanār and Karuppu.

He is usually seen riding a horse with a dog, holding a sickle or noose in his right hand and a gada is the left with ferocious look and thick moustache. He is always flanked by his two wives Bommi and Vellai fowls, goats, dry fish were offered to the deity with intoxicant drinks. The depiction of Madurai Viran resemble very much the hero stone representation of the Nayak times found in other parts of Tamilnādu.

Another village deity worshipped by the people of Vilimilalai is Māriamman commonly called Mahamāyi. She is considered as a concept of Eswari (Sakti). She is believed to be the guardian deity against diseases like small pox and epidemics. She is also believed to be the deity of rain. Among the Thombā families who worship Madurai Viran and Māriamman
certain customs like animal sacrifice are common. Though worship of deities is seen in diversified form all the people of the village except Thombas worship Vilinathaswami (Siva) in the main temple.
REFERENCES


5. Kiritikar and Basu, *Indian Medicinal Plant* vol I, 1933, p. 194. The leaves and roots are considered due-obstructive and antihelminitic (Drug which expels uterine worm) and the plant’s decoction is used for uterine obstructions.


16. ARE; 445 of 1908; TNSDA; 560 of 1977.

17. Mudal Tirumurai, pp.8-10.


20. Census of Tamil Nadu, Census Department Vol II Tanjavūr District Gazette, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, p.87.


26. The scholar interviewed Mr. Nagarajan, Assistant, Municipal office at Tiruvilimilalai on 8.1.94.


30. Ibid, p.15.

31. The Scholar had a personal interview with the people of the village on 8.1.94 and obtained the information.

32. Ibid


It is suggested that the worship of Karuppu was developed from hero worship. The deity is no way connected with Hindu Pantheon, which indicated that all along he has been considered as a local deity or the god of local population.

34. Ibid, p.43.

35. Ibid, p.45.

36. Māri in Tamil means rain. She is the Goddess of rain.

37. Scholar's Interview with Muthu Karuppan and Valli, (aged 42 and 35) Thombā Community of Tiruvilimilalai Village.