Sage Agasthiyar requested the son of Brahma, Manu to visit this place. At that time, the three goddesses Saraswathi, Lakshmi and Bhoomadevi were worshipping Lord Shiva. When Manu appeared, the goddess hid themselves in the Arjuna tree called Maruthamaram in Tamizh. When Manu wanted to destroy the tree Siva intervened and prevented him from doing so. The town and temple take their name from this tree and is called as Tiruppudaimarudur.

The legend behind the tilted lingam in the Tiruppudaimarudur Temple is interesting. The lingam was found in the hollow of an Ashoka tree by the king who then built the temple. It is said that a sage came from a long distance to have a darshan of the temple and its deities. He found the river near the temple in spate. Unhappy that he could not go into the temple, he prayed to the lord and the water subsided. When he came to the sanctum, he found that the lingam had tilted to one side. Filled with wonder, he asked the lord for the reason. The lord replied that he had tilted his head to hear his devotee’s call. The king of Madurai, Maravarman and his son had built a small temple in 650 BCE. After that, Pandians, Vijayanagar and Kalakkad kings expanded the temple. Situated in 6 acres of land, Tiruppudaimarudur Temple’s compound walls measure 575 feet in length. From outside, the temple tower can be seen to go up in five layers like a step pyramid. It is heavily embellished with figures from Hindu mythology.
The people of Ambasamudram taluk follow a tradition of Pancha guru sthalam starting from Tiruppudaimarudur. Narambunathar temple is chief among the Panchaguru sthalam Thachinamoorthy of this temple is called as yoga Thatchinamoorthy. The other four temples are Attalanallur, Arikesava Nallur, Tenthirupuvanam and Idaikal. The ardent devotees of siva used to go on foot to all these Panchagurusthalas are worship on Mahasivarathiri day.

The name Tiruppudaimarudur consist of two wards 'Tiru denotees holiness. Pudai marudur means village situated near the Sivalinga kept under Marutha tree\(^1\) There are many interesting accounts relating to this temple. Among them, three are frequently mentioned in this area. Davendra wanted to get rid of Brahmahathi Dosha which he got when he committed a sin. On the advice of his preceptor, he came to this place and assuming the form of a Maruda tree performed severe penance to obtain the blessings of the Lord. Indrani, the consort of Indra, who was separated from her husband for long, worshiped the presiding deity of this temple. At last, Siva gave darshan to her from a hole in the tree and also absolved Indra of his sin. Similarly, Swayambumanu, the son of Brahma came here on the advice of Sage Agasthya after visiting Kasi and other places which have been sanctified by Swayambu lingam. When he came here, he found Lord Siva surrounded by the Goddesses Parvathi, Lakshmi Saraswathi and Bhu Devi worshiping Him in order to be blessed by Him. Swayambumanu very much disappointed in not getting the darshan of Siva attempted to commit suicide. Immediately, God appeared before him and prevented him from doing so. Manu got the blessings of the God and constructed this temple and made thee beautiful stone idol of the Goddess. When one goes to Manimandapam near the Goddess sanctum we can find the image of

\(^1\) Temple publications Thiruthala varalaru, Tirupudaimaruthur, 2010, p. 9.
Swayambumanu there. The Anthralam possessed a fine piece of Mahanadi leading to the sanctum, here we find the lingam leaning little to the north. Once a pious devotees Sri Karuvoorthevar, a Saivva saint of the tenth century came to worship Sri Narambunatha swamy along the northern bank of the river which was in spate. He prayed to God to help him cross the river to have the darshan of the Lord. Since he made a sincere plea, the God yielded to him and made the floods subsided, enabling the devotee to cross the river and have darshan of the deity. Here the Lingam at the sanctum leaned to the north to listen to the grievance of this devotee. Narumbunatha means the Lord situated amidst of fragrant flowers. The ten day Thai Poosam festival is celebrated with great pomp and is attended by thousands of devotees in and around this District.

**Garbhagraha**

The garbhagraha is 6.17 ms (20’ 3”) square, the adhishthanam measures 1.45 ms (4’ 9”) in height from the ground level. Each free wall of the garbhagraha is divided into three vertical elements, each decorated with a Koshta-Panchara, and separated from one another by low recesses. The width of the central element is 3.12 ms (10’ 3”). After the antarala, there is an ardhamandapa, which houses a number of fine bronzes. In the south-western corner, facing east, is a bronze of Chandrasekar and Manonmani. on the northern side, along the wall, there are images of Nataraja and Sivakami Amman, Sri Perumal and Kankalamurti, the last one a very fine figure.

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3 The Hindu - 31 March 1995.
In the outer verandah, there is a sannidhi, not amounting to a shrine but constituting a chamber, where there is a fine set of stone sculptures of Nataraja, Sivakami, Patanjali and Vyaghrapada with Karaikkal Ammaiyar to the right of the Nataraja icon.

The wall of enclosure of the second prakara has close to it and on either side of the gopura, icons of Surya and Chandra. There is a shrine for Bhairavar in the north-eastern corner of the prakara. There is a second wall of enclosure on which is located the outer Gopura. The amman shrine housing Gomathi Amman is in the second prakara.

What is of importance in this temple is the Chandesvarar shrine located close to and north of the main temple, and adjacent to the antrala and the ardhamandapa, this forms a part of the original temple plan and contains some valuable and informative inscriptions.

Sri Narumpunathar temple afforded ample an opportunity to the people of the locality to serve the temple in various capacities involving religious, administrative and other quasi-religious and manual work. The temple servants are referred to by many general terms such as Koil Üliakkarargal.⁴ An inscription of Rajaraja I, found on the westwall of Narumpunather shrine, we have a damaged and incomplete record of Rajaraja I⁵. There is another of the tenth year of the same ruler which mentions a gift of land and bears signatures of donees in Grantha and Vatteluthu⁶. This is found on the north and east wall of this shrine. This is a record of the twentieth year of Sadaiyamaran on the east wall making a reference to a servant of Vira Pandya, and the village is therein

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⁵ ARE 1905 No.124
⁶ ARE 1905 No.123
called Tiruppudamarudil, in Pandimarttanda Valanadu. On grounds of style and epigraphical evidence, this temple (without the later accretions) could be a foundation of the time of Rajaraja.

Another inscription of Maravarman Kulasekhara Pandya refers to the grant of lands and house-sites to the temple servants. Perhaps this was the general pattern followed by way of remunerating the temple servants. Unfortunately the record does not give the details of the various servants and their functions. However, the temple servants such as gardeners, dancers, priests and other administrative staff have been mentioned in the temple inscriptions.

In 740 A.D., inscription belongs to the period of Kochadaiyan Ranadhiran (710 – 740 A.D) found on the north wall of Narumpunathar temple describes Perumkanmis of Narumpunathar temple donated a land to the Devaradiyal namely Manikkathal. Sixth regnal year 914 A.D of Maran Sadaiyan @ Rajasimha II (909 – 946 A.D) found on the steps situated at south west corner of first pirakara, describes twenty five sheeps were donated to the Narumpunathar temple to make light or it nantha lamps to poor the one alagu ghee per day by the madan viran Elini and his wife Muventhapaingav. A Tamil vatteluthu inscription belong to the 18th regnal year (924 – 925 A.D) of Rajasimha (909 – 946 A.D) alias Sadaiyamaran described. One servant of Virapandya of Malayamadevi puram in Pandimattondu valanadu granted a gift to the Chandeswara of

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7 ARE 1905 No.122
8 Balasubramanian, Middle Chola Temple, Madras, 1977, P.198
11 ARE 1916, No. 419
Tiruppudaimaruthur in Mullinadu. Sanskrit inscription in Grantha letter found on the east wall of Chandikesvara shrine partly in damaged mentions Virapandya (946 – 966 A.D)\textsuperscript{13}. Tenth regnal year 995 A.D of RajaRaja I (985 -1010 A.D) found on the east and north wall of Chandikeswara shrine describes, four patters namely Vivansharupathi Pattan and his younger brother Parpanabhan, Kaviniyan Thavamban and Vempasaman of Eyalatu mangai Biramadeya in Raja Raja valanattu Pandiya Nadu sold a land to Ambalavan nan of Bidavur in Chola country.\textsuperscript{14} Another inscription of RajaRaja I, found on the west wall of some shrine damaged and destroyed.\textsuperscript{15}

**Arthamandapa**

The *arthamandapa* reflects similar architectural characteristics in the concerned sanctum in all aspects, except the walls and kapotas. The walls as they have been shrunk, always avoid niches and carry lesser number of pilasters than the sanctum. The kapotas bear only two kudus irrespective of their number in the sanctum. The arthamandapa is rectangular in shape and is with a circumambulatory passage and tirru-churrumaligai. The garbhagriha and the antarala constitute one unit on a common plinth, while the arthamandapa is at a lower level, from which the antarala is reached by a flight of three steps. There are four pillars in the arthamandapa in the traditional Imperial Chola style, round and capped by a plain carbel with beveled edges. The *Arthamandapa* is considered as the shoulder of the deity of the shrine.\textsuperscript{16} The flat roof (42x45\textdegree) of *Arthamandapa* which remains part and parcel of the cell arises at a height of about 9ft

\textsuperscript{13} ARE 1905, No. 121  
\textsuperscript{14} ARE 1905, No. 123  
\textsuperscript{15} ARE 1905, No. 124  
from its interior ground level. It is covered with walls on all four sides and at the front wall the entrance door is fixed. There are eight pillars in two rows in the Arthamandapa with the height of 9ft each and 2ft width. The pillars have a gap of 7ft to each other. Icons are kept on the northern side of the Arthamandapa. Devotees stand to worship the Lord in this mandapa. On the outer-front of the arthamandapa, one on either side of the entrance, are two beautifully carved Rajaraja style dvarapalakas, measuring about 1.22 cm(4’) in height knows as Chandi and Mundi. They are pleased to receive devotees and to extend welcome and they report to God about the presence of devotees.¹⁷

First Prakara

The first prakara is also called karuvarai prakara. A platform shape encircles sanctum- sanctorum and Arthamandapa. On three sides of the prakara walls encircle it leading to front portion of Arthamandapa in which one door and two ways on each side in north and south. On the southern side of this prakara, Suradeva shrine, 63 Nayanmars shrine and Saptamatarikas shrine are located. On the western side of the karuvarai prakara, kannimula Ganapathi shrine, Utsavar shrine are situated. Subramania with his consorts, Chandikeswarar shrine, and Saneeswarar shrine are situated on the northern side of the first prakara, Yoga-Dhaksinamurthi shrine is located on the southern side of this prakara.

Mahamandapa

In front of the Arthamandapa, there is a covered hall known as the Mahamandapa supported by ten stone pillars in two rows and the height of each pillar is 10ft and 2 ft

¹⁷ Sambandam, Tirumular Tiruvirunthu, Madras, 1995, p.224.
width. The pillars have the gap of 10ft to each other. The *Mahamandapa* consists of 35ft length and 50ft width. All the pillars have floral designs and variety of animal structure decorations. In the middle of the northern wall of *Mahamandapa*, *Natarajar* shrine is situated. *Kalabairavar* shrine is located next to the *Natarajar* shrine towards the north-eastern side. At the right-inner side of the *Mahamandapa* eastern wall, the statue of *Chandra* is kept and the left-inner side of the eastern wall, *Adikaranandhi* and *Surya* statues are placed. On the western corner of *Mahamandapa* and infront of the *Arthamandapa*, sitting pose *Nandhi* is erected.

**Second Prakara**

The second *prakara* is also known as *Talavarisai prakara*. It is located between the *garbagraha prakara* and *Seevili prakara*.

**Third Prakara**

It is called *Seevili prakara*. To enter this *prakara*, there is an entrance situated in the middle of the southern side of the *Mahamandapa*. In this *prakara*, *madappalli*, temple Executive office, *Vinayagar shrine*, *Yagasalai* and *Alankara mandapa* are located. This *prakara* as a whole is supported by a single row of 70 pillars and one side walls on each side.

**Alankaramandapa**

Another important *mandapa* of the temple is the *Alankara mandapa* which is situated in between the southern side of the *kodimara mandapa* of the *Amman shrine* and the northern side of the *Muka mandapa* of the main shrine. It is supported by 30 pillars of
4 rows. In between the second and third pillars, 2 ft height platform is erected. Compound wall of the temple is of 103 ft length and 103 ft width.

**Mukamandapa**

Next to the Mahamandapa, Mukamandapa is situated. It is supported by 36 pillars of 4 rows with 9 pillars each. At the entrance of Mahamandapa and the western wall of Mukamandapa, image of Vinayaka and Subramanya are erected on both sides of south and north respectively. This mandapa is of 73 ft length and 63 ft width.

**Fourth Prakara**

It is known as outer prakara. This fourth prakara is situated out of the compound walls of the temple. The main entrance of the temple is located on the south - eastern side of the compound wall. The main door is of 10 ft height and 10 ft width. The compound wall of the temple is 25 ft height.

**Kodimaramandapa**

In front of the Mukamandapa and outer prakara, another mandapa called Kodimaramandapa of the main shrine is situated. It is supported by 70 pillars of 6 rows having 12 pillars on each row. It is of 70 ft length and 63 ft width. Kodimaram is erected in between the 5th and 7th pillars of the second and third rows. The height of the Kodimaram is of 33 ft. Two more mandapas are erected on the western side of the Kodimaramandapa with one feet heights platforms on each side of the main entrance.
Pandalmandapa

In front of the Kodimaramandapa, situates another mandapa called the Pandal mandapa. It is of 30 ft length and 30 ft width. It is supported by 16 pillars of 4 rows having 4 pillars each. On the top of it, separate provisions for housing the Sudai images of Vinayaka, Narumpunathar, Gomathiamman and Muruga sitting on their vehicles respectively. Narumpunathar – Gomathiamman on bull’s back and Muruga on peacock’s back respectively are made. Two Sivaganas (guardian deities) are decorated and placed on each corner of the top of the Pandal mandapa (main entrance). The pillars of the Pandal mandapa are beautifully decorated with floral designs of the Nayak period. On the northern side of the Pandal mandapa, another small mandapa meant for the 7th and 8th day festival and a Sastha shrine are located.

In Tiruppudaimarudur Temple, a stone figure of Lord Nataraja, the dancing form of Shiva, which is very unusual. Usually it is a bronze image in most temples. The south facing figure of Lord Nataraja is in a spacious and open sanctum in the northeast corner of the prakaram or compound along with his consort, Shivakamasundari. The saint Patanjali, the codifier of Yoga, and Vyaghrapada are placed next to the stone deity. Vyaghrapada was blessed by Lord Nataraja with tiger feet to prevent his feet from getting injured by thorns when he was picking fresh flowers untouched even by honeybees. The figure of Nataraja is fully covered with sandal paste from the abhisheka (oblation). Placed on a rectangular pedestal, the rare stone figure of Nataraja is over 2 meters in height. The Nataraja proper is probably at least 1.60 high. The pedestal is build up of traditional mouldings such as an upana, the lowest visible part of the pedestal; upapitha, additional moulded platform; the padmabandha the top of the shaft of a pillar.
with decorative bands between rows of lotus petals, separating the shaft from the capital; and kapota—over hanging cornice. prabha (circle of flames) is round and heavy with several layers of rims. Two makaras (crocodiles) with large mouths and tails are clear elements that are visible above a kind of base. Two makaras also occupy the top of the prabha, with a medallion placed in between. This is topped with a huge flame or shikhara. The Apasmara (dwarf trampled underfoot) lies with his head towards the right and wears a kind of diadem and flame or fan-shaped crown. He holds a large naga (cobra) in the hand that raises its head up to Shiva's left foot.

The jata, or locks of hair, ripples around the head and ears and on the shoulders. Shiva wears a kind of diadem and crown. From the head two struts connect it to what seem to be streamers from the mouth of the makaras which form some kind of decoration under the prabha. The body is sculpted beautifully and free from the stone background. Around the legs the background stone has been removed to leave open space. The sculptor has even carved away the stone between the earrings and the shoulders. A strut seems to have been left in place to support the lower hands. The upper right hand holds the damaru (drum) and the upper left hand holds a small vessel from which the flame blazes forth.

Tiruppudaimarudur Temple’s gopuram has five tiers. There are many niches in the walls with gods and goddesses. The Narumpoonatha Swami Temple, as it is also called, belongs to Thenkasi Pandya around the 16th century CE. The paintings on the gopuram are so detailed that it attracts the attention. The scenes depicted are from the epics and literature in many colors. Paintings on wood include Lord Shiva and Vishnu,
and Goddess Meenakshi's marriage ceremony in vegetable paints is exquisite. The four styles of temple architecture of the Pandiyas, Chera, Chola and Vijayanagara dynasties add distinction to this temple.

**Mural Paintings**

This mural is in the first tier of a temple tower of five tiers with 30 such walls in all, in a tiny village in the far south called Tiruppudaimarutūr in Thirunelveli District, Tamilnadu. Murals like these are found on the walls and ceilings of many temples all over India, though our work is confined to the state borders of Tamilnadu. This temple bears the finest specimens of mural paintings among all that we documented. The paintings are seen on the interior walls of the main tower (shown above) which is 5-tiered. Dedicated to Siva, specifically Narumpunatar, the temple is located at the confluence of the perennial Tamiraparani river with its tributary, in Tiruppudaimarutur village, Ambasamudram taluk, Thirunelveli district, in the far south of Tamilnadu.

Built over for more than a thousand years since 6th century CE, the temple’s mural paintings are datable to the late 16th / early 17th century CE. The paintings survive in a relatively better condition because they are inside the tower, not within easy access and are hardly known to anyone. In fact, the project survey missed this temple and it is a full story in itself how it eventually made it into our itinerary. As it turned out, it was the first temple we documented - and the best. The paintings are rich in historical detail and contemporary expression. There is myth, but much less in the overall comparison. Being at the edge of the Nayaka territory in the far south, in the domain of rulers known as Tenkaasi Pandiiyas, the artistic themes and styles are also the least affected by the
Nayaka idiom. In this sense, this is not Nayaka painting at all. The style of art seems in closer alignment with the neighbouring Kerala schools though it is beyond doubt that the temple received the patronage of the patriarch of the Nayakas, Krishna Deva Raya himself, and after, according to inscriptions in the temple.

In Tiruppudaimarutur, we see scenes from Tamil literature, well into the 17th century, while in other places contemporaneous to this, we mostly see scenes from myths of Sanskrit origin. In this respect, Tiruppudaimarutur carries forward the tradition of the Big Temple of Thanjavur of the 10th century CE.

The artistic style here is absolutely unique. The curve fidelity in these drawings, Bezier-precise, is not seen elsewhere, before or after. The figures themselves seem just a little bit stretched vertically to flow the curvature. They give the feeling that the figures have been achieved in fewer strokes. It is quite possible that the drawings are not entirely freehand, that some instrument has been used to obtain the smooth curves that we see. The black lines in the paintings are most likely painted over twice, once before tinting and once after.

The larger walls (east and west) are divided into three rows and painted apparently standing, sitting and crouching respectively from top to bottom. The smaller northern wall is divided in two columns. The entrance to and exit from the floor are on the southern wall. The story, or a series of stories, begins to the left of the entrance, runs clockwise and ends on the right. The walls of a whole floor are taken for certain narratives, just one wall for certain others. A general principle used in Tiruppudaimarutur is - the immediate vicinity around the ventilators of the tower is used for mythical figures and the larger walls that flank the ventilators are dedicated to historical, contemporary,
temple-specific themes or just motifs. This way the artist is able to assert the centrality of the divine elements, yet devote larger space to themes that are of interest in his own or his patron’s perception.

The Visual Language

The language of gestures used by the characters in the compositions seems true to the classical performing arts. It is a common feature of Nayaka paintings that in a particular composition, the principal character alone is presented full-faced and the rest of them sketched in profile. Tiruppudaimarutur murals are free of this constraint.

The colour palette is judiciously differentiated. In presenting myth, greens dominate. In the historical themes such as the one mural that is featured on the main page here, which is a scene recounted from a thousand years before the artist’s time, only the reds and blacks are used, a sort of ‘sepiatoning’ such as we see in period photographs and films today. In presenting contemporary material, the full palette is used.

North West Wall Tier - I

The subject of The Great Debate occurs with some frequency in Tamil country. The debate is between the Jaina school of thought and Hindu belief, a historic phase attributed to 7th century CE, when Hinduism successfully marginalises Jainism, almost eliminating it, in Tamil country.

Later day Tamil literature and art reflect on this, from which one may conclude that these debates were not isolated incidents. The incidents are remembered particularly
for how the losers of these debates (Jaina monks) pay for their loss. Jaina literature is destroyed and Jaina monks are executed in a gruesome way - they are impaled on a stake.

This theme is painted, one thousand years after the incident, on the north western wall, on the first tier, at Tiruppudaimarutur. The same theme is painted at the Kalakkadu Satyavagisvarar temple, and on the outer wall of the Thanjavur Big Temple. In Tiruccentūr, the incident is sculpted. It is most likely that it is found in a few other places besides Periyapuranam, a literary account of Saivite saints, composed most likely in 12th century CE, describes the debate in detail. It is worth noting that the other parallel stream of Hindu thought, Vaishnavism, is evidently not associated with the debate.

Top Left - At the court of the Pandīiya King, Madurai, Reading from right to left, we see an ornate palanquin arrive with fanfare at the king’s court. A young poet, a child prodigy in fact, is seated cross-legged and confident in the palanquin. He is Nana Campantan - dressed elaborately from head to toe. To the left of the pillar, we see the young poet seated on a pedestal, in audience with the Pandiya king, who has on his side three rather sparsely clad figures - the Jaina monks.

Reading the gestures, we are able to see that an argument is on and that the king is arbitrating. The debate is arranged for through the offices of the female figure in the painting, the wife of the Pandiya king. It is decided, as we discover in the next part of the painting, that the matter under discussion (never mind what it is for the moment) should be put to rigorous test.
The mural paintings. Spectacular as they were, we found that they were not a patch on the woodwork - on the 30 ft. high temple door, the ceiling of the 5 tiers of the temple tower and the ornate pillars and pilasters. Indications are, that the woodwork was fully painted over as well. But the wood retains much less of the paint than the wall. Indications are also that the wood and the paintings have both been conceived and executed by the same artists. Themes and characters repeat across the paintings and carvings. Elements from myth, history, temple legend and contemporary life are equally represented. On the long stretches, stories can be read, sequenced like a storyboard. Every now and then, the artist becomes an illusionist. The door has 78 square panels arranged in 14 rows and 6 columns. There is a smaller (trap) door the size of 6 panels which is free of carvings.

**Tiruppudaimaruthur Bird Sanctuary**

Tiruppudaimaruthur covered is a Bit I – Survey No 314/1- 2.40.50 Hec, Bit – II – Survey No 308 – 0.43.50 Hec and Total is 2.84.00 Hec. protected area declared as a sanctuary in 1992. It adjoins the tiny village of Tiruppudaimaruthur in Ambasamudram Taluk of Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, India. (a bustling town on the banks of the Tambaraparani River). It is composed of Tiruppudaimaruthur and Mukkudal irrigation tanks, conveniently linked by tar road. This is the largest reserve for breeding water birds in South India.

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18 Tamil Nadu Forest Animals protection Act 1972 (Central Law 53/1992)
Tiruppudaimaruthur A tiny village in the far west Tirunelveli District is emerging as a new favourite of the migratory birds. It may soon be catapulted into the list of popular water bird sanctuaries in the country. This village is sparsely populated. Migratory birds start coming by December end and fly away to their northern homes by June or July after they lay eggs, hatch them and the young ones grow old enough to fly with the older ones. About 35 species of birds visit this calm but congenial village for breeding.

The birds called Painted strokes are coming from North India and East European Countries to this place. Similarly the flamingoes which flew in mainly from the Rann of Kutch have hatched and reared their young ones in the village. The birds coming to their backyards for five generations are protected vehemently by villagers and regarded as harbingers of luck. The excreta of birds –‘guano’ is collected by villagers in summer along with silt to use as fertilizer in their fields. From children to grannies in the village all protect them, their nests and fledgelings. Chicks fallen are taken care of in the rescue centre till they are able to fly on their own.