CHAPTER – III

RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

Origin of Worship

In the prehistoric period, people worshipped natural forces like thunder, lightning, storm, etc. Initially the man opposed it and gradually he began to worship them. He believed and worshipped these powers in order to escape from the animals. He carved the images of animals in stone and worshipped them. Food was also offered to the deities. In the beginning, man lived in the caves; and later, he made huts and lived there.

Later, he began to worship mountains, plants, flowers, and their fragrance. The wide spread ocean, waves and sound were also worshipped by him. This type of worship emerged naturally and it witnessed gradual changes later.

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1 T.M. Bhaskar Tondaiman, Tamil Kovilkal Tamilar Panpadu (Tamil), Subramaniapillai Publications Tirunelveli, 1961, pp. 2-3.
2 Ibid., p.3
3 Ehambaranathan, Kovilum Eraivalipadum (Tamil), Sakthi Nilayam, Madras, 1986, pp. 42-43.
Temple Worship

In the pre-historic times, there was no temple and temple worship. People strongly believed that God would protect them from animals and natural calamities. The next stage was the emergence of temples.\textsuperscript{4} The place of worship with thatched shed was called temple. There are many reasons for the development of temples.

Temples served as epicenters from which the people got the spirit of God's love and kindness which is present everywhere in the prapanjam (universe).\textsuperscript{5} Philosophically, though water is spread underground, it can be fetched for use by digging of wells. Milk is available in the body of cow. Yet milk is got through its udder only. In the same manner, God's grace exists everywhere in the universe, and it is showered on human life through temples only. It is very common to get electricity through power stations. God's grace is available everywhere and is felt through temples which have athmic power.\textsuperscript{6}

Definition of Worship

Food is needed for the growth of a man. In the same manner, worship is needed for the growth of his life. People believe that, by

\textsuperscript{5} Personal interview with \textit{R.Varatharajan} aged 60, Kallidaikuruchi on 09.06.2013.
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}
worshiping God, their life becomes fertile.\(^7\) Hindu spiritualism defines the word worship as *perumai* prestige (pride), *Kalvi* education (knowledge), and *vaithigam*.\(^8\) (acting according to Vedic preaching’s).

The system of worship leads to merging with God; and it is the combination of *manasa, vacha, karmana* (thought, word and deed). *Thiyanam* (meditation) is the main feature of *manasa* (mind).\(^9\)

The power of controlling the mind is the ultimate one which leads to attain the blessings of God. By worshipping God, mind becomes crystal clear; worship purifies man and develops human life.

**Types of Worship**

There are two types of worship. They are (i) Outside worship (ii) Inner worship.\(^10\) Outside worship means to perform *Abisheka, Archana, Neivethya*, etc. to please God.\(^11\) The inner worship could be done only through outer worship.\(^12\) The worship to maintain the body health through devotion is called *Sariyai worship*.\(^13\) The way of

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\(^11\) Ibid., p.4.


\(^13\) Ibid., p.12.
worshipping God by prayer through mind and heart is called *Kiriyai* worship.

**Sakthi Worship**

Sakthi worship is based on the *Easwara* principles. The celebrated Indus valley civilization, and the glory of Mohenjodaro and Harappa.\(^{14}\) Speak about the existence of worshipping Mother Goddess in India before Christ. The unearthed seals at the sites on the banks of river Indus confirm the existence of a type of spiritualism at that time.

**Nerchai Worship (Donation)**

If a devotee demands anything from God, it is believed that it will be provided to him surely. In that connection, he offers *nerchai* (donation) to God. It is believed that God will get satisfied with this type of special offerings; and He will graciously satisfy the expectations of the devotee.\(^ {15}\)

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**Dhyana Worship (Worship through Meditation)**

Through *Dhyana* (meditation) the mind gets peace, and the duties can be performed well. *Dhyana*\(^{16}\) facilitates the organs of the body to function perfectly and to lead life with morality. It also helps for the co-ordination of the mind and the body.\(^{17}\)

**Livelihood and Worship**

During the course of men’s livelihood, so many things, good or bad, problems and confusions may come, and the only option to get relieved from these problems is the worship of God.\(^{18}\)

**Idol Worship**

For the *Sariyai* worship, idol is an essential one. It should be based on the five *Panchabootha* elements.\(^{19}\) Land, air, space; fire and water are the five elements. So the idols are made in *panchaloga* (five metals).

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Various Types of Offerings

When, the method of temple worship got developed later, certain new methods were emphasized. The basic text of the agamas (the holy rules) mentions that God operates all the activities of man. Gradually he began to offer cooked food to God first, and then he tasted.

In Sri Varagunapandeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, various types of offerings are made to the presiding deities. Varieties of offerings are being made to the deities during the aradhana (Mass Prayer) in the temples.

When a devotee enters the temple, first he takes bath in the holy tank and then he enters the temple for worship. Then he applies vibuthi (holy ash) and sandal which are the Hindu religious symbols.

While applying such religious signs, the people are supposed to concentrate their attention on prayer and they can avoid other thoughts.

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21 Personal interview with V.Ramanujam Pattar aged 60, Radhapuram on 07.05.2012.
A number of spiritualists are of the opinion that the offerings made to the kings were the same followed in the case of offerings to God also. They are the following: sitting face to face with love; allowing to stand in a particular place; washing the feet; offering to drink; dropping water over head; bathing; wearing dress; lighting lamps; offering the food, showering flowers, conducting *homa velvi* (holy fire), providing pedestal or altar stand, playing musical instruments and singing songs; sacrifice; dancing (*nardhana*) and blessings etc.\(^{23}\)

Singing of *Thevaram* songs (sung by the Trio - Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar) in front of the deity with whole heartedness and concentration of mind with at most sincerity will give maximum satisfaction to the people. People believe that God will consider their appeal and solve their problems. When entering a Shiva temple, a person should worship the *Dwajasthamba*.\(^{24}\) (flag staff) first, where he should tell his requirements.

Then he should worship *Nandhi* and after getting permission from the *Dwarabalagas* Vinayagar and Murugan, he worships the

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\(^{24}\) Personal interview with S. *Srirama Subramaniyan* aged 51, Valkadambu on 28.01.2012.
Sun. The Vinayaga is situated at the principal deity’s shrine. Then Soora devar, Dakchinamoorthy, Nayanmars et.al., are also worshipped. Finally people worship Ambal, and they circumambulated the temple once or thrice and come out of the temple. When going to a temple, one should take any one pooja material with him.25

**Goodness of Turmeric**

“அம்மாவாள் கவளக்கோவை கிளைங்கல்ம் அரணம்
 இந்துவேகம் என்கூற்றாம என்ன கிளைக்கருங்கு
 வெளியில் குண்ணார்களால் விரும்பில் கிளைக்கருங்கு
 வேலாவ் அரங்கத்துக் கிளை”

‘Goddess would heal
With turmeric unction
And with sacred ashes
Spiritual knowledge gained;
Those who recite
The name of Devikalyani,
Will have no misfortune’

are the lines of *Panchaga Venba* which highlights the Ambal’s greatness and the significance of *viral* turmeric.26

The sub-continent, India is a democratic country as well as a secular nation. But the Indian epics *the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, 18 puranas, 64 fine arts, 4 veda* and *78 sastras*...

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(scriptures) throw vivid light upon the fact that spiritualism is the indigenous phenomenon of this land.

The various places mentioned in the epics, puranas, scriptures, vedas and literatures, depict where the celestial gods, hosts of goblins, saints, ascetics, sages and hermits lived and performed their penitences and sacrifices. They also throw information on the religious centers and holy places, established with temples well-planned and beautifully sculptured. One such holy temple is situated at Radhapuram near Nanguneri, 68 kilometers away from Tirunelveli, in Tamil Nadu.

The main deity enshrined in the temple is Sri Varagunapandeeswarar. Goddess Nithyakalyani is also enshrined facing the south on the northern part of the temple. The Hindus in Tamil Nadu follow different ways of offerings and vows to the deities. They carry the kavadi with milk pots to accomplish their vow to Lord Muruga at Palani\textsuperscript{27} and tonsure-offering to Lord Venkatesa at Tirumalai, Tirupathi.

\footnote{M. Gandhidasan, \textit{Tamilakathil Murugar Vazhipadu} (Tamil), N.S. Publications, Udumalai Pettai, 1992, pp. 132-133.}
In the temples of Goddess Mariamman, people offer salt and pepper and parts of human body made of silver for her grace to resuscitate them from serious ailments. Similarly, in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple, people offer Virali turmeric to accomplish their vow to Goddess Nithyakalyani. This kind of offerings and accomplishment of their vow to the deity deserves special mention.

A verse in Dhanvanthiri Kulanthai Vakatam (Dhanvanthiri Child Health Treatise) declares the medicinal use of turmeric thus:

\[
\text{talaivali ni: retrari calaiya:tha meka} \\
\text{mulaitharu pi: ratthi nu:d vilisurabu} \\
\text{vica kadivishamum vi: ruvi:ra nangalum} \\
\text{po: ma ca kilakukku ma:l.}
\]

These lines mean that the turmeric root is an easy and successful remedy for headache, cold, poisonous snake bite, etc. This turmeric is referred to by different terms such as kanchini, nisi, peetham and arisanam.\(^{28}\) The turmeric plant is one of the celestial plants along with Karpagam (that yield everything one desires), bael tree and basil. Turmeric powder and paste are effective remedies for

cold, cough, headache, sinusitis, corn\textsuperscript{29} (in the sole of foot), trench-foot, etc.

**Worship of Virali Turmeric**

The devotees worship Goddess Nithyakalyani offering coconuts, plantain, betel nuts, fragment sticks, camphor, garland, rose water, etc, and pray to her for the fulfillment of their needs. At that time, the *virali* turmeric would be placed at the feet of Goddess Nithyakalyani. When the devotees get their prayer fulfilled, they would do the same offerings to the deity, with a large heap of *virali* turmeric.

This worship of *virali* turmeric is evident that the devotees of this area have such a staunch belief in the grace of Goddess Nithyakalyani. The worship or an offering of virali turmeric is of three types. They are offerings of *Virali* turmeric roots to the deity, offerings of *virali* turmeric powder (pounded in the mortar) and offerings of *virali* turmeric at the divine marriage function at Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple. The huge quantity of *virali* turmeric offered by the devotees is stored in the *manjal mandapa* (Fig: 52).\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{30} Personally visited and confirmed.
Offering of Virali Turmeric to the Deity

People offer *virali* turmeric roots to the deity Goddess Nithyakalyani with prayers to redress their grievances, to fulfill their acute needs, prospects, and profit in business and for blessing their children with good health and education. This offering is to be performed when a devotee’s prayer is fulfilled.

The devotees get *pooja* items (coconut, plantain, betel nuts, flower, fragment sticks, camphor, rose water, etc.,) and two packets of *virali* turmeric. First the devotee would worship Lord Vinayaga enshrined before the *Dwajasthamba* (flag staff). Then he or she would pound the *virali* turmeric of one packet in the mortar.

While pounding the turmeric, the devotees would pray to deity Goddesses Nithyakalyani. They offer the coconut (*soorai thengay*) to Lord Vinayaga and enter the temple to worship Lord Sri Varagunapandeeswarar. After worshipping the *Swami*, they enter the Goddess Nithyakalyani Shrine. Here, they offer another packet of *virali* turmeric at the feet of Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal and perform their vow to the deity. This has been the custom for ages.
Offerings of Virali Turmeric at the Marriage Function

Traditionally, the Hindus will have the betrothal ceremony in the bride’s or bridegroom’s place. But most of the residents of Radhapuram and surrounding villages perform the betrothal ceremony in the premises of this temple, specifically in front of Goddess Nithyakalyani. Particularly, the Yadhavas of this region perform their betrothal ceremony in this temple only. The official records of this temple give information on this tradition of performance.

In the betrothal ceremony, the bride’s group and the groom’s group bring all the usual pooja materials with virali turmeric in two different thambaalams\(^{31}\) (salvers) to Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple.

First they will worship Lord Vinayaga with an offering like archana. After this offering, the temple priest will hand over the archana salvers to the respective maternal uncles of the bride and groom. Finally, they would exchange the salvers or trays (of pooja

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items and *virali* turmeric offered to the deity) as a mark of fulfillment of the betrothal ceremony.\textsuperscript{32}

The people of Radhapuram and the nearby villages perform this *virali* turmeric worship for the following:

a. The unmarried damsels perform this worship for early marriage.

b. Married women perform this worship for their long prosperous life with their *mangalasutra* (thali) (sacred thread) around their neck.

c. The married women do this *virali* turmeric offering to Goddess Nithyakalyani praying for protection from *Mangalya dhosham*.\textsuperscript{33}

d. People perform *virali* turmeric offering for their complete recovery from chronic diseases and for successful surgical treatment.

e. People offer *virali* turmeric to Goddess Nithyakalyani, praying for welfare and protection of their children from evil forces.

f. The issueless women offer this Virali turmeric to Goddess Nithyakalyani to bless them with for begetting children.


\textsuperscript{33} *Mangalya dhosham*: Whenever the planet ‘chukran’ stays in the 7\textsuperscript{th} place of one’s Zodic, or when ‘chukran’ and ‘raghu’ stays in the same house of rasi, a Brahmachari has the *mangalya dhosham* (Matrimonial Misfortune)
Importance of Virali turmeric

Every Hindu woman would cherish the turmeric, *kumkum* and flower as her sole property like her soul. These three things are regarded as sacred ones to the Hindus inclusive of the *thirumangalyam* (*thali*) (sacred thread) by the Hindus as per the socio-cultural and religious tradition.\(^\text{34}\)

It is worth mentioning that these three sacred items (turmeric, *kumkum* and flower) are the women’s main adornment and the most cherished possession rather than other ornaments made of metals.

Saint Ganapathi Somasundaran says in one of his verse:

“*Thiru manjal kappale noy neekkum chelvi Thiruneerral meygnanam cerum*”

That means "O mother, you recover us from the diseases with the turmeric, and bless us to acheive wisdom with *vibuthi* (sacred ashes). These lines say, that devotees, who perform this *virali* turmeric offering to Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal and apply sacred powder *virali* turmeric on their forehead would attain wisdom.

The *Panchagavenba* says,

“*Devi Kalyani peyar ceppuvorkkillai mevalar kalendrum vinai*”

These lines say that there would be neither evils nor adversities for the people who chant the name of Goddess Nithyakalyani. The virali turmeric offered by the devotees accumulates and resembles a hillock.

Wonder indeed it is to find *virali* turmeric offered to Goddess Nithyakalyani, is fresh even after years has passed. Hundreds and thousands of people offer *virali* turmeric to Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal and get rid of their ailments and redressed of their grievances. The *virali* turmeric offered to Goddess Nithyakalyani, pounded into powder, mixed with water and made into a paste form, is the holy *prasatham* of the temple; and it is distributed to all the devotees.

In addition to the regular offerings and worship with *virali* turmeric, special *poojas* are performed on auspicious days such as the Tamil New Year day.

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The first day of the Tamil month, birth days of children, *Chitraw Pournami, Panguni Utthiram, Chitrai Visu, Vaikkasi Visakam, Ani thiru Manjanam, Adiperukku, Addivelli (Friday in the Tamil month of Aadi), Adi Krithikai, Adippuram, Sri Varalakshmi viratham, Purattasi Navarathiri pooja (inclusive of Aayudha pooja, Sarasvathi pooja and Vijayadasami), Deepavali, Thirukarthikai, Markali Thiruvathirai, Vaikunda Ekadasi, Thai pongal, Thai amavasai, Karadayan nonbu, Panguni Uthuiram, Shivarathiri, etc.* are the important auspicious days found in the Tamil almanac every year.36

The *virali* turmeric worship performed by devotees in the shrine of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple in Radhapuram has a unique socio-religious significance and importance; and beyond any doubt, it is no wonder that it finds a place in the history of Tamil Nadu.

It is evident from the inscriptions found in this temple that the Pandya King Varaguna Pandya not only built this temple but allocated fertile lands with alluvial soil and perennial water for the maintenance of the temple.

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Poojas

The general name given to worship is Pooja. Pooja consists of archana, vandhana and bhajan.\textsuperscript{37} i.e., offering flower, bow down the head and body and pay salutation and singing songs to praise the glory of God with different instruments. Doing worship with flower is called pooja which has two kinds viz, "athmartham" and "paratham". Athmartham is the pooja practiced by one in a house with a view to have the benefit of his family and salvation. The paratham is defined as the way for providing wisdom.\textsuperscript{38} The offerings are first submitted to God and His symbolically reflects that all are His creations.

Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal Temple

and Its Poojas

Pooja Timings

The daily offerings are obligatory and are very essential to preserve the sanctity of the temple. In general, the rituals should be performed four times a day, i.e. at sunrise, noon, sunset and midnight. However, the number may differ due to the ceremonial worship which has to be conducted; and may also depend on the


\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}, p.4.
traditions and the *agamas* which governed the respective temple. In the Madurai Meenakshi temple, the number of *poojas* to be performed daily is eight, each taking half to one hour to complete.\(^{39}\)

In the temple at Ramesvaram, rituals are performed six times a day. According to *Pancharat agama*, the daily *poojas* are expected to be offered from one to twelve. In Sri Varagunapandeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram six time *poojas* were in practice till A.D.1999.\(^{40}\)

i. *Ushakalam* (early morning *pooja*) from 4.30 a.m - 6.00 a.m

ii. *Kalasandhi* (morning *pooja*) from 6.00 a.m - 9.00 a.m

iii. *Ucchikalam* (mid- day (noon) *pooja*) from 10.00 a.m - 12 noon

*Sayaratchai* (evening *pooja*) from 4.30 p.m to 6.00 p.m

iv. *Erandamkalam* (Pre-night *pooja*) from 6.00 p.m to 9.00 p.m

v. *Arthajamam* (night *pooja*) from 9.00 p.m to 10.30 p.m

Nowadays it has been restricted to three times- at sunrise, evening and late evening due to the indifference of the successive Governments.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{39}\) Personal interview with K.Chandrasekara Pattar aged 52, Radhapuram on 23.05.2012.

\(^{40}\) *Ibid.*

**Abhisheka**

*Abhisheka* or oblation with a liquid medium is done in the early morning to the presiding deity. The idol is anointed with oil, camphor, sandal paste and entertained with moving flamer. Then, the idol is bathed with different articles like *kalaba*, honey, milk, ghee, *panchamirtham*.\(^{42}\) (a mixture of bananas, dates, jaggery, honey, and ghee), tender coconut and *panneer* (rose water).

After the abhisekha with the above articles the idol is purified with pure water poured from a conch and also by reciting the relevant *manthras* of *Purusha Suktham*, *Sree Suktham*, *Rudra Suktham*, *Vishnu Suktham*, *Kayatri Mantra* and *Iswara Suktham*.\(^{43}\) In this temple, the performance of *poojas* has been classified into daily *poojas*, weekly *poojas* and monthly *poojas*, etc.

**Daily Pooja**

The daily *pooja* starts at 5:30 a.m after hearing the music of *murasu*.\(^{44}\) (a musical instrument). Normally the southern gate is opened every day.

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\(^{42}\) *Panchamirtham* - a fruit salad consist of five fruits namely banana, mango, pomegranate, jackfruit, graphs and mixing with jaggery and honey.

\(^{43}\) Personal interview with M. Chellappa Pattar aged 62, Sittur on 06.07.2012.

\(^{44}\) Personal interview with K. Sorimuthu Mani Pattar, aged 65, Vijayapathi on 01.07.2012.
Viswaruba Exposure

Early in the morning at 5:30 a.m, the priests, after taking bath, opens the Swami and Ambal shrines and lighten the lamps there. Then he submits cooked white rice to the deities. The *darshan* of deities is temporarily stopped with a screen at the door-step, and the lamp is lit in the *sanctum sanctoraum*. Worship of God in this situation is called *Viswarupa Darshan*.

Kalasandhi (Morning) Pooja

*Kalasandhi pooja* commences after sunrise that is at 6.00 a.m. This *pooja* has to be completed before 9.00 a.m. The salient feature of this *pooja* is that all the deities of the whole temple complex receive *abhisheka* and other *aradanas*. *Neivedya* for this *pooja* consists of *suttannam* (plain cooked rice). The *pooja* is completed with the ceremony of *prarthana bali* in which the remaining food is deposited on the *pali beeda*. The morning *pooja* is held at 8:30 a.m. at the Swami and Ambal shrines. Cooked rice is offered and the lighting of lamp is done.\(^{45}\)

\(^{45}\) Personal interview with *Mistic Selvam*, aged 65, Tenkasi on 23.08.2012.
**Uutchikala (Noon) Pooja**

*Uchikala pooja* or the mid-day worship occurs between 10.00 a.m and 12.00 noon. In this *pooja padikkattalai* (ablution) is held in the sanctums of both Swami and Ambal. Curd rice as the principal meal is offered as *neivedya*. *Gajasamharamurthi* gets *neivedya* and *deeparadhana*, but no *abisheka* with this *pooja*. With that the forenoon *poojas* may come to an end. The temple is kept closed from 12.00 noon to 4.00 p.m. The *Shivalinga* is circumbulated and then ghee food is provided to the *Swami* and *Ambal*.

**Saayaratchai (Evening) Pooja**

This temple is reopened at 4.00 p.m for the evening worship. *Saayaratchai pooja* is performed before the sunset that is between 5.00 p.m and 6.00 p.m. This *pooja* is a repetition of the morning *pooja* in an abbreviated scale. White *Pongal*[^46] is the *neivedya* for this *pooja*. The salient feature of this one is that during this *pooja neivedya* and *deeparadhana* are performed to Nataraja.

The reason is that Lord Nataraja performed his evening cosmic dance (*Sandhya thandava*) only during the interval when the sun is about to set. *Neivedya* and *deeparadhana* are first performed for

[^46]: Personal interview with K.S.Chandrasekara Pattar aged 52, Radhapuram on 06.07.2012.
pradana vinayaga following which it is offered to Nataraja, Krittiveswarar, Gajasamharamurthi, and Balagurambal in an orderly manner. This pooja ends with the offerings to the Sahasra linga housed in the second prahara of this temple.

In the evening at 6:30 p.m the lamps are lighted in the Swami, Ambal and other shrines, and cooked rice is provided to God as food. Earlier six time- poojas were conducted every day. Due to changing trends, nowadays only three times poojas are performed.47

**Arthajamam (Mid-Night) Pooja**

Although arthajama pooja is said to be a mid-night pooja, it is held at present between 9.00 pm to 10.30 pm. During this pooja, abhisheka is performed to Lord Sri Varagunapandeeswarar alone.

Samba or pepper rice is offered as neivedya. After deeparadhana and neivedya to Lord Sri Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani, the urchavamoorthies are well decorated with gorgeous dress and ornamented and taken in a palanquin from the garbhagraha; and placed on a swing attached to a beam in the

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47 Personally visited and witnessed.
palliayarai\textsuperscript{48} situated next to the Ambal shrine for taking rest. At the beginning of every pooja, the temple bells ring to announce its commencement. During the six-time poojas different musical instruments were used according to the pooja.

For the Ushakalam, Kalasandhi, Uchikalam and Sayaratchai, musical instruments like Nadhaswaram and tavil are played together with sweet musical notes.

**Palliayarai (Bed Chamber) Pooja**

Every night at 8:30 p.m, the lamp is lighted in the Swami and Ambal Shrines and then nivethanam (food) is provided and karpoora deeparadhana is performed. Then in the bed chamber, moorthy, and his divine consort are placed in the bed; and after providing fruits and sweet rice, the door is closed.

**Naimittika Pooja**

Festivals are celebrated throughout the world. However, the Hindu religion observes a larger number of festivals than any other religion. The Hindu festivals are religious ceremonies accompanied with sacrifice to the God concerned. As prescribed in the agamas, the

\textsuperscript{48} Palliyarai - Bed Chamber situated near the sanctum sanctorum of the temple where the God and Goddess will take rest at night very day.
monthly festivals are necessary for the happiness of people, their prosperity and the progress of the country. The festivals are celebrated to commemorate the seasons, and for religious, social and cultural changes of the world. Festivals play a very important role in bringing in human relation among individuals and communities.\textsuperscript{49}

The people enjoy the festivals and on such occasions they get freed from their household work and go out for participating in various kinds of ceremonial activities of the temple. Temple festivals not only give solace and succour to the religious minded people, but also serve as a boon to the commercial people.

**Temple Offerings**

When every *pooja* is over, the priest offers *viboothi* (sacred ashes), turmeric, *kumkum* and *neivethyam* to the devotees. Unlike other Shiva temples, here the devotees offer *viral* turmeric to Ambal and significantly it never gets spoiled. That *viral* turmeric is pounded and a paste is prepared.

In this temple virali turmeric paste is provided as *prasatham* to the devotees, and it is a speciality of this temple. Normally in the Shiva temples, *viboothi* is given to the devotees as *prasadam*. Another speciality of the *prasadam* is that the *virali* turmeric paste emits different smell to different persons.

**Thirusangu Water**

Another remarkable feature of this temple is the huge turnout of the mentally affected people. They strongly believe that after attending the *poojas* for a short period, the affected persons get relieved from it. The mentally affected persons are offered to drink the water from *thirusangu* after preaching the *Moolamanthram* by the priest at the Ambal shrine. The devotees strongly believe that it relieves the patients from the ailment.

**Parihara Poojas**

The devotees wish to have their requirements fulfilled. So they offer *archana* to the deities with betel leaf, areca, coconut, plantain, camphor, paneer, flowers and *virali* turmeric; they inform the priest of their names and stars, and then the *pooja* is conducted.

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50 Personal interview with R. Varatharajan aged 60, Kallidaikuruchi on 16.06.2012.
**Vazhayal Kaanikkai (Bangle Offerings)**

The Pregnant women wear the black colored bangles.\(^{51}\) at the Ambal shrine praying for normal delivery of their child. The women folk in and around Radhapuram have the confidence of normal delivery of their daughters; and in that connection they offer *vazhayal* to Goddess Nithyakalyani. They have the practice of bringing the newborn child to the temple, forty one days after the delivery.

**Kaanikkai (Offerings of Agricultural Products)**

The agriculturists living in and around Radhapuram village have the custom of presenting their first yield of food grains to Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani temple. That kaanikkai may be paddy, plantain, fruits, flowers, etc. The presiding deity Lord Varagunapandeeswarar is provided with silk garments and *archana* materials. Ambal is provided with silk sarees, the colours of which are mango, emerald green, red, white, orange and yellow along with *virali* turmeric, *kumkum*, etc.\(^{52}\) This kaanikkai will be very huge during the festival seasons.

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\(^{51}\) Personal interview with *V.Mahalaxmi* aged 48, Radhapuram on 20.06.2012.

\(^{52}\) E.M. Subramaniya Pillai, *Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Thirukovil Varalaru* (Tamil), Kanesan Achsukoodam, Tirunelveli, 1962, p. 47.
**Donation of Gold Ornaments**

In this temple, people offer gold ornaments to Swami and Ambal as a mark of their thankfulness after attaining a happy married life. Very recently a devotee has donated a gold chain of 240 grams after having achieved her goal. The donation of gold ornaments are accounted and kept preserved in the government treasury at Radhapuram as a safety measure.\(^{53}\)

**Coconut Offerings**

On all occasions, coconuts are offered to the deities. It has a moral theme. Coconut has two parts with an inner coating which is white in colour and an outer coating which is the hard shell.\(^{54}\) Offering of coconut symbolically explains that the world is a magic one which is hard in character.

Offering of coconuts symbolizes the attainments of *Paramaanantham* (maximum happiness). At Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple; the devotees

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offer coconut to the presiding deities. They offer it to Pillayar and Subramania on the auspicious days.

**People and Their Prayer**

People who pray with multiple desires like perfect married life, smooth delivery of a baby, relief from *Grahathosam*, improvement in their children’s education, employment opportunities, freedom from their stress, earning more money, publicity, solution for their problems, and to face the enemy, etc., come to this temple and submit their pleas before the deity. They are confident that their prayers will be positively answered. It is significant to note that the people of this region still have the hope of achieving their goals after attending the *poojas* in this temple.55

**Paalkudam (Milk Pot)**

It is strongly believed that the acute diseases are cured by the blessings of Maha Ganapathy and Subramanya. After recovering from the diseases, the devotees used to take paal kudam (milk pots) in a rally to the Subramanya shrine. It is an age-old practice and a thanks giving ceremony in this temple.

Naming at the Ambal Shrine

The places in around Radhapuram like Udhayathur, Samugarengapuram, Parameswarapuram, Koodankulam, Panagudi, Aralvoimozhi, and Vadakankulam abound with girls with the name Kalyani\(^5\) and ‘Nithyakalyani’. The parents place their girl children at the feet of Ambal, which deserves mention. Those girls who pray to God for their early marriage are supposed to conduct their marriages in the temple premises alone.

Abisheka Materials

The following items like the flour of *pacharisi* (raw rice), *verali* turmeric powder, *kalabam* powder, milk, curd, *Panchamirtham* (fruit salad) honey, ghee, amla powder, *viboothi*, lime juice, tender coconut, rose water, sandal, etc are the things used for *abisheka* in this temple.\(^5\)

Weekly Worship

In addition to the routine daily *poojas*, special *poojas* are conducted for the *Swami* and *Ambal* on Tuesdays and Fridays. *Somavara pooja* is performed on all Mondays. Hundreds of devotees

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\(^{5}\) Personal interview with V.Nithyakalyani aged 42, Radhapuram on 27.07.2012.

will come on that occasion. Tuesday worship at Goddess Nithyakalyani Shrine and Subramania Shrine are very significant.

**Guru Worship**

On all Thursdays, at 7 p.m in the evening special abisheka is performed to Lord Dakshinamoorthi. On that occasion, nut garland (kondaikadalai garland) is offered by the devotees along with ghee lamp. Lemon garland is also presented to Guru Bhagawan.

**Saneeswara Worship**

On Saturdays, the deity Saneeswarar (Saturn) is worshipped by lighting the lamp of Ellu (Sesame) and providing neivedhyam, and red arali garland. On that occasion, special poojas are conducted in the morning and evening. On Tuesdays and Fridays, special poojas particularly Navagraha pooja is performed to Swami and Ambal.

**Muruga Worship**

*Muruga vazhipadu* or the worship of Muruga has a hoary past. Father Herahs of Spain says that the term, "Muruga" was found in one of the carvings in a seal got in the Mohenjodaro. At first Muruga worship was in the form of worship of the sun. As per archaeological

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evidence, it has been proved that the worship of Lord Shiva existed
everywhere in the world. Likewise Muruga worship has been traced
out in Palestine.\textsuperscript{59} The Muruga temple in Kathirkamam of Sri Lanka is
a popular one. The place of \textit{Kathirkadavul}, (the God of rays) is called
Kathirkamam.

The Sangam work "\textit{Thirumurugatrupadai}" explains how the
ancient Tamils worshipped Lord Muruga. Along with
\textit{Thirumurugatrupadai, Paripadal}, another Sangam work, also says that
Lord Muruga has six faces.

'\textit{Purananuru}' one of the eight anthologies also confirms the fact
that the people of the Sangam age had the idea that peacock was the
vehicle of Lord Muruga. These are the weekly worships followed at
Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple.

\textbf{Monthly Worship}

\textbf{Sangadahara Chathurthi Worship}

\textit{Chathurthi pooja} is associated with Vinayagar and it is
celebrated in all the Vinayagar Shrines. \textit{Sangadahara Chathurthi}

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Palestine} - A holy place for the Jews, Christians and Muslims. The Jews believe
that it was there Old Testament emerged. The Christians believe that it is the
birth place of Jesus Christ. The Muslims also consider it as associated with
Mohammed, the prophet, founder of Islam.
occurs twice a month. This day is an important one for Kodimarathu Pillaiyar at this temple. On that occasion at 7 p.m., special abishekams, beautiful decorations with Arugampul garland and sweet pongal are offered to the deity as neivedhyam. 

**Prathosam Worship**

Prathosam is the thirteenth day of waxing moon and waning moon, provided the thithi comes at the time of sunset. Even if the thithi spreads over two days, the day having the thithi at sunset alone is reckoned. On that day fasting and praying to Lord Shiva are preferable. The day is significant as it is believed that it was on the dusk of this day that Lord Sri Parameswara (Shiva) appeared as Lord Nataraja and danced to please the Goddess.

The period of Prathosam extends over a jaama (3 hours), i.e. 1½ hours (3¾ naazhikas) before the sunset and 1½ hours after the sunset. It is believed that during this period all Gods and Goddesses assemble before Lord Shiva for His blessings. Prathosam is observed in all Shiva temples. At Radhapuram, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar

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Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, *Prathosam* is celebrated in grand style. The flag staff *Nandhi* is named as *Prathosa Nandhi*. (Fig : 53)

Every month there occurs two Prathosams. On that day from 4 to 6 p.m, *Vilvam* and *Arugampul* garlands are offered with *abishekm*. As soon as the musical instruments start playing, the *Kodimarathu Nandhi* (seated near the *Dwajasthamba*) is anointed with milk, curd, honey, and rose water. The *Rudraksha abisheka* is performed after adorning it with *rudrakshamaalai*.

Then *Nandhi* is dressed with a huge white dhoti, garlands of *arugambul, Vilvam*, leaves and flowers are placed and sandal paste and vermilion are applied on its forehead; and the *neivedya* consisting of raw rice is placed in front of *Nandhi*, and then the *Shivachariyar* offers *deeparathana*. Then the idols are taken in procession on a *Nandhi* vehicle, and circumabulated in the *praharas*. On that occasion, singing of *Thevaram, and Thiruvasagam* and also showing of lighted camphor to the deity are important events.

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62 *Vilvam* – Angle Marmelas
**Maha Prathosam (Saturday Prathosam),** (Fig: 54)

If the *prathosam* falls on a Saturday, it is significant and named as *Sani prathosam* or *maha prathosam*. Thousands of devotees attend the function. It is significant to note that to worship God on that auspicious day will be more beneficial. It is considered equal to a thousand times visit to a temple.

Though the Brahmin priests were very particular to follow *Sanskrit mantras* earlier, the pure Tamil works like *Thevaram* and *Thiruvasagam* were sung on those days. Nowadays, it is very liberal to sing the songs of the *Nayanmars*. It is strongly believed that attending the *Mahaprathosham*, one can get the benefit of participating 108 ordinary *prothosams*.

**Pournami Pooja (Full Moon Day Worship)**

*Pournami* occurs once every month. On that day, the women folk perform *Thiruvilakku Pooja* (pooja with lamps) in the temple premises. On that occasion, all the deities are decorated and the *poojas* are performed to deities in order of *Ganapathy*, the principal deity,

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63 *Nayanmars*: Saiva Saints, Sixty three in number who worked for the promotion of Saivism.
Murugan and finally Ambal. Milk payasam is offered as neivedyam to the deities and after that it is distributed among the devotees.

**Agama Worship of the Temple**

Agama worship has two types of poojas - aanmaartha pooja and paramaarthra pooja. Aanmaartha Pooja is a ritual to be conducted by the people for the betterment of their relatives. Paramaarthra pooja is conducted for the welfare of others. It consists of three types.

1) **Nithiyam**

The daily poojas are known as Nithiyam. Earlier, eight-time poojas were conducted; and nowadays only three time poojas are performed at Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani temple.

2) **Naimithiyam**

During the festivals and nithiya poojas whether knowingly or unknowingly, sins like Manthra lobam, Thanthra lobam, Srartha lobam, Thiravia lobam, etc., may happen. It is delivered that through this Naimithiyam pooja, people get rid of their sins.

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3) Kamiyam

Symbolically, showing deepams to the deities is the final part of all poojas. It is called as Kamiyam. Various kinds of deepams (camphor with fire) are performed to God in all temples. In this temple the following items are used in practice:

They are oru muga vilakku (one faced lamp), paambu vilakku (snake lamp), puravi vilakku (horse lamp), yaanai vilakku (elephant lamp), virushpa lamp, mayil (peacock) lamp, nandhi (cow) lamp, maan (deer) lamp, Anjuthattu vilakku (five storied lamp), thamaraithattu (lotus plate) lamp, Poornatheeba lamp, cock lamp, singam vilakku (lion lamp), Nakoodathi lamp, Meru lamp, Saomaram, flag and Eladukku vilakku (seven tier lamp) are shown to the deities.

Festivals of the temple

The comprehensive Websters dictionary defines festival as a season devoted periodically to some form of entertainment. The compact Oxford Dictionary says that festival is a day or period of celebration. The term festival emerged from a Latin word festa which means feasts.

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Festivals are the functions which provide happiness, freshness and relief from ill health. Festival is the day of importance to the state with regard to the life of people. During the festival days, the ethnic discriminations are discarded. To get relief from the bad effects of the wrong *poojas* and also to perform the five duties of God, once or twice in a year festivals are conducted in temples.

India is a country famous for festivals. Among them religious festivals attracts thousands of foreigners towards this soil. Since the birth of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, festivals, rituals and celebrations emerged. Gradually the festivals and rituals occupied a dominant place. At present, Hinduism maintains its influence throughout the country. It connects the people in one way or other; and strengthens the national integration also.

The temples of India have been classified into two major groups *viz* north Indian temples and south Indian temples, due to the existence of a number of differences. South India occupies a unique place in the history of temples. Temples with palatial *gopuras*,

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mandapas, dwajasthambas, and outer walls, praharas, the vigragas and temple cars are some of the rare qualities and treasures of the south Indian temples. Starting with the Pallavas, followed by the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Nayaks, the Vijayanagar rulers, the local Zamindars, the Poligars, and petty rulers patronized the temples and temple art. The rulers protected both *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism*, the two major sects of *Hinduism*.  

Significantly temples were constructed on the banks of the rivers. In Tamil Nadu, Tirunelveli, Madurai, Thanjavur, Pudukkottai, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore and Tiruchirappalli are some of the important districts in which hundreds of temples stand in a majestic look which explain the artistic skill of the ancient and medieval Tamils. In Tirunelveli District, temples were constructed by the Pandyas and the Cholas in an extensive manner.

Tirunelveli Nellaiappar Gandhimathi Amman, Tiruchendur Subramania Swamy, Krishnapuram Perumal, Kazhugumalai, Papanasam Shiva, Generally in India, festivals are celebrated in various patterns in Tenkasi Viswanatha, Courtallam Shiva temples are some of the popular temples situated in this district.

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One such temple was constructed at Radhapuram, the headquarters of Radhapuram taluk of Tirunelveli District named after the Pandya ruler Varaguna Pandya who constructed and named the temple as Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple which is one of the popular Shiva temples of Tamil Nadu. It is also famous for the festivals and agamas follow.

**Kinds of Festivals**

Generally in India, festivals are celebrated in various patterns in various states. Certain festivals are highly religious in character. Certain festivals are connected with seasons and auspicious days. In olden days *Indira vizha*, swimming festival and sea bath festival were celebrated by the Tamils. These festivals were conducted with a view to make people to live a healthy and happy life. In general, festivals come off in larger number in certain months. A number of seasonal festivals are also there. Every year is divided into six seasons: *Koothir, Munpani, Pinpani, Elavenil Muthirvenil*, and *Karkalam*.

They consist of two Agamas viz, *Utharayanam* and *Thakshinayanam*.69

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Utharayanam (lengthy day time and short night time) is the period in which the sun traverse towards the north and it falls during the Tamil months from Thai to Aani. Thakshinayanam (short day and lengthy night time) comes off the period which falls during the Tamil months from Aadi to Margazhi.

Significantly, more festivals are celebrated during the Utharayanam period only. The fundamental idea to hold the festivals is to have a get -together in the society. For ten days this religious festival is conducted in which the deities are taken in procession in various vahanas (temple vehicles).

They are conducted in conformity with certain agamas and it is called as Thiruvizha agamavithi. The rules given in the holy texts emphasize daily poojas and making offerings through the poojas. The festivals are as many numbers as there are agamas also.

Poojas and festivals are of fundamental importance which formed an integral part of temple worship. Elaborate rituals and ceremonies are rapidly evolved and the heavenly beings are pleased with offerings like abhishekas (sacred bath) and oblations.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{70} V. Varadachari, Agamas and South Indian Vaishnavism, N.S. Publications Madras, 1982, pp. 381-390.
To maintain the divinity of the temple, the deity is provided with royal paraphernalia including a throne and an umbrella.\textsuperscript{71} The rituals and \textit{poojas} which the priests perform in temples on behalf of the society are believed to promote happiness and enable the people to obtain absolution and various other favours and privileges. Hence \textit{poojas} and festivals are regularly conducted in the temples.\textsuperscript{72}

\textbf{Nature of the Festivals}

Festivals are performed for ten, twelve or even seventeen days which include conducting various \textit{poojas} to the deities and taking them in procession around the four car streets in different vehicles. On the first day, they start the \textit{yagasaala} pooja and bury the seeds for germination which denotes the creation.

- Lord Brahma - \textit{Sruti} (creation)
- Lord Vishnu - \textit{Sthiti} (protection)
- Lord Eswaran - \textit{Samharam} (destruction)
- Goddess Logeswari - \textit{Anugraham}\textsuperscript{73} (blessing)

\textsuperscript{72} George & Michell, \textit{The Hindu Temple}, Tamil Kalai Pathipakam, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 20-25.
Annual Festivals

In Tamil Nadu all the Shiva temples have a number of annual festivals. At the Madurai Meenakshi temple, every month there is a festival. Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram also has a number of annual festivals.

Among the annual festivals which are in practice in the temple, the Chithrai car festival and Ayppasi Tirukalyanam (Divine marriage) deserve special mention. Other annual festivals like Vinayaga Chathurthi, Navarathiri, Aaruthiradarshan, Mahashivarathiri and Sree Rama Navami are also important.

Though the conduct of festivals is not compulsory, some of the major temples celebrate at least the annual festival (utsav). However the number of festivals and their grandeur largely depend on the financial condition of each temple.

In Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, the annual festival in the month of Chithirai and the Navarathiri festival lasting for ten days during the month of Puratasi are very attractive. The Aaruthiradarshan festival in the month of Margali is celebrated on
a grand scale and certain other festivals are also celebrated in a grand manner in this temple.

**Chithirai Festival**

It is the most important festival celebrated in the temple during the month of *Chithirai*. This festival is also called car festival. The very purpose of conducting the annual festival is to bring prosperity to the devotees and all the people of this locality.

The ceremony of flag hoisting is the commencement of the annual festival. The Lord’s flag is hoisted on the first day of the festival. On that auspicious occasion, the *Shivacharyas* perform *Kalashabhisekham* and a special *pooja* to *Kodipattam*. Payasam, fruits and betel leaves are placed under the *Dwajasthamba* and the *pooja* is performed.

The *peedam* of *Dwajasthamba* is decorated with mango leaves, peepal leaves and *tharppais*, and planted tridents around it. After that special *poojas* are performed, the flag is hoisted. During such occasions musical instruments like drums and *nathaswaram* are played. On this day, the *Parivara moorthies* (processional images) are

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75 *Kodipattam* - Temple flag in which Lord’s figure will be drawn.
76 *Tharppai* - a kind of grass.
decorated with grand dress, exquisite jewels and flower garlands, and mounted on various vehicles, and taken in procession through a number of streets. On the very same first day’s evening, the deities - Lord Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal-are mounted on a vehicle taken in procession through the four car streets and Maada Street.

During the second day, in the evening Lord Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal are mounted on the Simha (lion) vehicle and are taken in procession through the car streets.

The third day, evening, Swami and Ambal are mounted on a lion vehicle and are taken in procession through the streets. On the fourth day, Swami and Ambal are mounted on Kaalai (bull) and Karuda vehicle respectively and are taken in procession through the streets.

On the fifth day, Swami and Ambal are mounted on Simha (lion) and Annam (swan) vehicles and are taken in procession through the streets.
On the sixth day, Swami and Ambal are seated on a Simha (lion) vehicle and taken in procession through the streets.\footnote{K. Velluchamy, Chithirai Perunthiruwizha (Tamil) (invitation), Kovil Veliyeedu, Radhapuram, 2014.}

On the seventh day, the most magnificent celebration of the entire annual festival or Chitrai festival will be held in which the biggest crowd of people appears particularly at night. On that day, Swami and Ambal are seated on the vehicle of Poonguil Chapparam (howdah) and Natarajar is seated on Simha (lion) vehicle.\footnote{Personal interview with V.Ramanujam Pattar, aged 60, Radhapuram on 17.03.2012.}

The eighth day is exclusively devoted to the representation of Shiva as Lord Nataraja, the Master of Dance. This day is famous for ‘paarivettai’\footnote{Paarivettai - As per Hindu Sastras, the presiding deity of a temple should participate in hunting to kill the asura.} in the late evening hours. The ninth day is the day of Therottam (car procession). On this day multitudes of people from far and near throng the streets of Radhapuram. The social aspect of the festivities is seen at its heights.

On the tenth day, Swami and Ambal are seated on Poonguil Chapparam and are taken in procession through the car streets. On that night, the temple flag is lowered from Dwajasthamba. The tenth
day is the last day of the Chithrai festival as per agamas and on that day Aarattu\textsuperscript{80} function is conducted to all the deities on procession and at last the flag is lowered that night.

As per the tradition and agamas, the regular celebrations come to an end on that day. On the request and plea of the local people, the eleventh day is also celebrated now.

The eleventh day, which is sponsored and celebrated by the downtrodden communities, is a significant day with the distribution of food annathanam to all. On that night Swami and Ambal are seated on a bull vehicle and taken in procession along the car streets.\textsuperscript{81}

**Therottam (Temple Car Festival)** (Fig: 55, 56, and 57)

"Ther" or "ratha" denotes a temple car. The word ther implies select or choose, indicating thereby that the car is a selected possession. Iratham popularly called as ratham is the Tamilised form of the Sanskrit word ratha. In many Indo-Aryan languages ratha signifies chariot, cart or festival car.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{80} Aarattu - To convince the God and the devotees regarding the end of the festival in which special abhishekas and poojas are conducted to the urchavamoortis.

\textsuperscript{81} Personal interview with R.Jaikar aged 52, Radhapuram on 27.07.2012.

\textsuperscript{82} G Shivaramamangai, *Temple Festivels of Tamilnadu*, Meenachi Publications Madurai, p. 144.
The temple cars are used to seat the images of the Gods in ceremonial processions. Cars are made of the materials such as gold, silver, or wood. The wooden cars may be classified into (a) varitather (car of heart wood), (b) chattather (car of frames), (c) teppather (floating car). The popularity of temple cars is to be traced to the early medieval period. Depending upon the data provided by the hymns of the Alwars and Nayanmars, some 382 temple cars are said to have been there in Tamil Nadu.

Therottam or dragging the temple car around the main streets of the village keeps the religious spirit alive among the people. A glittering, plated kumba adorns the car. It is very necessary to get the cars very neat and tidy in a beautiful manner during the car festival. On such days, all the ratha veethis (car streets) are decorated with festoons, flags and garlands.

Large numbers of devotees from different parts of Tirunelveli District throng the four car streets of Radhapuram. The two cars are decorated with festoons, flags and garlands. Lord Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal are mounted on their respective cars; and in the Swamy’s car, a party of pipers and drummers are also seated. The cables used to pull the cars
are about half-a-furlong in length and six inches in diameter. Thousands of devotees hold the cables and pull the car or the chariot. Significantly, women alone are permitted to pull the Ambal car. Usually after the procession through the Rathaveethis (car streets), the cars are brought back to their original position.

**Thirukalyanam (Divine Marriage)** (Fig: 58)

Equally with the Chithirai car festival, Thirukalyanam\(^{83}\) (Divine Marriage) of Radhapuram Lord Varagunapandeeswarar with Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal, usually held during the Tamil month of Ayppasi, attracts thousands of devotees from Radhapuram and surrounding villages.

Next to the car festival, the divine marriage celebration is the most important one in this temple. The Thirukalyanam (divine marriage) ceremony is performed in all the Shiva temples during the Tamil month of Ayppasi every year.

Within the Tirunelveli District, it is very popular at Cheranmahadevi, Tirunelveli, Kothanallur and Radhapuram. So it is essential to highlight the twelve - day celebrations connected with the Thirukalyanam held at the Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar

\(^{83}\) *Thirukalyanam* - Divine marriage - Matrimonial alliance among God and Goddess.
Nithyakalyani Ambal temple. It starts on the day of *Uthiram Star* in the Tamil month *Ayppasi*.

At 6.30 p.m. on the first day, the temple priest collects *Thiruman* (soil) for *Mulaippaari*; and chanting of *mantras* and *poojas* start at *Manchal mandapa* where the royal representative will break *virali* turmeric. Now it is done by the executive officer of the temple. Then *Vigneswara* pooja is performed.

On the same evening *Kaappu kattuthal* (tying of *virali* turmeric in tag) is conducted. It starts with *Asuradeva* and followed by Lord Varagunapandeeswarar, and then to Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal. Finally it is performed to *Urchavamoorthies*. Then *Kalasa pooja* is performed.

At 9.00 p.m. on the same day Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal is taken in an *Anna vahana* (swan vehicle) in the *Mada* street and *Ratha Veethis* (car streets). The first day celebrations are sponsored by the staff of Sub-Registrar Office, Radhapuram.

On the second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth days except the sixth day, Ambal is taken in *Poonkuyil vahana* in the

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84 The Daily Thanthi Dated: April, 04-2006, p. 6.
morning; and Anna vahana in the late evening in procession which touches Maada street and car streets.

Significantly on the sixth day Ambal is taken on Yaanai vahana (elephant vehicle) in the morning, and Anna vahana (swan vehicle) in the evening; and the procession moves along the car streets as usual.  

On the ninth day, nava abishekas (9 holy baths) are performed to Ambal, and then she is taken in a poomppallakku (a typical vehicle) to Azhagiya Manavaba Perumal temple situated ½km from the main temple. There she undergoes Thapasu (a type of prayer) and finally a special food Thullu mavu (a powdery food) is offered to the Deity by the Perumal temple priest. After that, Theertham (holy water) is collected from the Naazhi kinanu (small well) situated in the Perumal temple and taken to the main temple, where Kumbabisheham is performed at the Thirukalyana mandapa.

In the evening the Urchavamoorthis along with Somaskantha are taken on the Rishaba vehicle (bull) to the west car street. There they give darshan to Urchavadevi who is in Thapasu, and finally all the

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deities return to the main temple where the Thirukalyana ceremony is held.

At the Thirukalyana mandapa, the Urchavamoorthis are seated and Thiru mankalyam\textsuperscript{86} (sacred thread) is placed on rough rice mixed with virali turmeric.

Finally in the midst of chanting of mantras, the Perumal temple priest will tie the taali (sacred thread) at the neck of Ambal, and at last exchanging of flower garments (Maalai maatruthal) is conducted; and with that the Thirukalyanam comes to an end.

In order to inform the public, Pattana Pravesam ceremony (the visit of the divine couple and giving darshan to the people) is conducted. On the tenth day, Unchal sevai ceremony is conducted in which both Ambal and Swami are seated in an Unchal (swing). On the last day of the Thirukalyanam at 10 a.m. Manchal Neerattu ceremony is held in which the mulaippari is mixed with virali turmeric and thrown it into the holy pond. This is the end of the 12 - day celebrations in connection with Thirukalyanam ceremony.

\textsuperscript{86}Thirumangalyam - Sacred thread used during the divine marriage of God and Goddess. Generally it is a sacred one but it gets ultra-sacred due to its utilization in the divine marriage.
Other Important Festivals

I. Chithirai Vishu Festivals

The first day of the Tamil month Chithirai is very auspicious as per Hindu astrology. This month is otherwise called Chaitra or Chaitra Vishu.  

It is celebrated on a grand scale on the state of Kerala where it is observed as Vishu kani Kaanuthal. At Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, the Hindus - from children to elders - come to the temple along with their relatives on that auspicious day for getting the blessings of Lord Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal. On that occasion, the devotees conduct navagraha poojas also.

II. Vaigasi Festivals

Vaigasi Visagam is very popular with Lord Subramaniya, because it is his birth star. So it is celebrated on a grand scale at the Subramania shrine of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram. Lord Subramania has another name

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88 J.S. Murali, Tamizhaka Sivasthalangal (Tamil), Sethurama Pathipakam, Chennai 2000, p. 77.
Vishagam to the month Vaigasi. It falls on the full moon day of that month. On that occasion, special poojas and abishekas are performed to Lord Subramanya.

On this occasion, a special sweet food Maampaal is prepared and offered to Lord Subramanya. In the major Murugan temples, Pushpaabishegam (flower abishegam) is done to the Lord. But at the Subramania Shrine at Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, no flower abishega is done to Lord Muruga. The devotees perform only milk abisheka on that occasion. Some of them carry Kaavadi to the Subramania Shrine.

**III. Aani Festivals**

The Tamil month of Aani is famous for marriages as per the Hindu sastras. In addition to that, Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays are significant in this month because parihara poojas are performed at that time. Aani Tirumanjanam is celebrated in a grand manner at Chidambaram, Madurai, Kanchipuram and other important religious centres.

At Radhapuram, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple also; Aani Tirumanjanam is celebrated in a grand manner.

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manner to Lord Nataraja. In the Tamil month of Aani on the day of uttiram, soon after the completion of kalasandhi pooja, special abisheka is performed to Lord Nataraja.

In this temple Thirumanjam is celebrated twice a year, which comes in the Tamil months of Aani and Margazhi respectively. But Aani Thirumanjanam is very popular. It comes on the ninth day of Uthiram star during the month of Aani. Special abishegas and aarathanas are conducted to Lord Natarajar and Shivagami Ambal at Natarajar mandapa. Decorations are made with costly jewels and rich garments.

The deities come out in perambulation along the main streets including Maada Street around the temple. Then an image is dipped in the tank of the temple. This festival is performed in a way so as to thank the providence for saving the people from the heat of summer.

**IV. Aadi Festivals**

Tuesdays and Fridays of the Tamil month of Aadi are famous for Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal. On that occasion, the devotees offer new clothes to the Ambal. Puuram is the special star for Goddess

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90 N. C. Leena, Aani Thirumanjanam Festivals of Tamil Nadu, Op.cit, p.2
Sakti, as is Tiruvadirai for Shiva and Thiruvonam for Vishnu. There is a legend regarding this festival in Hinduism. Goddess Parvathi was said to have taken birth under this star to make this earth flowing proper in all aspects. It is worthy of mention that Aandaal Naachchiyaar.\textsuperscript{91} was born on the holy day of Aadipooram. If it falls on a Friday, it is considered to be especially auspicious. This festival is celebrated in all Hindu temples of South India. At Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, Aadipooram is celebrated with rich religious colour. On this day, special abhisheka is done and offerings are made to Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal in this temple on a lavish scale.

Aadiperukku\textsuperscript{92} and Aadivelli (Friday) are also celebrated with special poojas in this temple. Aadi Amavaasai, the no-moon day in the Tamil month of Aadi, is observed with full religious colour. The devotees will come to the temple after taking bath at the temple pond and conduct special abishekas to the presiding deities.

\textsuperscript{91} Andal Nachiyaar - a Vaishnava saint of Srivilliputhur of Tamil Nadu sung so many paasurams (divine songs) on Lord Vishnu and it is said that he had mingled with the lord through untiring meditation.

\textsuperscript{92} Aadiperukku - It is a water festival celebrated in the rivers. River Kaveri is famous for this special festival. It has been recorded in the Sangam literature also. On the occasion the spinsters of the locality offer floral tribute to River Kaveri for pleading her to provide a better bridegroom.
Women folk normally observe fasting on the *sathurthi thithi* (the fourth day) which comes after the no moon day during the month of *Aadi* and come to the temple and worship *Nagaraja, Naagakannihal* and Sastha. In order to be free from *Naagadhosham*, they perform it.

**V. Aavani Festivals (Vinayaka Chathurthi)**

As per the Hindu *puranas*, *Vinayaka Chathurthi* is observed to safeguard the common man from obstacles in his day to day life. Generally, *Chankatahara Chathurthi* days of all the Tamil months are observed on a grand scale and during the month of *Aavani*; it is celebrated as *Vinayaka Chathurthi*, the birthday of Vinayaka on a very large scale. *Vinayaka Chathurthi* is a great festival celebrated from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Kamarup with great enthusiasm. Lord Ganesa, a son of Lord Shiva is worshipped by all the devotees as the redeemer of difficulties from all their commitments; and hence he is called *Vigneswara*.

On that day, the image of the deity with a mouse, His vehicle is made, duly consecrated and worshipped by all in every house. At Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple there exist five

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statues of Lord Ganesa. This festival is celebrated to overcome all
difficulties and failures throughout the year. It also indicates the
greatness of Vinayaga.

The birthday of Lord Ganesa is observed with a variety of poojas
like  Maha Ganapathi Homam and Nava Abishekam, etc. On that
occasion, special offerings like breaking a large number of coconuts,
neivadyams (appam, aval, vada, modhagam) are submitted and at last
deeperadhanam is also performed. Special performances with musical
instruments like  Pancha vaadya\(^94\) are played besides staging of some
performing arts.

On that occasion the following abishekas are performed. Rice
flour, Turmeric powder, Kalaba powder, Milk, Panchamirtham, Honey,
Ghee, Amla powder, Curd, Viboothi, Tender coconut, Panneer (rose
water) and Javvathu (mixed sandal) are the things which are used
during the abisheka. After the abisheka, Vinayagar is decorated with
Arugampul garland, Vellerukku.\(^95\)

\(^94\) Panchavaadya: There are five music instruments, in the temple; Nadhaswaram,
Melam, Gong, Conch and Horn are called Panchavaadyam. The playing of these
five instruments is called Panchavaadyam.

\(^95\) Vellerukku - Kalotropis Gigintia
Garland, and Jasmine and rose garlands. The metal icon of Vinayaga mounted on the *mushika vahana* (mouse) comes in procession around the outer *prahara* at night.

It is meant for the women folk only; and on that auspicious day, special *poojas* and *abishegas* are performed in the Gajalakshmi shrine in the inner *prahara*. At that time *manjal charadu* (viralic turmeric tied in a tag) is offered to Gajalakshmi; and the women worship her.

It is an auspicious day in the Tamil month of *Aavani*. On that occasion, *poonool tag* is offered to Vianayaga, Lord Varagunapandeeswarar, Subramania, Suriyan (the Sun), Chandran (the Moon), Chandekeswarar and Bairavar. On that day, the Brahmins of this locality will also change their *poonul*. *Paripaadal*, a sangam literature confirms the utilization of *poonul* by the Brahmins.

**VI. Purattasi Festivals (Navarathiri)**

Two *Navarathiris* come off in the Tamil months of *Purattasi* and *Panguni*. When it occurs in the Tamil month of *Purattasi*, it is called as *Saratha Navarathiri*. When it occurs in the Tamil month of *Panguni*, it is called as *Vasantha Navarathiri*.96

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*Sakthi vazhipaadu* is very common in India. *Shivam* is just like a stone which falls in a water source. But *sakthi* is the continuous process of emergence of waves on that water source. So the Hindus observe *Amavaasai* (no-moon-day), *Pournami* (full moon day), Friday fasting, Varalekshmi *vratam* (fasting), *Navaraathiri vratam* fasting in a perfect manner.

The *Navaratri* festival is celebrated in the month of Purattasi. Since this festival is held for nine nights it is called *Navaratri*. Goddess Sakthi is believed to have won over "Mahishasura" the half-human half buffalo monster, an embodiment of evil.

This festival is unique in which *Sakti* is worshipped as *Maheswari*, *Kaumari*, *Varahi*, *Mahalakshmi*, *Vaishnavi*, *Indirani*, *Saraswati*, *Narasimhi* and *Chamundi*. Sakthi’s divine forms are classified as three that is, *Ichchha sakti*, *kriya sakti*, and *Gnana sakti* and she is also triplicated as *Durga* (bravery), *Lakshmi* (wealth), and *Saraswathi* (education) which are deemed the three most essential characteristics in life. If any one of them is lacking, one’s life will be dull. To attain all the three *saktis*, the first three days that is

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from Pratamai to Tritiyai are reserved for the worship of Durga, Chaturti to Sashti for Lakshmi, and Saptami to Dasami for Saraswathi.99

In this temple, the festival is conducted by the public. Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal is decorated in different styles on all the nine days and placed in Kolu in the Thirukalyana mandapa for the convenient worship of the devotees. In front of the Ambal, the images of animals, birds, gods and goddesses, made of clay, metal, stone, etc. are arranged on the platform with steps. During these days special abhisheka and aradana are performed.

This is a nine-day festival held in the Tamil month of Purattasi which begins from the day next to Mahalaya Amavasai. In India, Navarathiri festival is celebrated in different ways like Durga pooja in West Bengal, Dusserah,100 in Karnataka and Aayuthapooja in other regions especially in Tamil Nadu. It is celebrated from prathamai thithi to Navami thithi. At Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple Navarathiri festival is celebrated in a grand manner.

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100 Dusserah - It is a famous festival in the erstwhile Mysore state i.e. present Karnataka. During the time of Durga pooja of Bengal, it is celebrated in a grand scale at Mysore.
On that occasion, Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal is seated in the *Thirukkalyana mandapa* on the first day. She is decorated as Goddess Meenakshi, and after conducting *nava abishekas*, finally *kumbabishega* is conducted. On that evening the devotees will sing *Devi Suktham, and Lalitha sahasranamam*, the devotional literature.

On the second day, Ambal is decorated as *Aandaal Avathaar* and on the third day, She is decorated as *Lakshmi Avathaar*; and She is decorated as *Annapurani, Sri Kamaakshi, Sri Nithyakalyani, Shivasakthi, Vishalakshi*, on fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth days respectively. The *Unjal sevai* (swing) ceremony conducted on the sixth day is an extraordinary occasion. In every house, women assemble in the evenings and sing songs in praise of the Goddess *Saraswathi*. This festival is observed in schools and educational institutions. The Hindus start the schooling of their children on the *mahanavami* day with special prayers.101

**Vijayadasami**

On the auspicious day of *Dasami*, the next day of *Sarasvathi pooja*, *Vijayadasami* festival is observed. This day is considered by the

Hindus quite favorable for schooling and other good things for excellent results and success. It is otherwise called 'Aayutha pooja'. On that occasion, all the tools and instruments used for work are placed before the Deity in the special Aayutha pooja.

On that morning, the paari vettai ceremony is performed within the premises of the temple in order to enact symbolically the killing of Mahishasura, a leader of the Ashuras. In the late evening of Vijayadasami, Chandrasekarar and Ambal are taken in procession on the Anna vahana.

On the same day Vidhyarambha is also performed in this temple, when children are initiated into the world of letters. There is profuse decoration and special poojas and offerings to the deities.

Yathevee sarvadhosha
Mathru roopena samstha
Namasthasayai namasthasayai
Namasthasayai Namo nama.

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102 Aaiyutha Pooja - During the Tamil month of Purattasi, it is celebrated at the time of Saraswathi Pooja.
This is a *Devi mahathmiya* sloga that explains the significance of *Vijayadasami*.

During the *Navarathri* festival, certain special *poojas* are performed. *Maheswari Bala Pooja, Koumari Kumari Pooja, Varahi Kanya Kalyani Pooja*, *Mahalekshmi Rohini Pooja, Vaishnavi Pooja, Indrani Pooja, Mahasaraswathi Shumangali Pooja, Narasimha Taranee Pooja* and *Samundi Matha Pooja*, are the special *poojas* performed on the occasion of *Vijaya Dhasami*.103 (*Dasarah*).

**VII. Ayyppasi Festivals** *(Fig: 59, 60.)*

Among the important festivals of India, *Deepaavali* is the most significant. It falls on the end of November or the beginning of December. *Deepaavali* is meant to celebrate the destruction of the arrogant tyrant *Narakasura* by Sri Krishna. Special *poojas* and *abeshekams* are performed to the presiding deities on that auspicious occasion.

On this day, in this temple also *abishekas* and *aradana* are performed in a grand scale to Lord Varagunapandeeswarar and Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal. On the occasion of the full moon day

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(pournami) in the Tamil month of Ayppasi, Anna abishega is performed to Lord Varagunapandeeswarar. Significantly every day Anna abishega is conducted to spadiha linga at Chidambaram. But the Anna abishega during the Tamil month of Ayppasi is very auspicious.

In Sri Varagunapandeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram, the presiding deity Varagunapandeswarar is enshrined in the sanctum sanctorum which has a dimension of 11 feet, 5.25 feet. So, 10 kg rice is cooked and offered to the deity. The entire Shivalinga will be covered with cooked rice, which is called annaabishekam. Finally special poojas are conducted and then the ghee rice is presented to the devotees as prasadam.

The Tamil month of Ayppasi is famous for marriages in the Hindu society. This practice emerged from the divine marriage of Swami with Ambal during this auspicious month.\textsuperscript{104}

In Sri Varagunapandeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram, the Thirukalyanam (divine marriage) festival is celebrated on a grand scale. It takes place for nine days. It is the second largest festival next to Chithrai car festival in which thousands

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\textsuperscript{104} A. Arumugham, Mantalabisekha Malar (Tamil), Raja Achakam, Radhapuram, 2005, p.16.
\end{flushleft}
of devotees will throng the temple. In the late evening hours, two vehicles (vahanas) are decorated and the deities are placed there and taken in procession around the car streets. After that, the divine marriage takes place.

**VIII. Karthigai Festivals**

During the Tamil month of *Karthigai*, three important festivals are celebrated. They are the following.

(i) *Somavaara pooja*

(ii) *Kanthasashti*

(iii) *Thirukarthigai Deepam festival*

**Somavaara (Monday) Pooja**

*Somavaara* is very auspicious in Shiva worship. It is said that the *Soman* (the moon) worshipped and pleaded with Lord Shiva for his assistance to relieve from *Thatchayini* which fell on Monday, and hence, in all the Shiva temples including Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, people throng in huge number on all Mondays.\(^\text{105}\)

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\(^{105}\) Personally visited and witnessed.
Kandasashti

The festival known as kandasashti is observed on the sixth day of the bright fortnight during the Tamil month of Ayppasi corresponding to the English month October-November. The observance is to propitiate Lord Subramanya, the second son of Lord Shiva. It is stipulated that Sashti is observed only on those days having thithi for more than six nazhikas in the morning of the day.106

According to tradition, Goddess Parvathi observed Suklaviratha for 108 days for getting back Lord Subramanya who disappeared in the form of Naaga. Similarly as per Hindu mythology, Devas observed the viratha at the battlefield for propitiating Skantha for slaying Thaarakaaasuran. In the Radhapuram temple also, this festival is celebrated in grand style in The Lord Subramanya Shrine.

Abishehas and poojas are performed to Lord Subramanya after Surasamhara. Thousands of devotees take part in the six days fasting in this temple.

During the first five days, the devotees consume food at noon only and on the last day, fasting is very strict and only after the

Surasamhara (death of the asura), the devotees take bath at the temple pond and participate in the abhishekas to be performed to Lord Subramania, and then only they take food. The devotees feel that there is no tiredness on that day. This is the significance of kandasashti festival.

Bharani Deepam is carried out on the day of the Bharani star, the day preceding Karthikai deepam. This is known as Ilankartikai. In this temple Astrapavevar is well decorated and taken out in procession, and a lamp is lit where chokkappanai\(^{107}\) is to be held.

**Thirukarthikai Deepam**

This festival is celebrated on the full moon day in the Tamil month of Karthikai corresponding to the English month of October - November. Karthikai Deepam is virtually a propitiation of agni (fire). Fire is one of the five constituent elements along with other elements such as air, water, earth and sky which make up the universe. This

\(^{107}\) Chokkappanai - In the Tamil month of Karthigai, during the Thirukarthigai Deepam Celebrations, it is conducted. On that occasion, huge number of Coconut leaves and Palm Leaves are added with a lengthy stick and it is installed in front of the temple and inflamed.
festival is observed with great éclat in the Arunachalleswara temple at Tiruvannamalai.¹⁰⁸

*Karthikai* deepam is one of the ancient festivals of the Tamils. It is mentioned in the Sangam literature. On this day, special *abhisheka* is performed to Muruga. *Chokkapanai* or deepa ghosa is also performed in the temple. In the Lord Subramanya Shrine within the premises of Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, this festival is celebrated on a grand scale.¹⁰⁹ *Chokkapanai* is planted with dried palm leaves and twigs for a height of 25 or 30 ft in front of the south gate. In front of the beacon, the idols are placed and the beam is set on fire with the lamp taken from this temple. This symbolic custom is celebrated to commemorate the occasion of Shiva burning down *Tripura*. Both in the temples and houses, Hindus used to illuminate lamps throughout this month, especially on *Tirukkarthikai* night.

**IX. Margazhi Festivals**

This Tamil month is very auspicious one, in which girls would observe fasting to get right persons as their husbands. Every morning,

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¹⁰⁸ *Thiruvanammalai* - a famous centre for Saivism, *Girivalam* - rounding the temple is the specialty.

¹⁰⁹ Personal interview with *R.Priya* aged 52, Radhapuram on 07.07.2013.
a group of devotees would go along the car streets, singing of *Thiruppavai*\(^{10}\) and *Thiruvempavai*.\(^{11}\)

*Thiruvathirai* star which occurs in the Tamil month of *Margazhi* corresponding to the English month of December - January is the birth day of Lord Shiva.

It is celebrated in all Shiva temples one a grand scale. This concerns exclusively the women and is said to be in commemoration of the death of Kamadeva. *Thiruvathirai* festival falls on the auspicious day when the full moon day of *margazhi* is in the constellation of *Arudra*.\(^{12}\) This is also known as *Arudra darisanam*. The Hindus believe that Shiva incarnated as Lord Nataraja on *Arudra* day, as Rama on *Navami* and Krishna on *Ashtami*. *Thiruvathirai* pertains to Shiva.

It is worth remembering that Shiva is otherwise known as *Adirayan* and *Arudran*. It was on *Thiruvadirai* day in *Margazhi*, Shiva rendered his cosmic dance in the presence of Uma, His consort. The

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\(^{10}\) *Thiruppavai* - A Vaishnava Literature  
\(^{11}\) *Thiruvempavai* - A Saiva Literature  
Lord Nataraja temple at Chidambaram is the most sacred place for this festival in South India.

The *Arudra* festival is celebrated to signify enlightenment and its victory over ignorance and egoism. The worship of Shiva in the early morning of the day known as *Aarudradarsan* is considered very auspicious. At Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple,

Early in the morning of the festival day, all people, both men and women, assemble at the holy pond situated outside the temple for bathing. At the time of taking bath, the devotees sing *Linga Paattu* and *Thiruvathirai Venba*, the accurate song related with Lord Shiva. Significantly *Thiruvathirai kazhi*\(^{113}\) a special sweet is prepared and offered in the evening only.

**X. Thai Festivals** (Fig: 61, 62)

In Tamil Nadu, the *Mahara Sankranti* is called *Pongal* festival. It occurs on the first day of the Tamil month *Thai* commencing astronomically on the 14\(^{th}\) January every year. Pongal is also

\(^{113}\) *Thiruvathirai Kazhi*: This *Kazhi* is a sweet pulp or pudding prepared by mixing the parched raw rice or parched black gram with jaggery, cardamom and ghee. This sweet pudding is considered to be an important special *neyvedhyam* to Lord Shiva.
celebrated to show our gratitude to the Sun, since it is essential for the good yield in the agricultural cultivation as well as for life on the earth. In short, it is a festival to honour Nature. It is believed that on this day, the Sun enters Capricorn on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of *Mahara.*\(^{114}\)

*Thai* is also an important Tamil month for the Hindus who visit the temples during the first day of the month and get the blessings of God.\(^{115}\)

On that occasion, thousands of devotees will visit the Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram to get His blessings. Free vegetables and fruits are presented to the devotees on that occasion. *Thai poosam* is a three-day celebration in this temple. Special *poojas* and *abishekas* are conducted to all the deities in general and Lord Subramanya in particular because *Thai poosam* is closely associated with Lord Subramanya.

**XI. Maasi Festivals**

*Maasi Magam* is celebrated in all the Shiva temples during the Tamil month of Maasi. At Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, it is started with the *Chandrasekhara*


yaga and is followed by Rudhraabhisheka with the holy water of eleven gadams (pots).\textsuperscript{116} Mahashivarathiri is a festival observed on the night of the fourteenth day of the dark half in the Tamil month of Masi to the corresponding English months of February-March. Mahashivarathiri literally means, the great night of Lord Shiva, which falls on the Krishna Chathurdasi Day.

It is believed that on that day Lord Shiva protected the universe from the total destruction by taking Haalahala (poison) in his palm and swallowing it.

In admiration of the benevolent act of Lord Shiva, Brahma, Vishnu, Sakthi and other Devas spend the day time in fast, and spend the night keeping awake and praying with gratitude.\textsuperscript{117}

This festival is very famous in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram; and it is grandly celebrated in this temple during the Tamil month of Maasi. On that occasion four special poojas are performed in the late evening hours in addition to the regular poojas.


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p.156
The first *jama pooja* starts at 9 p.m. and the second *jama pooja* starts at 12 mid-night and the third *jama pooja* starts at 2 a.m. and the fourth *jama pooja* starts at 4 a.m next day. Each *pooja* has nine to eleven types of *abishekas*. New garments are offered to Seevilineyagar and Seevilineachiyar. This day consists of special *abhishekas* followed by the chanting of *mantras* to Lord Shiva. The devotees, hundreds in number, take fast the whole day, and spend the night in the premises of the temple, offering *poojas* and reciting the *Shivapurana*.

**XII. Panguni Festivals**

During the month of Panguni, on the auspicious day of *Uttiram*, the festival is observed and celebrated to commemorate the completion of penance by Lord Shiva and Parvathi, their marriage,

The destruction of Manmata, and resurrection of Manmata at the request of his wife Rati, by Shiva. This festival is celebrated in grand style in the Shiva temples of Tamil Nadu. This temple speaks about a grant of endowment to celebrate the Panguni festival. However, this festival is celebrated with the financial assistance provided by the philanthropists of Radhapuram.
XIII. Other Festivals

a) Gurupeyarchi (Fig: 63)

Dhatchinamoorthi or Guru Bhagavan is responsible for the creation of all Vedas, Manthras and Agamas. Every year the transit of guru occurs in the Tamil month of Aaani corresponding to the English months of June - July and it has its effects for one year. In Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithiyakalyani Ambal temple, the devotees offer nut garland (kondakkadalai garland) to Him.\(^{118}\)

b) Sanipeyarchi (Transit of Saturn) (Fig: 64)

Among the Navagrahas, Saturn is powerful and famous. Thirunallaru, a place near Karaikkal, is very famous for Saturn worship. In addition to that, Kuchanoor (swayambu Saneeswarar), Thirukollikadu (Pongu Saneeswarar), and Thiruchendur etc. are also famous for Saturn worship.

Everybody must face 7½ years under Saturn’s influence in the rotation of every 30 years. Once again the 7½ years has been classified into Mangusani, Pongusani and Paadhasani with a spell of 2½ years each. Normally a human being will face two circles (i.e. 30 x 2 = 60 years). It is believed that as per Hindu astrology, accidents,

causalities and deaths will occur during this period of 7½ years (Elarai sanî). So with much concern, all the Hindus have to face Saturn.

With this background, Saturn worship occupies a very dominant place nowadays. To pacify Saturn, a special pooja called "Saneeswara Homam" is performed. Wearing black dress, feeding the crows, offering gingelly food to the deities are the special poojas which are in practice in that temple.\textsuperscript{119}

c) Raagu, Kethu Peyarchi (Transit of Raagu and Kethu)

Just like saturn, raagu and kethu also have their transit as per Hindu astrology. So people visit the holy places related with Raagu and Kethu for parihara poojas. Parihara poojas related with Ragu and Kethu are significant in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram. The people who are affected by these grahas are advised to offer blue dress and multi coloured dresses to Raagu and Kethu respectively.\textsuperscript{120}

Nowadays, people have much fear over the transit of Raagu and Kethu also. It is strongly believed that this transit will affect the day-

\textsuperscript{119} Sanipeyarchi, Invitation, Radhapuram, 2004, p.3.
\textsuperscript{120} Personal interview with R.Varatharajan aged 60, Kallidaikuruchi on 16.06.2012.
to-day life of a common man. So people are very particular to perform *Parihara poojas* on the occasion.

**Ashtabanthana Maha Kumbabisheham**

As per the epigraphic evidences, this Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple might have been constructed during the 12th or 13th century A.D. As per *Silpasasstra*, every temple should be renovated periodically with proper intervals. According to Hindu *sastras* and *agamas*, renovation and *Kumbabishekham* must be held at least once in 12 years. It is a ceremony of giving fresh power to God. The Gods and Goddesses are not taking food offered by the people directly. They take it through fire. If the people put anything as offerings in the fire, the God will get satisfied and give happiness and wealth to all.

In the *Kumbabishekam* celebrations, *yagasalai poojas* are famous. Deities like Agni, Indran, Sun, Vaman, Vaayu, Saraswathi, Ruthran, Viswamitran, Kandiravars, Absara, Suradevar, Devaganangal, Ganapathi, and Dakshinamoorthy get satisfied through the *yagasalai poojas*. 
In addition to the *yagasalai poojas*, *Deva Devathai Vigneswara pooja*, *Punniyakavasanam Maha Ganapathi Homa yaga pooja*, *Poornakuthi pooja*, *Go pooja (cow)*, *Brahmachari pooja*, *Kanni pooja*, *Navagraha Homam*, *Mahalakshmi Homam*, *Kumpa yagasalai pravesam*, *Muthalkala yaga pooja* are performed, and all these *poojas* and rituals give satisfaction to God, who blesses all the devotees, with all prosperities.

Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple has also witnessed renovation works and *Kumbabishehams* in 1967. Recently the renovation work worth of 60 lakhs was conducted in 2003-2004 and a number of additions were also done and finally *Astagandana mahakumbabishekam* was conducted.

The preliminary works were completed and the *yagasalai poojas* were started. After that on 10th of June 2005, Friday *Jeernothrana Ashtabanthana Maha Kumbabishekham* was conducted in a grand

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121 *Brahmachari Pooja*: Before any ashtabandana Kumbabishekam to be performed, a brahmacharya pooja is to be done. This pooja proceeds as follows: A Brahmin bachelor is to be adored with a new silk dhoti, a ‘parivattam’ (halo cloth) around his head and garland; and seated on a wooden plank. Then an ‘archana’ is performed with deepam, dhoopam and flowers.
manner in Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram after 48 years.\textsuperscript{122}

During the festival times, people observe fasting. After the completion of religious ceremonies, they enjoy grand feasts. In Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, the most popular festivals are conducted on some auspicious days round the year. \textit{Panchaparvams} are held in this temple every month. These are \textit{Amavasai, Pradosha, Krittika, Somavara} and \textit{Sukravara Amavasai}. It is evident that the festivals were celebrated gloriously in the previous regimes. Unfortunately, due to lack of government support, rise of price level, and other factors, the festivals are performed in limited proportions.

\textsuperscript{122} Daily Thanthi, Tamil Daily, Tirunelveli, 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2005, p. 8.