Chapter II

Historical and Cultural Heritage of Madurai
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HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE OF MADURAI

Madurai, the abode of Goddess Meenakshi is a well-known pilgrim centre and is one of the oldest cities in South India. For the last 2500 years it has been a great centre of South Indian culture and civilization. In India the history and culture of a region often centres around a temple. Madurai is also the famous and ancient home of Tamil Culture. The origin of this ancient city is very obscure for it goes back to a legendary past. Tradition refers to the existence of three academies known as ‘Three Tamil Sangams in the Pandyan Kingdom.’

According to Iraiyanar’s Ahapporul which contains the earliest account of the three Sangams, the first Tamil Sangam in Tenmadurai was founded by saintly scholars and pious kings. Tradition says Kunpandya died without legitimate children and all the illegitimate children naturally fought for supremacy and they all reigned in various parts of the kingdom with different capitals. The first Sangam existed at Thenmadurai for 4440 years. Presided over by Lord Siva, it had gods and sages as members. As the location of Thenmadurai could not be proved, it is believed that Thenmadurai could have submerged in the sea.

The second Sangam existed at Kapaadapuram, an early capital of the Pandya’s, for 3700 years. It was left under the control of sages, with Agastiya as president. Yet they could find no evidence in support of the existence of a sangam at Kapaadapuram. Therefore it was explained that the inroads of the sea contributed to the disappearance of Sangam. Thereupon, it was pointed out, that a third Sangam was set up in Madurai and it lasted for 1850 years, with the common elite in control of this academy.

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3 ibid p.23.

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The third Sangam period lasted during the first three centuries of the Christian era. It was followed by the age of darkness which lasted for about three centuries that is from A.D. 300 to A.D. 600. The Kalabhras were finally uprooted by Kadungon Pandya who inaugurated the first Pandyan Empire around about A.D. 570.  

Pandyas during the Sangam Age

Of the early Pandyas Nedunjelian II who ruled about A.D. 210 was the greatest ruler. He defeated a confederacy of the Cheras, the Cholas and five other Kings in a battle, which was fought at Talaiyalanganam near Thanjavur. Thereafter he was known as Talai Yalanganattu Cheruvenra Nedunjelian. In another battle he captured the chera ruler Mantharam Cheral Irumporai as a prisoner and annexed the Velir territories. These victories made the Pandyas supreme in the Tamil Country. After this victory, he defeated the Kongars and occupied their region. Also he suppressed several of the minor powers and annexed more of their territories. Under him Kudal Nagar grew into a great city and came to be known as Madurai.  

References to several Pandya kings are found in the Sangam poems. Maduraikkanchi, for instance, speaks of two kings, Nediyon and Palyagasalai Mudukudumi, but unquestionably the hero of the poem is Nedunjeliyan who won the famous victory at Talayalanganam against a combination of the contemporary Chera and Chola kings and five minor chiefs. Unfortunately it is not possible to determine the distance of time which intervened between this Nedunjeliyan and the king of the same name. Aryappadaikadanda Nedunjeliyan, is referred in Silappadikaram.  

The victory of Talayalanganam is praised also in numerous poems in Purananuru, Ahananuru, Kuruntogai and Nattrnai. An ambitious warrior, a generous patron of poets, and a staunch Hindu who performed a Vedic sacrifice, Nedunjeliyan was one of the outstanding Pandya kings, celebrated in the Sangam classics.

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6 K.Rajayyan, Tamil Nadu A Real History, Madurai, 2005, p.45.
7 ibid;p.46.
Among the successors of Nedunjeliyan known to Tamil literature there appears Ugraperuvaluti, a valiant warrior who subdued his opponent, the chief of Kanapper. A poet of eminence, he himself, is believed to have caused the anthology of Ahananuru to be made. Another Pandyan king, mentioned in the Sangam literature is the poet king Bhutappandiyan who captured Ollaiyur. He was an enlightened ruler. The names of several other Pandyan monarchs occur in the classics, but only a few details are available about them.

**Early References to Madurai**

The ancient history of Madurai is bound up with the history of the Pandyas. It is not known with any certainty when the Pandyas began their rule. According to one version, they were ruling in Madurai Country even in the age of the Ramayana, that a verse in the epic in the Kishkindha Kanda must be taken to refer to the Kapatapuram of the Pandyas mentioned in the Tamil legend of the Three Sangams. Another version states that the Pandya Kingdom was at least as ancient as the Mahabharatha. But there is ample evidence to show that about the beginning of the Christian era the Pandyan Kingdom of Madurai was a settled fact co-existing with those of the Cholas and the Cheras.\(^8\)

The classical writers of Greece and Rome were acquainted with Pandyan Kingdom. Many Roman Coins of their period have also been found in and around Madurai. In the early centuries of the Christian era, there were commercial and diplomatic relations between the Pandyan Kingdom and the Roman Empire.\(^9\)

In the third century around 302 B.C. Megasthenese speaks of a country called Pandya. Strabo refers an embassy presumably sent by the Pandyan King to Emperor Augustus. Pliny mentions about the people of the Pandya region, King Pandian and his Mediterranean in justice, Ptolemy refers to 'Maduora' the kingdom of the Pandyan, Kautilaya also mentions about the Pandiyas. But the first source that mention all the three together are the edicts of Ashoka. Parimelalagar, the renowned

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commentator on the *Kural*, mentions that Chera, Chola and the Pandya’s have been ruling over the Tamil country ever since the day of creation.

Ilango Adigal, the brother of the Chera King Senguttuvan wrote the epic poem *Silappadikaram*, also known as *Kovalan Kathai*. Ilango Adigal made it more realistic and lively by blending legend with history. The work is of great historical value as reflecting upon the social and political conditions of the country under the Pandyas. However, Sangam classics, comprising the literary works of the early Tamil contain extraordinarily abundant data of historical value. They throw some light on the political, and still more on the social and religious conditions of the early Tamil. This was the greatest period of the ancient history of Madurai and its secular prosperity is finely portrayed in the old Tamil Classics of *Manimegali* and *Silappathikaram*.

**Etymology of the name Madurai**

The district is named after the Chief town. The word is spelt *Mathurai* in Tamil. Yule and Burnell say that it is generally supposed to be in Tamil form of the name *Mathura*, the very ancient and holy city on the Jumna, 30 miles above Agra. The *Madurai Sthalapuranas* state that etymology is from the Tamil *Mathurai* meaning anything sweet, the story being that, Siva was so pleased with the buildings erected around his shrine by the first Pandyan King as a mark of special favour, he sprinkled the temple towers, palaces and houses of the town with drops of sweet nectar shaken from his locks called *mathuram*.

The name Madurai seems to have been a favourite one in early ages for there are several places so called in Ceylon and Malaya. There is a place called *Matara* in the extreme south of Ceylon, another in Burma, an island called *Madura* near Java. The term Madurai seems to have had some special significance and meaning which made it very popular in ancient times but which has been forgotten at present. In the Pandyan Kingdom there seems to have been a number of cities with name Madurai like *Tenmadurai*, *Vadamathuri*, and *Nedumadurai*. The early Tamil works, the city

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11 ibid p28.
of Madurai is known as Kudal. Kudal is a term which refers to the confluence of rivers. The ancient Madurai was built at the confluences of the Vaigai and one of the tributaries which might have changed its course during the lapse of centuries.

**Second Pandyan Empire**

As a feudatory power under the Cholas, the Pandyas retained their influence in limited areas of the far south. Maravarman Sundarapandya one of their chiefs won victory over the cholas. Yet due to Hoysala interventions he failed to gain any advantage. The ascendancy of the Pandyas once again could be seen in the time of Jatavaranman Sundra Pandya-I (1252 – 1270AD). By mid-thirteenth century under the chief, Jatavaranman Sundara Pandya, defeated Rajendra Chola-III expelled cholas from Madurai and founded the second Pandyan Empire. The most famous Pandyan Monarch of all times who ruled at Madurai during this period was Jatavaranman Sundara Pandya-I (1251 – 1270 AD).

Crown prince Maravarman 1268-1310 A.D. succeeded his father Jatavaran as the ruler of the Pandya kingdom. Cheran Mahadevi Inscription on his twentieth regional year tells of his victories over Malainadu, Cholamandalam, Kongudesam, Thondinadu and Lanka. The foreign travelers who visited the Pandyan Empire during the reign of Maravarman have given an account of the Pandya country. Ships from Hormas, Kis, Aden and all Arab countries visited it.

The glory of the second pandyan empire reached its Zenith under Maravarman but the fall came in a rapid succession of events. The death of the ruler was followed by a civil war between his sons, Sundra Pandya and Virapandy, the crown prince but Sundra pandya captured the throne in 1310. There upon Virapandya won the alliance of the ruler of Venad and recaptured the throne. Disappointed at the turn of events, Sundara Pandya sought the aid of the Afghans, who were engaged in a war against the Hoysalas. In 1313 Ravi Varma Kulasekara of Venad occupied Madurai and subsequently Malik Kafur led his Afghan army to the Pandyan country. There were many prominent monarchs ruling Madurai till the Muslim invasions of Madurai under

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12 K. Rajayyan, opcit, Madurai, 2005, p 46.
Malik Kafur in the 14th Century Thereafter Madurai was reduced to a province of the Afghan Sultanate.13

Yet the Pandyas did not altogether vanish from the scene of history. They held possession of remote areas and the inscriptions that are found in the district of Madurai, Ramnad and Pudukkottai indicate the survival of their influence in these areas till the end of the fourteenth century. The last rulers rebuilt the temples at Tiruppathur near Madurai. The pandyas of Tirunelveli had their existence up to the seventeenth century.

Madurai formed the southernmost province of the Delhi Sultanate. It was situated so remote from Delhi that the Afghan sultans found it impossible to exercise their authority from their capital. Added to this, the Delhi Sultanate was in a state of disorder.

The Muslim Sultanate of Madurai lasted from 1334 A.D to 1378 A.D a period of about forty-four years. These years were marked by constant persecution of the Hindus. The Hindus were often slaughtered, their temples were invariably pillaged and desecrated and their idols were continually deprived of worship.14

Meanwhile the newly established Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagar tried to deal with the Muslim Sultanate of Madurai. Kumara Kampana, son of Bukka, the Co-founder of Vijayanagar Kingdom, attacked the Muslims at Madurai about 1370 A.D. and defeated them. Kampanas expedition just weakened the Muslim power in Madurai but it had not ended the Muslim rule, which continued till 1378 A.D. Probably during this period of the Madurai Sultanate the Pandyas confined their activities to the extreme south leaving, Madurai in the hands of Muslims.15

The Madura Vijayam of Ganga Devi tells of the atrocities committed by the Sultans of Madurai and gives legitimacy for Kampana's expedition to the far south. According to tradition given in this work a mysterious lady appeared before him,

13 N.Venkataramanayya, Early Muslim Expansion in South India, Madras, 1942, p.58.
14 S.Krishnaswami Aiyangar, South India and her Muhammadan Invaders, Madras, 1921, pp168-170.
15 Sathyanatha Ayyar, History of the Nayakas of Madura, Madurai 1922 p.5
narrated the wicked deeds of the Muslim and produced a mighty sword, the symbol of Pandyan sovereignty. Accordingly in 1370 A.D Kampana marched from senji on his southern expedition. In the battles at Samayavaram and Kannanur Kuppam the invading army defeated the Muslim forces near Madurai in 1371, the Muslims again suffered a defeat and the Sultan died fighting. The last Sultan was Sikander Shah. Emperor Harihara II 1376 A.D-1404 A.D of Vijayanagar defeated and killed the Sultan and completed the conquest of Madurai Country by 1378 A.D.

The viceroyalty of Kumara Kampana might be regarded as the brightest chapter in the history of Vijayanagar rule in Tamil territory Kampana is thus represented to have restored Hindu sovereignty in the Madurai Kingdom as a lawful successor of the Pandyan kings. The Madurai Tala Varalaru makes it clear that from the year 1371 A.D. Kampana, his son Empana and his nephew Prakasa Wodayar ruled over Madurai for a period of thirty three years.

The period between 1559 A.D and 1781 A.D which can be called the Medieval Period in the history of Madurai. It is the most important period, since the city become under the rule of Nayaks. Tradition describes the foundation of the Nayak Kingdom of Madurai to Krishnadeva Raya. It is believed that Emperor Krishna Deva Raya in the last year organised the Nayakship of Madurai beginning with Vishwanatha Nayak 1529 A.D-1564 A.D.

Madurai experienced the rule of numerous Nayaks. Vishwanatha Nayak, showed outstanding abilities both as a warrior and statesman. Soon after he came to Madurai, he reconstructed the fort with 72 bastions. It was only Viswanath for the purpose of administration divided his territories into 72 palayams and placed them in charge of a local chieftain called a Palayakar or Poligar. The paliyakars were to
maintain troops for the defense of the territories, to run civil administration of the country and to pay one-third of the land revenue collection as tribute.\textsuperscript{20}

The most prominent Nayak of Madurai was Thirumala Nayak (1625-1659). He came to power at critical time in the history. He constructed fortress on the frontiers, he raised an army of 30,000 men and shifted his capital from Tiruchirappalli back to Madurai.\textsuperscript{21}

Taking advantage of the decline of the Vijayanagar empire, Tirumala threw off the nominal allegiance to Vijaya Nagar but had to face the Sultan of Bijapur who compelled Tirumala to pay him tribute. After the death of Tirumala, the kingdom of Madurai fell into pieces. Among his successors, the ruler of importance was Rani Mangammal (1689-1706). During her reign of fifteen years, she acted as a Queen-Regent for her minor grandson. The Madurai region enjoyed peace and prosperity during her rule. After Rani Mangammal Madurai began to decline in importance and the country became an easy prey to each successive band of invaders, the Marathas and the Mughals. Finally the Mughals established their rule in Madurai in 1736.\textsuperscript{22}

The Mughal rule ultimately changed into that of the Nawab of Carnatic and the rule of the Nawab went on till the settlement of the Treaty of Carnatic with the English in 1801 when the territory of the Carnatic including Madurai region came under the control of the English.\textsuperscript{23} The Carnatic Treaty of 1801 ended the conflicting system of control and started an administration obliged to accept sole responsibility over the Madurai region. The revenue of the Carnatic was decreasing but on orderly administrative by the British increased the resources. The English began to reconstruct Madurai which was greatly, affected by the widespread rebellion of 1801.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{20} K.Rajayyan., History of Madurai, 1736-1801, Madurai 1974, P.18.
\textsuperscript{22} R.Alala Sundaram , The Colonial World of Ananda Ranga pillai,1736-1761, Pondicherry, p.67.
Madurai has survived the political vicissitudes with undiminished vigor. The city's adaptability to changing times, politics and other circumstances has enabled Madurai to retain its central position all through till the present day. Madurai is one of the few Indian cities which has maintained its connections with the past intact and its growth is still dependent on the roots firmly planted in the soil that is 2000 years old.

Madurai has a good deal of culture and civilization which distinguish itself from other cities. Therefore, no other place in India where the foreigner, anxious to have an insight into the religious life and traditions of the Hindus, would be so well rewarded as by a visit to Madurai and a close study of the Meenakshi Temple.

Madurai is a city of religion. Hence temples and festivals play an important role in the cultural life of the people and in this way, Madurai is famous for its rich cultural heritage. Its temples and festivals have been the main inspiration for the religious and cultural activities right from the ancient period. The Temple city has a continuous spiritual history. The spiritual town of Madurai has been the centre of worship for many centuries, and it is one of the places where according to the Hindus divinity is concentrated which makes the city holy.

Pilgrimage Centres

The frequency of visits of the foreign and domestic tourists in the pilgrimage centres of Tamil Nadu revealed that most preferred pilgrimage centre for the foreign tourists in Tamil Nadu is Kanyakumari followed by Kanchipuram and Madurai. In the case of domestic tourists of Tamil Nadu, the most preferred pilgrimage centre is Madurai followed by Kanyakumari. Domestic tourists of Tamil Nadu also have high preference for Palani, Suchindram and Mamallapuram.
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Primary Source

In the case of pilgrimage centres, majority of the foreign tourists who have visited Tamil Nadu prefer Kanyakumari followed by Kanchipuram and Madurai. In the case of domestic tourists of Tamil Nadu, the most preferred pilgrimage centre is Madurai followed by Kanyakumari.
The distribution of frequency of foreign and domestic tourists’ visits at different tourist locations in Tamil Nadu.

Table 3:2 Frequency of Visits to Different Tourist Locations in Tamilnadu

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<td>Domestic No.</td>
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</table>

Primary Source

Meenakshi Temple

The Meenakshi Temple presents a magnificent blend of the continuous process of the evolution of the Dravidian art and architecture of South India. The Sculptors had lavished their skill in adorning the tall towers and mandapams of the temple. Carvings have an aesthetic attraction and they proclaim the heritage, culture and tradition of the Tamils.25

Therefore any person interested in spiritual advance or in the study of culture and art of Tamilnadu needs no invitation to this Temple in Madurai. Meenakshi temple was the first temple in Tamilnadu to allow Harijan. The temple entry was led by A. Vaidyanatha Iyer and on July, 8, 1939, he took a batch of five Dalits P. Kakkan

(who later became Home Minister in Kamaraj Ministry) Swami Muruganandam, Muthu, V. S. Chinnah, V. R. Poovalingam – and a Nadar -- S. S. Shunmuga Nadar – to make their first entry into the Meenakshi Temple.26

The twin temple of Meenakshi Sundareshwarar's complex is literally one of the largest of its kind in India, undoubtedly the oldest. Various kings renovated it, adding convoluted corridors. It is believed that most of the temple as it stands today, owes its existence largely to the endeavor of the Nayaks, who descending from Vijayanagar rulers, guided its destiny in the 17th century. Shiva in his incarnation as Sundareshwarar and his fish eyed spouse Meenakshi, are enshrined in this twin temple. There are four massive gateways enclosing the two temples. The huge temple is in the entirely of the town and all roads are so paved that they are parallel to the sides of the shrine. But Unfortunately the old city with its Fort was razed by a collector Blackburn in 1840.27

The temple enclosed by walls 847 feet by 800 feet are crowned by four soaring gopurams on all sides. The highest is the south tower rising to 152 feet. Though all the gopurams look alike from distance, each is distinct. The west gopuram is carved with stucco figures from Hindu mythology while the north has only specimens of temples and vimanas.28 The present design of the temple was laid by Visvanatha Nayak (1560 A.D) and further improved by successive rulers. It is related that it cost 12 million rupees and took 120 years for near completion.

Generally in all Saivite shrines, the access are through the east or west gopurams, but here the east is completely neglected and one should enter through the Ashta-sakthi mandapam.

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26 The Hindu, 10th July, 2012.
27 V. Narayanaswami, Temples of Tamil Nadu, Chennai, 2001, p.238
28 Sri Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Maha Kumbabishekam Souvenir, Madurai, 1963, p.34.
The Ashta-Sakthi Mandapam

This mandapam derives its name from the 8 (ashta) Goddesses adorning the pillars on both sides. A full history pertaining to the cause of the temple can be learnt from the figures carved in the niches, the birth and reign of Meenakshi, her marriage with Siva. From this mandapam one can pass to the Meenakshi Nayaka mandapam, the doorway being flanked by Ganesa and Subramania. Meenakshi Nayaka, one of the ministers of Thirumala Nayacka built this mandapam.

At its end is a huge Thiruvasi containing several oil lamps and when fully lighted the sight offered will be soul-stirring. This frame was donated by the zamindar of Sivaganga.

Sundaresvarar Shrine

To the north of the shrine of the Goddess is the shrine housing Lord Sundaresvara. A peculiarity is that though generally the Esvara is prominent in all temples, here the popular saying is “Meenakshi Temple.”29 The outer corridor contains Nayanmars and festival images of high artistry. In the west corridor are some marble figures presented by the Raja of Benares. These images are replicas of all the idols in Benares.30

Thousand Pillared Hall

The thousand pillared hall has only 985 columns but they so ingeniously constructed that the interior view is not blocked by any pillar obstructing and out of alignment. Before one enters this mandapam a fierce looking Korava and Raja Harichandra with his wife and dead son can be seen. They have been very realistically carved that the poignantcy in the face of the Raja Harichandra can be perceived clearly.

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30 ibid p.45.
Within the thousand pillared hall are Siva as Kirata and Saraswathi with her Veena. This sculpture is the most exquisite and one can never be tired of gazing at it. With one leg slightly uplifted for the waist to bear the weight of the veena, she has inclined her head a little enjoying the melody. Even the strings of the veena are cut in stone. Above all this, her nails have been carved to perfection. Nails are most important for plucking the strings.

Rathi and Manmatha adorn another two pillars. Manmatha the God of Love is seen in the act of flinging his arrow of flowers. Rathi true to her name has a perfect symmetry.\textsuperscript{31}

**Pudu Mandapam**

Leaving the temple through the eastern gate across the road is the “Pudu Mandapam”. A later creation by Thirumalai Nayak earned for it this name. ‘Pudu’, means ‘New’ 124 columns each different from the other, is about 25 feet high and contains unrivalled specimens of Yalis and equestrian figures. This Pavilion may be called a Hall of portraits, all the Nayak kings from Visvanada to Thirumala who ruled Madura being sculpted here. Their wives also are placed alongside. A moat runs round and during summer it will be filled with water and the Deity Sundaresvara stationed in the centre of the Hall during Vasanta Utsava\textsuperscript{32}.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SL.NO</th>
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Source: Tourism Department, Madurai

\textsuperscript{31} J.P.L Shenoy, *Madura, the temple City*, Madurai, 1955-P.11

76
Temples of Madurai

Alagarkoil

Alagarkoil is the popular religious centre located some 24 kilometers north of Madurai and the inscriptions throw much light on the Political, Cultural, Economical, Religious and historical art of this particular area.

Alagarkoil, which is also popularly known by certain other names like; “Thirumaliruncholai”, “Thirumalirun Kundram” “Irunkundram” “Solaimalai” and “Thiruvarai” is a popular religious centre at least from the Sangam age, if not earlier as it is undoubtedly proved by the ‘Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions’ noticed in this hill.33

The deity Alagar enshrined in the Kallalagar Temple located at the foot of this hill has been praised and worshipped in a number of hymns especially by ‘Bhuthathalwar’, ‘Nammalwar’, ‘Thirumangai Alwar’. ‘Periyalwar’ and ‘Andal’. These hymns prove beyond doubt the antiquity of this Vaishnavite Centre. ‘Palamudhircholai’ which is considered as one among the six sacred abode of Murugan also is identified with this hill.

As far as the inscriptions of the Kallalagar Temple, the earliest one dates back to the period of the Chola king Rajaraja I and then we have the inscriptions of the later Pandya rulers like Maravarman Sundara Pandya I, Jatavarman Sundara Pandya I etc., From these inscriptions of the later Pandya rulers it is clearly understood that a certain Monnaippiravan Viradhhammuditha Perumal alias Munaiyadharayan has evinced keen interest in constructing certain mandapas and erecting certain Pillars. Even today the mandapa constructed by this Munaiyadharayan is popularly known as “Munaiyadharayan Mandapa” after his name. Likewise the mandapam which is now known by the name Sundara Pandiyam Kurudu is playing an important role in certain religious activities and ceremonies of this Vaishnavite Centre, starting from the period of Maravarman Sundarapandya.34

33 Temples of South India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 1968, p.11.
From an inscription noticed in the South base of the Sundara Pandyan Mandapa it is, known the gift of the village Vilathur with its hamlet Ilongoneri in ‘Solapandya Valanadu’ for meeting out the expenses of the sacred bath offering, of the God Alagar and his consort seated in the Sundara Pandya Mandapa in every month, on the day of Uttiradam, the natal star of the king’s elder brother (Annalvi). It is clear that this mandapa was constructed in the Later Pandya period for conducting certain special worships to the deities. Further it is understood, that many individuals also had contributed liberally for the construction of this mandapa.\textsuperscript{35} The inscriptions engraved on the pillars speak about the individuals who have contributed for setting up of those pillars individually. Kuttan Attiyur alias Sundara Pandya Vilupparaiyan a vellala residing at Thirumaliruncholai, Venkurugur, Nagaran, Bhattan are the names of some donors found in these inscriptions.

An inscription of this temple records the provisions made for the recitation of the “Kothai Pattu” (hymns of Andal) before the deity. Another inscription records the remission of taxes at the instance of Ayyan Malavarayan, on the lands granted as devadana in Vanavan Madevi Chaturvedi Mangalam situated in Venbunadu for the offerings and other expenses of the God on the day of Sathayam in the month of Mina (Panguni) the natal star of Annavi (elder brother) Sokkandar.

From the earliest inscription recorded in the second prakara wall, it can be safely concluded that this Vaishnavite temple is having the extensive area of two praharas atleast from the period of that Kulasekara Pandya who ruled this area from 1190 AD to 1216 AD.

The Hoysala rulers also have made their contributions to this temple. A special worship by the name “Veerasmeshwaran Sandhi” was instituted in this temple after the name of the Hoysala ruler Veerasmeswaran.\textsuperscript{36}

Vanadhirayas also have contributed their best to this Vaishnavite shrine by rebuilding the main shrine from base to the finial in the year 1464 AD. Hence, the present shrine of Alagar can be safely dated back to fifteenth century AD. These

\textsuperscript{35} W.Francis., Madurai District Gazetter,1906,P.284.
Vanadhirayas were very much pleased to have their names as “Thirumaliruncholai Nintran” after the name of the hill where the deity Alagar resides as they were the strong devotees of Kallalagar. Among the Vijayanagar rulers Krishnadevaraya had come to this temple to worship Kallalagar and stayed here for a period of three days. The third prakara wall of this temple seem to have been constructed during the reign of the popular Nayak ruler “Thirumalai Nayakar”. “Padhinetam Padi Karuppu, a local guardian deity worshipped at the entrance of the eastern outer Gopura is now a days very popular and attracting a number of devotees from the surrounding villages.

Thirumalai Nayakar Mandapam looks like a theatre with a stage where people can assemble in large number and can perform their religious ceremonies, their folk arts and dances. Thus, this temple is plays a crucial role in the religious and social life of the people of this area. Both the general public and the government have taken much care and interest in the upliftment of the temple. All the activities related with the temple and societies are well recorded in the inscriptions engraved on the temple walls.

**Thirupparankunram**

Thirupparankunram which is four miles to the south-west of Madurai is famous for its Subrahmanya temple which is one of the six padai vidus(six houses of Lord Muruga) sacred to God Muruga. The temple is at the foot of the hill which rises to a height of 1048 feet. From early times the hill has been regarded as holy place by the Hindus and Muslims. There are evidences that the hill has been reported by Jains in the earlier centuries then by the Hindus from very early times and by the Muhammadans also for a considerable time. The Hindus regard the whole of the hill as the sanctum itself and therefore circumambulate the hill. At the top of the hill is a tomb stated to be that of a Muslim Fakir. The tomb is visited by Muhammad an pilgrims who call the hill Sikandermalai. The Hindus call it Skandamalai or the hill of Skanda.37

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37 Deva Kunjari, *Madurai through the Ages*, Madras. pp 76-87
This is one of the most famous shrines that existed from the Sangam periods in Pandya country and is considered to be a favourite place for Lord Muruga, the favourite God of Tamil people. They apportioned him to the land called Kurunj (Mountains and its neighbourhood is called Kurunji )and the Tamils have established temples for Muruga on every hill top. The term Muruga means ‘beauty’ and Tamils who are worshippers of beauty, personified it as a God of Supreme beauty. Muruga is also the God of war, ever battling against evil-doers to protect the good. His chief weapon is the spear (vel). In South India, Puranas declare that he encamped at six places before embarking on expeditions, and those places are called padaiveedu and the first of such padaiveedus is Thiruparankunram.38

Thiruparankunram is adjacent to Madurai with lofty hills surrounding it. As a matter of fact the temple here is on the slopes of a hill and is almost a rock cut shrine, with mandapas added later on. After entering the town, on nearing the temple, just at the fore is a beautiful pavilion at the junction of four streets and is known as Mayil mandapam (peacock pavilion). Proceeding further, we enter another mandapa a part of the temple and supported by 10 columns. In continuation is the Asthana Mandapa of 16 pillars in the centre with 50 pillars all around. These pillars carry works of art.

Farther on is the temple gopura rising in seven storeys, and 150 ft high. The sanctum has to be reached by several mandapas each a little higher than the other and mounted by steps for the reason that the shrine itself is a part of the slope of a hill. The first Kalyana mandapa is like a chariot drawn by monolithic horses. It is followed by the tank, next is the Kambathadi mandapam leading to the Maha Mandapa and Ardha Mandapa. As the temple rises up in tiers a way leads to the west from the kambathadi mandapa to the ground. This is used for procession of idols in festivals.

Not only the temple, but also the images of this temple are strikingly beautiful. Out of which the form of Muruga is the most charming. In the Ardha mandapa are housed Karpaga Vinayaga, Satyagrisa, Durga, Pavalakanivai and perumal. Above the form of Muruga are the Sun, Moon, Vidyadaras, Brahma, Devendra, Saraswati, Narada, Deivayanai. Below are seen goat, cock, and elephant and peacock all vehicles

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38 Ambujam Anantharama, *Temples of south India*, New Delhi, 2006, p.103.
of Lord Muruga. Flanking the Vishnu are his consorts Sri and Bhudevis and sage Matanga. Adjacent to the Goddess in Mahishasura to illustrate that in ancient times the Devis were Durgas. On the top a celestial view with Ganas, Devas and Gandarvas playing music. Vinayaga is seated on a lotus. The Ankusa commonly found is not seen but he wields a fruit and sugarcane.

Oblations are not performed for any of the deities, only a coating of oil is smeared periodically, resulting in complete obliteration of the original Pandya craftsmanship. The spear, the weapon of Muruga receives all oblations. Fortunately the outer wall of the cell of Sivalinga has escaped the attention of devotees. One can see Siva dancing in original purity and indeed this is a master-piece. In the same it is the Chatura dance holding the Rishabadwaja, and trampling the demon Muyalaka. Viewed through the next panel, Parvati, Nandi and an attendant playing a Drum, probably Kudamuzha are seen. From above the Divine dance is witnessed by Brahma, Vishnu and Indra.

A mile farther off the main temple is another cave with carvings of Nataraja and Sivakami. Nandi with a bull’s head but a human form is also seen here. Muruga with his spouses also can be seen. On the outside are carved the Nayanmars Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar, all evidently belonging to later periods.

In the field of Art, one great difference is found between the Pallava and Pandya rulers. While both have excelled in sculpture, the Pandyas had rivaled the Pallavas in paintings. As a matter of fact, the paintings must have preceded the sculptural work. In Sangam classics (pre Pallava period) read about the existence of Paintings in a mandapa called Ezuthu mandapam in Thiruparankunram. Though a major portion has vanished due to neglect and vandalism, the traces that are left highlight the ancient mastery over this form of art. Ezuthezil Ambalam was the name given to the pavilion of paintings in Sangam days. One such mandapa can be seen now on the way of Saravan Poygai to the east of the temple. In this hall were Dhruva Chakra, Sun, Ahalya, Indra and some more the classics related to it.

Nakkiar, the greatest of the Sangam poet, in his composition Thirumurukatrupadai has sung rapturously about Muruga and this sthala. The sacred
pools sheltered in groves, where sun’s rays do not pierce, the fertile fields in emerald green adorning the slopes and such present familiar sights are all a remnant of those natural beauties. The image of Nakkirar is in this shrine.

Another Sangam Classic Paripadal also eulogises Muruga. Arunagiri Nadhar visited this place and has sung hymns, which form a part of Thiruppugazh. This temple is considered as one of the finest specimens of Pandya art. 39

The Kudal Alagar Temple

The Kudal Alagar Temple which is to the south west of the Meenakshi Temple possesses as ancient tradition as the latter temple. It has its own Sthalapurana called the Kudal Puranam. 40

The deity of the temple is called Kudal Alagar and is installed in sitting posture in the lowest storey, in reclining posture in the second storey and in standing posture in the third storey of the Vimana. It may be recalled here that the deity in the Vaikuntanathasvami temple at Kanchipuram is also in the three postures of sitting, reclining and standing in three tiers of the sanctum.

Unity and simplicity combined with elegance is the keynote of the architectural style of this temple. Unlike the Meenakshi temple with its many lofty gopuras, towering above the central shrine, the outer gopuras of the kudal Alagar temple are subordinated to the beautiful central Vimana which is called the Ashtanga Vimana. The Vimana rises from a square basement in the shape of a perfect pyramid and is capped by a circular copula, with a pointed golden stupa on top. The general style of the architecture of this temple seems to be of the late Vijayanagar period. A noticeable feature is the number of tiers on top of the kamakudus, pancharams and salais which make each of them like a complete miniature shrine by itself. The same treatment is noticeable on kumbapancarams. The kantha of the upapitha is divided

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39 Deva Kunjari, opcit, p 124.
40 A.V. Shankaranarayana Rao, Temples of Tamilnadu, Bangalore, 2008, p. 87.
into a great number of panels carved in low relief illustrating Vaishnava legends. On the walls of the garbhagraha there are beautifully decorated pierced stone windows.\(^{41}\)

There are a number of portrait sculptures in the temple probably representing some of the Vijayanagara viceroys. On the ceilings of a mandapa with finely polished black stone pillars there is some carved wood work. The wooden ceiling, however, is in a neglected state and many of its carvings are missing. There is however, a small panel of Rama Pattabhishekam beautifully carved and worth noticing.\(^{42}\)

In the early years of the present century the Amman shrine of this temple was pulled down and completely renovated. Many of the inscribed slabs of this shrine were heaped in a corner of the nearby Madanagopalaswami temple. Subsequently they appear to have been either misplaced or lost.

The Vijayanagara rulers and their officials appear to have made liberal benefactions to the temple as borne out by many of the epigraphs found in this temple. A record of Ramaraja Vithaladeva Maharaj dated as 1469 A.D-1547 A.D states that Kandadai Konam man supplied stones for building the ardhara mandapa of the temple and that the work was completed during the administration of Immudi Yellappa Nayakkar.

The temple seems to have suffered during the various sieges of Madurai in the 18th century. Its outer walls bear marks of gun shots. The teppakulam of the temple is at a little distance to the north.

**The Madanagopalaswami Temple**

It is a temple very near to the Kudal Alagar temple. Its vimana is a fine piece of architecture. The high circular griva on its own adhishthdnam is a feature worth nothing. The present vimana is a restored one but the restoration follows closely the original structure. A picture of the vimana before restoration may be seen in Norman Brown’s book “A Fillared Hall”. The upapitha below the kapola is under the present

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\(^{41}\) V.V.Subba Reddy *Temples of South India*, New Delhi, 2009

ground level. On the wall of the ardha mandapa there are many Ramayana panels in low relief, but the work is not of a very high order. Many parts of the temple are in a bad state of preservation.\textsuperscript{43}

The Nanmaitaruvar Temple which is also close by is connected with some of the lilas in the Madurai Tiruvilaiyadals. The deity is called Immaiya Nanmaitaruvar and is said to have been set up at Naduvur and worshipped by God Sundareswara Himself when he ruled as the pandya king in Madurai. The present temple does not contain ancient vestiges though renovators appear to have attempted to conform to the earlier forms. The outer gopura has at present brick superstructure. The stone case might be assigned to about late 16\textsuperscript{th} century architecturally. On the ceiling inside the entrance of the gopura there is a panel of faded and discoloured painting. The stone beam has a beautiful carving of a lake scene with birds, boatmen and lotuses and recalls the painting in Sittannavasal.

The Ten Tiruvalavayudaiyar and Vada Thiruvalavayudaiyar Temples

These temples are also connected with the Thiruvilaiyadal legends. Except the garbhagriha which may roughly be assigned to the late 16\textsuperscript{th} century. A.D. The former have no vestiges of older structures. The base of the garbhagriha has a high upana and a chamfered kumudam above which are a kartha with lotus medallions and an agrapottiya. The other temple which is now generally called Palaiya Chokkanatha Temple is an entirely modern structure built during the early years of the present century.\textsuperscript{44}

Temples to Virabhadra

These temples are uncommon in the Tamil country. There are many sculptures of Virabhadra in the Meenakshi Temple. There is also a Virabhadra temple in the West Masi Street. The worship of Virabhadra was probably patronized and popularized by the Vijayanagara and Nayaka rulers who were Telugus and were worshippers of this deity.

\textsuperscript{43} ibid. p. 97.
\textsuperscript{44} Deva Kunjari, op. cit; p. 24.
The Sellattamman Durga Temple

It is a temple to the north of the city and is believed to be Kali one of the guardian deities of Madurai city, mentioned in early works.

The Tiruvappudaiyar Temple

It is a temple on the northern bank of the Vaigai has an ancient history. It has a sthalapurana. The old name of the place is Tiruvappanur. The temple is mentioned in the Devaram. A few bulbous capital pillars with large abacus and square base may be seen in the temple. Some of the utsava images in the temple are good specimens of early metal work.

Tirumohur

The temple at Tirumohur which is situated six miles northeast of Madurai is one of the 108 Vaishnava sthalas. Nammalvar, Tirumangai Alvar and Manavalamamuni have sung in praise of the deity here. The legendary origin of the shrine traces the story back to the churning of the ocean by the Devas and Asuras to obtain the divine Amirtham or nectar. Lord Vishnu appeared in the form of the beautiful maiden, Mohini. When the nectar was churned out Vishnu as Mohini collected it. While the Asuras were admiring the beauty of Mohini, she distributed the amirtham to the Devas who were waiting ready to receive it. Mohanakshetra, the puranic name of Tirumohur, shows that the nectar was distributed at this place. The goddess of the shrine is also aptly called Mohana valli Thayar. The deity here is called Kalamegha Perumal.

The Tirumohur temple is not a large one, but it is an ancient shrine, containing vestiges of early structures, dating back to the 14th century. The main shrine is enclosed by two walls which are unusually high and no doubt tempted many invaders to use it as a fort. There are many beautiful mandapas in the prakaras. At the east entrance is the Kambattadi or Marudu mandapa which has two fine portrait statues of Periya Mardu and Cinna Marudu, the noble chieftains who helped Kattabommun and his brother of panchalankuricci fame and who donated largely to the temple here. The
Kambattadi Mandapa leads to the Garuda mandapa which contains beautiful carved pillars with figures of Rama with Sita, Lakshmana, Rati and Manmatha. The Mahamandapa contains some ornate pillars of the Vijayanagar style.\(^{45}\)

The Kalameghapperumal sanctum is almost a square structure. The base has a high upana with a kumuda and a many-panelled kanta with kapata above which are the adhishthana mouldings. Architecturally the temple may be stated to be about the middle of the 16\(^{th}\) century A.D. There are, however, certain Pandya features inside the sanctum. Near the north-eastern corner is the kshirabdi Sayanar Sannidhi with eight pillars forming seven aisles. The shrine is found to be an ancient structure. The Kshirabdi Sayanar Sannidhi has square pilasters and twin palagars with a primitive ida below. Nagabandas are absent. The niches have short semi-pilasters with a torana above. The shrine probably might belong to the 13\(^{th}\) or 14\(^{th}\) century.

Another old bit of structure remaining is a disused shrine which has similar pilasters with twin palagas, with virakantam and bevel and tenon corbels. The semi-pilasters of the niche are surmounted by a tiruvasi-torana. There is a large Sudarsana image which is on a square slab more than four feet high. On the front Sri Sudarsana is carved with sixteen hands within a circle which has many tantric symbols. The flat surface of the square is carved with many figurines in its various boundaries. The back of the Sudarsana is similarly carved, but in the centre is a figure of Yoga-Narasimha. The figures of Sudarsana and Narasimha are somewhat mutilated, but there can be no doubt that this is a unique piece of iconography which should find a more secure place than the ground on which it stands next to the wall of the inner prakara. The image resembles very nearly the large and more famous one in the Kallalagar temple at Alagarkoyil which is stated to be the only one of its kind in India. A new image has been installed in the temple in place of this mutilated idol.\(^{46}\)

There are a number of mediaeval inscriptions on the walls of the temple. From them one learns that various gifts were made to the temple throughout the regime of the Pandyas. During the Sangam period in the early centuries of the Christian era,

\(^{45}\) ibid p26.
Tirumohur was the well-fortified stronghold of a Tamil chieftain and hero named palaiyan. Many Sangam age poets have sung about the place. Ptolemy, the Alexandrian astronomer, writing about 140 A.D., mentions an inland place, Magour, in his Geographical Tables, Probably this is a reference to Tirumohur which was known as Mohur in the early ages. Even as late as the 18th and 19th centuries, and Tirumohur was noted for its strong fortifications. The town and the temple played a prominent part during the troubled times that followed the downfall of the Madurai Nayaka dynasty in the middle of the 18th century. Tirumohur was then variously known as Kovilkudi and Tirumbur.

Festivals

Foreign tourists of Tamil Nadu are found to be attracted more to the festivals in Mamallapuram and Tiruvannamalai. The second attraction for the foreign tourists in Tamilnadu is the festivals of Madurai and Salem.

Table 3:4 Frequency of Visits of the Tourists to Festivals in Tamilnadu

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Primary Source

Festivals of Madurai

Madurai, the city of living religion, is also the city of festivals. Starting from the first month of the Tamil Year, every month some festival is celebrated. The chief festivals are the chitrai, Teppakulam and Avanimoolam festivals and there are several
other festivals. The chitral festival occurs in chitral (April-May) when the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar is celebrated and this wedding festival is also linked with Alagar festival, that is, (Meenakshi’s brother) Alagar’s unsuccessful journey to bring wedding gifts to his sister before her marriage. 47

The Teppakulam festival takes place in Tai (January-February) when the idols of God Sundareswara and Goddess Meenakshi are taken on a raft round the Teppakulam (Tank) which will be lit with thousands of lights for the occasion. The avanimoolam festival in Avani (August – September) commemorates the various miracles performed by Lord Siva.

The Tamils were very fond of festivals and one hears of many festivals celebrated in Madurai region. Even to this day Madurai is a city famed for its festivals. Nearly 300 days in the year are festival days. The city seems to have been equally well known for its festivals been during the Sangam Age. One poet says that festivals occurred ceaselessly in Madurai. The Maduraikkanci mentions the vizha in Tirupparankanalam. This poem also says that the seven days festival and the evening festivals were celebrated in the Madurai city. The Karttigai festival was celebrated on the day of karttigi asterism in the month of Karttigai with the lighting of many lamps and offerings of beaten rice prepared from the new harvested kar paddy and boiled in milk. In the month of Tai women and young girls bathed in the rivers in the early morning and offered prayers to God. This was called Tai niradal.

While there are numerous references to gods, festivals and worship there are not many direct references to temples. From the fact that the drums sounded announcing the beginning of festivals and that many flags were hoisted in the streets of Madurai in honor of the festivals in the temples and again that the gods went in procession through the streets of Madurai in the city. There were religious houses of vaidika and avaidika sects in the city of Madurai. Till about the 5th century the different religions flourished side by side. Harmony and tolerance characterised religious life in the Madura country.

Chithirai Festivals

The Chithirai festival is one of the biggest celebrations in Madurai. It re-enacts the wedding of Lord Sundararswarar and Goddess Meenakshi. This festival is celebrated for two weeks, it begins on the fifth day of the bright half of the Tamil month Chitrai (April in the English calendar). This festival is held at Meenakshi Temple in Madurai. The parade takes place in the streets around the temple known as the Maasi Street, The festival begins with a flag hoisting Ceremony on the first day, however the most important celebration occur towards the end of the festival. The most important functions are Coronation of the goddess Meenakshi (Pattabhishekam) Procession of Goddess Meenakshi, Celestial wedding of God and Goddess. The deities are paraded in their wedding attire around the temple streets, before being brought into the grandly decorated hall inside the temple.

Car Festivals

The invention of wheels not only signified the birth and advancement of civilization but also paved way for modernity. Spoke wheeled chariots also found its presence in a lot of mythological references in India where gods and kings could be seen riding chariots, (kovil ther).

One can find references from old Tamil texts like Silappathigaram, Manimegalai and Purananooru, where a lot of reference about Temple cars have been mentioned. Hence temple cars also form part of the culture and Tamil history. There is lots of reference about Temple car in the literature.

The temple festivals around Madurai are not complete without a car festival. Most of the cars are hexagonal in shape starting from four wheels to ten wheeled cars, which takes part in the procession. These cars are made by the blacksmiths of Karaikudi and Thiruvidai maruthur.

Madurai Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple car festival is the part of Meenakshi Kalyanam. Thousands of devotees witness the temple car festival which starts from karuppana swamy temple at Theradi. As the ‘Chapram’ of Lord

Legend has it that Lord Kallazhagar came mounted on a golden horse to Madurai from Azhagar kovil, a famous Vishnu temple near Madurai, to participate in the celestial wedding of his sister Meenakshi. However he arrives late and misses the wedding. Furious, he gets into the river, and then proceeds back home. One of the biggest spectacles of the Chithirai festival is this procession.

The Chithirai festival gives a great opportunity to the tourist to experience local life in Madurai and to see a traditional Hindu wedding ritual. It attracts huge crowds of people, who flock to Madurai from surrounding areas. The festival is celebrated with a great deal of excitement and hype of a real wedding. The celebrations extend all over the city and the streets are flooded with devotees.

Many festivals of the Madurai temple have an ancient tradition behind them. For instance, the Tiruvaddirai festival during the month of Margali which is one of the chief festivals at the present day is referred to in the Paripadal. Medieval Pandya epigraphs from the Madurai temple mention the Avarittinnd and the Tiruppurattirunonbu festival in the month of Aippasi.48

According to the Sritala the Masi (February-March) festival and Mandalotsava seem to have been celebrated from time immemorial. The big car festival also was held similarly from ancient times. The Navaratri festival and the Amman kolu or Darbar are observed from Puranic times. During Krishnadeva Raya’s time the Adi festival for Amman was inaugurated. During the time of Tirumala Nayaka under the administration of Ayya Dikshita, grandson of Appayya Dikshita, the Tiruvilaiyadal festivals were instituted as also the Avani Mula Citra and Vaikasi Vasanta festivals held in the Pudu Mandapa.

Tirumala Nayak also dug the Vandiyur Teppakkulam and originated the big floating festival. During the time of Mangammal the Onjal festival in Ani and the

48 P.V.Jagadisa Ayyar, South Indian Customs & South Indian Festivals, Madras 1921, p221.
karthigai festival were founded. The kodi or summer festival in panguni is celebrated in the velliyambalam. So from Tirumala’s time festivals are celebrated all the twelve months of the year. This was continued by the Carnatic or Muslim rulers.\textsuperscript{49}

The Chitra festival during April-May opens with the reading of the New Year’s almanac when a pair of dhotis costing about Rs. 3 was presented to the Jotishar. The main festival was the Tirukkalyana celebrated for ten days and concluding with the big car festival. On the sixth day of this festival is celebrated the victory of Sambandar over the Jains. On the seventh day kankalanathar alone goes in procession through the streets on the eighth day is celebrated the pattabhishekam of Meenakshi Amman.\textsuperscript{50}

The festival of the Azhagar Temple lasts for nine days. The glorious celebration of the event in which Azhagar steps into the Vaigai River is a very important function for which the Madurai City is famous. For knowing the significance of this event, we should have in our mind the story of Pandya queen Meenakshi’s marriage at Madura.\textsuperscript{51}

On the fourth day of the Azhagar festival, the Lord starts his journey to Madurai and returns to the hill on the ninth day. The three days of this stay at the Vaigai river bank, people throng in thousand to have his darshan, day in and day out. At nights, at the Ramayana Mandapam, the Dasavathara of the Lord is depicted as each of the Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna Avatars and the crowd enjoys these scenes and functions with devotion and respect. At nights, lot of fireworks and games can be seen lighting the sky.

The speciality of this function is people from the village nearby and at long distances come here to witness the great event and stay for three days for participating in the functions. The festival is conducted on the Vaigai river bank during the full moon day, the ‘Chitra pournami’ and so everywhere there is abundant light and cool air and people enjoy the pleasant evening and night with joy and devotion. Apart from

\textsuperscript{49} A.Krishnaswamy,The Tamil Country under Vijayanagar, Annamalai Nagar,1964,p.245.
\textsuperscript{50} Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Mahakumbabhisekam Souvenir, Madurai1963,p.29.
\textsuperscript{51} Shenoy, J.P.L, Madura, The Temple City, 1937,p.12.
the devotional aspect, this affords an opportunity for a happy congregation of men and women in the celebrations.

Pongal Festival

Jallikatu Bull Fight

On the 4th day of pongal festival, a kind of bull-fight, called the ‘Jallikattu’ is held in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. Bundles containing money are tied to the horns of ferocious bulls, and unarmed villagers try to wrest the bundles from them. Bullock cart races and cock – fights are also held. Community meals are held at night with freshly harvested ballads, folk dances, dramas and songs have rich cultural heritages, ‘Jallikattu’ or bull fight’ played in Madurai."

Village Deities of Madurai

An account of the religious conditions of the people will be incomplete without a reference to the village Gods and deities that is believed to protect the people of the respective villages from evil spirits and contagious diseases like small pox and cholera. They were propitiated to save the folk from such calamities. As Whitehead writes that sole object of the worship of these village deities is to propitiate them and avert their wrath. There is no idea of praise and thanks giving, no expression of gratitude or love, no desire for any spiritual or moral blessings. The one object is to get rid of cholera, small pox. The worship therefore, in most of the village takes place occasionally.52

The worship of village gods is the most ancient form of India religion. In almost every village of south India one can see a shrine of gramadevata who is periodically worshipped. The normal function of the grama devata is the guardianship of the village. It is probable that a large proportion of these gods have been reverence for centuries, but many are of quite recent origin.53

The village deities of Madurai do not belong to the Agamic pantheon of Hinduism which are found in almost all villages throughout Madurai district. They are known as kaval deivam or guardian spirits in Tamil. They are associated to a main deity who is generally described as kuladeivam by various sects of community and clan groups as part of tracing their roots and they are always found in the out skirts of the village. 54

These temples are usually in the open space and will not have traditional gopurams. These deities are represented in the form of a huge, fierce statue, on a simple stone, weapons such as trident or a lance or sickles are also associated with these shrines. It is the belief of the village people that the karuppu samy god is being disguised in the form of the man who predicts the future. This belief system about karuppu samy is called the “Arul Vaaku” in several part of Tamilnadu. The social issues will be discussed through the temple fore- tellers (Kodangi) whom the people usually consider as the voice of the karuppu. When lord karupu addresses the people in different villages through kodangi, different issues and dimensions on social, cultural and psychological aspects of people and society are reviewed for possible solutions.

Ayyanar is worshipped as protective deities around Madurai. Ayyanar shrines are usually located at the peripheries or boundaries of rural villages, and the deity is seen with a sword riding a white horse. He and fierce-looking karuppusami, his most important companion with a moustache, a large sickle and a scary demon by his side, are eternally vigilant fighting against demons and evil spirits that are threatening the village.

It is believed that the Ayyanar cult goes back to an ancient clan-based Dravidian cult of ancestor worship that is linked to nature and fertility worship. Blood sacrifices at these shrines are very common. The huge and terrifying images are accompanied by larger than life of attendants and animals. Most officiating priests are non-brahmins. They derive from local lineage that had initiated the cult many generations ago.

54 ibid p.186.
Some of the important village deities of Madurai are Kochadai Muthaiah, Muneeswarar, Samana Malai Ayyanar, Karuppanachami of Nagamalai, Velappa of Mavuthu, is a village near Theppampatti near Aandipatti, Mel malai Karuppu, Natham near Dindugal. Thottichi Amman of Periya Poolankulam Chenpaka Moorthi Ayyanal of Iyamkottai near Dindugal. Pandi Muneeswarar of Melamadai near Mattu Thavani of Madurai town, Maya Kuruvil of Makkudi in between Sivaganga and Madurai, Aachi Kizhavi of Usilampatti.

Street Names of Madurai – Emblems of an Era

In a city that has been alive for more than 2000 years, it’s the street names that have outlived landmarks. People and time discover. “Chithirakkara Theru” (Painters’ Street) has one such incident to narrate that Raja Ravi Verma learned the nuances of traditional Indian water colour portrait painting from Ramaswamy Naiker, a known painter of that time in the city.\(^5^5\)

Tucked between East Marret and East Masi Street, the chithirakkara street was once the home of portrait painters and those specialising in temple art. According to N. Sulaimaan, retired Assistant Director, Regional centre for Art and culture, “Painters of Madurai were well known for their expertise, today, the long, narrow stretch is filled with whole sale jaggery merchants and there’s nothing left of its glory”. “Around 300 painter families flourished under the patronage of naicker rule” says J. Fathima a retired Tamil professor.

Madurai is a maze of centuries old lanes and by lanes. But even longtime residents of their lanes were not able to decipher the origin of the street names. They offer only stories, myths, speculations and suggestions. R. Renganathan of Karivepillaikara Street says his grandfather had told him that once during the king’s rule, when Madurai was filled with kadamba trees, this part of the town was full of karivepillai trees’. Though his explanation was logical and convincing, there is not a single karivepillai tree in the lane today.\(^5^6\)

\(^5^5\) D. Devaraj, A study on street names of Madurai city, The Hindu, 10th November 2011, Madurai.
\(^5^6\) The Hindu, dated 17\(^{th}\) November 2011, Madurai.
Although Madurai has always been a very small town, it is often referred to as ‘Maanagaram’ (city) since it is a vibrant trading centre. Though the core city of Madurai is very small, history says that it was self-contained a thriving, like “Meenkara sandhu” (fisherman lane) stands a testimony to the city. Sellers from Tuticorin, Rameswaram and other coastal towns probably brought their fish to the market at Madurai city of diverse population, for example khansamaettu theru which should have been khan sahib Maettu Theru and Rendall Street, named after an American missionary.

Interestingly, no street is named after the Pandiya rulers. It may simply appear that people named streets as they wished and after sellers of flower (pookara theru) rice (Arisikara theru) (pacharisikara theru) spinach (keera kara theru), bangles (Valayalkara theru) betel leaves (Vetrilaikarasandhu) limestone (Sunnambukara theru) and so on so hidden among the city’s congested neighbourhood are stretches with peculiar names that highlights the social and cultural history of the city and the old princely state of Madurai.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{57}\) The Times of India, dated September 2\(^{nd}\) 2012.