3.1 INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari district enjoys an important place in terms of tourism potential. It can boast of several places of religious, social, cultural, historical and environmental significance in the district. The presence of ancient temples with architectural marvels, carvings, paintings and towers attract a steady stream of tourists throughout the year. The present study is undertaken with a focus on the environmental significance of the tourist spots in particular.

The Land’s End of India or the point where the three seas meet, is called otherwise with the enhancing nomenclature of Kanyakumari or Cape Comorin. It is one of the most popular tourist spots in the State and indeed, in the country. Part of the fascination is, of course, the fact that it is the very tip of the Indian Peninsula and marks the unique confluence of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. One would love to see Cape Comorin during the sacred Chitra Pournami (full moon day in April), when the sun and the moon come face to face at the ends of the horizon. On other full moon days also one can see the sun set and the moon rise almost simultaneously, as if by prior arrangement.

1. In and around Kanyakumari Tourist Guide Book, Published by District Collector, Kanyakumari District, Nagercoil, Co-ordination – Tourist Officer, Kanyakumari, July 2003, pp.2-21.
3.2 RELIGIOUS PLACES IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

The famous religious places in Kanyakumari district are Church in Kanyakumari, Kumari Amman temple, Suchindrum temple, Nagaraja temple, St. Xavier’s church, Thiruvattar temple, Mondaikadu Bagavathi Amman temple, Peer Mohamed Dargah at Thuckalay and Chittaral rock temple.

3.2.1 Church in Kanyakumari

On the eastern side of the coastal line of Kanyakumari there is a beautiful Church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary known for its intricate architecture. The 153 feet high central tower of the Church was constructed in 1956. The altar and sanctuary of the old Church date back to the times of St. Xavier who visited this place in 1543 A.D.

3.2.2 Kumari Amman Temple

Situated overlooking the shore, this temple, is dedicated to the Virgin Goddess, Devi Kanyakumari, a symbol of sanctity and liberty of womanhood. According to a legend, the Devi did penance to marry Lord Siva once upon a time. However, owing to some misfortune, the wedding could not take place and she vowed to remain a virgin (Kanya) sticking on to her decision, despite all appeals. The legend says one can even see the footprints of Devi Kanyakumari on a rock called “Sri Paadha Paarai” in the Vivekananda Rock Memorial Complex. The legend of the place has

it that Devi was wearing earnings set with rubies, which were so bright that they could be seen from far at night. Some ships sailing in the sea, mistaking this for the lighthouse, went off course and hit the rocks nearby, and were wrecked. It is in view of this incident that the eastern gate of the temple is kept closed permanently. Male tourists who enter the temple should remove their upper garments, in homage to the female deity.

3.2.3 Suchindrum Temple

It is a famous pilgrim centre, situated about 13 kms from Kanyakumari. The Thanumalayan temple here is a veritable repository of art treasure. The temple has unique, beautiful carvings and sculptures which are rarely to be found elsewhere. The corridor in the Suchindrum temple is one of the biggest corridors in South India. Musical pillars and a huge 18 foot high Hanuman Statue offer ample proof of the artistic skill of the artisans of the past centuries. Inscriptions said to be of the 9th century AD are also found in this temple.³ The gigantic images of Nandi, locally known as “Makkalai”, considered the second biggest in India, can also be seen here. This unique temple is dedicated to Trimurthy Vishnu, Siva and Brahma. The purpose of ones visit to Kanyakumari district will not be accomplished until or unless one visits this temple.⁴

⁴ Padmanabhan S., In and Around Kanyakumari, Kumar Pathippagam, Nagercoil, p.34.
3.2.4 Nagaraja Temple (Nagercoil)

Nagercoil is the headquarters of Kanyakumari district. It is situated 19 kms from Cape Comorin. The Nagaraja temple situated here is unique in many respects. Though Nagaraja (Serpent God) is the presiding deity, the images of the Jain Theerthangaras Mahavira and Parsuanathar are found on the pillars of the temple. The Nagaraja is installed on the ground where it was originally found and the sands are scooped out and given as prasadam to the devotees. The entrance to the temple is reminiscent of the Chinese architecture of a Buddhist Vishara. This is one of the important pilgrimage centres in Kanyakumari district.5

3.2.5 St. Xavier’s Church

St. Xavier, an outstanding and dedicated priest, visited the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu from Goa. He visited Kottar in Kanyakumari district which was a celebrated commercial centre at that time. During his stay at Kottar he used to worship St. Mary in a small church. While he was at Kottar he averted the invasion of Padagas on the people of Venad and the incident was highly appreciated by the King. In recognition of Xavier’s services, the King allotted a land to him for the purpose of constructing a catholic church at Kottar. Interestingly, there was already a church in 1544 in the same place where St. Xavier’s church stands now.

The church records show, that the church was built in the year 1600 AD. In the year 1865, the church was enlarged and in 1930, the church was raised to the status of a Cathedral. In 1955, the church was further extended. The church of St. Xavier enjoys repute as a place of miracles for centuries. The annual festival of the Church is celebrated during the month of November/December lasting for 10 days.

3.2.6 Thiruvattar Temple

The temple here is dedicated to ‘Adi Kesava Perumal’ in the Ananthasayanam posture and is considered one of the 13 sacred places for the Vaishnavas. The inscriptions found in the temple fix its age to the 12th century. Remains of old mural paintings, belonging to a period not later than the 17th century, are seen on the walls of the inner shrine. Wood carvings of exquisite workmanship, adorn some of the structures in the temple. It is about 11 kms north of Thuckalay on the Nagercoil-Kulasekharam road and 46 kms from Kanyakumari.

3.2.7 Mondaikadu Bhagavathi Amman Temple

Mondaikadu is situated on the seacoast 4 kms north-east of Colachel port. This place is famous for its temple dedicated to Bhagavathi Amman. The Amman is in the form of an Ant Hill, about 12 feet in height and with five heads, believed to be growing daily. The
annual festival called Mondaikadu kodai is celebrated with great enthusiasm and fanfare during March for 10 days.

3.2.8 Peer Mohamed Dargah at Thuckalay

There is a dargah named “Peer Mohamed Oliyullah Dargah” at Thuckalay, named after the great Philosopher Mohamed Appa, who was born in Tenkasi of Tirunelveli district. After spending sometime in spiritual pursuits in Peermedu of the Kerala State, he came and stayed at Thuckalay. Being a Tamil poet of great eminence, he wrote several books on philosophy. It is said that he laid the foundation stone here for the Padmanabhapuram granite fort. The anniversary of the great philosopher poet is celebrated every year on a grand scale on full moon day in the month of Rajap. Both the people of Kerala and Tamil Nadu attend the celebrations, regardless of their caste, creed and religion.

3.2.9 Chitharal Rock Temple

Chitharal is a small village, situated at a distance of 7 kms from Marthandam and 45 kms from Kanyakumari. It is famous for the rock-hewn temple. The hillock at Chitharal has a cave containing, rock-cut reliefs of sculptures of Thirthankaras and attendant deities inside and outside the cave dating back to 9th century AD. It was converted into a temple for Bhagavathy in the 11th century AD. Cars and vans can reach up to the foot of the hill. Visitors walk for about 10 minutes to reach the
temple. The Jain images have been preserved by Central Archaeological Survey of India.\(^6\)

### 3.3 MEMORIALS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

The important memorials in Kanyakumari district are Kamaraj memorial, Gandhi memorial, Vivekananda memorial rock, Thiruvalluvar memorial statue and Velu Thambi Dalawah memorial.

#### 3.3.1 Kamaraj Memorial

Regarded as the ‘King Maker of India’ Kamaraj influenced many political events in the country. From a humble background, he rose to the position of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, through sheer hard work and political acumen. As a tribute to the freedom fighter and ‘Perunthalaivar” (meaning great leader) this memorial was constructed where his ashes were kept for the public to pay homage, before immersion into the sea.

#### 3.3.2 Gandhi Memorial

A memorial named Gandhi Smarak Mandir in the Orissa style costing nearly Rs.3 lakhs was constructed on the golden sands of Cape Comorin in the year 1956. It commemorates the immersion of the ashes of the Father of the Nation on 12\(^{th}\) February, 1948 at the confluence of the three seas.

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6. ‘In and Around Kanyakumari Tourist Guide Book’, Published by District Collector, Kanyakumari District, Nagercoil, Co-ordination Tourist Officer, Kanyakumari.
At the place where the urn containing the sacred ashes was placed, a big hall has been built. Its central shape is 79 feet high, representing the age of the Mahatma. A striking feature of the massive structure is that it is so constructed that, every year on Gandhi’s birthday on 2\textsuperscript{nd} October, the sun rays fall on the exact spot where the urn was displayed before immersion.

3.3.3 Vivekananda Memorial Rock

There are two rocks projecting out of the Ocean. One is 1600 feet away from the southern most end of our holy motherland. This memorial was built in 1970. It is dedicated to Swami Vivekananda, the greatest modern social reformer and saint, India produced in the twentieth century. On 25\textsuperscript{th} December, 1892 Swami Vivekananda swam across the sea and sat in deep meditation on the rock. On this rock a memorial has been constructed in honour of Swami Vivenakanda in the year 1970. A meditation hall is also attached to the memorial. Ferry service is available to reach the memorial.

The Vivekananda Rock Memorial complex consists of four mandapams namely, Sree Pada Mandapam, Vevekananda Mandapam, Subha Mandapam and Dhyana Mandapam.
3.3.4 Thiruvalluvar Memorial Statue

A novel grandeur carved out of a hoary tradition namely 133 feet tall granite statue of Thiruvalluvar, has come up recently almost in mid-sea, off the shore of Kanyakumari. It is to be highlighted that nowhere in the history of world architecture, such a standing human form, fully made of granite has ever been attempted and that too in the midst of the sea waves. The statue is an embodiment of the essence of Tamil Classic “Thirukkural” a collection of pithy verses authored by Saint Thiruvalluvar, which marks the quintessence of the Tamil spirit. The statue located at the confluence of the three great seas, also depicts the great tenets of the Thirukkural namely, virtue, wealth and love.

The imposing 133 feet high statue was erected on a minor rock in mid-sea by Dr.Ganapat Sthapati and his team of around 500 shilpis and other technicians and engineers. The statue is fully made up of granite stones, weighing 7000 tonnes, comprising 3681 pieces of granite boulders, each weighing 3-8 tonnes. The statue proper, stands 95 feet tall on a pedestal of 38 feet in height and the whole structure has been designed based on the spirit of the poet’s great work, “Thirukkural”. In the design of the statue, the 38 feet high pedestal depicts the first 38 chapters which deal with the virtue and the statue proper of 95 feet depicts the rest of the 95 chapters, which deal with wealth and love.
There is also a striking feature in this monument which deserves note by modern technicians. The height of the statue is 133 feet, for which a scaffolding work had to be attempted up to a height of 150 feet. In this scaffolding work no steel fabrication was used except the traditional casuarina posts right from the beginning to the end of his mammoth project. The ferry that goes to Vivekananda rock first arrives at Thiruvalluvar statue. After seeing Thiruvalluvar Statue tourists take the next boat to go to the Vivekananda Rock.

3.3.5 Velu Thambi Dalawah Memorial

Thalakulam is a hamlet located in Kalkulam taluk of Kanyakumari district, 30 kms away from Kanyakumari. This place is historically important since it is the birth place of the great revolutionary Velu Thambi Dalawah, a Dewan in the former Travancore State who resisted the British. His ancient home at Thalakulam village was once destroyed by the British. Later on, the house was rebuilt by his nephews, in which some of his personal belongings and personal weapons employed in his battles, against the British are kept.

Thus, Kanyakumari district occupies a place of extraordinary significance as far as its natural environment and history are concerned. The scenic beauty of this unique district has been a major lure for thousands of tourists from far and near. International tourists very often, feel drawn towards these places as the exquisite beauty of the
landscape here cannot find a match anywhere. An attempt is made in this chapter to give a vivid portrayal of some of the beaches which have been a major lure for the local and national tourists.

3.4 THE FORT AND PALACE IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

The famous fort and palace in kanyakumari district are circular fort (vattakottai), Udhayagiri fort and Padmanabhapuram palace.

3.4.1 Circular Fort (Vattakottai)

This 18th century fort was built by the Dutch. Overlooking the sea, it is a fine tourist spot. The sea is generally calm here and is suitable for bathing.

3.4.2 Udhayagiri Fort

Built during the regime of King Marthanda Varma (1729-1730 AD) this fort also had a foundry for casting guns. De Lennoy’s Tomb is in the fort. He was one of the 24 European prisoners taken by King Marthanda Varma in 1741, when he defeated the Dutch at Colachel. He joined King Marthanda Varma and became a trusted general. He trained soldiers in the European method of combat. Presently, the district administration, with the help of the Department of Forests, has set up a Bio-Diversity park here.
3.4.3 Padmanabhapuram Palace

Padmanabhapuram\(^7\) (City of Lord Vishnu), the ancient historical town is situated 37 kms from Kanyakumari. It was the ancient capital of the erstwhile Travancore (Venad) State from about 1555 AD to the latter half of the 18\(^{th}\) century. King Marthanda Varma, the maker of modern Travancore (AD 1729-1758), after ensuring the autonomy of the State, constructed temples, palaces and forts. As a part of his enterprise, the mud fort around Kalkulam palace was demolished and a granite fort was built with four bastions in four corners. In 1744 AD, Kalkulam fort and palace were renamed Padmanabhapuram fort and Padmanabhapuram palace respectively.

The palace is situated at the very centre of the Padmanabhapuram fort with an area of 186 acres of land amidst Veli hills, dales and rivers. The exterior of the palace is simple and unpretentious like other secular and religious architectural specimens of Kerala. The interior is enriched by wood carvings and conspicuous murals. The palace consists of 13 important portions including Mantrasala (council chamber), Manimalika (Clock Tower), Uttupura (Dining Hall), Thaikottaram (Mother palace), Uppirikkka Malika (Four storeyed building), Anthapuram (Lady’s chamber), the long corridor, Indravilasam Palace, Navarathri Mandapam and Archeological museum etc.

Apart from them, there are many temples inside the fort, among which Sri. Ramaswamy temple, Sri.Subramaniya temple and Saraswathy temple are centres of worship. In the Ramaswamy temple, scenes from Ramayana have been carved on wooden panels.

3.5 THE BEACHES IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

The very beautiful beaches in Kanyakumari district are Kanyakumari beach, Sothavilai beach, Sanguthurai beach, Thekkuruchi beach, Muttom beach and Thengapattinam beach.

3.5.1 Beach in Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari is noted for its natural beach too. The following are the most sought after tourist heavens.

1. Sunrise and Sunset in Kanyakumari

This is the most popular tourist spot in India from where both sunrise and sunset can be seen. The time of sunrise is around 6 to 6.30 a.m. and that of the sunset is around 6 to 6.30 p.m. though these timings are subject to some variations depending on the time of the year. However, from April to October sunset cannot be seen from here. Moonrise and set also can be seen. The sunset and the moonrise on full moon day is an experience that lives in one’s memory for life. On such occasions, one can see the full-fledged golden disc of the moon emerging
from the eastern sea, when the sun plunges into the western sea. This is an exhilarating scene to watch.

2. **Triveni Sangamam**

Triveni Sangamam is another very important tourist spot at the Cape. Tourists both national and international, visit this place to see, how the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean meet. Further, this place is noted for its multicoloured sand, noted for its chemical historical composition and significance.

3.5.2 **Sothavilai Beach**

This beach is 12 kms from Nagercoil and 12 kms from Kanyakumari on the West Coast Road. It lies in Puthalam Town Panchayat and constitutes one of the best natural beaches of the district. Soft waves of shallow water with lovely sand dunes attract hundreds of domestic tourists here. It is an ideal, idyllic place for holiday lovers in the tropics. The district administration has provided the necessary basic infrastructure facilities like drinking water, shadow shelters, view tower, children’s play tools and toilet facilities here.

3.5.3 **Sanguthurai Beach**

It is a beautiful beach, which is very easily accessible to the local population of Nagercoil. The beach lies in Rajakkamangalam Panchayat Union. It is 13 kms from Nagercoil and 15 kms from Kanyakumari on
the West Coast road. There is convenient bus service to this spot from Nagercoil. The district administration has also provided basic infrastructure for tourists here.

3.5.4 Thekkuruchi Beach

Thekkurichi, a tiny village with lovely clam seashore, lies on the west coast road. It is a less known sea shore of Kanyakumari district, lying in the jurisdiction of Rajakkamangalam Panchayat Union. It is a calm seashore village, surrounded by shady thickets of casuarinas creating a spell-binding atmosphere. It is a fine picnic spot and a tourist centre. Coir making is a major small-scale business of the villagers here. This village is situated at a distance of 10 kms from Nagercoil and 29 kms on the West Coast road from Kanyakumari.

3.5.5 Muttom Beach

Located at 16 kms from Nagercoil and 32 kms from Kanyakumari, Muttom is a delightful place on the coast of Kalkulam, taluk, attracting people desirous of a seaside holiday. The seashore here looks majestic because of the mammoth rocks jutting out right into the sea. The waves dashing against the rocks and falling in huge cascades of water crystals create a mystic atmosphere. Muttom is also a renowned shooting location for both Tamil and Malayalam movies.
This seashore has a rich heritage on account of its ancient lighthouse, originally erected by the British in 1875 and subsequently improved in 1909. The sunset viewpoint here is one of the most enthralling ones in the world. The district administration has developed basic infrastructure facilities like shady shelters, benches, car parking, solar lighting and risk-free fencing on the rocks here.

3.5.6 Thengapattinam Beach

Thengapattinam situated on the West Coast near Painkulam village, in Vilavancode taluk has a fine beach adorned with coconut groves. As coconuts are abundant in this place, the place owes its name Thengapattinam to the coconuts growing in abundances here as coconut is known as ‘Thengai’ in Tamil. In ancient times this village had direct trade relations with foreign countries like Arabia. There was a busy direct cargo boat service between Thengapattinam and foreign maritime towns. Copra, dry fish, coir and shark fin were the main products that were exported from here.

Thengapattinam has also the estuary of the lovely river Tamiraparani aiming with its non-salty water from the inlands. The backwaters in the place are surrounded by breath-taking dense coconut groves. Boat rides on the river backwaters, is really a very pleasant experience. It is 35 kms from Nagercoil and 54 kms from Kanyakumari.
3.6 OTHER TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

The other important tourist attractions in kanyakumari district are Light house in Kanyakumari, Bay-watch, Kids Park, Thiruparappu water falls, Mathoor Thootti Palam and Petchiparai Dam.

3.6.1 Light House in Kanyakumari

From the top of the lighthouse in Kanyakumari at a height of 125 feet, one gets a bird’s eye view of Kanyakumari, which is surrounded by the sea on three sides and green coconut groves with the tail end of the Western Ghats jutting out on the northern side.

3.6.2 Bay-Watch

It is a water theme amusement park, located at a distance of 2 km on Kanyakumari- Kovalam Road. It is very near to the bus stand. This park has been promoted by Sree Bhadra Parks and Resorts Ltd., Thrissur, Kerala. Crazy Chairs, Flying Elephants, Hot tea cups, Cape train, Multiple splash, Milky way, Crazy Cruise, Aqua shuttle, Family Pool, Wave Pool, Sky train etc., constitute some of the main tourist attractions here.

3.6.3 Kids Park

It is located at a distance of 1 km from Kanyakumari near the new bus stand on Kovalam road. Aquarium, Dashing Car, Video games, Skill games, Caterpillar, Columbus ship, Baby train, Aqua dance, Swimming
pool, inflatable balloon, Swing Zigzag etc., are all spots which attract tourists to the place.

3.6.4 Thiruparappu Water Falls

Thiruparappu means a pavilion of beauty and sacredness. The panoramic view of Lord Mahadevar temple (Lord Siva) built at a site with green hills and the perennial river Kodayar running in front, presents fascinating and attractive scenery from the shrine. The Kodayar takes a descent at Thiraparappu and the sparkling waterfall makes a rich feast to the eyes of visitors. A Children’s Swimming Pool has also been recently constructed here.

3.6.5 Mathoor Thottipalam

The Mathoor trough is the tallest as well as the longest bridge in Asia, built at an altitude of 115 feet. Constructed in 1969, this bridge has become a place of tourist attraction. The bridge has been constructed at Mathoor across the river Parazhiyar and the trough canal on the bridge carries water for irrigation from one side of a hill to the other side. The trough is 384 meters long, with walls having 7 feet height, and 7 feet 6 inches width. The canal is being shouldered by 29 huge pillars. The district administration has created adequate infrastructure facilities for tourists coming over here. It is 60 kms from Kanyakumari.
3.6.6 Petchiparai Dam

It is nearly 62 kms from Kanyakumari and 43 kms from Nagercoil. This dam was built during the days of the Maharaja Sri Moolam Thirunal across the river Kodayar. The dam is 425.1 m long, with a catchment area of 204.8 sq.km. The location of the dam is quite pleasant. It is a fine centre for tourists and can boast of a pleasure boat service too. The dam is surrounded by dense forests with valuable trees, wildlife etc.

Thus, it can be seen that Kanyakumari district abounds with tourist places of scenic splendor, historic heritage and environmental significance. Kanyakumari district, located at the very tip of the land’s end of the Indian Peninsula, has a tremendous tourist potential. The entire place can look forward to the arrival of an enormous traffic of tourists both national and international, in the years to come.