CHAPTER V

COURTĀLLANĀTHAR TEMPLE

Courtāllanāthar temple situated in Courtāllam in Tirunelvēli District, Tamilnad is one of the fourteen places of Śiva worship in the Paṇḍya territory Courtāllam is known for its antiquity, picturesque location, sacred water, panoramic beauty and also for its presiding deity. The deity Courtāllanāthar, enshrined in the Courtāllanāthar temple is in the form of a Linga. Śiva the cosmic dancer and destructive force, is hailed as the primary deity with great power or sustained energy to protect people from the natural calamities. The Goddess of this temple is locally called Kulālvāyomolī Amman. The Śakti shrine in the temple complex is known as Mēru Pītham popularly called Dharani Pītham or Parāśakti Pītham. Another important Śakti shrine is Mahishāsuramardhīni in the inner periphery of the Goddess Kulālvāyomolī Amman temple. Champakā Dēvi one of the guardian deities of this temple is seen at the height of 2km from the foot of the Trīkūta hill, near Champakā falls. It is one of the temples linked with Courtāllanāthar temple.

Tradition

During the Divine wedding of Śiva and Goddess Uma there was a great crowd at Kailāsa, which resulted in an imbalance in the sub-continent. To avoid this imbalance, sage Agasthya came to Pothigaimalai, where the peaks join triangularly. So this place is named as Trikūṭaḥalām. The triangularly shaped peaks are the symbols of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra\(^2\). Since there are three peaks at the top of the Courtāḷlam hills, it is called Trikūṭamalai\(^3\). Ādhiśakti (primordial Śakti) delivered Śiva, Vishnu and Brahma at Courtāḷlam and hence Courtāḷlam was called ‘Trikūṭam’ and the same nomenclature has been applied to Trikūṭa mountain\(^4\).

The presiding deity here is known as “the Lord of the mountain peaks” i.e., “Trikūṭaḥalapathī”. The expression Trikūṭaḥalām became Tirukkuttalam and subsequently as “Kuttālam”. The


process of this derivation is not yet clear. The other meaning of the place is that it washes away all sins. Hence Courtallam is an ideal place of pilgrimage.

A brief history of Courtallam

Courtallam (77° 10' E & 8° 56' N) is situated at an elevation of five hundred and fifty feet above the sea level at the foot of a mountain which is part of the Western Ghats. It lies 155 kms south west of Madurai and 56 kms north west of Tirunelveli, 7 kms south east of Shencottah and 5 kms west of Tenkasi. Courtallam, a famous ‘Health Resort’ ‘Spa of the South’, is in Tenkasi Taluk of Tirunelveli District in Southern Tamilnad. Tenkasi is the nearest railway station. It is on the line which connects Chennai and Quilon (Kollam).

5. H.R. Date, District Gazetteer, Tirunelveli District, Madras, 1917, p.460.
8. Nilkaman Perumal, In a Corner of India, Madras, 1941, p.4.
9. Spa is the name of the Health Resort in Belgium.
Climate

Courtallam enjoys a salubrious and equable climate when compared to most of the temperate region. Though located very near the equator, it is not hot owing to its elevation. Courtallam attained importance due to the favourable climate which attracts tens and thousands of tourists from all over India and especially from Tamilnad. Therefore, it becomes one of the important tourist centres of Tamilnad. The temperature in Courtallam is about 4° lower than that in the surrounding areas, providing a climate which is pleasant and at the same time not oppressively cold.¹⁰

The mountain ranges give multifarious appearances rich in fauna and flora.¹¹ Chirping of birds, the rustling sound of the falls, the green forest on the hill tops, the monkeys jumping from branch to branch eating fruits with their kids under their belly, the honey dropping from the fruits – is a rare scenario that one can enjoy in Courtallam. Nature’s richness of Courtallam has been sung in the verses by Thirikudarāsappā Kavirāyar.¹²

¹⁰. A.C. Shanmuganaynar, op.cit., p.11.
¹¹. Ibid., p.3.
¹². Thirucourtallā Kuravanchi, v.43.
Courtâllam – A Health Resort

Courtâllam is not only a place of worship but also a health resort. The ancient Tamils regarded Courtâllam as a pilgrimage centre. But, during the British domination it was regarded as a health resort too\(^\text{13}\). Since a lot of vegetation is present even at the peak of summer, it is not very hot here\(^\text{14}\).

Every year, June to September is sâral season – a pleasant mixture of breeze and drizzling. During this season many patients suffering from physical and mental diseases are brought here for treatment and they get cured. ‘Ozone’ rich in oxygen is present in the winds blowing during the season. As the water in the falls flows over many medicinal herbs this water contains herbal nature too\(^\text{15}\). The electrical particles produced in the force of water falling and the ultra violet rays of the sun are congenial for health.

Other remarkable features

Courtâllam is a befitting place for Botanists and hunters since different types of fauna and flora are available here. Dr. White who did his research in Courtâllam region in

\(^{13}\) H.R. Pate, \textit{op.cit.}, p.40.

\(^{14}\) ThiruCourtâlla Slêdaivenba, v.30.

\(^{15}\) A.C. Shanmuganaynar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.12.
1835, has said that there are about 2000 varieties of flowers and medicinal herbs in and around this place. The spices cultivated in Courtallam were introduced by Mr. Casamajor in 1800.

Significance of Courtallam

The History of Courtallam has been unique and continuous since pre-historic times. Tenkasi (just 5 kms from Courtallam) near this place, was one of the capitals of the later Pandyas. The Tamil poet Kapilar who lived in the Kadaisangam period (last phase of the Sangam period) mentions Courtallam in his poems. From Sangam period till date Courtallam has occupied a prime place in the political and religious history of Tamilnad. This temple and Courtallam are referred to in Tēvāram hymns, Thirukkovaiyar,

16. Ibid., p.15.
19. Sivaperuman Thiruvanthathi, 80, 84, 87.
Thiruvāsakam\textsuperscript{22}, Mukkūdarpaḷḷu\textsuperscript{23}, Pattinathār Pādal\textsuperscript{24}, Thirucourtāḷḷa Thalapurāṇam\textsuperscript{25}, Thirucourtāḷḷa Slēdai venba\textsuperscript{26} and Thirucourtāḷḷanāṭhar Ula\textsuperscript{27}. This itself stands as a testimony to the significance of Courtāḷḷam, temple and deities. Saiva saints like Sundarar, Mānickavāchakar and Pattinathār have worshipped this temple\textsuperscript{28}.

The Śakti Pitha is situated on the banks of Chittar which is also known as Chitranadhi, a tributary of Tamraparani. Courtāḷḷam is blessed with nine water falls\textsuperscript{29} and all the water falls originate from this river Chittar. A bath at the falls is said to be very good for the body\textsuperscript{30}. Thousands of tourists bathe at Courtāḷḷam falls during season time (June to September). According to V.S.Padmanabha Ayyar, the Main

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Thiruvāsakam, Thirupalambal, v.3.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Mukkūdarpaḷḷu, v.51.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Pattinathār Pādal, v.369.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Thirucourtāḷḷa Thalapurāṇam, Thala Mahimai Charukkam, v.34.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Thirucourtāḷḷa Slēdai Venba, v.15.215.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Thirucourtāḷḷanāṭhar Ula, l.859-865.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Census of India, 1961, Vol.IX, Madras, 1968, p.299.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Saral Malar, Government of Taminad, Chennai, 1998, p.15.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Census of India, 1981, Vol.XI, Tirunelvēli District, p.19.
\end{itemize}
falls (name of the falls) is the first fresh water bathing place in the whole world\textsuperscript{31}. To Caldwell, Courtāllam is the finest fresh water bathing place in the world\textsuperscript{32}. In Sthalapurānam Vadavaruvi\textsuperscript{33} is praised as a "perennial water falls" Vattratha vadavaruvi\textsuperscript{34}.

Courtāllam is known by different names such as Piturkandathirthapuram, Pāvarkameetapuram, Vezham Puchithapuram, Vēdanvalamchaitapuram, Nannagaram, Vasantha Pērūr, Vēdaśakti pithapuram, Dēvakūtapuram and Śivamukundapuram etc.\textsuperscript{35}

**Brief History of Courtāllanāthar Temple**

Courtāllanāthar temple has had a continuous history from 7\textsuperscript{th} century. The earliest part of this temple complex seems to be a simple stone shrine facing west. At present it is called the Somalinga shrine. It contains the

\textsuperscript{31} V.S.Padmanabha Ayyar, *The Short Account of the Tirunelvēli District*, Palayamkottai, 1938, p.21.

\textsuperscript{32} R.Bishop Caldwell, *op.cit.*, p.460.

\textsuperscript{33} Vadavaruvi is referred as Main falls in modern times.

\textsuperscript{34} *Thirucourtālla Thalapuranam*, Vadavaruvi Charukkam, v.5.

\textsuperscript{35} *Thirucourtālla Thalapuranam*, Thala Mahimai Charukkam, v.30, 31.
vestiges of a few Vatteluttu (8th century A.D.) and Tamil inscriptions on the outer side of the back wall. There are nearly ten inscriptions of Parântaka Chôla I (dated 907-955 A.D.) who seems to be the greatest builders of this temple complex. The Chôla donations to this temple continued during the period of Rajarâja the Great. The two inscriptions of Rajaraja record his donations of lands for daily pûjas and cows for burning perpetual lamps to this temple and revenue to undertake repair work at the central shrine of Courtâllanâthar temple. Many little shrines belong to 16th and 18th century A.D., and their donors are not known. The Poligars of Vadakarai (10kms from Courtâllam) Chinnancha Thevar and Rajagopala Thevar were the important donors of this temple. They built kolu mandapa, trikuta mandapa, teppa kulam (sacred tank) and sheds for temple cars. Both these donors are seen standing in anjalihasta in the muhamanâdapa of the Courtâllanâthar temple.

36. ARE., Nos. 438 and 441 to 445, 447 and 448 of 1918.
38. C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, op.cit., p.123.
In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century the administration of the temple was brought under the control of Thiruvavaduthurai Mutt\textsuperscript{39}. As per the seventh regulation Act of 1817 formulated by the then British Government the temples of South India came under the direct control of the Government\textsuperscript{40}. The temples were administered by the Revenue Board. According to Religious Endowment Act of 1863 the Government established committees at the district level to look after temple administration. A committee was formed for Śiva temples of Tirunēlveli District and the administration of the Courtāllanāthar temple was handed over to that committee. Later in 1927 the Hindu Religious Endowment Act was passed under dyarchy\textsuperscript{41}. Necessary modifications were made in this Act in 1952, 1959 and 1961. A Board of Trustees was appointed for the administration of the temple from 1933\textsuperscript{42}. The Board of Trustee was like Pāsupatha Perumakkal, an Assembly looking after the administration of the temple during the time of later Chōlas\textsuperscript{43}. At present this temple is under the control of

\begin{itemize}
  \item [39.] TAS., Vol. I, p.150.
  \item [40.] A.C. Shanmuganaynar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.78.
  \item [41.] Ibid.
  \item [42.] Ālaya Sotthu Pathivēdu (Temple Property Register), Courtāllam, 1959, p.33.
  \item [43.] C. Subramaniya Kavirayar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.168.
\end{itemize}
the Commissioner of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board44.

In 1925, Kujaḻvāy摩 Amman temple was remodelled and kumbhabhishēkam was performed in 193345. Courtāllanāṭhar temple was renovated recently and Kumbhabhishēkam was held on 5-4-96 under the auspices of the Gurus of Thiruvāvaduthurai and Dharmapuram Mutt46. So the temple is in a good condition at present.

Courtāllanāṭhar temple is one of the fairly rich temples in Tamilnad. This temple possesses both moveable and immovable property. This temple has got more than 170 Acres of Wet land and 23 Acres of Coconut and mango groves. The lands are under the control of Pāttapathu co-operative Agriculture soceity47. Besides, the temple possesses a flower garden in 2 Acres 4 cents48. Flowers from this temple garden

44. A.C. Shanmuganaynar, op.cit., p.78.
45. Kasthuri Nagarajan, op.cit., p.56.
47. Alaya Sotthu Pathivēdu, (Temple Property Register), Courtāllam, 1959, p.18.
are used for daily pūja in the temple. In addition to the above lands the temple owns lodges, shops and kalyana mandapa. Besides, holy ornaments of gold and silver worth about Rs.51,5009149.

Courtāllanāthar temple has various Kattalaigal (donors) for conducting daily pūjas and annual festivals. Among the donors Travancore Mahārāja, Thiruvāvaduthurai Ādheenam, Tirunelveli Mēdaithalavai, Pillaiyan kattalai are worth mentioning50. Kattalaidars and Kattalai lands are given in detail by Thirikūdarāsappa Kavirāyar51. At present 55 kattalaigal are in practice52.

The sthala viruksha (sacred tree) of this temple is kurumpala. The great Saiva Saint Thirugnana Sambandar has written Thirukurumpala Pathigam53. It is the only temple where the sthala viruksha has been praised in separate verses54. The sacred tīrtha of the temple is Sivamadhu Gangai which is called

50. C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, op.cit., p.166.
52. Kattlaikāna Pathivēdu (Donors Register), 13, Courtāllam, 1976, pp.1-47.
53. Thirukurumpala Pathigam, v.3.
Honey falls\textsuperscript{55}. It is believed to be the Ganges of the South\textsuperscript{56} and is considered as a sacred one.

\textbf{Śakti cult in Courtāllanāthar temple}

Śakti is worshipped in her different manifestations in Courtāllanāthar temple. Śakti is worshipped in the form of Mother Goddess, Guardian deity, Village Goddess and Mahishāsuramardhini. Various modes of worship are followed by the devotees like chanting the mantras, i.e. astottarasata\textsuperscript{57} or nāmāvali (108 names or mūla mantra of Maha Tripurasundari), trisati\textsuperscript{58} (300 names of Maha Tripurasundari), sahasranāma\textsuperscript{59} (1000 names of Maha Tripurasundari), reciting sacred hymns like Tevāram, performing pūjās, celebrating festivals, sacred

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{55} C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.34.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Kasturi Nagarajan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Those who seek the grace of the Divine Mother take recourse to this Nāmāvali. Swami Pranavananda, \textit{op.cit.}, p.89.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Trisati Stotra or Nāmāvali is considered Sarvasiddhiprada or productive or conductive of fulfillment of all desires. Therefore, this is usually done at the end, for the fulfillment of all prayers.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} In the Lalitā Sahasranāma the lalitya or beauty of Lalita Mahatripurasundari is depicted. Beauty is of two kinds, the internal and the external; the internal is the form of Sat-Cit-Ananda (existence-knowledge-bliss) and the external is of namarupatmaka or of the forms of names and forms.
\end{itemize}
ablution, varieties of nayvēdyās (food offerings) different types of offerings to the deity by the devotees. The important Śakti shrines in the temple complex are those of Goddess Kuḷalvāymoḷi Amman and Mēru Pītham.

**Kuḷalvāymoḷi Amman**

Goddess Kuḷalvāymoḷi Amman is the consort of Lord Courtallanāthar. She is in the form of a Mother Goddess. She is a benign form. Her shrine is in the southern side of Lord Courtallanāthar. Saint Mānickavachakar has mentioned about Kuḷalvāymoḷi Amman in his writings from which it is inferred the worship of Kuḷalvāymoḷi Amman was in vogue during the time of Mānickavachakar. She is placed in a raised platform. The entire structure of the shrine is made out of polished black granite, with excellent artistic beauty. Chempuli Chinnancha Thevar, the Chieftain of Chokkampatti built the frontal mandapa of Kuḷalvāymoḷi Amman shrine in 14th century. The inner periphery of the temple was built by Veerapandian, the Chieftain of Chokkampatti. In the centre of the frontal

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60. [Thirukkovaiyar, v.17.](#)
61. [Thirucourtalla Kuravanchi, v.62.](#)
62. [C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, op.cit., p.56.](#)
mandapa of Kulalvaymoli Amman temple, the sacred bed chamber is situated. The puja done at night could be seen in the mirror kept opposite to the bed chamber.

**Dharani Pitham**

Dharani Pitham is another Sakti shrine in the temple complex. It is popularly called Mēru Pitham or Parāśakti Pitham. Situated in the northern side of Lord Courtallanathar temple is the well known Mēru Pitham or Parāśakti Pitham. Here Sakti is in the form of three dimensional Śrīchakra. It is one of the sixty four Śakti Pithas. This temple might have been constructed during the time of Nayaks. In the sanctum sanctorum of Parāśakti Pitham, Sapta Matrikās, Mahalakshmi, two Ganapathi, two Subramaniyar, two Bhairavas and Virabhadrar can be seen. Mahāmadhukari and Mahāmōdhini stand as Dwarapalikas in the northern and southern side. Kamkodēswara is seen in front of the sanctum sanctorum.

64. C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, *op.cit.*, p.223.
Pūjas

Pūjas form the daily principal ceremony in the temples. The pūja is the worship of the deity accompanied by certain formalities and offerings. The daily worship of the deity is called nityapūja. It is of two kinds atmardha pūja and parārtha pūja. While the atmardha pūja is a ceremony performed by individuals at different places, the parārtha pūja is performed at the temples to the deities by the priests. The occasional pūja ceremonies in connection with some festivals are called the naimittikas.

The basic principles of the pūjas and ceremonies of the Hindu temples are governed by the āgamās. According to Ajithagama the daily pūjas are expected to be offered eight times a day. The common domestic worship of Śiva is known as Panchaupasara pūja. Another view is that the temple ritual for an ordinary day consists of four celebrations which take place at sunrise, noon, sunset and midnight.

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67. The Saivites and Vaishnavites follow separate āgamās. There are twenty eight saivite āgamās.
69. As referred to be G.S. Churya, Religious Ceremonies, Bombay, 1905, pp.316-17.
The term ‘Agama’ literally means ‘what has come down as tradition’. It has also been mnemonically understood as three letters, ā, ga, and ma, standing respectively for bonds (pāśa), soul (pasu), and God (pati), respectively or for ‘Śiva knowledge’, release, and ‘discarding of impurities’. Pūjas are conducted in Courtāllanāthar temple according to Makutāgama and hence pūjas are offered to Lord Vinayaka first and then to Lord Natarāja. Only after conducting this, pūjas are conducted for Courtāllanāthar and Kuḷalvāyomoli Amman. There are twenty eight Saiva Āgamas which are considered as various parts of the body of Lord Śiva. Among the twenty eight Saiva Āgamas, Makutagama is considered the most important one because Makutam denotes the head of Lord Śiva. Pūjas are performed nine times daily by qualified priests in the following schedule.

1. Thiruvanandal 6 A.M.
2. Udayamarthanda 7 A.M.
3. Vizha Pūja 8 A.M.

71. T.M.P. Mahadevan, op.cit., p.309.
72. Thirucourtāllanathar Ula, l.203.
73. C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, op.cit., p.134.
74. Thirucourtālla Kuravanchi, v.36.
4. Sirukālasandhi 9 A.M.

5. Kālasandhi 9.15 A.M.

6. Uchikālam 12 A.M.

7. Sāyarakṣhai 6 A.M.

8. Ardhajāmam 8 P.M.

9. Ekantham 8.15 P.M.

All the above mentioned pūjas are performed for Goddess Kulalvāymoli Amman. For Mēru Pitham except Uchikālam (12 A.M.) and Ardhajāmam (8 P.M.) all the other seven times pūjas are performed. In addition special pūjas are also conducted. During the pūja time camphor light, ghee light, five branched camphor light are lit in front of the deities. This is followed by the singing of verses from Tēvāram. Recital of holy verses is said to please the gods and so is done in temples\textsuperscript{75}.

\textbf{Nayvēdyā (Food offerings)}

It is believed that Gods and Goddesses get pleased through different offerings of devotees. The food offerings called nayvēdyā presented to gods differed from deity to deity and according to ceremonies. Such stipulations are clearly laid down in the Āgamas\textsuperscript{76}. Offering of water or tirtham and

\textsuperscript{75} Thirumandiram, v.1824.
\textsuperscript{76} Kamikāgama, vv.31-35.
prasādam to the deities on the different occasions or specified hours of the day is an important item in the daily pūjas. This holy water and food offered to God are distributed among the temple employees and also to the devotees who gather for the service and worship. The food is offered thrice a day in the morning, midday and the early hours of the night (ardhajāmam). The offering occurs usually at the end of each of the series of functions in the course of the worship of the deity. During the Thiruvaṇandal pūja the paddy corn is offered as nayvēdya. Suddha annam (mere cooked rice) is offered as nayvēdya to Goddesses during the rest of the pūja time. During the festival days, varieties of nayvēdyas are offered to the Goddesses.

Sacred bath

The sacred bath known as tirumanjanam is an important ritual in the temple worship. The sacred bath of the deity is usually performed daily. It is commonly believed that the performance of bathing ceremony in the morning washes away all our sins, at the noon gives us all prosperity, and in the

78. SII., Vol.XVIII, No.88.
evening drives away all our sickness\textsuperscript{79}. In Courtällanãthar temple sacred bath is offered to Goddess Kuļalväymoli Amman and Mēru Pitham thrice at 6 A.M., 9.30 A.M., and 6 P.M. An inscription engraved in the north wall of the Courtällanãthar temple states the gift of land by local women for the performance of sacred ablution to Goddess Kuļalväymoli Amman\textsuperscript{80}. Generally for sacred bath, oil and water are used on ordinary days and on the auspicious days, gingelly oil, rice flour, turmeric powder, powder of scented herbs, milk, curd, tender coconut water, sandal and at last water in the sacred pot are used for ablution.

\textbf{MahishāsuraMardhini}

The malign form of Śakti is also worshipped in the Courtällanãthar temple as MahishāsuraMardhini. Her temple is situated in the pathway round the sanctum sanctorum of Goddess Kuļalväymoli Amman. Sacred bath is offered to her daily in the morning. Pūjas and nayvēdyas are offered to her twice in a day in the morning and evening. Śakti worship in the

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Indian Antiquity, XII, pp.315-326.}
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{ARE., No.404 of 1918.}
Mahishāsuramardhini shrine is in the form of offering ghee or oil lamp in the peel of lime during the rāhu kālam hours on Sundays 4.30 to 6 P.M., Tuesdays 3 to 4.30 P.M. and Fridays 10.30 to 12.00 A.M. in front of the deity by the devotees. Lamps are decorated with flowers, turmeric powder and kumkum.

**Sapta Māṭrikas**

The Sapta Māṭrikas (Seven Mothers), the village Goddess worship is also prominent in the Courtāllanāthar temple. The earliest known sculpture of the Sapta Māṭrikas in the Tamil country belongs to the Pallava period\(^81\). Three Sapta Māṭrika images are found in the Courtāllanāthar temple. One is in the inner periphery of the Courtāllanāthar temple. It may be assigned to 8\(^{th}\), 9\(^{th}\) centuries A.D. on stylistic grounds\(^82\). The other groups are in the sanctum sanctorum of Dharani Pitham and in the outer periphery of the Courtāllanāthar temple near Sāstha. Sacred bath is conducted once and pūjas and nāyvēdas are offered twice daily to these deities.

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Champakā Dēvi

Champakā Dēvi is one of the guardian deities of Courtāllanāthar temple and Champakā forest, near Champakā falls. Champakā tree is the sthalavirūkṣa (sacred tree) of this temple. Sthalapurana narrates the glory of Champakā Dēvi. In the sanctum sanctorum of Champakā Dēvi shrine Vālēswari, Bhuvanēswari and Tripurasundari are seen. In the southern side of the shrine, Goddess Petchi Amman is seen holding parrot, trident, fire and drum in her hands. The shrine of Ulagamman is on the eastern side. Before commencing the celebration of any festival in the Courtāllanāthar temple, the first puja is offered to Champakā Dēvi. By doing so, it is believed that all other festivals may be conducted without any obstacles. Single time puja, sacred bath and nayvēdyas are offered to her.

Courtālla Nangai

Once the house used by the Diwan of Travancore is now being used as the rest house for tourists. Courtālla Nangai, a deity, is within the premises of this house. She is also the guardian deity of the northern area of the temple. Single time sacred bath, puja and nayvēdyas are offered to her.

83. Thirucourtālla Thalapurānam, Kadavul Vāl thu, v.4.
Ganga Pūja

Rivers are generally considered as females and regarded as Mother Goddess\(^{84}\). In the *Rig Veda* Ganga does not figure as a Goddess. The conception of her divinity is also not new. It is evident from the *Jataka* stories that she was worshipped by the people\(^{85}\). In Buddha's time too, she was considered the most popular goddess\(^{86}\) and till to-day preserves her non-sectarian character\(^{87}\). Sarasvati is the purifier as a river and is invoked with seven *sindhus* called Mothers\(^{88}\). Residence on her banks is desired by the Ārya people\(^{89}\) and sacrifices used to be performed on her banks. In fact rivers are connected with Śakti cult from time immemorial.

In Courtāllanāṭhar temple daily rituals are performed for the Main falls deemed as the Ganges. So Ganga

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84. N.N. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, p.64.
87. In the Epics and Puranas, she has been exclusively appropriated to the cult of Śiva, but without any prejudice all Hindus worship her. Vide. M.C.P. Srivastava, *op.cit.*, p.142.
88. *Rig Veda*, X. 64.9.
puja is conducted in the Main falls and water is brought from here for the sacred bath to be given to the Lord Courtālathanāthar. The noon puja starts at 12'O clock. Tirthavāri⁹⁰ is also held in the Main falls. One can see the origin of the Main falls from the outer periphery of the Courtālathanāthar temple near Somalingam shrine. The temple priest shows camphor light from there to Main falls during puja hours daily. It indicates that water falls is worshipped as Śakti by the devotees.

**Festivals**

Festivals are an integral part of socio-cultural and religious activities of the people. To the Hindus, festivals are an expression of their piety⁹¹. It is natural that the Hindus offer their thankfulness to the maker of all things through their own chosen method and perform festivals in his honour⁹². Festivals in the temple are conducted on the basis of naimittika pūjās⁹³. Festivals provide an opportunity to the people to fulfil religious

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⁹⁰. Tirthavāri means sacred bath to the holy weapon of Lord Śiva which is called ‘Trisūla’ (Trident).
obligations and vows. During the festivals, taking deities on a procession along the main streets is a picturesque ritual followed in most of the temples. During these processions only the processional Gods (Utsava mūrti) are taken on the vāhanas. Devotees from various places congregate to witness the festivals. They are great occasions when the common folk from even the distant places gather to take part in the celebration. Moreover it enabled the multitudes of population who had no privilege to enter the temple and other socially and economically weaker sections of the society to offer worship. It was also a blessing to the sick and the disabled to offer their worship\textsuperscript{94}. But their scale and grandeur are determined by the financial resources of the temple and the benefactions of the devotees\textsuperscript{95}. Festivals are celebrated not only for the main deity but for the subsidiary ones. It led to the employment opportunities to priests, administrative staff, quasi-religious functionaries and craftsman such as the carpenters, blacksmith, painters, artisans, musicians, garland makers and others\textsuperscript{96}.

\textsuperscript{95} K.V. Raman, op.cit., p.96.
A notable feature of Courtällanāthar temple is that there is no separate dhwajasthambam (flag mast) and bali pitha (altar) for Kuḷalvāyomoli Amman. Apart from that Chandēswari shrine is also not present. So there is no separate festival for Kuḷalvāyomoli Amman. Only two festivals, Vasantha utsav and holy marriage are celebrated in the Kuḷalvāyomoli Amman shrine. During the festival days chanting Āsērvatham (Blessings got through conducting the festival or pūja) tradition is in practice in this temple.

**Vasantha Utsav**

Vasantha Utsav festival is celebrated on the day previous to the full moon day in the month of Chittirai, corresponding to April and May to reduce the prevailing heat of summer in Courtällam. It welcomes the Spring season. Adorned with ornaments and flowers Lord Courtällanāthar and Kuḷalvāyomoli Amman are taken out in a procession along the streets in a decorated chassis called ‘chapparam’. In the past, this festival was held in the central mandāpa of the holy tank.

opposite to Chitra Sabha in pleasant natural surroundings. But at present the same festival is celebrated in the sacred shrine of Goddess Kulalvayamoli Amman since the sacred water tank is under repair. Holy water in a brass utensil with some flowers floating is kept as a substitute for a pleasant, cool, natural environment.

**Holy marriage**

The Holy marriage (thirukkalyanam) of Lord Courtāllanāthar and Kulalvayamoli Amman is performed on the Purān star day of Aippasi corresponding to October-November. On this auspicious day, the idols are carried in a palanquin and taken out in a procession. After this ceremony, in the holy shrine of the Goddess, the idols are kept on a decorated swing. This function known as "Oonjal vizha" or the "Swing festival" is celebrated for three days. On these festival days Lord Courtāllanāthar and Kulalvayamoli Amman give holy marriage darshan to Sage Agasthya.

**Dharani Pitham**

Two monthly festivals i.e. *Vilakku pūja* and *Paurnami pūja* (Full moon day *pūja*) and one annual festival *Navarathiri* are celebrated in the Dharani Pitham.

**Vilakku pūja**

On the first day of every Tamil month (except Chittirai and Thai) special *pūjas*, of lighting 108 vilakkus, are performed to Dharani Pitham. The materials for vilakku pūja are supplied by private people. Sweet rice, Bengal gram dal, banana, camphor, pawn, arecanut, flowers, kumkum are offered to the devotees performing the vilakku pūja.

**Paurnami pūja**

On the full moon day of every month, special *pūjas* for Dharani Pitham are performed by the public. In the morning performing special *homam* (sacred fire) and offering holy bath to the deity are worth mentioning rituals. In the evening *navāvarana pūja* (nine types of *pūja*) are held. On the occasion, special *nayvēdyas* are offered to the deity and distributed to the public.100 *Vadai* (cake made with Black gram), *puliyodarai*

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(cooked rice mixed with tamarind and salt), pongal (rice pudding), sundal (Bengalgram dal), panchamirtam (mixture of several fruits) are some of the nayvedyas offered to the deity.

Navarāthiri

Navarāthiri is an important festival in India, observed with fast, feast and festival\(^{101}\). The origin of Durgā pūja for nine days during navarāthiri is traced to Saradotsava, a season festival at the conjunction of the cessation of rains and the incoming of autumn\(^{102}\). It is difficult to trace exactly the origin of the Durga pūja since it is several centuries old\(^{103}\). The objective of this festival is to propitiate the Goddess symbolizing every possible kind of energy in the universe, with an intention to obtain perpetual happiness and prosperity\(^{104}\).

During Navarāthiri days the holy texts of the Śakti are recited by the Śakti worshippers. Among the Śaktas the most popular text for chanting mantras is the chandi. It is also known as Durgasaptasati and Dēvi Mahātmya. The Chandi

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102. Ibid.
describes different battles fought by the Goddess with the asuras who were tyrannical to all in the world. It is recited throughout the country for propitiating Mother and attaining success in any endeavour\textsuperscript{105}. Two other important books the \textit{Dēvi Bhagavata} and the \textit{Lalitā Sahasranāma} are recited. The \textit{Lalitā Sahasranāma} enumerates the thousand names of the Goddess.

In South India the \textit{navarathiri} festival is dedicated to the Goddess. Kumari pūja or worship of the virgins who are considered to have a special manifestation of the Goddess is common throughout India during \textit{navarāthiri}. The worship of a woman with her live husband (Sumangali) is also in vogue in some areas\textsuperscript{106}. The Vaishnavas celebrate the \textit{navarāthiri} with dramatic presentation of the lives of Rāma and Krishna through Ramlīla and Raslīla.

‘Navarātram’ means the nine days falling in the month of Purattasi (corresponding to September, October) dedicated to the worship of deities to obtain their favour. This festival is associated with the Mother Goddess cult, since it is sacred to the Mother Goddess who suppressed the asuras

\textsuperscript{105} Swami Swahananda, \textit{op.cit.}, p.51.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.}, p.50.
(giant) and protected the people. This is one of the most important All India festivals. Worship of weapons also forms a part of the festival in many cases. It is celebrated for about ten days in Courtallanathar temple. *Laksha Archana* (chanting the names of the Mother Goddess one lakh time) is performed for ten days. During *navarathiri* days on Friday kumkum ablution is performed to the *Pitham*. It is meant for appeasing the anger of the Goddess. *Navavarana pūja* is performed daily to *Mēru Pitham* during *navarathiri* days. Hymns are recited, *Sodasopasara pūja* is offered to *Mēru Pitham*.

**Chittira paurnami**

During the month of *Chittirai* (April - May) ten days festival is conducted for Champakā Dēvi. It concludes on the

full moon day with special pūjas. It is believed that the rain is in yellow colour that night. This has been mentioned in the Thalapurāṇam\textsuperscript{110}. It is believed that on this day Gāṅgā Deī worships Lord Śiva with honey in Śivamadhugangai; otherwise called as Honey falls. The honey drops rain as yellow rain. This is the general belief. During full moon days there are large crowds in this temple.

**Different forms of Śakti in art and architecture of the Courtāllanāṭhar temple**

The art and architecture of Courtāllanāṭhar temple reflects the different forms of Śakti in various aspects.

**Chitra Sabha (Portrait Hall)**

Chitra Sabha one of the five dancing halls of Lord Śiva, is situated on the northern side of the Courtāllanāṭhar temple. It was built by Parākrama Pāṇdyā the builder of the famous Tenkāsi temple\textsuperscript{111}. The construction of Chitra Sabha might have been started by Parakrama Pāṇḍya (1422 - 1463 A.D.) and completed by Udaya Mārthāndā Varman\textsuperscript{112}. Parākrama Pāṇḍyan built the entire superstructure out of wood

\textsuperscript{110} Thirucourtāllā Thalapuranam, v.37.  
\textsuperscript{111} A.C. Shanmuganaynar, op.cit., p.35.  
\textsuperscript{112} Kasthuri Nagarajan, op.cit., p.70.
and had them all painted in luxuriant colours with lacquer paintings. The poligar of Vadakarai Chinnancha Thevar covered the roof with copper plates\textsuperscript{113}. Copper plates were fixed on the Chitra Sabha with 1008 copper nails. Pranava Mantra Om was engraved at the top of nail\textsuperscript{114}.

The paintings done into a number of panels on the walls of Chitra Sabha include the various forms of Śakti, Śiva, Vishnu, Mahāganapathi and Subramaniyar. The Ashta Bhairavas on the northern wall and the Ashta Durgas on the southern wall, the malign aspects of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are beautifully drawn here. Ashta Durgas - Mahishāsura Samharam, Durga, Jala Durga, Brahma Durga, Vishnu Durga, Rudra Durga, Samhari Durga and Sūlini Durga are beautifully painted. Another important painting is Lord Padmanabhar with his two consorts Sri Dēvi and Bhu Dēvi. The painting of Sita is also remarkable.

The entrance gate of Chitra Sabha is provided with a pair of wooden doors each one carrying a dozen panels distributed in six rows. Śakti is depicted in the form of Goddess

\textsuperscript{113} Thirucourtālla Kuravanchi, v.51.

\textsuperscript{114} C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, op.cit., p.189.
Śivagami Amman in one of the panels. In another panel Goddess Pārvathi is seated on the back of the divine bull with breast feeding. Lord Subramaniya was flanked by Goddess Valli and Dēvayanai in one of the panels in the door\textsuperscript{115}.

In the main hall of the Chitra Sabha, Lord Natarāja is in Thiripurathandavam posture\textsuperscript{116}. Adhi Śakti is also beautifully painted. Another painting depicting Goddess Śivagami Amman beautifully decorated with jewels and silk garments enjoying the dance of the cosmic dancer is worth mentioning\textsuperscript{117}.

In the right side of Lord Natarāja Srichakra is painted in light blue and red colour. It is like a full blown white lotus, and was drawn by Sage Agasthya. At the bottom of the Srichakra four Śakti figures are painted. Śakti is in the form of Śākta Pītha in Chitra Sabha. She is worshipped by the people.

In this way the symbolic representation of mythological stories in paintings and sculptures in temples served as visual aids to the uneducated\textsuperscript{118}.

\begin{flushright}{\raggedright
115. S.Lalitha, Courtāllanāthar Temple – A Study (unpublished M.Phil., Dissertation), Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1990, p.86.
118. J.K. Pillai, Educational Systems of Ancient Tamils, Madras, 1972, p.73.
}\end{flushright}
Goddess Meenakshi occupied a remarkable place in the paintings of Chitra Sabha. The important paintings of Goddess Meenakshi Amman are her Thiruvilaiyadal (sacred play) in the southern wall of Chitra Sabha. The victory of Goddess Meenakshi Amman over Lord Agni, Lord Indra, Kings of fifty six nations, Yamadharman and Kubēran are beautifully painted\[^{119}\].

In the inner periphery of Chitra Sabha, the paintings depicting Goddess Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Meenakshi Amman's sacred marriage, dance of Bhadrakāli are remarkably painted. Bhadrakāli is worshipped by most of the people in Tirunelvēli District\[^{120}\]. Her temples are found in villages and small towns in the above district.

**Ivory palanquin**

The ivory palanquin of this temple is a master piece of art. The god and goddesses on separate replicas of the bulls, Goddess Kāli\[^{121}\], Lord Natarāja and the figures of Dwarapālakas

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121. C.Subramaniya Kavirayar, *op.cit.*, p.156.
are rare pieces of art made in ivory. They are engraved in the wooden chassis of the palanquin. The colourful painted figures of Kuṭṭalvāyamoḷi Amman with the Kurumpalanāthar are beautifully engraved in ivory. Inside the palanquin, figures of Lord Natarāja and Goddess Śivagāmi Amman on one side and the figures of dancing Kāţi, Bhairava, Virabhadra on the opposite side are engraved in ivory.

**Bronzes**

Moola Vigrahās are enshrined in the temples. The lavishly sculptured images depict the appearance of Gods. They are held to be the silent voices of theology reaching the power of the Gods\textsuperscript{122}. Courtallanāthar temple has a good collection of thirty nine beautiful bronze images of Lord Śiva, Lord Vishnu and Śakti\textsuperscript{123}. The important bronzes of Saivite gods with consorts are Sabapathi and Śivagāmi Amman, Sri Balināyagar and Manōnmani, Subramaniyar, Valji and Dēvayānai, Somaskandhar, Śivan and Pārvathi.


\textsuperscript{123} Utsava Vigraha Pathivēdu (Register for Festive idols), Courtāllam, 1978, pp.1-4.
Saivite Goddesses

Manōnmaṇi

Manōnmaṇi is the consort of the Adhigāra Nandhi or the Sri Balināyagar. Lord Balināyagar is a four armed form of Lord Śiva. Manōnmaṇi stands on a lotus pedestal in the tribanga posture. Of her two hands, the left hangs freely in lolahasta and the right carries a lily. She is decked with a crown and jewels\textsuperscript{124}.

Saivite god with consorts

Subramaniyar, Vaḷḷi and Dēvayāṇai

Lord Subramaniyar is flanked by Dēvayāṇai and Vaḷḷi on his right and left respectively, both of them stand on lotus pedestals in tribanga. Dēvayāṇai holds a lotus in her left arm, while her right arm is in lolahasta, whereas Vaḷḷi holds a lily in her right arm while her left arm is in lolahasta.

Vaishnava gods with consorts

This temple has a set of very beautiful Vaishnava idols. It consists of Krishna flanked by Rukmaṇi and Satyabāma. Krishna is flanked by Satyabāma and Rukmaṇi on

\textsuperscript{124} Information gathered through field study.
his right and left respectively both of them standing on lotus pedestals in tribanga. Satyabâma holds a lotus in her left arm while her right arm is in lolahasta, whereas Rukmañî holds a lily in her right arm while her left arm is in lolahasta.

**Sculpture**

The art of sculpture in India is popular from time immemorial. Many specimens of different kinds of figures both animal and human have been found in various parts of the country. Tamilnad is the land of temples, where sculptures in stone and bronze are found in numerous\textsuperscript{125}. The dividing line between the iconography and the sculptures of a south Indian temple is not clear cut, for the sculpture itself is dominated by images of gods and goddesses\textsuperscript{126}. In the Courtâllanâthâr temple complex one can see a number of small shrines in the outer prakâra of the temple. In these small shrines, Saivite gods with goddesses are seen. Goddess Ulagamman with Lord Papavinâsar, Goddess Nâgéswari Amman with Swaminâthâr, Goddess Kândhimathi Amman with Nellaiappar, Goddess


Gomathi with Sankaralingar, Goddess Oppanai Amman with Lord Pālvanānāthar, Goddess Meenākshi with Lord Chockalingam, Goddess Aramvalarthā Nayagi with Lord Madhunādeswarar, Goddess Visālākshi with Lord Kāsi Viswanāthar, Vasuki, Lord Kulasēkaranāthar with his consorts and so on. In the Manakkolanāthar shrine one can see Śakti images of Pārvathi and Lakshmi.

Śakti figures in the Gopura of Courtāllanāthar temple

The entrance of the temple has a miniature three tier gopura, built after 17th century\textsuperscript{127}. It contains stucco works of poor workmanship\textsuperscript{128}. Stucco works of Goddess Meenākshi Amman’s sacred marriage\textsuperscript{129}, Goddess Sarasvati playing vīna are the important Śakti figures in gopura.

Trikuta Maṇḍapa

Temples became more elaborate and ornate.

Pillared maṇḍapas, Kalyana maṇḍapas, towering gateways

\textsuperscript{127} C. Subramaniya Kavirayar, \textit{op.cit.}, p.122.

\textsuperscript{128} S.Lalitha, \textit{Courtāllanātha Temple – A Study} (unpublished M.Phil. Dissertation), Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1990, p.90.

\textsuperscript{129} Kasthuri Nagarajan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.47.
above the outermost prakaras, separate shrines and subshrines for the goddesses and minor deities, elaborately carved pillars, statues all out of a single block of stone are the main contributions of the Nayak style of temple construction\textsuperscript{130}. One can see such features in the Courtālānāthār temple also. Trikuta Mandapa is a hundred-pillared hall with a raised platform. During the festival days the decorated deities are kept on the platform for worship. Sculptures of Goddess Rajarājeswari, Lakshmi in seated posture on lotus, fighting snakes are remarkable Śakti figures on the pillars.

Śakti is worshipped in her various manifestations in Courtālānāthār temple. Eventhough the Śakti of this temple Kuḷālvāyomoli Amman has no special festivals in her honour, her role in the temple is remarkable. During all the festivities in the Courtālānāthār temple like Chittirai Vishu, Āni Tirumanjanam, Adi Pūram, Aippasi Vishu, Mārgali Thiruvathirai, Teppōlsavam (floating festival), Rathōlsavam (car festival), Goddess Kuḷālvāyomoli Amman accompanies Lord Courtālānāthār in procession and other functions related with festivals. No festival

\textsuperscript{130} K. Rajaram, op.cit., p.99.
is celebrated in the temple in the absence of Śakti. This is an illustrative evidence to emphasise the significance of Śakti worship in Courtāllanāthar temple in which the presiding deity is Lord Śiva.