CHAPTER – I

HINDU MONUMENTS OF

KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT
Temples formed the nucleus of social life in the country. They integrated the various segments of the society from diversity. Temple is a place of worship. A sacred house of gods and goddesses, it catered to the religious needs of the people and provides a link between man and god and the earthly life and the divine life. Worshipping gods in temples not only infuses divinity and purity to the heart of the devotees but also it is natural outlet of their religious impulses and sentiments. They believed that if gods and goddesses were appeased, there would be rain and prosperity. So the heavenly beings were pleased with offerings of abhishekhas (sacred bath) oblations, rituals and festivals according to agamic prescriptions.¹

The South Indian temples have always played a vital role in the religious, social, cultural and economic life of the people. In this context, it is possible to bring in to light the unique nature of the famous Shiva temples of Kanyakumari District.²

While singing the glory of our motherland, the national poet Subramania Bharathi says: *All the nations in the world it is Bharat that nurtured the highest culture and civilization*. From his words we

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learn that India had been considered as a holy piece of land in the whole world. Why India is called a holy land? Why it is known as *Punya Bhoomi* (Holy Land)? In his poem Bharathi has given a list of reasons why India is called as a holy land. The first and foremost feature of India is its divine affinity. The poet says that India is a land of temples which elevate the people to spiritual dignity.

The temples where Hindu Gods and Goddesses are enshrined are the real pillars and protected forts of Hinduism. They have the greatest influence in strengthening the spiritual and cultural aspects of our country. Our ancestors have sacrificed their lives for the construction and maintenance of these temples. Our sculptures, music, dance, mantras and every aspects of our culture were dedicated to God in temples. Indian temples are thus the standing monuments of the everlasting spiritual and cultural heritage of our country.

The main parts of a temple are, (1) Garpagraha (Sanctum Sanctorum)(2) Vimana (3) Ardha mandapa (4) Prakaras and (5) Gopura (Tower). Indian temple is only a reflection of the physical form of a man.³

One can find different types of art and architecture in the temples of Kanyakumari District. The melodies sound produced by the musical pillars of Suchindrum temple, the beauty of the 145 wooden

panels depicting the story of Ramayana found in the Ramaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram, the exquisite wooden carvings of Udayamarthanda mandapa in Thiruvattar temple, the religious integration of Nagaraja temple at Nagercoil and the cultural integration of twelve Shivalayas are the important features of the temples in Kanyakumari District.\(^4\)

Architecturally we find several types of temples in Kanyakumari District. The Nagaraja temple of Chera style, Cholarajakoil of Chola style and the Suchindrum temple of Pandya style clearly show the impact of Chera, Chola and Pandya rule in Kanyakumari District. There are several temples with conical vimana of Kerala style in Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks of Kanyakumari District. There is a natural cave temple at Chitharal hill and a rock-cut cave temple at Thirunandikkarai. The two tiered conical vimana in the Mahadeva temple at Palliyadi is unique.

Kanyakumari District is having temples of great antiquity and cultural importance. Temples also functioned as a source of history. Music and dance formed a regular part of the temple festivals. Educational institutions were also run by the temples. A copper plate inscription dated A.D.866 informs us that an institution of learning in literary and martial arts was established in the campus of the Vishnu

temple at Parthibhasekarapuram. The temple of Nagaraja at Nagercoil which unifies the four streams of Indian religion Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism and Buddhism is a fine example of religious integration. The temple also serves as an arena of sports. On Shivarathiri several devotees start from the temple at Thirumalai and finish their marathon pilgrimage at Nattalam covering nearly 100 km. in 12 hours. That is called as Shivalayaottam. Thus, we have seen the Hindu temples were not only places of worship but the very focus of society.

SHIVA TEMPLES

Sthanumalayan Temple, Suchindrum

In Tamil Nadu the very word Koil denotes Chidambaram. Similarly in Kanyakumari District the world koil denotes Suchindrum. The holy place Suchindrum is considered as the spiritual metropolis of Kanyakumari district. In this temple Dakshinamurthy is given pride of place. In almost all the temples in Tamil nadu, Lord Vinayaga is worshipped first. But in Suchindrum temple, Lord Dakshinamurthy the God of Wisdom occupies the first place.

Traveling 12 kilometers north-west from Kanyakumari, one can reach Suchindrum, the temple town. It has a recorded history.

The 123 inscriptions of the place narrate a lot about its evolution, distinctiveness and development. The kings of almost all dynasties of the south had vied with each other to commemorate their association with the (124 meters long and 72 meters wide) main temple, by constructing halls and arranging for the conduct of special poojas in their name. A brass chair, known as 'Paranky Narkalee' presented by the Portuguese to the Travancore kingdom is even now used in temple rituals here.7

The presiding deity of this temple is Sthanumalayan (Thanu-Shiva, Mal-Vishnu, Ayan - Brahma). The main temple houses all the Godheads of Hindu Pantheon. Besides, there are exclusive temples for Sakthi, Nataraja, NamaShivaya Murthi and Krishna outside the main temple. The temple is a store house of varied types of sculptures. The well polished figures of Garudalwar, King Thirumalai Nayak, the musical pillars, the two Travancore Kings' Statues, the Vasanthamandapa, the Yalis8, the sculptures on the base of the Gopura are all very fine pieces of art. The monolithic good looking Anjaneya9 of 5 metres height invites awe and admiration. The

40 metres tall, seven tier gopura is stately look and its outer space is studded with exquisite plaster figures depicting scenes from puranas and epics. The temple has 4 cars (chariots), the biggest one - the biggest in whole Tamil Nadu - with splendid wood carvings is quite majestic in appearance. Regarding the temple cars, the Swamithier has 60 feet high and the Ammanther has 40 feet high and the Ganapathyther has 28 feet high.

People from all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala throng in tens of thousands to participate in the 10 days festival conducted in the Tamil months of Chithirai, Avani and Marghali. It has been a must for the newly wedds of the locality to attend the car festival especially in the Marghali festival. Worship on mondays, particularly in the month of Karthihai is considered very auspicious. The splendour and richness of the rituals of the temple can be gauged from the fact that in those palmy days, daily 7 bags of rice were cooked and offered to the deities. This temple is held in high esteem by pilgrims from far and near.\(^\text{10}\)

An inscription dated 10\(^{\text{th}}\) regnal year of Rajaraja, the Great, mentions the name of the village as Nanjil Nattu Thiruchivantheram. Another inscription belonged to the 14\(^{\text{th}}\) regnal year of Rajaraja, the Great, refers the village as Rajaraja Pandi Naattu Uthama Chola

Valanaattu Thiruchivantheram.¹¹ No inscription mentions about the term Suchindrum.

Among the inscriptions discovered in this temple, 24 of them mention the presiding deity as Nainar, 9 inscriptions mention as Mahadevar, 8 inscriptions as Emperumaan and 4 inscriptions refer as Sthanumalaya Perumal. The last four inscriptions belonged to 13th century A.D.

The total area of this temple is 93,900 square feet and the Theppakulam (great pond) also has the same measurement.¹² The temple has the following mandapas Naataka salai mandapa or Muha mandapa, Unjal mandapa or Kalyana mandapa, Vasantha mandapa, Alankara mandapa, Chitrasabai mandapa, Chenbaharaman mandapa, Aditya mandapa and Anuppu mandapa situated in front of the temple.

The construction of temple Gopura was started by Ramaraya Vittala Devarayar, Commander of Vijayanagar army in A.D. 1545 During the time of Travancore kings, a new Rajagopura work was inaugurated by Sri Aailyam Thirunal Maharaja in A.D.1875.¹³ The Rajagopura has 90 feet length, 60 feet width, and 135 feet high. Nearly

13 years were taken for finishing the Rajagopura. During this tenure, Sri Aaiylam Thirunal, Sri Visakam Thirunal and Sree Moolam Thirunal Ramavarma ruled the state.

The prakara of this temple is the second largest one in south India. Another notable point is the introduction of lotteries in India by Maharaja Sri Aailyam Thirunal, the king of Travancore on Aavani 7, 1875, when the construction of new Gopura (Tower) was going on.\textsuperscript{14}

The painting work in all seven stories of the gopura was done by \textit{Brahmasri Paachumuthu of Vattapalli Mutt}, Suchindrum.\textsuperscript{15} In 1888, the Kumpabishekam ceremony was conducted.

The temple prakara’s total length is 1014 feet with 263 beautifully carved granite pillars. The temple has two Dwajasthambas, one is in front of Sthanumalayan sannathi with 64 feet high and the second one is situated in front of Vinnakaraperumal sannathi (Perumal temple) with 56 feet high. Regarding the Hanuman or Anjaneya statue it is 22 feet high including 4 feet in the underground.

A biggest Nanthi locally called as \textit{Makkalai}\textsuperscript{16} has been built in 13 feet high, 21 feet length, and 10 feet width. A female posture of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} S. Padmanabhan, \textit{Kumari Mavatta Kovilkal} (Temples of Kanyakumari Distirct) (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1970, pp. 30-35.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} S. Krishnan, \textit{Varalattil Vattapalli Madam}, History of Vattapalli Mutt (Tamil), Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1991, pp.5-10.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} S. Sadasivam, \textit{Chera Nadum Senthamilum} (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1949, pp.10-15.
\end{itemize}
Vinayaga in the name of Vikneswari has been engraved in the Chenbaharaman mandapa.

The munificence of Thirumalai Nayak towards the temple of Suchindrum was remarkable. His visit to Suchindrum is commemorated by some embellishment to the temple. Several constructions and improvements within the temple of Suchindrum as well as outsides in the village of Suchindurm ascribe to Thirumalai Nayak. But epigraphic evidences are silent about his activities. The only inscription, in which a Nayak figure is found, is a Sadasevai. Perhaps he might be connected with the family of Thirumalai Nayak. The purpose of the Sadaseval is stated as the invocation of the duty not merely for the prosperity of the family of Thirumalai but also for the expedition of their sons. Either, he belonged to the ruling family at Madurai or was a general who participated in some of the plundering expeditions which were undertaken in the 17th century A.D.\textsuperscript{17} It is not possible to ascertain the date of the inscription, only the month and the day of the months can be made out. It must, however, be repeated that local tradition about Tirumala’s contributions is copied and since he belonged to the 17th century A.D. only about 300 years ago, the popular reports may be credited with a certain measure of reliability.

\textsuperscript{17} Personal interview with Dr. P.N. Sarma, aged 80, Vattapalli Mutt, Suchindrum on 10.04.2012.
Now let us consider the work of Tirumala in the light of popular reports. The setting up of the huge bull (the Makkalai) in the Eastern Sribelipura is ascribed to him. If a study of Tirumalai’s benefactions to the Madurai temple furnishes any point, it is that he revealed in erecting figures and structures of a prodigious size. The Makkalai of Suchindurm is certainly worthy of having been a product of Tirumalai’s artistic design.

Among other constructions in the temple ascribed to Tirumalai, it is likely that the erection, or rather the renovation of the eastern Sribelipura forms another. Doubtless, the eastern Sribelipura is distinctly inferior in date to the other Sribelipuras of the pagoda. The smaller girth of the pillars, the lower level of artistic merit presented by them, as well as the less developed corbels, all bear this out clearly. Moreover, the wornout nature of the pillars and of the stone beams above, indicate that the Eastern Sribelipura is considerably older in time than its counterparts in the temple. Regarding the date when the Eastern Sribelipura was constructed, no documentary evidence has come to light. But, very probably it was constructed only after 654 M.E. (A.D.1478) in which year the Chempakaraman mandapa was completed.

18. Sathiyana Iyer, Nayaks of Madura, Madurai, year, pp.120-130.
The Sribelipura was constructed in the present form in the time of Thirumala Nayak, because the ceilings over 'Garudadevar' and 'Makkalai' could not have been erected independently of the Eastern Sribelipura. The unity of plan evident in the construction of the Eastern Sribelipura and the Mandapas over the Makkalai and the shrine of Garudadevar shows that all these were built about the same time, viz. during the period of Thirumalai Nayak.  

Thirumalai Nayak's embellishments were not confined to the temple alone. His unflagging enthusiasm found ample scope even outside the pagoda. But the work outside was also activated by the desire to exalt the temple. Tradition avers that the systematic lay-out of the broad streets running around the village, providing scope for the procession of cahanas and of the cars in connection with the utsavas was undertaken by Thirumalai. Obviously the beautification of the village was considered a necessary complement to the embellishment of the temple. At the end of the south street stands the palace, the Caccaikottaram, ascribed to Thirumala Nayak.  

Popularly it is called "Thirumalai Nayakkar Kottaram", in this Saivaite centre reveals what a

20. Personal interview with Dr.Sharma, aged 80, Vattapalli mutt, Suchindrum dated 20.04.2012.
profound impression Suchindurm and its glories had produced in him. On the whole, the record of achievements in Suchindurm, on the part of Thirumalai Nayak constitutes an additional frather in his cap of glory.23

**Shiva Temple at Derisanamcope**

This tiny village was originally called as *Thirisarankoppu* and later it was misinterpreted as Derisanamcope. It is believed that this temple might have been constructed during the 15th century A.D. The presiding deity is called as Ragaveswarar and his better half is called as Ulahanayagi.24

An inscription is engraved on the south base of the Raghavesvara temple at Derisanamcope, a village about 10kms from Nagercoil. The script of the inscription is Vatteluttu and the language is Tamil. It belongs to the 8th year of the reign of Rajaraja the Great, the celebrated Chola king. It seems to record the appointment of a person to the accountship of the temple and of the village and the settlement of his remuneration by the *Karanattar*. The temple is referred to as the "big temple of Sri Mulasthanathu Aivar."25

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Another inscription of Rajaraja I is engraved on the south base of the central shrine of the Raghavesvara temple. The inscription records the gift of a perpetual lamp by the members of the sabha, on behalf of one Pullanarayana.

**Guhanathaswamy Temple at Kanyakumari**

The inscripational evidences confirm the fact that Guhanathaswamy temple at Kanyakumari was built during the time of Imperial Cholas. An inscription is found on the west base of the central shrine of the Guhanathaswamy temple belongs to the reign of Rajakesarivarman Raja Raja and is dated as the 31st year of his reign.²⁶ It records that the servants of the temple sold the land adjacent to the temple to a body of persons called the *Narpatteayiravar* for the purpose of establishing a watershed which was named *Jayamkondachola tannir pandal*, after the surname of Rajadhiraja.²⁷

Ayandambi alias Ten Mangalkkalam, the minister of the powerful Chola king, established a well, a water-shed in the great city of Kanyakumari.²⁸ He also arranged for maintenance of the watershed. It is very likely that he gave a piece of land which yielded

paddy sufficient enough to supply the watershed daily with 10 nalis of paddy.  

On the north well of the first prahara of the Guhanathaswamy temple is engraved a large inscription of the reign of Rajendradeva. The record is dated the fourth regnal year of this king. It is seen from this inscription that the king commanded that from the fourth year the taxes on the various articles, which were collected from the devadanam villages of the Goddess Kanyakumari of the Rajarajeswaram and of the Rajarajesswarapperunjalai and which seem to have been utilized for the public purposes of the villages be set apart as follows:

1. The taxes from the devadanam villages of Kanyakumari to be utilized for the celebration of a festival on the day of the Janma- nakshatra (ratal star) of his queen Kilanadigal;
2. Those from the villages of Rajarajeswara for the expenses of the temples.
3. Those collected from the villages of the Rajarajappurunjalai, for its expenses.

On the south base of the central shrine of this temple an inscriptions is found. It is dated the fifth year of the reign of the king

Parakeasrivarman Rajendradeva and records that a woman set up a perpetual lamp, for which she made a gift of twenty five sheep.\textsuperscript{31}

An inscription is engraved on the south base of the Ardhamanadapa of this temple. It belongs to the twenty fourth year of the reign of Parakesarivarman Rajendra Choladeva.\textsuperscript{32} It records that Cholakulavalli, the woman who cooked the meals for the king, made a gift of fifty sheep for a perpetual lamp. They seem to have been taken charge of by a person who bound himself to supply daily one ulakku of ghee as measured by the temple measure called \textit{Pacittira manikkam}, for burning the lamp.\textsuperscript{33}

Another inscription is engraved on the south base of the central shrine of this temple. It is dated the twenty eighth year of the king Parakesarivarman Rajendracholadeva who took the "Eastern country and the Ganges and Kadaram", and records that a perpetual lamp was set up by a private person.\textsuperscript{34}

Yet another inscription is found in this temple and is engraved on the west base of the central shrine. It is dated the twenty eighth year of the reign of the king Rajendracholadeva I, and also records the gift of a perpetual lamp.\textsuperscript{35}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Ibid}, p.242.
  \item \textit{Indian Express}, English Daily, Trivandrum, 29\textsuperscript{th} December 1991.
  \item \textit{Ibid}.
  \item \textit{Kathiravan}, Tamil Daily, Madurai, 5\textsuperscript{th} March 2008.
\end{itemize}
Three more inscriptions belonging to the 29th, 30th and 31st years of the king Parakesarivarman Rajendracholadeva I confirm the fifty of perpetual lamps presented by private persons.\(^{36}\)

An inscription is engraved on a natural rock in the prakara of the Sthanumalayan temple at Suchindurm. The script of the inscription is Vatteluttu and the language was Tamil. It appears to belong to the reign of Parantaka Chola I, the first Chola king who extended his conquests as far south as Kanyakumari. It records the gift of 50 sheep for maintaining a perpetual lamp in the temple at Suchindurum.

Another inscription is engraved on a rock in the temple in which the script of the record in Vatteluttu and the language was Tamil. It records the gift of 50 sheep for the upkeep of a perpetual lamp by Rajakesarinvaman to be burnt day and night in the presence of the deity at Suchindrum.\(^{37}\)

An inscription is written on the three faces of a stone about the coconut garden situated on the north of the salt factory near Variyur, a place about 3 miles north-east of Kanyakumari which was given to the temple. It records that in the fourth year of the reign of Kulottunga Choladeva, one Ponpassing-udaiyan Murayirattonusan


alias Kurkularayan of Amarepurimangalam, set up a perpetual lamp for
merit of the king, in the temple at Suchindurm. For the maintenance
of the lamp he granted two pans in the salt factory at Variyur. The
lamp so set up by him was called Kulottunga Cholan vilakku.

**Veerakeraleswaram Shiva Temple, Keralapuram**

Veerakeraleswaram Shiva temple is situated at Keralapuram, a small village situated very near to Thuckalay as well as Padmanabhapuram, the celebrated capital city of the erstwhile Venad and Travancore kingdoms. The temple had been constructed in three acres of land surrounded by paddy fields. It is a place for natural beauty.

The presiding deity Shiva is called as *Rudrewarar* and *Mayana* Rudresewarar. In addition with the main temple, small shrines are also available for Parvathi, Subramaniar, Natarajar, Lekshmi, Thirumangai Alwar, Edaikkadar, Puthathan etc. Even though

40. *Ibid*.
the above mentioned shrines are available within the temple, the Pillayar temple43 seated under the Arasu tree (Pipal tree) is the most popular shrine due to its changing colour once in six months.44 Constructed with granite stone only, this Keralaswaram temple is a popular one during the Venad hegemony.

Regarding the emergence of this temple, no concrete information is available. But on the basis of the inscriptive evidences collected by the Travancore Archaeological department, it is believed that this temple might have been constructed during the time of Veera Udaya Marthandavarma against the Kollam Era of 49145 (A.D. 1316).

As per the inscription available within the temple, the presiding deity is called as Veera Kerala Puratha Mahadevar and the place surrounded by the temple is called as Mahakeralapuram.46

Another version related with the emergence of the temple says that, this temple might have been constructed during the time of Veera Keralavarma and Udayavarma, the celebrated Venad Kings.

44. It is looking white in colour during the Dakshinayanam period and it will be black in colour during the Uthrayanam period.
Another version says that this temple was constructed in memory of VeeraKeralavarma and Udaya Varma. The available inscriptions within the temple say that certain cemeteries are available with in the sanctum sanctorum of this temple. Normally in a Shiva temple, it will not be constructed over a cemetery. But it is said that this Veerakeraleswaram temple has been constructed over cemeteries. If it is true it will be an unprecedented one. One relevant information confirms this point. ie. the name of the presiding deity is Masana Rudreswarar.47

The temples of Kanyakumari district have been classified into two major divisions. They are

(i) Vadakkidayam temples
(ii) Therkkidayam temples

Regarding the Vadakkidayam temples there exist a major difference related with agama rules with Therkkidayam temples. In the Therkkidayam temples, during the annual festivals, animals like elephant will be used as vehicles. In the Vadakkidayam temples this practice is not available.

Regarding Keraleswaram Shiva temple, it comes under the Vadakkidayam category and it is situated at the end of this district. Another notable feature of this temple is its annual festival (Utsavam)

47. Personal interview with Mr. K.K.Gopi Krishnan, aged 55, Secretary, Utsava Committee (Annual festival committee), Keraleswaram temple Keralapuram on 2.07.2012.
which is the last one in Kanyakumari district as per calendar system. Instead of animals, *Ter* (temple car) which is pulled by devotees on the ninth day and *Pumpallakku* is also in use.\(^{48}\)

An inscription is engraved on the west base of the central shrine of this Shiva temple. It informs that the king Vira Ravivarman of Kilapperur Illam and Tiruppapur Swarupan reconstructed the main temple, *Madapalli* (kitchen) and the Rishaba mandapa in the year 782 of Kollam Era. Another highlighting point is that the king is said to have made the sixteen great gifts to the master of all sciences and arts. After the reconstruction was over, the *Asthapanthana Maha Kumbabhiseka* ceremony was performed on 6\(^{th}\) of Tamil month Chitrai, Friday, the Swathi star in the Kollam Era 782.\(^{49}\)

This temple is famous due to its art, architecture and sculptural specimens. Huge number of pilgrims visit this temple during the Maha Shivaratri celebrations. But people from outside India are also coming to this temple not for this reasons alone, but for the existence of the colour changing Vinayagar shrine situated with in the main temple.


\(^{49}\) Personal interview with Mr. Sutharsana Kumar, aged 54, SreeKariyam (Manager), Keralesvaram temple, Keralapuram on 20.06.2012.
Boothalingaswamy Temple, Boothapandy

Boothapandy is a small village in the Thovalai taluk situated 8 kms from Nagercoil. The main attraction of this village is its Bhoothalingaswamy temple which is a rock-cut temple belonged to 9th century A.D. Inscriptions of the temple mention the village as Nanchi Nattu Boothapandy and Boothaipandy.¹⁰⁰

This temple got extension under the Pandya kings. A holy pond (Theppakulam) is also there. The temple car (Ter) is the biggest one in Kanyakumari District.¹⁰¹ Tradition says that this village was named after Olaiyur thantha Boothapandiyan, a Pandya king.

As per the inscriptive evidences, the present structure has been constructed during the 15th century A.D. It is a rock-cut cave temple in which the sanctum sanctorum is in a cave and the presiding deity is a Suyambu. Significantly it has no vimana over the Garpagraha (sanctum sanctorum).

The presiding deity is Boothalingaswamy and the Goddess is called as Shivakami Ambal. This temple is famous for its car festival and floating festival. In addition with that the temple car's weight and height are second one in Tamilnadu next to Tiruvarur temple.

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Sayantheesar Azhagamman Temple, Thazhakudy

Originally called as Thazhaikudi, this village is now called as Thazhakudy. The first phase of the temple was built during the time of Virakeralavarma, a Venad king in A.D.1127 and the Goddess Azhagamman temple was built in A.D. 1325. The presiding deity of this temple is Jegatheeswarar.52

Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, Aralvaimozhi

Aralvaimozhi village was called as Aruvamozhi, Aravaimozhi during the past. Originally it was a Sasta temple. The presiding deity is Parakodi Kandan Sasta.53 Later due to the installation of Meenakshi Sundareswarar, it was converted into a Shiva temple. The original temple was constructed during the Travancore kings. During the time of Sri Chithrai Thirunal Maharaja, the Muha mandapa was constructed and in commemoration of it a beautiful sculpture of Sri Chithrai Thriunal Maharaja has been engraved on one of the pillars of the Muha mandapa.

Shiva Temple, Seethappal

Seethappal village is situated in the banks of Palayar river near Boothapandy. Originally called as Sripadmanbhanallur, this

village was once closely associated with the Travancore kings. The original village Sripadmanabhanallur is a deserted one in which the temple is situated. Tradition says that the Shiva temple was surrounded by Brahmin Agraharams and the other communities like Vellalas lived around the temple. At present there is no human settlement around the temple and is surrounded by paddy fields only. The Shivalinga of this temple is very big in size. A musical Muruga sculpture has been beautifully engraved in this temple. We can get different sounds when we touch that sculpture.

**Uthayamarthandeswara Temple, Erachakulam**

Erachakulam is a small village but a fertile one situated 5 kms from Nagercoil town. A granite temple constructed during the 17th century A.D. by the Travancore kings has been dedicated to Lord Shiva. The presiding deities are called as Uthayamarthandeswara and Shivakami respectively.

**Shiva Temple, Jadayupuram**

Jadayupuram, situated on the banks of Palayar, is a suburb of Thiruppathisaram village which is one among the famous 108 Vaishnava temples. It is said that Jadayupuram is closely associated with Ramayana tradition by which Jadayu (Bakshirajan) got

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54. Personal interview with Natesan, aged 80, Seethappal on 20-11-2012.
Moksha (salvation) from Sri Rama. The presiding deities are Sri RamalingaShivam and Shivakami.\textsuperscript{56} No concrete information is available regarding the origin of this temple but it might have been constructed by the Travancore kings during the 16\textsuperscript{th} or 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries. It was in a dilapulated condition. Recently due to the efforts of the devotees, renovation was conducted and rituals and poojas are conducted in a grand scale.

**Shiva Temple, Thirunayinarkuruchi**

An ancient Shiva temple belonged to 12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. is available in this village. The inscriptions of this temple mention the village as *Rajaraja Thennathu Kurunatha Kadihaipattinam* and the presiding deity of the Shiva Temple as *Karaikandaswaramudaiya Mahadevar*.\textsuperscript{57}

This Shiva temple is situated on the banks of river Valliyaru at Thirunayinarkuruchi, a tiny village situated 10kms from Nagercoil. The presiding deity of the temple is *Sri Karai Kanda Iswarar*. A small but holy pond (Theppakulam) is there in front of the temple.

The temple has its main entrance from the eastern side and it stands majestically. The grand imposing sight of Sri Karaikanda

\textsuperscript{56} Aaivu Kalanjiam, Monthly Historical Research Journal, Nagercoil, April 2007, pp. 18-20.

Iswarar temple with its 100 feet gopura is a unique one due to its architectural significance.

The sanctum sanctorum and its inner designs are noteworthy. The monolithic emerald Shiva blesses from there. A monolithic Nandhi is also there just opposite to the Garpagraha which is in the classical form of ox.\textsuperscript{58}

Regarding the period in which the temple was built is a matter of discussion. Due to the supporting evidences and the utilization of granite for the construction, it might have constructed during the 10\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D. Except the wooden doors, all the remaining edifices were made in granite.\textsuperscript{59}

**Chola Raja Temple, Vadasery**

It is situated at Vadasery, a suburb of Nagercoil town. The inscription of the temple mention the village as *Raja raja Pandinaatu Uthamachola Valanattu Nanjil Nattu Thirukottarrana Mummudi Chola Nallur* and the deity is mentioned as *Rajendra Choleeswara Mudaiyar*. Later it was renamed as *Thirukkottarana Chola Keralapuram.*\textsuperscript{60} Parakkirama Pandya, a later Pandya king, during his 15\textsuperscript{th} regnal year, modified this temple and renovation was made.

\textsuperscript{58} Personal interview with Dr. T. Marachan, aged 67, Thirunayinarkuruchi on 28.04.2012.

\textsuperscript{59} Personally visited and confirmed.

\textsuperscript{60} S. Padmanabhan, *Significance of Vadasery Village*, research paper presented in the inaugural function of a mandapa at Vadasery on 20.04.2008.
It was reconstructed during the time of Rajendra Chola I. The presiding deity was sung by Thirugnanasambandar, one among the Trios who composed Devaram. In the inscriptions, it is mentioned as Rajendra Choleswaar. The presiding deity is called as Rajendra Choleswarar and the Goddess is called as Kolavar Kuzhaleswari. The Amman shrine was constructed by Kulothunga Chola. It is very surprising to watch the temple tower which is absolutely the replica of the tower at Prahadeeswarar temple, Tanjore. But it is small in size.

Neelakandaswamy Temple, Padmanabhapuram

The fort city of Padmanabhapuram has a number of beautiful temples. Among them, Neelakandaswamy temple is important one, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva.

The origin of the Neelakantaswamy temple is shrouded in mystery. According to Keralolpathi the sage Parasurama after consecrating the temple at Srivarthanapuram brought a prince from the east coast named Bhanuvikrama, belonged to Somavamsa-Kshatriya clan and crowned him as the king of Kerala at Srivarthanapuram, presenting him his own sword. P. Shungunny Menon, the famous historian of Travancore, is of the opinion that Srivarthanapuram is the modern town of Padmanabhapuram. From

61. S. Padmanabhan, Kottar, the Metropolis, article published in the Indian Express, Madurai, 10th March 1975.
these evidences it can be assumed that the origin of the Neelakandaswamy temple dates back to legendary times.

Epigraphical evidences reveal that the existing temple was constructed in the 12th century only.\textsuperscript{63} The earliest record that we find is the damaged \textit{Vatteluttu} inscription of 412 ME (A.D.1237) belonging to the Venadu ruler Ravi Keralavarman Tiruvadi. It mentions the Royal Order regarding the amount of expenditure that had to be incurred in the temple. Another inscription dated 753 M.E./ A.D. 1578 records that the inner prakara of the Mahadeva temple of Kalkulam was paved with granite slabs.\textsuperscript{64}

In 810 M.E./ A.D. 1635 Thirumalai Nayak, the famous ruler of Madurai invaded Travancore and encamped in the paddy fields around Kalkulam. Though he came to the area as an invader, he installed an image of Devi in remembrance of his family deity Madurai Meenakshi. He also renovated and reconstructed this temple in Dravidian style of architecture probably in the year A.D. 1635. The presiding deity of this temple Mahadevar might have been renamed as Neelakandaswamy after the installation of his partner at this sacred place.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{64} Report of the condition of the Major Devaswom Buildings, temples of Kalkulam village, P.W.D. Department, Government of Travancore, 1914, File No.316.
\textsuperscript{65} Stella Kranirisch, Cousins and Vasudeva Poduval, \textit{The Arts and Crafts of Travancore}, Kochi, 1999, pp. 50-54.
It is learnt from an inscription at Padmanabhapuram that Ravivarma, the king of Travancore conducted a religious ceremony to Lord Mahadevar in the Padmanabhapuram temple on the first day of Vrishchigam 754 M.E/ A.D. 1579 soon after finishing his architectural undertakings. This king might have been the co-regent of Sri Vira Udaya Marthandavarma who died in the year 770 M.E/ A.D.1595. He also performed the Thulapurashadanam ceremony in this temple and assumed the title "Kulasekara perumal". As he was very pious he took much pleasure in repairing temples and performing religious ceremonies. It is seen from the Thiruvattar inscription that Raja Ravivaroma’s reign continued till 780 M.E / A.D.1605.

The temple facing east contains two shrines, one dedicated to Linga, called 'Kalkulam Mahadevar' in the inscriptions, and the other to his consort Meenakshi, named Anandavalli by Marthandavarma. The Shiva temple consists of a garpagraha (sanctum sanctorum) and Arthamantapa built in granite. The former has a sikharam and the latter is terraced.

Attached to the Muha mandapa, there is a Rrishabha mantapa with a *muhappu* in its front. The door, the walls and the terrace are in good condition.\(^69\)

There is a Nalampalam built in granite and provided with a terraced granite roof. In the south-east corner of the Nalambalam there is a temple dedicated to the Ursavamurthi (procession vigraham) (idol). The Bhuthathan temple and the Chidambareswari temple are located in the northern ambalam. On the northern side of the Shiva temple there is a Chandekeswarar temple.

In front of the ambalam is the Kalikka mandapa. This is a terraced granite structure. On the south-east side of the Nalambalam is the *Madappalli*.\(^70\)

At the entrance of the shrine there is a flag staff. The Amman temple adjoins the swamy temple, stands in the north.\(^71\) The Amman Sreekoil consists of Garpagraha, Arthamantapa and a Muha mandapa. They are all built in granite. The Garpagraha has a Sikharam and the mantapas are terraced.

The Nalambalam could be seen in the Ammancoil. This Nalambalam was constructed with granite and terraced. There is a

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palliyyara in the north-east corner of this ambalam. Infront of the Ambalam, the Kalikkamantapa is situated. This is a terraced granite structure.\textsuperscript{72}

On the eastern side of the Kalikkamantapa, there are the Dhawajamantapa and the Sree Belipura common to the two temples. These are built in granite and terraced.\textsuperscript{73} The temple has a separate inner prakara enclosing the Swamy and Amman temples and a common outer prakara consisting of one for Sastha. Going round the outer prakara one can see the image of Adimulaswamy, a linga of a height of nearly five feet, which is enshrined in a separate campus.\textsuperscript{74}

There is a granite compound wall all round with five doors. Attached to the compound wall is an Ambalam having the compound wall as its outer wall. This is generally for keeping the Vahanams (temple vehicles). On the southern Ambalam there is a Chottukallu. The stones are finely joined. In the same Ambalam there is a Kavalpura constructed in masonry.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} S. Padmanabhan, \textit{Kumari Mavatta Kovilhal} (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1970, pp.50-60.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Report on the condition of the major Devaswom buildings, temples of Kalkulam village, P.W.D. Government of Travancore, 1914, file No. 316.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Stella Kranrisch, Cousins and Vasudeva Poduval, \textit{The Arts and Crafts of Travancore}, Cochin, 1999, pp.50-60.
\end{itemize}
In the north Ambalam, there exists the tailor's room, Kannakkapura, Thevattipura and Kavalpura. There is a Muhappu at the north entrance which is a terraced granite structure.\textsuperscript{75} There is a well on the north east corner of the outer Ambalam. The water of this well is not in use now.\textsuperscript{76} There is a five tiered beautiful Gopura at the entrance to the shrine of Sri Neelakandaswamy temple and on its right side is a temple dedicated to Vinayaka.\textsuperscript{77}

Neelakandaswamy temple is an old structure containing a few interesting sculptures.\textsuperscript{78}

There are many beautiful images of Deepalashmi around the outer Prakara.\textsuperscript{79} There is a \textit{Theppakulam} in front of the temple, and a small \textit{neerazhi} on the side of Theppakulam.\textsuperscript{80} In the south side of the Theppakulam there are sacred trees such as snaken stones, stone columns, and capitals with lotus buds.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Ronald M. Bernier, \textit{Temple Art of Kerala}, New Delhi, 1982, pp.110-115.
\item \textsuperscript{76} A. S. Ramanatha Ayyar, \textit{Travancore Archaeological Series}, Vol. VIII, Trivandrum, 1930, pp. 120-125.
\item \textsuperscript{77} Souvenir, published by Kanyakumari Devaswom Board, Nagercoil, 1977, pp. 10-12.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Radhakrishnan, \textit{Temples of Kerala}, Trivandrum, 1998, pp. 40-45.
\item \textsuperscript{79} P. V. Jagadisa Ayyar, \textit{South Indian Customs}, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 10-20.
\item \textsuperscript{81} \textit{The Travancore Directory} for 1936, published by the Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, Part II, Trivandrum, 1938, pp. 360-370.
\end{itemize}
The temple of Neelakandaswamy is a pretty old looking structure containing few interesting sculpture belonging to 16th century A.D. It is built entirely in the east coast style and has two shrines facing the east one for the Linga called 'Karkulattu Mahadeva' in the epigraphs, and the other for the goddess Anandavalli. A Nadana-Sabha which has been located in the north-eastern corner of the second prakara is a small building with four sculptured pillars, bearing the image of Karna, Kankalanathar, Venugopal and Arjuna. A few other pillars contain full size statues of men and these are said to be the portraits of some wealthy merchant-princes of Madurai who were responsible for some structural additions to the temple.

The subjoined inscriptions, one in vatteluttu and the rest in Tamil characters, are found in the Neelakandaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram. It is mentioned in the inscription that this place was the ancient seat of the Venadu kings. It contained to be a place of considerable importance in the beginning of the nineteenth century so that the Travancore king Bala Marthandavarma strengthened its position by the addition of fresh fortifications.82

The records found in the temple do not take us very early as in the case of Suchindrum. The earliest that we find is the damaged

Vatteluttu inscription of Kollam 412/ A.D. 1237, belonging to the Venadu ruler Vera Ravi Keralavarman Tiruvadi of Killapperur.\footnote{Travancore Devaswom Manual published by the Travancore Devaswom Board, Trivandrum, 1939, pp. 1-10.}

The second inscription is dated in Kollam 753/ A.D. 1578 on Wednesday the 9th day of Aipasi with Uttiram Nakshatra.\footnote{Dinamalar, Tamil Daily, Tirunelveli, 10th April 1992.} It states that the inner prakara of the Mahadeva temple at Kalkulam was paved with stone slabs, a drainage was constructed there in and that on both sides of the eastern entrance.

The third record is dated in Kollam Era 840 on Tuesday the 4th day of the month of Masi, with Ekadasi tithi and Mula-nakshatra. It is engraved on the stone in the pujapperai of the palace. It states that on a site in the northern row of the Vadakku-teru (north street) where the king was perhaps originally staying, Thambi Raja Ravi of Thiruvattar had built a Kalmadam and made provisions for the conduct of worship to the gods Acharappillaiyar and Kalkulattu-Mahadevar on certain specified days.\footnote{Aswathi Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bai, op.cit., pp . 70-74.}

The fourth inscription which is dated in Kollam 856, related to the above transaction and registers the gift of lands in
Kukkupparru in Mattiyur, made by Ravi Makutti and Sri Padmanabhakkutti of Tiruvattar for Mahesvarapuja in the Kalmadam.  

**TWELVE SHIVALAYAS**

It is believed that Shivarathiri is a spiritual festival celebrated throughout India in order to get the blessings of Lord Shiva for the removal of our sin. Even though it is a national festival in India, it is a unique one in the district of Kanyakumari.

The twelve Shiva temples closely related with the celebrated "Shivalaya Ottam" are situated in the two taluks of Vilavancode and Kalkulam of present Kanyakumari District.

The temples at Thirumalai, Thikkuruchi, Thirparappu, Thirunandikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannippaham and Thirunattalam are situated in the Vilavancode taluk and the rest of the temples situated at Kalkulam, Melancode, Thiruvidaicode, Thiruvithancode and Thiruppantricode come under Kalkulam taluk.

Nowhere else in the country, except in Kanyakumari district, where it is celebrated as an integration of Saivism and Vaishnavism two major sects of Hinduism. It is a rare example of Saiva-Vaishnava unity.

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The twelve sacred shrines of Shiva which are situated around Padmanabhapuram are called as Dwadasalayam. On the day of Shivaratri, the devotees wearing the saffron coloured robes and uttering the words "Govinda Gopala" start from Thirumala and finish their marathon running of Thirunattalam touching Thikkuruchi, Thirparappu, Thirunandikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannippagam, Kalkulam, Melancode, Thiruvidaicode, Thiruvithancode, Thiruppantricode covering nearly 100 kilometres within 24 hours.

The race of pilgrims on Shivaratri uttering the name of Lord Vishnu "Govinda Gopala" substantiates the truth that Shiva and Vishnu are one supreme being but two manifestations.

More than one lakh pilgrims from southern Tamil Nadu and southern Kerala are participating in this marathans travel every year touching twelve Shivalayas situated in the Kalkulam and Vilavancode taluks of Kanyakumari district. The total distance of this journey is 110 kilometres. Earlier the pilgrims visited all these Shiva temples by walk. Now the pilgrims are reaching all the twelve temples by vehicles.

89. S. Padmanabhan, Kumari Mavatta Kovilhal (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1974, pp.132-140.
Those who participate in this marathon journey will start their fasting since *Ekathasi* of *Masi* month and will take food once in a day. On the previous day of Shivarathiri, they will start their journey without taking any food and chanting the slogas like *Govinda*, *Gopala*.91 Significantly these slogas are associated with Lord Vishnu and they are using these slogas while going to the Shiva temples. This is a rare and unique one in India.

Regarding the art, architecture and sculpture, these temples are very good examples for Dravidian and Travancore style. The temple at Thirnanthikarai attracts much attention due to its Jain influence where a Rock-cut temple is also there. A cone shaped vimana is available in the Thirunattalam Sankaranaraya temple.92

On the day of Shivaratri, the devotees wearing the saffron coloured robes and uttering the words "Govinda Gopala" starting from *Thirumala* and finish their marathon running journey at Thirunattalam touching Thikkuruchi, Thirparappu, Thirunandikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannippagam, Kalkulam, Melancode, Thiruvidaicode, Thiruvithancode, Thiruppantricode covering nearly 110 kilometres within 24 hours.93


Thirumalai

Regarding the celebrated "Shivalaya Ottam", the marathan pilgrimage starts at Thirumalai, a village situated very near to Munchirai village. The place Thirumalai was previously called by Srisailanatham, Mangalagiri, Mangalathiri, and Sampugiri etc.

Significantly, we can see the remains of a fort very near to the temple.\(^9^4\) It is called as Uthachikottai (Uthachi fort) in common parlance. The name of the fort itself speaks about volumes of information on the reason behind the construction of the fort.

It is believed that a ruler of Madurai along with his princess Uthaichi came to this place, stayed there, and worshipped the God regularly for 41 days. The king had no issues so far. After getting a male child, the king and the queen named the child after Thirumalai Mahadevar -the presiding deity of the temple. That child was non other than Thirumalai Nayak, one of the most celebrated Nayak rulers of Madurai. It is believed that Thirumalai Nayak’s father had donated a 7½ kg golden coat (Angi) and a copper plate which refers the land donation.\(^9^5\)

Another notable feature of this temple is its fish symbol. It proves that this temple would have been maintained by the Pandyas.

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94. Padmanabhapuram (Folder), Published by Department of Tourism, Government of Tamilnadu, Madras, 1998.

The position of 'Nandhi' statue also attracts the attention of the visitors. Normally 'Nandhi' will be installed straight opposite to the presiding deity. In this Mahadevar temple, Nandhi has been installed just opposite to the sanctum-sanctorum but in a slightly diverted position.

In the temple utsav i.e. the main festival, which happens in the Shivaratri period, the first devotee who participates in the Shivalaya Ottam is hoisting the temple holy flag.96

Thikkuruchi

The second Shiva temple in the temple series is Thikkuruchi, situated on the banks of the river Tambraparani. The presiding deity is called as Thikkuruchi Mahadevar.

The Shiva temple is in the eastern direction. Significantly no Nandhi statue is available in this temple. There is an interesting story behind this episode. One day the temple's Nandhi disturbed the farmers of Thikkuruchi village. The angry farmers beat the cow and had driven out from that village. It is strongly believed that the trouble making cow was put in the temple's well. So even now, the poojas to be performed to Nandhi are being done to the well.

96. Pandiyan Cheppedugal Pattu (Tamil), Published by the International Institute of Tamil Studies, Madras, 1995.
Thirparappu

It is situated on the eastern banks of river Gothaiyar 10 kilometres north east of Kuzhithurai town. The temple has been constructed in western direction. The presiding deity is called as Veerapathrar.

Now the ancient temple has been renovated with Kerala style of architecture. The celebrated golden Vikraha (metal statue) of this temple was taken to Thiruvattar and kept preserved in the Adikesavaperumal temple, one among the 108 Vaishnava centres, in order to protect it from the Muslim invasion during the 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th} centuries. At present, the golden statue is kept preserved at Karuvur temple near Kalkulam which is very close to the great Padmanabhapuram palace.

One among the notable features of this temple is its ahama system. Normally, in all the temples the priest will chant mantras (Sanskrit slogas) sitting in the right side of the presiding deity. But in this temple, the priest is chanting mantras sitting in the left side of the presiding deity due to the existence of the temple in the western direction. Nandhi symbol has been incorporated in the Dwajasthamba (flag post). Another notable feature of this temple is the existence of Uttuppurai and Odukkupurai.\textsuperscript{97}

\textsuperscript{97} Personal interview with Mr. Mohan, Priest, aged 52, Head Priest, Kalakalar Temple, Melancode on 10.03.2012.
Thirparappu Mahadevar temple had a close contact with the Travancore kings during the past. During the Tamil month of Maarhazhi, on the Thiruvathirai festival, the Travancore Maharaja will be in fasting and after finishing his fast, he will eat the food coming from Thirparappu Mahadevar temple. This temple has a golden Vikraha (idol) and it is kept preserved in the Adikesava Perumal temple, Thiruvattar due to security reasons.98

It is a place for pilgrims coming from all sides. An inscription dated thirteenth century (A.D. 1232) (Kollam Era 407) reveals about the visit of a pilgrim from Madurai, who donated a Nandha lamp to this temple.

Another notable feature of this place is its present tourist attraction. This village is one of the best tourist resorts of Kanyakumari district due to its beautiful falls. It is popularly called as "Kumari Courtallam".

Thirunandikkara

The fourth temple in the Shivalaya series of Kanyakumari district is the temple at Thirunandikkara, which is situated nine kilometers from Marthandam town. The name 'Nanthi' itself raises doubts about it religious background.

Though it is a famous Shiva shrine nowadays, it might have been a strong Jain centre during the past. Achutananthi,

98. Personal interview with Mr. Vijayan, aged 60, Permanent Trustee, Neelapillai Amman Temple, Melancode on 10.02.2012.
Sarvananthi, Vajirananthi were the names of some of the Jain monks who were very popular during the early medieval period. On the basis of this fact, some historians are of the opinion that this place Thirunandikkarai might have come after the celebrated Jain monk "Thirunanthy".

Significantly the presiding deity of this temple is called as "Nanthi Kesavan". But no Nanthi is available in the main shrine. There is a rock cut temple situated on the northern side of the main temple, where we can see a Nanthi. The rock cut temple has been constructed in the east-west direction. It is believed that the place was once controlled by the Jains and later during the time of Imperial Cholas, it was taken over for the construction of a Shiva temple.

Significantly, a number of beautiful paintings were there in the rock cut temple till recently. Some of the moral paintings were of typical Kerala style. But all of them gradually disappeared. The Archaeological Dept of the Government of India has taken the temple under its custody in order to protect the remains of the paintings and also the inscriptions available there.

The commonalities of that location called that rock as Uzhuthupparai and also Kathavadaichan paarai. This rock cut temple has a varendah with a number of pillars and also possessed a small room with a Shivalinga. Moral paintings of this rock-cut temple are the typical example of Kerala style of paintings.
Regarding the sculptural and artistic values of the main temple, there is a hall by name *Purushaba mandapa* with 27 holes reflecting 27 stars of astrology. Even though it is a Shiva temple, the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, (the God of Preserver) have been carved in copper around the sanctum sanctorum. Finally, it is the only Shiva temple as far as 12 Shivalayas are concerned, where the annual *Utsav* (10 days festival) commences on the day of *Shivaratri*.

**Ponmanai**

The fifth Shiva temple which comes under the 12 Shivalayas is situated at *Ponmanai*, a place which has the distance of 7 kilometres from *Thirunandikkarai*.

The presiding deity of this temple is *Thippilan Kattappan* which means the protector of tribal areas. As per the oral history, during the past, the tribal people had the practice of worshipping this temple.

The sanctum-sanctorum of this temple has been constructed in a circular shape. In the *Muha mandapa*, Nandhi is there. Significantly, no permanent Dwajasthamba (flag post) is available there. The *vimana* of the temple has been covered with copper sheets. In the Nandhi mandapa, we can see the Puranic scenes and Navagraha (9 planets) which have been carved in wood.

**Pannipaham**

It is the sixth Shiva temple of the 12 Shivalayas situated in the Thuckalay - Surulode road. Till recently no proper road facilities were there in this temple. The pilgrims had to reach the temple by walking 2 kilometres at least.

It is situated in the eastern direction. The presiding deity of this temple is called as *Kirathamurthi*. Within this main temple, a small shrine has been dedicated to Kalapairavar. Significantly no permanent Dwajasthamba is available in this temple.

**Thiruvithamcode**

Otherwise called as Thiruvithamcode Mahadevar temple, it is the seventh temple in the twelve Shivalayas. Thiruvithamcode is a peaceful village situated near the Thiruvananthapuram - Kanyakumari highway, just three kilometres from Thuckalay town.

The place name Thiruvithamcode contains much significance. It is believed that *Thiruvithamcode* or *Thiruvithamcore* was derived from *Thirithamcode* or *Thiru Vaazhum Code* meaning the *Code* (land) where *Thiru* (prosperity), *Vaazhum* (reigns).

Situated in three acres of land, the temple stands in the eastern direction. Actually, there are two temples standing in a line and a little a part from one another when they are viewed from the front. The main temple is dedicated to Shiva and the one in the south, to Mahavishnu.
Like the South Indian temples, here too a lofty boundary wall encircles the temple complex. The main entrance and other parts of the wall carry many engravings of Sree Hanuman in various postures. Both temples have separate copper enclosed Dwajasthambas with the *Sapta Rishies* seated around them. Flag hoisting celebration is conducted in both the flag staffs simultaneously.

The *'Nalambalam'* contains within it a grand Sreekovil. The big granite *Yali* on the raised northern platform of the *Idanazhi* is of special importance. The Yali has a stone ball inside the mouth which is too big and not possible to taken out. It would have been carved from inside the Yali’s mouth itself and which is rolling around. Such type of expertise is seen in quite a few temples as examples of excellence in stone craftsmanship.

The Sreekovil is situated on a good elevation. It is a granite, large, rectangular in shape and three-chambered one. Long, solid, spaced granite sleepers connect the outer periphery to the lower level of the sanctum roof. In the first enclosure, dignified granite Nandhi faces the master residing within the innermost recess.

The rectangular granite roof of the sanctum is massive and plastered over with lime and mortar. Many engravings are there on the northern and southern walls of the Sreekovil.

**Kalkulam**

The name Kalkulam came into existence during the later period. Originally called as *Sirvarthanapuram*, Kalkulam got the new
name Padmanabhapuram later. Shungunny Menon, a celebrated Travancore historian accepts this interpretation.

Situated within the Padmanabhapuram fort, it is the seventh Shivalaya of the twelve Shivalaya line. The presiding deity is called as Neelakandeswarar which is 10 feet height. It is said that this temple was constructed by Maharaja Marthandavarman after worshipping the Meenakshi temple at Madurai. Significantly, this temple was constructed with typical Dravidian style.

Infront of the temple there is a Theppakulam (holy tank) in which the floating festival is celebrated every year. Among the twelve Shivalayas it is the only temple which was built with Dravidian style of architecture.

The entrance of the temple was covered with a gopura (tower). The images of Karna, Kangalanathar, Venugopal, and Arjuna have been carved in the pillars of the Chitrasabai.

A temple dedicated to Vishnu by name Ramasamy temple is also there very near to the Neelakandasamy temple. The most significant focal point of this temple is its modern carvings which speak about the entire episode of Ramayana in 145 wooden plates.

It is said that the celebrated Tamil scholar Neelakanda Shivan, who wrote 2000 Tamil Keerthanas (mantras) is said to come to this place and through His blessings, he had written it.
Melancode

Melancode Shiva temple, the ninth Shivalaya of the series is situated very near to Velimalai Kumaraswamy temple popularly called as Kumarakoil. It has the distance of 3 kilometres from Kalkulam Neelakandasamy temple.

The presiding deity of this temple is called as Kalakalar. The temple has been constructed in the eastern direction which is surrounded by fertile paddy fields. Melancode Shiva temple is the smallest among the twelve Shivalayas.\textsuperscript{100}

The Shiva temple at Melancode occupies an unique place among the twelve Shivalayas. Large number of female devotees are coming to the Melancode Amman temples on all Tuesdays and Fridays which are very near to the Shiva temple. In addition with this the Tuesdays of the Tamil month Aadi also attracts huge number of people. On those days this Kalakalar temple at Melancode will be busy to receive the devotees.

In that Shivalaya, there exists Vinayagar shrine, Sastha shrine and also the celebrated Nagaraja Kavu. In the sanctum-sanctorum, there is a Linga which is seen in a slightly tilted.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{100} Tamil KalaiKalanjiyam, Thanjavur Tamil University Publications, 1995, pp. 70-80.

\textsuperscript{101} Madhava Menon, A Hand Book of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, pp. 170-180.
**Thiruvidaicode**

The temple at Thiruvidaicode is the tenth Shiva temple of the Shivalaya series. This temple is also situated among the paddy fields. Though the temple is situated in the eastern direction, the main entrance is in the northern side. The presiding deity is called as Jadathari. One among the 18 Sithars, Edaikkadar lost his breath in this place, so it is called as Thiru Edaikkodu. Even now, the burial ground of Edaikkadar is available just opposite to the sanctum-sanctorum of this temple.

This temple possessed an unique position among the 12 Shivalayas. Just like Puri Jagannath temple of Orissa, here also the Shivalinga is looking like an unfinished one. Opposite to the presiding deity, Nandhi is there. But it is in damaged condition.\(^{102}\)

**Thiruppantricode**

The presiding deity of this temple is called as Thiruppantricode Mahadevar. This temple had a close relationship with the Travancore kingdom. When the Muslim general Muhilan conducted an expedition against the Travancore state in A.D.1680, this place got affected severely. Muhilan entered the temple, demolished it and even broken the presiding deity also.

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The Travancore army started repulsing the Muslim attack. A stiff battle had happened at Thiruvattar in which Muhilan was very near to taste the victory. But the unexpected arrival of insects in the battlefield confused the entire Muslim army. Muhilan fell down from the horse and finally he lost his life in the battlefield itself.

After the Muhilan expedition, the temple was in the devastated position for a long time. In 1885, Moolam Thirunal Maharaja, ruler of Travancore saw a dream in which the God told him to reconstruct the temple. The next day Moolam Thirunal Maharaja visited the spot, and ordered to start the renovation of the temple. Till his death, the Maharaja had much faith over this temple.

It is a specimen for typical Kerala style of architecture. The vimana of this temple has been beautifully designed. During the Tamil month of Karthihai, annual festival (utsavam) is celebrated.

**Thirunattalam**

The last Shiva temple of the twelve Shivalaya series, Thirunattalam Sankaranarayana temple is situated four kilometres from Thiruppantricode. There are two temples one dedicated to Lord Shiva and another one for Vishnu situated very closely. There is a holy tank (*Theppakulam*) in between the two temples. Both the temples are standing in the eastern direction.

The presiding deity of the temple is called as *Sankaranarayanan*. The name of the presiding deity itself speaks that
both Shiva and Vishnu are the same. Arthanareeswarar, Thirukannappar are the other names of the presiding deity.\textsuperscript{103}

The Vimana of this temple is conic in shape. Two inscriptions have been identified by the Archaeological department. One of the inscriptions says about the maintenance of the chaultry at Nattalam. Another one speaks about the presentation of Mahabaratha story in the Nattalam temple.\textsuperscript{104}

Another significant factor related with this temple is its holy tank (Theppakulam). The participants of Shivalaya Ottam will start their marathon journey from Thirumalai and will finish it at Nattalam. Earlier they will start \textit{Viratha} (fasting) on \textit{Ekadasi day} and will finish their \textit{Viratha} at Nattalam after taking holy path in the holy tank at Nattalam.\textsuperscript{105}

The twelve Shiva temples and their architectural significance get attraction throughout the country due to the celebrated \textit{Shivalaya Ottam}, nowadays. Even though Shivalaya Ottam is a unique spiritual marathon running, lakhs of pilgrims are very eager to participate in it nowadays.

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\textsuperscript{103} A.K. Perumal, \textit{Shivalaya Ottam}, (Tamil), Nagercoil, 2011, pp.140-150.
\textsuperscript{104} Malaimalar, Evening daily, Nagercoil, 10\textsuperscript{th} March, 2013.
\textsuperscript{105} Dinakaran, Tamil Daily, Nagercoil, 9\textsuperscript{th} March 2013.
\end{flushright}
**VISHNU TEMPLES**

It is a matter of fact that Hinduism penetrated the society in Kanyakumari district from 10th century A.D. So a number of Shiva, Vishnu and Amman temples emerged in this soil. During the region of the Pandyas, the Nayaks and the Travancore kings, a number of Vishnu temples were built on various occasions.

Thanks to the Travancore kings who were staunch Vaishnavites, temples at Thiruvattar, Thovalai, Krishnankoil, and Thippiramalai, Padmanabhapuram, Thiruppathisaram and Parakkai got royal patronage and on various occasions, additions and modifications were done there.

Among the Vishnu temples, the Thiruvattar Adikesava perumal temple and Thiruppathisaram Thiruvazhimarban temple have been listed in the 108 Divya *shetrams* (temples) of Lord Vishnu.

So it is essential to give a vivid picture about the various Vishnu temples of Kanyakumari district. Let us discuss one by one.

**Thippiramalai Krishnan Temple**

Thippiramalai is a small village situated just 2 kms from Karungal town and 30 kms from Nagercoil of Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, South India. We can see a round shaped, conical roofed, tiled shrine of Lord Krishna there. Though it is called as the temple of
Krishna, the deity enshrined within is of Lord Vishnu. It is a 13ft high granite idol of Lord Vishnu in standing posture with *Varadha Hasta*.106

In 2002, a *palipeedam* (altar) is found buried under the earth. The alter when cleared, revealed Tamil inscription in vatteluttu script on all sides of its *Kabodhaham* and three sides on its *Kumuda Padai*. The letters did not undergo any damage. They are deep and clear. There are altogether 35 lines. The text runs like this:

_Hail ! Prosperity when Jupiter is in Vrichiha, from the month of Tulam (of Kollam era) it is agreed to maintain two perpetual lamps to Thirupiraimalai Perunthirukovil Karu Manikkathalwar so engraved already in stone, is now engraved in prahara._

_For that purpose along with the seven buffalos already left with, one more buffalo is added to. With these and with two lands at Perumkundarai, and other Puraiyidams at the river side, east of Dakshina Malai, the puraiyidams decreed by the royal order, two perpetual lamps ought to be maintained by Vikramananukkan and his brothers for the perpetual lamps do this donation. Fourteen nail of ghee should be handed over to on every month on Sangaranthi day (i.e. the first day of Kollam month) by our Veerai Neelarayyan. So authorized by Vikramananukkan and his brothers. His Vargather dedicated the land to Punnadu Swamy Thevar._

If any obstruction happens to this lamp, double the shortage (as penalty) should be given. If any obstruction (for the revenue) from the lands happen twelve Kalanji of gold tax free agreement is made before Puravari Sabha.

1. The deity in the shrine is referred to in the inscription as Thippiramalai Perunthiru Kovil Karumanikathazhvar. At present the place is known as Thippiramalai instead of Thirupiramalai – that too ought to have been Thiru Piran\textsuperscript{107} Malai.

2. In Tamil, Nadu means the fetus in the womb. The inscriptive wording of the name of the God reveals the legend prevalent in the area about the deity.

Devehi, the mother of Krishna was worrying about the feat of the 8\textsuperscript{th} child in her womb at the hands of Kamsa, her brother. Then the Krishna has shown her Viswa Rupa (and hence the 13 ft. high statue) and pacified her (which explains why the idol of Lord Vishnu is referred to as Lord Krishna by the local people. The statue of mother Devahi (1.5 m high) is also found in sitting position at the right hand side of Lord Krishna.

3. The inscription mentions about one Vikramananukkan who might have been a local chieften or ruler of a

\textsuperscript{107} Piran means Lord or God Example : (Kannapiran, Krishnapiran, Shivapiran).
small province. It is said in the inscription "Sathimuhathuppata Puraiedangal Anaithum kondu thiru nanthavilakkirandu Seluthuvathu Vikramananukkanu thambimaru and Vikramanamkkanu thambimarai Erai ozhinja".

4. Hence by ordinance he allows certain lands for the lamps and made the lands tax free. He made one Veerai Neelaryyan responsible for the supply of fourteen nazhi of Ghee on Sanskranthi (first day) of every month of Kollam era. Veerai Neelayyan might have been an army head.

5. Donating buffalos to the temple is a unique news in this area.

6. The astronomical datas are insufficient to fix the date. No mention of Kollam era is in the inscription. But mentioning of the position of Jupiter at the background of constellation and the name of month as thulagnayaru reveals that Kollam era is at the making. The period may be 12th century or 13th century A.D.

Inscriptions of this temple mention the name of the village as Thirupiraimalai. A gigantic standing posture of Lord Krishnan in 13 feet height has been installed in this temple. The inscriptions confirm that the temple belonged to 12th century A.D. The presiding deity is called as Karumanickathalvar.108

108. Personal interview with Mathur Mutt Namudin Subramaniaru, aged 78, on 20.03.2012.
It is a typical Kerala styled temple in which the circular shaped prahara is seen with conic shaped in vimana at the top of sanctum sanctorum.

**Thiruvazhimarban Temple, Thiruppathisaram**

One of the places of interest for the attraction of the tourists in the taluk of Thovalai is Thiruppathisaram. It is on the main road that leads to Aralvaimozhi and is about five kilometers from Nagercoil. It is one of the most famous Vaishnava temples of South India, where hundreds of pilgrims especially Vaishnavites, gather from far and near for worship.

The temple is dedicated to Lord Sri Venkatechalapathi and the place is generally known as 'Second Thiruppathi'. The temple is situated amidst and unbroken a stretch of green wet India exhibiting a panoramic view extending right upto the temple street. Surrounded by high and massive walls of granite stones and by a quaint old village, the temple commands a splendid sight upon which the wistful eye dwells with pleasant avidity and rapturous delight. The southern spurs of the gigantic western ghats rising at a distance like an army of folded ramparts and sending forth their weird peaks above the regions of the clouds, and the fresh and invigorating breeze blowing from the famous Maruthuvamalai of puranic fame refresh the whole locality and adds to its attractiveness.

The temple here is remarkable for its beauty of form and perfection of workmanship. The inner courts, the pillared halls (Mandapas), the sanctum sanctorum and the innumerable columns supporting the massive granite roofs and terraces stand as monumental masterpieces of human ingenuity and achievements in the realm of art and architecture. The polish and the beauty of the embellished works of art, visible everywhere in the temple arrest the attention of any one who enters the temple and the entire appearance of the temple structure sends a mysterious and instinctive thrill and devotion in the minds of all. The temple is also noted for beautiful images of Nammazhvar and Kulasekhara Azhvar, two celebrated Vaishnavite Alwars.\textsuperscript{110}

The main deity worshipped in the temple is Thiruvazhi Marban. Unlike in many other temples in the state the image here is made of sharp pebbles and gravel powdered and mixed together by a peculiar process. The image itself, seated on a high pedestal measures about 9 feet from top to bottom.\textsuperscript{111}

Besides its artistic and architectural importance, the temple is also noted for its ancient inscriptions. One such inscription,

\textsuperscript{111} S.Padmanabhan, \textit{Temples of Kanyakumari District}, Nagercoil, 1970, p.53.
dated in the Kollam year 304 (A.D.1129) engraved on the west base of the second prakara of the temple in Tamil characters informs us that Vilinjam was renamed Rajendra Cholapattinam and continued to be called by that name even at so late a time as the date of the record.  

Among the three, the first one speaks about the donation given by Natesan Chetti of Vizhinyam to Thiruppathisaram temple in A.D.1129

Another inscription engraved on the east-wall of the first prakara of the temple records that on the 27th day of the month of Avani in the Kollam year 789 which was a Friday with Saptami tithi of the amara-paksha and Rohini nakshatra, Sambunarayana Nambi gave 150 fanams for the conduct of the festival on the Thiru Onam day in the month of Avani in the temple. The same individual also gave 50 fanams for feeding two Brahmins in the temple every month (at the rate of one man on every Dwadasi day).

Another record of the Kollam year 961, engraved on a slab of stone built into the floor next to the entrance into the first prakara of the temple, registers the fact that the paving of the floor with stone slabs was accomplished by a private individual, Kuppan Chetti of the village of Pillayarcoil, a hamlet in the Kalkulam taluk.

112. The Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. IV, p.216
113. Ibid.
114. The Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. IV, p.216
Of the festival connected with the temple the Adi Swati celebrations are perhaps the most sacred and important, for it is believed that it was on that day the God appeared before king Kulasekhara Azhvar and took him bodily to heaven. Next in the order of sacredness and importance, is the Vaikunda Ekadasi. But the most pleasant and enjoyable is the one celebrated in the first month of Mesham which lasts for ten days. As the temple is one of the Vaishnava shrines in the state, it is much frequented by ardent and pious tourists.

Adhikesavaperumal Temple, Thiruvattar

Thiruvattar is one of the big villages in Kalkulam taluk. It stands on the banks of the river Thiruvattar amidst of picturesque scenery. It is situated at a distance about 11 kilometers north of Thuckalay on the Nagercoil- Kulasekharam road. It has been described as ‘Valanir Vattaru’ by poet Mankudikizhar in verse 396 of Purananuru. This place is described by Nammazhvar as ‘Valamikka Varraru’117. It is one of the 108 sacred places for Vaishnavites.118

115. S. Padmabhan, op.cit, pp.58-59
117. Welcome to Kanyakumari, Tourist Traffic Advisory Committee, Kanyakumari District, 1980, p.2
118. Census of India, 1981, p.15
Thiruvattar is a beautiful healthy village in Kalkulam taluk, Kanyakumari District, with an area of 6.06 square miles.\textsuperscript{119} It is situated at a bend of Tambraparani river.\textsuperscript{120} It is about fifty kilometers south of Trivandum.\textsuperscript{121} Originally known as 'Aathi Anantapuram' or the ancient city of Ananta, it became famous later on as 'Thiruvattar'. This name came from the presence of abundance of water in the form of a swift moving river 'vattar', (river of perennial waters). By virtue of the fact, that it flowed around the Sree Adikesava perumal temple, it gained for itself the honorific prefix 'vattar', a less popular version too prevails.\textsuperscript{122} It substitutes 'Thiru' with 'vattar', the curved river as it flows encircling the temple. It is one of the thirteen Divyadesam places sacred to the Vaishavites.\textsuperscript{123}

Thiruvattar is noted for its temple dedicated to Adikesava Perumal, which is one of the oldest in South India. One of the Travancore kings Adithyanvarma has composed ten verses in Sanskrit called \textit{Avatharana Dasakam} in praise of the \textit{God Kesava} of Thiruvattar. The temple faces the west.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} P.W.D. File No. 316, year 1914, Reports on the condition of the Major Devaswom buildings in the Kalkulam taluk.
\item \textsuperscript{120} P.W.D. File No. 316, year 1914, Reports on the condition of the Major Devaswom buildings in the Kalkulam taluk.
\item \textsuperscript{121} M. Gopala Krishnan, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 1218.
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{itemize}
The Adikesava Perumal temple at Thiruvattar is considered to be of equal sanctity as that of Padmanabhaswamy temple, Thiruvananthapuram. The God Adikesava is stated to have taken his rest at Thiruvattar after having killed an Asura.\textsuperscript{124} According to tradition the daily due is believed to have been worshipped by Chandran and Parasurama. The temple can claim to have a considerable antiquity. The Vaishnavite saint \textit{Nammalavar} has enlogised the sanctity of the temple in his \textit{Thiruvaimozhi}. From all these it may be informed that the temple at Thiruvattar has been in existence for more than eleven hundred years.\textsuperscript{125} From an inscriptional record in the temple it is seen that the present shrine dates from the 12\textsuperscript{th} century.

The deity Adikesava Perumal, found in the Sreecoil, is in a Ananthasayanam posture sleeping and facing westwards. The image in the central shrine is a \textit{Sayanamoorthy} stretched out on his commodious serpent bed and bears a close resemblance to the deity in the Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Thiruvananthapuram. There are wood carvings all round the temple. The \textit{Ottakkal mandapa} is smooth and slippery. There is another sreecoil dedicated to Krishna and located on the northwestern side of the above sreecoil. This consists of Garpagraha and an Ardha mandapa with a small prakara round it.

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\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Ibid.}, p.601.
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There are *vilakku madams* round this temple. The sreecoil consists of a *Garpagraha* having three door ways and a *Maliga* and of an *Ottakkal mandapa* in front, and is built in granite and provided with a copper sheeted roof.

In front of the first sreecoil is a Muha mandapa having a granite basement and a copper sheet roof. There is an ornamental wooden ceiling, and also ornamental wooden pillars covered with brass sheets. There is a *Thirumuttam* paved with granite. There is a *Nalambalam*, built in granite and terraced. There is an *Azhi Madam* all round the Nalambalam. On the southern side of the Ambalam is the Sasthan Coil having a sreecoil and a Muha mandapa.¹²⁶ This has a tiled roof. There is a *Balikalpura* on the western side of the Ambalam. This is built in granite and terraced. There is a Sree Balipura all round having a terraced granite roof.

The massive dining halls and offices are situated in the open courtyards outside the *Sivelippura*. Six hundred and thirty kilograms of rice used to be cooked daily; today the quantum has shrunk to three and three fourth of that in the wake of fundamental changes and drastic economic measures.¹²⁷ A solitary *Deepalakshmi*

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¹²⁷ P.W.D. file No.316, 1914 (Reports on the condition of the Major Devasom buildings in the Kalkulam Taluk).
stands in the inner open courtyard, perhaps dreaming of past grandeur.

There is a lofty compound wall in granite. Attached to the wall are several outbuildings, such as Kalavarapura, Ulsavamadappalli on the southern side, Chottupura and Ootupura on the northern sides, Maligai and Gopura on the eastern side and Gopura alone on the western side. Of these Ulsavamadapalli, Kalavarapura and Chottupura have a Dutch tiled roof.

The Thiruvattar temple possesses twenty two inscriptions in Tamil, Tamil Vatteluttu and Sanskrit Nagari script relating to Chola and Chera royalty. While the earliest discovered is a Chola inscription, the rest are related to the Cheras. Some are damaged. These inscription seem to date from the nineth to the sixteenth century A.D. and deal mainly with grants, donations, structural additions and alterations made time and again by many especially by the royal trustees of Travancore.

A Belikkal inscription of A.D. 1582 / 757 M.E. records that "the metal casting of the stone Belikkal in the temple of Adikesava Perumal who is pleased to be in Thiruvattaru was put up by Kuttatti Inccammakutti. The A.D. 1603 / 778 M.E. inscription records that

the wonderful Ottakkal mandapa was put up by king Veera Ravi Ravivarma Kulasekhara. The one dated A.D.1605 /780 M.E. mentions repairs and additions made to the temple by him and his two brothers and their consorts. His younger brother Adithya Varma paved the inner quadrangle with stones while the next brother Ramavarma installed the two metal Dwarapalakas.

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 carrying of exquisite workmanship adorn some of the structures in the temple.

Many are the fine murals that adorn the walls of the Cheruchuttu and the Thiru Ampati shrine of Sree Krishna Bhagavan. Experts on murals like Prof. M.G. Sashibhooshan cite them as top ranking among murals executed by the "Malayala School of Painting". Majority of the paintings around the Cheruchuttu depict epic themes. Secular subjects too are occasionally adopted like a temple procession, parade of women, two worshippers and so on. Krishnaleela, Saraswathi, Narasimha, Gajendramoksha, Deendra, Sakti, Panchakshari, Vishnu on Garuda, Ananthasayana Moorthy, Kali, Shiva etc are portrayed. Those of Hanuman and Sree Rama are outstanding specimens of this art. They reveal a south Kerala style and appear

130. The Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. VII, p. 120
131. R. Vasudeva Poduval, Travancore Inscriptions – A Topographical list., p.93.
dated around the seventeenth century. They are rich in colour and content but their renovation is an imperative need. The murals of the Sree Krishna temple are of greater vintage. Characters like Venugopala, Dakshinamoorthy, Parasurama, Sankaranarayana, Bhadra Kali, Brahma, Ganapathy, Shiva Thandava etc. are some of the paintings on view there. Attention is invited to the rare mural of Shiva as Vishaapaharana Moorthy, swallowing the poison vomited by the serpent Vasuki.

1. Three historic events of interest are on record here. In A.D.1679 /854 M.E., during the rule of Umayamma Rani of Travancore, a Muslim adventurer known as Mukilan accomplished by his band of men entered Travancore territory with an eye on plundering the wealth of the temples. The Rani (queen) sent Kottayam Keralavarma of Malabar to deal with his threat. Keralavarma, who was a great scholar composed what is famous as 'Pata Sankerthana Silkams' or war verses for victory. These stanzes were addressed to Sree Adikesava Perumal to whom he paid homage as he went into battle. Four miles away from Thiruvattar, Keralavarma clashed with Mukilan in armed combat and killed him.¹³²

2. Maharaja Marthandavarma, maker of modern Travancore, reached Sree Adikesava Perumal Temple just before embarking on the

Battle of Colachal in A.D. 1741 with the formidable Dutch forces. He prayed before this deity, who was also his family deity to aid him at war, placed his famous sword before the Idol and received it back from the officiating priest with the blessings of God. The battle concluded in disaster for the Dutch and in triumph for Travancore. The dreams of conquest of the rich land of Travancore entertained by the Dutch thus lay shattered.

3. The third incident revolves round the Nawab of Arcot and is set in A.D. 1740. Chanda Sahib and Baba Sahib, relatives of the Nawab came to the wealthy plains of Nanjilnad during their plundering expeditions, invaded the temple and carried away the Archana Bimba of the Lord and was sent to the Nawab. He kept it locked up in a room. Despite pilling weights on it, to the amazement of all, it would be found stationed on top of everything. Finally to prevent this mysterious happening, he had the idol strongly secured by making a hole in its leg but its supernatural powers could not be controlled. In the meantime the Arcot Nawab developed a severe stomach ache. His Hindu friends advised him to return the sacred idol to its abode without further delay. At once orders were issued by the Nawab for the safe return of the idol and along with it the pain disappeared. Realising his folly and

as an expression of gratitude he sent a gold crown and a gold plate to carry the crown, along with the Archana Moorthy. Both these gold offerings were to accompany the deity daily for the Sivelies. It was festival time in the temple when the idol reached back. The Nawab instituted a special Pooja at his cost during the ten days of the Uthsava.\textsuperscript{135} It is performed to the Uthsava Vikraha on a separate mandapa before replacing it in the sanctum. This pooja continues even to day during the Uthasavas and is well-known as the Thiru Allah Puja.\textsuperscript{136}

Possibly due to its royal colouring and subsequent position in the domain of Travancore, this temple offers a fine blend of Kerala and Tamil styles of architecture. All artistic elaborations required by a great temple are present here. There is masterly utilization of wood and stone along with other building materials in evicting this grand edifice. The outer walls of dressed stone rise ten meters high and are painted with ochre and white vertical bands symbolic of the Vaishnava Namam.\textsuperscript{137} Majestic flights of granite steps lead to the entrances from road level, while stone pathways on three sides reach the Parali river flowing round the temple. Only the northern gateway gives access to

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the main road, while the western one reveals the panoramic view of the village. Lofty gable – type architecture adorns the eastern and western entrances.\textsuperscript{138} Though no full –fledged Gopura exists, the western entrance which is the main one, is double – storied through foundation for many floors has been laid and preliminary work on it including the generously sculptured base has been carried out.\textsuperscript{139}

The spacious \textit{Sivelippura}, is adorned by two hundred and twenty two \textit{Deepalakshmies} hewn out of the granite pillars. One extraordinary aspect is that they vary from pillar to pillar in mode of dress, hair style, features and so on. The copper covered Dwajasthambha rises up beyond the Sivellipura. A Malayalam inscription is engraved at the base of the flag staff. Two gigantic and unidentical Dwarapalakas, are seen at the entrance of the Belikkalura.\textsuperscript{140}

The Belikkalpura is multipillared and in Nayak style. Its outer structure is at total variance with its counterparts in south India due to the construction of its copper tiled double roof. Many fine sculptures carved out of granite pillars reveal a wonderful world of celestial beauty. They include highly rated sculptures of dancing Kali, Indrajit, Venugopala, Kirata, Ruthra Tandava of Nataraja, Sree Rama -

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\textsuperscript{138} Aswathi Thirunal, Gowri Lakshmi Bai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.71. \\
\textsuperscript{139} P.W.D. File. No. 316, 1914. \\
\textsuperscript{140} Aswathi Tirunal, Gowri Lakshmi Bai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.71.
\end{flushright}
Lekshmi- Hanuman, Vettakkaran, an unusual panel of a cow being suckled by a lioness and figures of the saint king Kulasekhara Azhvar as well as other Chera royalty. The subsidiary figures are also mainly rated high with the figure of an Apsaras. Standing on the side of handsome Indrajit, flower garland in land, ready to wed him, being given top quality. She is cited as possessing such excellence that the master craftsman himself has taken out the left eye ball from it to prevent perfection.

All over the temple, stone, wood and stucco have lent themselves to the art of expect craftsmanship. The main western double doorway gaining entry into the Chuttambalam is out of the ordinary as on the second panel of one door, instead of the lotus, is an Ananthashayana and on the other door, in the same manner a Gopastre Vastrakshepa is presented. The rest of the panels carry the traditional wooden lotuses. The Edanzhi in the Chuttambalam ends in the inner granite pad quadrangle, beautiful and big sculpted stone figures of Rethi and Kamadeva face each other on the raised platform on either side.

The temple completely contains a total of five Mandapas, some without the second enclosure. They include the Mandapa where

141. Celestial maiden.
142. Central Corridor
144. Ibid.
the temple council said to the operative as "Kothanalloor Sabha", from Kotha Udaya Marthandavarman's reign used to meet in session, and from where Kerala temple arts were performed, one where Thiru Allah Pooja is conducted and so on.\textsuperscript{145} Many of these Mandapas are replete with exquisite wooden carvings which are the gift of the Travancore craftsmen to the temple art of this state. Birds, animals, flowers, leaves and designs all dear to the Malayalee artisans and of course celestials and their play are all on display. Scenes from the puranas like churning the ocean of milk are worked in detail. The Namaskara mandapa of the temple named after the prince of Travancore Udaya Marthandavarman Thiruvati, who had built it is elaborately carved.\textsuperscript{146} It is cited as a remarkable example of Kerala carving. The pillars are also excellent specimens of the same. Inviting attention in the wooden ceiling of the mandapa where among the other carvings, Sree Vinayaga and his marriage procession are entrancingly executed.

The sacred texts hold forth that for the concentrated sanctity of the temple, proper conduct of poojas, festivals and other rituals are imperative. Thiruvattar followed an elaborate system of worship on the same lines as exists in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple, Thiruvananthapuram. The ancient institutions of the Kutta Nambies who were nominated by the Maharaja of Travancore and the

\textsuperscript{145} The Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol.VII, p.120.
\textsuperscript{146} Aswathi Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.71.
Pushpanjali Swamiyars of Thrissur Naduvil Madam (Mutt) and Munchira Madam (Mutt) who were common to both temples in rotation, played a vital role here. They are currently operational in the fullest sense perhaps only in the Sree Padmanabha Swamy temple. In the wake of many changes, for some time now they have ceased to be functional in Thiruvattar. It is heard that action is being initiated for at least a partial restoration of their services.

The Ramaswamy temple is situated in the north-western corner of the Padmanabhapuram fort. There is no inscription in the temple. According to local tradition it is believed to have been consecrated by His Highness Marthandavarma, the Maharaja of Travancore. It is famous for the carving of the Ramayana story in 45 wooden panels. The image of the presiding deity was originally kept in the temple at Thiruvithancode near Thuckalay town from which the state of Travancore took its name and also happened to be the first capital of Venad.

149. Ibid.
In A.D. 1680 an Islamic free booter popularly called Mukilan plundered and destroyed the temple after removing the image of Sree Rama. But during the reign of Maharaja Marthandavarma the image was taken out and reenshrined in Padmanabhapuram, the then capital of Venad.151

The temple of Ramaswamy is facing situated in the eastern direction. There is a small pond (tank) infront of the temple. It has a wooden roof covered with tiled square shaped inner shrine with a pyramidal vimana, the Namaskara Manadapa in front of the sanctum sanctorum, the quadrangular inner Prakara and a small hall infront of the inner temple containing a balipeeda.152

The presiding deity Sri Rama is a very imposing figure. This image of Sri Rama with five feet in height, is carved out of granite. The image of Sita on the left side of Rama and Lakshman with Anjaneya on the right side are made of Panchaloha (five metals).153 The right hand of the presiding deity has been covered with gold. The temple has two Prakaras; in the other side of which is the shrine of Vinayaka. The Dhwajasthambha of this temple is one of the highest flag staffs among the temples of Tamil Nadu.154

151. S.N. Chitra, op.cit., pp. 70-75.
The complete story of the Ramayana is depicted thematically around the exterior portion of the outer Prakara in 45 wooden panels. Around the outer Prakara, there are nearly 4000 Paavai vilakkus (metallic lamps), the illumination of which is very attractive and they are all the characteristic features of Kerala style.

**Ramasamy Temple, Padmanabhapuram**

The impressive feature of the Ramaswamy temple at Padmanabhapuram is its pictorial carvings which can be considered as one of the best specimens of this kind in the whole of India. The wooden Ratha and wooden sculptures are made of teak wood which speak about the artistic skill of the artisans.

The right hand of the presiding deity has been covered with gold. The flagstaff (Dwajasthamba) of this temple is the highest one in Kanyakumari district.

**Mathusoothana Perumal Temple, Parakkai**

It is one of the most ancient and important Vaishnava temples of Kanyakumari District. It has been referred in the early literature of Travancore.

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156. Daily thanthi, Tamil daily, Nagercoil 10\(^{th}\) March 2009.
Due to the old inscription found in this temple belonged to 10th century A.D., we can come to the conclusion that this temple might have been constructed during that period.158

The temple occupies an area of 62.5 cents. There are two Prakaras (corridors) and gigantic compound wall with 20 feet high are the important additions to the glory of this temple.159

From the entrance we can see two small mandapas and a big Muha mandapa is also there. An eight pillared mandapa locally called as Vadasery mandapa situated next to Muha mandapa is utilized for cultural programmes.160

In the sanctum sanctorum the presiding deity is there with 9 feet high. The wall in the south west corner is called as Karuda Mukku in local parlance.161

The Dwajasthamba of this temple is very popular and unique one in Kanyakumari District because it has been made in gold. We can't see any Golden Dwajasthamba in this district. The Maharaja

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159. Personal interview with Mr. A. Kumaresan, aged 57, Parakkai on 20.06.2012.


of Travancore Sri Chitrai Thirunal, had liberally donated for the erection of the Karudazhvar statue in standing posture.

An Artha mandapa is also there infront of sanctum sanctorum. A holy tank or pond (Theppakulam) is there infront of the which has an area equal with the total temple complex.162

**Venkatachalapathy Temple, Azhagiapandiapuram**

It is believed that the Venkatachalapathy temple at Azhagiapandiapuram belonged to 11th century A.D. An inscription within the temple says that the name of the village was *Nanchi Nattathianurana Azhagiapandiapuram* and the presiding deity of the temple is called as *Emperuman* and *Pavithiramanicka Vinyahaperuman*.163 Significantly the same inscription mentions that the *Nagarathars* (mercantile community) donated grants to the temple.164

**MURUGAN Temples**

Kanyakumari District is also famous due to its popular Murugan temples. They are situated at Kumarakoil, Vellimalai, __________

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163. Personal interview with Mr.A. Satheesh, aged 54, Melsanthis, Boothalingaswamy temple, Boothapandy on 12.02.2012.
164. Nagarathars - People who are living in the Chettinad region is in and around Karaikudi region. They were very popular due to their money lending business.
Marungoor, Thovalai and Chiramadam. All these temples have a hoary past due to their construction approximately 200 years to 500 years back.

**Kumarakovil Murugan Temple**

Kumarakovil is a place which is noted for its religious significance attached with its famous Murugan temple. It is a village situated at the foot of the Velimalai in Kalkulam taluk about three kilometres north east of Thuckalay town.\(^{165}\)

Velimalai is supposed to be considered as the abode of Lord Murug. This temple has greater antiquity and there are references about the place in the early Sangam works. *Nakkirar*, a great Sangam poet had mentioned *Thiruveragam* as fourth among the six abodes of Muruga. *Elango Adigal*, the author of *Silapathikaram* also made references about this place.\(^{166}\)

Velimalai is a name which denotes the significance of the place which literary means marriage hall. The appearance of the landscape from the top of the temple hill enchanting by all means scenery is extremely beautiful. The systematically planned streets of Kumarakovil added additional glamour to its natural beauty. The

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165. S. Gopalakrishnan, *op.cit.*, pp. 110-120.
166. U.V. Swamynathaiyar, *Silappathikaram* (Tamil), Published by him, Madras, 1938, pp. 450-460.
Rathaveethi (car street) running around the temple to the village is of considerable width. The temple cars are drawn through this street on the festival occasions.

There is a holy pond in the foot of the Veli hill. A Vinayaga temple is also there. We can reach the Murugan temple through 38 steps. The temple is a typical example of Chera architecture. The gigantic Murugan statue is 8 feet 8 lings height. A *Kanchipuram*\(^{167}\) built by the Travancore kings is also there in front of the temple.

An inscription dated A.D. 1733 of this temple mentions the land donation given by Rajaraja Thennathu Kadiappattinathu Senbaharaman to this temple. Another inscription discovered at Devakulam Vinayaga temple mentions about the corpus money sanctioned for the *Thirukkalyanam* (sacred marriage) at Velimalai Murugan temple. The Valli\(^{168}\) marriage celebrations of this temple attract thousands of pilgrims from Kerala and south Tamil Nadu. The *Kuravar Padukalam* (Fall of Kuravas) incident is an important event on that occasion.

The actual period in which the temple was built as per tradition, it goes well beyond the Christian era. But the physical structure would have been exposed to renovation during different stages of its lengthy evolution.

\(^{167}\) Kanchipuram - free feeding centre meant for non-Brahmins.

\(^{168}\) Kanyakumari Inscriptions, Vol.IV, No.1969/19, Valli-Divine wife of Lord Muruga.
The Subramania temple is constructed in the west-east direction. The temple has small sannathis (shrines) like Kalyana Ganapathy temple, Veerabhagu temple, Kasilinga Swamy temple, Shiva temple, Bhoothanatha temple, Athmalinga shrine, Chandikesvara shrine, etc. In this temple the following festivals are important.\(^{169}\)

(i) Thirukalyanam (Holy marriage), (ii) Pushpabhishekam

(iii) Skanthasasti, (iv) Thirukkarthihai, (v) Vijayadasami etc.

In this temple Goddess Valli and Subramanya are the presiding deities. The elevation at which the temple stands is really a matter of attraction to the visitors.

**Vellimalai Murugan Temple**

Vellimalai is a tiny village situated 3 kms from Kadiapattinam, a coastal village and it has a distance of 15 kms from Nagercoil. The height of the hill is 200 feet.

It is believed that the origin of Vellimalai Murugan temple popularly called as Balasubramanian temple is beyond time immemorial. A *Saint Viswanatha Swamigal* had stayed in that holy place. He prayed to God for adequate water. With the God’s blessings, a small well with beautiful water has been unearthed and even now it supplies plenty of water to the temple.

\(^{169}\) Personal interview with Mr. Murugesan, aged 55, Srikariam, Kumarakovil Devasthanam, on 15.8.2012.
The temple is situated in the top of the hill and we can reach the temple through 100 steps. A celebrated Vivekanda Ashramam adds importance to this village.

The Ashramam was named after Swami Vivekananda, notable preacher of Hindu philosophy. It was founded by Mathura Nayagam, an engineering graduate who was later called as Swami Ambaananthar in 1939. It became popular because of Swami Mathurananthaji.170

**Thovalai Murugan Temple**

Thovalai is a familiar village situated 8 kms from Nagercoil in the Nagercoil – Tirunelveli Trunk Road. It is famous for its flower market since time immemorial. For the past so many centuries flowers from Thovalai were supplied to Thiruvananthapuram Padmanabhasamy temple as well as the palace of the Travancore kings.171

The existence of Kanchipura and Ottuppura in this village added feather to the popularity of it. There are two Murugan temples situated at Thovalai. One is situated on the small hillock called

170. Personal interview with Prof. M. Padmanabha Pillai, aged 70, Rtd. Principal, aged 70, Siramadam dated 10.04.2012.
Thirumalai and another one on the Siddarmalai locally called as Chekkadimalai.¹⁷²

The Murugan temple at Chekkadimalai is so popular due to its connection with the Pandya royal family. It is said that this hillock was once closely associated with siddhars and one Lada Charmiyar supposed to be a siddhar stayed there and attained salvation there. A beautiful but small Murugan temple was built and the sanctum sanctorum is in a big cave and the length of it is not known. It is said that it was a tunnel and at present it was closed. Tradition says that there was a female siddhar who lived there, maintained a garden, utilized the two natural wells (Chunai) and hundreds of domestic animals were her possession and because of her influence the later Pandyas built the temple, two beautifully decorated temple vahanas (horse, peacock) were made for it.

An inscription engraved in the southern side of the small hillock mentions the village as Ethirvilli Cholapuram and the presiding deity is called as Thirumalai Anavar Pathikatha Nayinar. Kavimani Desigavinayagam Pillai, a celebrated Tamil scholar ridiculed the Kanchipura at Thovalai due to the lazyness of the common people.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Chekkadimalai – Originally called on Siddarmalai means place of residence of Siddhars.
¹⁷³ Personal interview with Dr.S. Subramania Pillai, Principal, Thovalai on 08.08.2012.
AMMAN TEMPLES

Kanyakumari, the smallest district in Tamil Nadu is protected by Mother Goddess under different names at the different corners of the district. She is Devi Kanyakumari in the Land's end of India, Bhagavathi in Mandaikadu, Kaali in Kollenkodu, Esakki in Muppandal, Meenakshi in Aralvaimozhi, Kamakshi in Vadasery, Bhuvaneswari in Ozhuginasery, Anandavalli in Padmanabhapuram, Shivakami in Boothapandy, Badreswari in Kottalumoodu and Aramvalartha Amman in Suchindrum, besides being in the name of Mother Goddess, this district is also considered to be Her abode.

Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Kanyakumari

Kanyakumari itself is a small town located 85 kms. from Tirunelveli, 86 kms. from Trivandrum and 19 kms. from Nagercoil. The total area of this town is 2.5 square kilometers and is located at a latitude of $8^\circ44'$ North and longitude of $77^\circ33'$ East. It was well known for the ancient people. It was called Komaria Akron, Cape Komaria by Ptolemy and Kumaria by the anonymous author of Periplus of the Erthirean Sea. The natives call it as Kanyakumari.

By its geographical location Kanyakumari occupies an unique place among the tourist centres in India. Kanyakumari, the popular pilgrim centre, has the proud distinction of being the land’s end and the pleasant confluence of the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. A temple dedicated to the virgin
Goddess Kanyakumari, an imposing memorial to Swami Vivekananda on a mid-sea rock, a majestic 133 ft Thiruvalluvar statue, Kamaraj Memorial, Bay Watch theme park, a magnificent view of the sunrise, sunset and moonrise attract thousands of tourists every day. A dip in the confluence of the three seas is considered a holy one. Kanyakumari is the only resort in which one can witness, the unique spectacle of sunrise and sunset. Though the sunrise can be viewed round the year, sunset is visible only from October 15 to March 15, the five-months period covering the later part of Dakshinayan and the early part of Utharayan. Apart from the above mentioned tourist spots the Roman Catholic Church and the Light House also attract the tourists.

From the very ancient days temples have played an important role in the life of the people. A study of temples help us to know about the services rendered by temples for the development of fine arts, social life of the people, history of the land etc.

On the southern corner of Kanyakumari town where the three seas namely Arabian sea, Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal meets. The temple of Kumari Amman is situated there.\textsuperscript{174} This temple is dedicated to the \textit{Goddess Bhagavathi}, also known as \textit{Kanyakumari}. \textit{Kanni} means \textit{virgin} and \textit{kumari} denotes a particular stage of a women.\textsuperscript{175} The Goddess in this temple is a virgin that is why she is


\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 591.
called Kanyakumari. There are a number of legends speak why she became virgin.

The Goddess Kanyakumari is being worshipped from very early days even before the birth of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{176} The \textit{Sthalapurana} speaks of Parasurama who raised a temple for Goddess Sakthi and worshipped her.\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Periplus of the Erithrean Sea}, an ancient travel document of first century A.D. also speaks about the Goddess of Kanyakumari.\textsuperscript{178} The worship of the virgin Goddess Kumari Amman is referred in the \textit{Silapatikaram} and \textit{Manimekalai} also.\textsuperscript{179} The \textit{Mahabharatha} mentions of the pilgrimage of Balabhadra to the Kumari Amman temple. The \textit{Bharatha Purana} contains an account about the Arjuna’s pilgrimage to this temple.\textsuperscript{180} It is evidence that there must have been a permanent temple for the Goddess Kanyakumari in between 6\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. and 3\textsuperscript{rd} century A.D. But there is no historic evidence to find out the structure of this temple

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[177.] K. Parameswaran Pillai, \textit{Kanyamariyan Chuttukshethrangalum} (Malayalam), Trivandrum, 1969, p. 62.
\item[178.] S. Nadarajan, \textit{Mandaikattamman Varalaru} (Tamil), Kattathurai, 1987, p. 11.
\item[179.] S. Raja Ganapathy, \textit{Vithi} (Deivika Matha Ethal) (Tamil), Madras, 1996, p. 2.
\item[180.] The Tamil Month Masi comes in March- April.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
during this period. Mortar was used as material for the construction of
this temple at Kanyakumari in between A.D. 765 to A.D. 815
The Imperial Cholas replaced the mortar and used stone for the
construction of this temple.181 During the reign of Raja Raja, the
Great, the structure of this temple was simplified by renovation.

At present this temple is situated on a spacious
rectangular ground on the very fore-shore is walled off on all sides.
There are three *prakaras* in the temple. The image of Kanni
Bhagavathy facing east is a fine piece of marvelous sculptural skill.
She stands with a garland in her right hand and the left hand is placed
on her thigh. The life-like image of Bhagavathy with a smiling face is a
combination of innocence, purity and beauty.

There is a Mani mandapa in front of the sanctum
sanctorum which is supported by six inscribed cylindrical pillars. The
Saba mandapa is located in front of the Mani mandapa.182 To the north
of the Garpagraha is the shrine of Thyagasundari, the playmate of the
Goddess Kanyakumari. On the northern side of the Sribali prakara is
the shrine of Balasundari, another playmate of the Goddess. In the
south-western corner of the inner prakara there is a shrine containing
the image of Vinayaka and Surya Bhagavan (Sun).

Nagercoil, 1989, pp. 30-36.
The eastern gate of the temple facing the Bay of Bengal is always kept closed except five times in a year. There is a belief that the sparkling rays from the gem on the nose ring of Goddess Kanyakumari dazzled and blinded the eyes of the mariners and thus led to shipwreck. To prevent this catastrophe the doors are said to be kept closed.  

According to one tradition the original temple dedicated to Kumari Bhagavathy was in the rock which was known as "Sri Padaparai" nearly 600 feet from the shore. Consequently due to the encroachment of the sea the rock became an island and the old temple had to be shifted to the present site.

Before independence this temple was administered and patronized by various rulers belonged to various dynasties. It is understand from the inscriptions found in this temple. For instance a inscription was engraved on the eastern wall of the first prakara of this temple. It belongs to the ninth year of the reign of Parantaka Pandya. It deals about dedication of the Purattayanadu to the Goddess by this king for the purpose of feeding all those who attend her grand festival

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held actually in the Tamil month of Tai.\textsuperscript{185} Apart from the rulers, the public also patronized and gave large endowments to this temple. For instance, an inscription in Tamil was engraved on the western wall of second prakara of this temple states that Maniyan Govindan, a merchant of Kollam (Quilon in Kerala) supplied the ghee necessary for maintaining a sacred lamp in the sanctum of the Goddess. He also gave a zinc lamp with an image of peacock to this temple in A.D.\textsuperscript{1201}\textsuperscript{186}

From the inscription found in this temple we learn that the Goddess Kumari Bhagavathy was in fact worshipped as the family deity of the Pandyas.\textsuperscript{187}

The Kumari Amman temple is functioning as a promoter of fine arts-architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, drama and literature. The idol of the Devi in the sanctum sanctorum is the most beautiful sculpture found in the temple. The \textit{yali} sculptures in the Tatti mandapa, Muha mandapa and Kanniyambalam are examples for sculptures. The paintings in the Navaratri mandapa seem to be an art gallery, which depict various aspects of Devi Kanyakumari.\textsuperscript{188} The paintings of Mahisasuramarthini on the eastern wall of the Navaratri Mandapa is one of the beautiful paintings in the temple.

\textsuperscript{185} M. Rajagopalan, \textit{Amman Dharisanam} (Tamil), Madras, 1993, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{188} K. Parameswaran Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 9.
Before independence this temple was administered by various rulers belonged to various dynasties. During the reign of Sree Moolam Thirunal (A.D.1885-1924) the king of Travancore, a separate Department of ‘Devasvams’ was established in A.D. 1922 and the temple came under its control.\textsuperscript{189} Now this temple is under the control of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board of the Government of Tamil Nadu.

Regarding the Bhagavathi Amman temple at Kanyakumari, the main entrance is through the northern gate, while the deity is facing the east. The eastern gate is always kept closed, except on special occasions when the festival deity is taken out for the ceremonial bath.\textsuperscript{190}

The Devi stands as a charming young girl in her penance with rosary in her right hand, and speaking nose jewel that shed lustrous radiance. The image made of blue stone, is believed to have been installed by sage Parasurama.\textsuperscript{191}

The Navarathri festival is conducted during September - October to commemorate the Banasura incident. The deity is taken out in a procession from the temple to Mahadanapuram, 4 km., north of Kanyakumari. The Parivettai, performed by the priests on the occasion, is a re-enactment of the Goddess - Banasura battle.

\textsuperscript{189} K. Parameswaran Pillai, \textit{op.cit.}, p.10.
\textsuperscript{190} \textit{Ibid.}, p.15.
\textsuperscript{191} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 19-20.
The above said temples and host of others stand to confirm the common prevalence of *Amman* worship in the district. All the communal and regional groups are involved in the Amman worship.\(^{192}\) It is worthy to see that the Amman is worshipped as a chief Goddess. The Amman temples at Mandaikadu, Valvachagoshtam, Melancode, Kanyakumari, Koottalumoodu and their annual festivals stand to promote the significance of Amman worship.\(^{193}\)

The place has been associated with great men like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in whose names memorials have been built there. Mahatma Gandhi first visited Kanyakumari in January 1925.\(^{194}\) In 1948 Gandhiji was assassinated and his ashes were immersed in the sea waters in Kanyakumari. In commemoration of the event, a beautiful monument has been constructed here. Its central shape is 77 feet high representing the age of the Mahatma at the time of his death.\(^{195}\) The Gandhi mandapa is built in such a way that the golden rays of the sun at mid-day on 2\(^{nd}\) October every year would fall on the *peedam* (platform) through a hole in the roof.\(^{196}\)


\(^{193}\) G. Krishnaswamy, *op.cit.*, p. 94.


\(^{196}\) *The South India Tourist Guide Book*, Swamy Publications, Tirunelveli, 1988,p.120.
Bhagavathi Amman Temple, Mandaikadu

Mandaikadu is one of the most sacred centres of pilgrimage got its name from the virgin Goddess Bhagavathi to whom the ancient and reputed temple in the place is dedicated.

The origin of the temple is in mystery. No inscription is found in this temple to know the exact date of the establishment of the temple. It is believed that this temple has its origin during the time of king Cheraman Perumal in 9th century A.D.

Mandaikadu is a hamlet of Lekshnipuram village in Kal-kulam taluk and it lies on the sea-coast, north-east of Colachel port. It is connected with Nagercoil and Thiruvananthapuram by motorable road. This place is famous for its temple dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathi. It dates back to the 7th century B.C. The Amman is in the form of 'ant-hill' about 12 feet height and believed to be growing gradually.\(^{197}\) The annual festival called \textit{Mandaikadu Kodai} is celebrated in February - March for 10 days which is the star attraction of this place.\(^{198}\)

This temple though small, attracts large number of people from all over the district besides a regular flow of pilgrims from Kerala State.\(^{199}\) Tradition says that years ago three men from Quilon

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came to the south on some business. They missed their way and wandered about and finally reached the temple at the night thinking it to be a hut of a villager. In that hut they received food from an old woman. When they woke up in the next morning they were surprised to see a temple instead of a hut and realized that the old woman who gave them food and shelter was none other than Goddess Bhagavathi.200

There were several interesting stories regarding the origin of this temple. The chief among them is that one day a boy who was looking after the cattle, cut the grass. Surprisingly he saw blood oozing out of an ant-hill. Having afraid of this, the boy informed this to the villagers who on arrival threw some mud, on the place from where the blood came.201

This grew into a bigger ant-hill. Thereafter, the people of the locality constructed a temple around this ant-hill. This temple is called "Mandaikadu Amman temple", after the place. In the beginning, there was no bar on people professing other religions to worship the Goddess. It is believed that the sick are cured if they worship this goddess.202
Poojas held on Tuesdays and Fridays are very important. Lot of devotees visit the temple on these days. Full-moon day of every month is another important day. Every year, grand festival called Mandaikadu Kodai is celebrated in the Tamil month of Mas\textsuperscript{203} for 10 days. The last Tuesday of the festival is very important. "Valia Padukkai Vizha\textsuperscript{204}" is one of the noteworthy functions during this festival. Salt, pepper, wooden toys, silk clothes, black bangles, and the things obtained from the first harvest are some of the offerings made to this deity. Next to the Masi festival, the Adi festival and the special poojas in the month of Karthihai are considered very important. For the Masi festival, people gather in thousands.\textsuperscript{205}

**Mahishasuramartini Temple, Valvachagoshtam**

This temple belonged to 13\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. The presiding deity is locally called as Mahishasuramartini. Next to the sanctum sanctorum, a single stoned Muha mandapa was constructed by Thiruvikkiraman of Mullaimangalam in A.D.1622. This Muha mandapa has large number of sculptures. Eight pillars are there in this mandapa which have number of sculptures.

\textsuperscript{203} Padmnabhan, S., *Temples in Kanyakumari District*, Nagercoil, 1970, p.3
\textsuperscript{205} P. Shungunny Menon, *History of Travancore from the Earliest Times*, New Delhi, 1878, p.11.
Another Amman temple in the name of Mahishasuramartini is also found in the village of Valvachagoshtam. Valvachagoshtam is situated about 2 km from Kattathurai on the Nagercoil-Thiruvananthapuram road. The name of this place is connected with the legend of "Parasurama". According to this legend, Kerala (the land between Gokarna and Kanyakumari) was recovered by Parasurama from the sea and was known as Parasurama Kshethram (the land of Parasurama). Parasurama, who had killed his mother Renuka to satisfy the wishes of his father Jamathagni. Then he wanted his son to be washed off for which he sought the advice of the learned Brahmins who suggested that he should quit the territory and do penance in Himalayas in order to save his soul from the perdition.

Accordingly, he started for the Himalayas but left his parasu (axe) at the place which later on came to be known as Parasuvakkal (in the Neyyatinkara taluk of the Kerala State). Similarly, he left his sword in a village which was later called Valvachagoshtam (Goshtam means temple). Later, a Chera king is said to have constructed a big temple at this place and dedicated to the Goddess Bhagavathi whose sword is supposed to be that of Parasurama.

This temple as patronized by the Chera king is of great antiquity and is held in very high esteem. The Perumal kings of ancient

207. Ibid.
208. Lena Tamil Vanan, op.cit., p.67.
Travancore visited this temple for worship before their coronation. The Goddess of the temple is in the form of Mahishasuramardini.\textsuperscript{209} The important annual festival is held in Vaikasi (May - June) and attended by a large number of people from all parts of the district. Unlike this, the one at Kanyakumari is more popular.

**Aypratti Amman Temple, Kurandi**

It is lying at Kurandi, a small village situated near Therur, at a distance of 8 kms from Nagercoil town. A temple dedicated to Aypratti Amman is there which is in a dilapidated condition. It comes under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{210}

As per traditions it is believed that this temple might have been constructed in the 14\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D. The people of this village were typically migrators from northern Tamil Nadu. It is said that their forefathers migrated from Cuddalore region nearly 600 years back and immediately after their settlement they constructed this Aypratti Amman temple along with Ujjaini Mahali Amman temple.\textsuperscript{211} Large number of landed properties have been denoted by the villagers to

\textsuperscript{209} Interview with K. Chonachallam Pillai, C., aged 55, Sreekariyam Kanyakumari Amman Temple, dated 18\textsuperscript{th} April 2012.


these temples. At present Aypratti Amman temple possessed 10 acres of land around it.\textsuperscript{212}

**Saraswathi Amman Temple, Padmanabhapuram**

The sovereigns of Travancore have always been men of deep piety. The dedication of the state to Sri Padmanabha by Maharaja Marthandavarma, the maker of modern Travancore, more than two hundred and fifty years ago is a landmark in the political as well as the religious history of the state. The sovereigns of Travancore founded many temples in the state and the Saraswathi temple at Padmanabhapuram is one among them.\textsuperscript{213}

A brief insight into the background seems to be necessary inorder to understand this temple’s special character. In the ninth century A.D *Kamban* the famed sage-poet wrote the great epic ‘Ramayana’ in Tamil comprising ten thousand and odd verses, well-known as the ‘Kamba Ramayanan’.\textsuperscript{214} According to tradition that he had an idol of Goddess Saraswathi made to which he rendered special worship in his personal ‘Pooja’ as source of inspiration for this monumental work. When time passed, he felt that the day was near at hand for him to relinquish his mortal coil, Kamban resolved to entrust this price-less idol to some person worthy of preserving it for

\textsuperscript{212} Sadasivam, S., *op.cit.*, p.154.

\textsuperscript{213} Aswathi Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bai, *op.cit.*, pp.70-74

\textsuperscript{214} *Ibid.*
prosperity. His choice fell on the then Kulasekhara perumal (King) of Malayalam Nadu (ancestor of the Travancore Royal Family) to whom he entrusted this treasure. From then onwards it remained in this family despite changed in its dynastic nomenclature.

The idol displays excellent proportions and is a combination of five metals known as ‘Panchaloha’. She is in sitting posture and has four arms holding the ‘Sankhu’ (conch) ‘Pushpa’ (resembling the sun flower) Grantha (palm-leaf scroll) and with the left lower hand in ‘Abhaya-Mudra’ (symbol of refuge). Two small idols are seated at par with her on either side and are Sree Narasimha Moorthy and Sree Veda Vyasa Maharishi. Their antecedents are obscure. All of them face the east. When the capital city was shifted from Padmanabhapuram to Trivandrum, it is the practice of the Travancore kings to take the Saraswathy idol to Thiruvanthapuram during the Navaratri celebrations. Even now the practice is followed with colourful celebrations.

Granite ‘Deepalakshmiies’ are stationed outside the temple. To the right of the sanctum and a little remote from it a couple of steps lead upto unadorned temple opening to the west. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva of side the temple walls but close by a Ganapathy and

216. Ibid
217. Panchaloha means five metals – Gold, Silver, Tin, Copper and Bronze
Nataraja bask in the shade of a spreading tree. The beautiful tank which is very near to it is relatively very big in size.\textsuperscript{218}

\textbf{Avvaiyaramman Temple, Aadichanputhur}

Sangam works have lot of references about Avvaiyar, a poetess who did immense services for establishing peace among the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas. Significantly Avvaiyar has been elevated to the position of Goddess by the people of Kanyakumari District. In this connection we are getting informations about an Avvaiyaramman temple at Aadichanputhur which belonged to 15\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.\textsuperscript{219}

Avvaiyar is a name closely associated with Sangam Literature. There are a lot of interpretations about Avvaiyaar. There are three temples dedicated to Avvaiyaar in Kanyakumari district. These three temples are situated at Muppanthal, Adichanallur and Kurathiarai.

This Avvaiyar temple is situated at Aadichanputhur, a village situated 3 kms from Boothapandy in the Aralvaimozhi - Thittuvilai trunk road. Adichanputhur was once a popular place as per records, but now it is a deserted village. The temple at Adichanputhur is the important and prominent one among them and it is believed that

\textsuperscript{218} N.S. Ramaswamy, \textit{Temple Festivals of South India}, Mysore, 1990, pp.15-25

it was constructed by two local inhabitants namely Matheva Pillai and Annamalai Pillai. It is believed that the present structure might have been constructed during the 19th century A.D.\textsuperscript{220} In this temple only women folk is permitted to worship. They prepare a sweet dish \textit{(Kozhukkattai)} there during the Tuesdays of the Tamil month \textit{Aadi}.

**Azhagamman Temple, Vadiveeswaram**

Another important Hindu temple at Vadiveeswaram is Azhakamman temple. The main feature of this temple is its Theppakulam.\textsuperscript{221} Lot of paintings and pillars are there. Otherwise called an Sundareswearar Azhagamman temple, it is very popular in so many reasons. Among the temples of Kanyakumari district, at this temple alone we can see a number of silver vahanas and wooden vahanas. The artistic, architectural, sculptural significance of the temple has not been recorded so far. The existence of Navagraha and Zodiac on the roof of the mandapa in front of the Dwajasthamba is a glamour to the temple. The entire temple complex including inner and outer prakara are full of sculptures of rare quality. A majestic \textit{Aatkondan Chettiar} statue a local philanthrophist who donated liberally to the temple is seated in the outer prakara. The golden \textit{Greedam (cap)} of this temple is a not worthy feature.

OTHER TEMPLES

Nagaraja Temple

About 5 kilometers from Suchindrum on the west is Nagercoil. It is the head quarter of Kanyakumari District. It is the largest town in this district. The name Nagercoil is derived from the five headed serpent deity of the Nagaraja temple which located in the centre of the town.\textsuperscript{222}

The original name of this area is called Anantha - Samudram as per the records. It was once a popular Brahmin agrahara. It was originally a Jain temple. The temple is surrounded by paddy fields, flower gardens and coconut trees. The \textit{Nanthavanam} (temple garden) is noted for its flower called 'Naga flower'\textsuperscript{223}, a symbolic representation of Nagaraja. It is believed that there are plenty of cobras inside the temple premises which guarded the temple. Though there are plenty of snakes, no fatal case of snake bite has ever occurred anywhere around the area.\textsuperscript{224}

Two separate shrines dedicated to Nagaraja and Ananthakrishan are found here. The \textit{Dwajasthamba} has been installed in front of Ananthakrishna shrine. Images of Parsavanath,

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\textsuperscript{222} The Travancore Archaeological Series, Vol. IV, p.118.
\textsuperscript{223} The botanical name of this flower is 'Couroupita guianensis'
\textsuperscript{224} Dr.James Hastings, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Religion and Ethics}, Vol.XI, p.418.
\end{flushright}
Padmanabha and Narasimha are found on the pillars and walls of the Artha mandapa.225 An image of Vinayaka is enshrined in the south-west corner of the inner prakara. There is separate shrine dedicated to Durga within the campus. Near this shrine, there is a newly constructed shrine for Lord Muruga.226

There are two big stone carvings of hydra-headed serpents just outside the main entrance to Nagaraja shrine. On one of the spiral shaped coils we can see the fair saint Parsavanath resting.227 The outstanding feature is that the sanctum sanctorum is surrounded by walls of mud and bamboo sticks. It is said that the king of Kalakkad had a dream in which Nagaraja intimated to him not to remove thatched roof over the sanctum.228

The people of Kanyakumari district believe that those who worship Nagaraja would lead a healthy life and would not be affected by any disease. Some of the skin diseases that could not be cured by any medicine could be cured if one pray at Nagaraja daily. On all sundays lot of people will come and worship Nagaraja by offering milk which is considered very sacred. On sundays in the month of Aavani, this temple wears a festival look. On those days people from the


226. Ibid.


228. Ibid.
surrounding villages come here and offer milk, salt, pepper and wooden toys to the deity. Even people belonging to other religions submit their offerings to the God. Annual festival is celebrated every year for 10 days in the Tamil month of Marghali, which attracts people from all over the district.\textsuperscript{229} Tourists from different parts of the country daily visit and make their offerings to the God.

The Naga cult originally arose probably in the hilly tracts where man inhabited early in the course of his evolution.\textsuperscript{230} It was widely spread throughout the world. It is believed that veneration of snakes began around 4000 B.C. In Ramayana, there are references about the mountain Mahendragiri which provided settlements to the Nagas.\textsuperscript{231} From this, it is assumed that the origin of Naga worship in the surrounding areas of Nagercoil goes back to mythology.

The architecture of Nagaraja temple is based on the Kerala style. As the Nagaraja temple is Jain in origin, the images of \textit{Vardhamana Mahaveera}, \textit{Parsvanath} and \textit{Padmavathy} are sculptured in the pillars of the Artha mandapa of the temple. The flag-staff facing the principal deity in the outer prakara of the temple is considered as the ‘\textit{Karuna Linga}’.

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\\underline{229.} S. Padmanabhan, \textit{Kumari Mavatta Kovilkal} (Tamil), pp.53-54. \\
\\underline{231.} Personal interview with \textit{Mr.N.Narayanan Potti}, aged 53, Melsanhti, Nagaraja temple, Nagercoil on 10.06.2011. 
\end{flushleft}
On the pillars of the temple there are many images of Jain monks known as *Thirthankaras*. At the time of reconstruction and renovation in the year 1535 the temple might have passed into the hands of the Hindus. This temple is a fine example of the transformation of a Jain temple into a Hindu shrine.\textsuperscript{232} Many people got solace and mental peace by visiting the Nagaraja temple and hence the devotees of the sacred place are swelling in numbers day by day.\textsuperscript{233}

Kunaveerapandithar, author of a Jain work *Neminaatham* has been mentioned in the inscription at Nagaraja temple. Another scholar Kamalavaahana Pandithar’s name is also there in the same inscription.

Though the temple entrance is in the eastern side, there is an entrance in the western side called as *Mahaameru Mahali*. In front of the western entrance a *Theppakulam* (holy pond) was there up to 1950’s and in which floating festival was conducted there. Now the holy pond was converted into a play ground where the political and Hindu religious meetings are conducted.

**Pillayar Temple, Keralapuram**

Eventhough Virakeraleswaram temple at Keralapuram village is a popular temple in this region, the colour changing Pillayar

\textsuperscript{232} Personal interview with *Mr.N.Narayan Potti*, aged 53, Melsanthi, Nagaraja temple, Nagercoil on 10.06.2011.

shrine within the Virakeraleswaram temple attracts thousands of devotees. Once in six months the colour of the statue is fully changing from white to black and vice versa. If we can say in other words, the pillayar statue is looking as black in colour for six months and the remaining six months, it is in white colour.

Keralapuram Pillayar is otherwise called as Arasaradiappar. It was made of Chandrakantha stone, one of the rare stones of the world. The pillayar statue will be in white in colour during the Tamil months from Thai to Aani. This period is called in Sanskrit language as Uthirayanam. It will be in black colour from Aadi to Marhali months which period is called as Thatchinayanam. It is a miracle in this modern scientific world.

It is a scientific phenomena because no scientist can able to know the exact reason behind the change of colour so far. Metal experts identified the material used for the manufacturing of this statue


236. Personal interview with Mr. S. Venkatrama Iyer, aged 57, Keezhashanthi, Keraleswaram temple, Keralapuram on 15.06.2012.


as *Chandra Kantha* stone. When the statue is in white colour, we can’t see the statute continuously because of the flash light coming out from it.

Once, Karthihai Thirunal Ravivarma, the Maharaja of Travancore visited Ramanathapuram to see the ruler of Ramnad. From there he went to Rameswaram, the most sacred place for Hindus, for taking a holy bath. The Ramasamy temple at Rameswaram is also famous because of its connection with the epic *Ramayana*. It is strongly believed that this Ramasamy temple emerged because of the holy visit of Sri Rama along with his associates to that place after the war with Ravana.

When the Maharaja was taking the holy bath at the Rameswaram sea, a small article touched on his foot. Immediately he took it out and he got astonished because it was a beautiful statue of Vinayaga.

After the completion of his Ramasamy temple visit, he reached the Ramnad palace, where he handed over the Pillayar statue to the ruler of Ramnad. But the latter humbly refused to accept the unearthed Pillayar statue and suggested the Maharaja of Travancore to take it to his kingdom. He also presented an Emerald Pillayar statue to

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the ruler. Unfortunately the Emerald Pillayar statue was stolen by a Muslim general *Muhilan* during his invasion on South Travancore later.\textsuperscript{241}

The ruler of Travancore installed the Pillayar statue taken from Rameswaram sea water at Keralapuram. The Pillayar statue got gradual growth in that place. At one stage the growth of the statue got stopped due to an incident. The incident follows:

A Brahmin priest who was performing routine poojas to Vinayagar had an illegal contact with a Devadasi woman. Everyday after closing the temple, he had the practice of visiting the Devadasi house. It is believed that due to the evil practice of the Brahmin priest, the growth of the Pillayar statue got stopped.\textsuperscript{242}

Another notable feature of this Pillayar is one leg of the Pillayar statue is looking like slightly bend. It is believed that it had happened because of an incident.

As already mentioned, a Brahmin priest who was performing poojas in the Pillayar temple had the practice of visiting a Devadasi house regularly after finishing the poojas. Occasionally an old man advised the Brahmin priest to leave this evil practice. But the priest didn’t care about it.

\textsuperscript{241} *Dinakaran*, Tamil Daily, Nagercoil, 10\textsuperscript{th} March 2009.

\textsuperscript{242} *Ibid.*
One day when the Brahmin priest entered the Devadasi house, the same old man knocked the door of the house. The Brahmin priest got angry and he came out of the house and pushed the old man. Unfortunately the latter fell in the ground and one of his legs got fractured.

The next day, the Brahmin priest opened the temple as usual but he got shocked. One of the legs of the Pillayar statue was in a broken position. The priest realised his mistake and apologized and prayed to Pillayar for forgiving his mistake and he completely stopped that evil practice of visiting the Devadasi house.243

There is a Theppakulam (pond) in front of the Pillayar shrine which is very beautiful. The period in which it was constructed is still now a matter of discussion. On the basis of inscriptive evidences, the banks of the great pond were constructed in A.D.1100. It was renovated in 1994. Another important point to be highlighted is its beautifully constructed dress changing rooms. The entire surroundings of the pond has been modernised with stone pathways. Due to the seasonal rains, this pond is always looking with maximum water.244

Another important specimen is the Sasta shrine situated very near to the great path. In the northern side of the Keraleswaram

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243. Personal interview with Mr. Sutharsana kumar, aged 52, Sreekariyam (Manager), Keraleswaram temple, Keralapuram on 20.06.2012.
244. The Scholar personally visited and confirmed.
temple, we can see a palace with dilapidated condition. Now only, 
remains are available. Due to the construction of a palace in this 
village, we can come to the conclusion that this village might have 
occupied a dominant place during the past.  

Another important focal point is the majestic Krishnan 
temple situated very near to the Shiva temple. The Krishnan statue is 
looking with a beautiful getup with butter in both hands. 

A sacred well available within the main temple premises is 
also significant due to the taste of its water. It is surprise to say that 
during the summer season also there is no decrease of water level. The 
taste of the water is so beautiful. 

We can see a palatial compound wall around the 
Keraleswaram temple which is seated around three acres. In order to 
worship the colour changing Pillayar, a gigantic window has been fixed. 
A small hole is also available in the compound wall. 

Another important point to be mentioned is its 
Dwajasthamba (temple flag staff). When the temple was constructed it 
is said that a Dwajasthamba was erected and later it fell down which 
caused damage to the temple car and temple wall. Later 
Devaprassannam was conducted and came to understand that God 

245. The Scholar personally visited and confirmed. 
246. Devaprassannam- a special pooja to be performed to know the matters 
 happened so far and will happen in future in a temple.
is not willing to install the temple flag staff there again. So at present there is no permanent Dwajasthamba in that temple.

**Aanai Sastha Temple, Charode**

Originally a Buddhist Vihara, at present in a dilapidated condition, this Aanai Sastha temple is situated at Charode near Padmanabhapuram, the capital of erstwhile Travancore kingdom. Unfortunately it is in ruins and only very limited portions are there. Initially it had a typical granite mandapa having 1001 elephant sculptures and granite roof was also built and now this abandoned mandapa silently speaks volumes of information about the glorious past of this Charode region. The existence of an underground tunnel between Padmanabhapuram palace and Charode palace confirms the close relationship between the royal family with Charode.

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247. Charode is a place situated five kilometers from Padmanabhapuram palace. Once a palace was there and at present we can see the remains.
