Chapter III

RELIGIOUS

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Every religion is good, that teaches man to be good. Religion also plays a predominant role in Thengamputhur Town Panchayat. Religion influence every individual's, social thinking and beliefs. Religion of people serves a major part in maintaining harmony in society. The deep involvement of the people in religion had its reflections in their life also. Thengamputhur people understand the essence of religion and utilize it to maintain a close relationship with God.

The religious history of Thengamputhur is almost identical with that of the rest of the villages of Kanyakumari district. Hinduism has been the predominant religion. Christianity and Islam though came later, existed side to side with their respective modes of religious life.

Hindu Temple and worship:-

Some Hindu temples of Thengamputhur had a very ancient history. In olden days they were not only places of worship, but also

centers of social and cultural life. They were maintained both by royal benefaction and public patronage. Not only did they tolerate religious sects other than their own, but they patronised all persuasions in equal measure. Inscriptions constitute the chief source of information for the study of the religious life of the people. Innumerable inscriptions found at the Siva Temple, Pillayar Temple, Murugan Temple and the Amman Temple at Thengamputhur and parakkai throw much light on the significance of such institutions in the social and religious life of the people.²

Hinduism is the dominant religion in Thengamputhur. Saivism is the most popular sect. Siva is worshipped in different appellations such as Mahadeva, Samba, Iswara and Digambara by the Hindus.³ In Thengamputhur there are Sivan Temples at Thengamputhur, Pillayarpuram, Vairavillai, Kattuvilai. Sivan Temple in Thengamputhur is situated in Vellalar Street. Sivaratri was celebrated in the month of Masi in Sivan Temple. The Prathosham is celebrated for twice in a month. In most of the Siva Temples there is always an image of his consort Parvati or Durga consecrated for worship. The goddess Durga is worshipped in

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Thengamputhur. She is work shopped under the name of Bhagavathi, the supreme Parasakthi Kali, Mariyamman etc. Her presence in the village is believed to protect the people from epidemics and other disasters and from the evil influence of the devils. She is propitiated by the villages periodically and special offerings are given and rituals are performed in an elaborate way in the village during pestilence.

Vishnu, next in importance in the Hindu Pantheon, is the God of love and humanity, the preserver of virtue and punisher of evil. He is also extensively worshipped by the Hindus.

Pillayar, next in importance in the Hindu pantheon, In Thengamputhur and in surrounding villages like Thirunagar, Chinnanaithanvilai, Kattuvilai, Pillayarpuram, Muhilanvilai, Vairavilai, Sasthankovil vilai etc. In Pillayar temple, the Vinayagar Sathurthi is

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4. Personal Interview with Allalkatha pillai, Headmaster (Rtd), Muhilanvilai, March 2nd, 2007
5. Ibid.
7. Ibid
celebrated. People calculate the days and stars, and celebrate once in a month “Sankada Sathurthi” by the Sastras.⁸

Thirdly Murugan temples are they were situated in Thengamputhur, Pudikudierruppu, Thirunagar. In this temple, vizagam has been celebrated once in a year. In the Tamil month Vaikasi, and last Friday, Oodukathu Friday is conducted. Important festival is “Soorampadu” during the month of Ipasi. Finally followed by the soora samsharan, Deepavali festival is celebrated for ten days.⁹ The other most important temples are Amman temple, and Mutharamman temple. These temples are in Thengamputhur, Chinnainanthanvilai, Kovilvilai, Pilliyarpuram, Alizankatuvilai, Muhilanvilai, Manikattipotal, Kadetti, Vadaku Anchikudieruppu, Therku Anchikudieruppu, Sasthankovil vilai.¹⁰ In Thengamputhur, a Amman temple is maintained by Vellalar Community. The people of Vellalar Community only are allowed inside the temple for worship. Another one Amman temple, is for goldsmith community

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⁸. Ibid
⁹. Ibid
and another one called *Easki Amman* temple, which is maintained by the Pandaram community.\(^{11}\)

For these Amman temples, whenever necessary, they conduct festivals for which they collect fixed amount of money from every *married* member of the village. Unmarried person are expected to pay half of the amount of what the married paid. In the month of *Karthigai*, special *pooja* was conducted. In Kamachanparappu, Tottukari Amman temple this temple for Nadar community only. During the *Marhali* month, there is a three day festivals. In Pulluvilai there is one *Esaki* Amman temple, and in Chinnanaithan vilai.\(^{12}\) In Mutharamman temples the festivals are conducted in the month of *Aadi, Pankuni, and Karthgai*. Every Tuesday special *pooja* is conducted in all Amman temples.\(^{13}\) Inferior divinities like Sattan are periodically worshipped. Devil worship is common among the people of Thengamputhur. The Devil temples of Muttaramman are found in and around of Thengamputhur.\(^{14}\) Some of the temples in Thengamputhur possess great wealth. The

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11. *Ibid*
13. *Ibid*
14. *Personal Interview with M. Ganesan, Councillor, Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, July 8th, 2007*
commoners vide with one another in making liberal endowments for the construction and maintaince of temples. In Thengamputhur there is one Government Temple Sasthan. Every Saturday common pooja was conducted daily two times people worshipped the Sasthan Temple. This temple was under the custody of Devasam Board. For once in a year 10 days festival was conducted and during this time cultural programes were given and this brings encouragement to people.¹⁵

Simple festivals of more or less social nature are celebrated. *Nirvila*, the bathing festival, is related to the festivals of bathing in holy rivers on auspicious occasions. *Antivila* is the evening festival when to the accompaniment of instrumental music, ornamented ladies used to carry to the temple flowers, incense etc., are needed for the *pooja*. This occurred in Hindu places of workship. Bells are used when pooja is are performed. Festival of the light lunch is celebrated by distributing cooked rice-balls mixed with ghee and served to all those who visit. *Tervillavu* or the chariot festivals are held in the precincts of the temple. *Er mankalam* is the festival of the *plough* share. There is a *Pankuni vila* held in the month of the

March – April, it is also called *Pankuni Muyakkam*.\(^{16}\) This is the same as the *Pankuni Uttiram* which is celebrated in honour of Murukan, *Arumin Vilavu*, the festival of the six stars was the *Karttikai* festival, the real festival of lamps which is even now regularly held in Thengamputhur.\(^{17}\)

Apart from priests, priestesses also are employed to perform pooja’s in the temples of female deities. The priestess who perform pooja for the female deity is Bhagavati.\(^{18}\) But pooja by priestesses has no agamic sanction, it is but a tribal practice. The influence of Hinduism on the upper layer of the society is quite considerable. It however, did not very much affect the rural, rustic, tribal elements in the society.

**Worship Under Tree:**

The worship of the hollows of tree is a primitive form of worship. People also worship the gods seated under the trees. The banyan tree is very important one.\(^{19}\) The temple the abode of god

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17. *Ibid*
19. *Ibid*
and the temple is known as kovil. A separate place is allotted in the temple for offerings to Gods. Idol worship is familiar. Festivals are conducted in the temples on important occasions. Tax is collected compulsory and in the occasions they serve the Annadhana. Many Mutharamman temples are constructed and almost all the Hindu temples are having their poojas daily at 6'o clock and every Tuesday and Friday having their poojas.\textsuperscript{20} In the Thengamputhur Town Panchayat only two villages are having the Ayyavali people. But most of the Ayyavali people are scattered into pieces and mingle with other Hindu people.\textsuperscript{21}

The upper class people gave importance to caste barriers, customs, rites, rituals and formal worship. They neglected the essence of Hinduism and blocked the entry of the poor, lower caste people to the temples. This offended the religious sentiments of right thinking Hindus and paved the way for the emergence of reformist movement. Among them Vaikundaswamigal of the south is significant. He tried to spread the message of love and

\textsuperscript{20} M. Ganesan, \textit{op.cit.},
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid}
condemned the outdated rites of the temples. He fought against Brahmin dominance.\textsuperscript{22}

Vaikundaswamigal who had a longing for social and religious reformations, was born at Swamithope in Kanyakumari District in the year 1803.\textsuperscript{23} He had natural names like Muthukutti and Mudichoodumperumal. He meditated and obtained salvation at Ampalapathi. He was greatly affected by the suppression of ordinary people in the name of caste and religion. Hence he started a movement to fight against these social evils. This movement tried to introduce simplicity in worshipping God. Insisting the importance of love and co-operations, this movement opposed life sacrifice idol worship, false beliefs and the worship of village God.\textsuperscript{24}

Trying to introduce purity and simplicity, this movement restricted the use of intermediaries for worship, offering to God, singing loudly and using spices. To avoid luxury, sandal, water and white clay were advised to be used for worship and people were instructed to worship God thrice a day bearing turban on their head.

\textsuperscript{22} Personal Interview with \textit{Pitchaipalam}, Village Head Keezha Udayappan Kudieruppu, July 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2007.
\textsuperscript{23} Dinakaran, \textit{Aanmika Sirappu Malar}, P.P 2-3, March 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 2007
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid
He tried to introduce joint worship and sharing food commonly. The improvement introduced by this movement spread rapidly in southern district. As a result of this, several worshipping places known as “Nilalthankals” were established in a village where low class people lived in plenty. The Nadar community accepted the principles of this movement.\textsuperscript{25} Ayyavali people worship the temples of Sreeman Narayana Swamy Thirukovil, Nadutheruviapathi, Alazharpathi, Ayya Nilalthangal. On every Massi 20, Ayya birthday is celebrated. Sreeman Narayana Swamy temple was built in 1947.\textsuperscript{26} In 2007 one function was celebrated and there is “Chempavala Panchavarna Thiruther”. Because commonly the thiruther (temple car) having four wheel but this has six wheel, break, and five horse. In Aani month the people of Ayyavali raise the flag in Ayyakoil and they celebrate 11 days function. In Karthikai month Yedu Vasippu is carried in the temple. The temple was reconstructed in 1991.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid
\textsuperscript{26} Temple stone inscription. Sreeman Narayanaswamy Thirukovil, 1947
Christianity and churches:-

In the Thengamputhur Town Panchayat, Christians are minority and the majority are Hindus and 15% were Muslims. At Thengamputhur there are eight Christian churches. These churches were built by Ringal Taube and Charles Mead in the 19th Century.

Church, the English translation of a Greek word (ekklesia) meaning “assembly” or “gathering”. In the Greek translation of the old testament (the Septuagint), two main words are used for gathering of people for worship assembly (esslesia) and synagogue. Since the Jews in the first century used the latter term. The first Greek speaking Christians selected the former in order to show that their roots lay in the old Testament and that they continue the Old Testament people of God. Christians are called Abraham’s offspring. With the incoming of Europeans in Tamil land, Christianity began to be rooted here. Christians formed the second community in Thengamputhur.

27. Thengamputhur Town Panchayat Census Report, 2001-2002
28. Refer Thengamputhur Town Panchayat Map.
29. Stone Inscription, dated 1821, Kulathuvilai Church.
Upto 31st October 1956, Kanyakumari District was a part of South Travancore. The first man who brought protestant Christianity inside the district was one Mr. Maharajan Vedamanickam. He hails from Mylaudy, South Travancore, but his fore father's were from Tanjore. His family was known for their expertise in Medicine and Astrology. Originally, Maharajan was a disciple of Lord Siva, and in search of peace along with this relative one Mr. Siva Gurunathan, he reached Chithamabaram in the year 1799. He attended the Poojas, but he could not get the mental peace and he was leaning against a pillar just napped. An Angel with white dress came in his dream and urged him to start immediately from there. The Angel also promised him that the way for him would be made known to him.31

On the same day both Maharajan and Siva Gurunathan listened to the Message given by Golf Iyer. There heat became melted, they understood Christ as the real God. Golf Iyer, baptised them and renamed them as Maharajan Veda Manickam and Sivagurunathan Masilamani. They reached Mylaudy, gathered around 30 at their neighbours, relatives shown them the path to follow Christ and they assembled in a church and worshipped Jesus.

31. Ibid, p.16
Thus the First seed for protestant Christianity Church in South Travancore was planted.

Christianity started spreading in and around Mylaudy. Many looked at Vedamanickam with hatred and his life was at risk. So Vedamanickam met Golf lyer at Tanjore, Golf lyer consoled him, encouraged him and promised to send the missionary Ringel Taube to South Travancore. Vedamanickam met the missionary Ringel Taube at Travancore and Ringel Taube considered this as the calling of God and immediately promised to came to South Travancore. So, with satisfaction Vedamanickam returned back to mylaudy and started his preachings about Christ Christianity.

Taube hailed from a missionary family in Germany. He was born in 1770 and during studying in college itself he was enlightened by God's vision as missionary and started preaching.³²

On 1804 he landed in Travancore and, reached South Travancore on 1806. With Gods enlightenment, he stayed in a hut and started the Missionary activities around mylaudy. Along with Vedamanickam from 1806 to 1816 the missionary service were extended to Kanyakumari, South Kerala regions with many

hardships. The light of Christ started to shine and many followed Christianity and today more than 500 churches are in the folds of Kanyakumari Diocese. Effort was made to build a church with help of Col. Macaulay. In 1809, the church was constructed under the supervision of the government officers according to instructions from the Resident and the approval of the Maharaja. In 1810, the government granted permission to build six more churches including Kovilvilai church and rendered substantial help in the construction.

The present pastor name of Kovilvilai Church is PETER.T. SRINIVASAN, M.A.B.D. The Kovilvilai Church have its proud by church was established by Ringle Taube in 1810. 197 years ago. Now the total members are 259, i.e., 74 families. The church is having a church committee to which persons are selected and together involve in all church activities. The Church secretary is the head of the committee and pastor is the head of church. For Small infants to Adults, Kanyakumari Diocese introduced the Sunday school. From Sunday class the students are getting knowledge about the spiritual life.

33. Kulathuvilai Pastorate C.S.I. Church, Sirappu Malar, 2004, p.16
34. C.M. Agur, Churuch History of Travancore, Madras, p.460
35. Stone Inscription of Kovilvilai, C.S.I. Church, 1810.
For ten more years Taube served in India and on 1816 he went to other countries for missionary services through a ship. But till today his where about and status of his death were not known. In Kanyakumari District Christians were found scattered base and there. In Kulathuvilai (Parakai) region, in 1818 Mr. Charles Mead Iyer came for service and started the Church. Mr. Charles born in 1792 in England.\textsuperscript{36} He lost his parents when he was young and brought up by his aunt. Mr. Charles and his highly learned wife along with Richard Neel-another missionary, landed in India on 1816. For sometime he learned Tamil. Mr. Charles had many sufferings, with his wife and with their infant children he has to travel to Cylon, Penang and Kollam. On the way, at Penang his wife died. But Mr. Richard consoled his soul and mind in the name of Christ. He reached mylaudy, when his child also died and still he was firm and determined on the missionary services. Col. Manto gave his Tourist bunglow for missionary service and Mr. Charles stayed there. He influenced the Travancore Government and the Queen Sethu Parvathi Bai who gave the places around the Tourist

\textsuperscript{36} Kulathuvilai Pastorate C.S.I. Church, Sirappu Malar, 2004, p.17
Bungalow, the present Women Christian College,\textsuperscript{37} He resigned the job within a year and continued the missionary activities. When Mead Iyer take charge as the Regional head of protestant Christianity, he formed may churches within a short span and Christianity further grown.

In Earlier days, Kulathuvilai and Madusudhanapuram areas ware also called as Parakkai, which was famous during those times. The upper class people with Government Jobs, wealth lived in that area. Kulathuvilai is a recent name where many Christian came and settled.\textsuperscript{38}

Before arrival of Mead Iyer, in Kulathuvilai one Mr. Maradi, later christened in Christ as Vedamaickam guided some others also in to Christianity. His brother Sudalimadan also became Christian and in early days they were going to Athikattuviai and later they constructed their own church in Kulathuvilai and started praying God. After this Mead Iyer reached this place and this church was elevated to Independent parish. During 1821 when the church was bifurcated.

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\textsuperscript{37} Nagam Aiya, \textit{op.cit}, Vol. II, p. 221
\textsuperscript{38} Kulathuvilai Pastorate C.S.I. Church, \textit{Sirappu Malar}, 2004, p.20
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According to Bible "The church built later would be famous than the first church" Even then, Christian paved the way for building a new church. The church building has actually started after a few months after the foundation stone laying ceremony. The total duration of church building construction taken infact 1½ years. The length of the church is 112ft and a width of 50' feet.

Next to Kulathuvilai the old church was Kadetti Church. The church was offered for first time on 1850. The first church got detonated and it was totally modified as new church and on 1995 and it was offered to God. A close intimate relation exists between both Kulathuvilai and Kadetti church members. So, Kulathuvilai church members made donations to Kadetti church in a special function on 2002. The people of Kadetti church are god's people and are getting the grace and Love of God.

Thengamputhur church became an Independent church in the year 1970. To build this church Mr. D.J. Anbiah and his son Mr. Godwin Ganaraj M.Com donated large sum of money. The newly built church was offered on 1972. Later the Pastor

39. Stone Inscription of Kadetti C.S.I. Church, 1850.
40. Personal Interview with Mr. Godwin Ganaraj, Kulathuvilai Church, July7th,2007
Illam, Westry etc. were added to this Church by the paustrate members.

Pulluvilai Church present pastor is Thangaraj and this church is under the pastorate Pillayarpuram church. The present pastor name of Pillayarpuram church is Arul Dhas. Another Church is Suvichesapuram and the present pastor is Packiyaraj and Keezha Kattuvilai Church.41

All the churches are under the control of Kanyakumari Diocease. The churches of Thengamputhur Town Panchayats are under the Puthalam Sekaram. (District). The Church administration is in the hands of Decannar. They form the church committee. This committee runs the church. All the churches are having Sunday Classes and Endeavour meeting and these are helpful to the youngsters to grow up in spiritual life.

**Muslims and Mosque:**

The question of the age of Mahomedanism in Thengamputhur is still unsettled. In Thengamputhur there is one Mosque. Its style resembles the Mughals art and architecture. This Jamath building 100 years back and this mosque belongs to seventy five families

41. Personal Interview with Pastor J. Bright Vincent Raj, Kulathuvilai, August 26th, 2007
paying the tax called Azarat Rs.20, per month. They collect the money and give the salary to Azarat. Thirty days they celebrate the Ramzan and they take the fast. Early morning in the fast days they workshop for five times. Prayers held at 5.30 A.M called subbu, 12.30 A.M Loger, 3.40 Assar, 6.30 P.M Mahariff, and 8.00P.M Essar. The fasting month is Ramlan, sometimes thirty days, the month calculation depends upon moon. Sawal is the Ramzan day and it is thirty first day. Bangu that is calling for workshop. The Thengamputhur mosque some members are from Kottar Manavalakurichi. Sahath meaning is a Muslim wants to give 2 ½ percentage in his total wealth to the poor. Kalima denotes that, every muslim performs five Kalimas. It is generally believed to have been introduced into Kanyakumari District before the 9th century A.D. The event is generally associated with the alleged conversion of the Cherman Perumal to Islam and his supposed pilgrimage to Mecca. But the story is groundless and unauthenticated. The fact is that it was not the last Cherman Perumal that embraced Islam, went to Mecca and died on his way.

42. George Scharhammer, Francies Xavier. His Life and Tiem, Rome 1997, p.82  
43. V. Nagam Aiya. op.cit., p.110
The Mohammedan religion is said to have been first brought in by a party of pilgrims headed by Malik-Ibn-Dinar about the middle of the 9th century. A.D. They all received hospitably at Edalakudy and were given lands to build mosques upon.44

Mahammed Nabi gave the koran to the world. The original copy of this Koran is the fountain of all science, knowledge and laws. Mohamed is their prophet, called by them their Bani. The great doctrine of their faith is the “there is no god but Allah and Mahammed is the prophet of God” This is the characteristic tenant and foundation stone of Mahomedanism. The Mahomedans are characterised by piety and devotion, their behaviour in mosques is said to be of an exemplary character the utmost solemnity and decorum being observed in their public worship.

A muslim does not care for his surrounding at the house of prayers. Mahomedans will begin their devotions in the midst of a crowd. They will stop their business transactions and whether in the store or in the field they will drop down on their knees and pray. For prayer a Moslem may sit or stand; but generally he sits of the calves of his legs over a cloth spread on the floor with his face turned towards the temple of Kaaba in Mecca. Friday is the

most important day of the week with the Mussalman and all the village Mahomedans are on that day expected to join in their prayers at the mosque and absence being punished by fines. Before praying, the Mussalman must wash his feet with water, or where that is not possible sand may be used, a substitute invented.

The five important precepts ordained by the Prophet on every Mahomedan are: (1) Belief god Allah (2) worship at the stated hours (3) alms-giving, (4) the fast of Ramzan and (5) the pilgrimage to Mecca, and as described above they are very strict in the observance of these precepts. The chief occasion for the giving of alms to the poor are during the Ramzan fast lasting thirty days, on the 70th day from it hajj, during the Mohurrum Season, and 15th day of Shabban called Barath and on the 27th day of Rajap.

The fast of Ramzan comes on the 9th month of Mussalaman year. Every day from sunset to 4 A.M. it is allowable to break the fast, but from 4 A.M. till sunset, eating or drinking is forbidden. This should continue throughout the month and every Mahomedan is required to spend his day and night in devote contemplation of

45. Ibid
46. Ibid
47. Ibid
Allah. In the mosque every evening twenty ceremonial prayers are recited in the presence of all, and on the last Friday a special Khootba or farewell sermon is read. On the 27th night when the Koran is said to have been revealed, the people should sit up all night burning frankincense, praying and reading the Koran.

Thus, religion is highly respected in Thengamputhur Town Panchayat.