



A Study on the History of Inmaiyl Nanmai Tharuvar Temple in Madurai

Assistant Professor M. Kavitha

Research Department of History, The Standard Fireworks Rajaratnam College for Women
(Autonomous), Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract. Madurai, renowned as a pilgrimage destination in modern times, stands as one of the most ancient cities in South India. Over the past two millennia, it has served as a significant hub of South Indian culture and civilization. The Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, Vijayanagar rulers, and the Nayakas each made remarkable contributions to the architecture of Tamil Nadu temples. These magnificent masterpieces were designed in unique ways by each dynasty. Every ruling dynasty has left an enduring mark on the State's architecture. With a glorious history, Madurai stands as one of the oldest cities in South India. Pancha Bhoota Sthalam refers to five temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, each representing a manifestation of the five prime elements of nature: earth, water, fire, air, and ether. The temple city of Madurai has a Pancha Bhootha Sthalam. Among them, the Immayil Nanmai Tharuvar Temple is represented by the Land. This temple is under the control of Sri Meenakshi Amman temple in Madurai. It is located in West Masi Street, Madurai. This temple is the only temple in Madurai where Lord Shiva worshipped himself by taking the form of a human. The devotees call this temple Naduvor Nayagan Temple as people who worship Lord Shiva are freed from their troubles in this lifetime together. This study examines the Historical background & Architectural importance of the Immaiyl Nanmai Tharuvar Temple in Madurai.

Index Terms- Madurai, Shiva, architecture, pujas, festival

I. Introduction

Madurai, renowned as a pilgrimage destination in modern times, stands as one of the most ancient cities in South India. Over the past two millennia, it has served as a significant hub of South Indian culture and civilization. Within India, the history and culture of a particular area frequently revolves around a temple. Madurai has served as a prominent settlement for over two thousand years. The city is closely linked with the Tamil language and is reputed to have hosted the third Tamil Sangam, a major assembly of Tamil scholars. It is considered to be of beautiful antiquity and has been governed at various periods by the Pandyas, Cholas, Madurai Sultanate, Vijayanagar Empire, Madurai Nayaks, Carnatic kingdom, and the British. Madurai was formerly known as Kadambavanam, a forest in mythology. A merchant passing through the forest spotted Indran, the King of Gods, worshipping a Swayambhulingam under a Kadam tree. This sighting was promptly reported to King Kulsekarer Pandayan. The king cleared the forest and constructed an impressive



temple, called the Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarer Temple, around the sacred Lingam, and later established a beautiful lotus-shaped city surrounding the temple.

Madurai's layout resembles a lotus and is centered around the Meenakshi Amman Temple, which served as the focal point for both the geography and rituals of the ancient city. The city's design consists of several concentric quadrangular streets encircling the temple. The squares are known by their traditional names of Aadi, Chittirai, Avani-moola, and Masi streets, which correspond to the Tamil month names and the associated festivals. The temple chariots used in these processions increase in size as they move through the concentric streets. According to ancient Tamil literature, the temple was considered the heart of the city, and the surrounding streets were likened to a lotus and its petals. With the advent of British rule during the 19th century, Madurai became the headquarters of a large colonial political complex and an industrial town; with urbanization, the social hierarchical classes became unified. It is situated on the banks of the river Vaigai. Owing to its rich cultural heritage and architectural splendor, the city is often called the 'Athens of the East'.

During the medieval period, the Pandyas were strong supporters of art and architecture, which led to the development of unique styles in Dravidian architecture. The dominant feature of garbhagriha vimana under the Colas gradually gave way to large gopuras and prakara walls. Temple towers and mandapas received more attention during this period, shifting the focus from the main shrines. The intense building activity of the Pandya rulers is evident from numerous epigraphs and literary sources. Certain parts of the Madurai temple, such as the kadaka and the East and West Gopuras, can be traced back to medieval times.

Temples are Hindus' home, a place to worship god and it's created in a way to unite people with god by their devotion. Temple is also known as Mandir, Koyil, Kovil, Kshetram, and also Devasthanam. It is a religious place for worship and prayers. According to Indian epics, the three main gods of this religion are Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma.

Pancha Bhoota Sthalangal denotes the sites of the five elements of the world. They're the five temples devoted to Lord Shiva. Each temple symbolizes one of the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and sky. 'Pancha' means five 'bhoota' means elements and 'sthalangal' means sites. All these sites are located in South India. There are four sites in Tamil Nadu and one in Andhra. The five components are believed to be embedded in the five Shiv Lingas.

Many devotees visit Pancha Bhoota Sthalam in South India. But many of us may not know that the temple city of Madurai has a Pancha Bhoota Sthalam. All the temples are located very close to each other. Among them, Immayil Nanmai Tharuvar temple is for land.

II. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCE MATERIALS

The present study attempts to identify, describe, and analyze the history of Immayil Nanmai Tharuvar Temple in Madurai. The data gathered from fieldwork



and the available literary sources are subjected to intensive examination to criticize the aspects that pertain to the topic. The researcher followed the narrative and descriptive methodology. The sources for the study could be broadly classified into primary and secondary sources. The primary source consists of inscriptions, archival records, and fieldwork. The secondary sources include published works, magazines, website data, and the like.

Aims and Objectives

“A Study on the History of Immaiyl Nanmai Tharuvar Temple in Madurai” forms the topic of the study. The basic aim of the study is to understand the history of the Temple, art and architecture, pujas, and festivals of the Temple.

- The study aims to provide a historical background of Madurai.
- The study attempts to trace the history of Immaiyl Nanmai Thaurvar Temple.
- The study intends to focus on the architecture of the temple.
- The study also attempts to examine the pujas and festivals of the temple.

III. History of Inmaiyl Nanmai Tharuvar Temple

The Immaiyl Nanmai Tharuvar temple is represented by the land. This temple is under the management of his control. This temple is opening from 6:15 to 11:30 am and 4:30 to 9:30 am. This temple is located at West Masi Street, Madurai. This temple is in located at a distance of 750 m from the Periyar bus stand, and 6.5 km from the Madurai central bus stand.

King Malayadhwan of Madurai married his daughter Meenakshi to Lord Shiva as Sundareswara. As per rules, a Siva pooja needed to be performed by the new king and queen before taking any responsible and high Positions. So the Meenakshi and Sundareswara came here and installed a new Siva lingam and worshipped it.

The garbhagriha of this temple is structured with the deity facing east and the worshipped facing west, as is customary for Siva pooja. Additionally, the garbhagriha contains both the east-facing Lingam and the west-facing seated murtis of Siva and Parvati as Sundareswarar and Meenakshi, making this temple particularly unique. Despite the west-facing entrance, the temple's other aspects adhere to the norms of a west-facing temple. Consequently, devotees worship Sundareswarar and Meenakshi while facing them and simultaneously worship the rear, rather than the front, of the Lingam. This temple is the only temple in Madurai where Lord Shiva worshipped himself by taking the form of a human. The devotees call this temple Naduvor Nayagan Temple as people who worship Lord Shiva are freed from their troubles in this lifetime together.

The Rajakopuram of this temple faces west and the lateral side of the temple is situated on Mela Maasi Street. This temple is under the control of the ruler of Sivaganga and it follows the customs of Sirungeri Sangara Madam established by Aadhi Shankarar. Special Poojas taking place in Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple follow the customs of Sirungeri Sangara Madam.



This temple is also known as “Neeshta Pradheshwarar” and “Madhya Boorishwarar” in Sanskrit. The temple’s history is set in the backdrop of the wedding of Lord Sundareshwarar (Lord Shiva) and Meenakshi. Meenakshi Amman Temple is at a distance of 1½ km from this temple. To its South, Madhanagopal Swami Temple and Koodalazhagar Temple are located.

Meenakshi was born to King Malayadhvajan and Queen Kanchanamalai. In Tamil Month Chithirai, their daughter married Lord Shiva, and the marriage ceremonies were performed by Lord Brahma in the presence of millions of Devas, demigods, and other Gods. After marriage, Lord Shiva was regarded as the King of Kings and so he assumed the form of human. He changed the symbol of his flag from Rishabha to Fish, mentioning that he belongs to the dynasty of Pandya. He modified his hairstyle and refashioned himself with the golden ornaments and the neem flower garlands. He changed his name to “Somasundara Pandya”.

In ancient days, the kings worshipped Lord Shiva after their coronation. Following the same custom, Somasundara Pandya worshipped Lord Shiva by creating a Linga in the place called Naduvloor, the center of the city. The Linga faced towards the west and he also created the statue of Goddess Parvati, named Naduvloor Nayagi.

Architecture of the Temple

The shrines of the temple are the Vibhuthi Vinayakar, Murugan, Valava Sitar, Ambal Madhyapuri Nayagi, Dakshina Moorthy, and Aswa Thevar. The temple is located in the center of Madurai. The Gopuram is situated on the western side. To reach the shrine of God, people should cross two passageways. Lord Vinayaga is located in the North, and in the South, the statues of Lord Muruga and his wives Valli and Deivanai are found.

After crossing the entrance, on the right side, the hall with eight pillars is situated and God Varasiddhi Vinayaga is seated here. Beyond this, there is a huge space. Here, Kodi Maram, Pali Beedam, and the statue of Nandhi, the divine vehicle of Lord Shiva are seen. In the Maha Mandapam, the gods like Sarawati, Chandra, Surya, Juvarashakthi, Juvaralingam and Maha Lakshmi, Vyakayabadhar, Padhanjali, Naradhar, Nataraja are found. The statue of Goddess Varahi is found in a sitting posture with ten hands.

Naduvloor Nayagi is situated in Sri Chakra Beeda in the standing posture and people around this place consider her as their favourite goddess. Kaala Bairavar is considered as Kshethra Balagar of this temple. People in and around Madurai come to this temple to fix the matrimonial alliances.

Dakshina Moorthy

The lord Dhakshina Moorthy idol is facing toward the south direction. The worshipping of Dakshina Moorthy is extremely beneficial in reducing the effects of mourning, death fear, indecision, disease, guilt, and the eradication of sins. This puja ritual gives relief from problems, fears, and stress. The Dakshina Moorthy Puja can help improve academic performance and cure panic and psychic attacks.



Navagraha

In Hindu Mythology, the Navagrahas have an exalted position in a person's life as they exert a great influence and it is said that the proper worship of these 9 planets can greatly tone down their malefic influence and thus grant peace and prosperity in a person's life. The entire place where the Navagraha is installed in a temple is a black granite stand and the Navagrahas are also black granite with facial features not so well-formed, but they are well decorated with the most favored colored cloth of the particular planet.

There are 2 kinds of installation of the planets when arranged in this fashion, known as Agama Pradishta and Vaidika Pradishta. In Agama Pradishta, Surya occupies the central place, Chandra on Surya's east, Budha on his south, Brihaspati on his west, Shukra on his north, Mangala on his south-east, Shani on his south-west, Rahu on the north-west and Ketu in the north-east. In Vaidika Pradishta, Surya is still in the center, but Shukra is in the east, Mangala in the south, Shani in the west, Brihaspati in the north, Chandra in the south-east, Rahu in the south-west, Ketu in the north-west and Budha in the north-east. In this temple, Vaidika Pradishta was installed. The Navagraha festival is celebrated in this temple.

Lord Murugan

The lord Murugan idol is placed facing east in this temple. The lord Murugan, Vali, and Devanai statues are beautiful and charming. The small statue of Murugan is there in the temple. The Panguni Uthiram is celebrated for this statue or idol.

The Vinayakar

The Vinayakar idol is facing east in the direction of the temple. This idol is under the Vilwa trees. The Vinayaka Chaturthi is celebrated here.

The Vibhuthi Vinayakar

The Vibhuthi Vinayakar shrine is facing towards the east direction of the temple. The many devotees come and visit the temple and pray to the god and collect the Vibhuthi from the merchant.

Pujas and Festivals

The daily worship offerings to the different deities hold great significance in Hindu temples. Nitya-puja, the daily ceremonies associated with worship, are vital for maintaining the sanctity of the shrine. The daily rituals are mandatory and play a crucial role in upholding the sanctity of the temple. Six kala pujas are conducted every day for the deity. Temples also observe weekly and monthly pujas.

The puja (rituals) at the temple is carried out by the priests during both festivals and on a daily basis. Four times a day, the temple rituals take place: Kalasanthi at 9:00 a.m., Uchikalam at 12:00 p.m., Sayarakshai at 6:00 p.m., and Arthajama at 8:00 p.m. Each ritual involves three steps: alangaram (decoration), neivethanam (food offering), and deepa aradanai (waving of lamps) for the main sanctum and sub-deities of the temple. During the final step of worship, nagaswaram (pipe instrument) and tavil (percussion instrument) are played, priests recite religious



instructions from the Vedas (sacred text), and worshippers bow in front of the temple mast. The temple also hosts weekly, monthly, and fortnightly rituals.

Aavani Moolam Shiva Puja (August-September)

It is observed in the Tamil culture on the moola nakshatra day in Avani month (August to September). It is dedicated to the Shiva lingam. It is basically dedicated to the famous lord Shiva involved in this incident and is known as the Puttu festival. The Avani Moolam is based on the local legend and is referred to as the sport of carrying soil for the wages of rice pudding. During this festival, the ten miracles performed by the lord of Madurai would be enacted by the Sivachariars. In this festival gods and goddesses wear blue color pattu sarees.

Masi Shivarathri (February – March)

Masi Shivarathri is the main festival of the temples which is organized on a grand scale and attracts thousands of devotees. Shivaratri literally means the night of shiva. The masi shivarathri is also known as Maha Shivarathri. The Shivaratri occurs on the 14th night of the dark fortnight of Krishna paksha which also happens to be the night before amavasya (new moon day). Both married women and unmarried women keep fasting and praying to the supreme lord Shiva. Married women fast for the good health and welfare of their husbands. Unmarried women worship the lord shiva to find their life partners.

Brahmotsavam (February – March)

Brahmotsavam is the most significant festival celebrated for the lord Venkateswara in February and March. The word Brahmotsavam is a combination of two Sanskrit words — Brahma and Utsavam (festival). It is widely believed that Lord Brahma reportedly conducted the first festival. Brahma also means “grand” or “large”.

Brahmotsavam is held over nine days at the beginning of the Ashweeja Masam, paralleling Navaratri. The evening before the first day, Ankurarpanam (the sowing of seeds to signify fertility and abundance) is performed. The main first-day activity is Dwajaroohanam – the raising of the Garuda flag to signify the beginning of the festival. Religious activities during the festival include daily homas and processions on the walkway surrounding and around the temple. The final day commemorates Venkateswara’s birth star. On the final day, Sudarshana Chakra is bathed in the temple tank with the devotees, a ritual called as Avabrutha / Chakra Snanam. The Chakra is then placed on a high platform, and the devotees walk under it and are blessed with its dripping water. The festival ends with Dhvajavaroohanam, the lowering of the Garuda flag.

Tirukarthikai (November and December)

Tirukartikai, also known as Kartikai Deepam, is a festival of lights celebrated in the Tamil month of Karthikai, which falls in November and December. It is observed on the full moon day of the Karthikai Tamil month. This festival involves illuminating lights in order to dispel darkness. The aim is to offer light to the Gods as a form of worship and to seek their continued protection for future



generations. Many devotees visit temples to offer light to the gods, seeking their blessings and hoping to eradicate darkness.

Significance of the Temple

Mother Madhyapuri Nayaki graces from a separate shrine. As the temple is at the centre (Madhya) of Madurai city, She is so named. She is also praised as Mangalya Vara Prasadini as those praying to Her for timely marriage, are blessed with happy matches. Mother Madhyapuri Nayaki appears in a standing posture on a lotus-designed peeta. The Peeta is adorned with a Sri Chakra carved in stone. Generally, Sri Chakra is drawn on copper sheets and installed in temples. This is a difference in this temple.

Lord Lingodhbava is under a Bodhi tree (Arasa Maram in Tamil) behind Mother Madhyapuri Nayaki shrine. Virgins facing delays in marriage worship here with milk abishek to Lord Lingodhbava, offering a skirt, mangal sutra, turmeric, and kumkum seeking a good match for them.

The priest in the temple performs Shiva Puja standing before the Linga and Suyarupa Shiva. Abishek is offered to Shivalinga only. Thaila (oil) Abhishek is offered to Suyarupa Shiva on the New moon, (Amavasya), full moon days (Poornima) days and 30 days in the month of Margazhi, all totaling 54 days in a year. On Shivarathri night (in Februaru-March) conch abishek (Shangabishek) is performed with Homas.

During the morning puja (Vila Puja) Dosa (a popular dish of Tamilnadu) is offered as naivedhana to Lord Shiva. Of the five components comprising the Universe-Land, Space, Fire, Water, and Wind. This place belongs to the Prithvi-land category. Hence, those constructing a new building, place a handful of sand in the Shiva shrine and then mix it with other building materials. It is noteworthy that Lord Shiva had His Coronation here and performed Linga Puja here. Those aspiring for leadership and respectable positions perform Raja Upachara Archana – Respecting the Royals to realize their wish.

Lord Shiva is said to have played 64 Tiruvilayadals – a play of miracles. In Madurai, appearing as Vallaba Siddha, He made an Elephant of Stone eat Sugarcane. He is sitting in Padmasana (one type of Yoga sitting) showing the sky (Space) in the right hand and holding some puja materials (Kungiliyam, Sambirani, etc.) in the right hand. People pray to Vallaba Siddha on Mondays. Special pujas are performed to Lord Siddha on full moon days in Thai (Januaru-February) and Chitra (April-May) months and on new moon days in Aadi(July-August). Lord Kasi Viswanatha in the front Mandap is fair in complexion. Mother Visalakshi is nearby. It is worth recalling that Lord Sri Rama performed Shiva Puja in Rameswaram with a sand Lingam for relief from the dosha of killing Ravana a Shiva devotee. Remembering this event, a Sand Linga was installed in this temple too. Lord Rama appears with His Kodandam Bow behind this Linga.

Devotees can also have the darshan of Jura Deva with His consort Jura Shakti who cures all types of fevers. Devotees offer Pepper Rasam and rice as



naivedhana here. Sri Chandikeswara who is maintaining a register of the devotees visiting Shiva temples and recommending to the Lord to listen to their prayer is not offered any special pujas generally in temples. Devotees do it in this temple. They worship Lord Shiva with a garland and offer it again to Sri Chandikeswara seeking His help to take their prayers to Lord Shiva. Hence, He is praised as Recommendation Chandikeswara.

The act of Pookuzhi walking, which involves walking on a fire pit as a form of prayer commitment, is typically observed in Shakti temples. This tradition is practiced by worshippers of Lord Muruga at this temple on the day following the Vaikasi Visakam festival.

The southwest location of Sri Meenakshi Amman Temple in the city is where the temple praised as Kailas on Earth is situated. Celebrations for the 60th and 80th birthdays take place in this temple. Lord Shiva and Mother Madhyapuri Nayaki, also known as Madura Nayaka and Madura Nayaki respectively, are revered based on the city's name-Madurai. The temple's Vilwa tree bears a stem with ten leaves known as Dasadhala Vilwa. Those experiencing negative effects from Jupiter's planet seek solace through special pujas and worship of Lord Dakshinamurthy in the temple.

IV. Conclusion

Madurai is a famous learning center for the early period. Tradition says that the Pandya capitals were the home, at different times, of three different Tamil Sangams i.e., academies of learned men. The first of these was at the old capital of Tenmadurai which was submerged in the sea, the second at Kapadapuram which was also swept under the sea, and the third at the present town of Madurai called Vadamadurai to distinguish from the Tenmadurai lost in the sea. The rich Dravidian art and culture are showcased in the enduring Tamil Nadu temples. The Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, Vijayanagar rulers, and the Nayakas each made remarkable contributions to the architecture of Tamil Nadu temples. These magnificent masterpieces were designed in unique ways by each dynasty. Every ruling dynasty has left an enduring mark on the State's architecture. With a glorious history, Madurai stands as one of the oldest cities in South India. In Panchabhootha Sthalam in Madurai, Immayil Nanmai Tharuvar temple is represented by land. This temple is the only temple in Madurai where Lord Shiva worshipped himself by taking the form of a human. The devotees call this temple Naduvor Nayagan Temple as people who worship Lord Shiva are freed from their troubles in this lifetime together. The maintenance of the temple for future generations requires action from the temple trust and the government.

References

1. Devakunjari, D. (1979), Madurai Through the Ages from the earliest to 1801 A.D, Saher Publications, Madras.
2. Gomatinayakam, P Thennindia Varalaru (Political) Manivasakam Publications.
3. Manoranjithamoni, C., (2012), History of Tamil Nadu UPTO 1565 A.D, Dave-Beryl Publications.



4. Parantamanar, A.K.,(1981), Madurai Nayakkar History., Published by Alli Nilayam.
5. Ramasamy, A.,Tamil Nadu History, New century book House pvt. Ltd.
6. Rajaram, K., (1982), History of Thirumalai Nayak, Ennes Publications.
7. Rajayyan, K.,(1974), History of Madurai (1736-1801),Madurai University, Madurai.
8. Rajayyan, K.,(1994), History of Tamil Nadu, Ratna Publications, Chennai.
9. Subrahmanian, N., (2007) , Social, Cultural History of Tamil Nadu (1336-1984 A.D), Ennes publications, Eighty and Fully Revised Edition.
10. Subramanian, N., (1977), History of Tamilnadu (A.D 1565-1956), Koodal Publishers, Madurai.
11. Sathyanatha Aiyar, R., History of the Nayaks of Madurai,Asian Educational Services, Madras.
12. Interview from Immayil Nanmai Tharuvar temple, Madurai (Land)
13. Archaeological Survey of India