ALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY

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RESEARCH PROJECT

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The Socio-Cultural Heritage of Chithirai Festival in Madurai - A Historical Study

Project submitted to the Alagappa University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
IN
HISTORY

Submitted by

A.PRIYADHARSHINI

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"The Socio-Cultural Heritage of Chithirai Festival in Madurai - A Historical Study"**. is a bonafide record of the research work, carried out by, **A.PRIYADHARSHINI** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year 2020-2022 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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DECLARATION

I hereby state that the project entitled **"The Socio-Cultural Heritage of Chithirai Festival in Madurai - A Historical Study"** Submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi-03, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Degree of Master of Arts, is a record of original research work done by me during the period 2021-2023 under the supervision and guidance of **Dr.G.PARANTHAMAN M.A., M.Phil., B.Ed., Ph.D., Assistant Professor Department of History, Alagappa University, Karaikudi** and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree /Diploma/ Associateship/ Fellowship or any other similar title of any candidate in any University.



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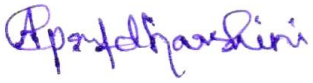
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ABBREVIATION

AD - ANNO DOMINIAN

BC - BEFORE CHRIST

CE - COMMON ERA

BCE - BEFORE COMMON ERA

KM - KILOMETRE

ARE - ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD OF EPIGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Madurai is one of the few ancient cities which enjoyed a continuous range of history from early days of human traces. The term “Madurai” seems to have some special significance and meaning which made it very popular in ancient times, but which has been forgotten at present. It is said to be derived from the word “Madhuram” which means “sweetness” and there is a story which says the word Madurai is derived from “Maruthai” denoting the presence of large number of marutham trees around the area. The other ancient terms for Madurai such as Kabaadapuram, Kadambavanam, Koodalmaanagar, Thoonganagaram are mentioned in various literary works. Each name of the ancient city holds the significance of separate stories behind it and some with relatable reference. It has been a great centre for culture and civilization. It faced different Dynasties, various invasions, and remarkable events in the course of history from prehistoric period. Madurai is noted for several things like food, festivals, tradition, culture, language, religion, art & architecture and so on.

From those days it is witnessed as a vibrant City due to its active role in the wide events of history. It is praised as the “Athens of South India” due to its symbolization and structure like ancient Greek. The Shthalapurana, which is consider as the oldest religious account speaks about Madurai and how lord Shiva and Parvati ruled over it. The purana known as “Thiruvilayadal” in Tamil narrates the 64 Leelas (acts) performed by lord Shiva in which all the leelas are said to be centered around the Madurai City. The epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana also had the references of Madurai. Pandyas and their region were mentioned in the songs of both epics. Many Sangam literatures talks about the ancient city and it’s Glory. The other literature belongs to Sangam period such as Maduraikanji, paripadal and others explain the greatness of Madurai. The works such as Silapathikaaram, Manimegalai are centered its story in and around Madurai. Madurai is also noted in the writings of foreign Travelers and invaders like Megasthenes and sultanates. The term “Sangam Vaithu Tamil valartha Madurai” is enough to describe the role of the glorious city in the Tamil history and Tamil language. It was the capital city of the victorious Pandya kingdom for many centuries. Their contribution in shaping Madurai is undeniable in the pages of history. Madurai is the home of several magnificent temples such as Meenakshi temple, koodal Perumal temple, Thiruparankundramtemple, Azhagar temple etc.

Azhagar temple or Azhagar Kovil is one such excellence that playing an essential role in acting as a historical and religious identity of Madurai even in contemporary world. This Azhagarkovil is most popular since time memorial. It is located outer from the city of Madurai. It is also the temple which was sung by alwars (devotee's of hindu religious lord Vishnu) as one of the 108 Divyadesams dedicated to lord Vishnu. Alwars like Periyalvar, Andal, Thirumangaialwar, and Buthathalwar have mentioned the temple of Azhagar Kovil in their hymns. There are 123 hymns that illustrate the glory of this temple. This temple was also known as in various names such as Thirumaliruncholai, Solaimalai, Irungundram, Thirumalirikundram, Thiruvarai and other names etc. Many inscriptions around the temple helps us to know the real name of Azhagar kovil and especially the name Thirumaliruncholai was highly mentioned in both the literatures and inscriptions. It is a Hindu religion-based temple, cultural centre, Heritage hunt, tourist treasure and the living historical monument. This temple has a long-timeback history which interlinks mythology, culture, and history in a single line. This temple attracts both saivaite & vaishnavite devotees and tourists in a large manner. Lord Azhagar is workshipped as the main deity along with sridevi and Bhudevi. They are the incarnation of Lord Vishnu and his wives. It was built by Pandyas and renovated by nayaks of Madurai. Palamudircholai which is considered as one among six sacred abodes of Lord Murugan also identified with this hill.

There is also a trace of Brami inscriptions that dates to 2000 years and a Jainbeds are identified in this temple. The cave at Azhagarmalai is located at a considerable height on the hill range and can be reached only after a stiff climb. The cave is spacious and has several stone beds carved on the rocky floor and a deep pool in one side corner. That cave has 13 tamil brami inscription. The inscriptions may be assigned to 1st century BCE. This temple traveled with many dynasties such as pandyas, Nayaks, Vijayanagar, Kalabras, cholas, Muslim Conquest, Vanadrayas, Nawabs, and others. The temple's glory was praised in every dynasty and its kings. Thus, this temple is playing a crucial role in the religious and social life of people of this area. Both the public and government have taken much care and interest in the upliftment of this temple. All the activities related with this temple and society are well recorded in the inscriptions engraved on the temple walls. The most notable think of this temple is its festivals. Provisions

made by the kings, royal family members, ministers, and rich people for conducting such pujas and festivals are well documented in the inscriptions.

Festivals are celebrated all the 12 months of Tamil. Basically, festivals are the celebration that includes people from all walks of life as it deals with socio, economic, cultural, and religious factors. Here, Chithirai festival of Azhagar temple is a splendid on-going festival in which a sea of people from all over the world throng to witness Madurai 's Magnum opus. This Chithirai thiruvizha is a carnival that is unique in many ways. This festival has a history that dates to more than 300 years as per the palm leaf manuscript sources. It will occur for whole 16 days. According to many sources, chithirai festivals is all about the event of Lord Vishnu had come to visit the marriage of goddess Meenakshi and Lord Sundareshwarar in Madurai and to take a holy bath in river vaigai. There are various events such as giving mokhsam to sage Manduga and watching the Dhasavatharam. The festival dramatically reenacts the visit of Lord Azhagar to Madurai from Azhagar kovil. From day one of the chithirai festival to its end, the city encounters the religious cultural and social events with flock of people belonging to different community. From alluring deities in Palaquin, to cheerful folk performances, decked up temples, crowded streets, tasty foods and colourful events, Chithirai thiruvizha is the city's noteworthy celebration. Even though it is a religious festival it not only awes devotees but also the people from all background as it involves a grand gathering of people encountering a cultural event. Simply the chithirai festival of Madurai mingled with the emotion and life of the people of Madurai.

Research topic

The title of this research project is "The Socio-cultural heritage of Chithirai festival in Madurai – a historical study".

Objectives

The objectives of the study are,

- To highlight the history of Azhagar kovil and Chithirai festival.

- To estimate the contribution of kings and others to Azhagar temple and Chithirai festival through inscription.
- To analyse the Chithirai festival's role in socio cultural history of people.
- To bring out the difference in historical and mythological perspectives of Chithirai festival.
- To celebrate Chithirai festival's journey through ages.

Hypothesis

This research on **The Socio-cultural heritage of Chithirai festival in Madurai – a historical study"** aims to encompass the temple and its festival from the earliest time to present. This work explains the historical background, geographical background, architecture, inscriptions, gifts, donations, contributions, and events of chithirai festival related to the Azhagarkovil. Epigraphy is the main source of information of the study. The inscriptions related to the Azhagarkovil temple are collected from the information of previous work by archeological Department of Tamilnadu. The main deity's name as "Kallazhagar" is never mentioned in any of the inscriptions of Azhagarkovil. It was added later according to the regional history and folk songs. The stories behind the events of Chithirai festival are mixture of both history and mythology which resulted in changing the course of the events in the contemporary happenings.

Methodology

This research topic had mostly adopted historical as well as descriptive method. This work involves the collection of data from various sources like field study, speeches, commentary, and gazettes from previous administrators. Chapter on king's contribution is collected from inscriptions in a descriptive manner and others from primary and secondary sources.

Review of Literature

Dr. Kalairajan's work on "Azhagar varalarum chithirai thiruvizhaneradi Varanipum" is based on a palm leaf script about the events in the festival of Madurai popularly known as Chithirai thiruvizha. Through his work he mentioned the practices in Chithirai thiruvizha in an order. It was the commentry by the varnipalargal (commentators) who had witnessed the festival in those days. This work fully deals with Lord Azhagar, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, main deity of Azhagar temple Madurai. This book also gives a clue on the role of mythological addings which slightly differ from actual history. The main deity's name mentioned in the palm leaf as "Kallalagar" should be revised as there was no authenticated sources or reason to term the deity's name.

Tho.Paramasivan's"Theivangalum samugamarabugalum" deals about the life of people's belief from early days and how we followed a relationship with the God through various activities and numerous beliefs. The author also explains about the practices of Chithirai festival and occasions related to it. The story he associates behind the name of the main deity and a particular community is seems only based on the folk songs by the local people as there is no reliable sources available rather than oral history.

Tho. Paramasivan's Azhagar Kovil gives a clear-cut view about the magnificent temple known as Azhagar Kovil in Madurai. His research on this temple is a useful contribution which helps us toknow about the nook and corner of the marvelous temple and its history.

Devakunjari's "Madurai through ages" has given the true picture & journey of Madurai from prehistory period.

"Madura" is a district gazetteer of Madurai by W. Francis, an administrator in British India. Through this we can learn the political condition of Madurai.

Chapterization

The present study "**The Socio-cultural heritage of Chithirai festival in Madurai – a historical study**" unfolds various aspects which are highlighted in three chapters with an appropriate introduction and conclusion. The introduction gives an overview of the topic, the review of literature, objectives of the research, hypothesis, methodology, period of study and the chapterisation.

CHAPTER – I

The first chapter deals with the historical and geographical background of Azhagar temple.

CHAPTER - II

The second chapter estimates the contribution of kings from various dynasties to Chithirai festival as the information which collected through the inscriptions in a descriptive manner.

CHAPTER - III

The third chapter explains about the paintings in the Azhagar temple.

CHAPTER – IV

The fourth chapters give accounts on the journey of Chithirai festival and its history in Madurai through the ages.

CHAPTER -V

The fifth chapter listed the order of events in Chithirai festival.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE AZHAGARKOVIL

AzhagarKovil is a village in Madurai district which named after a historical Azhagar temple. It underwent various changes through the centuries. It is a famous vaishnavite temple which is located at 24 km from the centre city of Madurai. It is known from Sangam period as there were many literatures mentioned about this AzhgarKovil from early Times. This temple is noted for its splendid location and architectural excellence. The place seems to have been a prosperous village once. This is also acting as an important pilgrim centre for both vaishnavite and saivite devotees as there is also a temple for Lord Murugan located on the up hills of Azhagar kovil.

Geographically Azhagar temple is in Madurai district which is the total area of about 147.97 degree in square kilometers. Madurai district was once a vast range of area consisted of present Theni, Dindugal, Ramnad, and sivangangai district. The wide Madurai district was Bifurcated into two different districts as Madurai and Dindugal in 1984 and then again into two districts as Madurai and Theni in 1997. Madurai district was politically surrounded by Dindugal district in North, Trichy in Northeast, sivagangai in East, Theni in West and virudhunagar in south. The present Madurai district consists of 11 Taluks. It extends between 9.925-degree latitude in North and 78.11-degree longitude in East. Madurai has a tropical savanna climate although it borders closely upon a hot semi-arid climate. The population of Madurai is estimated to be 4,223,171 in 2023 and it is third largest urban City in Tamilnadu. Madurai has been a major settlement for two millennia and has a document history of more than 2500 years.

Azhagar Kovil

Azhagar temple is located in the Melur Taluk of Madurai district. It extends between 10.5-degreelatitude in north and 78.14-degree longitude in East. It is situated in north, northeast direction from Madurai. The temple is constructed in between the ranges of hills from North to east direction. The mountain ranges can be seen in west & amp, north side from the

temple. Azhagarmalai range is 1000 feet in height and 20 km in length. This place is located at 900 feet above from the sea level. The hill region comprises of quarts and stone. The temple is surrounded by natural splendors of the forest.

Agriculture

Agriculture was the major profession of the people in the region and the farmers are praised and appreciated for their profession. It is once a major source of income for the whole region. Azhagar Kovil area witness different types of soil. They are Nanjainilam, Punjainilam and vayakkal can be seen in the area. The land quality is defined by the fixed cultivating crops. There is also a trace of dry land in which crops can be cultivated with the help of rainwater. Thinai, varagu, gingili, amanakku were cultivated here.

Irrigation

Variety of irrigation systems suitable for anyregion belongs to it. Tank irrigation is seen easily. The inscriptions in Azhagarkovil gives details about the tanks for example Maraneri, Punarkulam, and Kadambakulam are mentioned in various texts. Kannaru means water flow into smallest holes to the agricultural lands. Azhagarkovil inscriptions mention about few kannaru such as Pathinmunram Kannaru. Next to tank wells are commonly used as a means of irrigation. Moreover, wells are the most vital source and basic means of obtaining ground water. Well irrigation is also mentioned in the literary sources as “Kinarupasanam”. Mostly river water which flows from hill is used for cultivation. The presence of alluvial soil helps the people to enrich in agriculture activities. Due to its geographical location near the hilly region the bushes grow naturally and this place experience little rainfall, but it fills regional ponds.

People and Community

When we see the people around Azhagar Kovil, only the working community belongs to the temple area is settled very close to the temple and other commoners are settled little far away from the temple region. The temple was surrounded by agricultural fields on one side and hilly regions on other side. The people are from various communities doing different

professions and they depend on agriculture normally. Kallars, pallars, paraiyars, idaiyars, valayars and nayakar sare major community people near the Azhagarkovil region and among them kallars have the major settlements here. Their relationship with this temple is notable from early Times. Also, people from various communities visit this temple in greater number.

Temple Sorrounding

The chief architectural feature of the wall is their tower gateways or gopuras, whose origins are traced back to the early structures of the Pallavas. From the period of the Pandya rulers in the twelfth century of these gateways emerge as a dominant element in the outer appearance of the temple. Gopuras were residing at all cardinal points consistent with the expanding number of enclosure walls. As they were built to ever greater heights their structural ostentation came to overshadow the inner sanctuary, whose original super structure was frequently lost to view. A typical gopura is rectangular in plan with a central opening at ground level provided withwooden doors, often decorated with brass fixtures. Above rises the tapering tower, usually with a slightly concave profile. The tower of the gopura is divided into number of storey's which repeat on a diminishing scale the features of the walls beneath. On the summit of the tower is the characteristic barrel-vaulted roof form. These towers are celebrated for themrich ornamentation in which figural sculptures, executed in painted stucco and brick, are provided at each storey to give visible expression to the vast pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses, their consorts, and attendant figures.[1]

The method of construction of the gopura is almost similarto the construction of themain shrine of the temple. Here also, from foundation to the entablature, the method followed isone and the same. Gopura, in almost all cases, is provided with an upapitha. Occasionally double upapitha is also provided. Above the upapitha, the adhisthana of the gopura is constructed. Generally, the padabandha class of adhisthana is preferred. Above the adhisthana, the bhitti is built. This bhitti will have all the decorations found onthe regular bhitti of the shrine. The bhitti may be single-storied or double-storied. In the double-storied base, the lower storey is called adhojanga and the upper storey, the urdhvajanga. In case the bhitti is single-storeyed,

[1]George michell, The Hindu Temple an Introduction to its Meaning and forms, London, 1977, pp. 150-151

aprastara is built above the bhitti. In case the bhitti is double storeyed, above the bhitti of the first storey, a heavy kapota of the first type is placed. Above the kapota, vajana, gala and prati are built. Above this, the bhitti of the second storey is raised. Rare instances of second storey having the details of full-fledged adhisthana are also noticed.[2]Azhagarkovil temple has a seven-tiered gopuram (gateway tower). The largest gopura, in the outermost walls on the south, is an immense structure measuring about 39 by 30 meters in the plan. The temples have a series of one or more gopuras marking the main axis into the structure but are joined by a single additional gopura in the north wall of the first or second prakara.

This is the Vaikunta-vasal, sorkkavasal or paramapatavasal, literally "heaven's gate," a feature unique to the many Vaishnava temples built in this period. It is an exit for Vishnu during a specific annual festival performed in every Srivaishnava temple, the festival of recitation (Adhyayanotsavam). Architecturally, the "heaven's gate" is undistinguishable from other gopuras, though it is always located on the north side of a temple, whatever the overall orientation. Vishnu's heaven, Vaikunta, is understood to lie to the north. A small, four-columned mandapa may be located directly outside the sorkkavasal in which images of the Alvars, the Tamil Vaishnava poet-saints, are placed to greet Vishnu upon his first departure from his temple on Vaikuntaekatasi. The Andal temple at Srivilliputtur and the Azhagar temple at Azhagarkovi lboth have such a mandapa. Tamil Vaishnava temples are now divided between those following the northern Vadakalai or southern Tenkalai doctrine of Srivaishnavism. Many Vadakalai temples omit this gateway; for example, the pre-eminent Vadakalai Varadaraja temple at Kanchipuram and the Vaishnava temples of Kumbakonam, all now Vadakalai, do not have a sorkkavasal. In contrast, most Tenkalai temples do not have such a northern gateway. The emergence of such a ritually determined gopura is indicative of the growing architectural and sectarian distinction of Tenkalai from Vadakalai temples of the sixteenth–seventeenth century, a period of increasing Vaishnava sectarianism across India.

The main deity of the temple is sundarajaperumal and sundaravalliammal, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi. There is also separate shrine dedicated for Andal, an alwar who submitted her life for Lord Vishnu. The temple is surrounded by two forts

[2] Manoj, Temples of salem region (up to 1336 A.D.), Unpublishedph. D thesis, university of mysore, 2007.

namelyIraniyankottai (outer fort) and Alagapurikottai (interior fort). The two forts are nearly located around 100 acres of land. The fort constructed in southern side is four times bigger than the interior fort constructed in Northern side. The reference of this temple by Perialvar as "MathilsoolSolaimalai" denotes that they must be a fort existed during his period. The Mandapas holds a significant place in the historical excellence of AzhagarKovil. The various mandapas of this temple isYathiraja mandapam which is also known as Thirukalyana mandapam is located on the front area of main entrance of the Azhagar temple. The other notable mandapas are Thondaiman mandapam, Sundarapandiya mandapam, Maha mandapam and so on. There is a separate shrine constructed in the main entrance of the temple which is dedicated for Lord Pathinettampadi karupaswamy. There is a grand door is Workshiped in the name of karupaswamy. He is said to be the "Kaavaltheivam", a protector of Azhagar. This shrine is also a part of Azhagar Kovil. He is more associated with the regional people and their workship. There is a separate temple constructed for Lord Murugan, as one of his six shrines called as Aarupadaiveedugal in Tamil is located on the hill of the Azhagar Kovil. It is popularly called as "Palamuthircholai".

Streets of Azhagar kovil

The street around the temple is named according to its direction of location and occasions of Tamil months. The four streets from the kalyanamandapam or yathiraja mandapam located in the front of the temple is known as aadiveethi and yathirajaveethi. The god will be taken for a people's visit around these streets in anauspicious occasion on Aadi month. Rajagopuram located in the southern direction of the Aadi veethi. That leads way to the vasanthamandapam. In the centre of vasantha mandapam a stage which is known as "neeralimandapam" is constructed. In thr roof of the vasanthamandapam the paintings of nayaks can be traced. Ramayana stories were painted on the roof and each captioned with a Tamil explanation.

Rayagopuram or Rajagopuram

Rajagopuram of this temple can be seen from the east of the vasanthamandapam. But it is construction which was not constructed completed. There is an inscription on this rajagopuram which states about the vijayanagar kings especially the kings known as aaraveedu. This inscription date back to the period of 1546 AD. From that it can be identified thatthe rajagopuram is started to build in the sixteenth century but stopped inbetween and not constructed by any of the kings from different dynasties ruled Madurai.

Sanctum

The sanctum of this temple is called nangalkundram. Inside the sanctum the sculpture of the main deity Azhagar can be seen in a standing poster along with goddess Sridevi and Bhudevi on both sides facing the east direction. Here the main deity is called as sundararajaperumal. He is seen with chakara on his right hand, sangu(conch) on his left hand. The notable thing is this temple the chakara in the right hand of the main deity is placed as a using object not like a part of his body in a sculpture like other vaishnavite temples.

First thirusutru of the temple

The first round of the temple is located around the sanctum of the main deity which ends with munaiyatharaiya mandapam. From this phase the vimana of the temple can be seen. The vimana of this temple is called as “somasanthavimanam”. It denotes the comparison of the vimana with soman that is moon.

Second thirusutru of the temple

From the west of the munaiyatharaiya mandapam the second round of the temple can be reached. Thirukalyana sundaravallithaayar shrine located in the southern part of this thirusutru. At the backside of this sundaravallithayyar shrine, thiruvalialwar shrine is located. In the second

thirusutru there were the sculptures of the devotees who worked for the welfare of the temple. In the north side of the temple in second thirusutru, Palliyarai is located. From the northern side of the palliyarai the Yoga narasimhar can be identified. He is also called as Ukkiranarasimhar and Jwalanarasimhar. The shrine, which is dedicated for ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu, Andal located in the east direction of the second thirusutru. There is also a yahasalai and vahana mandapam.

Nandhavanam

Nandavanam is simply a flower garden around the temple from where the flowers are taken for the decoration of deities and their Palaquins. Here there is a story that says Periyalvar, an ardentdevotee of Lord vishnu takes flower from the Nanthavanam to décor the garland for the Lord. And thus, that Nanthavanam is called as Periyalvar Nanthavanam. Various inscriptions of Azhagar Kovil states that the nandavanams are usually gifted by various kings and donors to the temple. The common flower plants in the Nanthavanam are kuvalai, sengalunir, malligai, sirusenbagam, perusenbhagam, iruvatchi and other flowers etc.

Thoppu

Next to Nanthavanam, Thoppu is commonly seen around the temple. Thoppu denotes the large grove of trees. The grove belongs to Azhagar Kovil are rich with plantains, mango trees, areca nuts, jackfruit, coconut trees and other fruit trees.

Water resources

Aramathukulam, the main water source which extract water from a small river called silambaru that flows from the hill. It provides the basic water source to the temple area which then flows towards the Madurai City. There is also a pond situated on the nearby village called Poikaripatti which belongs to another Kovil from where the teppam festival will be conducted usually. Other then that there is a temple tank opposite to the Pathinettampadi karupaswamy shrine which is considered as temple tank built by pandya kings. The holy water that flows and

stored in the Rakkaiyi Amman temple on the top of the Azhagarkovil is called as "Nuburagangai". There are also other float festivals are workshipped on the auspious day of this shrine. An important part of the South Indian temple is a huge well of water known as the temple. Theppakulam or stepped tank, as is the tradition in Hinduism, a devotee may not go into the temple without bathing. For the convenience of the temple visitor, ancient architects constructed massive temple tanks for sacred bathing in holywater before going to pray and worship.

The infrastructures of the steps have also allowed many to gather and bath simultaneously, to cater to the large religious population in South India.[3]Temple tanks have also served more useful purpose as water reservoirs throughout the rain seasons of South India so that the local communities can collect and storewater especially given the high susceptibility of drought in the Indian climate. Lastly, in morerecent times as misuse and pollution have rendered many wells inconvenient for bathing, the tank complexes have helped maintain and increase the flora and fauna of the area by allowing for the growth of green space and water life within. In front of Karuppannswamy temple, there is trenching Azhagarkovil Theppakulam (tank). This temple tank is square in plan. Another Theppakulam is situated at Poigaikaraipatti, which is rectangular in plan. Many temples have two tanks: one inside and the other outside the temple building. Poigaikaraipatti, here is a structure known as Neerali mandapa situated in the centre the tank. The main purpose is to house the deity during the float festival. Granite slabs are used for constructing the steps on all sides.

Literary sources of Azhagar kovil

As already mentioned, the temple of Azhagar kovil was mentioned in many literary works of both tamil and Sanskrit from earlier days.

[3] Harini s. Rajaraman, Mending the seams of an urban patchwork quilt: Achieving an 'Ordered chaos' in Temple towns of southern India, unpublished Degree of Bachelor of Science in Art and Design (BSAD) thesis, submitted to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, June 2007, p.17.

Paripadal

Sangam poem Paripadal celebrates in verse below the glory of perumal and describes vividly **Tirumalirunjolai.**

"Alangumaruviarthimilpuiliyach
Silambaruanindaseergelutiruvin
Solaiyoduthodarmolimalirunkunran"[4]

The poet says that the greatness of Malirunkunram Mountain and **Silambaru.**

"Sunaiyelam Neelam malarach, chunaisool
Sinaiyelamseyalaimalarak, kaykani
Urala, nanaivengaiollinarmalara,
Mayonothavinnilaitha
Senrutholukaller! Kandupaniminme
Irungunrennumparandathaduve"[5]

Among these mountains and hills those which relieve men from hunger are very few. Again, few are the mountains withcloud-capped tops, and few are the ponds with flowers sacred to Tirumal.

"Kadalumkanalumpolavum
Pulliyasollumporulumpolavum
Ellamveruveruruvinorutholiliruvarth
Thanguneelnilaiongirugnkunram"[6]

Of these few the most outstanding is Tirumalirunjolaimalai in which Kannan and Paladevan reside. This ode gives us an interesting idea that at the time of Paripatal, the almighty

[4]Paripadal 15:21-23
[5]Ibid, 15: 30-35
[6] Ibid, 15:11-14

was worshipped here as Kannan and Paladevan. Their complexion is compared to sea andmirage, and even as the word and its meaning are inseparable their divine dispensations tohumanity was the same.

"Naruinarththulayonnalkinallathai
Earuthalelitho, veruperuthurakkam?
ArithinperuthurakkamMalirunkunram
Elithinperalurimaieathugam, silamba"[7]

The above verse stresses that without the grace of God, who wears the garland of basil (tulasi), no one can get the bliss of heaven. If we want to attain bliss easily, the best way is topraise and adores the Tirumalirunkunram. Tirumalirunjolaimalai is portrayed as well as its tarn ingraceful phraseology.

Tirumurugarrupadai

The Tirumurugarrupadai offers an interesting picture of his worship here.

"Ilumenailitharumaruvip
PalmudirSolaimalaikilavone[8]
Palamuthircholai is one of the six abodes of Lord Muruga".

Silappadikaram

"Kadampalakidandakadudankalidu
Tirumalkunrathuchelkuverayai."[9]

The epic Silappadikaram is said to belong to the 2nd century CE. The part of KadukanKathai, says about Tirumalkunram as follows:

[7]Ibid, 15: 15-18
[8]Thirumurugarrupadai, 316 and 317
[9]Silappathigaram 11-90 and 91

"Nilampakaveelndasilambarrakanralai"

This stanza refers to Silambaru, which flows on the Tirumalirunjolai mountain.

"Marravaininaiyathumalaimisaininron
Porramaraithalullamporundumin"

The main deity Lord Azhgar, whose feet is as soft as lotus, lives at Tirumalirunjolai.

Valmiki Ramayana

It is believed that Hanuman, a devotee of Lord Rama, went to Sri Lanka through Tirumalirunjolai. According to Kiskinda Kandam, this mountain did not have much height but spread into a stretching shape. According to Vanaparvatha, Tirumalirunjolai hill was also called Vrushapahtri.This poem also mentioned that a sage Yuthisthira took a holy bath in the stream flowing from the hills.

Nalayira Divya Prabandham

Nalayira Divya Prabandham, an ancient Vaishnava piece of literature is a collection of 4000 stanzas of Tamil poetry celebrating the 108 places of worship sacred to Lord Vishnu. These poems by tradition are attributed to a certain number of devotees, generally counted as twelve Alvars. The Alvars, who lived during the 7th and the 9th centuries, sang the praise of Vishnu and claimed divinity of the highest rank. Their poems constitute the anthology, known as Nalayira Divya Prabandham (the four thousand). Nalayira Divya Prabandham throws light on the early history of Azhagar kovil and Lord Vishnu as the supreme god of Azhagar kovil, Srirangam and Thiruppathi hills.

"IruppidamVaikundamVenkadamMalirunjolaiennum

PoruppidamMayanukkuenpornallor"[10]

According to **AlavarPasurams**

"Valarilampolil, sool, Malirunjolai"

"Mathithavalkudumi, Malirunjolai"[11]

"Mayalmigupolilsool, Malirunjolai"

"Varumalaithavalum, Malirunjolai"[12]

"Maru il van sunaisool, Malirunjolai"

"Malak kalirruinam ser, Malirunjolai"

"Mathuurumayil ser, Malirunjolai"[13]

All the above hymns mention about the present Azhagar kovil and ancient Tirumalirunjolai hill of Lord Azhagar.

Periyalvar

Periyalvar was a native of Srivilliputtur, a small town in the Virudhunagar district of southern Tamil Nadu. The 30 pasurams composed by Periyalvar in NalayiraDivyaPrabandam refered to Lord Azhagar eight times a Then TirumalirunjolaiPeruman.[14] Among the 30 Pasurams he composed, a full set of verses the Azhagarmalai itself stress the importance of Azhagarmalai in the moonram Tirumoli.[15] He also refers to the auspicious Thirtham Silambaru (presently called NupuraGangai) in his verse. Periyalvar spent last few years of his life at Tirumalirunjolai andsaid to have died here. This shows his special love for the temple and the Lord.

Andal

Andal, the foster child of Periyalvar has composed two works Tiruppavai and Nachiyar. Tirumol, which are immensely popular. Andal always nurtured a special love for Lord

[10]NalayiraDivyaPrabandam, 2896.
[11]Ibid, 3111.
[12] Ibid, 3113.
[13] Ibid, 3119.
[14]Ibid, 71,258, 338, 453, to 462.
[15]Ibid, 338.

Azhagar stationed in Tirumalirunjolai. From her early childhood, she grew up listening to her father's devotional pasurams expressing his love for the Perumal. Later she composed 10 pasurams about Lord Azhagar. These pasurams explain Andal'slove for Lord Azhagar, beauty of Tirumalirunjolai's hill, forest, and birds.

Nammalvar

Nammalvar is the champion philosopher among the Alvars. He is the author of Tiruviruttam, Tiruvasiriyam, Periya Tiruvandathi and Tiruvaymoli. He has written 46 hymns About Lord Azhagar and Tirumalirunjolai. In Tiruvaymoli, Nammalvar has delved deep into the several layers of consciousness for a mystic experience of God. Irandampathu, PathamTiruvaymoli has 11 songs composed on the reverence of mountain Tirumalirunjolai. People would go to Tirumalirunjolai and worship Malirunjolai Mayon.[16]Munrampathu, Mudalam Tiruvaymoli have 11 songs is composed about the beauty of Tirumalirunjolai Lord Azhagar. Munrampathu, IrandamTiruvaymoli have 11 songs is composed about deity Azhagar's courageous activities. Pathampathu, ealamTiruvaymoli[17]have 11 songs and Pathampathu, ettamTiruvaymoli have 2 songs in praise ofTirumalirunjolai and Lord Azhagar's love for Nammalvar.

Tirumangai Alvar

Tirumangai Alvar was a great campaigner. He visited as many as 85 pilgrim centers an and was responsible for building many Vaishnavite temples. His experiments with the Tamil Prosody, not hesitating to use even the folk song motifs, reveal his maturity, and establish him as one of the greatest poets in Tamil. Tirumangai Alvar, one of the most learned of the Alvars, is one who has contributed 40 number of Pasurams in the PeriyaTirumoli about Lord Azhagar and Tirumalirunjolai.On pathampathuettam Tirumoli[18]and onpathamTirumoli[19]mention

[16]Ibid, 3110 to 3120.
[17] Ibid, 3957, to 3967.
[18]Ibid, 1818 to 1827.
[19] Ibid,1828 to 1827.

about Tirumalirunjolairest of the 20 Pasurams describes Lord Azhagar and Tirumalirunjolai in detail.

Puthattalvar

Puthattalvar has composed three Pasurams in the second Tiruvandathi on Tirumalirunjolai. The Alvar describes the beauty of Tirumalirunjolai, and fragrance of flowers found on the hill. Peyalvar had composed only one Pasuram in his 3rd Tiruvandathi aboutTirumalirunjolai. He eulogizes the sanctity ofAzhagar kovil.

Sanskrit Literature

SundaraBahusthavam

SundaraBahusthavam was written by Kurattalvar, who lived during the 11th century CE. This work speaks about Lord Azhagar's leela, dasavatara features, significance of Soma SandaVimana, streams, and the beauty of Tirumalirunjolai hill. The poet narrates that Lord Azhagar gave darsan to Pandya king Malaiyathvasa Pandyan.[20]

SoundrarajaSubrabhatam

Kurattalvar wrote SoundrarajaSubrabhatam in Sanskrit is played to wakeup Lord Azhagar from sleep.

"Mathassamsthajagathamavanaya Lakshmi
Thuthvaishnavampathamubekshayavanathrithama
Propthasuyathya kamala thavaSubrabhata

This hymn is played for waking Lord Azhagar and his consort from sleep.

[20]Muthu Pichai, op.cit., p.174.

SundararajaSthothram

This Sthothram, written by same author describe Tirumalirunjolai hill.

"Vanasailapathegirivapralasan
Navaneerathaneelathanesuba
Aparathasathayirparithamthvaritham
Saranathvathsalbahivipo."[21]

SundararajaMangalam

Kuradalvar wrote Sundrarajamanalam song on Lord Azhagar praising Lord Azhagar, his consort and Soma Sanda vimana.[22]

AzhagarAnthadi

Tirumalirunjolai literally means "tirumal+irum+solai" or the place of residence of Tirumal or Maha Vishnu/Sriman Naarayanan. In his Nurrettu Tiruppatiantadi, the divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Aiyengar, states very clearly the benefits that can result from seeking the Lord's blessings through performing Saranagati at his sacred feet and offering garlands of Tamil payirams to him. Such a daring act on his part is linked by the Kavi to the gains of residence in the jotirmaya Paramapadam(sriVaikuntham). His payiram divyadesam for arca murti Sri Sundarabahu is constituted by Aparanjitangam (pure gold) and receives tirumanjanam from the waters of Nupura Gangai. He accepts hundred vessels of delectable akkaraadisil from Acharya Ramanujaand he hosted Kuresar at his divyadesam during a difficult period in his life. The grateful Kuresar presented the Sundarabahustavam in honor of his Kula deivam. At the time of Kalapam, Azhagar hosted Lord Ranganathan during his sancharam away from Srirangam.[23]Lord Azhagar was called by Alagiya Manavalar using various names, like Malalangaran, Alagan, Sundaran, Solaimalai and Lord Azhagar abode was called Solaimamalai.

[21]Ibid, p.175.
[22] Idem.
[23]AzhagarAnthathi, Annoted commentary in English by oppiliyappankovilsrivaradacharisathakopan, p.1.

Azhagarpillaithtamil

This song was written by Vembattur poets. The author biographical details are not known. This literature has 100 songs, from KappuParuvam to SirutherParuvam. This poem narrates the significance of Lord Tirumala, Malalangaran, Tirumalirunjolai hill, and Silambaru.

AzhagarKalambagam

Kavikunjaramayyar wrote AzhagarKalampagam and composed 100 songs that narrated various avathars of Lord Vishnu. He made a special attention to Kannan's leela from Krishnaavataras, besides singing about Tirumal's fight with demon and the significance of LordAzhagar.

AzhagarKuravanji

Kavikunjara Bharati (1810-1890) wrote AzhagarKuravanji, which drew its inspiration from KutralaKuravanji. The poet created two characters: Kuravan and Kuratti, who the significance of Azhagar, the beauty of Tirumalirunjolai, and importance of Silambaru and Soma Sanda Vimana.[24]

AzhagarKillaiViduThuthu

Palapattadai Chokkanatha Pillai wrote AzhagarViduThuthu in 19th century CE. Tirumalirunjolai was called by several names such as Alangaranmalai, Azhagar kovil, Azhagarmalai, Irunkunram, Kulamalai, Kulirmamamali, Korramalai, Kolamalai, Singathiri, Seerpathi, Solaimalai, Tirumalai, Tirumalkunram, Thenthiruppathi, Nilamalai, Neendamalai, Palamudhircholai, Malirunkunram, and Vanagiri. Lord Azhagar also called by various namessuch as Alangarar, Azhagar, SangattAzhagar, Sundarattolar, Solaimalaikkarasu, Deivasigamani, Malaiyalangarar, Malalangarar and Paramasvami. Lord Azhagar's consort was

[24]Azhagarkuravanchji. P. 105.

called as Sundaravalli. The poet wrote about sanctity of Lord Azhagar, the natural scenary of Tirumalirunjolaimalai and Silambaru, Chithirai Thiruvila, significance of Lord Tirumal's incarnations and Bhagavatha Kathai (story) in the literary work.

AzhagarAmmanai

AzhagarAmmanai was written by an unknown author, which highlighted Lord Azhagar's incarnations. Tirumalirunjolai was mentioned in this work as Kudamendi Kovalalarkal Kuttadum Kunrudaiyan. The shepherds were performing drama at Tirumalirunjolai.[25] Rather than literary works, inscriptions play a major role in explaining the history of Azhagar kovil and estimating the contributions of kings and others to the Azhagar kovil.

[25]Muthu Pichai, op. cit, p.177.

CHAPTER II

CONTRIBUTIONS OF KINGS TO AZHAGAR KOVIL THROUGH INSCRIPTIONS

The inscriptions of Azhagar kovil gives various accounts of information about the temple and its history from sangam period. These inscriptions can be identified majorly on every part of the temple. As far as the inscriptions copied from Azhagar temple the earliest one date back to the period of the cholas king rajaraja 1 and then we have the inscriptions of the later pandya rulers like marvarma sundarapandya 1, jatavarmasundarapamdya 1 etc. From the inscriptiona of the later pandya rulers it is clearly understood that a certain monnaippiran viradhammudithaperumal alias munaiyadharan has evinced keen interest in constructing certain mandapas and erecting certain pillars. Even today the mandapas constructed by this munaiyadharayan is popularly known as munaiyadharan mandapa after his name. Likewise, the mandapam which is now known by the name sundarapandiyankuradu is playing an important role in certain religious activities and ceremonies of this vaishnavite centre, starting from the period of maravarmansundarapandya 1, from these facts it can safely concluded that this mandapam is in existence from the period of sundarapandya 1(1216 -1238). From an inscription noticed in the south base of the sundarapandyan it is known the gift of the village vilathur with its hamlet ilonogeri in solapandyavalanadu for meeting out the expences of the sacred bath offerings etc. Of the god Azhagar and his consort seated in the sundarapandya mandapa in every month, on the day of uttiradam, the natal star of the king's elder brother(annalvi).

This mandapam was constructed in the later pandyas period for conducting certain special workship to the deities. Further it is understood that many individuals also had contributed liberally for the construction of this mandapam. The inscriptions engraved on the pillars speak about the individuals who have contributed for the setting up of those pillars individually. Kuttanattiyur alias sundarapandyavilupparaiyan a vellala residing at thirumaliruncholaivenkurugurnagaranbhattan are the names of some donors that can be traced from these inscriptions. An inscription of this temple records the provisions made for the

recitation of the "kothaipattu" (hymns of andal) before the deity. Another inscription records the remission of taxes at the instance of ayyanmalavarayan on the lands granted as devadana in vanavanmadevi chadurvedimangalam situated in venburanadu for the offerings and other expenses of the god on the day of sathayam in the month of mina (panguni) and the natal star of sokkanathar. From the earliest inscriptions recorded in the second prakar wall. It can be safely concluded that this Vaishnavi tetemple is having the extensive area of two praharas atleast from the period of that kulasekarapandya who ruled this area from 1190 AD to 1216 AD. The hoysala rulers also have contributed their best to this vaishnavite temple by rebuilding the main shrine of Azhagar can be dated back to fifteenth century AD. These vanadhirayans were very much pleased to have their names as "thirumaliruncholainintran" after the name of the hill where the deity Azhagar resides as they were the strong devotes of Azhagar. The third prakara wall of this temple seems to have been constructed during the reign of the popular nayak ruler "Thirumalainayak". Mandapam which looks like a theatre with a stage where people can assemble in large number and can perform their religious ceremonies and have eract their folks' arts and dances.

Cholas

Three inscriptions of Chola rules were found at Azhagar kovil. These inscriptions gave evidence that the royal patronage was extended to the temple by the Chola rulers. The earliest one dated back to the period of the Chola king Rajaraja Chola I. This damaged record begins with the historical introduction of Chola king Rajaraja I. Another damaged inscription of Rajaraja Chola's 22nd regional year mentioned of a gift of land donation to the Azhagar koviltemple.[26] This temple also has Sundara Chola Pandya's 22nd regnal year inscription, whichmentioned about lamp donation made to the temple.

Later Pandyas

More than sixty inscriptions belonging to later Pandya rulers were found in the temple. These epigraphs testified the royal patronage extended to the temple by the later Pandya rulers

[26]. ARE, 80 of 1910.

JatavarmanKulasekaran I (1190-1218)

Eighteen inscriptions of JatavarmanKulasekaran I, were found in the temple. His inscriptions began with a historical introduction on Puvin-Kilatti. JatavarmanKulasekaran I, in his 9th regional year (1201 CE), recorded an order issued by the king at the request of Kalingarayar. Kalingarayan' remitted the taxes on the land granted by Tuvarapati-VelanAlagap-Perumal.[27]

MaravarmanVikrama Pandya Devan I (1218-1232)

Maravarman Vikrama Pandya I ascended the throne in 1218 CE.[28]His prasasti is beginning with TirumagalJayamagal. Azhagar kovil temple has totally four inscriptions of this king. A record containing that prasasti mentioned about a certain endowment made to Azhagartemple to meet out the expenses of ghee to light lamps from the ninth day of the annual festivalof the temple.

MaravarmanSundara Pandya I (1216-1244)

MaravarmanSundara Pandya I could be called the true founder of the Second Pandyan Empire. He not only liberated the Pandya country from Chola imperialism but took revenge on the Cholas. Till the end of his reign, he carried on a relentless war against them.[29]

MaravarmanSundara Pandya II (1238-1255)

He had a short reign. During his period the Hoysala influence increased and with its consequent confusion. His thrones were called Malavarayan and Pallavarayan. His wife was Ulagamuluthudaiyal.[30]

[27]. ARE, 302 of 1929.
[28]A.J. Thinakaran, The second pandyan empire, Coimbatore, 1987.p.72.
[29]A.J. Thinakaran, op.cit., p.72
[30]K.V. Raman, some aspects of pandyan History in The light of Recent discoveries, University of Madras.

JatavarmanVirapandya I (1253-1283)

JatavarmanVirapandya I's accession date is said to be 1253 CE. We could identify theking by his inscriptions, containing epithet 'who tool Ilam, Kongu and Sonadu' and celebrated the anointment of heroes and victors and Perumbarrapuliyur. We could also identify the king by another prasastis, which was more elaborate in particulars than the one stated above Kongila Kondu Koduvadugu Kodalithu, Gangaiyiru Karaiyung KaviriyungKaikkonduPorpuliyur kamumpanniyaruliya Sri Virapandyadevarkuyandu.[31]

JatvarmanSundara Pandya Devan (1250-1284)

JatavarmanSundaraPandya was the greatest of the kings of the second Pandya Empire. Under him the Pandyan Empire reached the zenith of glory both in the political conquests and cultural achievements. The entire Tamil country had his active control. He built a hall in the Perumal temple at Azhagar kovil. It was called Kovil-ponmeinda-Perumal Tirumandapa.[32]

MaravarmanKulasekaran (1268-1312)

MaravarmanKulasekaran was also a contemporary of JatavarmanSundara Pandya and Virapandya. In 1268, the date of his accession, all the three were kings - a practice very peculiar to the Pandyan Kingdom alone and which had struck the foreign visitors also. Not only this, the rule of nearly five kings overlaps with one another, making it rather difficult to demarcate sharply their jurisdiction. Maravarman Kulasekaran was however a powerful monarch whose inscriptions are numerous.[33]

[31]. A.J. Thinakaran, op. cit., p.127.
[32]ARE, 85 of 1928-29.
[33]K.V. Raman, op.cit., p.72.

JatavarmanRajarajaSundara Pandya (1310-1332)

Towards the end of the years of Maravarman Kulasekara, another son Jatavarma sundara Pandya III became the sub-king some time in CE 1303 along with his elder brother Jatavarman Virapandyawho ascended the throne in 1297. Wassaf recorded the civil war between these two brothers. In this, the old king Kulasekara was murdered and Sundara Pandya was also defeated. He apparently sought the help of the invading Muslim forces under Malik Kafur, thegeneral of Allaud-din Khilji. His invasion only added to the confusion.[34]

Hoysala interruption

The contemporaries of Sundara Pandya I in Pandya Nadu maintained cordial relationswith the Hoysalas and become their passive protégés. The Hoysalas had marriage tie with both the Pandyas and Cholas. By now the Cholas began to show signs of recovery and play an aggressive role against the Pandyas. So, the Hoysalas intervened on behalf of the weaker kingdom, the Pandyas to maintain the balance of power. The Telugu Cholas, who tried to prop up the Cholas, were confronted by the Hoysalas. However, the Hoysalas arrived at acompromise with the Cholas after a show of strength. The Hoysalas power steadily increased inthe Pandya country.

As per a record, we know that MaravarmanSundara Pandya II called Somesvaraasmamadi. Somesvara appeared to have been mamadi to both Maravarman Sundara Pandya II and JatavarmanVikrama Pandya I. The two Pandyas were deemed as brothers. Pommiyakkan probably a Hoysala princess was said to be his mother. She was probablythe queen of MaravarmanSundara Pandya I and the sister of Hoysala Vira Somesvara (i.e., the daughter of Vira Narasimha II being implied). But this view has been questioned and it is pointed out that Narasimha II could hardly have given his daughter in marriage to MaravarmanSundara Pandya. Maravarman Sundara Pandya III called the Hoysala Vira Somesvara his mamadi and if Pommiyakkan, his mother was queen of MaravarmanSundara Pandya I, as per the version of the annual epigraphical report of 1912, then MaravarmanSundara

[34]Ibid, p.34.

Pandya II might have been the son of MaravarmanSundara Pandya I. It was certain however that Hoysala-Pandya relation was sealed by dynastic marriage in the reign of MaravarmanSundara Pandya 1.[35]

The word 'mamadi' could be translated as either maternal uncle (as aforesaid) or father-in-law or father's sister's (aunt's) husband. There was no epigraphical evidence for the latter relationship. It is opined that Somesvara stood in the relation of father-in-law to Maravarman Sundara Pandya II, for during CE 1240-47, he must have married his daughter to Maravarman Sundara Pandya II, it is also possible that the same person referred to as mamadi here both therelationship as father-in-law and as maternal uncle. The collected records from Azhagar kovil which allude to the mamadi of the Pandya king. A record, for instance, stated that at the request of his mamadi, a royal order was issued from Malavarayan at the Madurai palace remitting the taxes on the village Tirukkottiyur inKeralasinga-valanadu for the offerings and other expenses of the services called Posala-Vira. Somidevan-Sandhi instituted in the temple in the name of the Hoysala. The temple there was called Tirumalirunjolai-ninraruliya-Paramasvamin.[36]

This order was issued in the 988th day (i.e., 11th year) of MaravarmanSundara Pandya II (i.e., about CE 1249) from a record of ViraSomesvara found in the temple. We learn that this service was instituted in the tenth year of his last reign. (i.e., about CE 1243). As such, the grant was made for the said Sandhi by MaravarmanSundara Pandya II, in compliance with the request of his mamadi must have been a subsequentevent, after the lapse of five years or more. Another record dated in the eleventh year ofMaravarmanSundara Pandya II referred to the creation of a bramadeya called asPosal-Vira-Somideva-chaturvedimangalam.[37] From the inscription of Azhagar kovil's, we come to know about MaravarmanSundaraPandya II's Annalvi (elder brother) Sokkandar. This record dated back to the second year of the king and contains the epithet. The natal star of the king's Annalvi was given as Sadayam in mina, on the day in which offerings were to be made to the god at Tirumalirunjolai. The due provisions were made by the king's elder brother.

[35]Ibid, p.84.
[36] ARE, 291 OF 1929-30.
[37]. A.J.Thinakaran, op. cit., p.86.

The vanadarayas

Lord Azhagar of Tirumalirunjolai was the tutelary deity of the Vanadirayas. Azhagar kovil was most probably their political capital. They made numerous beneficiations to the temples at Azhagar kovil and Srivilliputtur. They had the Garuda banner and Azhagar Tiruvullam was them sign manual. These would indicate that they were ardent Vaishnavas. According to the inscriptions, one can assert the Vanadirayas ruled the nearby parts of Azhagar kovil, and they made contributions to Azhagar kovil. A Tirumalirunjolaininran alias Mavalivanadarayan was called the Madurapuri Mahanayagan was a subordinate of the Vijayanagara king, who witnessed theelephant hunt (probably Devaraya II). In 1453 Urangavillidasan alias Mahabali Vanadirayar was ruling the Madurai country. He seems to have had the name Tirumalirunjolaininran alsosince epigraphs call him Tirumalirunjolaininran Mavalivanadarayan alias Urangavillidasan or Tirumalirunjolaininran Mavalivanadirayan Urangavillidasam,[38] Tirumalirunjolaininran was succeded by his son Sundarattoludaiyan Mavalivanadarayan.[39] The Vanadarayas chieftains are devotees of Lord Azhagar and during their period Azhagar kovil had been a cultural centre. The rulers assumed titles bearing Lord Azhagar.Tirumalirunjolai ninran and Sundarattoludaiyan Mavalivanadarayan.

Krishna Devaraya (1509-1529 CE)

Sri Krishna Devaraya was the well-known king of Vijayanagara Empire. He belonged to the Tuluva dynasty. During his period Vijayanagara Empire attained its zenith. His inscription is engraved on the inner side of the south wall of the Pathinettampadi gopura of Azhagar kovil. According to that the inscription gift of the two villages as Tiruvidaiyattam, Samayanallur and Sattamangalam, located on the banks of the Vaigai river in Pandimandalam were donated by certain Immadi-Viraya-Dhandesvara on behalf of the Vijayanagara ruler KrishnadevarayaMaharaja.

[38]. ARE, 219 OF 1931-32.
[39]. Devakunjari, op.cit., p.179.

Achutha Raya (1529-1542 CE)

Achutha Raya was the younger brother of Krishna Devaraya, whom he succeeded in 1529. Azhagar kovil temple has inscription on the north wall of the Pathinettampadi gopura by this king. This records that the village Adanji in Kunratturseermai located on the northernbank of the Vaigai river was endowed as Tiruvidaiyattam by Visvanatha Nayaka, son of Nagama Nayaka as Achuthadevaraya Dharman.

Sadasiva Raya (1542-1570 CE)

His inscriptions engraved on the northwall of the Thondaiman gopuram in the Azhagar kovil records an endowment gifted as Tiruvidaiyattam to the deity Tirumalirunjolai Azhagar.

Aravidu dynasty

During the period of Aravidu dynasty Azhagar kovil was well patronized. A ruinedRaya gopuram (tower) was reconstructed by this dynasty.

Visvanatha Nayaka

Visvanatha Nayaka was a good administrator and was ably assisted in his work by AriyanathaMudali, the well known dalavay and pradhani who served under the first four Nayaka rulers. With his help Visvanatha demolished the old Pandya rampart and ditch which atthat time surrounded the walls of the temple and constructed an extensive double-walled fortress with bastions. On the outer side of the west wall of the Madappalli of the Azhagar kovil temple has Visvanatha Nayaka inscription. This records that the Nayaka had endowed the village Amanji, located in KunratthurSeermai, as Tiruvidaiyattam to the temple. AriyanathaMudali who has donated two villages such as Kurunthankulam and Veppankulam to this temple, and he instituted AriyanathaMudaliyarArakkattalai.

Thirumalai nayaka

Tirumalai Nayaka built an extensive palace and Mandapa at Azhagar kovil. This palace was demolished by Hyder Ali. Third prakara of thistemple tiruppani was done by him. This prakara has Tirumalai Nayaka portrait sculpture on thepillar of the mandapa. On the door jamb of the outer North gopura of the Azhagar kovil hasTirumalai Nayaka Inscription that to records the gift made by the Madurai NayakarulerTirumalai Deva Maharaja (emperor) for the Friday pujas of this temple. He also donated land to thistemple. There are few unnamed Nayaka period inscriptions founded at Azhagar kovil. During this time Madurai city and AlagapuriKottai cameunder the control of Sanda Saheb. Azhagar kovil wealth was looted by that Muslim invader.

Hyder Ali

Hyder Ali looted the wealth throughout Madurai region. He spoiled the Azhagar kovil Kalyana Mandapa's beautiful sculptures. Apart from that he also looted Azhagar kovil's wealth. AlagapuriKottai and Tirumalai Nayaka palace were damaged by Hyder Ali. Before Hyder Ali's invasion Malik Kafur damaged AlagapuriKottai.

Hyder Ali was driven away from Madurai toDindugal by a Muslim warrior Yusuf Khan in 1758. Yusuf Khan returned the wealth looted by HyderAli to Azhagar kovil authority.[40]

Modern Period

When the British established themselves in South India, they took over the management of all the temples within their territorial jurisdiction in 1801 CE, and credited the income understate the general revenues of the state.

[40]. Muthu Pichai, op. cit., p.125.

Later, during the middle of 19th century when the ydesired to relinquish their connection with the religious institutions, they conferred the administration of the temple of Azhagar kovil. Thus, the epigraphs of Azhagar kovil temple constitute the main source of information to know about history art and culture of the region corroborated with literary evidence.

CHAPTER III
PAINTINGS OF AZHAGAR KOVIL

Painting is an art of making pictures by applying colors to a flat surface like wood canvas, wall or paper, in order to create a two-dimensional image or to give the illusion of three dimensions by making the figures appear round and giving the impression of depth. To make them adhere to the surface, the colors or pigments must be mixed with some binding material, called the medium. The most common media are watercolor, tempera, oils and fresco.[41]

Temples in the southern part of the Tamil region testify to a pictorial tradition that flourished during the Nayaka period and later. Only fragments of the 17th century paintings survive within the great temple complex at Madurai. One portion is found in the small portico called kilikkuttu mandapa on the western side of the Golden lily tank. It depicts the marriage of Meenakshi and Sundaresvara attended by the Nayaka rulers Vijayarenga Chokkanatha and queen Mangammal.

The painting is executed on a vivid red background, with delicate black line work and large areas of white, ochre with a flavoring tree in the background. Their marriage costumes remind us of the Nayaka society.[42] In the Meenakshi-Sundaresvara temple complex, sixty-four lilas of Siva are depicted in pictures que panels narrating the story graphically but many of them have been repainted and ruined.

Paintings at Pandya country's Vaishnava Temple

The temples where the few surviving murals have been found are Alagarkovil-temple of Lord Alagar, Koodal-Alagarkovil at Madurai, Andal temple at Srivilliputtur, Uragamellanaiyan temple at Tirukkottiyur, Vaikundanatha temple at Sri Vaikundam, Nambi temple at Tirukkurungudi, Adinatha temple at Alavartirunagari and Rajagopalasamy temple at

[41] Edited Tomory, op.cit, p.xx
[42]. A.Mahalingam, op.cit., p.49.

Mannarkovil.[43] Ramayana paintings have been depicted in the Vasantha mandapa and Yali mandapa respectively in Alagarkovil and Srivilliputtur Andal temple. In the temples of Madurai, Tirukkottiyur and Mannarkovil, paintings were drawn in the second and third prakaras of the temples. Thighbalaga, Brahmma and Siva images are drawn on the wall. Nammalvar images are found at Alavar tirunagari temple.[44] Vaishnava Divya Desams are the 108 temples represented in different parts of Tamil Nadu. These temples have 108 main deities' images found at garbhagrigha and a small four pillar mandapa in front of Tiruvenkatanatha mandapa of Vaikundanatha temple at Sri Vaikundam.[45] Nambi temple images are mostly in ruined condition. Mahavishnu standing along with his consort Sridevi and Bhudevi, Trivikrama and Mahabali images are found there.

The Vasantha mandapa is remarkable for its ceiling paintings relating to the Ramayana and other Vaishnava episodes. As some of these panels are unfinished one may notice the artist‟s mode of work. These paintings are almost similar in style to the Tirupparuttikkunram paintings and were probably executed about the same period.

At present the Alagarkovil paintings are in dilapidated condition. While some parts of it have been vandalized white washing of certain portions. Vaishnavite themes in Alagarkovil paintings developed during the 17th century Nayaka period.

The Ramayana paintings are found on the ceilings and walls of Vasanhta mandapa at Alagarkovil contains elaborate illustration of Rama story mixing with local tradition. In this vasantha mandapa lord Alagar is said to have stayed for a few days to celebrate the Vasantotsava festival immediately after the Chithirai festival.

There is a painting where Sage Viswamitra enters Ayodya, while king Dasaratha is seen worshiping on his foot, and then in standing position. Here animation technique is used in the painting. A single Dasaratha‟s body image drawn from feet to hip, then another one body image standing upright are drawn. Same kind of animation technique applied at Tadagai vata.

[43] .L.Manivannan, op.cit.,p.165
[44]. Idem.
[45]. Ibid, pp, 184-185.

Here two types of Tadagai bodies are shown. In one is Rama‟s bow is pierced on her body and then she suffers from pain. In another image she is falls on the ground. Rama and Lakshmana worshiped their parents, before leaving to 14 years of exile in to vanavasa (forest). This scene recalls Dasaratha worshipping sage Viswamitra.[46]

This kind of technique is followed not only in paintings but also at sculptures. Tadagai vata and Agaligai sapavimosana animation technique images depicted on the vimana of Madurai Kudal-Alagarkovil. This kind of animation technique is shown images lively and, one type of incident expressed by two ways.

Impact of local Customs

Many types of new kinds of images (untold Ramayana story) depicted at Alagarkovil temple, reflect the customs of local people. In other words, though the story is an adaptation the artist cannot forget the characteristic features of the people of his own country. The Ramayan paintings contain several of these local elements. The practice of delivering babies by standing whilst servant maid held a sari like a curtain is depicted in the scenes where Kousalya, delivering Rama and his brothers. Such kinds of practice of delivering babies by standing are prevalent even today in this area (Madurai). Such ladies standing in a circle bear the regional cultural impact. The birth scene of Rama and his brother is borrowed from local culture. These kinds of scenes are depicted at Kambathadi mandapa and prakara respectively in Madurai Meenakshi Sundaresvara and Kudal- Alagar temple. Gautama Buddha scene is also depicted Mayadevi in standing position. Ashvagosha in his book Buddha charita mentioned that Mayadevi is standing under the sal tree during the delivery time.[47]

The scene depicting the servant maids bathing the newly born Rama and his brother is also essentially localized. The posture of the servant maids with their folded saris with children on their stretched legs while bathing them is a local custom which prevails even today in Tamil Nadu. Another panel showing the cradling of the princes in artistically beautified cradles

[46].L. Mannivannam,op. cit.,p.166.
[47] Ibid, p.167.

also has local colouring. Such kind of colourful cradles with architectural neatness could be found in use even in certain houses of this area (Alagarkovil). At Vasista‟s Ashram, Rama and Lakshmana learn "Silambu". This scene is curious to use as it is different from the single stick play of the modern times. The rivals are portrayed as fighting with a shield and a silambu (shaped likes an ankle) on hands. This probably reflects the‟ silambugame' of those days (18th century CE) similarly Rama falling down the seven-tala tree with a single arrow is depicted in one panel which is not in the versions of the Telugu Ramayana.

Dasaratha is shown with beard whilst he expects his child. It is usual customs of Tamil people that the husband grows beard during the period of wife‟s perganency. He removes beard after the child is born. This customs till now followed by people throughout Tamil Nadu. The same one could be seen in the panel when Dasaratha feels very sad over the departure of Rama to the forest. Several other customs and practices like singing of talattu (lullabies) for Rama, Lakshmana, Bharatha like Satrughana the oppari (lamentations) for Dasaratha after his death, the calibrate funeral rites for Dasaratha like Bharatha tonsuring his head, Vasista performing funeral rites like putting the bow on the body of Dasaratha, giving an oil bath to the dead body of Dasaratha, putting the fire near the heart of the death person (the belief is that first one‟s heart should be burnt).[48]

The paintings are also depicting the practice of several marriage rituals like" nalunku". There are two panels on the marriage scene of Rama and his brothers. On the first panel the Brahmanical practice of giving away the bride by pouring water is depicted.[49]

Language

The painter of the Alagarkovil Vasanta mandapa paintings is probably Telugu by origin. Though his label descriptions are in Tamil, they are in colloquial form of language. The descriptions of the panel reveal that the painter handles the Tamil with strain and difficulty and is therefore not proficient in Tamil. The inconsistent spelling system he had adopted in the

[48].L.Manivannan, op.cit.,p.167.
[49]. Muthu Pichai, op.cit.,pp-67-68

descriptive labels could prove that he is not a native of Tamil Nadu. The ending of proper names with "LU" is a characteristic feature in Telugu. The painters practice of adding" LI" suffix to proper name such as swamilu' indicates that he is possibly a Telugu by origin.[50]

Colour

Mostly green colour is used in Ramayana paintings. Next to green colour, yellow colour is used. Apart from the two colours, few other colours such as white, blue and black colours are also used. Whenever a character leaves the town always a river is shown to a palace. The river is always showed with two banks. The river is shown with crab, snake, and tortoise. The water is always painted in white.[51] The royal people"s rich cloth contains beautiful flower designs and a lot of jewels dominant among them are the pearls, famous among Pandya country. Rama and Lakshmana are painted in green whereas the other two in usual body colours. Besides when Rama and Lakshmana alone were depicted, only Rama is painted in blue colour, Lakshmana is in usual body colour. Animals such as elephant and horse are coloured by saffron.[52]

Features of Paintings

Ramayana scenes arranged in continuous strips are divided by black bands with white Tamil script. The best-preserved paintings occur on the ceiling of the central pavilion. The scenes proceed in clockwise direction from the three wives of king Dasaratha performing the Putrakameshti sacrifice. After its successful completion, they get a bowl of amirtham (sweet), and then they got blessings to Sri Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata and Shatrughna. Queens leading their children into the cradle, studying the scripts by Rama and his brothers and learning martial arts learning from the great sage Viswamitra are also depicted**.**

[50].H.Saranya,op.cit.,pp.67-68.
[51].L.Manivannan, op.cit.,p.186
[52] Idem.

On classification pictures are of three kinds they are (i) Bhamika, a kind of pictures drawn on the floor, (ii) Dudyaka are drawn on walls and (iii) Urdhvaka, are drawn on ceiling. In the Alagarkovil vasantha mandapa panels one can see the last two varieties only. In vasanthamandapa we can see the Ramayana paintings starts from the incarnation of lord Vishnu as Rama, the birth scene of Rama, his married life, forest life, coronations of the Bharatha, sages, Brahmins, rishi's, soldiers, harem life, Lakshmana, Hanuman, fight of Vali and Sukriva, Rama war with Ravana and death of Dasaratha are portrayed in the painting panels. These miniature paintings narrate the entire story of Ramayana. The panels of Vasantha mandapa paintings are not uniform in size depending upon the nature of the theme they are varying in size. Themes like marriage, procession, fighting scenes are of similar sizes.[53]

It is interesting to note that the artistic instruction as to how to look at the sequence of painting and read the labels are mentioned, though he has not given his name or his patron‟s name. The instruction is found at the end of the paintings below panel 41 in the central mandapa on north ceiling. It states that one should start from the northeast corner which is auspicious to go round the ceiling and start again in the northeast corner of the outer mandapa wall. First is start looking and reading at the upper row and then come to the lower row and round. The instruction also contains a phalasruti, which states that those who have viewed these and read the labels will not only understand the story Ramayana but will also attain moksha.[54]

The Alagarkovil Ramayana panels start with a situation where the people on earth harassed by Ravana, appeal to the lord for his divine intervention. The lord assures that he will take Ramavatara and what follows is a fulfillment of this promise. He is born as the son of Dasaratha depicted in to a few hundred panels with labels in colloquial Tamil. Though the artist has followed the version of Kamban in several places, there are some local innovations. The localized version of the story is rather fascinating, and it gives us an idea of how the Ramayana is adopted in this part of the country in a unique way. The theme may be taken from the puppet playing. The pagativesam one of the wandering groups of the Nayaka period. They performed

[53].H.saranya,op.cit.,p.58
[54] .Ibid,pp.58-59.

the Ramayana and Mahabharata story through puppet performance the painting panels at Alagarkovil also looks like puppet figures.

Dress and Jewells

The material originally used by man to save himself from extremes heat, rain and cold, later on, came to be considered as a symbol of civilization. This symbol called the dress forms an important part of the equipment of man. The nature of the material used, and the style adopted by artists give rise to distinctions too. The different types of dress and costumes found in the sculptures and paintings of the Vijayanagara, and Nayaka period throw much light not on the taste of the contemporary people, but on their economic conditions.

Different varieties of neck ornaments are seen in Vijayanagara and Nayaka sculpture and paintings. Neck lets are ornaments that hold closely to the neck. In most cases these neck lets are thin metal wires. In some cases, these wires have small diamonds or the lockets in the middle. Alagarkovil temple panels shown female figures wore neck lets, necklace and armlets.

CHAPTER IV
CHITHIRAI FESTIVAL THROUGH THE AGES

Pujas and festivals are a source of joy for all. They exist in all countries, at all levels of society, and have been celebrated through the ages. If man has been described as a social animal, festivals are the occasions for a close joyous coming together for the members of the social group and they give full expression to the social instinct. The festivals seem to have constituted in a sense the eternal religion of India, particularly Tamil Nadu. The performance of the pujas tothe deities in the respective temple were followed from the early period in the Madurai region. Inscriptions at Azhagar kovil attest the fact that the pujas and festivals were performed in a grand manner.[55] In a Hindu temple the daily offer of worship to the various deities at different times in aday is of fundamental importance. The day-to-day ceremonies connected with the worship are called the Nitya- Puja while the occasional ceremonies in connection with some special festival. From the epigraph of Azhagarkovil temple, it is known that this temple was richly endowed with provisions for the daily offerings (Nitya-puja) as well as number of festivals which have, in the course of centuries, become famous fortheir grandeur and beauty.

Festivals

The Tamil word for festival is Vizha (Vizhavu) which is derived from the term Vizhai, which means to desire or to love, thus its broad meaning being the thing desired or object celebrated and this find expression in the form of festival and celebrations. Similarly in Sanskrit the word Utsava is acquired from root word ut, meaning to rise upwards. It is called Utsava it gives rise to delight, and it is believed that God is also delighted by it. In ancient days under theroyal patronage the temple had received gifts and endowments primarily for the worship of the Lord and secondarily for augmenting the grandeur and attraction of the temple and increasing

[55]. G. Sugunswari, A Historical and Cultural study of seven Saivite temples in kongunadu, unpublishedph. D thesis, Periyar university, salem, 2012, p.229.

its popularity by means and profuse food offerings. Even the construction of spacious and artistic mandapam and imposing prakaras and gopuras were intended only for this purpose.[56]

The festivals in the temples may be classified into broad divisions, namely, the basic festivals connected with the ritual of temple worship, and which are enjoyed by the sastras and agamas, and auxiliary or secondary festivals according to the nature of its establishment, endowment by devotees etc. The basic festivals are compulsorily being enjoyed by the agamas. The clearest expression of the relationship between the sacred diagram and the secular landscape comes from the city's religious festivals. In a striking way, the ritual travels of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar (Siva) through their urban domain captures the subtle essence of vistu. These festival processions occur at the point of intersection between sacred and secular, diagram, and representation, the general and the time and space. They are real, alive, active, full of energy, butthey have no intrinsic physical dimension. Every month there are processions, and each has its local identity. But like one's own experience of the place, they add up over time. By the end of the year, the deities have drawn a map of the city, and the vistu-mardala is madereal. True to any realisation, the topology is what emerges. The pathsthat are traced draw a sacred geometry, but not a literal reotilinearity. Here is the evidence ofmeenakshi and Sundareswarar's wanderings at the end of the one-year cycle.

The stone Sivalingam and the idol of Meenakshi stay put within the inner sanctums. But separate processional deities are taken out on various vahanas. or vehicles. Lunar and solar calendars seem to overlapin fixing dates; in general, the first nine days of a month are processional days and the tenth the occasion for a special festival if thereis one. The names of the concentric streets (Adhi, Chitrai, etc.) are the names of the Tamil months associated with their respective festivals.

- In Vaikasi (May/June) the processional deities are placed in thePudu-mandapam. the extension of the temple eastward into the city fabric. The bustle of the normal occupants is interrupted for ten days in recognition of a sacred claim to this space. Or, in other terms, the deitiesleave the sacred precinct, that strongly defined enclosure with its

[56].N. Ramesan. The Thirumala Temple, Thieupati, 2012, p.153.

enormous walls and gopurams andbreathe the air of profane (pro-fanum) space. In the evenings, at sunset, they are taken in procession along Chitrai Street.

- In Ani (June/July), the deities reside within the temple. In Adhi (July/August), Meenakshi is taken in procession along Adhi Street, within thetemple wall.
- In Avani (August/September), Siva's part in a joint rule of the city is affirmed, after Meenakshi has ruled alone as queen for the four months after her coronation in Chithrai. The procession follows Avanimoola Street.
- In Puratassi (September/October), the Navarathi ('nine-night') festival is celebrated, and the deities again remain within the temple.
- In Ipassi (October/November). Meenakshi assumes the form of a little girl, and the procession follows Adhi Street.
- In Kardikai (November/December), again the route is along Adhi Street.
- In Margali (December/January), Meenakshi alone returns to grace the Pudu-mandapam, and is taken in the evenings along Chithrai Street. And in addition, there is a single circumambulation along Veli Street, the path that used to be outside the city walls. It was such a path that Kannaki and Kovalan followed in their day, but it seems unlikely that the deities would have ventured this far afield before 1840, when the walls were torn down.
- Even this boundary is broken through the following month, when a major festival involves the procession of the deitieseast beyond the city limits to the huge Teppakulam.
- In the month of Thai (January/February). On a specially constructed float, or teppam, the deities become waterborne for an evening and move slowly clockwise around the tank (kulanm). On the preceding days, the processions follow ChithraiStreet.
- In Masi (February/March), the festival again is on Chithrai Street. Thereis a discrepancy here between the month and the street name. Apparently, this was originally the occasion for the large car-festival on Masi Street, but Tirumala Nayak interchanged the Chithrai and Masi festivals to allow thepopular Azhagar festival in the month Chitrai to coincide with the car-prcession. So, the names remain out of phase.[57]
- In Panguni (March/April), the festival once more follows Chitrai Street.

[57] Dennis Hudson, Two citra festivals in Madurai, pp.38-39.

In Chitrai (April/May), the first month of the Tamil year, the cycle reaches its climax. The city is inundated by well over a quarterof a million pilgrims, drawn from the surrounding countryside. The events in fact involve two traditions, the Azhagar Journey festival and meenakshi and sundraeshwarar wedding festival. These over times have become fused in the popular mind as simply the ‘Chitrai Festival', but the wedding is of principle interest here. Its full duration is twelve days, but the most significant events are those toward the end. on the eighth day, the coronation of Meenakshi as the ruler of the city. on the ninth day, the acknowledgement of her dominion over the eight directions. The deity is taken out to Masi Street, and moves clockwise around the city, defeating in turn indra in the east, Agni in the southeast, rama in the south, Nirrtiin the southwest, Varuna in the west, Viyru in the northwest, Kuberan in the north, and Idina in the northeast. Her digvijaiaa is thus accomplished. Siva (Itana), however, overwhelms the goddess in turn, as she recognizes in him her future husband. Plans are made for the divine marriage, and Meenakshi returns to her kovil.

On the tenth day, an intense climax in the performance of the wedding ceremony. It is celebrated in the special wedding mandapam inside the temple compound, after the deities in full regalia have processed on Chithrai Street.on the eleventh day, the major processional event of the year. Thenewly married Lord and Lady of the city are taken together out to Masi Street, and there placed on enormous temple-cars (rathas). These chariots, with elaborately carved wooden bases and temporary super structures, tower forty to fifty feet, and are pulled by hundreds of devotees. Thousands more crowd the street. Slowly, somewhat jerkily, the deities and the irretinue make a triumphal journey through their secular domain.

In a metaphoriesal as well as a literal sense, everything comes full circle. The spatial gesture is there, reaffirming a secular - controlled space in the universal landscape, and marking its extent in the four cardinal and four intermediate directions. The temporal gesture similarly defines and controls a random flow and gives it a structure; with the other festivals, the rhythm of a yearly cycle is established. And just as the Masi Street procession does not trace an exact geometrical square but acknowledges the conditional aspect of human activity in the landscape, so the cycle of the year is not simply a general scheme, repeatable anywhere; it is

infused with the local condition, the history of this city in time, the Puranic understanding of its origins and claims to glory.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHITHIRAI FESTIVAL

This Chithirai festival celebrated in this temple for nine days on the full moon day of the Chithirai month, between April and May every year attracts crowds of thousands of people. Lord Azhagar before heading to Madurai this Chithirai festival commences at Azhagar kovil. His journey reaches to Madurai on the fourth day and return journey is on the ninth Day. This festival might be started during the period of early Pandya king Sadaiyan - Maran Rajasimha. During the early Pandya period the procession of Lord Azhagar on horse chariot starts from Azhagar koviltoends at reaching a place in Madurai called Tenur. Lord Azhagarreaches Tenur through the way of Alankanallur, Chinna Urcheri, PeriyaIlandaikulam, Maniyanji, Kovilur and Ellaiyur. Lord Azhagar, mounted on golden horse is taken out onprocession on the banks of Vaigai river at Tenur, by the people, though the pujas and theceremonies are performed by the priestly class standing near Azhagar. After the procession on thebanks of Vaigai river Lord Azhagar returns to his abode Solaimalai. This was the actual events happened in order in the events of Chithirai thiruvizha till a particular period of time.

During the period of Tirumalai Nayaka, Lord Azhagar's destination point changed from Tenur to Madurai.Historically speaking, originally there used to be two different festivals namely the Meenakshi festival and the Azhagar festival. They were celebrated in two different months. The Saivites celebrated the Meenakshi festival. It is believed that Meenakshi who was also another avatar of goddess Sakthi, the wife of Lord Siva was daughter of the Pandya king. She was born out of the fire and grew up to become a fearless warrior. After conquering the world, she attacked Kailayamwhere Siva lived but fell in love with him. Both married and ruled the Pandya kingdom from then on. Before the rule of Tirumalai Nayaka Meenakshi festival was celebrated in the Masi month. During the rule of King Tirumalai Nayaka, both the festivals were merged as one single event to unite the people of the two groups (Saivism and Vaishnavite). Since then, they are celebrated as one grand event during the Tamil month of Chithirai, and this gives the celebration its famous name Chithirai Festival. Tirumalai Nayaka

built two-way side mandapas for this festival purpose. On the festival day, Azhagar stayed in these mandapas. They are resting places of God. But later many rich people built mandapas for honour of the god Azhagar who visited all waysides Mandapa. At the time ofvisiting devotees gave offering to God. The pilgrims travelled from their native place to the holyplaces to worship Lord Azhagar and participate in the festival.

From the time of King Tirumalai Nayaka Lord Azhagar journey started from Azhagar kovil, Poigaikaraipatti, Kallandri, AppanTirupathi, Kadachanendal, and Sundararajanpatti. Part of the Chithirai Tiruvila of Lord Azhagar temple at Azhagar kovil, the "ethirsevai" began on the fourth day of the festival. On this day, Lord Azhagar changes his appearance as Kallar (disguised as robber) at Moonumavadi. Here palanquin cloth was removed; this cloth wascalled as Pannangu. Lord Azhagar reached Thallakulam Lord Sri Prasanna Venkatesa Perumal, here who took Tirumanjanam (bath). Special arrangements are being made to send a garlandand a parrot from Sri Andal Temple at Srivilliputtur to Madurai. The Lord entry into the Vaigai river takes place only after wearing the garland sent from Sri Andal Temple. Pujas are conducted to the garland and the parrot. They are taken in a procession around the Madatheru of Srivilliputtur before they start to Madurai. The time around which Lord Azhagar comes to Vaigai river is very hot and sunny. So, the devotees pour water on Lord Azhagar, golden horse, and besides priest. One of the highlights of the Chithirai Festival is the procession of Lord Azhagar's brother of goddess Meenakshi, who proceeds from Azhagarmalai to Meenakshi Sundaresvarar temple to give away his sister inmarriage to Lord Sundaresvarar. The procession of Lord Azhagar on shiny golden horse chariot starts from Azhagar kovil to Madurai.

Due to a celestial play, he was tricked by God Indhra and belated on the way. In the meantime, the marriage was presided over by a neighboring counterpart Koodal Azhagar. This act frustrated Lord Azhagar and he returns to Azhagar kovil withoutvisiting Madurai. The Lord Azhagar's entry into the river Vaigai is an attractive view. Once upon a time, Mandooka rishi (a saint) was taking bath in the sacred waters of Aagaayagangai in Azhagar kovil. While the powerful and quick-tempered Durvasa Maharishi came there to the secret waters. Mandooka rishi hadn't noticed his appearance, but Durvasa took this as an insult. So, he cursed Mandooka to become a frog and live in the river Vaigai. Mandooka was worried by the curse and pleaded

for mercy. Durvasa told him to go to Vaigai and pray to Lord Azhagar to get out of his curse and get back his human body. As advised by Durvasa he went to river Vaigai and lived in the river as a frog and prays to Lord Azhagar. Azhagar was pleased by the prayers of Mandooka rishi and he himself went to river Vaigai to lift the curse off Mandooka rishi. And, as per Mandooka's wish he showed him all his ten avatars and blessed him.

Lord Azhagar always visit a ThulukkaNachiyar or a Muslim lady devotee of him at Vandiyur in Madurai and so the deity of Azhagar would be taken as a procession on the banks of river Vaigai to Vandiyur, on that day, both the Hindu and Muslim celebrate this festival with happiness. In order to bring union of hearts and religious amity between the minority Islam sects and majority Hindu sects, King Tirumalai Nayaka introduced this tradition. This tradition is observed even today in the Chithirai festival every year, in the month of April-May. The caste disparities and communal variations were all dropped by means of religious festival andtraditions.

The twelve-day Chittirai festival in the Tamil month of chittirai (April-May) is the greatest of all the Minakshi temple's annual festivals. Its key events are Minakshi's coronation (pattabhisheka) on the eighth day, her 'conquest of the world' (digvijaya) on the ninth, her marriage (tirukkalyanam) to Sundareshwara on the tenth, and the great car (ter) procession on the eleventh. After Chittirai, the twelve-day Avani Mulafestival in avani (August-September) is the second most important, and its key events are Sundareshwara's coronation on the seventh day, and the enactment of episodes from the Tiruvilaiyadal myth on the eighth and ninth days. The most prominent single theme in the Chittirai and AvaniMula festivals pertains to the kingship of Minakshi and Sundareshwara. Madurai was the capital city of the ancient Pandyan kingdom, and for their devotees the god and goddess remain to this day the eternal Pandyan rulers from whom subsequent Hindu kings claimed descent. The sovereignty of Minakshi and Sundareshwara has been discussed in detail elsewhere,[58] and for the purposes of this article, the crucial event in Chittirai is the divine couple's wedding. At Avani Mula, the relationship between Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya is ritually elaborated within the context of Sundareshwara's sovereignty, and some of my previous material will therefore berepeated. The wedding of

[58]Fuller 1985.

Minakshi and Sundareshwara is the Chittiraifestival's climax, and it invariably attracts the temple's largest crowd of the year. It begins with a procession which is said tobe Sundareshwara's symbolic 'pilgrimage to Benares (Kashi), as performed by the groom before a Tamil Brahman marriage. After the procession, the divine couple's images are placed on a swing inside the temple to be entertained by a song. Then the images of Subrahmanya and Pavalakkanivay Perumal (Vishnu), which have come from Tirupparankundram temple, arrive to be greeted by Minakshi and Sundareshwara. The close link between the Tirupparankundram and Minakshi temples is said to be why Perumal is brought from there to give his sister away to Shiva inmarriage, and Subrahmanya's priests simply say that he must accompany Perumal to Madurai because the presiding deity always leads a procession outside his own temple. The next ritual is the washing of the groom's feet and then all the images are placed on a stage for the wedding itself. In the centre is Minakshi with Sundareshwara (Somaskanda) on her left as usual; onSundareshwara's left is Subrahmanya and on Minakshi's right is Perumal. Two priests act the roles of Minakshi and Sundareshwara; a third actuallyperforms the rituals which make up the wedding.

It is now necessary to turn to Azhagar's Chittirai festival. Much of the Minakshi temple as seen today was built during the period ofNayaka rule over Madurai (1529-1736) and the evidence suggests that the extant form of the main festivals predominantly dates from that period. The Nayaka kingdom reached its height during the reign of Tirumala Nayaka (1623-59), and various innovations in the Minakshi temple's festival cycle are widelybelieved to have been instituted by him.[59] These include the king's ownparticipation in the deities' coronation rituals in Chittirai and AvaniMula, which were plainly designed to legitimate his role by representing him as the Pandyan regent of Minakshi and Sundareshwara. Another importantinnovation was Tirumala Nayaka's alteration of the timing of theChittirai festival; it probably used to be celebrated two months earlier in masi (February-March) and in the temple today that is said to be why Minakshi's coronation is four, not six, months before Sundareshwara's, even though the divine couple share the crown equally. By moving the festival to chittirai, it was made to coincide with a festival, which is celebrated for Azhagar, the form of Vishnu who is the presiding deity of the Azhagar temple situated about twelve miles northeast of Madurai. As a

[59]. N.D. Devakunjari. Opcit,.302.

result, the two festivals could be seen as one and indeed, in Madurai today, almost all ordinary people see the Minakshi temple's Chittirai festival as inextricably linked with the nine-day festival celebrated for Azhagar, even though the two events areorganised completely separately.

REGIONAL HISTORY OF CHITHIRAI FESTIVAL

Azhagar is Azhagar of the Kallar, a populous, caste still inhabiting much of the countryside around Madurai. On the fourth day of his festival, which I now outline briefly, Azhagar sets out in procession from Azhagarkoil dressed as aKallar and guarded by large numbers of Kallar men, and he reaches north Madurai on the next day. On the sixth day, which is full-moon day, Azhagar, no longer dressed like a Kallar, arrives atthe dry bed of the river Vaigai, which bounds the city on itsnorthern side, and there he meetsViraraghava Perumal, a form of Vishnu from a small temple in the city. Azhagar then turns round and proceeds southeastwards alongside the river to a place called Vandiyur. On the seventh day, the god returns to the riverside to display the ten 'incarnations' (avatara) of Vishnu to his devotees. On the eighth day, he stays in north Madurai and during the last two days he journeys back to Azhagarkoil, dressed once more as a Kallar.

Azhagar is closely associated with the Ambalakkararbranch of the Kallar caste, whose traditional lands lie northeast of Madurai and the Vaigai. During the Nayaka period, the Ambalakkarar were a warlike group, who defied the Madurai kings' authority; their history is summarised by Dumont andNelson, to illustrate the group's defiance, claimed that 'they showed respect only to the Azhagar-Swami Azhagar. Discussing Tirumala Nayaka's alteration of the Minakshi temple's Chittirai festival, Hudson suggests that: 'Politically, the new combination of festivals would be a yearly statement of the unity of the northern part of the region over which he was sovereign, a unity depending on a positive relationship between himself and the Kallar'.Thus, despite Kallar resistance, the conjoined Chittirai festivals would represent a united Nayaka kingdom built upon a complementary relationship between the capital city of the king, the Brahmans and other high castes, and the northeastern rural region dominated by theKallar.

Azhagar's antagonism towards Sundareshwara seems toreflect continuing tension between, among other groups, the Kallar and the city's high castes, so that division, not unity, is most patently symbolised. In analysing the conjunction of the two festivals and their symbolisation of division, however, another perspective is added by drawing a contrast between Azhagar and Subrahmanya at Tirupparankundram, which previous studies of Chittirai have missed. Minakshi-Sundareshwara'srelationship with Subrahmanya (unlike that with Azhagar) is represented in ritual practice, even if it captures rather less popular attention in Madurai, and, as we have seen, Subrahmanya attends the crucial phases of the Chittirai and AvaniMula festivals, including his parents' wedding, which Azhagarmisses. Moreover, Minakshi and Sundareshwara's parental relationship with Subrahmanyais further reinforced when they attend his marriage to Devayanaiat Tirupparankundram in panguni (March-April), during that temple's principal annual festival. Between Minakshi-Sundareshwara and Subrahmanya from Tirupparankundram, therefore, there is a ritually constructed solidarity which stands in obvious opposition to the ritual disconnection and imagined antagonism between them and Azhagarfrom Azhagarkoil.This opposition has an interesting sociological dimension.

Subrahmanya is linked with the Pramalai Kallar, who traditionally occupy the territory west of the city and south of the river anddescribe themselves as slightly inferior to the Ambalakkarar fromwhom they separated. Historically, the PramalaiKallar were more closely allied with the centralauthority in Madurai than the rebellious Ambalakkarar, and they have a single headman whose title was granted by Tirumala Nayaka. Moreover, according to their own tradition, the Pramalai Kallarwere the watchmen at the Tirupparankundram temple, whereas the Ambalakkarar took the same role at the Azhagarkoil and Minakshitemples, and Tirumala Nayaka also granted them a royal title and special honours at Tirupparankundram to correspond to those enjoyed by the Ambalakkarar at Azhagarkoil.

In fact, the PramalaiKallar's connection with Subrahmanya hasalways been weaker than the Ambalakkarar's special relationship with Azhagar, and Subrahmanya is not called a Kallar deity. Nonetheless, the opposition between the two branches of the Kallar, refracted by their connections with Azhagar and Subrahmanya, has been significant in elaborating the regional socio-religious topography in which the territory from Azhagarkoil to

Tirupparankundram becomes one vast sacred space whose focal point is the Minakshi temple at the centre of Madurai city. Crucially, though, the space traversed by Minakshi, Sundareshwara and Azhagar at their Chittirai festivals is bifurcated by the river separating the old city from the northeastern countrysideof the Ambalakkarar, whereas the space occupied by Minakshi-Sundareshwara, and Subrahmanya seamlessly unites the city and its southwestern hinterland, where the PramalaiKallar live. Today, the history of the Nayakas and the Kallari mostly forgotten, but the contrast between Minakshi-Sundareshwara's close relationship with their son at Tirupparankundram and their separation from their brother andbrother-in-law at Azhagarkoil is still plainly visible in the pattern of Madurai's festivals.

CHAPTER V

EVENTS OF CHITHIRAI FESTIVAL IN AN ORDER

DAY 1

Kodi yetram – hoisting of temple flag

On the auspious day of Chithirai, a tamil month, the chief priest of the Meenakshi temple hoists the sacred flag on the flagpole of the temple called as Dwajasthambam. This denotes the beginning of the festival. The flag will stay on the flagpole until the end of the festival. The goddess is usually taken in simha vahana (the lion palanquin).

DAY 2

Kamadenu vahana ula

On the second day, the goddess Meenakshi is placed in a kamadenu vahanam and then palanquin is taken out in huge processions on the streets of Madurai especially around the Meenakshi temple.

DAY 3

Thanga pallaku

On the third day of the chithirai festival the goddess meenakshi is taken in a decored golden palanquin which is popularly known as" Thanga pallaku" around the streets of Madurai. Lots of devotees are gathered in the streets to get the blessings.

DAY 4

Thanga kuthirai vahana

On the fourth day, the goddess Meenakshi is taken in a thanga kuthirai vahanam which is a golden horse palanquin.

DAY 5

Rishaba vahana

The goddess Meenakshi is taken out in the streets of Madurai in a Rishaba vahana on the fifth day of Chithirai festival.

DAY 6

Pattabisekam – the coronation ceremony

Pattabisekam is a coronation ceremony of goddess Meenakshi. She is crowned as the queen of Madurai. She will be ruling the Pandya kingdom. Goddess Meenakshi is considered as the divine ruler of Madurai.On this special day the goddess is taken out in the streets of Madurai in a well decored flower palanquin. That part of this festival is said as “poo pallakku” that denotes the flower palanquin.

DAY 7

Dikvijayam – victory in all directions

After Meenakshi is crowned as the queen of Madurai, she encounters war with all kingdoms and witness victory. As per mythological story goddess Meenakshi goes to kailash which is said to be the Himalayan region & known as the home of Lord shiva, to conquer it. After seeing Shiva on the battelefield and marries him. After this the goddess and the lord is taken in a silver palanquin known as velli simhasana vahana. There is also a background story which says the story of Meenakshi begins with the Pandyan King Malayadhwaja and Queen

Kanchanmala who performed a yagya to beg the gods for a son. Instead, a girl appeared from the yagya fire. The princess was considered to be an incarnation of the goddess Parvati but was born with three breasts. The gods advised the royal couple to bring up their daughter as the heir to the throne and the astrologers predicted that the third breast would disappear when Meenakshi met her husband.

When her father died, young Meenakshi became the queen and began an expedition of conquests that took her to the north. Leading her army and after conquering many kingdoms, when the warrior queen reached Swarga in the Himalayas she came into conflict with the gods. As they were losing the battle the gods requested Shiva to save them and when Shiva appeared on the battlefield Meenakshi's third breast vanished and she knew she had finally found her husband. Meenakshi requested Shiva to marry her, and he very benignly consented.

Shiva told her to return to Madurai and wait for him. He arrived eight days later in the resplendent form of Sundareswarar, the Handsome Lord and married the beautiful Meenakshi in a magnificent ceremony called Thirukalyanam. Lord Vishnu appeared riding on a golden horse to give the bride away. Later the divine couple had a son called Subramanya also called Kartikeya. Later Subramanya will also celebrate his own marriage at Madurai. He is the consort of the queen because in Madurai it is Meenakshi who still rules the land and has a special place in the heart of the people. Here, in sculpture and paintings, the divine family is depicted as of Sundareswarar, Meenakshi, Skanda and Vinayaka.

DAY 8

Meenakshi thirukalyanam – the wedding of meenakshi and sundreshwarar

It is a grand ceremony in Madurai. Meenakshi Kalyanam is the wedding celebration of Meenakshi and Shiva (Sundareshwar) in Madurai. On the day of Meenakshi Kalyanam, devotees get up at sunrise and reach the Meenakshi temple in Madurai. After taking a holy dip in the golden lotus pond, they wear clean clothes. Meenakshi is first worshipped using traditional methods, following which prayers are offered to Viboothi Vinayakar. On this day, devotees sing devotional songs and bhajans. It is also considered auspicious to wear the holy ash

known as Vibhuthi while entering the temple premises. Devotees also carry fruits, coconuts and incense sticks to offer to the deities. Inside the temple, the images of the deities are decorated with silk clothes and floral garlands. There are nearly 50 priests in the Meenakshi Madurai temple who perform the puja rituals and special prayers. The main priests in the temple perform the ritualistic wedding ceremonies. At the completion of the event, images of Meenakshi and Sundareshwar are taken out in huge processions on the streets in the Pushpa Pallakku and Yaanai Vahanam.

DAY 9

Therottam - chariot festival

The Chariot festival, also known as Ther Tiruvizha or Rathotsavam, is performed the day after Meenakshi Kalyanam. The king and queen of the Pandya Kingdom, Meenakshi and Sundareshwar come to see their subjects in a well-decorated Grand chariot. It attracts many people in the Masi streets of Madurai.

DAY 10

Ethir sevai

It is also a popular event in chithirai festival as it involves the act of receiving and honouring lord Azhagar who is coming to Madurai from Azhagar kovil. He is taken to Madurai in a decorated palanquin. People from different communities are honour him at different stops known as “Mandagapadi”. There are also many rituals will be taken place in each mandagapadi.

DAY 11

Azhagar vaigai aatril iranguthal – holy bath at vaigai river

The lord Azhagar who started his journey to Madurai from Azhagar kovil to give moksham to manduka, the sage and to take holy bath in river Vaigai. He reaches the Tallakulam perumal temple to take his horse vahana and gets into the Vaigai river. But the mythologyical story says

that after the marriage of Meenakshi, her brother Alagar tried to come to the marriage. Alagar came from Alagarkoil to Madurai slowly, stops on the way at several place. When he reached the Vaigai riverbank, he heard that the wedding was over, so he got angry and returned to Alagarkoil after giving the gifts to Meenakshi and Sundareshwar, who came to receive him, but refused to enter Madurai. A reenactment of this event happens in a maiyya mandapam in Madhichiyam in the middle of river Vaigai. And then he heads back to Azhagar temple after receiving honour from many people at different stops.

DAY 12

Dashavadharam – ten incarnations of lord vishnu

After stepping into the Vaigai river Azhagar makes his journey to the place called as vandiyur in Madurai and stays there for one night. The next day he comes to a mandapam known as "Ramarayar mandapam" to decored up in the costumes of his (Lord vishnu's) ten incarnations. People gather there in a huge manner to witness the Dashavatharam of Lord Vishnu.

In the evening of 12th day of chithirai festival he gets back into the journey to return to Azhagar kovil after changing into the flowered palanquin.

Following this the lord Azhagar makes his way to the Azhagar temple in three days in the same route. There are also various events will be occurring on his way back to Azhagar kovil.

CONCLUSION

The highlight of the Chithirai festival is round the corner Lord Azhagar, in all his grandeur, will enter the Vaigai river and thousands of devotees are likely to flood the Albert Victor bridge, and streets and terraces of buildings near the river to have a glimpse of the grand event. Draped in traditional green silk cloth, the idol of Azhagar is brought from his abode at Azhagarkoil, 20km from the river, after special abhishekams and poojas the previous night. A family member from Velliyamkundramzamin will wave a piece of cloth in front of the deity 'pathinettampadi' Karuppasamy, the guardian deity of Azhagar, as a mark of the procession's start. Right from Azhagar's descent from the hill and the procession through the streets to his entry into the river and the ascent back to the hill, the family members offer 'protection' to the deity. On the roots of the tradition, copper plate tradition dating back to 1653 suggest that paadhsivazhikaaval, protection to Azhagar was performed by siruvalai zamin family. It was after the period of TirumalaiNayakar (a ruler of Madurai Nayak Dynasty who was instrumental in uniting all communities for the festival) between AD 1623 and 1659 that the tradition was handed over to Velliyamkundramzamin. In those days, Kallars created a disturbance during the procession.

Even now, people from Mangulam perform a ritualistic attack on Azhagar when he is in Ambalathukarar mandapam," he noted. Similarly, carriers of the palanquin, called seer pathamthaangigal, consider this as a service to God. Though they are from different places, they unite for the festival, at the end of which they would be honoured by the temple management. During the Nayakar period, they were offered land, During Tirumalai Nayakar's reign, people from 50 villages around Azhagar hills dressed as Kallazhagar and Karuppasamy and offered prayers by tonsuring heads, piercing ears, and sacrificing lambs. Veeraraghavaperumal would receive the first honour (Mudhal Mariyadhai) from azhagar when he enters the Vaigai on a golden horse. The festival of Azhagar used to be held in Thenur near Solavandan. Once, a fire broke out in the mandapam housing the idol and devotees and the king ran out to save their lives. But a priest named 'Amuthar' jumped into the fire, took the idol from the flames, threw it onto the riverbank before fainting. In recognition of his courage, the king said he and his family would be honoured. But Amuthar

said Veeraraghavaperumal should be honoured instead. Hence, to date, Veeraraghavaperumal receives the first honour from Azhagar. Arumugam said Thenur (called Sundarrajan Boomi) is one of the ancient villages in the State. “Till now, the people of Thenur offer their first agricultural produce to Azhagar kovil, remove their slippers before entering the village and walk barefoot to the temple as a mark of respect to Kallazhagar. Serial light adorning the streets, people dressing traditionally, colourful toys being sold everywhere, long queues in front of sweet shops, and devotional songs playing on the mic are common sightings during this 15-day thiruvizha. People travel from various cities and states to get a glimpse of Kallazhagar entering the Vaigai River and the Meenakshi Thirukalyanam. This festival is celebrated for a reason and the reason varies according to people mainly because the story has travelled from word-of-mouth for centuries, and later, books, experts, etc. For a few, the festivity is for Kallazhagar who is travelling long to witness his sister’s wedding, and for the others, it is about how Kallazhagar visits a maharishi to break the latter’s curse. The stories we hear or read are in many forms, but the thiruvizha is about celebration, tradition, devotion, and a lot more. It is believed that the festival is celebrated based on a story in which Lord Sundarraja Perumal leaves his abode to witness the marriage of his sister. But there is also another story that azhagar came to Madurai to give sabavimosanam for 'Sudabas Maharishi (also known as Manduka rishi)' to break a curse against him. The celestial marriage of Meenakshi-Sundaresvara is celebrated during the month of Chitrai.

This chitrai month has its own claim for prominence in Madurai temple and ending of that festival in a Tirthavari on Chitraipournami (full moon) at portramaraikulam (lily tank) for it was on that day that Indra worshiped Sundaresvarar and founded the Madurai temple by erecting the Indra Vimana borne by eight elephants. In the fitness of things, the annual chitraifestival ought to have been in vogue even prior to the days of Tirumalai Nayak. This was strengthened by another fact that the Chitrai festival is preceded and succeeded by two important Vasantha (spring) festivals, a kotaivasantham (presummer) in the month of Pankuni (February-March) and Vasantavila (post summer) in the month of Vaikasi (April-May). It is likely that Tirumalai Nayak made the VaikasiVasanthavila fastidious enough by the creation of PuduMandapam. The sculptural representation does not give identity to us to assume the festival. But the dance and musical instruments are essential elements both celebrations in temples and of the public rituals and festivals. The celestial marriage or Tirukalyanam of Meenakshi is referred

to in the Tiruvilayadalpuranam. It gives many descriptions of marriage ceremonies and marriage patterns of the Nayak society. The marriage scene is sculpturally represented in the Pudumandapam and Kambathadi Mandapam of Meenakshi temple. For officiants in their two temples, Azhagar's visit to Madurai is unconnected with Minakshi's wedding. The popular perception, however, is that Azhagar visits Madurai to give his sister away to Sundareshwara. Unfortunately, as Azhagar discovers when he reaches the Vaigai, he is late for the wedding, which is normally held two days before full moon. Going ahead without him is a gross insult to Azhagar and in a rage - mainly directed at Sundareshwara - he refuses to cross the riverinto the city, although he is said to hand over his wedding-present to Perumal to give to Minakshi. Hence the relationship between Minakshi-Sundareshwara and Azhagar, which is actually non-existent in ritual practice, is characterised for most ordinary people by Azhagar's anger towards Sundareshwarar.

The inscriptions of Azhagar kovil is clearly gives details about the various names of the temple such as thirumaliruncholai, irunkunram, thirumalirunkundram, Thirumaliruncholaimalai, and Thiruvarai. And the main deity's name was mentioned as Solaimalaikku Arase, Mayar, Mayavan, Tirumal, Kannan, Mayon, Azhagar, Govinda, Solaimalaipperuman, Malirunjolai NinraSundaran, Malirunjolai Manivanna, Tirumalirunjolai, Ninra, Kovalar, Govindan, Tirumalirunjolai, Ninra, Nangalbiran, Tirumalirunjolai, Ninra, VanavanKon, Tirumalirunjolai NinraKesavaNambi, Tirumalirunjolai Ninra Murti, Tirumalirunjolai Ninra Nalandigal Narananand Tirumalirunjolai Ninra Adar Paravaiyane. Other names include Tirumalirunjolai Paramasvami, Tirumalin Paramasvamigal, Ipparamasvamikalukku, Azhagar Tirumalirunjolaininraruliya, Tirumalirunjolai Ninrarulina Paramasvamigal, Azhagar Tiruvadinilai, Appan Tiruppati Tiruvengadamudaiyan, Svami Azhagar, vviraivan, Azhagarum Nachimarum, Tirumalirunjolai Ninrarulina Alvar, Azhagar Sirukkar,Azhagar, Ari, Paramasamy, MalaiyAzhagar, Malalangarar, Mayavar, Sundararajan, Sundarattol Azhagar, Madusudana Mugunda, Alangarar, Malirunjolai Malalangaran, Mayavan Malalangaran, and Baintulai, Malaiyalagane, Mugundanandan, Sundararaja Mal, Malaiyalagane, Karuppalagu, Kanna Thensolai Poruppalaga.

These inscriptions of Azhagar kovil clearly shows that there was no evidence to denote the popular name of the main deity as “Azhagar” which is known by the majority of the people. The term “Azhagar” was never mentioned in any of the inscriptions and literatures belong to ancient and sangam period describing thralagarkovil. The stories related to the name of the main deity is only based on the regional stories by the local people near the Azhagar kovil region. The relation of the kallar community with the Lord Azhagar can be partially acceptable that is also only because of the habitation and settlements of the people belongs to kallar community around the Azhagar kovil region from the earliest times. Another notable factor with the Azhagar kovil and Chithirai festival is, the role of the mythological addings in the oral history of the Chithirai festival. The Chithirai festival is all about the journey of the Lord Azhagar to Madurai to attend the wedding of his sister goddess meenakshi and Lord sundareshwarar. But the mythological story of goddess Meenakshi says that the parents of goddessmeenakshi doesn’t have a child, so they involved in doing special yagam to give birth and said as goddess meenakshi was emerged through the yagam.

There was no connection between the Lord Azhagar and meenakshi. The festivals of meenakshi including the celestial marriage of goddess meenakhi and Lord sundareshwarar was celebrated during the tamil month of maasi (before summer) and festivals related to Lord Azhagar was celebrated in the tamil month of Chithirai(summer). So, these two occasions were no way related to eachother. It was only after thirumalainayak from Madurai nayaks who united and brought the events into a grand celebration as Chithiraifestival. There were many reasons behind these acts of thirumalai nayak such as political reason, religious reason as to bring saivites and vaishnavites to workship together without any discrimination. The other major fact to note that the Lord Azhagar’s journey was went to a village called thenur, in Madurai during Chithirai festival. It is also the contribution of thirumalainayak who changed the route of Lord Azhagar’s journey to Vaigai river. So, the present celebrations are the changes made by thirumalainayak durimg his rule in Madurai. The stories behind the Chithirai festivals which is celebrating today are mixed of mythology and regional history on the courses of history in the times. Apart from all those history, mythological stories, the festival is part of the livelihood of people of Madurai in various forms.

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Dr T.BALASUBRAMANIAN
Teaching Assistant
Department of History
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work '**SAROJINI NAIDU NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN TAMILNADU – A STUDY**' submitted to the Alagappa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts inHistory** is a record of original research work done by **S. KUPA MUTHU** during the period 2021-2023 of his study in the Department of History, under my guidance and this project work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree other similar title to any candidate of any University.

Place : Karaikudi **(Dr T.BALASUBRAMANIAN)**

Date : Signature of the Guide

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work **'K.KAMARAJ MAN OF MASSES-A STUDY'** submitted to the Alagappa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in History** is a record of original research work done by **Ms P.MEGALA** during the period 2021-2023 of his study in the Department of History, under my guidance and this project work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree other similar title to any candidate of any University.

Place : Karaikudi
Date : 04.2023

(Dr T.BALASUBRAMANIAN)
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Dr AR. SARAVANAKUMAR
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Head
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work **'GLIMPSES ON HISTORY OF TAMIL MERCHANT GUILDS FROM HISTORICAL RECORDS'** submitted to the Alagappa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in History** is a record of original research work done by Ms **K.NANDHINI (Reg.No.2021415018)** during the period 2021-2023 of his study in the Department of History, under my guidance and this project work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree other similar title to any candidate o f any University.

Place : Karaikudi
Date : .04.2023

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project entitled **"Life History of Muthuramalinga Thevar – A Historical View"** is a bonafide record carried out by **A. Pasumpon Muthuramalingam (Register No: 2021415019)** scholar of **M.A** (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in history submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"PROTECTION OF INDIAN WOMEN: A HISTORIC-LEGAL PERSPECTIVE",** is a bonafide record of theirresearch work, carried out by,**Ms.M.POORNAKALA (Reg . 2021415020)** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his/her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"The Socio-Cultural Heritage of Chithirai Festival in Madurai - A Historical Study"**. is a bonafide record of the research work, carried out by, **A.PRIYADHARSHINI** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year 2020-2022 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS LEADER A.K. GOPALAN IN KERALA – A HISTORICAL STUDY "**, is a bonafide record of their search work, carried out by, **R.RAHUL (Register No: 2021415022)** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his/her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE OF Dr.MUTHULAKSHMI REDDY''** submitted to the Alagappa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in History** is a record of original research work done by **Ms M.RAKAVI** during the period 2021-2023 of his study in the Department of History, under my guidance and this project work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree other similar title to any candidate of any University.

(Dr T.BALASUBRAMANIAN)
Signature of the Guide

Place : Karaikudi
Date : 04.2023

Dr AR. SARAVANAKUMAR
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project entitled **"THE RELIGIOUS HERITAGE OF NATTUKKOTTAI CHETTIYAR- A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE"** is a bonafide record carried out by **M.RAMALAKSHMI (Register No: 2021415024)** scholar of **M.A** (History) under my guidance in the year 2021-2023 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in history submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"Unsung Women Freedom Fighters of India - A Historical Perspective"**, is a bonafide record of their research work, carried out by, **Ms. D. SABITHA** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his/her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project entitled **"The Nayak Dynasty of Administrative in Thanjavur - A Historical Perspective"** is a bonafide record carried out by **S.SABITHA PRIYA (Register No: 2021415026)** scholar of **M.A** (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in history submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work **'HISTORY OF RAMNAD SETHUPATHI'S AS REVEALED FROM COPPER PLATES'** submitted to the Alagappa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in History** is a record of original research work done by **Mr K.SAKTHIVEL** during the period 2021-2023 of his study in the Department of History, under my guidance and this project work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree other similar title to any candidate of any University.

Place : Karaikudi
Date : 04.2023

(Dr B.ARUNRAJ)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project entitled **"A Historical Analysis Of Kabaddi Game In Tamil Nadu "** is a bonafide record carried out by **S.Sangavi (Register No: 2021415028)** scholar of **M.A** (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in history submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"DR. A.P.J. ABDUL KALAM'S NATIONAL MEMORIAL IN RAMESWARAM – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE"**, is a bonafide record of there search work, carried out by, scholar of **R.SANTHI M.A** (History) under my guidance in the year 2021-2023 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his/her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"The Freedom Fighter of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai - A Historical Study",** is a bonafide record of the research work, carried out by, **M.SIVARAMAN** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year 2021-2023 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS in** History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"HISTORY AND ART OF KONARK SUN TEMPLE IN ODISHA - A STUDY"**, is a bonafide record of their search work, carried out by, **SONY KUMARI** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his/her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M.A project entitled, **"THE CAVE TEMPLES IN PUDUKKOTTAI – A HISTORICAL STUDY"**, is a bonafide record of their search work, carried out by, **P.Sowmiya (2021415034)** scholar of M.A (History) under my guidance in the year **2021-2023** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in History submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by his/her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project work **'AESTHETICAL APPORCH OF THIRUPATHUR THIRUTTHALINATHAR TEMPLE ICONOGRAPHY'** submitted to the Alagappa University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Arts in History** is a record of original research work done by Ms **S.THENMOZHI (Reg.No.2021415035)** during the period 2021-2023 of his study in the Department of History, under my guidance and this project work has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree other similar title to any candidate o f any University.

Place : Karaikudi
Date : .04.2023

(Dr B.ARUNRAJ)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Project entitled **"A Legacy of Swami Vivekananda – A Historical Perspective"** is a bonafide record carried out by **V.THIRULOGA CHANDAR (Register No: 2021415036)** scholar of **M.A** (History) under my guidance in the year 2021-2023 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in history submitted to the Alagappa University, Karaikudi is the record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. This has not previously formed for the award to any candidate of any Degree, Diploma or any other Similar Title.

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