

## **Cultural Attributes of River Bed Area of Gadilam: A Study on Temples and Festivals**

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### ***Abstract***

*Society has been flourished in the river region in the witnessed the cultural attributes from ancient to present day. Perhaps, civilizations were established and called the river name itself all over the world. On the consequence Tamil Nadu has a rich culture where several rivers were fallen and exhibit the history of ancestor's life and livelihood. Besides, Temple were built on the river basin for fulfil the basic needs, naturally, rivers were celebrated by the people as goddess, and the rivers from India names as Holy rivers. Gadilam is one of the important river in Cuddalore and Villupuram district, started from Thirukkivilur district and end with Bay of Bengal. somany temples locatd namely Thiruvandhipuram, Thiruvadhighai, Thiruvahindhipuram and Thirumanikuzhi in the region of Gadilam river. All the temples attained unique festivals to reveal the religious and cultural attributes in the River basin. Thus, the rivers were the living museums of ancient people and their social, cultural and economic life. This study mainly focused on how the temples and its festivals attributed of the cultural values of Gadilam river inhabitations in bygone years.*

***Keywords: Gadilam River, Cultural attributes, Temples, festivals, inhabitations.***

### **Introduction**

River is the natural gift that caused the establishment of several civilizations in the world. Indeed, it provides the needs of every human being in the earth. Earlier humans were settled near river basin for fulfil their water and other facilities. On the great phenomenon rivers were the main witness for the human history. Unless, the river flow the water throughout the year, civilization would fell on depth. Tamil Nadu has a rich culture where several rivers were fallen and exhibit the history of ancestor's life and livelihood. A culture is linked with river and every social aspect of life. Moreover, the temples situated near the river area to expose the cultural attributes for the inhabitants. Perhaps river water consumed in the temple for *puja* worship is sprinkled with water called *Abishekam* and a plantain leaf kept for a meal is cleaned with water and a prayer. Many other rituals also highlight the significance of river water in culture attributes. Indeed, people have believed throng for a dip in the river to wash away their sins, for the River Gadilam. Perhaps, the river is linked with culture, tradition and history of the areas. River bath<sup>1</sup> is a sacred customs of the people who visited to attend the festivals. Particularly, the festivals like *Adi perukku* is celebrated when the river is full flow reflected the cultural ethnicity of the people. On the whole, Gadilam River is also the important river in

Tamil Nadu which exhibits the socio-economic and cultural life of the reign. Gadilam River possessed more than hundred temples in the river basin. But this study mainly focused on four temples namely Thiruvandipuram, Thirumanikuzhi, Thirunavalur and Thiruvadigai. Moreover, it covered, how the temples and festivals of Gadilam River revealed cultural attributes on this region.

### **Geographical setting**

Earlier, the South Arcot District is one of the bifurcated districts of the composite south Arcot district. The total geographical area of the district is 3709 sq.km. The district has been divided into six taluks and thirteen blocks. The district has been divided into six taluks and thirteen blocks. At present this district has been divided into two districts Cuddalore district and Villupuram district. The study area Gadilam River basin is located in Cuddalore and Villupuram district. It lies between 79°05' and 11' 55' north latitude covered Villupuram and Cuddaloredistrict.<sup>ii</sup> The basin area is demarcated from the survey of Indian topographical maps and covers an area about 860 km. The district contains seven river basins namely Malattar river basin, pennaiyar river basin, Gadilam river basin, Manimuthar river basin , velar river basin , Uppanar river basin and coleroon river basin.<sup>iii</sup> Out of the seven basins, the Gadilam river Geographical area covered almost 458 sq. km. The Gadilam river basin lies on the northern part of Tamil Nadu. This river basin located between the two rivers, the Ponnai River in the north and Vellar River in the south. It is the smallest river in Tamil Nadu, which started near Thirukovilur district and end with the coast of Bay of Bengal in Cuddalore district.<sup>iv</sup>

### **Temples**

The Hindu temple forms the spiritual sense of sacred place for the Hindu devotee. The temple, as a site or an edifice dedicated to the worship of a deity, is found in many faiths and religions.<sup>v</sup> Derived from the ancient Latin word 'Aedes', or 'house of the god' – generally identified as 'temple' or holy ground on which a temple is built – a temple is a universal form represented in many cultures through its unique features<sup>vi</sup>. The Hindu temple, while distinct from all other building types throughout India, has certain universal characteristics of composition that are common throughout its stylistic and local variations.

### **Tiruvandhipuram**

Tiruvandhipuram is small town lies on the banks of the Gadilam River about five kilometres from Cuddalore. It is the only Vaish-nava holy place located along this river, which provides a nice backdrop for the temple. On the northern banks are the Shaivite places of Thiruppadiripuliyure, Thirunavalur, and Tiruamar. Tirumaniluli and Sendamangalam are found on the southern banks. The temple's main entrance is to the east, although without any tower. The west side has a simple five-tiered gopuram that faces the river. The main deity is known as Deva-naryayan or Devanatha, and is in a standing posture facing east. The Utsava or smaller festival deity is known by other names such as Mavaragghia, Achyuta, Dvishatnatha, Devanatha, Vibhuthanatha and Dasasathya. His divine consort is also located in spacious sanctum where she is seen in a sitting pose, and is known by many names, including Senkamalavalli Thayar, Hemabhujavalli Thayar, Vaikkundhananayagi, and Amritavasini. The temple interior also has shrines for several other deities as well, such as the most beautiful deities of Sita-Rama, Lakshmana and Hanuman.

## Pujas and Festival

Worship or pujas are conducted in the temple four times a day. There are major festivals throughout the year, among which the ten day festival in *Chitirai* between April and May has called as Margazhi festival that lasts twenty one days. During the *Masi Magam* festival, the deity is taken in a grand procession to the Cuddalore coast where He has a dip in the sea<sup>vii</sup>. The nearby “oushada Giri” hill is said to be a fragment of the sanjeevi Hill that was carried by Hamuman to cure Lakshmana of his wounds, as described in the Ramayana. A small shrine at the top accommodates the deities of Hayagriva, Lakshmi, Venugopala, Adhiseha, and Garudalwar. Hayagriva is one of the only of its kind in South India. Hayagriva is propitiated as the one who gives jnana(knowledge) which repulses ignorance. A longstanding custom is that the presiding deity of Devanatha is the elder brother to Lord Venkatachalapathi, the deity at Triupati. So, according to this tradition, the devotee who cannot visit Triupati can make offerings and fulfil their vows for Triupati here at Thiruvandipuram.

A number of tirthas exists at this holy place, one of which is a lake known as Vraja tirtha. A holy bath in it said to be equal to bathing in all the holy places of heaven. The Garuda tirtha is also said to be the origin of Gadilam River, after Maha Vishnu allowed Garuda to take a ceremonial bath there during the Rahotsavam festival.<sup>viii</sup> A place called the Sesha Tirtha has now taken the shape of a well, the wall of which is embellished with the image the serpent, Devotee pour many offerings into it that range from milk, pepper, jiggery, camphor, etc., the water is used for cooking food in the temple to offer to the lord. This kshetra was named Tiruvahin-dhipuram in honour of Adishesha (ahindra) who called for Devanatha . it was once a Shiva temple and later converted to a Vishnu temple. The local chola ruler was such a Shiva fanatic that he would demolish any Vaishnava temple that he saw, the n he came to Trivandhipuram and marched up to the temple gates. He saw the images of Vinayaga and Daskshinamoorthy , who are usually associated with Shiva temple, and he became perplexed . As he came near the sanctum, lord devanatha showed his form as the combined featured of the Trimurti or Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva. Moreover, the annual river festival on the banks of Gadialam river, the event marked the end of the five day long pongal festival .presiding deities from temples all over the districe were brought in a procession, in palanquins bedecked with flowers and bullock carts to the river front for the ‘theerthavari’(sanctified ritualistic bath).<sup>ix</sup>

## Thiruvadhigai

The temple is associated with Thiruvadhiga (thripursamhara) where lord Shiva had destroyed by the three forts of the demons, Tharkasha, kamalaskhsa and vidyumali. He did not just conquer the three forts of the asuras but the three vices of ego, karma and illusion of Devas as well. The ever compassionate lord revived the three asuras made tharakshsha and vidyumali as dwarapalas and kamalsksha was assigned the role of playing punchamukha vadiyam shivas smile alone was sufficient to burn the three forts to reduce them into ashes. The temple at thiruvadhigai spread into seven acres is believed to be the place where the Thirupurasamhara took place; it is located near panruti in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu. It has three concentric praharas with the plethora of superb culture that depict the various form of shiva. The thirupura samhara thandavam and other karanas are seen sculptured brilliantly from the very entrance itself.the presiding deity in veeranateswarar large 16 faced shivalinga as the

temple belonged to the pallava period, with find a strucco figure of parvathi and parameshvara in kalayana (marriage) posture.

A separate shrine known as veerateswarar sabha, house of tripuranthaka murthi held there. He is shown to be standing with a bow in his hand, accompanied by the goddess tirupurasundari. The lord also holds a deer, and arrow and a goad in the other hands. Another subshirne houses the famous panchamukha linga with four faces in the four cardinal directions and the fifth (athomoham), facing upwards. Since Shiva had appeared here in a grand chariot, designed by devas, the entire central shrine of these temple is build like a chariot. The vimana and the outer walls are filled with stucco figures, each depicting various scenes from puranas. It is believed that this structure had inspired king Rajaraja designing the famous Brahadeeswara temple at Thanjavur. It is also started that the very first chariot built was during the occasion when the Lord went for Thirupursamharam.<sup>x</sup>

Gedilam River that runs nearby is hailed in periyapuram as equal to Ganges. A well inside the temple known as soolatheirtham is set to cure diseases related to the stomach. As the goddess shrine is on the right of veerateswarar, many marriages are solemnized here. The ambal also called Periyanyaki. There is also a popular belief among the devotees that the lord remorse the three vices of ego, karma and illusion. Why applying vibuthi on the forehead, one has to bow his/ her head which indicates that the ego is submitted in front of god. Thevaram trio of sambandar, appar and sundar has sung Hymns in praise of the Lord. In fact, the very first Thevaram Hymns originated here from Thinavukkarasar (appar) when he returned home Jain monks to rejoin Saivism. His sister Thilagavathi led into the santuram asked him to pray the lord to cure him from acute stomach pain, he suffered at that time. They are to separate shrines inside the precincts of the temple to honour both Appar and Thilagavathi.

## Festivals

During the annual vaigasi vishagam festival, the thirupuranthagamoorthy, seated in a chariot is taken to kollidam. The three forts constructed with dried coconut and palm leaves or set to fire to mark the occasion. The deity returns to the temple after the grand spectacles, before we enter the main entrance. A sixteen pillar mandapam catches attention. Stucco figures of Ganapati, Subramanian or seen on both sides lord Shiva and Parvathi in marriage posture. The images of Ganapati, dwara palas and Nandi are seen in the seventh tier rajagopuram behind the sixteen pillar mandabam<sup>xi</sup>.

## Thirumanikuzhi

Thirumanikuzhi is located at the distance of around 10 km from Cuddalore five km from Thiruvanhindhipuram on the Cuddalore to panruti route. This is one of the 276 *Devara padal petra thalams* and 17<sup>th</sup> shiva sthalam in Nadu Nadhu. Lord Shiva in this temple is a swayamnumurthi. Moreover, this temple is one of the 1008 renowned Shiva temples. This east facing temple has corridors with a 5-tier main tower rajagopuram. The last consecration ceremony Maha kumbhasisegam took place on 28.10.2012. The temple is situated on the southern banks of River Gedilam and at the foothill of the capper hills. It is believed that this temple was renovated by the ancient emperor's Thirisangu and Harisantra. Moreover, this temple was enhanced in the time of Cholas. The historical names of this place are vamanapuri indiralogam and bheemasangama khetram. The legend of these temples involves lord

mahavishnu mahaballi sakravarhti the grandson of the celebrated Vishu devotee Pragalatha. It is believed that mahaballi was a rat in his previous birth. While eating the ghee from a lamp in this temple's sanctum, it incidentally raised the lamp's wicks which was about to burn out. Pleased that the rat had lit a lamp in the temple, lord Shiva granted the rat a boon that it will be reborn in a family of asura (demon) kings. This is how mahaballi chakravarthy came into existence. Mahaballai was very charitable in nature. He would be ready to offer assistance to anyone in need of help. The celestial gods were very jealous of him and they sought the help of lord mahavishnu to bring about his downfall. Lord Mahavishnu took the avatar of Vamana Brammachari to destroy Mahaballi.

Vamana approached Mahaballi seeking three feet of land which he readily offered. Lord mahavishnu then took his Thiruvikrama avatar and measured the entire earth with a single step of his feet. His second step covered the entire face. He then asked Mahaballi what he had to offer for the third feet left with no other option, Mahaballi politely asked his head, pleased with devotion, lord mahavishnu pushed him down towards the underworld (Pathalam) and made him one of the Chiranjeevis and the immortal. It is believed that lord mahavishnu came to this place as a bachelor (bramachari) and worshipped lord shiva at the end of his vama avtar, to seek respite from his brahmanhati dosam. Since vama was of small stature and he would have been able to see lord shiva's face, lord shiva took a smaller form and appeared inside a pit (pit is called kuzhi in tamil) to enable Mahavishnu to worship him since lord mahavishnu worshipped the lord here as a bachelor. Since the lord appeared inside the pit, this place is called thirumanikuzhi, thiru is a respectful prefix. The lord here is praised as srimanikavarathar.

It is believed that lord mahavishnu always worshipped lord shiva here. He also requested lord shiva that there should be any disturbance to his worship. Lord shiva asked one of his shivaganams (gods) – kubera bema rudra, to stay back at this place from a proactive scream and protect mahavishnu from any interference. Lord shiva also absolved lord mahavishnu of his sins. It is to be noted that puja is first offered to kubera bema rudra to get his permission and then offered to lord shiva. Kubera bema rudra's image can be seen on the screen in front of lord shiva. This screen is closed after every Aarathi. These procedures are unique to this temple. Here a lot of festivals are celebrated in this temple. First one Navarathri in the tamil month of puratasi (sep-oct). Next one mahasivarathri in the tamil month of masi (February-march), rohini dheepa brahmotsavam (Car Festival) in the tamil month of karthigai (nov-dec). During the brahmotsavam a lamp (moksha lamp) is lit on a hill opposite to the temple. This hill is called jyothigiri and rathinagiri. On the day rohini nakshathiram, thousands of devotees undertake Girivalam, this is similar to the Girivalam like thiruvannamalai. Pradosham is also observed on the specific days.

### **Thirunavallur**

Thirunavallur is another historic place nearby which is the birth place of Sundarar. The old temple was renovated and conserved a few years back. Naval tree is the sthala vruksha here, hence the name Navalur. There is a five-tiered raja gopuram in the front and the outer prakaram is vast. It is interesting to look at the sculpture depicting the scene from Chadirekeswara nayanar puranam. Thirunavallur is situated at a distance of about 10 km from Villupuram. Other devara paadal Petra Shiva sthalams near this temple are Thiruvamathur, Thriuthuraiyur, Thriuvadhigai, Thirumundeeswaram, Thirvennainallur. This is one of the 276 devara paadal Petra sthalams in

nadunadu. Lord shivain this temple is a swayambumurthi who is believed to have appeared in the midst of jambu tree (Naval). This is the birth place of saint sundarmoorthy nayanar, one of the four graeat saints (nalvar) and one of the 63 Nayanmars. This temple entrence has 5 tired main towers and it has 2 corridors. Thirunavalur is siturated in the erstwhile thirumunaippadi nadu and is in between the rivers gadilam and pennai. The temple is considered to be one of the oldest one and is said to have existed here even before the 4 yugas. This temple was earlier called “thiruthondeecharm” and the place around it was called thirunavalur and jambunathapuri. However it is now called thirnamanllaur. As per the stone increipstions savailable in this temple, the chola king rajathithan, son of paranthakan –I, renovated and expanded this temple.<sup>xii</sup>

## Festivals

The numerous festivals have celebrated in this temple throughout the year on special days. Particularly, the Saint Sundaramoorthy Nayanar’s birthday (janana vizha) in the Tamil month of avani(Aug-sept) on the day of the “Uthiram” star day. Sundarar’s guru pooja in the tamil month of Aadi(July-Aug) on the day of the “swathi” star, and car festival (ther thiruvizha) in the tamil month of chithirai(Apr-May). Pradosham is also observed regularly<sup>xiii</sup>.

## Conclusion

The river is the living museum of ancient culture and history on the native people. Yesteryear people are in habituated in the river basin for their basic facilities. Soon after the great settlement they built temples on the river side for their religious purpose. Later they functioning the pujas and festivals to exhibit the culture attributes, to fulfil their prayers to god. On the great path Tamil Nadu have several rivers to maintain the cultural attributes which followed by ancient period. However Gadilam River is also one of the rivers which have several important temples. Thus, the temples have picturing the people cultural life of the people ever. Unfortunately, Gadilam River is forgotten by historians and the contemporary people.

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<sup>ii</sup>M.Arunachalam, Festivals of Tamil Nadu, Gandhi vidyalayam, 1980, p.90

<sup>iii</sup>Madras District Gazetteer, Government India press, Madras, p. 76

<sup>iii</sup>Governement of Tamil Nadu : Integrated wasteland development project, Gadilam River basin, South Arcot district , Cuddalore, 1994, pp.1-2

<sup>iv</sup>A stastical atlas of the (district): south Arcot Distirct, Madras, Department of Statistics, p.1

<sup>v</sup> George Michael, The Hindu Temple and its meaning, university of Chicago press, 1988, 23

<sup>vi</sup>Vinayak Bharne, Rediscovering the Hindu Temple : the sacred Architecture and Urbanism of India, Cambridge scholars, 2014, p.79

<sup>vii</sup>Stephen knapp, Seeing the spiritual India, Universal publishers, 2008, p 13

<sup>viii</sup>Thinamalar(Tamil daily), sep o4, 2019

<sup>ix</sup>The Hindu, dated 20 January 2015.

<sup>x</sup>Malaimalar, dated 8 June 2017

<sup>xi</sup> Dinathanthi, dated October 19,2019

<sup>xii</sup>Thinamani, dated 19 November 2019

<sup>xiii</sup>Malaimalar, dated 11 February 2019