

A Noteworthy Veneration Of Mother Goddess With Special Reference To Madurai Meenakshi Amman Temple

Ms. J. Sivaranjani¹, Dr. P. Raja²

¹PhD. Research Scholar, Full Time, Department of History, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

²Associate Professor, Department of History, D.G. Govt. Arts college [W], Mayiladuthurai - 609 001.

Corresponding Author - Dr. P. Raja, Associate Professor, Department of History, D.G. Govt. Arts college [W],
Mayiladuthurai - 609 001.

DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.S06.562

Abstract

The Meenakshi Amman Temple is a significant Hindu Temple situated in the city of Madurai, which is arranged in the southern Indian province of Tamil Nadu. This Temple is devoted to the goddess Meenakshi, who is respected to be a Symbol of Parvati, and her consort, Siva, in his structure as Sundareswara. The current Temple was developed during the rule of Tirumalai Nayak, [1584-1659] a king who lived during the Seventeenth century. In any case, the first Temple was worked during a prior piece of the area's set of experiences. Mīnākṣī is a Sanskrit expression signifying 'fish-looked at', got from the words mīna 'fish' and akṣī 'eye'. She was likewise known by the Tamil name Taḍākai 'fish-looked at one', referenced in early verifiable record as a furious, unmarried goddess sanskritised as Meenakshi. The presiding Lord of this sacred shrine was in the times of yore known as Chockanathar, and Chockalingam. This paper focuses on worship of mother goddess Meenakshi and the significance of Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple.

Key Words Mina, aksi, ratha, gopuram and Saktism

Methodology

By employing primary sources this paper has been attempted inscriptional evidences of the major and authentic source materials for writing this paper. Secondary sources are books and journal mentioned in the bibliography part to make a compare and contrast of different problems arising out of various difficult situations to acknowledge and understand the Cult of Mother Goddess in general and the Cult of the Meenakshi in particular. The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive, analytical and historical.

The Meenakshi Amman Temple, a well-known Hindu temple, is located in the city of Madurai in the Tamil Nadu region of southern India. This temple is devoted to the goddess Meenakshi, who is seen as a depiction of Parvati, and to her husband, Siva, who is symbolised by his Sundareswara building. ¹ The present Temple was built during the tenure of Tirumalai Nayak, a king who ruled in the seventeenth century. In any event, the original Temple was built at a different point in the region's history. ²

The Temple, which is devoted to Meenakshi Amman and Siva, is a major destination in the Saivism culture. Despite this, the Temple honours Vishnu because of many stories, personalities, and customs that depict him as Meenakshi's sibling. The "southern Mathura" moniker for this Temple and Madurai came about as a

result of its connection to Vaishnava teachings. The largest sight of Madurai is the vast Temple complex, which draws hundreds of tourists each day. More than 1,000,000 people attend the Temple during the annual 10-day Meenakshi Tirukalyanam celebration, which is highlighted with a ratha (chariot) procession in the Tamil month of Chittirai (covers with April-May in Georgian schedule, Chaitra in North India).³

Fish-looked at is the meaning of the Sanskrit word Meenakshi, which is derived from the terms "fish" and "eye." The Tamil name Tadakai, which translates to "fish-looked at one," was also used for her. Early reliable accounts describe her as a lone, vindictive deity known as Meenakshi in Sanskrit. She is also known as Agayakai or Agayakaammai in Tamil, which means "the mother with the gorgeous fish eyes." Another version holds that the goddess' name, which translates to "rule of the fish," was really formed from the Tamil terms "min" for "fish" and "ci" for "rule."⁴

It has been suggested that this description means a variety of things, such as that she was originally a goddess of the fishermen, that her eyes are "enormous and magnificent" like those of fish, or that they are "long and thin" like the body of a fish. Another way to look at it is that the term derives from the idea that fish never close their eyes because the goddess keeps watch over her lovers all the time. Another translation claims that the name derives from the fanciful belief that fish feed their young merely by glancing at them; the goddess ostensibly supports her devotees by doing the same.⁵ According to ancient Tamil text, the original Meenakshi Amman Temple was built by people who had conquered the lost continent of Kumari Kandam, which has been equated to Atlantis.⁶ In any case, the Temple was constructed around the Seventh century expansion, according to the verified archives. The Pandyas, a native Tamil tradition, were in charge of the area at the time. The creation of the primary Meenakshi Amman Temple was ordered by the head of this tradition. Nevertheless, the first Temple was pillaged and destroyed in the middle of the fourteenth century (more specifically, in 1310) as a result of the Islamic onslaught from the south, which was led by Malik Kafur, a notable general of the Delhi Sultanate.⁷ The Meenakshi Amman Temple was completely rebuilt in the middle of the sixteenth century. The Nayak Line was now in effect throughout a substantial area of Tamil Nadu. The renovation of the Meenakshi Amman Temple was initiated by Viswanatha Nayak, the main Nayak figure in Madurai. Later, under the reign of Thirumalai Nayak, a subsequent Nayak king who flourished in the seventeenth century, the Temple was expanded. Visitors to Madurai today can view this Temple since it has survived for a very long time.⁸

Many sages and scholars, including the well-known Neelakanta Dikshitar, produced a few exceptional hymns on the goddess in the early modern period. Adi Sankaracharya (Eighth century Promotion) wrote the stotram Meenakshi Pancharatnam (Five Gems of Meenakshi), which is a hymn in her honour. Meenakshi doesn't explicitly appear in the stotram Lalita Sahasranama, however the phrase Vakthra lakshmi parivaha chalan meenabha lochana makes mention to her (She who has promise and brilliance of Lakshmi and has delightful eyes which seem to be fish in the lake of her face).⁹ Meenakshi is portrayed in a Tamil sonnet/song (Tamilpillai) as the nexus between domestic life and eternity and as a universal emblem for everyone who raise "unthinkable" children or spouses.¹⁰

The Tamil text Tiruvilaiyatarpuranam, which was written in the thirteenth century and tells stories about Master Siva, mentions King Malayadhwaja Pandya and his Queen Kanchanamalai as having participated in a yajna to find a child for advancement. Instead, a young girl with three bosoms is created; she is now 3 years old. Siva acts as a mediator and advises the guardians to treat her like a child; otherwise, she would lose the third bosom when she encounters her consort. They follow the advice. When the young woman meets Siva, his promises come true, and she adopts the name Meenakshi, the monarch crowns her as the substitute.¹¹ According to Harman, this may be a reflection of South Indian matrilineal customs and the regional belief that "penultimate [spiritual] powers lay with the ladies," supernatural creatures pay heed to their companions, and that women control the destiny of worlds.¹² According to Susan Bayly, the affection for Meenakshi is a part of the Hindu goddess tradition that fits with Hindu culture, where "ladies are the lynchpin of the framework" of social ties.¹³ Her eyes are said to give unborn children life in myth. The Meenakshi Amman Temple, which has 14 gopurams in total and a 6 hectare (14.83 section of land) footprint, is easily identifiable. These magnificent

pinnacles, which are a conspicuous feature of the Dravidian style of Temple building, are lavishly completed with models and carvings.¹⁴ The Meenakshi Amman Temple's gopurams may be divided into many levels, and each one is a magnificent example of architectural design. There are four nine-layered gopurams, also known as rajagopurams, for instance.

The tallest pinnacle in the Meenakshi Amman Temple is one of them, called the "South Rajagopuram," which was constructed in the sixteenth century. The level of this rajagopuram is roughly 50 metres (164.04 feet), and it is covered in more than 1500 beautifully coloured statues of famous characters.¹⁵ However, the "Master Holy Place Gopuram," which has three floors and was constructed during the Twelfth, is the gopuram with the greatest experience.¹⁶

The Lord once went by the titles Chockanathar and Chockalinga Perumal and presided over this sacred sanctuary. Sundareswarar, Meenakshi Sundarar, Somasundarar, Kalyana Sundarar, Shenbaga Sundarar, Allavai Devagan, Chockalingam, Adiyarku Nallan, Adhiraveesi, Vilayaduvan, Abhideka Chockar, and Azhagiya Chockar are some of the contemporary names for the god.

The spectacular dramatisations of Lord Siva, known as the Thiruvilayadal, are shown in art from the Nayaka era. The 64 paranormal occurrences of Master Siva are depicted in works of art that were all ordered in Madurai. These elegant designs should be seen on the northern wall of the lovely lotus tank, which faces the Pottamarai kulam.¹⁷ At a cost of Rs 26.25 lakhs, these drawings are presently undergoing a makeover by employing conventional colours. The gallery of the temple's 1000 support point hallway, or mandapam, is where a lot of the artwork that has been harmed by disrespect is kept.¹⁸

Drawings by Thiruezhukootrikkai: In the Petchiakkal mandapam, a drawing in the shape of a charriot explains the significance of the lyrics sung by Nakkeerar.

Panchakkabhai illustrations Images by Panchakkasabhai: Drawings of the five Tamil Nadu sabhas, or Panchaga sabhas, should be clear going back to the Velliammbala Nadarajar Sannithi. The workmanship dates back to the reign of Rani Mangammal. On the highest point of the Palaya unjal mandapam (ancient swing anteroom), on the eastern side of the unjalmandapam, these paintings should be seen. The sovereign Mangammal and her court are shown in these illustrations admiring the Meenakshi Thirukalyanam, or brilliant wedding.¹⁹ The six houses of Lord Muruka are shown in paintings that should be seen as the New Glass Unjalmandapam passes by. In the part of the Amman Sannithi, the designs of the Meenakshi Thirukalayanam and Pattabishekam have also been completed. Diagrammatic representation of heaven and earth: On the several sides of the wedding stage in the traditional Kalyana mandapam, there are drawings of heaven and earth. Similar illustrations of 64 Thiruvilayadal and other heavenly occasions may be found on the Kalyana mandapam.²⁰

More than 1,000,000 people attend the Chithirai Celebration, the largest religious gathering held at the Meenakshi Amman Temple. It is observed annually in the months of April and May and lasts for 12 days. Various activities are held during the course of the festival. The Meenakshi Thirukalyanam, which takes place on the tenth day of the festival and represents the union of the goddess Meenakshi and Sundareswara, is one of them.

The procession of Vishnu (as Kallazaghar, Meenakshi's brother), from his shrine in Alagar Koyil to Madurai is another festival. The tale states that Vishnu missed the wedding festivities because his travel was delayed. Furious, the deity swore never to go back to Madurai and set up residence on a neighbouring hill of Alagar Koyil. Vishnu continued on his voyage to Madurai to bestow blessings on Meenakshi and her husband after seeking mediation and appeasement from many heavenly animals.²¹

Because Meenakshi is the main deity of the temple, it stands for the importance of women in Tamil Hindu families. The temple also demonstrates the compatibility of Saivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism.²² The

Sundareswarar temple is a representation of one of the five "Pancha Sabhai" (five courts) where Lord Siva is said to have performed the cosmic dance. Rituals and processions make up the bulk of worship. A Sundareswarar image is carried to the Meenakshi shrine during one of the festivities inside a palanquin. The palanquin is transported inside the sanctuary each night and brought back to the Sundareswarar temple each morning. The devotees often worship Meenakshi before offering prayers to Sundareswarar.

References

1. The Great Temple of Madurai: English Version of the Book Koilmanagar, **Sri Meenakshi sundareswarar Temple Renovation Committee**, 1963, pp. 13-14.
2. William P. Harman., **The Sacred Marriage of a Hindu Goddess**, Motilal Banarsidass. p. 24. ISBN 978-81-208-0810-2. Archived from the original on 12 October 2020. Retrieved 5 June 2018.
3. **Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies**, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, April, 1966. International Association of Tamil Research. 1968. p. 543.
4. Menon, A. Sreedhara., **Cultural Heritage of Kerala: An Introduction**, East-West Publications, 1978, p. 250.
5. Howes, Jennifer (2 September 2003), **The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India: Material Culture and Kingship**, Routledge, p. 27. ISBN 9781135789961.
6. Rajarajan Archived 30 March 2019 at the Wayback Machine, R.K.K. 2005. **Minaksi or Sundaresvara: Who is the first principle? South Indian History Congress Annual Proceedings XXV**, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, pp. 551-553.
7. Meenakshi Pancharatnam Lyrics –“Meenatchi Pancha Ratnam”, **Hindu Devotional Blog**, Archived from the original on 22 January 2018, Retrieved 21 January 2018.
8. Fiedler, Amanda (2006). **Where does Meenakshi take her turmeric bath?: a multiply-constructed religious history and deity in Tamilnadu**, University of Wisconsin--Madison. p. 1.
9. **Journal of Kerala Studies**. Vol. 36. University of Kerala. 2009. p. 97.
10. Nelson, Louis P. (2006). **American Temple: Understanding Sacred Spaces**, Indiana University Press. p. 121. ISBN 9780253218223.
11. Manly Palmer Hall, ed. (1949). Horizon, Volume 9, Issue 3. **Philosophical Research Society**, p. 33.
12. Harman, **The Sacred marriage of a Hindu Goddess**, Indian University Press, 1992, p. p 44-47.
13. Susan Bayly (1989). **Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900**. Cambridge University Press. pp. 29–30. ISBN 978-0-521-89103-5. Archived from the original on 25 December 2018. Retrieved 25 November 2017.
14. Fisher, Michael H. (18 October 2018). **An Environmental History of India: From Earliest Times to the Twenty-First Century**, Cambridge University Press. p. 74. ISBN 9781107111622.
15. **Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies**, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, April, 1966. International Association of Tamil Research. 1968. p. 543.
16. **Journal of Indian History**, Department of History, University of Kerala. 2002. p. 96.
17. **Excerpt for the etymology of Meenatchi from "A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Tamil Language**, Vol. VII, PART - II", page 68
18. William Norman Brown (1978). "The Name of the Goddess Minākṣī 'Fish-Eye'". **India and Indology: Selected Articles**. Motilal Banarsidass. pp. 84–86. OCLC 871468571. Archived from the original on 12 October 2020. Retrieved 5 June 2018.
19. Klaus K. Klostermaier (2014). **A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism**. Oneworld. p. 153. ISBN 978-1-78074-672-2. Archived from the original on 12 October 2020. Retrieved 5 June 2018.
20. **Birth and birthgivers : the power behind the shame**. Chawla, Janet. New Delhi: Shakti Books. 2006. ISBN 8124109389. OCLC 181090767.
21. Richman, Paula (1997). **Extraordinary Child: Poems from a South Asian devotional genre**. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
22. Brockman 2011, pp. 326–327.