Sri Sathya Sai Bal Vikas

Glory of Bharath » Bharath Darshan

Dear Sai brothers and sisters,
This month let us visit the temple city of Tamil Nadu Madurai and offer our salutations to Goddess Meenakshi.

Madurai

Madurai is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the Indian peninsula. It is an ancient and prestigious city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, situated on the banks of the River Vaigai in Madurai district. The city is widely known as the Temple city, and is often also referred to as City of four junctions (Koodal Maanagar), Cultural Capital of Tamil Nadu (Kalaachaara thalainagar), City of Jasmine (Malligai Maanagar), Sleepless city (Thoonga Nagaram) Athens of the East and The city of festivals. Madurai was the capital city of ancient Southern civilization. Madurai's cultural heritage goes back 2,500 years, and the city has been an important commercial center and has conducted trade as far as Rome and Greece since as early as 550 B.C.

Madurai has history dating all the way back to the Sangam period of the pre-Christian era. It was the seat of power of the ancient Pandyan empire of Tamilakam. The Sangam period poet Nakkeerar is associated with some of the Tiruvilayaadal episodes of Sundareswarar - that are enacted as a part of temple festival traditions even today. As early as the 3rd century BC, Megasthenes visited Madurai. Later many people from Rome and Greece visited Madurai and established trade with the Pandya kings.

Madurai is built around the Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple. Concentric rectangular streets surround the temple, symbolizing the structure of the cosmos. The entire city is laid out in the shape of the lotus. Some of these rectangular streets are named after Tamil months. The six major rectangular streets around Meenakshi temple are Aadi, Chithirai, Aavani Moola, Maasi, Maarat and Veli streets. Being the oldest inhabited city, madurai is famous for its diverse culture and religious harmony. The three religious heads famously called as **Mummadha Thalaivargal** (Leaders of The Three religion) strive to keep madurai in peace.

The Aadheenam

This is one of the oldest mutt in India constituted during the period of Thirugnana Sambanthar.There are lot of immovable properties donated for this mutt, right from the day of its origin. The tradition of madurai Aadinam goes back to 1300 years and Thirugnana Sambanthar being the 1st Maga Sannidhaanam The Madurai Aadheenam. The mutt is headed by the Guru Maga Sannidaanam, The Aadinam of Madurai. Though being a saiva, the Aadheenam is considered as the religious head of all Saiva and Vaishanava Hindus of Madurai.

The Kaziyar

Kazi, the jury and religious head of Muslims, in Madurai is appointed by Govt. of Tamil Nadu. The tradition of Kazis in madurai goes back to 750 years. Syed Tajuddin was the 1st Kazi to the then Govt of Sultans. Till today, His descendants who live in the Kazimar street, Madurai are appointed as Kazis to the Govt. of Tamil Nadu in Madurai.

The Archbishop

The tradition of the Archdiocese of Madura goes back 70 years and the Archbishop of Madurai is considered the head of Roman Catholic Christians in Madurai. The archdiocese of Madura was erected in the year 1938, and was renamed as the Archdiocese of Madurai in the year 1950. The Suffragan Dioceses of Dindigul, Kottar, Palayamkottai, Sivagangai, Tiruchirapalli and Tuticorin come under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Madura. Bishop John Peter Leonard was the 1st archbishop of Madurai with whom the genealogy of the Archdiocese of Madurai starts.

Meenakshi-Sundareswar Temple

Madurai's Meenakshi-Sundareswarar temple, which stands today as one of the India's greatest cultural and architectural landmarks, was originally built by the early Pandya King Kulasekara. It is also one of the greatest Shiva Temples of Tamilnadu. The ancient city of Madurai was supposedly laid out in a lotus-like formation, with the temple at the center and the streets and main thoroughfares layered one after the other concentrically, outward from the center. One legend says that on the day the city was to be named, Shiva blessed the land and its people while divine nectar showered on the city from his matted locks. The city hence came to be known as Madhurapuri meaning The City of Divine Nectar. This is the place where Natarajar performed the dance raising his right leg. (Kal maariya Aadiya natarajar). Shiva was very happy with the temple construction and performed a different dance.

Kazimar Big Mosque (Periya pallivasal) and Maqbara

This famous mosque (masjid) is located at the heart of Madurai city. His Holiness Hazrat Kazi Syed Tajuddin (a descendant of Prophet Muhammad) who came from Oman during 13th century, received this land from the then Pandiya king, and constructed the mosque which is the first Muslims' place of worship in Madurai. Madurai Maqbara, the dargah of famous Madurai Hazrats (Their Holiness Hazrat Meer Ahamad Ibrahim, Hazrat Meer Amjad Ibrahim and Hazrat Syed Abdus Salaam Ibrahim Rahmatullahi Alaihim - Descendants of Prophet Muhammad) is also located inside the mosque premises. All of Kazi Syed Thajuddheen's descendants (Huqdars - shareholders of this mosque called as Syeds) have lived in the same locality (Kazimar street) for more than 700 years, and have managed the mosque since then. Syed Tajuddin was appointed as Kazi of the sultans, and still his descendants who live at Kazimar street, Madurai, are appointed as Kazis to the Government of Tamil Nadu. All Syeds belong to the Sunni sect of Islam, its Hanafi school and most of the descendants of Kazi Syed Tajuddin are shadhilis (shazuli) who follow the Sufi order Fassiyatush Shadhiliya.

Thiruparankundram

Thiruparankundram is 8 km from the Madurai city center. Thiruparakundram temple has become a symbol of the religious harmony as of the people of Madurai. An Islamic Durgah (shrine) is located at the top of the hill, where the grave of an Islamic saint Hazrat Sultan Sikandhar Badushah Shaheed Radiyallah Ta'al anhu, who came from Jeddah along with Hazrat Sulthan Syed Ibrahim Shaheed Badushah of Madinah (now in Erwadi, Ramanathapuram district) during the early 13th century, is found. Irrespective of religion, people from all parts of Tamil Nadu and from Kerala visit this durgah. People who visit the Ervadi Durgah in Ramanathapuram district are supposed to visit this durgah. Many poems have been written in praise of Hazrat Sultan Sikandhar Badhusha, by Syed Abdussalam Ibrahim Saalim Hazrat, the third in the list of Madurai Hazrats and his Maternal grandson Syed Abdus Salaam Ibrahim Saahib Hazrat and they are published in the Erwadi manaaqib. It is seen that people who come here with a wish see it answered in a very short time, and so He is also called Mustajab ad Du'aa Sikandhar Badhushah. Mustajab Ad Du'aa in Arabic means A saint whose Supplications are immediately answered by Allah. The Anniversary urus festival of Hazrat Sulthan Sikandar badusha Shaheed is commomerated on 17th Night of the islamic Month of Rajab every Hijri year.

The traditional legend is that Murugan married Deivanai at Thiruparankundram Murugan Temple, which also is the first among the Six Holy Abodes of Murugan (Arupadai Veedu, literally "Six Battle Camps"). This evocative cave temple is much older and has a more sacred atmosphere than the Meenakshi temple.

Koodal Azhagar Koil

A beautiful Vishnu temple which has Navagraham also (usually Navagraham is found only in Shivan temple). There is a hayagrivar temple close to this temple where hayagrivar (Horse/"haya"griva avataram) is the main deity. This temple is believed to be older than the Meenakshi temple. Near by this temple another Siva temple is located and the temple is called the Nanmai Tharuvar temple. The legend has it that this temple was build by Shiva himself when he was the king of Madurai. Still you can find a full grandie statue of Shiva along with Meenakshi worship Linga in the Karuvari of the temple. Another notable Vishnu temple found near the Kodal Azhagar temple is the Madhana Gopalan Temple which is a temple dedicated to Krishna.

St. Mary's Cathedral Church

St. Mary's Cathedral in Madurai is the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Madurai. It is one of the oldest Roman Catholic churches in India and is situated 2 km South East of Madurai Railway station and 200 meters from the Thirumalai Nayak Mahal. Meenakshi Temple

Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple is a historic Hindu temple located in the holy city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva (in the form of Sundareswarar or Beautiful Lord) and his consort, Goddess Parvati (in the form of Meenakshi). The temple forms the heart and lifeline of the 2500 year old city of Madurai. The complex houses 14 magnificent Gopurams or towers including two golden Gopurams for the main deities, that are elaborately sculptured and painted.

Goddess Meenakshi

According to Hindu legend, Shiva came down to earth in the form of Sundareswarar to marry Meenakshi, an incarnation of [Parvati]. Parvati had earlier descended to earth in the form of a small child in response to the great penance of Malayadwaja Pandya, the ruler of Madurai. After growing up to adulthood, she began ruling the city. The Lord appeared on earth and proposed to her. The marriage was supposed to be the biggest event on earth, with the whole earth gathering near Madurai. Vishnu, the brother of Meenakshi, was traveling to preside over the marriage from his holy abode at Vaikuntam. Due to a divine play, he was tricked by god [Indra] and delayed on the way. Meanwhile, the marriage was presided over by a local god from Thirupparankundram [Pavalaakanivaai Perumal]. This is celebrated annually as 'Chitirai Thiruvizha' in Madurai. During the period of Nayakar rule in Madurai, the then ruler Thirumalai Nayakar linked the 'Azhakar Thiruvizha' and the 'Meenakshi Wedding'. Hence was born the 'Azhaghar Thiruvizha' or 'Chithirai Thiruvizha'.

Modern History

The history of the original structure is not properly known, but Tamil literature speaks about the temple for the last couple of millennia. Thirugnanasambandar, the famous Hindu saint of Shaiva philosophy, mentioned this temple as early as the 7th century, and described the Lord as Aalavai Iraivan. The temple was believed to have been sacked by the infamous Muslim invader Malik Kafur in 1310 and all the ancient elements were destroyed. The initiative to rebuild the structure was taken by Arya Natha Mudaliyar, the Prime Minister of the first Nayak of Madurai (1559-1600 A.D.), and the founder of the Poligar System. Then came the most

valuable contributions of Thirumalai Nayak circa 1623 to 1659. He took considerable interest in erecting the Vasantha Mandapa of the temple complex.

Shrines

This temple is a complex of many deities. The Shiva shrine lies at the centre of the complex, suggesting that the ritual dominance of the goddess developed later. Outside the Shrine, lies huge scultpture of Lord Ganesh carved of single stone and there is a shrine for a giant Ganesh temple, called the **Mukuruny Vinayakar**. This idol is believed to have been found during an excavation process to dig the temple lake. The Meenkashi shrine is on the left of the Shiva shrine and is of sculpturally less valuable than the Shiva shrine.

Velli Ambalam

This is one of the five royal courts (Shabai or Shabha) of lord Shiva velli (Tamil)= Silver Ambalam (Tamil)= Stage or altar. This Shiva shrine also consists of an unusual sculpture of the Hindu god Nataraja. This massive Nataraja sculpture is enclosed in a huge silver altar and hence called **Velli Ambalam** (Silver abode). Famous Hindu marquee and a dancing form of Shiva that normally has his left foot raised, has his right foot raised in this temple. According to the purana, this is on the request of the Rajasekara Pandya king a sincere devotee of the lord. Asked the Lord to change his position, as he felt that always keeping a single foot raised will pose enormous stress on that, based on his personal experiments in dancing.

The lake Porthamarai

Porthamarai Kulam, the sacred pond inside the temple, is a very holy site for devotees. People go around the 165 ft (50 m) by 120 ft (37 m) lake before entering the main shrine. The name means the Pond with the Golden Lotus, and the lotus that grows in it has a golden color. According to legend, Lord Shiva promised a stork that no fish or other marine life would grow here and thus no marine animals are found in the lake. In the Tamil legends, the lake is supposed to be a judge for judging a worth of a new literature. Thus, authors place their works here and the poorly written works are supposed to sink and the scholastic ones are supposed to float.

Thousand Pillar Hall

Thousand Pillar hall of Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple was built with the oldest Nellaiappar Temple, Tirunelveli as a model. The **Aayiram Kaal Mandapam** or Thousand Pillar Hall contains 985 (instead of 1000) carved pillars. It is considered culturally important and is maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. The Thousand Pillared Hall was built by Ariyanatha Mudaliar in 1569. He was the Prime Minister and General of Viswanatha Nayak of the first Nayaka of Madurai (1559-1600 A.D.). He was also the founder of Poligar System, the quasi-feudal organization of the country, which was divided into multiple palayams or small provinces and each palayam was ruled by a palayakkarar or a petty chief[. At the entrance of the Mandapam, we can still see his statue; the majestic pose of Ariyanatha Mudaliar seated on a beautiful horse-back which flanks one side of the entrance to the temple.

Ashta Shakthi Mandapam

This is the first hall in the entrance of Meenakshi shrine tower near to East Tower. The hall carry the statues of eight goddesses and hence the name.

Next month we shall continue our sojourn. Till then Sairam.