

Elukadal- Forgotten Pond in Madurai City

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Abstract

Madurai is a traditional city also known as ‘Kudal’ because the city was built at the confluences of the river Vaigai. Vaigai is the main water resource of Madurai. Once there were 190 water bodies in Madurai. There were 38 ponds in Madurai city. At present very few tanks only available in Madurai. Some ponds were encroached by public buildings. Some ponds were turned as drainages. Some temple tanks are as much a part of Madurai’s identity as the temples themselves. Elukadal Street situated in the centre of Madurai city. It got its name from Elukadal Teppam. There is an ancient street, running in front of the Pudumandapam called Elukadal Street (affluence of seven seas). In this street, the stores which sold many essential goods existed. A Legendary Story says that Lord Shiva heard this, he miraculously brought water from seven seas to Madurai and formed a tank here to house the water to help his mother-in-law, who had pleased and took bath in that tank. Hence the tank got the name Elukadal (seven seas). The tank was constructed by Saluva Nayaka, an officer of the Vijayanagara ruler Krishnadevaraya in 1516 A.D. TimmuRauvtar, the administrative General of Chokkanata Nayak renovated and reconstructed this tank and named it as ‘Sapthasakaram’ (Elukadal) on 1564. But later due to the encroachment the size of the pond was reduced. The pond was strictly prohibited and the people were not allowed to enter into the pond, because the pond became the garbage ground and a point of illegal activities. Many Madurai people don’t know about this tank. It was forgotten by many people. The Elukadal Teppam will not be recovered. But the ponds like Tallakulam, Koodal Perumal Teppam, Madakulam canal are in endangered condition in Madurai. The people of Madurai must aware about their water resources and should take protective measures.

Keywords: Madurai, Water Bodies, Encroached, Affluence, Elukadal, Legendary, Scarcity

Introduction

Madurai, a well-known premier pilgrim center of today is probably over 2500 years old and the 13th oldest city in Tamil Nādu. The term Madurai is derived from the Tamil word, *Madhuram* (sweetness). The Madura ‘*stalapuranas*’ state that when Kulasekara Pandya built the city at first, God Siva sprinkled the whole town with drops of sweet nectar (*amirtham*) which were shaken off his locks.¹ As the amirtham had purified and blessed the city it came to be known as Madurai.

Madurai is a traditional city also known as ‘Kudal’ because the city was built at the confluences of the river Vaigai. The city was also called “*Nanmada Kudal*”², the cluster of four flowers, *Kadambavana K shetra Kannipuram*, and *Sivanagaram Dvadasantalam*. Madurai is also called the Athens of the East, which is a cradle of Tamil culture. It has been attracting the foreigners from the ancient times.

1 Robert Sewell, *Archaeological Survey of South India, List of Antiquarian Remains in Presidency of Madras, Vol.I, Madras, 1882, p.292.*

2 Census of India 1991, Series 23, Part XII-A, District Census Hand Book, Madurai Village and Town Directory, Directorate of Census operations, Tamilnadu, p.9.

Forty-nine famous Pandian kings were said to have ruled over Madurai.³ The reference is found in the Ramayana and in *Kautilya's Arthashastra*. Foreign travelers like Megasthenes (302 BC), Pliny (77 AD) and Ptolemy (140 AD) referred to Madurai as 'Modoura'.⁴ Madurai is also called a "Temple city". Some ancient literature carries references to the export of Pearl, Peacock feather, and Sandal wood to Queen Cleopatra. It is mentioned by classical writers and seems to have been well known both to the Greeks and the Romans. Some Roman copper coins were found in the river bed of the Vaigai.⁵ Madurai is also known as 'Alavay' or *Tiru Alavay* in Tiruvilaiyadal puranam.

Madurai District is situated on the banks of river Vaigai to the South of Chennai and geographically is located at 9.58N and 78.10E². The city is 110 miles above the sea level and it is the heart of Tamil Nadu, about 460km South West of the capital city Chennai, with a population of 9,22,913 and on area about 25.17 sq.km (2001 census)⁶. As the Vaigai valley is the most fertile land the Madurai town is considered as the most important centre of trade and industries of the district. Its suburbs extended for a considerable distance on all sides. Weaving and dying are the chief industries and trade is carried on cloth, agricultural and producing metal vessels.

The Western Ghats from the outline of Madurai which includes the broad mass of Palani hills on the west, the Varasanad and Andipatti ranges to the south, the Nagamalai range and the Sirumalai to the north - west; and Alagarmalai, Karandamalai and the Natham hills towards the north - east Madurai. These are the boundaries of Madurai. The Anaimalai (Elephant hills), Nagamalai (Snake hill) and the Pasumalai (cow hill) are the three hills surrounding the city of Madurai. Among them the first two are of rock formation. Being a tropical country Madurai has fairly high degree of temperature for the major part of the year as the rainfall is only about forty inches in a year. The

important trees in this district are *Karuvelam*, Fig, *Etti*, Coconut, Palmyra, Jack, Mango, Guava, Drumstick, Neem, Baniyan and Peepal Tree. Jasmine flower is exported to other cities of India and other countries from Madurai. The beauty of Madurai city was explained in the Tamil literatures like Paripadal, Silappadikaram, Maduraikanchi, and Tiruvilaiyadalpuranam.

Most of the people belonged to the Dravidian stock, through a small section belongs to the aboriginal and to Aryan group. Hindus are thickly populated; the Christians and Muslims are minorities⁷. As Tamil is the main language, Madurai is considered as the second largest town of the state. It is well connected by rail, road and air to all major cities of the state and to the other states of our country. National highways NH-7 and NH-49 pass through the city. The literacy rate has been improving over the last two decades in view of the city's growing significance in religion and Government.

Historical Monuments of Madurai

Meenakshi Sundareswara Temple, Alanganalur Jallikattu, Mariamman Tank, Tirupparankundram Hill, Chithirai festival, Madurai Jasmine, Sungudi Sarees, Mangammal Palace, Gandhi Museum, Goripalayam Dhargah, St. Mary's Cathedral Church, Tirumalai Naicker Mahal, Yaanaimalai, K.Puliankulam Jain Cave Beds are the tourist attractions of Madurai⁸. Gandhi changed his permanent dress code at Madurai on September 26, 1921⁹. In the past it was called *Madura*¹⁰; After independence, because 'Madura' was another town in north India, India's former Prime Minister Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a letter to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister on 4.1.1950 to change the name 'Madura' to 'Madurai' for the postal convenience.¹¹ So the

3 Madurai Municipality's R.Dis.No.4867/50 dated 19.3.1950,p.53.cf.

4 Census of India 1991,op.cit, p.10.

5 Robert Sewell, op.cit,p.295.

6 Census of India 2001, Provincial Population Total Series 34,TamilNadu, paper 3 of 2001,p.3.

7 Some Facts about Madura, General Information, Madura District, 1909, p.17.

8 Calender 2014, Published by Madurai District Administration, Madurai, 2014.

9 Smart Madurai, Monthly Journal published by R.M.Meyyappan, Chennai, September, 2014, p.11.

10 G.O.No.119 Local Administration dated 21.7.1949.

11 Copy of Letter in the Madurai Municipality's R.Dis. No.4867/50 dated 19.3.1950,p.1.cf.

Madurai Municipality decided to change the name as Madurai from 7.3.1951¹². Madurai is specially noted for its silk weaving which is carried on by a special caste *Pattunulkars*¹³. TVS, Madura Mills, Fenner are some olden industries running in Madurai. The chief festivals are Chittrai Festival, *Teppa Tiruvizha* and *Avani Moolam* feasts¹⁴.

History of Madurai

In the early Christian era, Pandyas ruled Madurai with a remarkable recovery during the last decades of the sixth century. The ancient history of Madurai was an epoch of Pandya Chola supremacy. The rulers of the period reputed for their patronages of art and architecture, constructed numerous monuments, especially temples. Sangam Academy had flourished at Madurai during the first three centuries of the Christian era¹⁵. In 1311 A.D, Malik Kafur, the General of Sultan Alaud-din-khilji of Delhi taking advantages of a disputed succession in the Pandya region sacked Madurai¹⁶. The decline of Madurai Sultanate by the first quarter of the fourteenth century offered an opportunity to Madurai to assert its independence. In 1370 A.D, Kumara Kampana in command of the forces of Vijayanagar, defeated and killed Nasir-ud-din Damaghan shah the sultan of Madurai. Krishnadevaraya the greatest of the sovereigns of Vijayanagar conquered Madurai and incorporated it with their empire. Under the Nayaks of Madurai, it enjoyed a quasi-independent status.¹⁷ They constructed great monuments like Meenakshi Temple and Tirumalai Nayakar Palace, promoted Hinduism and maintained irrigation works. Then Madurai went under the hands of Sethupatis. In 1736, the Mughals established their rule at Madurai. The Mughal rule ultimately changed into that of the Nawabs of the

Carnatic defect as well as demure. Then Mohammed Ali, Sanda Sahib, Maphuz Khan, Saheb's Khan invasions continued. The Nawab's regime lasted up to the settlement of the treaty of the Carnatic with the English in 1801.

Then the British rule started. Missionary activities, social reformation and lot of changes occurred in Madurai at the British period. After independence, Madurai was one of the leading districts of south India. Ramnad, Madurai and Tirunelveli were called as 'RMT' districts. Madurai had the largest population which was upgraded as a corporation in the year 1971, May 1¹⁸. In 1980 Ramnad, 1984 Dindigul, 1997 Theni was separated from Madurai. The present corporation area spans across 72 wards.

- Madurai population - 30,41,038
- Total Taluks - 7
- Villages - 1095
- Corporation - 1
- Streets - 9,788

Ponds in Madurai

River Vaigai started from Eastern Ghats and move 240km and end at Bay of Bengal. On the way of river Vaigal thousands of ponds, canals and lakes are there. So Vaigai is the main water resource of Madurai. Once there were 190 water bodies in Madurai. Some places were named after their ponds. There are Madakulam, Alangulam, Tallakulam, B.B.kulam, Mangulam, Teppakulam, Puliangulam, Perumalkulam etc. some more important ponds in Madurai are Kuruviturai, Koodal Perumal Temple Teppam, Krishnarayar Pond, Valaiveei Teppam, Elukadal Teppam, Karisalkulam, Kosakulam, Sellur, Sorikulam, Vandiyurkulam, Naganakulam, Aathikulam, Sengulam, Pudukulam, Anupanadikulam, Chintamani teppam, Kochadai, Avaniyapuram, Villapuram, Thiruparankundram, Iravathanallur, Pappakudi and Achampathu etc.

Condition of Ponds in Madurai

There were 38 ponds in Madurai city. At present very few tanks only available in Madurai. Some ponds were encroached by public buildings. Some ponds were turned as drainages. Some temple tanks are as much a part of Madurai's identity as

18 Sivakumar .R and Kanagavalli, Jo., 'Neerinni', Madurai Marathon, Madurai, Jan. 13, 2007, p.9.

12 Madurai Municipality's R.Dis No.67453/50 dated 7.3.1951.

13 Francis.W, Madurai District Gazateer, Vol.I, Madras,1906,p.110.

14 Ibid,p.117.

15 Rajayyan K, History of Madurai (1736-1801), Madurai University, Madurai, 1974, p.22.

16 Majumdar. R.C., The History of the Indian People the Delhi Sultanate, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1960, p.53.

17 Satyanatha Aiyer, R, History of the Nayaks of Madura, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1924, p.22.

the temples themselves. In earlier times, tanks with full of water were a familiar sight at every temple. These were beautiful and well maintained and ad an important role to play in many festivals. Some of the canals and ponds were constructed during the rule of Pandyas. But the tanks were best maintained by Nayak rulers from the 16th to 18th century. The kings developed systems that connected the water bodies with River Vaigai and helped to boost the groundwater level.

Elukadal Teppam

Elukadal Street situated in the centre of Madurai city. It got its name from *Elukadal Teppam*¹⁹. There is an ancient street, running in front of the *Pudumandapam* called *Elukadal Street* (affluence of seven seas). In this street, the stores which sold many essential goods existed.

Legendary Story

A Legendary Story says that *Kanchanamalai*, the mother of Goddesses Meenakshi wanted to take sacred bath in seven seas after her daughter's marriage. When Lord Shiva heard this, he miraculously brought water from seven seas to Madurai and formed a tank here to house the water to help is mother in law, who had pleased and took bath in that tank. Hence the tank got the name *Elukadal* (seven seas).

“*Andanedumugadrinchavarthelunthakadalelum
Kanumaanagarpanippakalimudivinayanpadaipu*”
 - Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam, *Elukadal Azhtha-Padalam*, Poem-130,131

Kanchanamala Temple

The Shiva temple is constructed on the bank of the tank believed to have been worshipped by Kanchanamala along with her husband Malayathuvasan²⁰. Both Kanchanamala and Malayathuvasan statues were erected in the temple and maintained by the Department of Hindu Religious Endowment. The people have a faith to bring unmarried girls to this temple they will get married soon²¹. Regular poojas were conducted here.

19 Abitana Chintamani, Encyclopedia of Tamil Literature, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1981, p. 274.

20 Paranjothi Munivar, Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam, Madurai Kandam, Kazhaham Publications, Chennai, 1931, p.184.

21 Interview with Vithvan Guruamy Desikar, Chief

Mislaid of the Pond

The tank was constructed by Saluva Nayaka, an officer of the Vijayanagara ruler Krishnadevaraya in 1516 A.D. Timmu Rauvttar, the administrative General of Chokkanata Nayak renovated and reconstructed this tank and named it as ‘*Sapthasakaram*’ (*Elukadal*) on 1564²².

“*Vindalamennu Elukadalukkuththen
melkaraimer
Kandavarullankallikaoar Mandapangkattuvithan
Teendarukkketherthik kavasappayan Timmu
Rauvattane!*”

-Dandava Moorthy Kavirayar, Thirupanimalai, poem 45.

It was a square shaped tank covered 5 acres of land with 5 feet to 10 feet deep. Seven steps led to the tank. Timmu Rauvtha constructed a front mandapa with sivalinga, Lord Vinayaka and Muruga statues. On the eastern side of Meeakshi temple *Agraharam*²³ was situated. It has 7 *Uttru* (tank eyes) at the centre of the tank. The tank had always full of water. Children and adults were enjoyed to bath here²⁴. During the colonial rule the pond was utilized by the people of *Elukadal Agraharam*. Brahmins used its water for *poojas*. There was no proper maintenance by the government. After the independence, Meenakshi Temple came under the Department of Hindu Religious and Endowments and the pond came under the control of Public Welfare Department (PWD)²⁵. But later due to the encroachment the size of the pond was reduced. The pond was strictly prohibited and the people were not allowed to enter into the pond, because the pond became the garbage ground and a point of illegal activities. So, the commission was formed under the Minister RM Veerappan during Dr MG Ramachandran's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhaham rule and started the

Otuvar (preacher), Meenakshiamman Temple, Madurai on 03.02.2018.

22 P.Balasubramaniam, Thirupanimalai, Historical Temple Literature, Azhagu Pillai Pathipagam, Sivagangai, 2010, p.184.

23 Agraharam – a place where Brahmins lived.

24 Interview with Thiru. P.Murugan, Watchman, Elukadal Complex, Madurai on 17.01.2018.

25 Interview with Thiru.Sanmugavel, Accountant, Meenakshi Temple Devasthanam Office, Madurai on 18.01.2018.

construction of complex. The new complex was inaugurated by the former chief Minister Dr J Jayalalitha²⁶. At present *Elukadal* complex has 155 wholesale shops and the rent income goes to the Meenakshi Temple *Devastanam*²⁷. Now there is a newly constructed four pillared mandapa with Chokkanatha and Meenakshi statue and the Malayathuvasan and Kanchanamala statues also there. A seven women sculpture symbolizes the seven tanks

26 A plaque engraved in the Elukadal complex building on 07.03.1994.

27 Interview with Thiru. Saravanan, Merchant, Elukadal Complex, Madurai on 25.01.2018.

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Many Madurai people don't know about this tank. It was forgotten by many people. The Elukadal Teppam will not be recovered. But the ponds like Tallakulam, Koodal Perumal Teppam, Madakulam canal are in endangered condition in Madurai. The people of Madurai must aware about their water resources and should take protective measures. This is not only in Madurai, all over Tamil Nadu the same condition prevailed. Water scarcity is a mounting problem day by day. The present generation should take responsibility to preserve water bodies in Tamil Nadu.