
ARULMIGU THANDAYUTHAPANI TEMPLE, SINGAPORE

A Palaniappan

Sri Thandayuthapani Temple not only epitomizes the glory of Lord Muruga, but also that of the Chettiars, once a community of traders, merchant-bankers and money-lenders. They hail from the Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram (Muthuramalingam) Districts of Tamil Nadu. They are often referred to as Nattukottai Chettiars to distinguish them from other groups of Chettiars. The term means "people with palatial houses in the countryside." They are also referred to as Nagarathars meaning city dwellers which is what they were until Poompuhar on the east coast of Tamil Nadu went under the sea.

It is not certain when the Chettiars came to Singapore first. However, Tamil literature, especially Silapathikaram of the second century, speak of the many travels that the traders had made to this part of the world prior to the founding of modern Singapore by Stamford Raffles in 1819. In his book entitled, "The Rise of Malaya", P N M Muthu Palaniappa Chettiar writes that the Chettiars could have arrived in Singapore sometime before 1838. However, A. Ramanathan Chettiar who wrote the history of the Nattukottai Chettiars, says that the Chettiars had come in sail boats to Penang and Singapore in 1824.

The first census in Singapore was held in that year. The records show the presence of 756 Indians. "The Klings were numerous and respectable as traders. The Bengalees few, and only as menials." (Buckley quoting Mr Crawford's letter of Jan 1824- from The first 150 years of Singapore by Donald & Joanna Moore). Some of these respectable traders could have been members of the Chettiar community as word had gone to Penang and India that there were business opportunities in Raffles' trading post Singapore, and that there was a need for merchants and money-lenders to provide the much needed finance for the newly established shop-keepers and businessmen.

The Chettiars with their trading experience were delighted to be of service. They established their trading business across the Singapore River at Market Street. Their business houses were known as kittangis

- warehouses. The kittangis were long buildings with no partitions. Each of the money lenders occupied a space with a cabinet and a wooden cashier's box which they kept inside the cabinet after the day's business. The Chettiars in addition to running the money lending business had invested heavily in properties. A lot of warehouses along the Singapore River near River Valley Road had belonged to them. A good number of Chettiars had established themselves in that part of the city that some roads, Arnasalam Chetty Road, Narayanan Chetty Road and Muthu Raman Chetty Road, were named after them.

The Chettiars' contribution to the growing commerce cannot be under-estimated. Credit companies were unknown in those days. In addition to the banks, it was the Chettiars and some members of the Sikh community who provided the money that was needed by the small businessmen.

"..... the British - who provided government, law and order, in essence, security and immigrant groups, the Chinese and to a lesser extend but still notable extend, the Indians - who provided the sinews of commerce and colony building-were complementary, each indispensable to the other. The Chinese and Indians' contribution to the development of Singapore was just as important, just as necessary as that of the British....." (The First 150 years of Singapore by Donald & Joanna Moore)

Having established several kittangis or business houses at Market Street, the Chettiars carried on a thriving businesses dealing in a variety of goods. Their kittangis were surrounded with spice and other sundry goods merchants with whom they had excellent business relationship. And almost after one hundred years of their arrival in Singapore, they established the Chettiars Chamber of Commerce in 1928, seven years before the Indian Chamber of Commerce was founded. Some elders of the community remember the time when the Chamber issued daily bulletins on the rubber and tin prices in Malaya and Singapore. It contained more information and analysis than the bulletins issued by the Indian Chamber of Commerce. The Chettiars focussed on

rubber because they were among the first planters in Malaya. The proprietors of some of these plantations lived in Singapore.

Some members of the community ventured into the money-lending business as well. In time to come, this business attracted more members of the community and they established their kittangis at Clemenceau Avenue and at Cantonment Road. However, these kittangis, were over period of time, acquired by the government. They also owned large pieces of land at Changi where they had coconut plantations and gardens. The flowers and young coconuts needed for the temple came from there until these lands were acquired by the government.

The kittangis at Market Street, where the Chettiars had concentrated their trading and money-lending business, were acquired for urban renewal in the 1970s and almost immediately the Chettiars found themselves displaced. It is indeed sad that the community which helped Singapore to earn its reputation as a financial centre, did not put up a landmark of its own in the area where it had its business for more than one and a half centuries. Being satisfied with the compensation they received, the Chettiars began to concentrate themselves at the remaining few kittangis at Tank Road. At present members of the 300 odd Chettiar families in Singapore can be found in the civil service, banking and educational institutions and the private sector and in the professions with no more than two scores engaged in money lending business.

The Chettiar community is deeply rooted in the Hindu tradition especially in the Saiva Siddhantha. Members of the community are very devoted to Thandayuthapani or Lord Muruga. But it was not until 35 years after their arrival in Singapore that they constructed a proper temple in honour of Thandayuthapani. C M Turnbull, in her book *A History of Singapore 1819-1975* records that the Nattukkottai Chettiars built the Subramaniam Temple (a popular name given to the temple by non Chettiars) in Tank Road in 1859.

However prior to that year, they had installed a Vel (spear), a representation of Lord Muruga, under a tree where they offered their prayers. The Vel was installed below a pipal (arasa maram) tree at the bank of a tank (pond). Fresh water from the hill where the Central Park is now, emerged as a waterfall and filled the tank. The location was ideal for the establishment of a temple. The Chettiars took their bath there before

offering their prayers to the Vel. The railway line nearby also provided an excellent form of transport to and from Malaya where they had also established their businesses. The tree had to be uprooted when the government acquired the land for re-doing Tank Road. The site where the Vel was now forms part of the slip road that leads to River Valley Road and Clemenceau Avenue.

Prior to the proper construction of their temple, the Chettiars visited and offered their prayers at the Sivan Temple, now relocated at Geylang East and at Sri Mariamman Temple at South Bridge Road. Their important associations with these two temples are described in their recent consecration ceremony souvenir magazines.

The slab stones found at Thandayuthapani Temple show that the temple was consecrated on 4.4.1859. That would mean that the building works had started one or two years earlier. In fact the community bought the land, where the present temple stands, from the estate of Mr Oxley, the first Surgeon General of Singapore. The temple in its original form was of a simple structure. At the entrance to the temple, two raised platforms similar to that found in Chettiar households in Tamil Nadu were erected. It had an alangara mandapam and an artha mandapam. The alangara mandapam was used to house the decorated deities on special occasions while the artha mandapam was the centre hall leading to the main sanctum. The main sanctum was of course dedicated to Lord Muruga in the form of Thandayuthapani. The Jambu Vinayagar and Iduambar sanctums were constructed on either side of the main sanctum somewhat similar to the present sanctums. A dining hall with a courtyard, called the Kaarthikai Kattu was used for serving food on Karthikai and special occasions such as Thaipusam. Under the chapter, "Many Gods", Roland Braddell, in his book, "the Lights of Singapore", (first edition 1935) describes quite light heartedly on how the Chettiars used to feed the people.

".....and a great reception is held at the temple to which all are welcome, whatever their race or creed, while the devotees are fed in the courtyard from huge cauldrons of rice and curry, which they pile upon fresh banana leaves, and from over-eating of which most them pass into a coma." The Kaarthikai Kattu, erected in 1859 was demolished about 122 years later in 1981 to make way for the Chettiars Wedding Hall. Food is served at the ground level of the wedding hall on days when Kaarthikai is observed

and on other occasions. Though the method of serving the food remains the same, one would be disappointed to see anyone passing into a coma.

It was a practice for the Chettiars to build Murugan temples wherever they settled. This was the case in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaya, Sri Lanka and Singapore. They had the advice of Sivachariars not to build any Sivan temples as certain rituals had to be observed. As the Brahmin Sivachariars were prohibited from crossing the seas, they advised them to establish Thandayuthapani temples where non Brahmin priests, the Pandarams could be employed. This does not mean that the Brahmin priests had not visited South East Asia before. Records show that they had been the priests at the royal courts of Thailand and Cambodia. The Hindu traditional practice of reciting Thiruvempavai during the coronation of Thai kings bear testimony to this. No one is certain when and why the Sivachariars - the Tamil speaking Brahmin priests stopped coming to South East Asia. By the third quarter of the 19th century things changed and the Brahmin priests in India, particularly Tamil Nadu became adventurous as the rest of the Indians and decided to seek their fortunes in Malaya and Singapore.

With this development, the Chettiars decided to build a separate sanctum for Lord Siva and His consort. They placed Siva and Goddess Shakthi in that sanctum in 1878. However a consecration ceremony was only held, eight years later, on 26 Jan 1886. Because the Chettiars hailed from the Pandia district of Tamil Nadu, they refer to Lord Siva as Chockalingam and Shakthi as Meenatchi. The present temple has separate sanctums for Lord Siva and His consort Meenatchi Amman.

The old temple underwent some renovation and restoration works on two occasions when the consecration ceremonies were held in 1936 and in 1955. However, the community felt the need to upgrade the temple with modern facilities so as to keep pace with the development of Singapore. The Nagarathars decided in the late seventies, to rebuild the temple on the same site. The temple was to be in the centre with a wedding hall and staff quarters flanking its sides. The food courtyard known as the Karthikai Kattu was replaced by a wedding hall with car parking facilities. The piling work started on 4 Jan 1981 and was completed on 19 Jan 1983. A two storey staff quarters was also built at about the same time. An imposing rajagopuram or the entrance tower was erected. It is 75 feet high and is one of the tallest

gopurams in this part of the world. As one enters the temple through the tower gate, the temple opens up into the arthamandapam, the alangara mandapam and an office on the right and the library on the left.

Figures of Hindu deities, especially that of the principal God-form, elaborately sculptured on the pillars draw attention of the visitor. The numerous stained glasses with Lord Ganesha and figures of other deities etched on them, are another attraction which elevate the minds of the devotees. The temple with its open concept adds space to the thousands of devotees who gather at the sanctums during the major festivities of the temple. The whole temple complex was built at a cost of \$3.3 million most of which came from the Chettiars themselves. The newly built temple was consecrated on 20 November 1985. The then President Mr C V Devan Nair and the First Lady, Mrs Devan Nair together with MPs of Indian origin and other dignitaries were among the thousands of devotees who turned up at the temple to witness the consecration.

Important Festivals

The temple is popular amongst the Hindus in Singapore. It is here that the annual festival Thaipusam is held in much grandeur and religious fervour. The festival dedicated to Lord Muruga is an essential one to those who have taken a vow. This annual festival is observed on the full moon day of the Tamil month Thai (Jan-Feb). The festival is an important one for the Chettiars and the rest of the Hindu community especially the Tamil speaking Hindus. The main event of the day before Thaipusam is the chariot procession in which Sri Thandayuthapani (Murugan) leaves the temple at Tank Road for a day's visit to His brother the Sithi Vinayagar at Keong Saik Road. The Sithi Vinayagar Temple is also administered by the Chettiars.

Sri Murugan is ceremoniously brought out of the Thandayuthapani Temple on the shoulders of devotees and installed in a large ceremonial silver chariot drawn by a vehicle. But in those days when motorised vehicles were not in vogue and when traffic conditions were not that acute, the large silver car was drawn by two white bulls. On its way, the chariot stops at Sri Mariamman temple at South Bridge Road where Murugan is said to greet the goddess within as She is one manifestation of goddess Parvathi, His mother. After a short poojah, the chariot proceeds to Keong Saik Road temple where Lord Murugan is installed. At about 7.00 pm on the same day Sri

Murugan returns to His abode in the chariot, taking a journey down memory lane through Market Street where the Chettiars once had their kittangis or business houses.

In those days, as the chariot meandered its way, the Chettiars from each of their kittangis on both sides of the road, would tie a garland to a rope and swing it towards the chariot. The garland would be quickly snatched by the priests and placed on the God-form.

Some members of the Chettiar community carry kavadis whilst accompanying the chariot on its way back. This event is referred to as Chetty Poosam as only the Chettiars carry the kavadis, a practice which continues up to this day. Upon His arrival, Sri Murugan is carried in a procession, clockwise, into the temple and finally He returns to His sanctum to receive the kavadis that His devotees would bring the following day.

Over at Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple, the devotees carrying kavadis, having had assembled the day before, make their way to the Chettiars temple. And upon their arrival they offer their kanikkai, and proceed to the open field where they dismantle their kavadis.

Thaipusam, has over the years become an important national festival and a tourist attraction. The Hindu Endowments Board which administers the Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple, has taken an interest in co-ordinating the festival with the Chettiars. Though the Chettiars by and large are amenable to the changes proposed by the Board and other relevant authorities there is generally a reluctance to impose conditions that would make Lord Muruga's devotees uncomfortable. To them His devotees are as important as Murugan Himself. Some members of the community sometimes feel that any rule that would draw the displeasure of the devotees would also displease Lord Murugan.

They also fondly recall the days when Thaipusam was celebrated for five days. The festivities used to end with the godform being brought to the sea-side near Beach Road, right in front of the Raffles Hotel, where great fireworks were held. Singai Nesan, "a Tamil Journal designed to commemorate the Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen - Empress Victoria", dated Feb 6, 1888 gives a graphic description of the five day festival.

Another important festival that is observed in this temple is the Navarathiri festival, a nine day

festival during which prayers and cultural activities are carried out in the evenings. The festival gives an opportunity to all local artistes to show their talents. Though the festival is observed in almost all the temples in Singapore now, Thandayuthpani temple has the honour of having first started it in Singapore during the second world war. The celebration has no place in other Murugan temples established by the Chettiars either in India or elsewhere.

The annual six day Kanda Sashti Viratham is another important festival that is observed at this temple. The monthly Karthikai prayers with lunch being served at the wedding hall also attracts hundreds of devotees.

As has been narrated before, the Nattukottai Chettiars are devout Saivaites dedicated to Lord Siva and Lord Muruga. They pay tribute, through a pooja called the Guru Pooja, to the four principal saints (the Naalvar), Sambandar, Thirunavukkarasar, Sundarar and Manickavasagar who through their literary works had glorified Lord Siva. Their works together with the works of other saints are referred to as the Thirumurais. Poojas are also conducted for Sekkilar and Kovilur Andavar. Sekkilar recorded the works and teachings of all the saints into a volume called the Periyapuramam. Kovilur Andavar is one of the spiritual gurus of the Chettiars. A short history on the life and teachings of each of the Gurus are read during the guru pooja after which lunch is served to all devotees present. The collection of hymns contained in the Thirumurai are sung daily by a specially trained person called the Othuvar who also teaches the Thirumurai hymns to young children. It was the Chettiars, who, introduced the Othuvar as part of the pooja (prayers) system and they also have honour of having first started the Thevaram classes in Singapore.

Sri Thandayuthpani had inspired many Tamil scholars and poets to compose songs in praise of Him. The earliest recorded works is that of Sadasivam Pandithar, a Jaffna Tamil. His poems, the Singai Nagaranthathi and Chitrakavikal published in 1887, give some description of the temple. His works also became the forerunner to Tamil literature in Malaya and Singapore. Notable among other literary works on Lord Thandayuthpani are by R M R Ramanathan and R K M Meyappa Chettiar. Kavignar Kannadhasan, a Chettiar and a distinguished poet has also composed songs in praise of the principal godform when he visited the temple in the late 70s.

other temples to follow suit. A ten thousand dollars donation was made towards the rehabilitation work of the Hindu Aftercare Officers of SANA . The temple also made significant contributions to the Tan Tock Seng Hospital and to the People's Defense Fund when Singapore became independent. Regular contributions are being made to other organisations in the neighbourhood.

The Thandayuthapani Temple is the oldest Murugan temple and is visited by all Singaporean

Hindus. It has, over the years, built up a reputation of being managed well. At the head of the management is a Trustee who is assisted by representatives of the various kittangis. The Trusteeship is rotated annually amongst the representatives of the kittangis. Important decisions affecting the temple and the community is made at a gathering of the entire Chettiar community, called the Nagara Koottam.



நகரத்தார்களின் முயற்சியினால் பிளாங்கு, சிங்கப்பூர், இரங்கூன் (மியன்மார்), செய்கோன் முதலிய கடல்கடந்த பகுதிகளிலும் தைப்பூசம் பெரு விழாவாகக் கொண்டாடப்படுகின்றது. இவ்விழா விற்காக இவர்கள் வெள்ளிரதம் செய்து வைத்து அதில் முருகப் பெருமானுக்குப் பொன்னாலும் மணியினாலும் அலங்காரம் செய்வித்து ஊர்வலம் சிறப்புடன் செய்கின்றனர். இரதத்துடன் காவடிகள் எடுத்து வந்து அவர்கள் வழிபடுகின்றனர்.

சிங்கப்பூரில் தைப்பூசச் சிறப்பு

சிங்கப்பூரில் தைப்பூசத் திருவிழா மூன்று நாட்கள் நடைபெறும். முதல்நாள் புனர்பூசத்தன்று காலையில் சுவாமி வெள்ளி ரதத்தில் தேங் ரோடு தண்டாயுதபாணி கோயிலிலிருந்து கியோங் சேக் ரோட்டிலுள்ள நகரத்தார் பிள்ளையார் கோயிலுக்குப் போய்ச் சேர்ந்து மாலை அங்கிருந்து சர்க்கரைக் காவடிகளுடன் நகரத்தார்கள் தொழில் செய்த மார்க்கட் வீதி வழியாக இரவு 10 மணிக்கு தேங் ரோடு திரும்பும். இன்று நகரத்தார்கள் மட்டும் காவடி எடுத்து வருவதால் இந்நாளையச் 'செட்டி பூசம்' என்று அழைப்பர். பூசத்தன்று அதிகாலையிலிருந்து ஸிங்கப்பூர்த் தமிழ்ப் பெருமக்கள் சிராங்கூன் ரோடு பெருமாள் கோவிலிலிருந்து பால் குடம், சர்க்கரைக் காவடி, வேல் காவடி, ரதக் காவடி ஆகியவற்றை ஆண்களும் பெண்களுமாக பல்லாயிரக்கணக்கில் எடுத்து வந்து தேங் ரோடு முருகனுக்கு அபிடேகம் செய்து வழிபடுவர். பலர் அலகு குத்தி வருவர். சீனர்களும் காவடி, அலகுடன் வழிபட்டு வரும் காட்சியையும் காணலாம். பூசத்தன்று பகல் 11 மணிமுதல் மகேசுவர பூசை எனப்படும் அன்னதானம் சிறப்பாக நடைபெறும். இரவு 7 மணி வரை இது நடக்கும். பல்லாயிரக்கணக்கான பேர்க்கு உணவு வழங்கப்படும். இரவு சுவாமி கொலு வீற்றிருக்கும்போது அதிபர், அமைச்சர்கள், நாடாளுமன்ற உறுப்பினர்கள், பிரமுகர்கள், துதுவர்கள் எல்லாரும் வந்து வழிபடுவர். வருபவர்களுக்கு மாலை மரியாதை செலுத்தி நகரத்தார்கள் சிறப்புச் செய்வர். மூன்றாம் நாள் (தைப்பூசத்தின் மறுநாள்) ஏலம், நகரத்தார் மகமைக் கூட்டம், புதிய மேலாண்மைக் குழுத்தலைவர், பணி ஏற்பு முதலியன நடைபெறும். மூன்று நாட்களுக்கு முருகப் பெருமான் தண்டாயுதபாணித் திருக் கோலத்தில் காட்சி அளிப்பார். ஆனால் பல ஆண்டுகளுக்கு இரண்டாவது உலகப்போருக்கு முன்பு முருகப் பெருமானை அலங்கரித்து வெள்ளிக் கேடயத்தில் வைத்து ஆர்ச்சுர்டு ரோடு வழியாகக் கடற்கரைக்குக் கொண்டு வந்து இரவு வாண வேடிக்கை நடத்தித் திரும்பும் வழக்கம் இருந்ததாகவும் 1937ல் நிறுத்தப் பட்டதாகவும் மலேயாவின் தோற்றம் என்னும் நூல் ஆசிரியர்.

பெ.நா.மு. முத்துப்பழநியப்ப செட்டியார் குறிப்பிடுகிறார். தைப்பூசக் காவடிகள் பற்றி ரோலண்ட் பிராடெல் என்பவரும் தம் நூலில் குறிப்பிடுகிறார்.

காவடித் தத்துவம்

தைப்பூசத்தில் எடுக்கப்படும் காவடி என்பதன் பொருளைக் காண்போம். கா + அடி என அமையும் இந்தச் சொல்லுக்கு இருபக்கமும் தொங்கும் தண்டு என்று பொருள் கூறலாம். "காமமும் நானும் உயிர்காவாத் தூங்கும் என் நோனா உடம்பின் அகத்து" (1163) என்னும் குறளுக்குப் பொருள் கூறும்போது காவா என்பது தாவரத் தண்டு எனப் பொருள் காண்கின்றனர். உரையாசிரியர்கள் மலைமேல் இருக்கும் முருகப் பெருமானுக்குரிய அபிடேகப் பொருள்களை எளிதாகத் தூக்கிச் செல்லும் பொருட்டுப் பக்தர்கள் தம் தோளில் தண்டு ஒன்றினை வைத்து இருபக்கமும் பொருள்களை செம்பு, குடம், கூடை முதலியவற்றில் வைத்துக் காவடியாகத் தூக்கிச் சென்றனர். இதுவே காவடியின் தோற்றம். காவடியில் இருபக்கமும் இருக்கும் அபிடேகப் பொருள்களுக்கு முக்கியத்துவம் கொடுக்க வேண்டுமே ஒழியக் காவடியின் அளவு, ஒப்பனை ஆகியவற்றிற்கு அதிக முக்கியத்துவம் கொடுத்தல் கூடாது. அபிடேகப் பொருள்களைக் காவடியில் தூக்கிச் செல்லும் அன்பர்கள் முருக நாமத்தைச் சொல்லிக் கொண்டும், அவன் புகழைப் பாடிக் கொண்டும் பக்தியுடன் சென்று காணிக்கை செலுத்துதல் வேண்டும். மனித மனமாகிய தண்டில் ஒருபக்கம் நான் என்னும் செருக்கும் மறுபக்கம் எனது என்னும் பற்றும் இருக்கக் காண்கிறோம். அவற்றைத் தூக்கிச் சென்று இறைவனிடத்தில் செலுத்தி அவன் திருத்தானை அடைந்து பக்தி நீரால் - அன்பு நீரால் அவனைக் குளிப்பாட்டிப் பேரின்பமாகிய வீடுபேற்றினை அடைவதுதான் காவடியின் உட்பொருள் என்பதை அன்பர்கள் உணர்ந்து பயன்பெற வேண்டும்.

முடிவுரை

தைப்பூச விழாவில் ஆண்டவன் வழிபாடு, அடியார் வழிபாடு ஆகிய இரண்டும் இடம் பெற்றிருக்கக் காணலாம். இவ்விழாவினைத் தமிழகத்தில் மட்டுமன்றித் தென்கிழக்காசிய நாடுகளிலும் பரவச் செய்த நகரத்தார் மரபு போற்றத் தக்க மரபாகும். மொரிசீயஸ் தீவிலும் தமிழர்கள் தைப்பூச விழாவினைச் சிறப்பாகக் கொண்டாடு கின்றனர். தைப்பூச விழாவினைத் தமிழகத்திலும் தரணியின் ஏனைய பகுதிகளிலும் பரப்பிய தனவணிகர் குலம் தழைக்கவும் தமிழ்ப் பண்பாடு மேலோங்கவும் இறைவனை வணங்குவோமாக.

* 1888-ஆம் ஆண்டில் கொண்டாடப்பெற்ற தைப்பூச விழா பற்றி சிங்கை நேசன் என்னும் பத்திரிகையில் அல்லாண்டு பிப்ரவரி 6-ல் வெளியிடப் பெற்ற செய்தியை இம்மலரில் காணலாம்.