

# MADURA

## THE TEMPLE CITY

BY

**J. P. LASRADOSHENOY.**

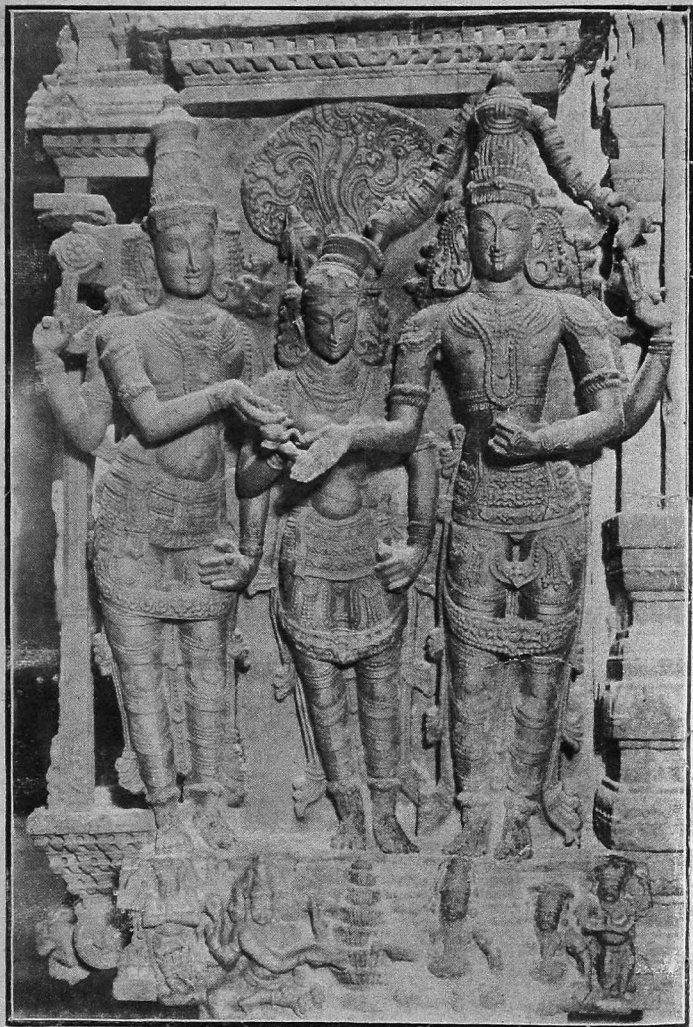
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The Marriage of Meenakshi.



## PREFACE

The main object of this little book is to attempt to bring to the popular mind some appreciation of the great art-treasures of the city of Madura. The sad neglect of these old masterpieces, and the present callous indifference to their beauty, may indeed be taken as an indication of the degeneration of the times. And if the future is to be something more than a retrospect of past glories, it is essential that the public be educated to a realisation of artistic standards, and to a more intimate understanding of ancient tradition. The assistance this book proposes to offer to the foreign visitor, or to any person generally interested in the achievements of Ancient India is of a character essentially practical. An attempt has therefore been made to classify the available information in as simple and intelligible a manner as possible.

I am grateful to my wife for many valuable suggestions and for her patience in correcting the manuscripts, and to Prof. K. S. Srikantan who has proved a veritable mine of information in all matters connected with the temple.

Madura.

J. P. L.

*November 27, 1937.*





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PART I.  
**HISTORY AND ANTIQUITY.**

Madura claims many things for itself, some of which are in dispute. One thing however is indisputable—it is the oldest city in South India. Unlike other ancient Indian cities it has survived the ravages of time and has escaped spoliation at the hands of the Moslem invader. New dynasties have appeared from time to time and

“Sultan after sultan with his pomp

Abode his destined Hour and went his way,”

but the city itself has lived through these changes of rule, and thanks to its favourable situation in the centre of the rich Vaigai valley, the town has grown in importance and is, if anything, a greater and more prosperous place today than it was in the palmiest days of the great Thirumala Naik. Its ready adaptability to changes of time and circumstance has enabled the town to retain its premier position, both in the past and in the present.

The city has another claim to fame. It has been for the last two thousand years the focal centre of Dravidian culture and civilization. European scholars sometimes refer to Madura as the Athens of South India and the title is not without some justification. As the

seat of the Tamil academy, it attracted all the scholars of the south. Famous Tamil poets yearned for recognition from the Madura Tamil Sangam, and were not satisfied with their works until the latter had obtained the hall-mark of this academy. Madura is one of the few Indian cities which has maintained intact its connections with the past, and its growth is still dependent on roots firmly planted in soil that is 2000 years old. Thus, while Buddha might feel a stranger in modern Patna, the famous Tamil Poet Thiruvalluvar would recognise in present day Madura, a good deal of the culture and civilisation which distinguished her in the past. There is, therefore, no other place in India where the foreigner, anxious to have an insight into the religious life and traditions of the Hindus, would be so well rewarded as by a visit to Madura, and a close study of the Meenakshi temple.

**History**  
— **Ancient**  
**Period.**

The History of Madura is intimately bound up with the History of South India and may, for convenience, be divided into three periods — the ancient, the mediæval and the modern. Madura was from the earliest times ruled by the Pandyan kings. Thus, the Mahavamsa, the famous Ceylonese chronicle, describes Vijaya, the first king of Ceylon (500 B. C.) as the son-in-law of a Pandyan king of Madura. This is probably the earliest mention made of the ancient city in a historical record. Megasthanes, the Greek ambassador at



the court of Chandragupta Maurya (Cir. 320 B. C.) describes Madura as being ruled by a Pandyan Princess, who enjoyed the revenue of 365 villages — each village having to pay its tribute on a fixed day of the year. This queen had an army of 500 elephants, 4000 cavalry, and 13000 soldiers. The city was well known to the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is mentioned in Ptolemy's Tables as the seat of the Pandyan Kingdom in the south. Ptolemy refers to 'Modoura' as the Mediterranean Emporium of the south. Reference is made in classical literature to a 'Regio Pandiones', and it seems probable that a Pandyan King sent an embassy to Augustus in 27 B. C. The frequent references to this country by the classical writers is conclusive evidence that the city was sufficiently civilised from earliest times to carry on a considerable commerce with European nations. The discovery of Roman Coins of the time of Augustus in the vicinity of Madura confirms this conclusion.

The earliest local records in which allusions to the city seem to be traceable are the old Brahmi inscriptions, found in the caverns of the Siddhar and the Alagar Hills situated near Madura. Palaeographically studied, these inscriptions cannot be placed later than the 3rd century B. C. There are also numerous references to Madura in the Sangam works, but the historian has not yet studied these records. It is, however, doubtful whether anything of historical value will

be discovered from these sources. Most of the local manuscripts deal with mythology, and it is difficult to distinguish facts from among arguments and childish prattle.

Very little is known about the earliest Pandyan kings, except that they were patrons of learning. They could not have been strong and able rulers, and their feudatories probably owed them only nominal allegiance. The earliest historical personality is Ugraperuvaludi (128—140 A. D.), who is remembered for the patronage he extended to the Poet Thiruvalluvar — the author of the famous sacred poem, the Kural. In the 10th century A. D., the Pandyan territory was conquered by the Cholas. They ruled the country till the 12th century, when the Pandyan kings successfully threw off their yoke.

Before leaving this period it might be of some interest to read a Tamil poet's description of the city in those days:— "The streets are.....the seats of endless traffic and eternal din. .... The surging crowds move to and fro, and in the confusion of tongues they create, we hear nothing but a roar, like 'The roar of the sea when lashed by the winds' ". The drumming, singing, dancing and other simple pleasures of those days were even more noisy than the stir and commotion of modern business.

### **Derivation of name.**

The word Madura means "sweetness", but it is doubtful whether this interpretation has anything to do with the origin of the name. There is, however, a tradition that Siva was so pleased with the buildings of the city that he sprinkled nectar (Madhu) over it—hence the name. It seems, on the other hand, more probable that an Aryan colony settled down here and named it after their own famous city of Madhura, the modern Muttra of the United Provinces.

### **The Muhammadan Invasion.**

In the fourteenth century, Malik-kafur, one of the Generals of the Emperor of Delhi, invaded Madura and set up a Muhammadan dynasty, which appears to have ruled for 48 years. A General of the Vijayanagar Empire, in turn, overthrew the Muhammadan rulers, and Madura then became a feudatory of the Vijayanagar Emperor, who, while guarding the kingdom against foreign aggression, restored to the Pandyan Kings their ancient heritage.

### **The Medieval Period. (1559—1781)**

This is the most glittering period in the history of Madura and the city is justly famous as the seat of the Naiks. They gave to Madura a succession of strong and able rulers, who brought peace and prosperity to the Madura country for a



I Viswanatha Naik.

natha Naik, the first and the greatest of a long line of distinguished rulers. Although Viswanatha Naik was the ablest of the Naik rulers, Thirumala Naik is better known to posterity on account of the famous palace and other buildings erected by him.

### **Viswanatha Naik.**

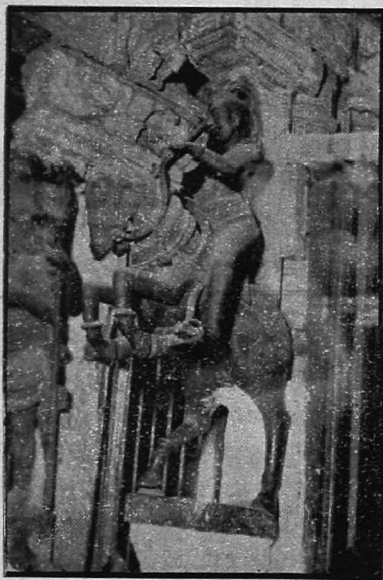
In the year 1559, one of the Chola kings of Tanjore invaded and captured Madura. The Vijayanagar Emperor, to whom the Pandyan puppet fled for protection, was furious at the rebellious conduct of his vassal from Tanjore and ordered his Commander-in-chief, Nagama Naik, to march to Madura.

period of 200 years. It is during this period that the modern city of Madura was planned, the lay out of its main streets determined according to the laws of the Silpa Sastras, and the defences of the city secured against foreign aggression. The credit for these remarkable achievements must undoubtedly go to Viswa-

Nagama Naik entered the city, which offered no resistance whatsoever; but instead of reinstating the deposed Pandyan king, he made himself the ruler of the country. The Emperor was beside himself with rage at this open defiance, and hastily summoning his council of state, demanded whether there was any one among them so brave as to bring him back the traitor's head. The generals assembled there had good cause for apprehension: for was not Nagama Naik the hero of a hundred battles, and the ablest general of the Vijayanagar forces? One may as well march into the mouth of a fully charged cannon, as do battle against so formidable an opponent. A hushed silence followed, the Emperor's challenge, each man looking towards his neighbour for the first move. Suddenly a young man of tall stature stood up, and in his face could be detected very mixed emotions—for this was no other than Viswanatha Naik, the son of the rebellious General. "Sire," said he "I will bring him back dead or alive, even though he is my own father". The king could hardly believe his ears, but was unable to resist this appeal from his favourite young captain, who had already distinguished himself in many pitched battles against the Moslem invaders. The son met his father's forces in open battle and routed them. He then took his father to the court as a prisoner. The Emperor however, at the request of the valiant young soldier, granted the father his liberty and made Viswanatha Naik the Governor of the Pandyan Kingdom. Real power,

thereafter, remained in the hands of the Naiks; the old line of effete Pandyan monarchs continuing to be rulers only in name. The fiction was kept up until Thirumala Naik, brushing aside all pretences, openly declared himself to be the real and sole sovereign.

Viswanatha Naik then set himself the task of consolidating the gains of battle.



## 2 Aryanatha Mudali.

Peace, above all things, was required to rehabilitate the people and heal the wounds of incessant warfare. And two centuries of firm rule by a succession of able

himself the task of His first step was to secure the services of that political genius, Aryanatha Mudali, by appointing him Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief of the armed forces. To this happy union of brawn and brains must be attributed the success of the early Naik rulers. Two centuries of anarchy, misrule, and foreign invasion had reduced the population to the greatest poverty and distress.

Naik rulers gave to the Madura country that much needed respite, assuring a rapid return to wealth and prosperity.

The young ruler, Viswanatha Naik, set about his task with vigour and determination — he pulled down the old Pandyan ramparts which gave a false sense of security, and erected an extensive double walled fortress round the city. (Remnants of this fortress wall may still be seen at the boundary of the Government Hospital). Within these fortified walls was planned a new city with wide streets running in the shape of squares, and having the temple as the common centre. (Incidentally these squares continue to this day and are called the Chitrai, the Avani and the Masi streets — North, South, East and West). This was the beginning of modern Madura and the city has, even at the present moment, the same lay-out. The new Governor did everything in his power to secure the goodwill of the Brahmins and of the people generally. Old pagodas were repaired and new ones were built. Agraharams or quarters for Brahmins were also constructed in suitable spots. Thus, having placated the Brahmin, this wise Governor ruled out all possibility of intrigue and secured for the service of his state the talents of this intelligent caste. The jungles were cleared and the robber-ridden roads made safe again. Law and order were strictly maintained. Irrigation works, constructed at great cost, brought prosperity to the land.

The last great campaign of this able ruler was his prompt suppression of the revolt in the south. Some scions of the Pandyan family fled to Tinnevely and mustered together a strong following which defied the Naik armies. The campaign threatened to be a protracted and arduous one, the Pandyan refusing to give open battle, but causing considerable annoyance by means of guerilla warfare.

Viswanatha's magnificent resource did not forsake him at this crisis. He was not slow to perceive the folly of a protracted war, especially against an elusive enemy. He therefore boldly challenged the rebel princes to fight him in single combat — five against one — on condition that they should abandon this vexatious warfare, if they failed in the contest. It must be said, in their favour, that his opponents had the gallantry to fight him one by one. In this contest they were severally worsted and the bloodless battle finally extinguished the last embers of revolt, leaving the Naik dynasty firmly established on the ancient Pandyan throne.

Viswanatha early recognised the necessity for an administrative machinery that would work independently of the particular sovereign on the throne. He foresaw the possibility of his good work being undone by a weak and incompetent successor.

### **The Poligar System.**



Ably assisted by his astute minister Aryanatha Mudali, he parcelled out his kingdom into a number of feudal units, each in charge of a poligar whose duty it was to maintain a band of retainers — resembling the modern militia — who could be called up for military duty whenever war or rebellion threatened. To support these retainers, the poligars enjoyed certain privileges regarding land revenue. This system obviated the necessity of a large standing army and gave no scope whatever for scheming generals or palace intrigues. The Poligar system was very well adapted to the conditions in the country and soon became universal in South India.



3. Thirumala Naik.

**Thirumala  
Naik**  
(1623 — 1659)

The next famous king of this line was Thirumala Naik. He ascended the throne in 1623 and ruled over Madura for a period of 36 years.

He was fabulously wealthy, his annual income being estimated at about £ 1,200,000. He assigned to the Madura temple, lands yielding an annual income of £ 41,000. His rule was marked by the splendour of the buildings he erected, many of which remain to the present day. He may reasonably claim to be the Shah—Jehan of South India. Skilful workmanship specially delighted him. He would look on while his sculptors and masons were busy with a mantap or an idol, and would sometimes encourage his best artist by giving him a betel nut with his own royal hand. Thirumala obviously had his eye to posterity and was determined to be known as a master-builder. He attempted far more than he could complete in his reign—the unfinished Rayagopuram is only one of 72 similar gate-ways that Thirumala planned in various places but could not possibly complete. The uncompleted gopurams scattered throughout S. India have served as a moral to many ambitious men, and in fact, 'Beginning a Rayagopuram' is a saying now used in Madura when any hopelessly ambitious work is undertaken. Thirumala is reputed to have had two hundred wives. His territories comprised the present districts of Madura, Ramnad, Tinnevely, Coimbatore, Salem and Trichinopoly including Pudukotah and Travancore.

Thirumala's death is associated with numerous legends. Local tradition is persistent in declaring that he met his death by violence, but there is no record

to substantiate this fact. One tradition has it that Thirumala persistently showed great partiality to the Christian Missionary, Robert De Nobili. This able Jesuit gained an extraordinary power over the king's mind, and almost succeeded in converting him to Christianity. The king thereafter refused to lavish any more money on Hindu temples or on parasitic Brahmin priests. This being an unpardonable crime for a Hindu monarch, the Brahmin priests or Bhattans, as they are called, plotted to murder him. With this end in view two or three of them, headed by a Bhattan, named Kulasekhar, went to the king and informed him that they had discovered a secret treasure in a vault under the great pagoda of Meenakshi. The unsuspecting monarch agreed to accompany them without any attendants. As soon as he entered the vault, a large stone which closed its entrance, was immediately fastened and the unfortunate man was left to die of starvation. The Brahmins then gave out that Thirumala had been translated to heaven by his favourite Goddess Meenakshi, while he was worshipping her in the pagoda, and forthwith proceeded to crown his son. Another story is to the effect that Thirumala had a liaison with the wife of a Bhattan and used to visit her secretly at night. While walking home one night after visiting her, he fell into an unprotected well in the Bhattan's garden and was drowned. The Bhattan was greatly alarmed when he made this discovery and to avoid suspicion, he filled up the well with earth. The story then went round that the Goddess had carried away her favourite.

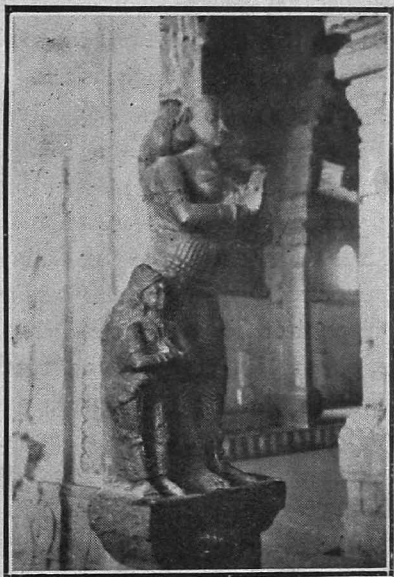
Thirumala cannot be regarded as an able ruler nor even as a great general. He squandered the immense treasures accumulated by his forbears on useless wars, which were undertaken more for self-aggrandisement than for the acquisition of territory. It was fortunate for posterity however that these wars did not consume his entire fortune. A portion of his wealth was reserved for constructing the Thirumala Naik palace, the Teppakulam, the Mottagopuram and a host of other buildings.

One of the letters of the Jesuit priests written just after his death sums up his character:—

“It is impossible to refuse him credit for great qualities, but he tarnished his glory at the end of his life by his follies and vices which nothing could justify. He was called to render account to God for the evils which his political treachery had brought upon his own people and the neighbouring kingdoms. His reign was rendered illustrious by works of really royal magnificence. Among these are the pagodas of Madura, several public buildings and above all the royal palaces, the colossal proportions and astonishing boldness of which recall the ancient monuments of Thebes. He loved and protected the Christian religion, the excellence of which he recognised; but he never had the courage to accept the consequences of his conviction. The chief obstacle to his conversion came from his 200 wives, of whom the most distinguished were burnt on his pyre. The beautiful Teppakulam at Madura, the Puthumandapam

and the unfinished tower of the Rayagopuram were all due to his magnificent taste."

The next ruler entitled to some mention is Mangammal. Her indefatigable energy and diplomacy gave the Naik dynasty a longer tenure of life than it would otherwise have had. She was a remarkable queen in many ways, and during the period of 15 years when she acted as Queen-Regent on behalf of her minor grandson, the Madura country enjoyed peace and prosperity. She conducted her wars with energy and determination and was faithfully served by her able Minister and Commander-in-chief, Narasappiah. She also constructed well-paved roads with shady avenues, and several temples.



4. Mangammal.

(Statue in Tiruparankundram Temple.)

In fact, tradition ascribes to her every good road and avenue in the Madura and Tinnevely Districts. She constructed many choultries one of which is still

functioning in Madura and is opposite to the Railway station.

Some writers have thought it necessary to search for motives for her numerous charities. One alleges that the charities were in expiation of youthful follies—another writer, less uncharitable, repeats the story that, in a forgetful moment, she placed betel in her mouth with her left hand. This gross breach of etiquette also offended the gods, who had to be placated by means of liberal charitable foundations. In support of the first version, the story goes that her court was scandalised by her love for her minister. A statue of a young man, seen in the little chapel built by Mangammal on the western side of the Golden Lily Tank is commonly regarded as the statue of Mangammal's minister and paramour. Further, on the ceiling of the chapel, there is a portrait of the same person opposite to one of the queen; and it may be observed that the queen's attire is not that of a grieving Hindu widow but the gay finery of a married woman. Another statue of Mangammal with her favourite general may be seen on one of the pillars of the Thiruparakundram Temple. These are undoubtedly circumstances that give point to the story. Charity, however, is not so rare a virtue among rich Indian ladies that one needs to discover a special motive for it. There are numerous instances of ladies of irreproachable character, making lavish endowments out of the purest of motives, and looking

for no greater reward than their own satisfaction at a good deed well done. And this is in the best tradition of Indian womanhood. The real cause of the scandal is probably the easterner's jealousy of a woman's prestige and independence, and any gossip that seeks to undermine it, gains ready credence. Mangammal's grandson came of age in the year 1704; and this event appears to have led to some serious disputes, which had a tragic ending. The details cannot unfortunately be ascertained with anything approaching precision. The queen appears to have lived for two or three years on terms of undue intimacy with Narasappiah's successor, a Brahmin named Achchaya and relying on his support, she refused to make way for her grandson when he came of age. In consequence of this, a strong party was formed against her and she was arrested and confined in the building, which is now used as a jail. Not satisfied with this measure of punishment her enemies murdered her with a refinement of cruelty that resembled the methods of the Spanish Inquisition. They slowly starved the queen to death, and to aggravate her sufferings, placed food periodically near the bars of her prison window, at such a distance that she could see and smell it without however being able to touch it. The place where this unhappy woman was tortured is pointed out to strangers and the story of her sad fate still excites compassion. Mangammal was succeeded by several rulers who were too weak to hold together the Empire.

Before leaving the Naiks, the following impartial verdict of an English writer may be quoted:—

“A government whose wealth and whose tastes are manifested by its temples and statues, and whose readiness to employ all its resources for the benefit of its people, as proved by the number and nature of the irrigation works which it completed, implies a contented and a prosperous people; while a high state of the arts and of knowledge is abundantly testified by the exquisite design and workmanship discoverable in many of the temples and statues, as well as by the grasp and mastery of the principles of irrigation—a complicated and difficult branch of the Engineering Art—displayed in their irrigation system.”

This period may be said to begin  
**The Modern** with 1781 when the revenues of the  
**Period.** Carnatic were assigned by Muhammad  
 Ali to the East India Company.

The old city of Madura came to an end soon after 1840, when Collector Blackburn razed to the ground its old fortifications, filled up the ditch of the old fort and opened out upon its glacis the four broad roads, now known as the Veli streets ('Outside streets' as they were beyond the limits of the old town). From this date the town expanded in all directions and considerably relieved the congestion in the old town. The people of Madura appreciated the great work of Blackburn and erected a high stone column with a light on it—

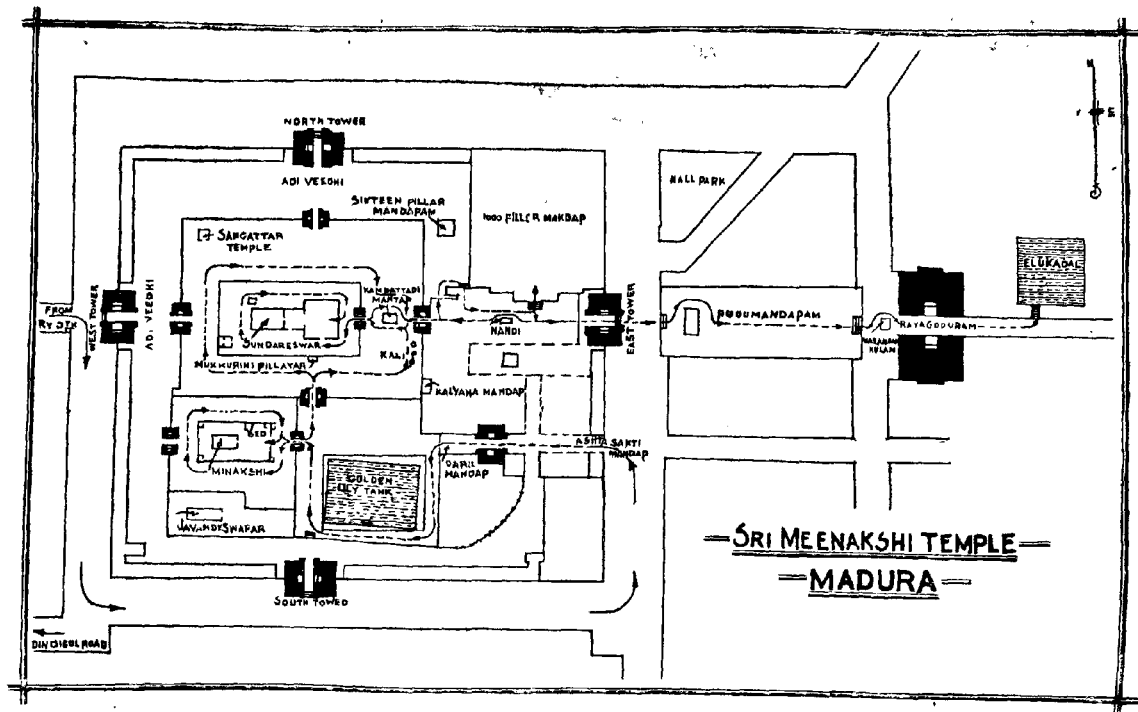


now called the Blackburn Light. On this monument is an inscription which says that it was put up 'by a grateful people'. But the numerous petitions complaining of his drastic proceedings in effecting these improvements nevertheless found their way to the higher authorities, who thought it expedient to suspend this brilliant officer. He was eventually restored to his post, though this was but poor consolation to him. Madura was first constituted a Municipality in 1866, from which date the Municipal council was invested with powers to impose taxation and to carry out the functions of a modern Municipality.

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PART II.  
**THE MEENAKSHI TEMPLE.**



Note:—The narrative follows roughly the route indicated in this plan.

**Religion and  
Art.  
—Hinduism**

For a proper appreciation of the temple, it is necessary to know something about the religion and art of the Hindus. What then is Hinduism?

Unfortunately, even the educated Hindu finds it difficult to answer this question. For Hinduism is not a simple religion founded by a single person or teacher. Hinduism is an aggregate of innumerable different cults. It consists of ideas so far removed from one another that it is difficult to discover any underlying unity of thought or design, and indeed there appears to be none. For Hinduism "consists of a tropical luxuriance of ideas and beliefs ranging from the most primitive forms of animism and phallic worship to the most highly developed philosophical system." Consequently it is curiously tolerant of the wildest heresies. Being the oldest of the existing religions, it has naturally attached to itself a strange stock of traditions and legends—frequently in apparent contradiction to one another. The temple attempts, in a limited manner, to represent this odd jumble called Hinduism. Thus we find innumerable different forms of the same God going

by as many different names. These answer to the descriptions found in the sacred books of the Hindus. Then again, the Hindu gods are frequently represented as being subject to the ordinary weaknesses and passions of human beings. Thus, the Sastras revel in the description of Siva's numerous love-affairs with the minor goddesses. Indeed the distinction between god and man often vanishes, for an ascetic Hindu may, by rigorous discipline and the performance of certain rites, attain supernatural powers and even command the Olympian deities to do his bidding. Another striking feature of Hinduisim is the large number of Gods, worshipped by the average Hindu. Early Hinduism however was concerned with the worship of a few major gods. Each of these gods was later worshipped in several different forms having different names—thereby accounting for the many gods we have to-day. Thus, although Siva himself is not mentioned in the ancient Rig-Veda, he appears in the Hindu Cosmogony of the Epic period. In later centuries, several forms of Siva were created in order to keep together the jarring sects of Hinduism and to counteract any fissiparous tendencies of their religion. For has not Christianity broken up into a hundred different sects worshipping in as many different ways? The genius of the Hindu religion lies in the fact that it permits the utmost latitude in worship, thus preventing internal dissensions and presenting a strong front in the face of opposition.

Hindu Art. Hindu Art is a mirror of Hindu religion and is therefore both complex and symbolical. To the Westerner for instance, the multiplicity of the limbs on most Indian sculptures might appear grotesque, if not barbarous. Even so learned a critic as Vincent Smith observes that "the figures of both men and animals become stiff and formal and the idea of power is clumsily expressed by the multiplication of members. The many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses whose images crowd the walls and roofs of mediæval temples have no pretensions to beauty and are frequently hideous and grotesque." This writer falls into the common error of judging Eastern art by Western standards. For it must be understood that Hindu art has long been the handmaid of religion, and was essentially devoted to the exposition of the personalities and acts of the deities. Authoritative texts declare that the making of the images of deities leads to heaven, not the making of likenesses of men; that only which accords with the canons is beautiful in the eyes of the discerning, not that which pleases individual fancy. Thus, we see that Hindu sculpture was not produced solely with reference to aesthetic ideals. Images, in particular, were regarded primarily as a means of obtaining communion with the gods, and artistic representation was considered of secondary importance. A Hindu sculptor may therefore, at times, reveal scant knowledge of anatomy, but he often exhibits a deep understanding of life, of emotion

and of the language of gesture long codified in the Nāṭya Sastra. The object being religious, the artist was frequently under the restraint of laws, e. g. the Agama Sastras, and his work was therefore necessarily somewhat artificial. The Sukra Niti says "The images of gods yield happiness to men and lead to heaven; but those of men, lead away from heaven and yield grief." The Hindu artist is therefore little concerned with portraying human likenesses—on the contrary, the more human the representation, the less does Hindu sculpture approach its own ideal of perfection.

The sculptures in the Madura temple are remarkable for the cunning with which passion and feeling are infused into the image and expressed not merely in the face, but in every limb and even muscle of the body. To them we may apply the dictum of Leonardo da Vinci "That drawing is best which, by its action, expresses the passion that animates the figure." In brief, Hindu art is suggestive, not imitative.

The sculptor whose object was to impress worshippers with the superhuman nature of the God they worshipped, attached various symbols to signify the deity's superiority. Therefore if a man has two arms, a god like Siva or Vishnu must have necessarily four or more arms. In representing the gods, the sculptor also took into consideration the tradition behind them: for example in making the image of Siva, the following



symbols were always added — the four hands, the drum and the deer. The skill of a sculptor was judged by his power in helping forward contemplation and yoga: thus while the Greek image may be described as 'graceful' and the Egyptian as 'formal', it is only the Hindu image that can claim to be 'contemplative'.

### **Portrait Sculpture.**

This does not, however, mean that all Hindu art is religious. There are also in the Madura temple many non-religious sculptures, which show that the artist could, when occasion demanded, imitate nature very successfully. In these cases, the artist was not bound by rigid sastraic rules and was therefore able to give free play to his fancy. Thus we find here numerous realistic images of stalwart soldiers, distinguished ministers, and beautiful dancing girls. That these are not types but portraits in stone of real persons, is clear from their facial expressions, stature and dress. A typical example is the statue of Muthurama Aiyar and his wife. We may here observe the shaven head, the protruding belly and otherwise flabby appearance of this generously-built Brahmin. The figure of his wife is also true to life. In the Pudumantapam also, may be seen lifelike representations of the ten famous kings of the Naik dynasty, beginning with Viswanatha Naik and ending with Thirumala Naik. Each statue is lifesize and what is more, bears a strong family resemblance to its neighbour. Among these, the figure of Thirumala

Naik (Pl. 3) deserves close scrutiny — the folds of his large belly and his indolent eyes are cleverly executed.



6. Muthurama Aiyar and his wife.

The artist has here given the minutest attention to detail. We may also observe a depression on the thigh of one of Thirumala's wives, who stands behind him on the same pillar. The story goes that the sculptor could not avoid making this depression, the well-controlled chisel involuntarily slipping at this point. By an odd coincidence,

Thirumala's wife did have a mole in the identical spot, but this fact was known to no one but Thirumala himself, so that when the latter saw the sculpture, he immediately suspected the chastity of his wife. While we are not interested in the further developments of the story, this is an instance of realism carried to extremes.

## The Temple Proper.

The temple stands in the centre of the town, the main roads running roughly parallel to its four sides. The city has grown with the temple as a nucleus, and in a real sense therefore, Madura is a temple city.

The outer walls of the temple form a rectangle 847 feet by 792 feet. Apart from the innermost shrines of Meenakshi and Sundareswar, it is doubtful whether any portion of the temple is older than the 16th century, but there is no doubt whatever that it occupies the same site as it did in the earliest Pandyan times. The old temple however, was almost razed to the ground during the Moslem invasion of Madura by Malik Kafur in 1310. The outer wall with its fourteen towers was pulled down; the streets and buildings which it protected destroyed, and nothing left of it but the two shrines of Meenakshi and Sundareswar. "Even these apparently owed their escape, less to any reverence for them in the victor's breasts, than to the outbreak of private dissensions among these Vandals."

The general plan of the temple was laid down by Viswanatha Naik in 1560 and the outermost walls were commenced during his reign. In succeeding generations, princes, nobles and wealthy merchants vied with one another in completing the structure, without however deviating from the original plan. It is estimated that

the temple cost altogether about twelve million rupees and took 120 years to complete. This is not surprising, considering that the carved and plaster figures alone are said to number over thirty-three millions!

The architecture is almost purely **Architecture.** Dravidian — its characteristics being the pyramidal towers of colossal height dominating the surrounding landscape for miles around; the rectangular enclosures one within the other like a China box (see plan); the use of the flat roof and the entire absence of the arch or dome; delicate sculpture worked in ponderous material, and finally a partiality for long galleries interspersed with sculptured pillars.

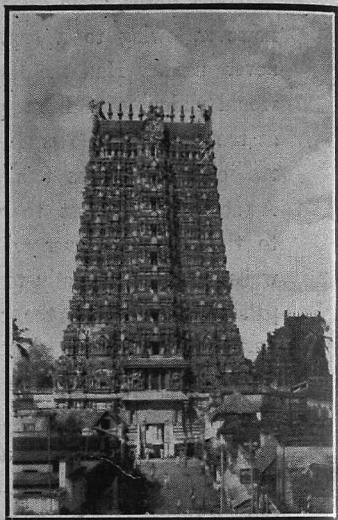
The writer of the District Gazetteer has remarked that the temple is “an aimless aggregate of parts that seem to have been added as time and circumstance dictated during a long course of time, rather than in accordance with the requirements of a deliberately set plan, and hence it lacks unity of plan and fails in effect.” This is often the impression of the casual tourist, who is led along obscure passages by incompetent guides, and shown one marvel after another in rapid succession without having their relation to one another clearly explained. The ground plan of the temple (Pl. 5.) gives a clear idea of its lay out. It shows that the proper entrance to the temple was via the Rayagopuram and the Pudumantapam through the

*Eastern* tower, as in all Hindu temples. In this temple however, owing to a superstition, the Eastern tower is never used. Had the Rayagopuram been completed, it would undoubtedly have provided a suitable gate-way, as the site plan shows how much larger than any of the other gopurams this gopuram was intended to be. A straight line east to west from the Rayagopuram to the Western tower will run parallel to the temple walls and lead directly to the chief deity's shrine after passing through all the minor turrets. Further, the north-to-south line of towers will intersect this line at the exact point where Sundareswar's shrine stands. It is therefore clear that all the gopurams and the minor towers have been arranged according to a well-conceived plan. The advantage of this arrangement is that the golden top (Vimana) of the central shrine can be seen from a great distance from all four points of the compass, through the apertures in successive towers.

The four outer towers or  
**The Temple Towers.** gopurams begin with door posts of single stones 60 feet in height and rise in tapering layers, carved with rows of gods and goddesses, animals of various kinds and mythical figures. This ornamentation may strike the foreign observer as being both vulgarly ostentatious and meaningless. This is actually far from being the case, for although all the figures on the tower cannot be said to be artistic, they serve a very useful purpose.



7. The Eastern Tower.



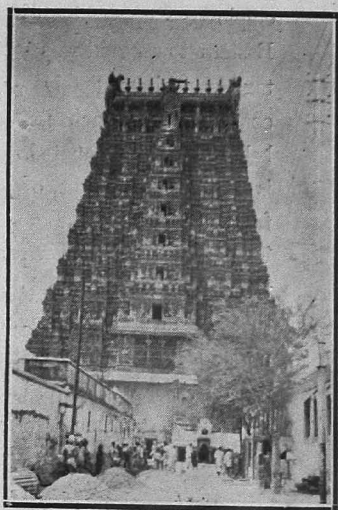
8. The Western Tower.

They are a summary of what is to be found within the temple and the low-caste Hindu who is not allowed access to the temple may still worship his household gods from a distance.

Of the nine towers, the four outer ones are the most significant. Although similar in shape, they differ fundamentally in their ornamentation. For instance while the Western tower is covered with innumerable plaster figures representing scenes from the Puranic stories, the Northern tower is very plain and contains miniatures of the various kinds of Gopurams and Vimanas to be found all over South India.)



9. The Southern Tower.



10. The Northern Tower.

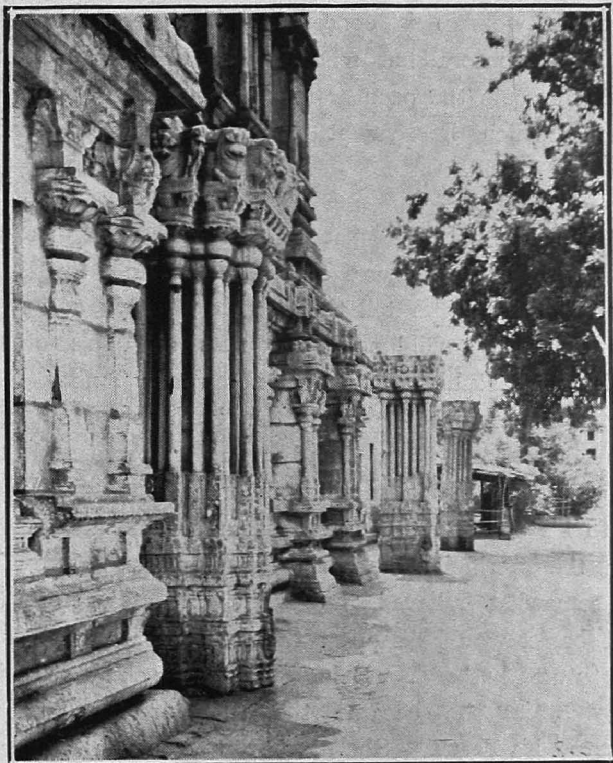
The Eastern and Western towers of a Siva temple are, according to the Silpa Sastras, the most important, but in this temple, the Eastern tower is strangely neglected. It appears to be the oldest, as we find here an inscription relating to the period of Sundara Pandya, but at the present day nevertheless, no worshipper makes use of the Eastern tower either for entrance or exit. The following tradition explains the taboo placed on it: during the reign of Chokkanatha Naik, the palace officials levied an unauthorised tax on the temple servants, who decided that one of them should commit suicide by way of protest; accordingly, a temple

employee threw himself down from the top of the Eastern tower and was instantaneously killed. The unjust tax was immediately withdrawn, but a superstition continued to attach itself to the tower and it is still believed to be haunted. At the foot of this tower is the famous flight of eighteen steps, running down from the foot of the god Karuppanaswami to the gate. This shrine is often resorted to when solemn affirmations have to be made and it is generally believed that a man or woman, who utters a falsehood and passes up and down the 18 steps, will meet with a violent death within 18 days. Several suits are to this day settled by a solemn declaration made before the image of Karuppanaswami.

The Southern tower is the highest of all and rises to 152 feet. A splendid view of the temple and city may be obtained from the top. The Northern tower, formerly known as Mottagopuram, or the peakless tower, was long left in an unfinished state. But thanks to the munificence of some courageous Chetties, who defied all superstition by building on the uncompleted structure, it can no longer be called a 'Motta' (Bald) gopuram. Near the gopuram are five curious pillars known as the 'Musical pillars'. Each of these is composed of 22 slender rods carved out of a single block of granite. The rods emit musical notes when tapped. At the foot of this tower is a small shrine known as the Koil of Mottai Gopurathan, who is the guardian deity



of the tower. He is also looked upon as the guardian of public health and is specially propitiated at the time of epidemics. A large number of toy cradles can be seen hung from a tree nearby, these being thank-offerings made by young women after safe childbirth. Not infrequently, a garland of flowers is thrown round the entire tower.



11. Musical Pillars.

### **The Ashtasakti Mantap.**

The Eastern tower being taboo, the temple is now entered through the Ashtasakti Mantapam, so called after the figures of the eight (ashta) goddesses or Saktis represented on the pillars on either side. According to Hindu philosophy, each god has his feminine counterpart, who as far as the routine of temple worship is concerned plays the subordinate part of a consort, but who, in a higher philosophical sense represents the peculiar energy or sakti of the god, without which he cannot be in active communion with the world.

The roof of the mantap has niches, which are filled with plaster figures of Meenakshi and Sundareswarar. The figures tell the pilgrim legends connected with the birth, childhood, conquests and rule of the goddess Meenakshi. The most noteworthy among these images is the one depicting the birth of Meenakshi. Malayadwaja, the great Pandyan ruler performed the famous Putrakameshti sacrifice in order to beget a son, but to his consternation the goddess Meenakshi emerged from the sacrificial fire with three breasts. The king was somewhat relieved, however, when told that the third breast would disappear the moment Meenakshi saw her future husband. Being the only child of king Malayadwaja, she became the ruler of the Pandyan realm on his death. She soon started on her conquests and defeated every king until she met Sundareswar,

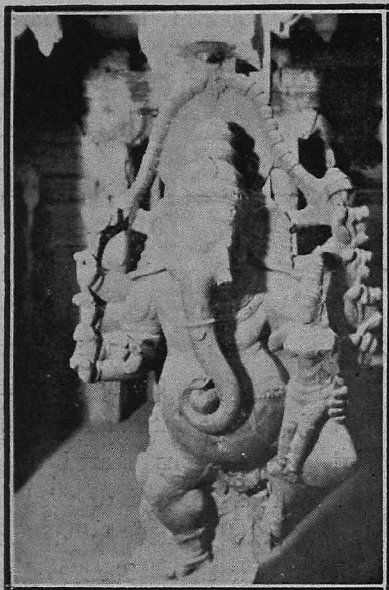
whereupon an irrepressible shyness overcame her and her third breast disappeared. We have in another corner the marriage of the goddess Meenakshi to Sundareswar, the durbar of Sundareswar and the coronation of Ugrapandya. The Ashtasakti mantap thus provides an introduction to the traditions surrounding the temple.

**The  
Meenakshi  
Nayakan  
Mantap.**

At the further end of the Ashtasakti mantap is the doorway leading to the extensive Meenakshi Nayakan Mantap, 160 feet in length. On either side of the doorway are the figures of the two sons of Siva and Parvati: Ganapathi with the head of an elephant, riding on a rat, and Subramanya with six heads and twelve arms seated on a peacock. Ganapathi is venerated as the god of wisdom, for tradition ascribes to him the authorship of the famous epic poem, the Mahabharatha. This god is invariably found at the entrance to every Saivite temple and frequently at important cross-roads. The explanation is a curious one: the puranas tell us that when his parents asked him to marry, Ganapathi answered that he would wed only that woman who was equal to his mother in beauty, power and wisdom. But where could he find anyone resembling the peerless Parvati? His parents however permitted him to search for such a woman, and Ganapathi is placed at the entrance to every Saivite temple so that no girl might enter unnoticed by him;

and it is believed that he is still looking for a wife! In this representation we see him testing, with obvious

relish, the charms of the goddess seated on his knee.



12. Ganapathi.

Beyond the gateway is the mantap proper. It is named after its builder Meenakshi Nayaka, one of the ministers of Thirumala Naik. It has five aisles separated by six rows of stone pillars, which though similar in size and height differ considerably in

detail. This mantap is one of the most open and spacious in the temple. It's beauty is however marred at the present day by numerous small shops on either side. These are highly objectionable in this artistic setting, and it is surprising that the temple authorities, instead of preventing this abuse, actually encourage it for the sake of the rent which they derive from the shop-keepers. Dividing the Meenakshi Nayaka mantap and the Mudali mantap is the massive Thiruvatchi, containing hundreds of oil lamps which are lighted at

sunset every day. These are particularly imposing at night, when the illumination is visible from a great distance. The large brass frame-work was presented to the temple by the Zamindar of Sivaganga, and its upkeep is met by a grant of the revenue from certain villages.

### **The Dark Mantap.**

The mantap to which this gateway of lights leads is, paradoxically enough, the darkest, and is in fact called the 'Dark Mantapam'. To the

local people however, it is better known as Mudali mantap. Of the eight-figures represented here, the figures of Siva as Bikshatanar (Beggar-boy) and Vishnu as Mohini, should not escape close scrutiny. The story goes that Siva, in order to test the fidelity of the wives of certain sages of the Taruka forest, assumed the beautiful form of



13. Siva as Bikshatanar.

Bikshatanar, a naked beggar-boy. The ladies had

been proud of their chastity, but we are told that he succeeded in seducing them all. At the same time



14. Vishnu as Mohini.

Vishnu assumed the feminine form of Mohini, in order to tempt the austere sages. The figure of Mohini is remarkable in many ways. It is an elegant creation of feminine beauty and we find here a conscious and meticulous attention to anatomical detail rare in Indian sculpture. The figure itself is poised in a fascinating gesture of surrender, and

we may observe also the voluptuous abandon in the face. There is no doubt that the sculptor has thoroughly enjoyed perfecting every line of his creation, and has not neglected even the minute folds of the clothing. The genius of the artist will be more readily appreciated when it is remembered that all these sculptures were produced by means of a few rude tools, viz., nothing more elaborate than two or three broad-pointed nails and a mallet!

It may be of interest to note here, that the figure follows closely the description given in the Nāṭyasastra of a nautch girl. Thus she must be "the possessor of a flawless complexion, graceful contours, full round breasts of fascinating feminine appeal, and dressed in a fabric of gold lace, decked with gem-studded ornaments.....". The sculptor has not stopped here, for just following Mohini as it were, is the figure of a sage carved on the same pillar. His lifted head, clasped hands and sensuous eyes indicate clearly that he has long cast to the winds his 'tapas' and is throbbing with passion.

• Opposite the figure of Mohini and near Bikshatanar is the graceful figure of Anasuya, a paragon of chastity. The beauty of workmanship can be appreciated only when the story behind the sculpture is known. Narada aroused the jealousy of Parvati, Saraswati and Lakshmi by reporting to their husbands that Anasuya was the



15. Anasuya.

that Anasuya was the



16. The Gay Rishi.



17. His Confederate.

chastest woman in the entire universe. With a view to test her chastity, the three husbands assumed the disguise of rishis (See Pl. 16 & 17.) and entered her hospitable doors, begging for food. Unfortunately for her, they laid down the strange condition that unless she served them stark naked, they would not partake of her hospitality. Anasuya's anxiety may well be imagined; but her virtue came to her rescue, for by the very power of her chastity, she was able to convert all three into babies and thus feed them without shame. The saree on Anasuya's loins is seen slowly

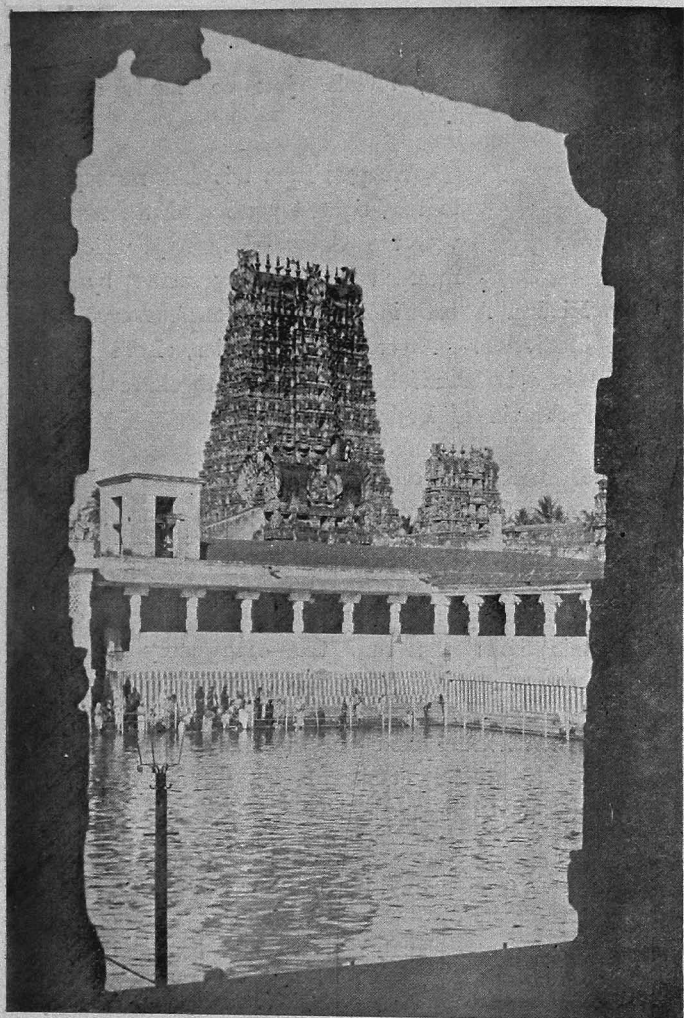


slipping down and reveals just so much as is artistically relevant.

We pass from this dark mantapam to the brightest portion of the temple viz., the Golden-Lily tank, which is regarded as extremely sacred by all pious Hindus. A bath in its waters will efface even the most deadly sin. According to tradition, Lord Indra bathed in this beautiful tank in order to cleanse himself of the sin of Brahminicide.

The tank is so called after a tradition that Indra worshipped Sundaeswar with the beautiful golden flowers which grew in the water. It is surrounded by a spacious corridor, used for performing religious ceremonies. There are numerous legends connected with this tank: thus runs the 48th story of the Sthala Purana:—

“.....a heron was induced to come to the famous Golden-Lily tank. It bathed in the waters and flew round the pagoda. Then being hungry, it was tempted to feed on some of the many fish which it saw in the tank. But, just as it was about to seize one of them, its eyes were opened to the enormity of the offence contemplated, and the bird beseeched God to kill its sinful body forthwith, removing its soul to the regions of bliss. Further, to prevent the possibility of such a sin being committed thereafter by other

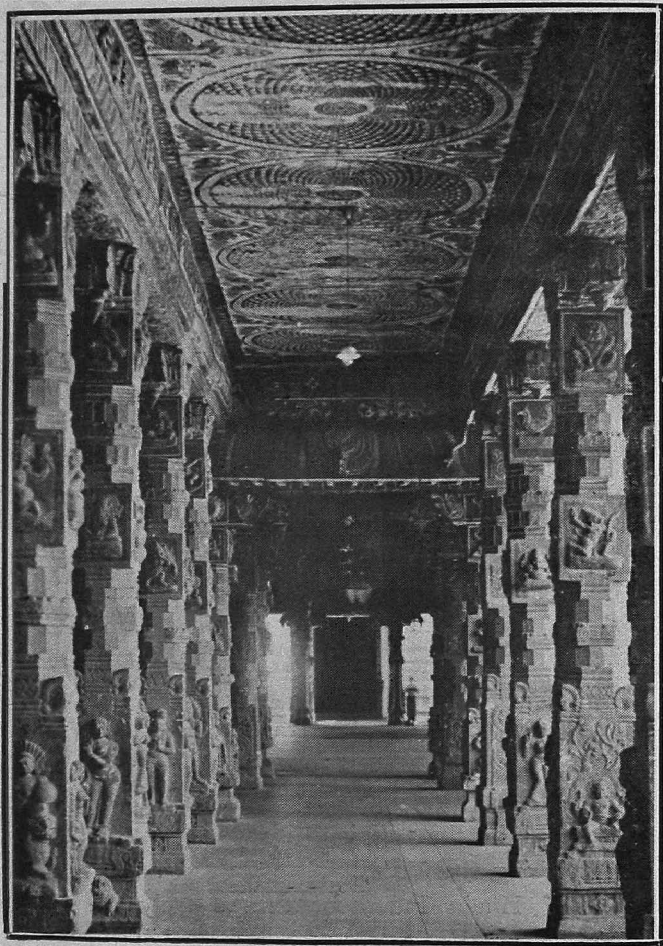


18. The Golden - Lily Tank.

birds, the heron prayed that the tank should cease to produce fishes and frogs. And God graciously answered its prayers". It is curious that to this day neither fish nor frog inhabit the Golden-Lily Tank.

On the Northern and Southern walls of the corridors are numerous frescoes, which give an accurate account of the famous Thiruvilaiyadal puranam, (the Sthala puranam of Madura), which appears to have been the chief source of inspiration for the sculptors and painters who worked in the temple. These paintings are recent restorations of older ones and one may here observe the deterioration of art in less than two centuries. The first painting illustrates the story of Indra's Brahminicide: the next depicts Indra's durbar. This is followed by the dance of Rambha and Urvashi, the return of Brihaspathi, the murder of the giant and the ghost of the giant following Indra. To one versed in the Puranas, the paintings are full of meaning.

The view from the eastern arcade shows up the temple towers in the best perspective, opening out a vista of ascending gopurams and vimanas. The corridors are occupied in the evenings by young men studying and memorising the Vedas. Here we get an insight into the soul of Hindu India, for this is truly the nursery of tradition, old Vedic secrets being handed down from teacher to pupil by word of mouth, and without the

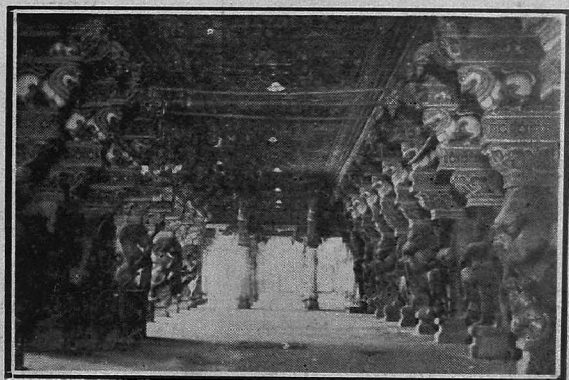


19. A beautiful Corridor.

assistance of either pencil, paper or script — a colossal feat of memory!

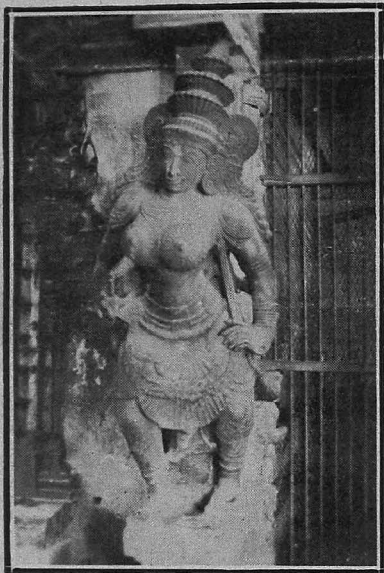
Projecting into the tank, on the western side, is a balcony with a porch of polished black stone in front of it. It is reputed to have been built by that great royal builder, Rani Mangammal. On the ceiling of the balcony may be seen the painted figures of Mangammal and Ramayan, the famous general of Thirumala. Mangammal was a widow, but the painter has decked her in gaudy dress and jewels, which are never worn by Hindu widows. This is not altogether without significance as has been pointed out earlier.\*

Leaving the tank and its granite porch we come to the Kilikkattu Mantap. The Kilikkattu Mantap. mantapam, so called after the parrots



20. Kilikkattu Mantap.

kept in cages inside it. The parrot is a sacred bird and is often shown in company with gods and goddesses. Meenakshi appears to have been particularly



21. Drowpathi.

partial to it. The mantap is supported by pillars which are remarkable in many ways. They are each cut from a single block of granite and have above them protruding corbels, which greatly enhance their beauty. The pillars are excellently carved into '*yalis*' (rearing lions), and into statues of the five Pandava brothers (the heroes

of the Mahabharata), and Drowpathi, their common wife. It has been remarked that "both in point of stability and in point of architecture and realistic richness of detail, the pillars as a whole are unsurpassed".

On either side of the entrance to Meenakshi's shrine are the sanctuaries of Ganapathi and Subramanya. To the north of the former is a mantap with fine black stone pillars, which are sometimes used by young girls for Kolattam (an Indian Maypole dance).

### **Dancing Poses.**

The entrance to the shrine of Meenakshi is guarded by two Dwara-palakas (Watchmen) on either side, with fearful and expressive eyes. The doors which are always kept open, to admit pilgrims, require careful study. On them will be found some of the most important dancing poses described in the Nāṭyasastra. It may here be observed that these poses, along with those represented on the niches of the Javandeswar temple, those on the doorways leading to the Mukkurini Pillayar and to the eastern tower, and again those on the stone pillars under the southern tower, exhaust almost all the types of classical Hindu dancing. The Madura temple is thus almost an encyclopaedia of the dancing poses depicted both in stone and wood.

The inner shrine of Meenakshi is surrounded by three mantaps. Just a few feet to the south, may be seen a fairly recent but well painted figure of Thirumala Naik with his two wives. On the other end but facing north, is a mantap guarded by two beautiful women. The next mantap is known as the Mahamantap. One may notice in the paintings on the walls of this mantap, as well as in those around the Golden-Lily Tank, Hinduism adopting an aggressive attitude, in sharp contrast with the tolerance it normally showed to other creeds. The paintings relate to the persecution of the Jains and reveal the length

to which Hindu persecution can go. The Jains of Madura have long been forgotten, their traditions ignored, their religion wiped out of existence; but the memory of the bitter struggle between Jainism and Hinduism is kept alive in the series of frescoes on the walls of this mantapam. As though this were not sufficient, the whole tragedy is re-enacted in the temple at five of the twelve annual festivals.

**The  
Fish-Eyed  
Goddess.**

The innermost mantap is the Ardhamantap, from which we get a clear view of the image of Meenakshi. As she is supposed to be the daughter of a Pandyan king, whose emblem was the 'fish', Meenakshi, meaning 'fish-eyed', is depicted with the eyes of a fish. The priests tell us that just as the mother-fish has merely to gaze fixedly on her spawn in order to develop life in them (a curious fallacy!), so also does spiritual life stir in the body of the worshippers the moment the Goddess Meenakshi casts her eyes on them. The image, though very small in relation to the size of the temple, is nevertheless inspiring to the devout pilgrim. Indeed, the colossal proportions of the outer towers and the spacious corridors leading up to this small shrine, only serve to enhance the power of the goddess. For the devotee, at last brought face to face with his deity, is immediately overwhelmed with religious fervour.



Meenakshi appears to have been a local goddess, dear to the hearts of the Dravidian inhabitants. The Aryan invaders, who came later, found it difficult, to oust her in favour of any of their own deities and with their characteristic adaptability, they overcame this obstacle by marrying her to Siva, thus welding together the old faith and the new. Meenakshi's importance may be judged from the fact that, up to the present time, the image of the God Siva is carried every night into the abode of his spouse with music, pomp and splendour, on a palanquin covered with red and gold draperies. Thus though she had perhaps suffered a temporary eclipse, as is indicated by the much larger shrine built for Sundareswar, we may consider that Meenakshi has once more come into her own.

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## SUNDARESWAR'S SHRINE.

From the temple of Meenakshi, we proceed northward through a large gate towards the shrine of Siva, here known as Sundareswar, meaning 'the Beautiful'. This portion of the temple is twice as large as Meenakshi's shrine. On entering we are confronted by the famous Mukkuruni Pillayar, a great monolithic figure of Ganesa, the elephant-god. This image is said to have been discovered when the large Vandiyur Teppakkulam was excavated. Passing the Pillayar we walk along three spacious corridors, which though not as beautiful as the roofed passages of the Rameswaram temple, are in their own way no less inspiring.

At the north western end is the chapel of the famous Tamil Sangam. This was a body of forty-eight learned men somewhat similar to the present Académie Française. The Sangam, a very ancient institution, appears to have flourished in the

early years of the present era. One of its functions was to sit in judgment over all literary productions, which had to gain the hall-mark of its approval in order to ensure success. The Sthala puranam recounts an interesting story of how the Sangam originated. Saraswathi, the goddess of learning, was once impudent to Brahma and was accordingly visited by him with a curse compelling her to undergo forty-eight successive births on earth. On Saraswathi's appeal for mercy, Brahma was pleased to modify the curse to forty-eight simultaneous births, and a forty-eighth part of her soul was thereupon transfused into each of forty-eight mortals, who became poets of transcendental excellence. They were received with honour by the Pandyan king and constituted the first Sangam. They were however, constantly annoyed by the absurd pretensions of others, who claimed to be their equals, till finally Siva gave them a gold-plank which contracted and expanded, so as to accommodate just so many of the forty-eight as were present and no more; and this prevented any unworthy aspirant from attempting to take his seat along with them. When at last, runs another story, Thiruvalluvar, the author of the famous Kural, submitted his work for the approval of the Sangam, its members declined to crown it; but the miraculous plank, knowing the worth of the book expanded to make room for it. And the book in its turn grew bigger and bigger till it pushed all the forty-eight off their seats.

The old Sangam's lineal descendant, the New Madura Tamil Sangam, was established in 1901 with the object of improving the Tamil language and is now a flourishing literary society.

We now proceed to the outer

**The Outer** corridor of Sundareswar's shrine. This  
**Corridors** is guarded by two giant watchmen,

which are the largest images in the Madura temple. The southern corridor of the inner prakaram contains the stone figures of the 63 Saivite Saints of Southern India, known as the Nayanars, who secured the unique privilege of being associated with every Saivite temple on account of their great austerity and devotion. From a sculptural point of view, the most interesting of these figures is the one seated in the centre: this is the emaciated figure of Karaikkal Ammaiyar, the only woman among the 63 Nayanar saints. This sculpture is remarkable for the ascetic expression of the face and the carefully executed detail.

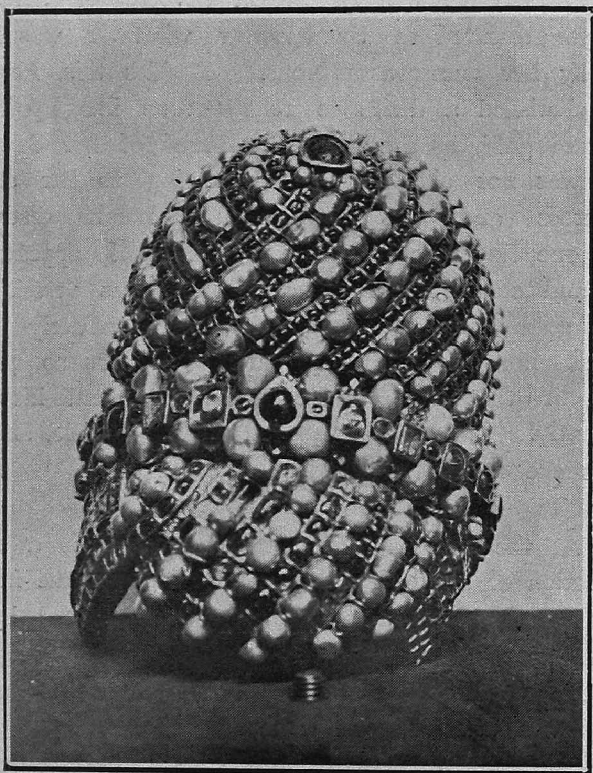
Nearby is a room containing certain images which are carried out in procession on festival days. It is unfortunate that visitors to the temple, in their anxiety to appreciate the major sculptures neglect these minor images, which are known as the Utsava Vighras and some of which are superb in design. It should be realised that the master-sculptor of old poured his love, devotion and skill, as much into his little images

as into his more elaborate and imposing icons. An interesting figure is the golden image of Sundareswar, which has on it a mark supposed to be the imprint of a dancing girl's kiss. The 36th story of the Sthala purana provides an explanation, thus: Hema, a beautiful dancing girl, attached to the temple in Sri Pushpavana, was an ardent devotee of Siva and always presented to Sundareswar whatever was given her by her numerous patrons. Besides this, however, she cherished a desire to construct an image of Siva in pure gold, as a still greater proof of her devotion. She was not able to do this owing to her slender resources and was consequently much distressed. But one fine morning, the god himself appeared to her and changed a number of her brass vessels into pure gold. Greatly delighted, she immediately had a golden image of Siva prepared and was so pleased with it that she embraced the idol and kissed it fervently. It was later placed in the temple, and still bears the mark of the dancing girl's kiss.

At the end of the western corridor is a choice collection of marble figures, representing all the idols in the temple of Benares. These were presented by the late Raja of Benares during one of his pilgrimages to South India. We now proceed to the room containing the temple jewels.

**Temple  
Jewels.**

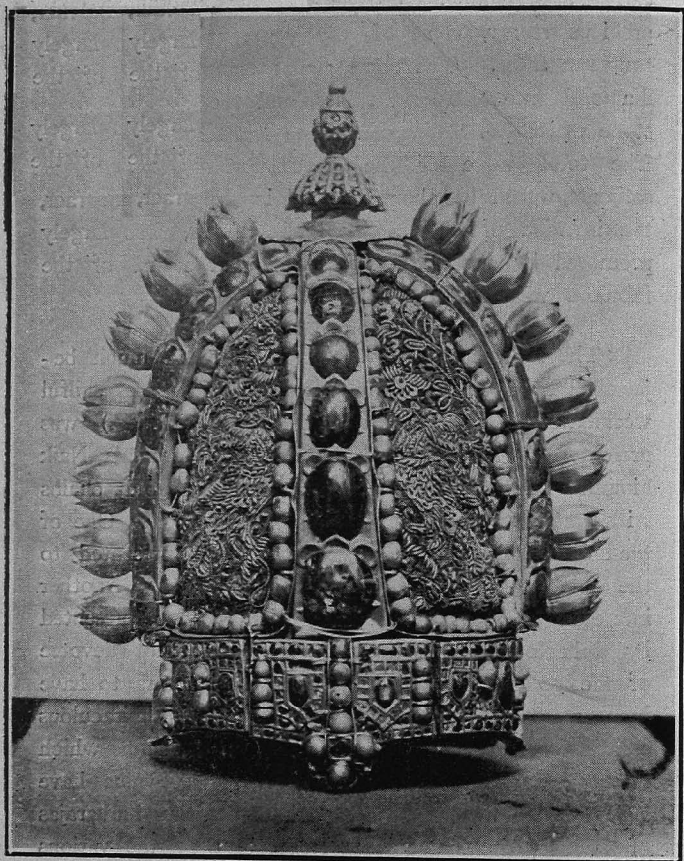
The Madura temple is justly famous for its fine collection of jewels, some of which are of priceless value. Many of the ornaments have a history going back several centuries, and one of the oldest is a beautiful pendant presented by an



22. A Crown of Pearls and Rubies.

early Pandyan king. Nearly all of them are inlaid with precious stones, some of which are no longer to be found in India. The stones most commonly used are diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, and there is one green stone which has a diameter of no less than three inches. The total value of the jewels, at a conservative estimate, would be about one million rupees. In fact, the invasion of Madura by Malik Kafur, was largely prompted by the wild stories he had heard of the fabulous wealth of this great temple.

The most interesting ornaments are the much be-jewelled head-dresses, which present a variety of skilful workmanship. The pearl head-dress (Pl. 22) was presented to the temple by the great Thirumala Naik himself. The collection includes several gold chains with numerous sovereigns hanging from them. One of these chains, carrying 108 sovereigns was presented to the temple by the East India Company. Another interesting item is a pair of golden stirrups presented by Collector Rous Peter, who was an ardent devotee of the goddess Meenakshi. This gift appears to have been made as a thank-offering for his miraculous escape from an attack by a furious elephant, which he had wounded. Other jewels of great value have been presented from time to time by the Maharajas of Mysore, Travancore and Nepal and by the various Zamindars of the districts of Madura and Ramnad.



23. A Jewelled Head - dress.



These temple ornaments are used to decorate the deities only on important festivals and are at other times very carefully deposited in a strong-room having as many as six different locks, the keys of which are kept by six different priests. Thus unless all six persons are present, the room cannot be opened. A fee of Rupees 20/— is charged for an inspection of the jewels.

The stump of this old tree is evidence that the area occupied by **The Sacred Kadamba Tree.** the temple was once a forest of Kadamba trees. In fact, the Puranas refer to Madura as Kadambavana Kshetra. The tree is surrounded by a number of Naga figures, which are worshipped daily by the women of the place. It may be of interest to mention here that the earliest inhabitants of South India were known as the Nagas.

Further on is a small well, called the Sākshi Kinaru (Witness-well). The story goes that a certain merchant married a girl from a remote land, but when he returned to Madura with his wife, the people would not believe that he was really married to her. The poor girl in her grief thought of Sundareswar, who sent this well, a solitary witness of the marriage, to bear testimony to it. There is no water in the well and it may therefore be the entrance to the underground passage connecting Thirumala Naik's palace with the

temple. According to tradition this passage was sometimes used by Thirumala Naik, and more particularly by the palace ladies who observed strict Purdah.

Entering the inner courtyard of **The Innermost Shrine.** the Sundareshwara temple, we see on the right the beautiful figure of Siva in the form of Nataraja (dancing pose). This abode of his is called Velliambalam (Hall of Silver) in contrast to Ponnambalam, the Hall of Gold in Chidambaram. The figure of Nataraja is



plated with silver and is one of the finest specimens of its kind in South India. The Agamas speak of seven dancing postures of Siva, and the pose found here is known as Ananda Thandava (dance of Joy). This form of Nataraja is to be seen in most Hindu temples, but the peculiarity here is that Siva has his right leg lifted

24. Siva in two forms. instead of his left. For this modification, the 24th

story of the Sthala Purana provides the following explanation: King Rajasekhara Pandya of Madura was expert in 63\ of the 64 branches of knowledge. Karikala Chola of the Chola dynasty however, was also well-versed in the 64th — the art of dancing. When the Pandyan ruler heard this, he immediately set out to master this final accomplishment; but while he was practising dancing he came to realize the immense strain put upon Siva, who danced continuously without ever changing his leg. He therefore proceeded to the temple and prayed fervently that Siva should change his leg; whereupon the God, touched by such sincere devotion, granted his prayer.

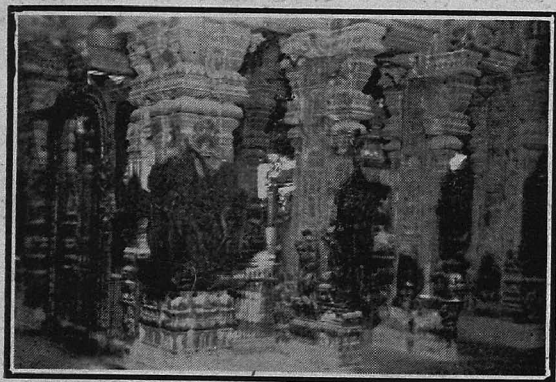
We now turn our attention to Sundareswar in the Holy of Holies, where he is represented in the form of a Linga (Phallus or Symbol of Creation). Siva here known as Sundareswar, is one of the three principal Gods of the Hindu cosmogony; the other two being Brahma and Vishnu. Brahma is generally known as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver and Siva as the destroyer. A stranger may well ask why this God of Destruction should be represented in the form of a linga. The answer is that according to Hindu belief destruction implies reproduction. Siva destroys not merely the heavens and the earth at the close of a world cycle, but also the fetters that bind each separate soul. New worlds must be formed to take the place of the old and new beings created by

process of transmigration. In this sense, therefore, Siva is looked upon as a creator, for he is responsible for restoring that which has been dissolved: hence his representation in the form of a linga.

On the top niches of the shrine of Siva are depicted in delicate plaster work many stories from the Sthala Purana. The plaster is in beautiful colours and forms a decorative setting for the shrine.

### **The Kambattadi Mantap.**

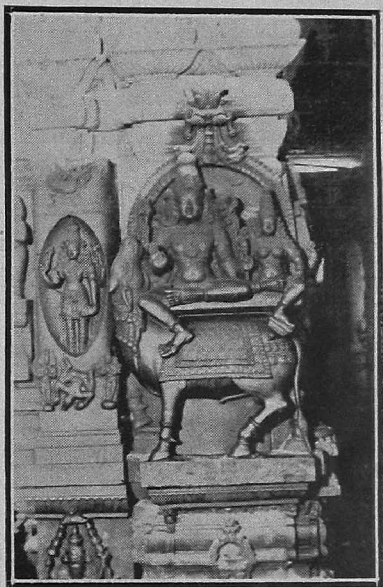
The mantap in front of Sundareswar with the flag-staff and bull is known as the Kambattadi (foot of the flag-staff) Mantap. The carving on its pillars is delicately executed and is perhaps the most elegant work to be found in



25. The Kambattadi Mantap.

the temple. On festivals a flag with the picture of a bull, the emblem of Siva, is flown on the staff.

The two pillars towards the west represent Siva and Parvati seated on their bull. Vrishabavahanamoorthi (Siva on his Bull) as this image is called, is an aspect of Siva in which he commands the highest veneration. Thus in the annual festivals, one day is entirely devoted to this yahana (vehicle) of Siva. Such represen-



26, Siva on his Bull.

tations of the God are however very rare in Saivite temples, the usual form being Siva with his right leg firm on the ground, while the bull stands behind him. On the same pillar, but to the left of the bull (See Pl. 26), may be seen Siva emanating from a linga. Brahma in the form of a swan is shown soaring up above Siva, while below his feet Vishnu, as a boar, is seen delving into the depths of the earth. The Linga Purana explains this aspect of Siva, the object of the

story being evidently, to establish the superiority of Siva over the other two gods. A dispute arose between Brahma and Vishnu as to which was the greater of the two: Siva, whose decision was sought, said that whoever saw the top or the bottom of his fiery linga-form first, would be considered the greater. Brahma soared on his swan to see the top of the Siva Linga, while Vishnu as a boar delved downwards. Years passed and neither was successful, but Brahma discovered a Ketaka flower which had fallen from Siva's crest a million years before and produced the



27. Siva granting a boon.

flower before Siva claiming that he had seen the top of the linga. Siva knowing the truth, was not deceived and punished Brahma by beheading him for uttering this falsehood. The story explains why Brahma is represented with four heads and not the five, which he is supposed to have had before this incident. Siva

further deprived Brahma of the privilege of being

worshipped in temples, and even today there is scarcely a temple in India dedicated to Brahma. The Ketaka



flower which abetted the crime was also punished by being excluded from among the flowers dear to Siva. Another pillar depicts Siva in the form known as Anugrahamoorthy. (See Pl. 27) Here he is seen conferring a boon on Vishnu in appreciation of the latter's devotion.

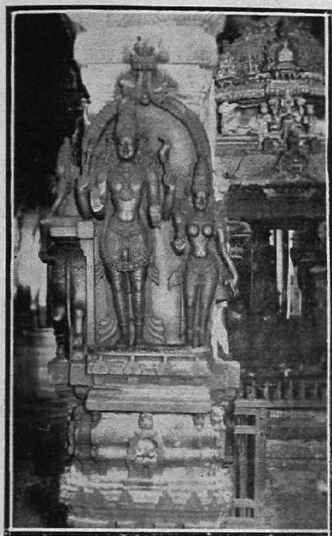
**28. Siva seated on Kailasa.** We now come to what is perhaps the most artistic conception in stone to be found in the temple. This is the pillar showing Siva and Parvati on the Kailasa mountain. Although the design is a complicated one, the details are cleverly worked out, without in any way marring the effect of the whole. We see here, the gigantic figure of Ravana with ten heads and twenty hands doing penance, with the Kailasa mountain on his broad shoulders. The story goes that Ravana, king of Lanka, once conceived the idea of carrying away Mount Kailasa

with a view to decorating his capital, and little realising that it was the abode of Siva. He thereupon proceeded northward and lifted the Kailasa mountain, causing a great shock to those above. Parvati who was terrified ran for protection to Siva. The latter at once aware of what was happening, pressed the topmost peak of the mountain with his toe, thus causing Kailasa to descend with all its terrific weight upon Ravana beneath. Ravana realizing at last what he had done, sought to propitiate Siva by playing on the veena, chanting at the same time the soul-stirring songs of the Sama Veda. Nowhere else in India, perhaps, has this story been so beautifully depicted in stone.

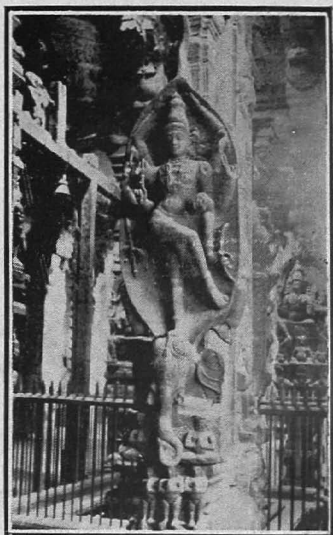
Yet another pillar represents Siva in the form of Ardhanari (the hermaphrodite). This form was the result of Sakti worship\* or the doctrine which affirmed that a god was capable of functioning only when combined with a feminine element. Siva is represented here with a 'male' ear-ring in the right lobe and a 'female' ornament in the left, indicating the inseparable union of the masculine and the feminine elements in the creator. The right half represents the man (Siva) and the left half the woman (Parvati); the drapery on the right is the tiger's skin of Siva reaching only to the knee, while on the left the robes reach down to the ankles. This image is remarkable for the perfect balance maintained by the sculptor between the male and the female aspects, in contrast with

\* See p. 36.





29. Siva as Harihara.



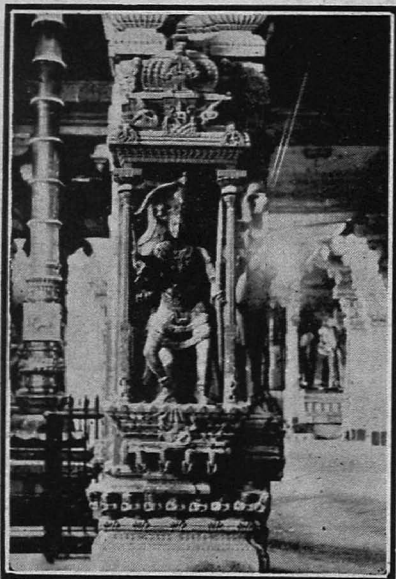
30. Siva dancing on an elephant.

certain Pallava Sculptures, where we find an undue emphasis upon the feminine aspect. Close to the figure of Ardhanari, but on another pillar may be seen another composite image of Siva called Harihara, in which the left half is Vishnu and the right half Siva. Accordingly on the left side we see the conch, the pearl necklace, the Vaishnavite mark and the brilliant ear-rings — all characteristic features of Vishnu. On the right will be recognised the deer, the snake and other emblems of Siva.

Siva dancing on an elephant adorns another pillar. In this form he is known as Gajaharamoorthy.

The elephant was a demon sent by the sages of Tarakavana to kill Siva for having seduced their wives when he took the form of Bikhshatanar.\* Here we see Siva killing the elephant and dancing upon its head.

The most popular among the pillars supporting the Kambattadi Mantap, is the one depicting the marriage of Goddess Meenakshi with Sundareswar (See *frontispiece*). Vishnu is seen standing to the right of Meenakshi and pouring sacred water over the joined hands of the bride and bridegroom. Observe



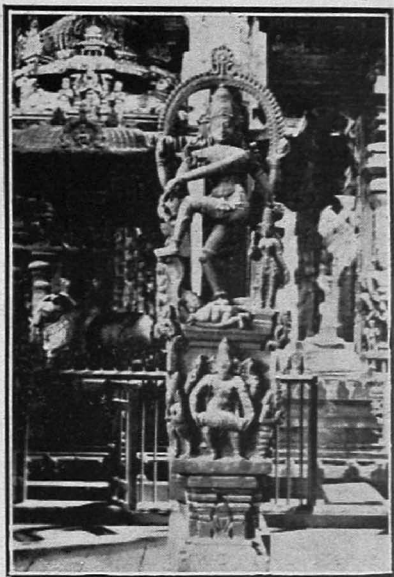
the bowed head of Meenakshi, which reveals the shyness characteristic of Hindu women. The facial expressions of all three are cleverly depicted and the general effect of the sculpture is extremely pleasing.

Behind this pillar and facing south is the figure of Siva, standing in a chariot and about

31. Siva in his chariot, to kill the giants, which are represented on the opposite

\* See p. 39.

pillar. According to the puranas Siva assumed this form in order to kill the three demons (Thripura) and to destroy their magical cities. During this campaign, the earth is said to have served as a chariot, the sun and moon as its wheels, the four Vedas as the horses and the Upanishads as the guiding reins. The right leg is firmly placed on the pedestal and the left bent in an attitude expressive of great energy.

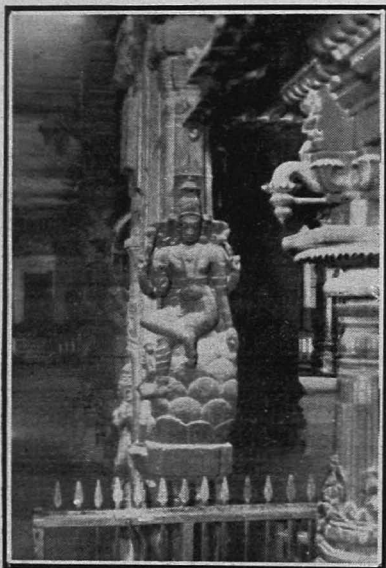


32. Siva as Nataraja.

Mention must also be made of the figure of Nataraja performing the dance of destruction. On the face is a subtle smile, slightly separating the well-proportioned lips and indicative of suppressed emotion. The violent nature of the dance is shown by the plaited hair stretched out on both sides of the head in wavy lines, and the cloth seen whirling rapidly round the leg which is placed on the back of the demon Apasmara. The right hand shows the Abhaya posture and holds a serpent—one of the usual ornaments

of Siva. Another serpent in the hand of the demon below is, as shown by Havell, the corresponding ornament of the left arm, but has dropped down during the dance.

At the further end is the Dakshinamoorthy, an important form of Siva. Here he is represented as a teacher of Yoga, music and other sciences; on either side of him are his disciples. This aspect is as remarkable for its tranquility as the Ananda Thandava\* is for its expression of joy. Though the sculpture



33. Siva in his Yogic pose.

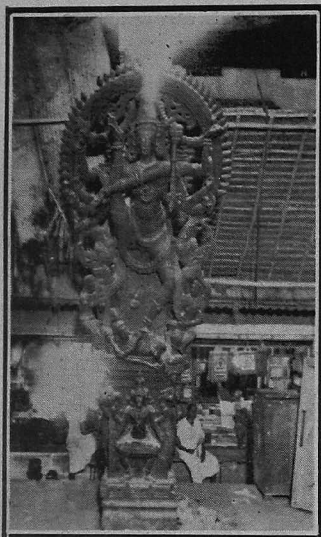
cannot compare with the finest representations of Dakshinamoorthy in other temples, it surpasses all its rivals in the expression of philosophic calm – the one attribute insisted upon again and again by the Agamas in connection with this representation of the deity. The emphasis on this feature of Siva as Dakshinamoorthy is

explained thus: a certain king called Daksha had

\* See p. 60.

a daughter Sati, who was married to Siva. Daksha performed an elaborate sacrifice, but invited neither Sati nor Siva. The daughter feeling greatly insulted at being overlooked by her father, proceeded straight-away to the scene of the sacrifice uninvited. Here, however, she was ignored by everyone, and being unable to bear the ignominy, she threw herself into the fire and perished. Siva was furious, and immediately created out of a lock of his hair the formidable Veerabhadra, who destroyed Daksha. He then retired to a forest with a firm resolve never to marry again, and sat beneath a banyan tree plunged in meditation. In this form he is known as the Dakshinamoorthy (the yogic pose).

Beyond the Kambattadi Mantap and towards the eastern gateway are four figures—three (Bhāirava, Veerabhadra, and Sabapathy) are forms of Siva and the fourth represents the goddess Kālī. Each is animated by a sense of motion and rythm and “their numerous limbs and elaborate ornaments and attributes make them probably the greatest triumph of technical skill in stone-cutting to be found within the temple walls”. The most remarkable of these figures is that of Siva in the form of Sabapathy exhibiting a rare type of dance, which is referred to as the Urdhva dance and represents the God with his right leg raised straight up so as to reach the top of his ear. The origin of this dance, according to local tradition is as follows: A conflict arose between Siva and Kālī as to which



34. Siva as a dancer.



35. Kali.

of the two was the better dancer. Siva found to his dismay that Kali followed him without difficulty in every kind of dance, and to put an end to her pride, he lifted up his right leg to his ear. This attitude Kali could not, with modesty, imitate and had to acknowledge herself defeated. Another story says that Siva, while dancing, dropped his ear-ring on the ground. He succeeded in picking it up with his toe, and put it in his ear-lobe, without being noticed by anybody or interrupting the dance. Students of the Nāṭyasastra will be reminded in this sculpture of the famous Lalatatilaka dance, in which the toe is used to put a mark on the forehead while dancing. Behind the

dancing Siva is the figure of Kanchanamala, a sorrowful old woman the mother of Goddess Meenakshi. She is seen doubting the virtue of Siva, her erratic son-in-law, whose strange dances and behaviour she could never comprehend. We see Siva on another pillar in the form of Veerabhadra. This is a dance that Siva performs in cemeteries and burning grounds, where heated with drink, he dances wildly with his wife Devi, accompanied by a troop of devils. This dance is evidently pre-aryan in origin.

Before leaving this part of the temple, we might observe that although the entire temple is called after Meenakshi, the area occupied by Sundareswar's shrine is more than double the area allotted to the Goddess. Again from an architectural and sculptural point of view, Meenakshi's portion of the temple can bear no comparison with that of Sundareswar. Further the Vimanas are different, the one above Sundareswar being at once larger and more beautiful than that above the Goddess. Taking these facts into consideration, it may be concluded that at the time the temple was built, Siva was considered of greater importance than his consort: in fact, the Jesuit missionaries in all their letters refer to this temple as the 'pagoda of Chokkanatha'. The prominence later given to the Goddess might have been due to a resurgence of Dravidian influence; and today the whole temple is named after Meenakshi, who is regarded as the guardian deity of the city.

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## THE HALL OF THOUSAND PILLARS.

At the entrance to this hall, we are greeted by some fine pieces of sculpture projecting from huge monolithic pillars. A characteristic of these figures is the boldness of their execution due to a freedom from convention and Sastraic restraint. They are executed with much spirit and are remarkable for their vivid facial expressions. The equestrian statue of Aryanatha Mudali, the famous minister who built this magnificent structure in about the middle of the 16th century, is given due prominence, for it is the first on the left as we enter. The personality of the talented general, his courage, energy and brilliance are well brought out in this noble sculpture. The erect posture and serene bearing show him to be a man of parts. (See Pl. 2). On the opposite side is the figure of Harischandra, the king who sacrificed everything for the sake of truth, and next to him is his devoted wife Chandramati with the corpse of her child in her arms. The expression on the face of Harischandra





36. A Korava.

and his wife tell us eloquently, if silently, the tragic story of their lives. Harischandra, a king of Ayodhya, was well-known for his love of truth. As it was impossible to wean him from the path of rectitude, the gods became jealous and reduced him, with his wife and child, to complete poverty, but they promised

that if Harischandra would only once break his word and thus acknowledge their superiority, everything would be restored to him. This however he could not be persuaded to do, and was accordingly compelled to end his days, with his faithful wife and son, in utter destitution. Here we see the former king and queen with the corpse of their child, who has just died from snake-bite.

Next to Chandramati, are the figures of a Korava and his wife. — The artist has depicted the woman



carrying three children — one on her back, one inside the basket and one clinging to her breasts. The rugged expression on the face of the man — a result of the hard life led by the labouring classes — is well brought out. But the Korava in spite of his hard lot is loaded with jewels of every description, thus

37. The Korava's wife.

illustrating the hoarding instinct of the thrifty

Hindu, which is older even than the temple! It may be of interest to point out that even to this day, his descendants, though they lead the same miserable existence, are invariably loaded with costly ornaments.

We now enter the so-called 1000-pillared mantap. There are actually only 985 pillars, as the space occupied by 15 columns is taken up by the small shrine of Nataraja.

The hall is a marvel of engineering skill, for the pillars are seen to be in a straight line when viewed from any angle. It is not therefore only the number of pillars which is so astonishing but more especially their peculiar arrangement. From any point inside the hall, there open up around us in all directions, sixteen colonnades of varying width and length. At each turn and at every step we take, the pillars rearrange themselves in orderly fashion as in a kaleidoscope, and from each new position different colonnades open to our view completely shutting out



38. Siva as a warrior.

previous impressions, and at the end of each converging colonnade may be seen the outer light. To achieve this effect, the architect had to take great care that all the pillars should be of exactly the same size and shape, and each had to be placed in a mathematically accurate position. Then again, it was necessary that the whole structure should form a perfect square. Halls of this type, a feature of all great Dravidian temples, appear to have been used for social and political meetings, when the central stage was visible at the



same time to a large crowd of people: any other arrangement of the pillars would not have secured this object.

Of the figures inside the Hall, that of Saraswati, the goddess of learning, calls for special mention. The attenuated waist, the shapely breasts and delicately

39. Saraswati, the goddess of learning chiselled hands will appeal to the artist's eye. The lute is placed in the correct position and even the strings are cut in stone.



40. Subrahmanya.



41. Rati, the goddess of love.

The meticulous attention to detail is also illustrated in the sharp finger nails, without which it is impossible to play on this musical instrument. Observe also the careful delineation of the veins on the feet of the damsel on an adjoining pillar. The figure of Subrahmanya, the War-god on his agile peacock, is worthy of attention. Further inside will be found a row of sculptured pillars on either side. Among these may be noted a curious figure with a long beard, but having breasts. The casual observer might take this to be a freak of the artist's imagination, but such a view would be wrong. For there is not

a single sculpture in the temple that has not a meaning and a tradition behind it. This sculpture represents Arjuna in the form of a eunuch: we are told that Urvashi, a celestial damsel fell in love with him, but as he failed to respond to her affection he was cursed to take this form.

Close by is the beautiful figure of Rati, the goddess of love, seated astride her 'hamsa', (a bird resembling a swan), with a maid of great beauty in attendance. Further on, we may stop to notice the



figure of a man carrying a woman on his shoulders. This is apparently a representation of the future Kali age when, according to predictions, man will be entirely subservient to woman.

These figures throw a great deal of light on the customs and manners prevailing at the time. The footwear

and the head dresses give an idea of the fashions of that period.

**The Obscene  
in Hindu Art.**

In this mantap may be seen a large number of so-called 'obscene' figures, which though occupying inconspicuous places on the various pillars cannot be said to be entirely without significance. Such figures will be found in almost every niche and corner of the temple. Are these then a mere aberration of the artist's morbid fancy? Or the result of pent-up emotion and restraint, which must have an outlet? I think not. The Hindu mind has never regarded the act of procreation as a thing obscene and unmentionable. Religion is so inextricably mixed up with the Hindu's workaday life, that every physical act is given a religious significance. Thus, as we have seen, the sacred linga is itself a representation of the male procreative organ; in allegory, what more striking emblem of the Creator and of Eternity? "To those who are childless and who pray for the blessing of issue, what more potent representation of power to anoint and pray to? Yet as a lesser vehicle of sensuous human nature, what unseemly depths may be reached!" The worship of the creative energy of God represented by the symbols of the Linga and the Yoni in union is apparently as old as man himself.

On many of the pillars in the Madura temple and specially in the thousand-pillared mantap, there are to be found a number of sexual figures, known as 'Mithunas'. Some of these appear to be translations in stone of verses from that classical work on the Hindu

science of Love: the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana. These figures are not intended to be obscene, for



43. A Mithuna.

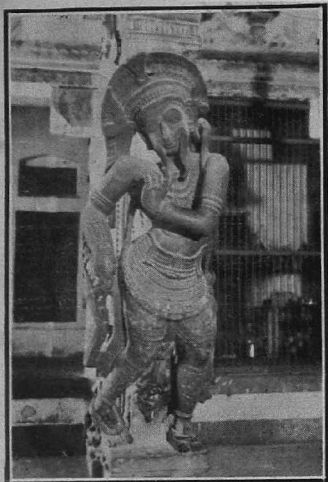
they have, as stated earlier, a certain religious significance. One of the texts relating to the choice of a site for a temple or shrine suggests that the best site is one where loving couples, human or animal, have lived, loved and reared their offspring, "Where the surabhis (a type of cow) have dallied with the bulls accom-

panied by their young ones, where beautiful women have dallied with their lovers: that place is worthy of all classes of people". Is it possible then that when the architect was compelled to build on a site not so sanctified, he sought to remedy the defect by depicting the figures of men and women in the love-embrace? The theory gains support when it is remembered that the underground cave-temples (which could not possibly have been sanctified by the love-play of human beings or of animals) have the largest number of such sexual figures.

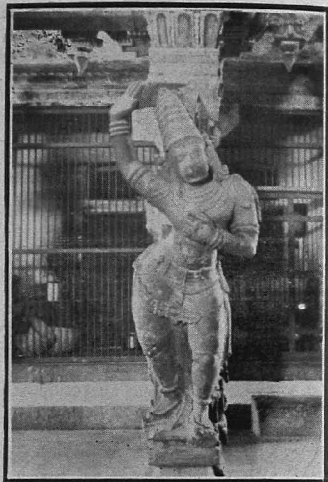


The foreigner, on visiting a Hindu temple, may be inclined to form the opinion that Hindu religion and art are debauched by an over-emphasis on sex. This short explanation will, we hope, help in some measure at least, to disabuse him of such an erroneous impression and provide him with some insight into the Hindu attitude towards sex.

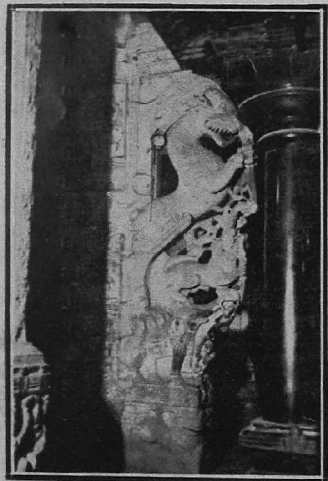
Leaving the temple through the **Pudumantapam** eastern gate-way and crossing the road, we enter the Pudumantapam or the 'new pavilion'. This was probably the latest creation of Thirumala and must therefore have appeared quite 'new' when compared with the surrounding structures. This splendid hall, built entirely of stone, measures 333 feet by 105 feet and is 25 feet in height. It was commenced in 1623 and is said to have taken 22 years to complete, but this appears to be an exaggerated estimate. The flat roof is supported by 124 sculptured columns, and the sloping eaves of the ceiling are very delicately carved, although the material consists of the hardest granite. Each pillar is different from its neighbour, but the proportions of the pillars have been so carefully worked out, that the deviations only serve to enhance the beauty of the hall. The sculptures represent 'yalis' (See Pls. 46 and 47), warriors on horseback trampling on men and animals, and some legends from the Sthala Puranam. "As works exhibiting difficulties overcome by patient labour they are unrivalled by anything found elsewhere".



44.



45.



46.



47.

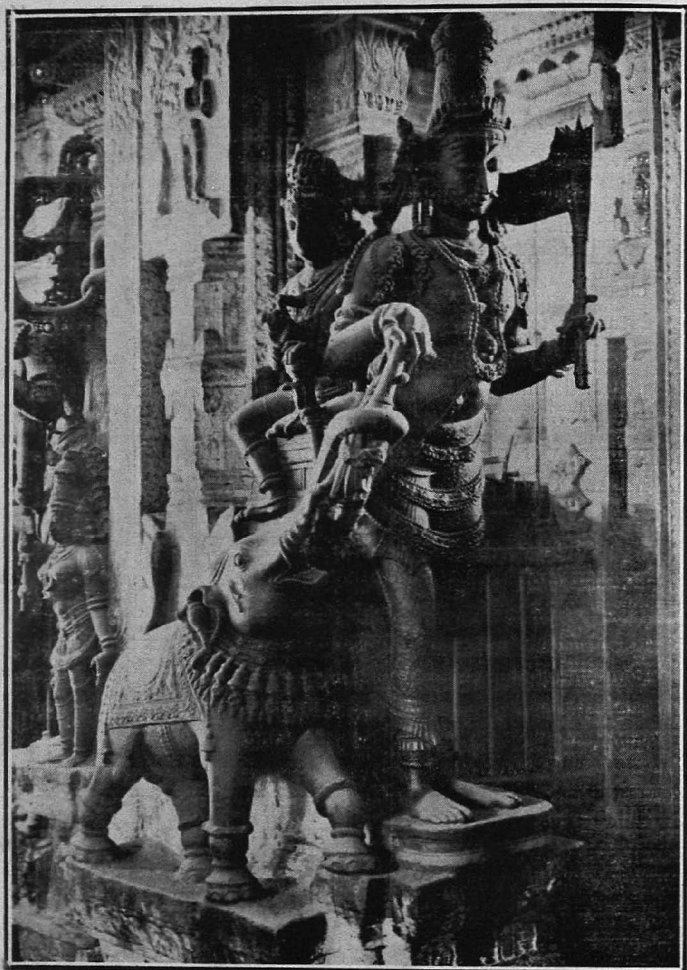
Some Typical Monolithic Pillars.

On the central columns may be seen life-size figures of the ten Naik kings from Viswanatha to Thirumala, whose statue is the best among them. The women alongside the main statues represent the wives of these kings. As has been pointed out earlier,\* the figures are extremely realistic. The Hall is surrounded by a moat built of stone and during the hottest months of the year, the unsightly shops are cleared, the moat is filled with water and floating lotuses, and the God Sundaeswar is brought for worship every evening into the elevated porch of polished black stone. This Hall is also known as the Vasanta (Spring) mantapam and was intended primarily for the comfort of the God during the hottest days of the year.

One of the pillars (See Pl. 48) represents the popular story of the stone elephant eating a sugarcane. The story goes that Siva appeared in Madura in the form of a saint performing miracles. The contemporary Pandyan king doubted his powers, until the saint made the stone elephant in the temple devour a piece of sugarcane offered to it by the king.

To the east of this mantap is  
**The** the Rayagopuram which, had it been  
**Rayagopuram.** completed, would have been one of  
 the grandest structures of its kind in  
 India. The foundation is so deep that it was obviously

\* See p. 27.



48. The Pandyan Ruler and the Stone Elephant.

meant to be of tremendous height. As it is, the unfinished base measures 174 feet by 107 feet, and the entrance is nearly 22 feet wide. The tall slender door-posts, sixty feet in height, consist of single blocks of granite covered with the most exquisitely carved designs of foliage. Local tradition has it that one of these pillars had cracked and the whole ambitious project was therefore abandoned. This is only one of 70 similar Rayagopurams which Thirumala planned to construct, but none of them got beyond the foundation. It was called the 'Raya' gopuram as it was built in honour of the Raya or Emperor of Vijayanagar, who was the overlord of the Naik kings of Madura.

### **The Elukadal.**

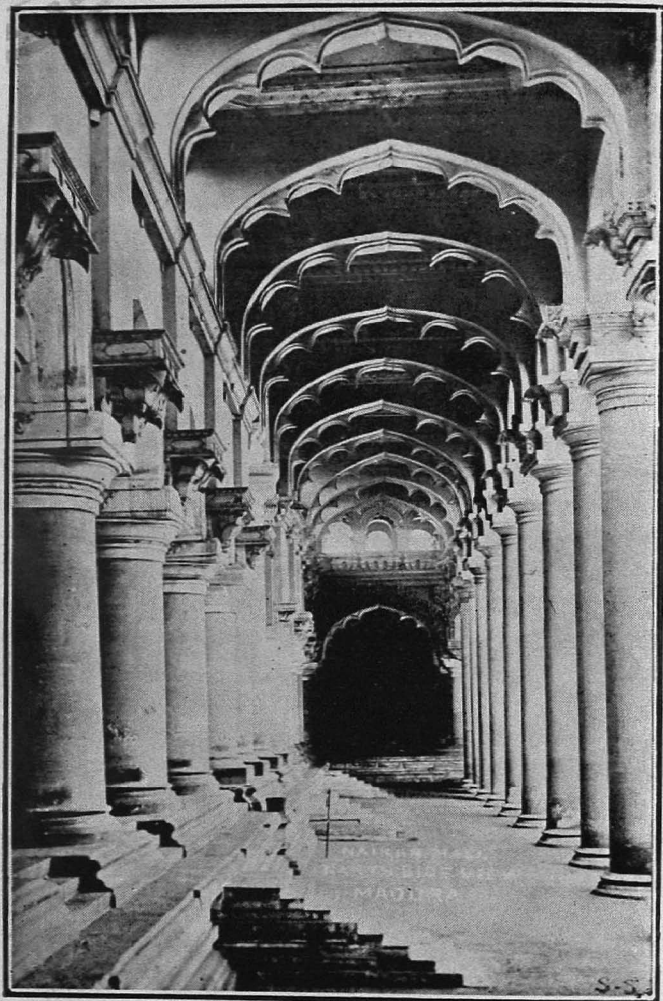
A little beyond the Rayagopuram and further east is a large tank known as the Elukadal (Seven seas). The story goes that Kanchanamala, the mother of Goddess Meenakshi, was too old to travel outside Madura, but she ardently desired to have a bath in the seven sacred oceans. Sundareswar accordingly obtained the waters of the seven seas by excavating seven deep wells, four of which have supposedly been located in this tank.

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PART III.

**OTHER PLACES OF INTEREST.**



49. Thirumala Naik Palace.



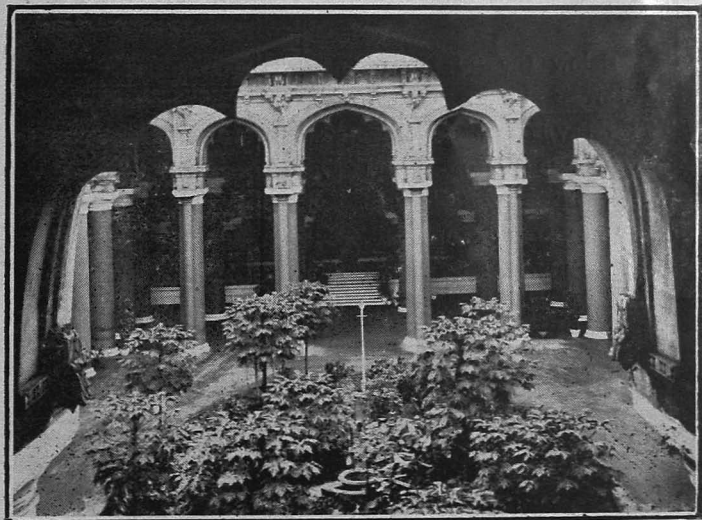
**Thirumala Naik  
Palace.**

An old map of Madura town shows that the palace buildings originally occupied a space larger than that occupied by the Meenakshi temple. We would not be far wrong in assuming that the front entrance to the palace was at the junction of the South and East Masi streets — the present ten pillars being the remnants of a grand structure east of the palace. Only one block now remains. Chokkanatha, the grandson of Thirumala began the dismantling process when he conceived the fantastic idea of shifting his capital to Trichinopoly and erecting a new palace there. He carried away the polished granite pillars and other valuable building materials, but succeeded in constructing only a second-rate building, which has remained unknown to fame.

The difference in style between this building and the temple is remarkable. It is a contrast between civil and religious architecture. The architect is not here bound by the rigid laws of the Silpa Sastras. Further the building has been designed with a view

to use as well as to ornamentation. The whole construction has been declared by competent authorities to be the largest and most perfect specimen of palace architecture existing anywhere south of a line drawn from Bombay to Calcutta. We have here an agreeable combination of Hindu, Muhammadan and Gothic architecture. Fergusson remarks that "In its dimensions it possesses all the structural propriety of a Gothic building. It is evident that if the Hindus had persevered a little longer in this direction, they would have accomplished something that would have surpassed the works of their masters in this form of art". As in the temple, timber has been rigourously excluded—the palace being constructed entirely of brick and plaster. Whereas the horizontal roof is exclusively used in the temple, the dome and the arch predominate here. In fact the arch is used for almost every conceivable purpose and yet it does not appear to be overdone. The skill of the Hindu architect in adapting other systems of architecture to his own uses, and in carefully selecting the good points of foreign systems while rejecting the faulty ones, is apparent in every detail of the palace. It cannot therefore be alleged that the Hindu architect was so much bound by rules that he was incapable of learning from observation. The existing remains are sufficient to show that the craftsman of Thirumala's days attained as high a standard of perfection in civil as in religious architecture.

The palace consists of two oblong blocks. The smaller is 135 feet long and about 70 feet wide and its roof is in the shape of a pointed arch. The larger of the two buildings is even more impressive. The District Gazetteer describes it as consisting of "A great open courtyard 252 feet long and 151 feet wide, round which runs a roofed arcade of great beauty supported on tall stone pillars 40 feet in height, connected by foliated brick arches of much elegance of design, ornamented with Hindu design carried out in the fine shell-lime plaster which almost resembles marble. Round three sides of this court, at the back



50. The Palace—Another View.

of the arcade, runs a very handsome line of lofty cloisters, 43 feet wide and upheld by three parallel rows of pillars supporting arches some 26 feet high. In the middle of two sides of this are large domes built on pillars of the same height as those of the outer arcade and an upper gallery runs all round it. On the fourth side of the court, the cloister is much deeper and finer, being altogether 105 feet wide, supported on five rows of huge pillars and roofed with three great domes, the central and largest of which measures 60 feet in diameter and is 73 feet above the ground. In front of it stands a magnificent portico, the pillars of which are 55 feet high to the spring of the arches".

Below the 60 feet dome is the Swarga Vilasam or throne room. An old manuscript states that "This pavilion is so constructed as to cause it to be said that in no other country is there a court equal to it, by reason of its splendid ornaments, their excellence, number, extent, curious workmanship, and great beauty. To the west, in the midst of a great dome-shaped hall, is a square building of black stone, inside which is a chamber made of ivory. In the centre of this is a jewelled throne, on which the king is accustomed to take his seat at the great Navaratri (nine-nights') festival, surrounded by all his banners or ensigns of royalty, and before which all kings are accustomed to do homage".

This room may be compared with the Diwan-i-Aum or great audience hall in the Moghul Palace at Delhi. There likewise, the dome is 60 feet high, and at the rear of the audience hall was the celebrated peacock throne of the Moghuls. In the Madura palace too, the audience hall is of polished granite with an enclosure of ivory in which stood the jewelled throne of the Naiks. In both cases the thrones have disappeared, but the story of their existence is a well-documented fact. The palace was almost in ruins when the British took possession of the city: almost every part of the building was cracked and about to fall. In 1888 Lord Napier, the Governor of Madras wrote a strong minute emphasizing the necessity of restoring all ancient ruins and this palace in particular and, thanks largely to his personal interest in the matter, a sum of over Rs. 500,000 was spent in repairs and restoration. It is now treated as an ancient monument and is preserved according to the provisions of the Ancient Monuments' Act.

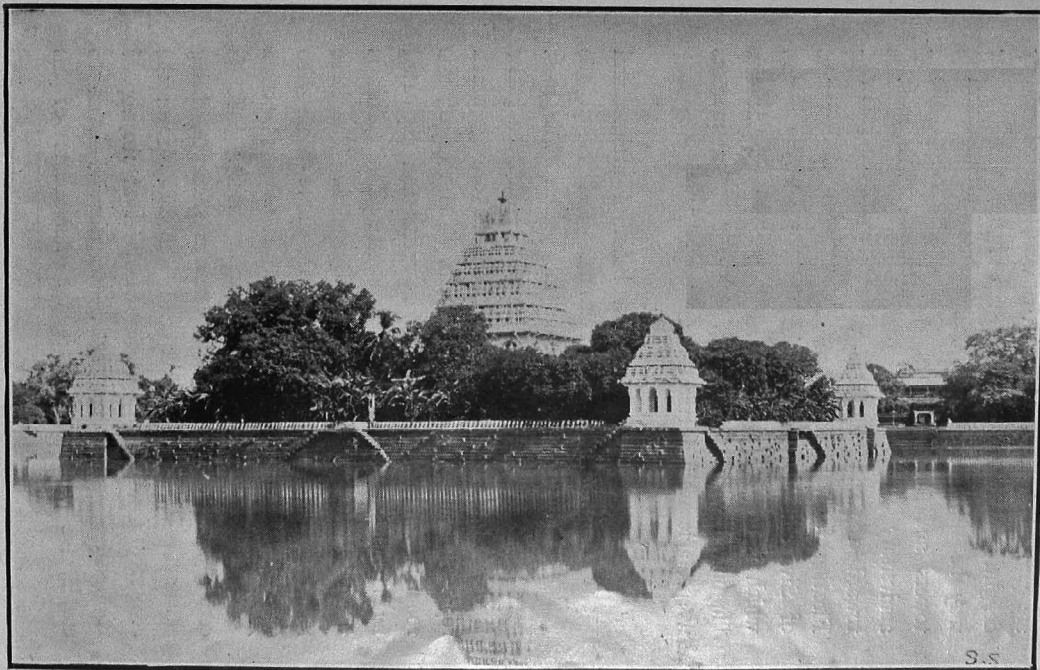
The palace is unfortunately used for various public offices and courts for which it is in no way suited, for the ventilation is poor and the acoustics worse. The partitions put up for the convenience of these offices go a long way to detract from its original beauty. The palace would however serve as an ideal place for a public museum, which the city badly requires. When the new District courts are constructed

north of the river, the palace will, it is hoped, after the neglect of a couple of centuries, be restored to something like its original grandeur.

**The** This tank is commonly known  
**Teppakulam.** as the Vandiyur or the Mariamman  
 Teppakulam. It measures 1000 feet  
 on the north and south and 950 feet

on the east and west, and curiously enough occupies an area almost ~~exactly~~ equivalent to that of the great temple. It is an artificial reservoir, built by Thirumala Naik in about the year 1645, for the use of the goddess Meenakshi. This remarkably beautiful tank is the largest stone-built teppakulam in the whole of Southern India and is never empty as it is fed by means of a channel from the river Vaigai. Tradition points to this spot as the place where the bricks for Thirumala Naik's Palace were made. Here too was found in the course of excavation the huge image of Ganapathi, which is now placed in the temple.\* Thirumala Naik could not overlook such a propitious omen and decided straightaway to construct a teppakulam on the sacred spot. Here every morning the pious Hindu may be seen taking his bath. In the centre of the reservoir is a beautiful little island, also faced with cut granite. From the midst of the green palms and flowering trees growing on it, rises the tower of a small white temple. The four little white turrets emerging from a green background of trees.

\* See p. 52



51. The Teppakulam.

are particularly graceful and the whole presents a very delightful picture. From the top of the central tower may be obtained a magnificent view of the temple towers and the palace in the distance. On every anniversary of Thirumala Naik's birthday, which falls towards the end of January, the famous Teppam or Floating - festival takes place. After nightfall the images of Siva and Meenakshi are floated on a raft (teppam), which is dragged round the island and the Teppakulam, illuminated with thousands of coloured lights, presents a spectacle well worth seeing.

This is a beautiful architectural relic of Thirumala and is in the same style as the palace. The most noteworthy feature of this Bungalow is the 'Lotus Hall' so-called from the ceiling, which represents an inverted lotus bloom. The roof of this room is a masonry dome 21 feet across and supported by crenulated arches resting on square pillars. This is the oldest part of the Tumkum Bungalow. The large polished black stone pillars in the ante-room also deserve attention. The word 'Tamakamu' is a Telugu word meaning 'a summer house.' It is certainly well adapted as a summer residence, being situated north of the river and well away from the congested town area. The small turret at the top of the building was, according to tradition, designed to enable the king to watch the movements of his



Muhammadan enemies from the north and commands, it is claimed, a distance of 18 miles in this direction.

It is not known who built the Tumkum. Oral tradition credits Thirumala and Mangammal with having constructed it, but as almost every ancient building in Madura is popularly credited to either of these two persons, the story counts for little: it seems probable however that it was constructed by Thirumala's grandson. The Tamkum is now the residence of the District Collector.

This is a small temple likely to be overlooked by the casual visitor. It stands no comparison with the Meenakshi temple, but has many individual points of interest. The presiding deity is known as Koodal Alagar and the tank in front of the temple is used ~~for carrying~~ for carrying the god round on a raft at the annual festival. The Perumal Temple is very ancient and can claim an antiquity at least as great as that of the Meenakshi temple itself. The contrast in architectural style between the two is noteworthy: whereas in the latter we are first met by four colossal towers and smaller ones rapidly diminishing in size until finally we reach the shrine of the central deity, which is altogether of insignificant proportions, in the former the chief tower stands in the centre of the temple directly above the deity, and the

other towers are subordinated to this central one and help to heighten its effect. In this temple the structure has been strictly confined to the barest essentials of worship and simplicity is the keynote of the style. The 1000-pillared hall, so prominent in other South Indian temples, is conspicuously absent, as also the miscellaneous pavilions, mantaps, cloisters and corridors. The central tower is in the shape of a perfect pyramid and has a circular cupola at its apex, ending in a pointed golden spear-head. The style of the Meenakshi temple is altogether more complex and involved. Both types however satisfy the highest aims of art and it would appear from the dates of construction of the two temples that the simpler preceded the more complex in accordance with the normal laws of historical evolution. According to Fergusson, the dome of this temple surpasses anything of its kind to be found in South India.

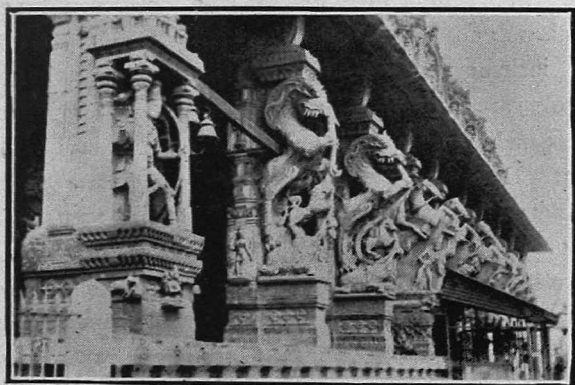
Situated in the midst of the  
**The Mosque.** Muhammadan hamlet of Goripalayam is a large mosque which is the most sacred place of Moslem worship in Madura. It contains two tombs in which lie the last remains of two Sultans of Delhi. The chief feature of interest is the massive dome (69 feet in diameter and 22 feet from base to apex), which is cut out of a single block of stone. According to tradition, Thirumala Naik intended this dome for his famous palace, but owing to the

insuperable difficulty of transport across the river Vaigai, the idea was abandoned. The liberal-minded Hindu monarch then proceeded to build this magnificent mosque for the benefit of his Moslem subjects.

**Tiruppuran -  
kunram.**

This sacred place is situated four miles south of Madura. The Muhammadans claim that the name is properly Sikkander Malai, after a fakir called Sikkander who is buried at the top of the hill. The place was formerly an outpost of Madura and figures in several of its wars, but to-day it is famous for its temple, dedicated to the god Subrahmanya. According to tradition, the granite of this hill was used for the purpose of constructing the Madura temple. On the very summit of the hill is the tomb of the fakir Sikkander. Here is a curious instance of Hinduism and Islam living side by side on terms of great intimacy and mutual tolerance, for nowhere else in India are we likely to find a Hindu temple and a Muhammadan mosque in such close proximity. Many devout Hindus actually worship the Moslem Saint Sikkander and the pious Moslem may be seen offering his homage to the Hindu deity. This is characteristic of the broad spirit of religious tolerance for which Madura has always been justly famous. In the whole history of the town, there has never been a clash between the two religions, and this may well be claimed as a unique record.

The temple of Subrahmanya belongs to a fairly high type of architecture. Its innermost shrine is cut out of the solid rock and in front of this are a series of mantaps built at different levels. The lowest of these mantaps, the horse-court of the temple, is a fine example of Naik architecture. The temple itself is a tribute to Thirumala's love of art and sculpture and it is appropriate that a statue of this great builder should stand at the side of the shrine. In the outermost mantap, is a statue of Mangammal, with her favourite minister. (See Pl. 4). Observe the diminutive stature of the minister alongside the figure of his queen and alleged mistress; this diminutive form is intended to indicate his inferior status, when compared with royalty. The building contains several inscriptions, one of which states that

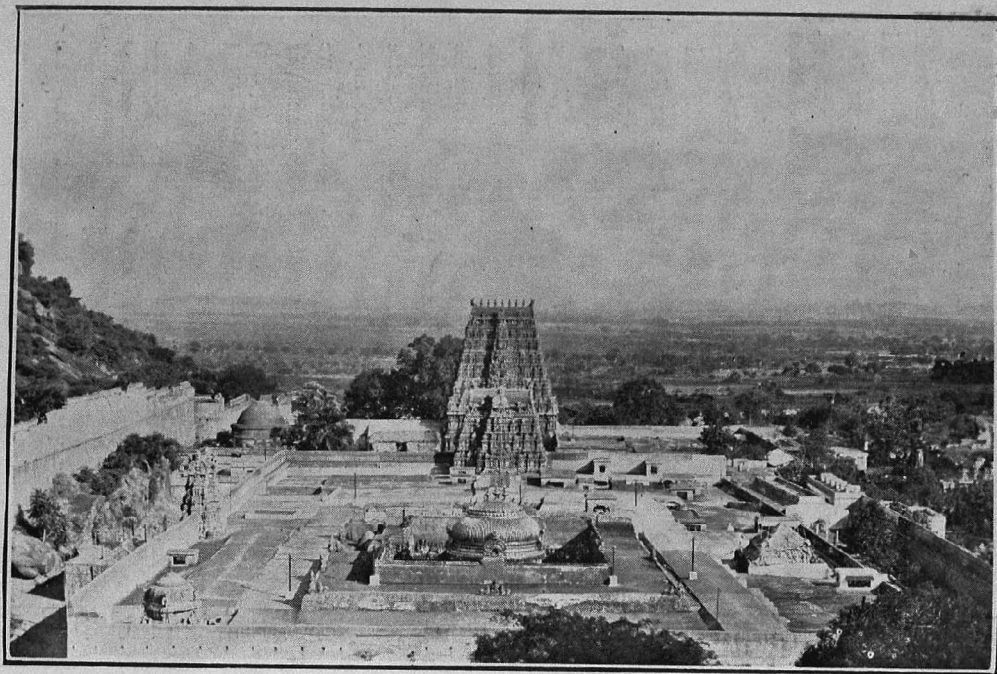


52. The Pillars in the Horse-Court of the Temple,  
Tiruppurankunram.

in the year 1792, a regiment of Europeans seized this town and was forcing its way into the temple; the priests fearing that its sanctity would be violated, prevailed upon a man called Kutti to throw himself down from the gopuram as a protest. When the man did so, the regiment withdrew; the temple was thus saved and Kutti (who evidently survived) was given a grant for his heroic action.

Another place of equal interest  
**Alagar Koil.** closely connected with Madura and  
 its temple is the famous Alagar Koil.

The temple is situated amidst very picturesque surroundings. Starting southwards from the foot of the hill and encircling the ruins of the old town of Alagar Koil runs a high rectangular wall faced with stone and brick and measuring 730 yards by 400 yards. On entering this place one sees on the western side a carved stone mantapam supposed to have been built by Thirumala, and inside which are several life-size statues. Some of these sculptures are as good as anything to be found in the Madura temple. Here again we find one of the famous unfinished Rayagopurams of Thirumala Naik. Further west is the Vasanta (Spring) mantapam, which like its namesake in the Meenakshi temple serves as a hot-weather retreat for the god. It contains a square central mantapam surrounded by a stone channel designed to hold the cooling stream of water. There is a festival in which the god of this temple is closely connected with the

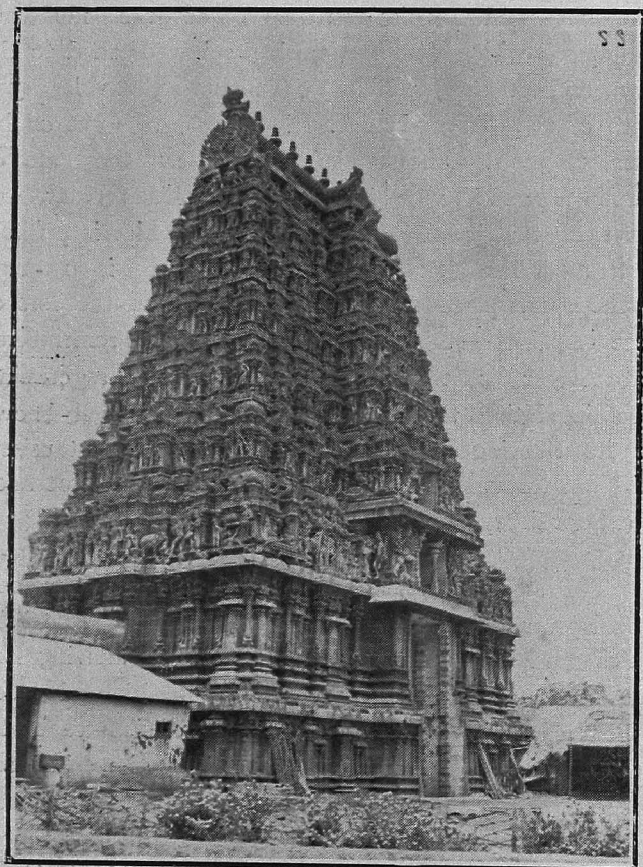


53. The Alagar Koil Temple.

goddess Meenakshi in Madura. About April or May, each year, the god Alagar proceeds on his sacred journey to Madura to attend the marriage anniversary of Meenakshi and Sundareswar. Alagar is carried in a large palanquin and halts at each of the numerous mantapams which line the twelve miles of road to the town, and eventually stops at Tallakulam, a village just north of the Vaigai bridge. Before he sets out on his journey, the palanquin is stopped at the gate of Karuppanaswami, who is regarded as his servant, and a list of the jewels he is taking with him is publicly recited. When he gets back, the list is re-read in the same place as a precaution against the loss of these valuables—this is necessary when it is remembered that Alagar is the god of the Kallars, a criminal tribe inhabiting the Madura country and well-known for its thieving propensities. The religious enthusiasm exhibited throughout the whole of this state-procession is extraordinary.

The story which popularly accounts for the god's annual journey is that Alagar, the brother of Meenakshi, comes to Madura for her marriage, but arriving too late for the ceremony, he returns in high dudgeon without entering the town. The story has no canonical authority and there is no real connection between Alagar's journey and the wedding, for before Thirumala's regime the two functions took place at different times; the former occurring in the month of Chitrai (April).

or May) and the latter in Masi (February or March). Thirumala combined the two festivals for the convenience of pilgrims by fixing the wedding in Chitrai, in which month it is celebrated at the present time.



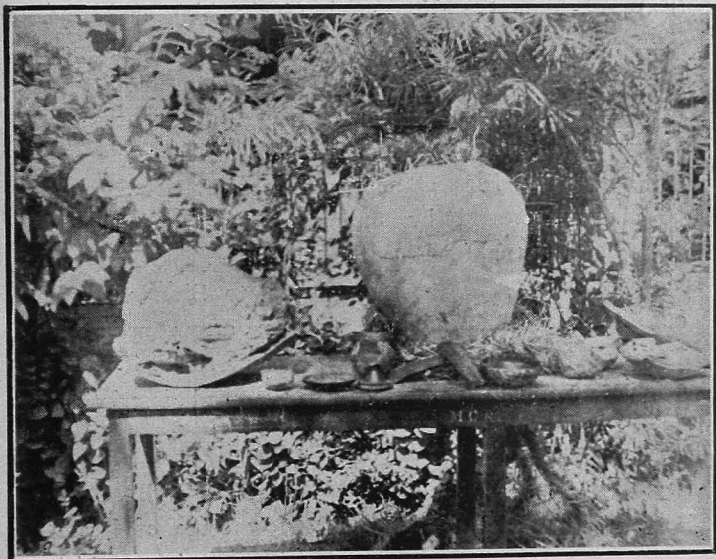
54. Alagarkoil Temple - the Main Tower.



The combined celebration, known as the Chitrai festival, is the grandest event in Madura and attracts over 100,000 pilgrims every year.

### **Burial of the living.**

To a student of archaeology and history, the city and its environments afford ample opportunities for research. Very recently, in a village called Anuppanady just two miles from the town, some earthen-ware jars containing a number of human bones were unearthed: the jars also contained



55. Buried Alive?

a number of small pots, and pans which were presumably intended for use after burial. The villagers stated that it had been an old custom of this village to bury living men when they grew old and became a burden on others. The jars which are of varying size, are most of them less than 5 feet in height. Similar vessels may still be seen buried in the ground at Anuppanady.

Some mention should be made  
**Anamalai.** of the three hills that surround the city of Madura:— the Anamalai (Elephant-hill), the Nagamalai (Snake-hill) and the Pasumalai (Cow-hill). The Anamalai, a rocky eminence lying north of the town, owes its name to its resemblance to a squatting elephant. The Sthala puranam narrates a legend to account for the curious shape of this hill. The Jains, attempting to convert the Saivites of Madura, created by means of magic a gigantic elephant that would subdue the Hindus. The Pandyan king on seeing the elephant prayed to Siva, who at once transfixed the monster with an arrow upon the very spot where its petrified remains now stand. The hill contains a number of Jain images and inscriptions dating back to the time of the great Asoka.

The 'Snake-hill' is well-named  
**Nagamalai.** for it is a long low ridge of barren rock of very uniform height, which approaches to within 3 or 4 miles of Madura town.

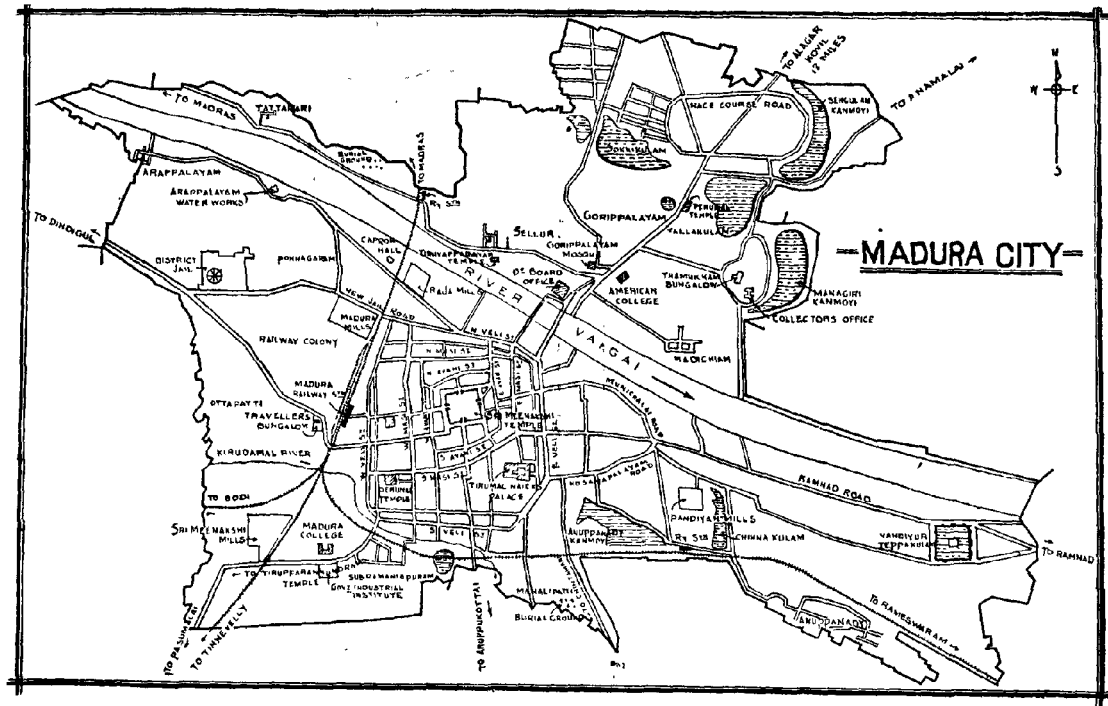
Local legend declares that it is the remains of a gigantic snake, also conjured up by the black magic of the Jains. This demon too was promptly destroyed by Siva, the powerful protector of Hinduism, and thus prevented from devouring the sacred city it so nearly approaches.

                    Foiled in their attempts to over-  
**Pasumalai.**     come the Saivites, the Jains in despair  
                    conjured up a colossal cow. They were  
confident that the Hindus would not dare kill this  
animal, which they regard as sacred. But Siva  
again rose to the occasion: he caused his bull, Nandi,  
to increase enormously in bulk and sent it out to  
meet the enemy, who seeing her lord approach was  
so overcome with passion that she lay down and died.  
Her petrified remains form the present hill, called  
Pasumalai, which lies to the south of the town.  
Thus were the Jains not merely vanquished, but the  
three hills round Madura stand as permanent monu-  
ments of this signal victory of Hinduism over Jainism.

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PART IV,  
**THE MODERN CITY.**



Although Madura's primary claim to fame is her magnificent temple with its ancient historical associations, hers is by no means a glory that is past. Today she ranks as the second city of the Presidency both in size and importance, Madras itself being the first. The population of the town, which covers an area of 8 square miles, is 186,000, and the municipality, the wealthiest after Madras, has an annual income exceeding 15 lakhs of rupees. With a flourishing cotton-spinning industry already firmly established, an ambitious and progressive business population, and highly favourable natural conditions, there is little doubt that the city has a future full of promise.

Of the total population, the large majority are Tamil Hindus of different castes, 40,000 are Sourashtras, 20,000 Muslims, and 8,000 Christians. Some description must be given of the Sourashtras—a community which is peculiar to Madura and not indigenous to South India. These people are a handsome race with polite manners and customs, and their outstanding quality is a keen

business ability which has established for them a prosperous and honoured position in the city to which they came originally as refugees. It is they, in fact, who are mainly responsible for the present prosperity of Madura. The Sourashtras speak a dialect of Guzerati and originally migrated from Guzerat about the fifth century A. D. They were gradually driven further south by successive Muhammadan invasions, but continued to carry on their time-honoured profession of weaving and soon established a reputation for the beautiful silks they manufactured. Owing to their skill they were in great demand at the courts of the Hindu monarchs in South India, who extended to them their patronage and so established their position. The success of these people is largely due to their strong *esprit de corps*, but they have not yet adapted themselves to modern methods of large-scale production; and this would appear to explain the present stagnation of the weaving industry in Madura. The Sourashtras would do well to utilize the large capital at their disposal to organise their business on more modern and systematic lines, and so continue to maintain their reputation for business enterprise and industry.

Another important commercial community are the Nadars, an unassuming yet business-like set of people who practically enjoy the monopoly of all the retail trade in Madura.



## INDUSTRIES.

Madura has been an important centre of commerce and industry from earliest times. The munificent patronage extended by the Naik Kings attracted skilled artisans of every description, who found in this great city ample scope for the exercise of their varied talents. Recent years have, however, witnessed the gradual but certain extinction of the artistic element among the hereditary castes of skilled craftsmen such as the sculptors, stone masons, ivory workers and painters. While some attempt is being made to preserve the great monuments of the past, the descendants of the trained artisans who were responsible for creating them, are allowed to languish for want of patronage. It is not surprising therefore that they should turn in disgust to the baser but more lucrative trades, for which alone modern civilisation offers remuneration. In recent years Madura has followed the example of other industrial cities and concentrated on the production of such commodities as are in demand among the masses.

The chief industries are spinning, **Spinning.** weaving and dyeing. The several large cotton mills in Madura employ about 15,000 labourers: of these the Madura Mills, which incidentally is the fourth largest spinning factory in the world, employs about 12,000 men and women.

This important company was started in 1892 by the Harvey Brothers and is in a very flourishing condition. It has about a quarter of a million spindles humming with activity all through the day and night. The climate and other conditions in Madura are favourable for the production of a very fine count of thread and the output of these Mills is enormous. The thread is of extremely uniform quality and is so well standardised that it finds a ready market. There are also some other Indian-owned Mills, e. g., The Meenakshi Mills and the Rajah Mills.

It is surprising that although a large quantity of cotton and silk thread is manufactured, there is no large weaving factory in Madura. Most of the cloth, both cotton and silk, is manufactured on hand-looms, of which there are about 6,200 in the town. Almost every Sourashtra house has a loom which is worked by every member of the family—man, woman and child. The handloom weaver has successfully met all competition from Indian mill-made cloth as well as foreign products, for he practically holds the monopoly of the more intricate and artistic patterns. The freedom he enjoys is reflected in his character, for he maintains a sturdy independence when compared with the mill-cooly. The latter is not only at the mercy of his employer, but is rendered entirely degenerate by the unnatural conditions of factory labour

and a wretched existence eked out in the slums which surround every large mill.

Gold and silver lace is manufactured on a large scale and is able to hold its own against outside competition by virtue of its fineness and durability, as compared with the foreign tinsel article which quickly tarnishes. The lace is used on the sarees and turbans for which Madura is famous. Scarves, brocades and silks of extremely fine texture and beautiful design resembling the Benares product, are also manufactured, and there is a demand for these from European and American ladies who make use of them for evening wear. Silk and cotton are extensively woven, the bulk of the cotton production taking the form of solid bordered cloths which cannot at present be woven on power-looms. The gold and silver brocade cloths that are manufactured would satisfy the demands of the most discriminating taste.

The well-known Madura sarees, famous throughout India, are of transparent cotton cloth which resembles muslin in its texture. They are made in delicate colours and the borders are of gold or silver lace of varied and artistic designs. These sarees are woven entirely on handlooms and though the demand for them is great, there is no mass production. Silk sarees of a rather heavy quality are also being manufactured and sold at very reasonable prices.

The next important industry is **Dyeing.** dyeing. The water of the river

Vaigai is very suitable for most dyeing processes and the Madura red cloths were famous in former days. Foreign dyestuffs have however, in recent years, almost ousted the native dyes.

The Sungadi-dyed sarees are a speciality of Madura. The pattern of these sarees is formed by small white spots on a coloured background and is pleasing in appearance. Although the same effect can be more easily achieved by wax-printing, the Sourashtra woman prefers the laborious process of tying a thousand knots per square yard of material. The cloth is then soaked in the dye and the knotted parts, which do not come into contact with the dye, appear as white spots. The women cultivate long finger nails for this work, as the knots are tied with very fine twisted yarn. Some idea of the industry of the Sourashtra woman may be gathered from the fact that she earns a trifling sum of three pies for tying a thousand knots!

Among the minor industries may be mentioned wood-carving, stone-carving and brass work. Nearly all the older houses in the town have doors and pillars beautifully carved with the most intricate designs in wood and stone. The elephant-legged Madura tables are a specialised product of this town

and are sold in large quantities to foreign tourists: they are too well known to need description. Madura has also specialised in the manufacture of brass vessels and various kinds of brass insects, icons and toys which are much fancied by the foreigner.

## THE AMENITIES OF LIFE.

### **Parks and Playgrounds.**

The city compares favourably with other Indian towns in the provision of amenities. There are a large number of parks and public playgrounds, but many more are required and are in process of formation. The most favoured rendezvous is the Race-course north of the river, so called on account of the elephant races that supposedly took place there in the days of Thirumala Naik. It has recently been laid out in lawns and flower-beds, with a casuarina hedge two miles in length. The air here is excellent and the place is much appreciated by the wealthier people who enjoy an outing to this spot, which is well away from the congested parts of the town.

### **Broadcasting.**

A regular broadcasting service was started by the Municipality in 1935. Vocal and instrumental music is relayed from the studio to eight loud-speakers situated in different parts of the town. Professional artistes of repute

and also local amateurs are engaged from time to time. Lectures on sanitation, public health, civic responsibilities and other subjects of educative value are frequently interspersed among the more entertaining items, and this has made the radio a useful weapon of propaganda.

There are about a dozen libraries  
**Libraries.** well-stocked with books in Tamil and English. The best known are the libraries at the Tamil Sangam, the Victoria Edward Hall and the Y. M. C. A.

The town has two first grade  
**Education.** colleges—the American College and the Madura College. There are also a large number of High Schools and elementary schools. Elementary education will shortly be made compulsory for both boys and girls residing within the Municipal area.

The most important hospitals are  
**Medical Relief.** the new Government Hospital and the two American Hospitals for men and women. These are well-equipped with the latest apparatus. The five Municipal Maternity Homes deserve special mention, as no less than 2,500 births receive skilled medical attention every year at these institutions; they provide for both ante-natal and post-natal

care of mother and child. There are also a large number of dispensaries which render useful service to the public. Indian systems of medicine are encouraged at the Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani dispensaries run by the Municipality. The public of Madura thus enjoy more facilities for medical treatment than most other South Indian towns.

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The future of the city depends almost entirely on the progress of its industries. The population has nearly doubled itself during the last 30 years and there is every indication of a capacity for further growth. With abundant cotton available in the neighbouring district of Ramnad, easy access to the southern sea ports, cheap electric power from Pykhara, and an enterprising business population, there is good reason to expect that the already established cotton industry will make great strides in the future, and that Madura will soon become the Manchester of South India.

But if industries are to keep pace with modern developments, there is need for improvement along well-considered lines. It is essential that an industrial institute, carrying out research in the latest methods of

spinning and weaving, should be established. A tinctorial laboratory and an experimental dye-house would be useful adjuncts to it, in order to afford the chemical and technical knowledge of which the dyers realise the need. There is no reason why the ancient industry of manufacturing gold and silver thread, which was formerly in the hands of the Moslem inhabitants of Madura, should not be revived under modern conditions: at present all the thread is imported from abroad. Local business magnates would also do well to study foreign methods of organisation, marketing and advertisement. The most important requisite for progress is, however, an intelligent operative whose senses have been sharpened and whose reactions are sufficiently rapid for modern methods of mass production; and to produce such men compulsory elementary education is essential. There is therefore considerable scope for the expansion of industry and it behoves those in charge of local administration to take a long-sighted view of the requirements of the town and provide for its expansion along carefully-planned lines.

THE END.