

# Sacred Heritage And The Historical Significance Of The Kizhvelur Kediliappar Temple In Tamil Nadu

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## Abstract

The Kizhvelur Kediliappar Temple, nestled in the culturally rich landscape of Tamil Nadu, stands as a testament to the profound historical and spiritual heritage of the region. This paper delves into the intricate fabric of its significance, tracing its origins, architectural marvels, and the enduring spiritual practices that have defined its existence over centuries. Through a multidisciplinary approach combining historical research, architectural analysis, and cultural exploration, this study unveils the layers of significance embedded within the temple complex. From its mythological roots to its role as a center for religious pilgrimage, the temple serves as a focal point for understanding the socio-religious dynamics of ancient and contemporary. Ultimately, this exploration underscores the Kizhvelur Kediliappar Temple's enduring relevance as both a sacred sanctuary and a living testament to the rich array of Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage.

**Key Words:** Sacred heritage, Chola temple, Kizhvelur, Kediliappar temple, Tamil Nadu.

## Introduction

Tamil Nadu, a state in southern India, embodies profound spiritual significance rooted in its rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and religious diversity. Its plethora of Hindu temples, including iconic sites like the Meenakshi Amman Temple and

Brihadeeswarar Temple, serve as sanctuaries for devotees from across the nation. The region's classical literature, such as the Sangam texts and devotional hymns of saints like the Alvars and Nayanars, imparts timeless spiritual wisdom. Tamil Nadu's pivotal role in the medieval Bhakti movement, Siddha tradition emphasizing physical and mental discipline and exploration of esoteric practices like Tantra and Yoga contribute to its spiritual drapery. Additionally, the presence of significant Christian and Muslim communities alongside Hinduism enriches its religious landscape. Vibrant festivals like Pongal and Navaratri offer occasions for communal worship and reflection. Through its sacred sites, literature, and cultural practices, Tamil Nadu continues to beckon seekers and devotees worldwide, remaining a beacon of spiritual enlightenment and cultural preservation. Temples, known as Sivalayams in Tamil, are places of worship dedicated predominantly to Lord Shiva, the supreme deity in the Shaivite tradition. While India hosts a significant number of Shiva temples, they are also found abundantly in other countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Cambodia. These temples vary greatly in size and significance, with some serving as major pilgrimage sites while others act as local centers of devotion. At the heart of many grand temples stands the principal deity, Lord Shiva, in various forms such as the iconic Shiva Lingam. Additionally, these temples often house shrines dedicated to other deities, contributing to the rich tapestry of spiritual practices within the Hindu tradition.

The Kizhvelur Kediliappar Temple, located in the town of Kizhvelur in Tamil Nadu, India, holds significant historical and cultural importance. Here are some key aspects contributing to its historical importance The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, known here as Kediliappar or Kedarnathar, and his consort Goddess Parvati, known as Periyanyaki or Kedilambika. As a place of worship, it holds religious significance for Hindus, especially devotees of Lord Shiva. Like many temples in South India, the Kediliappar Temple has ancient origins, dating back centuries. The exact date of its establishment is not precisely known, but it is believed to have been built during the Chola dynasty period, which ruled over this region between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Its architecture and inscriptions reflect the artistic and cultural achievements of that era.

The temple showcases the traditional Dravidian architectural style, which is renowned for its grandeur and intricate craftsmanship. Its towering gopurams (gateway towers), pillared halls, and intricately carved sculptures are noteworthy features. The temple's architecture serves as a testament to the skill and creativity of ancient artisans and architects. As a site of religious and cultural significance, the Kediliappar Temple has played a vital role in preserving and transmitting cultural traditions over the centuries. It serves as a center for religious rituals, festivals, and other cultural activities that are integral to the local community's identity. The temple likely contains inscriptions that provide valuable historical information about the region, including details about the rulers, patrons, and socio-economic conditions of the time. These inscriptions serve as important sources for historians and archaeologists studying the history of the Chola dynasty and its impact on South India. Over the centuries, the Kediliappar Temple has attracted pilgrims from far and wide who seek blessings and spiritual fulfillment. The temple's significance as a pilgrimage destination has contributed to its enduring importance and has helped sustain its cultural and religious legacy. The Kizhvelur Kediliappar Temple is not only a place of worship but also a repository of history, culture, and architectural heritage. Its ancient origins, architectural splendor, religious significance, and cultural importance collectively make it a site of historical importance in the region of Tamil Nadu

### **The Enigmatic Legacy of Senganan: A Tale of Valor, Devotion, and Temple Building**

Embedded within the verses of Tirumangai Alvar, a distinguished poet-saint hailing from Tirunaraiyur, lies a poignant homage to Kochenganan, a revered figure in ancient legend. This hymn lauds Kochenganan's extraordinary exploits and his profound devotion to the deity worshipped in the town's temple. The juxtaposition of his valor as a warrior alongside his piety forms a gripping narrative. Kochenganan, often synonymous with Chola Mannan, not only displayed formidable prowess on the battlefield but also demonstrated unwavering devotion to Lord Shiva. His fervor was so profound that he constructed an astonishing seventy temples in honor of the deity. Intriguingly, despite his allegiance to Shiva, Chola Mannan is noted for worshipping in the Vaishnava temple at

Tirunarai, a testament to the intricacies and depth of his spiritual journey.

In Alwar's verses, we delve into Senganan's military conquests, including his victories over a formidable elephant army, and the crucial role played by his cavalry. It becomes apparent that Cholamannan and Kochenganan are indeed one and the same. Cholamannan's cavalry and infantry are highlighted as pivotal elements in securing triumph over Cheramannan's elephant forces on the battlefield. The narrative extends beyond the borders of the Chola kingdom, unveiling Senganan's expansive military campaigns in Alundhai and Venni. It recounts a decisive battle where he triumphed over the Kurunila king named Vlantai Vel. The tales of his triumphs echo not only in the hymns of Tirumangaiyazwar but also in the verses of Thirunanasammandar and Sundaramurthy Nayanar, who extol the temples erected by Senganan in Ampur, Vaikal, and Nannilam. These sacred edifices, commissioned by Senganan, illuminate his profound dedication to his faith, embodied in the form of these temples. Sundara Chola's epistolary expressions further corroborate the assertion that these temples were erected by Senganan for Kaurisan, solidifying his historical stature as a prominent temple builder and devotee. Sekizhar's references to Senganan, his Chola lineage, and the documentation of his temple-building endeavors, including Jambugeswaram, leave little room for doubt regarding the identity of this Nayanar. Senganan, a mysterious figure whose life and devotion are intricately woven into the fabric of history, emerges as a compelling symbol of religious zeal and valor. His legacy endures in the narratives, hymns, and temples that continue to inspire and enthrall devotees to this day.

### **Thirunavukarasar and Sundaramurthy Nayanar**

Thirunavukarasar, alongside other Saivite philosophers like Thirunnasambandar and Sundarar, offers invaluable insights into the depths of Saivism's philosophy and its connection to broader religious ideologies. Notably, his verses often glorify Saivism, and references to Aksaya Linkakatilliapa are prevalent in his works. Thirunavukarasar, known as the "Ploughing Volunteer," was instrumental in temple maintenance, a practice revered as plowing among Saivas. Despite facing persecution, notably from Jain King Mahendra Pallava, Thirunavukarasar's devotion remained unyielding, eventually leading to Mahendra Pallava's conversion to

Saivism. In his later years, Thirunavukarasar, accompanied by a young Thirunanasambandar, embarked on Thala Yatras, showcasing his dedication to Saivism. His passing at Tirupukalur marked the end of a life dedicated to religious philanthropy, with Melakadampur's Amrithakadeshwarar temple holding special significance in his legacy. Sundaramurthy Nayanar, revered as one of Saivism's foremost saints, embodied dedication to Lord Shiva through his life's journey. Born as Nambiaruran, his encounter with Lord Shiva redirected his path, leading to a life of devotion and musical expression. Sundaramurthy's songs, known as 'Thirupta,' reflect his unwavering commitment to Saivism, reinforced by his marriage to Paravaiyar and Sangliyar, orchestrated by Lord Shiva himself. Anthakavi Veeraragava Mudaliyar, a distinguished poet, celebrated Sri Lanka's Bala Sekaran through his eloquent verses. Hailing from Chengalpattu, his literary contributions amplify the ancient glories of temples and serve as testaments to the worship of Muruga.

### **The Spiritual Journey of Muthuswamy Dikshitar**

The legacies of Thirunavukarasar, Sundaramurthy Nayanar, and Anthakavi Veeraragava Mudaliyar intertwine to enrich the tapestry of Saivism, reflecting devotion, resilience, and artistic expression. Muthuswamy Dikshitar, born on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of Panguni (October) in the year 1776, under the auspicious Karthikai Nakshatra, was the son of Ramaswami Dikshitar and Subbulakshmi Ammaiyar. His birth, believed to be blessed by Muthukumaraswamy at Vaideesuvaran Temple, led to his given name "Muthuswamy." Growing up, he displayed early devotion and received education in Telugu, Sanskrit, and Sangeet from his father, along with a deep understanding of various grammatical disciplines. Married at a tender age, Dikshitar had two wives, one of whom bore him female progeny. He shared many similarities with his father, both being well-versed in Vedas, Mantras, and proficient in singing and playing the Veena, alongside being esteemed Sahitya Lords. Initiated into the Srividya Mahamantra by Chidambaranatha Yogi, Dikshitar embarked on a spiritual journey to Kasi, where he had the darshan of Viswanatha. His encounters and experiences at this sacred site found their place in his hymns, notably in "Akshayalingakediyyppar." Throughout his literary works, Dikshitar extolled the magnificence of Kilvellur and its temple, drawing inspiration from sources such as the Brahmanada Purana.

His reverence for this sacred place resonates in his compositions, reflecting the profound impact it had on his spiritual and artistic journey.

### **Perunthirukoil: A Temple of Historical Significance and Spiritual Reverence**

Thirugnanasambandar praised Lord Shiva at this temple, calling it "Perunthirukoil." Originally built as Mada Koil by Ko Chengat Chozha, it was later reconstructed as a stone temple during the Chozha period and expanded under Maratha rule. Inscriptions within the temple mention historical figures such as Rajaraja-II, Thiribhuvana Chakravarti Rajaraja Chozha (possibly III), and Maratha king Thulajaji. One inscription from Rajaraja-II's reign mentions the endowment of Nandavanam for Punjai Load, gifted by Thiruvarur Temple's priest Kuravacheri Mulathana Bhattan and Avudayall Sani, wife of PerumpaRRappuliyur (Chidambaram) Vinayaga Bhattan. The temple underwent multiple renovations, with significant events recorded in inscriptions. Most inscriptions are in Tamil, some in Sanskrit and Grantha, attesting to the enduring readability of these languages on temple walls. References to Kochangas in Tamil Nadu's history suggest their involvement in building Shiva temples along the Kaveri river. Rajaraja-II's inscriptions in Atchalinga kediliyappar this Kilvellur provide insights into Chola history, particularly regarding conflicts with the Pandyans and Sinhalese. Rajaraja-II's reign saw significant military campaigns, documented in temple inscriptions, contributing to the understanding of historical events. Subsequent rulers like Rajatira and Kulothunga III continued patronage of the temple, as evidenced by inscriptions detailing their contributions and renovations. These inscriptions shed light on religious devotion, governance, and societal structures of the time, providing valuable historical records.

### **Tales of Redemption at Kadliapur Temple**

The Kadliapur Temple holds within its sacred precincts remarkable tales of divine intervention and redemption. Devandran, spared by Lord Guru Vashishtar, found solace and relief from relentless curses. Sri Krishna purified himself at Kadliapur, expiating his sins. Brahma sought renewal, uniting with Vishnu and Rudra, becoming Eka Badatri Murti. Lord Ashayalinga grants healing and absolution to seekers. King Vidhurman's unintentional act led to divine

visions, shaping his destiny. Dharmanjanan followed divine directives, finding solace and witnessing miraculous manifestations of Lord Shiva's grace. Anthana's curse led to rebirth as a donkey, seeking purification at Brahmatirtha. Sundarakujambikai fulfilled her obligations, receiving blessings. Vaikasi and Monday noons are considered auspicious at Kadliapur. An Adi Saiva's journey, accompanied by his son, witnessed divine wrath and redemption. Makaraviryan's encounter with Likitarishi led to enlightenment, abandoning his past to embrace spiritual enlightenment. In the annals of Kadliapur Temple, these stories intertwine, illustrating the enduring power of faith, forgiveness, and the transformative grace of the divine.

### **Celestial coup: Lord Muruga's Saga at Tiruchendur Temple**

In Mythological history, Lord Muruga's brave victory over the demon Soorapadman in Tiruchendur remains a divine testament. His mission: to protect the celestial realm and uphold righteousness. Seeking guidance from his father, Lord Shiva, Muruga received blessings. Shiva advised, "To cleanse Veerahati dosha, worship the Swayambulinga. Perform Navalinga Pooja and penance." Following this counsel, Muruga consecrated Navalingams in nine villages. Despite trials, he meditated undisturbed, guarded by sage Sundarakujambikai. The temple, with its Rajagopuram and Saravana Theertha, stands as a landmark. Inside, the Vasantha Mandapam holds Katiliappar Swayambuth Idols. Nataraja deity, Someskander Thiruchannidhi, and Ambigai Sundarakujambigai's shrines are revered. Sundara Ganesha and Ekapadamurthy idols add to its spiritual ambiance. Visit Kilvellur temple to seek blessings from Katiliappar and Sundarakujambika.

### **Legacies of Tanjore: Maratha King Tulasa I and Temple Builders**

Maratha King Tulasa I, born as the third son of King Ekoji I and Empress Tippamba, ascended to the throne of Tanjore in 1729, succeeding his brother, King Sakasi I Sarapoji. His reign marked a significant period of administrative consolidation in the region. Under his leadership, a formidable fort was erected at Mahadeva Pattanam near Mannargudi. Tulasa's rule over Tanjore spanned from the Salivagana era in 1697 to the Manmad year Vaikasi month in 1775. Notably, an inscription titled "Sri Tulajaji Dharma" adorns the upper prakaram of the Kilvellur temple, immortalizing his

legacy. Moreover, the temple stands as a testament to his patronage, with numerous Tirupanis conducted during the Maratha kings' dominion over Thanjavur. The temple hall proudly showcases sculpted depictions of King Tulajaji and Adi Parameshwara darshanam, embodying the reverence towards him.

In a separate context, the historical figure Swamiyappa Pillai's contributions are commemorated in local inscriptions, notably for his role in the construction or restoration of the south tower of the Katiliappar temple. The inscription on the south tower gate serves as a lasting testament to his endeavors in temple restoration. Additionally, the name Venkatapati Pillai resonates within the annals of the Kilvelur temple, evidenced by inscriptions scattered throughout its premises. These inscriptions shed light on the active involvement of Venkatapati Pillai and his ancestors in the temple's construction and upkeep. Notably, Venkatapati Pillai and his son Muthiya Pillai played pivotal roles in the creation of the western gopuram, as detailed in the temple inscriptions. Their dedication to the temple's welfare over generations underscores the enduring legacy of their contributions.

### **Inscriptional Legacy of Rajaraja II**

Delve into the rich tapestry of Tamil Nadu's history through the inscriptions of Rajaraja II, also known as Rajadhiraja Chola II. These invaluable records found in temples like Atchalinga kediliyappar in Kilvellur offer profound insights into the political, military, and socio-economic dynamics of his reign. From his ascension to the throne to pivotal events like the Pandyan wars, these inscriptions illuminate the Chola king's strategic decisions, military prowess, and religious patronage. (A.R.E. No. 515 of 1904. No. 558) No. 521. (A. R. No. 479 of 1904).

On a pillar in the mandapa in front of the Ramanathesvara shrine in the Vedaranyesvara temple. This inscription records the gift of 90 sheep by Kadan Kalitongal, a merchant of Tandiram in Tiruvarur-kkurram for burning a perpetual lamp to the deity with one ulakku of ghee daily by the measure called Tirumaraikkadan.

Parantaka I. Year 15 : 921

On the south wall of the central shrine in the Akshayalingesvara temple.



Rajaraja II. Year 18 : 1163 A.D.

The details of date given, viz., 18<sup>th</sup> year, Dhanus ba. 8, Sunday, Hastam, correspond to 1163 A.D., December 20, Friday (not Sunday) 79;

This inscription records the grant by purchase of land called Sendamaraikkannan-kollai situated in Sattangudi, a hamlet of Periyalattur alias Kshatriyasikhamani-chchaturvedimangalam for rearing a garden for god Kedili-nayanar by Srimulattanam-udaiyan-bhattan of Kuravaseri worshipping god Tiruvarur-udaiyar in Tiruvarur-kurram in Geyamanikka-valanadu and Avudiyalchchani, wife of Perumbarrap-puliyur Vinayaka-bhattan, a devotee of this same god. The latter is stated to have had the former as her guardian (mudukan). Provision was also made for the residence of the andar tending the garden.

Explore the intricate succession processes, regional power struggles, and the enduring legacy of Rajaraja II through these indispensable historical references. Rajaraja II, also known as Rajadhiraja Chola II, holds significant inscriptional importance, particularly in understanding the historical narrative of Tamil Nadu during his reign. Inscriptions mentioning his name found in temples like Atchalinga kediliyappar in Kilvellur serve as vital historical references. Rajaraja II's ascension to the throne and his subsequent decisions, such as adopting the title Rajadhiraja II due to the lack of a direct male heir, are documented in these inscriptions. They provide insights into the intricate succession processes and political dynamics of the Chola kingdom during his era. Moreover, inscriptional accounts shed light on pivotal events like the Pandyan wars, offering a more reliable perspective compared to other historical sources. Details regarding conflicts between Pandyan factions, interventions by external powers like the Sinhalese, and the Chola involvement in these conflicts are elucidated through these inscriptions. One significant event recorded in inscriptions is the assistance provided by Rajaraja II to Kulasekhara Pandyan, highlighting the Chola king's role in regional power struggles.

The inscriptions narrate battles, alliances, and the eventual restoration of Kulasekhara Pandyan to the throne, underscoring Rajaraja II's military prowess and political influence. Furthermore, inscriptions from temples provide valuable

information about Rajaraja II's patronage of religious institutions and his contributions to temple maintenance and renovations. Details about land grants, charitable acts, and administrative responsibilities entrusted to individuals are also documented in these inscriptions, offering a glimpse into the socio-economic landscape of the Chola kingdom during his reign the inscriptions related to Rajaraja II serve as indispensable historical records, providing insights into political, military, religious, and socio-economic aspects of Tamil Nadu during his rule. They offer a more nuanced understanding of his reign and its impact on the Chola dynasty and the region as a whole.

The details of date given, viz 18<sup>th</sup> year Dhanus ba. 8, Sunday, Hastam, correspond to 1163 A.D., December 20, Friday (not Sunday) 79; This inscription records the grant by purchase of land called Sendamaraikkannan-kollai situated in Sattangudi, a hamlet of Periyalattur alias Kshatriyasikhamanichchaturvedimangalam for rearing a garden for god Kedilinyayanar by Srimulattanam-udaiyan-bhattan of Kuravaseri worshipping god Tiruvarur-udaiyar in Tiruvarur-kurram in Geyamanikka-valanadu and Avudiyalchchani, wife of Perumbarrap-puliyur Vinayaka-bhattan, a devotee of this same god. The latter is stated to have had the former as her guardian (mudukan). Provision was also made for the residence of the andar tending the garden.

### **Conclusion**

In Tamil Nadu stands as a beacon of profound spiritual significance, encapsulating a rich tapestry of cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and religious diversity. Its vibrant religious landscape, adorned with iconic Hindu temples like the Meenakshi Amman Temple and Brihadeeswarar Temple, serves as sanctuaries for devotees from across the nation. The classical literature of Tamil Nadu, including the Sangam texts and devotional hymns of saints like the Alvars and Nayanars, imparts timeless spiritual wisdom, while the region's pivotal role in medieval Bhakti movements and Siddha traditions further enriches its spiritual fabric. Moreover, the presence of significant Christian and Muslim communities alongside Hinduism adds to the cultural diversity, fostering an environment of mutual respect and coexistence. Vibrant festivals like Pongal and Navaratri provide occasions for communal worship and reflection, uniting people from various faiths in celebration.

The historical temples of Tamil Nadu, such as the Kizhvelur Kediliappar Temple, stand as testaments to the region's rich architectural heritage and cultural legacy. These sacred sites, with their intricate craftsmanship and ancient origins, serve not only as places of worship but also as repositories of history and culture, attracting pilgrims and scholars alike. Furthermore, the tales of valor, devotion, and temple-building, as exemplified by figures like Senganan and Swamiyappa Pillai, highlight the enduring legacy of spiritual zeal and artistic expression in Tamil Nadu. Their contributions, along with those of renowned saints like Thirunavukarasar and Sundaramurthy Nayanar, continue to inspire and enthrall devotees to this day. In Tamil Nadu's enigmatic legacy of spirituality and cultural preservation continues to beckon seekers and devotees worldwide, making it a timeless symbol of spiritual enlightenment and cultural richness. As these traditions endure and evolve, Tamil Nadu remains a shining example of the harmonious coexistence of tradition and modernity, preserving its heritage for generations to come.

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