

Chapter IV

Tourism in Theni District

An Overview

TOURISM IN THENI DISTRICT – AN OVERVIEW

Theni town is known as “Second Manchester of South India” which indicates the influence of cotton trade.¹ Its location is a major influencing factor for the growth of tourism. Theni district has a privilege to be one among the various districts that share the space with Western Ghats. The Western Ghats add pristine beauty to its existence, which is one of the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) World Heritage site and is also one of the hottest spot of biological diversity in the world. It starts from Satpura range in the north, extends towards south covering Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and finally ends with Indian Ocean embracing Kanyakumari. Theni district holds the nature in its best form compared to various other places which gets the credit from Western Ghats.

This district being home to the second largest weekly market in entire Tamil Nadu is also the business hub for various products, cardamom, cotton, grapes and flowers. It has more number of temples that exhibit the inclination of the people towards spirituality. This district can be called as a major platform for almost all kinds of tourism. Many international tourists cross through Theni to reach Kerala. Simultaneously, people who visit Kerala, are often attracted to the destinations in Theni such as Suruli Falls, Gudalur Grape Farms, Top Station, Kolukkumalai and Kurangani and similar other attractions. It has got enormous tourism potentials that are pleasing for any tourist.

This district is rich in natural and agricultural resources mainly due to Colonel John Pennycuick, a British Engineer who had contributed his life for the welfare of five southern districts in Tamil Nadu, including Theni, Dindigul, Madurai, Sivaganga and Ramanathapuram. He had reached India in 1860 and served in different positions. Under PWD, he served as the chief Engineer in the construction of Mullai Periyar Dam which was hopeful to solve the drought condition in various dimensions. His amount of contribution was outstanding that he had even sold his own properties for the construction of dam.

During the process of construction, he had faced immense difficulties. Still he persevered to withstand it to the core. The dam was finally completed in 1895. As a

result, this dam enabled efficient irrigation facilities to 2.23 lakh acres throughout the five districts. This dam channelized the Periyar River in a proper manner securing the lives of thousands and thousands of people whose living was mainly dependent on agriculture.

Even though the catchment water surface and the Periyar Dam are located in the territory of Kerala, the dam is owned and maintained by the government of Tamil Nadu.² In effect to that, there are lots of controversies between Tamil Nadu and Kerala Government with regard to Mullai Periyar dam. Above all, the successful output is mainly due to the efforts of Colonel that reflect in every common man's life. There are various villages in Theni district that perceive him as their saviour and hence keep his portrait and worship him. The new bus terminus in Theni is named after him. There are many shops and buses that have his picture as well as his name and a memorial has been created for him at Lower Camp with a bronze statue as a token of gratitude. The people say that it is not a memorial but a temple with him as divine power. Though the dam was constructed before 120 years, the residents are still bound to their emotions and cherish his contribution towards the existence of Theni district.

4.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Initially Pandyas ruled Madurai region which has references in *Sangam Age*. It was then taken over by Cholas from the beginning of the 13th Century. Later Pandyas regained in 1223 AD and patronized Tamil language especially '*Silapadikaram*'. After a while, Malik Kafur, General of Alauddin Khilji had plundered more treasure. He was followed by various other Muslim Sultans. The Tughlaks took over in 1323 AD who were yielded by Vijayanagara Empire of Hampi in 1371 AD. Vijayanagara Kings had appointed Nayaks as governors to take care of their captured land and collect tax. After the decline of this empire due to the death of Krishnadevarayar in 1530, Nayaks took their control over territories independently. Though their rule was restricted to smaller area, they exercised complete control over their boundary similar to King. Hence, they were called as 'Sitrarasargal'. (Siru – smaller, Arasargal –kings) Later when the Britishers took over the entire territory, they appointed these 'Sitrarasargal' to collect tax in the form of the term Jameen (land owners). As a result, there are numerous Jameens throughout Tamil Nadu, including Theni district.

Theni district has the evidences of the Jameens, in Bodinaickanur, Thevaram, Periyakulam, Erasakkanaickanur and Vallal Nadhi Gandamanur. Bodinaickanur, Periyakulam and Thevaram only has got its historical remains in different form even now. Bodinaickanur has the same structure built by the Jameen in deteriorating stage where as Thevaram and Periyakulam has got its structure modified. The Jameen palace in Gandamanur has got few walls as the remains but in its worst form being littered by the neighbouring residents. Erasakkanaickanur has small structural remains that is being rented and not taken care. This district has also got enormous archaeological remains which add more effect to the history of Theni. Since Theni got bifurcated only in 1996, the traces of its history before that can be tracked down from Madurai district. The Kambala Naickar community people in Theni district exhibit the ancestral royal life style and rituals in all their celebrations and occasions.

4.2. GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

Theni is one of the southern most districts bounded by the state Kerala on the west, Virudhunagar district on the south, Madurai and Dindigul on the east and on the north. It has proximity to the major tourist spot, Kodaikanal which is in Dindigul district. This district is spread across an area of 3242.3 Sq.Km. It lies in the north latitude between 9°39' and 10°30' and east longitude between 77°00' and 78°30'.

4.3. ADMINISTRATIVE SETUP

The present Theni district was a part of Madurai district in the past which got bifurcated and formed into an exclusive district on 25.7.1996. After the bifurcation, Theni was called as “Veeran Azhagumuthu District” which had its headquarters at Theni. The two revenue divisions include Uthamapalayam and Periyakulam with five Taluks, Bodinaickanur, Andipatti Periyakulam, Uthamapalayam and Theni (Tab: 4.1.).The district is inclusive of 6 Municipalities involving Theni, Periyakulam, Bodinaickanur, Chinnamanur, Cumbum and Gudalur. The Community development blocks include 8 having 98 revenue villages also called as inhabited villages.³

TABLE: 4.1.
REVENUE ADMINISTRATION AND LOCAL GOVERNING BODIES

Sl.No.	Category	Numbers
1	Revenue Administrative Divisions	
	a. Revenue Divisions	02
	b. Revenue Taluks	05
	c. Revenue Firkas	17
	d. Revenue Villages	113
2	Local Bodies	
	a. Corporation	Nil
	b. Municipalities	06
	c. Panchayat Unions	08
	d. Town Panchayat	22
	e. Village Panchayat	130

4.4. TEMPERATURE AND RAINFALL

On an average, the temperature in the plains include maximum of 37.10°C with minimum 19.94°C. The normal rainfall during North East Monsoon is 357.9 mm and South West Monsoon is 158.4 mm whereas the actual rainfall recorded for North East Monsoon and South West Monsoon is 398.7 mm and 302.7mm.

4.5. FLORA AND FAUNA

The forest regions of Theni is the habitat for many endangered fauna such as Elephant, Panther, Tiger, Nilgiri Languar, Gaur, Nilgiri Tahr, Mouse deer, Sloth bear, Malabar Giant Squirrel, Lion Tailed Macaque, Porcupine, Spotted deer, Sambar, Jungle cat, Slender Loris and Common Palm Civet, etc.

4.5.1. Forest and Its Types

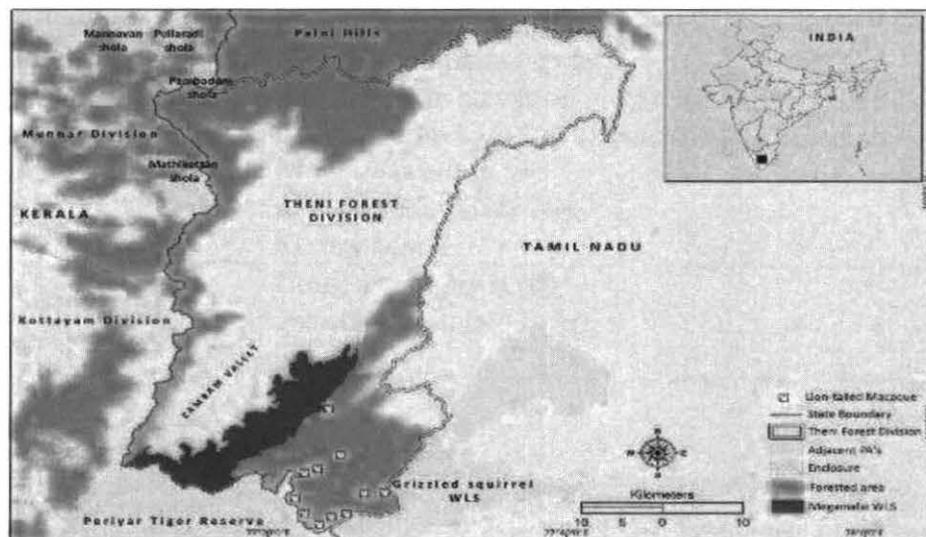
Theni Forest Division was formed in 1982 with Theni as the Headquarters comprising Uthamapalayam, Gudalur, Chinnamanur, Cumbum, Megamalai, Bodinaickanur, and Varusanadu range⁴(Map:4.01)to protect and develop the wealth associated with the forests. The total geographical area of the district is 3242.30 Sq.Km, of which the forest area covered include 1088.51 Sq.Km which is 33.6 % of the total geographical area (Tab: 4.2). Totally there are 27 forest areas in the district in which 19

areas fall under the Reserve Forest Category whereas 8 areas fall under Reserved Land Category. There are different types of forests within the district (Tab: 4.3). There are no unclassified forest areas within the district. The Forest Division in Theni lies between latitude of $9^{\circ} 31'$ and $10^{\circ} 15'$ North and East longitude of $77^{\circ} 10'$ and $77^{\circ} 42'$. The Forest divisions that protect the forest areas within the district is mainly due to the following divisions.⁵

4.5.2. Forest Divisions in Theni District

TABLE: 4.2.
NAME OF THE FOREST DIVISIONS

Sl.No.	Forest Divisions	Forest Cover (Sq. Km)
1	Theni Forest Division, Theni	863.85
2	Madurai Forest Division, Madurai	192.72
3	Varusanadu Soil Conservation Division	31.94
Total		1088.51



Map: 4.1 - Forest Division - Theni District

(Source: www.ruffordsmallgrants.org)

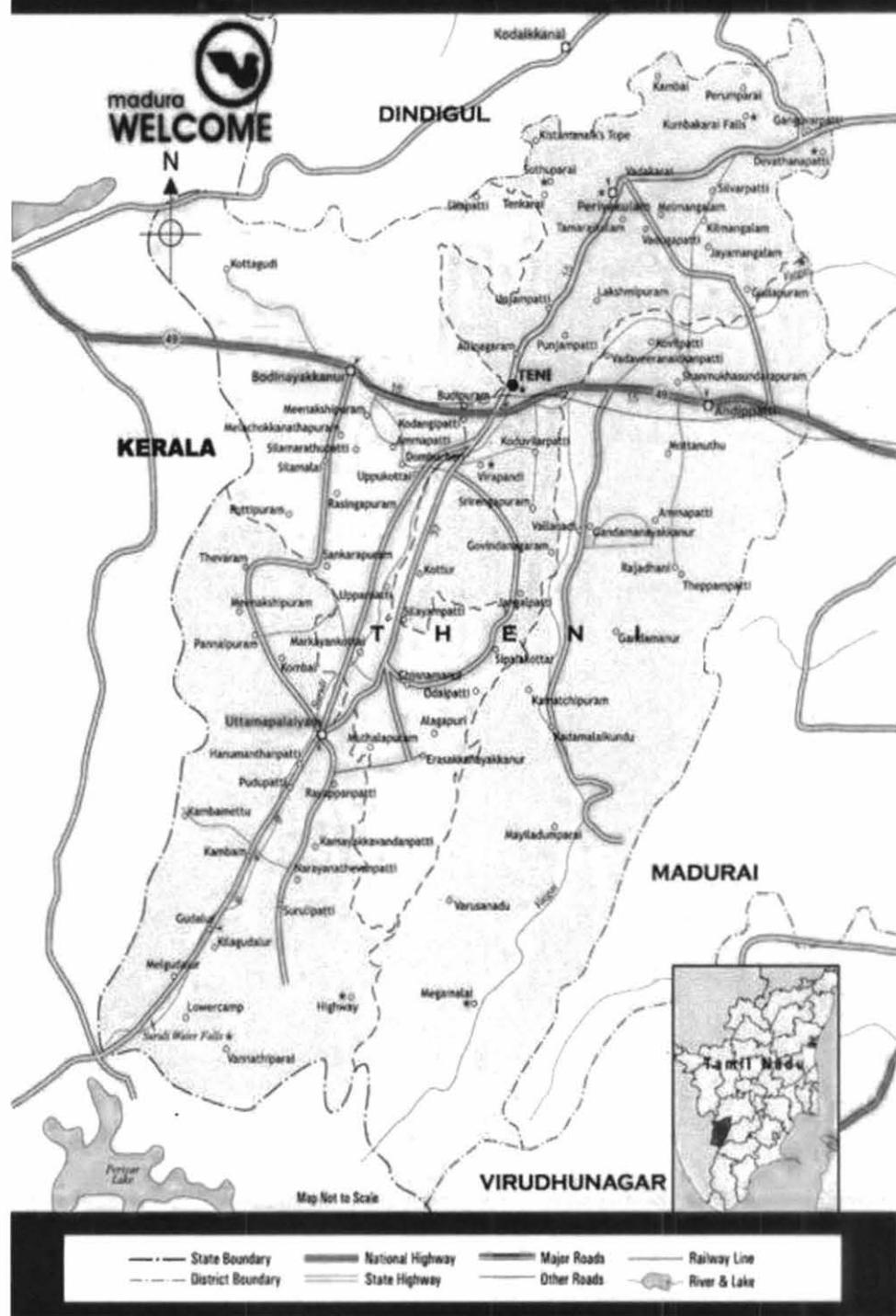
TABLE: 4.3.
FOREST TYPES IN THENI DISTRICT

Sl.No.	Forest Type	Nature	Places
1	Southern Tropical West Coast Semi-Evergreen Forests	found in Western Ghats between wet evergreen and moist deciduous types at an elevation of 900 m and above	Vannathiparai, Highwavs and Megamalai
2	Southern Tropical Moist Mixed Deciduous Forests	occur along the Western Ghats and in the interior areas and damp valleys	Mainly Gudalur and Cumbum. Pandarathurai Suranganar, Melgudalur, and Vanaathiparai
3	Southern Tropical Secondary Moist Mixed Deciduous Forests	Degraded type of moist deciduous one, has biotic factors like grazing and fire, open canopy with stunted tree growth.	Vanaathiparai, Kombai, Machakkal, Surulipatti, Boothakaradu, Erasakkanaickanur and Kappuvamadai forests in Cumbum and Gudalur range
4	Southern Tropical Dry Mixed Deciduous Forests	Open deciduous forests occurring in dry localities and sites throughout the division.	Lower outer slopes of Western Ghats in Cumbum and Gudalur range
5	Southern Tropical Carnatic Umbrella Thorn Forests	Scrub jungle occurs in marginal strips along foothills and plains up to 400 meters in elevation having stunted growth. More susceptible to biotic interferences due to easy access.	These forests generally adjoin cultivated areas
6	Southern Dry Deciduous Scrub	Consists of only scrub growth of 3 m to 6 m in height	-

4.5.2.1. Boundaries of Theni Forest Division

The district of Theni is bordered by forests on all the directions. The Northern part has the Kodaikanal Forest Division sharing with Dindigul District. The Western boundary has Kerala State. The Southern Part is shared by Kerala State boundary and Srivilliputhur Grizzled Giant Squirrel Sanctuary located in Virudhunagar district. The East of Theni district shares boundary with Madurai Forest Division and Catchment area of Vaigai Dam.

THENI



Map: 4.2 - Theni district Map - Major Places

(Source: Madura Welcome)

4.6. DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

The total population of Theni district is 12, 45,899. As per population census 2011, 46.18 percent of the population lives in rural areas where as the remaining 53.82 percent live in urban areas. The density of population per Square Kilometer has increased from 337 in 2001 to 384 in 2011(Tab: 4.03).The population growth during the decade between 2001 and 2011 is 13.9. The literacy rate has increased from 72 percent in 2001 to 76.62 percent in 2011 among men and 54.46 percent in 2001 to 62.99 percent in 2011 among women. The residents of Theni district speak different languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, English and Sourashtra.

**TABLE: 4.4.
URBAN/ RURAL POPULATION**

Sl.No.	Name of the Block	Urban/Rural Population in Percentage	
		Urban	Rural
1	Theni	62.75	37.25
2	Andipatti	19.73	80.27
3	K. Mayiladumparai	0.00	100.00
4	Periyakulam	52.73	47.27
5	Bodinaickanur	60.94	69.06
6	Chinnamanur	55.10	44.90
7	Uthamapalayam	54.56	45.44
8	Cumbum	85.02	14.98

Source: District Statistical Handbook 2014 – 2015 (Census of India 2011)

4.7. AGRICULTURE

The agricultural production dominates the entire district with the total cultivated area covering 127396 hectares. The principal cultivated crops include rice, banana, sugarcane and jowar. The commercial or non-agricultural crops cultivated in vast area according to 2014 – 15 statistics include coconut and mango followed by banana. Bodinaickanur city is called as ‘Cardamom City’ due to the huge production output and cardamom auctioning centre in Bodi that attracts people from various places.

4.8. HEALTH

The district Headquarters hospital is located in Periyakulam. There are also government hospitals located in Andipatti, Bodinaickanur, Uthamapalayam, Cumbum and Chinnamanur. The patients are treated with different techniques involving

Homeopathy, Indian Medicine (Siddha) and Modern Medicine. According to 2014-15 Statistics issued by Joint Director, Health, Theni, there are totally 14 hospitals, 6 dispensaries, 62 primary health centres along with 162 sub centres.

4.9. ELECTRICITY

Since Theni is rich in water resources, there are five power generating units which include three Hydro Power Station such as Periyar, Suruliaaru and Vaigai. There are also Kanchi Marathurai and Kuruvanoothu Micro Hydro Power Station. There are fourteen sub stations to support the better functioning process. There are numerous windmills for generation of power within the district. The functioning windmills throughout the district are 210.⁶

4.10. ECONOMY

The economy of Theni district is mainly based on the agricultural production. Hence, any fluctuation in production output affects the total economy in a drastic manner. There are also other avenues that reflect the economy including cotton spinning mills and sugar mills. Andipatti taluk dominates in handloom and power loom weaving. The production of power through windmills is also more in existence.

4.11. HISTORICAL EVIDENCES

There are many historical evidences and archaeological remains discovered and documented in Theni district. These express that Theni has got rich tradition dating back to even centuries. All these reflect the values that are retained within the district.

4.11.1. Archaeological Excavations

Sangam Age literature records clearly that during the period of Iron Age, monuments were laid in the memory of brave men by erecting *Nadukal* or Menhirs which later got transformed to *Veerakal*.⁷ The ancient and foremost deciphered scripts in Tamil Nadu is *Brahmi Script*.⁸ These Tamil *Brahmi Script* inscribed memorial stones found at Pullimancombai in Andipatti taluk on the banks of the river Vaigai⁹ speak of cattle raids (Fig: 4.1.). These inscriptions created a debate while dating the stones since these are considered to be more earlier than the proudly celebrated Mangulam

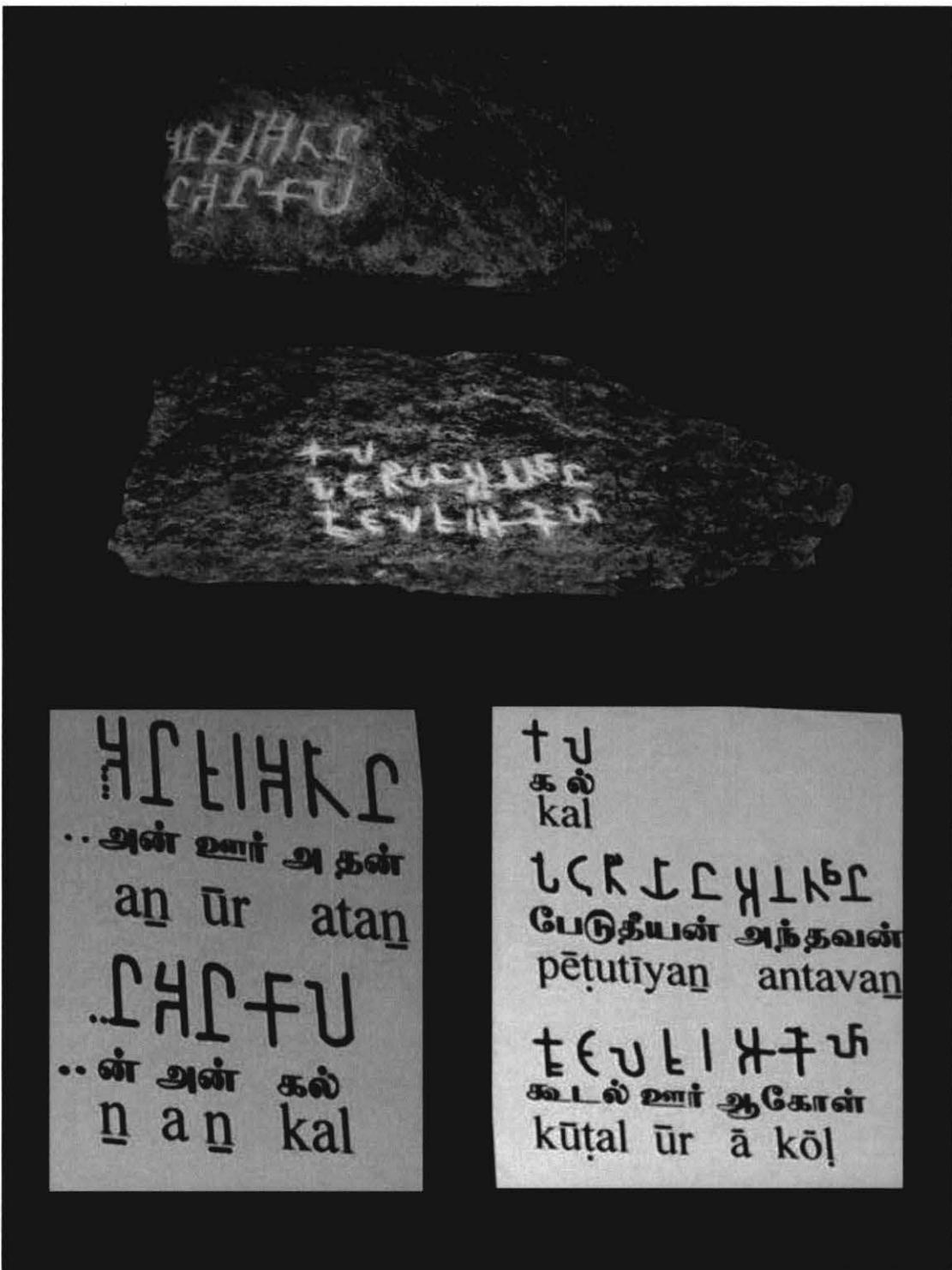


Figure: 4.1 - Pullimancombi Memorial Stones with the deciphered inscriptions

inscriptions¹⁰ and thus they get recognition of being the oldest and earliest throughout India with three feet height and one and half feet breadth.¹¹ These inscriptions dated to be even before 2300 years old belongs to *Sangam Age*¹² acts as the strong evidences that even during *Sangam Age*, there existed literacy among the Tamil residents¹³ and this adds a great pride and recognition for Theni district in archaeological perspective throughout India.

There are also various other explorations done throughout the district. Periyakulam and Andipatti brought to limelight a large number of microlithic sites.¹⁴ Few intact cairn circles in Andipatti¹⁵ and trapezoidal shaped two finely polished stoned celts and a broken hammer stone in Kodangipatti were recorded.¹⁶ More Megalithic burial sites were found in Kumanantholu and Narayana devanpatti.¹⁷ Theni district has the privilege of encompassing numerous archaeological sites with significance towards Iron Age sites (App.III.Map.1.) and the sites with roman coin remains (App.III.Map.2.).

4.11.2. Chinnamanur Copper Plates

King Maravarman Harikesari (640 AD – 670 AD) has created a place in his name called Harikesari Nallur and built a Shiva Temple there. This Harikesari Nallur is currently called as Chinnamanur.¹⁸ Chinnamanur has got a special mention in Tamil grammatical work, *Tholkappiyam*. During the excavation for additional construction within Perumal Temple premises, two sets of copper plates were discovered in 1888 AD that belonged to 8 AD. Normally, the copper plates once identified, it is named with the place where it is discovered and thus they were called as Chinnamanur Copper Plates. This was then placed in Madras Museum which was later handed over to Archaeology Department of Mysore. The information in these copper plates was published only in 1927.

Of the two sets, one is smaller and another one larger. The smaller Chinnamanur copper plate set has 3 Idhal (plates) and the larger one has 8 plates. The scripts are in Sanskrit as well as in Tamil. The Smaller Chinnamanur Copper Plate highlights on the punishments received by the people who spoil the concept of ‘Boomidhanam’(giving land as gift) and the rewards and benefits received by the people who preserve the same. It also focuses on the particulars of the Pandya rulers who name themselves with

‘Varman’ (Title name of Pallavas), after having succeeding them. The larger Chinnamanur Copper Plate elaborates on all the political aspects that emphasize on the needs that have to be provided for the community and the actions to be taken for enemies. It also expresses the helping nature, bravery aspects and fame that are the essentials needed for a man especially in balanced ratio.¹⁹

4.12. ACCESSIBILITY

Theni is connected to all the major cities by road. The rail facilities are available to Dindigul and Madurai, the neighbouring districts. The air routes are available from Madurai. The next nearest air travel is available from Cochin, Kerala.

4.13. ACCOMMODATION

There are various accommodation units (Tab: 4.5) available for the tourists ranging luxury accommodation to budget accommodation. There are also home stays available which were approved by MoT.

4.14. TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THENI DISTRICT

There are various tourist attractions within the district including temples, palaces, mosques, churches, dams and natural wonders. There are also various other destinations around the district. Madura Welcome has published a map (Map: 4.2) of major tourist attractions in Theni district.

4.14.1. Nature/ Climate

Nature and climate are the major attractions for any tourist and hence Theni district is ideal for tourism since it has a treasure of these resources. During winter and rainy seasons, this land is filled with an atmosphere in its best form especially in the following mentioned regions.

4.14.1.1. Cumbum Valley

Cumbum Valley has got special attention as a place filled with historical and cultural interest that attracts many tourists. This is one among the various composite valleys located in the eastern offshoots of the range of mountains of the Western Ghats

TABLE: 4.5.
LIST OF ACCOMMODATION UNITS WITIN THENI

Sl.No	Deluxe Accommodation
1	Briar, Megamalai
2	Raja Andhuvan Estate, Megamalai
3	Green Royale Resort and Hotel
4	ABM Grande, Theni
5	Theni International, Theni
6	Hotel Western Gatz, Theni
7	Harvest Fresh, Melgudalur
8	Bahri Beautiful Country, Periyakulam
9	RR Hotel, Cumbum
10	Pupiys Grand Swim and Slim Hotel, Theni
Budget Accommodation	
1	Adhitya Residency, Theni
2	Hotel Annalakshmi, Cumbum main road
3	New Everest, Theni
4	JJ Residency, Theni
5	Hotel Vaigai, Cumbum road
6	Hotel Sapphire, Palanichettipatti
7	New Vasantham, Theni
8	Sri Pandiyan, Theni
9	Sri Prakash, Theni

in South India. The length covered along northeast and southwest direction is around 60 km with an aerial extent of approximately 720 Km² throughout the Theni District.²⁰ This offers breathtaking views of Vallal Nadhi Gandamanur, Mayiladumparai, Kadamalaikundu and various other streams such as Varaha and Mullai River. There are also beautiful views of various hills and estates with frequent drizzles. The major attractions are Thekkady and Suruli which is on the border of Kerala.²¹ Suruli, a perennial river that flows towards the central part of the Valley show balanced moderate discharge of water throughout the year.²²

4.14.1.2. *Megamalai*

‘Megam’ means Cloud and ‘Malai’ means Mountain. Situated at a height of 1500 feet above sea level, the clouds cover the place like a blanket over the mountain and hence it is called as Megamalai (Fig: 4.2.). Located 52 from Chinnamanur, this can be accessed through two ways, from Theni via Chinnamanur and from Andipatti via Gandamanur. It is also called as Pacha Koomachi Malai expressing that the mountains are filled with green pastures of tea estates. (‘Pachai’ means green, ‘Koomachi’ means tower)²³ The climate that prevails here is more equal to any other hill station like Kodaikanal and Munnar.

Megamalai and Highwayvis are the major tourist attractions that are the treasures of Theni district. Highwayvis can be reached at a distance of 5 km from Megamalai. The Mountain range include seven villages Megamalai, Highwayvis, Manalar, Mel Manalar, Venniyar, Maharajamettu and Iravangalaru having more than ten thousand residents having various dams. Almost all the residents are the estate workers. From Maharajamettu, one can have the visibility of lamp lit in Sabarimalai. There is also a place called as Vattapaarai which gives a breath taking view of elephants, bison, leopard, deer and bear. Near Venni Aaru dam, there is an echo point that attracts tourists in a grand manner. During the period of British, ten thousand acres of lands were changed from dense reserve area into a cultivable tea estate by investing more than one crore. Added to that, 1400 houses were constructed for workers, supervisors and higher officials.²⁴ These were created by Hindustan Lever Limited group which is now in the hands of Wood Briar Company.

There is a temple constructed by the British for the tea plantation workers which has Koumariamman as the main deity. This temple was built around 1940 initiated by Estate officer Daiman, a British by native who wanted to fulfill the wish of the residents of Megamalai. Every year, in the Tamil month of *Chithirai*, festival for this goddess is celebrated here.²⁵ The festivals celebrated in Tamil Nadu follow a specific calendar (App.I.Table:3). In 1998, the government declared Megamalai as a tourist destination officially.

From then on, ‘Summer Festival’ which was celebrated subsequently for four years led to culmination due to more rainfall. Nowadays, these roads have become a thrilling experience for adventure seeking tourists. A value of 80.67 crore was allotted for the betterment of the roads. With reflection to this, the initial steps of renovations were enabled in February 2015.²⁶ But the later stages are lagging behind still.

4.14.1.2.1. *Megamalai Wild Life Sanctuary*

Megamalai Sanctuary shares its border with Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala and Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary, Virudhunagar district in Tamil Nadu. Megamalai was declared as Wild Life Sanctuary in 2012 under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. It has 67,000 hectare areas of wildlife. Out of which, 24000 hectare wild lands were used for cultivation of lemon, Silk cotton and various other crops. With effect to the declaration of Sanctuary, the lives of people who are brought here for changing the forest area into cultivable land is under threat.²⁷ But in parallel to this, SACON (Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History) has suggested that the existing area of 269.11 Sq.Km of the Sanctuary need to be expanded so as to boost the conservation of the Western Ghats as many of the wildlife habitats are outside the protected area. SACON also suggests that if this sanctuary can be made to Conservation Reserve, it will no way act as a threat for existence of the residents and at the same time, the biodiversity will also not be affected.²⁸

4.14.1.3. *Top Station*

This is located in Kottakudi division in Tamil Nadu Kerala border. From Bodinaickanur, Kurangani is 18 km from where another 22 km is the Top Station. Top Station also called as ‘Small Kodaikanal’, gives an excellent view of Kurangani,

Kolukkumalai, Mundhal, Kottakudi and Central Station (Fig: 4.3.). There is also telescopic view offered for the tourists.²⁹ People can go to Top Station either by walk from Kurangani in the form of a trek and pass through Central Station or can go by a vehicle through Munnar. Even though this place is located in Tamil Nadu, the access routes are only through Kerala by road. More trekking activities are common since there are lots of refreshing and rejuvenating waterfalls and natural atmosphere filled with fresh air.

The rope car provision enabled by British people to transport tea, pepper, cardamom and other spices from Top Station to Kurangani became out of use due to lack of maintenance. This initiative was again enabled in 2000 as part of tourism initiative focusing on Kurangani – Top Station being declared as Spice Tourism Spot.³⁰ If the scheme was successful, it would have attracted many tourists. To develop tourism in Theni district, a training programme was initiated in 2015 with the main objective of preserving natural resources, providing fitness to people of age between twenty to forty, to create awareness towards plastic consumption and its effects, wild life preservation and planting of trees.³¹

4.14.1.4. Kolukkumalai

Kolukkumalai has the tea estate situated on top of the mountain that is around 7000 feet above the sea level. This is called as ‘The World’s Highest Grown Orthodox Tea’ (Fig: 4.4.). This is situated in Bodinackanur near Tamil Nadu and Kerala border. Though it is located in Tamil Nadu, it can be accessed through Suryanelli in Idukki district of Kerala through road. Added to this, only jeeps are the ideal mode of transport to reach this place. This estate has the traditional old tea factory built during the mid-twentieth century where the traditional production techniques are still followed to produce tea. Tourists can try the different flavours and then can make purchase decisions. This place gives a spectacular bird’s eye view of various places including Kodaikanal, Central Station and Kurangani.

There are options of day visit as well as packages including night stay. The day visit includes a walk through the factory and promises the tourists a view of all the stages of production of tea in a traditional manner. There are also local guides who



Figure: 4.2 - Megamalai with the lake view



Figure: 4.3 - View of Western Ghats from Top Station
(Source: www.keralatourism.org)



Figure: 4.4 - Kolukkumalai Tea Estate – The World’s Highest Grown Orthodox Tea (Source: tamilnadu-favtourism.blogspot.in/2015/08/Kolukkumalai.html)

assist all through the stay over there. There are guest houses available at different rates based on the season as well as the type of package preferred. An overnight stay provides an opportunity for the tourists to trek to Meeshapulimalai located even above Kolukkumalai at 8661 feet above sea level. The tourists can either trek downhill back to Kolukkumalai or can reach the Silent valley estate on the other side which is in Kerala. There is nature walk and bird watching package offered on request. One can also have the option of witnessing the life of an estate worker where the tourists are taken to the residence of the worker in Kolukkumalai. The tourist can interact and have a different experience in the estate. The tourists can also join the workers in the field to pick tea leaves and also be part of the production unit. There are also provisions of tents available for the stay along with other existing accommodation. The permanent camp site near here gives a short walk to the neighbouring inhabited village, Yellapatti. The only drawback associated with the tour to Kolukkumalai is the climatic conditions. Because, there are situations where the weather gets too worse for the regular tourism based activities. Due to this, certain services will be interrupted in the process of delivering it to the tourists.

4.14.1.5. Bodimettu

This is a major cardamom growing area in Tamil Nadu. The famous tourist places such as Kurangani in Tamil Nadu and Munnar in Kerala can be reached from here. Travelling through the mountain roads normally create an exciting feeling for the tourists. One can travel from Theni district to Kerala state through three mountain roads, Bodimettu, Cumbumettu and Kumily. Bodimettu has fifty years of tradition. This covers a distance of 12 miles. It is very adventurous to travel through the seventeen hair pin bends each with the name of a traditional flower offering an excellent scenic beauty to the tourists (App.IV.Fig:12).

Since this village is located bordering Tamil Nadu and Kerala, a tourist can witness tea and cardamom estate in Kerala on one side and Coffee plantain on the other side in Tamil Nadu. Bodimettu mountain road starts from Mundhal which is 26 km from Bodi and ends at Bodimettu. This road starts at 1290 feet and goes up till 4644 feet above the sea level. Puliyoottu falls also called as Tiger falls is located on the way.

Currently, there are accommodation facilities offered for tourist the rent of five hundred to two thousand rupees at Bodimettu.³²

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4.14.2. Palaces

Though the district has a history of various Jameen, except one or two, all the others have almost diminished and few are in perishing stage. Currently, Periyakulam Jameen is modified with only the huge pillars in its original form. Ersakkanaickanur Jameen remains are converted to an office. Though the palace of Vallal Nadhi Gandamanur Jameen is almost diminished just with few wall structures, it is more intensely damaged by the residents of Gandamanur.

4.14.2.1. Bodinaickanur Jameen Palace

This is a historical place used as the residence by Jamindars of Bodinaickanur Palayapattu Jameen (Fig: 4.5.). Bangaru Tirumalai Bodinaickar was the Jamindar from 1849 AD to 1862 AD serving Bodinaickanur. He had constructed this palace during his period. He also has credit to the structure of Subramanyaswamy temple located in Bodinaickanur. The legal heirs of him have occupied this palace as their residence. This Bodi Jameen Palace is three storied palace which resembles the architectural style of north especially of Jodhpur Palace in Rajasthan. The entire structure is covered by huge wall. The palace encompasses a durbar hall (hall meant for meeting of royal court members), Ukkiranam (store room), Gotha (sports pavilion), granary for storing paddy and horse and elephant staple. There is also Lakshmi Vilasam, a treasury which was used to store gold, gems and various other ornaments. The clan deity of Bodi Palayakars, Vadimalai Naachi Amman with eight hands as Ashta Lakshmi is painted on the walls of Lakshmi Vilas. Once in every year, this mural goddess is worshipped. Researchers from Archaeology Department, international tourists and students of fine arts visit this palace to know its significance.³³

Within the palace, there are mural paintings on the walls of Durbar Hall and Lakshmi Vilasam hall. These paintings exhibit the scenes from the world famous epic, Ramayana with more attention given to even the minutest aspects. There are also paintings on Ramayana wedding (Fig: 4.6.) which is actually reflected in the current rituals of Raja Kambala Naickar weddings. These paintings reflect the affinity of





Figure: 4.5 - Bodi Jameen Palace, Bodinaickanur



Figure: 4.6 - Mural representing scenes from the epic, Ramayana in Bodi Jameen Palace

Rajakamabalam Naickars towards fine art tradition. The raw materials used in construction are lime mortar and intricately carved teak wood pillars. The paint involves right mix of herbal extracts along with coloured stone powders and Vajram (indigenous gums). Though the current generation family is taking utmost care to preserve this art form to their maximum extent, the misunderstanding among the siblings has become a threat for the existence of the palace. If no attention is given to preserve this, these paintings will perish forever.

4.14.2.2. Thevaram Jameen Palace

The palace which is 352 years old has got a renovated and fresh new outlook which proves its ethnicity, only through the traditional objects being displayed. The tourists and educationists are allowed to visit the palace with no entry fees being levied. There are also variety of birds and animals around the palace that add beauty to the ambience. It is a tradition for the kings to grow ‘hunting dogs’. Mr. Pradeep who is taking care of this Palace with his uncle, have a variety of breeds brought from places throughout the world such as Rottweiler, Basset Hound, hutch bug, Doberman, Dachshund, Min pin and pocket dog.

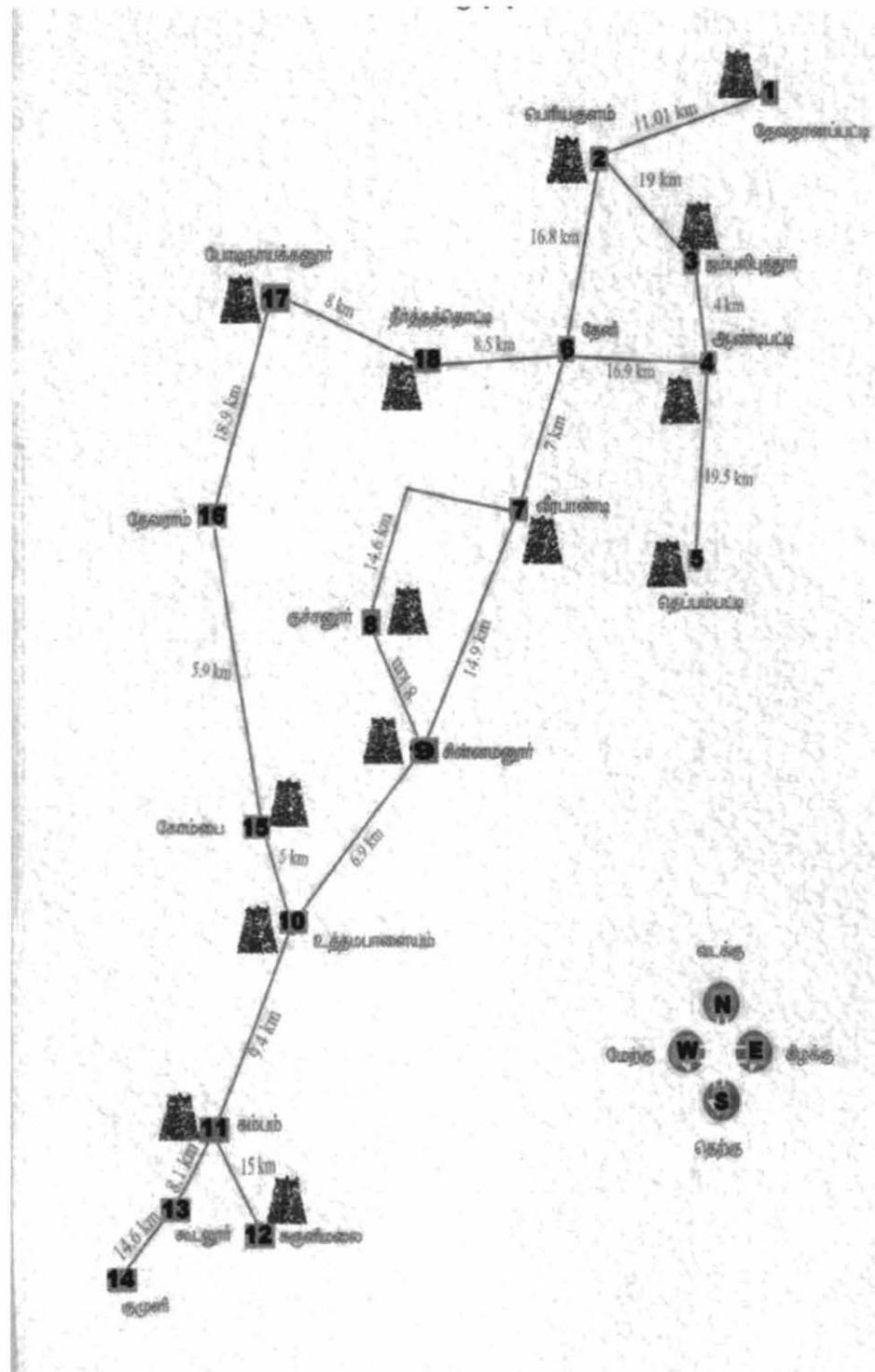
There is an *Ilavatta Kal*, a stone used for competitions in earlier days that adorn the entrance of the palace. There are numerous birds especially parrots which create a pleasant musical rhythm. There are also doves, cocks, hens, ducks and goats. There are goats with long ears bought from Rajasthan. There is a surprising aspect which involves a huge vessel used by the Jameen king as bath tub. The traditional antique objects displayed within the palace include beautifully carved gramophone, wooden jewel box, *Pallanguzhi*, a wooden game board with wheels attached and heavy stones used for exercising purposes in the past(Fig: 4.7.).

4.14.3. Temples

The vision of a temple evokes a feeling of spirituality, sanctity and reverence especially among the pilgrims in India.³⁴These temples attract more devotees who in turn not only offer worship to the divine powers, but also create an impact in the livelihood of the host population. Theni has got more temples, which has more potential to attract tourists leading to better economy level. The Map 4.3 illustrates the areas



Figure: 4.7 - Traditional Exhibits in Thevaram Palace, Thevaram



Map: 4.3 - Distance between the Major Temples within Theni district
 (Source: Hindu Religious and Cultural Endowment Board, Chennai)

TABLE: 4.6.
TABLE CORRESPONDING TO MAP 4.2.

Sl.No	Place	Temple
1	Devathanapatti	Moongilanai Kamatchi Temple
2	Periyakulam	Balasubramaniar Temple
3	Jambuliputhur	Kadhal Narasinga Perumal Temple
4	Andipatti	Arulmigu Meenatchi Sundareswarar Temple
5	Theppampatti	Mavoothu Velappar Temple
6	Theni	NA
7	Veerapandi	Veerapandi Koumariamman Temple
8	Kuchanur	Saneeswaran Temple
9	Chinnamanur	Poolanandeswarar / Sivagami Amman Temple Manikkavacakar
10	Uthamapalayam	Kalatheeswarar Temple
11	Cumbum	Arulmigu Nandagopalan Swamy Thambiran Maatu Thozhu Kambaraya Perumal Temple
12	Suruli Mountain	Kailasanathar Temple Boodha Narayana Temple Suruli Velappar Temple
13	Gudalur	Azhagar Swamy Temple
14	Kumily	NA
15	Kombai	Thirumalai Raya Perumal temple
16	Thevaram	NA
17	Bodinaickanur	Arulmigu Srinivasa Perumal Temple Arulmigu ParamasivanThirukoil
18	Theerthathotti	Virupakshi Arumuga Nayanan Temple Chitra Putra Nayanan Temple

where the major temples are located in Theni district with the distance factor while the Table 4.06 gives the particulars of all the temples located in those areas.

4.14.3.1. Kannagi Temple

Kannagi, a Hindu Goddess, is the leading character in the Tamil epic, 'Silapadikaram' dated between second and sixth century. Even though her husband Kovalan was in relationship with a dancer Madhavi, she was more faithful to him. She had burnt the entire city of Madurai when the then Madurai king had executed her husband as a result of injustice. She is considered as the god due to her undue faith, loyalty and chastity.³⁵ When she had lost her *Mangal Sutra* due to injustice, she prayed to divine power and got it back and hence she is the only goddess who is called as Mangala Devi.³⁶ In honouring her, Mangala Devi Kannagi Temple (Fig: 4.8.) was constructed on top of Vanaathi Parai, also called as Vinnetri Paarai by the natives, a place located south of Gudalur. It is believed that Kovalan and Kannagi had gone to heaven from here due to which the temple is constructed here. This temple is located 4000 feet above the sea level.³⁷ Since this temple is situated bordering the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, there are two ways to reach this temple. One can travel through Pazhiyan Kudi covering 7 kms by walk. It can also be reached by road through Kumily in Idukki district with a distance of 15 kms with jeep as the only transporting medium.

This 2000 year old temple was constructed by Cheran Senguttuvan only with stones.³⁸ After him, it was left with no attention. Later, this temple in its deteriorating stage was renovated and brought to a better shape by Raja Raja Chola I (985 – 1014 AD) followed by Pandiya King Maravarman Kulasekaran, Vijayanagara Kings and merchants who had crossed through for trade purposes.³⁹ It is believed that Cheran Senguttuvan had led an exploration to Himalayas and brought stones to build this temple. Every year, on Chitra Pournami day that falls in between April/ May, there is an occasion involving grand celebrations in this temple. No other day in a year is allowed for visiting the temple. More than one lakh devotees visit this temple through both the routes of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

There are various inscriptions found within the temple premises which highlights on the various aspects of the history associated with this temple. There is a

stone which has the engravings of *Silambu* which is the main property that created the impact in *Silapadikaram*. There are also remains of Copper coins belonging to the period of Raja Rajan (985 – 1014 AD) found within this temple premises handed over to Mr. Rajendran, Director of Tamil Nadu Government Department of Agriculture. He added that, these coins could have been used and left by the merchants who crossed through Madurai via this temple to reach Chera Country.⁴⁰

A thorough inspection is enabled especially for the people who travel through Kumily so as to avoid pollution due to plastic consumption. Due to the continuous agitations regarding Mullai Periyar Dam issue, the security is being tightened here. There is an excellent view of Western Ghats from the top of this mountain that gives a wonderful bird's eye view of devotees traversing through the Paliyankudi track. Currently the temple is not in its best structural form. Mr. Sanjayankumar, Associate Director of Thekkady Forest Department says that this temple is situated in the area belonging to Tiger Sanctuary. With reflection to that, neither modifications nor new construction can be permitted. There is a need to get the concurrence of Supreme Court if they want to renovate this temple, as there are many pending litigations against this temple.⁴¹ There is another Kannagi Temple, situated in Paliyankudi which start with the celebration of this festival by hoisting flag on a young bamboo pole. The celebrations happen simultaneously in both the temples. In Paliyankudi, there are more devotees who cast themselves as divine powers and bless and entertain the devotees and the visitors in the entire possible manner.

4.14.3.2. Moongilanai Kamatchi Temple

This temple is situated on the banks of Manjalaar River, 3 km from Devathanapatti near Periyakulam. The main deity is Kamatchi Amman. But the doors of sanctum sanctorum are always closed and so the special rituals and *poojas* are celebrated outside the door. The *poojas* and rituals are done for a five headed Serpent in hooded form, made out of bronze with a 'Soolayutham' (trident) kept before the door. Another unique feature is that, no coconut is broken and unpeeled bananas are kept which contradicts with any other Hindu temple because, before *Aarathi*, it is a ritual to offer broken coconut. There is also a lamp lit within the temple throughout the day which is in practice for more than five hundred years. The devotees offer ghee for this

lamp which is kept in stock and a surprising factor is that this ghee is never touched or felt by any insect regardless of it being kept open. The priests express that it is only due to the divine power of this goddess.

Normally, any temple has a *Gopuram* that covers the sanctum sanctorum. But over here, a certain type of grass is used to cover the temple top. Only Kamabala Naickar Community people can weave the roof after fasting for forty eight days especially with the eyes blindfolded. It is considered inauspicious if anyone views the sanctum from top and hence everyone abides to this sincerely. It is also made sure that no one else watches this process until it is over. This weaving is done only during the festive period and not on a regular basis.

4.14.3.3. *Bala Subramaniar Temple*

Bala Subramaniar Temple built by Rajendra Chola during the tenth century is situated in Periyakulam on the banks of Varaha River. This temple is popularly known as the one that gave more importance to *Saivism*. The main deity is lord Muruga with Devi. History states that while Rajendra Chola was on hunting expedition on the banks of Varaha River near Agamalai, unintentionally he had killed a pig which was feeding its piglets. To the king's own surprise, lord Muruga fed the abandoned piglets. Awestruck by this divine happening, Rajendra Chola had built this temple. *Thiruvilayadal Puranam* highlights that the pigs are given enlightenment in this place and there are evidences that include rare sculptures in the sanctum of lord Subramanya.⁴² This is the temple where, the two *Marudham* trees, a male and a female tree are located. Archaeologists have revealed that these trees are at least thousand years old. Various Tamil movies are shot here.

4.14.3.4. *Kadhali Narasinga Perumal Temple*

A temple built during the period of Later Pandyas is located 2 km from Andipatti on the way to Vaigai dam. This is one among the 108 Vishnu temples. There is a history that states that a person who was working as a care taker of the cattle had noticed a snake mound amidst 'Jambai', a type of grass. From then on, he was feeding the mound with cow's milk taken from the cattle without his owner's knowledge. Knowing this, the owner was very angry and tried to remove the snake mound. To his own

astonishment, he witnessed a *Swayambu*, self-manifested lingam in a stone form. From then on, everyone started worshipping the lingam for years. After a period of time, when there was a flood in the mountains of Mavootru Velappar, the temple car that was in Theppampatti Narasinga Perumal Temple had been forcefully moved by the flood and it halted once it reached the area where the lingam was found amidst the grass. Surprised by this happening, the Later Pandyas had constructed the temple for this divine form. Thus the name of the temple is derived from ‘Jambai’grass type, ‘puthu’ – snake mound, ‘Oor’ – place, resulting in Jambuliputhur. Since Kadhal Lingam and Narasinga Perumal are placed together within the sanctum sanctorum, it is called as Kadhal Narasinga Perumal Temple.⁴³

4.14.3.5. Arulmigu Meenatchi Sundareswarar Temple

The temple situated in Andipatti was built by a Pandya king so as to worship especially while he was on hunting. *Sidhars* also called as Saints, who visit many temples throughout Tamil Nadu, had more affinity towards Madurai Meenakshi and lord Sundareshwarar. Since Madurai was the capital city of Pandyas, they founded it difficult to visit the temple due to more crowd. Once they heard about the lord Sundareshwarar temple in Andipatti, they started flocking towards the temple so as to do rituals and penance at peaceful state. There is a separate sanctum for both the deities. It is believed that by praying here, childless people get blessed by the divine power with a child.

4.14.3.6. Mavootru Velappar Temple

This temple situated 20 km from Andipatti and 8 km from Theppampatti located on the top of a peak in Varusanadu hills was built by Gandamanur Zamindar. *Mavootru* means ‘The Spring of the Mangrove’ since there are more number of mango trees found around here. Lord Murugan is the main deity. It is believed that People belonging to Paliyar tribe had found the statue of the deity during an excavation. All the rituals and *poojas* are done by these Paliyar tribes. There is a natural spring attached to the temple which is assumed to heal even the most incurable diseases. A grand festive celebration happens in the Tamil month of *Chithirai*, where more devotees offer Kavadi as thanks giving ritual.

4.14.3.7. Kuchanur Saneeswaran Temple

Saneeswaran or Saturn is reputed to be both giver as well as a destroyer who is considered to be more powerful among the nine planets. The Kuchanur Saneeswaran temple located near Chinnamanur on the banks of river canal Surabhi has the privilege of being the only independent temple for lord Saneeswaran in entire Tamil Nadu.⁴⁴ The deity here is in its self-manifested form. This deity which keeps growing even now is completely applied with turmeric believing that the turmeric will control the growth. There are three pairs of eyes within the deity.

Every year, in the Tamil month of *Aadi*, festival is celebrated in a grand manner in this temple. All the five Saturdays, special *poojas* and rituals are performed. During this period, people from all over Tamil Nadu as well as the neighbouring states visit and offer *Nerthi Kadai*, simply called as thanks giving rituals. At the end of the fourth Saturday, the associate deity, Sonai Karuppa Samy is graced with special celebrations. It is a customary practice for the devotees to take bath in Surabhi River and leave the old clothes in the river. As a result, the Surabhi River gets more polluted. This acts as a major threat to the sustainability of this well-known temple.

4.14.3.8. Poolanandeswarar /Sivagami Amman Temple

The famous Shiva temple located in Chinnamanur was constructed by the Pandya King, Raja Simha III in 916 AD. As the Self manifested lingam of the main deity was discovered from Poolam (bush), he is called as Poolanandeswarar. He is also called as Palundhanathar, Thazhuva Kuzhaindhavar and Raja Simheswarar. This temple is glorified by Manickavasakar in his literary work, *Thiruvatasagam*.⁴⁵ It has its history involving Thiru. Rajasimeshwaran as one of the intense devotee of lord Shiva. It was a tradition by then to worship lord Shiva by pouring Cow's milk on Shiva Lingam. The king also followed the same ritual. Once, a milk man was hindered by a root while bringing milk to king's palace. Due to which all the milk got spilled in that area. This event happened repeatedly in the same area. Finally, when he tried to remove the root, it started bleeding and suddenly a sparkling light appeared which expanded and almost touched the sky. When the king rushed to the place knowing this through the milkman, he prayed to divine power to come down to his level so that he can offer his prayers.⁴⁶

As per the devotee's plea, the lord presented himself to the king Rajasimeshwaran by reducing his exorbitant height down to king's level. Hence he is also called as *Alavukkalavanavar*.⁴⁷ Overwhelmed by this, the king gently but tightly hugged the lingam. As a result, there are impressions of the armour as well as the jewels of the King even now which can be witnessed during *Aarthi* and the height of the Shiva lingam is as tall as that of height of any devotee and also the face of the Goddess is believed to always sweat. There are various festivals celebrated in association with this temple.⁴⁸

4.14.3.9. Kalatheeswarar Temple

The Kalatheeswarar-Gnanambigai temple built by Maravarman Sundrapandiyan is believed to be at least 800 years old.⁴⁹ The king who ruled the region of Uthamapalayam was also in charge of Rani Mangammal's army. He used to travel to Kalahasti to worship lord Shiva. But after a certain period of time, he was unable to continue due to the age factor. The lord was so moved by his intense devotion and so gave his presence in Uthamapalayam and stayed as Kalatheeswarar. From then on, this is called as Then Kalahasti.⁵⁰

The statue of goddess Ambica was found in Mullai River and was later named as Gnanambikai, which is the name of the main female deity of Kalahasti. Hence, this temple is also called as Gnanambikai Temple. The uniqueness of this temple is that, lord Muruga's statue is located in between lord Shiva and Goddess Gnanambikai. This temple is also identified as a symbolic representation of Mother's love towards son and thus believed to solve indifferences among the son and mother and result in strengthening their relationship.

Normally, the goddess Saraswathi is found to be playing the musical instrument Veena in all the temples. But here, she holds Veena in her left hand with an *Asha Mala* in her right hand. Normally there are 7 deities found together called as *Saptha Madhasor Sapdha Kannigal* who are considered as Seven Virgin Angels or divine forms in all the Hindu temples. But here, there are eight Madhas including Kaali Devi who is considered to be 'Aadhi Shakthi' (the primal power).⁵¹ This is the only temple throughout India that has 'Kaala Chakkaram' (Wheel of Time) and 'Rasi Chakkaram'

(Wheel of Planets) carved completely out of stone. There is also ‘Sahasra Lingam’ (The one that has 1008 small lingams carved within). So if a devotee worships this lingam, it is equal to worshipping 1008 lingams.⁵²This temple has got lots of surprising as well thought provoking aspects which is sure to attract the historians and devotees.

4.14.3.10. Arulmigu Nandagopalan Swamy Thambiran Maatu Thozhu

This temple is located in Cumbum where the cows are considered as the divine power with just a pillar at the centre of the temple. This temple is believed to be more than five hundred years old. It is said that lord Krishna had come here and was playing around with the cattle that was grazing in this area. In recognition to this, a pillar with carvings of the past is laid in the centre with a herd of cows around. This pillar and the open cow shed form the main sanctum sanctorum which is open to sky unlike any other sanctum sanctorum that are usually covered on top. The priest once shows *Aarathi* to the pillar, subsequently shows it to the cows. There is also a closed shed in its proximity that has heaps of straw stored for the cows.

Within the same premises, there is also Thathappan Temple, a temple created during the period of the Pandyas for a *Sidhar*. A devotee of lord Shiva, Shri Thathappar who hails from a place unknown reached Cumbum and had undertaken various efforts for the welfare of the community. He initiated the construction of a temple for lord Shiva. As per his request, even after his death, the devotees were regularly paying the rituals in the Shiva Temple which was later called as Thathappar Temple.

4.14.3.11. Kambaraya Perumal Temple

This temple located in Cumbum was initially attached with the fort, which is presently in ruined state (Fig: 4.9.).The fort was constructed by Viswanathanayak assisted by his General. The temple premises include two separate shrines, one for lord Perumal and another one for lord Siva. Until the commencement of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board in 1950, the trust formed under the control of British regime was taking care of the temple.⁵³The Siva temple has Sri Kasi Viswanathar as the presiding deity along with the consort Sri Visalakshiamman when Sri Kambaraya Perumal and Sri Alamelumangai Nachiar are the main deities of Vishnu temple.⁵⁴

4.14.3.12. Temples around Suruli Falls

Kailasanathar Temple: This cave temple is situated 800 metres above the level of waterfalls. It has eighteen caves attached to it. There is a spring attached to this temple which has got more curative powers and so the spring is considered divine. An individual feels very peaceful within the premises. There is Viboodhi Paarai, (Holy Ash Rock) which is in white colour due to the splashing of spring water. This Ash is only given as *Prasadham*.

Boodha Narayana Temple: Normally there are separate temples of lord Shiva and lord Vishnu. But in Suruli, these two deities are situated next to each other. To save *Devas* who are the divine beings, lord Vishnu had appeared in giant shape in this place and hence he is called as Bootha Narayana, Boodha meaning Giant. Right next to him is lord Shiva in the form of Mahalingam. Due to the combination of these deities, only *Viboodhi* is given as *Prasadham*.⁵⁵

Suruli Velappar: This temple is dedicated to lord Kartikeya who is also called as lord Muruga. History says that *Devas* had come and surrendered to lord Muruga so as to protect them from the Saturn. As a result, the lord protected and blessed them. He is seated in naturally formed cave temple. Besides this temple, there are statues of Vinayaka, Sandhana Krishna, Ramapiran and Lakshmanan located.⁵⁶

4.14.3.13. Gudalur Azhagar Swamy Temple

Thiru Koodal Azhagiya Perumal Temple in Gudalur is believed to be around five hundred years old. The architecture of Madurai Azhagar temple is reflected in the construction of this temple (Fig: 4.10.). Poonjar (Poonaiyar) Rajas of Kerala are believed to be the builders of this temple. *Ashtanga Vimana* is the very unique feature of this temple which acts as the basis of lord Perumal. This *Vimana* has tales from the epic Ramayana and also has Krishna Leelas. The sculptures are minutely carved with various events of Ramayana including the rule of Dasarathar, birth of lord Rama and his siblings, Rama's marriage and exile, abduction of Sita, destroying the demon king Ravana and the coronation of Sri Rama. Due to these aspects, this *Ashtanga Vimana* is also called as 'Ramayana Vimanam' and thus this temple has got another name called Ramayana Temple. There are Goddess Mahalakshmi, Child Navaneetha Krishnan



Figure: 4.8 - Mangala Devi Kannagi Temple, Vanaathiparai



Figure: 4.9 - Kambarayar Temple, Cumbum



Figure: 4.10 - Azhagar Temple, Gudalur

holding butter in hands, Saint Thirumangai Azhwar, Saint Nammazhwar and Sri Ramanujam in the hall before the Sanctum. Another highlighting aspect of this temple is the *Prakaram* located within the Sanctum Sanctorum which is found only in very few ancient temples.⁵⁷ There are inscriptions found near the entrance within the temple premises that convey information about this temple and also emphasize that the Mangala Devi Kannagi temple was constructed on Chola Architectural style.⁵⁸ These inscriptions register a donation of land made by the king for enabling worship in Mangala Devi Amman temple. There are also certain figures incised below the inscriptions. The period of this temple identified with these inscriptions denote 1668 AD.⁵⁹

4.14.3.14. Thirumalai Raya Perumal temple

This 350 year old temple is located at a distance of 6 kms from Kombai at the foot of Western Ghats Mountain. The main self-manifested deity of Lord Thirumalai Raya Perumal is found in a reclining posture. There is a hill behind this temple called as Ramakkal Malai. There are legends associated with this temple and the huge rock found in Ramakkal Malai. An individual was taking milk from this place downhill to serve the people. During this process, he was hit at a particular point continuously for few days and the milk spilled. So he had carried an axe to remove the one that was hindering him. But to his own fear, he noticed the particular area bleeding and left home immediately. On the same night, the lord appeared in the dream of the King and informed his presence and his test to a common milkman who witnessed blood stained area. Accordingly, as per god's insistence, the king had built this temple. It is believed that the remains of blood stain are found in the huge rock of Ramakkal Malai. The surprising factor is that the stain is in the form of the symbol of lord Perumal, 'Tilak'.

In seventeenth century, Tippu Sultan had come to Tamil Nadu and raged war till Uthamapalayam. To strengthen his team, he procured dogs from Kombai. As per the request of Jameen and people of Palayam, he had gifted *Urchavar* also called as procession deities of lord Perumal and Goddess Sridevi and Boodevi. Another unique feature of this temple is that it involves equal participation of Hindu and Muslim community during celebrations.⁶⁰

4.14.3.15. Arulmigu Srinivasa Perumal Temple

Situated in Bodinaickanur, this temple is very famous among the Vishnu temples in the entire Theni district. The king, Bodaya Naickar constructed this temple in this area after having a vision in his dream about the existence of Lord Srinivasa Perumal. Initially built with stone structure, got modified to wooden structure and finally got its current statue form in 1984 with completion of temple structure. It is believed that offering prayers to *Ashta Lakshmi* will relieve a devotee from all the debts. There is also *Sakkarathalvar* statue that is considered more special and powerful.⁶¹

4.14.3.16. Arulmigu Paramasivan Temple

The temple believed to be built in 1932, is located on a hilltop on Madurai – Theni Highway proceeding towards Munnar near Cardamom Planters Association College. This temple is also called as South Thiruvannamalai by the devotees. Every year, in the Tamil month of *Chithirai*, a grand festival happens for 10 days.⁶²

4.14.3.17. Virupakshi Arumuga Nayanaar Temple

Virupakshi Arumuga Nayanaar Temple situated in Kodangipatti is believed to be minimum five hundred years old with lord Muruga as the main deity with six faces. (Aru means six and Muga means face). The statue of the deity was found in a village called Virupakshi and so the divine power is named with the village name. There is a shrine where lord Shiva is found wearing *Rudhraksha Mala*. This form of lord Shiva is rarely seen. There is *Theertha Thotti*, a tank filled with holy water as part of the temple premises. It is a natural spring that never dries and is considered more holy and so people take a dip in this water and also take it home. There are sculptures of *Saptha Kannigal*, on the walls of the *Theertha Thotti*. History states that once when the *Saptha Kannigal* were on a mission to kill a demon, killed a sage by mistake. They felt that it was a sin and so created a spring and worshipped lord Muruga to relieve them from sin and as a result they were relieved. So, the *Theertha Thotti* is believed to be older than the temple.

4.14.3.18. Chitra Putra Nayanar Temple

The word ‘Chithiram’ means something that is surprising or wonderful and ‘Guptam’ means secret. Since he finds out all the hidden secrets within an individual and writes their destiny, he is called as Chitra Guptar or Chitra Putrar. Chitra Putra Nayanar temple is found in only two places within Tamil Nadu. Next to Kanchipuram, Theni has got the temple in Kodangipatti in front of Virupakshi Arumuga Nayanar Temple. Chitra Guptar is believed to have power in penetrating into the good and bad deeds of the people and account them perfectly and so lord Shiva appointed him to do the same. Since he was born to divine *Kamadhenu* cow that falls on Chitra Pournami day, there are special prayers and rituals offered to the divine power within the premises. Due to the divine nature, the devotees are restrained from consuming curd, ghee or butter prepared from cow. It is believed that if the devotees take oil bath on this particular day, all their sins will be reduced with that. There is also a separate shrine for the wife of Chitra Guptar, Prabavathy within the premises. There are images of nine zodiac planets on the ceiling of this temple.⁶³

4.14.4. Other Temples – dedicated for Personalities

Theni district has a credit to temples created exclusively for prominent personalities. Manikkavacakar and Thirugnana Sambandhar have contributed more towards growth of literature. There is also a temple for Agasthiar, an eminent sage who presented various alternate medicines through literature form even centuries ago.

4.14.4.1. Manikkavacakar

Manikkavacakar was a poet belonging to ninth century famous for his work, ‘*Thiruvatasagam*’. There are inscriptions that confirm that he was the minister of Pandiya King Arimarthana Pandiyan. History states that he was highlighted for his intense devotion towards lord Shiva. He had spent the money given for buying horses for cavalry towards construction of Avudaiyar temple in Pudukkottai district due to which lord has provided him with horses by changing foxes into horses.⁶⁴ The five hundred years old temple located in Markayankottai road in Chinnamanur has the main deity of Sri Manikkavacakar along with the deities of lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi which is special next to the one located in Adi-Annamalai in Thiruvannamalai. Still, this temple holds more significance since this is the only temple with a *Gopuram* and flag

post unlike the one in Thiruvannamalai. The main deity is found in standing posture wearing *Rudhraksha mala* and holding *Jaba Mala* on the right hand. There are palm leaves in his left hand. During the festival, he goes on a procession as minister reflecting the history of the past. The lord Chandigeswara who is normally found in seated posture in all Shiva temples is found in standing posture praying to Lord Shiva. Chitraguptar is found here along with his writing instruments, *Ezhuthani* and palm leaf in meditative form. The devotees normally pray this deity requesting for wise children and cure from stammering.

4.14.4.2. *Thirugnana Sambandar Temple*

Thirugnana Sambandar who is considered as the prominent one among the sixty three Nayanmars lived around seventh century. This temple is constructed in Vadugapattiin Periyakulam by Thiru. Muthalaghu Pillai who is a person behind creation of many schools. Every year, in the Tamil month of *Vaigasi*, special *poojas* and celebrations are enabled, because this is the month the divine saint attained enlightenment. During these celebrations, people from various places especially monks and saints those who are in spiritual path visit this temple. In the Tamil month of *Marghazhi*, *Arudhra Dharisana* Festival happens for ten days during which, ‘*Thirupavai, Thiruvembavai*’ is chanted and special *poojas* are organized.⁶⁵

4.14.4.3. *Agasthiar temple*

A revered Sage, Agasthiar is considered as the father of Tamil literature. He has the privilege of compiling the first Tamil Grammar literature. He is believed to have lived during sixth or seventh century. Considered as the Supreme one of all the other *Sidhars*, he possesses eight supernatural powers. The Siddha medicine technique is believed to have been received by Sage Agasthiar from lord Muruga. Reflecting this, he has given various instructions and descriptions for treating various diseases.⁶⁶ In Theni district, initiatives are taken to build Agasthiar temple in various villages along with Herbal garden emphasizing the value of trees and herbal medicine. Retired Military officer and nature lover, Mr. Sarguru, Secretary, Sarguru Swamigal Educational Trust conveyed that the trust is completely involved in building Agasthiyar temple in all the villages throughout the district. There is one such temple created in M.Subbulapuram. The devotees are given an herbal plant as *Prasadham*.

4.14.5. Other Religious Attractions

There are various other religious attractions in Theni district. Periyakulam has got more number of mosques and so it is easy to find clusters of Islam people around. Muhammed Yusuf Khan Mosque has got more significance in history that even in Tamil movie industry, a sensation was created when veteran actor Kamalahanan initiated to document in the title, Marudhanayagam. The churches equally have a long history, especially linked to Mullai Periyar dam.

4.14.5.1. Our Lady of Snow's Church

This church in Rayappanpatti is considered very holy for the Christians and is the oldest among all the churches within the district. The entire village of Rayappanpatti though has people of all religion in the present, was fully occupied by the Christians in earlier past. The church has the tower of 137 feet high. Being constructed between 1902 and 1925, it was opened to public in 1925. This is constructed similar to St. Lourdu's Church in Tiruchirapally. The huge bronze church bell creates a sound that can be heard even at a distance of 10 km. There is a strong belief among the residents that the Lady of Snows will safeguard them from all the possible ill effects especially against snakes and poisonous insects.

4.14.5.2. Holy Spirit Church

The church in Hanumanthanpatti is more unique in its structural form since it has more reflection of the technology used in Mullai Periyar Dam construction. There is also a history that Colonel John Pennycuick had stored raw materials needed for construction of dam and had gathered people for work staying in this church. This hundred years old structure is still in its magnificent form. The construction work of this church was initiated by the first Parish Priest Father F.X. Franco in 1881. Father Bertheju carried out later works from 1882 to 1889 and had worked on designing central part of the church. The raw materials used in the construction of this church are similar to Mullai Periyar Dam involving limestone, burnt brick powder, pal jiggery, teak leaves and Kadukkai Juice (*Terminalia Chebula*). The church was further renovated by Father E.Peter Sahaya Raj and consecrated by Arch Bishop Peter Fernandes.⁶⁷

4.14.5.3. Muhammed Yusuf Khan Mosque

Mr. Muhammed Yusuf Khan was born as a Hindu named Marudhanayagam. In his early days, he had left his family and had his education with the support from an European, Captain Brunton who was a Christian. Then, he served Nawabs and later embraced Islam and died as Muslim. There are various remarkable events that mark the life history of Yusuf Khan. Though he was a ruler for very short period of time in Madurai, he focused on social harmony.⁶⁸In 1752, he had joined British heading the weapons section. In 1759, he was serving as a Governor for Tirunelveli – Madurai. In 1763, he had won British in Madurai and established his rule. As a reflection to this, a treacherous plot was planned to catch him and finally Yusuf Khan was hanged in 1764 by the British. During the hanging process, he fell down couple of times and only the third time, he was hanged and killed properly. Fearing that he might come back alive, his body was chopped into pieces and were buried in four different places. His head in Trichy, legs in Periyakulam, hands in Palayamkottai and body in Madurai. In Periyakulam, the buried place is now the Mosque with his memorial within.

4.14.6. Architectural Evidences

Throughout the district, the architectural evidences are found more in the temples. There are temples with more of inscriptions which are yet to be deciphered such as Uthanda Perumal temple in Gullapuram. Due to this, the chances of gaining clarity of architectural aspects are incomplete. Certain temples such as Bala Subramaniar temple in Periyakulam and Kalatheeswarar temple in Palayam has more of finely carved architectural patterns that marvel the visitor amidst the poor maintanence. Ramakkal Medu and Samanar Caves are examples of architectural evidences.

4.14.6.1. Ramakkal Medu

Ramakkalmedu located in the borders of Theni and Kerala is a hill station at a height of approximately 2,200 feet above the sea level. It is located at a distance of 9 km from Kombai. It can also be reached through Cumbumettu which is at an equal distance of 9 km. It is believed that, in the initial stages, more tribal people were believed to have inhabited this area and in the memory of them, the statues of *Kuravan* and *Kurathi* were launched in 2005 by C.B. Jinan Shadod of Balaramapuram.⁶⁹ The

statues are in seated posture on a slab where there is a child standing next to these two statues. There is also a kid held by the women and a cock held by the man. The man and the woman are dressed in their traditional attire with the jewels and accessories.

This place also has historical importance through the great epic, Ramayana. It is believed to be visited by Rama and Lakshman while they were in search of Sita. As a result, there are foot prints of Rama. Due to the constant wind, it is said to be one of the largest wind blowing area in entire Asia. The mountain top gives a view at least upto 80 km involving Theni, Thevaram, Cumbum, Kombai, Gudalur, Megamalai, Chinnamanur and Andipatti. A telescopic view point can give even more clear sight. There is a need for understanding between the Government of Tamil Nadu and Kerala so as to beautify this tourist spot.

4.14.6.2. Samanar Caves

‘Samanar’ is the Tamil word for Jains. This Jain religion had originated in India in Bihar during sixth century BC. Later, only in the second century AD, it spread to southern states including the current Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. As a result, Samanar saints stayed in Madurai, Thiruparankundram, Kanyakumari, Nagarkoil, Kazhugumalai and Ramanadhapuram. There are evidences in Palayam that express that Samanars have lived here during nineth century. Normally they reside in areas away from the human settlements and so they had created caves near the Karuppanna Samy Temple in Palayam. Even now, a tourist can witness the sculptures and water spring designed by them. The sculptures include twenty third and twenty fourth Thirthankara, Mahavira and various others. This is declared as a monument of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958.⁷⁰ But care and attention need to be taken to preserve this monument by avoiding litter and pollution and also the graffiti works by the residents (Fig: 4.11.).

4.14.6.3. Akash Lingam

Akash Lingam, the Lingam of Space is located on top of the rock where Samanar sculptures are found (Fig: 4.12). There are remains of the foundation stone which expresses that the structure which was complete once had currently deteriorated. There is a statue of goddess Parvathi on a knee bent posture facing north direction. The



Figure: 4.11 - Samanar Caves, Palayam



Figure: 4.12 - Akash Linga, next to Samanar Caves, Palayam

Goddess is also found with flowers doing rituals for lord Shiva who is in the form of lingam. It is normally rare to find this kind of structure.⁷¹

4.14.7. Water Forms

Theni is filled with more of water resources in the form of rivers, waterfalls and dams. Though these are seasonal, they create greater impact during the season thus compensating the effect of tourism for an entire year. These forms contribute mainly towards enhancing the richness of nature and climate.

4.14.7.1. Suruli Falls

Suruli Falls is located at a distance of 10 kms from Cumbum (Fig: 4.13.). This is a spiritual as well as a tourist centre. People from various places including Kerala and southern districts of Tamil Nadu visit this falls. It is strongly believed that millions and millions of *Devas* and forty eight thousand saints had undergone penance here. Devotees perform *Thidhi* for their ancestors here since they feel this place to be more divine for the process. There are devotees who take *Theertham*, the holy water from here before they initiate any festive occasion or any family ritual. No moon day is considered more auspicious due to which the flow of tourists and devotees are more in number on this particular day.⁷² This falls has got a special mention in the Tamil epic *Silapadikaram* composed by the poet Ilango Adigal.⁷³ The water gushes through various herbal leaves and plants and has healing properties when it reaches down at a height of 40 feet. So the tourists believe that all the diseases especially skin diseases will be cured completely.

This falls comes under the control of Theni Forest Department. The bathing is well regulated by the Forest Department dividing the areas for men and women separately. There are provisions for changing dresses. June to October is the ideal time to visit this waterfall. In the month of November, the devotees of lord Ayyapan commence fasting for forty eight days by cleansing themselves here and wear a mala made out of Basil plant from Vinayakar TempleGurusamy.⁷⁴

Devotees of lord Murugan from Kamayagoundanpatti, Surulipatti, Rayappanpatti and Pudhupatti bathe in Suruli Falls, take Suruli *Theertham* and go on a

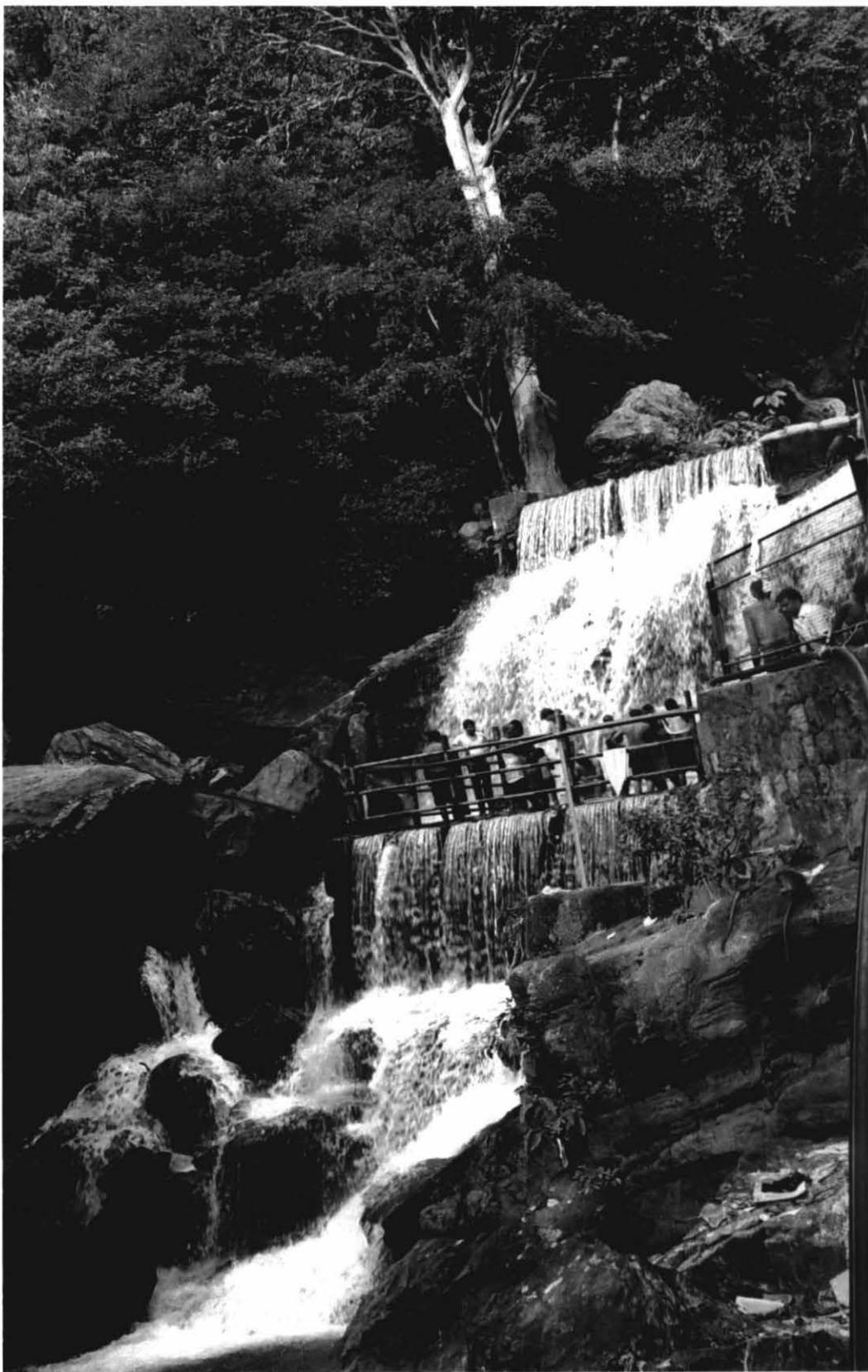


Figure: 4.13 - Suruli Falls, Suruli Mountains

‘Cycle Yatra’ towards Tiruchendur. This practice being practiced for the past 22 years, involved more than one hundred and seventy devotees in 2015.⁷⁵ There were battery cars introduced at the cost of five lakh rupees around September 2014⁷⁶ to drop the tourists near the falls from the parking area since the distance covered is difficult and inaccessible for old people, children and women. But the condition of these cars is now very poor which indicates that it is no more functioning.

4.14.7.2. Kumbakarai Falls

It is located 6 km from Periyakulam. This waterfall (Fig: 4.14.) is an ideal picnic spot which serve as base camp for trekkers based in Kodaikanal hills.⁷⁷ This waterfall has the chance of flooding if the rainfall is more in areas such as Kodaikanal, Thandikudi and Vaigai dam.⁷⁸ The *Vanadhevadhas* such as Boodhanaatchi, Sezhumbunaatchi, Sothumaayan, Chinna Annan and Karupannasamy are believed to gather on the rocks of this falls due to which it is called as Kumbal Paarai. (Kumbal – group, Paarai - Rock) This later came to be known as Kumbakarai.

Realizing the tourist potentials of this place, British Government has declared Kumbakarai as tourist spot in 1942. The entry fee charged is Rs.10 which allows the tourists between 8 AM to 4 PM.⁷⁹ This place is a treasure of rare species of birds and animals. There is also a park created for medicinal plants which includes minimum of fifty saplings near the falls which is poorly maintained. Vazhuku Paarai, Yaanai Kejam, Paambu Kejam were the spots within this falls which is closed for access by the tourists due to safety in the beginning of 2015.⁸⁰ Even though there is huge potential for tourism, there exists lack of basic infrastructure facilities to cater the tourists.

4.14.7.3. Tiger Falls

This is one of the preferred highest falls in Tamil Nadu that originates at a height of around 300 feet. This is located on Bodimettu – Munnar Highway which gives a visual treat to the tourists who passes by. The surrounding areas of this falls are ideal for trekking. There is also a small pond created by this falls downhill that stores the water ideal for tourists to spend some quality time.

4.14.7.4. Vaigai Dam

This dam is located at a distance of 14 km from Theni and 7 km from Andipatti (Fig: 4.15.). This is constructed across the Vaigai River and opened in 1959. There are parks located on both the sides of the dam and play grounds for entertaining the children. There is a toy train within the premises for the tourists to have a glimpse of all the available resources. There is also a zoo located in here. It is an ideal place to have entertainment throughout the day. June to October is very perfect to visit this dam though tourists are allowed throughout the year.⁸¹ This dam was awarded with ‘Best Maintained Dam’ for the year 2011 – 2012 by the Government under PWD.⁸²

4.14.7.5. Sothuparai Dam

This dam is situated across the Varaha River on the foot of Kodaikanal Hills and is 9 km from Periyakulam (Fig: 4.16.). It comes under Manjalaar Basin Division. This dam is the second highest in Tamil Nadu with a height of 126.28 feet. There is mango plantation throughout the way from Periyakulam to Sothuparai.

4.14.7.6. Shanmuganadhi Dam

This dam is located in Rayappanpatti at the foot of Highwayvis with the height of 52 feet 2 km from Andipatti. This dam was built in 1986. People who travel to Suruli falls have to travel through Shanmuganadhi dam due to which it is common to find more tourists here. Since it is at the foot of Highwayvis, there is the presence of fresh, pleasant air during morning and evening. But then due to lack of entertaining facilities and infrastructure, the inflow of tourists is reduced to a greater extent.⁸³ If properly maintained with launching basic infrastructural facilities, this can become a pleasant tourist attraction.

4.14.8. Other Attractions

There are various other spots in Theni district that can lure the attention of the tourists. These spots include a large number of temples each with a unique aspect. There are also various *Sidhars* found within the district.



Figure: 4.14 - Kumbakarai Falls, Periyakulam



Figure: 4.15 - Vaigai Dam
(Source: Sivaraman, Jayamangalam)

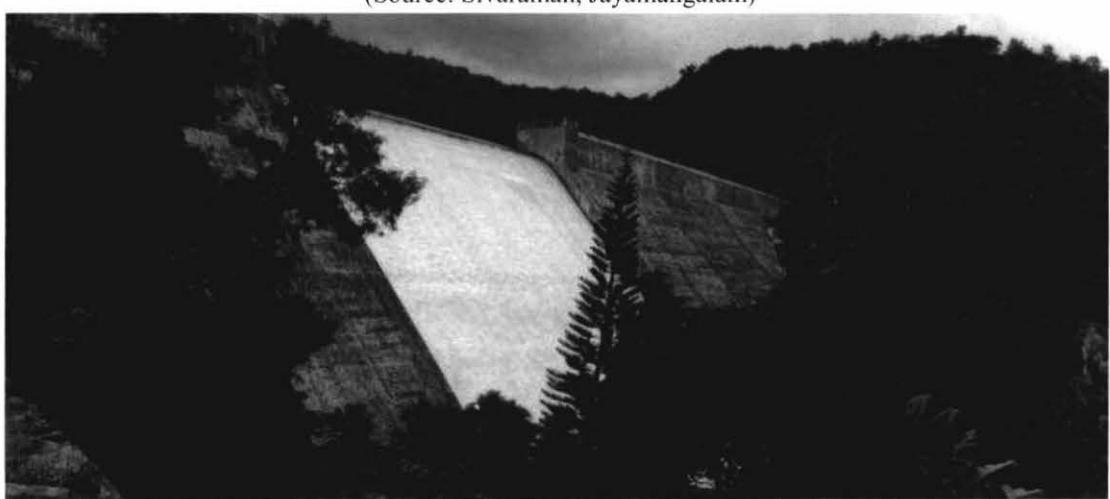


Figure: 4.16 - Sothuparai Dam
(Source: www.thenihotels.in)

4.14.8.1. Kodi Lingam Temple: This is the temple situated at the foot of Suruli hills. This has the lingam as the main deity under *Vanni* tree, a holy tree in Hindu tradition. A huge lingam encompasses tiny lingams within its structure and the period of which is unknown. It is believed that even now various *Sidhars* visit this temple and do rituals. The devotees offer a lingam as part of *Nerthi Kadan* once their vows are fulfilled. There is also a seventy two feet Dhayana Lingam behind this temple which is in the process of construction (Fig: 4.17.).

4.14.8.2. Kailasanathar Temple: This temple is situated in Kailasapatty on Theni – Periyakulam road. This temple has got various inscriptions that express the antiquity. Lord Shiva in the form of lingam is the main deity. There is also lord Vellai Vinayakar Temple as part of the temple premises.

4.14.8.3. Suranganaru Falls: This falls is situated in Theni district bordering Kerala. One can have a clear view of the falls from Gudalur amidst the mountains (Fig: 4.18.).

4.14.8.4. Vairavan Dam: This is a small check dam situated near Gudalur that has fresh flow of water. This area is secluded but gives a pleasant feel except the graveyard located in its proximity. This has actually thrilled few tourists.

4.14.8.5. Vellimalai: Located in the hills of Varusanadu at a distance of 6.5 km, this is also known as Silver Mountain. It has artificial lake, natural environment and Vaigai River as part of the attractions.

4.14.8.6. Anaipillayar Dam and Waterfall: This is located in near proximity to Bodinaickanur with a temple for lord Vinayakar also known as Sri Mookana Pillayar. If the flow of water is balanced, the tourists have an opportunity to walk through the flat surface on top of the dam (Fig: 4.19.).

4.14.8.7. Abubacker Masthan Dargah: There is a mosque created for Abu Backer, who was a renowned Muslim Mystic around 1630s near the cave temple of Kailasanathar. His body was interned in this place which is considered as an important place of pilgrimage in Suruli.



Figure: 4.17 - Kodi Lingam Temple, Surulipatti

(Source: www.wikipedia.com)



Figure: 4.18 - Suranganaru Falls

(Source: www.panoramio.com)



Figure: 4.19 - Anaipillayar Dam, near Bodinaickanur

4.14.9. Tourist Places around Theni District

4.14.9.1. Kerala

Thekkady is a tourist spot that is never left in a tourist itinerary if the visit is to Theni district. Chellar Koil, located in Kumily bordering Tamil Nadu and Kerala has a breath taking view of nature with its mountains and waterfalls. This village slopes down to the groves of coconut located in Theni district. This is an eco tourism destination at a distance of 5 km between Gudalur and Anakkara. Kumily, PooPaarai and Munnar are the other tourist places in Kerala that has easy reach and are at a shorter distance from Theni district.

4.14.9.2. Kodaikanal

This is one of the popular hill stations in Dindigul, Tamil Nadu at 7200 feet above the sea level. Located at a distance of 79 km by road, this place is also known as ‘Princess of Hill Stations’. This place has rich natural resources that are a real feast to the tourists. It can be reached from Theni through Periyakulam road. The major attractions are Kodai Lake, Dolphin’s Nose, Bryant Park, Silver Cascade, Pillar Rock and Guna Caves added along with other attractions.

4.14.9.3. Madurai

Madurai, which is more than 2500 years old, is a cultural and commercial centre that has more historical evidences of Pandya rulers. This is at a distance of 77 km from Theni district by road. Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple, Thirumalai Nayak Palace and Azhagar Temple are the worth visiting places among all the attractions.

4.15. THENI DISTRICT – A PARADISE FOR MEDIA INDUSTRY

Theni district is a representation of various aspects from Tamil film industry. This district is the birth places of eminent and talented personalities including Mr. Ilayaraja, a legendary Music Director who hails from Pannaiyapuram, Mr. Vairamuthu, a renowned Tamil poet and lyricist from Vadugapatti, the famous Tamil Movie Directors, Mr. Kasthuri Raja and Mr. Bharathi Raja and various others. Another added feature is that, more number of movies are shot in this district especially Tamil and

Malayalam Movies. There are also various writers who had authored books based in this district including Mr. Kamu Thurai.

Theni District is a composite of various tourist attractions spread throughout all the areas. Its proximity to various attractions in the neighbourhood is ideal for domestic as well as international tourist arrival. Still there are major influences towards the rural areas since the majority of the attractions are located in the rural areas. This acts as an influencing factor to explore all the areas of the district especially rural areas and their unique features there by facilitating rural tourism activities within the district.

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