



A SURVEY ON “STHALAVRIKSHAS” IN THE TEMPLES OF NAGAPATTINAM ENVIRON

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ABSTRACT

A survey of Sthalavrikshas also known as sacred trees (or) temple trees were conducting in 36 temples of the Nagapattinam environ during the time of 2010-2012. It was noted that 16 temples have Sthalavrikshas while 20 such element exists in remaining temples. 9 species of Sthalavrikshas have been recorded in these 16 temples.

Keywords:Sthalavrikshas, Sacred trees, Nagapattinam environ, Tamilnadu.

INTRODUCTION

Sthalavrikshas are venerated from time immemorial by devotees as being as holy as the presiding deity of a temple [1]. The Sanskrit term Sthalavriksha means tree of the locality (Sthal - place; Vriksha - tree). The nature worship consisted of worshipping various forms of natural elements. Besides panchaboorthas, recognizable natural elements like landscapes, grasslands, mountains, rivers and forests were also worshipped. Buddhists compared kailash to the legendary mountain 'Meru' and considered it a sacred element [2]. Worship of plants is practiced throughout the world and is well established from pre-historic periods in India. In Tamil Nadu state, India this customary practice follows with religious faiths and culture. One such religious worship is known as Sthalavriksha in temples. Very few field studies have been conducted on Sthalavriksha practice and its role in social, ecological and environmental impacts of local people. In particular, ethnomedicinal uses on Sthalavrikshas, occurring in the temples of Tamil Nadu have been unexplored. A survey was conducted in 1165 ancient temples of the state and revealed the occurrence of 112 plant species during 2002- 2006. At the time of study, several ethnomedicinal uses of 101 Sthalavriksha species were recorded by both direct observations and referred to by devotees, priests and Nattuvaidyas (traditional healers) in the temples [3]. A glimpse at the

list of the sacred trees reveals that they have ecological, economical and sociological significance. In Pondicherry region, Maheswari (2000) reported 176 tree species in the temple complexes of 143 temples. The elaborate mythology surrounding the tree in the Buddhism suggests that the tree is no ordinary creation but the tree of life[4].

Study Areas

The study was carried out in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry states. Nagapattinam district is located on the shores of the Bay of Bengal covering an area of 2715.83 Sq. km. This coastal district of Tamil Nadu lies between 10.10° and 11.20° North latitudes and 79.15° and 79.50° East longitudes. This region is bounded by Bay of Bengal on east, Thiruvavur District and Thanjavur District on West, Cuddalore District on North and Palk Strait on South and situated at Cauvery delta region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study covered the Nagapattinam Environ, Tamilnadu. 36 temples were enumerated, data collected in local people. Flowering twigs of trees found within the temples premises were collected and identified taxonomically using the Floras compiled by Hentry et al. (1989) and Matthews (1981, 1982, 1988, 1991) and

1993)[5-10]. The tree species grown as Sthalavrikshas in 36 temples in Nagapattinam environ were enumerated in the present study. The survey documented several interesting facets of tree worship.

Biocultural aspects of Sthalavrikshas in study area

Arasu (*Ficus religiosa*): Aiyandar temple situated near the Banyan tree. Under this tree their is a termite. In this termite usual prayer held on Friday, Sunday or Tuesday. On those days devotees were pouring the milk in that termite, lighting of camphor. And also kept some flowers, beetle nut, fruits and yellow band pray for their health and tie the band in her hands. The people trust these kinds of worship helps for quick marriage for virgin women.

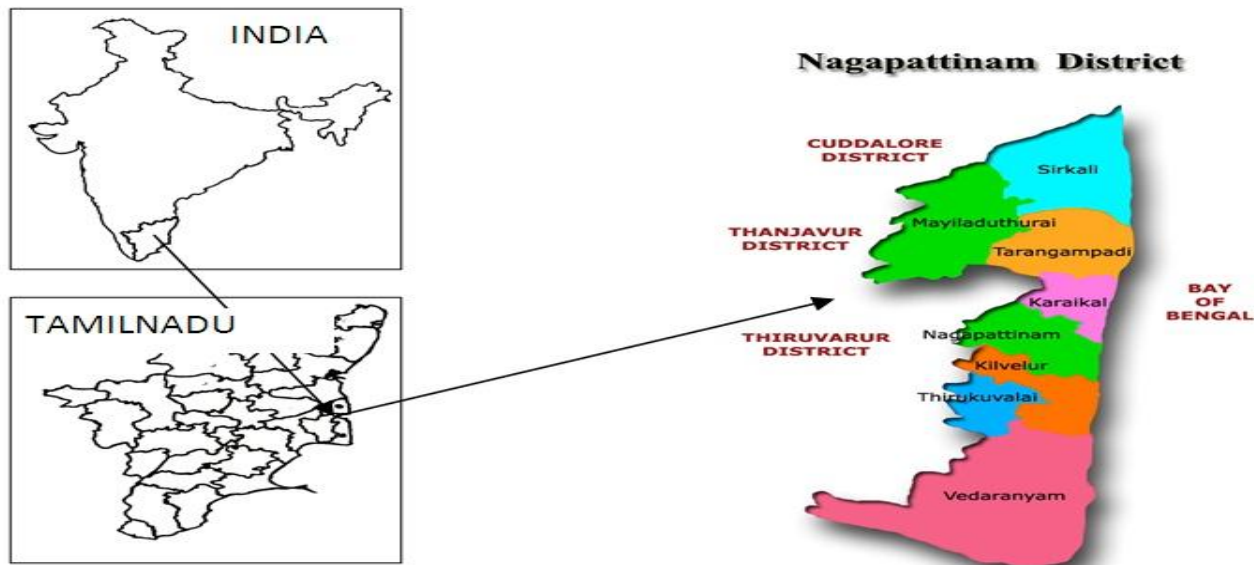
Vembu (*Azadirachta indica*): In this temple, the devotees visit Sthalavrikshas (Tree) tie their yellow ropes, thottil pray for their health and virgin women’s for their quick marriage.

Vembu (*Azadirachta indica*): In this temple there is a tree considered as god. In this tree women tie their yellow ropes, pregnant women pray for getting children.

Palamaram (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*): In this temple Jack fruit tree considered as God tree. In this Jackfruit tree the couples who are don’t have childrens used tie thottil and the unmarried virgin women used to tie mangalyam for fulfilment.

Table 1. Sthalavrikshas in the temples of Nagapattinam environ

Sl. No	Sthalavrikshas	Local Name	Family	Habit	Temple Name	Place of the temple	Deity
1	Aegle marmelos Linn.Corr.Serr.	Vilvam	Rutaceae	Tree	1.Abiramiamman and Aghatheeshwarar temple	Kadakkam	Sivan
2	Artocarpus heterophyllus Lam.	Pala	Moraceae	Tree	2.Angalamman temple	Athipadugai	SriAngala amman
3	Azadirachta indica Adr.Juss.	Vembu	Meliaceae	Tree	3.Puthadimariya amman temple	Aeralachery	Puthadimariyaa mman
					4.Pathrakaliya amman temple	Ambagarathur	Pathrakaliyaamm an
					5.Masaniamman temple	Athipadugai	Masani amman
					6.Muneeshwaran temple	Kameshwaram	Kadaliyaamman
					7.Rajakaliya amman temple	Anadhanallur	Rajakaliyamman
					8.Petharanyam temple	Valuvur	Aiyandar and petharanyam
4	Calomus rotang L.	Perambu	Poaceae	Herb	9.Subramaniyarway temple	Perambur	Murugan
5	Calophyllum inophyllum Linn.	Pinnai	Guttiferae	Tree	10.Agneeshwarar temple	Thirupugalur	Sivan
6	Calotropies procera (Ait.)R.Br.	Vellaerukku	Asclepiadaceae	Shrub	11.Siva temple	Pandaravadai	Sivan
7	Cassaia fistula L.	Sarakondrai	Caesalpiniaceae	Tree	12.Aiyandar temple	Kannapur	Aiyandar
8	Ficus benghalensis L.	Aalamar am	Moraceae	Tree	13.Aiyandar temple	Ambagarathur	Aiyandar
					14.Aiyandar temple	Kottapadi	Aiyandar
					15.Muniayya temple	Puthagaram	Muniayya
9.	Ficus religiosa L.	Arasamar am	Moraceae	Tree	16.Aagasha Aiyandar temple	Thirunallar	Aiyandar



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tree worship, as a part of nature worship is a trait of all traditional societies. Sacred trees have been chosen on the basis of certain ecological, economical and mythological considerations. This has enabled a variety of local trees to be conserved within the temples.

An analysis of the Sthalavriksham of Nagapattinam region revealed several interesting aspects of sacred tree concept. Vilvam (*Aegle marmelos*) is present in 29 temples, 22 of the have Lord Siva as the

presiding deity. Such a trend has also been reported by [11,12].

Species belonging to 8 genera and 7 families, where also growing within the temples. Of the 9 species, 8 are dicot species; 7 belong to polypetalae, 2 gamopetalae, only 1 are monocots viz. *Calamus rotang*.

It is recommended the maintenance of a sacred tree and nandavanam can be made compulsory though a state sponsored scheme, as it would contribute to conservation of tree diversity.

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