

The Paliyars and Shiva Temples of the Caturagiri Hills, Virudunagar District, Tamil Nadu, South India and the *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu*

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Abstract

Caturagiri is a mountain located about 58 km to the southwest of Madurai in southern part of Tamil Nadu, South India. The mountain valley, with a reserved forest cover, has two shrines dedicated to Shiva, natural shelters with rock paintings, and caves and shelters considered to be the abodes of the Siddhas. Thousands of people from Tamil Nadu visit the Shiva temples of Sundaramahalingam and Sandanamahalingam located on the Caturagiri mountain on the new moon days, and it has become a popular pilgrimage and tourist destination. This area is inhabited by the Paliyars who used to primarily subsist through hunting-gathering till the 20th century. This paper discusses about the Paliyars of this region, history of the Caturagiri temple, the Saptur Zamindari, which patronized the Caturagiri temples, and the *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu*, which is found in the British Library. It argues that the Siddha medicine system perhaps had the contribution of the hill people of Tamil Nadu, including the Paliyars, who do preserve and practice the traditional medicinal system.

Keywords: Caturagiri, *Cindu*, Palayakkarars, Paliyans, Paliyars, Poligars, Saptur Zamindari, Siddhas, Siddha Medicine, *Vazhinadaiccindu*

1. Introduction

Caturagiri (Sathuragiri or Chaturagiri or Caduragiri, 9.7346° N, 77.522° E) is a mountain located about 58 km to the southwest of Madurai on the eastern-most boundary of the Western Ghats in South India (Figure 1). The mountain valley has shrines dedicated to Shiva, and natural caves and shelters considered to be the abodes of the Siddhas, which are famous for pilgrimage, mainly on the new moon day of each month in the Tamil Calendar. The author found a *Vazhinadaiccindu*--a genre of devotional song recited by the people during their pilgrimage by walk, on the way to the Caturagiri temple--at the British Library¹. This paper presents the history of the Caturagiri temple, the Saptur Poligars (*Palayakkarars*) and the narrative details of the *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu*, which was published in 1916. *Vazhinadaiccindu* is devotional song, sung by devotees during their pilgrimage by walk².

1.1 The Caturagiri Mountains: Environmental Context

The Caturagiri is a large mountain with a deciduous forest cover, located on the south-eastern side of the Varushanadu-Andipatti hill range, which is an offshoot of the Western Ghats (Figures 1-2). The hill peak is more than 1200 m AMSL in height, and the temple is located in a valley, at an elevation of about 800+ m AMSL. Incidentally, the Kolli hills near Salem, which has the Shiva temple of Arapaliswarar, too has the name Caturagiri. *Caturam* means 'square' and *giri* means mountain in Sanskrit. The Caturagiri mountain of the Western Ghats that we discuss here, lies to the south of Saptur town (in Madurai district, 60 km southwest of Madurai) and to the northwest of Varrirayiruppu (in Virudunagar district, 78 km southwest of Madurai) in the southern part of Tamil Nadu. The mountain has a shrine dedicated to Shiva known as Sundaramahalingam temple, which has become very popular nowadays, mainly in southern Tamil Nadu. It also

has a Shiva temple called Sandanamahalingam and many other shrines, and caves, which are considered to be the abodes of Siddhas.

The Caturagiri is the eastern-most hill peak in the continuous mountain range of the Western Ghats (Figure 2). There are four main streams draining the mountains and valleys around the Caturagiri mountain. One of the main streams is called Mangani Odai, which is close to the path leading to the Caturagiri temple. The temple is in the valley formed by the Caturagiri hill on the east and the main hill range on the west. These streams form the river Arjuna, which becomes part of the Vaippar river further east. The Vaippar river flows through Virudhunagar district and finally joins the Bay of Bengal.

The Caturagiri hill can be reached from Saptur and Varrirayiruppu lying close to the foothills. Varrirayiruppu (Anglicised form Watrap) derives its name from the perennial water source from the Caturagiri hills. *Varrira* means perennial (which does not dry up) and *Iruppu* means settlement. Similarly, Saptur is derived from 'Sapa' means mat and "ootta" means spring in Telugu (*urru* in Tamil). The names of both the settlements reveal about the abundant natural water sources available around the hill area of Caturagiri.

1.3 Archaeological Research on the Gundar Basin near the Caturagiri Hill

The author undertook doctoral and post-doctoral research in this area, and research by various scholars brought to light a number of prehistoric and historical sites and settlements in the Upper Gundar Basin (Figures 3-5)³. A few sites associated with the Paliyars were documented in the basin. Peter Gardner, an American anthropologist who visited the temple earlier, mentions about the existence of a copper plate among the Paliyars with regard to their traditional rights over the temple⁴.

The Paliyars offer traditional medicines to the local people, who visit these temples and they have extensive knowledge on the traditional medicine⁵. The Paliyar hunter-gatherers were the main agency of this hill area, and they have detailed knowledge of the terrain and hills, springs, rocks and tracks, animals and medicinal plants. Hence, their knowledge base is essential for understanding the hills and its resources, for the people from the plains.



Figure 1. Location of Caturagiri Temple in Southern Tamil Nadu, Courtesy: Google Map.

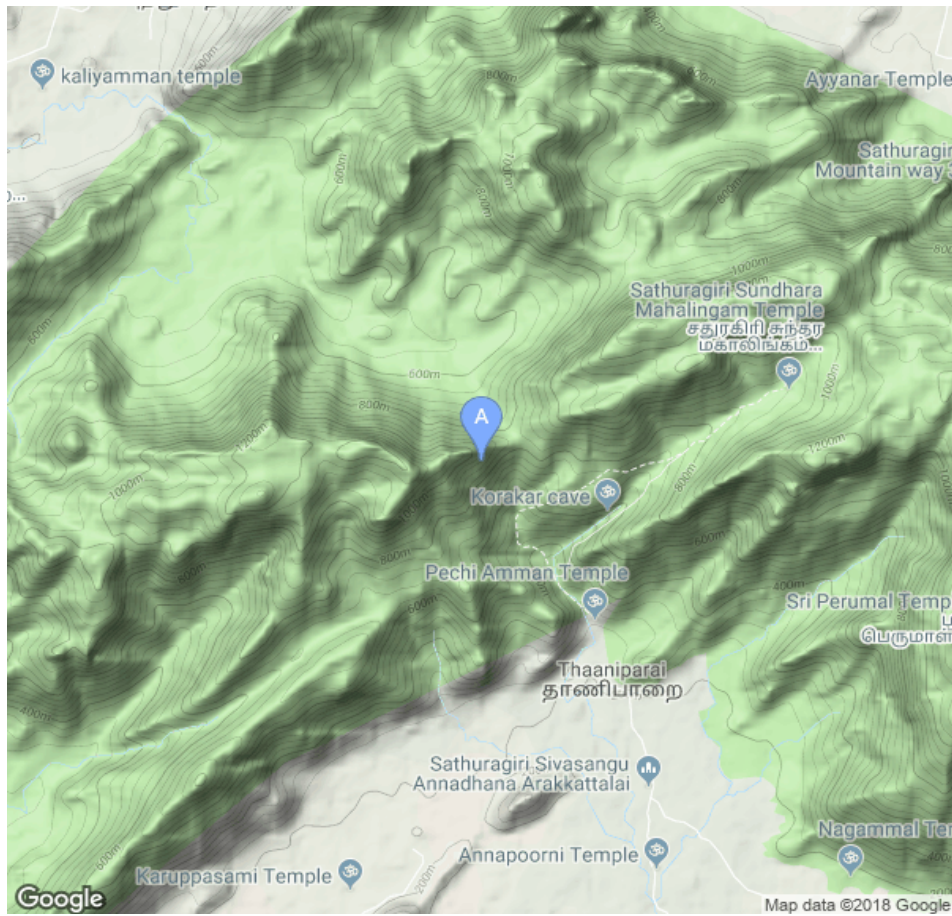


Figure 2. Contour Map showing the Route from Taniparai to the Mahalingam Temple
 Courtesy: Google Map.

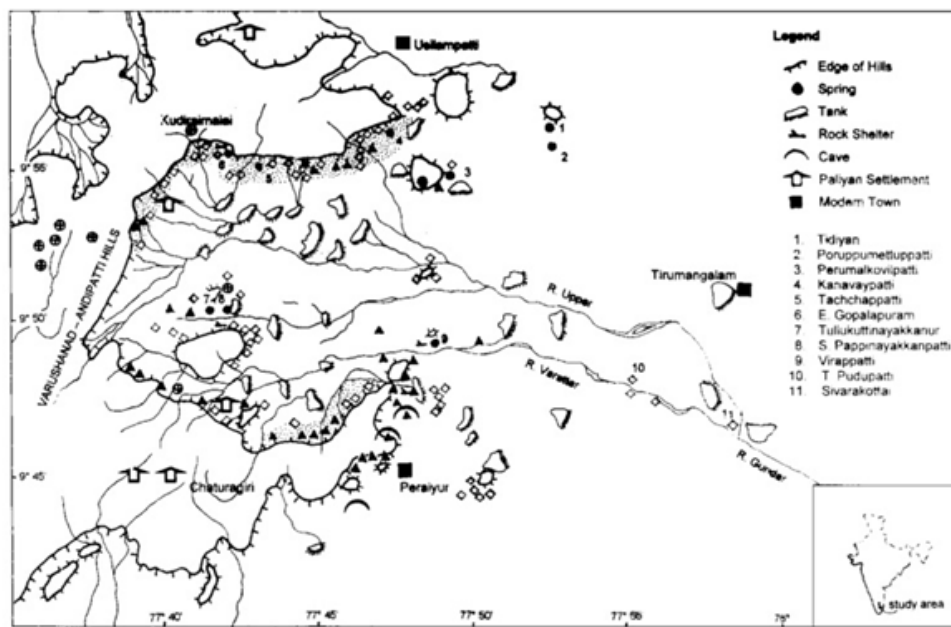


Figure 3. Microlithic Sites in the Upper Gundar Basin.

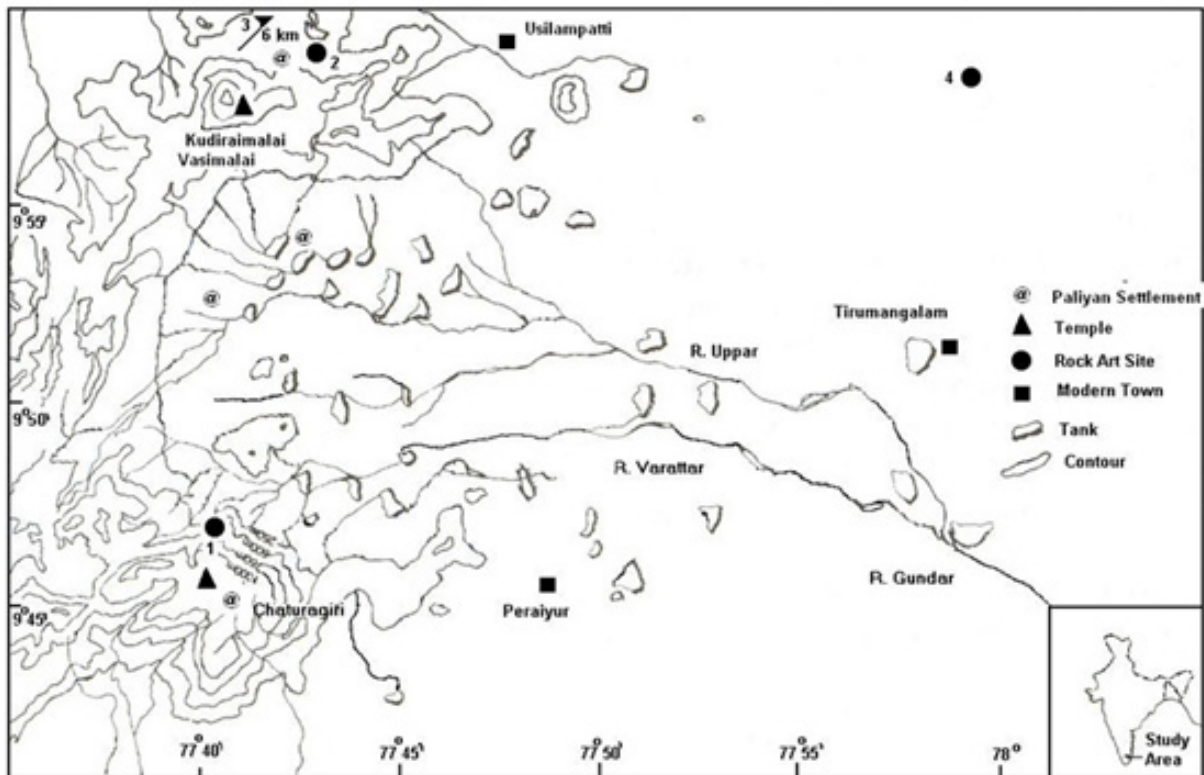


Figure 4. Paliyar Settlements in the Upper Gundar Basin.



Figure 5. Rock Paintings at Kuliratti Cave, Caturagiri.

2. The Paliyars of the Caturagiri and Varushanadu-Andipatti Hill Range

The Paliyars are the native hunter-gatherer group living in the Caturagiri Hill area (Figure 5)⁶. The Paliyars live in many parts of Southern Tamil Nadu; they are found in the Palani hills, the Sirumalai hills and also in Tirunelveli region, and archaeological remains and rock paintings are found at some of these sites⁷. Their population in this area was less than 50. I visited the temple in the 1990s; at that point of time, only a small group of people used to visit the temple and the forest department's restrictions were not there to visit the temple then. Nowadays a large number of people visit the temples, especially after 2000 the number of visitors increased many folds, and there are restrictions on the visitors.

The Paliyars live in several settlements and they are associated with several hill temples of this area; for example, Caturagiri temples, Mavuttu Velappar temple near Andipatti and Sastha Koyil near Rajapalayam. They interact with the local populations through several activities and means. Some of these groups live in the permanent settlements and some are semi-sedentary in nature. A few groups are considered to live in the forests without limited contacts with outside world.



Figure 6. The Paliyars and Visitors at the Sundara Mahalingam Temple.

An important service that Paliyars offer to the local people is ethnomedicine services⁸ and they have detailed knowledge on the traditional medicine. During the time of festivals and new moon days the local people who visit the temples of the hill region get treatment on various ailments. It is possible that the Siddhas interacted with the Paliyars and obtained information on the various herbal medicinal plants available on the hills.

3. Caturagiri Hill Temples

The Caturagiri temple seems to date back at least to the late medieval period. The hill is well known for the important medicinal plants used in the Siddha medicine. There are oral traditions that the Tamil Siddhas lived here in the past. A Siddhar named Korakkar is associated with this hill, and a shelter on this hill is considered to have been inhabited by Korakkar. It is called Korakkar cave. Bhogar, who composed the work called *Bhogar 7000*, is considered to have links with the Caturagiri mountain⁹. The Sivalingam on the way to the hill is considered to have been established by Konganar, another Siddhar.

A few Tamil textual sources are available on the temple. Apart from the *Vazhinadaiccindu* song which is discussed in this paper, a few more works related to Caturagiri are preserved in the British Library and Roja Muthiah Library. One is *Caturakiri Varnippu* (means description of Caturagiri) and this work was composed by Gurusamy Konar. Perhaps, it was edited by Kuppusamy Naidu (the Tamil word ‘Parvaiyittu’ mentioned in the work can

be taken to editing or proof checking) and printed at Ramachandira Vilasam Achchuyandirasalai and published by Pudumandapam Book House, Madurai, in 1917 and a copy of this work is available at the British Library. A work titled *Caturagiri Magattuvakkummi* is preserved in the Roja Muthiah library, published in 1925. *Kummipattu* is a song sung by women by dancing and clapping their palms, and this song praises the importance (greatness) of Caturagiri temple. Another work was published in 1940 as *Sathuragiri Talapuram*¹⁰. This *Talapuram* is perhaps a copy of the original work published in 1921. The 1921 publication of *Talapuram* available in Roja Muthiah library mentions that it was published based on the old records, by the order of Caturagiri Kattari Nagaiyya Kamarajendra Ramasamy Kamayya Nayakkar. Gurusamy Konar is the publisher of these works and several publications came out of his efforts and he was the proprietor of Pudumandapam publication house. Another work composed by Konkanar, perhaps the Siddhar, was *Caturagiri Anandavalliamman Navarattiri Tottiramalai*. This work, recited during the *Dussera* festival, was also published by the same agency in 1917, and is available at the British Library. For many of these works, encouragement might have been given by the Saptur Zamindar, who had an important role in the construction and promotion of this temple. The earliest published account of Caturagiri temple is available in the Madura District Gazetteer¹¹. The Madura district Gazetteer mentions that the hill “is declared to be even now the residence of celestial sages and is a favourite place of pilgrimage”¹².



Figure 7. People from the plains offering worship at Mahalingasamy Temple 1990s.

Much earlier source related to the temple is found in the copper plate inscriptions. The Sandaiyur copper plates (one dated to ca. 1675 and another, 17th century CE) mention Caturagiri Sundaramahalingam and Krishnamurty as divine witnesses to the rights given to some people in the copper plate grants¹³. The first name obviously refers to the Caturagiri temple; the latter name Krishnamurty perhaps refers to the Vasimalai Vishnu temple; another hill temple located further north of the Caturagiri. Therefore, it appears that the temple had come into existence at least by the 17th century CE.

On every new moon day, several thousands of devotees visit the temple (Figure 7), and during the month of May (Tamil month of *Adi*) several lakhs of pilgrims throng the temple. The temple can be reached through about 5 to 6 hours of trekking and could be accessed from Varrirayiruppu as well as from Saptur. The passage from Varrirayiruppu is easier to trek, but the pathway from Saptur is steeper and slightly tougher for trekking. The Caturagiri area comes under the protected reserve forest of Tamil Nadu Government. There are two Shiva temples, known as Sundaramahalingam and Sandanamahalingam temples. A small group of Paliyars, a hunter-gatherer group, lives in this area. There are a few caves and rock shelters with paintings, possibly of historical period¹⁴.

3.1 Talapuranam

On the origin of the Mahalingaswamy temple, there are a few versions of a story. A story, says that the Paliyars were grazing the cows owned by the people from the plains and one day a cow returned home and gave no milk. The local people reported that the Paliyars used to graze the cattle

of the local people (agro-pastoral groups), in the dry seasons, in the hills, and then hand them over to the owners. The owner of the cow, which did not give milk, scolded the Paliyar and on the next day, the Paliyar saw the cow offering its milk on a stone linga and then realised about the divine nature of the spot and a temple was built at the spot, later. This is a common motif used in the *Talapuranams* of many temples of South India, and a similar version was adopted for the Caturagiri temple too. There are other versions of stories on the origin temple. Another story associated the origin of the temple with a person called Pachchaimal from the village of Kottaiyur near Caturagiri.

Peter M. Gardner, who records about another story related to the origin of the temple, mentions about the finding of a linga by a wandering ascetic on the hill; on being an ascetic, he placed the responsibility of offering *pooja* (worship) to the Paliyar man, whom he came across in the forest. Since then the Paliyars were the priests of the Shiva temple; when the people from the plains came to the shrine in large numbers, a dispute arose over the priesthood. This dispute was resolved by the ancestors of the Saptur Zamindars and they gave the rights of the Paliyars on a copper plate¹⁵. The whereabouts of the copper plate is not known.

4. The Poligars/Palayakkarars and Zamindars of Saptur

The region of the Upper Gundar Basin, which lies to the north of the Caturagiri mountain and to the east of the Varushanad-Andipatti hills, has a few Shiva temples dating back to the times of the medieval Pandyas. There are medi-

eval inscriptions in the temples at Tirumanikkam, Peraiyur and Tevankurichchi, in this region. However, intensive occupation of this region with new settlements began in the late medieval period and the population increased in the area adjacent to the hillocks, mainly in the time of the Nayakas, after the 15th century. The Nayaka migration is often attributed to the pressures caused by the Muslim migrations and their political ascendancy in the Deccan region. However, there could be other factors behind this migration. Not many early inscriptions of the Nayakas are available in the Upper Gundar Basin region. The village of Elumalai and Saptur, and a few other temples in this region have evidence of later period temples; mostly Vishnu or Perumal temples, and a few inscriptions, sculptures and hero stones.

Saptur is an early poligar seat and settlement of Southern Tamil Nadu. The poligars of Saptur belong to the Rajakambala Nayakkar community. They are described under the Thottiyayanayakar caste by Edgar Thurston and Rangachari¹⁶, who compiled an account of castes and tribes of South India. The viceroy of the Vijayanagar empire for Madurai, Vishwanatha Nayakka ruled from 1535 to 1544, and he was the founder of the Madurai Nayaka dynasty. It is reported that he divided Madurai territory into 72 *palayams* and Saptur is considered one of these Palayams¹⁷. Similarly, it is reported that Madurai town had a fortification with 72 bastions, and each of the 72 Palayams was given the responsibility to defend these bastions. The early history of Saptur is shrouded in mystery, since documentary evidence is lacking. However, from the Colonial period, more particularly from the 18th century, we do have a number of references.

The poligars of southern Tamil Nadu are divided into Telugu and Marava poligars on ethnic grounds. The forefathers of Kattabomman, who resisted colonial rulers, had established around Panjalankurichi near Tirunelveli. The clashes between Kattabomman and the English Collector Jackson was inquired through Ramanathapuram Enquiry Committee. Later Kattabomman formed a confederacy against the British rulers. The Marudu brothers (Marudu Pandiyar) and other Poligars had already established themselves against the colonial rulers. The poligars of Saptur and Ezhayirampannai too joined this confederacy against the British¹⁸. It is claimed that the Saptur Poligar gave trouble to the people and officials who were looking after the administration in 1799, when the Palayam was annexed by the British¹⁹. In 1795, the Poligar of Saptur Kamayya Nayakkar did not give tribute to the British and was involved in irregularities, according to the account of the British, and a reward was offered for his head in 1799,

and it seems that the poligar escaped to the hills and he was captured in July 1800²⁰. And Later, after a trial by a board of officers, he was executed on October 1800. Another version records that he cut his own head and did not surrender to the British. It is possible that he escaped to the Caturagiri hills and was supported by the Paliyars. Under the British occupancy, S.R. Lusington was appointed as the collector for the southern poligars in 1801. The estate of Saptur was given to the poligar's son in 1803 and *sanad* (deed) was given and thus the Permanent Settlement was implemented in May 1803. Saptur Estate was transferred from Tirunelveli district in 1859²¹. Ramasamy Kamayya Nayakkar II, who was the Zamindar of Saptur, was born in 1849. He had six wives and two of them were married through the practice of *Kattari* wedding. *Kattari* means sword. The Kambala Nayaks had a peculiar system of marriage; in which, if the bride is from lower class, the bridegroom is represented by the sword, *Kattari*. The *Thali* is tied in the presence of sword²². Ramasamy Kamayya Nayakkar II created a garden of five square miles²³. The Zamindar, who was also a Tamil scholar, died in 1886 and there were disputes over the Saptur estate and land among the wives, after his death²⁴. There is one Caturagiri Kattari Nagaiyya Kamarajendra Ramasamy Kamayya Nayakkar mentioned in the Stalapuranam and perhaps, he was in power when many of the religious texts related to the temple were composed and his name has the prefix Caturagiri. This Zamindar was probably the same as Ramasamy Kamayya Nayakkar II or it could be his son.

It appears that the Saptur Zamindar's intensive involvement in the Caturagiri hills might have begun, when he was reported to have fled to the hills in the 1800. They seem to have started their pilgrimage to the hill temple in the nineteenth century and one of the members of the family had the name Sundaramahalingam. The temple at Caturagiri seems to have been constructed by the Zamindar family. There are also stories associated with a Zamindar called "Talaivetti Nayakkar", who capitulated the heads of thousands of people. There is also shrine associated with a Paliyar lady, who became a goddess, had association with the Zamindari. Later, the lands of the Zamindari and the temple administration were given to the government. The descendants of the Zamindar live at Saptur and the Periyar Raja was interviewed by Peter Gardner in the twentieth century, and by the author in 2000.

4.1 Caturagiri: A Colonial Hunting Ground

The hill areas of Varushanadu-Andipatti including the Caturagiri hill areas became a hunting ground for games and sports and entertainment. There are several wild animals

in the hill areas, which border the Varushanadu-Andipatti hill range and they migrate into the valley plains. There is evidence for hunting activities in this area from the early times and evidence of wild animals has been reported from the excavations at the site of S. Pappinayakkanpatti²⁵.

The railway time table *Illustrated Guide to the South Indian Railway* published by Higginbotham and Co., in 1900 mentions under the listing 'Sport' that in Saptur and Elumalai Zamindaris "good shooting can be had, deer, bison and wild boar being fairly plentiful. Permission to shoot must be obtained from the Zamindars. Shikaries and Collies can be hired at the spot"²⁶.

The people of the local villages used to visit the hills mainly for hunting, and it was reported that some of the people had country guns. In the 1990s, I could see the blood and evidence related to the hunting undertaken on the hills by some parties. The restrictions of forest department became more in this area only after the late 1990s, when a large number of people began to visit this area.

5. CaturagiriVazhinadaiccindu

5.1 Cinduppattu Genre

Cindu is a popular genre of folk poetry of the Tamil region²⁷ and often it is associated with the *Kavadi* ritual procession and pilgrimage (*Kavadi Cindu*). *Kavadi* is a ritual object consisting of a wooden bar and an arch made of wood above, and it is carried on the shoulder. *Kavadi* was perhaps a transformation of a device once used for carrying commodities over shoulder across a long distance. *Kavadiccindu* is perceived as a popular and subaltern form of musical and literary tradition²⁸. Many *Cindu* songs were composed during the colonial times on various themes in Tamil Nadu. This tradition was adopted by the Tamil poet of Annamalai Reddiyar, and Subramanya Bharatiyar has composed *Cindu* songs²⁹. *Cindu* was a popular medium for expressing any type of cultural events and historical episodes, apart from devotional poetry. Innumerable *Cindu* songs were produced in the colonial times and they are preserved in many libraries across the world. Annamalai Reddiyar (1865-1891), who was a Tamil poet, composed several *Cindu* songs on Murugan or Subramaniyan, and they have become very popular. He was born near Cennikulam near Sangarankovil. The *Kavadi Cindu* songs are sung during the time of carrying *kavadi* to the temple of Murugan, more particularly, when they visited the temple at Palani³⁰. There are debates if this was a popular or classical form literature; in fact, *Cindu* gave a simple format of poetry and folk form, so that people could express their ideas and document their

perceptions, with ease and without the constraints of literary and musical grammar structures³¹. The *Cindu* songs of Tamil traditions seem to have influenced Sinhalese *Cindu* tradition in Sri Lanka³².

The *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu* song was published as a small booklet and a copy of this song is found in the British Library. The song describes about lord Shiva, the hills and the roadways and the route from Virudunagar leading to the temple. Since the composition of the *Vazhinadaiccindu* was supported by the people from Virudhunagar, it describes the route from Virudhunagar to Caturagiri.

The *Vazhinadaiccindu* was composed by Kandasami Nadar and was printed by S.K.M. Ulagaiyya Nadar, who was involved in coconut trade at Virudunagar. It was printed at Virudupatti Ramalinga Gurukkal's press in 1916 (Figure 8). There is another *Cindu* song on Caturagiri temple, composed by T. Kuppusami Naidu, available at Roja Muthiah Library in Chennai, which was published from Chennai in 1905. The content of that *Cindu* song is not known, since it has not been seen by the author of this paper. There is also a *patikam* (hymn) on the Caturagiri temple, published in 1921. Now we shall look into the structure of the *cindu* song and its main content, briefly.

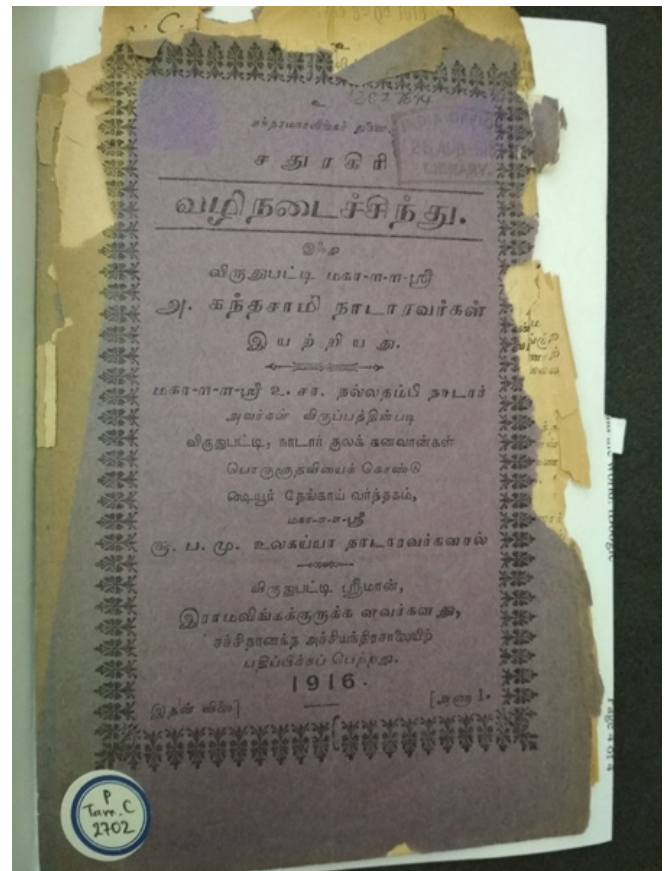


Figure 8. The cover page of the book *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu* Courtesy: British Library.

The *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu* is in pentameter (“seer” in Tamil means meter) and the *cindu* genre, normally has 8 to 24 meter/*seer*, and here in this song, only five meters are present. We could suggest that the structure adopted is very simple here.

The *Cindupattu* is composed as a narrative exposition by the heroine (*talaivi*), explaining about the temple to her friend (*tozhi*). For each stanza, the tempo (*mettu*) of the song is mentioned, in terms of another popular *cindu* song of that time.

5.2 Invocation

In the composition of poems and long literary works in the Indian and Tamil traditions, at first support of a god by the composition of an invocation song; then the poems related to the main theme are composed. The invocation in the *Caturagiri Vazhinadaiccindu* is in the name of lord Ganesa.

5.3 Narrating the Beauty of the Lady Companion (Tozhi)

After the invocation, in the name of lord Ganesa, the beauty of lady companion is praised by the heroine. The title of this section is “The heroine narrating the beauty of her friend”. The tempo (*mettu*) is mentioned as same as adopted in the song of “Mamagal Meviya Perainagar”, which was perhaps another popular *cindu* song. It has five stanzas in pentameter, i.e. each stanza is with five lines or *seer*.

5.4 In Praise of the lord Shiva at Sundaramahalingam Temple

The next section contains 13 stanzas in pentameter. In this section, the heroine explains the fame of lord Sundaramahalingam to her friend. The consort of Sundaramahalingam, Anandavalli, and the concept of Lingodbhava, in which Vishnu and Brahma could not locate the feet and head of Shiva, respectively, is specified, Ganesha and Murugan, the puranic story of burning *tripuras* are also presented. This section praises Siva explains his superiority over other gods and several puranic stories briefly.

5.5 The Prosperity of the Caturagiri Hills

This section, which praises the wealth of the Caturagiri hills, is titled as “Wealth of the Caturagiri”. It is in the tempo (*mettu*) of the *Cindu* song “Ennadi nan perra man-gai”, which was composed by Annamalai Reddiyar. It has six stanzas, again in pentameter.

Here the scenario of the Caturagiri hill is narrated. The Kuravars drink toddy, prepare the garlands and beat the drums. The animals of tiger, *kadaman* (*Rusa unicolor*) and *pulliman* (spotted deer) found in the hills are mentioned.

I have visited the hills, twice and had met the Paliyars and have observed them the hill milieu. The poem uses the label *Kuravars* to refer to the hill people. It mentions that the Kuravars sing and dance. I have not seen the Paliyars dancing and they are very shy by nature. The poet perhaps explains about an imaginative scenario. This in a way highlights how we need to be careful about the interpretation of the motifs seen in the literature, while using them for historical reconstruction. Sometimes, such literary motifs are used merely for poetic embellishments.

5.6 The Wealth of the Caturagiri Temple

The next section speaks about the wealth of Caturagiri temple. Here the tempo is mentioned as similar to that of “Manju nigar konthalam minnu”. It has four stanzas in pentameter. It talks about a tall tree with seven types of leaves. The bark, leave, flower and fruit of this tree could cure all diseases. Offering of curd, fresh ghee and three fruits of mango, jackfruit and banana is spoken. The offering of *punugu* (perfume from Civet cat), *savvathu* (aromatic substance from trees) and *paneer* (*Rose water*), in the performance of *pooja* at the temple creates strong fragrance. The poem mentions that women come to the temple seeking blessing of children. People, who got male child, came to fulfil their vows.

5.7 The Prosperity of the Pathway to the Caturagiri Hill

Here in this section, the heroine explains the wealth of the resources found on the way leading to the Caturagiri temple. It is in tetrameter and has 14 songs. It is in the tempo similar to that of “Telluthamizhukuthavu Seelan”, which is a *kavadiccindu* song composed by Annamalai Reddiyar.

At first it mentions about the temple in Virudunagar, and the float (*teppam*) created by the community of Nadars in Virudunagar. The *Teppakkulam* is an important landmark in Virudunagar.

After the Mottaipillayar temple, it refers to *Magamaikadai*. *Magamai* was a type of contribution collected from the shop owners; the collected fund is used for various welfare activities. Offering of buttermilk and cold water to the visitors by the merchants is praised. It mentions about the temple of Siva in which lord Sokkalingar was present. There is a Sokkanathar temple at Virudunagar to the

west of the Teppakkulam even today. Angayarkanniammai is the goddess here, according to the poem.

There is a temple of Ganesha established by Velayudha Devan. It mentions about a Magamayi temple. Then the Mariyamman *teradi* (Chariot base) is spoken. The *Sala* or school where the students of Kshatriya Nadar get training through Tamil and English languages is referred to. The image of Ganesha beneath the *pipal* tree, the Chettiyar tank and the Ayyanar temple worshipped by the community of Devars are mentioned.

5.8 Nondiccindu

Nodiccindu is a type of poem which has three words in a *seer* (meter or line). Here a brief description of the highway and the landmarks are mentioned.

After the south Virudunagar, we came to Sangaranarayanapuram; and around the village of Pavali, we see the paddy fields; then Mallaiya Nayakkanpatti, Sadaichipatti, Naranapuram, and the wealthy Kundilipatti, Sinappareddiyapatti, Puthuvur, Sengunrapuram, and a *Nandavanam* (garden for supplying flowers to temple) on the west, and the village of Ericcannattam with a river and tanks are mentioned. The Mangammalsalai, the road laid by Rani Mangammal to Srivilliputtur is mentioned. This road leads from Tirumangalam to Srivilliputtur.

Tungauttirappanayakkanpatti is referred to next. Karisakulam, Mannalarasapatti Kanavai (pass), Kottur Kanavai, Settiyakurichi Kanavai, Thambipatti, Ganapathisami *Samathi* (burial temple), the *samathis* of many people, who reached the foot of the lord of Caturagiri, and a Pallivasal (mosque), and Sivayogasami Madam (Mutt) are described as the landmarks on the way.

Maharajapuram was a settlement on this route and it exists even today. Barrister office (court) is mentioned at Maharajapuram, Police station where officers/employees live, and Mandithoppu (a grove of monkeys) are spoken. After a river crossing, Vandipannai and Tanipparai, Tall Kudiraiurru (a spring), Padivettupparai (a rock), Attiyurru (a spring) where Devars devotionally bathe, the curved Konavasal Medu (a raised area), Korakkar Kunda and Ettilingam (a Sivalinga), which was worshipped by Konganar, Ganapathy Samikal, Pasumithi, Pasukkadai, Neyykdai (Ghee shop) Rattinasamy dharman (Endowment), where water was offered, Navalurru (spring of Jambolan tree), Pambukkenithozhu (a place with a well and cattle shed), Pudupasukkadai, and Palavadi Karuppasamy temple are mentioned. The shops in front of the Karuppasamy temple in a row are mentioned. Then, Pechchiyanman temple, where the young goddess wears bangles, and the devotees obtaining sacred

ash *Prasad* is mentioned. The Nadars of the villages of Usilampatti, Sivakasi, Mangaravu, Kalpothu, Virudupatti, Kallupatti, Attipatti, Saptur and Chinayapuram visit the area and dine in the shelters or hostels. The *cavadi* (public building) of Devanga Chettimar of Mutturamanpatti is mentioned. Virudhaidevar madam (Mutt of Devar from Virudhunagar), Kuluchandai Chettiyar building, Mayandiasari Madam (Mutt of Mayandi, the carpenter), Subbaiyanasari madam (the Mutt of Subbaiyyan, the carpenter), people's residences are referred to.

People who tonsure their head as part of their prayers. Kattari Kamayavel's bungalow, the Saptur Zamindar, Vattirayiruppu madam, Paliyar madam are mentioned. The police staff that work like philosophers and the Ukkiranam or the storehouse or treasury of the temple, Navarattiri Kottagai, the shed for Navaratri festival are referred to. The final section titled as Happy Enjoyment concludes with a happy note and seeks the blessings of the lords of Sandanamahalingam and Sundaramahalingam shrines for the welfare of all living beings.

6. Discussions and Conclusions

One of the early sources on the Caturagiri temple is the *Talapuranam* published in 1921. This along with the *CaturagiriVazhinadaiccindu*, published in 1916, is a proof that some of the information that we have on this temple is as old as the early twentieth century and people had begun to visit the temple in a large number at least from that time. The temple might have come up in the Late Medieval period, although we cannot be very specific about the century in which it came into existence. The use of the hill area might have begun in the prehistoric times, especially by the hunter-gatherers of the neighbouring Gundar and Vaippar river basins³³. The Paliyars living in this area appear to be the original inhabitants of the mountains, and they had interactions with the local people from the plains from the historical period. With the expansion of agriculture and pastoralism in the Iron Age, reducing the animal resources on the plains, the hills were used as a source of wild-game hunting³⁴. This sport of hunting was allowed in the hill areas, in the early 20th century with the permission of Saptur and Elumalai Zamindaris, as revealed by the South Indian Railway guide, mentioned earlier. In addition, the knowledge of traditional medicine of the Paliyars was much sought after by the people from the plains to cure their diseases. I could see that the Paliyars offering medicine to the people from the plains, when they visited the Chaturagiri and Vasimalai temples, in the 1990s. Some of the Siddhars (Siddhas) might have utilised the knowledge of

the Paliyars and validated and documented the information on traditional medicine as texts in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts. The movement of people as part of pilgrimage to the hills boosted the commercial activities related to the consumption of resources for the performance of *poojas*, and several goods could also be sold to the visitors. The *Vazhinadaiccindu* mentions about the shops located on the way to the hills. Thus, the commercial agencies might have supported and encouraged the activities of pilgrimage, besides the spiritual needs of the people. The Paliyars used to gather the forest produce for the common markets and this practice must have increased in intensity in the colonial period. The hill was also a good source of timber, and the temple construction might have been one of the means of legitimization for the use of resources in the hill areas. Perhaps these resources were exploited by the Zamindaris. The reference to the hunting permits given to the tourists in the early 20th century mentioned in the Railway guidebook does prove the active exploitation of the resources of the hills. The personal interest of the Saptur Zamindari seems to have supported the development of the temple. Thus, composite factors seem to have led to the development of the temple as an important pilgrimage centre. In addition, its natural secluded context offered peaceful path to fulfil the devotional spiritual aspirations of the people from the plains.

The contents of the *Vazhinadaiccindu* give glimpses of the perceptions of the period in which it was composed. The idea of pilgrimage perhaps dates back to the protohistoric period, in India, and in the historical period several temples become very popular among the people to fulfil their spiritual requirements and their wishes and prayers related to their mundane existence. Normally, offering worship in the shrines of the neighbourhood does not require much effort from the devotee. Generally, in pilgrimage the perception of higher virtue is that making strenuous efforts to visit a sacred location would mean higher dedication and thus would have more value, in this same way as the higher efforts produce higher yields. In the age of increased population, and settlements, and political changes around the 15th to 20th century, the shrines on the isolated hills and the forests in natural contexts, which were located away from the settlements, gave a solace to the pilgrims and visitors. Even today the hill temples of Sabarimala and Tirupati have higher spiritual value among the people, because of context of these shrines and also the efforts required to visit the temples, besides the belief systems. The underlying idea was that the higher the efforts put forth by a devotee, the closer to god s/he could become. From the ancient times, higher energy expenditure and wealth meant higher the

chance for proximity to gods; and this notion is reflected in the special *poojas* and *darshans* offered in the contemporary religious institutions in many parts of the world. It is against such material value-oriented perceptions that the *bhakti* movement of the medieval South India emerged and it sought to simplify the mode of worship and approach to god, and helped to facilitate easier access to the gods. However, it is in the mind of the common people (or all *Homo sapiens*) that the degree of affection and quantum of outcome are conveyed by the value and quantity of the goods and gifts. This is how people even today nowadays determine quantity and value of their gifts and donations to various agencies right from their family members to the gods. The value attribution to social, political and economic status and proximity is a part of a cultural behaviour, which perhaps evolved in the prehistoric times. How can one express the variation in degree of affection and love? This idea is transformed into lower or higher value or lower or higher quantity goods. This correlation between human behavioural perception and material cultural value has been used by archaeologist to interpret the material culture found in the megalithic burials and other contexts. Thus, adoption of pilgrimage and *Vazhinadaiccindu* gave higher status to a particular shrine.

Despite the advancement of science, the behavioural area of belief is beyond rationalism among many common people. People as they have today, had their own mundane problems, for which they appealed to the gods and made offerings in the form of terracotta votive figures when fulfilled. Sometimes they prayed to visit the temple if their wish is fulfilled. When serious ailments afflict their sons or daughters people pray to god and vow to visit the temples at Tirupati, Pazhani or Velankanni church or Nagore Dargah even today.

The composer of the *Vazhinadaiccindu* describes the landscapes and the wealth of the village and the tradition of Mahamai. He mentions about Kshatriya Nadars in tandem with the social movements of those days. The various communities of this region and their activities are also spoken in this poem. The *Vazhinadaiccindu* is a means to explain the pathway to the temple and the landmarks that could be worshipped on the way. Such songs were also sung by the people to alleviate their tiredness during the pilgrimage.

Visiting temples and making offerings form part of an economic activity. The poem describes about the use of various objects for *pooja*, and the presence of shops selling goods is also indicated. The temples witnessed innumerable visitors, which boosted the economic activities and several traders must have set-up shops to sell diverse variety of goods on festival occasions. The above description of

the *Vazhinadaiccindu*, Caturagiri temple and the history of Saptur Zamindar reveals that multiple factors contributed to the development of Caturagiri temple. The factors such as the development of print-culture, popularity of the *cindu* genre of literature and the interest of the merchants, and the spiritual needs of the people and also the patronage of Saptur Zamindari contributed to the development of Caturagiri temple and the composition of the *Vazhinadaiccindu*.

In an earlier paper, I had argued that the development of temple at Caturagiri gave access and rights to worship for the people from the plains in the Paliyar's exclusive area³⁵. It is likely that the Paliyars supplied the forest produce and offered services to the people from the plains in the later medieval period, and this practice might have begun at an earlier period. During the enquiries conducted by me among the people of the Upper Gundar basin in 2000, the Moopars mentioned to me about their relationships with Paliyars and they stated that the Moopars were the elder brothers and the Paliyars were younger brothers. The Paliyars' territory has not been exclusive to the hills, and they come to the border areas of the Varushanadu hills and interact with the local people. The local people mentioned that the Paliyars moved into the hills permanently, since they could not pay "kisti" (tax to the government agencies), and this narration perhaps indicates that the Paliyars occupied the marginal area between the hills and the plains, and when the modern state or its agents sought to extract tax, they ventured into the hills. The attempt at taxing of Paliyars might have taken place around the time when the Palayakkarars or the Nayakkas dominated the political scenario in this region; the developments were also partly controlled by the emerging British Colonial power. The Palayakkarars perhaps viewed the hill area as a resource-rich zone that could be used to generate additional income, and also as hunting territories. It possible that they used this forested area to escape from the activities of the colonial power. The development of temple gave easy access to the people from the plains into the forest area and led to the active exploitation of the resources of the area such as firewood, timber, a variety of forest produce and herbs, and wild animals. In addition, the temple and the festive occasions could have been convenient for the interactions between the Paliyars and the local people. The full moon or newmoon days would have been ideal time markers of the month that could be easily identified by people. The pilgrimage could have provided access to the traditional medicine of the Paliyars.

The publication of the *Cindu* song on the temple was in tune with the movement of those days where composition

of these songs with the introduction of printing press, and publications in print became a kind of status for the shrine in the new context of print culture of the colonial times. The idea of Kshatriyar identity of the Nadar is highlighted by the composer of the *Cindu*.

Another important idea is that the Siddhas and their role in the development of traditional medicine. The Siddhas are considered alchemists and they practised *yoga*. They are attributed with several skills and knowledge set with supernatural powers and could solve mundane problems. Their period is generally placed around the 18th century CE. The hunter-gatherers of the hill areas of South India had detailed knowledge of traditional medicine and they were offering the services to the people till the recent period; and some of them offer this service even today. The history of traditional medicine in the Upper Gundar Basin area near the Caturagiri hills extends back to the Sangam Age. A skeleton of a man in middle age excavated from a burial at S. Pappinyakkanpatti near Saptur has evidence for recovery and bone growth after an injury, suggesting the existence of traditional medicinal system (Figure 9)³⁶.

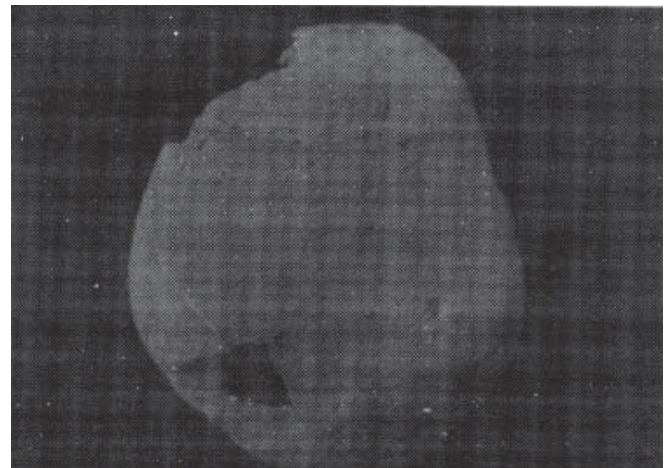


Figure 9. A Cranium with a cut-mark (injury) showing traces of recovery from S. Pappinayakkanpatti, Photo by Dr. S.R. Walimbe.

The Siddhas are often associated with various hills, which were also the abodes of the different hunter-gatherer groups, and a vast corpus of medicine. The Siddha medicine could be seen as a traditional knowledge system developed based on the understanding and knowledge of the Paliyars, and other hunter-gatherers of the hills. Perhaps the Siddhas might have interacted with Paliyars and other hill peoples, and it is possible that the Siddhas documented their medicinal practices. They might have validated the medicines through experiments. The Siddhas might have also consulted various old texts in the creation

of the medicinal systems; it appears that the traditional knowledge of the hunter-gatherer communities might have gone into the making of the traditional Tamil Siddha medicine. Although it has been contented that the Paliyar Medicinal system is similar to the Siddha medicinal system, the degree of similarity has to be researched. Therefore, the hunter-gatherer source of Siddha medicine could be proposed as a hypothesis, which needs to be tested through further studies.

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