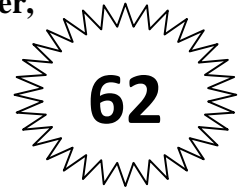


The cultural landscape of the Vaigai River at Madurai Palanikumar Anandakumaran¹, Ganesan Nivedhan², Gopal Lavanya³

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Abstract:

One important river in South India is the Vaigai. It starts in Theni district and flows through the temple district of Madurai to Ramanathapuram, Periya Kanmai, and the ocean. For a variety of reasons, the numerous Vaigai river segments are considered to be worshipped entities that can be seen both up close and at a distance. Due to a number of factors, this famous holy river is in danger of losing many of its values, including cultural supremacy and aesthetic appeal. The main objective of the study is to list and evaluate the numerous factors that contribute to and enhance these values, as well as make recommendations for the structure and design of the river in the city of Madurai.

Keywords: cultural landscape; reading and assessment of cultural landscape; Vaigai River and its values

1. Introduction: Why Madurai?

Madurai, the third-largest city in Tamil Nadu and the cultural centre of South India, is also one of the oldest continuously inhabited towns in the world. It served as the Pandyan Kingdom's capital. It is renowned for its culture, tradition, and temples constructed in the Dravidian architectural style by the Pandyan and Madurai Nayak monarchs. One of the main causes of Madurai's settlement was the River Vaigai. Madurai has a distinctive culture, heritage, way of life, pattern, and architectural style all of its own. Due to these distinctive characteristics, Madurai has a distinct cultural landscape. We can have a comprehensive grasp of Vaigai's cultural landscape by comprehending the various values connected to the city as well as the River Vaigai. The River Vaigai, which reaches its greatest extent in the centre of Madurai City, is another important component of its uniqueness.

2. Cultural landscape – Definition

The term cultural landscape embraces a diversity of manifestation of the interaction between humankind and its nature environment.

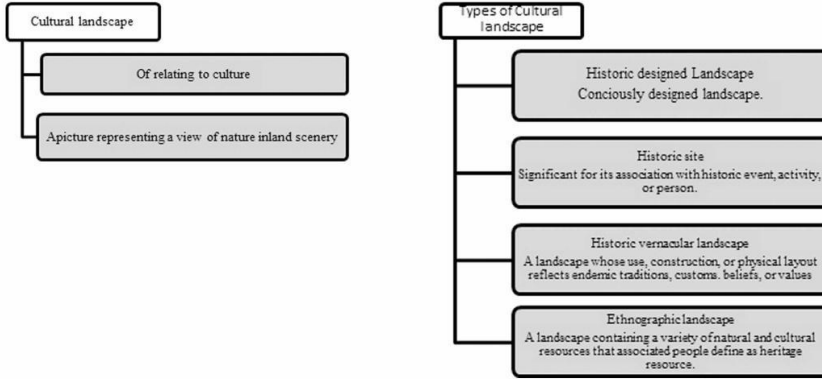
The **Cultural Landscape Foundation** states that:

“Cultural landscapes provide a sense of place and identity; they map our relationship with the land over time; and they are part of our national heritage and each of our lives.”



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Flow chart 1,2 – Cultural landscape model and its types.

According to **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**, the term “cultural landscape” embraces a diversity of manifestation of the interaction between humankind and its nature environment.

Cultural landscapes often reflect specific techniques of sustainable land-use, considering the characteristics and limits of the natural environment they are established in, and a specific spiritual relation to nature. Protection of cultural landscapes can contribute to modern techniques of sustainable land-use and can maintain or enhance natural values in the landscape.

The **National Park Service (NPS)** defines a cultural landscape as a geographic area, including both cultural and natural resources and the wildlife or domestic animals therein, associated with a historical figure, an occasion, a person, or something exhibiting additional cultural or aesthetic values.

Cultural landscape – How to read and assess

According **Melnick’s characteristics** for cultural landscape reading and assessment (Natural, Cultural, Visual and Meaning) it consist of 5 major steps.

Flow chart 3 – Melnick’s character of reading, assessing and planning of cultural landscape.

The basic 8 steps to read and assess cultural landscape are,

- Step: 1 – Identification,
- Step: 2 – Data Collection,
- Step: 3 – Literature references,
- Step: 4 – Delineation ,
- Step: 5 – Mapping and recording,
- Step: 6 – Analyzing,
- Step: 7 – Assessing,
- Step: 8 – Suitable Measures.

3. Significance of the Vaigai River:

Due to its location along the banks of the River Vaigai, Madurai has a long history involving the river. The Nayaka period saw the majority of the construction of the central core of Madurai's old city, which is now the beating centre of the contemporary urban agglomeration. The newly created city is on the North bank of the river, while the city's historic centre is on the South bank. Due to its location along the banks of the River Vaigai, Madurai has a long history involving the river. The Nayaka period saw the



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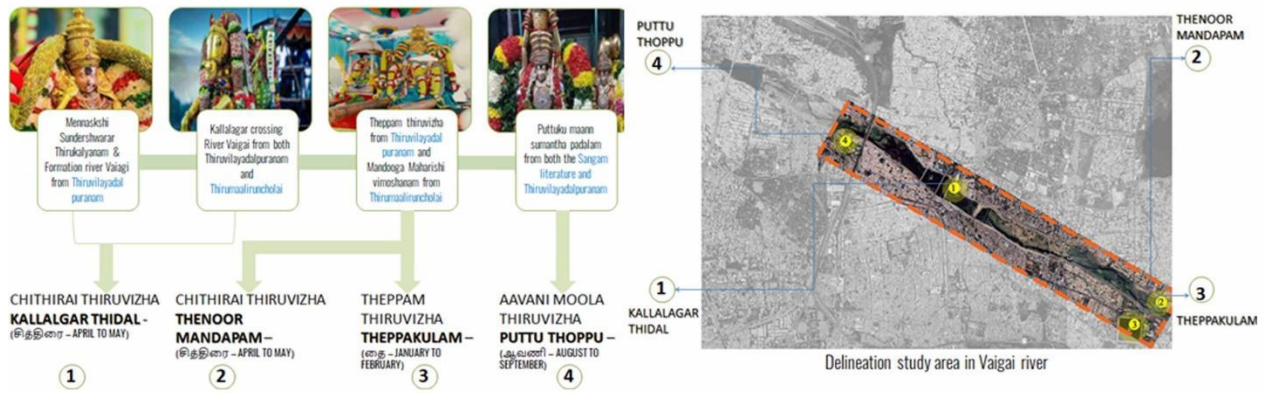




majority of construction work done on the central core of Madurai's old city, which is still the centre of the present urban agglomeration. The newly created city is on the North bank of the river, while the city's historic centre is on the South bank.

Ideology: "Imageable, Legible and Performative Landscape"

A temporal rhythm transforms the River Vaigai into locations for spectacle and performance. On a daily and episodic basis, myths are reenacted, and reverence is paid to gods and goddesses, reviving memory and reaffirming ideals while also creating flowing space. The three architectural landmarks of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, and Hindu India are the gopurams, mandapams, and padithurai. They can be seen in their whole from any point along the newly proposed bank roads on the northern side, whilst the southern bank of the river only has an urbanised vista with the silhouettes of mandapams. The observer develops a vivid mental image from both the far-off and up-close observations. During the Sangam century, the view city with River Vaigai panoramas has gained popularity and impacted a "style of seeing" the cultural landscape. Legibility is referred to as the characteristic of the landscape that enables understanding of its composition, or the simplicity with which its constituent components may be identified and arranged into a logical pattern. It has been determined to research the Cultural landscape of Vaigai in the Madurai region after considering the aforementioned considerations. It therefore has greater inherited value than the other locations. As starting points, started documenting the different cultural events in and around the River Vaigai in Madurai using imageable, readable, and perceptive



landscapes.

Figure 1,2 – Literature reference, Delineation of Site from Literature reference

4. Site brief

A. Kallalagar thidal: One month is dedicated to the celebration. Meenakshi's coronation as Madurai's divine ruler and her marriage to Sundareshwar are commemorated during the first 15 days. Over the course of the following 15 days, celebrations of the journey of Kallalagar or Alagar (a form of the god Vishnu) from his shrine in Alagar Koyil to Madurai take place. On the northern bank of the Viagai River, the Chithirai Thiruvizha festival will take place over an area of around 2.5 acres.



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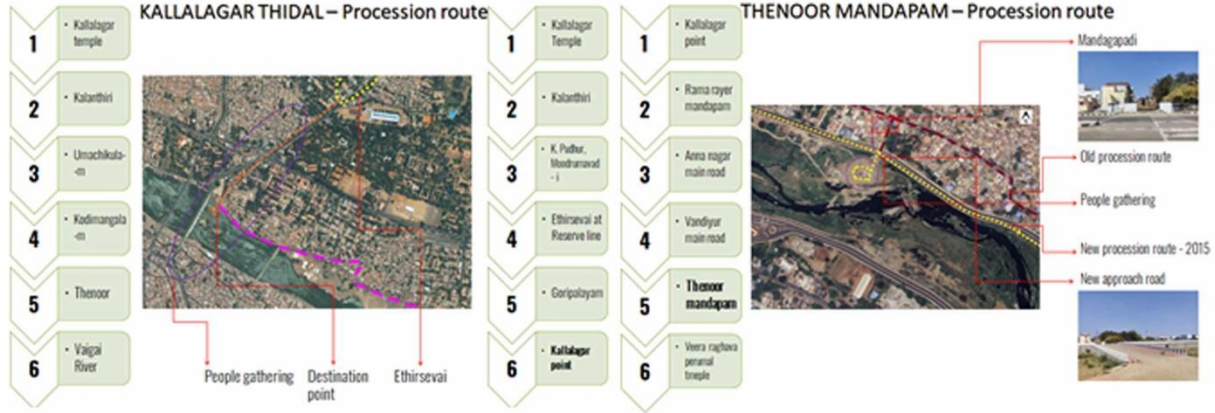


Figure 3,4 – Chithirai thiruvizha procession path 1, Procession path after Vaigai eluntharul.

B. Thenoor Mandapam: Thenoor Mandapam is situated on the northern bank of the Vaigai River, 4.8 kilometres from the Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai. In order to offer Thenoor residents first preference and priority during the Chithirai thiruvizha era, King Thirumalai Nyakar constructed Thenoor Mandapam in this area.

Significance: According to an inscription at Thirumala Nayakkar Mahal, Thenoor was a hub for the trade of bells and gold during the Pandya era. Alaghar participated in the celebrations of this Thenoor village near Cholavanthan via Alanganallur on the full moon day of the Chitrai month and entered the Vaigai River with them. He also witnessed the ceremony of going back to Alagharmala to lift Sage Manduka's curse. At this ceremony, holy water is brought in from Tirupati.

Uniting all festivals: The Thirukalyana Utsavam, held in the month of Masi, the Chariot festival, held in the month of Adi, and the Chitrai festival of Alaghar, combined with the Chitrai festival, became a nine-day event observed by the town under the reign of King Thirumalainayakar.

Respect to Thenoor People: Even now, Kallalagar enters the building after paying Thenoor residents' taxes. Even now, the Kallalagar still makes three laps around the hall as a sign of respect for the Thenoor population. The Vaigaya River across the street is home to storks, frogs, and fish. As a reminder of the mythological tale of Thiruvilayadal, which saved the stork, the flight of the stork is still done.

C. Theppakulam: King Thirumalai Nayak erected both the stairs and the temple. A Madapam called Maiya Mandapam (Central Mandapam) with a Vinayakar temple and garden is located in the middle of the tank. Mariamman Teppakulam is a stunning square tank that occupies a space that is nearly 16 acres. Square tank of size: 305 X 290 M. The whole length and width of the vandiyur mariamman teppakulam are 1000 feet and 950 feet, respectively. Which is entirely composed of granite, has a central citadel, and a madapa built into it with a garden. There are a total of 12 steps that are long and built of granite on all four sides. The mayya mandapam is roughly 10 feet deep, and there are 21 steps from the bottom of the tank to its base. Via a clever network of underground Pipes, the tank is joined to the Vaigai River. The ancient tank's outlet and inlet openings were carved out of rocks into lovely sculptures. The extra water would be released through outlets and returned to the river once the tank was full.

Significance: Teppakulam is well-known for its Float Festival events, which take place in the Tamil month of Thai (14 January to 15 February). The festivities take place on a full moon night (Thaipusam), and as the temple is lit, the crystal-clear water becomes colourful. The goddesses of the Meenakshi

Amman Temple, Goddess Meenakshi and her husband Lord Sundareshwarar, descend to the tank on colourful floats, creating an amazing sight. India-wide pilgrims travel to Madurai to take part in the event.

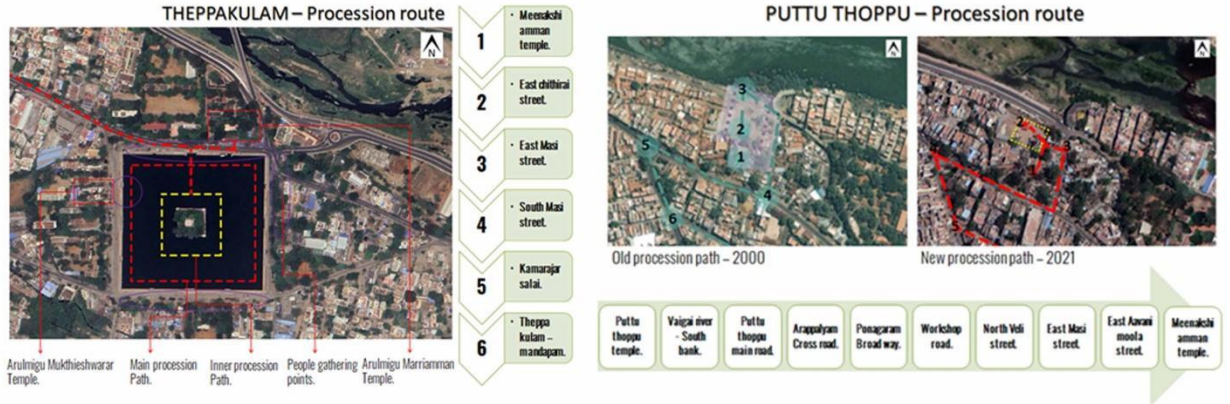


Figure 5, 6 – Theppam Thiruvizha procession path, Aavani moola thiruvizha procession path

D. Puttu Thoppu: Even today, during the month of Aavani, people commemorate this event with Puttu Thiruvizha. The Puttu Utsava Kattalai Trust renovated the temple when it was in the custody of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment, despite their attempts to seize it. Along with his relatives from 18 other villages, the trust's founder, Mariappa Chettiar of the Vaania Vysya Chettiar group, purchased the six acres of land with coconut palms that was once known as Arappalyam Village. The remaining property was leased out to individuals who were compelled to pay rent for the site but were allowed to build their own homes. The temple was roughly erected on one-fourth of the area. Even now, with all the tenants' current rent being collected, the Puttu festival is still celebrated with great ceremony. The Puttu festival is special because the temple is visited by Murugan from Thiruparankundram, Lord Shiva from Meenakshi Sundareshwarar Temple, and Goddess Meenakshi.

5. Analysis and interpretation

The amount of space used for the study demonstrates how many banks are impacted by the privatisation process. The areas are losing their cultural characteristics, and encroachments and changes in use have an impact on the building's atmosphere. Even though Madurai appears to be a heritage neighbourhood, the current reality shows it evolving into a commercial district. The commercialization has occupied more than 40% of the land and 37.5 % of the housing units. As a result, the river bank area is more commercial and less residential.

Kallalagar Thidal: The government has taken steps to conserve the culture and liveliness of the river in Madurai. The processes undertaken are,

- Removing the encroachments
- Deviating the traffic from Kalpalam
- Removed vendors.

Problems found: The fabric or the activity of the bank is not controlled due to the presence of Theni Anandham, commercial space. This result in a varied character to the place and the elements does not react to the environment.

Thennor Mandapam: The space is not at visible and it is active only in the festive seasons. The government took initiative to restore the mandapam and the major one is they are not trying to retain its authenticity.



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Proposed Solution:

- Proposing the space as narrative landscape strategy, where it is attracted common public as well as the tourist.
- Proposing a trial walk along the Northern Bank of the river, since it consists of few mandagapadis.

Theppakulam and Puttu thoppu: This is one network of road which connects the both the banks. The variety of shops ranges from vendors to truck shops. Problem due to more commercial activity and institutional activity are parking on streets. Half length of the streets is occupied by the parking. The parking facility provided by the city planning department is not enough for the public.

Proposed Solution

- Proposing multi-functional adaptive space
- Making the space as performative sacred landscape.
- Proposing the legible street scape to enjoy the views which is associated with temple and river.

Interpretation:

- Due to commercialization, the region of the cultural core won't be able to accommodate additional people.
- In some circumstances, a lack of parking space.
- Commercial activity takes place in conventional structures.
- For their actions, which damage the architectural and environmental qualities, historic elements are being utilised. Because visitors are unable to experience this heritage and cultural place, this harms tourism as well.
- Enhancing the room's visual appeal and legibility by using heritage pieces as the major subject; this will give the space its unique personality.
- Controlling activity variation is necessary.

6. Summary and conclusion

The cultural foundation of the Vaigai River is studied, examined, and appropriate programmes are suggested for the river's replicability. Mapped and analysed are the state of the cultural space's historic components and its physical attributes. The various activities and characteristics of the region are to blame for the alteration and disruption of the cultural landscape. The layers of the river around the four sites and the local historical components are used as a basis for analysis. The studies are based on changes in the area, the nature of the activity, the construction of the roads, and the structures along the river's edge. According to the data gathered, the river is changing from a place of cultural significance to a commercial district in some areas. Unrestrained movement and a lack of appropriate conservation criteria are to blame for the transition and degradation. To ensure its continued visual appeal in the future, the river Vaigai.

Conclusion: The strategies suggested are to change the fabric of the road and building without affecting the activity of the River Vaigai. The city and the river both rely heavily on commercial activity for their livelihood. The main activities along Vaigai's riverbanks include cultural events, public gatherings, markets, street vendors, and commerce. These activities can take place in a setting that serves several functions without compromising the community's cultural sense and values.



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S.NO	PLACE	URBANIZATION CONDITION	TYOLOGY	SOLUTION
1	Kallalagar thidal – Vaigai river	Urbanized – full commercial	Narrative landscape	Proposing performing and visual narrative landscape which enhances the space.
2	Thenoor mandapam – Vandiyur	Semi Urbanized	Sacred landscape	Maintain the originality of the space and leave without disturbing it.
3	Theppakulam – Maiyya mandapam	Urbanized – mixed use	Performative landscape	Proposing multifunctional space which is adaptive all type of activities, which can adopt both festive and non-festive functions
4	Puttu thoppu – Arapalayam	Urbanized – mixed use	Performative landscape	

Table 1 – Proposed Solutions.

References:

Samples of the correct formats for various types of references are given below.

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