



## **MAHAMAHAM FESTIVAL IN KUMBAKONAM**

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### INTRODUCTION

Kumbakonam is a town, 40 kms. from Thanjavur – the District headquarters. The town is bounded by two rivers, the Kaveri River to the north and Arasalar River to the south. Kumbakonam is known as a “temple town” due to the prevalence of a number of temples here and is noted for its Mahamaham festival which attracts people from all over the globe.

Kumbakonam dates back to the Sangam period and was ruled by the Early Cholas, Pallavas, Medieval Cholas, Later Cholas, Pandyas, the Vijayanagar Empire, Madurai Nayaks, Thanjavur Nayaks and the Thanjavur Marathas. The town reached the zenith of its prosperity during the British Raj when it was a prominent centre of European education and Hindu culture, and it acquired the name, the ‘Cambridge of South India’.

“Once in Twelve years Mahamaham”

“Once in Twelve years Kurunji Flowers”.

### PLACES OF INTEREST AT KUMBAKONAM

The Tank is located in the heart of Kumbakonam town. It covers an area of 6.2 acres and is trapezoidal in shape. The tank is surrounded by 16 small Mandapams (shrines) and has 21 wells inside the tank. The names of the wells carry the name of Hindu god Shiva or that of Rivers of India. Govinda Dikshitar, the chieftain of Rangunatha Nayak of Thanjavur, constructed the sixteen Mandapams and stone steps around this tank. Hindus consider taking a holy dip at the Mahamaham Tank on the day of Mahamaham as sacred. There are 12 temples in Kumbakonam dedicated to Lord Siva & 5 temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu (a Hindu God) and whose worship forms an integral part of the purificatory procedure.

People from all parts of India come and bathe here and history records that Krishnadeva Raya, the Vijayanagara king bathed in a Mahamagam in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Puranas proclaim that it has 16 crores of sacred pools within.

### KEY WORDS

Architectural, Heritage, Temple town, Culture.

## HISTORY OF MAHAMAHAM FESTIVAL

Masimaham is an annual event that occurs in the Tamil month of Masi (February – March in the star of Magam. Once in twelve years, when the planet Guru (Jupiter) enters Simha [disambiguation needed] (Leo) sign, the Kumbh mela festival of South India is celebrated at Mahamaham tank. Vast crowds gather at Kumbakonam to have a dip in the tank, along with saints and philosophers. All the rivers of India are believed to meet at the tank on this day and a purificatory bath at this tank on this day is considered equal to the combined dips in all the holy rivers of India. Festival deities from all the temples in Kumbakonam arrive at the tank and at noon, all the deities bathe along with the devotees – it called “Theerthavari”. The purificatory bath is believed to remove sins and after the dip, pilgrims offer charitable gifts in the hope of being rewarded in the current life and subsequent lives. The temple cars of major temples in Kumbakonam come around the city on the festival night.

The tank is significant particularly to the South Indian Hindus. The festival is a symbolic equivalent to the Kumbh Mela pilgrimage at Prayaga in Uttar Pradesh.

When Guru comes in Leo and Katiravan in Kumbha Rasi in Masi Matham, the full moon day is the day when Maha Nakshatra and Rishabha Lakna Mahamagha festival which is held once twelve years, a holy bath called Theerthavari takes place in the Mahamagha Thirukullam in Kumbakonam.

Bathing events are one of the important cultural elements of Bharat. for temples

1. Kudamuzku
2. Thirumanjanam for Lord
3. Punitha Bathing for Agama tradition
4. ‘Neeradap Pothuveer’ Tirupavai.
5. ‘Bhoombunal Paaithadalor’ Thiruvempavai

Highlighting the greatness of Neerat.

“Bumaru and Ganga are sacred temples

Where Mamakandan comes and worships”. \_\_\_\_\_ Sekkizhar.

‘Don’t give like a guru’ and crores of benefits to the guru and the catchphrases. Astronomically and geologically, the conjunction of the Sun and the Moon with the Guru on the day of Mahamagha gives more energy to the water in the Mahamagha pot. That is why the Tirthavari held in the Mahamagam assumes great importance. And the tirthavari held at Mahamagam is somewhat different, normally, Tirthavari is a bathing ceremony for the Lord at the end of the festival, but in Kumbakonam, the Tirthavari held on Mahamagata has Adi Kumbesar as the protagonist. To stand in front of him, other deities will arise and Mahamagad Theerthavari will take place.

That the Mahamagha festival and the Tirthamaduthal that takes place at that time are very ancient, we can learn from the Puranas and literature, there are many references to Kudanthai.

## LORD BRAHMA

According to a legend, people were washing their sins in the holy rivers of India, namely , the

1. Gangai
2. Yamunai
3. Saraswathi
4. Narmathai
5. Godavari
6. Kaveri
7. Sarayu
8. Thungapatra
9. Krishna

These rivers wanted to get rid of their sins and approached Lord Brahma, the Creator. Lord Brahma advised these rivers to converge and take a dip at the Mahamaham to wash their sins away. Hence, during the Mahamaham Festival, it is believed that taking a holy dip in the Mahamaham Tank is equivalent to taking a dip in the waters of rivers individually, since the Tank is a confluence of all these rivers and hence purificatory.

#### THE 20 THEERTHAMS (WELLS) AT THE MAHAMAHAM TANK

1	Indra Theertham	Provides moksham (salvation)
2	Agni Theertham	Rids Brahmahatthi dosham
3	Yama Theertham	Rids fear of death
4	Nruthi Theertham	Rids from fear of evil spirits
5	Varuna Theertham	Provides long life
6	Vaayu Theertham	Rids diseases
7	Gubera Theertham	Provides prosperity
8	Isaana Theertham	Moksham (to reach Lord Siva's feet)
9	Brahma Theertham	Pacifies ancestors
10	Gangai Theertham	Provides Kailasa padhavi
11	Yamuna Theertham	Provides wealth
12	Godavari Theertham	Fulfils wishes
13	Narmada Theertham	Provides physical strength
14	Saraswathi Theertham	Provides Gnaanam (enlightenment)
15	Cauveri Theertham	Provides knowledge
16	Kumari Theertham	Blessings to pets
17	Payodini Theertham	Provides joy
18	Saraya Theertham	Removes mental strain
19	Arubathaaru (66) kodi Theertham	Removes grief & provides happiness
20	Deva / Naaga Theertham	Rids of all sins & provides Devendra's post / Rids of Kaala Sarpa dosham.

After a dip in the Mahamaham Tank, devotees usually take a dip at the Potraamarai Kulam & the Cauvery river to complete the ritual.

16 Mandapas (Gopuram Towers) surround the corners and sides of the Tank. These towers are considered to be forms of Lord Siva.

#### THE THEERTHAS IN THE MAHAMAHAM TANK

This Mahamaham tank is not with only one river water but the water from sacred rivers. This punniya sacred Theertham is most auspicious in the land of Bharath. Apart from this 20 sacred rivers Theertham. The puranam are categorically registered that 66 crores of Theerthas are in the tank.

#### NAMES OF THE GOPURAM TOWERS

1	Brammatheertheshwarar
2	Mukundeshwarar
3	Dhaneshwarar
4	Virushabeshwarar
5	Baaneshwarar
6	Koneshwarar
7	Bhaktikeshwarar
8	Bhairaveshwarar
9	Agasthyeshwarar
10	Vyaneshwarar
11	Umaibakeshwarar
12	Nairutheeshwarar

13	Brammeshwarar
14	Gangatheshwarar
15	Mukthatheertheshwarar
16	Shethrabaleshwarar

All around the tank. There are beautiful steps and bund. The steps are all in Blacks stones. Water will be in the tank all around the year. But when Mahamaham festival approaching fast, the water in the tank used to be cleaned and fresh water will be allowed to stay for about two to three feet, not to cause any difficulty to the devotes comes to dip in the tank. There are 16 Mandapams around the steps of the tank. In each and every mandapam there is a temple in a tiny structure every temple is with Shivalingam. The said Shivalingam are.

#### TRADITION

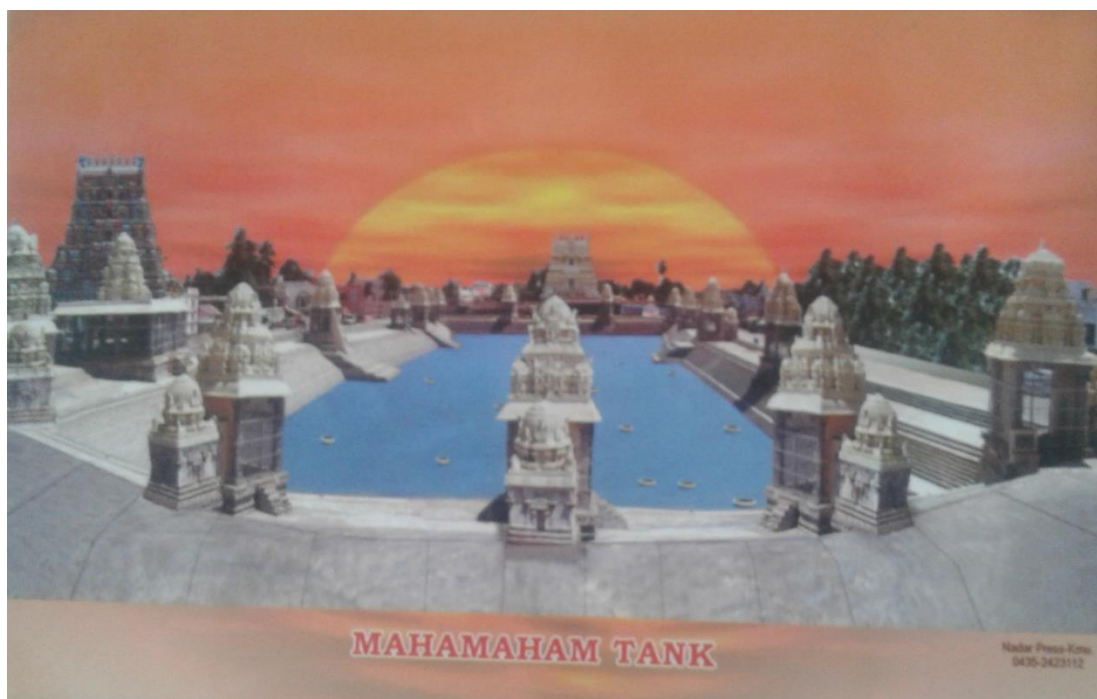
The sage Hemarishi did penance for getting Lakshmi as his daughter. His prayer was answered and Lakshmi appeared as a child in Potramarai tank. As part of Amrita the nectar halted in this place and the goddess, as child appeared here, this place is considered very important. The nine rivers mingle at mahamaham tank and get rid of their sins. It is believed that taking a bath at that time in Potramarai tank will give Punya (Hinduism) to the devotees, as the nine rivers had sacred bath at Potramarai Tank after Mahamaham Tank, those come to Mahamaham are doing so.

#### YEAR OF MAHAMAHAM FESTIVALS

Mahamaham festival once 12 years following the year of

1518, 1529, 1541, 1553, 1565, 1577, 1589, 1600, 1612, 1624, 1636, 1648, 1660, 1672, 1683, 1695, 1707, 1719, 1731, 1743, 1755, 1767, 1778, 1790, 1802, 1814, 1826, 1838, 1850, 1861, 1873, 1885, 1897, 1909, 1921, 1933, 1945, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016, ...∞

#### IMAGE OF MAHAMAHAM TANK



## NAME OF THE OTHER WISE CALLED MAHAMAHAM OR MAMANGAM

1. Amudavavi
2. Amutha Theertham
3. Kanniyar Theertham
4. Papanasa Theertham

## THE HOLY MAHAMAGAM WHERE THE PLANETS CONGREGATE

The day when Lord Prakaspati, the Lord Jupiter, who is the Lord of God, matches the sign of Leo, and joins with him in the month of Masi the Maga Nakshatra and Bowarnami, the day when the sun in the sign of Aquarius sees them and they see the sun with full vision is a day of great auspiciousness. As Guru Bhagavan comes to Kumbhaga Rasi once in 12 years, Mahamaghap Punnya period comes once in 12 years. Keeping in mind that the proper time to anoint Brahmadeva Kumbesan is Masithi, he immersed himself in the holy tirtha in Asuvati Nakshatra which comes on the first half of that month full of seal, started the pooja and performed Masi Maha Makodsavam.

On the day of Thirunal, which is called the tenth day of the nine-day festival, he performed the tirtha goat ceremony for Kumbesar in the tirtha at Agnith Dik. That is called 'Maka Vishta'.

## HOLY MAHAMAGAM ANTIQUITY AND ASTRONOMY

Our religious festivals are about seeing and showing the divinity in nature. Bharata's spiritual philosophy is to find the pancha budha philosophy of creation in living beings.

Astronomers know that the motion of the planets is the source of the motion of the world. The ethos is cleared on the movement of the planets, which are called Grahas, as elucidated in festival of Mahamagam, that sacred time, is holy the planets are fixed timing the bathing time.

History shows that many clan kings who ruled this land have celebrated this festival with the people. Just like the devotees, the king bathed in holy water, worshiped the Lord and made alms, paid tribute to their ancestors, sought peace for their souls through mantras and prayers.

## WORSHIP OF MAHAMAKHA PUNITHAM CHERA KUDANTAI TEMPLES

1. Sri Kumbeswarar Temple
2. Sri Nageswarar Temple
3. Someswarar Temple
4. Adi Kambatta Viswanath Temple
5. Kalatheeswarar Temple

## GOVINDA DIKSHITHAR

Govinda Dikshithar (1515 – 1635) was the teacher and advisor to the three Nayaka Kings of Thanjavur,

1. Chellappa Nayakkar
2. Achuthappa Nayakkar
3. Rangunatha Nayakkar

In honour of him, Rangunatha Nayakkar issued coins with his name engraved in Tamil as 'Givindaiya' Govinda Dikshitar has done many temple Thirupani in Thanjavur.

He built a temple in a town called Govindagudi near Pattieswaram. Gudi is the Telugu word for temple. The town was known as Singarasanpalayam till the time of Sevappa Nayaka, but the name was changed to Govindagudi during the period of Achuthappa Nayaka. It is known from literature and inscriptions that he went to Thanjavur daily in palak to attend to the government affairs and because of him Pattiswaram Thenupureswarar Temple, Tirupalaithura Palaivanathar Temple, Kumbakonam Kumbesar Temple, Thirunageswaram Naganathaswamy Temple, etc. Got very special and creative.

Tirupalaithurai Temple Tower, Tirupalaithura Rice Storage, Kumbakonam, new shrines of Kumbesar Temple Raja Gopuram, Kumbakonam Ramaswamy Temple, Puradhana Vedic School, Raja Veda Kavya School, all these are due to Dikshitra's efforts. He removed and cleaned the sand and mud areas around the Mahamagak pond and constructed step to facilitate access to the pond.

He also built sixteen mandapas around the Mahamagak pond on its top floor. In honor of this, he designed sixteen small and beautiful Shiva Temples near each one. Govinda Dikshitar was the main reason for the beauty of the Mahamakha pool that we see today, the artistic elegance and the magnificent appearance of the round halls that are filled with beautiful beauty.

Among the books composed by him, only "Gowmarila Darshanam" and "Sangitha Sudha" are available at present. As a proof of his interest in Tamil, he was a scholar in many languages like Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu etc. and he translated Panthanatheeswara Purana in the vernacular in to Tamil in A.D. 1605.

There are 16 halls around this pool. These are also known as Sodalanga Mandapams. Thanjavur was built by Govinda Dikshitar (1542 A.D.) who was a minister to King Achuthappa Nayakkar with the support of the King. His wife too his wife's Thirumeni is also in Kumbesuvraswamy Temple and Pattiswaram Thenupureeswarar Temple.

#### AUSPICIOUS PERIODS FOR BATHING

1. New Moon
2. Full Moon
3. Menstruation
4. Two Ayana periods
5. Sukravaram
6. Mahavidipadam
7. Karthikai
8. Shivarathri
9. Masimagam
10. Mahamagam

#### METHOD OF DONATION

There are many donations that devotees have to make in the Mahamaha Pool.

Donate according to their power Purity should be sought.

After bathing, one should sit on the bank of the pool and perform alms.

To make at least twenty donations in the rules of the great bath it has been said, its details are as

1. Bumithanam (Earth)
2. Kannikadanam (for this purpose donating)
3. Donation of Gold
4. Donation of Yagnopaveedha (Poonul)
5. Gothanam
6. Agava Danam (Horse)
7. Virushaba Danam (Bull)
8. Food Donation
9. Payasa Donation
10. Thanya Donation (Charity)
11. Donation of Karpaga Vritcham Tree (Coconut Tree)
12. Gupta Danam (Posanika, Palapalam, Elaneer, any one choice the One Rupee is to make a hole wide in one of these and Silver, put Gems, Diamonds, Vitreous. Pearls, Gold, etc. and give it with leather and hair Dakshin).
13. Donation of Sandalwood

14. Nalmuthu Donation
15. Navaratna Donation
16. Donation of honey
17. Salt Donation
18. Sesame Donation
19. Donation of Pomegranate
20. Donation of Choda sabala

(Donating 16 different fruits to 16 people).

There is variation which was in Purana in the names and details of the ThirukkudantaiThanas. The details in Kudantai Purana are as follows:

Pasudanam. Kanyadhanam, Suvarnadhanam, Kavikai (Umbrella) Donation, Vastra (Clothing) Donation, Donation of Upaveedham (Poonul), House Donation, Maid Donation, Rishaba Donation, Milk food Donation, Food Donation, Payasa Donation, Karpagadaru Donation, Thanya donation, Vibhuthi Donation, Kanda Donation, Navamani Donation, Honey Donation, Fruits Donation, Tambula Donation, Twenty alms of alms should be made in the secret place Thirukkudanthai in Purana, Isnanathana is prescribed as the existing songs say.

Kumbakonam, which is mentioned in the Thalapurana as Kudamookku, has many sacred theerthas from the Puranic period based on the belief that those who take holy bath during the Masi Maha Vaibhava will receive blessings. Thirukkudantai Purana explains to us that gods, sages, siddhas, benefactors and ascetics bathed here and got sanctified.

‘Na Karmana, Na Prajaya, Thane Na, Tyake Naike Amrutattva Manasha’. Means that man does not attain Amrutattva permanent moksha by lust, circumambulation or earned self. The meaning of this sloka is that one attains the state of complete salvation only through sacrifice. The first step to attain moksha is to attain the mental maturity to share what we have with others. All the donations done during the Mahamagam represent the spirit of sacrifice.

#### FACILITIES OF PUBLIC PEOPLE OR DEVOTEES

1. Bus
2. Train
3. Prasatham
4. Drinking Water
5. Medical
6. Security
7. Temple Donation
8. www.tnhrce.org
9. Camera
10. Advertisement of Festival
11. Radio Announced
12. Recreational facilities arrangements etc.

The flowing elixir rests in two water bodies. One of them is

1. Mahamagak Pond
2. Pottamarai Pond

If the temples are the symbols of our state, the symbols of these temple are the ponds rain water. Lives in rivers and ponds to think of God who is formless. If the mind is to grasp, the essence needs a form. Therefore, in a manner acceptable to the human mind, the supreme being is descending as an avatar bearing an image. The nature of ponds also corresponds to this nature of God. Rainwater falls into rivers; From

these the water goes to ponds and other bodies of water. Bathing in rainwater or fast-flowing river water is impossible; One can bathe blissfully only in the calm waters of the banks of the Aina River and in the temple ponds. This characteristic of water is known as 'fluidity' intangible the essence of existence is upon us like coming to earth out of grace where we can enjoy the it is impossible for the mind.

## CONCLUSION

For over a millennium Kumbakonam has been a sacred centre of Hindu pilgrimage. It differs from other temple cities of southern India in the diversity of the religious traditions manifested in its architecture and celebrated in elaborate cycles of ritual enactment that have been performed and re-interpreted down to the present day.

The siting of Kumbakonam near the head of the Kaveri delta has given it an exalted position as a religious and economic centre. Its craft traditions – in textiles, sculpture, bronze casting, brassware and gold jewellery – have been renowned since the ninth century AD and contribute to the city's present commercial prosperity. Kumbakonam under the Chola kings seventh to thirteenth centuries AD and Vijayanagara-Nayaka kings fifteenth-seventeenth centuries AD. It reflects the radical remodelling of the city under the Nayakas and their successors, the Marathas, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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