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Where discipline is a way of life

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R.Venkatraman, former professor, Madurai Kamaraj University, explaining the significance of Keezhamattaiyan village 'Heritage Walk' organised by INTACH and DHAN Foundation in Madurai on Sunday. Photo: G. Moorthy

Sanctity at Keezha Mattaiyan has been well maintained over several generations

Sunday's Heritage Walk organised by the Dhan Foundation, in association with the Indian National Cultural Heritage and Madurai Travel Club, took the participants to Keezha Mattaiyan village near the Vaigai, near Melakkal, where discipline has become a way of life.

Vehicles entering the village are asked to be parked at a place from where the visitors are to wash their footwear. The Valagurunathaswamy Temple, popularly known as Karuppasamy Temple and A Temple, is a few metres away from this point.

The presiding deity commands awe among the villagers. "All the decisions taken in my life are made by Chiththan inside the temple," says 55-year-old Mariappan. The 'Chiththan' is the 'Siddhar,' who attained 'jeeva samadhi' inside the temple many years ago. An idol is kept inside the mantap (a structure resembling a house). People residing on the streets carry their footwear on hand till they reach the temple.

The sanctity of the residential area beyond the temple has been well maintained over several generations. "After a trip away we first wash our clothes before entering our home," says Muthulakshmi. In the event of the death of a person at home, the front entrance is not used, even by children.

Only the back door is used for entry and exit. The liquor shop operated by the Tamil Nadu State Corporation is far away and if any resident gets drunk he quietly enters his home without making a sound. There is no drinking and smoking in the village, which is in close proximity to Thenur where there is a seamy atmosphere of drinking and smoking.

Theft is a rarity in the village. "You leave Rs one lakh at the 'manthai' in front of the temple, and you will still find it lying there after a week," say the villagers. However, Keezha Mattaiyan is famous for its way of identifying culprits in the event of theft, though rare.

The temple priest, who is the de facto judge and advisor of the village, convenes a meeting of the case of theft. The complainant and the suspect are asked to assemble before the 'panchayat,' with the suspect to prove his innocence.

If the suspect pleads guilty, the stolen object is quietly returned to the owner before the third hearing happens at the third meeting before which both the parties are asked to bathe in the river. The suspect by now is able to read the guilt on the face of the suspect and pronounces a 'judgement' in favour of the owner.

In the absence of a 'verdict,' the suspect is asked to dip his hand in boiling ghee. "But this seldom happens," says Muthulakshmi. People from neighbouring villages come to Keezha Mattaiyan to retrieve stolen objects.

R. Venkatraman, former Professor, Madurai Kamaraj University, says that discipline is the hallmark of the village, who belong to Mutharayar caste. Mutharayars once ruled the region from Thanjavur. They were displaced once the Imperial Cholas became supreme. They came to settle down in village in the tenth century.

V. Vedachalam, senior epigraphist, says that the stone inscription found in the village speaks of a piece of land to the temple during the period of Maravarman Sundarapandian, better known as 'Sundarapandian' (1216-1238 AD). The inscription provides a list of taxes waived for the land, which is to be used for maintenance of the temple.

Keywords: [Madurai Heritage Walk](#), [Keezha Mattaiyan village](#)

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