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# VANAKKAM

South Africa

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE NATAL TAMIL VEDIC SOCIETY





NATAL TAMIL VEDIC SOCIETY TRUST

## SA Tamil Centre for Creative Arts & Culture



*elayaraja-swaminathan-paintings-wooarts-com-04*

*By Indian Artist Elayaraja Swaminathan*

- South African Tamil Heritage Centre • Institute for the Advancement of Tamil
- Schools of Tamil Language, Music & Dance • International Tamil Network





# VANAKKAM



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Vanakkam SA to **Guest Editor:**

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**Design & Layout:** Craig Esbend  
of SA Suburbs (081 892 7257)

Cover Image

Mt Edgecombe Temple



# OLD TAMIL CUSTOMS ARE FADING FAST... **NAGAVELLI WEDDINGS**

**Pather/Archery Family Traditional Second or White Wedding**

By *Dr Juggie Pather*

*Using some local input and consulting authorities from Chennai, I was able to finalize what I think is an interesting document on a fast-fading ritual, in South Africa.*

**"THE ONLY DEVILS IN THE WORLD ARE THOSE RUNNING AROUND INSIDE OURSELVES.THIS IS WHERE THE BATTLES SHOULD BE FOUGHT" Mahatma Gandhi**

## Our Rituals Evolved From Prehistoric Times: Most Centring Around Our Mother Cult When Our Societies Were Matriarchal In Make-Up:

The Mother who gave birth and nurtured the young; Mother Nature who provided sustenance; the Mother Goddess in the form of rivers and lakes. Thus, from prehistoric times, the relationships between the hunter-gatherers and Mother Nature shaped lives and many rituals that were integrated into the day-to-day lives of early communities. This included wedding rituals. Of course, symbolism crept into such rituals. Over time, rituals were modified or changed, especially with the merging of societies, e.g., the influence of Brahmanical practices from the North on the communities of the south of India. The homa or fire ritual was at one time a purely North Indian practice in prayers and weddings. In Natal, during recent years, the Pathers and Archaries extended the main wedding ceremony to accommodate the Nagavalli Ritual mainly because of tradition. The two Durban priests, Thumbi Pather from the Angoo Pather household in Sirdar Road, Clairwood, and Tiny Pather from the Balaguru family were experts in preparing the “pundal” and conducting the Nagavalli rituals. But they are no more, after faithfully serving the Tamil community for decades.





In South Africa, the Nagavalli (snake or serpent coils) is a throwback to such prehistoric practices initiated by the Mother Goddess Cult. The serpent coils were a part of the totem used by primitive tribes. This reminds one of the totems used by the First Nation (incorrectly referred to as Red Indians) in the USA and Canada.

Narayan: "In the Kannada and Telugu community's weddings, there is a function called Nagavalli", a throwback to prehistoric beliefs that are reflected through symbolisms.

### **According to the author, the Kannada marriages include the following rituals:**

- *Arranging 7 decorated clay pots placed in the front of the pundil*
- *Tying a second Thali called Mangal Sutra*
- *Tying Bashingus, a multi-coloured pith headgear on the couples*
- *Arranging a mock play called Elephant Barter*
- *Cradling a pair of wooden dolls in a cloth cradle swing*
- *Relatives joining a procession around the pundil, accompanied by bell ringing:*
- *Carrying a lit torch when piercing a lemon with a knife, followed by roasting it over the flame of the torch*
- *Performing Arti to ward off evil.*



***NOTE: Except for the clay pots and the second thali the other formalities as above have disappeared from the local rituals.***

## **From The Above, We Discern That Nagavalli Was A Symbolic Replay Of The Tribal Lifestyle Of Pre-Vedic Tribes:**

- Earthen-decorated pots represent the major river goddesses
- Second Thali: a custom of hunter-gatherers using a necklace of genuine tiger claws, symbolising the Groom's prowess and bravery
- Pith headgear imitated headgear used in ceremonial dances
- Elephant barter: The couple negotiates a deal to sell the symbols of rice and salt drawings, on the floor, of two elephants, i.e. bartering the rice for the salt elephant drawing; this ritual relates to the preparation of the bride for a married life. Symbolic reference here is to the old tribal lifestyles: e.g., river valley farmers trading their grain for salt, with the inhabitants of the coast
- Further symbolism is reflected in mock drama: imitating the ringing of bells and beating of drums to scare off animals when the new bride and husband wend their way through the forests to the latter's home
- Piercing of lemon symbolizes the killing of a wild animal and braaing it with the lit-up torch
- The Aarti of red water was a symbol of distracting evil spirits
- Nagavalli was probably a ritual to signify the tribal identity of the Naga tribes who inhabited the many forests or the Naga tribes of the hills. These tribes used the totem of the serpent coils (Nagavalli) as their standard of identifying their group
- The cultural practice of Nagavalli was mainly practised by the highlanders of the Karnataka and Anhra regions.
- In the ritual, the packing of food for the long journey to the groom's family home also changed symbolically over the years. The ancients welcomed the bride when the mother-in-law fed her with milk and fruit.
- With assimilation, through inter-tribal marriages, the above wedding ritual continued albeit with changes
- Unlike the West, Indian marriage is a family union and not an individual formality.



## In the South African Context

- The cotton threads, a centrepiece of the pundal are cut simultaneously by both parties signifying a break from the past and a commitment to a new life together.
- The Toe-ring ceremony takes place after the marriage formalities; the placing of the foot on the Ami Kal and inserting of the silver toe-ring is an old Dravidian custom. At this point of the marriage ceremony, the priest explains the significance of the binary Arundhati star in the Big Dipper constellation, reminding the couple, of the need for mutual understanding and faithfulness. At times, the groom takes his bride to a higher spot such as a hill to get a better view of the binary star, Arundhati.

**THE WRITER:** “Interested persons should do more research and question experts on the significance of Nagavalli and the major changes that took place over several hundred years, especially as a result of the lack of contact with our Motherland. Also, be aware of some local priests who are not that knowledgeable and who tend to provide incorrect information.

Also, note that the younger set tends to reject some of the rituals and symbolic actions as old-fashioned. What must be remembered is that there is value in many of the symbolisms of the past, as they are not only colourful and add glamour to our social life, but they have intrinsic meaning. Over centuries, our culture and traditions, forming a part of our rich heritage, link the past to the present; and we must not sever this link.

***If you wish to arrive at your destination, you MUST know where you came from.*** Therefore, one should not ignore one’s rich heritage which is about 6000 years old. Understand the significance of all symbols and rituals. Remember that our Tamil weddings are the conjoining of two families and hence the joy and celebrations. Unlike Western weddings that are individualistic with few witnesses in a court of law, we have our families and friends and the community as witnesses and parties to the religious ceremony and celebrations. In Clairwood where many of us were born, weddings were social events.



### REFERENCES:

1. Narayan, M.K.V. (2009) Exploring the Hindu mind (cultural reflections & symbolisms. New Delhi: Roadworthy (Pub)
2. Interviews



By Dr J Pather

# CLAIRWOOD

## THE UNTOLD STORY

JUGGIE PATHER PhD



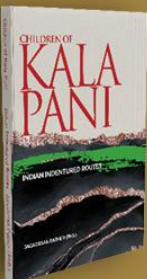
From this first generation of semi-slaves, Clairwood is proud to have produced several judges (one an internationally recognised jurist). Moreover, politicians were involved in the national struggle for freedom, professors, musicians, sportsmen, and eminent leaders in commerce, industry, education and medicine. An outstanding quality was the selflessness of the leaders and the spirit of camaraderie that went beyond religion or race...

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## LEST WE FORGET, OUR SA'S TRAILBLAZERS IN LITERATURE

# Dr Muthal Naidoo

**Educator, Playwright, Producer, Author, Political Activist**

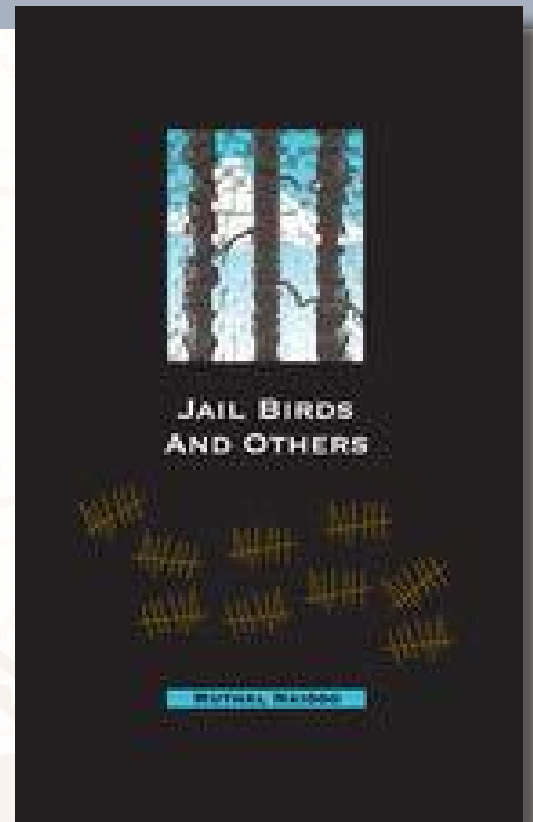
By Dr Muthal Naidoo

**Editor:** The younger set may recall prolific writer, Muthal Naidoo through her publication:

### **A Little Book of Tamil Rituals**

Dr Muthal Naidoo was born in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal in 1935. She was an educator in several schools, until her retirement in 1977.

She studied English and Drama at the University of Natal and taught in Marabastad, Giyani, Pretoria, the Limpopo province, and Washington University for 45 years. She has written widely for the theatre and published books on social commentaries, e.g. **Jail Birds & Others** (Africanbookscollective.com).





## Biography

In 1963, she became a founding member of the short-lived Durban Academy of Theatre Arts (DATA (sometimes referred to as the Durban Theatre Association) in Durban. Other members included Devi Bughwan, Pauline Morel, Fatima Meer, Ronnie Govender, Kessie Govender and Welcome Msomi. She also taught at the M.L. Sultan Technical College. Then she left DATA in 1964, to co-found the Shah Theatre Academy with Ronnie Govender.

As a result of her work as director, she was then awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study in the United States of America. She secured a joint appointment in the Black Studies Department and Performing Arts Area at Washington University in St Louis where she lectured and produced plays by African and African-American playwrights. During this time she completed a PhD in Theatre and Drama at Indiana University (1972).

She returned to South Africa in August 1976 to work with the Shah Theatre Academy once more and in 1981 formed her own company, the Work-in-Progress Theatre Company (WIP), and in 1983 became the Head of the Department of Drama at the Giyani College of Education. While in the Transvaal she was also involved in the organisation of the Laudium One-Act Play Festival.

She is the author of several published works, ranging from poetry, plays and stories, to autobiographical and academic articles and monographs.



***"THE ONLY DEVILS IN  
THE WORLD ARE THOSE  
RUNNING AROUND  
INSIDE OURSELVES. THIS  
IS WHERE THE BATTLES  
SHOULD BE FOUGHT"***  
***Mahatma Gandhi***

## Contribution to SA theatre, film, media and/or performance

Muthal is the author of many one-act plays, including Black Magic, Have Tea and Go, It's Mine (performed at the Hermit Theatre in Durban as a triple bill under the title Three for Tea), Nobody's Hero and Our Home performed as a double bill at the Market Theatre in 1987. Other plays include We 3 Kings, Ikhayaletu, Masks, Coming Home, The Masterplan, Flight from the Mahabarath, and Luci's Dilemma (2019).

Her play We Three Kings was published in 1992 in the Asoka Theatre Publications Playscript Series" ([esat.sun.ac.za/MuthalNaidoo](http://esat.sun.ac.za/MuthalNaidoo)).

After she retired from teaching, Muthal joined the UDF and participated in anti-government activities against the SAIC and other pro-apartheid organizations.

## National Order Of Ikhamanga

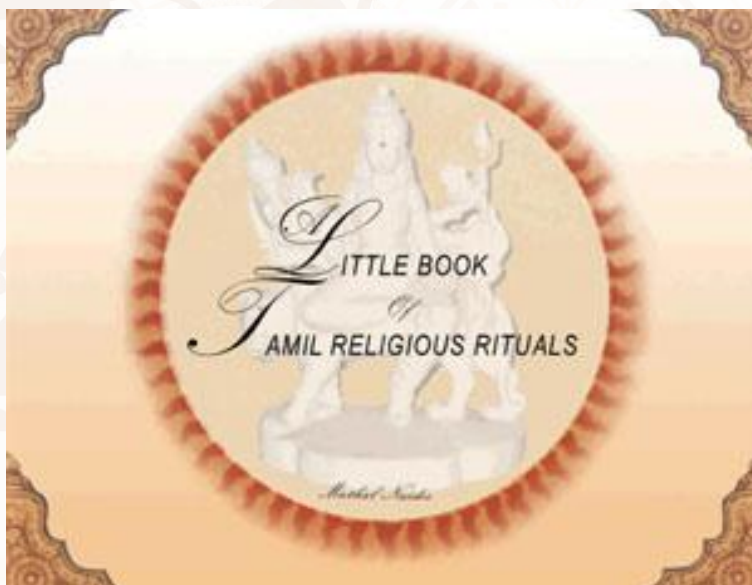
Rewinding to a younger 76-year-old Muthal:

In 2012, The Sunday Times caption read:

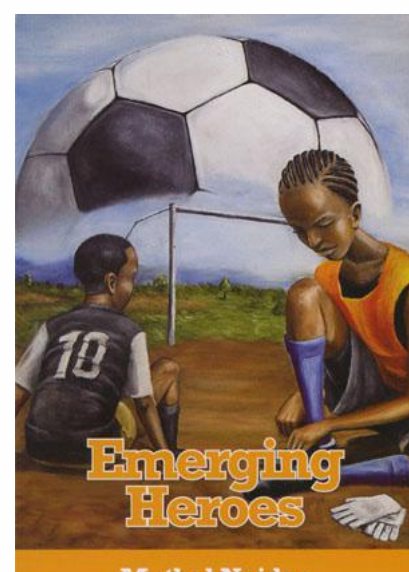
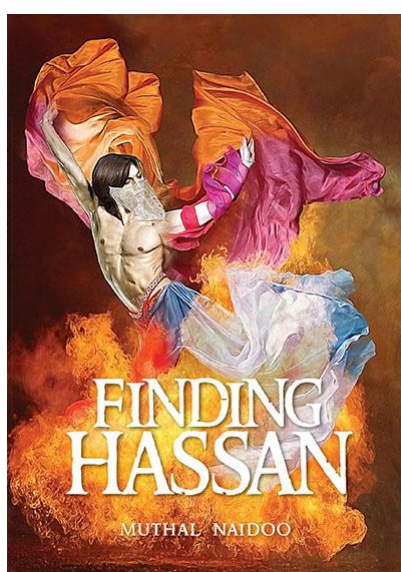
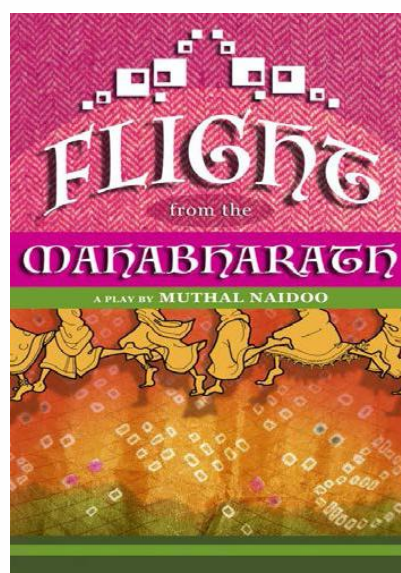
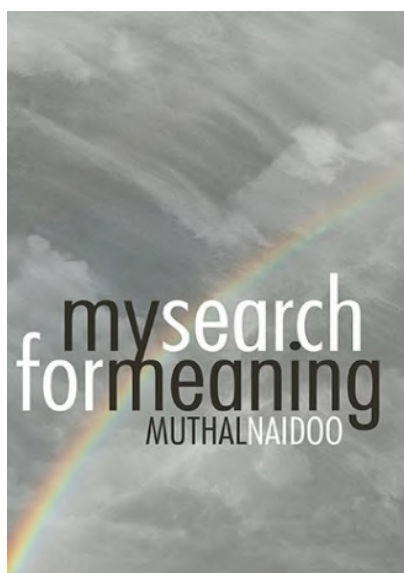
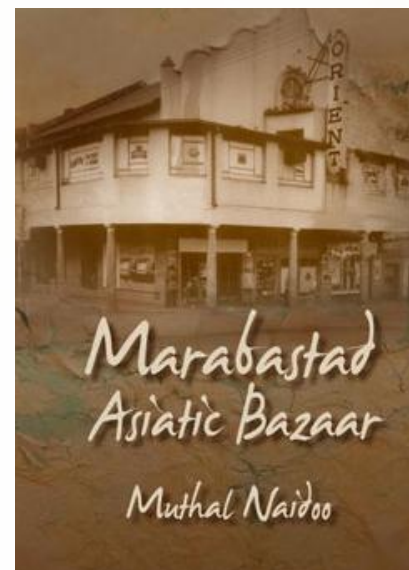
"The highest award for poet, writer...

*The Presidency this week acknowledged her skill by awarding her the National Order of Ikhamanga. The order - symbolised by the Strelitzia plant - was initiated in 2003 and is granted by the president for achievements in arts, culture, literature, music, journalism and sport (Sewchurran, Rowan: Times Lifestyle: 2012.29 April).*

## Examples of a few of her publications:



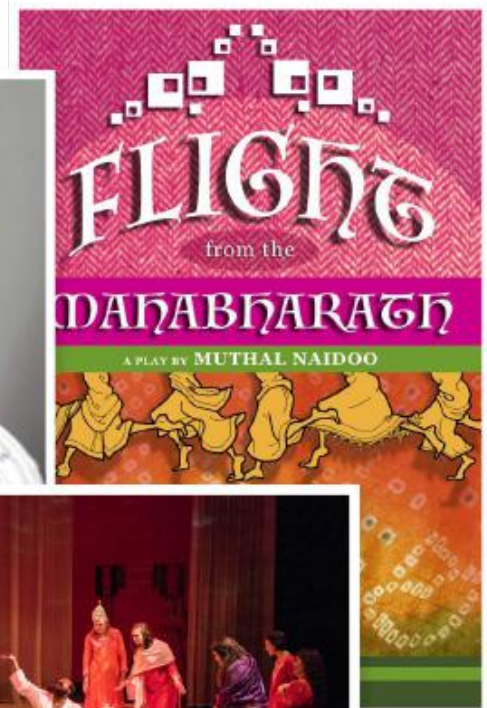






## Muthal Naidoo:

“I had written Flight from the Mahabharath sometime in the early 1990s after I had watched the Chopra brothers’ television dramatization of the epic, the Mahabharata. At the time I was also reading the works of the radical feminist author, Mary Daly, Professor at Boston College, whom I greatly admired. And as I watched the televised serial, Mahabharat, I was appalled at how women are portrayed in the epic and felt impelled to counter such a portrayal. So wrote Flight from the Mahabharath, in which women abandon the epic and create a play in which they free themselves of stultifying traditions and redefine themselves in terms of their individual understandings of who they are” (MuthalNaidoo.co.za).



In April 2017, the Theatre and Dance Department at Appalachian State University (ASU), USA, staged her play, the Flight of the Mahabharath. Muthal credits Dr Ray Miller and his team of actors, designers and technicians and Professor Kevin Warner for the success of the production.





# CHILDREN OF KALA PANI

INDIAN INDENTURED ROUTES

JAGADESAN PATHER (PhD.)

By Dr J Pather

Indian Indentured Routes honours all those Indians who made the perilous journey with meagre resources, to unknown distant lands to become the forebears of thousands who are still contributing to the development of what were the previous colonies of the British, French, Dutch and Danish.

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## **– ARE SA TAMILS IN A CRISIS –**

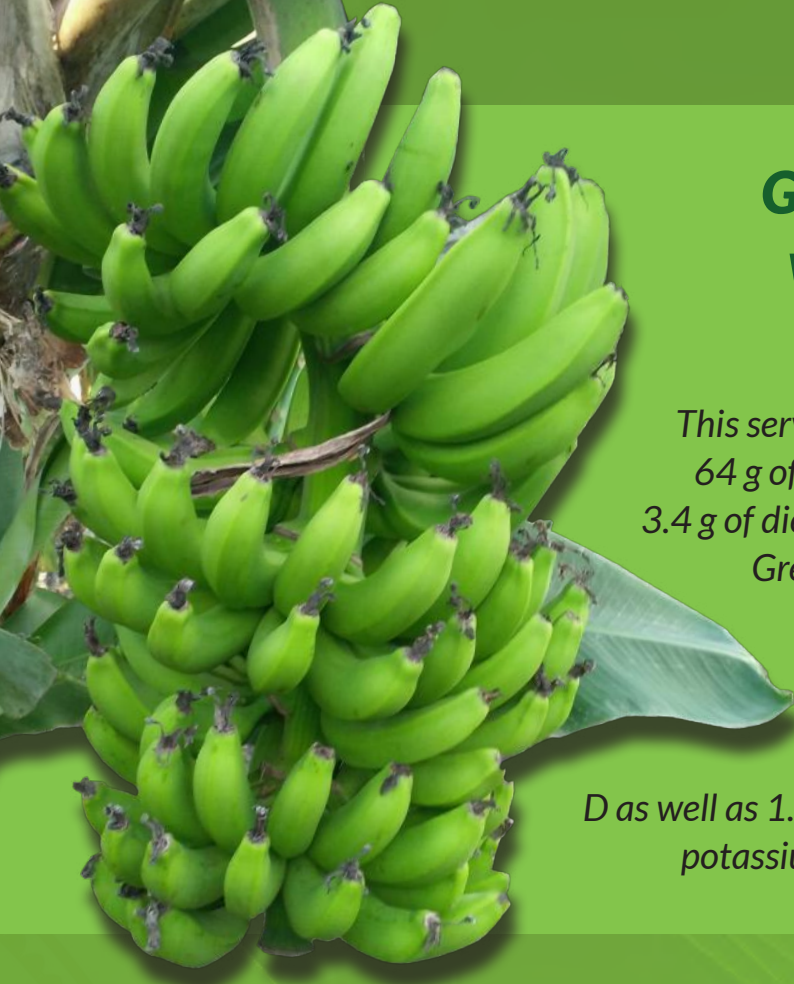
Considering the impact on us as a minority in SA, ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING Joblessness, politics of SA, a failed education system insecurity, etc., is our culture in crisis.

**Write to Co-editor: Dr Juggie Pather: [juggiepather@gmail.com](mailto:juggiepather@gmail.com)**

**Subject Line: Tamils in crisis**







## **Green banana, cooked in salt water contains 244 calories per 200 g serving.**

This serving contains 0.7 g of fat, 2.6 g of protein and 64 g of carbohydrate. The latter is 35 g of sugar and 3.4 g of dietary fibre, the rest is complex carbohydrates.

Green banana, cooked in salt water contains 0 g of saturated fat and 0 mg of cholesterol per serving. 200 g of Green banana, cooked in salt water contains 106.00 mcg of vitamin A, 31.2 mg of vitamin C, 0.00 mcg of vitamin D as well as 1.10 mg of iron, 6.00 mg of calcium, 972 mg of potassium, ([nutritionalvalue.org](http://nutritionalvalue.org))/[depositphotos.org](http://depositphotos.org)

# **Kela Upkari/Raw Banana Curry (South Indian Style Plantain Stir Fry)**

## **Ingredients**

- 1 large raw banana
- ½ cup small onions/shallots
- ¼ cup grated fresh coconut
- 2 green chillies/jalapenos
- ½ teaspoon jeera/cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon mustard seeds
- ½ teaspoon urad dal/split black lentils
- 1 dry red chilli
- ¼ teaspoon hing/asafoetida
- Few curry leaves
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric powder
- 2 teaspoons coconut oil
- Salt to taste
- Lemon wedges (optional)







## Method

1. Wash and peel the bananas using a peeler.
2. Chop into small cubes and place them in a bowl of cold water until ready to be cooked (this prevents them from browning or darkening).
3. Roughly chop the shallots or if using whole large onions, slice or chop them and keep aside.
4. In a blender jar, place the grated coconut, green chillies and jeera and make a coarse paste.
5. Heat coconut oil in a deep saucepan or kadai.
6. Once the oil is hot, add mustard seeds; when they crackle, add the lentils, dry red chilli (cut into 2 or 3 pieces) and hing. Saute for a few seconds.
7. Add the chopped shallots and curry leaves and fry on medium low till the onions turn a bit soft; about 1 to 2 minutes.
8. Stir in turmeric powder and coconut mixture and mix well. Saute or fry for a few seconds.
9. Drain water from the soaked banana pieces and add the raw banana to the onion-coconut mixture.
10. Add salt to taste, sprinkle a little bit of water, close the pan and cook on medium-low heat till the bananas are cooked (but not mushy), stirring in between. Squeeze lemon juice and remove from heat.
11. Serve hot, south Indian style raw banana or plantain curry with a simple dal and rice or with any of your meals.
12. Remove and serve hot with sambar and chutney





# Mt Edgecombe Temple

By Dr Jagadesan Pather



## **Shree Mariammam Temple**

*"Believed to be the oldest surviving 'solid' temple in Africa and one of the finest examples of temple architecture in South Africa, the 'Ganesha Temple', was built in 1898 by indentured bricklayer and temple architect Kristappa Reddy"*



Situated on the road to KwaZulu-Natal's, North Coast, and the temple is a classical arrangement enclosed within a walled courtyard, with 'Nandi the bull', guarding its corners. The temple has an axial entrance through a low gopuram (entrance tower) which leads past a kodi pole (an external entrance altar and flagpole) to the central cell a, the domed structure which houses the elephant- deity, Ganesha. The Shiva Temple was built in 1912 by master temple builder Kothanar Ramsamy Pillay. Crowned by a deeply modulated barrel vault, the temple's design shows a strong appreciation of architectural elements, although these are now diffused by arbitrary use of colour. The recent addition of the Hall has been insensitively executed, with little integration of the deities into its structure. **Editor:** such an insensitivity generally prevails in most South African temples.

### RECOMMENDED READING:

1. *The wealth money can't buy: Robin Sharma*

2. *Exploring the Hindu Mind  
(cultural reflections & symbolisms)*

M.K.V. Narayan New Delhi. Roadworks Pub. Ebook

### References:

1. <https://www.kznia.org.za/durban-city-guide/hindu-temples/ganesa-temple-shiva-temple-wayside-shrine>.

2. SA History Online

## Our Two, Star Temple Architects & Builders

"The South African Tamil communities are forever beholden to Kistappa Reddy and Kothanar Ramsamy Pillay and a few others whose creativity, passion, devotion, and love for architecture and construction have bequeathed to us and future generations, striking, spiritually endowed houses of the gods. Undoubtedly, they followed the advice of the great Tamil poet Avvaiyar: "Don't live in a place where there is no temple"

### Mr Kistappa Reddy ( 1863 - 1941 )

Mr Kistappa Reddy , affectionately known as the " Master Builder " hailed from North Arcot near Madras in southern India. He arrived in South Africa in 1898 and was indentured to the Campbells on the Mount Edgecombe sugar estate. He completed his indenture in 1903 and then settled in Cato Manor.

Mr S S Pather engaged the services of Kistappa Reddy in 1903 to build their new , more substantive and impressive temple which was then named the Umbilo Shree Ambalaavanar Alayam . This Alayam was completed in 1905. The Alayam was one of his outstanding masterpieces which launched his career as a " master builder" of temples in South Africa.

Kistappa Reddy was very talented and multi-skilled. He had no academic training in building or plan drawing; but was an accomplished and talented artisan. His brilliance in architecture and design is evident in the many temples that he built.

He was fluent in Tamil and Telegu and always wore his signature red turban. He established and ran the very popular and successful Ganesan Press in Queen Street, Durban. This printing press specialised in Tamil script. One of his sons, who became a draughtsman, was commissioned to draw the plans for the Umbilo Shree Ambalaavanar Alayam in Cato Manor.

Contributions by his Grandchildren Cally Reddy and Saro Govender



## **Note: Spelling of Kistappa Reddy varies.**

“When Reddy was offered a commission for a temple he would submit a charcoal or pencil sketch of the proposed design to the trustees; he did not use conventional drawings with plans and elevations in the European manner to show details of construction. With only a very simple sketch to guide him, he would lay out the foundations and proceed to erect the structure he had visualized - relying on experience and training”.

(Grossert 1942:29, 37 ill; SAAR July 1965:23-26).

## **“Architect & Temple Builder”**

The other prolific architect and builder of South Indian temples in South Africa was Kothanar Ramsamy Pillay (1863-1938).

Both Kothanar and Kistappa were not trained in their fields but we could assume that whilst in India, before being indentured, they worked with master builders.

Kothanar hailed from Pudukoti, in the Madras Presidency, India. He arrived in South Africa as a passenger Indian, in 1885. He worked mainly in Durban as an architect and temple building contractor. A temple in Port Elizabeth was designed In 1927, he returned to India where he passed away in 1938. by him (Information provided by Kothanar’s grandson: Jay Nair).

In 1927, he returned to India where he passed away in 1938.



**KOTHANAR RAMSAMY PILLAY**  
(1863-1938)





## The Other Temples In South Africa He Built And/Or Designed Were:

- **Bala Subrahmanya Temple:** 1910. Dundee, KwaZulu-Natal – Architect
- **KR Pillay private temple:** 1924. Redhill, Durban, KwaZulu-Natal – Architect
- **Railway Barracks Shree Emperumanl Temple:** 1924. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal - Architect
- **Shiva Subrahmanya Alayam Temple:** 1912. Mount Edgecombe, KwaZulu-Natal - Architect
- **Shree Shiva Subrahmanya Temple:** 1915. Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal - Architect
- **Shree Siva Subrahmanya Alayam:** 1901. Baarkens Valley, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), Eastern Cape - Architect
- **Umbilo Shree Ambalavanar Alayam Subrahmanya - Second:** 1905. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal – Architect
- **Umgeni Rd Shiva Temple:** 1910. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal – Architect
- **Shree Siva Subrahmanya Alayam:** 1901. Port Elizabeth. 11 Upper Valley Road, Southend, Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)

This temple was designed by Kothanar Pillay and the supervising architect was Hubert William Walker. An architect was engaged as it is presumed Mr Kothanar Pillay was away in Durban. The land for the temple was purchased by Tamil settlers from Mauritius, in 1893.

### References

1. Mikula, P, B & H. Harber, (1982) Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa. Durban: Hindu Temple Publications, pp 88.
2. Mikula, P, Kearney, B. 1982. Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa. Durban: Hindu Temple Publications. Pp 13, 15, 35, 38, 60, 61, 77, 86-89, 108, 109
3. Fransen, Hans. 1982. Three centuries of South African art: fine art, architecture, applied arts. Johannesburg: AD Donker. Pp





# 134 Years Off the Shri Mariammam Temple, Mount Edgecombe

Famously known as one of the oldest-standing temples in South Africa, the Mount Edgecombe Shri Mariammam Temple is etched deep into the history of Hindus from all over KwaZulu-Natal, seeping its ancestral roots through families for over 134 years.

Though the temple itself was formally established in 1890, it is believed that Hindu indentured labourers began worshipping Mother Mariammam here years before the formal establishment through her divine 'Puthu' (an anthill that is sacred to Hindus, where the snake goddess is believed to reside).

Chairperson of the temple, Seelan Archary comments: "We know our forebears, staunch Hindus, would have discovered our Mothers Puthu around 1862 when they were first brought to the Mount Edgecombe Sugarmill by a William Smeardon, to work on the sugarcane fields and mill. The area subsequently became known as Mill Barracks."



Blood, sweat, perseverance and hope for a better future motivated worshippers to build what would eventually become, especially almost a century and a half later, one of the most revered and sacred grounds for prayer in the present day.

Through ancestral knowledge passed down from generation to generation, families have created and upheld traditions that are tied strongly to the temple, one of which includes a flagship festival - the highly anticipated Easter Ammen Prayer.

The history of the prayer dates back to when Indian indentured labourers were made to toil from dawn to dusk in the sugarcane fields of Port Natal, some areas of which included Isipingo, Illovo and Mount Edgecombe. The working conditions for the labourers, which were inevitably no less than a form of slavery, left them without any means to practice Hindu rituals and prayers openly – apart from a four-day break in the year during Easter.

It was during this time that communities of labourers headed to their makeshift temples to worship and make their offerings to Mother Mariammen who is known as the goddess of weather, medicine and fertility. Religiously, Hindus would participate in Her worship over the Easter period together with their families for a long, prosperous and healthy life each year. This tradition became a legacy that is still observed in coastal temples belonging to the indentured labourers for over 100 years now.

During the Easter Weekend at the Shri Mariammen Temple, they host the Ammen Prayer, Ammen Awards and Mount Edgecombe Easter Festival, attracting well over one hundred thousand people over five days.







The Ammen Awards was introduced by the temple society in 2000 to recognise ordinary people doing extraordinary work in the Hindu community. Proudly, they continue this tradition and award to date. The Ammen Awards are divided into 8 categories which include: the promotion of the Hindu religion, promotion of Eastern languages, promotion of arts and culture, excellence in education, excellence in sports, and excellence in media, community socio-economic upliftment and special recognition awards.

The Shri Mariamman Temple Mount Edgecombe has successfully surpassed the test of time, standing strong throughout the three major eras of colonialism, apartheid and now democracy proving that ancestral heritage is greater than any man-made force. Millions of lives over the temple's 134 years have been prayed over for protection, prayer for by families and prayed with as communities came together to proudly practice Hinduism despite their earliest challenges. Devotees in modern society are fuelled by the power invested into their temple not only by the Divine Mother Mariamman and the residing deities but also by the forefathers who laid each brick and stone ensuring that they would pass on the baton of religion, culture, customs and beliefs so that future generations will continue to thrive for centuries to come.

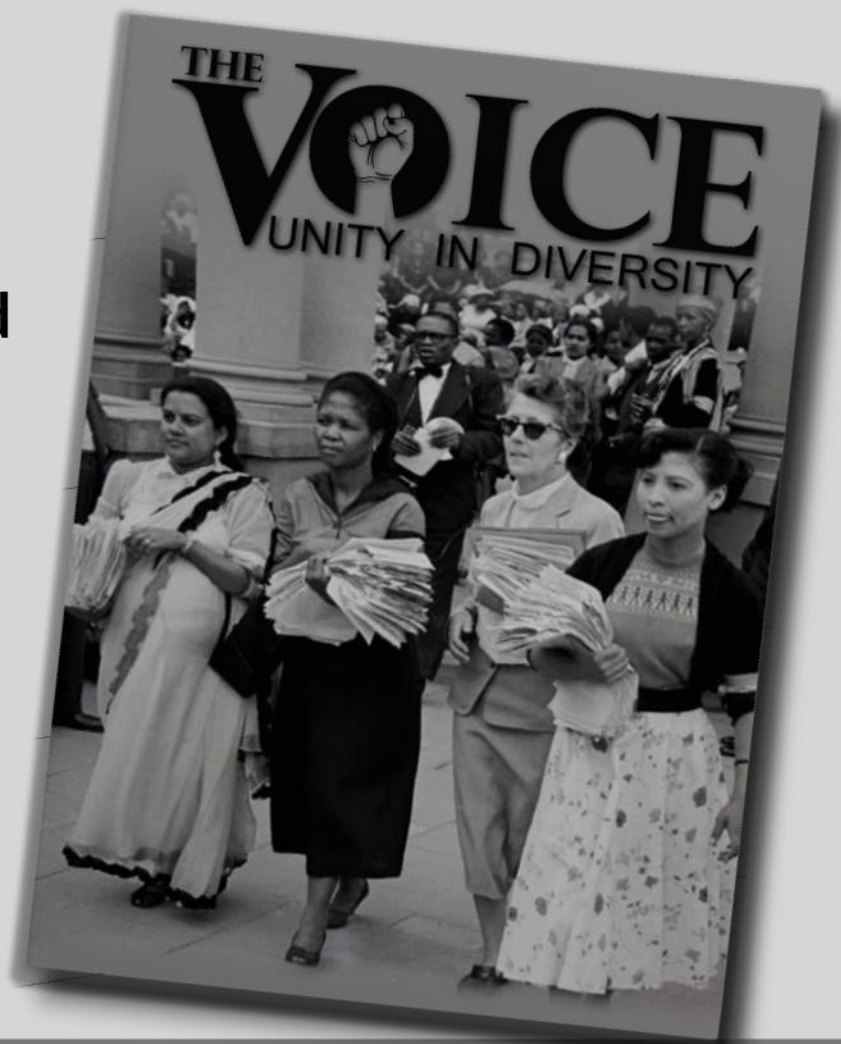


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# THE VOICE

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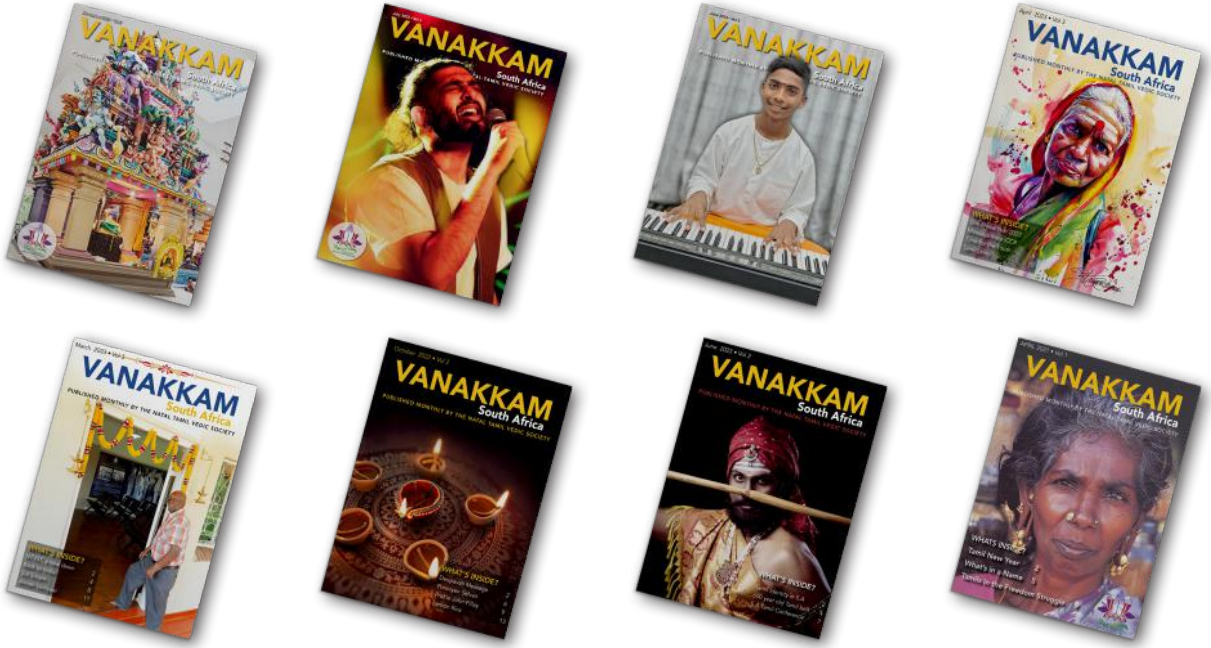
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- Politics In Their Blood
- Many In Exile Trained As Umkhonto We Sizwe Soldiers
- The Warrior Queens of India & SA Indian Women Political Activists



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