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IJMASRI, Vol. 6, issue 7, pp. 1106-1108, July -2026

<https://doi.org/10.53633/ijmasri>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (IJMASRI)

ISSN: 2582-9130

IBI IMPACTFACTOR 1.5

DOI: 10.53633/IJMASRI

RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURAL PARADIGMS OF KUDIL AND KURUMBALAI IN SANGAM LITERATURE: A STUDY ON HERITAGE EVOLUTION

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Abstract

This research investigates the primitive yet sophisticated architecture types of Tamil workshop spaces, specifically the *kudil* and *kurumbalai* as documented in classical Sangam literature. By synthesizing literary evidence from the *Ettuthogai* and *Pathinenmelkannakku* collections with contemporary field observations in the Sivaganga region, this paper delineates the transition of these architecture. The study highlights the material culture, structural engineering, and the socio-religious significance of “*Irai Podiyil*” (divine common halls) in the Tamil society.

Keywords: Sangam Literature, Kudil and Kurumbalai Architecture, Tamil Vernacular Architecture, Sacred Architecture and Heritage, Sivaganga Cultural Heritage.

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Introduction

Ancient Tamil civilization conceptualized sacred spaces through humble structures known as *Kudil*, *Kudisai*, and *Kurumbalai*. These early shrines, categorized as *Irai podiyil*, served as the primary

residence for deities before the advent of stone-based monumental architecture. Literary records suggest that these spaces were vibrant centers of ritualistic performances, including *Thullal* (sacred dance) and the establishment of *Bali-munril* (Sacrificial courtyards). This paper aims to analyze these literary descriptions to understand the evolution of traditional construction techniques and their persistence in modern religious heritage.

Research Methodology and Scope

The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, utilizing the *Manimidaipavalam* section of *Akananuru* and the epic *Silapathikaram* as primary textual frameworks. The investigation is geographically centered on the **Sivagangai district**, focusing on the remnants of traditional roofing and the preservation of folk deity shrines. The methodology involves a comparative analysis of ancient poetic descriptions against existing structural models in the region.

Structural Taxonomy of Sacred Dwellings

The Engineering of the Kudil

The *kudil* represents an early phase of formalized architecture, often associated with both domestic (*Manai*) and ritualistic (*Podiyil*) functions.

- **Frame and Support:** Construction typically utilized elongated bamboo as primary rafters and central beams.
- **Enclosure Materials:** Walls were fashioned from *Kidugu* (woven palm fronds), providing a breathable protective envelope.
- **Interior Iconography:** In many instances, the *Nadukal* (Hero stone) served as the central aniconic representation of the deity within the *kudil*.
- **Foundation Evolution:** *Akananuru* provides evidence of early brickwork integration, suggesting a gradual shift toward more permanent masonry.

The Vernacular Essence of the Kurumbai

The *kurumbai* stands as a testament to indigenous ecological adaptation, differing significantly from the *kudil* in both material and intent.

- **Roofing Systems:** These Structures were predominantly thatched with *ugam* grass, a resilient local material.
- **Diachronic Indicators:** Depending on the landscape, *kurumbai* structures were adorned with regional markers, such as elephant tusks in mountainous tracts or shark bones in coastal settlements.

Field Observation: The Living Heritage of Sivaganga

The architectural principles of the Sangam era are not merely historical relics but continue to influence the sacred landscape of the Sivaganga district.

- **Amman Manai Prototypes:** Numerous local shrines for goddesses retain the four-sided sloped roof geometry (*Naatpuram Sainthala Oattu Veedu*), which directly mirrors the ancient *Kudil* form.
- **Epigraphic Transitions:** Inscriptions at the Thirupuvanam Kampaheshwarar Temple indicate that even major structural components, like the *Mani Mandapam*, were originally designed as thatched pavilions.
- **Folk Deity Resistance:** Deities such as *Pechi*, *Esaki*, *Pidari*, *pichi* are traditionally believed to reside only in *kuchi-veedu* (stick-huts), often refusing modern concrete upgrades (*Matchu veeadu*).
- **Intuitive Adoption:** The 'Kudil' model is subtly integrated into the *Palliyarai* (divine bedchambers) and *Mandapalli* (temple kitchens) of major Shiva and Vaishnava temples in the region.

Conclusion

The transition from *kudil* and *kurumbai* to formal temple complexes represents a significant milestone in Tamil architectural history. This research underscores that the fundamental spatial logic of the

modern *Vimana* and *Mandapa* was pioneered within these early thatched dwellings. Preserving these traditional models is essential for understanding the continuity of Tamil heritage and the sophisticated engineering embedded in vernacular construction.

Footnotes

- 1-3 Early literary references to deities in *Kudil* and *Podiyil* structures.
- 10 Use of *Akananuru* and *Silappathikaram* as primary sources for architectural study.
- 22-24 Descriptions of bamboo rafters and hero stones as cited by poet kadiyalur Uruthirangkannanar.
- 32 – 35 Vernacular materials including *Ugam* grass and regional artifacts in *kurumbai* dwellings.
- 41- 43 Inscriptional and field evidence from Tirupuvanam and Manamadurai regarding hut-style mandapams.

- 46-48 Cultural preferences for *kuchi-veedu* among folk deities and temple kitchen layouts.
- 60 Final analyses on the integration of hut models into Dravidian architectural styles.

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