

The Church which made a Hamlet Famous

(Kuttyjaskar)

Megnanapuram is a village panchayat in Tuticorin District just 13 Km West of the temple town of Tiriichendur. But Megnanapuram is better known as an ancient and famous Christian Village. It has a population of about 10000 literate people. This is one of the very few Christian Villages in India in 1830 when a few families embraced Christianity the name of the village was changed from Nedu Vilai to Megnana puram (the abode of true wisdom). Rev John Thomas of Pembroke in Wales who took charge of this village congregation in 1837, was the man behind the all-round development of this village.

He was a great visionary. While there was only a very few Christian families in Megnanapuram during the middle of the 19th century, he built a very beautiful and impressive Church in Catholic style big enough to hold 3000 people. His dream came true only by the turn of this century when during the mid-day service on Sundays, the Church is full to the walls. The Church is 110 feet long and 55 feet wide, with a steeple in the front soaring into the sky a height of 192 feet. This is one of the biggest Churches with the tallest steeple in India, Lord Napier, the Governor of Madras Presidency who dedicated this Church Tower and who in his way a no mean critic or Architecture, described this church as a finest attempt he had seen to transplant the splendors of Gothic Architecture into a soil and atmosphere not by any means favourable to it.

He was greatly taken up with this church that he rode on his mare all around this church to different points from which he could view the splendour of this Church and was never tired afterwards at expressing his admiration of its beauty. It is interesting to note that this church used to be referred to as the "one rupee church" as a rupee then contained 192 paise and the height of the tower of the Church is 192 feet. By climbing a few storeys up the tower, one can command a panoramic view of many miles of sandy places all round. The name of the church at Megnana puram is St. Paul's Church and hence St. Paul's day which falls on 25th January is celebrated on a grand scale every year. Apart from the religious ceremonies, the main attraction of the festival is the Community

Dinner, commonly known as 'Asanam' in Tamil. On 28—1— 2011 about 18 tonnes of rice was cooked and served. It means about 1,00,000 people of all caste, creed and religion had taken part in this asanam. Sumptuous Food is served on plantain leaves with the people 'quailing on the sandy stretches in front of the church. Thousands are fed at one sitting.

Most of the natives of Megnana puram who are living elsewhere in this country will make it a point to attend this Asanam just as Hindus will do for their village temple festivals and consequently every home entertains more than one family as guests. Hence the village will get flooded with people from far and near and all over on that day. It is remarkable that as early as 1846 separate schools for boys and girls were established at Megnanapuram.

The boys school was progressively raised to a high school even in the year 1888 and now as a higher secondary school. The girls school had the unique privilege of having electricity to its complex as early as 1930. when that commodity was not heard of in that part of the country. The boys high school which was called C. M. S. High School till 1951 was renamed Ambrose High School. Rev. Ambrose V. Thomas a multi-linguist It was the only High School in Tiruchendur Taluk till 1930 and so it had to cater to the educational needs of the young boys of the adjacent Taluk also for about half a century.

This century old school had produced an array of distinguished men such as four Bishops, one of whom Rt Rev. V. S. Azariah was the first non-white Bishop in the world 2

Ministers (Cabinet Rank) of Tamilnadu Government 1 Vice Chancellor of an University, the First Indian Scientist to set foot on the north and south poles. A Chief Engineer of the Department of space. Government of India and a Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission of a State, Rev. Sebastian who was appointed the first Indian Presbyter at West-Minister Abbey London in 1978 also hail from Megnanapuram.

To commemorate Rev. Thomas a college of Education for women has been started at Megnanapuram.

It will be no exaggeration that Megnanapuram is a model village with well laid out long and straight sandy streets and Roads with puccs houses on each side, the like of which cannot be seen anywhere else in the state if not in the country. The village can boast of having all the facilities and amenities normally available in Big towns in India. As the village is in the midst of big towns on all sides it has a net work of good roads on all sides and has frequent bus service from and to Megnanapuram. A village as fully developed as Megnanapuram can seldom be seen anywhere else.

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