

Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar: The 10th Custodian of Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil

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Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar – a punctual and hands-on stern Administrator. His daily routine: walking from home to the temple at 8 am and returning home at noon with his signature umbrella, which he did even a month before he passed away at the age of 92.

Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar was born on January 15, 1929 to Ragunatha Maapaana Mudaliyar IV, (the great great grandson of Ragunatha Maapaana Mudaliyar I, the founder of the present Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil in 1734), and Kamalambaal Ragunathar. Before moving our focus onto Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar, it is perhaps appropriate to briefly examine his ancestry. Administration of Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil by the Maapaana Mudaliyar dynasty nearing 300 years had been constantly ‘progressive’ regarding temple evolution. Rather than a stubborn adherence to age-old rituals and traditions, the Maapaanars developed a check and balance method, leading to the continuing development of the temple, both in form and function. The inherent values of divinity, duty, and service, embodied within this lineage, have ensured that the temple is run with an aim to induce “Bhakti” within devotees, sans commercial considerations.

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Within this lineage, Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar was the 10th Custodian of the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil (December 15, 1964 – October 9, 2021). His primary education was at Saivamangaiyakkaras Vidyalayam, Nallur, Jaffna, followed by secondary education at Jaffna Central College and St. Peter’s College, Colombo. Although his ambition was for a career in Medicine, it was not to be. Following the passing of his father Ragunatha Maapaana Mudaliyar (the 8th Custodian), his eldest son Shanmugadas Maapaana Mudaliyar inherited the administrative role as the 9th Custodian of the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil. This led to Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar being requested by his older brother to take charge of the day-to-day running of the temple, thus halting the intended vocation in Medicine. Following the premature death of Shanmugadas Maapaana Mudaliyar on December 15, 1964, as per the age-old tradition and custom, Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar immediately took over the reins as the Custodian of the Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil, continuing to serve Lord Murugan with consummate dedication and devotion. Kumaradas

Maapaana Mudaliyar's administrative style was direct and devoid of ambiguity and complexity. His method was to simplify and compartmentalize even the most complex of problems; this process entailed clear, effective, and efficient solutions.

An overwhelming ethos was embedded within the temple DNA, with establishment-based hierarchy never evident and all individuals being treated as "very important persons".

Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar identified that the structural evolution of the temple was necessary to provide greater capacity. Thus, the temple complex was expanded during his tenure to accommodate the ever-increasing number of devotees. Structural expansion is best when accompanied by appropriate decorative features for the temple complex to maintain character and sanctity. Some examples of the above-mentioned new constructions, evolutionary expansion, and civic duties of the temple complex during his period in charge are chronologically listed in the accompanying table; the developments during the past 15 years were jointly carried out with his son and chosen successor, the present incumbent. It is clear from the tabulated timeline that development was constant during Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar's time at the helm. These developments were accompanied by continuous spiritual and functional perfection. He realized that the functions of the temple could be stratified into:

1. carrying out rituals and festivals and 2. provision of visual and/or metaphysical experience for devotees. Both the above were fulfilled in abundance. Remarkably the devotional experience came at a minimal non-inflationary cost, with the 'Archanai'/ pooja cost being just Rs. 1/- only making it affordable to devotees from all walks of life. Similarly, the anointing of "Rudra Abishegam", and "Shanmuga Archanai" were priced at a bare minimum, earning the temple a mere Rs. 15/- and Rs.75/- respectively. This conservative pricing reflected the philosophy of Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar - 'God does not discriminate between the rich and poor and is accessible to all'. An overwhelming ethos was embedded within the temple DNA, with establishment-based hierarchy never evident and all individuals being treated as "very important persons".

At this point, it is noteworthy to mention the pivotal role that his life partner, Sugirtha (daughter of Mudaliyar Namasivayam) Kumaradas, played. Her principal role involved assuming control of domestic affairs and family well-being. This enabled Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar to give undivided focus to the development and functioning of the temple, as is clear from the above narrative and accompanying table. Sugirtha, the backbone of the family, also functioned as an honorary secretary attending to various temple administrative requirements. Further, she was responsible for creating all apparel for the deities during the annual festivals. Both Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar and Sugirtha have set standards regarding devotion, selflessness, and discipline required by future generations of the lineage allocated to providing service. As mentioned previously, succession planning was evident, with his son Shayan Kumaradas holding a major role in the running of the temple and planning and executing the developments over the past 15 years. This foresight has ensured a seamless succession.

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Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar's piety, energy, vision, and clear thinking have led to the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple's accelerated evolution from a structural and functional perspective. This unbelievable and relentless lifework was only fulfilled as he was the sole steady hand on the tiller. This avoided the pitfalls of institutions run by committees and/or groups of individuals, each tugging in their selected direction, thereby leading to inertia. After a long life of devoted service, and with reassurance gained from an ensured succession of his son Kumaresh Shayanthana Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar (the 11th Custodian) and his grandson thereafter, Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar took permanent leave from earthly service to Lord Murugan, reaching his lotus feet on the auspicious day of Visaka Nakshathiram, Sathurthi during the holy Navarathri festival, on October 9, 2021.

Prof. (Dr.) Sudarshan Ramachandran (Son in Law of Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar)

Consultant Chemical Pathologist University Hospitals Birmingham Professor of Metabolic Medicine - University Hospitals of North Midlands/Staffordshire University

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Kandaswamy Kovil

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Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Brunel University London
October 23, 2021.*



Nallur Kovil today: The significant expansion was undertaken by Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar during his tenure as the 10th Custodian, which included 30 years of war.

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This was his last few moments (taken in September 2021) in the temple he built and enjoyed serving all his life.

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Taken in 1964: just before fate changes.



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With wife Sugirtha in July 2021 at Maapaanar Valavu.



Kumaradas Maapaana Mudaliyar, along with son Kumaresh Shayanthana
Kumaradas MM (the incumbent and 11th Custodian) and heir apparent, Kumaresh
Aneeshwara Kumaradas on his 90th Birthday at 'Maapaanar Valavu'.

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Laying of the Holy foundation for the Northern entrance Tower 'Kubera Raja Gopuram' in 2012. Along with son and grandson, which is recorded today as the island's biggest Gopuram (to date).

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Simplicity and Authority: The one who never wanted to publicly show his identity and authority. He was always seen mingled with thousands of devotees but still could call the shots.

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Aerial view of the temple and festival - showing the expansion of the temple done by Kumaradas Maapana Mudaliyar during his tenure.