The Nayak Period – Madurai Nayaks (Viswanatha Nayak, Thirumalai Nayak, Rani Mangammal), the 72 Palayams, Meenakshi Temple Gopurams, Thanjavur & Senji Nayaks | TNPSC Notes

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The **Nayaks** came to the Tamil country as governors of the Vijayanagara Empire and later set up their own kingdoms. **Madurai Nayak** rule was founded in **1529 by Viswanatha Nayak**, who with his Dalavai **Ariyanatha Mudaliar** divided the kingdom into **72 palayams** under the **palayakkarar (poligar) system**. **Thirumalai Nayak** (1623–1659) built the **Thirumalai Nayak Mahal**, the Teppakulam and the Pudhu Mandapam in Madurai; **Rani Mangammal** (1689–1704) is remembered for roads and choultries. The present form of the **Meenakshi Amman temple** (14 gopurams) is largely of the Nayak period. The **Thanjavur Nayaks** (1532–1673) and **Senji Nayaks** also ruled in this age. Madurai Nayak rule ended in 1736.

தமிழில் படிக்க

These notes are written for TNPSC Group 1, 2/2A and 4 aspirants. The Nayak period is a key part of the unit on **History, Culture and Heritage of Tamil Nadu**; the palayakkarar system is the background to the later anti-British struggles of Puli Thevar and Veerapandiya Kattabomman.

Background: Vijayanagara and the Tamil Country

- **c. 1371:** the Vijayanagara prince **Kumara Kampana** overthrew the Madurai Sultanate; the Sanskrit work **Madhura Vijayam** by his wife **Gangadevi** describes it.
- Under Vijayanagara, the Tamil region was administered in provinces; later **Nayaks** (military governors) were posted at Madurai, Thanjavur and Senji.
- After the battle of Talikota (Rakshasa–Tangadi) in 1565 weakened Vijayanagara, the Nayaks gradually became virtually independent.

Madurai Nayaks – Important Rulers

Ruler (reign)	Key achievements
Viswanatha Nayak (1529–1564)	Son of Nagama Nayak; appointed Nayak of Madurai by the Vijayanagara emperor; with Dalavai Ariyanatha Mudaliar created the **72 palayams**; rebuilt Madurai town and fort.
Muthu Virappa Nayak I (1609–1623)	Moved the capital to **Tiruchirappalli**; Robert de Nobili's Madurai mission (begun 1606) grew in this period.

Thirumalai Nayak (1623–1659)	The most celebrated; moved the capital back to **Madurai**; built the **Thirumalai Nayak Mahal** (completed c. 1636), the **Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam** and the **Pudhu Mandapam** of the Meenakshi temple; repelled Mysore invasions.
Chokkanatha Nayak (1659–1682)	Capital again at Tiruchirappalli; **took Thanjavur in 1673**, ending the Thanjavur Nayak line.
Rani Mangammal (1689–1704)	Ruled as regent for her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha; roads ("Mangammal Salai"), choultries, tanks and irrigation works; diplomacy with the Mughals; the **Tamukkam palace** in Madurai (now the Gandhi Memorial Museum).
Rani Meenakshi (1732–1736)	Last ruler; Nayak rule ended when **Chanda Sahib**, a relative of the Nawab of Arcot, took Madurai (1736).

The Palayakkarar (Poligar) System

- **Origin:** Viswanatha Nayak and Dalavai **Ariyanatha Mudaliar** divided the Madurai kingdom into **72 palayams**; by tradition each palayakkarar was responsible for one of the **72 bastions** of the Madurai fort.
- **Duties:** collect revenue in the palayam, pay tribute to the Nayak, maintain troops and send them when needed, keep law and order, and provide policing (kaval).
- **Purpose:** to control a large kingdom through local chiefs, share military costs and prevent revolts.
- **Later impact:** after the Nayaks fell, the palayakkarars resisted revenue collection by the Nawab of Arcot and the English East India Company – the **western palayams** under Puli Thevar and the **eastern palayams** under Kattabomman. The system ended with the Carnatic Treaty of 1801 and the zamindari system.

Nayak Architecture

Feature	Description / example
Tall gopurams	Gateway towers far taller than the sanctum vimana, covered with stucco figures – Meenakshi temple
Thousand-pillared hall	Aayiram Kal Mandapam of the Meenakshi temple – built by Ariyanatha Mudaliar (1569); actually 985 pillars
Prakarams (corridors)	Long enclosure corridors lined with pillars
Sculptured pillars	Composite pillars with yalis, horsemen and mythological scenes; musical pillars
Portrait sculpture	Statues of Thirumalai Nayak and his queens in the Pudhu Mandapam
Palaces	Thirumalai Nayak Mahal – a palace blending Dravidian and Islamic features; massive round pillars and the domed **Swarga Vilasam** (throne hall)
Temple tanks	Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam – float festival in the month of Thai

Meenakshi Amman Temple, Madurai – Key Facts

- Temple of Meenakshi Amman and Sundareswarar; an ancient shrine whose present form is largely of the **16th–17th-century** Nayak period.
- **14 gopurams** in all; the tallest is the **southern gopuram** (more than 170 ft, 52 m).
- The **Potramarai Kulam** (golden lotus tank); the thousand-pillared hall (now an art museum); the Pudhu Mandapam (Thirumalai Nayak).
- The Chithirai festival (Meenakshi Thirukalyanam and Kallazhagar entering the Vaigai) is Madurai's greatest festival.

Thanjavur Nayaks (c. 1532–1673)

Ruler	Note
Sevappa Nayak	Founder of Thanjavur Nayak rule (c. 1532)
Achuthappa Nayak	Minister **Govinda Dikshitar**; temple and irrigation works
Raghunatha Nayak	Patron of art, music and Telugu–Sanskrit literature; gave **Tharangambadi (Tranquebar)** to the Danes in 1620
Vijayaraghava Nayak	Last ruler; defeated by Chokkanatha Nayak of Madurai in 1673

After the Thanjavur Nayaks, **Maratha** rule began in **1676** under **Ekoji (Venkoji)**; under the Marathas the Saraswathi Mahal Library at Thanjavur flourished.

Senji (Gingee) Nayaks

- The Nayaks of Senji (now Villupuram district) ruled the northern Tamil country and strengthened the **Gingee fort** spread over three hills.
- Gingee later passed to the Bijapur Sultanate (1649), the Maratha **Shivaji** (1677) and the Mughals (1698), and later became the setting of the Raja Desingh story.
- The Gingee fort is now a monument protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Society and Culture in the Nayak Period

- **Language and literature:** Telugu and Sanskrit flourished in the Nayak courts; Tamil saw a growth of sthala puranas and minor literary genres (sitrilakkiyam).
- **Religion:** temple renovation and festivals; Robert de Nobili's Christian mission in Madurai (from 1606).
- **Economy:** tanks and canals; temple towns became trade centres; arrival of Europeans (Danes at Tharangambadi).

Writing Mains Answers (Group 1 / Group 2)

The palayakkarar system – origin, structure and consequences (about 150–250 words)

- **Introduction:** 1529, Viswanatha Nayak and Ariyanatha Mudaliar; 72 palayams.

- **Structure:** revenue collection, tribute, troops, policing, justice.
- **Merits:** easier administration of a large kingdom; shared military cost.
- **Defects:** local chiefs grew strong and challenged the centre.
- **Later impact:** palayakkarar wars against the Nawab and the British (Puli Thevar, Kattabomman, the Marudhu brothers); ended in 1801.

Features of Nayak architecture (about 150 words)

- Tall gopurams – Meenakshi temple (14 gopurams).
- Thousand-pillared hall, prakarams, sculptured pillars.
- Palace – Thirumalai Nayak Mahal; Teppakulam.
- Assessment: the last great phase of Dravidian architecture.

Practice: Match the Following

Item	Match
Viswanatha Nayak	1529 – start of Madurai Nayak rule
Ariyanatha Mudaliar	Dalavai; thousand-pillared hall
Thirumalai Nayak	Mahal, Teppakulam, Pudhu Mandapam
Rani Mangammal	Roads, choultries; Tamukkam palace
Raghunatha Nayak	Tharangambadi – Danes (1620)
Chanda Sahib	1736 – end of Madurai Nayak rule

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- The palayakkarar system was set up by Viswanatha Nayak (with Ariyanatha Mudaliar), not Thirumalai Nayak.
- The number of palayams is 72.
- The Srirangam Rajagopuram is not a Nayak work – it was completed in 1987.
- The tallest gopuram of the Meenakshi temple is the southern one.
- Thanjavur was taken in 1673 by Chokkanatha Nayak of Madurai; Maratha rule began in 1676 under Ekoji.

Key Terms – Tamil / English (for the bilingual paper)

தமிழ்	English
பாளையம் / பாளையக்காரர்	Palayam / Palayakkarar (Poligar)
தளவாய்	Commander-in-chief / chief minister (Dalavai)
கப்பம்	Tribute
கொத்தளம்	Bastion

கோபுரம்	Gateway tower (gopuram)
ஆயிரங்கால் மண்டபம்	Thousand-pillared hall
தெப்பக்குளம்	Temple tank for the float festival
ஆட்சிப் பொறுப்பாளர்	Regent

Quick Revision Table

Year	Event
c. 1371	Kumara Kampana ends the Madurai Sultanate
1529	Viswanatha Nayak – Madurai Nayak rule begins; 72 palayams
c. 1532	Sevappa Nayak – Thanjavur Nayaks
1565	Battle of Talikota – Vijayanagara weakened
1569	Thousand-pillared hall (Ariyanatha Mudaliar)
1606	Robert de Nobili arrives in Madurai
1620	Tharangambadi – Danes
1623–1659	Thirumalai Nayak
c. 1636	Thirumalai Nayak Mahal completed
1673	Chokkanatha takes Thanjavur
1676	Maratha rule at Thanjavur (Ekoji)
1689–1704	Rani Mangammal
1736	End of Madurai Nayak rule (Chanda Sahib)

TNPSC Key Points (PYQ-style facts)

- Founder of Madurai Nayak rule: Viswanatha Nayak (1529); father Nagama Nayak.
- Palayakkarar system: Viswanatha Nayak + Dalavai Ariyanatha Mudaliar; 72 palayams.
- Thirumalai Nayak (1623–1659): Mahal, Vandiyur Teppakulam, Pudhu Mandapam.
- Rani Mangammal: roads, choultries; Tamukkam palace = Gandhi Memorial Museum, Madurai.
- Meenakshi temple: 14 gopurams; southern gopuram tallest; thousand-pillared hall – 985 pillars.
- Madhura Vijayam – Gangadevi – Kumara Kampana's conquest of Madurai.
- Founder of Thanjavur Nayaks: Sevappa Nayak; Raghunatha Nayak – Tharangambadi (1620).
- Gingee fort – Shivaji 1677.
- End of Madurai Nayak rule: 1736, Rani Meenakshi – Chanda Sahib.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who introduced the palayakkarar system?

Viswanatha Nayak (1529–1564), founder of Madurai Nayak rule, with the help of his Dalavai Ariyanatha Mudaliar, divided the kingdom into 72 palayams. The palayakkarars collected revenue, paid tribute, maintained troops and guarded their areas.

Who built the Thirumalai Nayak Mahal and when?

It was built by the Madurai Nayak ruler Thirumalai Nayak (1623–1659) and completed around 1636. Its massive round pillars and the domed throne hall called Swarga Vilasam are its highlights; it is now protected by the Tamil Nadu State Archaeology Department.

Why is Rani Mangammal remembered?

Ruling the Madurai Nayak kingdom from 1689 to 1704 as regent for her grandson Vijayaranga Chokkanatha, she is remembered for roads (Mangammal Salai), choultries, tanks, irrigation works and diplomacy with the Mughals. Her Tamukkam palace in Madurai is now the Gandhi Memorial Museum.

How many gopurams does the Meenakshi Amman temple have?

Fourteen; the tallest is the southern gopuram, more than 170 ft (52 m) high. The present form of the temple is largely of the 16th–17th-century Nayak period.

How did Thanjavur Nayak rule end?

In 1673 Chokkanatha Nayak of Madurai took Thanjavur, ending the rule of the last Thanjavur Nayak, Vijayaraghava. Maratha rule at Thanjavur then began in 1676 under Ekoji (Venkoji).

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Practice questions

1. Who founded Madurai Nayak rule?

A. Viswanatha Nayak
B. Thirumalai Nayak
C. Sevappa Nayak
D. Chokkanatha Nayak

2. In which year did Madurai Nayak rule begin?

A. 1371
B. 1529
C. 1565
D. 1623

3. How many palayams were there under the palayakkarar system?

A. 56
B. 64
C. 72
D. 108

4. Which Dalavai helped Viswanatha Nayak set up the palayakkarar system?

A. Paranjothi
B. Govinda Dikshitar
C. Ramappaiyan
D. Ariyanatha Mudaliar

5. Around which year was the Thirumalai Nayak Mahal completed?

A. 1529
B. 1636
C. 1689
D. 1736

6. What was the reign of Thirumalai Nayak?

A. 1529–1564
B. 1609–1623
C. 1623–1659
D. 1689–1704

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7. What is the throne hall of the Thirumalai Nayak Mahal called?

A. Darbar Mahal
B. Ranga Vilasam
C. Swarga Vilasam
D. Saraswathi Mahal

8. What does the Tamukkam palace in Madurai house today?

A. District court
B. Government hospital
C. A university
D. Gandhi Memorial Museum

9. Which Madurai queen ruled as regent for her grandson and built roads and choultries?

A. Rani Mangammal
B. Rani Meenakshi
C. Velu Nachiyar
D. Gangadevi

10. How many gopurams does the Meenakshi Amman temple have?

A. 4
B. 9
C. 12
D. 14

11. Which is the tallest gopuram of the Meenakshi temple?

A. Eastern
B. Western
C. Southern
D. Northern

12. Who built the thousand-pillared hall of the Meenakshi temple?

A. Thirumalai Nayak
B. Viswanatha Nayak
C. Rani Mangammal
D. Ariyanatha Mudaliar

13. Who wrote the "Madhura Vijayam"?

A. Gangadevi
B. Tirumalamba
C. Ramabhadramba
D. Mangammal

14. Which Vijayanagara prince ended the Madurai Sultanate?

A. Krishnadevaraya
B. Kumara Kampana
C. Bukka I
D. Achyutaraya

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15. Who founded Thanjavur Nayak rule?

A. Vijayaraghava Nayak
B. Raghunatha Nayak
C. Sevappa Nayak
D. Achuthappa Nayak

16. Which Thanjavur Nayak gave Tharangambadi to the Danes?

A. Sevappa Nayak
B. Achuthappa Nayak
C. Vijayaraghava Nayak
D. Raghunatha Nayak

17. Who began Maratha rule at Thanjavur?

A. Ekoji (Venkoji)
B. Shivaji
C. Serfoji II
D. Sambhaji

18. In which year did Madurai Nayak rule end?

A. 1673
B. 1704
C. 1736
D. 1801

19. Who built the Vandiyur Mariamman Teppakulam?

A. Viswanatha Nayak
B. Rani Mangammal
C. Thirumalai Nayak
D. Chokkanatha Nayak

20. Who captured the Gingee fort in 1677?

A. Aurangzeb
B. Hyder Ali
C. Chanda Sahib
D. Shivaji

Answers with explanations

1. A) Viswanatha Nayak – Viswanatha Nayak, in 1529.

2. B) 1529 – 1529 – Viswanatha Nayak.

3. C) 72 – 72 – linked by tradition to the 72 bastions of Madurai fort.

4. D) Ariyanatha Mudaliar – Dalavai Ariyanatha Mudaliar.

5. B) 1636 – Around 1636.

6. C) 1623–1659 – Thirumalai Nayak ruled 1623–1659.

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7. C) Swarga Vilasam – Swarga Vilasam – the domed throne hall.

8. D) Gandhi Memorial Museum – Rani Mangammal's palace now houses the Gandhi Memorial Museum.

9. A) Rani Mangammal – Rani Mangammal (1689–1704).

10. D) 14 – 14; the southern one is the tallest.

11. C) Southern – The southern gopuram – over 170 ft (52 m).

12. D) Ariyanatha Mudaliar – Ariyanatha Mudaliar (1569); it actually has 985 pillars.

13. A) Gangadevi – Gangadevi, wife of Kumara Kampana.

14. B) Kumara Kampana – Kumara Kampana (c. 1371).

15. C) Sevappa Nayak – Sevappa Nayak (c. 1532).

16. D) Raghunatha Nayak – Raghunatha Nayak, in 1620.

17. A) Ekoji (Venkoji) – Ekoji began Maratha rule at Thanjavur in 1676.

18. C) 1736 – 1736 – Chanda Sahib took Madurai from Rani Meenakshi.

19. C) Thirumalai Nayak – Thirumalai Nayak; the float festival is held in Thai.

20. D) Shivaji – The Maratha king Shivaji, in 1677.

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