



/ August 17, 2023

## A Brief History Of Madurai Malligai

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**“T**o be overcome by the fragrance of the flower is a delectable form of defeat,” said the author Beverly Nichols, describing the Madurai Malligai.

The Madurai Malligai, Jasmine from the ancient temple town of Madurai, is sought after for its beauty and fragrance. Known as the “Queen of Fragrance” or “Belle of India,” it is inextricably woven into Tamil Nadu’s traditions, mythology and culture.

It is believed(<https://krishijagran.com/agripedia/madurai-malli-jasmine-flower-history-importance-and-varieties/>) that Meenakshi, an avatar of Parvati, adores Malligai; to keep her devotees happy, she blesses Madurai and the areas around it with Malligai. In turn, to please the deity, devotees who visit Madurai Meenakshi temple and offer Jasmine flowers to the deity.

“Over centuries, Madurai has seen the rise and fall of Kings and dynasties. Amidst the shifting sands of history, the city, like any other, has undergone many upheavals. But through all the vicissitudes of time, the aroma of a small white flower continues to linger gently in the air...,” writes Dr Umma Kannan in her book, *Madurai Malligai: Madurai and its Jasmine – A Celebration*.(<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39023471-madurai-malligai>)

The author, an anthropologist, outlines Madurai’s unique link to Jasmine flowers in her book. Malligai has been a part of Madurai ever since the Sangam Era; when Tamil scholars met, they referred(<http://www.maduraimalli.com/>) to Madurai Malligai as an offering

to the divine.

Malligai appears in many mythical tales(<https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/Food/on-the-scent-of-malli/article4146590.ece>), too. For instance, Parthan, the ruler of Ayodhya, worshipped Lord Shiva amid a grove of jasmine vines and transformed himself into 'Malleeswaran.' King Pari of the Sangam era, who did not want the beautiful jasmine creeper to grow on the forest floor, offered the plant his royal chariot to let it wrap itself around it.

The jasmine blossom is mentioned in the Vedas, the earliest Hindu texts and even in ancient Indian literature such as the Mahabharata and Vatsyana's Kamasutra. Today Madurai Malligai plays a significant role in contemporary pop culture; in Tamil movies, it is common to see the female lead adorning her hair with a string of Madurai Jasmine.

In Tamil Nadu, Madurai Malligai symbolises love, romance, beauty, grace, and divinity. Women use Malligai hair ornaments to supplement their femininity. Jewellery—such as necklaces, earrings, anklets and bangles—is etched with intricate designs of Jasmine.

Madurai Malligai is used everywhere—(<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20170209-indias-auspicious-flowers>) temple carvings, paintings, offerings, etc. No wedding can ever be complete without Madurai Malli. Ergo, Malligai, one of the oldest(<https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/Celebrating-the-jasmine/article12399523.ece>) cultivated flowers, contributes significantly to Madurai's economy.

Tamil Nadu is one of the top producers of Jasmine in the country. With an annual output of 77,267([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351064705\\_An\\_exploratory\\_study\\_of\\_socio-economic\\_challenges\\_of\\_Jasmine\\_flower\\_cultivators\\_and\\_traders\\_of\\_South\\_India\\_with\\_special\\_reference\\_to\\_post\\_geographical\\_in](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351064705_An_exploratory_study_of_socio-economic_challenges_of_Jasmine_flower_cultivators_and_traders_of_South_India_with_special_reference_to_post_geographical_in)) from a cultivated area of 9,360 hectares, it was ranked second in India in both flower cultivation area and loose flower production.

The villages around Madurai are adorned with vast stretches of jasmine fields. Women play a crucial role in the business. They work in the fields, grow flowers, harvest and pack the flowers in jute baskets and sell them in the flower market in Mattuthavani.

With a distinctive shape, scent and texture that sets it apart from the other varieties, the Madurai Malligai is unique. It has been GI tagged since 2013, (<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20170209-indias-auspicious-flowers>) and is exported globally; clients include perfume-making companies such as Dior and Chanel.

Madurai Malligai is not just a flower. It is a cultural symbol, an intricate part of Tamil Nadu's history, mythology and tradition that is now a multi-million dollar business opportunity.

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