

When politics shook hands with religion in Dravidian soil: Thiruparankundram turmoil and its after-math

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The Murugan Bakthargal Aanmeega [Maanadu](#) (Murugan Devotees' Spiritual Conference) that took place in Madurai, Tamil Nadu on June 22, 2025 has successfully garnered the attention of the majority, with the Hindu Munnani boasting around a lakh participants. But the genesis of it and what it envisions tells a tale that is unbecoming of the progressive social justice model of Tamil nadu, a state steeped in its Dravidian ideology.

The prefix to Murugan Conference

The Murugan Conference was primarily built on the controversy of the Thiruparankundram hill, a place of communal harmony which snowballed into a [communal tension](#) as a result of the Hindutva outfits obstructing islamic practice in the region in December 2024. The right wing extremist group in order to intensify the tension orchestrated a demonstration in February 2025 in which a senior leader of the BJP, H. Raja [said](#) "The first war, like Ayodhya, has already begun at Thiruparankundram which is Lord Murugan's first army camp", insisting on the relocation of the Dargah to another site.

This prompted the [formation](#) of "People's Federation for Communal Harmony" in Madurai, comprising of advocates, activists, civil society organisations and the left wing political parties lending their voices for communal harmony in the city. This coalition went on to

organise a legal conference on February 21, 2025 focusing on the legal and the archeological details of the place. A huge conference on religious harmony was held on March 9, with the leaders from different religions, lay people, activists across the state and leaders of leftist parties like Dr. Thol Thirumavalavan [coming](#) together to combat the extremist agenda. This coalition has been involved in both grassroot level activism and legal proceedings in the matter.

A political conference disguised in religion

It is under this context that the Murugan Conference was decided to be held in Madurai on June 22, 2025. The city was geared up for the conference, [adorned](#) with a huge model of the six abodes of Murugan (Aarupadai Veedu) in the venue, acting a spiritual centerpiece that drew admiration and reverence from devotees. Interestingly, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah prepared the way for the conference with his visit to the city on June 8, 2025. His divisive speech invited the [condemnation](#) of left wing leaders. The ruling DMK party and others anticipated a tension which the high court denied a listening ear to, and permitted the conference but strictly [ordered](#) that political rhetoric should not be part of this ostensibly religious event.

But what followed was searing speeches that went far beyond religion, speeches that were unapologetically political, as anticipated. With the voices of Pawan Kalyan, the deputy chief minister of Andhra Pradesh and Annamalai from the Bharatiya Janata Party in Tamil Nadu using Murugan as a symbol of ["resistance"](#) against the "Dravidian deracination" raging amidst the chants of "Muruganuku aro hara" and "Vetrivel veeravel", the choice of speakers and the content delivered were a clear indication that the conference was meant to be political in every sense.

The highlight of the conference was the 6 resolutions passed and the oath taken which includes lighting karthigai lamps at the Thiruparankundram hill, urging the [hindus](#) "to vote en bloc in the upcoming assembly elections" and demanding the DMK government "to stop treating temples as revenue sources." Pawan kalyan [contended](#) that Hindu religious practices face undue scrutiny unlike muslims and Christians, a statement attempting to frame Hindus as victims of selective bias. In a nation where muslim homes are [bulldozed](#) and [churches](#) are subjects of targeted attacks, Kalyan's allegations rang hollow, lacking evidence and far from the broader realities on the ground.

The speeches also had [direct](#) references to Pasumbon Muthuramalinga Thevar, a caste icon of the Mukkulathor predominantly in the city of Madurai, with Pawan Kalyan calling him "an incarnation of Lord Murugan." The conference also echoed calls to reclaim Hindu identity, a rhetoric often equipped to counter the dravidian ideology, which has long championed rationalism, social justice and largely defined the tamil society. Going a step further, the event [denigrated](#) the stalwarts of Dravidian movement like Periyar, C.N. Annadurai and Karunanidhi, vilifying them as "atheist foxes." Such vitriolic attacks on these towering figures who have shaped TN's sociopolitical tapestry is not merely an attack on personalities, but an affront to the state's enduring identity, long rooted in the dravidian ideology.

The after-math of the Conference and violation of religious rights

An [FIR](#) has been filed against Pawan kalyan and Annamalai and the organisers for violating the court orders in having delivered speeches that are political and inciting communal disharmony, as a result of a complaint filed by Adv. Vanjinathan, coordinator of the Madurai People's Federation for Communal Harmony.

Amidst the chaos happening around, it is important to revisit what has truly changed for muslims in Thiruparankundram. The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom under articles 25 and 26 now stands on a precarious ground, following a recent [split verdict](#) by the High Court. While Justice J. Nisha Banu allowed the worship of muslims citing the findings of civil courts and hence in the effort to "safeguarding secular coexistence, and to uphold the spirit of religious tolerance, Justice S. Srimathy denied the same citing "no documentary evidence that Kandoori animal sacrifice was carried on in Nellithope." This has resulted in disrupting or disturbing the centuries old harmony that existed between the two religious groups. The case has now been referred to another bench.

BJP's attempt to land in South

This whole picture ought to be seen in the larger political canvas of the ruling BJP's aspirations. Having successfully achieved its agenda in the state of Uttar Pradesh on Ram Mandir- Babri Masjid dispute in the North, the party has slowly turned its attention to Tamil Nadu in the south. The state has always been known for its communal harmony, especially the city of Madurai, as even the [locals](#) in Thiruparankundram testified to the religious harmony that exists between the Hindus and the Muslims regarding their worship in the hill for years. Amidst the simmering tensions stirred by Hindutva outfits in an otherwise peaceful city, the saffron tide seems to casually flow in to appropriate its ideologies for obvious political gains. Pawan Kalyan's speech directly appealed for the vote bank that can be achieved, according to him, through hindu unity. With the assembly elections soon approaching in the state, the time couldn't be more opportune for the BJP to indoctrinate the minds of people.

The constitution of India being built on the idea of secularism is being overthrown in recent times through inciting religious discord amidst peaceful existence of different religious groups. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party tries to fit this amidst their overall agenda of reclaiming the past glory of India in what they [call](#) the 'Hindu Rashtra'. The [recent](#) speech of Amit Shah on language politics where he stated that people speaking English would "soon feel ashamed" would also fit into this larger fabric of uniformity over unity. With the ruling party having a hard time and failing in several of its attempts to land a foot in Tamil Nadu, the only weapon it has been accustomed to using is religion. This brings into picture the question if Madurai would be the next Ayodhya. With the BJP being successful in most places wherever it has tried its hand on religious extremism, will the people of Tamil Nadu allow the same in a state built on its Dravidian identity is a question that everyone is awaiting the answer for.

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