# THE VAISHNAVA TEMPLES OF DINDIGUL DISTRICT: A STUDY

## SYNOPSIS

Hinduism is one of the oldest living religion of the world. Hinduism does not have a single common founder. It is formed of diverse traditions called Sanathana Dharma and spread over a territory. The cultural and ethnic diversity of the adherents Hinduism resulted in enormous variety of traditions. Hinduism is also the most complex of all living of all living religious in the word. Though several sects in Hinduism, Viṣṇuism and Saivism are the two major divisions of Hinduism. The Vaishnava tradition has many sub-schools ranging from the medieval era like Dvaitha school of Madvacharya to Vishistadvaidam school of Ramanuja. New Vaishnava Movements have also been founded in the modern era such as ISKCON (International Society for Krishna consciousness). Holy scriptures in Viṣṇuism include the Vedas, the Upanishads and Bhagavath Gita. These texts are called as "Prasthana Draiyam" (Major three). The origin of Viṣṇuism is unclear and thee evidence is inconsistent and scandy. The complex history is reflected in two main historical sects of Viṣṇuism. South Indian texts show close parallel with the North Indian tradition of Krishna and his Gobi companions. Early literature in Tamil such as Manimegalaiand Silapathigaram present Krishna, his brother favorite female companions in similar terms. According to Hardy the Sanskrit Bhagavatha purana is essentially a Sanskrit traditioin of the Bhakthi of the Tamil Alwars.

Field study of the temples become an interesting and invigorating field for the scholars. Out of 108 Divya desas 106 are on the earth. 105 Desams are in India, 1 is in Nepal, 84 Divya desams are in Tamilnadu, 11 are in Kerala(Malainadu), 2 in Andhra Pradesh, 1 in Gujarat (Dhuvaraga), 4 in UP and the rest of 3 in Uttarakand. These classification mentioned by Pillai Perumal Iyangar in his Nootri Eattu Thiruppathi anthathi.

In Tamilnadu, the study of Vaishnavism temples in accordance with Prabhandas, architectural and cultural aspects have contributed immensely for the spread of Vaishnava sprit among the common devotees. The study of Divya Desams had yielded many historical and social features. Those study of Vaishnava temples in Didigul District, will reveal new avenue in the field of research.

Paḻani to the west, Maṇappāṟai and Tiruccirāppaḷḷi to north, Nattam (means an antique village and Tiruppattūr to the east and Maturai to the south is the venue of the township, Tiṇṭukkal. *Tiṇṭu* means "pillow", and *kal* "stone", the pillow-like huge mass of granite hill, which is the distinguishing mark. Lying in the middle of the south Indian rivers, Kāviri (north) and Vaikai (south), Kuṭavanāṟu is a small river running on the western and northern fringes of the city. These are the geologically antique symbols to identify Tiṇṭukkal, which emerges into the historical period during and after the settlement of the *nākaya* communities in the region. The Political history of waterloo in 1565, January 23rd for Vijayanagar in battle of Thalaikottai. After the thalaikottai Madurai, senji, and Tanjure nayaks become independent rulers, but they royal affinity with Vijayanagar king. The imperial empire declined with the last king Srirangan III. The advent of Madurai Nayaks (1529CE – 1786CE) had effected tremendous political and cultural influence over this region. During the period of the Nayaks large number of Telugu speaking people migrated to this region and settled in Madurai and Dindigul. A number village in and around the city bearing the name, *nāyakkan-paṭṭi* may be located. During the historical past, it was a midway leading to the Koṅku country or the Cōḻa country from Maturai. Strategically significant, during the Nāyaka period some *pāḷaiyakkāran*s were appointed as governors, revenue collectors, and watch and ward of the region. There were more palayams in Dindigul and Tirunelveli district than elsewhere. Since there was unrest in the Northern and Southern defense they greater security. There were 28 palayams in this region. In the year of 1736CE 18 palayams in this region. The western sector

adjoining the Ghats was assigned to Rāmabhadra Nāyaka of Vaṭakarai in 1534 CE during the time of Viśvanātha Nāyaka, son of Nāgama Nāyaka. Dindigul was the first region to come under the English rule in Madurai District. After 1859CE Madurai was made head quarter of the British army. Tiṇṭukkal received the attention of the British during the days of Vīrapāṇṭiya Kaṭṭabomman and the Marutu Brothers. The *pāḷaiyakkārar* of the region were molested under British administration and most of the revolting local chiefs deprived of their landed assets. Some of the freedom fighters joining the "First War of Independence" 1801 were hanged, a terrorism much akin to Jallianwalla Bagh.

The *nāyaka*s were dedicated followers of Viṣṇuism. Therefore, a number of Vaiṣṇava temples are concentrated in the region, which emerged during the later Pāṇḍya (Empire II, e.g. Tāṭikkompu) and Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period. No systematic effort was taken to undertake an architectural survey of the temples in the Tiṇṭukkal region. In fact, there is no recorded history of the region. Therefore, the author's choice was to work on the Vaiṣṇava temples systematically. However, a scientific history of the Tiṇṭukkal region is a desideratum, which is warranted. The present work hopes to fulfill the lacuna in a study of Viṣṇuism. We hope the micro-regions all over India may have to be surveyed to obtain a full picture of Viṣṇuism.

**Sources**

Any Viṣṇu temple in whichever part it may be found could not neglect Sanskrit. Even in a temple in the interior region, one finds a *brāhmaṇa* priest reciting the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* or *Viṣṇuvāṣṭottaram* that are rooted in the *itihāsa-purāṇa*s and the *Veda*s. Therefore, whatever Sanskrit source is relevant is consulted. We have followed the translations, e.g. *Viṣṇusahasranāma*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and so on, including the *aṣṭottaram*s on Nṛsiṃha, Kṛiṣṇa and Rāma.

A study of Viṣṇuism in the Tamil country is meaningless without consulting the hymns of the Āḻvārs, called *Nālāyirativviyappirapantam*. These are a collection of the hymns of twelve Āḻvārs (dated during the 6th to the 9th century CE)

Among these, the four works of Nammāḻvār are considered equal to the *catur-Veda*s, i.e. *Ṛig*, *Yajūr*, *Sāma* and *Atharva*. The six works of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār are the six *vedāṅga*s (parts of the *Veda*s) such as *sikṣa* (phonetics or pronunciation), *chhandas* (meter), *vyākarana* (grammar), *nirukta* (etymology or glossary), *jyotiṣa* (astronomy) and *kalpa* (ceremonial). The *Tiruvaymoḻi* of Nammāḻvār and *Periya Tirumoḻi* of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār are the magnum opus of the respective hymnologists. The two put together are in more than 2000 hymns. Nam Piḷḷai (1147-1252 CE) and Periyavāccāṉ Piḷḷai (1167-1262 CE) have written commentaries on these works, which run to several thousands of pages. The University of Madras, authored by B. Purushothama Naiḍu, has published the *Īṭu* of Nam Piḷḷai on *Tiruvāymoḻi* in 10 volumes. The *Tattvatraya*, *Rahasyatraya*, *Śrīvacaṇabhūṣaṇam* and *Ācāryahṛdayam* of Maṇavāḷa-māmuṉikaḷ are another category of literature. The commentaries are much more elaborate taking hue from the *Veda*s, *itihāsa*s and the Viṣṇu-*purāṇa*s. If a copy of Nam Piḷḷai's *Īṭu* is given to Nammāḻvār, the great mystic would not believe whether this is the meaning of the hymns written by him some 350 years ago. These Sanskrit-based commentaries do not cite the ancient Tamil literary tradition of Māyōṉ noted in the *Tolkāppiyam*, *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, *Paripāṭal*, and other Caṅkam works, including the *Cilappatikāram* (e.g. 'Āycciyarkuravai') and *Maṇīmēkalai*. That means the Tamil 'Nālāyiram' was Sanskritized by the Ācāryas.

A thorough list of original and secondary sources bearing on Viṣṇuism is given in the bibliography. The Vaiṣṇava *āgama*s are broadly under two heads, Vaikhāsana-[*āgama*] (of the sage of the same name) and Pāñcarātra-[*āgamas*] in 108 *saṃhita*s (cf. Schrader 1916, Daniel Smith 1969). These canonical works deal

with *pūjā*, *utsava*, *śilpa* and *vāstu*. Either of these *āgama*s is followed in all Viṣṇu temples. Furthermore, the Vaiṣṇavas are divided into two sectarian groups called *vaṭakalai* (V-shaped *tirunāmam*) and *teṉkalai* (U-shaped *tirunāmam*). The *vaṭakalai*s are much more orthodox who attach importance to the *Veda*s. Another sectarian group is Śrīvaiṣṇavas who were concerned with temple administration since the time of Śrī Rāmānuja. They were in charge of temple gardens, and Bhagavata mendicants moving from place to place singing the 'Nālāyiram' (see *Āṟāyirappaṭi-Guruparamparaprabhāam*, p. 118). On listening to the hymns Nātamunikaḷ (first Ācārya - 10th century CE, Nammāḻvār according to some authorities) went to Kurukūr/Āḻvārtirunakari to discover the 'Nālāyiram'. This work notes *Śrīgoṣa* (*goṣṭi* recital, cf. Kōṭṭiyūr) and *pāṭampōtal* (leaning the hymns under a *guru* or school).

In a study of the Viṣṇu temples in Tamilnāḍu, the Tamil sources receive the priority because in almost all abodes of the Lord one may come across several hymns of the Āḻvārs written on the walls that are relevant in the context of the concerned venue. If a *divyadeśa*, the hymns bearing on the *sthala* may be found, e.g. Māliruñcōlai (totally 128 hymns). The *vimāna* of the Āṇṭāḷ temple in Śrīvilliputtūr temple is known as *Tiruppāvai-vimana* because the sculptures pertaining to each of the 30 hymns are illustrated in the first *taḷa* of the *vimāna*, which is not permitted for photography, neglected notification in earlier studies. Again, this part of the temple is closed for public *darśana* due to some unknown reason. The *vimāna* of the Māliruñcōlai temple is also closed now a day while earlier scholars have published photos of the *vimāna*.

**Scope of the study**

Broadly, the aim is to make a thorough survey of the Viṣṇu temples in the Tiṇṭukkal district. It is practically impossible due to time and finance. The present work is not supported by any agency financially, e.g. ICHR. I have selected some

temples that are reachable by transportation. Many of the temples are located in the interior regions without any conveyance facility. Therefore, the choice had to be selective.

The scope of the study may be specified as follows.

- To trace the history of the temple with reference to reliable historical documents; epigraphy may not be of help because many are unrecorded; oral traditions transmitted by the village folk are the only source in several cases.

- The current study is restricted to Dindigul district with the source collected through field study and the scope will be deciphered by the application historical and analytical research methodology.

- To trace the available literary evidences; no temple comes under the *divyadeśa* category; therefore, the 'Nālāyiram' is of no help.

- Since some of the temples are dedicated to Nṛsiṃha, Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, the *aṣṭottaram*s bearing on the *nāmāvaḷi* have been translated in the Annexure;

- The existing temple is the main source of information; the priests in the temple are of help to record the legendary histories; these come under the category *talapurāṇam*/*sthalapurāṇa*; mostly such accounts are unpublished;

- To record the architectural details such as *vimāna*, *maṇḍapa*, *gopuraṃ*, *tōraṇam* "arches" at the entrance of the village and so on;

- To record the sculptural evidences found in these structures; photography of the *mūlabera* is prohibited.

- Architecture and iconography is the main field for work.
- Big or small each temple has its own schedule of worship; to record the procedural details of *nityapūjā*s (daily offerings) and periodical festivals, *utsava*s and spirit of divine nature in the study area.
- To examine the societal setting of the temples in the overall cultural activities of the region.

**Hypothesis**

Scholars have so far concentrated on well-known temples (e.g. Hari Rao on Śrīraṅgam, K.V. Raman on 'Varadarāja' Kāñci) whose histories are based on literary and epigraphic evidences. Though Viṣṇuism is a major religion in India, the history of which could be traced to the Indic culture, its history in the interior regions is much neglected. If only these localized, hidden facets are brought to the light, we may be able to get at a better picture of the cult centering on Viṣṇu. For example, Śrīśailam on the Nallamalai hills is associated with Nṛsiṃha. The Lord is said to have taken the hand of a gypsy girl, called Ceñju. In the Vaiṣṇava history of Āndhradeśa, Ceñju-Lakṣmī (Ceñju) is an accepted Goddess. Similarly, the Tamil contribution to Viṣṇuism is Āṇṭāḷ, a local tribal Goddess or *kuladevatā*, accepted in Tamil Viṣṇuism. In most Viṣṇu temples in Tamilnadu, we have two separate chambers for Śrī and Bhū or Āṇṭāḷ. Āṇṭāḷ like Cañju is the local Goddess. It may be worthwhile to explore whether any such idiom peculiar to the Tiṇṭukkal region is traceable.

Exploring the little traditions of major religions is a factor neglected in Indian religious and art history.

The hypothesis formulated for the present study is "little traditions" and "neglected temples interior regions" (see "Preface") goes a long way in the making of a higher tradition.

The aim of the present study is to verify this hypothesis.

**Objectives**

- To narrate the sphere of Visnuism.(This study of Vaishnava temples in Dindigul district, will reveal new avenue in the field research)
- To narrate the Telugu language influence.
- To chart out the various field of study in Vaishnava temples. (The new method of temple administration and the relevant chance of community participation is studied).
- These field works which enable the aspirant scholar to identify the temples constructed by Poligars and Zamins and explore the prevailing Social and cultural changes which had influenced the study region.
- To trace the nucleus of festivals.

**Methodology**

The primary sources have been gathered from the priests and elders of the villages and town where the temples are situated. Random sampling method is followed. Most temples end with the suffix Perumāḷ, e.g. Ceṉṟāya Perumāḷ – Cennarāya (Vattalakuṇṭu), Koṇṭa[lu]rāya Perumāḷ (*konṭa* in Telugu means "hill"), Kaliyuka Perumāḷ and so on. These temples are normally known after the following name-category. The source of information is studied within the light of primary and secondary source materials. Field work observation and interviews of the relevant personalities and the published works of scholars are absorbed.

The Harvard system is followed sporadically if in case the reference is to be given within the text, e.g. Ganeshram (author) 2015 (year of publication): 71 (page). The full reference is given in bibliography.

Notes are given at the end of each chapter because a few are lengthy that could not be accommodated in footnotes.

**Review of Literature**

Renaissance in religion begins in South Tamilnadu with the advent of Bhakthi movement (6 – 9th century). The thrust of this study is based on the holy hymns of Twelve Āḻvārs and the commentaries of the "Bhashyakars" (Commentators). Field work with effective questionnaire and observations yielded ample results from temple priests and elders interviewed. Data collected by personal observations and relevant materials are assessed. Facts from the Census of India, for the year 2011 were also referred to get the social and religious atmosphere of the study region. Relevant sources are gathered from '*Nālāyirativviyappirapantam*, *ā'*shta*pirapantam*, *Bhagavat-Gītā* and Kambaramayanam. Journals such as Sapthagiri, Sanarthnasarathy, Amrithavahini, *Gītā* Charitham, *Bhagavatam* (ISCON), Ramakrishna Vijayam and newspapers such as Dinamalar, The Hindu and Decan Herald etc., were also referred to as source materials.

The research books on Viṣṇavā temples helped this study. T. M. Baskarathondaiman's Magnus opus "*Venkatam Muthal Kumari Varai*" (Venkatam to Kanyakumari) is a pioneering work in this field. R. Champakalakshmi's "*Review of Religion*" states the predominant branches of Hinduism. Viṣṇuism and 'Saivism became prominent due to the large followers and royal patronage. David Kingsley depicts the various aspects of Viṣṇu avatars. K. R. Srinivasan's "*Temples of South India*" depicts vivid features of Viṣṇuism cult and the architectural construction of the temples. R. Rangarajan's "*Temples of Tamilnadu*" elucidates the detailed accounts of the selected temples in Tamilnadu.

K. C. Varadachari's "*Alwars of South India*" and M. P. Srinivasan's "*Kulasekara Alvar*" narrated the influence of Āḻvārs. *pirapantam* throughout the

temples in Tamilnadu. The book entitled "*Alagar koil*" by Tho.Paramasivam is one of the pioneering works on a single temple with research methodology. "*South Indian studies*" edited by R. Nagasamy gives valuable information for the study.

"*Art and Architecture of Vaishnava temples of Pandiya Nadu*" by H. Manivannan gives extensive information about the Viṣṇuism temples which guides the field work for the scholar in the research area.

"*Palayapattukal Varalaru*" in three volumes published by Archeological department of Tamilnadu gives many details of some palayam which were situated in the study area. "*A Guide to Dindigul*" published by Gurumurthy (IAS) gives valuable information. A book of 108 Narasimha temples published by Ramanujathasan gives elaborate details about the 108 Nṛsiṃha temples. "*Varalarril Dindigul*" (Tamil) by M. S. Kanthavel gave accurate details about the various temples in this area.

"*Chathurvimsamoorthy Lakshman*" edited by A.Veeraeajavan narrates the detailed accounts about the construction of the temples and is very useful for this study. "*Thamilagam Valartha Kannapiran"* (Tamil) by M. Rajagopal gives new findings regarding the birth place of Kannan and Sri Saundararāja Perumāḷ temple in Vaṭamaturai. In this book he has listed some valuable information and narrates the epic events in a new method.

A.K. Paranthamanar's "*Nayakkar Varalaru"* (Tamil), narrates the history of maturai *nākaya* and the political and social history of southern Tamilnadu and gives relevant information for this study.

*'Sathalā Puranās* are considered to be a rare treasure of information. It contains puranic events and indicates rare glimpse of research rays for the study. "Dindigul Kalakatheshwarar temple *'Sathalāvaralāru* (Tamil), Sri Saundararāja Perumāḷ (Thadicombu) *'Sathalāvaralāru,* Sri Gopinatha Swami Kovil

*'Sathalāvaralāru,* Ceṉṟāya Perumāl temple *'Sathalāvaralāru* were immensely useful for this study. These books contain folk tales and beliefs which help to explore the customs and traditions of a particular temple or area. Sri Ceṉṟāya Perumāl temple in Kōṭṭaippaṭṭi is an example for this area. Festival invitations of some temples gave minute details regarding the rituals and the participation of the local people.

All the data and other supporting sources are properly documented. The foot notes and the Bibliography will vouch the narration. The study on the basis of primary and secondary sources will enlighten the spiritual as well as social sphere of Viṣṇuism temples in this region. This study will be a new endeavor in the socio – religious history in the unexplored field of society. This study will reveal the new vistas to the aspirant scholars to venture through various aspects in various Districts in the state. Hitherto unknown temples are exposed with relevant materials with mythological approach. This venture will vividly depict the folk influence in the Agamic rituals of Vaishnava cult. Folk tales and beliefs are the basic factors for the religious behavior of the people. All the details gathered are classified and explained in the socio-religious point of view. This study covers the unexplored aspects of the religious system prevailing in the area. The structure of the shrine may be in any form, but it remains the central point for the life of the people. All these facts will be analysed in the succeeding pages under various chapters. These chapters will expose the socio, economic, religious and historical changes in the process of new settlements and new construction of temples in this region.

**Chapterization**

Chapter I is an introduction to the subject. A brief account of the topographical location of Tiṇṭukkal is presented. The scope, aims and objectives

of the study are outlined. It says something about methodology and the hypothesis formulated.

Chapter II traces the history of the Tiṇṭukkal region through the ages. Vestiges of prehistoric paintings found in the Ciṟumalai hills would affirm the prehistoric origin of the settlements in and around. The pictographic writings found in the caves are considered to be of Indic origin based on similarity of the writing system. Several such mysterious scripts have been found in the Maturai district (see Soundararajan 2018), the link of which with the Indic culture has to be proved with authentic evidences and Carbon-14 analysis. Paḻaṉi as the base of an antique feudatory family is traced back to the Caṅkam Age (c. 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE). However, Tiṇṭukkal comes to prominence during the Nāyaka period in the early 16th century. Some of the *nāyaka* sub-castes and tribes such as *kampalam*, *toṭṭiyan*, *vaṭuka*, *velama*, *balijā* or *gavara* and *kāṭṭu-nāyaka* families seem to have migrated during the time of molestation of Āndhradeśa and Karnāṭaka by Mālik Kāpūr in the early 14th century. The Viṣṇu temples in the region seem to have originated and flourished under Nāyaka patronage.

Chapter III presents a broad survey of the religious setting and temples in the Tiṇṭukkal region. No *sthala* of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism extolled in the hymns of the Nāyaṉmār and Āḻvārs have become known. Pāṇṭik-koṭumuṭi and Pērūr are in the Kōyamputtūr region. Ñāṉacampantar is associated with the mythology of Pērūr having recovered a child swallowed by a crocodile. Āviṉaṉkuṭi as a center of Murukaṉ cult is noted in the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*. Māliruñcōlai lies in between Tiṇṭukkal and Maturai on the eastern side of the Cirumalai hills, reachable from Nattam. This *divyadeśa* is linked with Periyāḻvār and Āṇṭāḷ, including Rāmānujācārya. No temple comparable to the Mīnākṣī of Maturai or Kāmākṣī of Kāñci is present in this rural setting. The rise of Tiṇṭukkal to urban status is modern. However, the Abhirāmi temple of Tiṇṭukkal seems to have emerged due to an inspiration from Tirukkaṭavūr linked with Apirāmi-*paṭṭar* of the Marāṭha

period sometime in the 17th-18th century. Several temples for the *grāmadevata*s are for Kāḷi[yammaṉ] and Māri[yammaṉ] are distributed over the entire stretch. The temple for Śiva and Murukaṉ on the top of the rock-fort was demolished during the time of Hydar Ali and Tippu Sūltān. However, a temple for Māriyammaṉ emerged in course of time found at the foothills of the rock to its east. It has acquired wider popularity during the last quarter of the 20th century as the Kōṭṭai-Māri of Tiṇṭukkal. Mostly temples for Viṣṇu-Perumāḷ are popular in the Tiṇṭukkal area mainly due to the inspiration of the Telugu communities thriving here.

Chapter IV is on the architecture of the Vaiṣṇava Temples. The aim is to present the architectural drawing with plan and photographic illustrations. We wish to cover the *vimāna*, *maṇḍapa*s, *gopura*s and other integral parts of the temple. For this purpose, the following temples are selected:

Saundararāja Perumāḷ temple, Tāṭikkompu

Saundararaja Perumāḷ temple, Vaṭamaturai

Perumāḷ-Nācciyār temple, Ādilakṣmipuram (near Cempaṭṭi)

Ceṉṟāya Perumāḷ temple, Vattalakuṇṭu (Verrilaikuṇṭu)

Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple, Nākalnāyakkaṉpaṭṭi (Nākalnakar)

Rāma temple, Cempaṭṭi

Nṛsimha Perumāḷ temple, Kaṉṉivāṭi

Nṛsiṃha Perumāḷ temple, Ammaiyanāyakkaṉūr

Aṉumaṉ or Hanumat temples in the following locations: Malaikkōṭṭai, Vattalakuṇṭu

The aim is to specify whether these structures conform to any architectural manual such as the *Mānasāra* or *Mayamata*. A comparison of the temple layout with any

one of the *divyadeśa* (e.g. Kūṭal Aḻakar) may be rewarding to specify whether *śāstra* has played any role in the outcome of these rurally located temples, mostly the outcome of the post-Nāyaka period. Excepting in case of Tāṭikkompu, no royal patronage is discernible in the form inscriptional evidence.

Chapter V is on iconography of the Vaiṣṇava Temples. The *Śrītattvanidhi* in its second part deals with 'Viṣṇutattvanidhi' elaborating 76 canonical forms. These pertain to Keśavādi-caturviṃśati-Mūrtis, Catur-*vyūha*s, Daśāvatāras, and so on. In the context of the temples listed in the previous chapter, no iconographical form under Saundararāja is listed. Any form of Viṣṇu could be *saundara*, *sundara*/*cuntaraṉ* (cf. Cuntarēcuvaraṉ, Sundareśvara) is of different denomination meaning "handsome", equal of Aḻakar; Aḻakarcāmi is popular personal name in the Maturai district with the *nāyaka*s. Śrīnivāsa is the Lord of the Tirupati hills. Wherever, the Nāyakas went they carried with them Vēṅkaṭaṉ, and built temples for the Lord. Koṇṭalu-[naiḍu] is again a popular name among the *nāyaka*s, (*naiḍu* deformed English variation). Varadarāja is the name of the famous *divyadeśa*-Attiyūr in Kāñcīpuram (Raman 1975), which denotes the Lord redeeming an elephant from the clutches of a crocodile. Nṛsiṃha, Kṛṣṇa and [Dāśarathi]-Rama are *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. The Viśvarūpa of the Lord and other forms such as Garuḍa, Hanuman et alii are elaborated (cf. Desai 1983, Kalidos 2006: Vol. I). During the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period some new forms come to picture such as Aṣṭamukhagaṇḍabhēruṇḍa-Nṛsiṃha and Pañacamukha-Āñjaneya (Rajarajan 2006: II, pl. 118). However, not all these sophisticated iconographical forms may be present in temples found in rural setting. An effort is taken to trace what all wonders in iconography could be discovered.

Chapter VI is on fairs and festivals focusing Viṣṇuism. Aḻakar getting into the Vaikai River is the famous *Cittirai* Festival in Maturai. The same is celebrated in the Vaṭamaturai temple, the Lord taking a march from his original base to various villages in and around. This chapter examines the importance of festivals

in the socio-cultural setting of the region. Other than, Viṣṇu the grand festival of the Kōṭṭai Mariyamman̲ temple in Tiṇṭukkal is famous uniting the people around the villages below the rock temple.

Chapter VII is on Conclusion integrates the findings of all the chapters into an entity. It says how the Viṣṇu temples in a local environment have played a vital role in the shaping of Viṣṇuism at the national level in Tamilnāḍu, may be pan-Indian if the cults of Kṛṣṇa, Rāma, and Nṛsiṃha are considered (see Annexure). If something could be told about Tāṭikkompu in an internationally circulated Journal such as the *East and West* (Rome 1966), it is the attestation of the wonder that was Tiṇṭukkal. Some say Tiṇṭukkal is hidden or forgotten. It is neither hidden nor forgotten; we may say prejudice or lack of effort on part of scholars. Rural universities must come forward to get the due recognition for Tiṇṭukkal that it deserves. Viṣṇu is found in a rural setting in the present thesis.

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**Chapterization**

Chapter I is an introduction to the subject. A brief account of the topographical location of Tiṇṭukkal is presented. The scope, aims and objectives of the study are outlined. It says something about methodology and the hypothesis formulated.

Chapter II traces the history of the Tiṇṭukkal region through the ages. Vestiges of prehistoric paintings found in the Ciṟumalai hills would affirm the prehistoric origin of the settlements in and around. The pictographic writings found in the caves are considered to be of Indic origin based on similarity of the writing system. Several such mysterious scripts have been found in the Maturai district (see Soundararajan 2018), the link of which with the Indic culture has to be proved with authentic evidences and Carbon-14 analysis. Paḻaṉi as the base of an antique feudatory family is traced back to the Caṅkam Age (c. 3rd century BCE to 3rd century CE). However, Tiṇṭukkal comes to prominence during the Nāyaka period in the early 16th century. Some of the *nāyaka* sub-castes and tribes such as *kampalam*, *toṭṭiyan*, *vaṭuka*, *velama*, *balijā* or *gavara* and *kāṭṭu-nāyaka* families seem to have migrated during the time of molestation of Āndhradeśa and Karnāṭaka by Mālik Kāpūr in the early 14th century. The Viṣṇu temples in the region seem to have originated and flourished under Nāyaka patronage.

Chapter III presents a broad survey of the religious setting and temples in the Tiṇṭukkal region. No *sthala* of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism extolled in the hymns of the Nāyaṉmār and Āḻvārs have become known. Pāṇṭik-koṭumuṭi and Pērūr are in the Kōyamputtūr region. Ñāṉacampantar is associated with the mythology of Pērūr having recovered a child swallowed by a crocodile. Āviṉaṉkuṭi as a center of Murukaṉ cult is noted in the *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*. Māliruñcōlai lies in between Tiṇṭukkal and Maturai on the eastern side of the Cirumalai hills, reachable from Nattam. This *divyadeśa* is linked with Periyāḻvār and Āṇṭāḷ, including

Rāmānujācārya. No temple comparable to the Mīnākṣī of Maturai or Kāmākṣī of Kāñci is present in this rural setting. The rise of Tiṇṭukkal to urban status is modern. However, the Abhirāmi temple of Tiṇṭukkal seems to have emerged due to an inspiration from Tirukkaṭavūr linked with Apirāmi-*paṭṭar* of the Marāṭha period sometime in the 17th-18th century. Several temples for the *grāmadevata*s are for Kāḷi[yammaṉ] and Māri[yammaṉ] are distributed over the entire stretch. The temple for Śiva and Murukaṉ on the top of the rock-fort was demolished during the time of Hydar Ali and Tippu Sūltān. However, a temple for Māriyammaṉ emerged in course of time found at the foothills of the rock to its east. It has acquired wider popularity during the last quarter of the 20th century as the Kōṭṭai-Māri of Tiṇṭukkal. Mostly temples for Viṣṇu-Perumāḷ are popular in the Tiṇṭukkal area mainly due to the inspiration of the Telugu communities thriving here.

Chapter IV is on the architecture of the Vaiṣṇava Temples. The aim is to present the architectural drawing with plan and photographic illustrations. We wish to cover the *vimāna*, *maṇḍapa*s, *gopura*s and other integral parts of the temple. For this purpose, the following temples are selected:

Saundararāja Perumāḷ temple, Tāṭikkompu

Saundararaja Perumāḷ temple, Vaṭamaturai

Perumāḷ-Nācciyār temple, Ādilakṣmipuram (near Cempaṭṭi)

Ceṉṟāya Perumāḷ temple, Vattalakuṇṭu (Verrilaikuṇṭu)

Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple, Nākalnāyakkaṉpaṭṭi (Nākalnakar)

Rāma temple, Cempaṭṭi

Nṛsimha Perumāḷ temple, Kaṉṉivāṭi

Nṛsiṃha Perumāḷ temple, Ammaiyanāyakkaṉūr

Aṉumaṉ or Hanumat temples in the following locations: Malaikkōṭṭai, Vattalakuṇṭu

The aim is to specify whether these structures conform to any architectural manual such as the *Mānasāra* or *Mayamata*. A comparison of the temple layout with any one of the *divyadeśa* (e.g. Kūṭal Aḻakar) may be rewarding to specify whether *śāstra* has played any role in the outcome of these rurally located temples, mostly the outcome of the post-Nāyaka period. Excepting in case of Tāṭikkompu, no royal patronage is discernible in the form inscriptional evidence.

Chapter V is on iconography of the Vaiṣṇava Temples. The *Śrītattvanidhi*in its second part deals with 'Viṣṇutattvanidhi' elaborating 76 canonical forms. These pertain to Keśavādi-caturviṃśati-Mūrtis, Catur-*vyūha*s, Daśāvatāras, and so on. In the context of the temples listed in the previous chapter, no iconographical form under Saundararāja is listed. Any form of Viṣṇu could be *saundara*, *sundara*/*cuntaraṉ* (cf. Cuntarēcuvaraṉ, Sundareśvara) is of different denomination meaning "handsome", equal of Aḻakar; Aḻakarcāmi is popular personal name in the Maturai district with the *nāyaka*s. Śrīnivāsa is the Lord of the Tirupati hills. Wherever, the Nāyakas went they carried with them Vēṅkaṭaṉ, and built temples for the Lord. Koṇṭalu-[naiḍu] is again a popular name among the *nāyaka*s, (*naiḍu* deformed English variation). Varadarāja is the name of the famous *divyadeśa*-Attiyūr in Kāñcīpuram (Raman 1975), which denotes the Lord redeeming an elephant from the clutches of a crocodile. Nṛsiṃha, Kṛṣṇa and [Dāśarathi]-Rama are *avatāra*s of Viṣṇu. The Viśvarūpa of the Lord and other forms such as Garuḍa, Hanuman et alii are elaborated (cf. Desai 1983, Kalidos 2006: Vol. I). During the Vijayanagara-Nāyaka period some new forms come to picture such as Aṣṭamukhagaṇḍabhēruṇḍa-Nṛsiṃha and Pañacamukha-Āñjaneya (Rajarajan 2006: II, pl. 118). However, not all these sophisticated iconographical forms may be present in temples found in rural setting. An effort is taken to trace what all wonders in iconography could be discovered.

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