CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION
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Historical and theological studies tell us that in ancient India religion was a way of life. It is perhaps for this simple reason that a substantial body of historical research tends to focus on detailed studies of our temples. Research studies of this type attempt analysis of the placement of temple in terms of its socio economic political cultural and religious significance i.e. these studies assess the contribution of a specific society to a temple and vice versa. The study on the Vilinäthaswàmi temple in Tiruvílimälalai is no exception to the trend cited above. Its intended objective and scope cover several salient features of the temple and the changing dimensions which mark its existence down the ages. Some of the key points taken up for discussion are:

- the visitation of the saivite triumvirate in the 7th century and the consequent legendary importance attributed to the temple
- the resultant status of the temple as a pàdal perra sthalam (a place sung by saivite saints)
- the expansion of Tiruvílimälalai as an agricultural settlement under royal patronage of chôla kings from 9th to 12th centuries.

To elaborate a little on each of these points -

During the Pallavà rule (7th century) the village gained religious importance particularly as a sacred centre of saivism. The village and the temple had attained fame because of its close association with the lives of Appar and Tirugñânasambandar, who had stayed in the village at a time
when a famine broke out. They were stated to have sung in praise of Vilūnāṭhaswāmi (śiva) and were blessed with money (padikkāsu) with which they retrieved the famine stricken people of the village. The place became a pādal perra sthalam (a place sung by the saivite saints) and the temple attained significance.

During the chōlā rule (9th to 12th centuries) Tiruvēlimilalai became an agricultural base. It attracted a sizeable population of the agricultural classes like vellālās (who still are prominent section of people in the village). The rich cultivable land with irrigation facility from arisilāru have given rise to number of crops. The agricultural prosperity motivated people to make liberal contributions to the temple in the form of land grants and essentials for temple pūjās and festivals. It also provided a conducive atmosphere for other crafts like weaving and manufacture of pip (which is a popular industry even today).

The inscriptions in the temple bear testimony to the royal patronage to the temple down the ages. The village was made a Brahmadēyā dēvadana in the chōlā times. Brahmadēyā villages played an important role in local administration of the state and consequently functioned as an apparatus for social integration. The village had an assembly called Sabhā which looked after the local administration including matters pertaining to irrigation, justice, law and endowments. The kings made generous contributions towards the upkeep and various activities of the temple. The prevalence of land transfer among individuals, between the temple and individuals
and the land grants signify the rights held by the seller/donor in regard to the land, and the collective contribution of temple, individuals, and the royal donors to medieval economy.

The architectural and sculptural features of the temple represent the creative and artistic skills and trends of the generations of the sthapathis (architects) and silpis (sculptors) of the locality. The vouvāl nathā mandapā has a unique architectural and engineering excellence that on the roof of the mandapam the vouvāl or bat can not stay. This specific feature is not repeated anywhere in the temples of Tamilnādu, and is found only in Vilīnāthaswāmi temple of Tiruvilimilalai. The paintings seen on the roof of extended arthamaṇḍapā is another master piece. The colour presentation, style, seen in the three panels of paintings represent Vijayanagar style.

The micro and macro study on the temple reveal local history of the village, the people their material culture for generation.

The temple of Vilīnāthaswāmi is under Tiruvāṇaduthurai Ādhinam math, and not under Hindu Religious Charitable Endowments Board of Government of Tamilnadu as in the case of many other temples. The math appeared to have been primarily a seminary for imparting religious education at the same time disseminated secular knowledge. Since the extensive property granted to the temple was left in the custody of Mahā sannidānam (head of the math), they took the opportunity of
availing at least a part of them for providing facilities to
the students and scholars, like establishing libraries, and
spent the remaining part for the rituals and maintenance of
the temple.

The math at present controls 16 temples apart from
Vilinathaswami temple. The financial resources of the math is
limited and has several constraints in spending on temple
festivals. It resorts to contributions from philanthropists
and devotees for conduct of daily pujas and festivals.

In a nutshell, in this study an attempt has been made to
present in clear terms the political, socio economic,
religious, cultural, architectural significance of the
Vilinathaswami temple in Tiruvilimilalai, with epigraphic and
literary evidences. The temple inscriptions contain valuable
information on the political achievements of the rulers who
had shown royal patronage to the temple through endowments.
The temple had been a centre of multi varied activities - a
place of worship - a centre for promoting education and
culture - an owner and a donor of land which registered land
transactions - and a public institution catering to the social
needs of the people. Historical research of this kind attempts
to forge links to the past when religion was a way of life,
when socio economic and political interests merged together to
strengthen the society. In doing so, it often serves us with
a reminder, albeit in advertently, as to how divided our own
interests have become, leading to strife - torn times.