CHAPTER II

MONUMENTS : PLACES OF RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE

Indian culture has emphasized the significance of pilgrimage for spiritual progress. Every Indian has an inner desire to go on pilgrimage at least once in his lifetime. The regular and constant visits to holy places is a regular and continuous religious tradition of the Hindus. Many sacred places located in various parts of India, attract a large number of pilgrims from within the country and outside the country.

All major Indian scriptures *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas* and Upanishads are filled with the account of pilgrimages undertaken by the great sages and Kings. These may be quoted as oldest examples of pilgrimage tourism. The real contribution to tourism came from Shankaracharya. By establishing four sacred centres at Puri, Dwaraka, Badrinath and Sringeri, he became an initiator of pilgrimage tourism. Other sacred places of Hindu pilgrimage are Kurukshetra, Saptapuris, i.e. seven sacred cities, Ayodhya, Mathura, Haridwar, Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Ujjain and Dwarka; four places of Kumbh ka Meal Prayag, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik; twelve Jyotirlingas; fifty one 'Shakti-Pethas'; 108 major Vishnu temples; eighth self-manifested holy places - Sri Rangam, Tirupati, Sri Mushanam, Thotadari, Shaligram, Pushkara, Naimisharanya and Badrinath. The Himalayas are considered a sacred mountain range. The seven most sacred rivers are - Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri. All the three seas surrounding Indian peninsula are considered sacred.¹

Development of Pilgrimage in India

The nature of Hindu pilgrimage is encapsulated in the Indian expression *Tirthayatra*, which literally means "undertaking journey to river fords". Also, a visit to sacred places is considered *tirthayatra* (Tirtha - Britannca). According to Hindu tradition, a visit to a holy place is not only a physical act but it also implies mental and moral discipline. Pilgrimage to sacred places is accepted as a desirable practice to earn religious merit (*phala*) within a life lived according to 'dharma'. It is one of the ways towards self-realisation and bliss.

By visiting the various sacred centres according to their needs and requirements they maintain their wants fulfilled. There are many references in Hindu religious literature that suggest moral life as a precondition for deriving any benefit sojourn to holy sanctuaries and bathing in sacred rivers. A journey to sacred places provides opportunity for the householder to detach himself for sometime from the caressed worries of daily life and to devote that time to prayer, contemplation, and listening to the discourses of holy men.

Several views have been expressed by the scholars on the subject of origin and development of the practice of pilgrimage (*Trithayatra*). The earliest description of the practice of Hindu pilgrimage (*Tirthayatra*) in Indian literature is founds in the *Aitareya Brahmana* of the Rig Veda. The Vedic Aryans revered the rivers,

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3 The Brahmanas are expiratory Liturgical texts as attached to the Vedas. The period of composition of the Rig Veda is usually considered to be between 1500 and 1000 B.C.
4 Rig Veda, 75.5, as quoted in 'Kalyan Tirthan', *op.cit.*, p.4.
and it clear from the famous river-hymn (*nadi stuti*) of the Rig Veda.\(^5\) The Aryan reverence to the river assisted the outcome of the concept of *tirtha* (frod).\(^6\) Bharati believes that pilgrimage proper is not mentioned in the Vedic literature.\(^7\) The practice of *tirtha yatra* pilgrimages has also been described in the classic Aryan law book *Manusmriti*.

After the Vedic period, the practice of pilgrimage seems to have gained increasing popularity as show by the great epic *Mahabharata* (Ca.300 BC). The *Mahabharata* clearly considers going on pilgrimages (*tirthayatra*) superior than to sacrifice.

The practice of pilgrimage, with its ancient and diverse origins, continues to be popular among the Hindu. More people are increasingly visiting more sacred places than ever before in the history of India. It is not that the Hindus have become more religious; rather it is because modern means of transportation have made it possible for large number of individuals to undertake pilgrimages. The number of pilgrims each year visiting the *tirthas* is to be reckoned in several crores. Specific occasions, such as the *Kumbha Mela*, may attract over one crore devout on a particular day.\(^8\)

**Motives for Pilgrimage**

The purposes and motives for pilgrimage are so many. These may broadly be classified into two categories. First, there are specific

\(^5\) S.M.Bhardwaj, *op.cit.*, p.4.


\(^7\) *The Mahabharata* expressly says: O thou best of Bharta race, sojourns in tirthas which are meritorious. And which contribute one of the high mysteries of Rishis are even superior to the sacrifice. Ray, P.C., *The Mahabharata*, Vol.II, 175.

\(^8\) S.M.Bhardwaj, *op.cit.*, pp.32-33.
motives concerned with mundane existence. They involve a commitment or vow to the deity (*Sukhna*) whose blessing is sought for the solution of a problem. *Mundana* and *Shradha* also fall under this category.

The second category of motives consists of earning religious merit. It may include holy bath on a specific occasion (*Snana*), the *darshan* (sight of the deity), or visiting holy men for spiritual guidance. In the first category of motives, the deity the focus of pilgrimage, in second, the event of pilgrimage is more significant.

**Literature on Pilgrimage Places**

A lot of literature is available relating to Hindu pilgrim centres in particular. A brief description of the literature is given here.\(^9\) The *Mahabharata* is the oldest and the most important source of information about the places of pilgrimage in the ancient period. From the description of the *tirthas* in the *Mahabharata*, the following conclusions are made.

1. Association of *tirthas* with water is clearly brought out; most of the sacred spots lie either on river banks, at confluences, or on the sea coast.

2. The *tirthas* and sacred rivers were spread throughout the country and dedicated people used to visit these holy places.

3. The places of Hindu pilgrimage existed in the areas effectively occupied by people practicing Hindu beliefs.

4. There were clusters of sacred places and the largest numbers of *tirthas* were situated in the Ganga basin.

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The account of *tirthas* given in *tirthayatra* (pilgrimage) section of the epic *Mahabharata* suggests a grand tour, which includes India and some parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

**Places of Pilgrimage According to the Puranas**

Next to the epic *Mahabharata*, the most important sources of information on places of pilgrimage in India are the *Puranas*. The Puranas, as a body of Hindu literature, not only possess great sanctity but also contain much more material for the study of culture, history, geography, etc. They provide us great insight into all aspects and phases of Hinduism. Most of the *Puranas* include in their text important information about the sacred places, rivers, mountains and cities.

The *Garuda Purana* gives two separate lists of holy places or *tirthas*. It mentions, in all, eighty one *tirthas* throughout India out of which sixteen are considered most important and sacred in India.\(^\text{10}\) Some *tirthas* such as Kanyakumari are not mentioned in *Garuda Purana*. The *Matasya Purana* gives a comprehensive list of *tirthas* falling in the region of Narmada.\(^\text{11}\)

The *Agni Purana* also contains a list of sixty two sacred *tirthas*.\(^\text{12}\) Most of the *tirthas* mentioned in *Agni Purana* are situated in northern India and a few in South India.

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\(^{10}\) *Garuda Purana*, Chapter 5, pp.66 and 81.


Places of Pilgrimage in the Medieval Literature

The nine volume digest entitled *Kṛtykalpataru* of Bhatta Lakshmidhara compiled during 1110 A.D., lists a large number of *tirthas* spread over the entire Indian subcontinent.

Three non-Hindu sources, viz. (1) The Accounts of Hiuan Tsang's travels in India between AD 629 and 645, (2) Alberuni's *Kitab-ul-Hind*, written in about AD 1030, and (3) Abul Fazal's *'Ain-i-Akbari* of the late sixteen century give important and reliable information about sacred Hindu place. The seventh century account of Hiuan Tsang provides, among other things, one of the earliest foreign accounts of the institutions and places of the pilgrimage in India. From the travels of Hiuan Tsang, it is quite evident that Hindu places of pilgrimage were spread over the entire length and breadth of the country. The Buddhist traveller observed the state of affairs of Hinduism and particularly the sacred places of the Hindus. He noticed the practice of bathing in the sacred rivers, particularly in the Ganga River.\(^\text{13}\)

Alberuni in the third decade of the eleventh century AD noticed the institution of pilgrimage and the significance of ritual bathing in Hinduism. Since he remained in the northern part of the country, he had mentioned only the more important sacred place of northern India only.

An important list of major Hindu place of pilgrimage is supplied by Abul Fazal in his celebrated digest on administration entitled *'Ain-i-Akbari* written in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Abul Fazal

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, p.188.
gives a concise view of the basic philosophy of the institution of Hindu pilgrimages and attempts to classify and enumerate the more important of these places, particularly in reference to northern India.\textsuperscript{14}

**Important Places of Pilgrimage in India**

The institution of pilgrimage to holy places (\textit{tirthayatra}) was prevalent as an ancient and continuing religious tradition of the Hindus. Numerous sacred places spread across in various parts of India attract a large number of pilgrims; while some places draw pilgrims from all over the country, others largely from the neighboring village. Thus, religion assumes an important role in generating a circulation mechanism in which the entire social strata of Hinduism participates. Religion provides the basis of pilgrimage by offering the reward of unification of the soul and the attainment of objects related to the problems of mundane existence.

Thousands of holy places are scattered throughout India. Some places more spiritual significance than others. There are four ‘Dhamas’ or Kingdoms of God, which are Badrinath in North, Rameshwaram in south, Puri in East and Dwarka in west.

There are seven sacred cities known as the \textit{'Saptapuris'} (\textit{Mokshapuris}). The sacred cities are Mathura, Ayodhya, Mayapuri (Haridwar), Kashi (Varanasi), Kanchi (Kanchipuram), Avantipuri (Ujjain and Nasik). The seven most sacred river are Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri. The eight self-manifested holy places (\textit{Swayam Vyakta Khsetras}) are Sri Rangam,
Triumala, Sri Mushnam and Thotadri in South India; and Shalagram, Pushkara, Naimisaranya and Badrinath in North India.\textsuperscript{15}

A discussion on these as well as some other important places follows. Pilgrimage continues to be popular among the Hindus, with its ancient and diverse origins. It may be pointed out that a Hindu has an innate desire to visit at least a few of the hundreds of holy rivers, holy cities, temple and caves as mentioned in their holy scriptures. The number of \textit{tirthas} in India is so large that the whole of the country can be regarded as a vast sacred space organised into a system of pilgrimage centres.

Modern means of transports have made it possible for large number of individuals to undertake pilgrimages. The number of pilgrims each year visiting the well-known \textit{tirthas} is reckoned to be in several crores. Specific occasions, such as \textit{Kumbha Mela} at Haridwar and Allahabad may attract over one crore devotee's eager to bathe in the sacred rivers.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Kumari Amman Temple}

The temple dedicated to virgin Goddess Kumari Amman at Kanniyakumari is datable to 726 AD. It was built by Kochchdayan of the first Pandiya empire. According to legend, Devi Kanniya, is one of the incarnations of Goddess Parasakthi. In order to associate with her counter part Lord Siva, hard penance was observed by Goddess

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.189.
\textsuperscript{16} Idem.
Parasakthi, who vowed to remain as a virgin as her penance had proved futile.\textsuperscript{17}

The main entrance of the temple is facing north, while the deity is facing the east. The eastern gate is always kept closed excepting on special occasions. During the festivals, deity is taken out for the ceremonial bath. After a walk around the outer corridor the deity is crossing the \textit{Navarathri Mandapam}, and the pathway which leads to the second corridor encircling the shrine. One can have a clear vision of the Devi, before going in front of the sanctum sanctorum. The Devi stands as a charming young girl in Her penance with a rosary in Her right hand and a sparkling nose stud that sheds lustrous radiance. The image made of blue stone, is believed to have been installed by Sage Parasurama.\textsuperscript{18} After worshipping the Goddess, the pilgrims enter the inner corridor, where they can have the \textit{darshan} of Indra Vinayak. There is also a small shrine dedicated to Thiyaga Soundari. The temple is open to public from 4.30 a.m to 12.00 noon and again from 5.00 p.m to 8.30 p.m. The \textit{Vishaka} festival in celebrated during of the Tamil month of \textit{Vaikasi} (May /June). The deity is taken out in a procession through align the main streets both in the morning and at night. The car festival is celebrated on the ninth day and the float festival is celebrated on the concluding day.\textsuperscript{19} Another important festival is the \textit{Navarathri}. It is conducted during September / October to commemorate the Banasura incident. During this time more number of domestic tourists are arriving at Kanniyakumari.

\textsuperscript{17} P.S.V. Aiyar, \textit{Aspects of Tamil Culture}, Calcutta, 1979, p.95.


\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Idem}.
Sri Rangam: Sri Ranganatha Temple

Suchindram Temple
Sriranganatha Swamy Temple, Srirangam

This temple is at Srirangam Island, in the middle of Cauvery river. This temple was built by various dynasties including the Cheras, the Pandyas, the Cholas, the Hoysalas and the Vijayanagar Empire between 13th and 18th centuries. It covers an area of 2.5 sq. km and the main temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu. This temple with seven concentric walls and 22 gopurams has a north to south orientation. Srirangam island is also known as a centre for religious philosophy and learning. The great Vaishnava Acharya Ramanuja taught and wrote in the Srirangam School during the 11th century. This Vaishnava shrine is visited largely by devotees and tourists.

Suchindram

This is a small village situated about 5 Kms on the road from Nagarcoil to Kanniyakumari. It has a recorded history. The 123 inscriptions of the place narrate a lot about its evolution, distinctiveness and development. The kings of almost all dynasties of the South had vied with each other to commemorate their association with the main temple, by constructing halls and arranging for the conduct of special Poojas in their name. The presiding deity of this temple is Thanumalayan (Thanu–Siva, Mal –Vishnu, Ayan -Brahma). The main temple houses all the Godheads of Hindu Pantheon. Besides, there are exclusive temples of Sakthi, Nataraja, Namasivayamurthi and

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Krishnan outside the main temple. The temple is a storehouse of varied types of sculptures. The well polished figures of Garudalvar, Thirumalai Nayak, the musical pillars, the two Travancore kings, the Navagraha images on the ceiling of Vasantha Mandapam. The yalis, the sculptures on the base of the gopuram are all very fine pieces of art. The monolithic huge image Hanuman of 5 meter height invites awe and admiration. This is more or less akin to that of the one available at Namakkal.

The 40 meters tall, seven tier gopuram is stately in look and its outer space in studded with exquisite plaster figures depicting scenes from puraras and epic. Two important festivals are conducted one in the Tamil month of Markali and the other is the Tamil month of Chithirai. During Markali festival ending the Arudhra Dharsan the Lord Suchindaraperumal and other deities are taken out in procession around the streets on the ninth day the car festival is conducted with great pomp and show when three cars drawn around the streets. The Chithirai festival is conducted in a similar manner. On the Tenth day Suchindaraperumal and Umayal are taken round the mandapam of the tank on the decorative float. 23 Thus this sacred shrine of the Swath leaves inducible impressions in the minds of the visitors and no tourist fails to carry sweet memories on his exit from the shrine. This temple is known for its architectural beauty.

Swami Thoppu

Swami Thoppu, originally known as Poovandan Thoppu or Sasthankovil villai, is popular and well – known because it is the birth

23 R.K.Das, op.cit., p.11.
place of the great Hindu saint Vaikunta Swamigal. It is situated 12 kms south east of Nagarcoil and 8 kms northwest of Kanniyakumari.\textsuperscript{24} Vaikunta Swamigal was a great social reformer. He fought for the elevation of the down trodden common mass.\textsuperscript{25} He assumed the status of Ayya or father and treated all the people equally.\textsuperscript{26} He also asked his followers to treat others without any disparity.\textsuperscript{27} He created \textit{Samathuvapuram, Samapanthi Pojanam} (inter –dining) etc.\textsuperscript{28} After his demise at Ambalamathi his holy body was carried to Swami Thoppu and laid to rest there. In memory of him, a township has developed with the name of Swami Thoppu. Large number of devotees from the rear and far away visits this holy place as an important pilgrimage center. His followers have established thousands of \textit{Nizhal Thangals} (Small temples), throughout South India. Here there will be regular \textit{Poojas} and after that food will be supplied. Each \textit{Nizhal Thangal} will also serve as a healing place.\textsuperscript{29} His principle is known as \textit{Ayyavali}. The Nadar devotees went Swamythope in large numbers.

**Nagarcoil**

Nagarcoil is the headquarters and the largest town in Kanniyakumari District. The name Nagarcoil is derived from the five headed serpent deity of the Nagaraja temple, which is located in the

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} C.Umaithanam and P.Kasiutayam, \textit{Bhagavan Vaikutna Swamigal Varalaru} (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1966, pp.41-45.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Arulnul: p.24.
\item \textsuperscript{27} R.N.Yesudhas, \textit{A People Revolt in Travancore}, Trivandrum, 1974, p.61.
\item \textsuperscript{28} P.Sarveswaran, "Sri Vaikunta Swamigal and Social Reform Movement", Seminar on Social Reform movement in South India, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, 1981, p.52.
\item \textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p.53.
\end{itemize}
middle of the town. It was originally a Jain temple.\footnote{30} There are two shrines dedicated to Nagaraja and Anantha Krishna are found here. The 
\textit{dvajasthamba} (flag mart) is installed in front of Ananthakrishna. The images of the Jain Theerthangaras, Mahavira and Parswanatha that are found on the pillars of the temple. The entrance to the temple is reminiscent of Chinese architecture of Buddhist Vihar. The people of Kanniyakumari District believe that these who worship Nagaraja of this place would lead a healthy life and would not be affected by any disease. On Sundays in the Tamil month of \textit{Markali}, people from all over the district visit this temple.\footnote{31} Tourists from different part of the country daily visit and make their offering to the God.

\textbf{Mandaikadu}

Mandaikadu is situated on the sea coast, Northeast of Colachel port. It is connected with Nagercoil and Trivandrum by a motorable road. This place is famous for its temple dedicated to Bagavathi Amman. It dates back to the 7\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. The Amman is in the form of anthill, which is about 12 feet in height and with five heads and believed to be growing gradually. The Annual Festival called \textit{Mandaikadu kodai} is celebrated in March for 10 days and is the main attraction at this place. During this time devotees all over South India particularly from Kerala visit with 'Irumudi' like the one carried to Lord Ayyappa Temple. Before entering the temple they take a holy dip in the Arabian Sea. \textit{Poojas} held on Tuesdays and Fridays are very important. Lot of women devotees worship on these days. Full moon day of every month is another important day. Salt, pepper, wooden

\footnote{31} B.S.Padmanabhan, \textit{Kumari Mavatta Kottaigal}, (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1972, pp.53-54.
toys, silk cloths, black bangles, anything obtained from the first harvest are some of the offering made to this deity. For the festival occasion people gather in very large number. This festival attracts people of all castes and preach religious toleration.

**Tirunelveli**

This town was an important city of the Pandya Kingdom as it served as their capital next to Madurai for some time. The Kanthimathith Nellayappar temple of this place is dedicated to Parvathi and Siva. The lord has also come to be known as Nellaiyapper and the Devi is called Kanthimathith \textit{(Kanthi} means luster and \textit{Mathi} means moon).\footnote{33} Nataraja's shrine in the temple is known here as \textit{Thamira Sabha} or the Copper Hall and there are many sculptural representations in it. The \textit{Sabha} is one of five \textit{Sabhas} where Lord Nataraja is believed to have performed the cosmic dance.\footnote{34} Some of the architectural pillars of the temple when struck produce a musical sound. Vishnu who is said to have given away the Goddess Parvathi in marriage to Siva is represented here in a metallic figure with a \textit{Gindi} (a vessel with a spout) in His hands.

\footnote{32}{M.Gopalakrishnan, \textit{Tamil Nadu District Gazetteer, Kanniya Kumari}, Madras, 1995, pp.1186-1187.}
\footnote{33}{Porunar Attruppadai: 242-248.}
\footnote{34}{\textbf{Five Divine Sabhas} 

i) Chidambaram - Ponnambalam (Gold)

ii) Madurai - Velliambalam (Silver)

iii) Tirunelveli - Thamirasabai (copper)

iv) Thirucoutrallam - Chithra Sabai (Picture)

v) Thiruvalankadu - Rathina Sabhai (Ruby)}
Thirunelveli: Kanthimathi Nellaiyappar Temple

Sri Vaikundam: Sri Vaikuntapathiswami Temple
The temple measuring 850 feet by 756 feet was built by a Pandya king in the 7th century A.D. There are beautiful *mandapams* and *Theerthams* in the temple. The Golden Lily tank is also found here. The marriage festival of the Lord and the Devi is celebrated every year in the Tamil month of *Aippasi* corresponding to October-November. *Vasanta utsavam* is conducted here in the month of April-May in the *Vasantha Mandapam* specially constructed for the purposes. The Nandi in this temple is fairly big similar to those at Tanjore and Rameshwaram. The large number of pilgrims visits this temple every day and the crowd would increase during the festival occasions. This too is an attractive tourist spot for temple architecture.

**Srivaikuntam**

The name by which it is called Srivaikuntam denotes that it is a holy place amongst the Vaishnavas. Vaikuntam is the name of Vishnu's heaven. Srivaikundam is famous for the temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu with a lofty *gopuram*. The Thiruvengada Mudaliyar mandapam is rich with sculpture of yalis, elephants and figures of warriors. The *Ekadasi mandapam*, which is opened on *Vaikunda Ekadasi* day, contains exquisite sculptures. During the critical days with the East India Company forces, Kattabomman used this temple as a fort. The Kailasnathaswami temple is yet another important one. It contains six inscriptions of the times of Veera Pandia Kattabomman. There are nine Vaishnava shrines around this place and the Vaishnavites venerate them.

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Tiruchendur

Tiruchendur, meaning a sacred and beautiful town situated 29 kms to the south east of Srivaikundam in the Tirunelveli District. Another name for Tiruchendur is Thiruchiralivay. The temple dedicated to Muruga, the warrior aspect of Muruga is built on a small rock. History says that this is one of the oldest temples in south India. There are references about this temple in *Tirumurugarruppadai* of Nakkirar of the *Sangam* Age. The exact date of its origin is till unknown. Some of the most ancient pieces of literature like *Skandapuram* and *Silappadikaram* refer to this temple. Nakirar the famous poet of the Third *Sangam* has made prominent reference to this temple in his *Thirumurugatrupadai*. Historians fix the age of the 'Third *Sangam*' to be between the 3rd century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. So the antiquity of this temple can safety be traced back to at least two thousand years. The temple located here on the shore of the Bay of Bengal is one of the six abodes of Lord Subramanya. The location of the temple is ideal and draws perennial stream of devotees. The temple overlooking the singing sea is an inspiring sight.

The temple is said to have been constructed by Ugra Pandiyan, the fifth descendant of the Pandya dynasty of Madurai. There are some rock-cut temples and natural caves by the sea side and in close proximity of the temple with sculptural representations of Subramanya. The image of Vishnu in the cave close by it is also a place of worship. Before entering the temple, pilgrims either wash their feet or take a

40 *Thirumurugatrupadai*: 71-77.
Tiruchendur : Murugan Temple

Thirupparakundram : Murugan Temple
bath in the sea. The bathing ghat contains nine *theerthams*, according to *sthalapurana*. A bath in any of these *theerthams* is believed to confer miraculous benefits on a devotee.\(^{43}\) About 200 yards south of this temple, at the sea shore there is a rare natural phenomenon inside a square. There is a well, otherwise known as "*Nalikkinaru*" where the water is crystal clear and sweet in taste. The *gopura* is on the West and is a gigantic structure with nine storeys in a height of 137 feet commanding a good view of the surrounding area.\(^{44}\) This sea shore pilgrim centre is also an attractive tourist spot and devotees and tourists visit this centre regularly.

**Tirupparankundram Murugan Temple**

Tirupparankundram is located eight km south west of Madurai city. The famous Murugan temple is standing at the foot hill of Sikandarmalai or Subramaniya's Hill and Muslims call it Sikandarmalai. This rock cut temple is dedicated to Lord Subramanian, who resides in six abodes. This temple stands close under the northern foot of the hill and its innermost shrine is cut out of solid rock. Here Lord Muruga is sitting with Devayanai, daughter of Indra. In the temple there are separate shrines dedicated to Siva, Ganapathi, Durgai, Vishnu and other deities. Maravarman Sundra Pandya I (1216-35 A.D), the Pandya King had granted lands and endowments to this temple.\(^{45}\) Tirumalai Nayakkar, built *mandapam* in the middle with three aisles which is as much as 24 feet wide and it occupies a total

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area of 116 feet by 94 feet. The chief festivals are the *Thaipusam*, *Vaikunda Ekatesi*, *Vaikasi Visaka* and *Karthikai Deepam*. These festivals are celebrated on the Tamil months of *Thai*, *Vaikasi* and *Karthikai* respectively. As it is a renowned Murugan shrine, located near the temple city Madurai this also captivates the attention of the tourists largely. They even visit Tenparankunram when there is another rock cut cave temple and a peacock sanctuary.

**Pazhamudircholai**

It is located on Alagarmalai above the Alagar temple to the north and about four kms away from the temple. This temple is one of the six abodes of Lord Subramaniva. It is known from the *Sangam* times and one of the *Sangam*, poets Nakkirar has sung long poem about this temple called *Thirumurugatrupadai*. As in the case of other temples, new structures have been added later on. There a series of *mandapams* one above the other at stages in elevation in this temple. The front *mandapam* contains the picture of the marriage of Deivayanai and the sculptures of Thirumalai Nayak and Mangammal in the descent. In the *mandapam* there are caves with the image of Annapoorna, Varaha Avataram, Narasimha Avataram, Mahalakshmi etc. A little waterfall flows and it is called ’*Nupura Gangai*’. The reservoir is surrounded by a *Vasanta Mandapam*. This holy water is a great boon to the pilgrims. It is used for the holy bathing of the pilgrims and is always carried by them.

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Palani : Murugan Temple

Sri Villiputtur : Andal Temple
Palani

Palani, yet another abode of Lord Muruga, is an important pilgrim centre for the Hindus in Dindigul District. The old name of Palani is *Pothini* (another name is Thiruavinankudi) and the name of deity is Lord Dhandayuthapani. The Lord's influence is so great that it attracts devotees from different places and the temple management tries its level best to maintain the religious atmosphere. The Palani temple was believed to have been built prior to the 9th century A.D. by the Chera king Cheraman Perumal. But it must be of perishable nature because the inscription of the present structural temple points out that it had been built by Jatavarman Sundara Pandya (1251-1268) and Vira Pandya, contemporaries of Malik Kafur. The name of the deity is called Dandayudhapani (*Dandam +Ayudam+ Pani* = Dandayudhapani. Meaning having striek as weapon in his hand). At the neck of the deity there are *Rudraksha* beads in the form of a garland. The idol in composed of *Navapashana* (nine different kinds of poisonous herbs) blended together in certain rare proportions, the resultant substance resembling wax. The mixing of the nine poisons was done by a Siddha called Bogar. Festivals are conducted in this temple greatly for all the important days. Devotees on vow carry miniature *Kavadies*, which is available on hire locally, on their shoulders and climb up the steps to the sanctum sanctorum to propitiate the Lord. The *Devasthanam* maintains well furnished and conveniently

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51 *Dinamalar*, "Palani Arumuga Dhandayuthapani Swamy Thirukkoil, Kumbabisheka Sirappu Malar", 5th July 2000, p.10.
located choultries for the benefits of pilgrims. This hill shrine is attended regularly by the devotees. They are offering their devotion at all days. During *Taipusam* the devotees visit this temple by walk even from long distances. Thus this pilgrim tourist centre is also a significant one.

**Sankarankoil**

Sankarankoil is situated nearly 56 kms north west of Tirunelveli. It is a unique temple dedicated to Sankara Narayana who is the combined manifestation of Siva and Vishnu. There are two other shrines dedicated to Siva and Parvathi. Twice in a year sunrays fall on the pedestal. It is an engineering skill, which attracts large crowd. The Sankara Narayanar image is half Sankara (Siva) and half Narayana (Vishnu). The right portion of the image is covered with sandal paste and has the emblems of Siva, with cobra around His head, deer, Moon, etc. The left side is Vishnu with Sankham (conch) and *Chakra*(wheel). Both are carved in one figure depicting the oneness of Hari and Hara. The *gopuram* of this temple is of the usual style of South India and is a massive structure commanding a glorious view from a few Kms away. It is said to be the second highest *gopuram* in south India. During the *Aditapas* Festival of 10 days, which is considered to be the biggest event in every year in the temple, held during the month of July in commemoration of the penance done by Gomathi Amman (Parvathi) to see Shiva and Vishnu as one God is the same image, the sick and sufferings from the district and other parts of the country flock to the temple. This unique combination of Saivism and Vaishnavism captivates the tourists to this place largely.

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Sri Andal Temple at Srivilliputhur

According to the puranas, Srivilliputhur is referred to as Varaha-Kshetra. The local tradition mentions that the dense forest of the region was cleared and converted into a habitable place by a chieftain of the bowmen clan called Villi. The newly formed town by Villi was called Villiputhur and it was sanctified by the presence of Lord Mahavishnu. The town was later known as Srivilliputtur. At present Srivilliputhur is situated in Virudhunagar District.

According to the inscription in the temple, it was constructed by the Pandya king Srimaran Srivallabha during the period 815-862 A.D. The Chola ruler Kulottunga, Pandya ruler like Jatavarman Tribhuvana Kulasekera Deva, Maravarma Sundara Pandya I and Tirumalai Nayak have donated and decorated the temple with enormous gifts. The beautiful sculpture of the temple, the excellence of paintings of the walls and the golden tower in the sanctum sanctorum reveal the contribution made by the ruler Tirumalai Nayak to this temple. The original tower of the temple is said to have been built by Periyalwar along with certain portions of the temple with a sum of money which he won at a religious contest at the court of Srivallabha Pandya in Madurai.

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57 G.S.Murali, Tamilaga Tirumal Sthalangal (Tamil), Chennai, 1998, p.86.
58 Mythili Venugopal, Sri Andal Thirukkalyanam (Tamil), Chennai, 1993, p.112.
Regarding the structure of the temple it consists of two separate divisions, the Vataparthrasayanar in the north-east and the Nachiyar temple in the south-west. In between these two is the temple garden.\(^{59}\) The principal shrine is the Nachiyar temple is that of Sri Andal and Lord Rangamannar. The fine painting on the walls around the temple illustrate the story of Andal. The kalyana mandapam contain huge life like sculpture of Mohini, Rama, Rati, Manmatha and many other deities. The Vatapathrasayanar temple has the Lord Vishnu in a reclining posture attended by Sridevi and Bhudevi.

Next to Andal shrine is a two tier temple dedicated to Sri Narasinga Perumal on the ground floor and to Lord Vatapathrayanar at the top. The second floor also has the \textit{Gopala Vilasam} where sculptures carved out of teakwood adorn the ceiling. These are sculpture depict the \textit{Dashavatharam}. This Vaishnava centre sung by alwars captivate the Vaishnava pilgrims.

\textbf{Meenakshi Sundareswar Temple}

Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple is located in the heart of the city of Madurai. Pandya king Jatavarman Kulasekhara (1190-1214) built a great temple for Lord Siva; a \textit{syambulingam} once worshiped by Indra, King God.\(^{60}\) Gradually other temples were built for Sundareswara and his consort Meenakshi keeping the original temple as the nucleus. The gigantic outer wall with 14 towers was constructed.\(^{61}\) The oldest tower, eastern \textit{gopuram} was built by

\(^{60}\) W.Francis, \textit{op.cit.}, p.35.
Jatavarman Sundara Pandya. But this old temple was razed to the ground in 1311 A.D, during the Malik Kafur’s invasion. The outer wall with 14 towers was pulled down and the temple was closed for forty eight year. After the fall of Madurai Sultanate in 1365 A.D, Kumarakampana Udaiyar, Vijayanagar King, re-opened the temple and people were allowed to worship. Viswanatha Nayaka (1529-64), the founder of Nayak dynasty of Madurai, in 1560 A.D laid down the general plans of the temple and the construction of the outer most wells were started during his reign. In succeeding generation, princess and the rich vied with one another for completing the structure which took 120 years. The Temple has a rectangle area of 847 feet length from East to West and 792 feet breadth from South to North. The temple contains eleven finished gopurams and one unfinished Gopuram. In the temple precincts there are numerous minor shrines of gods and goddesses piously worshipped by the pilgrims. Another major attraction of the temple is the 1000 pillar hall, an art museum and music pillars. Inside the hall there is the dancing pose (right leg lifted up) of Siva popularly called Nataraja. It was constructed by Veerappa Nayak (1572-95), the successor of Krishnappa Nayak. Thus the gradually developed Meenakshi Amman temple captivates devotees and tourists from all over India.

62 S.Krishnasamy Ayyangar, South India and Her Muhammadan Invaders, New Delhi, 1921, p.99.
64 W.Francis, op.cit., p.39.
Madurai : Meenakshi Sundareswar Temple

Alagarkovil : Kallalagar Temple
Koodal Alagar Perumal Temple

Another important temple of Madurai is the ancient Vaishnavite deity situated in the South West part of the town, near Periyar Bus Stand. The central shrine of Lord Vishnu, to be three poses, sitting, standing and reclining each depicted one above the other. It has elegantly carved ornamental granite windows, all of different delicate designs in which light passes through the passage round the inner Shrine, is an excellent architectural design. This temple attracts domestic pilgrims as well as Vishnavite devotees.

Alagar Kovil

Alagarkovil located 21 kms north-east of Madurai has a Vishnu temple dedicated to Lord Alagarswami, 'The Beautiful God' and the brother of Goddess Meenakshi who is at the southern end of the hill Alagarmalai. This is one of the ancient religious centres of south India and has figured in Paripadal which is a renowned Sangam classic. The Sthalapuram states that king Malayadhwaja Pandya built this temple with lofty Gopurams and the spacious Prakarams and Mandapams. All the twelve Alwars, the Vaishnavite saints had visited this place and have sung in praise of Alagar and the hills. All these verses numbering 123 are included in the Nalayira Diviya Prabandan (4000 holy versions) a compiled work by Nathamuni. This is claimed to be the Tamil Veda by of the Vaishnavites. The place is also known as South Tirupati.

68 W.Francis, op.cit., p.273.
The temple is surrounded by a rectangular fort wall measuring about 730 yards by 400 yards, including an old town and a palace. This wall protects the temple property from the Kallar. Thirumalai Nayak, the Nayak king of Madurai, constructed a carved stone Mandapam fair round belly' and it contains several life size sculptured statues. Many festivals are celebrated in this temple, of which Chitra Pournami festival is significant and is celebrated simultaneously with a similar festival in the Meenakshi temple at Madurai. This also serves as a centre of cultural as well as religious tourism.

**Kasiviswanathar Temple (Tenkasi)**

Tenkasi, South Banaras is also famous for its temple. The story of its temple is narrated in an inscription on a four sided pillar set up in front of the gopuram. It is said that God Viswanatha appeared in the dream of Arikeari Parakrama Pandyan who was living in the fort constructed by him at Vinthankottai which is in the east of Tenkasi the frequently visited Banaras to worship Lord Viswanatha, and Lord ordered him to build a new temple at Tenkasi. The king started the work in 1446 A.D the central shrine, the ardhamantapam and the mahamantapam were finished and the god was established in this shrine. Ten years later the building of the nine stories gopuram began and in six years it was completed. In the same year 1463 A. D the king died. The temple contains many Pandya inscriptions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is believed that if a person dies in Banaras he will attain salvation. But if a person born, lives and dies in Tenkasi he will get salvation was the verdict of many puranas.

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Tenkasi: Kasiviswanathar Temple

Thiruvannamalai: Arunachalaswerar Temple
Many festivals are conducted in this temple in a grand manner. In the months of Ani (June/July) sangabhishekam is celebrated. In Avani (July/August) float festival is conducted and in the month of Purattasi (September / October) Navarathri festival takes place. Similarly Thirukkalyanam festival in Aypasi (October/November), Surasamharan festival and the Pandya King's great festival in Masi (February/March) are celebrated in grand scale. Thiruvathirai festival in Margali (December/January) is famous here. Thousands of pilgrims assemble in this temple to witness the cosmic dance of Lord Nataraja. During all these festivals Parakkirama Pandya's statue is honoured with poojas and sandal paste is applied to it and even today car festival is started by this king alone. This is the only temple where the founder of the temple is always honoured first. Tenkasi, located just 5 kms. away from Courtallam is also a renowned cultural tourism centre.

**Tiruvannamalai**

Tiruvannamalai is one of the most sacred cities of Tamil Nadu. This pilgrim town is the place where Siva (Arunachalaswerar) is believed to have appeared as a column of fire (Sthavara Linga) in order to assert his supremacy over Brahma and Vishnu. It was built during the 11th - 16th A. D. It has nine imposing towers, huge prakaras (walled and cloistered enclosures), the large Sivaganga Tank and a vast thousand pillared hall.\(^\text{71}\) In the Tamil month of Karthigai (November-December), on the full moon night, an important festival Karthigai Deepam festival is conducted. On that occasion a huge beacon is lighted at the top of the hill Arunachala Hill or the red mountain (which forms a backdrop to the town). It is a commemoration of the

\(^{71}\) Madhulita Mohapatra and others (Ed.), *op.cit.*, p.584.
At Thiruvannamalai is St. Ramana Maharishi spent 23 years in meditation. His Ashram near Arunachala Hill attracts devotees from all walks of life. This Thiruvannamalai is not only a pilgrim tourist centre but also a centre of philosophy which captivates attention of many foreign tourists also.

Pillayarpatti

Pillayarpatti is a fertile village in Thiruppathur taluk in Sivaganga District. The name Pillayarpatti is derived from the presiding deity (Pillayar) of the Temple. Pillayar means noble child and also synonym of remover of obstacles. The shrine of Sri Karpaga Vinayaga is a rock cut shrine and carved as the Gajaprista or elephant back. A.V.Jayachandram an art historian says that Pillayarpatti temple is the earliest rock cut temple of Tamil Nadu and belongs to the pre-Pallava period. He supports his view by citing of Brahmi inscription of late 5th century A.D that found in the temple. Vinayaka chathurthi (The birthday of Vinayaka) in celebrated for ten days in the Tamil month of Avani (July-August). Modhakam in an indispensable offering to Lord Vinayaka. It is boiled sweet rice cake and called Kolukkattai in Tamil and Modhaka in Sanskrit. The Nagarathars (chettiar) manage this temple. Nowadays a large number of the pilgrims visit this and worship the deity. It is one among the nine Nagarathar temples and it is located near Kunrakkudi, a popular Murugan shrine. Thus this Nagarathar architecture captivates the attention of pilgrim tourists.

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75 S.M.Lakshmanan, Folklore of Tamil Nadu, New Delhi, 1973, p.112.
Pillayarpatti : Sri Karpaga Vinayaga Temple

Kalayarkovil : Kalleswaran

Temple
Kalayarkovil

Kalayarkovil is 16 kms east of Sivaganga. It could be reached by buses from all directions. Kalayarkovil, derived its name from the Kalleswaran Temple of the place. *Kalayar* is a corruption of the word Kalleswaran. During the *Sangam* period this place was known as *Kannappeir* as seen from the *Purananuru*. In the 9th century A.D, St. Sundarar described the presiding deity in his devotional songs as *Kalai*. Since then the deity was known as *Kalayar* with Tamil or suffixed to it denoting respect. The temple came to be known as *Kalayarkovil* and the later adopted to the village also. The *Kalaiyarkovil* is a very large and handsome building surrounded by a strong stone wall about 18 feet in light and forming one angle of the fort which was dismantled. The new tower on the South was built by Marudhu during his rule over Sivaganga (1780-1801). It is 75 feet tall. Brick from Manamadurai was brought for building the tower. It is said that after the fall of Kalaiyarkovil, Vellaimarudhu escaped. In order to catch him, Col. Agnew announced that if the Marudhu did not surrender within the period stipulated the big tower would be pulled down and destroyed. It is said Vellaimarudhu surrendered. So that the lofty *gopuram* of the temple may be saved. The Marudhus also repaired the tank called an *Anaimadu* and made a wooden car for the temple. The Tomb of Marudhu is seen to the east of the temple facing the old entrance. The smaller tower on the north owes its existence to Varaguna Pandyan (1251-1261 A.D.).

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77 A. Ramaswami, *Tamil Nadu District Gazetteers, Ramanathapuram*, Government of Tamil Nadu, Madras, (1972, p.10.)
This temple is one of the fourteen sacred Pandya temple. This was built by Veerasenan, a Pandya King. There are three shrines called Someswarer representing Sthoola; Kalleswarar representing Sukshama and Sundareswar representing Karma. Their consorts are Soundra Nayaki, Sri. Sornavalli and Meenakshi respectively. This temple enshrines Vishnu idol also. The life-size stone statues of Muthu Vaduganathar and the Marudhu brothers are also found in this temple. Saint Ganasambandar, Sundarar, Appar and Arunagirinathar have visited this temple and sung its praise in their sacred poems. Perumparrapuliyur Nambi (13th Century), Umapathi Sivachariar (14th century) and Poyyamozhi Pulavar have also visited this place and sung poems. This renowned temple is known for the tall tower with architecture. It captivates the attention of pilgrim tourists and it is a standing monument of the Marudu Brothers.

**Rameswaram**

Rameswaram is situated 52 kms to the east of Ramanathapuram. It is a low sandy island separated from the mainland by the Pamban Canal. The configuration of the island resembles of conch in shape. Significant for the devotees because the conch is an attribute of Sisham. The climate of Rameswaram is warm, though it is mitigated by sea breeze. The island enjoys the benefits of marine climate. Fishing is a thriving industry of Rameswaram. From time immemorial it has been famous for pearl fishing. It is an important place for chunk fishing and also has an industry for the collection of shells. At present a lot of

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78 Thiruvarangarasan, *Thirukkanapper* (Tamil), Sivaganga, 1992, pp.5-10.
Rameswaram: Ramanathaswamy Temple

Rameswaram: Ramanathaswamy Temple Corridor
pilgrims visit Rameswaram more for offering a *Sraddha* for their dead ancestors than to worship Lord Siva in the temple.\(^{80}\)

The Ramanathaswamy temple, which is close to the sea on the eastern side of the island is renowned for its magnificent corridors with massive sculptured pillars lining it. It is an unique feature which captivates the tourists. Even today the devotees bring Ganga water from Kasi for the worship at Rameshwaram and carry the **Kotitheertha** from here to Kasi for worship. Though Rameshwaram is a saivite temple it is a holy place for both the Saivates and the Vaishnavites. This is because Sri Rama with His consort Sita worshipped Siva at Rameswaram, after he had killed Ravana.\(^{81}\) It is a place which exposes a harmonious blending of Saivism and Vaishnavism.

Though legends and puranic stories assign the origin of the Rameswaram temple to very ancient times, its recorded history commences only with the 7\(^{th}\) century A. D. Appar and Gnanasambandar, the Saivite saints, who lived in the 7\(^{th}\) century A. D gave a picture of the origin and the position of the temple in their works. The temple as it stands today was built by different ruler during different periods from the 12\(^{th}\) century A. D on wards.

This multi shrine temple complex consists of two main sanctums. One for Lord Ramanatha and other for His consort Parvathavardini. The temple has twenty two sacred wells (*theerthas*).\(^{82}\) The glory of

\(^{80}\) Ibid., p.25.

\(^{81}\) *Temples of South India*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 1960, p.21.

\(^{82}\) G.Sethuraman, *op.cit.*, p.29.
Rameswaram temples is much associated with those sacred wells and thus they are significant aspects in the lay out. The corridor is the longest in India.\textsuperscript{83} It is 197 meters long in east-west and 133 meters wide in south-north. The temple has a tower (Gopuram) of 38.4 meters height. The pillars of this temple, portray Nayak idols of life size sculptures and their minute carvings attest the proficiency of the stone cutters of that age. \textit{Maha Sivarathri} (February/March), \textit{Vasantotsvam} (May/June), \textit{Ramalinga Pretistha} Festival (June/July) and \textit{Thirukkalyanam} Festival (July/August) are the important festivals abraded in this temple.\textsuperscript{84}

The temple faces east. The sea here, about 100 meters from the main entrance of the temple, is very calm and therefore ideal for bathing. The water at this place is considered sacred and known as \textit{Agnitheertham}. Ritualistic performance (\textit{Sraddha}) is made by the people in this place and they take holy bath. It is situated on the highest point in the island. There is a two storied \textit{mandapa} upon a hillock called \textit{Gandhamadana Parvatham} on which two foot prints are found. It is popularly known to the pilgrims as \textit{Ramar patham} (feet of Sri Rama). It is situated to the north west of the town of Rameswaram. This also connected with the story of Kamban's Ramayana.

Dhanashkodi, another holy place is situated at a distance of 8 kms from Rameswaram and has a temple for Kothandaramaswamy. The Temple remains intact on the island, even though Dhanushkodi was

\textsuperscript{83} J.Jetley, \textit{The Great Temples of India, Ceylon and Burma}, New Delhi, 1988, p.42.

\textsuperscript{84} Tourism Policy Note: 2005-2006, Government of Tamil Nadu, Chennai, 2005, p.69.
washed away by the cyclone in 1964. Thus Rameswaram is another significant pilgrim tourist centre like Tiruchendur.

**Papanasam**

Papanasam is a noted pilgrims center with temples, rivers, waterfalls, a reservoir, hydro electric power station and a textile mill also is famous. It is situated in the west 48 kms away from Tirunelveli. The name Papanasam implies eradication of sins. The 500 year old temple of Lord Siva (Papanasar), the Agasthiyar temple, the Ayyanar temple and holy spring *Banatheertham* are all situated at the foot of the hill. The temples and places are richly blessed with the chill and pure waters of the holy Thamiraparani and tourists enjoy the natural beauty of this place. The ups and downs of Papanasam hill provide a virtual feast to the visitors. The river Thamiraparani originate from the peaks of Agastiyar hills in Pothigai ranges and runs through hilly terrains, rifts and valleys, before reaching the plains through a number of water falls. Here in Papanasam, in commemoration of Siva's fulfillment of the promise. Agastya is brought every year from his shrine to witness the marriage of the God and Goddess of the local temple. The temple receives the offerings thousands of pilgrims. This is a centre which captivates tourists mainly due to its wonderful scenic settings.

**Eruvadi**

Eruvadi or Erwadi is a coastal village lying 8 kms South of Kilakkarai, 24 kms South of Ramanathapuram and 35 kms east of

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Erwadi : Dargah of Sultan Ibrahim

Pottal Pudur : Kattubava Pallivasal
Kadaladi. There is a good black top motorable road from Kilakarai and special buses are run from Madurai on festival occasions. Erwadi is a corruption of *Erupadi*. *Erupadi* in Tamil means ascending steps.\(^88\) The tomb of Sultan Ibrahim is available here. The Dargah of Sultan Ibrahim, who came from Arabia via Cannanore is said to be about from 800 years old. The *Sandhana koodu* (sandal Car) Festival, which takes place during March/April of each year is a notified festival and attracts about lakhs people mostly Hindus.\(^89\) In this place the haunted persons are said to be cured. Leprosy and blindness are also said to be healed. A number of miracles are attributed to this place. Though it is a Muslim centre it attracts tourists and devotees from various quarters.

**Kattubava Pallivasal**

*Kattubava Pallivasal*, the mosque of forest father, is located about 26 Kms from Pudukkottai and near in Thirumayam. It is one of the old Islamic Monument, the dargah (tomb of a saint) of Syed Bava Fakruddin, who was the grand son of the celebrated saint Shahul Hameed (Wali) of Nagore. The monument belongs to the seventh century. According to the hagiology of the dargah, the saint while wandering in the forest in the area, tried to protect some Hindu women from the rubbers and died in the encounter and was entombed here. The present shrine containing the tomb of the saint has a big imposing in the Bijapur style of Islamic architecture. The pillars in the *mandapam* are in typical Dravidian style. The Thondaiman rulers of Pudukkottai, the Sethupathis of Ramanthapuram and the Nawabs of


Arcot have richly endowed to this dargah. This is yet another Muslim pilgrim centre.

**Pottal Pudur Dargah**

The center of attraction of this place is the oldest dargah built around the year 1674. It is so regular that it attracts the Muslims, Hindus, and Christians as well. This has been built adopting Hindu temple pattern. If the prayers of the pilgrims are answered, they pay their offerings, through the dargah in large numbers during Kanthuri festival with great reverence. In this dargah, where the lebbais act as priest, customs almost similar to that of Hindus are followed in the rituals. Here holy ashes obtained from tamarind bark, ghee, and flower called *narsa* are distributed to its devotees. Sandal paste is prepared in a pot on a large scale during the time of the Kanthuri and is sent to the Hindu village of Ravanamudram, from where it is brought back to this dargah with great pomp. This is offered to the Andover. Afterwards this sandal paste is distributed to the eagerly awaiting crowd without discrimination of caste, creed or religion. This stands as an example of communal harmony and secularism. This Dargah is considered as a pious and sacred one equal to the Nagore dargah.

**Overi**

Overi (or) Uvari is a coastal village nearly 32 kms South of Tiruchendur in Tirunelveli district. It was once a reputed port in the early Pandya Kingdom. It was also known to the western countries.

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91 H.R.Pate, *op.cit.*, p.322.
Nagore: Abdul Qadir Shahul Hameed Dargah

Velankanni: Virgin Mary Shrine
even during the period of King Solomon (1004 B.C).\textsuperscript{92} In the Biblical literature this place is described. Here we find the famous St. Xavier Church in the seashore. The St. Xavier church belongs to 16\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. It was, to begin with, a thatched shad where people used to congregate for worship. As the time passed by a seeing the increasing population Fr. Rayappar started constructing beautiful church in 1908. In 1917, when the new church reached the finishing stage, an unexpected natural calamity that took place caused the collapse of the roof of this church. Many conflicts and disturbances took place between the rival groups among the people of Uvari. Efforts of Father Antony Bernard succeeded in completing the construction of this church on 26 January 1929.\textsuperscript{93}

Another church of St. Mary was under the control of Pastors of Goa Mission. In course of time, in 1903, this church was converted into a school. On important occasions as per the wishes of the people, festivals were conducted and prayers were offered to her. Due to sea erosion this old church got damaged. Therefore the people decided to construct a new church for which the foundation stone was laid down by Fr. Thomas in 1970, 25\textsuperscript{th} January and that was finished on 1974.\textsuperscript{94} This church, designed as a ship, is called \textit{Kappal} Matha church.

At present Uvari is quite famous for the Siva temple. It is an old temple with \textit{Suyambulingam}. The temple is situated on the shore of the Bay of Bengal and the nearer of the sea add to its beauty. The temple of \textit{Suyambulinga} is in the traditional native style of architecture. On the northern side of the temple is a separate shrine for

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Old Testament}, 19-22.

\textsuperscript{93} Rev.Iruthaiyaraj (Ed.), \textit{Uvari Malar} (Tamil), Uvari, 1987, pp.56-63.

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.54-55 & 79.
the Devi. During the Tamil month of *Vaikasi Visakam* Festival is celebrated on a grand scale. On this day thousands of people from different parts of Tirunelveli and Kanniyakumari districts flock here to worship the Lord and to deliver their votive offerings. Tourist visits both these places in large number. Another important religious tourist spot in the famous Muslim *Athankarai Pallivasal*. This Durgah is situated on the right side of the main road from Uvari to Kanniyakumari.

**Velankanni**

Velankanni known as the *Lourdes of the east* is located on the Coramandel coast, is a beautiful beach with a shrine dedicated to Virgin Mary. She is venerated as *Our Lady of Health* and pilgrims of all faith throng this church. It is believed that Virgin Mary appeared before a shepherded boy at this place, seeking milk for infant Jesus. The shepherd boy who obliged was blessed and his pitcher of milk remained full always. A small thatched chapel was built here.

At the end of the 16th century, Virgin Mary is said to have appeared again here before a lame boy and cured him. A church was built here after this incident. Devotees seeking care from various illness and diseases come here and offer candles in the shapes of various organs of the body. They take a holy dip at the beach and offer their hair in prayer. This sacred place is visited by tourists and devotees even belonging to Hinduism. Hence its stands for religious harmony and religious toleration.

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97 [www.annaivelankanni shrine.net](http://www.annaivelankanni shrine.net).
Melmaruvathur

Melmaruvathur which came into prominence the last two decades ago is situated near Madurantagam. *Macha Puranam* a famous Tamil classic sings the fame of this holy place which is being considered holy for the past 2000 years. This is the place where 21 Siddhars, men as well as women, have their *Jeeva Samadhis*. These Siddhar are said to belong to various religions. In this holy land, a lady Siddhar resides and blesses,

Melmaruvathur shot into fame because of the *Arulmigu Adhiparasakthi Siddhar Peetam*, where more than 2000 years ago was an old temple which is believed to have been worshipped by *Gandharwas*. This is referred to in *Matsya Purana* written in Tamil by Vadamalayappa Pillai. It is the *Swayambu*, which was in that place now worshipped in the *Siddhar Peetam*. In course of time the old temple was ruined and covered by ant hills and there arose a neem tree. In 1966 the *Swayambu* was exposed consequent on the fall of the neem tree in a cyclone. The *Adigalar*, who is said to have been Mother Goddess in the form of divine cobra in the ant hills was gifted to go into a trace and say *Oracles* which attracted a large gathering on those days.

The basic principle of this *Peetam* is "one mother, one race" i.e., there is no distinction between human beings on any basis. Here one belonging to any caste, religion or race can, without any restriction, enter into the sanctum sanctorum offer prayers and worship. This is the first prayer centre that gave

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priority to women to enter the sanctum sanctorum to decorate the deity to perform *Aradhana, Abhisheka* and *Archana* and even to participated in the *yagas*. Several thousands of devotees assemble on festive occasions, like *Aadipuram, Navarathiri, Thaipoosam, Chitra pournami, Adigalar*’s birthday (March 3), Tamil and English new year days.\(^9\) This unique centre is popular now.

**Samayapuram**

There are many abodes in Tamilnadu where Shakthi Worship is predominant. Arulmigu Mariamman Temple at Samayapuram is one among them. Samayapuram was also known by the names Kannanur, Kannapuram and Vikramapuram and Mahalipuram in ancient times. Kannanur in the olden days was the residing southern capital of Hoysala ruler Vira Someswara in the 13\(^{th}\) Century. The tutelary tree (*sthala vriksha*) of this holy temple is vembu tree (neem tree). The (*Utsava murthy*) processional deity was being worshipped by Vijaya Ranga Chockanatha Nayak (1706-1732 AD), the Nayak king of Vijayanagar.\(^10\) He built this temple during his reign. Important festivals of this temple are *Thaipoosam* (January - February), Flower sprinkling festival (*Poochoridal*) in *Masi* (February - March), *Maham* festival conducted in *Panguni* (March - April) and *Panchapprakaram* festival also known as *Vaikasi* festival in April - May. During these festivals, the people of the entire

\(^9\) Short Notes on Arulmigu Adhiparasakthi Siddhar Peedam at Melmaruvathur.

Tamilnadu through the Samayapuram temple.\textsuperscript{101} It is a centre which depicts the continuation of the old Tamil tradition of Korravai worship.

**Triplicane Parthasarathy Temple**

Sri Parthasarathy temple in Triplicane is one of the 108 sacred centres of Vaishnavites. It was built during the 9\textsuperscript{th} Century and the temple is dedicated to Krishna (Sri Venkata Krishnaswamy). Images of Alwars and all Acharyars are installed in this temple with their respective uthsava (Professional) images. From the stone inscriptions, it is seen that the present temple was built by a Pallava King about 779 - 830 AD.\textsuperscript{102} The front gopuram and the structures etc., are believed to have been built by Sri Thondaiman Chakkaravarthi, a Pallava king. Renovations were effected by the Vijayanagar rulers. The most important festival is observed *Vaikunda Ekadesi* (20 days) in *Margali* month, floating festival in *Masi* for Seven days, *Brahmothsavam* in *Chitrai* month and the Car festival fall on Seventh days.\textsuperscript{103} This temple is another centre of attraction to the devotees who visit the capital of Tamil Nadu, Chennai.

**Sri Kapaleeswarar Temple, Mylapore**

Mylapore, which is now a part of Madras city is an ancient town. Thiruvalluvar, the author of the famous *Thirukkural* known as *Tamil Vedham* who lived in the First century AD, 

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p.1592.
lived at Mylapore. Saint Sambandar and Appar have composed songs mentioning the God at Mylapore as Sri Kapaleeswarar. But the present temple does not contain any feature of the Dravidian style of architecture. The carvings in the pillars are poor specimens compared with those in some of the ancient temples. When there was an erosion of the sea about the close of the last century, there was a land slip in the Santhome Beach. It revealed carved stone pillars and broken stones of mandapam found only in Hindu temples. It is a historical fact that the Portuguese who visited India in the 16th century had one of their earliest settlement at Santhome, Mylapore. In those days they were very cruel and known for their iconoclastic tendencies. They razed some Hindu temples to the ground. It is probable that the other Mylapore temple referred to in the Thevaram hymns was built on sea shore and that it was destroyed by the Portuguese about the beginning of the 16th century.

The Present temple was built about 300 years ago by Sri Maylai Mattu Muthaiappa Mudaliar and his heirs. He also dug a tank to the west of the temple. As this area was originally an abandoned burial ground of the Muslims, the Nawab conferred on them the right of immersing the panchu or peeli on the last day of Muharram in the tank. The Muslims continue to enjoy this right even today. If the Muharram falls in the month of Panguni, the Brahmothsavam is postponed till after the

completion of the former. This is yet another captivating pilgrim tourist centre of the Madras city and stands for religious unity.

**Sri Subramaniaswamy Temple (Tiruttani)**

The Tiruttani temple is one of the Lord Subramania and also it is one of the six famous hill abodes of Lord Subramania and a well known temples in South India. Lord Sri Subramania settled down at the top of Tiruttani hill after destroying Surapadma, the asura. It is here the Lord married one of His consorts Valli, whom he brought from the nearby Vallimalai hills. The Valli’s wedding festival is conducted on a grand scale on the eight day of Brahmothsavam, which is celebrated in the month of Masi every year.

The origin of the temple goes back to the pre-historic days. It is believed that it is at least four thousand years old. The rulers of Vijayanagar and Chandragiri and the Zamindars of Karvettinagar took a special interest in the temple and renovated it. The temples Sthalapuranam has been written both in Tamil and Sanskrit. The Tamil version known as Thanikaipuranam was written by Sri Kachiappa Munivar, the Sanskrit version is known as Kallargiri Mahathmiyam. St. Arunagirinathar and St. Ramalingaswamy have composed here their immortal "Thirupugazh" and "Thiruvarutpa" respectively. Saints Appar, Sundarar and Manikavasagar had visited

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107 Idem.
Tiruttani: Subramaniaswamy Temple

Chidambaram: Nataraja Temple
This small town is also the birth place of Dr. S. Radakrishnan, a philosopher, statesmen and former President of India.\(^\text{111}\)

**Chidambaram**

Chidambaram is famous for its ancient temple of Lord Nataraja. It was built by the Cholas in the 9\(^{th}\) Century to honour their patron deity, Shiva as Nataraja, the *Lord of Dance*.\(^\text{112}\) The temple has an unusual hut-like sanctum with a gold plated roof, tank and four *gopuras*. The most interesting is the eastern *gopura* which features detailed sculptures of the 108 hand and feet movements (*karanos*) of *Bharata Natiyam* and considered a veritable encyclopedia of this classical temple dance.\(^\text{113}\)

Lord Shiva is worshipped here in the form of *Akasalingam* and is therefore invisible. The temple is noted for its five *sabhas* and or halls known as *Raja Sabha, Deva Sabha, Chit Sabha, Kanaka Sabha* and *Nritya Sabha*.\(^\text{114}\) Each *sabha* is conceived for a special purpose. Of these, the *Raja Sabha* (Royal Hall), a beautiful thousand pillared hall, built as a venue for temple rituals and festivals. Many Chola kings were crowned here in the presence of the deity. In the central enclosure in the *Deva Sabha* (Divine Hall), where the temple bronzes are housed, and administrative functions are performed. The adjacent *Nritya Sabha* (Dance Hall), has a superb collection of sculptures, the


\(^{112}\) Mahulita Mohapatra and others (Ed.), *op.cit.*, p.590.

\(^{113}\) *Idem.*

finest being the *Urdhra Tandava*. The *Chit Sabha* (Hall of Bliss), is the main sanctum, housing one of the five elemental lingas of Shiva, the *akasha linga* which represents either, the all pervading elements central to human existence. Finally, the fifth hall, in front of the *Chit Sabha*, is the *Kanaka Sabha* (Golden Hall), where is supposed to have performed his cosmic dance.115

The temple, which is differently known in religious literature as *Chit Ambalam, Ponnambalam* and *Tillai Ambalam*, is associated with saint Manikka Vasagar who had the triumph of his life in defeating the Ceylonese Buddhists who attempted to overthrow the worship of Shiva. The saint is also said to have attained *Nirvana* or *Mukthi* at this place. Saints Triungnasambandar, Appar, and Sundarar also worshipped this shrine and immortalized it in their sacred songs. The *Arudra Darshanam* (December - January) and *Ani Thirunanjanam* (June-July) are attended by a large number of people all over the state.116 This is an exquisite pilgrim centre known for its artistic qualities.

**Kumbakonam**

Kumbakonam was the capital of Chola kings in 7th Century AD and is a well known pilgrim centre for both Saivates and Vaishnavates.117 Sri Aidikumbeswaraswamy temple is an ancient shrine at Kumbakonam. The presiding deity of this temple is Lord Adi Kumbeswara and his consort is Sri Mangalambigai.

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The other names of the deity are Amudha Kumbeswar and Amudesar. The temple was in existence even in the 7th Century AD, since Appar and Sambandar have praised this deity in their *Thevaram*. It was built by a Chola king and the temple building itself would seem to have been extended and improved by the Nayak rulers.\(^{118}\) A unique feature of this temple, depiction of twenty seven stars and twelve *Rasis* (Zodiac) signs carved on a single block of stone in the *Navarathiri mandapam*.\(^{119}\)

Another ancient shrine Sri Sarangapaniswamy temple is the most important Vaishnavite temple and was built more than a thousand years ago. Even though the exact age of the temple is not known, there is ample evidence to show that it was in existence during the period of early Alwars from the references made to it in their songs. Accordingly to the *Sthalapuranam* of the temple, the presiding deity is in the pose of briskly ringing up from his bed of *Adi Sesha*, for giving *dharshan* to saint Thirumalisai Alwar. Seven Alwars namely Boodhathalwar, Poigai Alwar, Peyalwar, Thirumalisai Alwar, Nammalwar, Periyalwar and Andal along with Thirumangai Alwar have visited this shrine and composed verses extolling the presiding deity.\(^{120}\)

The temple of Nagesvara, a fine example of early Chola architecture. The town’s oldest temple contains a separate shrine for the Sun, who is said to have worshipped Shiva in this place,

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\(^{118}\) *Ibid.*, pp.33-34.

\(^{119}\) Madhulita Mohapatra and others (Ed.), *op.cit.*, p.593.

and to this day the rays of Sun are seen to fall on the central Linga on certain days of the year. An inscription which is dated in the third year Parakesarivarman (i.e. Aditya Karikala II), refers to a gift to one of the famous commentaries on the *Purva Mimamsa Sutras* which founded a new school of philosophy called *Prabhakara mata*. The Telugu work “*Sakalurthasagara*” also mention of this *Prabhakara*.121

Kumbakonam is also famous for the festivals celebrated throughout the year, the *Makham* festival in the month of *Masi* (February and March) is the important one. Once in 12 years the *Mahamaham* festival is celebrated when lakhs of pilgrims from far and neighboring towns congregate here.122

Tranquebar is a quiet, serene town of historical importance. Tourist can sense the glorious ambience of bygone Danish era. On 5th May, 1620, the Nayak ruler of this place granted permission to the king of Denmark, Christian IV, to set up a trading center for a monthly rent of Rs.3111. The agreement document made on a small gold sheet it still preserved in the International archives at Denmark. The Danes built the majestic Dansberg Fort, which made Tranquebar a prime trading spot, attracting the sea voyagers passing throughout the East Coast, into Tranquebar.123

The English later bought Tranquebar from the Dutch for Rs.12.5 lakhs in 1845 A.D. There are several reminders of the

123 [www.tamilnadu tourism](http://www.tamilnadu tourism).
Dinesh-British era today. The masilamaninathar temple here is an equally important monument.

**Dansborg Fort**

The Dansborg Museum is a fine piece of architecture which attracted a lot of ships travelling on the East Coast and made Tranquebar, a very prominent trading centre. The fort was converted into a Government inspection Bungalow after Independence. The fort which was dilapidated was taken over by the Tamil Nadu Archaeological Department and recently renovated in 2002. The fort now houses a museum exhibiting relics of the Danish era and is a popular tourist attraction.\(^{124}\)

**Masilamani Nathar Temple**

This temple is the oldest monument to survive in Tranquebar. This was built by Maravarman Kulasekara Pandiyan in 1305 A.D. The Temple originally had three mandapams containing rich pieces of architecture and epigraphs. The ferocious tides and the salty air have taken their toll on the temple, which contains only the innermost mandapam now. The temple has been mentioned in hymns of Devaram.\(^ {125}\)

**New Jerusalam Church**

This beautiful church was built by Bartholomus ziegenbaig in 1718, following German architecture. It still retains its beauty today. Ziegenbaig was sent to Tranquebar by king

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\(^{125}\) *Idem.*
Fredrick IV to render religious and spiritual services in India. He showed great interest in the Tamil language and mastered it. He has translated several books from Tamil to German. The church holds the graveyard of Ziegenbaig, who also set up the first printing press of India at Tranquebar.  

**Tranquebar Gateway**

This majestic arch was constructed during the Danish rule in the year 1792, near the Buckingham canal. The giant doors of gateway are made of teak wood with minute carvings. The monument is now preserved by the Archeological survey of India. Thus there are many centres of tourist attraction of different types available in different parts of Tamil Nadu.