CHAPTER – VII

CONCLUSION

The doctoral research thesis entitled **Sacred Complex of a Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Temple, Radhapuram: A Historical Study** is an attempt to highlight the socio-economic, cultural, architectural, sculptural and artistic significance of the Shiva temple situated at Radhapuram village of Tirunelveli District. Radhapuram village has long been recognized as one of the important centers of politics and spiritualism of Tamil Nadu.

Regarding the historical background of Radhapuram region, *Thenpandinadu* known as Aynadu was surrounded by the Pothigai hills. Ay Andiran, the first King of Aydynasty, ruled over the Aynadu during sangam period. After the 7th century the Pandya King waged war against the Ay Kings, conquered and captured the Ay nadu region. In the eighth century Kochadayan, an Ayvelir, annexed Aykudi and ruled over a vast region of Ay nadu from the South Travancore upto the River Thamirabarani, Radhapuram, the religious center was situated in the Ay nadu.
Varaguna Pandiyan (769-815 A.D) conquered the Ay Velirs and constructed a strong fortress at Karavanthapuram. The fortress is now known as Ukkiram Kottai. Varaguna Pandiyan constructed the famous temple at Radhapuram. He ruled over a vast area that included the Pandiya region, Chola region and Thondaimandalam.

According to the various inscriptions, found in different places, one can come to learn that the Cholas ruled over this Pandiya region during the eleventh century and the Pandyas restored their regime in the twelfth century.

So, the Radhapuram region has a hoary past. All the leading dynasties of Tamilakam ruled this area. It is said that a Pandya King Varaguna Pandya built the Varagunapandeeswarar temple in the small village, Radhapuram, which is now a religious centre and a holy place. This temple also has had a hoary past.

As per the agamas and regulations, Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple was constructed facing the eastern direction. The presiding deity is in the form of lingam. Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal is facing towards the south. There is a close resemblance between Goddess Nithyakalyani Ambal and Meenakshi.
Ambal, the titular head of Madurai. The important structures in this temple are the sanctum sanctorum, arththa mandapa, maha mandapa, mani mandapa, inner prahara, outer prahara, vimanas, Dwajasthamba, muhappu mandapa, etc.

The prasadam distributed here is virali turmeric paste which is offered by the devotees in stick form. There is a Karnaparambara (traditional) story which mentions that Kalyani, daughter of a celebrated Vellala Chettiar of Uthayathur, a small hamlet situated near Radhapuram went to Travancore kingdom along with her family for attending a marriage. When they were returning to their village, they stayed at Radhapuram to sleep. On that night Kalyani went missing; and suddenly, a divine voice announced that Kalyani was accepted by God as His divine wife; and the voice directed the Chettiar family to build a separate shrine to Kalyani at the existing Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple.

The temple faces the eastern direction. Crossing the main entrance one can reach a spacious pillared hall i.e. muha mandapa, in which the ceiling is decorated with beautiful sculptures. Next to the Dwajasthamba (flag staff) the shrines of Ganapathy, Subramania, and Dakshinamoorthy and also a palibeedam (altar) are seen. Ascending a
few steps, one can reach a raised structure where the principal deities are installed. The most striking feature of the temple is the *vimana* which rises in stately properties to a height of 30 feet; and is built with full of granite.

The monolithic *nandhi* is placed in the *rishaba mandapa*. The *sthala viruksha - kadambha* tree is seen in the outer *prahara*. On a single piece of stone in the *Navagraha mandapa*, all the 27 stars and 12 zodiacs are carved out.

The temple is full of artistic, colourful and attractive sculptures touching various episodes of *puranas*. In the temple *athisthana* also, there are hundreds of sculptures carved beautifully in stone. There are a number of dance poses and animal figures. The pillars inside the shrine are carvings very delicately, done with numerous floral designs.

Just like the Madurai Meenakshi temple, there is a shrine for 63 *Nayanmars* (Shiva saints) who dedicated their life for the cause of Saivism. There is no *rajagopura* in this temple. But the main entrance on the eastern side is very gigantic and the wooden doors are marvelously designed and carved. On the top of the *Dwajasthamba*,
there is a nandhi sculpture made up of panchaloha. A holy well is there in front of the Nataraja shrine; it supplies holy water to this temple without any interruption.

The temple occupies a unique place in the social history of Tamil Nadu. The maada theru (name of the street) surrounded this temple in all four directions were once occupied by the devadasis (dancing girls); it confirms the importance of this temple. The yagasalai is situated on the northern side of Chitrai mandapa in which velvi and other rituals are performed during the festivals.

The Hindus of Tamil Nadu follow different kinds of offerings and vows like kavadi with milk pots to Muruga, tonsuring to Venkatesa, etc. Similarly, at Sri Varagunapandeeswarar temple Radhapuram, people offer virali (turmeric) to accomplish their vow to Nithyakalyani Ambal.

This temple has a number of inscriptions, among which some of them have been already published; and the remaining have not been published so far which speak about land donation, cattle donation, etc., to this temple.
Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram is so significant in the sense that it is surrounded by a number of subordinate temples with interrelationship with the main temple in one way or other. In this temple the performance of poojas is classified into daily poojas, weekly poojas and monthly poojas.

The daily poojas and offerings are important and they are very essential to preserve the sanctity of a temple. In the Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple, six-time poojas were in practice till A.D. 1999. Now only three-time poojas are followed.

Pregnant women used to offer black coloured bangles at the Ambal shrine for their normal delivery. The parents perform the namakarna (naming) for children at the holy feet of Goddess Nithiyakalyani. The girls who pray to God for their early marriage are supposed to have their marriages performed in the premises of the temple alone. In this temple Guru worship, Saneeswara worship, Muruga worship, Prathosam worship, Pournami pooja and Sangadahara chathurthi worship are very popular.
In this temple the annual festival during the Tamil month of
Chithrai and the Navarathri festival during the Tamil month of
Purattasi are very popular. During the annual festival, therottam (car
procession) is conducted on the 9th day which is a colourful one.
Equally with the car festival, Thirukkalyanam (divine marriage) of Lord
Varagunapandeeswarar with Nithyakalyani Ambal attracts thousands
of devotees. All the Tamil months witness specific festivals, so this
temple wears a festive climate every day.

A temple art and architecture of this temple are the combination
of spirituality and aesthetics. An art form represents this aesthetics
with unlimited freedom of expression. A study of the architecture of
the Radhapuram Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal
temple is interesting, for it throws light on some of the distinctive
architectural features prevalent in different period of South Indian
history.

One among the splendid monument of architectural skill is the
vasantha mandapa, which is ascribed by tradition to the 19th century.
It is located on the eastern direction of the temple’s outer prahara of
the temple. It is also called Vaikasi mandapa because during the
Tamil month of Vaikasi grand celebrations are held there to the
presiding deities. This partition too displays excellent workmanship. The temple *vahanas* (vehicles) are made of silver, lead, wood, ivory, etc.

This temple is a treasure house of varied types of sculptures. Among them, the most important and splendid products are the sculptures of the Gods and Goddesses particularly the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The pillars of the temple belonged to the 12th century A.D and exquisitely executed in the outer *prahara*. The various kinds of sculptures in the temple may be broadly classified into natural scenery, floral designs, animals and birds, human figures including the portraits of kings and eminent personalities, and Gods and Goddesses.

Lineal carving and architectural sculpture are at their best in the specimens of stone carving in the temple. Regarding the artistic significance of the *vasantha mandapa*, the numerous pillars and the carvings of different but unique sculptures over the pillars highlight the artistic skill of the Chola and Pandya artisans. Even the Travancore kings and the local dignitaries also created various sculptures there. The themes of the sculptures are puranic tales and Hindu philosophies. *Bharathanatya* performance is encarved at the
western side of a pillar situated at the western row of *vasantha mandapa*.

In the Tirunelveli region, hundreds of temples built by the ruling dynasties like the Cheras, the Cholas, the Pandyas and the successive ruling families became popular due to their unique character. Unfortunately, the present position of these temples is very pitiable. There is no proper maintenance of them due to various reasons. The arguments leveled by the state government include the non-payment of rents and taxes by the lease holders and tenants that caused failure of steady income to the temples. The collections through hundies are also remitted into the Government treasury. Unfortunately, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Department of the State Government also has failed in its duties for the proper maintenance of this temple. One such a temple is Sri Varagunapandeeswarar Nithyakalyani Ambal temple at Radhapuram. The tenants and the lease holders of the landed properties are not paying the taxes to the temple and this has resulted the poor maintenance of the temple. This temple acts as a big consumer, an employer, as a bank, etc.
Once it was maintained by 55 staff members including two Shivacharyas. Nowadays majority of the temple employee’s posts are vacant and only one Shivacharya is performing and this the poojas even though the bylaws and traditions suggest at least two Shivacharayas must work in this temple.

Even though this temple possessed 4000 acres of both nanjai and punjai lands as per the records, the officials and the state government failed to protect the sanctity and spirituality of the temple now. Nevertheless, the devotees came forward and organized special committees to look after the affairs of the temple.

There is a general opinion among the devotees that all these types of mismanagement of temples emerged since 1967 due to political changes. Instead of God fearing personalities, politicians are now appointed to monitor the temples. When the field survey was conducted, all the devotees unanimously expressed that the temples must be liberated from political control. Due to sideling of rationalism in Tamil Nadu, a strong demand arises for transferring these Hindu temples to the religious heads. Then only the wonders of this land - the temples both big and small - will once again get restored of their hoary past.