Introduction
INTRODUCTION

The historical study of a small area (or) micro-region, may be on political geography, agriculture and society has been an avenue for research in south India during the last few decades.¹ The present thesis is a study of the historical archaeology of a small area, namely the Musiri Region, from earliest times to the 16th century AD, in a view to understand the historical dynamics of the Macro-region, namely Tamil Nadu.

Here, the Historical Archaeology is used in a broad sense, so as to study not only the monuments and other material remains of the historical past but also the geographical and cultural bases of the material things.

The Region
Musiri Region covers the present Thuraiyur Taluk, Thottiyam Taluk and Musiri Taluk which forms recently the part of old Tiruchirappalli District in Tamil Nadu.² However for convenience’s sake, the present taluk divisions are followed in this thesis as all the existing epigraphs and other publications follow only the present taluks division.

¹ For example: Kanchipuram through the Ages by C. R. Srinivasan, The Early History of the Madras Region by K.V. Raman, The Political Geography of the Chola country by Y. Subbarayalu, The Revenue System of the Cholas of P. Shanmugam are of notable interest which confined to the regional / micro studies.
**Location of Musiri Region in Tiruchirappalli**

Tiruchirappalli district is bounded on the East by Thanjavur and Pudukkottai, on the South by Madurai, on the West by Coimbatore and parts of Salem and on the North by Salem and South Arcot districts. Situated principally between, $10^\circ16'$ and $11^\circ32'$ Northern latitude and $78^\circ8'$ and $79^\circ30'$ Eastern longitudes with an area of 4,500 square miles. The district is divided into two unequal portions by the river Cauvery. The two territorial divisions are traditionally called Nirambam and Kadarambam.

Musiri is the headquarters of the revenue division which forms the area of the present study — "Area". It refers to the places in the adjoining taluks (viz, Thuraiyur, Thottiam and Musiri) is also made frequently as they provide sources to the present study and help in getting a whole - some picture of the area.

The study region Musiri is bounded on the South by the Cauvery River and on the North by the Salem District and on the West by the Namakkal district and on the East by Lalgudi Taluk, Tiruchirappalli District. The region is bounded by two rivers namely Iyar and Cauvery and they are very useful for irrigation. On the North bank of Cauvery river that is from North of Musiri the whole region depends on tank and well irrigation for agriculture.

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The antiquity of Musiri region goes back into the Neolithic Age and Megalithic Age. In the early historic times, this area was ruled by the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas and Vijayanagar Emperors. Later, the Palayam chiefs of Thuraiyur and Mittah of Kattuputhur ruled this area.

The region has a rich historical potential but so far no attempt have been made to study this region. The present study has brought out 14 Megalithic sites to the light of history. Regarding the political geography and territorial divisions of the Chola period, the work of Y. Subbarayalu forms the bedrock for the study. Attempts have been made by S.R. Balasubramaniyam to study the art and architecture of some of the temples of this area. In the present work, all the inscriptions and temples are studied for their social and religious aspects.

**Period of Study**
The study period is fixed from the pre-historic period to 1600 AD, to bring out a comprehensive history of Musiri region. The researcher has also paved the way for further exploration by limiting the period of study upto 1600 AD. It contains veritable mine of information and

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6 B. K. Gururajarao, *Megalithic Culture in South India*, University of Mysore, Mysore, 1972, p. 91.
the future researchers can conduct research. That will come under the purview of modern history period.

**Hypothesis**

Musiri region is the centre of ancient past. It is on the river side paved the way for the settlement since ancient times. The great empires of Tamil Nadu wanted to place their stronghold at Musiri for its fertile nature. This helps Musiri to acquire the greater things especially in the form of culture and society. Every inch of Musiri region is loaded with historical information of political, social, cultural and economic values. Based on this hypothesis the present study is made.

**Objectives of the Study**

The following are the objectives and based on these the study was carried out:

* to illustrate and to define the etymological and historical background of Musiri
* to trace the impact of different political systems and dynasties in Musiri
* to examine the cultural value of religious centres and method of worship
* to evaluate the caste based society in Musiri
* to explain the predominating position of Musiri in writing history of Tiruchirappalli as well as Tamil Nadu
* to bring out the socio, economic and cultural legacy of Musiri
Methodology
An intensive field study in the form of archaeological and ethnographical was undertaken to understand the area and to collect the documents of archaeological and epigraphical importance. This helped to trace the megalithic period, 2\textsuperscript{nd} century historical antiquities such as copper plates, unnoticed inscriptions, unsprayed temples, location of ancient villages, and the \textit{nadu} units. The available evidences are corroborated with the obtained materials. Analytical and critical methodologies are used to describe the caste structure, worship of village deities, pujas and festival activities of the temple.

Demographic and geographic studies are made on the territorial divisions, village settlements, temples and other aspects. To facilitate this, the topographical maps of one inch to a mile published by the Surveyor General of India were used extensively. For the sake of readability, Tamil terms and the titles of Tamil texts have been transliterated following the University of Madras Tamil Lexicon. The name of deities, castes and institutions, the most recognizable Anglicized form is used. Though the topic covers a small area, but it widens the scope of the study area and focuses even on ordinary things. The thing is to be remembered that these were all left out in the macro study. Instead of macro view, micro look has been made to survey andanalyse the remains of historical and social past.
Sources of Information
The data for the present work comes mostly from the sources which
were brought out for the first time from the field work. There are
sources already collected by the Archaeological Survey of India
(ASI) and Epigraphists. They are summarised in the form of various
tables. A chronological and dynasty wise list of inscriptions from
this area and new inscriptions noticed by the researcher, are
appended besides the list of temples and the list of villages. Besides,
F.R. Hemingway's *Tiruchinopoly District Gazetteer*, Lewis Moore's
*Trichinopoly Gazetteer*, B. S. Baliga's *Madras District Gazetteer*,
*Selection from the Old Records of Tiruchinopoly District*, Tamil
literary sources, *Sthalavaralaru*, interviews and books of reputed
historians were consulted to substantiate the above hypothesis.

Chapterisation
The thesis is divided into five chapters excluding introduction and
conclusion. The First chapter deals with the historical background of
Musiri region. It illustrates the different names of Musiri,
Geographical features and the historical information of Musiri
region from Neolithic period to 1600 A.D. This chapter describes the
Neolithic and Megalithic culture in Musiri area and also during the
Sangam age. Inscriptions of various kingdoms and hero stones and
the information derived from these two primary sources are
explained comprehensively. The economic importance of this region
is also mentioned.

The Second chapter titled Musiri under Political Sovereignty.
It deals with the Chola administration with the micro level territorial
units like Nadu, Valanadu and Mandalams, Pandya’s administration, Pallavas’ influence in this region, Pallava’s administration, Vijayanagar’s administration, Nayak’s administration, Palayam administration, Maganum administration, Seermai (Seemai), Village administration and Musiri Panchayat are explained in detail.


The Fourth chapter deals with the folk centres of worship and composite culture with reference to village gods and goddesses. Here
the deities of folk tradition with reference to Aiyanar, Karuppannasamy, Munisamy. Madurai Veeran, Mariamman, Kannimar, Kali, Ellamman and evil gods are discussed. Devil worship, Snake worship, Tree worship, the role of the Kodangi and worship of family gods are also summarised in detail.

The Fifth chapter analyses the caste based social system, in which the origin of caste system and turmoil of marginalised communities are explained. Besides community wise discussion on Ambalakaras, Agamudiyars, Koravars, Kallar, Kurumba, Maravar, Muthurajas, Nadars, Pillais, Reddiars, Thottiyars, Udayars. Urali, Vanniyar, Vellalars, trading communities - Chetties, Semiyour, Weaving communities - Saliyars and Padmasaliyars, Sengunthars, Servicing communities - Ambattar, Brahmin, Commalas, Kusavar, Oddars, Vannar, Scheduled Castes - Chakkiliyas, Pallas, Paraiyar, Valluvar, Scheduled tribes - Malayalis, Christians and Islamic Labbaïs and various aspects of social classes are thrashed out. The changing patterns of communities due to the modernity are also mentioned.

Lastly the salient features and findings of the study are given in conclusion. Photos of the megalithic sites and antiquities, sculptures and temples of this area are given at the end.