CHAPTER I

Introduction
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Nearly everyone who visits South India returns with the impression that it is a land of temples. North India, too, was as much a land of temples, but having been relatively free form repeated foreign invasions, the country south of the Vindhyas was able to preserve a large number of its religious monuments form wanton destruction of calculated negligence. This historical circumstance accounts for a more continuous development of the art of temple building in the south, free from the arresting influences of alien cultures, which came to dominate North India, form the thirteenth century.

South India is dotted with thousands of temples, many of them old and some in ruins. Apart form the famous temple-towns, a good number of villages and towns have two or more temples, some so ancient and venerated that they have become places of pilgrimage. A large majority of the existing temples are simple, unostentatious structures with no great artistic merit. The really great ones are monuments of considerable antiquity, the oldest of them dating back to fourteenth century. Besides their antiquity and artistic excellence, there is the interesting fact that these temples have gone through a long evolutionary process documenting, as it were, the history of South Indian culture.

Visiting the great temples, one is struck by their massiveness of proportion and the excellence of craftsmanship found in their pillars,
figure sculptures, ceilings, towers and frieze-laden walls. We stand amazed at the super-human patience, which generations of artisans have bestowed on their construction, and the princely munificence, which made them possible. Beneath these architectural achievements lay the urge of the Hindu mind to subordinate life to religion and seek in it the motive and ideal of all human endeavours. The temple became an aesthetic formulation of an essentially theistic religion. Through the temple, men sought to make accessible to their sense perception all that their beliefs symbolized. These beliefs indeed influenced and commanded individuals in the privacy of their conscience. But as a visible emblem of the religion, philosophy and ethics of the people the temple played a role far more vital than any other institution. It became a symbol of 'dharma' for all- kings, nobles and laymen alike. To provide for its construction and maintenance became an act of merit here and hereafter.

The great builders and artists sought self-expression through conformity to tradition rather than originality of expression. They generally preferred to remain anonymous.

"Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life" is a popular dictum, because of its close association with the day to day life of every Hindu believer. Religion plays a vital role in everyman's life and the morale of every believer is being conditioned and guided by the religion. Religion has been one among the measuring chords of the status of civilizations. The social behaviour of every individual has been guided by the religious
values. Religion, studded with doctrines, dogmas and philosophy has a special place in the society. People, both literates and illiterates believe in God and Goddess and worship them in different forms, these gods and Goddess are being housed in sacred places called temples which commands very great respect from every believer. Temple worship is as old as rocks and mountains. The human civilization flourished as a result of the emergence of higher religions. Ever during the ancient past, there existed a variety of primitive religions called Totemism, Magic, Ancestor-worship etc., and human beings associated themselves with either of the primitive religions. Fear and Superstition are the two basic ideas, which controlled the entire activities of the primitive religions. But, due to the advancement of human Civilization and Culture, higher religions came into existence. Faith is the Central aspect of all these higher religions.

Indian history witnessed a great religious unrest during the 6th century B.C., and to new religious sects came into existence form the old form called Brahmanism. Hinduism and Vaishnavism are the two revolted daughters of Brahmanism" is the observation of a reputed Indian Philosopher Ever since the emergence of these two new religions, the Indian religious life has gained a new impetus. Enriched with rich rites and rituals, the two new religions began to attract the souls towards them and the Indian spiritual history has gained a new momentum.
In South India, especially in the part of Tamil Nadu, religion and literature have flourished hand in hand. Religion and religious activities were patronised by the Kings and Queens who also have patronised temple art and architecture. Religion, literature, art and architecture have flourished in this region as a result of the great patronage extended by them. The temples in India have had a hoary past. Tolkappiam, the early Tamil grammatical work refers to the Gods and Goddess of the ancient Tamil people. Tolkappiam refers to the five fold geographical divisions of the land and their chief Gods of Seyon, Mayon, Indran, Varnan and Kortravai.

During the ancient past, the images of the deities might have been simply enshrined under the trees for the purpose of worship. The early reference of "Alamar Selvan" might simply refer to the deity, housed under a banyan tree. The Sthala Virukshas or the sacred trees of the temples emphasize the fact of their association with the temples. There are also references to deities in the Sangam literatures also. Some of the iconographical features of the deities, Siva, Vishnu, Muruga are referred to in Purananuru, Pattinappalai, Mullaippattu, Perumpannatrupadai, Mudurai Kanchi, Thirumurugatruppadai, and Paripadal. These ancient Sangam works also have references to the existences of several temples. The twin epics of Silappathikaram and Manimekalai also establish the fact of the existence of temples in the Sangam Period. Devaram hymns
also refer to many types of temples namely Ilankovil, Alakovil, Manikovil, Madakkovil, Kurakkovil, Kokkudikovil and Gnanakkovil.

But, unfortunately these buildings were built with perishable materials like wood and bricks. So, all the ancient temples prior to the Pallava period have perished and hence could not be traced. The Pallavas who have contributed a lot to the field of temple art and Architecture patronized the construction of temples, both rock-cut and structural. There were followed by the Pandiyas, during whose period also, the rock cut architecture existed. When the Cholas rose to prominence they showed a great interest in constructing massive structures of temples. Right from the time of the king Vijayalaya down to Raja raja, the great, temple architecture gained greater momentum. Ever during the Vijayanagar and Nayak's period, many beautiful and elegant temples have come into existence.

These temples are not only sacred placed for worship but they are also museums of art treasures. Very beautiful sculpture, master carvings, wonderful icons, alluring paintings and massive constructions are all the belongings of every temple and they are standing quite majestically of every temple and they are standing quite majestically proclaiming the mastery of ancient art and architecture. Temples also have played a very responsible role as social agencies. They are providing labour, food, shelter, education and culture to the poor and needy apart from granting the soul care. To a student of history, a temple does not
remain merely as a place of veneration but they speak volumes of historical information. The economic prosperity of a Country in general and a specific dynasty in particular can well be judged by the number of temples that came into existence during their period. The technological expertise of that period can also be well ascertained from these temples. The art and architecture of these temples are also the measuring chords of that period's civilization and social status. Moreover, the Epigraphical details that are found on the walls of these temples are the real and original sources of information to write history and they also have unfurled several historical puzzles.

In the district of Thanjavur, TamilNadu, there are holy shrines, which were not actually constructed as the shrine for the worship of the Navagrahas. Except the Sooriyanar temple at Thirumangalakudi, all the other eight Navagraha temples were not constructed exclusively for the “Grahas” and installed in the temple as “Presiding deities”. But, after the seventh century A.D, the Saivite temples located in Thanjavur district and the Dharbaranyeswarar temple at Thirunallar, Karaikal, have gradually gained popularity and came to be known as the Sthalas for the worship of Navagrahas. All the nine grahas have either puranic or legendary association with these temples and the devotees began to attach equal importance and veneration in offering worship to the particular graha that has been installed with in the temple complex, housed in a separate shrine.
**Location:**

The Navagraha Sthalas in and around Thanjavur district have been located in the following places.

1. Sooriyanar Temple at Thirumangalakudi for the Sun or Sooriyan

2. Sri Kayilathanathar Temple at Thingalur for the Moon or Chandran

3. Sri Vaithiyanatha Swamy temple at Vaitheeswaran for Sevai or Angaragan

4. Sri Suvetharanyeswarar Temple at Thiruvenkadu for Puthan

5. Sri Abathsakayesar Temple at Alangudi for Viyazhan or Guru.

6. Sri Agneeswarar Temple at Kanjanur for Sukkiran

7. Sri Dharbaranyeswara Temple at Thirunallar for Sani or Saturn

8. Sri Naganathaswamy Temple at Thirunageswaram for Ragu

These Grahas are known in English as per the science of Astronomy and they are Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, The Moon's ascending node (Ragu) and the Dragon's descending node (Kethu).

Objectives:

The study has been carried out with the following objectives:

1. To study the sources available for understandings the general history of the nine temples and the Navagrahas housed in them.
2. To make an attempt to present the astrological association of the Navagrahas.
3. To present the history of the Navagraha temples along with certain aspects of the main temples.
4. To present the puranic association of the Navagrahas with each temple respectively.
5. To study the astrological aspects associated with each graha.
6. To study the Poojas, festivals, mode of worship, Pariharas and other agamic rites and rituals associated with each graha.
7. To draw some conclusion based on the factors studied on different aspects of the chapters.
Chapter Scheme:

To justify the cited objectives, and also for the sake of convenience, the entire study has been divided into thirteen chapters. They are:

I Chapter is of Introduction

II Chapter presents a detailed list of both primary and secondary sources available for the study. Some of the sources are cited which are used to understand the general history, as well as the temples of Thanjavur district.

III Chapter exclusively defines the aspects of Navagrahas and their association with the Science of Astrology.

CHAPTERS IV to XII, discuss in detail the various aspects of each Navagraha temple along with certain vital aspects of the main temples where the Navagrahas have been housed.

Chapter XIII is of Findings, Conclusion and Suggestion.

At the end of chapters, a Bibliography has been appended along with the required appendices.

Delimitation:

As the topic selected for the research involves the study of nine temples called “The Navagraha Temples”, there is a need to carefully focus the attention mainly on the details associated with Navagrahas, their origin, purana, their fortunes, Rasi or House of each graha,
astrological aspects, thoshas and pariharas, hence, the study on Art, Architecture, Sculpture and Iconographical details could not be studied. Moreover, except the Sooriyanar temple at Thirumangalakudi, all other Navagraha temples are not independent or temples exclusively built for the Navgrahas. Hence, this delimitation has become a must to confine the study only with the Navagrahas housed in the respective main temples.

**Methodology:**

Descriptive, Critical and analytical methods are followed in building up this work. Under the descriptive method, the general history of the temples are attempted. Through critical method, the astrological aspects of each graha and the sthala have been studied. By the analytical method, the puranic association of each graha and the sthala have been studied.