INTRODUCTION
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Tirunelveli district is situated between 8 05° and 9 30° of the northern latitude, and between 77 05° and 78 25° of the eastern longitude.¹ It is bounded by Virudhunagar district on the north, Thoothukkudi district on the east, Kanyakumari district on the south and Kerala state on the west.² It is a wide plain, a greater part of which forms the Thamirabarani river basin. The total geographical area of the district is 6,823 square kilometre.

The range of the Western Ghats bounding on the west of the district forms a steady line from north to south and is covered with thick forests.³ The Pothigai hill is said to be the renowned abode of saint Agasthiar.⁴ From the watersheds of the Western Ghats, innumerable streams flow east and irrigate vast areas and plains. River Thamirabarani originates from the Agasthiar hills in the Western Ghats.⁵ The river Thamirabarani that rises on the mountainous range above Papanasam, flows between Tirunelveli and Palayamkottai before reaching the sea.⁶

5. Ibid., p.6.
The river Thamirabarani is of considerable influence over the area. It makes the land fertile. As an important landmark and perennial source of water to the people of Tirunelveli, the Thamirabarani was frequently mentioned as Tanporundam⁷ in the inscriptions of the Cholas, Mudikonda Chola peraru⁸ in the inscriptions of Chola-Pandya viceroyys, Mukti Kavahini⁹ Tanporundapperaru¹⁰ in the inscriptions of later Pandyas and Thamirabarani¹¹ in an epigraph of the early 16th century A.D.

Thamirabarani Mahatmiyam, a Sanskrit palm leaf manuscript of medieval period refers to various tirthas and temples on either banks of river from its origin to the destination. It contains numerous mythological stories connected with the tirthas and the temples referred to. It says that each tirtha is unique and has merits of its own. The other rivers that flow in this region are Chittar, Manimuttar, Virasuli, Sarugani, Kundar and Vaippar. However, the river Thamirabarani is a perennial source for the people of Tirunelveli and Thoothukkudi districts.

The earliest inhabitants of Tirunelveli were the Dravidians. The people of Tirunelveli can be divided into three major social groups such as

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8. Ibid., Vol. XIV, Nos.144 and 194.
10. Ibid., 1929-1930, No.400.
11. Ibid., 1929-1930, No.402.
the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins, and the depressed class people. Normally, the first two claim high position and status in the society.\textsuperscript{12}

Among the non-Brahmins, the Vellalas had a high position next to the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, they came next to the priestly class in the order of social precedence. An inscription\textsuperscript{14} states that the vellala residents looked after the temple lands and cultivation. They were the chief advisors to the Tirunelveli poligars. The Maravas were the men who were noted for their bravery. Most of the poligars and security guards of Tirunelveli belonged to the Marava community.\textsuperscript{15} The Senaithalaivas had a good position next to the Vellalas. The Nayakkars were a sect of Telugu speaking people who migrated to Tirunelveli during the Vijayanagar rule in Madurai.\textsuperscript{16} In the early times, the Nadars were ill-treated by the people of other communities and were treated as a depressed class in the society. After their association with the Christian missionaries, the social status of the Nadars had improved.\textsuperscript{17} The depressed class people were treated as untouchables. They comprised of Pallas, Paraiyars and Chakkilias.\textsuperscript{18} Tamil was the popular language of the majority of the people and a few spoke Telugu.

The soil in the district is either red or black. The northern part of the region consists of the black-loam and the southern part consists of red-loam. The black-soil is of high value when compared to the red. In the erstwhile Tirunelveli district, in the Taluks of Tiruchendur, Srivaikuntam and Nanguneri, there are wind-swept sand dunes that at times look like small hillocks.

The wide sea-shore is filled partly with pure white soil and partly with a peculiar red soil piled up in great dunes known as teris. The teri region spreads around Nazereth and Tiruchendur. The vast water resources, known as tarwais in these sand-dunes, are judiciously tapped and utilized for cultivation. The region also abounds in palmyra palms.

Tirunelveli is an open region where cotton is largely cultivated on black-soil, though a considerable extent of land is still barren. The fertility of the black-soil has helped rich cotton cultivation, leading thereby to economic prosperity of the region. Srivaikuntam taluk, on the north-eastern part of the district, has black-soil, where cotton is grown extensively. Pearl-fishery is one of the important occupations in the Thoothukkudi coast and the men involved in it are more able-bodied and athletic than the ordinary people.

The major caste groups, Brahmins, Vellalars, Maravars, Nadars and the depressed people constitute about eighty per cent of the total Hindu
population of this district. The remaining twenty per cent consists of very small groups of artisans (Kammalar), writers (Kanakkar), weavers (Kaikolar), potters (Kushavar or Kulalar), barbers (Ambattar), washer-men (Vannar) and others. Muslims and Paravas are two minority groups. Thus, the social structure in Tirunelveli district is so complex and the social relations are so confusing that there is not only a lack of solidarity among the inhabitants but also riots very often. The cultivation is made on both wet and dry lands. Palmyra trees provide them with some occupation.19

At the time of drought, famine, flood and disease, the people suffered very much. Their food was very simple and most of the poor people took porridge or kanchi.20 Majority of the people of Tirunelveli are Hindus and worship different gods. Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions and has over 900 million adherents. It is not a single doctrine and has no single founder or teacher.

Hinduism originated in the Indus Valley around 2500 B.C. At present, about 80% of the Indian population regard themselves as Hindus. The Hindus believe in a universal eternal soul called Brahma, which manifests itself in everything, including Siva, Vishnu, Brahma, Sakti, and various deities. All living creatures are also considered as different manifestations of Brahma. The Hindus believe that existence is a

cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. They believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and it is always dependent on how the previous life was lived.

The *Vedas* are the most ancient religious Hindu texts and they constitute one of the main foundations of Hinduism. The Hindus believe that these texts were received by sages directly from God and transmitted to the succeeding generations by word of mouth. They celebrate many religious functions, like the Festival of Lights (*Diwali*), which are based on the astronomical conjunctions of the celestial bodies.

Hinduism has many philosophical schools and systems of belief, one challenging the other. So, often one gets confused with the availability of multiple answers to the same question and the presence of numerous ways that it suggests to one who seeks it for upliftment. Many are tempted to think that Hinduism is a religion of rituals and archaic practices. But when one overcomes this initial confusion and gets to taste its real essence, one would realize that Hinduism is a composite phenomenon.
Hinduism consists of different cults and practices having their origin in different ethnic groups as well as different geographical regions. In fact, it is a discipline that allows many religious sects like Saivam, Vaishnavam and many others to coexist, thus sharing a common *dharma* (discipline), permitting many philosophies - at times mutually exclusive. It is not a religion of mere postulations. It is a system, the concepts of which are based either on logic or on experience.

Hinduism is the religion which suits both the adventurous intellectual who wants to explore the essence and the real truth and the simple person who would be happy to follow a simplified procedure that would easily uplift without understanding the deep philosophies. It is like a roaring gigantic waterfall that runs into streams and substreams, which later join and finally reach the ocean. The courageous thinkers could go to the origin of the magnificent waterfall to explore and share the feeling with others, while those who do not want to get bewildered by that route could quench their thirst from one of the streams flowing from there. All in-between could go upto the point to satisfy themselves that the streams are from the trunk and reach the same ocean. The problem comes when the simple one gets scared of the roaring complexities of Hinduism and the adventurous one sees only the narrow running stream. It is a problem of improper application but not a problem of the system itself.
Though Hinduism is knowledge and experience supported religion, the ancestors thought of the need to record some of the important moments in the history. This history is in the form of puranas and ithihasas. The word purana means old and ithihasa means history. They refer to events that happened in the past years.

The history told in the puranas and ithihasas has the information as to who were the key people lived in various points of time, especially the sages and the kings and their remarkable achievements. These texts, apart from providing the mere information, also serve as the source that inspires people about the heroes of the past. They narrate the good and the evil of the past, so that people could take forward the contours of positive growth and keep away the errors.

The puranas are eighteen in number. There are also an equal number of sub puranas. (upa-puranas). They talk about the happenings of the ancient days. These historical times are in terms of many yugas (multi thousand years), chaturyugas (four such yugas is one chaturyuga), manvantara and kalpa. It would be a very difficult task and at times impossible to assign a fixed date for these happenings. Puranas came through various sources and were compiled by sage Vedavyasa. The importance that is given to the history and these puranas in Hinduism is obvious by the fact that some part of the puranas is read out as part of the
daily worship in the temples along with the *vedas*. The knowledge of the ancient past was spread mainly through the word of mouth by the individuals called *pauranikas*. So, apart from the original theme, much interpolation in the passing process could also be found in them.

It has the narration of incidents at two moments in this *chaturyuga*. They are two in number. One is the *Ramayana* sung by Valmiki and the other is the *Mahabharata* by Vedavyasa. Of these, the *Ramayana* narrates the story of *dvaparayuga*. The current *yuga* is *kaliyuga*. Though they elaborately talk about a war each, the precursor to the war and the scenario after that, they give an account of the previous kings who ruled and their deeds. The later epic, *Mahabharata* tells about the post war history upto the beginning of the current *kaliyuga*. How are these data scientifically captured? Hindus, who are well known for their astronomy from very old times, have marked the celestial positions of the planets as a way of pinpointing the time.

The different periods of Hinduism did not have a single consolidated documented history. However, the history of many of the glorious personalities was well written. There are numerous such biographies that talk about the social and political set up during those periods. Apart from these, the kings had the inscriptions made on stones and copper plates that briefly tell about special events like the construction of temples during the
reign of those kings. These clearly mentioned the year in which the event happened. Given the robustness of these materials, the recordings withstand time for many centuries. So, these serve as the historic evidences and help in determining the dates of other contemporaries using the references mentioned in them.

The second millennium was a dark period, because the land in which Hinduism was glittering gloriously was attacked by the Muslim invaders. Much of the well-matured culture and glory were put into shambles and forgotten. The vibrant open discipline, which was highly advanced spiritually and philosophically in the peaceful past, had to defend itself against the continuous wave of attacks. As this period was really too long, many of the Hindus on the forefront had to shelve the knowledge of the past and just pick some simple abstracts out of them to survive as Hindus even in the hostile environment.

The *sanatana dharma* (eternal discipline) through its journey has seen at one point, a religion that was spread throughout the world. But now it got confined to the land of Indian sub-continent and even there it had glorious as well as troublesome periods. The supreme bliss, viz., the great truth of this *dharma* becomes available in its pure form to all the seekers throughout the world.
Saivam is the religion that worships Lord Shiva. Saivam, a very old religion in the Hindu family of religions is very rich in its philosophies. With its vivid branches very well integrated in its roots, it becomes the feast, oxygen and life of many philosophers. With philosophy standing on the great Vedantic and Siddhantic strong bases, it presents to its followers the great paths to the blissful supreme called Siva.

In Saivam, there are many doctrines called Saiva Siddhantham, Kashmira Saivam, Vira Saivam, Vedanta Saivam besides many others. These are the contributions of many scholars who prospered under this Saiva discipline. Saivam is one of the most reputed disciplines of sanatana dharma. For most of the Saivites, apart from the vedas, the agamas are scriptures of importance. The Saivites worship the Supreme as Formless, Symbol and as many forms that lead to the ultimate attributeless Supreme.

The Supreme Siva, who stands immeasurable, stands beyond the limits of time, enacting the five deeds (pancha krityam), enjoying completely in the self, uplifting the one who worship. That God and its glory are too immense to be described in detail for anybody. It stands beyond the limits of sex to be described as He, She or It. It is the Absolute which is not born out of anything else. It stands as the pillar of flame with innumerable facades. Many are the philosophies that look into few of those facades praising their glory in the ways they can.
This work is an attempt to speak about the splendour of that Supreme Luminance called Lord Siva from the perspective in which it is seen. Sure, the speech about that glory will never end, but it is a great desire to talk about Him that motivates this work. It is needless to say that there can be no complete index to the holy paths of Saivam. But it is a glimpse of the glory of Pasupati who comes to us because of His unlimited grace liberating us. If that supreme lord Siva has to be described flawlessly, it is possible only by that lord himself. But Lord Siva who is praised as the Asutosha, the fast pleased, accept this offer to His pleasure as a fragrant flower nice for His feet, guiding through this effort of offering. A salutation to His feet is the ultimate goal.

Religion and philosophy are so inextricably blended in the tamil minds that it is too hard to dissociate one from the other. The Saiva Siddhanta is more a philosophy than a religion. This school of philosophic thought is purely Tamilian, and in the closing years of his ever busy life, Professor Max Muller advised the western orientalists to delve in the queries of Tamil philosophy which, he believed, would bear ample fruit.

The Saiva Siddhanta teachings are enshrined in the four ancient Tamil Marais and Agamas. When these Tamil writings found their watery grave as a whole or in part, their translations, recollections, and main teachings were attempted by the post diluvial immigrants, and these came
to be transmitted to posterity as their own without any acknowledgement. They were unquestioned till the 12th century A.D. Sankara's revolutionary philosophy and the decline of Buddhism and Jainism woke up the Tamil philosophic minds from its masterly inactivity. Meikandar took up the task of collecting and arranging the *Siddhantic* teachings and confined them in his *Sivagnana Bodham*. The thoughts were ancient, but their garb was new and largely Aryan. This fact has led many scholars to fancy that Meikandar's work was but a translation of the twelve *slokas* in *Pava Vimochanam* of the *Rourava Agamas*.

According to tradition, Siva revealed the philosophy to Nandi who, in his turn, handed it to sage after sage, till Meikandar rose to give them fixity in his laconic Tamil verse. Neither the invocatory nor the introductory stanza acknowledges the author's obligation to any Aryan original, and the absence or omission of such an acknowledgement cannot have been intentional, when the point is viewed in respect of the author's integrity or of the pride of authors in case of translations from vaunted originals in the alleged divine tongue. The *Meikanda Sastras* are fourteen in number composed by four men namely, Meikandar, Arulnandhi, Umapathi, and Marai Gnana Sambhandar.
The *Saiva Siddhantam* recognises three eternal entities, God, Soul, and Matter (action) and the dependence of the latter two on the first or prime mover. Life is a probation. The soul of man works up to the Master Soul or becomes gross. By good deeds done in a series of births, by contemplation and meditation, the grossness of the body gets lacerated, as it were, and its sublimation in the long end terminates in its liberation. The *Saiva Siddhantist* looks to *arul* or siva’s grace for such ultimate liberation.

God, according to Saivism, is both *Nirguna* and *Personal*. The word *nirguna* means that God has none of the mayavic *gunas* known as *satva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which are within the range of limitation, and does not mean that God has no attribute. It means *gunathitha* or beyond guna or matter. Both words imply what is non-material and therefore pure *chit* and pure being. The special characteristic of God, according to *Saiva Siddhanta*, consists in His possession of eight attributes, which are (1) self-dependence, (2) purity, (3) self-knowledge, (4) omniscience, (5) sinlessness, (6) graciousness, (7) omnipotence and (8) bliss. These attributes of God are included in *sat* and *chit… sat* is Being and *chit* is Intelligence… According to *Saiva Siddhanta*, God is personal, as meaning True Being (*sat*) both concrete and spiritual, a living being… God is True Being and Intelligence. *Sivagnana Botham* contains the shortest definition of God as Siva-*sat* or *chit-sat*. *Sat* denotes God, a Pure Being, in which
aspect He can never reach us. Chit or arul or Love denotes His aspect in which He can approach us and we can know Him. Sat is the sun which we can never comprehend. Chit is the Light, one ray of which is enough to remove our darkness and enlighten us, but for that one ray of light we can never know the sun...Sivagnana Botham, Sutra XI, ends by saying 'This underlying love will unite it (the soul) to His Feet (Lord).' This underlying love is the fourth and highest kind of love called 'Theevithathara,' by possessing which the soul gives up the love of the world entirely and loves the Lord alone fully. If a man possesses this kind of love, he will get the Divine Bliss.

From among the various schools of Saiva philosophy, five systems of thought stand out as conspicuous. They are represented by (1) the Saiva Idealists, (2) the Saiva Pantheists, (3) the Saiva Trinitarians, (4) the Saiva Unitarians, and (5) Qualified Saiva Monists. The Saiva idealists, such as Sankaracharya and others, hold that Atman, known as Brahma or Siva, is the only real being and that the rest, which appears as the Universe and individual souls, is an illusion called maya or ignorance. The Saiva pantheists seem to consider all the Vedic gods as equal and identical in all respects and to regard their names as but synonymous. The Saiva Trinitarians consider that there are three important gods: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Rudra, the destroyer; the other gods
being subordinate to these three. Any one of the gods may be worshipped, and through His grace, the samsara can be got rid of.

The Saiva Unitarians regard the above three gods as one and the same god with three functions to perform. Lastly, there come the qualified monists who form the large portion of the Saivaite population in India. According to them, Samba-Siva (Siva with His consort Amba, our mother) is the supreme or eternal being, possessed of all good and auspicious qualities par excellence and of the transcendental nature of intelligence, pure and happiness. He is a personal God and has His body made up of the two categories of chit and achit.

Owing to the effects of their earlier actions, the individual souls get involved in the samsara, from which, however, they are finally freed, solely by the study of the Jnanakanda of the vedas and of the Jnanapatha of the Agamas. For, the performance of rites alone, as laid down in the Karmakanda of the Vedas, does not, for certainty, enable anybody to attain moksha. In the later phases of this (Saiva) faith, the rituals are relegated to the background, while Bhakti, gnana, and Yoga are elevated to the highest place. This characteristic is fully manifested in that form of faith, called the Vira Saivam. An accurate knowledge of things may be obtained by ten means: perception, inference, comparison, authority, implication, prosperity, rumour, impossibility, reversion, and association.
This has resulted in the externalised form of worship by which awareness is created in the individual about the existence of something more sublime and real than perishable things that are seen around him - may be a superior being that controls and guides the whole universe. Those with a spiritual bent of mind get impetus and inspiration from the temples for further progress in their spiritual pursuit.

Temples serve the purpose of teaching the people who go there to offer worship, the grand principle that all that in cosmos can be seen in a human being. Thirumoolar says temples are therefore to be considered more as places intended for thanks giving, than as mere centres intended for worship.

Temples are the main stay and backbone of the Hindu religion. “Live not in a place devoid of temples” is a common dictum. The word ‘temple’ through its Latin root ‘templum’ originally signified any holy enclosure. It is exactly a place where Deivam, God, the supreme spirit dwells. It is an abode of gods, a place of worship for devotees, a centre of socio-cultural festivities and a place of philosophical disclosures.21 Thus, temples are not only a society’s religious interest but cultural, social, political and economic institutions worshipping gods in temple infuses

divinity and purity in the heart of devotees. It provides a link between man and god and the earthy life and divine life.

The Saiva Nayanmars and the Vaishnava Alwars popularized the love of god and temple worship. The tamil kings of medieval period constructed the monumental temples to fulfil the religious aspirations of the people. The temple is a literal storehouse of the life of the people and without the knowledge of it, the knowledge of life is incomplete.

Further, there was a general conception among the early people that godly element was actively at work in places of natural beauty. Hence, tree was sacred to the tamils, because, it was the abode of spirits and gods. They even believed that gods used to reside in the hollow of trees. Deivam, cernta, pararai, vembu, alamar, kadavul, alamar celvar and kadam pamar celvan clearly indicate the association of gods with trees. Besides many other trees like arasu (pipal), iratti (zizphus), pala (Jack), vakai (albizzia), vanni (porsophis) and vengai (peterocarpus) were also worshipped as the abodes of spirits and gods.

23. Purananuru, 52.
27. Paripadal, 8; 126.
The prominent gods of the Tamils namely Siva and Vishnu are associated with the banyan tree. These help us to suggest that the practice of worshipping trees as abodes or resting places of gods was in vogue among the early Tamils. To safeguard the place of worship, they had roofed galleries or raised enclosure walls around the place of worship.

The Hindu religion has continued to be an inexhaustible and powerful living force on account of its four effective vehicles viz., (1) philosophy (2) epics (3) mythology and (4) rituals. Each of these aspects has been carefully made simple and concrete and brought down to the level of the ordinary man. Of these, rituals continue to play an important role in educating the common man in matters, religious and spiritual. It can be said that the institution, the temple worship, is mainly responsible for popularising the great truths propounded by ancient sages.

God, according to Hindu religion, has several forms and cosmic functions and each form is made to function as a symbol that can be understood both by the ordinary as well as the enlightened persons. Various gods and goddesses have thus come to be worshipped in temples.

The symbol of each god or goddess may be considered as conventional but the fact remains that its cosmic function is an unassailable truth. An ardent devotee who offers worship at a temple regularly is enabled in due course to think deeply of the symbol and is rendered fit to realize by intuition the reality of which the image is the symbol. His realization will become complete only on realizing how the supreme god manifests in the form of many gods and goddesses. The supreme god is like the ocean when He is *Nirguna Brahman*, while He is like the ocean with waves when He is *Saguna Brahman*. As *Saguna Brahman*, he assumes many forms. It is this far-reaching principle that underlies the worship of various Gods and Goddesses in temples. The various festivals in the temple are also based on high principles. They provide not only a relaxation from the routine work but also promote religious fervour and craze for spiritual enlightenment. The idol is a sign and symbol for the worship of the incomprehensible divine being. Hinduism knows well, the utility as well as the limitations of idol worship. It holds that the idol is not the supreme but only stands for the supreme.

Name and form are inseparable and the mind is so constituted that it lays hold of the lord in the first instance only through the help of names and forms. The presence of an image helps us to attain the mental concentration and peace of mind required for spiritual *sadhanas*. By
consecrating the image with appropriate *mantras*, it becomes a store-house of spiritual power from which a stream of grace can flow to the soul of the devotee. By and by, he is enabled to contemplate the Lord in the image as being one with us. The significance and value of image worship is thus justified.

Idol worship cannot be considered defective or meaningless. Latest scientific theories indicate that a devotee's soul gets attuned to the proper wave-length in either and recaptures and experiences the intensity of spirituality that is ever present around the idols. As sound that is once created never dies, the hymns rendered by great saints, while paying their obeisance before the idols, remain immortal by divine grace. It is to preserve these and waves, that the sanctums of temples are so cleverly built. According to this view, *Nayanmars* and *Alwars* were able to perceive God in the idols which virtually spoke and communicated with them. Devotion to God by the distinguished *Bhakthas* had reached such a peak of inebriation and ecstasy that they assumed the attitude of *Prema* and even sympathised with God's imaginary sufferings.

*Kannapanayanar*'s attitude and experience may be quoted as an example in this connection. Much depends, therefore, on the attitude of the devotee, God may be seen in nature, in living beings, among devotees in one self and in images in temples.
Idol worship is indeed a boon to the soft-minded people who require something concrete and tangible to cling to and worship. It is, therefore, an invaluable aid to the devotees both literate and illiterate to rise from the visible to the invisible, to understand and grade it and ultimately to realise it. By having prescribed idol worship, Hinduism has only stooped to conquer.

_Yantras_ are placed under the images to acquire a lot of mystical power. Just as a motor car is useful for travel, only if the machine in the car is in proper working order, the image becomes effective only if a _yantra_ (a metallic plate with chakras or mystical diagrams inscribed on it) is placed under it, duly consecrated. The _yantra_ is kept potent and powerful by performing rituals regularly in regard to the image as prescribed by _agamas_. As metal gets polished when rubbed, the _yantra_ and image acquire power and force by chanting of appropriate _mantras_. The enormous power and force thus acquired, is collected and preserved in the temple. A lot of cyclic force is thus being generated and stored in temples for the benefit of people.

In some of the temples, the tanks are surrounded with colonnades and spacious _mandapas_ which afford ample room for the sojourn of the pilgrims visiting the shrine from distant places. "In case of smaller temples, the tanks are situated outside but as close to the shrine as possible. The
preservation of the temple gardens and the rearing of large trees and flowering plants therein purify the air in the locality. Not to speak of the sanitary advantages, there is the additional beauty and elation of the spirit that is afforded to us at beholding such spacious and ornamental structures".

Temples for same gods are constructed in various places in different names. It is believed that, the worship of different Gods in same name at different places will easily offer heavenly bliss. Following this general principle in Tirunelveli District, the Pancha Sivathalangal are constructed for lord Siva in favour of Panchapoothangal. The Panchapoothangal are soil, water, air, fire, and sky\textsuperscript{31}. The Panchapoothathalangal are Sankarancoil (soil), Tharukapuram, (water), Thenmalai (air), Karivalamvandha Nallur (fire), and Devadanam (sky).

Lord Siva is a cosmic dancer. His cherished bravery has been the out-come of the History of the Attaveerattathalangal. They are serially known as, Thirukkandioor Veerattam, Thirukkadavoor Veerattam, Thiruvathikai Veerattam, Thiruvaluvoir Veerattam, Thirupparialoor Veerattam, Thirukkovaloor Veerattam, Thirukkurugai Veerattam and Thiruvirkudi Veerattam. Like that, Sapthavidathalangal have also equal importance in Saiva cult; saptha means seven. Vidankar means suyambu

\textsuperscript{31} Purananuru, 2.
(not man made). They are Thiruvaroor, Thirunakaikaronam, Thirunallaru, Thirukkaravasal, Thiruvaymoor, Thirukkuvalai, and Thirumaraikkad. Panchavarnathalangal, are also considered in this manner. They are Thirukkarukavoor, Thiruvalivanalloor, Thiruarathipperumboli, Thiruirumpoolai and Thirukkollamputhur. Pancha Aranya Thalangal, serially known as Thirukkarukavoor, Audivandloor, Alangudi, Kollamputhur, Arithuvaramangalam also have equal importance. In Kerala also, the three places namely Vaikam, Ettumanur, and Kaduthuruthi are of great religious importance. In Kanyakumari district on the eve of Sivaratri, the devotees of lord Siva run to twelve temples uttering the name of Mahavishnu as Gopala and Govindha. This peculiar marathon race is known as *Sivalaya Ottam*.\(^{32}\)

The twelve temples are serially known as Thirumalai, Thikkurichi, Thirparappu, Thirundikkarai, Ponmanai, Pannipagam, Kalkulam, Melamcode, Thiruvindaicode, Thiruvithancode, Thirupantricode and Thirunattalam.\(^{34}\) The nine Siva temples under study signify nine planets. They are Papanasam (Sun), Cheranmahadevi (Moon), Kodaganallur (Mars), Kunnathoor (The Moon in ascending node), Murappanadu

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(Jupiter), Srivaikuntam (Saturn) Thenthirupperai (Mercury), Rajapathi (The Moon in descending node) and Chernthapoomangalam (Venus).\textsuperscript{35}

The Vaishnavites also followed this method to worship their lord namely Maha Vishnu. There are five postures of lord Vishnu. They are standing, sitting, reclining, rising and walking. Like the Saivites, the Vaishnavites also worship lord Vishnu at nine places signifying nine planets, such as Srivaikuntam (Sun), Natham (Mars), Thiruppuliangudi (Moon), Perumkulam (Saturn), Thulaivillimangalam or Erattai Thiruppatti (The Moon in ascending node and The Moon in decending node), Thenthirupperai (Venus), Thirukkaloor (Mercury) and Alwar Thirunagari (Jupiter).\textsuperscript{36} On Vaikunda Ekadasi, the devotees of lord Vishnu throng in large number to worship at the Navathirupathis serially, whereas on sivaratri day, the Saivites visit the \textit{Navakailasam} temples to worship lord Siva.

The main purpose of the study is to make known to the scholars of the world the name and fame of the Siva temples. Nowadays, these temples are familiar to the laymen also. On Sivaratri day and on most of the Sundays, the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation arranges buses to the devotees to worship these temples.

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\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 10.
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Except one or two of these temples, the name and fame of the remaining temples has not been sung by any of the Thevaram trios. All the chapters of this thesis explain the growth and development of Saivism in and around the temples. Tirunelveli is at the core of the growth of Saivism and the classical language Tamil. The topic not only has its historic importance, but also has socio-religious signification.

In the *Navakailasam*, lord Siva is installed representing the nine planets. They are serially known as Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, the moon in ascending node and the moon in descending node. Astrology is built up around these nine planets. It is crystal clear that, astrology is the by-product of astronomy. Each planet has its influence in the life of human beings for a stipulated period. The said cyclic period varies from planet to planet. Sun for six years, Moon for ten years, Mars for seven years, the moon in ascending node for eighteen years, Jupiter for sixteen years, Saturn for nineteen years, Mercury for seventeen years and the moon in descending node for seven years and Venus for twenty years.

The Papanasam temple is a peculiar one, where all are permitted to atone their sins. The starting point of a river is particularly known as *Nathimoolam*.\(^{37}\) It has its own auspicious importance. The river

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Thamirabarani originates from the Pothigai hills. Saint Agasthiar who has received the blessings of lord Siva at Thamirabarani river in the locality is salubrious. At Cheranmahadevi, there are numerous temples in support of Hinduism. Cheranmahadevi is familiarly called Dakshinakanchi.

Cheranmahadevi, Sri Kailasanathar temple, second one in the serial of Navakailasam is popularly known as Ammanancoil. It has deep religious significance. Here a festival is held during the Tamil month of Markazhi and it is generally called as Mahavithipagam and has some socio-religious importance. For, the people believe that, on that particular day the rivers such as Ganges, Yamuna, and Godavari mingle together with Thamirabarani. It is a rare festive occasion as far as South India is concerned. Kodaganallur, the third Siva temple is a summer resort. It is a place for Mars. Those who are suffering due to the malignant influence of Mars visit this temple and seek the blessings of Mars through lord Kailasanathar at Kodaganallur. Kunnathoor is very famous for the moon’s ascending node or raghu and popularly called Raghusthalam.

The alluvial red soil of the place is known as chenkani and later it is called as chankani. The Siva temple at Murappanadu is the fifth one among the nine and is dedicated to Jupiter or Guru. There is a proverb in Tamil, “The sight of Guru will atone at least one crore sins.”

There are ten temples at Murappanadu, and in the revenue records the place is familiarly described as *pathucoil* Murappanadu. At Agaram near Murappanadu, the ten incarnations of lord Vishnu are carved in a single stone and the temple is known as *Dasavatharacoil*. It can be compared with the *Dasavatharacoil* in Gujarat. It also reveals the unity of Saivism and Vaishnavism, the two streams of Hinduism. Srivaikuntam is a popular place in which the Kailasanathar temple is situated. It is the sixth among the nine in the series of *Navakailasam*. Srivaikuntam is also one of *Navathirupathis*. The poet Laureate Srikumaraguruparanar, a dumb by birth, became a great poet on the blessings of Goddess Kali, another incarnation of Parvathi, the consort of lord Siva. Sri Kumaraguruparanar, a poet Laureate, wrote *Kailaikalambagam*, in which he addressed his birth place Srivaikuntam as *Vaikunthakailai*. Just like Srivaikuntam, at Thenthirupperai also there is a temple for the Vaishnavites. Thenthirupperai is a peculiar place for the planet Mercury, who overlords education. Out of the nine places, at Rajapathi alone there is no temple. Due to natural calamities, the temple at Rajapathi is dilapidated as a result of continuous rainfall and cyclone. Any how the idols and auspicious remnants are found in and around Rajapathi in a few places such as Poraiyoor, Marukal, Vaikkakarai, Thenthirupperai, and Ottapidaram have reminiscences of the Rajapathi Sri Kailasanathar temple and they can be seen even now. Finally, the place Chernthapoomangalam, popularly called
as Cherthamangalam, an icon has been installed for Venus technically known as *Sukkiran*.

*Sivaratri* is the one and only holy night for lord Siva, whereas there are *Navaratri*, the nine holy nights for His consort Sakthi, who has many incarnations such as Lakshmi, Saraswathi and Parvathi. Three equal nights are for each of the three Goddesses, for three characters such as *Satva*, *Rakshatha*, and *Thamatha*. On *Sivaratri* day, the devotees of lord Siva walk from through the nine temples, barefootedly as the devotees run from one Siva temple to eleven others in *Sivalaya Ottam* in Kanyakumari district even now.\(^{40}\)

The Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation operates special buses on *Sivaratri* day, to enable the devotees to visit the *Navakailasam*. Besides, on all Sundays, buses are plying through the *Navakailasam* temples to help the pilgrims to see the nine temples easily. The name and fame of the *Navakailasam* are becoming popular day by day due to the increase of religious fervour among the people of Tamil Nadu. Tirunelveli is quite unique in Tamil Nadu and it is the core of the growth of Saivism and the Dravidian language Tamil. Temples act as learning centres for the community. The *Navakailasam* offer food, cloth and shelter to the devotees of Tamil Nadu.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p.9.
The nine temples are situated in different places in Tirunelveli and Thoothukkudi districts. The temples are in Ambasamudram, Tirunelveli and Thoothukkudi Taluks, and hence the area is very vast. They are all constructed on the banks of the river Thamirabarani otherwise called Porunai.\(^{41}\)

It is not easy to infer the period in which the temples were built. However it is seen from some of the early inscriptions that the temples were constructed in the early Chola-Pandya period. The early Cholas paid their keen attention for the development and growth of these temples. The name Cheranmahadevi, the second one in the series of nine reveals the influence of Chera kings in that particular area. Later Vijayanagar rulers and their representatives in south India renovated the temples and contributed to the wealth of the temples.

Krishnappa Nayak (1563-73 AD), who was a representative of Krishna Deva Raya in the South India was the real protector of temples. He constructed a temple near Tirunelveli and the place has been named after him as Krishnapuram. This temple is an example for the best in temple art and architecture. During his stay in the southern part of the country, he renovated Siva temples at Murappanadu and Srivaikuntam. The constructions were based on the Nayak style of architecture.

\(^{41}\) Kambaranayanam, Kishkindha Kandam, Naadu Vitta Padalam (T), Poetry No.31, Kamban kazhagam, Chennai, 1977, p. 702
The origin of the nine temples as well as the story of Agasthiar and his principal disciple saint Uromasar is given in the next chapter, Legends and the Nine Sivalayams. However, each temple has some historical truth. Most of the temples carry the symbols of fish engraved in the halls. It deals with the Pandyan connection. Besides, local kings like Vallala Maharaja had played a vital role in the history of Murappanadu, fifth among the nine temples. In the Cheranmahadevi temple, second one in the serial, the influence of Kerala rulers can be seen. In Kunnathoor, the fourth among the nine, the role of Kunnathoor Maharaja is significant.

The nine Siva temples play a vital role in the inner minds of the Saiva people and Saiva Adiyargal. In the past, these temples played a vital role in the day-to-day life of the cross section of the society. Saivism, a part of Hinduism, and Tamil-language have simultaneously grown in Tirunelveli District.

The presentation of this thesis is somewhat different from other projects. As the people relate to ancient history, the mode of approach to write the thesis is somewhat different from the usual way of approach. Besides the historical data, the work is supported by personal interviews conducted at various places with different persons. Periodical field visits have paved the way to the research study of the temple.
The Navakailasam itself has a special meaning. It can be divided into Nava and Kailasam. As per the numerology nava means nine, and kailasam means the abode of lord Siva. Hence, Navakailasam in toto means nine sacred places of lord Siva. Saivism and Vaishnavism are the two main streams of Hinduism. It is a practice in vogue in the two major sects of Hinduism that the same God is to be worshipped in different names in different places on the same day. The very same principle is followed in Navakailasam too, where the same God is worshipped in the same name in the nine sacred holy places namely Navakailasam. Lord Siva is generally named as Srikailasananathar and his consort Parvathi is worshipped in the name of Sivakami, in the nine sacred places.

The map of the erstwhile Tirunelveli District (present Tirunelveli and Thoothukkudi Districts) explains the topographical features of the nine temples individually. For the location of these nine temples, a map is also attached along with bibliography.

Sources

The topic Navakailasam- a Historical Study is mainly based upon both primary and secondary data. Regarding primary sources, the inscriptions found in the temples and published by the Department of Archaeology in various phases helped a lot to describe the annals of the nine temples. The information furnished by them are highly valuable to
complete the thesis. The articles published in leading dailies both in Tamil and English and the Historical information taken from weekly, fortnightly, monthly, Quarterly, Bi-annual and Annual magazines are of immense help to write the thesis.

Frequent field visits to the nine temples helped me to collect a fund of materials. In the course of my field study, I contacted officials and local people of the area around the temples. The meritorious services rendered by the branches of the Saiva mutts titled as Esanamadams, constructed in the vicinity of the Siva temples gave a lot of information of the nine temples.

Chapterization

The thesis Navakailasam - A Historical Study has been framed into six chapters besides an introduction and a conclusion. In the introductory chapter, the origin and the historical importance of the Tirunelveli District and the origin and the historical background of the nine Siva temples are clearly dealt with. Besides, the geographical features and the historical importance are also taken into account for deep study. Besides, Saivism, one of the two streams of Hinduism and its branches are also clearly analysed in the first chapter, the Structure of the nine temples. The formation of the nine temples, the God and Goddess found in the nine temples, the historical importance and the sanctity of the places are dealt
with in the chapter. The legends of the nine Sivalayams clearly deal with the local details and the local history of the nine temples. In the chapter, Pujas and Festivals, the daily rites and ceremonies performed in the nine temples and the annual festivals conducted in the nine temples along with their monthly festivals are dealt with. In the chapter, Architecture and Culture, the forms of architecture adopted in the temples are clearly described. The Dravidian style of Architecture is strictly adapted in the nine Siva temples. Out of the nine temples, Papanasam, the first one has Rajagopuram with nine tiers. It has been constructed on the basis of the Dravidian style of Architecture. In the chapter Administration, the temple accounts’ procedures, salary of the employees of the temple etc. are given. Source of income, assets and liabilities of the temple and the procedure of election of committee members are clearly explained.

The chapter Temple and Society deals with the participation of the community in the various services of the temple. The role of saiva brahmins, vaishyas, cowherds, ariya musicians, carpenter, metal workers, and artists has been elaborated. In the concluding chapter, the influence of the study and the various views of the religious personalities regarding the nine temples are deeply discussed. A group of people add another four temples in the list of Navakailasam. It has also been dealt with, why the four temples are not included under the Navakailasam, in a detailed
manner with the support of suitable reasons and statements received from competent persons of the areas around those temples.

The primary duty and the ultimate goal of the students of History are to bring to light many hidden truths to the people. In this sense, I hope this study will enlighten the students of History.

So far, no one has done a detailed study about the Navakailasam. This is the first attempt to bring the matter to light.