Introduction
INTRODUCTION

The Tamil country popularly spelt as Tamilaham is the cultural heart of the Dravidian south. Kakkaipatiniyar, a Sangam poetess and *Tolkappiyam* defined the frontiers of Tamilaham as follows. The North, South, East and West bounded by Venkadam, Cape Comerin and the seas.¹ Tamilnadu (formerly Madras) is a state in South East India located on the Coromandel coast of the Bay of Bengal. It is bound by the Indian Ocean on the South, the Bay of Bengal on the East, the states of Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, surround Tamilnadu on the west, north west and north respectively. Its geographical location in the world map stretches from 8.5° Latitude in the south and 13.8° north to 77° Longitude in the west and 80.20° East.

The history of Tamilaham is an epic in itself. No other part of India had made such inestimable contribution to literature, architecture, sculpture and painting, music and dance, Science and philosophy. Religion is an important force which is considered to be the life line and wine of the people. It touches every aspect of human society and upholds moral and spiritual values of life.

In the religious history of Tamilnadu the age of Pallavas (probably from 6th to 9th century A.D.) gets an immortal place as the threshold of Bhaktism, while the Sangam period was the age of

¹*Tolkappiyam*: Cirappu Payiram, Lines 1-3.
religious tolerance, that of the Kalabhra was noted for the progress of heterodoxical sects like Jainism and Buddhism. With the advent of the Pallavas and early Pandyas as imperial powers, a movement for the revival of Saivism and Vaishnavism commenced under the inspiring start given by the Alvars and Nayanmars. With them Tamil devotionalism acquired fresh momentum and popularity. The hymnologist made a brilliant contribution to literature and philosophy. And at the same time they gave a death blow to non-Hindu religious sects. The Cholas (9th to 12th Century A.D.) were noted for the progress of Saivism and Vaishnavism. Yet they patronised other non-Hindu religious sects. Though Brahminism occupied a unique place there were several religious factions prevailed during that time.

There was a move to dislodge one by another. They did not co-operative with each other. They took to milder modes of conflict such as debates; quarrels, torture by words, ridiculing other sects, destruction of places of worship, confiscation, religious persecution, punishment, proselytisation and mild clashes etc. Fortunately in the name of religion there was no armed conflict as it happened in the west?

**What is Religion?**

Religion (Latin 'religio' means 'obligation', 'bond', 'reverence', ‘re-read’ or ‘reflected upon’ and is related to ‘superstition’) is an important phenomenon in historical studies. Will and Ariel Durant
writing of world history have a volume on the “Medieval History of Europe” that they call ‘The Age of Faith’. 2 ‘The Age of Reason’. 3 Reason is scientific and faith is spiritual. Faith is a belief. The Webster’s New Dictionary & Thesaurus says religion is a “system of faith and worship”. Religion has no synonym in this Dictionary. On the other hand “religious” (adjective of religion) has the following synonyms: churchgoing, consciousness, devotional, devout, divine, doctrinal, exact, faithful, fastidious, God-fearing, godly, holy, meticulous, pious, punctilious, pure, reverent, righteous, rigid, rigorous, sacred, scriptural, scrupulous, sectarian, spiritual, strict, theological, unerring and unswerving. The New International Webster’s Pocket Dictionary of the English Language (1997) defines religion as follows: “A belief in a divine or superhuman power or principle, usually thought of as the creator of all things; the manifestation of such a belief in worship, conduct etc. The belief in a superhuman controlling power especially in a personal god/gods entitled to obedience and worship.

Faith and belief could not stand the quest of reason and answer queries such as ‘why’, ‘when’, ‘how’ and so on.

The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics “clearly refers to certain characteristic types of data ie. “beliefs, practices, feelings, moods, attitudes etc”. 4

3 *Idem*.
In every religion, there is a dogma, scripture, philosophy, divinity (God/s/dess/es), mythology, ritual and worship.

Augustus Comte defined religion as a collective delusion, a symbolic thinking and un-understandable behaviour an imagination and powerful emotions.\(^5\) Emile Durkheim also an associate of Augustus defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices which are related to sacred things, which are united into one single moral community.\(^6\) Gerald says that religion had its birth in the fear of early man.\(^7\) Richard’s view is that religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man.\(^8\) Count Leo’s opinion is religion arose from attributing a spirit to various aspects of natural animism and arose from fear of the forces of nature.\(^9\)

The Oxford Dictionary of world Religions (1997) defined religion as follows ‘Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature; the heart of a heartless world, Just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is a daughter of hope and fear explaining to ignorance the nature of the unknowable.

E.V.R. Periyar says that religion is the poison of the society.\(^10\) According to Karl Marx religion is the moan of the oppressed

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\(^{6}\) *Idem.*


creature and certainly it is the opium of the people. He considers religion as a necessary reality or part of all classes. He holds the view that the primary functions of religion is to strengthen a class ridden society. Religion is “the belief in spiritual beings”. This definition which is cited by Stanley A. Cook brings two questions to the forefront: 1. origin of the belief, and 2. its validity for every individual.

Galloway says: Religion is “man’s faith in a power beyond himself whereby he seeks to satisfy emotional needs and gain stability of life and which he expresses in acts of worship and service”.

The significant terms involved in the definition of religion are ‘death’, ‘heaven’, ‘sacred’, ‘supernatural’ etc. Stanley A. Cook suggests when these are pursued logically man’s whole body of thought, both religious and non-religious, could be visualized. Religion finds a gulf between man and the ‘divine’ and man is absolutely dependant on a ‘higher power’. In course of a man’s mental or psychical growth, he could distinguish between what is and what is not religion. Individuals because of certain vicissitudes in their development cultivate certain belief that is called ‘religious’. Because of their experience, they are able to demarcate the religious with ‘non-religious’ and ‘anti-religious’.

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Table - 1
Basic Information on Various Religions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sacred Texts</th>
<th>Place of worship</th>
<th>Title of local leader</th>
<th>membership (no reliable measures)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>1500 BCE</td>
<td>The veda</td>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>828 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>523 BCE</td>
<td>The Tripitaka</td>
<td>Temple Vihar</td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>364 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tribal Religions</td>
<td>Prehistory</td>
<td>Oral tradition</td>
<td>In Nature</td>
<td>Shaman</td>
<td>232 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shamanism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>570BCE</td>
<td>Siddhantg pakrit (Angas)</td>
<td>Temple Pallis</td>
<td>Pandit</td>
<td>4.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sikhism</td>
<td>1500CE</td>
<td>Guru Granth sahib</td>
<td>Gurudwaras</td>
<td>Granthi (Professional)</td>
<td>23.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Confucianism</td>
<td>520BCE</td>
<td>Lun Yu</td>
<td>Shrine, Seovan</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>6.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>Torah, Talmud</td>
<td>Synagogue</td>
<td>Rabbi</td>
<td>14.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Taoism</td>
<td>550BCE</td>
<td>Tao-Te-Ching</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
<td>no consensus</td>
<td>Avesta</td>
<td>Atash Behram, Agiary</td>
<td>Mobed Dastur</td>
<td>2.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Shinto</td>
<td>500 CE</td>
<td>Kojiki Nohon Shoki</td>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>Priest</td>
<td>2.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>622CE</td>
<td>Quran and Hadith</td>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>Imam</td>
<td>1226 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>30CE</td>
<td>The Bible</td>
<td>Church, Cathedral, Mission</td>
<td>Paster, Priest</td>
<td>2039 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>no date</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>775 million 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 19 major world religions which are subdivided into a total of 270 large religious groups and many smaller ones.

Why is Religion?

For certain categories of human thought, the question “why” is inapplicable or could not be rationally explained. If one asks the

question why man eats food, the reply may be a silence. If scientifically viewed one may say man needs food for nourishment, growth of the body and for sustenance. Similarly, man needs religion to nourish the spirit. Religion has something to do with the psyche. The names of gods and their attributes may differ from religion to religion but God, the Ultimate Reality, has no name and form. In Hinduism, he is called Brahman “the Absolute” (not brahmana, one among the caturvarnas), celebrated in the Vedas, who is a neuter.

Religion is born in faith, love and fear. Unless one has an unbreakable faith in Siva or Vishnu he does not belong to that religion. It is intense love that binds one to a God.

The Alvars and Nayanmars who spearheaded the Bhakti movement in Tamilnadu, were fascinated by Siva or Vishnu, their tissues were pierced by the divine love of their personal God.\(^{13}\) and sang tens of thousands of hymns.\(^{14}\) In Bhakti ‘devotion’ and ‘love’ is the primary concern. A good example for devotion to God is Antal. Her love to Tirumal (Skt. Vishnu) was unparalleled.

Fear is the prime factor in certain cults. For example in several cases of the village deities, they are adored under fear that the God may cause harm to a man, house or village. Such malevolent spirits were deified and offered periodical \textit{pujas} and festivals, pleased with


\(^{14}\) Kandasamy, \textit{Tirumurai Ilakkiyam} (Tamil), Madras, 1996, pp.2-5.
which such gods do not cause any harm, instead shower plenty and prosperity. The **Pattini** cult is a good example.

Religion brings peace to a family, a village, a nation and the world at large. In India as well as Tamilnadu, people adhering to certain religious factions were concentrated in a pocket of a city or village and thereby assured peace. For example, Kancipuram was divided into Siva-kanci, Visnu-kanci and Buddha-kanci. Within their own circle, they enjoyed peace and at times one came into conflict with the other. The Saivas and Vaishnavas in Kanci were fighting regarding the boundary of their jurisdiction.  

To say simply, for a man tossed in worldly pleasures and pains a super-natural power in which he believes is the solace. That supernatural power may be a God or Goddess upon whom religion stands. A religion became a political force in course of the historical times and decided the fortunes of kings and kingdoms.

**Characteristic Features of Religion**

The foremost criterion for a religion is **God**. Next to God, **godmen** play a vital role. Each religion has a scripture. The scriptures are held in high esteem by all religious factions. They are equal to god himself. The anti to God in any religion is the devil. In Hindu mythology, gods (**devas**) find their revels and enemies in asuras.

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Religion is an institution. It has a territory and place for its accommodation. The place may be a village (Eg. Tatikkompu) or city (eg. Maturai). It is called *sthala* in Indian tradition. A temple or more temples are accommodated in *sthala*. The venue of the temple, encompassed within a *tirumati* ‘wall’ is called *ksetra*. The *sthala* and *ksetra* are set against an environment of natural beauty. To quote the Brhat Samhita. “The gods always play where groves are near, rivers, mountains and springs and in towns with pleasure gardens”.  

The *ksetra* has *Murti* or presiding god. It has a bathing ghat, called *tirtha*, which serves the purpose of ablution and the requirement of water for purification in the temple. Each temple has a tree called *sthalavrksa*. The temple is the residence of the God and placement for worship by the devotees. Moreover, it is a holy placement for pilgrimage that all religions accept. The temple has its own establishment, a high priest and assistants, and a staff for administration. There is no religion without a temple that being the place for worship, offering sacrifices and for festive celebrations. Besides, the temples served other purposes such as education to the mass, a library, an orphanage for the poor and a hospital for the sick. Affluent temples have monastic institutions, attached to them. These are called *mathas*; eg. Kancipuram, Srirangam and

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16 *Brhat Samhita*, 45.8; According to Swami Vivekananda the entire Bharata country is *Punyabhumī*, sacred land.
19 *Idem*.
20 *Idem*. 
Tiruvavatuturai. A **pontiff** heads the **matha**, He is called **acarya** ‘teacher’. They take of education, hospitals and orphanages. There may be several head of **mathas** as at Srngeri, Kanci, Tiruppanantal and so on but each one is an independent organization.

Those in charge of monastic institutions became god-men in course of time. The original founder of the Tiruvavatuturai **matha** is supposed to be Tirumular. Author of ‘**Tirumantiram**’. The founder of the four **Sankara-mathas** is believed to be the Adi sankara.\(^21\) Since the Vedic period, sages like Vyasa and Valmiki were held in venerable status. The Alvars, **Acaryapurusas** (eg. Ramanuja) and Nayanmars in Tamilnadu are so important that they are treated equal to Vishnu or Siva himself. Festivals are undertaken in their honour on their natal stars.

Another important requirement of a religion is ritual, worship and festivity. The Hindus perform domestic rituals from the conception of a baby in its mother’s womb to birth to death. The rules and regulations of these are laid down in the **grhasutras** (*grha* means house). Several rituals are performed in temples to the deity during **pujas**. Worship may be daily, called ‘**nityapuja**’. There are periodical offerings in month, called ‘**masotsava**’, or in a year, called ‘**samvatsarotsava**’, or over a cluster of years (eg. The **Mahamaham** at Kumbhakonam, celebrated once in twelve years). Depending on resources, the daily offering may take place once, thrice or six times a day. Periodical offerings are **utsavas** ‘festivals’. The most important

annual festival is called *Brahmotsava*. It takes place for a number of days, lasting from seven to thirty days.\textsuperscript{22} Several *mandapas* ‘pavilions’ came to be built in the temples for the celebration of festivals. The rituals, worship and festivals were performed for the well being of an individual, community, village or humanity at large.\textsuperscript{23} Another characteristic features of religion was magic and spells, performed for both good and bad.

The archaic religious systems that went on operating in the country since time immemorial were the following:

- **Saivism** (God Siva),
- **Vaisnavism** (God Vishnu),
- **Saktam** (Goddess Sakti or Devi),
- **Ganapatyam** (God Ganapati),
- **Kaumaram** (God Skanda-Murukan),
- **Sauram** (God Surya)

and Countless village gods and goddesses (e.g. Karuppanacami, Mariyamman, Mutyalamma and so on) all of which go under the common denominator, Hinduism.\textsuperscript{24} The higher religions are called *aruvakaiccamayam* ‘six religions’.\textsuperscript{25} The evidences of phallic worship, Yogisvara and Pasupati, the Mother Goddess and Mal

\textsuperscript{22} Raju Kalidos, *Temple Cars of Medieval Tamilaham*, Madurai, 1989, p. 222.

\textsuperscript{23} Idem.

\textsuperscript{24} Rabindranath Tagore's "*A Vision of India’s History*", Indian History Congress 66th Session, *Santiniketan*, Souvenir, 2006, p.12.

\textsuperscript{25} *Tevaram*: 3.337.6 talks of *arucamayankal*; *Tevaram*: 2.165.5 notes *irumunrucamayankal* (2x3=6 religions); The Kutumiyalamalai inscription of the later Pandiya period gives the phrase, *aruvakaiccamayam alakutantikala* ‘let the six religions prosper well’. 
(Vishnu) have been reported since the earliest stratum of Indian history in the Indus culture around 2500 BC. It is very difficult to say how old these religious systems are.

The *Manimekalai*, the second great Tamil epic written by Cittalai Cattanar, has an occasion to talk about the religious systems in ‘*Camayakanakkartan Tiran Kettakaatai*** that prevailed in the Tamil country around the 6th century AD. It talks about the various sectarian creeds and philosophies but fails to define what *camayam* ‘religion’ is. To have an interaction with the religious heads of the age, Manimekalai, the heroine of the epic, visited Vanci, the Cera metropolis of the Cankam age. The sectarians with whom she interacted were the following:

**Vaitikamarkkam**: The followers of the Vedas. It is said to have been nurtured by Vetaviyatan (Veda Vyasa)\(^{29}\) Kirutakoti (Kratakodi)\(^{30}\) and caimini (Jaimini).\(^{31}\) The ultimate authority to Vaitikavati is the Veda. (Infra Vedavati) later another sectarian called

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\(^{27}\) *Manimekalai*, 27 Camayakanakkartantiranketta katai.


\(^{29}\) Vettan Mani, *Puranik Index*, New Delhi, 1990, pp.885-888.

\(^{30}\) *Idem.*

Vedantavati came into being, meaning the Veda is anta ‘end’.

**Caivavati** : Those who hold Civan (skt; Siva)\(^\text{32}\) as the highest God.

**Piramavati** : Those who hold Brahma as the highest God; they believed that the cosmos was an egg laid down by Brahma.\(^\text{33}\)

**Vainavavati** : For them the ultimate God is Narayanan (Skt. Narayana / Vishnu). His glories are told in the *vishnu purana*, dated in the 5\(^{th}\) century AD.\(^\text{34}\)

**Vedavati** : For the Veda there is no beginning and end. Whatever the Veda says is the ultimate end.

**Acivakavati** : It is Ajivika (skt) a sub sect of Jainism. Its founder was *Markalitevan*. Its original founder was Gosala Maskariputra, a friend of Mahavira (599-527 BC) founder of Jainism.

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\(^33\) RKK Rajarajan, "The Two Rock-cut Temples at Tiruccirappalli", *South Indian History Congress Proceedings 23\(^{rd}\) Annual Session*, Tiruccirappalli 2003, pp. 568-571.

Nikantavati : It is *Nigranta*, another sect of Jainism. The God of this sect was Arukan who is worshipped by Indra. Their scripture consisted of the three *Angagamas*.

Cankiyavati : It is Sankhya (means ‘count’), a school of philosophy founded by the legendary Kapila. Isvarakrsna wrote its earliest canon, called *Sankhyakarika*, dated in the 4th century AD. It is one among the six systems of salvation, familiar in Hindu tradition.35

Vaicetikavati : It is *Vaisesika*. Its legendary founder was Uluka Kanada. They specialized in physics.

Putavati : It is *Bhutavada*. This system attaches importance to the pancabhutas in cosmic activities.

The *Manimekalai* talks of ten sectarian groups and ends with the statement that the religions are five, *aivakaiccamayam* cf. *aruvakaiccamayam*. It is because of the fact that Vedanta, Vaideka, Sankhya, Vaisesika and Bhutavada are systems of philosophy and not religions. Philosophy is schematization of knowledge. There may or may not be a place for God in it whereas there is no religion without

35 The six are Nyaya (analysis), Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. See A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, Calcutta, 1971, pp.325-331.
God. Similarly, Ajivika and Nikantavati is a sub-sect of Jainism and could not be counted as a separate religious faction. The principal religions counted are Saivism and Vaishnavism. Brahmavada could not be taken into serious account because there was no religion after Brahma. Saktam glorified in ‘Cilappatikaram in its Vettuvavari’, Kaumaram glorified in ‘Tirumurukarruppatai’ and ‘Paripatal’, Ganapathyam appearing in Tevaram and Sauram appearing in Cilappatikaram do not receive the summation of religions in Manimekalai’s aivakaiiccamayam. It should be noted that it was in the Cera country that the worship of Devi as Pattinitevi was crystallized by Cenkuttuvan after his legendary expedition to the North to bring a boulder for carving an image of Kannaki. Kannaki came to be identified with Durga, Kali and Mahisasuramardini in the Tiruvilaiyatarpuranam. Vanci being the base of Pattini cult, Manimekalai, fails to talk about Saktam and Murukan, celebrated in Cankam works. Buddhism fails to come within the purview. Actually speaking, Buddhism and Jainism were nastika (atheist). The Buddha and Mahavira did not speak of god. Later they themselves were deified and a pantheon evolved for each religion.

Religion in Tamilnadu Before the 6th Century A.D.

Before the 6th century AD, Tamilnadu was under the aegis of Cankam rulers and the Kalabhras. The rulers of the Cankam Tamil country were Ceras, Pandyas and Colas. ‘Tolkappiyam’, Pattuppattu and Ettuttokai are the literary works that help to knit the history of
the Cankam age. The *Tolkappiyam* has a clear notation of the religious practices.

The country was divided into five topographical regions and each region had a God as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land</th>
<th>God</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kurinci</td>
<td>Murukan</td>
<td>Kaumara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mullai</td>
<td>Mayon (Visnu)</td>
<td>Vaisnavism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marutam</td>
<td>Ventan</td>
<td>-a minor god-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neytal</td>
<td>Varunan</td>
<td>-a minor god-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palai</td>
<td>Kor ravai</td>
<td>Saktam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is to be noted here that the major gods of the Hindu pantheon, viz., Siva (Saivism), Ganapati (Ganapatya) and Surya (Sauram) are missing in this list. The Tamil country did not know Ganapati worship during the Cankam age. Surya appears in the *Cilappatikaram*. Siva is supposed to be God of all five regions. To quote: “Let Siva of the southern country be exalted. Be extolled thou Lord of all countries”.

The *Cilappatikaram* (5th century AD), a post Cankam work epitomizes all the cult systems that prevailed before the 6th century

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36 Raju Kalidass, *op. cit.*, pp.58-60; Indra and Varuna were the chief Vedic gods. Later they become minor directional gods. Indra of the East and Varuna West.

37 *Idem.*

38 *Cilappatikaram*: I, Mankalavaltuppatal, II. I.
AD. Recent studies have brought to light all these materials.\(^{39}\) The prevailing cults were: Worship of *Amarataru* (*Kalpakavrkṣa*), the wish-fulfilling tree; Worship of *Velyanai* (*Airavata*), the white elephant; *Pukarvelainakar* (*Balarama*), the white skinned; *Pakalvayil-uccikkilan* (*Surya*), personified day, Lord at the sky; *Urkkottam* (Temple of the City, Nagaradevata), e.g. Maturapati; *Verkottam* (Temple of the Spear), personified weapon of Murukan, the *vel* (*sakti*), *Vaccirakkottam* (Temple of the Thunderbolt), personified vajra, another weapon of Murukan; *Purampanaiyan*, God at the outskirts of the city, i.e. *Sasta Nikkanta*, *Prakrit Nigranta*, a Jain God; *Nila*, the Moon; Cutukatu, God of the crematorium, temple for *Dakini*; *Kamavel*, Kamadeva, God of Love;\(^{40}\) *Piravayakkaiperiyon*, the unborn or self-manifest, *Svaauambhu*, Siva;\(^{41}\) *Armukaccevel*, the six-faced Murukan; *Nilameninetiyon*, the tall blue coloured, Visnu; *Malaivenkutaimannan*, King of rains, the white-banner holder, Indra. *Arvorpalli, palli* of the Dharmas, the Buddhists.\(^{42}\)

The Buddhist temple is called *Intiravikaram* (Indravihara) in the *Manimekalai*.\(^{43}\) The Buddhist *caitya* is called *cayittam*.\(^{44}\) In

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40 *Cilappathikaram*, 9; 11. 9-20.
43 *Manimekalai*, 28; II. 70.
44 *Cilappatikaram*, 10; 1; 14.
several places of Tamil epic notes the temple for a Chaste Goddess, called Pattini or *Mankalamantattai*.45

From the above account it is clear that religion before 6th C.A.D. was not a uniform or a single pattern. Animist worship and their notions of rebirth, heaven and hell were integrated into a primitive religio-cultural base. Worship of prescribed elements and superstitious belief were integrated into it in later days. There were three strands of religion in that age.

i. The indigenous gods and systems of worship

ii. The exotic Hindu-gods and systems of worship

iii. The exotic non-Hindu religious faiths and functions.

Monotheism and polytheism were also prevalent. As a result a strange mixture of every thing has prevailed at that time.

**Scope of the Study**

Of all the human institutions, religion is the most vital. It serves to unite people and acts as a disintegrating factor. In a historical retrospect it is imperative to know why it unites people and why it disunites. Therefore, the scope of the present study is to view Tamilnadu of the medieval period examine the factors that caused religious harmony and conflicts. It would help us to know more about the religious factions determining the course of medieval history during the period under study.

Universe of the Study

Religion is not peculiar to India or as for the matter Tamilnadu. It is a global phenomenon that was historical fact from the most ancient period. Religion decided the course of the history. It was the cause of several religious wars within Christianity and Islam (the Crusades that continues today in the tug of war between Israel and Palestine) and between Islam and Hinduism. The present study strives to gauge the factors that operated within the Hindu and non-Hindu social fabric. The study relates to the medieval period, i.e. from 6th century to 12th century A.D.

By area, the topographical delimitation of the study is meant. As the title clearly states the study pertains to medieval Tamilnadu. The boundaries of Tamilnadu were not uniformly the same during the various periods such as Cankam, Pallava, early Pandya and Cola. Since the study ends with the 12th century, it touches the fag end of the Cola period as the Cola political power came to an end at the middle of the 13th century AD. Therefore, by Tamilnadu the modern territorial jurisdiction of the country is taken into account.

Period of the Study

The title of the thesis clearly states that the study pertains to the period since the 6th century A.D to the 12th century AD, i.e. from the Pallava and early Pandya to the fag end of the Cola period.
Aims/Objectives of the Study

The study aims to bring out the characteristic features of the religion in general and particularly the Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism with Saivism and Vaisnavism prevailed in Tamil country at that point of time.

To trace the origin of Bhakti Movement and its significance in religion and also the impact/contributions of bhakti cult to literature and art.

To point out the predominant influence that Brahminism wielded on the Hindu religion.

To find out the success or failure of the religions in uniting the people without creed and caste.

To elucidate the factors that led to religious harmony and tolerance prevailed in Tamil country.

To identify the causation factors that led to religious conflicts and bickering during the study period.

Religion expressed itself in several ways. Temple building, idol worship and the outcome of religious literatures were among the chief moulding factors. The present study has taken a few examples from the hagiological religious literary works and the sculptural art of
Tamilnadu have been added to bring the eyes the kind of sectarian harmony and conflicts (disharmony) that prevailed in Tamil country.

The concept is that religion unites peoples. If so, why? That is the question which leads to an argument. If religion disunites people, why? Was there inter-religious dialogue or disharmony? if so why? These are the basic questions dealt in the present study.

**Review of Literature**

There are several works on Indian religious history particularly Tamilnadu. However, in many of these works, only passing references have been made about religion, Religious harmony and Religious Conflicts during medieval times. Some eminent historians like P.Maxmuller’s *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion*, (London, 1880) gives some more emphasis on the origin and growth of religion. Charles T.Gorttam’s, *Ethics of the Great Religions*, (London, 1921) has made an attempt to describe the growth and ethics of great religions. R.Gopalan’s, *History of the Pallavas of Kanci*, (Madras, 1928) gives a clear picture about the political, socio-cultural aspects of Pallavas of Kanci. H.Whitehead’s, *The Religious Life of India*, (London, 1921) gives a graphic picture of religious life of India. S.Krishnasamy Iyangar’s *Historical Inscriptions of South India*, (Madras, 1932) furnished the political aspects and endowments made by the rulers for various religious activities. Dr.S.RadhaKrishnan’s *Cultural Heritage of India*, Vols I to V (Calcutta, 1937); *Radhakrishnan Reader* by K.M.Munshi (Bombay,
1969) gives many more valuable information about the Indian Religions, heritage and culture. Gerald L.Berry’s *Religions of the World*, (New York, 1957) deals about the world’s Religions and its role played on the society. *The Wonder that was India* by A.L.Basham (Calcutta, 1971) is a comprehensive study gives more information about the political, Administrative and social life of the people.

K.K.Pillai’s *A Social History of Tamils*; (Madras, 1969) highlighting the social customs, traditions of Tamils. C.Minakshi’s *Administration and Social Life Under the Pallavas* (Madras, 1977); T.V.Mahalingam’s, Kanchipuram in Early South Indian History (Bombay, 1969) M.Rajamanickampillai’s *Pallava Varalaru* (Tamil) (Tinneveli, 1964) gives a vivid picture of social, political and cultural aspects of the Pallavas.

K.A.Nilakanta Sastri’s *The Colas*, (Madras, 1975); *Development of Religion in South India*, (Madras, 1963) gives a neat Chronological, Political and Religious account of the times. Perhaps it provides a lot of information about the rulers and their Contributions to Art and Architecture. The Pan-Indian trend received the attention of R.G.Bhandarkar’s *Vaisnavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems*, (Poona, 1928) deals the Hindu religious sects and other minor religious systems prevailed in the state. Jan Gonda’s *Aspects of Vaisnavism* (Utrecht, 1954) is an exemplary work, and the scientific history of Vaisnavism. T.A.Gopinatha Rao’s *History of
Vaisnavas (Madras, 1923) S.Jayaswal’s *Early History of Vaisnavism* (Delhi, 1967) B.V.Ramanujam’s, *History of Vaisnavism in South India Upto Ramanuja.* (Citambaram, 1973) and S.Jegdeesan’s *History of Sri-Vaisnavism in Tamilnadu* (Post Ramanujam) (Madurai, 1977) deals with the growth of Vaisnavism and its real role played in the history of Religion. J.A.Duboi’s *Character, Manners, and Customs of the India* (New Delhi, 1992) have given a valuable information about the Hindu manners and customs of the Tamils.

B.S.Chandrababu’s *The Land and People of Tamilnadu-An Ethnographical Study*, (Madras, 1996) traces the ethnicity of the Tamils against the backdrop of their land, religion and culture. N.Subramanian’s *The Brahmin in the Tamil Country* (Madurai, 1976) provides a lot of information about the role of Brahmins in moulding the course of ancient and medieval periods in the Tamilnadu History.

K.C.Varadachari wrote *A Sects of Bhakti Cult in Ancient India*, (Varanasi, 1985) and D.C.Sircar’s (ed), *The Bhakti Cult* (Calcutta, 1970) has paid more attention to Bhakti cult. C.V.Narayana Ayyar’s *Origin and Early History of Saivism in South India*, (Madras, 1936) and R.Subramanian’s (ed), *Saiva Camayam Oor Unmaivilakkam* (Tamil) (Madras, 2001) gives an elaborate account of Saivism in Tamilnadu.

N.Subbu Reddiyar’s *Religion and Philosophy of Nalayiram with Special Reference to Nammalvar*, (Tirupati, 1977) deals the life


Ehambaranathan’s *Tirumalai Samana Tirukkoilkal* (Tamil) (Madras, 1992) and Mayilai Seenit Vengatasamy’s *Camanamum Tamilum* (Tamil) (Madras, 1970) gives a detailed history of Jainism in Tamilnadu. M.P.Sivagnanam’s, *Kambarin Samayakkolgai* (Madras, 1983) and Dr.Sivapiya’s *Tirukkuralum Tirumuraiyum* deals their view of the religions. J.Anandaraman’s *Buddhamum Palantamilkkudikalum* (Tamil) (Madras, 2002) and V.Balakrishnan’s ed, *Indumatha Kodunkonmaiyn varalaru* (Tamil) (Madras, 2003) gives a clear account of the religious conflicts/rangours. R.Champakalakshmi’s *Religious Conflicts in the*
*Tamil Country* (Calcutta, 1978) gives the religious conflicts of Tamilagam.

These are all some samples and there may be several other works. Though these works traces the history of a sectarian group or groups, no attention has been paid to religious harmony or disharmony. Recently some articles and books have come out bearing on sectarian rivalry; e.g. Raju Kalidos (ed). *Sectarian Rivalry in Art and Literature*, Delhi 1997. The same author has published few articles in international journals that deals with the sectarian character of art in Tamilnadu, e.g. ‘*Vamacara Visnu in Hindu Iconography, East and West*’, Rome, 1994, Vol. 44:2-4, pp. 175-92. This article deals with the sectarian treatment of Visnu in iconographical forms such as Harihara by which Saivas degraded the personality of Visnu.

‘*Urdhavatandavam in the Art of South India, East and West*’, Rome, 1996, Vol. 46: 3-4, pp. 371-414; This article deals with the treatment of Devi in a degrading status by the Saivas.

‘*The twain-face of Ardhanari*’, Acta Orientalia, Copenhagen 1993, Vol. 54, pp. 68-106. This article deals with the Saivite treatment of Devi in a degrading status. The same theme has been elaborated by a Canadian scholar in her work (The Lord who is half woman: Ardhanarishvara in Indian and Feminist perspective, Albany 2001). See also R.K.K.Rajarajan’s, ‘*Dance of Pattini-Kannaki as Ardhanari with special reference to the Cilappatikaram*’, Berliner Indologische Studien, Berlin 2000, Vol. 12/13, pp. 401-14.
The contribution made by these eminent scholars to Religious history of Tamilnadu is invaluable. Though it trace the religious sectarian groups no attention has been paid to Religious Harmony or conflicts significantly. Hence an attempt has made to study the Religion, Religious Harmony and Religious Conflicts in Medieval Tamilnadu from 6th to 12th C.A.D. in the present analysis.

**Methodology**

The objective and critical narrative type of historical method is followed. Notes and references appear at the end of each pages. Standard diacritical method is employed to be scientific with the handling of terms in Sanskrit and Tamil, the Tamil Lexicon method of the University of Madras in respect of the latter.

**Sources**

The major sources are in the inscriptions and literature in Sanskrit and Tamil. Tamil literatures from the most ancient to the 12th century AD is examined. The Pre-Pallava phase of religious history depends mostly on Cankam works and post Cankam literature.

The religious works of the *Alvars* and *Nayanmars* are examined. These are called *Nalayirativiyapirapantam* and *Tirumurai*, e.g. *Tevaram* and *Tiruvacakam*. The bhakti phase of religious understanding mostly depends on these works. *The Mattavilasaprahasana* of Mahendravarman I deal with religious ridicules of *Kapalikas, Pasupatas* and *Buddhists*. During the Cola period certain literary works, e.g. *Tiruttontar Puranam* (12th century
AD), deals with the religious trends. Another class of sthalapurana came into vogue in the Pandya country, called Tiruvilaiyat Puranam. It deals with the tug of war between the Saivas and Jains.

Inscriptions of the Tirumeyyam temple throw light on the religious conflicts of the Saivas and Vaisnavas whose temples are found in close proximity in the village. From the above account it may be understood that literature and epigraphy is the main source of information, in addition to other secondary source materials which receive a fair deal in the narrative part of the thesis.

**Chapterization**

The thesis is in four chapters, prefixed by an introductory account and suffixed by the conclusion, bibliography, appendices and glossary.

The introductory part of the thesis deals with questions such as “what is Religion? And “why is Religion?” Simply religion is a system of faith in God. Man needs food for his nourishment while religion caters to the needs of spiritual uplift and also deals the characteristic features of religion. The major religions in the world and their impact on world history are briefly noted. Religion in Tamilnadu before 6th century AD is based on topographical segmentation; e.g. kurinci “hill country” Murukan; Mullai – Mayon; Marutam-Ventan; Neytal-Varunan and Palai-Korrawai. The early phase of history in Tamilnadu is noted for religious harmony and there is no evidence of any conflict or bickering. The religions that
were nurtured the cults centering around Murukan, Visnu, Indra, Varuna, Korravai, Siva, Baladeva, Sasta, Surya, Chandra, Kamadeva, and Dakni, the personifications of Karpavrksa, Vel, Vajra, Airavata, Nagaradevata, the Buddha and Mahavira. The scope of the study is to find out how these religions interacted, leading to harmony or disharmony or religious conflicts and what prompted the conflicts. The period of the study is from 6th century to the 12th century A.D. Though the area of the study is the Tamil country, it views the theme in a broader South Indian perspective for a better understanding of the problem. The objectives, aims and hypotheses are discussed. The chapter also presents a brief account of the earlier works on religion in general with pointed reference to religious harmony and religious conflicts. The source materials are also discussed that are mainly from inscriptions and literature.

**Chapter I** discusses the general religions of Tamilnadu from the 6th to the 12th century AD with particular reference to **Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism**. Buddhism born (6th century BC) in the Himalayan Nepalese highland spread to the various parts of India, North to South, South Asia and Southeast Asia due mainly to the patronage of the religion by the Asoka Maurya (4th century BC), grandson of Candragupta Maurya. In fact the earliest reference to the ancient rulers of the Tamil country is in the Asokan Edicts that talk of Pandya, Cola and Keralaputra. It is quite likely that Buddhism passed on to Sri Lanka via Andhradesa and Tamilnadu.
The numerous Buddhist vestiges, stupas and viharas (Eg. Kanchi, Puhar and Nagapattinam) discovered in Tamil country bear witness to the migration process progress and its popularity in Tamilnadu. Several Buddhist works were produced in Tamil down to the 12th century AD. The Manimekalai notes the various religious and philosophical systems that prevailed in Tamilnadu down to the 6th century A.D. Jainism actually bifurcated from Buddhism in the 6th century BC and had a strong following with the mercantile communities in the North. By way of Karnataka (cf. the legend of the migration of Candragupda Maurya to Saravanabelgola), it found its entry into the Tamil country. The legends connected with the Pandyas would prove the fact that Saivism and Vaisnavism had to wrest the land from the Jains as per accounts presented in the Tiruvilaiyatar Puranam. The Jain rock-cut beds and natural caverns found in prolific measures in the Pandya country (e.g. Tirupparankunram, Anaimalai, Kalukumalai) would prove the popularity of Jainism in that region while these are practically missing in the Cola country, especially in the Kaviri delta. The progress of Saivism and Vaisnavism during the period is presented elaborately. Tamil Saivism produced a rich corpus of literature that is called Pannirutirumurai, noted among them being Tevaram and Tiruvacakam.

The cult was propagated by a band of scholars and devotees, called Nayanmars. The Vaisnava corpus is Nalayirativviyappirapantam. The cult was propagated by saints called Alvars. Saktism and other factions of Hinduism like Kapalikas,
Kalamugas, Pasupatas are survived to make a mark on the history of the land. The facets of Sakti cult could be discerned from literary works such as *Cilappatikaram*.

**The second chapter** deals with the history of the *Bhakti* (devotional cult) *Movement*. Its origin is generally traced to the Gupta period in the bhagavata movement. Scholars as such R.G.Bhandarkar do push its origin back to the later Vedic period. Though bhakti was born in the North, it was in the Tamil country that it was systematically nurtured and propagated. In course of the historical process, it moved to the North (Maharashtra-Tukaram, Ramdev; Rajasthan-Mira Bai and Bengal-Jayedeva). Scholars in Karnataka and Maharashtra come to the Tamil country to find the origins and the impact of bhakti on their arts. This was because of the rich literature that Tamil produced which is unique not only in the history of Tamilnadu but also in the history of the world. The works are in tens of thousands of hymns grouped under *Pannirutirumurai* and *Nalayiram*. This chapter presents a complete catalogue of this rich literature that had a long-lasting impact on the culture and religious history of Tamilnadu.

**The third chapter** deals with the multifaceted aspects of *Religious Toleration and Harmony*. Rulers of the land, the Pallavas, Early Pandyas (of the First Empire) and Colas were basically for religious toleration. They patronized poets and built many temples of all sectarian lineages even if they had fascination for a particular sect.
(e.g. Rajasimha Pallava (A.D. 700-728) fascinated for Saivism who built the Kailasanatha temple at Kanchipuram, Nandivarman Pallavamalla for Vaisnavism (A.D. 730-795) who patronized Tirumankai Alvar and built the Vaikuntha Perumal temple at Kanchipuram). All Cola kings, beginning with Vijayalaya to Rajaraja III (A.D. 850-1279) were noted for religious harmony. They built temples for Siva in a large measure and did not neglect Visnu, Devi and other gods like Murukan and Ganapati and other non-Hindu sects. The public joined the milieu of the rulers in their religious Catholicism and did not engage in religious bickerings in either day-to-day life, or places or worships and festivities or public life.

The fourth chapter deals with Religious Disharmony or Conflicts. The main cause for conflict was mutual jealousy and need for the propagation of their sect. The Mattavilasaprahasana is an early book, attributed to Mahendravaranman I (early 7th century AD), that deals with the sectarian bickering of the Kapalikas, Pasupatas and Buddhists.

Under the later Colas, it acquired an ugly trend, leading a fanatic Cola king, called Krmikantha (A.D.1178-1218) to destroy the temple for Visnu in the Citamparam Nataraja temple and throw the cult image of recline Visnu (called Ranganatha) in the Bay of Bengal. This was mainly due to the confrontation of the king with the pontiff, Ramanujacarya, at Srirangam. Unable to bear the persecutions of the Cola, the Acarya had to migrate to the Hoysala country and come
back only when peace was restored. Few examples were taken from the literature and art to deal the sectarianism.

The conclusion does sum up the findings of the study. Religion is a worldwide phenomenon that harmony and disharmony prevailed in all major religious factions. There were armed confrontations in the West (e.g. the Crusades). Even though such incidents of war are not reported in India as well as Tamilagam, religious harmony and conflicts went side by side. This phenomenon is discernible since the 6th century AD down to the contemporary time.

The thesis has a glossary that explains the technical terms employed. There is an exhaustive bibliography and appendices. Few photographic samples have been added to bring to the eyes the kind of sectarian harmony and conflicts that prevailed in the Tamil Country.