Chapter-II

Socio-historical aspects of Srisailam

Sacred-tradition had played a very powerful and predominant part in moulding the character of Indian society. Pilgrimage to Srisailam was also one of the important ritual-activity of Hindus. It's ritual exchange revolves round the temple, pilgrims and priests. Accordingly, there developed a very specific pattern inevitably all vital sectors of an economic-units in Srisailam. Srisailam is referred to as Srigiri, Sripavatam, Rudra-parvata and Seschalam in several texts and 1 puranas. Srisailam is rich in legend and religious-tradi-
tion. It is associated historically with such great rulers

as the Chalukyan kings, Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagar and Chatrapathy Shivaji, Adi Shankara is also said to have worshipped the deity at the main temple here. The presiding deity at the place is Shri Mallikarjunaswamy in the form of a 'Lingam', which is one of the twelve Jyothirlingas existing in this country. Another important complex at the place is that of Brahmaarambhika, the consort of Lord Mallikarjunaswamy. It is 'Sakti-petham'. Mahasivarathri festival celebrated at the place attracts annually more than 50,000 Hindu-pilgrims from all parts of South India. They throng to worship deity

2 ibid. p. 242
'Pathala-Ganga'. The temple abounds in sculptural beauty and there are about 116 inscriptions in and around it.

Apart from its religious importance, Srisailam is also a place of scenic beauty and one of the important tourist spots in the country. Legend says that Lord Shiva came here as a hunter and married a beautiful girl of the Chenchu-tribe here. This legend is also illustrated in stone in one of the bas-reliefs on the courtyard wall.

The Chenchus believe themselves as the self-appointed guardians to this Mallikarjuna temple. They drag the car of the Lord on festive occasions. Mallikarjuna, on account of this association with Chenchu-tribe is

3. Ibid-p.243-244.
4. Ibid-p.244.
also called 'Chenchu-Mallaya' (hero of Chenchus). The complex is one of the most ancient and sacred Shaiva temples in South India. Moreover, Shri Mallikarjuna Lingam is accessible to each and every devotee as anybody can go into the sanctum of Mallikarjuna, touch him and perform abhishekam himself to recitation of mantras by the arch- 
akas without caste or creed. This denotes that all are equal before God and particularly we can say that socialistic pattern of society started from this place itself millions of years ago in India. This catholicity is said due to influence of Lingayat's noble-contribution.

5. Ibid-pp. 244-245.
6. Ibid...
traced back to thousand of years before the birth of Christ.

Modern town is an amalgamation of a number of social principalities, which had autonomous entities in the past. The Srisaila-valley was ruled by the Satavahanas, Iksahvakus, Vishnukundis, Kakatiyas and Reddys, whose contributions to art and culture are indeed great and unique. We can find 'Arya-Dravidian' influences in Srisailam's temple-structures. As the popular legend goes, the original-settlers of Srisaila-valley were Chenchu-tribe. They are the first caretakers of Jyothirlinga as well as Saktipeetham here.

All these castes and tribes live together peacefully to form an integral-devotion and they are tied up together

7. Ibid...
by their common-rituals of socio-cultural exchanges. The sacred-complexes have gained currency by the revival of shakti-movement. The Muslim attacks ruined them, but regained its identity by devotion and dedication to reconstruct the true-traditions by pilgrims and devotees. The British imperialist-crown established their colonial sway over them, but our social-reformers and spiritual-leaders fought to liberate them. These places have been pronounced according to their local-dialects, folk-lore, myths and legends. Socio- logically, we can find special attention to them from their 'Sthala-purana'. The places have become part and


9. Ibid...
parcel of Indian heritage and culture. As a result, these names gained currency only among those places like Shaivites, Vaishnavas and others, who acquired knowledge from their religious writings like 'Agamas' and 'Vedas' and other 'epics'. Temple towns formed another category with their own characteristic features. They had several successive rings of circumulatory paths to go round the central plots, where temples were situated. A number of minor shrines were also set up in these towns. A temple town such as Srirangam, Tirupathi, Kashi or Puri was the centre of diverse cultural activities. The employers of the temple included priests, musicians, attendants, dancers, 

10. ibid...
office-staff, craftsmen, functionaries and workers. Often
the temple maintained the schools, colleges, charity-

institutions and hospitals.

It was also a land-owner

contributing in its own way to an economic-development

of the region. Temples in some parts of South India were

corporate-bodies exercising secular-powers. Besides temple
towns, there were sacred-cities, which attracted pilgrims,

while some were all India pilgrimage centres, others were

regional ones. The former included Haridvar, Gaya, Nasik,

Ujjain, Pushkar and Mathura. All these cities formed part

of the 'sacred-geography' of the Hindus, serving the

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12 Ibid...

sacred-character from epics and mythologies. They represented the social-organisation of one or more world's religious-complexes. They maintained that the little-tradition developed into great-tradition with its special intellectual class, administrative-officers and rulers closely derived from the moral and religious life of the local-culture. They advanced an economic institutions coupled with sentiments of local-cultural centres. They believed that in the early civilization, the first cities were of kind, where the folk-culture is transformed into an 'orthogentic-civilization'. The system of pilgrimage, and the habit of listening to reading

14. Ibid...
whether in the privacy of one's own home or at the village centre, or the acts of propitiating the Gods of ancestors in holy-places all over India, have bound together the whole country by a deep sense of cultural-unity. The love of the mountains and forests, punctuated as they are with retreats of holy-man, who have renounced the pleasures of the world for higher pursuits of the soul, has become such an integral part of India's intellectual and artistic-tradition that we find evidence of it nearly every branch of her life up to the present day. The temples of India are built in accordance with canonical rules, which of course differ from one

15 ibid-pp.8-9.
region to another. According to the North Indian tradition, the temple is looked upon as a symbol of the human body. It has a caste just as soils have on the basis of their colour, smell and time taken by seeds of the sacred-sesamum to germinated in it. But the temple is also looked upon as a mountain. Names given to temples are often derived from the sacred-mountains of India like Meru, Mandara and Kailasa. Siva has abode in the mountains and therefore a temple in which his image is installed is also given a similar name, derived from one situated in some part of India. Temples as we know them, are not mentioned in the Samhitas.

which was originated in the first period of Vedic literature.

It was from the days of the Puranas, however, that the construction of temples assumed great importance. The gradual development of complexes in the Southern part of India like Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala can be traced during the last 13 to 14 centuries.

**Arts and Aesthetics**

The chanters and devotional-singers: They call themselves 'Saiva Brahmins'-broadly speaking all ordinary people according to their 'Lalitha-Kalas'. Like the temple priests they must be married in order to carry out their work and they give similar explanations for their role. That they must be 'complete' and have access to the feminine-power 'Sakti', as far as I know from the study-note, there is no

17. *ibid*...
specific obligation on a chanter to be married and a chanter, who did not else work as a domestic-priest could perhaps be unmarried. The chanters dress and wear hair like other 'Sangama-priests' here and usually wear the coloured-silk clothes especially kanchipuram-quality and carry the little casket for keeping vibhuti (holy ash).

In the last (1996) year there were two chanters working on part-time basis in the temple, although other post is reserved for kuchipudi-artists. During festivals, two types of Telugu-provide chants have to be recited along with rituals. Mantras, which derive from the 'Agamas' and mantras along with other verses which come from the
'Yajur-Veda'. It was the most important of the Vedas for details of the sacrifice (Yajna) and recitation of lengthy passages from it, especially that known as Sri Rudra (The offerings to Rudra, in Keith, 1914: 353: 62), remains an important in modern Saiva-temple's rituals. Suktas are hymns from the 'Vedas' chanted during performing a particular skill of its art. At the main periods of daily worship sacred-verses are chanted over the vessels of 'holy-water' that are then used to complete the bathing-ritual for the two main images, and at these same periods the first lines of each of it are declaimed to 'Jyotirlinga' and 'Sakti-poetham' after the lamps have been waved. All this chanting is carried out by chanters, not by priests. A chanter usually
takes over this role when the longer lists of 308 or 1008 names are to be recited. The chanters receive neither the 'Agamic-initiations' nor the 'consecration' before starting to work in the sacred-complexes here. They normally chant from outside the shrines, but they are said to have the right to enter all of them including the two main ones here, although they only irregularly have any cause to do so. Although these rights are identical to those of the temple-servants, the chanter's position in the sacred-complex structure is quite different, but before I can discuss this, I must turn to the devotional-singers of Sri-sailam.
The devotional-singers are non-Brahmins usually belonging to the vegetarian-groups, which traditionally ranks above most other castes here. Brahmins never work as singers in Veer-Saiva's complexes. In July 1968, there were five singers employed in the main-temple, like all other officials, except those mentioned above, they dress in the normal-style of Telugu-moles (though they never wear a shirt in the temple). Their role is to sing from the canon of Telugu-devotional hymns known collectively as the 'Veer-Saiva-Kavyas'. For most of the year, songs from a part of the 'Bageshvarar-Charitam' are sung at each of the four main periods of daily worship, immediately after the recitation
of the first lines of the four Vedas. Throughout the year, special-songs are sung at the first and last periods of worship respectively. At various festivals special-hymns also have to be sung by these devotional-singers. During daily-worship, the singers stand next to the chanters in the antechambers, just outside the entrances to the sancta. Before independence, they probably sang outside the antechambers; like all officiants except the priests, temple-servants and chanters, the functionaries of complex, singers

18 (cf)
Kings derive much of their power from this worship, and bestow their emblems and privileges in a cultural-atmosphere that permeated by the language and attitudes of worship. In turn, temples represent the pre-eminent position of the king by granting him the highest-honour in the temple before even the learned (Shrotriya) Brahman.

are not allowed to enter any of the shrines nor touch the images within them. They receive no initiation or consecration before working in the temple. In the Agamic model, the hierarchical interrelationship between Saivas and the Agamas, Brahman-chanters and the Vedas, and non-Brahman singers and the Telugu hymns is straightforward. Veer-Saivas, who alone should chant Agamic-mantras, rank above Brahmins, who alone chant the Vedas, and the Agamas, as the words of Siva, are, rather than the Vedas, considered to be the ultimate authorities. The hierarchical relationship is expressed spatially: Saivas chant the Agamas inside the shrines, Brahmins chant the Vedas from the ante-chambers and non-Brahmins sing the hymns from the halls outside.
the ante-chambers (Filliozat 1975: 107). It is also expressed in the order of ritual, for the Vedas follow the series of services and offerings that constitute Agamic worship proper, and the Telugu hymns follow the Vedas. From the Agamic viewpoint, indeed, as Brunner-Lachaux (1963: iv-vi) remarks, the Vedas are not component parts of the ritual of worship proper. But that is not how the matter is seen in the contemporary temple, where both the Vedas and the hymns are deemed essential, so that now we find two non-Agamic traditions—orthodox Vedic Brahmanism and Telugu non-Brahman (Jāgama) devotionalism taking their places in the temple-cult. In prototypical Hindu fashion, elements from these two traditions have been incorporated
hierarchically, so that the structure preserves the supremacy of the Agamic-cult and the Adisaivas, without denying the complementary indispensability of the other two ranked elements. At the same time, chanters themselves as Brahmins, claim that they are truly superior to the Adisaivas, who cannot chant the Vedas that they (the chanters) deem to be superior authorities to the Agamas. The significance of this last view is considered in those olden-days, but it is not strictly relevant to the Agamic-hierarchy inside the temple, which plainly places the chanters below the priests.

Nonetheless, by delegating to chanters much of the Agamic chanting priests damage the clear-structure of the tripartite hierarchy and thus qualify their own superiority...
although the most critical imperfection is the existence of
the Veda-priest, ideally competent in both the Agamas and
Vedas. How and why this anomalous role, which allows a
Brahman to do work in theory reserved exclusively for
consecrated Adisaivas, has come into being is a problem on
which I have no relevant evidence according to my purposive
sample.

The musicians and dancing-girls: The musicians here all
belong to the ‘jangama-caste’ that is now-a-days known here
as ‘Telugu-saivas’ (Aradhyas) in Andhra Pradesh. It is
traditionally ranked amongst the lower-non-Brahman castes
in Srisailam. The principal instrument in the temple is the
‘nagasvara’, a pipe which is played by the leader of the
musicians. The pipe is accompanied by drums, a drone and sometimes a pair of small cymbals (tala). Abhinaya during daily worship, while standing within the temple's inner precincts. During the miming, the girls were accompanied by the nattuvangam, the dancing master who kept time by beating sticks, and the other 'small-drums' for musicians.

That the dancing-girls abandoned their miming by the first decades of this century at the latest by the 1950's. Whatever may have been the case, though, today's musicians plainly are equivalent to the traditional 'big-drums' and their debarment from the inner-areas of the temple accords with the standard pattern of the other personnel who work in the
temple, none have an important and regular parts to play
in the performance of ritual-labour itself. Their rights
in the temple, in the context of rituals are the same as
those of ordinary Saiva-devotees.

Sankritan in praise of the great Basavaeswara: An everlasting
Sankritan is going on here at the various Lingayat's maths
since 1931 onwards. These Sankritans have been organised by
the various Lingayat-groups, who migrated from Kannada-desa
to Srisailam to preserve their ancient-arts. At the place of
Sankritan a few framed colour-photos of Basavaeswara, Akka-
mahadevi and Alamprabhu, etc, have been kept in the small
model of 'Anubhav-mantap'. Two other drums, mrdanga and
tavantai are also sometimes played. There is a tambi, nayana
kosti (Skt. yasti, assembly), to refer to the musicians collectively but they are more usually referred to indirectly as naga svara-malam (comes from barber-caste) drums and by extension all accompanying instruments. About selected musicians by the executive-committee of Devasthanam worked regularly in the temple from 1959 onwards.

virtually all rituals in the public worship require music and the musicians also accompany almost all processions. During the daily worship, musicians normally play from outside the entrances into the inner parts of the two temples, except at ‘pavalampa-seva’, when a pipe solo is played before the bedchamber on various other occasions, too, the pipe is played inside the inner areas of the two temples, near the sancta, as are the small drums, mrdanga as well as
The dancing-girls (Devasari), who worked in the main-temple were mostly recruited from the 'shegam' or 'Golle-shega' castes, but they effectively formed a distinct, partly endogamous-caste, and many dancers' daughters also became dancers, while their sons often became temple-musicians (Nelson 1968, 2:79; Thurston 1909, 2:127-9). Some of yesterday's Srisail temple musicians are descended from dancing-girls. All major temples had dancing-girls, who were ritually 'married' to the presiding-God of their temple. Allegedly, they were usually prostitutes to the priests as well as local-politicians, but it is not clear how
widespread this was. Their supposed immorality, however, was the main reason for the legislation to prohibit the dedication of girls as temple-dancers, enacted in Andhra Pradesh (then it was combined State with Madras) in 1947. In the temples of Srisailam, the dancing girls gave up working in the early 50's. Their main role, according to those few informants who recall them, was to dance in temple's principal festivals and in front of halls during processions on the city streets. I was told that they did not dance during the daily worship and never performed inside the temple.

except in its outer precincts. This appears to have been

the normal pattern in the major Telugu-temples, although

the dancing-girls also had another role inside them;

performing the elaborate miming-gestures known as

"lalithakalathoranams" erected for this purpose. Siva

sankritan continues whole day and night without any

break during the festive-days, namely, Shivarathri and

Ugadi at these Veersaiva-monasteries. All these singers

for sankritans and bhajans are paid either in cash or

in kind of inams. In addition to these appointed singers

there are a number of persons come from various caste

groups, who voluntarily participate in this Sankritans

or bhajans. It has been observed by me here that the

20. (cf) "The Devadasis illustrate the difference between

auspiciousness and purity. Till recently, they were associated

with all the important functions of the temples(..., next page )
some pilgrims who come to offer pooja at these maths
also participate in this socio-cultural activities,
of-course for a few minutes. The purpose of this
bhajan or Sānkritan as explained by Lingyat's Guru
is first to achieve spiritual-benefit and prosperity
according to their logic. Here, all performances are
observed in the honour of their ancestors as has
been discussed in their sacred-literature. At all
these maths daily sacred-performances are observed
with little difference of time and space according to
main-temple. Thus, it is clear that the present form of
the daily aesthetical-performances which are performed

in the various maths at Srisailam are in continuity with
As they were wedded to Gods they were known as 'Nitya-
sumangalis' (ever-married). Yet they were regarded as impure,
as they were the combines of temple-priests or local-patrons
(...., next page)
the various sequences in the Hindu-World. Agamic-forms of styles are practised and elaborate-rituals are adopted in honour of deities for the benefit of the universe as a whole by the artists and the sacred intelligentsia.

Art and Architecture according to symbolic-representation:

In Hinduism the symbols, forms and personalitic-conception of the Divinity have played a great part in the matter of construction of these sacred-complexes. Thus at the place of Srisailam it becomes easy to draw a clear cut distinction among the varieties of Shiva as well as Sakti deities here. For example, it focuses the aesthetic-vision like 'Harihara' as a synthesis of Vishnu and Siva and 'Archanaarishwara'
figure represent the principle of bio-unity rather than that of bi-polarity. T.R. Singh (1961) has tried to classify these deities and has used the word 'hierarchy' and thus has tried to describe it with special reference to an Andhra village. The concept of aesthetic-hierarchy as we apply it in case of Jangama-castes fully in the study of Dravidian-deities in general and sacred-art in particular. Because in the Shaiva religion, which is also deeply rooted in non-sanskrit-thoughts, there is so much hierarchy as all sacred-objects are said to belong to one supreme being. However, that 'mula-virat' when considered in practical-life, is worshipped under different symbols and forms, which may be classified
into various groups on the basis of their essential characters. Concentration of divine-power lies with its 'mula-virat' in grabha-gruha or gudi. Spiritual-intensity as well as invisible rays are concentrated here according to panchbhuatas. Thus, in a consecrated-idol or Jyothirlinga or Saktipeetham, there is an extraordinary-power and the worshipper apparently derives delight in its presence.

Virtue alone makes one noble due to its purity and purity of devotee is plays a very important part to make spotless (to cure), who are incurable. Here, the temples were largely built in stone according to Shaivite style of Madhya Bharat. Gradually the Lingam as well as Sakti-peetham came to be surrounded by a host of attendant deities and
dikpalakas with rich sculptural ornamentation associated with later styles of Deccan-identities. Lingayat-manuals on the construction of five (Panch-maths) stone temples were written giving minute-details of neo-classical Dharma. Classical-sculpture as well as Telugu-murals are visible in the Veershaiva images of yesterday were found at Kailasha-Dwaram and Bhimunikolanu. The fact that Shaivism prevalent in South India and the Northern hill-states in its aspect of tribal-worship, was in origin non-Aryan; the more Telugu-regions were to make their own contribution to Indian-Arts and aesthetics, which was not much identical with that of the north.

In Mallikarjuna's sanctum is a cylindrical stone-linga, said to have emerged from the ground (Svayambhuva = self-existent) shaded by a silver cobra's hood and a Kalasha on the top, which drops holy-water on its 'Jyothirlinga' continuously. In almost all Srisaila-complexes, the main sanctum houses His phallic-emblem the lingam, and not an anthropomorphic-image. Facing His sanctum are a series of stone-images of Nandin, the bull who is Siva's vehicle (vahana) and most fervent devotees always gazing directly at his lord. In both temples, at each gateway there are images of Vinayaka (Ganesha), Dwarpalakas and Yakshines. The chambers housing the movable, bronze festival images (Utsava-murthis) that are taken out in processions are
also inside the God's kovil (temple). The sacred-complex also incorporates a tank, an indispensable feature of any temple of South India. The kitchens are southeast of the sanctum, in the direction of Agni, God of fire. Even in the temple's outer precincts there are many images and shrines, and most of the thousands of pillars are carved with images of deities and other figures. They receive ritual attention from devotees, who worship with natural-lights (Deepams). The dimensional-differences between a great Mallikarjuna temple and a Brahmarumbha complex are perhaps worth emphasising to the Sociologist of Religion.

The swaymi's temple at least its central-portion, is more a solid monument like a pagoda than a work of
'architectural- Amma gopuram' being made to face it. The temple's heart is a dark cell which is moulded by silpi with its unique beauty perhaps ascension from the natural world. Garbha-gruha should always be peaceful and serene; music and singing at ritual-services is passionate by simultaneous music, drumming, bell-ringing and chanting.

The senses are assailed too by the odoriferous smoke pouring from camphor and incense that combines with the heavy perfume of flowers. After dark, when many rituals are held, the eye is treated to the spectacular display produced by flames circling through the blackness to illuminate in flashes the bright silks, gold, diamonds and jewellery of the adorned images. The
combined sensual impact is potent, especially when amplified by the press of a large crowd, and is readily observed in the excited emotionally manifested by many devotees, who come all age-ranges and all occupational groups and economic-classes. There is indirect-evidence that a number of visitors to the two main-complexes is probably raising from the significant-section of the Hindu population whose citizens are living descendants of a vibrant past with a noble-tradition, which still colours the lives of most Indian-pilgrims as a unique phenomenon.