PREFACE
The topic of research was taken up for investigation in 1993. The purpose of the study is to provide a cogent, comprehensive and comparative account of Śakti cult in Courtāllanāthar and Sankaranārāyanar temples. Since the recent historical research centres around the Śiva aspects of both temples, an attempt is made in the subsequent pages to trace the Śakti cult of those temples. Another reason for this attempt is that, a late Medieval Pāṇḍya temple at Tenkāsi has received repeated attention of many scholars, the Courtāllanāthar temple, inspite of its longer continuity with greater number of valuable inscriptions, has not drawn the attention of scholars so far. Unexplored by scholars, Sankaranārāyanaswāmy temple offers me a wider scope for a specialised study.

The temples at Courtāllam and Sankaranāi do not have Śakti cult alone as the only one followed. Both temples are prominent Śiva temples in Tirunelvēli District. In both temples Lord Śiva, Lord Vishnu and Śakti in Her different forms are also worshipped by the devotees. Courtāllanāthar temple at
Courtallam has Lord Courtallanathar as the primary or main deity. The temple at Sankarankoil is renowned for Lord Sankaralingam, Lord Sankaranarayanar and Goddess Gomathi Amman. The former represents the Saivite cult through the deity Courtallanathar, the latter a synthesis of Saivam and Vaishnavam through the deity, Lord Sankaranarayanar. In spite of this fact, these temples have been taken up for study as centres for Śakti cult because:

a) both temples have gained prominence and renown because of the Mēru pīṭha otherwise called Paraśakti pīṭha at Courtallam and Goddess Gomathi Amman at Sankaranarayanar temple.

b) Courtallam as a tourist centre and Sankarankoil as a place of pilgrimage attract people from far and wide. The visitors to Lord Courtallanathar temple are pilgrims as well as tourists whereas the visitors of Sankaranarayanar temple are only pilgrims. This difference is perceptible and well pronounced through the exodus of “Visitors” thronged at these temples. One or two published works on these temples also shed light on historical, literary and general aspects of the temple. A detailed
study of the Śakti cult or the comparison of Śakti cult in these two temples has not been attempted so far.

The pioneering works of R. Srinivasan, Śakti Vazhipādu; P. L. Sami, Tamil Ilakkiyathil Thai Theiva Valipādu; S. Ganpathiraman, Tirunelveli Pakuthiyil Sirutheiva Valipādu (Minor Deities of Tirunelveli); K. Pushpendra Kumar, Śakti cult in Ancient India; S. K. Dikshit, The Mother Goddess; N. N. Bhattacharyya, The Indian Mother Goddess are outstanding examples. These studies provide glimpses of information on the evolution of Śakti cult, different manifestations of Śakti and so on. Hence a comparative study of Śakti cult in Courṭāllanāṭhar and Sankaranārāyanar temples is found necessary.

The nature of the topic which I selected for my thesis made it necessary for me to seek help and assistance from several scholars. This has been one of the pleasant aspects of my research work which was conducted under the guidance and supervision of Dr. M. Desayar, Professor of History, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-12. I record my deep gratitude to him for suggesting the research problem valuable guidance, benevolent support, constant encouragement and scholarly advice.
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