Chapter-IX

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters a detailed study has been made to know about the Five Divine Sabhas of Lord Nataraja in Tamil Nadu. Lord Nataraja is one of the twenty five aspects of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is closely associated with number five in many respects such as five letter mantras (Na, Ma, Si, Va, Ya), Pancha Bootha Sthalas. (It refers to the Five Shiva temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, each representing the manifestation of the five prime elements of nature – ‘Land’ Kanchipuram, ‘Water’ Thiruvanaikkaval, ‘Air’ Kalakasthi, ‘Sky’ Chidambaram and ‘Fire’ Thiruvannamalai.) Five Divine Sabhas ('Kanaka Sabha' Chidambaram, ‘Velli Sabha’ Madurai, ‘Rathina Sabha’ Thiruvalangadu, ‘Thamira Sabha’ Tirunelveli and ‘Chithira Sabha’ Courtallam). Panchakriiyas (five activities-Creation, Destruction, Grace, Dissolution and Blessing) etc., Among them the Five Divine Sabhas should have evolved as a popular concept in Tamil Nadu.

The study was made under seven headings such as origin and development of the Lord Nataraja cult in Tamil Nadu, Historical Background of the Five Divine Sabhas, Architectural features of the Five Divine Sabhas, Administration of the Five Divine Sabha Shrines, Pujas and Festivals of them, Social welfare measures of the above said samba shrines and the impact of the
Lord Nataraja cult on Tamil Nadu. The methodology adopted in this work is partly descriptive and partly analytic and interpretative.

Hinduism is one of the oldest major religions of the world. It consists of three principal gods called Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the preserver and Shiva, the destroyer. Though there are several sects within Hinduism, Saivism and Vaishnavism are the two major divisions of Hinduism. They became dominant due to a large following among different sections of the society and royal patronage. Most urban Hindus follow one of these two divisions. While Saivism regards Shiva as the ultimate deity, Vaishnavism regards Vishnu.

Temples are constructed neither to prove the existence of god nor to propagate him. But they are mainly established to regulate man in the spiritual field of realizing god. Hundreds of Shiva temples of historic fame are found in Tamil Nadu. Lord Shiva is generally worshipped in the form of Phallus (Linga) fixed on a pedestal. The Lord Nataraja form of Lord Shiva is known to be the first of twenty five ones of Lord Shiva.

There are lot of temples in India and especially in Tamil Nadu where Shiva is worshipped as Nataraja. But, there are mainly five places in Tamil Nadu where the cult of Nataraja is worshipped with gaiety and pomp. The dancing deity Nataraja can be seen in these Five Divine Sabhas or five halls of Tamil Nadu. The five temples - Chidambaram, Madurai, Thiruvalangadu,
Tirunelveli and Courthallam, are very revered and is known as the five sabhas. It is said Lord Shiva has danced at these five places as Nataraja - the dancing form of Shiva, to benefit different devotees.

Development of Nataraja cult in North Indian, South Indian context especially in Tamil Nadu was studied elaborately. During Sangam Age, Lord Shiva was held supreme and was the deity for all the regions. The image of the Lord Nataraja was developed through the ages of the Cheras, the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Pallavas, the Vijayanagar and the Nayaks period. Archaeometallurgical, iconographic and literary evidence discussed shows that the Nataraja bronze, depicting Shiva’s Anandatandava or ‘dance of bliss’, was a Pallava innovation (seventh to mid-ninth century), rather than tenth-century Chola as widely believed. That this formulation was informed of ‘cosmic’ or metaphysical connotations is also argued on the basis of the testimony of the hymns of Tamil saints.

Lord Nataraja came to function as an emblem of the Chola dynasty as early as the fourth quarter of the tenth century. The same centuries intervening between the first Nataraja images and the texts Coomaraswamy used, roughly the tenth to thirteenth centuries, were also the centuries during which the Chola dynasty flourished, exercising political and martial authority across South India and beyond. As Chola fame increased over the course of the tenth century,
sculptures of Nataraja were rendered with increasing frequency in the Kaveri delta, which the Cholas aspired to control, particularly on temples sponsored by the Chola queen Sembiyar Mahadevi. Nataraja's visual form may even have played a role in encouraging Chola patronage and strengthening the alliance between these kings and the priestly community that maintained the temple at Chidambaram. Both groups cherished expansionist ambitions and strove to establish their own niches of the Tamil landscape as centers of a vast realm.

During the reign of the Chola dynasty, artists rendered Nataraja in freestanding bronze, in stone relief, and in mural painting. The sculptures could serve as objects of worship, sites into which the divine himself would become manifest when properly invoked. The bronze sculpture of Nataraja in the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram remains under worship at the temple's center as the most sacred of Lord Nataraja's representations. As such it receives the honours one would bestow on the body of a king: it is awakened each morning, bathed, offered meals, delighted with music and dance, and put to sleep in the evening. Here, as at other Hindu temples, the icon at the temple's center embodies the deity's living presence.

Lord Nataraja was not the first sculptural form to represent Shiva dancing. That subject had been carved in many parts of the Indian sub-continent since at least the early sixth century. Zvelebil maintains that some of the early
Southern forms may have served as iconographic precedents for Nataraja images, but their emblems and postures distinguish them consistently from this form. One most dancing forms of Shiva made before the tenth century, the lifted leg does not cross in front of the hips. Such figures may have as many as sixteen arms instead of four. The drum and the flame are usually absent from their hands. Many of these early figures dance on a platform instead of on a dwarf. Nataraja images throughout the Tamil country were intended to function as deliberate recapitulations of the original cult icon at Chidambaram.

The most important saba for Nataraja is the Kanaka Sabha or golden hall at Chidambaram. The Nataraja dances here in the Ananda Tandava or the dance of bliss form and he is called Kanaka Sabha or the Lord of the Golden Hall. This temple has been sung in a lot of Tevaram and Tiruvvasakam. Here Lord Shiva is worshipped in all the three forms, namely, arupa - which is called Chidambara rahasyam, aruparupa - Shiva Lingam and rupa - Nataraja. Lord Nataraja was the favourite deity of the Chola kings of Thanjavur and hence they kept idol of Nataraja in all the Shiva temples built by them in various places in their empire in Tamil Nadu and all over in South India.

Velli Sabha or silver hall (Velli Ambalam) at the Meenakshi Sundareshwarar temple in Madurai is another important Natarja shrine of Tamil Nadu. Nataraja is shown in a very rare posture here. He is shown his right leg
raised and dancing on the dwarf (apasmara purusha) with his left foot. Both the main image of stone (moolavar) and the processional image (utsava murti) in this shrine are in unusual posture. The usual posture of Nataraja is dancing with his right leg placed on the dwarf with his left leg.

The Thiruvalangadu temple is known for Rathina Sabha (Ruby hall) is a vast temple complex with beautiful mandapams and gopurams. The towering Rajagopuram is visible for a kilometer around. The temple tank goes by the name of Mukti theertham. Several inscriptions are found on the walls of the temple. The temple has some copper plates and sasanams. But, for the inscriptions of the place and the famous Thiruvalangadu copper plates, which are now preserved in the Government Museum, Madras.

The Thamira Sabha (Copper Hall of Dance), a brilliant work of art, is housed within the inner precincts of the Nellaiyappar temple at Tirunelveli. It is located in the Northeastern corner of the back side of Nellaiyappar shrine. The Thamira Sabha is remarkable for it stone icon of Kalika Tandavamurti associated with dance contest between Lord Nataraja and Goddesses Kali. The idols of Saiva Saints TirugnanaSambandar, Tirunavukkarasar, Sundarar and Manikkavasakar are found in front of the Lord Nataraja in the Thamira Sabha.

The Chithira Sabha (Hall of picture) dedicated to Lord Nataraja and decorated with mural paintings of deities and devotees, puranic stories and
religious events are a few meters away from Kutralanathar temple. This copper roofed sabha is with a lily pond and with a heavily ornamented gopuram. In Chithira Sabha, Lord Nataraja and the other deities are in picture forms.

The Five Divine Sabhas are located in the Natarajar temple, the Meenakshi Sundareswarar temple, the Vataranyeswarar temple, the Nellaiyappar temple and the Kutralanathar temple respectively. All the day to day activities of the Five Divine Sabhas are managed by the respective temple authorities. The Dikshitars administer the Nataraja temple, where as the remaining four temples are managed by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board of the Tamil Nadu Government. More over the movable and immovable properties of these temples are looked after by the temple authorities.

In the Kanaka Sabha at Chidambaram the pujas are conducted regularly six times everyday. Likewise pujas are also performed to Lord Nataraja and Sivakami Amman in the Velli Sabha, Rathina Sabha, Thamira Sabha and Chithira Sabha in their respective abodes. The Brahmostavams, Anithirumanjanam and Margazhi Thiruvathirai are observed with fervour and grandeur. Mahabhiskekam (great holy bathing) of the deities, Lord Nataraja and Sivakami is conducted six times in a year on certain specified dates. During pujas in a conventional way involves the rituals of abhishekams, archanas and
aradhanas. The world famous Natyanjali festival is celebrated every year in a grand manner in Chidambaram.

Social welfare measures such as Annadanam scheme, Karunai Illam for the orphans, free marriage schemes are studied in a detailed manner. Like Christians, the Hindus also conducted joint prayer for the healing of the sick people. At Madurai Meenakshi Sundareshwarar temple they conduct spiritual and moral education classes for the children. The employees of Madurai, Thiruvvalangadu, Tirunelveli and Courtallam temples are benefited by the welfare schemes for the temple employees introduced by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board.

The Nataraja cult has its impact in economic, social and cultural aspects. From the dance of Nataraja, the sages taught the principle of Love is God and Love is Shivam. The worship of Lord Nataraja on Arudra festival is considered to be purifying animal passions in human beings. The vibration of the dance itself shakes off impurities and makes the objects luminous. The cosmos itself undergoes an infinite number of deaths and rebirths. For the modern scientists, Shiva’s dance is the dance of subatomic matter. The universe is filled with the energy of Shiva’s aspect as tamas. By dancing he does his five acts of creation, preservation, destruction, unveiling of illusion and liberation of the soul.
The outcome of this research would motivate and inspire the young researcher in the history discipline to do research in *Pancha Bootha Sithalas* of Lord Shiva (five sacred places), *Sivalaya Ootam* in Kanyakumari District, (Shiva devotees covered twelve Shiva temples in Kanyakumari District through out the night of Maha Shivaratri day). Recent times Nataraja sculptures are smuggled from India to various foreign countries for the sake of arts. This should be prevent and protect the Nataraja sculptures by the efforts of the government. Lord Nataraja’s Five Divine Sabhas and its shrines are responsible for the promotion of Nataraja cult through the ages. In Tamil Nadu, Nataraja sculptures were famous during the Chola period, gradually became world famous.