CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The temple, "a symbolic expression of the religious impulse of the people", and the matha, "an institution that stood for the propagation of the religious ideals and philosophy", were "the two great gifts of medieval Hinduism to South India". These two historical institutions played a prominent and complimentary role in fostering the religious and cultural life of the people. The study of these institutions forms a fascinating chapter in the religious history of South India.

Both Śaivism and Vaishnavism, the two principal Hindu religious streams of the medieval period, had temples and mathas of their respective denominations. A study of these temples and mathas gives an insight into how they provided the institutional basis for these sects. Of the two, the institutions of Śaiva sect alone form a distinct and an interesting study. Considerable work has been done in recent years on Śaiva temple as an institution of religio and culture. But a systematic study of Śaiva mathas with a view to understand their multifaceted nature in the socio-cultural history of South India in general and Tamil country
in particular has not received adequate attention and remains still rather an untrodden field.

However, there are a few well merited works on Śaivism which incidentally deal with some aspects of Śaiva mathas in the Tamil country. Of them, some deserve special mention here. C. V. Narayana Ayyar's *Origin and Early History of Śaivism in South India* is a critical study of the origin and development of Śaivism in the Tamil country in general up to the age of the saints of the Bhakti cult. Though this work does not deal with the Śaiva mathas, it provides a background to understand the state of Śaivism in the age of the Nayanārs when the mathas emerged. M. Rajamanikkam's work *The Development of Śaivism in South India*, wherein is presented an account of the growth of Śaivism in the Tamil country up to the period of the Chōlas, contains a very brief reference to the Śaiva mathas. Ramendra Nath Nandi's *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, another important work, covers the Śaiva mathas in the region during the period A.D. 600 - A.D. 1000. Though it does not contain direct references to the history of Śaiva mathas in the Tamil country, it provides welcome basis for a comparative study with other regions. The *Kānālikas and Kālāmikhas* by
David Lorenzen deals with the monastic orders of the Kalāmukha sect in South India. Sporadic and sketchy has been the treatment meted out to the historical development of Śaiva mathas in this part of the land, perhaps, due to the diverse nature of the sources, viz. literature, epigraphs and traditional accounts, posing the problem of proper integration. Under such circumstances a monograph focussing on the Śaiva mathas in the Tamil country in its historical perspective is a desideratum.

**SCOPE**

In the absence of a systematic and detailed study of the Tamil literature and epigraphs, these invaluable original sources, when tapped to the maximum possible extent are apt to shed welcome light on the origin, development and the multifaceted aspects of the Śaiva mathas in this part of the land. An analytical and critical study of the evidence culled out from these sources, reveals the various elements that led to the emergence of these institutions, such as, the impact of the heretical sects during the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., the Jaina-Śaiva conflicts and the subsequent revival of Śaivism through the Bhakti movement under the stewardship of the
Mâyânas. Their growth, in course of time, brought in its train an out-crop of numerous types of mathas consequent to the springing up of various schools of Śāivism entailing thereby a methodical classification in accordance with the school to which these mathas were affiliated, as for example, the mathas of Bhakti school, Kālāmukha mathas, Śālaki mathas, and Gauharīs. Being an offshoot of the temples, and rooted in the socio-religious milieu, the nature and function of the mathas cannot be studied in isolation. Appropriately the study of the mathas vis-à-vis the temples is a *sine qua non* for a proper understanding of the mathas themselves. An examination of the method of internal organisation and the manner of the life of the monks becomes a corollary on their attaining a separate entity. So also, the role of the Śaiva matha as an institution that stood for the propagation of religious and philosophic ideals, as an organ of education and its impact and changes from time to time on the cultural, religious and socio-economic spheres also form an integral part of the study. The survey, when made in such a proper perspective, will enable one to assess and exemplify what this part of the land of the Tamils had to offer, as its regional contribution, to the development of Śaiva monasticism of the Indian sub-continent. An
endeavour is made in the following chapters to portray, in its varied dimensions, a graphic picture of the Śaiva māṭha in the Tamil country.

The period covered herein ranges from the beginning of the seventh century A.D. to the close of the thirteenth century A.D. The seventh century saw the beginnings of the Śaiva māṭha when the Tamil country was in the grip of the religious upsurge as a result of the Bhakti movement fostered and steered by the Tamil saints and widely supported by the common people. The māṭha consolidated the social basis of the Śaiva religion and the institutional development reached its culmination at the close of the thirteenth century A.D. By the end of this century, there began the decline in patronage to Śaiva māṭhas partly as a result of the decline and fall of the imperial powers in the Tamil country and partly as a consequence of the political instabilities, disturbances and invasions and economic flux that prevailed during this period. The period between A.D. 600 - 1300 A.D. is divided into two phases, viz. phase I : A.D. 600 - c. 1000 A.D. - the period of origin and formation; and phase II : c. A.D. 1000 - A.D. 1300 - the period of consolidation and proliferation.
SOURCES

As the period under study coincides with the dawn of the Bhakti age and thereafter, the Bhakti literature which developed from the seventh century A.D., constitutes a valuable source for the study of the subject. The hymns of the Bhakti saints, Tirunāvukkarasar, Tirugnāṇasambandar and Sundarar, collectively known as Tevāram, were incorporated in the codified Śaiva canon as the first seven Tirumurai. They throw a considerable light on the social conditions and religious conflicts of the seventh-eighth centuries A.D. They also portray how the revival of Śaivism was effected through the Bhakti ideology, which provided the background for the growth of the temple cult and the emergence of the matha as an institution linked with the temple.

Besides the Tevāram, two important Śaiva literary works, Tiruvācakam and Tirumandiram respectively of Manikkavācakar and Tirumālar, both ascribable to the ninth century A.D., are very much useful for the study of the subject. The Tiruvācakam, incorporated in the Śaiva canon as the eighth Tirumurai, is another work belonging to the Bhakti cult which forms the basis of the Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy.
The *Tirumandiram*, the tenth *Tirumurai* of the Saiva canonical literature, reflects the religious thought of South India during the ninth century A.D. It contains 3000 hymns which are divided into nine cantos (tantras). Its author, Tirumular, has rendered into Tamil the Saiva doctrines based on *Arama* and it became the foundation upon which the later structure of the *Saiva Siddhanta* was built. The different schools of Saivism, the religious practices of the ascetics as well as devotees, and the significance of Saiva asceticism are stressed in this canonical literature. Both *Tiruvaccan* and *Tirumandiram* explain the significance of the *Arama* which provided the doctrinal basis for the Saiva mathas.

The *Tiruvilagana*, a collection of hymns by nine saints of the second half of the tenth and the first half of the eleventh centuries A.D., forms the ninth *Tirumurai*. Though not they expound any distinctive philosophy of their own, these hymns, following the tradition of Nayanars extoll the glories of Siva and ideals of Saivism, and prescribe the various religious practices to be followed.
The importance of Muruttapar Purāṇam, commonly known as Periyarapurāṇam, for the study of the subject, can hardly be exaggerated. This Śaiva hagiological work of the twelfth century A.D., composed by Sēkkilār, deals with the lives and deeds of the sixty three Śaiva Nayanārś and nine groups of adiyārś who belonged to the age of the Bhakti movement. The verses portray the conflict between the heterodox and Śaiva sects and the consequent revival of Śaivism in the wake of the socio-religious fervour that prevailed in the Tamil country in the age of the Nayanārś. These conflicts and interactions bore indirect impact on the institutional development of the religion and the emergence of the mātharś of Śaivism. This work is invaluable for the present study in so far as it reveals the association of the Nayanārś with certain mātharś.

Sēkkilār, though belonging to the twelfth century A.D., tries to avoid any reference to contemporary conditions and attempts to portray faithfully the conditions prevailing at the time of the Nayanārś. While doing so, he not only relies on the traditional accounts of the devotees conveyed through generations, but also makes use of literary evidence and personal knowledge of the various religious centres, where sculptural representations of some of the Nayanārś existed.
Admittedly, the *Perivanapurāṇam* is a religious work with a devotional bias. However, it does provide many trustworthy historical facts helpful for the understanding of the social and religious climate of the period of the Nayanārs.

*Silappadhikāram* and *Manimekhalai*, the twin Tamil epics, are also useful. They depict the various religious faiths and the heretical sects that were rather predominant in the Tamil country before the Bhakti age. They include the Brāhmānapical and indigenous religious ideas in their texts. A fairly good account of the nature of Śaivism is known from these two epics.

The Sanskrit works of the Pallava period *Māttavilāsa prabhasana*, *Bhāgavadalukkam* of Mahendra I, *Kirātārjunīyaṇam* of Bhāravi and *Avantiundarikathā* of Daṇḍin shed light on the prevailing religious conditions that warranted imminent changes in that sphere and provide some helpful clues to the understanding of the religious atmosphere.

The epigraphic evidence comprising a large number of stone inscriptions and copper-plate charters remain the mainstay of our source of information. Most of them are in Tamil and belong to the period of the imperial powers in the Tamil country, viz., the Pallavas, the Chōlas and the Pāṇḍyas, and
the feudatory chiefs. These inscriptions which are mainly donative in character make frequent references to the multifarious activities of the Śaiva mathas. (From a systematic and chronological study of these inscriptions, we are able to identify nearly two hundred and fifty mathas of different Śaiva sects widely distributed in space and time in the Tamil country.) They also provide interesting information about the sequence of their development and their relative importance. Moreover, they provide useful data about the nature and organisation of Śaiva mathas, viz., the pontiff, his succession, powers and functions; the position of the matha in relation to the temple; the relationship between the preceptor and the disciple; matha as a religious and cultural institution; and its part in the socio-economic life of the people. But for the epigraphic evidence, the functioning of the institution would not have been clearly brought out. Besides these epigraphs, some inscriptions from the contemporary Deccan provide valuable information for a comparative study of the Śaiva mathas.
SCHEME OF THE WORK

The origin and spread of Śaiva māthas in the Tamil country constitute the main focus of the chapter succeeding the introduction. The third chapter covers the classification of various types, in accordance with the different schools, of Śaiva māthas in this region. The nature and organisation of these māthas form the subject matter of the fourth chapter. The Śaiva mātha as a religious institution and as a seat of higher learning are dealt with in the next two chapters respectively. The mātha and the society and the economic role of the Śaiva māthas are brought out in the next two chapters. The epilogue sums up the general inferences and conclusions that emerge from the survey made in the main body of this work.
REFERENCES


3. The fact that Tirunāvukkarasār lived in the seventh century A.D. has been well established by his contemporaneity with Mahendravrāman I. Tirugūna- sambandar was his younger contemporary. Sundarar - Čhāramēn Perumāḷ contemporaneity fixes the former to the eighth century A.D. See C.V. Narayana Ayyar, *Origin and early history of Śaivism in South India*, pp. 123, 126, 285, 423, 462; C. Meenakshi, *Administration and Social life under the Pallavas*, pp. 339-341;
4. The first three Tirumurais comprise of the hymns of Tirumavukkarasar, the next three (4th, 5th and 6th) Tirumurais consist of the songs of Ānandasarvaran and the seventh of the saint Sundarar.

5. Inspite of the divergent views with regard to the date of Manikkavacakar, it is now strongly held that he lived during the 2nd half of the ninth century A.D. and was a contemporary of the Pandya king Varavaṇa II.

See C. Meenakshi, op. cit., p. 345;
N. Subramaniyan, History of Tamil Nadu, p. 366;
M. Rajamanikkam, op. cit., p. 146.
K. V. Raman, Pandiyar Varalāru, p. 81.

6. Some earlier writers have placed the composition of Tirumandiram between the 4th - 6th centuries A.D.

See M. Rajamanikkam, op. cit., p. 92;
C.V. Narayana Ayyar, op. cit., p. 206 ff;
V. V. Ramanasastri, in his preface to Tirumandiram (ed. V. Visvanatha Pillai), p. 11.

But a critical study of the subject matter of the work reveals that in all probability, it should
have been composed in the ninth century A.D. See K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, p. 434.


9. Sēkkilēr was the contemporary of the Chōla king Kulōttuniga II (1133–1150 A.D.) On the basis of inscriptional evidence and with the help of contemporary literary works, it is established that Kulōttuniga II was his contemporary. The attempts at identifying the contemporary Chōla king with Kulōttuniga I or III have been disproved. See K. Nambi Arooran, *Glimpses of Tamil culture* (based on Periya Purāṇam), p. 7 ff.

M. Rajamanikkam, *op. cit.*, p. 11.


11. Much controversy revolves round the problem of the chronology of the twin epics. Divergent views have been put forth regarding the date ranging from 2nd century A.D. to sixth century A.D. But an examination of the various pieces of evidence provided by the two epics on social and religious conditions would lead to the surmise that they were composed about the end of the fifth century A.D.


12. The gist of these inscriptions is available in the *Annual Reports of Epigraphy*, published by *Archaeological Survey of India*. The texts of some of these inscriptions are published in the volumes of the *South Indian Inscriptions and Epigraphia Indica*.

The texts of unpublished inscriptions bearing on the subject, which are available with the Chief Epigraphist, *Archaeological Survey of India*, Mysore have been consulted.