CHAPTER - 3

THE KUNRAKUDI MUTT
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Introduction

‘Kunrakudi Thiruvannamalai Adheenam’, popularly called ‘Kunrakudi Mutt’ became a popular Mutt in Tamil Nadu, with the assumption of Mutt authority by Kundrakudi Adigalar the monk and scholar. This chapter on ‘Kunrakudi Mutt’ explainins the word ‘Mutt’, the origin and growth of Mutts, the purpose of the Mutts, their character and activities; it also lists out the prominent Saivite and Vaishnavait Mutts. In general and traces the origin, administration and assets of the Kunrakudi Mutt in particular.

Meaning and Definition of “Mutt”

The term ‘Mutt’ is a derivation from the Tamil word ‘Madam’ which refers to a monastery in English. The ‘Mutt’ is an ecclesiastical organisation of the Hindu Society. Nevertheless ‘Mutts’ in Tamil Nadu are associated with the socio-economic and cultural life of the people. ‘Adheenam’ is the Tamil equivalent of ‘Madam’ or ‘Mutt’. The word ‘Math’ also refers to Mutt. The Hindu monasteries, or ‘math’ in
Sanskrit are invariably of small size, providing accommodation for only a few inmates except at the important pilgrim centres.¹

The term ‘Mutts’ appears to have been originally applied to the solitary hut of the religious recluse and then to similar dwellings of the communities of hermits living together in the forest in the practice of austerities. The Mutts exist in considerable numbers all over India, but the inmates for the most part live a retired life. There is, however, no central control, nor any interference in the management or affairs of the Mutts. The older Mutt buildings were of the simplest character and architecture. Later more elaborate buildings were erected. To erect a Mutt for the service of monks and wandering ascetics has always been regarded as an act of religious merit. In most instances an endowment for the upkeep of the Mutt is provided either at the time of erection or by subsequent grant and this is increased from time to time by gifts of patrons who endeavour thus to secure merit for themselves. But the Mutts often became exceedingly wealthy in revenue and lands.

Origin and Growth of Mutts

The origin of Mutts in Tamil Nadu and in South India goes back to ancient times. The organisation of Mutts as a religious

institutions had its inception since the days of the Tamil Kings who liberally donated lands for the Mutts. The revenue of the donated lands was utilized for the maintenance of the Mutts and its religious and secular activities. The Aryans came and conquered India after a prolonged war with the native Dravidians. Afterwards the Aryans started to adopt and copy many of the virtues and good morals of the civilized Dravidians as their own. Later on the Aryans built on and developed their own religious systems. The Aryans grew as religious monopolists. The Aryans were very particular about promoting Sanskrit language and literature by means of popularizing the Vedas, Upanishads and Epics. Their attempts evidently let to undermine the glory, greatness and antiquity of the classical language namely Tamil. It is therefore quite natural to presume that the native Dravidians would have attempted to preserve and practise their own ancient systems of worship, rituals, language etc. Consequent upon the efforts of the Tamils, the Saivite Mutts might have originated as counter balancing factors to the growing Brahminical monopoly. Under these circumstances Saivite Mutts emerged.² During the Chola period very many religious Mutts were established. The Muslim invasion of South India not only altered the political map of South India but also paved the way for

² K.K. Pillai, Tamizhaga Varalaru Makkalum Panpadum (Tamils History, the people and culture), Tamil, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai, 2000, pp. 63 – 67.
political instability in South India. The foundation Vijaya Nagar Kingdom in 1336 A.D. on the Southern banks of Tungapadra, a tributary of Krishna with the help of the monk Vidyaranya of Sirungeri Mutt (13th Century) was a historic event; political stability and internal tranquility was gradually restored by the Vijayanagar rulers. The Nayaks, the so called deputies of the Vijayanagar rulers, held sway over Tamil Nadu.

Since the 13th century Islam began to spread rapidly not only in North India but also in Tamil Nadu. Similarly, since the 19th Century Christianity gained momentum. Conversions from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity took place in large scale in Tamil Nadu also. At this juncture, the rich aristocrats of Tamil Society understood the short coming of the Hindu Society and religion and consequently, they realised the need for some sort of religious organisation to arrest the spread of proselytisation. Thus the ecclesiastical organisation called Mutt or Adheenams emerged as an alternative to protect Hinduism.

The Nayak rule was ended by the Marathas. After the decline of the Marathas the British established their paramountancy over

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India. During those decades when Tamil Nadu was ruled by the Telugus, Marathas and the British, the Tamil language was relegated to background. Tamil lost its due place and position in worship, in music and in governance. Tamil language and literature lost the patronage of rulers. The mother of Dravidian languages known as Tamil lost its importance on account of the dominating influence of Telugu and the alien English language.

In course of time due to the impact of Tamil Renaissance, the Tamils were awakened from the long period of slumber and stagnation. The fore-runners of Tamils nationalism were Rev. Robert Caldwell (A.D. 1819 – 1891), the Scholar-Saint Ramalinga Swamigal (A.D.1823 – 1874) and the national poet Subramaniya Bharathi (A.D.1882 – 1921), and Western Scholars like G.U. Pope (A.D.1820 – 1908) and Constantine Joseph Beschi (A.D.1680 – 1747) popularly known as Veeramamunivar and many others. Their immense contribution to the growth of Tamil language and literature followed by numerous Tamil scholars in the 20th century kindled Tamil consciousness and thereby Tamil language emerged as a rallying symbol in the Tamil Society. Hence, the Mutts began to identify themselves with Tamil Renaissance and Tamil consciousness. Many Tamil scholars also associated themselves with the Mutt. In the
twentieth century most of the heads of the Mutt in Tamil Nadu were either Tamil scholars or patrons of Tamil language and literature.\(^6\)

**The Purpose of Mutts**

The *Mutt* in Tamil Nadu, particularly in the 20\(^{th}\) century, patronized Tamil scholars who engaged in the creation of literary wealth in the form of poems and anthologies etc. some of the heads of *Mutt* were dedicated scholars in Tamil language and Literature. Some of the poets who lived in the Thiruvaduthurai *Mutt* and Dharmapuram *Mutt* have authored many books on Saivism.\(^7\) They wrote literary criticism to some of the classical Tamil works which belonged to the sangam period. During the reign of the Pallavas, *Mutt* existed in Tondaimandalam. The purpose of those *Mutt* were spread of education and cultivation of morals in the minds of the people.\(^8\) Moreover those *Mutt* served as unique institutions of

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ethics and values. They have rendered enormous service for the promotion of Tamil language and literature.⁹

Some of the Adheenams or Mutts like Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam and Dharmapuram Adheenam had served as Saivites centres and they also became portals of Tamil language and literature. Those Mutts added strength to the Tamil Renaissance and Hindu Revivalism.¹⁰

**Character of Mutts**

The Mutts were more ecclesiastical in nature, in character and performance. The organization of Mutts as religious institutions took its beginning with the imperial kings of Tamil Nadu namely the Cheras, the Cholas and the Pandyas. Later on the authorities of Mutt and the local chieftains improved the functioning of the Mutts. The kings liberally donated lands for the Mutts. The Mutts were more or less like the princely States. It is no exaggeration that the

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¹⁰ Ooran Adigal, Saiva Adheenangal (Saiva Mutts), Tamil, Samarasa Sanmarka Research Institute, Vadalur, 2003, P.11.
Thiruvaduthurai and the Dharmapuram Mutts possessed almost all the characteristics of the princely States.\textsuperscript{11}

**Activities**

Hundreds of saints stayed in the Mutt as students. These saint – students later moved to various parts like Kashmir, Benares, Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka etc.,\textsuperscript{12} and established separate and independent Mutts in those regions.\textsuperscript{13} Mutts imparted secular education and religious education. Music, dance and medicine were also taught in Mutts. The Chola kings generally patronized Mutts. Mutts discharged social responsibilities such as providing salt, castor oil to the poor people and also medical treatment for diseased people.\textsuperscript{14} A Mutt was established in Thiruvidankali which was meant for providing opportunities to the Bhramin youth to learn the Vedas.\textsuperscript{15} During the period of Vikrama Chola (1120-1135 A.D.) an important Mutt was established at Thiruvaduthurai.\textsuperscript{16} Through this

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.167.
\textsuperscript{14} K.K. Pillai, Tamilaga Varalaru Makkalum Panpadum, (Tamils History the People and Culture), Tamil, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai, 2000, p.356.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p.356.
Mutt, food was provided to the Bhramins, monks (saints) Anarthikireesar (Christians) free of cost. Free boarding and lodging were provided to those who were students of Medicine and grammar.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Assets of the Mutt}

Fertile lands donated by the kings form the major part of the Mutt property. For example Thiruvaduthurai Mutt possessed hundreds of acres of fertile lands in the southern districts in addition to twenty big temples. The Dharamapuram Mutt possessed 12000 veli\textsuperscript{18} of fertile lands and twenty seven temples. Even though the Mutt possessed such huge immovable assets in the form of lands and temples, there was no other source of income.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Kinds of Mutts}

During the Chola period the temples and festivals abundantly grow in number. Simultaneously, the number of Mutts also grew

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.167.

\textsuperscript{18} A Veli is a term which denotes a unit of measurement of Land. 1 Veli = to 6.25 acres of land.

\textsuperscript{19} Ooran Adigal, Saiva Adheenanggal (Saiva Mutts), Tamil, Samarasam Sanmarka Research Institute, Vadalur, 2003, p.10.
and got multiplied.\textsuperscript{20} The \textit{Mutts} in Tamil Nadu could be generally categorised as Saivite and Vaishnavait \textit{Mutts}.\textsuperscript{21} The cults of Saivism called Pasupatham and Kalamugam also had \textit{Mutts} in Tamil Nadu. They were known as Kolaki \textit{Mutt}.

\textbf{Saivitee \textit{Mutt}}

There is mention about list of names of 18 Suddha Saivitee \textit{Mutts} as mentioned in the book Abithana Sinthamani published in 1910 A.D. The 18 \textit{Mutts} mentioned in the list are given below:

The 18 \textit{Mutts} the first seven were popular and exist even to day.\textsuperscript{22}

1. Thiruvadudhurai Adheenam of Nagapattinam District
2. Dharmapuram Adheenam of Nagapattinam District.
3. Thiruppanandal Kasi \textit{Mutt} of Tanjavore District.
4. Sooriyanarkoil Adheenam Aududhurai of Tanjavore District.
5. Thondaimandala Adheenam, Kancheepuram

\textsuperscript{20} Ma. Rajamanicham, Saiva Samaya Valarchi, (Growth of Saivaism), Tamil, Poonkodi Publications, Chennai, 1958, p.162.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. p.162.

\textsuperscript{22} Ooran Adigal, Saiva Adheenangal, (Saivite Mutts), Tamil, Samarasa Sanmarka Research Institute, Vadalur, 2003, p.9.
6. Madurai Thirugnana Sambandan Adheenam, Madurai.
8. Senkol Adheenam, Perunkulam of Tirunelveli District.
9. Thulavur Adheenam Thulavur of Sivagnaga District.
10. Velakkuruchi Adheenam Thiruvur
11. Nachiar koil Adheenam, Kumbakonam of Tanjavore District.
14. Swarkapuram Adheenam, Ambarthirumangalam, Nagapattinam District
15. Akama Sivaprakasar Adheenam, Chidambaram of Cuddalore District.
16. Thayumana Swamigal Adheenam, Annapan pettah of Tanjavore District.
17. Neelappadi Adheenam, Tanjavore District.
18. Rameswaram Adheenam Rameswaram of Ramanathapuram District.
Saivite Mutt

Kolaki Mutt: The members of this Mutt belong to the Pasupatham and the Kalamugam which were cults of saivism.\textsuperscript{23} The branches of the Kolaki Mutt and Kapalika Mutt,\textsuperscript{24} also existed in Tirunelveli, Thiruvarur, Madurai, Athur in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{25}

Mutts named after Kings and Chieftains

1. Arumozhidevan Mutt, Thirunampalli
2. Rajendra Cholan Mutt, Otriyur
3. Kulothuga Mutt, Otriyur
4. Rajendra Cholan Mutt, Udayarkudi
5. Vanarayan Mutt, Usathanam
6. Veerapandian Mutt, Valeesuvaram\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{24} Kapalikars, the followers of Saivism (Kalamugam). They were very dangerous people. They used to follow the cult of ‘Tantra’ and used to drink wine and human skull. The word ‘Kapalik’ means one who carries a human skull with him. They were extremely powerful. They degraded the entire religious life of the country, they used to sacrifice human beings before the goddess, one of the reasons for their supremacy was the occult power. They used to have black magic spell. They were quite strong in number. Mostly they used to acquire this power to harm others. This spell of black magic was known as ‘Siddhai’. Ugra Bhairav was a powerful ‘Kapalik’ who, among other colleagues accepted Sankara as their guru. They lived in these Kapalika Mutts.


\textsuperscript{25} Ibid. p.167.

\textsuperscript{26} ibid, pp.162, 163.
Mutts named after Nayanmars

1. Paranjothi Mutt, Thirumangalam
3. Thillaivazh Anthanar Mutt, Madurandhagam
4. Nambi Thirumurugan Mutt, Thiruppugalur
5. Nami Nandhiadigal Mutt, Thirukazhukunram
6. Vascoka Mutt Thiruvathigai, Thiruvathigai
7. Thirunavukarasudevar Mutt, Thiruvathigai
8. Thirunavukarasudevar Mutt, Thirupurana
9. Parasamayakolari Mutt, Thirumanacheri
10. Thirugnanasambanda Thirumadam, Palayarai
11. Thirunavukara Mutt, Thiruvizhimazhalai
12. Thirunavukasadevar Mutt, Thirupalaithurai
13. Thiruthondar Thogaiyam – Thirumadam, Vijayamangai
14. Thiruthoda Thogaiyan – Thirumadam Mutt, Vijayamangai
15. Thirugnana Sambandan – Thirumadam – Trippattur of Sivanganga District
17. Siruthondan – Thirumandam *Mutt*, Senkattagkudi
18. Thirumula devar – Thirumadam *Mutt*, Valivalam
19. Sundaraperumal *Mutt*, Kancheepuram
20. Thirugnanasambandar – Thirumadam, Nodiyur

**Miscellaneous Mutts**

1. Thiruveethi *Mutt* – Thiruvavaduthruai
2. Pramanavasagan *Mutt* – Thiruvavaduthruai
3. Narpathonnayiravan *Mutt* – Thiruvavaduthruai
4. Perunthiruvvatti *Mutt* – Thiruvavaduthruai
5. Munootru – Irupathu Nalvan *Mutt* – Thiruvavaduthruai
6. Parmakesuvara *Mutt*, Thirutcharamam
7. Dhanmavanigar *Mutt*, Thiruvanamalai
9. Arapperunj Selvi salai, Chindambaram
10. Thirumurai Devara Selvan *Mutt*, Sirkazhi
11. Thiruvedhan Azhagiya Thirumadam *Mutt*, Thiruvvannainallur
12. Ezhunootruvan Thirumadam *Mutt*, Thiruvatpokki

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13. Inootrenman Thirumadam *Mutt*, Thirukkodiga
14. Nalayiran Thirumadam *Mutt*, Thiruvvarur
15. Cholan vassal Thirumadam *Mutt*, Chudurvethi Mangalam
16. Andar Kadiyaparanar *Mutt*, Thiruppurambiam
17. Vannara Madhevra Andan *Mutt*, Thiruvalankadu
18. Thirupugalur *Mutt*, Auyurvedic Hosiptal, Thirupugalur
20. Sathasiva Pattarar Thiruvaiyaru *Mutt* Thiruvaiyaru
21. Anbarkadiyar *Mutt*, Thiruppalaivanam
22. Kanchi Kamakodi Pudam, Kancheepuram
23. Ramakrishnan *Mutt*, Kancheepuram
24. Sirinkeri Jagathgum Sri Sarada Pudam, Kancheepuram
25. Upanished *Mutt*, Kancheepuram
26. Ramaniya *Mutt*, Sriperumpudhur
27. Malayala Mamunivar *Mutt*, Sriperumpudhur
29. Mudaliyandan Thirumaligai, Kancheepuram
30. Prathivathi Payangaran Anna *Mutt*, Kancheepuram
31. Nampillai *Mutt*, Kancheepuram
32. Thirumalai Thiruppathi Periya Jeeyar *Mutt*, Thiruninravur
33. Appar Samigal Mutt, Pillayar palayam, Kancheepuram
34. Vanamalai Jeeyar Mutt, Chinna Kancheepuram
35. Barravi Mutt, Chinna Kancheepuram
36. Ahobila Jeeyar Mutt, Chinna Kancheepuram
37. Prakala Mutt, Chinna Kancheepuram
38. Nampillai Mutt, Chinna Kancheepuram
39. Udaseen Bharaji Mutt, Kancheepuram
40. Chidambara Swamigal Mutt, Thirupporur

Apart from those Mutts mentioned above there were some Mutts which were dependents on the temple exclusively. They were Thiruvallam, Thirumudhukunram, Koirkadu, Momal Thirupampuram, Achuthmangalam and Thiruidaikazhi.

Saivism is the devotional movement centered around the Hindu God Siva, one of the principal Hindu deities. He is regarded by some believers as the third deity in the ‘Trimurti’ or great triad, of Hindu Gods, the other two being Bramha (Brahma) and Vishnu (Vishnu). Saivism the cult of Shiva, is one of the chief strands in

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28 Kancheepuram Area Temples, Hindu Religious and Endowment Board, Government of Tamil Nadu, 2002, p.120.
Hinduism. The name Siva signifies is Sanskrit “auspicious” or of ‘good omen’ Saivism occupies a prominent place in India. It is considered one of the perfect and clear systems of human thought.

**Vaishnavism**

An adherent of Vaishnavism one of three major forms of Hindu devotion, along with Saivas and Sakthas. Vaishnavism is the cult of Vishnu, initially connected with Vishnu as the sun, pervading all things with light and spiritual enlightenment. He was assimilated with Narayana, Cosmic energy and was later associated with ‘Krishna-Vasudeva’ until the relation between all three became one of the dynamic manifestations. Vishnu came to be regarded as ‘Eswara’ supreme being and also Bhraman theistically conceived.

**Sankarachariyar Mutt**

Athisankarar (A.D. 788 – 820) was the founder of Sankarachariyar Mutt. There are four great centres of spiritual enlightenment even today. In the North, ‘Joshimath’ or Jyotimath stands near Badarikashram, in the South, “Shringeri Mutt” and at the West, at Dwarka Kshetra the Sharada Mutt\(^{30}\) and in the East


**Vaishnava Mutts**

There were many Vaishna *Mutts*. Seven important divisions were seen in the Vaishnava *Mutts*.

1. Thenkalai *Mutt* in South Division
2. Vadakalai in North Division
3. Akobil *Mutt* (or) Alagiyasimha *Mutt*
4. Barakkal Swamy *Mutt* (or) Prammadhanthira Swamy *Mutt*
5. Munithra Chambirathaya *Mutt*
6. Mathvachari *Mutt*
7. Sankarachariyar *Mutt*

Two divisions were very important ‘*Mutts*’ of 7 divisions.

1. Mathva *Mutt* alias Mathvachari *Mutt*.

In the *Mutt* some branchers were given below:

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Some Vaishnava *Mutts* in Tamil Nadu.

1. Kanchi Kamakodi Peedam - Kancheepuram
2. Sringagiri Jegathguru
   Sri Saradhapeetam - Kancheepuram
3. Upanishad *Mutt* - Kancheepuram
4. Ramanujar *Mutt* - Kancheepuram
5. Prathivathi Payangaram
   Annangarachary *Mutt* - Kancheepuram
6. Nampillai *Mutt* - Kancheepuram
7. Thirumalai Thirupathi
   Periyajeeyar *Mutt* - Thiruninravur
8. Vanamamalai Jeeyar *Mutt* - Chinna Kancheepuram
10. Brakalatha *Mutt* - Chinna Kancheepuram
11. Nampillai *Mutt* - Chinna Kancheepuram
12. Uthajaan Bharaji *Mutt* - Kancheepuram
The Chola kings indiscriminately patronized the temples and religious monasteries (*Mutts*). They extended liberal donations to the *Mutts* and temples and thereby enabled the growth of Saivism and Vaishnavism in Tamil Nadu. Still there were conflicts between the two sects. The *Mutts* of Vaisnavism also contributed to the development of education and the medical field and contributed for the growth of Tamil language.\(^\text{32}\)

**Origin of Kunrakudi *Mutt***

The Kunrakudi *Mutt* had originated in Thiruvannamalai. Afterwards it was shifted to Piranmalai. Later on it was reshifted and established at Kunrakudi. As it had its origin in Thiruvanamalai it was called Kunrakudi Thiruvannamalai Adheenam. It was later popularly known as Kunrakudi *Mutt*. Revered Deivasigamani was the founder of the *Mutts* in 1310 A.D.\(^\text{33}\) He belonged to Sivacharaya tradition.

\(^{32}\) Mu. Varadarajan, Tamil Elakkiya Varalaru, (History of Tamil Literature), Tamil, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2001, p.357.

Administration of the *Mutt*

The head of the Kunrakudi *Mutt* and its administration was its Chief Adheenakarthar. The coronation of Chief Adheenakarthar was also conducted at the *Mutt*. It gave legitimacy to the head of the *Mutt*. Revered Deivasisgamani was succeeded by 45 heads of the *Mutt*. As per the tradition of the *Mutt*, the chief Adheenakartha or the head of the *Mutt*, is the chief administrator and executive and he was the sole decision making authority.

The organisation of the *Mutt* is well established with the help of a large number of staff members. The administrative work was divided and entrusted to several committees. Each committee was entrusted with responsibilities by oral orders of the head of the *Mutt*.

The important committees were:

1) Committee for General Administration of the *Mutt*.

2) Committee for five Temple

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34 A List of 44 other Chiefs has been enclosed in the Appendix.


36 This Committee looked after the Administration and maintenance of the five temples namely, (i) Arultharu Shanmuganathan Temple, Kunrakudi, Sivaganga District, (ii) Arultharu Thiruthalinathar Temple, Tiruppattur, Sivaganga District, (iii) Arultharu Mangaipagar Temple, Arultharu Thiru Kodun Kundra Nathan Temple, Piranmalai, Sivaganga District, Arultharu Uthurakooteswarar Temple, Chadurvedhi Mangalam, Sivaganda District, (iv) Arultharu Kokalapureeswarar Temple, Thirukkolakudi, Sivaganga District, (v) Arultharu Thenatchiamman Temple, Thenatchiamman Koil, Sivaganga District.
3) Committee for the properties of the *Mutt*

4) Committee of Village Planning Forum.

Each committee was assisted by the staff of the *Mutt*. The administration of the *Mutt* was carried on systematically under the direct supervision of the chief Adheenakarthar or head of the *Mutt*.

The Kunrakudi *Mutt* rendered yeomen services not only for the promotion of religious life but also for the material welfare of the people.

**Assets of the Kunrakudi *Mutt***

- 3.45 acres of wet lands and 7.23 acres dry lands were in Thirukolakkudi, Sivaganga District.\(^{37}\)

- Few housing sites were in Tirupparankundram, Madurai District
- Few housing sites in Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli District.
- 37.19 acres of wet lands, 35000 coconut trees, 200 mango trees, 200 tamarind trees were in Pallapatti village of Sivagnaga District.

\(^{37}\) Ramanathapuram Gazetteer, 1972, p.1225.
• 28.95 acres of dry lands and 2000 different varieties of trees were in Kunrakudi village of Sivaganga District.

• 45 rented shopping complex in Tirunelveli Town.

• 7 dwelling houses were in Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli District.

• Many shops, few car sheds more than 40 dwelling houses were in Madurai city.

• 3 factory buildings were in Kunrakudi.

• A large building in Senkalneer Pillayar street in Chidambaram, Cuddalore District.

• One Hotel complex and few vacant housing sites were in Chennai city.

• Few housing sites were in Nagapattinam.

• In and around of Kunrakudi there were 187 acres of lands and trees of mango, coconut, tamarind and cashew nut.\(^{38}\)

**Conclusion**

The Kunrakudi *Mutt* was not only religious in character but also secular. It had lot of assets and got large revenue from its lands and buildings. The *Mutt* played a significant role in the socio-economic life of the people of Kunrakudi. The socio-economic impact of the *Mutt* on Kunrakudi Village made it a model village in Tamil Nadu.