CHAPTER-1
READING THE TEMPLE IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH INDIAN HISTORY

Temple in a south Indian context has always drawn attention of students, researchers as well as scholars of various hues for a long time due to multiple traditions, myths and mysteries surrounding it. When we trace the origin of the temple, there is mention of Kottam, Koil, both meaning temple, in the Sangam literary works. Though they were not big in size, nevertheless they remained places of worship as there were references to sanctum sanctorum in temples \(^1\). The earliest attempt to provide for a temple in durable material was made by Pallava Mahendravarman I at Mandagapattu \(^2\).The period of the Pallavas witnessed revival of Hinduism-both Saivism and Vaisnavism- and the devotional hymns of the Alvars and Nayanar saints played an important role in this. Their devotional hymns describe various types of temples viz, Natharkoil (Temple of the Lord), Ilamkoil (Small or tender temple), Mankoil (Temple of sand), Tirukkoil (Sacred temple), Maddakoil (Storeyed temple) etc. Let it be known that religion does not mean the mere existence of belief in the other world and various cult practices. It rather indicates a point of development in which a formalized system of beliefs and practices, with claims to universalism, plays a significant part in the process of transformation, requiring mediation through worship and sacrifice, i.e. through institutional means, and enables a certain politico-religious elite to command priority and exercise authority. This institution in south Indian context was usually the temple. Post 1000 A.D., temples assumed an important role in politics,
economy, society as well as in religious matters and different powers competed with each other for patronage and legitimation for themselves through the temple. Long lists of inscriptions were engraved on the temple walls by various donors to patronize them and at the same time, the donors sought support from it in both political and religious spheres, especially in times of crisis.

The main focus of the donations became the need for the legitimation of authority, whereby gifts to the Gods or their representatives on earth resulted in a transfer of divine sanctity and merit to the donors. It was very clear that the primary purpose of these grants was to tap into the power of the divine, to enhance sanctity, and then to showcase it to society. The inscriptions were themselves an integral part of these donations in terms of its demonstrative effect. Whereas in ancient period in India, the kings derived their legitimation through performance of grand royal sacrifices, the medieval period witnessed a distinctive shift towards royal patronage of local cults/shrines/temples in all possible ways. Politically, these cults or shrines had strong local or regional roots. Thus, one witnessed changing modes of legitimation at different stages of state formation, ranging from princely patronage of tribal deities by emerging early kings to the construction of imperial temples by the rulers of great medieval imperial ‘regional kingdoms’ with obvious expectations.

As a matter of fact, due to their relevance to any study of south Indian history, the temples in south have attracted scholars for a long time. In this context, it should be noted that initially the temple was seen as basically a religious institution that
played an important role in the spread of knowledge as well. Besides, it was also seen as an institution that served political purposes in decision making at the lowest level along with collection of taxes through its various committees for the political leadership. Gradually, in the later years of south Indian historiography, the economic dimension of the south Indian temple came to be emphasized as well.

Whereas some studies pointed out to its role as a major money-lending and livestock redistribution center, the others brought to light its role as an important employer.

However, in recent times, the multidimensional role played by the temples in a particular space and time has been brought upfront by scholars in a major paradigmatic shift. The importance of temples has been judged not only epigraphically but also through art and sculpture, dance and music, the struggle for supremacy by various political dispensations, by various religious sects etc. One has made an attempt in the following pages to present a general survey of various approaches by scholars in ‘Reading the temple’ in the last few decades (since 1960’s in particular though some works may still fall on either side), especially in the context of south Indian history. A major work with this perspective was from Burton Stein (1960). Basing his study on the stone inscriptions from the Sri Venkateswara temple at Tirupati, Stein clearly emphasized that Tirupati inscriptions dealt essentially with endowments of land and money and were therefore most useful for the analysis of the nature and utilization of the land and money placed with the temple as religious endowments. Beyond the obvious usefulness of the Tirupati inscriptions as source for economic analysis, these
materials also provided vital information concerning the modification of the Temple’s rituals as a consequence of the introduction of ritual forms from other parts of Tamil country.

In retrospect, in a conventional mould within the nationalistic framework, Nilkanta Sastri’s work focused on the dynastic changes in particular in a very detailed manner and the narratives on religion, art actually got marginalized. In fact, the descriptive account of art and architecture in the last few pages had merely listed various monuments on the basis of their style and mode of excavation or construction or execution without relating them to the institutional needs of society and polity of different periods.

Similarly, V.N. Hari Rao (1976) in his pioneering study on the history of the Srirangam temple, brought to light the various sculptural details of the temple besides bringing out its religious and political significance. He pointed out the fact that Srirangam was the foremost seat of the Vaisnava movement in south India. It was the headquarters of the Acharyas beginning from Ramanuja until the split between the Tenkalais and the Vadakalais occurred and the Vadakalais withdrew to Kanchipuram sometime in the 13th century. The state of prosperity enjoyed by the Srirangam temple under the patronage of the Hindu monarchs received a rude shock when the Muhammadans overran Ma’bar in the first half of 14th century. The temple lost its landed property and became poor and destitute. It is said that its prestige was restored with the revival of Hindu political power in south India under the leadership of Vijayanagara. In fact, the inscriptions in the Srirangam
temple, of the early Vijayanagar chieftains, painted a picture of conscious effort on their part to resuscitate the shrine as the celebrated center of Hinduism that it was. Focusing his study basically on the epigraphical records and the temple chronicle (Koil Olugu), Hari Rao pointed out that Srirangam temple was the result of a gradual process of accretion; the number of sub-shrines containing the images of minor deities and sublimated devotees clustering around the main shrine were raised in different periods by beneficent patrons. Besides, he provided details of a long list of Alvar saints and from their references, he elaborated on a historical account of the Srirangam temple.

K.V. Raman (1975) in his seminal study on the Sri Varadarajaswami temple at Kanchi too had a typically conventional approach in reading the temple. He saw the role of temple in the growth of Sri Vaisnavism and made many references to Ramanuja’s special attachment to Lord Varadraja. Besides, his work referred to the pujas and festivals conducted there, the functions of the temple management and, in a very general manner, references were made to the services provided to the temple by various social groups etc. At the same time, one must note that his work made short references to the multiple roles of the temple viz, temple as land owner, temple as center of learning, temple as provider of poor-relief, temple as patron of music and arts etc. In his another work as well, his emphasis remained more or less the same as far as the temple was concerned.

Within a feudal framework, D.N.Jha (1974, 1976) portrayed south Indian temple as a ‘landed magnate’ and argued that the increase in the number of pariharas
(exemptions to donees) signified increasing oppression of the peasantry and the growth of feudal agrarian relations. The temples became centers of power indicating increasing patronage from the chieftains, landowners, merchants, towns and village assemblies etc. Within the same framework, Kesavan Veluthat (1978) pointed out that the bhakti movement in south India, which in reality was a temple movement, was coeval with the rise and fulfillment of the temple. It reflected the newly emerging social order and legitimised it comprehensively. Thus, the temple was an institution whose potential was realized by the monarchs of south India as early as the period of the origin of the monarchical state in this part of the country represented by the Pallava kingdom. He pointed out that where it was the landlord class that patronised the temple, it ensured a more peaceful integration of the agrarian order as the peasants and those lower sections of society had started accepting the ideological hegemony of the temple. The traders and artisans too benefited from their relation with the temple as it was a major consumer and as it provided an occasion and a center for the coordination of their activities. All this was possible because the temple was at this point in time synonymous with Brahmanical groups owning vast tracts of land. This land was known as Devadanam (a gift to God)-devasvam (God’s property) and brahmadeyam (a gift to Brahmanas) and brahmasvam (Brahmana’s property) in Kerala. By the efficient management of this huge resource, such as also by clearing land and the management of irrigation, they could effectively promote the wealth; they could also wean away the royalty, the social groups and market from the tribal background of an earlier period.
Patronage of temples thus meant patronage of the powerful Brahmanical groups. Further, he demonstrated how bhakti movement had direct links with the expansion of agriculture and the formation of state based on it. As the temple gained in popularity with bhakti movement, the services in the temple and the jargon of bhakti came to reflect a particular kind of social organization. For instance, the deity in the temple was accorded full royal status, with no detail in the attendant paraphernalia wanting. Thus *Udaiyar* or *Perumal* meant both the king and the deity; *koil* meant both the temple and the palace and day-to-day routine of services in the temple followed, to the last detail, the services in the palace.\(^18\) However, although the terminology used in all these cases pertained to royalty, it was equally applicable to any major landed magnate or local chief. For, in the political structure obtaining in south India at that time, every chief or landlord looked like a king in his own way. In fact, the plurality and coexistence of a large number of deities, arranged sometimes in position of precedence, reflected eminently a political structure with the plurality and coexistence of a large number of lords and magnates arranged in a hierarchical order with codes of precedence and with strong ties of dependence\(^19\). Once these religious ideas got acceptance in society and validated the existing power structure, that the symbols derived from them should be made use of in seeking legitimacy for the ruler himself was only natural.

In a joint paper with M. G. S. Narayanan\(^20\), Kesavan Veluthat summarized in the following manner the way in which the temple behaved:
1. The temple served as an agency for easier and more efficient extraction of surplus from the peasants in the agrarian economy and this contributed to the extension of agriculture in the tribal areas and the consolidation of the landlord domination.

2. In the course of such extension, the temple accelerated the process of the disintegration of tribal society and its reorganization as a caste society.

3. In the newly formed caste society, the temple served as an integrating factor linking the high and low in service and drawing towards itself as clients the different castes and sub-castes.

4. Such integrated role paved the way for Brahman-inspired and Brahman-supported state power in the regional monarchies of south India. The temple put its imprimatur of legitimacy on the new polity and this in turn guaranteed state patronage for the temple.

5. In this process, the Brahmanical Varnasrama ideology strengthened its grip on society, its latest weapon being the Bhakti movement for which the temple served as an institutional base.

6. In course of time, the prosperous temple, which was a landed magnate from the beginning, also developed into a storehouse of gold and silver and precious jewels as well a the regular place of assembly for the ruling elite.

7. This produced the need for exclusiveness and protection leading eventually to the development of the temple to fortress like proportions with several circles of streets within streets, bazaars and armed forces.

8. Finally, the temple acted as the agent for developing, consolidating, transmitting and conserving the legacy of culture.
Naturally, the temple represented a most revolutionary and forward-looking force in south India and all those who were related to it many complex ways accepted the religion it represented. The temple, with its strong ideological weapon in the bhakti movement, was able to register the victory of what can be called the Hindu Brahmanical religion. This succeeded in gaining the victory of the agrarian order in south India bringing about differentiation of society with infinite gradations in a caste hierarchy that it entailed.

Once again, a landmark in this context was Burton Stein’s (1960, 1978, 1998) seminal essay on the evolution of the kingly traditions in medieval south India. He made reference to the evolution of three types of kingship in south India i.e. Heroic kingship that was discovered in the ancient bardic poetry of the Tamils; Moral kingship that was discovered in the Jain gnomic texts and in inscriptions of Karnataka and Tamil country and the third that could be designated as Ritual kingship that was discovered in the Shastric, Puranic and inscriptional sources all over south India as well as in iconography. He elaborated that it was in the context of ritual kingship that the temple slowly acquired its prominence both in terms of increasing number of grants that it received as well as descriptions of king’s valour in the inscriptions that were put in the temple complex. For example, the Pallava king Paramesvaravarman I’s Kurram plate grants of circa 675 A.D. made to the temple and chaturvedin Brahmans first described the king’s personal virtues and then dwelt lovingly upon the bardic battlefield description celebrating a great victory by the king over Chalukya and Ganga foes who had repeatedly invaded and looted the Tamil plains during the previous
decade. Burton Stein referred to the fact that in a Brahmanical ritual kingship, incorporation was attained through a transactional and redistributive process involving priests, kings, Gods, and a multiplicity of ranked groupings (castes) capable of being replicated in territorial segments of larger political systems as an ideology of homologies. Local chiefs i.e. the heads of dominant agricultural groups were homologized to great kings, as their tutelary Gods were homologized to great vedic Gods. The method of incorporation was the technical medium of ritual carried out by trained priests—increasingly within the special context of temples 23.

Hermann Kulke (1993) too dwelt upon the importance of the cults and temples where he aligned the growth of the regional kingdoms (though it was with special reference to Orissa) and the imperial power with the growth of increasing patronage to Brahmins and temples in the region 24. He pointed out that besides investing more and more into their increasing armies, the Hindu rajas of these regional kingdoms, in the absence of a centralized bureaucracy, tried with their traditional patrimonial power to counterbalance the dangerous local forces by ritual means. This aim was achieved mainly through three measures:

1. Royal patronage of important places of pilgrimage within their respective kingdoms,
2. A systematic and large-scale settlement of Brahmins and,
3. The construction of the new ‘imperial temples’ within the core region of the kingdoms 25.
According to him, these places of pilgrimage (tirthas) slowly became main centers of religious activities and cults developed. One of the characteristic features of the cults at these centers of pilgrimage was an increasing process of a ritual ‘royalization’ of the deities. It is beyond doubt that the daily performance of the rituals and the great annual festivals associated with the deities with all their royal paraphernalia and exuberant wealth – became the best and most visible legitimation of royal power and wealth of the ‘divine kings’ on the earth. Kulke pointed out that the royal patronage of these places of pilgrimage through generous land donations and constructions of new and impressive temple buildings in these tirthas had a great significance for the legitimation of royal power. In a way, these tirthas, as Kulke said, became centers of multi-centered royal networks which united the different nuclear areas religiously and even economically 26. As the cult of the imperial temple was directly linked with the raja—in fact it was an extremely enlarged cult of the personal istadevata of the small palace shrines—this new centralized ritual structure was focused on the raja himself in the end. For example, in circa 1003 A.D., Rajaraja Chola constructed the largest temple of India at his capital Tanjore called Brhadesvara temple at a time when their was struggle for establishing hegemony against the powerful western Chalukyas. The temple symbolized new royal power and its manifestations. Hundreds of Brahmans and temple servants were brought to Tanjore, among them 400 dancing girls, about 200 dancing masters, musicians, drummers, tailors, goldsmiths, accountants etc. For the maintenance of Brahmans and others, villages were donated to the temple all over the empire, even in Sri Lanka 27. In fact, George W. Spencer puts it
straight: “In order to understand the importance of patronage of Rajaraja to the Tanjore temple, we must recognize that such patronage, far from representing the self-glorification of a despotic ruler, was in fact a method adopted by an ambitious ruler to enhance his very uncertain power”.

Kulke also used a very interesting formulation of *ksatra* (Royalty) and *ksetra* (Holy places). According to him, one of the most significant distinctions between the spiritual principles of early Hindu kingship and its later, medieval developments was an inherent change from its associations with *Brahman* to the concept of *ksetra*. Whereas the early kingship ideology was founded on the symbiotic relation between *ksatra* and *Brahman*, the *ksatra* of medieval Hindu kingship became embedded spiritually in a network of relations with holy places (*ksetra*) of divine manifestations. Brahmins also had to share their earlier spiritual monopoly with sectarian leaders at the *ksetras*.

Arjun Appadurai (1987) did an important case study of a south Indian temple where the temple became a ‘contested terrain’ for supremacy between various groups—both spiritually and politically. He made reference to the Sri Partasarati Swami Temple in Madras city which had Vaisnava sectarian affiliations. The deity was the center of the temple and was not a mere image or icon for the expression of abstract religious sentiments and principles. In its capacity to command and redistribute economic resources, and in its capacity to rank individuals and groups, by the unequal distribution of these resources, the deity was founded on the south Indian notion of sovereignty. He said that the deity was a ‘paradigmatic
sovereign’, and thus the south Indian temple was a polity, in which all the relationships with the royal figure were privileged. Elaborating this notion further, Appadurai said that all the contributions to the temple, whether endowments or services, were privileged. So also the output of the deity, in whatever form, was privileged. In the divine court of the deity, rank and status were expressed by the amount of these divine ‘leavings’ one received, on what occasions, and in what order. Access to these divine remnants was systematically related to the services or substances one offered to the deity.

Appadurai further referred to fact that the conflict used to occur often between groups and individuals for these privileges flowing from the deity which is referred to as ‘honours’ (mariyatai). The tension between the two Sri Vaisnava sects of Tenkalai (southern school) and Vadakalai (northern school) was a case in point 31. Although there are a number of ritual, dietary and marital distinctions between these two sub-sects, the dominant antagonism between them pertained to temple-ritual and temple-management.

R. Champakalakshmi (1996) 32 referred to major urban complex of the Chola period in the fertile delta of Kaveri called Kudamukku which witnessed a steady growth of temple establishments, especially the Nageshvara temple. According to him, this place was an important point on the trade route apart from being an important religious center which led to receiving of huge patronage from the merchants, traders apart from the royal family, officials, artisans etc. Some form of centralization of land and labour, as well as all kinds of produce, was taken to be
an invariable component in the rise of the ceremonial center. The main function of such centers was those of redistribution, the movement of commodities being towards the center, the appropriative role being implicit in the physical disposition, as well as the organization of the shrine. Architecture, sculpture and other art forms served as metaphors to convey the different levels of meaning behind the obvious religious functions of the temple, signifying changing world views and interrelationships between political and religious functions.  

James Heitzman (1997) made an attempt to ‘Read the temple’ through a term that he coined namely ‘Gifts of Power’. In terms of historical development, he referred to the emergence of secular donors, Brahmans and kings that added to the growing network of temple administration and land control by more gifts of land in places within the temple villages and outside the boundaries of temple villages in more extended networks of temple estates during the centuries after circa 1000 A.D. He mentioned the growth and expansion of local temples alongside the growth and expansion of commercial networks focused on the mercantile communities (nagaram) scattered amid the numerous agrarian zones of central Tamilnadu and the slow development of temple urbanism. He referred to the fact that the people, who could afford to give lavish gifts to religious institutions and then arrange to engrave the memory of their beneficence, were often members of the most important cultural, political, and economic elites in their societies.

To James Heitzman, temple was seen as central to the emergence of a transactional network developed over centuries that expanded their own power
over local economies. At every level, the transactions petrified within south Indian temple inscriptions embodied ‘Gifts of power’. The study of these records, according to him, was automatically an immersion into the relationships between political economy and ideological complexes. He examined the time during Chola dynasty that ruled for about four centuries (circa 849-1279 A.D.) over much of southern India, Srilanka and parts of Southeast Asia. In one of the chapters on the structure of the Chola state, Heitzman described the change in the emphasis of royal activities from donations to royal orders as a key to understanding the state formation during the four hundred years of Chola rule. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, when stable Chola overlordship was a relatively recent development, the royal family concentrated on constructions or big public rituals in which they could pose as chief devotees. The crowning achievement of this policy was the Rajarajesvara temple—a pervasive system of religious largesse where authority derived its legitimacy from donations, where kings consolidated their lordship through patronage of religious rituals. During the later centuries, the kings exerted influence through interference in local management issues. Although many of the royal orders may have been the official confirmation of deals concluded locally, they still represented the direct relationship of the central power with local conditions and actors. According to Heitzman, the importance of the ritual influence as a primary policy in situations of political ambiguity was particularly apparent in the Tiruchirapalli study area. Around A.D. 1070, the Hoysalas began to exert pressure on the western edge of the Chola country, joined by the Pandyas in the thirteenth century in a three-way struggle for power. Under these
circumstances, the later Cholas resorted to a policy of personal involvement in the affairs of the ritual centers on the border—a policy pursued earlier at Tanjavur—and they appeared more often at Srirangam and Jambukesvaram. The manifestation of ritual sovereignty on the border was a policy pursued equally by the other major political protagonists, and accordingly Hoysala and Pandya royal orders and donations, including gifts by queens, appeared at Srirangam and Jambukesvaram. Thus, Heitzman very clearly brought out the fact that the religious world-view promulgated under the Chola period defined political power as the ability to protect and propagate dharma throughout the world, and the legitimate ruler as the person who most effectively carried out this work. By winning battles and donating to Brahmans and temples, the kings especially set themselves up as the leaders of the dharmic kingdom and potentially as legitimate authorities everywhere.

Paul Younger (1995) studied the Hindu Temple at Citamparam (read Chidambaran) and found out how the kings, landlords, and other social leaders who used their leverage as the custodians of surplus goods within society to lend their support to the Citamparam temple. He referred to the growing importance of the temple at Tancavur (read Tanjavur) which was made almost an extension of his royal palace, and ran it as a personal monument and an expression of imperial grandeur. He asserted that the pattern in which Citamparam was influenced by its donor community was quite different from that of most south Indian temples. Its remote location during its early history meant that it did not have the direct dependence on landlords that most other temples did, but on the other hand, its
mysterious reputation did attract political leaders of all kinds who felt that it might provide legitimacy to their rule. Eventually, the combined reputation of its priestly community and its close ties to kingship meant that it came to have a preeminent reputation in cultural matters as well, so that saints, religious reformers, court poets and founders of *matams* (read *mathas*) all sought to associate themselves with the place.

Cynthia Talbot (2001), in her study on the temples in Kakatiya Andhra, also referred to the fact that though the earlier practice was giving *danam* to the Brahmana, the inscriptions issued after circa 1000 A.D. in Andhra region showed that the traditional practice was gradually waning in popularity. Rather than copper-plate grants to the Brahmanas, one found an ever-increasing proportion of stone inscriptions recording gifts to temples. By the Kakatiya period, copper-plate grants to the Brahmanas had become a rarity. In most cases, Brahmanas were subsidiary to the temples, for they were mentioned only at the end of the inscription and were sometimes not even named. She also highlighted the importance of the temples as hundreds of non royal donors almost reduced the royal role in religious patronage. At the same time, bhakti devotionalism within a temple context relegated the Brahmanas to second place as religious-gift recipients.

She further pointed out that many temple patrons wanted specific assistance from Gods or Goddesses rather than the indeterminate religious merit accruing from *dana*, especially in its form as a Brahman land grant. Besides, the construction of new temples must also be understood as a reflection of the expansion of Kakatiya
Andhra’s agrarian resource base—it was motivated by devotion but made possible by economic growth 40. The human caretakers of the Gods were also to be supported, and the rituals of worship required continual supplies of foodstuffs and other material offerings. Almost always, therefore, the construction of a new temple also entailed the endowment of rights to land. The ability of the donors to alienate such important property rights in favour of a temple indicated that economic development in their localities had advanced to the point of a surplus in agrarian production. The high levels of temple construction thus characterized regions experiencing high rates of economic change 41.

Thus, the patronage of temples became very popular because a multiplicity of social and political objectives could be subsumed within that act, along with the undoubtedly powerful incentive of providing spiritual solace for oneself and one’s family. A temple donor might enhance his stature as a lord, express solidarity with colleagues in commerce or in war, achieve tax reductions on property still under his control, make new contacts in an established community or worship, or advance any number of other ambitions. The public nature of temple endowment surely accounted for much of its appeal to individuals seeking to establish themselves within the rapidly changing milieu of the temple. Political networks were thus extended and reinforced through the public ritual of endowment in which relationships were ceremoniously enacted.

Kenneth R. Hall 42 in his study on the ‘Cidambaram’ (read Chidambaram) as a sacred center and the Siva Nataraja temple therein during the Chola period throws
considerable light on the fact that as the Chola society in southern India became more complex and stratified, the integrative function of the court, the temple and the market place became more crucial which converged to accelerate the exchange of human and material resources through several kinds of interlocking networks (political, religious and commercial). The Cidambaram temple thus emerged as the center of relationship and resolution in Chola times, a prime locus for the expression of Chola authority and the resolution of dominance issues and decisions. The temple was the center for vows of loyalty to the Siva Nataraja as well as to Chola sovereigns; there were parallel notions of authority, of the king and the divinity who shared sovereignty and were mutually interdependent. Cidambaram’s inscriptions and its temple chronicle defined a ‘textual community’ that was inclusive of local residents, priests, and ‘outsiders’ who acknowledged Chola monarchs as well as the sacred temple deity. Pooled reciprocity was critical to these definitions of community; temple endowments engendered by reciprocity networks allowed the Cidambaram community to survive despite the fluctuating fortunes of the Chola polity.

Crispin branfoot (2003), in a study on the Skanda temple at Tirupparankundram during Madurai Nayakas 43, brought to light the fact that the shifting emphasis in the Hindu temple toward the deity Skanda might partly be explained through the increasing identification of Skanda with the local Islamic association of the site with both Iskandar (Alexander) and Sikandar Shah, the last ruler of the fourteenth century Madura Sultanate. The emphasis placed upon Skanda at this temple may be dated to the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. It was partly related to the rising status of Skanda/ Murukan as an independent deity throughout the Tamil country
in this period. But more specifically it could be explained with reference to the changed political conditions of the late fourteenth and fifteenth century in the Madurai region, with the overthrow of the short-lived Madura Sultanate and the reestablishment of Hindu dharma by the generals of the newly founded Vijayanagara Empire. The rise of this deity from twelfth to fifteenth centuries may also be partially explained by the incorporation of previously marginal social groups into mainstream Tamil culture. The worship of Murukan by marginal hill dwellers is referred to in the early Sangam literature. The period from the fourteenth century, when the early Tamil deity Murukan is clearly identified with the Sanskritic Skanda, is characterized by extensive internal migration of just such groups and the extension of the agricultural frontier to previously marginal areas. This broad cultural change throughout the Tamil country may explain why Skanda became the presiding deity at Tirupparankundram. But this site had become of great importance to the Muslim communities of south India in the fourteenth century, as both the capital of the Madura sultanate and subsequently the location of a Muslim shrine to the fallen warrior-heroes of this short-lived Islamic regional power. The rising status of Skanda as a warrior-deity throughout the Tamil country, and specifically here at Tirupparankundram, post-fourteenth century, may therefore be seen as a defiant reaction to the overthrow of the Turkish invaders from the North. Iskandar, Sikandar Shah, and Skanda have all become intertwined at Skandamalai.

Alexandra Mack (2004) emphasized that landscapes had multiple meanings and the landscape of the fourteenth- to sixteenth-century south Indian capital of Vijayanagara was the setting for important mythological events, interplays of
power between the elite, ritual and pilgrimage for devotees. While the mythic landscape was shared by all who shared the Hindu beliefs, these associations were manipulated by Vijayanagara rulers to enhance their own power and to legitimize their rule in the eyes of local chiefs and other elites. Architecture and urban structure, as well as inscriptions, give evidence to this landscape of power constructed by kings, and experienced by royals and other elite. With reference to the Ramachandra temple, endowed by the ruler Devaraya II in the early fifteenth century, and the celebration of the *Mahanavmai festival*, she insisted that the ritual landscape further reinforced the power drawn from the physical and architectural landscape 44. Annual tributes were paid to the king during the Mahanavami celebration, and at this time the king presented honors to other elites to instill loyalty and legitimize status hierarchies. Fritz (1986) has also argued that the city was structured such that the Ramachandra temple not only lay in the heart of the royal center, where the kings’ power was concentrated, but it was also at the center of circulation routes through the city. He claimed that this overall urban structure allowed the Vijayanagara kings to legitimize their own power by actively drawing associations between themselves and Rama, the ideal God-king, noting that “the site of the king’s activities was also that of Ramachandra—the royal power that radiated outward was empowered by the divine authority of the deity” 45.

In the end, one must say that many more works are there to be explored and ‘read’ and there is no gainsaying the fact that it would provide fruitful insight into the temple and its working. It is with this perspective that an attempt has been made in the following chapters to explore and analyze the notions of power, patronage and legitimation that came to be associated with the Srirangam temple in Tamilnadu.
Endnotes


2 Epigraphia Indica (E.I.) XXVII- pp. 14-17; (The brickless, timberless, metalless and mortarless mansion was caused to be made by king Vichitra Chita for Brahma, Isvara and Vishnu).


8 Burton Stein, ‘Economic Functions…’, op.cit.


11. Ibid., pp.1-2

12. Ibid., pp.4-48.


14. Ibid., pp.136-144.


18. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

19. Ibid.


21. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.


31 Ibid.

32 R. Champakalashmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, OUP, Delhi, 1996.

33 Ibid., pp.426-427


36 Ibid., p. 147.


38 Cynthia Talbot, *Pre-Colonial India in Practice: Society, Religion and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, OUP, Delhi, 2001, pp. 87-125.

39 Ibid., p.90

40 Ibid., pp.93-94.

41 Ibid., p.94


