



The Temple of
Tirukkētīśvaram

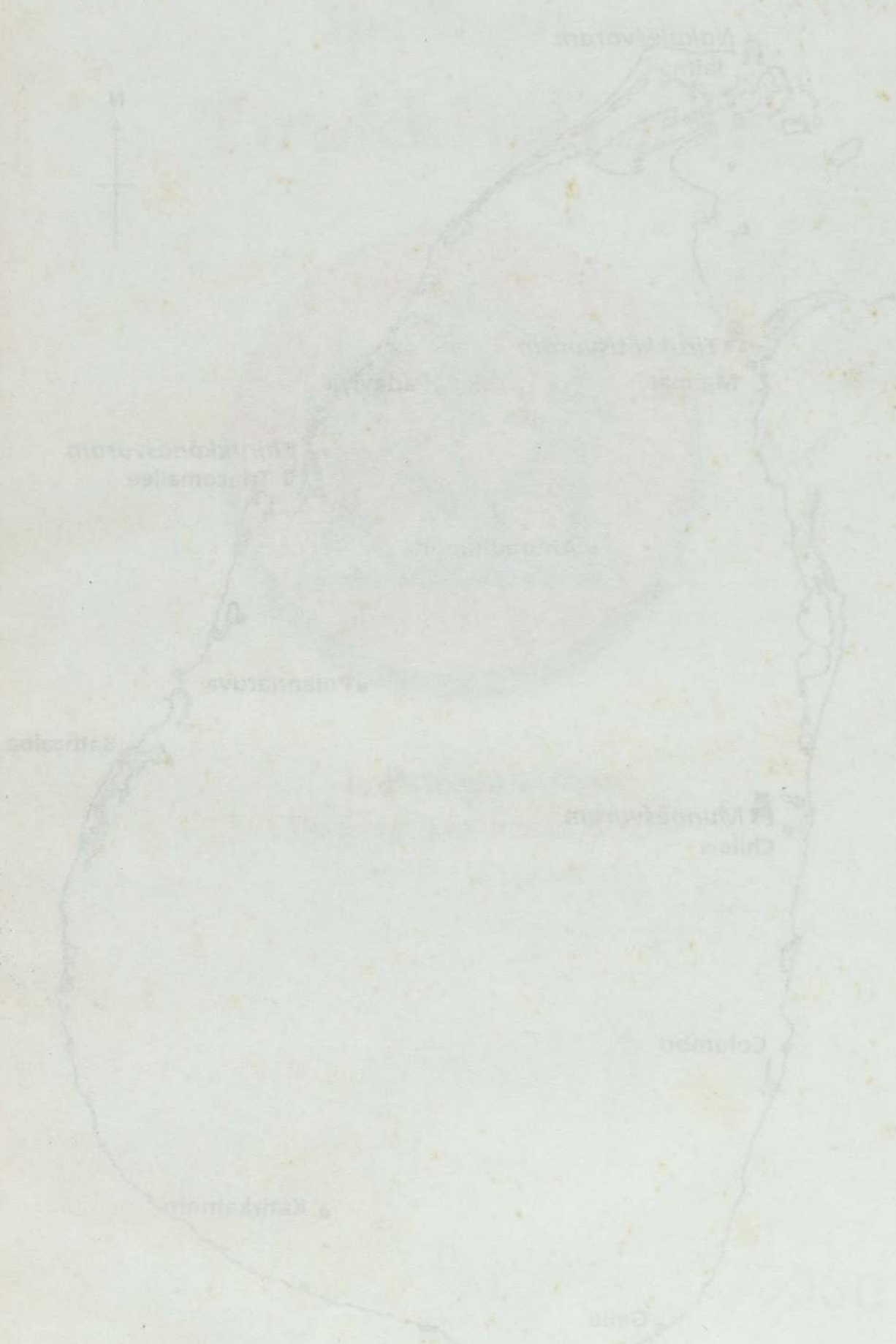
S. Pathmanathan

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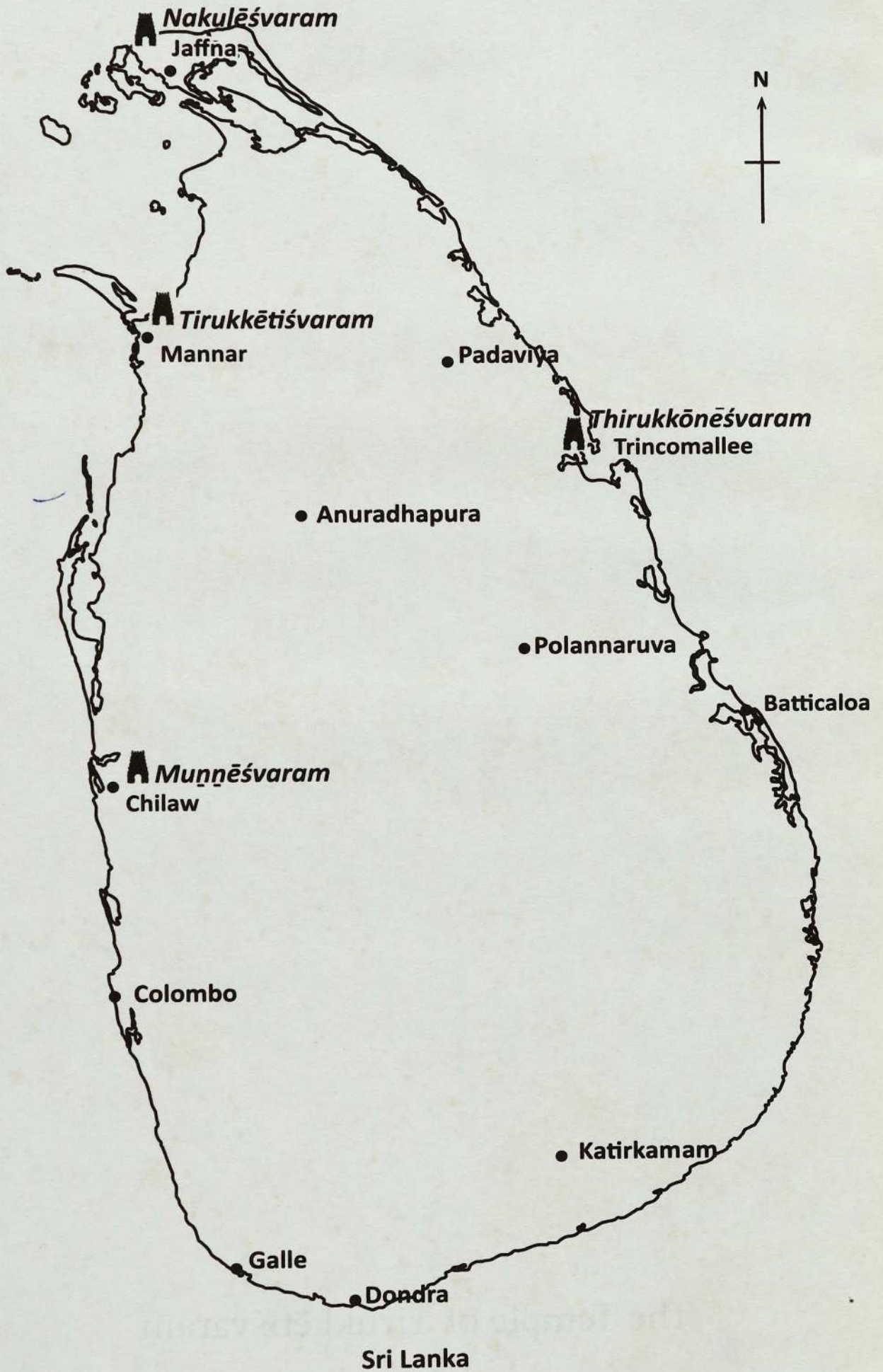


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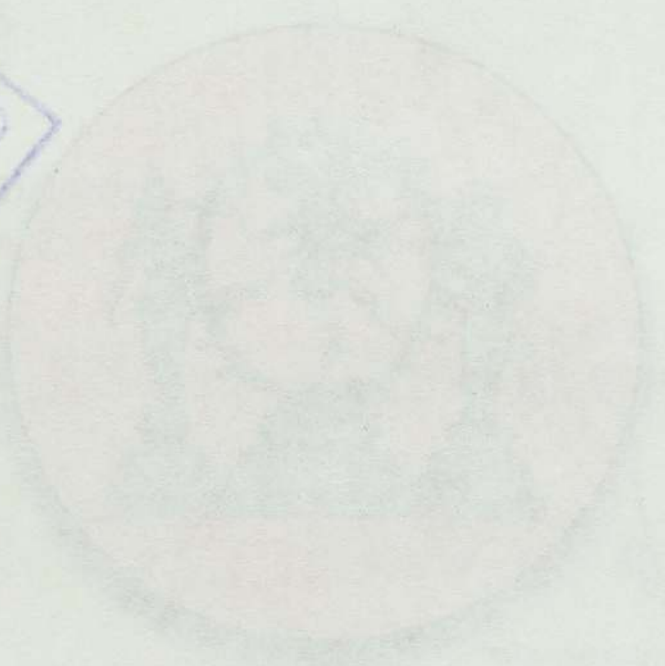
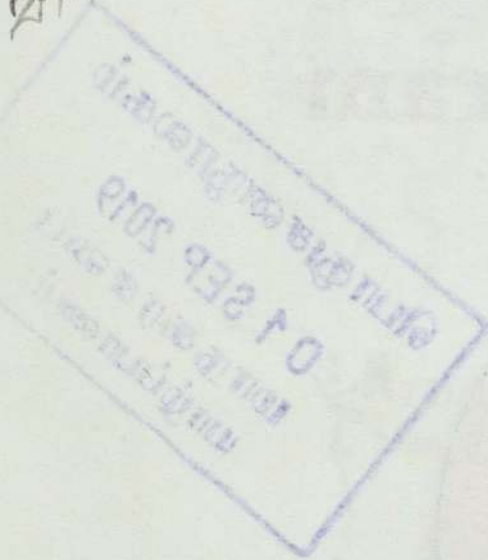
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The Temple of Tirukkēṭiśvaram

by S. Pathmanathan©

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Preface

This monograph of modest proportions presents a reconstructed history of Tirukkēṭīśvaram, one of the most ancient Hindu temples of Sri Lanka. It had suffered enormously from the destiny of fate and the evil designs of men. After a long period of 300 years of obscurity the temple has been restored by the co-operative endeavours of the Hindus of Sri Lanka whose reminiscences were re-animated by Arumuka Navalar who ushered in an age of the Renaissance of Tamil culture under circumstances that were favourable in the days of British rule, in the late 19th century

The restoration of the Tirukkēṭīśvaram Temple was accomplished by the Tirukkēṭīśvaram Restoration Society under the leadership of successive generations of men whose integrity, commitment to the cause of Hinduism and the capacity for mobilizing resources and winning public confidence are worthy of emulation. The reminiscences about their contribution for the recovery of the values, institutions and traditions of the cultural heritage of Tamil society are of special relevance in these days of rehalitation, reconstruction and attempts at national reconciliation.

There are many articles and a few books published by different authors on this subject in English and Tamil. The most notable among them are those of Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan and S. Arumugam. They have laid the foundation for a comprehensive and authentic studies about this temple.

The present volume is of a special kind. An attempt is made here for the first time to correlate the evidence of archaeology with literary notices in a systematic manner and with imaginative insights. In this book there are seven main themes: (1) The city of Mātōṭṭam (2) the origins of Tirukkēṭīśvaram, (3) Tirukkēṭīśvaram in the Tēvāram hymns (4) the Chola temples at Mātōṭṭam (5) Portuguese and the Temples of Mātōṭṭam (6) the restoration of the temple and (7) the stone and bronze sculptures found at the reconstructed temple. The second item which is a new revelation is based on the decipherment of the inscriptions on the stone images that had been recovered in 1894. That the temple of Tirukkēṭīśvaram was founded by Nākar princes about 2000 years ago is now established without any measure of doubt. The third section is an imaginative exposition of the Tēvāram hymns in a historical setting. In the fourth section, the Cōla inscriptions from Tirukkēṭīśvaram, which are presently exhibited in the Colombo National Museum, have been examined in considerable detail. The last section on the stone and metal sculptures written by the present author is a reproduction from *The Life and Times of R. Namasivayam and the Reconstruction of the Temple of Tirukkēṭīśvaram*.

The author is beholden to the following individuals and institutions for their support and assistance in preparing this volume: the Tirukkēṭīśvaram Restoration Society and in particular the Secretary of this society Pulavar Thirunavukkarasu, Dr. Rajan Namasivayam, Express News Papers Ltd (*Virakesari*), the officiating priests of the temple and lastly and not in the least Mr.G.Kumaran and his staff for their enthusiasm in bringing out this publication in its present form.

S. Pathmanathan

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Translation Table

a	அ	k	க்	l	ல்
ā	ஆ	ñ	ங்	v	வ்
i	இ	c	ச்	l	ழ்
ī	ஈ	ñ	ஞ்	l	ள்
u	உ	t	ட்	r	ற்
ū	ஊ	ṇ	ண்	n	ன்
e	எ	t	த்	j	ஜ்
ē	ஏ	n	ந்	ṣ	ஷ்
ai	ஐ	p	ப்	s	ஸ்
o	ஓ	m	ம்	h	ஹ்
ō	ஔ	y	ய்	kṣ	க்ஷ்
au	ஔ	r	ர்		
k	ஃ				



1. The City of Mātōṭṭam

Tirukkētīśvaram, one of the most ancient Saiva Temples of Sri Lanka, had its origins under the local chieftains in the early centuries of the Christian era. Mātōṭṭam (Māntai) otherwise called Mahātittha (the Great Port, in Pali)) where this temple is located, became the principal emporium of the island in the Early Historic Period that corresponds, in its later phase, to the Age of the Roman empire in the West. It also developed as a great commercial city, the only one of its kind, in the island before the 13th century A.D. It had become a centre of craft production, international sea-borne trade and the exchange of commodities brought from distant lands.

Its location on the estuary of the Aruvi Āru otherwise called Malvatu Oya, which provided avenues for establishing communications through overland routes with Anurādhapura, the principal centre of dynastic power, and on the sea-coast, which was a flourishing centre of maritime activities, the pearl and chank fisheries in particular, had provided the impetus for its development. It became the major outlet for the flow of trade with south India. Since Proto-historic times Sri Lanka and south India had formed a single trading unit.

The people of the Early Iron Age in south India who navigated the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the Palk Strait, developed the art of boat-making and ship building. They were attracted to the island because of its marine resources. They moved into the island in considerable numbers, established settlements through which they intermingled with the indigenous people of the Mesolithic

Culture who adopted the elements of the Megalithic Culture and thereby were transformed from the status of food gatherers into a sedentary community of agricultural producers. It was during this stage of development that the names Tāmbraparṇi and Īlam were applied to some parts of the island. In course of time they denoted the whole island. The origins of settlements occupied by commodity producers led to the development of villages, towns, marketing centres and chiefdoms. It is in such a setting that Mātoṭṭam emerged as a centre of regional trade in Lower South Asia and gradually developed into a commercial city.

Archaeological excavations at Māntai reveal that it had developed as a vital centre of international trade. As a commercial city it had a dual character; it was a flourishing centre of trade while at the same time it developed as a major centre of industrial production. Some of these products were exported to Indian ports across the Palk Strait and to countries far away across the Arabian Sea.

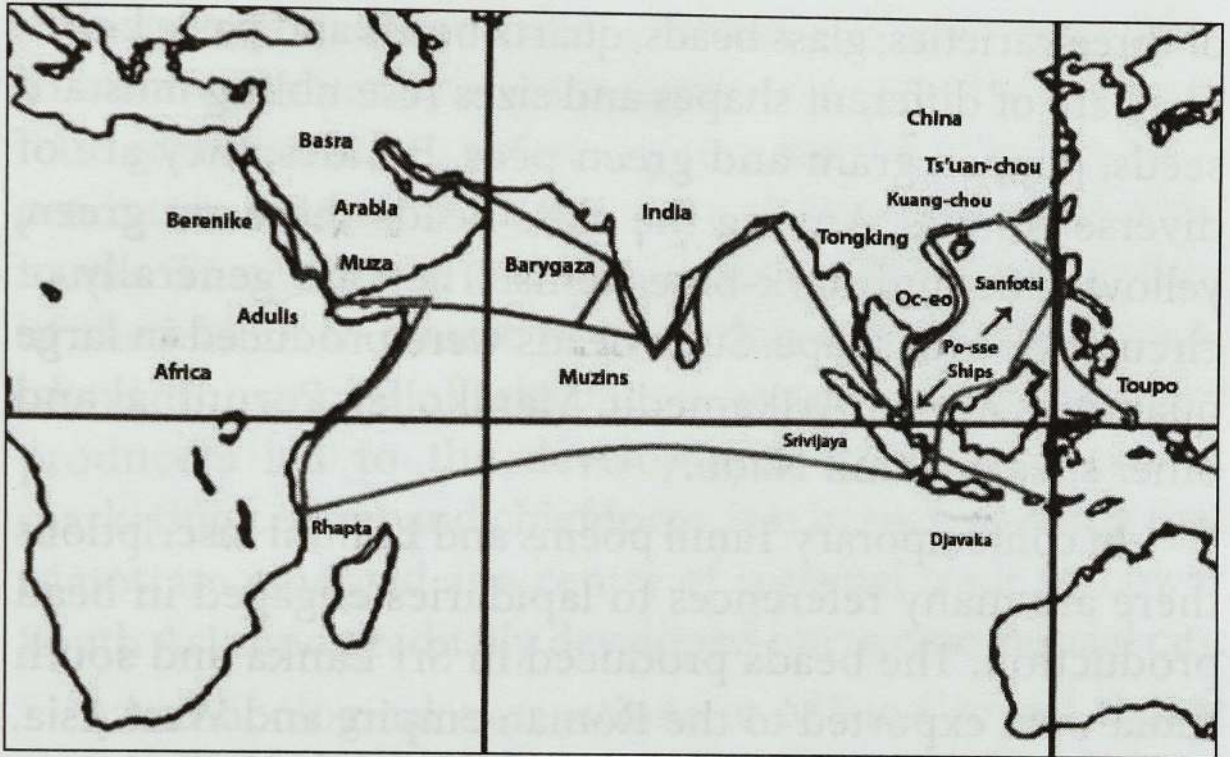
The archaeological finds include a great variety of beads in large quantities, potsherds of diverse origins and of great variety, sawn pieces of conch in large numbers, pearl-oyster shells, imported coins, copper and iron slag and ceramics. Bricks and tiles of the earliest variety could be dated to a period of four-hundred years before the fourth century AD. The principal exports at this stage were pearls, conches and ornaments made from them, beads, some varieties of timber and gems brought down from the capital city as the king had a monopoly over all precious items obtained from mines and forests.

Beads collected from the surface of the excavated sites that are now fully covered with ground soil are principally

of three varieties: glass beads, quartz beads and paste beads. They are of different shapes and sizes resembling mustard seeds, pepper, gram and green peas. Besides, they are of diverse colours. Among the glass beads there are green, yellow, blue and dark-blue items. They are generally of circular or oval shape. Such beads were produced in large quantities also at Arikamedu, Mañikoḷḷai, Porunthal and other sites in Tamil Nāḍu.¹

In contemporary Tamil poems and Brāhmi inscriptions there are many references to lapidaries engaged in bead production. The beads produced in Sri Lanka and south India were exported to the Roman empire and West Asia. The production of ornaments from conch-shells was a major industry at Māntai. A large number of conches, sawn pieces of conches and ornaments made from conch shell have been found at the excavation sites. Ornaments made from conch shells were produced and exported to India and other countries to the west of it as there was a great demand for them.

Among the potsherds found in abundance and which are datable to this period, three categories are conspicuous: Roman wares that include Arretine Ware and amphora, local products and wares from India. Sherds of Black and Red Ware are only a few among the surface finds, but those of other wares closely associated with the BRW as known from Megalithic sites, are found in substantial numbers. It may also be noted that pieces of the Rouletted Ware are among the artifacts obtained through excavations. Reports of archaeological excavations and surface collections of artifacts reveal that Māntai had acquired a dual character. While the port of Māntai had developed as an emporium



Trade Routes in the Medieval Indian Ocean

of regional and international trade, the city of Māntai had become a major centre of industrial production.

It would appear that the port and the emporium of Taprobane as described by Cosmas pertains to Māntai, as there was no other port in the island, which had reached a state of development as the one described by him. He says:

“There is a large oceanic island lying in the Indian sea. Among the Indians, it goes by the name of Sielediba, but the Pagans call it Taprobane, where is found the stone hyacinth... There are two kings in the island who are at feud with each other. The one possesses the hyacinth and the other the rest of the island wherein are the port and the emporium of trade.”²

“The emporium is one that is resorted by the people of those parts... As its position is central, the island is a great resort of ships from all parts of India, and from Persia and Ethiopia, and in like manner it dispatches many of its own to foreign ports. And from the inner countries, I mean

China and other parts in that direction, it receives silks, aloes, clove wood, sandal wood and their other products and these, it again, passes on to outer ports, I mean Male, where pepper grows, and to Kalliana, where copper is produced and sesame wood and materials for dress; for it is also a great mart of trade; and to Sindhu also, where musk or castor is got... and to Persia and the Homerite country, and to Adule.”³

“Receiving in return the traffic of these parts and transmitting it to the inner ports, the island exports to each of these at the same time her own products.” “Sieleidiba being thus in a central position with reference to the Indies and possessing the hyacinth, receives wares from all trading parts and again distributes them over the world, and thus becomes a great emporium.”⁴

This description of the emporium of Taprobane is an authentic one because it is based on the reports of contemporary observers who had visited the island. It is also a unique one as there is no other description of the emporium recorded with such precision and clarity anywhere else in the whole range of foreign notices on the island. As testified by Cosmas, the great emporium of Lanka, which was doubtless Māntai, had developed into a centre of international trade and commerce and this development had preceded the birth of Islam.

From the testimony of Cosmas, it is evident that mariners from all parts of India, China, Persia and the Mediterranean world dominated by Byzantium had brought commodities to this emporium for distribution and among merchants coming from foreign countries. The pace of development of Māntai as a commercial city had continued until the 12th century. Sherds of several

varieties of pottery types of Indian, Islamic and Chinese wares datable to the ninth and tenth centuries have been found in large quantities. In this period the population of Māntai had a multi-religious and multi cultural character.

Commercial prosperity was the mainstay of economic support for the development of Tirukkēṭīśvaram as the great temple of Mātōṭṭam. Through the mariners and traders who participated in commercial activities at Māntai, the traditions and myths concerning the antiquity and sanctity of Tirukkēṭīśvaram had spread to many parts of south India where it was venerated by pious devotees in the centuries that preceded the development of the Bhakti school of Saivism in the sixth century.



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2. The Origins of Tirukkēṭīśvaram

The origin myths relating to Tirukkēṭīśvaram are not elaborated in any literary work worthy of consideration. There are only stray allusions about the antiquity of the temple in the *Tirumurai*, the large compendium of Saiva Sacred literature in Tamil. This compilation could not have been the work of a single individual.

There is a tradition based on the *Tirumurai Kaṇṭha purāṇam* (A History of the compilation of Saiva Sacred literature attributed to Umāpāthi Civācāriyar) that Nampiyāṅtar Nampi had done the work of compiling the entire collection in the reign of the Cōḷa king Rājarāja I (985-1014). The author of the *purāṇam* had no proper knowledge of the name of the king. He does not mention Rājarāja by his personal name or any of his epithets. Apaya Kulasekaran is the name of the king mentioned by him. Therefore one is tempted to entertain the notion that the monarch referred to was the last great Pāṇḍyan king Māravarman Kulasekaran (1268-1310).

Because of the foregoing considerations it may be assumed that the work of compiling the Saiva sacred literature in the form of a compendium was initiated by Nampi with the support of the Chola king Rājarāja and that it was completed by others in the reign of Māravarman Kulasekaran during the late 13th century. In the *Tirumurai* Tirukkēṭīśvaram is mentioned at several places.

In the Tiruvācakam, Māṅikkavācakar states that Maṇḍōtari, the consort of Rāvana, had regularly worshipped Siva at the temple of Mātōṭṭam.⁵

There is also a tradition that Rāhu, one of the planetary gods had propitiated Siva at this site in a bygone age. This legend could perhaps suggest the connection that the Nākar had with the origins of Tirukkētiśvaram.

As it will be seen here later, there are two Tēvāram hymns of the seventh and eighth centuries, on this temple, when it was in a flourishing condition and venerated by the followers of Saivism living on either side of the Palk Strait as an inspiring symbol of a shared heritage.⁶

The Tēvāram hymns presuppose that Tirukkētiśvaram had a fairly long history before the period of the Pallava kings in south India. Hitherto the antecedents of this development had remained obscure. Nevertheless, we are now in a position to trace the origins of the great temple of Mātōṭṭam with the support of archaeological evidence. The archaeological monuments concerned have been there for a long time since 1894. Their chronology could not be determined as none had the capacity to decipher the inscriptions engraved on them. They are inscribed in the oldest form of the Tamil script known as the Tamil Brāhmi that was in use over a long period of time (BC 250 – AD 300) in Tamil Nāḍu and Sri Lanka.

In the trial excavations conducted at Tirukkētiśvaram under the direction of Pasupati Ceṭṭiyār, in 1894, four monuments of exceptional importance were discovered and these have been preserved with utmost care and presently they are found in the temple premises.⁷ Three of these are large stone images and the fourth one is a composite bronze image of Somāskanda. The bronze image, which is of a high quality as a work of art could be assigned to the 14th or

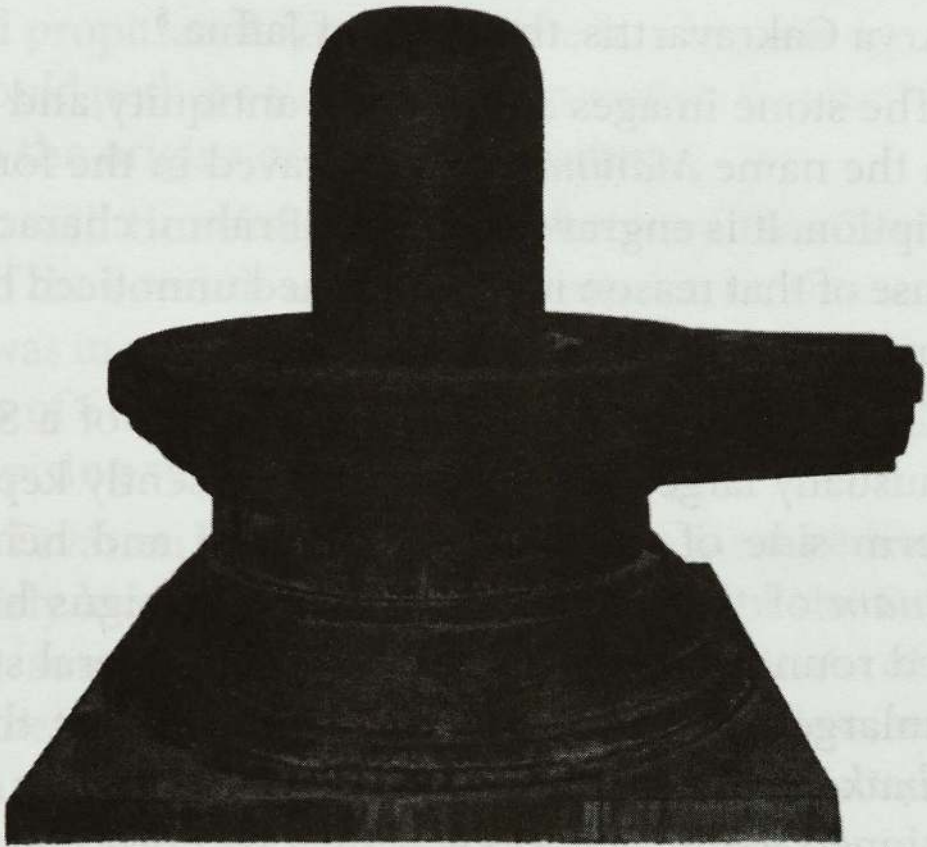
15th centuries when the temple was under the custody of the Arya Cakravarttis, the kings of Jaffna.⁸

The stone images are of great antiquity and in all of them the name *Maṇiṇākan* is engraved in the form of an inscription. It is engraved in Tamil Brāhmi characters and because of that reason it has remained unnoticed by casual visitors to the temple and even scholars.

One of the stone images is the figure of a Sivalinga of unusually large proportions. It is presently kept on the western side of the *tiruccurumālikai* and behind the *vimānam* of the temple. Ornamental designs had been carved round its base, the *Āvuṭaiyār*, in several stages. In the enlarged photo-copies of this monument the name *Maṇiṇākan* engraved in characters of the variety of script mentioned earlier is visible. It may be observed that the name is found also on the Linga at Tirukkarasai, which is a monument of great antiquity. There is also a similar item in the sanctum of the Sivan Kōyil at Karaikkāṭu in the village of Iṇuvil. It may be observed here that the figure of the Linkam is depicted in some varieties of Nāga stones found in the Jaffna Peninsula and Batticaloa.

The second item among the stone sculptures recovered during the excavations of 1894 is a stone image of the God Gaṇesa. It is a sculpture of medium size that is now found in the subsidiary shrine of the main temple, at the southwestern corner of the inner *prākāra*.⁹

Although the iconographic details of the image are somewhat similar to those of the medieval and modern periods there are some peculiarities in this item. It is stiff, primitive in style and does not evoke any feeling of aesthetic sensibility. The dominant feature of the anatomy is the



Ancient Mahalingam obtained from the excavations conducted under the direction of Pasupathy Chettiyar at the end of the 19 century.

pot belly which is disproportionately large. The legs are rigid and short and the trunk, which is very lean, is turned towards the left to touch one object held in the lower left hand. It could be the mango given by Siva according to a purāṇic story or a *mōtakam* (a sweet meet) granted as an offering by pious devotees at a session of worship. The two upper hands as generally found in the images of this deity, hold the goad (*aṅkusam*) and the noose (*pācam*). The lower right hand holds the tip of the broken tooth on the right and it is reminiscent of the purāṇic legend that Gaṇēśa used his broken tooth as a stylus to record the text of the *Mahābhārata* as Vyāsa had recited it. The crown on the head



*The ancient Nandhi obtained from the same excavations
and presently installed in front of the Rajakopuram.
It was made about 2000 years ago.*

is tall and multitiered having the appearance of a miniature *vīmānam* of circular and conical shape. It is interesting to find the name *Maṇinākan* engraved on the upper layer of the pedestal.

The third item discovered in 1894 is the stone figure of a Nandhi, the rider of Siva, which is usually positioned on a raised platform in (or in front of) the *Mahāmaṇḍapam* of a temple of Siva and facing the sanctum. The Nandhi about which we are concerned here is presently lodged on a raised platform in front of the Kōpuram. It is enclosed with a railing and a close examination of the item is rather difficult.

The ancient Nandhi at Tirukkēṭīśvaram attracts the attention of even a casual visitor because of the majesty of its appearance and the exquisite character of its workmanship and its imposing dimensions. It is undoubtedly the largest and the most impressive one of its kind in the whole island. Therefore it is not surprising that it has been hitherto considered as one of the finest monuments of Cōla art. A close scrutiny of the monument reveals that it is an item of greater antiquity and nearly a thousand years older than the Cōla monuments.

Such an impression is supported by two principal considerations. One is the occurrence of the name *Maṇiṇākan* engraved on the body of the image and the other is the existence of a circular ring carved on the shoulder of one of the fore-legs. It is a distinctive characteristic of Nāga monuments including Dolmens found in Sri Lanka. There is the figure of the head of a lion with manes at the centre of the circular design. Beside it and within the ring the name *Maṇiṇākan* is carved in letters of a minute size.

All the three items described here bear the name *Maṇiṇākan* inscribed on them in Tamil Brāhmi characters, which were used for a long time before 300 AD. Besides, the name *Maṇiṇākan* is found only in Tamil Brāhmi inscriptions.

For the benefit of the readers the connotations of the expression *Maṇiṇākan* have to be explained. Originally the name *Maṇiṇākan* was applied by the Nākar to the deity propitiated by them. It was an imaginary five-headed cobra of which there is a large number of sculptures in many parts of the island. Incidentally, the most ornately carved



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Nāga sculpture is from Tirukkētiśvaram and it is presently exhibited in the archaeological museum at Jaffna.

When the Nagas were converted to Hinduism or Buddhism they applied the same name to Hindu gods, the Buddha and the bodhisattvas and to all other objects of veneration in both the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. A large number of antiquities bearing this name could be found in many parts of the island. Terracotta images bearing this name have been found in considerable numbers in the Vanni districts including that of Mannar.¹⁰

The three stone images recovered from Tirukkētiśvaram in 1894 presuppose that the Saiva temple at that site was established by chieftains of Nāka lineage. As will be seen in the sequel there is archaeological evidence about the existence of a chieftom of the Nākar in and around Tirukkētiśvaram. In the light of the foregoing considerations it may now be safely asserted that the temple of Tirukkētiśvaram was established by local chieftains of Nāga lineage before 300 A.D.

In the Dāṭhāvamsa, a chronicle of the Tooth Relic of the Buddha, there is a reference to a Hindu temple at Mahātittā, which flourished during the reign of Meghavaṇṇa Abhaya (AD 303-331). It is said therein that the Kalinga prince and his sister, who had come to Sri Lanka as refugees with the Tooth Relic, had stayed at this temple during a night on their way to Anuradhapura.¹¹

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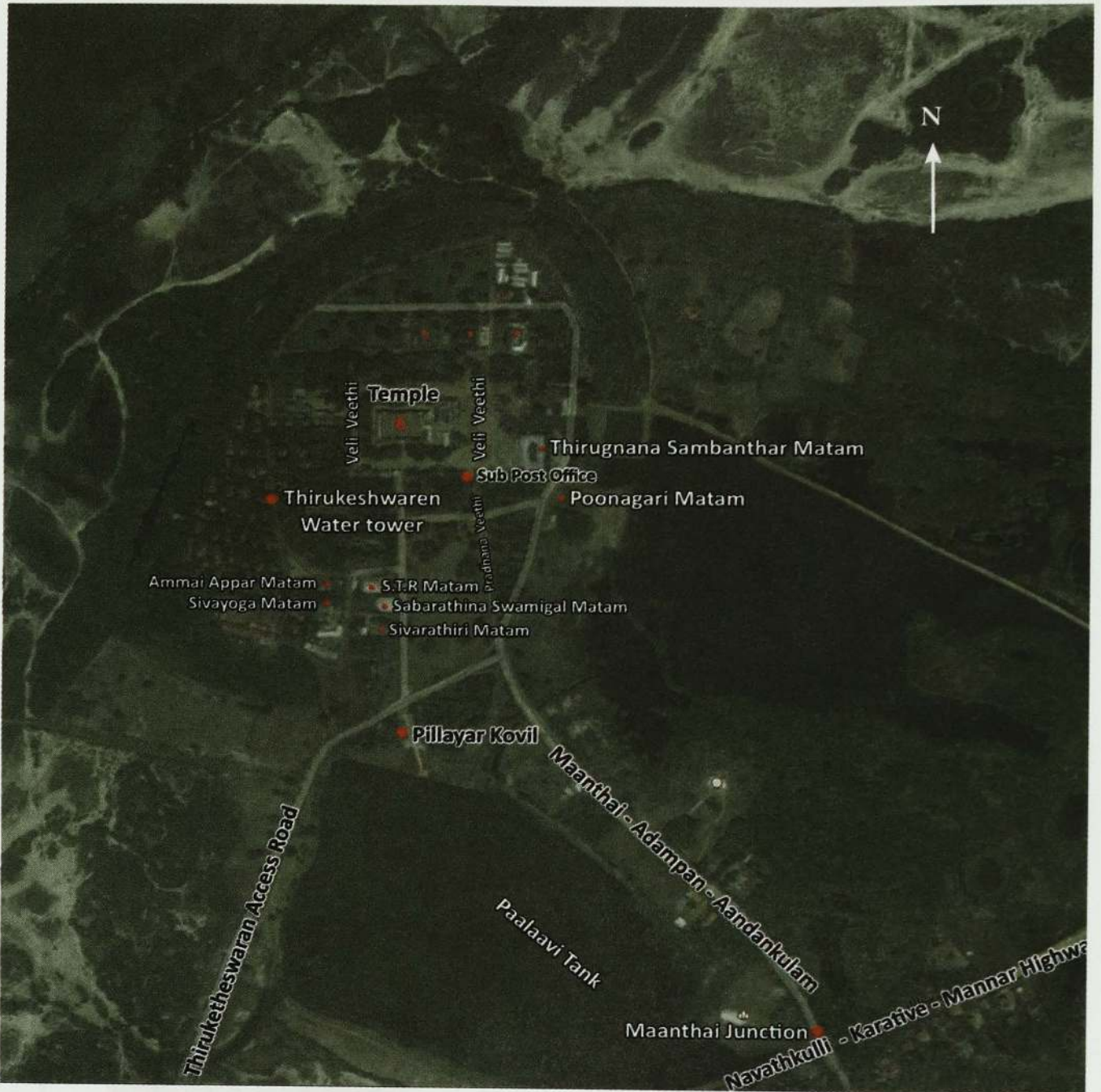
3. Tirukkētīsvaram in the Tēvāram Hymns

There are contemporary descriptions of the temple of Tirukkētīśvaram in the hymns of the Nāyanmār, the leaders of the movement for the revival of Saivism in Tamil society in the seventh and eighth centuries, during the period when the Pallavas were ruling over Tontaināḍu and the portion of Cōlanāḍu to the north of the Kaveri river from the famous city of Kānchipuram.¹²

Three of the *Nāyanmār* and Mānikkavacākar from the Pāṇḍya kingdom have been accorded a supreme position among the exponents of the Saiva religion in the Tamil tradition. They are called the four *Camaya Kuravar* (the teachers of the Saiva religion).

The three *Nāyanmār* among them were Tirujñāna Campantar, Tirunāvukkarcar and Cuntaramūrṭti Nāyanār. The first and the last among them have composed hymns on the glories of Tirukkētīsvaram.¹³ These hymns are included in the vast compendium called *Tirumuṟai*, the sacred literature of Saivism, as noted earlier.

In Saivism the worship of God with piety and intense devotion is the principal means for attaining communion with the eternal spirit after being released from all attachments through prayer and divine grace. Worshipping God at temples is the principal avenue for attaining the ultimate goal and this method of worship is open to all despite the variations in their vocations and social distinctions.



Aerial View of Tirukkētisvaram

The temple, in Saivism, is a symbolic representation of the religious ideology and the notions of Hindu cosmology in relation to space and time. In the art, architecture and the system of worship in the Hindu temple there is a convergence of four principal streams: the Vedic notion about an impersonal, all pervading and eternal agency that is beyond time and space; the *Purāṇic* myths and traditions

pertaining to a personified God reckoned as *īśvaran*; the Āgamic traditions that relate to temples and worship and above all the conceptions and ideology of the bhakti school. The convergence of all these traditions is adequately represented in the *Tēvāram* hymns.

Generally in each hymn there are four main components: the *Purāṇic* and other traditions pertaining to the antiquity and sanctity of the temple site; the purāṇic and philosophical conceptions of God enshrined at the sanctum of the temple; a description of the natural setting and an emphatic assertion about the benefits attained by the pious devotees engaged in the act of worship. Among these, the third item, which is about the natural setting, is of the utmost concern to us here. Both, Tirujñāna Campantar and Cuntaramūrṭti Nāyanār specifically refer to the location of the temple. It was on the estuary of the stream Pālāvi at the good and great town of Mātōṭṭam (*mātōṭṭa nannakar*).¹⁴

In the hymn of Tirujñāna Campantar the town of Mātōṭṭam is described in all the eleven (11) verses. According to him the town was exceedingly beautiful because of the dense vegetation in the groves and parks of the city that was tossed by the roaring waves of the ocean. The settlements in the city were surrounded by groves of mango trees, areca palms and banana plantations, the sight of which generated feelings of delight to the spectators.¹⁵

In the parks the sound of the humming of bees that resembled rhythmic musical notes filled the air, while the peacocks enjoyed the cool breezes that blew in the woods, and danced in the ecstasy of delight with their spread-out plumes of feathers.



Inscription of Rajaraja I from Tirukkētiśvaram



Another scene that attracted the attention of the visitors was the roaming of the hordes of delighted monkeys in the banana plantations. Besides, according to this hymn, pearls, gold and gems were to be found in large quantities in this city. Such a description presupposes that the city of Mātōṭṭam was a centre of trade in these items.

According to the description of Campantar, the temple of Tirukkētiśvaram, which was located in the flourishing city of Mātōṭṭam was the abode of Śiva, where the Lord was impressed by the unsullied devotion of Rāvaṇa, the King of Ilaṅkai in the south, conferred favours on him. In each verse of this hymn, Siva is glorified with reference to a particular *Purāṇic* myth. Besides, he asserts that the Lord bestows his grace on pious devotees who perform worship at the temple, daily. At several places in the hymn, the author asserts that the pilgrims who worship the Lord at Tirukkētiśvaram will be relieved of all suffering resulting from the effect of accumulated sins. From the description of Campantar it is evident that *Tirukkētiśvaram* situated within the flourishing city of Mātōṭṭam was deemed as a most sacred centre of great antiquity. In the seventh century, Appar otherwise called Tirunāvukkaracu Nāyanār, a senior contemporary of Campantar, casually refers to the Lord of *Tirukkētiśvaram* along with the Lord enshrined at Kētāram (*Tirukkētiścarattār Kētāratattār*).¹⁶

In the hymn of Cuntaramūrṭti Nāyanār, there is a reference to the temple of Tirukkētiśvaram in all the ten verses, as in the hymn of Campantar. Mātōṭṭam is described in nine verses and the description of the landscape is almost similar except for the fact that in the hymn of Cuntaramūrṭti Nāyanār there is also a reference to the groves of coconut

palms. There are two significant differences. One relates to the character of *Mātoṭṭam* and the other is the reference to the *Pālāvi* stream in the hymn of Cuntarar. The *Pālāvi* is mentioned in all the ten verses of his hymn in which the location of the temple is specified. It is said to be on the estuary of the stream *Pālāvi* passing through the city of *Mātoṭṭam*.¹⁷

In this Particular hymn *Pālāvi* is invested with a high degree of sanctity. It was a holy bathing ghat, the waters of which had the potency of curing diseases and afflictions and also washing away the sins of pious devotees and pilgrims who had ablutions in it. There are in this hymn, many references to a large number of great ships arriving at the port (*vaṅkam malikinra mātōṭṭam*).¹⁸

The implication of the descriptions of *Mātōṭṭam* in the hymn of Cuntarar is that the city of *Mātōṭṭam* was a flourishing centre of maritime trade and commerce.

The notices in the *Tēvāram* hymns that have been considered here lead to the following conclusions:

1. *Tirukkēṭiśvaram* was one of the ancient and most sacred centres of Saivism. It had attained a position of great celebrity among the Saivites living on either side of the Palk Strait when the *Tēvāram* hymns were composed. It had become a centre of pilgrimage and the bathing ghat of *Pālāvi* also had become an object of great veneration and attraction for pious devotees.
2. The beauty of the natural landscape at *Mātōṭṭam* was enhanced by parks, groves and gardens with a dense concentration of trees and plantations that alleviated the burning heat of the tropical Sun. A similar description

of the landscape of *Mātōṭṭam* is not found anywhere else.

3. Moreover, these hymns have the effect of confirming the impressions gained from archaeological excavations and foreign notices that *Mātōṭṭam* had become a focal point of international sea-borne trade. For supplementary information about the progress made in the development of trade and industrial production, attention has to be focused on the contents of the inscriptions of the 11th century.

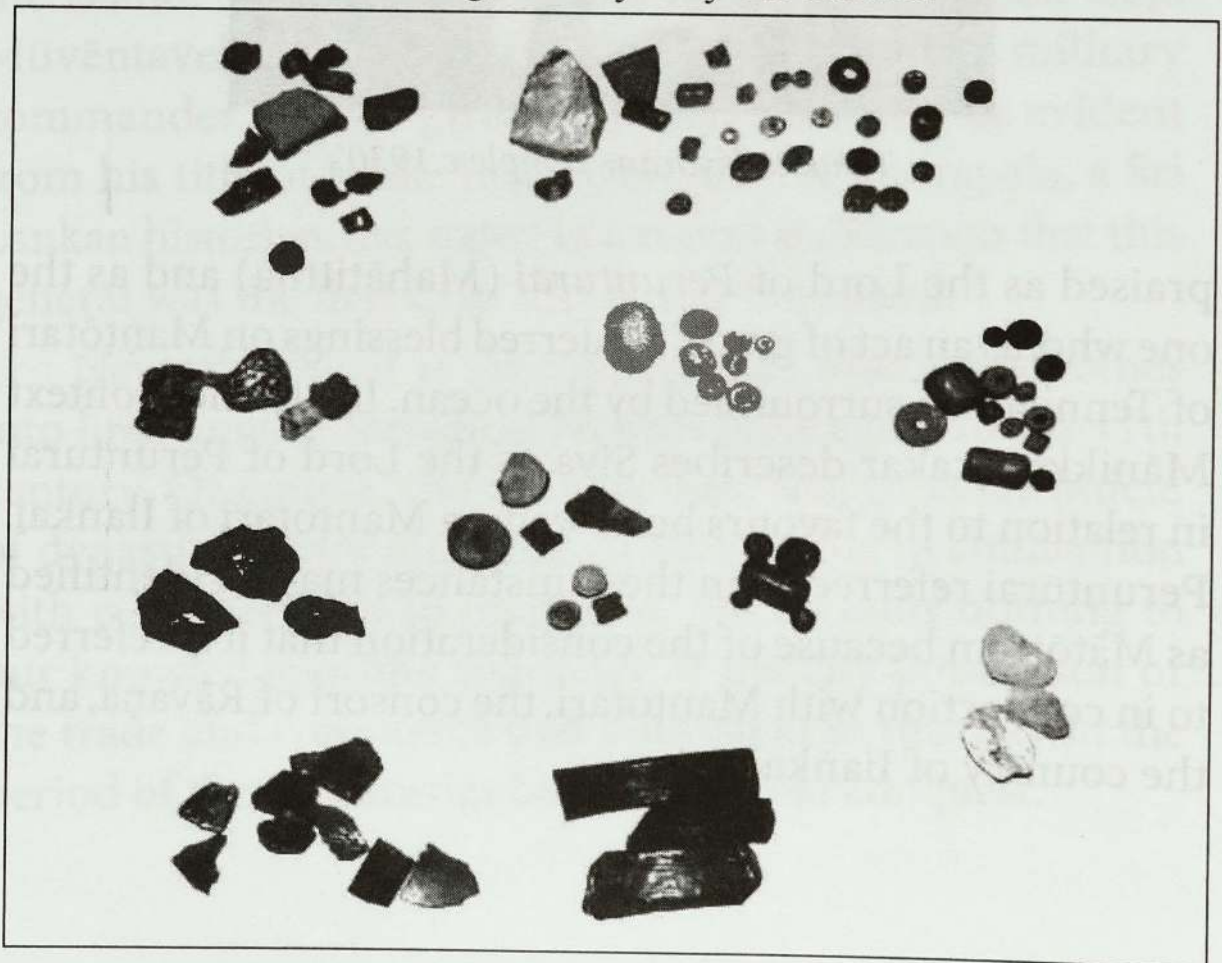
That the bathing *ghat* of *Mātōṭṭam* was also considered as a sanctified site by Buddhists is attested by two Sinhalese inscriptions of the tenth century. They provide the indication of the extent of veneration in which the Saiva shrine of *Māntai* and its bathing *ghat* were held by Buddhists. The fragmentary portion of an inscription from Anurādhapura, recording the donations made to the *Jētavana* temple, asserts, that those who obstruct the arrangements concerning the donation would incur the sin of slaughtering cows at *Mahātoḍi*.¹⁹

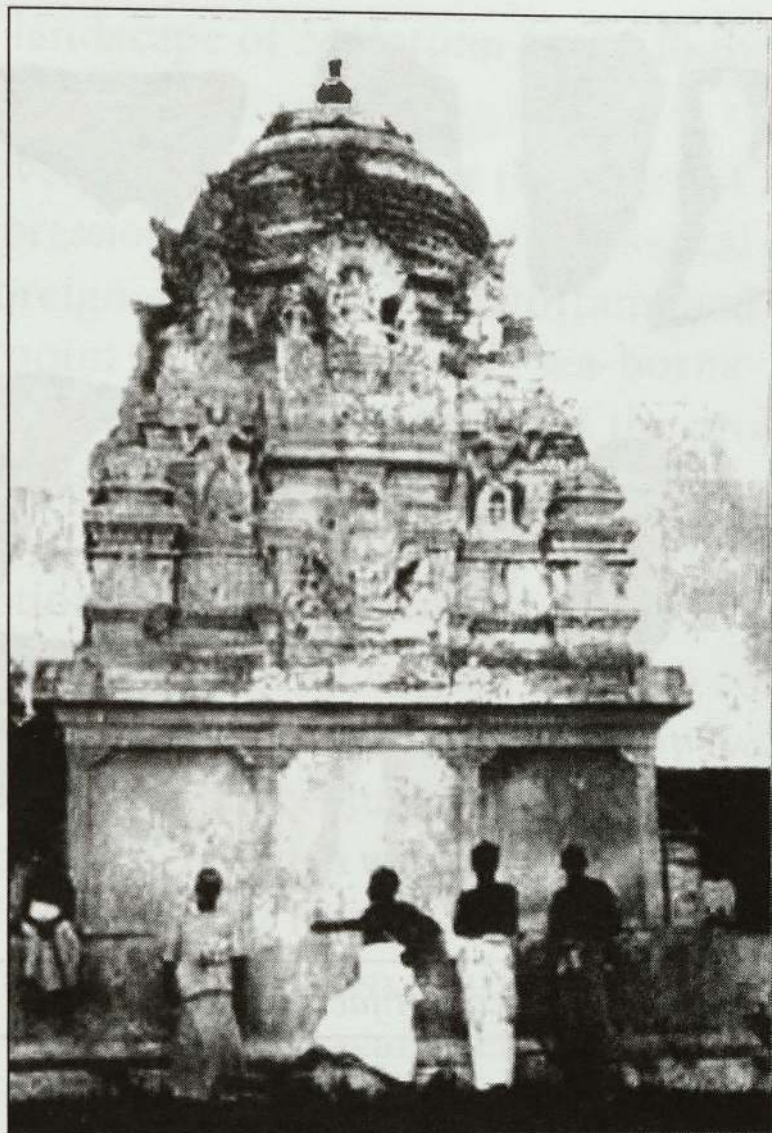
Another inscription found at Kataragama, records that those who cause hindrances to certain regulations stipulated in the text of the epigraph, would incur the sin of slaying cows at the site of *Mahatoḍi* (*Mātōṭṭam*/ *Mahātittha*).²⁰ The imprecatory portions of these inscriptions provide a clear indication of the fact that *Mātōṭṭam* was considered as a locality of great sanctity, even by the Buddhists. Such a situation presupposes a close interaction between Saivism and Buddhism during the period when these inscriptions were engraved.

In the hymn called *Kuyir Pāṭṭu* in the *Tiruvācakam* of *Māṇikkavācakar* the God enshrined at *Tirukkētiśvaram* is



Archaeological artifacts from Māntai





Tirukkēṭiśvaram Temple c.1930's

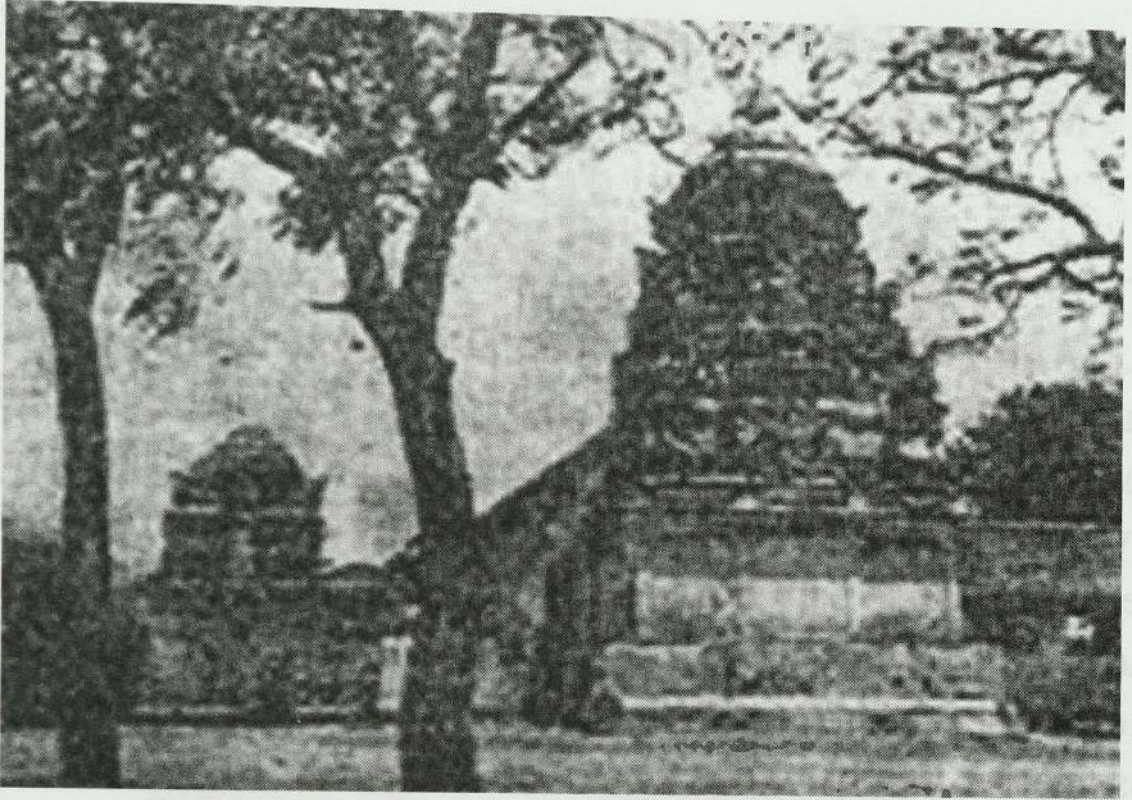
praised as the Lord of *Perunturai* (Mahātitha) and as the one who, as an act of grace, conferred blessings on Maṇṭōtari of Tennilaṅkai surrounded by the ocean. In another context Māṅikkavācakar describes Siva as the Lord of Perunturai in relation to the favours bestowed on Maṇṭotari of Ilaṅkai. Perunturai referred to in these instances may be identified as Mātōṭṭam because of the consideration that it is referred to in connection with Maṇṭōtari, the consort of Rāvaṇa, and the country of Ilaṅkai.²¹

4. Rājarāja-Īśvaram and Tiruviramīśvaram of Mātōṭṭam

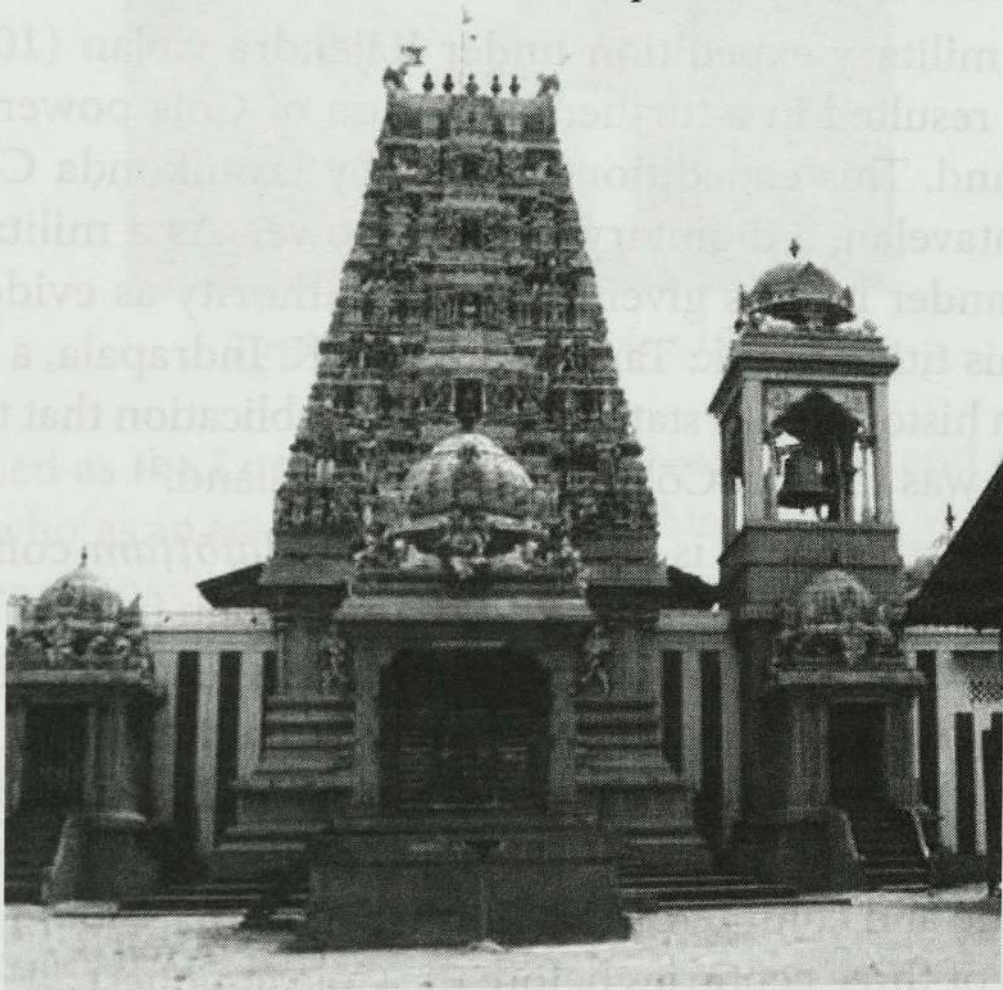
Consequent to the collapse of the earlier dynastic power in Anurādhapura because of a military revolt, the northern part of the island was occupied by the Cōla armies easily and without any show of resistance. The Cōla king Rājarāja I, whose armies accomplished this task of conquest, soon began to consolidate his power by redefining the limits of the earlier territorial divisions and making arrangements for their administration. In these efforts the powerful merchant association called *Ainnūrruvar* (of “the thousand directions”) seem to have rendered assistance.²²

A military expedition under Rājendra Cōlan (1012-1044) resulted in a further expansion of Cōla power in the island. This expedition was led by Jayañkoṇḍa Cōla Mūvēntaveḷan, a dignitary of great power. As a military commander he was given supreme authority as evident from his title of rank: *Taṇtanātanār*²³. K. Indrapala, a Sri Lankan historian, has stated in a recent publication that this general was the first Cōla Viceroy in the island.²⁴

Nevertheless, it is significant that *Mātōṭṭam* comes into lime light in historical records once again in the 11th century. Of course, the *Mahāvamsa*, the ‘great chronicle’ of dynastic history mentions of Mahātīttha in connection with events related to invasions. But it adds nothing to our knowledge of the character of the city population or the trade and commerce that flourished in that city in the period of three centuries before the Cōla conquest.



Tirukkēṭīśvaram Temple c.1930's



Tirukkēṭīśvaram at the end of the 20th Century



For the Cōlas who had occupied the northern part of the island by 993 AD, around the eighth regal year of Rājarāja I (985-1014), the control of *Mātōṭṭam* was of vital importance for a variety of reasons. A firm hold over the city gave access to the hinterland, and that was of capital importance in sustaining their power at Polonaruva and other strongholds in the island, especially in times of local resistance against them. Besides, Māntai was still the principal outlet for the flow of commodities to India. Another additional factor was the circumstance that Māntai commanded access to the routes of navigation across the Palk Strait to the south Indian coasts on the Coromandal and the Arabian sea.

The principal sources of information about Cōla presence and activities at *Mātōṭṭam* are two inscriptions from Tirukkēṭīśvaram, which are presently exhibited in the Stone Gallery of the Colombo Museum and a fragmentary record from Hammenheil, Kayts. The longer inscription from Tirukkēṭīśvaram is written on the four faces of a pillar. Some lines of writing on the top and bottom of all the faces of the stone are almost completely obliterated and therefore there are major gaps in the text of the inscription, which records the construction of a temple called Rājarāja-Īśvaram and the endowments made for conducting daily worship and the annual festival at this temple.

Dr. A. Veluppillai who revised the text read by the south Indian epigraphist H. Krishna Sastri, and published it with his own comments, made the pertinent suggestion that under the Cōlas, the ancient temple was reconstructed and conferred a new name.²⁵ The validity of this claim is suggested by two considerations. The inscription was

discovered at the locality of Tirukkēṭīśvaram, that was named after the ancient temple just as in the case of Munnēśvaram. The circumstance of the discovery suggests that the inscribed stone is an archaeological relic of the temple constructed by the Cōlas at Tirukkēṭīśvaram.

The second major consideration in support of Dr. A. Veluppillai's claim arises from the general involvement of the Cōla rulers in constructional activities at the sites that are glorified in the *Tēvāram* hymns, which were conceded around this time the status of a sacred literature. The Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava temples on which the Nāyanmār and Ālvār had composed hymns were of brick construction. These were demolished, and at their sites stone temples were constructed in the late ninth and tenth centuries corresponding to the early phase of the Cōla period in south India.

Recent studies have revealed that the longer of the two inscriptions records a royal proclamation relating to the endowments made to the temple reconstructed at Mātōṭṭam. The inscription states that the temple of Rajaraja-īśvaram was constructed at Mātōṭṭam otherwise called Rājarājapuram by Tāli Kumaran, the *uḍaiyān* of Cīrurukūrranallūr in Vēlār-nāḍu of Kṣatriyasikhāmaṇi Vaḷanāḍu, a subdivision of Cōlamaṇḍalam.²⁶

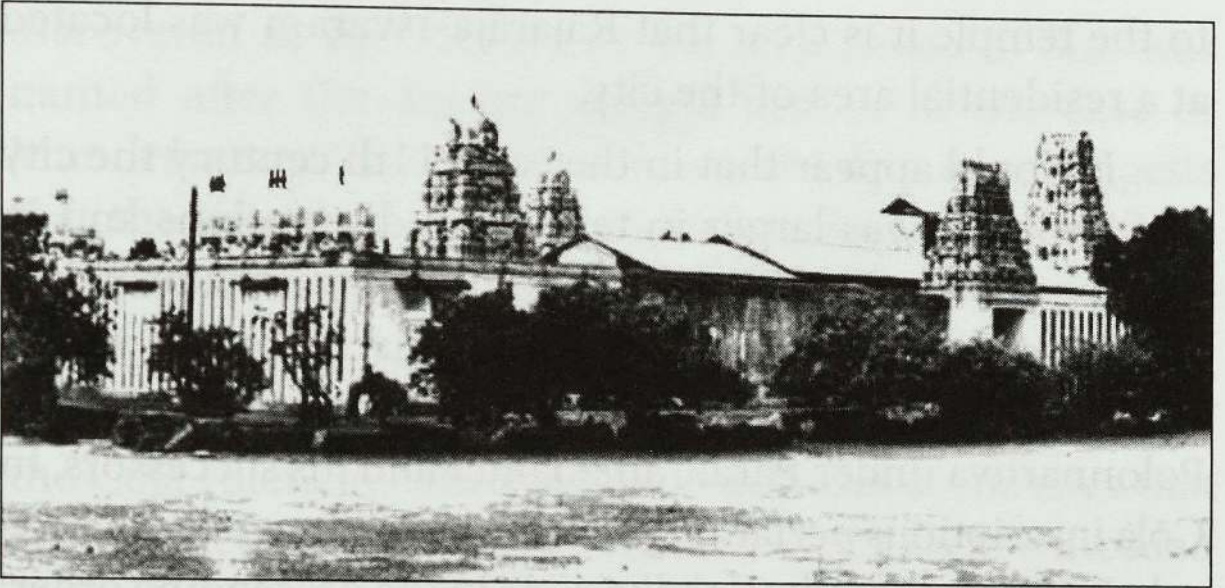
From the description it is quite clear that Tāli Kumaran who constructed the temple was a Cōla agent who held a position of rank in the administration of the city of Mātōṭṭam. This city, which was otherwise called Rājarājapuram was adjacent to a territorial division called Arumolittēva vaḷanāḍu, which was also named after (an epithet of) Rājarāja I. From the description of land granted

to the temple it is clear that Rājarāja-īsvaram was located at a residential area of the city.

It would appear that in the early 11th century the city of Mātōṭṭam was larger in territorial dimensions and in the density of population than Polonnaruva, the principal centre of dynastic power and administration. It was in fact, the premier city in the island until the enlargement of Polonnaruva under Pārakramabāhu I and his successors. In Cōla inscriptions pertaining to land grants generally, there is a description of territorial divisions in the descending order: *mandalam* (which was previously a separate kingdom); *valanāḍu* (a subdivision of the *mandalam*), *nāḍu* (two or more of which constituted a *vālanāḍu*) and *ūr*, *brahmadeya* and *nakaram* many of which formed a *nāḍu*.

Some of the *brahmadeyas* and *nakarams* were large enough to be reckoned as divisions of the status of units called *valanāḍu*. There was a similar situation in respect of Mātōṭṭam in the Cōla inscriptions. The two inscriptions from Tirukkētīsvaram, which are presently in the National Museum, Colombo, describe the city of Mātōṭṭam that was otherwise called Rājarājapuram as a sub-division of Īlam otherwise called *Mummudicōla maṇḍalam*. It is significant that in this description the two intermediate units in the general official classification, the *vālanāḍu* and *nāḍu* are not mentioned. It may therefore be assumed that Mātōṭṭam was reckoned as a territorial division that was of the status of a *valanāḍu*.

In the order of classification Polonnaruva otherwise called Jananātapuram was in a lower grade in comparison with Rājarājapuram. In one of the inscriptions from Śiva Devale No.2 Polonnaruva otherwise called Jananātapuram



Tirukkēṭīśvaram Temple c. 1976, after the construction of the buildings in the second stage of restoration.

is described as a unit of *Rajendracōḷa-valanāḍu* otherwise called *Nikariliccōḷa-valanāḍu*, a division of *Īlām* otherwise called *Mummuḍicōḷa Maṇḍalam*. Such a description implies that Janānatapuram was of the status of a *nāḍu*. It is therefore quite clear that in contemporary Cōḷa official records, Rājarājapuram was deemed to have been of a larger category than Jananātapuram.

The inscription that records the endowment made by the Cōḷa king to the temple at Rājarājapuram contains a description of three main items:

1. a land grant.
2. an allocation of capital collected in the form of taxes.
3. and the imposition of new taxes on almost all the same sources of revenue for conducting daily worship and rituals.

Because of the gaps in the inscription, the information about the land-grant is incomplete. Nevertheless, it is clear that the land granted to the temple was in a residential



Tirukkētīśvaram at the beginning of the 21st Century

quarter of the city of Mātōṭṭam. The *tēvatānam* land had as its boundary in the north, the settlement of the artisan communities (வடபாற்கெல்லை கம்மாணச்சேரி) and in the west, the high road called Rājarājapperunteru (மேல்பாற்கெல்லை ராஜராஜப்பெருந்தெரு).²⁷ The purpose for which the land was given cannot be ascertained because of the fragmentary character of the text.

The king made two separate grants to the temple in the form of monetary contributions. One of these was for conducting the annual festival for seven days including the day on which the asterism *Vicākam* was ascendant, in the month of *Vaikāci* (May-June). The contribution for this purpose had to be made from revenue collections in the following order:

1. An amount of two *vaṭṭam* (a unit of currency) from the money collected daily from crossings at pathways leading to *Arumoḷit tēvavaḷanātu*,
2. the *pīṭilikai vāri*, a tax on highlands that had some usufructory value,

3. the taxes from looms,
4. the taxes levied on crossings on land and ferries,
5. and the income from the collections called *vaṭṭam*.
(வட்டத்தால் கூடின முதலும்)²⁸

It may be noted here that the whole amount was in the form of monetary contributions, the sources being trade, transport and textile looms in the city. The character of the endowment suggests that Mātōṭṭam, around this time, as in the preceding centuries, was a commercial city. Traders, artisans and weavers were among the principal inhabitants. The king was obliged to make a special arrangement (மகமை) for making a contribution to support the temple for conducting daily worship and rituals. It was in the form of an impost on almost all the sources of royal revenue, but in this instance, the amounts to be collected were stipulated in the following order:

1. *One akkam* (a unit of coined money) levied at crossings on land and by boats,
2. a monthly contribution of one-eighth of an *akkam* from each loom of weavers in the city,
3. and a contribution at the rate of a *vaṭṭam* per each *kācu* of the value of commodities from the buyers and sellers.²⁹

Worship was conducted regularly from the incomes acquired in this manner. From the amounts collected, four measures of rice was to be supplied for making sacred offerings, twice daily. The officiating priests, the two young Brāhmins who prepare sacred offerings and the person who managed the pilgrims' rest were also supported with allowances for subsistence.³⁰

The inscription of Rājendra Cōla I (1012-1044) from Tirukkētiśvaram records a grant made by the Uḍaiyān of Cīrukuḷattur, for burning lamps on a special occasion every month at the temple of Tiruviramīśvaram at Rājarājapuram. The donor is described as a *paṇimakan* (an employee) of the *peruntanam* rank in the service of the king. Probably he was a military chief of low rank in the Cōla army.

He invested some money with three groups of traders: *Caṅkarappāḍiyar* (dealers in oils), *Verrilai Vāṇiyar* (dealers in betel leaves) and *Vālaikkāy Vāṇiyar* (sellers of bananas).³¹ They undertook responsibility for supplying oil for burning the lamps. These communities of traders are described as the residents of the city. Probably they had monopoly over the trade on the respective items of commodities associated with their names.

The fragmentary inscription from Hammenheil records the information that the army leader called Jayaṅ koṇḍacōla Mūvēntavēḷān, a *daṇḍanāyakan*, visited a temple and made gifts while he was at Mātōṭṭam. There are no inscriptions from Tirukkētiśvaram or any other site at Mātōṭṭam after the first part of the eleventh century.³² There are descriptions of the temple of Tirukkētiśvaram in the *Periyapurānam* composed by Cēkkiḷār in the 12th century.

The metallic image of Somāskanda, which is exhibited within the premises of the recently constructed temple may be assigned to the 14th century and it confirms the general impression that the temple at Tirukkētiśvaram was in a flourishing condition during period of the Ārya Cakravarttis of Jaffna.

5. The Portuguese and the Temples of Mātōṭṭam

There is a wide gap in the history of the temple of Tirukkēṭīśvaram since the 11th century. The epigraphic records of the subsequent period have not survived because of the fact that the temples of Mātōṭṭam had been systematically destroyed by the Portuguese in the 16th century. The site where the temple had existed previously had the appearance of a desolate mound until the end of the 19th century when the resurgent Hindu community developed a passionate interest in Tirukkēṭīśvaram as a result of the inspiration provided by Ārumuka Nāvalar, the champion reformer of the Hindus.

Some British Officers had written short notes on Tirukkēṭīśvaram in their reports and some Journals. In his *Administration Report* for the year 1887, William Twynam, the Government Agent of the Northern Province, says:

“The tradition is that the temple was as large as the one at Rāmēśvaram and was held in great veneration by the Hindus, who made pilgrimages to it from all parts of India as they now do to the temple at Rameswaram. The Portuguese it is said, destroyed the temple and built the Martin Church with the materials and this is borne out by the discovery lately of some stone images in the foundation of the old Church, which was built, I believe, on a part of the site of the old temple. Some Roman Catholic Churches in Māntai were also, it is said, *built of the temple*.”³³

It is claimed that

“soon after the friars got the broken images and the inscriptions buried in the foundations of their new Church at Mantota.”³⁴



The impressions of William Twynam seem to be supported by the observations of Hugh Neville who says:

"This city was a great emporium, the population of which mainly belonged to the Kadiyar race, when it attracted the cupidity of the Portuguese. In 1543 A.D., a missionary sent by S. Francis Xavier converted these people to Christianity, but the political use made of this conversion so excited and alarmed the Chakravarti Raja of Jaffna their ruler, that he extirpated by wholesale executions which took place about 1546 A.D.

The trade of the port was then shattered, and when the Portuguese finally destroyed the Tamil rule in 1590, the old port was abandoned in favour of Mannar which could be defended by the shallow channel between it and the mainland, from a sudden surprise by land. When they took final possession they sacked and burned the city of Mantotte, and razed its ancient temple to the ground."³⁵

The observations made by Paul E. Pieris may also be recalled here. He writes:

"... the Portuguese (were found) busily engaged in transporting stone for the fortress, the Viceroy himself acting as engineer, the famous shrine of Thiruketeeswaram being demolished to supply materials for the fort and the churches which were subsequently erected"³⁶

W.J. S. Boake, the Assistant Government Agent, Mannar, who became interested in the ruins of Thiruketeeswaram, conducted amateurish archaeological surveys and trial excavations in 1886. In a paper he wrote on the basis of his finds, he says:

"Nothing remains above ground of this ancient city except a few fragments of sculpture, broken tiles, bricks and pieces of pottery. Its site is entirely overgrown by low dense jungle, the only large trees being a few *tanaku* and *boabub*. Indications may still be seen of the old streets

and there are two or three old wells. The foundations of a brick building, somewhere about the centre of a hill, on which I believe the greater part of the city stood, are pointed out as those of the place; and the entrance of the temple is said to have been near the old well... it is one of the sixty-four sacred places of the Hindus. Its temple rivalled that of Rameswaram and was probably built about the same period."³⁷

P. de Hoefft, who was Colonial Secretary, had visited the site of the ruins at Tirukkēṭiśvaram on several occasions during the years 1894-1895. He made careful observations and kept notes. His description of what he saw at the site is of interest, as it portrays what the site was like during the period of excavations by Pasupathy Chettiyar. He says :

"It was in November, 1894 I first visited the deserted sacred place of the Hindus. I had then no notion of its great sanctity for the Hindu, nor of its antiquity. The site was thickly covered with low scrubby jungle trees known as odai, the ellonole, the tanaku and other thorny undergrowths. Some low walls in one particular place were pointed out as relics of temples of by gone days and dwellings of an extinct people. We came also upon broken pieces of sculptured Hindu saints and small bits of a very white transparent stone not known in the district..."³⁸

In the late 16th century, the temple fell on evil days. It was sacked, looted and completely destroyed by the Portuguese soldiers who had recourse to the unusual step of digging out the foundations and burying the stone inscriptions beneath the ground somewhere. The architectural remains were removed from the site and used as building material for their constructions. As the practice of Hinduism was suppressed for a period of more than two centuries until the British occupation, the Tamils of Jaffnapatnam could not identify the site of the old temple, the memories of which had almost faded out of their minds.

6. Restoration Work at Tirukkēṭīśvaram

In the 19th century, when Hindu temples were reconstructed everywhere in the northernmost part of the island it was inevitable that the restoration of the Tirukkēṭīśvaram temple would be undertaken by the Hindu community.

Acquisition of Land at the Site of the Ancient Temple

The Restoration of this temple was originally conceived by Ārumuka Nāvalar, “the Champion Reformer of Hinduism”, in Sri Lanka during the 19th century. In a tract on *Religious Conditions in Jaffna* published in 1872, Ārumuka Nāvalar brought to the notice of the Hindus of Jaffna, the existence, in close proximity to Jaffna at a distance within a hundred miles, of an ancient site of Hindu worship sanctified by the *Tēvāram* hymns of the *Nāyanmār*. His appeal had the effect of initiating a movement, some years later, for the rediscovery of the site of the ancient temple.³⁹

As interest was aroused in the country, the Government Agent of the Northern Province decided to see the location.⁴⁰ Earlier applications were made by Subadar Vythiligam, Thambyah Mudaliyar of Colombo, the manager of the Kantacuvami Temple at Nallur, and Asaippillai of Jaffna for the purchase of the site of the temple. The *Saiva Paripalana Sabhai*, “The Society for the Preservation of Saivism”, made representations to the government on matters relating to the transfer or sale of land at Tirukkēṭīśvaram by the government to individuals sponsored by the society.

Discovery of the Site of the Ancient Temple

On 13th December 1893, William Twynam, the Government Agent, put up for auction at the Jaffna Kaccheri, the crown land of jungle land. It was bought by R.R. Palaniyappa Chettiyar.⁴¹ In January 1894, S. T. M. Pasupathy Chettiyar a Philanthropist of great renown and Honorary Treasurer of the Saiva Paripālana Sabhai set out to the site and commenced work on clearing the jungle. He was supported in his efforts by the residents of the neighbouring village of Viḍattaltivu.

The lay-out of the ancient Temple was discovered and the southwest corner of its wall was located. The walls rose from a depth of over ten feet from ground level to a total height of over twenty feet. The foundations of the wall had been of granite stone after which it had been erected on limestone and continued in the upper portion in brick work.

The original site of the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Portuguese, was traced in June 1894 from the clue afforded by the old well in the temple land. A *Sivalingam*, Nandhi, stone image of *Gaṇesa* and an image of Somāskanda were the most important archaeological finds obtained during the course of the trial excavations conducted under the supervision of S. T. M. Pasupathy Chettiyar., He had taken temple priests, architects, artisans and workmen from Jaffna to Tirukkēṭīśvaram for conducting investigations.⁴²

A New Temple at Tirukkēṭīśvaram

A small temple was erected at the site and it was consecrated for worship, in 1903, by N.Kumarasami Tikṣitar.⁴³ In the meanwhile, the maintenance of this small temple had

become the responsibility of the *Nagarattār*, who played a prominent and active role in promoting the cause of Hinduism. Therefore, the management of the temple at Tirukkēṭīśvaram continued as part of the regular activity of the management of the Katirēcan temples in Colombo. A special consecration ceremony was performed annually in commemoration of the *Kumbha-abisekam* of 1903 and worship was conducted regularly. Nevertheless, it was an aspiration of the Hindu community that a temple of sufficient proportions that could reflect at least partially the dimensions and glory of the ancient temple should be constructed.

The Thiruketheeswaram Temple Restoration Society

The formation of a Society for the restoration of the temple at Tirukkēṭīśvaram in 1948 was mainly an outcome of the efforts made by Subramaniam Sivapathasundaram, who was a scholar of high reputation because of his deep knowledge of all the branches of Saiva learning.⁴⁴ As a competent exponent of the *Saivn Siddhānta*, the philosophical school of south Indian Saivism, he had published a number of manuals on Saivism, its philosophical tenets and rituals.

Sivapathasundaram sent a letter of appeal to the Hindu residents of Malaysia, in which he cited the historical and religious importance of Tirukkēṭīśvaram and urged them to support the restoration of the temple. Many of his former pupils were holding influential positions in government service in Malaya and Singapore. They responded to his call and formed a Society, which undertook responsibility for erecting the Gowri Amman shrine and its kōpuram.

When a Society was instituted for the restoration of the temple at Tirukkēṭīśvaram, Sivapathasuntharam was

elected as the first president.⁴⁵ The images of Naṭarāja and Sivakami Amman found at the temple were donated by him. The Thiruketheesvaram Temple Restoration Society was formally inaugurated at a public meeting held at the old Kathiresan Temple at Bambalapitiya, on the 24th of October, 1948.

During the period 1947-1952, considerable progress was made in formulating plans for the construction of the temple, which turned out to be a project of great magnitude. The project envisaged two stages of construction work:

1. The erection of the buildings of the subsidiary shrines to be followed by the construction of the inner boundary wall and the *rājakōpuram* were to be completed in the first stage
2. In the second stage, according to the projection, a three-storeyed *rājakōpuram* in the second *pirākaram* and a seven-storeyed *rājakōpuram* in the third *pirakāram* were to be constructed. Provision was also made for one, on the southern wing of the Amman shrine.⁴⁶

The overall dimension of the perimeter wall measured 218 feet by 132 feet. The ground plan of the Piḷḷaiyār temple in the southwest had a dimension of 42 feet by 13 feet. The shrine of Kantacuvami had the same dimensions. The *palliarai* and the shrine of Natarāja were to have a dimension of 12'4" by 10'3" each.⁴⁷

The foundation ceremony for the subsidiary shrines was conducted in the presence of a large gathering of devotees on the 26th of March, 1953.

Ceremony of Consecration - 1960

On the completion of some of the buildings in 1960, it was decided to install their respective images. Accordingly, the ceremony of consecration was held on 31 October, 1960, at the shrines of Piḷḷaiyār, Murukan, Naṭarājar, Mahāliṅkacuvāmi and at the renovated shrine of Caṇḍesvarar.

The bell tower was completed in 1961 and the bell outfit was mounted on it. The bell, which was cast in pure copper and tin only, has a net weight of 1 ton 3cwts, 1qr, 26 lbs and an overall size of 50" x 50" x 50".⁴⁸

The original designs of 1952 made provision for a three-tiered *kōpuram* in the second *pirakārn* and a seven-tiered *rājakōpuram* in the third *pirakāram*. Provision was also made for one, on the eastern wing. Another *kōpuram* was to be constructed on the southern wing at the entrance to the Amman shrine. However, the temple was adorned with a five-tiered *rājakōpuram* rising majestically to a height of fifty feet from the main gateway structure of the temple. It contains 160 sculptures.⁴⁹

Worship and rituals were conducted daily at the subsidiary shrines ever since the images were installed and consecrated on 31st October, 1960.⁵⁰

Ceremony of Consecration - 1968

Once the programme of work on the subsidiary shrines was completed, and images were installed within them, another ceremony of consecration was performed on 19th August, 1968, and thereby the first stage of the building programme was completed.⁵¹

The responsibility of mobilising support and collecting funds required for buildings of the first phase of reconstruction

was undertaken by Sir Kanthilah Vaithianathan. He was born in an aristocratic and orthodox Hindu family from Kopay. He had a brilliant academic career as a student and passed the CCS examination while he was a medical student in England. Inevitably, he entered the Civil Service and earned a reputation because of his distinctive performance. He served as Secretary to three Prime Ministers since the days of Mr.D.S.Senanayake. Later he was appointed to the Senate and raised to the status of a cabinet minister under Sir John Kotelawela. Vaithianathan was elected President of



The composite image of Somaskanda cast in 1978 at the temple premises by Jagannatha Sthapati of Kumpakonam.

the Restoration Society in 1953 after the foundations for the buildings were laid. He Published the *Thiruketheeswaram Papers* in an attempt to attract the attention of Hindu Society on the sanctity of the site and for mobilizing resources. As he had a commanding influence in society Hindus reposed their confidence in him and responded most favourably.

Towards the end of his career work at the temple became a passion for him and he raised the Cottage (*Kudil*) where he



stayed during most of the week and supervised work on the building programme. He was also the first President of All Ceylon Hindu Congress.⁵²

The Sanctum and the Amman Shrine

Work on the second stage of the construction programme was carried out under the able guidance and direction of R. Namasivayam, who assumed duties as Hon. Secretary of the Restoration Society in 1974.⁵³

Because of his wide ranging contacts here and abroad, Namasivayam was able to harness and mobilize the support of many individuals and institutions in positions of authority and influence. Steady progress was maintained in assembling materials required for the second stage of the building programme. The innermost sanctum and the Amman shrine were to be constructed during this stage. The ceremonial laying of the foundation commenced in the early hours of 27th August, 1971.⁵⁴

Namasivayam vigorously pursued the execution of the building programme with a deep sense of commitment. He was ably assisted by Saravanamuttu, Pulavar Thirunavukkarasu and several other enthusiastic supporters of the programme. It was customary since ancient times to invite south Indian architects and artisans to design and construct the sanctum and other parts of temples. Even some of the outstanding, medieval Buddhist monuments were constructed in this manner. It had become an established tradition in respect of the reconstruction of Hindu temples in the island, since the early days of British rule.

Under Namasivayam's direction the construction work at this site resulted in an effort of international co-operation. He was able to obtain the support of the government of Sri Lanka, and the state governments of Tamil Nāḍu and Andhra Pradesh in the Indian Union. A *dvajaśtambham* (*kodimaram*) of 31 feet in height and covered with copper sheeting was erected. It was of teak wood obtained from the jungles of Mullaitivu after a long period of laborious search and selection. A magnificent *nandhi* and *palipitam* were established in front of the sanctum of the shrine of Kauri Ampāl. All construction work was done by a team of competent architects and sculptors under the direction of the master craftsmen Cellakkannu *Stapati* and his son Cinkaravelu. In *The Lord of Thiruketheśwaram*, the author, Arumugam says;

“The erection of the main temple structure for Sivan and Gowri Ambal progressed satisfactorily thereafter as most of the materials required were already there. Prodigious progress was made thereafter in building the temple for the Lord. The new Secretary of the TTRS, R. Namasivayam spared no pains in expediting matters. The 1975 Annual Report of the Thiruketheeswaram Temple Restoration Society, proudly record a whole list of works that had been done and several contributions that were received from persons not only in Sri Lanka but also from Malaysia and India as well.”⁵⁵

Steps were taken to erect expeditiously the following in cement and concrete blocks:

- *Mahāmaṇḍapam*
- *Niruttamaṇḍapam*
- *Stambhamaṇḍapam and*
- *Ambāl Maṇḍapam*

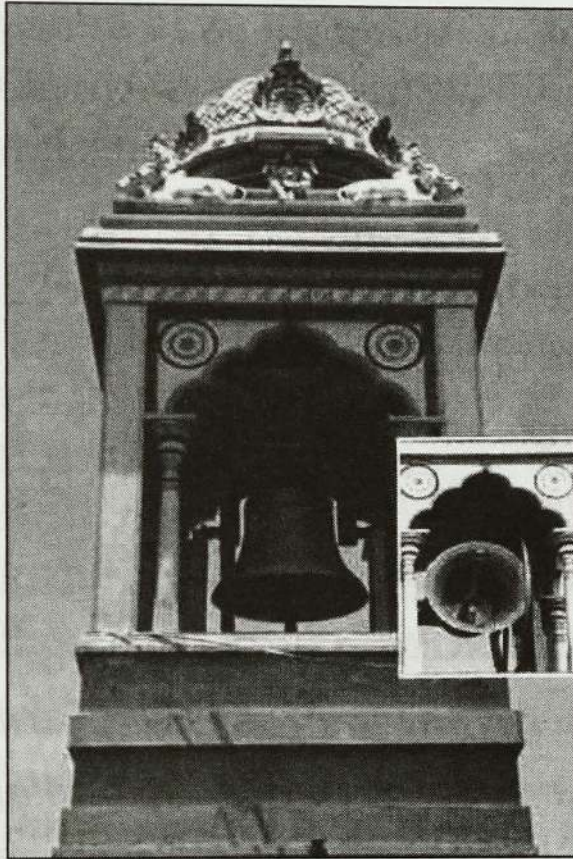


The *Vasanta Maṇḍapam* was renovated. A large number of subsidiary (*prākāra*) shrines that remained unconstructed were erected at their designated locations. These were:

- *The shrine of Tuvāra Kaṇapati*
- *The shrine of Subramanyar*
- *The Navagraha shrine*
- *The shrine of Saṅiśvaraṇ*
- *The shrines of Sun and Moon gods*
- *The shrine of Kētu*
- *The shrines of the four Samaya Kuravar*
- *The shrine of Sampantha Cuvāmikaḷ*
- *The shrine of Suntaramūrṭti Nāyanār*
- *The shrine of Cēkkilār*
- *The shrine for Tirumuṛai (Tamil Saiva Sacred Literature)*
- *The shrine of Caṇḍēśvarar*

The *vimānam* erected over the roof of the inner sanctum of the main shrine was 42.5 feet in height while that of the Amman shrine had a height of 34 feet. On the initiative of Namasivayam, all stone sculptures required for the shrines were made by sculptors of exceptional merit, at the Government School of Sculpture at Mamallapuram.

“The Annual Report (1975) also records the casting of bronze images of several deities. The work was done at the temple premises by Sivacankaran Stapati and other artisans brought from India. A most remarkable item among these was the image of Somāskanda, which was 4.5 feet in height. Besides, there were several others including the images of Prathosa Mūrṭti and Ampāl.”⁵⁶



The temple bell, made in England, was brought to the temple premises during the first stage of construction. Due to a special mechanism in its construction, the tongue of the bell when chimed hits the upper rim of the bell at the base and generates a sound which is loud enough to be heard from a distance of five kilometres.

A large number of bronzes of exceptional quality were cast by R. Jagannatha Stapati and his son Civacankaran Stapati of Kumpakonam. The group of bronzes cast by them included the following items:

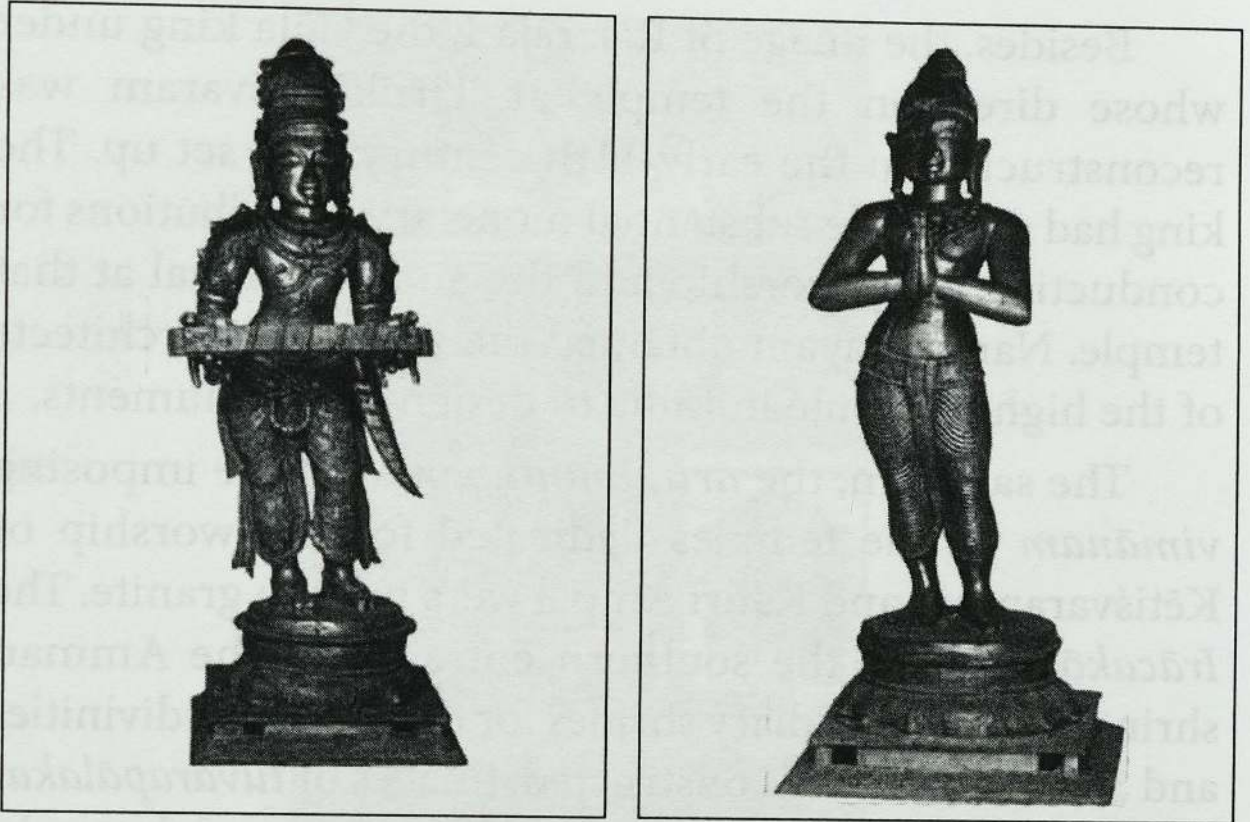
1. Sōmāskantar
2. Kauri Ampāl samēta Naṭarācar
3. Piccāṭanar
4. Sarabhāmūrtti and Ampāl
5. The image of Ampāl for processions
6. Umā Mahēśvarar
7. Kalyāṇasuntarar

Besides, the image of Rājarāja I, the Cōla king under whose direction the temple at Tirukkētiśvaram was reconstructed in the early 11th century, was set up. The king had also made substantial monetary contributions for conducting daily worship and the annual festival at that temple. Namasivayam obtained the services of architects of the highest repute in India to design the monuments.

The sanctum, the *arttamaṅṅapam* and the imposing *vimānam* of the temples dedicated for the worship of Kētiśvaranāṭar and Kauri Ampāl were built in granite. The *Irācakōpuram* at the southern entrance of the Amman shrine and the subsidiary shrines for the attendant divinities and Saiva saints were constructed. Images of *tuvārapālakar* and *tuvāracaktikaḷ* were established in front of the main sanctums.

In the second *pirākāram* in front of the *irācakōpuram*, the ancient Nandhi discovered in the course of excavations was installed in a specially constructed shrine. All stone images were carved at the Government College of Architecture and Sculpture at Mamallapuram. The images of Rājarāja, Cēkkiḷār and the four *Camayakuravar* of the Saiva tradition are of exceptional quality.

The progress of construction work was abruptly terminated at the site with the riots of 1983, in consequence of which the administration of the Northern and Eastern Provinces was placed on a military footing. During the civil war the temple was occupied by the army and converted into a military camp. There was enormous damage to the buildings and other monuments and the temple and its premises were desecrated.



*Bronze images of the Cōla King Rajaraja I (985 -1014)
and Nampi Āndār Nampi, cast in 1974.*

Namasivayam, took up the matter with the Government of Sri Lanka to move the army out of the temple premises. The cessation of hostilities and positive steps taken by the government in the direction of restoring normalcy since the beginning of the year 2002 have rekindled the hopes of reviving the temple as a centre of Hindu worship and pilgrimage. The ceremony of reconsecration, *kumbhabhisekam*, was conducted on a modest scale in July, 2003. It is also noteworthy that the chief pontiff of the Tiruvāvaḍuthurai Ātinam visited the temple and presided over the ceremonial events relating to the re-opening of the temple for the devotees and pilgrims.

Namasivayam was ably assisted by Pulavar Thirunavukkarasu, during the last years of his life. He resided permanently at the premises of Tirukkēṭiśvaram

and was largely responsible for settling a small community in the environs of the temple and creating beautiful parks and gardens with a vision of recreating human habitation, vegetation and parks similar to those described in the *Tēvāram* hymns of the Nāyanmār.

A sub-post office and a cooperative store have been established to serve the needs of the community of settlers. Besides, there is also an Ayurvedic medical care centre in the vicinity of the temple site.

A Transformed Environment

Tirukkēṭīśvaram had the appearance of a desert devoid of any vegetation about a hundred years ago. Because of its inhospitable environment it was almost inaccessible to pilgrims and other visitors. Now there is an entirely different situation. During the rather long process of the restoration of the temple the physical environment at the site has been completely transformed. It has become a major centre of pilgrimage visited by hundreds of devotees, daily coming from many parts of the country.

Some of the pilgrims' rests that were destroyed during the war years have been resurrected. They provide comfortable accommodation and meals at reasonable costs to pilgrims and other visitors. There are about two-hundred peacocks in the temple premises and the surrounding areas. The rhythm of their musical cries that could be heard frequently reverberates throughout the entire landscape. It is a unique and a most pleasant experience for any visitor to hear them at the Temple site which is surrounded by parks and groves that arrest the attention of the lovers of nature.

R.Namasivayam was succeeded as President of the TRS by Mr.Kailaasapillai under whose guidance the Restoration Society took over the responsibility of enlarging and renovating the buildings.

The Indian government made a generous grant of 330 million rupees for the construction of the *Mahamandapam*. The stones required for it were carved at the school of sculpture in Mamallapuram and transported here some years ago. The work of construction is now almost completed. The building programme of the outer *prākāram* is to be undertaken by the Tirukkēṭiśvaram Restoration Society with its own financial resources.



Vimānam

7. Sculptures in Stone and Metal at Kētiśvaram

In Hindu temples, there is a tradition of installing sculptures of a large variety. Some of these are representations of God, some others are the concrete representations of religious ideas and philosophical thought embedded in the vast literature of Hinduism.

The images installed at the sanctum of the main temple and the subsidiary shrines are of prime importance. The images to be taken in procession round the temple on festival occasions are made of metal. They are made of a combination of five metals in varying proportions. Moreover, there are sculptures in the niches of the external walls, particularly of the *vimānam* and the *maṇḍapam*.

The form of the images and their respective locations are defined in the *Agamas* and the treatises on art and architecture.

There could be a large number of sculptures on pillars, the tiers of the *vimānam* and the *Kōpuram*.

The stone and metal sculptures at Tirukkētiśvaram were designed by craftsmen from the School of Sculpture at Mamallapuram and a few others, of great repute in India. It can be seen from the descriptions given here that some of the sculptures and bronzes are of a unique character and represent a significant deviation from conventional norms. They are of vital importance for understanding the history of the temple and the Saiva religion in particular.

Naṭarāja Bronzes

There are two metallic images of Naṭarāja, one of which was presented by *Saivap-periyār* Sivapathasundaram and the other one was cast, with other metallic images, by south Indian craftsmen at the temple premises.



Naṭarāja and Sivakami with Māṇikkavācakar on the right.



The three items in a different style.

Somāskanda

At Tirukkētīśvaram there are two images of Somāskanda of which one was obtained during the course of excavations conducted in the last years of the 19th century. The other image about the quality of which tall claims are made was cast in recent years in the temple premises.



Somāskanda



Somāskanda, 14th century

There are significant differences between them. In the ancient image, Siva and Uma are found on a single pedestal that is unusually long. In this production Skanda is represented in the form of a child in a standing posture. In the image cast recently the figures of Siva and Umā have been cast separately and supported on two separate pedestals, the image of Skanda is in a standing posture behind the image of the Goddess.

In aesthetic conception, the quality of workmanship, in the proportion of the limbs and other anatomical details the ancient image is of a much superior quality.

Bhikṣātana

At Tirukkētīśvaram there is only a single item of this form of Siva.



Bhikṣātana

Sivakami

There are many images of Umātēviyār, sometimes referred to as Sivakāmi, at Tirukkētiśvaram. Among them only three are separately free standing while all others are items of composite images. Although there is considerable variation among them with regard to anatomical proportions and projection they have been cast on the basis of *Āgamic* prescriptions.



Sivakami

*Siva and Sivakami**Sivakami*

Prathosamurthi

The image of Prathosamurthi is one of the forms of Siva in Saiva iconographic art. It is a composite image consisting of three separate and detached items: the image of Siva is in a *tribbhanga* standing posture and Sivakami is in the same posture and the Nandhi with its head raised up is in a posture of the witnessing of the Lord.



Prathosamurthi

Gaṇesa

In almost all Hindu temples in Sri Lanka, there is provision for the worship of Gaṇesa, who is the remover of obstacles and the God of wisdom.

In most temples, there is a shrine, as at Tirukkēṭīśvaram, on the south western corner of the *inner prakāram*.

There are two images of Gaṇesa illustrated in this volume, and the larger one is a solid and stately figure of the deity which is in the sanctum of the Piḷḷaiyar temple and the smaller one is of the form of a *Vimāna devatā*.



Subramaniyar, Valli and Teyvayānai

There are three images of Subramaṇya at Tirukkēṭṭīśvaram. One of them is enshrined at the temple dedicated for the worship of Subramaṇya at the northwestern part of the temple complex. The other two images are metallic ones. The figures of Valli and Teyvayānai are on either side of the principal image. They are in the *Tribhanga* posture and each of them has two hands. The stone image is a composite one, consisting of the figure of Subramaṇya in a standing posture in front of his vehicle, the peacock.

He has four arms. The upper one on the right holds the *sakti* and the one on the left holds another weapon. The lower right hand is in the *abhaya* posture and the one on the left is in *varada mudrā*.



Valli

Subramaniyar

Teyvayānai

- (i) Subramaṇya in the centre and his two consorts, each on either side. All of them are in a standing posture. The drapery of the costume and the anatomical proportions are well balanced and the productions are of a high order in artistic merit.
- (ii) The second metallic image is of an entirely different character. At the centre is the image of Ārumukacuvāmi seated on a peacock. He has six faces and twelve arms of which two on either side hold weapons. The images of Vaḷḷi and Teyvayānai are cast on either side of the main deity at considerable distance. All these are on a common pedestal and framed by an arch. The production is not of a high standard.

*Arumukacuvami*

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Sarabhamurtti

The images of Sarabhamurtti owes its origins to a situation of ideological conflicts between the followers of Saivism and those of Vaishnavism. The conflict is articulated in the form of myths on which the image of Sarabhamurtti was conceived and produced.



The Four Camayakuravar

Tirujñānacampantar : At Tirukkēṭīśvaram there are three images of Campantar. The first one is installed in the shrine of the four *camaiyakuravar*, the second one is lodged at the shrine set up exclusively for his worship and the third one is meant to be taken on festival processions.

Appar: There is only a single image of Tirunāvukkaracar, in bronze, at Tirukkēṭīśvaram.

Cuntaramūrṭti Nāyanār: There are images of Cuntaramūrṭti Nāyanār in stone and metal in the restored temple at Tirukkēṭīśvaram. He is accorded an honoured position in the programme of worship and the art and architecture of this temple. His *Tēvāram* on Tirukkēṭīśvaram is a landmark



Campantar

Appar

Cuntarar

Manikkavacakar

in the history of the temple and the city of Mātōṭṭam. In all the verses of his hymn on this temple there is a description of Pālāvi as a sacred stream visited by pious devotees and pilgrims in large numbers.

Māṇikkavācakar: At Tirukkēṭīśvaram there are two bronze images of Māṇikkavācakar one of which is lodged in the shrine of the four *camayakuravar* while the other is to be taken in processions round the temple.



Tirujnanacampantar



Māṇikkavācakar

There are separate shrines for the four *camayakuravar*, Campantar and Cuntarar at Tirukkēśvaram and this a feature unique to this temple.

Recently bronze images of all the sixty-three saints have been cast for installation at Tirukkēṭīśvaram. The final touches in the work of their production have been given by the Stapati who was engaged by Kumar Namasivayam, son of R. Namasivayam.

The Sixty - Three Nayanmār

The tradition of venerating the supreme devotees of Siva, reckoned as sixty-three (63) in number, as mentioned elsewhere here, had its origins in a hymn of Cuntaramurtti Nayanar, in the eighth century. This tradition, in course of time developed into a cult that became an essential component of Saivism in Tamil Nadu. It also led to the development of a literary tradition that culminated in the *Periyapurānam* of Cekkilar.



The Sixty - Three Nayanmār

Rājarāja Cōlan

The image of the Cōla king Rājarāja I (985-1014) at Tirukkētiśvaram is unique. A metallic image of this king had not been cast anywhere else. It was cast by professional craftsmen from south India on the direction of R. Namasivayam who had a deep knowledge of the history of Saiva literature in Tamil. This image represents a major innovation in the Saiva tradition of metal casting.

Recent studies on the Cōla inscriptions from Tirukkētiśvaram have revealed that the great Saiva temple at Mātōṭṭam was reconstructed on his initiative and provided with endowments for conducting daily worship and the annual festival. The temple was called Rājarāja-Īsvaram.



Rājarāja Cōlan

The image of the King is in a thrice bent standing posture supported with a lotus pedestal. The anatomical details are well-proportioned and is of an excellent standard of workmanship exhibiting the characteristics of the art of the ultimate phase of the Nayakkar style, which has come down to our own times in a standardized form. The king is represented here in a posture of holding a bundle of manuscripts with both hands.

The ornamented crown of the head and the sword inside a case hanging down from the right side of the waist to which it is attached by a belt are symbols of regal status.



Cekkilar

Vimāna Devatās

It is customary to establish images of deities in the Hindu pantheon on the niches (தேவகோட்டம்) of the external walls of the *vimānam* and the *maṇḍapam*. The order in which the particular images have to be installed are prescribed in the *Āgamas* and the *Silpa Sastras*. It is in conformity with the tradition that these have been installed at Tirukkētiśvaram in the following order:

Dhaksināmūrṭti and Vināyakar in the south; Linkōtpavar in the west and Brahma and Durgā in the north.

These have been beautifully carved and in their aesthetic quality are of a standard of excellence.



Brahma



Durgā

*Vinayakar**Dhakṣiṇāmūrti**Liṅkōtpabvar*



Ārumuka Nāvalar

The restoration of the Tirukkēṭīśvaram temple, which was a vision of Ārumuka Nāvalar has turned out to be a reality. Recently an image of Ārumuka Nāvalar that was carved at the School of Sculpture at Mamallapuram has been brought to Tirukkēṭīśvaram for ceremonial installation at an appropriate location in the temple.



Ārumuka Nāvalar

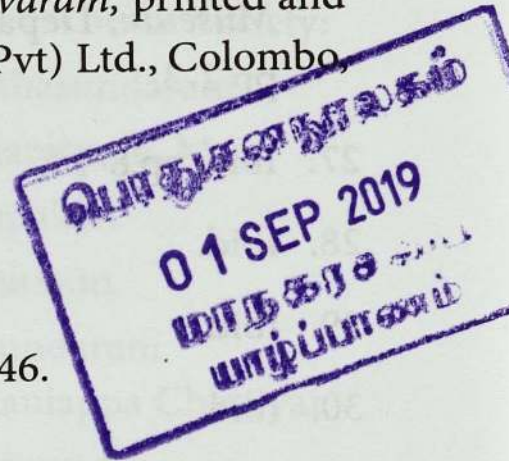


Astira Tevar

Endnotes

1. This description is based on a brief note prepared by Dr. Yathees Kumar, a specialist in Archacology who is presently working in Department of Archacological Survey of India. S.Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of R.Namasivay and the Reconstruction of the Temple of Tirukketisvaram*, Colombo, 2013.
2. K.A.Nilakanta Sastri, *Foreign Notices of South India*, University of Madras, 1929, p.88.
3. Ibid, p.
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5. ஆ.கந்தையா, திருக்கேதீச்சரம் (112 பக்கங்கள்). திருக்கேதீச்சர மகா கும்பாபிடேக வெளியீடு, யாழ்ப்பாணம், 1968.4. .46.
6. As the temple had attained a great reputation as an ancient centre of Saiva worship in Tamil Nāḍu before the Seventh Century AD it may be assumed that it had a fairly long history before that period.
7. The large size of this Linga suggests that the sanctum of the temple where it had been established was proportionately of large dimensions.
8. The image of Somaskanda cannot be assigned to the Cōla tradition of casting metal sculpture. The formation of the limbs and ornamentation suggest a much later date.
9. S. Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of R. Namasivayam and His Contribution to the Restoration of Tirukkēṭiśvaram*, printed and published by Express Newspapers Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd, Colombo, 2013, p.114.
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11. V. Civacāmi, “Tirukkēṭṭicaram Marapukaḷum Aitikaṅkaḷum”, *Tirukkuṭat Tirumañcana Malar*, 1976: *Tirukēṭṭicara Ālayat Tiruppaniṅcapai Veliyitu*, pp.98-101.
12. S. Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of R. Namasivayam and His Contribution to the Restoration of TirukkēṭṭiŚvaram*, printed and published by Express Newspapers Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd., Colombo, 2013, p.39.
13. *Ibid.*, p.47.
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15. A. Kantaiya, *Tirukkēṭṭicaram*, Jaffna, 1968, p.46.
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18. *Ibid.*
19. S. Parnavitana, “Inscriptions on the Stone Canoe within the Citadel, Anuradhapura”, *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol.3, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, London, p.133.
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21. S. Pathmanathan, *The Life and Times of R. Namasivayam and His Contribution to the Restoration of TirukkēṭṭiŚvaram*, printed and published by Express Newspapers Ceylon (Pvt) Ltd., Colombo, 2013, p.15.
22. *Ibid*, p.48.
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35. Hugh Neville, "Mantota, its Temple, and Ancient Trade", *Taprobanian*, Vol. II, December, 1887, p.165.- p.38.
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37. S. Arumugam, *Thiruketheesvaram*, p.57.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
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40. S. Arumugam, *Tiruketheeswaram*, Second Revised Edition, Colombo, 1990, p.41.



41. Ibid., p.41.
42. Ibid., p. 63-64.
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44. The following were elected as the first office-bearers of the Society:
- | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| President | : | S. Sivapathasundaram |
| Chairman of Committee | : | K. Kanagaratnam, M.P. |
| Secretary | : | A. Sittampalam |
| Asst. Secretary | : | V. Gunaratnam |
| Joint Treasurers | : | S. Somasundaram
R. M. Palaniappa Chettiyar |
| Propaganda Secretaries | : | S. Saravanamuttu
V. K. Chellapah |
45. Ibid., p.118.
46. S. Arumugam, *Thirukketiswaram*, p.90.
47. Ibid, p.118.
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51. Ibid.
52. V.Muttucumaraswamy, *Some Eminent Tamils*, Department of Hindu Religions and Cultural Affairs, Colombo, 1992, pp, 167-174.
53. S.Arumukam, *Thiruketheeswaram*, p.124.
54. Ibid.
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55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.



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