

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

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Abstract: *The Hindu monasteries, particularly founded by saints of Shaivaite sects, played multiple roles in Tamilnadu during the medieval period. The Tamil term matam/□□□□ stands for hermitage, monastery, Choultry, rest-house etc.¹ During the Vedic period there were hermitages (ashramas) in the forests inhabited by brahmanas, their wives and disciples. These inhabitants “fulfilled their social obligations and moved towards renunciation in the twilight of their life.”² Both in the Buddhism and Jainism the sanghas were operating as the monastic orders. They had their own monastic rules for the celibates to follow.³ The Buddhist sangha were opened even to the young, in contrast to the ashramas.⁴ The important Buddhist monasteries were located at Mainamati, Vikramashila (Bihar), Somapuri (Paharpur), Ratnagiri (Odisha), Nalanda,⁵ Valabi (Gujarat), Nasik, Nagarjunakonda,⁶ Mathura under the patronage of Kushana etc.⁷ Jain monastic establishments spread across Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamilnadu (Madurai, and Kanchipuram), and Karnataka (Shravana Belgola). One of the reasons for the decline of monasteries of Buddhism and Jainism was the revival of Hinduism.⁸ This paper makes a survey on the existence Hindu monasteries, particularly Saivaite monasteries and their contribution in regard to the development of religious and literary culture in Tamilnadu.*

Keywords: *Bhakti, Hinduism, Monastery, Tamilnadu, Saivism Somapuri etc.*

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Introduction

The emergence of Hindu monasteries, called *matam/matha* engaged in competition with Buddhism and Jainism during the early medieval period. On the one hand, won in the competition the Buddhist and Jain monks were persecuted by the Saivaite and Vaishnavite sects. The Brahmana ruler Pushyamitra Sunga, the Huna king Mihirakula, and Saivaite and Vaishnavite in South India bitterly opposed Buddhists and Jains and persecuted them. Shashanka of Gauda even did cut the Bodhi tree at Bodh-Gaya under which Buddha attained

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

salvation. Hsuan Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim in India during 630-643 CE, states that 1600 stupas and monasteries were destroyed, and a large number of Buddhists were persecuted.⁹ On the other hand, revivalism of Saivaites and Vaishnavaites led to the attraction of royal patronages, expansion of agrarian regimes, prosperity and creativity in Hindu temple architecture, enormous number of literary textual production and development of other arts etc.

One of the terms used for traditional learning centres in ancient Tamilnadu was *Kadiga*. During the early centuries of Christian era, 4th c.CE, a *kadiga* existed in Kanchipuram. The Kasakudi copper plates and Velurpalayam copper plates are evident for the *kadiga*. (SII.vol. 2:P.iii, p.349) According to Kasakudi copper plates, four Vedas had been taught in the *kadiga*. Mostly Brahmins learned in the *kadiga*. Mayursharma (CE. 345-365), a Kadamba king, along with his teacher Virasharma also had joined the *kadiga* as a student. A campaign under Satyasena captured the *kadiga*, but Pallava King Kantha Sishya (CE. 350-375) won him and brought freedom. Under the reign of Pallavas, particularly Kantha Sishya, Mahendra Varma-I, and Rajashimma were the royal patrons of the *kadiga*.¹⁰

Since 8th c. CE, there was the existence of monasteries (*matam*) in Tamilnadu. During the time of the Pallava king Dantivarman(795-845), one Mutharaiyar chief made an endowment to the Shiva temple and its monastery. During the reign of Nripatungavarman (CE. 855-896) there was an endowment for Varadaraja Perumal temple in Kaverippakkam. It rules out that the endowment should be taken care of by the *matam* (monastery). This monastery continued to operate even under the Chola, as later inscriptions inform.¹¹ During the reign of the Pallava King Vijayakamba Varma (850-882 CE), there was a monastery founded along with a temple called Niranjaneshwaram by Niranjana Kurava in Tiruvotriyur (181 of ARE 1912). There they taught Sanskrit texts on *Viyakarana*, *Vedanta*, *Prabhakara*, *Mimamsa* etc. One Sathuranana Pandit from Kerala made land endowments to Niranjaneshwaram and also joined as a student. After the death of Niranjana Kurava, Sathuranana Pandit succeeded to the headship of the monastery; they seemed to belong to the Kabalika sect of Saivism.¹²

According to certain inscriptions and literary texts, there were monasteries (*matam*) at Tiruvathikai, Tirunallur, Sirkali, Tirupugalur, Tirukadavur, Tirumaraikadu, Tirupointuruti, Tingalur, Tiruvarur, Tiruvilimililai, Madurai, Kanchi, Kalathi, Chaththanur, Kotungallur, and Orriyur. In the earlier Saiva world the mutts were meant for initiating the students to learning as *asramin*, with the *guru* offering teaching. By the eighth century, the mutts began to receive royal patronage; by the ninth and tenth centuries mutts collected taxes and benefitted from

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

agricultural profits.¹³ According to Mu. Arunachalam, there was a tradition that informs the existence of 18 mutts in Sanskrit, particularly the *paddhati* textual tradition. In the history of Tamil culture there is no existence of such tradition.¹⁴

According to an inscription (ARE 311 of 1927), there was a new monastery founded by Vidyasiva Pandita in Thanjavur district that is connected to the revival of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy by santanakuravars.¹⁵ One of the monasteries, called Vedaviyasa monastery was in operation at the Bhaktavatsala Temple, Sermadevi (ARE 544 of 1911), similar institution also found at Murappanadu in Tirunelveli (ARE 435 of 1906).¹⁶

Madurai

In Thiruparankunram, Madurai district there was a monastery which was a branch of Golaki order. It was attested by an inscription found in Vikkiramangalam, dated to be 9th regnal year of the King Sundara Pandya.¹⁷ Thirujnana Sambandar, one of the 63 *Nayanmars*, had performed miracles in his lifetime. Once the **Pandya** King Ninrasir Netumaran, who was a Jain. His wife the former Chola princess Mankaiyarkarasi and his minister Kulachirai were staunch saivaites. Once the king was infected with ravenous fever. It was not able to be cured by Jain physicians in Madurai. At the time there was a news spread about the miracles performed by the saint Thirujnana Sambandar who cured a man from malaria, women from epilepsy, and reanimated the bones of the dead. This news also reached Mankaiyarkarasi and the minister Kulachirai. So they invited Sambandar to Madurai to cure the king from ravenous fever. Before he reached over to the king he had to face the strong challenges posed by Jains who were having royal patronage. The Jains torched the inn where Sambandar was staying in Madurai. Finally his staunch devotion to Siva made him win over Jains in all the challenges. He reached the Pandya King, applied sacred ash over his body and cured him from illness. The defeated Jains were impaled, their numbers to be 8000. This event is mentioned by Nambi Andar Nambi in his *Alutaiya Pillaiyar Tiruvulamalai* (verse 59 & 74).¹⁸ The Pandya King turned out to be one of the 63 Shaivite saints. The Saivaite inn in Madurai was named after Thirujnana Sambandar. Further, we learnt that there was a mutt named Vakisa mutt in Madurai where Thirujnana Sambandar resided.¹⁹

Tirupoonturuti

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

The monastery at Tirupoonturuti was established by Appar, is one of the 63 *Nayanmars*. By staying in the monastery Appar composed a number of *pathikam* texts.²⁰

Thiruvavaduthurai Matam

It was founded by Namashivaya Desikar, who was a student of Meykandar.²¹ Meykandar belonged to the 13th century, and is referred to in an inscription dated 1232 CE.²² Meykandar's *Siva-Nana-Bodam* contains the translation of 12 Sanskrit sutras from Raurava Agama. And also explains the fundamentals of Saiva Siddhanta- God (*pati*), Bondage (*pasa*), and Soul (*pasu*).²³ About *Siva-Nana-Bodam* there is an attribute that the Veda is the cow, *Agama* is its milk, the Tamil texts the *Thevaram* and *Thiruvachakam* of the four saints is the ghee, Meykandar's *Siva-Nana-Bodam* is the sweetness of such ghee.

According to Prof.Mu.Arunachalam, the Thiruvavaduthurai mutt was founded in the 16th century.²⁴ Thiruvavaduthurai was the place where the veteran Tamil scholar U.Ve.Swaminatha Iyer had his education taught by Minatchicuntaram Pillai. Cuppiramaniya Tecikar continued teaching Iyer after the death of Minatchicuntaram Pillai in 1875.²⁵ Later, U.Ve.Swaminatha Iyer published Sangham texts. Thiruvavaduthurai monastery is such a largest establishment owning lands around 29000 Acres (3000 acres in Thanjavur; 25000 acres in Tirunelveli, 1000 acres in Madurai). It also maintains the administration of 15 temples.²⁶

Dharmapuram *Matam*

It was probably founded by Nanaprakacar (a) Nanacambandar.²⁷ He was also known as Gurujnanacambandar (1550-75).²⁸ It is said that the teacher of Nanacambandar was Meykandar.²⁹ Kamalai Nanaprakacar (1525-75), a devotee of Tyagaraja, was also the guru of the founder of Dharmapuram Adheenam.³⁰ Kamalai Nanaprakacar's work *Catinul* discusses the birth of pure castes, mixed castes through *Anuloma*, *Pratiloma*, secret wedlocks; and the formation of social hierarchy, particularly the birth of *tintima* castes through *Anuloma* alliances.³¹ His other works are *purana* on Tirumaluvadi, kovai on Tiruvannamalai, and a number of manuals on ritualism, asceticism and other religious subjects.³² The fourth chief of the Dharmapuram monastery was Masilamani Desika, whose important work is a *purana* on Uttaraghosamangai which provides the life story of Manikkavasagar.³³ Masilamani Desikar

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

also performed the initiation ceremony to the famous poet Kumaraguruparar (1625-1688). Kumaraguruparar went to north-India, performed miracles, said to be met Dara Shikoh (1615-59)—the eldest son of Shah Jahan and the Mughal heir apparent, received a gift of land grant to erect a temple and to build *Kumaraswamy matam*, Kedarghat, Varanasi (Kasi).³⁴ His theological descendant Thillai *Nayaka Swamikal* founded Thirupananthal Kasi *Matam* in 1720.³⁵ He built a branch of his monastery at a village called Moranki in Nepal.³⁶ Dharmapuram *matam* has land endowments around 26,679 acres.³⁷ At present 27 temples and the huge landed estates are under the management of Dharmapuram *matam*.³⁸

Thirupananthal *Matam*

It is known as Thirupananthal Kasi Matam, was founded by Thillai Nayaka Swamikal in 1720. He was the 6th chief (Thambiran) in the line of Kumaraguruparar at Kumaraswamy *matam*, Kedarghat, Varanasi. Since 1720 Thirupananthal Kasi *matam* was being the headquarter, and is appointing a representative to manage the Kumaraswamy *matam* at Varanasi as a subordinate branch. It became usual that the Thambirans from Dharmapuram *matam* are only allowed to become the head of Thirupananthal Kasi *matam*. In 1737, Nayak Pandari *alias* Thillai Nayaga Swamy- the founder of Kasi Mutt at Thiruppanandal in 1720, did convey to the acting female ruler Sujanabai that the grant worth of 500 *chakram* per year to the mutt issued by the previous king had not been reaching regularly. Thus, he requested the Queen for a tax-free village grant. Accepting the appeal the Queen made tax-free land grant of Sonpat village near Thalukakurichi, and the grant was worth of 1000 *chakram* per year.³⁹ After Thillai Nayaka Swamikal (1720-1756), Thirupananthal Kasi *matam* was succeeded by Kumaraguruparar-II (1756-90), Chidambara Nathar (1790-98), Sadaiyappar-II (1798-1836), Ganapathi-I (1836-38), Ramalingar-I (1838-41), Chokkalingar (1841-52), Ganapathi-II (1852-58), and Ramalingar-II (1858-80). It received royal patronage from Marathas of Thanjavur, who made Talukakurichi, and Sonpat villages as sarvamanya tax-free village grants to the Thirupananthal Kasi Matam. The Kumaraswamy *matam* at Kedarghat, Varanasi copied and bought many books and sent them to Thirupananthal Kasi Matam, and also the holy water from Ganga river. Serfoji-II (r.1787-93& 1798-1832) the Maratha King of Thanjavur visited Varanasi for pilgrimage and stayed at Kumaraswamy *matam* in 1821 CE. During the headship of Sadaiyappar-II (1798-1836), there was an issue: one man named Narasu who was a Kannaar by caste (brass-smith) had a strong desire to have a meal in the line along with Brahmins. He was supported by Arunachala Thambiran from the

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

Thirupananthal Kasi *Matam*. Brahmins opposed the move. But food charities to the Brahmins in the monastery was stopped. The Brahmins wrote a letter to Serfoji-II, and won over their side.⁴⁰ The Thirupananthal *Matam* owns larger land endowments.⁴¹

Thondaimandala Adheenam

It was founded by Kachi Nanaprakacar during the 14th century CE. Kachi Nanaprakacar's theological lineage could be traced back to Meykandar (1232 CE). Meykandar's disciples founded a number of monasteries. In a descending order it can be listed as Meykandar, Arulnandi, Maraignana Cambandar (Vedajnanamuni, 14th c.) , Umapati (1313 CE), Maccucettiyar, Civapparakacar, and Kachi Nanaprakacar. Meykandar was a *vellala*, Arulnandi was a Brahmin, Maraignana Cambandar was a *vellala* being alive in 1484 CE, Umapati was a Brahmin, Maccucettiyar was a *vellala*, Civapparakacar was *vellalas*, and Kachi Nanaprakacar was *vellala*.⁴² The period of Umapati was 13 and early 14th c. He wrote *Tirumuraikanda Puranam*, his work *Sankarpanirakaram* is dated to 1313 CE.⁴³

Suryanarkoil Adheenam

It was founded by Sivakoluntu Shivachariya (a) Shivagiraha Yogi in the 16th century. Sivakoluntu was born in the family background of Adishiva Brahmin. His monastery was founded in the tradition of Vamadeva-santhanam. It means saint Vama-Maharishi received divine knowledge directly from the lord Skantha.⁴⁴ In 1564, Sivakoluntu Desikar wrote a commentary on *sittiyar*.⁴⁵ Accounts also provide social history that there were confrontations between the Brahmin *sanyasins* and Vellala *pantarams* for power and status within the monastic order. The Brahmin *sanyasins* were saffron rope, hold upper status, and call their as *periya matam* (greater monastery). On the other hand, the monastery of the Vellalas *sanyasins* were termed derogatorily to be 'little one', who wear white rope. The case was brought in front of the Vijayanagar King and compromise was eventually evolved by accepting that non-Brahmin *sanyasins* were also subjected for *sanyasinhood*. It happened during the time of Vijayanagar king Sadasiviraya (1543-73) and his vessel Cevvapa Nayaka (1572-1614) ruling in Thanjavur. To ascertain the decision several books were written in Sanskrit. The *Saiva Sanyasa Paddhati* was written by Sivagrahayogin a brahmin, the second

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

pontiff (head) of the *matam*.⁴⁶ The other works by anonymous authors were *Varnasramacandrika* and *Kriya Diksha*.⁴⁷ At the end of the 16th century Karkatta Vellalas-Tirumanturai *pantara canniti* and Chokkalinga Tecikar occupied the headship of the *matam* in consecutive terms.⁴⁸

Chidambaram Sri Agora Chivachariyar Matam (Mela Matam)

In Chidambaram Thirumalikai Tevar might have founded a mutt.⁴⁹ Maraignana Cambandar (16th c) lived in a monastery in Chidambaram. He wrote texts, such as *Sivadaru Mottaram* (1553 CE), *Saiva-Samata-Neri*, and *kural-venbas*.⁵⁰

Thuzhavur Matam

It is located south of Kundrakkudi. Thuzhavur monastery was founded by Nirambavazhakiya Tesikar (1550-75) during the end of the 16th century. He belonged to the Saiva Vellala community. He was born in Thirumaraikkadu. He had learnt and mastered both on Tamil and Sanskrit. He was a student of Gnanaprakasara in Thiruvarur. He composed works such as *Setu puranam*, *Thirupparangiri puranam*, *Thiruvarutpayan urai*, and *Sivajnana Siddhyar urai*.⁵¹ His disciple Sambanda Muni composed *Thiruvarur puranam* in 1592. This monastery performs initiation ceremony (*tiksha*) for the women of Nattukkottai Chetti caste. Because the people of Nattukkottai Chetti caste migrated from Kaviripumpattinam to Madurai there was a lesser number of women than men in the community. They planned to get the women on marital alliances from the Vellala community. The Vellalas also agreed upon the conditions that the Chetti women must receive initiation (*tiksha*) from the Thuzhavur mutt. This monastery received a 100 acres of land endowment in 1863.⁵²

Velakurichi Matam

It is headed by *Pandarams*, *vellala* caste. They wear white attire.⁵³ An inscription issued in 1623 (309 of 1916) records that the *matam* act as the trustee for managing some of the lands endowed to Tyagaraja Temple. Once The priest of the Ericca Utayan Temple at Velakurichi in Mullinadu issued a decree, on the orders of Visvanathan Nayaka, that the five branches of Kammalas were prohibited from the communal fellowship.⁵⁴

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

Chepparai Matam was founded by Machu Cettiyar alias Arul Namachivaya Tesikar (1330) during the fourteenth century. He was a colleague of Umapathi Sivacharya. The Chepparai mutt located on the banks of river Porunai in Tirunelveli was headed by Ponnambala Tesikar in the 16th century (1560). Alagiya Kootha Tesikar who resided in Chepparai mutt composed a text, *Chepparai Ula*.⁵⁵

Varani Adheenam (Yazhpanam) has its branch of monastery located in Vedaranyam, It administers the temple at Vedaranyam.⁵⁶ Nachiyar Kovil Adheenam is located at Mayladuthurai district, Paranjothi Matam in Tirumangalam, Sattanatha Swamikal Matam had been there at Sirkali.

Koonampatti Adheenam

It was founded by Manikkap Pandithar who was a disciple of Manikkavasakar, one of the 63 saintly poets of Saivism- Nayanmar. Manikkap Pandithar born in the Adhisaiva family background, in Valpoki (a) Ratnagiri village in the Chola county. Adhisaivas usually submerged into the knowledge of Vedas, *Agamas*, *Sashtras*, and *Mantras*. Once Manikkap Pandithar visited Madurai to pray in the Meenatchi-Chokkanathar Temple where fortunately he met Manikkavasakar. He became Manikkavasakar's disciple. Both together visited various Shiva temples and sang devotional songs.⁵⁷

Tiruvanaika

The matam was known as *narpatti ennayiram matam* (monastery of 48000) which was later taken over by Brahmins and converted into *Advaita Sankara matam*.⁵⁸

Sinthupoonthurai Matam (Tirunelveli)

It is located in Tirunelveli. To attain excellence in grammar and literature Sivaprakasar started journey to Tirunelveli. In his course, at Tirumangalam in Madurai district, Sivaprakasar met a landlord Annamalai Reddiar who made a generous grant of ₹ 500 for his fellowship. Sivaprakasar visited Sinthupoonthurai *Matam* where Velli Ambala Thambiran was the head. In his first test to Sivaprakasar was to compose a poem begin and ended with Sivan . Sivaprakasar has shown his exceptional quality and passed in the test. Thambiran requested him to defeat his opponent Valaithalaiman who was the head of the Tiruchendur matam. Sivaprakasar visited Tiruchendur and defeated Valaithalaiman by composing *Tiruchendur-Nirotta Yamuga Anthathi* within the fixed time. With pleasure of the victory Thambiran asked Sivaprakasar to accept headship of the matam. But Sivaprakasar did not desire the headship of the matam. He returned to Tirumangalam, staying in the *Mantapam*

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

run by Annamalai Reddiar. Here, he composed a number of texts such as *Pirabu Linga Leelai*, *Vedantha Sudamani*, *Nanneri* etc.⁵⁹

Sorkapuran mutt was founded by Cirrambala Tesikar in the 18th century. Cirrambala Tesikar received *tiksha* (initiation) from the pontiff of Dharmapuram Adheenam. Later, the Sorkapuran mutt stopped its functioning and disappeared.⁶⁰

Mutt in the Inscriptions

Prof.Ma.Irasamanikkanar has listed out a number of monasteries by gleaning from the inscriptions, which are given in the following.⁶¹

Sl. Number	Place	Monastery/Mutt (<i>Matam</i>)	Epigraphic Reference (ARE)
1	Avaduthurai	Tirunilavitankan matam	144 of 1925
2		Sivaloganayagan matam	148 of 1925
3		Sarvadevan matam	103 of 1925
4		Panchanathivanan matam	67 of 1926
5		Tiruveethi matam	147 of 1925
6		Piramaana matam	155 of 1925
7		Narpathennayiravan matam	150 of 1925
8		Peruntiruvaati Arasalai	71 of 1926
9		Munnurru Irupathu Nalvan	158 of 1925
10	Tiruvilimilalai	Alagiya Tiruchirrambalamudayan matam	302 of 1909

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

11	Sikaali	Tirumurai Tevarach Selvan matam	158 of 1911
12		Tirunavukkarasar matam	402 of 1909
13	Usath Thaanam	Koothadu Nayanar matam	218 of 1908
14		Vanarayan matam	211 of 1908
15	Tirunanipalli	Arumolidevan matam	186 of 1925
16	Orriyur	Rajendra Chola matam	132 of 1912
17	Orriyur	Kulothunga Chola matam	200 of 1912
18	Utaiyarkudi	Rajendra Chola matam	622 of 1921
19	Valisuvaram	Virapandiya matam	357 of 1916
20	Tirumangalam	Paranjothy matam	246 of 1930
21	Karkudi	Tiruvakisam-Rajendra Chola matam	467 of 1908
22	Madurantakam	Tillaival Andhanar matam	404 of 1922
23	Tiruppugalur	Nambi Tirumurugan Tirumatam	88 of 1928
24	Kalukkunram	Nami Nandi Adigal matam	179 of 1894
25	Tiruvathikai	Vakisa matam	49 of 1903
26		Tirunavukkarasa Devar matam	382 of 1921

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

27	Tiripuvanai	Tirunavukkarasa Devar matam	203 of 1909
28	Tirumananjeri	Parasamaya Gowri matam	534 of 1918
29	Palayarai	Tirunanasambandan Tirumatam	392 of 1908
30	Tirupalai Thurai	Tirunavukkarasa Devar matam	583 of 1909

Sl Number	Place	Monastery (<i>Matam</i>)	Epigraphic Reference (ARE)
31	Visayamangai	Tiruthondar Thokaiyan Tirumatam	192 of 1929
32	Tiruputhur (Pa. nadu)	Tiruthondar Thokaiyan Tirumatam	104,116 of 1908
33		Tirunanasambandan Tirumatam	129 of 1908
34	Araiyani Nallur	Tirunanasambandan Tirumatam	174 of 1935
35	Senkattankudi	Siruthondan Tirumatam	76 of 1922
36	Valivalam	Tirumulatevar Tirumatam	116 of 1911
37	Kanchi	Sundara Perumal matam	SII 1.87
38	Nodiyur	Tirunanasambandan Tirumatam	199 of 1932-33

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

39	Trasharamam	Panmakeshuvararamam matam	344 of 1893
40	Annamalai	Thanmavanikar matam	547 of 1902
41	Tevarayanpettai	Munuvilangam Pillaiperral matam	278 of 1923
42	Chidambaram	Arapperun Selvi Salai	266 of 1913
43	Vennainallur	Tiruvetham Alagiya Tirumatam	35 of 1922
44	Tiruvatpoki	Elunurruvan Tirumatam	179 of 1914
45	Tirukodika	Ainurrenman Tirumatam	60 of 1930
46	Tiruvarur	Nalayiravan Tirumatam	477 of 1912
47	Chaturvedi Mangalam	Cholanvasal Thiranthan matam	312 of 1927-28
48	Tirupurambiyam	matam (pontiff: Andar Katiyaparanar)	353 of 1917
49	Tiruvalankadu	Vannara Mahadeva Andan matam	93 of 1926
50	Tirupukalur	matam (with dispensary)	97 of 1928
51	Kottur	matam (pontiff: Tirumalikai Pichan)	446 of 1912
52	Tiruvaiyaru	matam (pontiff: Sadasiva Pandarathar)	121 of 1925

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

53	Tirupalaivanam	Anbarkadiyar matam	350 of 1928-29
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The Virasaivaite Monasteries

The monasteries at Tiruvannamalai and Duraimangalam belong to the Virasaivaite sect of Hinduism.⁶² Further, the monastery at Srimailam, Santhalinga Swamy monastery at Perur near Coimbatore, Sri Jnaniyar monastery, Thirupporur monastery founded by Chidambara Swamikal are fall into the category of the Virasaivaite sect of Hinduism.⁶³ In fact, the monasteries at Perur and Siroor are headed by pontiffs from the Gounder caste.⁶⁴ The Mailam Pommapuram Adheenam is located in Viluppuram district, near Puducherry.

Thiruvannamalai Adheenam

It was founded by Theivasikamani Tesikar in Thiruvannamalai. It belonged to the Virasaivite sect of Hinduism.⁶⁵ It opened branches across the country, including at Kundrakkudi.⁶⁶ In the village of Thuraiyur (Musiri taluk, Tiruchirappalli), Thiruvannamalai Adheenam opened a branch of the virasaiva mutt, called Sivaprakasa Swami mutt. Sivaprakasa Swami received initiation (tiksha) from Namachivaya Tesikar, the pontiff of Thiruvavaduthurai mutt.⁶⁷ According to copper-plate inscriptions, the mutt received land-grants from the local poligar Venkatachala Reddiyar in 1743.⁶⁸

Kundrakudi Thiruvannamalai Adheenam

It was founded by Nagalinga Tesikar, who was the seventeenth pontiff of Thiruvannamalai Adheenam. He once made a pilgrimage to Rameshvaram Temple. The Setupati king of Ramnad gave a royal reception to Nagalinga Tesikar, and also requested him to establish a branch of Thiruvannamalai Adheenam in the Setupati country. On the king's request a branch was founded in Kuntrakudi, and he appointed his disciple Kumarasamy Tesikar as pontiff. It belonged to the Virasaivite sect of Hinduism.⁶⁹

Adheenam and Sengol (Gold Sceptre)

“The puja prasadam and a sceptre made of gold will be presented to Pandit Nehru at his residence in New Delhi at 11 p.m., on August 14. The gold sceptre was made by Vummidi

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

Bangaru Chetti and Sons, Jeweller and Diamond merchants of the City”. “On this night (August 14, 1947) Jawaharlal Nehru received the Sengol from the Adheenams (Priests) of the Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam (Mutt) in Tamil Nadu, who had specially arrived for the occasion, as the English daily *The Hindu* registers..”⁷⁰ In the *Time* magazine it was recorded that two emissaries of Sri Amblavana Desigar, head of a sannyasi order of Hindu ascetics, from Thiruvavaduthurai came to Delhi, met Jawaharlal Nehru, sprinkled holy water carried from Tanjore, drew a streak of sacred ash on his forehead, and handed over gold sceptre to him.⁷¹ This gold sceptre (*sengol*) was brought to Delhi from the Allahabad museum, and with the presence of heads of Tamil Adheenams installed in the new Parliament building by the prime minister Narendra Modi on 28th May, 2023.⁷²

On 13th June, 1966 Tamilnadu government formed a Tamilnadu Theological Association for Saivaite sects (/Theivikap Peravai) which continued its operation till 1976.⁷³ It consisted of government officials, pontiffs of the Adheenams, Saivaite societies, patrons, members etc. By 1976, its branches grew into 2606, with the enrollment of 92869 members. The association carried renovation activities in 115 temples, 50 publications with 10000 copies each, and two magazines named *Arulosai* and *Seithikathir*.⁷⁴

Studying the history of the hindu monasteries would also inform the context of the emergence of the Tamil Bhakti movement. It is also to be noted that the family men have also been selected for the pontiff of the several mutts, such as the Adheenam at Thuzhavur, Velakurichi, Nachiyar Kovil, and Varani in Yazhpanam. On several occasions even Suryanarkoil Mutt was also headed by family men.⁷⁵ According to the report of 1957-58 by the Government of Tamilnadu there are 126 monasteries(*Matam*) existing in Tamilnadu.⁷⁶ As per a research in 1961 which records these monasteries and the temples under their managements together owns 200,000 acres of agricultural lands in the old Thanjavur district (Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, and Tiruvarur) which accounted for one sixth of the total cultivable lands in the district.⁷⁷

Prof.R.Champakalakshmi rightly pointed out the mutual influences between Kashmir Saivism and Tamil Saiva Siddhanta which produced a strong philosophical base for Saivism during 13th and 14th centuries. Accordingly, the emergence of these monastic orders, such as Saiva Siddhanta mutts in Tamilnadu, Virasaiva Mutts in Karnataka, Golaki Mutt in Tripuri (Central India), Lakshadhyayi of the Bhiksa mutt of Kasi (Banaras) were the most important Saiva monastic networks during medieval period. These mutts were engaged in making the conflation of Vedanta and Saiva Siddhanta philosophies, and unfolded with the growth of

The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

Saiva textual canon.⁷⁸ Prof. M.G.S.Narayanan opines that “*the Tamil Bhakti movement . . . was the ideological projection of the temple movement which was in itself the off-shoot of the Agrahara movement to be traced back to the Pallava time.*”⁷⁹ B.Kolappan writes in the English daily *The Hindu* that “*18 Saivite, non-Brahmin Mutts remain the citadels of Tamil language and culture*”.⁸⁰ Prof. Romila Thapar states that the monasteries “*could act as a channel of acculturation introducing the culture of the urban centres and the royal courts to the countryside.*”⁸¹

“*Nandini Chatterjee’s recent exploration of the forms of history written by Kayasthas in Mughal Malwa reminds us that many Kayastha scribal families were able over time to establish themselves as landed lineages who celebrated their military as well as their scribal accomplishments.*”⁸²

“*Scribal specialists travelled across devotional as well as literary networks, some in support of their spiritual commitments, others in search of opportunity. Scholars and poets with administrative skills as well as ties to devotional cultures often moved across the networks of monastery, temple and shrine. They found shelter and support as they travelled, renewing their connections and sometimes lending their scribal and literary services.*”⁸³

Conclusion

In Tamilnadu, these Saivaite monastic orders, as Kolappan writes in *The Hindu*, “*Emerging in the 16th Century, almost as organisations parallel to temples to propagate the philosophy of Shaiva Siddhanta, these rich institutions own innumerable acres of land, properties and branches. They have always remained the patrons of Tamil language, culture, and music.*”⁸⁴

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The Saivite Mutts (*Matam*) in Tamilnadu: A Historical Survey

56

2.7.

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