

Temples in Tamil Country, 1300-1750 A.D.*

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INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONS

This is a preliminary analysis of important structural shrines devoted to Hindu deities in Tamil country between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. The discussion is preliminary in a number of ways. It is, first of all, incomplete. The study does not take up the question of prevailing and perhaps changing contexts of religious practice and doctrine in South India during the several centuries under study. Nor is attention given to the prevailing and perhaps changing context of resource control and availability. On these and related matters, there is a growing corpus of published research.

The present discussion is preliminary in yet other and perhaps more important ways. It is based upon evidence of questionable validity; its methodology is based upon assumptions that are also questionable; and the principal finding on the relationship of Siva and Amman temples is too startling, perhaps, to be accepted without considerably more research.

Even so preliminary a study of temples of medieval Tamil Nadu is valuable, however, in that it seeks to identify and explain certain heretofore neglected features of what most South Indian historians have agreed is one of the most important institutions in Tamil society—the Hindu temple. It is widely agreed that in devotional (*bhakti*) Hinduism, the temple bridged social and cultural stress points in earlier centuries as they appear yet to do. Temples linked towns and their rural hinterlands; religious groupings (*sampradāyas*) lodged in temples incorporated new peoples within the context of the devotional religion, offering new conceptions of deity which assimilated different levels and kinds of religious experiences and affiliations; temples constituted an arena in which the ancient locality populations of Tamil country and the new, intermediary level of political authority of the Vijayanagara period of the fifteenth to eigh-

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teenth centuries were linked. The temple was the chief focus of all of these facets of society of the time. Yet, notwithstanding this widely recognized focal character of Hindu temples, almost nothing of an aggregative character has come to be known about temples. Where and when were structural temples constructed or enlarged beyond their often ancient and modest bases? To what deities were they devoted? Are there patterns that can be discerned and underlying processes that can be suggested about the temporal and spatial distribution of Hindu temples in Tamil country? These queries guide the present discussion.

EVIDENCE

Only the most imprecise knowledge exists about temple construction during the medieval period. Fuller understanding must await an altogether different use of inscriptional evidence than we have had heretofore,¹ together with research on the *sthalapurāṇas* and *māhātmyas* of individual temples of which we have but few. Pending these developments, recourse must be had to evidence of a far less certain sort. One such body of evidence has recently become available as part of the Madras (Tamil Nadu) State Census of 1961 operation, that is, the series entitled, *Temples of Madras State*.² Some information on 10,542 temples³ from the several districts of the State for which these volumes have been published has provided the basis for Table 1.

The limitations of the data upon which Table 1 is based are considerable. Not unexpectedly, coverage is a major problem. Thanjavur (Tanjore), the district with the largest number of temples in the State,⁴ is not represented in

¹Professor George Spencer of Northern Illinois University has already embarked on a scheme of computer analysis of inscriptional data; others engaged in such work are N. Karashima and Y. Subbarayalu.

²India (Republic), Census Commissioner, *Census of India*, 1961, Vol. IX, *Madras*, Part XI-D, *Temples of Madras State*: i, Chingleput and Madras City (1965); ii, Tiruchirapalli and South Arcot (1966); iii, Coimbatore and Salem (1968); iv, North Arcot and Nilgiris (1968); v, Kanya Kumari and Tirunelveli, vi, Ramanathapuram and Madurai (1969); and vii, Thanjavur, part I (under the altered title of "Temples of Tamilnadu") (1971).

³This figure is provided in the Thanjavur volume, p. xxiv.

⁴*Ibid.*, v. 7, Thanjavur, pt. 1 provides an estimate of 1809 temples for the district. Of these, 277 are discussed; the remainder are merely reported to have been distributed according to presiding deity as follows:

<i>Deity</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent of Total</i>
Siva	914	51
Vishnu	426	24
Murugan	57	3
Ganesha	127	7
Amman	173	10
Other	112	6

tables because comparable data on the chronological and taluk distribution of temples in that district had not been published, when this analysis was undertaken and completed. This has required the exclusion of Chōlamanḍalam from the tables presented here and thus reduces the reliability of the overall analysis of the 1961 survey data. In the following discussion, it is also to be borne in mind that not all of the temples which were actually constructed in the period from 1300 A.D. to 1750 A.D. were surveyed in the Census volumes. The criterion for inclusion in the Census survey of temples was that temples be consecrated, functioning institutions. Many temples constructed over these several centuries have been abandoned; some were destroyed. Another source of error pertains to the presiding deity of temples during the time of the survey. Except where inscriptional evidence from the medieval period exist and were consulted, there is no way of determining whether the present deity was the original one. This does not merely refer to changes in the name of the deity, from one to another Siva appellation, for example. Such name changes seem to have occurred, but for the present purposes, these would not be important whereas a change from a Siva deity to a Vishnu deity, for example, would be.

Finally, and perhaps most hazardously of all, the dating of temples was based upon architectural features primarily, and in about a quarter of the cases, this information was not known or clear to the survey personnel. Nor were the survey personnel trained to make informed judgments on the basis of such features. Architectural features were grouped into well known stylistic categories beginning with those of the Pallava period and concluding with "modern" features from the late eighteenth century on.⁵

The procedure followed in this analysis was to consider the age of temple as that when its dominant architectural features were established. On that basis, each temple was assigned to one of the four time periods of this study. Major sacred places in Tamil country, as elsewhere, were often places of ancient sanctity, and in many temples, the sanctorum (*garbhagriham*) may date from the Pallava period (c. seventh to tenth centuries A.D.). However, most temples in Tamil country possess an overall architectural quality which can be associated with later eras when major construction occurred. And, even if some construction was undertaken at even later times, the modal architectural character of a particular temple would change but little.

Were elements of architectural style the sole criterion for dating (as perhaps assisted by inscriptional evidence) and were each temple enumerated in the

It may be noted that the general proportions of the distribution resembles that of Toṇḍai-manḍalam, perhaps reflecting the fact that the latter area was, after the Kavēri, the principal locus of Chola authority.

⁵These features together with sketches are discussed in the first of the survey volumes to be published, vol. i, 'Chingleput and Madras City,' pp. 6-8, and again in vol. vii, 'Thanjavur,' pp. xxviii-xxxiv.

Census volumes appraised at its site by trained enumerators, few could cavil about the dating of these thousands of temples. However, this procedure was not followed in most cases; questionnaires and site evaluations by untrained personnel were resorted to in many cases. This error factor is compounded by the propensity of respondents and local "experts" to exaggerate the age, hence the venerability, of temples; at other times, spite or malice may have led to the opposite distortion of the age of some temples. These and other potential sources of error appear to have been taken into account by the compilers of the Census volumes on temples.

According to the summary statements for each district in the several volumes, temples whose major architectural features indicate construction between about 600 and 1750 A.D. constituted approximately one quarter of all the temples surveyed. However, based upon a detailed examination of the date presented in the volumes, this presumed proportion appears to be low: a truer estimate would be closer to thirty or thirty-five per cent of the temples surveyed falling within these dates.⁶

METHODS

To underestimate the many probable sources of error in the data displayed in the accompanying tables would certainly be rash. However, to reject the evidence provided by the 1961 Census temple survey because of its errors and incompleteness would be equally rash. For to do so means either to ignore the potential value of aggregative analysis or to revert to the usual impressionistic methodology of historical research on aggregative aspects of the question. Statistical procedures exist to assess the limits of reliability of findings involving evidence which is quantifiable, and these procedures have been followed in the present analysis. The number of temples is large enough to provide safeguards against incorrect inferences about general trends from the evidence, provided of course, that there has been no systematic error in the basic data themselves. No such systematic error in the evidence appears to exist,⁷ and the statistical test for reliability and significance of the data presented in Table 1 provides the basis for proceeding with confidence in the analysis and interpretation of the evidence.⁸

⁶According to the summary statements for each district in their respective volumes (and excluding Thanjavur and Kanya Kumari for which there are no summary statements, 2,066 are stated to date from the seventh century to 1750 A.D. However, Tables 1 and 2 are based upon 2,035 temples, all of which have certain dates attributed to them and these 2,035 temples are those constructed between 1300 and 1750 A.D.

⁷This is evident both from the methodological sections of each of the volumes, and as a result of the special efforts which the present writer made to ascertain the reliability of the survey findings in 1967-68 and in 1975 while in Madras.

⁸The procedure followed for the data presented in Table 1 was as follows. For each of the taluks of the four mandalams, the number of temples by deity and period were entered

The presiding deities of the temples in the present analysis are designated in slightly different form than those given in the census survey volumes. In the latter, presiding deities are enumerated as: "Siva and His consort," "Vishnu and His consort," "Murugan," "Vinayagar," "Goddesses (village deities)," and "Other Deities." For the present analysis, "Ganesha," a more common name for the elephant-faced god, "Vinayagar," has been used. In place of the designation "Goddesses (village deities)," the name "Amman" has been substituted to correspond with the actual names of the presiding goddesses enumerated in the census survey, e.g., "Sri Kaliyamman," "Sri Mariyamman," "Sri Badrakaliyamman."⁹ The designation "Amman" temples also avoids the ambiguous label of "village deities," since the survey volumes take considerable care to point out that the survey was restricted to "structural shrines" and "well-known and important temples," not the great number of shrines of a less substantial and more local nature.¹⁰ The latter are properly distinguished as "bajanai koils" or "temples for village deities" and are far more numerous than the more substantial shrines enumerated in the survey. The magnitude of difference was estimated for Chingleput district where five randomly selected villages returned a total of seventeen structural shrines of importance and a total of fifty-three village shrines. As a result, the discussion for Chingleput concluded that, for that district, there may have been as many as 2,000 village shrines as against the 404 structural shrines enumerated.¹¹ Finally, the temples presided over by those designated as "Other Deities" deserve preliminary mention here. For the overall sample analyzed here, temples of "Other Deities" exceeded temples devoted to Murugan and approximately equalled those presided over by Ganesha (four per cent and nine per cent respectively). Little attention will be given to this category in the analysis below, but it is well to note here that this class of deities is limited in number for the survey region as a whole, and in any single maṇḍalam or part of a maṇḍalam a few of these "other deities" turn up consistently, suggesting localized cults.¹²

Other points of procedure in analyzing the temple survey data presented here should be made. The dating of the 2,035 temples is reported in the

into a computer and a three-way analysis of variance was performed. This analysis revealed that there were statistically significant effects for the differences shown among maṇḍalams, periods and deities as well as for interactions among the three. It is general trends alone which are of significance in these displays.

⁹ *Temples of Madras State*, iii, "Coimbatore and Salem," Gopichettipalayam, pp. 34-36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vii, "Thanjavur," p. xxiv.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, i, "Chingleput and Madras City," p. 9.

¹² Thus, for example, in the Krishnagiri and Hosur taluks of Salem, the god "Hanumantharoyaswami" is popular; in Tiruchengode taluk, the "other deity" frequently worshipped is "Ammamarswami"; and in Namakkal taluk, the god "Karuppannaswami" is popular; *ibid.*, v. 3, "Coimbatore and Salem." Or again, in Nilakottai taluk and elsewhere in Madurai, the gods "Ayyanar" and "Karuppuswami" are worshipped in substantial temples as well as in more modest village shrines; *ibid.*, v. 6, "Madurai and Ramanathapuram."

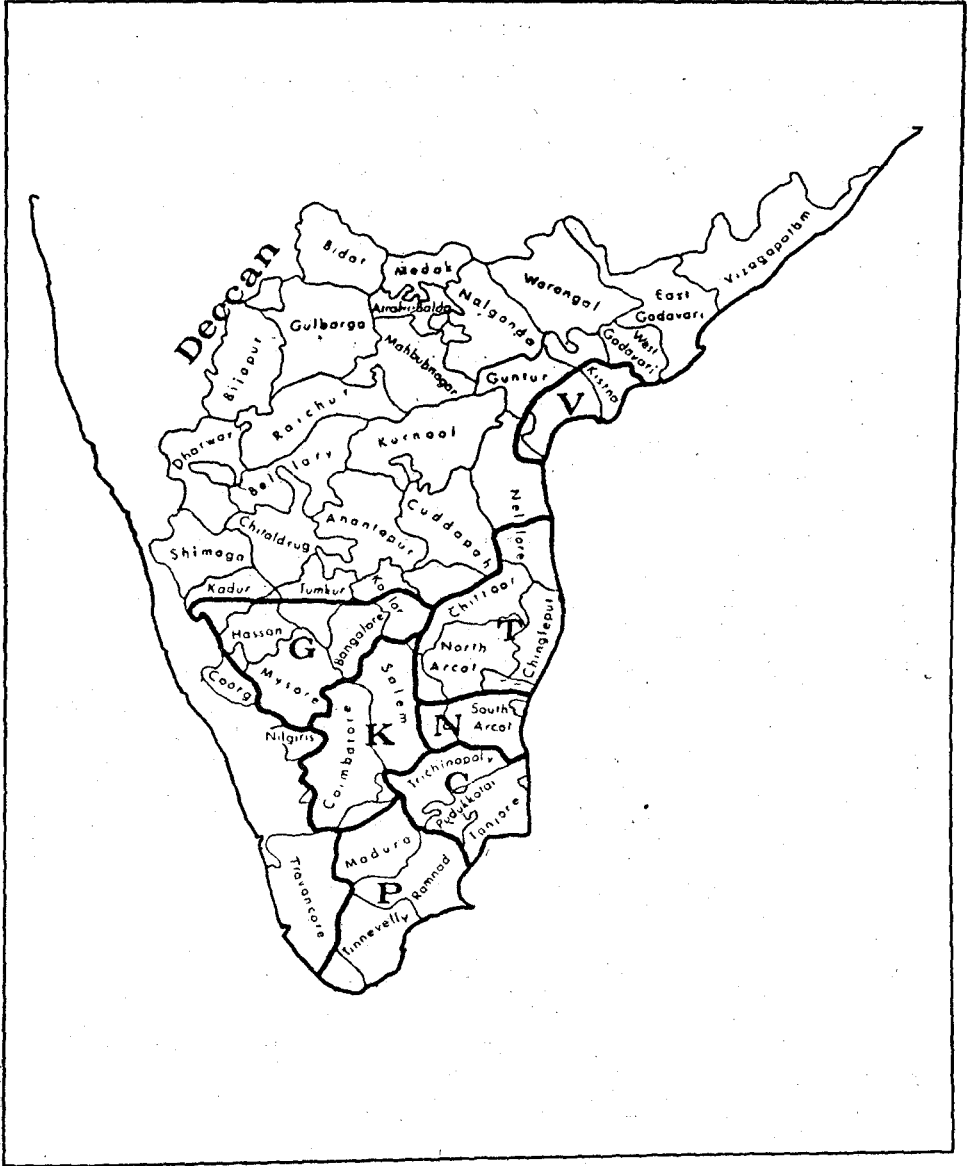
census survey volumes in a form different from that in the present analysis. Temples are reported in the survey as so-many hundred years old. This has been converted into four time periods for purposes of convenience in display and to avoid attributing an accuracy which is not supportable from the basic data. Thus, a temple reported to be "three hundred years old" is shown in the analysis as dating from the period, 1650-1750 A.D. The second clarification pertains to temples of Madras City, returned in the first volume of the survey. These seventy-six temples have been excluded from the analysis for the reason that the factors involved in the construction of many, if not most, may be considered to result from European occupation and developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Only two temples are returned from here for the time before 1550 A.D. when the major settlement was what is now Mylapore.¹³ The Madras city distribution is strikingly and suspiciously different from that of the surrounding countryside both with respect to the periods of construction and the proportions among presiding deities.

Finally, the method followed here is to aggregate temples by the ancient maṇḍalam to which the taluks in which the temples are found belong (Map 1). The use of the maṇḍalam region is justifiable on the grounds that this territorial unit was a major cultural category through the entire period covered by the analysis. This is known from the *maṇḍala-Śatakams*¹⁴ and from inscriptional references.

The frailty of the data permits little more than the present gross analysis according to the broad periods of about a century and the broad spatio-cultural units of the maṇḍalams. And even here a caution must be entered. That is, in only three of the four historical maṇḍalams is there anything like complete spatial coverage: Koṅgumaṇḍalam, Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, and Naduvil-nāḍu. Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam is incomplete because its ancient northern and western portions presently comprise parts of modern states of Karnāṭaka and Āndhra, from which states no comparable temple survey data are available. And, as has been noted, Chōḷamaṇḍalam is excluded altogether because of lack of comparable data from Thanjavur district which has made most of temple returns from most of Tiruchirapalli district as well as parts of South Arcot district useless for the analysis.

¹³K.V. Raman has drawn attention to the early religious significance of Mylapore: *The Early History of the Madras Region*, Madras, Amudha Nilayam Private Ltd., 1959, pp 189-207.

¹⁴The *śatakams* are: *Pāṇḍimaṇḍala Śatakam* by Aiyar Perumal Asiriyar of Madurai, Sirkali, 1932; *Chōḷamaṇḍala Śatakam* by Atmanathar Desikar Velur (1650-1728), ed. by Somasundaradesikar, Maynar, 1916; *Toṇḍaimaṇḍala Śatakam* by Paddikkasupulavar (1686-1773), Madras, 1913; *Koṅgumaṇḍala Śatakam* by Karmegkkavinar of Vijayamangalam, ed., T. A. Muthuswami Konar, Tiruchengodu, 1923; and *Karmaṇḍala Śatakam* by Araikilar of Avanasi, ed. by P.A. Muthuthandavaraya Madras, 1930. See the author's forthcoming essay entitled, "Circulation and the Historical Geography of Tamil Country," *Journal of Asian Studies*.



MAP I: CHŌLA MACRO-REGION, c. 1300 A.D.

v: Vēṅgi; G: Gaṅgavāḍi; T: Tonḍaimaṅḍalam;

K: Koṅgumaṅḍalam; N: Naduvil-nāḍu; C: Chōlamaṅḍalam; P: Pāṇḍimaṅḍalam

FINDINGS

Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2 summarize findings from the temple survey of 1961. Numerous questions are raised by these data and only a few can be addressed here. A salient feature in Figure 1 pertains to the variation in the number of temples constructed in each of the four maṇḍalam in the four periods. The 2,035 temples constructed between 1300 and 1750 A.D. are unevenly distributed over the four maṇḍalam if all four periods are taken together: Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, 406 temples; Naduvil-nāḍu, 332 temples; Koṅgumaṇḍalam, 517 temples; and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, 780 temples. Respectively the proportion of each maṇḍalam to the total is: 20 per cent, 16 per cent, 26 per cent, and 38 per cent. There are, of course, several good reasons for not assuming a uniform distribution of temples over the four maṇḍalam; variations in population, population density, and wealth strike one immediately. However, a partial analysis of variance of these factors in relation to the number of temples yielded nothing significant whereas the simple relationship of the number of modern taluks in which the temple data are given and the number of temples is close. Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam with 19 taluks, or 27 per cent of all of the taluks in the study area, contains 20 per cent of the 2,035 temples; Naduvil-nāḍu, 9 taluks, 13 per cent of total taluks, 16 per cent of total temples; Koṅgumaṇḍalam, 13 taluks, 20 per cent of total taluks, 25 per cent of temples; and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, 28 taluks, 40 per cent of the total taluks, 39 per cent of temples. There is, of course, considerable variation in the size and population of modern taluks of Madras (Tamil Nadu) State, but as mentioned above an analysis of a third of the taluks of the 1961 temple census survey indicates that there is no clear relationship between population, density or size (as these data may be obtained from the earliest censuses of the nineteenth century to 1961) and the number of temples enumerated in 1961.¹⁵ Other indirect indices of taluk variation, such as relative wealth or prosperity, could be constructed from the middle of the nineteenth century, but such findings would at best provide only the most inferential bases for explaining phenomena of several centuries earlier.¹⁶

Figure 1 shows the general increase in temples over all four periods in each maṇḍalam. The single instance of a decrease is found in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam in the period from 1450 to 1550 A.D. There are several possible reasons for this, but one factor to be considered is that it was precisely in those northern sections of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam presently included in the modern States of

¹⁵Twenty-three taluks of the sixty-nine in the analysis changed in size by less than ten per cent between 1872 and 1961 thus permitting use of censuses from 1872 to 1961.

¹⁶For example, data are available on the proportion of wet and dry cropping, the proportion of double cropping, and the vulnerability of particular taluks to famine hazard between 1871 and 1891 from, among other sources, Charles Benson, *A Statistical Atlas of the Madras Presidency; Compiled from Existing Records*, Madras, 1895.

FIGURE 1: TEMPLES OF MADRAS STATE, 1300-1750 A.D., BY MAᅇDALAM, DEITY AND PERIOD

N=2035 Source: Data of Table 1

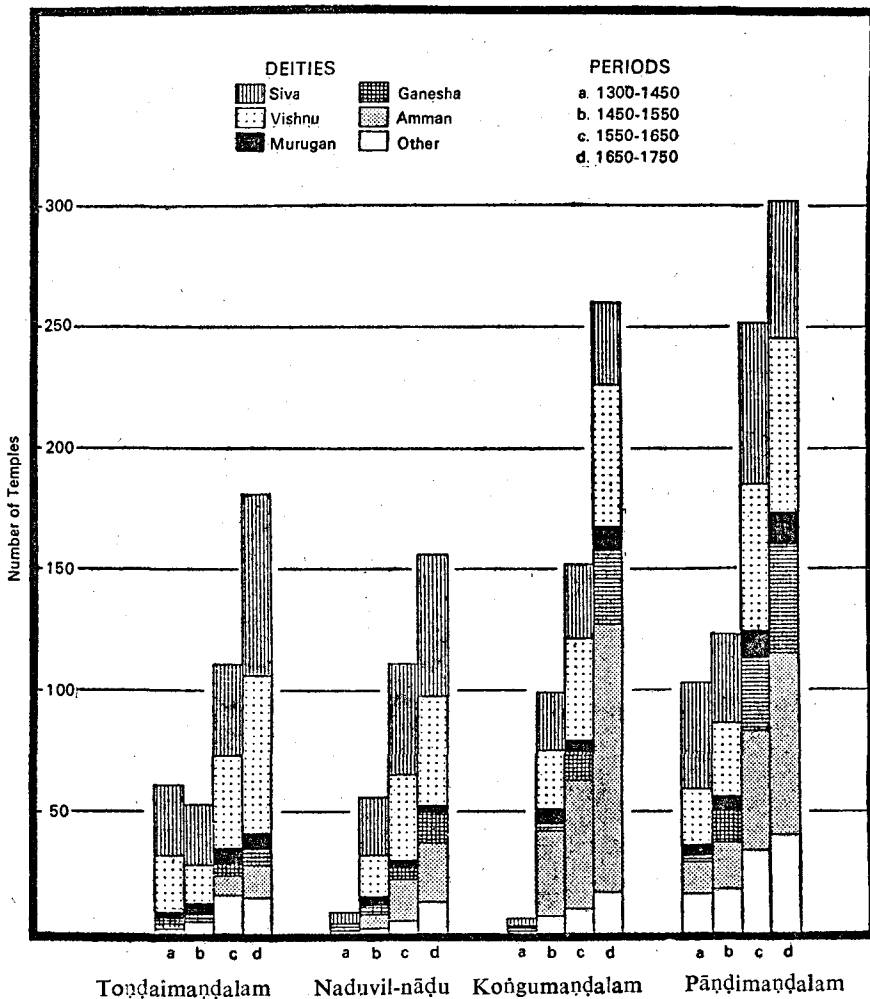


TABLE 1

TEMPLES OF MADRAS STATE, 1300-1750 A.D., BY DEITY, PERIOD, AND MANDALAM

N=2035 Figures in parentheses are percentages of totals.

	Deity					Total by Mandalam	Total of Period
	Siva	Vishnu	Murugan	Ganesha	Amman		
a. 1300-1450 A.D.							
N _a = 179 (9% of N)							
Tondaimandalam	29(47)	23(38)	2(3)	3(5)	2(3)	2(3)	61(100)
Naduvil-nadu	5(55)	4(45)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	9(100)
Koṅgumandalam	3(49)	1(17)	0(0)	1(17)	0(0)	1(17)	6(100)
Pāṇḍimandalam	44(43)	23(23)	4(4)	3(3)	13(13)	18(15)	103(100)
Total for Madras	81(45)	51(29)	6(3)	7(4)	15(8)	19(11)	179(100)
b. 1450-1550 A.D.							
N _b = 331 (16% of N)							
Tondaimandalam	25(48)	16(30)	2(4)	5(9)	0(0)	5(9)	53(100)
Naduvil-nadu	24(43)	17(30)	3(5)	4(7)	6(11)	2(4)	56(100)
Koṅgumandalam	24(24)	24(24)	6(6)	3(3)	35(36)	7(7)	99(100)
Pāṇḍimandalam	37(30)	30(24)	6(5)	13(11)	19(15)	18(15)	123(100)
Total for Madras	110(33)	87(28)	17(5)	25(8)	60(18)	32(10)	331(100)

c. 1550-1650 A.D.

N_c = 628 (31% of N)

Tonçaimaᅇᅇalam	38(34)	38(34)	5(5)	6(5)	8(7)	16(15)	111(100)	(18)
Naduviᅇ-nāᅇu	46(41)	35(31)	3(3)	5(5)	17(15)	5(5)	111(100)	(18)
Koᅇgumaᅇᅇalam	31(20)	42(27)	4(3)	12(8)	53(35)	10(7)	152(100)	(24)
Pāᅇᅇimaᅇᅇalam	67(27)	61(24)	11(4)	30(12)	49(19)	34(14)	252(100)	(40)
Total for Madras	182(29)	178(28)	23(4)	53(9)	127(20)	65(10)	626(100)	(100)

d. 1650-1750 A.D.

N_d = 339 (44% of N)

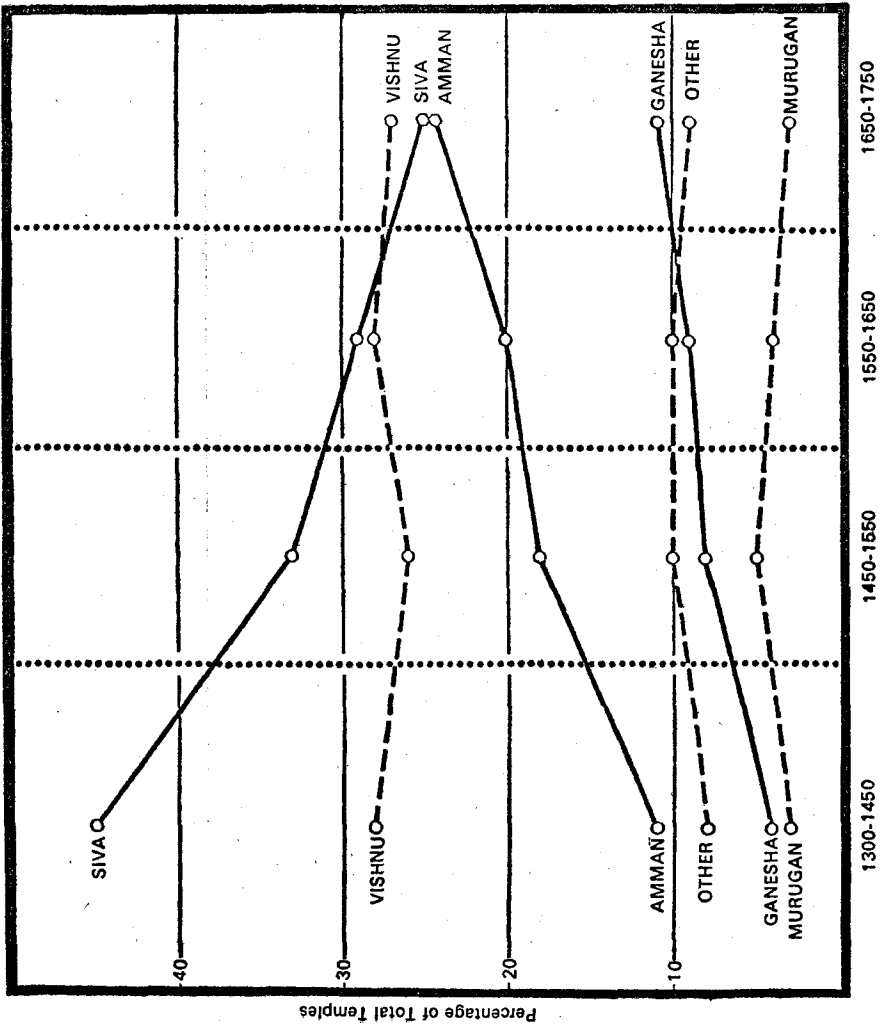
Tonçaimaᅇᅇalam	75(42)	65(36)	6(3)	7(4)	13(7)	15(8)	131(100)	(20)
Naduviᅇ-nāᅇu	59(39)	45(29)	2(1)	13(8)	24(16)	13(8)	156(100)	(17)
Koᅇgumaᅇᅇalam	34(13)	59(23)	9(3)	31(12)	110(43)	17(6)	260(100)	(29)
Pāᅇᅇimaᅇᅇalam	57(19)	72(24)	13(4)	45(15)	75(25)	40(13)	302(100)	(33)
Total for Madras	225(25)	241(27)	30(3)	96(11)	222(25)	85(9)	849(100)	(100)

TOTALS: 1300-1750 A.D.

Tonçaimaᅇᅇalam	167(41)	142(35)	15(4)	21(5)	23(6)	38(9)	406(100)	(20)
Naduviᅇ-nāᅇu	134(40)	101(32)	8(2)	22(6)	47(14)	20(6)	332(100)	(16)
Koᅇgumaᅇᅇalam	92(18)	126(24)	19(4)	47(9)	198(58)	35(7)	517(100)	(26)
Pāᅇᅇimaᅇᅇalam	205(26)	183(28)	34(4)	91(12)	156(25)	108(14)	780(100)	(38)
Total for Madras	593(29)	568(27)	76(4)	181(9)	424(21)	201(10)	2035(100)	(100)

FIGURE 2: PROPORTIONS OF TEMPLES OF MADRAS STATE, BY DEITY, FOR FOUR PERIODS, 1300-1750 A.D.

N=2035 Source: Data of Table 1



Andhra and Mysore that substantial temple development occurred in the period from 1450 to 1550 A.D. Like much of Koṅgumaṇḍalam, the northern section of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam was a region which saw rapid development in the post-Chola period. In contrast, the present nineteen taluks of the southern part of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam were areas of the much earlier settlement and development of the Chola period. During the period 1450-1550 A.D., the relatively short-lived Sāluva dynasty (1486-1505 A.D.) controlled the fortunes of the Vijayanagara State from its base in northern Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. The dramatic growth of the Tirupati temple during this period may be taken as symptomatic of the general support for existing temples of this region as well as the construction of new temples by warriors of this region whose fortunes rose with those of Sāluva Narasimha and his successors.¹⁷ Resources for the support of temples within the core territories of these warriors were drawn from a large region, including the southern parts of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam.

Striking variation in the number of temples constructed between 1300 and 1750 A.D. is shown in Figure 1. Considering variation from one period to the next, in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam the number of major temples doubled between 1550 and 1650 A.D.; in Naduvil-nāḍu, there was a six-fold increase between 1450 and 1550 A.D.; and in Koṅgumaṇḍalam there was an even more dramatic, sixteenfold, increase in temple construction between 1450 and 1550 A.D. These relatively short-term variations may be compared to the changes in the rates at which temples are recorded over all periods. The most impressive development is seen in Koṅgumaṇḍalam where temples increased by a factor of forty between 1300 and 1750 A.D. and in Naduvil-nāḍu where the increase was sixteenfold. In contrast, Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, with the largest number of temples for the whole period, showed a threefold increase between the first and the last periods and that of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam was even less.

Figure 2 moves the discussion to more pointed analysis. The most striking finding is the interaction of temples dedicated to Siva and to Amman deities. In the line graph, the relationship between the two temple types over the four periods and all maṇḍalams is one of reciprocal symmetry. That is, the proportion of temples dedicated to Amman deities increased over the four periods in the same proportion as those dedicated to Siva diminished. At the same time, the proportion of temples dedicated to Vishnu remained high and steady at around 30 per cent while those dedicated to the other deities display some of the same stability in the range of five to ten per cent of the total.

¹⁷Burton Stein, "The Tirupati Temple: An Economic Study of a Medieval South Indian Temple," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, University of Chicago, December 1958, pp. 53 and 61-62, especially Table 3, p. 53 recording grants of land to the Tirupati temple between 830 and 1628 A.D. as 168 of which all but 21 grants came between 1456 and 1564 A.D. and grants of money as 397 of which all but 126 came in the same period.

The table and graphs expose certain clear differences in the proportions and numbers of temples presided over by the six types of deities. Taking all maṇḍalams for the entire period, the 2,035 temples analyzed here show Siva temples comprising 29 per cent, Vishnu temples 26 per cent, Murugan temples 4 per cent, Ganesha temples 9 per cent, Amman temples 21 per cent, and "Other Deities" 10 per cent. Each of the maṇḍalams contributes to the total array in quite different ways. Thus, in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, Siva temples comprised 41 per cent for all periods while in Koṅgumaṇḍalam, Siva temples comprised only 18 per cent of the temples of the period between 1300 and 1750 A.D. Or, considering the same two maṇḍalams, Amman temples in the former comprised only 6 per cent whereas in Koṅgumaṇḍalam, Amman temples accounted for 38 per cent of the total.

The six types of deities can be reduced to three classes in order to elicit certain differences. The gods Siva and Vishnu are universal deities of the highest order in Hinduism; Murugan and Ganesha may be regarded as secondary universal deities in medieval Hinduism;¹⁸ while the Amman and "Other Deities" are essentially local, tutelary gods. Thus arranged, Siva and Vishnu together constitute the majority of temples—76 per cent—of all those constructed from 1300 to 1750 A.D. in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. These two deities together constitute 72 per cent of the presiding deities in temples of Naduvil-nāḍu. In both of these maṇḍalams, Siva temples predominate. By contrast, Siva and Vishnu temples together contribute only 42 per cent of the temples of Koṅgumaṇḍalam and those dedicated to Vishnu enjoy about the same predominance as Siva temples do in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam and Naduvil-nāḍu (i.e., about 6 per cent). In Pāṇḍ maṇḍalam, Siva and Vishnu temples together and in almost equal proportions comprise half of the temples constructed during the period.

Murugan and Ganesha temples are unevenly distributed over the four maṇḍalams, ranging from 9 per cent of the total in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, where Ganesha temples are three times as numerous as Murugan temples. In Koṅgumaṇḍalam, temples dedicated to this pair of gods comprise 13 per cent, and in Naduvil-nāḍu they comprise 8 per cent; in both of these maṇḍalams Ganesha temples were most numerous.

Most important for the present discussion is the range of variation among the four maṇḍalams with respect to Amman temples. Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam's 409 temples in this analysis include only 23 Amman temples, and remarkably, returns from the taluks of Chingleput district in 1961 included no Amman

¹⁸While Murugan is a god of the Tamils, his association with Skanda Subrahmanyam, and Kārttikeya iconographically and hagiographically gives him an equivalent status with Ganesha, the other son of Siva. See Fred W. Clothey, "The Many Faces of Murugan: the History and Meaning of a South Indian God," Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, Divinity School, March 1968; and Alice Getty, *Ganesa: A Monograph of the Elephant-Faced God*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936.

temples within the fourteenth to eighteenth century period.¹⁹ Koṅgumaṇḍalam, with 38 per cent of its temples of the period 1300 and 1750 A.D. dedicated to Amman deities, was the highest in this category of any maṇḍalam. When Amman and "Other Deities" are combined for these two maṇḍalams, Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam shows the lowest proportion, 15 per cent, and Koṅgumaṇḍalam shows the highest with 42 per cent of the temples of the maṇḍalam dedicated to these tutelary deities. In Naduvil-nāḍu, 20 per cent of the temples dating from 1300 to 1750 A.D. were presided over by Amman and "Other Deities," the former comprising 14 per cent of that region's total; in Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, 34 per cent of the temples in the period under study were dedicated to tutelaries, Amman shrines providing 20 per cent of the high total of 70 temples.

INTERPRETATIONS

The 2,035 temples enumerated in the present analysis, incomplete as the numbers may be, for reasons already discussed, pose difficult problems of explanation. Certain of the findings conform with our present understanding of the later medieval history of Tamil country. Thus, variations noted above which contrast the rapid and large increases in temple construction in the formerly peripheral areas of Chola times—Koṅgumaṇḍalam and Naduvil-nāḍu—with that of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, each with well established ancient core areas, conform well with the general historiography of the Vijayanagara period. And, the large numbers of temples involved in this study confirms the profound devotional faith of Tamilians to the gods of bhakti Hinduism.

Temples represent an impressive commitment of resources to that faith. It is to be remembered that the temples enumerated in this analysis are often structures of great size and often constructed on hills, which would have required large and sustained inputs of skilled and unskilled labor. Once completed and consecrated, temples also required the mobilization and maintenance of personnel ranging from various kinds of ritual specialists to menials. These temple centers also became the principal resort of Brahmans and other learned persons whose livelihoods were supported by laic clienteles and whose activities generated even more permanent construction in the form of *maṭhas* and similar institutions capable of sheltering and feeding long-termed residents. Nor must it be forgotten that, apart from regular ritual performances and periodic festivals which were required to maintain the consecrated condition of temples, other kinds of cultural performances regularly occurred there,

¹⁹Madras City reported sixteen Amman temples half of which date from 1550 to 1650 A.D. and the rest for the last period. Amman temples accounted for twenty-four per cent of the Madras City total for the 1300-1750 A.D. period.

including Sanskrit dramatic presentations.²⁰ Finally, temples were sect and cult centers to which a large and dispersed clientele—from kings to humble cultivators—regularly gathered to pay homage to the presiding deity and to sect gurus. Feeding houses for pilgrims had also to be constructed along with other facilities for their stay. The thousands of structural shrines constructed during the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, and enumerated in the 1961 census temple survey, provide a foundation for the more comprehensive definition of sub-regional cultural profiles than scholars have thus far undertaken. These census data, while not complete, permit a level of analysis which might be called “macro” to augment and provide a context for the growing number of separate temple studies which have been undertaken.

Among the questions raised by this analysis of temple construction in Tamil country are the following. What accounts for the statistical interaction of Siva and Amman temples in the portion of Tamil country covered by the four maṇḍalams? Why did temples dedicated to Siva decline relatively while the construction of Vishnu temples remained proportionately stable? What differential religious, cultural and social objectives were satisfied by devotion to Murugan and Ganesha in comparison to that offered Amman and “Other Deities,” on the one hand, and the universal gods Siva and Vishnu, on the other? Other questions raised by these data could certainly be posed (e.g., factors involved in the variation within taluks and maṇḍalams over time), but these require further analysis of the temple census data.

The relationship of reciprocal symmetry between temples constructed to shelter Siva and Amman deities from 1300 to 1750 A.D. is the most interesting finding in the analysis. It is unexpected and paradoxical in the sense that Siva is the most ancient and entrenched of the universal deities among Tamilians whereas Amman deities are folk deities; theirs was a relationship of long-standing coexistence. The commitment of most Tamil Brahmins has generally been to Siva, and the most impressive religious development in the age—the Saiva Siddhanta movement—was a renewed and resurgent devotion to Siva by the highest non-Brahmin groups among Tamilians. Thus, the diminishing proportion of structural shrines dedicated to the Siva deities may be viewed as a significant shift of sectarian affiliation of most Tamils, a turning away from Siva to other deities, most notably to goddesses. Such a view may be considered consistent with those interpretations of religious developments of the later medieval period which stress the impressive development of Vaishnavism, on the one hand, and the importance, on the other hand, of devi

²⁰This matter was recently discussed by Dr V. Raghavan in a paper entitled: “Sanskrit Drama in Performance,” presented to an international conference on Sanskrit drama in Honolulu, 19-23 March 1974. Papers of this conference are to be published under the editorship of Professor Rachel v M. Baumer and James Brandon of the University of Hawaii.

shrines in Tamil country.²¹ The former development is supported in the 1961 census survey data, especially in the showing of a steady and high (about 30 per cent) proportion of temples dedicated to Vishnu deities in comparison with the declining rate of new Siva temples.

But, the suggestion of competition and displacement may be quite incorrect. What little is known of sectarian affiliations among South Indians now and in the past does not support the notion that most people forsook older sectarian associations and formed new ones. That this occurred among Brahmans is of course true; the history of medieval Vaishnavism and the growth of non-Vaikanāsa Brahmanism can only be explained by the shift of sectarian affiliation of Siva Brahmans. However, for most non-Brahmans, exclusive sectarianism appears to be rare if the sectarian information provided of the eighteenth century and later is credited.²² These eighteenth century reports and later ethnographic evidence provided, especially by Dr Brenda E. F. Beck and Professor Louis Dumont, suggest that most non-Brahman Tamilians maintained multiplex sectarian affiliations, seldom shifting from one to another, but more often adding to their affiliational connections through time.

There is another reason for rejecting the proposition that the increase in Amman temples between 1300 and 1750 A.D. represented a transference of sectarian affiliations from Siva deities to goddesses. That is, both of these types of gods may be considered to possess strong territorial characteristics and the relative growth of Amman temples was essentially complementary with, rather than at the expense of, older patterns of Siva devotion. It is to be recalled that temples dedicated to Siva deities continued to be built; only the proportion diminishes.

To pursue the complementarity argument, it is noted that in proposing a threefold classification of deity types above, Amman and "Other Deities" were called "tutelaries," guardians of particular places and peoples. Supporting that assertion are the reports in the *Bāramahal Records* on "sudra" castes

²¹B. Stein "Devi Shrines and Folk Hinduism in Medieval Tamilnad," in *Studies in the Language and Culture of South Asia*, Edwin Gerow and Margery D. Lang (eds.), Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1973, pp. 75-91. This discussion is based on the earlier discussions of K. R. Srinivasan in, for example, his *Some Aspects of Religion as Revealed by Early Monuments and Literature of the South*. Sankara Parvati Endowment Lectures, University of Madras, 1959-60, Madras: University of Madras, 1960 pp. 32-35

²²E.g.: Madras, Records of Fort St. George, the *Bāramahal Records*, III, "Inhabitants" (Madras: 1907) and Francis Hamilton, *A Journey from Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar*, v 1, pp. 236-61. v 2, pp. 329-31, London, 1807. B.E.F. Beck, *Peasant Society in Konkku: A Study of Right and Left Subcastes in South India*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1972; Louis Dumont, *Une Sous-Caste de L'Inde du Sud: Organisation Sociale et Religion des Pramalai Kallar*, Paris, Mouton and Company, 1957, Pt. 3, "La Religion," pp. 315 ff. and his "A Structural Definition of a Folk Deity of Tamil Nad: Aiyannar the Lord," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 3 (1959), pp. 75-87, reprinted in his *Religion/politics and History in India; Collected Papers in Indian Sociology*, The Hague, Mouton Publishers, 1970.

of that region in the 1790s as well as sections of Buchanan's report of 1800 A.D. From these sources, it is clear that there existed three levels, tiers, or concentric zones of sectarian affiliations of the non-Brahman, agricultural and artisan populations. The first level of religious activity, beyond the often elaborately described domestic ritual in the *Bāramahal Records*, pertains to clan and place tutelaries. Most often these were goddesses, several of whom were worshipped by any single group. However, in most cases, there was one goddess, or less frequently a male tutelary, who was worshipped in a locally important and often impressive structural shrine to which all or most of a particular group extended ritual homage. Such a shrine might at times have had Brahman pujaris, at other times it might have been officiated over by a non-Brahman priest (generically: *naṇḍāram*). The second level of ritual affiliations involved temples of pilgrimage usually presided over by a Siva or Vishnu deity under an established order of Brahman priests following agamic practices. The third level was that maintained through guru networks culminating in one of the premier temple centers of South India. In the *Bāramahal*, for many of the landed castes that temple center was Tirupati; for most of the Kongu castes, however, the place would have been the Siva temple at Pērūr in modern Coimbatore taluk.

It is precisely from the regions described in the *Bāramahal Records* and in Buchanan's report of 1800 that the highest proportion of Amman temples are recorded in the 1961 census survey. This interior upland of Tamil country was also among the most variegated social regions in the macro region. Kongu country attracted immigrants from Andhra and Karnāṭaka as well as the lowland portions of Tamil country.²³ The resulting structure of cultivating and artisan castes is a mosaic in which boundaries among various ethnic elements seems to have included varied sectarian affiliations. Buchanan's discussion of Vellalas ("*Vaylalar*, a tribe of Tamils")²⁴ in Coimbatore provides a good illustration of this. Seven Vellala groups are identified as comprising a large portion of the Tamil population of Coimbatore. Among these were the Senda-lai ("*Shayndalay*") Vellalas.

All *Vaylalars* can eat together; but these [seven] different kinds do not intermarry, nor can a man marry a woman of the same family with himself in the male line. The *Vaylalars* are farmers, day-labourers, and servants who cultivate the earth; many of them can keep accounts [sic] and read books written in their native language. At Canghium [Kangayam, Dharapuram

²³The 1901 census of Madras reported the following linguistic variety for Coimbatore: Tamil speakers, 66 per cent; Kannada, 12 per cent; Telugu, 21 per cent. Compare with: Tanjore, Tamil speakers, 94 per cent; North Arcot, Tamil speakers, 26 per cent and Telugu speakers, 39 per cent. *Census of India, 1901*, vol. XV-A, Madras, Pt. II, v. 1, p. 107, Subsidiary Table 5.

²⁴Buchanan, *Journey*, v. 2, p. 329.

taluk] resides *Canghium Manadear*, hereditary chief of all *Shayndalay Vaylalars*. . . . They are all worshippers of *Siva*; but the proper *penates*, or family gods, are various *Saktis*, or female destructive spirits; such as *Kālī*, *Bhadra Kālī*, and the like The *Pūjāris* or priests in these temples are *Pāndarams* [sic], who are the *Sūdras* dedicated to the service of *Siva*'s temples Their *Gurus* are *Siva Brāhmanas*, or *Brāhmanas*, who act as *Pūjāris* in the temples of *Siva*, and the great gods of his family. These are considered as greatly inferior to the *Smartal*, either *Vaidika*, or *Lokika*. The *Guru* comes annually to each village, distributes consecrated leaves and holy water, and receives a *Fanam* from each person, with as much grain as they choose to give.²⁵

Thanks to the detailed research of Dr Brenda Beck on Vellalas (Beck's "KavuNTar") of Kangavam, we have a model of modern territorial religious affiliations which conforms well with descriptions of 150 years ago and which may even be taken as operative during the late medieval period. That model, in relation to the 1961 Census data on temple distribution for Koṅgumaṇḍalam particularly, where the largest proportion of Amman temples are found, suggest a persuasive explanation for the sharply contrastive, reciprocal interaction of *Siva* and Amman temples.

In her discussion of religion, as in other aspects of the society of Kangayam nadu in Coimbatore, Dr Beck distinguishes a fundamental division of Kongu castes (approximately two-thirds of the population of the district)²⁶ into a right division (*valaṅkai*) and left division (*iḍaṅkai*). This division provides a major theoretical focus for her discussion and revives an ancient social division long thought defunct among Tamils.²⁷ Within the right division of castes, worship is concentrated upon "territorially based divinities who protect well-defined local areas" as well as particular subcastes and clans; contrastively, left division castes worship universal gods of the Hindu pantheon, those whose renown and whose sacred domains are universal, not narrowly territorial. Each division is further contrasted with respect to other ritual features: among right division castes hierarchy is emphasized during worship whereas among left castes there is equality of worshippers;²⁸ among right division castes sectarian allegiances are restricted to the Kongu region whereas left castes seek and maintain preceptorial and pilgrimage affiliations outside of the region.²⁹

The right division of Kongu castes consist of agriculturists, particularly those of the Vellala or Gaunda (Beck: KavuNTar) community and their ser-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 329-30.

²⁶ Beck, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59, Tables 1-3.

²⁷ Here the divisions are analytical categories, not empirical ones as in the past

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 71 and 74-75.

vice dependents. Kangayam nadu consists of twelve major villages under the dominance of Gaundas, and in each village there is a Siva temple. The Siva temple of one of these villages, Sivanmalai, is the primary Siva temple of the locality, "spoken of as representing the [Kangayam] nāTu as a whole."³⁰ Moreover, each Kongu Gaunda subcaste has a chief temple for its constituent clans (*kulam*), and each clan in turn has a chief shrine for its constituent lineages (*pangāli*), and finally, each lineage maintains shrines for its constituent families (*Kudumbam*) units.³¹ There is therefore a well-articulated territorial system of sacral associations which ties Kongu Gaundas of Kangayam together within their locality and with other Kongu subcastes elsewhere and, always, in opposition to other non-Gaunda groups. And the prime objects of caste temple devotion are goddesses who are often hagiographically connected with a particular Gaunda subcaste.³²

Dr Beck judiciously proposes that the Kangayam system of religious affiliation is part of regional one of Kongu as a whole; she also proposes that the system is quite ancient. There is reason to accept both proposals.

Inscriptional evidence pertaining to these central Siva temples of Kangayam nadu date from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries for the most part.³³ Of the twelve Siva temples referred to by Beck as the shrines of the major villages, inscriptions mention eleven.³⁴ These Tamil language inscriptions are no earlier than the twelfth century and for the most part refer to two local dynasties of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries: so-called "Kongu Cholas" or "Kongu Konāttār."³⁵ There are also several Vijayanagara inscriptions principally of the time of Mallikarjuna, whose regnal years were 1447-1465 A.D.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 66, note 10.

³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 31.

³³Sivanmalai (Arasanpalayam village). Pālvannēsvarasvāmi temple, *A.R.E.* 256-72/1920; Kangayam, *Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency*, v. 1, p. 532, No. 123A; Kiranur, Adinathesvarasvami temple, 247-251/1920; Marudurai, Pattisvarasvami temple, 240/1920; Nattakkaraiyur, Jayangondanathasvami temple, 230-239/1920; Kannapuram, Vikrama Cholesvara temple, 218-224/1920; Parajervali, Machayapurisvara temple, 558-560/1920; Muttur [Kadagattur], Cholesvara temple, 193-196/1910; Velliয়ারasal, Mandisvara temple, 619/1905; Pappani, Arda Kapilisvarasvami temple, 225-229/1920; and Vellakovil, Parakrama-Cholesvara temple, 216/1920.

³⁴Beck, *Peasant Society in Konku*, p. 67. The only village for which there appears to be no inscriptional material is Alampati. However, this village is mentioned in an early Vijayanagar inscription of another major village of Kangayam nadu, Pappani, 225/1920 without providing any information about a Siva temple.

³⁵On these dynasties see: Robert Sewell, *Historical Inscriptions of Southern India*, p. 362 and *A.R.E.*, 1920, paragraph 24, pp. 108 ff; the most critical discussion of these dynasties, especially the Kongu Cholas, is by K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, *E.I.*, xxx (1953), No. 19, "Seven Vatteluttu Inscriptions from the Kongu Country," pp. 95-112 in which he argues that this designation be replaced with the more accurate, "Kongu Kōnāttār" chiefly lineage

Disappointingly little can be culled from these temple inscriptions about either the relationship among deities in Kangayam nadu during this early time or about the relationships of its dominant landed people to such deities. A set of Vijayanagara inscriptions of the sixteenth century from the Jayangondanāthasvāmin temple at the major Kangayam village of Nattakkaraiyūr (Beck: "NattakāTaiyūr") refer to local Kongu chiefs, with the title "Kongavēladaraiyar," as "Vellalāpayirar."³⁶ This confirms Beck's identification of one of the four Vellala "titled families" (*Paṭṭakkārar*) of Kongu as the "Payira clan." Beck also relates an account of this Kongu Vellala family in which an ancestor was rewarded for service to the Pandyan ruler Jatāvarman Sundara Pāṇḍya (regnal years : 1251-1268 A.D.) with land and the title "Nalla Sēnāpati Cakkarai Manrādiyar." This too is confirmed in a Nattakkaraiyur inscription dated 1622 A.D. in which among other things, the title "gaundar" is mentioned.³⁷ The several inscriptions from the Siva temple at the base of Sivanmalai hill, in the hamlet of Arasanpalayam, all date from the time of the so-called Kongu Cholas, and several are of the earliest of these local warriors, Vikrama Chōḷadēva of the early eleventh century.³⁸ This shrine to Siva as Pālvaṇṇēśvara appears to be among the oldest in Kangayam nadu which may account for the present recognition that this is the premier Siva temple of the nadu, as Beck reports.

There appear to be no suggestions in the inscriptions of the Pālvaṇṇēśvarasvāmin temple or the other Siva shrines of Kangayam that these territorial religious centers were linked together as Beck observes in present-day Kongu. Such an organization can by no means be excluded, however. According to Dr Beck, major Murugan and Siva temples of Kongu are linked hierarchically through affiliations of temple priests.

Each of these groups of . . . temples is organized around a leading or primary shrine: a single great temple in which all the Konku-linked manifestations of the deity converge. In the case of the Civā temples this shrine [Sri Pattesvarasvamin temple] is found at Pērūr [Coimbatore taluk], while in the case of Murukan an equivalent status is ascribed to the [Sri Dandayudhapani] temple at . . . Palani. Each of these religious centers represents

recognizing that the rulers of Kongu from the tenth century were warriors from Kōnādu, in modern Pudukkottai, abutting on southern Kongu, rather than scions of the Chola family. Also see K.V. Subrahmanya Aiyer, *Historical Sketches of Ancient Dekhan*, 2, Coimbatore, K.S. Vaidyanathan, 1967, pp. 64 ff.

³⁶235/1920, dated in the reign of Mallikārjuna of Vijayanagar.

³⁷239/1920. The title on this record is: "Nallatambi-Gaundar Visvanātha Chakkarai Uttamakkāmindamanrādiyar, A Vellalāpayirar of Karaiyur."

³⁸Subrahmanya Aiyer, *E.I.* XXX, No. 19, p. 105 points out that an inscription from the village of Piramiyan, Dharapuram taluk, of Vikrama Chōḷadēva begins with the words: "I am Vikrama Chōla of Kōnādu"; this is dated 1025 A.D.

the pinnacle of a local organization of priests who serve that deity in the Konku area. All priests who work in the local Civā temples look ultimately to Pērūr for direction and for decisions in ritual matters.³⁹

Just as the Siva pujaris at Sivaṅmalai (Arasanpalayam) look to Pērūr, the priests of the Siva temples of the twelve major villages of Kangayam are linked to the Sivaṅmalai temple.⁴⁰ Whether this linkage is replicated in each of the twenty-four nadus of Kongu, Dr Beck is understandably tentative about, but she believes it to be the case.⁴¹

Another way in which temples might have been linked horizontally or vertically was by the caste ties of most temple priests in Coimbatore and elsewhere. According to the 1961 temple census survey and to commentators from the eighteenth century, the priests of lower level temples were non-Brahman, *Paṇḍārams*. Thurston's summary statement on *paṇḍārams* identifies them generically as non-Brahman priests who are recruited largely from Vellala and Palli castes, who are Saivites, vegetarians, and celibate. Many underwent formal priestly investiture (*dhikshai*), and many were the manager/priests of richly endowed temples.⁴² That the ritual custodianship of non-Brahman priests was significant can be seen from a further analysis of the 1961 temple survey. Considering several of the most important districts in the present study, Table 2 summarizes evidence on officiating priests as provided in the 1961 temple census volumes.

Several features in Table 2 are important. One is the considerable variability in the proportion of all temples under Brahman priests. In three of the districts, the majority of priests in substantial structural temples were non-Brahmans: Coimbatore, Salem, and Madurai. In these same districts were the highest counts of Amman shrines, and here the priestly custodians of Amman temples were non-Brahman to the extent of 90 per cent. A second noteworthy feature of this table is that in Chingleput, where the overwhelming number of priests were Brahmans, one quarter of the Amman temples of the district were under Brahman ministrations, and in Ramanathapuram district, where about 70 per cent of all temples were under Brahman priests, over a third of the Amman temples were also under Brahmans. These varying proportions of Brahman temple priests are independent of the number of Brahmans in the various districts of Madras. According to the 1901 census, the Presidency average of Brahmans as a proportion of the total population was 3 per cent. In the eight districts shown in Table 2, the percentage of Brahmans varied between 1 per cent in Salem and South Arcot and 3 per cent

³⁹Beck, *Peasant Society in Konku*, p. 26.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Thurston, *op. cit.*, vi, pp. 45-46.

in Tiruchirapalli and Tirunelveli; the district with the highest proportion of Brahmans in 1901 was Tanjore, with 6 per cent.⁴³

TABLE 2
MADRAS (TAMIL NADU) STATE TEMPLES BY OFFICIATING PRIESTS FOR
SELECTED DISTRICTS*

District** (Vol., p.)	1		2		3		4	
	Number of Temples		Temples under Non-Brahmans		Amman Temples		Amman Temples under Non- Brahmans	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Salem (iii, 335)	1135		665	60	402	35	374	93
Madurai (vi, 5)	477		272	57	104	22	96	93
Coimbatore (iii, 3)	1201		677	55	424	37	403	95
Tiruchirapalli (ii, 2)	1226		411	33	284	23	227	80
Tirunelveli (v, 171)	864		270	31	162	19	136	84
South Arcot (ii, 92)	922		287	31	175	19	133	76
Ramanathapuram (vi, 188)	508		158	31	96	19	61	64
Chingleput (i, 3)	610		95	15	82	13	61	75
Total	6943		2833		1729		1491	

*Covers all of the temples enumerated, not only those from 1300-1750 A.D.

**SOURCE: India (Republic), Census Commissioner, *Census of India, 1961*, v. IX, Part XI-D, "Temples of Madras State", v. 7.

Coefficient of correlation between:

Columns 1 and 2: $r_{1,2} = .30$ N.S.

Columns 3 and 4: $r_{3,4} = .735$, $p \angle .025$

Columns 2 and 4: $r_{2,4} = .794$, $p \angle .01$

Columns 2 and 3: $r_{2,3} = .834$, $p \angle .005$

While several factors may be involved in the often wide disparities among districts with respect to the incidence of non-Brahman priests, one interpretation of the findings in Table 2 is that in many parts of the macro region, the fact that its priests are not Brahmans need not diminish the status of a particular temple. And even where Brahmans are reported as being under the direc-

⁴³*Census of India, 1901, Madras*, v. XV-A, Pt. II, Table XIII, "Caste, Tribe, Race. . . ."

tion of Brahmans, the role of non-Brahman officiants may be important. This is suggested by one of the early scholar-administrators of the Madras Presidency, F.W. Ellis, when he observed that in many, if not most, temples of the Bāramahal, the Arcots, Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, Madurai, and Tirunelveli, the non-Brahman *paṇḍārams* managed and held important ritual offices of the temple while Brahman Gurukkals officiated over only a portion of the ritual.⁴⁴ The data in Table 2 also raise the further question of a probable close kinship relationship between the principal non-Brahman landed castes of a region and those *paṇḍārams* who officiate over its temples. This linkage, if demonstrable, would have the effect of strengthening the horizontal integration already extant where local temples dedicated to tutelary goddesses are sponsored by clans of the same subcaste (as in Kangayam according to the findings of Beck). It would also suggest the possibility that in many cases, the central Siva temple to which subcaste tutelary goddesses were vertically linked through the devotion of the major local subcaste representatives and their clients also drew its priests (or some of them at least) from the same locally dominant subcaste.

The kind of multilevel, hierarchical system of religious affiliations involving established Siva shrines and subcaste/clan temples dedicated to Amman deities described by Dr Beck receives some support from inscriptional records, but demographic evidence of the eighteenth century supports the historical persuasiveness of her position rather more fully. As already noticed, Buchanan in 1800 A.D. referred to seven "Vaylalar" groups of Coimbatore.⁴⁵ According to the 1881 census of Coimbatore, the core of Kongu country, Vellalas of various subcaste division numbered 629,540 persons, 83 per cent of the agricultural population of the district.⁴⁶ Other major agricultural caste groups in Coimbatore at the time included Vokkaligas, Kannada-speaking cultivators, comprising 6 per cent of the dominant agricultural population of the district and located almost entirely in the northwestern taluk of Kollegal, bordering on Mysore.⁴⁷ Telugu Kmmas comprised 3 per cent of the agricultural population.⁴⁸

In Salem district, a similarly high count of Amman temples is found (34 per cent of all of the temples constructed between 1300 and 1750 A.D.). Here, Tamil Vellalas and Telugu cultivating castes accounted for about thirty per cent of the total population in almost equal proportions and comprised a

⁴⁴Thurston, *op. cit.*, v. 6, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁵Buchanan, *Journey*, v. 2, p. 329; the groups enumerated are: "Caracatu [Karaikattu], Palay [Palai], Chōla, Codical, Cotay, Pandava, and Shayndalay." Also see Arokiaswami, *The Kongu Country*, Madras, 1956, pp. 267-71.

⁴⁶Nicholson, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 18; Kollegal is now part of Mysore State, and its population comprised Kannada-speakers to the extent of 80 per cent, *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 18.

majority of the district's agricultural population, though the single largest agricultural caste here were Pallis (especially the subcaste of Arasa Vanniyur Pallis) who comprised 28 per cent of the district population.⁴⁹ The spatial distribution of Tamil- and Telugu-speaking cultivating castes in Salem lends support to the argument made for Kongu. Almost eighty-five per cent of the Vellalas are concentrated in the southern portion of Salem district, below the upland divide, or the Talaghat.⁵⁰ Here, they constitute dominant landed communities. Most are called "Kongu Vellalas" and are further divided into two sections: a northern section (*Vadatalai*) in Salem, Attur, and Uttankarai taluks and a southern section (*Tentalai*) in Tiruchengodu and some Coimbatore taluks.⁵¹ Other Vellalas are similarly segmented territorially.⁵² Telugu-speaking landed groups in Salem included Reddis, Kammas, Telagas, and Velamas of whom 80 per cent were concentrated in the Hosur taluk.⁵³

In the *Bāramahal Records*, sectarian affiliations of important localized agricultural groups were centered upon shrines serving a circle of several villages. This is specified for the following groups: Morsu Vellalas worshipping the tutelary Timraisvāmi, Bandi Vellalas worshipping Chandēsvara, Malaiyandi Vellalas worshipping Kaliyamma, and Telugu Kammas worshipping Yellama.⁵⁴

The Tamil agricultural caste of Paḷḷis, or Vanniyars as they increasingly insisted on being called, comprised the single largest agricultural community in the Madras Presidency. They exceeded Tamil Vellalas by 100,000, Telugu Kapus by 200,000, and untouchable Paraiyans by 400,000.⁵⁵ Paḷḷis too were concentrated in several districts in addition to Salem where they reportedly comprised 28 per cent of the population: in North Arcot they comprised 25 per cent of the population; in Chingleput, 21 per cent; and in South Arcot, 31 per cent.⁵⁶ Like other peasant castes, Paḷḷis worship a variety of dieties with a preference for Siva.⁵⁷ However, Paḷḷis are also reported to favor a

⁴⁹Richards, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 139, and 142. The Census of 1921 and 1931 return somewhat lower proportions of Pallis in Salem: 23 per cent and 25 per cent respectively.

⁵⁰Richards (*op. cit.*, pp. 164-67) cites returns from the 1911 census showing the Vellala population of Salem as 268,649 the bulk of whom were in Tiruchengodu taluk (96,000), Attur taluk (29,000), and Uttankarai taluk (31,000).

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 140-41.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³These are called "Kapus" or "Tottiyans," generic terms for Telugu-speaking Telugu groups in Tamil country, but many appear to have been Kannada-speakers; *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁴Section III, "Inhabitants," in the chapter on "Sudras."

⁵⁵India, Census Commissioner, *Census of India, 1921*, v. 13, *Madras*, Part I (Madras: Government Press, 1922), p. 155 and Part II, Table 13, p. 131.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, Provincial Table 1, pp. 328 ff.

⁵⁷India, Census Commissioner, *Census of India, 1872*, *Madras Report*, Madras Government Press, 1872, pp. 157-58.

caste deity variously identified as Draupadi or, in a male form, Kuttandavar.⁵⁸ This last affiliation appears to be supported by data from the 1961 Census survey, though a full demographic analysis of this has not been undertaken.⁵⁹

The proposal in this paper that the relationship between the declining rate of construction of Siva temples and the rising rate of Amman temples was complementary in Kongu and in the Pāndya country appears to be supported by Dr Beck's recent findings, by the historical, inscriptional evidence related to Kangayam, and by demographic evidence of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Where an agricultural group lacked sufficient number in any place to maintain its own territorial shrine, it often retained an affiliation with a shrine at some distant place where their kinsmen were numerically powerful. Tonḍaimaṇḍalam Vellalas in the Bāramahal are said to worship their tutelary, Yellama in the distant Arni taluk of modern North Arcot district.⁶⁰ Certain clans of Kongu Vellalas living in Tiruchengodu taluk of Salem district, the Nattan Vellalas, are reported to have maintained affiliations with a clan center in Kangayam nadu, fifty miles from their villages in Salem, from which the Nattans probably originally migrated.⁶¹

In her study of Kangayam nadu, Dr Beck confirms this with her observation that clan temples are only found in those places where the particular clan of the Kongu Vellala subcaste are the dominant landed group of the locality. Thus, neither other clans of Kongu Vellala subcastes nor the non-Vellala subcastes bound in service relations to the locally dominant Kongu Vellalas maintained shrines of their own in settlements or in localities under the dominance of another Kongu Vellala clan. Instead, all Kongu groupings—whether they were Vellalas or service castes—worshipped at the shrines of the dominant landed Kongu patrons of the place:

Not all clans and lineages belonging to the Konku KavunTar subcastes. . . have their own separate set of temples. A full complement of levels with tiers [subcaste, clan, lineage, household] seems to develop only when a particular subcaste, clan, or lineage becomes numerically and economically dominant in a given place. . . .⁶² [Other Kongu castes] instead of establi-

⁵⁸H. Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India*, London, Oxford University Press, 1921, pp. 27-28; Thurston, *Castes and Tribes*, v. 6, p. 10; K.A.N. Sastri, *Development of Religion in South India*, Madras, Orient Longmans, 1963, p. 116; and Oppert, *op. cit.*, pp. 122 ff.

⁵⁹A total of 138 Amman shrines are enumerated of South Arcot district of which 38, or 28 per cent, were devoted to the goddess "Dhrowpathiamman": India (Republic), Census Commissioner, *Census of India, 1961*, v. 9, Madras, Part 11-D, "Temples of Madras State," v. ii.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹F.J. Richards, *Madras District Gazeteers: Salem*, Madras, 1918, p. 144; F.A. Nicholson, *The Coimbatore District Manual*, Madras, 1898, p. 51.

⁶²Beck, *Peasant Society in Konku*, p. 79.

shing independent sacred structures to express parallel divisions within their own community . . . tend simply to worship at the clan or subcaste temple of whatever landed family they have traditionally served.⁶³

These findings of Dr Beck together with the fragmentary evidence of the eighteenth century sect networks reported in the *Bāramahal Records* and by Buchanan suggest that in those parts of the South Indian macro region where tutelary, especially Amman, deities were established in impressive structural shrines and where such temples constituted a large proportion of all temples, local peasant groups were completing a pattern of sectarian affiliation long based upon the worship of Siva as a territorial deity, i.e. as a nadu deity. This completion—a filling in—of the pattern of territorial worship at local levels was accomplished by raising the sacral credentials of non-vedic, tutelary deities worshipped by the dominant cultivating groups of a locality and their dependents to a higher order while not divesting them of their local significance.

Indeed, it is precisely the enhancing of the independent, local importance of established local subcaste tutelaries by dominant landed groups that seems to explain the most interesting findings uncovered in this analysis. Continuing to focus upon Kongumaṇḍalam and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam, where goddesses and to a lesser extent other tutelaries were installed in structural temples in proportionately large numbers, it is proposed that this is to be seen as a means by which locally dominant landed subcastes strengthened their local control. Subcaste goddess shrines, when linked to established Siva temples of a locality contributed both to the dominance of peasant subcastes in Kongu and Pāṇḍya countries and to the horizontal and vertical integration of an agrarian region. Horizontal integration among various peasant subcastes, already extant in shared ethnic titles (e.g. Kongu Vellalas), allegiance to regional chiefs (e.g. Kongu *Pattukkārar*), and even kings (e.g. Kongu Cholas, or *Kōnāṭṭār*), was deepened by shared ritual affiliations to the locally dominant subcaste tutelary by all related subcastes of a place. Simultaneously, vertical, or spatial, integration was strengthened by the linkage of all such tutelaries to local Siva shrines and through these to great regional Siva centers. Secular dominance based upon subcaste segmentation of land control was thus joined to ritual affiliation to distinguish the core of peasant peoples of a territory from non-peasant, local groups on the one hand (Beck's left division of castes of mobile traders and artisans) and from outsiders (e.g. Telugu and Palli cultivating groups in Kongu) on the other hand. Established Siva temples under Brahman and agamic direction had long constituted one of the significant religious affiliations of peasant groups in every nadu. This assertion is supported by the temple inscriptions of Kangayam where, in ancient times as well as

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 87.

in the present time, major support and worship of local Siva shrines came from "gaunda" or "Vellala" subcastes.

Neither the early inscriptions of Kangayam nor those from other parts of the macro region refer to the nature of linkages between subcaste, tutelary shrines and locality Siva temples; tutelary shrines appear never to have had inscriptions, and the inscriptions of Siva temples, not surprisingly, say nothing about the relationships with minor, non Brahmanical shrines. How these two kinds of shrines are linked can only be guessed therefore. It would not be expected that the subcaste shrines were formally subordinated to local and supra local Siva temples, even in the loose manner of sacred centers of Brahmanical *sampradāyas* (e.g., Srivaishnava centers linked subordinately to Tirupati). In contrast to Brahmanical sacred networks, the linkage between lineage shrines and territorial Siva shrines as in Kongu involved no sharing of doctrinal or ritual traditions requiring instruction, initiation and guidance. Pujaris at the two kinds of shrines were custodians of very different sacred lore, preserved and transmitted within families.

Beck's observation is that linkages among shrines in Kongu were essentially those between priests, that is, priests serving in local Siva temples of Kangayam were oriented to the major Siva center at Pērūr. Whether it is, moreover, appropriate to interpret Beck's sparse description of this relationship between the two kinds of shrines as comprising a *hierarchy* of shrine affiliations is also unclear. Certainly, one view of Beck's findings on this relationship is to suppose a hierarchical structure of shrines at the base of which are the lineage shrines of the dominant subcaste of Kongu Vellalas of a locality. These lineage shrines, in turn, are linked to subcaste shrines and these to local Siva temples. The capstone of such a presumed hierarchy would then be a primary Siva shrine, such as the one at Pērūr. A structure of this sort certainly goes beyond, but is consistent with, the descriptions of sectarian affiliations in the *Bāramahal Records* and other contemporary evidence. In these late eighteenth century records, affiliations of a number of peasant groups ranged from varieties of domestic worship to occasional relations with learned preceptors of the primary sacred centers of South India; but there is no suggestion of local and supralocal hierarchies of religious affiliation.

Whether or not linkages between subcaste, tutelary shrines and nadu Siva temples are seen as hierarchical, there is another question which deserves attention. That is, why did the elaboration of structural shrines of goddesses occur when it did?

Once again, considering the question of timing in Kongu and Pāṇḍya countries, notice is taken of the high overall proportion of Amman shrines in these two Tamil regions: 38 and 20 per cent respectively. Note is also taken of the very rapid growth of Amman shrines after the first period in this analysis, 1300-1450 A.D. What accounted for this rapid increase between 1450 and 1750 A.D.?

Two different kinds of factors can be considered. The first may be thought of as internal to the religious system. Here, the salient fact would be that the Hinduism of Kongu and Pāṇḍya countries gave greater prominence to non-vedic gods than the variants of Hinduism in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, Naduvil-nāḍu, and Chōlaimaṇḍalam. Though detailed comparative figures are not available for Chola country, summary information in the Thanjavur volume of the temple census (volume vii, part 1) for temples of all periods reveals that, as in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam and Naduvil-nāḍu, temples dedicated to Siva and Vishnu comprised 75 per cent of all temples surveyed. One reason for the differences between Kongu and Pāṇḍya countries and these other places is that the former were more remote and thus later to fall under the influences of efflorescence of puranic Hinduism during the Pallava and Chola periods. One student of this early period, Suresh B. Pillai, has argued that under the Cholas a deliberate policy of "canonization" of temple deities resulted in the demise of non-canonical temples in Thanjavur, especially those devoted to independent goddesses.⁶⁴ Another possible reason for the prominence of Amman shrines in the interior portions of Tamil country is that there was a lower density of the foremost institution of South Indian puranic Hinduism prior to the fourteenth century, the great Brahman (*brahmadēya*) settlements of the Coromandel coast. These reasons can hardly be accepted as final ones; they obviously confound a variety of issues which are not exclusively religious (e.g., environmental and political factors). However, these factors may explain a part of the variance among the subregions of Tamil country.

Yet another explanation of this variance would stress exigent demographic factors. The principal of these would be the incursions into Kongumaṇḍalam and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam of Vijayanagara warrior groups. Both of these territories became increasingly diverse in their ethnic composition from the middle of the fifteenth century as a result of the movement of Telugu- and, to a lesser extent, Kannada-speaking, Vijayanagara soldiers into the Tamil interior upland. Even before the fifteenth century, however, both of these interior subregions of Tamil country had received waves of Tamil-speaking migrants from the coastal plains whose descendants retained an identification with their place of origin. This process is outlined by Arokiaswami for Kongu.⁶⁵ Moreover, prior to the fifteenth century, people like the Maravars, Kaḷḷars were well marked off from others in Pāṇḍya country and in the border region between there and Chola country (e.g., Pudukkottai) and in other less hospitable parts of the macro region. To this ethnic mosaic were added new and quite different elements of population during and after the fifteenth century. Telugus serving

⁶⁴"The Raajaraajeesvaram at Tancaavuur," *Proceedings of the First International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies*, v. 1, Kuala Lumpur, International Association of Tamil Research, 1968, pp. 439-43.

⁶⁵M. Arokiaswami, *The Kongu Country*, Madras, University of Madras, 1956, Ch. 10.

in Vijayanagara armies invaded Tamil country several times, and each time a residue of these warriors remained behind to establish themselves as dominant in some of the more sparsely settled zones along the foothills marking the edge of the Coromandel Plain. From these bases, before very long, these intruders extended their dominance elsewhere. The result of all of these developments were numerous, highly variegated local societies within the Tamil interior country, each with different patterns of cultic affiliations. These affiliations when orchestrated as locality religious systems resulted in very complex overall arrangements.

The Kongu territorial system of Dr Beck is centered upon the Kongu castes of the region, perhaps two-thirds of the population. There are Telugu-speaking and Kannada-speaking groups as well. Coimbatore thus shares with several other Tamil districts the kind of ethnic mosaic which prompts consideration of other findings in the 1961 census temple survey. One promising possibility pertains to the often remarked relationship between Telugu-speakers in Tamil country and Vishnu worship.

It has long been recognized that ancient Telugu settlement in Tamil country followed a distinctive spatial pattern. Thus, in the *Report* of the Madras volumes of the 1931 Census, M.W.M. Yeatts observes:

A remarkable feature of Telugu is its persistence throughout the region between the Western and Eastern Ghats. With the exception of the southern taluks of South Arcot, the whole of Tanjore district, Pudukkottai State, the Ramnad and Sivaganga zamindaries and Tinnevely south of the Tamraparni river, Telugu remains throughout an appreciable though never majority element. Its course is capricious but two points can be observed (i) a tendency to follow the higher ground and (ii) a preference for the black soils similar to those of the Ceded Districts. The deltaic or coastal belts are practically free of Telugu. The stretch of red soil that runs along the Eastern foot of the Ghats in Tinnevely and Ramnad has a smaller Telugu element than the black cotton soil which thrusts down the centre of the region through Sattur, Srivilluputtur, Sankaranayanarkovil and Kovilpatti. Similarly Tirumangalam taluk in Madura which is largely black cotton soil has stronger Telugu element than Melur to the East which resembles Eastern Ramnad and Pudukkottai in its peculiar yellow soil. . . .⁶⁶

It has also long been supposed that Telugu-speakers in Tamil country showed a marked preference for the worship of Vishnu deities. Charles S. Crole noted that in Chingleput district:

⁶⁶Census of India, 1931, v. 14, *Madras*, Pt. 1, "Report," Madras, Government Press, 1932, p. 289, graphically supported by a map on a p. 286.

While the religion of Siva seems to have taken hold of the original people of the district and became naturalized among them, so as to make it difficult to tell whether, in its principal form, it is not a local superstition with an Aryan name and surroundings, the Vishnuvite creed seems never to have got rid of its foreign and intrusive flavour. . . a very numerous class of brahmins, chettis or merchants, nāyudus, who are soldiers and so forth, together with many other northern and Telugu-speaking people. . . are all, without exception, Vishnuvites, and it might be said that to these foreigners, is the creed of Vishnu even yet confined.⁶⁷

Nelson in Madurai makes a similar observation, and later census officials and compilers of the district gazetteers of the Madras Presidency also notice this relationship.⁶⁸

Utilizing the 1961 Census temple survey, it would appear that there is little support for this presumed relationship between Telugus in Tamil country and Vishnu temples. There are 15 taluks among the 69 taluks analyzed here which consist of black soil tracts and in which the proportion of Telugu-speakers is relatively high, in excess of 15 per cent of the population of each taluk. Table 3 shows that in only 9 of the 15 taluks with substantial Telugu population in Tamil country (i.e., 15 per cent or more) do Vishnu temples exceed the proportion of Vishnu temples in the districts to which each taluk belongs and, calculated on a maṇḍalam basis, the proportion is smaller: 8 of 15. This would seem scant support for the observations noted above and suggest caution in attempting to attribute any clear sociological causation to the distribution of Vishnu temples for the period from 1300 to 1750 A.D. in terms similar to those adduced for the distribution of Amman temples. Further, if all of the 69 taluks of this study are examined for the relationship of the distribution of Telugu-speakers and Vishnu temples of the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries, this cautionary position is confirmed.

Considering all 69 taluks, the coefficient of correlation of Telugu-speakers as reported in the Tamil districts in 1961 and Vishnu temples of the same taluks which can be dated to the period of the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries is 0.13, not significantly different from zero. If the taluks are grouped by maṇḍalams, as in Table 4, the findings are not significantly different.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented a unique view of temples in Tamil country during the later medieval period. It is a first attempt to enumerate ancient temples

⁶⁶C.ingleput: *A Manual*, Madras, 1879, p. 27.

⁶⁸J.H. Nelson, *Madura Country*, Madras, 1868, p.81. Also, see *Madura Gazetteer*, p. 108; *North Arcot Gazetteer*, p. 185; Thurston, *op. cit.*, v. 6, p. 248.

TABLE 3
VISHNU TEMPLES (1300-1750 A.D.) IN TALUKS SELECTED FOR HIGH
PROPORTION OF TELUGU-SPEAKERS

1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Maṇḍalam</i> [% <i>Vishnu</i> Tem- ples, 1300-1750]	<i>Taluk</i>	<i>Telugu-</i> <i>speakers</i> (% 1961)*	<i>Total</i> <i>Temples</i> (1300- 1750 A.D.)	<i>Vishnu</i> <i>Temples</i>	<i>Col. 4/</i> <i>Col. 5</i>
<i>Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam</i>					
[35]					
Chingleput (34)	Ponneri	21	25	8	32
	Tiruvallur	21	23	7	30
	Tiruttani	31	11	4	37
	Arkonam	16	19	9	47
	Gudiyattam	23	30	7	23
Salem** (27)	Krishnagiri	18	72	23	32
	Hosur	37	40	11	28
<i>Koṅgumaṇḍalam</i>					
[24]					
Coimbatore (24)	Palladam	20	54	11	21
	Udumalpet	35	27	8	30
	Gobichettipalayam	20	45	12	26
<i>Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam</i>					
[24]					
Madurai (25)	Periyakulam	21	46	10	21
	Sattur	27	19	4	21
Ramnad (19)	Srivilliputtur	15	21	6	29
	Aruppukottai	20	21	3	15
Tirunelveli (30)	Kovilpatti	20	23	8	35

*India (Republic), Census Commissioner, Census of India, 1961, Vol. IX, Madras, Pt. X-IV, "District Census Handbook" for the above districts, Table C-V, "Language (Mother Tongue)."

**These Salem taluks are not included in any traditional maṇḍalam.

for a substantial part of the Tamil region and to probe some of the findings pertaining to the distribution of some of these temples. The evidence and the method of analysis raise obvious problems. Caution is mandated as a result of the, at times, casual and inexperienced way that the age of temples was determined by census enumerators and to some extent by the way the major deity of

particular shrines was assigned. And, some uneasiness must attend the necessary homogenization of great temples of all-India fame with very local shrines in order to make the counts required in this analysis. The results are therefore to be considered quite tentative. However tentative the findings and interpretations, the analysis has raised several interesting issues. Particular attention was given to the finding of a symmetrical and reciprocal relationship between the proportion of Siva shrines which attained importance from 1300 to 1750 A.D. and shrines devoted to independent goddesses (Ammans). Secondary attention was given to the presumed relationship between Vishnu temples of the time and the distribution of Telugu-speakers in Tamil country.

Often eloquent on the religious enthusiasm of Hindus in Tamil country and elsewhere in South India, the extant historiography gives deserved prominence to the importance of temples: to temples as a manifestation of the devotional faith of the time; to the variety of social, cultural, and even economic function which temples carried out; and to the significance of sectarian organizations and cleavages. A few major shrines have also received monographic attention. Until recently, however, it has not been possible to consider other questions, specifically, those raised by an aggregative analysis.

TABLE 4
CORRELATION OF TELUGU-SPEAKERS AND VISHNU TEMPLES*
(1300-1750 A.D.) IN ALL TALUKS AND BY MAṆḌALAMS

1	2	3	4	5
<i>Maṇḍalam</i>	<i>No. of Taluks</i>	<i>Average Proportion Telugu-speakers</i>	<i>Average Proportion Vishnu Temples</i>	<i>Correlation Col. 3:4</i>
Tonḍai-	19	12.32	35.11	-.11
Pāṇḍi-	28	6.54	23.07	.27
Koṅgu-	13	18.46	26.92	-.36
Naduvil-nāḍu	9	6.78	29.78	.06
All Maṇḍalams	69	10.41	27.00	.13

*As in the tables above, i.e., 69 taluks excluding those of Chōlamanḍalam.

The volumes of the 1961 Census in Madras entitled "Temples of Madras State" do permit such an analysis. A set of findings emerges which in some ways was to have been expected and in other ways could not have been anticipated. Thus, it would be expected that there would be a considerably larger proportion of older structural shrines in Tonḍaimaṇḍalam and in Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam than in Koṅgumaṇḍalam and Naduvil-nāḍu. The former were the more ancient settled territories, and each was the seat of a major ancient

kingship. It might also have been anticipated that in Tonḍaimaṇḍalam, the proportion of universal canonical deities—Siva and Vishnu—would be greater than in other territories owing to the density, and probable origin there, of the uniquely brahmanical institution, the *brahmadēya*. The last expectation would obviously apply to Chōlamaṇḍalam for which comparable returns were not available. The data in Table 2 pertain to and support such expectations; these data also form the basis for an empirical hypothesis about Chōlamaṇḍalam when comparable data in this region are finally prepared.

But contrary to reasonable expectations were other findings of this aggregative analysis. Among these are: the differential distribution in time and space of the deities for whom impressive structural shrines were constructed; the apparently simple correlation of the number of taluks and the proportion of temples on a maṇḍalam basis; the relatively stable proportion of Vishnu temples over time and to some extent across maṇḍalams in contrast to the general (and in some places, the sharp) decline in the proportion of Siva temples, and finally, the relationship between Siva and Amman temples to which the major attention of this discussion has been addressed.

With respect to the last finding, what has been proposed is an explanation based on conflict. The conflict was not between devotees of rival gods as might be suspected. This displacement thesis was rejected. Rather, the explanation of the declining proportion of Siva temples and the almost symmetrical rise of Amman shrines is seen as complementary.

Religious affiliations of various locally dominant Tamil landed groups and particularly their temple building activities reflected an effort to buttress their landed dominance against others who might be somewhat like themselves (e.g., other Tamil-speaking Vellalas) or quite different (e.g., Telugu Redḍis). One way of accomplishing this was to solidify cultic cooperation by building temples to which only members of the same landed group of a locality, together with their dependents, offered worship. Often, in Kongu and Pāṇḍya countries these temples would be dedicated to ancient female tutelaries, and these tutelary shrines, now transformed architecturally and possibly transvalued in ritual practice, were linked to established Siva temples of the locality and region. Analytically, the choice of the deity to be sheltered in a new temple may be taken as a clue to the principle of segmentation operating among dominant landed groups in various parts of Tamil country. In those parts of Koṅgumaṇḍalam and Pāṇḍimaṇḍalam where Amman temples were complementarily linked to established locality and regional Siva shrines, the principle of segmentation of land controllers was that of subcaste membership.

Elsewhere in Tamil country, other orchestrations of religious affiliation are conceivable. Where Tamil Vellalas competed with other Tamil castes (e.g., Maravar, Kallar, Palli) or with non-Tamil agricultural groups, it is hypothesized that the latter did not support established Siva temples, but established

shrines for other deities. These included male tutelaries (e.g., Karuppuswami) or deities with better sacral credentials, such as Murugan.

Whatever the weaknesses of the 1961 Census evidence on temples—and these are acknowledged to be considerable—the volumes offer a unique opportunity to extend our knowledge about religious affiliations of the recent and remote past. These volumes also present a challenge to our methods of analysis which this study has attempted to address.