CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES
OF THE CHETTIARS

Sources: (1)

The Chettiars belong to the Saiva Siddhanta School of Hinduism. As in Christianity there are several sects in Hinduism. There are Advaitas, or absolute monists—Visishta advaitas (qualified monists) Dvaitas--dualists, and pluralists sub-divided again into Vaishnavites, Saivites, Sakhtas, Sauras, Ganapatya. What is common to all these Hindu sects is: Acceptance of (1) the Vedas as the primary source of their religious beliefs, (2) existence of soul and its reincarnation according to the doctrine of Karma and system of ethical conduct that will lead the soul to get final rest at the feet of God. They differ in their conception of God, the sensible universe, the soul, and the nature of the union of the soul with God when it happens.

There were other religious sects in India that did not accept the Vedas like the Buddhists, Jains, Charvakas. Though Hinduism became the religion of the majority of Indians, the Chettiars have been and are ardent Saivites. The Chettiars' affirmation of strict allegiance to Saivism came during the eighth century, which was the "golden age of Hindu revivalism." This was the culmination of
the Bhakti movement that was started independently by the followers of Siva and Vishnu in the sixth century. An outspoken hatred for Buddhists and Jains who repudiated the authority of the Vedas, a retaliation against the absolute monistic idealism of the Advaita Vedanta; and an active propagation of a theistic pluralistic, realistic philosophy involving an intense devotion (bhakti) to a personal God, by a succession of singer poets who traversed the whole country composing, singing, dancing and debating all the way, were the dominant characteristics of the Hindu revivalism of this period. The shrines visited by the saint poets called Saiva Nayanmars and Vaishnava Alwars came to be held sacred and were the recipients of generous gifts from princes, nobles and merchants. Temple worship, temple construction and maintenance became increasingly popular. In fact the medieval period of South Indian history is called the age of temple building. The temples, as we saw earlier became more than centres for worship. They became central to all the spheres of the social life of the people. It is significant that the Chettiar's allegiance to Saivism and the emergence of their temple-based social organisation occurred at a time when the temples were increasingly becoming landlords and bankers. Professing faith in Saivism at a time when there was severe opposition to the heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism, became
perhaps necessary because of the Chettiar's earlier association with these faiths in the Sangam age when harmony and tolerance characterised the relations between the various faiths. Adherence to Saivism not only gained them the administration of temple funds and a business clientele, but also an ethical justification for their active pursuit of wealth. In the words of a Chettiar industrialist we interviewed the object of pursuing wealth is for the glorification of Lord Siva. "Thedum Porulum ellam emperuman tiruppanike". Thirumular calls the Gnanis (seers who have known Siva) as walking temples whose worship is most pleasing to Lord Siva. Feeding of the devotees of Siva, called Maheswara Puja is cherished as the prime end of human life by Appar Tirumular, Sekkilar, Arulnandi Siva Charya, Sivagna Siddiar. An unintended benefit of this again, as pointed out by a Chettiar industrialist, was that it diverted the attention of the have-nots from their wealth. Charity works, secular or religious, on a grand scale created a kind of satisfaction in the minds of the have-nots, so that their reaction would often be expressed as "let him make money so long as he gives others."

It is necessary, therefore, to examine at some length

---

Glorifying Siva means serving Siva's Adiyars -- those who have dedicated their lives to the worship of Siva.
the tenets of their religious beliefs and this Chapter explains in a relevant summary form those beliefs and activities that intimately supported their economic activities. It must be remembered that what is attempted here is not a discussion of Saiva Siddhanta in relation to other systems of Hindu religion but a resume of its essentials illustrating their activity.

Like all theistic philosophical systems of India, Saiva-Siddhanta also posits the trinity of God, human soul (Jiva) and the phenomenal world of existence (Samsara or Prakriti). The aim of human birth is to help the human soul to get away from the clutches of Prakriti or (samsara) and get itself attached to God, in which attachment alone it obtains supreme bliss. Each system of Indian Philosophy like the monism of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara, qualified monism (Visishtadvaita) of Ramanuja and dualism (Dwaita) of Madhwa has its own statement of the interconnections in the trinity. Sankara asserts the identity of human soul and God and says that it is ignorance or Maya that makes it believe it is separate from God. When this ignorance is dispelled by knowledge, the soul will realise its identity, which alone is the ultimate reality. This is expressed in famous Vedic texts like 'Aham Brahma asmi' (I am Brahman) 'Brahmana Satyam Jagat Mitya' (God alone is truth and the world is illusion). Tat tvam Asi (That
thou art). So it is called the philosophy of Advaita- (not two). Saiva Siddhanta also calls itself Advaita but the meaning it attaches to advaita is different. In philosophic parlance Saiva Siddhanta is called Dvaita philosophy. Actually it is pluralistic and realistic because it asserts the reality of God and the souls and rejects the theory which considers the world as illusory.

The Bible of the Saiva Siddhanta in Tamil consists of two parts. The first part consists of the outpourings of Saiva Saints among whom five are important. They are Gnana Sambandar, Appar, Surdarar and Manickavasagar and Tirumular. The hymns of the first three are called Tevaram. The work of the fourth is Tiruvachakam and of the fifth, Tirumandiram. They are all grouped under twelve sets of books called Thirumafragal which include a book on the lives of Siddhanta Saints called 'Peria-puranam' (the Big Puranam). The second part consists of systematic treatises on Saiva Siddhanta. The most important of these is the Sivagnanabodham of Meykandar, consisting of only twelve short sutras. Because of its importance the entire critical literature on Saiva Siddhanta is called Meykandar Sutram. These are fourteen in number. An elaborate commentary on Sivagnanabodham called Sivagnana Siddhiyar was written by Meykandar's family guru who subsequently became his disciple. In the 14th century one Umapathy Sivacharya (one of the
three thousand priests of the famous Nataraja temple of Chidambaram) wrote a treatise called 'Sivapragasam' in one hundred verses. These then are the source books of Saiva Siddhanta. Describing all the sources of Siddhanta is a traditional verse

"The Vedas is the cow Agama its milk, Thevaram, by the four Saints is its ghee and Meikandar's work(Sivagna Bodham) is the fine taste of it."

The Tathvas of Siddhanta

The basic tenet of the Siddhanta is the eternal and uncreated existence of three entities, God, soul and the matrix out of which the Universe is created. They are known as Pathi (God) Pasu (soul) and Pasam entanglement of the soul in the Matrix (Maya). Realisation or Mukti is the self realisation of the Soul by detaching itself from the Maya and reaching the feet of God. What follows is a brief description of these four aspects.

1. **Pathi or God**

   God is the highest supreme reality of thought and life. He is Sat, Chit and Anandam i.e. Existence, Knowledge and Bliss. He has no rupa or (form) but can take any form. He is the one God whom we must love and worship. His greatest attribute is the unbounded nature of his love. "Love is God" is a well-known maxim in Tamil Saivism. Unlike the Vedantists' conception of God as
Nirguna—without attributes—the God of Siddhanta possesses eight attributes: (1) Self existence, (2) Purity, (3) Omniscience, (4) Unbounded love, (5) Omnipotence, (6) Infinite bliss, (7) Infinite freedom, (8) Infinite wisdom. God is free of the threefold gunas of Rajas, Sathva, Tamas which are limiting factors.

He is beyond the reach of sense and mind. Even the Vedas and Agamas praise God but fail to give a full definition of God. Tiruvachagam says that the Vedas and the Agamas knead knowledge and wonder but fail to explain. Tirunavukkarasar says in his Tevaram—"Unless you see Him with the eye of His grace, you cannot describe Him as such and such and as possessing such and such a form or as partaking of such a nature. Nor can one give a pen picture of Him and point out. This is the Lord."

It is God who is instrumental in creating the Universe from out of the Primordial matter (Maya) so that souls can acquire a body (Tanu), faculties (Karanas), the world of sense enjoyment (Bhuvana) and the souls' enjoyment of the world (Bhoga). God does this out of his infinite compassion to give an opportunity to souls steeped in ignorance, to evolve into better and better beings and realise their innate quality. He assumes several forms to start and direct the evolution of the Universe. They are: (1) Sivam, (2) Sakti, (3) Nadam,
(4) Bindu, (5) Sadasivam, (6) Maheswara, (7) Rudra, (8) Brahma and (9) Vishnu. The first four are invisible and the last four visible and Sadasivam both. It is this form of God that is worshipped in temples as the Linga. It is God's Sakti that works in souls and Maya for evolution, dissolution and realisation. This concept of Sakti is central to the Siddhanta. Sankara in the opening verse of Soundarya Lahiri says that Siva and Sakti are inseparable and both unite to create. God is the efficient cause and Sakti is the instrumental cause. This task of creation by Sakti involves five processes called Pancha Krityas.

(1) Srishti—creation or gift of body and mind and environment.

(2) Sthithi—maintenance of the process of evolution.

(3) Samhara—destruction. This is not complete annihilation but giving rest to the evolution when souls go to their first step. It is called Pralaya.

(4) Thirodhana - concealment of the true nature of things and to make souls get involved in worldly activities to work out their karma.

(5) The last is Anugraha or grace. By the grace of God souls get rid of the effects of Karma and also their original taint and are received by the Lord into his Blessedness.
This work of evolution and dissolution and grace is not due to God's sport - Lila - as is urged by the Vedantas but is the result of God's unbounded love for all souls.  

The final proof for the existence of God is the actual experience (Anubuthi) as expressed by the Nayanar saints. They are also proof of the existence of God by the familiar proofs: ontological, cosmological, moral argument and the argument by design. These proofs are not infallible to the scientific mind though they are difficult to be rebutted. Existence of God can be neither proved by conventional arguments nor disproved by them and the only proof is the actual subjective personal experience.

(2) Souls

The second entity which is eternal and uncreated is the soul. The soul has innate intelligence like God but is tainted from the beginning so that it is incapable of exercising this intelligence by itself. The soul is tainted with three impurities. The first is called Anava which may be called the original sin. From the beginning this defect clings to the soul just as husk is united to the grain.  

The soul is there in its pure or Kevala Avastha. Siva in his infinite compassion, to give an opportunity to the soul to get out of the shackles of Anava, creates through his Sakti, the world which
gives the soul his body and faculties. It is now en-meshed in the world and activities. This involvement in the world is its second defect or disability and is called Maya. This involvement however, is both a disability and an opportunity for spiritual advancement of the soul. Because it gets a body and faculties, the soul is able to use its intelligence outwardly. As yet it does not know itself. It does not become self-conscious but it is able to understand the world and its objects, and can think, desire and act. Its thoughts desires and actions create the third disability for the soul, which is called Karma. The soul has to reap what it sows i.e. reap the fruits of its Karma. Its Karma can take the soul upwards or downwards.

Thus the soul gets involved in the phenomenal world and it then reflects the world. It is just like a crystal or mirror which reflects what it is directed on. The soul is compared to the eye which at all times needs light for its vision. Defective eye sight is to be corrected by lenses. Maya is like a lens to the soul, since it enables the soul to know. God is like the sun which gives light. The soul is called Sadasat i.e. true and not true. In fact its spiritual substance is like God. Hence it is called Sat when it is in union with God. It is called Asat, when it is in union with Maya or the World - Samsara. It cannot have knowledge by
itself. It has to depend on God or matter though it is a spiritual entity. The relation of the soul to God is just like the relation of soul to body. God is soul's soul. It is not a particle of God nor a spark from Him. Neither is it a reflection or shadow of God nor an illusion like silver seen or misseen in a shell.23

The World or Maya

The third eternal entity of the Siddhantha is called Maya, which refers to the primordial matter out of which God, through the work of his Sakti creates the world of sense objects as well as the faculties like thinking, feeling and knowing of the souls. "Maya provides the scene whereon our drama of human history is to be enacted". Maya corresponds to the Prakriti of Sankhya philosophy. But Sankhya stops with enunciating twenty four tatwas evolved from Prakriti like the five Bhutas—ether, air, fire, water and earth, their essences, the sense organs, the mind, intellect and ahamkara or individuality. But the Siddhantists accept these and evolve eleven more tatwas ending with Sakti. This Maya is inert and though capable of motion it has to be set in motion by God who has to direct its motion.24

Goal of Life and Practical Discipline

"The Supreme goal of life is the attainment of 'Veedu', Moksha or release. The wayward soul having wandered far and wide and tasted the joys and sorrows of
the world, gets disillusioned, feels sincerely for its folly and error, tries to make amends and finally comes to its true home to experience perfect peace and unsurpassed bliss." It is not merely release from the shackles of Anava, Karma and Maya but a positive attainment of supreme bliss. The soul transcends through all the Tatvas and finally reaches the lotus feet of the Lord in complete possession of its purity and excellence. In the presence of God, it is able to understand its spiritual nature and thus gets bliss. The soul does not merge in God as the Advaitists state. This position of Saiva Siddhanta finds support in Aurobindo Ghosh who says that in unifying with God in Mukti, "there is no loss of personality but loss in divine personality." In release the soul deprived of all its impurities gains its original status of Sat, but its intelligence never equals that of God. Unless there is Grace of Lord Siva, the soul cannot have delight of its own status.

The course of discipline necessary for getting this is fourfold: (1) Charya, (2) Kriya, (3) Yoga, (4) Gnana. Charya is service done to God by thought, speech and acts. Whatever the aspirant does, says and thinks, must centre round God. There is no distinction between secular and sacred duties. This is an echo of the verse in Bhagavat Gita which says that whatever one does should be done as an offering to God.
"Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you sacrifice, whatever you give, in whatever austerity you engage, do it as an offering to me."\textsuperscript{28}

The end of Charya is Saloka i.e. going to the same plane as God. Saint Appar is the best representative of this phase. Kriya consists of worship of God by Upasana, chanting of Mantras and daily puja, etc. This takes the soul near to God (Samipya). The third is Yoga, which involves eight steps—Yama (Moral qualities), Niyama (virtuous action), asana (posture), Pranayama (control of breathing), Pratyahara (steadiness of mind), dhyana (meditation) and Samadhi. It takes the soul to Saroopya (getting into the same form of God). The fourth is gnana which leads to Sayujya or union with God.

In all these steps human effort alone is inadequate. Grace of God is essential for the soul's onward march. Siva helps by guarding the aspirant by appearing before him in many forms and acting as his guru. Siddhanta does not believe in the theory of Avatarship, i.e. the descent of God into the world. Siva has no avatara, but takes any form to guide each individual aspirant.\textsuperscript{29}
As ardent Siddhanthists, the Chettiars are great worshippers of Siva and do charya and kriya in accordance with the Agama cannons. The custom of obtaining Diksha was common, though in the present day Chettiars have become quite sophisticated and have not kept up this kind of individual worship. The introduction of the element of grace in the matter of attaining salvation is significant. It is not, as Max Weber and his followers allege, that salvation is determined purely by the Karma doctrine. Only God's grace which is inscrutable is both the necessary and sufficient condition and for salvation God's grace has to be sought after avidly. In Charya they have always been particular in all their business activities to share their profits with Siva. It is a custom for most Chettiar firms to put the name of Siva, or the name of the deity of the kovil they belong to, as signature in the business letters. Instead of writing his own name, the proprietor will simply write Nataraja Thunai (with the help of Lord Nataraja). Chettiers have generously contributed to the erection, repair and maintenance of temples in all countries they operated. Dr. Philip Siegelman writes, "huge sums were expended by the Chettiars for temple construction, the guilding of temples of Tanjore and the purchase of lands in the Kaveri delta whose income sustained and still sustains
the temple trusts of many of South India's most oppulant temples. They are still thought of as financial wizards in the administration of temple lands and funds. ....... Chettiar contributions to the support and construction of temples was often so seemingly legendry that it approaches a hyperbole. A study on the Brahmin Priests of Tamil Nadu reports a number of cases of individual Chettiar families maintaining a Veda Pathasala in many villages. One Chettiar patron's pathasala had as many as twenty students in 1946.

V. Ramanatha Chettiar of Dharmapuri Mutt writes, "the code of business ethics of the Chettiars as mentioned in a copper plate inscription and a rock inscription, says that Chettiars must administer the property of the temple trusts well and spend the entire income in discharging the trust. It also says that Chettiars must not leave Saivism and espouse other faiths, and that Chettiars have been described in old poems as Dhanvanigars who earn wealth, spend wealth on charity, seek fame, move in righteous path, and faith and thus seek the grace of the Incomparable Lord Siva."

The Nattukottai Nagarathar Varalaru gives a detailed list of Chettiar money spent on various temples in South India:

(1) The Nine Nagara Kovils Rs. 1,05,42,500
(2) in the 78 villages of Chettiars Rs. 3,83,14,700
(3) in the outlying villages   Rs.  64,92,500
(4) Temples in Chola Nadu     Rs.  2,96,43,500
(5) Temples in Pandya Nadu    Rs.  95,44,500
(6) Temples in Kongu Nadu     Rs.  12,41,000
(7) Temples in Nadu Nadu      Rs.  67,35,000
(8) Temples in Thondai        Rs.  39,27,000
Total                        Rs. 10,64,40,700

We have already stated that all the Chettiar without any exception are Saivites and there has not been even a single case of Chettiar's conversion to any other faith, though some have married wives from other religions. Not a single Chettiar girl has been given in marriage to a non-Chettiar. This is also reflected in the responses to a question in our questionnaire regarding their views on choice of mate, etc. This is a remarkable feature since most of the other Hindus who were settled by the Chola and Pallava rulers in Malaysia and Indonesia became Muslims in the fifteenth century.\(^3^4\)

Wherever they went for business the Chettiar first set up a temple. The temple which was mostly for Lord Murugan (Dandayuthapani) was housed in the same building as their 'kittangis' or business firms. The reason reported by PR. Kannappa Chettiar for the Chettiar's favouring Murugan instead of Siva despite being Saivites, is that the worship of Siva in the temple requires a strict adherence to the Agamas and such a
strict adherence may not be possible in countries outside India. Moreover, Dandayutha Pani is associated with forgiveness, the God who will forgive easily the Chettiar lapses in worship. Somalay has pointed out that Dandayuthapani worship did not require the services of a Brahmin priest, a non-Brahmin Pandaram could offer worship and besides, Brahmin priests were averse to going out so far. The building was the property of the Kovil or God. All the firms paid rent to Him. Thus God became a natural proprietor in their business. The funds contributed as Magamai, a percentage of their business turnover every year were spent for the maintenance of the temple. The temple administration rotated annually among the firms of that house or building. In the absence of any checking from the Government of the temple funds in those days, this system of managing the temples by the member firms by annual rotation provided for a vigilant match over the common funds of the community.

The Calcutta Chettiars for example had made No. 40 Canning Street their business premises cum temple. They had installed a vel (spear-symbol of Murugan). They had set apart the 5% rebate the firms received every year on the export charges they paid from the Shipping Company as 'Dharma fund' or temple fund. The fund had an annual income of Rs. 25,000. In 1840 there was a split among the Chettiar groups called Devakottai
Group and Karaikudi Group emerged. The temple property was divided by lots, between the two groups—The God and the Jewels for one and the building for the other. Thus there started again two kovils or temple groups in Calcutta—with the small group of Karaikudi Chettiars shifting to No. 64 Canning Street along with the 'Vel' and jewels. The big group from Devakottai continued in No. 40 Canning Street for some years and finally shifted to 180 Lower Chitpore Road in 1893. They remained there till 1921. The big House ordered another 'Vel' from Devakottah and called it 'Singara Murugesan'. Thus the Magamai collections also split into two.

The business prospered by leaps and bounds with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. As the Calcutta Chettiars started their migration to Burma their Calcutta business began to shrink. In 1914 the Small House wound up except for two firms who joined the Big House. In 1909 there was a firm operating for God, in the name of V.PR.S.M. It had started with a capital of Rs.1,17,000. This was also wound up in 1909. The Silver Chariot made for the Kalighat festival was sold to Tiruppadiripuliyoor Kovil and the money given by the small group towards the chariot was returned to them.

The 'Dharma' fund increased with the increase in the income for rebate, reaching up to Rs. 50,000 every year. Thus started the Chettiars attention to Charity works 'Arappani' in Kasi and four other sacred shrines in India.
They set up a Nagarathar Chathram in Kasi (Varanasi) in 1863. The cost of this was borne by contribution from both the houses in Calcutta when the Small House wound up, the idols and jewels were transferred to Kasi Chatram. Similarly when the Big House also finally wound up in 1935, again the Vel and the property were transferred to the Kasi Chathram. The Calcutta Chettiars set up a Chatram in Gaya, Prayag, Tarakeswar and Nasik also. With the transfer of Calcutta Viduthi's property, the Kasi Nagar St. Chathram's property also grew. Even now the Kasi Chathram owns the No. 34 Ezra Street building in Calcutta. This is a three storeyed building patterned on Chettinad model, reconstructed on a building bought in 1918 at Rs. 1,27,916/10-18 from one Mr. David Ezra. It is 6120 sq. feet in area. This was bought in the name of one Swaminathan Chettiar, agent of AR.AR.S.M. firm and in 1921 was made into a trust under the trusteeship of AR.AR. Somasundaram Chettiar. In 1934 this property was transferred to the Managing Society of Kasi Nagar Chathram and in 1955 the AR.AR. family gave away their rights to the property by a power of attorney to the Society. Since 1958 this is known as the 'Nagarathar House'.

The Calcutta Chettiars also maintained a temple at 35 Strand Bond. They constructed the temple costing Rs. 80,000 for the Sivalingam that was already in the
site and named it 'Nagareswar' and its Consort was 'Nagareswari'. A Brahmin Sastri conducts worship till today. The maintenance is under the Kasi Nagara Chettiar Managing Society. This building and land of 1160 sq. feet is free from tax.

The Chettiar association with Kalighat, the Kali temple, five miles from Nagarathar House began in 1878 when they decided to conduct the Kalighat festival. The property here was acquired in three stages--1878, 1885, and 1893. This is again a three storeyed building, costing Rs. 40,000 and more. They had also acquired space for a shed for the Silver Chariot for Rs. 3150 which was later sold for Rs. 6000 in 1939, when the Chariot was sold off.

Tarakeswar: is 36 miles from Howrah. There is a Nagarathar Matham costing Rs. 10,000. It has an arch and was set up in 1890. Poor feeding was done every year till 1941. Now some portions of the Matham are rented out to shopkeepers.

MADURAI

An article in the centenary souvenir of Kasi Nagarathar Chatram by R. Soma Sundaram gives details of two brothers Nagappa Chettiar and Venkatachala Chettiar of Amaravatipudur (one of the 96 villages of Chettinad) in renovating the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai. The brothers were doing yarn business. Moved by the dilapi-
datedness of the temple the brothers spent nearly Rs.10 lakhs in the middle of the 19th century in renovating the temple gopuram, the tank, the temple walls, paving the Prakarnas and plastering the walls. In addition they made jewellery for the idols. The painting along the walls of the temple tank of the sixty three 'lilas' of Lord Somasundera who is believed to rule Madurai were done by the Chettiars. Following the work of two brothers, M.KR.V. Alagappa Chettiar had a purifying ceremony performed in 1929.

There is a Vimana for the Nandi in front of the Lord’s Shrine. During the rule of the Naiks it had only four stone pillars. Donations were collected from Nagarathars and in 1877 the number of Pillars was increased to eight and the present Vimana was built. This Vimana is a veritable museum of sculpture. The eight pillars are all made of one stone and sculptures are carved on them. The one depicting the marriage of Meenakshi to Lord Siva, the bridge being given over by 'Vishnu' is remarkable for the expression of euphoria in the dark Meenakshi getting a fair complexioned Siva as her husband.

Chidambaram

Chidambaram is an important Shiva shrine, the abode of Lord Nataraja. Donations by Chettiars have been innumerable particularly from the family of Raja Sir
Annamalai Chettiar. Chidambaram is the seat of the Annamalai University founded by Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar. Most of the Chettiars make an early contribution for worship on a particular day.

The other Siva shrines in Tamil Nadu which are the beneficiary of the Chettiars' munificence are Tiruchendur --famous shrine of Murugan, son of Siva, the Legendry God of Tamil Nadu, Vaithheeswaran Koil, Thiruvannamalai where Ramana Maharshi lived, Kalahasthi and Palani.

Temple Service Overseas

An exhaustive account of the Nagarathat 'Tiruppani' or temple building is contained in the famed Chettiar historian and journalist Somalay's book - Alai Kadalukku Appalum Nagaratharkalin Alaya Panigal. This section owes much to this source.

The temples built by the Chettiars in these places are not big like the traditional temples in South India. There is no thousand pillared or even a hundred pillared hall in any one of these. But they can be easily identified as belonging to the type of South Indian temples. They have been built in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hence they have not acquired the same importance of other shrines, but they show the Chettiars' religious persuasions and the idea of constant partnership with God in their daily activities both private and business. They are maintained by an annual contribution from each
of the firms doing business as well as by the sale proceeds of the offerings of the devotees like flowers, sandal paste, even jewellery, trunkets. God is believed to bless the buyers with a prosperous business year. The buyers belong to all faiths and subcastes and are not necessarily confined to Chettiars alone. The management of the temples rotates between the important firms and a lot of prestige is attached to being in charge of the management of the temple.

The usual idol worshipped in these temples as said earlier is Lord Murugan Subramanya (Kartik), the second son of Lord Siva. The social life of the Chettiars revolved very much around the temple during their heyday. It was in the temple that annual meeting of their Association were held and all important decisions affecting the community were taken. Usually there was no chairman for the meeting. The Lord himself was supposed to conduct the deliberations. In case of divisions of opinions the Lord's decision was ascertained by a lot by writing the different opinions on pieces of paper, folding them, and placing them at the altar and have one of them picked up.

Thus while in South India, the Chettiars have donated generously to build and maintain temples, without a large say in the management of the temples, overseas, the temples are the public property of the
Chettiar community and are managed exclusively by them, even today.

**Ceylon**

The Tiruketheeswaram temple, 32 km from Talaimanar, is one of the oldest temples in Ceylon, figuring prominently in classical literature of Ceylon. Legend has it that Ravana worshipped Siva here as Rama worshipped Siva in Rameswaram on the other side of the strait. In the seventeenth century this temple was destroyed by the Portuguese. RM.A.R. Palaniappa Chettiar of Colombo purchased this site in 1893 for Rs. 30,001. A Siva Linga was brought from Varanasi and installed here in 1903. The management of the temple was entrusted to the management of the Chettiars of Kathereeswaram Temple Colombo. In 1952, the management was transferred to a local committee. When the Chettiars came on the scene, the site was a jungle. When they gave the management to local committee it was a well built temple with an endowment of Rs. 10 lakhs.

Selva Vinayaka temple in Kattukkle, Kandy district, now one of Ceylon's major Hindu temples was built in 1800 by a single Chettiar family from Devakottah who carried on business in the name of AR.L.Sv.N. In 1940 the company closed its business in Ceylon but the temple continues to flourish on the adequate endowments of over Rs. 6 lakhs. The deities from the temple are taken
in procession in three decorated chariots during Panguni Utthiaram - (March-April) every year at a cost of Rs. 60,000.

The Murugan temple at Kattargam (Kathir gamam in Tamil) is a world famous temple worshipped both by the Tamils and Sinhalese. The Chettiars had built a shrine for the Lord of Kattargam. In 1971 the Ceylon Government declared the place as a holy city and all buildings in the area were ordered to be demolished. The Chettiars got compensation for these buildings. They are planning to build another mandappam and a shrine.

The Sea street in Colombo was the Ceylon counterpart of Moghul street in Rangoon. It was the Chettiars street. The Chettiars built a temple here in 1820. Money contributed was mostly by Chettiars from Devakottai and Okkur. It is called the old Kathiresan Temple since a new one was built in 1870 by the new entrants to Ceylon business who also aspired for the office of the management of temple. The greatest arrival festival of the temple is the Adivel Festival (July-August). Even ministers and high officers of the Government participate in it. In 1971 there was an emergency declared and the Chettiars were reluctant to have the festival. But the Government wanted the Chettiars not to stop the festival. The total properties of the two temples was estimated at Rs. 60 lakhs in 1963 by the Colombo Chettiar Chamber.
The temple at Calle has properties worth Rs. 10 lakhs.

The temple at Rathnapuri with properties worth Rs. 1 lakh was given over to the local Hindus in 1950.

The temple at Navalapitti has property worth Rs. 3 lakhs and the temple has a big mandappam to feed 750 people.

In Jaffna the Chettiar temple for Siva has Rs. 7 lakhs worth of property.

The temple at Candy for Vinayaka was built by the Devakottah family of AR.L.S.V.N. in 1800. It has a property of Rs. 6 lakhs.

Burma

Burma was the most important of the overseas countries where the Chettiars were operating. It was, therefore, here that the largest number of temples were built; some sixty-two temples at sixty places were built and maintained by the community. In 1933 the Chettiars Association in Rangoon admitted Harijans also to the temples. It may be mentioned that there were no Burmese Harijans but only immigrant Harijans from India. There was enthusiastic participation by the local Burmese community in maintaining the ceremonial worship in these temples. They used to adorn the deities with silk cloth on festive occasions. Outside Rangoon, the
same important temples were at Kanbe Henzarda, Akyab, Moulmeina. The festival of Masi Maham (Feb. 14-March 14) was particularly celebrated; the deity being taken out in a procession in a silver car. Akyab was a prosperous rice trading centre and both the Burmese clients and Chettiar bankers vied with each other in the conduct of the festival. In Rangoon, the earliest temple was the one at the 'Ararai' i.e. six roomed building which was also their business place. The temple dedicated to Lord Murugan was located on the first floor. It was installed in 1890. In 1935 the Rangoon Nattukottai Chettiar's Temple Trust was established to manage their temple as well as the one for Murugan in Pasumadam (near Rangoon) and a Mutt at Kanbe. The festival day is Thai Poosam day (Jan. 14-Feb. 14). There is a procession of the deity from Rangoon to Pasumadam and back. Films on Siva temples in South India were exhibited during the festival. The Pasumadam temple built in 1900 was damaged by the Japanese bombing in 1942. The temple was reconstructed at a cost of 1 1/2 lakhs of rupees in 1967. To quote Siegelman "for a group which is expecting imminent withdrawing this is a remarkable act."

Today in Burma there is not a single Chettiar living outside Rangoon city. The temples and their properties are left uncared for. The temple trust in Rangoon is still functioning but there are only a dozen
Chettiars still left and they are without that zeal which characterized them in their bright days.

**Singapore**

The Chettiars' Temple in Tank Street, Singapore was consecrated on 4th April 1859. It is stated to be the richest Hindu Temple outside India. It is "efficiently managed"/(Singapore Hindus' Religious and Cultural Seminar 1967-71, pp. 183-184). During Thai Poosam all communities, Indians, Chinese, Malays, all participate in the festival. It has been featured prominently in a recent Tamil film Vellan Varuvan "Velan will come". Sikhs and Chinese can be seen dancing to the temple music carrying Kavadis with the usual religious fervour. Besides this there is Nagarathar Vinayaka kovil which was reconstructed in 1971. The Navarathri-Dassara is celebrated very grandly here.

**Malaysia**

The Chettiar temples in Malaysia stand as a class by themselves. They are richly endowed. They are very very clean something of a surprise to the temple-goer in Tamil Nadu. The Chettiars have not left Malaysia as they have left Burma. Hence the ritual in the temples is kept in all its glory on Thai Poosam, Parguni uttiram, Chitra Poornami (April-May), Vaikasi vilakku (May-June) Adivel (July-August), Kartigai (Oct.-Nov.), Thiruathirai (December-January), Masi Maham (February-March) and so
on. All the year round one can see festivals as they are observed in Tamil Nadu temples. A Saiva Siddhanta Conference was organized in 1970 and Saiva Siddhanta classes are being held in Kuala Lumpur.

The important among the temples are (1) Siva temple in Penang. (2) Selva Vinayagan Temple in Seremban. (3) Vinayagar temple, Malacca, (4) Dhendayuthapani temple in Bari Pund. In addition, there is the Mariamman Temple in Kuala Lumpur which is the oldest temple in Malaya. The UNESCO is considering a proposal of aid for its preservation on the lines of their aid to Thanjavur and Rameswaram.

Thailand

The eighty year old Mariamman temple in Silam Road is a landmark of Bangkok city. According to an article in the Hindu of 4-4-1971, by K.R.N. Swamy, the Chettiars of Thailand obtained a grant of land from the King and built this temple in the last quarter of the 19th century. The Goddess is worshipped by the local people also particularly now when the number of Indians in the country is very small. On the Tamil New Year day, i.e. 14th of April the temple is studded with Chinese.

Saigon

In Saigon, in South Vietnam there is a temple built for Murugan in 1880. On Mondays the Chettiar community of Saigon assembles at the temple, holds a
common prayer and reads Siva Puranam. The 'Thithi' days – day of attainment of salvation of the four Thevaram Nayanmars – are celebrated with great earnestness. The temple has assets worth over Rs. 5 crores.

The United States of America

Under the efforts of Dr. Alagappa Alagappan, a member of the U.N., a temple for Vinayaka was constructed in 1977 July in New York. Financial assistance was provided by the Andhra Government and the Junpathi Devasthanam. However, the major contribution came from the Nagarathar temples in Malaysia and Singapore. This is a member of the Hindu Temple Society of North America.

Temples are being constructed in Los Angeles, Pittsburg and Houston also. Mr. L. Narayanan Chettiar, one of the Madurai industrialists is personally involved in the construction of a Meenakshi Kovil in Houston. The cost of the main idols for worship in the temple would be borne by the Karumuthi S. Chokkalingam, grandson of the late Textile king of Madurai, Karamuthu Thiagaraja Chettiar.

From the foregoing account of the Chettiar Charya and Kriya, organization and calculation appear as the most distinctive features. The funds for the construction, renovation and maintenance of temples, chathram and pathasalas were collected, accounted for, and administered systematically on a community basis. The
efforts of 'merit-making' by temple building and maintenance of choultries or Pathasalas were not sporadic or left to individual inclinations, as among the 'teravada Buddhists of Burma and Thailand, so that unlike 'teravada Buddhism' it did not militate against the productive uses of their accumulated wealth since the Chettiar contributions to temple works and other charities were organizationally linked to their annual business turnovers through the 'magamai' system, and the additional fact that the contributors being individual firms and not individual Chettiars. God was also made to earn for His work by being made a natural partner whose capital came from the rents from His tenants i.e. the Chettiar firms located in His house, the temple. The Chettiar contribution to temple activities reached a spectacular scale only during the time when their economic success also reached a high watermark. What do we call this rational calculation or irrational religiosity? The fact that the 'magamai' contribution also split whenever there was a rift among Chettiars of a city, as it happened in Calcutta and Colombo, only confirms the predominance of the rational calculation even in their religious activity. However to attribute this to the special doctrines of Saiva Siddhanta would necessitate an explanation for the absence of this feature as a highlight among other Tamil Saiva sub-castes. For, the non-
Brahmins of Tamil Nadu are either Saivites or Vaishnavites. Thus the explanation for the Chettiar success in economic enterprise lies in factors other than religious.

REFERENCE


(2) Pillai, G. Subramania. 'Introduction to and History of Saiva Siddhanta', in *Collected Lectures on Saiva Siddhanta, 1946-1954*. Annamalai University, 1965, p. 16.


(4) Ibid., p. 41.

(5) S. Pillai, op.cit., pp. 9-10.

(6) Refer Chapter III.

(7) Pillai, op.cit., p. 80.

(8) Ibid., p. 85.

(9) Ibid., p. 87.

(10) Ibid., pp. 85-93.

(12) Ramanujachari, R. 'Lectures on Saiva Siddhanta'.
Collected Lectures on Saiva Siddhanta, 1946-54.
Annamalai University, 1965, p. 5.

(13) Ibid., p. 6.
(14) Ibid., p. 17.
(15) Ibid., pp. 7-8.
(16) Ibid., p. 10.
(17) Ibid., p. 11.
(18) Ibid., p. 25.
(19) Ibid., p. 19.
(20) Ibid., p. 27.
(21) Ibid., pp. 30-32.
(22) Ibid., p. 37.
(23) Ibid., p. 41.
(24) Ibid., p. 44.
(25) Ibid., p. 50.
(26) Ibid., p. 51.
(27) Ibid., p. 51.
(28) Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 9, Verse 27.


(34) Somalay, "Chettiars and Hinduism", a Seminar Paper in the Journal of the Institute of Traditional Culture, University of Madras.


(36) Somalay (ed.) S.K.N.N.N.V.M.

(37) Somalay. Alaikadalukku Appalum Nagaratharin Alaya Panigal.