INTRODUCTION

The Koyil, Periya Koyil or the great temple of Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam lies on an islet formed by the twin rivers, Kaveri and Coleroon (Kollidam), few miles north of the district of Tiruchirapalli in Tamilnadu. In the Vaisnava parlance, the term “Koil” signifies the Srirangam temple only. It sounds presumptive but true to say that the Periya Koyil is complete in all respects. It has the full complement of seven prakaras and has a main shrine where the Lord (Ranganatha) is found in a reclining posture in his serpent bed. There are also sub shrines for Vishvakṣena, Rama, Krishna, Nachiyar, Chakratalvar, Garuda, Hanuman, Andal etc. and for all the Alvars and the acharyas upto Vedanta Desika within the precincts. According to Sriranga Mahathmyam, the glittering Sriranga Vimana sprang as a result of the tapas of Brahma in the depths of the Milky ocean. It was borne by the celestial bird Garuda. Adisesha, had spread his hood over it. Vishvakṣena, the archangel-in-chief walked in front clearing the way. The sun and moon were fanning the deity. The celestial musicians Narada and Thumburu followed singing His glory. Rudra and other Gods raised the “jayaghosha”. The celestial maids danced. There was a rain of flowers ¹. The first three Alvars (worshippers of Vishnu) viz, Poigai, Bhutam and Pei, who are assigned to the Sangam period, refer to Vishnu enshrined in Srirangam. The later Alvar saints made many references to the temple. Tirumalaisai Alvar refers to the eight sacred tirthas or pools surrounding the temple in the eight directions, in which the worshippers bath before offering worship. Lord Ranganatha also finds mention in the Valmiki Ramayana and the
Padma and Matsya Puarnas. The Sanskrit hagiology viz, the ‘Prapannamrtam’ makes frequent references to the temple. ‘The Lakshmikavyam’, a work of the 15th century, describes the marriage of Uraiyurvalli with Lord Ranganatha and gives an elaborate description of the Adibrahmotsava. The ‘Madhuravijyam’ and the ‘Saluvabhyudayam’ refer to the Muslim occupation of the temple and its restoration by the generals of the Vijayanagara army².

Let us now turn to the elaboration of the chosen theme of the evolution of Srirangam temple and how the notions of power, patronage and legitimation came to be associated with it. It is imperative to understand these notions clearly at the outset so that one is able to scrutinize the available data with this perspective in mind. It should be noted that the temple and the palace are both indicated in Tamil by the same word i.e. Koyil, even as the word Nagaram also referred to temple and the palace. There is no doubt that the palace was a model for the temple (both were residences for the sovereigns), for ‘Ko’ means only king and not God. By analogy and implication, it was used as a byword for the temple as well. The deity, it was imagined, commanded all the services which the king normally enjoyed in his palace e.g. ‘Ula’ or circumambulation of the city of the king came to adopted as a practice for the deity as well in the temple. Thus, there was a close connect between the temporal and the transcendental right from the beginning in the context of south Indian history.

It needs to be clarified that the notion of power is at once the most ubiquitous and the most elusive theme of historical writing. Power is not an identity that can be
said to inhere in groups or individuals; rather it expresses a relational state of affairs. The capacity of a powerful person or entity to secure compliance may be sustained through the threat or actual exercise of violence, through the innovation of norms-traditional or otherwise, through persuasion, reward, protection, or by other means contingent upon the particularities of the specific social and political constellation. Power is thus neither a substantive entity, nor an institution, nor even a possession, but rather an attribute of the relationships within which it is exercised. It was in recognition of this feature of the phenomenon that Michel Foucault, the most influential post-war theorist on power, refused to treat it under a separate rubric, choosing instead to embed his reflections in an analysis of specific institutional and disciplinary contexts and practices. From this flows the difficulty of power as an object of synoptic historical contemplation, for the relationships within which it makes itself felt are as varied as the entire field of human experience. As a purely relational concept, it is often difficult to localize it.

In fact, Max Weber saw power as the ‘probability that a person in a social relationship would be able to carry out his or her own will in the pursuit of the goals of action regardless of the resistance.’ When the exercise of power was regarded by people as legitimate, it became authority. One particular criticism of the Weberian approach is that, by its emphasis on agency and decision-making, it fails to recognize that non-decision-making may also be an exercise of power. The very expectation that power should have to ‘legitimize’ itself implies that it is in some sense always arbitrary, that its exercise requires justification or masking. In contrast, Marxian perspective regards power as a ‘structural relationship’, existing
independently of the wills of individuals. The notions of agency and intentionality are not essential to this definition. The existence of power is a consequence of the class structure of societies. Thus, N. Poulantzas (1978) defined power as the capacity of one class to realize its interests in opposition to other classes. In this perspective, power has the following features (i) power cannot be separated from the economic and class relations; (ii) the analysis of power cannot be undertaken without some characterization of the mode of production.

The functionalists have their own understanding of power. For example, Talcott Parsons defines power as ‘a positive social capacity for achieving communal ends. It is regarded as widely diffused through society rather than being concentrated in the ruling elite. The political system is seen to be open and pluralistic, permitting the whole community to participate to some degree in the political process.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the individuals or elites who sought to sustain and consolidate their power always sought various ways to legitimize it. There were myriad ways and processes through which the ruling authorities derived—or at least attempted to derive—justification for their power. In this context only, one can mention Max Weber’s theory of legitimacy as one which stressed the importance of follower’s beliefs. He stressed that there were three ideological bases of legitimacy (traditional, charismatic and legal-rational) which may confer authority on rulers or ruling elite.

There is no doubt that the validation of power was necessary not only in communities passing from the pre-state society to the stage of state society, but
also in established complex societies. As a matter of fact, power is always in a flux, it disperses, becomes localized, and in doing so changes its character. Then it is refocused on a higher plane. A steady state is never achieved; all relationships are subject in the longer term to recontestation, renegotiation and social upheavals and wars can always intervene to recalibrate the balance. In England, for example, as Christine Carpenter has suggested, the dynastic civil wars known as the Wars of the Roses (A.D. 1455-1485) produced a structural shift in the provincial relationship between the gentries and the nobilities that refocused authority on monarchical state and prepared the ground for the era of muscular Tudor kingship that followed.

The notion of legitimation helps not only in addressing the concerns and compulsions emerging from within the community and locality or the little tradition, but also in conforming to or becoming a part of the greater tradition. It has also been assumed by various historians and critiques alike, and rightly so, that legitimation is not a monolithic concept. Rather, it was ever evolving, transforming, in both form and content, in both time and space. Despite criticisms, legitimation as a dynamic process--encompassing the political, economic, cultural, and ideological--has been underscored as valid notion that created an identity, howsoever assumed it might be, for the royalty or the royal elite or a community or an icon in a specific politico-social-cultural context. For example, as R.Champakalakshmi points out, *prasastis* were the chief domain of legitimation of the ruler’s sovereignty, containing as they do, all the chief motifs and themes drawn from the composite package handed down as the
Brahmanical tradition, common to all the south Indian dynasties of the early medieval period’. 

On the other hand, patronage is to be located in acts or activities in a societal context that confers status and legitimizes the patron’s authority. Patronage nurtures asymmetrical social relationships by creating a network of bonds and increases the unequal spread of power in society. It influences the domain of popular perceptions in various ways and means, but all based on a just order which itself becomes a byproduct of an ideological process fostered by the ruling elite. Perception is definitely an important component in the whole process.

Thus, legitimation was an all-encompassing notion that came to be systematically and frequently used by the powers-to-be, using their resources and strategies to establish a special relationship not only with the Gods in their specific realms but also with the community at large. Rituals, festivals and special fairs centered on a deity or a temple or a religious ideology were all various manifestations of this legitimizing process. Patronage thus also becomes a tool in many ways to bind social groups in an unequal relationship to strengthen or further the dominant ideology.

Thus, in a given context, legitimation is certainly a two-way process of conformation to a set of rules or ideologies that the ruling elite elaborates with the consent of the community. It could be either symbolic or elaborate in a given context, but always remained reflective and dynamic. Take for example, the case of Asokan inscriptions in the context of early India. It has been proven that they
were not merely inscriptions put up on rocks and pillars in various parts of the country, but as statements and symbols of royal authority intended to empower the ruler with popular awe, respect and support. Another example could be the establishment of the institution of ‘Devkula’ under the Kushanas, involving the housing of the statues of dead rulers in temple like structures that could suggest efforts to ‘appropriate the divinity’.

It has been understood that with the expansion of State society, multiple traditions centered on multiple deities were transformed into temple Gods by brahama-king alliance through a twin process of legitimation-validation in order to provide the necessary support base for the ruling authority. Vishnu in particular symbolized the necessary requirements of an expanding polity and society due to his association with protection and prosperity.

It should be noted that in south Indian inscriptions, the rendering of the ‘prasasti’ section in Sanskrit and the operative part in the regional languages can be partly explained in terms of the royal need to extend legitimacy both vertically and horizontally. There was an interesting interface between regional and transregional processes in early medieval India and the flow of goods, persons and information through a variety of exchange networks created cultural arenas that went beyond those defined by the regions or sub-regions, while undoubtedly related to them. Patronage that centered on the locality deities and their shrines may be understood in the context of the need to create larger community identities by transcending kinship considerations. The politics of patronage would legitimize power and help
the emergence of a stratum of ruling elites. Consequently, it would accentuate differentiation within communities and lead to the formation of complex relationships of domination and subordination.

As a matter of fact, the ruling lineages in medieval south India patronized the construction and maintenance of temples as it had become an important source of political validation. Such an understanding is evidenced by the simultaneous evolution of the cult of Jagannatha and a regional kingdom in Orissa under the later Eastern Gangas. George Spencer has argued on similar lines referring to religious networks and royal influence in eleventh century south India. James Heitzman has also argued that transactional networks of the imperial temple bound the core, intermediate and important places in the peripheral regions as well as the king and local leaders in a cooperative relationship, while providing the king with an enhanced leadership profile. One must not underestimate the temple on the periphery as well which, in certain circumstances played no less an important role in socio-cultural transformation and political legitimation. For example, the temples at Simhachalam and Draksharam, in Andhra Pradesh, by virtue of their location became sites of contestation between rival dynasties during the late early medieval centuries and beyond. It is borne out by inscriptive records of the contending parties on the walls of these temples. T.K. Venkatasubramanian makes it clear that in religion, the aim was not to attain equality but harmony, to evolve a system in which each person and class would find a place, a foothold from where the next step was to be taken. The ritualistic routines based on agamas helped to shape religion as an instrument of order, a prop for political power and a
legitimazer of royal succession in the ancient and medieval Tamilakam. The strategic position of Kanchipuram, one of the principal cities of Chola Empire, is highly illustrative of the mutual relations of rival religious systems (Saivism and Vaisnavism) which were competing for royal patronage and popular favour.

Actually, one may find the following pattern in the Tamil region in the historical development of the Vaisnava pantheon and its relation to the temporal power. The early Sangam chieftain or king was a ruler of people, a glorious hero whose authority was based on bravery, success in war and generosity to kinsmen. His legitimacy was derived from various symbols and myths associating divinities like Mayon /Netiyon or the cosmic Narayana with his person and his city. Bardic poetry singing his praise served as the basis for the later Bhakti poetry, which sang the praise of a transcendental but personalized God. Thereby, it enabled the king, who patronized the Bhakti cult, to become the visible symbol of that God. Whatever may be the appellation by which the relationship between the God and the devotee, or the king and the subject may be characterized, it served to establish an almost total identity between the spiritual and the temporal lords and their spheres. The person of the Sangam chief was the subject of adulation. But it was more of the office of the king that came to be venerated and, hence, equated with the divine in medieval monarchy, God being ‘the transcendental reference point’, and the Brahmaṇa priests became the agents for legitimizing temporal sovereignty through divine sanction and fabricated genealogies for divine descent. The temple idol and the king acted and were made to act alike. So, venerating God meant venerating the king and vice versa. Vishnu possessed in abundant measure the qualities required of a spiritual and temporal
sovereign, both as the cosmic deity and through his endless manifestations. The bhakti ideology assisted in the process of enhancing the power of both the divine and the human sovereigns through the symbolism of the cosmos/temple/territory 19.

In fact, as the temple was very relevant to any understanding of south Indian history, there have been many scholars who have written on the subject. The first chapter focuses on this in order to bring more clarity on the theme. The conventional notion on the theme was very restricted due to the prevailing circumstances when the need of the hour was to highlight the political, social, religious and cultural in general rather than elaborating on one institution in totality. It was seen as basically a religious institution that played an important role in the spread of knowledge as well 20. It was not more than an appendage to a discussion on religion or art or culture. But with the changing times after independence, there have been several attempts to understand the role and relevance of the temples in totality. They have been judged not only epigraphically but also through art and sculpture, dance and music, the struggle for supremacy by various political dispensations, by various religious sects etc. It is imperative to find a deeper understanding through a general survey of various approaches by scholars in ‘Reading the temple’ in the last few decades (since 1960’s in particular though some works may still fall on either side), especially in the context of south Indian history).

The second chapter explores the evolution of Srirangam temple in terms of power, patronage and legitimation and by extension, its relationship with the evolving
political structure in the pre-Vijayanagara period in south India between 10\textsuperscript{th}-14\textsuperscript{th} centuries. It is to be understood that it was much before the period of 10\textsuperscript{th} century i.e. in the 6\textsuperscript{th}-9\textsuperscript{th} century period only there was a marked shift from the \textit{yajna} to a \textit{gift} based broadening of sovereignty\textsuperscript{21}. The Puranic world view replaced the Vedic sacrificial one, and Vishnu or Siva, particularly the former replaced Indra and other Vedic Gods in the equation of royalty with Vishnu’s all pervasive character as the protector of earth, the husband of Sri or prosperity, and as being associated with fecundity and fertility.

The earliest inscriptions in the temple belong to the Cholas of 10\textsuperscript{th} century. For instance, we learn that Parantaka I, the Chola king during the 10\textsuperscript{th} century, was an ardent devotee of Lord Ranganatha. During his reign, the temple received many benefactions. A gift of thirty pieces of gold for a permanent lamp, forty pieces for camphor, one for cotton wick and a silver lamp were received by the sabha of Tiruvarangam which managed these endowments. A hundred kalanju of gold was made for performing the Tirumanjanam of the Lord with a “Sahasradhara” gold plate (1000 holed). Provision for cake offerings to the Lord on the ekadasi day during the Panguni festival was made through a gift of two plots of land \textsuperscript{22}. It is important to understand that in Tamilakam, a logical and elaborate historical understanding of kingship is possible only in relation to the temples. It was seen as a miniature cosmos, a legitimating institution for the ruling elite, the king in particular who conveyed his power and authority through the temple and its symbolism.
By eleventh century A.D., the Hindu temple had become the hub of activity in the lives of the various communities in this area—be it social, political, economic and cultural. There was a vigorous effort, both on part of the royalty and the community, to bring temple to the closest of people’s lives. In fact, the Chola kingdom had grown to imperial dimensions and the ruler was synonymous with ‘Chakravartin’, however, the official records still described him as ‘Udaiyavar’. As the records suggest, the rule of the Cholas covered roughly a period of four centuries (circa 850-1250 A.D.), and during this period, the entire Tamil region was covered with stone temples \( (karralis) \) of different sizes. Arjun Appadurai underscores this reality when he says that ‘the relationship of human kings with temple deities was an elegant and symbolic division of sovereignty’. In fact, the temple, as the major channel of socio-political communication, conveyed the royal orders through inscriptions.

There are in all one hundred and five Chola inscriptions in the temple. Of these, sixty five are assignable to Kulottunga I and fourteen to the reign of his son, Vikrama Chola between the years circa 1070 -1125 A.D. Kulottunga III and Raja Raja III also continued to bestow care and interest in the temple affairs. They appointed royal personnel as Srikaryam officers. Thirteen Srikaryams are mentioned in the inscriptions. During Raja Raja III’s reign (AD 1216-1257), the Oddas of Orissa were in occupation of the temple for about two years between circa 1223 – 1225 A.D. They were ultimately expelled by the Pandyan force under Maravarman Sundara Pandya (AD 1251 - 1268). The benefactions of this ruler are simply breath-taking. He also appointed his officers as “Srikaryams” who were
invested with full authority to administer the temple. As a consequence, the Srirangam temple seems to have gained in stature in a big way during this period.

After the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Hoysalas, Vijayanagara kings and the Nayakas took care of the shrine and made significant additions and benefactions. In the year circa A.D 1311 and again in circa A.D 1323, Turkish forces from north led by Malik Kafur and Ulugh Khan respectively, attacked the temple. In the first sack of Srirangam temple, all the golden gifts made to it were carried away but fortunately, it did not affect the religious life at Srirangam. But the second sack resulted in a complete chaos and fall of the Srirangam temple in alien hands who used it as a garrison for some time till they were persuaded to leave the temple precincts. It was Malik Kafur who caused the collapse of the Pandyan dynasty in the 14th Century, raided Srirangam and carried away most of its treasures. Ten years later, Mohammed bin Tughlaq turned the temple of Srirangam into a fort. The priests of the temple took the Uthsavamurthy of Ranganathaswamy along with whatever vessels and jewels they could save and fled with it. The idol of Thayar was buried in the temple courtyard itself. The processional deity itself had to be moved to safety by a band of devotees headed by Pillai Lokacharya. For over fifty years, the Uthsavamurthy lived in exile. The temple functionaries managed to keep the Moolavars (main idols) safe by building a wall over them. The Uthsavamurthy is said to have travelled all over the country and was finally kept at Tirupati, apparently hidden in a ravine. When peace returned, since the old idol could not be found, a new one was installed. The wall protecting the Moolavar was removed.
However, a couple of years later, suddenly the old idol resurfaced and there was a controversy regarding the original one. A blind washer man, it is said, identified the true idol by the fragrance of kasturi which lingered on its vestments. The restoration took place only in circa A.D 1371 with the conquest of the south by the Vijayanagara dynasty. During the period from circa A.D 1331-1371, the Madurai sultanate exercised jurisdiction over the temple and we find traces of their influence in the temple routine and art. An inscription in the second prakara records that Gopanna took the image of God Ranganathasvamy from Tirupati to Chenji, his capital and after the defeat of the Turkish army, restored the image to Srirangam and had it installed with the Goddesses Lakshmi and Bhoodevi.

Let us also see how some historians have seen the evolution of political structure in pre-Vijayanagara times as it would be closely related to the emerging power and patronage structure in the society. G.W. Spencer believed that the Cholas used rituals in temples to ‘enhance a very uncertain royal power’, and effect centralization through ritual sovereignty\(^25\). Another historian David Shulman, in his study on the south Indian kingship \(^26\), believed that the king was elusive and the state transformational with a non-existent centre. The inscriptions were meant to hide the structural weakness of the medieval polity. Thus, the rich corpus of inscriptive material of the Chola period, according to him, was not expressive of the inner reality i.e. the real motivations behind the ritual of *dana* (actually it was atonement). Hence David Shulman looked into the literary sources to understand the nature of kingship and polity. It was in this perspective that he observed that both king and Brahmana were clown in the south Indian context with their roles
often being interchangeable. Noboru Karashima has pointed out that the social formation in the heyday of Chola rule showed a tendency for the state to seize direct control over the people, through state administrators; attempting to bypass the hold of local community organizations like the *nudu*. Karashima further pointed out that the king’s deeds of collecting or exempting taxes from the locality by giving orders to the intermediaries responsible in the local administration always occupy the chief position among the matters recorded in inscriptions. However, the relation between the king and the local people assumed different forms in accordance with the change in social formation, particularly with the change of the intermediary between the king and locality, such as *nattars* in the Chola period and *nayakas* in the Vijayanagara period, and also with the change of ideology in the rule. Burton Stein’s ‘segmentary state model’ referred to a ‘dual sovereignty’ where the political structure was clearly decentralized i.e. rested with the segments. At the same time, there was reference to the ‘ritual sovereignty’ that was exercised by the king in south India. This work explores the inscriptions from the Srirangam temple, classifies and analyses the real mechanism of the working of these notions and finds out the veracity of these generalizations though it restrains itself from making any theorization as it would not be correct on the basis of the inscriptions sources from just one temple.

The third chapter traces the historical processes at work during the Vijayanagara period from 14th century onwards as well as the evolution of Srirangam temple and its close connection with the contemporary power structure, patterns of patronage and various levels of legitimation. The Vijayanagara period marks the emergence
of supraregional state in south India for which earlier ideological constructs which had been developed as strictly regional idioms, although based on pan-Indian norms (i.e. Bhakti) would have proved to be inadequate. New technology of warfare—introduced by the Islamic states of north India and the Deccan—would have further underlined the limitations of religious ideology and necessitated new technologies of control combined with existing ideological apparatuses. Multiple loci of power and militarization had left the old ideological apparatuses incapable of preventing the gradual secularization of political power, although the ceremonial and political center – both at the supraregional and local levels—continued to retain the traditional symbols of validation. Secularization and differentiation of political and religious authority is, for the first time, expressed through the increasing dependence of political power on a balance of forces between the secular and the sacral leadership (mathas). The Vijayanagara kings, it is said, stressed upon the Vedic norms in the inscriptions and the king was depicted as the protectors of the Vedas and the twice-born. In the Tamil country, in particular, the Vijayanagara kings quite clearly claimed to have restored the worship in temples in the wake of the Muslim invasions and also proclaimed to save them from possible future attacks. It definitely enabled them to intervene in the temple matters and administration through their officers. As a matter of fact, the temple resources were under their supervision and control.

The evolving Srirangam temple also witnessed serious changes in the structure of power and patronage, as evident from the donative inscriptions in the temple complex. Noboru Karashima has called the 16th century period in Vijayanagara
social formation as ‘feudal’ based on his study of inscriptions in north and south Arcot districts of Tamilnadu under Nayaka rule as well as the in the lower Kaveri valley. His contention, especially with regard to the lower Kaveri valley, is that king enjoyed more power and authority to make grants of lands and allow tax remissions till 15th century than in the 16th century. For the 17th century, there were no cases of grants by the king 33. Karashima further says that there was disappearance of grants by a pradhan or mantri (both meaning minister) of the king in the 16th century, while during the earlier period, there were four cases of land/village grants made by them. Secondly, 16th century inscriptions begin to refer to nayakkattanam. The nayakkattanam is a clearly defined territory bestowed by the king on Nayakas for their own management 34. One would attempt to explore the deeper meanings of the inscriptions at the temple to come to such generalizations. Let us not forget that it was during 16th century only that Vijayanagara saw the apogee of its glory under king Krishnadevaraya and despite an increase in the nayakkattanam grants, a reduction in the power of the king and his ministers seems a bit far-fetched. At the same time, Velcheru Narayan Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have attacked Karashima’s utilization of the concepts of social formation and feudalism, and his methodology in citing evidence from temple inscriptions. Drawing from Telugu literature, they challenged Karashima’s basic assumption that individuals bearing titles, referred to in the inscriptions, did indeed hold a functional bureaucratic post, contending that these titles were most often only symbolic honorifics without administrative function, and pointing to the consequent interpretative problems that arise when
such a ‘terminological approach’ is the basis for statistical analysis\textsuperscript{35}. Their revisionist study addressed Karashima’s view that Vijayanagara’s initial bureaucratic administration was displaced by the 16\textsuperscript{th} century ‘feudal society’ in which the nayakas were the delegated feudatories of the Vijayanagara monarch. In their alternative reading of the texts and inscriptions, the Vijayanagara era was either:

(a) a consistently authoritative and locally assertive state system—their citations of the evidence stress that the powerful 16\textsuperscript{th} century nayakas still identified themselves as the ‘executors’ of Vijayanagara rule; or

(b) a continuum of ‘ritual sovereignty’ polity (consistent with Burton Stein’s historical reconstruction), wherein there was a resilience of community-based individuals and institutions who/which had to be repeatedly induced to participate in a weakly bureaucratized and marginalized state. They cite as evidence the continuing focus of the inscriptions on temple grant and donation initiatives as records of the attempts by the nayakas, Telugu Brahmanas and others associated with Vijayanagara expansion to articulate a local relationship\textsuperscript{36}.

To the credit of the Vijayanagara emperors, it must be said they realized the magnitude of the task of restoring this temple to its pristine glory and in this stupendous task, they were ably and faithfully assisted by the Uttama nambis of Srirangam - one of the most influential families associated with the administration of the temple for long.
There are plenty of inscriptions (254) which throw considerable light on the Vijayanagara hold on the temple. A characteristic feature of these inscriptions is that they contain the saka (year) dates. This was the period which witnessed a spirit of religious enthusiasm and expansion. A continuous flow of the royalty and high dignitaries frequented the temple and made offerings on a lavish scale. Among these distinguished worshippers were Krishnadevaraya, Achutadevaraya and Sadasivaraya (Vijayanagara rulers). During this period, the sub-shrines of the Alvars and Acharyas were furnished with vimanas, gopuras and the mandapas. The construction of the Alagiya-Singar Koil (after clearing the forests) in the east, the erection of the mandapa and the installation of the Hanuman idol and renovation and installation of the Dasavatara images in circa 1439 A.D., a shrine for Dhanvantri, the Lord of medicine in the north side of the fourth prakara and the thousand pillared mandapa are some of the standing monuments that testify to the abiding interest of the Vijayanagara rulers as well as evolving importance of the temple. The Nayaka viceroy at Tanjore and Madurai, having become independent of Vijayanagara in the middle of the 16th century, were also attracted to the Srirangam temple and extended their attention and patronage in a big way. Achyutappa Nayaka (A.D.1580-1614) was so passionately devoted to the Lord of Srirangam that he abdicated his throne in favour of his son, Raghunatha and retired to Srirangam to spend his time in the midst of devotees and pundits. He is credited with having covered the vimana with gold afresh and reconstructed some of the outer prakaras, gopurams etc. The shifting of capital to Tiruchirapalli by the Madurai Nayakas forebodes more pleasant times. Vadhoola Desika of Srirangam
was adopted as the royal guru and manifold benefactions were made to the temple. Vijaranga Chokkanatha (A.D.1706-1739) was the most magnificent benefactor. Further, it was during the Nayaka period that the ceilings and walls of several mandapas - particularly those on the enclosures surrounding the Nachiyar shrine and the ceilings in the Dharmavarma veedhi (Tiruvannali) were painted with scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.

The Vijayanagara period was marked by important changes in all spheres of life that put society in a constant state of flux. Politically, it witnessed a major shift in the center of power to the Deccan and the emergence of new rivals like the Muslim sultanates, larger territorial integration (supra-regional), introduction of new military technologies influenced by the Turkish invasions, military chiefs (Nayakas) to whom the power was delegated and the migration of such warrior chiefs to the peripheries, and their participation in temple building activities and endowments to religious institutions. These were very crucial to the disintegration of older institutions like the brahmadeya and the nadu, more intensive urbanization, increase in craft production, cultivation of cash crops, a fair degree of monetization and more importantly, expansion of trade and trading networks and regions. New entrants into all these spheres of activity had to be accommodated and thus the temple society expanded. All the emerging groups had to be provided space and made components within the same legitimating framework, which necessitated shifts in ideological structures. The vertical Right and Left hand divisions enabled the incorporation of all non-agricultural and other marginal groups into temple ritual and administration, albeit below the priestly
brahmana elite and the non-brahmana land-owning and warrior groups. It goes without saying that in the context of the above developments, the evolution of Srirangam temple was closely connected with the evolving political and social structures of the time that has been explored in this chapter through the actual reading of the inscriptions from the temple complex.

It is a fact that in most of the historical works in the past, the temple has received attention more or less as part of the art and architectural history i.e. virtually in complete isolation from other historical processes at work at any given time or context in history. As opposed to this, the fourth chapter takes up the temple architecture and sculpture as a visual text which was deeply connected to its context. The notions of power, patronage and legitimation were very closely connected to it which were expressed mostly through metaphors and symbols. In fact, the art history of Tamilakam represents the fusion of mainstream Sanskritic norms and the region-specific cultural traits and together it makes a huge impact as a visual text. The construction of the temples metaphorically reflected both the temporal and the transcendental powers. It derived its plan from cosmic structures and was designed to symbolize the cosmos (equated with territory) through the representation of the main deities Siva and Vishnu in the Brahmasthana of the Vastupurusamandala and the Vedic deities as dikpalas and lokapalas in the periphery as the padadevatas. In other words, the temple stood for a visual text of the change from the Vedic to the Puranic religious tradition, with endless possibilities of incorporating local, regional and folk forms. There is no doubt that the scheme of construction programmes followed in the temple were actually
meant to create a political iconography (royal imagery) through metaphor and symbol. As a matter of fact, it has been stressed by historians in recent times that the visual narratives are also texts, drawing their ideas from the verbal imagery of literary texts and epigraphic allegory. They not only assimilate and transform them, but often present them in a redefined version. The visual form of a myth also elaborates and develops the mythological structure under the dictates of changing cult requirements. Thus evolves what may be called a ‘language’ of art in which, while the vocabulary of symbols remains more or less constant, with each symbol taking on a new value in a changed context. The textual or literary and the visual versions of a myth may not at times tally with each other, but rather supplement each other.

The Srirangam temple witnessed tremendous amount of addition, accommodation, multiplication of images as it evolved through centuries from the Chola times to the Vijayanagara times. It can be argued that while rituals necessitated the creation of images, the social needs of the religion and the political needs of the royal patron contributed to iconographic multiplicity and proliferation and canonization of such developments. It is further argued in this chapter that there was a close connection between the art and sculpture at this temple with the contemporary power structure and the legitimizing ideals through the extended network of patronage and bonds at various levels of society and polity at any given historical time or context.

In the fifth chapter, the evolution of Srirangam temple and the society (individuals, social groups/communities, social networks and bonds, local /trans-local ties/
relations, various sects and their co-operation/ conflict etc) around it has also been taken up for understanding in this work through the inscriptions on the walls of the temple. There is no doubt that in pre-Vijayanagara times, that is in early medieval inscriptions, neither caste nor community, with the exception of the brahmana and some sectarian groups, is emphasized as a determinant in people’s relationships with the temple; the arena in which such identities were indeed built up 43. It is the occupational background that is invariably mentioned 44. On the contrary, in the textual traditions from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, caste and community are important categories and predominant issues in their ideological expressions. By the time one comes to the Vijayanagara period, these two become major categories, both in the inscriptive records and the textual traditions as makers of identity and organizing principles in society and polity. This was due to the fact that during this period, the Varna order is not only re-asserted as the norm but practiced consciously and religious community identities get consolidated 45. Our main concern in this chapter is to cull out not only the actual mechanism of such identities as reflected in the inscriptions on the walls of Srirangam temple, but also to see whether these identities and ties—both local and trans-local—had any embedded meaning for the contemporary power structure, both in the pre-Vijayanagara and the Vijayanagara periods.

Historically, one must note that there have been a large number of works that deal with the temple across Indian topography 46 and one must also candidly acknowledge to have acquired a good many cues from almost all of that which have been surveyed. In fact, rather than bringing out the weaknesses of these
works, one would prefer to bring out the gaps that popped up. The purpose of the present work is to throw light on those gaps as well as focus on the importance of it for a student of south Indian history. The present work is essentially socio-political as well as a view from the perspective of evolution of art (visual text) at the Srirangam temple. A study of power, patronage and legitimation over a period of about eight hundred years cutting across various dynasties in south India was a challenging task and an integrated study of these dimensions necessitated to focus on these aspects as many scholars have already detailed on the religious, economic, and historical aspects of it. There is no doubt that the various dimensions of a social system—political, economic, religious, cultural etc—intersperse with each other and the present work also takes note of it at many places as and when required to highlight the socio-political, albeit the focus remains on how the Srirangam temple became a center, and also a witness, of power struggles between different dynasties and sects with sometimes intended and the other times unintended competition for patronage and legitimation.
Endnotes


2 Ibid.


9 B.P. Sahu, Social Science Probing..., op.cit.. p. 12.


12 Ibid.


16 B.P. Sahu, ‘Brahmanical ideology...’, op.cit.


19 Ibid.


22 See Appendix-2, no.1/3, no.1/4.

23 R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion...*, op.cit., p.75.


31 Ibid.


34 Ibid.


36 Ibid.

37 R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion…*, op.cit., p. 35.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., p.470.

41 Ibid.


45 R. Champakalakshmi, *Religion…*, op.cit.

46 See Chapter-I of this work.