UNIT 19  TEMPLE TOWNS IN PENINSULAR INDIA*

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19.1  INTRODUCTION

In this Unit our focus is to look into the emergence of sacred spaces as urban centres and how did they serve as ‘symbols of economic vitality’. What were the factors that played role in the emergence of sacred place as a centre of economic activities? Whether a particular religious ideology or its geo-political location or its political legitimation was instrumental in the emergence of a space as a prominent urban centre? Largely this phenomenon was confined to the Tamilakam (land between the Tirupati Hills [Vengadam] and the southernmost tip of the Peninsula) region in the Peninsular India that is why focus of our discussion is going to be on the processes of the emergence of temple towns in the Tamilakam region in the medieval period. You would find that there were several factors that contributed to the rise of temple towns in the Tamilakam region. The Unit attempts to provide you a broad structure of the temple towns and the processes involved. However, three Sections are devoted on case studies to provide you the indepth study on how it were not just the one factor that held prominence for the emergence of a temple town across the region instead of multiple factors that worked depending upon the socio-religious and geo-political conditions.

Tamilakam provides a unique geography in terms of tinai concept. This tinai is demarcated on the basis of eco-zones - Mullai (pastoral zone - inhabited by warriors and pastoralists), Kurinci (hilly zone), Marutam (wet lands along the rivers) Neital (littoral), and Palai (dry tracts). The earliest urban centres visibly appeared in marutam and neital zones which were dominated by the Cheras (Periyar valley), Cholas (Kaveri valley), and the Pandyas (Vaigai and Tamraparni valley).

Champakalakshami has identified two periods of urbanisation in the Tamilakam region: First occurring during the Sangam (Early Historic) period (300 BCE-300 CE); and the Second during 7th to 13th centuries (largely falling into the period of the Cholas). It is with the second phase with which we would largely be concerned here.

19.2  EMERGENCE OF TEMPLE TOWNS IN PENINSULAR INDIA

The dominant feature of urbanism in the early historical phase was the coastal/external trade; once the trade declined it resulted in the decline of the urban centres as well;

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followed by a so-called period of ‘crisis’ in the Post-Sangam period which is attributed in the Brahmanic records as ‘onslaught of the evil kings’ (*kali arasar* or *Kalabhras*) and the ‘dominance of heterodoxy’ (Jainism, Buddhism and *bhakti*). It was the period marked by the decline of the three traditional *vendar* (crowned kings – Cheras, Cholas, and the Pandyas (for further details on *brahmadeya* expansions are given along with case studies).

The process of the emergence of urban centres in the early medieval period begins with the spread of Puranic religion in the region coupled with the rise of the Pallavas and the Pandayas (sixth to ninth centuries). Under them began the process of *brahmadeya* (to *brahmanas*) and the *devadana* (to the temples) grants in the region that facilitated the agrarian expansion in the region. The period (sixth to ninth centuries) between Sangam and the rise of the later Cholas (ninth to thirteenth centuries) followed by large scale agrarian expansion under the Pallavas and the Pandayas coupled with the emergence of urban centres. This agrarian expansion (seventh to ninth centuries) facilitated increased commercial activities during the post-ninth century. The hinterland of Kudumukku was the fertile region of Kaveri (see Map 3).

The merchant guilds and *nagarams* (market towns) further facilitated movements of goods through itinerant guilds/merchants and became points of intersection for the exchange of local and exotic goods which in turn connected with higher marketing centres – *erivirappatinam* (a merchant town protected with fortified walls and armed troops) and *managaram* (a merchant town comprised of a number of *nagarams*); though not all *nagarams* emerged as urban centres. Under the Cholas, particularly the deltaic region (Kaveri) emerged as nuclei with temples at the centre. There emerged a number of *managarams* which were often creation of state sponsorship. Kachchi (Kanchipuram) of the pre-Chola period was such *managaram*. The *managaram* of the Pallavas was Mamallapuram. Kenneth Hall argues that in the network villages were connected to the market (*nagaram*) and *nagaram* in turn with *managaram*. However, Champakalakshmi emphasises that such link is not visible in the Pallava period. Instead in the tenth century in the Chola period one gets datable evidence of such connectivity of *nagaram* being ‘served as nuclear marketing centre of the agrarian unit called *nudu* [peasant assembly/organisation] (which is local marketing territory)’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 213). It escalated further in the late Chola period in the thirteenth century. *Brahmadeyas* and *nagarams* not only expanded in the Chola heartland but also in the newly acquired Ganga [Western Gangas; third to tenth centuries] and Pandya kingdoms such as Mudikondacholapuram, Nigarilicholamandalam. Champakalakshmi argues that they were used ‘as independent agents of political synthesis under the Cholas’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 216). From the middle Chola period *nagarams* with specialised markets/merchant guilds emerged – *Saliya Nagarattar* (dealing with textiles), *Sankarappadi Nagarattar* and *Vaniya Nagaram* (supplying ghee and oil), etc. *‘Erivirappattanas*, or chartered mercantile towns, also began to appear from the eleventh century’ (Champakalakshmi,1996: 216). These were ‘inland ports’ and generally established in remote and difficult areas. Ramanathapuram, a tribal region marred by militant Maravars that’s why in this region itinerant merchants built their warehouses ‘protected’ and with royal sanction and defended by their own troops (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 219). *Erivirappattanas* such developed were – Basinikonda (Chittoor district), Aiyapolil Kattur (Chingleput district), Tirumalagandarlottai (Ramanathapuram). *Erivirappattana* in Tirunelveli district were protected by army Munrukai Mahasenai particularly to protect temple and its treasury. These specialised merchant organisations specially became instrumental in the expansion of temple

1 Champakalakshmi has divided the Chola developments into three periods: Early Cholas 850-985; Middle Cholas 985-1150; Later Cholas 1150-1279.
urbanisation which were the biggest consumers of goods in the eleventh-thirteenth centuries (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 217-219). The Mahalingeshwara temple of Tiruvudaimarudur was managed and administered by sabha (Brahman assembly) and the nagarattar of Tiraimur together. Merchants from far off places like Kumaramartandapuram, Nandipuram, Tiruviasalur (in Kumbhakonam) and Mayilappur frequently visited the Shaiva temple of Tiruvudaimarudur and offered gifts.

Itinerary merchant guilds were another crucial link in the growth of urban centres in the region. Champakalakshmi argues that its proliferation occurs from eleventh century onwards; under the Pallavas the Manigramam was the only such guild recorded in the ninth century (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 214). In the Pudukkottai region Ayyavole guild was involved in trade. The Valanjiyar, a militant itinerant guild was active in the Chola region in the tenth century. In the eleventh century guild activities extended to Andhra region. The merchant organisation of the Five Hundred and Valanjiyar of Sri Lanka are reported to have made endowments to the temples of Sivapuri, Tirunelveli and Arupukottai in the twelfth-thirteenth centuries. Even craft organisations had their dependence on merchant organisations. In Erode a ‘refugee’ centre got established by Nanandeshi in the eleventh century. At the same time in the eleventh century Chitramel Periyandu (an organisation of the Tamil agriculturists) became active in the Andhra and Karnataka regions. All these organisations actively participated in gift making and temple activities. Champakalakshmi argues that ‘agricultural surplus was mobilized and brought from rural areas to urban settlements through nagaram …[which] from the twelfth century would indicate that mobilization of agricultural surplus made possible the expansion of urban activities’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 221). The Tigai Ayirattainnurvu, an organisation of itinerant merchants erected a mandapa in the Shiva temple (modern Mahalingeshwar temple) of Tiruvudaimarudur. The kavanam section of the Tiruvudaimarudur temple was the meeting place of the nagarattar (assembly of merchants).

Apart from agriculture (land) the multifaceted activities performed around the temples were—maintain cows, goats, feeding brahmanas and ascetics, burning of lamps, construction and renovations, ornaments for the deity, religious discourses, education, etc. To maintain temple properties special communities were involved in their upkeep. Manoradis (a class of shepherds) maintained temple cows and goats; while Kaikkolas (weavers) were involved in ‘gift making’ as well as served as members of the army as terinja kaikkolas (chosen Kaikkolas); while mulaparishada (mainly consisted of brahmans) controlled the entire temple activities. For construction special colonies of architects and sculptors were developed. These non-agricultural groups were accommodated in the Tirumadaivilagam of the temple. From the eleventh century onwards at Sirkali, Arantagi, Kumbhakonam and Nannilam talukas in Tanjavur district several weaving centres in the Tirumadaivilagam of the temples through special privileges emerged under the Cholas. Weavers-cum-traders even formed their separate Nagarattar (Saliya Nagarattar) and enjoyed similar privileges and rights as those of other nagarams. In the Vijayanagara period several loci of power altered, particularly kaikkolas replaced the saliyas and organised themselves into Mahanadu with their headquarter at Kanchipuram. At Palaiyarai, Saurashtra weavers Pattunulkaras settled around Pattishvaram temple, one of the most sacred shrine of the Shaivas, during the Nayak period and entered into an agreement with the cheti merchants to receive ‘ritual precedence in the matter of receiving betel and nut on marriage occasions and offering the cloth, betel leaves and nuts to the goddess of the temple’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 349). Under the Cholas developed metalwork and textiles. Chola artists surpassed casting bronze images. These processes provided the opportunity to the brahmans to emerge as ‘economic administrators’ through their sabha which interum legitimised the kshatriya power.
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_Bhakti_ facilitated the ‘acculturation’ of local and folk traditions, thus _tinai_ deities got absorbed into brahmanic religions. It even countered the ‘heterodox’ (Jainism and Buddhism) traditions. There were two other major aspects related to _bhakti_ — social differentiation and sectarianism leading to sectarian rivalries (between the Shaiva and the Vaishnavas). Gradually political and economic power of the _brahmadeyas_ came into the hands of the temples. The process of temple building began with the Pallavas and the Pandayas which achieved permanence under the Cholas. ‘Under the Colas some of the _bhakti_ centres became leading political, sacred or pilgrimage centres and evolved into huge urban complexes...Such temples were built by the major ruling dynasties and their subordinates, either to legitimize their sovereignty or to bring various socio-economic groups within the orbit of _bhakti_ centres. Temples became landed magnates, with tenants and temple servants remunerated through land’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 207). Temples served as ‘institutions of higher learning (_maligai_ _melaikkalluri_).’ One such was established by Rajaraja I in Tukkalivallam. Towering gates and encompassing shrines emerged as centres of educational and cultural activities. To Tiruvidaimarudur Shaiva temple was attached _salai_ (educational institution) of brahmanas.

There developed three types of temple towns. First, the ‘ceremonial centres’: the Cholas sponsored two such ceremonial cities – Tanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram as sacred centres. Madurai and Kanchipuram, the oldest cities, whose antecedents could be traced in the early historical period, also served as major ceremonial centres. Another type of urban centres was ‘multi-temple centres’ developed after centuries of agrarian expansion. The chief characteristic of such centres was their dispersed foci. Instead of having single ceremonial centre they possessed a number of temple complexes and depending upon the patronage of a particular ruler for legitimation accordingly their foci also kept on changing. Kudamukku-Palaiyarai and Kanchipuram can be classified as multi-centre temple towns. Kumbhakonam had both the Shaiva (Kudandai Kilikkottam (famous Nageshvara temple) and the Kayavarohana (the Kashi-Vishvanatha temple) and the Vishnu temple (Sarangpani). During this period three more temple complexes emerged – Tirunageshvara, Tiruvalmuchuli and Tirukkarugavur. Around these temples emerged the five temple centred settlements. Since the Cholas patronised Shaiva cult most of these settlements were surrounded by majority Shaiva population. While Nageshvara temple continued to remain dominant throughout the Chola period; it was the Vaishnava Kumbheshvara temple that assumed importance in the post-Chola period and thus suffered the Shaivite temples due to lack of patronage. Someshwar temple (Somanathamangalam) grew up in the region from mid-Chola period. However, it declined and earned the nickname ‘elai Somanatha’ (poor Somanatha) due to lack of patronage in the post-Chola period. While Nageshvara temple continued to remain dominant throughout the Chola period; it was the Vaishnava Kumbheshvara temple that assumed importance in the post-Chola period and thus suffered the Shaivite temples due to lack of patronage. Someshwar temple (Somanathamangalam) grew up in the region from mid-Chola period. Similarly at Tirukkarugavur, southwest of modern Kumbhakonam existed temples dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and Pidari (local deity). At Palaiyarai also earliest settlements were those of the Jainas (Jain _palli_ at Dipankudi) and the Shaivas when finally in Jaina-Shaiva conflict Jains were relegated into the background; while Vishnu temple was located at Nandipuram in the region. The third type of temple towns were those sacred centres evolved around a ‘single cult’; developed into a _tirtha_ (pilgrimage). Chidambaram for the Shaivas and Srirangam for the Vaishnavites were such sacred towns. Chidambaram even held importance as Chola centre of royal coronation ceremonies. These centres developed through a long successive stages of growth (Champakalaxmi, 1996: 65-67). In the Tamraparni valley
Cholas developed new *brahmdeya* complexes – Rajarajachaturvedimangalam (Mannarkoyil) and Cheravanmahadevichaturvedimangalam. At Cheravanmahadevi Rajaraja I (985-1016) constructed a palace complex for a Chola-Pandaya prince where ‘hundreds’ of families were provided with spaces to settle around; while Tirukkalukkurnam developed more in the form of an ‘agglomeration of a series of settlements around them’ (Champakalaxmi, 1996: 67).

The revival of Asian trade in the ninth century led to the emergence of new coastal towns with shift in the locations. Nagappattinam at the mouth of the Kaveri replaced Mamallapuram; though Sangam ports Marakkanam, Tondi and Korkai were still in use. Tiruppalaivanam and Mayilarppil emerged in the eleventh-twelfth centuries. Other ports developed during this period were Kovalam, Tiruvadandai, Cuddalore, and Tiruvenipuram.

19.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF TEMPLE TOWNS

Champakalakshmi identifies four major factors behind the rise of Kudamukku-Palaiyarai (the twin capital cities of the Cholas) as prominent urban centre in the Chola heartland in the Tamilakam region in the early medieval period. The foremost importance is given by her to the emergence of *brahmadeya* and *devadana* grants – *brahmadeyas* being instrumental in creating rural hinterland; the resource base and temple emerged as ‘consumption points’ facilitating trade and crafts. The conscious efforts of the state to create political and administrative centres at strategic locations, particularly the urban development of Palaiyarai could be attributed largely on account of its being the Chola residential capital; emergence of sacred associations facilitating the emergence of sacred centres contributed in a big way to the urbanisation in the region. She believes, though
undoubtedly trade was the facilitator but ‘trade and commercial activities…were not
the dominant factor in the development of Kudamukku-Palaiyarai’ (Champakalakshmi,
1996: 356). However, Kudamukku had added advantage for being situated on the
larger communication network connected with Tanjavur, Uraiuyr, Nagapattanam,
Gangaicondacholapuram, Chidambaram and Kaverippumpattiman thus emerged as an
important convergence point in the entire Cholamandalam. The urban development
and the enhanced importance of Tiruvidaimarudur was also, apart from being an
important Shaiva centre, attributed to its proximity to the Chola residential capital –
Palaiyarai. Champakalakshmi (1996:68) argues that the ‘ceremonial centres’ were ‘pre-
eminent instruments of orthogenetic\textsuperscript{2} transformation’. Though in the early medieval south
India, it is difficult to pinpoint one single factor instrumental in the growth of urbanisation,
the ‘ideological’ base it received was from bhakti which got expressed through the
institution of ‘temple’. Champakalakshmi records that, ‘even where trade and commercial
activities were major factors, the presence of religious institutions was a necessary
concomitant of the urban process’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996:58-59). Kenneth Hall
and George Spencer branded Kanchipuram as primarily a ‘sacred centre’, ‘…the city’s
eminence as a religious and political centre enhanced its commercial prestige…’ (cited
in Champakalaxmi, 1996: 59). Thus religious ideology was instrumental in providing
‘effective urban spaces’ in south India, a factor which was absent in the early historical
period. During the early phase it was the king who was equated with the ‘divine’ and
the brahmans as ‘legitimising’ agents who fabricated genealogies in favour of the kings/
chiefs. Champakalakshmi emphatically puts forth the importance and role of religion in
the growth of urban centres:

It would seem superfluous to speak of the religious factors in the development and
sustenance of urban centres, for quite certainly religion provides the most constant
denominator of all, i.e. the legitimisation of all ventures, political, economic and social.
However, sacred associations have been the most active determinant of the urban
character and survival of centres like Srirangam, Tirupati, Chidambaram, Tiruvannamalai
and many more such temple towns, whose umland extended not merely to the immediate
neighbourhood or cultural region, but sometimes over long distances which pilgrims
traversed at periodic intervals.

It was maritime trade that played ‘crucial’ role in the growth of urbanisation of the
Sangam period in south India where Sangam Cheras, Cholas and Pandaya chiefdoms
actively participated. Once the external trade declined so were the urban centres as
well as there was sudden disintegration of the early chiefdoms. However, the prominent
characteristic of the early medieval urban centres was that they largely embedded into
rural surroundings and their chief feature was rural-urban continuum. They were not
the creation of the agrarian surroundings rather they created their own agrarian hinterlands.
This continuum is more marked in the Marutam (wet lands along the rivers) zone
where these urban centres worked more as ‘consumption points’. ‘The demand
generated by the local elite and the temple for locally unavailable goods brought itinerant
trade to these markets and encouraged the large scale settlement of craftsmen and
artisans, who were eventually accommodated in the temple centre’ (Champakalakshmi,
1996: 207). The earliest centres growing along the brahmadeya and devadana were
Kudamukku-Palaiyarai – the twin capital cities of the Cholas. The densest brahmadeya
were to be seen around Kumbhakonam (ancient Kudamukku). Out of the total ninety-
three brahmadeyas in the region Kumbhakonam taluk alone possessed twenty five.
These early brahmadeyas were created by the Pallava rulers. The earliest being –
Simhavisnu-Chaturvedimangalam (by Simhavishnu [550-590]); Mahendramangalam

\textsuperscript{2} A unilinear natural process of evolution as a result of internal mechanism or ‘driving force’.
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(Mahendravarman I [590-630]); Dayamukhamangalam (Nandivarman II Pallavamalla [731-796]). From the ninth century onwards Cholas established huge irrigation network in the region. Rajendra I constructed the Cholaganga tank and canal-network. The inscriptive reference on the irrigation pattern suggests that in the early medieval Tamilnadu in Kumbhakonam taluk 85 per cent irrigation was through canals while 7 per cent constituted tank irrigation; in Tiruchirappalli taluk 84 per cent was canal irrigation while 7 per cent area was irrigated by tanks; in Tirutturaippundi taluk 79 per cent was canal irrigation while 15 per cent were tanks; similarly in Pudukkottai 49 per cent were canals while 38 per cent were tanks and in Tirukkoyilur taluk 60 per cent were canal irrigation while 23 per cent were tank references. However sluices constituted just 4.7 per cent and wells 5.4 per cent of the total references according to Heitzman’s survey in Tirutturaippundi taluk (Heitzman, 1997: 38-54). Even temple administration often involved in irrigation activities. The mulaparudai (executive committee) of the Tirunageshvaram supervised on behalf of the Nageshvara temple the repair works of the irrigation channels caused by heavy floods. Champakalakshmi argues that in fact the laying out of the new capitals — Tanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram were primarily prompted by the anxiety to ‘protect this resource base’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 208). Another brahmadeya which developed into huge urban complex was Rajarajachaturvedimangalam (modern Mannarkoyil) located between the Tamraparni and Gatna rivers provided a huge agricultural hinterland. Here was first built a Vishnu temple in the early 11th century by a Chera subordinate of the Cholas which developed into an urban centre in the 12th century. The original brahmadeya was Brahmadesam; while Rajendracholapuram was the first nagaram (market centre) of this complex. The merchants from as far as Kumbhakonam and itinerary merchant guild Nanandes Tisai Ayirattu Ainnurruvar actively participated in trading activities from 11th century onwards. Another brahmadeya such developed was Tiruvalisvaram which developed around Siva temple which soon acquired the status of Eririppattanam (a merchant town protected by armed troops). Equally significant role was played by Golaki matha in the thirteenth century which encouraged trade through itinerary merchants who were in turn inducted into their organisational network.

Another important feature of these temple towns was unlike the general argument about the medieval urban centres that they were largely parasitic, does not hold good in their context. There appears to have existed a rather symbiotic relationship between the two. There existed continuous socio-economic and religious exchanges benefitting and enriching them both.

None of these temple towns were ‘fortified’ except that their temples were provided with ‘defensive walls’, demarcating the sacred spaces (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 67). The nagarams (market centres) and their itinerant merchant organisations were also accommodated. It was at tirumandaivilagam where spaces were provided to merchants and craftsmen.

Architecturally, one could see two phases of developments. First, between seventh to eleventh centuries, when the structures were largely royal creations. Their chief feature was vimana (shrine), enclosures and gopura (gateway); during the twelfth-thirteenth centuries further expansions were done through ‘complex of shrines’ and pillared halls (mandapas and the gopuras) were largely the contribution of the ruling elites/chiefs; the inner spaces (prakara) were constructed by the ‘powerful agricultural and commercial communities seeking validation’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 68). The five tall gopurams of the Sarangpani temple of Kumbhakonam were further built by the Vijayanagara rulers.
Another factor added was the rise of Shaiva and Vaishnava monastic traditions. They controlled the administration and the landed property of the temple. The power of the Virashaivas further expanded as a result of liberal ideology of Ramanuja which later resulted in schism among the Srivaishnavas (Vadakalai and Tenkalai); while among the Shaivas non-brahmanical lineages were supported from "velalas", merchants and the weavers ("kaikkolas"). Under the Cholas Pallippadai (present Ramanatha Koyil) built by Rajendra Chola I emerged as centre of Pasupata sect of Shaivism. During the Vijayanagara-Nayaka period the Sri Vaishnava monastic establishments also emerged prominent – the Sankaracharya matha (thirteenth century) and the Vira Shaiva matha (Hiriya matha [sixteenth century]). Similarly Pattishvaram in Palaiyarai emerged as important centre of three Shaiva mathas – Tirumular, Navukkarashar, and Sambandar named after their propounder.

In the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries new features emerged in the urban landscape as a result of changing power relations under the Vijayanagar kingship. The major trend that
emerged was militarisation resulting in the fortification of towns. Earlier settlements were not fortified. Earliest of such settlement could be traced in the Tamil region was Karavandapuram, district Tirunelveli which was dominated by Vaidya family of merchants. Pandayan king constructed a fort here in the eighth century; its ramparts were also reported to have been guarded in the tenth century; a big market (perangadi) was constructed by Pandayan king Rajasimha III (c. 900-920 CE) which was put under the protection of Ayyavole guild. Even the temples were put under guards. In the eleventh century in the late Chola period armies were stationed in the temples on the newly occupied zones and trade routes. Charigaikkottai (toll-fort) became a regular feature under the Later Cholas. Even the merchants fortified their settlements to safeguard their goods. Merchants also started assuming the title chakravartis suggestive of their superior status and the rise of new urban groups. Other fortified urban centres viradalam and suradalam were the traditional power centres of the agrarian elites and chiefs. This trend towards fortification was the Pandayan resistance against the Hoyasala intrusion in the Tamil country and later by the Vijayanagara rulers, against the ‘new technology of defence and warfare’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 69-70). However, the type of militarisation developed under Vijayanagar suggests a new form where new fortified urban centres emerged under the nayakas as ‘militarily viable fortified towns. Even in old sacred centres a new alliance was forged with the monastic heads where ‘dominance remained strictly at the political level of the state, exemplified by its kingship’. This brought a major shift in the existing bhakti ideological base towards ‘secularisation’. The new urban forms dominated the royal residential or administrative complex as exemplified in Hampi (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 72). This put the power of the tutelary deity in the background, even in the ceremonies like Mahanavami festival it was not the deity instead it ‘centred around the royal person’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 71-72). At certain centres on account of the dwindling fortunes of the Cholas under the Vijayanagara-Nayaka, temples suffered owing to the lack of royal patronage. At Kumbhakonam royal patronage of the Shaiva temples were withdrawn and precedence was given to the Vishnu temples - Sarangapani and Adi Kumbheshwar along with two new Vishnu temples Ramasvami and Chakrapani emerged in the region. Kumbheshvara temple achieved so much importance that a ritual bath in its tank (mahamakam) is considered to be counterpart of north Indian Kumbhamela at Allahabad. Another Vishnu temple that assumed importance in Vijayanagara-Nayaka period was Ramasvami temple in Kumbhakonam.

There also appear hierarchies among urban centres – puram, pattinam, nagaram. Puram suffix was generally given to ‘expanding centre or to new quarter’; while pattinam refers to coastal towns, though some such suffixes could be seen being used for interior towns as well (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 232).

### 19.4 CASE STUDY: KANCHIPURAM

Kanchipuram was situated in the Tondainadu (later Tondaimandalam) region. It was variously known as Kanchi, Kanchipuram, Kanchimanagaram. In the Sangam period its port Nirppeyarru connected the region with maritime trade which facilitated trade in luxurious goods. Kanchipuram being the consumption point. On account of its place in the maritime trade its rulers were known as Tiraiyar (people of the waves). Manimekhalai, a Buddhist work, mentions it a managaram. Under the Pallavas, in the sixth century, it became a royal centre. It was also an important craft centre and possessed heterogeneous population – Buddhist, Jains, Vaishnavas and Shaivas. It even survived the decline of Roman trade by shifting its activities towards southeast Asia. By sixth century Mamallapuram emerged as an outlet for trade, while Mayilai was another trading outlet.
The Tondainadu (Tondaimandalam) in the pre-Chola period was dominated by the Pallavas. The region largely comprised of the Arni and Kortallaiyar and Palar-Cheyyar-Veghavati rivers. In the Sangam period the region is recorded as constituted of twenty-four kottams (a region where dispersed agriculture and pastoralism was dominant). These kottams got integrated through brahmadeya grants under the Pallavas marked the beginning of early medieval urbanisation in the region. Temples turned agricultural settlements into ‘surplus-oriented’ (ur) ‘grouped into nadus within the kottams’ (Champakalakshami, 1996: 375). The process continued till the Chola period. Champakalakshami has identified that these developments occurred into three phases: In the first phase (seventh-eighth centuries) brahmadeyas served as ‘chief integrative force’ resulting in agrarian expansion in the Palar-Cheyyar valleys accompanied by massive irrigation works (tataka [reservoir] and eri [lake]). In the second phase temples (ninth-tenth centuries) assumed supreme position. In this period brahmadeyas extended in six kottams resulting in the emergence of urban activities in the region in the second half of the ninth century. This phase is also marked by massive irrigation projects under the Pallavas and later under the Cholas. By mid-tenth century almost every kottam had new irrigation works managed extensively (repairs, sluices, waste weirs and channels, etc.) by variyams (committees). The reported seventy-two nadus had at least one important irrigation source each. In the third phase i.e. the eleventh century when the process reached its zenith. Rajaraja I (985-1016) and Rajendra I (1016-1044) created wide agricultural hinterland for Kanchipuram in the river valleys. By twelfth century the entire Palar-Cheyyar valleys formed hinterland for Kanchipuram. Champakalakshami (1996: 376) argues that ‘the brahmadeya and the temple may be seen as harbingers of advance farming methods such as irrigation technology and seasonal regulation of the cultivation process through proper management of resources.’

With brahmadeyas emerged brahmana, velala (non-brahmana) and occupational service groups. The agrarian expansion further expanded the exchange network in the nadus and the revival of trade in the ninth century led to rise of nagarattar (trading community) controlling the local and intra-regional trade. ‘Puranic religion and the bhakti cult provided the ideological premises and the institutional means, i.e. the temple, to create effective space – rural and urban…’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 378).

In the Tondainadu these brahmadeyas and temples by tenth-eleventh centuries emerged as urban nuclei. However, this was largely the ‘royal creation’. Brahmadeyas were organised in tan-kuru (separate revenue units; later as tani-ur [independent units]) which were equivalent to valanadu of the Cholanadu and were ‘supreme example of rural-urban continuum’. During the tenth-twelfth centuries tan-kuru expanded in size. Under the Cholas ‘nadu affiliation ceased to operate and their kottam location alone is mentioned ‘…as an act of deliberate royal policy’. The markets (nagaram) developed within these taniyurs and ‘direct links established with the king’s government’. Interestingly, ‘temples in the taniyur were invariably royal foundations’ (Champakalakshami, 1996: 378-379). Such was the royal control that even the markets (perangadi and angadi) and quarters (cheri) demarcated for the elites were named after the royal members (Madurantakam) or patron deity (Uttaramerur). The perangadi and angadi located at central points were connected with nagaram, managaram, and royal centres. Even major craft production centres were attached to it as devadanams.

With the agrarian integration of the Tondainadu in the Pallava and the Chola periods through brahmadeya and devadana its population which was initially confined to Eyil Kottam, by mid-thirteenth century expanded to what is presently Kanchipuram town. In its confines it had sixty devadana villages and several brahmadeyas with fourteen kottams and eighteen nadus serving as agricultural hinterlands. The largest share was
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with Varadarajaswami Vishnu temple in Attiyur. Kanchipuram was connected through nagaram networks where through brahmadeyas and devadanas ritual requirements (paddy, etc.) were supplied to Kanchipuram. Temple funds were used for rural and urban crafts. Soon Kanchipuram emerged as leading weaving centre. By thirteenth century hinterland further expanded to south Karnataka in the Hoysala territories where one finds several gavundas and pradhana mudalis (rich landlords) of the Idai nadu gifted cardamom to Varadaraja temple. By 9th century Kanchipuram enjoyed prestige of mahanagarattar ‘as executor of royal orders and managers of temples’ (Champakalakshami, 1996:391).

Under the Cholas, though Kanchipuram relegated to second position but it continued to remain commercially strong and as a prominent textile production centre. The weavers and merchants thronged the city. The city had four weavers’ quarters associated with Urgam temple. The managarattar of Kanchipuram was strong and powerful and involved in large scale transactions and gifts made to the temples in the early and mid Chola periods. The city was thronged by itinerant trading organisations like Nanadesi or Tisai Ayirattu Aimmuruvar (eleventh-twelfth centuries). It soon emerged as headquarter of the Vaniya nagaram. The weaving industry got further boost in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries under the later Cholas and Telugu Cholas with the movement of Nellur (Andhra) and Kerala traders and merchants in the region. Kanchipuram thus emerged prominent centre in South India where merchants brought horses, spices and other commodities in exchange for textiles (Champakalakshami, 1996: 394).

Though, Kanchipuram also derived its strength as chief seat of power in the Tondaimandalam under the Pallavas; under the Cholas it relegated to secondary capital, it also served as military base under the Cholas during Chola-Rashtrakuta (tenth century) and Chola-Chalukya conflicts (eleventh-twelfth centuries). Even the entire temple
accounts of the Tondaimandalam were audited from Kanchipuram (Champakalakshami, 1996: 395).

Kanchipuram emerged as multi-temple centre with affiliation with more than one religious tradition. It was the major centre for both the Vaishnavites and the Shaivites. Among the Vaishnavas it was Poygai Alvar and among the Shaivas it was Appar bhakti cults which were prominent in the region. The Pallavas outlined the Puranic (brahmanical) viewpoint and accordingly constructed dravida style temples at Kanchipuram and Mamallapuram. The Cholas revitalised the bhakti ideology. Under their patronage Periya Purana was composed in the eleventh-twelfth centuries. They not only consolidated temples by granting devadana and creating brahmadeyas but also renovated the old shrines as well as constructed the new ones. The great Vaishnava Ramanuja formulated his philosophy of vishishta advaitavada and founded Sri Vaishnava religion here. However, later on the centre shifted to Srirangam. Cholas, however, patronised Shaivas and during the early medieval period a number of Shaiva mathas emerge in Kanchipuram. Shankara, the propounder of advaita philosophy established the Sakta-Pith (Kamakshi temple). Thus during the early medieval period Kanchipuram emerged as prominent multi-cult urban centre. Commenting on the importance of Kanchipuram Champakalakshmi (1996: 398) remarks:

…the growth of Kanchipuram into a multi-temple complex…its role as a centre of cultural creativity, especially art, religion, and literature, Kanchipuram surpassed all other medieval cities of South India. Its continuous importance as a prime mover in the ideological shifts, cultural changes and the reorganization or restructuring of the Tamil society and patterns of patronage, was not shared even by Madurai, which was the Tamil city par excellence in the early historical period.

## 19.5 CASE STUDY: TANJAVUR

Cholas pursued bhakti ideology through temple building, consolidating hymns of the saints in the form of Periya Purana (under Kulotunga II) which heightened in the form of inclusion of Chola royal members among the sixty-three nayanars. The temple city of Tanjavur (so also Gangaikondacholapuram) emerged as the ‘ceremonial centre’ ‘entirely by the political will of the Cholas’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 424-425).

Tanjavur (Tanjai of the Chola inscriptions) was initially a kurram (collection of rural settlements) controlled by Muttaraiyars. It came under Chola sway under Vijayalaya (mid-ninth century) who built Nisumbasudhani temple. However, it was under Rajaraja I’s (985-1016) patronage with the building of Rajarajeshwar (Brihadeshwara) temple that the town really grew and expanded. The strategic location of the place, for being situated at the mouth of the Kaveri delta was used to protect the resource base as well as to provide ideological base for the Cholas along with Gangaikondacholapuram in the delta region.

Champakalakshmi argues that the temple thus created symbolised the cosmic order:

The cosmic symbolism of the Tanjavur temple, as revealed by its designation ‘Daksinameru’ (the southern Meru as the axis of the universe) and that of its lord as ‘Daksinameruvitankar’, also extended to the city as the centre of the territorial authority of the Colas [Cholas]. This is further supported by the ritual consecration, along with that of the main shrine, also of the shrines of the regents of the eight quarters (astadikpalas), viz. Indra, Agni, Yama, Nirrti, Varuna, Vayu, Soma, and Isanan, situated at the cardinal points…the Rajesvara temple was the central ceremonial complex dominating the city and was carefully engineered to align the city with cosmic structures and forces. One may see here the impact of the bhakti ideology, which assisted in the process of enhancing the power of both the divine and human sovereigns through the symbolism of the cosmos/temple/territory. The
It was a planned city and was the result of the ‘deliberate act’ of the royalty. The whole temple complex was ‘laid out and designed simultaneously’ as ‘single dominant ceremonial complex’. The Tripurantaka form (portrait of the king/deity as warrior) of Shiva symbolise ‘the king’s conscious assimilation of the divine and the royal roles’. Thus ‘ritual elements in C[h]ola polity, political and ritual sovereignty coincided, and the divine and the temporal realms were conterminous’ (Champakalakshami, 1996: 430, 432). Even the Chola rulers set up the images of their ancestors as sacred body (tirumeni). Kundavai set up image of her father Ponmalinaittunjinadevar (Sundara Chola) and his queen. Thus Chola kings almost identified themselves with divinity. Similarly, the temple imitated the royal court. Champakalakshami remarks, ‘The Srikaryam (the chief manager) of the temple had comparable functions to discharge…like the king, the temple images also had army groups separately assigned to them. The role of C[h]andes[h]vara as the mulabhrtya looking after the accounts of the temple, assigning revenues, investing through deposits, receiving paddy and other forms of interest and ritual requirements, would also indicate an imitation of the royal court. It would even appear that here the king himself acts through C[h]andes[h]vara’ (Champakalakshmi, 1996: 435-436).

The economic outreach of the temple was almost the whole Chola kingdom. It received revenue grants of villages not only from Cholamandalam but also from Jayankondacholamandalam, Gangapadi, Nulambapadi, Malainadu, Pandinadu, and Ilamandalam. Even the temple received paddy, money and oil for burning lamps from as far as Sri Lanka.

The town of Tanjavur, with temple at the centre, was divided into two parts – ullalai (inner core around the temple) and the purambadi – the outer circuit consisted of the
residences of the priestly class and elites, living quarters of the professional groups and palace servants (velams), and the royal retinues. Each quarter was named after the king and other members of the royal family. Chola kings brought musicians, dance masters, drummers, tailors, braziers, goldsmiths, astrologers, etc. from different parts of the empire. Even brahmans as temple servants and accountants were brought to Tanjavur from distant places. The rural hinterland supplied the temples general ritual services including milk. Tanjavur developed into a huge market centre that operated through four angadis and nagarattar and itinerant merchants (Kongavalar).

19.6 CASE STUDY: SRIRANGAM

The city of Srirangam developed as ‘sacred centre’ around ‘a single cult (tirtha)’. It is seven kilometers from Tiruchirapalli, falls into marutam (wet lands along the rivers) zone and situated along the Kaveri and Kollidam rivers. It owed its emergence largely to its presiding deity Ranganathasvami temple of Vishnu of the Srivaishnavas. In the late Sangam literature Srirangam is referred to as Turutti, a centre of Mayon worship with no association of a shrine. However, with bhakti the idea of shrine and pilgrimage got associated with the sacred space. Thus occurred fusion of local (Tamil) and epic-Puranic tradition and Mayon got identified with Vishnu.

Ranganathaswami Temple Complex, Srirangam
Photo by Patrick MICHAUD, March, 2012
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c4/Panorama_Temple_Ranganatha-Swami.jpg

The region situated on the confluence of rivers/wet lands had all the potential to emerge as prominent urban centre. However, till Sangam age Kanchipuram and Tirupati claimed all the antiquity as pilgrimage shrines and one does not find any reference to structural shrine in the region. It is the bhakti that actually brought the region into the fore. In the sixth century two-pronged urban growth was visible: first urbanisation got stimulus as a result of expanding hinterland which integrated new peasant settlements and resulted into the peasantisation of the tribal population; second, emergence of new state systems – Pallavas of Kanchi in the north, Pandayyas of Madurai in south, Cheras in the southwest and the Cholas in the Kaveri valley. These states consolidated themselves through nadus and sought legitimisation through newly created network of brahmadeyas and by patronising temples as a result of royal initiatives. The body of the temple, the sabha, regulated the temple negotiated gifts and donations and was involved in frequent economic transactions like exchange of paddy and gold. Both the temple and brahmadeyas integrated varied peasant and tribal groups into the broad varna-jati structure and temple as centre of sacred activities. The bhakti made Vishnu accessible to everyone irrespective of caste hierarchy. This not only broadened the base of the sacred shrine at Srirangam, but also ‘strengthened the redistributive economy and led to the growth of the town’ (Datta, 2015: 466). In the hymns of later alvars (9-10th century) Srirangam with focus on Ranganathasvami temple emerged as centre of religious activities in the Cholamandalam. Bhakti at the same time challenged the brahmanical dominance as well as brought the dominance of Tamil over Sanskrit. Srivaishnava bhakti rejected
By 11th century ‘economy based on circulation and redistribution’ gained currency (Datta, 2015: 467). One finds donors as far as Tanjavur, Malainadu and Nammalnadu, also from the region of Pandyanadu especially from Tamrapani river valley zone, making donation to the shrine. The pastoral groups made donations of cows for milk and ghee. One also finds proliferation of brahmadeyas in the Sasanamangalam, Uttamasilacaturvedimangalam, and Nandivarmangalam, purchase of lands by the temple, particularly from Pallavarayan and the sale of temple lands all facilitated broadening the base of the agrarian hinterland. One even finds restructuring of the existing brahmadeyas and creating them anew. These newly created brahmadeyas interestingly have political overtones and suggest to have been created to establish Pandayan political control, being named after Pandayan rulers – Kaliyugaramacaturvedimangalam, Kondandramachaturvedimangalam, Ravivarmacaturvedimangalam by Jatavarman Sundar Pandya (c. 1251). Temple also received royal patronages. The queen of Chola King Kulottunga I (1070-1122) made liberal land grants to the temple. Even similar grants were made by Kakatiyas, Gajapatis and the Vijayanagara rulers to Srirangam temple clearly suggestive of the exploitation of the temple space by the rulers to legitimise their political power. The ritual structure of the Srivaishnava temple also got further consolidated. One finds for the first time the presence of Srikaryam (temple executives) involved into temple administration like construction of platforms for flags; negotiating gifts; settlements of arrears. Even temple rituals became more elaborate – recitation of Vedas, celebration of Panguni-Uttiram and Tirumanjanam (sacred bath of the deity). Under the Pandayas a change occurred in the official machinery. Apart from the brahmanas even non-brahmanas were included. Land grants were made largely for the purpose of flower gardens, performing rituals and celebrating festivals. Often temple grants were leased out to peasants (kammis) for paddy cultivation. Their resource base was largely agro-pastoralist. Even the social base of the Srivaishnava temple got widened. Kons (shepherd community) are reported to have provided ghee to the temple. ‘Besides peasants, various categories of chiefs, artisans and craftsmen were incorporated through ritual ranking within the temple… [generating] economic activities of diverse nature that eventually became the basis of urbanization’ (Datta, 2016: 471). To add to this, from twelfth century onwards there was frequent migration from dry upland areas of the Deccan and deltaic region further exhausted the resources that resulted in population pressure in the region. It was in this context that Srirangam got the attraction for being well suited for agrarian expansion. These linkages of religio-economic activities and the expansion of agrarian hinterlands through brahmadeyas resulted in urbanisation in the region to a large extent. By fourteenth century Srirangam emerged as a prominent centre of the Srivaishnavas, used for political legitimisation. One finds frequent grants, gifts and donations of the merchants made to the temple from far off places – horse dealers (kudiricettis) of Malaimandalam were the chief donors along with kaikkolas (weavers) and the Paradesi-savasi (itinerant traders).
19.7 SUMMARY

The emergence of temple towns in the Tamilakam region was the unique phenomenon. Temples not only served as instruments of political legitimation but also created a huge hinterland and resource base to emerge as prominent urban centres. Temple towns, so named for in a region ‘temple’ became the source of economic activities; emerged as biggest generator of demands and facilitated trade and commerce. This phase is marked by the emergence of bhakti in the region which facilitated the construction and spread of Vishnu and Shaiva shrines (vimana) and mathas/tirthas. These temple towns so developed were either a single cult centres (Srirangam) or at times were also multi-cult centres (Kanchipuram); some of them developed as a result of a deliberate act, by the political will as ‘ceremonial’ cities (Tanjavur). Nadu, periyanadu, nagaram, managaram, erirappattinam, nagarattar and merchant organisations (guilds – Ayyavole, Manigramam, etc.) contributed and facilitated significantly to the emergence of these towns in the Tamilakam.

19.8 EXERCISES

1) Discuss the emergence of temple towns in the Tamilakam region.

2) Critically examine the characteristics of the temple towns in the Peninsular India.

3) Discuss various types of temple towns that emerged in the Tamilakam region with examples and characteristics.

4) How did brahmadeya and devadana grants facilitate the emergence of temple towns in the Tamilakam region?

5) In what ways bhakti was instrumental in the emergence of temple towns in the early medieval period in South India?

6) ‘Tanjavur emerged as the chief ‘ceremonial’ centre by the political will of the Cholas.’ Comment.

7) What are the characteristics of multi-deity temple towns? Illustrate with examples.

8) Trace the development of Kanchipuram as prime multi-temple town.

9) ‘Srirangam developed as ‘sacred’ town around a ‘single’ cult.’ Illustrate its characteristic development pattern on the basis of a ‘single cult’ temple town.

19.9 REFERENCES


