



THE LOCATION AND REGIONAL BACKGROUND OF ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Annamalai University is located in Chidambaram near Annamalai nagar . This manuscript is described economic background, educational background, religious background, cultural background, political background, University campus area, topography of university etc, Annamalai University is located in Annamalai nagar Township adjacent to the ancient town of Chidambaram. This town, located in north latitude 11, 24" and east longitude 79, 44", is a pilgrim town which boasts of the famous temple dedicated to Lord Nataraja, the cosmic dancer. Today the town's claim to fame rests on: 1. The dance of Lord Siva, 2. Presence of Annamalai University by the munificence of Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the first Founder Pro-Chancellor of Annamalai University, and 3. The work of Swami Sahajananda as represented by Nandanar schools. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Chidambaram became a municipality and taluk head quarters. This taluk is presently one among the eight taluks of Cuddalore District (known earlier as South Arcot district) of Tamil Nadu state in India.

KEYWORDS: *Economic background, Annamalai University campus area, Topography of University.*

INTRODUCTION

Annamalai University is located in Annamalai nagar Township adjacent to the ancient town of Chidambaram. This town, located in north latitude 11, 24" and east longitude 79, 44",¹ is a pilgrim town which boasts of the famous temple dedicated to Lord Nataraja, the cosmic dancer. Today the town's claim to fame rests on: 1. The dance of Lord Siva, 2. Presence of Annamalai University by the munificence of Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, the first Founder Pro-Chancellor of Annamalai University, and 3. The work of Swami Sahajananda as represented by Nandanar schools. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Chidambaram became a municipality and taluk head quarters.² This taluk is presently one among the eight taluks of Cuddalore District (known earlier as South Arcot district) of Tamil Nadu state in the Indian Union.

The Tamil Nadu state has a long coastal area, facing the Bay of Bengal. Cuddalore, a town and headquarters of a district, is located in the coastal area. This district has a coastal area of 10,899 sq km.³ Cuddalore is located fifty kilometers to the north of Chidambaram town. Chidambaram taluk lies in the south east corner of the district on the shore of Bay of Bengal and is bounded in the north by the Cuddalore taluk, in the east by the Bay of Bengal, in the south by Sirkazhi taluk and in the west by Kattumannarkoil taluk. The town of Chidambaram is located 245 km, to the south of Chennai, the capital of the state of Tamil Nadu. The river Coleroon, a branch of river Cauvery also known as Kollidam, flows on the southern side of Chidambaram town. Another famous historical town Sirkazhi, the birthplace of Saint Gnanasambandar,⁴ one of the Nayanmars, is situated on the other side of Kollidam, 15 km from Chidambaram town in the south. The village Marudur, the birth place of Saint Ramalingar, the Founder of the



Sanmarga movement, is located north west of Chidambaram. The head quarters of the Suddha Sanmarga, the holy town Vadalure, is located forty km from Chidambaram town in the same direction. A great tank erected by a Chola ruler, the Veeranam tank connected by Cauvery and Vellar rivers, is located on the western side of Chidambaram.⁵ The canals branching out from Veeranam tank⁶ irrigate the lands of Kattumannarkoil and Chidambaram taluks. A branch of Coleroon finally joins Bay of Bengal near Porto-Nova 50 km north east of Chidambaram and 12 km south of Porto-Nova. Pichavaram famous for its mangrove forests is located 10 km east of Chidambaram. Chidambaram taluk is a plain; there are no mountain ranges in this taluk, the land area comes under the category of Marutham and Neythal as per the classification of ancient Tamil Sangam literary works.

This taluk resembles the delta taluk of Thanjavur district, the granary of Tamil Nadu. It has a heavier rainfall than the other taluks. The annual average rainfall in Chidambaram taluk is 51.82 inches and the number of rain days is 54.3 days.⁷ It is a level plain sloping gently to the sea mostly covered with black alluvial soil. Nearly the whole of this alluvial area is one great paddy swamp. The major type of soils in the Chidambaram taluk are black soil, red soil and araneous soil constituting 75%, 14% and 11% respectively.⁸ As per the census of 1941, Chidambaram taluk had a population of 3,89,002⁹ and extended to an area of 505 square km. Seventy per cent of the people depended on agriculture. The density of population in the Chidambaram taluk was high being 900 to 1000 persons per square mile which was the highest in the state.¹⁰

1. Economic Background

Agriculture is the main occupation in this region. Fishing is carried out in the sea shore area and inland fishing is seasonal. The oldest factory in the district, the Nellikuppam sugar factory, started by "Parry and Co" has been in existence from the middle of the nineteenth century.¹¹ Only after Independence (1947), a Sugar factory was established at Sethiathope in Chidambaram taluk. Another important establishment is the Neyveli Lignite Corporation located in Cuddalore district. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, laid the foundation stone for the mining industry in 1950's.¹² Apart from this no other major industrial establishment is located in the South Arcot district. However, a number of manufacturing units have come up in the SIPCOT complex near Cuddalore.

Paddy is the major crop in the Chidambaram taluk, where it occupies about 70 per cent of the area (including 63 per cent under the Coleroon).¹³ This is because of the taluk's excellent irrigation facilities, through the anicut across the Coleroon and the Sethiathope anicut on the Vellar river. Land under the lower anicut irrigation can be irrigated earlier than other areas because of the freshes in the Coleroon following the rain in the western Ghats with the onset of the south west monsoon.

The Major crops of the Chidambaram region are paddy, sugarcane, groundnut, ragi and cumbu.¹⁴ They are grown in large areas both under dry and irrigated conditions.

Transport: In 1850, the first trunk road was laid from Madras through Tindivanam, Villupuram, Ulundurpet and Toludur upto Tiruchirappalli.¹⁵ In 1852, the East India company sanctioned the building of a road from the port of Cuddalore to Salem.¹⁶ In 1854, 400 miles of road were laid or improved. Thus transport became more continuous and steady. Almost all the major towns of the district got connected with one another well before the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁷

Railways: The district is well served by the Railways. The meter gauge railway traverses the district from north to south and from east to west. The main line of this system stretches from Madras in the North to Trichy in the South through Tindivanam, Villupuram, Chidambaram, Mayiladuthurai, Kumbakonam and Thanjavur. The stretch from Madras to Tindivanam was opened in 1876,¹⁸ extended to Porto – Nova in 1877, to Chidambaram in 1878 and to the Coleroon bridge in 1879.¹⁹ Chidambaram town is connected by the main line which connects Chennai in the north and Karaikudi in Chettinad in the south.

2. Educational Background

The region comprising the erstwhile South Arcot district is notable for ancient centres of learning. The Jain pallis had flourished at Thirupathiripuliyur²⁰ during the Kalabhra and Pallava rule. The holy town

Chidambaram was also famous as an important centre of learning in ancient and medieval times. A library with palm leaf manuscripts was located in the temple premises itself. Also, it is estimated that there were then about 700²¹ religious mutts, mostly saivite, which had indulged in the noble task of imparting education. Even today, at the beginning of the 21st century, about sixty mutts²² are still active in Chidambaram town. Swami Sahajananda established Nandanar mutt in the twentieth century.²³ These mutts, apart from taking care of the pilgrims, who throng from various parts of the sub-continent, are doing a great service for the preservation, propagation and promotion of traditional religious literature, most of them being in Tamil language. A good number of disciples are being trained in this. Hundreds of palm leaf records and several copper plates have been preserved in these mutts for the benefit of posterity. When English education gained importance for employment, the need for establishing schools was felt. The English encouraged private sector to use all the resources for promoting education. The wealth of Pachaiyappa Mudaliar, who lived in the fag end of eighteenth century (1754 - 1794), was brought under a trust, in his name by the native and English efforts. This trust which came into being in 1841²⁴ established choultries, schools in important towns and pilgrim centres all over the Presidency. By the effort of this trust, in 1862 a middle school was started in the town of Chidambaram.²⁵ This school developed into a higher secondary school later. In 1915, Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar's elder brother Dewan Bahadur Ramaswami Chettiar established a high school in Chidambaram.²⁶ It also progressed and now functions as a Higher Secondary School in the same place. Swami Sahajananda established a school in 1916 at Chidambaram.²⁷ By his effort, two schools, namely, Nandanar Boys High School and Nandanar Girls High School came into existence. Today both the schools are functioning as Higher Secondary schools and are located in the same campus.

GROWTH OF COLLEGIATE EDUCATION

The first College in the South Arcot district was established in 1879, and this was a result of the upgrading of the Higher to Zilla school functioning in Cuddalore taluk.²⁸ When it became very popular, this school was upgraded into a Second Grade College and was called Town College but its life was very short. In 1886, another College came to be opened at Cuddalore by the Roman Catholic Missionaries²⁹ (St Joseph's College). This College existed for a short period as the sole College in the district.

As the Colleges established in this district in the nineteenth century failed to survive, there was no College in this district at the beginning of the twentieth century. Only in 1920 Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar established Meenakshi Second Grade College at Chidambaram.³⁰ In 1922 this was raised to the status of First Grade College in Chidambaram.³¹ Later this College grew up and blossomed as Annamalai University.

3. Social Background

The social background of the people of Chidambaram taluk corresponds to their religious background and is on caste lines.³² The Sanskrit version of the Varuna system is not followed or adhered to totally whereas it was represented by first and last varuna that is Brahmin, Sudra and the Avarna respectively. The Vaishyas were small in number like Brahmins. No trace of Kshatriya varuna is found. Vanniyars, a Sudra caste, styles itself as Vanniyakulakshatriyas. The Avarnas, namely Panchamas, were divided into three major castes namely Parayars, Pallars and Chakkiliyars. Members of this caste group suffered very much due to the stigma of untouchability. In the state of Tamil Nadu, this section of Avarnas is named in official records as Adi – Dravidas. Among them the Parayars were dominant and numerically superior in this district as per the Census of 1961.³³ In the official records of the Government of India, they are classified as Scheduled Castes. Constitutional safeguards were provided for their civil liberties in the Constitution of India. On account of their population the nearby taluk Kattumannarkoil is a reserved assembly constituency and Chidambaram is a reserved Parliamentary constituency.³⁴

Malayalees : A section of the population in the district comes under the classification of Scheduled Tribes. They are called Malayalees. They live in Chinna kalvarayan hills. Their population in the district is about 65,000.³⁵ The Government has classified them as Scheduled Tribes

Ambattans and vannans: The Ambattans are the traditional barbers. They are scattered throughout the district by the very nature of their occupation. They are backward both educationally and economically. They form about 1% of the population of the district.³⁶ The Vannans are the traditional washermen. Practically, no village exists without one or two families of Vannans. Socially, they are treated as inferiors in the villages, though there is no objection to their living in caste Hindu habitations. The Adi – Dravidas have their own washermen who go by the name of Puthirai Vannan.

Odders: The Odders are Telugu speaking people. Their main occupation was sinking wells, laying, roads breaking stones etc. They move from place to place in search of work and live in temporary huts erected near the work spot. They are educationally and economically very backward. The Government has classified Ambattans, Vannans and Odders as Most Backward Class.³⁷

Asaris: The Asaris form 2% of the population in the district. They are engaged in their traditional occupation of goldsmithy. The persons who pursue these occupations go under the name of Thattan, Karuman etc. Tamil speaking Asaris are divided into three endogamous sects called the Pandia kammalars, Solia kammalars and Kongu kammalars.³⁸ The Asaris whose mother tongue is Telugu are called Kamsalavadu. This group is very negligible number. The government has classified them as Backward Class.

Kusavans: The Kusavans are traditional mud pot makers. They style themselves as Odayans, Velars and Chettis. They wear sacred thread and claim that they are equal to Vellalas. Every village in the district has a Kusavan family. The Government has classified them as Most Backward Class.

Weaving Castes

Kaikolas: The Kaikolas are the indigenous weavers. Handloom weaving is their traditional occupation. In education, the community is classed as backward. They are mostly non-vegetarians. They constitute 2% of the population in the district.³⁹

Devangas: The Devangas are less numerous in the district than the Kaikolas. They are good weavers. They are divided into two sects, one speaking Telugu and the other, Kannada.⁴⁰ They style themselves as Chettiers. They are educationally backward. The Kaikolas and Devangas are classified as Backward Class.

Fishermen: Sembadavans are the traditional fishermen. They generally do inland fishing. They suffix a caste title of Nattan and Chetti to their names. They are generally backward both educationally and economically. The Government has classified them as Most Backward Class.

Shepherds: Idayars who rear cattle constitute 4% of the population in the district. They style themselves as Konars. Though the traditional occupation of Idayars is tending cattle, they have now taken to agriculture and many of them in the district own lands. They are divided into several endogamous sects and mostly these sects follow Vaishnavite faith. The government has classified them as Backward Class.

Agricultural Castes

Vanniyars: One of the most dominant castes is the Vanniyar caste in the district. They are also called Padayachis. They constitute 32% of the population in the district.⁴¹ Most of them are agricultural labourers and a small proportion of them are land owning agriculturists. The State Government has classified them as Most Backward Class.

Karkatha Vellalars: Another land owning economically dominant caste in the district is the Vellala caste. This caste constitutes 6 % of the population in the district. They are mostly agriculturists. They are also called Pillai. The Government has classified them as a community to compete in open competition category.

Udayars : The Udayars belong to three endogamous sects called Nathamans, Sundarmans and Malaimans. In religious beliefs, they are mostly saivites. Among them some are vegetarians, though the bulk of them are non – vegetarians. In economic status they are a little better than Vanniyars; but in education, they are equally backward. They form about 2 % per cent of the population of the district.⁴² The Government has classified them as Backward Class.

Balijas: The Balijas who style themselves, as Naidus are a scattered community found throughout the district. Some of them in the district are engaged in agriculture, but many of them are petty traders. They are migrants from Andhra Pradesh, a neighboring state.

Kapus: The Kapus are a migrated population. Their mother tongue is Telugu. Probably they moved to this region during the Vijayanagara invasion. They constitute 2 % of the population in the district. The Government has classified the Balijas and Kapus as a community to compete in open competition category.

Merchant castes

Vaniyas: The Vaniyas are also called Chekkars. They extract oil with the help of country chekkus and sell the oil. They are generally backward. They come under the Backward Community.

Aryavysyas: The Aryavysyas otherwise known as Komutti Chettis are found mostly in towns and big villages. Their mother tongue is Telugu. The community is broadly divided into two sects called Gowras and Kalingas. Though the percentage of literacy in this community is very high, few have taken to higher education and entered Government services. The Government has classified them as a community to compete in open competition category.

Brahmins: The Brahmins are the most dynamic of the communities in the district. Their concentration is mostly in towns. Though a few in the community are still engaged in their traditional occupation as priests and purohits, the bulk of them have taken to other services. The Brahmins living in the district belong mostly to the Tamil speaking sect of Smarthas. Some of them are Ayyangars. The Telugu Brahmins and the Kannada speaking Madhwas are also found in appreciable numbers. They form about 1.5% of the population of the district. The Brahmins who perform puja and other rituals in the Lord Nataraja temple are called Dikshitaras. They migrated to this region some one thousand years ago. Now there are three hundred families who manage the affairs of the temple.⁴³ All these above caste groups practice Hindu customs and religion. They are divided religiously as Saivite and Vaishnavite.

Religious minorities

Jains: The Jains of North Indian origin are called Marwadis. Their population is very negligible. They are mainly engaged in pawn brokerage. They live only in towns like Chidambaram and Cuddalore.

Muslims: The Muslims in the district belong to the Tamil speaking sect of Labbais. They are generally orthodox, but their marriage ceremonies and other social customs resemble those followed by the caste Hindus. They form about 2 % of the population in the district.

Christians: They are mostly converts from lower castes. In the economic sphere they have still to advance considerably. They form about 2.8 % of the population in the district.

4. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Man is generally associated with religion and possesses a spiritual bent of mind. Occasionally he is also an atheist. In this taluk, traditionally Saivism and Vaishnavism prevail over the centuries. Whenever a saivite says koil (Temple) he thinks only of Chidambaram and the temple of Lord Nataraja. This temple complex within its enclosure has a temple for Lord Govindaraja. Hence both Saivism and Vaishnavism prevail. However, both the sects had quarrels, litigation etc., in the earlier centuries. The temple of 'Ada – vallan' (Lord Nataraja) attracted Saivite Hindus and others from many parts of the world especially from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore etc. A mutt having connection with Tamil saivites of Sri Lanka is in existence in Chidambaram for the past seven centuries. Over the centuries, many devotees, kings, Saints and ordinary people paid their homage to Lord Nataraja. The Saivite Saints, Appar, Thirugnana Sambandar (7th century AD) and Manikkavasagar (8th century AD) came and sang songs in praise of the Lord.⁴⁴ The deeds of Nayanmars like Saint Nandanar (also known as Thirunallaipovar), Saint Senthonar and Saint Thiru Nilakandar were associated with this temple. Among the twelve Alvars, Thirumangai Alvar and Kulasekara Alvar came to Chidambaram and recited songs in praise of Lord Vishnu.

These Nayanmars and Alvars played an important role in the Bakthi Movement.⁴⁵ This movement in a way brought cohesion in the society, but failed to bring down the tyranny of caste hierarchy. Because of this the Indian society is discussed in terms of its caste components and its interface with religious activity. This caste is 'more pertinent to hereditary groups arranged hierarchically with unequal rights, a separation based on taboos of marriage rule, food and custom, and a resistance to unification with others'.⁴⁶ This social background produced the concept of high and low based on their birth.

Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam

Many reformers attempted to reform the society. The nineteenth century witnessed such socio – religious reform movements both in North India and in South India. The socio – religious and economic condition of the south produced the reformer Saint Ramalinga, also called 'Vallalar', a native of Marudur near Chidambaram.⁴⁷ He was a Saivite Saint and made pilgrimage to Lord Nataraja temple. In 1865 he founded an organization called Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga Sangam⁴⁸ or association for equality and the good way in Vadalore near Cuddalore.

He condemned discrimination on the basis of religion, caste, creed and community and stressed the idea of one human society and one God. He was for love, non–violence and truth and preached Universal brotherhood. One of the important works initiated by him at Vadalore was the distribution of free food to all. Even today the fire he lit in the kitchen is still burning.⁴⁹ This movement attracted a large number of followers in this region. A branch of this organization founded in Chidambaram in that century is still functioning. A substantial number of his followers are spreading the principles of Saint Vallalar. They were non–vegetarian. The followers of this movement supported the freedom struggle. Saint Ramalinga wrote 'Thiru Arutpa'. He faced opposition to this from Arumuga Navalar of Ceylon, who wrote Marutppa. A school in the name of Arumuga Navalar was founded in 1864⁵⁰ and now it functions as a higher secondary school.

In spite of all this, the caste and associated discrimination is strong even today. However, modernization and westernization resulted in creating there major divisions by 1920's in Tamil Nadu. It is applicable to Chidambaram region also. The major divisions were the Brahmins, the Non Brahmins and the Scheduled castes. In spite of all these conditions of the society, like other temples, this temple witnessed the pilgrimage made by rulers, Saints, Madathipathis (religious pontiffs), leaders of the society, noblemen, merchants, philanthropists etc., all through the centuries.

Other Temples

There are many temples near Lord Nataraja temple within a radius of one km they are 1. Elamai nayanar and Anantheeswarar temples on the western side, Thillai Kali temple on the northern side and Kilatheru Mariamman temple on the eastern side of the Lord Nataraja temple. Hence the entire growth of Chidambaram town is associated in a way with these temples.

The total number of the temples spread all over the district and under the control of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board of the Government of Tamil Nadu are 797.⁵¹ The break up is as follows: Siva temples 263, Vishnu temples 190, Murugan temples 33, village goddesses 147 and other temples 164.

In Chidambaram taluk itself 159 temples are located. Out of these 127 temples⁵² come under the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board. Lord Nataraja temple is not under the control of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board. The temple is administered by the Dikhsitars whereas Lord Govindaraja temple is under the control of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board. All these temples received the patronage of rulers, merchants and others. The temple inscriptions reveal the various land grants and other grants given to the temple.

Mosques:The growth of Muslim population in this taluk is traceable from seventeenth century A.D. In Chidambaram town, there are four Mosques. One is located inside the main market. The second one is at the entrance of the Chidambaram town near the temple. The third one also is near the market and the fourth one is on the western side of the town. In the 1970's the Muslims erected a mosque in Annamalainagar township opposite Elai Mariamman temple

Dargas: There are ten Dargas in Chidambaram town. One Darga is located very near the administrative building of the University. This Darga of 'Hasaradha Saiyadha Fathima Beevi Sayaba,⁵³ the woman Sufi, is older than the University. People irrespective of their religion pay their homage in the Darga.

Church :The Protestant Christians from Tharangampadi established a church on the northern side of Chidambaram town probably at the fag end of the nineteenth century. In 1960, a Catholic Church was established on the South eastern side of the Chidambaram town very near the University Campus.

Marvadis: (Jain) have their own shrine very near the Chidambaram main market and it is located on the south western side of the town. This is of recent origin.

5. CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Sir William Jones and others of Asiatic society of the Bengal laid the foundation for the study of Orientalism. Their studies mainly concentrated on Sanskrit and North India. However, they neglected the knowledge recorded in Tamil language. It was Father Caldwell, who laboured hard to highlight the deeds of the Tamils. V.A. Smith also realized that the history of India has to begin from the South. By the end of nineteenth century A.D., more and more works of Tamil literature like Thirukkural, Silppathikaram etc., were brought to light in the print media. Now this literature revealed that Tamils of Sangam age divided the land into five thenais and classified the literature as Aham and Puram. Tamil itself is classified as Muthamil (Three kinds of Tamil) Iyal Tamil, Nataka Tamil and Isai Tamil. Muthamil symbolizes one of the two eyes of the Lord Siva and Sanskrit symbolizes the other eye. Lord Siva, who is described as Rudra in Veda, is spoken of in Tamil literature as king of Dancers. His Dance, performed at Chidambaram for his devotees, is known as 'Ananda Thandavam'. The meaning, philosophy associated with the dance of Siva was highlighted and explained by Dr. Kentish Ananda Kumaraswamy to the English knowing people especially to the western world by his work 'the Dance of Shiva'. He published this work in 1870 and this book brought to light the concept of Lord Siva as the Lord who belongs to the south and God of every country.

The temple of Chidambaram, by the grace of Lord Nataraja presents the Muthamil. A Tamil literary work, Periya puranam, recorded the work of Nayanmars. This work was written by Sekkizhar.⁵⁴ According to tradition, this work received its imprimatur here in the Lord Nataraja Temple in the eleventh century AD. Like this many literary pursuits were attempted in this region over the centuries. All these come under Iyal Tamil. The Dance of Shiva stands for Nataka Tamil. The Tamil Music, which had its hoary past, had a setback, during the 14th and 15th centuries AD. In the 16th century Muthuthandavar (1560 - 1640) Sirkazhi came to Chidambaram daily and recited Kirthanas in praise of Lord Nataraja.⁵⁵ He never sang songs on any other God. He is the first of the Trinity of Tamil music. Because of his efforts Tamil music had a revival. What we call Carnatic music is actually Tamil music only. Only the language is not Tamil in Carnatic music. All this shows the sway of Muthamil in this part of the country. To revive the cultural scenario of the town, for the past two decades in the month of February a 'Dance festival' under the title 'Natyanjali'⁵⁶ is organized in the temple. Every Bharatha Natyam Dancer has a wish to perform in the temple complex. Music concerts and discourses are organized in the temple complex frequently in the evenings.

6. POLITICAL CONDITION

The history of Chidambaram can be traced from ancient times. According to Periyapuram, the Chola King, Kochenganan of Sangam age ruled this place.⁵⁷ Lord Nataraja is the Kuladeivam (family deity) of the Chola rulers. There was a dark age in the history of Tamilagam. It was called Kalabhara inter regnum. The Sthalapuram of the Lord Nataraja temple gives a clue for the Kalabhara rule. It mentions about one Kutruva Nayanmar, a Kalabhara ruler who ruled this region. After this the region was under the later Cholas (800 – 1200

AD). Later Koperunchengan of Kadavarayan brought this region under his sway in 1237 A.D. In the inscriptions of the Chola rulers, this place is recorded as Rajathi Raja Vala Nadu ‘Thaniur’ Perum parru puliyur (uh\$hpj uh\$ tsehl;Lj; jdpā{h; bgUk; ghw;W g[ypa{h;)/⁵⁸ Actually, Chidambaram had many names like Thillai, Perumparru puliyur etc. The word ‘thaniur’ indicates the unit of Chola administration as a separate “ur” i.e., town. Still later the Pandyas brought this region under their sway in 1251 AD. The region also witnessed the Muslim invasion followed by Vijayanagara expansion. Vijayanagara rulers brought this region under their control by 1428.⁵⁹ They were succeeded by Nayaks of Madurai, Senji Nayaks (1520) and the Marathas of Thanjavur (1684). In 1780 Sir Hyer Coote of the English East India company kept a garrison in the temple, while waging a war against the Mysore forces (Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan). Finally the region passed from the hands of Nawabs of Arcot to the English East India company. When India came under the crown in 1858, developments in transport, education began in the region under the British. By the beginning of the nineteenth century Chidambaram became a part of the district of South Arcot in Madras Presidency and Chidambaram became a Municipality in 1871.⁶⁰

The region slowly gained political consciousness after the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics in 1920’s. The Non-Brahmin movement as represented by the Justice party held its sway in the municipal elections. One P. Venugopal Pillai dominated the entire politics of the town by using his power and wealth. By 1935, the Congress emerged powerful in the municipal elections. Apart from this, the communists and followers of Dravida Kazhagam of E.V. Ramaswami Periyar were a force in this region. The Dravida Kazhagam being a party interested in social reform and self respect preaches atheism. It never contests elections. This town has a branch of the Dravida Kazhagam party. A number of ardent followers follow the ideals of Periyar. A section of students of the University also participated in the freedom struggle from the inception of the University till attainment of Indian freedom.⁶¹ Similarly, a section of students, under the leadership of a student leader Balathandayutham laid foundation for communist movement.⁶² In this region from 1950, the communist party of India has a strong base in the agricultural sector. This party always fights for the rights of agricultural labourers. In spite of this base; this party has failed to make any considerable political gain. Only the Congress party had a majority vote bank upto 1959. The Founder of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, C.N Annadurai, willingly avoided nomination of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party candidate in a contest in electoral constituency against Swami Sahajananda who represented Congress in the region at that time. Later, either the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam or Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam wins elections in the region. At present (1998) the Chidambaram parliamentary Constituency has 10,54,046 voters on the electoral rolls.

7. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS AREA

Presently the University area comes under Annamalainagar Town Panchayat. Annamalainagar has a past which can be understood from place names and historical data. Two important places which come under the University area are 1. Korravankudi and 2. Thiruvetkalam. These places assume importance on account of Umapathi Sivachariyar, who came out from the temple complex of Chidambaram and spent the rest of his life at Korravankudi.⁶³ The Engineering faculty is now located in this area only. Adjacent to the administration block of the University lies the Mausoleum of ‘Hazrad Saiyadha Fathima Beevi Sayaba’, popularly known as Poomakoil.

a. Selection of Land

The first Founder Pro-Chancellor of the University, Dr.Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, displayed his vision and foresight in the selection of the land for the erection of buildings for Sri Meenakshi College, Chidambaram. He stayed in Chidambaram and prayed to Lord Nataraja everyday for the success of his endeavour. It is said that in the beginning he had thought of buying land on the western side of Chidambaram Railway station. On a particular day, with this thought seriously in mind, he went to Thiruvetkalam temple. This temple had been renovated at considerable expense, a few years earlier to the establishment of the College, by Ramaswamy Chettiar, the elder brother of Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar. In the temple he worshipped Lord Pasupatheeswarar

along with a few friends. While coming out after prayers he saw a Garuda bird going round in the sky.⁶⁴ He took this as a good omen and as the desire of Lord Nataraja. Then he took the decision to buy one hundred acres of land to erect buildings for the newly started Meenakshi College.⁶⁵ This land is located on the eastern side of the railway station. Thus this selection of land and performance of poomipuja paved the way for the sprawling University campus.

Heritage of the area

Apart from this episode, there are many other reasons of historical and locational importance. Before the establishment of Sri Meenakshi College and Annamalai University, the locality had earned popularity as a calm village. This heritage is associated with place names, myths and personalities. They were (1) place name (i) Korravankudi and (ii) Thiruvatkalam (2) personalities (i) Umapathi Sivachariyar (ii) Hasaradha Saiyadha Fathima Beevi Sayaba. At present, the University area covers Korravankudi, Thiruvetkalam and Nataraja Puram revenue Villages

i. Fame of Korravankudi: In Tamil language, Korraavan denotes king. Kudi means household. The name Korravankudi hence stands for the residence of the ruler. The Chola rulers on their sojourn from their capital, Thanjavur or Gangaikondacholapuram, when they came to worship Lord Nataraja may have stayed in this place for both pilgrimage and administrative purposes. All this can be a historical derivation about the name Korravankudi. The village name Korravankudi now pronounced as Kothankudi in corrupted form is associated by the people with the abode of the rulers. The administration of Lord Nataraja temple was not with Dikshitaras in the beginning. Only when Umapathi Sivachariyar came out from Lord Nataraja temple, the temple administration came under Dikshitaras. Umapathi Sivachariyar, who left Chidambaram town, had his abode in Korravankudi.⁶⁶ He has contributed much for Saiva Sidhantha. A mutt in his name is located and is functioning even today in this place. (The successors of Sivachariyar played an important role in the propagation and promotion of saivism).

ii. Thiruvetkalam Village There are many legends and myths prevailing in this region, apart from the legends recorded in the Sthalapurana of Lord Nataraja temple. These legends are connected with the deeds of Lord Siva and place names of the local region besides having epic associations. Vetkalam means a hunting ground. Lord Siva as a hunter started to hunt boars in the region. Before his hunt he saw the boars lying and sleeping on the ground. He made them wake up to begin his hunt. The place where he made them wake up is recorded in Tamil as 'Usuppur'. The boars ran from Usuppur to Thiruvetkalam where the Lord hunted them.

Another story associated with Thiruvetkalam is the story of Arjuna of Mahabharata. This legend, associated with Lord Pasupatheeswara of Thiruvetkalam temple, claims that Arjuna did penance here and obtained weapons for war from Lord Siva. Among the Nayanmars, Appar and Thirugnanasambandar came and stayed in Thiruvetkalam.⁶⁷ This temple was a padalperrathalam. In the eighteenth century Saint Arunagirinathar visited this place.

On the outskirts of the village a Sufi woman Saint Hasaradha Saiyadha Fathima Beevi Sayaba lived in the eighteenth century and after her death a Darga was erected upon her mortal remains. This Darga is known in the locality as poomakoil.⁶⁸ Some legends are associated with this Darga. These legends record the peaceful atmosphere surrounded by trees and a well. One of the legends speaks of the presence of reptiles like snakes etc. This legend gave rise to the faith that the woman Saint will protect the people from being bitten by the snakes. In 1791, the Nawab of Arcot gave a land grant of Ten kanis to this Darga as Inam.⁶⁹ Later this inam land was transferred by the Government⁷⁰ to the University. The Founder Pro-Chancellor, Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar, was very particular about the upkeep of the Darga and its surroundings. He was responsible for installing of electric light in the Darga area.⁷¹ Thus the heritage of the area is associated with rulers, Saints, Sivacharis and the Sufi woman Saint.

b. University Land Area: The First Founder Pro-Chancellor Dr. Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar at first purchased one hundred acres of land in the Thiruvetkalam Revenue village in 1920,⁷² to construct buildings for the newly

started Sri Meenakshi College in Chidambaram. When the College blossomed as Annamalai University in 1929. The total area owned by the University was 300 acres and these lands were located in Korravankudi and Thiruvetkalam revenue village of Chidambaram taluk.⁷³ After the establishment of an Engineering College in the University around 1948, the University covered a land area of 554 acres of land. The University authorities also spared a few acres of land to the left side of Chidambaram railway level crossing for Rajah Muthiah Polytechnic in 1959.⁷⁴ Under the able guidance of the second Founder Pro-Chancellor Dr. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar of Chettinad, the University acquired and purchased more land and by 1984 the University had 754 acres of land and covered⁷⁵ the Natarajapuram revenue village also. When the third Founder Pro-Chancellor Dr. M.A.M. Ramaswami succeeded his beloved father to the hereditary office of Pro-Chancellorship in 1985, he initiated further expansion of the University area for the construction of a Hospital in the Natarajapuram revenue village. At present the campus area has one thousand acres of land⁷⁶ under its control facilitating further development and progress.

Topography

The University campus area is in plains and twelve km away from the seashore. Before the establishment of the University, the entire land area was used as cultivable land with a grove around the Poomakoil. A large part of the site then remained as waste land at the disposal of the government. This scenario changed after the foundation of the College and blossoming of the same into a University. The present topography will give an impression about the growth of the University infrastructure. How much the Founder Pro-Chancellor of the University toiled for such a growth can be visualized. In the beginning there was not a good serviceable road, when Sri Meenakshi College was founded in 1920. Only in 1923, a more serviceable road was laid. The condition of the University area was well recorded and known to the people of the region. To quote the record, "The site was infested with serpents, the water snake, Russell's viper, the hooded cobra and snakes of every description. The cobras were all over the place and the labourers, tough as they were, were scared and went about in mortal dread of the reptiles. There was only one thing to do and that was to destroy them. And, destroyed they were but not without a blow being struck in their behalf. For cobras are held sacred and, in fairness to them, it should be said that they generally held aloof. Cobra poisoning in the rare instances in which it occurred, was treated by incantations".⁷⁷

Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar took all efforts to clear the menace of the snake. He gave a reward of two rupees for every cobra that was killed in the campus area. Gradually the menace of the reptiles was brought to an end. Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar took all efforts and because of it, the site of land emerged as an attractive pleasing University area. In this progress, it should be noted that "there was no recorded instance of any one having lost his life as a result of snake – bite".

To reach the University area, one has to alight at Chidambaram Railway station or Bus stand. The University is located on the eastern side of Chidambaram Railway station and Bus stand. Both old buildings of the University and the newly constructed ones are located in the heart of the campus, where the life size statue the first Founder Pro-Chancellor, Dr. Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar is standing majestically in the middle of the statue garden facing the Administrative block known as Sastri Hall (1929) of the University. This block is one of the oldest buildings of the University. It houses a tower clock. In front of the Sastri Hall, there is a garden. This block is connected with Golden Jubilee buildings which houses the examinations sections of the University. Behind the statue the University general library, Sir C.P. Ramaswami Library, is located. This location is called Kumara Rajah Muthiah Avenue. Behind the general library the men students' hostels Malligai, Thendral and Mullai are located⁷⁸. The oldest building of the University, namely, the Sri Meenakshi building at present houses the Dean's offices and the Departments of Sociology and Psychology are located, on the eastern side of the statue separated by a garden known as Sri Meenakshi garden. Opposite to this garden, the Poomakoil is located. Behind it, the Tennis Courts, Indoor Stadium, the department of Physical Education, and play grounds are located adjacent to these, Dr. S.V. Chittibabu road leads to the far end where Rajah Muthiah Institute of Health Sciences building housing the Dental College and hospital is located. In front of this building the life size statue of the second Founder Pro-Chancellor Dr. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar faces the Nataraja

temple. A short distance from here the Iyappa temple is located on the road leading to Pichavaram, which connects Rajah Sir Muthiah Medical College and Hospital. This place is in the revenue village of Natarajapuram. By the side of the hospital a huge fruit garden is maintained by the department of Agriculture, Annamalai University. Behind the Dental College there is a road leading to Rajah Muthiah Medical College and Medical students men's hostel. Behind the entrance to the hospital, a new building houses the medical College library.

East of Poomakoil, a tall building houses the Faculty of Science. Also the Departments of Physics, Chemistry, the Music College and the University Guest house are located here. The Music College functions in an old building. By the side of it a new auditorium stands. One side of this new auditorium has the shape of veena (musical instrument). Next to Music College the Guest house is located. It has more than 40 rooms, dining halls, kitchen, seminar hall, etc. The Guest house has a beautiful garden in front of it. Near the entrance of the Guest house the casket containing the holy ashes of Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar is kept buried under a raised granite platform for veneration. Opposite to the Guest house there is the R.K. Shanmugam Chettiar building housing the education department. West of this building, there is a big building housing the Departments of Zoology, Geology, Population studies, Rural Development and the School of Management. New buildings are coming up, opposite to the Botanical garden which is located on the back side of Sri Meenakshi College buildings. This building has a link to the Oriental building which houses the Departments of Statistics, English and Tamil. Behind this building, the University canteen and Centre for Linguistics buildings are located. By the side of the Linguistics department, the famous Gokhale hall exists in the middle of Suthanthira thina poonga (Independence Day Park). A road separates Gokhala hall and the Commerce Department. By the side of the Commerce Department there is the Yoga centre in a tiled structure. Behind it is the old Pandits' quarters. Opposite to the Linguistics Department, the P.G block is located. It houses the Departments of History and Political Science. By the side of it, a three storied building houses the Department of Philosophy, the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Botany. Opposite to the Commerce Department on the eastern side there is a row of buildings housing the day scholar's resting hall and the National Service Scheme Office and Publication division. Behind it, the Department of Hindi, Annamalai University Staff Co-operative credit society and the Directorate of Distance Education Examinations hall and Directorate of Distance Education Library for science students are located. Adjacent to that in an enclosure the University Hospital outpatient department functions. Opposite to this Medical centre, there is the office of the Annamalai University Retired Teachers Association in a small independent room. There are Private Residential buildings and extension of Annamalainagar Township behind the medical centre.

To the east of the Guest house there is the Annamalainagar post office. It is functioning in a separate building. Next to this, there is a row of old houses, used as Professors' Quarters. Annamalai University Women's Hostel called Thamarai Illam comes next. There is an open air theatre in this area. The road which leads from the post office in the eastern direction takes one to Thiruvetkalam temple and the Agriculture College. This College is one km away from the post office. This Agriculture College of the University covers a span of 100 acres of land and houses the buildings of Agriculture Department, hostel for men students of Agriculture, Agriculture Library etc. Between the Agriculture College and the post office, private residential buildings shops, restaurants and the like are located. This area has three schools catering to the needs of the children of the staff of the University. They are 1. Meenashi primary school 2. Rani Seethai Achi Higher Secondary school and 3. Rani Meyyammai English school.

As one heads to the university campus from the town, one crosses the Railway level crossing and passes by the Directorate of Distance Education building, the University press and the Directorate of Distance Education Seminar hall. The road branches off here, one going towards Pichavaram, via the Medical College and Hospital and the other, towards the University campus. Muthiah Polytechnic campus is located opposite the Directorate of Distanced Education Building. At the junction of the Sivapuri road and the road leading to the University campus, there is a statue erected in honour of one Rajendran who was shot dead in the police firing during the Anti Hindi Agitation in 1965. On the western side of this statue the Faculty of Engineering and students hostels are located. At the end of this road, the research scholars' hostel called Pothigai Illam is located near the south end of the Railway station. This stretch of land houses the buildings of the Faculty of

Engineering and Technology, the Department of Computer Engineering and the Department of Pharmacy buildings. These buildings face the Sivapuri road. On the other side of the road is located the building of Golden Jubilee Engineering students hostel for men. There is a portion of land in the Engineering block, which belongs to Umapathi Sivachariyar mutt and there is encroachment here by private dwellers.

The road on the eastern side of the statue leads to the University main campus. The arch at the entrance to the main campus has a statue of Lord Nataraja on its top. It further leads to a beautiful road flanked by trees. It leads to the statue of the first Founder Pro-Chancellor Dr. Rajah sir Annamalai Chettiar. On the right side of the road, the National Cadet Corps commander Quarters is located followed by a row of residential Quarters and a newly constructed modern bungalow for the Registrar's residence. By the side of it Adinarayanan road leads to Sivapuri Quarters. Further to the Registrar's residence on the same road an enclosure of newly constructed flats in an enclave called Kumara Rajah Muthiah Avenue is located. The road leads to Vice-Chancellor's Lodge followed by water tanks on both sides of the road and at the end of the road, near the tank E3 garden on the left side and lake garden on the right side are located. All these gardens are maintained by the Department of Agriculture, Annamalai University. The water tanks supply water to the University hostels and the Residential Quarters. At the far end on the left side of the road at the entrance of the main University campus, there is the Bachelor Staff Quarters followed by a row of newly constructed flats, which was previously known as Kothangudi quarters. This Road, Ranganathan Road, finally leads to a new women's hostel for Engineering students, called Rose hostel.

The Department of Marine Biology is located in Parangipettai 18 km away from Annamalainagar. This department building is very near to the seashore and occupies more than 10 acres of land. Here the department has two buildings with class rooms, laboratory, staff rooms, and library.

In this connection, it is wise to recall the impression of Hilton Brown, an I.C.S officer, who was both a novelist and a critic, about Annamalainagar, and the University, which he expressed in 1954. To quote Hilton Brown.

"The first impression the visitor to Annamalainagar receives – it was, at any rate, this first impression I personally received – is one of unity. Here, in brick and stone, timber and glass, stands the conception of a single mind. Those who were privileged to know the late Rajah Sir Annamalai Chettiar would agree, I think, that one of his outstanding characteristics was a meticulous thoroughness in plan and in execution; never was there a more devoted adherent to the maxim that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well, or to that other injunction that says, "If you want a thing done right, see to it yourself". His University is a monument to his personality not less than to his resolution. It does not sprawl, it does not peter out. It does not war with itself in clashing forms of incompatible architecture, it is nowhere half – done. It is a complete entity – as solid, square – set and individual as would have been a statue of its founder himself".⁷⁹

"And this physical unity extends itself into other spheres, ... This unity, as closely woven as the pattern and texture of the buildings themselves, would alone make the Annamalai University remarkable. I speak as a visitor only, but visitors see these things".⁸⁰

The establishment of the University, in a way acted as stimulus for Urbanization and changed the topography of Chidambaram. Many new residential localities came up on their own and with the support of the University authorities and staff. A new Nagar called Rajah Muthiah Nagar in reverence to the Second Founder Pro-Chancellor came up in the 1980's. The present Founder Pro-Chancellor Dr.M.A.M. Ramaswamy provided full financial support for the construction of an over head water tank. This supplies drinking water to this Nagar and to nearby Nagars. This Nagar is located on the northern side of the University on the road leads to Pichavaram. Another Nagar, called Kumara Rajah Muthiah Nagar came up in 1990's. It is located on the southern side of the University and the old Pandit quarters and Annamalainagar police station. This nagar was named after the first son of Dr. Rajah Sir Muthiah Chettiar. In 1980's, the University staff formed a Nagar known as AUTA Nagar, in a small area which is located on the Sivapuri road near Sivapuri village.

Apart from this private individuals took interest in real estate and created a nagar in their name. This enterprise in a way helped the University staff, to buy the plot and to raise residential buildings of their own. Some of these nagars are 1. Kanagasabai Nagar, located on the western side of the Railway station in

Chidambaram town. 2. Mariyappa Nagar 3. Govindasamy Nagar located on either side of the Sivapuri Road 4.S. Ranganathan Nagar and 5. Siva Sakthi Nagar located in the southern side of Chidambaram town.

To cater to the residential needs of the University staff, the authorities under the guidance of the third Founder Pro-Chancellor, Dr. M.A.M Ramaswami constructed multistoried flats in Annamalai Nagar for the first time in this area in 1991. The Post and Telegraph department of the Government of India also constructed a few flats for residential purposes at the northern entrance of Chidambaram town. On account of it, in spite of the rural background of the Chidambaram town, slowly flats are coming up since 2000 in the town and its outskirts.

To assess the general impression in the mind of individuals and of the society about the University, one should read the preface to the book authored by K. Nagarajan 'Annamalai University 1929 – 1979: A Short History'. He writes about Jude, an obscure country lad. To quote him

"In Jude the obscure, there is a striking passage which records the hopes and ambitions of Jude, a poor country lad. He loved to learn but had not the means or the opportunity to do so. He had heard of Christminster, a seat of learning in Wessex, to which the teacher he loved had migrated to qualify for the church. One evening he stood on a piece of rising ground and gazed at the domes and spires of Christminster and the picture impressed itself on his mind and on it he dwelt incessantly and told his dreams to the silent night

'It is a city of Light; he observed.

'The Tree of knowledge grows there; he added, a few steps further on.

'It is a place that teachers of men spring from and go to;

'It is what you may call a castle, manned by scholarship and religion;

'It would just suit me".⁸¹

The same feeling is generated in men and women in the region and in far off places who come to pursue studies and to earn a decent living. Such lingering thought the villagers and rural flock carry and bring their wards to this citadel of learning, the Annamalai University, for higher studies.

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