

The Heritage of
**HINDU
TEMPLES**

in Singapore



The Heritage of

HINDU TEMPLES

in Singapore

© Copyright 2013 Aadhi Designs

All rights reserved

Printed in Singapore

Design and layout by

Aadhi Designs

Concept and Photography

P Umasankaran

Content Written and Compiled by

Vanitha Shankar

Supported By

National Heritage Board's Heritage Industry Incentive Programme (Hi²P)



The Appollo Sellappas Pte Ltd

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced
into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978-981-07-3845-7

Contents

Evolution of Temples	8
Origin of Temples in Singapore	10
Growth of Indian Temples in Singapore	11
Sri Mariamman Temple	13
Sri Sivan Temple	17
Sri Thendayuthapani Temple	21
Sri Krishnan Temple	25
Sri Senpaga Vinayagar Temple	29
Sri Srinivasa Perumal Temple	33
Sri Manmatha Karuneshvarar Temple	37
Sri Sivadurga Temple	41
Sri Ruthra Kaliamman Temple	45
Sri Vairavimada Kaliamman Temple	49
Sri Arasakesari Sivan Temple	53
Sri Layan Sithi Vinayagar Temple	57
Sri Vadapathira Kaliamman Temple	61
Darma Muneeswaran Temple	65
Sree Maha Mariamman Temple	69

Contents

Sri Veeramakaliamman Temple	73
Sri Veeramuthu Muneeswarar Temple	77
Sri Muneeswaran Temple	81
Arulmigu Velmurugan Gnanamuneeswarar Temple	85
Arulmigu Murugan Temple	89
Holy Tree Sri Balasubramaniar Temple	93
Sri Siva Krishna Temple	97
Shree Lakshminarayan Temple	101
Murugan Hill Temple	105
Sree Ramar Temple	109
Loyang Tua Pek Kong	113
Significance of Navagrahas	117
Kodimaram	118
Deepam	119
Coconut Breaking	120
Thaipusam	121
Glossary	123
Acknowledgements	127
References	128



Sri Ranganathar S



Evolution of Temples

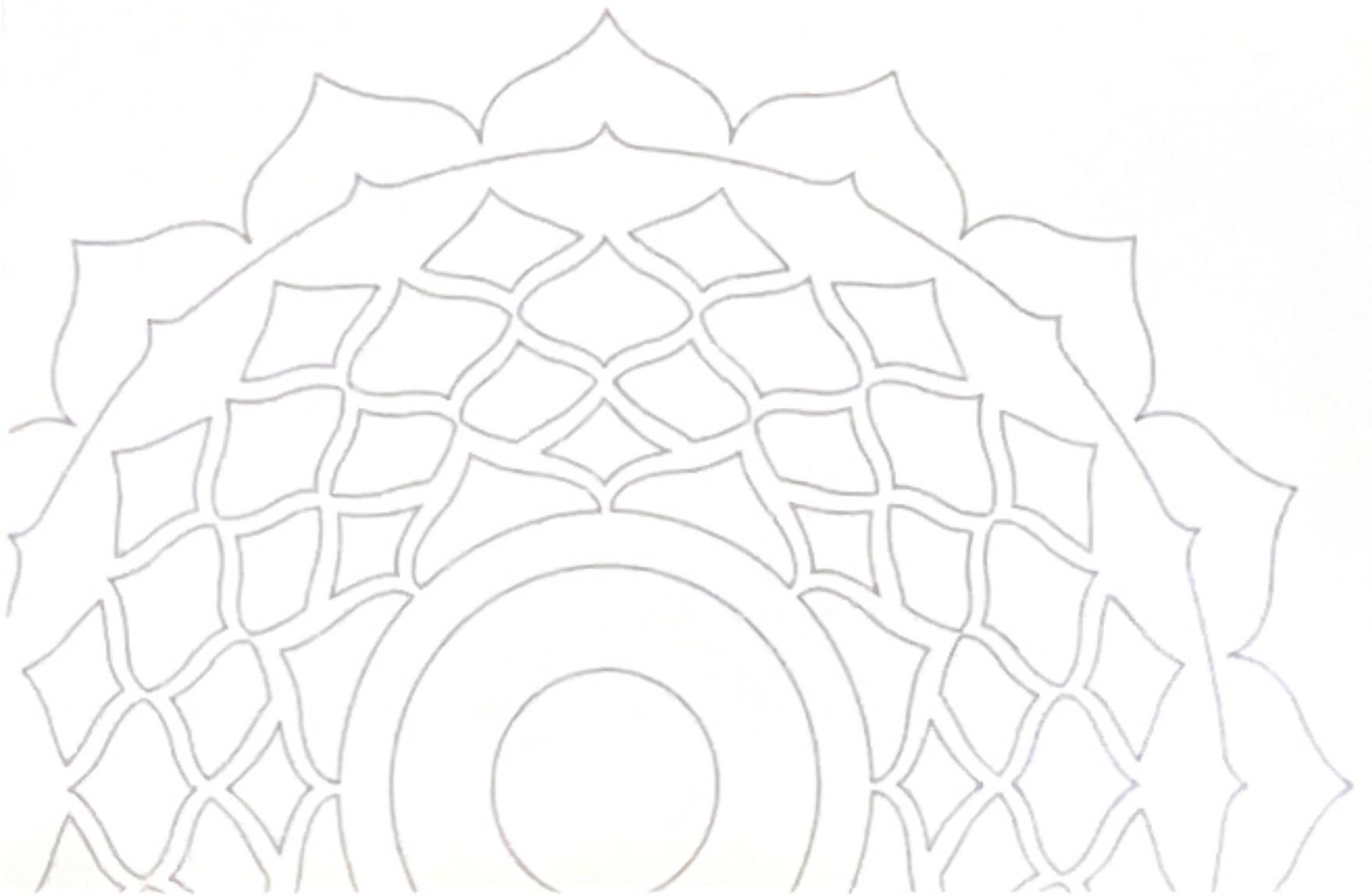
Beyond divine doors of existence as religious establishments, temples have always carried forward a rich legacy, acting as a bridge connecting the traditional and cultural roots of the past with the modern world. The concept of temples as a place of worship for Hindus is believed to have originated at the end of the Vedic age, when there was a widespread practice of revering deities or statues with distinct attributes.

According to historian Nirad C Chaudhuri, evidence of idol worship traces back to 4th or 5th century AD. As idol worship gained prominence, it led to a steady growth of temples in that era. Historians believe that some of the ancient temple structures may have been built using clay or straw, and some existed in caves. The temple architecture seems to have gone through a steep evolution between the 6th and the 16th centuries, alongside the growth and decline of various ruling dynasties during the period. Gradually, temples became an integral part of Hinduism, signifying religious devoutness and reverence. It was consequently a natural progression that Hindu Kings and Rulers built some of the greatest and most intricate temple structures during their reign. This growth also paved way to unleash the mind boggling creativity of some of the finest artisans and temple architects, whose works still stand as testimony to the rich heritage. Some of the ancient, historic temples dates back to the 5th century AD, built mostly in South and North of India.

Over centuries, the evolution of temples gradually spread all over India and South East Asia, progressively stretching its boundaries from being a place of worship to a holy place of congregation for all cultural and social gatherings. With time, temples have also served as a place of safety during a situation of crisis like war or disasters.

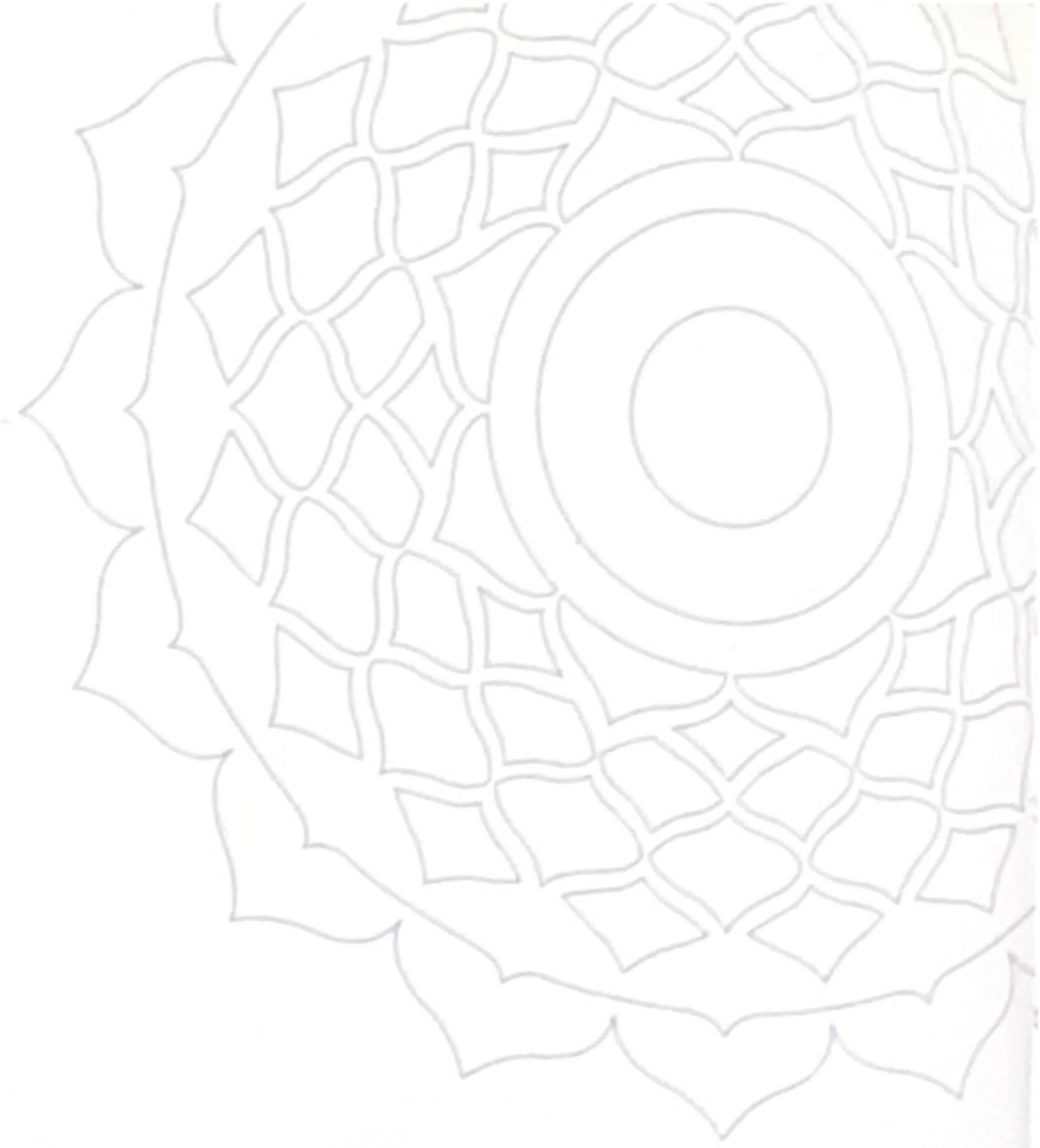


Sri Ranganathar Swamy Temple - Srirangam, India



The advent of Hindu Kings in South East Asia explains the spread of Hinduism, and presence of historic temples in these regions. Some marvellous temple architecture stands evidence to the spread of Hinduism influenced by the Champa Kingdom in Vietnam, Sri Vijaya Kingdom in Sumatra, Singhasari Kingdom and Majapahit Empire in Java and Bali. Other places such as Burma, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore also bear evidence to rich Hindu practices in the past. Some of these monumental temples display a highly refined tradition, culture and legacy, making them part of world heritage sites.

Singapore's influence of Hinduism dates back to the times when it was originally a settlement of Sumatran Empire. Even the country's name is said to have been derived from Sanskrit. Further influence came from the Sri Vijaya Empire that conquered the kingdom of Malaya, and established its supremacy over the neighbouring islands. Though the island has attracted many maritime powers after the decline of the Sri Vijaya Empire, nothing substantial is reported from 800 AD to 1800 AD until the British entered the scene.

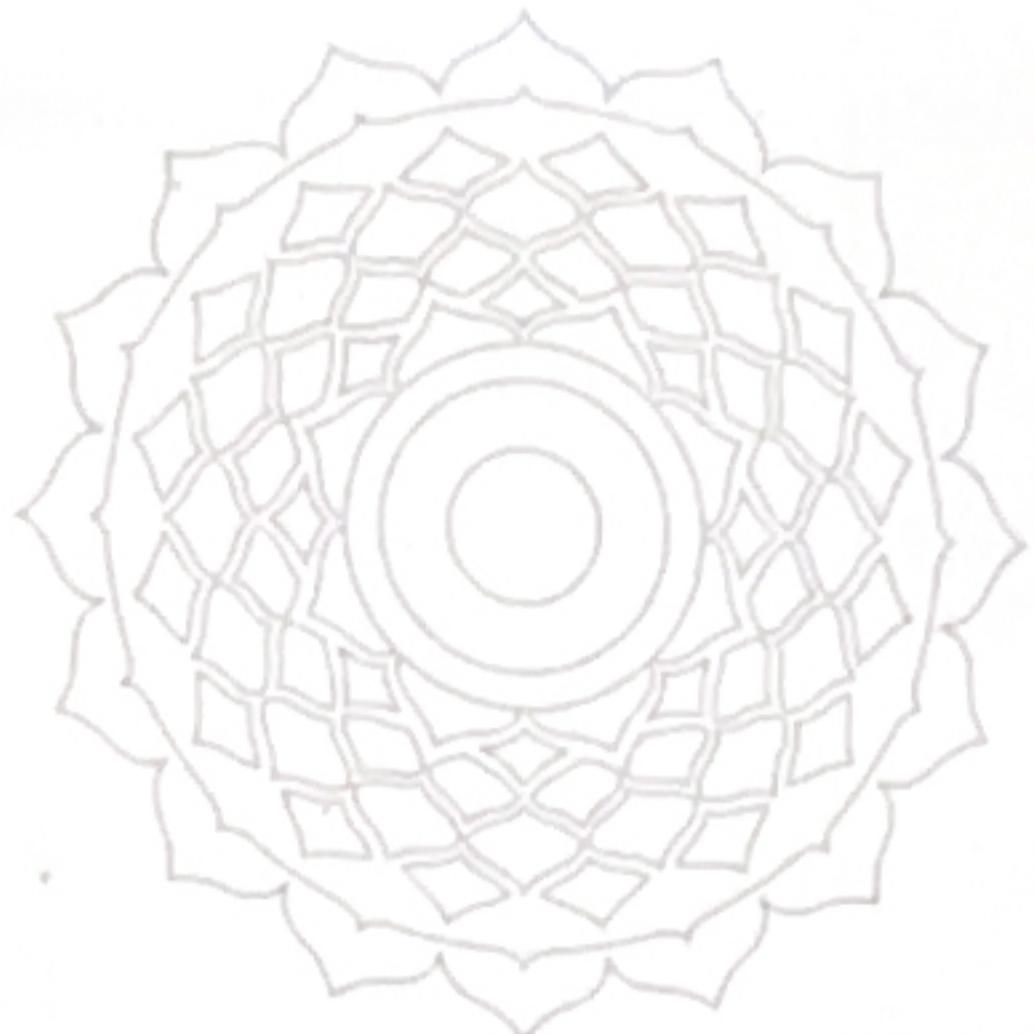


Origin of Temples in Singapore

The Straits Settlement, comprising of four individual settlements of Malacca, Penang, Dinding (formerly Majung), and Singapore was formed by the British East India Company (EIC) in 1826 with the vision of establishing British territories in South East Asia. This establishment, which was envisaged as an opportunity to develop land for their employers and partake in the wealth generated, brought along many Indian employees to these shores. The expansion of these settlements coupled with a need for workers in the plantations of rubber, tapioca, and coconut saw the arrival of the next wave of Indians after the decline of the Sri Vijaya Empire.

The population of the Indian community went through a marginal rise in 1819, when Sir Stamford Raffles, Lieutenant General of EIC established base in Singapore. Several Indians who held important portfolios accompanied the Lieutenant General during his second visit from Penang, gradually expanding the Indian population base in the island to around 132 excluding the Indian Soldiers in the British Military Base and the EIC workers. One such influential Indian who accompanied the Lieutenant General was Mr Narayana Pillai, a senior clerk in EIC, who was instrumental in establishing Singapore's first Hindu temple.

The exponential growth of Indian immigrants can also be attributed to the liberal trade policies established by Sir Stamford Raffles. With an increasing immigrant population, there arose a need for a chief among the Indian immigrants to govern their affairs. Mr Pillai's influence among the Indian community encouraged the British to appoint him as the "Chief of Indians".

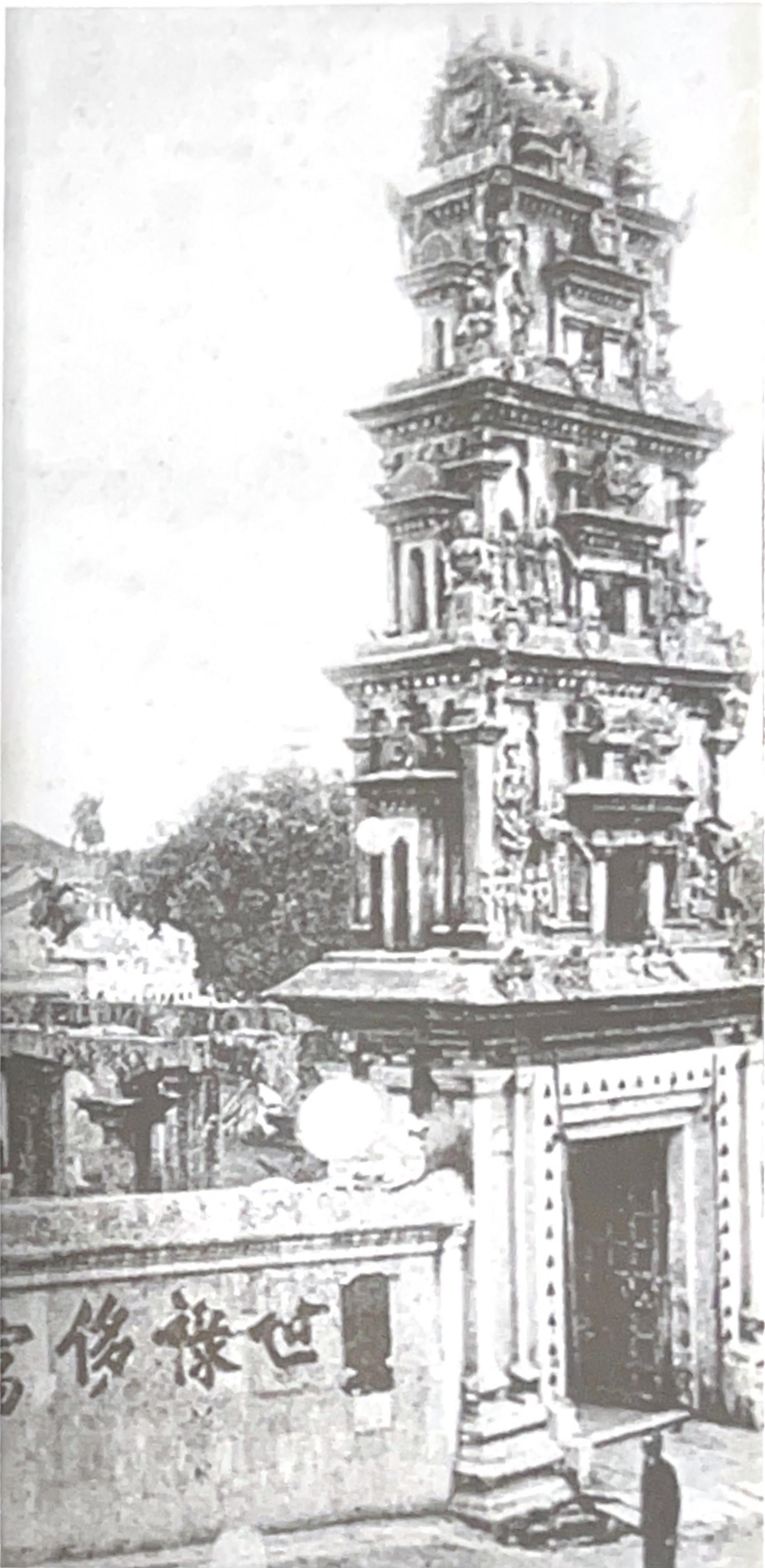


Growth of Indian Temples in Singapore

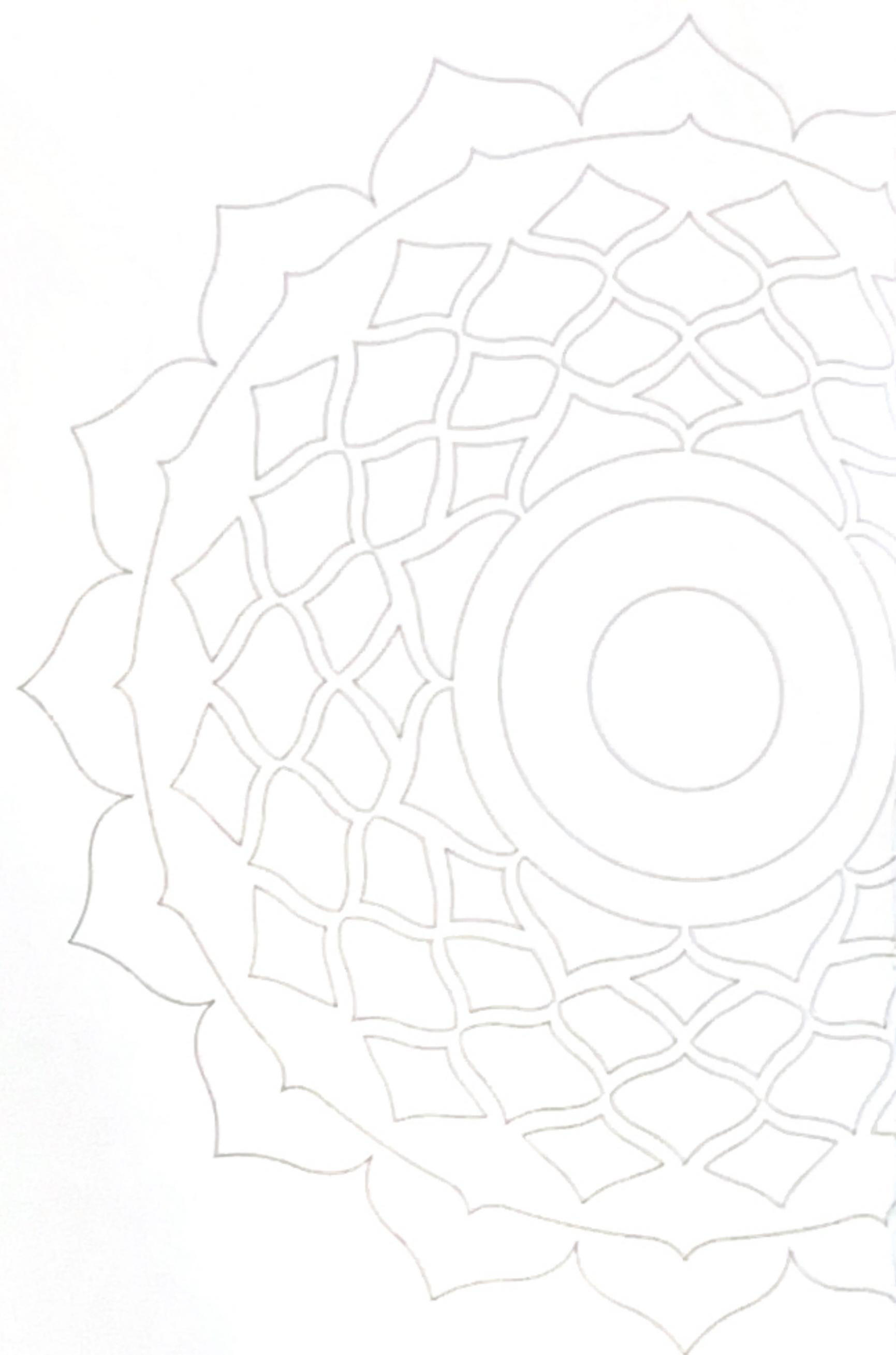
By 1822, plots of land were granted by the EIC for the construction of various religious establishments including a Hindu temple, a mosque and a Chinese temple. While the initial developmental plan was to house the different religious buildings within the same district, lack of water supply for the maintenance of the temple was cited as a reason to reject the offer at the Telok Ayer Site. The second offer of a plot in the canal area around Stamford Road did not take off owing to changes in Colonial planning. Finally a plot of land in South Bridge Road was identified for building the Mariamman Kovil, the very first Hindu temple in Singapore.

Singapore's town planning by EIC was strategically demarcated based on the ethnicity of various fragments. Town Planning maps indicate an area near the Mariamman Temple as "Chulia Camp" (Indian Immigrants were referred to as Chulias), assigned by the British as the site of residence for Indian settlers. This explains the names of the roads in this enclave such as Nagapattinam Street, Nellore Street and so on. The Chulia Camp mostly comprised of South Indians of Hindu and Muslim communities, who resided there mainly because of the employment and trade opportunities that it offered.

The Indian immigrant population grew rapidly to more than 2500 by the year 1860. A huge number of Indian immigrants who arrived after 1825, when Singapore was made a British penal station comprised of convicts, predominantly freedom fighters. The Singapore establishment with its landmark roads, bridges public institutions, and churches were all built with the sweat and toil of these immigrants and freedom fighters during that period.



Mariamman Temple completed in 1827



The steep increase in the population base also witnessed the formation of various pockets in the island based on their trade and work. While the spice traders, shop keepers, shop assistants, clerks, and labourers settled around the Chulia camp area, Indians involved in the milk trade lived along the current Cross Street, earlier called Milk Vendor Street. The wealthy Chettiar community that was involved in money lending business was seen around the Market Street, which was by then a growing and bustling commercial district. In due course, the Kling Street gradually became Chulia Street.

Sensing the rapid transformation of the Chulia Camp into a potential business centre, the colonial town planners phased out the agrarian and life stock trade from that area. This saw the Indians involved in the cattle rearing and other agricultural traders moving into open spaces for their business. By 1935, a new Indian community, predominantly involved in the cattle trade settled around the Rochor area. The thriving cattle trade gave rise to new industries and businesses in the area. This area grew into what we presently know as Little India. The extent of prosperity and the influence of the livestock trade is evident in the names of the streets like Buffalo Road or Kerbau Road today.

Gradually, as the Indian Immigrants spread out their trade and base in different parts of the island, several small religious sites for worship, particularly temples mushroomed all over Singapore. Having a Temple around the vicinity of their new homes gave them a sense of belonging and re-established them with their traditional connections.

The further sections in the book will delve on the history and origins of the individual temples in Singapore.



Sri Mariamman Temple - Main Entrance

Sri Mariamman Temple - Main Entrance Inside



As indicated by the temple's historical records, the first Kumbhabhishekam was conducted in the year 1936 followed by the second one after 12 years in June 1949. The temple has seen subsequent Kumbhabhishekams in the years 1971, 1984, 1996, and most recently in 2010.

Some important festivals organized by the temple include Theemidhi held annually in October/November, Navarathiri and 1008 Sankabhishekam. Right from serving as a refuge for new immigrants during colonial times to acting as a Registry of Marriages for Hindus, the temple has always had a reputation for being a focal point for the Hindu community.



Sri Sapthakanigal