CHAPTER - III

TEMPLES FEATURED IN THE ŚIVA KRITĪŚ OF MUTHUSWAMI DIKSHITAR
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‘The highest art is always the most religious and the greatest artiste is always a devout man’.

In Hindu-India, life and religion are so entirely mixed up that it is difficult to separate them. Next in importance to the Vēdās, the Purāṇās which are the records of the ancient history of India, interspersed with religious matters, are the important sacred books of the Hindus.

With the development of the Bhakti Movement in the 7th and 8th centuries in South India, the great Chōla Kings, who were ardent devotees of Lord Śiva, studded the land with temples and endowed them richly with land and wealth for perpetual conduct of religious worship.

The temples, from ancient days, are the places where every Hindu has to do his worship to the divine. “According to tradition, the temple is just like a human body. The top of the temple is the head, the garbha gruha is the neck, the front mandapa is the stomach, the prakāra walls are the legs, the gōpura is the feet and the Lord is the jīva in the body”.¹ Thus every point of a temple is conceived of, as the body of the Lord and so should be treated sacred. Temples were not only places of worship, but also became cultural centres patronising Oduvars, Arayars, dancers, instrumentalists, musicians, sculptors and painters.

It is said that a soul of a nation is enshrined in its temple, literature and arts. All these are represented as having been born from God and are
highly venerated in our land. Fine arts in India have always been looked upon as things divine and have all along been used as vehicles for spiritual pursuits.

The devotional musical forms such as Tēvarām, Divyaprabanham, Lali, Unjāl, Saranu, Heccharika, Mallāri tunes, Rakti Mēlam, Kavattuvam and Sthala kritis constitute the live music of the temples and are still sung at specific hours of worship.

Almost all the temples have ‘sthalapurāṇās’ which reasonably and ingeniously furnish as explanations for the sayings in sacred books. They give us details of the local history of the place and of the temples and the purānic legends on which they are built. These may be said to be the legendary history of the temples and places of pilgrimage. They describe the circumstances under which the place originally acquired its sanctity, the period when it became a hallowed ground, the foundation of the first temple, the different dynasties of the kings who worshipped the Gods and Goddesses, the renovation done in the present age, the marvels which have resulted from the worship of the Gods and so on.

Muthuswami Dikshitar travelled widely and composed songs in praise of a large number of deities at different places in South India. Each of his kritis has a lot of information, purāṇas, legends, sthalamāhātmyā, sthala vriksha, tīrtha, temple architecture and so on. To really understand and appreciate his kritis, we must understand our ancient temple tradition and lore.

The Śiva kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar is found to have been composed on the deities of about 35 major temples of South India. He has
composed the maximum number of kritis on the deity of the temple at his birth place, Tiruvarur. There are also deities on which he has composed single kritis.

A brief description of the temples will help in going deeper into the meaning of the kritis composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar

TIRUVARUR

Tiruvarur is one of the seven sacred places of Lord Tyāgarāja. The others are Tirumaraikkadu (Vedaranyam), Tirunagal (Nagapattinam), Tirukkolili, Tirunellur, Tirukkaramayil and Tiruvanmiyur. Tiruvarur was the birth place of Muthuswami Dikshitar and it was also the place where he stayed the longest in his sojourn. Naturally, it was on this deity of Tiruvarur that he composed the maximum number of Śiva kritis.

Tiruvarur temple is one of the biggest temples in the south. This temple is said to have been built between the 7th and 10th centuries A.D. King Rāja Raja Chōla-I was a royal patron who did a lot for this temple. The massive gopuram was built by the Vijayanagara Kings.

On the western side of the temple there is a famous tank known as ‘Kamalālayam’ where Goddess Kamala was born. It is considered to be the biggest tank in the whole of South India, having an island temple in the middle dedicated to the Goddess. During the course of churning of the milky ocean by the Dēvāsurāś, Goddess Lakshmi was born with nectar. Kamala was brought up by Varuṇa and after devoted penance, she was married to Vishṇu at Tiruvarur and hence the name ‘Kamalālayam’.
SrīTyāgarāja, the main deity of the temple is said to be performing the ‘Ajapanāṭanam’. It is conceived as a symbolic representation of the highest mystic mantra affirming the oneness of the individual with the Supreme Soul expressed as ‘Ahamsah’ or ‘I am He’ which is called the ‘Ajapa mantra or ‘Hamsa mantra’ which is the same as the Upanishadic truth, ‘Aham Brahmasmi’ *2 Dikshitar has mentioned the Ajapa naṭanam in many of his kritīs.

1. ‘Tyāgarāja Pālayāśumam’ in the rāga Gaula (Charaṇam)
   ‘Yogi Vidita Ajapa Naṭana Rangam’
2. ‘Tyāgarājo Virājate’ in the rāga Atana (Charaṇam)
   ‘Ati Lalita Hamsa Naṭanam’
3. ‘Chandraśēkharām’ in the rāga Margahindolam (Charaṇam)
   ‘Ajapanāṭanānanda Vaibhavam’
4. ‘Vīra Vasanta’ in the rāga Vira Vasantam (Anupallavi)
   ‘Manitājapa Naṭana Prabhāva’
5. ‘Tyāgarāja Mahadhwajāroha’ in the rāga Srirāgam (Charaṇam)
   ‘Śisṭa Sēvīṭajapa Narttanam’

The deity is in the form of Somaskanda Mūrti with Uma on one side and Skandar in the middle. It is said that Vishnu worshipped Śiva in the form of Sōmaskanda. Muthuswami Dikshitar has referred to this Mūrti in the Śiva kritīs in Begada and Margahindolam.

1. ‘Tyāgarājāya Namaste’ in the rāga Begada (Charaṇam)
   ‘Mukundādi Pūjita Sōmaskanda Mūrtayē’
2. ‘Chandraśēkharam’ in the rāga Margahindolam (Charaṇam)
   ‘Ānandakandam Sōmaskandam’

   Lord Śiva is said to have appeared in the form of an ant hill or valmīka representing the Prithvi Linga. This finds mention in Dikshitar’s Mohanam, Gaula and Kamboji kritis.

1. ‘Nāgalingam’ in the rāga Mohanam (Anupallavi)
   ‘Srīnagarasthita Valmīka Lingam’

2. ‘Tyāgarāja Pālayāśumam’ in the rāga Gaula (Charaṇam)
   ‘Bhūsurādinuta Valmīka Linga’

3. ‘Sṛī Valmīka Lingam Chintayē’ in the rāga Kamboji

In this temple there is the ‘Marakatalingam’ obtained by the king Muchukunda, from Indra, along with the idol of Tyagaraja. ‘Vitanka’ literally means without chisel and the ‘Marakatalingam’ here is known as ‘Vīthi Vitanka’. This is also mentioned in some of the Dikshitar kritis.

1. ‘Tyāgarājāya Namaste’ in the rāga Begada (Charaṇam)
   ‘Vitankarūpa Saktaye’

2. ‘Tyāgarāja Pālayaśumām’ in the rāga Gaula (Pallavi)
   ‘Sōmaskanda Vīthi Vitanka’

3. ‘Sṛī Valmīka Lingam’ in the rāga Kamboji (Anupallavi)
   ‘Devatādi Vinuta Divya Vīthi Vitanka’

The sacred tree or sthalavruksham is the ‘Pādri’ or Mango tree or ‘Pātali’. Dikshitar in his Bilahari kriti ‘Hāṭakēśwaram’ has reference to this in the anupallavi.
The Tiruvarur deity has yantra svarūpam and has three lines and three mystic syllables over. This is depicted in the Begada kriti, ‘Tyāgarājāya Namaste’, as,

‘Akaṭādi trirēkhaṭmakādhāra Pravṛttayē’

“South India is believed to have five Rājas, Naṭarāja of Chidambaram, Varadarāja of Kanchi, Tyāgarāja of Tiruvarur, Govindarāja of Tirupati and Rangarāja of Srīrangam of which Tyāgarāja is considered as the King of Kings”. Thus Dikshitar mentions this in some of his kritis.

1. ‘Tyāgarājāya Namaste’ in the rāga Begada (Pallavi)
   ‘Simhāsanapate’ (sits on the throne because he is the king)
2. ‘Tyāgarājo Virājate’ in the rāga Atana (Pallavi and Anupallavi)
   ‘Mahārājah Sṛī Tyāgarāja’ and ‘Rājadhirāja’
3. ‘Vīra Vasanta’ in the rāga Vira Vasantam (Charaṇām)
   ‘Kanakaratna Simhāsanābharaṇa’

The Nandi vāhana in the temple is a standing Nandi unlike in other temples where it is seated. Dikshitar has refered to this ‘Nava Nandi’ in his kriti ‘Sṛī Tyāgarājasya’ in the rāga Rudrapriya.

‘Navanandyāti Bhaktajana pālasya’

The above kriti has also reference to the evening pāja ‘Sāyaraksha pūja’ which is very important in this temple. In the charaṇām, Dikshitar says, ‘Amarēṣādi pūjita Sāyamkālasya’.
Though the Panchamukha Vādyam is the most important musical instrument kept within the temple, Dikshitar has mainly mentioned the Śuddhamaddalam and Nāgaswaram in his kṛitis.

1. ‘Sṛī Tyāgarājasya’ in the rāga Rudrapriya (Charanam)
   Ati Śuddhamaddalādi Vādyalōlasya

2. ‘Chandraśekharam’ in the rāga Margahindolam (Charanam)
   Ati Śuddhamaddala Vādyadi priyam’

In this kṛiti Lord Śiva is depicted as one who loves the ‘ashtādasa vādyās’ in the charanam as, ‘Ashtādasa vādyādi priyam’

“The panchamukhavādyam has got five faces and is ornamented with the snake, the swastika and the lotus on the three. The fourth face is plain without decorations. The central face shows the face of a deer. It is believed that Nandi played on this instrument when Śiva danced. The circumference of the instrument is 56 inches”.

The marakata lingam which Muchukunda installed was known as Achalēśwar. The peculiar feature of this lingam is that its shadow can be seen only in the eastern direction and it is also said that this shadow will not be visible to a man who is going to die within a period of six months.

The Śiva lingās representing the Panchabhūtās, Hāṭakēśwara, Anandēśwara, Valmīkēśwara, Achalēśwara and Siddheēśwara are in the second prakāra of the temple. In the kṛiti ‘Sadāchalēśwaram in the rāga Bhupalam, Dikshitar says,
'Chāyarahita deepa prakāśa garbhagruha madhyarangam'

It is believed that Śiva told the King Chamatkara that He would always be at Tiruvarur in answer to the latter’s prayers. Dikshitar says in his Bhupala kriti,

'Chamatkāra Bhūpālādi prasādakaraṇa nipuṇa’

This kriti also refers to ‘Naminandi Atikal’, a bhakta who lit a lamp using water, instead of oil, as,

'Udajyakrita nāmadhēyavāham'

Once a childless king named Amsa, conducted many yāgās to be blessed with a child. Atlast he came to Tiruvarur and installed a Śiva lingam in the temple and conducted penance for many years. Śiva gave darśan to the king and blessed him. So the linga was called ‘Siddheśwar. In the Śiva kriti in Nilambari rāga, ‘Siddheśwarāya’, Dikshitar refers to the ‘Śabdādi pancha tanmātra’.

In the Anandabhairavi rāga kriti, ‘Ānandēśwarēna’, Dikshitar expresses his advaita philosophy, ‘Chidānanda rūpōsīi Brahmananda rūpōsīi’.

The temple festivals are mentioned in some of the kritīs of Dikshitar. The ‘Arudra darśanam’ is a famous festival of the temple. The ‘Rathōtsavam’ mentioned in the kriti ‘Tyāgarāja Mahadhwajāroha’ in Sri rāga, is one of the occasion when the idol of Tyagaraja leaves the sanctum. Dikshitar describes it as ‘Āślēsha Mahāratha Sthitam’ in the charaṇam.
The handsome appearance of Lord Tyagaraja is depicted in the kriti ‘Chandraśekharam’ in the rāga Margahindolam as, ‘Tarēnduṣekharīsamēta Chandraśekharam’

During the float festival, which is a very important festival of the temple, the Lord Kalyānasundarēswara is brought out from the temple in a procession. In the kriti ‘Tyāgarāja Mahadhwajārōha’ in Sri Rāga, charaṇam says, ‘Ishtaphalapradā Kalyānaśundarēśa nama’

This kriti also describes the annual Vasantōtsavam in the temple as, ‘Srishti Swarūpa Vasanta vaibhavam’

Other terms that are special to the Tyāgarāja murti and those are used in this kriti are, ‘Dhwajārohanam’, ‘Tīrtha prabhāvam’, ‘Pādādarśanam’ etc. The tirtham is capable of removing all the illness. The sacred feet of the Lord, is visible only twice a year, during the ‘Uttarāyanam’ and ‘Dakshināyanam’. The rest of the year only the face can be visible.

In short almost all the important factors regarding the Tiruvarur temple is included in the Śiva kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar.

**Sthalapurāṇam**

Once when Lord Śiva and Parvati was in the garden at the foot of Mt. Kailas, a monkey dropped some bilwa leaves on the Lord. Śiva was too pleased with the monkey that He blessed him to be born as a king in
Manu dynasty, named Muchukunda. Muchukunda was a good ruler and he built many temples and encouraged pandits and scholars. He was a great warrior too and ruled the country with his capital at Karuvur.

Once the Dēvās were attacked by an Asura and he sought the help of Muchukunda. Muchukunda readily agreed to help the Dēvās and he kept his words. The Asura was defeated. King Muchukunda offered prayers to Lord Śiva and the Lord appeared before him asking him to build a temple at Tiruvarur, for Him. At the time of his return, Muchukunda requested Indra to give him the Sōmaskanda mūrti that he had and was worshipping daily. Indra was not so happy to give him the idol. So he kept six similar idols in front of Muchukunda and asked him to select the idol he wanted. Lord Śiva helped Muchukunda to find the original one. Indra gave all the idols. A big temple was thus constructed by Viṣwakarma.

TANJAVUR

The city of Tanjavur or Tanjore lies in the fertile Kaveri Delta, a region often referred to as the rice-bowl of TamilNadu. Tanjavur is justly famous as the home of Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music and Drama. For nearly a thousand years this great town dominated the political history of the region as the capital of the three powerful dynasties, the Chōlas (9-13th C), the Nāyakas (1535-1676) and the Marāthās (1676-1855)

“Probably Tanjavur was previously called Tanjai. But some give a derivation to the name from Tanjam, a demon who was haunting the locality and was destroyed by Viṣṇu. The demon’s dying request to
Vishnu was to name the place after him. The request was granted. Some others also give a derivation from Tanjam meaning refuge; the city being thus called the ‘city of refuge’. *

The magnificent Brihadeeswara temple is the most important Chola monument. Today Tanjavur’s culture extends beyond temples and palaces to encompass classical music and dance. It is also a flourishing centre for bronze sculpture and painting. The Brihadeeswara temple is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It was built by RajaRaja Chola-I and completed in AD 1010 and dedicated to Lord Siva.

**Sthalapurāṇa**

RajaRaja-I was suffering from black leprosy. The only remedy prescribed was to build a great temple to Lord Siva, after bringing the Siva linga from the Narmada River. His spiritual preceptor told him that his disease was due to the infliction of injuries to animals during his past birth.

Within six months, the king visited River Narmada with 64 merchants and brought the Siva lingam. The Siva lingam, it is said, went on increasing in size when it was taken out of water. That is why it is called ‘Brihadeeswara’. It took 12 years to complete the construction of the temple. It is the tallest in South India. The site on which it was constructed is said to be the place where the great sage, Naimīsāranya, lived in meditation and prayer. The Kumbhābhishekam (installation ceremony) was done on the 20th day of he 26th year (1011) by king RajaRaja-I himself. The king took his bath in the tank and was cured off his black leprosy.
The Brihadeśwara temple in Tanjavur is the first to reverse the custom of building the entrance gopura bigger than the Vimāna. The Vimāna tower is known as the ‘Dakshiṇa Mēru’. In the sanctum-sanctorum stands the Mahālinga like a huge hill. Contemporary inscriptions call it ‘Aḍavallan’ or the skilful dancer and also ‘Dakshina Mēru Vitankan’. The linga is also called ‘Rājarājēśwaram Udayar’ after the name of the builder of the temple.

The sanctum is in two storeys. It has two walls around it. In the first place there are three colossal sculptures in the south, west and North. They are Lord Śiva depicted respectively as carrying a spear, as holding a sword and trident and as dancing. In the second place there are panels of reliefs depicting 81 of the 108 dance poses as prescribed in Bharata’s Nātyasāstra. In the third place there are some superb murals in the characteristic Chōla style.

On the western wall there is a huge panel of Lord Śiva as Dakshiṇāmurti. The northern wall depicts Lord Śiva as Tripurāntaka. The Phenadyuti kriti of Muthuswami Dikshitar, ‘Srī Dakshiṇāmūrtim’ depicts Lord as Dakshiṇāmurti.

The Goddess in the temple is known as ‘Brihannāyaki’. Brihannāyaki as the consort of Lord Śiva is mentioned in many of the kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar.

1. ‘Brihadeśwaram’ in the rāga Nagadhwani (Anupallavi)
   ‘Brihannāyakī Manahpriyakaram’
2. ‘Brihadeśwarāya’ in the rāga Sankarabharanam (Anupallavi)
‘Brihannāyakī Manōllāsāya
3. ‘Panchabhūta Kīraṇāvalī’ in the rāga Kīranāvalī (Charaṇam)
   ‘Brihannāyakīṣam’
4. ‘Brihadeeswaro’ in the rāga Ganasamavarali (Charaṇam)
   ‘Brihannāyakī Sahitānanda Yuta

Muthuswami Dikshitar has used the sthala mudra in his Sankarabharanam kriti, ‘Brihadeeswarāya’. In this kriti he has depicted the Lord as the Lord of Tanjavur.

   ‘Kaivaḷyapradāya Tanjavpurīṣwarāya’

Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed four kritīs on Brihadeeswara in the rāgās Jivantika, Nagadhwani, Sankarabharanam and Ganasamavarali in the vibhakti style. They commence with Brihadeesa, Brihadeeswaram, Brihadeeswarāya and Brihadeeswaro.

The kriti in Gundakriya rāga, ‘ṚjaRaRa Chōla’ is in praise of the King RājaRāja Chāla. The Pallavi begins as ‘ṚjaRaRa Chōla Pratishtītham’. The charaṇa again takes the phrase ‘ṚjaRaRaḷṇḍra Chōzhadharam’

Most of the kritīs depict Lord as holding the sword and trident and as dancing. Many dance poses of the Lord and His vehicle, Nandi, is also mentioned in these kritīs. The ornamental serpent is also a common theme. All these aspects are included in the murals and sculptures of this great temple.

In this temple, Nandi, the great Bull is placed in a mandapam in the front and it has a striking size. It is made up of a single stone. This
Nandi is considered to be the second largest in the whole of India. The biggest one is in the Lepakshi Temple of Andhra Pradesh. Tradition says that this Nandi at Tanjavur was once growing in size every day. For preventing its further growth a nail was driven at its back. Some say that there was a toad inside the Nandi and when the toad was killed the growth of the Nandi was prevented. The Nandi finds mention in some of the kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar on Brihadeśwara.

1. ‘Agastīśwaram’ in the rāga Lalita(Anupallavi)
   ‘Nagajāhālādakaram Nandīṣam Śankaram’

2. ‘Śrīngārādī’ in the rāga Dhavalangam (Charaṇam)
   ‘Gangādhara Vrishabha turanga’

The Saraswati Mahal Library constructed by the Maratha rulers, is one of the most important reference libraries in India. It was actually established by Maharaja Śarabhoji, in the 19th century. It has a fine collection of rare palm leaf manuscripts and books collected by the versatile and scholarly Śarabhoji. “The manuscripts number 24,627 in Sanskrit, 1953 in Marathi, 1206 in Tamil, and 816 in Telugu on a variety of subjects such as Vedas, Vedanta, Grammar, Music Dance, Astronomy, Architecture etc.”

Muthuswami Dikshitar has mentioned Maharajah Sarabhoji in the kriti in Nabhomani rāga. In this kriti Lord Śiva is depicted as one whose feet are worshipped by king Śarabhendra.

‘Śarabhendra Samsēvita Charanam’

The sthala vriksham banyan tree finds mention in the Phenadyuti kriti, ’ŚrīDakshiṇāṃurtim’

‘Vēdāntavēdyam Nyāgrōḍha Vriksha mūla vasanam’
Dakshināmūrti is believed to remove the ignorance in a person. He is the person who clears all doubts. The above kriti also mentions this in the Charaṇa as,

‘Anādyā vidyā tamōbhāskaram’

Every month, the day on which the ruling star is Satābhishaṇq is treated as a festival as that was the ruling star at the time of Rājarāja’s birth. Another festival is Krittika day in the month of Kārtika. The annual festival for 9 days is celebrated in the month of Kārtikah. The annual festival is Krittika day in the month of Kārthika. The annual festival for 9 days is celebrated in the month of Vaiśākha, during which the famous drama of Rājarājēswara is also enacted.

KANCHEEPURAM

The small temple town of Kancheepuram or Kanchi, as it is popularly known, is one of the seven sacred cities of the Hindus. Kancheepuram is situated on the banks of the river Vegavati. From the 6th to the 9th centuries, it was the capital of the Pallavās, who built the numerous temples here. Royal patronage from the succeeding Chōla, Paṇḍya and Vijayanagara dynasties further consolidated the city’s reputation as a religious and commercial centre.

The Nāyanmārs have praised the Lord here in their Tēvārams. Sundaramurti Nāyanār regained his sight here. Kanchipuram is the Banaras of the South. The town is sacred to the Śaivaites as well as the Vaishnavaites and is thus divided into two distinct zones with the Śaivaites temples to the North and Vaishanvaite temples to the south-east. The Śaivaite strong hold is Big Kānchi or Śiva Kānchi and Vaishnavaite
strong hold is Little Kanchi or Vishnu Kanchi. Both combines to form the city, Kancheepuram. ‘Brahmānanda Purāṇam’ says that Kanchi and Kāsi are the two eyes of Lord Ṣiva. Kānchi Kāmākshi and Kāsi Viṣālākshi are often spoken of together.

Sri Ėkāmrēśwara Temple

The most famous Sīva temple at Kānchi is the Ėkāmrēśwara temple where He is worshipped in the form of Prithvi linga. The linga in the main sanctum is of sand, representing the element of earth. The name of the Lord, Ėkāmrā, is said to have been derived from an ancient mango tree near the sanctum. Its branches are believed to represent the four Vēdās. It is also said that Ėkāmrā comes from the word ‘Kamba’ or ‘pillar’, a synonym for the pillar of fire or Sthānu, a well known name for Lord Śiva. The mango tree in the temple is worshipped by all even today. Each branch of the tree bears fruits with different taste and the leaves are also different in appearance. The Panchalingasthala kriti in Bhairavi rāgā, ‘Chintaya Mākanda’ has reference to the mango tree as,

‘Chintaya Mākanda mūlakandam’ (Pallavi)

This kriti also has the linga mudra in the charanam as,

‘Guruguhāntarangam Prithvīlingam’

There are idols of the 63 Nāyanmārs. There are two tanks in the temple, Kampa Nadi and Šiva Ganga. In this Śiva temple there is also a Vishnu shrine and the name of the Vishṇu is ‘Nilatinkal Tundattan’

Kāmakshi is said to be the Super Goddess. Goddess finds mention in some of the Dikshitar kritīs.
1. ‘Ekamranathaya Namaste’ in the raga Vira Vasantam (Charanam) ‘Kamakshi Mohitaya Kmita Phalada’
2. ‘Parvati Pate’ in the raga Sankarabharanam (Nottuswara)
   ‘Kamakshi Ekamrapate’
3. ‘Saileswaram Bhajare’ in the raga Sumadyuti (Charanam)
   ‘Sailetmaja Kamakshiramanam’

Kailasanatha Temple

The Kailasanatha temple is the oldest and grandest structure in the town. Built in the early 8th century by Narasimhavarman-II Rajasimha, the last great Pallava king, this Siva temple is surrounded by 58 smaller shrines, each with splendid carvings of the various representations of Lord Siva. The temple is built in red sandstone. The carvings of Pallava art, includes the ‘Urddhva Tandava’ dance of Siva and the laughing face of Parvati which are worth seeing. “The sanctum has a circumbulatory passage with great symbolic meaning; seven steps indicating the seven births, leading to a dark passage indicating the journey of life and a narrow outlet indicating death”.

Kancheepuram is also the seat of Kamakoti Pita, a monastry which was founded by Sri Sankara. The Kamakoti Pita is refered to in the Gamakakriya raga kriti, ‘Ekamranatham Bhajeham’ in the charanam as ‘Prakaiththa KamaKotipitasthitam’

The kritis ‘Ekamranathaya’ in Vira Vasantam, ‘Ekamranatheswaram in the raga Chaturangini, ‘Saileswaram’ in the raga
Sumadyuti and ‘Chintaya Mākanda’ in Bhairavi take the Sthala mudra like Kāṇchi, Śrī Kāṇchi, Śiva Kāṇchi and so on.

**Sthalapurāṇam**

Lord Śiva in Kāṇchi is in the form of Prithvi Linga. The sthalapurāṇa says that when once Lord Śiva was deeply immersed in the task of creation, protection and destruction of the Universe, Parvati, His consort in a jocular mood closed His eyes. The whole Universe was stuck by her action. Lord Śiva became angry and cursed Parvati. She was asked to go to the earth and expiate her misdeed. Accordingly Parvati came to the banks of the river Kampa, under a single mango tree at Kāṇchi and made a Śiva Linga out of sand from the bottom of the mango tree and worshipped it. To test her sincerity Śiva placed various obstacles and hindrances in the way of Parvati’s penance. But with the help of Vishṇu, she could overcome all difficulties. Atlast Śiva hurried a deluge by taking out the Ganges from His matted hair, to wash away the linga that was worshipped by Parvati. Parvati clasped it with all sincerity to her breasts and this pleased Śiva, who, again accepted her as His consort. In the month of Phalguni, on the tenth day of Uthram, the marriage of Śiva is celebrated with great pomp and splendour.

**CHIDAMBARAM**

Sacred Chidambaram, where Śiva is believed to have performed His Cosmic dance, ‘Tāṇḍava Nṛttā’ is a traditional temple town where history merges with mythology to create a deeply religious ambience.
The focal point of the town is the awe-inspiring Natarāja temple built by the Chōlas, in the 9th century, to honour their patron deity, Śiva as Naṭarāja, ‘the Lord of Dance’. The naṭana vaibhava of Lord Śiva is expressed in most of the kritis of Dikshitar on the Chidambaram deity.

1. ‘Ānanda Natana Prakāṣam’ in the rāga Kedaram
2. ‘Chidambara Naṭarājamūrtim’ in the rāga Tanukirti
3. ‘Chidambara Naṭarājam Āṣraye’ in the rāga Kedaram
4. ‘Chidambarēśwaram’ in the rāga Bhinnashadjam as, ‘Chidānanda Natanaprakāsam’
5. ‘Chintayēham sada’ in the rāga Sankarabharanam as ‘Chintāmāni swarūpam Tāndavēśwaram’
6. ‘Śivakāṁipatim’ in the rāga Natakūrinji as, ‘Nava Kālijita Nартtana dheeram’
7. ‘Śivakāmēśwaram’ in the rāga Arabhi as, ‘Naṭēśwaram Bhānukotisadṛṣam’

The temple is also known as ‘Ponnambalam’ and ‘Tillai’. It has an unusual hut-like sanctum with a gold-plated roof, the huge colonnaded Śiva Ganga tank and four colourful gopūras. The eastern gopura has detailed sculptures of the 108 postures of Bharatanātyam and is considered a veritable encyclopaedia of this dance form.

Within the temple’s three enormous enclosures are five major halls (sabhās) each conceived for a special purpose. In the outer enclosure, next to the Śiva Ganga tank is the Rāja sabha, a beautiful 1000 pillared hall, built as a venue for temple rituals and festivals. Many Chōla kings were crowned here in the presence of the deity.
In the central enclosure is the Dēva sabha, where the temple bronzes are housed and administrative functions are performed.

The adjacent Nritya sabha has a superb collection of sculptures, the finest being the ‘Urddhva tāṇḍava’.

The innermost enclosure, the holiest part of the complex contains the Chitsabha or Chitrambalam from which the town derives its name. This is the main sanctum, housing one of the five elemental lingās of Lord Śiva, the Ākāśa linga, which represents ether, the all prevading element central to human existence. The Chitrambalam or Chitsabha finds mention in some of the kritīs of Dikshitar.

1. ‘Ānandanaṭana Prakāṣam’ in the rāga Kedaram
   ‘Ānandanaṭana prakāṣam Chitsabhēṣam’
2. ‘Chidambara Naṭarajam’ in the rāga Kedaram
   ‘Śivakāṃipatim Chitsabhāpatim’
3. ‘Chintayēham Sada’ in the rāga Sankarabharanam
   ‘Chintayēham sada Chitsabhānāyakam’

The inner sanctum containing the linga is hidden behind a black curtain symbolising ignorance which is removed only during prayer time. The concept is that of the Lord of ether. Nearby, there are processional images of Lord Nāṭarāja and His consort Śivakāmasundari, the crystal linga presented by Sri Śankara, an emerald image of the Lord named ‘Ratnasabhāpati’ and images of Svarṇabhairavi and Kalyāṇasundara. Śivakāmasundari is depicted in almost all the kritīs on this city. Some of them are,
1. ‘Chidambara Naṭarāja’ in the rāga Tanukirti (Charanam)
   ‘Madamba Śivakāmipatim’

2. ‘Chidambarēśwaram’ in the rāga Bhinnashadjam (Anupallavi)
   ‘Śivakāmavalli Manahpriyakaram’

3. ‘Kanakasabhāpatim’ in the rāga Malavasri (Charanam)
   ‘Śivakāmēśwari Manollāsakaram’

4. ‘Chintayēham sada’ in the rāga Sankarabharanam
   ‘Ekāntahrudaye Śivakāmasundari patim

The main object of worship is represented by the
‘Chidambara Chakram’ popularly known as ‘Chidambara Rahasyam’. It
consists of a long string of the petals of a leaf, the bilwa, sacred to Lord Śiva made of gold.Finally the fifth hall in front of the Chitsabha is the
Kanakasabha where Śiva is supposed to have performed His cosmic
dance. The Kanakasabha finds mention in the Siva kriti in the rāga
Malavasri as,

‘Kanakasabhāpatim Bhajare Mānasa’.

“Naṭarāja as the Lord of dance is one of the great
philosophical concepts of Tamil Hinduism. The Lord is dancing on the
remains of evil and ignorance so that His worshipper is free of birth.”

Five stone steps lead from the Kanakasabha to the Chitsabha.
They are considered symbolic of the sacred Panchākshara, the five
syllables Na-Ma-Śi-Va-Ya.
According to tradition, Lord Śiva defeated Goddess Kāli in a dance contest He performed the type called Urddhva Tāndava. She was asked to reside on the northern limits of Chidambaram. The devotee is enjoined to worship Her as well as Lord Naṭarāja. The defeat of Kāli is depicted in the Natakurinji rāga kriti, ‘Śivakāmipatim’ as,

‘Nava Kālijita Nartana dheeram’

The sthalamudra, ‘Chidambaram’ is a common term in almost all the kritis on this deity. The kriti, ‘Chintayēham sada’ in Sankarabharanam and the Panchalingasthala kriti ‘Ānandanaṭana Prakāṣam’ in Kedara rāga have the Linga mudra as,

1. ‘Chintayeham sada in’ in the rāga Sankarabharanam
   ‘Dhyanta varjam Niradharam Akasa’

2. ‘Ānandanaṭana’ in the rāga Kedaram (Anupallavi)
   ‘Bhuktimuktiprada Daharakasam’

Sthalapurāṇam

Once in Dāruka vanam, Śiva wished to teach a lesson to the rishis who were proud of their knowledge. Śiva took the form of a mendicant with a begging bowl in hand, accompanied by Vishnū disguised as Mōhini. The ‘rishipatnīs’ were attracted by the sight of the beautiful pair. Understanding this, the rishis became angry and tried to destroy the pair. They raised a sacrificial fire and raised a tiger which sprang up at Śiva. Śiva peeled off the skin of the tiger and wrapped it around His waist. They then send a poisonous snake which Śiva tied around His neck. Later an Apasmāra purusha, Muyalaka, was sent, whom the Lord crushed by pressing him to the ground with His foot. At this, the rishis confessed defeat and Śiva started dancing before all the Gods and rishis. Lord Ādiśeṣha heard the description of Śiva’s dance from Vishṇu
and requested Vishṇu to allow him to witness the dance himself. Vishṇu agreed. Ādiśēsha performed penance and prayed to Śiva to allow him to see the dance. Being pleased, Śiva appeared and promised him to dance at Tillai. Accordingly Ādiśēsha was born as a human being, as Patanjali and went to the forest of Tillai. In the forest Vyāghrapāda also joined him.

Vyāghrapāda was the son of Madhyāndina Rishi and came to South and started praying to the Swayambhu Linga under a banyan tree near a tank in the Tillai forest. He used to collect flowers for puja and to help him to do so, he prayed for the boon of tiger’s feet and claws so that he could easily climb up the trees and pluck plenty of flowers. He also prayed for the bee’s eyes such that he could collect flowers before any bee could taste the honey. Since he had the feet of a tiger he was called ‘Vyāghrapāda’.

Vyāghrapāda and Patanjali constructed their own hermitage, Patanjali at Ananteeswaram and Vyāghrapāda at Tirupapuleeswaram in Chidambaram. They started worshipping the Swayambhulinga in the Tillai forest. When the time for Śiva for giving them Darsan came, the guardian Goddess of the place, Kalika Devi would not allow it. So there was a dance contest between Lord Siva and Kāli. Finally Kāli was defeated. Then Naṭarāja performed the Ananda Tândavam, which was watched by Śivakamasundari, all the rishīs, all the Gods and the two devotees, Patanjali and Vyāghrapāda. The rishīs requested Lord Śiva to continue this cosmic dance at Tillai for ever, for the benefit of devotees. The devotees, Patanjali and Vyāghrapāda are depicted in the kriti, ‘Ānandanatana Prakāṣam’ in the rāga Kedaram (Anupallavi) as,

‘Divya Patanjali Vyāghrapāda’
Darṣṭa Kunjitābja Charaṇam’

“In his kriti ‘Chidambara Naṭarājam’, Dikshitar specifies that the Lord blesses devotees with Chidananda, the dancing legs indicating the continuous evolution of the Universe. Chidambaram i.e., Chid + Ambaram, the prime seat of cosmic dance, indicates the fact of His dance in space (Ākāśa). The dance pose indicates the task of creation, sustainance, destruction and much more”.

SRI KĀLAHAŚTĪ

Located between two steep hills, on the southern bank of the Swarnamukhi River, Kālahasti is one of the most important pilgrimage centres in Andhrapradesh. Dominating one end of the crowded main street is a 365 m high free standing gopura erected in 1516 by Emperor, Krishna Deva Rāya of Vijayanagar. The royal emblems of the dynasty depicting the boar and the sword together with the sun and the moon are intricately carved on to the walls of this seven storeyed, towered, gateway.

The beginnings of the temple are lost in immemorial times. Kālahasti has reference in the Skandapurāṇam where Arjuna is said to have visited during his teerthayatra, worshipped Kālahastīswara Swami and met Bharadwaja Maharshi on the top of Kailāsa Giri, who told him the sthalamahatmyam of the place and the sacredness of the river Swarnamukhi.

The Śiva linga of Kālahasti is one of the Supreme lingās representing the five great elements. They are installed in five great Kshētrās. All these five elements are mentioned in the Panchalingasthala
kriti of Muthuswami Dikshitar in Huseni rāga, corresponding to the Vāyu linga.

Anupallavi – ‘Anilākāṣa Bhūmi Salila Agni prakāsa Śiva’

The vāyu linga is said to be installed in this kshētra of Kālahasti. In proof of this it can be seen that in the Garbhagruha of the temple, there is a light, which to this day is flickering, even though there is no loop hole for air to enter the temple. The representation of Lord in the form of wind is depicted in the pallavi of the above kriti as,

‘Srī Kālahastīsa Sritajanāvana
Samīrākāra mām pāhi’

Sthalapurāṇam

The Śiva linga in this temple is said to have been worshipped by a spider, a serpent and an elephant. All of them were ardent devotees of Lord Śiva. The spider worshipped the Lord by spinning a web over the linga. The snake placed a gem over the linga. The elephant took water in its trunk and and washed the linga daily. Each thought that his own worship was apt. Atlast, there arose a dispute among them on the same issue. In the end all the three had to lose their lives. Lord Śiva was very much pleased with their devotion and they all attained moksha. The marks of the three beings, Spider (Srī), Cobra (Kāla) and Elephant (Hasti) are still pointed out on the central linga which together with ancient Nandi in front, is white in colour and hence held to be Swayambhū.

Srī Kālahasti is also linked to the legend of Kannappa, the hunter, through its Kaṇṇappa temple. Kannappa was initially known as
Thinnappa. He lived in the forest hunting animals. He was a Siva bhakta. He used to offer the flesh of animals to the Lord after tasting it first by himself. To test his devotion, Lord Śiva once made it appear that His one of His eyes was watering. Thinnappa thought that somebody harmed the Lord. He plucked one of his eyes and offered it to the Lord. Immediately the other eye started watering. He was about to remove his other eye also, when he realised that he would be blind and would not be able to locate the Lord's eye. He raised his feet and kept it at the place of the Lord's eye and started removing his eyes when the Lord appeared before him and said that he should always be near the lingam. So, we find the idol of Kannappa near the lingam and pujas are offered to him first, and only then to the Lord.

The Goddess here is called ‘Jnānaprasūnāmbika’ and is said to be the sister of Lord Venkateshwara of Tirupati. She is called Jnānaprasūnāmbika because she bestows Supreme knowledge of reality on those who worship her with devotion. She was the first to inform Indra of the nature of Parabrahma and hence she is so named. Goddess Jnānaprasūnāmbika finds mention in the above kriti. Lord Śiva is depicted as the beloved of Jnānaprasūnāmbika in the charanam as,

Jnānaprasūnāmbikāpate’

The main temple also has sculptures on a hill named ‘Dakshina Kailāsa’. This hill is curved in shape and at some places of the Kālahastiśwara temple, form its walls. The ‘Dakshina Kailāsa’ hill is also mentioned in the Huseni kriti in the charana as,

‘Bhaktābhīmāna Dakshina Kailāsa’
The sthalapurāṇa states that when Brahma, the creator, began to perform penance in the presence of this linga, Lord Śiva left Kailāsa and took his abode in this linga. He was accompanied by Parvati and her attendant, Durga. Thus this place is known as ‘Dakshīṇa Kailāsa’.

The low caste hunter Kannappa finds mention in the charaṇam of the Huseni kriti as, ‘Hīnajāti kirātākēna Pujita kīrte’.

Kālaḥasti is thus an ancient place mentioned in the purāṇās extensively. The most important festival in this temple is that of Mahāśivarātri which lasts for 10 days between the months of February and March. Another big festival is on the third day in Sankrānti when this deity is taken in procession round the hills which is a circuit of nearly 20 miles. There are in all 85 festivals in this temple in a year.

TIRUVANṆĀMALAI

One of the most sacred cities of Tamilnadu, this pilgrim town is the place where Lord Śiva is believed to have appeared as a column of fire (Sthāvara lingam) inorder to assert His supremacy over Brahma and Vishnu. Arunāchala (red mountain) which forms a back drop to the town is said to be the site where the fire manifested itself and is thus perceived as the light of God himself. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed a kriti ‘Arunāchalanātham’ in Sararga rāga on the Tējo lingam.

Sthalapurāṇam

Two traditions are associated with this historic temple, those of Lingodbhava and Arddhanārīśwara. According to the first one, once
Brahma and Vishnu quarrelled for ascertaining the superiority of one over the other. Later Lord Śiva appeared as a cosmic flame of light before them. They were surprised to see the flame and did not know the top and bottom of the flame. For this Lord Vishnu took the form of a boar and dived deep into the earth. Bahma took the form of a swan and flew up. Lord Vishnu admitted his defeat. But Lord Brahma, on his way met a ‘thāzhambū’ and realised that the flower had been floating down for 40,000 years from Lord Śiva’s head. He told Siva a lie that he had seen the top of the flame. Lord Śiva understood that Brahma was lying and plucked off the head with which he told the lie. He also said that there on there will be no temple for Brahma. The thāzhambū was also punished that it would not be used for the Lord’s worship.

The second tradition says that Parvati once jokingly closed the Lord’s eyes with her hands. The whole world became actionless and the people suffered. To expiate the sin the Goddess went to Kāncheepuram where she made a linga of earth and worshipped it. Lord Śiva then told her that she should go to Tiruvanāmalai and perform penance for their reunion. Accordingly, she came to Tiruvanāmalai and set up a hermitage on the top of a hill there. During that time she killed the enormous giant or demon ‘Mahishāsura’. She then organised a big festival on Kārtīgai day. She saw the cosmic flame on the summit and then took her place in the Lord’s left side. Thus the ‘Arddhanārīśwara’ form.

On the day of the Kārthigai deepam festival, an enormous deepa using 2000 lts of ghee and a 30 m. wide wick is lit on the hill and it burns for days.
The Arunāchalēśwaram temple, the town’s most important structure is one of the five elemental shrines of Lord Śiva as said above. Here the linga is encased Gold and represents fire. This representation is made clear in the Saranga rāga kriti of Dikshitar. He has used the terms ‘Tarunāditya köti sankāșam’, ‘Tejomaya lingam’, ‘Svapradīpa’ and ‘Svaprakāṣa’.

This temple is one of the largest temple complexes in India, parts of dating to the 11th century. It has nine imposing towers, huge prakaras, the large Śiva Ganga tank and a vast 1000 pillared hall. The beginnings of the temple are lost to history. Tiruvannāmalai is also where Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi, the famous 20th century saint, spent 23 years in meditation.

RĀMEŚWARAM

A pilgrimage to Rāmeśwaram is among the important injunctions laid on the Hindu, from time immemorial. The great temple of Śrī Rāmanātha is connected by tradition with Kāsi. A pilgrimage to Kāsi is considered incomplete without one to Rāmeśwaram and a bath in Dhanushkōṭi, a tip of the island where the Bay of Bengal, called the ‘Mahōdadhi’ in ancient times joins the Indian Ocean.

The Rāmanātha Swāmi temple is dedicated to Lord Śiva. It houses the linga that Lord Rama, the hero of the epic, Rāmaṇyaṇa, is said to have installed and worshipped after his victory over Rāvana in Lanka. Founded by the Chōla rulers, but expanded extensively during the Nāyaka period in the 16th-18th centuries, this massive temple is enclosed within a high wall with five gōpurās.
After defeating and killing Rāvana, Śrī Rama returned to Rāmēśwaram Island with Sita. Since Rama killed a brāhmaṇa (Rāvana was the grandson of sage Pulastya, a Brahmin by caste), he had the sin of brahmahatya. To get rid of this, Rama had to perform a purificatory rite before a Śiva lingam. As there was no Śiva lingam, Hanumān was ordered to go to Kailāsa at once and request Śiva to give his image for worship at Gandhamādana Hill. As Hanumān could not get the image readily, he started penance. As the auspicious time was to expire shortly, “Sita made an image of Śiva out of sand and it was worshipped at the fixed time, Wednesday, the Śukla 10th day of Jaishta when the moon was in hasta and the sun in Taurus”\(^1\) Just then Hanumān returned with a Śiva linga from Kailāsa. Seeing that the pūja was over, Hanumān became angry. Rama seeing his discomfiture, told him to remove the already installed linga and in that place to install the linga which he brought. Hanumān gave an effort but failed. Seeing this Rama consoled him and installed the linga which Hanumān brought to the left of the other linga and said that all the pilgrims would worship his installation first. The linga is called ‘Kāśi Viśvanātha Rāmanāthaswāmi’ and ‘Rāmalinga’

The temple is conch shaped. The Sēthupatīs of Rāmanāthapuram, of which district Rāmēśwaram is an administrative part, were the guardians of the Sēthu, the bridge according to tradition was built for Rama to cross over into Srilanka, when he set out to recover Sita. Muthswami Dikshitar has composed the kriti in the rāga Kasiramakriya on this Śiva deity. He has mentioned the bridge Sēthu and also the Gandhamādana Hill which is the biggest point of the island. He depicts the Lord as,
The two storeyed mandapa stands on the Gandhamadana.

The most remarkable feature of this temple is the sokkattan mandapam, so called because of its shape of a dice (sokkattan). The complex also has a staggering 22 tirthas for ritual ablutions. According to time honoured tradition, the pilgrim bathes first in the ‘Agni Tīrtha’ as the sea to the east of the temple is called and finally in the Koti Tīrtha which is within the temple. The importance of bathing in these tirthas derives from the tradition that Srikrishna himself did so. The ‘Kōṭi Tīrtha’ finds mention in the Kasiramakriya kriti as,

‘Kāmitaphalapraada Dēvam

Kōṭi Tīrtha Prabhāvam’

Dhanushkōṭi has a spectacular beach. From here a series of boulders, known as Adam’s bridge can be seen extending forth into the horizon. These are believed to have been used by Hanumān and his friends, when they crossed the ocean in search of Sita. Dikshitar indirectly mentions Hanumān and his friends in the kriti as,

Kapibrindādi Sannutam’, i.e., worshipped by a group of monkeys.

“The Kōdanaḍa Rāma temple on the shore is said to be where Rāvana’s brother surrendered to Rāma. Miraculously, the temple survived a devastating cyclone in the year 1964”*11. The Vimāna of three storeys contains image of Hanumān, Gandhamadana linga and the Agastya linga. In yet another shrine there is an image of the consort of Lord Śiva, ‘Parvatavarddhini’. Usually in Śiva temples, the Goddess is enshrined to the left of the Lord. But here, this location has not been followed. The
consort of Lord Śiva at Ramēswaram, Goddess Parvatavarddhini, is also mentioned in the Kāsirāmakriya kriti.

‘Sadā Parvatavarddhinī Mānasōllāsakaram’

The important festivals are Mahāśivarātri, Vasantōtsavam, Rāmalinga pratishṭōtsavam, the holy marriage, Navaratri, Skanda Shashti and Arudra Darṣanam. The installation ceremonies of the linga by Rama and Sita are celebrated every year.

TIRUCHIRAPALLI

Situated at the head of the fertile Kaveri Delta, this city is named after the fierce three- headed demon (Trisira), who attained salvation after being slain by Śiva. The history of the town is interwoven with the political fortunes of the Pallavās, Chōlas, Nayakās and finally the British who shortened its name to Trichy. Today Tiruchirapalli is the second largest city of Tamilnadu. Muthuswami Dikshitar in his Śiva kriti ‘SrīMātrubhūtam’ in the rāga Kannada depicts Lord Śiva as ‘Trisiragirināatham’ in the Pallavi.

In this fabulous Śiva temple, the Lord is worshipped as ‘Tāyumānavar’ (The lord who became a mother). These aspects are included in the above Dikshitar kriti. He addresses Lord Śiva as ‘Srī Mātrubhūtam’ and ‘Vaiśya jāti Sthreecēshadharanam’

Sthalapurāṇam

The legend goes to say that a pious lady, advanced in pregnancy, had to cross the river Kaveri, which she could not because the river was in spate. Stranded on the bank, the poor lady stood helpless. At
that moment, Lord Śiva disguised as her mother, attended on her as a mid-wife. Thus the Lord here came to be known as ‘Tāyumānavar’ (Tāyum-mother also and ānavar- who became)

At the base of the southern rock face is the first two cave temples. The lower one dates back to the 18th century and the upper one to the reign of the Great Pallava ruler, Mahendravarman (600-630). This contains one of the great wonders of the Pallava art, the Gangādhara Pand, depicting the Lord holding a lock of his matted hair to receive the River Ganga as she descends. There is a beautiful tank near the Rock temple known as the Teppakkulam, which adds to the beauty of the town and the shrine

TIRUNELVELI

Situated in the fertile tract fed by the Tāmarapāṇi river, Tirunelveli is dominated by the Kāntimati Nellaiyappar temple, parts of which date to the 13th century. There is a story behind the name of this town. Once a Brahmin named Vēda Śarman, who was a great devotee of Lord Śiva, lived in this town. He was very poor. He daily went out begging alms with which he offered Naivedya to the Lord. Once when he was drying the paddy which he had collected, it rained suddenly. The Brahmin prayed to the Lord who took pity on him and protected the paddy from rain. So this place came to be known as ‘Tirunelvēli’ (Tiru-Divine, Nel-Paddy, Vēli- Fence). The Lord here came to be known as Nelliayappar and the Dēvi, Kāntimati.

This complex of twin temples, dedicated to Śiva and Parvati has two huge rectangular enclosures connected by a long corridor. The Śiva temple is to the north while the Parvati temple is to the south.
Muthuswami Dikshitar in his Devagandhari kriti, ‘Sālivatīśwaram’ has depicted Lord Siva as one who delights Kāntimati, the daughter of the mountain as,

‘Ṣailasuta Kāntimatīlīlam’

The same kriti has the mention of Lord Siva as one who resides in the city of Sālivāti as, ‘Sālivāti Nagaravihāram’. This temple has elaborate mandapas which include the Sōmavāra mandapa which contains the two pillars carved like gōpurās, the Rishabha mandapa, with exquisitively carved sculptures of Manmatha, the God of Love and his consort Rati and the Mani mandapa with a set of stone pillars that produce the melodic notes of carnatic music when tapped. The Nandi in this temple is fairly big, similar to those at Rāmēśwaram and Tanjavur.

Sthalapurāṇam

There are several legends connected to this temple. They are,

1. A Śiva lingam known as the ‘Anavarata Khan’ is installed in the south-eastern corner of the prakāram. It is believed that the wife of one of the Nawab was suffering from some acute disease and consulted Brahmins for treatment. She was advised to worship Nellaiyappar. To the surprise of all, the queen was recovered and a male child was born to her. The boy was named Anavarata Khan and the shrine was built in a corner of the prakāram in memory of the prince and the queen.

2. When the marriage ceremony of Lord Śiva and Parvati took place in the Himalayas, the northern part of the country was so
overcrowded that the equilibrium was disturbed. Lord Śiva asked Sage Agastya to go to the south and restore equilibrium. The sage agreed and obtained darsan of Lord Śiva at Tirunelveli.

3. It is believed that when Sri Rama went on in search of Sita, he came to this place and worshipped Nellaiyappar.

4. Lord Śiva once came to Tirunelveli in the form of a lingam. He had the four Vēdās, standing around him as bamboo trees, providing him shade. So this place is known as ‘Vēṇu Vanam’ (Bamboo forest)

Every summer the temple’s wooden chariots are led in procession through the town during the annual chariot festival or summer festival, which attracts thousands of devotees. This summer festival is also quoted in the Devagandhari rāga kriti as, ‘Valipūjita Grīshma Mahōtsavam’.

KUMBHAKOṆAM

Like Kāancheepuram, Kumbhakōṇam is one of the most sacred cities in Tamilnadu located on the southern bank of the Kaveri river. This is a very ancient city. There are innumerable Śaiva and Vaishṇava temples in the town. The oldest Śaiva fane is the Ādikumbhēśwara.

Sthalapurāṇam

When there was a deluge after the Dvāpara Yuga, the Almighty left a pot of nectar containing the seeds of creation, adrift on the face of the waters. The drifting pot became stranded in what is now
Kumbhakōnā. Lord Śiva appeared as a hunter and aimed an arrow at it. The pot (kumbham) broke and the nectar spilled all over. Majority of it flowed into what is now called the ‘Mahāmaham Tank’. The place from where the Lord aimed the arrow came to be known as ‘Bānapurēsam’. The nectar spread out on the ground up to a distance of 5 krōsās and touched the five famous Śiva shrine around Kumbhakōnānam namely TiruvidaiMarudūr, TiruvōrugaM, Tirunāgēswaram, Tirudharāsuram and Tirupadalavanam. These five places came to be known as ‘Panchakrōṣa Sthalās’. A pilgrim is required to visit these five places before visiting Ādi Kumbhēśwarar. From the drops and spray of the nectar there arose innumerable holy tank. Out of the pieces of broken pot, Lord Śiva made out a Śiva linga and entered into it. This is the same linga now enshrined in the temple and hence the name ‘Ādi Kumbhēśwarar’ meaning, one who entered the Kumbha long long ago.

The unique feature here is the depiction of the 27 stars and the 12 zodiac signs carved on a large block of stone in the Navarātri Mandapā. The Goddess in the temple is Mangalāmbika. Goddess finds mention in the kritis ‘Kumbhēśwarāya’ and ‘Kumbhēśwarēṇa’ in Kalyani rāga.

‘Kumbhēśwarāya’ - ‘Kumbhēśwarāya Namaste Śrī Mangalāmba Samētāya Namaste Namaste’

‘Kumbhēśwarēṇa’ - ‘Indudhara Mangalāmbāyutēṇa’

The image of the Lord in the Ādi Kumbhēśwara temple, tradition says, is made of the nectar mixed with sand. During the annual festival, ‘Māsi Makam’ in the temple, the image of the Lord is brought to
the banks of the tank. This grand annual festival is specially mentioned in
the kriti ‘Kumbhēśwarēna’ as,

‘Kumbhamāsa Maka Mahōtsavēna’

This festival is celebrated in the Maka nakshatra in the
month of Kumbha every year.

To the north of the Mahāmaham Tank there is a shrine
dedicated to Lord Śiva under the name ‘Kāsi Viśwanātha’. It is said that
Lord Viśwanātha at the instance of the Nava Kannikas , i.e, nine virgins
namely Ganga , Yamuna, Kaveri, Godavari, Narmada, Saraswati,
Kumari, Payoshini and Sarayu, came down to Kumbhakoṇam and stayed
with them. Temples for all these virgins have been built here. The shrine
representing the river Kaveri occupies the central position. Muthuswami
Dikshitar in his kriti ‘Kumbhēśvarāya’ has mentioned Kaveri as,

‘Ambudhi Kāverī Tīrasthita’

The Mahāmaham tank is Kumbhakoṇam’s sacred centre and
the site of the great Mahāmaham festival, held every twelve years. At this
auspicious time thousands of devotees enters the tank for their holy dip.
Devotees believe that all the nine sacred rivers of India mentioned above,
also bathe in the tank to clean themselves of the sins of humanity
accumilated in their waters.

Kumbhakoṇam also has the Mutt of Srī Śankara of Srī
kāṇchi. The head quarters of the Kāṇchi Kāmakōṭi Pīṭam were shifted
from Kāṇchi, first to Tanjavur and later in 1743 to
Kumbhaköṇam. Dikshitar has mentioned the ‘Kōmaköṭi Pīṭa’ in his kriti, ‘Kumbhēśwarēṇa’ as, ‘Kāmakōṭi Pīṭa Yatinutēṇa’ (Śiva worshipped by the pontiffs of Kamakōṭi Pīṭa)

**TIRUVĀNAIKKAVAL**

East of the Ranganātha Temple at Srirangam is the mid 17th Jambukēśwaram temple in the village of Tiruvānaikkāval. The main sanctum contains one of the five elemental lingās representing Śiva as the manifestation of water. There is always water around the linga in the sanctum, no matter how often the water is pumped off. Because of this, the linga is called the ‘appu linga’ from the Tamil word for water.

**Sthalapurāṇam**

Long ago this place was a forest of jambu trees. A sage named Śambhu, once performed penance under a tree and he got a jambu fruit which appeared special to him. He set out to Kailās to offer it to Lord Śiva and he himself took a part. Immediately a jambu tree started growing in his stomach and came out. He was turned into a jambu tree. The sage was happy and requested Lord Śiva to take his abode under the tree. Lord Śiva asked him to return to his original place and after many years gave darsan to the sage. The sthala vruksham is jambu tree.

**Appu lingam**

Once Parvati had a doubt and when she went to Lord Śiva for clarification, she was asked to conduct penance at Tiruvānaikkāval. Parvati made a lingam of water particles and started worship. Even today
when Kaveri is in flood, water oozes out of the lingam. Atlast Lord Śiva appeared before her and said, 'Just as a dancer dances before his disciples to train them in that art, so also, we first led a family life to show the people how they should live as husband and wife and then we led a life of ascetics to teach the people how to worship the Almighty to get salvation at the end. As Devi took upadēṣa from the Lord in this place, both of them are enshrined facing each other. Such places are known as Upadēṣasthalās. Mūthuswami Dīkshitar in his Yamunakalyani rāga kriti ‘Jambūpate’ has mentioned Lord Śiva as manifested in the form of appu linga in deference to the prayers of Parvati as,

‘Parvataja prārthita appulinga vibhō’

In Mount Kailasa, two people Malyavan and Pushpadanta always quarrelled on the issue of devotion to Lord Śiva. They atlast cursed each other and Malyavan became a spider and Pushpadanta became an elephant. Both of them came to this place and worshipped the same linga. The elephant collected holy water and conducted abhishēkam to the lingam daily. The spider constructed a canopy over the linga to protect it from dry leaves. The elephant was angry when he swathe cobwebs and tore it off. This went on for days. Once, the spider was too angry that it crawled into the trunk of the elephant and bit it. The elephant could not bear the pain that it hit the trun on the ground and died. So did the spider. Lord Śiva was pleased with their devotion and blessed them. As the Lord was once worshipped by elephants, this place came to be known as ‘Tiruvānaikka’, meaning, ‘grove of the holy elephant’. “The present name ‘Tiruvānaikkāval’ or ‘Tiruvānaikkōvil’ is only a corruption of this ancient name”. *12

Lord Śiva as worshipped by the elephants is depicted in the above kriti in Yamunakalyani as ‘Samajāṭavi Nilaya Svayambhō’.
The spider was later reborn as the son of the Chōla King Subhadeva and his queen Kamalāvati. The boy Kosenkannan, inherited his father’s kingdom and remembering his former births constructed a Śiva temple near the white Jambu tree in the sacred elephant grove where he formerly worshipped the lingam.

The Devi in the temple is known as Akhilāndēswari. The Yamunakalyani kriti of Muthuswami Dikshitar finds mention of Devi Akhilāndēswari as

‘Ambudhi Gangā Kāvēri Yamuna
Kambu Kandyākhilāndēswari Ramaṇa’

It is said that Devi Akhilāndēswari was fierce with Ugra kala and that Sri Sankara diminished her ferocity by transferring it to gold earrings with which he adorned her.

A number of festivals take place in this temple throughout the year. ‘The Maṇḍala brahmōtsavam’ celebrated in the Tamil months of Panguni and Chitirai (March –April) lasts for 40 days and attracts thousands of devotees from surrounding places.

VAITHEESWARAM KOIL - TALAKKĀD

The historic city of Talakkād situated on the north bank of the Kaveri River, now lies partly buried under shifting sand-dunes. From the 5th to the 10th century it was the capital of the Ganga dynasty. But only two temples survive from that period. The largest edifice at this site is the 12th century Vaitheeswaram temple dedicated to Lord Śiva. Nearby is the
more modest Kirtinarāyanan temple, where the 3mt. high image of Vishṇu is still worshipped. The famous Panchalinga Darṣana in Nov-Dec owes its origin to purānic lore.

**Sthalapurāṇam**

The place attained the name ‘Talakkād’ after two hunter brothers, tala and Kada. They once struck at a tree with an axe, beneath which there was a Śiva linga. They saw blood pouring forth from the linga. A heavenly voice made them dress the wound with the juice of the leaves and fruits of the same tree. Thus the linga was named as ‘Vaitheēswaram’ meaning, one who treated himself.

This is also believed to be the place where Angāraka was cured by Lord Śiva from leprosy in the form of a Vaidya. All the Navagrahās are enshrined here and among them Angāraka is worshipped with great reverence and thus this shrine is also called ‘Angāraka kshētra’. It is said that ‘Tiru Chand Pills’ was the medicine which Vaidyanātha gave to Angāraka to cure his illness. Muthuswami Dikshitar commences one of his kritis in Atana as,

‘Sri Vaidyanātham Bhajāmi’

The panchalingās are worshipped in Talakkād. As the Lord treated himself he was Vaitheēswara, northward he was Arkēśwara, eastward he was Vasukeēswara or Pātālēśwara, to the south he was Saikaṭēswara or Marālēśwara and to the west he was Mallikārjuna. The five lingas represent Lord’s five faces.
The Panchalinga darsana falls on a rare astronomical combination that it occurs at intervals ranging from 4-14 years. The pilgrim ought to bathe first in the Gökarna tirtha and without changing his wet clothes he has to, after worshipping at the shrines of Gökarnēswara and Chandika devi, go to the Vaitheeswaram temple and take his permission to worship the other four lingās. He should bathe in the north, east, south and west stretches of the Kāveri in that order and worship the respective lingās returning to the Vaitheeswaram at every stage and finally in the Kīrtinarāyaṇa temple. The pilgrim must complete the pilgrimage in a day.

The Goddess of this temple is Bālāmbika, who has a special mention in the above mentioned kriti of Dikshitar as,

’Sritajana Vandita Bālāmbikēsam’

The sthala vriksham, the sacred neem (medicinal) tree is in the eastern outer corridor. The important teertham known as the ‘Siddhāmruta teertham’ is a big tank lying south of the temple of the Goddess in the southern corridor.

TIRUVAIYĀR

The fertile region watered by the Kāveri Rriver and its four tributaries is known as ‘Tiruvaiyār’, the land of the five rivers. The Tamil people have regarded the Kāveri as the sacred source of life, religion and culture for nearly 2000 years. As a result many scholars, artists, poets and musicians settled in this region under the enlightened patronage of the rulers of Tanjore. Among them was saint Tyagaraja, the great composer
of carnatic music. The history of this small town is thus deeply linked with the growth and development of South Indian classical music.

The little Tyāgarāja temple in the town was built in memory of the last resting place of the celebrated saint composer. A musical festival is held every year on the death anniversary of Saint Tyagarāja. The Pancharatna kritīs are rendered in high esteem at this occasion.

Another important temple in the town is the 9th century Panchanadeśwara temple (Lord of five rivers) built by the Chōlās, dedicated to Lord Śiva. The Goddess here is Dharmasavarddhini. The Panchanada Kṣhetra finds mention in the kritīs of Mūthuswami Dikshitar

1. ‘Pranatārthiharam’ in the rāga Nayaki (pallavi)
   ‘Pranatārthiharam Namami Sata
   Panchanadakṣētra Prakāśitam’

2. ‘Pranatārthiharāya’ in the rāga Samantam (Charaṇam)
   ‘Panchanada kṣētra Prakāśakāya’

3. ‘Paramēśwara’ in the rāga Nata (Charaṇam)
   ‘Panchanadakṣētra Prabhākara’

The Goddess Dharmasavarddhini is also depicted in some of his kritīs.

1. ‘Paramēśwara’ in the rāga Nata (Anupallavi)
   ‘Dharmasamvarddhini Manōharāya’

2. ‘Pranatārthiharāya’ in the rāga Samantam (Pallavi)
   ‘Dharmasamvarddhini Sahitāya’

3. ‘Pranatārthiharam’ in the rāga Nayaki (Charaṇam)
‘Vara Dharmasamavarddhinī Ramaṇa’

Tiruvaiyar is one of the sapta sthalās of Lord Śiva and the term ‘Sapta Sthāna’ finds mention in the Nayaki kriti in the charanam as ‘Vasudēvanata Sapta Sthānam’.

NĀGAPATṬINAM

The place attained the name ‘Nāgapaṭṭinam’ since this was the town where Naṭarāja was once blessed by Mahāvishṇu. The Lord here is called ‘Kāyārohana Swāmi’ and the Goddess is’Nīḷayatākshi’. The name Kāyārōhana Swāmi was obtained because the Lord gave mōksha to Pundareeka in his bodily state. Mūthuswami Dikshitar has mentioned Kāyārōhanaswāmi in two of his kritīs.

1. ‘Kāyārohanēṣam’ in the rāga Devagandharam (Pallavi)
   ‘Kāyārohanēṣam bhajare re manasa’
2. ‘Śivakāyārōhanēṣāya’ in the rāga Rudrapriya (Pallavi)
   ‘Śivakāyārōhanēṣāya namaste’

The idol of the Goddess Nīḷayatākshi in the temple here is said to have been brought from the region of Nile River in Egypt. “It is also said that there are some Hindu temples still in Arabia which goes to show that Hinduism prevailed in ancient times in Arabia and Africa” *13. Goddess Nīḷayatākshi finds mention in both the above kritīs.

‘Kāyārōhanēṣam’- ‘Nīḷayatākshi Manōllāsa Kāranam (Charaṇam)
‘Śivakāyārōhanēṣāya’ - ‘Nīḷayatākshi Manōharāya’ (Charaṇam)
The temple has a metallic idol of Vināyaka with five heads, one at the top and four on various sides. This Ganapati has lion as vāhana. There are paintings of Urddhva Tāṇḍava of Lord Naṭarāja posed against Śivakāmi in the dancing form on the opposite wall. On another side there is a painting of the Lord testing the devotion of the Brāhmīns. It shows the Lord coming to his bhaktas in the form of an out caste with four dogs and a drum with Him and Parvati leading two boys by the hand and a liquor pot on her head. The Brahmins, who were performing the yajna shouts at the outcaste to go away since he was an untouchable. The out-caste proceeds and except a true devotee, all others run away from him. Only the true devotee realises the Lord.

There is also the Tyāgarāja deity in the temple. Nāgapattnam is one of the seven abodes of Tyāgarāja. The temple is also called ‘Śiva Rājadhāni kshētra’ which finds mention in both the above mentioned kritīs.

‘Śivakāyārōhanēśāya’ - ‘Śiva Rājadhāni Kshēstrasthitam’ (Charanām)

‘Kāyārōhanēśam’ - ‘Śivarājadhāni Kshēstrasthitam’ (Pallavi)

It is said that sage Dhruva came to this place in the krita yuga. Chaitra māsam, makam Nakshatra day, is that of festivity in the temple now. He came to this place to conduct penance.

MĀYĀVĀRAM

Māyāvāram is popularly known as the ‘Banares of the poor of the South’. This temple of Mayūranātha measures 719 ft. by 527ft. and is
situated at a distance of about 2 miles from Māyāvāram junction. There is an imposing gopuram 164ft. high adorning the entrance in the east and it has nine storeys.

**Sthalapurāṇam**

The legend goes that Sati Dēvi attended the Daksha Yāga disobeying her Lord and she was insulted by her father. While the yāga was desecrated by Veerabhadra, a pea- hen got injured and it took refuge under Sati. At the end when Sati entered the fire, she was thinking about the pea- hen to which she gave shelter and so in the next birth she took the form of a pea- hen and came to this place. Sati conducted penance for many years and at last attained re-union with Lord Śiva. So the place came to be known as ‘Māyāvāram’ or ‘Mayūram’, meaning pea-hen. The Lord of the temple came to be known as ‘Mayūranātha’. The other names by which the place is known are, Sudavanam, Sikhandipuram, Brahmapuram, Brahmavanam, etc. The Dēvi is known as Abhayapradāmbika, Abhayāmbika, Anjalanāyaki, Anjali and so on, which means, one who gave refuge. The legend says that when Dēvi conducted penance in the form of pea- hen, it consumed the leaves of mango tree which is the sthala vriksham.

Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed kritīs on the deity of this temple. In the kriti ‘Mayūranātham’ in Dhanyasi, he depicts the Lord as ‘Mayūranātha’ in the Pallavi.

‘Mayūranātham aniśam bhajāmi’

In this kriti he has mentioned the Lord, who is worshipped by pea- hens as,

‘Kekipūjitāmra vanagēham’
This line also takes the sthala vriksha name – ‘Amra’ meaning mango.

The Goddess Abhayāmbika also finds mention in the charanam of the kriti as,

‘Nandikēṣamapramēyam Abhayāṃbikēṣam’

There are three shrines dedicated to Vināyaka under the names ‘Periya Vināyaka’, ‘Agastya Vināyaka’ or Granary Vināyaka. At Māyāvaram there are many holy teerthams and the river Kāveri flows near by. Vrishabha teertham is a particular bathing ghat in the river Kāveri. It was formed as a result of the anger of Lord Śiva when he pushed Nandi down to Pātāla lōka at Māyāvāram on the bank of the river Kāveri. Devotees take their holy bath and perform obsequies to their deceased ancestors during the month of Tulām (Oct- Nov). It is believed that the rivers Ganga and Yamuna visit this place and mix with the Vrishabha teertham on the day of New Moon, occurring in Tula month. A pot of water taken from this teertham on this auspicious day can be preserved for many years without getting spoilt.

Many festivals are celebrated in this temple, the Brahmōtsavam being the most important.

**TIRUVENKĀDU**

The sacred shrine of Tiruvengādu is situated about 7 miles south-east of Shiyali railway station in the Tanjore district between the rivers Kāveri and Manikarnika. The temple is situated in the heart of the
town, surrounded on all sides by five prakārams known as the ‘Pancha prakārams’. The gōpuram adds beauty to the temple.

Once upon a time, this place was surrounded by thick forests on all side which when seen from a distance looked white and hence the name Tiru-Ven-Kādu. In Sanskrit it is called ‘Śwētārāṇyam’. Muthuswami Dikshitar has commenced his Śiva kriti in Arabhi rāga with ‘Śwētāranyēśwaram Bhajēham’

He has again used the terms ‘Śwētāranya Kshētram’ and ‘Śwētāmbarādi Dharam’ in the charanām. This place is also known as ‘Vēdavenkādu’, ‘Muktināgar’, ‘Murugan Pundi’, ‘Pātala Kailās’, ‘Jnānanārāyanam’, ‘Ādi Chidambaram’ etc. There are many shrines dedicated to Vināyaka and the Navagrahās are installed in a single row facing the Lord.

Lord Śwētāranyēśwara is the presiding deity of the place and His consort is known as ‘Brahmavidyā Nāyaki’ and the shrines of both Lord and the Dēvi are built facing the east. Muthuswami Dikshitar has mentioned the Goddess in the above Arabhi kriti as ‘Sada Brahmavidyānāyakīsamētam’

The ears of the Nandi installed at the entrance, face the the shrine of Dēvi and the face towards the shrine of the Lord. “This implies that the heavenly bull, Nandi, is losing no time in transmitting the message from Devi and waits for further commands”. Nandi here has nine wounds made with a spear. He was injured in the war with an Asura called Marutēśwara. Knowing that His attendant was injured by the Asurās, the Lord opened his third eye and a jyōthi came flashing. The
sages there prayed him that the jyōthi may be turned into a form. This form is called the ‘Aghōra Mūrti’ which is installed in a portion of the temple. It picturises Lord Śiva in rage, in a pose of action.

It is said that the Lord attained the name ‘Śvētāranyaswāmi’ since He gave salvation to a devotee named Śvētakētu. For this devotee the Lord danced the seven tāndavams namely Ānanda, Sandhyā, Sambara, Tripurāntaka, Urddhva, Bhujanga and Lalita.

The Goddess Mother (Kāli) also dances the Gowri Tāndavam and Kāli Tāndavam. The Kāli here is called ‘Bhadrakāli’. There are two other Kālis called ‘Brahmavidyai’ and ‘Durgai’. There are also the Ashtalakshmīs in the temple. In his Rudrapriya rāga kriti, Mūthuswami Dikshitar has depicted Lord as the husband of Bhadrakāli.

‘Bhadrakāli ramaṇam Bhavaharanam’ (Anupallavi)

The image of Lord Nāṭarāja has seven weapons- Vētalam, Khadgam, Uḍukku, Mani, Kēdayam, Kapālam and Triśūlam. Opposite the Lord is Bhadrakāli with eight hands in a sitting posture.

In this temple, the image of the Lord has five faces. The sthala vrikshās are Vilva, Vadaval and Konrai. The Vilva vriksham is near the shrine of Devi, the Vadaval on the side of the Chandra Tīrtham and the Konrai tree behind the shrine of the Aghōramūrti in the second prākāram.

According to the sthalapurāṇa, Indra, Iravatam, Brahma, Agni, Sūrya, Muruga, Vyāghrapāda and many other angels have worshipped the
Lord and obtained their desires fulfilled. Among the 279 famous Śiva temples, Sri Umāpati Śivāchāriar has given this temple, the 11th place.

There are three tīrthās inside the temple which are Agni, Sūrya and Chandra which are said to have been created out of the three drops which fell from Lord Śiva’s eyes when He was dancing.

There are festivals and celebrations through out the year. But the period between mid February and mid march- which coincides with the Tamil month Masi is most important. There are celebrations for 12 days and on the twelfth day, the float festival is celebrated in all grandeur in the Chandra Teertham.

TIRUKKADAIYUR

Tirukkadaiyur Amrutaghatēśwar temple is situated in the small town of Tirukkadaiyur. It is a very holy place of pilgrimage in the south. It is the place where Yama Dharmaraja was punished by Lord Siva for his indiscreet action.

Once Lord Brahma was given some Vilva leaves by Lord Śiva and was asked to sow the seeds at many places. Lord Śiva told him that the place where the seeds sprouted will be the place where he himself would appear and give jnānopadēśa. Brahma did so and the seeds sprouted only at Tirukkadaiyur. The Vilva trees grew like a forest and gave the place the name Vilva vanam. The Lord here is called Vilvanēśwar.
Tirukkadaiyur is also famous that, this was the place where Sage Mrukandu was blessed with a son. The Śiva lingam originally worshipped by Markandeya is still to be seen very close by. It is believed that a flower plant called Pinjitam along with water from Ganges was brought by the Lord for the worship of Markandeya. The Pinjitam is the sthalavruksham and the place is also called ‘Pinjitavanam’.

There are three tirthams- amrita pushkaram, Kāla teertham and Mārkanḍeya teertham. The water of the Mārkanḍeya teertham is used only for ablusion of Śrī Amritaghaṭēswar and Śankabhishekam. The devotees are allowed to take bath in it only on the Suklapaksha Aswini day in the month of Phaguni (March – April)

Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed the kriti ‘Sankaramabhirāmin’ in Kamalamanohari rāga in praise of this deity. Lord Śiva is depicted as ‘Amritaghaṭēswar in this kriti as,
‘Amrutaghaṭēswaram Bhajēham’ (Pallavi)

The Sankhabhishēkam which is one of the most important ceremonies of the temple is mentioned in this kriti as,

‘Ṣankhabhishēka gātram
Sachidāṇandamāṭram’ (Pallavi)

In this kriti Lord Śiva is also depicted as one who conferred long life to Mārkanḍeya and the one who destroyed and later blessed Yama. (The event happened in this place)

‘Bhaktamārkanḍēyāyushpradam’ (Charaṇam)
‘Yama nigrahāṇugraham’ (Charaṇam)
A festival is observed here, during the month of Phalguna, when the image of Mārkanḍēya is carried in procession to the well, in which the same water brought by the Lord was stored from the day it was received. Another important festival is the Brahmōtsavam in Chaitra. During this festival, on the 6th day, Kālasamharam will take place. Navaratri and Ādi Pooram are also celebrated here. The most important festival is the ‘Sankhateertha Abhisēkam’ on each Kārthikā Sōmavāram.

SANKARANAYINĀRKŌIL

Sri Śankaranārayanan Swāmi temple is one among the five famous temples of Śiva in the Tirunelvēli district. The image at Śankaranāyinar Kōil is Mṛittika lingam (Earth)

At present the Sankaranāyinăr is half Śankara and half Nārāyana. The right portion of the image is smeared with sandal paste and has the emblem of Śiva with cobra around his neck, deer, moon etc. The left side is Vishṇu having Sankham and Chakra. Both are carved in one figure

The legend says that Gomati Amman, the consort of Śiva, wanted to see Hari and Hara as one and the same Murti. She conducted penance and on one full moon day Lord Śiva gave her darsan as Śankaranārayana. To commemorate this date, the Ādi Tapas festival is performed every year near Poongavana Kshētram.

Another legend is connected with the Pāṇḍya ruling chief of the locality, Ugra Pāṇḍyan. He used to go to Madurai on an elephant for daily worship. One day his elephant got into a pit. When the king stood
perplexed, a Harijan came running and informed the king that a cobra was clinging on to a Śiva lingam inside an ant-hill in the nearby jungle. The king rushed to the spot and constructed a temple around the Linga later. This is the origin of the present shrine. The earth obtained from the ant-hill is said to have wonderful healing power of skin diseases. This sacred earth is sold at the temple in the form of globules.

The sacred tank known as the Nāga Sunai is believed to have been dug by the serpent kings, Śankha and Padma to ensure supply of water for the daily ablution of Śankaranārāyana Swami. This water also has wonderful healing power.

The gopuram of the temple is said to be the second highest gopuram in India. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed a kriti in praise of Śankaranārāyana Swami, in the rāga Nārāyana Dēsākshi. It commences as, ‘Śankaranārāyanam Bhajēham’
He has depicted the Goddess as ‘Śankaranārāyani’ in the Anupallavi as, ‘Śankaranārāyanī Priyakaram’.

TIRUKKAZHU KUNRAM

Nine miles south-east of Chingelput is Pakshiteertham, one of the most visited pilgrim centre of tamilnadu, commonly known as Tirukkazhukunram. Here, a pair of kites, daily come at 12.00 noon, have their food and then fly away. The belief that these kites have their bath at Banaras, worship at Rāmēśwaram, food at Pakshiteertham and rest at Chidambaram is popular among the people.
Sthalapuranam

Legends say that once upon a time, two sages Athi and Sambhu who were brothers lived in this place. Athi was devoted to Lord Śiva and Sambhu to Sakti. Once they fell into a quarrel regarding the superiority of their respective deities. Lord Śiva appeared before them and told them that both had equal power. Since the brothers were not satisfied, Siva became angry and cursed them to become kites.

The classical name of the place is Vēdagiri, which means that the hill represents the four Vēdās. The Vēdās were originally one. Later when they were divided, these Vēdās were depressed and requested Lord Śiva to unite them. Lord Śiva asked them to take the form of mountains at Tirukkazhukunram and promised to be present there himself to receive their offerings.

The shrine is built on three huge blocks of stones which form its innerwalls and on these walls are cut the relief sculptures, one of Śiva and Parvati with Subrahmania and another of Śiva as Dakshiṇāmūrti with two sages. These two sages are the ones who were turned to vultures. A third sculpture on the southern wall represents Śiva as Chandēśwara and Nandikēśwara. A huge lingam in the centre of a cell forms the central shrine at the top of the hill.

Down the hill, there is the Śankhateertham in which Valampiri Chanks, held as highly auspicious by Hindus, are said to appear once in twelve years. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed the kriti ‘Vēdapurīswaram’ in Dhanyasi rāga, in praise of the temple deity. The
Goddess Tripurasundari is depicted in the Charanam as, ‘Prasiddha Tripurasundari Samētam’

VĒDĀRANYAMB

Vēdāranya is on the Tiruttaraipundi – Point Calimere line of the Southern Railways. The temple faces the east and is at a slightly lower level than the town. The Lord of the temple is known as ‘Vēdanāyakam’ because of the fact that the four Vēdās adored him. The Goddess whose temple is to the north of the Siva temple came to be called ‘Vādanāyaki’ and ‘Vēṇāvādana Vibhūshani’, because it was in this place that Parvati defeated Saraswati in the art of tuning the Vina. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed a kriti in Todi rāga. He begins the kriti with

‘Vēdāranyēṣwaram namaste’

Dikshitar has also depicted Lord Śiva as the spouse of Vēṇāvādana Vibhūshani – Ambika in the Pallavi itself.

‘Vēṇāvādana Vibhūshyāmbikāsamētāya’

After the deluge, once the Vēdās, Purāṇas, Āgamās, Śāstrās and Smrītīs approached Lord Śiva and complained that they had lost all their powers since they were used by sinners. They requested Him to bless them. They told Him that they wished to live as trees, plants, creepers and shrubs there itself, unnoticed by others. They also requested Him that there after Satyavati river should be named as Vēdanadī. The sea there should be known as Vēdateertha. The locality must be known as Vēdāranyam and the tank made by them must be known as Vēdāmrutam. Lord Śiva granted all their wishes.
Vēdāraṇyam is one of the five temples where Muchukunda installed the sphatika lingam he brought from heaven. It is placed in the iron chest secured by three huge locks. The connection of this temple to the Vēdās, are clearly shown through the terms, used in the kriti as, Vēdāraṇyēśwara, Vēdāgama vinuta etc.

TIRUVOTRIYUR

Once a Śiva devotee, Śivanesar, who lived in Kaveripoom patanam in the Tanjore district of Madras state, was blessed with a son and was named ‘Tiruvengaḍar’, meaning, one who was born through the grace of Lord at Tiruvenkādu. He was later renowned as Paṭṭinathar. Years later, Tiruvenkadar was married and the couple remained issueless for many years. They prayed to Lord Śiva and were blessed with a son, who was named ‘Marudavanar’. Marudavanar was actually Śiva himself and he made his parents realise that, from this world where people go behind worldly pleasures, not even an eyeless needle could be taken along to the next world.

Tiruvengadar renounced all his earthly possessions and became a sanyasin. It was from then that he was known as Pattinathar. He visited many holy places like Shiyali, Chidambaram, Tiruvekambaram, Kalahasti, Tiruvalangadu and last came to Tiruvotriyur. At Tiruvitriyur, he worshipped Lord Śiva and composed many songs. He used to show miracles and amuse the urchins. Once he asked some boys to place a big vessel over him, covering the whole body. The boys expected him to come out miraculously as usual. But after a long time, not seeing the sage, the boys removed the vessel. They were surprised to see a linga in the place. A temple was constructed over the Lingam.
The Lord here is called Ādipūrīśwara and his consort as Tripurasundari. Muthuswami Dikshitar, in his Arabhi rāga kriti, mentions the Lord and his consort.

Pallavi - ‘Ādipūrīśwaram Sadā Bhajēham Tripurasundari Samēta’

VĀRANĀSI

The city of Vāranāsi acknowledged by the Hindus as one of the most sacred of the pilgrimage places is also a sacred image of the cosmos. This place got its name because it is situated on the midst of varuna and Asi. This is in Uttar Pradesh. Vāranāsi ia also known as Kāsi (The city of light) or as Banares. Vāranāsi is situated on the west banks of the Ganges and is India’s holiest Hindu city with a spiritual and religious legacy that goes back nearly 3000 years. This is the city of Śiva, the foremost among the 12 places where the Lord burrowed and then burst into the sky in a fiery pillar of light (jyōthir linga). Vāranāsi is said to be the permanent earthly home of Lord Śiva and is often called ‘Avimukta, the never forsaken (The place Śiva never leaves). According to myth Śiva upholds this city on the tip of His trident even during the pralaya when the Universal flood destroys the earth and from this place the world created again.

One of the two cremation ghats of Vāranāsi, Harishchandra Ghat lies just to the south. Behind the holy Daśāshvamēdha ghat meanders a winding lane known as the Viswanāth Gali lined with a multitude of shops that sell all manners of religious objects. It leads to the city’s principal shrine, the Viṣwanāth temple, said to be over 1000 years old.
Manikārṇika Ghat is the other cremation ghat. According to legend, Śiva’s maṇi (crest jewel) and His consort Parvati’s karṇīka (earring) fell into the nearby well while they were bathing and hence the name Manikārṇika. Dying in Vāraṇāsi is a cause of celebration for Hindus, as it is believed to bestow instant salvation or mōksha. It is said that Lord Śiva whispers into the years of the dying and the old and infirm, sages and ordinary people come here to breathe their last.

The Viṣwanātha temple, dedicated to Lord Śiva, who is called here as Viṣwanātha (Lord of the Universe) is a main attraction of the city. According to legend, the Jnāna Vapi well (well of wisdom) is believed to contain the linga of the original Viṣwanātha temple which was destroyed by the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb in the 17th century.

Kāsi is said to be the emblem of Śiva linga. The entire city, a sacred circle or Mandala with radius 10 miles is said to be Śiva linga. With it’s over 3000 years of continuous habitation, at the centre, is the famous Śivalinga of Viṣwanātha.

Vāraṇāsi ia also renowned as a centre of Sanskrit learning and Hindu philosophy, attracting scholars and students all over India.

Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed the kriti ‘Viśwēśvarō’ in Kanada rāga on the deity of Viṣwanātha temple. The Goddess ‘Viṣālākshi’ also finds mention in the Kriti as,

‘Viṣālākshi Sahitānandayutō’
TIRUVIṆAIṆARUDUR

The place is named as ‘iḍaimarudur’ as it is in between Sri Śailam and Ambasundaram. It is also called Shanbagaranya, Saktipura, Tapōvana, Muktipura etc. The presiding deity is Mahālinga, because Śiva worshipped himself. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed three kritīs on the deity of this temple.

1. ‘Chintaye Mahālingam’ in the rāga Paras
2. ‘Mahālingēśwaram’ in the rāga Paras
3. ‘Mahalingēśwarāya’ in the rāga Atana

The Pallavi itself of all the three kritīs take the name of the deity. In the temple, the consort is Brihatsundara Kuchāmba. The consort is also mentioned in all the three kritīs as,

‘Brihatkuchamba Sahavāsam’ ‘Brihatkuchāmba Ramaṇam’ and Brihatkuchāmba Samētāya’ repectively.

In the shrine of Brihatkuchamba, there is a cell facing the north. This is the Mookambika temple in the North Indian style.

KULITTALAI

The Śivasthalam also known by the name ‘Kadambanturai’ located at Kulittalai near Tiruchirappalli is considered to be one of the 5 Kadamba shrines. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed three kritīs on the deity of this temple.
1. ‘Marakata lingam’ in the rāga Vasanta
2. ‘Nilakanṭam’ in the rāga Kedarāgaula
3. ‘Nilakanṭāya’ in the rāga Nathanamakriya

In the Kedaragaula kriti, Dikshitar has addressed Lord Śiva as,

‘Srī Kadambavananātham’ in the Anupallavi

Legend

Brahma is said to have conducted the chariot festival here and hence, the name Brahmapuram. Vishṇu is said to have prayed to Lord Śiva prior to recovering the Vēdas from Somāsuran and hence the name ‘Chaturvēdapuri’. Siva is said to have given a vision of His marriage with Meenakshi to a devotee here, hence the names Sundarēśwarar and Meenakshi in the Kulittalai temple.

The Sapta mātās are engraved in the sanctum behind the Śivalingam. Brahmōtsavam is celebrated in Māsi with procession on vāhanam and the temple chariot. During Taipooyam, deities from nearby temples of Kattupathur, Śivayam, Musiri, Velloor, and Rajēndram assemble here at the Kāveri river in a grand ceremony. The Kāveri river finds mention in the Kēdarāgaula kritias,

‘Kāvēritūrtharabhimukham’

Śiva is seated facing north, on the banks of the main stream of this perennial river.

SRIVĀNHCHIYAM

There are many temples in South India for the Gods of Hindu pantheon. But there are hardly any for the God of death, Yamadēva. He is
enshrined and given preference in daily worship at Sri Vānchiyam, a village situated between the rivers Muḍikondan and Puttur in Tiruvarur district.

Six places on the banks of the river Kavery are said to be the most sacred and equivalent to Vāranāsi- Tiruvengādu, Tiruvaiyār, Sāyavanam, Mayūram, Tiruvidaimarudūr and Sri Vānchiyam. Of these, Sri Vānchiyam is 1/6th more sacred than Kāsi. Lord Śiva is said to have told Parvati that he loves this place the most. Muthuswami Dikshitar has included this fact in the anupallavi of his Siva kriti in the rāga Suruti, ‘Srivānchanātham’ as,

‘Sṛīkāram Kāsyādhika Phalapradam’

The presiding deity is a svayambhu and the oldest among the 64 in the world. The Agnēya Purāṇa says that the Linga was facing west when the Sun God offered worship here. It is peculiar to see two Nandis here, one behind the other facing Vānchanatha, the deity in the Sanctum Sanctorum. Muthuswami Dikshitar has commenced his kriti as

‘Sri Vānchanātham Bhajēham

The Goddess in the temple is Mangalāmbika. The Pallavi of the above the kriti also takes the words, ‘Sṛī Mangalāmba Samētam’. The temple complex is spread over five acres of land including the sacred tank, ‘Gupta Ganga’. It is one of the largest temples in Tanjavur district.

PASUPATINĀTHA KSHĒTRA OF NĒPAL

Paṣupatinātha Kshētra is situated in Nepal. It is also called
Nepalam. It is two kilometres away from Katmandu. Because of the imposition of the Tāntric type Hinduism by the Brigand Zoraver and his horder, who came from Kashmir. Nepal is said to be an oasis of Hinduism in a Buddhist desert. It is important to visit this temple on the Śivarātri day. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed the kriti ‘Pasupatiśwaram’ in the rāga Sivapantuvarali on this deity. In the anupallavi he has addressed Lord Śiva as The One who is extolled by king of western Kashmirās,

‘Paśchima Kāshmira Rājavinutam’

The deity here is ‘Panchamukha linga. The synonym ‘Panchānanam’ is included in the charanam of the above kriti. It is believed that this place is the head of Lord Śiva in Mahisha rupa.
FOOT NOTE

1. N.Ramesan - ‘Temples and Legends of Andhra Pradesh’ Pg. 4
2. Sumati Krishnan - ‘Muthuswami Dikshitar and Tiruvarur’ Pg. 46
3. Sumati Krishnan - ‘Muthuswami Dikshitar and Tiruvarur’ Pg. 48
4. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 160
5. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 118
6. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 122
7. Illustrated Guide to India (Reader’s Digest) Pg. 582
8. N.S.Ramasamy - ‘Temples of South India’ Pg. 176
9. Bhavan’s Journal - Vol. 54 No. 24
10. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 73
11. Illustrated Guide to India (Reader’s Digest) Pg. 613
12. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 105
13. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 167
14. R.K.Das - ‘Temples of Tamilnadu’ Pg. 189