



# KANCHIPURAM EKAMBARANATHAR TEMPLE: A SYMBOL OF SHAIVISM ADORE AND SCULPTURAL MARVELS

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## Abstract

Ekambareswarar Temple is one of the most revered Shiva temples and is one of the "Pancha Bhoota Stalam" (Five Shiva temples, each one representing one of the five components of life). It stands for the Earth element. Ekambareswarar is a name used to worship Shiva. The existing building of the temple, which is a reconstruction from approximately 600 AD by the Pallavas, is thousands of years old. However, every dynasty that controlled Kanchipuram is represented in the temple. The 172-foot Raja Gopuram is a magnificent example of Vijayanagara Empire architecture. The Cholas also contributed to the temple's architecture.

**Key Words:** Shaivism, Kanchipuram, Shiva, Sculptural

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## Introduction

Ekambareswarar Temple is made and worshipped by Goddess Parvati herself and that we can still see a mark on the Lingam which holds this legend true. Once Goddess Parvati covered Shiva's eyes and the world suddenly filled with darkness. Shiva's eyes were closed, and neither the Sun nor the Moon shed a single ray of light. He opened his third eye and saved the day for the mankind. Parvati was struck with shame

after watching all this. Shiva asked her to undergo penance to liberate her from bad karma. Parvati began her penance when she arrived on Earth as Kamakshi. As soon as Kamakshi learned about the flood, she embraced the Prithvi Lingam out of fear that it would be destroyed. Due to Kamakshi's devotion and affection, Lord Shiva physically began to melt. He then appeared in his materialized human form and wed Kamakshi. In addition, Kamakshi unintentionally left some markings on the

lingam at this time from her bangles and kuchas striking the sand-made lingam, which are still visible today. The interior walls of the temple are decorated with 1008 Shiva Lingams, and the inner passageway has ten musical pillars. The fact that the sun shines directly on the Shiva linga on every 19, 20, and 21 of the Panguni month (March–April), when the Ekambareswarar Temple celebrates its most significant festival, the Panguni Uthiram, is another feat of architecture.

### Historical milieu of the shrine

One of the largest in India, the temple complex spans 25 acres. It has four gopurams, or gateway towers. The southern tower, one of the highest temple towers in India, is the tallest, standing at 11 floors and 58.5216 metres (192 feet) in height. The most notable shrines in the temple are those of Ekambareswarar and Nilathingal Thundam Perumal.

The thousand-pillared hall, which was constructed during the Vijayanagar era, is the most remarkable of the several halls in the temple complex. One of India's oldest temples, this enormous one has been there since at least 600 CE. Tamil poetry from the second century CE mentions the Kama kottam and the Kumara kottam (now the Subramanya Temple and the Kamakashi Amman Temple). The temple is mentioned in works from the 300 BCE Tamil Sangam period, such as Manimegalai and Perumpuppaai. Initially, the Pallavas constructed the temple. At the temple, the Vedantist Kachiyapper worked as a priest.

The subsequent Chola Kings demolished the previous building and rebuilt it. With the assistance of local authorities, Adi Sankara, a saint from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, renovated Kanchipuram and expanded this temple, along with Kamakshi Amman Temple and Varadaraja Perumal Temple. Inscriptions from 1532 CE (record 544 of 1919) attest to Achutaraya's donation of a number of villages. Achutaraya's directive to give an equal gift to both temples was broken by Vira Narasingaraya Saluva Nayaka, who gave more land to the Ekambaranathar temple than the Varadaraja Swamy temple. Upon learning this, Achutaraya divided the territory between the two temples evenly. One of the highest gopurams in the nation is the eleven-story southern gopuram, which Krishnadevaraya constructed between 1509 and 1529. It is 57 metres (187 feet) tall.

The Vijayanagar rulers contributed significantly to the temple during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, which Vallal subsequently expanded. Pachiyappa Mudaliar used to go frequently from Chennai to Kanchipuram to pray at this temple. He lavished money on its refurbishment during the British era, and a temple pillar depicts him sitting on a horse. In order to save time commuting to Kanchipuram, Pachiyappa Mudaliar subsequently built a temple with a similar design and the same name in Chennai. According to the Archaeological Survey of India study from 1905–1906 the Nattukottai Chettiars undertook extensive renovations in the temple. The Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department of the Government of Tamil Nadu now maintains and oversees the temple.

## Vertex presentation Arts

The temple covers more than 23 acres (93,000 m<sup>2</sup>) of space are occupied by the temple. The Raja gopuram, or temple entry tower, is one of the largest in South India, standing at 59 m (194 ft) in height. The temples of Vinayaka and Murugan are located on each side of the lowest portion of the entrance tower. Two halls, the Vahana Mandapam (vehicle hall) and Sarabesa Mandapam (also known as Navaratri hall), are accessible from the entryway. The Vijayanagar Kings constructed the "hallway with a thousand pillars" known as the Aayiram Kaal Mandapam, which is located on the precinct after the entrance tower. There is a little Ganesha temple and a pond in the fourth courtyard. Numerous minor shrines may be seen in the third courtyard.

The temple's flagstaff is situated diagonally from the main gate and the temple tank in either direction, axial to the shrine. Near the flag staff are two shrines: Thirukachi Mayanam, which is dedicated to Pachayappa Mudaliar, and Kalayana Mandapa. In the four corners of the temple are Thirukachi Mayanam, Valeesam, Rishabesam, and Satyanadeesam. The pillars at the flagstaff's hall have beautiful carvings that represent many Shiva stories and avatars.

The lingam and the statue of Shiva are both kept in the sanctum sanctorum. Around the first precinct are stone statues of the 63 Nayanmars. A variety of Shivalingam are shown in the temple's innermost precinct, including a Sahasra Lingam that has 1,008 Siva lingams carved onto it. In contrast to

the other Shiva temples in Kanchipuram, this complex does not include a separate shrine for Parvati. Locals think that Ekambaranathar's consort is the Kamakshi Amman Temple. Shiva and Parvathi are shown on a plaque behind the Lingam picture in the shrine, with Shiva shown as Tazhuva kuzhainthaar and Parvathi as Elavar Kuzhali. Within the cluster of temples is a modest shrine to Vishnu called Nilathingal Thundam Perumal temple.

The temple is praised by the Alvar saints as one of the 108 Divya Desams and Vishnu is worshipped as Vamana Murthy. On the second precinct, Nataraja has his own temple. The temple tree, also known as the sthala-virutcham, is thought to be a 3,500-year-old mango tree whose four branches are claimed to produce four different kinds of mangoes.

## Religious significance of the temple

The term "Bhoota Stalam" refers to the five Shiva temples, each of which symbolizes the manifestation of one of the five fundamental elements of nature: fire, air, water, and land. Bhoota means components, Pancha means five, and Stala means location. The locations of all of these temples are in South India, with four of them in Tamil Nadu and one in Andhra Pradesh. The five elements are believed to be enshrined in the five lingams and each of the lingams representing Shiva in the temple has five different names based on the elements they represent. In the temple, Shiva is said to have manifested himself in the form of Prithvi Lingam.

The other four manifestations are Appu Lingam (representing water) at Jambukeswarar Temple, Thiruvanaikaval Ten Tevaram poems, collectively known as the First Tirumurai, written by the Tamil Saivite poet Tirugnana Sambandar in the seventh century, honoured Ekambareswarar. Sambandar's contemporaries Appar and Sundarar honoured Ekambareswarar with ten Tevaram poems that were collected as the Fifth Tirumurai and the Ninth Tirumurai, respectively. The temple is categorised as Paadal Petra Sthalam, one of the 276 temples mentioned in the Saiva canon, since it is worshipped in Tevaram. Tamil poet and saint Manickavasagar, who lived in the ninth century, praised Ekambareswarar in his works. The four Saiva Kuravars respect the shrine as a result. One of the three trinities of Carnatic music, the well-known folk singer Kanchi Kotayappa Nayak, praises the ruling god in his lyrics. Both Pattinathar and Muthuswami Dikshitar

### **Worship and festivals**

The pooja (rituals) are performed by the temple priest every day and at festivals. The priests at this and other Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu are Shaivaites, a Brahmin sub-caste. Ushathkalam at 5:30 a.m., Kalasanthi at 8:00 a.m., Ucchikalam at 10:00 a.m., Sayarakshai at 6:00 p.m., Irandamkalam at 8:00 p.m., and Ardha Jamam at 10:00 p.m. are the six times every day when the temple rites are done. Abhishekam (holy bath), alankaram (decoration), naivedyam (food offering), and deepa aradhanai (waving of lights for the pedestal of Ekambareswarar) are the four steps of each ceremony. Since it

is a sand mound-based Lingam, just the pedestal needs to be washed.

The worship is held amidst music with nagaswaram (pipe instrument) and tavil (percussion instrument), religious instructions in the Vedas read by priests and prostration by worshippers in front of the temple mast. There are weekly rituals like somavaram and shukravaram, fortnightly rituals like pradosham and monthly festivals like amavasai (new moon day), kiruthigai or on krittika nakshatram, pournami (full moon day) and chaturthi. The worship service is conducted in the midst of music played on the nagaswaram and tavil instruments, priests reading from the Vedas, and worshippers prostrating in front of the temple mast. There are weekly rituals like somavaram and shukravaram, fortnightly rituals like pradosham, and monthly celebrations like chaturthi, kiruthigai, or on the day of the full moon, and amavasai (new moon day).

The event is the most well-liked Kanchipuram temple celebration. The celebratory images of the temple's presiding deities are carried in a variety of processions during the course of the 10 days on various mounts. On the fifth day, Ekambareswarar is borne by Ravanaeswara Vahanam in the evening and silver mount Nandi in the morning.

Numerous festivals are observed at the temple throughout the year. The most significant of them is the Panguni Brahmotsavam, which lasts for 10 days during the Tamil month of Panguni, between March and April, and culminates in the

celebration of Kalyanotsavam. The sixth day's morning procession of the 63 Nayanmars is followed by an evening procession of Ekambareswarar during the Silver Car Festival. On the ninth day, Silver Mavadi seva is carried out. The marriage of Ekambareswarar is performed out on the last day, which is when Kalyanotsavam (the marriage celebration) is conducted. Numerous singles are married on the day, regardless of their caste, beside the deity. Each year, thousands of people attend the event.

### Conclusion

One of the oldest temples in Kanchipuram. Although this temple, which is considered to have been special during the Pallavar period, is considered to be later than the Kailasanathar temple built by Narasimha Pallava II, the inscriptions found in the temple complex, dating back to the time of this king, have raised doubts among historians that a brick-built temple may have existed in this place before. Anyway, this temple is considered to be more than 1300 years old. In this temple, many inscriptions of various kings from the Pallavar period to Nayaka period are found in this temple. The big Raja Gopuram at the southern gate of the temple was built by Vijayanagara King Krishna Devaraya. Its date is 1509 AD from the inscriptions. There is also an Ayrangal Mandapam, which belonged to the king of Vijayanagara. It appears that this mandapam was a hundred and fifty mandapam before that and it was built by the later Cholas and modified later. Every temple has a tree called sthalavirtsam and in this temple the 3500 year old mango tree is worshiped as

sthalavirtsam. This mango tree has four branches. Its specialty is that four different types of mangoes are produced in the four branches of this mango tree at different times. These four branches represent the four Vedas namely Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvana. Raja Gopuram, the eastern tower of this temple, is 58.5 meters high and has nine tiers.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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