Chapter 1
Kanchipuram, the Goddesses, and Their Temples

In order to contextualize the temples and their goddesses within the South Indian temple town Kanchipuram, this chapter introduces the field in more detail. I will provide a brief description and history of Kanchipuram before describing the two temples addressed in this study, their residing goddesses, and their ritual traditions.

Kanchipuram: A Brief History

Kanchipuram (Ta. Kāñcipuram), or just Kanchi, is a famous temple city and popular pilgrimage site in northern Tamil Nadu. The city lies 75 km southwest of Chennai on the banks of the Palar River. The city houses many well-known temples and attract pilgrims among Śaivas, Śāktas and Vaiṣṇavas alike. Among the most famous temples, all named after their main deity, are the Śiva temple Ekāmranātha,[33] the Viṣṇu temple Varadarāja and the goddess temple Kāmākṣī ammaṉ. The latter puts Kanchipuram on the map as an important and powerful *śaktipīṭha*,[34] a place of worship dedicated to the goddess, and it hosts the principal goddess of the city. According to Hindu theology, Kanchipuram is one among the seven sacred cities of India,[35] where it is considered easier to achieve liberation (Skt. *mokṣa*) from the cycle of life and death and has been described as the "Benares of the South" (Gopal 1990, 177, Gupta 2001) and as "the City of Thousand Temples". In literature, the city was mentioned first by the grammarian Patañjali in his *Mahābhāṣya* (2nd century) and later described as "the best among cities" by the Sanskrit poet Kālidāsa (probably 5th century).

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33 The Ekāmranātha temple is one among the five *pañcabhūtasthalas* (Skt., "shrines dedicated to the five elements") in Tamil Nadu. Here, Śiva is represented as an earth *liṅga*.

34 The 51 *śaktipīṭhas* are considered the 51 places on earth onto which the body parts of the goddess Satī fell, the first consort of Śiva, after she had immolated herself and the lamenting Śiva carried her corpse around the world. These became important seats of goddess worship spread across India.

35 According to the *Garuḍapurāṇa*, the *saptamokṣapurīs* (lit. "the seven cities of liberation") are enumerated as follows: *ayodhyā mathurā māyā kāśī kāñcī avantikā purī dvāravatī jñeyā saptaitā mokṣadāyikāḥ* (2,38,5). This translates "Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Haridwar), Kashi (Varanasi), Kanchi (Kanchipuram), Avantika (Ujjain) and Dvaravati (Dvaraka); these are known as the seven cities granting liberation". Kanchipuram is the only one of the cities situated in the south of India.

Kanchipuram was the capital of the Pallava kingdom from the 3rd to the 9th century CE, and during this time, Kanchi's two oldest archeological heritage temples Kailāsanātha and Vaikuṇṭha perumāḷ were built (the 8th century). Kanchipuram was later a sub-capital of the Cholas from the 10th–13th century, and of the Vijayanagara kings from the 14th–17th century. The British East India Company ruled from the end of the 18th century.
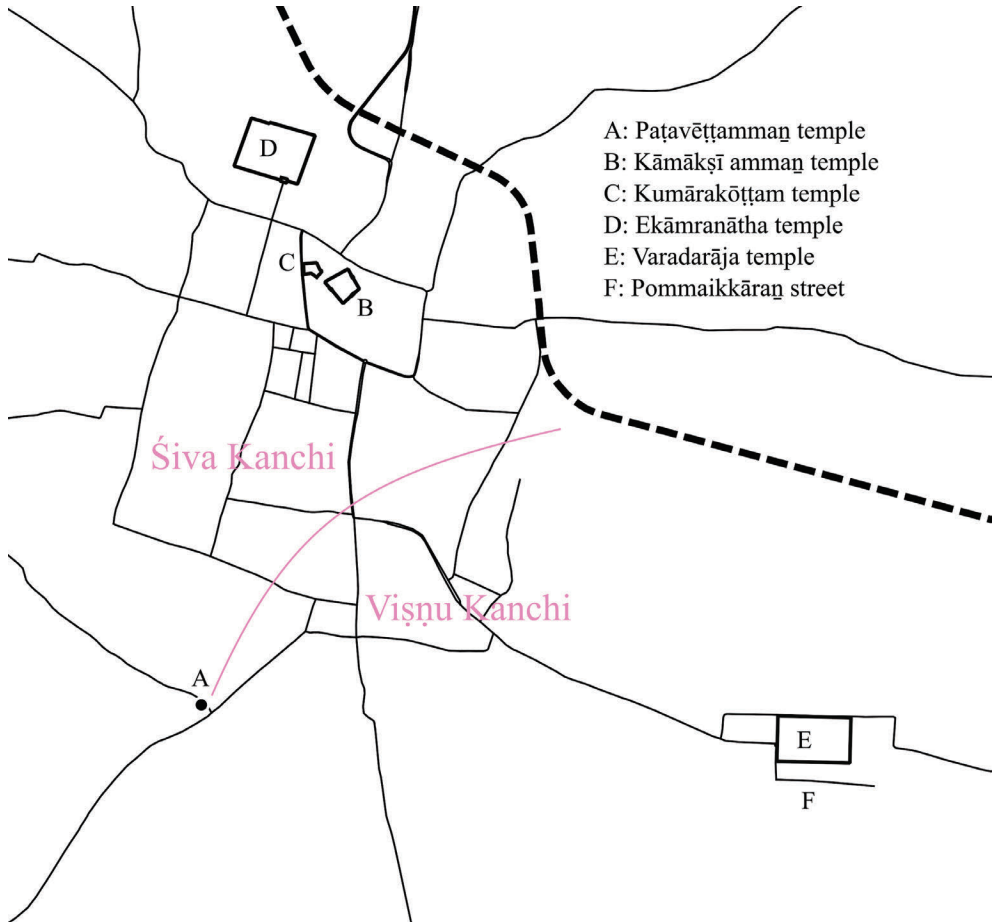

Figure 1.1: Map of Kanchipuram. Modeled on the map in Schier (2018, 16).

The city center of Kanchipuram is today divided in two: Śiva Kanchi, also known as big (Ta. *periya*) Kanchi, and Viṣṇu Kanchi, or little (Ta. *ciṉṉa*) Kanchi. Śiva Kanchi is the northern part where the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples are situated. The well-known Murukaṉ temple Kumarakōṭṭam lies between them,

so that these three temples form a so-called "somāskanda cluster."[36] These are all independent temples who follow their own liturgical systems, although local mythology ties them together. Viṣṇu Kanchi is the south-eastern part of town, where the Varadarāja temple is situated.

Kanchipuram has long been a thriving center for religious, political, and cultural activity. Besides its numerous Hindu temples, a variety of faiths are represented with mosques, churches, Jain temples and a Sikh institution (Rao 2008, 30). While Buddhist, Jain and Hindu spirituality was thriving in Kanchipuram for centuries; there is no practicing Buddhist presence left today. Apart from its numer ous famed temples, Kanchipuram is, like Varanasi, known throughout India for its production of fine and exclusive hand loomed silk saris, distinguished in style by wide contrast borders.

The Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ Temple

The Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ temple (henceforth the Kāmākṣī temple)[37] is situated in the middle of Śiva Kanchi. The part of town where it is situated is called Kāma-kōṭṭam (Skt. *koṣṭha*), which is also a general name of *devī* shrines in Śiva temples.[38] The temple covers about 10 000 square meteres and has four entrances with *gopurams*, ornate pyramid shaped towers characteristic of Dravidian temples, above them. The main entrance *gopuram* faces east (figure 1.3), as does goddess Kāmākṣī in her sanctum.

The temple in its present, modern form was built by the Cholas in the 14th century (Rao 2008, 102),[39] but the Kāmākṣī cult itself dates back prior to the 10th century (Brooks 1998, 71). According to Kerstin Schier (2018, 122), the

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36 Referring to the Śaiva family group depiction originating in the south during the 6–8th centuries, where Śiva and his spouse Pārvatī are represented along with their son Murukaṉ.

37 The temple's full name is Śrī kāmākṣī ampāḷ devastāṉam.

38 A mythological narrative explains why none of the Śiva temples in Kanchipuram have a separate shrine for the goddess as Śiva's consort: Kāmākṣī withdrew all the powers of the śaktis into herself to help the god of love to conquer Śiva. Later, she granted that the śaktis returned, but not to Kanchipuram. Thus, the Kāmākṣī temple functions as Kanchipuram's Kāmakōṭṭam. For more on the development of Kāmakōṭṭam, see Schier (2018, 122–123).

39 Some scholars have argued that the present Kāmākṣī temple is a second temple, while the earliest or original temple is that of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, situated very close to the Kāmākṣī temple and adjacent to the Kumārakōṭṭam, dated by Venkataraman to "a little after A.D. 800" (Venketaraman 1973, 12). See also Schier (2018, 125–131).

first reference to the goddess of Kanchipuram with the name Kāmākṣī occurs in an inscription dated to 1392 CE, by the Vijayanagara king Harihara II.[40]

After entering the main *gopuram* (figure 1.2), the visitor may circumambulate the sanctum by moving clockwise through the outer *prākāra* (Skt. "temple corridor"). Here, she will first pass the flagpole (Skt. *dvajastambha*), the pedestal for food offeings (Skt. *balipīṭha*) and the goddess's vehicle – the lion (Skt. *siṃha*), who looks directly at Kāmākṣī through a square hole in the wall of the sanctum building.[41] The Navarātri pavilion (Skt. *maṇḍapam*) is situated in the southwestern corner (figure 1.3). This is where the goddess is brought out at Navarātri evenings for her fights with the demon, and a concert is performed here afterwards. In front of the western *gopuram* and thus behind the sanctum, lies the temple tank called Pañcagaṅgatīrtham. On the northern side of the tank, there is a Durgā shrine, and the temple's *nīm* tree (*sthalavṛkṣa*). Its branches are filled with small wooden swings or cradles, often with baby Kṛṣṇas in them, hung up by devotees as prayers for conceiving, and under it are stone cairns set up as prayers for property. The *yāgaśālā*, where the fire-offerings are performed during festival times, is situated at the right side of the entrance *gopuram*. On top of the sanctum building shines the golden tower (Ta. *baṅgāru vimānam*)[42] as well as a smaller golden *gopuram*.

The sanctum and the inner *prākāras* are at present only open for Hindus.[43] The entrance to the temple interiors is situated in front of the main *gopuram*. In front of the office, close to the entrance of the temple interiors, looms the *jaya-stambha* (Skt. "victory post") which, according to local mythology, was erected after Kāmākṣī's victory over the demon Bandhāsura. The devotee passes by several shrines on her clockwise way to the sanctum, including those housing the procession images of Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī who come out along with

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40 ARE 1890, No 29 and ARE 1954/55, No. 316. However, the temple and the goddess were probably sung of even earlier by the Śaivite poet saints Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar (7th–9th centuries). The three references in the Tēvāram (collection of poetry) that very likely refer to Kāmākṣī of Kanchipuram mention the names Kāmakoṭi, Kāmakōṭṭi and Kāmakōṭṭam. See Schier (2018, 119–121).

41 Only the main sights and those relevant to the Navarātri festival will be described here. The descriptions are based on how the Kāmākṣī temple looked before the latest renovation (finished in 2017), and since temple architecture also is subject to change, changes might have occurred since then.

42 *Baṅgāru* is the Telugu word for gold, and relates to Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, the golden procession image originally kept in the Kāmākṣī temple, but later brought to Tanjavur and installed there.

43 This has been the case during all my visits between 2009–2015. The following description is based on interviews with priests and a hand drawn map made by Ute Hüsken and Mr. Satyamurti Sastrigal.

Kāmākṣī during Navarātri evenings. The main image of Kāmākṣī (Skt. *mūla-mūrti*, Ta. *mūlavar*, *mūlapēram*; lit. "root image") is situated in a 24-pillared hall called the Gāyatrī Maṇḍapam, where each pillar represents a syllable of the Gāyatrī mantra. Here she is surrounded by her subsidiary (Skt. *parivāra*) deities; Vārāhī, Mātaṅgī, Sarasvatī, Lakṣmī, and Annapūrṇā, and has the *śrīcakra* diagram installed in front of her, to be described shortly.

Kāmākṣī and Śrīvidyā

Kāmākṣī, the principal goddess of Kanchipuram, is considered a form of Lalitā Tripurasundarī, also known as Rājarājeśvarī. She is the Great Goddess of the tantric *Śrīvidyā* ("auspicious wisdom") tradition. As such, she is the highest aspect of the divine, and considered a form of Pārvatī or Durgā. Kāmākṣī of Kanchipuram is explicitly identified as Lalitā Tripurasundarī in the text *Lalito-pākhyāna* (*LU*) of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* (chapters 39–41), and Kāmākṣī is one of Lalitā's thousand names (n. 62) in the *Lalitāsahasranāma* (*LS*), which is popularly chanted during Navarātri in Kanchipuram.[44]

Śrīvidyā is a pan-Indian tantric *śākta* tradition devoted to goddess worship, with roots stretching back to the 6th century (Brooks 1992, xiii). The tradition had manifested in South Indian temples by the 13th century. The practice origi-nated among Brahmins and is in contemporary South India closely associated with Smārta Brahmins, who define their tradition in terms of not being tantric (Brooks 1992, 5). *Śrīvidyā*, following the Śrīkula canon of tantras, focuses on the benevolent and motherly aspect through which the goddess manifests as Lalitā, contrasting with the fierce goddesses Durgā, Kālī and Caṇḍī of the Kālīkula tantras. However, as the supreme goddess, she also embodies these fierce aspects, as the Great Goddess manifests her energy (*śakti*) through both *ugra* (Skt. "fierce", Ta. *ukkiram*) and *saumya* (Skt. "benevolent", also Skt. *śānta*, Ta. *cāntam*) manifestations. In this view, *any* goddess is seen a form of the supreme goddess, who is localized in various forms and under various names. At the same time, she transcends the local boundaries by being part of the supreme *śakti*. Thus, Lalitā Tripurasundarī has manifested in Kanchipuram as Kāmākṣī.[45]

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44 Two texts are important for the worship of Lalitā Tripurasundarī: the *Lalitopākhyāna* of *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* and *Lalitāsahasranāma*. These will be further addressed in chapter 2. According to Brooks, the *LU* was probably composed either in the Kanchipuram or Sringeri Śaṅkara *maṭhas* (1992, 59).

45 Three other South Indian goddesses relate to Lalitā: Mīnākṣī of Madurai, Śivakāmasun-darī, the consort of Śiva Naṭarāja (lord of dance) of Cidambaram, and Akhilandeśvarī, the consort of Jambukeśvara of Tiruchirappalli (Trichy).

Figure 1.2: Kāmākṣī temple, entrance *gopuram*, 2014.

Figure 1.3: Navarātri *maṇḍapa*, 2014.

Kāmākṣī, as Lalitā Tripurasundarī, is worshipped in three forms, corresponding to the three aspects of her nature:

1) Physical (Skt. *sthūla*) as the anthropomorphic deity represented in the temple. This is the goddess who is depicted in mythology and iconography.

2) Subtle (Skt. *sūkṣmā*) as the *Śrīvidyā* mantra, Lalitā's root mantra (*mūla-mantra*) of 15 syllables.

3) Transcendent (Skt. *parā*) as the *śrīcakra yantra*,[46] a mystical diagram of nine intersecting triangles and two sets of lotus petals, numbering 8 and 16 (figure 1.4). In the middle of the diagram, there is a drop (Skt. *bindu*) representing the goddess.

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46 A yantra is a geometrical contrivance by which any aspect of the Supreme Principle may be bound (*yantṛ*, to bind; from the root √ *yam*) to any spot for the purpose of worship (Kramrisch 1981, 11 in Brooks 1992, 116). Kanchipuram is considered a replica of the *śrīcakra*, with the Kāmākṣī temple as its *bindu* (Wilke 1996, 148–149).

Figure 1.4: *Śrīcakra*, scan of card bought in Kanchipuram in 2014.

There is a hierarchy among these three modes of worship, where the goddess's physical form is the most accessible. This is Kāmākṣī's iconic, anthropomorphic form, which her devotees come to worship in the temple. For worshipping her transcendent form in the *śrīcakra*, initiation into the Śrīvidyā tradition is required. In the Kāmākṣī temple, it is the *śrīcakra*, and not the anthropomorphic image that is the main recipient of worship by the priests. The *śrīcakra* represents both the process of creation and its actual form, being both reality's form and its reflection (Brooks 1992, 115). The *śrīcakra* has three levels: it is a map of creation's divine power projected visually; it is divine power to be accessed for those with the right esoteric knowledge; and it is the actual presence of the divinity. The *śrīcakra* is considered an extremely potent ritual object, as it contains all the gods of the creation as well as the supreme Kāmākṣī. Mr. Satyamurti Sastrigal explained:

"The *bindu* (the center) is Kāmākṣī. Every god is in the *śrīcakra*. So, it is called *yantrarāja* (king among *yantras*). […] When we are doing *pūjā* to the *śrīcakra*, it is like doing *pūjā* to each and every god, then finally we are going to Āmpāḷ (Kāmākṣī)".

Figure 1.5: Kāmākṣī, scan of poster bought in Kanchipuram in 2014.

The name Kāmākṣī means "Having eyes (*akṣi*) of desire (*kāma*)". Folk etymology and her priests take the syllable KA to represent Sarasvatī and the syllable MA Lakṣmī, and thus Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī are reckoned Kāmākṣī's eyes. Kāmākṣī shares many traits of the iconography of Lalitā Tripurasundarī: She

holds the noose, goad, five flower-arrows and the sugarcane bow,[47] and the moon clings to her head (figure 1.5). But two things separate her from Lalitā: Kāmākṣī is seated in lotus posture (*padmāsana*) whereas Lalitā's right leg touches the ground, and, like Mīnākṣī of Madurai, Kāmākṣī carries a parrot atop of her flower arrows.[48] According to Douglas Renfrew Brooks, her four arms suggest that she is more closely associated with Lalitā than the rest of the *saumya* goddesses such as Pārvatī, who have two hands (the more hands, the more power), and emphasize her status as the Great Goddess independent of Śiva (Brooks 1992, 71). Kāmākṣī is, as is Lalitā, depicted with the *śrīcakra* inside of a *yoni*-shaped receptacle in front of her, and the eight Aṣṭalakṣmī figures are represented inside the *yantra* receptacle.

Priests and Worship

Kāmākṣī's priests are Brahmins and belong to three families with the caste-surname Sastrigal, who hereditarily share the rights to perform worship in the temple. In 2015, about 20 priests worked in the temple regularly. Their worship for the goddess follows the Sanskrit ritual manual *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇi*, a *śākta āgama* accredited to the sage Durvāsa, who is also enshrined in the temple. Mr. Satyamurti Sastrigal explained in an interview: "There is a difference between *pūjā* performed in this temple and other temples, we only follow *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇi*. It is called *vaidika* (Skt. "Vedic", "orthodox") *pūjā*. According to *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇi* she (Kāmākṣī) is *Śrīvidyā*."

Daily worship for Kāmākṣī includes morning, afternoon, and evening ablutions (Skt. *abhiṣeka*, Ta. *apiṣēkam*) to the *śrīcakra*, which is the recipient of worship in this temple, as well as morning and evening *Sahasranāma arcana* and *Aṣṭottaram arcana* (these are recitations of the goddess's names). In addition, full moon days are considered special days with special worship performed at nighttime, nown as the *navāvaraṇa pūjā*.[49] Several *utsavas* of various length are celebrated during the ritual year, among which Brahmotsava in the month of Māci (February–March) and Navarātri (September–October) are regarded the most important ones.

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47   The five flower arrows are red and blue lotus, *asoka*, mango and jasmine (Rao 2008, 10). According to legend, Kāmākṣī snatched the arrow and the sugarcane bow from Kāma, the god of love, so that he would not use them against his devotees.

48   The parrot is an iconographical detail shared with Āṇṭāḷ, the female Vaiṣṇava *āḻvār* saint, who carries a lotus flower with a parrot on top.

49   The *navāvaraṇa pūjā* is addressed in chapter 3.

The Taming of Kāmākṣī

The Kāmākṣī temple is closely connected to the monastic institution Kāmakoṭi pīṭha (known as the Śaṅkara maṭha) and the śaṅkarācāryas, who are hereditary trustees of the temple. The *maṭha* (monistary) has administered the temple since 1842. The 8th century philosopher Ādi Śaṅkara, who according to tradition founded the *maṭha*, is popularly believed to have pacified the formerly wild Kāmākṣī and subdued her fierce powers by means of the *śrīcakra yantra* which is installed in front of the sanctum image. Legend tells how Kāmākṣī used to take the form of Kālī at night and scare people, but after Ādi Śaṅkara had performed penance, she was pleased and promised not to leave the temple anymore without his permission. Thus, he is credited with installing the original *śrīcakra* in the sanctum of the temple, as well as creating the Vaidic and orthodox form of worship in the temple devoid of tantric elements.[50] As Annette Wilke has shown in her intriguing article on South Indian legends on Śaṅkara and his taming of wild goddesses, it is however not likely that the historical Ādi Śaṅkara was involved in this cult reform. This is rather a retrospective imposition of *Śrīvidyā*, which had grown to be a regular feature both within the *maṭhas* and some South Indian temples (Wilke 1996). Ādi Śaṅkara has a shrine within the Kāmāksī temple, and during festival processions, Kāmākṣī's procession image leaves the temple only after granting permission from Ādi Śaṅkara's image. The present *yantra* in the Kāmākṣī temple was installed during the 16th century (Schier 2018, 124).

Despite her history of violence and being appeased by Ādi Śaṅkara, Kāmākṣī is today considered an exclusively benevolent goddess. Although Kāmākṣī is worshipped in her temple as an independent goddess, she is in mythological narratives married to Ekāmranātha Śiva, Lord of the mango tree, whose temple is situated within walking distance from Kāmākṣī's. The story of how Kāmākṣī embraced a sand *liṅga* after Śiva released a flood to test her, then follows their marriage, is very well known in Kanchipuram (and beyond). However, as Schier (2018) shows in her research on the Ekāmranātha Mahotsava, the marriage is not emphasized in any degree by priests neither in the Kāmākṣī temple nor the

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50 Mr. Satyamurti Sastrigal held that Ādi Śaṅkara did not have any connection to the Kāmā-kṣī temple in Kanchipuram at all, and that the god Brahmā was the one performing the initial *śrīcakrapratiṣṭhā* (Skt. "installation of the *śrīcakra*") there. According to him, Ādi Śaṅkara installed an *ardhameru* (the base of the three-dimensional *śrīcakra*) of herbs at Mangadu, a south-western suburb of Chennai, to sooth the earth again after the heat of the goddess' austerities. Magadu is known as the place where Kāmākṣī performed *tapas* and houses another well-known Kāmākṣī temple.

Ekāmranātha temple.[51] Kāmākṣī is through this mythological marriage identified with Pārvatī, the consort of Śiva, but is still quasi-independent, since her role as a benevolent goddess is not connected to her status as Śiva's wife. Rather, she *surpasses* Śiva as the highest aspect of the divine, bestowing welfare in the world as well as liberation. At the same time, Kāmākṣī manifests as a demon-slayer who sports and ferociously battles with demons in myth and ritual. As I show when I discuss Navarātri mythology and rituals in coming chapters, there are different interpretations available to how the nature of Kāmākṣī as a beningn goddess is preserved.

The Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ Temple

The Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ temple [52] is situated slightly outside the city center of Kanchipuram, in a neighborhood called Jayappā nakar. The temple is private and belongs to a non-Brahmin priest (Ta. *pūjāri*, *pūcāri*) of the Ceṅkuntar Mutaliyār community, who carries out worship together with his sons. The priest's grandmother built the temple in the mid 70's, when she installed a statue of the goddess and worshipped it. According to the priest, people come to their temple for worship regardless of caste affiliations, including Brahmins.

   The temple is situated in a side street off the Vandavasi road which leads out of the city towards Tindivanam and Pondicherry, and an arch where the road meets the Vandavasi road marks its presence. The Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ temple is small and modest and consists of a single room with the goddess's sanctum situated in the middle (figure 1.6). In line with the goddess's image, right outside the temple there is a trident (Skt. *triśula*, Ta. *tiricūlam*), a lion, and an offering pedestal (Skt. *balipīṭha* Ta. *palipīṭam*).

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51   While the marriage of Kāmākṣī and Ekāmranātha is enacted in the annual *paṅkuṉi uttiram* festival, Kāmākṣī takes the position of bridesmaid instead of Śiva's wife in contemporary performance of the ritual. See Schier (2018) for more about the marriage myth and how it is re-enacted yearly in the Ekāmranātha temple.

52   The full name of the temple is Aruḷmiku śrī paṭavēṭṭammaṉ tirukkōyil (lit. the holy temple of honourable Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ).

Figure 1.6: Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ temple, 2014.

Inside the temple the sanctum dominates, housing a statue of the goddess with a head in front. Her son Paraśurāma (Ta. Paracurāmaṉ) stands on her left side. On the sanctum's left-hand side, there is a shrine housing Gaṇeśa (Ta. Viṉāya-kaṉ), and on its right, a shrine housing Subrahmaṇya (Ta. Murukaṉ) along with his two wives. The temple also houses a shrine of the nine planets (Skt. *nava-graha*, Ta. *navakkirakam*), a statue of Durgā (Ta. Turkkai) standing on the head of the severed buffalo demon, a Hanumān (Ta. Āñcaṉēyaṉ) shrine and a *liṅga* (Ta. *liṅkam*), and on the eastern side of the temple entrance there is a shrine housing stone snakes (Skt. *nāga*, Ta. *nākakal*). Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ's procession image is enshrined in a niche behind the sanctum.

Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ

Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ is a form (Skt. *aṃśa*) of the *grāmadevatā* (Skt. "village goddess") Reṇukā, who again is considered a form of the better-known and very popular South Indian "village" goddess Māriyammaṉ. Her concern is mainly with worldly problems like bestowing children and marriages, and Māriyam-maṉ is widely known for curing pox diseases, nowadays particularly

chickenpox. According to Mr. Mahesh, approximately 50 people come each day during the summer season to get cured from chickenpox by receiving the goddess's *tīrtha* (Skt. "holy water", Ta. *tīrttam*).

Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ's name is derived from the town Padaivedu,[53] where Reṇukā's main temple is situated, referred to as her "head office". The story of sage Jamadagni's wife Reṇukā is known from the Sanskrit texts *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The myth relates how Reṇukā is beheaded by her son Paraśurāma, on behalf of her husband, for transgressing a sexual norm. Subsequently she is revived again on Paraśurāma's request and made to forget about the whole incident. In contrast to the pan-Indian Sanskrit myths, in Tamil folk tales and oral myths Reṇukā's decapitation takes a different turn as a lower caste woman is decapitated along with her. When Reṇukā is revived, her body is switched with that of the lower caste woman. She ends up with an outcaste body and a Brahmin head, after which she is known as Māriyammaṉ.[54]

This myth explains why Reṇukā-Māriyammaṉ is represented in the sanctum of her temples as a head (Skt. *śiras*, Ta. *ciram*), often with a full statue behind it (figure 1.7). This is also the case in the Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ temple, where the head is the main recipient of worship. The *pūjāri* explained: "The head is Reṇukā devī, and then there is the total form given to her [the *mūlapēram*]. That is Māriyammaṉ. She is given a form and seen. Any [Māriyammaṉ] temple you go, there will be two statues."

Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ shares her iconography with Karumāriyammaṉ of Thiruverkadu,[55] depicted with white skin, garlanded, dressed in a red sari, and sitting in half lotus posture with a stone head in front of her (figure 1.8). In her four hands she holds the *triśūla*, a knife (Ta. *katti*), a two-headed drum shaped like an hourglass (Ta. *ṭamaram*), and a bowl (Skt. *kapāla*, Ta. *kapālam*), which her priest and devotees explained was for distributing *kuṅkumam* (Ta. vermillion powder).

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53 Padaivedu is in the Tiruvannamalai district, ca. 60 km from Tiruvannamalai. The small town is home to a well-known Reṇukā ampāḷ temple (see Craddock 1994).

54 According to Tamil folk etymology Māriyammaṉ means "the changed mother". The Tamil verb *māṟu* means to change but is spelt with the alveolar *ṟ*. Māriyammaṉ is spelt with the dental *r* and thus not derived from the verb. *Māri* in Tamil means rain, but in Sanskrit *māri* carries the meaning "smallpox, pestilence, death". Although none of my respondents linked Māriyammaṉ to rain, she probably originated as a Dravidian goddess concerned with fertility and rain, though such origins are difficult to trace.

55 Thiruverkadu, close to Chennai, is one of the two "head offices" of Māriyammaṉ, the other is Camayapuram in Trichy.

Figure 1.7: Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ *mūlamūrti*.

Figure 1.8: Māriyamman̠, scan of poster bought in Chennai in 2014.

As a generalization, local village goddesses such as Paṭavēṭṭamman̠ are often tutelary or border deities of social units or towns, who protect the people there from adversity and illness. They are commonly unmarried (or, if they are

married to Śiva, they are represented without him in the temple), characterized as hot and with heightened sexual energy. Very often, but not always, these goddesses are served by non-Brahmin priests of lower castes.[56] While many *grāmadevatās*, including several forms of Māriyammaṉ, are *ukkiram* manifestations who receive non-vegetarian offerings, many of them, such as Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ, are also peaceful (Ta. *cāntam*) and receives only vegetarian offerings. Mr. Mahesh emphasized: "She is peaceful and not even a hen is given, no *bali* (Skt. non-vegetarian offering). [...] Everything is vegetarian. Not even dry fish, as is given in some temples, is given here".

This picture is not black and white. While the fierce and hot character of any village goddess may be appeased or pacified in an iconic, cool form inside the sanctum, she might take on her fierce form occasionally, such as when she manifests in a non-iconic form such as a pot during a festival (Flood 1996, 194). These goddeses may also punish if not propitiated – so that she rather *potentially* is a violent and angry goddess. For instance, as Māriyammaṉ, Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ is simultaneously the cause and the cure for pox. The pox "pearls" (Ta. *muttu*) are regarded a manifestation of the goddess' grace as well as of her rage. Although the picture of goddesses as fierce or benign is polarized, the village goddesses are considered more independent and unpredictable than and distinguished from the consorts of the great gods, like Pārvatī, Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī, whose characters are exclusively auspicious and benign. This is expressed in myth and ritual, in which Paṭavēṭṭammaṉ ferociously kills the demon on Vijayadaśamī after which she needs to be cooled by ablutions.

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56 Today an increasing number of village goddesses are served by Gurukkaḷ Brahmins, and temples are renovated or built new, through processes of Sanskritization and urbanization. As Joanne P. Waghorne's study of the goddess' gentrification in Chennai (2001, 2004), has shown, Māriyammaṉ and other *ammaṉs'* popularity increased from the 1970's as a village goddess to a middle-class identity marker. This growth is due to social, economic, and political changes.