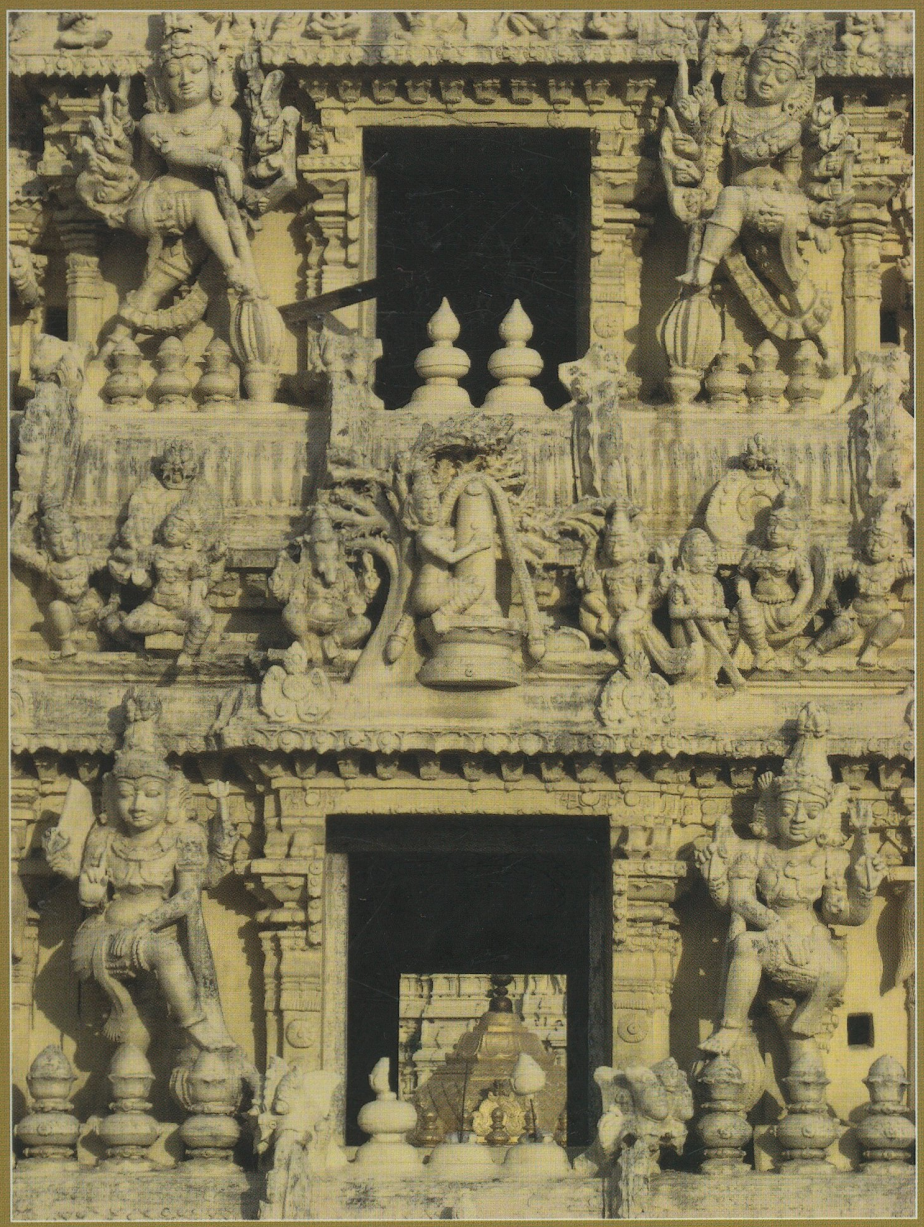
Kerstin Schier

The Goddess's Embrace

Multifaceted Relations at the Ekāmranātha Temple Festival in Kanchipuram



Harrassowitz Verlag

Ethno-Indology

Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals

General Editor
Axel Michaels

Volume 15

2018

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

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Cover illustration: The goddess's embrace, depicted on the eastern side of Ṛṣi Gopura, Ekāmranātha temple, Kanchipuram, 2009.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.dnb.de abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

For further information about our publishing program consult our website http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de

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Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Printing and binding: Memminger MedienCentrum AG
Printed in Germany

ISSN 1860-2053
ISBN 978-3-447-11134-8

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Acknowledgements

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation, which I defended in 2013 at the University of Oslo. The publication was made possible through financial support offered by the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS) and Axel Michaels, editor of the Ethno-Indology Series. I thank them for their generous funding.

This book owes to several people. First and foremost, I wish to thank all the people in India, who made my field research a positive and fruitful experience, in particular the priests and participants of the Ekāmranātha temple festival for sharing their thoughts and knowledge with me.

My greatest thanks go to my supervisor Ute Hüsken for her genuine interest, prompt responses, and thoughtful comments. David Shulman deserves special thanks, not only for generously taking the time to translating the Tamil texts, and supplying me with a copy of the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*, but also for his inspiring enthusiasm and warm hospitality during my stay in Jerusalem. I am truly indebted to Harry Falk for teaching me Sanskrit, guiding me through my studies, and for his generous support and wonderful trips to India.

For help with fieldwork, I am grateful to my research assistant, Narayanan Subramanian, for his patience, manifold advice and organization of practical things. Many thanks for hospitality and warm-heartedness in Kanchipuram go to Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Anand Gurukkal, K. Balasubramanyam, R. Narayanan, Avinash S. Kumar and Raja; in Thanjavur to Dr. Sudarshan from the Saraswati Mahal Library and Dr. Kulathooran from Tamil University; in Pondicherry to Dominic Goodall and Valérie Gillet from the École française d'Extrême-Orient; in Chennai to Ravi and Ramanadhan Vaidyanaat from the Agama Academy, and special thanks go to M.D. Muthukumaraswamy, director of the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), and members of his staff, in particular Arun, Dhivya and Sarah for their assistance and a great festival time. For help with translations, I am grateful to my Tamil teacher, Dr. S. Arokinathan in Pondicherry, and A.K. Selvadurai in Kanchipuram.

I would like to thank the Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, for granting me the doctoral stipend, and the Department of Cultural Studies and Oriental Languages for an excellent working environment. I am particularly grateful to the members of the Oslo South Asia Symposium for their feedback and fruitful discussions over the years.

I wish to thank my friends for having a lot of fun, and for their encouragement and belief in me. I am deeply grateful to my parents for their unlimited love and support throughout my life. Finally, very special thanks go to my husband Jan for being there.

Oslo, 30. August 2018 Kerstin Schier

Notes on Transliteration and Translation

Transliteration

Indian words have been transliterated according to standard academic conventions for Sanskrit. Gods, temples, and historical persons, as well as Sanskrit and Tamil words are written with diacritics. Personal names of my interviewees, language names, dynasties and geographical designations like states, towns, rivers, mountains are written in common transcription without diacritical marks. However, when the geographical names occur in the source text, I use diacritics in the translation. Thus, for example, for the town Kanchipuram the names Kanchi, Kāñcī, and Kacci may occur.

Problematic was the rendering of names given in inscriptions. Different spellings occur and since some names are not known to me, I reproduce the names of historical persons and dynasties as given in the ARE volumes, although they are not consistent.

Texts written in Tamil have the Tamil ending –m, such as *Periyapurāṇam*, whereas texts written in Sanskrit are without the ending –m, such as *Skanda Purāṇa*.

Generally I give preference to the Sanskrit spelling, because my background is Sanskrit. Moreover, many technical terms are derived from Sanskrit. Thus, for example, I write Sanskrit *abhiṣeka* instead of Tamil *apiṣēkam.* However, if I came to know the word basically in its Tamilized form, or when it was mostly used in this form, I give its Sanskrit equivalent in parenthesis. For example, I use Tamil *tīrttavāri* instead of Sanskrit *tīrthasnāna.*

Translation

All interviews and conversations I had with interviewees have been interpreted from Tamil by my research assistants. Some of them have been paraphrased. Further, some translations from Tamil by my research assistant are rather drafted. I have used single quotation marks for this type of quotes. Double quotation marks refer to accurate quotes from written sources.

Whenever I quote informants, I have stayed as closely as possible to the translation of my research assistant. Sometimes, I have added information in brackets to explain terms, and in square brackets in order to clarify the narrative of the interviews.

Abbreviations

ARE – *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy*, New Delhi.
BṇḍP – *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*
EI – *Epigraphia Indica*, New Delhi.
HR&CE – Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department
KāVi – *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*
KM (Ś) – *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Śaiva)
KM (V) – *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Vaiṣṇava)
KP – *Kāñcippurāṇam*
MW – Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary (http://www.sanskrit-lexicon.uni-koeln.de/mwquery/)
PP – *Periyapurāṇam*
SII – *South Indian Inscriptions*, Mysore.
SkP – *Skanda Purāṇa*
Skt. – Sanskrit
Tam. – Tamil

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Introduction

Numerous gods and goddesses are worshipped in India. Many of them, like humans, are married, and this is a reason to celebrate. Especially in South India, the association of god and goddess is celebrated in festivals that re-enact the deities' marriage year by year. Male gods, who have more than one wife, may have several marriage festivals a year. Mythological narratives are often linked to the festivals, and serve to explain the circumstances in which the divine marriage came to occur at that particular place.

This book focuses on the annual re-enactment of the divine marriage at one particular place: the Śaivite Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram, in the South Indian state Tamil Nadu. On the tenth day of the temple's major annual festival (*mahotsava*), under the auspicious star *uttiram* in the Tamil month of Paṅkuṉi (mid-March to mid-April), the marriage of the god Ekāmranātha (a form of Śiva) and the goddess Kāmākṣī from the neighboring Kāmākṣī temple is celebrated—at least this is what is described in written sources. Kāmākṣī is venerated as an independent, powerful goddess, representing the most prominent 'seat of the Goddess' (*śaktipīṭha*) of South India. She is recognized as a manifestation of the goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī of the Tantric Śrīvidyā cult, and has her own ritual tradition and temple in Kanchipuram. Her role, as independent goddess and consort of Ekāmranātha, is continuously negotiated. This is reflected in the myths of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, which allude to alternate roles and to a wide-ranging conceptualization of the deities' relationship dependent upon texts and sectarian identities.

Decisively influenced by Fuller's (1980) analysis of the divine couple's relationship in Madurai, my initial objective was to examine the implications and effects of this complex relation of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram, as expressed in myths and rituals, especially in the ritual re-enactment of the deities' marriage during the annual temple festival at the Ekāmranātha temple. Rituals both reflect and create hierarchies, therefore, I enquired whether the sacred marriage presents an 'ideal relation' from a Śaivite point of view, or if there are breaks and/or inconsistencies in the ritual process. If so, these might indicate tensions and asymmetries in the relation of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, and between the human actors connected to the two temples, in particular, their priests.

However, after my first field trip and festival participation I learned that in the contemporary marriage rituals, Ekāmranātha is married to Ēlavārkuḻali, his consort housed in a shrine at the Ekāmranātha temple, and not to Kāmākṣī. Kāmākṣī attends the wedding celebrations as bridesmaid, together with the goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. Moreover, the expected interactions and negotiations between the priests of the two temples were nonexistent. These discoveries brought new dimensions to my research project. I realized that my previous knowledge, gained from textual studies, transmitted a picture of the events different to that which I experienced while being at the place. Further, it showed me the importance of setting the temple's written tradition in relation to contemporary ritual practices.

I now had to rethink my initial research questions. Instead of focusing on the relationship between Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī, I placed more emphasis on the relation of the three goddesses—Ēlavārkuḻali, Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpaḷ—to each other and also to Ekāmranātha. I tried to find out as much as possible about each goddess from a historical perspective, looking into their identities and contemporary roles, and aiming both to understand the present situation and find explanations for the difference of representation found in the rituals.

Furthermore, a participant's remark towards the end of my first two-week festival participation made me reconsider my research questions and perspectives. A man in his fifties approached me and told me in broken English that he was now observing me every day, and remarked: "You only watch the deities, but never the people." This statement provided food for thought and I realized how preoccupied I had been with the deities' relationship, and that of their priests, paying comparatively little attention to the participants' relations to the deities and the festival. From that point onwards, my research interest was also directed towards various participants. I explored their perceptions of the events and how they perceived their roles in the festival. Speaking with them showed me that, for them, the deities' relationship was not in the foreground; rather the personal relationship of the participants and their social groups to the deities and the temple was of paramount importance.

Research Questions

The study's investigation is twofold. First, I describe and analyze the re-enactment of the deities' marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple festival in Kanchipuram, which so far has not been studied in any detail. How is the marriage integrated in the broader framework of the *mahotsava*? What is the relation of the contemporary ritual performance and normative descriptions in the ritual handbook? How is the associated myth related to the ritual re-enactments and to oral narratives? How is the relationship among those deities involved in the marriage celebrations defined?

Second, I consider the social dimensions of the divine marriage. Questions addressed include: How do participants celebrate and partake in the festival's rituals? How do they perceive their roles? What does the deities' marriage mean and communicate to them? How do participants interpret the present situation of three goddesses, and the disagreement in the textual and performative representation of the divine bride? Does it matter that Kāmākṣī is not the bride, and if yes, in what sense?

Answering these questions provides an opportunity to better understand how a tradition that exists and lives both through the remote past and the continuous re-enactment of this past, adapts to changing circumstances while maintaining continuity with the past, and thus to interrogate what are the very conditions of survival for a tradition existing within the rapid globalization, modernization and economic development of South Asia.

Methods

My training in Indian philology and enthusiasm for Sanskrit inclines me to first consult textual sources as an approach to the study of Indian culture and Hindu religious traditions. However, the study of the living tradition in India is equally fascinating and provides a deeper understanding of cultural processes as they intersect with religious practices. Both

interests can be pursued through a combination of philological and anthropological methods; that is textual studies and fieldwork. In recent decades, this combination—Indian philology and anthropology—has become increasingly utilized within Indian studies. For example, Michaels (2005a: 11) coined the term 'Ethno-Indology' to describe the confluence of philology, anthropology and historical studies. My study is based in the present and focused on contemporary performance, yet, in my analysis, I rely on historical perspectives, too. The Ekāmranātha temple festival has been shaped over centuries and historical incidents have changed the nature of its performance. Donors often recount the history of their endowments, an occasion in which "the past is a conscious element of contemporary interactions" (Appadurai 1981: 216).

Textual studies

My first objective was to identify those texts that give accounts of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī's marriage in Kanchipuram, which for convenience I call the 'marriage myth'. I confined my textual analysis to printed sources. The analysis began with localized texts (Māhātmyas and Sthalapurāṇas) that deal with Kanchipuram's sanctuaries and their related myths. My original plan was to limit the analysis to textual sources I can read myself: Sanskrit texts. However, in the research process it became clear to me that I needed to include some Tamil texts in the analysis, too. These texts also give accounts of the 'marriage myth' and are extremely valuable in that their authorship and approximate date are known. Moreover, some of them constitute text genres other than Sthalapurāṇas, which I found particularly interesting in terms of how this may influence their representation of the 'marriage myth'. In total, I identified versions of the 'marriage myth' in nine textual sources of various genres, which have been produced across a time period spanning over a millennium (ca. seventh to eighteenth century). Some of these texts have been accessible through library catalogues and online databases. Others, such as the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* and the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, have been provided to me by Ute Hüsken. The Tamil *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* poem was provided by David Shulman. I found the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* in the library of the French Institute of Pondicherry, and obtained the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* as a photocopy from a priest of the Ekāmranātha temple.

Sthalapurāṇas can be extremely bulky texts, which often makes the detection of specific thematic passages difficult. I benefited greatly from a French synopsis of the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Porcher 1985), and a French synopsis of the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* and its concordance with the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Dessigane et al. 1964). Further, Moßner (2008) translated parts of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* to German in an unpublished master's thesis. These works helped me to identify relevant passages in the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas that recount the 'marriage myth' of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī. English renderings were available for two of the Tamil texts (*Tēvaram* and *Periyapurāṇam*), and these proved useful in the initial stages. However, upon closer inspection it became clear that the translations depart from the original, and require revision. Moreover, two other important Tamil texts (*Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* and *Kāñcippurāṇam*), have not yet been translated to English. Therefore, it was necessary to work with Tamil scholars in order to translate them.[1]

1 I am extremely grateful to David Shulman for a revision of *Tēvaram* hymns and passages in the

After the translations of the 'marriage myth' in the Sanskrit sources were done by myself, and in the Tamil sources with the help of others, I analyzed their narrative themes and motifs. I compared and contrasted the narrative themes in each source, and identified core themes that are significant to all or most versions of the 'marriage myth', and themes or elements that are rather source specific. I was aiming to interpret the different themes against the backdrop of the text's context, considering the author's background or religious affiliation, and the textual genre in general, since "texts are not only passive store-houses of information but are also generated for reasons of power, influence, honour or prestige" (Michaels 2005a: 9).

In addition to the analysis of the 'marriage myth', I planned to study the ritual handbook *Mahotsavavidhi*, which is used as a reference for the conduct of the Ekāmranātha temple festival. After I obtained a photocopy of the ritual handbook from a priest during my first stay in Kanchipuram, I worked my way into Grantha script and began translating parts of it. By this time I came to know that Richard Davis was preparing a translation of the *Mahotsavavidhi*, and I therefore refer to his work.[2] Primary sources used also include temple brochures, leaflets and festival invitation letters,[3] and inscriptions. My use of inscriptions was however limited to the summaries and translations given in the ARE volumes.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken between 2009 and 2011, and comprised a total of six months, divided into three periods of roughly two months each. These periods were timed in accordance with the Ekāmranātha temple festival, which takes place annually in the Tamil month Paṅkuṉi (mid-March to mid-April). In addition, I stayed in Pondicherry in July/August 2009 to attend a six-week course in spoken Tamil, and to conduct literary research at the libraries of the École française d'Extrême-Orient and the French Institute of Pondicherry.

My initial access to the field was greatly assisted by my affiliation with the Kanchipuram Research Project[4], which conducted research in Kanchipuram since 2002. When I arrived in Chennai in March 2009, the long-term field assistant of the Kanchipuram Research Project, Narayan Subramanian, had made practical arrangements to pick me up, and had informed Nagaswamy Aiyyer, an influential priest of the Ekāmranātha temple, that a researcher would be coming to study the temple festival. It was advantageous that the first and essential contacts at the temple had already been established. Moreover, I benefited from an existing research permit of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department (HR&CE), which manages and controls the temples in Tamil Nadu. Nagaswamy Aiyyer, my first contact at the Ekāmranātha temple, proved to be invaluable.

Periyapurāṇam; A.K. Selvadurai and Narayanan Subramanian for an English rendering of the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* poem; and my Tamil teacher Arokinathan for a translation of relevant sections in the *Kāñcippurāṇam.*

2 I am very grateful to Richard Davis for sharing his introduction with me before the book was published in 2010.

3 My field assistant Narayanan Subramanian translated these texts from Tamil to English.

4 http://www.kanchi-project.sai.uni-heidelberg.de (accessed 19.01.2018).

He introduced me to other priests, donors and temple officials, and supported me throughout the research period.

During the first field trip in March/April 2009, I remained in Kanchipuram to get acquainted with the town, the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples, and their priests. Since I had arrived more than two weeks before the festival started, I spent time at the Ekāmranātha temple, followed the preparatory works that turned the temple into a festival space, and visited temples and *maṇḍapas* on the processional routes. I had hoped to begin interviewing priests at this time, but all of them seemed to be too busy or reluctant towards a newcomer and postponed my query to 'after the festival.' However, my field assistant Subramanian introduced me to one priestly family of the Kāmākṣī temple, who we visited regularly and with whom we conducted our first interviews.

During the festival itself I first tried to figure out 'what was going on.' Although I had some previous knowledge of temple rituals and festivals from scholarly literature and my own experience of previous field trips to other parts of India, I had never participated in a festival so closely and intensely over such a sustained period. I tried to absorb as much as possible of the festival, observing the rituals in the temple and joining all processions through town. The field assistant Narayanan Subramanian accompanied me throughout. By the end of the two weeks of participation, I felt well acquainted with the festival's structure and its daily routines, and had many more questions than before. I assume that through this intense participation I became a familiar face to the priests involved; at least they were now willing to make time for interviews. Thus, most interviews with priests of the Ekāmranātha temple were conducted in the period after the festival.

In July/August 2009 I returned to India for the course in spoken Tamil and literary research at the libraries in Pondicherry. Initially, I had planned to spend at least a weekend in Kanchipuram, but did not have the time. Instead, I prioritized some extra days in Chennai to visit people of the Āgama Academy and the National Folklore Support Centre, with whom I had inspiring discussions about my work.

My second field trip in March/April 2010 was interspersed with travels to Pondicherry, Chennai and Thanjavur. In Chennai I worked in the Tamil Nadu Archives Library, hoping to find documents about the Ekāmranātha temple festival, and in particular, references to the relocation of the festival statues from Kanchipuram to Udayarpalayam. In Thanjavur I spent time at the Saraswathi Mahal Library for documentary research. Most fruitful, however, was my visit to the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur and the interviews I conducted with two of the temple's priests, with the assistance of Dr. Sudarshan, the librarian of the Saraswathi Mahal Library. In Pondicherry I continued to work at the libraries of the École française d'Extrême-Orient and the French Institute of Pondicherry.

In Kanchipuram I was fully occupied with the festival. Observing and participating in the Ekāmranātha temple festival for the second time enabled me to elucidate further details while broadening my perspective on the festival in its entirety. I still joined almost all ritual activities and processions, but shifted focus from the structural aspect of the rituals to the events around them and the involvement of participants. I explored the marriage ceremony and the role of its donors in some depth. A very important aspect of this fieldwork was my acquaintance with two of the main donors for the marriage rituals, who warmheartedly and generously invited me to their homes and were willing to let me join and observe their ritual activities on the marriage day.

The third and final field trip to Kanchipuram in March/April 2011 was the shortest, lasting just one month. I focused on details that I had overlooked during my previous visits and used the time to clarify doubts and questions which had arisen from former interviews. Still, I joined daily the morning and evening processions, but for shorter periods. Only important rituals such as the 'hoisting of the flag', special processions such as *māvaṭi cēvai* and, obviously, the marriage day and night, were observed and covered fully. Invaluable was contact with the priest and the trustee of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, which for several reasons had not materialized in the previous years. A large part of this stay in Kanchipuram was also used to translate the Tamil poem *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* with the help of A.K. Selvadurai and N. Subramanian.

Festival participation

The *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is a highly complex festival, extending over thirteen days and involving a multitude of festivities and ritual activities. How is one to study such an enormous cultural event? It is, as Janaki (1988: 203) remarks, "almost impossible for a single person to follow the entire 'scenario' as many things happen at the same time in different locations as well as on different levels of cultural understanding." Even when observing only 'one' event it is difficult to figure out 'where to look first', since an event often comprises the interplay of simultaneous rituals and the deep sensory exposure of the performance can be overwhelming. At the same time, there are often long waiting periods during which 'nothing' happens, or ritual events which seem to be of no interest to those other than priests. Thus, modes of participation vary from person to person and across interest groups. The festival provides a setting for a wide range of activities and modes of participation.

I was lucky to witness the festival three times, thus it was possible to focus on different elements in each year, and I could recheck things that had eluded me before. Further, I placed an emphasis on the events taking place on the tenth festival day, which celebrates the divine marriage. Still, the ritual activities comprise almost twenty-four hours, and many things are happening simultaneously at different locations.

In the first year, I was seeking an overview of the ritual activities and structural aspects of the entire festival. I mainly followed the deities and their priests. Thus, I stayed close to the priests to observe the rituals they perform for the god Ekāmranātha and goddess Ēlavārkuḻali.

In the second year, I concentrated on the donors for the marriage rituals and began interviewing participants in the streets. For the marriage day I was supported by Dhivya Murugaiyan and M. Shanthini Sarah from the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC), with whom I conducted several interviews in the streets of Okkapiranthan Kulam and the temple area.

In the third year, I pursued a slightly different strategy during the marriage rituals. Rather than basing myself near the donors and priests, I stayed with 'ordinary' participants who enjoyed no special status, in order to grasp their perspective on the rituals. With the help of Sarah from NFSC, random interviews were conducted on the streets and at the temple area during *māvaṭi cēvai* and Paṅkuṉi Uttiram.

Simply put, I was following the deities in the first year, the donors in the second, and diverse participants in the third year. This method helped me to observe various (ritual)

activities and gain multiple perspectives on the events, which would not have been possible with only one period of fieldwork.

My role as researcher

Unlike the Kumbh Melā or other popular Indian festivals, the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is not typically visited by foreigners. Most foreigners only make a brief stopover in Kanchipuram to see the temples on their way to or from Chennai. I only saw a group of foreign tourists three times, who had rather accidently come across the *mahotsava* while visiting the temple, and once a Japanese camera team taking shots for a documentary on Indian marriages. Thus, most of the time I was the only foreigner and white woman participating in the Ekāmranātha temple festival. Through my constant presence, the festival's main actors, such as priests, assistants and carriers of the deities, knew me after the first year, and participants who had seen me before asked if I came each year for the festival. I believe my returns and repeated participation increased my credibility. I also found myself often in a privileged position, since often participants stepped aside or pushed me to the front to ensure that I had a better view. Having a camera and taking photographs certainly had a positive effect, and I often heard the word "press" when passing by.

Already in the first year, I found myself partaking not only in the festival, but also in the temple's 'redistributive process' (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976). As suggested by my field assistant, I donated silk garments for Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali as wedding gifts to the divine couple. Two days later the goddess was wearing 'my' sari on one of the big evening processions, to which several priests drew my attention. I considered this as a kind gesture, but was not fully aware of the significance of this fact. Only after some time and explanations from my field assistant, did I realize that this was a great honor, which was discussed among the priests. The next year, I was honored through the gift of one of Ekāmranātha's garments during the marriage ceremony. This was publicly enacted and noticed by a broader audience. Partaking in the temple's 'redistributive process' was essential for establishing relationships with priests and others affiliated to the temple. However, at the same time, I felt that expectations had been set on me which I could not always meet. Especially in the last year, when I was participating less, or only in selected events, it happened that priests or other people closely affiliated to the temple complained that I was not showing up. The explanation that I am now focusing on other aspects of my research was not really approved, and I felt that many people preferred to perceive me as foreign devotee and sponsor rather than as a researcher.

Field notes, photography and video

Taking notes while observing and participating in a festival is rather impractical, disturbing, and often not feasible in the crowd. Instead, I have made extensive use of photography and video recording. At the beginning I tried to operate the video camera myself, but quickly felt distanced from what was happening. Therefore, my field assistant Subramanian and I distributed the work; he usually took the video footage, while I took photos and observed. In addition, I intended to write field notes about each procession and the events after returning to the hotel at noon and in the evening. But two weeks of partaking in the festival routine can be extremely exhausting. In practice, the time between

two processions was mainly used to eat and rest before the next procession started. Especially towards the end of the festival my field notes were mere scribbles. However, the huge amount of video and photo material was to prove invaluable.[5] After the festival I was able to go over the events and performances repeatedly. I discovered details which would have evaded my attention in a single observation. The photographs enriched and partly replaced my field notes. They depict the events and help me to remember chronologies, but more important is that I took the pictures myself, and so reviewing them awakens memories of my own observations.

Language issues, interviews and the work with interpreters

Many researchers face language problems in India, a country with twenty-two scheduled languages and numerous non-scheduled languages and dialects. Trained in Sanskrit and Hindi, it was obvious that I would have to work with an interpreter for conducting fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravidian language Tamil is the official language. In the initial stage of the research I had hoped to use some simple sentences in spoken Sanskrit when approaching priests, as I have had positive experiences with it during the fieldwork for my M.A. thesis in Karnataka. However, at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram only very few priests I met had studied Sanskrit to such an extent that they were able to read Sanskrit texts or speak. Those who did were the same few priests who had higher education and command of English. Without any knowledge of Tamil I felt a huge distance between myself and the people around me. Therefore, after my first field trip, I attended a six-week course in spoken Tamil in Pondicherry, which provided me with some basic knowledge of the language. The command of a few sentences in Tamil was very helpful, not only to open doors, but also to better follow interview situations. The will to communicate in the local language was highly appreciated and the use of a Tamil word often gave me a smile. I never managed to converse in Tamil, which was for me most frustrating when I tried to talk with participants in the streets and our communication usually came to an end after three sentences.

However, during formal interview situations and conversations with priests I felt rather comfortable with not knowing the language well and having my field assistant Subramanian with me. He usually established the first contact with people I wanted to talk with and never gave up with the tedious work of calling people to make appointments for an interview. In India it is the proper conduct to let the man speak first and questions are often directed to the man, even when they actually address the woman. Thus, it felt appropriate to first let Subramanian explain the matter, introduce me, and have him as a facilitator between the interviewee and me. At the beginning of an interview, he often chatted with the interviewee and thus created a relaxed atmosphere.

The interviews were generally semi-structured. I followed interview guides, which I prepared beforehand. Interviews with priests usually lasted between one and two hours, and less with others. This difference in time was partly because I had more questions for the priests, but also because priests were often more talkative when discussing topics, which

5 Moreover, through the affiliation with the Kanchipuram Research Project I had access to video and photo material taken during the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple in the years 2007 and 2008.

then raised new questions I followed up. During all interviews I used an MP3 recorder, and with priests, sometimes a video camera. My field assistant Subramanian continuously translated the basic message and I sometimes took notes in addition. After the interviews we talked about main points and important observations. Later, Subramanian prepared an English translation for almost all interviews on the basis of the recordings. Subramanian is not a trained interpreter, but he has a good command of English.

Subramanian's interpersonal skills in dealing with priests were most valuable. He is a Brahmin himself, and I believe this had an impact on the relationships I/we established with the temple's priests and donors. Berreman's (1962) essay, about his experiences with research assistants of different castes and religious affiliations, has shown that in a highly stratified society like India the social class of an assistant must be considered, since it inevitably influences the self-presentation and responses of people interviewed. I cannot know whether, or in what ways, another field assistant would have changed the response of the priests, but I assume that priests met us with more openness and trust because Subramanian, as a male Brahmin, was 'one of them' and he was familiar with temple hierarchies and etiquettes through previous working experiences. In contrast, I noticed that his social class was rather disadvantageous when talking with people in the streets. On the one hand, it was not easy for him to play the role of a novice asking simple questions, which was further complicated by the fact that he was an inhabitant of Kanchipuram. On the other hand, people in the streets often felt unqualified to answer the questions, or did not understand why he was asking them when he could simply explain these things to me himself. Thus, when interviewing people in the streets I was working with M. Shanthini Sarah and Dhivya Murugaiyan from the National Folklore Support Centre, which gave me the opportunity to interact with a wider range of informants. Both are women in their mid-twenties from Chennai, and Sarah is Christian, which proved to be invaluable. I think it was much easier for the people to respond to questions from a group of young women, all of us not locals and more or less novices. Often, they were very keen to explain to us what was happening and to share with us their views and opinions about the events.

Research Ethics

A primary ethical concern for ethnographic research is responsibility for the individual. A major ethical dilemma of my research was deciding whether I should preserve the anonymity of my interviewees or not. At the beginning of my fieldwork I introduced myself to the temple's administration and the officiating priests. I gave them and other people I spoke with detailed information about the purpose of my research and the University I am affiliated with. All interviewees gave free and informed consent to participate in the interviews and were willing to be quoted under their own full names. Moreover, some talked to me because they wanted to make their opinions and their names known. But often it is difficult to assess possible harmful consequences of being identifiable, not only for interviewees, who gave their consent, but also for researchers, who cannot always predict how the data in their publication might be used, or misused, in future. However, the temple community I worked with is relatively small and most people I spoke with occupy certain positions, whether as priests, trustees or secretaries. Giving pseudonyms to the interviewees would not have protected their identity; at least within the community it is obvious who is speaking without naming the person, and obscuring their

positions would have led to loss of vital data. The only possibility would have been to anonymize the temple and the place, which was never an option, since this is a localized study of a place's specific myths and rituals.

As far as I can judge it, I was not touching sensitive issues in the interviews. In my experience, the interviewees were aware and certain about what and how much they wanted to let me know. It happened once that an interviewee gave me specific information requesting not to be quoted by his name, which I of course respected. In my opinion, it is also important to respect the interviewees' wishes to be quoted with their full names. Most people who were willing to share their knowledge with me would be disappointed by not finding their names in this book. Therefore, I refer to interviewees by their real name on the basis of their permission.

Another ethical issue I faced during my research is that the distribution of my video and photo material may cause potential future harm to individuals. As mentioned, to avoid any conflicts due to differing areas of accountability I obtained a research permit from the HR&CE Department of Tamil Nadu, which includes permission for photographing and filming. Many priests asked me to produce a DVD documenting the festival, and some also wanted to have photographs on CD, preferably with them in the pictures. Ideally, anthropological fieldwork is based on reciprocity, and I believe that every anthropologist is glad about an opportunity to give something back to the people who contributed to his or her research. However, providing the priests with videos and pictures was a sensitive issue. The material may attest to perceived shortcomings in the ritual performances, which might be used as evidence in the case of internal disputes. Thus, with the help of my research assistant, we carefully considered the choice of photographs, hoping not to cause any future harm to the people they depict.

Positioning my study

Kanchipuram is probably the most complex of Tamil temple towns. It is a place of religious pluralism with a rich festival culture, yet studies of Kanchipuram's ritual and festival traditions are few. Kanchipuram has been studied from historical and art historical perspectives, with a focus on Kanchipuram as the capital of the Pallava dynasty between the sixth and ninth centuries. In particular, the Pallavas' Kailāsanātha and Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ temples had been of interest to scholars in terms of their architecture and iconography (see, for example, Hudson and Case 2008). Further, there are publications dealing with Kanchipuram's architectural history (for example, Minakshi 1954) and one monograph about the Varadarāja temple, though also mainly from an art historical perspective (Raman 1975). A comprehensive study of the city's diverse ritual traditions is wanting. The Kanchipuram Research Project is filling this gap by focusing on rituals in Kanchipuram's three largest temples of classical Hindu traditions and temples of non-textual folk traditions. Outcomes of the project include several articles by Hüsken (2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2017, 2018) providing insights into Kanchipuram's festival and ritual traditions, in particular of the Varadarāja temple. Further, Ilkama (2018) is working on the Navarātri festival traditions in the Kāmākṣī temple, village goddesses' temples and homes in Kanchipuram. With this book I contribute to the limited extant literature on the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram. Scattered information about the temple's history can be found in publications on Kanchipuram in general. A valuable contribution is Stein's

doctoral dissertation (2017) on Kanchipuram's urban development between the eighth and twelfth centuries. A part of her study is concentrating on the evolution of the Ekāmranātha temple.[6] Further, Boulanger (1992) published a French monograph about the temple's priesthood and kinship system of one particular priestly family. Otherwise, research on the temple is in its infancy. I provide an in-depth study of the temple's *mahotsava* based on textual studies and anthropological fieldwork. My focus is on the contemporary ritual practice of one festival day, which celebrates the deities' marriage. I analyze its associated myth and oral narratives, and set the rituals and events in a wider historical and socio-cultural context. Because of this multidisciplinary approach, a broad range of studies has been relevant to my research.

Sources of inspiration have been studies on other temples and temple towns in Tamil Nadu. Most comprehensive is the five-volume publication on Tiruvannamalai and the Aruṇācaleśvara temple. A team of scholars affiliated with the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Pondicherry investigated Tiruvannamalai in terms of its epigraphical records, architecture, sociology, rituals, demographics and economics. Volume three, dealing with the temple's rituals and festivals, provides a description of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival. However, as the volume deals with the festival cycle of an entire year, the section on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is only a few pages (L'Hernault et al. 1999: 132–36). It was interesting to see parallels between the Aruṇācaleśvara temple and Ekāmranātha temple in terms of the constellation of donors for the marriage. At both temples, three donors sponsor the marriage rituals and regard themselves as the representatives of the bride's side. However, L'Hernault does not elaborate on the socio-cultural implications these overlapping claims may have.

Another Tamil temple town that has been studied in great detail is Madurai, which holds the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple. Fuller (1984, 2003) studied the temple's priesthood and its changing socio-cultural environment. As mentioned, his article (1980) on the rituals and festivals of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple decisively influenced my initial approach to the festival at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram. Further, Hudson (1982) described and analyzed the Cittirai festival that celebrates the divine marriage of Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī. Harman (1989), too, investigated the divine marriage at the Madurai temple through an analysis of the attendant myth, rituals, and South Indian kinship patterns. These studies of the Madurai marriage, though valuable, often exclude the participants' voices.

A remarkable work that combines different perspectives is Younger's (1995) monograph on the temple of Naṭarāja in Chidambaram, which provides an ethnographic account of the temple's priest and worshiper communities, and the daily rituals and periodic festivals they perform. Younger investigates the temple's architecture, inscriptions and changing patterns of donors and patronage from a historical perspective. Further, he deals with information about the temple's myths and religious traditions found in the Sthalapurāṇas, and other references to Chidambaram from Śaiva poet saints and Śaiva Siddhanta thelogians. Good's (2004) monograph on the Kalugumalai temple focuses on the ritual, economic and social interactions of a large South Indian temple. The publications of

6 I am very thankful to Emma Stein for sharing her unpublished doctoral thesis with me.

the last two authors have not directly provided material for comparison, but have inspired me in terms of their comprehensiveness and inclusion of various perspectives on the temples.

Descriptions of South Indian temple rituals can be found in books on Āgamas, or translations of it. For my research, Davis's (2010) translation of Aghoraśivācārya's *Mahotsavavidhi* was most valuable. Besides the translation, Davis provides many useful cross-references and explanations of the described rituals. Further, Davis's (2008) monograph on Śaiva Siddhānta rituals, and Good's (2001) ethnographic study on the daily *pūjā* in a South Indian temple, have enriched my knowledge of ritual and worship patterns.

In terms of the Ekāmranātha temple's myths, I am drawing on Shulman's (1980) structural analysis of a vast amount of late medieval Sthalapurāṇas. He has shown that the goddess's marriage to the god is a central structural element of many Tamil temple myths, and often, the major god is drawn to the site by the goddess, who has been at the place before (1980: 139). Shulman also includes some myths of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī in his analysis, however he seems not to take into account that the different Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram have also been composed with specific sectarian intentions. In contrast, I concentrate on one myth in its variations, and therefore extend my sources to various textual genres of different times. I aim to set the texts in their contexts and show that the choice of the myth's narrative themes was, and remains, driven by the motivations of the respective authors or their sectarian affiliations.

My understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of the 'redistributive process' in a South Indian temple and the significance of temple honors was informed by Appadurai and Breckenridge (1976). They argue that the "worship offered to a sovereign deity (...) permits the donor to enter into a transactional relationship with the deity. This transactional relationship, viewed in terms of honors and share, links deity–donor–temple staff and worshipper in a larger redistributive system" (1976: 200). A strong focus on a transactional relationship with the deity can be seen in the way participants perceive their role in the festival and how all actions and narratives related to the festival are directed towards the center, where the gods are situated.

Instead of approaching the re-enactment of the divine marriage from the perspective of myth and ritual theories, I found the concepts of cultural memory studies more helpful for understanding the local and historical dynamics. Connerton's (1989) book *How societies remember* inspired me to examine the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage as a commemorative ceremony that creates, sustains and transmits an image of the past. In addition, highly influential of my thinking was the scholarship of Erll, especially in understanding the production of cultural memory as a dynamic process to which different 'media of memory' contribute. 'Media of memory' have an inherent quality, an agent who produced them, and people who receive them (Erll and Nünning 2004, Erll 2009). Thus, I regard the ritual re-enactment of the divine marriage as one medium of memory that co-exists and communicates not only with the written myth, but also with oral narratives, visual images, and discourses during the festival.

Outline of the book

After the introduction I proceed with two chapters that provide background information to the place and the festival. **Chapter One** is dedicated to the Ekāmranātha temple, its

location in Kanchipuram, and its physical appearance, from the perspective of a pilgrim entering the temple on his way to the sanctum. Places and structural elements that are important during the *mahotsava* are highlighted. Next, I present the two focal points of worship at the Ekāmranātha temple, the mango tree and the sand *liṅga.* Both are connected by a major myth, which is closely associated with the re-enactment of the divine marriage on the tenth day of the festival. Furthermore, the name of the temple and its presiding deity Ekāmranātha are discussed. Then, the perspective switches from the contemporary appearance of the Ekāmranātha temple to its history and architectural development. I point out distinctive structures and important periods in its formation to show that the Ekāmranātha temple has always been a monument in the making.

In **Chapter Two** I examine the history and structure of the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple to demonstrate how the marriage ceremony on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is related to and integrated in the *mahotsava.* I present historical references to the festival, comprising iconographic considerations, inscriptions, one poem, and travel reports. Then, I introduce Aghoraśivācārya's *Mahotsavavidhi*, a ritual text from the twelfth century, which is the reference work for the conduct of the festival. I describe the ritual structure of the *mahotsava* based on my observation of the contemporary festival at the Ekāmranātha temple, investigate the processional routes and special events that allude to local myths, and explain the relation of the ritual text and actual performance.

The major myth of the Ekāmranātha temple, which is closely associated with the re-enactment of the divine marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, is the topic of **Chapter Three**. For convenience I call it the 'marriage myth', although not all versions conclude with the re-marriage in Kanchipuram. I present the myth and its variations as found in nine textual sources of various genres, which have been produced over the span of a millennium (ca. seventh to eighteenth century). I introduce the respective source, briefly retell the myth, and identify its narrative themes, which are compared and contrasted with respect to each source. I demonstrate that a core storyline of *tapas/pūjā*, testing, flood, embrace, and revelation, runs through almost all versions. Each text features some motifs of the core story line more than others, or highlights different themes, which I discuss against the backdrop of the text's context.

Chapter Four analyzes the events and rituals taking place on the tenth day of the *mahotsava*, which culminates in the divine marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. Key scenes of the 'marriage myth', such as the goddess's penance, the establishment and worship of the sand *liṅga*, Śiva's revelation, and the marriage, are commemorated and re-enacted. I provide a detailed description of the events and rituals, presented in a chronological order. Accordingly the subchapters are: Ēlavārkuḻali's trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam, her penance and the worship of the sand *liṅga*, and the marriage ceremony. Some of the events were explained to me by festival participants, and I describe these oral narratives too, and analyze them in relation to the myth of the written sources I discussed in the preceding chapter. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the relation between the performed rituals, the written sources, and the oral tradition(s).

Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī are *the* divine couple of Kanchipuram. However, at present the marriage rituals are performed with the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali from the Ekāmranātha temple. Kāmākṣī joins the goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ for the bridal procession. They are recognized as Ēlavārkuḻali's female friends who take on the role as bridesmaids.

Chapter Five portrays each of the three goddesses from a historical perspective and analyzes their contemporary roles, identities and relations to each other. One reason for this constellation is the goddess Bangāru Kāmākṣī. Her festival image was used in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals up to the end of the seventeenth century, until she was moved to Thanjavur and possibly replaced by the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali.

In **Chapter Six** I focus on participants and how they perceive their participation in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival. First, I outline ways to participate and motivations of the diverse participants. After briefly discussing the priestly roles and issues at work during the festival, I concentrate on families or groups involved in ritual activities and describe the rituals they perform on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. I begin with the residents of Okkapiranthan Kulam, who celebrate their own neighborhood festival as part of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage celebrations. I then examine three donors for the marriage ceremony, who perform their community and family based customs and rituals, which at one point meet the ceremonies at the Ekāmranātha temple. Finally, I analyze the role of human couples, who are married at the Ekāmranātha temple at the same time as the gods. The ritual activities and objectives of the diverse participating groups vary, yet all of them put emphasis on the importance of their roles in the divine marriage.

Drawing on concepts of cultural memory studies, I examine in **Chapter Seven** in what ways we can interpret the divine marriage as a commemorative ceremony that forms and transmits a collective cultural memory.[7] I focus on the bride's identity, which is far from clear. The goddess Kāmākṣī from the neighboring temple is publicly presented as the bride, whereas the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali from the Ekāmranātha temple serves as the actual bride in the ritual performances, and is explicitly recognized as the bride by participants. Analyzing iconographic, textual, performative and oral media that represent the mythological wedding, I show that these media are in continuous dialogue with each other, which creates a specific form of cultural knowledge.

Finally, in the conclusion, I link the main findings, discuss further implications, and reflect on themes for future research.

7 A version of this chapter has been published in *South Asian Festivals on the Move*, ed. Ute Hüsken and Axel Michaels. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013, 59–82.

1 The Ekāmranātha Temple

Before getting into the details of the *mahotsava*, it is first necessary to provide information about the Ekāmranātha temple. The temple is the host and locale of the annual festival. The diverse parts of the temple festival are closely connected to the place's specific features and localized myths, which are recalled and enacted in the course of the festival's activities. First, I give a brief description of the temple town Kanchipuram. Next, I focus on the physical appearance of the Ekāmranātha temple including its symbols of the divine (the mango tree and the sand *liṅga*), which are central to the temple's myths and festival celebrations. Then, I outline the temple's history and architectural development, using inscriptions and literary references as evidence.

1.1 Kanchipuram

Kanchipuram is a busy temple town and important pilgrimage site in the South Indian state Tamil Nadu, about seventy kilometers southwest of Chennai.[1] It is considered one of the seven ancient holy Hindu cities (*saptapurī*), all of which promise liberation from the cycle of rebirth (*mokṣa*). Up to the present day, the famous temples of Kanchipuram, and the local production of high-quality silk saris, attract pilgrims and visitors from all over India.

Kanchipuram's history[2] can be traced to the pre-Christian era. The place is named in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (second century BCE) and described in the Tamil poem *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai* (second century CE). Kanchipuram gained importance as the capital of the Pallava dynasty between the sixth and ninth centuries of the Common Era. It was ruled by the Cholas from the tenth to thirteenth century, and subsequently by the Vijayanagar kings and Nayakas from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century, the British East India Company controlled the city.

Kanchipuram has a long history of diverse religious traditions, including Buddhism, Jainism, Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism and Śāktism. The city and its miscellaneous religious groups are vividly described in the Tamil classic *Maṇimēkalai* (ca. sixth century) and Mahendravarman's play *Mattavilāsaprahasana* (seventh century). The Chinese Buddhist monk, Hsuan Tsang, visited Kanchipuram in the middle of the seventh century. His account describes Kanchipuram's flourishing religious culture. Hsuan Tsang mentions eighty *deva* temples, referring to Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and probably Jaina temples, further a Buddhist *stūpa*,

1 According to the 2011 Census of India, Kanchipuram town had a population of 164,384. See http://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/471-kancheepuram.html (accessed 15.07.2018).

2 This section is a brief overview. There are a number of publications on the rich history of Kanchipuram. For a detailed historical study see Srinivasan (1979); for the early history see Mahalingam (1969); on the Pallavas in Kanchipuram see Gopalan (1928). Further, the introductory chapters in Das (1964), Krishna (2006), Minakshi (1954), Raman (1975), and Seshadri (2003).

and a large Buddhist monastery.[3] However, apart from a few Buddha statues, most Buddhist remains have disappeared from Kanchipuram. Jainism has continued to flourish in Tirupparuttikkunram, to the south west of Kanchipuram, in the settlement commonly called Jina Kanchi.

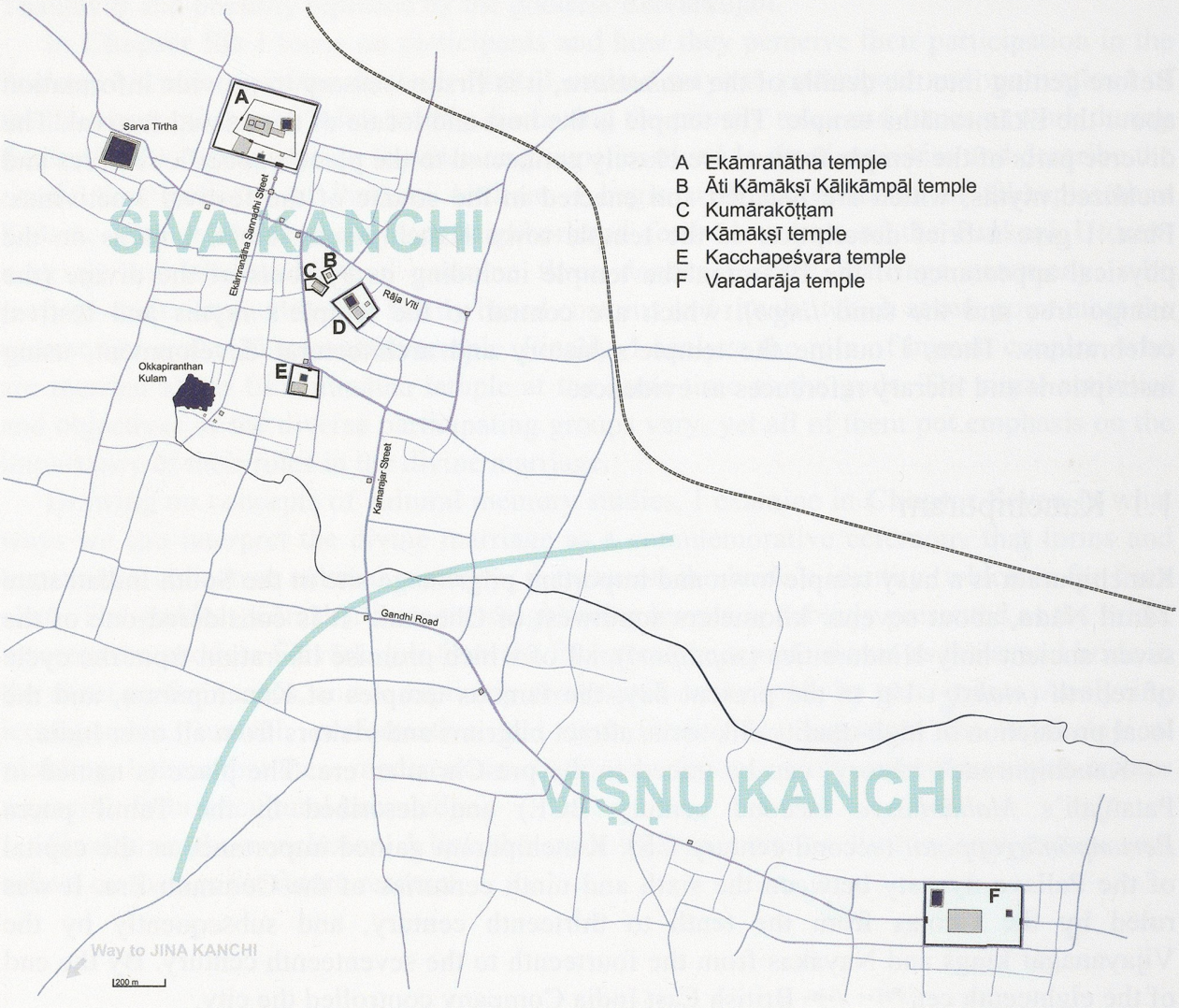


Figure 1.1 Map of Kanchipuram

Today, Kanchipuram is famous for its three largest Hindu temples,[4] named after their presiding deities: Varadarāja as a form of Viṣṇu, Ekāmranātha as a form of Śiva, and the goddess Kāmākṣī. The simultaneous existence and development of separate religious centers is reflected in the names of two divisions of Kanchipuram. The southeastern part of town, where Varadarāja and a number of other Viṣṇu-temples are situated, is called Viṣṇu Kanchi or Cinna Kanchi (Little Kanchi). The northwestern part of town is called Śiva Kanchi or Periya Kanchi (Big Kanchi) (see fig. 1.1).[5] Here are the temples of the deity

3 See Hudson (2008: 111–12).

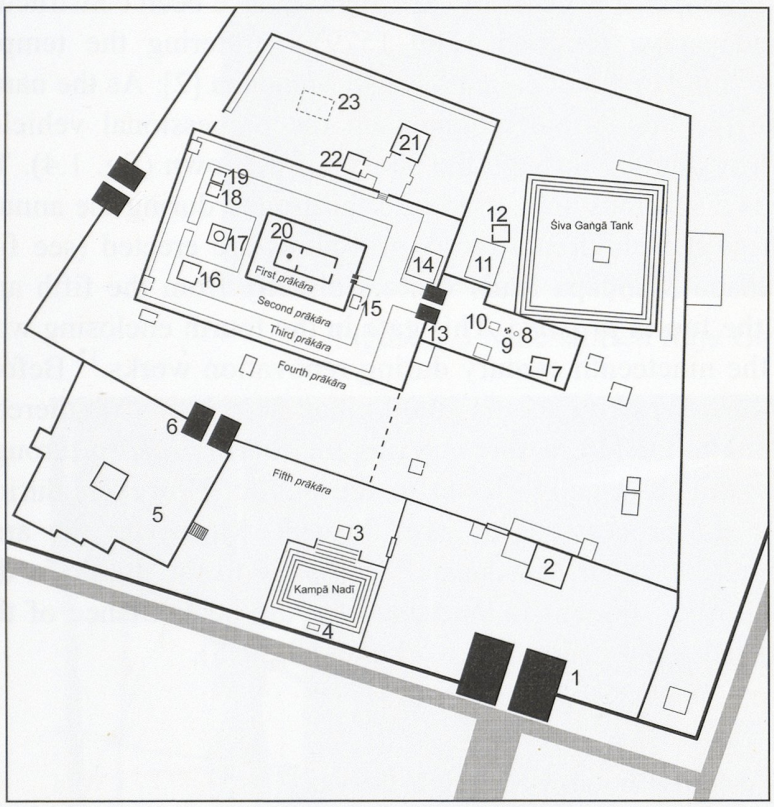
4 Besides these, smaller temples and shrines of Hindu gods and folk deities, monastic institutions like the Śaṅkara Maṭha, a *dargah*, and few mosques and churches shape the religious landscape of the town.

5 Stein (2017: 10) notes that the designations of Śiva Kanchi and Viṣṇu Kanchi have not come into use

Ekāmranātha, goddess Kāmākṣī, and in between them is Kumārakoṭṭam, a temple dedicated to Kumāra (Murukaṉ, Subrahmaṇya, Skanda). Hence, the layout of the temples in Śiva Kanchi is said to resemble Śiva's divine family, regarding Kāmākṣī as his wife and Kumāra as his son.[6]

1.2 Entering the Ekāmranātha temple

Like other great temples, the Ekāmranātha temple, popularly known as Ekāmbareśvar temple, began as a small shrine and was developed over a number of centuries into a huge temple complex. Today, it is an impressive monument with numerous shrines, long corridors, open pillared halls (*maṇḍapa*), gardens, and five enclosures (*prākāra*), extending over an area of 23.5 acres (95,000 m^2).[7]



1 Rāja Gopura
2 Vāhana Maṇḍapa
3 *Maṇḍapa* for Ekāmranātha
4 Place of Ēlavārkuḻali's penance
5 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa
6 Palli Gopura
7 Kaccimayāṉīśvara
8 *Balipīṭha*
9 *Dhvajastambha*
10 Nandin
11 Office
12 Ṛṣabheśvara
13 Ṛṣi Gopura
14 *Yāgaśāla*
15 Pralayakālī
16 Utsava Sannadhi
17 Mango tree (*sthalavṛkṣa*)
18 Māvaṭi Kantar
19 Ēlavārkuḻali
20 Sand *liṅga*
21 Naṭarāja Sannadhi
22 Former shrine of Pralayakālī
23 Vasanta Maṇḍapa

Figure 1.2 Map section of Ekāmranātha temple

until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Early colonial sources distinguish Little Kanchi from the rest of the city without linking the areas to particular gods.

6 It seems that according to this division of the city goddess Kāmākṣī and her temple are not perceived as a distinct tradition.

7 See Caivattiru (2003). *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (1935: 36) accounts for 23–28 acres temple ground. However, Ayyar (1965: 144) mentions an area of 49 acres. Aerial photos of the vast temple complex can be found on: http://www.eambaranathartemple.tnhrce.in/gallery.html (accessed 15.01.2018).

The following description traces a pilgrim's or visitor's journey from the outermost *prākāra*, inward to the sanctum of the Ekāmranātha temple. It focuses on places and structural elements that are either important or specially designed for use during the *mahotsava*. Figure 1.2 shows both the temple's layout and the shrines included in the description.[8] However, as Branfoot (2007: 5) points out, the architecture of a South Indian temple can be understood not only from the perspective of the devotee going inward to the sanctum, but also from the perspective of the god coming out of the temple during the festival's processions. The emergence of the god and his retinue from the temple will be dealt with in the next chapter.

The main and at present only entrance to the Ekāmranātha temple is on its southern side. A sixteen-pillared and a four-pillared *maṇḍapa* in the Ekāmranātha Sannadhi Street[9] lead the pilgrim or visitor to a lofty, pyramidal gateway (*gopura*) at the entrance [1].[10] The nine-storied entrance *gopura*, nearly 59 meters (192 feet) high, is one of the largest and tallest in South India. It also is the highest structure in Kanchipuram, and visible from far away. It is called Rāja Gopura (fig. 1.3), as it is generally assumed to have been constructed by the Vijayanagara king Kṛṣṇadēvarāya (reigned 1509–1529).[11] Entering the temple through the Rāja Gopura, one faces a pillared hall called Vāhana Maṇḍapa [2]. As the name indicates, this is the place where the deities are mounted on the processional vehicles (*vāhana*) before they set out on their journey through the streets of the town (fig. 1.4). To the right of the Vāhana Maṇḍapa is a spacious area, used as a fairground during the annual temple festival, when a giant wheel and children's merry-go-rounds are erected (see fig. 6.1). A gate to the left of the Vāhana Maṇḍapa leads visitors directly from the fifth and outermost enclosure (*prākāra*) to the fourth *prākāra.* This gate in the fourth enclosing wall was probably built at the end of the nineteenth century during renovation works.[12] Before that, one followed the fifth *prākāra* west up to the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa [5], thereby passing the Kampā Nadī temple tank to the left, before entering the fourth *prākāra* through the Palli Gopura [6]. Today, this way is usually closed to the public. However, during festivals, it is briefly opened for the processions to pass through. Moreover, the area between the Kampā Nadī tank and 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa is accessible to the public in the night of the tenth day of the *mahotsava,* since it is the venue for the performance of the marriage rituals of the god Ekāmranātha and goddess Ēlavārkuḻali (fig. 1.5).

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8 The shrines' numbers in the map are indicated in square brackets in the text.

9 The *caṉṉati* or 'shrine' street denotes the street in front of the temple's main entrance, in which the houses of most of the temple's priests are situated.

10 During the annual temple festival, a thatched roof is constructed, which connects both *maṇḍapas* with the entrance *gopura.* This construction serves as a kind of temporary corridor for the procession to leave the temple, and for salesmen to offer their goods in small stalls on each side of the corridor.

11 However, Michell (1995: 79) is of the opinion that the *gopura* is a Nayaka structure, belonging to a later date. He argues that the smaller, seven-storied *gopura* on the southern entrance to the fourth *prākāra* shows characteristics of Kṛṣṇadēvarāya's constructions like "somewhat squat proportions" and other typical features as the "fully modeled architectural elements of the seven diminishing storeys and the pronounced projections in the middle of each side." Yet, this smaller *gopura* on the south side is called Pallava or Palli Gopura, and priests of the temple believe that the Pallavas constructed it (see fig. 1.5, fig. 1.19 and fig. 1.20).

12 See Seshadri (2003: 121).



Figure 1.3 Nine-storied Rāja Gopura [1]



Figure 1.4 Vāhana Maṇḍapa [2] with temporary erected thatched roof



Figure 1.5 Venue for the performance of the marriage rituals; left: Kampā Nadī tank, front: *maṇḍapa* for Ekāmranātha [3], behind: 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa [5], right: Palli Gopura [6]



Figure 1.6 Columned hall with *balipīṭha* [8], flagstaff [9] and shrine for Nandin [10]

In the fourth *prākāra* are the large Śiva Gaṅgā temple tank, different shrines,[13] and *maṇḍapas*[14] (historical photo, fig. 1.14). A columned hall, which is attached to the gateway to the third *prākāra*, shelters some of the shrines (see fig. 1.6 and fig. 1.16). It dominates the architecture and emphasizes the west-east axis, on which a shrine for Śiva's bull Nandin [10], the flagstaff (*dhvajastambha*, [9]), and a pedestal for tribute offerings to entourage deities (*balipīṭha*, [8]) are situated. Here, the important 'hoisting of the flag' ceremony, which marks the beginning of the *mahotsava*, is taking place. Many pilgrims use the columned hall as a place to eat and rest during the midday hours, when the temple's innermost part (first to third *prākāra*) is closed from twelve to four.

Proceeding through the next gateway, called Ṛṣi Gopura [13] (fig. 1.15 and fig. 1.16), one enters the third *prākāra*, which is characterized by long corridors with columns and a high roof. Here are a number of subsidiary shrines, a row of 1000 *liṅgas*, the deity's sleeping chamber, and the sacrificial hall (*yāgaśālā*, [14]), in which fire oblations are performed during *mahotsava*. The third *prākāra* opens onto a courtyard behind, or to the west of, the sanctum. In the center of the courtyard is the holy tree (*sthalavṛkṣa*) of the Ekāmranātha temple, which is the mango tree [17]. Under the mango tree is a small shrine dedicated to Śiva in his domestic form as Somāskanda (Śiva with his wife Umā and son Skanda, fig. 1.7). A small, elevated circumambulatory path leads around the shrine and holy tree (fig. 1.8). This is, after the *liṅga* in the sanctum, the main attraction of the Ekāmranātha temple, and the focus of worship. Furthermore, from the third *prākāra* one can access the Naṭarāja Sannadhi [21] to the north of the sanctum.[15]

The second *prākāra* runs parallel to the corridors of the third *prākāra*, but is elevated by approximately one meter, and not separated from the third *prākāra* by a wall. The shrines considered more important are on the raised level of the second *prākāra.* Circumambulating the sanctum, the first shrine to the left houses the goddess Pralayakālī [15] (see fig. 1.9). She is regarded as very powerful and receives much worship from devotees. Pralayakālī also plays an important role in some versions of the 'marriage-myth', to be discussed in Chapter Three. The next shrine is the Utsava Sannadhi [16] (see fig. 1.10), which houses the processional icons (*utsavamūrti*).[16] During the festival, the ablution (*abhiṣeka*), adornment (*alaṃkāra*) and worship of the *utsavamūrtis* takes place in front of the shrine.

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13 Among others, the Ṛṣabheśvara and Kaccimayāṉīśvara shrines which are discussed below.

14 One *maṇḍapa* is nowadays used as the office of the temple's administration (*devasthāna*).

15 The Naṭarāja Sannadhi houses Śiva as 'the Lord of the Dance'. This shrine has an attached *maṇḍapa,* directly adjoining another shrine housing a festival statue of the goddess Pralayakālī [22], donated in 2006 (historical photos, fig. 1.17 and fig. 1.18, show the shrines before they were connected with each other). I have been told that this was the former shrine of the stone image of Pralayakālī, which is now installed in the second *prākāra.* However, Boulanger (1992: 98) notes that it was the former shrine of the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali, which is now in the second *prākāra* near the mango tree. The Naṭarāja Sannadhi is located in a backyard garden with a two-storied colonnade. Formerly, this area was accessible through the *maṇḍapa* and the deities were brought there to the now ruined Vasanta Maṇḍapa [23] for the celebration of the spring festival.

16 It is also known as Sabhānāyaka shrine or Kaṉṉāṭi Aṟai.



Figure 1.7 Somāskanda *mūrti* under the mango tree



Figure 1.8 Mango tree (*sthalavṛkṣa*) [17]



Figure 1.9 Shrine of goddess Pralayakālī [15]



Figure 1.10 Utsava Sannadhi [16]

Further, on the elevated second *prākāra,* are the shrines of Māvaṭi Kantar [18] ('Skanda of the mango tree') and of goddess Ēlavārkuḻali [19], who is Śiva's consort and bride in the marriage rituals on the tenth day of the *mahotsava.* Besides these shrines, the second *prākāra* accommodates most of the processional vehicles (*vāhana*), when they are not in use. The next gateway leads the devotees to the first *prākāra* and finally, through a gateway into the sanctum (*mūlasthāna*). The first *prākāra* and sanctum are restricted to Hindus. The main form of the god in the sanctum is the 'sand *liṅga*' [20].

1.3 Ekāmranātha's central myth, divine symbols and name

The two focal points of worship at the Ekāmranātha temple are the sand *liṅga* in the *mūlasthāna*, and the sacred mango tree in the courtyard of the third *prākāra* (see fig. 1.8). The major myth of the Ekāmranātha temple connects the mango tree with the sand *liṅga.* I will briefly retell the myth at this point, because it is crucial for an understanding of the subsequent reflections. However, a thorough analysis of the myth and its variations will be provided in Chapter Three. Another issue addressed here is the name Ekāmranātha and its development, which is closely connected to the mango tree.

The central myth

The central myth associated with the Ekāmranātha temple tells of the goddess's worship of the sand *liṅga* under the mango tree. In short, the story can be summarized as follows:

> Śiva's wife Pārvatī came to Kanchipuram to practice austerities under a single mango tree on the banks of the Kampā River. There, she built a *liṅga* out of sand and worshipped it. After some time Śiva wanted to test her devotion and sent a flood in the Kampā River. To protect the sand *liṅga* from the raging waters, the goddess embraced it and pressed it to her breasts, which left the marks of her breasts and bangles on it. This affectionate gesture made Śiva appear under the mango tree as Ekāmranātha ('Lord of the single mango tree') and grant her the boon to re-marry her in Kanchipuram.[17]

The myth can be understood as foundation myth. It explains the origin of Śiva's main form in the sanctum, the sand *liṅga,* and his local name, Ekāmranātha, the 'Lord of the single mango tree'. Key-scenes of the myth, like the worship of the sand *liṅga,* Śiva's appearance, and the re-marriage, are re-enacted and celebrated during the annual temple festival. Moreover, the depiction of the goddess's embrace of the sand *liṅga* under the mango tree is a recurrent theme in the visual arts of Kanchipuram, and can be regarded as the emblem of Śiva Kanchi.

The sand liṅga

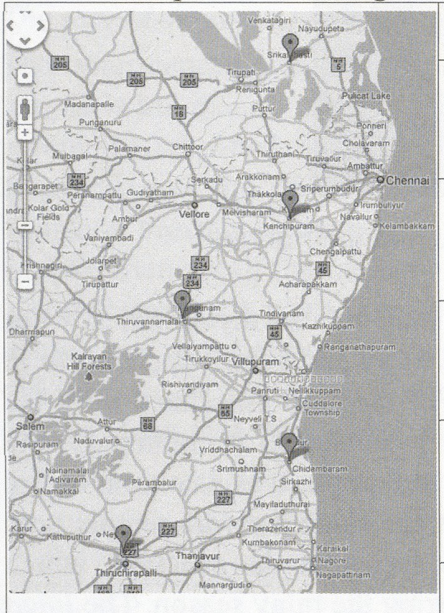
According to myth, the goddess created the *liṅga* under the mango tree from the sand of the banks of the Kampā River. This *liṅga* is now thought to be worshipped in the *mūlasthāna*

17 This summary is based on *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś).

of the Ekāmranātha temple.[18] The *liṅga* is egg-shaped, dark colored, 30 to 40 cm high and placed on a large pedestal (*pīṭha*) with a diameter of 2.5 to 3 meters. Apparently, the *liṅga* or its inner part is made of sand or sandstone (Minakshi 1954: 24). Priests regularly apply a balm consisting of eight fragrant substances (*aṣṭagandha*) to bind it. Another kind of gum-like paste consisting of eight substances (*aṣṭabandha*) is used to fix the *liṅga* base to the pedestal. Due to the *liṅga*'s delicate material, only the stone pedestal receives ablutions (*abhiṣekas*), and offerings such as flowers.[19]

The sand *liṅga* at the Ekāmranātha temple belongs to a group of *liṅgas* called *pañcabhūtaliṅgas,* the 'five element *liṅgas*'. The five elements—earth, water, fire, air and ether—are represented by five *liṅgas*, four of which are situated in Tamil Nadu (T.N.) north of the Kaveri River, and one in the state Andhra Pradesh (A.P.).[20] The sand *liṅga* at the Ekāmranātha temple represents the element earth (*pṛthivī*); the *liṅga* at the Jambukeśvara (Tiruvanaikaval) temple near Srirangam represents the element water (*jala* or *āp*); the *liṅga* at the Aruṇācaleśvara temple in Tiruvannamalai represents the element fire (*agni* or *tejas*); the *liṅga* in Kalahasti the element air (*vāyu*) and the *liṅga* at the Naṭarāja temple in Chidambaram the element ether (*ākāśa*) (see table 1).

Table 1 The *pañcabhūtaliṅgas*



Source: Google maps 2011

Place	Temple	*Liṅga*	Element
Srikalahasti (A.P.)	Srikalahasti Temple	*vāyu liṅga*	Air
Kanchipuram (T.N.)	Ekāmranātha Temple	*pṛthivī liṅga*	Earth
Tiruvannamalai (T.N)	Aruṇācaleśvara Temple	*agni liṅga*	Fire
Chidambaram (T.N.)	Naṭarāja Temple	*ākāśa liṅga*	Ether
Srirangam (T.N.)	Jambukeśvara Temple	*jala liṅga*	Water

18 According to an oral narrative, the sand *liṅga* has been shifted from its former location under the mango tree to its present location in the *mūlasthāna.* See Boulanger (1992: 95).

19 Near the end of my last field trip, my main contact priest offered to take me to the sanctum. He guided me through the first *prākāra,* but he was reluctant to take me close to the sand *liṅga.* I was only able to catch a glimpse of it. Therefore, regarding the *liṅga*'s physical appearance, I rely on the descriptions from Anand Gurukkal and Murti Gurukkal (01.04.2011).

20 Except for the *liṅga* in Srirangam, all *liṅgas* are situated in the ancient Tondaimandalam region, which roughly comprises the modern districts Cuddalore, Villupuram, Tiruvannamallai, Vellore, Kanchipuram, Tiruvallur, Puducherry and Chennai city in Tamil Nadu, and Chittoor and Nellore districts in Andhra Pradesh.



Figure 1.11 Painting of the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas* and their myths

Figure 1.11 shows a painting of the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas* and their related mythologies.[21] For Kanchipuram (top left), the goddess's embrace of the sand *liṅga* and Śiva's appearance in front of, or emerging from the mango tree, is depicted. The *liṅga* is associated with the element earth through its mere materiality. The *liṅga* in Tiruvannamalai is connected with the element fire, on account of the myth that Śiva appeared at that place as a column of fire to show his supremacy to Brahma and Viṣṇu. The *liṅga* at the Jambukeśvara temple near Srirangam represents the element water due to a natural spring in the sanctum, which surrounds the *liṅga* with water on all sides[22] and floods it during the rainy season. The *liṅga* in Srikalahasti is associated with the element wind, owing to a flame in the sanctum, which is always flickering as if it is being blown by wind, even though there is no external air source. In Chidambaram, Śiva is worshipped in his highest un-manifested form, present as the open space and therefore linked to the element ether. Francis reports in the *Gazetteer of South India* that "actually no *liṅga* exists, but a curtain is hung before a wall, which is pulled away when visitors enter to show the invisible *liṅga*."[23]

21 The painting is downloaded from http://todaysquiz.in/panchabootha-psthalas/ (accessed 30.10.2011). For a description of the places' mythology see for example Meena (2010).

22 See Francis ([1906] 1989: 202).

23 See Francis ([1906] 1989: 120). However, he denotes the *liṅga* as 'air *liṅga*'.

It is difficult to trace the origin of the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas* as a group. It seems that the particular places were associated with one of the five elements through their myths or natural characteristics. The Sanskrit Sthalapurāṇas dealing with Kanchipuram describe the *liṅga*'s material with the word *saikata* (sandy, made of sand)[24] and, except for one verse,[25] the texts do not employ the term *pṛthivī* (earth) to associate the *liṅga* with the element earth. Moreover, the Sthalapurāṇas related to Kanchipuram do not offer any mythological narrative connecting the five places and their respective *liṅgas* with each other.[26]

The first literary reference to the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas* as a group, which I found, is a travel report of Karl Graul, director of the German Lutheran Leipzig Mission. Graul's main destination in India was the Danish settlement and Protestant mission in Tranquebar, from which he visited a number of places in South India and Sri Lanka between December 1849 and October 1852. His account of the temple in Chidambaram includes a footnote, in which he refers to the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas.* He states that 'the earth *liṅga* in Kanchipuram and the ether *liṅga* in Chidambaram are most famous among the five *liṅga* temples,' and also mentions the water *liṅga* in Tiruvanaikaval, the fire *liṅga* in Tiruvannamalai, and the air *liṅga* in Srikalahasti.[27] Today, the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas* form a well-established sacred geography, which is promoted in temple booklets and by tourist agencies in Tamil Nadu.

The sacred mango tree

The other central element in the 'marriage-myth' and divine symbol of the Ekāmranātha temple is the mango tree. Almost every temple in Tamil Nadu has a sacred tree within its precincts (*sthalavṛkṣa*), which symbolizes the axis mundi (Shulman 1979: 28). The *sthalavṛkṣa* of the Ekāmranātha temple is the mango tree and it is said that it had four branches bearing mangos with four different tastes, which represented the four Vedas. People often recall the memory of the different tasting mangos. However, the mango tree was infected by a plant disease a few years ago and subsequently was removed. A new mango tree, from a shoot of the old tree, has been planted at the same spot. A piece of the old tree's trunk is exhibited in a glass cabinet within the temple. A signboard besides the cabinet states that "this sacred mango tree is 3500 years old."[28]

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24 See SkP 1.3.4.13, 18, 27, 35, 49; KM (Ś) 45.14, 21, 35, 36, 77, 102; KM (V) 24.20, 50 and 25.16; KāVi 8.4, 33, 37, 81. The *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* uses the Tamil word *maṇal* for sand (verses 30, 44, 200, 370). The Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam*, however, does not mention the sand at all.

25 KM (V) uses in verse 24.24 the adjective *pārthiva.*

26 I do not know, however, whether the other places' Sthalapurāṇas connect the *liṅgas* with each other. One instance in the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas could be interpreted as a link between the elements earth and fire, and possibly between the two places Kanchipuram and Tiruvannamalai. The 'marriage myth' in the *Kāñcīmahātmya* (Ś) recounts that Pārvatī comes to the mango tree in Kanchipuram, under which she sees a light-ray *liṅga* (*jyotirliṅga*). She is piling up sand on that light *liṅga.* Finally, she accomplishes to cover it completely with sand and thus creates the sand *liṅga,* which is later worshipped by her. The myth however, does not refer to Tiruvannamalai and the light-ray *liṅga* is not necessarily connected with Tiruvannamalai, since Śiva's appearance as a pillar of light is known from a number of places.

27 English rendering by me (Graul 1855: 327, fn. 64).

28 This information is based on a report from 1957 of the chief conservator of forests (Rajaram 1978: 6).

The name

The sacred mango tree is also the name giver for Śiva in his form as Ekāmranātha, the 'Lord of the single mango tree'. However, this has not always been Śiva's name here. The earliest literary reference to the Ekāmranātha temple is found in the Sanskrit play *Mattavilāsaprahasana*.[29] The Pallava king Mahendravarman I (reigned ca. 600–630 CE) composed this satirical play at the beginning of the seventh century. The play, which characterizes the idiosyncrasies of Śaiva and Buddhist ascetics at that time, is set in the Pallava capital, Kanchipuram. The plot describes the drunken roaming of a Śaivite Kāpālika, and his mistress, through the streets of Kanchipuram as they search for the Kāpālin's lost skull-bowl.[30] It describes their encounters with a Buddhist monk, with another ascetic of the Śaivite Pāśupata sect, and with a madman. At one point, when the Buddhist monk sees the Śaiva Kāpālika, he exclaims: "Aye, this is the wicked Kāpālika, who lives in Ekāmra" (Sanskrit: *ayi ayam ekāmravāsī duṣṭakāpālikaḥ*).[31] Gaṇapati Śāstrī (1917), whose first edition of the *Mattavilāsaprahasana* served as major reference for subsequent editions, explicitly translated: "Ay, it's the evil Kāpālika who lives at the temple of Ekāmranātha."[32]

However, the Sanskrit rendering *ekāmra* is ambiguous. The Buddhist monk and the Kāpālika's mistress speak in different varieties of Prakrit, and only the Śaiva Pāśupata and Kāpālika in Sanskrit. The Prakrit text of the Buddhist monk reads '*ai ayaṃ eaṃvvavāsī duṭṭhakavālio*'. Unni (1974: 51) rendered the Prakrit *eaṃvvavāsī* to Sanskrit *ekāmravāsī,* in accordance with the known designation for the temple and its residing deity Ekāmranātha – the 'Lord of the single mango tree'. Ayyar (1965: 145), on the other hand, is of the opinion that *eaṃvva* is a "colloquial form of *ekhambha*," the 'pillar'. An anonymous commentary on the *Mattavilāsaprahasana* goes along the same line. Here, the Sanskrit rendering of the passage is *ēkampavāsī*, from which Barnett (1924: 282) reconstructs the Prakrit form *ēampavāsī,* which would suggest *kampa*, the 'pillar'.

Other early literary references to the existence of the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram are found in the *Tēvāram*, a collection of Tamil Śaiva devotional hymns, which were composed by the three poet saints, Campantar, Appar, and Cuntarar, between the seventh and ninth centuries. Twelve hymns have been composed in praise of Kacci Ēkampaṉ—four (1.133, 2.12, 3.41, 3.114) by Campantar (seventh century), seven (4.7, 4.44, 4.99, 5.47, 5.48, 6.64, 6.65) by Appar (seventh century), and one (7.61) by Cuntarar

29 Srinivasan (1979: 244) mentions two earlier literary sources. First, Paraṇadēvanāyanār (ca. fifth century), author of the *Śivaperumānandādit*, referred to a Śiva shrine named Ēkaṃbam. Second, Aiyāḍigaḷ Kāḍavarkōṉ, identified as Pallava Simhavarman III (ca. 550–574), mentions in the work *Kshētravaṇbā* Ēkaṃbam as a place of pilgrimage. However, I was not able to find the first reference. The second must be Aiyaṭikaḷ Kāṭavar Kōṉ's *Kṣēttirattiruveṇpā* (11th Tirumuṟai, verse 145–168), which mentions in verse 164 *ēkampa*. However, Zvelebil (1975: 137) states that most authors identify the poet with the Pallava Parameśvaran I (ca. 670–700) without sufficient evidence. Thus, it seems unclear, which Pallava ruler composed the poem and consequently, whether the poem was composed earlier than the play *Mattavilāsaprahasana*.

30 The Kāpālikas are ascetics, having the skull-bowl as emblem, with which they are supposed to beg for alms. For more information about the cult and doctrine of the Kāpālikas see Lorenzen (1972: 73–83).

31 Translation and text in Sanskrit according to Unni (1974: 51).

32 Quoted in Lorenzen (2000: 89).

(ninth century). Kacci is the name for Kanchipuram and *ēkampaṉ* or *kampaṉ* ('one/a pillar') is the name by which Śiva in Kanchipuram is addressed throughout all *Tēvāram* hymns.

Therefore, the oldest known name of Śiva at the place is Kampaṉ or Ēkampaṉ, from Prakrit *khambha* or Sanskrit *skambha*, the 'pillar'. The etymology of the name points to the worship of a pillar deity, possibly symbolizing the 'pillar of light'. Based on epigraphic and literary evidence, Ayyar (1965) has shown that the name Ēkampaṉ was prevalent from the seventh to the twelfth century. After the twelfth century the name changed to Ekāmra and the place became closely associated with the mango tree (*āmra*).

1.4 Notes on the history of the Ekāmranātha temple

Before the seventh century, buildings in South India were made of materials such as wood and brick, which inevitably decayed over time. Therefore, literary sources are usually the only available references for descriptions of places of which we do not have any archeological remains. As mentioned, portrayals of the town Kanchipuram can be found in the second-century Tamil poem *Perumpāṇāṟṟuppaṭai*, the probably sixth-century Tamil classic *Maṇimēkalai*, and Mahendravarman's Sanskrit play *Mattavilāsaprahasana*. The latter contains the earliest known reference to the Ekāmranātha temple, or more precisely, to a shrine or place associated with the Śaivite Kāpālika sect.

The oldest inscription at the Ekāmranātha temple leads to the Pallava king Mahendravarman I, too. An inscribed granite pillar has been found in a ruined *maṇḍapa* near the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa at the Ekāmranātha temple (ARE 1921, No. 82; published in SII, Vol. XII, No. 14). The inscription does not bear a date, but is written in Pallava Grantha script and lists some of Mahendravarman's epithets. Since the inscription has been found on a detached pillar, it is assumed that the pillar formed part of a structural temple during the time of Mahendravarman I, which no longer exists.[33] The pillar is now at the Government Museum in Chennai. Apparently, it is regarded as the pillar of a *maṇḍapa,* built in front of the Ekāmranātha temple by Mahendravarman I.[34] Thus, the origins of the Ekāmranātha temple can probably be traced to the beginning of the seventh century, though no structure from this period remains at the Ekāmranātha temple.

One of the oldest, barely altered structures at the Ekāmranātha temple is the Ṛṣabheśvara (Tam. Iṭapēcuvarar) or Vālīśvara shrine [12], situated in the fourth *prākāra* by the Śiva Gaṅgā tank behind the office building [11]. The shrine seems to have been built with sandstone, the typical Pallava building material in Kanchipuram. Today, however, it is plastered with cement, which partly obscures its original architectural elements. The single-celled shrine houses a prism-shaped *liṅga* with 32 facets (see fig. 1.12). On the wall behind the *liṅga* is a panel of Śiva and Umā (Umāsahita), each carrying a *triśula.* The Pallavas widely employed the Somāskanda (Śiva with Umā and Skanda) motif as panel behind the *liṅga*. Thus, the absence of Skanda is conspicuous. The panel seems more characteristic of

33 See SII, Vol. XII, No. 14 and Minakshi (1954: 11).
34 See Ayyar (1965: 145) and Srinivasan (1979: 245).

a Pandya cave temple, as Seshadri (2003: 128) points out. However, Stein (2017: 84) cautions, that although the shrine "may be compared with ninth-century temples" it cannot be dated firmly to the ninth century. Unfortunately, the inscriptions on the outer wall of the shrine have become illegible over time and do not provide any date. Minakshi (1954: 17) suggests, on the basis of architectural style and choice of motifs, that the shrine belongs to the first quarter of the eighth century. Today, the Ṛṣabheśvara shrine is rather neglected, although it is most probably the oldest preserved structure at the Ekāmranātha temple.



Figure 1.12 Ṛṣabheśvara *liṅga* [12] with Umāsahita panel

The Kaccimayāṉīśvara shrine [7] has been of importance since early times, and it continues to receive much attention and worship from priests and devotees. The name Kaccimayāṉīśvara (Skt. Śmaśāneśvara), the 'Lord of the burial ground', speaks once more to the place's connection with the Śaivite Kāpālika sect, which worships Śiva in the form of Bhairava, living at the burial ground. The poet saint Appar, in the seventh century, refers in a *Tēvāram* hymn (6.97.10) to Kacci Mayāṉam. The present Kaccimayāṉīśvara shrine, however, is regarded as a structure from the middle Chola period (Krishna 2006: 42). Inscriptions on a stone built into the floor at the entrance of the shrine are from the time of Uttama Chola (reigned 970–985).[35] Other inscriptions[36] on the wall of the same shrine are

35 ARE 1906, No. 2, 3; published in SII, Vol. XXII, No. 2, 3.

from Kulōttuṅga Chola (reigned 1070–1120) and Rājādhirāja I (reigned 1018–1054). Since Kacci Ēkampaṉ and Kacci Mayāṉam have been praised independently in *Tēvāram* hymns, it is likely that they have been separate shrines. Today, Kaccimayāṉīśvara and Ṛṣabheśvara are situated in the fourth *prākāra*, and are therefore integrated in a superstructure that constitutes the present Ekāmranātha temple complex. Stein (2017: 24–25) proposes that the temple's eastern part in the fourth *prākāra* was the older zone. It includes the Kaccimayāṉīśvara and Ṛṣabheśvara shrines, the large Śiva Gaṅgā temple tank and a sandstone shrine supported by lion-based pillars, situated outside the eastern exterior wall (fig. 1.13).[37]



Figure 1.13 Sandstone shrine, Ekāmranātha temple

With its origins in Pallava times, the temple has undergone vast structural expansions during the Cholas, but was substantially built during the Vijayanagar and Nayaka periods in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the Carnatic wars, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Ekāmranātha temple must have experienced tumultuous times. The *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (*Kanchipuram Directory*) (1935: 38) states that the military stayed at the temple during the Carnatic wars and used it as a fort and hospital. An inscription (ARE 1923, No. 45) on a cenotaph, set up in Pollilur[38] near Kanchipuram, records that the temple was first occupied by the French and then stormed by the British on 16 April 1759. Minakshi (1954: 3) notes that the French sacked the city once in 1757 and again in 1760. It is also reported that Hyder Ali conquered the place in 1767, when he was marching to

36 ARE 1893, No. 1, 54; published in SII, Vol. IV, No. 813, 867.

37 I speculated about this shrine, too, and wish to thank Emma Stein for explaining its relevance.

38 The battle between Tipu Sultan of the Kingdom of Mysore and the British took place in Pollilur in 1780.

capture Chennai (*Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* 1935: 38). The Ekāmranātha temple must have been severely damaged during the Carnatic wars, and, most likely, lost its eastern *gopura*. An inscription (ARE 1939/40, No. 346), dated 1483, records the establishment of a monastic institution (*maṭha*) near the eastern *gopura*. Today, there is no eastern *gopura* at the Ekāmranātha temple, though, the *maṭha* is still on the eastern side, and only an archway indicates where the former eastern *gopura* must have been. Evidently, the British restored the damaged wall. An inscription (ARE 192, No. 83) in English on the outer eastern wall of the third *prākāra* states that Hodgson, the collector of the Chingleput District at this time, repaired 30 yards of the wall in 1799.[39]

A description of the Ekāmranātha temple from the nineteenth century may indicate the temple's condition, as it was built and extended over centuries, and repeatedly damaged and renovated.[40] Fergusson (1910: 360) comments in *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* that the Ekāmranātha temple has:

> A hall of about 540 columns, several large and fine mantapas, large tanks with flights of stone steps, and all the requisites of a first-class Dravidian temple, but all thrown together as if by accident. No two gopurams are opposite one another, no two walls parallel, and there is hardly a right angle about the place. All this creates a picturesqueness of effect seldom surpassed in these temples, but deprives it of that dignity we might expect from such parts if properly arranged.

It must be considered that the first edition of *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* was published in 1876.[41] Thus, James Fergusson (1808–1886) collected his data in the years before 1876.[42] Major repair works had been undertaken by the end of the nineteenth century, which gave the temple its present look with a rectangular and symmetrical first and second *prakāra* and an emphasis on the west-east axis by means of newly constructed columned halls in the third and fourth *prakāras*. A photograph (fig. 1.14) taken between 1862 and 1876 shows the fourth *prākāra* of the Ekāmranātha temple during the time of Fergusson's visit. The shrines[43] appear scattered in the temple compound and may have contributed to Fergusson's impression that "all is thrown together as if by accident."

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39 The Dutch, too, left a mark on the Ekāmranātha temple. A huge bell on top of the wall of the second *prākāra*, next to the *gopura*, bears the coat of arms of the United East India Company (VOC—Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie) and the date 1705. The priests and temple's administration did not know for what reasons it was put up there. See figure 1.15, a small bell tower is visible to the left.

40 Ayyar (1965: 146) draws attention to a number of raids on Kanchipuram and the Ekāmranātha temple before the Carnatic wars. For example, an inscription (ARE 1923, No. 128), dated 1681, reports that Rājā Liṅgōji renovated the Ekāmranātha temple among others.

41 About the data collection, see the preface to the first edition, written by Fergusson (vii-xi) and the second edition, written by Burgess (xii-xv), both in Fergusson (1910).

42 James Burgess revised the second edition in 1910. He extended the information on Kanchipuram, but did not revise Fergusson's description of the Ekāmranātha temple.

43 The shrine to the right is Kaccimayāṉīśvara, in the middle behind the *maṇḍapa* (at present the temple's office building) is the Ṛṣabheśvara shrine.

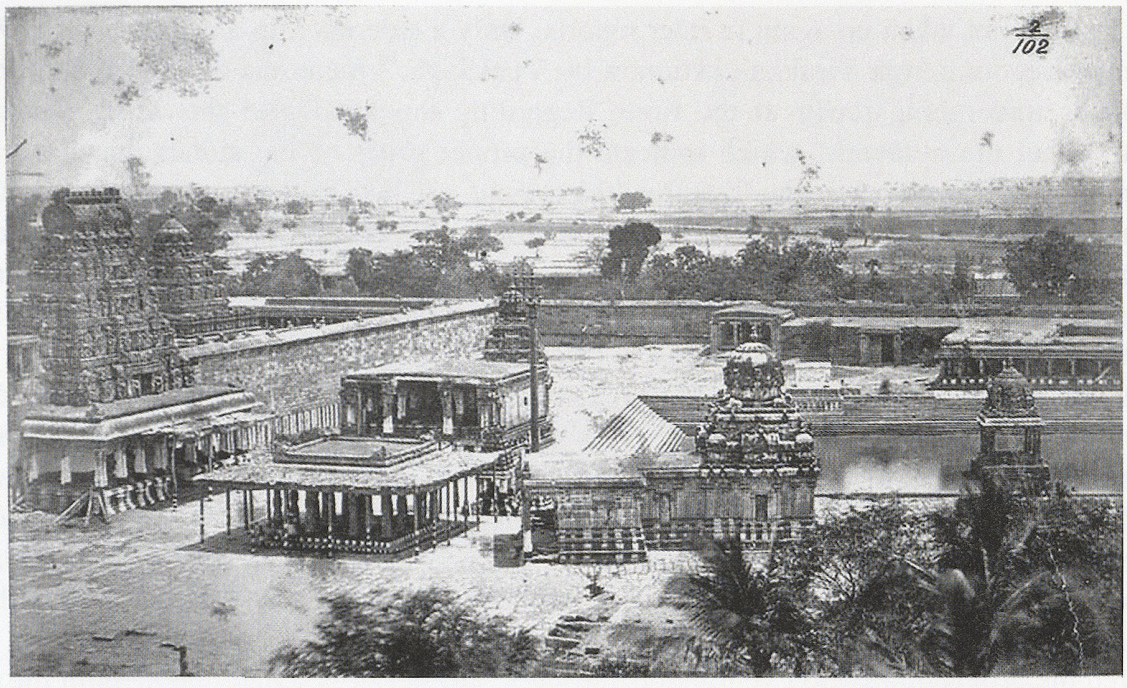


Figure 1.14 View from the Rāja Gopura on the fourth *prākāra,* 1862–76
Source: Madras College of Arts and Crafts, *General view from the top of the Temple, Big Conjeeveram, 1862-76,* accessible through the Digital South Asia Library (http://dsal.uchicago.edu/images/madrascollege)

Furthermore, the Ekāmranātha temple must have been in a dilapidated state before the repair works were undertaken at the end of the nineteenth century. As the collector of the Chingleput District wrote in the annual report, dated 14 August 1893:

> The trustees of the temple (...) are going to improve the inner portion of the temple by pulling down the central shrine and its first enclosure, and rebuilding both. This is much to be regretted as both the shrine and the enclosure are covered with ancient inscriptions. Part of those on the enclosure have been copied by my Assistant.[44] The shrine itself is covered with such a thick layer of chunnam that only a few letters are visible here and there, and would have to be carefully cleaned before its inscriptions can be read and copied. I do not know if Government can interfere with the internal management of the temple so far as to prohibit the pulling down of the shrine and enclosure. I would, however, suggest that a responsible Hindu officer of the Public Works Department might be deputed to the Ekāmranātha temple and might be ordered to superintend the removal of the stones which could be numbered before they are taken out, and rearranged in their original order either as part of the new building or in one of the outer courtyards of the temple. The small outlay which the adoption if this proposal would involve, appears to be justified by the number and importance of the records which may thus be saved from wanton destruction.[45]

44 It seems that the copied inscriptions are from the first *prākāra.* However, in ARE 1893 are only inscriptions from the second *prākāra* listed.
45 ARE 1893, p. 4.

This issue is not taken up again in later reports. Only a side note, in a report from 1894/95 about inscriptions from Tirukkalukkunram by Venkayya,[46] mentions that the Ekāmranātha temple is undergoing repair at the time. Regarding the quality of the work, Venkayya remarks that the numerals, which indicate the proper order of the stones that have been taken out for repair work at the Ekāmranātha temple, are just painted on the stones with tar or chunnam, whereas in Tirukkalukkunram the numerals have been chiseled into the stones. Unfortunately, Venkayya gives no information about the extent to which Government interfered with and controlled the repair work at the Ekāmranātha temple, as had been alluded to in the collector's annual report.

A donation board at the entrance of the Ṛṣi Gopura at the Ekāmranātha temple, dated 4.2.1900, records that Lakshmanan Chettiar from Natukottai "renovated the *mūlasthana,* the second *prākāra,* and repaired the compound wall etc." The *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (1935: 36) specifies that Lakshmanan Chettiar built the wall around the mango tree and the *pañcamūrtis*, Svāmi, Ampāḷ and the others, and that he provided a way for them to be taken to the vehicles in the year 1889 at the cost of 25 lakh[47] rupees. Apart from this, he built the *garbhagṛha*, Naṭarāja shrine, *yāgaśālā* and the temple's kitchen with new stones, and ensured the provision of good ventilation and light. Further, it is stated that he built the road up to the Ṛṣi Gopura as well as the Ṛṣi Gopura *prākāra.* I assume this refers to the columned hall in front of the Ṛṣi Gopura (fig. 1.14 and fig. 1.15 show the Ṛṣi Gopura and *prākāra* before the renovation, fig. 1.16 its the present appearance). The deteiled description gives an idea how extensive and grand the renovation measures must have been. As the donation board also shows, a *kumbhābhiṣeka* took place in 1900 after the repair work was finished.

Two photographs taken by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1897/98 illustrate the modernizing and (re)building measures that took place at the Ekāmranātha temple. One photograph (No. 1008/3(322); fig. 1.17) shows the construction work on the second *prākāra* in front of the Naṭarāja shrine. The photograph is labeled 'Subrahmanyaswami shrine'. According to the temple's priests, the shrine has never been dedicated to Śiva's son Subrahmanya. It houses Naṭarāja—Śiva as the Lord of the Dance, which is also indicated by the sculptural program of the shrine's *vīmana,* depicting Śiva in various dance positions.

The second photograph (No. 1008/3(323); fig. 1.18) is labeled 'Amman shrine'. It is likely that this is the original shrine of Pralayakālī, whose stone *mūrti* has been moved to a new shrine in the second *prākāra.*[48] The two-storied colonnade can be seen in the background of both photographs. Traditionally, the deities have been brought to this backyard garden during the spring festival (*vasantotsava*). Today, the colonnades and *vasanta maṇḍapa* are dilapidated and the backyard is closed.

46 EI 1894/95, Vol. III, p. 276.

47 One lakh is equal to one hundred thousand.

48 Today, the original shrine houses an *utsavamūrti* of Pralāyakālī, which was donated in 2006 by the Ekāmranātha temple priest Balasubramanian. However, the doors to the shrine are very often closed.

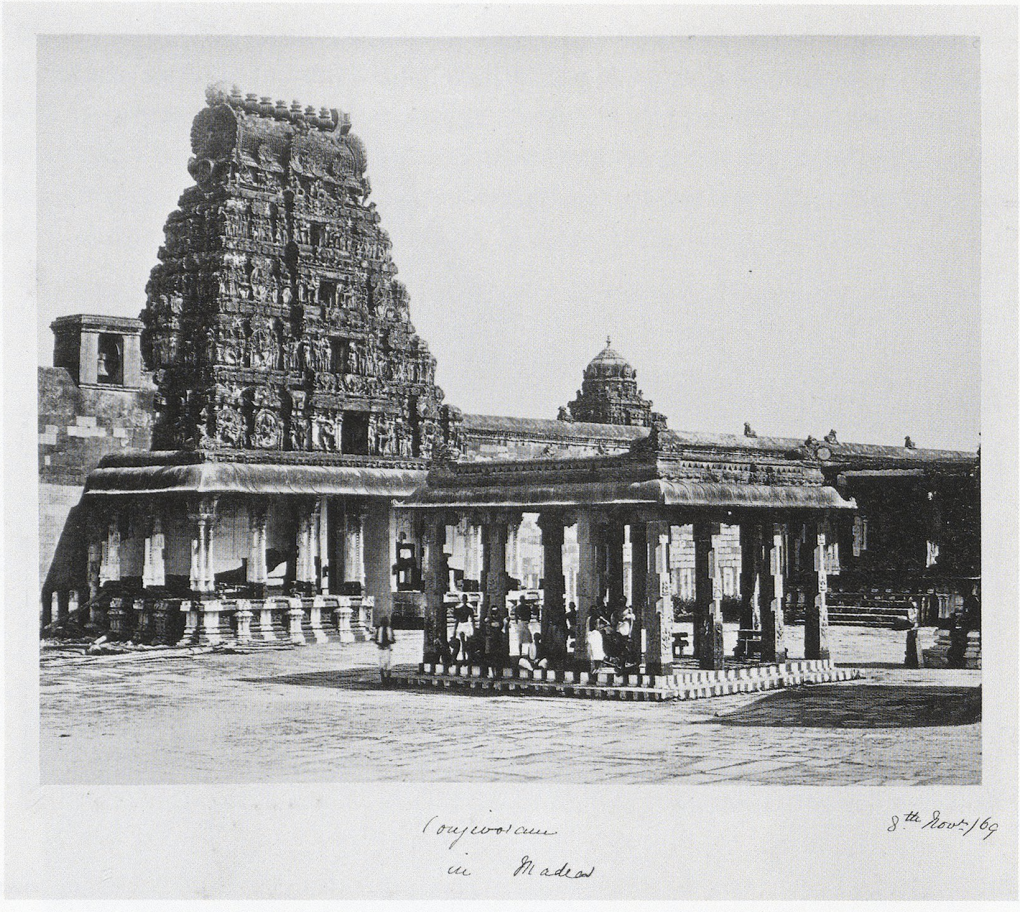


Figure 1.15 Ṛṣi Gopura [13], 1869
Source: Nicholas & Co. (British, active Madas, India 1860s - 1920s), Photo 21823701, *Conjivoram in Madras, November 8, 1869,* The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Figure 1.16 Columned hall attached to the Ṛṣi Gopura [13], 2009

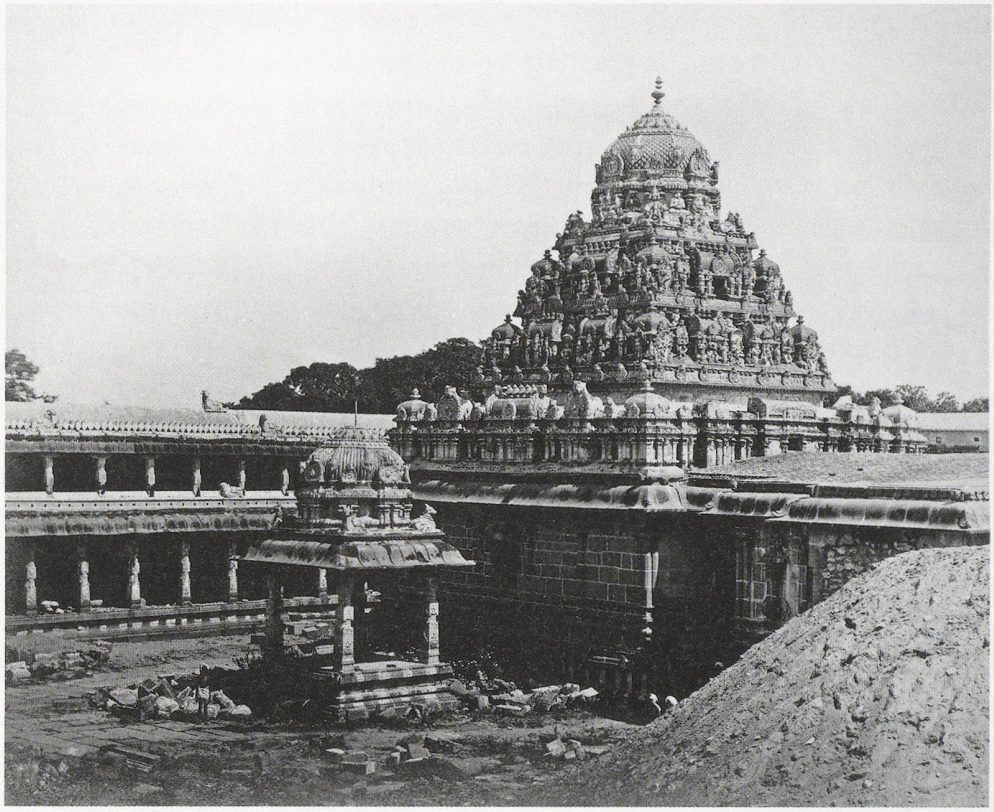


Figure 1.17 Naṭarāja shrine [21], 1897/98
Source: © British Library Board. Photo 1008/3(322). Archaeological Survey of India, *Subrahmanyaswami shrine, Ekambreswaraswami Temple, Conjeevaram, 1897-98*

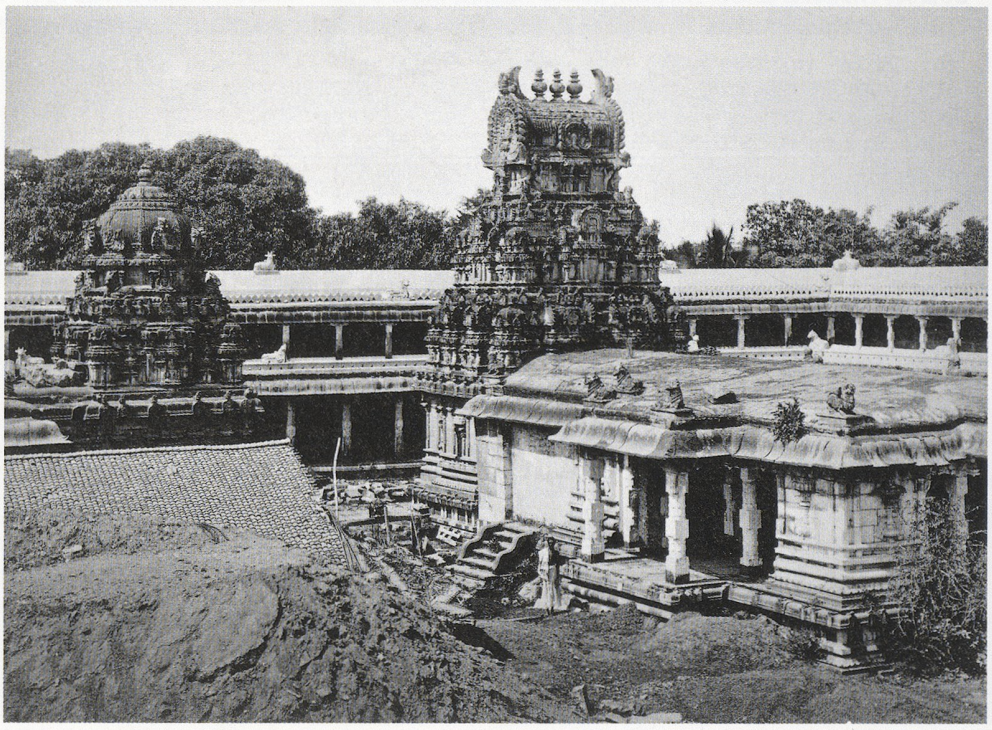


Figure 1.18 Former shrine of Pralayakālī [22], 1897/98
Source: © British Library Board. Photo 1008/3(323). Archaeological Survey of India, *The Amman shrine, Ekambreswaraswami Temple, Conjeevaram, 1897-98*

Another photograph (No. 1000/26(2562); fig. 1.19) found in the *Archaeological Survey of India Collections*, depicts the enclosing wall of the third *prākāra* and the Palli Gopura. The gallery with two-rowed columns no longer exists. It is possible that some of the columns have been re-used to build new structural elements, such as the columned hall in front of the Ṛṣi Gopura (fig. 1.16). The dilapidated *maṇḍapa* on the left edge of the picture has been rebuilt into a shrine with walls, which today houses a *liṅga* (fig. 1.20).

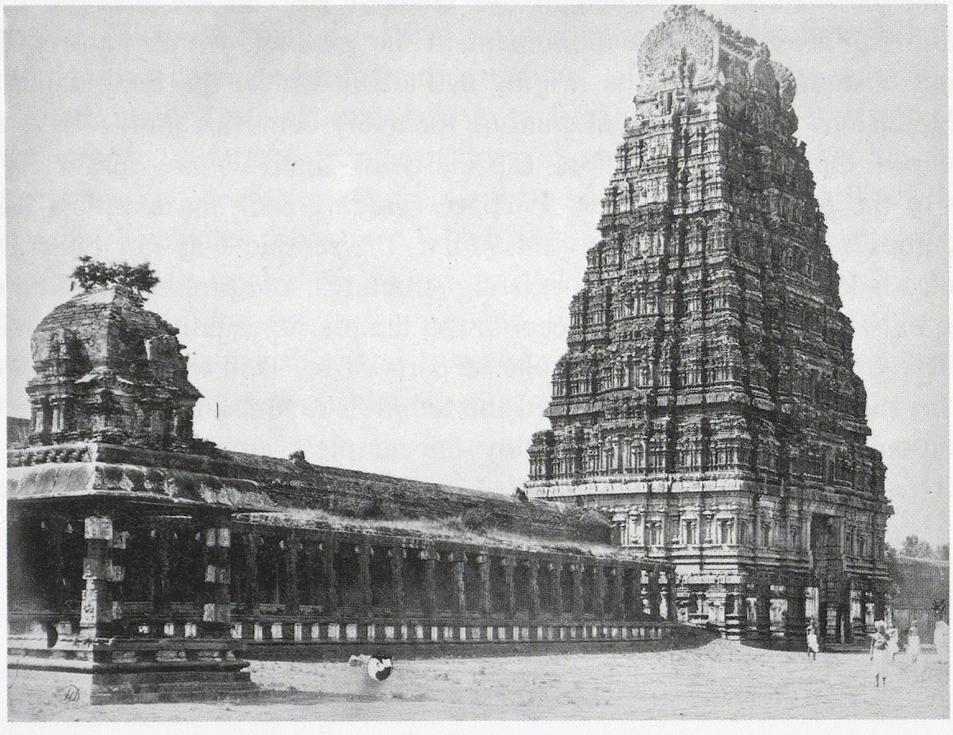


Figure 1.19 Gallery and Palli Gopura [16], 1868
Source: © The British Library Board. Photo 1000/26(2562). Archaeological Survey of India, Henry Dixon, *Gopura between the first and second courts of the Ekambareshvara Temple, Kanchipuram, 1868*



Figure 1.20 Rebuilt *maṇḍapa* and Palli Gopura [16], 2010

Other donation boards at the entrance of the Ṛṣi Gopura record renovation work and subsequent *kumbhabhiṣekas* in 1922, 1979 and 1992. The latest renovation was done from 2002 to 2007, a long period in which the annual Ekāmranātha temple festival had been suspended. The next planned project is the renovation of the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, on the roof of which the marriage ritual was performed until it had to be stopped for security reasons some twenty years ago.

Reviewing the material presented in this chapter, we can see that the Ekāmranātha temple is and has always been a monument in the making, which has repeatedly been modified and customized. With its origins in Pallava times, the temple has undergone structural expansions and building alterations for many centuries until today, which must have influenced the festival tradition, especially as festivals are intimately linked to movements of the god within the temple space. Tracing back the temple's history poses some difficulties for a number of reasons. First, the temple was not built at one time. Different rulers added progressively to existing structures, and probably altered or replaced some of the existing structures, too. Second, the temple repeatedly was affected by raids and hostilities, which destroyed and displaced parts of it.[49] Moreover, renovation work at the end of the nineteenth century changed the temple's layout and appearance drastically. These conditions make it difficult to study the temple's architecture, which might be, among others, a reason for the lack of detailed studies about the Ekāmranātha temple.

49 For example, slabs with inscriptions, dating from the seventh century are built in the outer most *prākāra* (ARE 1939/40, 344 and 345).

2 The *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha Temple

Every major temple in Tamil Nadu annually celebrates with a festival known as *mahotsava* or *brahmotsava*.[1] These enormous cultural performances are distinctive features of public life in South India, characterized by processions of the deities outside the temple compound. These major festivals may last up to fifteen days, with two processions each day. For this purpose, a portable image of the god, usually made of bronze, is dressed in exclusive garments, and decorated with ornaments and huge flower garlands. He or she is mounted on special vehicles (*vāhanas*), which are in the form of animals or other beings associated with the god's mythology. When the god leaves the temple, he is escorted by his priests, other deities of his retinue, musicians, worshipers, and spectators. Insignia of royalty, such as banners, parasols, and flywhisks indicate his status as divine ruler, and allow a broad audience to get an auspicious sight of him marching through town (fig. 2.1).



Figure 2.1 Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali in procession near the Kacchapeśvara temple

1 *Maha-utsava*, 'great festival'; *brahma-utsava*, 'Brahma's festival'. The term *utsava* is generally translated as 'festival'. It comes from the Sanskrit root *ud-sū*, 'to cause to go upwards' (MW), 'to rise' (Michaels 2006: 42). Āgama texts offer a number of interpretations of the meaning of the term, such as 'that what brings prosperity,' or 'that which causes creation.' See Rao (2005: 1–6) and Davis (2010: 25) for examples of interpretations according to different Āgamas. The Tamil term is *tiru-viḻā*, 'holy festival'.

Some processions and events during the festival allude to the deity's great deeds, and integrate local myths, which are re-enacted in the course of the festival's activities. The main event of the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is the re-enactment of the marriage of the god Ekāmranātha and goddess Ēlavārkuḻali on a day called Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. Paṅkuṉi denotes the Tamil month (mid-March to mid-April) and *uttiram* (Skt. *uttara phālgunī*) the *nakṣatra* (lunar mansion).[2] This stellar constellation is the auspicious time for the marriage ceremony, and a reference point for the calculation of the entire festival's timing.[3] The importance of the marriage as major event is also highlighted by the festival's name *paṅkuṉi-uttirat-tirukkalyāṇap-peruviḻā*, the 'great festival of the auspicious marriage on *paṅkuṉi uttiram*.' Usually, people refer to the festival as Paṅkuṉi Uttiram or Tirukkalyāṇam ('holy marriage').

2.1 Historical references to the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple

The practice of processions with an image of the god can be traced to the Pallava rulers of the ninth century.[4] This can be ascertained from references found in inscriptions and devotional hymns, and processional bronze icons from the period. Likewise, priests of the Ekāmranātha temple trace their festival tradition back to the Pallavas. They are of the opinion that the processional icon of Somāskanda (Śiva with Umā and Skanda), which is still in use, dates to the Pallavas. They justify this assumption with figures of lions, found on each side of the icon's pedestal (see fig. 2.2). The lion motif is known from the Pallavas. Pallava pillars often have a sitting lion as their base,[5] and coins with the lion motif have been attributed to the Pallavas. However, I have not been able to find a reference to decorative figures of Pallava lions on pedestals, which, if it existed, would support the priests' assumption that the Somāskanda *utsavamūrti* dates from the Pallava period. Yet, from the perspective of iconographic styles, the broad nose, arm construction, and reclined posture could indicate a Pallava or early Chola origin.[6] Michell (1995: 156–7) stresses that

2 The moon passes through 27 *nakṣatras* (lunar mansion) on his orbit around the earth. The *nakṣatra* is named after a prominent star or asterism in the lunar mansion. *Uttiram* corresponds to the Western star Denebola (Beta Leonis).

3 The *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple has a thirteen-day festival program. Since the marriage ceremony is on the tenth day of the festival, the time for the *dhvajārohaṇa* ('hoisting of the flag'), which marks the beginning of the festival, is calculated by subtracting ten days from the date of *paṅkuṉi uttiram*. If the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival is celebrated in a temple situated near the ocean, it is calculated with reference to the full moon and not the *nakṣatra uttiram*. This is the case, for example, at the Kapālīśvara temple in Mylapore, Chennai, which is situated near the shore of the Bay of Bengal. For other *mahotsavas*, the auspicious time coincides with the final bathing rite (*avabhṛtasnāna*, Tam. *tīrttavāri* from Skt. *tīrtha*), which therefore is taken as a reference point for the calculation of the *dhvajārohaṇa*.

4 See Davis (2010: 16–17). Yet, the mode of procession was different from today. Inscriptions indicate that until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the processions took place within or before the temple, only occasionally the deity went on excursions outside the temple compound (Orr 2004).

5 See, for example, depictions of lion pillar bases in Longhurst (1998) part 1, plate XVIII (b); part 2, plate XXVII (b). Lion-based pillar fragments are also found at the Ekāmranātha temple, see fig. 1.5 far left.

6 Descriptions of different Somāskanda bronze statues (see, for example, fig. 36, 86 and 92) and their

South Indian bronzes repeat older iconographic forms, which makes it difficult to distinguish later work from earlier prototypes. He illustrates his point with a Somāskanda *utsavamūrti,* which was commissioned for the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram, and is now in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (Michell 1995: 157, fig. 112). Michell argues that this Somāskanda *utsavamūrti* seems to be Chola in composition and detail, but that the stiffness of posture and an inscription on the base suggest a sixteenth-century date. It is clear that the present Somāskanda *utsavamūrti* at the Ekāmranātha temple has been in use for a long time; it is quite corroded from countless *abhiṣekas* with fruits and dairy products, yet it remains difficult to date, even approximately.



Figure 2.2 Decorative figure of a lion on the pedestal of the Somāskanda *utsavamūrti*

Inscriptions

Inscriptions are valuable sources of information about rituals or festivals and related endowments. However, inscriptional evidence for festivals at the Ekāmranātha temple is very poor. Only three inscriptions explicitly mention donations for the conduct of festivals, and all of them are found on the wall and base of the Sabhānāyaka shrine.[7]

The earliest of these inscriptions (ARE 1989/90, No. 131), in characters of the fourteenth century, comes from the seventeenth regnal year of Mallinātaṉ Irājanārāyaṇa Śambuvarāyaṉ, of the Sambuvarayar dynasty. It is written in Tamil and records the conferment of the right of chief-priesthood (*sthānācārya*) on Bhūmikumaraṉ Ādi

stylistic development can be found in Srinivasan (1963).

7 The Sabhānāyaka shrine is today often just called Utsava Sannadhi (fig. 1.10), since it houses the *utsavamūrtis* of Śiva. However, the term is confusing, since the Śiva temple in Chidambaram bears the name Sabhānāyaka Naṭarāja temple. The name for the shrine at the Ekāmranātha temple is said to be derived from Nāyakar, a title of honor, which was given to the priest family that is in charge of the shrine. Because of the mirrored walls inside the shrine it is also known by its Tamil name Kaṇṇāṭi Aṟai ('mirror room').

Paśuvatīśuvar. Further, the priest was provided with a house, a certain amount of paddy per day, as well as a specific amount of money per month. He was also vested with the right of collecting the gifts made to the deity. It was agreed upon that he should perform the daily worship, rituals, and festivals to the deity. Unfortunately, the inscription does not further specify the festivals.

The next inscription (ARE 1955/56, No. 275) is in Sanskrit, found in Grantha letters from the Vijayanagara king, Kṛṣṇarāya. It is dated Śaka 1432, equivalent to 1510 CE. This inscription records the king's gift of the village Kuṇṇattūr in Chandragiri-Rājya, for the purposes of worship and making various offerings to the god Ekāmranātha, on the occasion of a festival conducted in the name of the king.

The last inscription (ARE 1989/90, No. 132) that refers to festivals is written in Tamil and comes from the Vijayanagara king Śrīraṅgayyadēva-Mahārāja (Śrīraṅga I), dated Śaka 1496, which corresponds to 1574 CE. The inscription records the gift of the village Kaḍambūr-Uṛattūr for the purpose of expenses of various festivals, daily worship and offerings to the deity Tiruvēgambam-Uḍaiya-Nāyinār (Ekāmranātha) of Kanchipuram by Tikkamba-Nāyakkar, son of Tippu-Nāyakkar of Vēlūr. Further, it is mentioned that the *mahājanas* (chiefs) of the granted village supplied ghee for the bathing ceremony of the deity on the *tiruvātirai* day[8] in the newly constructed *maṇḍapa*, near the main stone temple (Kailāsanātha temple in Kanchipuram). The name and location of the *maṇḍapa* are not specified. This inscription suggests that the god Ekāmranātha travelled to the *maṇḍapa* near the Kailāsanātha temple to receive an *abhiṣeka* (bathing ceremony). However, it remains unclear whether the excursion of Ekāmranātha was a common practice and part of the *tiruvātirai* festival, or if this event was initiated on the occasion of the newly constructed *maṇḍapa*.

The number of inscriptions referring to festivals, at three out of fifty inscriptions listed in the ARE from the Ekāmranātha temple, is very low.[9] Nevertheless, there are two further inscriptions, which refer to festivals connected with the Ekāmranātha temple. One is found at the Varadārāja temple, and the other at the Kāmākṣī temple.

The inscription at the Varadarāja temple (ARE 1919/20, No. 641) is found on the wall of the Tāyār shrine. It is in Tamil, comes from the Vijayanagara king Vīrapratāpa Kṛṣṇadēva-Mahārāya, and is dated Śaka 1439, corresponding to 1517 CE. This inscription states that while Kṛṣṇadēva-Mahārāya was camping at Kanchipuram, he granted two villages for the floating festival of the god Ekāmranātha. Further, he constructed two small cars, one for the Vināyaka in the Ekāmranātha temple, the other for Kṛṣṇa in the Perumāḷ

8 This is an important Śaiva festival celebrated on the *tiruvātirai* (Skt. *ārdrā*) *nakṣatra* in the month of Mārkaḻi (mid-December to mid-January).

9 There are seventeen inscriptions, listed in ARE 1890, No. 27–8 and ARE 1893, No. 1, 3–4, 5a–b, 6, 7a–c, 8–12, 54, which give no information about their content. They have been published in SII, Vol. IV, No. 350–1, 813, 815–25, 867. All but one are written in Tamil, the other in Telugu. Thirteen inscriptions belong to the Chola dynasty, almost exclusively to the Later Cholas (1070–1279 CE). Kings mentioned are Kulōttuṅga I and III, Rājarāja II and III, and Rājādhirāja I, but most do not name the successor explicitly. Two of the Chola inscriptions are found on the walls of the Śmaśāneśvara shrine, the rest on the walls of the second *prākāra*. Maybe one of these inscriptions could give further information about festival practices at the Ekāmranātha temple.

temple. He also specified the routes which the Śiva and Viṣṇu temple cars should take on the respective festival days.

The Kāmākṣī temple inscription (ARE 1954/55, No. 310) is found at the Ṛṣi Gopura in the second *prākāra*. It is written in Tamil and there is no reference to a dynasty, but it mentions Tribhuvanacakravartin Rājagaṇḍagōpāla. The date is given as "20th +1" regnal year. Srinivasan (1979: 161) notes that Madurāntaka Pottapi-Chōḷa Rājagaṇḍagōpāla was one of the last Telugu-Choda chiefs in Kanchipuram. It is not clear if the regnal year refers to his own reign or to that of another king. Srinivasan proposes that Rājarāja III (1216–1256) was the king at the time of Rājagaṇḍagōpāla. If this is true, and the regnal year refers to the reign of Rājarāja III, the inscription could be dated to ca. 1237 CE. Alternatively, Devi (1995: 503) places Rājagaṇḍagōpāla at the beginning of the fourteenth century, noting that the direct line ended with him in 1325 CE. This seems to be more plausible since there is one dated inscription according to which his reign began in 1291 CE.[10] Therefore, the Kāmākṣī temple inscription could be dated to 1312 CE. The inscription explicitly refers to the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival. It records the gift of two villages, Kūttāṉpākkam and Mādēvimaṅgalam, as *sarvamānya*[11] for *ābhyantarapūjā* on the occasion of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival and Rājagaṇḍagōpāla-Sandhi.[12] Interestingly, the inscription is found at the Kāmākṣī temple, although Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is, at least today, the most important festival at the Ekāmranātha temple. Possibly, the *ābhyantarapūjā* ('interior or internal *pūjā*') refers to the practice of offering an elaborate *abhiṣeka* to the festival statue of Kāmākṣī after she had spent three days at the Ekāmranātha temple (see Chapter Five).

An examination of the inscriptions at the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram gives a different picture. There, festivals and related donations are frequently documented. Some examples are: ARE 1919/20, No. 370: A serpent vehicle has been gifted to the temple by Vyāsa-Tīrtha. It has to be carried in procession on the fourth day of all festivals. ARE 1919/20, No. 380, records the gift of five villages for the conduct of the festival in the month of Vaikāci (mid-May to mid-June). ARE 1919/20, No. 381 to 383, records provisions made for festivals, which have been conducted in *maṇḍapas* inside the temple precincts. ARE 1919/20, No. 401, is a Hoysala inscription about the agreement to conduct festivities in a grove. ARE 1919/20, No. 406, records the gift of land for feeding Vaiṣṇava Brahmins, who came to witness the festivals in the month of Māci (mid-February to mid-March) and Vaikāci (mid-May to mid-June). ARE 1919/20, No. 475, documents that the necessary vehicles for the god have been constructed. ARE 1919/20, No. 604, enumerates the localities to which the image of the god shall be taken, after it processed on the elephant, horse, and Garuḍa *vāhanas*, and the car festival. ARE 1919/20, No. 614, records provisions made for cake-offerings after the deity returned from processions. ARE 1919/20, No. 634, records the gift of two pinnacles of gold for the festival car. Further, references to

10 See *Indian Archaeology*: *A Review* 1963–64, p. 67, inscription no. 9. Further, *Indian Archaeology*: *A Review* 1958–59, p. 57, inscription no. 3.

11 *Sarvamānya* denotes a rent-free holding or village in the possession of Brahmins or religious institutions. See Sircar (1996: 405).

12 *Sandhi* denotes special offerings or services, which were instituted by kings and other high-ranking persons on a large scale in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Often, they were named after the donor. See Chari (1992: 97).

donations for different festivals can be found in inscriptions No. 419–421, 434, 438, 446, 454, 458, 461, 476, 484, 502, 530, 535, 646, 659–60 of ARE 1919/20.

The high number of inscriptions at the Varadarāja temple documenting donations for festivals, when compared to the number found at the Ekāmranātha temple, indicates that for some reason the festival practice at the Ekāmranātha temple was not as flourishing and/or that the temple did not get the same support as did the Varadarāja temple. Considering the quantity of inscriptions from Vijayanagara kings, the Varadarāja and Kāmākṣī temples were more supported, although the Ekāmranātha temple registers donations, too.[13] However, it is also problematic to draw conclusions from the number of inscriptions. As detailed in Chapter One, the Ekāmranātha temple has been reconstructed and it is likely that inscriptions from the first *prākāra* and the *mūlasthāna* were lost during the renovations.

Ēkāmparanātar Ulā

A literary reference to the Ekāmranātha temple festival tradition is a fourteenth-century poem called *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*. The Ulā (Tam. 'procession') poem is a literary genre,[14] which describes the king's (or god's) procession through the streets of town, while girls and women watch him pass by. They develop passionate feelings for him, which are not returned. The women's beauty and desire for the king (or god) are portrayed according to their maturity. The women are divided into seven fixed age groups, namely *pētai* (5–7 years), *petumpai* (8–11 years), *maṅkai* (age 12–13 years), *maṭantai* (age 14–19 years), *arivai* (age 20–25 years), *terivai* (26–31 years) and *pēriḷampeṇ* (32–40 years).[15]

Iraṭṭaiyar (the 'twins'), or Iraṭṭaippulavar (the 'twin poets'), who lived in the fourteenth century, authored the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*. Their life story recounts that they were born in a village named Ālanturai, in the Chola country.[16] Both were handicapped at birth: one was born blind, the other lame. Thus, while the blind man carried the lame brother on his shoulders, the lame was the eye for the blind man. In this symbiotic relationship they travelled through the country composing various poems under the name 'the twin poets', and were patronized by the Sambuvarayar chief, Veṇṇumaṇkoṇḍān (1321–39) (Srinivasan 1979: 252).

The *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*, dedicated to the god Ekāmranātha, beautifully describes in 556 verses the god's emergence from the temple through the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, his imposing appearance in the procession through Kanchipuram, and the desire and lovesickness he arouses in the women on the streets. The *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* is

13 Worth mentioning is an inscription from the Vijayanagara king Achyutadēva-Mahārāya. On the occasion of his coronation, he directed Sāḷuva-Nāyaka to assign villages to the Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha temples of equal estimated worth. But Sāḷuva-Nāyaka gave more to the Ekāmranātha temple than to the Varadarāja temple, and on hearing this, Achyutadēva went to Kanchipuram to redistribute the villages equally between the two temples (ARE 1919/20, No. 544–5, 547–8, 584). Boulanger (1992: 24) suggests that Sāḷuva-Nāyaka was one of the Ekāmranātha temple priests.

14 On Ulā poems see Shulman (1985: 312–24), Wentworth (2011: *passim*) and Zvelebil (1974: 197–98).

15 These are the ages as specified in the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*. Shulman (1985: 312, fn. 36) mentions that the list of ages somewhat varies.

16 For a description of their life story, see Zvelebil (1975: 216) and *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* (2006: 9–10).

particularly noteworthy as an historical reference to the Ekāmranātha temple festival,[17] since it points to the Paṅkuṉi festival, the donation of a chariot and the processional route:

(1) Verse 49 describes that 'the gods came for the *tirup-paṅkuṉit-tirunāḷ* to praise the Lord.'[18] *Tirunāḷ* means auspicious day (*nāḷ*), day of celebration, festival. Thus, one can safely assume that the described procession was taking place on the occasion of Paṅkuṉi (Uttiram) or simply in the month of Paṅkuṉi.[19] However, it is not clear whether *tirunāḷ* denotes a one-day celebration of Paṅkuṉi (Uttiram), or one festival day as part of a festival lasting several days, such as the *mahotsava.*

(2) Verse 102 states that 'a wealthy person named Mallināṭaṉ gave a beautiful *tēr* (chariot) to the Lord.'[20] This is a reference to Mallināṭaṉ Irājanārāyaṇa Śambuvarāyaṉ (1331–1381), the last of the Cenkeni chieftains of the North Arcot and Chingleput districts (Zvelebil 1975: 216). Apparently, he donated the chariot for the procession.

(3) Some verses hint at the processional route. For example, the god came to the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa (verse 52), then he climbed on the chariot (verse 102), and left the temple to process in the chariot through the streets, where the houses are (verse 128). One street is named as *māṭa neṭu vīti* (verse 253). Usually, this denotes the main street surrounding a temple. Further, a young woman (described in the 14–19 years old *maṭantai* group) went to Kaccālaiyapattum (Kacchapeśvara temple), where she saw Ekāmranātha in the streets (verse 322). This suggests that the processional route passed the Kacchapeśvara temple.

Considering these points, it appears that the god Ekāmranātha emerged from his temple, mounted a chariot, likely donated by Mallināṭaṉ, in order to process through the streets on the occasion of Paṅkuṉi Tirunāḷ. It remains unclear whether Paṅkuṉi Tirunāḷ refers to one day of a multi-day festival (*mahotsava*), or to a one-day festival only. Interestingly, a marriage celebration is not mentioned in the context of Paṅkuṉi Tirunāḷ—neither as the conclusion of the procession nor as the climax of the festival. Also, the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*'s account of the 'marriage myth' (verses 1–44) does not end with the marriage, but with Ekāmranātha's appearance out of the sand *liṅga*. However, the absence of a reference to the marriage in the text does not necessarily mean that marriage was not celebrated or not important to contemporary worshippers. In the Ulā poems, the women must be left desperate and longing for the departed Lord. The idea of marriage and that a consummation is going to happen would be in contrast to formal strictures of the literary genre.[21] However, one can conclude that in the fourteenth century a festival was celebrated in honor of Ekāmranātha, named Paṅkuṉi (held in the month of Paṅkuṉi or on the *nakṣatra* Paṅkuṉi Uttiram), during which Ekāmranātha processed on a chariot through the streets of Kanchipuram.

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17 Besides, the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* is very interesting in terms of the depiction of the 'marriage myth' (verses 1–44), since the poem is a datable text, which fills the gap between the twelfth century *Periyapurāṇam* and the later composed Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas (see Chapter Three).

18 *Tutiperukat tēvar neruṅkum tiruppaṅkuṉittirunāḷ mēviy vēta viḻavoliyil* (49).

19 At the Varadarāja temple, for example, *tirunāḷ* denotes a specific day, namely when Viṣvaksena processes through the streets before the main festival begins.

20 *Viruppāl vaṭittacuṭar vēṟcampaṉ vāḻmallināṭaṉ koṭuttatiruttērmēṟ koṇṭu* (102). Mallināṭaṉ and the chariot are mentioned in verse 146, too.

21 I am very grateful to Blake Wentworth for sharing his knowledge about the Ulā poems with me.

Travel reports

Reports of foreign travelers are interesting reading and informative sources. Two accounts from the first half of the nineteenth century refer to the Ekāmranātha temple festival.[22] Both descriptions mention a special event on the evening of the third festival day, when Ekāmranātha is processing to Viṣṇu Kanchi, to perform *ēcal* towards Varadarāja, which will be described in more detail below (see *special events*).

The Scottish physician and geographer Francis Buchanan travelled in April 1800 to Kanchipuram. He reports that, just like today, Viṣṇu visits Śiva twice a year, whereas Śiva returns the visit only once. In addition, "at these visits the worshippers of the two gods, who are of different sects, are very apt to fall into disputes, occasioning abusive language, and followed by violence" (Buchanan 1807: 13). Kanchipuram is and has been an important pilgrimage site for both Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. Their relationship has been shaped by sectarian rivalries over many centuries, extending from relatively friendly disputes to violent encounters. Particularly, at the times of festivals, disputes about certain customs and processional routes arose.

Karl Graul, the director of the German Lutheran Leipzig Mission, describes the mutual visits and animosities of both Hindu traditions, too. He visited a number of places in South India between 1849 and 1852, including Kanchipuram in 1852. He writes that Ekāmranātha is going to a *maṇḍapa* near the Varadarāja temple each year during the festival, noting that the priests close the temple's doors when Ekāmranātha is approaching (Graul 1856: 188). Furthermore, he mentions that the Vaiṣṇava priests deny that they pay a visit to Śiva each year. Instead, they claim to just be travelling around Big Kanchipuram. Besides his vivid description of the various groups of priests in the city, Graul makes some interesting observations about the financial situation of the temples and the festivals. For example, he (1856: 187) expresses his surprise that the income of the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples is very low in comparison to that of the Varadarāja temple. He states a combined income of 3.000 to 4.000 Rupees for the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples, whereas the Varadarāja temple earns over 12.000 Rupees per year. These numbers corroborate the impression that the Varadarāja temple has been well-supported, as the high number of inscriptions documenting donations for festivals already indicate. Further, Graul (1856: 190) mentions that Śiva's bull vehicle, the *ṛṣabha vāhana*, was old and shabby, which probably reflects the economic situation of the Ekāmranātha temple in the middle of the nineteenth century.

2.2 Aghoraśivācārya's Mahotsavavidhi

During the rule of the Chola dynasty, from the tenth to the thirteenth century, temple culture in South India expanded and uniform patterns of festival practice developed (Davis 2010: 16). Consequently, ritual manuals (*paddhati*) were composed, and are still used today, as guidelines for the conduct of the festivals. The reference work for the conduct of

22 Stein (2017: 232–301) discusses several nineteenth-century travel accounts and the colonial period in Kanchipuram in general.

the festival at the Ekāmranātha temple, as with most Śaiva temples in Tamil Nadu, is a ritual manual known as *Mahotsavavidhi* of Aghoraśivācārya. The ritual manual establishes guidelines for the performance of the festival, but local customs based on many years of practice are also of importance. In fact, many of the priests I spoke with learned the festival's procedures not by studying the manual, but by observing the festival since they were young, and through their father's instructions. Therefore, most priests give preference to the temple's particular procedures. This is a position which occasionally collides with the opinion of those priests who follow more strictly the regulations given in the *Mahotsavavidhi*.[23]

The author and the text

The *Mahotsavavidhi* is a Sanskrit text, composed by the South Indian scholar Aghoraśivācārya, who lived in the twelfth century during the reign of the Chola king Rājarāja II (1146–1173). Aghoraśivācārya is known for his commentaries on Śaiva Āgamas, Śaiva Siddhānta theological and philosophical works, and independent works on Śaiva ritual practice, such as his magnum opus *Kriyākramadyotikā* ('light on ritual procedures').[24] The *Mahotsavavidhi* ('prescriptions for the great festival') is considered the sixth part of the *Kriyākramadyotikā*.[25] Aḷakappa Mutaliyār published in 1910 the first printed version of the *Mahotsavavidhi.* Previously, it had circulated only in the form of various handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts (Davis 2010: 3). Aḷakappa Mutaliyār included in the published edition of the *Mahotsavavidhi* a Tamil preface and introduction.[26] The published edition of the *Mahotsavavidhi* consists of three parts.[27] The first part is a self-standing work, entitled by Aḷakappa Mutaliyār as '*utsavapaddhati* of Aghoraśivācārya'. In the colophon it is stated that the text forms part of Aghoraśivācārya's major work, *Kriyākramadyotikā.* The second part, given the title *Mahotsavavidhikrama Āgamaśekhara* ('crown of Āgamas pertaining to festival rules and procedures'), is a voluminous work. It appears as a compilation, citing the regulations given in different Āgamas to the various topics mentioned in the first part. The third part is a brief section entitled *Gotrasantati,* which gives the genealogy of Aghoraśivācārya. Its colophon also states that the text forms part of the *Kriyākramadyotikā* and gives the date of its composition as 1157 CE.

Davis (2010: 9) argues that the first part of the 1910 published edition of the *Mahotsavavidhi* has been composed by Aghoraśivācārya, and that it forms part of his major

23 I came to know about one case, brought to court about five years ago. The dispute between the priests regards the correct sequence of the placing of the *bali* on the *dhvajastambha* during the *dhvajārohaṇa* rite on the first day of the *mahotsava*. According to the *Mahotsavavidhi*, the placing of the *bali* should start form the east part of the *dhvajastambha*, but the practice at the Ekāmranātha temple is to start from the south part. One priest put a case in the court that it should be done according the ritual handbook, but the majority of priests do not want to change it. They prioritize the temple's local practice. The case is still pending.

24 About Aghoraśivācārya and his work, see Davis (2010: 10–12).

25 However, this view is debatable, as Davis (2010: 6–9) discusses.

26 A xerox of the 1910 edition is available at the library of the French Institute in Pondicherry. A copy of this edition served as my reference, and was the source for Davis's translation, published in 2010 (Davis 2010: 4).

27 See Davis (2010: 5–6) for detailed information on the three parts.

work *Kriyākramadyotikā*, as is indicated in the colophon. The second part, however, can not be ascribed to Aghoraśivācārya. It cites a number of Āgamas, which have been composed after Aghoraśivacārya's lifetime in the twelfth century. On the basis of two benedictory verses at the beginning of the second part, Davis (2010: 5–6) suggests, that the seventeenth-century scholar Kacchapeśvara has composed it.[28] However, the *Mahotsavavidhi* is thought by the priests to be authored by Aghoraśivācārya, and the published edition is today their reference work for the performance of the temple festival.[29]

The marriage in the text

The first part of the *Mahotsavavidhi* gives instructions for a nine-day festival. The marriage ceremony, as part of a *mahotsava,* is not prominent in this first and oldest section of the ritual handbook. Only one verse addresses the marriage ceremony: "Afterward, on the tenth, seventh, or fifth day, the priest should celebrate the marriage and have the festival of wedding vows performed according to the marriage procedures, with all the necessary services."[30] The second and later part describes a thirteen-day festival in which a marriage ceremony is scheduled for midday on the tenth day. Here, the events are described in more detail:

> At a pavilion near a holy bathing place, the Goddess is gratified with food and other offerings. Respectable married women (*suvāsinīs*) honor the Goddess, and she is raised onto a jeweled pedestal, accompanied by singing and auspicious sounds. She is taken to the temple, surrounded by a retinue of seven sword-bearing women, and proceeds to the wedding pavilion (*kalyāna-maṇḍapa*), where she is placed next to Śiva. The priest performs the wedding. Then Śiva and the Goddess are raised onto the Bull, and taken in procession, accompanied by all the usual festive instruments, regalia and festoons, dance and song, and so on.[31]

Davis (2010: 35) is of the opinion that the brief references to the marriage festival and other rites, which do not clearly fit into the nine-day festival program, could be later interpolations in the first part of the *Mahotsavavidhi*, or that these festival practices were in a formative stage whereas they were well established by the time of the composition of the second part in the seventeenth century.[32] Today, a marriage festival is a regular feature in many South Indian *mahotsavas* and it is the major event and name giver for the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple.

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28 However, Dominic Goodall is of the opinion, that Aghoraśivacārya only composed the third part, which gives his genealogy. He suggests that the first and second parts are of later date and have only been attributed to the twelfth-century author Aghoraśivācārya (personal communication).

29 Most priests at the Ekāmranātha temple use the 1974 edition of the *Mahotsavavidhi*, published by the South Indian Archakar Association with additional comments and explanations in Tamil.

30 *Anantaraṃ daśame saptame pañcame vāhni vivāhaṃ vidhivat aupacārikeṇa kalyāṇavratotsavaṃ kārayet* / (Davis 2010: 132).

31 Davis (2010: 132–33, fn. 233).

32 Orr (2004: 448, fn. 13), too, notes that references to the marriage are rare in medieval inscriptions, and if, they come from Viṣṇu temples. In contrary to Śaiva texts the marriage ritual is treated at some length in Vaiṣṇava texts, thus, she suggests, that the marriage was ritually more important for Vaiṣṇavas than for Śaivas.

2.3 Ritual structure of the mahotsava at the Ekāmranātha temple

The ritual activities of *mahotsavas* follow a certain structure, which is explained in various Āgamas and *paddhatis* such as the *Mahotsavavidhi.* Barazer-Billoret (1999) analyzed the regulations for festivals contained in these texts, identifying four major ritual cycles: (1) 'inaugural rites', (2) 'twice-daily ritual activities', (3) 'the *tīrtha* cycle' and (4) 'rites of closure'. A number of rites mentioned in the Āgamas and *paddhatis*, however, do not fit within this classification. Therefore, she labeled them 'additional ceremonies'. I employ Barazer-Billoret's classification in the following description of the ritual activities, except for '*tīrtha* cycle', which, I claim, forms part of the 'rites of closure', since these rituals mark the conclusion of the fire rites in the *yāgaśālā.*

The description is based on my observation[33] of the contemporary festival at the Ekāmranātha temple, which follows a thirteen-day program.[34] Most of the festival's rites are described in the *Mahotsavavidhi,* but may for example differ with regard to their sequence or the degree of elaboration with which they are performed. With its twice-daily processions, each of which is sponsored by different donors, the entire festival appears to be put together as a modular system of different sub-festivals. This is also sometimes indicated by the processions' names ending with *utsava.* These sub-festivals are framed by the *mahotsava*'s overall structure of preparatory, inaugural, and concluding rites.

Preparatory rites

On the evening preceding the festival, preparatory rites are performed in order to assure the prosperity and success of the entire event. As with most undertakings, the god Gaṇeśa (Vināyaka), known as the remover of obstacles, is worshipped first. His *utsavamūrti* (portable image) is taken in a procession on the regular route along the four Rāja Vīthis (see fig. 2.20). This festival is called Vināyaka Utsava.[35] After Gaṇeśa's return to the temple, the rites of *mṛtsaṃgrahaṇa* ('collection of the earth', fig. 2.3)[36] and *vāstubali* ('tribute offerings to the deities of the site', fig. 2.4)[37] are performed in the third *prākāra* near the entrance to the sanctum. Then, the performances of the rites of *aṅkurārpaṇa* ('seed-sprouting', fig. 2.5)[38] and *rakṣābandhana* ('tying of the protective cord', fig. 2.6)[39] follow in the sacrificial hall (*yāgaśālā*).

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33 I participated in the *mahotsava* three times between 2009 and 2011. The photographs presented here are taken in different years. Therefore, the identity of the main festival priest differs across the various pictures.

34 A list of the entire festival program of the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is given as appendix.

35 According to the *Mahotsavavidhi,* the Vināyaka Utsava prior to the main festival may last from one to nine days (see section 2, Davis 2010: 65–66).

36 Actually, the earth has been collected before and the priest only mimics the digging. Afterwards, the earth will be used for the 'seed-sprouting' rite (see section 5, Davis 2010: 70).

37 A group of fifty-three deities of the site (*vāstudevatās*) are invoked in their respective places in a geometrical diagram (*vāstumaṇḍala,* containing sixty-four squares) laid out in the rice on the ground. The figure made of straw, called *vāstupuruṣa,* is lit with the sacrificial fire and dragged through the temple to satisfy the deities of the site, with the black burnt portions (*rakṣā*) falling from the straw figure. The rite is also called *vāstuśānti* ('pacification of the site').

38 See section 6, Davis (2010: 70–71).

39 The protective cord is tied to the main festival priest, called *viśeṣa gurukkaḷ* ('special priest'). The cord



Figure 2.3 Preparatory rite: *mṛtsaṃgrahana*



Figure 2.4 Preparatory rite: *vāstubali*

protects him against polluting events, like death or birth in the family (see section 12, Davis 2010: 100–101). The *utsavamūrtis*, too, have a protective cord tied around their wrist for the time of the *mahotsava*, since the emergence out of the temple exposes them to a variety of pollutants and possible dangers such as the evil eye.



Figure 2.5 Preparatory rite: *aṅkurārpaṇa*

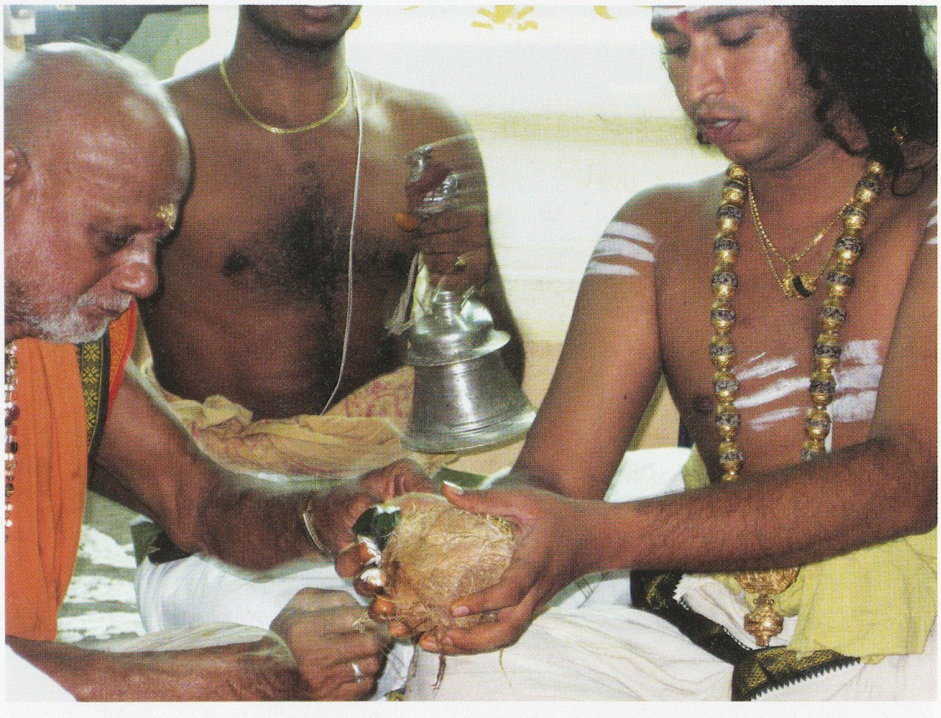


Figure 2.6 Preparatory rite: *rakṣābandhana*



Figure 2.7 Inaugural rite: Invoking Nandin in the festival flag



Figure 2.8 Inaugural rite: Chanting of the 'Cūrnikā'



Figure 2.9 Inaugural rite: *bherītāḍana*



Figure 2.10 Inaugural rite: Worship of the *astradevatā*

Inaugural rites

The *dhvajārohaṇa* ('hoisting of the flag') rite marks the beginning of the festival on the early morning of the next day.[40] According to the *Mahotsavavidhi*, Śiva's vehicle, the bull Nandin, should be drawn on the flag. Today at the Ekāmranātha temple, however, a *kūrca* (bundle of grass) stick is tied to the flag and Nandin is invoked into the stick (fig. 2.7),[41] not into a drawing on the flag. The *dhvajārohaṇa* is a solemn rite, attended by a large number of priests, main donors, students from a nearby Āgama school, and devotees. The priests chant a song called 'Cūrnikā', which invites all deities and living beings to attend the festival (fig. 2.8).[42] The hoisting of the flag is a dramatic moment, since the flag must not become stuck while it is being raised. Included in the flag hoisting ceremony is a rite called *bherītāḍana* ('beating the *bherī* drum', fig. 2.9).[43] The main priest consecrates the main festival drum and beats it with *darbha* grass before handing it over to the musician (*vādya*). Another rite, performed as part of the *dhvajārohaṇa,* is the worship of the *astradevatā* ('weapon-deity'), who is the deity of the protective weapon of the god Śiva—the trident (fig. 2.10). At the Ekāmranātha temple, the *astradevatā* is taken in procession on the first and last day. It should head the procession, but in practice it is taken on the same cart as the festival statue of Ekāmranātha or Ēlavārkuḻali. On all other festival days, the trident is kept and honored in the sacrificial hall (*yāgaśālā*).

Twice-daily ritual activities

After the *dhvajārohaṇa*, the deities are taken on their first procession through the streets of town. Śiva appears most often in his form as Somāskanda (with Umā and Skanda), accompanied by his consort (Ēlavārkuḻali), his two sons Vināyaka and Subrahmaṇya, and his favored devotee Caṇḍeśa at the back. The regular processions, one in the morning and one in the evening, structure most of the days of the festival.[44] Before each procession, a fire oblation (*homa*) is performed in the sacrificial hall (*yāgaśāla*). There, a black balm (*rakṣā*)[45] is prepared and applied on the forehead of the main priest and the *utsavamūrtis* as protective measure before they leave the temple (fig. 2.11). Part of the twice-daily ritual activities is the adornment (*alaṃkāra*) of the *utsavamūrtis*. They are bathed, dressed up, ornamented, garlanded with flowers, and worshipped. The *pūjā* before the evening

40 Today, a flagpole is permanently installed in all bigger temples. However, the *Mahotsavavidhi* describes in section 3 the acquisition of the pole and in section 4 the construction of the flagpole (Davis 2010: 67–69).

41 The *Mahotsavavidhi* classifies the installation of the bull as a preparatory rite, which takes place on the evening before the festival commences (see section 7, Davis 2010: 71–78). At the Ekāmranātha temple, the flag and *kūrca* stick are prepared at the beginning of the flag hoisting ceremony. Figure 2.7 shows the flag with the *kūrca* stick peeping out on top of it.

42 See section 8, Davis (2010: 78–83). However, this section on the *dhvajārohaṇa* rite refers to the chanting of *mantras,* but does not mention a song called 'Cūrnikā'.

43 See section 9, Davis (2010: 83–91).

44 See section 14, Davis (2010: 106–12).

45 The *Mahotsavavidhi* refers to a black fragrant balm (*kṛṣṇagandha*), which is prepared from black aloe wood and applied on the festival statue of Naṭarāja (Davis 2010: 129). At the Ekāmranātha temple, the black balm is prepared from the ashes of burnt *darbha* grass, which is lit at the sacrificial fire, and mixed with water or ghee.

processions is more elaborate than in the morning. It includes the waving of different lamps (*dīpa*) and incense (*dhūpa*), and is accompanied by the recitation of Vedic texts and singing of Tamil devotional hymns (fig. 2.12). The singers of the *Tēvāram* hymns, called Ōtuvārs, follow the evening processions at a distance, while singing the hymns in the streets.

Usually, the vehicles (*vāhana*) of the deities vary according to each of the processions. Most of them allude to mythological and iconographic themes associated with the deity. The *Mahotsavavidhi* and other ritual manuals prescribe the particular *vāhanas* for the morning and evening processions according to the festival days. The prescriptions in the texts vary slightly, but agree, for example, on the *sūrya vāhana* (sun) and *candra vāhana* (moon) for the morning and evening procession of the second day, the *nāga vāhana* (snake) on the morning of the fourth day, and the chariot (Skt. *ratha*, Tam. *tēr*) on the seventh day.[46] However, the days of the vehicles can be changed according to local circumstances and preferences. For example, at the Ekāmranātha temple's *mahotsava*, the *gaja vāhana* (elephant) has been used on the evening of the sixth day as prescribed in the *Mahotsavavidhi* for a nine-day and thirteen-day festival. After the donation of the silver chariot, the elephant vehicle was shifted to the evening procession on the thirteenth day and the silver chariot used instead on the sixth day. Moreover, special *vāhanas* that recall local legends as the *veḷḷi māvaṭi vāhana* ('silver mango tree') on the evening of the ninth day can be integrated in the festival. A senior priest of the Ekāmranātha temple told me about the relation between the ritual handbook and the *vāhanas*: 'All temples are following the *Mahotsavavidhi*, but according to the story of the temple or the history of the temple, some changes in the *vāhanas* will be made.'[47]

Rites of closure

On the final day, a purifying bathing rite (Tam. *tīrttavāri,* Skt. *tīrthasnāna, avabhṛtasnāna*) is performed at Sarva Tīrtha, a huge water tank west of the Ekāmranātha temple, for the *astradevatā* (fig. 2.13), the priests and others, who participated in the festival.[48] The rite is intended to remove all kinds of pollution to which deities and humans were subjected during the processions. On this occasion the sprouts of the seeds, which have been planted during the beginning of the *aṅkurārpaṇa* rite for the festival's and people's prosperity, are thrown into the tank water (fig. 2.14). This marks the end of the fire rituals (*homa*) in the *yāgaśālā.* On the same day, after the deities have returned from the last procession in the evening, the festival concludes with the *dhvajāvarohaṇa* ('lowering of the flag').[49] This rite largely resembles the *dhvajārohaṇa* ('raising of the flag'), including the ceremonial beating of the festival drum (*bherītāḍana*), but has a quiet ambience and is attended by only a few participants.

46 See Davis (2010: 108, 135) for a list of the particular *vāhanas* for a nine-day and a thirteen-day festival, according to the *Mahotsavavidhi* and different Āgamas.

47 Interview with Rajappa Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 14.04.2009.

48 The *Mahotsavavidhi* describes the final bathing rite as a pilgrimage of the festival icons and devotees together to the banks of a holy bathing place (*tīrthatīra*) (section 18, Davis 2010: 117–19). Usually, the *tīrttavāri* is held at the Sarva Tīrtha tank, though from 2008 until 2010 the rite was performed at the Śiva Gaṅgā tank at the Ekāmranātha temple, because Sarva Tīrtha was in a dilapidated condition.

49 See section 20, Davis (2010: 120–22).

Subsequent rites

On the morning of the following day, pacification rites (*utsava śānti*) are performed. At the Ekāmranātha temple an ablution with 108 conches (*śankhābhiṣeka*) is offered to the *utsavamūrtis* (fig. 2.15) and with 108 water-pots (*kalaśābhiṣeka*) to the *liṅga* (or rather to the pedestal) in the sanctum (*mūlasthāna*).[50] In the evening, a swing festival (Tam. *ūñcal*) takes place. It is intended for the pleasure and relaxation of the deities after the exertions of the festival and its processions. The *utsavamūrtis* of Śiva and his consort are seated on a swing, gently rocked, and entertained with music and songs (fig. 2.16). Additionally, the *Tēvāram* book is honored and taken in a small procession along the Rāja Vīthis, accompanied by the Ōtuvārs (fig. 2.17).[51] The evening concludes with a ceremony for the main festival priest (*viśeṣa gurukkaḷ*), in which he is honored and solemnly taken to his home (fig. 2.18).[52]

As mentioned previously, there are a number of rites that do not fit within the classification of the ritual cycles, and which therefore have been labeled 'additional ceremonies' by Barrazer-Billoret. Davis (2010: 34) explains that some of the additional rites, such as the festival for Vināyaka, or the honouring of the priest, exceed the boundaries of a nine-day festival, both before and after. Yet, some other rites referred to in the *Mahotsavavidhi*, such as the festival for Naṭarāja, the wedding, or the festival for devotees, do not so clearly fit into Aghoraśivācārya's structure of a nine-day festival. Davis is of the opinion that "their inclusion in the *Mahotsavavidhi* may well reflect developing festival practices during Aghoraśiva's own time, or possibly later interpolations into the text" (2010: 35). The extended time frame of a thirteen-day festival, as exemplified in the second and later part of the *Mahotsavavidhi,* allows for the inclusion of the additional ceremonies.[53] The *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple follows a thirteen-day program and includes additional ceremonies, some of which are important festivals in their own right.

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50 The *Mahotsavavidhi* refers briefly to pacificatory rites on the following day after the festival's conclusion. Further, it mentions that the deities should get some rest after the festival, without specifying any rites (see section 28, Davis 2010: 136–37).

51 The honoring of the *Tēvāram* is not mentioned in the *Mahotsavavidhi.* However, a festival for the devotees (*bhaktotsava*), which most likely refers to the sixty-four *nāyaṉmārs,* is performed before the honoring of the main priest on the last evening of a thirteen-day festival (see section 27, Davis 2010: 134–36). Possibly, the honoring of the *Tēvāram* is a vestige of this practice. At present, the procession of the sixty-four *nāyaṉmārs* on the morning of the sixth day is one major attraction at the Ekāmranātha temple festival, as in other Śaiva temples in Tamil Nadu.

52 According to the *Mahotsavavidhi,* the priest is honored on the last evening, after the flag-lowering ceremony. See section 22, Davis (2010: 123–24).

53 A list of 'additional ceremonies' included in the thirteen-day festival can be found in Davis (2010: 135).



Figure 2.11 Ēlavārkuḻali with *alaṃkāra* and *rakṣā* on forehead



Figure 2.12 Elaborate evening *pūjā*

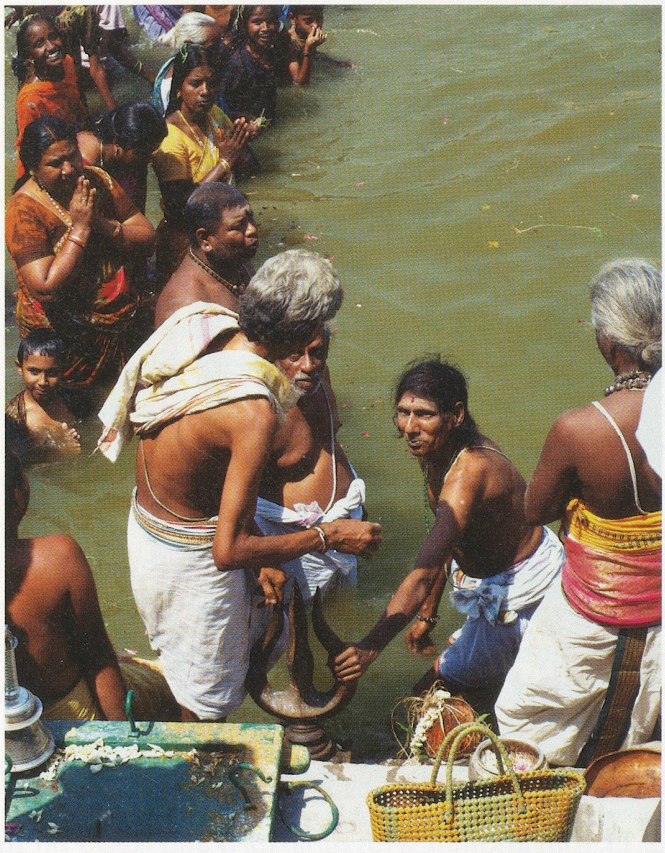


Figure 2.13 Rite of closure: *tīrttavāri* for the *astradevatā*



Figure 2.14 Rite of closure: *tīrttavāri*



Figure 2.15 Ablution with 108 conches



Figure 2.16 Swing festival: *ūñcal*



Figure 2.17 Honoring of the *Tēvāram* book



Figure 2.18 Honoring of the main festival priest

2.4 Processional routes, special events and donors

Processional routes

The twice-daily processions of the deities outside the temple compound are *the* striking feature of *mahotsavas*. Mirroring royal processions, the god marches with his retinue through the streets of town, where residents wait to get his *darśan* ('auspicious sight').[54]

The inner processional route (see fig. 2.19) currently begins at the Utsava Sannadhi, in front of which the *utsavamūrtis* of Ekāmranātha (in the form of Somāskanda), Ēlavarkuḻali, Subrahmaṇya with his two wives, as well as Vināyaka and Caṇḍeśa are dressed up, ornamented, and worshipped. They circumambulate the sanctum (*mūlasthāna*) along the third *prākāra*, pause in front of both the *yāgaśāla* and at the main entrance to the sanctum facing the *liṅga*. On their way out of the temple, they stop in front of the Ṛṣi Gopura (next to the office building) to be worshipped once more. Following the east axis under the columned hall, the procession passes the *dhvajastambha, balipīṭha* and Kaccimayāṇeśvara shrine, and walks along the fourth *prākāra* to the Palli Gopura. They proceed through the Palli Gopura and the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, passing the Kampā Nadī tank until the deities reach the Vāhana Maṇḍapa in the fifth *prākāra* opposite the Rāja Gopura. The way through the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa and Palli Gopura is now closed during normal days. Only during the festival is the gate opened to let the procession through. Formerly, this must have been the regular way to enter the temple. At present, the main access to the temple is a gate to the left of the Vāhana Maṇḍapa, which was probably built during the renovation work at the end of the nineteenth century (Seshadri 2003: 121).

At the Vāhana Maṇḍapa, god Ekāmranātha and goddess Elavārkuḻali are mounted on their respective vehicles (*vāhana*). This process takes some time and requires collaboration between the carriers, handymen, and priests. When Ekāmranātha is ready, priests line up to accompany him on the carriage on which the deity's *vāhana* is placed (see fig. 1.4). The god is worshipped again in the temple precincts before the carriage is pulled through the Rāja Gopura, and the long aisle flanked by stalls, until it stops in front of the sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa* to be provided with huge parasols on each of its sides. After the paraphernalia are properly placed and the deities have been worshipped once again, the procession sets out on the journey through town.

54 Orr (2004: 465) is of the opinion that this form of processions took shape in the last four hundred years. Medieval inscriptions from the ninth to early fourteenth centuries indicate that the processions took place within the temple or before the temple gates. Occasionally, the deity made an excursion outside the temple for hunting, bathing, and resting in a garden. Yet, these outside processions were rather meant as a means to "getting from here to there" (Orr 2004: 452) and references to circumambulatory processions, as we know them from contemporary festival performances, are absent. Furthermore, the inscriptions give the impression that devotees and pilgrims rushed into the temple for the celebration of festivals. This implies that the hub of festival activities was the temple and not the streets of town. Later, it became more important to extend the deity's territory and mark its boundaries, probably due to sectarian disputes and claims, as the above-mentioned inscription (ARE 1919/20, No. 641) of Kṛṣṇadēvarāya, dated 1517 CE, indicates, since it records the regulation of the processional routes for the Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja temple cars.

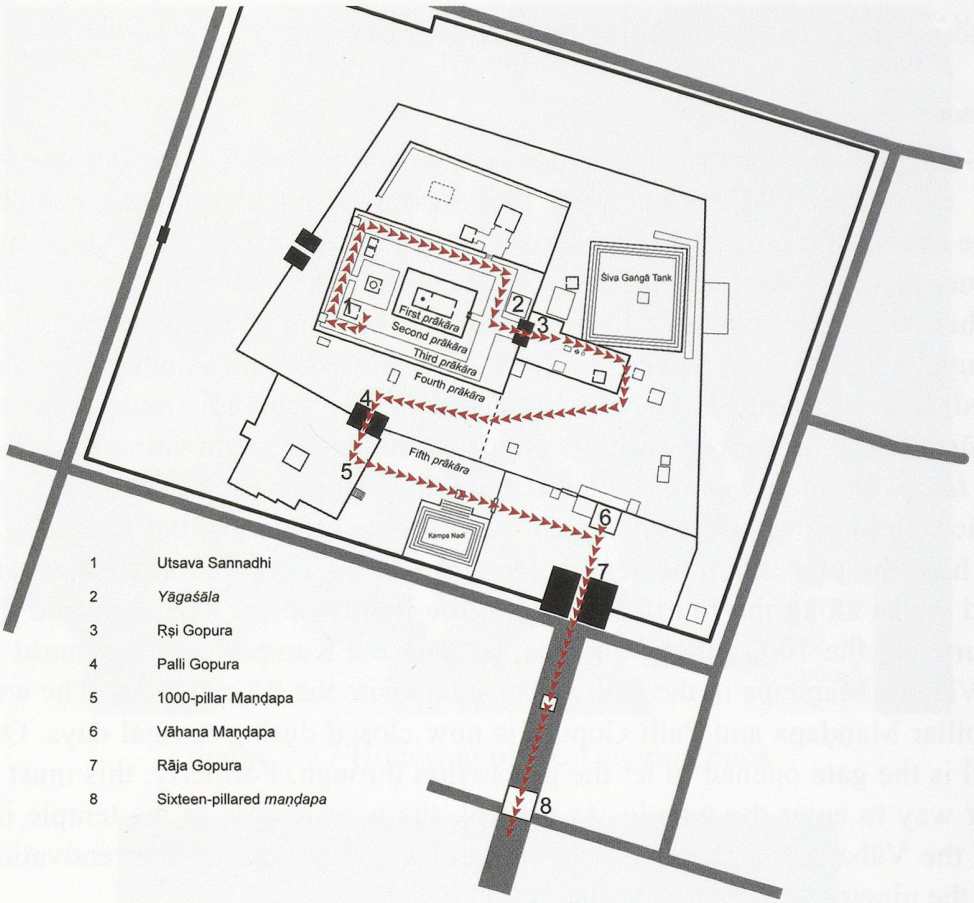


Figure 2.19 Map oft the inner processional route

In most places, the processions circumambulate the temple on the four streets surrounding the temple compound (*māṭa vītis*). However, at the Ekāmranātha temple the processional route is along the four Rāja Vītis,[55] circumambulating the space where the Kāmākṣī temple is situated and where a royal palace might have once stood (see fig. 2.20).[56] The procession stops regularly in front of the Śaṅkara Maṭha and near the flower market. A longer pause is made at the Nalli Maṇḍapa next to the Kacchapeśvara temple, where a *maṇṭappaṭi* (ceremonial reception of the deities) takes place during the morning processions, and fireworks are released during the evening processions.

55 They denote the four directions: north, east, south, and west Rāja Vīti.

56 Archaeological excavations indicate that the area around the present Kāmākṣī temple was the earliest center of Kanchipuram. It seems that the area was fortified with a moat around (Srivatsan 1992: 102), and could have been the site of the royal palace. The naming of the four streets around the center supports this view: Rāja Vīti (king's road), and the orientation of many temples in Kanchipuram towards this point (Seshadri 2003: 10). Conventionally, Hindu temples face east, but in Kanchipuram temples, which are situated to the east of the central area like the Varadarāja temple face west to look towards the center, where the royal palace might have stood. However, the conspicuous orientation of the temples towards this area has also been interpreted to mean that the goddess (now Kāmākṣī) resided there from Kanchipuram's beginning and the city was built around her (Hudson 2008: 89). Stein (2017: 93–97) rejects these theories, arguing that Kanchipuram's temples face towards the central avenue called Kamarajar Street, which runs north-south.

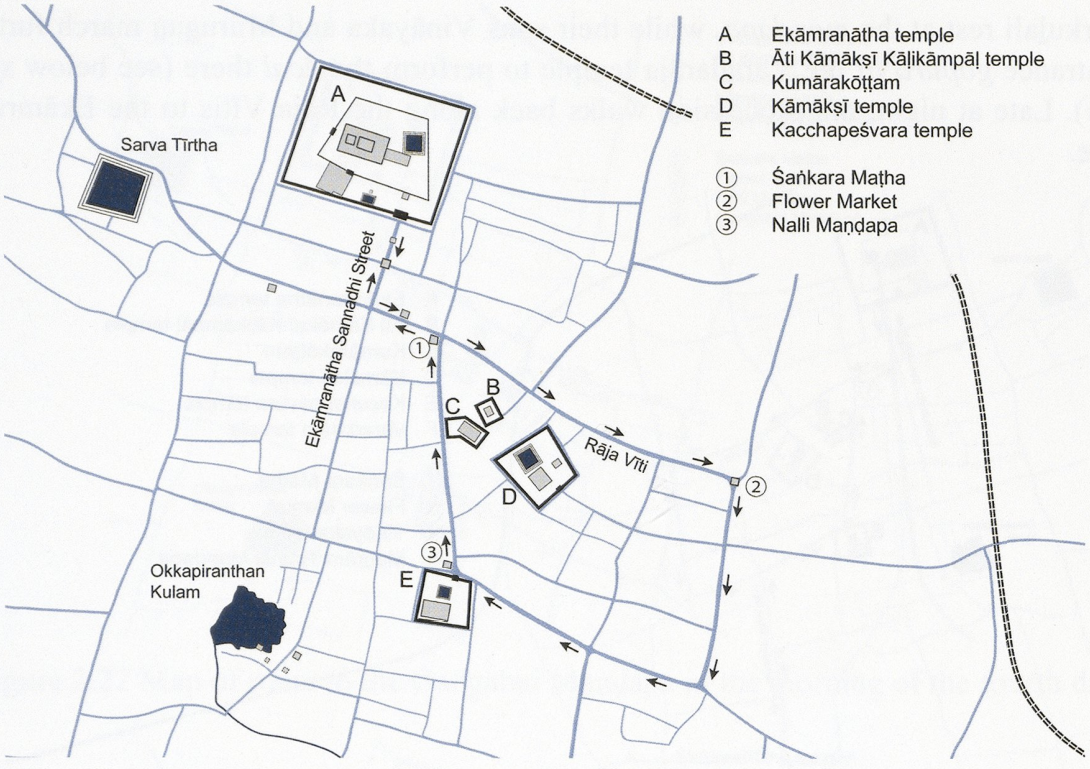


Figure 2.20 Map of the regular route along the Rāja Vītis

On certain festival days, longer excursions to tanks are scheduled, and to *maṇḍapas* owned by the temple or by endowments (Tam. *kaṭṭaḷai*).[57] The journeys extend the deity's territory and mark its boundaries. At the Ekāmranātha temple festival, alternative processional routes are taken on the evening of the third day, the morning of the fourth, the afternoon of the tenth, and on both processions of the thirteenth day.

On the evening of the third day, Ekāmranātha undertakes his longest journey towards the Varadarāja temple (see fig. 2.21). The procession sets out on the standard route around the Rāja Vītis, but takes a left turn into the Kamarajar Street near the bus stand, and turns left again into Gandhi Road. An enormous *maṇṭappaṭi* and fireworks take place in front of a Vināyaka temple in the center of the shopkeeper area.[58] Then, the procession travels further to the Muṉṟām Tirunāḷ Maṇḍapa[59] near the Varadarāja temple. The *maṇḍapa* is named after the event: '*maṇḍapa* of the auspicious third day'. Ekāmranātha and

57 Endowments are controlled by individual families, former local rulers, or voluntary associations such as caste associations. The endowment meets the cost of bringing the deity to the *maṇḍapa* and worshipping it there. However, many endowments have been taken over by the temple administration (Fuller 2003: 101).

58 Some years ago, it was in practice that Ekāmranātha left the temple with only simple ornaments and the main *alaṃkāra* was done at this place. Now, the *alaṃkāra* is done at the Ekāmranātha temple, but as a memory of the former practice, the biggest flower garland is adorned to him during this *maṇṭappaṭi*.

59 The *maṇḍapa* was built about 250 years ago for this purpose. Furthermore, the same person has built a house with two shops next to the *maṇḍapa* and stipulated that the income of the shops is used to meet the expenses for the *maṇṭappaṭi* at the *maṇḍapa* on the third day of the festival. The buildings are not in the Ekāmranātha temple's property. They are managed independently by the Muṉṟām Tirunāḷ Charitable Trust.

Ēlavārkuḻali rest at the *maṇḍapa*, while their sons Vināyaka and Muruganṉ march further to the entrance *gopura* of the Varadarāja temple to perform the *ēcal* there (see below *special events*). Late at night, the procession walks back along the Rāja Vīti to the Ekāmranātha temple.

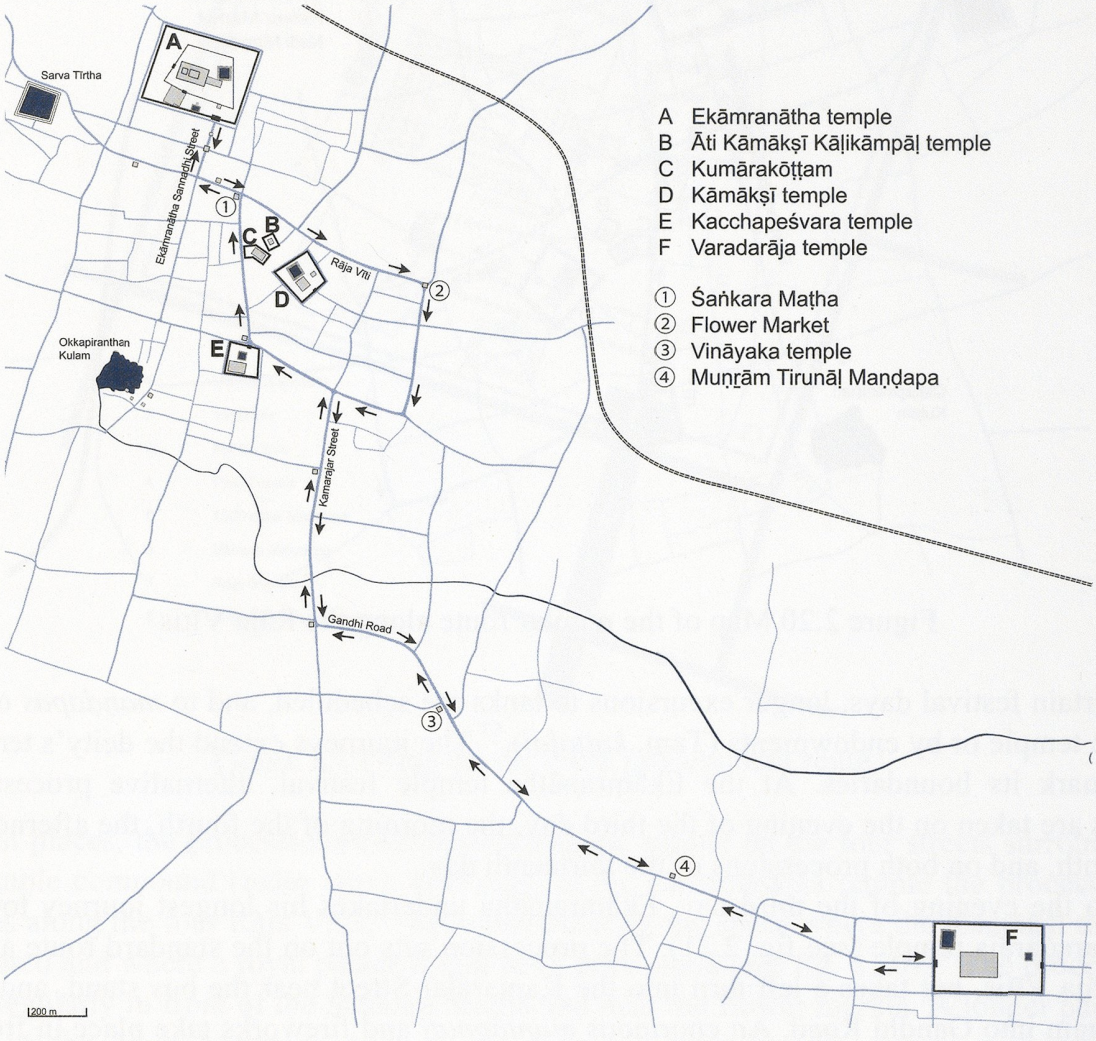


Figure 2.21 Map of the route to Varadarāja temple, on the evening of the third day

In the morning of the fourth day the procession takes a minor deviation to visit a *maṇḍapa* near the Ekāmranātha temple (see fig. 2.22). After the regular route around the Rāja Vīti, the procession passes the Ekāmranātha temple without entering the Ekāmranātha Sannadhi Street. Instead, it goes further on the street until it reaches the Gangabai Maṇḍapa in a garden to the left, where the deities rest for some time. Gangabai is the woman who once built the *maṇḍapa* and donated the snake vehicle (*nāga vāhana*), which is used for the procession on that day.

A different processional route is taken on the afternoon of the tenth day, when the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali goes to Okkapiranthan Kulam, a rural part of Kanchipuram (see fig 2.23). Here, too, the destination of the trip is a *maṇḍapa*, at which the *maṇṭappaṭi* of the goddess is taking place (this event is detailed in Chapter Four).

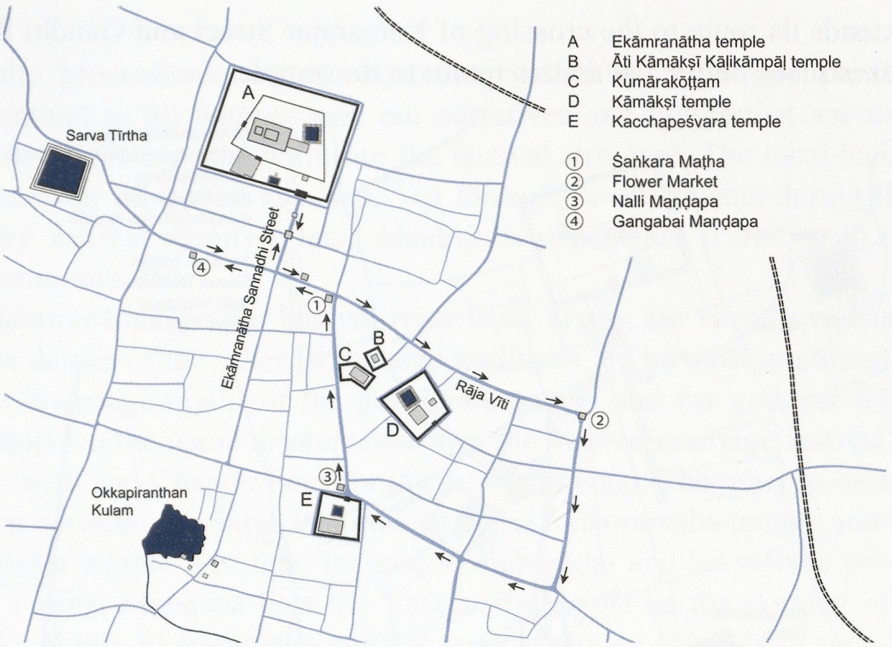


Figure 2.22 Map of route to the Gangabai Maṇḍapa in the morning of the fourth day

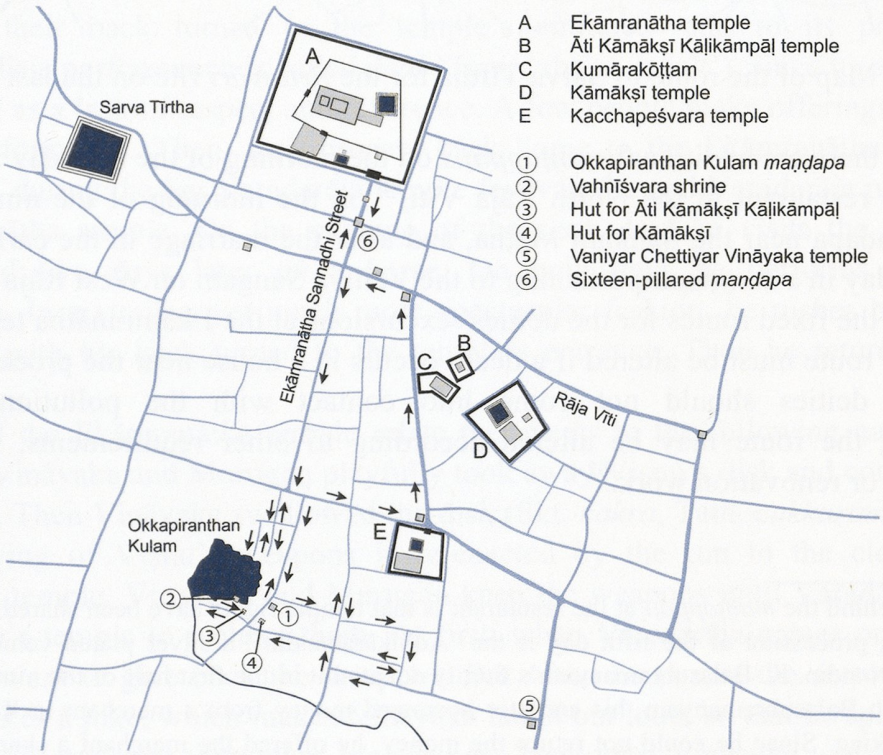


Figure 2.23 Map of the route to the *maṇḍapa* at Okkapiranthan Kulam, afternoon of the tenth day

On the thirteenth and last festival day, the standard processional route is extended for both the morning and evening processions. In the morning, the procession first takes the Rāja Vītis, passes the Ekāmranātha temple on the way back without entering the Ekāmranātha Sannadhi Street, and marches on the main street westward to the huge Sarva Tīrtha tank, on the south bank of which the *tīrttavāri* rite is performed (see fig. 2.24). The evening

procession extends its route to the crossing of Kamarajar Street and Gandhi Road, where a *maṇṭappaṭi* takes place before the deities return to the temple.

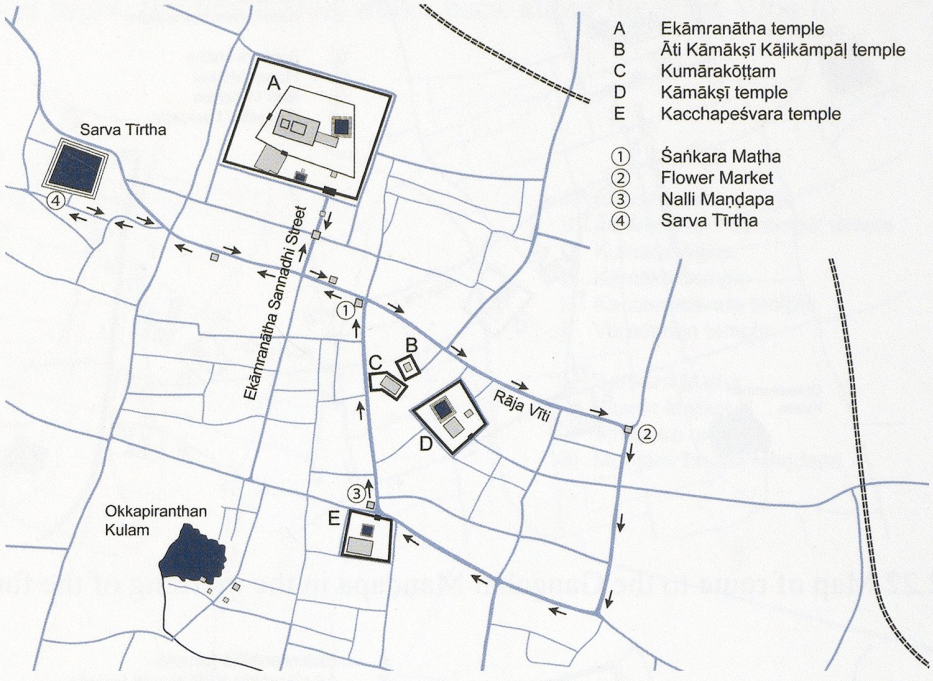


Figure 2.24 Map of the route to Sarva Tīrtha for the *tīrttavāri* rite on the last festival day

Furthermore, there are additional *maṇṭappaṭis* on the morning of the fifth day at the Mysore Arya Bhavan restaurant in the North Rājā Vīti,[60] on the morning of the ninth day in the Dīpāvāli Maṇḍapa near the Śaṅkara Maṭha, and after the marriage in the early morning of the eleventh day in a *maṇḍapa* pertaining to the Vaniya Sangam on West Rāja Vīti.

These are the fixed routes for the deities' excursions at the Ekāmranātha temple festival. However, the route must be altered if a death occurs in a house near the processional route, because the deities should not come into contact with the pollution of death.[61] Alternatively, the route may be altered according to other requirements, such as road constructions or renovation work.[62]

60 The story behind the *maṇṭappaṭi* at the restaurant is that temple rights have been shared. The *vāhana* of the morning procession of the fifth day is the 'Adhikāranandin', a silver plated vehicle modeled on Śiva's bull Nandin. K. Balasubramanyam's family donated it in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Balasubramanyam, his ancestor borrowed money from a merchant in Kanchipuram for this undertaking. Since he could not return the money, he offered the merchant a share of the temple honors in the form of a *maṇṭappaṭi* at his place. Apparently, they were originally spice merchants, but changed in course of time to catering trade (see more on donors in Chapter Six).

61 For example, in 2009, on the morning procession of the ninth day, the news about a death near the flower market spread while the procession walked on the North Rājā Vīti. To avoid the area, which was polluted by death, the procession made a right turn to cut off the path until it met South Rāja Vīti again, and continued on the standard route.

62 For example, in the years from 2008 to 2010 the *tīrttavāri* was performed at the Śiva Gaṅgā tank at the Ekāmranātha temple, which changed the processional route of the last festival day. The reason for this was the dilapidated condition of Sarva Tīrtha. In 2011, the tank was cleaned and refurbished, and the processional route to Sarva Tīrtha has been taken up again.

Special events

The twice-daily processions and accompanying rituals in the temple are the structuring principles common to all *mahotsavas*, but narratives and myths that are unique to each place and each temple are also built into the festival structure. The local legends might be recalled in the form of special *vāhanas,*[63] or through re-enactments during the festival. In this way every festival retains a local identity, which makes it unique to that particular place and its communities.

At the Ekāmranātha temple festival, two local myths are ritually re-enacted, both of which involve deities of the other Brahmanic traditions.[64] The most important re-enactment is that of the 'marriage-myth' of the god Ekāmranātha and the goddess Kāmākṣī, which gives the *mahotsava* the name *tirukalyāṇotsava,* the 'sacred marriage festival' (see Chapter Three for the myth and Chapter Four for the re-enactments). The other re-enactment creates a contact point between the Śaiva community of the Ekāmranātha temple and the Vaiṣṇavas of the Varadarāja temple. For that, the god Ekāmranātha and his retinue process far up to the Muṉṟām Tirunāḷ Maṇḍapa near the Varadarāja temple on the evening of the third day (see fig. 2.21). While Ekāmranātha and his consort remain there, both sons Vināyaka and Muruganṉ march further to the entrance *gopura* of the Varadarāja temple. The temple doors are closed and the streets are dark. First Vināyaka, then Muruganṉ, rush three times back and forth, with their back turned to the temple's entrance—and to its presiding deity Varadarāja. This performance is called *ēcal* (Tam. 'abuse, insult'), since turning your back is considered as a lack of respect and reverence. A few people make offerings to the deities after the performance. Then, they process back home to the Ekāmranātha temple. Two months later, during the big Varadarāja temple festival, the god Varadarāja processes up to the Ekāmranātha temple. On the evening of the sixth day, he visits the temple on an elephant, and two days later on a horse. On both days he performs *ēcal* towards Ekāmranātha. In a similar, yet much more spectacular fashion, he rushes back and forth three times, with his back turned to the temple`s entrance. Then he returns to his own temple.

Priests of the Ekāmranātha temple relate the events to the following narrative: Once, Śiva's sons Vināyaka and Muruganṉ playfully took away Viṣṇu's disk and conch, which are his weapons. Then Vināyaka swallowed the disk (Skt. *cakra*, Tam. *cakkaram*). The seizing and swallowing of Viṣṇu's weapons is re-enacted by the run to the closed doors of Varadarāja's temple. Vinayaka and Murugan keep the weapons until Varadarāja comes to Ekāmranātha's temple to reclaim them. At first, when Varadarāja comes on his elephant, they do not want to give back the weapons. But when he comes the second time on his horse, he makes a joke, which makes Vināyaka laugh out loud, so that he spits the disk out of his mouth. Varadarāja then takes his weapons back until Vināyaka und Muruganṉ seize them again the next year.[65] Hence, Vināyaka is enshrined in front of the Palli Gopura at the Ekāmranātha temple as Vikaṭa Cakkara Vināyaka ('jesting disk Vināyaka').[66]

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63 The regular *vāhanas,* such as Śiva's bull, often look alike in different Śaiva temples, because they are constructed according to regulations given in the Śaiva Āgamas.

64 Although, in fact, the deities of the different traditions never meet, but their priests and worshipping communities meet and interact.

65 On the contrary, Varadarāja temple priests tell the story that Ekāmranātha, or more precisely his sons,

Besides the re-enactment of the 'marriage-myth' and the seizing of the *cakra*, a special *vāhana,* which is scheduled for the evening procession of the ninth day, is unique to the Ekāmranātha temple festival. The special *vāhana* recalls a local feature and divine symbol of the Ekāmranātha temple, the sacred mango tree (see Chapter One). The *vāhana* has the form of a silver-coated palanquin with a mango tree in its center (fig. 2.25)[67] and with side panels ornamented with scenes of the local 'marriage-myth' (see fig. 7.8). Thus, the evening procession of the ninth day is called *veḷḷi māvaṭi cēvai* ('worship of the silver mango tree') (fig. 2.26). A priest of the Ekāmranātha temple explained to me the relation between this special *vāhana* and the prescribed *vāhanas* in the *Mahotsavavidhi*: 'Here in this temple they perform the *māvaṭi cēvai*, that does not come in the *Mahotsavavidhi* since it is the *sthalavṛkṣa.* (...) Each temple has got its own specialty. They perform according to that one day, and they call it as the *purāṇa utsava.*'[68] Purāṇas ('old stories') are texts that provide narratives of a place's or temple's legendary history. The central legend of the Ekāmranātha temple is the goddess' worship and embrace of the sand *liṅga* under the mango tree, which is recalled with that special *vāhana.*



Figure 2.25 Detail of the silver coated mango tree in the *veḷḷi māvaṭi vāhana*

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come to the Varadarāja temple in order to bring back butter he once borrowed from Varadarāja. Moreover, Varadarāja travels during his festival to the Ekāmranātha temple in order to prove his superiority. For a description and analysis of the textual versions of the narrative in the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) and *Kāñcippurāṇam* see Hüsken (2017: 70).

66 The fourteenth-century *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* poem praises Vināyaka in this form, too, explaining that he is named Vikaṭa Cakkara Vināyaka, because Perumāḷ (Viṣṇu) gave his disk to him.

67 Some participants are of the opinion that a part of the original mango tree has been built into the *vāhana.*

68 Interview with Ganesh Gurukkal and his sons Tyaga and Murti, 20.04.2009.



Figure 2.26 Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali in the *veḷḷi māvaṭi vāhana*

When I asked participants which days they consider special for the Ekāmranātha *mahotsava,* they named unanimously the *veḷḷi tēr* ('silver chariot') on the evening of the sixth day, the *veḷḷi māvaṭi* ('silver mango tree') on the evening of the ninth day, and the *kalyāṇa* ('marriage') on the tenth day. Some added the procession of the sixty-tree *nāyaṉmārs* on the morning of the sixth day.

Donors and expenses

Usually, various donors, who are mostly associations of merchants and communities or specific families, meet the expenses of the processions. They arrange for the material for the deities' anointment (*abhiṣeka*) with fruits, milk, curd, honey, scented powder, tender coconut and sugar cane juice (see fig. 2.27), the flowers for their adornment (*alaṃkāra*), firecrackers and music or dance groups accompanying the procession, by which they display the prosperity of their community. In return, they receive privileges and temple honors, which show the role of the particular community and the status of the leading members within the community. A publicly displayed mark of honor, for example, is the tying of a head cloth (*parivaṭṭam*) by a priest to a donor, which is in turn noticed by neighbors and the public at large (see fig. 6.9).[69] The importance of the donors for the

69 These forms of displaying honors are clearly visible to an outside observer. Yet, the deeper meaning and above all the further impact on the socio-cultural relations of the communities and their members is more difficult to grasp. It must be extremely obvious from an emic perspective, and I am grateful for the endurance of my research assistant and informants trying to explain the matter to me.

festival events is reflected in the fact that the first worship of the deities only starts when the respective donors are present.[70] During the ritual the donors stand in a well-defined hierarchical order, honored by relative proximity to the principal deity. On the processional route the deities are often taken to *maṇḍapas* of donors, where they stay for some time to be worshipped and receive food offerings (*naivedya*). The leftovers of the deity's food are returned to the donors as a symbol of honor.

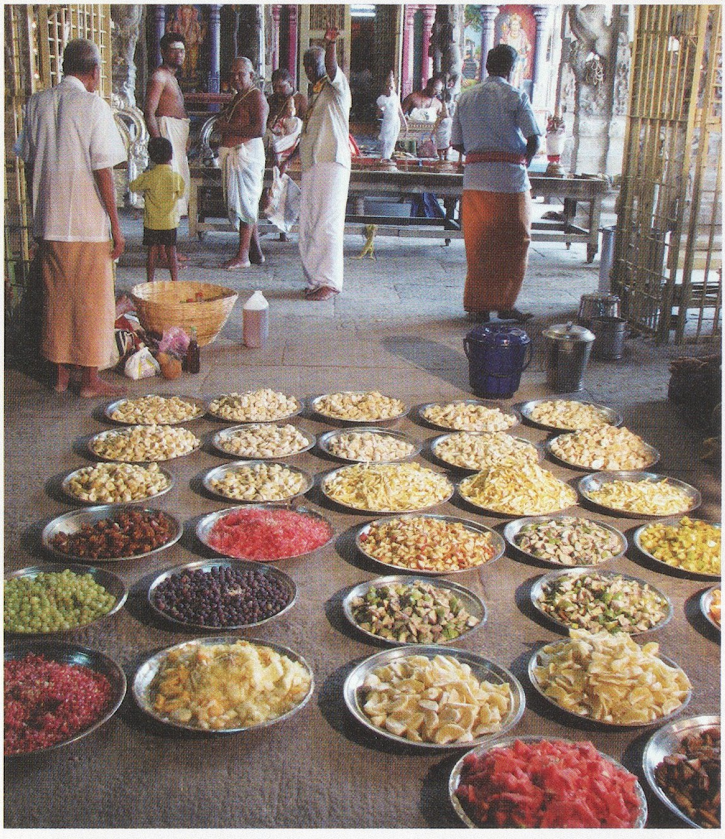


Figure 2.27 Fruits for the anointment (*abhiṣeka*) of the deities

The socio-cultural significance of the temple honors has been explained in detail by Appadurai and Breckenridge (1976). What they denote as 'redistributive process' in South Indian temples is described in the following way:

> The deity is a paradigmatic sovereign, and thus the south Indian temple is a polity, in which all relationships with the royal figure are privileged. All contributions to the temple, whether endowments or services, are privileged. So also the output of the deity, in whatever form, is privileged. The food he has eaten, the water in which he has bathed or has drunk, the vestments he wears, are quintessential objects of value. In the divine court of the deity, rank and status are expressed by the amount of these divine 'leavings' one receives, on what occasion, and in what order. (Appadurai 1981: 205)

70 There is a saying in Kanchipuram that the rituals begin at the Varadarāja temple in accordance with the announced and auspicious point of time, at the Kāmākṣī temple when the goddess feels thus, and at the Ekāmranātha temple when all donors are present.

Rank and status are not only conferred by priests to the donors; within the donor's community the festival is the scene to set up hierarchies and make them visible to community members. Often, before the evening *pūjā,* priests do not only wait for one donor to come. Since most donors are associations, several members (with their families) have to be present before the ceremony begins. Assembled donors can be seen discussing and pushing each other to stand in the correct hierarchical order in relative proximity to the deity, which expresses the hierarchical order within the community. When the donors receive the leftovers of the deity's offerings from the priests, they re-distribute them in their own communities. Thus, the donors themselves exercise the power to confer honor to selected members and thereby determine hierarchies within their communities.[71] The main donor of the marriage festival, the Vaniya Chettiar community, for example, offers special sets of flower garlands to the divine bridal pair. Traditionally, these have been two sets of garlands, provided by two families from the community, who have this hereditary right. A few years ago, the community began to offer a third set of flower garlands to the deities. Now, every year another family is chosen from the community's association to provide the third set of flower garlands. In this way, they confer honor and recognition to one particular member of the community (see more on donors in Chapter Six).

2.5 Concluding remarks

The main event of the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple is the re-enactment and celebration of the divine marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. The temple's priests and participants, who I spoke with, repeatedly emphasized the importance of Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. First, this is reflected in the way the date for the *mahotsava* is calculated each year. The main festival priest of 2009 and his father explained to me differences between the Ekāmranātha temple and others: 'In other temples the *tīrttavāri* (final bathing rite) is the important thing (...) whereas here, the marriage is important. It is calculated according to the star (*uttiram*). Based on that, and not on the *tīrttavāri,* the function starts [ten days before].'[72] Second, it is likely that Paṅkuṉi Uttiram was the main festival, which has been extended to a thirteen-day *mahotsava,* as the priest's father suggested: 'In most of the temples the marriage forms a part of the *brahmotsavam* (= *mahotsavam*), here it is the *brahmotsavam* which forms a part of the marriage.' Thus, the reference to Paṅkuṉi Tirunāḷ in the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* could indeed refer to a one-day festival.

However, the historical material presented in this chapter indicates that the divine marriage may once have not been as prominent as it is today. A look at the ritual handbook *Mahotsavavidhi* reveals that the marriage as part of the *mahotsava* is briefly mentioned in one verse in the first part of the handbook from the twelfth century. Only the second part, presumably from the seventeenth century, dedicates a section to the marriage rituals, which may reflect its rising importance. The references to the Paṅkuṉi (Uttiram) festival in

71 I once experienced this myself, very explicitly, when the main donor for the marriage invited me to join rituals at their community temple, saying "I am doing the function keeping you as the main person," which he did by putting me (almost) first in the hierarchical order of redistribution.

72 Interview with Ganesh Gurukkal and his sons Tyaga and Murti, Ekāmranātha temple, 20.04.2009.

Kanchipuram may point in the same direction; at least, both references from the fourteenth century do not explicitly mention a marriage. The *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* focuses on the chariot procession, and not on the wedding, which, however, might be due to the strictures of the genre. The inscription from the Kāmākṣī temple suggests that Paṅkuṉi Uttiram was either celebrated at the Kāmākṣī temple, or that the temple was involved in the festival to a higher degree, as today. However, interpreting the term *ābhyantarapūjā* as a reference to the purifying rituals performed after the statue's return from the Ekāmranātha temple, is speculative. Thus, it remains unclear if a marriage was celebrated. Generally, Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is associated with the gods' marriage. References to the festival are found in *Tēvāram* hymns of Campantar (2.47.7) and Appar (4.102.2), but both describe the festival without mentioning the celebration of a divine marriage. Also, a reference in the *Periyapurāṇam* and an inscription from the Chola king Rājādhirāja at the Tiruvottiyur temple[73] gives no hint at a marriage. Thus, it seems possible that the deities' marriage has not always been associated with Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, or at least not as prominently as it is today.

Another point worth considering is the relation of the *Mahotsavavidhi* and the actual performance. The text appears to be the structural frame for the conduct of the festival. It is the reference work for the contemporary performance of the festival's rituals, which might be referred to in cases of dispute over proper conduct. References to local custom seem to have the same value, though. Priests emphasize that the festival follows both the prescriptions given in the *Mahotsavavidhi* and the temple's local traditions. Moreover, the text is written in a way that allows for the integration of local traditions, and encourages adaption to local circumstances. Local features, such as special *vāhanas* or re-enactments of local myths, distinguish one temple's festival from another, and make them special for the respective worshipping community. Besides, one has to keep in mind that the text was written for priests, as Davis (2010: 43) points out. On the one hand, it presupposes knowledge of certain rituals, on the other hand, it is rarely concerned with the range of people that performs the rituals beside the main priest.[74] Through the interplay of numerous priests, assistants, musicians, devotees, and so on, the actual performance becomes more complex and versatile, as can be described in a ritual handbook.

73 See Ayyar (1922: 45).

74 On the wide range of festival actors known from inscriptions see Davis and Orr (2007).

3 The 'marriage myth'

The central myth of the Ekāmranātha temple tells how Śiva's wife, Pārvatī, came to Kanchipuram to practice austerities under a mango tree on the banks of the Kampā River. She built a *liṅga* out of sand and worshipped it. To test her devotion, Śiva sent a flood down the river. The goddess embraced the sand *liṅga* and pressed it to her breasts, leaving the marks of her breasts and bangles. This affectionate gesture made Śiva appear under the mango tree and finally re-marry her in Kanchipuram. I refer to the myth as the 'marriage myth', because the contemporary performance of the marriage on the tenth day of the Ekāmranātha temple festival is clearly associated with the myth. However, *the* myth exists in multiple versions and not all conclude with the re-marriage in Kanchipuram, as will be discussed ahead.

The 'marriage myth' is not unique to Kanchipuram and the Ekāmranātha temple. Shulman (1980: 138) notes that in the majority of Tamil Sthalapurāṇas[1] the central structural element is the goddess's marriage to the god. In the pan-Indian Śaiva mythology, the mountain daughter Pārvatī performed *tapas* (austerities) for many years to win the ascetic god Śiva as husband.[2] In some versions, Śiva tests her firmness in the disguise of an old man or young Brahmacārin, who tries to prevent her from marrying Śiva. But Pārvatī remains steady and finally Śiva appears and marries her. The scene is set in the Himālayas. Many Tamil marriage myths follow the same pattern, but require the goddess to perform her *tapas* at a particular place or shrine in Tamil Nadu instead of the Himālayas (Shulman 1980: 144). Frequently, the rationale for her descent to earth and her *tapas* at that particular place is the expiation of some misdeed with the promise of a reunion or re-marriage at that place. The 'marriage myth' in the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas adheres to this pattern, too. Furthermore, the re-marriage or second marriage on earth is explained by a promise given to the sage Agastya. He was forced to miss the original marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī on Mount Kailāsa in the Himālayas, and Śiva granted him the boon to repeat the marriage ceremony for him in the south of India (Shulman 1980: 268).

In this chapter I examine the 'marriage myth' and its variations according to different textual sources. First, I investigate how the myth is depicted in each source. In doing so, I introduce the respective source, briefly retell the myth, and identify its narrative themes and components. An overview of the themes is given as an appendix. Second, I compare and contrast the narrative themes with respect to each source in order to articulate core themes that are significant to all or most versions of the myth, and those themes or elements that are more source specific. This analysis explains how these texts are internally related to each other and, in doing so, forms the basis for the following chapter, which deals with the ritual re-enactment of the myth's narrative themes.

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1 Sthalapurāṇas are localized texts that glorify a certain place, temple or sanctuary.

2 The myth appears (in variations) in several Purāṇas (for example *Śiva Purāṇa* 2.3.21–50), the *Mahābhārata* and Kalidāsa's *Kumārasaṃbhava*.

3.1 Sources

The majority of the texts under consideration here can be categorized as Māhātmyas (literally 'greatness'). These texts glorify certain places or deities by giving an account of their greatness. They provide narratives of a place's legendary history, explaining how it came into being, which deities and epic heroes visited the place, and what deeds they did there. Therefore, Māhātmyas are an important source in Indian literature for the study of myths and legends. Māhātmyas are regarded as a sub-group of Purāṇas ('ancient stories'), and some Māhātmyas are integrated in Purāṇas or claim to be part of them.[3] However, these categories can not clearly be distinguished, and the titles Māhātmya and Purāṇa are often used interchangeably, as the names of the texts below show. Another frequently used term for a sub-group of Purāṇic texts is Sthalapurāṇa (Tam. Talapurāṇam) or Sthalamāhātmya. The term designates localized and place specific texts (Skt. *sthala*, 'place'), that tell of the origins and local traditions of a certain temple or sanctuary. They are often written in vernaculars, but some have Sanskrit versions as well. Pan-Indian mythological themes can be found in the Sthalapurāṇas, often modified and re-interpreted in order to locate them at the respective place and combine them with local traditions. At the same time, local myths and motifs of the folk tradition are integrated into pan-Indian myths. The mythology of every major Tamil temple has "developed through the fusion of local and imported elements" (Shulman 1980: 5). Sometimes, mythological themes are also modified to underline a sectarian favoritism by depicting the respective favorite god as the superior cause of all actions. Besides the narration of the place's mythology, Sthalapurāṇas provide practical information, such as topographical details about the location of various shrines, instructions for devotees, what kind of worship is recommended, and an overview of the marvelous merits one might expect from acting accordingly. However, the focus of this chapter is the place's mythology, and especially the variations in the account of the 'marriage myth' according to different Sthalapurāṇas and other texts.

I detected nine texts that narrate the Kanchipuram 'marriage myth' in one variation or another.[4] More than half of the texts are written in Sanskrit, and the translations are my own. However, some of the oldest and, moreover, datable texts are written in Tamil. Unfortunately, for these texts English translations are either not available or, if they are available, are often flawed and not faithful to the original. Thus, for the analysis of the Tamil texts, I was working with new or revised English translations, produced with the help of Tamil scholars and native speakers.

The first three texts are presented in chronological order; these are written in Tamil and are datable. First, *Tēvāram* hymns from the seventh and ninth centuries; second, the *Periyapurāṇam*, dated to 1135; and third, the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* poem of the fourteenth century. The following four texts are Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram, which probably were

3 On Purāṇa as a literary genre and the contents of specific Purāṇas see Rocher (1986). See Rao (2004: 97–115) for a more recent discussion of the genre and its scholarship. Shulman (1980: 29–39) deals especially with Tamil Purāṇas.

4 Besides, grey literature in the form of temple booklets and pamphlets exists. They mostly summarize the *Kāmākṣilīlāpirapāvam*, which is a Tamil rendering in prose of the Sanskrit *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*.

not composed prior to the sixteenth century.[5] The author of one of theses texts, the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam*, is known and datable to the end of the eighteenth century. Two of the Sanskrit texts bear the same name '*Kāñcīmāhātmya*', yet one text presents the events rather from a Śaiva perspective and the other text clearly from a Vaiṣṇava perspective.[6] To avoid confusion, I indicate the sectarian affiliation either prefixed or abbreviated in parentheses, although this is actually not part of the original title. Of the four Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram, I first analyze the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya.* This text is the Sanskrit source for the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam*, which I examine afterwards. Following this, I address the Sanskrit *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, which has parallels with the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Last, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which obviously emphasizes Viṣṇu as the superior cause of all actions. The Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram offer the most extensive and elaborated versions of the 'marriage myth'. The two remaining texts present the myth from different perspectives and are therefore placed at the end of the analysis. One text, the *Aruṇācalamāhātmya*, includes the events in Kanchipuram rather as a preamble for the main story, which glorifies Śiva on Mount Aruṇācala in Tiruvannamalai. Finally, I turn to the *Lalitāmāhātmya* or *Lalitopākhyāna*, a Śākta text dedicated to the goddess Lalitā, in which the 'marriage myth' varies significantly.

Tēvāram

The *Tēvāram*[7] is a collection of Tamil Śaiva devotional hymns, which were composed between the seventh and ninth centuries by the three poet-saints (Tam. *nāyaṉār*) Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar. Campantar and Appar are dated to the first half of the seventh century, and Cuntarar to the first half of the ninth century.[8] The poets travelled through Tamil Nadu and visited numerous Śaiva sanctuaries, which they praise in their hymns. Most often, the poets praise Śiva's qualities and deeds in epithetic form. For example, they address Śiva as the killer of the demon elephant or the swallower of poison, alluding to myths that can be assumed to have been common knowledge, since they are not explained any further. But there are also descriptions of site-specific features and localized myths, which are not only in epithetic form, as for example the 'marriage myth' in Kanchipuram. As mentioned in Chapter One, twelve hymns (*patikam*) are dedicated to

5 The 'golden age' of the composition of Tamil Sthalapurāṇas begins in the sixteenth century (Shulman 1980: 32). Another indication for dating the texts are references made to structures. For example, the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) mentions the *gopura* of the Ekāmranātha temple, which has been built in the sixteenth century or later (see Chapter One).

6 However, Ayyar (1965: 151–52) speaks about three Kanchipuram Māhātmyas in Sanskrit. I was only able to detect two of them. One is the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which he calls *Pañcāśat* (fifty). It has fifty chapters and claims to belong to the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. The other is the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* containing thirty-two chapters. According to Ayyar, the third one is named *Śatādhyāyī* (one hundred chapters) and composed on the basis of stories from the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* and the *Śiva Purāṇa*. Further, he mentions that this text has been translated to Tamil in the eighteenth century, just as the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.

7 The following information is based on Zvelebil (1974: 91–98) and (1975: 138–42).

8 See Shulman (1990: xli). Zvelebil (1974: 91) suggests that Cuntarar lived from ca. 780 to 830. However, on page 96 the date is given as 680 to 730. Similarly, two different dates can be found in Zvelebil (1975) on page 142 and 132.

Ekāmranātha in Kanchipuram, addressed as Kacci Ēkampam.[9] Kacci denotes Kanchipuram and *ēkampam* or *kampam*, 'one/a pillar', is the name with which the Tēvāram poets refer to Śiva at the shrine in Kanchipuram, which is today the Ekāmranātha temple. Two of the hymns dedicated to Kacci Ēkampam, one composed by Campantar (3.114), the other by Cuntarar (7.61), narrate the story of the 'marriage myth' within a verse.

The first reference is verse 7 in hymn 3.114 by Campantar:

Once long ago the Woman, dark as a rain cloud, was performing tapas.
Then, as a beautiful trick, the rushing river came in flood,
Sweeping away bamboo, aloe and sandal; and tormenting the elephant,
so he could not run away.
She embraced and touched the god, who is bathed in the five products of the cow.
That pillar is still there, marked by her breast with luminous jewels.
That is Kampam in the great city of Kāñcī.[10]

The second reference can be found in verse 10, hymn 7.61 by Cuntarar:

Umā was not too proud to go there and stand in worship with joy in her heart –
like any other woman serving the lord, king of the gods.
He saw her – that trickster Kampaṉ, our own lord –
and sent a flood to frighten her;
alarmed, she ran to embrace him,
and he revealed himself to her.[11]

The narrative form of both verses follows the model: goddess[12] performs *tapas*/worship;[13] Śiva tricks (tests) her by sending a flood;[14] she embraces him; he reveals himself. In addition, Campantar describes the goddess's dark complexion by comparing her with a dark rain cloud. Further, he specifies that the flood came in a river. Campantar does not name the river, but in one of his other hymns (2.12.5) he makes reference to 'Ēkampam on the banks of Kampā,' which suggests that the flooding river was the Kampā River. Moreover, he explicitly refers to Kampam as a pillar deity, as it has been proposed by Ayyar (1965),[15] and describes the marks of the goddess's breasts on it.

As will be shown in the following section, the narrative of worship, testing, flood, embrace, revelation appears in almost all versions of the myth. Considering that Campantar

9 Campantar composed four hymns (1.133, 2.12, 3.41, 3.114), Appar seven hymns (4.7, 4.44, 4.99, 5.47, 5.48, 6.64, 6.65), and Cuntarar one hymn (7.61).

10 I am deeply indebted to David Shulman for a translation of this verse.

11 Shulman (1990: 395).

12 The goddess is most often addressed as Umā, 'Mountain Girl/Daughter' (= Pārvatī), or simply as the Woman/Lady.

13 In the South Indian philosophical system of Śaiva Siddhānta, *tapas* is in most cases not defined as actual mortification, but as devotion for Śiva. See Shulman (1980: 357, fn. 7).

14 One characteristics of Śiva is that he tests his devotees with his divine games (Tam. *tiruviḷaiyāṭal*). In the same way, he tests or tricks the goddess by sending a flood.

15 Apparently, Ayyar has not been aware of this verse, although it would support his argument. He (1965: 156) mentions only Cuntarar's verse 7.61.10 as the earliest reference to the myth.

probably composed the hymn in ± 650,[16] it is remarkable that this pattern has been maintained up to the present day. It might be regarded as the core of the 'marriage myth', although the final marriage or re-marriage in Kanchipuram is absent in this early version. However, two more elements, which are crucial in contemporary accounts of the myth, are absent in the *Tēvāram* hymns: the sand *liṅga* (the goddess embraces a pillar) and the mango tree. Both are the divine symbols and focal points of contemporary worship in the temple, and constituent elements in later versions of the myth.

Periyapurāṇam

The Tamil *Periyapurāṇam,* composed by the poet Cēkkiḻār in ± 1135, is a hagiography of the sixty-three Śaiva saints (*nāyaṉārs*).[17] The description of the life story of each *nāyaṉār* is based on what is known about them from their hymns, and enriched with other textual sources and oral traditions. The 'marriage myth' is integrated in the hagiography of Tirukkuṟippuṭṭoṇṭar Nāyaṉār (*Periyapurāṇam* 4.5), who was a washerman in Kanchipuram. His life story is not at the forefront, but is rather used as a framework for the narrative. Most verses are dedicated to pompous descriptions of the town Kanchipuram, beginning with the narrative of how the goddess came to Kanchipuram to worship Śiva according to the regulations of the Āgamas.

Brief summary of the story (PP 4.5.50–70):[18]

> Śiva explained to Umā the rules of the Āgamas on Mount Kailāsa. Having heard them, she wished to perform *pūjā* (worship) for him in the Āgamic way. He pointed to the city of Kanchipuram, where he lives at the foot of a mango tree, and sent her to perform the *pūjā* there. With her attendants and the necessary implements for *pūjā* she went to Kanchipuram. There she met the big snake Patumam,[19] who offered her to make a temple in the hole[20] in which it lived. With a steady mind she did penance until Śiva appeared under the mango tree. Full of joy she performed for days the Āgamic *pūjā* with flowers, water, sandal paste, light and incense for him, who lived in the Kampam. One day, Śiva wanted to play (Tam. *tiruviḷaiyāṭal*) and produced a big flood in the Kampā River. The goddess feared that the devastating flood would cover the heavens and overcome her god. She tried to stop it with her hands, but it did not stop. Thus, she tightly embraced Kampam and pressed the bangles on her arms and nipples of her breasts against him. By the touch of her breasts he became soft and showed himself to her. All beings came together and praised Ekampam, who wore the marks of her breasts and bangles on his body. Then

16 He is said to have died at the age of sixteen in 655. See Zvelebil (1974: 95).

17 The information is based on Zvelebil (1974: 173–76).

18 The summary is based on the English translation of Ramachandran (1990) and a revision by David Shulman, to whom I am very grateful.

19 According to the *Fabricius's Tamil and English Dictionary* Patumaṉ is one of the eight serpents that support the earth (http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/fabricius/).

20 The hole is reminiscent of the *bilākāsa*, the cavity in the present Kāmākṣī temple. This reference presumably indicates that the place was initially worshipped as an anthill with snakes, as it is common in Tamil Nadu.

> he showed to her his beautiful bridegroom form and granted her the boon that she will remain at the place to do *pūjā* and thirty-two *dharmas*[21] forever.

The narrative pattern of worship, testing, flood, embrace, and revelation can be seen here, too. However, a number of details have been added to this basic storyline. First, the story begins on Mount Kailāsa and provides a reason for the shifting of the scene to Kanchipuram. A rationale is absent in Campantar's verse; we do not know why the goddess performs penance in Kanchipuram. But Cuntarar's verse 'the goddess was not too proud to go there' implies at least a shifting of the scene. In the *Periyapurāṇam*, the reason for Pārvatī's descent to earth and to Kanchipuram is her wish to perform *pūjā* according to the Āgamas. The Śaiva Āgamas are a text corpus thought to have been revealed by Śiva. They contain, among other things, instructions for domestic and temple worship, and the philosophical doctrine of the South Indian Śaiva Siddhānta system. By the time of the text's composition in the twelfth century, the performance of *pūjā* in the Āgamic way must have been widespread in Tamil Nadu. Yet it is remarkable that the text stresses it in that way and that Umā not only receives lessons in the Āgamas, but that she is so eager to perform it herself.[22] Nagaswamy (1982: 36) interprets this feature as a sign that Āgamic worship "knew no barrier of sex and caste," since a female does *pūjā* according to the Āgamas. In my view, this interpretation is far-fetched. After all, it is the goddess who performs *pūjā,* not just any woman. However, it must be acknowledged that Umā is provided with agency in the *Periyapurāṇam.* She is coming to Kanchipuram on her own will, and not as expiation for some misdeed, as the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas account.

With reference to the divine symbols at the Ekāmranātha temple, it is important to note that the mango tree appears here for the first time in a literary source. We come to know that Śiva lives there at the foot of the tree. However, the other divine symbol of the Ekāmranātha temple, the sand *liṅga,* is not mentioned in the *Periyapurāṇam*. The goddess performs *pūjā* to 'the god, who lives in the Kampam,' which points to the worship of a

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21 The thirty-two *dharmas* (Tam. *aṟam*) are a determined group of good works and charities, which are said to have been established and practiced by the goddess in Kanchipuram. Therefore, she is also known as Dharmadevī, the *dharma* goddess, or Dharmasamvardhinī ('she, who fosters good deeds'). *Periyapurāṇam* 4.5, verse 70, accounts that the goddess received the measurement of two *nāḻi* rice seeds from Kampam to exercise charities. The thirty-two *dharmas* and two *nāḻi* rice seeds appear also in the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas. The *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) lists the thirty-two *dharmas* as follows: 1. offerings to the gods, 2. to ancestors, 3. to *bhūtas*, 4. to humans, 5. to Brahmins, 6. recitation of Vedic hymns, 7. establishing *maṭhas* for ascetics and 8. houses for householders, 9. giving of vessels for the household and 10. a place for supplying water, 11. planting of shady trees in all directions, 12. support of poor and 13. blind people, 14. giving medical help for sick people, 15. giving betel with chalk and 16. oil for anointing, 17. giving things used for bathing and 18. a bed, 19. donation of land, 20. giving cows, 21. giving daughters in marriage, 22. giving sesame and 23. lamps, 24. giving debt relief, 25. donations for Śaiva devotees, 26. giving *rudrākṣa* rosaries, 27. sacred ashes and 28. articles used for *pūjā,* 29. donation of garments and 30. Purāṇas, 31. teaching of devotion towards Śiva to twice-borns, 32. giving fearlessness (*abhaya*) to everybody. However, the list given in the *Apitāṉacintāmaṇi – Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature* varies in some points.

22 The opening scene of Śiva teaching Umā on Mount Kailāsa is known from many Purāṇic texts. However, Umā is often inattentive or falls asleep, which is why she is being punished and cursed to incarnate as mortal (Doniger O'Flaherty 1982: 134), whereas in this text she comes to earth as an eager student.

pillar deity, as described in Chapter One. It seems that at the time of text's composition in 1135, the sand *liṅga* was not established. Further, it is not clear whether the myth ends with a re-marriage. The line 'he shows himself in his beautiful bridegroom form' can be interpreted in this way, but in comparison with the elaborate descriptions of the marriage in the Sthalapurāṇas, the marriage is certainly not a prominent element in the *Periyapurāṇam*.

Furthermore, it should be noted that another section on Kanchipuram is found in *Periyapurāṇam* 6.2. Here, too, verses allude to the myth and characteristics of Ekāmranātha. Reference are made to 'the god who became soft when the goddess embraced him' (*maṅkai taḻuvak kuḻaintār*) (verse 287), to 'his form, which has the mark of the breast' (*mulaiccuvaṭṭuk kōlam*) (verse 288), or to 'the god who is beautified by the marks of the breasts and bangles' (*mulaiccuvaṭum vaḷaittaḻampum*) (verse 290). These epithets signify the importance of the goddess's embrace and the marks of her breasts and bangles on Śiva's body as distinguished features of Ekāmranātha in Kanchipuram. The section in *Periyapurāṇam* 6.2 does not, however, give an account of the 'marriage myth'.

Ēkāmparanātar Ulā

As outlined in Chapter Two, the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*[23] poem describes in 556 verses the procession of the god Ekāmranātha on the occasion of *tirup-paṅkuṉit-tirunāḷ*, the 'holy Paṅkuṉi Day'. Iraṭṭaippulavar (the 'twin poets'), who lived in the fourteenth century, composed the poem (Zvelebil 1975: 215). The poem is not only a valuable historical reference to the celebration of the Paṅkuṉi festival at the Ekāmranātha temple in the fourteenth century, it also mentions some of the temple's architectural features, and gives an account of the 'marriage myth' at the beginning, from verse 1 to 44. Moreover, references to the goddess's embrace and marks of her breasts are interspersed throughout the poem.

Brief summary of the story (verse 1–44):

> Śiva and Umā were living happily on the silver mountain (= Kailāsa) in the Himālayas. Once, for fun, Umā covered Śiva's eyes, which are the moon and the sun, with her hands. Thus, the world became dark and disordered. As expiation for this misdeed, Śiva instructed her to go south to Kanchipuram to the single mango tree, where she can see him in the tree's shadow, and to perform *pūjā* according to the Āgamas. Umā happily agreed and went with her female attendants to Kanchipuram. She was wandering through the streets of town until she came to the banks of the Kampā River, where she saw the mango tree. She piled up sand from the river and formed an idol, which she adorned with flowers and *vibhūti* (sacred ash). With the *pañcākṣara*[24] in her heart, she performed endless *pūjā*. Then, Śiva, who existed in the shadow of the mango tree, tested her affection. He made the

23 I am grateful to David Shulman, who showed me the beauty of this literary genre and made a copy of the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* available. Further, I am deeply indebted to A.K. Selvadurai, a scholar in medieval Tamil, and my research assistant N. Subramanian, who helped me to make an English rendering of the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā*, which is the basis for the summary.

24 This is the five-syllable *mantra* of Śiva: '*na-maḥ-śi-vā-ya*'.

> Kampā River flood the banks with such force it was as if the *pralaya* (destruction of the world) was upon them. Umā did not get scared and performed the Āgamic *pūjā* flawlessly. Then, for whatever reason,[25] she fell on the sand (*liṅga*) and embraced his body in such a way that her breasts and bangles left a mark on him. She softened him by the touch of her breasts, and Śiva became visible.

This version of the myth adheres to the known storyline of worship, testing, flood, embrace and revelation. However, in the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* the rationale for Umā's coming to Kanchipuram is not the wish to perform *pūjā* according to the Āgamas, as was stressed in the *Periyapurāṇam*, but the expiation for her misdeed of blindfolding Śiva's eyes, which caused darkness and chaos in the world. This motif will appear again in some of the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas. To be sure, the performance of *pūjā* according to the Āgamas is of importance, too, and mentioned in the poem, though not as the reason for the coming to Kanchipuram.

Again, Śiva is present at the foot or in the shadow of the mango tree. Now, the goddess piles up sand with her hands and forms an idol to worship it. This is the first literary reference to the sand *liṅga,* although the specific term *liṅga* does not appear, but rather the word 'idol' (Tam. *tiruvuruvam*) or 'holy body' (Tam. *tirumēṉi*). It seems the sand (*liṅga*) gained importance between the composition of the *Periyapurāṇam* in the twelfth century and the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* in the fourteenth century.

A recurring theme throughout the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* is Umā's embrace that left the marks of her breasts and bangles on Śiva's body.[26] This motif can be traced back to the *Tēvāram* hymn from the seventh century. It is either used as an epithet of Śiva in Kanchipuram, describing him as 'the one, who has the breasts' marks on his body' (verse 535), or the motif is used to describe the longing and passionate feelings of the female devotees for their divine hero Ekāmranātha, as for example in verses 143 and 144: 'The ladies watched the marks of the breasts and bangles on Siva's body and thought, what will happen, if our marks fall on his shoulder?' It may seem obvious to use the allusion to the breasts so frequently, since the Ulā as a genre is a love poem. Nevertheless, it is the distinctive feature of Śiva in Kanchipuram to bear the marks of the goddess's breasts and bangles on his body.

Kāñcīmāhātmya (Ś = Śaiva)

The text at hand is a printed edition of the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś),[27] written in Sanskrit with Telugu script. It claims to be part of the *Kāḷikākhaṇḍa* in the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, as the following phrase at the end of each chapter shows:

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25 The author goes through a variety of reasons for Umā's action, without arriving at a conclusion: 'If I leave, what will happen to the body of the god? Did she (Umā) think like this? Was it because of her ancient femaleness? Maybe her love? Was it her nature by birth? Was it the strength of her desire? Or was it due to her faithfulness to him? We do not know.' (verse 41 and 42). Most other versions of the myth are clear about, that the goddess embraced the *liṅga* to protect it from the waters.

26 For example verses 59, 65, 114, 143, 145, 171, 196, 211, 236, 261, 299, 378, 535, 547.

27 *Kāñcīmāhātmyam – Skāndapurāṇāntargataṃ (Rudrakōṭimahimādarśaḥ).* Kāñcīkāmakōṭipīṭhādhipatīnāṃ Candraśēkharēndra Sarasvatī Svāmināṃ Divyādēśēna Prakāśitaṃ Vijayatētarāṃ (ed). Pijayavāḍa; Madrāsu; Haidarābādu: Vēṃkaṭrām Pavar Pres, 1967.

"*ityādimahāpurāṇē śrīskāndē sanatkumārasaṃhitāyāṃ kāḷikākhaṇḍē tīrthapraśaṃsāyāṃ kāñcīmāhātmyē.*" The *Skanda Purāṇa* is the most extensive Purāṇa to which many Māhātmyas claim to be a part. There are two versions of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. One is based on a division in *saṃhitās* (with subsections called *khaṇḍas*), often referred to as the 'southern recension'. The composition of the *Skanda Purāṇa* in *saṃhitās* is only known from singular texts or manuscripts, which claim to be part of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, as does the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) at hand. The *Skanda Purāṇa* based on *saṃhitās* does not exist physically, though it is possible that it once existed in this form, but is now lost. The other version of the *Skanda Purāṇa* is based on *khaṇḍas,* referred to as the 'northern recension'. This version is available as printed editions.[28] However, the *Skanda Purāṇa* based on *khaṇḍas* is a rather arbitrary text. It is a collection of materials, mostly local Māhātmyas, which were combined for the printed editions by the end of the nineteenth century.[29] For example, the *Aruṇācalamāhātmya*, to be discussed below, is one of the Māhātmyas that has been integrated in the printed edition of the *Skanda Purāṇa*. However, the text's claim to be part of the *Skanda Purāṇa* points rather to its imagined affiliation to a major tradition, with a view to enhance its significance.[30]

The copy of the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) at hand is almost certainly a new edition of a rare text of the Sanskrit Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* from 1889, which was also written in Telugu script.[31] The *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) has fifty chapters and is therefore sometimes referred to as *Pañcāśat* (fifty).[32] The 'marriage myth' begins in chapter 39 and concludes with chapter 45, comprising almost 650 verses. However, the text also integrates other myths and the legendary origin of minor shrines in Kanchipuram, so that the 'marriage myth' consists of about 330 verses, the core of which is found in chapter 45, which is summarized below. The story revolves around Pārvatī's misdeed of covering Śiva's eyes on Mount Mandara, which plunges the entire world into darkness (chapter 40). As a remedy, she is sent to Varanasi (Kāśī), and afterwards to Kanchipuram (chapter 41), where she walks through town and visits different sanctuaries until she finds Śiva in the form of a light-ray *liṅga* under a mango tree near the Kampā River.

Brief summary of the story:

> Pārvatī explained the thirty-two *dharmas* to her female friends and established a place of charity (*dharmaśālā*) near the cavity in Kāñcī. There she saw the light-ray *liṅga* (*jyotirliṅga*). She wished to worship it, but wondered how to perform a proper *pūjā* for the light *liṅga.* Thus she had the idea to build a *liṅga* made of sand on top of the light-rays. To be granted the boon to do so, she practiced excessive austerities near a mango tree until Śiva became visible. He instructed her to build a sand *liṅga* on top of the light-ray *liṅga* and worship it duly. Pārvatī built the sand *liṅga* and

28 These are the Bombay edition (Veṅkaṭeśvara Press, 1910) and Calcutta edition (Vaṅgavāsī Press, 1911).

29 However, there are scholars such as Bakker, who do believe that an 'original' *Skanda Purāṇa* existed as a single and coherent text. On various approaches of modern scholarship see Rao (2004: 110–13).

30 The same is also true for other Purāṇas, as, for example, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* claims to be part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, indicating a Śākta affiliation.

31 Dessigane (1964: vi) mentions this rare text in the introduction to the synopsis of the *Kāñcippurāṇam*.

32 See Ayyar (1965: 151).

performed an elaborate *pūjā* according to his commands. After some time Śiva wanted to test her devotion. He called the primordial waters to arise as a flood in the Kampā River. Pārvatī, fearing that the *liṅga* might dissolve in the waters, embraced it closely, so that she left the imprints of her breasts and bangles on it. Then, her friend Bhadrakālī came to help her. She gathered the waters and confined them to her skull-bowl. All gods and celestials came together, celebrating the goddess's transformation of the former light *liṅga* into a sand *liṅga*. Finally, Śiva manifested from that *liṅga* and commanded Bhadrakālī to release the waters from the skull-bowl, so that they could flow into Sarva Tīrtha. Then, he granted Pārvatī the wish that they would always be present in Kāñcī together. Furthermore, Pārvatī wished to become Gaurī ('the golden one'), and not be addressed as Kālī ('the black one') any longer, as Śiva did before on Mount Mandara. Śiva commanded her to cast off her dark skin, and explained that this was necessary for the welfare of the world. From Pārvatī's dark skin a goddess manifested, named Kauśi-Durgā, who was created to destroy the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha. Pārvatī became fair-skinned (Gaurī) and happily asked for the celebration of a Gaurī-wedding in Kāñcī. Śiva agreed, since he formerly also promised this to the sage Agastya. He determined that the wedding should take place every year at the end of the great festival on the star Uttara Phalgunī in the month of Phālguna in the wedding pavilion near the cavity. Then he assigned Viṣṇu to arrange the wedding ceremonies. Later, Śiva also married Kauśi-Durgā and appointed her as the protector of Kāñcī, known by the name Kāñcīkanyārakṣā.

This is the bulkiest version of the myth. Besides the above-mentioned insertions on myths of minor shrines, the text contains a lengthy description of the performance of the *pūjā* (chapter 45.22–65), and the marriage party (chapter 45.166–225), which I did not retell. Evidently, the text shows some internal contradictions. To begin with, it was Pārvatī's idea to build a sand *liṅga,* but then she performs *tapas* to get Śiva's permission and instructions for doing so. Further, the story of Bhadrakālī seems to be misplaced at this point in the narrative. Some more examples could be cited which, taken together, give the impression that the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) was not written by a single author. Its Tamil rendering, the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, on the contrary, was written by two authors and is a very coherent text (see next section). However, the central narrative of worship, testing, flood, embrace, and revelation is maintained. New narrative elements are integrated, some of which also appear in other Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram. New motifs include a stopover in Kāśī, the light-ray *liṅga,* Bhadrakālī as helper to stop the flood, the transformation of the goddess from dark-skinned to fair-skinned, and the manifestation of the goddess Kauśi-Durgā. These will be discussed successively.

A narrative theme, which reoccurs in other versions of the myth, is the stopover in Kāśī (Varanasi in North India). When Pārvatī asked Śiva where to perform *pūjā*, he explained to her that among all holy places on earth Kāśī and Kāñcī are eminent, but that of these two places, Kāñcī is dearest to him. Therefore, Pārvatī goes first to Kāśī, worships Śiva, who resides there as Viśveśa (Viśvanātha), and establishes a *liṅga.* Afterwards she comes to Kāñcī, where the main plot unfolds. This stylistic device is often employed in Sthalapurāṇas. First, a connection to the pan-Indian tradition is established and

acknowledged by, for example, honoring a renowned pilgrimage site such as Kāśī. As the story progresses, the local site is, in comparison to the renowned site, depicted as superior. In this case, however, Kanchipuram is itself a renowned pilgrimage site on a pan-Indian level. Thus, it is likely that the goddess's stopover in Kāśī is meant to establish a connection between the North and South Indian tradition.

A distinctive feature of this myth is the light *liṅga* (*jyotirliṅga*), which Pārvatī covers with sand. The text's internal explanation is that the light *liṅga* can not be worshipped duly, since an ablution with milk, fruits and water would not be appropriate for it (KM (Ś) 45.13). The transformation of the *liṅga*'s materiality may reflect changes in the main object of worship at the Ekāmranātha temple, from Kampam, the pillar, to the sand *liṅga,* built by the goddess.

Another new element, which also occurs in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, is the appearance of Bhadrakālī, who confines the waters of the flood in her skull-bowl. This seems to be a rather confusing interpolation (KM (Ś) 45.90–92). It interrupts the storyline, which actually describes the joyous assembly of gods after Pārvatī embraces and marks the *liṅga* with her breasts and bangles. Later, when Śiva appears, he instructs Bhadrakālī to let the waters run into Sarva Tīrtha. Sarva Tīrtha is a huge water tank to the west of the Ekāmranātha temple, at the banks of which the final bathing rite is performed on the last day of the festival (see Chapter Two). Further, Śiva assigned Bhadrakālī a place in front of him, giving her the name Pralayamandā ('the one who slowed down the *pralaya*'), since she confined the waters, which came like the final destruction of the world (*pralaya*), in her skull-bowl.

Another theme is Kauśi-Durgā and the transformation of the goddess from dark-skinned to fair-skinned. This appears in the *Kaccippurāṇam*, too, and in variations in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* and the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Kauśi-Durgā or Kauśikī is a figure known from Purāṇic mythology: Śiva, who is known for his fair skin, teased Pārvatī for her dark skin. Thus, she performed penance until she sloughed her dark skin. The dark skin became the goddess Kālī ('the black one'), also known as Kauśikī ('born of the sheath'), who later killed the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha. Pārvatī became fair-skinned, and known as Gaurī ('the golden one').[33] The 'marriage myth' in the *Kāñcimāhātmya* (Ś) picks up on this Purāṇic myth, but with the addition of Śiva marrying Kauśi-Durgā, too, and appointing her as the guardian goddess of the city Kanchipuram, known as Kāñcīkanyārakṣā ('the virgin protectress of Kāñcī'). In the text itself, the goddess Kauśi-Durgā is also called Ādiśakti. This may point to goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ who, by the Kāmākṣī temple priests, is considered one of the eight protecting deities of Kāmākṣī, and who joins the bridal procession of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals, to be discussed in Chapter Five.

Kāñcippurāṇam

The Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam*[34] was written by the scholar and poet Civañāṉacuvami and his pupil Kacciyappamuṉivar at the end of the eighteenth century. Civañāṉacuvami died in 1785 and his student Kacciyappamuṉivar then finished the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (Zvelebil 1975:

33 See Doniger O'Flaherty (1980: 350) for the myth and references to it in different Purāṇas. Further, Joshi (1996: 4–6, 30–31) for the myth and for Kauśikī's iconography in depictions of Pārvatī's penance.

34 *Kāñcippurāṇam* of Civañāṉacuvami. C. Aruṇai Vaṭivelu Mutaliyār (ed). Kanchipuram, 1937.

248). The *Kāñcippurāṇam* is regarded as one of the four great Tamil Purāṇas.[35] It is a translation of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya.* The author himself indicated the Sanskrit source in verse 5.26 of the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (Dessigane 1964: vii). Dessigane (1964) translated the *Kāñcippurāṇam* into French in condensed form. The 'marriage myth' is told in chapter 63 (427 verses) and chapter 64 (82 verses). The Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* is indeed a "rather close translation" of the Sanskrit *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, as Zvelebil (1975: 248) states. Almost the same ramifications for, and insertions about other myths and minor shrines, as in the Sanskrit text, can be found in the Tamil text. Yet, the text is written as a coherent whole. Again, here I will only summarize the parts which are relevant for the storyline of the 'marriage myth'.[36]

Brief summary of the story:

> One day, Pārvatī playfully covered the eyes of Śiva. This caused complete darkness in the world and all *pūjās* and rituals stopped. Śiva recommended her to do penance and worship him and his disciples as expiation for this great offense. Then he explained in which way the *pūjā* should be performed and praised Kāñcī as a highly qualified place for it. The goddess bid farewell and went together with female deities and other friends first to Kāśī, where she worshipped Viśvanātha, then arrived in Kāñcī. She stayed at the cavity near Ulakānītīrtha and developed thirty-two *dharmas*. Desirous to see Śiva, who is present in the form of a mango tree near the Kampā River, Pārvatī walked through the decorated streets of town, where the inhabitants praised her joyfully. After entering the *gopura* of Tiruvekampan, she saw Śiva, who lived there under the mango tree. Immediately she performed an elaborated *pūjā* for him. Having completed it without fault, she went back to the cavity and observed the thirty-two *dharmas*. One day, when she was doing the *pūjā* again, Śiva thought of a holy play and made all waters come together in a big flood in the Kampā River. Pārvatī was very frightened, but with great affection she embraced Śiva closely to protect him from the flood. She left the marks of her breasts and bangles like scars on Śiva's body. Then, the whole world immersed in happiness and all gods with their wives came along. Śiva appeared from the *liṅga* and banished the flood in Sarva Tīrtha. Then, he showed his bridegroom form and granted her the boon that all people in Kāñcī will be blessed. Being asked a second time to tell her wishes, Pārvatī asked that she not be called Kālī any longer and wished for her dark skin color to be made fair. Śiva explained to her that this was only necessary, because Durgā has to appear as Kauśī from her dark skin sheath to destroy the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha. Then, Pārvatī removed her dark skin like a snake, from which Kauśikī arose, and wished, now fair-skinned, for a Gaurī-

35 See Zvelebil (1974: 172, 178). The others are *Periyapurāṇam*, Parañcōti's *Tiruviḷaiyāṭāṛpurāṇam* (Madurai) and *Kantapurāṇam*.

36 The 'marriage myth' comprises over 500 verses in Tamil, written in an 'old' and poetical style. A synopsis in Tamil prose is appended to each chapter in the printed edition of the *Kāñcippurāṇam* at hand. Since the text follows closely the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś), and is, moreover, available as French synopsis by Dessigane (1964), I concentrated only on the text in prose. I am very thankful for the help of my Tamil teacher S. Arokinathan, who made with me an English rendering of the relevant sections.

wedding in Kāñcī. Śiva agreed, since he had already promised Agastya that their wedding shall take place every year on the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival. Later, Kauśikī appeared and asked Śiva for marriage. He assented and assigned her as guard of Kāñcī. Thereupon she was called Kacci Kaṉṉikāppu.

The Sanskrit *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) and the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* are close in respect of their story line and the relative lengths they devote to each narrative theme. Here, I will only deal with the deviations, which are basically two. First, Pārvatī does not form a sand *liṅga* in this version of the 'marriage myth'—either on the banks of the Kampā River or on top of a light-ray *liṅga* as in the Sanskrit *Kāmākṣīmāhātmya* (Ś). This is remarkable, not only in comparison to the Sanskrit source, but also to the other texts, most of which include the sand *liṅga,* and especially with respect to the text's late composition at the end of the eighteenth century. To be sure, Śiva appears from a *liṅga,* which was worshipped and embraced by the goddess, but she did not establish it, and sand as its materiality is not mentioned. It is only mentioned that Śiva was there (in the form of a *liṅga*)[37] at the foot of the mango tree on the banks of the Kampā River when she entered the temple. Second, the narrative theme of Bhadrakālī, who confined the waters of the flood into her skull-bowl, is missing. Śiva banishes the waters straightforwardly into Sarva Tīrtha. As mentioned above, the section with Bhadrakālī appears in the printed edition of the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) slightly misplaced. Possibly, the section is an interpolation, and was not in the manuscript that has been used as source for the Tamil translation. However, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* includes the narrative theme of Bhadrakālī, too, and shows also another parallel to the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś).

Kāmākṣīvilāsa

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*[38] is one of the Sanskrit Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram, which has also been translated into Tamil.[39] It claims to be part of the *Śrīvidyākhaṇḍa* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. Part of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* is the *Devīmāhāmtya*, a central and famous text in the worship of the goddess. By affiliating itself with the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* indicates a Śākta orientation. The name '*Kāmākṣīvilāsa*' highlights the goddess Kāmākṣī as the main actor. However, the text gives almost equally space to the myths of the three major deities of Kanchipuram, Śiva Ekāmranātha, Devī Kāmākṣī, and Viṣṇu Varadarāja. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is a text which has received some attention from scholars. Shulman (1980: 392, fn. 28) notes that it "offers perhaps the most complete and most mature versions of the myths of Kāmākṣī." However, the text's date is disputable. Shulman (1980: 392, fn. 28) and Wilke (1996: 157) are of the opinion that the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is of uncertain date. Nagaswamy (1982: 207-8) argues that the text refers to structures in the Kāmākṣī temple, which are of recent origin. He proposes therefore that it is a late nineteenth-century work, possibly composed at the time of the first printed edition in

37 Dessigane (1964: 86) includes in his translation the '*liṅga*', which, however, is not mentioned in the Tamil verse (63.142) and prose.

38 *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. Beṅgalūr: Bhāratalakṣmī Mudraṇālayam, 1968.

39 The *Kāmākṣilīlāpirapāvam*, first published in 1906, and the *Kāñcimahimai*, first published in 1927, are Tamil renderings in prose of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa.*

1889. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* comprises fourteen chapters. Chapter 8 (13–158) deals with the 'marriage myth' of Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī across 145 verses. The major storyline of the myth is told from verse 13 to 94, with a lengthy description of the wedding party carrying through to verse 158. The description of the wedding hall, the bride's ornaments and the marriage ceremony (KāVi 8.92b–137b) are the same verses as those found in the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) (45.166–213a).[40]

Brief summary of the story:

> Once Pārvatī covered the three eyes of Śiva on Mount Kailāsa. This caused destruction in the world. As a consequence of this offense, Pārvatī's golden body turned black. Distressed, she asked Śiva for a remedy to regain her golden color. He instructed her to go first to the hermitage Badarikāśrama, then to Kāśī and finally to Kāñcī. She followed his order. At Badarikāśrama she stayed in the form of a child with the sage Kātyāyana for eight years. The sage gave her thirteen implements to take with her, which would change when she reached Kāñcī. Then she set forth for Kāśī. There was a terrible famine when she arrived. She stayed there for twelve years, gave food to the people and became known as Annapūrṇā. Afterwards she went to the South. In one place her implements changed in the same manner as the sage Kātyāyana had formerly predicted it. Hence she recognized Kāñcī. She searched for a single mango tree and named it Ekāmra. At its root she built a *liṅga* of sand, worshipped Śiva and performed severe penance. After some time, the sage Nārada came along. He discerned her desire to gain Śiva as husband and indicated the god Kāma as a good means to achieve him. Through Pārvatī's fierce penance and Kāma's spell, the fire of passion inflamed Śiva. As he could not stand the heat any longer, he released Gaṅgā out of his hair and plunged into her cooling water. Afterwards he sent Gaṅgā in the form of the great *pralaya* flood to Kāñcī to interrupt Pārvatī's penance. When Pārvatī saw the flood, she instructed her female attendant Durgā Kālikā to stop it. Durgā gathered the waters and confined them to the skull-bowl in her hand. Hence, Pārvatī gave her the name Pralayabandhinī. However, Śiva released the waters from the skull-bowl again with great wrath. This time Pārvatī thought of her brother Viṣṇu. He appeared in the form of Candrakaṇṭha, so that she almost mistook him for Śiva. Viṣṇu explained her that Śiva comes in the form of the waters and that he will be pleased, if she protects the sand *liṅga*. Thus, when the flood came near, she embraced the sand *liṅga* closely and Śiva became visible. He placed her to his left and she was again shining in her golden color. Then, Śiva proclaimed that their marriage should be performed every year, since this boon was formerly given to Agastya. He assigned Viṣṇu to arrange for the festivities and finally the marriage took place on the tenth day of the great festival for Śiva.

40 Parts of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* have been translated to German in an unpublished master's thesis (Moßner 2008). Moßner (2008: 7) remarks that the preface of the printed edition of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* in Nagari script names as its source an old text of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, published in Kurveṭinagaram, 1889, written in Telugu script. Coincidentally, there exists an old edition of the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś), published in Kurveṭinagaram 1889, written in Telugu script, too (Dessigane 1964: vi). Possibly, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* and the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) have more text passages in common.

As in other versions of the 'marriage myth', the account in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* follows the same model: Pārvatī performs *tapas* and *pūjā*, Śiva tests her by sending a flood, she embraces him and he reveals himself. However, Pārvatī has two stopovers on her way to Kanchipuram. First, she stays in the hermitage of the sage Kātyāyana called Badarikāśrama.[41] Here, she receives thirteen implements that would transform once she reached Kanchi. These implements are:

vyāghrāsana (tiger-skin seat)	→	*somavṛtta* (edifice to install a *liṅga*)[42]
ghaṭa (pot)	→	*sūtraka* (drainage channel at the *liṅga* base)
gaṅgāsaikata (sand of the Gaṅgā)	→	*liṅgarūpa* (form of a *liṅga*)
ākṣamālā (rosary)	→	*bilvamālikā* (garland of *bilva* leaves)
chatra (parasol)	→	*nāgabhūṣaṇaka* (snake ornament)
yogadaṇḍa (staff for ascetic exercises)	→	*triśūla* (trident)
cāmaradvandva (a pair of fly whisk)	→	*yuvatīyugma* (a pair of young woman)
vyajana (fan)	→	*sukarūpaka* (parrot)
dīpadhāra (light stand)	→	*vahnirūpa* (fire)
pustaka (book)	→	*dhenuś* (cow)
vidyādhāra (book stand)	→	*sūcikā* (needle)
taptamudga (roasted mungbeans)	→	*aṅkura* (sprouts of beans)
gaṅgāthīrtha (Gaṅgā water)	→	*payorūpa* (milk)

An interpretation of the transformation of the implements was offered to me by the Śaiva adept (*sādhaka*) Ramanadhan Vaidyanaat.[43] He explained that the implements change so that Pārvatī is able to perform a proper *pūjā* according to the Āgamas. The first set of implements belongs to an ascetic way of life, whereas the second set is adjuncts to perform a temple-style *liṅga pūjā*. They seem to contrast the renouncer (*sannyāsin*) with the

41 Badrikāśrama is modern Badrinath, a major pilgrimage site in North India, and place of one of the Śaṅkara Maṭhas.

42 See http://www.kamakoti.org/kamakoti/kamakshi%20Vilasa/bookview.php?chapnum=8 (accessed 12.02.2018).

43 Interview with Ramanadhan Vaidyanaat, 23.04.2009.

householder (*gṛhastha*). However, the needle and fire are used to perform *tapas*, as Pārvatī is instructed in verse 39: "Hold in the hand the best parakeet, and stand on top of a needle in the middle of five fires."[44] Although the verse describes mortification rituals, *tapas* is, as mentioned above, understood as devotion to Śiva. The other implements are used for the establishment of the sand *liṅga,* its adornment, and proper worship (fig. 7.4 depicts some of the implements).

The second stopover brings Pārvatī to Kāśī, not to worship Śiva Viśvanātha and establish a *liṅga,* as in the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś), but to associate her with the nourishing goddess Annapūrṇā ('full of food'), which underlines the text's preference for the goddess.

Further, in this version of the myth Pārvatī has two helpers. First is Durgā Kālikā, who confines the waters in her skull bowl; hence Pārvatī names her Pralayabandhinī. To recall, in the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) the helping goddess Kālī (Bhadrakālī) was later named Pralayamandā by Śiva. Both names refer to the same event, the stopping of the water that came like the *pralaya* flood. However, in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, Pārvatī is the agent who assigns the new name to Kālī. There is a shrine for the goddess Pralayabandhinī in the second *prākāra* at the Ekāmranātha temple (see fig. 1.9). Possibly, she was also formerly known as Pralayamandā. Today, most people address her as Pralayakālī. The second helper is Viṣṇu, who appears in the form of Candrakaṇṭha, 'having the moon (light) on his throat.' Viṣṇu Candrakaṇṭha is also mentioned in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya.* He has a shrine in the first *prākāra* of the Ekāmranātha temple, known by the Tamil name, Nilātatuṇṭa Perumāḷ[45]

In the preamble to chapter 8, Śiva is described by the known epithet 'he, who bears the breasts' and bangles' marks from Umā's embrace' (KāVi 8.5).[46] Yet, this is not mentioned again in the account of the myth. Essentially, the text only says 'she embraced the *liṅga*' (KāVi 8.84), without the detailed and emotional descriptions found in other versions. It seems the author(s) did not want to stress the embrace and especially not the marks on Śiva's body. Another point here is the Kampā River: the bank of the river is not the scene of the story and the river is not mentioned in chapter 8. However, in the following chapter a reference is made to the Kampā River, where it is described as an invisible river which runs into Sarva tīrtha, and which previously had dried up (KāVi 9.7–9). This suggests that the Kampā River also lost its importance. Possibly, the composition of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is rather late and adapted to the topography.[47]

Kāñcīmāhātmya (V = Vaiṣṇava)

This text, too, bears the name *Kāñcīmāhātmya*,[48] but it differs from the above-mentioned *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) by presenting its myths from a purely Vaiṣṇava perspective. It has

44 KāVi 8.39a: *kare dhṛtvā śukaśreṣṭhaṃ pañcāgnau sūcikopari.*

45 This is one important Viṣṇu shrine, praised by the Vaiṣṇava poet-saint Tirumaṅgai Āḻvār (eighth century) (see Chari 1982: 56).

46 In another chapter Śiva is addressed in a similar way (KāVi 9.11 and 9.52–53).

47 There have been two streams around Kanchipuram, which are dried up now. It is very likely that Kanchipuram was often affected by floods, and that the Kampā River was one of them.

48 *Kāñcīmāhātmyaṃ – Brahmāṇḍapurāṇāntargataṃ.* P.B. Anantācārya (ed). Śāstramuktāvalī No. 26, Conjeeveram/Kāñcī: Sudarśana Press, 1906.

thirty-two chapters, written in Sanskrit (Nagari script) and claims to be connected to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa.* Porcher (1985) published in an article a synopsis in French (1985). The 'marriage myth' is found in chapters 23–25.[49]

Brief summary of the story (chapters 23–25, comprising 139 verses):

> Śiva and Pārvatī quarreled after a game of dice on Mount Kailāsa. Śiva felt offended by Pārvatī's jokes about his dubious appearance and cursed her with ugly eyes and a dark colored, misshaped body. As remedy for the curse he advised her to go to Kāñcī, to a place called Kāmakoṣṭha, which was created by Vāmana (Viṣṇu), and worship Vāmana there at the entrance of the cavity.[50] Pārvatī followed Śiva's instructions, and after one year of severe penance and worship, Vāmana appeared before her and freed her from the curse. Like a snake, she cast off the dark skin, and regained her divine body and beautiful eyes. Vāmana named her Kāmākṣī ('having loving eyes') and designated her to stay in Kanchipuram as the bestower of all that is desired. After some time, she desired to have her husband Śiva near. Thus, Vāmana instructed her to build a *liṅga* made of sand in the northwest and worship it continually with various offerings. Śiva, attracted by her devotion, came in the form of the sun at the end of the world. Pārvatī was heated by this fire and took refuge with Vāmana, who created a single mango tree for shelter. In return, Śiva burned the tree with the fire of his third eye and Pārvatī fainted from the unbearable heat. Again, she meditated on Vāmana, who appeared as Candrakhaṇḍa ('having a part of the moon').[51] He showered nectar on her and on the mango tree, by which the heat declined, and both Pārvatī and the tree were revived. Then, at the root of the mango tree, Pārvatī once again built a *liṅga* out of sand and worshipped it. This time Śiva came near and released the river Gaṅgā out of his hair to frighten Pārvatī with a big flood. Vāmana advised her to appease Gaṅgā, since the river (goddess) was her elder sister. But Gaṅgā became more and more swollen and Pārvatī, in fear for the sandy *liṅga*, embraced it closely, so that she left the marks of her breasts and bangles on it. Then, she cursed Gaṅgā to be treated like an outcast and Gaṅgā seeped away into the earth. Pārvatī started anew with the worship of Śiva and Vāmana. Finally, Śiva appeared on his bull to be united with her at the root of the single mango tree.

The basic storyline of worship, testing, flood, embrace and revelation is also visible in this version of the myth. However, ramifications and details that present Viṣṇu, in his manifestation as Vāmana, as the cause of actions, extend the narrative. Further, a battle between Śiva and Viṣṇu is interwoven in the storyline. The story begins on Mount Kailāsa,

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49 A text titled *Kāñcīkṣetramāhātmya* is accessible through the library of the French Institute of Pondicherry. The text is a transcript (T.No. 1083) from a paper manuscript (D. 15705) of the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai. It is the same text as the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, but the contents are arranged in twenty-eight chapters, instead of thirty-two. The corresponding chapters of the 'marriage myth' are 20–22.

50 Viṣṇu in his manifestation as Vāmana is worshipped in the Ulagaḷanda Perumāḷ temple near the Kāmākṣī temple (Kāmakoṣṭha).

51 Candrakhaṇḍa ('having a part of the moon') became Candrakaṇṭha ('having the moon on his throat') through the mediation of Tamil Cantirakaṇṭaṉ (Shulman 1980: 173).

but the reason for Pārvatī's descent to Kanchipuram is a quarrel after a game of dice, in which she humiliates Śiva and is subsequently cursed to become ugly and dark colored. Only through the grace of Vāmana is she freed from the curse. Moreover, he created the Kāmakoṣṭha (Kāmakōṭṭam), and, after all, installed her at that place with the name Kāmākṣī. The transformation of the goddess from dark to bright color is a theme in all Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas, but the transformation of the eyes is a new element, probably included to explain her name Kāmākṣī ('having loving eyes'). The transformation is not happening through Śiva's appearance, but through Vāmana's grace after excessive penance and worship towards him. However, the goddess wishes to have Śiva as her husband and Vāmana instructs her to build a sand *liṅga* and worship it. Śiva appears and a battle between him and Viṣṇu begins. First, Śiva burns the goddess with his heat. Vāmana creates a single mango tree to give her shelter in its shadow. Then, Śiva burns the tree, too, and Viṣṇu appears as the moon to shower nectar on Pārvatī and the tree. After this episode, Pārvatī builds a sand *liṅga* once more, now under the revived mango tree, and worships it until Śiva releases Gaṅgā out of his hair, who comes in a big flood to frighten her. The Kampā River, however, is not mentioned in this version of the myth. Again, Pārvatī seeks refuge with Vāmana, who advises her to talk to Gaṅgā, without success. When the flood comes, she embraces the sand *liṅga*—the motif which is found in all but one versions of the myth—and leaves upon it the marks of her breasts and bangles. Finally, Śiva appears from the *liṅga* to stay together with her at the single mango tree. Clearly, Śiva is addressed as Pārvatī's husband and manifests in Kanchipuram to be united with her again, but a re-marriage is not mentioned. Far less, Viṣṇu's playing host to the marriage ceremony. The narrative ends with the résumé: 'In that way, the daughter of the mountain king, who has been cursed in a game of dice by the angry Rudra (Śiva), became in Kanchipuram again bright and a heart's joy through Vāmana.'[52] This verse illustrates the intention of the author(s) to present Vāmana as the cause of all actions.

Of particular interest is the episode in which Pārvatī curses the river Gaṅgā, making it an outcast. By extension, everybody who comes into contact with the river also becomes an outcast. Usually, Gaṅgā is regarded as the salvific river par excellence. The curse of Gaṅgā occurs only in this version of the myth. I can offer no explanation for this singular variation, except the underlying jealousy of Pārvatī and Gaṅgā, which is known from pan-Indian myth, and serves as a theme in the oral tradition of the Ekāmranātha temple festival (see Chapter Four).

Aruṇācalamāhātmya

The *Aruṇācalamāhātmya* is, as the name indicates, a text that describes the glory of Aruṇācala, a mountain near Tiruvannamalai. Aruṇācala is associated with the *liṅgodbhava* myth, in which Siva revealed himself in the form of a fiery *liṅga* to prove his supremacy over Brahma and Viṣṇu. The *Aruṇācalamāhātmya* I read[53] is found in the printed edition of the *Skanda Purāṇa*, book 1 (*Māheśvarakhaṇḍa*), section 3 (*Aruṇācalamāhātmya*), which again is divided into two parts (*pūrvārdha* and *uttarārdha*). Part 1 (*pūrvārdha*), chapter

52 *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (V), chapter 25, verse 46.

53 Rocher (1986: 230) mentions also an *Aruṇācalamāhatmya* that claims to be part of the *Liṅga Purāṇa*. It seems to correspond partly with the section in the *Skanda Purāṇa*.

3.23 to 4.52, tells the 'marriage myth' in Kanchipuram. However, the myth does not end with the re-marriage in Kanchipuram. In the *Aruṇācalamāhātmya*, Pārvatī's penance and worship of the sand *liṅga* in Kanchipuram appears merely as a stopover on her way to Aruṇācala.

Brief summary of the story:

> One day, while Śiva and Pārvatī enjoyed themselves on Mount Kailāsa, Pārvatī thoughtlessly closed her hands over Śiva's three eyes, which are the moon, the sun and the fire. Consequently, the entire world was filled with darkness and destruction. As expiation for this improper behavior, Śiva instructed her to perform penance near a single mango tree at the Kampā River in Kanchipuram. Accompanied by female friends, the goddess went to Kanchipuram. There she performed good deeds, practiced severe penance, made a *liṅga* of sand and worshipped it duly. After some time, Śiva, with the intention to test Pārvatī's devotion, caused a big flood in the Kampā River. On seeing this, the goddess became worried about the potential hindrance of her worship and destruction of the sand *liṅga*. Thus, she closely embraced the *liṅga* and pressed her breasts and bangles so hard against it that the impressions of them were left on the *liṅga* like a scar. She heard Śiva's voice telling her she can release the *liṅga,* since the flood had now receded. After this, he declared that the sand *liṅga* worshipped by her will always bless human beings and instructed her to go further to perform penance at the Aruṇācala mountain, where he reveals himself in his fiery form (*tejorūpa*). Before the goddess leaves Kanchipuram, she proclaims that she shall be known as Kāmākṣī at that place.

The 'marriage myth' in the *Aruṇācalamāhātmya* begins with the familiar setting on Mount Kailāsa: Pārvatī blindfolded Śiva's eyes, which caused darkness in the entire world. As expiation for her misbehavior she is sent to Kanchipuram to perform penance near a mango tree on the banks of the Kampā River. She built a sand *liṅga*, and worshipped it. Then, Śiva sent a flood down the river to test her devotion. To protect the *liṅga* she embraced it tightly, leaving upon it the marks of her breasts and bangles. Up to this point, the storyline follows the sequence we know already from the previously discussed texts. In this version of the myth, however, the goddess's effort does not effect Śiva's revelation of himself before her. Pārvatī only hears his divine voice that instructs her to travel further to Aruṇācala (where she once more performs penance to be finally freed from the misdeed of having blindfolded Śiva's eyes). To be sure, the myth acknowledges the sand *liṅga* and praises its salvific power, but Śiva in his manifestation as Ekāmranātha, the 'Lord of the single mango tree', is not mentioned. The final reunion of Śiva and Pārvatī is shifted to Aruṇācala, hence a reunion or re-marriage in Kanchipuram is absent, too. Yet, the presence of Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram has to be explained somehow. Therefore, Pārvatī declares in one verse (4.52), that devotees who worship her as Kāmākṣī at the place shall obtain all that they desire. In the next verse, Pārvatī immediately leaves for Aruṇācala to follow Śiva's command. Thus, Kāmākṣī is not prominent in that version of the myth, being mentioned in one verse only, which may have been interpolated.

Lalitāmāhātmya

The *Lalitāmāhātmya*, also known as *Lalitopākhyāna*, is found at the end of the printed edition of the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* in part 3 (*Uttarabhāga*), section 4 (*Upasaṃhārapāda*), chapters 5 to 44. It is likely that the *Lalitāmāhātmya* was originally an independent work, which has been subsequently appended to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* by Śakti devotees in order to include it among the more authoritative scriptures, and to give the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* a "Śākta colouring," as Tagare (1984: part 4: viii) states.[54] Most Purāṇic texts are difficult to date. Dates proposed for the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* vary between 400 and 1000 CE (Rocher 1986: 157). Datta (1976: 466f.) assumes that the *Lalitāmāhātmya* was written during the reign of the Chola king Rājarāja (985–1014 CE). However, this seems very early considering the fact that the goddess Kāmākṣī, who occurs in inscriptions only by the end of the fourteenth century, is named in the text.[55] Venkataraman (1968: 27) suggests that the parts of the *Lalitāmāhātmya* dealing with the goddess Kāmākṣī were added much later, although he does not specify a date.

As the name *Lalitāmāhātmya* indicates, the main deity, who is glorified in the text, is the goddess Lalitā, also known as Tripurāsundarī. She is the major deity in the Śākta cult of Śrīvidyā (see Chapter Five). The *Lalitāmāhātmya* describes the goddess's origin, her manifestations, and major exploits, such as the destruction of the demon Bhaṇḍāsura. The goddess Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram is regarded as one of her manifestations, and the Kāmākṣī temple is an important center of her worship. Chapters 39 to 41 of the *Lalitāmāhātmya* are exclusively dedicated to Kāmākṣī's deeds and glory. The 'marriage myth' of Śiva and Pārvatī in Kanchipuram is described in thirty-five verses in chapter 40 (verses 10–45).

Brief summary of the story (BṇḍP 3.4.40.10–45):

> Once, as a pastime, Pārvatī blindfolded Śiva's eyes on Mount Kailāsa. Since his eyes are the moon and the sun, the three worlds became dark and all religious rites ceased. As expiation for this misdeed, Śiva instructed her to go to Kāśī and afterwards to Kāñcī. There, she should keep a Tulasī plant in front of herself and perform penance on the banks of the Kampā River to propitiate goddess Kāmākṣī, who destroys all sins. Pārvatī went to Kāñcī and acted accordingly. Pleased with Pārvatī's severe penance, Kāmākṣī manifested, holding the noose, goad, sugarcane bow and five arrows in her hands, and granted her the boon of obtaining Śiva as husband, as she desired. Pārvatī, delighted, praised Kāmākṣī. Then, Kāmākṣī declared: 'What sin can there be in your case? I am you. What is the difference? You are I. You are the destroyer of all sins,' and went directly into Pārvatī's heart. At the same time, Śiva was agitated due to the separation from Pārvatī. He meditated on Kāmākṣī at the root of the single mango tree to regain Pārvatī. Kāmākṣī appeared before him and assigned him to stay forever at her place (*pīṭha*),

54 The *Lalitāmāhātmya* as an independent work is discussed by Datta (1976: 451), Tagare (1984: part 4: viii) and Schwarz Linder (1996: 112).

55 To my knowledge, the first reference to the name Kāmākṣī is an inscription (ARE 1890, No. 29 and ARE 1954/55, No. 316) from the Vijayanagara king Harihara II, dated to 1392 CE.

known as Ekāmra, and to bless Pārvatī at the banks of the Kampā River. Further, she instructed him to refrain from twofold distress, one that arises from yogic activities and one from separation from Pārvatī. Then she vanished into Śiva's heart. Śiva delightedly accepted Pārvatī in accordance with the rules for marriage and took her to Mount Kailāsa.

This version of the 'marriage myth' depicts the events obviously from a Śākta point of view. Śiva and Pārvatī are reunited in marriage due to the grace of Kāmākṣī, who is a manifestation of the omnipotent goddess Lalitā-Tripurāsundarī. Interestingly, and unlike other variations of the myth, the *Lalitāmāhātmya* indicates an equal status for both characters. Pārvatī performs penance, and her husband Śiva, too, performs penance in order to regain her. The first on the banks of the Kampā River, the latter under the mango tree, but both with the intention to please the supreme goddess Kāmākṣī and the wish to become united again. The storyline is very different from other versions of the 'marriage myth'. It begins on Mount Kailāsa and the rationale for Pārvatī's descent to Kanchipuram is the blindfolding of Śiva's eyes, but key elements such as the sand *liṅga,* the flood, and the embrace, are missing. However, other elements like the Kampā River, the mango tree and the marriage are there, but presented differently. Pārvatī performs penance on the banks of the Kampā River, but with a Tulasī plant in front of her, and not the sand *liṅga.* Tulasī is known as Viṣṇu's plant; yet, Pārvatī's penance is directed towards Kāmākṣī. The omission of the sand *liṅga* is easier to understand, since the text centers exclusively on the worship of Kāmākṣī. Pārvatī is not worshipping Śiva, therefore, testing her devotion with a flood and the subsequent embrace of him becomes redundant, too. Thus, the core storyline, as we know it from the earliest references in the *Tēvāram* hymns—*tapas*/worship, testing, flood, embrace and revelation—is not existent in the *Lalitāmāhātmya*. Moreover, the supremacy of the goddess is expressed by the assignment to Śiva to stay at *her* place, known as Ekāmra.

3.2 Narrative themes

A comparison of the numerous variations of the 'marriage myth' shows that the core storyline—*tapas/pūjā*, testing, flood, embrace, and revelation—is shared by all sources, except the *Aruṇācalamāhatmya*, which skips Śiva's revelation, and the *Lalitāmāhātmya*. Yet, there are narrative themes which do not occur in all versions, or which are unique to just one version. In this section I will summarize the themes of the core storyline.

Most versions of the 'marriage myth' rationalize their plots in terms of Pārvatī's blindfolding of Śiva's eyes. This misdeed causes chaos in the world and has to be expiated by Pārvatī. In the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, a quarrel over a game of dice and the subsequent curse on Pārvatī to become ugly is the reason for her descent to earth. Joshi (1996: 4–7) in his study of the iconography of 'Pārvatī in penance' analyzed the related Purāṇic mythology, locating two forms of penance Pārvatī performs after her marriage. In one account, Pārvatī quarrels with Śiva about her dark skin and performs penance to get rid of it. The dark skin sheath is then transformed into Kauśikī, who later kills the two demons Śumbha and Niśumbha, while Pārvatī becomes fair-skinned and is named Gaurī. In the

second account, Pārvatī playfully covers Śiva's eyes, which causes darkness in the world. Because of this misconduct, Pārvatī has to practice austerities. However, Joshi analyzed only major Purāṇas and the *Mahābhārata*. Actually, the Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram blend both forms of Pārvatī's post-marriage penance. In most versions, the rationale is the blindfolding, yet, the transformation from dark-skinned to fair-skinned goddess and the creation of the goddess Kauśikī is included in the myth, too.

One text, distinguished in this regard, is the *Periyapurānam*. Here, the rationale for Pārvatī's descent to Kanchipuram is her desire to practice *pūjā* in the Āgamic way. The text refers frequently to the Āgamas and the performance of Āgamic *pūjā*. Additionally, the *Ēkāmparanātar Ulā* stresses *pūjā* according to the Āgamas. Further, a reference to the *Kāmikāgama* appears in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. The *pūjā* is also important in other versions of the myth, but focuses less explicitly on a performance in the Āgamic way. However, the descriptions of the *pūjā* in these versions are essentially Āgamic, mentioning for example purification rituals such as *bhūtaśuddhi*, or the imposition of mantras (*nyāsa*), and so on. Some texts did not consider it necessary to underline the Āgamic way, possibly because Āgamic *pūjā* was already widespread and well known at the time of their composition. Besides, texts presenting a rather sectarian view, such as the *Lalitāmāhātmya*, might not have been interested in stressing the Āgamic way.

In the South Indian philosophical system of Śaiva Siddhānta, the terms *tapas* and *pūjā* are often used interchangeably, understood as devotion for Śiva. Many Tamil Purāṇas even state that worship at a shrine is a superior path to truth than renunciation, as Shulman (1980: 357, fn. 7) notes. This notion is also expressed in two of the texts under consideration here. First, in the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) 45.20, Śiva stops Pārvatī's penance and encourages her to perform *pūjā* for him. Second, in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa,* a preference for worship over renunciation is indicated by the transformation of the implements from articles associated with an ascetic lifestyle into adjuncts used for temple-style *liṅga pūjā.* All versions of the myth, except the *Lalitāmāhātmya*, stress the goddess's worship and describe the performance of *pūjā,* whether to a pillar or sand *liṅga.*

While Pārvatī performs the *pūjā*, Śiva is sending a flood to test her devotion. One of Śiva's characteristics is his tendency to test and trick his devotees with his divine games (Tam. *tiruviḷaiyāṭal*). In the same way, he tests the goddess in the myth. In some versions it is the river Gaṅgā that appears as a flood, in others, the primordial waters. Most versions, however, mention that the flood comes in the Kampā River.

Consequently, Pārvatī embraces the pillar, sand *liṅga* or body of Śiva so tight that she leaves the marks of her breasts and bangles on him. In some versions, Śiva is so touched that he becomes soft by her embrace. The embrace and the marks of the goddess's breasts appear already in the *Tēvāram* hymn of Campantar in the middle of the seventh century. The goddess's embrace and the subsequent marks is the distinctive feature of Śiva in Kanchipuram.[56] It is also frequently depicted on temple pillars and other materials, and can be regarded as the emblem of Śiva Kanchi (see Chapter Seven). However, it seems that the

56 To be sure, the image of the embrace is known from other myths, too, for example Mārkaṇḍeya clasped the *liṅga* to escape death. Scars or marks on the *liṅga* are a recurring theme in South Indian Sthalapuranas as well. Yet, marks of the goddess's breasts are particular to Kanchipuram. The motif of the wounded *liṅga*, has been studied in detail by Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1987: 23–47).

closeness of the embrace, and especially the reference to the marks of breasts and bangles, is avoided in modern depictions and downplayed in some texts. For example, an English translation of the *Aruṇācalamāhatmya* states "she devoutly adorned the *liṅga* clasped to Her breast" (Subramanian 2004: 21), whereas the Sanskrit text says "she pressed the nipples of her breasts hard against the *liṅga*" (4.31). Obviously, sexual connotations are omitted. Yet, Śiva reveals himself because of the tight embrace, and not only through the (Āgamic) *pūjā*.

After Śiva's revelation, the Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram in particular concentrate on the re-marriage and lengthy descriptions of the marriage party. They also specify the date of the marriage as Paṅkuṉi Uttiram on the last day of the great festival. However, at present the marriage is celebrated on the tenth day of the thirteen-day festival, which corroborates the assumption that the *mahotsava* has been built around Paṅkuṉi Uttiram and was extended to a thirteen-day festival (see Chapter Two).

3.3 Concluding remarks

I examined the 'marriage myth' in nine textual sources, which have been produced in a time period spanning over a millennium (ca. seventh to eighteenth century). The texts differ in style and length. For example, the *Tēvāram* hymns from the seventh century describe the core of the myth very concisely in a few lines, whereas the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas dedicate lengthy passages to it. Some versions are extremely dense and complex, incorporating additional themes and elements which would have been interesting to examine more closely, such as the goddess's identity as Dharmadevī and her role in establishing and fostering the thirty-two *dharmas*, or Viṣṇu's role as helper to stop a flood, which is also known from the *Hastagirimāhātmya*, or the relation of the temple's architecture to shrines mentioned in the Sthalapurāṇas. However, I touched on these themes only briefly, since my focus is on the myth's themes that are associated with the contemporary performance of the marriage rituals on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram.

The analysis of the different sources has shown that a core storyline—*tapas/pūjā*, testing, flood, embrace, and revelation—runs through almost all versions. Clearly, motifs have been adapted to changing circumstances, such as the shift from embracing Kampam, the pillar, to the sand *liṅga*. Besides, each text features some motifs of the core story line more than others or highlights different themes. For example, the *Tēvāram* poet-saints underline in their hymns the goddess's *bhakti* towards Śiva. Cēkkiḻār, a Śaiva Siddhānta scholar and author of the *Periyapurāṇam*, promotes Āgamic *pūjā* in his version of the 'marriage myth'. The 'twin poets', who composed the *Ēkāmparnātar Ulā,* place special emphasis on the goddess's embrace and her breast marks on Śiva's body, as may be appropriate for a love poem. The authors of the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas embellish the 'marriage myth' with themes known from the pan-Indian tradition, and some of them utilize the motifs of the core storyline in a modified form, to present their respective god as superior. Thus, the different versions of and variations in the Kanchipuram 'marriage myth' often represent the interests of the authors, the religious community with which they are affiliated, and also the literary genre.

Considering that Tamil temple myths developed through the fusion of local and transregional elements, the Kanchipuram 'marriage myth' has been influenced by three major currents. First, *bhakti*—the devotion to Śiva, mainly expressed in the motif of the goddess's embrace and the marks of her breasts and bangles on Śiva's body. This seems to be a place specific theme and unique feature of Śiva Ekāmranātha. Another local element is the notion of the thirty-two *dharmas,* or Viṣṇu's appearance as Candrakaṇṭha. Second, the 'marriage myth' is influenced by the pan-Indian tradition, which is mostly felt in the Sthalapurāṇas. A known theme from the pan-Indian Śaiva mythology is that Pārvatī performs *tapas* to gain Śiva as husband. Other elements are the promise given to sage Agastya to witness the second marriage on earth, and the manifestation of the goddess Kauśikī from Pārvatī's dark skin sheath. However, in the Kanchipuram 'marriage myth' the latter is modified, because Śiva marries goddess Kauśikī, too. Possibly, this serves to connect the two local goddesses Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ to the pan-Indian myth, and to adapt the pan-Indian mythological theme to the local situation of having two intimately connected goddesses in Kanchipuram (see Chapter Five). Third, the South Indian philosophical system of Śaiva Siddhānta must have influenced the preference for *pūjā* in the 'marriage myth'. *Tapas* is mentioned casually, but the true means is *pūjā* according to the Āgamas and, in line with *bhakti,* only the goddess's devoted embrace makes Śiva appear and eventually re-marry her. Thus, the Kanchipuram 'marriage myth' features local elements and place specific themes influenced by three major currents, namely *bhakti*, pan-Indian Śaiva mythology, and the South Indian philosophical system of Śaiva Siddhānta.

4 Rituals on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram

This chapter addresses the events and rituals which take place on the marriage day and into the night. Taken together, the rituals related to the marriage run for almost twenty-four hours. The rituals begin in the afternoon of the marriage day, which is the tenth day of the *mahotsava*. Late at night, between three and five o'clock, during the auspicious star constellation Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, the marriage rituals are performed. A procession then takes place, which runs until noon the next day. Only then, at about one o'clock in the afternoon, does the 'morning' procession start, which marks the beginning of the eleventh festival day. The following account of the events and rituals are based on my observation of the festival over three successive years, from 2009 to 2011. In addition, I gathered information during informal talks and interviews with priests, donors and participants, while utilizing a few textual sources.

In the preceding chapter, I showed how a core storyline runs through almost all versions of the 'marriage myth', which serves as reference for the re-enactment of the marriage on the tenth day of the Ekāmranātha temple festival. The storyline is as follows: Pārvatī performs *tapas/pūjā*, Śiva tests her by sending a flood, she embraces him (in the form of a pillar or sand *liṅga*), he reveals himself, and, in some versions, finally re-marries her in Kanchipuram. Key scenes of the myth, such as the penance, the establishment and worship of the sand *liṅga*, Śiva's revelation, and the marriage, are commemorated and re-enacted. However, the embrace, which is a constituent element of the myth, is not re-enacted during the festival's rituals.

I describe the events in a chronological order, first presenting goddess Ēlavārkuḻali as the main actor in the narrative. I prioritize Ēlavārkuḻali over Ekāmranātha because she has a more active role in the events of the wedding day, whereas Ekāmranātha remains in the temple until night. The sequence of her actions, and accordingly the subchapters, are: Ēlavārkuḻali's trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam, the *tapas* and worship of the sand *liṅga*, and the marriage ceremony. Festival participants explained some of the events to me, and I include these oral narratives too. At the end of the chapter, I discuss the relation between the performed rituals, the written sources, and the oral tradition(s).

4.1 Okkapiranthan Kulam – the meeting of the goddesses

A calm atmosphere prevails over the Ekāmranātha temple in the afternoon of the wedding day. Vendors doze in the shade of their handcarts, people rest on the stone floor in the shade of the *maṇḍapas*, and only a few children run around as if unaffected by the midday heat. The sleepy atmosphere is suddenly interrupted, however, when the temple's main door opens. Upon hearing the sounds of drum and flute, people raise their heads, and hurry to get up when a small procession comes near: it is the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali, accompanied by two of her priests, and a torch and parasol bearer. Her appearance on this day differs;

she wears a simple dress and lacks her usual array of splendid ornaments. Not a single flower garland is tied around her neck. Her hair is tied into a high knot, a hairstyle she wears only on this day—and, she is alone! This is the only time she will leave the temple without Ekāmranātha (fig. 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Ēlavārkuḻali leaving the Ekāmranātha temple

The goddess Ēlavārkuḻali leaves the Ekāmranātha temple to go south to a rural part of Kanchipuram, called Okkapiranthan Kulam. Okkapiranthan Kulam denotes the area around a pond (Tam. *kuḷam*) of the same name. The narrow, unfrequented roads and small houses with tiled roofs and tiny porches convey a village-like ambiance. Yet, the area has changed in recent years. Some years back only dirt roads led to the pond, whereas now they are paved. Also, increasing numbers of newly constructed, two-storied, concrete buildings stand side by side with the small houses. In 2011 the government pruned the vegetation of the pond, and built a bank reinforcement and promenade with light posts, which gives the formerly overgrown pond the look of a suburban recreational area.

At the beginning of Ēlavārkuḻali's journey only a few people stand at the roadside, but the numbers increase the closer the procession gets to Okkapiranthan Kulam (see fig. 4.2). Groups of people stand in front of their houses, often close to the wall to get some shade from the overhanging roofs. A woman pours water from a vessel on the street to cool the hot ground and to prevent dust flying up when the procession passes by. Other women skillfully draw *kōlams*[1] in front of their houses. When Ēlavārkuḻali approaches, a family

1 A decorative design drawn with rice powder in front of houses to create prosperity for the home.

member, often the lady of the house or a daughter, brings a plate with offerings of *tāmpūlam*[2], flowers, bananas, sometimes a coconut, coins, and a camphor cube. She hands the plate to the priest, who orders the torchbearer to light the camphor. The priest then shows the flame and offerings to the goddess. Meanwhile, some family members prostrate in front of the goddess and encourage their children to do the same. The priest takes the flowers from the plate and places them at the goddess's feet. In exchange he puts another piece of flower garland, which was lying at the goddess's feet, on the plate with some *kumkum*[3], and hands the blessed offerings back. When the woman takes the plate back, she protects the flame with her hands and rushes into the houses, hoping that the flame is not extinguishing before it can be shown to the deities in the house shrine. This mode of welcome and worship is repeated in almost every household in Okkapiranthan Kulam, and the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali pauses generously for every single offering.[4]



Figure 4.2 Welcoming the goddess in Okkapiranthan Kulam

Okkapiranthan Kulam is only about one kilometer from the Ekāmranātha temple, but the goddess processes at a slow pace through every street in the neighborhood, so that it takes nearly four hours before she reaches her final destination, a *maṇḍapa* near the banks of the pond at Okkapiranthan Kulam. The streets are bathed in the red-golden light of the setting sun when the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali enters the *maṇḍapa*. The priests, who have accompanied her during the procession, look tired. Their hands and bodies are red-stained from the

2 Rolled betel leaves with areca nuts inside.

3 Tam. *kuṅkumam*. A red powder made from dried turmeric mixed with lime. Usually applied on the forehead.

4 Whereas the bigger processions have specific stops, where devotees can bring their offerings.

never-ending distribution of *kumkum* powder. As of now, two other priests take over. They curtain off the public to change the goddess's dress; she gets an *abhiṣeka* with turmeric, scented powder, fruits, milk, curd, honey, tender coconut, sandal and rose water, after which the *alaṃkāra* takes place. The goddess Ēlavārkuḻali will be dressed in a bridal costume with a long golden braid and other ornaments appropriate for her wedding.

When the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali arrives at the *maṇḍapa*, two other goddesses, Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, await in thatched huts, which have been temporarily constructed on the open space beside the *maṇḍapa* towards the pond's bank (see map, fig. 2.23). Each goddess leaves her respective temple in the morning between nine and ten o'clock and processes in a manner similar to Ēlavārkuḻali through the streets of Okkapirantan Kulam, pausing at every house to receive offerings, until they reach the thatched huts in the early afternoon. They too receive the *abhiṣeka* and *alaṃkāra* at Okkapiranthan Kulam. By the time the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali arrives at the place at sunset, the goddesses are already prepared for public *darśan*.

In the evening, the houses on the road leading to the gathering place of the goddesses are lit with chains of yellow, green and red lights. Vendors placed their goods on the side of the road, others sell fried tapioca chips and boiled peanuts from small handcarts. The streets and the open space in front of the *maṇḍapa* are packed with people, who flock to get the *darśan* of each of the three goddesses.



Figure 4.3 Procession of the three goddesses;
left: Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, center: Ēlavārkuḻali, right: Kāmākṣī

At around ten o'clock, the three goddesses set out together on a grand procession to the Ekāmranātha temple. At the beginning, in the small road at Okkapiranthan Kulam, the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali takes the lead, followed by Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ.

Afterwards, when the streets are wide enough, the three goddesses process almost next to each other, with Ēlavārkuḻali in the middle. On the way to the Ekāmranātha temple, the procession pauses at the Kacchapeśvara temple, where all three goddesses are placed in one line beside each other, and fireworks are released. Different musical bands and a dance group bearing Śaivite symbols, such as the trident, accompany the procession. Those who awaited the goddesses at the roadside join the crowd, following the procession up to the Ekāmranātha temple, with a brief pause at the Śaṅkara Maṭha. The goddesses process together up to the sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa* in front of the Ekāmranātha temple, where all three are worshipped with light (*dīpārādhana*) (see fig. 4.3). Then, the goddess Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ return to their respective temples, while the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali enters the Ekāmranātha temple followed by many devotees.

Why Okkapiranthan Kulam?

In the course of the festival's processions, deities typically visit their surrounding properties and *maṇḍapas*, where they are ceremonially received (*maṇṭappaṭi*) and rest for some time. Often, the *maṇḍapas* are in the temple's possession, or individuals have received temple honors to play host to the deity at their *maṇḍapa* on a certain day of the festival. For example, at the Ekāmranātha temple festival, different *maṇḍapas* are visited on the third, fourth, fifth, ninth, tenth and eleventh days (see Chapter Two). The *maṇḍapa* at Okkapiranthan Kulam is owned by the Ekāmranātha temple. Unfortunately, the temple's office does not have documents showing whether the *maṇḍapa* was donated to the temple, or the time of its construction, or whether it was especially built for the goddess's visit on the afternoon of the marriage day.[5]

However, a reference to Okkapiranthan Kulam and the *maṇḍapa* is found in the *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (*Kanchipuram Directory*). The book, published in 1935, describes various temples, *maṇḍapas*, and *tīrthas* in Kanchipuram. The account of Okkapiranthan Kulam states that the 'goddess Ēlavārkuḻali is taken to the Ekāmranātha temple in her marriage dress from the bank of this pond' (1935: 28). Of the *maṇḍapa* it is noted that: 'On the tenth day of the Ekāmranātha *mahotsava*, during the month of Paṅkuṉi, for Ēlavārkuḻali, Kāmākṣī and Karukkiṉilamarntavaḷ *maṇṭapappaṭi*[6] and *alaṃkāra* takes place here' (1935: 98). Surprisingly, Karukkiṉilamarntavaḷ is mentioned as one of the accompanying goddesses, and not Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ as is customary today. The worship of Karukkiṉilamarntavaḷ, and her temple, have a long tradition.[7] However, the hereditary priest of the temple did not know about a participation of Karukkiṉilamarntavaḷ in the marriage festival in previous times, or of any other relation to the Ekāmranātha temple. Possibly, a name has been mistaken in the account from the *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari*. However, the account indicates that it has been a tradition since at least the early

5 Today the *maṇḍapa* is used as storage for wood, which is removed a few days before the festival begins.

6 In modern texts, *maṇṭappaṭi* or *maṇṭakappaṭi* (responsibility for the ceremony of receiving the deity at a *maṇṭapam* during a festival). In spoken Tamil usually 'mandapadi'.

7 Two inscriptions (ARE 1975–76, No. 210, 211) from the temple of Karukkiṉilamarntavaḷ in Kanchipuram are dated to the eleventh century.

twentieth century to go to the *maṇḍapa* in Okkapiranthan Kulam and meet two other goddesses there.

How is the goddess's visit at Okkapiranthan Kulam related to the 'marriage myth'? Is there a reference to the place in one of the Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram? A leaflet from the Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ temple, situated on the banks of the pond, explains that the pond is named Okkapiranthan Kulam because 'two sages were born as twins at the same time at this natural spring' (Tam. *okka-p-iranṭu*, 'two that are similar'). The leaflet also mentions two other names for the pond: *aivar arampaiyar tīrttam* and *cakōtarar tīrttam*. A reference to the latter is made in the *Kāñcippurāṇam*. Chapter 24, comprising ten verses, deals with *cakōtaratīrttam* (Skt. *sahodaratīrtha*) and *vaṉṉīcam* (Skt. *vahnīśa*), a *liṅga*, housed in a small shrine on the banks of the pond. *Kāñcippurāṇam* 24.6 connects the naming of the pond to a story about Agni, who was hiding in the pond and considered it as his brother. Hence, the pond is called *sahodara* ('born of the same womb'). Thus, it becomes clear that while the Tamil term *okkapiranthan* and the Sanskrit term *sahodara* have the same notion 'twin/brother', the background stories differ. However, the stories told in *Kāñcippurāṇam* 24 bear no relation to the 'marriage myth' or the goddess's visit to Okkapiranthan Kulam on the marriage day.

Oral narratives

Oral narratives circulate, explaining why the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali goes to Okkapiranthan Kulam and meets the other goddesses there. The majority of people I talked with take the view that the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali left the Ekāmranātha temple in anger. For example, during the procession to Okkapiranthan Kulam, the head of the bearers of the deity brought my attention to the goddess, saying: 'Look at her, you can see in her face how angry she is!' Others interpret the goddess's hairstyle, simple dress and lack of ornaments as a sign that she left the temple hastily and in anger. Yet, opinions about the reasons for her anger differ. A woman in the streets of Okkapiranthan Kulam explained to me the reason for the goddess's anger: 'Ēlavārkuḻali comes to her mother's place because she is angry about an affair of her husband.' Another woman was even more specific, saying: 'Ekāmranātha has one hidden wife, who is Kāmākṣī. Ēlavārkuḻali did not know about it. She is very angry.' The motif of Ēlavārkuḻali's jealousy about either an affair or Ekāmranātha's first wife is prominent in interviews I took at Okkapiranthan Kulam. Three interviewees also explicitly name Kāmākṣī as Ekāmranātha's first wife. Women more often than not expressed jealousy of another wife, whereas men attributed Ēlavārkuḻali's anger to 'general marital problems.' While speaking with a group of people waiting in the streets of Okkapiranthan Kulam for the goddess, a woman told me 'there is another wife,' and a man next to her interrupted her saying 'no, it is not like this.' Similarly, an old man interposed: 'This is the normal trouble between husband and wife, there is no other wife.' Most people regard Okkapiranthan Kulam as the goddess's home or mother's place, where she takes refuge after the quarrel with Ekāmranātha. The two goddesses Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ take on the role of her friends or sisters who convince her to go back to Ekāmranātha and finally marry him. A male resident of Okkapiranthan Kulam expressed it as follows: 'Ēlavārkuḻali comes here fighting with Ekāmranātha. The other goddesses, Kāḷikāmpāḷ and Kāmākṣī, will console her saying that such fights are common in any household. Together they take her back to Ekāmranātha in the evening and then return back.'

The notion that Ēlavārkuḻali leaves the Ekāmranātha temple in anger is widespread, whether the ultimate reason is another woman or general marital disharmony. Priests of the Ekāmranātha temple also give an account in terms of the goddess's anger, although most of them concede that this is the belief of the people and that, actually, nobody knows the motivation of the deities. They rather depict the events at Okkapiranthan Kulam as a tradition of the girl taking her leave from home before the marriage.

Traditionally, in marriages the bride is dressed and ornamented for her marriage, then takes leave from her mother's place and is brought to the location where the marriage rituals take place. Likewise, the events at Okkapiranthan Kulam are understood as the bride's customary, pre-marriage practices. A priest of the Ekāmranātha temple explained to me: 'If you see, nowadays the girls are going to the beauty-parlor to get decorated for the *januvasam* (procession of the bride and bridegroom), like that our Mother (Ēlavārkuḻali) is going to Okkapiranthan Kulam for getting decorated.'[8] During the preparations for the marriage the bride is in the company of female family members and friends (Tam. *tōḻi*), who offer emotional support and escort her in the bridal procession (Tam. *peṇ aḻaippu*) to the place of the wedding. Participants generally spoke about the two accompanying goddesses as *tōḻi,* the female friends of the bride, and referred to the nocturnal procession to the temple as *peṇ aḻaippu.* In this way, the rituals on the afternoon of the wedding day resemble the procedures for a human bride before her marriage.

Goddesses: Three, Four, Seven or Eight?

In the three years I participated in the festival, two other goddesses, Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, accompanied the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali in the evening procession to the Ekāmranātha temple. These three goddesses together form the core group. Until 2008, the local goddess of Okkapiranthan Kulam, known as Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ, had joined the bridal procession as a fourth goddess. When I came there in 2009 the residents of Okkapiranthan Kulam had recently demolished her shrine, which stood on the bank of the pond near the Vahnīśvara shrine, to make room for a new, larger shrine for Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ. Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ does not join the procession until her new shrine is completed and inaugurated.[9] However, it seems Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ does not have the same status as Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. She joins the procession only as a courtesy to the residents of Okkapiranthan Kulam, as a priest from the Ekāmranātha temple emphasized to me: 'Since the goddess Kaṉṉiyammaṉ is their village goddess, she also comes, but she should come at the back only.'[10] The line up of goddesses in processions and other rituals is regulated and reflects a hierarchy. Thus, 'to come at the back' of a procession indicates a minor status. Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ did follow the procession of the other goddesses at the back, as video footage of the 2008 event shows.[11] By contrast, a

8 Interview with Kamesvara Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 18.04.2009.

9 During the renovation of a temple's sanctum the power of the deity is removed from the idol and 'stored' in materials such as *attimaram* wood. After renovation the deity's power is transferred to the idol, which then becomes its full efficacy again. The Tamil term for the deity's 'inoperative state' is *pālālayam*.

10 Interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 05.04.2010.

11 Ute Hüsken and Narayanan Subramanian have filmed the 2008 event.

resident of Okkapiranthan Kulam interpreted the processional line up in favor of the local goddess: 'Kaṉṉi Ammaṉ is the eldest, so she will come back in the end.'

Yet, some people mentioned to me that in previous years, seven or eight goddesses joined the procession. Speaking of seven goddesses reminds me of the Saptakaṉṉis, the Seven Sisters, a prominent group of goddesses in Tamil Nadu.[12] People who mentioned eight goddesses related them to the eight direction goddesses, which protect Kanchipuram.[13] However, the names of the safeguarding deities vary; some regard Akāya Kaṉṉiammaṉ as one of them, others Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. A list of the eight direction goddesses from a priest of the Ekāmranātha temple, for example, did not include any of them, but instead Karukkiṉilamarntavaḷ, who was mentioned in the *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* as one of the accompanying goddesses. The groupings of the goddesses as either seven sisters or eight safeguarding deities run parallel and do not exclude each other. When I asked why the other goddesses no longer join the procession, a priest of the Ekāmranātha temple explained that 'some came from small temples, that can not cope any longer.'[14] Small temples may lack local and therefore economic support, and often have no priest or caretaker.

Discussion

The procession to Okkapiranthan Kulam encompasses various themes and involves a number of aspects. The goddess Ēlavārkuḻali goes to the *maṇḍapa*, which belongs to the Ekāmranātha temple, to undergo the *abhiṣeka* and *alaṃkāra* for the marriage ceremonies. This practice mirrors human marriages. The term for the accompanying friends, *tōḻi*, is used to address the goddesses who accompany Ēlavārkuḻali in the evening procession, which mirrors the ceremony of bringing the bride to the place of the wedding (Tam. *peṇ aḻaippu*).

A reference to the bride's procession is given in the second and later part of the ritual handbook *Mahotsavavidhi*:

> At a pavilion near a holy bathing place, the Goddess is gratified with food and other offerings. Respectable married women (*suvāsinīs*) honor the Goddess, and she is raised onto a jeweled pedestal, accompanied by singing and auspicious sounds. She is taken to the temple, surrounded by a retinue of seven sword-bearing women, and proceeds to the wedding pavilion (*kalyāna-maṇḍapa*), where she is placed next to Śiva. (Davis 2010: 132–3, fn. 233)

This description parallels the events at Okkapiranthan Kulam: the *maṇḍapa* near the tank, the veneration of the goddess, and the festive procession back to the temple. One could even imagine a connection between the Saptakaṉṉis and the seven sword-bearing women as a kind of female protective force that escorts the goddess on her way to the marriage. It appears that the goddess's trip to a *maṇḍapa* and the subsequent procession to the temple are fundamental parts of the marriage rituals, as it is described in the *Mahotsavavidhi*.[15]

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12 The Saptakaṉṉis are related to the Saptamātṛkās, as the group is called in the north of India.

13 The three major temples in Kanchipuram (Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī and Varadarāja) have their own groups of safeguarding deities, though some of them overlap.

14 Interview with Suresh Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 02.04.2010.

15 The same is in practice at the Kacchapeśvara temple in Kanchipuram. Here, the deities' marriage is

Oral narratives explain why the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali processes to Okkapiranthan Kulam. The popular version is that she is angry with her (soon-to-be) husband Ekāmranātha. Two symbols in the performance are interpreted as indicators of this. First, Ēlavārkuḻali lacks her usual splendid style and ornaments, which gives rise to the assumption that she left the temple in a hurry. Second, she leaves the temple alone. This is the only time throughout the year Ēlavārkuḻali can be seen outside the temple compound without Ekāmranātha in front of, or beside her.[16] Usually, only unmarried goddesses leave the temple alone, whereas married goddesses either stay in the temple or leave it together with their husband. Ēlavārkuḻali's marital status is ambiguous. Thus, her unadorned appearance and the fact that she leaves alone are interpreted as evidence of a hasty, post-quarrel departure. Moreover, Okkapiranthan Kulam is regarded as her mother's home, the only place to seek refuge after a marital dispute. This interpretation is not shared by all, however. Ekāmranātha temple priests emphasize that for practical considerations the goddess is brought unadorned to the *maṇḍapa* at Okkapiranthan Kulam, where she receives an *abhiṣeka* and *alaṃkāra*, so that in the evening she can be taken, in bridal costume, to the Ekāmranātha temple.

In addition, the well-known theme of Pārvatī's jealousy is interlaced in the oral narrative of the goddess's anger with her husband. In its pan-Indian form it is often jealousy with Gaṅgā, who dwells in the hair of Śiva. However, only a priest of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple referred to Gaṅgā when he explained the events to me: 'The Lord is having Gaṅgā on his head and these two (Ēlavārkuḻali and Gaṅgā) get into problem. Okkapiranthan Kulam is like her (Ēlavārkuḻali) mother's place, so when she gets angry she goes to that place. Then Kāmākṣī, our Kāḷikāmpāḷ and all go there. They get her pacified and look that she is clad in her marriage dress. Then they bring her to the Ekāmranātha temple and go back to their respective shrines.'[17] The majority of people I spoke with in Okkapiranthan Kulam referred to an affair or a first wife, without naming her, although three explicitly named Kāmākṣī as Ekāmranātha's first wife. This suggests that the pan-Indian motif of Pārvatī's jealousy is made manifest locally in Kanchipuram in the form of a jealousy between Ēlavārkuḻali and Kāmākṣī.

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celebrated on the fifth day of the temple's *mahotsava*, which is held in the month of Cittirai (mid-April to mid-May). Sundara Ambikā, the consort of Kacchapeśvara, leaves the temple at five o'clock to go to Pillayar Palayam. She, too, wears only a simple dress and is worshipped at every house until she reaches the Thirmethalinathar temple in Pillayar Palayam, where she gets the *abhiṣeka* and *alamkāra*. She leaves from Pillayar Palayam at ten o'clock in the evening. A village goddess accompanies her up to the entrance of the Kacchapeśvara temple and returns, while Sundara Ambikā enters for the marriage ceremonies. The marriage ceremony at the Kacchapeśvara temple is similar to the Ekāmranātha temple, except that the goddess does not perform *tapas* and worship of the sand *liṅga*. The reason for the goddess's trip to Pillayar Palayam is explained by the fact that the Kacchapeśvara temple is the community temple of the Śaiva Vellalam Modalyars, who mainly live in Pillayar Palayam (interviews with Prabha Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha and Kacchapeśvara temple, 03.04.2010 and 29.03.2011).

16 Ēlavārkuḻali processes alone during the Navarātri festival, but only up to the Vāhana Maṇḍapa in the fifth *prākāra* of the temple and not outside the temple compound.

17 Interview with Dhandapani Gurukkal, Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, 12.03.2011.

4.2 *Tapas* and the worship of the sand *liṅga*

After the farewell to Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpaḷ at the sixteen-pillared *maṇḍapa*, the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali enters the Ekāmranātha temple and goes straight to the Kampā Nadī tank next to the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa. The Kampā Nadī tank is understood as the visible part of the subterranean Kampā River, on the banks of which, according to mythology, the goddess performed *tapas* and built the sand *liṅga*. The tank is only accessible from the open field on its north side, where a wide flight of stairs leads down to the water. Its other sides are flanked by low-ceilinged colonnades, which demand some skill from the carriers to bring the goddess unscathed to the south side of the tank, where she is placed on a small podium. Only Ēlavārkuḻali's priests and a few other people stay with her, while she is kept isolated for some hours on this side of the tank in a symbolic representation of the goddess's penance (fig. 4.4).[18]

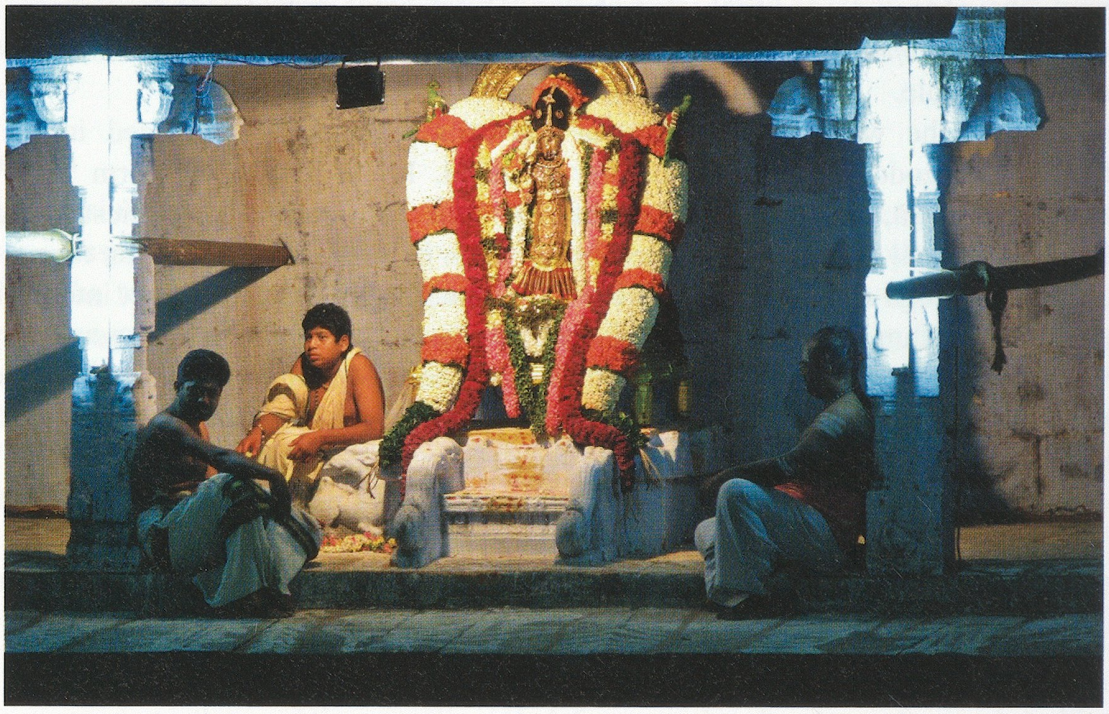


Figure 4.4 The goddess's *tapas* at the Kampā Nadī tank

The atmosphere at the tank is rather contemplative, while the background noise of the festival—loudspeakers broadcasting the cultural program, shrieks from children riding the

18 Apparently, the same is practiced at the festival in Chidambaram. Loud (2004: 144) observes that the goddess Śivakāmasundarī is taken to a tank, which "commemorates the time when the goddess performed *tapas* by standing on top of a needle." However, at the Ekāmranātha temple it has also been customary to bring the goddess for one day to the Kaṅkaṇeśvara temple in Kanchipuram. This temple is mentioned in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* as the place where the goddess wore a *kappu* (Skt. *kaṅkaṇa*), or bracelet, as a protective cord before she commenced the rituals. Up to twenty-five years ago Ēlavārkuḻali was brought there on Aippaci *mūlam* and a golden bracelet was put around her wrist. This day marked the beginning of the time of her *tapas*. For want of donors this practice stopped. Today, the goddess's penance is only symbolized by the remoteness and separation from Ekāmranātha at the Kampā Nadī tank (interview with Anand Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 16.04.2009).

swing boat—is audible from the temple's entrance area.[19] However, after some time, the quietness is interrupted by a group of people, led by drummers and a man who wears a cloth around his mouth and head, and bears a wooden pole on his shoulders to which two brass vessels are tied (Tam. *kāvaṭi*) (see fig. 6.7). The group walks along the tank's colonnades to the side where Ēlavārkuḻali is placed on the podium. A brown garland, made from a fragrant root called *kuruvi vel* (see fig. 4.5), is taken from one vessel as an offering to the goddess and adorned to her by one of her priests. Soon afterwards, two similar groups of people, led by a man bearing a *kāvaṭi*, approach the goddess to offer her garlands, one made of *tumpai* flower, the other of rose. The men belong to the Vaniya Chettiar community, whose association, the "Periya Kāñcipuram Vāṇiyar Tarma Paripālaṉ Caṅkam," is the official donor for the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals (see Chapter Six). The three groups leave after the adornment of the different flower garlands, and the tank becomes quiet once again. People look tired from the long waiting time. Some have difficulty keeping their eyes open and doze off, while others talk with their neighbors in low voices.



Figure 4.5 *Kuruvi vel* garland

19 The contrasting ambiance is certainly reinforced by a guarded gate between the Kampā Nadī tank and the main temple area. While the goddess performs *tapas*, only people affiliated to the temple, such as priests' families or donors, and reporters, have access to the tank and the open field in front of it.

At about three o'clock in the morning, god Ekāmranātha is brought from the Utsava Sannadhi through the Palli Gopura and 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa to the four-pillared *maṇḍapa*[20] on the north side of the Kampā Nadī tank (see fig. 1.5). He is seated on the bull *vāhana*, facing Ēlavārkuḻali on the other side of the tank. Actually, both can see each other across the tank, but Ēlavārkuḻali is already concealed behind a curtain, while another curtain is stretched in front of Ekāmranātha. The gate to the main temple area is opened and people fill the open space between the Kampā Nadī tank and 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa to watch the marriage ceremony. The goddess's side of the tank also becomes crowded, mostly with priests, donors, and others affiliated with the temple. The *pūjā* of the sand *liṅga* is taking place on the stone steps in front of the goddess. An assistant brings a plate with sand to the priests sitting there. One priest pours water over the sand and piles it up to form a *liṅga*, while another performs the *saṃkalpa*[21] with the donors (fig. 4.6).



Figure 4.6 Piling up the sand for the worship of the sand *liṅga*

The main festival priest performs the *pūjā* for the sand *liṅga.* This is the same *pūjā* as performed for the *liṅga* in the sanctum called *pañcavarṇa pūjā*. After half an hour, when the *pūjā* of the sand *liṅga* is completed, the screens in front of Ēlavārkuḻali and Ekāmranātha are removed and both are worshipped simultaneously with the waving of lamps (*dīpārādhana*). This is a particularly significant moment, celebrating Ekāmranātha's appearance, and constitutes the 'first viewing' of bride and bridegroom as it is also enacted

20 The four-pillared *maṇḍapa* is located on the north side of the tank, where the flight of stairs leads down to the water. It is situated opposite the small podium on the south side of the tank, to which Ēlavārkuḻali is brought. Obviously, the *maṇḍapa* and the podium have been built for this performance.

21 The *saṃkalpa* is the ritual resolution, declaring the performance and purpose of the ritual. For its form and function, see Michaels (2005b: 45–63).

in many local versions of everyday marriages. Firecrackers are lit. People murmur some verses or *mantras*, often the *pañcākṣara mantra* '*namaḥ-śivāya*', and fold their hands in reverence. Drums mark the climax, and the musicians then shift to a well-known marriage song called 'Mālai Cārriṉāḷ Rāmā'. The assistant takes the plate containing the sand *liṅga*, walks down the stairs, and immerses it in the water of the Kampā Nadī tank, while people slowly move to the open field at the other side of the tank in front of the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, where the exchange of garlands will take place.

One may be surprised that the sand *liṅga* is immersed in the temple tank. Recalling the myth associated with the celebration and re-enactments, it was the goddess's embrace that *protected* the *liṅga* from dissolving in the waters of the Kampā River. I asked the Ekāmranātha temple priests about this apparent contradiction. The 2009 festival priest's brother explained that the sand *liṅga* is a temporary *liṅga* classified as *kṣaṇika liṅga*, which has to be immersed in water after the completion of *pūjā* according to Āgamic regulations. Therefore, one line in the *mantras* of the *pañcavarṇa pūjā* changes, praising the sand *liṅga* with the words 'you remain here as long as the *pūjā* is done,' instead of 'you stay here as long as the moon and the sun exist,' as it is done for the *liṅga* in the sanctum.[22]

Another noticeable point regarding the relation of the 'marriage myth' and the ritual re-enactments is that the embrace of and marks on the *liṅga* are completely absent from the rituals. The embrace is a key element in the 'marriage myth' and the characteristic feature of Ekāmranātha in Kanchipuram. In most versions of the 'marriage myth' Ekāmranātha appears because he is touched by the goddess's devoted embrace. Why is the embrace, so relevant to the myth, not re-enacted? A priest of the Ekāmranātha temple indicated that the goddess's embrace is an embellishment of the mythological story, which bears little relation to the ritual performance, in which the focus lies on the Āgamic *pūjā* of the sand *liṅga*.[23]

4.3 The divine marriage

After the completion of the *pūjā* of the sand *liṅga,* the goddess is carried through the low-ceilinged colonnade to Ekāmranātha on the north side of the tank. The open area is packed with people; policemen shout to get them seated in rows on the sandy soil. A path between the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa and the four-pillared *maṇḍapa* is kept free for the performance of the 'exchange of garlands'. Ēlavārkuḻali is brought near the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, while Ekāmranātha is taken from the silver bull *vāhana* and turned to face the goddess. Policemen and spectators flank the thirty-meter walking path between the deities. Musicians play the same joyful marriage tune as previously. A small procession consisting of three priests, flanked by two others fanning with fly whisks, some donors, and devotees with Śaivite banners, walk at a moderate pace under an umbrella towards Ēlavārkuḻali. The main festival priest walks in the middle; next to him on one side is a *stāṉikar* priest with a silver plate in his hands and on the other side a *stalattār* priest, murmuring *mantras* while

22 Conversation with Murti Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 01.04.2011.
23 Conversation with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 29.03.2011.

he holds his hand protectively over the silver plate.[24] On the silver plate are the flower garlands, which are used for the 'exchange of garlands' rite. But more significantly, and almost not noticeable under the flower garlands, are two *kūrca* sticks, which represent Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali respectively. Each *kūrca* stick is made of a bundle of grass, wrapped with white jasmine flowers knotted to a cord. Throughout the rituals the deities are represented by these two *kūrca* sticks; in one hand the main festival priest holds the *kūrca* stick representing Ekāmranātha while he performs ritualistic tasks as bridegroom, and likewise the other stick as bride (see fig. 4.7). When the procession reaches Ēlavārkuḻali, the main festival priest takes the *kūrca* stick that represents Ekāmranātha in one hand and places the flower garland around the goddess's neck (see fig. 4.8). This is done with some difficulties, because her statue is already overloaded with huge flower garlands. Then, the procession marches back to Ekāmranātha, and the main festival priest adorns him with the other flower garland, while holding the *kūrca* stick representing Ēlavārkuḻali. The procession paces back and forth between the two deities, who garland each other thrice in this manner. After the third exchange of garlands, the goddess follows the procession towards Ekāmranātha, circumambulates him, and stops on his left side. Firecrackers are lit and both deities are worshipped with the waving of lamps.



Figure 4.7 Main festival priest with *kūrca* stick

24 The *stalattār* priest is in charge of performing the anointments and *pūjās* to the *liṅga* in the sanctum, while the *stāṉikar* priest 'assists' him and is responsible for the adornment and jewelry of the festival statues. On the different priests at the Ekāmranātha temple, see Boulanger (1992: 108–13).

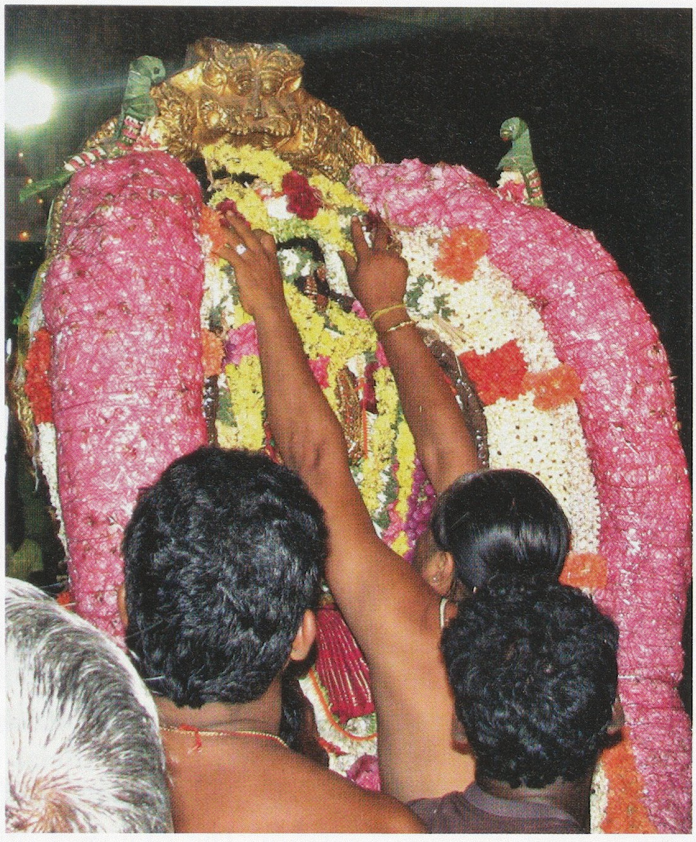


Figure 4.8 Exchange of garlands

After the performance of the 'exchange of garlands', Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali are brought to the marriage stage, which has been set up in front of the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa. The stage is elevated, but most rituals, such as the fire oblations (*homa*), take place on the ground in front of the stage.[25] A great part of the rituals can only be observed by the small group of people sitting next to the priests performing them. These are the donors, people from the temple's administration, and heads of monastic institutions. To the right side of the marriage stage is an area set aside for the priests' family members, mostly women and children. The 'ordinary' spectators sit in rows on the open field to witness the divine marriage.

The deities' marriage ritual is performed in accordance with the *Baudhāyana Gṛhyasūtra*, which is also used by the Ekāmranātha temple priests for their own domestic rituals. A priest of the Ekāmranātha temple described the significant steps in the following way: First, the performance and purpose of the ritual has to be declared (*saṃkalpa*). Then, the main festival priest asks Śiva for permission to perform the rituals. After that, a small Vināyaka idol is formed of turmeric paste and worshipped. Next, the *puṇyāhāvacana* rite ('invocation of auspiciousness') for the purification and sanctification of the site and ritual

25 Until about thirty years ago the marriage rituals were performed on a platform on the roof of the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, which made it easier to spectate, as people told me. The platform is still there, but the practice stopped due to the roof's dilapidated condition. The temple's administration is considering performing the marriage there again after the renovation of the 1000-pillar Maṇḍapa, for which they are collecting funds (http://www.ekambaranathartemple.org/needs.php, accessed 19.02.2018).

items is performed. Then, the main festival priest places *mantras* on his hands and limbs (*karanyāsa, aṅganyāsa*) and purifies his body and soul (*bhūtaśuddhi, ātmaśuddhi*) to make himself suitable for the subsequent rituals.[26] After these preliminaries, the primary marriage rituals begin with a *pūjā* for Pārvatīparameśvara. Then, Ekāmranātha is welcomed as bridegroom with the *madhuparka* rite. Water and a mixture of milk, curd, honey, banana and sugar (*pañcāmṛta*) is offered to him from five silver cups (see fig. 6.8). Then the *saṃkalpa* for giving the daughter into marriage (*kanyādāna*) and donation of a cow (*godāna*), symbolized by a coconut, is performed. Afterwards, garments are presented to the deities and the necklace signifying marital status (Tam. *māṅkalyam*, Skt. *maṅgalasūtra*) is tied around the goddess's neck. Then, for the rite of *pāṇigrahaṇa* ('seizing the bride's hand') the two *kūrca* sticks representing Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali are placed on a silver plate. The silver plate with the two *kūrca* sticks is taken seven steps by the main festival priest for the subsequent rite of *saptapadī* ('walking seven steps'). A sacrificial fire has been established for the *lājahoma* and god Agni is invited. The priest, who is in charge of the *mūlasthāna* on this day, represents the god Brahma, and serves as a witness to the marriage.[27] The god Varuṇa is invited into a water vessel, standing opposite of the main festival priest; the latter performs the fire oblations (*homa*). One of Ēlavārkuḻali's priests takes on the role of her brother, and places parched rice grains (Skt. *lāja,* Tam. *pori*) in the hand of the main festival priest, who offers them into the sacrificial fire. Then, the main festival priest moves the silver plate with the two *kūrca* sticks around the fire, representing the bridal couple's walk around the sacrificial fire. The sequence of giving parched rice grains, strewing them in the sacrificial fire, and circumambulation is repeated three times. Then, a 'full offering' (*pūrṇāhuti*) is made in the fire as completion of the *homa* and the gods Brahma, Varuṇa and Agni are released to their respective places. The black *rakṣā* paste[28] is applied on the foreheads of Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali. Then, the marriage contract is sealed with water. The main festival priest holds a two-rupee coin in one hand and pours water over it with the other hand. When he holds the coin he is the bridegroom, when he pours the water he represents the party of the bride. Then they are married.[29]

Most parts of the marriage rituals are not really visible for the broad audience. Yet, the various tunes of the musicians, and beats of the drummers, indicate what is happening, at least to informed spectators who have an idea of what is going to happen. Moreover, some rituals are obviously staged to incorporate members of the audience as active participants. For example, the *māṅkalyam* is displayed before it is tied to the goddess (fig. 4.9), and *tumpai* flowers are distributed in the front rows, so that people shower them on the newlyweds, both after the tying of the *māṅkalyam* and upon the completion of the *lājahoma* (see fig. 4.10).[30]

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26 For a detailed description and pictures of these rites, see Davis (2008: 47–60).

27 The priests work in turns. At the Ekāmranātha temple each day it is the turn (Tam. *muṟai*) of a priest of another priestly family to perform *pūjā* for the *liṅga* in the sanctum (*mūlasthāna*). The assistant priests and priests for the surrounding shrines shift turns every three month.

28 A black paste prepared from the ashes of burnt *darbha* grass, which was lit at the sacrificial fire, and mixed with water or ghee.

29 Conversation with Murti Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 01.04.2011. A description and pictures of a Brahmanic wedding can be found in Tachikawa et al. (2001: 135–68).

30 This rite is performed with unhusked rice (*akṣata*) in human marriage rituals as a blessing for the



Figure 4.9 Priest shows the *māṅkalyam* to the participants



Figure 4.10 Showering of *tumpai* flowers on the newlywed deities

In addition, the distribution of temple honors is embedded in the rituals and takes up much time. While the divine couple is seated on the marriage stage, one of the most influential priests at the Ekāmranātha temple stands in front of them and directs the distribution of

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newlyweds. However, one priest of the Kacchapeśvara temple was critical of this practice, because 'humans can not give blessings to the gods.'

temple honors, clearly visible to the audience. Most temple honors are transferred in the form of garments that have been in touch with god Ekāmranātha. The garments are placed first at the deity's feet, then the priest takes them and wraps them like a shawl around the shoulders of the honored persons. The priest honors these persons in a well-defined order. Most of them are donors, people from the temple's administration, religious and political leaders, and others partaking in the temple's 'redistributive process' (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1976). At this occasion, head cloths (Tam. *parivaṭṭam*) are also tied to two donors who bring a specific set of marriage presents (Tam. *varicai*) (see Chapter Six, fig. 6.9). In addition, special marriage *tāmpūlam* packages are distributed, containing betel leaves, arcea nuts, auspicious symbols such as a blouse piece, bangles, a yellow thread, piece of turmeric, *kumkum*, *vibhūti*, and sweets.

After the marriage, both deities are brought to the Vāhana Maṇḍapa, where Ekāmranātha mounts the big golden bull *vāhana* and Ēlavārkuḻali a canopied vehicle (Tam. *capparam*). By now it is almost six o'clock and day is dawning. A huge crowd awaits the newlyweds in front of the temple and in the streets on their 'honeymoon ramble' through town.[31] When the deities return to the Ekāmranātha temple at about ten o'clock, they are brought to the *maṇḍapa* attached to the Naṭarāja Sannadhi, which is on this special occasion temporarily used as bed chamber (Tam. *paḷḷiyaṟai*). The deities rest there for two hours, then the doors are opened and the *viśvarūpadarśana*[32] ('the vision of the universal form') takes place, which marks the end of the tenth festival day.

Popular legend: a cat is crossing the marriage

A popular legend holds that a cat crosses the marriage rituals of Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali, and this is considered to be a bad omen.[33] In this case, the divine marriage has to be stopped and postponed to the next year.

The idea that a cat crosses the marriage is widespread. Priests of the Varadarāja temple, too, knew about the cat, asking my research assistant: 'Did you see the cat coming in the middle of the marriage?' Diverse opinions exist about the nature of the cat. A woman from Cinna Kanchi, who comes every year to the marriage, told me: 'This is not a real cat, it is a silver cat, which is placed there by the priest.' Another person believed that Pārvatī, jealous of Ēlavārkuḻali, comes in the form of the cat: 'When Śiva comes near her (Ēlavārkuḻali), Pārvatī, who is Śiva's wife, becomes a cat and stops the marriage.' The cat story is so popular that during the wedding rituals spectators say to each other: 'Keep watching, the cat is going to come!' Others, such as a man from Okkapiranthan Kulam with whom I

31 Davis (2010: 132–3, fn. 233) described the procession after the wedding as 'honeymoon ramble', since the *Mahotsavavidhi* uses the term *bhrāmayati* (to wander, roam) instead of *pradakṣiṇayati* (to circumambulate), which suggests a more relaxed route for this particular procession.

32 The couple is thought to enjoy sexual relations and the first sight after their consummation is extraordinarily beneficial.

33 See for example Thurston (1912: 17): "In the list of bad omens come a donkey, broom, buffalo, untied bullock, barber, widow, patient, cat, washerman. The worst of all omens is to allow a cat to cross one's path."

spoke, locate this event in the past, saying: 'Before they used to let a cat inside the marriage. It is inauspicious, but it is not happening today.'

The story of the cat that thwarts the completion of the divine marriage is also known to the priests of the Ekāmranātha temple, one of whom said: 'Even these days, the village people are saying that Ampāḷ did not get married,' and laughingly added, 'They say that a cat comes in the middle!'[34] He then explained the circumstances: 'They brought a big basket, in that was the silver bell. When they were taking the bell out, people used to say the cat is being taken from the basket. It took place in olden days.' The silver bell might account for the notion of a silver cat. Another priest of the Ekāmranātha temple commented: 'The story was told by somebody, it spread and became propaganda. That is why they are doing the marriage next year. How can you stop the marriage? This is the public opinion.'[35] Indeed, for many people the cat is deliberate tactic to ensure a repetition of the festival: 'Someone sends a cat in between to stop the wedding so that we can conduct the festival next year again,' for 'if the marriage takes place, the festival will not take place the next year.'[36]

Obviously, it is a conceptual problem, why Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali are getting married year after year. One solution, maintained by the public, is the cat's crossing and interruption of the marriage, which demands a repetition of the marriage in the next year. The Ekāmranātha temple priests dismiss this notion as a belief (Tam. *aitīkam*) of the people. At least when talking to me, they refer instead to the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas, in which Śiva himself determined that the divine wedding shall take place every year in Kanchipuram.

A similar phenomenon of hindered marriage rituals has been noticed in the wedding of Sundareśvara and Mīnākṣī in Madurai. Elmore ([1913] 1995: 84) writes: "At this celebration the marriage ceremonies are again performed, but they are never completed. While the ceremonies are proceeding, every year without fail someone sneezes at the right moment, and as a sneeze at such a time is most inauspicious, the marriage is declared off for another year." Shulman (1980: 166, fn. 86) refers to this source, too, adding that he has been informed that the sneeze is not reflected in present-day rituals. He relates the phenomenon of the postponed wedding to his analysis of Tamil marriage myths, which follow the structural principle that the goddess cannot be married fully, because she has to maintain her virginity in order to be a powerful goddess. In this respect, my data from the marriage rituals at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram points in the same direction. The completion of the marriage has to be hindered. In Kanchipuram, this is achieved by the inauspicious crossing of a cat, and in Madurai by a sneeze. At both places the tradition is well known, though it is not present anymore in the contemporary performance of the rituals, if it ever was. Yet, in the people's opinion the hindrance is necessary, so that the festival can take place again the following year, and not because the goddess needs to maintain her virginity. However, the maintenance of virginity may be an underlying motive, which formed the popular legend of the cat crossing the marriage.

34 See interview with Kamesvara Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 18.04.2009.
35 See interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 17.04.2009.
36 Conversation with people at the Ekāmranātha temple before the marriage rituals, 19.03.2011.

4.4 Concluding remarks

At present, the goddess's penance, the establishment and worship of the sand *liṅga*, Śiva's subsequent revelation, and the re-marriage, are re-enacted on the tenth day of the temple festival. However, the goddess's embrace, which is a constituent narrative theme in the 'marriage myth' and one reason for Śiva's appearance, is not a part of the contemporary re-enactments. At the same time, elements that do not occur in the written form of the 'marriage myth' are integrated in the re-enactments, such as the goddess's trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam and the bridal procession in the evening. These events mirror human marriage customs. In addition, they are framed by oral narratives about marital disharmony and/or jealousy.

The theme of marital disharmony is also displayed in a ritual performance called *ūṭal* ('love quarrel').[37] During the evening procession of the eleventh day of the *mahotsava* a quarrel between Ēlavārkuḻali and Ekāmranātha, and their reconciliation is re-enacted.[38] Here, too, many are of the opinion that the quarrel arises due to jealousy of another woman, in particular the goddess Gaṅgā.[39] Priests of the Ekāmranātha temple, however, tend to deemphasize the jealousy motif, and dismiss it as a 'misunderstanding and wrong interpretation of the people.' They instead highlight the role model function of the gods, showing that small misunderstandings between husband and wife are common, and are not a problem as long as one is reconciled again. One priest also stressed the educational function of displaying the quarrel and reconciliation: 'The *ūṭal* is to prove and teach the public that Svāmi and Ampāḷ are not different, that is Śiva and Śakti are not different. They are one. Only if such an incidence takes place it will be in the mind of the public.'[40]

Another point worth considering is that for a re-union and re-marriage a separation is first necessary.[41] In the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas, the separation is initiated by Śiva, who sends the goddess to Kanchipuram for the expiation of a misdeed. In the re-enactments the spatial distance to Ekāmranātha through Ēlavārkuḻali's trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam displays the separation. In the oral narratives, the goddess, who is running away in anger due to a quarrel, causes the separation. Thus, it seems that a separation is necessary, but expressed differently in the textual, oral and performative traditions. Moreover, in the oral

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37 In classical Tamil poetry *ūṭal* is a distinctive behavior pattern in love defined as "the lover's infidelity and reconciliation" (Zvelebil 1974: 37).

38 The second and later part of the *Mahotsavavidhi* mentions a 'love quarrel' (Skt. *praṇaya kalaha*), describing that Śiva and the goddess circumambulate the city and become angry at each other by the time they reach the northeast corner. When they return to the temple they are reconciled (Davis 2010: 134, fn. 237). At the Ekāmranātha temple festival the quarrel is re-enacted at the flower market, which is the northeast corner of the processional route.

39 However, Ēlavārkuḻali's priest suggested another motive. He told me that Ēlavārkuḻali is upset because Ekāmranātha takes the golden bull *vāhana* on the 'honeymoon' procession after the marriage, whereas she has to take the small cart. Therefore, they quarrel the day after. Ekāmranātha conciliates her by offering the golden bull *vāhana* to her, which she then takes on the evening procession of the twelfth day (interview with Anand Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 16.04.2009).

40 Interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 17.04.2009.

41 For example, Baudy (1998: 40) reports that the Greek goddess Hera was brought to Nauplia and bathed in a spring, which made her a virgin again, so that the sacred marriage could happen again every year during the festival.

narratives Ēlavārkuḻali has to be convinced by her female friends, the goddesses Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, to go back to Ekāmranātha and marry him. This reflects Shulman's category 'reluctant bride' (1980: 144). He analyzed forms of divine marriage in Tamil temple myths and in some of them the local goddess is reluctant to take the step to marry or avoids the marriage altogether. The oral narratives focus on this theme, whereas in the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas the goddess eagerly wishes to be united with Śiva again. It seems the written (Sanskrit) sources attempt to connect to the pan-Indian Sanskrit tradition, which does not prevail against the local traditions.

5 Three Goddesses

Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī are *the* divine couple of Kanchipuram, and well known at a supra-regional level. Their union is announced on festival posters and invitation letters; yet, in the contemporary re-enactment of the divine marriage, Ekāmranātha is married to Ēlavārkuḻali, from the Ekāmranātha temple, while Kāmākṣī joins the marriage celebrations. In the afternoon of the wedding day, Ēlavārkuḻali meets Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ in Okkapiranthan Kulam. Both goddesses accompany Ēlavārkuḻali in the evening in the bridal procession to the Ekāmranātha temple, where the marriage rituals are performed with Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali. A popular interpretation of the present day performance is that Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ are recognized as Ēlavārkuḻali's sisters or female friends (Tam. *tōḻi*) who serve as bridesmaids.

Why are these three goddesses—Ēlavārkuḻali, Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpaḷ—involved in the marriage rituals, and how are they related to each other and to Ekāmranātha? The similarity of both the names and iconography of the festival statues of the accompanying goddesses—Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ—is striking, and points to a special relationship between them. Moreover, one could ask why Kāmākṣī joins the ceremonies as bridesmaid and not as the bride? One reason, among others, involves the goddess Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. Her festival image was used in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals up to the end of the seventeenth century, until she was shifted to Thanjavur and possibly replaced by the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali.

This chapter investigates each goddess from a historical perspective and analyzes their contemporary roles, identities and relations to each other. The information is based on epigraphical and literary documents, and the representations of the goddesses from the perspective of their priests and temple administrations.

5.1 Kāmākṣī, Kāmakoṭi and the Kāmakōṭṭam

Kāmākṣī today is considered the supreme goddess of Kanchipuram, and her temple is an important center for goddess worship in South India. She is identified with Lalitā Tripurasundarī, the great goddess of the Tantric Śrīvidyā cult. Kāmākṣī is often named together with the goddess Viśālākṣī of Varanasi and Mīnākṣī of Madurai, forming a triad, distinguished by their eyes (Skt. *akṣi*). However, to the best of my knowledge, the first reference to the goddess in Kanchipuram with the name Kāmākṣī occurs in an inscription from the Vijayanagara king Harihara II, dated to 1392 CE.[1] Earlier literary sources and inscriptions address the goddess and consort of Ekāmranātha by the name Kāmakoṭi

1 ARE 1890, No. 29 and ARE 1954/55, No. 316.

('creeper of desire'), or as Periya-Nācciyār of Kāmakōṭṭam ('Great Lady of Kāmakōṭṭam'), which is discussed below.

Kanchipuram's goddess in the *Tēvāram*

In the *Tēvāram*, a collection of Tamil Śaiva devotional hymns composed by the poet saints Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar between the seventh and ninth centuries, three references can be found, which possibly allude to the goddess in Kanchipuram. They refer to the names Kāmakoṭi, Kāmakōṭṭi and Kāmakōṭṭam.

The poet saint Campantar, who lived in the first half of the seventh century, mentions in a hymn (2.36.4), which is dedicated to Śiva in Irumpūḷai,[2] Kāmakoṭi of Kanchipuram. The stanza reads: "You, who worship with desire. Please, tell us. Why are you roaming around begging for food, with the god of Irumpūḷai on your head (= having bowed to him), together with Kāmakoṭi of Kacci."[3] Kacci is the ancient name of Kanchipuram, and Kāmakoṭi can be translated as 'creeper (*koṭi*) of desire (*kāma*)'.[4] Therefore, it seems to be a reference to the goddess Kāmakoṭi in Kanchipuram. Yet, it is surprising that the goddess of Kanchipuram is named, while the hymn is dedicated to Śiva in Irumpūḷai. Nagaswamy (1982: 207) suggests that the goddess of Irumpūḷai was possibly also called Kāmakoṭi, because the name was generally applied to Śiva's consort. The image of the 'creeper' alludes to the union of Śiva with his consort, either in intimate embrace or in the form of Ardhanārīśvara (half male and half female form).[5] However, the reference to Kanchipuram in the hymn is perhaps too obvious to take the term Kāmakoṭi in this case as a general appellation for Śiva's consort. It remains unclear why Kāmakoṭi of Kanchipuram is mentioned in a hymn dedicated to Śiva in Irumpūḷai, and how the two places and their deities are related.

Another reference in the *Tēvāram* is from the poet saint Appar, who also lived in the first half of the seventh century. The hymn (6.4.10) is dedicated to Śiva in Tiruvatikai Vīraṭṭam.[6] The stanza reads: "His mountainous chest has the wounds from having fought with the two breasts of Kāmakkōṭṭi, who has lips like a ripe fruit."[7] Kāmakkōṭṭi means 'the one who lives in Kāmakkōṭṭam'. Since the stanza refers to wounds (Tam. *tarambu*) on Śiva's chest from the breasts of the goddess, it seemed obvious to take it as an allusion to

2 What is now the village Alankuti, located between Thanjavur and Tiruvarur.

3 *Tēvāram* 2.36.4, translation based on a draft of David Shulman. The English rendering in the *Digital Tēvāram* translates "joining with Kāmakkoṭi, who is prominent in Kacci."

4 However, Devasenapati (1975: 13) is of the opinion that Kāmakkoṭi refers to Kāmakōṭṭam and not Kāmakoṭi, Śiva's 'creeper of desire'. He argues that a differentiation between long and short vowel has always been made in spoken Tamil, but in written Tamil only since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Before that, only *o* was used in writing, as stone inscriptions show. Therefore, he reads *kōṭi* with long vowel *ō,* instead of *koṭi*. However, the name Kāmakkōṭi would signify that the goddess bestows a core (*kōṭi*) of wishes (*kāma*), but not a reference to Kāmakōṭṭam. Devasenapati does not explain the doubling of *ṭ* to read *kōṭṭi*. It remains unclear, how Campantar's hymn should refer to Kāmakōṭṭam. Moreover, the *o* in Kāmakoṭi should be metrically short (as David Shulman pointed out to me).

5 See Venkataraman (1968: 7).

6 The village Tiruvatigai near Panruti.

7 *Tēvāram* 6.4.10, translation based on a draft of David Shulman.

Kāmākṣī's embrace in the Kanchipuram 'marriage myth'.[8] However, Nagaswamy (1982: 205) suggests that the marks on Śiva's chest refer to the love play of Śiva and his consort, indicated by the vocabulary of "amorous force." This idea does not match with the Kanchipuram myth, in which the goddess's embrace serves to protect Śiva's body from the flood in the Kampā Nadī. Thus, he is of the opinion that Kāmakkōṭṭi in this stanza refers to 'the one who lives in the Kāmakkōṭṭam' in Tiruvatikai Vīraṭṭam.[9] Yet, in my view, an allusion to Kāmakkōṭṭi in Kanchipuram is for two reasons possible. First, the goddess's embrace in the Kanchipuram myth, especially references to the marks of her nipples, obviously has sexual connotations[10] (see Chapter Three). Second, *Tēvāram* hymns have place names and the localized form of the god as structuring principle, but particularly in Appar's hymns, the praise of Śiva's nature is more prominent than references to the sacred site (Orr 2014: 195). Thus, the stanza can refer to the known myth of Śiva in Kanchipuram.

A clear reference to the Kāmakkōṭṭam in Kanchipuram is made in a *Tēvāram* hymn by the poet saint Cuntarar, who lived in the first half of the ninth century. One stanza in Cuntarar's hymn (7.5.6) on Śiva in Ōṇakāntaṉṭaḷi near Kanchipuram begins as follows: "Here is the Kāmakkōṭṭam in the ancient town Kacci (Kanchipuram)."[11] (Tam. *kacci mūtūrk kāmakkōṭṭam uṇṭāka*). Venkataraman (1968: 7) renders *uṇṭāka* as "now that it has come into existence," which in his opinion implies that the Kāmakōṭṭam did not exist before. Therefore, he argues that the Kāmakōṭṭam in Kanchipuram was established shortly before Cuntarar's visit to Ōṇakāntaṉṭaḷi, which would place its foundation at the beginning of the ninth century. In contrast, Shulman[12] and Peterson[13] translate the hymn in the present tense "there is/exists," which gives no indication of the time of its establishment. In any case, Cuntarar makes in this hymn an explicit reference to the Kāmakōṭṭam in Kanchipuram. This suggests that the abode of Śiva's consort in Kanchipuram was known as Kāmakōṭṭam by the beginning of the ninth century, whether it has been established recently, or some time ago.

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8 See, for example, Devasenapati (1993: 12) or the English rendering given in the *Digital Tēvāram:* "in the chest which can be compared to a mountain there are impressions which aquired beauty when the two breasts of the goddess, Kāmakkōṭṭi (Kāmakshi) who has lips like the flawless coral and the red fruit of the common creeper of the hedges embraced the chest as if they were waging war against it."

9 Understanding the reference in this way implies that several places or shrines called Kāmakōṭṭam existed as early as the seventh century. This contradicts the theory of Srinivasan (1951: 56), who is of the opinion that the Kāmakōṭṭam in Kanchipuram was the first renowned place of the goddess, so that the name was used to designate goddess's shrines after the eleventh century. However, I find Srinivasan's argument to be a rather weak one. I rather subscribe to Nagaswamy (1982: 205), who questions the theory that the Kāmakōṭṭam originated from Kanchipuram and spread to other places.

10 Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1987: 45) points to this erotic variant of the woundend *liṅga* motif, too.

11 Translation of Cuntarar 7.5.6 by Shulman (1990: 32): "Here is the Kāmakōṭṭam in the ancient town of Kacci, its groves dark with clouds, where you placed the Lady who never leaves your broad chest covered with honey-rich koṉṟai, the Mountain Girl with flowing dark hair and eyes long as swords. You placed her here so the world would prosper. Why, then, do you travel the villages looking elsewhere for alms, you who are in Ōṇakāntaṉṭaḷi?"

12 See footnote above.

13 Translation of Peterson (1989: 234): "Lord who lives in Ōṇakāntaṉṟaḷi, why do you go begging for alms in the ancient city of Kacci with its dark woods, when your Goddess who has long, dark hair and eyes curved like swords, the mountain's daughter who wears the koṉṟai garland brimming with honey on her high breasts, abides here in the Kāmakkōṭṭam shrine for the salvation of the world?"

What exactly is the Kāmakōṭṭam?

The Tamil word *kōṭṭam* (Skt. *koṣṭha*) means place or temple. Therefore, Kāmakōṭṭam can be rendered as 'place of desire (*kāma*)' or as a temple that houses the one who is desirable—the goddess. Srinivasan (1946, 1951) was perhaps the first to explore the topic of 'Kāmakōṭṭam'. He defines Kāmakōṭṭam as "the name given in inscriptions to the separate shrine dedicated to Parvati or Devi installed and consecrated as the Consort of Lord Siva" (1946: 3). Srinivasan shows that the construction of a separate shrine for the goddess within the Śiva temple complex started in South India at the beginning of the eleventh century, and flourished thereafter. In the early Chola period, from the ninth to the eleventh century, it was common to build eight sub-shrines (*aṣṭaparivāra*) around the main sanctum. The sub-shrines usually contained the deities Sūrya, Saptamātṛkās, Gaṇeśa, Jyeṣṭhā, Subrahmaṇya, Caṇḍeśa, Candra and Nandin, but none of them housed the goddess as consort of Śiva. The earliest epigraphical reference to a shrine for Śiva's consort as a new structural element in the temple layout is from the reign of Rājendra I (ca. 1012–1043 CE). In the later half of the Chola period (from the eleventh to the thirteenth century) numerous temples constructed their separate shrine for the goddess, either as an addition to an existing temple, or from scratch in newly built temples. The goddess's shrine can be found almost invariably on the northern side of the *mahāmaṇḍapa* or in the forecourt, facing south. With the growing importance of the shrine for the goddess, the sub-shrines of the earlier period gradually disappeared. The succeeding Vijayanagar and Nayaka kingdoms continued the practice of including a separate shrine dedicated to the goddess within the temple complex. From the twelfth century onwards these goddess's shrines are referred to in inscriptions as Kāmakōṭṭam[14] and the goddess is frequently addressed as Periya-Nācciyār of Tirukāmakōṭṭam[15] ('Great Lady of the holy Kāmakōṭṭam').

Inscriptions[16] found at the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temple also address the goddess as Periya-Nācciyār of Tirukāmakōṭṭam.[17] They are six inscriptions[18] in total, the earliest is probably from 1312 CE and the latest from 1438 CE. The name Kāmākṣī for the goddess in Kanchipuram seems to appear for the first time in an inscription from king Harihara II of the first (Sangama) dynasty of Vijayanagara. The inscription is dated Śaka 1315, which corresponds to 1392 CE. It is a Sanskrit verse, written in Grantha, which is found at the entrance to the inner *prākāra* of the Kāmākṣī temple. It records that the shrine (*vimāna*) of Kāmākṣī was covered with copper by the king (*kāmākṣyāś śrīvimāna[ṃ] vyatanuta*

14 See Srinivasan (1951: 52–55) for references to inscriptions of this period.

15 The term is often used with the prefix *tiru*, which serves as a marker for auspiciousness and respect, similar to the Sanskrit prefix *śrī*. For convenience, it is often translated as 'holy' or 'sacred'.

16 My examination is based on the information and translations given in the ARE and SII volumes.

17 Further, she is addressed as Kāmakoṭi in one inscription. However, the inscription is from the temple in Tripurantakam in Andhra Pradesh and not from the Ekāmranātha or Kāmākṣī temple. See ARE 1906, No. 217. The inscription is dated to 1260 CE. It states that the Telugu chief Immaḍi Basava Śaṅkara Allāḍa was lord of Kanchipuram and a devotee of Kāmakoṭyambikā. Another inscription (ARE 1906, No. 272), dated 1264 CE, mentions that the chief Vijaya-Gaṇḍagōpāla was a devotee of Kāmakoṭyambikā, too.

18 See ARE 1989/90, No. 129 (Ekāmranātha temple) and ARE 1954/55, No. 301, 302, 311, 324, 346 (Kāmākṣī temple).

sukṛtāmbhonidhis tāmrabandham).[19] In the first half of the fourteenth century, the name Kāmākṣī occurs with the appellation Periya-Nācciyār of Tirukāmakōṭṭam.[20] Just fifty years after the first inscriptional reference to the goddess with the name Kāmākṣī did her new name prevail over the name Periya-Nācciyār of Tirukāmakōṭṭam. From the middle of the fourteenth century onwards, only the name Kāmākṣī is found in inscriptions from the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples.

Kāmākṣī and Śrīvidyā

It is possible that the rising popularity of the name Kāmākṣī is connected with her recognition as a manifestation of goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī, 'the charming and beautiful goddess of the three cities'.[21] Lalitā Tripurasundarī, also known as Rājarājeśvarī, is the great goddess of the Tantric Śrīvidyā cult.[22] Śrīvidyā appears in South Indian temples by the thirteenth century. Before it was a "non-temple based tradition of Tantric goddess worship," as Brooks (2002: 61) notes. Lalitā Tripurasundarī is worshipped in three forms: 1) as a mystical diagram (*yantra*) of nine intersecting triangles called *śrīcakra* or *śrīyantra*, 2) as a fifteen-syllabled mantra called *śrīvidyā,* and 3) as anthropomorphic deity. Her form as anthropomorphic goddess became part of the South Indian *bhakti* movement, and her image is also worshipped by non-initiates.[23] Lalitā Tripurasundarī is often depicted as seated on the recumbent body of Śiva, which in turn lies on a pedestal with legs fashioned in the image of the gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra and Īśāna. In her four hands she holds a noose, a goad, and the attributes of the god of desire (Kāma), namely five flower arrows and a bow.

Kāmākṣī's iconography closely resembles the iconography of Lalitā Tripurasundarī. She, too, holds the noose, goad, five flower arrows and a sugarcane bow as attributes in her hands, and in some depictions, a parakeet sitting atop the flower arrows (or single flower) (fig. 5.1). Further, the mystical diagram called *śrīcakra*, inserted in a *yoni*-shaped receptacle with eight goddesses (*aṣṭalakṣmī*) on its inner surface, is most often part of Kāmākṣī's iconography, and thus links her explicitly to Śrīvidyā.[24]

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19 Listed in ARE 1890, No. 29 and ARE 1954/55, No. 316. The inscription is published in SII, Vol. IV, No. 352 in its original Grantha text, but without further comments. More information about the inscription and a transcript in Devanagari can be found in a postscript to record No. 32 of EI, Vol. III, p. 229-30. The English translation renders incorrectly that the shrine was provided with a copper door.

20 Vijayanagar king Dēvarāya-Mahārāya addresses the goddess in one inscription, dated 1427 CE, as Kāmākṣī (ARE 1954/55, No. 313) and in another, dated 1438 CE, as Periya-Nācciyār of Tirukāmakōṭṭam (ARE 1954/55, No. 301).

21 Texts, such as the Lalitopākhyāna (chapters 39–41) explicitly identify Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram with Lalitā Tripurasundarī, and tell of her heroic deeds (see Chapter Three).

22 For detailed information on Śrīvidyā see the work of Brooks (1990, 1992b, 2002).

23 However, for initiates in the Śrīvidyā cult, the worship of the goddess in her anthropomorphic form (*sthūlarūpa*) may be secondary to the higher forms of diagram (*yantrarūpa*) and mantra (*mantrarūpa*) (see Brooks 2002: 61).

24 The identification of Lalitā Tripurasundarī with local goddesses is often achieved by linking the goddesses to the *śrīcakra*. Most prominent is the example of goddess Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram. Another goddess is Akhilāṇḍeśvarī at the Jambukeśvara temple near Trichy (Tiruchchirappalli), who wears earrings with the *śrīcakra.* Further, Brooks (1992b: 72) instances goddess Mīnākṣī of Madurai, whose image is sometimes provided with the *śrīcakra.*

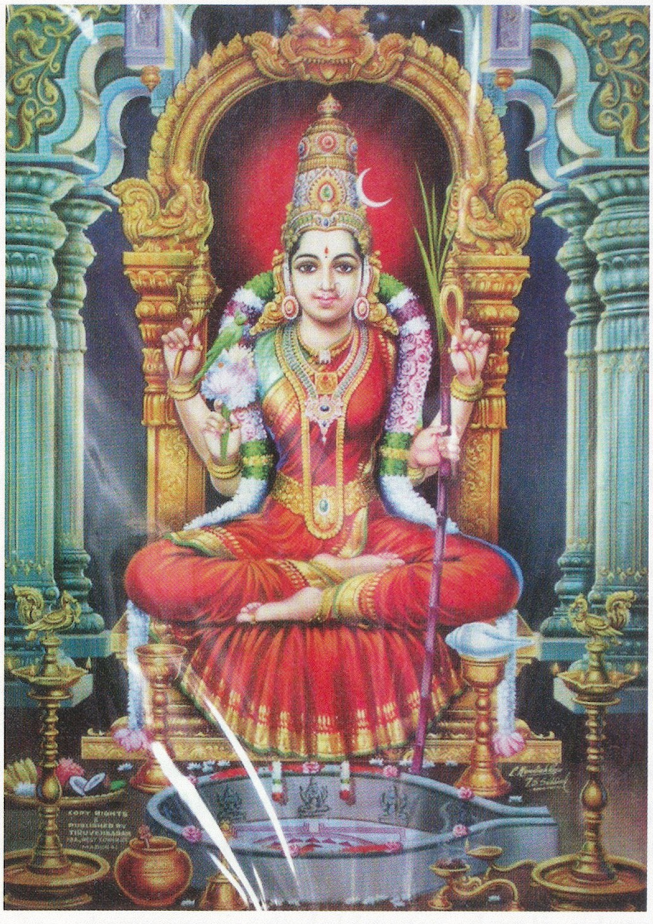


Figure 5.1 Painting of Kāmākṣī with *śrīcakra*
Courtesy: Christian Luczanits

The *śrīcakra* is also installed in front of Kāmākṣī's stone idol in the sanctum of the Kāmākṣī temple, and is the main subject of the priests' worship. An inscription (ARE 1954/55, No. 349) from the Kāmākṣī temple in characters of the sixteenth century records that Narasiṃhādhvarin installed the '*kāmakōṭī-pīṭha*', which in all probability refers to the *śrīcakra* in front of Kāmākṣī's stone image in the sanctum. The inscription reports that he constructed the receptacle and surrounded it with fine stones of different colors with Lakṣmī figures on them.[25] Another inscription (ARE 1954/55, No. 348) in characters of the sixteenth century, found on a pavement slab near the Gāyatrī *maṇḍapa* in the Kāmākṣī temple, records that the paved floor in the *chitra maṇḍapa* (presumably the present Gāyatrī *maṇḍapa*) near the entrance of the Tripurasundarī shrine was laid by the king's minister, Śrīpati. Srinivasan (1979: 255) specifies the king of the latter inscription as Vēṅkaṭa II (1586–1614 CE), and dates the former inscription to the reign of Śrīraṅgarāya (1572–1585 CE). Thus, it seems that by the end of the sixteenth century the *maṇḍapa* in front of the sanctum, now called Gāyatrī *maṇḍapa*, had taken its present shape, and that the identification of Kāmākṣī with Lalitā Tripurasundarī and the worship of her diagrammatic representation as *śrīcakra* was well established.

25 See Venkataraman (1968: 28, 31–32), who supplies the text and a tentative translation of this inscription.

Closely associated with the Śrīvidyā tradition in South India are the Śaṅkara Maṭhas in Kanchipuram and Śṛṅgeri (Karnataka), traditionally said to be founded by the eighth-century Hindu philosopher, Śaṅkara.[26] A popular legend ascribes the 'taming' of wild goddesses to Śaṅkara. He is said to have transformed ferocious (*ugra*) goddesses into benevolent (*saumya*) ones by confining their powers into the *śrīcakra*, cleaning their worship of Tantric elements and establishing a Vaidic (orthodox) form of worship.[27] The installation of the *śrīcakra* in the Kāmākṣī temple is also attributed to him, although the above-mentioned inscription points to a much later date.

This relatively late date for the installation of the *śrīcakra*, and also Kāmākṣī's late appearance in literary and epigraphical sources, raised for some scholars (Srinivasan 1960, Venkataraman 1968, Nagaswamy 1982) the question of whether the present Kāmākṣī temple was the Kāmakōṭṭam mentioned in early sources such as the *Tēvāram*, or another temple, namely the nearby temple of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, a deity who also joins the marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram.

5.2 Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ

Adjacent to the Kumārakōṭṭam temple, and close to the Kāmākṣī temple, is the temple of the goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, who joins the bridal procession on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. Why does the goddess come with Kāmākṣī to accompany Ēlavārkuḻali as bridesmaid? Who is Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, and why does her name relate to Kāmākṣī?

A visit to the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple

A small road leads from North Rāja Vīti towards the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple. A newly constructed archway with colorful carvings signals that this is the 'holy temple of goddess Āti Kāmāṭci[28] Śrī Āti Pīṭā Paramēsvari Kāḷikāmpāḷ' (see fig. 5.2). The Tamil word *āti* (from Skt. *ādi*) means 'first' or 'beginning', which implies that the goddess housed in this temple is the original goddess Kāmākṣī, and that this was the original seat of the goddess (Tam. *āti pīṭā;* Skt. *ādi pīṭha*) in Kanchipuram.

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26 However, there is no undisputed evidence for the existence of the Śṛṅgeri Maṭha before the fourteenth century, the Kanchipuram Maṭha before the sixteenth century, or Śaṅkara's role in their foundation (see Wilke 1996: 135).

27 The idea of Śaṅkara as a reformer of worship is deeply rooted in Tamil Nadu, although it is highly unlikely that he introduced a refined form of goddess worship. It seems the Śaṅkara Maṭhas adapted the Śrīvidyā cult and ascribed important texts of the tradition to Śaṅkara. In particular, the monastery in Kanchipuram played a crucial role in locating Śrīvidyā in Kanchipuram and promulgating the cult (see Wilke 1996: 135). Since 1842 the Kāmākṣī temple is administered by the Śaṅkara Maṭha in Kanchipuram (also known as Kāmākōṭi Pīṭha). 'Taming' narratives are also known from the Śṛṅgeri Maṭha. Price (1996: 155–6) describes an incident in 1894 when a local king called in the then Jagadguru to change the ritual practice of the goddess in the Ramnad palace. The head of the Śṛṅgeri Maṭha was the only one considered powerful enough to pacify her.

28 The spelling of the goddess's name is inconsistent. Most often the Tamil/Sanskrit mix 'Āti Kāmākṣī' is used, in this case, however, the Tamil form 'Kāmāṭci' is used.



Figure 5.2 Archway to the temple of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ



Figure 5.3 Snāpana Vināyaka

The temple has a forecourt with a festival *maṇḍapa, balipīṭha*, flagpole (*dhvajastambha*) and shrine for the goddess's vehicle, the lion. The main temple complex is entered through a four-storied *gopura* on the southern side. From here, a few steps lead to the entrance porch (*ardhamaṇḍapa*), which in a niche to the right-hand side houses the sandstone idol of Snāpana Vināyaka, considered to be one of the temple's oldest idols and commonly worshipped first (see fig. 5.3). The sanctum is a small cella with an antechamber (*antarāla*), flanked by a pair of *dvārapālakīs* holding a dagger and skull cup in each hand, and *dvārapālakas* with a club and skull cup.



Figure 5.4 Painting of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ

Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ is seated on a lotus throne in the sanctum facing south. She has four hands, the upper two holding the noose (*pāśa*) and the goad (*aṅkuśa*), and the lower left a skull cup (*kapāla*), while the lower right hand is showing *abhaya-mudrā* ('do-not-fear-gesture'). The goddess has a calm face, but small protruding teeth on either side of the mouth. The plinth below the lotus throne shows three heads in low relief, which are said to be the heads of demons[29] that the goddess has killed (see fig. 5.4). Opinions vary, however,

29 However, Venkataraman (1968: 11) suggests that the heads are "probably a Kālāmukha motif," though he does not elaborate on the link to the Śaivite Kālāmukha sect. Further, he mentions that it is commonly believed that the heads are representations of the *trimūrti* (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva). However, none of the people I spoke with recognized them as the heads of the *trimūrti*. All three heads look alike and have small protruding canine teeth. I suggest that the *trimūrti* would have been depicted by the

on whether these are the three heads of the demon Triśiras,[30] or the heads of the three demons Śumbha, Niśumbha and Mahiṣa.[31]

In the antechamber (*antarāla*) between the sanctum and the *ardhamaṇḍapa,* a *yoni*-shaped receptacle can be seen on the floor in front of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. It resembles the receptacle in which the *śrīcakra* is inserted in the Kāmākṣī temple (see fig. 5.1). Yet, the figures of eight goddesses (*aṣṭalakṣmī*) on the inner surface are missing and the receptacle does not contain a *śrīcakra.*[32]

The sanctum is surrounded by one *prākāra*. The sacred temple tree with Nāgā stones, and statues of the deities Śāsta, the Seven Sisters, Annapūrṇā, Mahiṣāsuramardinī, Vīralakṣmī, and others are found here. The statue of the latter goddess is especially interesting, since it closely resembles the statue of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ enshrined in the sanctum. She has four hands; the upper hands hold the noose (*pāśa*) and the goad (*aṅkuśa*), the lower left and a skull cup (*kapāla*)[33], and the lower right hand is showing *abhaya-mudrā*, in the same manner as Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. She has long matted hair (*jaṭā mukuṭa*), a wide nose, full lips and three eyes. She wears a human figure as an ornament (*nara kuṇḍala*) in her right ear and a disc earring (*patra kuṇḍala*) in her left. She, too, is seated on a lotus throne, but the depiction of the three heads on the plinth below is absent (see fig. 5.5).

The resemblance between the two statues is not accidental. Both the temple's main priest and the head trustee told me that the statue of the goddess in the *prākāra,* which some call Vīralakṣmī, is the original statue of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ.[34] Apparently, this statue was previously installed in the sanctum. It is made of sandstone, a delicate material, and the goddess's nose and right thumb were broken. Thus, the statue is no longer suitable for worship[35] and has been shifted to the outer wall of the *prākāra,* replaced by the statue of

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deities' respective iconography, and not with demon like canines.

30 Interview: Ute Hüsken with Kamakoti Sastrigal of the Kāmākṣī temple, 13.09.2003. A verse in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* refers to the killing of the demon Triśiras, too. KāVi 10.12–17 gives an account of six different manifestations of Durgā in Kanchipuram. One of them is Kāḷikāmpāḷ. She is mentioned in line 16b and 17a: "Twenty-one [parts] to the south is Kālikā called Pīṭhavartī ('abiding at the seat'). Formerly, she killed Triśiras, she, the protector of the Kāmapīṭha ('seat of desire')." (*tasyaikaviṃśe yāmye 'sti pīṭhavartīti kālikā // purā triśirasaṃ hatvā kāmapīṭhābhirakṣiṇī* /).

31 Interview with Senthil Kumar, head of the Viśvakarma trust, 13.03.2011.

32 It is not possible to take pictures in the sanctum. However, a picture of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ and other pictures of the temple are available at http://temple.dinamalar.com/en/new_en.php?id=1152 (accessed 13.01.2018). Note the heads on the plinth and the partly visible receptacle. A picture that shows the *yoni*-shaped receptacle more clearly can be found in Venkataraman (1968, plate IV).

33 Sharma (2007: 133) suggests that she bears an *akṣayapātra*, a begging vessel or divine vessel of inexhaustible food.

34 Interviews with Dhandapani Gurukkal, 12.03.2011 and Senthil Kumar, 13.03.2011.

35 Damaged or broken statues should not be used for worship. Instructions for the renovation of temples and damaged images can be found, among others, in the Āgamas. The Ajitamahātantra, for example, has one chapter (*paṭala* 84) entitled *jīrṇoddhāravidhiḥ* ('the process of renovation'). Verse 84.50 states that the worship of a decayed *liṅga* or icon might cause a drought, and should therefore be removed and replaced with all efforts (Bhatt et. al. 2005: 155). However, the Somāskanda festival statue at the Ekāmranātha temple is very decayed due to numerous ablutions. New Somāskanda festival statues have been donated, among others by the Śaṅkara Maṭha, but the priests (and devotees) prefer the decayed statue, because its potency is much higher, since it has been charged for many years with ablutions and worship.

Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. The broken parts, however, have been repaired with *aṣṭabandha* material, and a shrine was built around the statue in the course of renovation work in 2006.[36]



Figure 5.5 Original statue of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ

The former statue of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ is not the only idol out of place in the temple. The statues of Mahiṣāsuramardinī and Annapūrṇā, too, belong to another place or even shrine, as Seshadri (2003: 155–56) suggests, since their present place on the outer wall of the *prākāra* does not suit them. He concludes that "the entire original temple has been disturbed at some stage or the other, and rebuilt during the later period, that too at various stages" (2003: 156). However, he does not suggest any dates for the different stages

36 Before, the statue was just placed in a niche in the wall as plate III in Venkataraman (1968) shows.

of the temple's development. Venkataraman (1968: 12) is more specific: "This temple, datable a little after A.D. 800, has, in the subsequent centuries, undergone several modifications, both in architecture and iconography, the latest being the transformation wrought in the early Vijayanagar style (...) It still contains vestiges of the past in some parts of the structure and the mutilated idols lying about." Venkataraman must have visited the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple more than forty years ago, though. Since then, the temple has undergone major renovation work, the latest being undertaken in 2006.[37] When I visited the temple for the first time in 2009 it was newly painted and I could not find mutilated idols lying around. Venkataraman had probably referred to some of the idols that are now fixed under the sacred temple tree beside the Nāgā stones, such as the statue of the deity Śāsta (see fig 5.6).



Figure 5.6 Śāsta, Nāgā stones, and other idols under the sacred temple tree

Overall, only few sources[38] deal with the Āti Kāmākṣī Kālikāmpāḷ temple and the information about the temple's history and age is very vague. Sources note, for example, that the temple predates the present Kāmākṣī temple (Chandramouli 2001), that the temple's *gopura* is of an "early type" (Venkataraman 1968: 12), or refer to the "early

37 For example, in 1996, the niches in the sanctum's outer wall have been provided with *parivāra devatās* (Interview with Dhandapani Gurukkal, 12.03.2011).

38 The only sources I found are Venkataraman (1968: 10–12), Seshadri (2003: 155–56). Sharma (2007: 127–35) and Chandramouli (2001).

character" of the sculptures (Seshadri 2003: 155). In my view, the temple's architecture and its sculptures need to be studied thoroughly by art historians to gain more accurate information about their history and development.[39]

However, all sources agree on the antiquity of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, a fact which is, among others, used to support the theory that the temple of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ was the original place of goddess worship in Kanchipuram. This theory was, to my knowledge, first proposed by Srinivasan (1960: 165), who suggests that "a temple called Ādi-pīṭhā Paramēśvarī temple, in the vicinity of the modern temple of Kāmākshī, containing a very old seated four-armed sculpture with three human heads on the pedestal, was perhaps the original site where the *Śaktipīṭha* was installed, after the reformation of the worship by Śaṅkara." Venkataraman (1968) elaborated this theory, using literary and epigraphic references as evidence. He argues (1968: 5) that the goddess in Kanchipuram was first worshipped as Kālī, then as Rājarājeśvarī, each at their respective places (the present Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple and present Kāmākṣī temple), which he denotes as old and new Kāmakōṭṭam. Venkataraman claims that the Kāmakōṭṭam mentioned in Cuntarar's hymn (7.5.6) refers to the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, because during Cuntarar's time at the beginning of the ninth century, the present Kāmākṣī temple was possibly a Jaina and Buddhist place of worship,[40] which has gradually been converted to a Hindu place from the eleventh century onwards. The twelfth-century *Periyapurāṇam* speaks about a *yoga* and *bhoga pīṭha*, which Venkataraman (1968: 22) interprets as a reference to two goddesses' temples, namely the old and the new Kāmakōṭṭam. Some fifteenth-century poets, such as Villiputtūrār and Aruṇagiriyār, praise the dark complexion of the goddess in Kanchipuram, which Venkataraman takes as reference to Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ. Mūkakavi describes her holding a skull cup, and Aruṇagiriyār also refers to the *śrīcakra*, which has been built in the present Kāmākṣī temple more recently. Therefore, Venkataraman concludes that the two temples existed side by side for some time. He (1968: 28) is of the opinion that the growth of the new Kāmakōṭṭam was completed by the installation of the *śrīcakra* in the present Kāmākṣī temple in the sixteenth century, whereas the old Kāmakōṭṭam fell gradually into disrepair. However, this theory is not undisputed. Nagaswamy (1982: 207) is of the opinion that the Kāmakoṭṭam in Cuntarar's hymn (7.5.6) has always been the present Kāmākṣī temple, although the temple's structure has undergone modifications. Unfortunately, he does not substantiate his assertion.

Who is Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ?

The Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple is the temple of the Viśvakarma (Viśvabrahma) community, and currently administered by the Viśvakarma trust and the HR&CE department.[41] My main contact, the head trustee Senthil Kumar, has held office since 2009

39 Moreover, the temple has two unread inscriptions, which could give some details about the temple's history.

40 See Rao (1915: 127–29), who discusses the findings of Buddha images at the Kāmākṣi temple.

41 The Viśvakarma community traditionally represents the five crafts (carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, coppersmiths and sculptors), as Senthil Kumar, the head of the Viśvakarma trust, told me (Interview 13.03.2011). See also http://viswabrahmintemples.jimdo.com/kancheepuram-district-8/ (accessed 13.01.2018). The earliest reference (*Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* 1935: 34) I found to the Āti Kāmākṣī

and appears to be very dedicated. He commissioned a leaflet and a board at the temple's entrance with information about the temple's history and mythology.[42] On the leaflet the question 'Why is goddess Āti Kāmākṣī in the Kālī form?' is raised, and answered with reference to the *Kāñcippurāṇam* and an account of the 'marriage-myth', as follows:

> The Lord and the Goddess were living happily on mount Kailāsa. Once, Ammai covered for fun Appaṉ's eyes for a split second. The sun and the moon are the two eyes of Śiva. Since their rays were covered by Ammai's holy hands, the entire universe became dark. The work of creation was stopped and the precept of dharma vanished in the whole world. Sin increased under the living beings. That sin changed into black color and fell on the body of Umā Maheśvarī. Due to that her golden color changed into black. On seeing this, the gods realized that a big calamity was going to take place and started shouting. Goddess Umā realized this and removed the hands from Siva's eyes. Immediately the world got back to its old form. Umā asked the Lord for forgiveness for her mistake. She was upset to see her body turned into black. She praised Parameśvara: "Oh Lord, what is the reason that my body which was sparkling like gold got changed into black?" The Lord replied: "Devī, this is not black color. It is the sin of all living beings in the world. Because you are black, you will henceforth be called Kālī." Trembling, Umā asked the Lord: "What is the atonement to be done to get relieved from this black color?" Saṅkara explained the expiation rules. Accordingly, Umā worshipped her husband and left to Badarikāśrama. There she manifested as a child, born to the sage Kātyāyana. When she attained the right age, she collected from him an ascetic's staff (*yogadaṇḍa*), rosary (*japamālā*), parasol, book, sand and water from the river Gaṅgā, a lamp stand (*dīpastambha*), book stand (*vidyādhāra*), tiger-seat (*vyāghrāsana*), two fly-whisks (*cāmara*), two pots, a fan, fried beans, and went to Kāśī. There she draw away the evil of a famine, got the name Annapūrṇī and gave *mukti* to the king of Kāśī. Then she went south and at one place the *yogadaṇḍa* and the other implements changed as the Lord has told it. On seeing this she realized this is Kāñcī town. On the banks of the Kampā River the Goddess made a beautiful *liṅga* out of sand under the mango tree and started worshipping Ekāmranātha. To test her devotion, the Lord caused a flood in the Kampā River. Umā thought it must be harmful for the sand *liṅga.* Thus, she kneeled down and pressed the *liṅga* with both hands to her chest, which left the marks of Umā's bangles and breasts on Śiva's body. Her embrace made Maheśa so happy that he appeared in front of her. "Kālī, you and I are not different. You attained the name Kālī due to the blackness. You destroyed the demons Śumbha, Niśumbha, Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa and Mahiṣa with your *ugraśakti*. On seeing this, my heart was delighted. Ask what you want." Devī bowed before him happily several times: "Parameśvara! Before on mount Mandara you called me Kālī. Bless me, that this black color changes into golden color." "Ammai, because you became the black

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Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, too, mentions that the temple (listed as Āti Pīṭā Paramēsvari Tēvastāṉam) is under the management of the Viśvabrahma community.

42 Further, he is planning to publish a booklet containing more detailed descriptions and pictures of the temple.

> colored Kālī the world is full of good deeds again, and the demons have been killed. According to your request your body will become gold. Like the snake removes its skin, you will come out of the black color and get the golden color. Henceforth you will be called as Gaurī (the Golden One)." Thus, it was told by the Lord. Immediately the Goddess removed her black color like a cloth, from which a goddess named Kauśikī appeared. We can still have *darśan* of the Kauśikeśvara *liṅga*, which was worshipped by this goddess in Kanchipuram. After getting the golden body, the Goddess with the name Gaurī married the Lord according to his wish on the auspicious Paṅkuṉi Uttiram day.[43]

This account of the 'marriage-myth' is not a mere retelling of the *Kāñcippurāṇam*. It combines motifs from the version of the myth found in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* and the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (see Chapter Three). The goddess's stopovers at Badarikāśrama, her appearance as Annapūrṇā in Kāśī, and the provision and subsequent transformation of the implements, are uniquely known from the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, whereas the manifestation of Kauśikī from the goddess's dark skin shed is known from the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (and the closely related *Kāñcimāhātmya* (Ś)).[44]

Obviously, the 'marriage-myth' is used to associate Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ with the dark colored Umā, who was called Kālī since the darkness of all sins in the world fell on her body. When she came to earth 'she came to the place of the Āti Kāmākṣī temple and did penance there, before she went for the *pūjā* to the Kampā Nadī to prepare a sand *liṅga* under a single mango tree,' as the head trustee described vividly.[45] He also explained that the appellation 'Kālī' means 'blacky', and is not to be confused with the Kālī who kills the demons.

Yet, the link to Kālī who kills the demons is made in the version of the myth presented on the leaflet, which tells that she destroyed them with her fierce powers (*ugraśakti*). However, it is unclear whether Kālī's *ugraśakti* is a separate entity, or whether this refers to the goddess Kauśikī, who manifested from the dark skin shed to kill the demons, as the myth's version in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (and KM (Ś)) tells. Moreover, in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (and KM (Ś)) the story goes on: Before goddess Kauśikī (also called Kālī in the KM (Ś)) kills the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha, she appears before Śiva and begs him to marry her. Śiva agrees and appoints her as the guardian of the city Kanchipuram. It is curious that precisely this part of the myth is not accounted for by the leaflet. Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ is indeed regarded as a protective deity, at least from the perspective of the Kāmākṣī temple priests,[46] while Śiva's double marriage to a bright and dark goddess could be one reason, among others, why the dark goddess Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ and the bright goddess

43 Translation from Tamil by Narayanan Subramanian.

44 The myth's account on the board at the temple's entrance is abbreviated. Details, such as the stopovers at Badarikāśrama and Kāśī, the provision and transformation of the implements, and the appearance of goddess Kauśikī are omitted.

45 Interview with Senthil Kumar, head of the Visvakarma Trust, 13.03.2011.

46 She is regarded as one of the eight direction goddesses (*dikpālikās*) of the Kāmākṣī temple 'called as Pīṭhavartinī, since she is safeguarding the *pīṭha*' (interview with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 18.03.2009.)

Kāmākṣī are processing next to each other in the bridal procession of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals.

The taming of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ

In interviews and conversations, however, another legend regarding Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ was often told to me. When I asked the head priest of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple why the goddess is named both Kālī and Āti Kāmākṣī, he explained:

> The reason is, there are three heads under the *pīṭha* of Ampāḷ. She killed the three demons, and in the night when she was going out, whoever came in the way, she killed them. At that time, Ādi Śaṅkara came over here and did *pūjā* to her—you would have seen the *śricakra* in front of her—he sat there only and did the *pūjā*, and he controlled the anger of Ampāḷ and installed the *śrīcakra* and then she was invoked as Kāmākṣī over there. This here was the Ampāḷ before Kāmākṣī.[47]

Not only people affiliated with the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple apply the 'taming' legend of Śaṅkara to the goddess. For example, the 2010 festival priest of the Ekāmranātha temple told me: 'The first thing was Āti Kāmākṣī and then Śaṅkara subdued her ferociousness and everything, and the next form is Kāmākṣī which you see in the present temple in a subdued form.'[48] One reason to apply the 'taming' legend to Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ is the existence of the *yoni*-shaped receptacle in front of the goddess. It does not currently contain a *śrīcakra*, but a *kālī yantra*, which was inserted about one hundred and twenty years ago, as the temple's head trustee informed me. However, he is of the opinion that it originally contained a *śrīcakra*, which had been installed by Ādi Śaṅkara.[49]

It is noteworthy that the 'taming' legend and the existence of the *yoni*-shaped receptacle are not mentioned either on the leaflet or the board at the temple's entrance. Moreover, the receptacle in front of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ is not part of her iconography. Paintings of the goddess available at the temple (see fig. 5.4) do not depict it (contrary to most depictions of Kāmākṣī, where the *śricakra* forms a fundamental part of her iconography). Is this policy possibly influenced by the Śaṅkara Maṭha of Kanchipuram? At least in interviews and conversations, this legend is frequently told to explain the naming of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ and her relation to Kāmākṣī.

Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple as *śaktipīṭha*?

The board and leaflet also refer to the tradition of the *śaktipīṭhas* ('seats of the Goddess'), which raises the question whether the temple of Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, or of Kāmākṣī, is regarded as a *śaktipīṭha*. On the leaflet it is stated: 'The Goddess's grace exists in different forms as eighteen, fifty-one, sixty-four and one hundred and eight *pīṭhas*. In all of them Kanchipuram is mentioned. When the Goddess burned herself in Dakṣa's sacrifice and her

47 Interview with Dhandapani Gurukkal, Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, 12.03.2011.

48 Interview with Suresh Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 02.04.2010. The same view was expressed in interviews with Umapathi Sivacharya, 26.03.2009, Anand Gurukkal, 16.04.2009, and Dhandapani Gurukkal, 11.04.2009.

49 Interview with Senthil Kumar, head of the Visvakarma Trust, 13.03.2011.

body was cut into pieces, the hipbone fell in Kanchipuram. It was called as Kāmakōṭi Pīṭha, otherwise also called as Oṭṭiyāṇa[50] Pīṭha.'[51]

The tradition of the *śaktipīṭhas* is linked to the Purāṇic myth[52] of Dakṣa's sacrifice: Dakṣa, the father of Śiva's first wife Satī, conducted a great sacrifice. He insulted Śiva by not inviting him and his wife. Satī could not bear her father's insult and killed herself. Full of grief Śiva wandered through the universe with Satī's dead body on his shoulder. This caused major disturbance in the three worlds, so that the gods requested Viṣṇu to use his discus. He cut Satī's corpse into several pieces until nothing remained on Śiva's shoulder. The severed parts of Satī's body fell to earth and became sacred sites, which are venerated as *śaktipīṭhas,* the 'seats of the Goddess'.

The *śaktipīṭhas* are spread over the Indian subcontinent, though most of them are found in the northwestern and eastern parts. The tradition of the *śaktipīṭhas* is not canonized. Thus, the number of *pīṭhas,* the represented part of Satī's body (or body ornament), and the location can vary according to different texts. Some early texts, such as the *Hevajra Tantra* or *Kālikā Purāṇa*, describe four *pīṭhas*, but lists of ten, eighteen, fifty-one, fifty-two, sixty-four or one hundred and eight are also known.[53] Usually, the *pīṭha* lists presented in Tantric or Purāṇic texts give the name of the place, the associated body part, the name of the residing goddess and the Bhairava (form of Śiva) who protects the site.

Some texts name Kanchipuram as *śaktipīṭha*. For example, the *Rudrayāmala* list, as it is quoted in the *Tantrasāra*,[54] includes Kanchipuram as a *pīṭha* and links it to the hip (*kaṭi*) of Satī's body. Another *pīṭha* list comes from the *Pīṭhanirṇaya*, which Sircar (1998: 24) dates to 1690–1720 CE. This text, as cited by Sircar (1998: 36), also lists Kanchipuram as a *pīṭha.* It enumerates *kaṅkāla* (skeleton, bones) as the body part, Devagarbhā as the name of the goddess, and Ruru as the accompanying Bhairava. A similar list can be found in the *Śivacarita*, which closely follows the *Pīṭhanirṇaya*, as Sircar (1998: 39) observes. For Kanchipuram the body part is specified as *kaṅkāla* (skeleton, bones) and the accompanying Bhairava is Ruru, as in the *Pīṭhanirṇaya.* Only the name of the goddess is given as Vedagarbhā, which, could be a transcription error owing to the similarity of *b* and *v*, and thus refers to the goddess Devagarbhā as in the *Pīṭhanirṇaya*. Bhattacharyya (1974: 143) is of the opinion, that "the writer of the Pīṭhanirṇaya had absolutely no idea of South India," because he lists Kanchipuram as *pīṭha* with its presiding goddess Devagarbhā, and not with

50 This is the Tamil equivalent of the Sanskrit term *kāñcī,* which denotes a girdle-like ornament worn by women around the waist.

51 Translation from Tamil by Narayanan Subramanian.

52 See Sircar (1998: 5–7) for the different stages of the myth's development and Mertens (1998: 235–384) for a detailed study of the Śākta versions of the myth.

53 See Sircar (1998: 11–15, 17–31).

54 See Sircar (1998: 18). He suggests a date around 1670 CE for the *Tantrasāra* (Sircar 1998: 80), but regards the *Rudrayāmala* as "composed considerably earlier than 1052," because it is mentioned in a manuscript copied at this time (Sircar 1998: 17). However, this does not mean that the cited *Rudrayāmala śaktipīṭha* list can be dated to 1052 CE or earlier. The *Rudrayāmala* is often used as a source in other texts (for example, it is also referred to in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* 14.116), but the original text appears to be lost and what has survived are either fragments or new creations with the name *Rudrayāmala* (personal communication with Dominic Goodall). See also Galewicz (2017) on the use of the *Rudrayāmala* as a remote source of scriptual authority.

the "celebrated Kāmākṣī of Kāñcī." It is indeed striking that the above cited lists do not name Kāmākṣī as the residing goddess of the *śaktipīṭha* in Kanchipuram. Is it possible that the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple is the *śaktipīṭha* of Kanchipuram?

A recent Tamil publication[55] about the fifty-one *śaktipīṭhas* explicitly points to the Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple as *śaktipīṭha* of Kanchipuram. It ascribes the hipbone as body part, Tēvakarppā (= Devagarbhā) as the name of the goddess and Kaṅkāḷār as the accompanying Bhairava. Further, on a webpage listing the *śaktipīṭhas* according to the *Pīṭhanirṇaya,* a commentator wrote: "The modern Kāmākṣī temple is very big and famous, but the *śaktipīṭha* is Ādi Pīṭheśvarī or Ādi Pīṭha Parameśvarī. (...) Devī in this original temple is called Kīrtimatī/Devagarbhā in *Tantracūḍāmaṇi*. She has four hands containing in each of them respectively *pāśa*, *aṅkuśa*, *abhaya* and a *kapāla*."[56]

However, most other recent sources highlight the Kāmākṣī temple as *śaktipīṭha.*[57] Usually, they do not name a protecting Bhairava or associated body part, but if they do, it is the navel.[58] On the contrary, older publications on Kanchipuram, such as Newell (1914) and Ayyar (1922), do not mention the *śaktipīṭhas* at all, while the *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (1935: 44) states that 'Madurai Mīnākṣī, Kāñcī Kāmākṣī and Kāśi Viśālākṣī are world famous,' without labeling them as *śaktipīṭhas*. Only later, it seems, do publications and temple booklets link the Kāmākṣī temple to a *śaktipīṭha,* or regard the above-mentioned goddess triad as the three important *śaktipīṭhas.*[59] Chari (1982: 62) and Arivoli (1983: 50) again state that the three important *śaktipīṭhas* are "Jagannātha regarded as Oḍiyāna or Girdle Pīṭha, Jvalamukhi as Jālandhara Pīṭha, and Kanchipuram as Kāmarāja Pīṭha." These examples show that the term *śaktipīṭha* is a very loose concept, at least in Tamil Nadu. As mentioned, the tradition of the *śaktipīṭhas* is not canonized, and the information given in the available sources about Kanchipuram is unclear and contradictory. It seems the term *śaktipīṭha* is above all used to designate an important place of goddess worship or a powerful goddess. Drawing conclusions from just a few examples would be premature; yet, I got the impression that the term only appears in publications from the second half of the twentieth century, or to put it in other words, after independency. This might be due both to Neo-Hindu propaganda of the Indian state as goddess,[60] and the rising fame of Kāmākṣī through the promulgation of Śāktism by the late head of the Śaṅkara Maṭha Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī.[61] I did not encounter any form of worship of the associated body part or body ornament as it is known from other *śaktipīṭha* sanctuaries.[62] The head priest of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple has 'heard that the goddess's hip fell' there,

55 See Sharma (2007: 126–35).

56 http://www.shaktipeethas.org/panchasat/topic191.html (accessed 13.01.2018). Diacritics and italics added by me.

57 See, for example, Seshadri (2003: 150) and Rao (2008: 7).

58 Kanchipuram is regarded as 'the navel of the world.'

59 For example, Śrinivasan (1958: 27).

60 The idea of the earth as personified goddess reaches back to the Ṛgveda, but the reverence of the Indian subcontinent as 'Mother India' became popular during the independence movement and is still cultivated. See Kinsley (1986: 178–87).

61 See Wilke (1996: 149).

62 Surely, the most known example is the Kāmākhyā temple in Assam, where a cleft in the rock is worshipped as the vulva (*yoni*) of the goddess.

but confirms that no place or formation in the temple is recognized and worshipped as the hip.[63] In the Kāmākṣī temple, however, a hole in a pillar in the Gāyatrī *maṇḍapa* in front of the sanctum is regarded as the goddess's navel, but it does not receive any special worship or offerings. This, too, gives the impression that the link with the tradition of the *śaktipīṭhas* is not firmly established in Kanchipuram, irrespective of which temple might be associated with it.

How are the goddesses related?

The considerations above have shown that a relationship between Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ and Kāmākṣī is established through the 'marriage-myth' and the 'taming' legend. In both cases, a transformation of the goddess is taking place: in the myth, from dark to bright, and in the legend, from fierce to benevolent. These identities of the two goddesses are partly reflected in their attendant iconography. Kāmākṣī's iconography underlines the bright and benign aspects, while Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ shows her dark and fierce side with protruding teeth, a skull cup, and the demon's heads, although this part of her character is today sometimes downplayed by underlining her calm facial expression, and the identification of the skull cup with a bowl. However, if one considers the statue installed in the *prākāra* of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple as her original statue, the iconography highlights ascetic features rather than fierce aspects, indicated by the goddess's matted hair, skull cup, and calm, meditative face.[64] This statue expresses rather the myth's motif of the dark goddess performing penance in Kanchipuram than the wild goddess that has to be tamed.

Another, obvious connection between the goddesses can be seen in the existence of the *yoni*-shaped receptacle installed in both temples, although the one in the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple currently contains no *śrīcakra* and is not part of the goddess's iconography. The absence of the *śrīcakra* supports the view of one priest of the Kāmākṣī temple who holds that the goddess housed in the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple cannot be the 'original' Kāmākṣī: 'There is no *śrīcakra* in that temple and there is no *bilākāsa*,[65] for this Kāmākṣī there will be *śrīcakra* and *bilākāsa*, both are here, so she is Kāmākṣī and this is the original temple.'[66] Obviously, she uses the name Āti Kāmākṣī much to the indignation of the Kāmākṣī temple's priests. From their perspective, the goddess housed in the temple is Kāḷikāmpāḷ, one of the eight protecting goddesses of Kāmākṣī, but surely not the 'original' Kāmākṣī.

I have been told that the name Āti Kāmākṣī in addition to Ātipītāparamēsvari and Kāḷikāmpāḷ has only been used in the last ten years.[67] It seems that the change of name

63 Interview with Dhandapani Gurukkal, Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, 12.03.2011.

64 See also Seshadri (2003: 156), who interprets her iconography as a *sātvika* form of the same goddess, who is in the sanctum installed in *kālī* form.

65 According to some versions of the 'marriage-myth' the goddess stayed near a cavity called *bilākāsa* when she came to Kanchipuram. There is a hole in the ground in the sanctum of the Kāmākṣī temple, which is regarded as the *bilākāsa.*

66 Interview: Ute Hüsken with Kamakoti Sastrigal, 13.09.2003.

67 Donation boards on the temple walls from the years 1962, 1982, 1992 and 2004 designate the temple as "*srī ātipītāparamēsvari kāḷikāmpāḷ tēvastāṉam.*" The latest board from 2006 mentions the name Āti Kāmākṣī, it says "*srī āti kāmātci aruḷmiku ātipītāparamēsvari kāḷikāmpāḷ tirukkōyil.*" However, the

influences how the goddess is perceived, as the following incident illustrates: One evening, while I was sitting in the small office of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, an elderly lady came in. She was very excited and upset, because a chicken had been sacrificed behind the sacred temple tree that afternoon. She wanted to know who was involved in this and required the head trustee to stop such behavior, arguing that only small village temples with folk deities still perform blood sacrifices, adding that if he wants to bring the temple to the standard of the Kāmākṣī temple, he should not allow such practices to continue. I do not know whether the new name affix was chosen deliberately to elevate her to the rank of Kāmākṣī, but it surely affects the ritual practice and image of the goddess and may even increase her popularity.

5.3 Kāmākṣī, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī and Ēlavārkuḻali

Several subsidiary shrines are located in the inner hall that encloses the sanctum of Kāmākṣī in the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram. One of these shrines is known as the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī shrine. It is situated on the right-hand side of Kāmākṣī at the end of the upper *prākāra*. The goddess Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is regarded as a manifestation of goddess Kāmākṣī, created to figure as a bride of Ekāmranātha. The idol of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī has probably been used for the marriage ceremonies with Ekāmranātha until the end of the seventeenth century. During this unstable political time the festival statues of Kāmākṣī, Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja had been secretly shifted to Udayarpalayam (see fig. 5.7, B), about 220 km south of Kanchipuram, to safeguard them from the so-called Muslim invasion. While Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja returned to Kanchipuram in 1710, the statue of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī travelled with several stopovers further to Tiruvarur (fig. 5.7, C), where the musician Syama Sastri composed hymns in her honor. Finally, at the request of the king of Thanjavur, she was brought to Thanjavur (fig. 5.7, D) and installed there in her present temple in 1786.[68] Despite the fact that Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī never returned to her home place, the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram, she is today worshipped there in her original, but 'empty' shrine. Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī, the late head of the Śaṅkara Maṭha in Kanchipuram, installed a pedestal adorned with her footprints on the occasion of a *mahākumbhābhiṣeka* in 1941, to remember her. A large-sized photograph was placed on the wall of her shrine in Kanchipuram in 2009 (fig. 5.8). It depicts a painting of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī in the form in which she is today enshrined and worshipped in the temple in Thanjavur.

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head trustee Senthil Kumar told me that the name Āti Kāmākṣī is not new. Apparently, it also occurred in older documents from the time of Candraśekharendra Sarasvatī (interview 13.03.2011). Also Seshadri (2003: 155) notes that the goddess is "locally known as Adi Kamakshi." Thus, the appellation might have existed before, but is certainly more frequently used since the renovation in 2006.

68 This is not an isolated case. Festival statues have often been hidden or relocated in times of conflict. The keeping and protecting of statues became a source of (royal) power; see Davis (1993) and Peabody (1991).

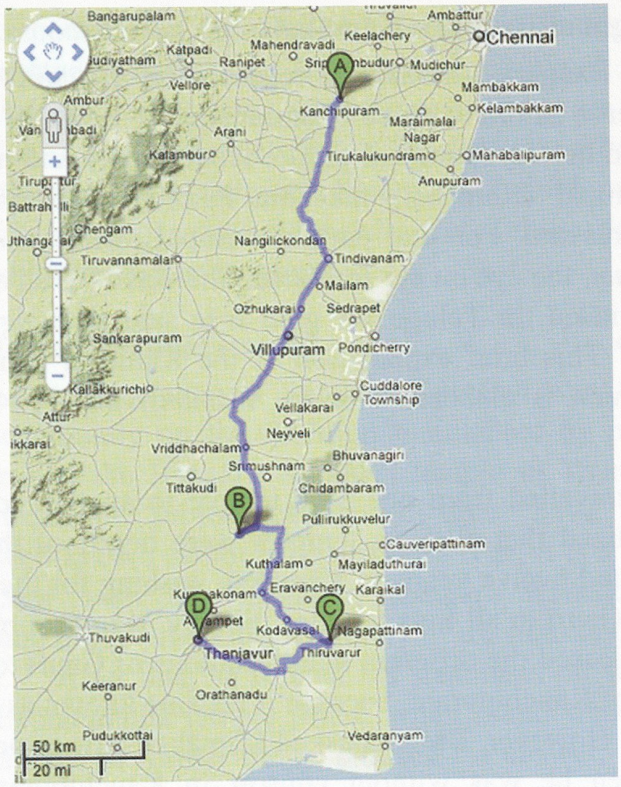


Figure 5.7 Travel route of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī
Source: Google maps 2011



Figure 5.8 Painting of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī

The mythological origin of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī

As mentioned above, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is regarded as a manifestation of the goddess Kāmākṣī, created to serve as the bride of Ekāmranātha. A priest in the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram explained her mythological origin, iconography and naming in a few words: 'Brahmā worships Ampāḷ (Kāmākṣī) that the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage has to be performed to Ekāmbareśvara. For that purpose Ampāḷ makes another Ampāḷ with two hands from her *trinetram,* the eye on her forehead. She was of gold and that is why she was called as Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. In Telugu for gold it is said as *baṅgāru*. So *baṅgāru* is of Telugu terminology.'[69] This brief explanation of the Kāmākṣī temple priest is a concise version of a myth which is elaborated in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (14.68–85).[70] It reads as follows:

> Once, Brahmā travelled from one Śiva temple to another to pay homage to Śiva. Thereby he realized that all Śiva temples were bereft of the goddess (*ambikā*).[71] Thus, he meditated twelve years on Kāmākṣī, wishing for the joint presence of Śiva and his consort Gaurī in all Śiva temples. Finally, Kāmākṣī manifested to grant him his wish. She released the different manifestations of Gaurī to all places as consorts of Śiva, except of Kanchipuram, because it became known as *śivajitkṣetra*, the place of Śiva's defeat. However, Brahmā asked Kāmākṣī, how to perform Śiva's marriage every year, when he was without consort in Kanchipuram. Thereupon a light emerged from Kāmākṣī's third eye on the forehead and a beautiful, two-armed, golden goddess, manifested. Kāmākṣī instructed Brahmā to install this goddess in all Śiva temples in Kanchipuram, and to celebrate the marriage between her and Ekāmranātha.

The iconography of the goddess, which should be installed in all Śiva temples in Kanchipuram, is described in the following way: she has two arms, with a shining parakeet in the right hand and a pendent left hand; she stands in tri-bent pose and her body is bow shaped; she is adorned with jewelry and made of gold (*divyaloha*).[72] This iconographical

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69 Interview with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 18.03.09.

70 The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is, besides its Tamil rendering, the *Kāñcimahimai*, and new reproductions of it, the only Sthalapurāṇa of Kanchipuram that gives an account of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. However, a verse in the *Lalitāmāhātmya* gives a hint to Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, too. A passage, in which Kāmākṣī describes her different manifestations in the temple in Kanchipuram, reads: "To my right is Mahāgaurī, created of my eye. She is the limit of the essence of beauty, adorned with all ornaments." (*mamākṣijā mahāgaurī vartate mama dakṣiṇe / saundaryasārasīmā sā sarvābharaṇabhūṣitā // (Lalitāmāhātmya* in BṇḍP 3.40.106)). Yet, the text does not allude to the golden body of the goddess, or that she was created for the marriage with Ekāmranātha. The *Lalitāmāhātmya*, also known as *Lalitopākhyāna*, is found at the end of the printed edition of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*. See Chapter Three for more information on the text.

71 This myth accounts for the episode in which Kāmākṣī imbibed the presence of the goddesses of all Śiva temples and remained as a concentrated power in Kanchipuram. With great longing for his consort, Śiva was looking everywhere until he reached Kanchipuram. There he saw Kāmākṣī and mistook her for his consort Gaurī. He expressed his love for her, but Kāmākṣī rejected him. When Śiva wanted to seize her forcibly she defeated him and made him surrender with the help of Kāma (KāVi 14.29–65).

72 For example: *tathā dvibhujasaṃyuktāṃ dakṣahastalasacchukām / lambavāmakarāmbhojāṃ tribhaṅgīṃ dakṣakuñjitām // 84 // tāṃ dhanurvigrahāntanvīṃ sarvābharaṇabhūṣitām / divyalohena nirmāya*

description seems to be modeled on the statue of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. However, the name Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī never appears in the text. As the priest explained, *baṅgāru* is the Telugu word for gold; in Sanskrit the terms *hema* and *svarṇa/suvarṇa* are used. Thus, the name Hema Kāmākṣī is used in a few instances in the Sanskrit text *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*. But most often the goddess is addressed as Mahāgaurī, Śivā or Ekāmbikā, and characterized by a golden body (*svarṇāṅgī, hemāṅgī, svarṇavigrahā*). Her Telugu derived name, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, is usually used in the spoken language.

Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as former festival statue?

The narrative relating that the statue of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was formerly used for the marriage rituals is based mainly on the tradition maintained by priests of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram and the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur.[73] Priests of the Ekāmranātha temple treat the subject cautiously; they 'have heard about Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī.' One of the well-known senior priests states: 'Yes, it is a fact, once upon a time before Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī went to Thanjavur, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī will come to the [Ekāmranātha] temple and they will do the ceremony of the marriage and then it will return to the Kāmākṣī temple.'[74] After this, he refined his statement: 'It was heard, but we have not seen it.' Another Ekāmranātha temple priest, when asked whether Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was married to Ekāmranātha in former times, phrased his answer, in a similar way: 'It is only by way of hearing that it has taken place, nobody has seen it.'[75] Obviously, the narrative of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as former bride is not so deeply routed in the oral tradition of the Ekāmranātha temple priests.

More importance is given to the narratives of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī by priests of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram and the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur, who have preserved the memory of her role in the marriage rituals in great detail. I conducted interviews with one Kāmākṣī temple priest and two priests of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur.[76] A priest of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple recounted the following after I inquired about the performance of the marriage rituals with Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī and Ekāmranātha:

> How the *kalyāṇa* was done before was, it was done for two days, it is also in the book (*Kāmākṣīvilāsa*) (…) This Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ (Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī) went to Ekāmbareśvara, she will go to the Ekāmbareśvara temple entrance. They are Śivācārya and we are Smārtas. They will keep the *tirumāṅkalyam* at the feet of Ekāmbareśvara and then tie it. (...) For going out and coming itself the *śrīcakrayajana* (worship of the *śrīcakra*) has been done, then after coming here the

tāmāvāhya dhruveśvarīm // 85 // (KāVi 14.84–85).

73 The temple in Thanjavur is today most often called Kāmākṣī temple. I use the term Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple to make a clear distinction between the temples in Kanchipuram and Thanjavur.

74 Interview with Rajappa Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 14.04.2009.

75 Interview with Nagaswamy Iyer, Ekāmranātha temple, 05.04.2010.

76 Furthermore, I had access to interviews conducted by Srilata Raman and Ute Hüsken in the years 2003 and 2007.

> *sahasrakalaśābhiṣeka* (ablution with one thousand water-pots) has been done to Ampāḷ.[77]

Another priest of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple gave the following account:

> As long as Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was in Kanchi, the marriage *utsava* took place during Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. At that time this Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī Ampāḷ starts from the *dhruvasthāna* (permanent place) and comes to the temple entrance, and Ekāmbareśvara will come to the entrance of his temple. Ēlavārkuḻali Ampāḷ, the *utsava* idol from Ekāmbareśvara temple will also come. She is a *pratinidhi* [representative] and the *kalyāṇa utsava* takes place. After she returns to the *yathasthāna* (her original place) *sahasrakalaśābhiṣeka* takes place. (...) Since Ampāḷ moved out of the *dhruvasthāna*, this *sahasrakalaśābhiṣeka* took place. Now she is not there, she is only here [in Thanjavur].[78]

A priest of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram recollects the event in the following way: 'The marriage is actually between Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī and Ekāmbareśvara only. So after this, when Ampāḷ returns, they perform the *sahasrakalaśābhiṣeka* after two days and then bring in Ampāḷ. Because this is Vaidika and that is Āgama. This is one reason. The second is, there is no *naivedya* for Ampāḷ in this *caṉṉati* (shrine) for two days. So, as a remedy they do the *sahasrakalaśābhiṣeka.*'[79] The same priest recounted in another interview, conducted six years later in 2009, that the goddess returned from the Ekāmranātha temple after three days.[80]

These interviews show that narratives about the performance of the marriage rituals with Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as bride have been transmitted differently in Kanchipuram and in Thanjavur. Both priests in Thanjavur recount that Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī has been brought to the entrance of the Ekāmranātha temple and one of them even mentions Ēlavārkuḻali as a representative. Apparently, in the memory of the Thanjavur priests, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī never entered the temple compound of Ekāmranātha, whereas according to the description of the Kanchipuram priest she stayed there for two (or three) days. The narrative of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī staying at the Ekāmranātha temple for two days may have been influenced by, or reflected in, an episode in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (14.86–90), in which Kāmākṣī instructed Brahmā how to perform the marriage rituals with Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī:

> Bring Mahāgaurī (Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī) on an auspicious day near the great *liṅga* of the mango tree and celebrate with joy the marriage of both Śivas in the afternoon and the festival of both Śivas in due order until the evening. Then hand them over to their respective places, Mahāgaurī to her permanent home, Śaṅkara to Śaṅkara's home. Great fault is created, when Ambikā is not worshipped in her permanent home for two days. O Vidhi (Brahmā), perform together with Durvāsas's disciples[81]

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77 Interview: Srilata Raman with Janakiraman, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 18.03.2003.

78 Interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.

79 Interview: Ute Hüsken with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 11.01.2003.

80 Interview with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 18.03.2009.

81 The disciples of Durvāsas are the priests of the Kāmākṣī temple. According to their tradition, the sage Durvāsas instructed and initiated them in worshiping goddess Kāmākṣī. The worshiping procedures

> the ablution of Gaurī with one thousand water-pots according the way the Tantra has been described in the Veda. Thereafter worship (the *śrīcakra*?) and let the festivals of Maheśitṛ (Śiva) be performed every year in due order according the rules.[82]

According to these verses, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī should not leave her permanent shrine for more than two days, and a *sahasrakalaśābhiṣeka* has to be performed when she returns.

One informant, affiliated to the Ekāmranātha temple, raised an interesting objection on the subject of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's former role in the marriage ceremonies, doubting that she has ever been taken out for festivals and processions: 'The original Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī will be in the temple only, it cannot be taken out, the idol cannot be taken out from any temple, that is why they make the replicas (...) a replica of her will be made in the form of a *pañcaloha vigraha*[83] and it comes out.'[84] This argument might be sound in terms of practical considerations such as the weight and security of the idol (if it was really made of solid gold, as narrated). However, this view also implies that two idols of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī existed, one permanently installed in the *mūlasthāna*, and one as portable festival statue.

Thus, it appears that questions relating to Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's former role in the marriage rituals in Kanchipuram cannot be sufficiently answered. To summarize, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was apparently used for the marriage rituals with Ekāmranātha until the idol was shifted to Udayarpalayam at the end of the seventeenth century. It remains unclear whether her idol was used or a replica of it, whether she entered the Ekāmranātha temple and stayed there or just came up to the temple's entrance, and whether the idol of Ēlavārkuḻali existed at that time and could have (already) been used as the representative for the marriage rituals.

The legendary history of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's travels to Thanjavur

Narratives about Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's move from Kanchipuram to her final destination, Thanjavur, are situated between legend and history. The following reconstruction of her journey is based on interviews, the biography of the Zamindars of Udayarpalayam[85], inscriptions, British reports[86] and references found in scholarly literature. Although opinions and details differ according the different sources, four points in time stand as landmarks for the reconstruction of this historical incident: a) the shifting of the statues in the last two decades of the seventeenth century; b) the return of Varadarāja (and

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have been laid down in the ritual handbook *Saubhāgyacintāmaṇi*, which is used in the Kāmākṣī and Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temples.

82 *kalyāṇadivase cūtamahāliṅgasya sannidhau / tām ānīya mahāgaurīṃ kalyāṇam śivayor mudā // 86 // kṛtvā parehnī sāyāhne śivayor utsavaṃ kramāt / dhruvālaye mahāgaurīṃ śaṅkaraṃ śaṅkarālaye // 87 // yathāsthāne nidhehi tvaṃ dhruvahīnālaye 'mbikā / dinadvayārcitā cet sā mahān doṣaḥ prajāyate // 88 // vedoktatantramārgeṇa durvāsaśśiṣyakair vidhe / kṛtvā gauryabhiṣekaṃ ca sahasrakalaśais tadā // 89 // yajanaṃ ca tataḥ kṛtvā varṣe varṣe krameṇa tu / utsavādīn yathāśāstraṃ kārayitvā maheśituḥ // 90 //*

83 This is an alloy of five metals, which is used to make the festival statues.

84 Interview with K. Balasubramanyam, 27.03.2010.

85 Vadivelu, A. *Family History and Biography – Zamindar of Udaiyarpalaiyam*. Reprint from "The Aristocracy of Southern India" Vol. II. Madras, 1921.

86 Crole, Charles Stewart. *The Chingleput, late Madras, district : a manual*. Madras: Government, 1879. I was unable to access Crole's report.

Ekāmranātha) in 1710; c) Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's stay in Tiruvarur when Syama Sastri was born there in 1763; d) the inauguration of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's temple in Thanjavur in 1786.

a) The shifting of the statues in the last two decades of the seventeenth century

The relocation of the festival icons of the three major temples in Kanchipuram is usually linked to the 'Muslim invasion' or 'Muslim rule', which is only vaguely defined. For example, a Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple priest placed the incidents 'during the seventeenth century at the time of Vijayanagara rule, when there was the Muslim invasion.'[87] One Kāmākṣī temple priest[88] attributed the shifting of the idols to a threat posed by the Nawab of Arcot.[89] A more precise reference to the historical background is found in a report[90] of the secretary R. Ramachandra Rao (ARE 1919/20: 122), where it is stated that "the Delhi Emperor Aurangzeb fitted out an expedition in about 1688 A.D. against the Mahrattas of the South, and Conjeeveram (Kanchipuram), in common with several other important centres of South-India, felt the shock of this iconoclastic invasion." Yet, the account of the family history of the Zamindars of Udayarpalayam mentioned Surap Singh (the commander or chieftain?) in this context: "Owing to the downfall of the Royar family and also on account of the disturbance caused by Surap Singh in that part of the country, Ekambaraiswerar, Varada Raja, Kamatchi Amman and other deities of Conjeeveram were all brought to Udaiyarpalaiyam" (Vadivelu 1921: 11). This account gives no date for the relocation, but mentions that Nallappa Udaiyar gave shelter to the deities. Likewise, the time of his reign is not given, but it is reported (Vadivelu 1921: 10) that he succeeded his father Kalyana Rangappa Udaiyar after the latter made a donation in Śaka 1600 (= 1678 CE). Thus, Nallappa Udaiyar must have ruled after 1678 and therefore, the shifting of the statues to Udayarpalayam probably took place in the last two decades of the seventeenth century.

The choice of Udayarpalayam as an asylum for the Kanchipuram deities is on the one hand explained by its strong fortification and location in a dense forest, and on the other by the history of the Zamindars of Udayarpalayam, who trace their roots to "members of the Conjeeveram royal family" (Vadivelu 1921: 5). It seems that their ancestors had previously been poligars (Tam. *pāḷayakkār*, 'watcher, chieftain') of Kanchipuram, and that land in the forest region of Udayarpalayam and the honorary title 'Kachi' were assigned to them by rulers of the Vijayanagara Empire in the sixteenth century (Vadivelu 1921: 1–5). Further, reference to an established connection between Kanchipuram and Udayarpalayam is made in a book titled *Jathi Sangraha*, which indicates that the deities of Kanchipuram were brought annually to Udayarpalayam.[91]

87 Interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.

88 Interview with Babu Sastrigal, 18.03.2009.

89 The first Nawab of Arcot was appointed by Aurangzeb in 1692. Arcot is located, near Vellore, approximately 50 km west of Kanchipuram.

90 Order-No. 985, Home (Education), dated 31. August 1920. I assume that Rao's account is based on Crole's report in the Chingleput Manual from 1879.

91 See Vadivelu (1921: 12). I could not get hold of this book. However, the distance of ca. 220 km between Kanchipuram and Udayarpalayam seems to be too far for annual travels of the deities.

However, Udayarpalayam was not necessarily the first place of refuge for the Kanchipuram deities. A priest of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple[92] and Venkataraman (1968: 40) mention the Gingee Fort as the first shelter, used before the idol of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was brought to Udayarpalayam.

The circumstances in which the deities were relocated are associated with the legend that the idols were disguised as corpses to bring them safely out of Kanchipuram. A priest of the Kāmākṣī temple described the events:

> When they took [Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī] from here they applied this Plugu[93]. If you apply that, it will look black in color. They prepared the statue in such a way as if a small child died. Even then the Muslims blocked and asked. So they said the child is suffering from chicken pox. They were afraid of that, they won't come near. So they thought the child has died due to chicken pox and so they left.[94]

A reference to the disguise of the deities as corpses is also made in Crole's report in the Chingleput Manual of 1879 and the same account is given by Ayyar (1922: 77–78).

b) The return of Varadarāja (and Ekāmranātha) in 1710

Knowledge about the return of Varadarāja from Udayarpalayam is based on an inscription (ARE 1919/20, No. 639) on a slab of stone, placed in front of the goddess's shrine at the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram. The inscription is dated to Śaka 1632, which corresponds to 1710 CE. It consists of two Sanskrit verses in Telugu script, followed by a translation in Telugu prose and twelve lines in Nagari.[95] The inscription records that the chieftain Rāja Śrī Lālā Tōḍaramalla brought the idols of Varadarāja and his consorts back from Udayarpalayam according to the order of Srinivāsa, alias Attāṉ Tiruvēṅgaṇa Rāmānuja Jiyar, and reinstalled them in the temple at Kanchipuram.[96] The report of the secretary R. Ramachandro Rao explains the difficulty in regaining the festival statues from Udayarpalayam:

> But when the danger was past and Conjeeveram was considered safe, the local chieftain of Uḍayārpāḷayam, who was much enraptured at the image of the god Varadarāja refused to restore it to its original abode at Kāñchī, with the result that, at the special intercession of Srīmat Paramahamsa Parivrājakāchārya Āttāṉ Jīyar, his disciple Lālā Tōḍaramalla terrorised the chief with a strong contingent of troops at his back and safely brought back the image and reinstated it in the temple with great pomp and splendor. (ARE 1919/20, p. 122)

92 See interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.

93 This ingredient is made of the secretion of the civet cat. Even today, it is smeared on the statue's face to disguise the gold and to recall the dramatic escape. Note the black face of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī (fig. 5.8).

94 Interview: Ute Hüsken with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 11.01.2003.

95 The inscription is not published, but is described in detail in ARE 1919/20, pp. 121–22.

96 The ritual and sectarian consequences of Varadarāja's return are detailed in Hüsken (2017: 72–73).

The inscription at the Varadarāja temple does not record the return of Ekāmranātha. However, Crole (1879) reports that after the shifting of the festival statues "the idol of the Siva Temple was restored to its place by a Brahmin called Sellambattu."[97]

In the account of the family history of the Zamindars of Udayarpalyam it is noted that "the Ekambaraiswerar and Varadarajar deities were clandestinely removed to Conjeeveram. The Swarna Kamatchi Amman [Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī] deity alone remained at Udaiyarpalaiyam" (Vadivelu 1921: 14). Why the deities Ekāmranātha and Varadarāja were removed clandestinely, and why only Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī remained, is not explained.

It is worth mentioning that doubts were expressed about whether Ekāmranātha had also been shifted to Udayarpalayam. A priest of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple spoke of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's times in Udayarpalayam: 'When Ampāḷ was in Udayarpalayam, the *utsava murti* of the Varadarāja temple was also there. He returned to Kanchipuram.'[98] When asked whether Ekāmranātha was also there at this time, he insisted: 'No. People say he was there. No. Only Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī and Varadarāja came. Only this is the old history, nothing about Ekāmbareśvara.' The authorities of the Ekāmranātha temple have no records pertaining to Ekāmranātha's stay in Udayarpalayam. Their information about the relocation of the festival statue is based on the account of the family history of the Zamindars of Udayarpalayam.

c) Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's stay in Tiruvarur when Syama Sastri was born there in 1763

Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī remained in Udayarpalayam, while Varadarāja (and Ekāmranātha) moved back to Kanchipuram in 1710. It is not known why she alone stayed in Udayarpalayam, or why she left. After several stopovers she eventually arrived at Tiruvarur, the place of her next prolonged stay. Information varies about the different stopovers and their durations, and very little is known about the background and motivation for the repeated relocations of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. A priest of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur recollected the following stopovers:

> She was worshipped for about fifty years by the Udayarpalayam Zamindar. Next she was in Karaikuruci (Karaikkudi?) for some time. This is the place where betel leaves are famous. She was for a short period at Anaikari (?). It has come to know that Ampāḷ, was also at a place called Kudikadu, which is near to Mannargudi and in Poondy (Pondy?). Then she was worshipped for about fifty years at Tiruvarur.[99]

Another priest of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple remembered merely one stopover by name: Nagapattam. Further, he simply referred to 'other small towns on the Eastern coast.'[100] Venkataraman (1968: 40) reports Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's journey from Udayarpalayam to Tiruvarur: "Dakshiṇāmūrti Śāstri's son Aiyā Śāstri and some others later took the idol to Aṇakkuḍi, then to Nagore and Sikkil before it reached Tiruvārūr where it was kept in worship for some years."

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97 Quoted in Sharma (1987: 80).
98 Interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.
99 Interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.
100 Interview: Ute Hüsken with Janakiraman, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 22.06.2007.

A comparison of these three statements reveals an inconsistent record of stopovers between Udayarpalayam and Tiruvarur. They are Karaikuruci, Anaikari, Kudikadu and Poondy according to one Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī priest, Nagapattam according to the other priest, and Anakkudi, Nagore and Sikkil as stated by Venkataraman. Most of the stopovers cannot be located with certainty, the duration of stay is not known, nor are the reasons for the repeated relocations. However, all sources concur that Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī had reached Tiruvarur by the time the musician Syama Sastri was born there in 1763[101] as grandson of Vēnkaṭādri, then chief priest of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. Syama Sastri composed hymns in honor of the goddess and became renowned as one of the trinity of Carnatic music.

d) The inauguration of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's temple in Thanjavur in 1786

The statue of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī left Tiruvarur, probably in 1780 or 1781, when Syama Sastri was eighteen years old.[102] Since he belonged to the priestly family of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, he and his father accompanied the goddess to her final destination, Thanjavur. It seems that the influence of the Rāja of Thanjavur was instrumental Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's relocation there.

> On the desire of the King Thulaja Rāja of Thanjavur that he wanted Ampāḷ (Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī) to be in Thanjavur itself and he would construct a temple for her, Ampāḷ stayed there itself. Before the temple was constructed, Ampāḷ was in Mela Vidhi Street in the Konganesvarar temple for five years and Moolai Hanuman Koil for five years, and *pūjās* were performed to her. The stable where the horses used to be were given for construction of the temple, and in the year 1786, the first *kumbābhiṣeka* took place.[103]

According to the priests of both temples, attempts have been made to restore Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī to her original place in Kanchipuram. The last such attempt is documented in a lawsuit that took place in the 1960s, in which the Śaṅkara Maṭha in Kanchipuram claimed the right of control over Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. However, the Maṭha only gained administrative rights, not the right of to bring the idol back to Kanchipuram.[104]

Problems of dating

So far, I have described the events with reference to a date which connects the 'Muslim invasion' to Aurangzeb's time in the second half of the seventeenth century. However, a second date is provided by some sources, which relates the 'Muslim invasion' to Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan, and which would place the events one century later, in the second half of the eighteenth century. For example, Irschick (1994: 16–7) discussed the battle of Pullalur near Kanchipuram, where Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan defeated the British. In this context he reported "that in 1780 the authorities of the three temples in Kanchipuram (...) decided that they had to find ways to protect the idols from Hyder Ali's armies" (1994: 17).

101 Alternatively, 1762 is given as his year of birth.

102 See Venkataraman (1968: 40). However, Kamesvara Sastrigal (interview 15.03.2010) refers to his sixteenth year.

103 Interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.

104 See Mines and Gourishankar (1990: 776).

Further, he noted that they were disguised as corpses according to Crole's Chingleput Manual. The eighteenth century as the period for the relocation of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is also mentioned in an article by Mines and Gourishankar (1990: 776). It could be possible that Crole's report in the Chingleput Manual led to this late dating. A note in the *Annual report on Indian epigraphy* (ARE 1919/20: 121) points to a miscalculation of the date of the inscription (ARE 1919, no. 639) that reports the return of Varadarāja. Crole misread Śaka 1632 as 1799 CE instead of 1710 CE, so it seemed an obvious choice for sources that based their information on Crole's report to associate the 'Muslim invasion' with Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan.

K. Balasubramanyam, a donor for the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage ceremony, also connects the shifting of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī with Tipu Sultan. Balasubramanyam's ancestor Challambhotlu was, according to their family history, the spiritual advisor of the king of Kanchipuram at the time when Tipu Sultan lay siege to Kanchipuram in the second half of the eighteenth century:

> At that time there was a golden idol of Kāmākṣī here. It is about life-sized in pure gold. The Kanchi Rāja assumed that the actual war was about taking away the gold idol and not for conquering the kingdom. Thus, he wanted to protect the presiding deity of Kanchipuram. Then, some people died a natural death in the city. The king's spiritual advisor (Challambhotlu) had the idea to send the dead bodies in a procession out of the city, where Tipu Sultan's camp was, and spread the rumor that Kanchipuram was plague-ridden. On those days plague was considered as a threatening and contagious epidemic disease, so people in the army camp got frightened and some ran away. In that funeral procession the golden idol of Kāmākṣī was disguised as dead body. The idol was carried by my forefather (Challambhotlu). Now it is kept near Thanjavur.[105]

The story continues that, as a mark of respect, the king declared that for the generations to come Challambhotlu's family will have hereditary rights in the Ekāmranātha temple to perform whatever *pūjā* they wish (see Chapter Six). In a later interview, Balasubramanyam added that his ancestor Challambhotlu had also made the golden idol of Kāmākṣī (Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī).[106]

As mentioned above, Crole (1879) reports that a Brahman called Sellambattu restored the idol of Ekāmranātha to its place. This could be a reference to Balasubramanyam's ancestor, Challambhotlu. The spelling of Sellambattu resembles Challambhotlu, considering that in Tamil the letter *c* in the initial position is often transcribed as *s*. To me it seems more likely that Balasubramanyam's ancestor was involved in regaining the statue of Ekāmranātha, rather than in commissioning Kāmākṣī's golden statue or assisting the relocation of her idol to Thanjavur. This would at least explain the close relationship of Balasubramanyam's family with the Ekāmranātha temple, and not with the Kāmākṣī temple.

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105 Interview: Ute Hüsken with K. Balasubramanyam, 20.03.2008.

106 Interview with K. Balasubramanyam, 27.03.2010.

A dating of these events to Tipu Sultan's time, in the second half of the eighteenth century, is especially unlikely in the case of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī. She stayed in Tiruvarur in the middle of the eighteenth century and her temple was inaugurated in Thanjavur in 1786. However, it could be that the statues of Varadarāja and Ekāmranātha have been shifted twice: first, during Aurangzeb's time in the seventeenth century, and second, during the Carnatic wars in the eighteenth century. It is stated in the *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (1935: 38) that the Ekāmranātha *utsava mūrti* was taken to Jambukesvara in 1767 and kept in a cut mango tree and worshipped there for twenty-five years. After the completion of the third Carnatic war the statue was brought back to the temple and reestablished in 1793. Likewise, Mukund (2005: 73) states that, according to records in the Madras Archives, the priests of the Varadarāja temple brought their festival statues to Madras to protect them from Hyder Ali.

Paṅkuṉi Uttiram in Thanjavur

Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī in Thanjavur is today considered the bride of Ekāmranātha.[107] She is also called Cūtaliṅgeśvarī, the 'Lady of the mango tree *liṅga*', since she was created for marriage to Ekāmranātha, as a priest in Thanjavur explained.[108] The same priest remarked in another interview that this lasting union is expressed by a sacred thread, which is adorned to her, because her husband is not present: 'To say that the Lord is within her, she is adorned with one *upanayana* thread daily, which is not in Kanchi. Every day in the early morning a sacred thread is put to her.'[109] Apart from this symbolism, the celebration of the wedding day on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is an important event in the annual festival cycle. A significant difference to Kanchipuram is that the marriage ritual itself is not celebrated, but rather the wedding anniversary. A new sari is presented to and adorned upon the goddess on the day of Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, following the custom of an Indian wife on her wedding anniversary. Additionally, the *māṅkalyam,* a neck ornament, which signifies marital commitment, is symbolically renewed on this day. A priest in Thanjavur described the procedure in the following way: 'On the day of Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, the *tirukalyāṇa utsava* for Ampāḷ takes place. It is the tradition that the *neriñci mālai poṭṭu*[110] was given by the Maharashtra king (of Thanjavur). That *poṭṭu* is taken in a palanquin to the Thanjavur senior prince's house. They will touch and give it, and it will be collected and brought and adorned [to Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī].'[111]

The hereditary right to provide the *poṭṭu* rests with the family of the former Mahārāja of Thanjavur. The priest explained that the royal family is not able to give a new one every year.[112] Thus, the old *poṭṭu* is brought to their house, touched by one family member, and

107 However, one priest of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram denied that she was ever Ekāmranātha's bride.

108 Interview: Srilata Raman with Janakiraman, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 18.03.2003.

109 Interview: Ute Hüsken with Janakiraman, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 18.06.2007.

110 The *poṭṭu* is a special designed pendant hanging from the chain of the *māṅkalyam*. The term *neruñci mālai* refers to the chain (*mālai*), which looks like tiny thorns named after the *neruñci* plant (cow's thorn, *tribulus terrestris*).

111 Interview with Kamesvara Sastrigal, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple, 15.03.2010.

112 In Kanchipuram, the right to provide the *poṭṭu* for Elavārkuḻali is within the Chettiar community. Every year they make a new one, which has exactly the same design as the old one. This newly made

handed over to the priests as if it was a new one made for the marriage. The priests then bring it to the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple and, as they emphasize, adorn it and do not tie it to the goddess, because 'tying' is only performed during the marriage rituals. Afterwards the goddess receives the eleventh *abhiṣeka*[113] of the year.

Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is an important festival in the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur. Food is served to devotees and the poor, as is customary in Hindu temples on such occasions. This service was initiated about ten years ago by Babu Sastrigal, a priest of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram. When I interviewed him in 2009, he was about to leave for Thanjavur with about thirty people, including his family and cooks, to provide food on the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram day in a nearby hall (*kalyāṇa maṇḍapa*) which belongs to the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple. He says he initiated the service because Kāmākṣī instructed him to do so:

> For every Paṅkuṉi Uttiram for the past ten years we are going there. Why I started doing this is, once when I was doing *alaṃkāra* to Ampāḷ (Kāmākṣī), I thought that she is my mother as well as my daughter. Then she said to me that: 'You are saying I am your daughter, so keep ten Rupees aside daily.' So that is why I am keeping that amount separately. In the first year I prepared and gave Laddus [in Thanjavur], in the second year about 150 people had lunch and now it has increased to this level. Now there are about one thousand people![114]

It is interesting that he travels to Thanjavur for the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival, because priests of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple and the Kāmākṣī temple usually stress that there are no relations between the two temples today. Yet, Babu Sastrigal's priestly family, from the Kāmākṣī temple, certainly attributes increasing importance to Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī and the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram celebrations in Thanjavur.

A narrative about the events on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram in Thanjavur circulates among Ekāmranātha temple priests in Kanchipuram. One priest observed: 'What she (Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī) has said is: 'I am in Thanjavur and bless everybody, but one day I will not be in Thanjavur, on the day of Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. I will go to Ekāmbareśvara temple for the marriage.' That is why during the marriage, after five o'clock they close the door and keep it closed.'[115] The same narrative has been recounted by another priest of the Ekāmranātha temple: 'Once upon a time, it is said that on the day of Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, even though the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is in Thanjavur, that day the temple will be closed. On that day there will be no *darśan* of Ampāḷ. It is implied that she comes here [to the Ekāmranātha temple].'[116] The temple in Thanjavur is not closed today; yet, the narrative of the Ekāmranātha temple priests sustains Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's status as bride of Ekāmranātha.

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poṭṭu is tied to her during the marriage rituals, while the old one is put into the temple treasury year after year.

113 Eleven *abhiṣekas* are performed for Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī in one year: nine during the Navarātri festival, the tenth on her birth star *pūram* in the month of Aippaci (mid-October to mid-November), and the eleventh on the marriage anniversary on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. The *abhiṣeka* is done in *ekānta* way, which means that devotees cannot witness it (opposite: *lokānta*, in public).

114 Interview with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 25.03.2009.

115 Interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 05.04.2010.

116 Interview with Anand Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 16.04.2009.

5.4 Concluding remarks

Reviewing the material presented in this chapter, we can see that the three goddesses—Ēlavārkuḻali, Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ—are closely related, though their relationship is not clearly defined and remains open to change. Obviously, this situation sometimes leads to tensions and competitions, most visible in the relationship between Kāmākṣi and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, but also more subtly between Ēlavārkuḻali and Kāmākṣī. Kāmākṣī is at present the superior goddess of Kanchipuram and it seems that the other two goddesses benefit from being linked to her. From a historical perspective, however, the goddess with the name Kāmākṣī does not appear before the fourteenth century. The Kanchipuram goddess's 'original' place will probably never be known. It is also possible that a number of shrines to different goddesses existed simultaneously. Orr (2005) has demonstrated that goddesses' images, and the vocabulary used to designate them in inscriptions from the eighth to thirteenth centuries, show so many similarities that sectarian categories and characterizations, such as fierce and benevolent, do not apply to them and have probably been assigned at a later stage. This assumption might be corroborated by the appearance of Śaṅkara's 'taming' legend no earlier than the fourteenth century.

What has become clear in the depiction of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's history and her present day situation is that the priests of the three temples, Ekāmranātha, Kāmākṣī and Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, transmitted knowledge about the goddess differently. Yet, all agree that Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was, and remains (in a sense), the former bride of Ekāmranātha. The status of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as bride of Ekāmranātha is maintained, though to variable degrees in the different temples. Surely, her tradition is maintained in detail in her own temple in Thanjavur, but a rising interest in her can also be witnessed in one priestly family from the Kanchipuram temple. For the priests of the Ekāmranātha temple, she no longer plays an important role and knowledge about her compromises merely narratives and vague memories, which have faded into the recesses of history.

The account of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī's former role as bride in the marriage rituals in Kanchipuram clearly shows that the relocation of her statue to Thanjavur changed the rituals significantly. It must be considered that the entire temple festival stopped for some years, while the festival statues were kept in safe custody in Udayarpalayam. Then, it must have been unclear for some time whether Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī would be coming back to Kanchipuram, given her travels from one place to another over a period of about one hundred years and the attempts that have been made to restore her to her original place. Thus, it can only be speculated when, and under what circumstances, Ēlavārkuḻali replaced her in the rituals.

The origin of Ēlavārkuḻali is unknown. Priests of the Ekāmranātha temple assert that she has been housed in the temple long before Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī was shifted to Thanjavur. She is regarded as a long-established consort of Ekāmranātha, whose name can be traced back to the poet saint Cuntarar of the first half of the ninth century. He praises her in one hymn (7.61) on Kacci Ēkampam (Ekāmranātha in Kanchipuram). In one line Umā is characterized as having long, perfumed hair (with cardamom or unguent) (Tam. *ēlavār kuḻāḷ umai*), which gave Śiva´s consort in the Ekāmranātha temple the name Ēlavārkuḻali.

However, priests of the Kāmākṣī temple trace the name Ēlavārkuḻali back to the *Lalitātriśatistotra,* the hymn of Lalitā's three hundred names. Here (verse 7), one of Lalitā's names is *elā-sugandhi-cikurā*, which means 'having hair that has the good smell of cardamom.' From this perspective is Ēlavārkuḻali the Tamilized form of the Sanskrit name *elā-sugandhi-cikurā,* which is an epithet of Lalitā. Thus, Ēlavārkuḻali is considered to be a manifestation of Lalitā/Kāmākṣī, whose statue has been produced to replace Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, as one priest of the Kāmākṣī temple suggests.[117] However, the shifting of the statue of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī has a historical basis and might be one reason why Ēlavārkuḻali is the bride in the marriage rituals, while Kāmākṣī joins the marriage rituals as bridesmaid.

117 Interview Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 25.03.2009.

6 Perspectives on Participation

In Chapter Four I outlined the rituals performed on the tenth day of the festival with a focus on the schedule of the deities Ēlavārkuḻali and Ekāmranātha. However, from this perspective the events appear very linear and one-dimensional. Two observations during my first festival participation awoke my interest, and I followed them up over the next two years, which resulted in this chapter. First, it should be noted that the festival is highly complex. The movements of the deities and the priests' performance of attendant rituals are not the only rituals on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. Donors and participants perform their own rituals, some of which run parallel, overlap or come together with those performed by the Ekāmranātha temple priests. Second, participants attend the marriage festival in various ways; few would follow the entire schedule of the deities to observe all rituals relating to them, as I did for research purposes. I changed my perspective to focus not only on the deities and priests as main actors, but also on other participants and their actions during Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. I spoke with people in the streets and at the temple area, with inhabitants of Okkapiranthan Kulam, and with the donors who sponsor the marriage ceremony.[1] My questions were related to their mode of participation and their perspective on the events. Those who were engaged in rituals not performed by the temple's priests, but connected to the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival, especially attracted my attention. These include the *kāvaṭi* bearers, who come to offer flower garlands to the goddess, and the donors, who bring their marriage presents in a festive procession to the temple. I accompanied some of them to learn about their rituals and schedule on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, which only partly intersect with the 'main' rituals performed by the priests for Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali. Their schedule and participation are often aligned with their family tradition, and the performance of specific ritual roles is perceived by them as a right and a duty. Another group, participating in a very specific way in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival, is that of couples who come to the temple to be married on the same night as the gods. Participants and priests highlight these (human) marriages as a characteristic feature of the divine marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram.

Based on my observations and informal conversations with participants, I will first outline ways to participate and motivations of the diverse festival participants. After briefly reflecting about the priestly roles and issues at work during the festival, I concentrate on families and groups involved in ritual activities. I describe the rituals they perform on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram and address questions of how they perceive their role in the festival, and how they contribute to the complexity of the festival. Their ritual activities and objectives vary, yet all of them emphasize the importance of their role in the divine marriage. The first

1 Anonymous participants who I quote in the following sections were interviewed during the evening procession of the ninth day (*veḷḷi māvaṭi cēvai*, 18.03.2011), and on the marriage day, in the streets and at the temple area in 2010 and 2011. Their responses have been recorded as MP3 files and translated by my research assistant, M. Shanthini Sarah. For convenience I do not mention this in every quote.

example is that of Okkapiranthan Kulam residents, who founded an association to collect money for hosting the three goddesses on the afternoon and evening of the marriage day, and created their own neighborhood festival as part of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage celebrations. Then, I turn attention to three donors involved in the marriage ceremony. They have their own schedule of community and family based customs and rituals, which at one point meet the ceremonies at the Ekāmranātha temple. Finally, I deal with the human couples who are married at the Ekāmranātha temple at the same time as the gods. What are their reasons for performing their own marriage in this context, and what expectations are connected with it?

6.1 Festival participation

The deities' processions through town are *the* characteristic feature and structuring element of the great annual temple festivals (see Chapter Two). The god or goddess leaves the temple to come to the people. This is perceived as a special feature, as one participant, at about fifty-five years of age, explained: 'It is always the people with good health that go to the god in the temple, but during the procession the god himself comes in the street to meet the people. Only on that occasion the god comes out to give *darśan* to the people.' People sit and stand in groups in front of the houses or at relevant points on the processional route, such as the flower market or the Nalli Maṇḍapa near the Kacchapeśvara temple (see map, fig. 2.20). They chat with each other in a relaxed atmosphere while waiting for the procession to arrive. When the beating of the drum signals the approaching procession, people stand to get a first glimpse of the deities and admire their ornaments (*alaṃkāra*). They welcome and worship them with palms together, and many offer plates with camphor, fruits and coins. Then, they take some *vibhūti* and *kumkum* from the priests and let the procession pass by. People often comment on the deities' *alaṃkāra*, saying for example 'see how the garlands are arranged' or 'look how beautiful the goddess is.' Seeing *alaṃkāra* of the deities is for most participants one of the festival's major attractions. Some told us that they do not know the story behind the festival in great detail, but that they like to see the decorated gods. An elderly lady with a group of women even said: 'The whole festival is about the *alaṃkāra* of the goddess, which is so beautiful.' Many participants are also attracted by the fireworks, held at night during the *maṇṭappaṭi* (reception). The donors, who sponsor the *maṇṭappaṭi* of the evening processions, spend huge amounts of money on fireworks to entertain the deities—and the participants. It seemed to me that many people assess a donor's wealth by the splendor and noise level of the nocturnal fireworks.

Many participants come each year with their families to watch specific processions and to partake in specific events. Some meet relatives, who have been married off to nearby villages and who also come to Kanchipuram for the festival. A group of women, sitting and chatting in the streets, explained: 'It is an outing. Our husbands are at home. We are happy to enjoy ourselves in a group with friends.' Socializing is clearly an important aspect of participation in the festival.

However, there are also many devotees who go to the Ekāmranātha temple to get their first *darśan* of the deities there. They participate in the *dīpārādhana* ceremony (waving of different lamps in front of the deities), which is performed at the Utsava Sannadhi before

the evening processions (see fig. 2.12). Participation in the worshipping ceremony before the starting of the procession is an obligation and honor for the respective donors. They come with their families and get the best places in close proximity to god Ekāmranātha, whereas the 'average' devotee often has to watch the ceremony from a distance.

During Paṅkuṉi Uttiram, the most spectacular events take place at Okkapiranthan Kulam, where the goddesses meet, and during the actual marriage rituals in the Ekāmranātha temple complex. Instead of waiting in the streets for the deities' procession to pass by, many participants either go to Okkapiranthan Kulam and accompany the procession of the goddesses from there, or join the procession on the way to the Ekāmranātha temple to spend some time at the temple before the marriage ceremony begins. The temple area is the meeting place, and many activities take place there at the same time. For example, a fair is temporarily set up near the main entrance of the Ekāmranātha temple and attracts many people. A woman from Cinna Kanchi told me that her children like to come to the temple because of the giant wheel and the stalls selling plastic toys (fig. 6.1). A cultural program entertains spectators, human couples get married, and many people sit in groups on blankets and chat, wait and rest, while Ēlavārkuḻali performs *tapas* at the Kampā Nadī temple tank and Ekāmranātha is ornamented for the marriage at the Utsava Sannadhi. People from nearby villages stay overnight and sleep on the temple ground until the beginning of the marriage ceremony. Those living in Kanchipuram usually do not witness the marriage; they go home, sleep and worship the newlywed deities on their 'honeymoon' procession in the early morning of the next day.



Figure 6.1 Fairground with giant wheel, Ekāmranātha temple

6.2 Priests

Festival time is a very busy one for the priests. Their duties begin in the early morning with fire oblations and also encompass the large evening processions, including fireworks. This means that they often return home from the temple only late at night. At the same time, the priests often take turns, so that no single person is in charge for too many rituals in a row. However, an exception here is certainly the *viśeṣa gurukkaḷ*, the one, main priest for the year's festival. He has to be present for almost all events. He joins each single procession and therefore has a very busy schedule throughout the entire festival.

The flowers are often a matter of great concern for the priests during the festival. Do they arrive in time, so that the *alaṃkāra* of the deity is ready for the festival procession? Are there enough flowers to decorate the deity beautifully? Another, more sensitive issue for the priests is the deities' costly jewelry. With so many people involved, and the considerable movement and contingencies of the processions, the priests have to safeguard the costly jewels worn by the deities during their outings, since this is one of their main responsibilities. If any jewels are missing at the end of the day, they will be the first ones to be accused of theft. Moreover, the priests have to ensure that the main donors are happy, while often guiding them through their ritual roles. Often, they have to suspend the rituals until all donors are present. When they distribute temple honors and the deity's leftovers, they must carefully consider both the correct sequence and amount of distribution.

The priests have a very specific focus during the festival events. For example, for them the *liṅga pūjā* is a central element of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals (see Chapter Four), though this is hardly noticed by many other participants. Often, the priests distance themselves from the public, dismissing some of the oral narratives as the 'people's belief.' One priest of the Ekāmranātha temple commented unfavorably that 'the ordinary people only come for the celebration of *bhājī* and *vaṭai* (snack foods), and enjoy buying balloons.'[2] Clearly, the priests represent the normative side of the festival, at least when talking to a German Sanskritist and researcher. Moreover, they are aware of their status and central roles in the rituals. After all, they are the only ones who are entitled to touch the deities.

Since the ritual descriptions in Chapter Four include the priestly perspective, at least implicitly, I focus in the following sections on other participants who play central roles in the marriage rituals and celebrations.

6.3 The 'Seven Streets' of Okkapiranthan Kulam

As a regular feature of the festival's processions, the deities visit various *maṇḍapas* or other places on the processional route, where they are ceremonially received (Tam. *maṇṭappaṭi*). The donors, who sponsor the *maṇṭappaṭi*, are honored by the deity's stay. They often present costly garments and offerings to the deity and also to the priests involved. The stopovers are often no longer than twenty minutes, but in some instances they are extended, depending on agreements between the temple authorities and the donors. At present, the

2 Interview with Kamesvara Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 18.04.2009.

most extended stopover during the Ekāmranātha temple festival is goddess Ēlavārkuḻali's visit to the *maṇḍapa* in Okkapiranthan Kulam on the afternoon of the marriage day. There she meets two goddesses, Kāmākṣi and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, and is bathed (*abhiṣeka*) and dressed (*alaṃkāra*) for the bridal procession to the Ekāmranātha temple in the evening (see details in Chapter Four).

This has been tradition since the beginning of the last century, as a reference in the *Kāñcipuram Ṭairekṭari* (1935: 98) indicates. Yet, the mode of going there has changed in recent years. According to the manager of the Ekāmranātha temple, the goddess used to go straight to the *maṇḍapa*, where the *abhiṣeka* and *alaṃkāra* took place.[3] Only recently has she begun to process slowly through every street in the neighborhood of Okkapiranthan Kulam. One reason for this change is the 'Seven Streets', as the donors for the *maṇṭappati* are usually named. In 1999, residents of seven streets in Okkapiranthan Kulam formed an association to collect funds and share costs for the rituals on the marriage day. The association provides thatched huts for Kāmākṣī and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ, and makes the payment to the respective temple administrations for Ēlavārkuḻali and Kāmākṣī to come to Okkapiranthan Kulam, and for their *maṇṭappaṭi*.[4] According to the secretary of the association, the total expenditure for that day came to 50,000 INR in 2009.[5] It is part of the agreement between the 'Seven Streets Association' and the Ekāmranātha temple's administration that Ēlavārkuḻali processes through each of the seven streets and pauses at every house to receive their offerings. Now, the association includes residents of more than seven streets, nevertheless, the designation 'Seven Streets' has remained. Thus, each year the goddess processes through more streets in the neighborhood and some routes are specifically taken to pass by houses of people who donated some extra money to the association. This is a very important aspect, because in larger processions the deities instead move on and only pause at specific stops; they do not halt for each offering in front of the houses. However, not only the residents benefit from the honor of the goddess's stopover; the priests and carriers of the goddess profit from the frequent stops, too. They have the customary right to share the money from the offerings, the total of which obviously increases in relation to the number of offerings the goddess receives during her procession. In 2011, for example, the procession went through fourteen streets (see map, fig. 2.23), and took more than four hours to reach the *maṇḍapa* at Okkapiranthan Kulam.

Additionally, the timing of public *darśan* in the evening hours has been extended in recent years. The main priest of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple compared the contemporary mode of going to Okkapiranthan Kulam with how the procedure was undertaken at the time he started his job, about thirty-five years ago. He told me: 'The procedures of the procession and all this are the same, but in those days the goddess (Kāḷikāmpāḷ) came back in the evening by seven o'clock itself, since there were not many devotees. Now the devotees are more, so to start there it is already ten o'clock.'[6] In 2002, shortly after the formation of the 'Seven Streets Association', the festival's invitation letter stated that Ēlavārkuḻali goes back to the Ekāmranātha temple at five o'clock in the evening.

3 Interview with Srinivasan, manager of the Ekāmranātha temple, 19.04.2009.
4 However, another donor sponsors Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ's procession, *abhiṣeka* and *alaṃkāra*.
5 Interview with S. Sengalvarayan, secretary of the 'Seven Streets Association', 22.03.2009.
6 Interview with Dhandapani Gurukkal, Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple, 12.03.2011.

Now, the invitation letter announces that she goes back at night without giving a specific time. In the evening, the residential houses in the main road are decorated with colorful light chains. Traveling salesman offer their goods spread out on cloth on the side of the road and vendors sell various meals and snacks from small handcarts (see fig. 6.2). A festive mood prevails in Okkapiranthan Kulam. The expanded evening hours attract more and more people from other parts of town, who come in the evening for a *darśan* of all three goddesses. Clearly, Okkapiranthan Kulam has become another major attraction for the festival visitors, in addition to the Ekāmranātha temple and the two daily general processions of the gods through town.



Figure 6.2 Vendors at Okkapiranthan Kulam

For most people in Okkapiranthan Kulam, the highlight of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival is when three goddesses come to their houses and meet them in their village before they process together to the temple in the evening (see Chapter Five). The significance of Okkapiranthan Kulam as Ēlavārkuḻali's mother's place, and the role of the other goddesses (and the village goddess) as conciliating sisters or friends, is frequently emphasized by the inhabitants. The secretary of the association described the role of Okkapiranthan Kulam in a few words: 'Ēlavārkuḻali has come in anger after fighting with Ekāmranātha. She comes to her mother's house, this Kaṉṉiammaṉ, who is like her sister, Kāmākṣī and Kāḷikāmpāḷ, they pacify her, compromise and send her back, and only then the marriage [takes place].'[7]

The inhabitants of Okkapiranthan Kulam are proud of playing an important role in the divine marriage, providing refuge to Ēlavārkuḻali, to whom they feel closely related. The gathering of the goddesses at Okkapiranthan Kulam turned into the inhabitant's neighborhood festival, which they celebrate with great dedication. For them, this

7 Interview with S. Sengalvarayan, secretary of the 'Seven Streets Association', 22.03.2009.

neighborhood festival is of much greater significance than the *mahotsava* and marriage celebration at the Ekāmranātha temple.

6.4 Donors for the marriage

As explained in Chapter Two, the *mahotsava* appears to be composed of many sub-festivals. Each is sponsored by a donor, mostly merchant or craftsmen associations at the Ekāmranātha temple. The marriage is the longest and most complex sub-festival of the *mahotsava.* It has one official donor, and in addition, two families, who hereditarily perform a ritual role in the marriage ceremony. Similarly to the inhabitants of Okkapiranthan Kulam, the donors make the sub-festivals into their 'own' festival and the highlight of the entire *mahotsava.*

The official donor for the marriage, named on the festival's invitation letters, is the Vaniya Chettiar merchant community. The community's association "Periya Kāñcipuram Vāṇiyar Tarma Paripālaṉ Caṅkam" collects money from the community members every year to provide the *abhiṣeka* materials and the necklace, which is tied around the goddess during the marriage rituals (*māṅkalyam*), made of one Sovereign (= eight gram) gold. Further they prepare 500 packages of *tāmpulam*, an offering of betel leaves and areca nuts. When this offering is made to wedding guests it also includes auspicious items such as a blouse piece, mirror, comb, bangles, yellow thread (*maṅgalasūtra*), piece of turmeric, *vibhūti*, *kumkum* and sweets. The marriage *tāmpulam* packages are distributed among female community members, at Okkapiranthan Kulam after the *abhiṣeka*, and at the Ekāmranātha temple after the wedding ceremony. The marriage *tāmpulam* symbolizes marital bliss and is extremely favored by women, who even cause turmoil in attempts to get one package.

The association's head, the secretary and leading members perform the ritual role as donors. In addition, three families of the community, two of which are hereditary and one selected each year, are entrusted with the provision of specific flower garlands, which are brought in a *kāvaṭi*[8] to the Ekāmranātha temple to be adorned upon Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali before the marriage ceremony (see details in Chapter Four).

R. Narayanan, head of the association, invited me in 2010 to join them on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram to witness their celebration of the festival. For the Vaniya Chettiars, the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival begins in the morning in their community temple, a small Vināyaka temple near the bus stand. Leading members of the association, their families and other community members come together in the temple to perform a *pūjā* for the *māṅkalyam* (fig. 6.3 and fig. 6.4). Then, they process through the streets of their residential quarter towards the Ekāmranātha temple, bearing the *māṅkalyam* in a palanquin, and the fruits and other ingredients for the *abhiṣeka* on a cart. These offerings are regarded as *varicai* (marriage presents) from the girl's house. On the way to the temple they often pause so that residents may worship and prostrate before the *māṅkalyam*.

8 A (bamboo) stick resting on the shoulder with a bucket on both ends of the stick.

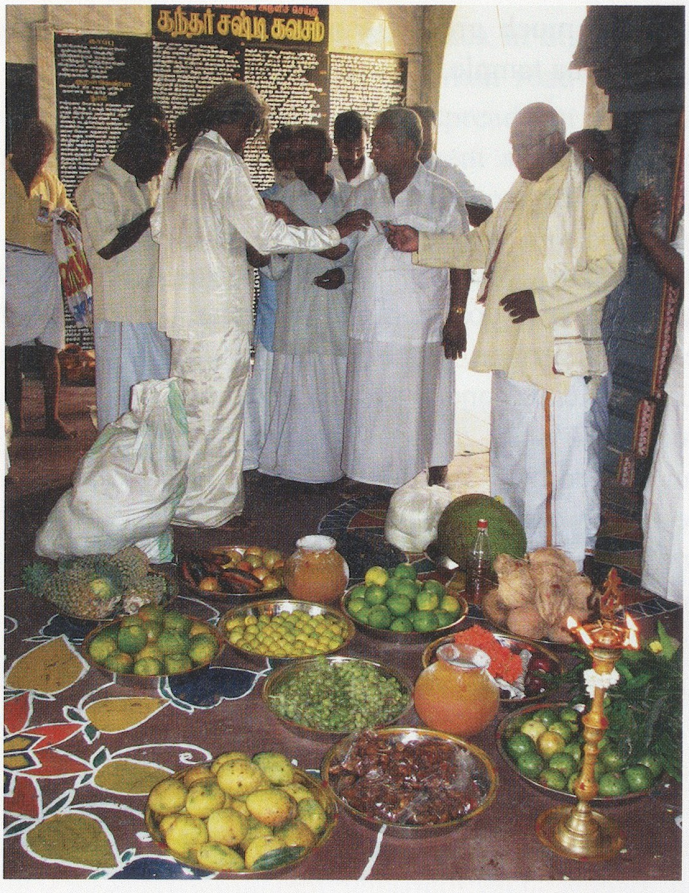


Figure 6.3 Vaniya Chettiars at their community temple with *varicai*



Figure 6.4 Worship of the *māṅkalyam* (tied to the coconut in the palanquin)

In the evening the community members meet again in their community temple to worship the flower garland offerings and to honor those who carry them in a *kāvaṭi* to the Ekāmranātha temple. When I arrived at the temple it was the turn of the family that hereditarily offers the *tumpai* flower garlands to the deities. The temple's priest performs a *pūjā* for the flower garlands placed in the brass vessels of the *kāvaṭi.* At the same time a community member garlands the bearer of the *kāvaṭi* and ties a piece of cloth around his head and mouth (fig. 6.5). Each bearer fasts on this day and refrains from speaking, which is symbolized by the cloth around the mouth. Drummers play a rhythmic tone and the man begins to sway back and forth, while a woman next to him starts to dance erratically, showing that a deity or ancestor has entered them (fig. 6.6). After some time the bearer lifts the *kāvaṭi* on his shoulders and circumambulates the main shrine in the temple. Family and community members prostrate before him. The woman is still dancing in possession, and both the priest and head of the association put their hands and *vibhūti* on her head, to pacify the deity who possessed her. Led by drummers and two dancers, the *kāvaṭi* bearer with his family and some community members marches at a slow pace to the Ekāmranātha temple (fig. 6.7). When the procession arrives at the temple, they first go to the Utsava Sannadhi to offer the flower garland from one vessel to the festival statue of Ekāmranātha. Then they process further to the Kampā Nadī tank, where the garland from the other vessel is adorned upon Ēlavārkuḻali. In a similar manner, the other two families bring the flower offerings from the community temple to the Ekāmranātha temple.



Figure 6.5 Tying of a piece of cloth around the *kāvaṭi* bearer's mouth and head



Figure 6.6 Dancing in possession



Figure 6.7 Devotee with *kāvaṭi* on his shoulders
Courtesy: Dhivya Murugaiyan

To bring offerings in a *kāvaṭi* is a ritual associated with Murukaṉ temples, and many of the Vaniya Chettiars are Murukaṉ devotees, as the head of the association told me. Often, this way of presenting offerings is accompanied with ritual piercing, which is not practiced here, although people of the community said that they practice it on Murukaṉ festivals. Another element known from folk traditions is the possession by a deity or ancestor during a ritual. The community temple's hereditary priest, who is also priest at the Ekāmranātha temple, told me that it happens regularly that a deity or ancestor enters the bearer or one of his family members on this occasion, often in the homes of the bearers, where they start with a *pūjā* for their family deities before they come to the community temple.[9] However, the association's head made clear that this would not happen at the Ekāmranātha temple, because Ekāmranātha is not a god that possesses people.

The Vaniya Chettiar community performs rituals according to their own traditions and integrates them partly in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage celebrations. However, a line between the ritual conventions is noticeable. Rituals associated with folk traditions such as piercing or possession are practiced in their community temple at a distance from the 'high' tradition of the Ekāmranātha temple. Nevertheless, they are practiced (at least possession), though in their ritual space, not in the space of Ekāmranātha.

The Vaniya Chettiar community does not know when or under which circumstances they received the right to provide the *māṅkalyam.* The association's head, R. Narayanan, aged seventy, knows that his father also performed the ritual role in the marriage, while the families who hereditarily provide the flower garlands assert that they bear the *kāvaṭi* across at least three generations. The community temple's hereditary priest confirms this, since his grandfather performed the *pūjā* for the *kāvaṭi* bearers in the temple.[10] This would imply that the Vaniya Chettiar community has provided the *māṅkalyam* at least since the beginning of the twentieth century.

The provision of the *māṅkalyam* is part of the *kanyādāna* ritual ('giving away one's daughter in marriage'). For *kanyādāna* another person is listed as a donor, namely K. Balasubramanyam. Although his name is not mentioned on the festival's invitation letters, Ekāmranātha temple priests consider his family as the time-honored donor for the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage. Balasubramanyam takes this family obligation very seriously. He was born and raised in Kanchipuram, but lived mostly in major cities due to his work as banker. When I first met him, he lived in Delhi, but during my last field trip he had moved to Hyderabad. But no matter where he lives, he guarantees that he will return to Kanchipuram for the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple to perform his ritual roles during the Adhikāranandin *vāhana* on the fifth day, and at the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage on the tenth day of the festival.

Balasubramanyam's ancestors donated one hundred acres of land, the 'Adhikāranandin' (a silver plated vehicle modeled on Śiva's bull Nandin, used for the morning procession on the fifth day of the festival), and the 'Vairamudi' (a golden crown studded with precious stones). In return for these endowments they were offered the hereditary right to perform

9 Interview with Prabha Gurukkal, 29.03.2011.
10 Interview with Prabha Gurukkal, 29.03.2011.

the marriage. Balasubramanyam refers to a document, dated to 1857, which stipulates that his family has the right to perform the *kanyādāna*. This means that they represent the family of the bride (i.e. the goddess) and perform ritual roles accordingly. Balasubramanyam recounts that his family had the marriage fully in hand until the beginning of the twentieth century. For financial reasons the right of performing the *kanyādāna* ritual, composed of several elements, has been split. Balasubramanyam tried to recollect details and dates pertaining to the sharing of the right with the help of the Ekāmranātha temple priest Nagaswamy, but they were not able to do so. According to Balasubramanyam, the right to provide the *māṅkalyam* was given to other family members, who handed it on until it came to the Vaniya Chettiar merchants.[11] Clearly, for Balasubramanyam it is very important to be able to trace his family's involvement with donations to the temple, since this is what legitimizes his right to perform the *kanyādāna* ritual.



Figure 6.8 Offering of the *madhuparka* to the bridegroom Ekāmranātha

Although the rights for the *kanyādāna* ritual have been split, Balasubramanyam's family maintains the rights to provide the materials for the marriage *homa* and to perform the *madhuparka* rite, for which they once donated five silver cups. The *madhuparka* rite is the ceremony of receiving the bridegroom on his arrival at the bride's place, during which the father of the bride offers *pañcāmṛta*—a mixture of five products (milk, curd, honey, banana

11 The Vaniya Chettiars are sure that they have provided the *māṅkalyam* at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, which would, however, imply that it came right away to the Vaniya Chettiar community after the splitting of the *kanyādāna* ritual.

and sugar)—to the groom. Balasubramanyam took over the ritual role from his father in 2005. He and his wife, brother, nephew and other family members, come to the Ekāmranātha temple in the evening after Ēlavārkuḻali returns from Okkapiranthan Kulam. They bring cloth for the bride and groom, materials for the marriage *homa,* and the five silver cups for the *madhuparka* rite. During the marriage rituals, Balasubramanyam stands in front of Ekāmranātha to offer him, in the role of the bride's father, the mixture of the five products out of the silver cups (see fig. 6.8).

Balasubramanyam approaches closer to Ekāmranātha than anyone else (besides the priests) during the marriage ceremony. This close physical proximity to the god indicates a high status, since honor is expressed through relative proximity to the deity. Yet, his name does not appear on the invitation letter and festival poster. When I inquired about this, an influential priest of the Ekāmranātha temple acknowledged that Balasubramanyam should actually be named on the invitation. He explained: 'Mr Balasubramanyam does the *kanyādāna.* The family itself is called as *kanyādāna kuṭumba* (family). He is also of the girl's side. This Chettiar group came in the middle only. (...) Though there are two communities, the right of doing the *kanyādāna* is only Balasubramanyam, secondly only for Balasubramanyam the *kanyādāna saṃkalpa* (declaration to perform a ritual) is done. It is only Balasubramanyam who can go near the god and do the *madhuparka.* It is only Balasubramanyam who is in the next stage to the *arcaka* (priest). So for the Chettiar community it is only the *saṃkalpa* of the *gotra* (lineage) and name, and they bring the *māṅkalyam,* whereas Mr Balasubramanyam is doing the *kanyādāna,* gives the *madhuparka*, and also the *godāna*[12].'[13] The priest regards Balasubramanyam as the original donor for the marriage ceremony, which is expressed by the family's name and by the declaration to perform the *kanyādāna* ritual in their name. Moreover, Balasubramanyam maintains a higher ritual status, because he has the right to come close to the god, next to the priests.

Although the Vaniya Chettiar community is not the original donor, and is from a ritualistic point of view on a lower rank, Balasubramanyam apparently never demanded to be named on the invitation letter. However, he emphasized that his family is the only one (and the only Brahmins) who serve as donors at the Ekāmranātha temple festival. It is possible that, owing to his status as Brahmin, he is allowed to come close to the deity during the *madhuparka* rite. Furthermore, he underlined the importance of his family as the 'history creators of Kanchipuram.' His ancestor Challambhotlu was, according to their family history, actively involved in safeguarding the statue of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī (see Chapter Five). Balasubramanyam's family is held in high esteem by the Ekāmranātha temple priests, probably due to their role in the marriage rituals. Some priests also pointed out that they are the only family, moreover the only Brahmin family, currently involved in the *mahotsava* as donor.

Another family that traditionally plays a role in the marriage rituals is the Gopalakrishna Mudaliar family. They, too, are not official donors and are not named on the festival program. They donate every year a certain set of marriage presents (*varicai*) called Nāṭṭār

12 *Godāna* – the gift of a cow – is another element of the marriage rituals. In contemporary rituals this is symbolized by the gift of a coconut.

13 Interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 05.04.2010.

Varicai after their former honorific title Nāṭṭār, which denotes the head of a village. As a mark of honor a head cloth (*parivaṭṭam*) is tied to an appointed family member during the wedding rituals. They do not know exactly how their family received this honor, but they assume that it reflects good relations between their ancestor Adi Dharmarayan Mudaliar and the British officer Robert Clive in the mid-eighteenth century. However, the first document referring to their role in the marriage rituals is from a law suite, filed in 1890, which regulates the internal family succession to whom the *parivaṭṭam* will be tied. At present it is forty-two-year-old Sridhar Mudaliar, who was been appointed at the age of twelve. He explained the customs when I visited him and his family a view days after Paṅkuṉi Uttiram: 'For our family the festivities start with a joint meal in this house in the evening. Around ten o'clock a palanquin is sent from the Ekāmranātha temple, in which we place the marriage presents (*varicai*). We serve food to the musicians and light bearers, who will accompany the procession to the Ekāmranātha temple. At around three o'clock at night we leave and the entire family joins the procession to the temple.'[14] At the Ekāmranātha temple the *parivaṭṭam* is tied to Sridhar Mudaliar after the presentation of the wedding gifts (fig. 6.9). Sridhar's aunt explained to me that the tying of the *parivaṭṭam* is a great honor in society. She said 'everybody sees it and people, neighbors, etc. know that we get the *parivaṭṭam* during the marriage,' while another male family member added: 'Even when spending a crore (ten million Rupees) you would not get the same honor.'[15]



Figure 6.9 Head cloth (*parivaṭṭam*) tied as a mark of honor
Courtesy: Sridhar Mudaliar

14 Interview with Sridhar Mudaliar and other family members, 03.04.2011.
15 Interview with Sridhar Mudaliar and other family members, 03.04.2011.

All donors I spoke with consider the temple honor (*mariyātai*) to be invaluable. Dirks (1987: 289), too, reports that his informants often told him that: "One can buy and sell land but no one can buy the mariyatai of another person; it is not for sale at any price." However, Dirks adds that many of his informants in fact did attempt to buy honors in government offices and legal courts. Also, Balasubramanyam has had to clarify his rights in a few lawsuits. He told me that he would never miss coming to Kanchipuram to perform his ritual role, because in that case somebody might lay claim to his temple honor. R. Narayanan, the head of the association of the Vaniya Chettiar community, also reported a recent dispute between his community and the Natukottai Chettiar community; the latter sought the right to perform the marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple after the *kumbhābhiṣeka* in 2005.[16] Although the temple honors have no substantial material advantages as in pre-colonial and colonial times, they have great value for the participants and can be perceived as a form of property (Hüsken 2007: 282–3).

However, how does the official donor of the marriage understand his role in relation to the other donors involved? The Vaniya Chettiar community represents the girl's side in the marriage. They provide the *abhiṣeka* materials, which are considered marriage presents (*varicai*), and the *māṅkalyam* as it is usually done on behalf of the girl's side. The Gopalakrishna Mudaliar family, too, presents wedding gifts (*varicai*) and Balasubramanyam represents the girl's side more than anybody else by doing the *saṃkalpa* for the *kanyādāna* ritual.[17]

R. Narayanan, the head of the association, explained the role of the Vaniya Chettiar community in the following way: 'The history is, when the incident took place she (the goddess) was born in a Chettiar family and all these things happened. It is Ēlavārkuḻali who is born in a Chettiar community. That is the history behind it.'[18] When I inquired about the role of Balasubramanyam, who also represents the girl's side, Narayanan denied it, commenting that Balasubramanyam must represent the boy's side in the marriage. I received a similar reaction when I mentioned that the people in Okkapiranthan Kulam regard their village as Ēlavārkuḻali's home place and their local goddess as her sister, and in that way also feel related to the girl's side. Narayanan argued: 'They can not say like that. We can say to our wish, that is all. God is available to everybody, so they are also enjoying it by saying so.'[19] Thus, although he does not agree with them and thinks it is not true, he does not interfere in their views and opinions. Priests often took the same attitude when I talked with them about the oral narratives circulating about Paṅkuṉi Uttiram (see Chapter Four). Narayanan did not only stress the community's importance as representative of the girl's side and kinship with Ēlavārkuḻali, but also extended the role of the Vaniya Chettiar community in the marriage rituals to other temples dedicated to Ekāmranātha, informing me that 'wherever there is a *tirukalyāṇa*, it is only our community people to do,' continuing

16 The marriage rituals for Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali are performed after each *kumbhābhiṣeka*, though without the re-enactment of the worshipping of the sand *liṅga*.

17 L'Hernault et al. (1999: 134) reports that also in Tiruvannamalai three groups of different social status sponsor the marriage rituals, and all claim that the goddess is one of them.

18 Interview with R. Narayanan, 18.03.2010.

19 Interview with R. Narayanan, 18.03.2010.

'whenever Ekāmranātha's name comes, our community will be there.' When I asked which temples these are, he referred vaguely to the Ekāmranātha temple in Aminjikarai, Chennai, and to one in south Tamil Nadu. Obviously, he wanted to emphasize the significance of the Vaniya Chettiar merchant community to me, not only the local community in Kanchipuram, but in general Vaniya Chettiars in Tamil Nadu.

In summary, members of non-Brahmin communities, such as the Vaniya Chettiars, play an important role in the marriage rituals, but they perform their community-specific rituals in their space, and when the two ritual schedules overlap, they adapt to the Brahmin demands. For the Brahmin donor Balasubramanyam, the maintenance of this ritual duty is so important that he makes sure to come every year, not matter where he lives. It is also important for him to document the historical role of his family for the temple, which is clearly not important for the Vaniya Chettiars, who maintain their customary ritual right by doing it. Balasubramanyam's status seems to be, among other things, the result of his caste, which may be why the priests can tolerate his proximity to the deities. Further, for all donors the public nature of the honor reception is important, since it publicly displays their status.

6.5 Human marriages

While Ēlavārkuḻali is brought to the Kampā Nadī temple tank to perform *tapas* in a rather quiet and contemplative atmosphere, the temple area is filled with huge crowds of people. Some come to stroll around, enjoy the fair and the cultural program, but a number of people come to the temple to perform their own marriage rituals at the same time as the deities. Frequently, participants and priests pointed the human marriages out to me as a special feature of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival at the Ekāmranātha temple.

Already at the temple's entrance area, near the fair, some brides stand out in the crowd. They wear the typical bridal hair ornament—a fake plait cut out in cardboard, embroidered with white jasmine flower buds and colorful trims. Female relatives and friends, who here and there tug the bride's sari and headdress to bring them into the correct shape, surround them. Many brides look a bit scared and overwhelmed by all the attention they receive. On the fourth *prākāra* more brides can be seen near the columned hall. Here, some of the ceremonies have already started. The bride is seated next to the groom. Family members and relatives, densely packed, sit and stand around them (see fig. 6.10). Some just watch, while others discuss and comment on the next step to be taken in the marriage rituals, since some groups perform the marriage without a priest. This is a characteristic of the ritual, as a priest of the Kāmākṣī temple emphasized: 'There is no *vāttiyār* (family priest) for the marriage, they just tie the *maṅgalasūtra* at the same time the gods do it.' I have seen couples without a priest, just taking the advice of family members on how to exchange garlands and tie the *māṅkalyam* (see fig. 6.11). Though, just as many came with a priest, who performed the rituals on their behalf. Obviously, the more affluent wedding parties were attended by a priest and performed the marriage near or in the lighted columned hall, while the more impecunious couples squatted at the dim margins. The wedding parties varied not only in terms of ritual refinement, but also in size. For example, a male relative of the groom's side of one wedding party informed me that they rented a van to come with

fifty family members from their village about twenty kilometers away from Kanchipuram. He proudly added that they even brought a photographer along with them. Yet, some groups included just a handful of people, almost unnoticeable, had it not been for the prominent flower embroidered headdress of the bride.



Figure 6.10 Wedding party at the Ekāmranātha temple



Figure 6.11 Exchange of garlands

While conducting my fieldwork I saw each year approximately twenty to thirty couples[20] married at the Ekāmranātha temple. The size of the wedding parties and the elaboration of the ceremonies varied, yet, all of them choose to be married at the temple on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. What are the motives behind this? Clearly, Paṅkuṉi Uttiram is considered an auspicious star for marriages, for deities, as well as for humans. Many Śiva temples (as well as Viṣṇu and Murukaṉ temples) throughout Tamil Nadu celebrate the deities' marriage at this particular time of the year. Yet, according to my knowledge, only the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram becomes a venue for public weddings of human couples to such an extent.

This phenomenon has also been documented in scholarly literature. Chari (1982: 56), for instance, writes about the marriage festival at the Ekāmranātha temple: "A special feature of this Kalyanotsavam is that many young brides and brides-grooms get married, at a time on the same auspicious occasion in the same Kalyana Mandapam without any distinction of caste, social status etc." Hudson (2003: 37) observes this in a similar way: "Customarily, many couples belonging to various castes marry at the same time in the wedding hall of the temple, as subjects imitating their divine rulers." Both accounts emphasize that this practice—people from all backgrounds coming to marry on this occasion—demonstrates the festival's inclusivity. This argument for inclusivity is also used when people from different communities pull the temple car side by side during the *tēr vāhana* procession.[21] One must not forget that entry to the temple was restricted for low castes until independency.[22] However, whether the celebration of human marriages at the Ekāmranātha temple was customary at that time too, is not known.

People I spoke with, too, described a kind of inclusiveness, saying for instance that 'whoever wishes, will get married here,' or 'the haves and have nots come here and get married.' After a general appreciation of the human weddings, many of them were critical of changes in the numbers and social structure of the wedding parties. A man in the streets of Okkapiranthan Kulam stated: 'Before there were a thousand marriages, now only a few get married, often second and love marriages,' while a woman standing next to him added 'poor people marry in the temple.' It seems that some twenty years ago a public marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram was regarded as very prestigious and thus performed in great numbers by all social ranks. Today, the situation looks somewhat different. Though denied by the temple's priests, many participants indicated that the opportunity to marry in the temple is more and more used by people on a low income and for 'inauspicious' marriages. A marriage is regarded as inauspicious when the bride or

20 Only in 2009 were fewer couples, since Paṅkuṉi Uttiram fell on a Tuesday. This day is regarded as very inauspicious for marriages. However, those couples, which were present, solved the difficulty by getting married on the morning of the next day.

21 Hüsken (2013) is questioning the festival's frequently highlighted inclusivity, drawing on examples from the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram.

22 Nevertheless, cases of discrimination against low castes in temples have been reported to this day. See, for example, news reports such as: "Orissa temple purified after low caste minister visit" (http://in.reuters.com/article/2009/01/16/idINIndia-37481620090116; accessed 02.02.2018) or "Low caste villager punished for entering a temple" (http://ishare.rediff.com/video/Entertainment/Low-caste-villager-punished-for-entering-a-temple/393086; accessed 02.02.2018), and Sivathambika's thesis (http://www.mgutheses.in/page/?q=T%200064&search=&page=&rad; accessed 02.02.2018).

groom is born under an unfavorable star for marriages, or when it is a second marriage or love marriage. These marriages take the advantage of the auspicious time (Paṅkuṉi Uttiram) and auspicious place (Ekāmranātha temple) to compensate for the implied inauspiciousness.[23]

The groom of one wedding party explained: 'Even when the boy and girl have a *doṣa* it will get resolved. Even if you do any wrong it will get sorted out, if you marry here.' *Doṣa* means fault or defect and refers to an unfavorable precondition, such as an inauspicious birth star. The second example alludes to the groom's own situation. He told me that his bride eloped from her hometown, about 190 km away, to marry him without the approval of their parents. 'Only friends and a few relatives are helping us to get married,' he continued, and explained why they decided to get married at this place: 'This is Śiva's temple and it is Ekāmbaranātha who is getting married. This girl (Ēlavārkuḻali) likes him so much that she does *pūjā* to get married to Śiva. Finally Śiva accepts that (...) So it is believed that the couples who come here to get married, will not have any problem in their married relationship.'

A male relative of another marriage party specified the following motives for a marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple: 'If the couple does not have a child, they will pray that when the child is born, they will marry in the temple. If there is delay in marriage, people pray that they come and get married here. And those people, who cannot afford a marriage outside come here. So they make it simple by getting married here and it is good to get married on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram in the temple.' This comment illustrates another reason for getting married in the temple: a personal vow or promise to the deity, which has to be performed in return when the wish is fulfilled. Further, it points to financial reasons, a factor which seems to become increasingly relevant. The organization of a marriage includes renting a marriage hall, a feast for the marriage party, payment of a priest, etc.—expenses which not everybody can meet. As one female relative of yet another marriage party expressed in plain words: 'The people who have money rent a marriage hall, but we here do not have. What shall we do? We don't have, and we get married in the temple.'

In summary, the human marriages at the Ekāmranātha temple form an elementary part of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival. Reasons for choosing this form of marriage are, first of all, the indisputable general auspiciousness of time and place, and besides this, the fulfillment of a vow, 'inauspicious' marriages, and/or lower-income backgrounds. The integrative aspects and openness towards all social classes plays an important role for the people. Yet, participants indicated that today less marriages are taking place, and that the social structure of the marriage parties shifts from mixed to mainly low-income groups.[24] Further, an increase of love and second marriages has been observed. This might be related to the

23 My research assistant Sarah explained it to me in this way. On issues related to 'inauspicious' marriages in contemporary Tamil Nadu, see also http://www.lesleybranagan.com/love-marriage-and-banana-trees-in-rural-tamil-nadu (accessed 02.02.2018).

24 The research assistants with whom I interviewed the marriage parties assessed most of them to be below lower middle class.

rising popularity of these forms of marriage in Tamil Nadu, though they are still not fully accepted and therefore require above all extra blessings.[25]

Another observation worth mentioning is that a few people understood the human marriages as the completion of the divine marriage, which, according to oral legend, has to be stopped due to the bad omen of a cat crossing the marriage (see Chapter Four). A woman from Cinna Kanchi, who comes every year with her husband and sister-in-law's family, explained: 'The marriage does not take place. Because they let a cat in. (...) This stops the marriage. Then so many marriages take place here.' Also the groom, who has been mentioned above, said: 'When the marriage stops for Ammaṉ, our marriage here takes place.' A relative of another marriage party said: 'The marriage is happening today, because Ekāmranātha is getting married. When the marriage stops there, here the marriage takes place.'[26] I witnessed the marriages of the latter two. Actually, both took place before the divine marriage began. However, their statements express the idea of contributing to the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage by helping to complete it (although it is in fact not stopped). They stress the important role of the human couples, who associate themselves with the divine couple, Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali.

6.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I examined the ways in which diverse participants engage in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival, and how they perceive their own roles. I focused mainly on participants and groups involved in ritual activities and contributing their own rituals and customs to the complexity and variety of the festival. Each group celebrates this day differently, integrating ritual elements from their own, often caste-specific tradition, as for example bringing the flower offerings in a *kāvaṭi*.

Every participating group sees their ritual contribution as the center of the events, and everyone is in some way essential in making the marriage happen: the bride would not go back to the temple to get married without the people at Okkapiranthan Kulam, the bride's side has to give the *māṅkalyam*, give the gifts, and also the *madhuparka* to complete the marriage, and the human couples marry even in the stead of the gods. For all involved, the auspiciousness of the events is a motivating factor, and for those who have public roles (the donors), the public display is important, because it confirms and reaffirms their status among the members of their group and in society at large; the importance of *who* is 'on stage' becomes clear when looking at the number of court cases involved in the establishment of ritual rights. So while making the marriage happen seems to be a community effort, it is at the same time also very fragmented, since many valid, yet differing stories about ritual roles (especially evident in the case of the representation of the

25 The rising popularity and acceptance of second marriages seem to be reflected in online portals such as http://www.re-marriage.com (since 2002), http://www.secondshaadi.com/ (since 2007), or http://www.thesecondmarriage.com (since 2009).

26 The term 'here' refers to the area around the front hall of the temple on the fourth *prākāra*, whereas 'there' denotes the open field in front of the Kampā Nadī tank on the fifth *prākāra*, where the divine marriage takes place.

bride's side) coexist, without coming into conflict with each other. This has much to do with the fact that the temple—in general—functions based on a system of redistribution, focused on the center, at which are the gods.

7 The Formation of Cultural Memory

In the preceding chapter I demonstrated that participants are involved in the marriage festival, and accompanying rituals, in various ways. The forms of participation vary according to, for example, group affiliation, personal expectations, and interests. Some participants wait eagerly near the Utsava Sannadhi to get their first *darśan* of the deities, while others stroll around the temple's entrance area to enjoy the carnival atmosphere of the fair. Priests and donors are committed to fulfill their specific duties and ritual tasks, and a number of people come to the temple to be married at the same time as the gods. The festival provides a setting for a wide range of individuals, and meets various needs such as amusement, socializing, religious merit making and social recognition, through the distribution of temple honors. Considering this wide range of activities and modes of participation, I will now investigate the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage celebration as a commemorative festival that re-enacts the marriage of two deities each year.

Inspired by Connerton (1989), who emphasizes the importance of commemorative ceremonies as acts of memory transfer, I examine how the marriage festival forms and transmits a collective cultural memory. Connerton (1989: 40) argues that "images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances." I inquire how an image of the past can be conveyed and sustained in a long-standing festival, which had to adjust its performances to changing circumstances while maintaining a continuity with the past. In doing so, I focus on the divine bride's identity in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals, since her identity is far from clear. Up to the end of the seventeenth century, a festival image of Kāmākṣī, called Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, from the Kāmākṣī temple nearby, was the bride performing the celebrations. When this image was shifted to Thanjavur, however, she was presumably replaced by the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali from the Ekāmranātha temple (see Chapter Five). Today, the goddess Kāmākṣī, from the neighboring temple, is publicly presented—one can even say officially promoted—as the bride, whereas the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali serves as the actual bride in the ritual performance, and is explicitly recognized as the bride by participants. So there is a rift between public representation in leaflets and so on, and the individual participants' recognition of the identity of the bride. I analyze how these differences in the 'official' representation and the lived experience shape and re-shape the cultural memory (or memories) of the participants—who, as mentioned, can be said to celebrate the festival in different ways.

7.1 Commemoration[1]

The word 'commemoration' is derived from the Latin verb *commemorare* (*com* (together) + *memorare* (bring to remembrance)), rendered by Schwartz (2004: 2267) as 'remembering together'. The act of 'remembering together' takes place in social groups of various sizes. These can comprise friends or family members, who, for example, look at photographs and reminisce about the events depicted. Within bigger social groups, such as associations, religious communities, or societies, the act of 'remembering together' often takes a rather organized form as commemorative ceremony. Significant for commemorative ceremonies is the fact that they "include activities that explicitly recall important (historical) events" (Bell 1997: 104).[2] Many of them, including the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival, do so by re-enacting key scenes of these events. This explicit link to a past event sets them apart from other rites, which rather imply continuity with the past through their repetitive character (Connerton 1989: 45). It is specifically this explicit link to the past that accounts for the role of commemorative ceremonies in the formation and transmission of collective memory, as Connerton (1989: 48) argues. Commemoration calls on collective memory, which Beim (2007: 23, fn. 1) describes as "the collective thought that gives meaning to the events or persons commemorated."

Hinduism and commemoration

Several practices of Hinduism—as with other religions[3]—can be interpreted as ways to evoke memories of mythological and historical events or persons, which are of significance for the religious community. Hindu sacred sites in India, for example, are most often associated with heroic deeds of gods or epic heroes, and people set out on pilgrimages to visit these memorial places. Moreover, many of these places are linked with each other through shared mythologies and/or are grouped on the basis of common characteristics (as for example the *pañcabhūtaliṅgas* described in Chapter One). They thus form a sacred geography of places of memory on a local, regional or national scale.

Texts such as Sthalapurāṇas and Māhātmyas glorify these memorable places and narrate their associated mythology. The reading and retelling of the narratives evoke the memory of important past events and persons. Yet, the themes of the narratives are not only recalled and circulated by storytelling, but are often also supported by visual representations. For instance, temple walls and especially the pyramidal temple gateways (*gopuras*) in South India are studded with sculptures, depicting the heroic deeds of their deities, which are known from the texts as well. Today, the memorable events as told in the mythological

1 Commemoration and commemorative ceremonies have been the topic of many studies. Most of them deal with nation-state commemorations (see for example Gillis 1994; Schwartz 1982), and less with religious commemorative festivals.

2 I put the word 'historical' in parentheses, since I am not distinguishing between historical and mythological events. The memorable event is believed to have taken place, whether in a mythological or historical past.

3 On commemorative holidays and festivals in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see, for example, Connerton (1989: 45–48) and Bell (1997: 104–08).

narratives are further supported by visual representations such as comics[4], TV series and other new media.[5]

Commemorative days and festivals are other ways of recalling a memorable event. Frequently, the memorable event and its date in the annual cycle are indicated in the festival's name. For example, the Navarātri festival[6], celebrated throughout India, concludes after nine nights (*navarātri*) on the tenth day with *vijayadaśamī*, 'the victorious tenth day'. The name recalls the memorable event, namely the victory of the goddess Durgā over the demons after a ten-day battle. Each year, the Navarātri festival re-creates this moment with elaborated re-enactments of Durgā's battle in order to vividly recall this event. Stories about the goddess's deeds are found in texts such as the *Devīmāhāmtmya*, which might also be read, recited or sung during the festival. The memory of her deeds is kept alive and circulated through storytelling and performative re-enactments once a year during the festival, and supported by visual representations. The significant moment, when the goddess is slaying the buffalo demon Mahīṣa, has been depicted on temple walls and columns since the sixth century.

There is a wide range of modes of recalling the past. Different means can be employed, or, as Schwartz (2004: 2268) says, different 'commemorative symbols' such as scriptures, icons, monuments, naming conventions, ritual observances and so on, may activate the commemorative process. They can be combined and connected with each other in 'commemorative networks'.[7]

Commemorative aspects of the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival

The Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival at the Ekāmranātha temple, too, evokes memories of a past event by re-enacting it. The link to the past event is intensified through the enactment at the 'same' time and 'same' place as the original event is believed to have taken place. The time of the marriage has been determined by Śiva in one of the Kanchipuram Sthalapurāṇas: 'Our wedding will be celebrated here every year in the month of Paṅkuṉi, in the constellation *uttiram*.'[8] The memorable time and event is also recalled in the festival's name *paṅkuṉ-uttirat-tirukkalyāṇap-peruviḻā*, 'the great festival of the sacred marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram', often shortened to either Paṅkuṉi Uttiram or Tirukkalyāṇam. Additionally, re-enacting the marriage not only at the 'same' time, but also at the 'same'

4 Certainly, the most famous example is the ACK (Amar Chitra Katha) comic series, which started in 1967 and produced a collection of more than 430 titles on Indian history and mythology. The illustrated retelling of classic stories educates Indian youth and shapes their memories and knowledge about the religious traditions in India up to the present day.

5 See for example the "Karadi mythology DVD series" with titles like "Birth of Ganesha" and "Krishna's Conquests," or flash animations on children's educational websites (http://www.kidsone.in; accessed 22.01.2018).

6 On the diverse rituals, narratives and performances of the Navarātri festival in South Asia see Simmons, Sen and Rodrigues (2018). The articles of Hüsken (2018: 179–196) and Ilkama (2018: 157–178) are dealing with Navarātri in Kanchipuram.

7 See Schwarz 2004: 2267–68.

8 *Kāñcippurāṇam* 63.424–427, see French rendering in Dessigane et. al. (1964: 91). *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Ś) 45.168–69 and *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* 8.128–29 give the same date (in Sanskrit: month of *phālguna*, star *uttara phalgunī*) and specify further, that the marriage should be held on the tenth day of the great festival.

place, further enhances the connection to the original event. The Kampā Nadī temple tank, to which the goddess is brought before the marriage, is believed to be the visible part of the Kampā River, on the banks of which the goddess performed penance before the wedding in the mythological past. Here, too, the connection with the past is indicated by the naming of the tank as Kampā Nadī (Kampā River), and intensified by re-enacting the goddess's *tapas* and worship of the sand *liṅga* at the 'original' location during the festival (see Chapter Four).

The Paṅkuṉi Uttiram festival clearly operates within a commemorative framework: it is linked to a mythological event in the past, which is re-enacted at the 'same' place and 'same' time each year. Yet, the mythical and performative representations of the past, connected to the commemorative ceremony, differ considerably. This is most obvious in the changing identity of the bride: the myth tells of the (re-)marriage of Śiva with his wife Pārvatī, whereas the marriage rituals are performed with the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali from the Ekāmranātha temple, and the festival invitation letters announce the wedding of the god Ekāmranātha with the goddess Kāmākṣī from the neighboring temple. How do participants understand and interpret the current situation? The next section describes and analyzes various media which represent the past event and thereby influence the formation of the participants' cultural memories.

7.2 What is remembered? – The transmission of cultural memory

If a social or religious group regards an event as worthy of being remembered, certain strategies are employed to maintain and convey the memory of this event. First, knowledge about the event has to be externalized in order to be shared with other individuals. The simplest way of doing so is to tell somebody about it. In order to make information about the event more permanent, it is usually externally stored in form of written texts, paintings, or sculptures, examples of what Schwartz (2004: 2268) called 'commemorative symbols', since they are mobilized to awaken ideas about the past. However, information about the past needs also to be circulated and transmitted, preferably over spatial and temporal distances, as for instance from one generation to the next. At this point, the term 'media of memory'[9] seems to be more suitable, because symbols represent information, whereas media have a rather dynamic connotation since they store, circulate and transmit information (Erll 2005: 137). In this context, 'media' is understood in its broadest sense as something that mediates.[10] This includes oral communication between individuals, which is an important method of transmitting ideas about the past.

Media of memory always involve an agent who produces them, and people who receive them. If media of memory are not well received, the knowledge of the past they were meant

9 More precisely, 'media of collective memory', since they are distinct from 'media of individual memory' distributed and accessible to people. However, Meyer and Leggewie (2004: 278) have shown that the boundaries are flexible, as in the case of a diary, a medium of individual memory which was later discovered and published, thereby supplying the collective cultural memory of a bigger social group.

10 See Berek (2009: 87–88) on a discussion of the term *medial*.

to circulate and transmit can be forgotten, or become less influential in the formation of collective memory. At the same time, forgotten media of memory can be rediscovered, revived or newly interpreted to fit current needs and the present-day situation of people. These reflections shall underline the dynamics of collective cultural memory. People draw on different media of memory, mix them and set the contents in relation with each other in order to create meaning in accordance with the background of their social group environment.

Media of memory

There are a number of different media of memory that tell the story of the divine marriage in Kanchipuram. I shall examine here what kind of knowledge about the past event, especially about the bride's identity, they transmit, who produced them, and how they are received by participants. The media of memory, which I regard as relevant and influential today, can be classified as iconographic, performative, textual and oral media.

Iconographic media

Iconographic media are visual representations of an image of the past. They store and transmit knowledge of the past in the form of sculptures, reliefs, paintings, prints, and the like. In Kanchipuram, scenes of a past event such as the covering of Śiva's eyes, or the goddess's penance, can be found as reliefs on temple pillars and as sculptural elements on temple roofs. However, the most prominent visual representation is the depiction of the goddess embracing the *liṅga* under the mango tree. This episode is also told in the mythological narrative. To recall the storyline briefly: 'While the goddess worshipped the sand *liṅga* on the banks of the Kampā River, Śiva sent a flood in the river to test her devotion. To protect the *liṅga* from the raging waters, she embraced it and pressed it to her breasts, which left the marks of her breasts and bangles on it. This affectionate gesture made Śiva appear under the mango tree and finally re-marry her in Kanchipuram.' The motif of the flood and embrace of the *liṅga* is testified as early as the *Tēvāram*[11] (seventh to ninth century; see Chapter Three).

The depiction of the goddess embracing the *liṅga* under the mango tree can be regarded as *the* emblem of Śiva Kanchi, the central part of Kanchipuram around the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples. It is widespread in many kinds of artistic variations, forms and materials; for example as sculpture on temple roofs (fig. 7.6), reliefs (fig. 7.1), on pillars (fig. 7.7), fine metalwork (fig. 7.2), and as modern paintings printed in booklets (fig. 7.4), posters, or even on bags (fig. 7.3).

11 *Tēvāram* 3.114.7 and 7.61.10.



Figure 7.1 Relief, Ekāmranātha temple



Figure 7.2 Insignia, carried by a devotee



Figure 7.3 Emblem, printed on a bag



Figure 7.4 Intimate embrace of the *liṅga*

Artistic representations vary most strikingly in their depiction of the way the goddess embraces the *liṅga,* either close and affectionately, or distanced and rather stiff. Figure 7.4 is a photograph taken from a temple booklet, published in 2007 on the occasion of the *kumbhābhiṣeka* of the Ekāmranātha temple after five years of renovation from 2002 to 2007. It depicts the goddess intimately embracing the *liṅga* under a mango tree. Peaks and what likely represents the flooded river are visible in the background of the picture. Articles used for *pūjā*, such as small vessels and lamp stands, lay scattered on the ground in front of the *liṅga*. A seat covered with a tiger skin is depicted to the left. The depiction of these items clearly refers to the version of the myth found in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* (8.28–40), according to which the goddess was provided with thirteen objects that changed to articles used for a *liṅga pūjā*, when she reached Kanchipuram (see Chapter Three). The depiction of the *liṅga* as malleable is unique. *Periyapurāṇam* 6.2.287 refers to Śiva as *maṅkait-taḻuvak-kuḻaintār*, 'the god, who became soft when the goddess embraced him,'[12] and three other verses in the *Periyapurāṇam* (4.5.64, 65, 67), too, mention Śiva's softness and vulnerability through the goddess's embrace. However, this photograph is a rare example, illustrating the *liṅga*'s malleability and the affectionate embrace of the goddess.

More often, however, the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga* is rather stiff and formal. Figure 7.5 shows the dilapidated Rāmanāthasvāmī temple in the Ekambaranathar Sannadhi Street (shrine street). The sculpture on the temple roof shows the goddess barely touching the *liṅga*. The mango tree and remnants of a snake hood are visible. As part of the renovation work in 2011, the sculptures on the temple roof were rebuilt and repainted (fig. 7.6). Now, the sculpture of the goddess' embrace has been supplemented with a depiction

12 The homepage of the Ekāmranātha temple (http://www.ekambaranathartemple.tnhrce.in/history.html; accessed 03.02.2018), too, refers to this characteristic: "In this context he [Śiva] is referred to as Tazhuva kuzhainthaar ('He who melted in Her embrace') in Tamil."

of Śiva's head hovering over mount Kailāsa (indicated by grey boulders), from which the river Gaṅgā[13] is streaming down. Moreover, the scene of the closing of Śiva's eyes has been integrated as a sculptural element on the temple roof. This extends the symbolic character of the goddess's embrace into a depiction of the mythological narrative.



Figure 7.5 Rāmanāthasvāmī temple before renovation, 2009



Figure 7.6 Rāmanāthasvāmī temple after renovation, 2011

13 According to the myth's version in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, Śiva released the river Gaṅgā out of his hair to cause the flood in the Kampā River.

Two other examples add details to the symbol by depicting the flood in a rather dramatic fashion. On a pillar, located in front of the Kaccimayāṉīśvara shrine at the Ekāmranātha temple, small human figures can be seen to the right of the goddess in a dynamic embrace of the *liṅga* (fig. 7.7). One figure has its hands folded above the head and others are struggling as if they were washed away by the flood. The second example is found as a decorative element on a silver-coated festival palanquin called *veḷḷi māvaṭi cēvai* ('worship of the silver mango tree') (fig. 7.8). It brings our attention to the flood, showing the goddess kneeling in the swollen river filled with fish.



Figure 7.7 Pillar at the Ekāmranātha temple



Figure 7.8 Detail of *veḷḷi māvaṭi cēvai* palanquin

The examples represent a wide variety within the artistic representation of the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga.* It seems that most contemporary reproductions avoid the depiction of an affectionate embrace and the obvious touch of her breasts, which is nevertheless an important motif in the earliest versions of the myth.

Interestingly, the artistic representation of the goddess's embrace is also found beyond Kanchipuram. Sculptures of the goddess in an intimate embrace, clearly pointing to the touch of her breasts and hands (bangles), are known at the Bṛhadeśvara temple in Thanjavur,[14] at the Śivatemple in Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh,[15] and at the Śaktivaneśvara temple in the village Tirusaktimuttam, near Kumbakonam.[16] It seems that today the goddess's embrace forms part of the local legend of the Śaktivaneśvara temple.[17] Yet, to my knowledge there is no other Purāṇic myth, except the one known from Kanchipuram, which deals with the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga.*

Evaluating iconographic media in terms of its reception poses some difficulties. The emblem of the goddess's embrace can be found prominently and widely in various forms and materials. Yet, the depictions on temple pillars are often hidden and, just like the decorative sculptural elements on temple roofs, usually do not catch the attention of pilgrims and visitors.[18] Nevertheless, it does seem that the emblem, and the information stored and distributed therein, are influential in the formation of a collective memory. The emblem's widespread and diverse distribution makes it part of everyday life in Śiva Kanchi. Even if it may not be noticed consciously, it certainly works on a subtle level, imprinting the goddess's embrace into the memories of the inhabitants and visitors of Kanchipuram.

Regarding the question about the identity of the goddess, the emblem gives no clear answer. It does not explicitly depict Kāmākṣī, Ēlavārkuḻali or Pārvatī. But this is not the only ambiguity. The artistic variations stress different elements as well, and so does the interpretation of the emblem. It can be read as the worship of the *liṅga,* the testing of the

14 A picture of the sculpture can be found in Sivaramamurti (2007: 41). However, the location specified in the caption of the picture, reading "Parvati with *linga*, east of the garbhagriha" must be wrong. The sculpture is probably in a niche in the *ardhamaṇḍapa* of the Amman shrine in the same temple complex. L'Hernault 2002 describes large painted stucco panels in the Amman shrine, which are dedicated to the veneration of the *liṅga*. One of them shows Pārvatī embracing the *liṅga*.

15 A picture of the relief can be found in Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1987: plates).

16 See Rajeswari 1989, fig. 5.

17 A brief description of the myth and a picture of the *liṅga* (with Pārvatī to the left) can be found on http://www.kumbakonam.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=254&Itemid=328 (accessed 03.02.2018). I would suggest that the goddess's embrace known from Kanchipuram served as a model, which was transferred to the Śaktivaneśvara temple. Ayyar (1922: 72), too, points out that the sculptural representation of the goddess is "in accordance with the Kanchipuram legend."

18 During the festival in 2011, chalkboards were placed at the temple's entrance to the third *prākāra.* Drawings on them described the processions and events that took place on the same day or the day before. Here, again, the emblem of the goddess's embrace of the *liṅga* was reproduced. It was permanently depicted on one corner of the board, while the other drawings changed daily. Three scenes were shown from the events on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram: the goddess at the temple tank, the couple on the marriage stage, and the early morning 'honey moon' procession. Daily, I witnessed groups of visitors and pilgrims, standing in front of the chalkboard, studying the drawings on it, and discussing and explaining to each other what was depicted on the board. In this sense, the chalkboard was an excellent example of an iconographic media, which was well received by the audience.

devotee, the affection that made Ekāmranātha appear, or the union of god and goddess. Probably, it is the emblem's inherent ambiguity that allows it to function even today as a powerful symbol.

Textual media

Another medium, which stores, circulates and transmits knowledge about the past, is the written word, and in this case especially the Sthalapurāṇas of Kanchipuram. They tell the story of the divine marriage. Yet, they are not at all consistent in their representation of this memorable event. Clearly, the narratives have been formed and re-formed according to the interests of their authors and their sectarian affiliations. In general, at some point in the storyline, mostly in the description of the wedding party, the name Pārvatī or Umā is replaced by Kāmākṣī to refer to the local bride in Kanchipuram. But none of these texts mention Ēlavārkuḻali as the bride's identity.

The Sthalapurāṇas are in verse, either written in Sanskrit (KM (Ś), KM (V), KāVi) or an old form of Tamil (KP), which can be read by a small group of people only, and, moreover, are difficult to acquire. Thus, priests and *paṇḍits* play an important role in the formation and transmission of cultural memory through storytelling.[19] Also, women circulate these stories, for example during *Navarātri Kolu*.[20] However, a number of temple booklets and recent publications, such as the *Kāñci Kāmakōṭi Purāṇam*, reproduce the Kanchipuram myths in simple Tamil and with illustrations. Almost all these texts mention Kāmākṣī as the bride.[21] The *Kāñci Kāmakōṭi Purāṇam*, for example, states that 'every year on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram the marriage of Kāmākṣī Devi is done with all *pūjās*,' that 'Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī are made to sit on the marriage stage,' or that 'the *māṅkalyam* was tied by Ekāmranātha to Kāmākṣī.'[22]

Another textual medium, which reaches a huge number of people, is the festival poster. Each year, the temple's administration (*devasthāna*) produces posters that advertise the festival's program and additional information, such as timings, processional routes, and the donor's names for each procession. The posters are distributed in the form of invitation letters to donors and other persons affiliated with the temple. Additionally, they are put up in the temple and in large-size print in the streets. Advertising of the festival in large print increased drastically during the three years (2009–2011) I was participating. Most often, these large prints point to specific processions with pictures of the deity on the respective vehicle of the day.[23] In 2011, at main stops on the processional route, such as the crossing

19 Moreover, one must not forget that the Purāṇas and Māhātmyas originated from oral traditions.

20 *Kolu* is a religious ritual in which small clay figures of gods and others are displayed at home during the ten-day Navarātri festival. During this time families visit each other's homes and exchange stories and mythological narratives connected to the *kolu* figures (Hüsken 2012a: 188–91, Ilkama 2018: 159–63). Shops in front of the Ekāmranātha temple sell such *kolu* clay figures of the goddess embracing the *liṅga* under the mango tree.

21 However, one exception is Arivoli (1983). Here, Ēlavārkuḻali is explicitly mentioned as Ekāmranātha's wife (p. 36) and that the marriage between Ekāmranātha and Ēlavārkuḻali is taking place on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram (p. 39).

22 *Kāñci Kāmakōṭi Purāṇam,* p. 63–64. Translation from Tamil by Narayanan Subramanian.

23 Most often donors arrange for them to promote their respective procession. In few instances also priests were responsible for the production of the large prints.

near the flower market and the Kacchapeśvar temple, large prints displayed the schedule of the entire thirteen festival days (fig. 7.9). Often, participants and spectators stood in front of them and read the program while they were waiting for the deities to come.



Figure 7.9 Festival program on large print posters near the flower market

Apart from the general information they provide about the ongoing and upcoming events, these posters and invitation letters proclaim the union of Kāmākṣī and Ekāmranātha on the one hand, and associate Kāmākṣī with Ēlavārkuḻali on the other. The invitation letter of 2009 advertised its headline with big letters:[24] *kāñcipuram aruḷmiku kāmāṭciyammai iṭaṅkōṇṭa (aruḷmiku ēlavārkuḻali ammai) aruḷmiku ēkāmparanāta cuvāmiyiṉ carvatāri āṇṭu (pacali 1418) paṅkuṉi uttirat tirukkalyāṇap peruviḻāp pattirikai*—'invitation to the great festival of the sacred Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage of the holy Kanchipuram goddess Kāmākṣī (holy goddess Ēlavārkuḻali) along with the holy Lord Ekāmranātha in the *carvatāri*[25] year (*pacali*[26] 1418).' The invitation letters and posters of 2010 and 2011 changed slightly, now announcing: *kāñcipuram aruḷmiku ēlavārkuḻali ammai (aruḷmiku kāmāṭciyammai) iṭaṅkōṇṭa aruḷmiku ēkāmparanāta cuvāmiyiṉ (...)*—'the holy goddess Ēlavārkuḻali (holy goddess Kāmākṣī) along with the holy Lord Ekāmranātha.' Thus, naming Ēlavārkuḻali first and putting Kāmākṣī in parentheses gives clear prominence to goddess Ēlavārkuḻali.[27] I

24 The letters of 2002 and 2008 use the same headline (with another Tamil year). Between 2002 and 2007 the festival was suspended because of the temple renovation. Unfortunately, I was not able to find an invitation letter made before 2002.

25 The Tamil calendar follows a sixty-year cycle with different names for each year. After the completion of sixty years it starts anew with the first year. The Tamil year *carvatāri* corresponds to 2008–2009 of the Gregorian calendar.

26 The revenue or harvest era (Urdu *faṣlī* – harvest) was instituted by Akbar in 1555 CE and introduced to South India in 1630 CE. By adding 590 to the Fasli year one gets the Gregorian year.

27 Also the posters of the years 2016 and 2017 offered on the homepage of the Ekāmranātha temple

asked one of the main priests why they named Ēlavārkuḻali first. He explained: 'Kāmākṣī is only Ēlavārkuḻali, of late the trustees due to affection to Tamil language they wanted to have the names in Tamil. So instead of Kāmākṣī they (*devasthāna*) have put it as Ēlavārkuḻali, otherwise both are same only. (...) It was put as Kāmākṣī *camēta* Ekāmranātha last year and this year Ēlavārkuḻali *iṭaṅkōṇṭa* Ekāmranātha. The meaning is the same, last year it was mixing of Sanskrit and this year it is Tamil.'[28]

The preference for Tamil might be one reason. Yet, Kāmākṣī's name is often used as Kāmāṭci, the Tamilized form of the Sanskrit name, and *iṭaṅkōṇṭa* ('along with') as equivalent to the Sanskrit word *sameta* (Tam. *camēta*, 'united, joined') was also used in invitation letters from 2002, 2008, and 2009, and in a temple brochure published in 2007 on the occasion of the *kumbhābhiṣeka* after the renovation of the Ekāmranātha temple. This shows that the Tamil form was already preferred in former invitation letters by writing *kāmāṭciyammai iṭaṅkōṇṭa*.[29] It seems that a rising awareness of the identity of the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali added to the preference to use her name instead of the Tamilized form of Kāmākṣī. It remains to be seen, however, if the shift of their names marks the beginning of a durable shift in perception of the goddesses.

Performative media

Re-enactments of myths and memorable events are performative media that display and transmit a picture of the past. The intensity of the experience through participation, and the involvement of all senses, embeds these re-presentations of the past deeply in the memory of the audience. The rituals and re-enactments related to the marriage festival comprise a time frame of almost twenty-four hours and take place at various locations. The events have been described in detail in Chapter Four. As can be seen, the performative media put emphasis on three key scenes of the memorable event as told in the mythological narrative: the goddess's penance, the establishment and worship of the sand *liṅga* (though the embrace is not re-enacted), Ekāmranātha's appearance and the final (re-)marriage. A scene which does not occur in the myth as represented in the Sthalapurāṇas, is the goddess's trip to Okkapiranthan Kulam. Here, she meets two other goddesses, one of them the goddess Kāmākṣī, who is now promoted as the bride on invitation letters and posters. However, in the performance, the festival statue of the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali represents the bride. She is the bride throughout the rituals and Kāmākṣī takes the role of the bridesmaid, accompanying her to the Ekāmranātha temple. The majority of participants I talked with clearly recognized the different festival statues and the role they take on in the festival. They recognize Ēlavārkuḻali as the bride and address her by that name, in addition to Ampāḷ, the general appellation for a goddess.

However, it is difficult to pin down what ideas about the past event are actually transmitted through the performance alone. Participants discuss what is taking place, and interpret the events accordingly.

(http://www.ekambaranathartemple.org; accessed 01.02.2018) name Ēlavārkuḻali first.

28 Interview with Nagaswamy Gurukkal, Ekāmranātha temple, 05.04.2010.

29 The headline is not only used for the invitation letters to the festival, but for any ceremony such as private marriages, birthdays, and other rituals that stand in relation to the Ekāmranātha temple

Oral media

There are two popular narratives which are circulated orally during the marriage festival. One is about a cat that is crossing the marriage, which for many participants is the reason for a repetition of the festival (and not Śiva's instruction to celebrate it each year, as told in the myth). The other narrative tells of a domestic quarrel between the goddess Ēlavārkuḻali and her soon-to-be husband Ekāmranātha, which according to some originates from Ēlavārkuḻali's jealousy of Ekāmranātha's first wife, Kāmākṣī. Both narratives have been detailed in Chapter Four.

I regard these oral narratives as a medium of memory, since they store and circulate knowledge of the past event. But at the same time, they are already formations of cultural memory, which have been produced by participants, who draw upon different media and their own experiences to understand and interpret the present situation within the framework of the culturally transmitted images of the past.

Regarding the question about the bride's identity, people establish a relationship between the two brides, which can be classified as one of three relationships: 1. Identificatory, 2. Spatial, or 3. Temporal.

1. Identificatory relationship: Identifying two deities with each other is a common strategy in the Hindu religious traditions when incorporating deities from other traditions. Michaels (2004a: 7) coined the term 'identificatory habitus', defining it as "the establishment of an identity by equating it with something else." This mode of establishing a relationship is mainly used by priests of the Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī temples. Both priestly groups, though, tend to imply a hierarchical order in the identificatory relationship. Ekāmranātha temple priests regard Pārvatī as the consort of Śiva, and both Ēlavārkuḻali and Kāmākṣī as local manifestations of her. In contrast, Kāmākṣī temple priests consider Ēlavārkuḻali as a form or part of Kāmākṣī, which serves as bride for Ekāmranātha, whereas Kāmākṣī in her total form is not married.

2. Spatial relationship: This relationship, too, acknowledges the identification of the two brides with each other. Yet, it does not imply a hierarchy. People consider both goddesses to be the same. They understand the changing name as an indication of where the goddess is placed. 'In each place one name comes,'[30] said the main donor for the marriage festival. The secretary of the 'Seven Streets Association', which arranges for the function at Okkapiranthan Kulam, explained in more detail: 'Kāmākṣī Amman̲ and Ēlavārkuḻali are the same, only the name is different. Ēlavārkuḻali is having a *caṉṉati* (shrine) at the Ekāmranātha temple, Kāmākṣī is having a separate temple. Once Kāmākṣī Amman̲ goes there her name changes into Ēlavārkuḻali.'[31] Thus, the goddess has different names. She is Kāmākṣī at the Kāmākṣī temple, Ēlavārkuḻali at the Ekāmranātha temple and Pārvatī on Mount Kailāsa.

3. Temporal relationship: What I classify as temporal relationship is the oral narrative that Kāmākṣī is the first wife of Ekāmranātha, and Ēlavārkuḻali the second wife whom Ekāmranātha is going to marry during the festival. This narrative is prevalent in interviews I took at Okkapiranthan Kulam. It shows an interesting development in the sense that it

30 Interview R. Narayanan, 18.03.2010.

31 Interview S. Sengalvarayan, 22.03.2009.

highlights Ēlavārkuḻali as the contemporary and local bride, whereas the marriage with Kāmākṣī is placed in the remote past. In some versions, more often told by women, the narrative implies Ēlavārkuḻali's underlying jealousy of Ekāmranātha's first wife, Kāmākṣī.

To sum up, the four different media of memory dealt with here highlight different elements of the memorable event and transmit different knowledge about the bride's identity. The iconographic media focus on the embrace of the *liṅga*. In terms of the goddess's identity, they allow many interpretations. A clear statement is made in the textual media, which strongly promote Kāmākṣī as the bride. In contrast, the performative media present Ēlavārkuḻali as the bride, whereas Kāmākṣī plays a secondary role as bridesmaid. The oral media in turn do not prioritize any of the two brides. They rather try to bring both of them in line by establishing a relationship between the two. The oral media can at the same time be seen as a representation of cultural memory, produced by individuals and groups. The analysis strongly suggests that a picture of the past and present event is formed according to specific patterns, which are available for different social groups, such as priests and their temple affiliations, inhabitants of Okkapiranthan Kulam, or men and women.

What is not remembered?

I have described and analyzed the different media that represent the memorable past event, and pursued the question of how people make sense of the event by means of the different media and what picture of the past they remember. A similarly intriguing question relates to what people do not remember. Or to put it in other words, 'which knowledge about the past is not transmitted?'

In our case, obviously the role of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as the former bride of Ekāmranātha in the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals is not remembered (see details in Chapter Five). The history of the relocation of the festival statue of Kāmākṣī, called Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, at the end of the seventeenth century is hardly known to the public. The priests of the Kāmākṣī temple in Kanchipuram and of the Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī temple in Thanjavur remember this narrative and hand it down among themselves, but they do not promote it, nor the former role of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī as bride in the marriage rituals. However, Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī is not forgotten. She still has a shrine at the Kāmākṣī temple, which houses a pedestal with her feet and, since 2009, a drawing of the goddess. The myth of her creation from Kāmākṣī's third eye is told in temple booklets, and a note about the relocation of her statue to Thanjavur is found on the homepage of the Kāmākṣī temple.[32] Some sources even mention that Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī has been created to serve as Ekāmranātha's consort, and that she still is his consort, as evidenced by the annual celebration of her wedding anniversary in Thanjavur. Nevertheless, this knowledge is not spread or transmitted on a large scale. Hardly any of the participants I spoke with have heard about Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī before. She does not form part of their collective memory, only of the group specific memory of her priests.

Connerton (2008) distinguishes seven types of forgetting. Among these, 'structural amnesia' suits best in the case of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, because "structural amnesia results

32 http://www.srikanchikamakshi.org/kamakshi-ambal/ (accessed 01.02.2018).

from a deficit of information" (2008: 64). However, this does not answer the question of why knowledge about her former role in the marriage rituals fell into oblivion or why this information is at present not promoted. I suggest that this policy is in the interest of her priests, who follow a ritual tradition other than the Ekāmranātha temple, downplay existing connections between the two temples, and, moreover, emphasize that the goddess Kāmākṣī is actually not married.

7.3 Concluding remarks

Commemorative ceremonies and re-enactments are important means for conveying and sustaining images and recollected knowledge of the past. The analysis of the media of memory has shown that a number of media are available for the production of collective cultural memories. It seems that participants differentiate and use the available media in a variety of ways. Most striking is the clear recognition of the bride's identity as Ēlavārkuḻali in the ritual performance. Yet, the performance is only one medium of memory which is in dialogue with other media, such as texts and images. Taking the example of the bride's identity at the Ekāmranātha temple festival, the textual media are influential for the formation of cultural memory, as the persistence of Kāmākṣī as bride has shown. However, a powerful means for the circulation of images and ideas about the past is orality, since the contents of the available media are often discussed and transmitted through storytelling.

Moreover, it seems that for the participants the importance of the performance is the lived experience. This experience is rooted in the present and interpreted accordingly. Although the Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage festival is represented as the commemoration of a past event, it is not retrospective. Rather, it connects the past with the present and provides future prospects. These future prospects—the creation of auspiciousness and well-being through the marriage of two deities—are highlighted by participants and seem for them much more important than the commemoration of a past event.

Conclusion

Based on anthropological fieldwork and textual studies, this publication has examined the celebration of the deities' marriage at the annual festival at the Ekāmranātha temple in Kanchipuram. My objective has been to investigate various relations that are established and expressed through the re-enactment of the divine marriage—relations between deities, and also relations of participants and donors to the deities and the temple. Moreover, I examined the relation and interplay of different sources that inform the contemporary rituals. I have argued that the re-enactment of the deities' marriage is a means to create and transmit a specific form of cultural knowledge, which is in constant dialogue with other cultural productions, such as written mythological texts, oral narratives, iconographic images and discourses. Various interpretations and meanings are offered through the variety of available media. Additionally, each medium provides a range of possible interpretations, depending on the interpreter's points of view. Through this open-endedness, cultural knowledge is produced in a highly dynamic process that brings the tradition up to date while maintaining continuity with the past.

This study is located in the present, but throughout I have also aimed to include a historical perspective. I analyzed a wide range of source material, such as mythological texts, hymns, a poem, epigraphical records, reports, iconographic images, and observed rituals, collected oral narratives, and conducted interviews. The combination of these sources provides as detailed a picture as possible of the divine marriage as seen from different perspectives. In the following sections, I will link together the main findings of the different chapters.

The actual performance of the divine marriage

As outlined in the introduction, a main objective of this research project has been the analysis of the contemporary rituals and re-enactment of the divine marriage at the Ekāmranātha temple festival. This study has shown that the local context has a strong impact on the performance of the festival's rituals. The temple's priests refer to the ritual handbook *Mahotsavavidhi* for the conduct of the festival, but attach at the same time great importance to the temple's local traditions. The ritual handbook provides a structure that allows for the integration of place's and temple's specific features, which makes the festival special for the respective worshipping community. Moreover, local issues and potential conflicts can thereby be expressed and negotiated, as interactions with other deities during the festival indicate.

The rituals performed by the Ekāmranātha temple's priests are not the only ritual activities taking place on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram. This fact is often not taken into account by other studies, many of which provide normative ritual descriptions and thereby often represent the perspective of the festival's priests, a perspective that is also foregrounded in the ritual handbook. In particular, donors, and other participating groups, engage in ritual activities, some of which begin at their homes or in the local community temple, until they come

together with those rituals performed at the Ekāmranātha temple. They contribute to the complexity of the festival with ritual elements from their own, often caste-specific traditions. This specific form of participation of course shapes the perspectives of the diverse groups. There is not one, but many festivals celebrated on this occasion.

I argue that the divine marriage festival embraces various ritual activities that reach far beyond the 'mere' re-enactment of the deities' marriage and related key scenes of the 'marriage myth'. Interweaved are ritual elements of the folk tradition, oral narratives, and life-cycle rituals such as (human) marriages. Only the combination of these various ritual and narrative elements, and the interplay of various actors, such as priests, donors, musicians, participants, and so on, make the actual performance of the divine marriage on Paṅkuṉi Uttiram.

The deities' relations

Ekāmranātha and Kāmākṣī are *the* divine couple of Kanchipuram, at least they are known as such on a supra-regional level. On a local scale, however, their relation is more complex and differentiated. In the contemporary performance of the divine marriage, Ekāmranātha is getting married to Ēlavārkuḻali, his consort housed in a shrine at the Ekāmranātha temple, and not to Kāmākṣī. Kāmākṣī attends the wedding as bridesmaid, and, in fact, never meets or interacts with Ekāmranātha. The ritual performance represents Kāmākṣī as an independent, unmarried goddess. By contrast, most textual sources represent Kāmākṣī as Ekāmranātha's bride. Their union is announced on festival posters and promoted in several written sources. Local participants, however, clearly recognize Ēlavārkuḻali as the bride in the marriage rituals and seem to relate to her more than to Kāmākṣī. In my view, Kāmākṣī has moved beyond the stage of a local goddess, or as the main donor of the marriage phrased it: 'Kāmākṣī is a general thing. Throughout the world it is known, if there is Īśvara (Śiva) it is Kāmākṣī.'[1] Ēlavārkuḻali took her place as the local bride, and is either identified with Kāmākṣī or claimed to be Ekāmranātha's second wife to maintain continuity with the tradition. Historically, one reason for the introduction of the new bride was the relocation of Baṅgāru Kāmākṣī, the former festival statue doing the marriage rituals. However, this is hardly known to participants and at present is not promoted by priests. This policy is in the interest of the Kāmākṣī temple priests, who follow another ritual tradition than the Ekāmranātha temple and tend to keep quiet about connections between the two temples, since this also reinforces Kāmākṣī's status as powerful, unmarried goddess.

Nevertheless, Kāmākṣī is still involved in the marriage; she joins the bridal procession with Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ as bridesmaid. Both goddesses share similarities, and are linked to each other through the 'marriage myth' and the 'taming' legend of Śaṅkara. However, whether one was the 'original' goddess of Kanchipuram will probably never be known. Moreover, there are many questions related to Kāmākṣī that need further investigation. One of these questions is her sudden popularity. Was this caused by royal Vijayanagara sponsorship, or perhaps by the identification with Śrīvidyā and promotion through the Śaṅkara Maṭha? At present, Ēlavārkuḻali and Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ benefit from being linked to the supra-regional renowned goddess, Kāmākṣī. The three goddesses

1 Interview with R. Narayanan, 18.03.2010.

are closely related, though their relationship is not clearly defined and remains open to change.

Social dimensions of the divine marriage

One characteristic I encountered throughout the study is the coexistence of different views, claims, myths and narratives. To continue with the example of the goddesses' relations: Priests of the Kāmākṣī temple object that Kāḷikāmpāḷ now uses the name prefix Āti Kāmākṣī, and of the announcement on the festival posters, one priest commented: 'Everybody gets the impression that he (Ekāmranātha) is getting married to Kāmākṣī, which is not so.'[2] Obviously, they advocate Kāmākṣī's status as supreme, unmarried goddess. Yet, they do not interfere in the policy of the other temples. Similarly, the donors' claims to be a representative of the bride's side overlap, yet, they are not disputed. Likewise, priests have their views on the events, which often represent the normative, 'high' tradition, and they insist that most of what people say is 'just belief or propaganda.' It seems that all participants uphold their divergent interpretations, without interfering in the domains of others. At least to my knowledge, no attempts have been made to unify or even coordinate these different views.

A pool of data and opinions about the divine marriage is available, out of which individuals and various interest groups make selections according to their specific purposes. The motifs of the 'marriage myth', oral narratives, notions about the goddesses' identities, and interpretations of the ritual activities can be adapted to serve one's needs and to represent one's group-specific interests. This is an ongoing process, as shown by the recent re-making of the 'marriage myth' by the trustee of the Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ temple: it refers to the *Kāñcippurāṇam,* yet combines motifs from the version of the myth found in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* and the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*, with the intention to associate Āti Kāmākṣī Kāḷikāmpāḷ with the dark colored Umā, and thereby creates a new version of the 'marriage myth'.

Most interpretations held by the diverse people I talked to revolve around the deity's motive for the activity. It seems that by sharing knowledge of the god's motives or thoughts another level of closeness and intimacy with him, or with her, is expressed. In addition, as long as the deity's motivation is the center of the interpretations, nobody can claim to know it 'better'. In this sense, nobody is directly interfering or suppressing the views of others, although one's own view is often considered as superior. This enables different communities and individuals to find their specific and unique roles and identities in the festival's activities. When the roles overlap, as is evidently the case with the representatives of the bride's side, other roles and opinions are ignored, since the focus is on one's own ritual contribution directed towards the center—the gods.

In a highly stratified society, it is especially important to allow space for diverging interpretations and to handle them, if not with acceptance, at least with 'ignorance' rather than suppressing them. In my view, without this attitude many more conflicts would arise during the close contact of differing and to some extent competing groups during the festival, particularly in a pluralistic setting such as Kanchipuram.

2 Interview with Babu Sastrigal, Kāmākṣī temple, 18.03.2009.

Identity of humans and gods

The celebration and re-enactment of the deities' marriage is central to many temples in Tamil Nadu. Harman interprets the divine marriage as a 'metaphor' (1989: 5); priests of the Ekāmranātha temple refer to the 'role model' function of the deities. I my view, the deities mean much more to many devotees than mere role models; the gods are 'one of them'. This becomes most visible when donors speak about their relationship to the goddess. One explicitly states that the goddess was born in their family, while people of Okkapiranthan Kulam establish kinship relations with the goddess, considering their village as the goddess's mother's place. I suggest that the deities' marriage is not just an enactment of a 'role model', but that it is an expression of the identity of gods and humans. This is also ritually expressed by the priests performing in the stead of the gods, who "become" the gods by placing *mantras* (*nyāsa*) on their own bodies.[3] Thus, the identification of gods and humans is ritually enacted. The gods are part of one's own family and the participants of the divine marriage are wedding guests as they would be at a human wedding. As Raja, the twenty-five-year-old torchbearer, said: 'Ekāmranātha is my father, would you miss your parents wedding?' Unnithan-Kumar (2008: 207) describes the "absence of an absolute distinction between divine and human beings" and notes that gods descend to earth to "take part in human affairs." However, I would add that humans also take part in divine affairs. Devotees follow the deities' mood and feelings with great concern, and the way they speak about them shows how small the distance between humans and gods is considered to be.

Perspectives

The Ekāmranātha temple festival is a highly complex festival that has repeatedly been modified and customized. It provides space for various ritual activities and diverse interpretations of the events. The festival is in the making, adapts itself to changing circumstances, and renews itself. Today it seems to be more popular than ever. The processions become bigger and funding increases. Sponsoring religious rituals is a means to express status, not only for the Indian middle-class, but also for non-resident Indians. The new festival chariot of the Ekāmranātha temple has been sponsored with a crore (ten million) Rupees by the Sivarpanam trust, located in the US. This clearly affects the interests and status of local donors, competing with donors from abroad, who try to buy into the temple's redistributive system. It is vital to examine cultural transfer and the influence of globalization on festival practices, not only in the Hindu Tamil diaspora, but also in their homelands.

3 Within the ritual setting the worshipper 'becomes' Śiva by purifying his body and placing *mantras* on it to constitute it as a 'divine' body, because "only a Śiva can worship Śiva" (Davis 2008: 83).

Appendix

List of the festival program of the *mahotsava* at the Ekāmranātha temple (2010)

Day	Morning	Evening
		Vināyaka Utsava (*peruccāḷi*, rat); *mṛtsaṃgrahaṇa; vāstubali; aṅkurārpaṇa; rakṣābandhana*
1	*dhvajārohaṇa*; Somāskanda (*capparam*, canopy) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy)	Somāskanda (*siṃha*, lion) Ēlavārkuḻali (*kiḷi*, parrot)
2	Somāskanda (*suryaprabhā*, sun) Ēlavārkuḻali (*suryaprabhā*, sun)	Somāskanda (*candraprabhā,* moon) Ēlavārkuḻali (*anna*, goose)
3	Somāskanda (*bhūta,* goblin) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy)	*ēcal*; Somāskanda (*capparam*, canopy) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy) Subrahmaṇya (*mayil*, peacock) Vināyaka (*peruccāḷi*, rat)
4	Somāskanda (*nāga,* snake) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy)	Somāskanda (*veḷḷi ṛṣabha,* silver bull) Ēlavārkuḻali (*ṛṣabha*, small bull)
5	Somāskanda (*adhikāranandin,* bull) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy)	Somāskanda (*kailāsapīṭha rāvana*) Ēlavārkuḻali (*kāmadhenu*, 'wish-cow')
6	63 Nāyaṉmar Somāskanda & Ēlavārkuḻali (cart)	Somāskanda & Ēlavārkuḻali (*veḷḷi tēr*, silver chariot)
7	Somāskanda & Ēlavārkuḻali (*tēr utsava*, big wooden chariot)	——
8	6-face Subrahmaṇya (pavilion) Afternoon: Bhikṣāṭāṉa (*capparam*) and Mohinī (*capparam*, canopy)	Somāskanda (*kutirai*, horse) Ēlavārkuḻali (*kutirai*, small horse)
9	Somāskanda (*aḷmēl pallakku*, palanquin) Ēlavārkuḻali (*aḷmēl pallakku*, palanquin)	Somāskanda & Ēlavārkuḻali (*veḷḷi māvaṭi*, silver mango tree palanquin)

Day	Morning	Evening
10	Naṭarāja (*capparam*, canopy) and Śivakāmī (canopy); *ūṭal*; *tīrttavāri* for *rudrapāda;* Afternoon: Ēlavārkuḻali goes to Okkapiranthan Kulam	Procession of three goddesses; Penance at Kampā Nadī tank; Paṅkuṉi Uttiram marriage rituals; Morning: Somāskanda (*tanka ṛṣabha,* golden bull) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy); *viśvarūpadarśana*
11	Kantappoṭi Utsava	Somāskanda (*rudrakōṭi vimāna,* pavilion) and Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy); *ūṭal*
12	Somāskanda (*puruṣamṛga,* 'man-deer') Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy)	Somāskanda (*veḷḷi ṛṣabha,* silver bull) Ēlavārkuḻali (*tanka ṛṣabha*, golden bull) Subrahmaṇya (*mayil*, peacock) Vināyaka (*peruccāḷi*, rat)
13	Candraśekhara (*ṛṣabha*, small bull); *tīrttavāri* for *astradevatā*	Somāskanda (*gaja*, elephant) Ēlavārkuḻali (*capparam*, canopy); *dhvajāvarohaṇa*
	Ablution with 108 conches (*śankhābhiṣeka*) to the *utsavamūrtis* and with 108 water-pots (*kalaśābhiṣeka*) to the *liṅga.*	Swing festival (*ūñcal*) for Somāskanda and Ēlavārkuḻali; honoring of *Tēvāram* book and main festival priest.

Overview of narrative themes of the 'marriage myth'

	Tēvāram 3.114	Tēvāram 7.61	Periyapurāṇam	Ēkāmparanātar Ulā	Kāñcīmāhātmya (Ś)	Kāñcippurāṇam	Kāmākṣīvilāsa	Kāñcīmāhātmya (V)	Aruṇācalamāhātmya	Lalitāmāhātmya
Rationale			*pūjā*	eyes	eyes	eyes	eyes	quarrel	eyes	eyes
B.āśrama / 13 implements							X			
Stopover Kāśī					X	X	X			X
Tapas	X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Mango tree			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Light *liṅga*					X					
Sand *liṅga*				X	X		X	X	X	
Pūjā		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Kampā River			X	X	X	X	(X)		X	X
Flood	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Helper Kālī					X		X			
Helper Viṣṇu							X	X		
Embrace	X	X	X	X	X	X	X (no marks)	X	X	
Marriage			(X)		X	X	X	(X)		X
Marriage to Kauśikī					X	X				
32 *dharmas*			X		X	X	(X)		(X)	

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Ethno-Indology. Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals

Herausgegeben von Axel Michaels

10: Astrid Zotter, Christof Zotter (Eds.)

Hindu and Buddhist Initiations in India and Nepal

2010. 380 pages, 45 ill., 5 tables, hc
170x240 mm
ISBN 978-3-447-06387-6 *€ 58,– (D)*

Broadly speaking, two sets of rituals are relevant to a discussion of initiations in Hindu and Buddhist traditions: initiatory rituals as part of the life-cycle which are observed in many social groups and are compulsory depending on gender or age, and those – more optional in character – that allow admittance to a certain religious group or practice.

The contributors to *Hindu and Buddhist Initiations in India and Nepal* are from different academic disciplines and treat examples of both kinds of rituals in various religious settings. Of special interest are interrelationships among initiations and their relations to other kinds of rituals. The papers are devoted to the study of minute details and point to the dynamics of initiations. The transfer of ritual elements accompanied by readjustments to new contexts as the modification of procedures or the reassignment of meanings is one of the recurring traits. Other aspects addressed by the authors include the relation of script (ritual handbooks) to performance or various forces of change like the economics of ritual, gender-related variations, modernization, and democratization.

12: Niels Gutschow, Axel Michaels

Getting married

Hindu and Buddhist Marriage Rituals Among the Newars of Bhaktapur and Patan, Nepal

With a film on DVD

With contributions of Manik Bajracharya, Christiane Brosius and Tessa Pariyar

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Getting Married is the third and final volume on Hindu and Buddhist life-cycle rituals among the Newars of the ancient city of Bhaktapur in Nepal. While *Handling Death*, the first volume, focussed on the dynamics of death and ancestor rituals, and *Growing Up*, the second volume, focussed on the rituals of childhood, adolescence and youth, the present volume deals with a number of rituals related to marriage.

After an introduction of studies on marriage rituals in Nepal the authors give some basic marriage rules of Hindu and Buddhist Newars, the social topography and hierarchy, the families of the marriage partners as well as the problems of endogamy and exogamy in Bhaktapur. They present a detailed description of Hindu and Buddhist marriage rituals among Newars (which are partly documented on the DVD included in this book) and come to relevant conclusions regarding life-cycle rituals in general and the place marriage rituals occupy in Newar society and Hinduism. The richly illustrated books have been highly appreciated by the scholarly community as a unique attempt to provide a comprehensive ethno-indological study of all major life-cycle rituals of a certain Hindu and Buddhist community.

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Ethno-Indology. Heidelberg Studies in South Asian Rituals

Herausgegeben von Axel Michaels

13: Ute Hüsken, Axel Michaels (Eds.)

South Asian Festivals on the Move

2013. 431 pages, 1 diagram, 109 ill., 4 maps, pb
170x240 mm
ISBN 978-3-447-06909-0 *€ 54,– (D)*

South Asia is one of the richest areas with regard to its festivals. We find an immense variety of performance traditions: theater, plays, recitations and enactments of oral epics, ritual performances, healing or shamanistic rituals, games and sportive competitions, performances of itinerant or sedentary musicians and religious specialists, pilgrimages, and much more. In many cases, these festivals, their agents and participants are "on the move" – they are changing, but they are also literally on the move and since long also took roots beyond South Asia. These festival traditions, along with their material cultures, clearly are of major importance for creating and sustaining individual and group identity. This holds especially true in situations of rapid changes, caused for example by situations of crisis. With dramatic changes taking place in South Asia and beyond, some festivals will disappear or already have vanished; others undergo radical transformations; some traditions manage to preserve their practices within a new and very different social setting; and new festivals come into being.

The miscellany edited by Ute Hüsken and Axel Michaels traces these radical changes in South Asian festival traditions within the context of voluntary or enforced mobility of the performing agents and their traditions. Especially this aspect of mobility – of ideas, of people and their actions – and its consequences is a central concern of the volume.

14: István Keul (Ed.)

Banāras Revisited

Scholarly Pilgrimages to the City of Light

2014. 283 pages, 35 ill., hc
170x240 mm
ISBN 978-3-447-10201-8 *€ 58,– (D)*

In *Banāras Revisited*, scholars from various disciplines talk about their research in a city that has been described as a veritable microcosm of India: multifaceted, complex, vibrant, and full of contradictions. The themes range from the sensory aesthetics of everyday life to the history of the Marathas in Banāras; from Harishchandra, the "father" of modern Hindi, to the "tribals" of Nagwa; from the architecture of the ghāṭs to the works of the Austrian writers Zweig and Winkler; from "informative relationships" with research assistants to the mediatization of goddesses; from reflections on public education to a contemporary literary chronicler of Assī; from "colonial ghosts" in the 1950s to present-day Western travelers. In addition to its thematic diversity, the volume benefits from another strong asset: the voices of its contributors, clearly audible in reflexive passages and personal vignettes that make the essays a useful reading also for undergraduates considering fieldwork in Banāras or elsewhere.

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