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.

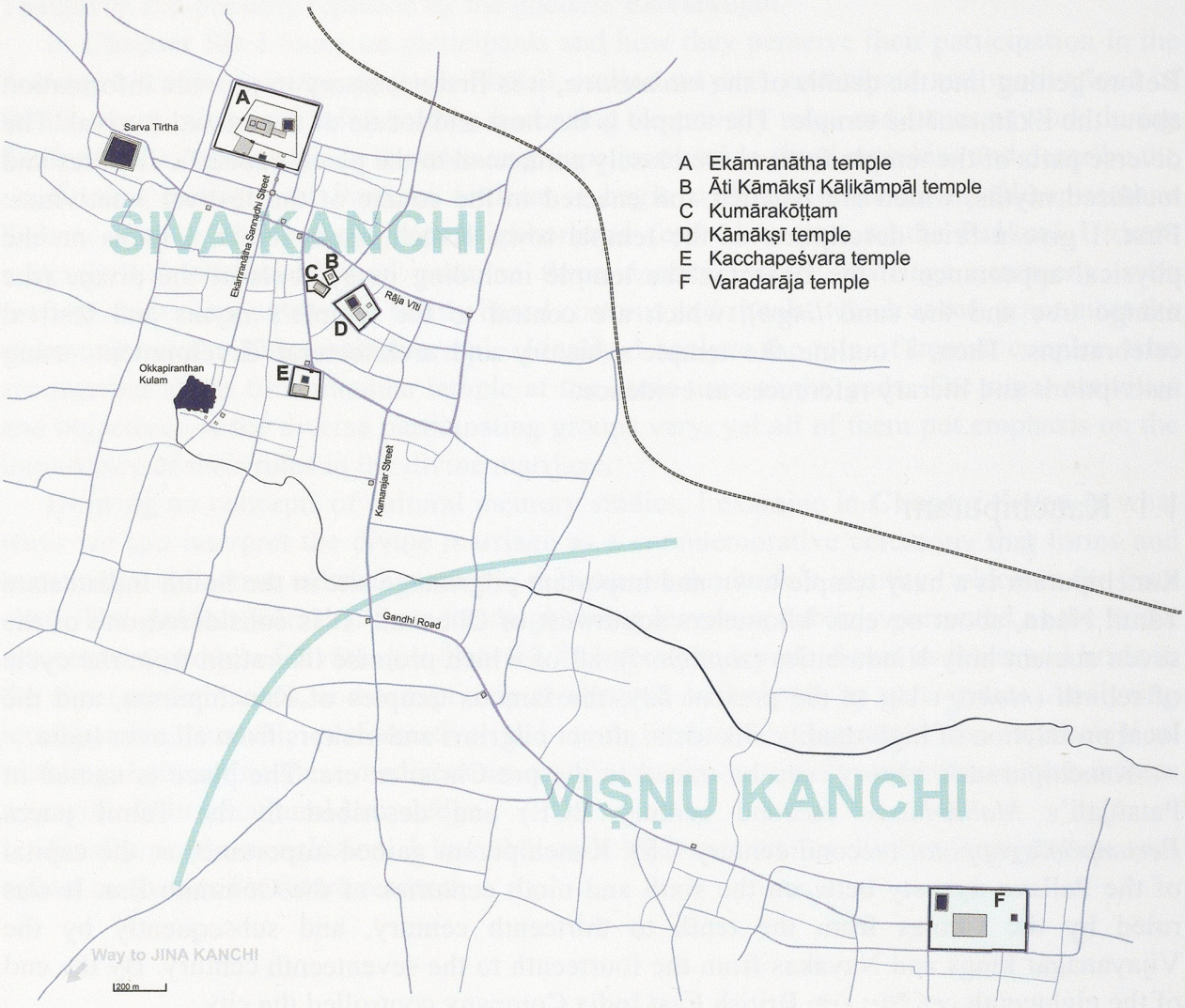


Figure 1.1 Map of Kanchipuram

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).

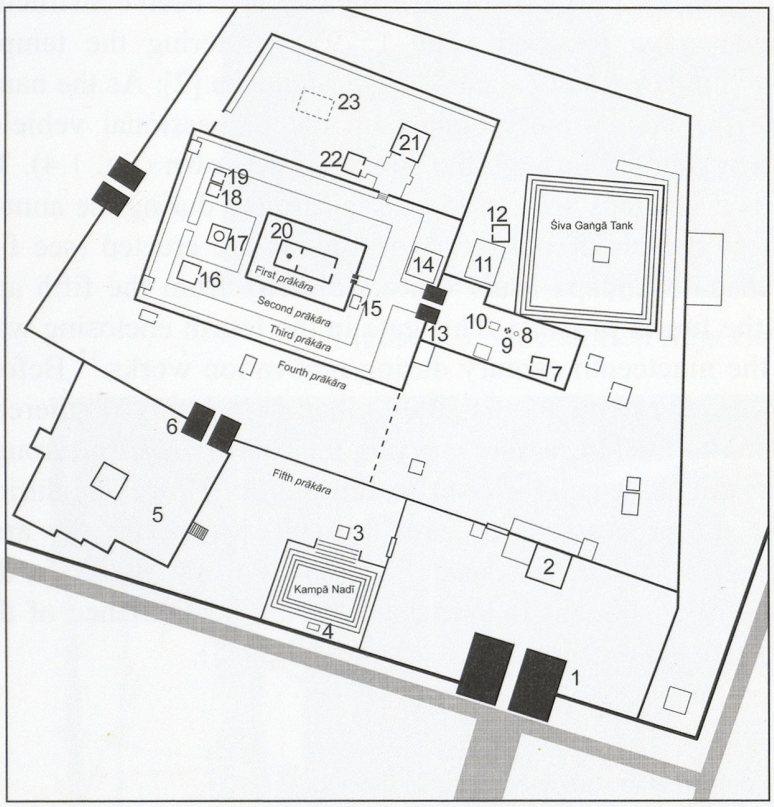
4 Besides these, smaller temples and shrines of Hindu gods and folk deities, monastic institutions like the Śaṅkara Maṭha, a *dargah*, and few mosques and churches shape the religious landscape of the town.

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

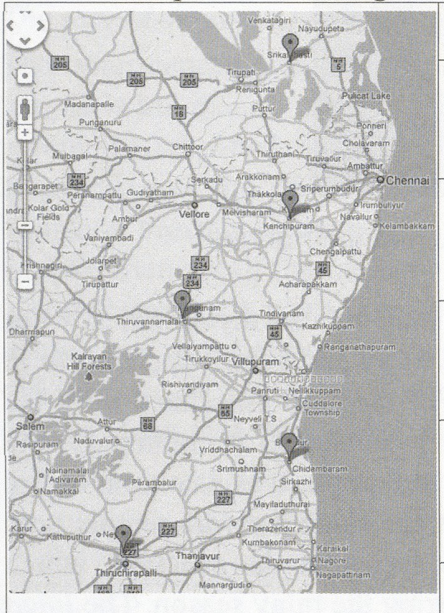
According to myth, the goddess created the *liṅga* under the mango tree from the sand of the banks of the Kampā River. This *liṅga* is now thought to be worshipped in the *mūlasthāna*

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.

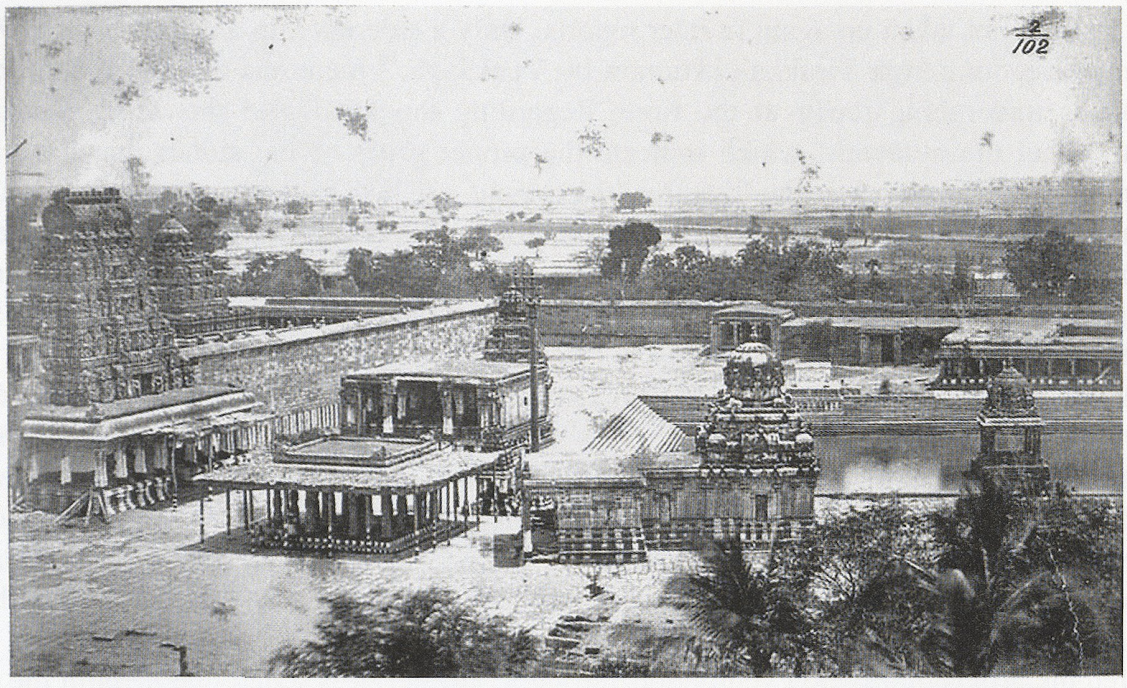

Figure 1.14 View from the Rāja Gopura on the fourth *prākāra,* 1862–76
Source: Madras College of Arts and Crafts, *General view from the top of the Temple, Big Conjeeveram, 1862-76,* accessible through the Digital South Asia Library (http://dsal.uchicago.edu/images/madrascollege)

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.

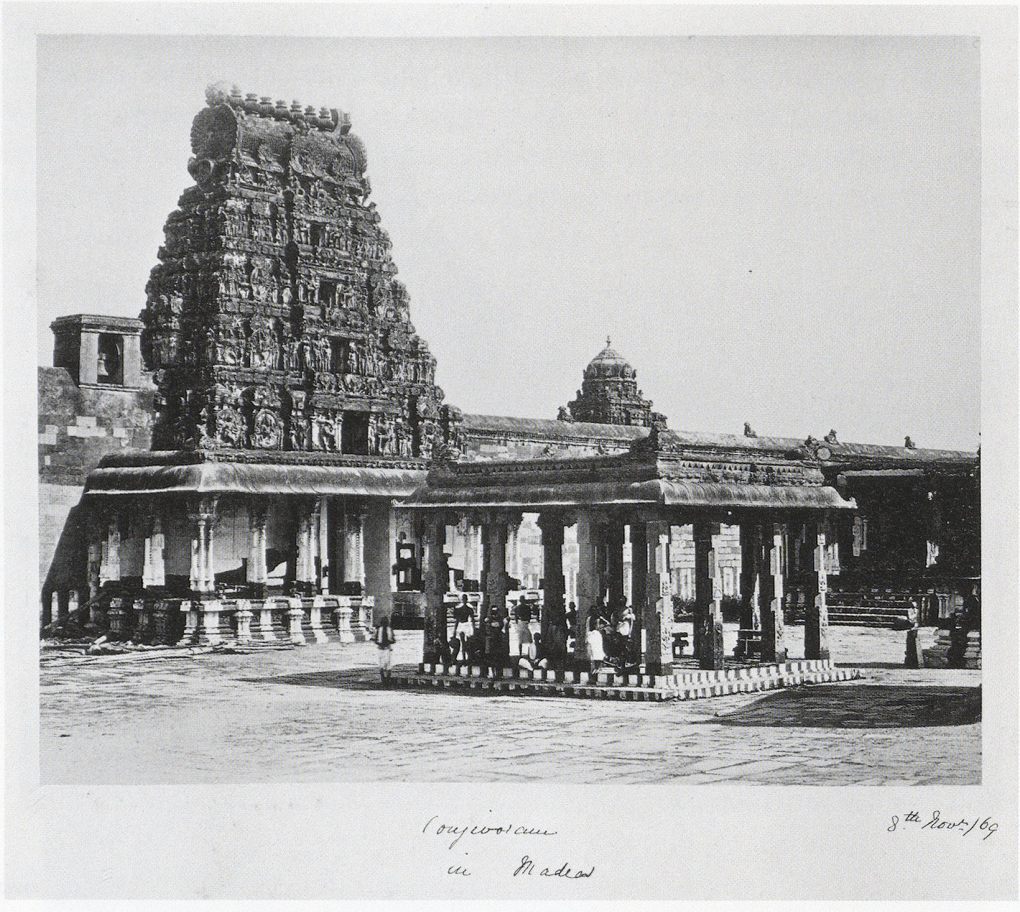

Figure 1.15 Ṛṣi Gopura [13], 1869
Source: Nicholas & Co. (British, active Madas, India 1860s - 1920s), Photo 21823701, *Conjivoram in Madras, November 8, 1869,* The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

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

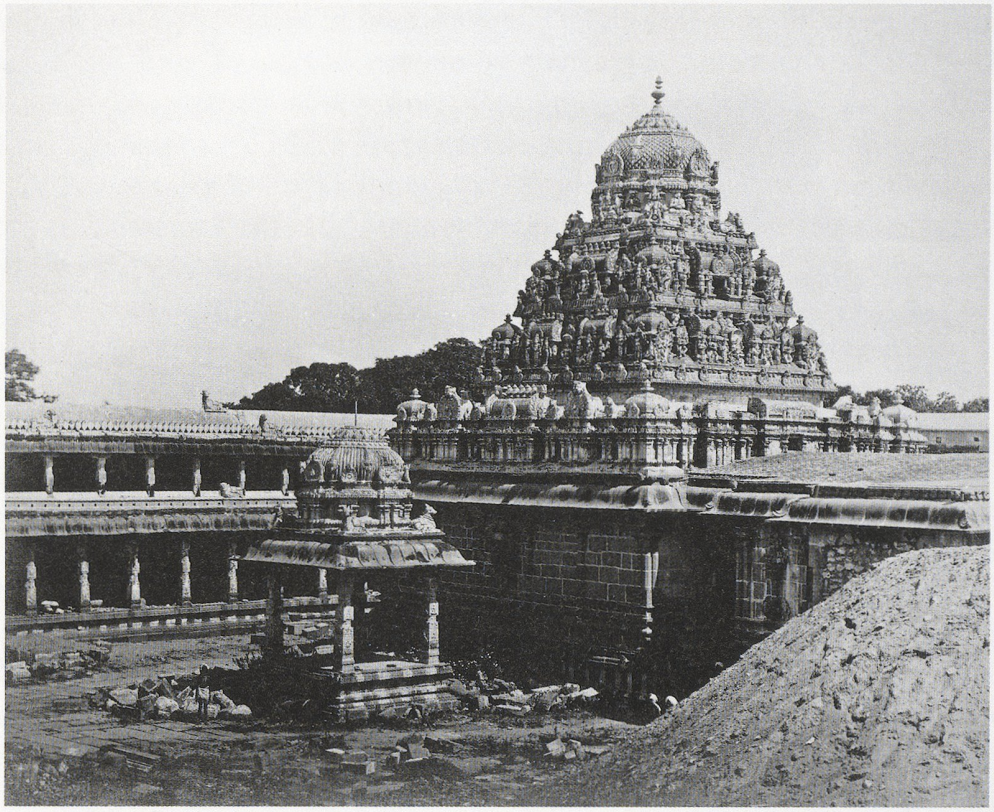

Figure 1.17 Naṭarāja shrine [21], 1897/98
Source: © British Library Board. Photo 1008/3(322). Archaeological Survey of India, *Subrahmanyaswami shrine, Ekambreswaraswami Temple, Conjeevaram, 1897-98*

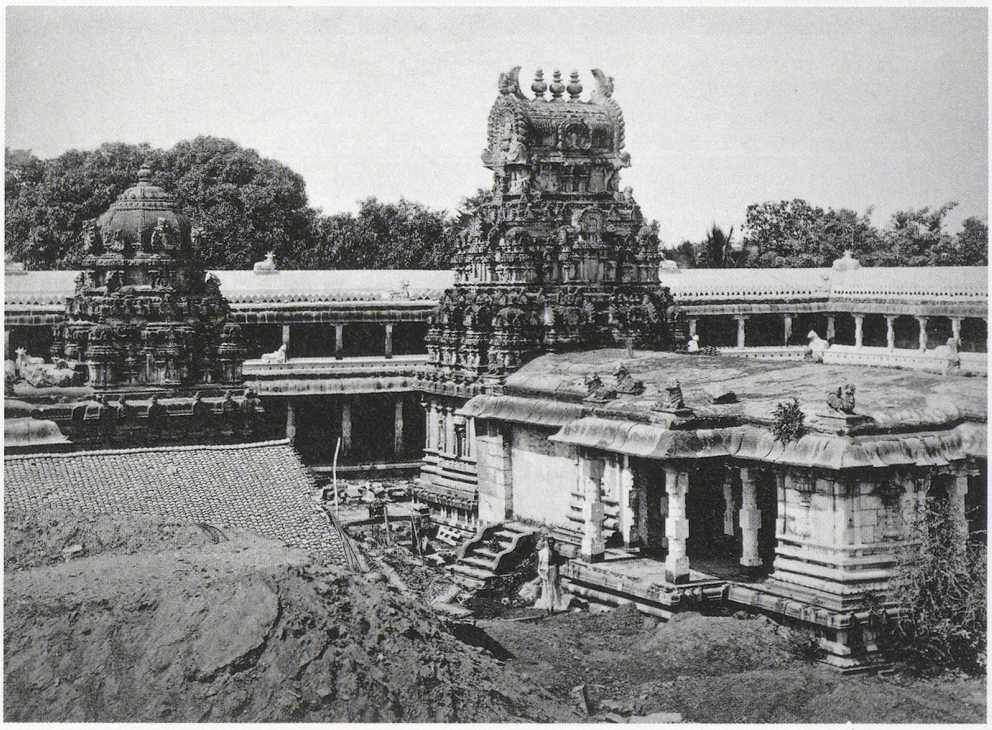

Figure 1.18 Former shrine of Pralayakālī [22], 1897/98
Source: © British Library Board. Photo 1008/3(323). Archaeological Survey of India, *The Amman shrine, Ekambreswaraswami Temple, Conjeevaram, 1897-98*

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).

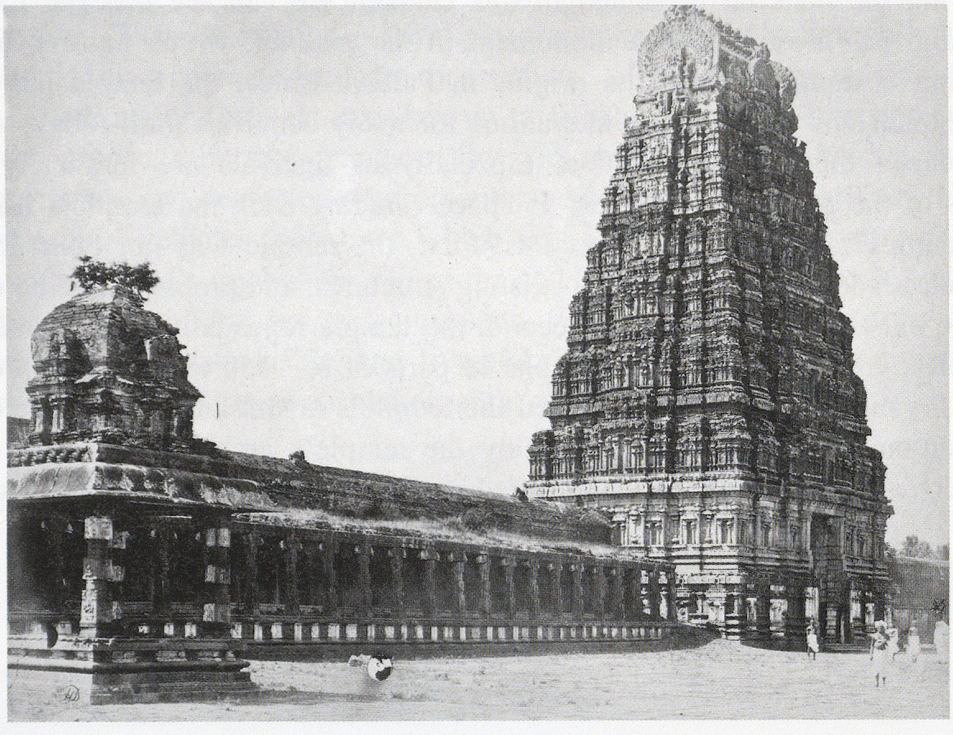

Figure 1.19 Gallery and Palli Gopura [16], 1868
Source: © The British Library Board. Photo 1000/26(2562). Archaeological Survey of India, Henry Dixon, *Gopura between the first and second courts of the Ekambareshvara Temple, Kanchipuram, 1868*

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).