

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 Ēlavārkuḷali 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-viḷā*, '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 Ēlavārkuḷali on a day called Paṅkuṇi Uttiram. Paṅkuṇi 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 *paṅkuṇi-uttirat-tirukkalyāṇap-peruvilā*, the 'great festival of the auspicious marriage on *paṅkuṇi uttiram*.' Usually, people refer to the festival as Paṅkuṇi 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 *paṅkuṇi uttiram*. If the Paṅkuṇi 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 Mallinātaṅ Irājanārāyaṇa Śambuvarāyaṇ, of the Sambuvarayar dynasty. It is written in Tamil and records the conferment of the right of chief-priesthood (*sthānācārya*) on Bhūmikumaraṅ 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 Arai ('mirror room').

Paśuvatiśuvar. 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 Śrīraṅgayadēva-Mahārāja (Śrīraṅga I), dated Śaka 1496, which corresponds to 1574 CE. The inscription records the gift of the village Kaḍambūr-Uṟattūr 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* day⁸ 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 Varadarāja 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-Mahārāja, and is dated Śaka 1439, corresponding to 1517 CE. This inscription states that while Kṛṣṇadēva-Mahārāja 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 Perumā

8 This is an important Śaiva festival celebrated on the *tiruvātirai* (Skt. *ārdrā*) *nakṣatra* in the month of Mārkaḷi (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 R̥ṣi 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 Paṅkuṇi Uttiram festival. It records the gift of two villages, Kūttānpākkam and Mādēvimaṅgalam, as *sarvamānya*¹¹ for *ābhyantarapūjā* on the occasion of the Paṅkuṇi Uttiram festival and Rājagaṇḍagōpāla-Sandhi.¹² Interestingly, the inscription is found at the Kāmākṣī temple, although Paṅkuṇi 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), *maṅantai* (age 14–19 years), *arivai* (age 20–25 years), *terivai* (26–31 years) and *pēriḷampeṅ* (32–40 years).¹⁵

Irattaiyar (the ‘twins’), or Irattaiyappulavar (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, Veṅṟumaṅkoṇḍān (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 Maṅḍapa, 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 Paṅkuṇi festival, the donation of a chariot and the processional route:

(1) Verse 49 describes that ‘the gods came for the *tirup-paṅkuṇit-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 Paṅkuṇi (Uttiram) or simply in the month of Paṅkuṇi.¹⁹ However, it is not clear whether *tirunāḷ* denotes a one-day celebration of Paṅkuṇi (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 Mallinātaṅ gave a beautiful *tēr* (chariot) to the Lord.’²⁰ This is a reference to Mallinātaṅ Irājanārāyaṇa Śambuvarāyaṇ (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 Maṅḍapa (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 Mallinātaṅ, in order to process through the streets on the occasion of Paṅkuṇi Tirunāḷ. It remains unclear whether Paṅkuṇi 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 Paṅkuṇi 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 Paṅkuṇi (held in the month of Paṅkuṇi or on the *nakṣatra* Paṅkuṇi Uttiram), during which Ekāmranātha processed on a chariot through the streets of Kanchipuram.

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 tiruppaṅkuṇittirunāḷ mēviy vēta viḷavoliyil* (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 vaṭṭitacūtar vērcampaṅ vāḷmallinātaṅ koṭuttatiruttērmēr koṇṭu* (102). Mallinātaṅ 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 Ekāmrānātha 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 from the east part of the *dhvajastambha*, but the practice at the Ekāmrānātha temple is to start from the south part. One priest put a case in the court that it should be done according to 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 Aghoraśivācārya'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 *Mahotsavidhi* 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 *Mahotsavidhi* 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 *Mahotsavidhi*, 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.

28 However, Dominic Goodall is of the opinion, that Aghoraśivācārya 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 *Mahotsavidhi*, published by the South Indian Archakar Association with additional comments and explanations in Tamil.

30 *Anantaram daśame saptame pañcame vāhni vivāham vidhivat aupacārikeṇa kalyānavratotsavam 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 observation³³ 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 Vītis (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*).

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: *aṅkurārpana*

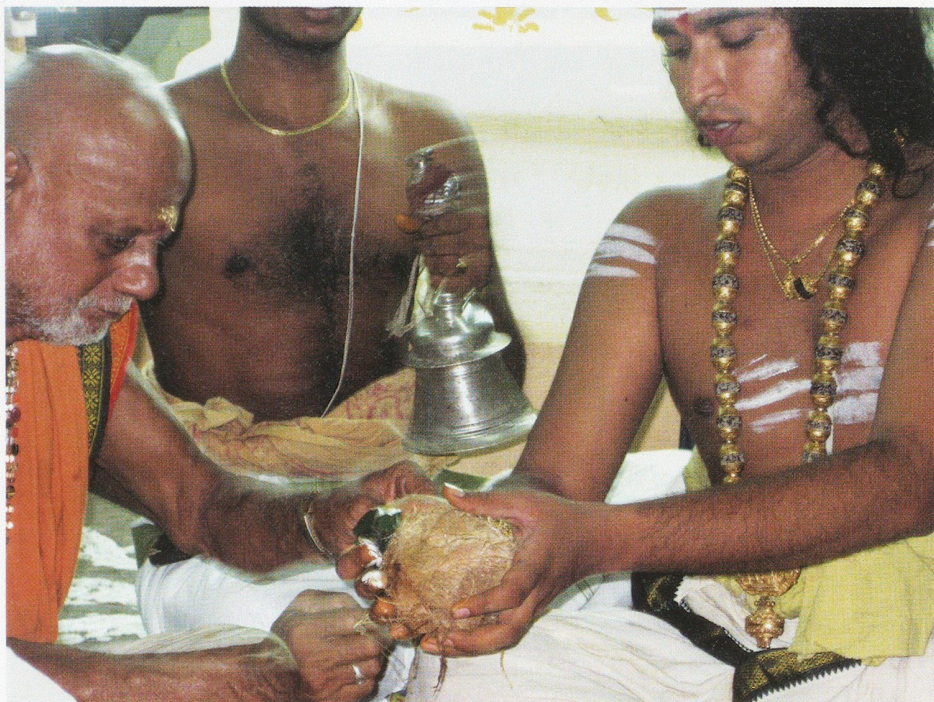


Figure 2.6 Preparatory rite: *rakṣābandhana*



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 *bherītādāna* ('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 Ēlavārkuḷali. 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 (Ēlavārkuḷali), 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 (*yāgaśālā*). 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 Ekāmrānātha 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 *velli māvaṭi vāhana* ('silver mango tree') on the evening of the ninth day can be integrated in the festival. A senior priest of the Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha 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, Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha 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 Vītis, 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.

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 *nāyaṅmārs*, 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 *nāyaṅmārs* 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 Ēlavārkuḷali 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 Ekāmrānātha (in the form of Somāskanda), Ēlavarkuḷali, 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 Rṣi 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 Ekāmrānātha and goddess Elavārkuḷali are mounted on their respective vehicles (*vāhana*). This process takes some time and requires collaboration between the carriers, handymen, and priests. When Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha and Varadarāja temple cars.

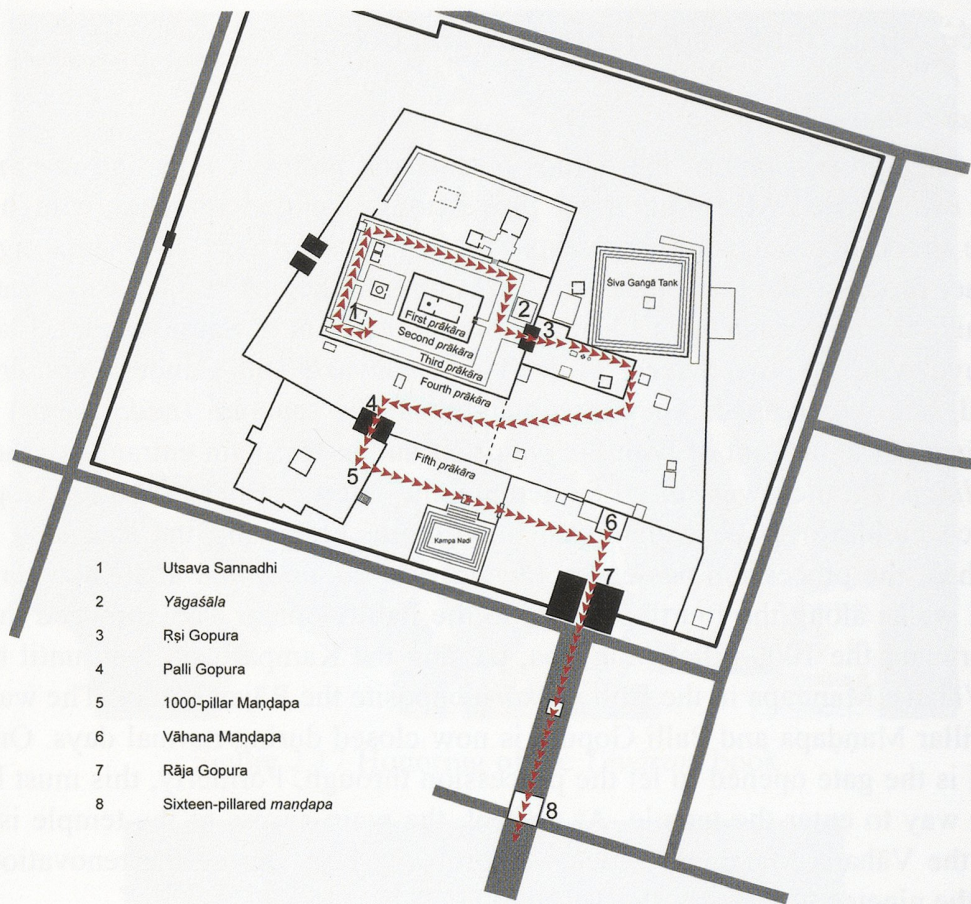


Figure 2.19 Map of the inner processional route

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.

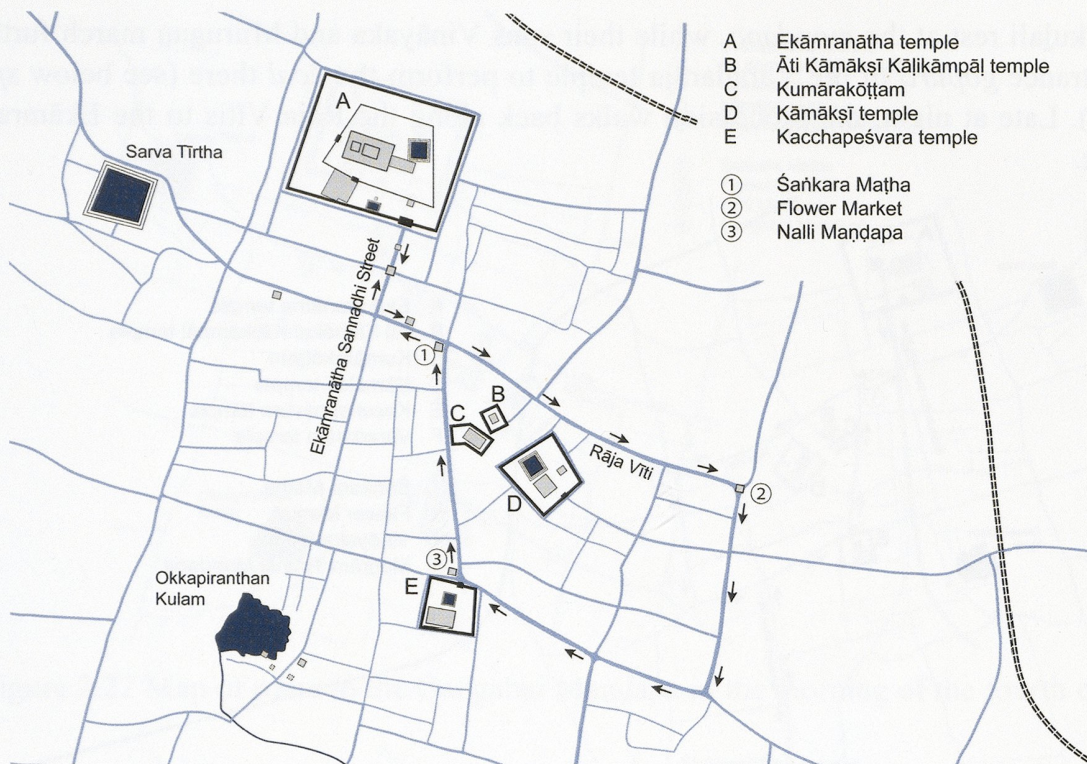


Figure 2.20 Map of the regular route along the Rāja Vītis

On certain festival days, longer excursions to tanks are scheduled, and to *maṇḍapas* owned by the temple or by endowments (Tam. *kaṭṭalai*).⁵⁷ The journeys extend the deity's territory and mark its boundaries. At the Ekāmrānātha 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, Ekāmrānātha 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 Muṅṅām Tirunāl Maṇḍapa⁵⁹ near the Varadarāja temple. The *maṇḍapa* is named after the event: 'maṇḍapa of the auspicious third day'. Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha left the temple with only simple ornaments and the main *alaṃkāra* was done at this place. Now, the *alaṃkāra* is done at the Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha temple's property. They are managed independently by the Muṅṅām Tirunāl Charitable Trust.

Ēlavārkuḷali rest at the *maṇḍapa*, while their sons Vināyaka and Murugaṅ 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.

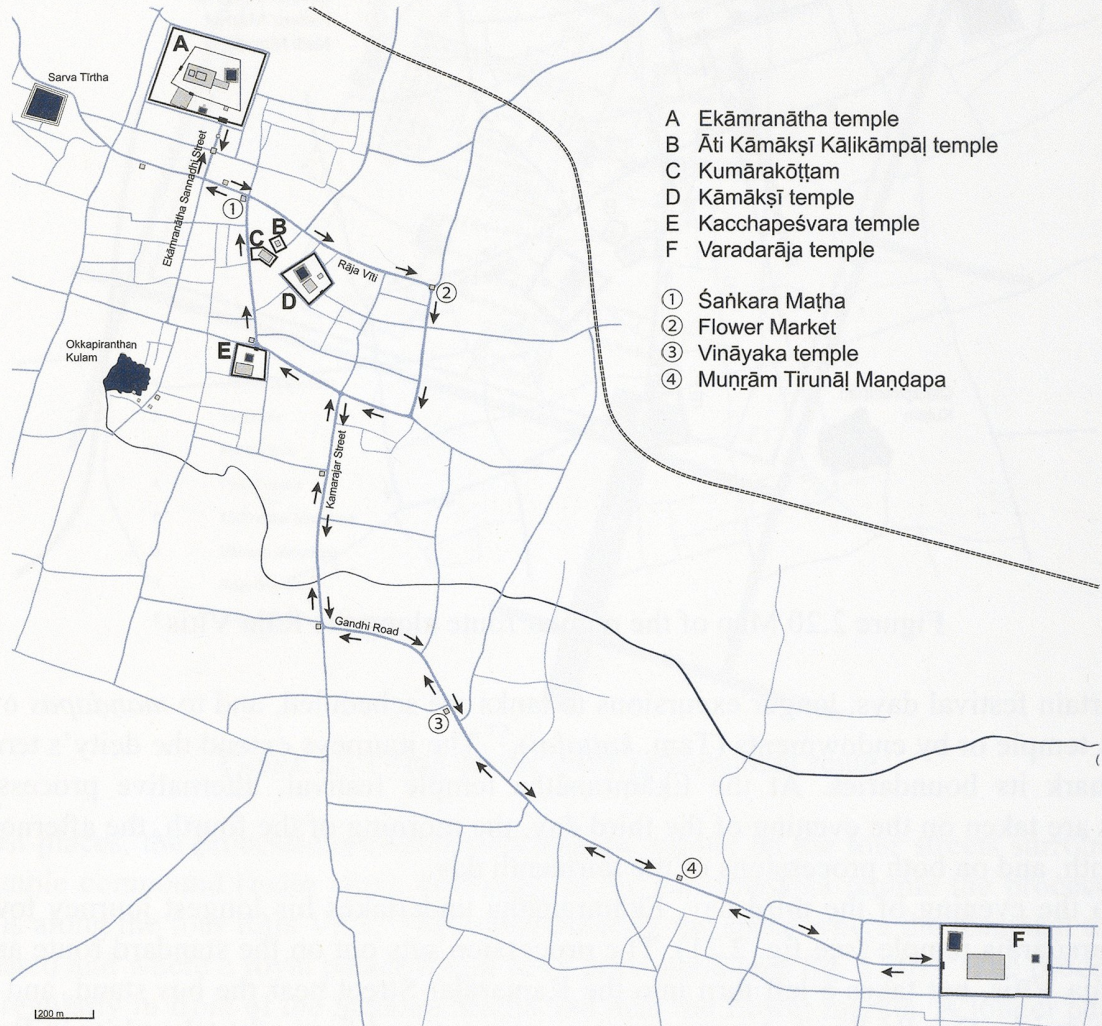


Figure 2.21 Map of the route to Varadarāja temple, on the evening of the third day

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 Ēlavārkuḷali 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 *maṅṭappaṭi* of the goddess is taking place (this event is detailed in Chapter Four).

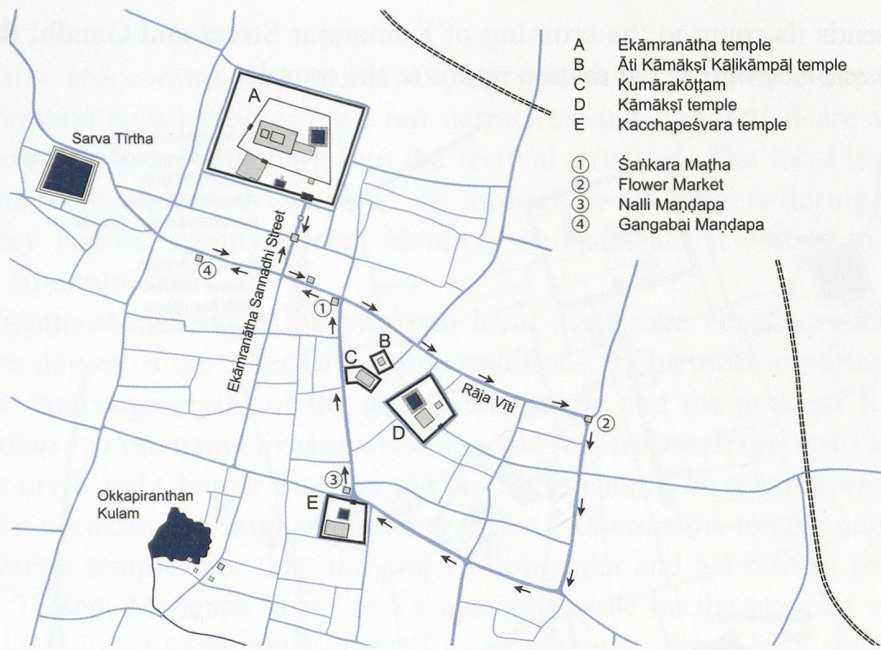


Figure 2.22 Map of route to the Gangabai Maṇḍapa in the morning of the fourth day

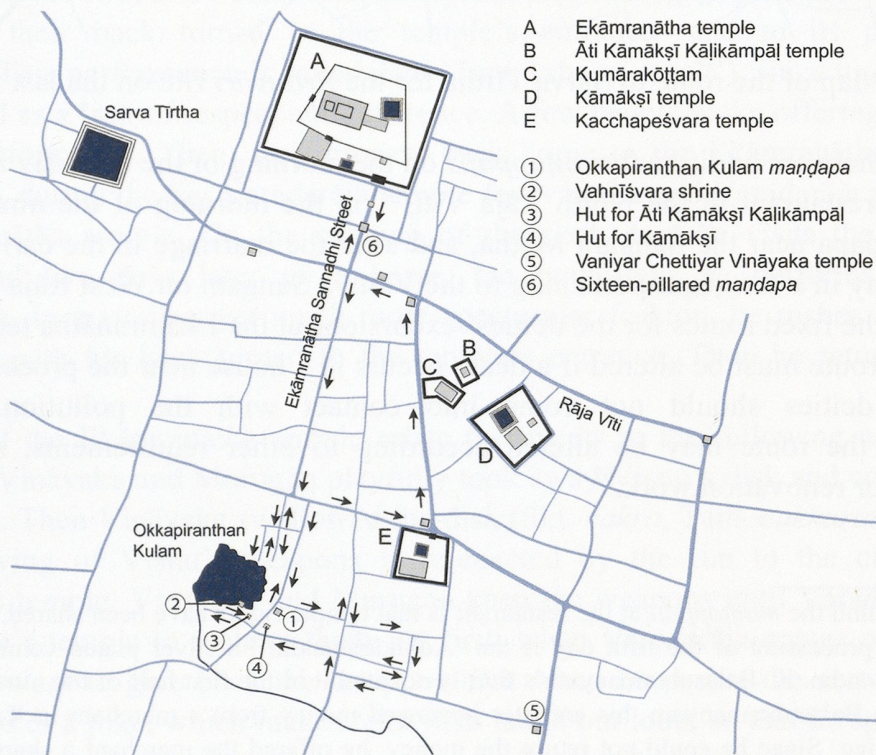


Figure 2.23 Map of the route to the maṇḍapa at Okkapiranthan Kulam, afternoon of the tenth day

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 Ekāmrānātha temple on the way back without entering the Ekāmrānātha 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 *maṅṭappaṭi* takes place before the deities return to the temple.

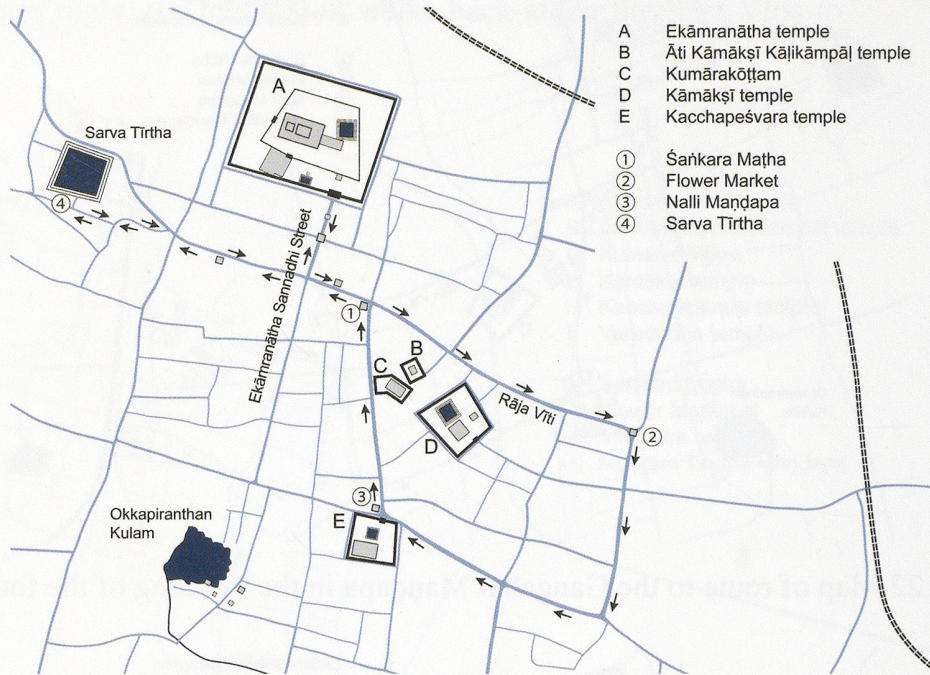


Figure 2.24 Map of the route to Sarva Tīrtha for the *tīrttavāri* rite on the last festival day

Furthermore, there are additional *maṅṭappaṭis* 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 Maṅḍapa near the Śāṅkara Maṭha, and after the marriage in the early morning of the eleventh day in a *maṅḍapa* pertaining to the Vaniya Sangam on West Rājā 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 *maṅṭappaṭi* 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 *maṅṭappaṭi* 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 Rājā 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 Muṇṛām Tirunāl 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 Murugaṅ march further to the entrance *gopura* of the Varadarāja temple. The temple doors are closed and the streets are dark. First Vināyaka, then Murugaṅ, 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 Murugaṅ 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 Murugaṅ 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 and Murugaṅ 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

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 Ekāmrānātha temple festival. The special *vāhana* recalls a local feature and divine symbol of the Ekāmrānātha 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 *velli māvaṭi cēvai* (‘worship of the silver mango tree’) (fig. 2.26). A priest of the Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha 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 *velli māvaṭi vāhana*

come to the Varadarāja temple in order to bring back butter he once borrowed from Varadarāja. Moreover, Varadarāja travels during his festival to the Ekāmrānātha 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 Ekāmrānātha and Ēlavārkuḷali in the *velli māvaṭi vāhana*

When I asked participants which days they consider special for the Ekāmrānātha *mahotsava*, they named unanimously the *velli tēr* ('silver chariot') on the evening of the sixth day, the *velli 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 *nāyaṇmārs* 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 (*alaṅkāra*), 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 Ekāmrānātha temple is the re-enactment and celebration of the divine marriage on Paṅkuṇi Uttiram. The temple's priests and participants, who I spoke with, repeatedly emphasized the importance of Paṅkuṇi 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 Ekāmrānātha 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 Paṅkuṇi 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 Paṅkuṇi Tirunāl 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 Paṅkuṇi (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, Ekāmrānātha 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 Paṅkuṇi 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 Ekāmrānātha temple, is speculative. Thus, it remains unclear if a marriage was celebrated. Generally, Paṅkuṇi 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 Rājādhiraṅga at the Tiruvottiyur temple⁷³ gives no hint at a marriage. Thus, it seems possible that the deities' marriage has not always been associated with Paṅkuṇi 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).