Ewa Dębicka-Borek / Ofer Peres (eds.)

Routes, Patterns, Ideologies

Navigating Sacred Sites in India

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Routes, Patterns, Ideologies

Navigating Sacred Sites in India

edited by
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Cover image: Yifat Peres

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Introduction[1]

Sacred spaces in South Asia present a fascinating paradox: while temples and shrines assert their unique sanctity through distinctive origin myths and localized divine presence, their religious significance is often profoundly shaped by their connections to other sacred sites. Such relationships manifest in various forms—shared mythological narratives, coordinated ritual practices, or interlinked pilgrimage circuits—weaving together sacred geographies that transcend the confines of individual locations. Yet sacrality itself is neither static nor absolute; it is a fluid construct, perpetually negotiated, redefined, and transformed by the interplay of social and political forces, religious innovation, and cultural change. Likewise, the networks that bind sacred sites are not immutable but evolving structures that shift as communities reimagine their religious landscapes and forge new devotional pathways.

This volume sets out to explore the dynamic nature of Hindu sacred geographies in India. It brings together essays that study how sacrality emerges and intensifies through connections between sacred spaces, focusing on the diverse mechanisms, patterns, and strategies by which such connections are forged, maintained, and reimagined across time.

South Asian sacred spaces stand at the center of a fast-growing body of scholarship. While earlier research predominantly focused on individual sacred sites, recent decades have seen the emergence of more nuanced approaches that recognize sacred sites as integral components of complex networks, shaped by multiple forces and agents. Among such works, Diana Eck's influential analysis of India's sacred geography stands out (Eck 1998, 2012). Her "grammar of sanctification" identifies the patterns through which sacredness is inscribed onto space, with particular emphasis on the embedding of mythological narratives in land and

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landscape, the replication of sacred sites, and the creation of meaning through inter-referential relationships among sacred spaces. These concepts serve as key reference points for the studies presented in this volume. Anne Feldhaus's exploration of connected places and regional identity in Maharashtra (Feldhaus 2003) provides another critical framework, particularly her typology of Hindu "temple clusters," which is addressed in several chapters of this volume. Complementing these perspectives is Knut Jacobsen's analysis of pilgrimage networks and "salvific space" (Jacobsen 2013), which highlights the pluralistic configurations of Hindu sacred geographies. Jacobsen shows how multiple sites often share equal sanctity rather than existing in strict hierarchies, fostering both competition between sites and their integration into systematic pilgrimage networks that reflect regional cultural and geographical realities. Localized studies further enrich this discourse, such as Gengnagel's research on Varanasi's religious cartography (Gengnagel 2011) and Lazzaretti's analysis of the city's *jyotirliṅga*s (Lazzaretti 2017), which illustrates the "spatial transposition" of pan-Indian deities into localized networks. Regarding the textual dimension of sacred geography, Michaels's seminal framework for studying individual pilgrimage sites (Michaels 1990) underscores the importance of combining critical analysis of *māhātmya* texts with the examination of their associated performative aspects. Recent contributions by Ambach, Buchholtz, and Hüsken (2022) further emphasize the centrality of *māhātmya* literature in shaping the imagination and ritualization of sacred geographies, offering fresh insights into how these texts inform the conception and enactment of spatial sacrality.

Building on these foundational insights—particularly the shared understanding of sacred geography in Hindu traditions as multifaceted, decentralized, and context-dependent—this volume adopts a distinctive approach by placing the connections between sacred sites at the heart of its inquiry. Rather than treating these links as secondary features of sacred places, we propose that the connections themselves—their formation, maintenance, and transformation—are central to understanding both individual sites and the broader sacred landscapes they constitute. By employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates textual analysis, visual studies, ethnographic observations of contemporary practices, and attention to historical and socio-political processes, the volume significantly advances the concepts of inter-referentiality and interconnectedness among sacred sites.

The contributions assembled in the present volume explore a diverse array of linking mechanisms: from sacred itineraries documented in *sthalapurāṇa*s and the exchange of sacred substances across distant locations, to processional routes, temple clustering, and connections forged through modern media and social movements. The detailed case studies, spanning a variety of regions and historical periods, illustrate how these varied forms of connection not only bind

sacred sites together but actively shape their religious significance and social meaning. Collectively, they demonstrate that the links between sacred sites are not merely by-products of sacred geography but are fundamental to how sanctity is perceived, created, maintained, and transformed across time and space.

Among the recurring themes in this volume are the formation and dynamics of temple clusters. As Feldhaus has shown, sacred Hindu sites are often grouped in sets or networks, related to each other through shared rituals, mythology, or, sometimes, simply a number (Feldhaus 2003). Sacred sites are often replicated, commonly in northern and southern 'incarnations' (e.g., Kashi, Uttarkashi, Tenkasi), and deities can be transposed from their 'original' abodes to other sites and form a set in a shared space, whether localized (as, for example, in the case of Varanasi's *jyotirliṅga*s, see Lazzaretti 2017) or spread over a vast territory (e.g., the *cār dhām* temples, Eck 1998: 180–82). Eck suggests that the duplication of sites and deities highlights the importance of the original site/deity and functions as a method of sanctifying the landscape, knitting together the sacred geography of India (Eck 1998). Jacobsen explains the arrangement of sacred sites in discrete groups as theological constructions for decentralizing Hindu pilgrimage centers, and as a tool for integrating larger areas into the Brahmanical fold by forming pilgrimage routes (Jacobsen 2013: 142–43). Feldhaus stresses the role of temple sets as a phenomenon that enables devotees to conceptualize and experience sacred geography, connecting local traditions to translocal narratives, and reinforce a sense of regional identity (Feldhaus 2003). Moving beyond the identification and classification of temple clusters offered by earlier scholarship, the studies in this volume examine the mechanisms of cluster formation and transformation. They demonstrate that sacred networks operate through nuanced organizational patterns, beyond simple centralized or decentralized models, and emphasize the temporal and processual nature of cluster formation, showing how these networks emerge and evolve through the interplay of multiple agents, forms of authority, and media. This dynamic understanding challenges static models of temple clusters, showing them to be evolving systems that reflect and respond to broader social and cultural transformations.

The role of religious narratives—written, oral, and visual—in creating and sustaining links between sacred sites emerges as another key theme in this volume. Religious narratives, particularly of the *māhātmya* genre and its derivatives, are known to have been charting sacred landscapes, functioning as 'mapping machines' (Tally 2014: 3); the association of sites with mythological narratives is a standard element in Eck's "grammar of sanctification." The studies presented in this volume reveal here, too, a more complex dynamic at work. They identify an ongoing cycle of influence, where narratives shape the understanding and experience of sacred spaces, while changes in physical landscapes, ritual practices, and historical events are simultaneously woven back into these narrative traditions,

generating new meanings and connections. This continuous interplay between text and terrain, between story and space, creates an ever-evolving sacred geography that reflects both the mythological imagination and the historical reality.

This volume includes a rich collection of visual material, reflecting our conviction that images are essential for comprehending the relationship between mythological texts and sacred sites. Maps are a significant form of visual material in this context, as they have the power to reflect connections in the physical space that shape sacred hierarchies. Visual documentation of temple reliefs, wall paintings, or architectural layouts offers insights into how myths are physically embedded in architecture and landscapes. By presenting such materials, this volume aims to deepen our understanding of how mythological narratives and sacred spaces are mutually constitutive, both in their symbolic meanings and in their tangible, physical forms.

The contributions and the structure of the volume

In structuring this volume, we have opted for a thematic approach (rather than adhering to a geographical or chronological organization), which best showcases the underlying relationships and dynamics that the contributors' essays highlight, allowing for a more fluid exploration of diverse 'linking mechanisms' across different regions, traditions, and periods. The arrangement of the chapters follows three conceptual categories behind the grouping and networking of sites: routes and movement, patterns and clusters, and relationships between temples shaped by religious or social ideologies.

The first three chapters focus on the category of movement and its role in linking sacred sites. The opening essay by **Sravani Kanamarlapudi**, "Sacred Itineraries and 'Intersacrality' in Premodern *Sthalapurāṇa*s," addresses the theme of pilgrimage from a literary perspective. Kanamarlapudi explores how sacred geographies are constructed in premodern South Indian literature, specifically focusing on two vernacular *sthalapurāṇa*s from the Srikalahasti corpus. By introducing the concept of "intersacrality," Kanamarlapudi demonstrates that the sacrality of a site is not merely inherent but also relational—measured against other sacred locations included in literary pilgrimage itineraries. Her analysis of the Telugu *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* and the Tamil *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam* reveals that these sites gain value and sanctity through their connections with each other. The chapter examines how the deliberate inclusion of certain locations in these itineraries reflects both the theological and regional significance, thus enriching our understanding of how sacred networks were established in premodern South India.

R. Sathyanarayanan, in his chapter "Rāmeśvaram Sacred Sand and Gaṅgā Holy Water: The Pilgrimage to Prayāga Starts from Rāmeśvaram," provides a fundamental analysis of the practice of *tīrtha-yātrā* (a Hindu pilgrimage). Using the Rāmeśvaram-Gaṅgā pilgrimage as his main example, Sathyanarayanan shows how the exchange of sacred elements—sand from Rāmeśvaram and water from the Gaṅgā—creates profound conceptual links between distant sacred sites. His study extends beyond the physical journey to explore the spiritual, cultural, and symbolic forces that underpin pilgrimage practices in South Asia. Through a meticulous analysis of a multitude of Sanskrit texts concerning this *yātrā*, Sathyanarayanan delves into the motivations, benefits, and challenges of this pilgrimage, offering new insights into the concept of *tīrtha-yātrā* and its lasting significance.

Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz's chapter, "Tracing Raṅganātha's Journey," offers yet another perspective on the relationship between movement and sacred geography. This essay explores historical and devotional narratives surrounding the relocation of the Raṅganātha processional image from the Srirangam temple to Tirupati/Tirumala during the fourteenth century, at a time when the image was hidden away to avoid desecration by the invading forces of the Delhi Sultanate. Czerniak-Drożdżowicz shows how this event, a practical response to exigent historical circumstances, had also been a powerful means of linking sacred sites through literature and ritual. Focusing on two primary texts—the *Kōyil Oḻuku* and the *Prapannāmṛta*—the chapter looks into the ways in which these narratives recontextualize historical events for theological and communal purposes. By illuminating the political and religious stakes involved in the image's journey, the essay opens a broader dialogue on the construction and preservation of sacred geographies in South Indian Vaiṣṇavism.

The three subsequent chapters center on patterns and clusters, exploring the phenomena of temple clustering and inter-temple relationships, and their expression and development in textual traditions and ritual practice. **Jonas Buchholz**'s chapter, "The City of Many Temples: Textual Representations of Kanchipuram's Śaiva Temple Network," examines how the Sanskrit and Tamil *sthalapurāṇa*s of Kanchipuram weave the city's Śaiva temples into an interconnected sacred landscape. Through his analysis, Buchholz shows how the texts he engages with emphasize both the equal status of many temples and the prominence of the Ekāmranātha temple as their central axis, suggesting a model of sacred geography that is beyond the binary division of centralized/decentralized. His study demonstrates how the literary strategies employed in these texts have shaped perceptions of Kanchipuram's sacred geography and continue to influence both the veneration and preservation of certain sites, while allowing others to recede into obscurity.

The following chapter, "Murukaṉ's 'Six Battle-Camps': The Origin and Development of the *Āṟupaṭaivīṭu* Concept," by **Ofer Peres**, offers a critical re-examination

of the evolution of one of Tamil Nadu's most iconic temple configurations—Murukaṉ's six sacred abodes. Peres traces the formation and development of the "six battle-camps" concept, unravelling the layers of textual, devotional, and cultural history that have shaped its modern significance. Challenging the traditional view that the said concept emerged from the sixth-century Tamil text, *The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ* (*Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*), he argues that the current notion of Murukaṉ's six sacred abodes fully crystallized only in the mid-twentieth century. Through a detailed exploration of literary, theological, and devotional sources, he traces the processes by which the "six battle-camps" were solidified into their modern form. Peres demonstrates how devotional imagination and human agency shaped the enshrinement of these six sites into a canonical pilgrimage circuit, emphasizing the decisive role of practices of textual transmission and commentary, and the influence of print culture in this process.

Ewa Dębicka-Borek's "Nine Narasiṃhas of Ahobilam: On Marking Sacred Territory, God's Manifoldness, and Polyphony of Narratives," examines another temple cluster—the nine shrines dedicated to various aspects of Narasiṃha, the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu, at Ahobilam (Andhra Pradesh). This chapter explores how the concept of a "sacred cluster" emerges from the narrative, ritual, and spatial dimensions of these shrines, reflecting broader patterns in India's sacred geographies. Dębicka-Borek investigates the interplay between textual traditions like the *Ahobilamāhātmya* and local oral narratives, including those of the Chenchus, alongside the visual representations of the "nine Narasiṃhas" found in murals at the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple in Kanchipuram. These diverse sources—textual, oral, and visual—collectively establish the sacred status of the nine sites, despite the differences in their origin and medium. Through this convergence of representations, Dębicka-Borek shows how these shrines form a cohesive sacred cluster, reinforcing their religious significance across different layers of tradition.

The volume then turns to examine how relationships between temples are actively negotiated through competing claims of authority, local practices, and modern media. **Ute Hüsken's** essay, "Four Viṣṇus in Kanchipuram: Cooperation and Competition," explores the intricate dynamics between four Vaiṣṇava temples in Kanchipuram: the temples dedicated to Dīpaprakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja, Yathoktakārī, and Varadarāja Perumāḷ. These temples, linked by myths that present their presiding deities as brothers, are examined through the lens of cooperation and competition influenced by sectarian affiliations, ritual practices, and the agency of local figures such as priests and devotees. Drawing on both her fieldwork and textual sources, Hüsken illustrates how these temples navigate their relationships within Kanchipuram's sacred geography, balancing cooperation with rivalry. Her analysis reveals the dynamic interplay between myth and religious practice, emphasizing the ongoing negotiation of power and status among these

temples, and offering valuable insights into the broader complexities of the local Vaiṣṇava traditions.

In "Temple Arithmetic: Brother Temples of Kerala," **Olga Nowicka** examines a set of temples in Kerala known as *nālampalam*, each of which is dedicated to one of the four brothers known from the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna). This temple set has been replicated in smaller, regional sets within Kerala itself. Nowicka demonstrates how the temples of the main set, spread across central Kerala, have been conceptually 'clustered' through modern narratives inspired by the *māhātmya* literature, and propagated via modern technologies and social media. Her analysis shows how the interconnectedness of these temples was shaped by contemporary narratives and pilgrimage networks, making this chapter a nuanced exploration of how sacred geographies are re-imagined in the modern context.

Concluding this volume, **Jigyasa Meena**'s essay, "Sacred Spaces, Legitimacy, and Connections: Socio-Political Mobilisation in Princely States of Southern Rajputana," expands the discussion to include the intersection of sacred sites and socio-political movements. Through her detailed case studies of Bēṇēśvara Dhāma and Mānagaṛha Dhāma in colonial Rajasthan, Meena examines how sacred spaces were transformed and utilized by reformist movements among tribal communities, particularly the Bhils, during the late colonial period. Meena demonstrates how these sites amplified the voices of marginalized tribal groups, granting legitimacy to their socio-political mobilization, and how the political use of these sites enhanced their own sacred status. Her chapter reveals the reciprocal relationship between political action and sacred geography, as the sacrality of these spaces was reinforced and elevated through their role in tribal resistance and reform.

The studies collected in this volume throw light on how Hindu sacred landscapes are fundamentally shaped by the connections between the sites. These connections—whether manifested through pilgrimage routes, ritual practices, narrative traditions, or modern technologies—emerge as crucial agents of religious and social transformation. In examining how such links are created, maintained, and reimagined across different historical periods and cultural traditions, the volume reveals sacred networks as dynamic systems that both reflect and catalyse broader processes of religious and social transitions, continuously reshaping the meaning and experience of sacred space.

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Sacred Itineraries and 'Intersacrality' in Premodern *Sthalapurāṇas*

A common narrative trope found in many premodern texts belonging to the genre of *sthalapurāṇa* (lit. "ancient myths of a place") or *māhātmya* (since they usually profess the "greatness" of a place)[1] is that of a mythical devotee travelling through multiple sacred sites before reaching the sacred place extolled by the text in question, where the journey often, but not always, ends. For instance, in the early modern vernacular *sthalapurāṇa*s of Srikalahasti,[2] such as the sixteenth-century Telugu *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* by Dhūrjaṭi and the seventeenth-century Tamil *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam* by Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ and his brothers, the Tamil poet Natkīra (Telugu) or Nakkīraṉār (Tamil) travels from Madurai to ultimately reach Srikalahasti where the curse placed on him by the god Śiva is nullified and where he is liberated by Śiva's grace (*Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.178–222; *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*, *nakkīrac-carukkam*, 78–135).[3] Similarly, two *veśya* (courtesan) girls who

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1   While the Sanskrit terms *sthalapurāṇa* and *māhātmya* refer to Sanskrit texts, in this essay they will also point to the corresponding genre in the vernaculars, such as the *sthalapurāṇamu* or *māhātmyamu* in Telugu and *talapurāṇam* or *māṇmiyam* in Tamil. For various scholarly perspectives on the differences in *sthalapurāṇa/māhātmya* texts composed in the Sanskrit and vernacular traditions, see Lanaghan 2006 30 ff. and Buchholz 2022: 26, who note that aesthetics, *rasa* theory, and poetic flourish are typically not emphasized in Sanskrit texts; as well as Ramesh 2020, for more thoroughgoing observations on how Sanskrit and Tamil texts usually engage in prescriptive / didactic and emotional aspects respectively. At the same time, Sanskrit *māhātmya*s across time periods should not be thought of as following some standard template. The above scholars are careful to point out exceptions to the general patterns they highlight, but more importantly, we should also acknowledge striking differences in premodern and contemporary *māhātmya* writing in the Sanskrit sphere itself, as Andrea Pinkney suggests in her study of modern Uttarakhand *māhātmya*s (Pinkney 2013).

2   An important Śaiva temple site in the Telugu–Tamil borderlands of south India, specifically in the modern state of Andhra Pradesh. It is especially important in the Śaiva religious landscape as it hosts the *vāyuliṅga* (*liṅga* of air), one of the *pañcabhūtaliṅga*s (*liṅga*s of the five elements).

3   For an accessible, though abridged, translation of Natkīra's story in the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhāt-myamu*, see Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002, chap. 14.

are ardent devotees of Śiva, specifically of Śrīkāḷahastīśvara (name of the local form of Śiva at Srikalahasti), leave their home in Madurai to reach Srikalahasti where, by Śiva's grace, they attain liberation (*Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 4.56–128; *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*, *kaṉṉiyarc-carukkam*, 83–147). During their peregrinations, these characters pass through various sacred sites where they worship and perform appropriate rituals to the local resident deities.

While these examples refer to different devotees undertaking sacred journeys in the Srikalahasti corpus, the case of the mythical sage Agastya is interesting since we find the grand narrative of his (and his wife Lopāmudrā's) journey from the north to the south of the subcontinent captured and variously narrated in different *sthalapurāṇa*s.[4] This grand narrative is based on one famous story connected with Śiva and Pārvatī's wedding: when all the gods and other celestial beings gather in the Himalayan abode of Śiva and Pārvatī to participate in their wedding festivities, the earth dangerously tilts to the north. Śiva tells Agastya that since only they both are capable of redressing the situation, Agastya should proceed to the south and balance the earth. Agastya, though distraught about missing the divine wedding, obliges, and, accompanied by Lopāmudrā, he proceeds to the south, while also subduing on his way the arrogant Vindhya mountains, which had risen so high into the sky that the movement of the stars became difficult. In some versions of the story, Agastya's journey down south is impelled by Brahmā and other celestial gods, who task the sage with just subduing the Vindhya.

As mentioned, this central narrative appears in different versions across different texts. According to one vernacular Srikalahasti text, Agastya and Lopāmudrā depart Śiva's Himalayan abode and traverse the sacred rivers of Gautami and Krishnaveni, as well as the sacred sites of Srisailam and Siddhavata (both in modern Andhra Pradesh),[5] before reaching (and later departing) Srikalahasti (*Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.108–10).[6] In the vernacular texts associated with other sacred

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4   For some observations about Agastya's "journey narratives" (to use the author's phrase) found specifically in Tamil *talapurāṇam*s, such as the *Tirukkuṟṟālappurāṇam* (eighteenth-century composition on Courtallam by Tirikūṭarācappak Kavirāyar) and the *Tiruṉĕlvelippurāṇam* (nineteenth century, about Tirunelveli, by Nĕllaiyappa Kavirāyar), as well as in the *Kantapurāṇam* (fifteenth century, by Kacciyappa Civācāriyar), see Davis 2000: 109 ff.

5   While Sidddhavata just holds regional (not transregional) importance, it is quite significant in the landscape of Srisailam for being the southern "gateway" of Srisailam. As Prabhavati Reddy points out, "after fulfilling ritual obligations at [Srisailam, pilgrims] would continue the journey to the southern gateway Siddhavaṭa" (Reddy 2014: 67). At this point then, the Srikalahasti texts invoke an established pilgrimage route surrounding Srisailam.

6   Agastya's itinerary varies even within the Srikalahasti corpus. For further details, see Kanamarlapudi forthcoming, chap. 4.

sites, too, we find, for instance, Agastya going from Kashi to Kanchipuram in the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (an eighteenth-century Tamil *talapurāṇam* of Kanchi composed by Civañāṉa Muṉivar); and in the fourteenth-century Telugu *Bhīmakhaṇḍamu* or *Bhīmeśvarapurāṇamu* (a text by Śrīnātha that glorifies Draksharama), we see the sage expressing his nostalgia for Kashi in poignant poetry even while exuberantly praising Draksharama.[7] Within Sanskrit narrative traditions, as well, in the famous medieval *māhātmya* on Kashi, the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa*, Agastya's journey—here deployed as a frame story within which the bulk of the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* text is nestled and through which Kashi is established as center of the cosmic universe[8]—is framed between his (former) residence in Kashi and his final arrival at Srisailam where the god Skanda relates to Agastya the glories of Kashi and thereby assuages the sage's grief at leaving Kashi.[9] A modified version of this story is also narrated in the medieval Sanskrit *Karavīramāhātmya* (a text glorifying Kolhapur and its resident goddess Mahālakṣmī in present-day Maharashtra), where Agastya and Lopāmudrā's journey is again leveraged as a frame story to recount the greatness of Kolhapur and other sacred sites.[10]

All these journey narratives from the Srikalahasti corpus (of various itinerant devotees) and from the different *sthalapurāṇa* traditions (of a single sage's peregrinations) could certainly leave a dizzying effect on the reader. This, however, is not the intended purpose of lining up these examples. Rather, I wish to underscore the ubiquity of the narrative trope that lies at the heart of this essay: namely, devotees in the *sthalapurāṇa*s traversing multiple sacred sites and thereby giving

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As per the *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*, the pious couple travel via places including Kedarnath and Kashi in the north, and Draksharama in the Telugu south before arriving at Srikalahasti (*Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*, *pŏṉmukaric-carukkam*, 7–10).

7   In this Telugu text, Agastya expresses his nostalgia for Kashi and praise for Draksharama to the great sage Vyāsa, who is himself banished from Kashi by Śiva and is therefore travelling—while stopping at various sacred spots on the way (Kuntimadhava, Puri, Srikurmam, and Simhachalam, etc.)—to Draksharama, which, the text claims, is "southern Kashi." For an insightful discussion of this story and the source text, see Shulman 1998.

8   For a discussion of this frame story and for the dating of this voluminous *māhātmya* to the late eleventh century, see Smith 2007.

9   For an extension of this story, see the sixteenth-century Telugu *Pāṇḍuraṅgamāhātmyamu* by Tĕnāli Rāmakr̥ṣṇa. Here, after their conversation about the greatness of Kashi, Agastya and Skanda go from Srisailam to the Mount Kailash, where they, along with Pārvatī and other sages, hear from Śiva the greatness of the Vaiṣṇava site Pandharpur (in modern Maharashtra). Agastya and Skanda's journey to Śiva's abode is instigated by the sage's curiosity to know if there was any place that hosted the best of gods, the best of sacred lands, and the best of rivers (*velupu*, *kṣetramu*, and *tīrthamu*) all at the same spot (1.152).

10   For a detailed discussion of this frame story, see Lanaghan 2006, chap. 3.

the texts an opportunity to discuss the (relative) greatness—or specifically the sacrality—of the different sites that are included in the devotee's journey.

The pervasiveness of this sthalapurāṇic narrative trope, then, serves as a reason enough to elicit scholarly gaze; and to this end, my essay attempts to analyze the logics of this trope. More specifically, the main thrust of this essay is to understand what precisely the sthalapurāṇic journeys accomplish for the *sthala*s that are the subject of *sthalapurāṇa*s, for their mythical travelers, for their source texts, for their composers, and/or for their audience. After some important theoretical reflections on interpreting these journeys as 'sacred itineraries' and contrasting them with the analytical category of 'pilgrimage,' this chapter will consider the following questions: Why the fascination with the trope of sacred itineraries? What is achieved in variously inflecting this trope across different *sthalapurāṇa* texts? What sites are included in and excluded from the sacred itinerary, and why? And most importantly, how does this trope serve (or reveal) the intended ideological agenda of the *sthalapurāṇa* compositions—that is, how does it aid in glorifying the *sthala* connected with the *sthalapurāṇa* in question?

In attempting to answer these queries, much of my data will come from two early modern vernacular *sthalapurāṇa*s of Srikalahasti that I have already alluded to:[11] the Telugu *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* by Dhūrjaṭi, and the Tamil *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam* by the three brothers Civappirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, Karuṇaippirakāca Cuvāmikaḷ, and Velaiya Cuvāmikaḷ.[12] By analyzing the journey narratives primarily drawn from these texts, this essay will suggest that the trope of sacred itineraries throws important light on the theology of place embedded in *sthalapurāṇa* narratives. More specifically, I argue that the *sthalapurāṇa* materials envision and articulate the sacrality of the *sthala* in question predominantly in relation to the sacrality of other sacred sites—that is, in relational terms rather than in absolute, non-referential terms. As we will see, while *sthalapurāṇa*s do claim, without reference to other sacred sites, that the particular *sthala* grants liberation, they express the sacredness of the site more forcefully in relative terms—thereby elevating the sacredness of the concerned site over that of the others. The *sthala*, then, is rendered and claimed as not simply *a* means of liberation but *the most* expedient means of liberation. The *sthalapurāṇa*s, in other words, understand

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11 The Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa*s are the focus of my currently ongoing dissertation project on the Srikalahasti temple site and its narrative traditions—hence the priority for the Srikalahasti materials in this essay. It is the many itinerant characters in the Srikalahasti narratives that first sparked my curiosity about sacred itineraries in the larger genre of the *sthalapurāṇa*s. However, I also invoke the journey narratives from other, non-Srikalahasti texts.

12 The composition of this Tamil *sthalapurāṇa* was based on the Telugu text, yet there are noteworthy variations in both these narrative works. For further details, see Kanamarlapudi forthcoming, chap. 1.

the sacrality of a *sthala* in relation to other sites, revealing what I refer to as the sthalapurāṇic conception of "intersacrality." Defining intersacrality as the conceptualization of the sacrality of one site in relation to that of other sites, I posit that the trope of sacred itineraries is an important narrative strategy that exemplifies the sthalapurāṇic phenomenon of intersacrality.

Sacred itinerary vis-à-vis pilgrimage

Considering the nature of the journeys in the *sthalapurāṇa*s would be a fitting starting point in our analysis since this enterprise would allow us to conceptualize these journeys in relation to already familiar analytical categories of human mobility. Indeed, the most relevant form of mobility that comes to mind in the context of the sthalapurāṇic journeys, given their focus on visiting sacred places, is the category of pilgrimage. Derived from the Latin word *peregrinus*, which semantically ranges from a foreigner to someone on a journey, pilgrimage usually connotes religious journey or the journey of a pilgrim, especially to a place considered sacred. As the medieval historian Richard Barber defines it, pilgrimage is "a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding" (Barber 1993: 1).

But pilgrimage need not, of course, entail or restrict itself to just one sacred spot and/or a solo traveler. As Indira Peterson points out, pilgrimage can instead be understood as the "journey undertaken by a devotee or group of devotees to one or more shrines/sacred places which they have a desire or obligation to visit" (Peterson 1982: 71). In her study of the *Tevāram* corpus[13] of the three principal Tamil Śaiva saint-poets (Campantar, Appar, and Cuntarar; sixth to eighth century C.E.), Peterson accordingly understands the journeys of the three saints recorded in the *Tevāram* songs as pilgrimages, for these songs were composed/sung by the saints as they journeyed through various Śaiva sacred sites in the Tamil country.[14] The *Tevāram* songs therefore are, in Peterson's reading, "literature of pilgrimage par excellence" (p. 69).

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13 The *Tevāram* compendium of about eight hundred songs comprises the first seven volumes of the twelve-volume Tamil Śaiva canon called *Tirumuṟai*.

14 According to Peterson, "there is no reason to doubt that the songs record actual pilgrimages made by Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar; the topographical accuracy of description in the Tevāram is, in itself, enough to convince us of the concrete reality of the places described" (Peterson 1982: 71). On the other hand, in her study of the medieval Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava Āḻvār and their *bhakti* poems, Katherine Young suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. Observing that the Āḻvār "refer to movement only in very general or mental terms" and that the "descriptions of the sacred places

With *sthalapurāṇa* texts narrating the sacred journeys of numerous reverent devotees, it is tempting to also interpret the sthalapurāṇic journeys as pilgrimages and the *sthalapurāṇa*s as containers of (mythical) pilgrimage narratives. There are, however, often important differences in the journeys of the Tamil saints versus that of the sthalapurāṇic devotees—such as desire or intentionality on the part of the traveler to undertake the journey and the traveler's conviction about the destination's uniqueness or sacrality. In the case of the *Tevāram*, Peterson comments on the motivation behind the saints' journeys as follows: "Love of Śiva was the sole criterion for pilgrimage. The motivation of the saint's journeys is best described as their intense desire to experience Śiva in all his variety, inasmuch as he manifests it in specific places and forms" (Peterson 1982: 73). As can be inferred from their emotionally charged songs, then, the Tamil Śaiva saints were not only very deeply invested in their pilgrimage but were also convinced about the sacrality of the approximately 260 places they sang about.[15] More generally, pilgrimage studies scholars have often underscored, among others, these "essential elements of pilgrimage": (1) "The experience of pilgrimage is seen in advance as capable of creating an enduring memory one returns to in later life"—an aspect that engenders the desire for a pilgrimage—and (2) "Celebrating a physical location as a site of symbolic or real access to powers beyond the human realm"—an aspect that emphasizes the significance of the destination (Greenia 2018: 10).

In light of such conceptualization of the category of pilgrimage, it is interesting to consider the sthalapurāṇic journeys. Some of the sthalapurāṇic travelers do set out on their journey fervently, a motivation born of their intense desire to visit a certain holy place. The journey from Madurai to Srikalahasti by the two *veśya* girls I alluded to in the introduction, for instance, was instigated by the girls' intense love for the Śrīkāḷahastīśvara form of Śiva. Yet, such a motivation is more often *not* the norm. To illustrate, consider the following (abridged) story of the poet Natkīra.[16] When the Tamil poet arrogantly faults Śiva's poem, the god curses him with leprosy. Natkīra immediately repents for his sin to Śiva and the latter, pacified, suggests Natkīra that the curse will be lifted when he sees Mount Kailash.

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themselves are very formulaic," she remarks that the journeys in the Āḻvār poetry could be partly true (in case of the local temples) and partly imagined (in case of temples in northern India); see Young 2014: 345 ff.

15 Indeed, the fact that these places elicited the saints' poetical outpourings is already indicative of the perceived sacrality of the sites. Significantly, the songs, in turn, consolidate the sites' holiness: as Peterson observes (1982: 71), "the visit of the saint has a positive and lasting effect on the *talam* (the pilgrimage site), for after such a visit it is known as a "*pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*," "a sacred spot sung (by the nāyaṉmār [i.e., the Tamil Śaiva saints])" and is specially loved by Tamil Śaivites."

16 For a more detailed version of the story, see Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002, chap. 14.

Natkīra at once sets out north from Madurai, visiting holy sites and rivers along the way, including Tiruvanaikaval, the Kaveri, Tiruvannamalai, Kanchipuram, Nellore, Simhachalam, Srikurmam, Puri, Gaya, and Kashi (*Śrīkāḷahastimāhāt-myamu* 3.180–92). When proceeding further north while already increasingly suffering from leprosy, the poet is caught by a demon, and he thereby prays to the god Subrahmaṇya (Śiva's son) for rescue. Subrahmaṇya manifests himself and rescues the poet, and when the latter informs the god of the purpose of his journey, the god suggests that the poet can simply be cured at Southern Kailash (i.e., Srikalahasti, as the Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa*s like to proclaim):

> The secret god (Guha, i.e., Subrahmaṇya) replied: "Śiva may have said Kailāsa,
> but he didn't specify the Kailāsa of the North.
> The Southern Kailāsa will do just as well.
> That will heal you." And, after pondering the best way
> to bring Natkīra there,
> he hid his own power within the lake and addressed
> the prince of poets: "Bathe in this lake, and Kailāsa will come
> searching for you, as the proverb says."
> It was music to Natkīra's ears. With full awareness, he bathed
> in the pond. By the time he lifted his head out of the water,
> that mountain of Śiva from the south came walking toward him,
> along with its river, the Song of Gold (i.e., the Svarnamukhi river in
> Srikalahasti).[17]

As the god Subrahmaṇya rightly suggested, the poet is finally cured by the mere glimpse of Srikalahasti. But it is important to note that the poet himself does not halt at Srikalahasti during his travel north from Madurai although Srikalahasti conveniently lies between Kanchipuram and Nellore which the poet visits. Natkīra, then, seems to be initially unaware of the greatness (or even the existence?) of Srikalahasti; or perhaps the narrative avoids including this temple town in the journey early on to finally make the grand revelation of its extraordinariness at the very end. Furthermore, we must note an additional aspect regarding the poet's travel: while the journey from the poet's base in Madurai to the north is punctuated by visits to sacred sites and rivers, thereby resembling the pilgrimages of the *Tevāram* saints, the journey is hardly underpinned by a desire to visit the various sacred spots; rather, it is to nullify the unfortunate curse of leprosy that the poet painstakingly embarks on the journey. Natkīra, then, is neither enthusiastic for the journey nor is aware of the significance of Srikalahasti. Many sthalapurāṇic

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17 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.213–15. Translation by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002: 199–200).

travelers likewise undertake their journeys without a desire for the journey and without a prior conviction about the destination's significance. As I further discuss below, Agastya's journey down south, which is narrated differently in various *sthalapurāṇa*s, and Vyāsa's journey from Kashi to Draksharama in the *Bhīmeśvarapurāṇamu* are just a handful of examples that additionally illustrate this phenomenon.

To be sure, the sacrality of the different sites visited prior to the destination is acknowledged and sometimes even underscored by the Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa*s,[18] and such recognition of the uniqueness of the pilgrimage sites is, as pilgrimage studies scholars point out, often observed in the pilgrims' earnest for their journeys. Yet, as I discuss later, discourses about different sites' sacrality are ultimate leveraged to elevate and proclaim the even greater sacrality of the *sthala* extolled by the *sthalapurāṇa* in question, and not to demonstrate the eagerness of the sthalapurāṇic traveler to embark on his/her journey. In Natkīra's story, too, what we constantly find is not an enthusiasm for the journey, but practical anxieties about the feasibility of the journey given the poet's physical disabilities on account of his worsening leprosy. Natkīra therefore panics:

> How many rivers, forests, mountains,
> wild villages will I have to pass,
> how many animals will I have to face,
> how many lonely paths will I have to walk
> before I can see Śiva's mountain?
> No one has seen it, no one knows
> where it is.
> There are lions, tigers, wild elephants,
> rhinoceroses, and all those fabled beasts,
> to say nothing of the demons,
> on those routes; snowstorms, too,
> and cutting rocks. Can anyone travel
> that way? Śiva, flowing with mercy,
> what shall I do?
> Soon my body will lose sensation.
> Then black spots will appear all over.
> The skin will thicken, and blisters will break out.

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18 To illustrate, in the case of Natkīra's story, see *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.182, 3.184–85, and 3.189, where the Kaveri, Tiruvannamalai, and the Ganges are admired with descriptions about their virtues and about the blessings they confer on their worshippers.

> I will feel weakened, and turn ugly.
> Flies will hover around my oozing pus and blood.
> People will turn away in disgust when I beg for food.
> So let me go now, while I can still walk,
> to look for Kailāsa. There is no escaping
> God's words.[19]

To reiterate then, Natkīra's journey is instigated *not* by a desire for the journey and *not* by a recognition of the pious nature of the sites included in the journey— all these aspects undermining the interpretation of his journey as a pilgrimage.

In a similar light, consider also Agastya's peregrinations, narratives about which permeate the *sthalapurāṇa* corpus in Sanskrit as well as in vernacular traditions.[20] As William Davis notes, and as may be gleaned from the examples provided in the introduction, most *sthalapurāṇa*s use the famous myths associated with Agastya including the humbling of the Vindhya mountains and/or the balancing of the earth as framework for presenting their version of Agastya's travel adventures (Davis 2000: 109 ff.). That is, when Agastya is urged by Śiva or Brahmā to head south from Mount Kailash (the seer's starting point according to the earth-balancing myth) or Kashi (often noted as Agastya's starting point in the Vindhya-humbling myth), the sage is distraught about missing the divine wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī or about leaving the holy, liberation-granting Kashi. Agastya is however convinced by Śiva or Brahmā who explain to him that he would witness a repeat performance of Śiva and Pārvatī's wedding at the destination and/or that the destination is as excellent a place as Kashi.[21] Significantly, in this conversation, Agastya too, like Natkīra in the Srikalahasti myths, originally seems to be ignorant of the site's excellence, or its very existence in the south (Davis 2000: 212). The seer is however made to oblige the command, even as he still laments his exile from the north.[22] The journey is then often explained as a process whereby the distraught sage gradually overcomes his grief by halting at various sacred sites

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19 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.175–77. Translation by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002: 196–97).

20 As Davis points out (2000: 109 ff.), the "southern sage" Agastya's journey myths are especially aplenty in Tamil *talapurāṇam*s, possibly since the sage's legends are often connected with the beginnings of Tamil grammar and culture (Shulman 1980: 6 ff.).

21 In the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, for instance, Brahmā and the other gods hail Kanchipuram as the southern equivalent of Kashi. See *Kāñcippurāṇam* 63.185–249 translated in Davis 2000: 117.

22 To illustrate, see *Bhīmeśvarapurāṇamu* 2.91 translated in Shulman 1998. Here, even as Agastya is at Draksharama, he "indulges his nostalgia for Kāśī in several emotional verses" (Shulman 1998: 199).

and rivers to worship the lord before ultimately reaching the site connected with the *sthalapurāṇa* in question.[23]

As David Shulman notes in the case of the *Bhīmeśvarapurāṇamu*, the sage Vyāsa's journey from Kashi to Draksharama[24] is also similarly purposed: Vyāsa "heads south toward Dakṣārama (i.e., Draksharama), stopping at various shrines on the way—Kuntīmādhava, Puri, Śrīkūrmam, Siṃhācalam—all described, rather poignantly, as providing partial forms of much-needed "cooling" for the fiery suffering of separation from Kāśī, as a loving wife would fan her over-heated husband" (Shulman 1998: 198). Again considering the fact that the journeys—or rather the exiles from the holy Kashi—were not desired by the two travelling sages and that the destinations were not intended by them in advance, it is hard to categorize wholesale the sthalapurāṇic journeys as pilgrimages,[25] as has been done in earlier scholarship (for instance, Shulman 1998). Rather, as Davis's nuanced study of Agastya's journeys southward also suggests, despite tempting resonances between Agastya's travels and the pilgrimages of the *Tevāram* saints which Peterson discussed, we find fundamental differences in the sthalapurāṇic journeys and the Tamil Śaiva pilgrimages (Davis 2000: 197ff.). These differences include the aspects I have already discussed (lack of desire for embarking on the sthalapurāṇic journeys, lack of a prior recognition of the *sthala*'s sacrality, etc.), as well as Davis's additional important observation in light of an integral part of the typical Indian pilgrimage experience, namely the pilgrim's return trip,[26] which is a component that is usually not found in Agastya's sthalapurāṇic journeys.[27]

It should also be noted, considering modern definitions of pilgrimage, that this concept usually also emphasizes the *journey* of a devotee to a sacred religious site. That is, the idea of pilgrimage usually indicates two kinds of experience: "that of the journey, and that of being at the destination, the desired place" (Peterson

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23 At this point, the *sthalapurāṇa* often narrates how Agastya is not only finally pleased with the destination but is also so moved by the sight of the place that he utters an extended praise of the beauty and the merits of the *sthala*. For instance, Davis notes in the case of the *Tirukkuṟṟālappurāṇam* (a *sthalapurāṇa* of Courtallam) that "Agastya's approach to Courtallam occupies over forty verses of poetry that describe the beauty of the town and the surrounding area" (Davis 2000: 111). We will return to this point later in the essay.

24 See fn.7 for the context of Vyāsa's journey.

25 That is, if we understand the idea of pilgrimage in the way modern pilgrimage scholars have theorized it.

26 Here, Davis draws upon Ann Grodzins Gold's work on Rajasthani pilgrims; see Gold 1988.

27 Once he reaches the south, the seer never returns to the north. He must remain so according to the Vindhya mountains myth, for if the sage returns and crosses northward, the mountain range would again rise high into the sky and thereby disturb various cosmic phenomena.

1982: 71).[28] While the *sthalapurāṇa* narratives do contain extended descriptions of both these aspects, it seems to me that the journeys are detailed not to mark the events as instances of pilgrimage but since a journey is inevitable to transpose a character to the *sthala* being glorified.[29] As noticed in Natkīra's story wherein the poet is magically transported from Kashi to Srikalahasti by Subrahmaṇya's grace, or rather Srikalahasti itself manifests in front of Natkīra, it appears that other sthalapurāṇic characters too would happily forego the travails of journeying if the narrative allowed them to do so. But as I discuss in the next section, giving this leeway and removing the journey narrative would deplete the *sthalapurāṇa*s of an excellent opportunity to proclaim the extraordinary sacrality of the *sthala* being celebrated. In what I argue as an ingenious narrative strategy, the *sthalapurāṇa*s carefully craft the journey to a particular *sthala* via stops at several significant holy sites so as to invoke the sacrality of the intermittent sites in service of elevating the sacrality of the concerned *sthala*. The *sthalapurāṇa*s, in other words, craft careful itineraries—by a strategic inclusion of significant sites—as part of their journey narratives, and the included sites are significant in the sense that they are locally or transregionally venerated sacred sites and rivers. I therefore read the carefully programmed sthalapurāṇic journeys not as pilgrimages but as "sacred itineraries"—the word "sacred" to capture the fact that the included intermittent spots are primarily chosen for their sacrality,[30] and the word "itineraries" to capture the idea that rather than being haphazard or arbitrary, the sthalapurāṇic journey routes incorporate a carefully curated line up of sacred sites and rivers before leading the itinerant to the *sthala* that is the subject of the *sthalapurāṇa*.

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28   However, many contemporary studies of pilgrimage continue to debate whether the journey or the destination is emphasized in different instances of historical and contemporary pilgrimage traditions. See, for instance, Bailey 2023.

29   At least in the case of the South Indian *sthalapurāṇa*s, which are usually more poetic than the typically descriptive Sanskrit *sthalapurāṇa*s, these journeys also provide a wonderful opportunity for the composer(s) of the *sthalapurāṇa* texts to display their poetic finesse in describing different landscapes and other topographical features.

30   Sometimes, regional, economic, and/or political motivations are additional factors to consider when analyzing the logic behind the inclusion—or exclusion—of different intermediate sacred sites. In the case of the Tamil *talapurāṇam* journeys, for instance, places of politico-economic significance such as from the Kaveri delta region frequently feature in the journeys since this region was the heartland of the Chola empire when the so-called temple Hinduism flourished in southern India. See also Smith's study of the *sthalapurāṇa*s of Kashi, where he identifies the political and ideological valences embedded in the inclusion of Kolhapur and Srisailam in Agastya's journey down south. Smith hence points out that the itineraries typically trace "paths of Śaiva patronage and pilgrimage. The framework thus delineated is at once geographical and ideological" (Smith 2007: 174).

Intersacrality in the sacred itineraries of premodern *sthalapurāṇa*s

Why exactly do *sthalapurāṇa*s task their characters with embarking on their sacred itineraries? We have already noted Peterson's observation about the *Tevāram* pilgrimages that the impetus for those journeys is an "intense desire [on part of the Tamil Śaiva saints] to experience Śiva in all his variety" (Peterson 1982: 73)—an observation convincing in the case of the *Tevāram* since in these poems "Śiva *is* the place, and, therefore, to sing of the place is to sing of Śiva" (p. 81).[31] That is, with the *Tevāram* corpus homologizing a sacred place and its resident deity, pilgrimages to different places allows Tamil Śaivites to experience the various local Śivas, whom the *Tevāram* rhetoric envisions as unique deities with distinct local mythologies even though ultimately rendering them as identical with "Śiva Mahādeva of Great Traditional Hinduism" (p. 79). However, rather than equating place and god, *sthalapurāṇa*s, as the name suggests, typically prioritize the *sthala* over the resident god [32]—that is, it is the sacred place that the text is primarily concerned with, and the local deity is made significant because he resides at the place.[33] This idea has already been advanced in scholarly works on different holy places of the subcontinent, such as when Diana Eck states that "Kashi is not such a great *tīrtha* [i.e., pilgrimage place] because all the gods are there; all the gods are there because it is such a great *tīrtha*" (Eck 1982: 157), and when Tamara Lanaghan notes in the context of the Sanskrit *Karavīramāhātmya* an "ingathering [of] all

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31 Peterson demonstrates this equivalence with several cogent examples based on which she remarks: "there are numerous songs where there is a set of phrases describing Śiva and ending with the name of the place, couched in an ambiguous Tamil construction or grammatical ending which leaves it unclear as to whether it is the Deity or the place which the devotee must see, remember, praise, love, sing" (Peterson 1982: 81).

32 By prioritizing the *sthala*, *sthalapurāṇa* texts primarily emphasize the extraordinary sacrality of the site. At the same time, and possibly owing to this priority for the site, these texts—particularly the vernacular ones—frequently also provide extensive, exquisite descriptions of the natural features of the site. Tamil *talapurāṇam*s, for instance, typically have dedicated customary chapters called *tirunāṭṭuppaṭalam* (description of the holy country) and *tirunakarappaṭalam* (description of the holy city) immediately following a prefatory section called *pāyiram*. For an interesting study of these chapters in the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, see Buchholz 2023.

33 Indeed, even if we consider the case of the twelve famous *jyotirliṅga*s (*liṅga*s of light) of Śiva, the earliest extant lists and stories of them are actually about the corresponding sites, with many of the stories not mentioning the *jyotirliṅga*s at all; see Fleming 2009: 53 ff. Consider as well medieval inscriptions of the Tamil region and their "strong sense of the divine power of place": the inscriptions "often refer to a deity as the "Lord of such-and-such a place" rather than indicate whether it is Śiva or Viṣṇu" (Branfoot 2022: 269). These cases too illustrate how in many cases the sacred place has primacy over the residing deity.

things sacred, holy or laudatory in order to intensify Kolhapur's *own* sacredness" (Lanaghan 2006: 104, emphasis added). The same conception can also be observed in vernacular *sthalapurāṇa*s such as in the Srikalahasti materials which narrate about the influx of Śiva, Pārvatī, the gods, the *gaṇa*s, the mountains Kailash and Meru, and other celestial beings at the already holy land of Srikalahasti, thereby making it further holier as "southern Kailash" (called *dakṣiṇakailāsamu* in Telugu or *teṉkayilāyam* in Tamil; *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.90–97; *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*, *teṉkailāyac-carukkam*, 57–68).[34]

With this premise that a *sthalapurāṇa* is predominantly concerned with a *sthala*, and with the fundamental understanding that the major aspect of a *sthalapurāṇa*'s agenda is to assert the exceptionality of the concerned *sthala* and thereby its resident deity, I posit that unlike the *Tevāram* pilgrimages, the sthalapurāṇic sacred itineraries are *not* motivated by a desire to experience Śiva in his manifold local forms, for this would run counter to the *sthalapurāṇa*'s contention about the consummate nature of both the concerned *sthala* and its god (that is, if the *sthalapurāṇa*'s *sthala* and its deity can grant everything that a devotee desires, then why visit other places or pray to other divine forms?).

If this hypothesis is granted, we are back to our unresolved question about the impetus for the *sthalapurāṇa*s' preoccupation with sacred itineraries. Why then does the *sthalapurāṇa* genre insist on narrating various sacred itineraries? Some of the purposes the itineraries serve are clear: first, the itineraries sketch out journeys that audience or devoted pilgrims could potentially follow with the assurance that they are tracing mythically or historically attested routes.[35] As well, the process of reactivating a mythic knowledge of sacred journeys helps keep the *sthalapurāṇa* relevant for changing times.[36] Furthermore, mapping itineraries to a *sthala* and thereby gesturing at journeys directed to that place aids in further consolidating the sanctity of the sacred site. That is, visits to a site—and

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34 In this context, I should also point out the imprecision in referring to the *Śrīkāḷa-hastimāhātmyamu* as (*Śrī*)*kāḷahastīśvaramāhātmyamu* (i.e., a *māhātmya* of the lord of Srikalahasti), as several scholars have erroneously done (Narayana Rao 2003: 426, Sanderson 2012: 84, and others)—imprecise for the latter title elides the fundamental fact that the text is a *sthalapurāṇa* (i.e., a glorification of the *sthala* and not that of the *sthala*'s deity).

35 This point mainly holds when the journeys are not simply literarily crafted, geographically illogical itineraries (quite often the case), but are pilgrimage routes that are practical and/or historically attested (see, for example, fn.5). Here again, the distinction I try to make between practical pilgrimage routes and literarily curated sacred itineraries comes to the fore.

36 I draw upon my ethnographic fieldwork at Srikalahasti here. Alluding to the Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa*s, the temple priests and local signboards remind devotees that the sacred site was visited by Agastya and several other characters significant in Hindu traditions.

performance of rituals there (which, as we will see, sacred itineraries also suggest)—can help reinforce the site's holiness.[37]

A basic need for sacred itineraries in *sthalapurāṇa*s is also worth noting: given that *sthalapurāṇa*s primarily deal with places, and that too in a relational manner as I will further demonstrate, the journey narratives help the corpus juxtapose different places in a way that other narrative themes or strategies may not support. At the basic level, what sacred itineraries do is connect one holy site with other religiously marked spaces, thereby presenting the site as part of a larger religious landscape (Peterson 1982: 77). But significantly, such connections do not mean that the concerned site and the other various places with which it is connected are conceptualized equally, for this would undermine the *sthalapurāṇa*'s unabashed proclamation about the exceptionality of its *sthala*. In fact, I argue that rather than placing the different sites on a level playing field, a *sthalapurāṇa*'s sacred itineraries hierarchize the sites—not by distinguishing amongst the various sites, but by elevating the merits of the concerned *sthala* over that of all the other sites included in the itinerary. The sacred itineraries are thus carefully crafted by incorporating important religious sites which, in helping the sthalapurāṇa to extol its *sthala*, are ultimately rendered inferior to the *sthala*. The particular *sthala*, in other words, draws from the sacrality of other sites, but ultimately outshines them—and this, I posit, is what sacred itineraries achieve for the *sthalapurāṇa*s.

Given my reading of sthalapurāṇic journeys as sacred itineraries strategically crafted to assert the intended *sthala*'s exceptionality, I develop this hypothesis in the rest of this essay by demonstrating some of the ways in which sacred itineraries distinguish between the concerned *sthala* and the other holy spots they incorporate.

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37 The idea that worshipful visits to a site can consolidate the site's sanctity can actually also be observed with places like tourist attractions and/or spiritual sites, as the geographer Noga Collins-Kreiner points out: places are not intrinsically sacred, rather they are social constructions that get sacralized and are thereby marked as meaningful (Collins-Kreiner 2010: 444). I hasten to add that in the context of the sthalapurāṇic theology, however, the concerned places are considered inherently sacred, as we already discussed. Theologically speaking then, what pilgrimages to the religious sites supposedly do is not sacralize the sites but cement and consolidate the sites' intrinsic sacrality. From an anthropological perspective, however, as Collins-Kreiner suggested, it is primarily the reverent visitations to the site that make it sacred. For other human practices that can mark a space as sacred, like performing a prescribed ritual at a given time, see Chiara Letizia's ethnographic work on South Asian river confluences (2018). Letizia thereby argues that "a quality of *a priori* sacredness does not exist": sacredness is not "something intrinsic to a place, but rather … a product of ritual actions performed there" (Letizia 2018: 360).

Emotional response

As I have been suggesting, sacred itineraries can help us unpack the ways in which *sthalapurāṇa*s hierarchize their respective *sthala*s vis-à-vis the other sacred spots included in their itineraries. To start this unpacking, we can first consider the responses of a *sthalapurāṇa*'s mythic travelers as they make their way to the *sthala* and as they halt at the other religious spots that they usually visit prior to (i.e., on their way to) the *sthala*. The ailing poet Natkīra (we may recall Śiva's curse of leprosy here) in the Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa*s, for instance, halts at Kashi, where he takes a dip in the Ganges and honors the city's deities, before proceeding further on in his journey. The *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* tells us:

> He bathed in the Ganges,
> took darshan of the lord of liberation, Viśvanātha (Śiva at Kashi),
> worshipped Viśālākṣi, Śiva's wife, who is the rain [that douses] the fires of sins,
> devoutly praised the destroyer Lord Kālabhairava,
> prayed to the abode of auspicious virtues, Ḍuṇṭhi Vināyaka,
> and as his enthusiasm for the journey increased…[38]

In contrast to this single verse for Kashi, once the poet sees the southern Kailash or Srikalahasti and his curse of leprosy is lifted, we learn about the poet's response to the site in the form of a hundred-verse poem:

> The leprosy was gone. He came near that Kailāsa
> on the banks of the Song of Gold [i.e., the Swarnamukhi river].
> Bathing in its waves,
> he composed a Tamil song, a hundred verses,
> to Śiva, first of all the gods.[39]

Here, the Tamil song mentioned is a reference to the *kayilaipāti kāḷattipāti antāti* "ascribed to Nakkīrateva Nāyaṉār, in the eleventh volume of the Tamil Śaiva canon (fifty verses on Kailāsa intermingled with fifty verses on Kāḷahasti)" (Narayana Rao and Shulman 2002: 200). Natkīra's composition of the *kayilaipāti kāḷattipāti antāti* reveals several important points: first, it gestures not only at the greatness

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38 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.191 (my translation):
gaṅgāsnānamucesi viśvapati mokṣasvāmi darśiñci pā
pāṅgāravrajavṛṣṭi nīśvari viśālākṣi' śivaṃ gŏlci bha
ktiṃ gālāntaku' kālabhairavapatiṃ gīrtiñci ḍuṇṭhi dvipā
syuṃ galyāṇaguṇālayuṃ dala'ci yātrotsāha mŏppāra'gan

39 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.216. Translation by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002: 200).

of Srikalahasti, which countered a curse that was to be invalidated by the (supposedly northern) Kailash, but also at the poet's final realization, thanks to the god Subrahmaṇya who makes him realize, of the equivalence of the Mount Kailash and Srikalahasti. The *sthalapurāṇa* thus presents us with a classic example of the rhetoric of the duplication of a sacred place, a rhetoric that is often found in what Diana Eck notes as the "grammar of sanctification" in the language of the *sthalapurāṇa*s (Eck 2012).[40]

More importantly, I wish to highlight another noteworthy aspect of the Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa*s' grammar of sanctification as captured in the sacred itineraries that they narrate: whereas Srikalahasti elicits a hundred-verse poem in its praise, other sites, including the greatly celebrated Kashi, are presented in a strikingly simple, non-extravagant manner. Note for instance *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.188 where in a single *gadya* or prose passage we learn about the numerous sacred spots that Natkīra crosses: Nellore, the Gundlakamma, Krishnaveni, and Gautami rivers, Pithapuram, Simhachalam, Srikurmam, Gokarna, Puri, Krittivasa, Gaya, and several additional holy towns. Looking at the *sthalapurāṇa* genre's sacred itineraries as a whole, then, we observe that while the *sthala* that is the subject of a *sthalapurāṇa* often elicits an emotionally charged, deeply affective response from its visitor (Natkīra's poetic outpouring being a case in point), the other sites for the most part simply receive seemingly mechanical rituals (like Natkīra's ritual activities at the other sites).

To be sure, Natkīra's very brief stops at other sites and his extended poetic outpouring at Srikalahasti can simply be interpreted as being prompted by his deteriorating and regained health respectively, rather than by the relative merits of the different sites. However, when we cumulatively consider multiple sacred itineraries from different *sthalapurāṇa*s, it becomes evident that the *sthala*s extolled by the *sthalapurāṇa*s versus the other places included in the texts are consistently attributed with different responses from the devotee-traveler: namely, with deep emotional/poetic versus simple descriptive/prescriptive/informative responses, respectively. This variation becomes evident from the very fact that sometimes the other places are grouped together in descriptive *gadya* prose while the *sthala* is granted numerous exquisite *padya* verses, as we saw in Natkīra's story.[41] In Agastya's itinerary in the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu*, too, we find a similar

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40   See also Feldhaus 2003, chap. 5, for a thorough discussion of the different modes of linking sacred sites in a relativistic manner.

41   The *padya/gadya* distinction holds for premodern Telugu *sthalapurāṇa*s as they are mostly composed in the *campū* style, that is in mixed verse and prose. While beyond the scope of this essay, it would be interesting to juxtapose this phenomenon found in Telugu *sthalapurāṇa campū*s to what Phyllis Granoff refers to as "pilgrimage *campū*s" in medieval Sanskrit literary cultures. For instance, looking at the *Yātrāprabandha*,

situation, though with both the descriptive and the affective narrated in verses rather than in prose and verse. This is how Agastya journeys across different sites prior to reaching Srikalahasti:

> He shattered the arrogance of the Vindhya mountains,
> bathed in the Gautami and the Krishnaveni,
> took *darśan* of the lord of Srisailam,
> worshipped Jyoti Siddavateswara,
> and as they (i.e., Agastya and Lopāmudrā) were approaching [Srikalahasti]...[42]

And this is how the pious couple react to the sight of Srikalahasti:

> Approaching [Srikalahasti], tearing asunder
> the binding fetters of sins, with tears of joy
> rolling from his eyes, with trembling voice,
> he and his wife [saw Srikalahasti].[43]
> Seeing [Srikalahasti] along with his wife,
> bowing while his body hairs stood on end,
> he meditated with his eyes slightly closed like buds;
> with the bliss of the *darśan*, the sage
> worshipped Śiva with a thousand names,
> praised him with various exquisite words,
> made many circumambulations,
> chanted the five-syllable mantra joined with Om,
> with mind intent on meditation, he remained silent,
> he was overjoyed, unable to depart he stood there seeing,
> wobbling his head, he was amazed inside,

a late sixteenth-century Sanskrit pilgrimage *campū* about Rāma's bridge (Skt. *setu*; the bridge that Rāma supposedly constructed across the ocean to Laṅkā) composed by a south Indian brahmin Samarapuṅgava, Granoff notes that the bulk of the text is "a record of the places visited, ... more importantly of the pilgrim's emotional responses to those places" (Granoff 1998: 106).

42 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.108 abridged (my translation):
vindhyaparvatagarvambu viṟuga' ṯṟŏkki
gautamī kṛṣṇaveṇyavagāhanamulu
sesi śrīśailanāthu darśiñci jyoti
siddhavaṭanāthu' ḵŏlci vicceyunapuḍu

43 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.111 (my translation):
ḍaggaṟi pĕna'ḵŏnu duritapu'
ṟaggambula' trĕñcivaici pramadāśrutatul
dṟggoḷambula' ṯŏra'ga'ga
ḍagguttikatŏḍa' tanapaḍatiyu' tānun

> overcoming his grief at separation with the lord of Kashi,
> bowing, with his wife, to Śiva who was there as a fruit of Vasiṣṭha's penance,
> the best of sages worshipped Dakṣiṇamūrti.[44]

These passages relate how Agastya performs appropriate rituals at the sites visited prior to Srikalahasti, with no reference to his emotional state while performing rituals at these sites, and how upon approaching Srikalahasti, the sage has a devotional outpouring for this *sthala*: we are informed that his voice trembled (*dagguttika-toḍan*), his eyes shed tears of joy (*pramadāśrutatul*), and his body hairs stood on end (*pulakāñcitadehamu*) as soon as he merely spotted the Srikalahasti mountain peak from afar (i.e., before he even reached the sacred place).[45] Such sudden change in devotees' demeanor as soon as a sacred site just comes into sight is in fact a frequently observed theme in not just the sthalapurāṇic sacred itineraries but also in pilgrimage traditions across the globe, for the theme helps convey the idea that the devotees are crossing into sacred space as soon as the space is first glimpsed (Bailey 2023). We thus notice this phenomenon in the Srikalahasti *sthalapurāṇa* narratives of not just Agastya and his wife, but also in the myth of Natkīra, whose leprosy was cured, as we noticed, as soon as Srikalahasti was merely glimpsed. This rhetoric thus helps mark the threshold of Srikalahasti as a juncture that sets apart the highly sacred space of this *sthala*.

Furthermore, once Agastya enters Srikalahasti and is enraptured by the space and the local Śiva, he is finally able to overcome his grief at his painful separation from Kashi, a feat that could not be achieved at the sites he visited prior to

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44 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.113–14 (my translation):
kāñci vadhūyutu'ḍai pula
kāñcitadehamuna' p̱raṇatu'ḍai dhyāniñcĕn
k̲iñcinmukuḷitanayanayu
gāñcalu'ḍai mauni darśanānandamutoḍan (1.113)
arciñcĕ śivuni sahasranāmambula
vividhavākprauḍhi' k̲āvincĕ nutulu
sesĕ' p̱ekkulu pradakṣiṇamulu japiyiñcĕ'
pañcākṣarambu sapraṇavamuganu
dhyānaniṣṭhābuddhi maunamudra vahiñcĕ
nānandaparavaśuṇ ḍayyĕ' p̱idapa'
ṯala'gipo' c̲ālaka nilici cūcucu nuṇḍĕ'
ṯalayū'ci vera'gande' ṯanaku'tānĕ
kāśikānātha viprayogavyathāvi
dūru' ḍagucu vasiṣṭhataporamānu
bhava mātmavadhūṯito' p̱raṇuti' c̲esĕ
muniśikhāmaṇi dakṣiṇāmūrti' k̲olicĕ (1.114)
45 For the Tamil retake on this moment, see *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam, pŏn̲mukaric-carukkam*, 11–12.

Srikalahasti. In effect then, the single verse allotted for the other sites and the multiple verses narrating the sage's affective response to Srikalahasti corroborate what Davis has observed in his study of Agastya: "The greatest of the laudatory descriptions… are found when Agastya nears the end of the journey and approaches the temple town which is the subject of the *talapuranam*. What he sees with his own eyes, and his reactions to the sight, … are described in detail and provide final proof of the excellence of the place" (Davis 2000: 110).

To wrap up this analysis, by narrating an emotional experience for their respective *sthala*s, the *sthalapurāṇa*s seem to facilitate for their audience, as Jay Ramesh has already pointed out, a deeply felt connection to the concerned holy sites, thereby offering an emotional experience to the audience as well (Ramesh 2020: 162). Furthermore, if what *sthalapurāṇa*s aim at is developing for the reader or listener an intense emotional entanglement with the *sthala* and its resident deity, it makes sense that the texts refrain from lending an emotional rhetoric for other sites (in order to create a single pointed emotional response for the *sthala* alone). A *sthalapurāṇa*'s sacred itinerary does acknowledge the sacrality of other sites, however, and we hardly find any trace of disdain for any place, but each *sthalapurāṇa* simultaneously maintains the claim that the other sites are just not as glorious as the *sthala* it is invested in.

Outcome at the concerned sthala vs. at other sites

Another way that a *sthalapurāṇa* marks its *sthala* as superior to other sites can be found in the declaration that the *sthala* serves as an expedient means of liberation, a declaration that is ubiquitously found in the *sthalapurāṇa* genre (Ramesh 2020: 117). There are multiple ways this claim is usually advanced by a *sthalapurāṇa*: (a) the text can sometimes simply state the fact in poetic terms,[46] such as when the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* notes that Srikalahasti is a play area for the goddess of liberation (*mokṣalakṣmiki vihārasthānamu; Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.62); (b) the text can point out how the *sthala* can grant liberation to even unconventional beings, such as when the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* makes a case that Srikalahasti can grant liberation to even animals;[47] and/or (c) the text can

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46 Using a poetic mode to express abstract ideas such as liberation is commonplace in much of religious literature.

47 Direct liberation to animals—that is, without the animal having to reincarnate in human form for liberation—is an idea that contradicts classical, mainstream Hindu thought that claims that only human birth can lead to liberation. Hence, animals attaining liberation is a remarkable idea found in only a limited number of *sthalapurāṇa*s, including the Srikalahasti texts. For a detailed analysis of this theme, see Kanamarlapudi forthcoming, chap. 2.

narrate the stories of various people who attained liberation at the *sthala*, such as when the sacred itineraries in a *sthalapurāṇa* narrate how the devotee-traveler finally attains liberation, at the end of his journey, upon reaching the concerned *sthala*. In the Srikalahasti texts, for instance, Natkīra and the two *veśya* girls from Madurai attain liberation at Srikalahasti after travelling through all the various holy sites included in their itinerary (*Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.222 and 4.128 respectively).[48] To continue with the narration of Natkīra's story, here is the Telugu text's narration of how the poet is blessed with liberation:

> Pleased with these hundred verses,[49]
> the lord of Kāḷahasti, father of Kumāra
> and husband of the goddess Fragrant with Wisdom,
> the god who cares for those in trouble,
> revealed himself and said, "Your life
> has been fruitful, master of poetic speech.
> I'll give you whatever you choose. Ask,
> I'll make you free from fear." Natkīra bowed
> again and again to the god, his mind pulsing with joy.
> He brought his hands together over his forehead
> and tried to speak, but the words were choked
> and fumbling in his ecstasy. Emotion and eloquence
> struggled with one another as he prayed:
> "Joy, in life, is never unmixed
> with pain. That special happiness
> one gets by letting go of the world—
> make that mine."[50]
> As he prayed thus, the wish-fulfilling tree for devotees,
> the sickle that severs the bonds of ignorance,
> the scissors that cut the cloth of existential pain,
> the wish-granting gem for the goal of liberation,
> one in a virtuous householder state of conjugal relationship with
>   the Himalayan daughter,
> the god of the town of Kāḷahasti granted liberation.[51]

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48 Given the grand narrative of Agastya's final settlement further down south in the Pŏtiyil Mountain, the Srikalahasti texts do not have the liberty to claim that Agastya too attained liberation at Srikalahasti!

49 Reference to the *kayilaipāti kāḷattipāti antāti*.

50 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.217–21. Translation by Narayana Rao and Shulman (2002: 200).

51 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 3.222 (my translation):
   ani prārthimpa'ga bhaktakalpaka mavidyāsūtradātrambu jī

The Srikalahasti text's narration of Natkīra's sacred itinerary already informed us that the numerous sacred sites the poet visited prior to Srikalahasti were incapable in curing his leprosy or in eliciting an affective response from him. But significantly, what the Srikalahasti texts further suggest is the other sites' inadequacy in granting liberation, an important inadequacy that is of course needed for the poet to remain embodied and continue his travel until Srikalahasti, but also for reinforcing the claim about Srikalahasti's superiority and status as southern Kailash. This distinction of the ability of Srikalahasti and the apparent inability of the other sites in granting liberation does arguably correlate with the fact that while Natkīra has a deep emotional outpouring at Srikalahasti, he only performs seemingly mechanical rituals devoid of an affective reaction at the other sites. Yet, what is perhaps only covertly conveyed via the emotional/affective distinction becomes readily apparent in the different outcomes for Natkīra at Srikalahasti versus the other sites. The *sthalapurāṇa* texts' grammar of sanctification therefore usually also includes the narrative theme of devotees attaining liberation at the concerned sites.

Acknowledging and drawing from the sacrality of the intermittent sites

Prioritizing one *sthala* over the other sites does not mean, as I repeatedly note, the denunciation of or even indifference towards the other sites. At the same time that *sthalapurāṇa*s unabashedly eulogize their respective *sthala*s, they frequently also praise—or at the very least acknowledge—the merits of other sites. We have already seen how Srikalahasti is equated to the holy Kailash (in Natkīra's story) and compared with Kashi (when Agastya finally overcomes his grief at leaving Kashi).[52] Furthermore, even when narrating Agastya's first glimpse of the Srikalahasti mountain peak, the temple town is declared as the gem of the jewel composed of the fame of Kashi, Mathura, and Kanchipuram—cities which Hindu thought includes in the category called the *saptamokṣapurī* or the seven places that grant liberation:

> Seeing Southern Kailash, the gem of the waistbelt
> that is the wealth of the towns, such as Kashi, Mathura, and Kanchi,

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vanakhedāmbarakartarīmukhamu kaivalyārthadānāmṛtā
śanaratnambu tuṣāraśailatanayājāmpatyasampannapā
vanagārhasthyamu kāḷahastipuradaivambiccĕ sāyujyamun

52 In *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.156, the seer explicitly tells the sages living in Srikalahasti that they are extremely fortunate to reside in a place that is just the same as Kashi.

> which are famed in the whole of the earth girdled by the ocean,
> the best of sages...[53]

So even while glorifying Srikalahasti, the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* reminds us of the sanctity and the fame of other sites.

In a similar manner, while the *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*, in its narration, notes that Srikalahasti is the best place amongst all the divine abodes of Śiva (*Cīkāḷattip-purāṇam*, *teṉkailāyac-carukkam*, 1), it also praises other holy cities, along with Srikalahasti, for their ability to grant liberation: the text notes that one born in Tiruvarur, one who sees Chidambaram, one who dies at Kashi, one who medi-tates on Tiruvannamalai, or one who resides in Srikalahasti attains liberation (*teṉkailāyac-carukkam*, 5). Of course, this appreciation of the other sites does not undermine the *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam*'s earlier claim about Srikalahasti's superiority: elsewhere, too, the text narrates how the two *veśya* girls traveling from Madurai to Srikalahasti worship the local Śiva in the holy Chidambaram but at the same time yearn for Srikalahasti and the Śiva residing there (*kaṉṉiyarc-carukkam*, 92).

Taken together, these examples clarify how sacred itineraries assert the sanc-tity and superiority of a *sthala* over that of other sites. As we see, *sthalapurāṇa*s do not accomplish this through a simple, out-and-out biased admiration for the *sthala*; rather they narrate programmed itineraries that rely on the glory of the interim sites to finally glorify the concerned *sthala*. Srikalahasti's glory is, for instance, drawn from that of the *saptamokṣapurī* cities of Kashi, Mathura, and Kanchipuram; and its capabilities to grant salvation are juxtaposed with those of Thiruvarur, Chidambaram, Kashi, and Tiruvannamalai. Being "like" Kailash, Kashi, Chidambaram, and other places, then, Srikalahasti is characterized as a space that replicates renowned sacred Hindu sites (Feldhaus 2003: 159ff.).

Simultaneously, strategies of narrative juxtaposition also aid in asserting Sri-kalahasti's superiority, as seen in the *veśya* girls' pining for Srikalahasti even while they reverently worship Śiva at Chidambaram, revealing what scholars have identified as the "better than" mode of discourse used by *sthalapurāṇa*s to claim that their site is better than another (Feldhaus 2003, chap. 5; Lanaghan 2006, 104). Thus, acknowledging and drawing from the sacredness of the intermittent sites need not undermine the concerned *sthala*'s status, rather this strategy can also serve to amplify the supposedly superlative sacredness of the *sthala*. In other words, we see the "better than" rhetoric ingenuously narrativized in the

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53 *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* 1.110 (my translation):
   kāñci munīndru'ḍu jalanidhi
   kāñcīvalayaprasiddha kāśīmadhurā
   kāñcīmukhapuralakṣmī
   kāñcīmaṇi yāmyabhāgakailāsagirin

sthalapurāṇic sacred itineraries. Thus, Srikalahasti may be "like" Kailash in being its replica in the south (*dakṣiṇakailāsamu* or *teṉkayilāya*), but the narrative of Natkīra explains how it is "better than" Kailash for being more accessible to devotees[54] and in ultimately granting liberation to them.

I further posit that the *sthalapurāṇa* texts reveal in sacred itineraries their vision of what I call "intersacrality," that is, they shape and assert the sacrality of their site in relation to the sacrality of other sacred sites. This hypothesis helps illuminate one peculiar aspect of *sthalapurāṇa*s, namely their frequent succinct narration of the *māhātmya* of other sacred site(s). Consider, for instance, the fact that Agastya, during his sacred itinerary in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa,* narrates the sacred stories of other sites to his wife Lopāmudrā (Smith 2007). In the *Karavīramāhātmya*, the sage himself learns about the sacredness of Srisailam from Skanda. And in the Srikalahasti texts, the sacred itinerary of the two *veśya* girls from Madurai invokes the sacred myths of several sacred sites including Kumbakonam, Chidambaram, and Kanchipuram. This narrative strategy of invoking the glory of other sacred sites brings to life, I posit, the claim that the *sthalapurāṇa*'s *sthala* is extraordinarily sacred. Rather than simply handwaving claims of superiority, the acknowledgement and indeed assertion of the sacrality of other sites ingenuously lends credibility to claims about the superlative status of a particular *sthala*. An absolute, non-referential glorification could be trite and superficial—such as when the *Śrīkāḷahastimāhātmyamu* points out that Srikalahasti is a play area for the goddess of liberation. But when sacred itineraries help juxtapose Srikalahasti with other sacred sites, the strategy skillfully works in establishing the idea that Srikalahasti is not just *a* site that grants liberation but is *the most* expedient site for liberation.

Concluding remarks

Demonstrating the dizzying and ubiquitous presence of a narrative trope found in numerous premodern *sthalapurāṇa*s—the trope of a mythical character travelling across multiple sacred sites prior to reaching the *sthala* that is the subject of the *sthalapurāṇa* in question—this chapter has attempted to understand both the nature and the function of this trope. Contrasting with the analytical category of pilgrimage helped reveal the distinct nature of the sthalapurāṇic journeys vis-à-vis pilgrimages: unlike the latter, the former are often not undertaken willingly and do not include a prior conviction about the significance of the destination. While pilgrimages are often voluntary undertakings, sthalapurāṇic journeys are

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54 Recall that while Natkīra's painstaking journey to Kailash is unsuccessful, Srikalahasti instantly appears before the poet (thanks to Subrahmaṇya's help) and cures his leprosy.

typically imposed on the travelers. Indeed, as we have seen, it is the reluctant traveler's eventual amazement and emotional outpouring upon finally reaching the site—or merely even at the first glimpse of the site—that makes the claim of extraordinariness for the *sthala* that much more compelling. The unwillingness on the part of the sthalapurāṇic traveler, then, carries its own rhetorical value.

Additionally, sthalapurāṇic journeys include, as I suggested, carefully curated itineraries that strategically incorporate select sacred sites to ultimately help laud the destination *sthala*. Even while revealing ideas of competition and hierarchy amongst different sacred sites, these itineraries articulate the sacrality of the site in question in relation to the sacrality of other sites. Thus, while *sthalapurāṇa*s do claim, without reference to other sites, the exceptional merits of a particular *sthala*, they express the virtues of the site more forcefully in relative terms. Indeed, it is this relativistic rhetoric that renders the *sthala* as the most expedient means of liberation. Identifying what I refer to as intersacrality also demonstrated how *sthalapurāṇa*s envision the sacrality of one *sthala* in relation to that of other sites. Thus, it is in exemplifying this phenomenon of intersacrality that the trope of sacred itineraries becomes an important narrative strategy for the *sthalapurāṇa*s to push their agenda about the exceptionality of the concerned *sthala*s.

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Rāmeśvaram Sacred Sand and Gaṅgā Holy Water
The Pilgrimage to Prayāga Starts from Rāmeśvaram

India, viewed as a holy land (*puṇyabhūmi*), is home to thousands of ancient temples, great saints, monasteries, cultures and traditions. It boasts an abundance of holy and spiritual places, where ancient practices remain intact even in modern times, each place in possession of its own set of rituals, guidelines, and beliefs that people ardently follow. Devotees all over India routinely undertake religious journeys to these various holy sites, be they temples, rivers, mountains, or monasteries. Among the many different pilgrimages at their disposal (e.g., *cārdhām yātrā*,[1] *pañcakedāra yātrā*,[2] *āṟupaṭai vīṭu*,[3] and so on), one of the most famous pilgrimage tours (*tīrthayātrā*) is the pilgrimage from Rāmeśvaram to the river Gaṅgā (either in Prayāga or in Kāśī), which begins and ends at Rāmeśvaram. All the three places, which are among the oldest pilgrimage centres in India, are located about 2500 km from each other (Kāśī and Prayāga in the north, Rāmeśvaram in the south). In spite of that, since ancient times people have been travelling the long distance to observe this pilgrimage. Present chapter discusses the procedure and structure of a Hindu pilgrimage, *yātrā*, with the Rāmeśvaram-Gaṅgā pilgrimage as the central example.

In the first half of the chapter, I describe the general practice of pilgrimage, its motivations, benefits, and conditions. I then discuss the destinations of pilgrimage as they are described in traditional accounts found in the epics and the *purāṇa*s. Thereafter, I provide a close-up description of my specific case study, the *yātrā* from Rāmeśvaram to the river Gaṅgā and back, detailing its myths, requirements, and customs.

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1   The circuit includes four abodes located at the four cardinal points of the subcontinent: Badarīnāth in the north, Dvārakā in the west, Purī in the east and Rāmeśvaram in the south (modern Rameswaram). The 'small' Himalayan circuit of four abodes, confined to Uttarakhand, consists of Kedārnāth, Badrīnāth, Gaṅgotrī and Yamunotrī.

2   The circuit of five sacred places consists of: Kedārnāth, Tuṅganāth, Rudranāth, Madhyameśvar and Kalpeśvar.

3   Six abodes of Murukaṉ in Tamilnadu: Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Tiruccĕntūr, Paḻaṉi (Tiruvāviṇaṅkuṭi), Cuvāmimalai, Tiruttaṇi, and Paḻamutircolai. A study by Ofer Peres of this *yātrā*'s origins appears in this volume.

Pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*)

In his *History of Dharmaśāstra*, P. V. Kane writes:

> All religions have laid great emphasis on the sacredness of specific local-
> ities and have either enjoined or recommended with great insistence of
> undertaking pilgrimages to them. Among the religious duties of a Muslim,
> a pilgrimage at least once in his life to Mecca and Medina, the birth-
> place of the Prophet Mohammad, is one. The four places of pilgrimage
> for Buddhists have been the birthplace of Buddha (Lumbini), the place
> where he attained enlightenment (Buddha Gaya), the place where he set
> in motion the wheel of dharma (Sarnath) and the place where he passed
> away into the state of *nirvāṇa* (Kuśīnāra). For Christians, Jerusalem has
> been the holiest place. (Kane 1953: 552)

Similarly, for people who follow ancient, customary Hindu practices, holy places
play a very important part. Great rivers, mountains and forests have been wor-
shipped for millennia as sacred and are seen as abodes of God.[4] The concept of
pilgrimage is considered as meritorious and is firmly knitted in the minds of the
people of India; one can undertake the pilgrimage journey according to one's
personal choice, devotion, and interest.

Performing a pilgrimage: motivations, fruits, conditions, and obstacles

Hindu pilgrimage can be undertaken for many reasons. Every individual who is
interested in acquiring merits (*puṇya*) and destroying his de-merits / sins (*pāpa*)
can undertake a pilgrimage for this purpose. Some take up a *yātrā* to appease their
forefathers by performing ancestral rites (*śrāddham*); others undertake pilgrimag-
es as a substitute for *kṛcchra* (austerities),[5] or to fulfil other religious observances,
while yet others undertake the journey for the sake of a divine experience.

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4   An example for the centrality of pilgrimage can be found in the *Brahmapurāṇa*, where
    a full chapter is devoted to explaining the four types of *tīrtha*s: Daiva, Āsura, Ārṣa and
    Mānuṣa (*Brahmapurāṇa, Gautamīmāhātmya*, 1.1–33).
5   *Kṛcchra* is a general word for several penances. It has a number of varieties such as
    atikṛcchra, taptakṛcchra, śītakṛcchra, kṛcchrātikṛcchra, sāntapana, parāka, cāndrāyaṇa
    and so on.

The *Gṛhyasūtra*s and ancient *smṛtikāra*s, such as Manu and Yājñavalkya, do not speak much about *tīrthayātrā*. In the *Mahābhārata*,[6] however, the performance of a pilgrimage is compared to a sacrifice to the gods. Sacrifices, it is said, require numerous implements, collection of materials, the support of priests. Thus, they can be performed only by kings or wealthy people, but not by poor men. At the same time, the reward that a man gets by visiting holy places as the result of the *tīrthayātrā* cannot be secured by performing even such sacrifices as *agniṣṭoma*, *vājapeya*, etc., in which a large fee and expenditure is involved; therefore, visiting holy places is superior to sacrifices.[7]

However, this is not accepted unanimously, as, for example, the *Vīramitrodaya*[8] states that those who have the right or obligation regarding *yajña*s, especially the householders, do not have the obligation of pilgrimage, because *yajña*s yield more fruit than resorting to any *tīrtha*. Thus, according to this text, the status of pilgrimage is that of a non-obligatory rite, which is recommended for those who are less capable of performing other, more expensive types of rites; nevertheless, pilgrimage does yield substantial spiritual results.

The power of pilgrimage is 'measured', so to speak, by its ability to be a substitute for other religious rites. An early expression of the general notion of pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) as a substitute (*pratyāmnāya*) of performing a *kṛcchra* penance is given in Parāśara's code of laws (*Parāśarasmṛti*): "One who undertakes a pilgrimage of two *yojana*s is considered as equivalent of undergoing a *kṛcchra* penance."[9]

Gautamadharmasūtra 26.1–5:   *athātaḥ kṛcchrān vyākhyāsyāmaḥ ||1|| haviṣyān prātar āśān bhuktvā tisro rātrīr nāśniyāt ||2|| athāparaṃ tryahaṃ naktaṃ bhuñjīta ||3|| athāparaṃ tryahaṃ na kaṃcana yāceta ||4|| athāparaṃ tryaham upavaseta ||5||*
"Next we will describe the arduous penances. During three days a man should eat in the morning food fit for sacrifice and not eat anything in the evening; during the next three days he should eat only in the evening; during the following three days he should not request food from anyone; and during the final three days he should fast."

6   *Mahābhārata, Araṇyaparva* 80.34–38: *ṛṣibhiḥ kratavaḥ proktā vedeṣv iha yathākramam | phalaṃ caiva yathātatvaṃ pretya ceha ca sarvaśaḥ || na te śakyā daridreṇa yajñāḥ prāptuṃ mahīpate | bahūpakaraṇā yajñā nānāsaṃbhāravistarāḥ || prāpyante pārthivair ete samṛddhair vā naraiḥ kvacit | nārthany ūnopakaraṇair ekātmabhir asaṃhataiḥ || yo daridrair api vidhiḥ śakyaḥ prāptuṃ nareśvara | tulyo yajñaphalaiḥ puṇyaistaṃ nibodha yudhāṃ vara || ṛṣīṇāṃ paramaṃ guhyam idaṃ bharatasattama | tīrthābhigamanaṃ puṇyaṃ yajñair api viśiṣyate ||*

7   A similar idea is found in the *Brahmapurāṇa*, too, when Nārada asks Brahmā to elaborate on the notion that worshipping in *tīrtha*s is superior to *tapas*, *yajña* and *dāna* (*Brahmapurāṇa, Gautamīmāhātmya* 1.3: *tapaso yajñadānānāṃ tīrthasevanam uttamam | iti śrutaṃ mayā tatto jagadyone jagatprabho*).

8   A vast digest of *dharmaśāstra* composed in the seventeenth century by Mitramiśra, I refer to the edition of 1987, p. 20.

9   *Parāśarasmṛti* 12.61ab: *dviyojane tīrthayātrā kṛcchram ekaṃ prakalpitam |*

Another text, Śrīdhara's twelfth-century *Smṛtyarthasāra* (edition of 1912, p. 153), assigns to each holy site the value of a particular number of penances, in proportion to the distance travelled. For example:

> Bathing at Setu [yields the fruit of] 30 *kṛcchra*s for one who travels 30 *yojana*s; if one worships Rāmeśvara after taking bath [at Setu] will get the equal fruit of 60 *kṛcchra*s for the people of Vindhya; the fruit of [bathing] at Seturāmeśvara and the Jāhnavī is triple; similar [fruit for] Jāhnavī and Kedāra; for the people of the countries of the Southern ocean, bathing at the Jāhnavī is six times; similarly, for the people [residing] at the Gaṅgā region, bathing at Seturāmeśvara [yields the fruit] six times; worshipping Skanda [yield the fruit] equal to 30 *Kṛcchra*s for one who travels 30 *yojana*s; similarly, wherever [a waterbody] is regarded as 'Gaṅgā'; in all cases, there will be a reduction of distance based on the difference in language and [intervened by] mountains etc.[10]

The *Devīpurāṇa*, quoted in the *Smṛtyarthasāra*, says, "The Pāṇḍavas, to obtain the kingdom and to get rid of their sins, performed *tīrthayātrā* along with Kṛṣṇa, Nārada, Mārkaṇḍeya, the seven Ṛṣis, etc., as a substitute for performing twelve *kṛcchra*s for twelve years." [11] Similarly, in the case of the pilgrimage to Rāmeśvaram (that we shall elaborate upon later), one makes, at the nearby beach of Dhanuṣkoṭi, the following *mahāsaṅkalpa* described in a ritual manual called *Bhāratasthalayātrā*:[12]

> I perform the great reparatory rite (*mahā prāyaścitta karma*) in the form of bathing 36 times in the Dhanuṣkoṭi of Rāmacandra which is

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10 *Smṛtyarthasāra* of Śrīdhara, p. 153: *setau triṃśatkṛcchrasamaṃ triṃśadyojanagatasya | snātvā rāmeśvaradarśane ṣaṣṭikṛcchrasamaṃ vindhya deśīyānām | seturāmeśvare jāhnavyaṃ ca triguṇaṃ phalam | jāhnavīkedārayos tathaiva | dakṣiṇābdhideśīyānāṃ jāhnavyāṃ ṣaḍguṇam | gaṅgādeśīyānāṃ tu seturāmeśvare ṣaḍguṇam | skandadarśane triṃśatkṛcchrasamaṃ triṃśadyojanagatasya ca | yatra gaṅgā saṃjñā'sti tatra caivam | sarvatra bhāṣābhedaparvatādinā yātrāhrāso bhavaty eva |*

11 *Devīpurāṇa* as quoted in *Smṛtyarthasāra* (1912, p. 150): *pāṇḍavā rājyalābhāya duritopaśamāya ca | śrīkṛṣṇanāradavyāsaśrīkaṇṭhendrājalomaśaiḥ || mārkaṇḍeyapulastyājasaptarṣipramukhais tathā | dvādaśadvādaśābdāni kṛcchrāṇy ādaya bhaktitaḥ || tīrthairakurvannityādi purāṇe śrūyate katha |*
There are many similar examples. The *Laugākṣi Smṛti* states that if the *prājāpatya kṛcchra* could not be observed to purify a multitude of sins that one had committed, one can undertake bathing in great rivers as a substitution (ibid., p. 257).

12 A *mahāsaṅkalpa* is the description of the entire universe and helps one to identify himself in the universe, which is invoked before commencing any important rituals. For the text of *mahāsaṅkalpa*, see: *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, pp. 76–80.

a confluence of the Sea and Ocean, which yields the fruit of undergoing one year of *kṛcchra* in single bathing, as compensation for those who could not carry out 1080 *prājāpatya kṛcchra*s, which is possible [to carry out] in twelve years, for the removal of all sins such as great sins, etc.[13]

It should be noted, however, that some texts prescribe a maximum number of *yojana*s for a *yātrā*, above which the benefit derived from each *yojana* declines. Even then, some particular trans-India journeys make an exception to this rule, such as the journey from the Gaṅgā to Rāmeśvaram, and from the Vindhya mountain-range (in the middle of the sub-continent) to Kedāra in the extreme north or to Rāmeśvaram in the extreme south (Salomon 1979: 126–27).

Some general aspects and conditions for *tīrthayātrā*

According to the scriptures, one precondition for a successful pilgrimage is the pilgrim's faith. In fact, faith is essential for performing any rite, otherwise, no ritual will yield its fruit. [14] The *Nāradapurāṇa* and the *Vāyupurāṇa* state:

> A steadfast man visiting *tīrtha*s with faith and controlling his senses would be purified even if he has been guilty of sins; [and if so,] what is there to say about him whose actions have been pure? One who has no faith, who has committed many sins, whose mind is not free from doubts [about the rewards of pilgrimages and the rites there], who is an atheist, and who

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13   *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, pp. 62–63: … *mahāpātakādi samastapāpakṣayārthaṃ ratnā-kara mahodadhi saṅgame rāmacandra dhanuṣkoṭau triguṇita dvādaśābdasādhyān aśītyuttara sahasra saṃkhyāka prājāpatya kṛcchrān, svarūpataḥ anuṣṭhātum aśaktyā tatpratyāmnāyatvena ekasnānena abdakṛcchraphalapradāyāṃ śrīrāmacandra dha-nuṣkoṭyāṃ ṣaṭtriṃśatsaṃkhyāka snānarūpa mahāprāyaścitta karma kariṣye.*
  In general, observing 1080 *prājāpatya kṛcchra*s is considered *mahāprāyaścitta*, and takes 36 years to complete. Taking a bath in Dhanuṣkoṭi yields the fruit of observing a year of *prājāpatya kṛcchra*. Therefore, those who cannot perform the *mahāprāyaścitta* as it is can compensate for it by taking 36 bathings in Dhanuṣkoṭi.

14   This is stated, for example, in the *Smṛtisārasamuccaya*, quoted in the *Vīramitrodaya* (1987, p. 14): *mantre tīrthe dvije deve daivajñe bheṣaje gurau | yādṛśī bhāvanā yasya siddhir bhavati tādṛśī || anena śraddhayā phalāvāptir iti spaṣṭīkṛtam |*
  "Just according to one's thought or faith on mantras, pilgrimage, brahmin, God, fortune-teller, physician and teacher, his fruit will be such. With that it is clarified—[one] obtains the fruit by faith."

is examining on bad reasoning—these five do not reap the rewards of pilgrimages.[15]

The *Vāyupurāṇa*[16] prescribes the following general conditions, "Those who wish to perform the *tīrthaśrāddha* should abandon desire, anger, and greed, and should have truthfulness and compassion." The *Mahābhārata* speaks in a similar vein, setting the greatest emphasis on the cultivation of high moral and spiritual qualities, if the complete reward of pilgrimages is to be reaped:

> He whose hands, feet, and mind are well controlled and who possesses knowledge, austerities, and good fame derives the [full] reward of pilgrimages. He who is away from receiving gifts and is content with what little he gets and controlled, and he who is free from hypocrisy (or deceit) obtain the rewards of pilgrimages. He who is free from impurities, self-supported, (not engaged in wicked undertakings for earning), moderate in diet, has subdued his senses, and is [therefore] free from all sins, obtains the rewards of pilgrimages. He who is free from anger, firm in protecting truth, and seeing himself in all beings will obtain the rewards of pilgrimages.[17]

Thus, the general idea seems to be that pilgrimages may help to remove the sins of men who do not possess the above characteristics, while those who possess these acquire a great amount of merit in addition. To this should be added that, according to the *Nāradapurāṇa*, if one undertakes the pilgrimage incidentally, he gets only half of the 'fruit,' and if one goes on pilgrimage for the sake of others, one will

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15 *Vāyupurāṇa* 77.125–27: *tīrthānyanusaran dhīra śraddhadhāno jitendriyaḥ | kṛtapāpo viśuddhyeta kiṃ punaḥ śubhakarmakṛt ||*
Also, *Nāradapurāṇa* II, 62.15c–17b: *tīrthāny anusarandhīraḥ śraddhadhānaḥ samāhitaḥ | akalpako nirārambho laghvāhāro jitendriyaḥ || vimuktaḥ sarvasaṅgais tu sa tīrthaphalabhāg bhavet | tīrthāny anusarandhīraḥ śraddhadhānaḥ samāhitaḥ || kṛtapāpo viśudhyet tu kiṃ punaḥ śuddhakarmakṛt | aśraddhadhānaḥ pāpārto nāstiko'cchinnasaṃśayaḥ || hetuniṣṭhaś ca pañcaite na tīrthaphalabhāginaḥ | nṛṇāṃ pāpakṛtāḥ tīrthe pāpasya śamanaṃ bhavet || aśraddhadhānāḥ pāpmāno nāstikā sthitasaṃśayāḥ | hetudraṣṭā ca pañcaite na tīrthaphalabhāginaḥ ||*
16 *Vāyupurāṇa* 105.40–41: *tīrthaśrāddhaṃ prayacchadbhiḥ puruṣaiḥ phalakāṅkṣibhiḥ | kāmaṃ krodhaṃ tathā lobhaṃ tyaktvā kāryā kriya 'niśam || brahmacaryekabhojī ca bhūśāyī satyavākśuciḥ | sarvabhūtahite raktaḥ sa tīrthaphalamaśnute ||*
17 *Mahābhārata, Āraṇyakaparva, (Tīrthayātrāparvan)* 80.30–33: *yasya hastau ca pādau ca manaś caiva susaṃyatam | vidyā tapaś ca kīrtiś ca sa tīrthaphalam aśnute || pratigrahād upāvṛttaḥ saṃtuṣṭo niyataḥ śuciḥ | ahaṃkāranivṛttaś ca sa tīrthaphalam aśnute || akalkako nirālambho laghvāhāro jitendriyaḥ | vimuktaḥ sarvadoṣair yaḥ sa tīrthaphalam aśnute || akrodhanaś ca rājendra satyaśīlo dṛḍhavrataḥ | ātmopamaś ca bhūteṣu sa tīrthaphalam aśnute ||*

get the fruit of one-sixteenth of a pilgrimage.[18] The *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha*,[19] while explaining the word '*prasaṅgena*' as '*vāṇijyarājasevādiprasaṅgena*', i.e., as part of his trade or official duties, states that bathing at a pilgrimage site while on a work assignment and not as a part of a pilgrimage *per se* accrues only a marginal merit.

There are several preconditions for pilgrimage. One major condition is the presence of the pilgrim's wife. This is not unique to pilgrimage, as any religious activity, including pilgrimage, is to be performed along with one's wife. In fact, according to the *Padmapurāṇa*, if a man performs any dhārmic activity without his wife, the same will yield no fruit.[20] An example for this is found in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, where, while preparing for the *aśvamedha* sacrifice, Rāma instructs Bharata to make a golden statue of Sītā as a substitute for her person, since she was not with him at that time.[21] Specifically with regard to pilgrimage, the *Brahma-purāṇa,* as quoted in the *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha,*[22] elaborates: "[by] leaving one's wife and undertaking a pilgrimage, all one's virtuous results are in vain."

Another general aspect of pilgrimage is related to one's means of transportation. Although nowadays long-distance pilgrimage journeys are most often done by railway, bus, or car, traditionally, pilgrimage was to be done only on foot. For example, the *Nāradapurāṇa* states that if one goes on a pilgrimage using vehicles out of feelings of supremacy, desire, or ignorance, his pilgrimage is fruitless, and therefore he has to abandon the journey.[23] The *Vīramitrodaya* further states—if one undertakes a pilgrimage on a cow as a vehicle, he will be considered a murderer of a cow.[24] Also, there is no fruit from the [pilgrimage] if going on a horse,

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18 *Nāradapurāṇa* II, 63.37: *ardhaṃ tīrthaphalaṃ tasya yaḥ prasaṅgena gacchati | ṣoḍaśāṃśantu labhate yaḥ parārthena gacchati ||*

19 *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha*, p. 2: *tīrthaṃ prāpya prasaṅgena snānaṃ tīrthe samācaret | snānajaṃ phalam āpnoti tīrthayātrākṛtaṃ na tu ||*
"If someone goes to a pilgrimage place incidentally and bathes, he will get the fruit of taking bath in the sacred bathing not the fruit of pilgrimage."

20 *Padmapurāṇa*, *Bhūmikhaṇḍa*, 59.8: *pūtāṃ puṇyatamāṃ svīyāṃ bhāryāṃ tyaktvā prayāti yaḥ | tasya puṇyaphalaṃ sarvaṃ vṛthā bhavati nānyathā ||* [...] *bhāryāṃ vinā ca yo dharmaḥ sa eva viphalo bhavet |*

21 Rāma conducted the *aśvamedha* with the statue as a substitute of Sītā, saying (*Rāmāyaṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa*, 91.25): "the golden image of my wife [Sītā] to be initiated at the sacrifice, let illustrious Bharata go before." *kāñcanīṃ mama patnīṃ ca dīkṣārhāṃ yajñakarmaṇi | agrato bharataḥ kṛtvā gacchatv agre mahāyaśāḥ ||*

22 *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha*, p. 1: *pūtāṃ puṇyatamāṃ bhāryāṃ yo vā tyaktvā prayāti hi | tasya puṇyaphalaṃ sarvaṃ vṛthā bhavati nānyathā ||*

23 *Nāradapurāṇa* II, 62.33–34: *aiśvaryāl lobhamohād vā gacched yānena yo naraḥ | niṣphalaṃ tasya tattīrthaṃ tasmād yānaṃ vivarjayet || goyāne govadhaḥ prokto hayayāne tu niṣphalam | narayāne tadarddhaṃ syat padbhyāṃ tac ca caturguṇam ||*

24 *Vīramitrodaya*, p. 34: *goyāne govadhaḥ prokto hayayāne tu niṣphalam | narayāne tadardhaṃ syāt padbhyāṃ tac ca caturguṇam ||*

and if someone uses a human being as a vehicle, he will get half the fruit; if one goes on foot, he will obtain four times of the fruit [of pilgrimage]. But, the *Kūrmapurāṇa* quoted in the *Vīramitrodaya* says that if someone is not able to go on pilgrimage due to health, he is allowed to go in a vehicle drawn by humans, a mule, chariot attached with horses, and that will not be considered as a fault.[25]

When going on pilgrimage, there is the question regarding the identity of the priests—should one bring one's own priests, who, naturally, belong to the same tradition, or should one use local priests? The latter option is the one endorsed by several digests, such as the *Kṛtyakalpataru*[26] that says, quoting from *Devīpurāṇa* on *tīrtha*, that one should not enter upon an examination of the worth of *brāhmaṇa*s at holy places. At the same time, *brāhmaṇa*s who are known for certain to possess defects deserving of condemnation should be avoided. Another example is found in the *Varāhapurāṇa*, which, with regard to the Mathurā pilgrimage, says that at Mathurā a pilgrim should prefer to honour a *brāhmaṇa* born and brought up in Mathurā over a *brāhmaṇa* who has studied all the four Vedas (but is a stranger to Mathurā). Those who reside in Mathurā, indeed, are in the form of Viṣṇu, the wise men see him as [Viṣṇu] and the ignorant see him as not.[27]

Places of pilgrimage

How does a place become a pilgrimage destination? The *Mahābhārata* explains why some parts of the earth, or some waterbodies, are considered holy: "Just as some parts of the body (right hand or ear) are held to be purer [than other body parts], similarly, some localities on earth are held to be holy, and some places are graced by *sādhu*s with their brilliance, therefore, those parts of the land and the water bodies are sacred."[28] Thus, *tīrtha*s are held to be holy on three grounds: on account of some wonderful natural characteristic of the locality, on account of the peculiar nature of some watery place, or because some gods or sages resorted to them for bathing, austerities, and so on. A similar statement is

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25 *Vīramitrodaya*, p. 34: *narayānaṃ cāśvatarī hayādisahito rathaḥ | tīrthayātrāsvaśaktānāṃ yānaṃ doṣakaraṃ na hi ||*
26 *Kṛtyakalpataru*, p. 10: *tīrtheṣu brāhmaṇaṃ naiva parīkṣyeta kathañcana |*
27 *Varāhapurāṇa* 165.57–58: *caturvedaṃ parityajya māthuraṃ pūjayet sadā | māthurāyāṃ ye vasanti viṣṇurūpā hi te narāḥ || jñāinas tān hi paśyanti ajñā paśyanti tān na hi |*
28 *Mahābhārata, Anuśāsanaparva* 108.16–18: *śarīrasya yathoddeśa śucayaḥ parikīrtitā | tathā pṛthivyā bhāgāś ca puṇyāni salilāni ca || parigrahāc ca sādhūnāṃ pṛthivyāś caiva tejasā | atīva puṇyabhāgās te salilasya ca tejasā ||*

found in the *Nāradapurāṇa*, which explains the greatness of pilgrimage in the following passages:

> Please hear the reason for the holiness of *tīrtha*s on earth. Just as some spots in the body are remembered as important/superior, *tīrtha*s are declared as holy because of the supernatural power, glory of the earth or water, and also because of the grace of seers.[29]

As the name *tīrtha* ("crossing") may suggest, many of the pilgrimage sites are connected to waterbodies. Thus, we find the following statement in the *Śaṅkhasmṛti.* A Hindu scripture outlines the duties and rituals for different stages of life: "All the springs and mountains are sacred, all rivers are sacred especially the Jāhnavī (i.e., Gaṅgā)."[30]

The names of many pilgrimage sites are listed in the epics and the Purāṇas. These lists vary from text to text. In the *Mahābhārata*'s *Araṇyaparva*, for example, there is a very long list of *tīrtha*s, running for about 500 verses, spread over four chapters (80–83), in which are given the names of the *tīrtha*s, their speciality, the fruit of taking a bath there, specific people who benefited by taking a bath and worshipping in those places, the bathing procedure, and so on. The list ends with the advice of sage Pulastya to Kauravya [viz. Bhīṣma]: "Therefore, O Kauravya (Yudhiṣṭhira), you also should undertake the pilgrimage […] to please your ancestors, the gods and the *ṛṣi*s."[31]

A later example can be found in Śrīdhara's twelfth-century *Smṛtyarthasāra*, which lists thirty-eight places as sacred and as those that yield liberation in an equal manner to Gayā:

> By worshipping the following liberation-yielding places, one will obtain the [fruit of] taking bath in Gayā, they are: Gayā, Mahānadī, Seturāmeś-vara, Someśvara, Bhīmeśvara, Śrīraṅga, Puruṣottama [in] Padmanābha,

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29 *Nāradapurāṇa*, *Uttarakhaṇḍa* 62.46–47: *bhaumānām atha tīrthānāṃ puṇyatve kāraṇaṃ śṛṇu | yathā śarīrasyoddeśāḥ kecin mukhyatamāḥ smṛtāḥ || prabhāvād adbhutād bhūmeḥ salilasya ca tejasaḥ | parigrahān munīnāṃ ca tīrthānāṃ puṇyatā smṛtā ||*

30 *Śaṅkhasmṛti* quoted in *Vīramitrodaya* VII (1987, p. 14): *sarve prasravaṇāḥ puṇyāḥ sarve puṇyāḥ śiloccayāḥ | nadyaḥ puṇyāḥ sadā sarvā jāhnavī tu viśeṣataḥ ||*

31 *Mahābhārata*, *Araṇyaparva* 83.90–94: *evaṃ tvam api kauravya vidhinānena suvrata | vraja tīrthāni niyataḥ puṇyaṃ puṇyena vardhate || bhāvitaiḥ kāraṇaiḥ pūrvam āstikyāc chrutidarśanāt | prāpyante tāni tīrthāni sadbhiḥ śiṣṭānudarśibhiḥ || nāvrato nākṛtātmā ca nāśucir na ca taskaraḥ | snāti tīrtheṣu kauravya na ca vakramatirnaraḥ || tvayā tu samyagvṛttena nityaṃ dharmārthadarśinā | pitarastāritāstāta sarve ca prapitāmahāḥ || pitāmahapurogāś ca devāḥ sarṣigaṇā nṛpa | tava dharmeṇa dharmajña nityam evābhtoṣitāḥ ||*

> Naimiśa, Badaryāśrama, Puṇyāraṇya, Dharmāraṇya, Kurukṣetra, Śrīśaila, Mahālaya, Kedāra, Puṣkara, Rudrakoṭi, Narmadā, Āmrātakeśvara, Kubjāmra, Kokamukha, Prabhāsa, Vijayeśa, Purīndra, Pañcanada, Gokarṇa, Śaṅkukarṇa, Bhadrakarṇa, Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Dvāravatī, Māyā, Avantī, Gayā, Kāñcī, Śālagrāma, Śambhalagrāma, Kambalagrāma, and others. Vārāṇasī is the superior among them.[32]

Rāmeśvaram sacred sand and Gaṅgā holy water

1) The story

The Rāmeśvaram-Gaṅgā pilgrimage includes a visit to either Prayāga or Vārāṇasī (and sometimes to Gayā as well), after which one is to return to Rāmeśvaram again. In the current chapter, Prayāga is considered the main destination, given the larger number of sources that suggest it as the place for the specific practices of this pilgrimage: in addition to the regular ritual procedures in each of the sites, this pilgrimage also includes the carrying of sand from Rāmeśvaram to the Gaṅgā and taking back Gaṅgā water to Rāmeśvaram. This is explained by an oral tradition, which is claimed to belong to the ninth *skanda* ("canto") of the *Srīmadbhāgvatapurāṇa*, as part of the story of the origin of Gaṅgā.[33]

According to the legend, the great king Sagara of Ikṣvāku dynasty was ruling Ayodhyā. He had two wives, namely Keśinī and Sumatī. Keśinī had a son called Asamanjasa, while Sumatī was blessed with sixty thousand sons. Once, Sagara performed the *aśvamedha* sacrifice and, as a part of the ritual, the sacrificial horse was to be released to wander in the nearby kingdoms. The Kings of those kingdoms had to either surrender and offer gifts or tie the wandering horse and fight the King. The sacrificial horse, after passing through many kingdoms,

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32 *Smṛtyarthasāra* (1912, p. 152): *gayāṃ mahānadīṃ seturāmeśvaraṃ someśvaraṃ bhīmeśvaraṃ śrīraṅgaṃ padmanābhaṃ puruṣottamaṃ naimiśaṃ badaryāśramaṃ puṇyāraṇyaṃ dharmāraṇyaṃ kurukṣetraṃ śrīśailaṃ mahālayaṃ kedāraṃ puṣkaraṃ rudrakoṭiṃ narmadām āmrātekeśvaraṃ kubjāmraṃ kokamukhaṃ prabhāsaṃ vijayeśaṃ purīndraṃ pañcanadaṃ gokarṇaṃ śaṅkukarṇaṃ bhadrakarṇaṃ ayodhyāṃ mathurāṃ dvāravatīṃ māyāmavantīṃ gayāṃ kāñcīṃ śālagrāmaṃ śambhalagrāmaṃ kambala-grāmamevamādi muktikṣetrāṇi saṃsevya labhate gayāsnānam | sarveṣāṃ vārāṇasī viśiṣṭaiva |*

33 While this section indeed tells a very similar story, the crucial difference is that, in the current text, Kapila *muni*'s *āśrama* is in the "north-east" and not in Rāmeśvaram (*Śrimadbhāgavatapurāṇa* 9.8.9).

eventually arrived at the *āśrama* (hermitage) of Kapila Muni ("sage Kapila") which is believed to be in Rāmeśvaram.

Kapila Muni was seated in a state of silence, when the sixty thousand sons of Sagara came looking for the horse. Assuming that Kapila Muni, who was sitting with his eyes closed, have captured the horse, they shouted at him, disturbing his transcendental state. Enraged at being disturbed, the sage opened his eyes, resulting in sixty thousand sons of Sagara burning down to ashes. Sagara, who was worried for his sons, sent his grandson, Aṃśumantha (son of Asamanjasa), to find the whereabouts of his sixty thousand sons and the sacrificial horse. Aṃśumantha reached the Kapila's *āśrama* and learned about the incident. Sage Kapila advised him that only the celestial river Gaṅgā can wash off the sins of his uncles. So Gaṅgā had to flow over the heap of ash. Then Sagara, his son Asamanjasa, Aṃśumantha, and his son Dilīpa, made many attempts to bring the celestial Gaṅgā down, but failed. Finally, King Bhagīratha, the son of Dilīpa, took up the task, performed a severe penance, and was successful. He routed the Gaṅgā to the ocean (*sāgara*), which is now called the Bay of Bengal. It is further said that Gaṅgā, after it enters the ocean, used to touch the shore in Rāmeśvaram near *agnitīrtha*, where the ashes of the ancestors of Bhagīratha were present. However, in Treta Yuga, when Rāma and his army of monkeys (*vānarasenā*) built the bridge to Laṅkā, Gaṅgā could no longer reach the sands of Rāmeśvaram. Hence it was made a custom for the pilgrims to carry some sand from *agnitīrtha*, which holds the ashes of Sagara's sixty thousand sons, to Kāśī, and immerse it in Gaṅgā's waters.

The reason for carrying back some Gaṅgā water and using them to anoint Śrī Rāmanāthasvāmi, the deity of Rāmeśvaram temple, is further explained. As time went by, not only the waters of Gaṅgā could not reach Rāmeśvaram, but also many other rivers appeared, which were draining out into the Bay of Bengal, such as the Godāvarī, Kṛṣṇā, and Kāverī. Thus, it was no longer a "Gaṅgā ocean" (Gaṅgā Sāgara); it became the confluence of many rivers, apart from Gaṅgā. Therefore, pilgrims bring real Gaṅgā water, unmixed with other rivers' water, in order to immerse the ashes of Sagara's sons in Kapila's *āśrama* at Rāmeśvaram.

Thus, the mythological explanation of the complementary acts of immersing southern sand in northern waters and pouring back northern waters on southern sands (by anointing the image of God in Rāmeśvaram), is a continuation of an ancient ancestral rite, performed to liberate the sons of the ancient King Sagara.

2) Rāmeśvarayātrā

There are certain preparatory rituals and procedures to be performed prior to undertaking any pilgrimage, one of the most common being *śraddha*—an offering

to one's ancestors (made on any auspicious occasion). The *Brahmapurāṇa*, for example, says:

> Before commencing the pilgrimage and after returning from it, one should perform *vṛddhi-śrāddha* with a great quantity of ghee.[34]

The *Vāyupurāṇa* says, in the context of pilgrimage to Gayā:

> Those who have undertaken the pilgrimage to Gayā should perform *śrāddha* accordingly, dressed in ragged garments, circumambulating the village. They should proceed to the next village and consume the remainder of the *śrāddha*, then every day they should continue the journey without receiving any gifts. They will obtain the fruit of performing the horse sacrifice in each step he proceeds to *tīrthayātrā*.[35]

With regard to the visit to Rāmeśvaram ("*setu*"), the *Skandapurāṇa* suggests another variation, and adds fasting and worship of Gaṇapati:

> He who wishes to undertake a pilgrimage should fast on the previous day, at home, and worship Lord Gaṇeśa, the ancestors, brahmins, and the [other] relatives, according to his capacity. Having completed the fasting, he should start [the journey] happily. After returning from the pilgrimage, he should perform the *śrāddha* to his ancestors and thus he will obtain the fruit.[36]

The procedure of pilgrimage to Setu (viz. Rāmeśvaram) is prescribed in the chapter called "Setuyātrākrama" in the *Skandapurāṇa*:

> On the next day, after the personal purification, one should make a *saṅkalpa*: "I will undertake a pilgrimage to Setu" (*setuyātrāṃ kariṣye 'haṃ*) and then, while reciting *aṣṭākṣara/pañcākṣara* mantras, with minimal consumption of food and controlled senses, he should depart to Setu (Rāmeśvaram). On his way, the pilgrim should read the glory of Setu

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34 *Brahmapurāṇa*, as quoted in the *Vīramitrodaya* VII (p. 26): *tīrthayātrāsamārambhe tīrthāt pratyāgame 'pi ca | vṛddhiśrāddhaṃ prakurvīta bahusarpiḥ samanvitam |*
35 As quoted in the *Vīramitrodaya* VII (p. 29).
36 *Skandapurāṇa* quoted in *Tristhalīsetu* (1915, p. 4): *tīrthayātrāṃ cikīrṣuḥ prāgvidhāyopoṣaṇaṃ gṛhe | gaṇeśaṃ ca pitṝn viprān bandhūñ chaktyā prapūjya ca || kṛtapāraṇako hṛṣṭo gacchen niyamadhṛk punaḥ | āgatyābhyarcya ca pitṝn yathoktaphalabhāg bhavet ||*

(*setumāhātmyam*) or *Rāmāyaṇa* or Purāṇas, and refrain from unnecessary talk. In addition, he should give alms (*dāna*) to mendicants.[37]

As stated in the *Bhāratasthalayātrā* (pp. 47ff.), in Rāmeśvaram, the pilgrim should first bathe in the sea, at the place where the bridge (*setu*) was built to Laṅkā. After bathing, he should draw a bow on the sea sand, place a fruit on it and make a *tarpaṇa*[38] with sesame seeds to gods, *ṛṣi*s, ancestors. He should offer the sand (on which the *tarpaṇa* has been performed) in the water which was collected from the shore, which is called *pāṣāṇadāna* there. Having done that, he has to offer water from his hairlocks (*śikhodakaṃ*) and his garments (*vāsodakaṃ*), as a mark of the completion of ceremonial bathing. He then recites Gāyatrī-mantra and offer gifts to a Brahmin. Similarly, he has to make a *saṅkalpa*, *snāna*, *tarpaṇa* and *dāna* in each of the baths in the sacred tanks in the following stage of the visit (there are different fruits of taking a bath in each of the tanks). Then, he should make a *mahāsaṅkalpa* and, along with his wife, take a bath, for the uninterrupted completion of the pilgrimage.

The next part consists of taking baths and performing rituals in the various *tīrtha*s in and around Rāmeśvaram. The pilgrim should first go, along with his wife, to Ādisetu,[39] and worship lord Gaṇeśa. He should then make a *saṅkalpa* and pray to all gods and the gods of the directions, to allow them to take a bath in all of Rāmeśvaram's *tīrtha*s, starting from Cakratīrtha up to Dhanuṣkoṭitīrtha. There are sixty-four tanks in total, out of which twenty-two (see Fig. 1) are present inside the temple (some people prefer a dip in all the sixty-four tanks and some only in the temple's twenty-two tanks).[40]

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37 *Skandapurāṇa*, *Setuyātrākramavidhi* 51.5–10: *setuyātrāṃ kariṣye'ham iti saṅkalpya bhaktitaḥ | svagṛhāt pravrajen maunī japann aṣṭākṣaraṃ manum || pañcākṣaraṃ nāmamantraṃ japen niyatamānasaḥ | ekavāraṃ haviṣyāśī jitakrodho jitendriyaḥ || pādukāchatrarahitastāmbūlaparivarjitaḥ | tailābhyaṅgavihīnaś ca strīsaṅgādi vivarjitaḥ || madhye mārgaṃ paṭhan nityaṃ setumāhātmyam ādarāt | paṭhan rāmāyaṇaṃ vāpi purāṇāntaram eva vā || vyarthavākyāni santyajya setuṃ gacched viśuddhaye |*

38 *Tarpaṇa* (literally "satisfying") is a libation of water to the gods and deceased ancestors.

39 Ādisetu is a strip of land about one km wide and about fifteen km long on the eastern end that resembles an arrow poised for release. On one side of it is the Indian Ocean and on the other—the Bay of Bengal.

40 Currently there are twenty-two sacred wells inside the Rāmanāthasvāmi temple in Rāmeśvaram; they are: Śiva-tīrtha, Mahālakṣmī-tīrtha, Gāyatrī-tīrtha, Śaṅku-tīrtha, Sarasvatī-tīrtha, Sethumādhava-tīrtha, Kavaca-tīrtha, Gandhamādana-tīrtha, Gavaya-tīrtha, Nala-tīrtha, Nīla-tīrtha, Cakra-tīrtha, Brahmahattivimocana-tīrtha, Sāvitrī-tīrtha, Sūriya-tīrtha, Candra-tīrtha, Gaṅgā-tīrtha, Yamuna-tīrtha, Gayā-tīrtha, Sadyamṛta-tīrtha, Sarva-tīrtha and Koṭi-tīrtha. The *Skandapurāṇa* (*Brahmakhaṇḍa*, *Setumāhātmya* 2. 104–14) lists the following twenty-four sacred ponds in Rāmeśvaram: *caturviṃśatitīrthāni santi setau pradhānataḥ | prathamañ cakratīrthaṃ syād vetālavaradantataḥ || tataḥ pāpavināśākhyaṃ tīrthaṃ lokeṣu viśrutam | tataḥ sītāsaraḥ*

At the end, one should go to Dhanuṣkoṭi and make a *mahāsaṅkalpa*:

> For the expiation of all sins such as great sins (*mahāpātaka*), I shall perform the great atonement in the form of thirty-six baths in Dhanuṣkoṭi of Sri Rāmacandra, which bestows the fruits of performing 1080 *prājāpatya kṛcchra* undertaken in three times twelve (i.e., thirty-six) years of performance, of those who cannot undertake [that many *kṛcchra*] as that much, as a substitute here [in Dhanuṣkoṭi] by one bathing will yield the fruit of undertaking *kṛcchra* for one year, in that manner [I will perform] thirty-six bathings.[41]

In all the above-mentioned *tīrtha*s, one should perform *tīrtha-śrāddha* individually; if not possible, one can perform a single *śrāddha* by offering (*piṇḍa*s) with cooked rice.

In addition to these, one should, of course, worship the main deity of the temple, that is, Śiva as Rāmanāthasvāmi.

3) Rāmeśvaram sacred sand and Gaṅgā holy water

From the sea near Dhanuṣkoṭi/Rameśvaram, one should collect the sand (see Fig. 2) and divide it into three lumps. One should invoke the first one as *setu-mādhava*, the second as *bindu-mādhava*, and the third as *veṇī-mādhava*, worship them in the place of Setumādhava shrine (i.e., in Rāmeśvaram) and then disperse the first one (viz. *setu-mādhava*) in the Rāmeśvaram sea. The second one, *bindu-mādhava*, is given as a gift (*dāna*), along with money, to a *brāhmaṇa*.[42] The third sand lump,

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puṇyaṃ tato maṅgalatīrthakam || *tatas sakalapāpaghnī nāmnācā'mṛtavāpikā* | *brahmakuṇḍaṃ tatas tīrthaṃ tataḥ kuṇḍaṃ hanūmataḥ* || *āgastyaṃ hi tatas tīrthaṃ rāmatīrthamataḥ param* | *tato lakṣmaṇatīrthaḥ syāj jaṭātīrtham ataḥ param* || *tato lakṣmyāḥ paran tīrtham agnitīrtham ataḥ param* | *cakratīrthan tataḥ puṇyaṃ śivatīrthamataḥ param* || *tataś śaṅkhābhidhan tīrthaṃ tato yamunatīrthakam* | *gaṅgātīrthantataḥ paścādgayātīrthamanantaram* || *tataḥ syāt koṭitīrthākhyaṃ sādhyānām amṛtaṃ tataḥ* | *manasākhyan tatas tīrthaṃ dhanuṣkoṭitataḥ param* || *pradhānatīrthāny etāni mahāpāpaharāṇi ca* | *kathitāni dvijaśreṣṭhās setumadhyagatāni vai* ||

41 *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, p. 62–63: [...] *mahāpātakādisamastapāpakṣayārthaṃ ratnākaramahodadhisaṅgame rāmacandradhanuṣkoṭau triguṇita dvādaśābdasādhyān aśītyuttarasahasrasaṃkhyāka prājāpatyakṛcchrān svarūpataḥ anuṣṭhātum aśaktyā tatpratyāmnāyatvena ekasnānena abdakṛcchraphalapradāyāṃ śrīrāmacandradhanuṣkoṭyāṃ ṣaṭtriṃśatsaṃkhyāka snānarūpamahāprāyaścittakarma kariṣye* |

42 This is what is currently being practised. However, the *Skandapurāṇa* dealing with this issue can be understood to mean that one sand lump is to be dispersed (as *Veṇīmādhava*) in Prayāga and another in *Bindumādhava* in Vārāṇasī.

Fig. 1   *Sarvatīrtha* one of the twenty-two *tīrtha*s inside the Rāmanāthas-vāmi temple. Photo by R. Sathyanarayanan.

Fig. 2   Pilgrims are doing *saṅkalpa* at Rāmeśvaram to undertake a pilgrimage to Prayāga after collecting sand (invoking as three Mādhavas: Setumādhava, Bindumādhava and Veṇīmādhava) from Dhanuṣkoṭi. Photo by R. Sathyanarayanan.

called *venī-mādhava*, is to be taken to Prayāga and dispersed in the water of the Gaṅgā there. Early evidence of this practice of carrying sand from Rameśvaram to the Gaṅgā and bringing the holy water Gaṅgā to Rāmeśvaram appears in the *Skandapurāṇa*:

> If a man takes sand from Setu (viz. Rāmeśvaram) and disperses it in the Gaṅgā, having divided it, in Mādhavapura—he will reside [after his death] in Mādhava's city, [Vaikuṇṭha]. [If] a learned person, who wishes to go to the Gaṅgā, sets off toward the Gaṅgā after having made a *saṅkalpa* at Setumādhava shrine,[43] that pilgrimage will be fruitful. Also, [if] one brings [back] Gaṅgā water, anoints Rāmeśa [with it], and pours it at Setu, he will, by all means, obtain the *brahman*.[44]

This passage from the *Setumāhātmya* may be the source for the present-day practice of the Rāmeśvaram-Gaṅgā *yātrā*.

4) Prayāgayātrā

Having completed the pilgrimage to Rāmeśvaram, the next stop in the Rāmeś-varam-Gaṅgā *yātrā* is the conjunction of the Gaṅgā and Yamunā in Prayāga (the present day Prayagraj/Allahabad). The importance and greatness of Prayāga has been stated already in the supplementary (*pariśiṣṭa*) verses to the *Ṛgveda*:

> Those who take a bath in the confluence where the white and black rivers (viz. Gaṅgā and Yamunā) meet—go to the heavens. The brave men who abandon their bodies [there]—will enjoy immortality.[45]

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43 This beautiful Setumādhava temple is located inside the complex of the Rāmanāthas-vāmi temple in Rāmeśvaram.

44 *Skandapurāṇam, Setumāhātmya*, 50.112–15: *gṛhītvā saikataṃ setoḥ gaṅgāyāṃ nikṣiped yadi | vibhajya mādhavapure vaikuṇṭhe sa vasen naraḥ || gaṅgā jigamiṣur vipraḥ setumādhavasannidhau | saṅkalpya gaṅgāṃ nirgacchet sā yātrā saphalā bhavet || ānīya gaṅgāsalilaṃ rāmeśam abhiṣicya ca | setau nikṣipya tadbhāraṃ brahma prāpnoty asaṃśayaḥ ||*

45 *Ṛgveda-pariśiṣṭha* 22.1 (p. 779 in Satwelkar's 1957 edition of the RV): *sitāsite sarite yatra saṃgathe tatrāplutāso divam utpatanti | ye vai tanvaṃ vi sṛjanti dhīrā ste janāso amṛtatvaṃ bhajante ||*
Here the word *dhīrāḥ* may also indicate the forceful abandoning of their life (sui-cide), but still, it is not a fault (although suicide is considered a crime according the *Dharmaśāstra*). Perhaps we can also understand this passage as saying—"If one stays here until one dies."

On the day before this pilgrimage, one should shave, fast, and perform the ancestral *śrāddha* with ghee. The pilgrim should make the following *saṅkalpa*:

> I along with my wife undertake the pilgrimage to Prayāga (Prayāgayātrā) for the removal of physical, verbal, and mental sins committed in this birth and in any other births, and also for obtaining the eternal worlds of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and others, by lifting my ancestors from different hells.[46]

The sequence of procedure to be followed in Prayāga is given thus: "First one has to plunge into the water [in the holy river], then shave one's hair and then he has to take a bath. Afterwards, he should perform the *śrāddha*."[47]

The practice of shaving one's hair is not uncommon in the context of pilgrimage. In fact, according to *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha*, "shaving and fasting in all pilgrimage places is common except Kurukṣetra, the wide Virajā, and Gayā."[48] At the same time, shaving one's hair is regarded sinful in non-ritual contexts. Thus, the *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha* also states that "he who shaves the hair without [the context of] a pilgrimage, or a *yajña*, or the death of his parents—he is [like] a son who committed patricide."[49] The reason for shaving one's hair is clearly stated in the *Bhāratasthalayātrā*: "Any sins similar to that of great sins (*brahmahatyā*...) are resting in the hair, therefore one has to shave the hair."[50]

Going back to the Prayāga pilgrimage—after shaving the head, one begins the rituals with the following *saṅkalpa*: "For the removal of all my sins committed physically, verbally, and mentally, in this birth or in any other births, for lifting my ancestors from the different hells, and for obtaining the eternal worlds of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and others—I undertake the *prayāga yātrā*."[51]

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46 *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, p. 2.: [...] *mama sapatnīkasya iha janmani janmāntare ca kāyika vācika mānasika sakalapāpakṣayārthaṃ—asmatpitṛṇāṃ nānānirayoddhāraṇadvārā śāśvata brahmaviṣṇvādilokaprāptyarthaṃ ca prayāgayātrāṃ kariṣye.*

47 *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, p. 6 fn.1: *pūrvaṃ vagāhanaṃ tīrthe muṇḍanaṃ tadanantaram. tataḥ snānādikaṃ kuryāt paścāc chrāddhaṃ samācaret ||*

48 *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha* (1936, p. 9): *muṇḍanaṃ copavāsaś ca sarvatīrtheṣvayaṃ vidhiḥ | varjayitvā kurukṣetraṃ viśālaṃ virajāṃ gayām ||*

49 *Tristhalīsetusārasaṅgraha* (1936, p. 10): *vinā tīrthaṃ vinā yajñaṃ mātāpitror mṛtiṃ vinā | yo vāpayati lomāni sa putraḥ pitṛghātakaḥ ||*

50 *Bhāratasthalayātrā* (1971, p. 2): *yāni kāni ca pāpāni brahmahatyā samāni ca | keśānāśritya tiṣṭhanti tasmāt keśān vapāmy aham ||*

51 *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, p. 2: [...] *mama iha janmani janmāntare ca kāyikavācikamānasikasakalapāpakṣayārthaṃ— asmatpitṛṇāṃ nānānirayoddhāradvārā śāśvata brahmaloka prāptyarthaṃ ca prayāgayātrāṃ kariṣye.*

In Prayāga, one offers one's hair at the confluence of the three (Gaṅgā, Yamunā, and Sarasvatī [52]) rivers, which is called Veṇīdāna. Two fingers' breadth of shaved hair is put on a plate, along with *kuṅkuma* (turmeric) powder and other auspicious items (*maṅgaladravya*), alongside additional precious metals, gems, and money. All these are then offered into the confluence of three rivers, while uttering: "Let all my sins be destroyed by offering hair in the confluence, let the fortune grow even in my other births." [53] This offering of hair (*veṇīdāna*) is performed during the first pilgrimage only, and not every time. After this offering, the pilgrim disperses the *veṇīmādhava*, which has been carried from Rāmeśvaram, in the confluence at Prayāga, and some people collect the holy water from here to go again to Rāmeśvaram to perform *abhiṣeka* of lord Śiva there.

After dispersing the *veṇīmādhava* sand, one should make a *mahāsaṅkalpa* and take a bath at the confluence. Then, he should make another *saṅkalpa* for the *tīrtha-śrāddha* (as was previously explained regarding the Rāmeśvaram *yātrā*). Before commencing the rituals of *tīrtha-śrāddha*, he should make reverential homage as a supplement to the *śrāddham* (*śrāddhāṅga-tarpaṇam*). In this supplementary *śrāddhāṅgatarpaṇam*, he first performs homage to gods (*deva-tarpaṇa*), then to the sages (*ṛṣi-tarpaṇa*), and then a *tarpaṇa* for his ancestors (*pitṛ-tarpaṇa*). [54] After performing the homage to ancestors, one should also pay homage to all the living beings, starting from the celestial to the creatures in the water, earth and air, uttering:

> Let all these beings be satisfied with the water given by me. Also, the libation of water is given to refresh those who are in all hells, who are experiencing punishment. Those relatives and non-relatives, or relatives in other births, let them be satisfied with the water. Wherever the afflicted souls suffer from hunger and thirst, let this water with sesame seeds bring happiness to them. [55]

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52 Sarasvatī is a mythological river that, according to tradition, intermingles with the Gaṅgā and Yamunā in Prayāga.

53 *Bhāratasthalayātrā*, p. 2–3: *veṇyāṃ veṇīpradānena sarvaṃ pāpaṃ praṇaśyatu | janmāntareṣv api sadā saubhāgyaṃ mama vardhatām ‖*

54 The *tarpaṇa* to the ancestors has a specific order given, for example, in the *Tristhalī-setusārasaṅgraha* (1936, p. 13): "First the father, then mother, a fellow-wife of father, maternal grandparents along with their wives, wife, sons, brothers, father's brother, maternal uncles along with their wives, daughters, sisters, daughter's son, sister's son, father's sister, mother's sister, mother-in-law, father-in-law and teacher, these are the [people] satisfying in the pilgrimage centres and *mahālaya* days."*ādau pitā tato mātā sāpatnajananī tathā | mātāmahāḥ sapatnīkā ātmapatnī tataḥ param ‖ sutabhrātṛpitṛvyaś ca mātulāś ca sapatnikāḥ | duhitā ca svasā proktā dauhitro bhāgineyakaḥ ‖ pitṛṣvasā mātṛṣvasā śvaśrūś ca śvaśuro guruḥ | ete syuḥ pitaras tīrthe tarpaṇe ca mahālaye ‖*

55 *Bhāratasthalayātrā* (edition of 1971, p. 5): *devāsurāstathānāgāḥ yakṣagandharvarākṣasāḥ | piśācaguhyakās siddhāḥ kūśmāṇḍās taravaḥ ‖ jalecarā bhūmicarāḥ*

Fig. 3   Offering *piṇḍa*s (cooked rice balls) mixed with the sesame seeds to one's deceased ancestors. Photo by R. Sathyanarayanan.

At this point, one has to perform the ancestral rituals (*tīrthaśrāddha*) with *piṇḍa*s (cooked rice balls) mixed with the sesame seeds to deceased ancestors (*piṇḍadāna*, see Fig. 3).

Conclusion of the pilgrimage

Having completed the rituals in Prayāga, one should go back to Rāmeśvaram and perform the *śrāddha* with many gifts (*dāna*) to brahmins, according to one's capacity. One should worship Rāmanātha (i.e., Śiva of the Rāmeśvaram temple) and Setumādhava, with incense (*dhūpa*), lamps (*dīpa*), food offering (*naivedya*), etc. It is in this stage that the pilgrim uses the Gaṅgā water he brought for performing ritual bathing (*abhiṣeka*) to Rāmanātha.

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vāyavādhāraś ca jantavaḥ | tṛptimetena yāntvāśu maddattenāmbunā'khilāḥ || narakeṣu samasteṣu yātanāsu ca ye sthitāḥ | teṣām āpyāyanāyaitad dīyate salilaṃ mayā || ye bāndhavā'bāndhavā vā ye'nyajanmani bāndhavāḥ | te tṛptimakhilā yāntu ye cāsmat-toyakāṃkṣiṇaḥ || yatra kvacana saṃsthānāṃ kṣuttṛṣṇopahatātmanām | idam akṣayyam evāstu mayā dattaṃ tilodakam ||

There are different practices followed when bringing holy water from Vārāṇasī or Prayāga. The *Tristhalīsetu* advises that the holy water to Rāmeśvaram has to be brought from Prayāga.

In an alternative practice for the end of the pilgrimage, the devotees head to the holy spot—the Triveṇī Saṅgam in Prayāga. Here, after the rituals, the devotees disperse the lump of sand (*veṇīmādhava*) brought from Rāmeśvaram. They then visit Lord Viśvanātha in Vārāṇasī to collect the water from the river Gaṅgā before heading back to Rāmeśvaram. The devotee then stops at Rāmanāthasvāmi temple at Rāmeśvaram and offers the holy Gaṅgā water to the Lord (before distributing it to the near and dear ones). With this the *tīrthayātrā* to Kāśī is completed. Although this practice is presently more familiar, the pilgrimage between Rāmeśvaram and Prayāga is better anchored in the textual tradition.

Having concluded the pilgrimage (Kāśī to Rāmeśvaram or Prayāga to Rāmeśvaram), one should return home after stated restrictions, feed a great feast to the brahmins and others; with that Rāmanātha satisfies and grants all his desires, as stated in the *Skandapurāṇa.*[56]

Conclusion

Although India was historically divided into many kingdoms, and the people of India followed distinct practices, pilgrimages were inclined to foster the idea of the essential and fundamental unity of India. Places like Kāśī, Prayāga, and Rāmeśvaram, were held sacred by all Hindus, whether they hailed from the North, South, East, or West. The Hindu community, divided as it was into numerous castes and their specifications, continuously fostered the practice of pilgrimage, which tends to level up all men by bringing them together through their visit to the same holy rivers or shrines.

Undertaking a pilgrimage (*tīrthayātrā*) and, particularly, taking a holy dip (*snāna*) in such a place, is considered to yield the fruit of performing the *kṛcchra*s, to get rid of one's sins and crimes. As we have seen, performing ancestral ceremonies is central to any pilgrimage, and is considered to yield the liberation of one's ancestors and virtue to oneself, as stated in the *saṅkalpa*.

The practice of exchanging Rāmeśvaram sacred sand and Gaṅgā holy water is traditionally considered to be for the liberation of the mythological King Sagara's sixty thousand sons, through washing their ashes—assumed to be intermingled

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56 *Skandapurāṇa* 51.74–75b: *pūrvoktaniyamopetaḥ punar āyāt svakam gṛham | brāhmaṇān bhojayad annaiḥ ṣaḍrasaiḥ paripūritaḥ || tenaiva rāmanāthosmai prīto'bhīṣṭaṃ prayacchati ||*

with the sands of Rāmeśvaram—with the Gaṅgā's water. With time, however, the water brought back to Rāmeśvaram came to be used for performing the ritual bathing of Lord Rāmanātha.[57] This may be a process of merging together the mythological cause with the temple practice, through the assumption that the water used for ablution would anyway flow to the sand where Kapila Muni's *āśrama* used to stand and bring liberation to Sagara's sons. The mythological narrative behind the practice may also be connected to the strong emphasis on ancestral ceremonies that are prescribed, as we have seen, when performing this pilgrimage. However, the textual traditions do not indicate such a connection, and performing of ancestral ceremonies takes place in pilgrimages to many other holy places (e.g., Kāśī, Kāñci, Ayodhyā, and holy rivers such as Godāvarī and Kṛṣṇā). Therefore, I think the performing of ancestral rituals at pilgrimage sites has a different purpose and the exchanging of the sand and the water in these two places, different.

Undertaking the holy dip (*snāna*) will yield the fruit of performing the *kṛcchra*s to get rid of one's sins and crimes committed by one, and performing the ancestral ceremonies will yield the liberation (as stated in the *saṅkalpa*) for one's ancestors and accrue virtue to the performer.

Acknowledgements

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57 The *Skandapurāṇa* passage also states that *ānīya gaṅgāsalilaṃ rāmeśam abhiṣi-cya*—"bringing the Gaṅgā water and anointing Rāmeśa in Setu".

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Tracing Raṅganātha's Journey

This chapter examines possible relations between the Raṅganātha temple in Srirangam (Śrīraṅgam) and some other places associated with this temple by exploring the story of the journey of the processional image of Viṣṇu, in the form known as Raṅganātha, from the Srirangam temple to the temple in Tirupati/Tirumala, where Viṣṇu is worshipped in the form known as Veṅkaṭanātha. The journey proceeded in stages, via several other places, among them an influential *divyadeśa*[1] namely Melkote (Melkoṭe) which was renowned for having been visited by the distinguished Vaiṣṇava teachers and, as the tradition has it, was the place of Rāmānuja's years-long stay.

The narratives giving an account of the journey represent, unlike many other stories about connected places that reference mythological events and divine interventions, a specific type of linkages that were impacted, among others, by political circumstances and historical events. In this chapter, we, therefore, ask: How and why were these linkages represented in certain non-historical texts of the Vaiṣṇava tradition that claim to be historical but reference historical facts only partially? Is it correct to suppose that at least some of the mentioned places had earlier, well-established connections, for example, due to the activities of religious teachers or their sacred status? Or could have such an interconnectedness been deliberately constructed and knowingly imposed on the stories by the authors of the narratives which constitute our sources?

The historical facts and the narratives about the journey have already been briefly discussed by other researchers.[2] The journey took place in the fourteenth

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1 108 places/temples of importance for the Vaiṣṇava tradition which ascribes to all of them the visits of the Āḻvārs.

2 For example, Spencer (1978), Branfoot (1999), Davis (1999), Hopkins (2002), Aiyangar (1940), Madhavan (2018). Madhavan, in her recent popular publication about Srirangam, presents a slightly different route. Judging from the book's bibliography, she based her description mainly on Hari Rao's two books of 1967 and 1976. She provides a list of places visited by Raṅganātha's image together with a map of their location. Thus, the itinerary provided by Madhavan presents itself as follows: Srirangam → Tirukoshtiyur (near Pudukkotai); Tirukoshtiyur → Jyotishkudi (near Madurai); Jyotishkudi → Tirumaliruncholai (Alagar Koil); Tirumaliruncholai → Calicut; Calicut → Tirukkanambi

century CE, during the Vijayanagara (Saṅgama dynasty) rule, and was under-taken to avoid the desacralization of god's image/s by the invading forces of the Delhi Sultans. The escape from the Srirangam island on the Kaveri (Kāverī) river was just the beginning of a long peregrination that took place between 1323 and 1371. It was initially led by Piḷḷai Lokācārya (eminent Śrīvaiṣṇava teacher and philosopher of the thirteenth-fourteenth century CE) and entailed stops at several places on the way to the final destination, the Tirumala hills. There, the image of Raṅganātha spent almost forty years, before being ultimately taken back and re-installed in the repossessed Śrīraṅgam temple by Kumāra Kampaṇa, the chief and son of king Bukka I of the Vijayanagara dynasty.[3] By the fourteenth century CE, both Srirangam and Tirupati temples were already important Vaiṣṇava religious centers of established position and power, where some of the most prom-inent religious teachers, such as Rāmānuja and Vedānta Deśika, were active. The Srirangam temple premises were built and further rebuilt by successive dynasties beginning with the Pallavas (fourth to ninth century CE), the Coḷas (ninth to thirteenth century CE), and the Pāṇḍyas (c. sixth to fourteenth century CE) and similarly, Tirupati owes its development to the same dynasties.

South Indian sacred sites are often described in connection with each other. Such connections are built by way of mythological stories else are attested to by other tangible links of various kinds. These links can be very creative and quite effective in enhancing processes of developing the places themselves or the pilgrimage routes leading to them. In the case of Raṅganātha's journey, the choice of transit sites mentioned in different narratives is probably the result of a considerate selection, at least in some cases, of places important for the tradition, mainly the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, especially in the case of the three locations that are more thoroughly featured in the story, namely Srirangam, Tirupati, and Melkote.

(Terakanambi, in-between Calicut and Mysore); Terakanambi → Malkote; Melkote → Tirupati/Tirumala (via Candragiri); Tirupati/Tirumala → Singavaram (Senji/Gingee); Singavaram → Srirangam. Aiyangar (1940: 417–19) mentions yet slightly different places, namely Jyotiṣkudi does not appear at all, but one place on the way from Mysore to Melkote is named: Srirangam, Pudukkotai, Tirukottiyur (Tirukoṣṭhiyur), Tirumali-rumśolai, Calicut, Terukanambi (Mysore), Punganur (Chittor), Melkote, Tirupati hills (Candragiri?), Tirupati. It is difficult to assert which sources Aiyangar uses, however judging from the differences in the list, the Srirangam temple chronicle (*Kōyil Oḷuku*) was not his only source.

3   While discussing the situation of Śrīvaiṣṇavas at the time of Muslim raids to the South, Viraraghavacharya (1953 [rep. 2003]: 377–78) writes that it was Srirangam which due to its high position among devotees became a vulnerable place but "Tirumala somehow escaped the danger and all the religious minded Sri Vaishnavar counted on the God of the Vengadam Hills for safety of their religion."

The two texts that are the special focus of this study are the Srirangam temple chronicle (*Kōyil Oḻuku*) and a hagiographical text titled the *Prapannāmṛta* ("The Nectar for Supplicants"), both of which mention the journey. Before moving on, let us reiterate questions to be addressed in the context of these texts: How and why some quite specific historical facts related to the journey were used by the authors of the two texts? How do these narratives view the journey and relationships between the places, be they the starting point, the destination or the stops on the way? Why are some of these places treated more thoroughly than others and what does this tell us about the authors' motives?[4]

The historicity of the journey is supported by at least one well-known inscription from the Srirangam temple. Parthasarathi (1954), in his English rendition/summary of the Srirangam *Kōyil Oḻuku*, mentions this inscription, dedicated to Gopaṇa, a Brahmin and the Vijayanagara ruler Kumāra Kampaṇa's general, whose role was crucial in protecting and re-installing the image in Srirangam. The inscription appears on the wall of the Viṣvaksena shrine.[5]

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4 The process of development of places of worship and the temple cult in South India resulted in the appearance of a body of literature known as *māhātmya*s, *sthalapurāṇa*s, and in Tamil *talapurāṇaṃ*s, all of which enlarge our knowledge related to the processes of establishing and developing sacred spots. Some of those texts can be useful sources of data that help us to understand the history of the place as well as the evolution of linkages between places, though this particular phenomenon is not always envisaged in the texts. Such seems to be the case of Raṅganātha's journey, which is not mentioned in the *Śrīraṅgamāhātmya* versions available to us, therefore we have to investigate other types of texts such as temple chronicles or local hagiographies.
On *māhātmya*s in other regions of India, see, for example, Feldhaus 2003 and Neuss 2012. The role of this class of texts has been recently acknowledged, for example, by Buchholz (2022) and Nachimuthu (2022). See also Czerniak-Drożdżowicz and Sathyanarayanan 2022, Sathyanarayanan and Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2023.

5 Rendition of Sanskrit text and translation after Parthasarathi (1954: 57):
svasti śrī bandhu priye śakābde (śakābde 1293)
ānīyānīnīla śṛṅgadyutiracita jagad rañjanādañjanādreḥ
ceñcyāmārādhya kañcit samayam atha nihatyodvanuṣkān tuluṣkān |
lakṣmī kṣmābhyām ubhābhyaṃ saha nija nagare sthāpayan raṅganāthaṃ
samyag varyāṃ saparyāṃ punarakṛta yaḥodarpaṇo goppaṇāryaḥ ||
viśveśaṃ raṅgarājaṃ vṛṣabhagiri taṭāt gopaṇṇakṣoṇī devo
nītvā vāṃ rājadhānīṃ nija bala nihatotsikta tauluṣka sainyaḥ |
kṛtvā hrīraṅgabhūmiṃ kṛta yuga sahitāṃ te ca lakṣmī mahībhyāṃ
saṃsthāpyāsyāṃ sarojodbhava iva kurute sādhucaryāsaparyām ||
"Hail! In the year 1393 (1293) of Śaka [era].
After bringing Sri Ranganatha from Anjanadri (Tirumalai), which delights the world with its peaks covered with dark clouds, and worshipping Him for some time at Chenchi with Sri Devi and Bhu Devi, Goppanarya, who is like a mirror of fame, vanquished the Muslims, who were expert archers. [By] re-installing the Lord at His own city of Srirangam, [he] restored the traditional system of worship in the temple. Goppanarya,

The second inscription, to be found in Tirupati/Tirumala temple, is mentioned in *Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical Report* by Sastry (1930: 131–32). Sastry addresses it as no 485 TT, dated to Kālaka year, which, in his opinion, corresponds to 1290 of the Śaka era (1368 CE). The inscription speaks of a minister of Kumāra Kampaṇa Uḍaiyar, whom Sastry identifies as Somappa or general Gopaṇa, known from the Raṅganātha inscription of 1293 of the Śaka era from Srirangam. In fact, the inscription published in Sastry (1931: 169) is very brief and does not tell the story of Raṅganātha. It only mentions the Pekkaḍai (minister) of Kampaṇa.[6] Sastry, however, in the *Report* (Sastry 1930), evokes the story and refers to the above-mentioned Srirangam inscription known from *Epigraphia Indica*. At the end of the passage dedicated to this subject (p. 132), he expresses surprise that though the stay in the temple was of prolonged duration, "there occurs no kind of epigraphical or literary notice, except an oral tradition."

Davis (1999), referring to the *Prapannāmṛta*, writes that the Srirangam inscription is ascribed to Vadānta Deśika (twelfth-thirteenth century CE), prominent Śrīvaiṣṇava teacher and exponent of the Vaṭakalai[7] branch of the tradition, who was born in Kanchipuram, and who, as we shall see below, also had a role in the

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the Brahmin, brought Sri Rangaraja, the Lord of the Universe, from the slope of the Vrishabhagiri (Tirumalai) to his capital and after destroying the Muslim army with his forces, reinstalled Him with Sri and Bhumi at Srirangam and thus introduced the Krita Yuga there again. In this deed, which is praised by all righteous men, he acted like the very Lotus-Born (Brahma)."

The inscription is testified to in the SII vol. XXIV, ed. Narasimhaswamy 1982: 303—inscription nr 286—in 1371 Gopana took the image from Tirupati to Ginji and then to Srirangam (II *prakāra*, east wall).

6   No. 181 (Nos.373 and 485-T.T.) in Sastry (1931: 169):
line 1   *svasti śrī kīlaka saṃvatsarattu*
line 2   *mahāmaṇḍaleśvara harirāyavibhāṭa...*
line 3   *kaṇḍa śrī vira kumārakampaṇa uṭaiyār pekkaṭai*
line 4   *...tiruveṅkaṭam-uṭaiyāṉukku tiruṉantāviḷakkukku viṭṭa pacu*
line 5   *28 riṣapam 1 itu candrāditya varai cellakkaṭavatu itu śrī vai-*
line 6   *-ṣṇava rakṣai*

"Hail! In the prosperous year Kīlaka...The charity of 28 cows and 1 bull for seven-eights of a *nandāviḷakku* for Tiruvēṉkaṭamuḍaiyāṉ was made by the *Pekkaḍai* (minister) of Śrī Vīra-Kumāra-Kampaṇa Uḍaiyar entitled *Mahāmaṇḍalēśvara*, *Arirāyavibhāḷa* and (*Bhāshaikuttappuvarāyara*)*gaṇḍa*. This (charity) shall last as long as the moon and the sun endure. May this the Śrīvaiṣṇavas protect!"

Transcript by DR. Sathyanarayanan (EFEO, Pondicherry). Translation by Sastry (1931).

7   The two sects of Vaṭakalai and Teṉkalai, appeared at some point in the post-Rāmānuja time. Their earliest exponents were Maṇavāḷa Māmuṉi dated to the fourteenth-fifteenth century CE, a Teṉkalai, and Vedānta Deśika (the thirteenth-fourteenth century CE)—a Vaṭakalai. The Vaṭakalais, with their center in Kanchipuram, were adherents of Sanskrit sources and followers of the *mārkaṭa-nyāya* (analogy to monkey) theology, while

story.[8] Thus, it can be surmised that reliable evidence confirms the historicity of Raṅganātha's journey, as well as the role of certain historical personages, in temporarily establishing the image in the Tirumala temple and hosting it also for some time in Senji, before taking the image back to Srirangam.

The sources

The two sources for the present study are the temple chronicle of the Srirangam temple (*Kōyil Oḻuku*, written in Maṇipravāla) and the seventeenth-century Sanskrit hagiographical work *Prapannāmṛta* (hereafter referred as PA), by Anantācārya.[9] Both treat the story of the image more extensively only in relation to some of the visited places and concentrate mainly on Srirangam itself, Melkote, and Tirupati. Other places are mentioned vaguely or merely their names are given.[10] The *Kōyil*

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the Teṅkalais, with their center in Srirangam and the Kaveri region, were followers of Tamil texts and the *mārjāra-nyāya* (analogy to the cat) theology. See, for example, Raman 2007.

8   Hultzsch gives a shorter version of the inscription, quoting only two verses: *ānīyānīlaśṛṅgadyutiracitajagadrañjanād añjanādreś ceñjyamārādhya kaṁcitsa-mayam atha nihatyoddhanuṣkāṁs tuluṣkān | lakṣmīkṣmābhyām ubhābhyāṁ saha nijanilaye sthāpayan raṅganāthaṁ samyagvaryāṁ saparyāṁ kuruta nijayaśodarpaṇo gopaṇāryaḥ |* (Hultzsch, *Epigraphia Indica* vol.VI, pp. 322–23; 1900–1). Davis' (1999: 131) translation based on the Hultzsch's version reads:
"From Collyrium Mountain [Tirupati] which delights all the world with the lustre of its dark blue peaks, that mirror of fame Gopaṇa brought Lord Ranganatha to Gingee and worshipped him there for some time. He destroyed the Turks who had raised their bows and then installed Ranganatha along with his wives Laksmi and Earth in Ranganatha's own city, Sri Rangam, and once again worshipped him in the proper manner. The brahmin Gopaṇa took Ranganatha, Lord of Everything, from Bull Mountain [Tirupati] to his own capital. When he had defeated the proud Turkic army with his own forces, he installed Ranganatha, Laksmi, and Earth, and thereby reunited the ground of Sri Rangam with the Golden Age. Like lotus-born Brahman, that virtuous man now dutifully worships Ranganatha."
The role of Gopaṇa in protecting the image is also mentioned by Srinivasachari (1943: 59–62).

9   The two texts in focus cannot be treated as historical sources, yet they have a contextualizing value, which is perceived by scholars as similarly interesting and valuable as the primary sources themselves. See for example Snell 1994, Nowicka 2016, and Nowicka 2017.

10 The story of the Sultanate raid and destruction of the temple appears also in some literary sources such as, for example, *Madhurāvijaya* by Gaṅgādevī; however, this poetess refers to the earlier episode of Malik Kafur's military expedition. About Gaṅgādevī's

Oḻuku (hereafter the Chronicle) is a typical South Indian temple chronicle.[11] Hari Rao, the author of several publications concerning Srirangam and of the English summary of the Chronicle, describes it in the following words:

> The Koil-Olugu is stated to be the work of 'Purvacaryas', i.e., the Acaryas of the past', in other words, it was not the work of a single writer belonging to a particular period but a temple record written and maintained by successive wardens of the temple or their accountants or writers. Events are narrated, especially in the latter portions of the Olugu, under specific dates, and a perusal of the entire book conveys the idea that it was a diary kept up by successive generations, true to its name, 'Olugu'. (Hari Rao and Reddi 1976: 4)[12]

The Chronicle provides a mythological story about the temple's origins and describes the temple's administration. In addition, it refers to many historical facts, yet it also contains many inconsistencies.[13] It describes the involvement of the

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work and references to Śrīraṅgam invaded by the Muslims, see Sudyka 2013: 112; 136–37. See also Truschke 2021: 79–80.

11 Short translation, or rather recapitulation, with a short introduction is by Hari Rao 1961. Yet another one is by T.S. Parthasarathy 1954.

12 The Chronicle's writing was probably initiated after Rāmānuja (eleventh-twelfth century CE), the great philosopher and Śrīvaiṣṇava religious teacher. His life and especially his contribution to the temple life are treated thoroughly in the Chronicle, while the earlier history before him is only cursorily described. According to Spencer (1978), the Chronicle goes up to 1725 CE, and similarly, according to Orr (1995), it was written between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. It reached its present form in 1803 when the British Collector John Wallace asked the priests to put together all manuscripts of the Chronicle. Spencer writes about controversies connected with the dating of this text and that the text, in some portions, has an apocryphal character, nevertheless it is perceived as one of the most reliable temple chronicles. It brings information about the ritual, temple organization, internal discussions, etc., and was probably written periodically by successive generations of *ācārya*s; thus, there are some gaps and also incoherencies within the text. See Sathyanarayanan and Czerniak-Drożdżowicz 2023.

13 Hari Rao (1961: 5) writes: "A perusal of the Koil-Olugu shows that the sequence of events adopted is jumbled, e.g., the period of the Acaryas is dealt with after the first Muslim attack on Srirangam. Certain events or names are repeated in a different context; this was perhaps because an accountant recorded certain past events in the diary without inquiring whether the same had been recorded or not by a predecessor of his. The jumbled sequence might have been due to the constant resuscitations of the original due to the vicissitudes of history and the imperfections and shortcomings of scribes. It is also possible that a scribe while making a copy made his own interpolations. The Olugu maintains a fairly correct sequence of events while dealing with the Vijayanagar period and after."

temple with many local dynasties as well as important Śrīvaiṣṇava personages. Due to these entanglements, the writings of the text could be biased in many ways. While speaking about political influence exerted not only by the Sultanate forces from the North but also some Indian dynasties (such as the Orissan Gaṅgas, and, in later times, the Marathas), Spencer mentions sectarian rivalry and change in affiliation of the temple in the thirteenth century CE, as the temple was run for some time by the Vaikhānasas instead of the Pāñcarātrikas.[14]

Our second source, PA, is a typical hagiography, dedicated basically to the life of Rāmānuja presented alongside other distinguished Śrīvaiṣṇavācāryas.[15] The hagiographic genre has an ideological and promotional character, since the authors are often associated with religious institutions such as monastic *maṭha*s, as was frequently the case in the Vijayanagara and post-Vijayanagara times.[16] Yet hagiographies can reveal strategies used to propagate particular ideas and traditions since their authors "variously intend to correct, reinterpret, subsume, authenticate or legitimize the writings of their forebears" (Snell 1994: 3). In the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, hagiographies form a part of the canon, for they present the tradition's development as well as historical and cultural continuity, and it was through them that the tradition was transmitted and memorized.[17]

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14 Spencer (1978: 18) writes: "The Orissan incident also illustrates how easily sectarian religious rivalries could affect court-temple relationships, since royal preferences for Śaivism over Vaiṣṇavism, or vice versa, could have adverse effects upon institutions controlled by the less favored sect." The ritual system following Rāmānuja's reform was re-introduced in the seventeenth century CE by the Ācārya called Śrīnivāsa Desikar.

15 The important and popular Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies are, for example, *Guruparamparāprabhāva*s, three texts glorifying the Āḻvārs and the Śrīvaiṣṇavācāryas. They are dated to around fourteenth-fifteenth century CE and are known as *Āṟāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprabhāvam*, ascribed to Piṇpaḻakiyaperumāḷ Jīyar; the *Pannīrāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprabhāvam*, ascribed to Dvitīya Brahmatantrasvatantra Parkālasvāmī Jīyar, and *Mūvāyirappaṭi Guruparamparāprabhāvam* by Tritīya Brahmatantrasvanatra Parkālasvwāmī Jīyar; see, e.g., Dutta 2014: 28–29.

16 Dutta (2014: 76) writes: "Thus hagiographies served the crucial function of confirming the socio-religious and political contexts in which Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition and identity were constructed and reinforced."

17 For more about the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographies and the religious, social, and political context in which they were created see Dutta 2014, especially chapter 3, "Texts, Contexts, and the Śrīvaiṣṇava Community". On p. 95 she writes: "The Hoysalas also shifted their capital from Dvārasamudra to Kaṇṇanūr near the Kāverī delta in the Tamil region, where the Pāṇṭiyas were already making inroads. The tension between these two powers manifested in their competitive patronage extended to the Vaiṣṇava temple of Raṅganāthasvāmi and the Śaiva temple of Jambukeśvaram, situated on the either side of the Kāverī at Śrīraṅgam."

The PA, ascribed to Anāntācārya, is dated to the seventeenth century CE and thus is much later than the described event.[18] While hagiographies tend to devote much attention to philosophical issues and to praising extraordinary attributes and greatness of the religious teachers they feature, the PA does not stress the glory and distinction of Rāmānuja as a philosopher and presents him more as a mature and ardent devotee, directly communicating with God.[19] In this long text of 126 chapters, some portions are also dedicated to the lives of Yamunācārya and Nāthamuni, and some portions (from the end of chapter 120 to the beginning of chapter 122) to the story of Raṅganātha's journey. This story involves two of the Śrīvaiṣṇavācāryas: Piḷḷai Lokācārya (thirteenth-fourteenth century CE), a representative of the Teṅkalai school, and his contemporary, Vedānta Deśika, a Vaṭakalai proponent. The story also mentions Sudarśanasūri, another contemporary of the two and the commentator of Rāmānuja's *Śrībhāṣya*.

Interestingly, the *Tirumalai Oḷuku*, the chronicle of Tirupati/Tirumala temple, does not evoke the story of the journey. This text is mostly dedicated to mythological events and includes references to Veṅkatanātha from different sources as well as some hymns. Nevertheless, the text's editor mentions the journey in the "Introduction" (Balasundara Nayakar 1953: xvi).[20] He writes that when in 1328 Muhammad bin Tughluq was plundering villages around Madurai and ransacking the temples, some Nampis from Srirangam, to save the image of Aḻakiyamaṇavāḷan (Handsome Bridegroom, the processional image of Raṅganātha) from falling into invader's hands, whisked it away with a view of lodging it for safety in Tirumala. It took them approximately two years to reach Tirumala from Srirangam. In 1330, they put Perumāḷ up in a *maṇḍapa* in front of the Tirumala temple's main shrine. The *maṇḍapa* is still called Raṅgamaṇḍapa. Since Aḻakiyamaṇavāḷan was staying there temporarily, as a guest, he was worshipped first and the composition beginning with the words '*kaṅkulum pakalum*'[21] is still recited in front of Tiruveṅkaṭamuṭaiyān (Viṣṇu Veṅkatnātha in Tirumala temple). After some years, when Gopaṇa, a feudatory of Senji and a subordinate of the Vijayanagara's Kampaṇa II, came to Tirumala, he was told the story of the image and, after obtaining permission from Tirumalai *sabhā* (assembly) and the king Tiruveṅkaṭa Yadavarāya, moved it to Senji in 1363. At that time, the Sultanate forces were still occupying Srirangam, so for the next eight years Gopaṇa kept the image in

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18 For the date and content, see Granoff 1985: 459–67, and Ayyangar 1919: 34–40.

19 Granoff (1985: 463) writes: "In fact, of all the texts of major Vedānta philosophers examined to date, the *Prapannāmṛta* is unique in its singular lack of interest in the philosophical debate."

20 I am grateful to Dr. Suganya Anandakichenin for helping me to find this text. I am using the English rendition by Dr. R. Sathyanarayanan.

21 Probably dedicated to Aḻakiyamaṇavāḷan, but we were not able to identify it yet.

Senji. Only after Sultan's forces had left, in 1371, did he bring the image back and establish it in the Srirangam temple. Balasundara Nayakar gives as his source the above-mentioned *TT Epigraphical report* (Sastry 1930: 131–32).

Raṅganātha's journey

The story, as known from some secondary sources that we have mentioned (e.g., Davis 1999, Hopkins 2004), is associated with the military expeditions of Muhammad bin Tughluq to South India, which took place in 1323–28 and resulted in the destruction of the Srirangam temple. A need arose to protect at least the *utsavamūrti* (processional image) of Raṅganātha, which was secretly sent away. The whole journey of the Raṅganātha image outside Srirangam lasted 48 years (1323–71) and on its way it stopped at several places, only to remain for more than 40 years in the Tirupati/Tirumala Veṅkatanātha temple. After that, Raṅganātha was taken back to Srirangam, where, already under the Vijayanagara governance, his image was reinstalled. The Sultanate invasion left lasting traces on the life of the re-established temple. In her article concerning the Vaiṣṇava community of Śrīraṅgam, based on meticulous analysis of the temple's inscriptions, Orr (1995: 110) says:

> At the beginning of the fourteenth century, temple life at Śrīraṅgam was disrupted by the depredations of the "Turks", Muslim armies from the North. In the later part of this century, the newly-established kings of Vijayanagara and their officers and subordinates dedicated themselves to the restoration of worship, and to their own legitimation through temple patronage. In this context, competition among temple authorities and between the emerging Teṉkalai and Vaṭakalai divisions of Śrīvaiṣṇava community resulted in a restructuring of relations within the temple and among sectarian leaders, political rulers, and other members of society.

While tracing the story of the journey, we need to consider its merely partial historicity and acknowledge the possibility of there being a mix-up or merging of several narratives or narrative strands describing quite different historical events. Davis (1999 and 2004), referring to the *Kōyil Oḻuku*, discusses the Chronicle's two accounts of two journeys of the image.[22] One story evokes a Muslim

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22 Hultzsch discusses briefly the journey of the image and his version is closer to our understanding of the events, namely that there were two journeys and the inscription refers to the second, the 1323–71 one (Hultzsch 1900–1: 322–23). Also, Hopkins refers

princess who fell in love with the processional image of Raṅganātha. Davis mentions two versions of this episode. In one, from the Chronicle, the Sultan attacking Srirangam took the image of Viṣṇu to Delhi, where his daughter fell in love with it. After some time, the Sultan permitted the Raṅganātha's devotees to take the image back to the South. In the second version, the Melkote version of the story, presented in the PA, it is Rāmānuja himself who went to Delhi to retrieve the image. In the Chronicle version the Sultan, having seen the princess heart-broken by the departure of Viṣṇu, sent his troops to Srirangam to get the image back, but the priests of Srirangam had spirited the image away and sent it to Tirupati to hide and protect from desacralization. In the Chronicle version, the princess died of sorrow, but in the Melkote version, the princess accompanied the image back to the South. When they reached Melkote she was mysteriously united with the image and became one with Viṣṇu. Thus, in both temples, the Cheluvanarayana in Melkote and in the Raṅganātha temple in Srirangam, there are shrines of Tulluka Nācciyār—Tughluq Princess. The ambiguity of the story and its lack of consistency might have been caused, as also Davis suspects, by problems with dating the raid of the Sultanate forces. Obviously, while assigning a date to the raid, the Chronicle had in mind the earlier military venture of Malik Kafur, a general of Allauddin Khilji of Delhi, in 1310, but the story of the journey to Tirupati is associated with the later, Muhammad bin Tughluq's (known also as Ulugh Khan, especially before assuming the throne in 1325) raid and destruction of the Srirangam temple in years 1323–28. While referring to the story about the second, later event, Davis mentions also the episode of the temporary hiding of the image in the forest near Tirumala. We assume that the place was close to the Candragiri fort and indeed, as we see later, it is mentioned in our sources.[23]

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to both stories of wandering icons: the one at the time of Malik Kafur's invasion and the second under Ulugh Khan (Muhammad bin Tughluq) (Hopkins 2002: 68–72).

23 Davis 2004, fn 6 writes: "The verses are repeated in *Prapannāmṛta* (Krishnaswami Ayyangar 1919: 40), where they are identified as the composition of Vedantadeśika, the Srivaisnava theologian. Local tradition at Tirupati holds that the Handsome Bridegroom was kept in the Rangamandapa during his sojourn there (Subrahmanya Sastry 1981: 85), while the Koyil Oluku describes a much more inaccessible bivouac in the Tirupati hills. According to the Srirangam temple chronicles, one of the image's Brahman attendants 'tied himself to Visnu with the help of roots and herbs and asked the other two attendants to lower him down into the declivity by means of a creeper fastened to a promontory of the mountain, jutting out like the hood of a serpent' (Hari Rao 1961: 27). The image spent fifty years suspended like this."

The *Kōyil Oḷuku* version

The version of the temple chronicle, in the edition from 2005–11,[24] is detailed and supplemented with useful footnotes by the editor, A. Krishnamacharyar, although he does not state his sources clearly.

The text (in Volume I, p. 463 and after) refers briefly to the family lineage of the priest officiating at the temple, R. Nṛsiṃha Deśikar, who plays an important role in the story.[25] It was he, who, during his office, learned that Muslims were approaching Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam.[26] Resorting to the South Indian method of divination known as *tiruvuḷḷaccīṭṭu*,[27] Nṛsiṃha Deśikar addressed Raṅganātha directly, asking Him what should be done to protect Him. Following on the *tiruvuḷḷaccīṭṭu* response, the priests kept the image in the temple itself and began the regular performance of the annual river festival. During the festival, when the Aḻaki-yamaṇavāḷan Perumāḷ was in the nearby Paṉṟiyāḷvāṉ [Varāha] temple, temple priests heard the news that Sultanate army had advanced beyond Samayapuram (a town near Srirangam).

Śrīraṅgarājānāthan Vādhūla Deśikar, the father of Nṛsiṃha Deśika, planned to flee before the arrival of the Sultanate forces in Śrīraṅgam and take the images with him. He felt that people of Srirangam would follow Raṅganātha. He ordered the *garbhagṛha* (main shrine) to be covered with a curtain, pretending the worship was going on, arranged a palanquin, put Raṅganātha's image together with his consorts in it, and dispatched them to the South. He also sent priests, an *arcaka* and two *paricāraka*s, and *śrīpātam tāṅkuvār* (palanquin bearers) with the image. Piḷḷai

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24 *Kōyil Oḷuku* vol.1: 463–69; vol. 2: 175–80. I am presenting the story according to the working English translation by DR. Sathyanarayanan.

25 Interestingly, he belonged to the Vādhūla family. As I was told by S. A. S. Sarma (EFEO, Pondicherry), it is an extremely rare lineage nowadays and there are very particular temple connections in Kerala in the places inhabited by them.

26 The same information is given in the English abbreviated rendition of the Chronicle by Hari Rao (1961: 127). He also mentions the PA which follows the Vaṭakalai tradition and says that Pillai Lokācārya and others fled with the images under the direction of Vedānta Deśika, while Vedānta Deśika himself escaped to Satyamangalam with the single manuscript of the *Śrutaprakāśika* and the two sons of Sudarśanācārya.
   In the Chronicle itself, the same note (p. 470) reads: "Vaṭakalai *Guruparamparāprabhā-vam* declares that "Śrī Nikamānta Mahātecikan saved Sutarcaṇa Bhattar's two sons (Parācara Paṭṭar, Parāṅkuca Paṭṭar) and the *Śrutaprakācikā*." Moreover, it mentions that during the revolt, "Śrī Tecikan, [and] Sutarcaṇa Paṭṭar's two sons, escaped after staying two days in the heap of corpses. If the *Śrutaprakācikā* was not saved on that day we might have lost a great text." English rendition by R. Sathyanarayan.

27 Two options were written on two pieces of paper—in this case, should the image remain in the temple or should it be taken out for safety reasons. One of the pieces of paper is picked up at random and it is believed that this is the decision of god. Information provided by R. Sathyanarayanan.

Lokācārya, along with his disciples, was also accompanying them. In addition, he sent a jewel box (*tiruvāparaṇappeṭṭi*) and Raṅganācciyār, namely the goddess image, with some attendants. Then, in front of Periyaperumāḷ (Raṅganātha's main image, *mūlamūrti*), he raised stone wall called *kulaśekaraṉpaṭi* and in front of that wall, he installed a (duplicate) image of Raṅganātha and locked the door. In the same way, he also constructed stone wall in the goddess shrine (and installed a duplicate image of Nācciyār). He closed all secret passages and left the temple. When Sultan's soldiers reached the temple and could not find the image, they damaged the Paṉṟiyāḻvāṉ (Varāhamūrti) image and several other idols, and killed many inhabitants. Because of these events, the invasion is known as "*paṉṉīrāyira-var muṭitiruttiya paṉriyāḻvāṉ meṭṭukkuṭi*" viz. "the incident of beheading 12,000 inhabitants".[28] The story then moves on to some matter connected to the chief of the Sultanate army, who was apparently seduced by a temple dancer-devotee (*dāsī*) and convinced by her to stop damaging the temple.[29]

Subsequently, the text turns to the account of the Raṅganātha journey, relating a story about looting of the image's jewelry by forest robbers and many other hardships encountered during the journey. In the face of such difficulties, Piḷḷai Lokācārya called a halt to their journey. They stopped for a month in Jyotishkudi near Tirumokur, and there, the text says, he died (attained the highest abode, *paramapatam*).

The next stop of the journey was Tirumaliruncolai (Aḻakarkoyil), where the image and its entourage stayed for a year, and where, in that period, they constructed a water tank named after the image (Aḻakiyamaṇavāḻaṉ). From there, after journeying from one village to another, they reached Calicut (Koḻikkoṭu; the editor suggests it could be the present-day Kannur, near Calicut). In Kolikottu, other neighbouring (*divyadeśas*') images of god and the image of Nammāḻvār, which, as the Chronicle claims, found refuge in Calicut at the time of the Sultanate raid, were all brought to Raṅganātha and the image of Nammāḻvār stayed with him for a year. During that period this image was kept together with Raṅganātha on his throne.[30]

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28 *Kōyil Oḻuku* 467–68. English rendering by R. Sathyanarayanan.
29 Because of several *yantra*s installed in the temple by Kūranārāyaṇa Jīyar, the chief of the *maṭha* became ill. It was believed that the illness was the result of the offense caused to the god (*daivakuttam*). Even after the chief had stopped the damage to the temple, he remained ill and so he decided to leave the place and move to another fort/palace in Kannanur (Kaṇṇanūr; present Samayapuram), built with the stones/rocks removed from Srirangam fort. The text also relates that meanwhile, a brahmin called Siṅkapirāṉ, one of those managing the temple lands, recommended by the *dāsī*, met the Sultanate chief, joined him as a servant, and protected the temple from further misfortune.
30 We do not have much knowledge about the Keralan episode of the journey, but recently, in an article published in the Kerala edition of *The Hindu* (May 25, 2024),

Fig. 1   Jyotishkudi.
Photo by Marzenna
Czerniak-Drożdżowicz.

Fig. 2   The cave in which,
according to the local
respondent, the image
of Raṅganātha was kept.
Photo by Marzenna
Czerniak-Drożdżowicz.

Fig. 3 and 4
Piḷḷai Lokācārya's
Sannidhi. Photos by
Marzenna Czerniak-
Drożdżowicz.
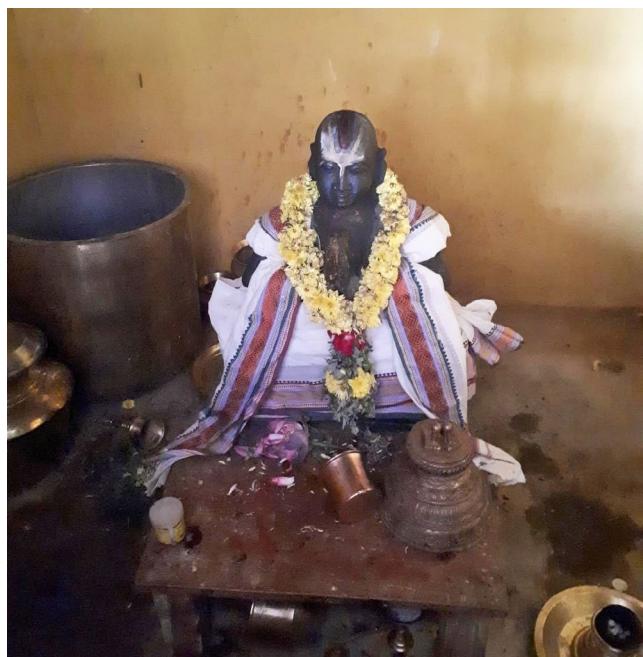
The Chronicle then relates a boat voyage by sea. During this journey, the image of Nammāḻvār, accompanying Raṅganātha, accidentally fell into the water. The priests did not want to continue the journey without it and managed to locate it in the sea with the help of an eagle. After pulling it out of the water, they put Nammāḻvār's image together with Perumāḷ's and proceeded to Tirukkaṇṇāmpi (Terakanambi in Karnataka), where the image remained for several days. Further (from p. 475 onwards), the Chronicle informs us, that both images, of Raṅganātha and Nammāḻvār, were at that time kept on the same pedestal, worshipped with the same vessel (*ekapatra*) and some of Raṅganātha's ornaments were given to Nammāḻvār.[31]

Having given to the image of Nammāḻvār some of the Raṅganātha's ornaments, the group left Nammāḻvār there (in Tirukkaṇṇāmpi) and proceeded with Raṅganātha and his 'family' (*parivāra*) to Tirunārāyaṇapuram (Melkote) via Puṅkanūr, and from there, again, after some time, to Tiruveṅkaṭa (Tirupati). At this juncture in the story, the Chronicle employs the term "circumambulation" (*pradakṣiṇa*) in the context of the long and circuitous journey which started in Srirangam and ended in Tirumala. The image remained in Tirumala for a long time, festively celebrated, and established in the Raṅgamaṇḍapa.[32] The text claims that the *maṇḍapa* was constructed by Yātavarāya in 1360 CE.

The story has some continuation in vol. 1, part 1 (p. 175 and following) of the Chronicle, however, it seems to be somewhat mixed up with the story about the first journey to Delhi, since at the beginning of the passage it refers to the Muslim princess mentioned above. When the Sultanate forces that were sent to retrieve the image reached Srirangam, they realized the image was still not back, so they could not take it to Delhi. Thus, being separated from her beloved for too long a time, the princess died.

Even with mixing up of the stories, the passage clearly describes the image's stopover in Candragiri, which is supposed to have preceded the long sojourn

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A. S. Jayanth speaks about Vaiṣṇava temple in Nellikode, called Azhvar Trikkovil (dedicated to Nammāḻvār) and hosting a small shrine of Gośala Kṛṣṇa. In the opinion of C. K. Ramachandran (a member of the Calicut Heritage Forum and former officer of Indian Administrative Service), the image of Nammāḻvār was kept there together with some other images that were escaping from Madurai. It is the very same temple where the image of Raṅganātha was hosted. I owe this information to S. A. S. Sarma (EFEO, Pondicherry).

31　This event is remembered and recalled in the Melkote temple when, at the completion of worship, the sacred water (*tīrtha*) is given in the Viṣvaksena shrine to the Śrīraṅganārāyaṇa Jīyar and other officials.

32　The Chronicle says: *intappaṭi tirunārāyaṇapurattileyum anekanāḷ eḻuntaruḷiyiruntu, pradakṣiṇamākat tiruveṅkaṭattuk keḻuntaruḷi tirumalaiyile bahukālam divyotsavattuṭaṉe eḻuntaruḷiyiruntār.*

in Tirumala itself. According to the text, three people (priests: *koṭavar*s) of the image's escort took Perumāḷ and ascended the Tirupati hills, while the rest of the people, fifty-seven in number, went back to Srirangam independently, without being seen by the Sultan's forces. The text refers here to the group that came to Delhi to repossess the image from the Sultan, thus it is also a part of the Delhi journey story.

The subsequent passage seems to refer to the later journey. The Sultan, aware that the image was somewhere in the Tirumala foothills, ordered his soldiers to search the place. The oldest of the three priests, wishing to keep the image hidden, covered it with herbs, held it closely, and ascended the cliff which looked like a hood of a snake. Two other priests, who were his brother-in-law and his son, let him down from the edge of the cliff on a creeper used as a rope. On the way down, the priest got injured severely and died. The brother-in-law and the son then came down with the help of a rope, worshipped Perumāḷ, and performed the last rites for the dead priest. They stayed there secretly for a long time. After the priest's brother-in-law also passed away, the son stayed on in hiding, alone with the image, surviving on roots and bulbs.

Meanwhile, in Srirangam, the inhabitants, with the permission of the Coḷa king, opened the temple door and searched for the image of Aḻakiyamaṇavāḷan Perumāḷ (i.e., Raṅganātha) but could find neither the image nor the priest (*koṭavar*). There-fore, they consecrated another image (called Tiruvaraṅgamāḷikaiyār). They also could not find the goddess (Nācciyār) who had been sent away from Srirangam as well but traveled separately from Raṅganātha; they made another image of her, consecrated it there, and continued the festivals as before using the tempo-rary images.

The next passage goes back to the image's journey, but again mixing the two sto-ries of two different journeys. The image, says the text, having departed from the temple (in Srirangam), stayed for two years at the residence of the king of Delhi, and the remaining time, for a period of nearly sixty years, in the forest which is not named in the text but we suppose it to be the Tirumala hills.[33] After some time, two Iruḷars (members of a local tribe known for their snake and rat-catch-ing skills) found the image near the waterfalls in the foothills of Tirumala. They also found an eighty-year-old brahmin with a head of matted hair, a creeper tied to his waist, and his clothes made of plants. He was serving the image. The two Iruḷars approached the old man and asked him to tell them his story which he narrated, beginning with Srirangam and everything that happened since then. He hoped, with their [Iruḷars'] help, to spread the story of the image among the people and return it to its temple.

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33 Referring to such a long period, the passage means the second, 1323–71 journey, and not the shorter, 1311 one. However, the given period of time is too long.

Fig. 5   Singavaram. Photo by Marzenna Czerniak-Drożdżowicz.

The Iruḷars narrated this story to the chief of Candragiri town, then took him to where the image was kept. The chief worshipped the image and the old man; he was astonished by what he saw and heard, and took the image and the old man with him to the town. Thereafter the old priest resided in Candragiri along with the image, with the support of the chief.

At that time, the Sultanate forces had spread up to Pāṇḍyamaṇḍalam. Local rulers, according to the text, were Vidyāraṇya of the Rāya dynasty in Ānaikkonti Paṭṭaṇam and Harihararāya who ruled territory reaching up to Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. Harihararāya's agent, Gopaṇa Uṭaiyār, came at that time from Senji to Tirumala to worship Veṅkatanātha. He worshipped the lord's feet and learned about Raṅganātha image residing in Candragiri. The chief of Candragiri, informed that the Gopaṇa had come to Tirupati, invited him to Candragiri and took him to worship at the place where the image was kept. After staying in Candragiri for some days Gopaṇa took the image of Raṅganātha with him to Singapuram/ Singavaram nearby Senji and performed all types of festivities.[34]

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34 It was in the Singavaram Raṅganātha temple, not in the Senji fort itself, where the image was kept. The name of the place appears in several variants such as Chenchi, Ginji or Gingee.

Having heard that the image was in Singapuram, the officials from Srirangam asked Gopaṇa to drive Sultanate forces from Srirangam. As the text observes, Gopaṇa, with an immeasurable force, having fought with the Sultan's army, dislodged it from Srirangam. On the seventeenth day of the month Vaikāci (May-June) in the year Parītāpi (i.e. one of the sixty-cyclic years), in the Śaka year 1293 (1371 CE), he brought back Perumāḷ and Nācciyār to Tiruvaraṅgam (i.e. Srirangam), opened the temple doors, consecrated the images along with Periyaperumāḷ (*mūlamūrti*) and made them available for worship. He announced it on the outer face of the eastern wall called Dharmavarman.[35]

The *Prapannāmṛta* version

The PA version of the story begins at the moment when Piḷḷai Lokācārya receives the news about Yavanas approaching Srirangam:

> A spy presented himself to Lokācārya and then immediately told [him] secretly (*karṇe*) about the arrival of the Yavanas. "Now Yavana with all his powers reached the city of Khaṇḍana (?) and this cruel one certainly will quickly come [here] even today." (PA 120.54–55)[36]

Piḷḷai Lokācāraya decided to ask the eminent teacher, Vedānta Deśika, how to protect Raṅganātha. The great teacher advised him to take the processional image of Raṅganātha and his wife out of the temple and proceed towards Goṣṭhipūra (Thirukoshtiyur) near Sivaganga. Then he advised the devotees to return to the temple and he protected the entrance to the *garbhagṛha* by walling the doorway with bricks.[37]

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35 *ānīyānīlaśṛṅgadyutiracitajagadrañjanādañjanādreḥ |*
    señjyāmārādhya kañcit samayamatha nihatyotdhanuṣkaan ||
    lakṣmīkṣmābhyāmubhābhyām saha nijanilaye sthāpayan raṅganātham |
   *samyagvaryām saparyām kuruta nijayaśodarpaṇo kopaṇāryaḥ ||*
    This is the text known from the above-mentioned Srirangam inscription.

36 For the Sanskrit text of the relevant passage, see Appendix. All translations from PA are mine.

37 PA 120.57–61: "Having heard his words, then, the clever teacher of the world immediately informed [about it] Vedānta Deśika. Then following his [Vedānta Deśika's] order, he took the Lord of Raṅga with His wife, [and] left, following the way to Goṣṭhipūra. Thus things [the situation] slowly improved. Meanwhile, all terrified people quickly took refuge with Raṅga. Having speedily entered [the place of] Raṅga [and] firmly closed the doors, Vedāntārya and others stayed there tormented by fear. So the wise, great Vedānta Deśika, having lighted the whole light in the nearness of the Raṅgaśāyin,

Fig. 6   Tirukoshtiyur.
The shrine with figures
of Rāmānuja and Pillai
Lokācārya. Photo by
Marzenna Czerniak-
Drożdżowicz.

At the beginning of the next chapter (PA 121.1–5), the Muslim invasion is compared to the mythological story of Kālayavana invading Mathurā.[38]

The following portion presents an episode connected with the two sons of Sudarśana (i.e. Sudarśanasūri, the famous commentator of the *Śrībhāṣya* and the author of its commentary *Śrutaprakāśikā/Śrūtapradīpikā*) who entrusted into the

immediately protected the door of His main shrine by covering [it] with bricks, stayed on [there] with all Śrīvaiṣṇavas."
The portion of the text (58ab *tadvat taṃ śanakaiḥ samyag abhūt kliṣṭataraṃ tataḥ*) is a bit problematic, thus our translation "Thus things [the situation] slowly improved" is tentative.

38   PA 121.1–5: "Then the Yavana, the enemy of god, speedily set out from Khaṇḍapura to Śrīraṅgam with [his] soldiers. All Yavanas arrived quickly in Śrīraṅgam, just like

hands of Vadānta Deśika (Vedāntārya) his sons and his work, *Śrutaprakāśikā*, to protect them from the invaders. When the Yavanas entered the temple, Vedānta Deśika escaped to Yādavādri (Melkote) together with Sudarśana's two sons and the commentary.[39] At that time, the journey of Lokācārya began and the text describes it in the following verses (PA 121.12–21), mentioning the difficulties on the way, such as the looting of god's jewelry by the thieves. When they reached Jyotiṣmati (Jyotishkudi), Lokācārya, depressed by the news from Srirangam, died. The group proceeded to Sundarācala (Alagar Koil) and after establishing there a well, left for Kerala. There they visited fourteen Vaiṣṇava places and subsequently reached Yādavācala (Melkote), where Raṅganātha was worshipped together with Sampatkumara (processional image of the Melkote temple). Then the Raṅganātha image proceeded to Veṅkatācala (Tirupati/Tirumala) residing there for some time.[40]

Kālayavana in Mathurā, with three hundred thousand [soldiers]. All inhabitants of Śrīraṅgam were stricken with fear of him, in the same way that the inhabitants of Mathurā were afflicted by fear. The inhabitants of Mathurā were thinking of going to Dvārakā as did Lord Kṛṣṇa by the power of yoga. Similarly, imitating this, indeed, the Lord of Raṅga decided for the inhabitants of Śrīraṅgam to go to Vaikuṇṭha." Kālayavana, according to the stories known, for example, from the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and *Harivaṃśa*, invaded Mathurā with Yavanas against Kṛṣṇa.

39 PA 121.6–11: "Then the learned, old man named Sudarśana, born in the Kūravaṃśa, the wise one, having approached Vedāntārya of great splendour [and saying to him] 'Save [my] two sons', handed the two sons quickly over to him. All-knowing Vedāntārya, having agreed to protect for the good of the world, took the two sons, as well as his [Sudarśana's] work, the *Śrutaprakāśikā*, and guarded [them] out of compassion of Raṅgeśa. Then, having broken the solid doors by force, the mighty Yavanas thrust their way into Raṅga's [place]. All the sinless Vaiṣṇavas were slain by the killers of Brahmins, [but] there was the superiority of those living there [the Vaiṣṇavas] over the Yavanas. Having taken the *Śrībhāṣya* (commentary) and two sons of Sudarśana [given] to Vaṅkateśa, the wise one [namely the said Veṅkateśa] went then to the Yedavādri (Melkote)."

40 PA 121.12–21: "Raṅgeśa, in the company of Lokācārya, moved quickly by a difficult forest path to the region of Pāṇḍyas. There, the whole wealth of Raṅgin was taken away by the thieves. Lokārya, going in front, even after hearing about it, was not afraid. He, the wise one, came quickly [and] with respect gave himself his wealth to these thieves (*corajana*). The Lord of Raṅga, together with Lokārya, reached the town of Jyotiṣmatī. Then, having heard the whole story of the place (*kṣetra*) of Raṅga and Raṅgin, resigned Lokārya reached the highest abode. Raṅgeśa was very unhappy because of separation from Lokācārya. Having left the town of Jyotiṣmatī (Jyotishkudi), Raṅgarāṭ ("the Lord of Raṅga" (Srirangam)) went toward Sundarācala (Alagar Koil). Having established there one well in his name, [he] left the region of Pāṇḍya [and] went to the Kerala country. In no time, having seen fourteen Viṣṇu places in Kerala, Raṅgarāṭ together with his wife took refuge in Yādavācala (Melkote). After residing there for some time with the lord of Yādavācala, Saṃpatputra and his wife, Raṅgeśa, the Lord of the world, Lord Raṅgin quickly came to Veṅkaṭācala (Tirumala). Raṅgeśa

The above description of the PA does not give many details and does not mention the names of all the places visited by Raṅganātha. Nevertheless, the main locations are briefly referred to. The Keralan episode is very cursorily described and although according to the text, the image visited fourteen places of Viṣṇu worship, none of them is mentioned by name.

The next passage takes us back to Srirangam and brings up the story of saving the temple by a canny devotee named Narasiṃhadeva. The latter, pretending friendship with the chief of Yavanas, saved the rest of Vaiṣṇavas of Srirangam from death. The text proceeds with the story of a devoted woman and her son named Śrīśailanātha. He, being desirous of women (*yuvatī janalolupaḥ*) and not knowing what is good and what is bad (*kṛtyākṛtyena na vedāryaḥ sa dvijo*), approached the teacher from the Kūra family. When the teacher died, Śrīśailanātha who received, due to his devotion, a new name—Satputra (Virtuous Son), went to Melkote. It is there that the *Śrībhāṣya* was created by Rāmānuja (Yatirāja), and then handed down to Satputra, who lived there for some time. Satputra transmitted the commentary to Vedānta Deśika, who introduced it in Śrīraṅgam after the Raṅganātha image returned there.

In the subsequent passage, the text goes back to Raṅganātha's return to Srirangam. It mentions Govana (i.e., Gopaṇa) who was asked in a dream by god himself to conquer Mlecchas (Yavanas) and to bring back the Raṅganātha image. Govana did so and reestablished the image in the temple. Vedānta Deśika, having also come back to Srirangam, created one verse for Govanārya, which was inscribed on the wall of Raṅgaprākara. He also introduced "in the world" the text of Rāmānuja and its commentary, *Śrutaprakāśikā*.[41]

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was worshipped in the Veṃkaṭala by Śrīnivāsa (Viṣṇu Veṅkatanātha) [and] resided [there] for some time happily, free from the fatigue of the travelling."

41   PA 122.1–13: "At that time, in the city of Nārāyaṇa (Tirupati), a righteous devotee of Viṣṇu, named Govana, was ruling the country in righteousness. In the night dream, the Lord, the ruler of Śrīraṅgam satisfied with the vigorous one called Govaṇa, uttered a pleasing speech: 'On my order, by conquering with your own strength the whole power of the Mlecchas, bring my lord of Raṅga to the place of Raṅga, O mighty one.' Then, the one named Govana, filled with amazement, got up from sleep, mounted Veṅkaṭācala, and bowed to Raṅgeśa. Hearing the whole story from the mouth of his priest, he respectfully stood in front of Rangeśa, the lord Hari who was accompanied by Lakṣmī and Bhū (Kṣmā). [Then] the mighty one proceeded to the city of Raṅga at the auspicious time. He, the wise Govana, reached the city of Señjī and learning of the strengths and weaknesses of the Yavana through skillful spies, decided to go there at night together with the lord of Raṅga. In the best time, having conquered the whole enfeebled power of the Mlecchas, he, the one named Govana, of great splendour and great power, established this lord of Raṅga, as previously, in the city of Raṅga and rejoiced. The noble Vedānta Deśika arrived at Śrīraṅgam and created, with respect, the auspicious praise to glorious Raṅgeśa and, invented one *śloka* for Śrī Govaṇārya.

History in the service of religion

How exactly was Raṅganātha's journey used by the Chronicle's compilers and the author of the hagiography? The content of the two texts I have referred to above is definitely the result of conscious efforts on the part of the authors, as the texts were created in order to strengthen their tradition, to advertise their uniqueness and grandeur, to introduce well-known and distinguished personages into the story, and to show the connections between certain places.

In the case of the Chronicle, the obvious lack of reverence for the precise facts is attested to by the confusion regarding dates and the mixing up of the stories. The same is also visible in the case of the Tirumala chronicle, which gives yet another date for Muhammad bin Tughluq's raid and also claims that the image spent eight years in Senji before reaching Tirumala itself.

The story about the priest saving the image in the Tirumala hills even at the cost of his life (hence, emphasizing the theme of an ardent devotee saving the god at all costs), suites the Chronicle's both stories about two different peregrinations of the image (one connected with Malik Kafur's raid dated 1310 and the second, of Muhammad bin Tughluq's, dated 1323). For the Chronicle, Raṅganātha's journey in the years 1323–71 is an important element of the temple's history in reference to its sacred processional image. Additionally, it is another opportunity to present an example of god's mighty and divine intervention, as well as the interrelation between the god and his devotees cooperating in times of distress. Thus, the story fits into the tasks and specificities required of this type of text.

The Tirumala hills/Candragiri story does not appear in the PA. The reason could be that the PA is more focused on the Śrīvaṣṇava teachers' role not only in saving the image (in deciding how to protect the image) but especially in saving the central text of the tradition, namely, the *Śrībhāṣya* of Rāmānuja and its commentary, the *Śrutaprakāśikā*. The story about its saving by Vedānta Deśika, who travelled with two sons of Sudarśanasūri, creates a kind of frame story for the image's peregrinations. The passages from the PA evoke the involvement, connections, and respectful relations among the Vaiṣṇava *ācārya*s such as Rāmānuja, Veṅkatanātha, Piḷḷai Lokācārya and Sudarśanasūri who were representatives of

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Even today this *śloka* is seen in the Raṅgaprākara: 'Having taken [Raṅganātha] from the Añjana mountain which gives colour to the world, embellished with splendour of the dark summit, in Cenji having worshipped [Him] for some time, then having conquered the Turks with raised bows, Govanārya, properly established Raṅganātha together with both Lakṣmī and Kṣmā in the innate place (Srirangam) attaining the glory by the previously unseen conduct and worship.' At that time the great Vedānta Deśika introduced in the world the *Śrutaprakāśika* commentary for Bhagavat, the commentary which was created by Kurukeśa (Rāmānuja; and then collected by Sudarśana Sūri) and greatly renowned. It is known that the son of Veṃkaṭeśa was Varadārya."

both Śrīvaiṣṇava communities of the Teṅkalais and the Vaṭakalais. Thus, it makes sense that in this version the connection of Srirangam with Melkote is also emphasized. This is done not only through the account of the visit of Raṅganātha's image during his escape, but also by referring to Melkote as the location in which Rāmānuja lived for some time and created the texts that are very important for the Srirangam temple tradition. On the whole, the hagiography is concentrated on the role of the teachers and the fate of the important texts of the tradition. In comparison, this element of the story is not at all present in the Chronicle's version (although it was known to the present-day editor, who mentions it in his notes, the Chronicle vol. I: 470).

In both sources, only some stages of the journey are more elaborately described, such as the episode about particular priests' involvement in rescuing the image and some historical personages' role in dislodging the invaders from the temple.

In the Chronicle, which is predominantly connected with the temple life, the priests, especially Śrīraṅgarājanātha Vādhūla Deśikar, presented also as members of the lineage of the temple's officiating priests, were the ones deciding how to protect the temple and the image. Instead of relying on the advice of the religious teachers, they asked the god directly by resorting to the custom of divination called *tiruvuḷḷaccīṭṭu*. As the text states, it was the Lord himself, Śrīraṅgarājanātha, who sent Piḷḷai Lokācārya away with the images, and who protected the main shrines by way of additional walls. Thus, in this version, the role of the priests and temple officials is decisive.

In contrast, the hagiography stresses the role of Vedānta Deśika in deciding the mode of action in the face of the Sultanate forces' attack, which is compared with the mythical story of the oppression of Mathurā by Kālayavana. The Srirangam episode introduces also the concern for the *Śrutaprakāśikā* commentary, which, as we already know, is important for this hagiography.

The Keralan episode is described much more thoroughly in the Chronicle than in the hagiography, which barely mentions it. The former connects the journey with yet another Vaiṣṇava saint, Nammāḻvār, who, in the form of his image, joins Raṅganātha on his journey. The story about the Nammāḻvār image falling into the sea brings up once again the theme of supernatural intervention, by its retrieval through the help of an eagle. Nammāḻvār's image accompanied Viṣṇu up to Tirukkannampi, and, as the Chronicle claims, this has left some traces in the ritualistic practice in the nearby Melkote temple which was the next stage of the journey. The Chronicle highlights the fact that Nammāḻvār's image was kept together with Raṅganātha's on the same platform. Hence, the role of the Āḻvārs for the South Indian Vaiṣṇavas is being reiterated and emphasized.

Melkote is another point of importance for the Chronicle, not only due to our story, but also because it is where, during the first 'journey' (in 1311 CE, to Delhi), the Muslim princess (according to the Melkote version known from PA) was

reunited with the image of god and became one with him, and therefore she has a shrine there. According to the Chronicle's version (of the second journey), Raṅganātha's image stayed there for several years, being honored by the devotees.

In comparison, in the PA, Melkote is mentioned briefly as a stop in Raṅganātha's journey, where he resided for some time with the Melkote processional image (Saṃpatputra). Yet this version emphasizes Melkote's importance as the place where Rāmānuja handed down to the disciples his *Bhāṣya*. The PA dedicates several chapters to Rāmānuja's Melkote episode, thus his stay on the Yādavādri—the Mountain of the Yādavas—is also fully acknowledged in chapters 44–51. In the PA, Melkote is also the place to which Vedānta Deśika and the sons of Sudarśanasūri took the *Śrutaprakāśikā*, the text which was later introduced "all over the world" (*jagatyāṃ bhūri viśrutam*). This element of mentioning previous generations of religious teachers is also typical for hagiographical works.[42]

Worth noting is also the usage of the meaningful term *pradakṣiṇa* in the context of the journey. It appears in the Chronicle when the text recounts the travel of the image from Melkote to Tirupati and its "proceeding to Tiruveṅkaṭa (Tirupati) as a circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*) and reaching Tirumala"[43]. The term *pradakṣiṇa* denotes circumambulation and, in the temple context, it refers to the clockwise movement of the devotees around the main shrine. Looking at the map presenting the places mentioned in both our texts, we can see that indeed, the route is more or less circular and covers all cardinal and intermediate directions.

The use of this term locates the journey in the domain of the custom of circumambulating the most holy spot, which from the point of view of the Chronicle is Srirangam. It also can allude to the concept of visiting and, through this, conquering the main four directions and the regions around it—the *digvijaya*. This appellation appears also in the hagiographical works referring to the great kings, religious teachers, and philosophers visiting places located in all directions of the subcontinent and through this extending the domain of their influence.[44]

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42 Dutta (2014: 102), while speaking about the mutual profits of the rulers and the Vaiṣṇava temple, writes: "In this context, the notion of a lineage emanating from the Āḻvārs, Rāmānuja, and even Rāmānuja's close disciples became significant. The hagiographers through their narratives in addition to delineating Rāmānuja as the most prominent *ācārya* also delineated the disciples of Rāmānuja and prominent *ācārya*s on the basis of their avowed proximity to him. Therefore, associating or attaching to one of the ancestries of these Āḻvārs and *ācārya*s on the part of the Śrīvaiṣṇava religious leaders provided a reference point to project themselves as legitimate religious authority and lay claim over the temple resources and honours."

43 For the quote see fn 32.

44 See, for example, Sax (2000: 43), where he writes: "In literary representations of the practice, the *digvijayi* usually moves through the area he desires to conquer by an auspicious and powerful *parikrama* (circumambulatory movement) (…)." See also Nowicka 2016 and Nowicka 2017.
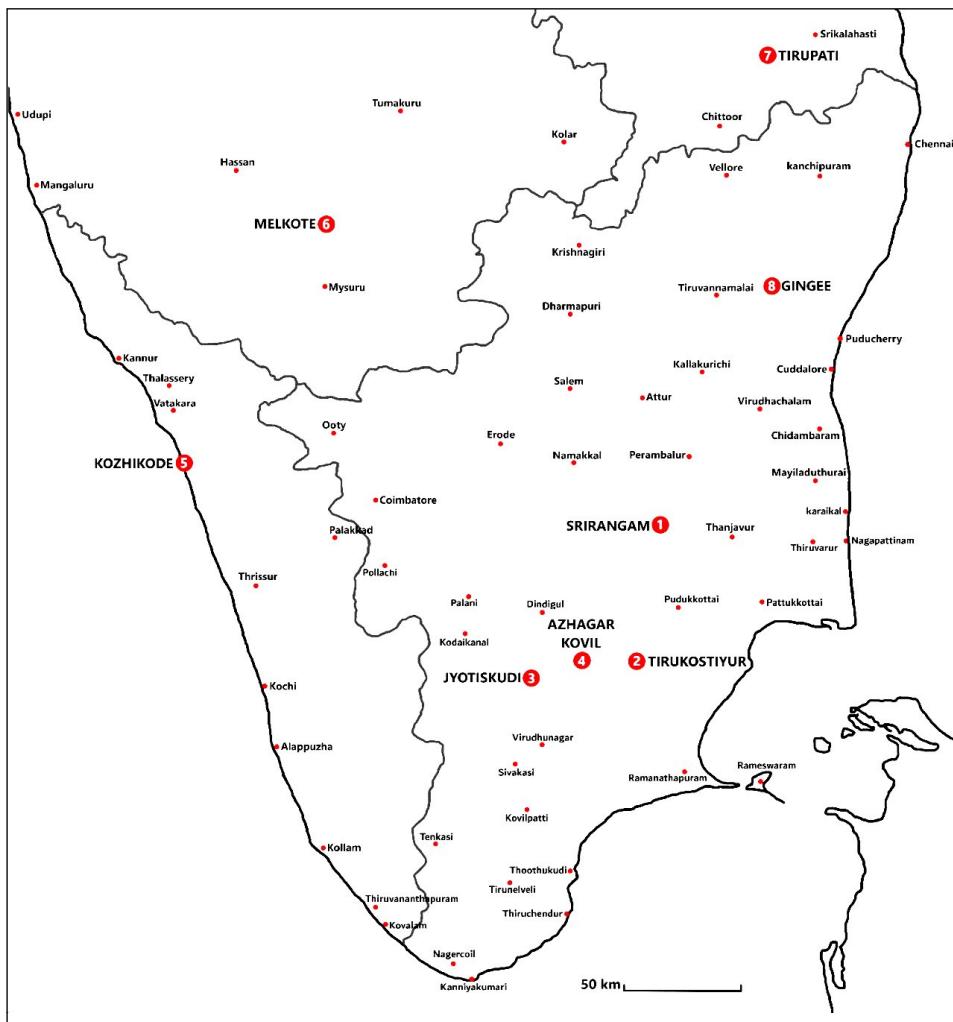
Map. 1   The map by Mohan Ramesh (EFEO, Pondicherry).

Through the usage of the term *pradakṣiṇa*, often associated with the *digvijaya*, the Chronicle could allude to the strategy used purposefully to underline and reinforce the position of Srirangam but also to present the journey as if it were not an escape but a deliberate expedition of the god in his movable representation. The inclusion of the Kerala episode makes the glory of Srirangam active and effective also in the country where the Tamil-bound tradition was less popular.

To sum up, in the sources we chose to analyze, only some stages of the journey were more thoroughly described. The choice of these places could have been intentional. They could have been chosen for some particular reasons, for

example, in consideration of their remote and safe location, solicitations of local chieftains/priests or local communities who wanted to host the image, or it could have been deliberate decisions of the priests transporting the image. The authors of the texts important for their tradition added value to some of them, dedicating to the chosen locations more space in their narratives.

At least three of these locations, namely, Srirangam, Melkote, and Tirupati were influential, well-established Vaiṣṇava holy spots. By dedicating longer passages to them, the texts of the tradition emphasized their role but also their interconnectedness as well as friendly coexistence, both factors allowing them to consider the locations as appropriate places to host the image. Sectarian affiliations could both facilitate but also impede the relations between the places. We may notice, for example, that Srirangam itself has a Pāñcarātra Teṅkalai affiliation [45], but the priests belong to both sects, while the Tirupati temple, being of the Vaikhānasa tradition affiliation, is Vaṭakalai in the case of the priests, and Teṅkalai in regard to the Jīyars, the heads of the *maṭha*, who supervise the temple. Thus, both traditions and their sects are present in these places, which could have made the contact between them more complicated. [46] Viraraghavacharya (2003: 118), very briefly and imprecisely mentioning the visit of Raṅganātha in Tirupati while referring to the Raṅgamaṇḍapa within the Tirupati temple premises, notices the problems of different affiliations. Since only the *utsavamūrti* was brought to Tirupati, he says, the *mūlamūrti* was locally manufactured and installed. This enabled the worship of god according to the Pāñcarātra rules which differ from the Vaikhānasa rules of the Tirumala temple. This event left its impact on the ritual order of the temple and introduced "many festivals which were before foreign to the Vaikhanasas."

Another connecting element is the role of Rāmānuja and other important Śrīvaiṣṇava personages who visited these places and left their impact on the temple life. For example, one of the crucial inputs of Rāmānuja was the introduction of the Pāñcarātrika mode of temple worship in most of the Vaiṣṇava temples of South India, and in Srirangam; in addition, he structured the administration prescribing different rights and obligations to different groups of temple functionaries. He also spent several years in Melkote where some of his writings were created. Veṅkatanātha/Vedānta Deśika, in turn, was responsible for reintroducing in Srirangam rules created by Rāmānuja after the break caused by the raids of the Sultanate forces. He was also the one to protect the scripture authored by Rāmānuja as well as its commentaries through his escape from Srirangam to Melkote together with Sudarśanasūri's sons.

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45   It is through Śrīraṅganārāyaṇa Jīyar Maṭha.
46   The sectarian differences and rivalry as well as takeovers are beyond the scope of the present article.

In addition, the role of the political situation in this process of connecting particular places at the time of the second journey (1323–71) should not be overlooked, for example, the growing power of the Vijayanagara dynasty present in the region. There were relations of different kinds between the rulers and the temple priests and functionaries in different holy spots.[47] Thus, their supporting each other was a common practice. In the case of the image's journey, it is the presence of the Vijayanagara forces in the Tirupati region, making it a safe place for offering sanctuary to one of the most distinguished forms of Viṣṇu, that established the link and enabled the priests to consider Tirupati/Tirumala as the final destination. It made possible the escape, peregrinations of the image, its long stay in the Vijayanagra-protected Tirupati, and, finally, after the subsequent vanquishing of the Sultanate forces by Vijayanagara in Srirangam, the safe return of the image to Srirangam.

Conclusions

The authors of the Chronicle and the hagiography, in addressing the past events presented above, set different goals for their texts. Their goals are evident in the choice of points of elaboration and emphasis, and the ways of presenting them.

The Chronicle is more detailed in describing the journey. It concentrates more on the role of the priests and the devotion of the people to the extent of even risking their lives, staying in Srirangam, or protecting the image in the wilderness of Candragiri. It also, expectedly, views Srirangam as the central point of reference and attention, even suggesting an interpretation of the image's peregrinations as *pradakṣiṇa*. In mixing the stories of two different journeys, in one of which a Muslim princess falls in love with the image, it even suggests that the Sultan's forces were impressed and affected by the glory of God. Thus, the story exemplifies the ineluctable power of God—the Muslim princess dedicated her life to following the image and staying with it forever.

The PA treats the journey more briefly since Srirangam and its history are not at the center of its attention and the sections dedicated to the journey concentrate

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47 Referring to relations between Vijayanagara rulers and the temple (however, in this passage, in the post-journey times), Dutta (2014: 102) speaks about the mutual interests of both groups: "It is worth examining the relationship between the temples' primary benefactors (the Vijayanagar rulers and chiefs) and the sectarian leaders enmeshed in temple politics. On one hand, both needed and took support from each other; on the other hand, sectarian rulers used the temple as a base for building power and were also in a position to make endowments."

more on several Śrīvaiṣṇavācāryas and their role in the protection of the texts of the tradition.

Even if not well known and difficult to trace in detail, the story was creatively and efficiently used by the authors of these two texts to achieve some of their goals.[48] These goals, such as establishing and highlighting the role of the great teachers or the role of a particular temple and its priests, remind, create, and underline the connections among different Vaiṣṇava spots. The topic of the journey of the image creates an opportunity to evoke the varied relations of these places. Some of the places had already been in contact, being important Vaiṣṇava centres visited by the Āḻvārs and then the Śrīvaiṣṇavācāryas. The route of the journey included also some places of lesser visibility in the community, but useful as safe places of rescue. In addition, being dispersed over a bigger region, the very mention of these places could be used to prove the breadth of influence of a particular temple and a particular form of god. These widely scattered spots also enable the authors of the texts to show the route as a circular peregrination of the god exemplifying his might and influence. The connections, be they real or imagined and constructed by the authors of the discussed texts, accentuate relations and nets of connections between holy spots often present in the South Indian religious literature.

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48 At the present stage of our knowledge, we cannot exclude that the local *māhātmya*s, if any, mention this event. If so, it would shed some more light on the reasons for choosing particular places and could speak for special bonds between some of the locations perceived as appropriate and safe while providing additional data about affinities between other Vaiṣṇava sacred spots.

Appendix

Prapannāmṛta chapter 120

lokācāryasya nikaṭaṃ kaścic cāraḥ samāgataḥ || avocat sahasā karṇe yavanāgamanaṃ tadā ||54|| idānīṃ yavanaḥ prāptaḥ sabalaḥ khaṇḍanaṃ puram || āgamiṣyaty ayaṃ kṣudro hy atraivādyāśu niścayaḥ ||55|| pratigṛhya vacas tasya sahasā nipuṇas tadā || vedāntadeśikāyaiva tan nivedya jagadguruḥ ||56|| tacchāsanāt sa raṅgeśaṃ samādāya sadārakam || taḍgoṣṭhīpurapanthānam anusṛtya yayau tadā ||57|| tadvat taṃ śanakaiḥ samyag abhūt kliṣṭataraṃ tataḥ || tenodvignāḥ prajāḥ sarvā raṅgaṃ viviśur añjasā ||58|| praviśya sahasā raṅgaṃ dṛḍhaṃ baddhvārarāṇi (?) ca || vedāntāryādayas sarve tasthus tatra bhayārditāḥ ||59|| tatas tatrāñjasā dhīmān mahān vedāṃtadeśikaḥ || akhaṇḍadīpaṃ prajvālya sannidhau raṅgaśāyinaḥ ||60|| tadgarbhasadanadvāram iṣṭikābhiḥ pidhāya ca || palāyan aparas tasthau sarvaiḥ śrīvaiṣṇavais saha ||61|| iti śrīprapannāmṛte śrīraṃgavāsināṃ yavanabādhāprāptir nāma viṃśatyadhikaṃ śatatamo 'dhyāyaḥ ||

Prapannāmṛta chapter 121

yavanaḥ khaṇḍanapūrāt sa tadā devakaṇṭakaḥ || niryayau sainikais sārdhaṃ śrīraṅgaṃ prati satvaram ||1|| yavano yavanais sārdham agāc chrīraṃgam añjasā || mathurāṃ kālayavanaḥ koṭibhis tisṛbhir yathā ||2|| śrīraṅgavāsinas sarve bhayārtās tena te janāḥ || yathaiva bhayam āpannā mathurāpuravāsinaḥ ||3|| mathurāvāsināṃ teṣāṃ dvārakāprāpaṇe manaḥ || yathā cakāra bhagavāñ chrīkṛṣṇo yogamāyayā ||4|| tataiva raṅgarājo 'pi śrīraṅgapuravāsinām || cakāra tena vyājena vaikuṇṭhaprāpane manaḥ ||5|| tadā sudarśano nāma bhaṭṭāryaḥ kūravaṃśajaḥ || vṛddhaḥ sametya matimān vedāṃtāryaṃ mahaujasam ||6|| putradvayaṃ ca rakṣeti tasya hasteñjasā [haste 'ñjasā?] dadau || vedāntāryas sa sarvajñas tatputradvayam añjasā ||7|| śrutaprakāśikāṃ caiva tatkṛtiṃ lokarakṣane || aṃgīkṛtya rarakṣātha raṃgeśakṛpayā tadā ||8|| tato nirbhidya sahasā kapāṭāni dṛḍhānyapi || viviśuḥ sahasā raṃgaṃ yavanā balavattarāḥ ||9|| brahmaghnair nirhatās sarvaṃ vaiṣṇavā vītakalmaṣāḥ || tatra sthitās tair yavanair viśeṣam abhavat tadā ||10|| śrībhāṃṣyaṃ veṃkaṭeśasya sudarśanasutadvayam || samādāyāñjasā dhīmān yādavādriṃ tadā yayau ||11|| lokācāryasahāyena raṃgeśaḥ pāṇḍyamaṇḍalam || pratasthe sahasāraṇyavartmanā durgamena ca ||12|| sarvañ ca raṃgiṇas tatra corair apahṛtaṃ dhanam || agrayāyī sa lokāryas tac chrutvāpi na vivyathe ||13|| tatra gatvāñjasā dhīmān svakīyaṃ dhanam ādarāt || tasmai corajanāyaiva pradadau svayameva saḥ ||14|| jyotiṣmatīpuraṃ prāpa lokāryeṇa sa raṃgarāṭ || raṃgakṣetrasya vṛttāntaṃ taṃ sarvaṃ raṃgiṇas tadā ||15|| śrutvā saviṣṇulokāryaḥ prepede paramaṃ padam || lokācāryaviyogena raṅgeśo bhṛṣaduḥkhitaḥ ||16|| jyotiṣmatīpuraṃ hitvā prapede suṃdarācalam || kūpaṃ svanāmnā tatraikaṃ vidhāya ca sa raṃgarāṭ ||17|| vihāya pāṇḍyakaṭakaṃ keralaṃ deśam abhyagāt || caturdaśa vilokyāśu viṣṇusthānāni kerale ||18|| sadāro raṃgarāṭ śīghraṃ prapade yādavācalam || yādavācalanāthena saṃpatputreṇa sādaraṃ ||19||

sthitvātha tatra raṃgeśaḥ kañcitkālaṃ jagatpatiḥ || ājāgāmāñjasā raṃgī bhagavān veṃkaṭā-
calam ||20|| pūjitaḥ śrīnivāsena raṃgeśo veṃkaṭale || nivṛttādhvaśramas tasthau kiñcitkālaṃ
yathāsukham ||21||

[...]

devādhipaḥ samāhutaḥ śrīśaileśasamanvitaḥ || yādavācalamāsādya yatirājasya san-
nidhau ||42|| kṛṣṇapādakṛtaṃ bhāṣyaṃ pradadau premapūrvakam || satputradevarā-
jādiśiṣyebhyaś ca mahāyaśāḥ ||43||

[...]

tadā raṅgeśvaraḥ śrīmāñ chrīraṅgagamanonmukhaḥ || babhuva bhagavān dṛṣṭvā kalyāt-
makam idaṃ jagat ||52||

Prapannāmṛta chapter 122

govano nāma dhatmātmā kaścid bhāgavatottamaḥ || śaśāsa rājyaṃ dharmeṇa nārāyaṇapūre
tadā ||1|| tasya prasanno bhagavān svapne śrīraṅganāyakaḥ || vyājahāra śubhaṃ vākyaṃ
govaṇākhyaṃ mahaujasam ||2|| hatvā mlecchabalaṃ sarvaṃ svabalena madājñayā || raṅ-
gasthalaṃ prāpayādya raṅgeśaṃ mām mahābala ||3|| tataḥ svapnāt samuthāya govaṇākhyaḥ
savismayaḥ || veṅkaṭācalam āruhya śrīraṃgeśaṃ praṇamya ca ||4|| tadarcakamukhāt sarvaṃ
jñātvā vṛttāntam ādarāt || raṃgeśam agre saṃsthāpya lakṣmīkṣmāsahitaṃ harim ||5||
pratasthe raṅganagaraṃ sumuhurte mahābalaḥ || sa sañjīnagaraṃ prāpya prājño gov-
aṇabhūmipaḥ ||6|| yavanasyāśu nipuṇaiś corair jñātvā balābale || raṅgeśasahitaṃ tasmān
nirgatya niśi niśćalaḥ ||7|| sarvaṃ mlecchabalaṃ hatvā niḥśepaṃ samaye vare || raṅgeśaṃ
raṃganagare taṃ pratiṣṭhāpya pūrvavat ||8|| tutoṣa sumahātejā govaṇākhyo mahābalaḥ ||
vedāntadeśikaḥ śrīmāñ chrīraṃgaṃ prāpya sādaram ||9|| maṃgalāśāsanaṃ kṛtvā raṃgeśāya
mahaujase || śrīgovaṇāryaviṣayaṃ ślokam ekam akalpayat adyāpi raṃgaprākāre sa ślokaḥ
paridṛśyate ||10|| ānīyānīlaśṛṃgaddyutiracitajagadrajanād añjanādreś ca jām [Cañji? Gingee]
ārādhya kiñcitsamayam atha nihatyoddhanuṣkāṃs turuṣkān|| lakṣmīkṣmābhyām ubhābhyāṃ
saha nijanilaye sthāpayan raṃganāthaṃ samyak caryāsaparyāpunarakṛtayaśaḥprāpaṇo
govaṇāryaḥ ||11|| śrutaprakāśikābhāṣyaṃ bhagavadviṣayañ ca yat || kurukeśakṛtaṃ bhāṣyaṃ
mahān vedāntadeśikaḥ ||12|| pravartayāmāsa tadā jagatyāṃ bhūri viśrutam || veṃkaṭeśasya
putro 'bhūd varadārya iti śrutaḥ ||13||

Abbreviations

PA	*Prapannāmṛtam*
SII	South Indian Inscriptions
TTD	Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam

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The City of Many Temples
Textual Representations of Kanchipuram's
Śaiva Temple Network

ataḥparaṃ pravakṣyāmi santi sthānāni bhūriśaḥ |
kāñcyāṃ muktipradāyinyāṃ mocakasyātmanāṃ vibhoḥ ||

I will tell further on. There are many sacred sites in Kanchi, the city that
gives liberation, belonging to the Lord, who is the liberator of the souls.

Kāñcīmāhātmya 12.1

kacciyuḷ eṇṇ aṟu tīrtta' niṟaint' uḷa kāmuṟu pala tāṉam
poccam il pōkamum vīṭum aḷippaṉa pōkk' aṟu mēṉmaiya vām ...

In Kanchi, countless *tīrtha*s abound. Many desirable sacred sites grant
true enjoyment and liberation and possess imperishable excellence.

Kāñcippurāṇam 8.2

Kanchipuram or Kanchi, located about seventy km west of Chennai in the Indian
state of Tamil Nadu, is a city of many temples. Many other South Indian temple
towns, such as Chidambaram or Tiruvannamalai, are dominated by a single
great temple, which forms the centre of the city both figuratively and literally
(Michell 1993: 9). Kanchipuram, on the other hand, has not one, but three great
temples, the Ekāmranātha, the Varadarāja Perumāḷ, and the Kāmākṣī Ammaṉ,
which are consecrated to local forms of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and the Goddess, respectively.
The followers of these deities (Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, and Śāktas) each have their
own concept of Kanchipuram's sacred space, in which the main temple of their
preferred deity stands at the centre (Hüsken 2017). However, what is perhaps
even more characteristic for Kanchipuram's religious topography is the presence
of a large number of further temples that dot the city's urban landscape (Stein
2021). Among them, Śiva temples, ranging from great temple complexes to small
streetside shrines, are particularly numerous.

What most of these temples have in common is that their mythical origin
stories are told in Kanchipuram's temple legends, mythological texts from the
medieval and early modern periods known as *sthalamāhātmya* in Sanskrit
and *talapurāṇam* in Tamil. Owing to its religious importance and diversity,

Kanchipuram has received a particularly large number of such texts, composed by adherents of different religious traditions in both Sanskrit and Tamil (Buchholz 2022). For the city's Śaiva traditions, two works are particularly relevant: the Tamil *Kāñcippurāṇam* (KP) of the author Civañāṉa Muṉivar, and its Sanskrit source, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM). Both these texts, along with the other *sthalamāhātmya*s and *talapurāṇam*s of Kanchipuram, are currently being digitally edited and translated under the "Hindu Temple Legends in South India" project.[1] In this article, I investigate the representation of Kanchipuram's Śaiva temple network in the KP and the KM. As we will see, the two texts present Kanchipuram as a city of many temples, as they deal with more than a hundred Śiva temples in and around Kanchipuram.[2] Moreover, I will show how the texts describe the temples—namely as sacred places that are rooted in the mythological past, rather than as historically tangible architectural structures—and what patterns emerge from the narratives associated with them. Finally, we will revisit the present-day role of the texts for the Śaiva temple traditions of Kanchipuram and how they have contributed to the consolidation of the city's sacred topography.

The KP and the KM

Of the two texts that are relevant for our discussion, the *Kāñcippurāṇam* (KP) is by far the one better known today. It was composed in the late eighteenth century by Civañāṉa Muṉivar (d. 1785), an influential Tamil Śaiva intellectual, and is considered one of the best-known Tamil *talapurāṇam*s. More precisely, the KP contains two books (*kāṇṭam*), the first written by Civañāṉa Muṉivar and the second by his pupil Kacciyappa Muṉivar (see Buchholz 2022: 24–29). While framed as two parts of the same work, the two books of the KP are, in fact, independent compositions. As we will see, Kacciyappa Muṉivar's second book of the KP is far less known than the first book by Civañāṉa Muṉivar and is therefore not relevant for our discussion. Thus, wherever I refer to the KP in this article, I refer to the first book by Civañāṉa Muṉivar, which in itself is quite a sizeable work, containing sixty-seven chapters with a total of 2742 verses.

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1   I am currently preparing an edition and a translation of the KP, whereas Aneesh Raghavan is working on the KM. Until the completion of the digital editions, I refer to the extant printed editions of the texts (see Bibliography).
2   A list of those temple, with their respective present-day names and locations, can be found in the appendix to this chapter.

The KP is based on a Sanskrit source, the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM).[3] This is an anonymous Sanskrit *māhātmya*, claiming to belong to the *Skandapurāṇa*, and which must have been composed before the first half of the sixteenth century.[4] It contains about 4700 verses divided over fifty chapters.[5] While the KM is far less known today than the KP, it also deserves mention for being the source of the latter's narratives. I have discussed the relationship between the KP and the KM elsewhere in detail (Buchholz 2023a). Suffice to say here that the KP, like most Tamil *talapurāṇam*s, is composed in a far more sophisticated poetic style, but follows the KM very closely on the narrative level. For this reason, I do not normally distinguish between the two texts when discussing their contents. However, where the KP and the KM are not in agreement, I point out their differences.

The KP begins with four introductory chapters that are not based on the KM, but which constitute conventional elements of Tamil *talapurāṇam*s, including two lengthy chapters that contain an ornate description of the country and the city, that is, the region surrounding Kanchipuram and the city itself (see Buchholz 2023b). Both texts then employ a purāṇic frame narrative (KM ch. 1–3, KP ch. 5–7) that provides the backdrop for the narration. After these introductory chapters, the bulk of both the KM (ch. 4–45) and the KP (ch. 8–64) deals with the origin stories of a large number of Śiva temples in and around Kanchipuram. The exposition of the Śiva temples of Kanchipuram culminates with the Ekāmranātha temple, Kanchipuram's most important Śiva temple (Fig. 1), which receives far more space than any of the other sites (KM ch. 36–45, KP ch. 62–64). Both texts end with a number of concluding chapters (KM ch. 46–50, KP ch. 65–67), which deal with miscellaneous topics, including the rules of right conduct and the various ways through which one can accrue religious merit (*puṇya*).

When dealing with the Śiva temples of Kanchipuram, the two texts introduce one temple after another successively. The KP, as a rule, devotes a separate chapter to each temple.[6] In the KM, the chapter divisions are more arbitrary, but the

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3   The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* must be distinguished from a Vaiṣṇava work that also bears the title *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see Buchholz 2022: 15–17). Apart from the title, the two texts have nothing in common. Since this article is only concerned with the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, I will henceforth refer to it simply as the *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM).

4   As Dominic Goodall (personal communication) has recently discovered, the KM is quoted in the *Śaivāgamādimāhātmyasaṅgraha* of Vedajñāna II, also known as Maṟaiñāṉa Tēcikar II, whose uncle (Maṟaiñāṉa Tēcikar I) is believed to have died in 1563 CE.

5   When comparing the length of the KP and the KM, it is important to note that the Tamil metres used in the KP are much longer than the *anuṣṭubh* verses found in the KM. On average, one Tamil verse can be said to correspond to approximately two Sanskrit verses.

6   This also means that the length of the individual chapters varies greatly, ranging from four to 427 verses.

Fig. 1   The Ekāmranātha temple, 2023. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

sections on individual temples are clearly demarcated through specific narrative strategies. The section on each temple begins with a formulaic phrase like "hereafter I will tell about the greatness of another sacred site" (*ataḥparaṃ pravakṣyāmi sthānasyānyasya vaibhavam*). This introductory passage names the temple in question and usually indicates its geographic position in relation to the previously described site (e.g., to the south of X, there is Y). Sometimes, other geographical details, such as a nearby river or the name of the surrounding locality, are also mentioned. In the KP, too, each chapter begins with a verse that introduces the new temple, although, true to the more ambitious poetic agenda of the KP, these verses are far more ornate than the rather utilitarian verses of the KM. Consider the following verse that is found at the beginning of the *Paṇātarīcappaṭalam*, i.e., the chapter on the Phaṇādharīśvara temple (KP 18.1):

> We have told about the nature of Muttīccaram (Muktīśvara), where *vāḷai* fish leap from the sweet, fragrant waters of the excellent tanks that are stirred up by dark buffaloes with large mouths and cloven-hooved feet. Now we will speak about Paṇātarīccaram (Phaṇādharīśvara), where singing bees drink nectar and buzz melodies in the lush groves with heaps of flowers, making the assembly of the gods marvel.[7]

After introducing the site, the texts tell the temple's myth of origin, i.e., the story of how this sacred place came into being through the actions of gods or other mythical characters. The contents of these narratives will be discussed in more detail below. The KM usually signals the beginning of the narratives through the keyword *purā*, 'formerly', which situates them in the distant mythological past. Towards the end of the origin story, the text often points out that the presence of the deity or the salvific power of the place can be felt 'ever since' (*tadā prabhṛti*) or 'even today' (*adyāpi*), thus referring again to the present. The section on each temple typically ends with a *phalaśruti*, i.e., a description of the benefits that may be gained by visiting the temple. Consider, for example, the *phalaśruti* of the section on the Kacchapeśvara temple in the KM (14.20–21b):

> Since then, Śaṅkara (Śiva) never leaves Kanchi. That *liṅga* named Kacchapeśvara gives good fortune to the people in the world. By thinking about it, any good man can obtain liberation.[8]

And the corresponding passage in the KP (23.11):

> Since then, Kacchapeśvara, the one with [a garland of] laburnum and long matted hair, resides in Kanchi without ever leaving. All those who go to worship him, who see him, or who think about him will be freed of their sins and be redeemed, having reached everlasting liberation through the state in which one is both one and not one [with Śiva].[9]

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7   *kavai yaṭik kaya vāyk karu mētikaḷ uḻakkiya kaṭi vāvic*
     cuvai naṟum puṉal vāḷai mīṉ kutikku' muttīccaratt' iyal coṟṟāṉ
     kuvai malarc ceḻum potumpariṟ pāṭṭ' aḷi koḷi naṟā maṭutt' umpar
     avai viyattakap paṇ payil paṇātarīccaram iṉi yaṟaikiṟpām.

8   *tadādi satataṃ kāñcīṃ na vimuñcati śaṅkaraḥ |*
     kacchapeśākhyaliṅgaṃ tal loke kalyāṇadaṃ nṛṇām ||
     smṛtvā muktim avāpnoti yo vā ko vā narottamaḥ |

9   *aṉṟu toṭṭ' eṉṟum ak kāñciyi nīṅkalāt' amarntiṭuṅ*
     koṉṟai vār caṭaiyaṉaik kaccapēcaṉ ṟaṉaik kumpiṭac
     ceṉṟavar kaṇṭavar karutiṉar yāvarum tītu tīrnt'
     oṉri yoṉṟā nilai māṟ' ilā mutti peṟṟ' uyvarē.

Temples in the KM and the KP

Following the relatively uniform pattern outlined above, the KM and the KP describe a large number of temples in Kanchipuram and its surroundings. As can be seen from the list of these temples (found in the appendix to this chapter), the KM deals with a total of 106 temples. This number seems suspiciously close to 108, a number that is considered sacred in Hinduism, all the more since there are popular claims to the existence of 108 Śiva temples in Kanchipuram.[10] Indeed, the number presented here is somewhat arbitrary as it is sometimes difficult to decide what should be counted as a separate site, so a slightly different count might well have resulted in the auspicious number of 108. However, the KM itself does not number the sites that it describes, nor does it address their total number in any other way. Moreover, as we will see, the number of temples that are described in the KM varies between different recensions of the text. As such, the number of the temples must be considered incidental.

The KP, as a rule, describes the same temples in the same sequence as the KM. However, twelve temples that are mentioned in the KM do not feature in the KP (nos. 5, 6, 7, 19, 21, 22, 55, 61, 64, 72, 81, and 95 on the list in the appendix). This seems to correspond, at least partly, to differences between various recensions of the KM: in the case of some of the temples that are not mentioned in the KP, the corresponding sections are also missing in a part of the manuscripts of the KM (Buchholz 2023a: 397). It thus seems likely that the temples in question are missing in the KP because the sections dealing with them were not part of the version of the KM that Civañāṉa Muṉivar perused when he composed the KP.

True to the Śaiva orientation of the KM and the KP, almost all temples with which the two texts deal are Śiva temples. The only exceptions are Valampurivināyaka (no. 3)—a Gaṇeśa shrine inside the (Vaiṣṇava) Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple—and the Kumarakōṭṭam temple (no. 86), which is dedicated to the god Skanda/Murukaṉ.[11] Other local deities also occasionally feature in the narratives,

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The phrase 'the state in which one is both one and not one' (oṉṟi yoṉṟā nilai) reflects the Śaivasiddhānta doctrine, according to which the bound soul and Śiva retain their different qualities, but become one during the state of liberation. I would like to express my gratitude to Vigneshwaran Muralidaran for explaining this point to me.

10 See, e.g., the article titled *Kōyil Nakaramām Kāñcipurattil Uḷḷa 108 Apūrva Civattalaṅkaḷin Taricaṉam* ('Darshan of 108 unique Śiva temples in Kanchipuram, the city of temples') in the online edition of the popular Tamil newspaper *Āṉanta Vikaṭaṉ*, September 11, 2018 (https://www.vikatan.com/spiritual/temples/136583-temple-city-kanchis-108-shiva-temples-dharisanam, accessed February 11, 2025.) Similar claims are found on numerous other websites.

11 Throughout the text, I refer to the temples by their contemporary names. The names under which the temples are mentioned in the texts can be found in the appendix.

but they do not receive sections of their own. This is true for several local forms of Viṣṇu, who act as protagonists in the stories of various Śiva temples (see below), and also for the goddess Kāmākṣī, whose story is (somewhat awkwardly) embedded into the origin myth of the Vīraṭṭāṉeśvara temple (no. 78).

The large majority of the sites mentioned in the KM and the KP can be identified with temples that exist today. The identifications that are presented in the appendix to this article are the result of my research, conducted partly with the help of printed and online sources and partly through fieldwork in Kanchipuram.[12] In most cases, the name and approximate location indicated by the texts are sufficient to identify a temple. In other cases, the identification is less straightforward but can be confirmed through other findings. Only thirteen of the 106 sites (nos. 7, 19, 21, 22, 39, 55, 61, 72, 75, 79, 80, 81, and 94) remain currently unidentified. In some of these cases, further research might allow tracing the temples in question. It may, however, also be the case that these temples simply do not exist anymore.

Fig. 2 shows a map[13] of the temples that are mentioned in the two texts. When looking at their spatial distribution, it becomes evident that the sequence in which the temples are mentioned follows a specific (if sometimes slightly erratic) geographical trajectory. Allowing for some zigzagging and occasional detours to the city's hinterland, the route begins in the eastern part of Kanchipuram, then moves through the city's southern part, before heading to the southern and south-western fringes of the city centre. From there, we again move to the south-western and north-western outskirts of Kanchipuram before making a wide arc and approaching the city centre from the north-east. We then move through the central part of Kanchipuram and finally reach the Ekāmranātha temple, which is located just north-west of the city centre. In generalised form, the route that the texts describe can be characterised roughly as a clockwise spiral around Ekāmranātha. As such, the texts present the Ekāmranātha temple as the centre of Kanchipuram's

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12 An identification of the temples mentioned in the KP was undertaken already by Dessigane, Pattabiramin, and Filliozat (1964), although their map is relatively imprecise and therefore only of limited use. Among the numerous publications on Kanchipuram's temples (often simple booklets that are sold in local bookstalls), Vijayakumar (2014) is the most useful. Informative online sources include the Tamil-language edition of Wikipedia (cf. the articles contained in the category *Kāñcipuram māvaṭṭattiluḷḷa Civaṉ kōyilkaḷ* 'Śiva temples in Kanchipuram District' [https://ta.wikipedia.org/s/6410]) and the website shaivam.org (cf. the page *Kāñcipura Civat talaṅkaḷ*, 'Śiva temples in Kanchipuram' [https://shaivam.org/temples-special/kanchipura-siva-sthalangal/], both accessed February 11, 2025.). Moreover, online services such as Google Maps, Google Earth, and Google Street View have proven extremely useful for locating particular temples. I have verified the location of most temples during fieldwork trips to Kanchipuram in 2020, 2023, and 2024.

13 Open Street Map is open data (see https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright for more details, accessed February 11, 2025).
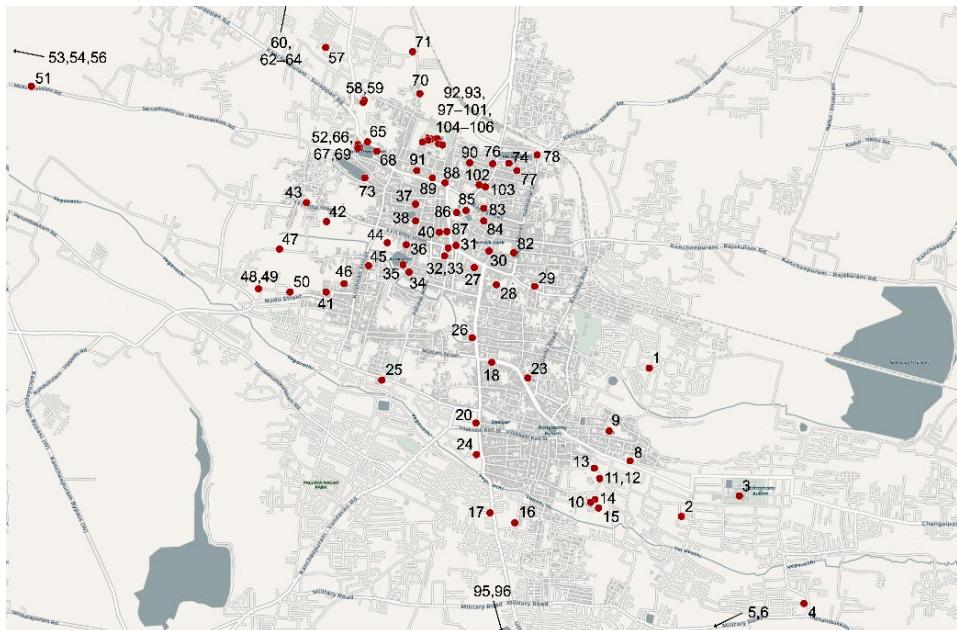
Fig. 2   Temples mentioned in the KM and KP (map by Jonas Buchholz; base map: Open Street Map).

sacred space. This is mirrored by the introductory chapters on the country and the city at the beginning of the KP, which similarly move from the outside to the inside and place Ekāmranātha at the centre (Buchholz 2023b: 46–47).

The temples that are described in the KM and KP include all major Śiva temples of Kanchipuram and many of the minor ones. In addition to Ekāmranātha, they also encompass other major temple complexes such as the Kacchapeśvara temple (no. 33; Fig. 3) and important pilgrimage sites, including various *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*s, i.e., temples that are considered particularly sacred in Tamil Śaivism.[14] Moreover, almost all of the ancient Pallava-era (eighth to ninth century) temples, for which Kanchipuram is famous, are mentioned in the texts, as are several

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14   The *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*s are the 274 (or 276) places which are mentioned in the *Tēvāram*, the most important part of the Tamil Śaiva canon. The following temples mentioned in the KM and the KP are *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*s: Ekāmranātha (no. 93), Tirumēṟṟaḷīśvara (no. 41), Oṇakānteśvara (no. 58), Aṉēkataṅkāvatīśvara (no. 42), Satyanāthasvāmī (no. 1), Vedapurīśvara (Tiruvattipuram) (no. 96), Maṇikaṇṭheśvara (Tirumālpūr) (no. 60). Two more *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*s are only mentioned in the KM, but not in the KP. They are Valīśvara in Kuraṅkaṇilmuṭṭam (no. 5) and Tālapurīśvara in Tiruppāṉaṅkāṭu (no. 6). On the significance (or lack thereof) of the *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam* status of these temples for the texts, see Buchholz 2023a: 409.
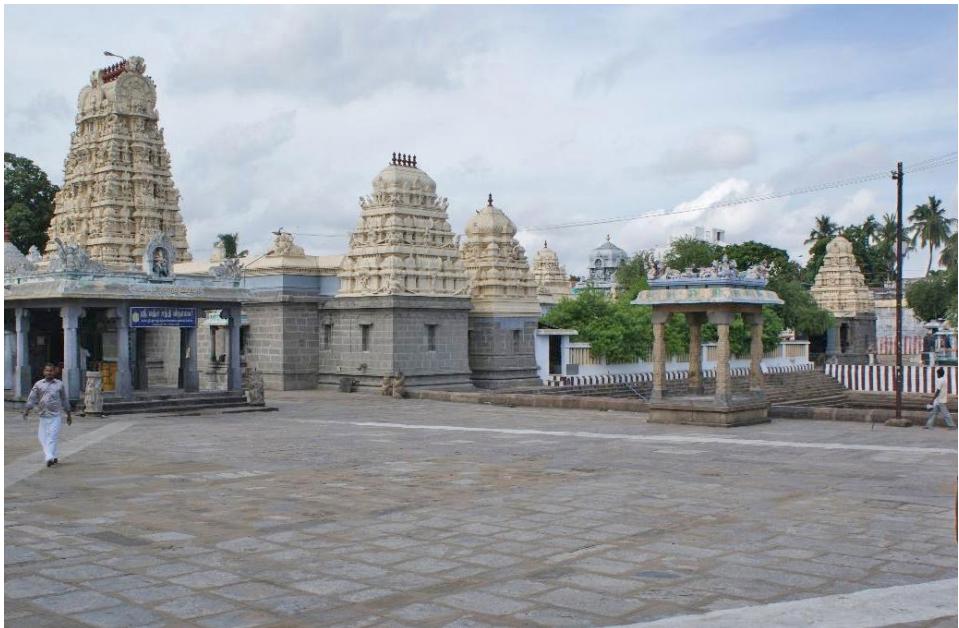
Fig. 3 The Kacchapeśvara temple, 2014. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

Fig. 4 The Mācāttaṉṟaḷīśvara temple, 2020. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

other temples of art-historical interest.[15] However, many of the sites that feature in the KM and the KP are just nondescript shrines without particular significance or memorable architectural qualities. Some of them cannot even be described as temples in the narrow sense of the word, such as Mācāttaṉṟaḷīśvara (no. 87), a *liṅga* kept in an old *maṇḍapa* that today houses a carpenter's workshop (Fig. 4). The large number and diversity of the sites that are described in the KM and the KP testify to the exceptionally rich religious landscape of Kanchipuram.

Fig. 5a   Valmīkanātha in 2016. Photo by R. Ilamurugan.

What do the KM and the KP have to say about these temples? First of all, they are not concerned with temples as physical structures, but as sacred sites. As a rule, the texts do not describe architectural features of the temples but focus on the mythical narratives associated with them and their salvific powers. Even the more florid KP, which often adds ornate descriptive passages that are not found in the KP, does not describe the physical appearance of the temples; rather the descriptions tend to focus on the natural beauty of the temples' environment, such as the ponds and groves that surround them.[16] The only exception is the Ekāmranātha temple: here both texts contain a description of the temple's physical features, including its gateway towers (*gopura*s) and enclosure walls (*prākāra*), although this description is highly idealised and presumably does not aim at a realistic portrayal of the temple's architecture (Buchholz 2022: 22–23).

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15   On the Pallava temples of Kanchipuram, see Stein 2021: 43–102. The following temples mentioned in the KM and the KP can be dated at least in part to the Pallava era: Ekāmranātha (no. 93), Tāṉṟōṉṟīśvara (no. 38), Kailāsanātha (no. 43), Iṟavāttāṉeśvara (no. 76), Piṟavāttāṉeśvara (no. 74), Airāvateśvara (no. 31), Amareśvara (no. 40), and Mataṅgeśvara (no. 29). The only major Pallava temples in Kanchipuram that are omitted by the KM and the KP are Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ (which, however, is a Viṣṇu temple), and Mukteśvara (for no apparent reason). Other art-historically remarkable temples that are mentioned in the texts include the tenth-century Kauśikeśvara (no. 84) and the twelfth-century Jvarahareśvara (no. 37; see Stein 2021: 119–20), both from the Cōḻa period.

16   Cf. the verse on the Muktīśvara and Phaṇādhareśvara temples that was quoted above.

Fig. 5b   The Valmīkanātha temple in 2024. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

It is worth noting that the texts normally do not even speak about temples, but about sacred sites (Skt. *sthāna*). The defining feature of such a sacred place is not an architectural structure, but the presence of a physical manifestation (*mūrti*) of a deity—in the case of a Śiva temple, a *liṅga*. Indeed, quite a number of the sites described in the KM and KP seem to have been not more than *liṅga*s until fairly recently. An example is the Valmīkanātha temple (no. 47), which is located in agricultural area on the outskirts of Kanchipuram's Piḷḷaiyārpāḷaiyam neighbourhood. An online blog post from December 2016 shows images of a free-standing *liṅga* surrounded by paddy fields (See Fig. 5a).[17] Another blog post allows us to track the subsequent development of the site.[18] At some point, a simple concrete shed appears to have been constructed around the *liṅga*. This structure was then replaced by a proper shrine (see Fig. 5b), which was consecrated on

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17   R. Ilamurugan: "Vanmeeganathar Temple, Kanchipuram," *Tamilnadu Tourism* (blog), 2016. https://tamilnadu-favtourism.blogspot.com/2016/12/vanmeeganathar-temple-kanchipuram.html, accessed February 11, 2025. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Ilamurugan for kindly allowing the use of his photograph.

18   Sai Srinivasan: "Successful Completion—Maha Kumbabishegam of Vanmeega Nathar Temple @ Kanchipuram," *Sage of Kanchi. Virtual Mahaperiyava Temple* (blog), 2018. https://mahaperiyavaa.blog/2018/01/27/successful-completion-maha-kumbabishegam-of-vanmeega-nathar-temple-kanchipuram/, accessed February 11, 2025.

January 19, 2018 by Vijayendra Saraswati, the then junior pontiff of the Kanchi Śaṅkara Maṭha.[19] Many of the other smaller Śiva temples of Kanchipuram may have had a history similar to that of the Valmīkanātha temple.

Importantly, the texts do not make a distinction between such relatively unimposing sites and major temples that must have been magnificent structures already at the time of the texts' composition. With the exception of the Ekāmranātha temple, all temples are given equal status and are all described in the same hyperbolic terms: for virtually every one of them, the result of visiting them is nothing short of liberation. The length of the section on a particular temple (again with the notable exception of the Ekāmranātha temple) is also not contingent on the temple's importance. Thus, the section on the Kacchapeśvara temple—arguably Kanchipuram's second most important Śiva temple after Ekāmranātha—comprises only 27 verses in the KM, whereas the chapter on Bāṇeśvara (no. 57)—a small street-side shrine in Kanchipuram's north-western outskirts—is almost three times as long. This is because the story of the battle between Kṛṣṇa and the demon Bāṇāsura is told in quite some detail, whereas the section on Kacchapeśvara is much more condensed.[20] It thus becomes clear that the length of a section is primarily determined by the narrative. It is the contents of these narratives to which we will turn in the next section.

Narrative patterns

As we have seen, the main concern of the texts is to tell the mythical origin stories of the sites. Some of these narratives are rather unique. This is true for the myth of origin of the Ekāmranātha temple (see Schier 2018: 73–96), and also for the origin stories of some other temples, such as Tirumēṟṟaḷīśvara (no. 41), where Viṣṇu is said to have become a *liṅga* when he heard a hymn sung by the poet-saint Tiruñāṉacampantar. The origin stories of most temples, however, are

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19   In an interview conducted in 2023, the priest in the Valmīkanātha temple confirmed that the present shrine had been built by the Śaṅkara Maṭha. He also specified that the upper part of the *liṅga* had been there before and was eight hundred years old, whereas the base (*āvuṭaiyāḷ*) was newly installed (interview conducted by Ute Hüsken and N. Subramaniam, April 2, 2023).

20   Civañāṉa Muṉivar further expands on this, adding extensive descriptions of the battle scenes that follow the conventions of ancient Tamil heroic poetry (*puṟam*). The difference is therefore even more pronounced in the KP: here the chapter on Kacchapeśvara comprises thirteen and that on Bāṇeśvara 111 verses. On the relative length of the Tamil and Sanskrit verses, see above fn. 5.

relatively stereotypical and deal with particular mythological characters who are said to have come to Kanchipuram and to have founded the temples in question. The list of the protagonists includes various gods, demons, sages, celestial bodies, and other mythical beings—practically the entire Hindu pantheon. The narrative pattern is usually the same: each of the protagonists of the narratives needs to worship Śiva in order to obtain the power to accomplish the deed for which they are known, or to expiate a sin that they have committed in the course of their actions. For this purpose, they come to Kanchipuram, install a *liṅga*, worship Śiva, and thus obtain what they had wished for. The *liṅga* is then named after the character in question, usually following the pattern X-*īśvara* ('Lord of X'), where X is the name of the one who had installed it.

From the above it follows that the KM and the KP retell well-known purāṇic narratives and localise them in Kanchipuram by relating them to a particular temple that is said to have been established by the protagonist of the narrative. As such, the texts contain a virtual encyclopaedia of purāṇic mythology. Notably, the retellings found in our texts allow us to understand in which form these narratives circulated in early modern Kanchipuram. For example, the Maṇikaṇṭheśvara temple (no. 8) is said to have been established by the gods, who collectively worshipped Śiva there in order to atone for the sin that they had committed by making Śiva swallow the poison that emerged during the churning of the milk ocean. The retelling of this episode that is contained in the section on the Maṇikaṇṭheśvara temple by and large conforms with the well-known purāṇic versions: in order to obtain the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*), the gods and the demons decided to churn the cosmic milk ocean, using Mount Mandara as the churning rod and the snake Vāsuki as a rope, while Viṣṇu supported the mountain in the form of the tortoise Kūrma. However, the narrative differs in one respect: as neither the gods nor the demons were strong enough to move the churning rod, the monkey Vālī had to churn the ocean for them (see Fig. 6). As Vasudha Narayanan (2013) has shown, Vālī's prominent role in the churning of the milk ocean is also attested in other South Indian textual sources, as well as in visual representations of the myth found in South India and Cambodia.[21] She convincingly argues that this narrative element is unique to South India and might have travelled from there to South-East Asia. The contents of the KM and the KP are further testimony of this.

In all the narratives that are found in the KM and the KP, Śiva is presented as the prime cause of the events. The other deities humbly beseech and worship him before Śiva appears and graciously fulfils their wishes. As such, the texts represent a decidedly Śaiva worldview, in which Śiva is considered the supreme deity.

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21   Thanks to Ute Hüsken for pointing out this reference to me.

Fig. 6   The churning of the milk ocean (illustration of the origin story of the
Maṇikaṇṭheśvara temple in the 1900 edition of the KP).

Particularly the relationship between Śiva and Viṣṇu is of major concern for the
texts. A large number of the narratives deal with how Viṣṇu, in various different
forms, worshipped Śiva in a particular temple. This includes all ten *avatāra*s of
Viṣṇu, but also his most important local manifestations in Kanchipuram. For al-
most every major Viṣṇu temple in town, there is a Śaiva 'counter-temple', that is
said to have been established by that particular form of Viṣṇu.[22] An example is the
Puṇyakoṭīśvara temple (no. 2; Fig. 7), located in the eastern part of Kanchipuram
not far from the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple (Kanchipuram's most important
Viṣṇu temple). Already the position and the name of the temple make it clear
that Puṇyakoṭīśvara stands in relation to Varadarāja Perumāḷ. The east-facing
Puṇyakoṭīśvara and the west-facing Varadarāja Perumāḷ are, as it were, facing
each other, and the name Puṇyakoṭīśvara recalls the name of the main shrine of

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22 Varadarāja Perumāḷ → Puṇyakoṭīśvara (no. 2); Yathoktakārī Perumāḷ → Brahmapurīś-
    vara (no. 4); Aṣṭabhuja Perumāḷ → Aṣṭabhujeśvara (no. 19); Dīpaprakāśa Perumāḷ →
    Ādipatīśvara (no. 20); Aḻakiya Ciṅka Perumāḷ → Nārasiṃheśvara (no. 21); Ulakaḷanta
    Perumāḷ → Abhirāmeśvara (no. 30); Paccaivaṇṇa Perumāḷ and Pavaḷavaṇṇa Perumāḷ
    → Vīraṭṭāṇeśvara (no. 78); Pāṇḍavadūta Perumāḷ → Pāṇḍavadūteśvara (no. 39). The
    only major form of Viṣṇu in Kanchipuram who is not mentioned in the KM and the
    KP is Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ.

Fig. 7   The Puṇyakoṭīśvara temple, 2020. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple, which is known as *puṇyakoṭi-vimāna*. The narrative found in the KM and the KP reinforces this connection. According to the texts, the Puṇyakoṭīśvara temple was established by Viṣṇu, who installed a *liṅga* and worshipped it with flowers; pleased with Viṣṇu's worship, Śiva granted him the name Varadarāja; Viṣṇu then decided to stay on the Hastigiri hill (*hastigiri* being the mythological name of the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple) and asked Śiva that any religious merit (*puṇya*) accrued there be multiplied ten million (*koṭi*) times.[23] This narrative makes Varadarāja Perumāḷ's presence on Hastigiri (the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple) contingent on Śiva's grace and offers an alternative explanation of the name Puṇyakoṭi, thus presenting Viṣṇu's most important form in Kanchipuram as subordinate to Śiva.

Whereas the KM and the KP connect particular Śiva and Viṣṇu temples in Kanchipuram, they do not normally link any individual Śiva temples with each

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23   The narrative on the Puṇyakoṭīśvara temple also incorporates the well-known story of the elephant Gajendra, whom Viṣṇu saved from the jaws of a crocodile. It is connected with the Puṇyakoṭīśvara story by stating that Gajendra had helped Viṣṇu collect flowers for the worship of Śiva when the crocodile assaulted him. Viṣṇu then asks that the hill on which he resides be named after Gajendra, thus providing an explanation for the name *Hastigiri* ('elephant hill').

other, except when describing the temple's location in relation to the previously mentioned site. The only exception is again the Ekāmranātha temple, which regularly features in the narratives of other sites. A recurring trope that is found in the stories of several temples is that the protagonist of the narrative came to Kanchipuram, worshiped Ekāmranātha, and then proceeded to install a *liṅga* of their own.[24] The other Śiva temples of Kanchipuram are thus presented as subordinate to the Ekāmranātha temple. This mirrors the contemporary ritual relationship of the Śiva temples of Kanchipuram, as the smaller temples are usually served by priests who also work in the Ekāmranātha temple (Boulanger 1992: 117). As such, the relations between the Ekāmranātha temple and the other Śiva temples of Kanchipuram may be best described in terms of centre and periphery.

As far as connections between Kanchipuram and other places are concerned, the KM and the KP frequently claim that Kanchipuram is superior to Varanasi (Kāśī). The origin story of the Kāśīviśvanātha temple (no. 69) even has it that Śiva himself left Varanasi for Kanchipuram because he decided that Kanchi was dearer to him than Kāśī. However, given that countless sacred sites all over India claim to be equal or even superior to Kāśī (cf. Feldhaus 2003: 157–84), such claims say more about the prominence of Varanasi than about the status of Kanchipuram: Varanasi clearly was the prototype to which other sacred sites, including Kanchipuram, were compared. Occasionally other places are also mentioned in the KM and the KP. For example, the origin story of the Rāmanātheśvara temple (no. 89) states that Rāma, upon returning from Laṅkā, had first installed a *liṅga* in Rameswaram before Śiva told him to also worship him in Kanchipuram; the text even explicitly states that Rāmeśvara (in Kanchipuram) is more redeeming than Setu (Rameswaram). On the whole, however, the relationship between Kanchipuram and other sacred sites in India is not a major concern for the texts.

Particularly, it is worth noting that the KM and the KP do not contain any reference to the concept of the *pañcabhūtasthala*s. This is a group of five Śiva temples in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh that are associated with the five elements (*bhūta*) of Hindu cosmology. Among them, the Ekāmranātha temple is connected with the element of earth; the other temples are the Jambukeśvara temple at Tiruvāṉaikkā near Srirangam (water), the Aruṇācaleśvara temple in Tiruvannamalai (fire), the Kālahastīśvara temple in Kalahasti (air), and the Naṭarāja temple in Chidambaram (ether) (Eck 2012: 127–36). In the case of Ekāmranātha, the temple's origin story,

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24 E.g., Vyāsa → Vyāsacāntālīśvara (no. 10); Atri, Kutsa, Kāśyapa, Aṅgiras, Vasiṣṭha, Bhārgava, Gautama → Atrīśvara, Kutseśvara, Kāśyapeśvara, Aṅgīrasīśvara, Vasiṣṭheśvara, Bhārgaveśvara, Gautameśvara (nos. 11–17); Parāśara → Parāśareśvara (no. 18); Jaigiṣivya → Jaigiṣivyeśvara (no. 22); Rāma → Vīrarāghaveśvara (no. 44); Balarāma → Balabhadrarāmeśvara (no. 46); Andhaka → Andhakeśvara (no. 56); the Pāṇḍavas → Pāṇḍaveśvara (no. 79).

which tells that Pārvatī built the *liṅga* from sand, explains the association with the element of earth (Schier 2018: 24–27). The KM and the KP do state that the *liṅga* is made from sand, but do not otherwise address Ekāmranātha's connection with the element of earth, nor do they link Kanchipuram with the other four sites.[25] This is all the more surprising as the concept of the *pañcabhūtasthala*s is a rather well-known one today. The fact that it does not play a role in the KM and the KP suggests that it might have become popular only at a later date.[26]

The present-day role of the texts

The KM and the KP are not only historical sources on the sacred topography of Kanchipuram, but the texts—particularly the KP—also play an important role for the city's contemporary religious traditions. Today, the KP is very much present in the Śiva temples of Kanchipuram. In many of those temples, we find stone slabs, murals, and signboards that contain summaries of the temples' stories of origin. These summaries almost always follow the KP, and usually also explicitly identify the KP as their source. Very often, even the original text of the KP is displayed in the temples. For example, the *phalaśruti* verse on the Kacchapeśvara temple that was quoted above (KP 23.11) is displayed in several places in the Kacchapeśvara temple itself (see Fig. 8). In other cases, the entire section dealing with the temple in question is inscribed on the temple walls. Temple priests also often refer to the KP when retelling their temple's origin story to temple visitors. Only some of them have first-hand knowledge of the text, but most priests are aware of the fact that their temple is mentioned in the KP and can name the chapter of the KP that deals with it. Grey literature and online sources on the Śiva temples of Kanchipuram also regularly refer to the KP and quote the relevant verses. It is worth noting that it is almost invariably Civañāṉa Muṉivar's first book of the KP that is referred to, whereas the second book, by Kacciyappa Muṉivar, seems to be largely unknown. Similarly, the Sanskrit KM, at least today, is far less well known than the KP, despite being the original source of the latter.

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25   Of the four other sites, Kalahasti is mentioned in connection with the Mahākāḷeśvara temple (no. 85) and Chidambaram in connection with Viṣṇvīśvara, a side shrine of the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 104). However, the concept of the *pañcabhūtasthala*s does not play any role in these narratives.

26   The concept as such, however, must be older as it is mentioned already in verse 100 of the *Kuñcitāṅghristava,* a panegyric on Śiva in Chidambaram by the fourteenth-century author Umāpati Śivācārya (quoted in Kulke 1970: 140).

Fig. 8 Stone slab with quotations from the KP (23.11, 22.25, and 22.10) in the Kacchapeśvara temple. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

From the above, it becomes clear that there is a strong local tradition that links temples in Kanchipuram with the KP. The displaying of texts from the KP in the temples can be seen as a material representation of this. In other words, the connection between sites that are mentioned in the KP and the currently existing temples is very much alive in local memory. This is particularly remarkable in the case of smaller or 'hidden' sites, such as the above-mentioned Māccāttaṉṟaḷīśvara (the *liṅga* in the carpenter's workshop). Although this site can hardly be found unless one knows what one is looking for, it features on lists of Kanchipuram's Śiva temples, and the fact that it is mentioned in the KP is also pointed out.[27] Moreover, even though there is no signboard identifying the name of the *liṅga*, the people at the workshop know that it is called Māccāttaṉṟaḷīśvara. In other words, the identity of this place and its connection with the KP are well entrenched in local memory. Another example is Mātalīśvara (no. 90). A picture taken by Ute Hüsken in 2008 shows (see Fig. 9) that this site, until rather recently, was not more than a *liṅga* in an abandoned open space. Although there still is no structural shrine today, this site has been completely revamped (see Fig. 10),

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27 Cf. e.g. the article on the Mācāttaṉṟaḷīśvara temple in the Tamil-language edition of Wikipedia (https://ta.wikipedia.org/s/5fbb), accessed February 11, 2025.

Fig. 9   Mātalīśvara, 2008. Photo by Ute Hüsken.

Fig. 10   Mātalīśvara, 2023. Photo by Jonas Buchholz.

and a signboard now identifies the *liṅga* as Mātalīśvara.[28] This means that at the time when the site was refurbished, there must have been someone who remembered that the *liṅga* was called Mātalīśvara (or at least that a *liṅga* named Mātalīśvara was supposed to exist in that area). Quite possibly, the fact that Mātalīśvara is mentioned in the KP was instrumental for maintaining this memory.

Other sites had a different fate and may have been simply forgotten. In this respect, it is worth noting that almost all the temples that are described the KP still exist in present-day Kanchipuram. Currently, only five of the ninety-six temples mentioned in the KP remain unidentified (and it might still be possible to locate at least some of them through further research). On the other hand, as we have seen before, there are twelve temples that are only mentioned in the KM, but not in the KP. Notably, eight out of these twelve sites remain currently unidentified. An example are the temples mentioned at the beginning of chapter 12 in the KM. The Sanskrit text describes four sites—Aṣṭabhujeśvara, Ādīpiteśvara, Nārasiṃheśvara, and Jaigiṣivyeśvara (nos. 19–22)—which, according to the description in the text, must be located in the Tumpaivaṉam neighbourhood in Kanchipuram. Of these four sites, only Ādīpiteśvara is also mentioned in the KP, and it is the only one of them that can be currently located (although its name has changed to Ādipatīśvara). The other three sites cannot be found. One wonders whether they are not mentioned in the KP because they had ceased to exist already at the time of the text's composition. This would presuppose that they were left out, either by Civañāṉa Muṉivar when he composed the KP or by a redactor of the KM who was responsible for the recension on which the KP is based, because they were deemed obscure. It is, however, also possible that the sites were forgotten precisely because they are not mentioned in the KP. This would mean that Aṣṭabhujeśvara, Nārasiṃheśvara, and Jaigiṣivyeśvara might have been *liṅga*s that were once found somewhere in the Tumpaivaṉam neighbourhood (or which might still exist in a hidden location), but which were not converted into structural shrines because there was no recollection about their existence. Had they been a part of the KP, things might have been different. Admittedly this scenario is speculative, but it invites us to reflect about the role that the KP has played in solidifying local memory in Kanchipuram. Given the importance of the KP for Kanchipuram's Śaiva temple traditions, it seems plausible that the text not only describes the city's sacred topography but has also played an active role in shaping it.

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28   The site is also identified as the *samādhi* of Kaṭuveḷi Cittar, a Tamil Siddha saint.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown how the KM and the KP, the two most important textual sources for the Śaiva temple traditions of Kanchipuram, describe Kanchipuram's religious landscape. Their emphasis on listing a large number of sites reflects the peculiar sacred topography of Kanchipuram, which—more than in other South Indian cities—is characterised by a multiplicity of temples. At the same time, the special status that the texts attribute to the Ekāmranātha temple speaks of an attempt to create a specifically Śaiva topography, in which— in contradistinction to Vaiṣṇava and Śākta views—this great Śiva temple forms the focal point. We have also seen how the KM and the KP localise well known purāṇic myths in Kanchipuram and how they assert Śiva's status vis-à-vis other deities. This illustrates the value of *sthalamāhātmya*s and *talapurāṇam*s as sources both on the local proliferation of pan-Indian Hindu mythology and on the contested sectarian relations during the early modern period. A more detailed analysis of the texts' contents could provide further insights. In this respect, the digital editions and translations of the KM and the KP that are currently being produced by the "Hindu Temple Legends in South India" project are highly welcome as they will make the texts available for further research.

While the KM and the KP present the temples as timeless sacred places, they also anchor them in Kanchipuram's real-world cityscape by describing their geographical location. This allows us to identify the sites that are mentioned in the texts with the presently existing temples. As we have seen, this project is also relevant for the local temple traditions in Kanchipuram, in which particularly the KP plays a very important role. Why specifically the Tamil KP is so prominent, while the Sanskrit KM has been largely neglected, is a question that could not be addressed here, but that deserves to be raised. Similarly, it would be worthwhile to compare the textual versions of the temples' origin stories with their oral retellings that circulate locally. While the oral versions are often similar to the textual narratives, they may also have other priorities or contain unique features that are not found in the written texts. Be that as it may, the prominent role of the KP demonstrates how the text has helped to shape local memory and highlights the continuing relevance of *talapurāṇam* literature for living Hinduism.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix: List of Temples in the KM and the KP

What follows is a list of all temples that are mentioned in the KM and the KP. Since the names under which the temples are known today mostly have a transparent Sanskrit etymology, the temples are listed under the Sanskritic form of their contemporary name, followed by the Tamil form in brackets. The following lines indicate the names under which the temples are listed in the KM and the KP, respectively, as well as the location of the relevant passages in the texts. For the location of the temples, geographical coordinates have been provided.

1. **Satyanāthasvāmī (Cattiyanātasvāmi)**
   KM: Satyavrateśvara (4.35–153)
   KP: Tiruneṟikkāraikkāṭu (8.1–57)
   Coordinates: 12.82909, 79.71770
   Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*

2. **Puṇyakoṭīśvara (Puṇṇiyakōṭīsvarar)**
   KM: Puṇyakoṭīśvara (5.1–70)
   KP: Puṇṇiyakōṭīcam (9.1–34)
   Coordinates: 12.81724, 79.72034

3. **Valampurivināyaka (Valampuri-viṇāyakar)**
   KM: Dakṣiṇāvartavināyaka (6.1–85)
   KP: Valampuriviṇāyakar (10.1–48)
   Coordinates: 12.81889, 79.72509
   Note: Gaṇeśa shrine inside the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple

4. **Brahmapurīśvara (Piramapurī-svarar)**
   KM: Śivāsthāneśvara (7.1–78)
   KP: Civāttāṉam (11.1–49)
   Coordinates: 12.81031, 79.73035

5. **Vālīśvara (Vālīsvarar)**
   KM: Kuraṅgiṇīgoṣṭha (7.79–85)
   KP: —
   Coordinates: 12.76719, 79.69096
   Note: In Kuraṅkaṇilmuṭṭam (8 km south of Kanchipuram)
   Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*
   Note: Different from no. 100

6. **Tāḷapurīśvara/Kṛpānatheśvara (Tāḷapurīsvarar/Kirupānātīsvarar)**
   KM: Tāḷīvaneśa/Kṛpānātha (7.86–91)
   KP: —
   Coordinates: 12.80095, 79.61339
   Note: In Tiruppaṉaṅkāṭu (11 km south of Kanchipuram)
   Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*

7. **Jīvatpākeśvara**
   KM: Jīvatpākeśvara (7.92–95)
   KP: —
   So far not identified

8. **Maṇikaṇṭheśvara (Maṇikaṇṭīsvarar)**
   KM: Maṇikaṇṭheśvara(8.1–62, 9.1–69b)
   KP: Maṇikaṇṭīcaram (12.1–63)
   Coordinates: 12.82169, 79.71610
   Note: Different from no. 60

9. **Phaṇāmaṇīśvara (Paṇāmaṇīsvarar)**
   KM: Phaṇāmaṇīśvara (9.69c–116)
   KP: Paṇāmaṇīcam (12.64–67)
   Coordinates: 12.82407, 79.71438

10. **Vyāsacāntālīśvara (Viyācacāntālīs-varar)**
    KM: Vyāsaśrāntāśrayeśvara (10.1–81)
    KP: Cārntācayam (13.1–51)
    Coordinates: 12.81839, 79.71288

11. **Atrīśvara (Attirīsvarar)**
    KM: Atrīśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Attirīcam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.82027, 79.71361
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)
    Note: Atrīśvara (no. 11) and Kutseś-vara (no. 12) are two *liṅga*s in the same shrine

12. **Kutseśvara (Kuccēsvarar)**
    KM: Kutseśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Kuccēcam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.82027, 79.71361
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)
    Note: Atrīśvara (no. 11) and Kutseś-vara (no. 12) are two *liṅga*s in the same shrine

13. **Kāśyapeśvara (Kācipēsvarar)**
    KM: Kāśyapeśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Kācipēcam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.82110, 79.71320
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)
    Note: Inside the Āṟṟaṅkarai Māriyam-maṉ temple

14. **Aṅgirasīśvara (Aṅkirēsvarar)**
    KM: Aṅgirasīśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Aṅkīracam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.81857, 79.71322
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)

15. **Vasiṣṭheśvara (Vaciṭṭēsvarar)**
    KM: Vasiṣṭheśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Vaciṭṭēcam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.81791, 79.71351
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)

16. **Bhārgeśvara (Pākkīsvarar)**
    KM: Bhārgaveśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Pārkkavēcam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.81672, 79.70668
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)

17. **Gautameśvara (Kautamēsvarar)**
    KM: Gautameśvara (11.1–35)
    KP: Kavutamēcam (14.1–13)
    Coordinates: 12.81752, 79.70464
    Note: Part of a group of seven temples (Saptasthāna/Cattatāṉam)

18. **Parāśareśvara (Parācarēsvarar)**
    KM: Parāśareśvara (11.36–82)
    KP: Parācarēcam (15.1–28)
    Coordinates: 12.82953, 79.70477
    Note: Inside the Vaḷakkaṟuttīsvarar temple

19. **Aṣṭabhujeśvara**
    KM: Aṣṭabhujeśvara (12.1–7b)
    KP: —
    So far not identified

20. **Ādipatīśvara (Ātipatīsvarar)**
    KM: Ādīpiteśvara (12.7c–18)
    KP: Ātīpitīcam (16.1–6)
    Coordinates: 12.82467, 79.70351

21. **Nārasiṃheśvara**
    KM: Nārasiṃheśvara (12.19–22)
    KP: —

So far not identified

Note: Different from no. 53

22. **Jaigiṣivyeśvara**

KM: Jaigiṣivyeśvara (12.23–47)

KP: —

So far not identified

23. **Muktīśvara (Muttīsvarar)**

KM: Garuḍeśvara/Muktīśvara (12.48–71)

KP: Muttīcam (17.1–17)

Coordinates: 12.82829, 79.70774

Note: Different from no. 75

24. **Phaṇāmuṭīśvara (Paṇāmuṭīsvarar)**

KM: Phaṇādhareśvara (12.72–83)

KP: Paṇātarīccaram (18.1–7)

Coordinates: 12.82219, 79.70353

25. **Kāyārohaṇeśvara (Kāyārōkaṇīsvarar)**

KM:Kāyārohaṇeśvara (13.1–34b)

KP: Kārōṇam (19.1–14)

Coordinates: 12.82811, 79.69575

26. **Siddheśvara (Cittīsvarar)**

KM: Siddheśvara (13.34c–42b)

KP: Cittīcam (20.1–4)

Coordinates: 12.83153, 79.70320

27. **Hariśāpabhayantīttēśvara (Aricāpapayantīrttīsvarar)**

KM: Hariśāpabhayāpaheśvara (13.42c–86b)

KP: Aricāpapayantīrttatāṉam (21.1–20)

Coordinatres: 12.83712, 79.70336

28. **Trikālajñāneśvara (Tirikālañāṇēsvarar)**

KM: Trikālajñāneśvara (13.86c–90b)

KP: Tirikālañāṇēcam (21.21)

Coordinates: 12.83573, 79.70518

29. **Mataṅgeśvara (Mataṅkīsvarar)**

KM: Mataṅgeśvara (13.90c–92b)

KP: Mataṅkēcam (21.22)

Coordinates: 12.83563, 79.70830

Note: Pallava-era temple

30. **Abhirāmeśvara (Apirāmīsvarar)**

KM: Abhirāmeśvara (KM 13.92c–97, 32.72–83)

KP: Apirāmēcam (21.22, 56.1–9)

Coordinates: 12.83842, 79.70458

Note: Mentioned twice

31. **Airāvateśvara (Airāvatīsvarar)**

KM: Airāvateśvara (13.97–103b)

KP: Airāvatēcam (21.23–24)

Coordinates: 12.83890, 79.70188

Note: Pallava-era temple

32. **Iṣṭasiddhīśvara (Iṣṭacittīsvarar)**

KM: Iṣṭasiddhīśvara (13.103c–146)

KP: Iṭṭacittīccaram (22.1–25)

Coordinates: 12.83866, 79.70123

Note: Inside the Kacchapeśvara temple (no. 33)

33. **Kacchapeśvara (Kaccapēsvarar)**

KM: Kacchapeśvara (14.1–27)

KP: Kaccapēcam (23.1–13)

Coordinates: 12.83803, 79.70091

34. **Māṇḍukarṇīśvara (Māṇṭukaṇṇīsvarar)**

KM: Māṇḍukarṇīśvara (14.28–34)

KP: Māṇṭakaṇṇīcam (24.1–3)

Coordinates: 12.83672, 79.69799

35. **Vahnīśvara (Vaṇṇīsvarar)**

KM: Vahnīśvara (14.35–44)

KP: Vaṇṇīcam (24.4–9)

Coordinates: 12.83732, 79.69754

36. **Śaunakeśvara (Cauṇakēsvarar)**

KM: Śaunakeśvara (14.45–47b)

KP: Cavuṇakīcam (24.10)

Coordinates: 12.83890, 79.69779

37. **Jvarahareśvara (Curakarēsvarar)**

KM: Jvarahareśvara (14.47c–78)

KP: Curakarīcam (25.1–25)

Coordinates: 12.84216, 79.69857

38. **Tāṉrōṉrīśvara (Tāṉtōṉrīsvarar)**

KM: Svāyaṃbhuvaliṅga (15.1–15)

KP: Tāṉrōṉrīccaram (26.1–12)

Coordinates: 12.84081, 79.69856
Note: Pallava-era temple

39. Pāṇḍavadūteśvara
KM: Pāṇḍavadūteśvara (15.16–19b)
KP: no name is given (26.13–14)
So far not identified

40. Amareśvara (Amarēsvarar)
KM: Tridaśeśvara (15.19c–45b)
KP: Amarīcam (27.1–21)
Coordinates: 12.83992, 79.70050
Note: Pallava-era temple

41. Tirumēṟṟaḷīśvara (Tirumēṟṟaḷīs-varar)
KM: Paścimasthāna (15.45c–64)
KP: Tirumēṟṟaḷi (28.1–11)
Coordinates: 12.83515, 79.69122
Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*

42. Anēkataṅkāvatīśvara (Anēkataṅkā-vatīśvarar)
KM: Anekapeśvara (16.1–18)
KP: Aṉēkataṅkāvatam (29.1–12)
Coordinates: 12.84075, 79.69127
Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*

43. Kailāsanātha (Kailācanātar)
KM: Kailāsanātha (16.19–80)
KP: Kayilāyam (30.1–42)
Coordinates: 12.84227, 79.68959
Note: Pallava-era temple
Note: Different from no. 80

44. Vīrarāghaveśvara (Vīrarākavēs-varar)
KM: Vīrarāghaveśvara (17.1–52)
KP: Vīrarākavīcam (31.1–30)
Coordinates: 12.83907, 79.69624

45. Kalkīśvara (Kaṟkīsvarar)
KM: Kalkīśvara (17.53–58b)
KP: Kaṟkīcam (31.31)
Coordinates: 12.83725, 79.69468

46. Balabhadrarameśvara (Palapatti-rarāmēsvarar)
KM: Balabhadreśvara (17.58c–77)

KP: Palapattirarāmīcam (32.1–18)
Coordinates: 12.83581, 79.69268

47. Valmīkanātha (Vaṇmīkanātar)
KM: Valmīkeśvara (17.78–104)
KP: Vaṇmīkanātam (33.1–19)
Coordinates: 12.83856, 79.68740

48. Cōḻīśvara (Cōḻīsvarar)
KM: Bhairaveśvara (18.1–64)
KP: Vayiravīcam (34.1–38)
Coordinates: 12.83542, 79.68567

49. Viṣvakseneśvara (Viṭuvaccēṇīs-varar)
KM: Viṣvakseneśvara (19.1–64)
KP: Viṭuvaccēṉīcam (35.1–39)
Coordinates: 12.83542, 79.68567
Note: Inside the Cōḻīśvara temple (no. 48)

50. Dakṣeśvara (Takkēsvarar)
KM: Dakṣeśvara (20.1–127)
KP: Takkīcam (36.1–77)
Coordinates: 12.83516, 79.68825

51. Muppurārīśvara (Muppurārīsvarar)
KM: Tripurārīśvara (21.1–22)
KP: Muppurārikōṭṭam (37.1–11)
Coordinates: 12.85154, 79.66706

52. Hiraṇyeśvara (Iraṇyēsvarar)
KM: Hiraṇyeśvara (21.23–71)
Iraṇiyīcam (38.1–22)
Coordinates: 12.84661, 79.69385

53. Narasiṃheśvara (Naraciṅkēsvarar)
KM: Nārasiṃheśvara (22.1–20b)
KP: Nāraciṅkīcam (39.1–13)
Coordinates: 12.89012, 79.59271
Note: In Tāmal (13 km west of Kanchi-puram)
Note: Different from no. 21

54. Varāheśvara (Varākīsvarar)
KM: Varāheśvara (22.20c–38)
KP: Varākēcam (39.14–15)
Coordinates: 12.88954, 79.59336

In Tāmal (13 km west of Kanchipuram)

55. **Jaṭāyuliṅga**
KM: Jaṭāyuliṅga (22.39–45b)
KP: —
So far not identified

56. **Andhakeśvara (Antakēsvarar)**
KM: Andhakeśvara (22.45c–73, 23.1–16b)
KP: Antakēcam (40.1–32)
Coordinates: 12.87050, 79.62100
Note: In Tiruppuṭkuḻi (10 km west of Kanchipuram)

57. **Bāṇeśvara (Vāṇēsvarar)**
KM: Bāṇeśvara (23.16c–104b)
KP: Vāṇīcam (41.1–111)
Coordinates: 12.85467, 79.69119

58. **Oṇakānteśvara (Ōṇakāntīsvarar)**
KM: Auṇakānteśvara (23.104c–112b)
KP: Tiruvōṇakāntaṉṟaḻi (42.1–9)
Coordinates: 12.85042, 79.69434
Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*

59. **Jalandhareśvara (Calantarēsvarar)**
KM: Jalandhareśvara (23.112c–115b, 24.1–86)
KP: Calantarīcam (43.1–23)
Coordinates: 12.85027, 79.69427
Note: Inside the Oṇakānteśvara temple (no. 58)

60. **Maṇikaṇṭheśvara (Maṇikaṇṭīsvarar)**
KM: Pravāḷeśvara (25.1–36)
KP: Tirumāṟpēṟu (44.1–18)
Coordinates: 12.93746, 79.64054
Note: In Tirumālpūr (13 km north-west of Kanchipuram)
Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*
Note: Different from no. 8

61. **Krūreśvara**
KM: Krūreśvara (26.1–5b)
KP: —
So far not identified

62. **Paraśurāmeśvara (Paracurāmēs-varar)**
KM: Paraśurāmeśvara (26.5c–98)
KP: Paracirāmīccaram (45.1–62)
Coordinates: 12.95727, 79.66935
Note: In Paḷḷūr (14 km north of Kanchipuram)

63. **Reṇukeśvara (Irēṇukēsvarar)**
KM: Reṇukeśvara (27.1–68b)
KP: Irēṇukīccaram (46.1–35)
Coordinates: 12.95688, 79.66899
Note: In Paḷḷūr (14 km north of Kanchipuram)

64. **Dakṣiṇāmūrti (Taṭciṇāmūrtti)**
KM: Dakṣiṇāmūrti (28.1–5b)
KP: —
Coordinates: 12.94523, 79.66657
In Kōvintavāṭi (13 km north of Kanchipuram)

65. **Dhavaḷeśvara (Tavaḷēsvarar)**
KM: Lakulīśvara (28.5c–43)
KP: Ilakulīccam (47.10)
Coordinates: 12.84714, 79.69462

66. **Kāmeśvara (Kāmēsvarar)**
KM: Kāmeśvara (29.1–9)
KP: Kāmīccaram (48.1–7)
Coordinates: 12.84672, 79.69385

67. **Tīrtheśvara (Tīrttīsvarar)**
KM: Tīrtheśvara (29.10–30b)
KP: Tīrttīcam (48.8–19)
Coordinates: 12.84664, 79.69397

68. **Gaṅgāvareśvara (Kaṅkāvarēsvarar)**
KM: Gaṅgāvareśvara (29.30c–33)
KP: Kāṅkāvaram (48.20)
Coordinates: 12.84636, 79.69539

69. **Kāśīviśvanātha (Kācivisvanātar)**
KM: Viśvanātheśvara (29.34–42)
KP: Viccuvanātam (48.21–26)
Coordinates: 12.84686, 79.69385

70. **Javantīśvara (Cevvantīsvarar)**
KM: Javantīśvara (29.43–49)

KP: Cevvantīccaram (49.1–3)
Coordinates: 12.85098, 79.69890

71. **Paridhīśvara (Paritīsvarar)**
KM: Sūryaliṅga (29.50–56b)
KP: Paritīcam (49.4)
Coordinates: 12.85431, 79.69831

72. **Sparśavedhiśilāliṅga**
KM: Sparśavedhiśilāliṅga (29.56c–59)
KP: —
So far not identified

73. **Candreśvara (Cantirēsvarar)**
KM: Candreśvara (29.60–61b)
KP: Cantirēcam (49.5)
Coordinates: 12.84422, 79.69440

74. **Piṟavāttāṉeśvara (Piṟavāttāṉēs-varar)**
KM: Apunarbhaveśa (29.64c–71b)
KP: Piṟavāttāṉam (50.1–8)
Coordinates: 12.84541, 79.70622
Note: Pallava-era temple

75. **Muktīśvara**
KM: Muktīśvara (29.71c–75)
KP: Muttīcam (50.9–10)
So far not identified
Note: Different from no. 23

76. **Iṟavāttāṉeśvara (Iṟavāttāṉēsvarar)**
KM: Mṛtyuñjayeśa (30.1–15)
KP: Iṟavāttāṉam 51.1–8
Coordinates: 12.84535, 79.70488
Note: Pallava-era temple

77. **Mahāliṅgeśvara (Mahāliṅkēsvarar)**
KM: Mahāliṅga (30.16–75)
KP: Makāliṅkam (52.1–23)
Coordinates: 12.84482, 79.70683

78. **Vīraṭṭāṉeśvara (Vīraṭṭāṉēsvarar)**
KM: Vīrāṭṭahāseśvara (31.1–132)
KP: Vīrāṭṭakācam (53.1–55)
Coordinates: 12.84606, 79.70854

79. **Pāṇḍaveśvara**
KM: Pāṇḍaveśvara (32.1–16b)

KP: Pāṇṭavīcam (54.1–8)
So far not identified

80. **Kailāsanātha**
KM: Kailāsanātha (32.16c–18)
KP: Kayilāyam (54.9)
So far not identified
Note: Different from no. 43

81. **?**
KM: no name is given (32.19–61)
KP: —
So far not identified

82. **Matsyeśvara (Maccēsvarar)**
KM: Matsyeśvara (32.62–71)
KP: Maccīcam (55.1–10)
Coordinates: 12.83829, 79.70658

83. **Kṛṣṇeśvara (Kaṇṇēsvarar)**
KM: Kṛṣṇeśvara (33.1–14b)
KP: Kaṇṇīcam (57.1–10)
Coordinates: 12.84180, 79.70414

84. **Kauśikeśvara/Cokkeśvara (Kaucikēs-varar/Cokkīsvarar)**
KM: Tvakkauśikeśvara (33.14c–16b)
KP: Kavucikīccaram (57.10–11)
Coordinates: 12.84078, 79.70414

85. **Mahākāḷeśvara (Mākāḷīsvarar)**
KM: Mahākāḷeśvara (33.16c–22)
KP: Mākāḷēcam (57.12)
Coordinates: 12.84163, 79.70268

86. **Kumarakōṭṭam**
KM: Kumārakoṣṭha (33.23–83, 34.1–52)
KP: Kumarakōṭṭam (58.1–45)
Coordinates: 12.84149, 79.70189
Note: Murukaṉ temple

87. **Mācāttaṉṟaḷīśvara (Mahāśāstreśvara)**
KM: Mahāśāstreśvara (34.53–106)
KP: Mācāttaṉṟaḷi (59.1–34)
Coordinates: 12.83998, 79.70111

88. **Maṅgaḷeśvara (Maṅkaḷēsvarar)**
KM: Maṅgaḷeśvara (35.1–11)
KP: Maṅkaḷīcam (59.35)
Coordinates: 12.84387, 79.70098

89. **Rāmanātheśvara (Irāmanātēsvarar)**
KM: Rāmeśvara (35.12–24b)
KP: Irāmanātam (59.36)
Coordinates: 12.84421, 79.69992

90. **Mātalīśvara (Mātālīsvarar)**
KM: Mātalīśvara (35.24c–27)
KP: Mātalīccaram (59.37)
Coordinates: 12.84545, 79.70301

91. **Anantapadmanābheśvara (Aṉantapatmanāpēsvarar)**
KM: Anantapadmanābheśvara (35.28–44b)
KP: Aṉantaparpanāpam (60.1–10)
Coordinates: 12.84482, 79.69866

92. **Kaccimāyāṉam**
KM: Śmaśāneśvara (35.44c–97)
KP: Kaccimayāṉam (61.1–23)
Coordinates: 12.84694, 79.70045
Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)

93. **Ekāmranātha (Ēkāmparanātar)**
KM: Ekāmranātha (36–45 passim)
KP: Tiruvēkampam (62–64 passim)
Coordinates: 12.84733, 79.69963
Note: Most important Śiva temple in Kanchipuram; *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam* (Tiruvēkampam)

94. **Vedanūpureśvara**
KM: Vedanūpureśvara (37.54–55)
KP: Vētanūpuram (62.78)
So far not identified

95. **Kadambanāthasvāmī (Kaṭampanātasvāmi)**
KM: Kadambeśvara (37.56)
KP: —
Coordinates: 12.70503, 79.74747
Note: In Kaṭamparkōyil (15 km southeast of Kanchipuram)

96. **Vedapurīśvara (Vētapurīsvarar)**
KM: Adhyāpakeśvara (37.59c–62)
KP: Tiruvōttūr (62.80)

Coordinates: 12.64868, 79.53971
Note: In Ceyyāṟu (Tiruvattipuram) town (27 km south-west of Kanchipuram)
Note: *pāṭal peṟṟa stalam*

97. **Veḷḷaikkampar**
KM: Svacchaikāmreśvara (38.4c–12)
KP: Veḷḷakkampam (62.86–90)
Coordinates: 12.84728, 79.69952
Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)

98. **Kaḷḷakkampar**
KM: Coraikāmreśvara (38.4c–12)
KP: Kaḷḷakkampam (62.86–90)
Coordinates: 12.84736, 79.69972
Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)

99. **Nallakampar**
KM: Bhadraikāmreśvara (38.4c–12)
KP: Nallakampam (62.86–90)
Coordinates: 12.84732, 79.69980
Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)

100. **Vālīśvara (Vālīsvarar)**
KM: Vāliliṅga (38.36–67)
KP: Vālīcam (62.103–21)
Coordinates: 12.84713, 79.70075
Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)
Note: Different from no. 5

101. **Ṛṣabheśvara (Iṭapēsvarar)**
KM: Vṛṣabheśvara (41.2–43)
KP: Iṭapēccaram (63.73–107)
Coordinates: 12.84739, 79.70030
Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)

102. **Kaṅkaṇeśvara (Kaṅkaṇēsvarar)**
KM: Rakṣabandheśvara (42.1–3b)
KP: Kaṅkaṇēcam (63.131–32)
Coordinates: 12.84370, 79.70389

103. **Kaṭakeśvara (Kaṭakēsvarar)**
    KM: Kaṭakeśvara (42.3c–4)
    KP: Kaṭakīcam (63.133)
    Coordinates: 12.84352, 79.70426
104. **Viṣṇvīśvara (Viṣṇuvēsvarar)**
    KM: Viṣṇvīśvara (42.29–67)
    KP: Viṇṭuvīccaram (63.150–82)
    Coordinates: 12.84713, 79.69914
    Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)
105. **Agastyeśvara (Akattīsvarar)**
    KM: Agastyeśvara (43.1–109)

KP: Akattiyēccaram (63.183–288)
    Coordinates: 12.84723, 79.69956
    Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)
106. **Mardalamādheśvara (Mattaḷamātēs-varar)**
    KM: Mardaḷamādhaveśvara (44.1–18)
    KP: Mattaḷamātavēccaram (63.289–312)
    Coordinates: 12.84740, 79.69963
    Note: Inside the Ekāmranātha temple (no. 93)

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Murukaṉ's "Six Battle-Camps"
The Origin and Development of
the *Āṟupaṭaivīṭu* Concept

Introduction

South Asian holy places often come in sets. This phenomenon holds profound significance within the landscape of Hindu religious traditions, across the various sects included under this umbrella. Sets of holy sites, characterized by shared thematic elements, by mythology, and by pilgrimage routes, embody a complex interplay of cultural, social, and religious elements. These sets can differ widely from each other, yet they are all deeply rooted in the practice of pilgrimage, which has particular significance and popularity in South Asia. Among them, the twelve *jyotir-liṅga*s, the fifty-one (or 108) *śakti-pīṭha*s, the "seven holy cities" (*sapta-purī*), and the five Śiva temples of the element-*liṅga*s (*pañcabhūta-sthala*s), are some notable configurations. These sets can be small or large, scattered across South Asia or centered in one region, and the connections between them can be based on a shared mythology, ritual links, or some physical correspondence. Some of the above examples belong to a common type of sets, which Anne Feldhaus described as "numbered sets" (Feldhaus 2003: 127–36). In numbered sets, the temples or sites are interlinked by an abstract idea (at times based on mythology) that is expressed in a number.[1] Some of the numbered sets, like the *śakti-pīṭha*s and *pañcabhūta-sthala*s symbolize a simultaneous unity and individuality of the places (each *śakti-pīṭha* has one part of the Goddess's body; each *bhūta-liṅga* is made of one of the five elements in nature). In other sets, the common element is duplicated and distributed in several different places, such as the set of twelve *jyotir-liṅga* temples, the *sapta-purī*, and the seven Tamil temples with *tyāgarāja* icon, commonly known as *sapta-viṭaṅkastalam*. In these cases, the duplication is by a typological number.

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1   Ewa Dębicka-Borek's chapter in this volume is a scholarly treatment of one such numbered set, namely, the set of nine Narasiṃhas in Ahobilam.

This article studies the history of one widely known numbered set—a group of six holy places of the Hindu god Murukaṉ in Tamil Nadu, conventionally called "the six battle-camps" (*āṟupaṭaivīṭu*). On the surface, this cluster of sites seems to be a typical case of a numbered set, in particular because of the inherent relation of Murukaṉ to the number six.[2] However, in the following pages I show that it has an entangled history that involves traditions of textual transmission and commentary, and the early history of print in the Tamil language.

Murukaṉ and the "six battle-camps"

Murukaṉ is one of the most popular divinities among Tamil people. Within the Hindu pantheon, he is identified from a very early stage with Śiva's son, Skanda (also known as Subrahmaṇya, Kārttikeya, or Ṣaṇmukha). Yet Murukaṉ is also deeply rooted in the Tamil religious and literary traditions from their earliest known stages, at the beginning of the common era. Among the numerous Tamil temples dedicated to Murukaṉ, there is a set of six temples that are conventionally called *aṟupaṭaivīṭu*[3] ("the six battle-camps"), located in Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Tiruccĕntūr, Paḻaṉi, Cuvāmimalai, Tiruttaṇi, and Paḻamutircolai.[4]

Nowadays, it is generally accepted among Murukaṉ's devotees that these six temples, as a group, are the most important pilgrimage centers for the Murukaṉ cult. An article from *Hinduism Today* magazine, published in 2007, illustrates the contemporary popular ideas about the "six battle-camps."[5] This article, titled "Journey to Murukaṉ," describes a pilgrimage journey that its authors took to all the six sites, in the order presented above. According to the authors, Murukaṉ "shower[s] grace upon the seeker who visits His six abodes" (*Hinduism*

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2 Murukaṉ's mythology is suffused with 'six-ness:' he was born out of six sparks from Śiva's third eye and was raised as six separate infants by six of the *kṛttikā*s (the Pleiades). Even though he was later 'welded' into a single child by Umā, when she took them\him in her lap, one of his forms remains Ṣaṇmukha, "Six-faced."

3 A note on transliteration: since this article has transliteration of both Sanskrit and Tamil, I follow David Shulman's Tamil transliteration scheme (Shulman 2016: xii), marking the short Tamil vowels ĕ and ŏ (which are distinctive to the Dravidian languages) and not marking the Sanskrit diphthongs and the long Tamil diphthongs.

4 Since the occurrences of these sites' names in written sources make up a large part of this article's data, I use their standard ('correct') transcription throughout the article, rather than the more popularly used phonetic equivalents (i.e., Tiruparankundram, Tiruchendur, Paḻani, Swamimalai, Tiruttaṇi, and Paḻamuthirsolai).

5 *Hinduism Today* is a magazine on various aspects of what is conventionally called "Hindu" faith, produced by a Hawaii-based monastic community that is a branch of the "Kailāsa Parampara."
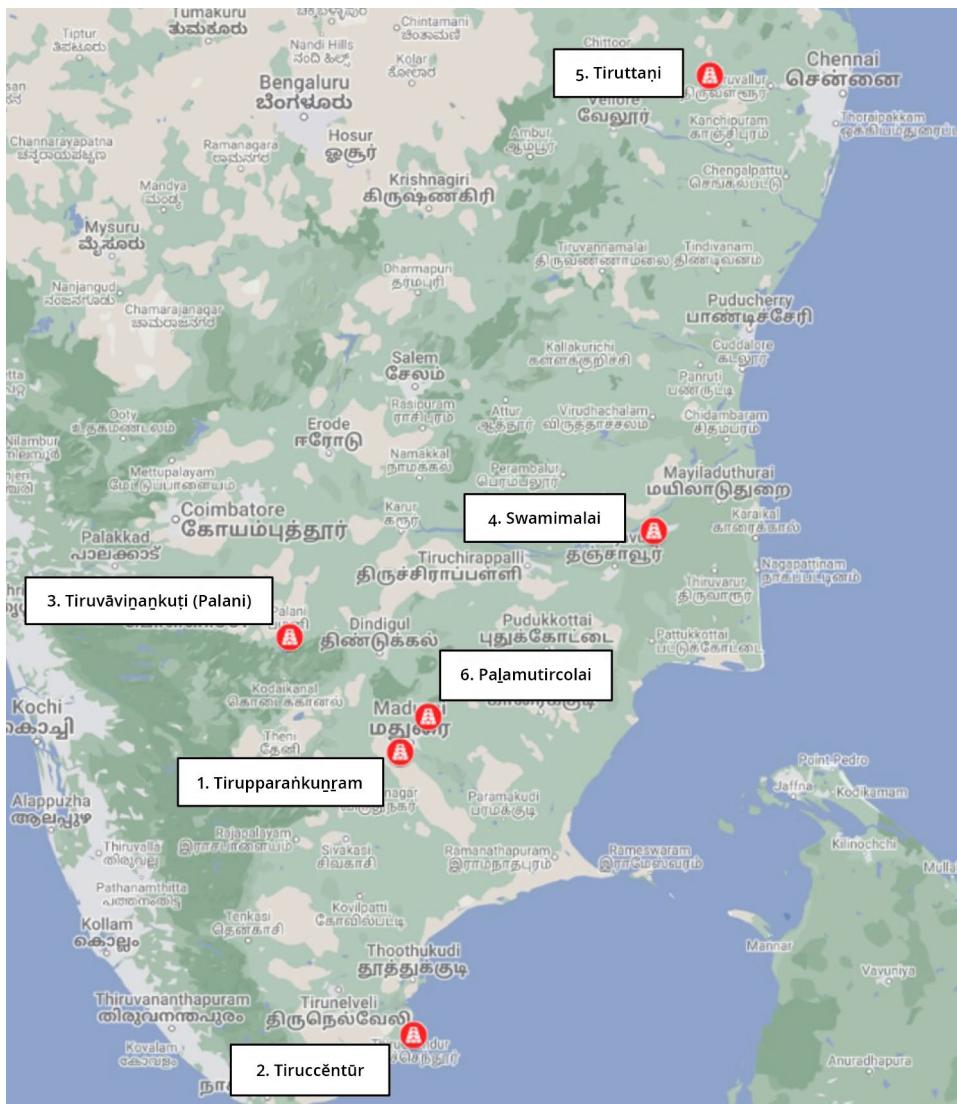
Fig. 1   Map data © 2024 Google.

Today editors 2007: 39). Each of the six sites is associated with an episode from Murukaṉ's mythology. In Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam he is said to have married his first, 'celestial' wife, Tĕyvayāṉai (or Devasenā, in the Sanskrit sources). Tiruccĕntūr was the place where Murukaṉ encamped before and after his oceanic battle with the demon Cūr/Cūrapaṉmaṉ (Skt. Sūrapadma). Palaṉi is where Murukaṉ came, in his childhood, to practice austerities, after losing a contest to his elder brother, Gaṇapati. The prize in that contest, initiated by Śiva, was a pomegranate,

a symbol of wisdom. Śiva came to Paḻaṉi and consoled Murukaṉ with the words: "**you** are the fruit" (*paḻam nī*), which provides a popular etymology for the town's name. Another episode from Murukaṉ's childhood is said to have taken place in Cuvāmimalai. Here, Murukaṉ locked up Brahmā when the latter did not know the meaning of the syllable "Om." When Śiva later came to speak for Brahmā, he revealed his own ignorance about the meaning of the sacred syllable and eventually Murukaṉ taught this sacred knowledge to Śiva. Tiruttaṇi is the place in which Murukaṉ married his second, 'tribal,' wife, Vaḷḷi. It is also where Murukaṉ delivered the supreme Śaiva knowledge to the sage Agastya. Finally, in Paḻamutircolai the saint and poetess Auvaiyār had an encounter with a young boy who sat on a tree above her and who later turned out to be no other than Murukaṉ himself.

Even a preliminary examination of the above description shows that this temple-set has some quirks. First, the sequence of the sites makes little sense, both as a pilgrimage route (in particular, the route between the first three sites) and with regard to the mythological chronology.[6] Along with the issue of sequence, there is some imbalance in these myths' relative significance, which further enhances the sense of asymmetry: the killing of the demon Cūr—basically, the victory of Good over Bad—can hardly be compared to a 'casual' vision given to Auvaiyār, or even to Murukaṉ's myth of the fruit in Paḻaṉi.[7]

In addition to the asymmetry in their mythology, there is also some imbalance in aspects of the temples themselves: although the list of "six battle-camps" includes *some* of the most popular Murukaṉ temples, they are not *the* six most popular Murukaṉ temples, nor are they the six wealthiest Murukaṉ temples.[8] Similarly, although some of them are among the oldest known Murukaṉ temples, it is not a list of the six oldest Murukaṉ temples. This could be further problematized: among these six temples, the one located in Paḻaṉi is not the extremely

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6   In Paḻaṉi and Cuvāmimalai, that is, the third and fourth "battle-camps," the myths concern Murukaṉ's childhood, while the others concern his adulthood. In addition, Murukaṉ's marriage with Tĕyvayāṉai in Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam (the first "battle-camp") is supposed to have taken place after his victory over Cūr, which is associated with Tiruccĕntūr (the second "battle-camp").

7   This is more than an intuitive observation: the central myths of Murukaṉ were canonized in the fifteenth-century *Kantapurāṇam*. The central narrative is Skanda's war with Cūr and his army of demons. One can also find there Murukaṉ's marriage to Tĕyvayāṉai and his love affair and marriage with Vaḷḷi. The main story of Cuvāmimalai is there, but it is not associated with the place. However, the abovementioned stories of Paḻaṉi and Paḻamutircolai are not included in this text. While this has no necessary implications on the antiquity of these narratives, it does provide some scale of relative importance and popularity, at least up to the fifteenth century.

8   For example, the Kumārakoṭṭam temple in Kanchipuram and Kantacāmi temple in Tirupporūr are two very popular and important temples not included among the "six battle-camps."

popular hill-temple of Paḻaṉi, but the smaller and less-frequented Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi temple.[9] In addition, the temple of Paḻamutircolai is a relatively minor pilgrimage center, which did not have a structure prior to the last few decades.[10] Nevertheless, these six sites are, indeed, linked by a common thread, which also provides the *raison d'être* for their given order: the "six battle-camps" list is based on an old Tamil text called *The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ* (*Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*).

The development of the "six battle-camps" concept, from its roots in *The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ* (hereafter, *The Guide*) to its contemporary expressions, stands in the focus of the current article. For the sake of clarity, I first provide a very brief historical survey of Murukaṉ's cult and some of the major stepping-stones of its devotional literature. Next, I follow the textual route which begins with *The Guide*, goes through its medieval commentaries, to its allusions in the early modern and modern devotional literature on Murukaṉ. I show that the concept of Murukaṉ's six abodes did not arise from *The Guide* and was originally a distinct, abstract notion. I point out the dynamics by which *The Guide* became associated with this concept, and the origins of the term *paṭaivīṭu* ("battle-camp"). Finally, I address the unique case of Tiruttaṇi and how it came to be regarded as the fifth "battle-camp."

Murukaṉ's cult and devotional literature

The first references to Murukaṉ and his cult are found in the earliest layers of Tamil *caṅkam* (pronounced "sangam") literature, from the beginning of the first millennium CE. Murukaṉ is depicted there as a youthful hunter-warrior-lover mountain god, and is associated with rituals of ecstatic dancing, intoxication, and blood offerings (Clothey 1978: 25–35). In addition, within the context of the *caṅkam*

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9 In the *Hinduism Today* article quoted above, the authors ask their guide, a member of the hill temple's administrative board, about the difference between the temples, and he answers that the two temples are considered as one, since they are under the same management and share the same priesthood (*Hinduism Today* editors 2007: 46). However, it should be noted that the same management is responsible for over thirty temples in and around Paḻaṉi (See Somasundaram Pillai 1941). In addition, the seventeenth-century *talapurāṇam* of Palani (*Paḻaṉittalapurāṇam* by Palacuppiramaṇiya Kavirāyar), which extolls all the shrines around the town, differentiates between the temples, and speaks only of the Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi in the context of Murukaṉ's six sacred sites.

10 I could not find information on this temple's date of construction. However, Fred Clothey mentions only the site—and not the temple—in his 1972 article "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukan" (Clothey 1972: 85n10) and does not mention it at all in his more elaborate work on Murukaṉ (Clothey 1978). In the 2007 *Hinduism Today* piece mentioned above, the authors interview the son of the temple's chief priest who says the temple "was constructed recently" (*Hinduism Today* editors 2007: 52).

poetry's system of conventions, with its divisions to poetic landscapes (*tiṇai*), Murukaṉ is associated with the *kuṟiñci* landscape, that is, the hill landscape of *kaḷavu*, "stolen love" (Ramanujan 2005: 115). In short, Murukaṉ is a divinity with substantial presence in the earliest existing Tamil records. More important for the matter at hand, Murukaṉ is also the subject of what is considered the first Tamil devotional poem—the above-mentioned "Guide to Lord Murukaṉ." This text, dated to the sixth century, belongs to the later strata of the *caṅkam* literature, and it is ascribed to Nakkīrar, a famous poet and 'president' of the ancient Tamil academy (Wilden 2015: 8).

Āṟṟuppaṭai ("guide poem") is a genre of *caṅkam*-age Tamil poems, in which a bard addresses his fellow practitioners and directs them to the residence of a generous patron who has supported him. It is, in essence, a eulogy poem for that patron, describing the latter's land and town, his heroic victories and his many merits and qualities. In *The Guide*, the patron is replaced with God, and instead of one residence the text describes several places where one may find Murukaṉ and appeal for his help. Due to this shift of subject, from patron to God, it is considered a transitional and innovative text, which stands out as a representation of a moment of change and a bridge between the secular *caṅkam* poetry and the wave of *bhakti* poetry that washed over the Tamil speaking region from the seventh century onwards (Zvelebil 1974: 50–51). Nevertheless, the style of *The Guide* and most of its descriptions of nature and social life are better associated with the category of *caṅkam* poetry (Zvelebil 1973: 129–30). *The Guide* mostly consists of long descriptive clauses portraying various natural sceneries, landscapes, and Murukaṉ himself, who is presented as more of a 'universal' god, featuring some of Skanda's purāṇic attributes, yet without directly narrating his purāṇic mythology (Zvelebil 1974: 49–51, Clothey 1978: 69–72). The worship depicted in *The Guide* combines cult elements attested in the *caṅkam* poetry, such as the possession-dance of the *velaṉ* priests and blood offerings, alongside descriptions of Brahminic practices. However, *The Guide*'s main point of emphasis is not mythology, theology, or ritual, but the personal sentiment of devotion (*bhakti*) toward Murukaṉ, and Murukaṉ's intrinsic relation to the various places that are described.

Although Murukaṉ was clearly a popular god in the Tamil speaking region around the middle of the first millennium, the following centuries are marked by a gap in the textual evidence for his cult (Gros 2009: 268, Clothey 1978: 73–77). The infrequent mentions of Murukaṉ in the early body of Śaiva *bhakti* poems (the *Tevāram*, composed between the seventh and ninth centuries) refer to him only as Śiva's son, without any additional religious significance.[11] Yet this long period of relative 'silence' (with regard to the Murukaṉ cult), from the seventh to the

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11   Within this vast corpus there are only around forty such mentions (Clothey 1978: 75).

thirteenth century, may have been only a "literary event," in Leslie Orr's words, which does not reflect the actual patterns of Murukaṉ worship in medieval Tamil Nadu (Orr 2014: 37). In any case, during this period, there were relatively few temples with individual images of Murukaṉ; these were usually in his form as Subrahmaṇya, and in "multi-shrine contexts" (p. 25). This state changes from around the middle of the tenth century, a period from which an increasing number of separate shrines for Murukaṉ can be found, including a complex iconography that represents different aspects of his divinity and mythology (Clothey 1978: 77).

The growth in Murukaṉ's popularity from the tenth century onwards manifested primarily within the context of the Śaiva religion and temple culture. The post-medieval cult of Murukaṉ became a part of Śaiva system, using Śaiva infrastructure, in the institutional sense as well as with regard to philosophy: the metaphysical speculations that developed around Murukaṉ are anchored in the basic elements of Tamil *Caivacittāntam* (the Tamil formulation of the Śaivasiddhānta system). As for *The Guide*—despite its association with the ancient, 'tribal' Murukaṉ cult, which is irrelevant to the Śaiva framework, it was not left behind but rather the opposite: *The Guide* was included in the eleventh book of the Śaiva devotional corpus, the *Tirumuṟai,* compiled in the twelfth century (Francis 2017: 321).[12]

Two literary milestones that have had an immense influence on the shaping of the cult to this day are commonly dated to the fifteenth century. One milestone is Kacciyappa Civācāriyār's *Kantapurāṇam*, which, despite its name, is not a Tamil translation of the Sanskrit *Skanda Purāṇa*, but rather an independent Tamil work that presents a complete and integrated account of the Tamil Skanda-Murukaṉ mythology. Although neither the narratives it tells nor its integration of Tamil and Sanskrit themes are new, the *Kantapurāṇam* nevertheless represents a significant moment of canonization of Murukaṉ's Tamil purāṇic mythology, and to some extent also of the Tamil mythology of Śiva: the *Kantapurāṇam* became a highly influential text in the Śaiva tradition, and it remained a reference point for later tellings of Śaiva mythology (Shulman 1980: 30–31).

The second fifteenth-century literary milestone is the huge body of devotional poetry ascribed to Aruṇakirinātar, an interesting figure with a juicy biography. According to tradition, Aruṇakirinātar "spent his young years as a rioter, good-for-nothing brawler, drunkard, and unbridled seducer of women" (Zvelebil 1973: 239). His lifestyle eventually led him to illness and social rejection, and, in his despair,

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12 Although *The Guide* belonged to two different canons—the *Pattupāṭṭu* ("Ten Idylls") of the *caṅkam* corpus and the Śaiva *Tirumuṟai*—in the extant manuscripts it is transmitted mostly alone or within a compilation of loosely-related texts. Thus, as Francis shows, at least in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, *The Guide* was mostly regarded as a devotional text without an exclusive connection to the Śaiva context (see Francis 2017).

he attempted suicide by jumping from the eastern tower of the Tiruvaṇṇāmalai temple. However, his body was caught before crushing on the paved ground by no other than Murukaṉ himself. As a result, he became an ardent Murukaṉ *bhakta* and composed numerous devotional songs in His honor. Aruṇakirinātar's works mark the beginning of a wave of devotional poetry to Murukaṉ that continued throughout the early-modern period and, to some extent, to this day.[13] Murukaṉ's association with the Tamil language (which has its earliest manifestations already in the middle of the first millennium), first in his depiction as a supreme poet of Tamil and, in later narratives, as a preceptor of Tamil language and literature (Ramaswamy 1998: 81), was intensified through Aruṇakirinātar's works[14] and became an inseparable part of Murukaṉ's popular image. With the sprouting of the first buds of 'Dravidianism' in the late nineteenth century, which came into full bloom in the middle of the twentieth century, this association, along with Murukaṉ's ancient roots in Tamil literature and religion, turned Murukaṉ into an "emblem of Tamil identity" (Orr 2014: 21).[15]

The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ and the "six battle-camps"

The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ is generally accepted to be the source for Murukaṉ's set of six pilgrimage centers, the "six battle-camps" (*aṟupaṭaivīṭukaḷ*). However, reading the text may lead to a different conclusion. Hence, I will first present *The Guide*'s structure and contents, to facilitate this argument.[16]

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13   Countless devotional works from this long period are available today in print. Although few are revered like Aruṇakirinātar's poems, some were canonized alongside them, such as Kumarakuruparar's *Kantar-kali-veṇpā* (seventeenth century) and Devaraya Swamigal's *Kantar-caṣṭi-kavacam* (late nineteenth century), which is used by Murukaṉ devotees for daily worship.

14   See the many examples from Aruṇakirinātar's poems in Cĕṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai's 1941 *Murukarun Tamiḻum*, which examines in detail this very notion.

15   This process is eloquently summarized by Clothey: "[Murukaṉ]...is riding the crest of a Tamil self-consciousness which has come to new focus in the minds of many Tamilians, at least since Bishop Caldwell's publication of a comparative Dravidian grammar in 1856.... The cult of Murukaṉ is, in some respects, an expression of Tamil self-consciousness, for many Tamilians recognize that Murukaṉ has been identified with the Tamil cultural heritage for centuries and feel he is an embodiment of their heritage" (Clothey 1978: 2).

16   I am greatly indebted to Maanasa Visweswaran, who generously shared with me her detailed translation of the *The Guide*, a part of her MA thesis written under the super-vision of Prof. Eva Wilden at Hamburg University (Visweswaran 2022). Her diligent

The Guide is composed of 317 lines in the *akaval* meter. It begins with an introductory sentence of 66 lines, in which the speaker turns to his audience and says: "if you desire a pilgrimage to the feet of Murukaṉ—you will obtain [what you wish]." Most of this sentence consists of descriptive clauses, depicting Murukaṉ and the bloody battle-field from which he came out victorious. The following sentences explain where Murukaṉ could be found. The first is ten lines long and it says that Murukaṉ resides on a hill near Madurai (which is identifiable as Tirupparaṅkuṉram). The hill itself is described very briefly and most of these lines describe the near city of Madurai. The next sentence, forty-eight lines long, says that it is Murukaṉ's "well-established habit" (*nilaiiya paṇpe*, TMĀP 125) to go to Cīralaivāy (i.e., Tiruccĕntūr). This sentence mostly consists of a description of the six-faced and twelve-armed form of Murukaṉ. The site itself is not described. Next, the speaker says that Murukaṉ also resides in Āviṉaṉkuṭi (i.e, the temple at the foot of Paḻaṉi hill) along with his wife. There, Murukaṉ is worshipped and praised by all the sages, gods, and other divinities, in what seems to be a procession, the description of which takes up most of the fifty-one lines dedicated to this place. In the next sentence, starting in line 176, the speaker says that Murukaṉ also resides in Erakam, where brahmins perform their rituals and chants. The brahmins' description takes up all thirteen lines that are dedicated to Erakam. Then we are told that Murukaṉ has another well-established habit: "dancing on every hill" (*kuṉṟu tor' āṭal*, TMĀP 217).[17] The expression "every hill" is predicated by twenty-eight lines which describe the dance-rituals of the hill-tribes' women and shaman-priest (*velaṉ*), typical of Murukaṉ's cult in the *caṅkam* literature, and the beautiful form of Murukaṉ himself as he dances with these women, embracing them. Lines 218–48 say that Murukaṉ is one whose known nature is to reside wherever he is worshipped (*āṇṭ' āṇṭ' uṟaitalum aṟintav aṟe*, TMĀP 248). This sentence consists mostly of descriptions of the occasions on which Murukaṉ is worshipped: various rituals performed during festivals in many towns and villages, mostly by the hill-tribes' women (*kuṟa makaḷ*) and the *velaṉ* priests. In line 249, the speaker turns again, like at the beginning, to his (imagined) audience and says that even though Murukaṉ is everywhere, "when you come to see him 'in person'" (*muntu nī kaṇṭ' uḻi*, TMĀP 252ab), bowing with your hands folded, even before your thoughts are filled with praises of Murukaṉ (and here comes a long list of these praises, as an embedded *stotra* (TMĀP 256–80))—the God's attendants will speak in your favor, and Murukaṉ will appear, tell you "fear not!" and grant you the rarest of gifts (i.e., liberation) (TMĀP 287–95). The poem then ends with

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linguistic analysis of the work, as well as her detailed comments and insights on the earlier influences on *The Guide*, have been extremely valuable.

17 TMĀP 217: "…Also, His well-established habit is dancing on each and every hill" (*kuṉṟu tor' āṭalu(m) niṉṟa taṉ paṇpe).*

a long clause (lines 296–317) that describes "Him"—that is, he who grants the 'gift'—as "lord of the hill with groves of ripening fruit" (*paḻa-mutir-colai-malai kiḻavoṉe*, TMĀP 317). Most of this clause is made of subclauses that beautifully describe the hill's dense natural life, flora, and fauna.

To sum up this outline, *The Guide* begins with a personal address of the speaker to his imagined audience, talking about the benefits of pilgrimage to Murukaṉ. Then he presents four locations where Murukaṉ can be found, whether by residence or because of his habit to visit them. He adds that Murukaṉ also dances (or 'sports,' if you like) on every hill, and, in fact, he resides in every place where he is worshipped. In any case, the speaker concludes, while addressing his audience once again, when one comes to see Him in person, even before uttering the first praise, one can be sure of obtaining one's wishes.

The contents of *The Guide* do not suggest a direct or linear connection between the text and the "six battle-camps." The term "battle-camp" (*paṭaivīṭu*) does not occur in *The Guide* and, as we shall see toward the end of this article, it will not appear in the context of Murukaṉ's six holy abodes before the end of the nineteenth century. More crucially, *The Guide* points out only four sites that are associated with Murukaṉ, and although these four can be identified with four of the current "battle-camps," the text does not express the idea that Murukaṉ has "six holy abodes." Nevertheless, the "battle-camps" concept is rooted in *The Guide*'s textual tradition. The following examination of this text's transmission and influence would enable us to see how this happened.

In all the extant manuscripts and printed editions of *The Guide*, the text is divided into six sections, bearing as titles the names of Murukaṉ's so-called 'abodes' that are mentioned in the text.[18] The first section (lines 1–77) is titled "Tiruparaṅkuṉram," and it includes the speaker's introductory statements and

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18 There is some diversity in the section-titles between the different manuscripts. The complete description can be found in Francis 2016 (512–13). In some cases, the variations are minor: for example, instead of Tirupparaṅkuṉram one can find Tiruppĕruṅkuṉram or Tirupparaṅkiri. In other cases, the more recent name of a place can appear instead of the old one, e.g., Tiruccĕntūr instead of Cīralaivāy. For a discussion on the identification of Ālaivāy with Tiruchendur, see Gillet 2014. Erakam is in some section titles called by the name of the current fourth "battle-field," Cuvāmimalai. The identification of Erakam with Cuvāmimalai, which is located in the Kaveri delta, seems to have appeared relatively late: the fourteenth-century commentator Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar identifies Erakam as a "holy hill in Cera-country" (*malai-nāṭṭ' akatt' ŏru tiruppati*, *Tirumurukārṟppaṭai* 1959: 60), and so does the thirteenth-century Parimelaḻakar (*Tirumurukārṟppaṭai* 1959: 135). In the fifteenth century, however, Villiputtūrār glosses "Erakam" as Cuvāmimalai, in his commentary on the first verse of Aruṇakirinātar's *Kantar-antāti* (*Kantar-antāti* 1879: 5). In any case, Erakam clearly indicates an actual geographical spot, which is the important point for the current paper. The identification of Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi with the temple at the foot of Paḻaṉi hill that currently bears

the much shorter description of Murukaṉ's dwelling in Tiruparaṅkuṉṟam.[19] The second section (78–125) includes the lines that describe Murukaṉ's habit of coming to Cīralaivāy and it is titled accordingly. Similarly, the third and fourth sections are titled "Āviṉaṉkuṭi" and "Erakam," and they are in congruence with the lines that mention Murukaṉ's 'residence' in these two places (TMĀP 126–75; 176–90, respectively). The fifth section is titled "*kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*," that is, "dancing on every hill," and includes the description of this habit of Murukaṉ's (191–217). The sixth and last section, taking up almost a third of the whole poem (218–317), includes the lines that describe Murukaṉ being wherever he is worshipped, the speaker's addressing of his audience and his account of what happens when one comes to 'meet' Murukaṉ, with the long final epithet of the deity as "Lord of the hill with groves of ripening fruit" (***paḻamutircolai****malai-kiḻavoṉe*). This section is titled "Paḻamutircolaimalai."

The section-titles are taken from *The Guide*'s text itself; the first four are the sites in which Murukaṉ can be found. The last two section-titles, *kuṉṟu toṟ'āṭal* and *paḻamutircolai*, present some difficulties. *Kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*, commonly explained nowadays as signifying Tiruttaṇi,[20] is obviously not a place name, but rather Murukaṉ's habitual action—dancing or 'sporting' on every hill—which seems to be a reasonable characteristic for a deity with such a long-lasting association with the mountain landscape.[21] Although not signifying a place, it makes sense as a section-title, since it captures the general idea expressed in the relevant segment of the text. The sixth section-title is a bit trickier to interpret. In some manuscripts, the title is Colaimalai ("Colai hill"), while in others it is the compound *paḻamutircolai*, which is the name of the present-day sixth "battle-camp." Both versions echo the very last bit of *The Guide*: "O The lord of the hill with groves

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that name is not under any dispute. Finally, it is important to note that there is no variation in the fifth section-title, *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*.

19   The text refers to Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam only as "*kuṉṟu*" ("hill"), but specifies its location, west of Madurai (*kūtal kuṭavāyiṉ*, TMĀP 71). The identification of this hill as Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam is also affirmed by a parallel from the *Aiṅkuṟunūṟu* (See Visweswaran 2022: 26 n 36).

20   See, for example, Comacuntaram 1967: 12–13; *Hinduism Today* editors 2007: 50–51.

21   This reading is supported by the five medieval commentaries on *The Guide* (see *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* 1959), dated roughly between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries (Francis 2020: 255–58). It is also supported by the commentary of the nineteenth-century scholar Ārumukanāvalar, which is an adaptation of Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar's commentary (*Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* 2011). In an appendix to the 19th edition of Ārumukanāvalar's commentary (1967), Cu. Turaicāmip Piḷḷai states similarly that "[*kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*] are the hill-sites for the dances of Murukaṉ, who is the Lord of the Kuṟiñci-landscape" (*kuṟiñci nilak kaṭavuḷ ākiya murukaṉukku viḷaiyāṭṭayarum iṭaṅkaḷ kuṉṟukaḷ ākum*, *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* 2011: 85), a view agreed upon by other twentieth-century scholars, such as Ki. Vā. Jakannātaṉ (Jakannātaṉ 1970: 159).

of ripening fruit!" (***paḻa mutir colai malai** kiḻavoṉe*, TMĀP 317). This epithet of Murukaṉ could be translated in several other ways. For example, it could be "the lord of the hill [called] *paḻamutircolai*," as it is commonly understood today, or, alternatively, "the lord of *colai-malai* ("Colai hill") [that has] ripening fruit." The five traditional commentators of *The Guide* read *malai* here as "hill" in singular, and since Colaimalai is also a name of a hill near Madurai (also known as Aḻakar-malai or Tirumāliruñcolaimalai), the identification of the two is possible. However, keeping in mind the poem's structure presented above, it seems unlikely that this final epithet, a part of the text's conclusion, is supposed to denote another specific location in which Murukaṉ can be found. It simply does not fit the thematic progression of the poem, which proceeds from the local to the universal.[22]

One alternative interpretation is that "the hill" (*malai*) in the last line should be read as plural, meaning that Murukaṉ, generally known as a mountain-god, is the Lord of all the hills that have groves of ripening fruit, perhaps a reference to his traditional literary role as Lord of the *kuṟiñci* landscape. In other words, the last epithet could imply that even though Murukaṉ is the Lord of the Hills, since his known nature is to come wherever he is worshipped, he would come to bless the devotee who seeks him.[23]

Even if we interpret the name Paḻamutircolai in *The Guide* as a reference to a specific abode of Murukaṉ, perhaps the one known as Colaimalai, the data provided above is still sufficient to determine the three following points: first, *The Guide*, despite encouraging the act of pilgrimage, does not offer a geographical template for pilgrimage, and definitely not the "six-battle-camps" template accepted by present-day devotees. Nothing in the text suggests that the order of the four geographic spots that appear in it beyond doubt (Tiruparaṅkuṉṟam, Cīralaivāy, Āviṉaṅkuṭi, Erakam) has any significance, nor that the geographical and physical attributes of these places have any significance, as they are not the focus of the

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22 *The Guide* begins with the suggestion of pilgrimage, continues to four locations, proceeds to "every hill" and then to "every place where he is worshipped." This suggests an effect of widening the scope, turning the deity from local to universal. Then comes the poet's conclusion: a description of one's fanciful hypothetical encounter with Murukaṉ, and the poem ends with the long clause describing the hill or hills of which Murukaṉ is the lord (*kiḻavoṉ*). Thus, it is hard to believe that the poet is again pointing out another specific location of Murukaṉ in this finale.

23 A similar doubt is raised by Turaicāmip Piḷḷai in his appendix to Ārumukanāvalar's commentary on *The Guide*, in which he claims that according to the Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar and Uraiyāciriyar (which he quotes on this matter), there is no reason to think that an actual 'holy place' by this name has existed ("*avarkaḷ uraiyāl ippĕyar kŏṇṭa tiruppati iruntat' ĕṉa kŏḷḷa iṭam illai*," *Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai* 2011: 85). Likewise, Ponnambalam Arunachalam, in an article on the worship of Murukaṉ, suggests that *paḻamutircolai* refers to a whole category of places, among which the Murukaṉ shrine in Katartagama (in today's Sri Lanka) is included (Arunachalam 1981: 132).

descriptions (at times to the degree of not being described at all). The second point that can be argued is that although the general association of Murukan̠ with the number six is present in the text,[24] *The Guide* neither provides an inventory of six sacred sites, nor does it imply an underlying concept of six 'special' places. The third point is that *The Guide*'s division into six sections, although found in all the manuscripts of the text and its old commentaries, does not arise organically from the text—it has no internal justification, neither semantic nor syntactic.[25]

Nevertheless, this division into six was an important stepping stone in the development of the "six-battle camps" concept from *The Guide.* Since none of the extant manuscripts is earlier than late eighteenth century (Francis 2020: 306), it is difficult to point out with certainty the exact moment in which *The Guide*'s division into six sections originated. However, one medieval commentator sheds some light on this issue.

There are five medieval commentaries on *The Guide,* which survived in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manuscripts and are currently available also in print. All five commentaries are divided into six sections, in agreement with *The Guide*'s division. Since their manuscripts are just as old as *The Guide*'s, this does not provide any valuable information. Luckily, commentaries sometimes have internal segmentation. Two of the five commentaries on *The Guide* have no segmentation at all.[26] Two other commentaries, more elaborate in style, make a syntactic segmentation of the text, which does not suggest any sixfold division.[27] But the fifth commentary, by Uraiyāciriyār (perhaps thirteenth-fifteenth century), is structured differently. This commentary has line-by-line paraphrases of the source text's segments. Each glossed segment is concluded with a recapitulation

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24 His six faces are described at relative length (TMĀP 91–102), but he is also described as having attacked the demon in the six parts of the day/in six ways (TMĀP 58), his six-syllable mantra contains the whole Veda (TMĀP 186), he is one who was begotten by six and remains six (or—in "sixness," TMĀP 255).

25 A more natural and logical division would be into eight sections, by separating the introductory part, which encourages the audience to perform pilgrimage (lines 1–66) from the proper section on "Tirupparaṅkun̠ram" (lines 67–77) and splitting the last section in two: one part on Murukan̠'s known disposition of being everywhere he is worshipped (lines 217–50) and a concluding section that describes the hypothetical *darśan* of Murukan̠ (lines 251–317).

26 These are the intertwined commentaries of Kavippĕrumāl and Pariti (perhaps eleventh-thirteenth century). They are relatively simple running commentaries, which provide line-by-line paraphrases and explanations without any segmentation of the source text (See *Tirumurukār̠r̠uppaṭai* 1959: 150–76).

27 These are the commentaries of Parimelaḻakar (thirteenth century) and Naccin̠ārkkin̠i-yar (fourteenth century). They both cut the source text into sentences/clauses (*tŏṭar*). After glossing the words of each segment, they paraphrase the segment, sometimes rearranging its order for clarification, and give further explanations.

of the relevant portion, which rearranges the syntactic units in a more comprehensible and natural order. What is unusual is that the points in which the text is segmented (that is, the points where he inserts his recapitulations) are in accordance with *The Guide*'s current sixfold section-division.[28] Thus, Uraiyāciriyar's commentary is the first known example for *The Guide*'s sixfold division. Since none of the other medieval commentators apply this division, we can assume that it was not an accepted feature of the text for any of them. Yet this division later became standard for all manuscripts and editions of *The Guide* and its commentaries. Hence, either Uraiyāciriyar was introducing an innovation, maybe even his own, or, perhaps, he should be dated relatively later than the other commentators, closer to the fifteenth century. In that case, the segmentation found in his commentary may reflect this period's upsurge in religious interest in Murukaṉ.

Uraiyāciriyar does not explain his segmentation of the source text, and so we are left with the same question—why was the text divided in this manner? The most reasonable possibility is that the division of *The Guide* into six sections was a religio-hermeneutical act. The sixfold division does not have an internal justification in the text, but being a text on Murukaṉ and for Murukaṉ, it has an *essential* justification. Uraiyācāriyar, or whoever it was who decided to apply Murukaṉ's 'six-ness' to *The Guide*, used a common traditional South Asian hermeneutical principle, according to which, the meaning of a text is found not only in its words but also in its form.[29] Thus, dividing a devotional text on Murukaṉ into six is a hermeneutical technique for making the text a representation of this divinity; the division embodies the deepest meaning of the text—God himself.

So far, we have seen that *The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ*, despite some modern claims, is not the source for the present-day concept of the "six-battle-camps." It associates Murukaṉ with four or five of the "battle-camp" sites, but it does not suggest a template for pilgrimage, nor a notion of six sacred abodes. *The Guide* was divided into six sections around the fifteenth century, probably as an act of religious projection of the sixfold divinity of this deity onto the first devotional poem dedicated to him. As we shall see next, the expansion of Murukaṉ's 'six-ness' that influenced Uraiyāciriyar, manifested in other early-modern texts, through an abstract notion of "six abodes."

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28 That is, TMĀP 1–77; 78–125; 126–76; 177–89; 190–217; 218–317. After each of the first five segments there is a concluding recapitulation of the segment, and after the last segment—a recapitulation of the whole text. The same practice of adding a syntactically rearranged recapitulation after a segment of the text is found in Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar's commentary too, but his segments are shorter and seem to be based on syntactic units.

29 See, for example, the argument made by Mishra on Vallabhācārya's analysis of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*'s structure (Mishra 2018).

The Guide and Murukaṉ's "six abodes"
in early-modern Tamil literature

The idea that Murukaṉ has six favorite (terrestrial) abodes does not find its way into texts before the fifteenth century. Among the very first references, there are two verses from Aruṇakirinātar's fifteenth-century *Tiruppukaḻ*—a monumental collection of devotional songs to Murukaṉ. Verse 81[30] in this collection begins with a long description of prostitutes who tempt young men. The speaker admits his own foolishness and fickleness, because he cannot help hankering after them. In the last part of the verse, the speaker calls for Murukaṉ's help and blessing, turning to him by using various epithets, the last of which is:

> O Great One who mounts the grand peacock, [and] who resides in **the six abodes** that are foremost [among] all [places]![31]

In another *Tiruppukaḻ* verse, the speaker begs Murukaṉ to teach him the wisdom that would release him from his worldly bondage. Here, too, the verse ends with a list of epithets in the vocative case, of which the last is:

> O Great One who dwells in **six holy abodes**![32]

These two verses are the only references to the concept of "six abodes" in the whole *Tiruppukaḻ* (which accommodates over 1,300 verses). The word used for "abode" is *pati* or *tiruppati* ("holy abode"), which does not appear anywhere in *The Guide*. Moreover, these two verses are not linked with any specific location, nor are they related in any other form to *The Guide*. Nevertheless, Aruṇakirinātar was, beyond doubt, familiar with *The Guide*, as we can see from the opening verse of the *Kantar-antāti,* another of this poet's famous devotional works:

> Go to **Paraṅkuṉṟu**, which [is so high it] fills the sky,
> to **Cīralaivāy**, to **Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi**,
> to **Erakam**, to **every hill** [on which Murukaṉ] **dances** (kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal),
> [and] to the mountain [covered with] cool rainclouds,
> on which dwell herds of roaring elephants,

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30 The order of the verses varies between editions. Throughout this article, I use the numbering of the 1935 edition of the *Tiruppukaḻ* (and other works of Aruṇakirinātar), which lists the poems alphabetically.

31 *Tiruppukaḻ* 81 … *cakalamu(m) mutal ākiya* **aṟupati** *nilai meviya | taṭa mayil taṉil eṟiya pĕrumāḷe* ‖

32 *Tiruppukaḻ* 237 … *āṟu tiruppatiyil vaḷar pĕrumāḷe* ‖

> *And praise [these] homes of the Youthful One,*
> *whose skill in the great, ancient scriptures was [highly] esteemed*
> *by Viṣṇu, whose 'soul' is Lakṣmī,*
> *and by Śiva, whose half-body*
> *is the lady with lovely eyebrows, Umā.*[33]

In this verse, Aruṇakirinātar mentions *The Guide*'s first five section-titles—four abodes of Murukaṉ and "dancing on every hill" (all marked in bold letters in the text above)—by their exact names and order of appearance in *The Guide*. The commentators, beginning with Villiputtūrār (presumably Aruṇakirinātar's contemporary), unanimously claim that the hill with dark clouds and herds of elephants, which appears in the last *pāda* of the verse, is Paḻamutircolai. This interpretation can be challenged, but accepting it has interesting implications on the way Aruṇakirinātar, and perhaps all his contemporaries, understood Paḻamutircolai's status in *The Guide*: the verse implies an essential gap between the first five 'abodes' (four places and "every hill"), and Paḻamutircolai. This gap is less evident in the translation, but unignorable when looking at the Tamil verse's word order. The first five names appear as a set list and are followed by the incomplete verbal form *cĕṉṟu* (derived from the root *cĕl*, "to go"). Only then comes the compound denoting the cloudy mountain, followed by the finite verb, "to praise" (in an imperative plural form). While the meaning is the same as in the above translation, the word-order gives the impression that reaching the last hill and praising it is a conclusion of the previous actions. In addition, the first five are categorized in the verse as Murukaṉ's "homes" (*kuṭi*), while the last is not.[34] In other words, the structure of this verse implies an interpretation of *The Guide*'s structure, according to which, Paḻmutircolai should be distinguished from the first five 'abodes,' and perhaps should not be considered as one of them at all.

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33 *Kantar-antāti* 1:
   tiruv āvi ṉaṉ kuṭi paṅkāḷar ĕṉ mutu cīr urai ca-
   *tir uvāviṉaṉ kuṭi vāṉ ār **paraṅkuṉṟu cīralaivāy***
   ***tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭiy erakaṅ kuṉṟu tŏr' āṭal** cĕṉṟ' a-*
   tir uvāv iṉaṉ kuṭi kŏṇṭa taṉ kār varai cĕppumiṉe ‖
   Aruṇakirinātar's emphasis here is on the phono-aesthetic effect, typical to this text: in addition to the technical constraint of the *antāti* (the last word of each verse is the first word of the next one), the first two metrical units (*cīr*) of each verse are identical, while their meaning is different in each repetition. This makes the translation rather awkward and given to many interpretations, yet for our purpose, even just looking at the Tamil would have been enough.

34 It may also be of some importance that the word used here for "home" or "dwelling" is *kuṭi* and not *pati*. This could be explained as Aruṇakirinātar's way of handling the need to match the repeating *cīr*, but it also seems that for him *pati* or *tiruppati* is a term that belongs in a different context.

Whether the last *pāda* refers to Paḻamutircolai or not, this verse demonstrates beyond doubt that for Aruṇakirinātar, *The Guide* was well-known and significant enough to stand in the focus of the first verse of one of his greatest works. At the same time, it was not sufficiently significant to be mentioned at the beginning of *all* his works, nor to leave any other substantial reference. From a wider perspective, this verse is a standard example of how *The Guide* is referred to in early-modern Tamil devotional works—that is, by using the fixed list of *The Guide*'s section-titles, in their original order. A similar reference can be found, for example, in Pakaḻikkūttar's fifteenth-century *Tiruccĕntūr piḷḷaitamiḻ*, which, following the conventions of the *piḷḷaitamiḻ* genre, describes Murukaṉ as an infant in various daily situations. The "toy drum" (*ciṟupaṟai*) chapter of Pakaḻikkūttar's poem consists of ten verses that encourage the infant-Murukaṉ, in the final *pāda* of each verse, to play his toy drum, while the rest of the *pāda*s are long epithets. In the seventh verse, the epithet that takes up most of the verse describes Muru-kaṉ as Lord of *Paraṅkiri*, *Cīralaivāy*, *Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi*, *Erakam*, *kuṉṟu tŏṟ'āṭal*, and *Paḻamutircolaimalai*.[35]

Another similar reference to *The Guide* is found in the benedictory verses (*kaṭavuḷ vāḻttu*) of Kacciyappa Civācāriyar's fifteenth-century *Kantapurāṇam*. Seven verses of the benediction are dedicated to Murukaṉ.[36] In each of the first six, Murukaṉ is eulogized as the master of one of *The Guide*'s (so-called) abodes: he is The God who resides in Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam (*tirupparaṅkuṉṟ'amar cey*), The God who came to Cīralaivāy (*cīralaivāy varu cey*), The immaculate One who came to Āviṉaṉkuṭi (*āviṉaṉkuṭi varum amala[ṉ]*), The six-faced Lord of Erakam (*erakatt' aṟumukaṉ*), Kumara who dances on every hill (*kuṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭiya kumara[ṉ]*), and The beautiful Lord of Paḻamutircolai (*paḻamutircolaiy am pakavaṟ*), respectively.[37] The contents of these verses are mostly epithets, which have little to no relation to the specific geographical features and mythologies of the places themselves, or to the descriptions found in *The Guide*.

The *Kantapurāṇam* has an additional noteworthy reference to *The Guide*: verse 106 of the introductory chapter on the town (*tirunakarap-paṭalam*) praises Muru-kaṉ of Kumarakŏṭṭam (Kāñcipuram) in the following way:

> The One who abides in Kumarakŏṭṭam temple,
> graciously dwells on the difficult-to-reach hill [that is located] west of
> Madurai,

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35 The full verse (with my translation) can be found in appendix 1 to this chapter.

36 The verses (*Kantapurāṇam*, *kaṭavuḷvāḻttu* 12–18), along with my translation, can be found in appendix 2.

37 The seventh verse eulogizes Murukaṉ as the master of Kāñcipuram's Kumarakŏṭṭam temple, where Kacciyappa Civācāriyar composed this work.

> in Alaivāy, in Āvinankuṭi, in good Erakam,
> on the hills of this earth, such as Taṇikai,
> [and] in temples in other magnificent towns.[38]

The mention of "the hill west of Madurai," Alaivāy, Āvinankuṭi, and Erakam makes it clear that this is a reference to *The Guide*. It is curious that Paḻamutircolai is not mentioned here, even though it was mentioned in the benedictory verses. This may hint to the possibility that Paḻamutircolai was perceived differently, as I have suggested above with regard to the first verse of the *Kantar-antāti*. In addition, the absence of Paḻamutircolai, along with the plural "hills," makes the verse incompatible with the six-abode concept. The most interesting point, however, is the mention of Taṇikai (i.e., Tiruttaṇi) in the clause on the "hills of this earth," which corresponds to *The Guide*'s "dancing on every hill" section-title. This could have implied that the idea that Tiruttaṇi is Murukaṉ's fifth 'abode' originated from the *Kantapurāṇam*. However, as will shall see later in this chapter, Tiruttaṇi did not enter the "battle-camp" list before the twentieth century.[39]

The list-like references in fifteenth-century texts, such as those presented above, are not correlated with the concept of "six holy abodes" mentioned in the two *Tiruppukaḻ* verses quoted earlier. They still appear as two different phenomena: the latter is an expansion of Murukaṉ's 'six-ness' to include also some (unknown, abstract) six spatial manifestations; the former is a reference—perhaps tribute, perhaps lip-service—to the ancient ancestor of Murukaṉ *bhakti*, which attests to the continuity of this tradition.

This, however, has one exception: a small section from the *Tiruvakuppu*, a less-celebrated collection of praise songs by Āruṇakirinātar, seems to hint at a partial fusion of the two phenomena. This section of four short verses praises Murukaṉ as one who "abides in countless holy places" (*alaki(l) ṟiruppatiyiṟ payil*) and provides a short list of examples for these places. The first item in the list is "Tiruparaṅkiri—the first of the six sites" (*āṟu nilaiy ĕṉṟu mutal ākiya paraṅkiriyum*). At the same time, the rest of the list does not substantiate this fusion: it includes eight other sites, among which only two are equivalent to places from *The Guide*, and the idea of "six places" is not reiterated.[40]

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38 *Kantapurāṇam, tirunakarappaṭalam* 106:
   mev' aruṅ kūṭal melai vĕṟpiṉil alaivāy taṉṉil
   āviṉaṉkuṭiyi(l) ṉall erakan taṉiṟ ṟaṇikaiy ātip
   pūv' ulak' uḷḷa vĕṟpiṟ pŏṟp' uṟum ĕṉai vaippiṟ
   kovil kŏṇṭ' aruḷi vaikuṅ kumarakŏṭṭattu meyoṉ ‖

39 Moreover, as far as I know, this verse was not quoted or referred to as the source of the identification of Tiruttaṇi with "*kuṉṟu tŏṟ'āṭal*" prior to 1980.

40 *Tiruvakuppu, pūtavetāḷa-vakuppu*, 16–19:
   āṟunilaiy ĕṉṟu mutal ākiya paraṅkiriyum

A similar formulation appears in Nirampav-aḻakiya Tecikar's sixteenth-century *talapurāṇam* of Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, the first among the "six battle-camps." In the tenth chapter, "the killing of Cūr" (*Cūracaṅkārac-carukkam*), we are told that after defeating the demon, Murukaṉ went to Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam:[41]

> He reached Paraṅkiri, the first among **the six holy places** that give joy to
> His heart, and sojourned there.

Like the *Tiruvakuppu* verse, this seems like potential evidence for a fusion of the idea that Murukaṉ has six abodes with the abode-names that appear in *The Guide*. Yet it refers only to the first among the six, and, just like in the *Tiruvakuppu*, the author does not provide any further elaboration. Meanwhile, many other contemporary works do not adopt this fusion. Pālacuppiramaṇiyak Kavirāyar's seventeenth-century *Paḻaṉittalapurāṇam* eulogizes all the temples and sacred spots located around the Paḻaṉi hill. Its thirteenth chapter, dedicated to Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi, begins with a set of seven eulogy verses to Murukaṉ, somewhat reminiscent of (and perhaps inspired by) the *Kantapurāṇam* set of eulogy verses mentioned above. Here, too, each of the first six verses praises Murukaṉ as the master of one of *The Guide*'s 'abodes': he is The One of Paraṅkuṉṟam (*paraṅkuṉṟattāṉ*), The One of Alaivāy (*alaivāykkaraiyāṉ*), The One of Āviṉaṉkuṭi (*āviṉaṉkuṭiyāṉ*), The One of Erakam (*erakattāṉ*), The One who dances on every hill (*kuṉṟu-tŏṟum-āṭalāṉ*),[42] and Kumara of Colaimalai (*colaimalaikkumaraṉ*).[43] Like in the *Kan-*

āviṉaṉ ĕṭuṅ kuṭiyum āraṇa muṭint' iṭamum ‖
aruṇaiyum ilañciyuñ cĕntūr tiruppaḻaṇiy
aṭiyar maṉa paṅkayañ cĕṅkŏṭ' iṭaik kaḻiyum ‖
aṉavarata(m) nīla malar mutt' ĕṟi cuṉai puṉalil
aruvi kutipāy taru cĕruttaṇiy ĕṉ vĕṟpum ĕṉum ‖
alaki(l) ṟiruppatiyiṟ payil kaṟpakāvaṭaviy
aṉupavaṉ atta(ṉ) ṉiruttaṉ arattavāṭaiyaṉ ‖

He who enjoys the [heavenly] wishing-tree groves, The Great One, the Dancer, whose garment is red, resides in coutless holy sites:
Tiruparaṅkiri—the first of the six sites, the prominent Āviṉaṉkuṭi, the peak of all Vedas, Aruṇācalam, Ilañci, Cĕntūr, Tiruppaḻaṇi, Cĕṅkŏṭu, the mind-lotus of [His] devotees, Kāli, and the hill called Cĕruttaṇi (i.e., Tiruttaṇi), where waterfalls always leap and splash in the ponds, scattering pearls and blue lilies.

41   TPKP *cūrcaṅkāraccarukkam*, 20ab:
     tiruvuḷaṅ kaḻi pŏruntiya **tiruppatiy āṟ**' uḷ
     varu mutaṟ pati paraṅkiriy aṭant' avaṉ vatintāṉ

42   Literally: "the One whose dance (*āṭal*) is [on] every hill."

43   The seventh verse serves a *phalaśruti* of this mini-*stotra*, which opens the thirteenth chapter of the *Paḻaṉittalapurāṇam*. It consists of additional, standard epithets of Murukaṉ, and concludes that those who would worship him will obtain divine honors. The seven verses (and their translations) can be found in appendix 3 to this chapter.

tapurāṇam, each verse consists of a list of epithets, the contents of which have little relation to the places themselves, or to the descriptions found in *The Guide*. Moreover, the idea of Murukaṉ's "six holy abodes" is not expressed in any of these verses. Thus, they, too, function as a signifier for a direct link between *The Guide* and the *Paḻaṉittalapurāṇam*, that is, between the ancient ancestor and its seventeenth-century offspring, but it is an empty link, with no other function than signifying its existence.

Alongside such references to *The Guide*, the abstract "six-abodes" notion still appears separately in other seventeenth-century texts. The *Tiruccĕntūrk-kantar-kalivĕṇpā* is a devotional-philosophical treatise, describing Murukaṉ as the supreme divinity, composed by Kumarakuruparar, a well-known seventeenth-century Murukaṉ devotee and poet. In this work, which became a part of the devotional canon of Murukaṉ's cult alongside the works of Aruṇakirinātar, we find a single reference to the concept of Murukaṉ's abodes:

> You dwell in the hearts of those who see [your] **six holy abodes** and utter
> with devotion the six syllables![44]

The *Kantark-kalivĕṇpā* refers to some of the main myths of Murukaṉ, but it does not mention any sacred site except Tiruccĕntūr, the home of the deity to which this work is dedicated.[45] It also does not have any 'list-reference' to *The Guide*. Other authors from this period, such as Vĕṉṟimālaik Kavirāyar, who composed the *Tiruccĕntūrppurāṇam*, ignored completely the "six abodes" notion. The same is true for Kacciyappa Muṉivar, the renowned eighteenth-century poet and scholar, who composed the *Taṇikaippurāṇam* (a *talapurāṇam* on Tiruttaṇi) and *Tanikai-yāṟṟuppaṭai* (a "guide poem" on Taṇikai), in neither of which there is a reference to the abstract concept of "six abodes," nor to the set-list of *The Guide*'s section titles.

Let us sum up what we have seen so far. First, there is no textual evidence for the idea that Murukaṉ has six particularly favorite or holy abodes prior to the fifteenth century, that is, almost a millennium after the "Guide to Murukaṉ" was composed. This gap may be attributed to the general "textual silence" of the Murukaṉ cult in this period. Yet even from the fifteenth century onwards,

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44 TKK 109:
āṟu tiruppati *kaṇṭ' āṟ' ĕḻuttum aṉpiṉ uṭaṉ*
kūṟum avar cintai kuṭikŏṇṭoṉe ‖

45 According to tradition, the author, Kumarakuruparar was unable to speak until the age of five. His parents took him to the Tiruccĕntūr temple, and by Murukaṉ's blessing he was given not only speech but also perfect knowledge of both Tamil and Sanskrit. He then sang the *Tiruccĕntūrk-kantar-kalivĕṇpā* (*Ceyttŏṇṭarppurāṇam*, 935–38). Even so, Tiruccĕntūr is mentioned only twice in the text (TKK 98, 110).

this concept did not occupy a central place in devotional texts. It was mentioned by some poets and ignored by others, but other than two uncertain cases (the verses from the *Tiruvakuppu* and the *Tirupparaṅkirippurāṇam*), it remained an abstract idea that is not directly correlated with any specific locations, including the places mentioned in *The Guide.* Thus, it seems to be merely a non-particular expansion of Murukaṉ's association with the number six that, although known, had minor importance for the central figures in the early-modern Śaiva and Kaumāra literary traditions. During the same period, *The Guide* itself was alluded to by some of these early-modern poets, not very frequently, but in a consistent manner—by mentioning the names of its six places/section-titles, in the same given order. The consistency of these allusions suggests that the sixfold division of the text and the section-titles were, by this time, generally accepted. The fixed template of these allusions strengthens the conviction that this list is not meant to provide a map—the geographical aspect seems almost irrelevant—but rather that these names are used as codes for 'constructing' the divinity from its parts: the deity is represented through the division of His ancient text into the typological number that captures His essence; alluding to it by using this sixfold division is a form a verbal embodiment of God.

Nevertheless, the identification of the "six abodes" with the section-titles of *The Guide* seems to have been almost inevitable. After all, five of them were already accepted as known geographic spots, and *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal* is a minor inconsistency in this scheme: it is understood as "every hill," a general category of holy sites. Since this set of places still floated between the literary and the purely abstract realms, and was not yet perceived as a sacred map, it posed no problem. And thus, in Beschi's Tamil-Tamil dictionary, the *Catur-akarāti* (first published in 1732), we find an indication for this fusion: an entry for *Cuppiramaṇiyar-piratāṇattalam* ("the important sites of Subrahmaṇya"), which presents a short list of names—Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Tiruccīralaivāy, Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi, Tiruverakam, *kuṉṟukaḷ* ("hills"), and Colaimalai.[46] That is not to say that Murukaṉ's six places have become a matter of common knowledge or a central concept for the cult. As mentioned above, the eighteenth-century renowned poet and scholar Kacciyappa Muṉivar ignored the notion completely in his devotional works, and, in addition, other dictionaries from around the same period, such as Proença's *Tamil-Portuguese Dictionary* (1679) and Fabricious's *A Malabar and English Dictionary* (1779) do not mention this concept at all. This inconsistency continues deep into the nineteenth century until, at the turn of the twentieth century, Murukaṉ's "six abodes" begin to have a clearer, more palpable form.

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46   This is found in the *tŏkaiy-akarāti* section of the dictionary.

The Guide and Murukaṉ's "six abodes" in the nineteenth and early twentieth century

From the nineteenth century onwards, even larger numbers of devotional works addressed to Murukaṉ are composed, which at this period are more easily distributed by the growing use of print in Tamil Nadu. The increase in devotional writing to Murukaṉ comes hand in hand with the major efforts by Śaiva publishers to print religious works in Tamil. One of the earliest Tamil texts to have been printed in Tamil Nadu, and the first among *caṅkam* texts, was *The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ*, with the first edition perhaps as early as 1834 (Francis 2020: 287, Francis 2017: 322–23). The central part that print-culture played in promoting religious trends in Tamil Nadu during this period was already discussed by Richard Weiss (2016). We can assume that the resurgence of *The Guide* in print entailed a rise in its popularity and its status among Murukaṉ devotees. The publication of *The Guide*'s printed editions may also explain why in dictionaries published after the middle of the nineteenth century, the "six abodes" of Murukaṉ are consistently associated with the section titles of *The Guide*: Dupuis and Mousset (1855), Winslow (1862), Visvanatha Pillai (1888), and Ciṅkāravelu Mutaliyār's encyclopedia *Apitāṉacintāmaṇi* (1910), all mention them as the "six important places of Subrahmaṇiya."

The association between *The Guide* and Murukaṉ's six important sites, although attested in dictionaries, did not play a part in this period's devotional poetry. An example for this can be taken from the writings of Kumarakurutāca Cuvāmikaḷ, alias Pamban Swamigal. Pamban Swamigal, born around the middle of the nineteenth century, was a prolific author of devotional texts to Murukaṉ. His devotional hymns are considered his earliest writings and are said to amass to 6,666 verses in total. His corpus of devotional hymns begins with a poem to Murukaṉ as "king of gods" (*amararkoṉ*), which is then followed by poems dedicated to many temples and holy places, composed in a style similar to the Śaiva *Tevāram* poems. The first six among these temple-hymns are titled *Tirupparaṅkiri*, *Tiruccĕntil*, *Tiruppaḻanimalai*, *Tiruverakam*, *Tirukkuṉṟutoṟāṭal*, and *Tiruccolaimalai*, respectively. In other words, Pampan Swamigal opened his collection of temple eulogy-songs with a reference to *The Guide*, similar to what we have seen in Aruṇakirinātar's *Kantar-antāti* and Pālacuppiramaṇiyak Kavirāyar's *Paḻaṉittalapurāṇam*, although more elaborate (to each temple or 'place' he devoted a decade of verses).[47] In another one of his works, the *Tiruvalaṅkaṟ-ṟiraṭṭu* ("Collection of divine garlands"), we find another set of such decades, yet slightly

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47   It is difficult to confirm beyond doubt that the arrangement of the hymns was decided by Pamban Swamigal himself or by a later editor, as the information on the editing of his devotional hymns is practically non-existent. However, since many of his other

different: the first two are titled "Tirupparaṅkiri" and "Tiruccīralaivāy," respectively. The third is titled "Tiruverakam" (which we would expect to find as fourth), the fourth is titled *"palakiri"* ("many hills"), which obviously stands for *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*, and the fifth—"Tiruccolaimalai" (normally the sixth in the list). Then, there are three decades, the first two are titled "Tiruppaḻani," and the third— "Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi." Thus, the template of the six names in their given order is not maintained here.[48] One point, to which I shall return later, should be noted— for Pamban Swamigal, *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal* (paralleled with *palakiri*) does not mark a single place but a category of places, that is, the hills where Murukaṉ dwells.[49]

A third mention of our 'places' appears in the same collection of Pamban's poems, the *Tiruvalankaṟ-ṟiraṭṭu*, in a ten-verse poem called *Tirukkantar tiruppalāṇṭu* (*Tiruvalankaṟṟiraṭṭu* 58). Each verse of this poem ends with the words "I sing [this] *pallāṇṭu* to *Guha* (Murukaṉ)" (*kukaṉukkup pallāṇṭu kūṟutume*). The third verse goes as follows:

> He, who graciously bestows greater-than-great wealth
>> On those who meditate on [his] feet,
>>> [while] being at Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, which is abundant with waters,
>>> at Tiruccĕntūr, in which beauty abounds,
>>> at the immensely flourishing Tiruverakam,
>>> at the faultless Paḻani,
>>> and on the beautiful Tiruccolai mountain, of expansive wealth—
> I sing [this] *pallāṇṭu* to Guha.[50]

The absence of *kuṉṟutoṟ'āṭal* from this verse, along with the substitution of Āviṉaṉkuṭi with Paḻani (i.e., the central hill-temple), indicates a certain shift in the meaning of these references to *The Guide*, from being mainly literary to being a direct call for a real pilgrimage to well-known (and central) places. At

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the same time, it should be emphasized that the concept of "six abodes" does not play a part in Pamban's references to *The Guide,* since the last two of the three examples above do not maintain a sixfold template. In fact, this concept is almost completely absent from his devotional poetry, with the exception of one verse, in a poem called *ĕṇṇ alaṅkāra lakari* ("The Billow of Number-Ornaments"). Poems of this type use successive numbers for praising a deity. In the current case, there are ten verses that use the numbers one to ten. The sixth verse goes as follows:

> "Six are his mouths," it was said [, and therefore]
> six was the number of women whose breasts[51] suckled him.
> Six are his most important places,
> [and] six are the syllables in his mantra.[52]

As in the earlier examples for this notion in poetry (and unlike some of the dictionaries), there is no information about the places. Given the context, it seems to be only a 'number-ornament' and not a reference to a sacred geography.

The poet-devotee Devaraya Swamigal was a contemporary of Pamban Swamigal. His *Kantar-caṣṭi-kavacam*, a poem of 118 couplets, is currently one of the most popular devotional songs on Murukaṉ and a part of the daily worship (Zvelebil 1995: 663). The poem, dedicated to Murukaṉ in Tiruccĕntūr, is another example for the relative absence of the "six abodes" from the nineteenth-century devotional literature, as it does not mention the concept of "six abodes," nor does it have any 'list reference' to *The Guide*'s six section-titles. In present-day publications and on devotee websites, Devaraya Swamigal is attributed with five additional "*kavacam*" poems, each dedicated to one of the five other "battle-camps."[53] However, this

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51 The last *cīr* of the second *pāda* appears in all the editions as *mu***kai***cciyar ĕṇ*. Since this makes little sense, I read here *mu***lai***cciyar [ĕṇ]*, which is more thematically consistent with the preceding *pĕyarĕccam "uṇṭa."*

52 *Tiruvalankaṟ-ṟiraṭṭu, mutaṟ kaṇṭam* 45.3 c–d
   āṟ' ām avar āṉaṉam ĕṉr' aṟaital
   āṟ' ām avar uṇṭa mu[l]aicciyar ĕṇ
   āṟ' ām avar mukkiyamāṉa talam
   āṟ' ām avar mantirav akkarame ∥

53 One example for such a printed publication is *Āṟu-kantar-caṣṭi-kavacaṅkaḷ* (2012). On the web, see: https://kaumaram.com/text_new/k6_kavasam_u.html and https://murugan.org/texts/devaraya.htm. The six *kavacam*s also appears in the "Project Madurai" website, accessed February 11, 2025, (https://www.projectmadurai.org/pm_etexts/pdf/pm0034_02.pdf). In addition, these six *kavacam* poems attributed to Devaraya Swamigal appear on some (relatively new) wall panels in the outer *prakāra* of the Kapalīśvarar temple in Mayilapur, Chennai, near the Paḻaṉi-Āṇṭavar shrine.

attribution is somewhat dubious, since there are no old editions of these poems, which differ significantly in style and length from the *Kantar-caṣṭi-kavacam*.[54]

To conclude this section, by the nineteenth century, the notion of Murukaṉ's six holy abodes was established and was already fused with the list of *The Guide*'s section-titles in some circles, to the degree that it appeared in dictionaries. However, as the above examples show, this does not entail its acceptance in all the devotee circles, nor does it mean it became a key notion in the mainstream of the Murukaṉ cult. As we have seen, for two prominent and influential devotees such as Pamban Swamigal and Devaraya Swamigal, it seems to have been a rather minor to non-existent element within their theological system. The change, however, did not take place until later.

The resurgence of the *Tiruppukaḻ*

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, an important turn of events began to unfold when Va. Ta. Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai, a head clerk at the Mañcakuppam district court and an ardent devotee of Murukaṉ, heard for the first time in his life a quote from Aruṇakiranātar's *Tiruppukaḻ* and decided to dedicate his life to the collection and publication of this poet's works, beginning with the *Tiruppukaḻ*. Prior to that, Aruṇakirinātar's poems, like many other literary and devotional works, were scattered throughout the Tamil region on palm-leaf manuscripts. Between 1876 and 1903, Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai collected hundreds of them. The first volume, with only 603 poems, was published in 1894, followed by a second volume in 1902, and a revised second edition in 1909 (Zvelebil 1992: 209–10). Subsequent editions were published by Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai's son, Va. Cu. Ceṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai, who continued his father's endeavor after his death (Zvelebil 1995: 136).[55]

54　Even if we accept the claim that these six poems should be taken together as one body of works by Devaraya Swamigal, it does not change the current argument, since the poems, despite making occasional references to the "battle camp" sites, are only loosely linked to the places they are associated with (and that appear in their titles). In addition, the fifth poem, titled *kuṉṟu tor'āṭum kumaraṉ* ("Kumara who dances on every hill"), does not mention Tiruttaṇi. Thus, in this case, too, the sixfold formation seems to be intended to echo the structure of *The Guide* as the ancient source of Murukaṉ *bhakti*.

55　Va. Cu. Ceṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai eventually published between 1952 and 1957 the *Murukaveḷ paṉṉiru tirumuṟaikaḷ*, an anthology of devotional works, mostly of Atuṇakirinātar's alongside several notable others. The whole anthology is structured to parallel the Śaiva *Tirumuṟai*, in an attempt to create a Kaumāra parallel to the Tamil Śaiva scriptures. This is stated in the preface to the works and apparent by the choice of the name "*Tirumuṟai*." His endeavor complements his father's wish to form a Kaumāra parallel to the Śaiva *Tevāram* anthology. Thus, the first seven books of this anthology,

Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai organized the *Tiruppukaḻ* poems in groups, the first of which was of poems dedicated to the 'abodes' mentioned in *The Guide*. Next, he grouped together the poems on Śiva's *pañcabhūta* temples, followed by groups of poems organized by region (*nāṭu*), and, at the end, the general poems (i.e., poems not associated with any specific site). In other words, Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai followed the footsteps of all the poets we have seen so far, as his editing work echoes the same type of allusion to *The Guide*. However, for Cuppiramaṇia Piḷḷai, the poems' context was (like Pamban Swamigal's poems) clearly geographical and not only literary. Thus, under the title of Tiruvāviṇaṇkuṭi he included all the poems to Paḻaṉi hill as well. Similarly, under the category of *kuṉṟutor' āṭal*, he gathered first all the poems that use this expression or what he considered its variants (i.e., *kiriy ĕṅkaṇum, pala kuṉṟum, pala malai, pala vĕṟpu, malai yāvum*),[56] but then also added the poems dedicated to many different mountains and mountain-shrines, beginning with mythical mountains like Kailāsa (Tam. *kayilai*) and Skanda-giri (*kanta-kiri*), followed by thirty-two different terrestrial hills and mountains. It should be noted that within this list of hills, Tiruttaṇi occupies a significant position as one of the temples that has the largest number of poems, yet it is not the first in the list and nothing suggests it has a unique status.

Cuppiramaṇia Piḷḷai explained the arrangement of the poems, in his own words, in his preface to the first edition of the *Tiruppukaḻ*: "when arranging [the poems], the songs of the six [holy] sites—Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Tiruccĕntūr, Tiruvāviṇaṇkuṭi, Tiruverakam, *kuṉṟu tor' āṭal*, Paḻamutircolai—which are the central **"battle-camps"** (*paṭaivīṭu)* of Lord Murukaṉ, were placed first."[57]

These words reveal a full-fledged fusion between the abstract concept of "six abodes" and The Guide's section-titles, in the circles of Cuppiramaṇia Piḷḷai and his collaborators in the *Tiruppukaḻ* publishing project, which are contemporaries of Pamban Swamigal and Devaraya Swamigal. This fusion will soon have become a common property, with the distribution of the *Tiruppukaḻ*'s printed editions. The question of how the tradition of paying tribute to *The Guide*, which appeared relatively insignificant at the end of the eighteenth century, became a central component in the new networking of the cult, seems to have a simple answer: print. As I have said above, *The Guide* was being printed in multiple editions from 1834 onwards, and this may well have been one of the consequences of its new form

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which include Aruṇakiri's temple-poems (with Ceṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai'a own commentary), parallel the *Tevāram*; the eleventh book, like the *Tirumuṟai*'s, is a collection of poems (and verse-selections) from a variety of sources, and the twelfth book is the *Ceyttŏṇtarppurāṇam*, a hagiography of famous Murukaṉ devotees, which parallels the *Pĕriyapurāṇam*.

56   All the expressions mean "every/many hill(s)/mountain[s]."

57   From his preface to the first edition of the Tiruppukaḻ (*tiruppukaḻ mutaṟpatippiṉ mukavurai*), *Tiruppukaḻ* 1921: vii.

and extent of distribution, which has raised *The Guide*'s symbolic significance for the Murukaṉ devotees of the late nineteenth-century.

The above quote from Cuppiramṇiya Piḷḷai's preface is also an early indication of the use of *paṭaivīṭu* ("battle camp") in this context. In all but one pre-twentieth-century dictionaries I have checked, if the term *paṭaivīṭu* appears at all, it is only in its original meaning of "arsenal" or "soldiers' quarters."[58] Dupuis and Mousset's dictionary (1855) is the only exception, adding "temple" as a possible translation. In his 1910 Tamil encyclopedia, the *Apitāṉacintāmaṇi*, Singaravelu Mudaliar used *paṭaivīṭu* to describe only Tirupparaṅkuṉram, without applying this term to the "important Subrahmaṇya places" (which appear elsewhere in this work), or to any other one of them in particular. In the same year, Nā. Katiraivel Pillai, in his *Tamiḻ-mŏḻiy-akarāti*,[59] translated *paṭaivīṭu*, alongside the original meanings, as temple (*tevālayam*), and, in a separate entry, *tiruppaṭaivīṭu* is translated as "an abode of gods, [in which they] sit with crowds of great-ones."[60] In addition, in the separate entries for Murukaṉ's sites, he used "battle camps" and "Subrahmaṇya's important places" interchangeably.[61] Hence, when the term "battle-camps" appeared in the first edition of the *Tiruppukaḻ* in 1894, it was not yet the accepted and standard appellation for these six sites, and, therefore, it may be the source for the present-day popularity of this term. Cěnkalvarāya Piḷḷai, Cuppiramaṇia Piḷḷai's son, expressed his opinion on how this term was coined. In his commentary on *Tiruppukaḻ* 81 (the verse quoted above on "the Lord who resides in six foremost-of-all holy abodes" *cakalamum mutal ākiya aṟupati nilai meviya pěrumāḷe*), he writes:

> [the six abodes are] the places called *tirupparaṅkuṉram, tiruccěntūr, tiru āviṉaṉkuṭi (palaṉi), tiruverakam, kuṉru tŏṟ' āṭal,* [and] *palamutircolai,* who have primacy among all [holy] places. These places are, therefore, six

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58 Proença (1769) and Beschi (1824 [1732]) do not have an entry for *paṭaivīṭu*. Fabricious (1779) and Winslow (1862) give only the original (i.e., literal) meaning.

59 The first edition of the dictionary was printed in 1910. Unfortunately, I could not find anything earlier than the sixth edition (1928).

60 *tevarkaḷ periyorkaḷ kuṭṭatt' uṭaṉ irukkum.*

61 "Cěntil" (i.e., Tiruccěntūr) is "one of Murukakkaṭavuḷ's *battle-camps*" (*murukak-kaṭavuḷatu paṭaivīṭukaḷuḷ ŏṉru*), but in the entry for Tiruccěntūr it is defined as "one of Subrahmaṇiya's important places." Similarly, Āviṉaṉkuṭi is "one of the six places that belong to Subrahmaṇya mūrtti," and Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi (i.e., the same place): "one of Subrahmaṇya's battle-camps." Erakam is "one of the six places of Subrahmaṇiya," and Colaimalai—"a place of Subrahmaṇiya, one of the battle-camps." Interestingly, Tirupparaṅkuṉram is described just as "a major hill of Subrahmaṇya" (*cuppiramaṇi-yarukkup piratāṉa malai*). Tiruttaṇi is not described as one of the six places. Naturally, there is no entry for *kuṉru tŏṟ' āṭal.*

homes (*vīṭu*) of Murukaṉ, which are mentioned in the [*Tiru-*]*murukāṟṟup-paṭai.* People of later times started calling [them] by the altered [form]: "*āṟupaṭai vīṭu*" ([from] "*āṟṟuppaṭai vīṭu*").[62]

According to Cěṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai, the term *āṟupaṭaivīṭu* is a corrupted form of *āṟṟuppaṭai-vīṭu*, that is, "the homes [which appear in Murukaṉ's] guide-poem." Since the word "*āṟu*" ("way") can also mean "six," this term was altered, or perhaps misunderstood, by later readers, who disjointed the first part of the compound from the text's name (*tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*). Taking "*āṟu*" as "six" causes, in turn, a reorganization of the compound, so it now comes to mean "the six *paṭai-vīṭu*," hence, "the six battle-camps." This, too, may have been a peripheral influence of *The Guide*'s distribution after its publication in print (from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards), among audiences who were not necessarily familiar with genres of the *caṅkam* era, and in any case were more interested in the devotional value of this text. Whether Cěṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai's explanation is historically accurate or not, by the middle of the twentieth century "the six battle-camps" became the standard appellation for Murukaṉ's six holy abodes.

The first edition of the *Tiruppukaḻ* was published in 1894, sixty years after the first printed edition of *The Guide*. By this time, the concept of Murukaṉ's six abodes is well established. The abodes are considered a set of Murukaṉ's most sacred spots and, therefore, auspicious pilgrimage sites. They are identified with the names that appear in the six section-titles of *The Guide*. They are elevated to a special status among the numerous holy sites of Murukaṉ in the Tamil region, which are now perceived jointly, to form a 'sacred landscape,' by virtue of their appearance in the unified and accessible corpus of the *Tiruppukaḻ*. In addition, the six abodes obtained a new appellation—"the six battle-camps"—which is perhaps another outcome of *The Guide*'s shift into the cult's mainstream during the nineteenth-century, thanks to its publication in print form. These innovations are not reflected in the writings of some author-devotees who are contemporaries of the *Tiruppukaḻ*'s editor. Nevertheless, most of the innovations can be perceived in dictionaries and encyclopedias from the later part of the nineteenth century. Thus, things at this point in time—the turn of the twentieth century—are not too far from what the pilgrim-authors of the *Hinduism Today* piece described in 2007. Yet there is still one important difference from the present-day "six-battle camps:" the fifth "battle-camp," *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*, is still considered a category of sites and

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62 Cěṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai 1992, Part I vol. II, 646: "*cakala talaṅkaḷukkum mutaṉmaiyākav uḷḷa tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, tiruccěntūr, tiru āviṉaṉkuṭi (palaṉi), tiruverakam, kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal, palamutircolai ěṉṉum talaṅkaḷ. it talaṅkaḷ murukaṟṟuppaṭaiyiṟ kūṟappaṭṭa muru-kaveḻiṉ āṟu vīṭukaḷ ātaliṉ. ("āṟṟppaṭai vīṭu") āṟupaṭai vīṭu ěṉa maruviniṟkap piṉṉor aḻaikkalāyiṉār.*"

not a specific place. As a result, the "six battle-camps" could not have been considered yet a pilgrimage route. This last development consists of two different issues, which should be put as two separate questions. The first is—when and how did the idea that Tiruttaṇi can stand for *kuṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭal* originate? There is no certain answer to this, yet we can track at least one important source that may have been the spark to ignite the spreading of this idea.[63] This will be discussed below. The second question is more complex—when and how did the idea that *kuṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭal* stands for Tiruttaṇi become the accepted opinion by the general public of Murukaṉ devotees? This question will stand in the focus of a follow-up research I am conducting, and therefore will be only briefly addressed below.

Vaḷḷimalai Swami and the
Tiruppukaḻp-pārāyaṇat-tavanĕṟit-tirumuṟai

One plausible origin for Tiruttaṇi's status as one of Murukaṉ's "battle-camps" points in the direction of a person called Vaḷḷimalai Swami. Vaḷḷimalai Swami was born in 1870 to a poor brahmin family in a village near Erode.[64] He was given the name Artanāri, after the deity of Tiruccĕṅkŏṭu temple (Ardhanārīśvara), by whose blessing he was born. His father died when he was very young and he was raised by his maternal uncle in Mysore, where he was trained as a cook, eventually becoming the head cook in the royal palace and a personal cook for the king. He took little interest in religious matters and received no literary education. In the fourth decade of his life, he experienced a series of personal tragedies, as five of his six children died one after the other. In addition, he began to suffer from a stomach ailment that could not be cured by any standard means. Feeling distaste for worldly life, he then followed the advice of a fellow worker at the king's court and took a long pilgrimage to ask for the grace of Paḻaṉi Āṇṭavar, that is, Murukaṉ in his form as the Lord of Paḻaṉi hill. Artanāri remained in Paḻaṉi with his family between 1908 and 1912, doing simple services for the temple, and soon was cured of his disease. One day during this period, he happened to hear

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63 As I have shown above, there is one verse from the *Kantapurāṇam* (*tirunakarappaṭalam* 106, quoted above) that could be interpreted in a manner that suggests that Tiruttaṇi is the first or most important among Murukaṉ's hill temples. However, none of the authors quoted above, nor the authors of dictionaries and encyclopedias, have picked up this verse as a source for such an identification.

64 This account of Vaḷḷimalai Swami's life is based on his short biography (*Śrī-saccitānanta-svāmikaḷiṉ-caritrac-carukkam*) given in the preface to the TPTM (1978: xiv–xxxii).

a *devadāsī* from Madurai, who came for the temple's *utsavam* (festival), sing a verse from the *Tiruppukaḻ*. Artanāri was enchanted. Having spent most of his life in the Kannada-speaking Mysore and having received no relevant education, Artanāri's Tamil skills were very basic. Yet he decided to please his Lord by means of the *Tiruppukaḻ*. For that purpose, he studied Tamil, and, in addition, he found a way to contact the Chennai publisher of the *Tiruppukaḻ*, who in 1912 was Va. Cu. Cĕṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai (Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai's son), and ordered a copy of the work to be sent to him in Paḻaṉi. At this stage in his life, the forty-two-year-old Artanāri learned the *Tiruppukaḻ* and started reciting verses in the temple's courtyard, with growing numbers of people gathering to listen to his recitations. He later traveled to Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, where he spent a few months with Ramana Maharshi, and then went off for three years on a pilgrimage in the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent. Throughout this time, Artanāri continued learning and reciting the *Tiruppukaḻ*. He returned to Tiruvaṇṇāmalai in 1916, but very soon, after an encounter with Ceṣātri Cuvāmikaḷ, settled in a mountain cave on the Vaḷḷimalai hill, the place where, according to tradition, Murukaṉ courted his second wife, Vaḷḷi, and which also gave Artanāri his famous name—Vaḷḷimalai Swami. His exclusive form of worship was to sing *Tiruppukaḻ* verses, for which he also composed melodies. He initiated *Tiruppukaḻ bhajan*-groups wherever he went, with several such groups gathered in Vaḷḷimalai itself. As years went by, his mountain cave turned into an ashram and attracted pilgrims and continued to draw pilgrims also after his passing away in 1950.

The impact of Vaḷḷimalai Swami's life-project was immense. Zvelebil describes him as one who "was mostly responsible for the Tamils adopting Murukaṉ as their 'national' deity" (Zvelebil 1995: 734). This strong influence that Zvelebil attributes to Vaḷḷimalai Swami is the result of his part in spreading the *Tiruppukaḻ* throughout Tamil Nadu and beyond (Clothey 1978: 115). In addition to singing Aruṇakiri's poems himself and organizing *Tiruppukaḻ bhajan*-groups, Vaḷḷimalai Swami's most significant contribution was his *Tiruppukaḻp-pārāyaṇat-tavaṉĕṟit-tirumuṟai*. This work is particularly important in our context, since it is here that we find, for the first time, the identification of the fifth 'battle-camp" as Tiruttaṇi. The *Tiruppukaḻp-pārāyaṇat-tavaṉĕṟit-tirumuṟai* ("The Virtuous System for the Path of Adoration [by] Recitation of the *Tiruppukaḻ*," hereafter *The System*) is a practical prayer book, which provides a selection of *Tiruppukaḻ* verses, alongside verses from other works by Aruṇakirinātar (*Kantar-antāti*, *Kantar-alaṅkāram*, *Kantar-anupūti*, and *Tiruvakuppu*), with a detailed plan for their recitation according to the days of the week.[65]

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65 The existing editions of this work were published by the "Vaḷḷimalai Swami's Tiruppukaḻ council," from 1957 onwards, yet they are based on earlier editions published by Vaḷḷimalai Swami himself.

The System's plan includes clusters of general verses, which are to be recited every day, and specific verses for each weekday. The division of verses is structured according to Murukaṉ's "six battle-camps." The special daily verses of Sunday to Friday are mostly (although not exclusively) associated with Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Tiruccĕntūr, Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi, Tiruverakam, *kuṉṟu toṟ'āṭal*, and Paḻamutircolai, respectively. The verses for Saturday include a selection from the six other days' special verses (one verse for each of the six "battle-camps"), with the addition of Aruṇakirinātar's *kṣettirak-kovai*, a *Tiruppukaḻ* poem that lists twenty-nine of Murukaṉ's most important places. In each day's recitation, after the initial benedictory verses and before the day's special verses, appear two verses of Aruṇakirinātar that were already quoted above: *Kantar-antāti* 1, which mentions all the section-titles of *The Guide*, and *Tiruppukaḻ* 237, which praises Murukaṉ as having "six holy abodes." Hence, the daily prayers are structured according to the notion of six abodes and are filled with devotional content that is associated with the names of *The Guide*'s section-titles.

 Vaḷḷimalai Swami settled, perhaps for the first time, some of the ambivalent issues around the place-names from *The Guide*. The most important—and perhaps controversial, as we shall see below—is his interpretation of *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal.* Among the six special verses for Thursdays, dedicated to *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal*, only two are on Murukaṉ's tendency to inhabit the hills,[66] one is a general verse not dedicated to any place, and three are on Tiruttaṇi.[67] In other words, Vaḷḷimalai Swami makes a firm association of the "many hills" with one specific place—he does not include any other of the thirty-one hills and mountains that appear in the *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal* section of the *Tiruppukaḻ* editions, only Tiruttaṇi.

Where did this idea come from? Vaḷḷimalai Swami was not a part of any monastery (*maṭam*), and the gurus he met during his life, that is, Ramana Maharshi and Ceṣātri Swamigal, were not associated with the Murukaṉ cult (nor were they familiar with the *Tiruppukaḻ* before meeting him). It also does not seem probable that he learned it from his attested personal encounters with Cĕṅkalvarāya Piḷḷai, who does not imply this identification of Tiruttaṇi in his extensive commentary of the *Tiruppukaḻ*. Thus, it may well have been Vaḷḷimalai Swami's own innovation,[68]

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66 TPTM 41, 67 [*Tiruppukaḻ* 778, 30].
67 TPTM 42, 43, 68 [*Tiruppukaḻ* 1249, 296, 783].
68 Tiruttaṇi is known to have been one of Vaḷḷimalai Swami's most adored places. He is also associated with Tiruttaṇi in another way—Vaḷḷimalai Swami started in 1917 the tradition of Tiruttaṇi's "step festival," which takes place every year on December 31st (thus unusual in being set according to the Gregorian calendar rather than the traditional calendar) and in which pilgrims recite *Tiruppukaḻ* poems while climbing the steps leading to the temple (*Śrī-saccitānanta-svāmikaḷiṉ-caritrac-carukkam*, in TPTM 1978: XXVII). Yet if it was personal taste that led Vaḷḷimalai Swami to make this choice, would it not be more reasonable that he chose Vaḷḷimalai and not Tiruttaṇi?

perhaps inspired by or based upon the verse from the *Kantapurāṇam* that was mentioned above (although we have no way to know for certain). In any case, this idea, which is mostly left unexplained,[69] was not immediately embraced. As the following example shows, this caused some incongruity in the scholarly understanding of the "six battle camps."

In 1970, the renowned Tamil scholar Ki. Vā. Jagannātaṉ published a short article titled "*Ārupaṭaivīṭukaḷ.*" In this article, he explains the etymology of the term *paṭaivīṭu*,[70] describes the sites' origin in *The Guide*, and their unique aspects. Regarding the fifth "battle-camp," *kuṉru toṟ' āṭal*, he says: "It is Murukaṉ's nature to be in a state of 'sporting' in each and every hill" (Jakannātaṉ 1970: 159). He adds that another suitable name for this *paṭaivīṭu* would be "*pala kuṉru*," that is, "many hills," and quotes Aruṇakirinātar who eulogized Murukaṉ as "the Lord of many hills." Finally, he explains Nakkīrar's choice of this description by referring to Murukaṉ's association with the *kuṟiñci* hill-landscape. Nothing in his words suggests that *kuṉru toṟ' āṭal* could be considered a specific sacred site. Two years later, in 1972, Fred Clothey published an article in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, named "Pilgrimage Centers in the Tamil Cultus of Murukaṉ," which also deals with the "six battle-camps." Clothey writes that "[T]he Murukaṉ devotees are virtually unanimous in acclaiming the existence of six pilgrimage centers of special sacrality. However, in the present cultus only five of these sites are accepted as authentic without dispute" (Clothey 1972: 81–82). Surprisingly, the "accepted" five sites that Clothey names are Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi, Tiruverakam, Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam, Tiruccěntūr, and Tiruttaṇi. The sixth center, Clothey continues, is under dispute. Both in this article and in his 1978 book, *The Many Faces of Murukaṉ*, Clothey repeats this statement. Although the identification of Paḷamutircolaimalai with the Aḻakarmalai is found everywhere from the medieval commentaries on *The Guide* to all the nineteenth-century dictionaries, Clothey mentions it only in a footnote, saying that "[R]umor associates

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69   The closest thing to an explanation is what we find, for example, in Comacuntaram Cěṭṭiyār and Věṅkaṭeca Carmā *viḷakkam* about *The Guide*, in which they say that "in the current usage, when talking in general, *kuṉrutoṟāṭal* [means] that [Murukaṉ] dwells on every hill, and when considering [it] as a single place, it means Tiruttanikai" (*kuṉru-toṟāṭal: tŏkaiyākac cǒṉṉāl kuṉrukaḷ toṟum ěḻunt' aruḷiy uḷḷāṉ ěṉṟum, taṉittalamākak karutiṉāl tiruttaṇikai ěṉṟum cǒlluvatu vaḻakku*, Comacuntaram Cěṭṭiyār and Věṅkaṭeca Carmā 1969: 152). In his introduction to the *Tiruttaṇikai-canniti-muṟai*, Mu. Caṇmukam Piḷḷai quotes the above-mentioned *Kantapurāṇam* verse (*tirunakarappaṭalam* 106) as an explanation for the identification of Tiruttaṇi with the fifth "battle-camp," yet this reference is not found in any of the many other modern materials I have come across (*Tiruttaṇikaicannitimuṟai* 1980: ix-x).

70   That is, he explains the compound "battle-camp," and the association of this term with Murukaṉ's myth of the war against Cūr (Jakannātaṉ 1970: 155).

the Paḻamutircolai with Alakarmalai" (Clothey 1972: 85n30). Another odd point is that Clothey never follows the 'right' order of "battle-camps:" In both his article and book, he begins with Paḻani, then Tiruccĕntūr, Tiruttaṇi, Tirupparaṅkuṉram, and finally Cuvāmimalai, leaving the sixth and last slot empty. Thus, it appears that he organizes the sites according to their popularity, from the most popular to the least.

Another peculiar (and obviously confused) observation of Clothey is that he takes the last and what he calls the "most obscure" shrine to be *kuṉrutoṟāṭal* (Clothey 1978: 117). This is in accordance with his organizing principle, but it also implies that he associates Tiruttaṇi with the name "Paḻamutircolai." Colaimalai is not even suggested in the list of the potential sites to fill the sixth slot. What caused Clothey, who conducted several years of fieldwork in Tamil Nadu in the late 1960's, such a confusion? And how did he arrive at the depiction of Murukaṉ's "six battle camps" that is so different from his contemporary Ki. Vā. Jagganātaṉ's? It is hard to believe that it is the result of sloppiness. Rather, it seems that Clothey based his knowledge of "battle-camps" on human informants and not on textual materials, focusing on the contemporary common knowledge regarding the "battle camps." In the late 1960's, the Paḻamutircolai temple was not yet constructed. At the same time, the temple at Tiruttaṇi was the third most popular Murukaṉ temple in Tamil Nadu. Perhaps Clothey's informants belonged to the same devotional circles as Vaḷḷilmalai Swami, but there are other possibilities: Tiruttaṇi has several more advantages, one of which is its proximity to Chennai, the modern cultural, political, and economic center of the region. Clothey only hints at the political importance of Tiruttaṇi's location, saying it is "the northern outpost of Murukaṉ's sacred domain" (p. 123). This point implies the potential dynamics that may have eventually led to the acceptance of Tiruttaṇi as the fifth "battle camp" despite being contested by some even today.[71] Further research is necessary to track down the spread of this notion and to analyze the underlying currents that made it popular.[72]

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71 Some of the recent books on the "battle-camps" that take a textual approach, show some difficulties with the identification of Tiruttaṇi as the fifth battle-camp." For example, in Tirumarukal Ciṅkāravelaṉār's *Ārupaṭaivīṭukaḷ* (2003), the author lists under "the fifth battle-camp—*kuṉru toṟ'āṭal*" eight hill-shrines, among which Tiruttaṇi is only the fourth (the others are Curuḷimalai, Ilañci, Kuṉrakkuṭi, Vayalūr, Virālimalai, Vait-tīcuvaraṉ koyil, and Cĕṉṉimalai) (Ciṅkāravelaṉār 2003: 115–52). Another example is *Aḻaku murukaṉiṉ ālayaṅkaḷ* (2016) by P. Cuvāminātaṉ. While the author indeed takes Tiruttaṇi to be the fifth *paṭaivīṭu*, he adds that "Nakkīrar called Tiruttaṇi '*kuṉru toṟ'āṭal*.' Even though '*kuṉru toṟ'āṭal*' refers to all hill-sites where Murukaṉ appears, spiritual instructors have concluded that it indicates Tiruttaṇi as the best [place] among them" (Cuvāminātaṉ 2016: 116).

72 As part of my undertaking in the SITes project, I am currently conducting a follow-up research, aiming to trace the spread of this identification (kuṉru toṟ' āṭal=Tiruttaṇi) in texts from the second half of the twentieth century, in order to map its branching

Conclusion

Murukaṉ's "six battle-camps" is a set of six Tamil temples which are connected by a textual thread, but it is an inconsistent one, with several gaps and deviations. Its origins can be traced to the sixth century, in *The Guide to Lord Murukaṉ*, which mentions four important shrines. This text was divided into six sections by at least one medieval commentator (Uraiyāciriyār), as a form of hermeneutical embodiment of the deity. In the existing manuscripts, each section was titled after an important word or aspect from the relevant part of the text, and the medieval commentators also associated the last epithet in *The Guide* with a specific site, Colaimalai. And so, around the fifteenth century, *The Guide* had a six-fold division with section-titles, of which five were considered to refer to terrestrial holy sites. While the acknowledgement of the text seems to have had certain importance for the devotees of this period, it was not a central element in the cult. Similarly, the concept of Murukaṉ's "six holy abodes," which appears in texts from around the same period, seems to be of minor importance to the cult, just an abstract expansion of Murukaṉ's 'six-ness.' Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, this state does not change much—we find some sporadic occurrences of tributes and allusions to *The Guide*, made by mentioning its six section-titles, and some references to Murukaṉ's six abodes, but the two seem hardly to coincide. The real change seems to have taken place in the nineteenth century, with the publication of *The Guide*'s first printed editions. The complete fusion of the abstract "six abodes" concept with *The Guide*'s section-titles is reflected in the printed editions of the *Tiruppukaḻ*, from the end of the nineteenth century. The *Tiruppukaḻ*'s printed editions put Murukaṉ's six abodes at the center of the cult, and also affixed their common appellation—"the six battle-camps."

From the sixth century until the twentieth century, the term *kuṉṟu toṟ' āṭal* did not indicate a specific location. "Dancing on every hill" was understood as an expression which emphasizes Murukaṉ's innate relationship—in ritual and in literature—with the hill landscape. Later, when it was considered to be one of Murukaṉ's "battle-camps," it was understood as a category of hill-shrines. At some point around the middle of the twentieth century, the title "dancing on every hill" came to be identified with one specific hill-shrine—Tiruttaṇi. This may have happened through the teachings of Vaḷḷamalai Swami, an influential Murukaṉ devotee, who recorded this identification in his *Tiruppukaḻ*-based prayer book, the *Tiruppukaḻp pārāyaṇat tavaṉĕṟit tirumuṟai*. As soon as this idea (i.e., that the fifth

in time and space. This would allow cross-referencing it with historical events and trends, and provide a better understanding of the complex dynamics behind shifts in religious notions.

"battle-camp" is a defined, terrestrial site) was thus formed, the *āṟupaṭaivīṭu* set of temples could go through its last transition and become a pilgrimage route.[73]

Murukaṉ's "six battle-camps" have their roots in the ancient corpus of Tamil poetry, yet their present reality as a temple-set was determined by a variety of elements, not all expected. These include aspects of literary transmission, such as the transmission of *The Guide* between and across different types of literary corpora (e.g., *Pattupaṭṭu* and *Tirumuṟai*), the application of theological-hermeneutics, and the allusion-strategies of early-modern poets to produce the semblance of a continuous tradition, by relying on the segmentation of *The Guide*. The list of the "six battle-camps" was and remained for a very long time—in fact, for most of its history—a literary allusion, a reference to a *literary* moment of transition into Murukaṉ-*bhakti*. This allusion was devoid of specific theological or mythological meaning, but like the medieval segmentation of the text, it embodied the deity. Another influential factor in the history of the "six battle-camps" was the technological advancement that resulted in an outburst of printed editions of Tamil texts. And not least important is the human factor: the development of the current perception of the "battle camps" involved moments in which individual people heard a verse of poetry that changed their lives—we have seen above two such instances! The case of Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai is particularly important: the most crucial change in the history of the "six battle-camps" concept took place when Cuppiramaṇiya Piḷḷai decided to dedicate his life to publishing the *Tiruppukaḻ* and creating (as he says in his own words) a religious corpus for the Murukaṉ cult that would parallel the Śaiva *Tevāram*.[74] The implications of this decision (and its successful execution) are not purely literary: just as the *Tevāram* maps the Śaiva pilgrimage-centers throughout the Tamil region, so does the *Tiruppukaḻ* in its anthologized form, thus forming a Kaumāra sacred landscape for the cult's devotees, which, in turn, allows the six "battle-camps" to shift to the center of scriptural and practical attention. However, up to the point in which the fifth "battle-camp" was generally accepted to be Tiruttaṇi, the religious centers were distant from other types of centers (e.g., economic and political): looking at the six sites's geographical distribution, it is evident that without Tiruttaṇi, up in the north, the "battle camps" 'cover' only the southern half of the Tamil-speaking region. Despite the cultural (and historical) importance of Madurai, it is very far from the modern political center, which is Chennai. But by including Tiruttaṇi, the sacred region of Murukaṉ marked by these sites overlaps with the territory of the modern Tamil Nadu. Further research is necessary to establish the undercurrents

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73 A recent example for this current perception of the *āṟupaṭaivīṭu* as a pilgrimage route is found in this blog: https://visakhkrishna.medium.com/the-six-divine-barracks-of-the-tamil-country-f37f8f072339 (accessed January 25, 2024).

74 *Tiruppukaḻ* 1921, preface to the first edition: vi.

that popularized the idea of Tiruttaṇi as the fifth "battle-camp." This will definitely add another twist to the entangled history of the *āṟupaṭaivīṭukaḷ,* an unusual example of 'numbered set' of South Asian holy places.

From a wider perspective, the complex turns of events that gave birth to the current form of the "six battle camps" can add to our understanding of the powers that connect sacred sites. Sacred sites can be perceived as points of interaction between the mythological and the geographical. This is particularly evident in South Asia, with its many examples of "sacred landscapes." Scholarly reflections on sacred sites are often based on an analysis of human-related dynamics (mainly social and economic aspects) and religious dynamics, expressed in mythologies and theologies, along with their manifestations in the temples' architecture and narrative traditions. The sacred site is indeed the point of interaction between these currents, usually embodied through ritual and experienced by pilgrims. Yet the example of the "six battle-camps" shows that we must also consider the effects of literary-aesthetic currents as additional factors in this system: as we have seen above, shifts and innovations of a literary nature, such as changes in modes of transmission, commentary, and editing, the addition of melodical aspects, and, moreover, the aesthetic effect of literature (and performative art) on human beings, can play a crucial role in the development of religious phenomena.

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Appendix (1) *Tiruccĕntūrppiḷḷaittamiḻ, ciṟupaṟaipparuvam* 7:

aṟan taru purantarātiyar ulakil aramakaḷir āṭu(m) maṇiy ūcal ciṟṟil
ammaṉai kaḻaṅku pala cĕṟiyun taṭañ cāral aruvi pāy paraṅkiriyum uṭ-
puran taru puṉiṟṟu vĕḷ vaḷaik kaṭaṟ ṟirait tŏṟum pŏruta cīralaivāyu(m) mĕṉ
potu kamaḻ tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭiyum ariya maṟai pukalum erakamum iṉimaik
kuṟan taru kŏṭicciyar pĕrun kuravai muṟai kulavu kuṉṟu tor' āṭalum taṉ
kŏṇmū muḻaṅkum atu kaṇṭ' iṉam ĕṉak karaṭa kuñcaram piḷiṟum aravam
ciṟanta paḻamutircolai malaiyum puranta nī ciṟupaṟai muḻakkiy aruḷe
cĕṟuvil ĕtir pŏrutara para nirutar kula kalakaṉe ciṟupaṟai muḻakkiy aruḷe

In Paraṅkiri waterfalls run down the wide slopes,
     heavenly nymphs from the world of Indra and the other celestials
        (the world obtained by [preserving] *dharma*),
     huddle to bathe, sit on gem-set swings
        and play many [games, such as] *ammāṉai, kaḻaṅku,* and play-houses,
to Cīralaivāy all the ocean-waves reach, [full of] fresh, white conch-shells,
Tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭi is fragrant with soft buds,
in Erakam the difficult Vedas are chanted,
on every hill the *kuṟava* hill-women sport,
     sweetly rejoicing, according to [their] custom, in the great *kuravai* [dance]
on the eminent Paḻamutircolai hill rutting elephants trumpet,
     calling their herds, having noticed the thundering approach of cool rain clouds.
You, who protect [all these places], sound you little drum!
You, who fought the tribes of enemy-demons, confronting [them] on the battlefield,
Sound you little drum!

Appendix (2) verses from the *Kantapurāṇam, kaṭavuḷ-vāḻttu* 12–18:

irupp' araṅ kuṟaitt' iṭum ĕkka vel uṭaip
pŏruppar aṅk' uṇarv' uṟap putalvi taṉ micai
virupp' araṅk' amar iṭai viḷaṅkak kāṭṭiya
tirupparaṅkuṉṟ'amar ceyaip pŏṟṟuvāṃ ‖12‖

We praise the God who resides in Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam,
     who has revealed his love toward the daughter of the hunters

whose pointed spears are whetted with iron files
on the deadly battlefield,
to make them know [his divine nature].[75]

cūr alai vāy iṭait tŏlaittu mārpu kīṇṭ'
īralai vāy iṭum ĕḵkam entiye
veral aivāy taru vĕḷḷi vĕṟp' ŏrīic
cīralaivāy varu ceyaip poṟṟuvām ‖13‖

We praise the God who took in his hand the pointed spear
that would kill Cūr in his oceanic abode, tear open [his] chest, and devour [his] liver,
left the silvery Mount Kailāsa, with its bamboos and lions,
[and] came to Cīralaivāy.

kāviṉaṉ kuṭil uṟu kāmar pŏṉ ṉakar
meviṉaṉ kuṭivara viḷiyac cūramutal
pūviṉaṉ kuṭilaiyam pŏruṭku māl uṟa
āviṉaṉkuṭi varum amalaṟ poṟṟuvām ‖14‖

We praise the Immaculate One
who settled in Indra's beautiful celestial city of gold,
who killed Cūr and [all] the other [demons],
who caused confusion to the lotus-born Brahma, regarding the meaning of Om,
[and] who came to Āviṉaṉkuṭi.

nīr akatte taṉai niṉaiyum aṉpiṉor
perakatt' alamarum piṟavi nītt' iṭuṉ
tārakatt' uruvam āṉ talaimaiy ĕytiya
erakatt' aṟumukaṉ aṭikaḷ ettuvām ‖15‖

We praise the feet of the six-faced Lord of Erakam,
who obtained the supremacy of which form is the Om
that removes the [state of] recurrent birth upon the vast earth
[for] the devotees who meditate on Him in [their] good hearts.

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75 The hunters' daughter is Murukaṉ's second wife, Vaḷḷi. The verse probably refers to
the episode in which Vaḷḷi's kinsmen fight Murukaṉ for having an extramarital affair
with her, and he kills and then revives them.

ŏṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭalaiy ŏruviy āvi mĕy
tuṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭalait tŏṭaṅki aivakai
maṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭiya vaḷḷal kāmuṟak
kuṉṟu tŏṟ' āṭiya kumaraṟ pŏṟṟuvām ‖16‖

We praise Kumara who dances on every hill,
     to pray to the generous Śiva,
         who left behind the task of coalescing all the souls,
         undertook the [divine] play of attaching a body to each soul
         and dances in each of the five halls.[76]

ĕḻ a(m) mutiraip puṉatt' iṟaivi muṉpu taṉ
kiḻa(m) mutir iḷa nalaṅ kiṭaippa muṉṉavaṉ
maḻamutir kaḷiṟ' ĕṉa varutal veṇṭiya
paḻamutircolaiy am pakavaṟ pŏṟṟuvām ‖17‖

We praise the beautiful Lord of Paḻamutircolai
     who wished his elder brother would arrive as a rutting elephant
         in front of the Goddess from the fields of tall, beautiful millet,
     in order to obtain, in his old form, the pleasures of [her] ripe youth.[77]

īru cer pŏḻutiṉum irutiy iṉriye
māṟ' ilāt' irunt' iṭum vaḷaṅkŏḷ kāñciyiṟ
kūṟu cīr puṉai taru kumarakŏṭṭam vāḻ
āṟu mā mukap pirāṉ aṭikaḷ pŏṟṟuvām ‖18‖

We praise the feet of the great six-faced Lord,
     who resides in the highly praised Kumarakŏṭṭam temple,
         in Kāñcipuram of which wealth is unequalled
         and that would remain unextinct even at the end of the eon.

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76   These are the five temple halls in which Śiva is known to dance: Cidambaram, Tiru-valaṅkāṭu, Maturai, Tirunĕlveli, and Tirukuṟṟālam.

77   This is a reference to the episode in which Murukaṉ approaches Vaḷḷi in the form of an old ascetic and tries to seduce her. She rejects him and runs away, and he prays for his brother, Vināyakar (Gaṇeśa), to appear on her path in the form of a frightening elephant. Vināyakar accepts the request, and, upon seeing him, Vaḷḷi rushes quickly back to Murukaṉ 's arms.

Tirunakarappaṭalam 106:

mev' aruṅ kūṭal melai věṟpiṉil alaivāy taṉṉil
āviṉaṉkuṭiyi(l) ṉall erakan taṉiṟ ṟaṇikaiy ātip
pūv' ulak' uḷḷa věṟpiṟ pǒṟp' uṟu, eṉai vaippiṟ
kovil kǒṇṭ' aruḷi vaikuṅ kumarakǒṭṭattu meyǒṉ ‖106‖

The One who abides in Kumarakǒṭṭam temple,
graciously dwells on the difficult to reach hill, [that is located] west of Maturai,
    in Alaivāy, in Āviṉaṉkuṭi, in good Erakam, on the hills of this earth, such as Taṇikai,
    [and] in temples in other magnificent towns.

Appendix (3) *Paḻaṉittalapurāṇam, tiruvāviṉaṉkuṭiccarukkam* 1–7

teṉ imir potak kuravaṉ ṟěriv arum potak kuravaṉ
ṟāṉ utavav āraṇattāṉ ṟaḷuvu těyvavāraṇattā(ṉ)
ṉāṉakara vaccirattāṉ āṟ'āyav ac-cirattāṉ
vāṉa paraṅ kuṉṟat tāṉ vaḷarnta paraṅkuṉṟattāṉ ‖1‖

He who has [garlands of] *Kurava* flowers, humming with bees,
the preceptor of the obscure knowledge,
the [master] of the Vedas that he himself delivered,
he who embraced the divine [she-]elephant,[78]
whose fragrant hand [holds] the *vajra* [weapon],
He whose heads are six—
[he is] the [Lord] of the Paraṅkuṉṟam,
    [the hill which] he elevated [so much that even] the lofty heavens diminished.

nāk' avir kolaṅ kaiyā(ṉ) ṉavai tavir kol aṅkaiyāṉ
vekam uṭaṉ ūṟ' ūrāṉ viri pǒḻili(ṉ) ṉūṟ' ūrāṉ
mokam ǒḷi vāyiṉāṉ moṉa mǒḻi vāyiṉāṉ
māka malai vāykkaraiyāṉ maruvum alaivāyk karaiyāṉ ‖2‖

He who never disfavors a form of glittering youth [for himself],
    and who [holds] in his beautiful hand a staff that removes [all] blemish,

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78 Těyvayāṉai ("divine elephant") is Murukaṉ's first wife, which he married in
   Tirupparaṅkuṉṟam.

whose enemies were destroyed by [his] wrath
>[and] whose hundreds of 'hometowns' are full of groves,

whose abode is without delusion and whose mouth speaks silent [teachings],

He who [resides] on the tip of the heavenly mountain—
>[He is the One who dwells] on the shore of the place that the waves 'embrace.'[79]

vaṉ paṇa nāk' arav' araiyāṉ matalai cūkara varaiyāṉ
iṉpa(m) mayil vāk' aṉattāṉ eṟṟu(m) mayil vākaṉattāṉ
aṉpar uḷa(m) malaiv' elāṉ aṇi kŏḷ civa malai velā(ṉ)
ṉaṉk' ĕḻum āviṉaṉ kuṭiyā(ṉ) ṉalaṅ kĕḻum āviṉaṉkuṭiyāṉ ‖3‖

The son of [Śiva], who has fierce, hooded snakes on his waist,

the Lord of the hogs' mountain,[80]

he whose mount is the peacock,

he who is praised by the goose[-riding Brahma]
>[and by Viṣṇu, whose] arms [hold] the loving peacock[-like lady],

he who never accepts delusion in the hearts of [his] devotees
>[and] who [holds] the spear, [residing on] the beautiful Śiva-malai,[81]

the kin of [Śiva who rides] the good, tall bull—

 [he is] the Lord of Āviṉaṉkuṭi that abounds with wealth.

cīlar tamakk' aṟam aṟaintāṉ cey paṭiṟarkk' aṟa maṟaintāṉ
māl avaṉ iṉpam arumakaṉ maṟaivarar aṉp' amaru(m) makaṉ
kola malark katampattāṉ kuḻaiviṉar mikka tampattā(ṉ)
ṉūlavari(ṉ) ṉer akattā(ṉ) ṉuvalav arum erakattāṉ ‖4‖

The son of Him who taught the *dharma* for [the benefit of] the virtuous people,

he who is entirely hidden for the cruel [people],

Viṣṇu's beloved son-in-law,

the devoted son of the great [Śiva, who spoke] the Vedas,

he who has beautiful [garlands of] blooming *Katampa* [flowers],

who is a great pillar [for] those who languish,

who [dwells] in the virtue of learned—

[he is] the Lord of the ineffable Erakam.

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79 That is, Alaivāy (=Tiruccĕntūr).
80 The "hogs' mountain" (*cūkara varai* or *varāka kiri*) is a hill near Paḻaṉi, which is mentioned in this *purāṇa*.
81 Civamalai is another hill in the Paḻaṉi area (also described in this text).

mĕlliyalāḷ paḻa(m) nimalai vimalai cey paḻani malai
cĕlviyar mekāravaṉañ ciṟanta kaṉṉikāra vaṉa(m)
mallal vaḷanāṭṭiṉāṉ vaikāvūr nāṭṭiṉāṉ
kŏl ciṉa vel āṭalāṉ kuṉṟu tŏṟum āṭalāṉ ‖5‖

The son of the tender, ancient, immaculate [Goddess],
he who [dwells] in the wealthy, fertile lands [that include] Paḻani hill, Mekāra forest,[82]
    the excellent Kaṉṉikāra forest, and who resides in [Tiru]vaikāvūr,[83]
he who [uses] the lethal, raging spear in battle—
[he is] the One who dances [on] every hill.

vĕvviyav āc' akatt' uṟaiyāṉ veta vācakat tuṟaiyāṉ
mai vaṇa mā(l) ṟāṉ aṉattāṉ vāltt' iṭum āṟ' āṉaṉattāṉ
pauva(m) māviṉaik kŏṉṟāṉ pavam uṟu(m) mā viṉaikk' ŏṉṟāṉ
ṟĕvvar puram alaikkum araṉ cey colai malaik kumaraṉ ‖6‖

He who never dwells in hearts that 'burn' with faults,
who [instructs] the path [given in] the Veda's words,
whose six faces are worshipped [by] the collyrium-color Viṣṇu [and] the goose[-riding Brahma],
who chopped down the mango [tree] in the ocean,[84]
who is completely unattached to the great karma that [causes the [state of recurrent] birth,
the son of the Hara, who destroyed of the enemies' city (i.e., *tripuram*)—
[he is] Kumaraṉ [who resides in] Colai-malai.

vāri cuṭuñ cara vaṇattāṉ maruka veḷ caravaṇattāṉ
cūr tapa muṉ pŏrum ayilāṉ curecar virump' ŏru mayilāṉ
cīr uṇarvu tarum aṭikaḷ tevar ot' arum aṭikaḷ
ārvam uṟap paṇivārey amarar ciṟapp' aṇivāre ‖7‖

Veḷ, the son-in-law of the Beautiful [Viṣṇu],
    who [was] the arrow that burned down the fortifications [of Tripura],
who [was born in] Śaravaṇa [pond],
whose spear formerly fought to kill Cūr,

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82 According to the commentator, this is another name for Vilvavaṇam. The place names that appear in this *pāda* may be related to sites around Paḻani.

83 This seems to be the Vilavavaṇecuvarar temple, near Kumbakonam. Its relation to the current context is unclear.

84 This is a reference to the episode of the killing of the demon Cūr (Śūrapadma), who, in his escape from Murukaṉ, turned himself into a mango tree in the middle of the ocean.

the one and only peacock[-rider], adored by the best of gods,
the preceptor who grants the most profound knowledge,
the Lord whom [even] the gods cannot describe in words—
those who worship [him] lovingly will be 'adorned' with divine honors.

Abbreviations

TMĀP	*Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai*
TPKP	*Tirupparaṅkirippurāṇam*
TKK	*Tiruccĕntūrkkantarkalivĕṇpā*
TPTM	*Tiruppukaḻppārāyaṇattavanĕṟittirumuṟai*

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tecikar aruḷiccĕyta tirupparaṅkirip-
purāṇam mūlamum maturait tamiḻc
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pārāyaṇat tavaṉĕrit tirumuṟai 8
anupantaṅkaḷ uṭaṉ kūṭiyatu, vĕḷḷi viḷā
patippu, māṉasija pūjai muṟaiyākat
tŏkutt' aruḷiyavar: śrī vaḷḷimalai
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Nine Narasiṃhas of Ahobilam
On Marking Sacred Territory, God's Manifoldness, and Polyphony of Narratives

In this chapter I discuss a sub-category of temple networks, in which several temples are believed to form one sacred cluster. My case study is a group of nine shrines dedicated to Narasiṃha, the man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu, in its unique local aspects associated with the village of Ahobilam/Ahobalam, in the Kurnool district of the present-day Andhra Pradesh. The nine shrines are located around the village ("Lower Ahobilam") and on the slopes of the surrounding mountains, which form part of the Nallamala Hills ("Upper Ahobilam").

The site's association with the number nine—conveyed in its alternative Sanskrit name *navanarasiṃhakṣetra* (i.e., "the field of nine Narasiṃhas")—is so strong that it persists despite the fact that the actual number of Narasiṃha shrines there has increased. The prevalent concept of ninefoldness seems to have contributed most, at least in recent times, to the popularity of Ahobilam in the Andhra region and beyond. Contemporary tourism advertisements—aimed at pilgrims across India and reaffirming both the uniqueness of Ahobilam in hosting the ninefold Narasiṃha as well as the efficacy of the cluster concept in attracting devotees—often use the term *navanarasiṃhakṣetra* instead of, or alongside, the more familiar toponym.

In addition, the Ahobilam concept of the ninefold Narasiṃha has been creatively multiplied, reused or transplanted to other sites.[1] For example, the Ahobilam tradition is acknowledged as the source of inspiration by the priest and founder of a modern private temple on the outskirts of Chennai, at a place called Navalur, where the images of nine peculiar Narasiṃhas are installed. The Tamil village of Avaniyapuram (Tiruvannamalai district, Tamil Nadu), where yet another set of nine aspects of Narasiṃha are hosted in two temples situated on a hill, is

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1 The phenomenon of duplicating sacred *tīrtha*s, which often reflects the emotional and devotional connections of inhabitants of the sites to which they were relocated, as expressed through toponyms, is common in Hindu religious traditions and extends beyond the geographical boundaries of the Indian subcontinent (see Salomon 1990).
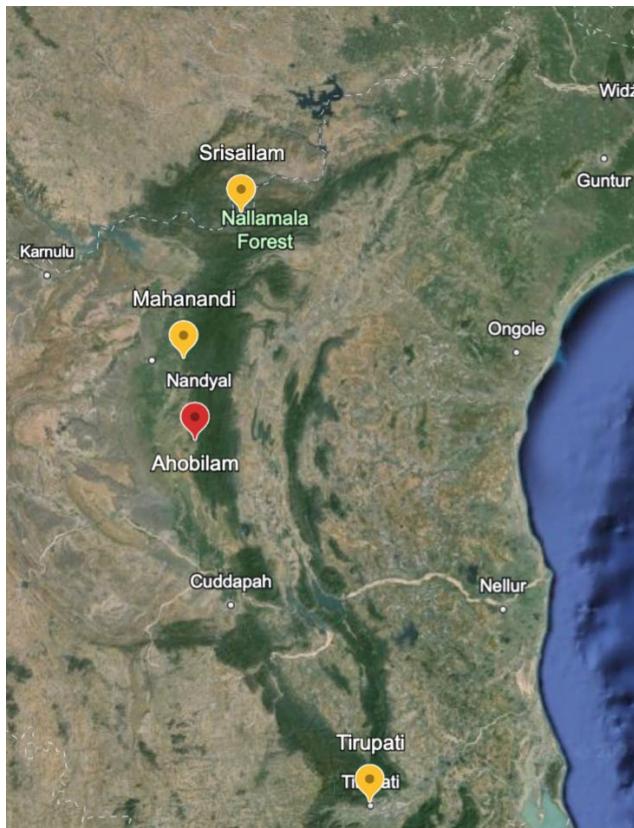
Map. 1. Ahobilam and other important religious sites along the Nallamala Hills in the current Andhra Pradesh, 2024, based on Google Maps

believed to be a southern replica of Ahobilam, hence its other name "Southern (*dakshina*) Ahobilam." A "Northern (*uttara*) Ahobilam," in turn, is under construction at Naimisharanya (Uttar Pradesh), one of the 108 Śrīvaiṣṇava holy places (which include Ahobilam itself), where funds are being raised to build a temple complex, advertised as a Navanarasiṃha temple, on a land that belongs to the Naimisharanya branch of the Ahobila-*maṭha* (monastery).[2] Last but not least, the nine Narasiṃhas of Ahobilam have been 'brought' to the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram, in the form of mural paintings, probably during the late Vijayanagara or Nāyaka period (i.e., seventeenth century).

In Ahobilam itself, there are at least two coexisting, somewhat intersecting, and often mutually enriching narrative traditions about Narasiṃha's nine local aspects. One version is typically presented by the priests who serve in the temples and by the officials of the local *maṭha*, both representing Śrīvaiṣṇava

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2   For details, see: https://www.ahobilamutt.org/us/data/pdf/Naimisharanyam_Appeal. pdf (accessed April 16, 2025).

circles. According to them, the source for the concept of nine is to be found in the Sanskrit literary production, particularly in the eulogy of the place, the undated *Ahobilamāhātmya*. The second set of narratives comes from a popular oral tradition that is more attuned to the local environment and beliefs predating the arrival of Vaiṣṇavas at the site. Often incongruent, these narratives are shared and circulated by the 'common' residents of Ahobilam, including the Chenchu community, former hunter-gatherers who have lived in the Nallamala Hills since the Palaeolithic era (Fürer-Haimendorf 1982: 2),[3] and today make up a significant part of the local worshippers of Narasiṃha. Having largely adopted the Hindu way of life, they actively participate in the Ahobilam temple rituals and festivities, enriching them with elements of their original forest-related beliefs and practices. Local temple guides, including some Chenchus, play a particularly influential role in shaping the contemporary oral traditions, as pilgrims rely on their knowledge while visiting the site.[4]

In many respects, the cluster of Narasimha sanctuaries at Ahobilam aligns conceptually with observations by, for instance, Feldhaus (2003) and Eck (2012), with regard to groupings of sacred sites in India.[5] Ranging from networks encompassing the entire subcontinent to clusters organising the sacred space of a specific locality, these groupings are an essential element of Indian sacred geography. Basically, the number of elements in the Ahobilam set of Narasiṃha temples symbolically evokes the multiplicity of a god, as is usually the case in such contexts (Eck 2012: 31). Furthermore, pilgrims often travel through imaginatively connected locations, even if not all sites in the pattern hold significance for them (p. 34). Similarly, in the case of Ahobilam, not all visitors reach the site or a specific shrine within the cluster because it is their ultimate goal, but rather because it is on their way to another destination. Additionally, the pilgrims' urge to visit all nine shrines of the Ahobilam cluster supports the idea that, while these are

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3   More on mutual influences between indigenous beliefs and a Vaiṣṇava version of Narasiṃha cult in Andhra, including the case of Ahobilam, see Sontheimer 1985, Murty 1997.

4   Guiding Hindu pilgrims through the Nallamala Hills has been the mainstay of the Chenchu's livelihood since they began visiting temples situated along the range, chiefly Srisailam and Ahobilam. In the case of Srisailam this custom is, for instance, mentioned in the Telugu *Srisailam Temple Kaifiyat* which was recorded in 1810 CE as a part of Col. Mackenzie collection aimed at gathering digests of village registers from the Deccan (see the English summary of its content in Sitapati 1981: 15). It came to end in the 1950s, after the construction of the State Highway which made it possible to transport pilgrims to the site by bus (Turin 1999: 255). In Ahobilam the tradition has survived, but only within the territory spread between the nine shrines of Narasiṃha; moreover, because of commercialisation it has also been partly taken over by other local communities.

5   However, neither Feldhaus nor Eck discusses a group of sites comprising nine elements.

narratives that frequently link sites into a set, the simple act of counting these sites can be equally meaningful (Feldhaus 2003: 127).

In the context of Ahobilam, however, the dynamics of perception and reinterpretation of the pattern, both at the site and beyond, raise not only the question of what connects the nine shrines, but also how a change of perspective affects the concept that connects them. As I hope to show, on many levels the case of Ahobilam perfectly illustrates phenomena that have typically been studied in relation to large, multi-religious pilgrimage centers, where their sacredness is no longer viewed as eternal and unchanging, but rather as a product of dynamic, ongoing changes initiated by specific agents and historical circumstances.[6]

Basically, I explore the issue of Ahobilam-related cluster from two angles: one is its representation in rich, and variously articulated, narrative heritage of Ahobilam itself; the other is a tradition from another Vaiṣṇava sacred site, where the narrative of the nine Narasimhas has been adopted. For the former, I propose a comparative analysis of relevant passages of the Sanskrit *Ahobilamāhātmya* (hereafter: AM), the eulogy of the site, and popular myths, shared among devotees and visitors in reference to certain shrines, which I have collected during my fieldtrips to Ahobilam. For the latter, I discuss the potential agenda and a narrative behind the visual representation of the nine Narasiṃhas in the Varadarāja temple at Kanchipuram.

With the aim to highlight the complexity of Ahobilam's narrative tradition and the diverse strategies employed by different communities to assert their presence there, I begin with observations on the contemporary pilgrimage practice at the site. Following this, I briefly outline the epigraphic and textual sources that trace the site's transformation from a peripheral and hard to reach place of the Narasiṃha worship to a renowned Śrīvaiṣṇava pilgrimage destination strongly defined by the distinctiveness of its ninefold Narasiṃha. My investigation into the potential links between the nine aspects of the god and the concept of the cluster focuses on the AM, which is the primary textual source that offers an extensive treatment of Narasiṃha's nine forms, their abodes, and powers, and sets them in a fixed order. I argue that this order does not evoke any linear narrative that would join them, but rather emphasises the number nine as crucial for delineating a perfect territory. Another number-nine-oriented idea that may have influenced the pattern I briefly consider regards a theological perspective: the Pāñcarātrika concept of the all-pervading god who encompasses nine forms (*navamūrti*). What also seems to speak in favor of 'arithmetic' symbolism of the nine-fold pattern is that it was maintained despite changes in the actual number of temples or their spatial rearrangement at the site. In this sense, the concept

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6   See, for instance, Lazzaretti (2017) for a summary of the recent scholarly approaches to the sacredness of Varanasi.

which connects the nine forms of the god as given in the premodern texts[7] differs significantly from the popular oral traditions, which tend to encapsulate the nine aspects of the god within a 'totalising' narrative, aiming at subordinating single episodes related to certain aspects of Narasiṃha so that all the nine are explained in a cohesive and unified manner. The last case I discuss is the cultural articulation of the nine Narasiṃhas beyond Ahobilam exemplified by their visual representation on the walls of the Kanchipuram Varadarāja temple. As I show, the aspects painted in a mural seem to follow a linear narrative, yet adjusted in a way that focuses more on recalling Narasiṃha' s multiplicity and fury, than details of individual episodes of his localized myth.

Nine Narasiṃhas and the current pilgrimage tradition in Ahobilam

The nine temples of Narasiṃha in Ahobilam are named after locally rooted forms of the god, which are associated with specific episodes from his mythology and are often believed to be represented by elements of the natural surroundings. Although basically produced with the Puranic Vaiṣṇava version of the Narasiṃha myth as a point of reference, these episodes enhance the widely acknowledged narrative through endowing the god with a sort of afterlife, which he experienced in Ahobilam after killing the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu there.

The order of aspects one is usually informed about while at Ahobilam is as follows: Jvālānarasiṃha, Ahobilanarasiṃha, Lakṣmīnarasiṃha (or: Mālola-), Vārāhanarasiṃha (or: Kroḍa-), Karañjanarasiṃha, Bhārgavanarasiṃha, Yogānandanarasiṃha, Chatravaṭanarasiṃha, and Pāvananarasiṃha (or: Pamuletti). This particular sequence, which also appears in most of the modern religious literature accessible at the stalls in Ahobilam, is not a new concept; it features, for example, in the Telugu *Ahobila Kaifiyat*, recorded in 1810 by Kasuba Karnam Ramanna (Sitapati 1982: 3).[8]

The Jvālānarasiṃha, Ahobilanarasiṃha, Lakṣmīnarasiṃha, and Vārāhanarasiṃha are located on the hills, in what is known as the "Upper Ahobilam."

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7   Besides the AM I briefly refer to the poems of Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār, Taḷḷapāka Annamācārya/Annamayya, and one of the *jīyar*s of Ahobilam, in which they venerate the nine Narasiṃhas.

8   Although the *Kaifiyat* has not been published, excerpts from it happen to be cited in contemporary scholarly books on Ahobilam. Sitapati mentions that the manuscript in Telugu is available in State Archives, Hyderabad.

Three temples, i.e., Karañjanarasiṃha, Yogānandanarasiṃha, and Chatrava-ṭanarasiṃha, are scattered at the foot of the hills, around the village, in the area known as the "Lower Ahobilam." Karañjanarasiṃha lies on the paved road that connects the village to the Upper Ahobilam. The remaining two, i.e., the Bhārga-vanarasiṃha and Pāvananarasiṃha temples, are located deep in the jungle, far from the village but on the lower slopes of the hills.

Today, the most common and effective tool for informing the devotees about the circumstances related to the occurrence of each of the nine Narasiṃhas is a bulk of the locally produced myths that, in addition to being spread orally, are circulated through small, cheap pamphlets in Telugu, Tamil, or English, and sold at stalls in Ahobilam, else by way of more substantial authored publications, chiefly released under the auspices of the Ahobila-*maṭha*. Both pamphlets and books creatively emulate the style of Sanskrit *māhātmya*s, supplementing sections on the mythical background of Ahobilam with historical overviews and practi-cal information, including maps of the spatial distribution of the temples and the routes by which they may be accessed. In some, the meaning of the number nine is explained as corresponding to the nine elements of the *anuṣṭubhmantra* of Narasiṃha (the so-called *mantrarāja*), which goes as follows: *ugraṃ* (1) *vīraṃ* (2) *mahāviṣṇuṃ* (3) *jvalantaṃ* (4) *sarvatomukhaṃ* (5) *nṛsimhaṃ* (6) *bhīṣaṇaṃ* (7) *bhadraṃ* (8) *mṛtyormṛtyuṃ* (9) *namāmy aham.*[9]

Additionally, the nine-partition of the god is visually emphasized through a modern pictorial religious map (Fig. 1), which is displayed in several lo-cations, including spots along routes connecting the shrines and in the village. Although the map's legend includes other religiously important sites situated

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9   Which literally means "I bow to wrathful (*ugraṃ*), heroic (*vīraṃ*), great Viṣṇu (*mahāviṣṇuṃ*), fiery (*jvalantaṃ*), facing in all directions (*sarvatomukhaṃ*), Nṛsiṃha (*nṛsiṃhaṃ*), terrifying (*bhīṣaṇaṃ*), auspicious (*bhadraṃ*), the Destroyer of Death (*mṛtyormṛtyuṃ*)". The identification of this *mantra* with the nine aspects of Ahobila-narasiṃha, apparently based on a simple association with a number nine, is given, for instance, in the 14-page-long *Sri Ahobila Nava Narasimha Kshetram; A Travel Guide* by Krishna Kumar (2008) and the anonymous, undated, 24-page-long modern booklet, *Sri Ahobilam Navanarasimha*. However, this idea is also considered in scholarly books, see Narasimhacharya 1989: 32. The *mantra* comes from the *Nṛsiṃhatāpanīyopaniṣad* of the *Atharvaveda* tradition, namely from its first part called *Nṛsiṃhapūrvatāpanīya*, see Deussen 2004: 810; according to Farquhar the *Nṛsiṃhatāpanīyopaniṣad* cannot be later than the seventh century (Farquhar 1920: 188). The same *mantra* is also promulgated by the *Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā* of the Pāñcarātra tradition (ca. thirteenth century, see Rastelli 2006: 50f.), which in its three consecutive chapters (54–56) explains the subtle (*sūkṣma*) and gross (*sthūla*) aspects of its respective words. According to the text, the *mantra* is suitable for adherents of any five major schools of thought, i.e., Sāṃkhya, Yoga, the doctrine of Sāttvatas/Pāñcarātras, Vedānta, and the doctrine of Pāśupatas (*Ahirbudhnyasaṃhitā* 54.2–5), see Dębicka-Borek 2011: 108–13.

Fig. 1   A modern pictorial information board displaying the network of the Ahobilam shrines and routes, 2019. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

around Ahobilam, such as the largest and most popular temple of Prahlāda-varadarasiṃha/Lakṣmīnarasiṃha located at the village center (which is shown on the map, yet situated on the far edge of the sacred area) or the Bhavanashini river (whose size is considerably exaggerated), the map primarily focuses on the nine shrines that form a cluster, numbered from 1 to 9. Other places of veneration are marked with letters, clearly distinguishing them from the nine. Despite the efforts to be topographically accurate—for instance, the space's organization is relatively correct, and routes' distances are indicated by numbers indicating kilometers, this map—as Gengnagel (2011) has shown in relation to the cartography of Varanasi—is more of a medium for representing the sacredness of the area and transforming its space into an imagined, in this case 'nine-folded', landscape, rather than a practical tool for pilgrims.

In turn, the popular myths primarily strive to create a sequential storyline that connects the nine aspects, assigning each a distinct and logical position in the order.

1. Jvālānarasiṃha

The aspect with which the prevalent narrative starts is Narasiṃha in a fiery (*jvālā*) form. It comes as the first, for in this very aspect the god is believed to have defeated the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu at the site, and his anger has not yet subsided. Visually, his fierceness is conveyed by the main *mūrti*, installed in a small cave

Fig. 2   The Jvālānarasiṃha shrine, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

Fig. 3 The Jvālānarasiṃha shrine, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

shrine: the eight-armed *ugra* Narasiṃha is shown while mutilating Hiraṇyakaśipu who lays on his laps, with the demon's intestines around the neck. One among the several other figures kept in the shrine depicts the combat between Narasiṃha and Hiraṇyakaśipu (*dvandva-yuddha*). In the popular imagination, the column of Hiraṇyakaśipu's palace, from which Narasiṃha emerged to slay the demon, is a rock called Ugra Stambha ("wrathful pillar"), which rises vertically in the Upper Ahobilam. Devotees can admire it from a distance on their way to the shrine. Before they approach it, they can also visit a small pond of reddish water, in which Narasiṃha is believed to have washed off Hiraṇyakaśipu's blood from his hands. For many, this is the most important temple at the site.

2. Ahobilanarasiṃha
The next aspect in the popular sequence, the Ahobilanarasiṃha, resides in the largest temple in the hills of the Upper Ahobilam. This temple is also considered to be the earliest among the grouping, perhaps constructed on a spot previously sacred to the Chenchu people (Sontheimer 1987: 149). According to Biardeau

Fig. 4   The Ahobilanarasiṃha temple, 2019. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

(1975: 52), the structure is of the early Vijayanagara period (ca. fourteenth century). Sitapati (1982: 13) estimates similar time of its construction (although labeled as under the Kākatīya period), and remarks that the *Ahobila Kaifiyat* mentions an inscription—so far not discovered by the epigraphists—which refers to the construction of the *mūkhamaṇḍapa* of the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple in 1385/1386 CE.[10]

The main deity of this temple, the Lord of Ahobilam who is believed to self-manifest (*svayaṃbhū*), also displays a wrathful aspect (*ugra*). As in the case of the Jvālānarasiṃha's *mūrti*, he is shown as tearing apart the demon who rests on his lap, yet he is two-handed and there are no entrails decorating him. In addition, the demon's position is different: whereas the Jvālānarasiṃha keeps the demon's head on the left thigh, the Ahobilanarasiṃha keeps it on the right thigh.

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10   Vasantha (2001: 17) estimates the dates of all the temples, however, with not much evidence; these proposals, particularly in regard to the shrines considered the oldest, are extremely early, even if pointing not to a structure itself but to some iconographical elements it contains: Ahobilanarasiṃha shrine to the second-third century; Pāvana- to sixth-seventh century; Vārāha-, Yogānanda- and Jvālā- to seventh-eighth century; Karañja- and Bhārgava- to tenth-eleventh century; Mālola- to twelfth-thirteen century; and Chatravaṭa- to early Vijayanagara period.

The most popular version of the myth, particularly favoured by the priests and the *maṭha* circles, is that Narasiṃha appeared here in response to a penance of Garuḍa.[11] However, a version circulated in contemporary pamphlets says that the God stayed here at Prahlāda's request, when his anger after killing his demonic father Hiraṇyakaśipu did not abate. This version is closer to a narrative, which begins with the Jvālānarasiṃha's act of killing the demon (Krishna Kumar 2008).

3. Lakṣmīnarasiṃha

The Lakṣmīnarasiṃha shrine is where, according to the local guide I talked to in 2024, Narasiṃha appeared, after being impressed by the penance of Lakṣmī that she took on in hope of appeasing him, after he killed the demon. That is why
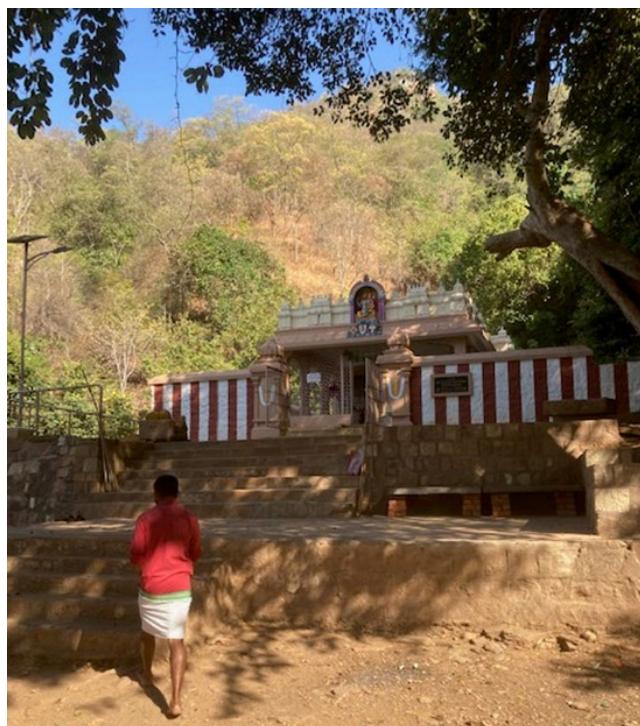
Fig. 5
The Lakṣmīnarasiṃha (or: Mālolanarasiṃha) shrine, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

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11   The motif of Garuḍa's penance occurs in AM 2 narrative on the etymology of the designation of 'Garuḍācala' (Mountain of Garuḍa) and reuses the epic and Puranic myths on how Garuḍa became a vehicle (*vāhana*) of Viṣṇu. According to the AM, instructed by his father, Garuḍa undertook mortifications in Ahobilam, on a hill called Nārāyaṇa, with a wish to fulfil all his desires. In response to his penance Viṣṇu in the form of Narasiṃha manifested in front of him and granted him two boons: becoming Viṣṇu's vehicle and calling the hill where he performed austerities by his name. See Dębicka-Borek 2023: 131–37.

his alternative name, Mālolanarasiṃha, is interpreted as 'dear [Lola] to Lakṣmī [Mā]'. According to another variant of this narrative, Lakṣmī approached Narasiṃha on the request of gods, who were threatened by Narasiṃha's anger after the slaughter. She then 'tamed' the god and stayed with him there, to bless the devotees (Rangachar 1993: 10–11). Some narratives attribute more agency to the goddess, saying that she moved to the hilly area of Markonda (local name of the hill where the shrine is situated) because she was offended by Narasiṃha, when he invited a Chenchu huntress to their abode, associated with a cave shrine of the Ahobilanarasiṃha (Ayyengar 1914: 82). Unlike the Lakṣmīnarasiṃha shrine, the main *mūrti* of the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple is shown in an *ugra* aspect, and thus without a consort. However, a figure of Lakṣmī in her aspect of a Chenchu huntress (Ceñcūlakṣmī) is kept not far from him, in a separate cave shrine.

4. Vārāhanarasiṃha

The next episode continues the theme of the goddess as Narasiṃha's companion, by locating in Ahobilam the Puranic myth of rescuing the Earth (Bhū). It is believed that Narasiṃha, having taken the form of the boar, dug her out of Pātāla—to which she had been taken by Hiraṇyākṣa, the brother of Hiraṇyakaśipu—at the very site where the temple of the Vārāhanarasiṃha now stands.

Fig. 6   The Vārāhanarasiṃha shrine, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

5. Karañjanarasiṃha

The following episodes are rather loosely connected, if at all, with the rest of the story. According to one version, Narasimha, in the aspect called Karañja, designated after a Karañja tree (*Pongamia Glabra*) under which he sat, blessed Hanumān when the latter approached Ahobilam. Out of respect for Hanumān's worship of an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu other than Rāma in this particular place, Narasiṃha took a bow, an emblem of Rāma, in one of his four hands. Accordingly, the god's *mūrti* in this shrine is depicted as having four arms, with a bow in one hand. In addition, there is a small shrine of Hanumān on the temple grounds.

Fig. 7   The Karañjanarasiṃha temple, 2019. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

6. Bhārgavanarasiṃha

The oral tradition associated with the aspect of the Bhārgavanarasiṃha is also related to the theme of Viṣṇu's other incarnations, claiming that Bhārgava (i.e., Paraśurāma) worshipped Narasiṃha here. This belief seems to be hinted at by the fact that the halo (*prabhāvali*) that frames the *mūrti* depicts Viṣṇu's ten incarnations. Unlike the Karañjanarasiṃha, the Bhārgavanarasiṃha is shown in the *ugra* ("wrathful") aspect, ripping the demon lying on his thigh.
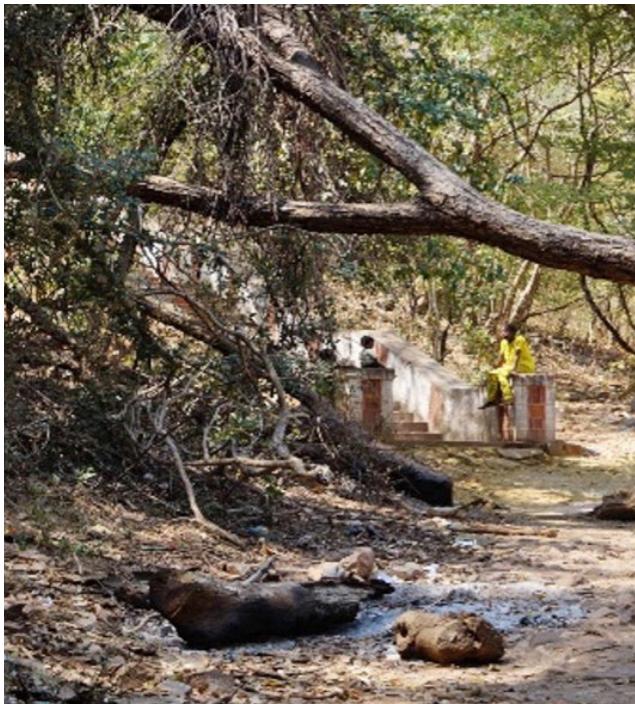
Fig. 8 and 9
The Bhārgavanarasiṃha
temple, 2015 (above),
2024 (below). Photos by
Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

7. Yogānandanarasiṃha

The aspect known as the Yogānandanarasiṃha is associated with Narasiṃha who taught yoga and other wisdom to Prahlāda after the death of his demoniac father.

Fig. 10   The Yogānandanarasiṃha temple, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

8. Chatravaṭanarasiṃha

The Chatravaṭanarasiṃha, called after a Banyan tree the deity sits under, is the aspect which, as my interlocutor explained, was entertained by the singing Gandharvas (this narrative occurs in the AM, see below). Due to that, he interpreted the main *mūrti*'s face as smiling with contentment.

Fig. 11   Chatravaṭanarasiṃha temple, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

9. Pāvananarasiṃha

The last in the sequence, the Pāvananarasiṃha, is situated in a temple located in a protected forest with restricted access, close to the hamlets of the Chenchu community, about 8 km from the Ahobilam village. Currently, the Chenchu's contribution to the local form of worship is emphasized and discernible in the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple's festival programme: it is the Chenchu who decorate temple premises with products brought from the forest and escort the god to the Lower Ahobilam before the yearly hunting festival (Paruveta, Tel. *pāruvēṭa*) starts; the marriage of the Ahobilanarasiṃha with the Ceñcūlakṣmī is celebrated here on the occasion of Brahmotsava; and on the night of Garuḍasevā, the Chenchus perform an enactment of stealing jewelry from Narasiṃha.[12] However, it

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12   This is not to say that the Chenchus are invisible in the Prahlādavarada temple of the Lower Ahobilam. For example, they play an important ritual role when the Paruveta

is only in the Pāvananarasiṃha shrine that animal sacrifices for Narasiṃha happen to be offered, particularly during religious festivals.[13] According to a tradition especially alive among the Chenchus, Narasiṃha met and married a Chenchu huntress in this area.[14] This belief resonates with the wilderness of the site but also with the strongly emphasized presence of the goddess. Whilst the main *mūrti* of the Pāvana temple is shown accompanied by Lakṣmī, there is also a shrine of Ceñcūlakṣmī, Narasiṃha's local wife, within walking distance from the temple, in a tiny cave slightly higher on the hilltop, where she is believed to have been born. The priestly and *māṭha* circles do not explicitly neglect this version of the myth associated with the Pāvana. Nonetheless, when requested to explain the myth behind the temple, they point to certain verses of the AM (4.80–82; see below), which associate the designation with the site's purifying (*pāvana*) power.

Fig. 12   The Pāvananarasiṃha temple, 2015. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

procession sets out from the temple for a 40-day march through the local villages. On Paruveta in Ahobilam, see Dębicka-Borek 2021.

13   Noteworthy, Sitapati (1982: 17) mentions the Chenchu practice of sacrificing fowls at the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple but is silent about it in relation to Pāvana. This can mean that with the growing interest of pilgrims over the last four decades, the practice has been redirected (or restricted) to the most distant and difficult to access shrine.

14   According to Sethuraman Kidambi, communication officer of the Ahobila-*māṭha*, more and more people believe this version of the story nowadays because of the bloody sacrifices that can be seen there.

In terms of temple ritual, contrary to other shrines in Ahobilam where priests follow the Pāñcarātra order, those appointed in the Pāvana (in 2025 there were two of them) belong to the Vaikhānasa tradition.

As we could see, the linear narrative that encompasses all nine Narasiṃhas, begins with an episode of Narasiṃha's slaying of the demon, which, in the Puranic tradition, essentially ends the Narasiṃha myth. The linear narrative closes with an episode that is particularly important for the inclusive character of the Ahobilam religious tradition, namely the romance between him and the Chenchu huntress. Importantly, it does not exclude Lakṣmī, the god's first wife. This narrative, involving a series of episodes based on a particular timeline of the nine aspects of Narasiṃha, is an influential tool for capturing the imagination of the pilgrims, even if it is only roughly coherent. While its linearity facilitates the comprehension of the god's 'nine-ness', another important factor is the visual dimension of the narrative's episodes.[15] First, by anchoring certain episodes in the local landscape, they can be experienced and seen by devotees on their journey (Ugra Stambha, certain peaks, jungle). Second, the iconographic features of *mūrti*s more loosely connected to the rest of the narrative, are translated into myths (or vice versa) to which pilgrims are exposed. This is especially evident in the case of the myths concerning aspects of Karañja and Chatravaṭa, which, although associated with specific trees by designation, focus on elements of the deity's iconography (the bow, the facial expression). The narrative fulfils the purpose of showing the god at successive moments in his 'life' at Ahobilam, and, as a result, unites the nine temples into a group that reflects these events in a chronological order.

However, the narrative order of the nine aspects is not in congruence with the order of visiting the shrines, particularly in the case of those located in the Upper Ahobilam. For instance, to reach the Jvālānarasiṃha shrine, which comes first in the narrative, one has to walk a challenging footpath which starts on the premises of the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple of the Upper Ahobilam, and then pass by the Vārāhanarasiṃha and the Lakṣmīnarasiṃha shrines, as the Jvālā is located at the end of this route.

Nowadays, apart from the temple of the Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha in the Lower Ahobilam ('the tenth' temple), which is usually the first on the devotees' agendas due to its convenient location in the heart of the village, the order in which the nine shrines are visited depends on the time and resources of the pilgrims. Currently, all shrines, served by over thirty priests, open daily: the Prahlādavarada temple in the Lower Ahobilam from 6.30 AM to 1 PM and 3 PM to 8 PM; the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple in the Upper Ahobilam from 7 AM to

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15   On the role of visuality in experiencing Ahobilam, see Adluri 2019.
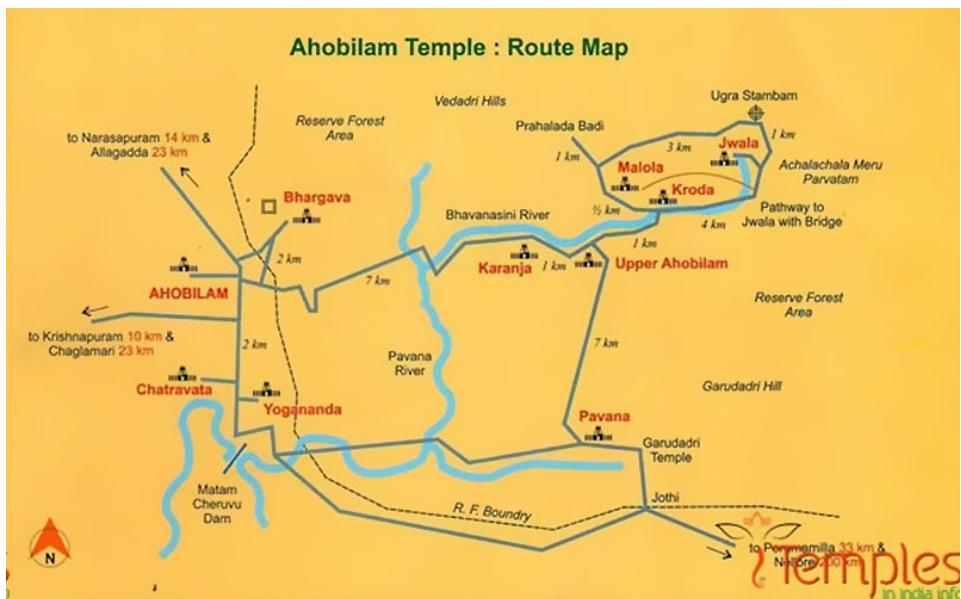
Map 2   A route map of temples in Ahobilam circulated in inexpensive booklets and on the Internet.

1 PM and 2 PM to 7 PM, and the rest of shrines from 9 AM to 4:30 PM. Given the challenging terrain, distances, opening hours of the temples, and the timing regulating when the protected area in which some of them are located is accessible to visitors, saving time is paramount.

Having reached the hills of the Upper Ahobilam in a vehicle, along a paved road, just after the sunrise, pilgrims often spend half a day there, walking back and forth on a steep footpath leading to the Jvālānarasiṃha shrine, and worshipping in the Vārāha- and the Lakṣmīnarasimha shrines in between. Whereas some of them visit the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple as the last amongst those in the hills, others do it at the very beginning, before setting off to the Jvālā. The other half of the day is usually spent using various means of transport to visit the shrines of the Lower Ahobilam, including the furthest one, the Pāvananarasiṃha, and, on the same occasion, the Bhārgavanarasiṃha shrine, which is also situated in a deep forest. The Karañjanarasiṃha, located along the road from the Lower to the Upper Ahobilam, is customarily visited during a short journey between the two. Some visitors choose to divide their stay into two days, especially those who come from far away. Another option taken by many is to do the pilgrimage in the reverse order, starting in the afternoon at the Lower Ahobilam, crossing the hills early the next day, and after lunch moving on to the Pāvananarasiṃha and the Bhārgavanarasiṃha.

Beyond the nine

The Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha temple, commonly viewed as Ahobilam's tenth Narasiṃha shrine and thus beyond the traditional cluster of nine, is a large temple dedicated to the peaceful Narasiṃha, accompanied by Lakṣmī, and considered a benevolent aspect of the fierce Ahobilanarasiṃha of the Upper Ahobilam. Nowadays, because of its naturally easier accessibility in the heart of the village, the Prahlādavarada temple attracts most pilgrims and serves as the centre of temple festival life. It was most likely built after the cluster of nine had already been established.

Vasantha (2001: 17) suggests that the Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha temple of the Lower Ahobilam was a project of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, and thus its construction began between the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Michell (1995: 176), however, believes that certain features of the sculptural representations of the god in the temple' main hall prove that the temple is contemporary with the Viṭṭhala temple at Vijayanagara, meaning that it was built in the mid-sixteenth century.

Another shrine not currently included in the group of nine is a cave shrine of Narasiṃha in a yogic posture, located in the Upper Ahobilam behind the Lakṣmīnarasiṃha (Mālolanarasiṃha) structure, at the back of a flat rocky area known as "Prahlada Badi" (Prahlāda's school). According to oral tradition, this is where young Prahlāda studied yoga under Narasiṃha's guidance before his father was killed. Therefore, the shrine is called Yoga/Yogānandanarasimha, that is, in the same manner as the shrine hosting Narasiṃha in a yogic posture in the Lower Ahobilam, which does belong to the cluster of nine, or the Prahlādanarasimha, that is by the name which emphasizes the fact of teaching yoga to Prahlāda.[16] Not all pilgrims visit this shrine, as it requires extra effort to reach, and not always there is a chance of finding it open. When I approached it in 2024, a group of devotees was roaming around waiting for a priest. In February 2025 the priest was there. In this case, the exclusion from the cluster was most likely caused by natural reasons. The temple's *mūrti* was 'duplicated' and transferred to a larger shrine, built later on in the Lower Ahobilam, for, according to Rangachar, the natural setting of the 'original' Yoganarasiṃha temple made its circumambulation impossible (Rangachar 1992: 21).[17]

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16   For instance, Ayyangar (1914) distinguishes between the two using Prahlādanarasiṃha when referring to the old shrine in the Upper Ahobilam and Yogānandanarasiṃha when referring to the later one, in the Lower Ahobilam.

17   On the various mechanisms of displacing deities in reference to religious heritage of Varanasi, see Lazzaretti 2017.

Fig. 13 and 14
The 'old' Yogānandanarasiṃha
(or: Prahlāda-) temple in
the Upper Ahobilam, 2024.
Photos by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

The latest addition to Ahobilam's complex religious landscape is a modern and brightly painted temple donated by the followers of the recently deceased guru and Kadapa-born saint, Kasireddy Nayana Swamy, who was not associated with the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. Operated by a Śaiva priest and collectively called Navanarasiṃha, this temple combines the concept of the nine Narasiṃhas with that of the nine planets (*graha*s), which are usually represented collectively in Śaiva temples. In such a case, their figures are assembled on a small platform, all are represented in anthropomorphic forms which do not face each other and are often differentiated by the colour of their garments, with Sūrya in the centre, and others around, in eight cardinal directions, i.e. Moon/Candra (south-east), Mars/Maṅgala (south), Mercury/Budha (north-east), Jupiter/Bṛhaspati (north), Venus/Śukra (east), Saturn/Śani (west), the ascending node/Rāhu (south-west) and the descending node/Ketu (north-west). These celestial bodies are worshipped as deities and believed to influence human destiny (Bühnemann 1989: 1–2). In Ahobilam, the distinctive adaptation of the *navagraha* cult to the local Vaiṣṇava tradition is clearly manifested in the pairing of each *graha*'s *mūrti* with the *mūrti* of each local form of Narasiṃha (see Fig. 16). The *graha*s' idols are displayed and worshipped in the temple hall in a pattern consisting of the
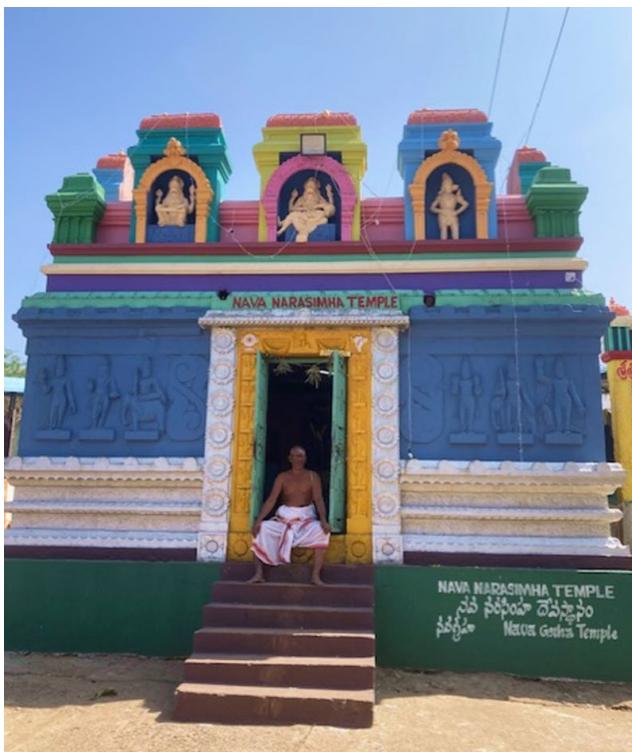

Fig. 15 and 16
The Navanarasiṃha temple in the Lower Ahobilam (left) and its interior, with the nine Narasiṃhas paired with the nine *graha*s (right), 2024. Photos by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

three rows of three *graha*s each, and each *graha* is in conjunction with an aspect of Narasiṃha that evokes the typical distribution of *graha*s. This temple stands in the Lower Ahobilam, right next to the Yogānandanarasiṃha temple (note the association of Śiva with a yogin), which is now considered one of the nine. While this external and relatively recent initiative of appropriating the nine Narasiṃhas by the Śaiva-oriented tradition of the nine planets, additionally filtered through the teachings of a modern guru, reinforces the character of the Ahobilam centre of Narasiṃha worship as a contested site already shared with the Chenchu, it also naturally increases the appeal of the nine Narasiṃhas by widening the range of potential visitors who do not necessarily identify as Vaiṣṇavas. This is reflected, for instance, in the active sale and distribution of devotional artefacts containing the motif of the nine Narasiṃhas in combination with the nine *graha*s, often simply listing their names in pairs, that were unavailable on the local market a few years ago. On the other hand, consolidating the nine Narasiṃhas into a single, easily accessible temple might discourage devotees from making the effort to visit each one in its original, natural location.

Although the sequence in which the shrines of the Upper Ahobilam are visited is somewhat forced by the terrain and, to some extent, remains unaltered
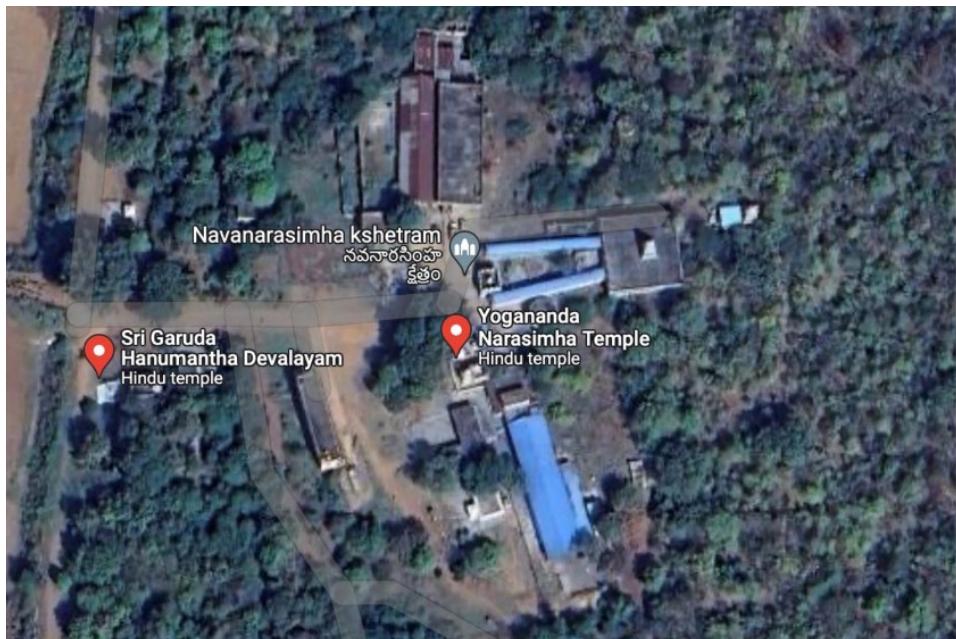
Map 3   Orientation of the Navanarasiṃha temple (here: kshetram) towards location of the Yogānandanarasiṃha temple, 2024 (based on Google Maps).
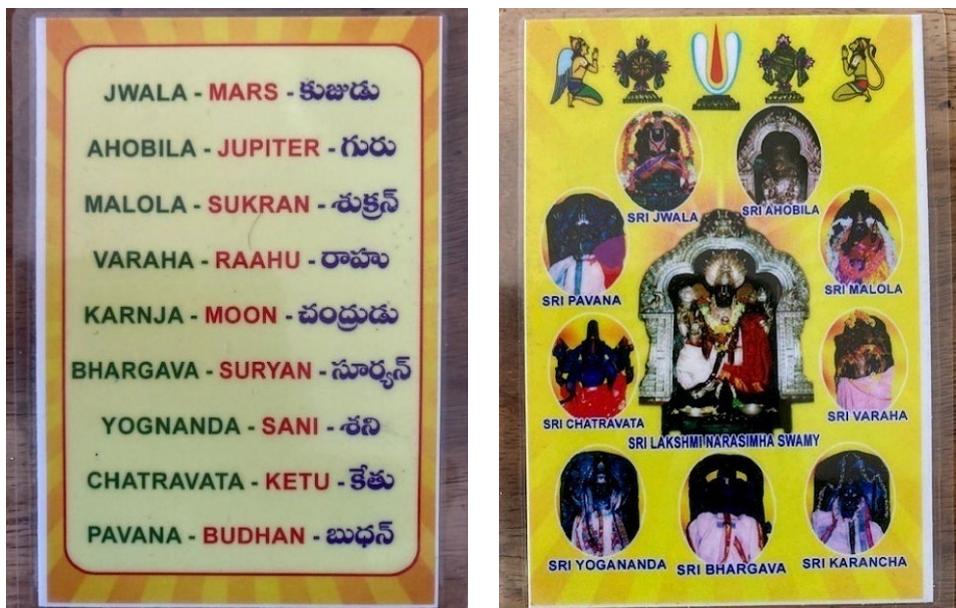
Fig. 17 and 18   Both sides of a small card explaining the concept of the nine Narasiṃhas associated with the nine *graha*s, 2024. Photos by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

Fig. 19 A stall with religious articles, mostly prints, in the Lower Ahobilam, 2024. Photo by Ewa Dębicka-Borek.

(Ahobilanarasiṃha, Vārāhanarasiṃha, Mālolanarasiṃha, Jvālānarasiṃha and back to Ahobilanarasiṃha, optionally with Vārāhanarasiṃha and/or Mālolanarasiṃha visited on the way back to Ahobilanarasiṃha), in general, the order of worshipping the remaining aspects is not as important as ensuring that the visit covers all of them. This includes the Prahlādavarada temple of the Lower Ahobilam, making it a total of ten aspects. Just like aligning the nine Narasiṃhas with the nine *graha*s, the process of widening the customary pattern of nine temples is discernible at the stalls in front of the Prahlādavarada temple, where most of the illustrations on the covers of religious booklets, calendars or posters display the nine aspects of the god gathered around the tenth, which is in the center.

This process, however, still does not affect the content of the religious brochures and tourist guides, which constantly emphasize Narasimha's ninefoldness. Their authors recommend other sacred sites, i.e., the Prahlādavarada temple, the ancient Yogānandanarasiṃha temple and its flat rocky surroundings associated with the Prahlāda school, and the Ugra Stambha, as important but additional places to visit. On the other hand, neither modern pilgrims nor ritual specialists in Ahobilam will find the question of why Narasiṃha manifested in exactly nine forms relevant. What matters is his omnipresence.

Ahobilanarasiṃha and *navanarasiṃha*: textual sources and inscriptions

The paucity of inscriptions makes it difficult to reconstruct and verify Ahobilam's past before the turn of the sixteenth century when, probably for geopolitical reasons, the site fell into the sphere of interest of the Vijayanagara kings, and the

Ahobila-*maṭha* was established there.[18] It is also very likely that the site's remote location in the Nallamala Hills limited its appeal to pilgrims for many centuries.

Textual sources of various genres and traditions, though relatively scarce, shed some light on the crucial points in the earlier history of the place. Most of them refer to Ahobilam by invoking the Ahobilanarasiṃha or the Ahobileśvara, the Lord of Ahobilam, usually identified with his *ugra* form associated with the Upper Ahobilam, and, sometimes, benevolent (*saumya*) in a company of Lakṣmī, but not to his other aspects. To my knowledge, the concept of the nine Narasiṃhas appears in only a handful of pre-modern texts and in one inscription, most of which were not produced earlier than the fifteenth century. The most extensive treatment of the nine Narasiṃhas and their abodes is found in the independent Sanskrit glorification of Ahobilam, i.e., the AM, which ascribes itself to the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, and can only be relatively dated to a period earlier than the fifteenth century. As I argue below, this suggests that (1) the popularity of the nine Narasiṃhas viewed collectively as a cluster of shrines that encompasses the god's various aspects is a rather modern phenomenon; and (2) the concept of the nine aspects known to us was established by the author/s of AM.

The earliest textual mention of a place associated with Ahobilam is found in Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's *Pĕriya Tirumŏḻi* (1.7.1–10), in which he praises it under its Tamil name Siṅkavĕḻkuṉṟam ('The Hill of the Youthful Lion'), focusing on the correspondence of the harshness of the area with the nature of Narasiṃha, who killed the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu there. Considering that the poet may not have visited the site personally,[19] yet the setting he describes does not differ much from the natural features of the Ahobilam landscape, we can assume that it must have been known to the South Indian Vaiṣṇavas as a place of a particular terrifying ambience from as early as the nineth century CE.

A version of the "Glorification of Ahobilam" is embedded in chapters 48–49 of the *Śrīśailakhaṇḍa*,[20] a text linked with the ancient and famous Śaiva centre at Srisailam. This text, dated by Reddy to the twelfth-thirteenth centuries, includes

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18   Most of inscriptions in Ahobilam are in the Telugu language. Vasantha (2001: 2) mentions that the earliest inscription belongs to the times of Cālukya Kīrtivarman (eighth century) and the latest to Vĕṅkatapatirāya II (sixteenth/seventeenth century). The name Ahobala as a designation of Narasiṃha occurs already in 1124 CE in an inscription engraved on a slab set up to the west of the Śiva temple in Peddamudiyam, currently Kadapa district (SII, vol. IX, p. 208, no. 207; cf. Vasantha 2001: 16). On inscriptions in Ahobilam from Vijayanagara period, see Adluri 2019.

19   Discussion on whether Āḻvārs visited all the sites they praised, see, e.g., Dutta 2010, Young 2014.

20   These two consecutive colophons state that they contain glorification of Ahobalam, which is a part of the second part in *Śrīśailakhaṇḍa* of *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā* of the *Śrīskāṃda Mahāpurāṇa*.

narratives associated with Ahobilam, along with the narratives of Śaiva Nandi *tīrthamaṇḍala* (i.e., the area of present-day Nandyal, Sanskr. Nandyālaya, and its surroundings), which lies between the two (with Śriśailam to the north and Ahobilam to the south) in its sacred mythology.[21] Remarkably, the sacred territories of both Nandi *tīrthamaṇḍala* and Srisailam are structured on the ninefold pattern. The area which stretches between the present-day Nandyal and Mahanandi, is marked by nine temples of Śiva, the so-called *navanandi*, dated to the Cālukya period (seventh-eighth centuries), and displaying features of the *nagara* style (Subba Reddy 2009: 69–70).[22] The religious tradition of Srisailam presents the centre with the famous Mallikārjuna temple as surrounded by eight gateways, all together comprising nine sites. According to Reddy, the concept of the four major gateways to Srisailam was developed by the tenth century, and the full, eight-element concept by the thirteenth century. Each of the eight gateways became a religious center with temples of Śiva and the Goddess, and the routes between them and Srisailam are important pilgrimage tracts (Reddy 204: 62–65).[23] In Alampur, which is considered one of the Srisailam's eight gateways, we find another group of nine temples dedicated to Śiva, the so-called *navabrahmā*, as in the case of *navanandi* built in the times of Cālukyas of Badami (Subba Reddy 2009: 65–69). The ninefolded architectural and conceptual solutions linked to Nandi *tīrtha* and Srisailam, including Alampur, appear much earlier than in the case of Ahobilam. Because of the close proximity of these three sites, one wonders if the two Śaiva centers could have been a source of inspiration for the pattern of the nine Narasiṃhas.[24]

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21 Both Nandi-*tīrtha* and Srisailam, and additionally Tirupati, are mentioned in the AM passage which deals with sacred geography of Ahobilam and its surroundings, see Dębicka-Borek 2022: 249–56.

22 Currently the group of *navanandi* temples is located within a radius of eighteen km, in the area stretching between the town of Nandyal and a famous Śaiva pilgrimage centre in Mahananadi (Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh). The nine temples are: Prathamānandi (in Nandyal town), Naganandi (in Nandyal town, inside Añjaneya temple), Somanandi (the eastern outskirts of Nandyal), Sūryanandi (on the road to Mahanandi), Śivanandi (on the road to Mahanandi), Viṣṇu-/Kṛṣṇanandi (on the road to Mahanandi), Garuḍanandi (at the outskirts of Mahanandi temple's premises), Mahānandi (in Mahanandi village), Vināyakanandi (northwest of Mahānandi temple) (Subba Reddy 2009, 69–70). Although the pilgrimage infrastructure at the place is still not fully developed, already in the 1940s it was recommended to make the circuit in one day (Nandyal Theosophical Lodge 1942: 44–48).

23 The eight gateways of Srisailam are eight towns situated towards the four cardinal (Tripurantaka, Brahmeshvara/modern Alampur, Umamaheshvara, Siddhavata) and the four intermediate directions (Eleshvara, Somashila, Pushpagiri, Sanghameshvara), all together marking the boundary of the "Greater" Śrīśailakṣetra (Reddy 2014, 62–65).

24 However, during the period of Ahobilam's heyday, i.e., in the sixteenth-seventeenth century, nine temples dedicated to Viṣṇu in the vicinity of Alvar Tirunagari (Tirunelveli district of current Tamilnadu) were most likely perceived as forming a group as well.

As Reddy proposes, the literary strategy of including narratives concerning Nandi-tīrtha and Ahobilam in the *Śrīśailakhaṇḍa* may indeed testify to the early stage of development of a pilgrimage route linking sacred sites of different religious affiliations along the Nallamala range (Reddy 2014: 103–09).[25] The *Śrīśailakhaṇḍa* introduces the topic of Ahobilam at the end of chapter 47, where *ahobilasthalapati* (the Lord of the place [called] Ahobila) is mentioned (47.70) as the form that Viṣṇu in his Narasiṃha aspect took to kill the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. The two consecutive chapters unfold the myth and localize it in Ahobilam by means of praises of Narasiṃha by gods and other divine beings, after he defeated the demon: "Ah, what strength! Ah, what shape! Ah! what brilliance! Ah, what cruelty! Ah, what affection to devotees! Ah, what an expert in doing favours!"[26] It is worth noting that variants of this verse, which explains the traditional etymology of the toponym Ahobalam (i.e., the site where Narasiṃha was praised with exclamation "*aho balam*!"), occur in the 'independent' AM and in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, which I discuss later.

Another relatively early Sanskrit text that mentions Ahobilam is the twelfth-century *Smṛtyarthasāra* by Śrīdhara. In the section discussing a pilgrimage to specific holy sites as an alternative to penances based on distance traveled (the so-called *tīrthapratyāmnāyāḥ*), "Ahobalam" is listed among a select group of South Indian *tīrtha*s (Salomon 1979: 109).

That the Ahobilam centre of Narasiṃha embraced the Pāñcarātra temple order before the fourteenth century can be deduced from another Sanskrit source, the *Vihagendrasaṃhitā* 4.11cd,[27] where a Narasiṃha's aspect called Ahobilanarasiṃha is listed among the seventy-four forms of the Man-Lion.

During the same century an eminent Telugu poet, Errapragada, composed the *Narasiṃha Purāṇamu*, in which he situates the episode of Narasiṃha killing the demon in the hills surrounding Ahobilam (Adluri 2019: 173–74).

The *Rāyavācakamu*, a Telugu prose work composed ca 1600 CE, which reports events from early years of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's reign (1509–1529) (Wagoner 1993: 3), mentions that the king visited *navatirupati*, "Nine Tirupatis" (transl. in Wagoner 1993: 158). According to Branfoot (2022: 271), the *navatirupati* temples are not uniform in terms of construction, with the earliest evidence for the building of two of them, Alvar Tirunagari and Srivaikuntham, in the thirteenth century. Branfoot suggests that the *navatirupati* temples started to be perceived as a connected group under the patronage of Madurai Nāyakas, at whose court the *Rāyavācakamu* was composed, or under the Tenkasi Pāṇḍyas.

25 This route is nowadays reflected in a popular myth in view of which the Nallamala Hills are the embodiment of Viṣṇu's snake Śeṣa, which spans the range from north to south, with his tail in Srisailam, belly in Ahobilam, and head in Tirupati.

26 *Śrīśailakhaṇḍa* 49.38: *aho balam aho rūpam aho tejaś ca sāhasaṃ | aho bhakteṣu vātsalyam aho satkāraveditā ‖*

27 On dating *Vihagendrasaṃhitā* see Gonda 1977: 106.

Perhaps the first to mention the Ahobilam-related concept of the nine aspects of Narasiṃha was another Telugu poet, Taḷḷapāka Annamācārya/Annamayya, associated with the famous Tirupati temple. Some of the copper plates engraved with his compositions dedicated to Narasiṃha were found in Ahobilam, which is usually interpreted as a proof of his visits there (see, e.g., Vasantha 2001: 3). The period of Taḷḷapāka Annamācārya's life is usually estimated between 1408 and 1503, which allows us to assume that some form of the *navanarasiṃha* group was known (at least) to the Telugu speaking audience in the fifteenth century. One of the poet's songs begins with the phrase "Hail to the nine Narasiṃhas ..." "*nava nārasiṃhā namo namo* ...". Based on the translation of Narasimhachary and Ramesh (2008: 252–53), the aspects extolled by Annamācārya are: (1) Ahobala-, (2) Jvālā-, (3) Yogānanada-, (4) Kānugumāni-, (5) Maṭṭemaḷḷa-, (6) Bhārgava-, (7) Prahlāda-, (8) Lakṣmī-, (9) Varāha-. The forms I am not sure how to identify, i.e., Kānugumāni- and Maṭṭemaḷḷa-, can either conform under their local names to the two amongst lacking Chatravaṭa-, Karañja-, and Pāvana known to us through the medium of the AM and currently circulated oral myths, or refer to other, unique forms known to the poet, that predate those known to us today.[28]

However, two fifteenth-century Sanskrit courtly poems—the *Rāmābhyudaya* of Aruṇagirinātha Ḍiṇḍima and the *Sāḷuvābhyudaya* of Rājanātha Ḍiṇḍima, written under the patronage of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, the founder of the second Vijayanagara dynasty of the Sāḷuvas—which contain a narrative based on the motif of a king as the incarnation of God, in this case translated into the narrative of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha as the incarnation of the *ugra* Ahobilanarasiṃha, are silent about the nine aspects of the god. [29] Nonetheless, since the plot begins with another

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28 In the opinion of Sethuraman Kidambi, "Kānugu" refers to Karañjanarasiṃha, "Maṭṭemaḷḷa" to Mālolanarasiṃha, and "Prahlāda" to Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha of the Lower Ahobilam. However, given that the aspect called Maṭṭemaḷḷa is characterized in the poem as "terrifying," it is questionable whether it can be associated with an aspect shown with Lakṣmī. In turn, considering that the Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha temple of the Lower Ahobilam was most likely built after the fifteenth century, I would rather link Prahlādanarasiṃha aspect with the ancient shrine of Narasiṃha in a yogic posture located in the Upper Ahobilam, which is also associated with the teaching of yoga to Prahlāda, and thus speculate that the poet includes both in the pattern. Or, Annamācārya praises the aspects which had not been yet enshrined in the temples we associate them with nowadays.

29 These two Sanskrit *kāvya*s mark the beginning of the Empire's interest in controlling the Ahobilam area. We can assume that the strategic importance of Ahobilam resulted from its location on the northern border of the empire; it was close to the already famous temple at Tirupati and, above all, to the nearby headquarters of the Sāḷuva generals at Candragiri, from where the king could control both the northern and the southern territories (Stoker 2016: 79; Dębicka-Borek 2022a). Particularly useful for this polity was the establishment of a *maṭha* at Ahobilam (probably early sixteenth

recognized motif, i.e., the miraculous conception of a heir as a reward for austerities performed by his parents (the miraculous conception of Sāḷuva Narasiṃha due to austerities performed by his parents in Ahobilam), the poem mentions, besides the god's wrathful aspect, also his benevolent form, accompanied by Lakṣmī (Dębicka-Borek 2022a: 19–20).

Likewise, another Sanskrit source, which may predate the sixteenth century and mentions Ahobilam, i.e., the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (the glorification of the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram; on dating see Buchholz 2022: 22) does not explicitly refer to the ninefold nature of Narasiṃha, but, instead, limits the Ahobilam related thread to events associated with an angry aspect of Narasiṃha. *Kāñcīmāhātmya* 3.35–37 evokes the fierce Narasiṃha in a passage that provides a variant of etymology for the name Ahobilam:

> Ah! What valour! Ah! What firmness! Ah! What power in [his] arms! Ah! Look at the great strength of Narasiṃha's body! Ah! What teeth! What jaws! What features, Ah! What a very terrifying roar! What strength inspiring beings!' O Rājendra! The land of Hari, which was praised by gods in this way, is therefore called Ahobala [and] destroys all sins.[30]

The larger motif within which Ahobilam is mentioned in the *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, i.e., the motif of Narasiṃha associated with the Varadarāja who travels to Ahobilam to kill the demon there, seems to reflect contacts between these two Vaiṣṇava centres that were under the same patronage of the Vijayanagara monarchs. While important agents of these contacts were the *jīyar*s of Ahobilam,[31] both the Varadarāja temple in Kanchi and the Narasiṃha shrines in Ahobilam belong to the Vaṭakalai branch of Śrīvaiṣṇavism and follow the Pāñcarātra temple order.

Undisputably to the sixteenth century belongs another Sanskrit piece that mentions Ahobilam, albeit not the nine Narasiṃhas, i.e., 'pilgrimage account',

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century), a monastic institution that managed the Narasiṃha shrines at the site and coordinated the spread of the Śrīvaiṣṇava faith in the Telugu region and beyond in cooperation with the successive Vijayanagara emperors (Appadurai 1977: 69–70).

30 *Kāñcīmāhātmya* 3.32–34ab: *kareṇa tasyorasi śailasāre samprāharad vajranakhena viṣṇuḥ | tasyorasaḥ samprahatasya viṣṇunā vinirgatāś śoṇitabindavo ye ||32|| sadyas ta evāsurarājakoṭayo babhūvur urvyāṃ śataśaś ca sāyudhāḥ | tato nṛsiṃho 'pi samīkṣya dānavān saṭā vidhūnvan sasṛje nṛsiṃhān ||33|| sṛṣṭai nṛsiṃhaiḥ paritaś supūrṇā babhūva bhūmis savanādrisāgarā |*

31 According to tradition, the first *jīyar*, Ādi Van Saṭgopa Jīyar, studied in Kanchipuram under the guidance of Ghaṭikāstanamammāḷ (a.k.a, Varadakavi) before he left for Ahobilam. Inscriptions at the Varadarāja temple, dated 1530 and 1539, mention that the third *jīyar* of Ahobila-*maṭha*, Paraṅkuśa Jīyar, gave offerings to the temple on the occasion of Caturmāsa-Ekādaśī and Kauśikadvādaśī days and made provisions for reading the *Kauśikapurāṇa* on the latter (Raman 1975: 81).

a *campū* (a mixture of verse and prose) titled *Yātrāprabandha*, authored by a South Indian Brahmin, Samarapuṅgava Dīkṣīta, born after 1574. The protagonist is the author's elder brother, who undertakes a pilgrimage to eventually experience the presence of Śiva in Varanasi and visits other religious centres along the way (Granoff 1998: 105–6). One of them is the site of Ahobilapati ('Lord of Ahobila'), as the poet calls the fierce deity portrayed briefly as destroying the demon.[32]

In the case of literary production later than the Annamācārya's poem, the differentiation into more than two aspects of Narasiṃha—benevolent and angry—seems to be a feature of pieces composed at the site, i.e., in Ahobilam. The Sanskrit drama *Vāsantikāpariṇayam*, allegedly produced locally in the sixteenth century, is usually attributed to the seventh *jīyar* of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Ahobila-*maṭha,* under the patronage of the Vijayanagara kings. Although it does not mention the nine Narasiṃhas, it nonetheless widens the scope of the god's usual aspects, by portraying him taking a local girl as his second wife, with the approval of Lakṣmī (Dębicka-Borek 2016). Unlike the works patronised by Sāḷuva Narasiṃha, which emphasise Narasiṃha's fearsome qualities to reinforce the image of the ruler through identification with the fierce deity, in this case the plot aims to symbolically convey the reconciliation of the state/Vaiṣṇava tradition with the local community and beliefs, thus evoking Narasiṃha in his benevolent aspect, already married and additionally enchanted with his future spouse from the indigenous community.

The evolvement of aspects of Ahobilam's Narasiṃha is also hinted at by a Telugu inscription at the site dated 1564, which records a grant of land by Śrī Parāṅkuśa Śrīvansatagopa Jīyar and mentions him as the benefactor who provided the road and steps to the shrine of the Bhārgavanarasiṃha (Vasantha 2001: 7–8), i.e., one of the aspects included in the group as we know it today. This suggests that by the sixteenth century, some kind of structures enshrining aspects other than the Ahobilanarasiṃha of the Upper Ahobilam and the Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha of the Lower Ahobilam had already been built.

It seems that the nine aspects of Narasiṃha are explicitly mentioned only in one inscription (No. 57 of 1915) at the site, engraved on the south wall of the goddess's shrine in the Prahlādavarada temple at the Lower Ahobilam— thus most likely after the end of the fifteenth century—which commemorates the construction of the Kṣīrābdhi-Navanarasiṃhamaṇṭapa (i.e. 'a pavilion of nine Narasiṃhas for the Kṣīrābdhi [-dvādaśī vrata] for the god Ahobaleśvara') (Rangacharya 1919: 969).

In fact, a full characteristic of the nine aspects of the god is found exclusively in the undated Sanskrit AM. The passage which deals with this topic is divided into two thematic sections. The first section (AM 4.9–53) discusses the location of the Narasiṃhas' abodes (*sthāna*; note that the text does not explicitly speak about the

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32 *Yātrāprabandha* by Samarapuṅgava Dīkṣīta, edited by Paṇḍita Kedāranātha, 1936, p. 121.

temples/shrines of Narasiṃha but the sites where the god is present) and briefly explains the myths behind the names (*nāma*) of each aspect. The second section (AM 4.54–109) focuses on the powers (*prabhāva*) that can be attained by visiting the nine respective sites (*kṣetra/tīrtha*). According to AM 4, the sequence of the nine Narasiṃhas is as follows (1) Ahobila [narasiṃha] (*ugra* aspect), (2) Vārāha-, (3) Lakṣmī-, (4) Yogānanda-, (5) Pāvana-, (6) Karañja-, (7) Chatravaṭa-, (8) Bhārgava- (*ugra* aspect), (9) Jvālā- (*ugra* aspect). The same nine Narasiṃhas, although in different order, are praised in the *Navanārasiṃhamaṅgāḷāśasāna*, attributed to the eleventh *jīyar* of the Ahobila-*maṭha* (and which, if the attribution is correct, can be roughly dated to the sixteenth century).[33] In consecutive stanzas of the hymn (3–12) the author hails: (1) Jvālānārasiṃha, (2) an aspect who dwells on a bank of Gajakuṇḍa pond in a cavern of Garuḍādri (*garuḍādriguhāgehe gajakuṇḍasara-staṭe*) (i.e., Ahobilanarasiṃha), (3) Mālolanarasiṃha (i.e., Lakṣmīnarasiṃha), (4) Vārahanarasiṃha, (5) an aspect who passed knowledge on sage Gobhila indifferent to cattle, land and gold (*gobhūhiraṅyanirviṇṇagobhilajñānadāyine*) (i.e., Karañjanarasiṃha), (6) Bhārgavanarasiṃha, (7) Yogānandanarasiṃha (note that this aspect is described as dwelling in a cave of Vedādri, i.e., in its old location; *vedādrigahvarasthāya yogānandāya*), (8) Chatravaṭanarasiṃha, (9) Pāvananarasiṃha.

Tab. 1   The sequence of the nine Narasiṃhas according to Taḷḷapāka Annamācārya (TA), the AM, the *Navanārasiṃhamaṅgāḷāśasāna* (NMŚ), the *Ahobila Kaifiyat* (AK) and contemporary oral tradition (COT).

TA	AM	NMŚ	AK	COT
Ahobala	Ahobila	Jvālā	Jvālā	Jvālā
Jvālā	Varāha	Ahobala	Ahobila	Ahobala
Yogānanada	Lakṣmī	Lakṣmī	Lakṣmī	Lakṣmī
Kānugumāni	Yogānanada	Varāha	Kroḍa/Varāha	Varāha
Maṭṭemaḷḷa	Pāvana	Karañja	Karañja	Karañja
Bhārgava	Karañja	Bhārgava	Bhārgava	Bhārgava
Prahlāda	Chatravaṭa	Yogānanada	Yogānanada	Yogānanada
Lakṣmī	Bhārgava	Chatravaṭa	Chatravaṭa	Chatravaṭa
Varāha	Jvālā	Pāvana	Pāvana	Pāvana

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33   In this case I rely on the text reproduced here: http://www.prapatti.com/stotras.php The lineage of Ahobilam *jīyar*s: https://www.ahobilamutt.org/us/acharya/lineage/lineage.asp?file=26-11jeer.inc (accessed July 10, 2024).

The *Ahobilamāhātmya* and the myths associated with nine Narasiṃhas

The AM passage on the Ahobilanarasiṃha (AM 4. 9–15ab) is quite generic in terms of the god's distinctive local features. It describes a fearsome Man-Lion, ready to slay demons, with clichéd phrases glorifying his mane, sharp fangs and claws, and ability to produce fire from the third eye:

> The shore of the Gajatīrtha is the most fortunate of all locations. Narasiṃha who tears asunder enemies appears there. He sits on the disc-seat (*cakrāsana*) [and is] endowed with a disc (*cakra*) and other weapons. With his jaw he brings destruction to those who wander about. With a mane dispelling the groups of demons, with jaws full of terrible fangs, he is fearsome even to Fear. With his nails sharp as white thunderbolts he makes demons shake, with the cruel fire produced out of the eye on the forehead, he, of immeasurable form, appears to burn the three worlds. With his compassion to devotees, constantly, he is looking at [those] focused on gods. Extremely delighted, he dwells, welcoming with affection Prahlāda, full of love, sitting in front with folded hands, a true devotee. This is the first location (*sthāna*) honoured by Brahmā and others.[34]

Such a treatment of the first among the nine Narasiṃhas blurs, to some extent, the boundaries between him and other *ugra* aspects among the nine that one can see today in Ahobilam, i.e., the Bhārgavanarasiṃha and the fiery Jvālānarasiṃha. However, this particular form can be identified as the Ahobilanarasiṃha by a reference to a pond called Gajatīrtha/Gajakuṇḍa, which is the same as where the present Ahobilanarasiṃha temple stands. More details on this aspect can be gleaned from AM 7.78–82, which, unlike other sources I have already mentioned, offers two variants of traditional etymology of the toponym Ahobilam and its

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34 AM 4.9–15ab: *sthānānām eva sarveṣāṃ gajatīrthataṭaṃ śubham | vidārayan ripūṃs tatra narasiṃhaḥ prakāśate ‖9‖ cakrāsane samāsīnaś cakrādyāyudhasevitaḥ | caṃkramakramitānāṃ tu vaktrāśayavināśanaḥ ‖10‖ saṭācchaṭāsamāyukto vidhūtāsuramaṇḍalaḥ | daṃṣṭrākarālavadano bhayasyāpi bhayaṅkaraḥ ‖11‖ śitadambholiparuṣair nakhair vilulitāsuraḥ | phālekṣaṇasamudbhūtavahninā dāruṇātmanā | aprameyakṛtākāras trilokaṃ nirdahann iva ‖12‖ bhaktānukampayā nityaṃ bhāvitāmṛtavīkṣaṇaḥ ‖13‖ agre prāñjalim āsīnaṃ prahlādaṃ priyapūritam | premṇānugṛhṇan sadbhaktaṃ samadhyāste 'tiharṣitaḥ ‖14‖ idaṃ tu prathamaṃ sthānaṃ brahmādibhir upāsitam |*
Most of translations of the AM 4 passages are given after Dębicka-Borek 2023, sometimes slightly modified.

alternative, Ahobalam. Their explanation is put into the mouth of Narasiṃha, who is addressing Prahlāda after he has killed his father, the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu:

> This field (*kṣetra*) is of a great merit due to my appearance. From today, the world should proclaim it as "Ahobalam." Having known my incomparable strength (*balam*), gods proclaimed thus: "Oh, what a valour, oh, what a heroism, oh, what a power in Narasiṃha's arms, the highest deity, oh, what a cave! (*aho bilam*), oh, what a strength! (*aho balam*)." Therefore, this field (*kṣetra*) indeed will be Ahobalam. I will dwell at this very spot, near the Gajakuṇḍa, and you [will dwell] right in front of me, on the bank of Bhavanāśinī. Living here, you shall govern a whole kingdom successfully. Here, indeed, sages, ancestors, gods [shall] praise me.

In accordance with this passage, the name of the *kṣetra* which is located nearby the Gajakuṇḍa can be interpreted either as referring to a cave (*aho! bilam*) in which Narasiṃha manifested in response to the penances of Garuḍa, or to his strength (*aho! balam*), which, along with his other qualities, was worshipped by gods and sages after he killed Hiraṇyakaśipu.

The next aspect in the sequence, the Vārāhanarasiṃha, locates in Ahobilam the Puranic myth of Viṣṇu's *avatāra* of the Boar, who saved the Earth from the ocean by lifting it with his tusk. The connection of this aspect with the Earth is also apparent in the merits attributed to this *kṣetra*: If one recites the *stotra*, in which the Earth (Bhū) praises her saviour (cited in AM 4.59–71) for a certain period of time, one's desire for the land (*bhūkāma*) and the kingdom (*rājyakāma*) will be fulfilled (AM 4.57cd).

A passage concerning the Lakṣmīnarasiṃha says that the whole mountain glitters because of the glances Lakṣmī throws.[35] Verses from the section on Narasiṃha's abodes additionally explain that in this place Narasiṃha granted Lakṣmī supremacy (AM 4. 25).[36]

The site of the Yogānandanarasiṃha is associated with the event of the teaching of yoga to Prahlāda (AM 4.47).[37] The passage which addresses the powers

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35 AM 4.45: *lakṣmīkaṭākṣavikṣepāt sadāyaṃ parvatottamaḥ | phalapuṣpalatākīrṇaḥ sarvataḥ saṃprakāśate ‖45‖* "This eminent mountain always glows due to glances thrown by Lakṣmī, [and is] covered on all sides with fruits, flowers and creepers."

36 AM 4.25: *prādhānyaṃ tatra devyās tu hariḥ kalpitavān purā | tataḥ prabhṛti lokās tu lakṣmyās padam avādayan ‖25‖* "There, Hari once bestowed Devī with supremacy. From this time people have proclaimed the place as Lakṣmī's."

37 AM 4.47: *yogābhyāsaṃ tu kṛtavān prahlādasya mahātmanaḥ | tadā prabhṛti lokas tu yogānanda iti bruvan ‖47‖* "He was teaching yoga to the noble Prahlāda. From this time people call him "Yogānanda.""

attainable at this *kṣetra* mentions various mythical figures and gods, including Brahmā, who attained peace of mind here (AM 4.77–79).

The Pāvananarasiṃha is linked with the power to purify transgressions, such as the loss of caste (*jātibhraṃśa*) or the killing of a Brahmin. The passage appropriates the Puranic myth of the sage Bhāradvaja, who, in the AM's version, got rid of his sin here thanks to Narasiṃha's presence (AM 4.80–82).

Regarding the Karañjanarasiṃha, the text mentions a Karañja tree, under which the god sits, holding a *cakra* and a bow.[38] Another passage associates the site with the sage Gobhila, before whom Narasiṃha manifested when he recited there the king's *mantra* (*mantrarāja*) [39] (AM 4.85–89).

The myth of another aspect associated with a tree, the Chatravaṭanarasiṃha, concerns Narasiṃha dwelling in its shadow,[40] while being entertained by various mythical beings with music and songs. There he granted two Gandharvas, called Hūhū and Haha, who approached Ahobilam from the Meru Mountain, the boon of being the best musicians. The *kṣetra* is therefore recommended for ambitious artists who dream of fame (AM 4.90–96).

The name the Bhārgavanarasiṃha is explained as being taken after the sage Bhārgava, who performed severe austerities there. After bathing in a pond (*tīrtha*) called *akṣaya* ('undecaying'),[41] one should worship the god as the Adhokṣaja (an epithet of Viṣṇu, 'who is beyond perception'). The *kṣetra* grants heaven and emancipation (AM 4.97–105).

The Jvālānarasiṃha, the last aspect in the sequence given by the AM, is known for his wrath. As his name suggests, his ferocity is associated with fire (since *jvālā* means "flame"). The final verses of the chapter praise his incorporeal (*atanu*) form, which is united with the body of the eviscerated Hiraṇyakaśipu.[42] One can attain the state of communion with God (*sāyujya*) in this *kṣetra* by offering burning diyas and clarified butter or sesame oil.

As we can see, the AM passages, which illustrate the successive aspects of Narasiṃha in Ahobilam, are not coordinated by any expressions indicating that

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38 AM 4.83: *karañjamūle bhagavān yatrāste śārṅgacakradhṛt | kārañjaṃ kṣetram uddiṣṭam āśritaṃ bhavanāśinīm ‖83‖* "At the feet of Karañja, where the Venerable One holding a *cakra* and a bow resides, there is a *kṣetra* described as Karañja, adjacent to Bhavanāśinī."

39 I.e., the *anuṣṭubh-mantra* of Narasiṃha mentioned before in the context of contemporary attempts at interpreting the ninefoldness of Narasiṃha.

40 AM 4.51cd*: āste chatravaṭacchāyām āśrito narakesarī ‖51‖* "Narasiṃha dwells in the shadow of a Banyan tree like an umbrella (Chatravaṭa)."

41 The pond of such a name is situated in the same place nowadays.

42 AM 4.109: *saṃbhinnaṃ bhinnadaityeśvaratanum atanum nārasiṃhaṃ bhajāmaḥ |* "We honour the incorporeal Nārasiṃha who is joined with a split body of the Lord of demons."

their narratives follow or precede each other. Moreover, most of the episodes do not really concern deeds of Narasiṃha which would advance the plot, but simply refer to his appearance in a particular place as a result of ritual activities of certain sages or other beings. Even though they are linked as they explain various aspects of the same god, in fact they constitute unrelated vignettes rather than subsequent episodes of a cohesive myth. This impression is enhanced by a lack of consistency with the *phalaśruti* of AM 4, which lists the nine *kṣetra*s of Narasiṃha in a different order from that in which their abodes, names, and powers are characterised in the descriptive part of the same chapter, namely: (1) Garuḍakṣetra (i.e. Ahobila), (2) Potrakṣetra (i.e. Vārāha), (3) Jalanidhitanayā (i.e. Lakṣmī), (4) Yoga (i.e. Yogānanda), (5) Kārañja, (6) Chatravaṭa, (7) Jvālā, (8) Bhārgava, (9) Pāvana,[43] versus (1), (2), (3), (4), (9), (5), (6), (8), (7).

In addition, the motifs briefly touched upon in the (allegedly) sixteenth-century *Navanārasiṃhamaṅgāḷāśasāna* to praise nine Narasiṃhas can only be fully comprehend if one is aware of their myths embedded in the AM. Therefore it seems plausible that the AM is earlier than the former. The lack of mention of the aspect of Narasiṃha embodied in the Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha temple at the Lower Ahobilam ('the tenth' temple) could be another argument to date the AM as predating the sixteenth century.

The period before the turn of the sixteenth century was a time when the Śrīvaiṣṇava masters of Ahobilam were in the process of establishing its reputation as a pilgrimage centre that is worth visiting, despite its unfavourable peripheral location in the Nallamala Hills, inhabited by the Chenchus and, in the popular imagination, robbers preying on the travellers. In such circumstances, the imposition of the pattern of a nine-fold god on the territory might have served to integrate local beliefs under the umbrella of Vaiṣṇavism (and soon the Vijayanagara state, which was interested in religious patronage). Taḷḷapāka Annamācārya's poem, in which he uses purely Telugu expressions such as 'Kānugumāni' and 'Maṭṭemaḷḷa' to praise two particular aspects of Narasiṃha, suggests that the pattern of nine Narasiṃhas had evolved and was transmitted in various configurations already before the sixteenth century.

The inconsistency in the enumeration of the aspects of Narasiṃha by authors aware of the concept of the nine appears to confirm the artificiality of the linear myth behind them. In other words, the transmission of the texts does not give any basis to the contemporaneously promoted narrative which subsumes all the nine Narasiṃhas. On the contrary, the textual sources which legitimized the concept

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43 AM 4.113: *pakṣīndraṃ potrasaṃjñaṃ jalanidhitanayāsaṃjñitaṃ yogasaṃjñaṃ kārañjaṃ kṣetravaryaṃ phalitaphalacayaṃ chatrapūrvaṃ vaṭaṃ ca jvālākhyaṃ bhārgavākhyaṃ bhagavadabhimataṃ bhāvitaṃ yogivaryaiḥ puṇyaṃ tat pāvanākhyaṃ hṛdi kalayatāṃ kalpate satphalāya |113|*

focus more on locating the deity in Ahobilam, by means of revealing his complex nature, than on praising these aspects as temporally linked or coordinated by a common plot (other than the identity of Narasiṃha himself). As I argue below, what the AM seems to suggest is that the nine Narasiṃhas are brought together by their natural location.

The *Ahobilamāhātmya* and the boundaries of Narasiṃha's territory

The AM passages that deal with the seats (*sthāna*) of the nine Narasiṃhas, although rather brief and operating mainly with the quarters, the mountain of Garuḍa (Garuḍācala), and the mountain of the Vedas (Vedācala) as points of spatial reference, outline the sacred territory of Ahobilam surprisingly realistically, if compared with the contemporary arrangement of the nine shrines (see Map 4).
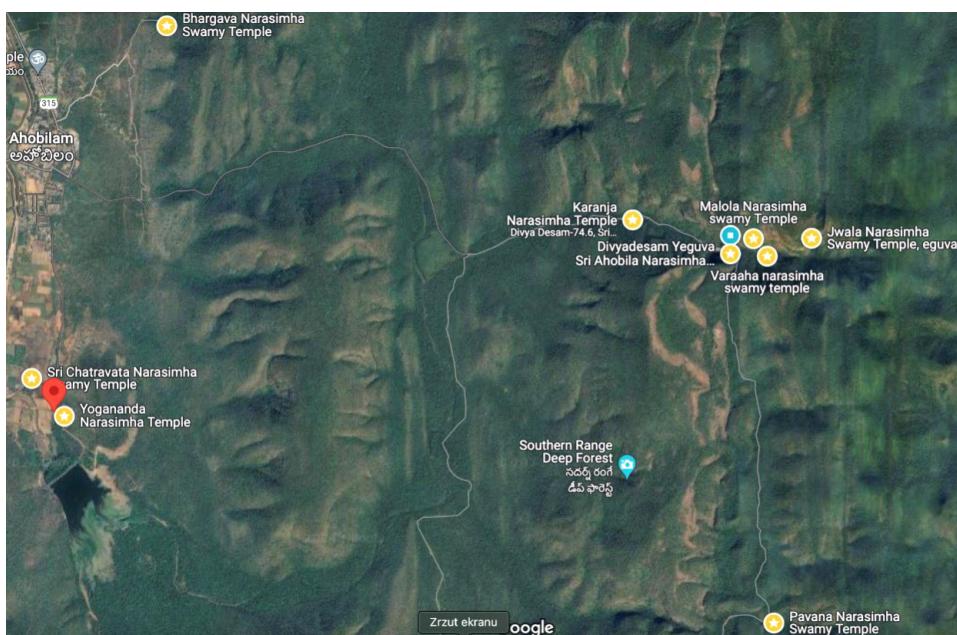
Map 4   The nine Narasiṃhas' temples (yellow dots), the Prahlada Badi terrain where the (old) *mūrti* of Narasiṃha in a yogic posture mentioned in the AM is kept (a blue dot), the Prahlādavaradanarasiṃha temple in the Ahobilam village, i.e., 'the tenth' (marked with an Om sign), 2024 (based on Google Earth map).

As already mentioned, the first aspect in the series, i.e., the Ahobilanarasiṃha, can be identified due to a reference to a pond called Gajakuṇḍa/Gajatīrtha located in his proximity. Additionally, in AM 7.84, he is described as dwelling at the side of Garuḍācala, on the banks of the Bhavanāśinī river.[44] This description seems enough to identify his abode with the place where the temple of the Ahobilanarasiṃha was built: high on a hill, naturally nestled between the peaks of Garuḍācala and Vedācala, in the vicinity of a river known under the same name as the text reads.

The Vārāhanarasiṃha, i.e., the Boar Narasiṃha, is described as dwelling on the hinder (or upper) side of the Vedādri (*vedādreḥ pṛṣṭhabhāge*, AM 4.22),[45] which also matches the actual location of Vārāhanarasiṃha's cave shrine, slightly above the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple, on the higher slopes of the Vedādri hill.

The Lakṣmīnarasiṃha, popularly known as Mālolanarasiṃha, dwells, according to the text, on top of Vedācala, and faces south (AM 4.23–24).[46] In this case, too, the description reflects the actual bearings of the shrine.

The next passage concerns the Yogānandanarasiṃha, optionally called Yoganarasiṃha. Unlike the others, in this case the AM description does not parallel the location of the shrine that is currently a part of the ninefold pattern but refers to its today neglected predecessor. The text (AM 4.46–48)[47] locates the abode of the Yogānandanarasiṃha, which faces south (perhaps towards the Ahobilanarasiṃha), "to the west (or: obstructed part) of Garuḍādri, near the place of Lakṣmī," and continues: "To the north-west from there, Lord Narasiṃha shines in the cave in his own form of Yogānanda." Clearly, the extolled abode parallels the open rocky space in the north-west quarter of the Ahobilam sacred territory, up

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44 AM 7.84 *garuḍābhidhabhūdharasya bhāge nivasan vai bhavanāśinī taṭe | vinutas sakalair mahīsurendrair vijayī tiṣṭhati nārasiṃharūpī ‖84‖* "Dwelling at the side of the mountain called Garuḍa, on the bank of Bhavanāśinī, praised by all chief earth-gods (Brahmans), the victorious [god] remains [there] in the form of Narasiṃha."

45 AM 4.22: *vārāhaṃ rūpam āsthāya dhatte jāyāṃ vasundharām | vedādreḥ pṛṣṭhabhāge tu sthitvā devaḥ sanātanaḥ ‖22‖* "Assuming the form of Vārāha, the eternal god supports his wife Vasundharā, having remained at the hinder part of Vedādri."

46 AM 4.23–24: *tasya bhūdharavaryasya unnate mastakottame | dakṣiṇābhimukhaḥ śrīmān narasiṃhaḥ prakāśate ‖23‖ tasya bhāge mahābhāgā kanakākhyā mahānadī | sadā dravati dhārābhir udvahantī sadā udam ‖24‖* "On the highest, lofty peak of this eminent mountain [Vedācala], venerable Narasiṃha manifests [himself] facing towards the south. On his side an eminent great river called Kanakā (Golden) always flows carrying water with its streams."

47 AM 4.46, 48: *vedādreḥ paścime bhāge lakṣmīsthānāt samīpataḥ | dakṣiṇābhimukho devo yogānando nṛkesarī ‖46‖ [...] tasya vāyavyabhāge tu bhagavān narakesarī | yogānandasvarūpeṇa guhāyāṃ samprakāśate ‖48‖* "To the west of Vedādri, near the place of Lakṣmī, there is the god Yogānanda Nṛsiṃha who faces south. To the northwest from there Lord Narasiṃha glows in the cave in his own form of Yogānanda."

the Vedādri hill, now called Prahlada Badi, and the old cave shrine that contains the *mūrti* of Narasiṃha in a yogic posture situated at its edge.

The fifth abode belongs to the Pāvananarasiṃha, whom, in accordance with the present distribution of the nine shrines, the text situates to the south of Garuḍādri (AM 4.49).[48]

The sixth is the *kṣetra* called Karañja, at whose feet the god sits, west of the Garuḍādri (AM 4.50).[49] The description is also consistent with the location of the actual shrine, situated along the tarmac road that runs from the village (the Lower Ahobilam) to the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple in the Upper Ahobilam.

According to AM 4.51,[50] the abode of Narasiṃha in the aspect of Chatravaṭa lies to the south-west of the Karañjanarasiṃha, within half of a *krośa* (i.e. a distance of about 2 miles). It extends around the umbrella-like Banyan tree (*chat[t]rvaṭa*) under the shade of which Narasiṃha rests. The present location of the shrine corresponds to this description.

The features of next in the sequence, the abode called Bhārgavakṣetra, are given in reference to the Garuḍādri. Narasiṃha is said to sit in a place hidden between the mountains, to the north of it (AM 4.52).[51] Contemporarily, the shrine is situated in the same area, not far from the Lower Ahobilam.

The last *kṣetra*, belonging to the angry Jvālānarasiṃha, is briefly mentioned as located in the middle of the Acalacchāyameru hill (AM 4.53ab).[52] Accordingly, the shrine of the Jvālānarasiṃha is built high on the hill that is still known under the same designation.

Comparing the text with the actual topography of Ahobilam reveals that at the time of the composition of the AM, the spatial arrangement of individual aspects of Narasiṃha was almost the same as it is today, with the exception of the abode of the Yogānandanarasiṃha. The features of the abode referred to in

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48 AM 4.49: *garuḍādrer dakṣiṇataḥ pāvanaṃ nāma tīrthakam | tatrāste bhagavān viṣṇur nṛsiṃhasya svarūpadhṛt ǁ saṃśritānāṃ tu jantūnām abhīṣṭārthapradāyakaḥ ǁ49ǁ* "To the south of Garuḍādri there is a *tīrtha* called Pāvana. Lord Viṣṇu in his form of Narasiṃha is there, the bestower of desired objects to living beings who resort to him."

49 AM 4.50: *garuḍādreḥ paścimataḥ hy avidūre karañjakaḥ | mahān vṛkṣas tatra cāste tanmūle narakesarī ǁ50ǁ* "Behind/to the west of the Garuḍādri, nearby, there is a great tree Karañjaka, Narakesarī is at its feet" [...].

50 AM 4.51: *tatsthānān nairṛte bhāge krośārdhe hy avidūrataḥ | āste chatravaṭacchāyām āśrito narakesarī ǁ51ǁ* "In the place to the south-west from this site, nearby, within half of *krośa*, Narasiṃha dwells in the shadow of a Banyan tree like an umbrella (Chatravaṭa)."

51 AM 4.52: *tasya cottarabhāge tu parvatāntarite sthale | bhārgave tīrthavarye tu samāste narakesarī ǁ52ǁ* "To the north from there, in a place hidden between the mountains, Narakesarī sits in the prominent *bhārgavatīrtha*."

52 AM 4.53ab: *acalacchāyameros tu madhye jvālānṛkesarī |* "In the middle of the Acalacchāyameru there is Jvālānṛkesarī."

the text correspond to the location of the ancient cave shrine of Narasiṃha in the aspect of a yogin who taught young Prahlāda, which still exists but is currently excluded from the pattern of nine. Vasantha (2001: 8) observes that this *mūrti* appears to be older than the one installed in the Yogānadanarasiṃha shrine in the Lower Ahobilam, which, over time, took over the role of one of the nine shrines. This suggests that the AM was composed before this abode was replaced by the shrine that is now conveniently situated at the outskirts of the Lower Ahobilam.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from various maps featured in contemporary Ahobilam guidebooks is that the literary distribution of the nine Narasiṃhas in the AM attempts at reflecting an ideal territory, at least much more ideally sketched than in geographical reality, with the Ahobilanarasiṃha (1) at the centre and the other eight places defining its boundaries. Moreover, their order in the AM, although not ideal, follows the circular order of *pradakṣiṇa*: the route starts from the centre (viz. Ahobilanarasiṃhakṣetra), makes a short approach to the north, passing *kṣetra*s of Vārāha (2), Lakṣmī (3) and Yoganarasiṃha (4), then the path turns south-east (or, as required by *pradakṣiṇa*, right), towards Pavānanarasiṃha (5), and continues south-west through Karañja (6), Chaṭravaṭa (7) and then north-west through Bhārgavakṣetra (8) to close the circle at Jvālānarasiṃhakṣetra (9) in the north-east (see Map 4).

Strikingly, the boundaries of this imaginary space are not distorted when—as it happened in some point in time—the site of Yogānandanarasiṃha is moved from the north-west (as described in the text) to the south-west, where the shrine of Narasiṃha in a yogin aspect currently included into the cluster of nine stands: in this case, too, the territory remains symbolically outlined by the eight aspects surrounding the Ahobilanarasiṃha, the ninth. Apparently, what is crucial is simply the symbolism of a digit nine, as "the grouping of tīrthas in numbered sets creates a landscape that connects place to place and thus spans the land in between" (Eck 2012: 31).

Moreover, the route sketched by the AM is challenging and time consuming: it requires traversing the jungle and negotiating varying altitudes, as well as approaching the Ahobilanarasiṃha temple twice: at the beginning, before setting off to the Vārāha-, and at the end, before setting off to the Jvālā-, but it still seems manageable. Given that the text nowhere recommends traversing it in this particular order, and that the natural conditions around Ahobilam were much more difficult than they are today, it is likely that the 'map' was essentially a mental exercise. Nonetheless, in such a configuration, the three wrathful forms of Narasiṃha, i.e., the Bhārgava, the Ahobila and the Jvālā, are visited in succession (at least today, as abovementioned, the climb to Jvālā begins at Ahobila, so by following the recommended route, the pilgrim would have to return to the latter, despite having visited the place at the very beginning). Therefore, one gets

the impression that this is a deliberate strategy to amplify the experience of the frightening nature of the god.

It seems that, from the AM's point of view, the importance of the order of the individual Narasiṃhas, in terms of the logic of the plot that connects them, is secondary to the spatial arrangement of their abodes. As we could see in regard to the change of the temples' spatial arrangement, whereas 'relocating' of the Yogānandanarasiṃha may affect linearity of the myth if perceived as consisting of sequential episodes, it does not affect the symbolically sketched territory around the Ahobilanarasiṃha.[53]

The spatial interpretation nonetheless does not address the question of why the sought-after pattern in Ahobilam includes nine aspects of the god. It is true, however, that most texts, when talking about directions, mention eight of them, hence nine is suitable for an 'eight directions plus one" template. In addition, the idea behind a cluster can be multidimensional: its elements can demarcate a wider sacred space through symbolic reference to the directions, but also endow the deity with a complex nature.[54] And indeed, the concept of ninefoldness provides Narasiṃha with a range of aspects—a teacher, a yogin, a husband, a demon-slayer, etc.—which address a variety of emotions and thus potentially trigger a wide repertoire of modes of devotion (*bhakti*).

The nine and the Pāñcarātra concept of *navamūrti*

The double nature of Narasiṃha's, generally based on the opposition between his wrathful (*ugra*) and peaceful (*saumya*) forms, had been further differentiated in Ahobilam by enriching these forms with local features conveyed by the narratives attached to them in the AM and oral traditions. This differentiation, chiefly through the expansion of Narasiṃha's nature with a whole range of benevolent aspects, may have been a strategy aimed at making the place—hitherto seen through the prism of the Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's poem as defined by the bloody episode of the demon's slaughter against the backdrop of a landscape conventionally portrayed by Tamil authors as arid (*pālai*)—more accessible and less frightening in the eyes of devotees.

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53 In such a case, the Yogānandanarasiṃha episode would presumably have been moved between the episodes relating to the Pāvana and Chatravaṭa aspects, which is not, for example, reflected in the contemporary oral tradition.

54 Diana Eck (2012: 31) states this in relation to the tendency to present a goddess as triplicate, materially reflected in her three shrines, either within one sanctum or built separately.

It is noteworthy that Tirumaṅkai praises Narasiṃha in nine stanzas (the poet introduces himself in the tenth),[55] each of which evokes the man-lion dwelling in Ciṅkaveḷkuṉṟam (i.e., Ahobilam). Whereas in the first eight he evokes him in a wrathful form, in the nineth stanza he 'softens' the god's fierceness by introducing the image of the goddess Lakṣmī, whose beloved is Narasiṃha. There is nothing explicit in the poem about Narasiṃha's ninefold nature. Rather, the nature of the god is customarily polarised into the violent, which dominates the image, and the traces of the gentle, implied in the nineth stanza by the goddess present at his side. Nevertheless, one wonders whether this ninefold structure of praise may have influenced (or reflected?) a concept that was yet to develop fully.

The digit nine is endowed with theological symbolism in the teachings of the Pāñcarātra tradition. As already mentioned, one of the important steps in the development of Ahobilam as a Śrīvaiṣṇava centre of Narasiṃha worship was the adaptation of the Pāñcarātra mode of ritual, probably before the fourteenth century. According to the Pāñcarātrins, the all-pervading God (Viṣṇu) encompasses nine manifestations, all of which are known collectively as *navamūrti* or *navavyūha*. Depending on the Pāñcarātra *saṃhitā*, these aspects are: Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Nārāyaṇa, Brahmā or Hayagrīva, Viṣṇu, Nṛsiṃha or Varāha. Detailed teachings on rituals for nine *mūrti*s are included in texts such as *Pauṣkarasaṃhitā*, *Viṣṇurahasya*, *Agnipurāṇa*, and *Garuḍapurāna*, whereas in later Pāñcarātra *saṃhitā*s they are rather cursorily treated. This suggests that the concept was more important in earlier periods than the later (Rastelli 2007: 201–2).

This idea of a nine-folded god is perhaps echoed in the AM, *nota bene* containing references to the Pāñcarātra doctrine and to the presence of the Pāñcarātrins at Ahobilam, in its description of the Ahobilanarasiṃha, the first of the sequence of nine, as the all-pervading (see e.g. AM 4.16. cd; *nṛsiṃhanāyako viśvaṃ vyāptavān puruṣottamaḥ*; "The chief Narasiṃha, the all-pervading, the Best of Men"). In practice, the theological symbolism of nine may have been helpful in the process of expanding Narasiṃha's territory with the latest, tenth temple: whereas from the Pāñcarātra point of view the digit nine evokes nine aspects of Viṣṇu, for Vaiṣṇavas in general the digit ten recalls Viṣṇu's ten incarnations (*avatāra*).

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55 See translation of the poem by Kausalya Hart available at: https://www.projectmadurai. org/pm_etexts/utf8/pmuni0622_eng.html (accessed January 20, 2024).

The painted nine: narrative murals of Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple in Kanchipuram

Another example of the polyphony of the nine Narasimhas is their visual interpretation on the *garbhagṛha* walls of the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple in Kanchipuram. In the narrative interwoven into the third chapter of the Sanskrit Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*, the Narasiṃha associated with the Varadarāja temple goes to Ahobilam, to kill demons there (Dębicka-Borek 2021). In contrast, the painting on the same temple wall (see Fig. 20) in a sense brings Ahobilam to Kanchipuram. As Seastrand notices in her work on murals in southeastern India, incorporation of images of other temples into the murals visually established a network of interconnected locations, encouraging pilgrims to experience their journey aesthetically besides solely through physical travel (Seastrand 2023: 187).

The painting of Ahobilam belongs to a series of narratively unrelated images, which allegedly depict the 108 holy places (*divyadeśa*) of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, all intended to remind the devotees of the many forms of Viṣṇu, to identify and

Fig. 20. A mural depicting nine Narasiṃhas of Ahobilam in the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple, 2015. Photo by Ute Hüsken.

confirm the places where he manifests, and to encourage pilgrims to visit them (Krishna 2014: 23–24, see also Hüsken in this volume). According to Raman and Krishna, the stylistic features of the attached labels, which name the god's forms in Tamil and Telugu, indicate that the murals were created in the sixteenth century, with most of the panels presumably painted during the reign of the Vijayanagara emperor Acyutadevarāya, who sponsored the reconstruction and enlargement of the temple (Krishna 2014: 20–21, Raman 1975: 176–78). According to Dr. Madhan, who was a part of the murals' restauration team, they represent the style of the Nāyaka dynasty, i.e. the art of the seventeenth century, however one more layer of painting was found below (personal communication).[56] In South India, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a significant increase in the practice of painting temple walls with maps of sacred places or landscapes. This trend coincided with a surge in literature focused on praising holy sites, mirroring the growing enthusiasm for pilgrimage practices, as well as the expansion and renovation of many temples during this time (Seastrand 2023: 187).

In Balaji's interpretation (2018: 116), the images, when read clockwise, create a nine-element narrative: (1) Narasiṃha comes out of a pillar (of Hiraṇyakaśipu's palace), (2) angry Narasiṃha is seated with flames around his head (i.e., in the Jvālānarasiṃha aspect), (3) Narasiṃha is seated as a warrior in *vīrāsana*, (4) Narasiṃha fights with Hiraṇyakaśipu, (5) Narasiṃha kills the demon, (6) Narasiṃha stands in anger with sixteen arms, (7) Narasiṃha is seated in a lotus posture (*padmāsana*) with a body of the demon (?) lying in front of him, (8) Narasiṃha is seated in a yoga posture (*yogāsana*) to control his anger, (9) Narasiṃha's anger is finally tamed by Lakṣmī sitting beside him.

While the panel undoubtedly illustrates Ahobilam—we see nine aspects of Narasiṃha against the background of the hills—the forms of the god do not quite match those described in the AM, and certainly deserve more research. Especially peculiar is the seventh vignette, which shows Narasiṃha with a brown figure, identified as the demon lying in front of him and said to be unattested elsewhere by Balaji (2018: 117). As Ramaswamy Babu suggested to me in personal communication (February 2025), perhaps the interpretation should be different: the dark figure is not lying in front of Narasiṃha, but beneath him, dead and trampled, similarly to the iconography of several other gods and goddesses, who are depicted as trampling a demon to emphasize their victory over him.

The narrative visually rendered in the mural does not evoke any aspects of the god uniquely bound with Ahobilam tradition. Instead, it rather follows a widely circulated Puranic version of Narasiṃha myth, which begins with his manifestation from a column, culminates with destroying Hiraṇyakaśipu and

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56   I thank Prof. Ute Hüsken for connecting me with Dr. Madhan.

ends with attempts at reducing Narasiṃha's anger after the slaughter. Moreover, the mural's painters deployed iconography of Narasiṃha which, except for the aspect portrayed with a figure lying in front of it, are rather generic and attested to in other places. In this light, the only hint of Ahobilam, besides the nine-folded organization of the narrative and the hilly background, seems to be the emphasis put on the wrathful aspect of the god, and thus on the act of killing Hiraṇyakaśipu—note that, whereas according to Ahobilam's tradition, six aspects of Narasiṃha out of nine are peaceful, in the mural only the last three vignettes illustrate the tame/d god— with which the site has been popularly associated. However, these two elements—the nine-partitive depiction of Narasiṃha and the hilly backdrop—appear sufficient to evoke the essence of Ahobilam. Much like the modern religious map of the network of local shrines found on the boards in Ahobilam itself, the mural's goal is not to offer an accurate topographical representation or a detailed visual rendering of the local myths tied to the place, but rather to communicate the experience of its sacredness.

Such an approach to the local flavour of the myth associated with Ahobilam by those behind the visual rendering of the site in the Varadarāja temple responds to the needs and expectations of pilgrims visiting Kanchipuram. Notwithstanding the labels explaining what is shown in the mural, the Varadarāja paintings actually de-localise the space in which, in accordance with Ahobilam tradition, the painted events take place. This is understandable if we consider that the murals' recipients were pilgrims who mentally experienced Ahobilam during a pilgrimage actually aimed at worshipping Varadarāja of Kanchipuram. For them, probably unaware of the details of the myths locally rooted in Ahobilam, a coherent narrative consisting of nine episodes, along with emphases on the wrath of Narasiṃha and the hilly terrain in which the myth takes place, was enough to learn about, or recognise, the already established Śrīvaiṣṇava holy spot. Supposedly, rather than the detailed myths of Narasiṃha found in the locally known *Ahobilamāhātmya*, the mural evoked—and still does— the devotional poem of recognized Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār, in which he praises the god who killed the demon in the hills of Ahobilam in nine stanzas.

Conclusions

The Ahobilam-related concept of nine Narasiṃhas exemplifies the persistence and power of the pattern of nine Narasiṃhas—materially expressed in nine temples which outline a sacred territory—regardless of the shifting circumstances, audiences and perspectives. In other words, the number of elements in the cluster remains intact, even when, through the ongoing processes of appropriation,

questioning, adaptation, or even relocation, the very concept of the nine Nara-simhas begins to function as a cultural product of various traditions, expressed through various media. From the point of view of anthropology of a space, Aho-bilam is another instance of a site which is culturally constructed, and therefore can be variously perceived and variously represented by various agents (Gaenszle and Gengnagel 2006).

In a shared place like Ahobilam, where multiple narratives coexist, are con-tested and reinterpreted, it is rather the symbolism behind the cluster and the conceptual tools for linking its elements that may require certain modification to be comprehensible by and meaningful for a given community than a num-ber of the cluster's elements. However, regardless of the initial inspiration or need to frame the Ahobilam centre in the symbolic pattern of nine—be it the architectural solutions already applied in other religious centers, the textual structure of Tirumaṅkai's poem, the theological teachings of the Pāñcarātra, or the outlining of a sacred territory—in practice, the most effective and universal method of linking the nine temples is a narrative. A linear and coherent narrative that encompasses various aspects of the god through words or images—and thus provides a whole range of experiencing *bhakti*—has the greatest impact on the minds of pilgrims, even if it is not confirmed by the authoritative textual tradi-tion, or it is impossible to be recreated, episode by episode, while traversing the demanding sacred territory.

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Acknowledgements

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Four Viṣṇus in Kanchipuram
Cooperation and Competition

Many South Indian temples are a part of not merely one but several networks, thereby attesting to rivalling or parallel perceptions and constructions of sacred space. While these diverse layers of sacred spaces often do not directly conflict with each other, economic resources are distributed differently, not the least through the agency of the corresponding pilgrimage routes, other aspects of infrastructure, and, for example, through the diverse human agents at work in, and connected to, the temples. These different networks can profit from each other but might also be in conflict with each other. This relationship between the temples and their networks is therefore contested and, over time, undoubtedly very dynamic. This paper explores four Viṣṇu temples in the South Indian temple town of Kanchipuram, who are today considered to be 'brothers', because the local mythology narrates their coming into existence as a connected series of events. All four are, moreover, part of the network of "108 (Vaiṣṇava) divine places" (*divyadeśa*). At the same time, the four temples are not a homogenous group either. What sets them apart are their individual sectarian affiliation (Teṉkalai or Vaṭakalai) and their affiliation to one of two modes of worship, Pāñcarātra or Vaikhānasa. Keeping the above in mind, this chapter addresses the following questions: How are these complex relationships expressed in the Sanskrit texts that convey temples' legends, and how do such relationships unfold in the contemporary day-to-day religious practice of the temple town? When and how do the temples cooperate, and in what way are they in competition with each other? What is the role of human agents, such as local Vaiṣṇavas, pilgrims, donors, trustees, and other stakeholders in this process? By investigating overlapping networks, I will explore how these networks play out in different ways, sometimes in several ways simultaneously.

The setting: Kanchipuram

The South Indian town of Kanchipuram has played a major role in the political and religious history of South India at least since the second century BCE.[1] Kanchipuram is praised in the fourth-century Caṅkam text *Perumpaṇārṟuppaṭai*; it was the capital of the Pallavas; an important political and religious centre during the Cōḻa rule and the Vijayanagara empire; from early on it was a trading center with strong connections to the overseas trading routes and especially Southeast Asia; it is frequently mentioned in the Purāṇas as one of the seven *mokṣapurī*s; and till today it is a town well known for its numerous temples and handwoven silk saris. Since the early centuries of the common era, Kanchipuram was the home of numerous shrines, temples, monasteries and sacred water bodies, attracting religious specialists, monastics, and scholars of various religious denominations. Many of its sacred sites praised by the early poets are extant today and remain active sites of worship, drawing thousands of pilgrims to Kanchipuram every day. Especially important for this chapter is the fact that Kanchipuram is home to numerous famous Viṣṇu temples, the biggest of which today is the Varadarāja temple in the south-eastern part of town. In contemporary local perception, the Viṣṇus residing and venerated in four of these temples are considered to be four brothers, among whom Varadarāja is the youngest.

Four Viṣṇu temples

The four Viṣṇu temples under discussion are all situated in Kanchipuram's south-eastern part which is today known as Viṣṇu Kanchi or *ciṉṉa* (small) Kanchi.[2] These temples are (from West to East) the Dīpaprakāśa temple, the Aṣṭabhuja temple, the Yathoktakārī temple and the Varadarāja temple.[3]

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1   See for example Mahalingam 1963 and Srinivasan 1979.
2   Stein (2021: 36–37) posits that the present-day subdividion of Kanchipuram into Śiva Kanchi and Viṣṇu Kanchi (and also Jina Kanchi) was not set in place until the latter half of the nineteenth century. She also shows that colonial sources use "Little Kanchi" without mentioning affiliation with a particular god (p. 37).
3   These temples are locally know by their Tamil names: Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ (Dīpaprakāśa), Aṣṭapuja Perumāḷ (Aṣṭabhuja), Coṉṉa Vaṇṇam Ceyta Perumāḷ (Yathoktakārī) and Varatarāja Perumāḷ (Varadarāja). In this study I refer to the temples and the deities installed therein by their Sanskrit names. A table listing the Sanskrit and Tamil names of these temples, along with their ritual tradition and Vaiṣṇava affiliation, is given at the end of this chapter (table 1).

Until the fourteenth century, much of this south-eastern part of Kanchipuram was not part of the city proper (called then *kacci* or *kaccipeṭu*).[4] The location where the Varadarāja temple is situated was then a village known as Attiyūr ("the village [full] of Atti trees"). Today, Viṣṇu Kanchi is an integral part of Kanchipuram. However, a physical reminder of the old city bounds are the two sixteenth-century pillar fragments, marking the old city gate (see Fig. 1 and 2).[5] Until today, the huge chariot (*tēr/ratha*) used by Varadarāja on the seventh day of his annual *brahmotsava* festival is kept near the old city gate, within the old city limits (see Map 1).[6]
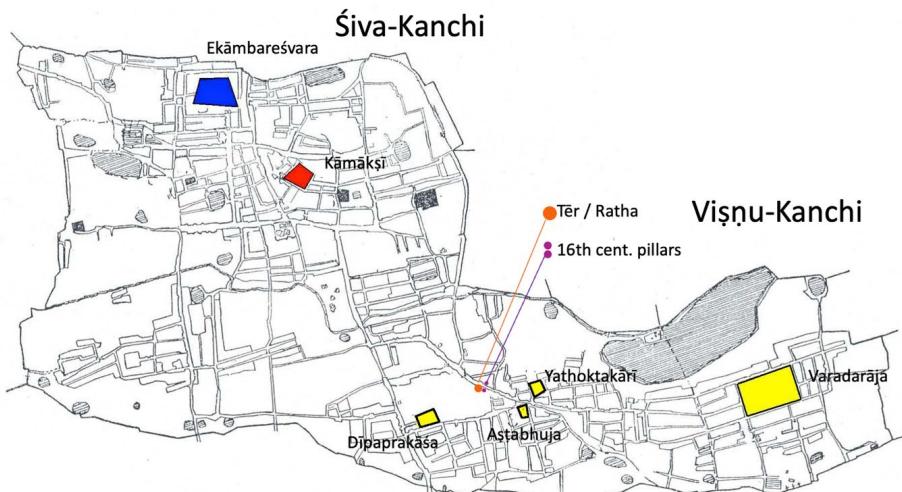
Map 1   Viṣṇu Kanchi with Dīpaprakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja, Yathoktakārī, Varadarāja, the location of the chariot, and the location of the two pillar fragments of the old city gate. © Ute Hüsken, based on the map in Porcher 1985: 27.

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4   Nagaswamy emphasizes that one twelfth-century inscription mentions the Yathoktakārī temple as the eastern border of Kacci—unlike other scholars, who claim that the shrine was outside city bounds (see Nagaswamy 2011: 6, 33). Stein (2021: 46–47) refers to the Caṅkam poem *Perumpaṇāṟṟuppaṭai* (Wilden [2014: 8] dates this text to the fourth century), which describes Kanchi's city walls as large brick constructions. However, Stein considers this description of this wall to be rather a literary trope than a piece of information reflecting physical reality.

5   Stein (2021: 133) says: "These pillars likely once supported an arched gateway that marked the passage between the two city zones." However, she misrepresents the processional route by claiming that "this route (…) leads from the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple to Aṣṭabhuja Perumāḷ and Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ, and then turns north to pass the Ulakaḷanta Perumāḷ temple and onwards to Tirupati" (p. 133): In fact, Varadarāja's processions only occasionally pass the Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ (= Dīpaprakāśa) temple (see below, p. 248 f.). In these cases, the procession does not pass through this former city gateway, but turns West immediately after passing the Aṣṭabhuja temple.

6   This annual festival takes place for ten days in the month of Vaikāci (May/June). *Tēr utsava* is one of the major attractions during this festival. On that day, the processional

Fig. 1   Varadarāja's temple chariot (*tēr*) covered with metal sheets; one sixteenth-century pillar integrated into the front of the fruit stand.
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Fig. 2   Two pillar fragments at the side of the chariot. © Ute Hüsken, 22.9.2023.

The four temples as *divyadeśa*s

All four Viṣṇu temples are among the so-called *divyadeśa*s located in Kanchipuram (for the distribution of *divyadeśa*s in Kanchipuram, see Map 2)[7]—sacred spaces praised by the poet-devotees of Viṣṇu called Āḻvārs (ca. seventh to ninth century CE) in their songs. Most of these sacred spaces at the time of the composition of the Āḻvārs' hymns probably were not huge temple complexes but shrines built from bricks, sometimes in a walled enclosure. In the thirteenth century, long after the composition of the Āḻvārs' songs, the individual *divyadeśa*s were ordered and systematized as "108 *divyadeśa*s," the number 108 being derived from a "somewhat forced count of all the different temples mentioned in the

Kanchipuram's *divyadeśa*s

43: Tirukkacci (Varadarāja temple)
44: Aṣṭapuyakaram (Aṣṭabhuja temple)
45: Tiruttaṇkā (Dīpaprakāśa temple)
46: Tiruveḷukkai (Aḻakiya Cinka temple)
47: Tirunīrakam (in the Uḷakalantar temple)
48: Tirupāṭakam (Pāṇḍavadūta temple)
49: Tiru Nilātiṅkaḷtuṇṭam (in the Ekāmbareśvara temple)
50: Tiru Ūrakam (in the Uḷakalantar temple)
51: Tiru Vehkā (Yathoktakārī temple)
52: Tirukkārakam (in the Uḷakalantar temple)
53: Tirukkārvāṇam (in the Uḷakalantar temple)

54: Tirukkaḷvaṉūr (in the Kāmākṣī temple)
55: Tiruppavaḷavaṇṇam (Pavaḷavaṇṇa temple)
56: Tirupparamēccura Viṇṇakaram (Vaikuṇṭha Perumāḷ temple)
[57: Tiruppuṭkuzhi (Vijayarāghava temple)]

Map 2   Kanchipuram's *divyadeśa*s as enumerated in the lists of 108 *divyadeśa*s.
© Ute Hüsken, based on the map in Porcher 1985: 27.

image (*utsavamūrti*) of Varadarāja is carried to the chariot, placed in it, and is then pulled through town—first along the MG road and Kamarajar Salai, then along all four Rajavitis, and back through the Kamarajar Salai and MG road, to stop again and rest for another year at the parking space.

7   Hardy (1977: 146, fn. 131) counts fourteen *divyadeśa*s in Kanchipuram. However, Seshadri (2003: 2), for example, counts eighteen *divyadeśa*s. Ninety-seven of the 108 *divyadeśa*s are in South India, and eighty-two are in Tamil Nadu (Hardy 1977: 125). Twenty-two *divyadeśa*s are in Toṇṭaināṭu (based on a classification by Piḷḷaipperumāḷai-yaṅkār; see Young 2014: 353).

whole Prabandham."[8] Since then, 108 temples (or shrines within temples) appear as a fixed group in the literature, although which sites exactly are counted among the 108 differs from text to text (Young 2014: 355). In some temples, 108 *divyadeśa*s are physically represented, as collection of 108 processional images (*utsavamūrti*s, as in Naṛaryūr), or as murals, as in Śrīvaikuṇṭham and in the Varadarāja temple.[9]

Moreover, the contemporary prominence of certain temples might lead to the erroneous assumption that these places have enjoyed equal importance also in earlier times. Raman (1975: 59), however, cautions that "there is nothing to indicate that it (= the Varadarāja temple) was a prominent temple in the beginning. On the other hand, from the works of the other Āḻvārs, it is seen that Vehkā (=the Yathoktakārī temple) was the most prominent Vishnu temple at Kanchi. Both Poykai and Pēy Āḻvārs frequently refer to Vehkā and rank it with other shrines like Srirangam and Vengaṭam etc."[10] This shift in focus of the Vaiṣṇava communities, taking place around the fourteenth century (Nagaswamy 2011: 6), is the background to the mythological narrative that makes Dīpaprakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja, and Yathoktakārī the older brothers of Varadarāja—a concept that we shall look into below.

While it is not difficult today to visit all fourteen or fifteen *divyadeśa*s listed for Kanchipuram even within one day, their numbering in the lists of 108 *divyadeśa*s (see above, Map 2) does not suggest the ideal sequence of their visit:[11] following this sequence, one would wander in a zig-zag manner through town. Importantly, the sequence of the four Viṣṇu temples that is suggested by the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (see below), namely Dīpaprakāśa-Aṣṭabhuja-Yathoktakārī-Varadarāja is not

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8 Hardy 1977: 125. In note 47 there Hardy explicitly mentions "Periya Nampi's Tiruppatikōvai, Vaṅkippuratt' Ācci's (Nālāyira-ppāsura-ppaṭi) Nūrr'ēṭṭu ttiruppati-kkōvai, etc." Young sees Vātsyavaradaguru's *Paratvādipañcakam* 5 as the first text that refers to the idea of 108 places mentioned by the Āḻvārs. Vātsyavaradaguru in turn might have adopted the idea of '108 places' from Amutaṉār's *Tiruppatikōvai* in the first third of the thirteenth century (Young 2014: 352).

9 On the murals in the Varadarāja temple, see Lochan 2019: 81–131, Krishna 2014, and Nagaswamy 2011: 196–218. Here, too, the identity of the 108 places varies. For example, in the Varadarāja temple, the Jagannātha temple in Puri is also represented, even though this sacred site is not praised by any of the Āḻvārs.

10 Raman (1975: 60) adds, "in the age of the Āchāryas, the modest temple of Attiyūr grew in importance and in the course of time completely overshadowed the other Vishnu temples of Kāñchi. Known as Hastigiri, it became one of the three most important places for a Srī-Vaishnava. The three in their order of importance are Kōil, Tirumālai and Perumāḷ-kōil, which are respectively Srīrangam, Vēṅgaḍam and Hastigiri at Kāñchi."

11 Orr sees the situation with the 276 places praised by the Nāyanmār similar: the list of 276 places "did not serve to define an actual program of pilgrimage" (Orr 2014: 191).

reflected in the *divyadeśa*-lists, in which their sequence is: Varadarāja-Aṣṭabhuja-Dīpaprakāśa-Yathoktakārī.[12]

In October 2022 I visited the *divyadeśa*s in Kanchipuram, and had brief conversations with several priests (*arcaka*)[13] and other custodians of the temples and the shrines about pilgrimage routes. Most said that the pilgrims or tourists would not necessarily visit only the *divyadeśa*s. Rather, they would visit the most famous temples. And, in fact, the crowd in the diverse *divyadeśa*s was very varied: When visiting Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṇṭam (16.10.2022), a Viṣṇu that is established and worshiped in the Śaiva Ekāmranātha temple, I encountered the 'normal' Ekāmranātha temple crowd, and hardly anyone was wearing a *tirunāman* (Vaiṣṇava mark) on the forehead, identifying them as Vaiṣṇavas. While some people specifically wanted to worship Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṇṭam, most visitors came because they visited the Ekāmranātha temple, the Śaiva priest at Nilāttiṅkaḷtuṇṭam confirmed. During my visits in the Paccaivaṇṇa Perumāḷ and Pavaḷavaṇṇa Perumāḷ temples I was the only visitor. The priest in the Pavaḷavaṇṇar Perumāḷ temple reported that pilgrims typically come to this temple either because they specifically ask the auto drivers to take them there, or because they arrive in Kanchi from Chennai along this specific route, entering the city from the North, along the Big Kamala Street, coming from the Bengaluru-Chennai Highway (no. 48). Several pilgrims would specifically visit on a Saturday in Purattāci (September/October), but on other days there would hardly be any people. It would also be crowded on Vaikuṇṭha Ekādaśi[14], even though there is no "gate to Vaikuṇṭha" in the temple.[15] This assessment resonates with the statement by priests in other *divyadeśa*s in Kanchipuram.

Young (2014: 361) convincingly argues that the Āḻvārs, in fact, did not visit all the places they praised,[16] nor was the list of temples conceived as a pilgrimage

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12 While it cannot be ruled out that certain pilgrimage groups make an effort to visit the *divyadeśa*s in the order they are mentioned in the available lists, most would follow the local infrastructure (roads, vicinity) and agents (auto drivers).

13 In the context of Brahmin Vaiṣṇava temple ritual, the term *arcaka* (rarely *pūjaka*) is a generic term for temple priests. By contrast, *ācārya* describes a "master", who leads the rituals during a festival. *Ācārya* can also describe the eldest acting temple priest who takes the highest place in the hierarchy of ritual specialists in the temple (see Colas 1996: 129 f., 132, 143, 153 f.).

14 This is the only day in the year when the gate (*dvāra/vācal*) to Viṣṇu's abode (Vaikuṇṭha) is opened. It is believed that anyone who goes through the gate will attain Vaikuṇṭha.

15 Curiously, the only Viṣṇu temple in Kanchipuram that has a Vaikuṇṭha *vācal* is the Aṣṭabhuja temple.

16 Orr (2014: 200–1) makes a similar argument for the Śaiva Nāyanmār, in contrast to Peterson (1982: 71), who finds with reference to the Nāyanmār that "The song was composed by the saint when he was in that place, i.e., when he visited the shrine as part of a pilgrimage." Young sees the mostly formulaic descriptions of the places, the fact that the poems often are about the *desire to go* to those places rather than *being*

route.[17] Dutta (2010: 24) elaborates that in the later "process of constructing a textual or canonical tradition, the adaptation and elaboration of the sacred sites and pilgrimage network between them in these texts emerged as an important exercise." She sees the concept of *divyadeśa* that had emerged in the hagiographies and *guruparamparā*s from the twelfth century onwards further developed in the *sthalapurāṇa*s: The idea of the sacred places to be visited on a pilgrimage, individually or in groups, was rather an idea pursued and promoted in this literature (pp. 18, 22). In fact, the importance of pilgrimage and the thought that pilgrimage might be actually superior to other ritual actions is explicitly expressed in many of the frame stories of the *sthalamāhātmya*s, in which the eulogy of a place or of areas is introduced by way of a debate of the *ṛṣi*s on the question which action is more conducive to salvation: Is it ascetic practices, Vedic sacrifice, the act of giving to Brahmins, or the practice of pilgrimage? (see, for example, KM(V) 1.7).

While the *māhātmya*s were composed much later than the Āḻvārs' hymns, precursors of their narratives might have been around already at the time of the Āḻvārs. Nagaswamy (2011), however, takes the poetry of the Āḻvārs along with the inscriptions as (in principle) representing historical facts, and is strongly opposed to taking the narratives of the *māhātmya*s seriously. He repeatedly makes the point that the inscriptions and Āḻvārs' poems do *not* reflect (precursors of) the *māhātmya*s' narratives.[18] Rather, he sees, for example, in the verses of Pūtattāḻvār that are linked to Varadarāja and other Viṣṇu temples in Kanchipuram the "basis for subsequent development of Varadarāja cult" (Nagaswamy 2011: 214).

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at those places (2014: 346), and the possibility of an imitation of an already existing Nāyanmār tradition (p. 349) as indications that the Āḻvārs might not actually have seen many of the shrines they praise (see also Dutta 2010: 22). This would explain the often vague connection between the place praised and the actual physical features of an icon (*mūrti*) or shrine that is identified with the respective poem. As numerous *divyadeśa mūrti*s have been displaced, or replaced over time, it seems that identification of specific hymns by the Āḻvārs with specific contemporary *mūrti*s/places in some cases stands on shaky grounds. Such 'exchanged' *mūrti*s include, for example, the *mūlamūrti* (the immovable stone icon in the main shrine) of Pavaḷavaṇṇa Perumāḷ (see Hüsken 2017), and the original wooden *mūrti* of Varadarāja, called Attivaratar (see Hüsken 2022).

17   It was only the printing press, and modern transportation that made the 108 places a feasible lifetime pilgrimage goal, usually pursued as a series of different journeys undertaken during the festival seasons (Young 2014: 361; see also Dutta 2010: 23).

18   See for example Nagaswamy (2011: 40, 42) with reference to the Yathoktakārī legend: "All the Alvars sing of the place as Vehhā and there is no hint that Viṣṇu placed himself across the river to block it (…) Neither in this ancient literature nor in the poems of Alvars do we have this suggestion of Viṣṇu acting as a dam." He rather thinks that "This legend is trying to impart a meaning to the Tamil term aṇai in vehh-aṇai-kiḍanta perumāḷ—'The God who slept on a couch on the river Vehhā'. But it's all but a legend,

The four Viṣṇus as 'brothers'[19]

The four Viṣṇu temples Dīpaprakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja, Yathoktakārī, and Varadarāja are very different in size (both physically and in terms of their income), but they are considered to be 'brothers' because the local Vaiṣṇava mythology narrates their coming into existence as a series of connected events.[20] The texts narrating the local mythology are the *Kāñcīmāhātmya*s, which are transmitted in Sanskrit and in Tamil, and of which we know of at least three 'sectarian' versions: A Śaiva, a Vaiṣṇava, and a Śākta version.[21] While these *māhātmya* texts seem to work with a common stock of motifs, the elaboration and details of the narratives pertaining to the separate temples can differ considerably, as we shall see when looking at these texts' sections related to the four Viṣṇu temples.

The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcimāhātmya*'s version

The Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (KM(V)) in Sanskrit gives the most detailed account of the coming into existence of the Viṣṇu temples in Kanchipuram. As Porcher in 1985 noted, the 32 chapters of the text can be subdivided into four, or alternatively two sections, each of which lays out the coming into existence of one specific section of Kanchipuram, or, to be more precise, of one cluster of Viṣṇu temples

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and came into existence only after Varadarāja had become most important, that is in the 14th century." (p. 43, 47).

19 My contemplations regarding Yathoktakārī and Varadarāja as represented in the three Sanskrit *māhātmya*s are significantly inspired by Malini Ambach's presentation "As you said, as I said, as he said—Three mythological interpretations of Viṣṇu Yathoktakārī and the river Vegavati in Kanchipuram" during a session of the weekly colloquium meetings of the Cultural and Religious History Department (South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University) in the Winter term 2022 (February 7, 2022). Some of these four Viṣṇu brothers also have sisters. For example, Varadarāja is said to have eight sisters (see Hüsken 2013 for details), and Yathoktakārī has at least one sister (see Hüsken in the forthcoming 'Yathoktakārī volume'). However, here we are concerned with the family relationship as expressed in the *māhātmya*s, which is the fraternal bond between the diverse Viṣṇus.

20 There are more brothers to Yathoktakārī. Malini Ambach identified Uttira Raṅkanātar in Paḷḷikōṇṭā and Raṅkanātar in Tiruppāṛkaṭal as immediate predecessors to Yathoktakārī, mentioned in the Sanskrit texts. Both temples are situated 95 km (Paḷḷikōṇṭā) and 33km (Tiruppāṛkaṭal) west of Kanchipuram at the shores of the Palar river. These two predecessors to Yathoktakārī are typically not mentioned in Kanchipuram's Viṣṇu temples, whereas the people at the temples in Paḷḷikōṇṭā and Tiruppāṛkaṭal refer to Yathoktakārī. This reconfirms the clear focus on Kanchipuram as the centre.

21 For details, see Buchholz 2022.

in Kanchipuram. The first of the two spatial sections (KM(V) ch. 2–18) deals with what I refer to as Viṣṇu Kanchi.[22]

Here the focus is on the myth of Brahmā's royal horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*; KM(V) chapters 9 ff.). In short: Brahmā created the world on the command of Viṣṇu, and afterwards wished to see Viṣṇu in his form as Varadarāja. He prepared first one, then 100 *aśvamedha* sacrifices on the shores of the river Yamunā. Moreover, he performed 100 years of ascetic practices (*tapas*). A voice from the sky told him that he needed to perform 1000 *aśvamedha*s, or alternatively one *aśvamedha* in a place called Satyavratakṣetra. In KM(V)'s chapter 10, Brahmā arrived in Satyavratakṣetra, met Narasiṃha, climbed on a hill and prepared for the sacrifice. He asked the divine architect Viśvakarman to create the city (KM(V) 10.12–19) and started the sacrifice. However, Brahmā was joined by his wife Sāvitrī, not Vāṇī (Sarasvatī), who refused to come for the sacrifice. The Asuras competed with Brahmā, wishing to perform a similarly splendid sacrifice. When sent away, they planned to burn down Kanchi. Brahmā asked Viṣṇu for protection and Viṣṇu destroyed the army of the Asuras as Śṛṅgadhārin. KM(V)'s chapter 12 describes how the demons were chased by Narasiṃha and fled to the North,[23] while Brahmā continued his sacrifice. The demons asked Śiva in Śrīśaila for help and the demon Śambara created the illusion of absolute darkness in Satyavratakṣetra. Again, Brahmā asked Viṣṇu for help; Viṣṇu then appeared as the burning sun and illuminated the world as **Dīpaprakāśa**. In chapter 13 the eight-footed Śarabha approached Satyavratakṣetra to kill Narasiṃha. Now Viṣṇu turned into an eight-armed deity (**Aṣṭabhuja**), standing on Garuḍa's shoulder, manifesting with eight weapons in his eight hands. Śarabha was turned around and acted now as the protector of the sacrifice. Then follows the Gajendramokṣa story, in which an elephant was seized by a crocodile while worshipping Aṣṭabhuja. The crocodile was killed by Aṣṭabhuja. KM(V)'s chapter 14 deals with the final attempt of the Asuras to destroy the sacrifice.[24] They informed Sarasvatī that Sāvitrī had taken her place as the sacrificer's wife. Here we also get to know why Sarasvatī did not join her husband: Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī had asked Brahmā who of the two was the best. Brahmā chose Lakṣmī, thus infuriating his wife Sarasvatī. KM(V's) chapter 15 describes how Sarasvatī rushed angrily as a river towards Satyavratakṣetra,

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22   Porcher subdivides the events described in the KM(V) into four (with each an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu as main protagonist), or, alternatively two (centring around two 'cavities' in Kanchi, Narasiṃha's cave at the foot of Hastigiri and Kāmakoṣṭha) sections (Porcher 1985: 25).

23   These events are also dealt with in KM(V) chapter 3.

24   The diverse textual sources relating to Yathoktakārī will be published, translated and analysed in detail in a forthcoming volume by the team of the "Hindu Temple Legends in South India" project (see https://www.hadw-bw.de/forschung/forschungsstelle/hinduistische-tempellegenden-suedindien/personen; date of last access: 16.4.2025).

aiming to drown the sacrifice. Again, Brahmā asked Viṣṇu for help. When Viṣṇu first tried to stop her, the river disappeared underground and reappeared to the East of Viṣṇu.[25] Viṣṇu attempted to stop Sarasvatī again, but she again was able to avoid him.[26] Now Sarasvatī realized that she too wanted to see Viṣṇu and decided to just frighten the sacrificial priests, and to worship Viṣṇu when he appeared. Viṣṇu manifested, Sarasvatī appeared as a woman and prayed to Viṣṇu, who is **Yathoktakārī**. Chapter 16 narrates how Sarasvatī joined Brahmā for the sacrifice, and how Viṣṇu appeared as **Varadarāja** from the sacrificial fire.[27]

In this text, Viṣṇu appears repeatedly to save Brahmā's sacrifice. In the end, he appears as Varadarāja. Accordingly, today, the four Viṣṇus Dīpaprakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja, Yathoktakārī, and Varadarāja are considered to be brothers.[28] The longest and most detailed parts of the narrative focus on Yathoktakārī and especially Varadarāja.

Two Viṣṇus in the *Hastigirimāhātmya*

These latter two temples are the sole focus of the first part of another Sanskrit Vaiṣṇava *sthalapurāṇa*, namely the *Hastigirimāhātmya* (HM). This Sanskrit text with Maṇipravāḷa commentary relates the story of Varadarāja in its first eight of total eighteen chapters.[29] The eight chapters seem to be a reformulated version of the major plots covered by the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*.[30] Here, too, Brahmā

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25 This place is identified as Uttira Raṅkanātar in Paḷḷikōṇṭā.

26 This place is identified as Raṅkanātar in Tiruppāṟkaṭal.

27 In KM(V)'s chapter 17 Brahmā excitedly praised Varadarāja, and asked him to stay in Kanchipuram. Varadarāja responded that he would stay in an image (*pratimā*), which Brahmā should make. Viśvakarman produced the *pratimā*, and Brahmā together with Sarasvatī worshiped this *mūrti*.

28 Even though this Śṛṅgadhārin is rather prominent in the narrative, to my knowledge Śṛṅgadhārin is not identified with a specific Viṣṇu temple today. Narasiṃha is identified with Aḻakiya Ciṅka, who today, however, is only marginally part of the oral narrative. On the two further brothers in Paḷḷikōṇṭā and Tiruppāṟkaṭal, see above, fn. 20.

29 On editions of the HM, see Buchholz 2022, and Anandakichenin forthcoming ('Yathoktakārī volume'). See also Srinivasan 2004.

30 Both the KM(V) and HM claim to be part of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*, but neither of them is given in any published version of the *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa*. In contrast to the KM(V), the HM text is framed as a conversation between Bhṛgu and Nārada, whereas in the KM(V) the *hastigiri* sections are framed as a conversation between Ambarīṣa and Nārada. The exact relationship between the HM and the KM(V) remains to be explored in detail.

performed a horse sacrifice in Satyavrataksetra (ch. 1). When he asked Sarasvatī to join him she declined, because Brahmā had preferred Lakṣmī to her. In addition, he had not been willing to acknowledge Sarasvatī's superiority over Gaṅgā. Brahmā continued the sacrifice without Sarasvatī (ch. 2). When Sāvitrī joined Brahmā, the Asuras informed Sarasvatī, and she rushed towards the sacrifice as a river (ch. 3). Brahmā appealed to Viṣṇu who stopped Sarasvatī in the form of a dam. The goddess paid respect to Viṣṇu and flew as seven rivers into the ocean (ch. 4). Brahmā pacified her, and the sages were able to convince her to join the sacrifice (ch. 5 and 6). Now Varadarāja appeared from the sacrificial fire and granted Brahmā his sight (ch. 7 and 8).[31] In this text, only Yathoktakārī is mentioned as predecessor to Varadarāja, whereas Dīpaprakāśa and Aṣṭabhuja do not appear at all.

The four Viṣṇus in the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa*

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is a Sanskrit *sthalapurāṇa* of Kanchipuram that focuses on the goddess Kāmākṣī.[32] The text is very popular in Kanchipuram, and many people know stories that are given in it better than the corresponding narratives in the other two local *māhātmya*s. This popularity is most likely based on the text's translation into Tamil as *Kāmākṣīlīlāpirapāvam*, first published in 1906 (Pōtarattiṇākaram and Ālālacuntaram Piḷḷai 2000). This prose Tamil rendering follows the content of the Sanskrit text closely.

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31 The text of the *Hastigirimāhātmya* is read out aloud in front of the god Varadarāja during the Pallavotsava festival at the Varadarāja temple by one member of one branch of the Tātācārya families. The importance of this seven-day-long festival for this temple is also emphasized by the fact that Pallavotsava is one of the only four annual festivals that require the wearing of a *rakṣabandha* by the main priest. During this festival, the 'appearance' of Varadarāja is also ritually enacted on every evening of the seven-day long festival. The third of the seven days carries special importance, as then the chapter is read in which Varadarāja's emergence from Brahmā's sacrifical fire is described, the Avatārakathā. For details, see Hüsken forthcoming (Yathoktakārī volume).

32 The text claims to be part of the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, though it is not part of any of the printed editions of this text. This attribution emphasizes the Śākta character of the text, since the *Devīmāhātmya* is also part of this Purāṇa and like the *Devīmāhātmya*, the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is presented as a conversation between Mārkaṇḍeya and Suratha (see Moßner 2008). Ambach (forthcoming) shows that in its narratives, the KV closely follows both, the KM(V) and the KM(Ś), and therefore the 'Śākta' character is most evident in those sections that deal with Kāmākṣī's myths and her ritual tradition, and in the fact that it is claimed there that Viṣṇu and Śiva in Kanchipuram are nothing but manifestations of the goddess (KV 1.122–24, 14.127–32ab).

The text encompasses 1,360 *śloka*s in 14 chapters of very different lengths. The first chapter of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* deals with the delineation of the *kāñcīkṣetra*, in which the goddess manifested as Devī, but also as Śiva and Viṣṇu. Chapters 2–5 deal with what today is known as Viṣṇu Kanchi and with the Viṣṇu temples therein, especially with the **Varadarāja** temple and its associated temples, shrines and *tīrtha*s (sacred water bodies).

KV's chapter 2 is framed as dedicated to **Varadarāja**, whose realm is called *harikṣetra*. Some deities are defined through their contribution to Brahmā's horse sacrifice, and several Viṣṇu temples are mentioned along with short references to their legends. Yathoktakārī appears in chapter 2 as 'Digambara' (air-clad, i.e. naked), who 'destroyed Vāṇī's pride' in a reclining form. Further, we read of Guhāsiṃha Janārdana (Yoganarasiṃha) in the "heart" of Mahendra (Indra)[33]; of Viṣṇu **Aṣṭabhuja** who threw Māyākāli on the ground and sat on her head; of Siṃhajanārdana who killed a Kāpālika and swallowed his weapons is mentioned; and of **Dīpādhāra** Janārdana (Dīpaprakāśa) who destroyed the fire of Māyā and transformed it into a lamp he held. Then we read of Hari Vaikuṇṭhanilaya who granted king Tuṇḍira the sight (*darśana*) of Vaikuṇṭha; and of Vidrumābha Janārdana who became furious because he drank blood from the stomach of the Daityas.[34] In this chapter, the Viṣṇus that are today identified as brothers are mentioned, though not in the sequence that is followed later in the same text, in KV's chapter 4. KV's chapter 3 is dedicated to "the power of *hastiśaila*" and explains that the "hill" previously was an elephant.[35] Chapter 4 talks of Varadarāja[36] who emerged from Brahmā's sacrifice. Here the text explains Sarasvatī's and Brahmā's quarrel in a way similar to the KM(V): Like Indra before him, Brahmā took Lakṣmī's side in the dispute between Sarasvatī and Lakṣmī. Then, however, the KV narrative takes a different turn: Sarasvatī, infuriated, took Brahmā's *sṛṣṭidaṇḍa* (stick of creation) and Brahmā lost his ability to create. He practiced asceticism in the Himalayas and asked Viṣṇu for a *sṛṣṭidaṇḍa*. Viṣṇu advised Brahmā to go to the

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33 This refers to the narrative of the 'elephant-hill' (*hastigiri*), as the elephant form Indra shed in Kanchipuram as given in KM(V), chapter 31 (see Hüsken 2022).

34 For details, see Malini Ambach in her contribution to the forthcoming volume on Yathoktakārī. The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* also gives a number of details of deities, shrines, *tīrtha*s, etc. within the Varadarāja temple. After the brief enumeration of a few further landmarks in the vicinity of the temple, the chapter ends with the story of Brahmin Gargin, exemplifying the purifying effect of *kāñcīkṣetra*.

35 See Hüsken 2022.

36 KV 4.3–9. Here, he is described as having Śrī and Bhū at his side, which is not the case with the *mūrti* in the *garbhagṛha*. Might it be that the original wooden *mūrti* had his two consorts with him? This would also explain the specific form of the *vimāna*, which is normally of a lying Viṣṇu, or a *mūrti* along with his consorts (Crispin Branfoot, personal conversation).

earth and perform 100 *aśvamedha*s, which equals one *aśvamedha* performed in Kanchipuram on the elephant mountain (*hastigiri*). Then he, Viṣṇu, would emerge from the sacrificial fire and would give the *sṛṣṭidaṇḍa* to Brahmā. Brahmā moved on to Kanchipuram and prepared the sacrifice. Then follows a brief summary of Sarasvatī's first three attempts to disturb the sacrifice. First she created a fire in Kanchipuram. When the fire was about to destroy the sacrifice, Viṣṇu took the fire with his hands and carried it like a lamp on his fingertips (**Dīpaprakāśa**). Next, Viṣṇu as a lion ate Kāpālika, drank the blood of the Daityas and took on a coral colour. As **Aṣṭabhuja** he killed Kālikā, threw her on the ground and sat on her head. Ten verses are then dedicated to **Yathoktakārī's** story: Sarasvatī took the form of a river, united with Payoṣṇī (Palar)[37] and separated again from her. Naked, Viṣṇu lay down in her way in *harikṣetra*. Bashfully avoiding the sight of the naked Viṣṇu, Sarasvatī vanished into the ground and Brahmā continued his sacrifice. **Varadarāja** appeared from the sacrificial fire and handed over the *sṛṣṭidaṇḍa* to Brahmā. Brahmā erected a divine *vimāna* (palace) on the *hastigiri* as Viṣṇu's abode, and Viśvakarman built a staircase with twenty-five steps leading up to the hill. Brahmā elevated Viṣṇu within the *vimāna* and worshiped him. Chapter 5 deals with the restitution of Sarasvatī's honor, after she has been shamed by the naked Viṣṇu and had been forced to disappear into the ground. She is told that Brahmā awaits her at the confluence with Prayoṣṇī.

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* depicts the background of Brahmā *aśvamedha* as his desire to receive back his 'stick of creation.' In the narrative of Sarasvatī's attempts to destroy the sacrifice, the sequence of the four Viṣṇus reflects the KM(V)'s sequence, yet with slightly different narratives. These aspects match with the KM(V) on the one hand (sequence of the four Viṣṇu brothers), and with KM(Ś) on the other (Brahmā's motivation), as we shall now see.

The four Viṣṇus in the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*

With 4,700 verses in fifty chapters, the Śaiva version KM(Ś) is the longest among the Sanskrit *Kāñcīmāhātmya*s. While the text focuses on the Śiva temples in and around Kanchipuram,[38] the Viṣṇu temples relevant to this chapter are also

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37   Chapter 5 of the *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* starts with the praise of the river Vegavatī, which united and separated from the river Pāyoṣṇī (Palar) twice. The chapter also deals with the expiatory power of a bath in the Vegavatī (Sarasvatī as a river) and the positive effects of having the auspicious sight (*darśana*) of Varadarāja.

38   The KM(Ś) is available in two printed editions. Civañāṇa Muṇivar's first book of the *Kāñcippurāṇam* is based in the KM(Ś). For details, see Buchholz 2022: 15 f. and 24 ff.

mentioned there, albeit always in the context of a narrative focusing on a Śiva temple. Varadarāja's narrative is given in KM(Ś)'s chapter 5, in close connection with Puṇyakoṭīśvara and as a variation on the well-known Gajendramokṣa motive, but disconnected from the other three forms of Viṣṇu, which are mentioned as Varadarāja's predecessors in KM(V). Similar to the KV, Viṣṇu asked Śiva to bestow on him the ability to create, similar to Brahmā's. Śiva ordered Viṣṇu to worship his *liṅga* in Kanchi with lotus flowers. An elephant helped Viṣṇu to gather the flowers, but the elephant was then seized by a crocodile. The elephant called out for Viṣṇu's help and Viṣṇu killed the crocodile. Both continued to worship Śiva, who granted Viṣṇu several boons, and gave him the name **Varadarāja**. Viṣṇu wished that the mountain should be called—after the elephant—*hastigiri*, that Śiva should stay in the Puṇyakoṭīśvara *liṅga* (for this temple's location, see Map. 3), and be venerated by Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī and all other gods. Viṣṇu himself wished to reside in the Puṇyakoṭivimāna on the *hastigiri* hill. Śiva granted him all these boons.

Chapter 7 of the KM(Ś) tells the story of **Yathoktakārī**, in which Brahmā's sacrifice plays major role (cf. Fig. 3). Brahmā wanted to have the same creative faculties as Viṣṇu and asked Śiva to grant him this boon. Śiva ordered him to go to Kanchipuram. Brahmā (like Viṣṇu before him) erected a *liṅga* to the East of Puṇyakoṭīśvara, created the pond named *brahmātīrtha*, worshiped Śiva and started a Soma sacrifice with his wives Sāvitrī and Gāyatrī. The location of these events

Fig. 3   Woodcut in a 1900 print of the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, a Tamil re-composition of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* by Civañāṉa Muṉivar. Here Śiva instructs Viṣṇu to save Brahmā's sacrifice from Sarasvatī as river.

is the contemporary temple Brahmapurīśvara (for this temple's location, see Map. 3). Sarasvatī heard of Brahmā's plan, and angrily decided to destroy the sacrifice by becoming a roaring river. Brahmā asked Śiva for help and Brahmā sent Viṣṇu as Varadarāja to protect the sacrifice. Viṣṇu lay down in Sarasvatī's path. She avoided him twice,[39] and after having been blocked the third time by Viṣṇu, she entered the ocean. Viṣṇu was named Yathoktakārī by Śiva, and Sarasvatī received the name Vegavatī.

Only then **Dīpaprakāśa** is briefly mentioned: When Sarasvatī as a river reached Kanchipuram, it was dark, but Viṣṇu "became like the light of a lamp." He therefore receives the name Dīpaprakāśa. Brahmā unites again with Sarasvatī, and they finish the sacrifice together. **Aṣṭabhuja** is mentioned at the beginning of the 12th chapter, with reference to KM(Ś)'s chapter 5, in which Viṣṇu killed the crocodile. In the first seven verses the eight demon brothers of the crocodile want to kill Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu worships Śiva and receives eight arms and weapons from him.[40] With these he kills the eight demons and becomes Aṣṭabhuja. Dīpaprakāśa is again briefly mentioned after this story, this time in the context of the explanation of Ādīpiteśvara, a Śiva temple which is in the vicinity of the Dīpaprakāśa temple (for this temple's location, see Map. 3).

Only in the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* are the four Viṣṇu temples presented as part of a continuous development, culminating in the appearance of Varadarāja,
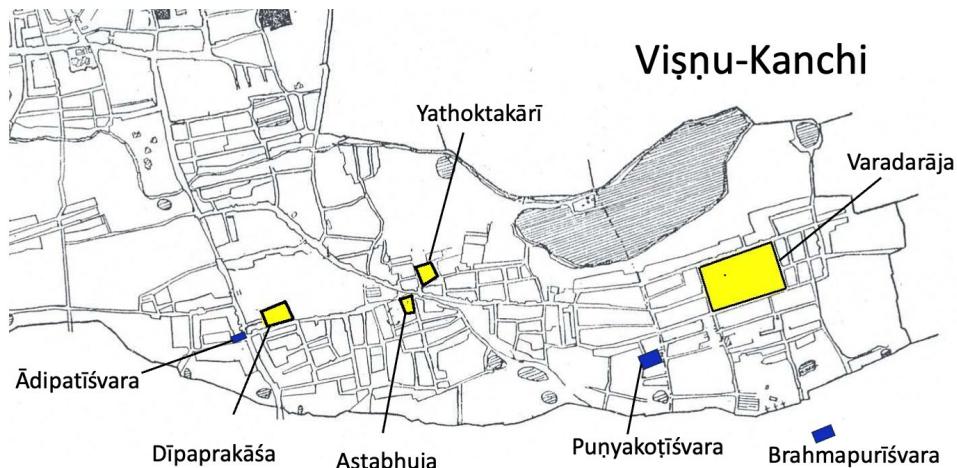
Map 3 Śiva temples central to the narratives of the four Viṣṇu temples in the KM(Ś). © Ute Hüsken, based on the map in Porcher 1985: 27.

39 This refers to Paḷḷikōṇṭā and Tiruppāṟkaṭal, see above, fn. 20.
40 Aṣṭabhuja is again briefly referred to in KM(Ś) 22.17–19b as the one who killed the brothers of the crocodile demon.

which is consistently represented as the desired outcome of Brahmā's (Vedic) horse sacrifice. This is at the same time the background to the contemporary perception of these four Viṣṇus as 'brothers', among whom Varadarāja is most important and powerful.

The *Kāmākṣīvilāsa* is familiar with this interpretation and reproduces it, albeit with significant differences. Thus, similar to the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya*'s interpretation, the background to Brahmā's sacrifice is not his desire to see Varadarāja, but to regain his power to create, which his estranged wife Sarasvatī had taken away from him. When Sarasvatī attempts to disrupt Brahmā's sacrifice several times, Viṣṇu intervenes first as Dīpaprakāśa, then as Aṣṭabhuja, and finally as Yathoktakārī. While the sequence of Viṣṇu's interventions corresponds to the KM(V), the narratives' details are different. In the end, Viṣṇu appears on the Hastigiri and returns the *sṛṣṭidaṇḍa* to Brahmā.

The Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* is also cognizant of all four Viṣṇu temples yet narrates their stories not as a sequence of events but rather in connection with and as subordinated to Śiva temples (see Map. 3). Yathoktakārī appears before Dīpaprakāśa, and Aṣṭabhuja appears after Varadarāja. The events unfold in connection with Viṣṇu's and Brahmā's wish to receive from Śiva the ability to create. Thus, Varadarāja establishes and worships Puṇyakoṭīśvara, and is also ordered by Śiva to fight eight demons as Aṣṭabhuja. Yathoktakārī is the result of Śiva's instruction to Viṣṇu to save Brahmā's sacrifice at the Brahmapurīśvara temple, and Dīpaprakāśa's mention in connection with the sacrifice is closely connected to the Ādipatīśvara temple.

Ritual expressions of the fraternal relationship

While we do not know many details of the ritual interactions between the four Viṣṇu temples in the remote past,[41] ritual activity and especially the movement of the gods during processions can tell us a lot about their contemporary mutual relationship. Here, we need to pay close attention to the actual route the *mūrti*s take, to the direction and speed of movement, as well as to the people who accompany the deity, where they walk, and what they recite when accompanying the deity. All these issues are of prime importance and signal (perceived or aspired) relative status and worth within the Vaiṣṇava communities.

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41 There are occasional inscriptions that mention, for example, procession routes (Raman 1975: 3). However, the corpus of inscriptions pertaining to the four Viṣṇu temples still awaits systematic scrutinization in this regard.

Notwithstanding the fact that only one of three Sanskrit *māhātmya*s depicts the first three Viṣṇus as emerging from Viṣṇu's continued efforts to save Brahmā's sacrifice, the relationship of these first three (Dīpaprakāsa, Aṣṭabhuja, Yathoktakārī) to the fourth, Varadarāja, is in fact publicly enacted and negotiated during the three temple's processions, when the *utsavamūrti*s leave their temples and stride through town. Importantly, all three "older brothers" of Varadarāja in Kanchipuram pay a visit or multiple visits to their youngest brother during their annual major temple festivals (*brahmotsava*, or *mahotsava*), reversing the hierarchy of their family relationship: In general, it would be the younger family member who would have to visit and thus pay respect to older family members. Not so in the case of Dīpaprakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja and Yathoktakārī. When I started my research in Kanchipuram in the early 2000s, all respondents unanimously confirmed that the three older brothers would visit Varadarāja, sometimes they would even be taken in *pradakṣiṇa* around the Varadarāja temple's Mada streets.[42] This is an even stronger acknowledgement of the hierarchically higher status of Varadarāja, as the venerated object/person is circumambulated by the hierarchically lower person as a sign of respect.

However, procession routes tend to change, often expressing changing (power) relationships. Here, the relationship of two sects of Vaiṣṇavas in town is of great importance: the Vaṭakalai and the Teṅkalai. From about the mid-thirteenth century, two distinct schools of thought are identifiable within the Vaiṣṇava tradition, precursors to the "Northern" Vaṭakalai and the "Southern" Teṅkalai branches of the tradition respectively.[43] The subdivision is traced back to a doctrinal split within the philosophical school of Viśiṣṭādvaita. Although both groups recognize

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42 The Mada streets are those streets that lead around the temple. In 2006 I witnessed this personally and was informed that Aṣṭabhuja twice a year circumambulates Varadarāja along the Mada streets, namely on his (Aṣṭabhuja's) birth *nakṣatra* and on the last day of his *brahmotsava*. At that time, he comes in a palanquin named *puṣpapallakku*. It should be mentioned, however, that in 2023, when I wanted to reconfirm this, two people closely associated with the Varadarāja temple independently from each other claimed that Aṣṭabhuja only stood in front of Varadarāja's temple entrance but had never gone along the Mada streets. Dīpaprakāśa visits Varadarāja on each single day of his *brahmotsava*, and stays for quite some time in front of the Varadarāja temple's *gopuram*. In 2006, also Yathoktakārī typically would circumambulate Varadarāja's temple twice a year, on Yathoktakārī's birth *nakṣatra* and during his Ōrikkai procession, when he is carried on his Śeṣavāhana to the river Palar (for details, see Murali forthcoming, 'Yathoktakārī volume'). The latter circumambulation took place during Yathoktakārī's Ōrikkai procession in 2024.
43 The Teṅkalais' traditional 'intellectual centre' is Srirangam, the Vaṭakalais' centre is considered to be Kanchipuram. The Vaṭakalai tradition is generally viewed as emphasizing the 'Northern' language Sanskrit as the language of transmission of their sacred texts, whereas the Teṅkalais are mainly linked with the 'Southern' language Tamiḻ.
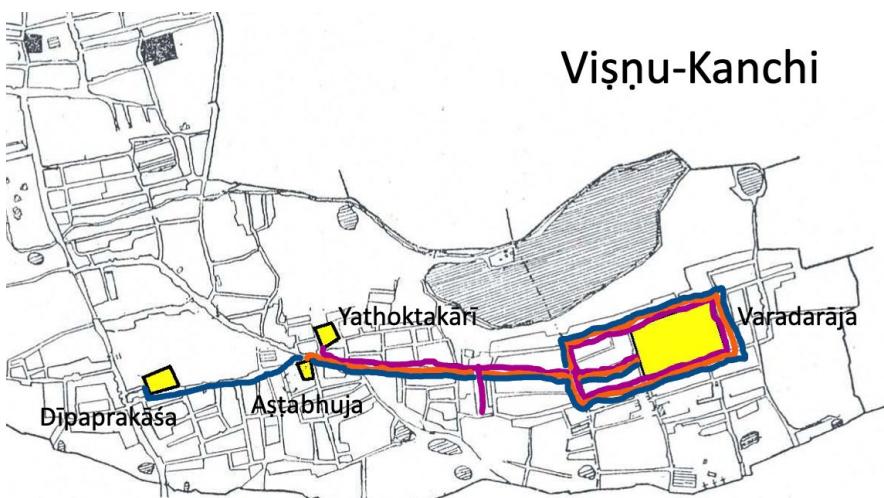
Map 4 Procession routes of Dīparakāśa, Aṣṭabhuja, and Yathoktakārī as witnessed by Ute Hüsken and as described in interviews in 2003 and 2006. © Ute Hüsken, based on the map in Porcher 1985: 27

Rāmānuja (trad. dates 1017–1137 CE) as their religious teacher, the lists of his successors as spiritual and religious leaders differ. While the Teṅkalais consider Māṇavāḷamāmuni (1370–1443 CE) as the spiritual successor to Rāmānuja, and also as the Teṅkalais' founder, this position is attributed to Vedānta Deśika (trad. dates 1269–1369 CE) by the Vaṭakalais.[44] The differences between both groups are of doctrinal and ritual nature.[45] In short, the Vaṭakalai school emphasizes the necessity of self-effort through the meditative and ritual practices of *bhaktiyoga*, whereas the Teṅkalai group argues against the ultimate efficacy of self-effort on the part of the devotee (MacCann 2023: 309). However, although most of the ritual differences are traditionally traced back to doctrinal differences, the actual conflicts between the two groups pertain to ritual differences, to hereditary rights, and by implication, to power and authority in the temples (see Hüsken 2007, Subramanian 1996: 250). A Tamil Viṣṇu temple today is governed either by the Vaṭakalais or by the Teṅkalais. Among the four Viṣṇu temples in question, the Aṣṭabhuja and the Yathoktakārī temples are run by the Teṅkalai group, whereas

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44 The two teacher-pupil lines of succession were established only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, therefore the perception of the two teachers as the 'founders' of the two strands is a restrospective one (Siauve 1978: 23 f.).

45 On the doctrinal differences, see Colas 1995: 121 f. For a detailed description and analysis of the traditional number of eighteen differences, see Doraiswamy 1983 and Siauve 1978.

the Dīpaprakāśa and the Varadarāja temples are run by the Vaṭakalais. However, the authenticity of the Varadarāja temple's Vaṭakalai affiliation has been disputed for a long time.[46] Moreover, the right to perform certain services to the god Varadarāja form the background of the continuing disputes between the members of both groups. Both the Teṉkalais and the Vaṭakalais repeatedly took their cases to court. In 1888 it was confirmed that the Teṉkalais alone hold the hereditary right to lead the recitation of the Tamiḻ hymns. This issue was taken to court again in the beginning of the twentieth century (judgement from 1915). At that time the Teṉkalais wanted to make sure that the Vaṭakalais could join the Teṉkalai congregation, but could not form a separate congregation (*goṣṭi*). The Vaṭakalais, however, wanted to form a separate congregation behind the deity during processions. In the early 2000s, when I started visiting the Varadarāja temple on a regular basis, the Teṉkalais would typically stand and walk in front of the deity during processions outside of the temple building, and recite the *Tiviyapirapantam*s. The Vaṭakalai congregation would walk behind the deity, reciting Vedic hymns.

Yathoktakārī and Varadarāja: Teṉkalai-Vaṭakalai encounters

The conflict over ritual rights evidently never subsided and flared up again in the early 2020s. Shortly after the severe Covid19 restrictions were lifted, the Vaṭakalais first successfully challenged the Teṉkalais' right to lead the recitation of the Tamiḻ hymns. This led to several rather violent interactions between the Vaṭakalai and the Teṉkalai congregations. The Vaṭakalais then successfully had a stay order implemented, according to which the Teṉkalais were forbidden to recite as a group within the Varadarāja temple, until the court case was settled.

In the longer run, this turn of events prompted the local Teṉkalai community to focus their ritual engagement on the most prominent among the Teṉkalai temples in town, the Yathoktakārī temple. Their adverse stance towards those who have a say in the Varadarāja temple now seems even to translate into adversity between the two deities. While, as we have seen, Yathoktakārī in the early 2000s circumambulated his younger brother Varadarāja on at least two occasions

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46 This section on the history of the Teṉkalai/Vaṭakalai dispute within the Varadarāja temple is an abbreviation of several paragraphs given in Hüsken 2007: 272 f., based mainly on personal experience, interviews by Ute Hüsken with diverse stakeholders, and on Ramaswamy (2003: part 3).
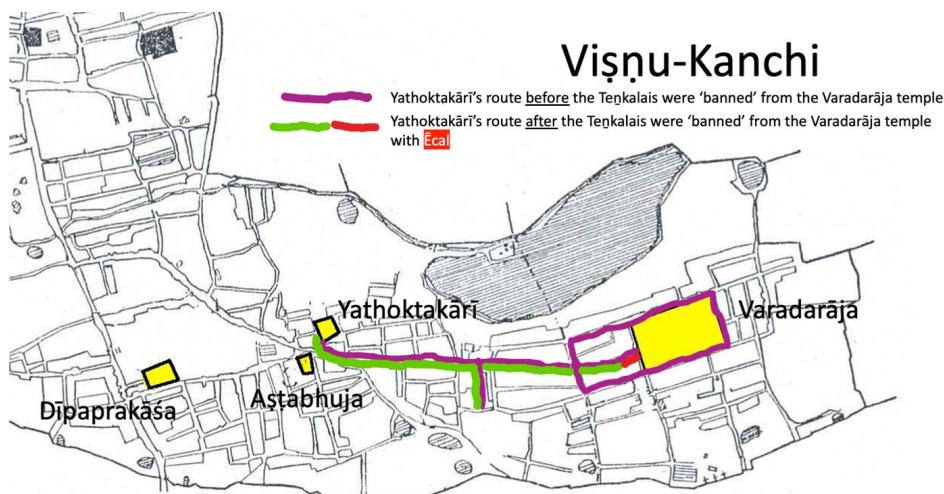
Map 5   Yathoktakārī's processional route before and after the stay order implemented in the Varadarāja temple, prohibiting the Teṉkalais from reciting the *Tivviyappirapantam*s as a congregation in front of the deity. © Ute Hüsken, based on the map in Porcher 1985: 27.

during his annual festival schedule, he now changed his procession route, and the mode of his approach to the Varadarāja temple.

Instead of circumambulating the Varadarāja temple, Yathoktakārī visits the Varadarāja temple, but on one occasion also performs a provocative 'ritual insult' (*ēcal*). During the elephant and horse *vāhana*s (on the 6th and the 8th day, during the evening processions), he approaches the temple door of the Varadarāja temple, turns his back to the temple's entrance and to its presiding deity, Varadarāja, and three times rushes back and forth (see Map. 5).

Until recently, this "ritual insult" (*ēcal*) was an exclusive feature of Varadarāja's visits to the major Śiva temple in town, Ekāmranātha, and of the visit of Śiva's sons, Gaṇeśa and Murukaṉ, to Varadarāja's temple once a year (for details, see Schier 2021). *Ēcal* is characterized by tension and rivalry: "turning one's back is considered a sign of lack of respect and reverence. Repeating the gesture three times is a clear provocation," explains Schier (p. 7). While to me this change in the processions seems to be a significant alteration, giving expression to a changing relationship between the congregations of the two deities, my conversation partners—at least in 2023—did not take this change overly seriously.[47] It remains to be seen whether this change from respect to provocation has come to stay.

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47   I was repeatedly told that the management of the Yathoktakārī temple (a private temple, run by a board of trustees) is "of their own mind."

Dīpaprakāśa and Varadarāja: A complex Vaikhānasa-Pāñcarātra connection

Mutual visits of the diverse Viṣṇus can also be complicated if the two temples do not follow the same ritual tradition. In Tamil Nadu,[48] the Brahmin priests (*arcaka*) in Vaiṣṇava temples belong to one of two traditions: the Vaikhānasa or the Pāñcarātra. The two traditions are mutually exclusive. A temple follows either the Pāñcarātra or the Vaikhānasa mode of worship, but never both. Moreover, the two priestly groups usually do not intermarry. While the rituals performed are similar, they are not identical and young Vaikhānasa and Pāñcarātra priests receive separate training in the learning institutions (*pāṭhaśālā*). The Vaikhānasas and the Pāñcarātrins follow different sets of canonical texts in Sanskrit (*saṃhitā/āgama*),[49] prescribing ritual procedures within the temples. The oldest of these texts date back to the eighth or ninth century CE.[50] While for the average temple visitor it might never have been of great relevance whether a temple follows one or the other tradition, the distinction between the two groups is emphasized by the groups themselves, since Pāñcarātrins and Vaikhānasas for centuries vied for prominence and resources in diverse Viṣṇu temples. In the *saṃhitā* texts, access to membership in the respective group is the main marker of identity: While one becomes a Pāñcarātrin through a series of initiations, one can be Vaikhānasa only by birth (Hüsken 2009). The affiliation of temples to either Vaikhānasa or Pāñcarātra determines the affiliation of their priests. According to the ritual texts of both traditions, this affiliation is unchangeable. Yet we know that several temples did in fact change affiliation. We are, for example, informed in the *Kōyil Oluku* (the Srirangam temple chronicle)[51] that Rāmānuja changed the affiliation of the Srirangam temple from Vaikhānasa to Pāñcarātra. This potential fluctuation is one reason for the rivalry between the two groups, which emerges in the texts. Therein a "mix of traditions" (*tantrasaṅkara*) is not tolerated[52]—and to my knowledge today such a "mix of traditions" is not practiced.

The Dīpaprakāśa temple, and along with it the adjacent Tūppul Tēcikar (= Vedānta Deśika) shrine, are served by Vaikhānasa priests, whereas the Varadarāja temple follows the Pāñcarātra tradition. Relevant here are the mutual *visits* of Tūppul Tēcikar and Varadarāja, which are very prominent events for the (Vaṭakalai)

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48   This holds true also for parts of Andhra Pradesh and also for some temples in Karnataka.
49   See Caudharī 1995: 406 on the use of the terms *āgama* and *saṃhitā*.
50   Sanderson 2009: 62 f. and 2001: 35. Colas (2013) adds that the extant *saṃhitā*s were likely preceded by older handbooks which are today lost.
51   See Parthasarathy 1954, Rao 1961, and Subrahmanya Aiyar 1911.
52   See, for example, *Pādmasaṃhitā caryāpāda* 19.122–29, *Viṣvakseṇasaṃhitā* 10.143–46; 39.270–74, 284–85, 304–6, 324–27, *Sāttvatasaṃhitā* 15.283–90.

Vaiṣṇava communities affiliated to both temples, for the Vaiṣṇava *ācārya* Vedānta Deśika in multiple ways constitutes a close connecting link between Dīpaprakāśa and Varadarāja: As a major Vaṭakalai *ācārya*, Vedānta Deśika is prominently worshipped in the Varadarāja temple and his shrine is within Varadarāja's *vāhana-maṇḍapa*.[53] Each time Varadarāja's processional icon (*utsavamūrti*) leaves the temple building, Vedānta Deśika is honored. With ca. 200 such occasions annually, there is constant contact between the god and the *ācārya*. In this regard, the interaction between Varadarāja and Vedānta Deśīka differs profoundly from the interaction with any other Vaiṣṇava Āḻvār or *ācārya* enshrined in the Varadarāja temple. Background to this intimate connection is the Vaṭakalai affiliation of the temple and many of its trustees (see below), and the fact that Vedānta Deśika's birth place is in Kanchipuram (in Tūppul, adjacent to the Dīpaprakāśa temple). In addition, Varadarāja is thought of as Vedānta Deśika's favorite deity, as evidenced for example by the text *Varadarājapañcāśat* authored by him. Vedānta Deśika is—as Tūppul Tēcikar—also installed in a shrine adjacent to the Dīpaprakāśa temple, where he is served by the temple's Vaikhānasa priests. Varadarāja, in contrast, follows the Pāñcarātra ritual tradition. Here, only the Pāñcarātra priests of this temple are allowed to perform worship.[54]

This situation requires mutual accommodation on those occasions, when Tūppul Tēcikar visits the god Varadarāja *within* his temple. This is the case on the occasion of Tūppul Tēcikar's birth *nakṣatra*, which often falls in the Navarātri time. On that day, the Tēcikar-Maṅkalacāsanam (Vedānta Deśika's 'auspicious felicitations' of Varadarāja) is celebrated in the Varadarāja temple, in parallel to the Navarātri rituals. For this festival, Tūppul Tēcikar is placed in one of Varadarāja's palanquins and is carried through town to the Varadarāja temple, accompanied by the Vaikhānasa priests of the Dīpaprakāśa temple. However, when the palanquin with Tūppul Tēcikar's *mūrti* reaches the entrance *gopuram* of the Varadarāja temple and is taken inside the temple compound, the Vaikhānasa priests hand over the palanquin to the Pāñcarātra priest of the Varadarāja temple (see Fig. 4, see Map. 6).[55]

Tūppul Tēcikar is now served by the Pāñcarātra priests of the Varadarāja temple, while the Vaikhānasa priests from the Dīpaprakāśa temple remain at the temple's entrance. From here, Tūppul Tēcikar starts an extended visit to the diverse shrines within the Varadarāja temple, while Vedānta Deśika's compositions

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53 Vedānta Deśika's *mūrti* shares the shrine with Kanyakoṭikumāratātādeśika and his wife Śrī Ammaṇkār. Moreover, a metal *utsavamūrti* of Hayagrīva is worshipped in this shrine.

54 Among the four brothers only Dīpaprakāśa is a Vaikhānasa temple, the other three are Pāñcarātra temples.

55 This is not the case when Dīpaprakāśa comes to Varadarāja's temple door during Dīpaprakāśa's "great festival", as the deity does not enter Varadarāja's temple compound.

Fig. 4   Handing over of the pallanquin with Tūppul Tēcikar from Dīpaprakāśa's Vaikhānasa priests to Varadarāja's Pāñcarātra priests. © Ute Hüsken, 9.10.2008.
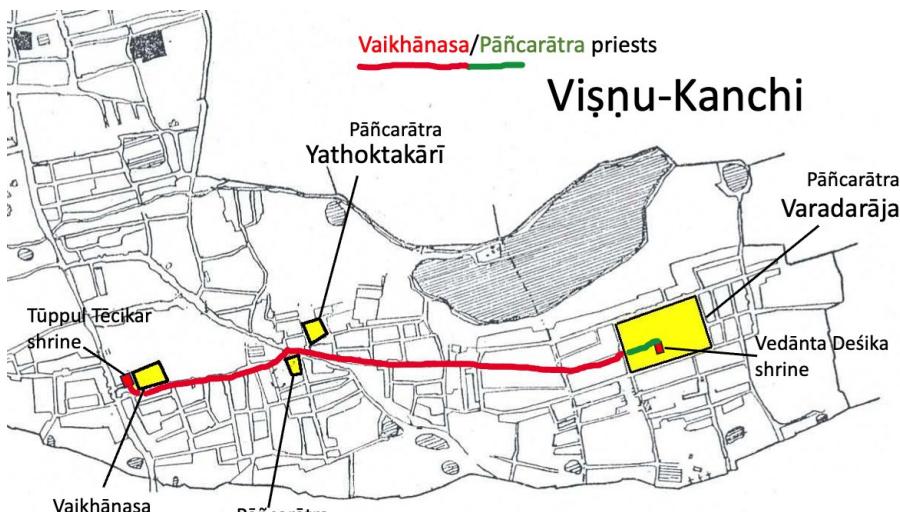
Map 6   Procession route of Tūppul Tēcikar when he visits Varadarāja once a year. © Ute Hüsken, based on the map in Porcher 1985: 27.

are chanted. He only returns to his own shrine in Tūppul late at night, again attended by Dīpaprakāśa's Vaikhānasa priests.[56] There is, however, a slight imbalance in treatment, as one can observe when Varadarāja once a year enters the compound of the Vaikhānasa Dīpaprakāśa temple: During Mohinī Avatāra (the 5th day of Varadarāja's *brahmotsava* festival) Varadarāja circumambulates the Dīpaprakāśa temple building within the temple walls, yet without entering the temple building. On that occasion, no change of priests takes place.[57] I suspect that this difference in treatment expresses the perceived higher status of the Varadarāja *arcaka*s compared to those of Dīpaprakāśa and Tūppul Tēcikar.

Dīpaprakāśa and Varadarāja: A close Vaṭakalai connection

Even though Dīpaprakāśa among the three 'brothers' is the furthest away from Varadarāja, during his *brahmotsava* festival he makes his way to the Varadarāja temple daily. He is very welcome there, as the two Viṣṇus share their Vaṭakalai affiliation:[58] Both temples have been dominated by the Vaṭakalai tradition (as trustees) for several centuries, and most, if not all, Vaṭakalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas affiliated with the Dīpaprakāśa temple are also intensely involved in the proceedings and have inherited ritual rights in the Varadarāja temple. This is a very important fact for an assessment of the contemporary ritual connections between the two sacred sites.

As mentioned, Vedānta Deśika, the main *ācārya* of the Vaṭakalais, was born in Tūppul, just next door to the Dīpaprakāśa temple.[59] His shrine is adjacent to the Dīpaprakāśa temple and is served by the same (Vaṭakalai) priests. Also, the trustees of the Dīpaprakāśa temple and the Tūppul Tēcikar shrine are identical. Often the rituals for Dīpaprakāśa are performed in Tūppul Tēcikar's shrine with Tūppul Tēcikar's *mūrti* as onlooker and honored guest. It seems that the Vaṭakalais in the Dīpaprakāśa temple have for quite some time enjoyed autonomy, "undisturbed" by the Teṇkalais. It even seems to me that the Vaṭakalais of the Dīpaprakāśa temple avoid contact with the Teṇkalais as much as possible: During several of his *brahmotsava* processions, Varadarāja visits Tūppul Tēcikar in his shrine—yet

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56 For details, see Varada Tatacharya 1978, and Madhavan 2007: 49–51.

57 When I witnessed this procession on 15.5.2006, I was told by two employees of the Varadarāja temple that Varadarāja shows respect to his older brother in this way.

58 The priests of both temples are also of the Vaṭakalai affiliation; the *mūrti*s and all other paraphernalia bear the corresponding sect marks, which are also painted on the temple walls.

59 Vedānta Deśika praises Dīpaprakāśa in his *Śaraṇāgatidīpikā*.
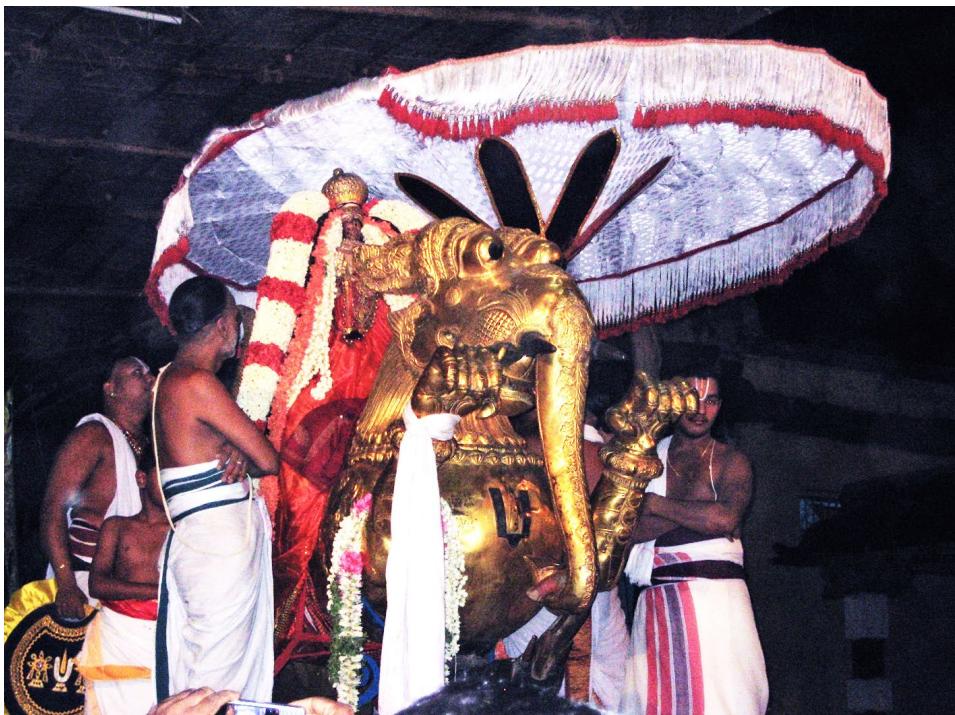
Fig. 5   Yāḻi *vāhana* bearing a Teṉkalai sect mark on the chest during Varadarāja's
brahmotsava in 2009. © Ute Hüsken 8.6.2009.

these visits are restricted to those vehicles (*vāhana*) of Varadarāja which bear
a Vaṭakalai sect mark. Significantly, the processions with the Yāḻi *vāhana*, which
bears a Teṉkalai sect mark (see Fig. 5), does not pass by the Tūppul Tēcikar shrine.[60]

The increasing tension between the two groups and the 'ban' of the Teṉkalais
from their long-standing ritual rights in the Varadarāja temple might have been
the background to an open conflict between the two groups in late 2023. On the
19th of November 2023, the Teṉkalai assembly attempted to join the Vaṭakalais'
Tiviyapirapantam recitations in front of Tūppul Tēcikar in the Sannati street, in
front of the Varadarāja temple.[61] Generally, the *goṣṭhi* (reciting congregation)
accompanying Tūppul Tēcikar to the Varadarāja temple consists of the Vaṭakalais
alone. Therefore, the Vaṭakalais objected that the Teṉkalais join their recitation,

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60   This assessment was not shared by my conversation partners—my respondents claim
      that the different (and shorter) procession route for Yāḻi is chosen to save time, and
      because Yāḻi is a very heavy *vāhana*.

61   See https://www.puthiyathalaimurai.com/tamilnadu/clash-between-two-sides-over-
      chanting-of-prabandham-commotion-in-kanchipuram; last accessed 7.1.2024.

referring to the stay order that prevented the Teṉkalais from reciting inside the Varadarāja temple—which, according to the Teṉkalais, did not ban then from reciting *outside* of the temple. Police and members of the Hindu Religious Endowment Board were called to the spot; they decided that both parties could recite, albeit under heavy police protection.

Aṣṭabhuja and Varadarāja: A surprising Vaṭakalai-Teṉkalai connection

Membership of the Teṉkalai or the Vaṭakalai school and the division of the specialists in temple ritual into the Pāñcarātrins and the Vaikhānasas are essentially separate issues. Nevertheless, the division of Vaiṣṇavas into the Vaṭakalai and the Teṉkalai also had and still has major effects on the organization of the ritual specialists in Viṣṇu temples. As mentioned, membership of one or the other group is advertised through the sect marks (*ūrdhvapuṇḍra*) worn on the forehead and on other parts of the body (see Jagadeesan 1989, chap. 5). In a temple, these marks are in most cases also applied on the god's image and the temple walls. Also the temple priests wear the sect mark and thereby show their affiliation to one of the two groups, the Teṉkalai or the Vaṭakalai. At the same time, an *arcaka* is always also either Pāñcarātrin or Vaikhānasa. While the division into the Vaṭakalais and the Teṉkalais in itself only concerns the devotees, it also often has an effect on temple ritual (Colas 1995: 123 f.). Thus, today a Vaikhānasa priest who wears a Vaṭakalai sect mark is usually not allowed to touch the image of the god Pārthasārathi in the Teṉkalai Pārthasārathi temple in Chennai, even though the ritual there is Vaikhānasa. In many cases sectarian disunity overrides the affiliation to a ritual tradition. Despite such issues, the rift between the Vaṭakalais and the Teṉkalais has never permeated the priestly groups entirely: Among both Vaikhānasas and Pāñcarātrins, intermarriage between Vaṭakalais and Teṉkalais is not uncommon.[62] Whether individual priests belong to the Vaṭakalai or Teṉkalai fold is only important because of the respective temple's sectarian affiliation and the public pressure (especially the pressure by the trustees) resulting from this.

Yet the Teṉkalai/Vaṭakalai distinction does not prevent priestly cooperation entirely, as we can see from aspects of the relationship between the Teṉkalai

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62 Intermarriage is, for example, practiced between the Melkote priestly families (Teṉkalai) and one priestly family of the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram (Vaṭakalai). Moreover, many of the young Vaṭakalai Varadarāja priests are educated in the Teṉkalai temple in Melkote, where they wear a Teṉkalai sect mark when serving in the local Viṣṇu temple.

priests of the Aṣṭabhuja temple and the Vaṭakalai priests of the Varadarāja temple. One specific family among Vararadāja's hereditary priests for a number of years were the main performers during the *brahmotsava* and *pavitrotsava* festivals at the Teṉkalai Aṣṭabhuja temple.[63] They wore the "protective cord" (*kāppu/rakṣabandha*), acting as the main priests (*ācārya*) during the major festivals at the Aṣṭabhuja temple. The local Teṉkalai priests were then involved, but as subordinate priests. This practice however was discontinued with the death of the two most senior priests of the Vaṭakalai priestly family, and for the re-inauguration ritual after a major temple renovation in the Aṣṭabhuja temple in late February 2024, a Teṉkalai priest from Melkote was asked to act as main performer. Yet the earlier practice, when the Vaṭakalai priests lead the performance in the Teṉkalai Aṣṭabhuja temple, is a clear indication that on the priestly level the Vaṭakalai/Teṉkalai distinction is less important than the Vaikhānasa/Pāñcarātra distinction and hereditary rights.

Conclusion

The earliest texts mentioning the four Viṣṇu temples, the Āḻvārs' hymns, show an earlier focus on other Viṣṇu temples in Kanchipuram rather than the "four brothers," who are the major focus of the later *māhātmya* texts, and especially of the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya*. Also, during the time of the Āḻvārs, the sacred spaces were not imagined as connected with each other but the temples/Viṣṇus were described as separate sacred spaces. It might well be that the temples were not thought of as a pilgrimage circuit. This idea appeared only later, when the *divyadeśa*s were 'collected' and listed in the Āḻvārs' hagiographies and *guruparamparā*s. Then, the *divyadeśa*s were conceived and propagated as part of one (or more) pilgrimage circuits (Young 2014: 361). With the focus of ritual and economic activities shifting from the Ulakaḷantar temple in in the centre of the city to the Yathoktakārī and to the Varadarāja temple in Kanchipuram's East, and pilgrimage as a major religious activity coming to the fore, the *māhātmya*s provide the relevant background, albeit each 'sectarian' *māhātmya* clearly has its own agenda. It always depends on the audience and the context, which mode of belonging is activated: Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, or Śākta.

In line with the Āḻvārs' hymns, the Vaiṣṇava *Kāñcīmāhātmya* acknowledges the older age of Varadarāja's three 'brothers', but presents Varadarāja as their 'culmination', resulting from Brahmā's Vedic sacrifice—possibly by this move

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63   In August 2005 I witnessed one such *pavitrotsava* festival in the Aṣṭabhuja temple.

also trying to integrate the value system of the orthodox Vedic Brahmanism and the idea of pilgrimage.[64] The pilgrimages promoted by the *sthalapurāṇa*s then established a variety of connections between the sacred spaces and allowed also the "transmission, exchange and circulation of ideas and beliefs, which influenced and enriched the community ideology" (Dutta 2010: 20)—but also contestations over the control of community resources, "thereby developing multiple contexts for the crystallisation of various sectarian affiliations, which were finally grouped as the Vatakalai and Tenkalai" (p. 20).

Different and competing connections are at work not only between sacred spaces belonging to different Hindu communities (Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, Śākta), but also *within* the Vaiṣṇava tradition. Understanding the Viṣṇu temples as "brothers" is a contemporary interpretation, establishing a hierarchical network among the temples, with Varadarāja at the top. Here, for the priests (*arcaka*s) the affiliation to one of two ritual traditions remains very relevant: Since the Vaikhānasa and the Pāñcarātra traditions exclude each other, the ritual handling of the *mūrti*s and the ritual activity within the temple precincts is the exclusive privilege of the respective āgamic traditions of the temples. Thus, if a Vaikānasa processional image enters a Pāñcarātra temple, the handling of the *mūrti* is taken over by the priests of the local tradition. Of course, other scenarios would also be conceivable: One could imagine that the Vaikhānasa priests would insist that no Pāñcarātrin could handle the Vaikhānasa *mūrti*. However, the decision of which connection is more important depends on a number of factors—in this case, the prevailing solution seems to be a combination of the power and influence of the Vaṭakalai Śrīvaiṣṇavas, who are trustees in both the Dīpaprakāśa and the Varadarāja temples, and of the power and influence of the Pāñcarātra *arcaka*s of the Varadarāja temple, who insist that within 'their' temple walls only they can perform ritual activities. The Pāñcarātra/Vaikhānasa distinction of Vaiṣṇava ritual traditions in South India is old, and it seems to be in the interest of both priestly groups to maintain this distinction, in spite of a certain (hierarchically determined) cooperation.[65] Yet the power imbalance between the relevant temples makes itself felt here, too: The Vaikhānasa priests of the Dīpaprakāśa temple leave "their" *mūrti* to the Pāñcarātra Varadarāja priests at the temple entrance, whereas the

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64 Dutta (2010: 18) argues that sectarian identities "were always fluid and underwent constant reconfigurations under the influence of the pilgrimage network, which provided a space for a continuous interface between various social and political groups, ideas and cultural values."

65 Even though the normative ritual texts explicitly rule out the "mix of tradition", there is evidence in the Vaikhānasa-*saṃhitā*s that there were occasions when the two traditions had to cooperate within one temple: The *Yajñādhikāra*, for example, ordains that those employees of a temple who are not Vaikhānasas must undergo the initiation relevant for Pāñcarātrins.

Varadarāja priests enter the Vaikhānasa Dīpaprakāśa temple compound (though not the temple building) with "their" *mūrti.*

Yet changes did take place in the past and continue to take place now. Power and influence within the networks of sacred spaces are expressed and negotiated through ritual activity. Many such negotiations take place between the Vaṭakalai and the Teṉkalai Vaiṣṇava communities within Kanchipuram: For centuries, the Varadarāja temple has been the site of this conflict, which at the moment seems to escalate again, this time even severing the ties between two of the four temples. Here, the donors, trustees, and other hereditary right holders within the respective temples exert major influence. It is about their ritual rights and honors which translate into social standing. While thus the Vaṭakalai/Teṉkalai distinction continues to impact the relationship between the trustees and others who have a say on what can and cannot be done in a temple, this distinction is not as relevant for the priests, as we can see from the Vaṭakalai (Pāñcarātra) *arcaka*s performing rituals in the (Pāñcarātra) Teṉkalai Aṣṭabhuja temple.

A sacred site or temple potentially belongs to several different networks at the same time. The connections between the sacred sites or temples might pull into different directions, sometimes the pull might even be so strong that another connection is disrupted. New connections between the sacred sites and different 'pulls' might appear over time, while others might lose their relevance, or disappear altogether.

Acknowledging the examples of Varadarāja's increasing prominence in and after the fourteenth century, of Yathoktakārī's contemporary attempts to rise to prominence, and the emerging competition between Varadarāja and Yathoktakārī, we clearly need to acknowledge that connections between sacred sites are typically of unequal strength, or gravity. Connections are dynamic, and the centre of gravity, or 'pull' of connections within the networks, can change over time. When analyzing the connections between sacred sites, we therefore need to take into account the 'relative strength' of certain connection within the larger network, and the interaction of *different* networks in which several sacred sites participate. Only then we will start to understand the complex power dynamics that allow certain sites to rise to prominence, and others to be forgotten.

Table 1.

Name in Sanskrit / Tamil	Ritual tradition	Vaiṣṇava affiliation
Dīpaprakāśa / Viḷakkoḷi Perumāḷ	Vaikhānasa	Vaṭakalai
Aṣṭabhuja / Aṣṭapuja Perumāḷ	Pāñcarātra	Teṉkalai
Yathoktakārī / Coṉṉa Vaṇṇam Ceyta Perumāḷ	Pāñcarātra	Teṉkalai
Varadarāja / Varatarāja Perumāḷ	Pāñcarātra	Vaṭakalai

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KV: *Kāmākṣīvilāsa: Śrīmārkaṇḍeyapurāṇāntargataḥ Śrīkāmakoṭimahimādarśaḥ Śrīkāmākṣīvilāsaḥ*. [In Devanagari script.] Bangalore, 1968.

KM(Ś): *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Śaiva). *Śrīskāndapurāṇāntargataḥ Śrīrudrakoṭimahimādarśaḥ*

Śrīkāñcīmāhātmyagranthaḥ. [In Telugu script.] Karvetinagaram: Bhāratīlīlāsadanamudrākṣaraśālā, 1889. [Digital copy retrieved from the Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.372832, accessed February 11, 2025].

KM(V): *Kāñcīmāhātmya* (Vaiṣṇava): *Kāncīmāhātmyam. Brahmāṇḍapurāṇāntargatam.* [In Devanagari script.], edited by P. B. Ananta Chariar. Kanchipuram: Sri Sudarsana Press, 1906.

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Temple Arithmetic
Brother Temples of Kerala

Introduction

Nālampalam (Malayalam "four temples") is the popular name for a cluster of four temples dedicated to the sons of Daśaratha from the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic—Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna—in the South Indian state of Kerala. The most famous cluster among the various *nālampalam*s consists of the Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple in Thriprayar, the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple dedicated to Bharata in Irinjalakuda, the Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple in Moozhikkulam, and the Śatrughna temple in Payammal (Vaidyanathan 2011: 123–34). The four temples are located within the Thrissur and Ernakulam districts (central Kerala), within a radius of ca. fifty kilometers.

Princess Gouri Lakshmi Bayi claims that the *nālampalam*'s founding myth is given in the Malayalam *sthalapurāṇa* of the Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple; she also mentions the existence of a Sanskrit *sthalapurāṇa* (Bayi 2013: 332–33).

Fig. 1 *Nālampalam* cluster (from the left at the top: the Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple in Thriprayar, the Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple in Moozhikkulam, from the left at the bottom: the Bharata temple in Irinjalakuda, the Śatrughna temple in Payammal). Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.
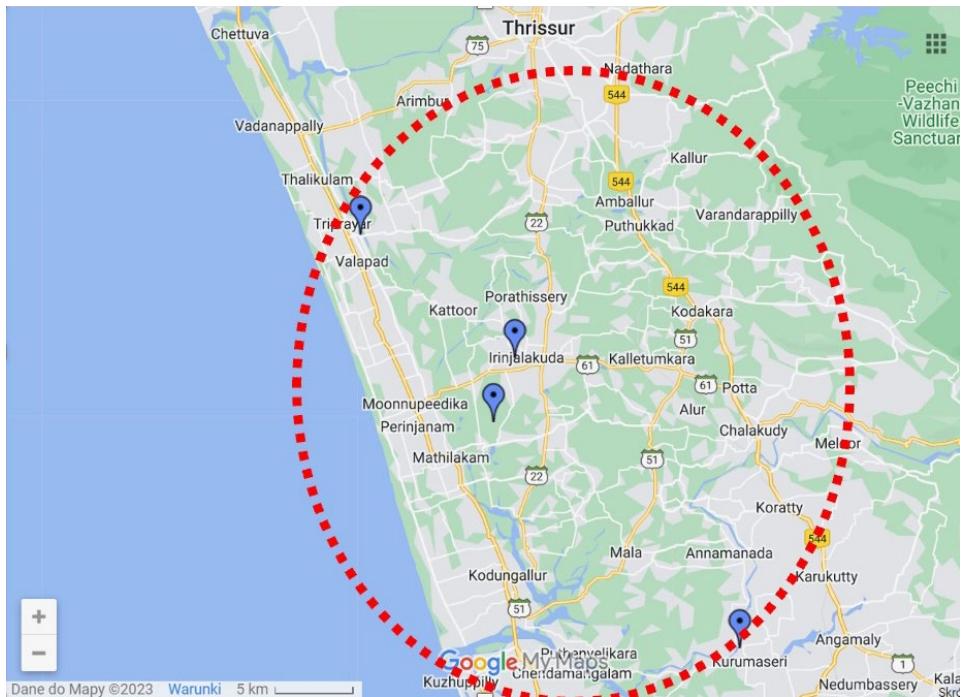
Fig. 2   Location of the *nālampalam* network, source: Google Maps.

However, the myth appears to be in circulation mostly in oral transmission.[1] Its description can be found in three modern *nālampalam māhātmya*s, i.e., *Nālampalam Tīrtthayātra* and *Sree Koodalmaanikyam: History and Legend*, both authored by T. Venugopal, and the *Nālampalamāhātmyam* by Radhakrishnan Poṭṭaykkal (see more in the section *Nālampalam in textual sources*). All three

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1   One of the main objectives of my case study was to identify and study premodern *māhātmya*s or *sthalapurāṇa*s of the temples that nowadays form the *nālampalam* cluster. However, it appears that this kind of textual sources most probably do not exist. By employing the term *sthalapurāṇa*, Princess Gouri Lakshmi Bayi meant oral narratives which remain (nowadays widely) in circulation in Kerala. She was not aware of the existence of any premodern written sources recoding the *nālampalam* founding myth (personal communication 2023). Till date, I was not able to trace any premodern *nālampalam sthalapurāṇa*s or *māhātmya*s. Moreover, the consulted senior scholars from several Keralan universities, replied to my inquiries stating that the texts that I am looking for do not exist, since the temple network—i.e., the interconnections which cause the four temples in question to figure in the collective consciousness as a coherent set of interlinked religious institutions—is a relatively recent phenomenon.

sources are consistent while citing the myth of origin of the four brother temples in Kerala; no discrepancy in the narrative is to be observed. The account relates that the icons of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna were *pūjāmūrti*s belonging to Kṛṣṇa, which he worshipped in Dvaraka. After Dvaraka sunk into the sea, the icons of the four brothers drifted to the Kerala coast, near Thriprayar. There they were caught in the nets of the local fishermen. At that time, one Vākkayil Kaimaḷ—a minister of the Ayirūr Kōvilakam of Ponnani—had a dream about the icons floating in the sea. Kaimaḷ, being an ardent devotee, hastened to the seashore. There, the fishermen who found the *mūrti*s passed them on to him. After conducting the *dēvapraśna* ritual ("question put to the deity," Tarabout 2007: 85), the proper locations for the icons' installation were selected. Thus, the temples were built in Thriprayar, Irinjalakuda, Moozhikkulam, and Payammal (Bayi 2013: 332–33).

Apart from the abovementioned temples in Thriprayar, Irinjalakuda, Moozhik-kulam and Payammal, there are at least three more sets of *nālampalam* temples located respectively in Malappuram district; Ernakulam and Kottayam districts; and in the Kottayam district. These sets of *nālampalam* are arranged in more compact clusters—the temples are situated within a range of a few kilometers from each other.

The temples belonging to the clusters in question seem to be brought together predominantly by the association with the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative. Each cluster includes four temples, each dedicated to one of the four brothers—sons of Daśaratha. Furthermore, most of the temples constituting the clusters are associated with a selected *Rāmāyaṇa* episode—an association about which devotees are informed by the modern *nālampalam māhātmya*s, temples' websites
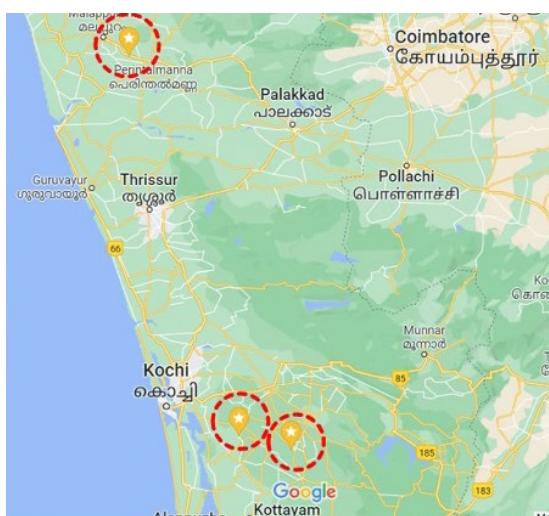
Fig. 3   The three smaller *nālampalam* clusters, source: Google Maps.

and social media profiles (e.g., Facebook and Instagram profiles of the temples), oral narratives, etc. The connection with the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme is also articulated through the temples' ritualistic practice, which is interpreted, primarily by the modern *nālampalam māhātmya*s, in terms of its interconnections with the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative, as, for instance, the ritual reenactments of the particular episodes during annual temple festivals. Finally, what brings *nālampalam* together and institutes them into set(s) of connected places or temple network(s) is the pilgrimage practice of *nālampalayātrā*—a custom of pilgrimage to all four brother temples during one day, following a fixed order of visiting the temples.

In this article, I focus on the multi-layered bonds that bring the *nālampalam* sets together, mostly oscillating around the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme, by analysing sources which articulate those bonds, that is, modern *māhātmyas/sthalapurāṇa*s of the temples in question, local oral traditions, temple rituals and festivals, temple paintings and sculptures, as well as tools of modern communication as, for instance, social media, online apps, etc.[2]

Temples' historical setting

The available materials on the history of the major *nālampalam* set of four temples (the Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple in Thriprayar, the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple dedicated to Bharata in Irinjalakuda, the Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple in Moozhikkulam, and the Śatrughna temple in Payammal) do not indicate any connection between particular sites that may have allowed us to see them as a temple network. It seems that the only historical materials that might aid establishing further linkage between the institutions in question are the temple murals found in the Thriprayar and Moozhikkulam, which depict selected *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes. The murals from the Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple in Thriprayar are dated to ca. eighteenth century, while the Moozhikkulam murals remain undated.

While it is often not easy to gather any more specific information concerning a history of some of the Keralan religious institutions,[3] in the case of the main

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2   The materials presented in this article have been collected by me during several fieldtrips to Kerala, which were conducted across the years 2022–24.

3   As, for instance, in the case of Śaṅkaran *maṭha*s in Kerala, which, despite being wealthy and influential religious centres for centuries, covering the entire area of the region with a network of dependent institutions, seem to have very limited number of preserved historical documents recording their past. Except for only one *maṭha*, the archives containing the monasteries' administrative documents seem to have vanished (see Nowicka 2022).

nālampalam cluster, two of the temples, i.e., Irinjalakuda and Moozhikkulam, belong to the thirty-two so called 'original Brahmin settlements' in Kerala. Thus, these two were investigated by historians such as Kesavan Veluthat, and Thriprayar temple murals were studied by M. Nambirajan and S. Suresh. Before proceeding further, I briefly locate the said temples in a historical and geographical setting by referring to the current scholarship.

According to Kesavan Veluthat, several Brahmin settlements were established in Kerala well before the rule of the Cēra Perumāḷs of Mahodayapuram (ca. 800–1124). As he explains, the Brahmins of Kerala originally settled in thirty-two *grāma*s (villages), enumerated in the *Kēraḷōlpatti* ("The Origin of Kerala", ca. seventeenth century).[4] According to the narrative, Paraśurāma created the land of Malanāṭu by throwing his arrow(s) into the Arabian Sea, thereby making the sea recede. As is stated in the account, he then peopled the newly created region—between Gokarna and Kanyakumari—with Brahmins, brought from the north, who were subsequently settled in sixty four *grāma*s, out of which thirty-two were in the present day Kerala, and the other thirty-two in Tuḷunāṭu.[5] Each of the said Brahmin villages of Kerala has been centered around a temple, which formed a social, religious, political, and economical nucleus (Veluthat 2013: 1–11).

Irinjalakuda (Iruṅkāṭikkūṭal) *grāma*, where the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple dedicated to Bharata is located, belonged to the group of the early Brahmin settlements. The temple was extremely wealthy and possessed vast land estates. Moozhikkulam (Mūḻikkaḷam) was one of the most important Brahmin settlements in Kerala. In the Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple, located in this village, there are two inscriptions of the Cēra Perumāḷs of Mahodayapuram, that is, of Indu Kota, dated to 948 CE; and of Bhaskara Ravi, dated to 1010 CE. Furthermore, inside the temple there is an undated mural depicting Rāma's coronation (Veluthat 2013: 27–28).

Regarding the other two *nālāmpalam* temples, the coastal city Thriprayar, which did not belong to the thirty-two original *grāma*s, hosts the temple dedicated to Rāma. The temple is situated on the bank of the Karuvannur River. The

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4   *Kēraḷōlpatti* is composed in prose, in Sanskritized Malayalam. It narrates, in the purāṇic style, Kerala's history since its creation by Paraśurāma (Veluthat 2009: 133). There exist many recensions of *Kēraḷōlpatti*, giving a mythical account of the origin of Kerala (*ulpatti* "origin"; *Kēraḷōlpatti* "The Origin of Kēraḷa"), like, for instance, the *ulpatti* titled *Jambudvīpōlpatti*, which is a northern recension of the narrative giving a legendary account of the Malanāṭu's beginnings (Vielle 2014: 17).

5   Tuḷunāṭu—the region spreading across south Karnataka and north Kerala. It covers the districts of Udupi and Dakshina Kannada in Karnataka, and the northern part of the Keralan Kasaragod district up to the Payasvini River. The ethnic group of this region, referred to as Tuḷuvas, speaks the Tuḷu language. See Bhat 1975.

exterior wall of the *śrīkōvil* (*sanctum sanctorum*) is covered with paintings pre-served in a fairly good condition. The wall contains twenty-seven panels which are dated to ca. eighteenth century (Nambirajan and Suresh 2015: 136). The panels deal with various themes—some of them refer to the Vaiṣṇava mythology and particular *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, such as Rāma's coronation and the *aśvamedha-yajña* performed by Rāma (p. 140, 181). Besides, the temple compound features some modern-looking murals, depicting *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes as well—the one on the left side of the main gate shows Sugrīva reclaiming the *vānara* kingdom, and Rāma's coronation. However, these murals seem to be modern productions.

The fourth temple from the main *nālampalam* cluster, the Śatrughna temple in Payammal, is the smallest and apparently least significant in historical terms. It is located in the tiny village Payammal, seven kilometers away from the Irin-jalakuda temple. The temple website refers to one episode allegedly connected with the Tipu Sultan invasion (1789–1792), which sheds some light on its dating. During the period of Tipu Sultan, this temple suffered severe damages. In order to protect the icon of Śatrughna from Tipu's army, the temple priests took the *pañcaloha* (metallic alloy containing five metals: brass, bronze, copper, gold, silver) *mūrti* from the *śrīkōvil* and hid it in the temple pond.[6] If the narrated account is historically accurate, it might indicate that by the eighteenth century the temple was already in existence.

The available historical records, as well as literary sources, do not indicate any particular connections between the *nālampalam* temples of Kerala. The only ma-terial which might serve as a basis for developing further links between the four brother temples are the murals featuring particular *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, which can be seen in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple and the Moozhikkulam Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple, the former, as already mentioned, dated to ca. eigh-teenth century. The murals, however, do not seem to feature the episodes which are ascribed to particular temples by the modern *nālampalam māhātmya*s. They do not occur in the narrative's successive stages either. The paintings decorating the temples represent various *Rāmāyaṇa* themes. The only repeating mural is the one depicting Rāma's coronation—it is to be found both in the Thriprayar and the Moozhikkulam temples. This particular episode is in turn connected with the Irinjalakuda temple and is re-enacted there in the grand scale Kathakaḷi performance which takes place during the annual Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple festi-val. This might point to the presumption that the *nālampalam* concept is a later development, and of a relatively recent origin.

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6   Nowadays, the original *pañcaloha mūrti* is not traceable anymore, although efforts have been made to retrieve it from the temple pond, situated in the back yard of the temple complex.

Nālampalam in textual sources

The links between the *nālampalam* temples are mainly articulated through the modern *māhātmya* writing,[7] which narrates the founding myth shared by the four temples, regarding the icons' origin appearance, when caught in the nets of local fishermen. In addition, the modern *māhātmya*s connect selected *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes with some of the temples,[8] inform about the pilgrimage practice and the *darśana* order, explain ritual practice in particular temples in terms of inter-connections between the institutions—such as the ritual re-enactments of selected *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes,[9] and provide details on the annual festivals (*utsavam*) in each of the four temples. In this article, I have used five such textual sources, among which four are in Malayalam and one in English. All were published within the last two decades by small, local publishing houses.

These inexpensive printed pilgrim's guidebooks are available at the small book stalls situated near the temples' main entrances. As Andrea Pinkney shows,

Fig. 4   Modern *māhātmya* writing on *nālampalam*. Photo: Olga Nowicka.

7   On the modern *māhātmya* writing in the context of Uttarakhand, see Pinkney 2013.
8   *Nālampalam māhātmya*s describe the *nālampalam* temples to be connected with se-lected *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, for instance, the Irinjalakuda temple to be connected with the episode of Bharata waiting in Ayodhya for Rāma's return from exile. However, not all temples constituting *nālampalam* clusters are associated with *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes.
9   Among the ritual re-enactments of the *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes there are, *inter alia*, a ritual of *setubandhana* ("the construction of a bridge") annually observed by the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, which evokes the events from the *Rāmāyaṇa*; and a grand scale Kathakaḷi performance of the *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam*, a ritual re-enactment of Rāma's coronation, which is staged every year during an annual temple festival in the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple.

these booklets not only "appropriate the name of *māhātmya* but also exploit the conventions of the classical genre in distinctively modern ways" (Pinkney 2013: 234). James G. Lochtefeld, who examined a series of Haridwar *māhātmya*s from the beginning of the twentieth century, described this kind of literary sources as blending site's "promotion and interpretation" (Lochtefeld 2010: 224). In addition to adopting the classical *māhātmya* conventions, the locally produced modern *māhātmya*s also introduce detailed travel information, road maps, images of gods, temples, and temples' precincts (in drawn images or photographs), distances between pilgrimage sites with travel directions (also for the use of the public transport such as buses); temples' exact addresses and contact details; descriptions of temple offerings with price lists; calendar of the temples' festivals; and texts of the *stotra*s for religious recitation. As Pinkney observes, while there are many continuities between classical and contemporary *māhātmya*s, the genre innovation lies in including the up-to-date information and travel logistics, therefore marking the difference between the said publications and the classical atemporal *māhātmya*s (Pinkney 2013: 252). Thus, the modern *māhātmya* writing crosses temporalities and is deeply rooted in particular geospaces.

Till date I found three modern *māhātmya*s of the *nālampalam* temples: *Nālampalam Tīrtthayātra* and *Sree Koodalmaanikyam: History and Legend*, both authored by T. Venugopal, and the *Nālampalamāhātmyam* by Radhakrishnan Poṯṯaykkal. The *Sree Koodalmaanikyam* is written in English, the other two works are in Malayalam. The *Nālampalamāhātmyam* was first published in 2005, and was reissued six times in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2017, and 2019. The current edition of the *Nālampalam Tīrtthayātra* was published in 2018, yet, according to the booklet, it is the twelfth reprint. The *Sree Koodalmaanikyam: History and Legend* has no information on the date of its publishing.

Another publication that I came across, titled *Rāmāyaṇakathakaḷum Nālampalaṅṅaḷum* and authored by Kuṯṯipuḻa Ravi, which however does not belong to the *māhātmya* genre, describes in detailed manner not only the main *nālampalam* cluster, but also the smaller clusters as well. It was published in 2017.

All four texts are very recent publications, produced in the last two decades. It is important to note that earlier texts do not seem to mention the *nālampalam* concept. For example, another modern *māhātmya*, a *māhātmya* of the *Kuṭalmāṇikyam* temple, *Śrī Kuṭalmāṇikyam Caritrasaṃkṣēpam*, authored by Pāykkāṭṭū Paramēśvaran Nampūtirippāṭu (the current edition from 2018, reissued nine times), which was first published in the year 1963, does not refer to the *nālampalam* or *nālampalam tīrtthayātra* concept at all. It might suggest that at the time of the work's composition the four temples in Thriprayar, Irinjalakuda, Moozhikkulam, and Payammal weren't perceived as a cluster yet.

The *nālampalam māhātmya*s, like other modern *māhātmya*s, provide the devotees with the practical guiding information concerning the *nālampalayātrā*,

which, they explain, is supposed to be undertaken during the *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* ("Rāmāyaṇa month," i.e., Kaṟkkaṭakam month; July-August). They include, along with the temples' addresses, the road indications and maps sketching the route of the *nālampalam* pilgrimage, with marked landmarks, bus stops, road names, and the names of the villages passed on the way to the four brother temples. Most importantly, while informing about the temple offerings and festivals, they also interpret ritual practice in the particular *nālampalam* temples in terms of their interconnections.[10] Furthermore, these texts relate the particular *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, localised in the Keralan geospace,[11] which they connect with some of the *nālampalam* temples (not only from the main cluster), thereby making the local pilgrimage route meaningful for the pilgrims. For instance, the Irinjalakuda Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple's Bharata is awaiting the return of Rāma from the fourteen-years long exile, having just learned from Hanumān that Rāma is already on the way to Ayodhya; the Moozhikkulam temple is associated with the episode of angry Lakṣmana intending to kill Bharata—he confused intentions of Bharata, who approached Rāma in order to pass over the reins of the kingdom, but was soon appeased after learning of Bharata's innocence—while the Thriprayar Rāma temple is connected with the episode of Hanumān returning from Laṅkā and informing Rāma that he has seen there Sītā who was abducted by Rāvaṇa. The Śatrughna temple in Payammal does

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10 To enumerate several instances: the ritual of *setubandhana* ("the construction of a bridge") annually observed by the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, which evokes the events from the *Rāmāyaṇa*; Cākyār kūttŭ performed in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple every year in the month of Vṛścikam featuring *Rāmāyaṇa* episode of Hanumān meeting Sītā in Laṅkā and subsequently informing Rāma about it; Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi offering, consisting of firing crackers (Mal. *katina*), interpreted as a commemoration of Hanumān's return after his search for Sītā and delivering a message that he has seen her; ritual re-enactment of the Thriprayar Rāma's coronation during the Kathakaḷi performance of the *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam* in the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple (see section *Interconnections articulated through ritual practice*).
11 An earlier example of this mechanism can be observed for instance in *Vilvapurāṇa*—the premodern Malayalam *sthalapurāṇa* of the Vilvādrinātha temple ("Lord of the Vilva tree mountain") in Thiruvilvamala, in the Thrissur region, which is dedicated to Rāma. A palm-leaf manuscript with this text, stored in the Vaṭakke Maṭham Brahmasvam in Thrissur, is dated to 1019 year of Kollam Era, that is 1842 CE. The *sthalapurāṇa* narrates the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode where Śabarī, an elderly woman ascetic, is featured. The episode describes Śabarī, who received Rāma's *darśana* and blessing due to her devotion. After meeting Rāma, who during his *vanavāsa* came to her *āśrama*, she attained *mokṣa*. The most important feature of this particular account is the given location of the Śabarī's *āśrama* where she is visited by Rāma himself and where she subsequently attains *mokṣa*. Namely, her *āśrama* is said to be at the top of the hill, located by the Bharatappuzha river, in Thiruvilvamala in Kerala. As the *sthalapurāṇa* narrates, it is in the very place where Śabarī attained liberation, that the Vilvādrinātha temple, dedicated to Rāma, was built.

not seem to be associated with any particular *Rāmāyaṇa* episode—till date I have not found any particular association in the modern *māhātmya* literature.

The episode connected with the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple is re-enacted during the annual temple festival in the Kathakaḷi performance of the *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam* ("Rāma's coronation"); the episode associated with the Thriprayar Rāma temple is re-enacted in the 12-day Cākyār kūttŭ performance, staged every year in the Vṛścikam month. As far as I know, in the Moozhikkulam and Payammal temples there are no ritual re-enactments of the *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes.

In the following sections I will present how the *nālampalam* concept is presented in the modern *māhātmya* writing, and how these source materials articulate the links between the brother temples through descriptions of common founding myth, pilgrimage route, and sequences of ritualistic practices.

Nālampalayātrā

The pilgrimage pattern connecting the four temples (*nālampalayātrā; nālampaladarśanam*) prescribes a visit to all the shrines in a particular order, in the course of one day, sometime in the Kaṟkkaṭakam month: one should first attend the initial *darśana* in the Thriprayar Rāma temple, then the morning worship in the Irinjalakuda Bharata temple, the afternoon worship in the Moozhikkulam Lakṣmaṇa temple, and the evening worship in the Payammal Śatrughna temple (see Fig. 5). This specific order is prescribed by the *māhātmya*s; noteworthy, each of the texts describes exactly the same sequence, together with the same timings, for visiting particular shrines by the devotees. The description of the *nālampalayātrā* is to be found in three modern *māhātmya*s: *Nālampalam Tīrtthayātra* (p. 10) and *Sree Koodalmaanikyam: History and Legend* (pp. 14–16), authored by T. Venugopal, and the *Nālampalamāhātmyam* (p. 6) by Radhakrishnan Poṭṭaykkal. Worthy of attention might be also the gradation of the importance of the deities, which is implied by the pilgrimage scheme: Rāma, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa, Śatrughna. This gradation of importance (which is also the brothers' birth order) seems to be reflected in the contemporary prominence of the said temples—the temples in Thriprayar and Irinjalakuda attract significantly more pilgrims on the everyday basis than the temples in Moozhikkulam and Payammal.

The pilgrimage to all four temples is supposed to be conducted within a single day, which might also point to the recent establishing of this pilgrimage route, since without a vehicle it would not be possible to visit all four temples within such a short period of time.

The Kaṟkkaṭakam month, which falls during the peak of the monsoon season in Kerala, is considered as the period of rejuvenation—physically, as the people are

Fig. 5 Nālampalayātrā, source: Moozhikkulam Śrī Lakṣmaṇapperumāḷ temple's Facebook page, accessed February 11, 2025.
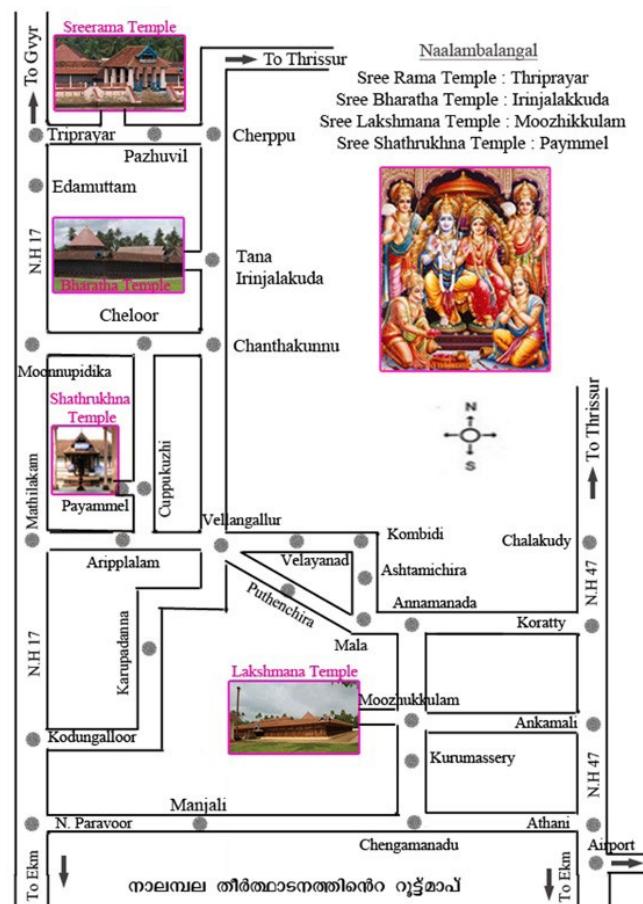
following specific āyurvedic treatments during this month, and nowadays it is also often referred to as the time of spiritual purification. This latter designation is expressed by the custom of daily *Rāmāyaṇa* readings in temples and private households throughout the month, and of going on the *nālampalayātrā* pilgrimage. For instance, in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, a priest reads *Rāmāyaṇa* every morning for three hours, from 7.00 am till 10.00 am. The reading of the whole text is usually completed within seven days and then restarted. It is important to note that the *Rāmāyaṇa* version that is read during the Kerala *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* is the Malayalam *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam Kiḷippāṭṭu*,[12] attributed to Tuñcattŭ Rāmānujan

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12   "Parrot's song"—an indigenous literary genre, characterised by the parrot-narrator and the use of the Dravidian meters. The genre seems to have originated through this particular text (Freeman 2003: 480). Eḻuttacchan's work is a translation into Malayalam of the North Indian Sanskrit fourteenth-century *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa.*
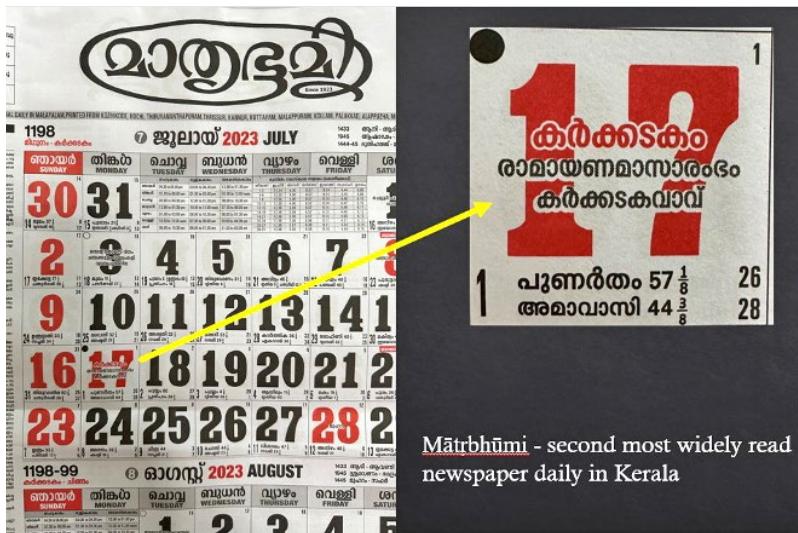
Fig. 6 Beginning of the *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* (Mal. *rāmāyaṇamāsārambham*) marked in the Keralan calendar. Photo: Olga Nowicka.

Fig. 7 *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* in media. From the left: *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa; Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* reading; newspaper article informing about the beginning of the *nālampalayātrā* season.
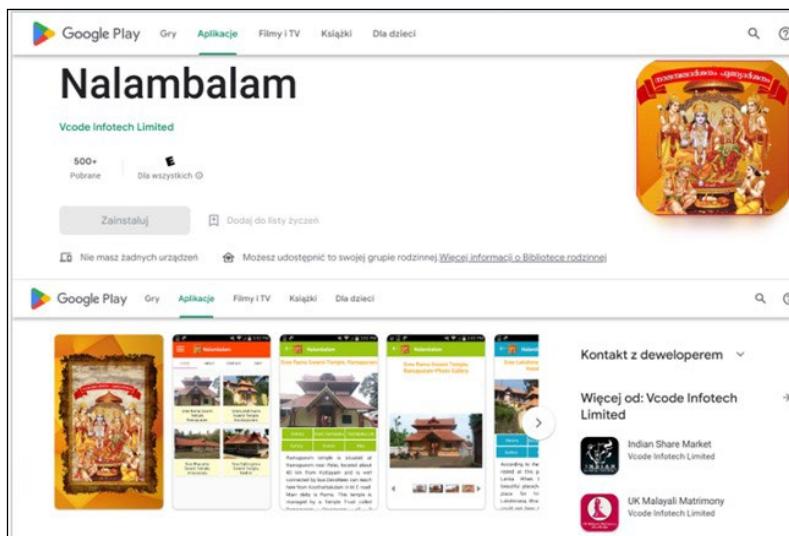
Fig. 8   *Nālampalam* App—a journal of the *nālampalam darśanam*.
It can be downloaded from Google Play.

Eḻuttacchan, roughly dated to the sixteenth century[13] (Freeman 2003: 480). Like the *nālāmpalamyātra*, the practice of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reading during the *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* seems to be rather a modern development, counting a few decades, as conducted interviews with representatives of the local community seem to show.

The concept of the *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* is interlinked with the *nālampalam* pilgrimage, and it appears to be nowadays widely present in the collective consciousness of the Keralan society, as the information about the *Rāmāyaṇa* month appears in calendars and across the media (newspapers, internet news, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp status). In addition, the particular temples forming the various clusters actively advertise the pilgrimage, each within the cluster it belongs to. Boards with the *nālampalayātrā* map are displayed in the vicinities of the temples, numerous travel agencies and even the KSRTC (Kerala State Road Transportation Corporation) advertise and promote travel packages, not only to the main cluster but also the smaller ones. Even the smaller clusters are actively attracting pilgrims—they have well designed websites and Facebook pages, and they produce advertising posters. The temples themselves have undergone extensive renovations in the recent years due to the financial support of the visiting pilgrims. One of the smaller clusters has also launched a pilgrimage app—the *nālampalam darśanam*, which can be downloaded from Google Play.

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13   Tuñcattŭ Rāmānujan Eḻuttacchan is considered to have contributed to the development of the Malayalam language and literature.

Interconnections articulated through ritual practice

The interconnections between the *nālampalam* temples, except of being articulated by the modern *māhātmya* writing and the pilgrimage practice of *nālampa-layātrā*, seem to be expressed through the ritualistic practice and temple festivals. The *māhātmya*s not only discuss in detail the rituals conducted in each of the temples in question, but also give an interpretation of their performance, which explains the links between the brother temples.

However, some of the interpretations expounded in the temple brochures appear to be misleading. One of such instances is the Pattām Udayam celebration. During Pattām Udayam ("rise of the tenth day", 10th day of Dhanu) in the Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple in Thriprayar there is supposed to take place a commemoration and an 're-enactment' of the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode in which Hanumān returns from Laṅkā after the search of Sītā and reports to Rāma that he has seen her. This episode is supposed to be alluded to by a procession (*ghoṣayātrā*) that takes place, in which the Hanumān image from a nearby temple (Erakuḷaṅṅara Śiva kṣetram) is taken to the Thriprayar Rāmasvāmi temple, crossing the Karuvannur River (*Nālampalamāhātmyam* 2005: 20). While I attended the festival, it turned out that it was in fact Dharma Śāstā (Ayyappan, son of Śiva and Viṣṇu in the form of Mohinī) who took part in the procession and was crossing the river, as I was informed by the local priests.[14] Thus, the brochure's attempt to interpret the ritual practice in this manner appears to be an example of imposing the temples' interconnections—it tries to inscribe temple's ritual practice into the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme with a view of connecting all the *nālampalam*.

Another festival, called Utram Viḷakkŭ, takes place in the Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple in Thriprayar just after the end of the biggest *pūram* (temple festival, of which an important part is an elephant procession) in Kerala, i.e., Āṟāṭṭupuḻa Pūram, which takes place at the Arattupuzha temple, where the main deity is Śāstā. For the time of this festival the Thriprayar temple's presiding deity leaves its abode in order to attend the *pūram* in Arattupuzha as the festival's main guest. It is stated in the *nālampalam māhātmya*s that during the time of the Rāma's absence, it is Bharata from the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple in Irinjalakuda who is in charge of the temple. It is explained in the *Nālampalamāhātmyam* that Utram Viḷakkŭ performed in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, being a recreation—on a small scale—of the Āṟāṭṭupuḻa Pūram (in which ca. thirty deities participate), is performed so that Rāma, after returning to his temple in Thriprayar, might relate to Bharata, who was guarding the Thriprayar temple during Rāma's absence, the events of the festival in Arattupuzha (*Nālampalamāhātmyam* 2005: 12–16). Just

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14   Information obtained during fieldwork conducted in Kerala (25.12.2022).

Fig. 9   Pattām Udayam: the arriving of Dharma Śāstā, after crossing the river (to the left); procession of Rāma and Śāstā (to the right). Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2022.

before the return of Rāma from Arattupuzha, a Brāhmaṇiyamma (belonging to the Ambalavāsi caste, "temple-dwellers", a group of Hindu castes customarily involved in the occupations connected with the functioning of a temple), located in the *namaskāra maṇḍapa*, where there is believed to be the presence of Hanumān, sings *brāhmaṇippāṭṭŭ* (songs sung in the temples during festivals, usually in the Bhagavatī temples). The songs contain *inter alia* references to some *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, for example, Daśaratha's *putrakāmeṣṭi yajña* (oblation in desire of conceiving children), the birth of his sons, and the *annaprāśana* (rice-feeding ceremony) of the four sons of Daśaratha; Hanumān after seeing Sītā in Laṅkā; Rāma and others preparing for the battle (*yuddha*).[15]

The Śrī Kūṭalmāṇikyam Tiruvutsavam (that is, the festival of the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple, the Bharata temple in Irinjalakuda) lasts for ten days and is one of the biggest temple festivals in Kerala. The festival's culmination is scheduled for the ninth day, called Valiya Viḷakkŭ. The day's climax is a grand scale Kathakaḷi performance of the *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam*, the ritual re-enactment of Rāma's coronation, from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It lasts from midnight up to ca. 7:00 AM and engages as many as fourteen actors, a rare event for this particular performative form. Throngs of devotees attend the event. The actor who plays Rāma is treated as god's manifestation for the time of the performance. When the Kathakaḷi performance is over, devotees approach the scene from where *prasādam* is

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15   I recorded the song performance during fieldwork in Kerala in April 2023. The transcript of the recording was prepared by Dr Muralikrishnan MV, post-doctoral scholar at the DiPiKA (Digitization and Preservation of the Kerala Archives) project, Thrissur.

Fig. 10   Utram Viḷakkŭ. Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

Fig. 11   Utram Viḷakkŭ. Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

distributed. According to *Nālampalam Tīrtthayātra,* it is the coronation of Thriprayar's Rāma that takes place during this event (*Nālampalam Tīrtthayātra* 2018: 32).

The examples presented above show how the *nālampalam* concept is translated into the temples' ritualistic practice. However, as it was pointed out in the case of Pattām Udayam's *māhātmya* interpretation, in some instances modern *māhātmya*s seem to force this concept on the existing traditions in order to inscribe some of the temples' ritualistic practices into the *Rāmāyaṇa* theme. This specific *māhātmya* rhetoric seems to imply the modern sources of the *nālampalam* clustering.

Moreover, the temples' association with selected *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes, and in particular with the sons of Daśaratha, is expressed in its festival calendar. The particular elements of the discussed rites articulate well the interconnections between the shrines' main deities, as the mentioned close relation between the Thriprayar Rāma and the Irinjalakuda Bharata who visit each other during festival processions and actively participate in temples' ritualistic performance.

Noteworthy, the lack of symmetry between various discussed examples of the ritualistic articulation of interconnections among the *nālampalam* does not testify against it being considered a temple network or a set of connected places. One should remember that the temples in Thriprayar and Irinjalakuda are more prominent institutions than the temples in Moozhikkulam and Payammal. These are Rāma and Bharata temples which are renowned religious institutions—even when perceived outside the *nālampalam* cluster—that attract crowds of devotees all year round, and whose festivals are broadcasted live on the local television. The temples in Moozhikkulam and Payammal are currently much less known, and on a daily basis they are mostly visited by people living in the vicinity. Nevertheless, the *nālampalam* concept is imposed on those temples even though the Payammal temple seems to attract less of attention within this set. As demonstrated, the clustering is articulated and promoted mostly by the modern *māhātmya* writing and enhanced by the said temples themselves. Despite the presence of numerous shrines dedicated to figures of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic such as Hanumān, Sītā, etc., and numerous temples dedicated to Rāma himself across Kerala, the said *māhātmya*s clearly define the set(s) of *nālampalam* by enumerating particular temples constituting the cluster(s). No other temples connected with the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative are referred to as *nālampalam*—"four temples"—since the term explicitly refers to particular cluster(s) described by the modern *māhātmya*s. The strength of the bonds connecting those temples, despite being probably modern clustering, is testified to by the devotees' perception. The *nālampalam* concept's popularity and presence in the Keralites' collective consciousness is attested to by the large number of pilgrims visiting those temples during the Kaṟkkaṭakam month, as well as the concept's wide presence in various media.

Fig. 12   Śrī Kūṭalmāṇikyam Tiruvutsavam—Valiya Viḷakků procession.
Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

Fig. 13   Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam. Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

Fig. 14   *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam*. Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

Fig. 15   *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam*. Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

Articulating interconnections through modern media

As already mentioned, the interconnections between the *nālampalam* temples appear to be articulated also by means of modern media. Every year, as the month of Kaṟkkaṭakam approaches, the *nālampalam* founding myth is recapitulated and circulated by the leading Keralan news providers, such as for instance *Malayala Manorama*, a morning newspaper in Malayalam published in Kottayam, Kerala, which also publishes an online edition. In an article titled *The Nalambalam Yathra and its message of sacrifice* of the *Malayala Manorama* online edition, published on the 30ᵗʰ of June 2018, one can read:

> When Dwaraka sank into the sea, the idols that were worshipped by Lord Krishna were carried away by the current. Vakkayil Kaimal, a local feudal lord, had a dream that idols of four-armed Vishnu were floating in the sea. Next day, apparently, Kaimal was handed over the idols by fishermen. Legend has it that Kaimal, on realizing the importance of these idols, consulted with astrologers and installed them at four temples—the Nalambalam— a Rama temple on the banks of Kuleepani Theertham [Thriprayar], a Lakshmana temple on the banks of the Poorna river [Moozhikkulam], a Bharata temple [Irinjalakuda] and a Shatrughna temple [Payammal].[16]

Thereby, in this case the modern newspapers seem to fulfil the purpose of the *māhātmya* writing by promoting the sacred sites, introducing the pilgrimage pattern of the *nālampalayātrā*, and providing basic travel information.

One can learn from the article that "[a] visit to these four temples on one day during Karkkidakom is said to bring you prosperity and blessings." The author instructs: "[i]t is ideal to set aside a day for the Nalambalam journey. Start early, because you have to factor in the puja times at each temple and about 4 hours in the afternoon when the temples will be closed after the noon puja. There are plenty of small hotels and eateries along the way." Similarly to the modern *nālampalam māhātmya*s, while promoting the *nālampalam* pilgrimage, it provides the practical visualisations as maps, here created by such modern tool as Google Maps.

To the aid of those devotees who for whatever reason cannot go on the pilgrimage comes another achievement of modern technology, i.e., virtual reality. On the website created for this purpose, devotees may catch a glimpse of the *nālampalam* temples and go on the pilgrimage by means of the "Nālampaladarśanam

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16   *The Nalambalam Yathra and its message of sacrifice*, Onmanorama, https://www.onman orama.com/travel/kerala/2018/06/30/the-nalambalam-yathra-ramayanamasam-thrip rayar-koodalmanikyam-moozhikulam-payammal-religious-tourism.html [accessed July 15, 2024].
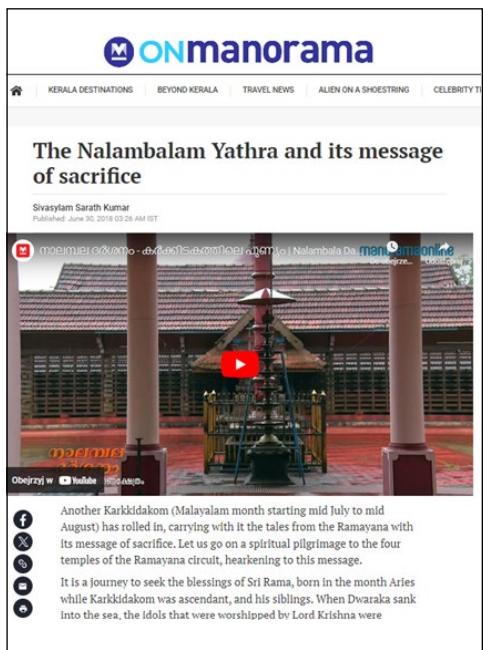
Fig. 16   Article in the Onmanorama. Source: https://www.onmanorama.com/travel/kerala/2018/06/30/the-nalambalam-yathra-ramayanamasam-thriprayar-koodamanikyam-moozhikulam-payammal-religious-tourism.html [accessed July 15, 2024].

Fig. 17   Nālampaladarśanam 360° Virtual Reality. Source: https://www.p4panorama.com/gallery-item/naalambala-darshanam/ [accessed July 15, 2024].

360° Virtual Reality." One click takes a person to—noteworthy—one of the smaller *nālampalam* clusters located in the Kottayam district. The tool allows to see each of the brother temples from the outside and from the inside in a 360° perspective, accompanied by devotional songs played in the background. The text attached to the vista guides pilgrims on the proper way of performance and its significance. The website thus promotes the *nālampalam* pilgrimage to this particular—and lesser known—Kottayam cluster.

Another practical tool created to facilitate the actual *nālampalam* pilgrimage is a mobile app launched in 2021, which, according to the description provided, is supposed to act as a pilgrims' guide. The introduction of the tool was announced in one of the leading Keralan newspapers—Mathrubhumi. The app, however, just as the virtual reality site discussed earlier, refers to the *nālampalam* cluster located in the Kottayam district only. Hence, it seems to indicate the intense efforts of this cluster's administering body to promote the four brother temples centered around the small village of Ramapuram.

Besides the already discussed modern tools used to articulate interconnections between the *nālampalam* temples and to advertise the *nālampalam* pilgrimage (which should be undertaken in the *Rāmāyaṇa māsam*), one can also observe dedicated songs and playlists on such popular portals as Spotify, and the use of the social media such as Facebook and Instagram—the particular *nālampalam* clusters have websites, as well as profiles on social media. Moreover, one may
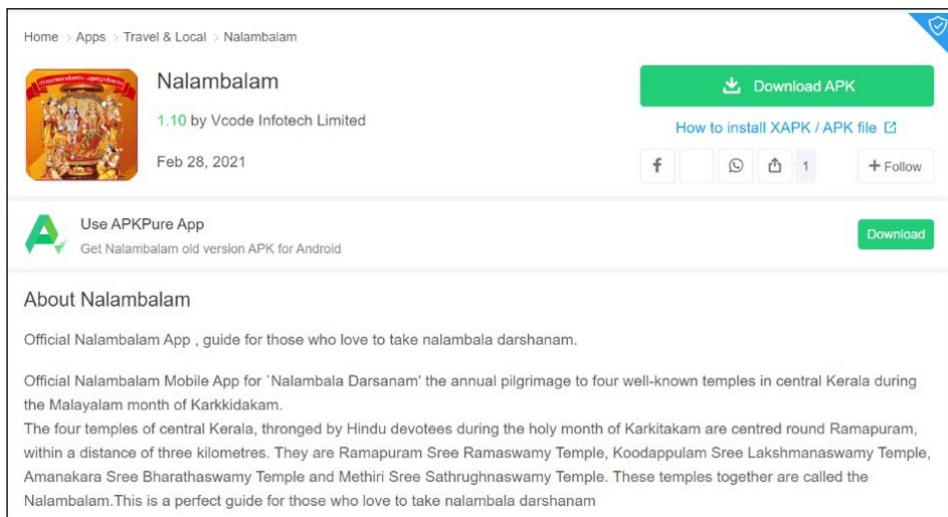
Fig. 18   *Nālampalam* mobile App. Source: https://apkpure.net/nalambalam/com.vcode.nalambalam [accessed July 15, 2024].

Fig. 19   Mathrubhumi heading. Source: mathrubhumi.com [accessed July 15, 2024].
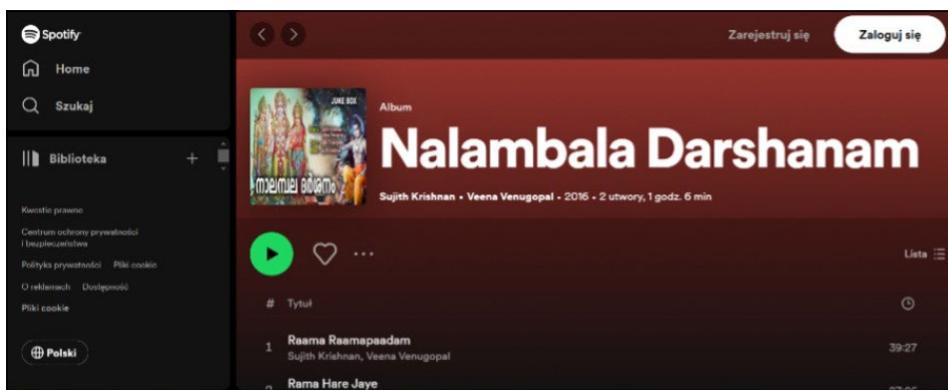

Fig. 20   Nālampaladarśanam: A Spotify playlist. Source: spotify.com [accessed July 15, 2024].

Fig. 21   Cover of the music album dedicated to *nālampalam*. Source: https://www.jiosaavn.com/album/nalambalam-punyadarsanam/ybSGejHq3Tk_ [accessed July 15, 2024].
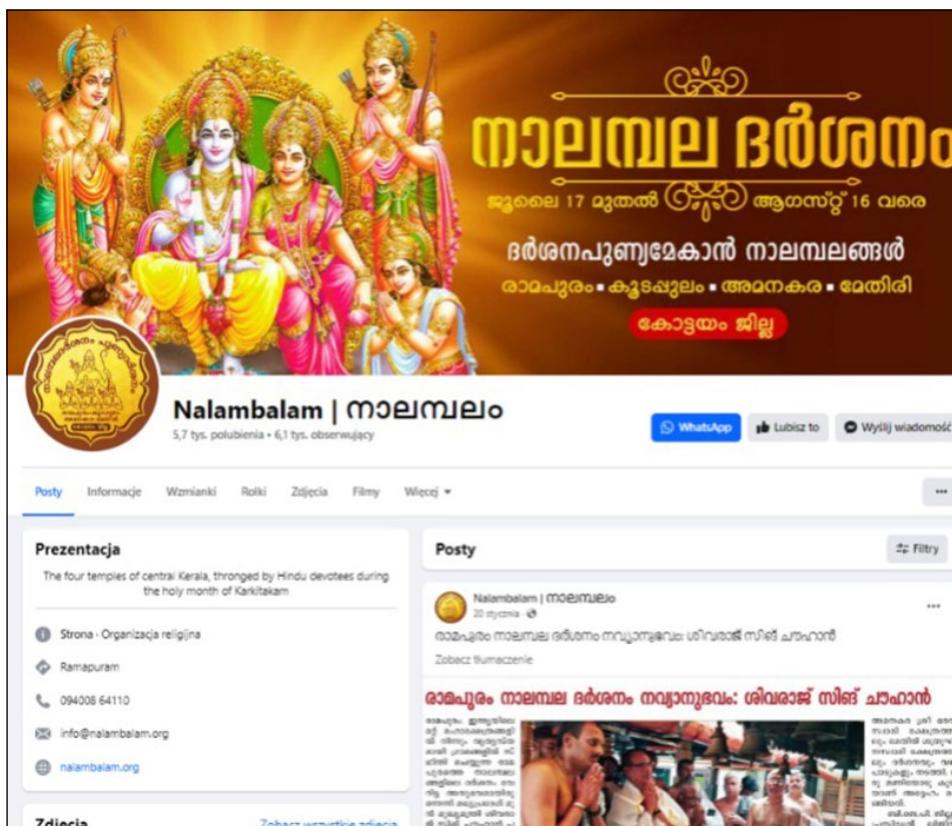

Fig. 22   Facebook page of the *nālampalam* cluster in Kottayam. Source: Facebook.com [accessed July 15, 2024].
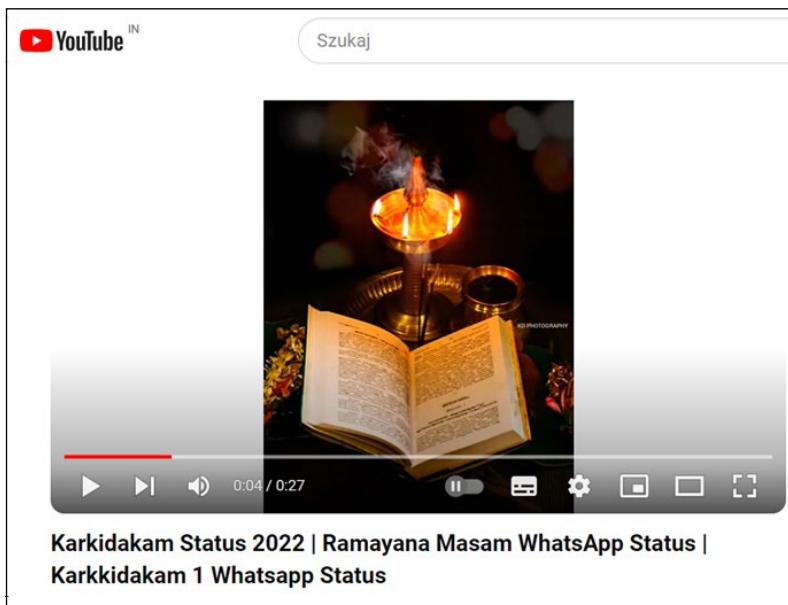
Fig. 23 *Rāmāyaṇa māsam* WhatsApp status on YouTube.
Source: YouTube.com [accessed July 15, 2024].

also easily find on the internet dedicated content aiming at promoting *Rāmāyaṇa māsam*, such as Instagram and WhatsApp status meant to be shared with other social media users. Therefore, modern technology enables new modes of communicating the specific links between the analysed constituents of the temple network in question and translating them into the religious practice.

Replication of the *Rāmāyaṇa* geography in the local geospace of Kerala

One of the elements which are strongly emphasized in the modern *nālampalam māhātmya*s is the replication of the *Rāmāyaṇa* geography in the local geospace of Kerala, as we have seen above in the case of *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam*, the re-enactment of Rāma's coronation in the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple in Irinjalakuda. Another example appears in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, where every year in the Malayalam month of Vṛścikam (beginning mid-November), the theatrical performance Cākyār kūttŭ (performative form involving one male actor being present on the stage) takes place, featuring the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode of Hanumān
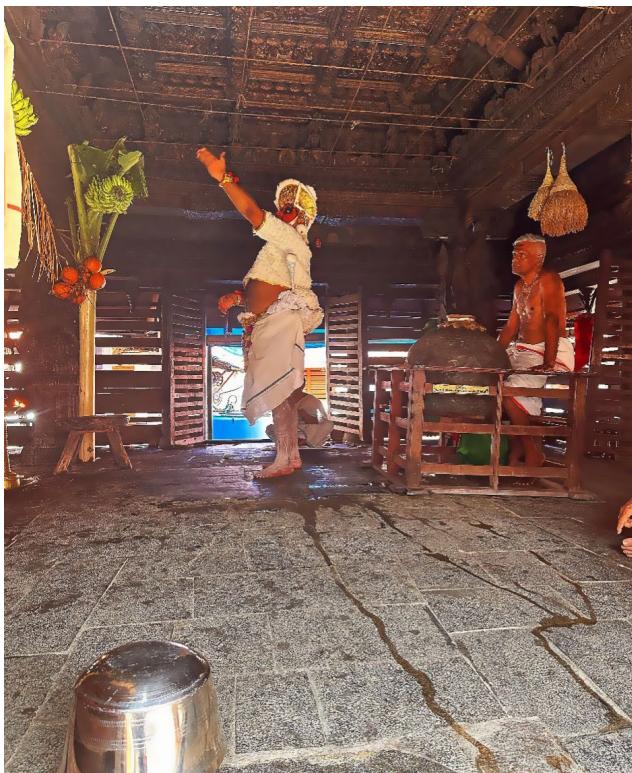
Fig. 24   Cākyār kūttŭ in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, in the month of Vṛścikam. Photo: Olga Nowicka, 2023.

meeting Sītā in Laṅkā and subsequently informing Rāma about this encounter (*Nālampalamāhātmyam* 2019: 20–21). The Cākyār kūttŭ performance starts on the first day of the month and is presented for 12 days within the premises of the temple. The performers enact the *Aṅgulīyāṅkam* ("Act of the Ring"), which is the sixth act of the Śaktibhadra's (ca. ninth century) *Aścaryacūḍāmaṇi*.[17] A major part of the performance is devoted to a conversation between Hanumān and Sītā. It is staged in the *namaskāra maṇḍapa*, in front of the Rāma icon situated in *śrīkōvil*, and is considered an offering to the temple's presiding deity. For most of its duration, no spectators are allowed. Devotees can catch a glance of the performance, only for a short moment, during *darśana* times.

Noteworthy, one of the important temple offerings is firing of crackers (*katina*). As the modern *māhātyma*s inform, it is to commemorate the return of Hanumān after the search of Sītā, and his confirmation of having seen her. The *valipāṭŭ* (offering by firing a cracker) is performed at the southern courtyard of the temple (*Nālampalamāhātmyam* 2019: 24).

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17   A play in seven acts that focuses on a number of episodes from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Another instance of the replication of the *Rāmāyaṇa* geography is the ritual of *setubandhana* ("the construction of a bridge"), which is annually observed by the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple. The ceremony evokes the events from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The ritual reenactment is performed by the team of temple priests at the Śrī Rāman Ciṟa—a freshwater pond, containing paddy fields, located two kilometers away from the temple. Rāma's bridge that is built during the ceremony at the Śrī Rāman Ciṟa seems to replicate the one in Rāmeśvaram. As Anne Feldhaus explains "[…] by replicating those other places […] [Keralan] holy places acquire a good deal of their sanctity from their relationships with distant places widely acknowledged to be holy" (Feldhaus 2003: 158).

The discussed ritual actions, such as *setubandhana* in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiṣekam* re-enactment in the Kūṭalmāṇikyam temple, Cākyār kūttŭ performance in the Thriprayar Śrī Rāmasvāmi temple, and Thriprayar *vaḷipāṭŭ* offering, seem to replicate the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s geography in the vernacular space of Kerala, i.e., they aim to transpose particular events from the epic's universum into the familiar—for the local devotees—geospace of Kerala.

The ritualistic practices in question seem to draw the connections between the discussed institutions and the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative, thereby creating relations between the four brother temples, forming in this way set(s) of connected places/temple network.

Conclusion

As it was demonstrated above, what creates interconnections between the discussed temples and knits them into the temple network is primarily their relation to the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative. The epic appears to be, in this case study, the effective joining tool between the religious institutions in question. Each temple in the cluster is dedicated to one of the four brothers—sons of Daśaratha. The temples are decorated with murals featuring *Rāmāyaṇa* themes, some modern, some dating to the eighteenth century; moreover, the temples' ritual practice alludes to the *Rāmāyaṇa* themes as well, consisting *inter alia* of the re-enactment of selected episodes of the epic, inscribing thereby the said institutions into the well-defined *Rāmāyaṇa*-oriented network of connected places. However, what seems to be the most powerful clustering tool appears to be the pilgrimage practice of the *nālampalayātrā*, which is enhanced by the contemporary *māhātmya* writings, as well as the modern media and travel agencies. Various sources presented above inform devotees about pilgrimage itinerary and provide pilgrims with the practical guidance. Therefore, the pilgrimage practice seems to create most explicitly the strongest interconnections between the temples of the cluster(s).

In the *nālampalam* phenomenon we can see not only the creation of the main numbered set of places, but also the multiplication of the main cluster, by the creation of three smaller *nālampalam* sets—organized in the more compact clusters where temples are located within a range of a few kilometers only. The closer study of the *nālampalam* case shows that it is not only the family ties between the brothers and the references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic that bring the said temples together, but also the number four and its multiplication that causes them to be perceived as a set of connected places. Therefore, there are four temples of four brothers, and furthermore, this cluster of four temples is multiplied by four—there is one "main" *nālampalam* cluster, and three smaller and less known *nālampalam* clusters, so in total there are four sets of *nālampalam* across Kerala. We obtain the equation 4 × 4. Hence, what we observe is a play with the number four (Feldhaus 2003: 127–56).

The particular connections between the discussed temples, which organize them into defined sets, seem to be articulated mostly through the medium of the modern *māhātmya*s. These literary sources, while informing about the temples' ritualistic practice, define the *nālampalam* set as a coherent and meaningful entity. Therefore, they constitute the medium through which the links between the temples in question are communicated to the devotees. All mentioned *nālampalam māhātmya*s appear to be recent publications, produced across the last twenty years. Noteworthy, one of the available earlier works, *Śrī Kuṭalmāṇikyam Caritrasaṃkṣēpam*, written by Pāykkāṭṭŭ Paramēśvaran Nampūtirippāṭŭ, published in 1963, does not mention the term *nālampalam* nor *nālampala-tīrtthayātra* concept. It seems to suggest that *nālampalam*, perceived as a set of connected places and pilgrimage destination, might have been a relatively recent phenomenon. Moreover, the pilgrimage practice of *nālampala-tīrtthayātra*, assuming a distance of eighty kilometres, which supposed to be traversed within one day—from morning to evening—seems to require a modern amenity such as car or bus transportation.

Therefore, the case study reveals some of the contemporary mechanisms of temple 'clustering', encouraged by the temples themselves, as the use of modern *māhātmya* writing and modern media, such as websites and social media, which appear to be effective tools to communicate with the devotees and promote new devotional practices.

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Sacred Spaces, Legitimacy, and Connections
Socio-Political Mobilisation in Princely States of Southern Rajputana

Introduction

India's polity till the eighteenth century was typified by numerous monarchical states that ruled over the expanse of the subcontinent. The rulers of Rajputana states in north-western India, mostly Rajputs, also exercised monarchical powers. From the seventh century onwards, the process of state formation in the region, notably in southern Rajputana, was inextricably linked to the role of sacred spaces, origin myths and symbolism in establishing legitimacy and facilitating expansion (Kapur 2002). In their transition from feudatories to sovereign rulers, the numerous Rajputs clans sought to cement their legitimacy by associating themselves with sacred spaces and symbolism.[1] One of the ways of seeking divinity was through tracing their lineages from Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, two prominent deities of the Hindu pantheon. The major clans, such as Mewar, Jaipur, Bikaner, and Marwar traced their lineage from Rāma called Sūryavaṃśīs (descendants of the Sun), while the ruling clans of states such as Jaisalmer traced their descent from the lunar line of Kṛṣṇa and hence were known as Candravaṃśīs (Jain and

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1   To illustrate, the Ranas of Mewar sought legitimacy and distinction not merely by seeking descent from the God Rāma but they even bestowed divinity and divine grace on their kingdom by regarding it as the dominion of Lord Śiva. The Ranas sought to promote and popularise religious symbolism in their official correspondence. Furthermore, when they visited the shrine of Ekaliṅgajī (Śiva is revered in Mewar in this form), they assumed the role of the priests and performed the ceremonies themselves. The rulers considered it highly honourable to donate to the shrine of Ekaliṅgajī and confer and distribute holy emblems and insignia of religious authority upon the priests of Ekaliṅgajī. It has been a ritual with the Maharanas to seek the Ekaliṅgajī's permission before leaving the city's confines. The present scion of the Sisodiyas adheres to this tradition. Due to their status as divine representatives, the words the Maharana uttered were taken to have descended from Śrīmukha, the pious mouth, and their persons were honoured as Śrījī, a great being (Jain and Sharma 2004: 46–47).

Sharma 2004: 46–47). The preoccupation of Rajput political elite with sacred and divine kingship reveals that personal/clan honour and status in political domain were a major concern even in the preliminary stages of these polities. Such an association between the political legitimacy and the religious connect has been predominantly observed in the region. In this context, the socio-political mobilisation in the region during the colonial period was perceived to be closely associated with the sacred sites and symbolism that were integral to the region's cultural identity.

The advent of British colonial rule in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed the political landscape of the country. The Indian subcontinent, hitherto, had two simultaneous and distinct administrative and political systems. While some states, nomenclatured as 'British Provinces', were conquered and directly ruled by the British administrators, colonial power chose to leave many monarchical polities, henceforth called 'Princely states,' under the native rulers. Princely states were characterised by limited autonomy in the internal administration but were under the overall control of the British Paramount power. These princely domains continued the socio-political environment of the earlier centuries, with discernible feudal vestiges, intermingled with plodding imperial interference (Bhagavan 2003). Particularly after 1909, the princes were given considerable leeway to rule according to their own objectives and their inherited notions of South Asian tradition, which represented legitimate royal behaviour (Copland 2004: 807). This scenario created a distinctive space, in which British provincial laws were never enforceable. The entire Rajputana continued as princely states till India gained independence in 1947.[2]

This chapter concerns the princely states of Rajputana located in the northwestern corner of the Indian subcontinent. These Rajput polities share cultural characteristics while maintaining individual specificities. They were deeply entrenched in traditional feudal structures, in contrast to the British-ruled provinces that were gradually evolving democratic institutions and practices. The focus of this study is on the southern states of Rajputana, which primarily consist of the former states of Mewar, Dungarpur, Banswara, and the neighbouring regions located at the southern end of the Aravalli range. This region has a considerable population of indigenous communities such as the Bhils.

The Bhils are an indigenous community that resides predominantly in today's Udaipur, Dungarpur, Banswara and Sirohi in southern region of Rajasthan, and in the neighbouring states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra, forming the largest indigenous community in western India. From the seventh century onwards, the regional state formation in southern Rajputana states was

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2   The sole exception was the British province of Ajmer-Merwara, which constituted an enclave situated within the Rajputana states.
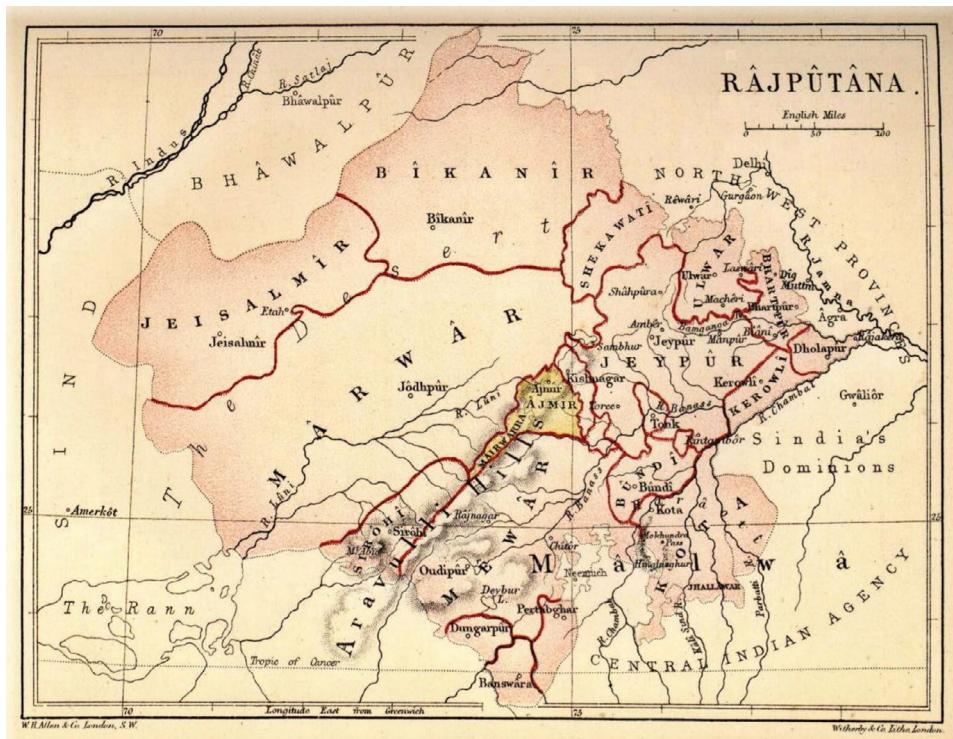
Map 1   Rajputana States (Pope 1880: 28).

characterised by the ascendance of Rajput clans in the region, which resulted in the incorporation of the Bhil dominions under their rule. The history of the Bhils' participation in the state formation in southern Rajputana states included protracted negotiations, involving both resistance to and collaboration with the ruling clans, culminating in the marginalisation and peasantisation of these indigenous communities (Kapur 2008). Prior to the Rajput conquest, the Bhils held a significant portion of the southern half of the Rajputana.

The annals of Mewar mention the assistance provided by the Bhils to the early Guhila rulers.[3] Additionally, the towns of Dungarpur, Banswara, and Deolia, the

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3   The Guhilas were a prominent ruling clan in Rajasthan, with a notable presence since the early seventh century CE. They subsequently became a dominant power in the region during the course of following centuries. The Guhilas of Mewar were a Rajput dynasty that ruled the Kingdom of Mewar (Medapata, modern Mewar) region in the present-day Rajasthan state of India. The Guhila kings initially ruled as Gurjara-Pratihara (dynasty ruling northern India between the eighth and the eleventh centuries CE feudatories between the end of the eighth and ninth centuries, subsequently becoming independent in the early tenth century. In the mid-twelfth century, the dynasty underwent

old capital of Partabgarh, are all named after Bhil chieftains who formerly held sway there. Finally, it is widely known that in the three states, Udaipur, Banswara, and Dungarpur, it was customary to mark the brow of a new chief with blood taken from the thumb or toe of a Bhil from a specific family. The Rajputs believed that the blood mark signified the Bhil's loyalty, but it appears to have been more of a remnant of the Bhil's authority (Erksine 1908: 228). In the nineteenth century, the region witnessed British intervention with the treaties of 1818.[4] Over time, a series of socio-political decisions by the authorities resulted in mounting discontent among the tribal population in the area, leading to a rise in revolts by the Bhils in the southern Rajputana states (Doshi 1974; Mathur 2000, 2004; Doodwal 2021). Recent scholarship has debated and challenged the categorisation of princely states as homogenised entities. It has been highlighted that these arenas of native rule presented different courses of political and ideological responses to the conditions of imperial rule (Copland 1997, Ramusack 2003). In consequence, the manifestation of socio-political activism in these domains was perceived to diverge from the British provinces (Meena 2022), exhibiting notable contrasts in the administrative apparatus and socio-political milieu, especially in the context of pervasive religious and regional symbolism.

This study concentrates on the role of sacred spaces in the socio-political mobilisation in the princely states of southern Rajputana during the colonial period. It is crucial to contextualise this socio-political mobilisation within the broader framework of activism in the region, which initially sought to address the socioeconomic marginalisation of tribal communities through social reform. This activism subsequently gave way to the emergence of political reforms. Social upliftment was in most Rajputana states followed by political mobilisation, leading to Bhils' participation in struggles for their own rights as well as the larger struggles against the respective rulers, with a view to bringing about a responsible government. The socio-political movements, discussed in this paper, persuasively employed select sacred spaces for legitimising their cause and establishing themselves as potent voices within their respective domains. I explore this proposition by examining two sacred sites in this region, namely Bēṇēśvara Dhāma in

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a division into two branches. One branch continued to rule from Chitrakuta (modern Chittorgarh), while the other originated from the village of Sisoda with the title Rana and established the Sisodia Rajput dynasty, which ruled until independence (Hooja 2006: 152–56). Also, the ruling dynasties of Dungarpur and Banswara states had branched out from the Mewar dynasty.

4   The Rajputana states entered into individual treaties with the British East India Company and this marked British intervention in the region. By the end of 1818, almost all states of the present day Rajasthan were under the treaty obligation with the British. The guiding principle behind these treaties was the Subsidiary Alliance system promoted by Lord Wellesley, the Governor General of India (1798–1805).

Dungarpur and Mānagaṛha Dhāma in Banswara, and their relationship to the socio-political mobilisation that emanated as reformist campaigns and magnified into efficacious ferments that influenced the region's politics, as well as to cults that remain active to the present day.

Sacred spots and socio-political mobilisation

The Rajputana states' political space was highly restrictive—due to its triple-layered subservience of the region—to the British, the Indian monarchs, and the local *jagirdar*s or feudal lords (Hooja 2006: 987). Given these restrictions, sacred spaces and religious symbolism played a significant role in the socio-political mobilisation in these states in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. This was more pronounced among the indigenous and folk communities and in the pre-modern and pre-democratic societies during the colonial era.

Socio-political mobilisation can be explained as the motivating, persuading, and inspiring a group, community, or nation to take collective action for a cause that seeks to improve their lives, whether perceived or actual. T. K. Oommen explains mobilisation and collective actions through "the existence of certain uniformity among participants based on their interests rooted in socio-economic background and ideas emanating from their political orientations and ideological commitments" (Oommen 1977: 16). Mobilising any group or category of groups for a collective action is a challenging task for any leader, regardless of whether the group is urban or rural, tribal, or non-tribal, literate, or illiterate. In the absence of nationalist notions, 'pre-political' societies express their values primarily through religious vocabulary. Mobilisation efforts may be based on communal or primordial attachments (Oommen 1977: 16). Also, in the pre-democratic societies in question, when monarchical regimes were the norm, individuals rarely had access to communicative environments or civic spaces to express dissent and protest. In such polities, people had to contend with limited and constricted spaces. Mobilisers who wished to rally people needed therefore to reimagine and redefine the concept of public space to facilitate mobilisation. In many oppressive environments, the only secure locations for expressing alternative, opposing, or rebellious viewpoints were the sacred spaces where individuals could gather to worship.

The premise of the paper revolves broadly around two lines of thought. One is that the sacred or holy sites can lend the necessary credibility and legitimacy to a message, thereby making it more receptive and popular. Most cultures regard holy sites as representations of their beliefs, and the emotions evoked by these religious locations become shared and communal rather than merely private or

internal. Second, in the restrictive environment of non-democratic monarchical polities, there were limited spaces for socio-political mobilisation. In the princely states, in the face of the almost absent and restrictive public sphere, sacred spaces inevitably became an arena for people to address and challenge social and political issues. The interface of sacred spaces and socio-political mobilisation reveals that such engagements strengthen and reinforce each other.

This use of sacred places and religious symbolism as platforms for mobilisation has been observed in various historical contexts worldwide. In Brazil, churches facilitated trade union meetings during the dictatorship (1964–85), while in apartheid-era South Africa they became centres for anti-apartheid activism after the ANC's[5] ban. Similarly, churches in the United States played vital roles in the civil rights movement (Devine, Brown, and Deneulin 2015). In Iran, mosques played crucial role in the 1979 Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini used mosque networks to distribute his recorded lectures, which helped to galvanise support and ultimately overthrow the monarchy (Collins 2011: 42–44). Thus, sacred places and religious symbolism have been instrumental in fostering social change and political mobilisation, demonstrating their adaptability and resilience in challenging political climates.

In the South Asian context, Zohra Batul (2022) presents a pertinent analysis of contemporary times, examining sacred sites such as mosques and shrines in Kashmir's politics. Her study reconsiders the concept of the public sphere in non-western societies and its relation to political activism through collective action. She notably argues that the role of religion in political movements adds legitimacy to the struggle and encourages participation that is hard for believers to dismiss. She veritably stresses that particularly in the early twentieth century, the political leaders of the Kashmir Valley, representing a variety of political persuasions, have acquired legitimacy by associating their political activities with Islam and its symbols, including mosques and shrines. Since there is not much space available for protest in Kashmir, due to the ongoing strife, holy places have become the main hubs for political activism and thus help to facilitate construction of a counter-narrative to the official one.

Furthermore, religious institutions, due to their formal and informal structures, are well-positioned to mobilise social action. Community congregations have a significant impact on the growth of reform movements. The congregations associated with the sacred sites such as the fairs or *mēlā*, and festivals celebrated at the sites, facilitate continued participation through pre-existing networks and ties based on faiths. This creates a firm foundation and strengthens the movement

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5   African National Congress (ANC) is a political party in South Africa that was founded as an anti-apartheid liberation movement and has governed South Africa since Nelson Mandela was elected president in 1994.

(Hutchison 2012). Moreover, as Kama Maclean (2008) argues, pilgrimages serve as opportunities to unify the masses with the "common language of piety and ritual," particularly in the less literate societies. Hence, religious fairs are potent resources in socio-political mobilisation.

The present study examines two sacred complexes, namely the Beneshwar Shrine (Bēṇēśvara Dhāma) and the Mangarh Shrine (Mānagaṛha Dhāma). The two sites are discussed in the following two sections, which highlight their association with the socio-political mobilisation during the colonial era in the southern Rajputana states. This analysis reveals a pronounced correlation between sacred sites and socio-political movements, particularly in relation to indigenous groups. This connection serves to reinforce the bond between these communities and the issues raised by the movements. Consequently, both sites, with their distinctive trajectory witnessing mobilisation of these communities, highlight this connection.

Bēṇēśvara Dhāma / Beneshwar Shrine (Dungarpur) and Māvajī Movement

The sacred site of Beneshwar is located in Dungarpur, in the southern part of Rajasthan. It has been widely venerated as a holy abode, situated at the confluence of the river streams of Mahi and Soma.[6] The name 'Bēṇēśvara' is derived from the repute accorded to the Śiva-*liṅga* at the Bēṇēśvara Mahadeo temple, located in the river delta of Mahi and Soma.[7] The widespread reverence for the site is further derived from its supposed mention in the *Skandapurāṇa*.[8]

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6   In popular perception, this place is also known as Triveni Sangam (Trivēṇī Saṅgama) and Vagad Prayag (Vāgaṛa Prayāga), as it is considered to be the confluence of three rivers: Mahi, Soma, and Jakhama. However, it should be noted that River Jakhama, the tributary of River Soma, joins the River Soma before the site itself. 'Vagad' or 'Vāgaṛa' is a region located in the south-eastern part of Rajasthan. Its boundaries are mainly defined by the borders of the districts of Dungarpur and Banswara.

7   In the Vagadi language, 'Vēna' signifies delta. Consequently, the term Vēṇēśvara, also called Bēṇēśvara, refers to Śiva (Mahadeo), the 'Lord (Īśvara) of Vēna (delta)' (Sehgal 1974: 363–64).

8   The *Skandapurāṇa* mentions the sacredness of River Mahi and the greatness of the *tīrtha*s (pilgrimage sites) associated with its banks. Bēṇēśvara, situated on the banks of Mahi, is considered to be an auspicious *tīrtha*. Chapter 3 of Section II *Kaumārikākhaṇḍa* in Book 1 titled *Maheśvarakhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa*, describes 'The Greatness of the Tīrtha at the Confluence of Mahī and Sea.' The text states that, "The great river named Mahī has been (in its earlier stages) full of all the Tīrthas. What (doubt) then about (the sanctity of) its meeting place with the Lord of Rivers!" (Shastri 1950: 105).

Map 2   Bēṇēśvara Dhāma (Dungarpur). Source: Google Maps

The site houses a Mahadeo (Śiva) temple, of which the present structure was built by Maharawal Askaran, the ruler of Dungarpur in the fifteenth century, although repairs were made to the sanctum in the eighteenth century. The Mahadeo temple was a revered spot among the local inhabitants, as Mahadeo was a venerated deity among the Bhils (Kapur 2008: 33–54). A fair (*mēlā*) at the site in honour of Bēṇēśvara Mahadeo was held continuously for no less than three centuries after the temple of Mahadeo was built.

In the early decades of the eighteenth century, a Brahmin reformer called Māvajī made Beneshwar the centre of his new sect. According to tradition, he was profoundly influenced by Mīrā and the *bhakti* cult.[9] It is believed that on the *mārgaśīrṣa śukla ekādaśī* (1785 V.S.)[10] he received heavenly revelation to preach the

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9   Mīrā was perceived to be popular among the so-called depressed and weaker sections of society. In fact, she incurred the wrath of her family, who resented her association with the low-caste people. It has been argued by some scholars that Mīrā owes her popularity and survival in public memory to her following among the depressed and the downtrodden sections of peasants and artisans who, by singing Mīrā's *bhajan*s, symbolically seek to defy the authority of the Rajput ruling family of Mēvāṛa/Mewar (Jain and Sharma 2018).

10   *mārgaśīrṣa śukla ekādaśī* falls on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight (*śukla pakṣa*) of the Mārgaśīrṣa month in the Hindu calendar. This day holds significance in Hinduism, particularly for Viṣṇu devotees who observe fasting and perform rituals dedicated

Fig. 1 and 2   The Śiva-*liṅga* at the Mahadeo temple (Bēṇēśvara). It is called a self-created Śiva-*liṅga* or *svayaṃbhū* and is split into five parts. Photo by Jigyasa Meena.

message of the Vaishnava *bhakti* to the masses. He proclaimed himself as Kalki, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, and established the Niṣkalaṅka Sampradāya, with Beneshwar as its seat. According to popular lore, his earliest followers were Audichya Brahmins.[11] However, he earned formidable repute in the area due to his appeal to the marginalised caste groups and tribes (Interview with Keshav Kallal, the fifth-generation associate of Bēṇēśvara Dhām *pīṭhādhīśvara/pīṭhādhīśa*,[12] January 2, 2024). He initiated social reforms among the Bhils and other marginalised communities and castes like Kalalls, Bunkars, etc. within the Hindu fold (Kallal 2024, Mathur 2000: 5).

Māvajī's social reform initiatives were significantly shaped by the *bhakti* movement, with the objective of promoting social and religious equality. He instructed his followers to engage in *kīrtan*s (devotional singing) and to attend discourses on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, thereby promoting spiritual growth and community cohesion. He placed great emphasis on abstinence from alcohol consumption, as part of his broader vision of moral and ethical living. Māvajī's approach was inclusive, as evidenced by his practice of admitting followers into his sect without discrimination, thereby breaking down the barriers of caste and social status. By advocating both social and religious equality, Māvajī's reforms sought to uplift marginalised communities, integrating them into a more cohesive and egalitarian society. His efforts not only promoted spiritual devotion but aimed at creating a socially just environment that would be aligned with the core values of the *bhakti* movement (Mathur 2000: 5–7, Sharma 1968: 238). Legend has it that Māvajī's virtues and his life of dedication won him the respect of everyone in the region of Dungarpur, Banswara, and the surrounding areas. His sect placed a lot of emphasis on the regular singing of devotional songs (*bhajan*). He is said to have had extraordinary spiritual abilities and to have penned many works on various religious topics, making forecasts about the future of the country (Census 1966: 26). Between 1728 and 1732 CE, he wrote, with the help of his follower Jeewandas, five illustrated treatises known as *Chopras*; they were in the Vagadi language. In these treatises

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to Viṣṇu. V. S. stands for Vikram Samvat, a calendar that is 57 years ahead of the Gregorian calendar—i.e., 1728–29 CE.

11 Audichya Brahmins are a sub-caste of Hindu Brahmins, mainly from the Indian state of Gujarat. They are the largest Brahmin community in Gujarat, with a minority residing in the Indian state of Rajasthan. The Audichya Brahmins have a wide distribution, with their main concentration being in Ahmedabad, Mehsana, Kheda, Bharuch, Surendranagar, Sabarkantha, and Panchemahal districts. According to historical records, the Audichya Brahmins descend from over a thousand North Indian Brahmin families who were invited by the Solanki kings in the tenth century to Gujarat to serve as priests. The term *audīcya* means pertaining to north in Sanskrit, *udīcī* means north, so the Brahmins invited by Mulraj from Northern India came to be known as 'Audichya Brahmans' (Lal 2002: 82).

12 Pīṭhādhīśvara/Pīṭhādhīśa is the head of the *pīṭha*/sacred seat.

he predicted the nation's destiny, described various facets of the Vaishnavism, and included several images representing different incidents from the life of Kṛṣṇa and the *rāsalīlā* (Vashishtha 1995: 25). His adoration for Kṛṣṇa was visible in his dressing up like Kṛṣṇa and his performance of the *rāsalīlā*.[13]

With time, Māvajī's following evolved into a sect, and his disciples came to be known as 'Bēṇēśvara Dhāma Panthī' or '*māvabhaktas*', a title which required strict adherence to the ethical code preached by Māvajī (Mathur 2000: 17). Bēṇēśvara Dhāma became popular, and his devotees thronged to show their reverence.

Māvajī advanced his Niṣkalaṅka Sampradāya[14] among his followers and he called it the Bēṇēśvara Dhāma Panth. Spreading the message of the Vaishnavism, he preached non-violence, temperance, and vegetarianism to the illiterate Bhil *ādivāsī* (tribe) and to other castes without discrimination (Vashishtha 1995: 27–28). Hence, his followers are spread over several communities and groups such as Bhil, Chamar, and Sadh, as well as a small number of upper-caste Hindus such as Brahmins and Rajputs.

The sect came to be known as the "Mavaji guru-na-bhagat movement," or the "Beneshwar-na-bhagat movement." According to Stephen Fuchs, the movement emphasised the importance of 'social prestige' among the indigenous communities, who were willing to make significant sacrifices to climb the social ladder (Fuchs 1965: 54–61). Social prestige, in addition to economic factors, Fuchs argues, can be a powerful incentive for abandoning well-established and time-tested traditions in favour of new and unfamiliar ones. Māvajī's social reforms, manifested in his indiscriminating teachings, gave rise to the sect's initial popularity among the lower and middle classes.

Māvajī chose a sacred and venerated shrine to spread his message of social reform, largely driven by the objective of Sanskritisation[15] of the tribals and the so-called low caste groups. By promoting adherence to specific dietary norms (such as vegetarianism and total abstinence from alcohol), participation in distinctive

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13 *Rāsalīlā or rāsa* dance is a dance drama from northern India that is based on scenes from the life of Kṛṣṇa.

14 The Niṣkalaṅka Sampradāya is a religious sect founded by Sant Māvajī; it has a significant following. Followers of this tradition believe in Sant Māvajī as an enlightened figure and consider him to be the manifestation of Lord Viṣṇu's tenth *avatāra*, Kalki. The tradition emphasises devotion to Viṣṇu and follows the teachings of Sant Māvajī, focusing on spiritual purity and liberation.

15 In this context, the process of Sanskritisation should be understood as developed and popularised by the Indian sociologist M. N. Srinivas (1956). It broadly refers to the process of social or upward mobility of castes and communities situated at the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy through the adoption of rituals, customs, ways of living (such as vegetarianism, teetotalism) of the higher castes, and also exposure to ideas and values mentioned in Sanskrit texts, both sacred and secular, such as *karman*, *mokṣa* etc. (Srinivas 1956: 485).

Fig. 3 The Brahmā temple (Bēṇēśvara Dhāma) constructed by the Śrīgauṟa Brahmins. Photo by Jigyasa Meena.

forms of worship, and the adoption of dress codes that were consistent with those observed by the higher-caste Hindus, Māvajī sought to facilitate their upward social mobility.

By establishing his connection with Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa as also through legends that underscored his own magical and divine powers, his personality imparted a divine aura. Māvajī chose a site that was already marked as sacred amongst the local populace. Such environs must have enhanced the popularity and acceptance of his social message. In consequence, as the subsequent narrative establishes, Māvajī's social and religious activities in the region further served to reinforce and augment the sacrality of the site. Not surprisingly, this site and particularly the fair associated with it became an interaction point for intermingling of the indigenous population with the non-tribal Hindus, which in turn has facilitated the process of Sanskritisation among these inhabitants residing in the remote hilly terrain (Vashishtha 1995: 32).

Later, in the last decade of the eighteenth century, Māvajī's daughter-in-law, Janakuṁvarī, built a temple of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa, next to the Mahadeo Temple, to commemorate Māvjī, who passed away in the mid eighteenth century.[16] The Government Census publication accounts that this temple, presently called Hari Mandir, holds great significance, as a large number of people come to pay homage there. The fair in its present form started only after this temple's construction. At first, two fairs were held concurrently, one to pay tribute to Bēṇēśvara Mahadeo, and the other to celebrate the completion of the Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa temple's construction. As Viṣṇu's fair gained prominence with time, a sizeable crowd could be seen honouring him. While the followers of these two deities come to honour their respective deities, they also honour other deities (Census 1966: 26).[17]

Fig. 4 The stone slab outside the Brahmā temple displays information about the site as it is popularly perceived. It mentions the 'Hari mandir' as the 'Viṣṇu temple of Lord Kṛṣṇa' constructed by Janakuṁvarī, daughter-in-law of Saint Māvajī. This shows the interchangeable use of nomenclature for the temple as 'Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa/Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa/Hari Temple'. Photo by Jigyasa Meena.
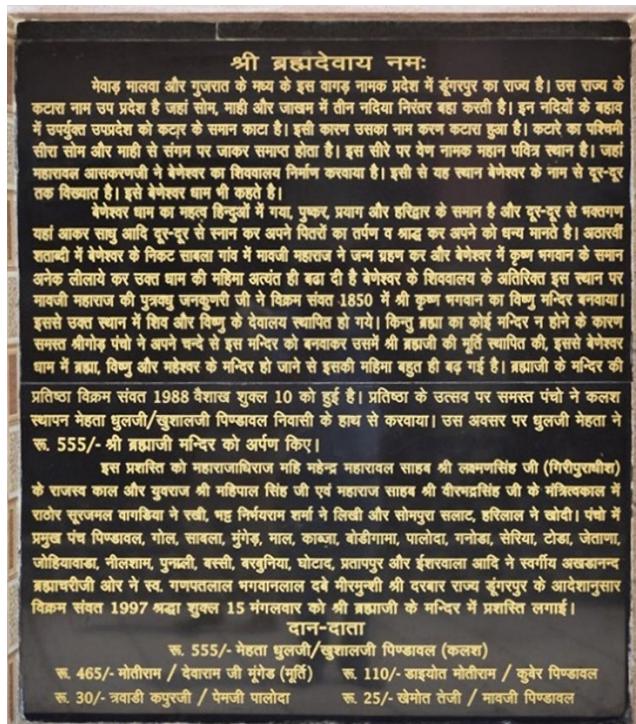
16 According to the Government Gazetteer, in Samvat 1850 (1793 CE), Janakuṁvarī, who was Māvajī's daughter-in-law, constructed the Viṣṇu Temple at Bēṇēśvara (Sehgal 1974: 364). It is worth noting that the temple has been referred to interchangeably as the Viṣṇu temple, Śrī Kṛṣṇa temple, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temple, and currently, as the Hari temple (see Fig. no. 4 & 5).

17 The fair is held between *māgha śukla ekādasī* and *māgha śukla pūrṇimā*. In addition to the temples of Bēṇēśvara, Mahadeo, and Hari Mandir, there is a temple dedicated to Brahmā, the three Hindu gods forming the trinity (Brahmā the creator, Viṣṇu the

Fig. 5   The Hari Temple, also known as the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa Temple (Bēṇēśvara Dhāma), has recently undergone a complete renovation. The exterior structure is entirely new, while the idols inside the temple remain unchanged. Photo by Jigyasa Meena.

Fig. 6   The images inside the Hari Temple are considered to be the family of Saint Māvajī, and he is venerated as Kṛṣṇa. Photo by Jigyasa Meena.

In the present format of the Beneshwar fair, the *mahanta* (chief priest)/*pīṭhādhīś-vara* of the Bēṇēśvara Dhāma, who is a descendent of Māvajī, hoists a seven-coloured flag on top of the Hari temple to mark the commencement of the ten-day fair (Sharma 2023). This highlights the importance of the Māvajī cult. On the first day of the fair, *māgha śukla ekādaśī*, the *pīṭhādhīśvara* (chief) arrives in a procession from the town of Sabla, along with a silver idol of Māvajī mounted on a horse. The Bhils in this region have been scattering the ashes of their deceased relatives in Ābudarrā Ghāṭa on *māgha śukla dvādaśī* (twelfth day). This ritual is performed in the morning, after the *pīṭhādhīśvara* has bathed there, as it is believed to enhance the water's sanctity. At the Hari temple, an *āratī* of the *pīṭhādhīśvara* is performed and the *rāsalīlā* is staged at night.

The fair resulted in the spread of Māvajī's teachings and following, and it gained the stature as the "*kumbha* of the *ādivāsī*" in the present times.[18] The fair created a religious and economic network that leveraged this sacred site. In addition to becoming a great religious congregation/pilgrimage site (*tīrtha*) for the tribals, it also opened space for developing wider interactions and networks that augmented the cult which developed around the site and enhanced the social base

Fig. 7 Ābudarrā Ghāṭa (Bēṇēśvara Dhāma). Photo by Jigyasa Meena.

preserver and Śiva the destroyer). The temple was constructed in 1931 by Śrīgauṛa Brahmins (sub caste of Brahmin community) from Dungarpur, Banswara, and Udaipur. The premises also house a Gāyatrī temple and a few Dharmaśālās (shelter or rest house, especially for spiritual pilgrims), which were later additions to the place.

18 *Kumbha* is a major sacred pilgrimage of the Hindus. So, the Bēṇēśvara fair is considered as the most sacred pilgrimage site by the *ādivāsīs* or tribals of the area.

of the devotees, as large numbers of devoted followers from the nearby states used to visit the fair (Report 1926: 1). An excerpt of a folk song widely sung by the tribals in the region exhibits the appeal and social diversity of the Bēṇēśvara fair among the Bhils and the tribals who visit the fair:

> *The Vagad Bhils and Dhebar Bhils have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The Mangalia Bhils of Gujarat have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The Bhils of Paniyar have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The bald Bhils of Bhana Seeman have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The Bhils of Vadgaon, resembling long-legged grasshoppers, have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The Bhils of Baudi, like the tiny hola bird, have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The wasp-waisted Bhils of Palna have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The dandy Bhils of Khedapani have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The langot-wearing[19] Bhils of Santrampur have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The well-groomed Bhils of Chatrina, Sanjali and Baria Paraganas have come to the fair. O, my friend!*
> *The Bhils of Chorasia Parganas, Dohad and Jhalod, carrying canes, have come to the fair. O, my friend![20]*

This gathering turned the space into a trading hub for the neighbouring areas and attracted traders alongside the pilgrims. The fair is predominantly attended by tribal people, with over half of the attendees being Bhils. Bēṇēśvara Mahādēva

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19 A bottom wear cloth worn by men in the Indian subcontinent.

20 The folk song mentions places including neighbouring areas such as Vāgaṛa (Banswara and Dungarpur) and Salumber (Dhebar Lake, Udaipur), Gujarat, Paniyar (a village near Mahi River), Bhana Seeman (in Santrampur), Vadgaon, Baudi (Dungarpur), Palna (Banswara), Khedapan, Sanjali and Baria Paraganas, Chorasia Parganas, Dohad and Jhalod (Gujarat). The excerpt of this folk song in the local dialect, translated by the author of the article into English, is as follows:
'Baneśvara nā meḷā nuṃ gīta' ("The song of Beneshwar Fair")
Vāgaḍajyāṃ ḍhebarajyāṃ meḷe āiyāṃ helī re
Gujarātanāṃ bhāgaḷajāṃ meḷe āiyāṃ helī re
Pāṃṇīyārānāṃ kāṃṇiyāṃ meḷe āiyāṃ helī re
Bhāṃṇā hebaḷanā sāṃdarā meḷe āiyāṃ helī re
Vaḍagāmīāṃ ṭīṭuḍiyāṃ meḷe āiyāṃ helī re
Bāvaḍīnāṃ olāṃ te meḷe āiyoṃ helī re
Pālāṃnā pātaḷajyāṃ meḷa āiyoṃ helī re
Kheḍā pāṃnā śelī meḷe āiyāṃ helī re
Hutiyām̐nā laṃgoṭiyā meḷe āiyoṃ helī re
Satarīnāṃ suṃgāḷajyāṃ mele āiyoṃ helī re
Sohā sorāhajyāṃ ḍeṃgāḷajyāṃ meḷa āiyoṃ helī re
<div align="right">(Pathak 1915: 58–59)</div>

and Māvajī are both revered at the fair. The latter is mostly worshipped by the so-called low castes among the Hindus, who also assemble there in large numbers. Although members of other Hindu castes also attend, their numbers are relatively small. Non-Hindu visitors are mostly traders or tourists.

The fair was originally organised under the patronage of the erstwhile princely state of Dungarpur. It brought religious fame to the place and provided income from the trade and from taxes and customs duties,[21] garnering good revenue for the state and showing a notable increase over the years.[22] In addition to its religious and commercial aspects, the fair also developed as a site for entertainment and leisure. Attendees could enjoy songs, folk dances, magic shows, animal shows, acrobatic feats, merry-go-rounds, and swings. After independence, the Panchayat Samiti[23] has been arranging exhibitions, showcasing improved agricultural techniques and instruments, instructions on sanitation and hygiene awareness as well as family planning (Census 1966: 29). Government administration has used the platform to communicate and provide relevant information to locals and tribals. Various government departments and organisations would set up stalls and exhibitions at the fair, including those related to government initiatives and schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)[24] to educate and reach out to the public.[25] The fair thus serves

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21 According to official records, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, there were around 250–550 shops at the fair, with a considerable volume of trade in cloth and cotton goods, mostly from places such as Bombay and Guzerat (Gujarat), and Pertabgurh (Pratapgarh), also along the Dungarpoor. A wide variety of goods was sold at the fair. The value of goods such as 'drugs, copper and brass utensils etc. was higher than the other goods such as paper, perfumes, glass and crystal ware, silk, etc'[Report 1874: 86, Report (1876–77) 1877: 60–61, Report (1875–76) 1877: 62–63, Report 1884: 96]. Later, after the independence, the fair gradually expanded the range of items for sale. The Panchayat Samiti collected taxes from the shopkeepers, the amount varying according to the item being sold.

22 The fair was reported as 'a great success' because 'the value of goods sold considerably' increased and it showed that 'the sales were extraordinary' (Report 1886: 116, Report 1888: 98).

23 Panchayat Samiti is a rural local government (Panchayat) body in India.

24 The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a social welfare measure of the Indian government. It guarantees the "right to work" and aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas. The program provides at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. The MGNREGA guarantees women one-third of the available jobs and aims to create durable assets, such as roads and wells.

25 "Vāgaṛa prayāga bēṇēśvara dhāma para dasa divasīya mēlā śurū : saptaraṅgī dhvajā laharāī, santa māvajī kī mahimā batāī," *Rajasthan Patrika* , 21 February 2024.https://epaper.patrika.com/Dungarpur?eid=8&edate=21/02/2024&pgid=1504833&device=desktop&view=3

Fig. 8   Exhibition Stall of the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Rajasthan, showcasing various government schemes and initiatives at the Beneshwar Fair 2024. Source: Panchayat Samiti, Sabla, Dungarpur.

as a vital platform for social mobilisation at the present time, the way it did also earlier, before the independence. It provides an opportunity to engage with the public, educate them about available resources and programmes, and foster community participation and awareness. This enhances the efficacy of public welfare schemes and promotes inclusive development. The convergence of religious and social activities at the pilgrimage site thus constitutes a significant factor in the process of social change and empowerment.

In the popular perception, this sacred location is considered by the *ādivāsī*s today to be a bigger and more important pilgrimage site or *tīrtha* than Pushkar, Prayag, and Kashi. The highest numbers of visitors are usually seen during *māgha pūrṇimā* when hundreds of thousands of tribal devotees from Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh gather there for a holy dip. The location where the three rivers meet is called Triveni Sangam. Each tribal group that arrives there brings its drums, which livens up the atmosphere. The tribal people, particularly the Garasias and the Bhils, attend the fair wearing their traditional attire and ornate jewellery, creating a vibrant display of colours.[26] The fair has hundreds of food

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26   They are particularly noticeable in their colourful clothing wearing elaborate blue, green, and red ghagras (long pleated skirts traditionally worn by women in Rajasthan),

Fig. 9   People visiting government stalls at the Beneshwar Fair 2024. Source: Panchayat Samiti, Sabla, Dungarpur.

Fig. 10   Interior Wall of the Exhibition Stall of the Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department, Rajasthan, showcasing various government schemes and initiatives at the Beneshwar Fair 2024. Source: Panchayat Samiti, Sabla, Dungarpur.

Fig. 11 Exhibition Stall of the Agriculture Department, Rajasthan, and local artists performing and giving social messages at the Beneshwar Fair 2024. Source: Panchayat Samiti, Sabla, Dungarpur.

and drink stalls, along with fun activities such as giant wheels or merry-go-rounds (Pillai 2016). Also, many colourful cultural programs are organised by the district administration and tourism department. Various sports and other competitions are organised by the Tribal Area Department. Thus, melas may be viewed as the social media of the earlier times and apart from recreational and informative facets, they also have immense potential to mobilise in today's time.

Sacred sites, hence, serve non-sacral purposes such as socio-political mobilisation. The Beneshwar Fair was particularly famous and witnessed major gatherings of tribals from the region and the nearby areas. Like other fairs and festivals, it served as a sacred space for mobilisation and provided a platform for the local populace, activists, and social workers from the neighbouring regions to interact. In the pre-independence era, political leaders extensively used the holy spot of Bēṇēśvara for their meetings. Despite its location in the tribal belt and lack of regular means of transport and communication, a large number of people used to flock to the fair, so regional leaders were also drawn to the event. In 1938, for example, Gauri Shanker Upadhyaya of Dungarpur and Haridev Joshi of Banswara, both of them Gandhian activists, attended the fair to interact with and mobilise the tribals, so that they may rise up for the socio-political reforms (Vyas 1986: 159–61).

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along with chunky earrings, attractive necklaces, and tinkling anklets, which attract tourists. The men of this tribe wear coloured shirts, a dhoti, and a red or saffron *pheṃṭā* or turban.

The annual fairs at Bēṇēśvara and other similar locations used to provide a platform for institutions such as the Sēvā Saṅgha in Dungarpur and the Harijan Sēvā Samiti in Partapur (Banswara), both of which worked for the propagation of Gandhian constructive programmes among the Bhils through speeches, songs, and exhibitions (Vashishtha 2014: 103–4, 199).[27] Similarly, Manikyalal Verma, a key leader of the Prajā Maṇḍala Movement (a popular movement for responsible government in princely states during the 1930s and 1940s), effectively utilised this platform to educate and rally the tribals for socio-political reforms through Gandhian means. Verma used to organise an exhibition using tent camps throughout the week of the fair, with a view of teaching weaving and spinning. In the exhibition display, he used to include the program of singing, with a bhajan troupe regularly in attendance, to draw the tribals to the exhibition. Verma would give speeches, which were illustrated through pictures, to promote Gandhian messages advocating spinning and weaving, and giving up foreign goods. He preached against certain social customs, such as *mṛtyu bhōja* (death feast), child marriage, use of inappropriate and abusive songs on the occasion of wedding ceremonies. To make the content more communicable, Verma and his team used to make various charts elucidating such policies and display them at the exhibition. At the same time, all the organisational heads, teachers, and social workers also gathered from the surrounding villages, to argue against the practice of *purdah*, prohibition of child marriage, abusive songs, and death feasts, and for a healthy and hygienic way of life (Parmar 1992: 216–17). These initiatives raised the socio-political consciousness of the tribal people in the remote regions and ultimately connected them and their regions to the larger struggles such as the Prajā Maṇḍala movement[28] and the national freedom struggle, thereby making them a part of the wider political dissent and civil disobedience against the colonial rule.[29]

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27 Sēvā Saṅgha was founded by a Gandhian, Bhogilal Pandaya, in 1938, as an institution for implementing Gandhian constructive programs among the Bhils in Dungarpur. Harijan Sēvā Samiti in Partapur (Banswara) was a branch of the Harijan Sēvā Samiti, an organization dedicated to the upliftment of *harijans.* The term *harijan* which means 'children of God', was popularised by Mahatma Gandhi, and refers to the members of the outcaste groups in India, previously known as the untouchables and referred to now as Dalits.

28 Prajā Maṇḍala movements were a wave of political campaigns that originated in the princely states under the British rule in the 1920s. People residing in the princely kingdoms, ruled by the local monarchs instead of the colonial rulers, led campaigns for political reforms including civil liberties, against their feudatory rulers and, on occasion, the British government.

29 The Ḍūṅgarapura Rājya Prajā Maṇḍala and Bāṁsavāṟā Rājya Prajā Maṇḍala were formed in the 1930s and 1940s in the princely states of Ḍūṅgarapura/Dungarpur and Bāṁsavāṟā/Banswara as part of the Prajā Maṇḍala Movement initiated across the princely states in colonial India. The Praja Mandals or Lok Parishads were political

Mangarh/Mānagaṛha Hills (Banswara) and the Bhagat Movement

Mānagaṛha is an iconic site, with multiple meanings and rich symbolism deeply entrenched in the public memory of the people of Rajasthan. The association of the site with both religious and political activism, especially of the marginalised and the oppressed, has endowed it with a wide currency in the politics of the present times, too.[30] Mānagaṛha is a small hillock situated at the southern end of the Aravalli mountains in the present Rajasthan, bordering the village of Ānandapurī (formerly known as Bhukiyā) in Banswara district in Rajasthan and Sunth (erstwhile Sant Rampur state) in Gujarat.

The site is more popularly known today for the Mānagaṛha Massacre Memorial, commemorating the massacre that took place on 17 November 1913 in Banswara district of Rajasthan. Mānagaṛha was highly venerated by the Bhils and was part of the earlier Bhil kingdom.[31] It is the place where Govindgiri, of the Govalia Banjara community (semi-nomadic goods carriers), launched a moral and social reform movement among the Bhils, popularly known as the 'Bhagat Movement' (already mentioned earlier), which later transformed into a political movement aimed at forming Bhil Raj (Bhil Kingdom).

Govindgiri was born in 1863 in Bersa, a village in the former princely state of Dungarpur (Vashishtha 1997: 20). His father was a skilled trader who utilised the community barter system to trade goods extensively across Gujarat, Vagad, and Malwa regions. This allowed him to witness first-hand the struggles and hardships faced by the *ādivāsī* communities (Sonker 2022: 408). During the major famine of 1899–1900, the Bhils, who were the most marginalised group in the region, were devastated. Govindgiri, too, lost his family and home in the famine, and around 1909 he decided to start a cult to "reform the degenerated Bhil" (Fuchs 1965: 51). He organised a feast for the Bhil inhabitants, lit a *dhūnī,* ("sacred fire"), declared

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movements that advocated responsible government for the subjects of the princely states against the rulers as well as the British Paramountcy, as the freedom movement led by the Indian National Congress (INC) consciously distanced itself from political agitation in the princely states until the late 1930s. Eventually, these movements merged with the national freedom movement after a change in the INC's stance to support them.

30 The recent large gathering of tribals at Mānagaṛha with the demand for 'Bhil Pradesh' traced back to the historical roots of the site ("Tribals from 3 states", 2024).

31 As previously mentioned, Banswara was ruled by the Bhil chieftains before the Rajput clans took over the region. In 1530, Jagmal, son of the Sisodia Rajput ruler of Dungarpur, displaced and defeated the local Bhil chieftain Vasna and became the ruler of Banswara. The successors of Jagmal continued to rule the princely state of Banswara until its integration into the state of Rajasthan in 1948 (Kapur 2008, Vashishtha 2014).

Map 3   Mangarh/Mānagaṛha Hills (Banswara). Source: Google Maps.

Fig. 12   The Mānagaṛha Massacre Memorial (Banswara, Rajasthan), Source: *Wikimedia Commons.*

himself to be the incarnation of God, and began his campaign. Gradually, the Bhils started believing him and, as a result, his reputation among them grew. He then travelled extensively in the Bhil-inhabited areas, including the surrounding regions of Dungarpur, Banswara, Sant-Rampur, Idar, and Panch Mahals, which significantly increased his appeal among the Bhils, who eagerly flocked to join his cult (Fuchs 1965: 51–52).

Govindgiri presented a strict ethical code that one must accept to participate in the new faith. His teachings emphasised prohibition on inter-dining with the outsiders, even Brahmins, and encouragement of virtuous living and association with good people. The followers were instructed to always speak truthfully, refrain from lying, stealing, or coveting others' spouses; avoid meat and wine; and maintain cleanliness by bathing daily and wearing clean clothes (Fuchs 1965: 52).

To spread his message and influence to other regions, Govindgiri used a religious token, sending his disciples to neighbouring villages to light the *dhūnī* in new centres, and from there to spread his sect throughout the area. In a few years, large sections of the Bhil in the districts around Dungarpur became ardent followers of Govindgiri. *Dhūnī* and *niśāna* (sacred flags) were employed to mark their domain; they held religious fairs (mela) on auspicious days to pay respect to these symbols. One auspicious *dhūnī* was lit at Mānagaṛha, which, as mentioned above, was an ancient sacred spot. Thus, Govindgiri used prevalent sacred spots to popularise his message, while, at the same time, creating new *dhūnī*s that became new spots endowed with sacral and divine power. The wide diffusion and impact of his message were in direct relation to his efforts to create and replicate spots marked by religious and sacral meaning.

Govindgiri later became known among the Bhils as 'Govind Bhagat' due to his powerful preaching. After the formation of his Sampa Sabhā[32] and establishing *dhūnī*,[33] his preaching evolved into a transformative movement, earning him the title of 'Govind Guru'. Initially, the British and the Dungarpur ruler himself were highly appreciative of Govindgiri's moral and social transformative initiatives. The Dungarpur ruler himself welcomed Govindgiri to his palace and courteously listened to his devotional songs (*bhajan*) (Fuchs 1965: 52). Also, the correspondence

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32 Sampa Sabhā was an association formed by Govindgiri in 1883 for socio-political reform among the Bhils. Its main stated objectives were abstinence from alcohol, stealing, robbery; opening schools in villages; personal cleanliness; worshiping god; amelioration of the economic condition of the downtrodden (Sharma 1991: 213).

33 The concept of *dhūnī* or sacred fire has been in use in many religious orders since earlier times. Also, it was considered an Ārya Samāj influence, as Dayanand Saraswati visited Mewar during this period. It is noteworthy with regard to Govindgiri's movement, as he made it a symbolically integral part of his cult. In the popular perception, the *dhūnī* in Mānagaṛha has been considered as present in some form also in the past, making the site holy for local inhabitants (Vashishtha 1997, Mathur 2000).

of the British officials described Govindgiri as a "genuine ascetic" and appreciated his teachings, which aimed at the "moral and social improvement of the Bhils" and led to the "spread of education and civilising influences."[34] However, with time, the rulers began to disapprove of his activities, perceiving them to be a reforming spree. This change in attitude was primarily due to the revenue losses incurred by the authorities because of his teachings against liquor consumptionVashishtha 1997: 28–31). Additionally, the authorities were fearful of his activities at Mānagaṛha. This was particularly evident in 1912 and early 1913, when Maharawal, the ruler of Banswara state, imprisoned him. However, he was released in April 1913, due to the fear of commotion among the Bhils.

In October 1913, Govindgiri and his followers sought refuge on Mangarh Hill, in response to mounting tensions with the authorities. This gathering was more reminiscent of a traditional tribal protest than a conventional act of resistance. Its purpose was to attract the attention of the state authorities to the grievances of the local population. The site was transformed into a focal point for Govindgiri's activities and served as a platform for disseminating the message and gathering the Bhils. The message was disseminated that on the occasion of the fair on 13 November (1913), the congregation would initiate the establishment of Bhil Raj.

Mānagaṛha was chosen as the location for the Bhils' congregation since there was a *dhūnī* of the Bhils at Mānagaṛha in ancient times, and because it was one of the prominent centres of the Bhil kingdom. As a result, Govindgiri could attract a large gathering of his disciples to attend a fair there. In addition, he chose it as a place for residence, worship, and accommodating a fair, because of its beautiful garden-like qualities and the convenient availability of water and firewood. Further, it was strategically placed on the border of the Banswara and Sunth states, which made it accessible to the Bhils of the neighbouring areas to congregate easily (Vashishtha 1997: 87, Mathur 2000: 25). An excerpt from a folk song, widely popular among the Bhil tribals today, underlines the antiquity of Mānagaṛha and its *dhūnī* for the Bhils:[35]

34　Letter from Government of Bombay, No.1647, Dated the 17th (Received 19th) March 1914—Proceedings, August 1914, Internal-A, Foreign & Political Department, National Archives of India.

35　Translation of the song in English is by the author of this paper. Original text after Sharma (1956:103):
　Gīt govinda gurū ro ("Song for Govind Guru!")
　Raī ne kevāan bole re, mānagaḍha māte dhūmāl kare
　Hāansu mānagaḍha vāje re
　Hāansu ek garū be selā
　Hāansu jūnī dhūṇī jūnī
　Hāansu dhūṇiye pūjā karo
　Hāansu danakāan jātarī āve

Everyone together says—There is a fight over Mānagaṛha,
Mānagaṛha is famous, there is a Guru and two disciples,
There is a very ancient dhūnī, worship this dhūnī,
Every day travellers come, many travellers come,
There is a fair of people, a huge fair, people gather here.

On November 13th, 1913, a large number of Bhils gathered on the Mānagaṛha hill, to take part in the annual fair on the full moon of the month of Kārtika. The religious force of the *dhūnī* and the historicity of the site had a strong attraction for the Bhils. This huge assemblage was disapproved by the state authorities.

In the eyes of the authorities, the Bhil gatherings at Mānagaṛha and the massive influence of Govindgiri among them "portended a Bhil rebellion against the Rajput rule".[36] The rulers have been, perhaps, apprehensive of the potential power of mobilisation inherent in a historic holy land and the "former stronghold of Bhil dominion" as a symbol of ancient glory that could remind the Bhils of their earlier kingdom (Vashishtha 1997: 38).

For this reason, the Govindgiri-influenced Bhil assemblage at the Mānagaṛha hills on the Sunth-Banswara border, which was disapproved by the colonial authorities and the Dungarpur Durbar (royal court) and found formidable enough to deploy the Mewar Bhil Corps,[37] was eventually attacked to arrest the movement (Report 1913–1914: 4). The Mewar Bhil Corps, along with the troops of the Rajput rulers, attacked the Bhils gathered at Mānagaṛha. This led to the fateful massacre of Mānagaṛha on November 17th, 1913.

Following the suppression of the Bhagat movement activities in Mānagaṛha in 1913, the authorities restricted access to the site for the Bhils. Furthermore, the site became a disputed territory between the princely states of Banswara and Sunth. After India's independence in 1947, it became a part of the state of Rajasthan, and was recognised as a sacred site of the 'Bhagat Bhils' and a historical site, popularly known as Rajasthan's Jallianwala Bagh.[38] In honour of Govindgiri

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Hāansu gaṇāan jātarī āve
Hāansu mānaviyāan no melo
Hāansu bharī melo bhārī.

36 Letter from Government of Bombay, No. 1647, Dated the 17th (Received 19th) March 1914, Progs, Aug 1916, Internal-A, Foreign & Political Department, National Archives of India.

37 The Mewar Bhil Corps, established in 1841 by the British Indian government, was a military unit formed with its headquarters in Kherwara. This corps was specifically created to employ the Bhil tribe, while also serving to police and maintain order in the challenging and rugged hill terrain of the Mewar region.

38 The Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab, British India, is a historic site where a massacre occurred on 13 April 1919. On the annual Baishakhi (harvest festival) fair,

and his Bhagat movement, the village of Bhukhiā (meaning "hunger"), situated within the precincts of Mānagaṛha Dhāma, was renamed Ānandapurī (meaning "city of bliss") in 1959, with the objective of fostering environment of peace and tranquillity (Vashishtha 1997: 87–88, Tribhuvan 2022).

Following its dispersal in 1913, the fair at Mānagaṛha was revived only in 1952. Although the Bhils were scattered and suppressed, this incident further reinforced the memory of the sacred site of Mānagaṛha among the Bhils. The 1952 Mānagaṛha Fair, celebrated as a religious activity of the Bhagat Bhils, was marked by the purification of the bloody hill of Mānagaṛha through a *yajña* (ritual performed in front of a sacred fire) performance and a night-long singing of devotional songs. At the beginning, only a small group of Bhagat Bhils participated in the fair. Since 1975, however, the fair has grown considerably, due to the construction of a temple, known as Mānagaṛha Pañcadhāmā, which contains five shrines, dedicated to Govindgiri, Hanumān, Vālmīki, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Niṣkalaṅka. The temple has become a place of pilgrimage (*tīrtha*) for both Bhagat Bhils and non-Bhagat Bhils, evolving with time into a significant pilgrim site among the tribals of the region. Bhagat Bhils from the Māvajī and Surmaldass[39] sects attend the temple fair and are warmly received by the Bhils of the Govindgiri sect. As a result, even in contemporary political circles, Mānagaṛha has been chosen to be the object of adulation and celebration by various political groups in their bid to garner support from the tribals of the region and has been persuasively pitched to be the 'national monument' (Tabeenah 2022, PIB 2022).

This historical movement influenced several socio-political campaigns[40] in the later times and served as the inspiration for H. R. Meena's historical novel, *When Arrows Were Heated Up* (2016), which presents the perspective of tribals, whose narrative appears to be buried under the official records. The novel presents the struggle of the *ādivāsī* under the leadership of Govind Guru both against the British and the rulers of princely states. In his analysis of the novel, S. K. Sonker

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a significant gathering of individuals had assembled with the intention of voicing their opposition to the Rowlatt Act and the detention of pro-independence activists. In response to the gathering, Brigadier General R. E. H. Dyer surrounded the assembled crowd with troops of the British Indian Army, blocking the exit and ordering fire. The troops continued to fire, even as the crowd attempted to flee, and did so until their ammunition was exhausted.

39 Surmaldass, a Bhil reformer, founded Surmal Panth in the 1870s. His followers spread to Gujarat, Mewar, Banswara, Dungarpur.

40 The socio-political awakening among the Bhils due to Govindgiri's Bhagat movement inspired other Bhil revolts such as the Eki movement led by Motilal Tejawat in 1920s, and the Praja Mandala agitations in the region, which aimed at political reforms and became prominent after 1930s and 1940s, saw the participation of the tribal communities in these states.

stresses that Govindgiri knew that religious activities could influence people. Therefore, argues Sonker, he effectively incorporated religious elements into his social movement to fight against the oppressive system, using *dhūnī* and Sampa Sabhā (association for socio-political reform among the Bhils formed by Govindgiri in 1883), thus re-orienting the *ādivāsī* to stand with him (Sonker 2022: 420). The sacrality of this place advanced with the installation of sacred fire (*dhūnī*) and organisation of fair, and eventually developed as a *dhāmā* (sacred shrine and pilgrimage), with the massacre marking the valour of the Bhils. Govindgiri's movement had a permanent impact, evident from the annual fair that attracts ever-increasing visitors to the hillock of Mānagaṛha to pay homage to Guru Govindgiri and bring Banswara on the pilgrim and tourist map.

Conclusion

Sacred spaces evolve within the wider socio-political milieu and not in isolation. Thus, religion and socio-political engagements are mutually reflective and re-inforcing. The immense reverence for the venerated sites studied above facilitated the campaigns and mobilisation as well as socio-economic connections in the concerned region. This shows that non-religious motives and commitments can be gleaned through sacral might and mediums, such as ritual symbolism, holy oaths, and slogans. Sacred spaces have been effective mobilisation grounds that imparted legitimacy and protection to the discussed movements against the dominant power structures.

The religious and the sacred have had a powerful emotional appeal not only for the less-literate tribal communities, but have been a part of the mobilisation strategy of the urban and educated as well. The role and impact of religion in socio-political movements have remained undiminished in the Indian subcontinent. For instance, the political ideology of the extremist nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak[41] exhibited a religious and revivalist orientation, as evidenced by his use of imagery and symbolism, including references to the Gaṇeśa festival, to appeal to the sentiments of many Indians and facilitate solidarity in the national movement. Tilak transformed the quintessentially religious space of Gaṇeś Utsav in Maharashtra into a political space, when he saw the possibility of uniting the

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41   Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856–1920) was a prominent nationalist leader who played pivotal role in the early stages of the Indian independence movement. He was actively engaged in the latter decades of the nineteenth and the early decades of the twentieth century and emerged as a notable figure during the extremist phase (1905–19) of the Indian nationalist movement, which advocated radical measures to achieve self-rule.

people against British oppression through this religious festival, which had been earlier a celebration on a much smaller scale (Gopinath 2019: 97–98). In a similar vein, Kama Maclean's research on the Kumbh Mela (2008) shows that both the nationalists and the British used extensively mela space for communication and information dissemination. The holy *saṅgama* (river confluence) at Allahabad, where the Kumbh Mela takes place, attracts pilgrims from all around the country, making it a potent space for the nationalists of all hues to utilise it to communicate with the masses. It is important to note, however, that the Gaṇeśa festival, popularised by Tilak, and the Kumbh Mela, were intended to appeal to a wide audience, and although exclusive in many ways, they became powerful spaces. The appeal of the sacred spaces under study in the current chapter was quite regional, intended for a given, specific locality. Being in a tribal-dominated region, both the shrines and the associated melas managed to attract largely marginal and tribal communities of the neighbouring areas.

Māvajī and Govindgiri, two charismatic and messianic leaders who led campaigns around these sacred shrines, emerge as ingenious individuals who, despite being non-tribals, were seeking to enter the minds and hearts of the populace, in which tribals formed the predominant group. It is difficult to ascertain their motives, yet how they negotiated space for themselves in the region is indeed incredible. Oommen, who explored the nature and significance of regional and local leadership in India, refers to these leaders as "local charismatics" who operate within a specific locality or culturally autonomous region. Oommen categorises such leaders into two distinct groups: those who are simply a replica or an edition of the national charismatics and who seek to style themselves after the pattern of behaviour of the national leader; and those who use their charisma without reference to the national leaders (Oommen 1972: 9–10). Reminiscent of the latter, the leadership of these two leaders, Māvajī and Govindgiri, has demonstrated profound regional ingenuity.

It is interesting to observe the increasing influence and subsequent popularity of the non-tribal leaders in the tribal belts. At the outset, despite the seminal contribution of the Bhils to the foundation, formation, and sustenance of the princely states of southern Rajputana, the image of the Bhils as a backward, semi-civilised isolated group of people persisted.[42] This demeaning and condescending projection of the tribals in colonial narratives and popular understanding prevented tribal leaders from earning legitimacy and respect among the non-tribals. Moreover, these groups remained resourceless in terms of material wealth, education, and clout. Hence, non-tribal leaders who could mobilise resources and

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42 Relevant discussion on the theme of participation of tribal communities in the state formation processes in the southern Rajputana states from the early medieval times to the colonial period has been well documented in N. S. Kapur (2008).

state support for the tribal populations through their charisma, mobilisation strategies, and networking skills became imperative for the Bhil populace of the region. In the advanced phase of the anti-colonial and pre-independence activism, too, non-tribal outsiders like Manikyalal Verma and Bhogilal Pandya devoted themselves to the cause of ameliorating the living conditions of tribal communities in southern Rajputana. Hence, the region hardly experienced the presence of popular and powerful tribal leaders. Even in modern times, tribal leaders are seldom able to successfully champion the causes and rights of the tribal population.[43]

The use of sacred sites was central to the social, religious, and political activism of Māvajī and Govindgiri. The attempt to gain access, influence, and legitimacy through the use of these sites speaks to their acumen as mobilisers. They acquired initial popularity using ancient sacral spots, and further embellished the sites by the addition of more shrines and a *dhūnī*, thus establishing their independent identity among the people. The fairs organised by them emerged as additional and popular spaces associated with people's religious beliefs and faith. Increasing the number and the territorial dispersion of sacred sites was the key to their formidable influence in the region.

Each sacred space attracts its visitors based on the ideologies, tendencies, and messages it espouses. The sacred sites of Bēṇēśvara and Mānagaṛha are situated in the predominantly tribal-populated states of Dungarpur and Banswara but have differing social bases. For example, although Beneshwar fair is revered as the '*maha kumbh*' of the tribals, it has a much wider social outreach among other communities, due to an effectual reform campaign by Māvajī who brought the *bhakti* and the Vashnavite influence in harmony with the existing Shaivite traditions. Mānagaṛha largely remained a tribal attraction as the shrine was primarily remembered as an ancient holy centre of the Bhils. Govindgiri advocated the worship of Mahadeo—he used to emphasise his devotion and wore *rudrākṣa*[44] (Mathur 2000: 22, Vashishtha 1997: 24). However, the Mānagaṛha shrine also houses other deities, which are revered with similar devotion. Mahadeo/Śiva has been revered by the indigenous, tribal, and local communities, as well as the royal houses and the non-tribal populace in these princely states.

The two sacred shrines in the focus of this study have historical and cultural significance that is evident also in present times. The temple complexes, the fairs (*melā*), religious congregations and gatherings around them exhibit the socio-economic and cultural bond that had nurtured activism in the region. The fairs at the shrines hold a massive significance, as they involve not just religious celebrations

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43 https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/have-indias-tribal-leaders-failed-their-people-13197 (accessed August 25, 2024).

44 *Rudrākṣa* is a prayer bead associated with Śiva.

but commercial and recreational aspects. The socio-political campaigns around the two sites under study exhibited the substantial power of mobilisation of these religious fairs and, as Maclean points out with regard to the Kumbh Mela, "an unparalleled opportunity to influence the congregated masses" (Maclean 2008: 5). The development of these sites' sacrality followed varied paths, but eventually they both provided space as well as motivation for the predominant tribal communities to unite for the sake of activism.

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Hindu sacred geographies are shaped by interwoven webs of myth, ritual, and pilgrimage. *Routes, Patterns, Ideologies: Navigating Sacred Sites in India* brings together essays that offer in-depth explorations of Hindu sacred spaces, focusing on the relationships between sites as a crucial dimension of their theological and social significance. Drawing on textual analysis, visual studies, and ethnographic insights, the contributors to this volume illuminate the patterns and mechanisms that link sacred sites into dynamic networks, demonstrating how sacrality is continually negotiated through evolving cultural, political, and theological landscapes.