UTE HÜSKEN
South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University

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 *Perumpaṇārruppaṭai*; 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.
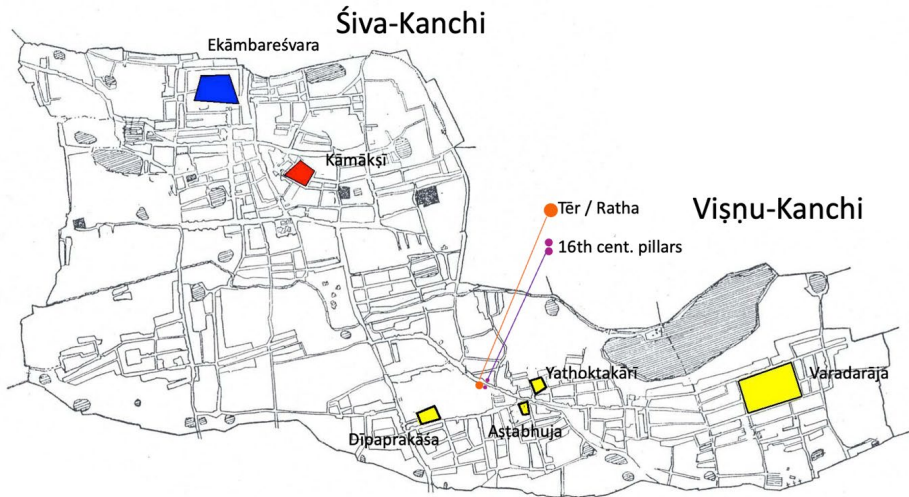
Four Viṣṇu temples

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]

---

1   See for example Mahalingam 1963 and Srinivasan 1979.
2   Stein (2021: 36–37) posits that the present-day subdivion 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.

---

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
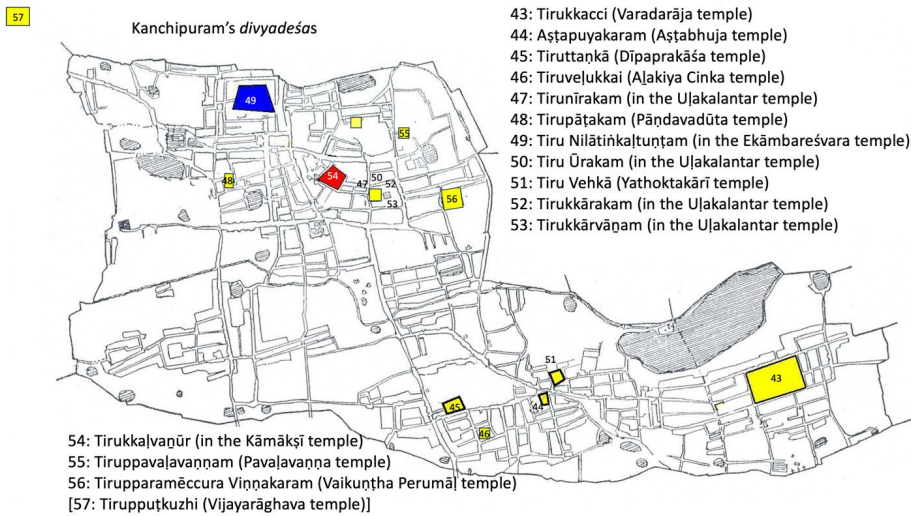
Fig. 1   Varadarāja's temple chariot (*tēr*) covered with metal sheets; one sixteenth-century pillar integrated into the front of the fruit stand.
© Ute Hüsken, 22.9.2023.

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 Piḷḷaipperumāḷaiyaṅkār; 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

---

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

---

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).

---

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

---

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 Tiruppāṟkaṭal as immediate predecessors to Yathoktakārī, mentioned in the Sanskrit texts. Both temples are situated 95 km (Paḷḷikōṇṭā) and 33km (Tiruppāṟkaṭal) 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 Tiruppāṟkaṭal 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,

---

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

---

25 This place is identified as Uttira Raṅkanātar in Paḷḷikōṇṭā.

26 This place is identified as Raṅkanātar in Tiruppārṛkaṭal.

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 Tiruppārṛkaṭal, 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 Satyavratakṣetra (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 (Pōtarat-tiṇākaram and Ālālacuntaram Piḷḷai 2000). This prose Tamil rendering follows the content of the Sanskrit text closely.

---

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

---

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

---

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
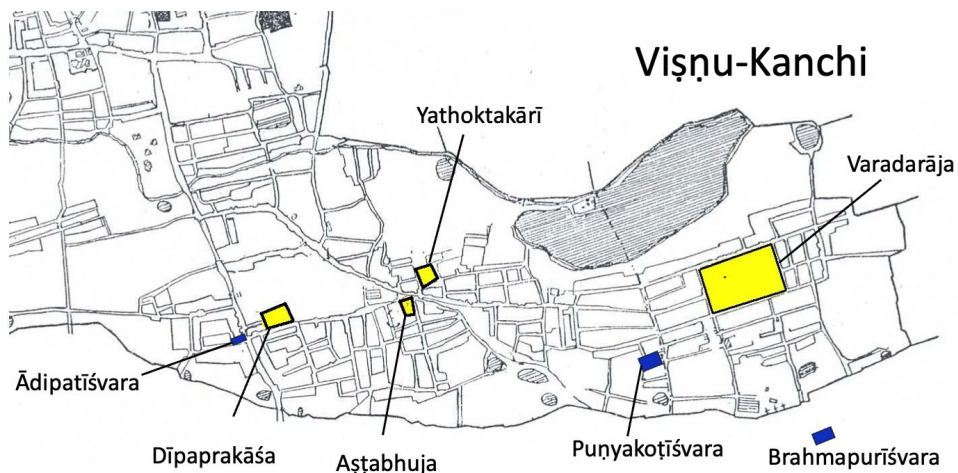

Fig. 3 Woodcut in a 1900 print of the *Kāñcippurāṇam*, a Tamil re-composition of the Śaiva *Kāñcīmāhātmya* by Civañāṉa Muṉivar. Here Śiva instructs Viṣṇu to save Brahmā's sacrifice from Sarasvatī as river.

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.
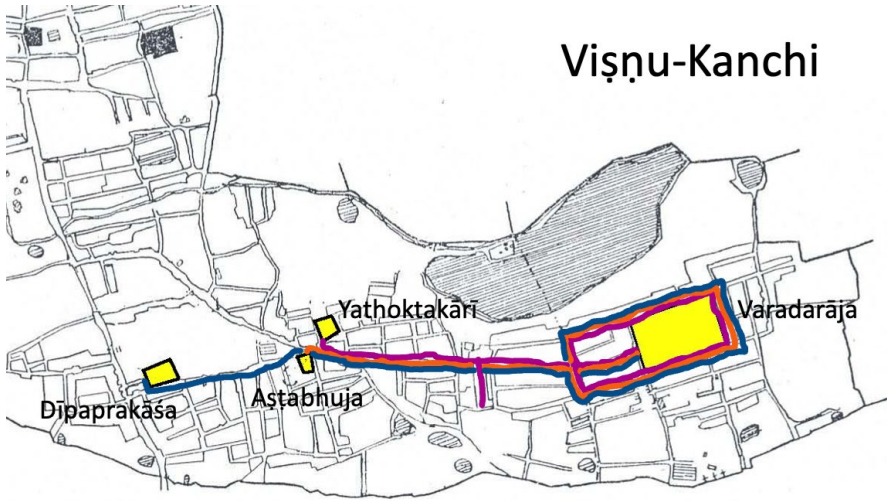
---

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 Teṉkalai. 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" Teṉkalai 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

---

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 Teṉkalais' 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 Teṉkalais 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 Teṉkalais consider Māṇavāḷamāmuni (1370–1443 CE) as the spiritual successor to Rāmānuja, and also as the Teṉkalais' 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 Teṉkalai 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 Teṉkalais. Among the four Viṣṇu temples in question, the Aṣṭabhuja and the Yathoktakārī temples are run by the Teṉkalai group, whereas

---

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.
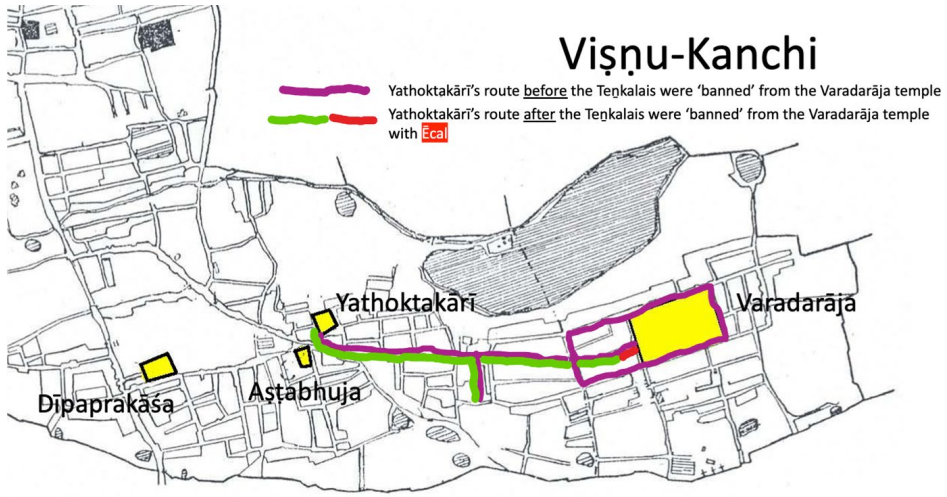
the Dīpaprakāśa and the Varadarāja temples are run by the Vaṭakalais. However, the authenticity of the Varadarāja temple's Vaṭakalai affiliation has been disputed for a long time.[46] Moreover, the right to perform certain services to the god Varadarāja form the background of the continuing disputes 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

---

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.

---

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)

---

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
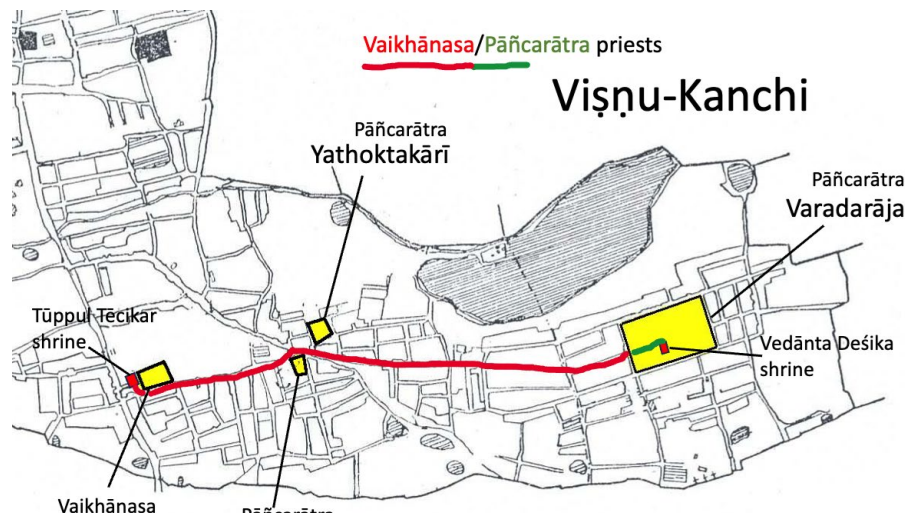
---

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

---

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.
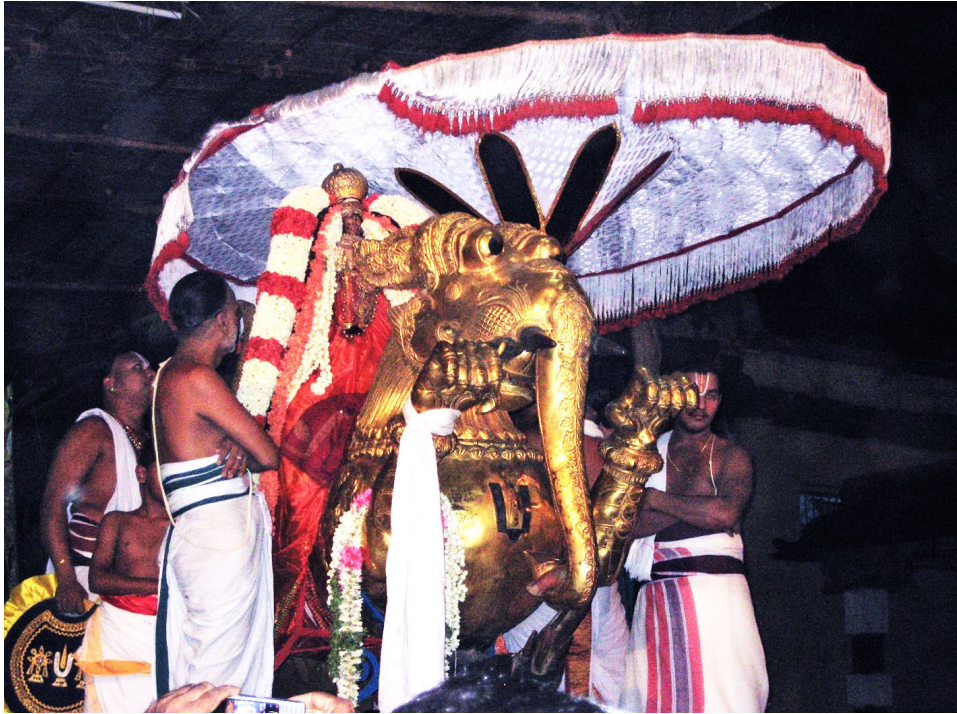59   Vedānta Deśika praises Dīpaprakāśa in his *Śaraṇāgatidīpikā*.

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,

---

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

---

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 Teṅkalai 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 Teṅkalai 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 Teṅkalai priest from Melkote was asked to act as main performer. Yet the earlier practice, when the Vaṭakalai priests lead the performance in the Teṅkalai Aṣṭabhuja temple, is a clear indication that on the priestly level the Vaṭakalai/Teṅkalai 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

---

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

---

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

Acknowledgments

Bibliography

Primary sources

HM: *Hastigirimāhātmya: Śrīhastigirimāhāt-myaṃ Maṇipravāḷavyākhyānam*, edited by R. Tātatēcikatātācāriyar. [In Grantha script, with Maṇipravāḷam commentary.] Kanchipuram: Śrī Vēṅkaṭēcvara mutrākṣara cālai, 1971.

KV: *Kāmākṣīvilāsa: Śrīmārkaṇḍeyapurāṇān-targataḥ 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.

Pādmasaṃhitā: *Pādma Samhitā*, edited Seetha Padmanabhan, R. N. Sampath and Venkatadriagaram Varadachari (Pancaratra Parisodhana Parisad Series 3–4), 2 vols., Madras, 1974 and 1982.

Sāttvatasaṃhitā: *Sātvata-Saṃhitā with comm. by Alaśiṅga Bhaṭṭa*, edited by Vraja Vallabha Dwivedi (Library Rare Texts Publication Series, 6), Varanasi, 1982.

Viṣvakseṇasaṃhitā: *Viṣvaksena Saṃhitā*, edited by Lakshmi Narasimha Bhatta (Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha Series, 17), Tirupati, 1972.

Secondary sources

Ambach, Malini. Forthcoming. "Multiple Sacred Geographies." PhD diss., Heidelberg University.

——. Forthcoming. "Yathoktakārī's Narrative in the Vaiṣṇava Kāñcīmāhtmya: Text and Translation." In *Sources on the Yathoktakārī Temple*, edited by Jonas Buchholz, Dominic Goodall, and Ute Hüsken. Heideberg: HeiUP.

Anandakichenin, Suganya. Forthcoming. "Yathoktakārī's Narrative in the Maṇipravāḷa commentary on the *Hastigirmāhātmya* and Vedānta Deśika's *Meyviratamāṇmiyam*: Text and Translation." In *Sources on the Yathoktakārī Temple*, edited by Jonas Buchholz, Dominic Goodall, and Ute Hüsken. Heidelberg: HeiUP.

Buchholz, Jonas. 2022. "Sthalamāhātmyas and Talapurāṇams of Kanchipuram: A Network of Texts." In *Temples, Texts, and Networks: South Indian Perspectives*, edited by Malini Ambach, Jonas Buchholz and Ute Hüsken, 11–40. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing. https://doi.org/10.11588/hasp.906.c13934

Caudharī, Rāghavaprasāda. 1995. „Vaikhānasa Āgama. Bhāratīya Tantraśāstra." *Saṃyag-Vāk Series* 7: 405–22.

Colas, Gérard. 1995. "Cultes et courants du vishnouisme en Inde du Sud. Quelques observations á partir des textes." In *Les ruses du salut: Religion et politiques dans le monde indien*, edited by Marie-Louise Reiniche, 111–38. Paris (*Puruṣārtha* 17).

——. 1996. *Viṣṇu, ses images et ses feux. Les métamorphoses du dieu chez les vaikhānasa* (Presses de l'école francaise d'extreme-orient, Monographies, 182). Paris: Presses de l'Ecole francaise d'Extréme-Orient.

——. 2013. "Vaiṣṇava Saṃhitās." In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, edited by Knut A. Jacobsen, Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar and Vasudha Narayanan: Brill Online.

Dessigane, R., P. Z. Pattabiramin, and Jean Filliozat. 1964. *Les légendes çivaïtes de Kāñcipuram. Analyse de textes et iconographie* (Collection Indologie 27). Pondicherry: Institut Français d'Indologie.

Doraiswamy Iyengar, M. A. 1983. "Appendix II: Tenkalai Vatakalai Divisions in Sri-vaisnavism." In *Two Great*

Acharyas. Vedanta Desika and Manavala Mamuni, edited by V. Varadachari, vii-lxiii. Madras: Prof. M. Rangacharya Memorial Trust.

Dutta, Ranjeeta. 2010. "Pilgrimage as a Religious Process: Some Reflections on the Identities of the Srivaisnavas of South India." *Indian Historical Review* 37, no.1: 17–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/037698361003700102.

Hardy, Friedhelm. 1977. "Ideology and Cultural Contexts of the Śrīvaiṣṇava Temple." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 14, no. 1: 119–51.

Hüsken, Ute. Forthcoming. "Yathoktakārī's ritual traditions." In *Sources on the Yathoktakārī Temple*, edited by Jonas Buchholz, Dominic Goodall, and Ute Hüsken. Heidelberg: HeiUP.

——. 2006. "Pavitrotsava: Rectifying Ritual Lapses." In *Jaina-Itihāsa-Ratna. Festschrift für Gustav Roth zum 90. Geburtstag*, edited by Ute Hüsken, Petra Kieffer-Pülz, and Anne Peters (Indica et Tibetica 47), 265–81. Marburg: Indica et Tibetica Verlag.

——. 2007. "Contested Ritual Property. Conflicts over Correct Ritual Procedures in a South Indian Vishnu Temple." In *When Rituals Go Wrong. Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual*, edited by Ute Hüsken, 273–90. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004158115.i-377.94.

——. 2009. *Viṣṇu's Children: Prenatal Life-cycle Rituals in South India*. Translated by Will Sweetman. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

——. 2013. "Flag and Drum: Managing Conflicts in a South Indian Temple." In *South Asian Festivals on the Move*, edited by Ute Hüsken and Axel Michaels, 99–135. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

——. 2016. "Slaves and Sons: The Court Dynamics of a Religious Dispute in South India." In *Filing Religion: State, Hinduism, and Courts of Law*, edited by Daniela Berti, Gilles Tarabout, and Raphael Voix, 124–46. Delhi: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199463794.003.0005.

——. 2022. "Two Lizards in Kanchipuram's Varadarāja Temple." In *Temples, Texts, and Networks: South Indian Perspectives*, edited by Malini Ambach, Jonas Buchholz and Ute Hüsken, 157–213. Heidelberg: Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing. https://doi.org/10.11588/hasp.906.c13939.

Krishna, Nanditha. 2014. *Paintings of the Varadaraja Perumal Temple Kanchipuram*. Chennai: C.P.R. Publications.

Lochan, Pramila, with S. Subbaraman. 2019. *Mural Paintings of Kāñcipuram*. Bengaluru: Indira Gandhi Nationals Centre for the Arts.

MacCann, Erin. 2023. "Agency, surrender, and community. Piḷḷai Lokācārya's indwelling Lord." In *Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Changing Forms and the Becoming of a Deity in Indian Religious Traditions*, edited by Marcus Schmücker (Veröffentlichungen zu den Sprachen und Kulturen Südasiens 40), 309–32. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.

Madhavan, Chithra. 2007. *Vishnu Temples of South India* 1. Chennai: Vighnesha Printers.

Mahalingam, T. V. 1963. *Kāñcīpuram in Early South Indian History*. Bombay: Asia publishing house.

Moßner, Anne. 2008. "Sthalapurāṇas in Tamil Nadu: Der Kāmākṣīvilāsa." MA thesis, Heidelberg University.

Mumme, Patricia Y. 1993. "Rules and Rhetoric: Caste Observance in Śrīvaiṣṇava Doctrine and Practice." *Journal of Vaiṣṇava Studies* 2, no.1: 113–38.

Nagaswamy, R. 2011. *Viṣṇu Temples of Kāñcīpuram*. New Delhi: DK Printwold.

Orr, Leslie C . 2014. "The Sacred Landscape of Tamil Śaivism: Plotting Place in the Realm of Devotion." In *Mapping the Chronology of Bhakti: Milestones, Stepping Stones, and Stumbling Stones*, edited by Valérie Gillet, 189–219. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondicherry and École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Parthasarathy, T. S., ed. 1954. *The Koyil Olugu. History of the Srirangam Temple. Condensed English Version.* Tirupati: Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams.

Peterson, Indira V. 1982. "Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tēvāram Songs of the Tamil Śaivite Saints." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102, no.1 (Jan.-Mar.): 69–90.

Porcher, Marie-Claude. 1985. "La représentation de l'espace sacré dans le Kāñcīmāhātmya." In *L'espace du temple: Espaces, itinéraires, médiations*, edited by Jean-Claude Galey, 23–52. Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales.

Raman, K. V. 1975. *Śrī Varadarājaswāmi Temple, Kānchi: A study of its History, Art and Architecture*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.

Raman, Srilata. 2007. *Self-surrender (prapatti) to God in Śrīvaiṣṇavism: Tamil cats and Sanskrit monkeys* (Routledge Hindu studies series). London: Routledge.

Ramaswamy, T. S. 2003. *Judicial Solutions for Temple Disputes: A Critical Analysis*. Madras: RNR Printers.

Rao, Hari V. N., ed. 1961. *The Koil Oḷugu: The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes*. Madras: Rochouse and sons.

Sanderson, Alexis. 2001. "History through Textual Criticism in the Study of Śaivism, the Pañcarātra and the Buddhist Yoginītantras." In *Les Sources et le Temps. Sources and Time*, edited by François Grimal (Publications du département d'Indologie 91), 1–47. Pondicherry: Institut français d'indologie.

——. 2009. "The Śaiva Age—The Rise and Dominance of Śaivism during the Early Medieval Period." In *Genesis and Development of Tantrism*, edited by Shingo Einoo (Institute of Oriental Culture Special Series, 23), 41–349. Tokyo: Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo.

Schier, Kerstin. 2021. "Ritualising offence: Mitigating re-enactment of sectarian rivalry in Kanchipuram." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 44, no. 3: 522–37.

Seshadri, A. K. 2003. *Kancheepuram and Its Temples* (T.T.D. Religious Publications Series 261). Tirupati:

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Press.

Siauve, Suzanne, ed., transl. 1978. *Aṣṭadaśabhedanirṇaya. Explication des dix-huit différences (entre les deux branches de l'École de Rāmānuja) de Śrī Vātsya Raṅganātha* (Publications de'l Institute Français d'indologie, 58). Pondicherry: Institut français d'indologie.

Srinivasan, C. R. 1979. *Kanchipuram Through the Ages*. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan.

Srinivasan, G. R. 2004. *The Hastigiri Māhātmyam of Vedāntadeśika*. Chennai: Śrī Vedāntadeśika Vidhya Trust.

Stein, Emma N. 2021. *Constructing Kanchi: City of Infinite Temples*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.5117/9789463729123.

Subrahmanya Aiyar, K. V. 1911. "Koyilolugu." *Indian Antiquary* 40: 131–44.

Subramanian, P. 1996. *Social History of the Tamils (1707–1947)* (Reconstructing Indian History and Culture 7). New Delhi: DK Printworld.

Varada Tatacharya, R. 1978. *The Temple Lord Varadaraja, Kanchi: A Critical Survey of Dr. K. K. Raman's Sri Varadarajaswami Temple, Kanchi.* Kanchipuram: Sri Tatadesikar Tiruvamsastar Sabha.

Wilden, Eva. 2014. *Manuscript, Print and Memory. Relics of the Caṅkam in Tamilnadu* (Studies in Manuscript Cultures 3). Berlin-München-Boston: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110352764.

Young, Katherine K. 2014: "Śrīvaiṣṇava Topoi: Constructing a South Indian Sect through Place." In *Mapping the Chronology of Bhakti: Milestones, Stepping Stones, and Stumbling Stones*, edited by Valérie Gillet, 335–64. Pondicherry: Institut Français de Pondicherry and École Française d'Extrême-Orient.